2023 VCE Music Contemporary Performance written external assessment report

General comments

In 2023, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced the first Music Contemporary Performance examination based on the *VCE Music Study Design 2023–2027*. The examination consisted of two sections, A and B. The overwhelming majority of students attempted all questions.

Section A – Listening and interpretation required students to demonstrate consistent practice in listening to works and writing about what they heard, using the elements, concepts and compositional devices found in the cross-study specifications, on pages 15 to 19 of the Music study design. This practice should commence from the beginning of Unit 1 and continue throughout Units 2, 3 and 4, and should not be attempted as an intensive unit of work. Following frequent and regular sessions discussing how performers interpret and manipulate the elements of music, concepts and compositional devices in contemporary performance, teachers should, over time, introduce students to completing written responses with time constraints as per the examination conditions.

Students should read the questions carefully to ensure they are addressing the key ideas raised in the question. For example, students should note whether the question requires them to address particular elements of music, or whether there is a free choice, or whether there is a choice within several options. In addition, students should read the question carefully to see if they are asked to discuss how the performers create musical character or style in their response. Some students highlighted or underlined the key terms in the questions to assist with this.

Higher-scoring responses in Section A demonstrated a good understanding of the elements and appropriate terminology. These responses were able to link the elements of music to the musical character; however, students need to ensure the link between musical character and the element of music is logical. For example, it is not self-evident that acoustic sound sources result in a reflective and melancholic character. There may be other points that can be made to build an argument. For example, the tempo and ways in which the vocal and instrumental sound sources are used may contribute to the musical character. Overall, the students were able to highlight the musical character successfully, but greater attention needs to be given to how the elements of music, concepts and compositional devices contribute to the identified character. Students should become familiar with a range of vocal and instrumental techniques commonly found in contemporary performance and be able to use music terminology appropriately, including terminology specific to contemporary music performance in a range of styles and genres.

For Section B – Music Language, many students used a sharp pencil, which is strongly advised. Students should take great care when completing the music documentation using the staff or alternative documentation options and ensure there is no ambiguity in the pitch or rhythm when writing notes on the staff or completing the graphic notation. When undertaking transcription questions, students are advised to complete their rough work on the blank manuscript paper provided and then transfer a neat, legible copy of their final response to the space provided for the answer. Students should provide only one response for transcription questions where they are asked to document the missing notes by drawing on the staff **or** writing letter names or completing the rhythm grid.

Where possible, students should have access to appropriate aural training software and a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), especially to sequence rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural practice. Regular class singing and playing of melodies and chords and performance of melodies and rhythms is highly recommended to develop an understanding of the connection between the sound and the musical documentation, ideally using a 'little and often' and 'sound before symbol' approach.

Specific information

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Listening and interpretation

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	Average
%	2	98	1.0

An overwhelming majority of students correctly identified the style as Latin.

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	0.8	25	54	20	1.9

This question was broad, allowing students to draw on one or more of the elements of music and compositional devices listed, or to choose a musical element or compositional device not listed, to describe how the performers achieved the characteristics of the Latin style. The highest scoring responses were able to make links between specific characteristics of the style and musical characteristics of the excerpt. For example, instrumental sound sources such as vocals, trumpets, guitars, piano, bass and Latin percussion (bongo, conga, timbales, claves, guiro) are characteristic of Latin music. The arpeggiated and repetitive piano pattern that accompanies the vocal line, and that is heard throughout the excerpt, is also characteristic of Latin music.

Most students successfully answered this question, and they used Question 1a. to scaffold their response to Question 1b. as they had already correctly identified the style. A reasonably common error was that some students did not read the question carefully and wrote about how the performers created musical character instead of style.

This question highlighted the need for students to consistently practise using the elements of music, concepts, and compositional devices found in the cross-study specifications, and music terminology specific to contemporary music performance when responding to music. Students are encouraged to practise this with previously unheard excerpts in a range of styles as well as their own and their peers' performance pieces.

Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0.8	13	43	33	10	2.4

This question required students to discuss how the performers used both tone colour and texture to create musical character.

Most students answered this question successfully, although some students did not read the question carefully, focusing on only one element of tone colour and texture. Some students did not identify the musical character. Students must read the question carefully to ensure they are addressing all its requirements.

The highest scoring responses were able to make points in relation to how the performers used both tone colour and texture, and link this to how the performers created musical character. For example, 'the piece begins with a thick texture with the piano highlighting the harmony with the percussion syncopated and rhythmically complex percussion creating a homophonic texture, helping establish the playful and energetic character. The tone colour of the trumpet is full and resonant and helps establish the playful and energetic character'. The call and response between the vocal line with piano and then trumpets was noted by some students in relation to texture.

Some students struggled with the texture aspect of this question and did not have the terminology to describe the instruments, their role within the ensemble and the layers of sound. Regular listening with class discussions of appropriate terminology of these elements is required so that students can build a vocabulary of terms that relate to the elements, concepts and compositional devices. Although terms such as thick/thin and monophonic/homophonic can relate to texture in general terms, students should develop an understanding of, and be able to discuss, the roles of instruments and voices such as melody, harmony, accompaniment and the interaction between these within the excerpt.

Question 2

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0.2	0.2	0.3	2	8	14	23	19	15	8	6	4	0.5	6.8

In their responses, students had to refer to three of the following: duration, texture, structure, vocal and instrumental sound sources, sound production methods and repetition. This question required students to compare the ways in which the two interpretations created different musical characters through these elements of music and compositional devices.

Responses presented comparisons in a range of formats; various approaches were all effective. Some students used bullet points to list points that were evident in each interpretation. Others used a two-column format, aligning the descriptions of the specific features of each interpretation. The highest scoring responses made a clear comparison between the two interpretations, giving specific examples of how the elements of music and compositional devices were used to create musical character. Again, students need to develop a vocabulary of specific terminology for a range of contemporary music performance styles associated with each of the elements of music and compositional devices.

The following are examples of possible relevant points.

Duration

Interpretation A

- moderate/moderately fast tempo, 120 bpm
- continuous straight 8 quaver feel, accents on beats 2 and 4

- four on the floor kick drum pattern
- bassline on the off beats

Interpretation B

- slower tempo
- more variation between sections; in sections with the original riff, the rhythm is similar to the original – heavy emphasis on the beat, accents on 2 and 4
- towards the end, strings play straight bowed crotchets

Texture

Interpretation A

- dense texture with parts all playing most of the time
- texture becomes thicker/denser with addition of backing vocals, multi-tracked by Minogue
- added layers of harmony with keyboards playing arpeggiated and sustained chords

Interpretation B

- greater variation in texture; contrast between sparser and denser textures as instrumental accompaniment is added and taken away
- layers of electronically produced lines to create the accompaniment
- layers of synthesiser
- string part towards end playing crotchets adds harmonic depth and a denser texture
- effects such as reverb add depth

Structure

Interpretation A

- collection of 4-bar and 8-bar repetitive sections
- sections are delineated by contrasting lyric content and melody
- numerous fragmented sections

Interpretation B

- some alterations of lyric and melody content
- alternate vocal embellishments and melody in bridge ('won't you stay')
- alterations of accompaniment

Vocal and instrumental sound sources

Interpretation A

- electronic generation of backing
- Moog synth bassline
- Rhodes keyboard, counter melody
- drum machine
- light soprano voice

Interpretation B

- solo female vocalist using conventional vocal techniques, ethereal and bright
- breathy vocals
- acoustic strings used along with electronic sources
- electronic sources: synth textures, samples, sound FX
- backing vocals sings harmony part
- digital drums

Sound production methods

Interpretation A

- vocal driven
- mostly programmed instrumental backing
- multi-tracked vocals and backing vocals
- electronically produced
- drum machine
- sequenced bassline
- digital keyboards (Moog synth and Rhodes keyboard-style sounds)
- live vocals in a neo-disco style
- made for dancefloor/club – big kick drum, kick drum heavy

Interpretation B

- use of digital/electronic drums enables subtle percussion expression
- sampling used extensively
- contrasting acoustic strings
- acoustic vocals processed with reverb, compression, delay, FX
- ethereal synth and whooshes

Repetition

Interpretation A

- vocal melody is very repetitive, e.g. la la la hook/riff
- accompaniment is very repetitive
- repetitive 4-bar and 8-bar sections

Interpretation B

- more variation, less repetitive than interpretation A

Section B – Music language

Question 3a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	29	36	35	1.1

- The first interval was a minor third.
- The second interval was a perfect fourth.

The majority of students identified the first aural interval correctly as a minor third and the second interval as a perfect fourth. Students are reminded to practise hearing and identifying intervals that are presented harmonically as well as ascending and descending. To obtain the mark, both quality and quantity needed to be correct.

Students must avoid using 'M' or 'm' to indicate intervals, as this is unclear, and should instead write minor or major. If the interval was not clearly identified, it was deemed incorrect.

Question 3b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	32	25	43	1.1

- The first interval was a minor seventh.
- The second interval was a diminished fifth or tritone.

The majority of students correctly identified the first written interval as a minor seventh and the second interval as a diminished fifth or tritone. Most students correctly identified the quantity; however, quality was more challenging. A clear process to determine the quality would be helpful; for example, count up from the bottom note, counting the bottom note as 1, then determine if the top note belongs to the key. The second interval is a fifth; however, B major has an F# and so F natural is a semi-tone smaller than a perfect interval and so it is a diminished fifth. Tritone was also accepted.

Regular singing, playing and documenting of all diatonic intervals in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach, both in context and in isolation, is recommended.

Question 4a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	22	38	40	1.2

- The first scale or mode was minor pentatonic.
- The second scale or mode was phrygian.

Most students correctly identified the first scale or mode as minor pentatonic and the second scale or mode as phrygian. Some students incorrectly identified minor pentatonic as major pentatonic; students should ensure they are clearly able to distinguish these scales.

Regular singing, playing and documenting of scales and modes in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach, both in context and in isolation, is recommended.

Question 4b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	20	23	57	1.4

- The first scale or mode was mixolydian.
- The second scale or mode was major.

Most students correctly identified the first scale or mode as mixolydian and the second scale or mode as major.

Some students confused the mixolydian mode with dorian. The dorian mode differs in that it has a minor third from the bottom note or flattened scale degree 3.

Regular singing, playing and documenting of scales and modes in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach, both in context and in isolation, is recommended.

Question 5

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	18	16	20	12	12	5	8	1	8	2.9

Many students found this question challenging.

Students are encouraged to use the information given; for example, look at the chord symbols given to identify chord tones. Likewise, students should listen for stepwise motion.

The first note was D, and this was heard numerous times in bars 1–3. The second note, E, moved up by step from the D. Some students were able to identify chord tones from E minor in bar 4; the chord symbol Em was provided in the given notation. Some students were able to identify that the final four pitches moved by step, beginning on B, which is a chord tone of E minor, rising to the first note in bar 5, which was an F#.

Students were asked to document the missing notes by either drawing the notes on the stave or writing letter names in the empty boxes. Students are reminded to read the question carefully – some students documented the pitches on the stave and wrote letter names; in this case only the first response was assessed, which was the pitches on the stave. Students who use the stave are reminded to write neatly and carefully, clearly indicating which notes are on a line or in a space. Some students did not clearly indicate whether the first note was a D or an E and when this was unclear, this was deemed incorrect. When using leger lines, students need to use these correctly.

Regular singing, playing and documenting of short melodies in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach is recommended. This should include examples both in context and in isolation. In contemporary music, learning by listening and copying recordings is a common way of learning; this can be extended to include documenting short melodic ideas. This approach is also to be encouraged, to develop the aural skills required for this question type.

Question 6

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	16	27	25	20	12	1.9

- The first triad/chord was minor seventh.
- The second triad/chord was power chord.
- The third triad/chord was major.
- The fourth triad/chord was half diminished seventh.

Responses generally showed a reasonable command of triads/chords.

The recognition of the seventh chords in the first chord and fourth chord proved challenging for many students. For the first chord, some students identified a major seventh; this chord is a major chord with a major seventh above the root. For the fourth chord, some students confused the full diminished seventh chord with the half diminished seventh chord. The half diminished seventh chord has a minor seventh (a

semitone smaller than a major interval) above the root note, whereas the diminished seventh chord has a diminished seventh (a semitone smaller than a minor interval) above the root.

Most students correctly identified the second chord/triad as a power chord and the third chord/triad as major.

Students need to practise recognising the quality of chords that are presented melodically and/or harmonically. Regular singing, playing and documenting of chords in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach, both in context and in isolation, is recommended. In contemporary music, learning by listening and copying recordings is a common learning approach that can be used to practise identifying chords. These approaches are encouraged to develop the aural skills required for this type of question.

Question 7

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	61	28	10	0.5

2.	3.
bVII	IV

Many students found this question challenging. Students are reminded to practise identifying the common chord progressions listed in the study design and to identify missing chords within these progressions. There are only a limited number of chord progressions given, which assists students in identifying the missing chords. Students are encouraged to use the information given to assist in identifying the missing chords, for example: there are only two common chord progressions with four chords that begin and end with chord I. Students can use this information to narrow down the options and then identify the correct chord progression and missing chords. A knowledge of chords and their function in the common chord progressions may also be of assistance; this may be developed through singing, playing, documenting, creating and improvising.
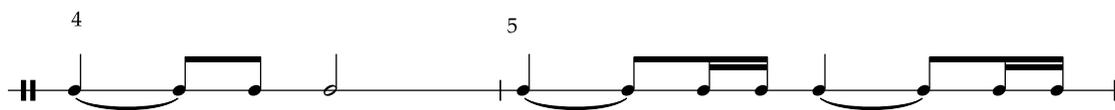
Regular practice recognising chords as part of a chord progression is recommended. Regular singing, playing and documenting of chords and chord progressions in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach, both in context and in isolation, is recommended. In contemporary music, learning by listening and copying recordings is a common learning approach that can be used to practise identifying chords and chord progressions. These approaches are encouraged to develop the aural skills required for this type of question.

Question 8

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	12	13	18	24	33	2.5

- The first triad/chord was D F A.
- The second triad/chord was A C Eb G.
- The third triad/chord was F A C E.
- The fourth triad/chord was B D F.

This question was generally handled well. Students were required to write the letter names of the chords. Most students were able to correctly write the names of the first chord and the fourth chord. Students found the second and third chords, which were both seventh chords, more challenging. Students are encouraged to correctly write the triad that forms part of these chords and then correctly write the seventh. For example,

a half diminished seventh is made up of a diminished triad (A C Eb) with a minor seventh (G). Note that enharmonic equivalents such as D# are not correct when writing chords and were deemed incorrect. The regular singing, playing and documenting of chords that was recommended for Questions 6 and 7 would also be of assistance here.

Question 9

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	21	29	4	41	2.6

The fragments were heard in the following order: C A D B
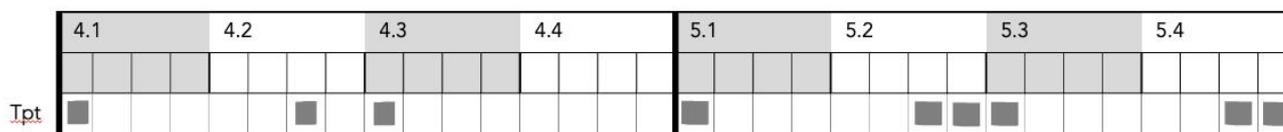
This question was generally handled well, with most students identifying at least two of the fragments in the correct order. The rhythm was short and quite easy to remember. Students are reminded that memorising the rhythm when it is played will assist, as when the music is not being played, students can 'replay' the rhythm in their heads during the silent working time. As this question was multiple choice and it was played four times, students may also find it useful to focus on one bar for each playing.

Question 10

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	29	43	28	1

- The first rhythmic feel was straight eights.
- The second rhythmic feel was funk.

While most students were able to manage this question well, some students found it challenging. Students are reminded to practise identifying (and recreating) a range of rhythmic feels found in contemporary performance; some examples are given in the study design. Activities such as listening, playing, creating and improvising will assist with developing this knowledge.

Question 11

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	5	10	13	15	18	12	7	5	14	4.1

OR

OR

OR

OR

This question provided the students with options on how to respond to this question. Many students chose to respond using the rhythm grid, a method of documentation that is a new option in this study design.

Students are encouraged to use the information given in the notation or in the rhythm grid that was provided to introduce the missing excerpt to assist with their response. For example, the missing rhythms in bar 5 were previously heard in the given trumpet part.

Students were asked to transcribe the missing notes by either drawing the notes on the stave or drawing in the rhythm grid. Students are reminded to read the question carefully; some students transcribed the pitches on the stave and drew in the rhythm grid. In this case, only the first response was assessed, which was the staff notation.

Students are reminded to write neatly and carefully and use a sharp pencil for this question. Some students who responded using the rhythm grid did not clearly indicate whether the first note in bar 5 began on beat 1 or was held across from the previous bar. When this was unclear, it was deemed incorrect.

Students should practise a range of forms of documentation as appropriate to contemporary music performance to gain fluency and confidence with a variety of documentation approaches before responding to these types of questions under the time pressures of the examination.

Regular singing, playing and documenting of short rhythmic ideas in a 'little and often' and 'sound before sign' approach is recommended. This should include examples both in context and in isolation. In contemporary music, learning by listening and copying recordings is a common way of learning; this can be extended to include documenting short rhythmic ideas. This approach will also develop the aural skills required for this question type.