

2023 VCE Music Repertoire Performance written external assessment report

General comments

In 2023, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced an examination based on the *VCE Music Study Design* for 2023–2027 for Music Repertoire Performance. The examination was of one hour duration and consisted of two sections: Sections A and B. The large majority of students attempted all questions.

Section A – Listening and interpretation involved listening to three previously unheard works and analysing the ways the performers used the elements of music. A comprehensive understanding of the elements of music (duration, pitch, tone colour, texture, structure, dynamics and articulation) as well as compositional devices (repetition, transition, variation and contrast) was required (pages 15-19 of the study design). The ability to describe, discuss or compare the interpretative decisions made by performers and/or conductors was also required, together with knowledge of the resultant musical character or expressive intentions of the work.

Students do not need to repeat the question as an opening statement. Very good responses tended to use subheadings to refer to the specific elements of music. Dot points were also useful, enabling students to write concisely. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated a good understanding of the elements and the use of appropriate terminology. The highest-scoring responses demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the way the elements were used, and writing with evidence and appropriate music terminology. Many students experienced difficulty in writing about both elements equally in Question 1a. (duration and texture), and many students were unclear about variation as a compositional device (Question 1b.).

Students need to read the question carefully and ensure that they are addressing the issues raised in the question. Some students underlined or highlighted key terms in the question to assist with this. A stream-of-consciousness narrative resulted in less successful responses. Similarly, students who became heavily involved in the psychology of the lyrics in Question 1 forgot to mention the connection to musical features and details in their responses. Gathering thoughts and ordering them, with subheadings for focus, keeps the writing on task.

In Question 2, many students reverted to the previous study design in their answer style, connecting each musical feature to an expressive outcome (even using the abbreviation EO) in a formulaic style. This year, no expressive outcome was asked for in this question as it was a comparative analysis of the musical elements used. Dividing the page into two columns works well for most students, provided that they are able to connect the musical excerpts and use comparative language, rather than analyse the two excerpts in isolation.

Handwriting was an issue in this section, with some responses being very difficult to read.

Section B – Music language was handled well on the whole. This section was quite different from the previous study design in that it required students to adhere to a time frame for answering questions, as it was a mixture of theory and aural questions. Overall, the timing seemed to work well for most students, and they made good use of the extra time at the end for checking their answers. Problems occurred in this section

when students were not equipped with a sharp pencil and the notation was not clear. Music notation is a skill that should be practised regularly and taken very seriously. For example, the notation of a treble clef was not always satisfactory, while some students still need to differentiate between semibreves and crotchets, with fully filled-in note heads to indicate crotchets, quavers and semiquavers. Students need to be mindful of the conventions of writing accidentals on the left-hand side before the note, and in the correct space or line as needed. Note stems change direction from the middle line of the staff, and should be on the correct side of the note. Rhythmic notation needs to include correct grouping of notes to show the beats. There is adequate blank manuscript to complete rough work and then transfer a neat, legible copy of the response to the space provided for the answer. At VCE level, clear and accurate handwritten notation is expected.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

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

Section A – Listening and interpretation

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	16	41	33	9	2.3

This question required students to describe how the performers used duration and texture to convey musical character. The musical excerpt was ‘When I grow up’ from a film production of *Matilda the Musical* composed by Tim Minchin.

Most students were unsure of ‘duration’ and many interpreted it as the duration of the excerpt, rather than details of the tempo, rhythms, metre, beat etc. Similarly, ‘texture’ was problematic for many students, who confused it with tone colour, or character and mood, instead of the layers of musical lines and instruments. Some students used terms like monophony, heterophony or polyphony (often incorrectly), forcing the texture into a single-word category without a clear understanding of these, while others used descriptors like ‘silky texture’, or ‘mournful texture’. Much too much page space was devoted to wistful long descriptions of the emotional developments and ‘deep’ analysis of Matilda’s and Ms Honey’s psyche, often without musical examples. High-scoring answers linked the initial character and subsequent changes in character with musical evidence in duration and texture.

The following are examples of possible relevant points.

Duration

- steady, well-defined pulse, simple metre, almost a march-like feel driven by drums
- long brass ascending lines and short, low brass bursts add comedic feel, punctuating the ends of phrases
- strings accompany on long held notes and arpeggiated quaver lines
- semiquaver piano accompaniment creates joyous momentum while adding rhythmic interest
- ascending glissando runs in high woodwind
- singers' lines bounce with rhythm
- singers hold long notes on 'up' on an open vowel
- tempo does not slow very much, but the effect of a thinner texture and the solo singer's use of rubato gives the impression of a slower, more intimate feel.

Texture

- varies, from vocal ensemble accompanied by orchestra – thick and busy texture – to a thin solo of single voice with sparse piano accompaniment
- orchestral interlude swirls through a lush string texture, soaring over subordinate piano quaver movement with a flourish of flutes
- vocal texture is thick with harmony and use of imitation in children's voices
- homophonic texture with solo voice and piano.

Character

The mood at the opening was joyous, exuberant, vivacious. The children's jaunty singing was matched by the busy orchestral writing and rhythmic drive. After a transition of the orchestra gradually paring back, it reduced to a single melancholy voice and a sparse piano accompaniment to create a change in character.

Many very effective responses used headings to address each element separately. However, the following is a good example of how a student addressed duration, texture and musical character in a more integrated answer:

At the commencement of the excerpt a homophonic texture is immediately created with a blend of instrumental voices typical of a Broadway musical genre. The vocals sit comfortably in the foreground of the music, initially playing a melodic role. During the first phrase the long duration of the note held at the climax on the word 'up' accentuates the song's energetic and youthful character. This is further intensified by the bright blend of instrumental voices in the middle of the mix (string/brass/rhythm section). However, the strings shift from a harmonic role to a melodic role. Their long languid phrases coupled with a thinner homophonic texture signals a shift to a more tranquil character. The tenderness of this character is heightened by the entrance of a solo vocal singing with far longer duration than the children before, and a piano marking chords ...

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	13	41	34	12	2.5

This question required students to discuss how variation is used in the excerpt to express musical ideas.

Many students confused variation with contrast.

Variation is defined as: *changes/modifications to established musical ideas and patterns, while retaining significant recognisable features* (see the study design, page 16).

Contrast is defined as: *achieved where significant new musical material is introduced or where significant changes are made to established musical patterns* (see the study design page 16).

In this case, the melodic material remained the same, from the children singing to the solo adult, but was varied by the textural change, the accompaniment, and the lack of rhythmic drive behind it. The orchestra doubled the melody line in places, but did so in a swirling texture as it transitioned. Also, the melody line itself was varied rhythmically, with the use of triplets instead of dotted quavers. The adult solo singer varied the line with her use of rubato.

The musical ideas portraying childhood's joyful innocence moving to the grown-up melancholy of adulthood were not lost on students, who devoted much time to describing this. The depth of the answer affected the score. Responses that skimmed the surface with the big picture ideas of childhood v adulthood scored less favourably than those who delved deeper into the musical ideas (such as the rhythmic variation of the melodic line). Unfortunately, most described the contrast effected by the music.

Students were also asked to 'discuss' this use of variation. This would involve identifying issues, with points for and against and offering hypothesis or opinion ([VCAA Glossary of command terms](#)). The highest-scoring responses offered a verdict on the effectiveness of the musical variations in portraying the change from childhood to adulthood.

High-scoring responses were able to focus successfully on the concept of variation:

Sample 1

With each repetition of the main melodic motive ('when I grow up') a different character is evident. In particular the choir of children sing with a youthful energy that is lacking when the band drops out (evident in varied articulations and high registers). In contrast the solo vocalist, despite singing the same melody, stretches vowels for maximum effect and utilises a smoother, more legato articulation. ... the piano accompaniment at this point is far more subtle than the full band, despite outlining the same harmonic progression. Indeed this variation in musical approach is symbolic of growing up itself, gaining a more measured and restrained perspective.

Sample 2

Variation in articulation marked the shift in musical ideas in this excerpt. The crisp accompanying instruments in the beginning of the excerpt musically establish the ideas of childishness and joy. A shift to legato, with high string lines in the transition to the second section, with fast fluttery woodwind, brings a sense of change and mystery, making way for the establishment of the musical idea of ageing and maturing achieved in the second section.

Sample 3

... the variation of tone colour – a warmer, softer tone colour compared to the bright vocals in the beginning helps establish the idea of growing older and wiser ...

Sample 4

... the variation in instrumentation of the melody assists in achieving the transition from an animated and vibrant mood to a more reflective and introspective character.

Question 2

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	0	0	1	2	8	9	14	15	16	11	13	8	3	7.5

In their response to this question, students had to refer to any three of the following: tone colour, texture, dynamics and articulation. This question required students to compare the ways in which the two interpretations used three of these elements.

The question did not ask the students to compare or comment on the character or expressive outcome of the two interpretations. It was an exercise in analysis of musical features. Many students did not read the question accurately and proceeded to link every feature to an expressive outcome or character. This often took over the response and it became more about the storyline or mood, the angry lyrics and emotional connection etc. and less about the musical elements. This also revealed formulaic answers.

The highest-scoring responses tended to divide the writing into two halves, addressing the treatment of each element by Interpretation A and then Interpretation B. These responses compared each element clearly and concisely before moving on to the next element.

Responses where the comparison mixed the elements, e.g., comparing the texture of A with the dynamics of B, were less successful. Some students divided their page in half and listed dot points for each interpretation under each element. This had limited success where there was little actual comparison. A divided page and use of dot points is a good way to address the question, but comparative language should be used. An effective comparison should describe the similarities as well as differences, but most students focused only on the contrasts. Students should also ensure that when selecting an element, the points made actually address the treatment of that element.

Again, texture proved problematic for most students. The highest-scoring answers were able to describe and compare this effectively. To focus listening on what the question requires, within a time constraint, is a skill that requires consistent practice throughout the year. Long-term preparation would allow students to develop vocabulary and to use appropriate terminology.

The following are examples of possible relevant points.

Interpretation A

Tone colour

- drumkit uses bright cymbal crashes, shimmering cymbal roll with sticks and various tom-tom fills throughout
- orchestral sections are understated and well balanced; strings use arco throughout
- vocals shift from a clean tone to a growl leading into guitar solo

Interpretation B

Tone colour

- full register of cello used
- lower register has an edge to the tone, similar to a growl
- higher melodic line is clean and soars above accompaniment parts
- bowed until the last fragment where pizzicato section enters

Interpretation A

Texture

- homophonic – vocals are the dominant layer with vocal harmonies, guitar, bass and drums supporting
- the orchestra is less featured but thickens the texture, particularly with strings
- the addition of brass and woodwind under the guitar solo creates a fuller sound
- there is a significant reduction in density of sound as a decrescendo occurs at the end of the excerpt

Interpretation B

Texture

- homophonic – violin shines
- thick texture due to all playing constantly throughout
- a quartet sound with three parts playing in rhythmic unison

Interpretation A

Dynamics

- generally forte throughout
- crescendo into guitar solo led by semiquaver fills on drums
- vocals combine with drums at the crescendo
- decrescendo occurs under cymbal rolls leading to the end of the excerpt

Interpretation B

Dynamics

- more subtle dynamic movement throughout
- sustained dotted minim 'bass' notes have a slight crescendo
- crescendo into solo section led by semiquaver pattern
- textural dynamic sound, thinner and softer at first

Interpretation A

Articulation

- vocals legato with some accents
- strings use a slightly detached articulation in their underlying rhythmic pattern
- under guitar solo drumkit uses a heavy accent on the snare on bar 2 beat 1 of the four-bar sequence
- cymbals accent beats 1, 2 and 3 of the four-bar sequence

Interpretation B

Articulation

- a more brittle sound (even with vibrato) due to the attack and aggressive playing style
- rapid bowing utilised in semiquaver crescendo into solo section
- pizzicato at the end of the excerpt
- in the second section bass parts are marcato in attack on very long notes
- this articulation makes the bass prominent and equal in importance with the solo line
- upwards slides add intensity.

Section B – Music language

Question 3

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	1	14	84	1.8

Melody 1 – B

Melody 2 – C

This was a new style of question which allowed students to focus on and track the contour of a melody. It was handled well.

Question 4a.

Mark	0	1	Average
%	14	86	0.8

Answer: melodic minor

This was handled well with few incorrect responses.

Question 4b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	4	3	91	2.8



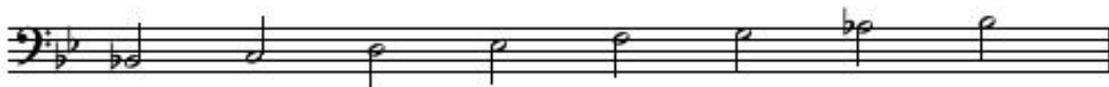
Students handled this question well. They were required to add a clef and accidentals to make this scale the scale of D major. One mark was awarded for the clef and one mark for each accidental (sharp). However, some treble clefs were unrecognisable and some accidentals were not accurate enough – they needed to be on the left/before the note and on the same line or space as the note. Most students knew the scale of D major. This question asked specifically for accidentals to be used, but many students wrote a key signature instead, and in some cases the key signature was incorrect (such as incorrect placement or order of sharps on the staff). Careful reading of the question would avoid loss of marks in this section.

Question 4c.

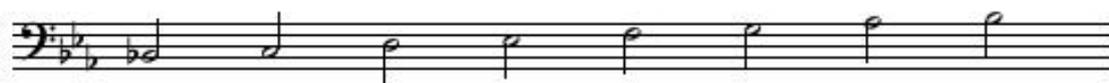
Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	8	27	65	1.6



Or



Or



This question proved more challenging. Students were required to write a Bb Mixolydian mode from the given note. The placement of flats in the key signature or on the staff was not accurate. Many students missed placing a flat on the upper tonic note.

One mark was awarded for the correct mode and one mark was awarded for the use of minims and correct stem direction.

Question 5a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	3	8	12	9	11	12	12	34	4.7



This question was handled quite well. Students were required to provide the missing pitch notation in bars 2 and 3. One mark was awarded for each correct pitch.

Some students missed the perfect 5th interval between the first two notes in bar 2, and that threw their melody out for bar 3 as well. Many students who went astray in bars 2 and 3 were able to bring the pitch back to the final D in bar 3 as it was correctly heard as a step to bar 4.

Students should note that where the rhythm is given in the transcription, it should be accurately copied to the staff when writing the melody. This includes the dotted crotchet in bar 3.

Question 5b.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	2	28	70	1.7

This question required students to identify the bracketed intervals in bar 1 and bar 4.

Bar 1 – perfect 5th

Bar 4 – minor 2nd

Many students missed the minor 2nd, calling it a major 2nd. Responses were good, with the quality and number of the intervals being written accurately. Very few students used the abbreviation 'm', which was correct.

Question 5c.

Mark	0	1	Average
%	21	79	0.8

Students were required to identify the scale or mode that the melody was based on.

Answer: G major scale

Many students missed the key note G. In this question, with a key signature and the excerpt beginning and ending on the tonic, it was clearly based on the scale of G major.

Question 6

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	9	5	17	69	2.5



major 6th above A

perfect 5th above Bb

minor 2nd above D

Students were required to write three intervals as directed.

The three intervals were handled well. One mark was awarded for each.

Most students noted that the question required semibreves to be used and were also cognisant of the changes in clefs. In Interval three some students struggled with writing the interval of a second with a flat. In conventional notation the flat should be written outside the pair of notes, and the notes of the interval of a second can be set side by side. Students should note that filled-in note heads are not semibreves, and using them resulted in an incorrect response. It should also be noted that an interval requires two notes to be written – writing only a single note resulted in an incorrect response.

Question 9

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	8	8	11	14	11	9	12	26	5.1

Bars 2 and 3



Or



Students were required to complete the rhythmic notation of bars 2 and 3 in the excerpt.

One mark was awarded for each correct beat.

Students could work on building a vocabulary of rhythms in simple and compound time and to correlate the sound with the notation. This requires consistent practice over time as well as strategies for remembering the sounds. It is worthwhile, during reading time, to look closely at the notations used in the excerpt, as some may be used again in the missing bars. The triplet in beat 3 of bar 2 was generally well recognised, as was the four-semiquaver group at the beginning of bar 2.