

2013 Practice Analysis Questions (1st published on Facebook – VCE Music Support page)

Identify how tone colour and blend and balance of voices have contributed to expressive outcomes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjM9T-yanz0>

Sample Response Student 1: A bright tone is created as the female voices often sing in the upper range of their voices.

Jenny Gillan: I usually use more than one tone colour word each time. Using two strengthens each word.

Sample Response Student 1: This range almost makes the singing sound strained but this is countered with the resonance that is produced in both the voices.

Jenny Gillan: GREAT comment. You're not only saying what the tone colour is but HOW it's created. Great.

Sample Response Student 1: This high tessitura creates a hopeful, optimistic character while upbeat while the resonance prevents urgency from being conveyed, replacing it with a relaxed easy going character.

Jenny Gillan: This sentence a little confusing. I think I know what you're trying to say but reread and reconsider. I would also strengthen your argument by saying "a high tessitura combined with a ___ tone colour and a ___ (some other element you've noticed) creates the ___ character." This way you're not saying major = happy. Which is a bit simplistic.

Sample Response Student 1: This character is further supported by the electric bass part. It acts as the gravity of the piece harmonically but also rhythmically along with the drum set by moving in steps rather than leaps. It creates a strolling nature rather than erratic.

Jenny Gillan: I think instead of gravity you mean foundation? What rhythmically about this creates the foundational effect? You've mentioned something melodic (step wise) but didn't give any proof as to why it is part of a rhythmic foundation. On another note here, I don't know if this actually contributes anything to answering the question. If you mentioned what the blend is and how the bass fits in with the blend this would answer the question more fully.

Sample Response Student 1: Through the piece the blend of voices swaps between a single female voice, and two females in harmony.

Jenny Gillan: You can't have a blend of voices if there's only one.

Sample Response Student 1: The single female conveys purity and innocence due to the plainness and simplicity of the part. It is very light to listen to, and this analogous to youth.

Jenny Gillan: Does this answer the question?

Sample Response Student 1: When both voices are combined, a more mature character is conveyed as the overall vocal texture is thicker with the harmonized vocals. Furthermore, the harmony line gives off a certain reminiscence of the lead melody, almost as if there is a subtle delay between the two lines. This reminiscence infers experience and therefore age and maturity.

Jenny Gillan: Some good points made but in order to answer the question more fully you need more tone colour words and you need to sort out in your mind what constitutes blend and balance of instrumental voices. Outline the roles of the instruments and what about them makes them blend - this can be tone colour or melodic elements or rhythmic etc etc. or stand out. Bring in all the elements and use the words of the question to make it clear to examiners what you're actually writing about. Make sure your backing up evidence has a clear link to your argument.

This piece outlines different characters. How do the performers express these characters?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HHx81ZgvDs>

Sample Response Student 1: The piece "towards infinity" creates an overall inspirational and uplifting character through the exploration of sweet, melancholic and dramatic characters.

Jenn Gillan: Great. Setting out characters first up.

Sample Response Student 1: In the initial section of the piece a sweet and innocent character is created through the simple melodic line of the piano which contains only one voice.

Jenn Gillan: Do you mean one voice as in unison choir? Or one voice solo piano line? More specific here.

Sample Response Student 1: Contributing further to this is the major tonality and the stepping motion of the melody. The harmony that follows is tonal and consists of very few notes

Jenn Gillan: What do you mean by very few notes? Are you talking about repetition or small range? Again, more specifics here might make things a little clearer.

Sample Response Student 1: creating a thin texture.

Jenn Gillan: The texture once the harmony enters is actually thicker in comparison to the introduction - homophonic versus monophonic. The number of parts is what increases texture though dynamics, register etc. may seem to make the texture thicken.

Sample Response Student 1: This simple piano accompaniment then becomes a harmonic cohesive device and is then lowlighted by the introduction of the choir which, initially only contains female voices; A combination of the high and light timbre and the single line flowing melody that changes by small intervals contributes to the sweet and innocent character. Moreover the long smoothly legato phrases and the sustained notes at the ends of phrases evokes melancholy and longing creating a bitter-sweet atmosphere.

In the chorus the addition of other melodic parts creates a fuller texture accompanied by more complex chordal configurations with the addition of major seventh chords and the juxtaposition of loud and soft dynamics with the use of crescendo serve to create a sense of drama.

Jenn Gillan: Good. Make sure you always go back to the question. This could be a little clearer in parts.

Sample Response Student 1: Following the chorus, there is a sudden reduction of voices with a boy solo line with a unison melody accompanied by a rhythmically and harmonically repetitive and simple piano accompaniment. This sudden contrast to the much louder and fuller (in texture) chorus serves to create drama and suspense.

This serves to build to the climax with the gradual introduction of more harmonies at increasingly higher pitches in both the choir and the piano.

Jenn Gillan: Overall you have a beautiful turn of phrase and eloquent writing style. Make sure your examples are clear and that you answer the question fully and avoid tangents. The question was how do the performers express these characters. I'd talk about the characters separately and how they transition. How they work on their own and how they work as part of a cohesive whole ie. how they borrow or develop ideas/techniques from each other or how they are uniquely different. Some of this got lost. Overall, I think you'd do pretty well with this answer. Just watch that you're answering the question all the time.

Sample Response Student 2: The piece opens with the simplistic and sparse melody of the piano. It is played with a sense of gentleness and is piano in terms of its dynamics. The very brief silence between phrases as the sustained notes decay creates the angelic character and heightens the anticipation for the introduction of the main melodic line – the vocal section.

Jenn Gillan: I'd probably start by outlining what characters you saw first and link point to character. Even saying eg. eg. eg = gentle, relaxed character is fine.

Sample Response Student 2: The heavenly character

Jenn Gillan: Is heavenly the best word for this character? Is heavenly a character? Stronger word?

Sample Response Student 2: is reinforced by the opening phrases of the vocal part. At this point the vocalists are singing in unison and their clear articulation and rounded vowels create a warm tone colour reflective of the optimistic and hopeful character.

Jenn Gillan: These are better character words.

Sample Response Student 2: The crisp ends of phrases free from vibrato create a more clear and concise end to phrases lending them an air of purity, which conforms to the heavenly character.

Jenn Gillan: again, better word?

Sample Response Student 2: As the piece builds momentum the high register of the soprano part is juxtaposed against the alto part the harmonies creating a sense of unity and solidarity amongst the cohort of vocalists.

Jenn Gillan: How is it extremes here? Juxtaposition is extreme of high and extreme of low. Maybe a bit too strong a word here especially if the effect is unity.

Sample Response Student 2: The repetition of the phrase 'don't you wait for me' coupled with an increase in the dynamics is evocative in its demeanour as the character becomes ethereal and awe inspiring.

Jenn Gillan: Great musical example... better words than 'ethereal and awe inspiring'?

Sample Response Student 2: In keeping with this character the piano part is complimentary to this character as it builds momentum through a simplistic but forceful chordal section.

In this piece's closing all the vocal lines converge as one as the part becomes increasingly subdued and mellow in its nature. The piano accompaniment assumes the role of playing the melodic motif that was introduced in the piece's opening. As the piece begins to dwindle a canon between the vocal parts ensues as they layer, creating a rich and vibrant texture which in turn crystalizes the uplifting character of the piece. This is also supported by the repetition of the phrase 'towards infinity' which encapsulates the optimism of the piece.

Jenn Gillan: Some good examples. Overall, the writing has flow but lacks a little in terms of answering the question clearly. Some dot points or headings might help you and the answer. For example -

Character: Gentle, soothing created through

dot point dot point dot point

Increasingly energetic and uplifting through

dot point etc. Reflective/pensive through dot point.

Just a thought. You certainly don't have to do dot points but it would make it clear what's there and what's missing immediately.

<p>This question is from the 2011 Exam Paper:</p> <p>Describe ways the performers have interpreted expressive elements of music to create character in this performance. In your answer you may refer to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tone colour - balance of music parts/lines - melodic/rhythmic ornamentation 	<p>Flap Down Down Down</p>
<p>Sample Response Student 1: Tone Colour:</p> <p>The plucked, twangy tone colour of the percussively used banjo, the breathy trumpet and bright, smooth double bass work together to create a busy, energized and excited sound.</p> <p>J Gillan: To answer the question I'd use the words of the question - "creates a busy, energised Character" rather than sound. If you were referring to tone colour though, busy and energised are not tone colour words, they're character words. Careful you don't get them mixed up. It's a common mistake.</p> <p>Sample Response Student 1: Throughout the verse, the deep, resonant double bass creates a mysterious and somewhat sneaky, creeping feel,</p> <p>J Gillan: Again I'd say character rather than feel - use words in the question. I'd also consider your character words "sneaky and creeping" could probably be replaced by something a little more sophisticated.</p> <p>Sample Response Student 1: which is contrasted with the bright twang of the banjo and interjections by the cutting but playful improvisatory trumpet which adds to the cheeky, mischievous and unpredictable character.</p> <p>J Gillan: 'playful' is not a tone colour word. Also, I'm not sure you've decided on the character very clearly. It seems you've changed your mind with every example. You don't have to have one, you can have a few characters, but you need to state how they change if they change. Maybe give a summary of character to start then give egs.</p> <p>Sample Response Student 1: The use of light, soft and clean xylophone in the recurring descending motif adds a childlike, humorous element to the piece's overall character.</p> <p>Jenn Gillan: Good things - your use of tone colour words!! You've used a lot and every time you've mentioned an instrument you've given tone colour words. It's a bit meandering but you've made some great points. I'd just sharpen up your character words and be careful not to mix character words with tone colour words.</p> <p>Sample Response Student 1: Balance of musical parts/lines:</p> <p>The piece begins with all instruments playing a descending motif in unison- a recurring motif throughout the piece, which highlights the theme 'Down, down, down'- and the tone colour is dominated by the playful, cheeky xylophone and breathy, cutting trumpet, all of which add to its busy, energized character.</p> <p>J Gillan: You've repeated yourself here but I don't think it'll get you extra points. To complete this point I think you're trying to say that the tone colour brings these instruments forward in the balance but I don't think you quite get there. Again, use the language of the exam to answer the question.</p>	

Sample Response Student 1: As the introduction progresses into a verse, the double bass carries an active bass line which sounds on the 1st which sounds on the 2nd which adds further excitement and a frantic element to the character.

Jenn Gillan: I don't quite know what you mean here... You need to outline the role of the parts here and say where it is in the mix - I usually use foreground mid-ground and background as words to describe where it is in the mix.

Sample Response Student 1: This foundation is embellished with sporadic, improvisatory phrases by the trumpet, which adds to the playful drama of the piece. The frequent interjections of the descending motif, which all instruments perform in unison, create an image which emphasizes and correlates with the lyrics 'down, down, down, I fell down again,' working well with the melody and lyrics and yet showing an obvious contrast between the laid-back, casual tone of the singer and the frantic, excited character of the instruments.

Jenn Gillan: But what is the role of these instruments in the blend?

Sample Response Student 1: Melodic/Rhythmic ornamentation

The melody correlates clearly with the lyrics, as the contour descends with the lyrics 'down, down, down' in an arpeggiated movement with a minor tonality to indicate a somewhat dark and grim theme amongst the otherwise lively and humorous character created by the instrumentation. Throughout the piece, the melody is simple and balanced, and delivered in a casual, speech-like manner, further contrasting with the energized and active instrumental accompaniment.

Jenn Gillan: I'd give specific examples here of what you mean. Saying it's casual without saying what the elements do to make it so is not answering the question. You need proof.

Sample Response Student 1: The rhythm is driven and excited, with the syncopated banjo sounding on the off beats, in alternation with the bass line, ultimately maintaining a lively and animated spirit throughout the piece. and 3rd and 4th beats; creating an excited and up-beat rhythm

Jenn Gillan: I'm confused about these last bits... does this bit go with the other paragraph?!