

2017 VCE Music Performance examination report

General comments

The 2017 Music Performance examination was the first examination for the *VCE Music Study Design 2017–2021*. The examination comprised 19 questions across three sections and was worth a total of 100 marks.

The overall standard of results was good. Some students did not attempt to answer some of the questions, especially in Section B.

The three sections of the examination focused on listening and analysing performers' interpretations, aural perception and understanding of music concepts.

Students are advised to use a sharp pencil for Sections B and C, as pen can smudge and become difficult to read. Students may find it easier to notate more clearly using a pencil.

In the melodic transcription questions, many students appear to have analysed the chord progression as part of the working process, for example, working out which notes fit with the chords provided.

Advice to students

- **Students are advised to read the questions carefully. Many students highlighted key terms or symbols.**
- **The study design, examination specifications and sample materials are only available from the VCAA website.**
- 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.
- **If students complete their rough rhythmic transcription work using 'stick' notation (stems and flags without note heads) or slashes across lines representing rhythmic subdivisions/segments of each beat, they need to be very careful when they transfer their work across from the 'rough work' page to the answer space.**
- Where possible, students should have access to appropriate aural training software and a computer music 'sequencer', especially to program rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural practice.

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.

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.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	14	26	30	19	8	2.8

Students were asked how the performers used tone colour to achieve expressive outcomes. Students described many different tone colours in their responses and generally used appropriate music terminology to explain how specific outcomes were achieved.

Examples of descriptions used in high-scoring responses included:

- Voice – dark, husky and restrained. Low and narrow tessitura to establish a mystic atmosphere. Other terms that could have been used to describe these effects included lyrical, smoky, sombre and balladic.
- Voice adds the aspirant ahhs.
- Hand drum with a dull tone creates a sense of forward motion.
- Breathy female vocal tone with clean acoustic guitar and hand drum gives a bare, tribal feel.
- Shaker gives a laid-back Latin feel.
- Guitar arpeggio has a clear tone using nylon strings.
- Guitar tone without distortion gives a clean sound.
- Doubling of voice and guitar, and blend of instrumental tone creates a new tone; guitar is trying to imitate the tone of the voice.
- Synth strings/flute tone was muffled.
- Production of sound adds breathiness.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	11	18	25	25	15	6	2.3

This question required students to describe performers' use of articulation to achieve expressive outcomes. High-scoring responses included comments and terminology such as:

- Diction – words are not over-articulated. Laid-back articulation blends well with the shaker and drum. This creates a smooth phrase against the instrumental backing.
- Shaker – the articulated shaker supports other percussion-like sounds.
- Guitar – clearly articulated guitar through gentle plucking.
- Drum – clearly articulating, emphasising the first beat. Uses a hand to achieve subtlety.
- Other sounds create unevenness.
- The combination of different articulations – gentle plucking, soft drum patting, breathy vocals and floating flute ornamentation – gives the work a dreamy, floating, expressive quality.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	2	7	15	23	22	18	9	4	4.6

This question required students to describe how the performers used specific techniques and/or manipulated elements of music to create and sustain mood and character. Students are advised that for questions such as this, there are no correct or incorrect answers about what the mood or character is, rather that they need to justify their view with relevant evidence from the music. The following points demonstrate appropriate descriptions:

- The opening establishes a quiet intensity, with an even balance of winds and strings, soft yet sustained. This builds to a heroic exclamation from the brass (particularly the horns and trumpets) created through crisp and intense articulation and a tone colour that is brassy and bursting (centred tone with fast air, giving a bright but solid tone) and glistening glockenspiel and triangle that shimmers through the use of hard brass mallets. Overall a triumphant effect is created.
- Character/mood sustained through throbbing of strings and woodwinds, bold dramatic brass interjecting and dramatic use of dynamics via the pauses.
- Shimmering woodwind section, added with the strings, sets the mood of anticipation.
- Fanfare brass with surging short phrases gives a triumphant mood.
- The offbeat staccato beats slightly interrupt the fanfare quality towards the end while maintaining the mood of mystery and suspense.
- Dynamics – shifts between instrument sections. Dramatic pauses. Crescendos to a climax, usually towards a cadence, add to the momentum of build-up.
- Articulation – clear, easy to distinguish each note.
- Instrumental grouping:
 - brass – surging, swelling, bright, bold, fanfare
 - strings – providing ostinato that grows with the use of long bows on fast swelling sections
 - woodwinds – flourishes. The flute glissandos add to the ‘Star Wars’ quality of the score
 - percussion – triangle sustains clear rolls throughout the work. Percussion is a mixture of heavy, deep, low drums exploding at the peak of the brass crescendo (heavy articulation is achieved with force of mallets).

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	0	3	5	10	10	17	17	14	9	8	4	2	6.8

In their responses to this question, students needed to refer to each of tone colour, balance of music lines and improvisation/embellishment/ornamentation to achieve full marks. References to these matters did not need to be equally balanced. Examples of relevant points included:

Tone colour

- Prince – Tone colour is expressed very idiomatically and distinctively in the way he uses the wide tessitura of his voice. He moves rapidly from the mid–lower registers of his natural voice to dramatic, sudden and sustained use of his controlled falsetto. He sometimes deliberately wavers on the ‘break’ between natural and falsetto for an extra expressive effect. Prince tends to use a quicker, more shimmering vibrato. In Prince’s interpretation, the rock organ has a throbbing (gentle vibrato) retro ‘gospel/soul’ quality and the electric guitars have a clean, unaffected purity for the occasional melodic interjections. The undistorted guitar, bass and acoustic piano with snare clicks give a sense of acoustic setting, although the Hammond organ sounds lie also accompanying, but well back in the backing.
- k.d. lang – She sings with a wide-ranging vocal tessitura, occasionally leaping up to her head voice. Generally, she remains closer to her mid-range throughout. This version is much sparser in the phrasing of the vocal line, opening predominantly in chest voice, but moving into the head voice.
- Comparison – This is a love song. Generally, the various tone colour techniques used in both performances create musically expressive outcomes that reflect the beauty and sensuousness of Joni Mitchell’s lyric poetry. The tone colour of Prince’s version is more diverse overall than that of k.d. lang, especially with the male vocal harmonies and instrumental improvisations (i.e. piano and organ). Although k.d. lang’s performance uses marginally less overall diverse tone colour than Prince, she compensates through the sheer sustained quality and expressiveness

of her vocal presentation. k.d. lang uses a more consistent, sustained and fuller vocal tone quality than Prince's sometimes 'fragile' voice, with a slower use of vibrato on her longer notes. Both singers achieve rich tone colour through a variety of gentle nuance by creative use of dynamics and micro techniques such as breathy aspiration (singing with a full tone, then breathily dropping off in intensity for emotional effect) and subtle pitch variation (i.e. pushing into a note to increase pitch, or dropping off a note with a controlled, expressive, falling cadence – common in jazz idioms).

Balance of lines

- Prince – His voice, while clearly an outstanding solo instrument, is more an equal among many other instruments. The instrumental choice – voice, rock organ, electric lead and bass guitars, piano (sometimes soloing) and drum kit – is consistent with gospel/soul. While Prince's virtuoso voice is necessarily prominent at times, other instruments, such as the clear and pure acoustic piano melodies/vamps and electric guitar riffs, are also prominent when featured. The organ solo is dynamically understated but not prominent. Overall the voice and piano lead, and the other instruments, in balance, generally accompany and support. Vocals dominate when present; however, the improvised piano solo is highly ornamented and takes a significant role, supported with sustained Hammond organ and bass and drum kit well back in the balance.
- k.d. lang – Her voice/piano/acoustic bass trio has a very rich and full solo vocal over a relatively laid-back piano chordal accompaniment, as well as a low-key, but rhythmic, accompanying bass. In this sense of overall texture and balance, k.d. lang's version is more intimate and sparse. Her vocal presence surges above the other, more restrained, instruments. Vocals and keyboard are dominant in balance, giving it a gentle, almost unrecognisable use of percussive sound that outlines the pulse very gently. There is also an acoustic bass that outlines the underpinning of harmony but is easily lost in the piano arpeggio pattern.
- Comparison – Prince uses a much stronger focus on his voice. This serves as another soloing instrument. Interpretation B is a more relaxed and intimate performance, with solo voice. It seems like a simple duet (voice and piano), as other lines seem inaudible in the mix. It has more of a storytelling feel, given the unrushed diction of the words. Interpretation A is busier than Interpretation B, especially in the vocals interacting with the other lines. It gives it an intimate but full arrangement.

Improvisation/embellishment/ornamentation

- Prince – He uses much improvisation. The lines are highly embellished, rhythmically complex and relatively diverse. His virtuoso vocal performance, with its wide-ranging leaps and transitions from natural voice to falsetto, gives the impression of a largely improvised work, while still retaining a structural connection with Joni Mitchell's original. Prince takes every opportunity to deviate from the expected melodic and rhythmic path. The male backing singers also join him, call-and-response style, in not easily predictable syncopated cross-rhythms. The piano solo is clearly improvising in a jazz style in terms of melody and harmonic progression; the piano/bass also occasionally adds – in a freewheeling, improvisatory way – expressive chromatic passage work in triplet rhythm (i.e. extended descending and ascending passages of gospel piano chord mixtures).
- k.d. lang – Her interpretation is less improvisatory. In particular, she effectively uses a subtle syncopated-related device such as anticipation and delay to fluidly transition over the rhythmic predictability of the bass and piano accompaniment groove. Melodically, she transitions into her higher, head voice register for expressivity, alters the melody and extends passages, in an improvisatory manner. The chordal piano accompaniment is fairly restrained, but the repetitive rhythmic vamps free up from time to time. The soft, acoustic bass is rhythmic then melodic, but some of the player's choice of pedal and groove verge on the improvisatory.

- Comparisons – Both performers employ improvisation and embellishment. Prince appears to be establishing improvisation at every opportunity. Piano solo is very improvised and creative; guitar licks respond to vocal solo. Interpretation B is not as improvised but is more subtle in anticipated rhythmic placement of phrases and delicate time shifts to give a feeling of lyric/rhythmic freedom or relaxation.

Students presented their comparisons in a range of formats. Some listed points evident in each interpretation and then summarised similarities and differences. Others used a two-column format, aligning the descriptions of the specific features of each interpretation.

Section B – Music language (aural)

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	24	27	24	25	1.5

1. major 7th
2. perfect 8ve
3. major 3rd

Generally, students were able to complete this question reasonably well.

To obtain full marks both quality and quantity needed to be correct. Therefore, for interval 2 'octave only' was not awarded a mark.

Responses were deemed incorrect if the interval was not clearly identified.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	7	14	19	22	36	3.6

1. blues
2. melodic minor
3. Lydian
4. major
5. minor pentatonic

To obtain full marks students needed to identify the specific pentatonic and minor forms with further information. For example, minor pentatonic and melodic minor. Marks were not awarded for incomplete answers.

Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	31	31	24	13	1.2

1. perfect 4th
2. minor 3rd
3. major 2nd

Many students were unable to identify interval 2. In order to prepare for this type of question, students are advised to develop strategies to help them with intervals in melodies they hear, for example, listening and then singing or playing a previously unheard melody.

Question 6b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	78	22	0.2

Mixolydian

Many students identified the tonality as major, rather than mixolydian.

Students are encouraged to be familiar with the differences between different scale/mode structures. For example, while major and mixolydian both use a major 3rd and 6th, the mixolydian mode uses a minor 7th and the major scale, a major 7th.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	27	27	17	9	1.7

1. dominant 7th
2. minor 7th
3. augmented
4. half diminished (7th)

This question was generally well answered. Some students were not able to identify the difference between augmented and diminished chords.

Chord 4 was generally identified as a diminished chord, not a half diminished chord.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	29	16	55	1.3

Harmonic grid 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

Bass note	A	C#	A	F#	D	E
Quality	major	minor	major	minor	major	major

Students were generally able to recognise that the last two chords formed an imperfect cadence – one of the common cadences listed for study.

Some students seemed not to be familiar with the chord structure for major keys.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	16	20	16	11	9	9	7	6	3.5

Harmonic grid

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.

Bass note	E ♭	C	A ♭	G	B ♭	D	B ♭	E ♭
Quality	major	minor	major 7	minor	major	dim	dom7	major

This chord progression ended with a perfect cadence – another of the common cadence forms set for study.

As with Question 8, understanding of the chord structure for major keys and the ability to apply this to E ♭ major assisted students to correctly identify chords 3–6. Students found chord 3 and chord 6 to be the most difficult to identify.

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	7	22	29	18	9	6	9	2.6

Melodic transcription requires higher-order musical thinking. Students need to follow the flow or logic of the melody and its underpinning harmonic implications, for example:

Bar 2

- 1st beat – E ♭ and C are common notes of the C major chord.
- 2nd beat – A and F are common notes of D minor.
- 3rd beat – D is a common note of G minor.
- 4th beat – C is a common note of C major.

Bar 3

- 1st beat – B ♭, A and B ♭. The C from bar 2 descends to B ♭ then to A, then ascends to B ♭, which is part of the G minor chord.
- 2nd beat – E, F and G. E is part of the C major chord, F and G ascending from the E ♭.
- 3rd beat – A, G, E, F.
- All notes are related to the bass notes F and E.

- 4th beat – D is a common note of the D minor chord.

Question 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	16	33	30	11	5	4	1	1.7

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Flute, Oboe, Bass Clarinet in Bb, and B. Cl. The score is in 4/4 time and features a melodic minor scale transcription. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The transcription is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Flute, Oboe, and Bass Clarinet in Bb. The second system includes parts for B. Cl. and Bass Clarinet in Bb. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it in the second system.

Students needed to understand the formation of a melodic minor scale to successfully complete this transcription. Awareness of the notes in G melodic minor also assisted students. Some students wrote out the scale on the working page and this was a good strategy. The study design states that a melody for a transcription question can only be in a major key or a melodic minor key.

Question 12

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	19	23	25	28	2.5

The image shows a rhythmic pattern in 4/4 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The second measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The time signature is 4/4.

There was a wide spread of marks for this question. Students should use strategies such as going through each rhythmic pattern in their head during reading time.

Question 13

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	9	13	13	12	10	8	7	8	21	4.2

bar 3

bar 7

The image shows a rhythmic pattern in 12/8 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure contains a double bar line followed by a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The second measure contains a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The time signature is 12/8.

Students who understood the structure of 12 – that is, 4 groups of 3 quavers – were more able to complete this transcription. For example, students indicated the start of each group by aligning the first note with the start of the group in other parts. This also assisted them to identify the tie in bar 3.

Section C – Music language (written)

Question 14

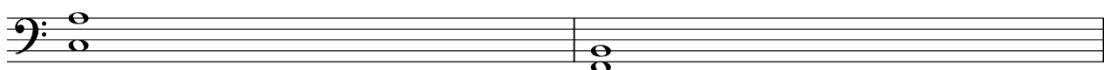
Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	3	14	83	1.8

1. perfect 5th
2. minor 2nd

Most students answered this question well; however, the B ♭ was more challenging for some students.

Question 15

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	11	39	50	1.4



major 6th above C

augmented 4th below B

Some students read the clef incorrectly. Some students overcomplicated the augmented 4th by adding accidentals to the given note.

Question 16a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	7	25	68	1.6

1. minor 3rd
2. perfect 4th

This question was completed at a high standard.

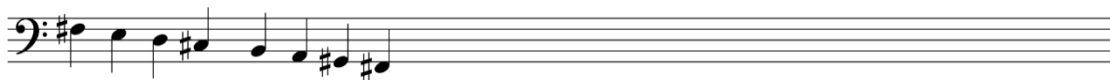
Question 16b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	47	53	0.6

Dorian

Question 17

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	18	28	7	47	1.7



Two marks were awarded for correct notes and one mark for correct stems and direction of scale. Students are reminded to practise writing scales in both ascending and descending directions.

Question 18

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	5	5	11	22	51	3.9

Piano

1. B ♭ major7 2. G minor7 3. C minor 4. E ♭ major7 5. F7 6. G minor

This question required students to know the structures of specific chord types. If a key signature is given, accidentals should not be added throughout responses. If students want to write the accidentals in they should also use brackets, for example, (#).

Question 19a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	0	100	1

Lydian

Question 19b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	44	56	0.6

Diminished 5th

Some students identified it as a tritone.

Question 19c.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	29	71	0.7

3/4

Question 19d.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	29	71	0.7

2/4

Question 19e.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	68	32	0.3

G major 7th

Some students did not notice the F# and identified the chord as G major.