

# Music in Context

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# MUSIC IN CONTEXT

## 2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

### OVERVIEW

The number of schools offering this unit has decreased in the last 2 years. However, it is clear from the high quality of many investigations and written examination answers that students are engaged by the subject's content and assessment tasks.

### SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

#### Assessment Type 1: Skills Development

From the student responses it was obvious that teachers had chosen their school-developed topic wisely, according to their strengths and their students' interests.

The best range of answers was elicited by teachers whose sound task design gave their students opportunities to demonstrate against the performance standards for the knowledge and communication and analysis assessment design criteria at a range of levels, including at the highest level, and to achieve at their personal best.

These teachers used a range of question types (including short-answer and multiple-choice questions, and extended-paragraph responses), allowing responses that ranged from the simple, factual one-word answer to those requiring higher-order thinking, where judgments were to be made and supported by musical evidence.

#### Assessment Type 2: Investigation

Investigations covered a very broad range of topics and many exceptional investigations included wide-ranging lists of resources. Successful students used primary sources (e.g. musicians, scores, and recordings) and secondary resources (e.g. texts, academic articles, and web materials), and demonstrated excellent footnoting skills.

Music, either referred to in notation, or as short aural excerpts in the presentation or supporting CD, was used to great effect by the students who produced work of the highest standard. The better investigations focused on the music, but also placed the works in their historical and cultural context.

Students who demonstrated high-level analytical and communication skills transcribed their chosen contemporary works into notation, analysed the features aurally, and reported their findings against times such as 'at 1'10" a tonic pedal begins that lasts until 1'45"'. Teachers should encourage students to notate music or accompanying audio examples with reference to the music in the text. The successful students used musical examples that included musical clefs and were discussed in the text, thus showing musical understanding.

Students should list resources or references. When deciding whether or not a footnote is needed, students should ask 'Did I find this information from a source

other than my own understanding of the music?' If the answer is 'Yes', a footnote is needed.

Students are encouraged to minimise historical or cultural details, such as the lives of the performers of the songs, and to focus on musical analysis. If the study involves more than one song, movement, or work, some comparisons should be drawn between each entity.

Students should be encouraged to draw their own conclusions at the end of the investigation by succinctly summarising any findings. They should also be encouraged to include musical examples and to refer to them in their text.

## **EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT**

### **Assessment Type 3: Examination**

For this assessment type, students are to provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

- knowledge and communication
- analysis.

The best answers for each topic focused on the musical elements and used the appropriate musical terms correctly. It was clear that these students had studied the music by listening to the work(s) and by studying the notation when it was available.

#### **Essay**

The best essays focused on answering the question. The students gave relevant information, backed up with appropriate references to musical examples.

Strong student responses were clearly structured: a brief introduction (note *brief*, and not just a rewording of the question) and summary (again *brief* and not just a rewording of the question), and each paragraph focused on a particular aspect of the music. Having made a point, the student gave an example or two (with direct reference to the music, using bar numbers/rehearsal marks/verse/chorus, as applicable) and, if relevant, briefly discussed what effect this has on the music and its relationship to the question. Students should be discouraged from listing facts ('information-dumping') without relating them back to the question.

#### **Short Answers**

Students should use the allocated marks to help determine how much they should write, and to ensure that they give enough information on the longer questions, and do not waste time giving unnecessary information on the shorter questions.

In the case of a question such as 1(b)(ii), students are asked for three ways of creating contrast and the question is allocated 6 marks: a clear example, with references, for each of the three ways is required for full marks.

#### **General**

In writing about the music, students should assume that the reader has basic to moderate musical knowledge. Dynamics may be an important point to mention and

relate to the question, but discussion should be of their use on a macro scale and their effect on the piece/movement/song as a whole, not merely pointing at their existence.

Students should read the question carefully and answer it carefully. If an essay question asks for a discussion of 'musical elements', students should not focus on historical and social factors, and should ensure that they address all elements of the question. For example, in Question 6(a), each of the blues performers listed needed discussion, as did all three set works in Question 3(a). Similarly, Question 9(b)(v) required students to discuss *how* the unusual instruments were used.

A student who is answering a question that has the instruction 'compare and contrast' (e.g. Question 8(b)(v)) should go beyond talking about each element separately. Some discussion needs to focus on the contrast between the two: how are they different/the same, what effect this has musically, why those differences/similarities are there.

Comparing and contrasting works can also be an effective way to discuss musical elements, even if the question does not specifically ask for this. It is a way to bring structure to the response and avoid a style of writing in which the first paragraph deals with the first song, the second paragraph deals with the second song, and so on.

If appropriate to the question, diagrams and pictures are another way of demonstrating knowledge and understanding. This was used to great effect by some students in answering Question 10(b)(iii): giving an illustration of the string technique symbol, followed by an explanation of what it meant, was the clearest and most concise way to answer the question. Illustrations could also be used effectively to show rhythms, or even short musical motifs where appropriate.

Questions that asked about rhythm, melody, and instrumentation were generally answered better than questions about form and texture.

## **The Topics**

### *Topic 1. Bach: Music and Patronage*

All answers on this topic showed a good understanding and used appropriate musical terminology. It was clear that students had a thorough knowledge of Bach's style, the significance of the work and its place in history. Some outstanding answers included highly detailed discussions of the musical elements.

### *Topic 2. Beethoven: Music Finds Its Voice*

Very few students answered questions on this topic; of those who did, the results were mixed though largely satisfactory. The best answer had a strong focus on the musical elements in the work.

### *Topic 3. Schubert: The Romantic Voice*

This was a popular topic and in the main was done well. Students were confident in their understanding of German Lieder and the various aspects of each of the works. Their understanding of the form, though sometimes superficial, was accurate, as was their understanding of the role of the piano and voice in each.

*Topic 4. Stravinsky: A New Musical Direction*

This was the second-most popular topic and was generally done well. Students had an understanding of how and why Stravinsky wrote his ballet score as he did, and communicated their knowledge clearly, using appropriate musical terms and references to the score.

*Topic 5. Contemporary Australian Indigenous Music*

There were no answers on this topic.

*Topic 6. The Blues: Of Sadness and Joy*

Students would do better to study the musical elements more closely so that they could be used, where appropriate, as examples in examination answers. A discussion of the meaning of the lyrics should be given only when specifically addressing the question.

*Topic 7. Duke Ellington: Pianist, Composer, and Bandleader*

This was another popular topic, with some very effective answers that demonstrated highly against the performance standards for both knowledge and communication, and analysis. Students had listened carefully to the performances of these works and studied the background to Duke Ellington's style so that they could discuss these with confidence.

*Topic 8. Miles Davis: Jazz Comes of Age*

Students demonstrated very clear understanding of the heads of each work and the improvisation styles of the various players. Students showed a particularly strong understanding of the harmonic and modal languages used and of the influences that brought the styles about.

*Topic 9. The Beatles and the Beach Boys: Soundtracks of a Generation*

Once again this was the most popular topic. There was a complete range of responses from very poor to highly sophisticated. Students giving the weakest answers seemed unable to talk about the music and included in their seemingly prepared answers quite inaccurate information, whilst those that gave outstanding answers were able to give great insight into the wide variety of musical styles found among the set songs.

*Topic 10. Contemporary Australian Music.*

Port Essington for Strings is a work that students could clearly relate to. Most understood the work to be a double set of variations where all of the thematic material used is based on the Aboriginal melody. A few did not understand how Schulthorpe had modified the Aboriginal melody to make the theme for the second movement, the settlers' theme, and that the three versions of this theme showed a progression in the settlement through Schulthorpe's choice of musical styles, using firstly the style of a Handel march in movement two, then in the fourth movement a variation in the style of Mendelssohn and finally in movement six a variation of this Europeanized melody in the style of Elgar. Other elements of the work were clearly well understood and students generally scored well for their answers on this topic.

## **OPERATIONAL ADVICE**

Teachers are to be commended for the care taken in packaging materials for moderation. The learning and assessment plan was generally accompanied by a completed addendum where applicable and a Variations — Moderation Materials form when necessary. Most teachers included in the moderation materials the answers to the skills development test and topic approvals for the individual investigations. Many teachers also helped the moderation process by including a shaded rubric to show how student work achieved the assigned grade.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

When schools with small numbers are combining, teachers are encouraged to collaborate with each other, and engage in professional dialogue about task design and a common understanding of appropriate standards. There should be certainty that all the marks truly reflect the rank order across the entire assessment group.

Music in Context  
Chief Assessor