



2008 Music Solo Performance GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2008 Music Solo performance aural and written examination consisted of three sections and comprised a total of 105 marks. All sections of the examination were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published in the sample assessment material. The question style and length of the examination were consistent with the published material.

2008 was the third year of the current *VCE Music Solo performance Study Design* and students were well-versed in the requirements of the examination, particularly those relating to the 15 set works. The mean score for the 2008 paper was just under 55 per cent, a result similar to 2006, but lower than the almost 60 per cent mean achieved for the 2007 paper. While the 2008 cohort showed improvement in examination technique (with fewer incomplete examinations), many students did not dedicate sufficient time to questions worth a significant number of marks, notably those questions with a ‘discuss’ or ‘explain’ stem, and wrote overly lengthy responses to straightforward ‘describe’ questions.

Some students struggled to tailor the material they had studied to the specific question context presented in the examination. They instead responded with rote-learned answers that were sometimes irrelevant to the question being asked. Students must be prepared to answer questions that relate to all of the key knowledge and key skills presented in the study design, not merely those tested in the previous year’s examination. While responses containing unsupported or pejorative value judgements continued to be a problem in Section B of the examination, far fewer students based entire answers around these judgements, particularly in Section C.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

For each question, an outline answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

Section A – Theory and aural comprehension

Section A of the aural and written examination paper is worth approximately 50 per cent of the total marks. Therefore it is not possible for students to achieve high marks in this examination unless they have been thoroughly grounded in the fundamentals of music theory, are comfortable using standard music notation, and possess some degree of aural acuity.

Some students struggled to deal with fundamental issues of music theory, particularly notation conventions. Many were unable to make clear links between the different aspects of music theory as they related to the requirements of the study design. This was particularly evident in the questions that featured aural content. For example, some students lacked an awareness of:

- how notes are positioned on a staff
- the correct placement of accidentals before a note-head
- the correct alignment of accidentals with regard to pitch
- the rudiments of chord construction
- the conventions associated with the notation of rhythm
- the connection between key and ‘possible’ chord quality
- the implications of the context provided for the aural questions, for example, harmonic implications evident in other parts.

Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

Question 1 – Music theory – Intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	4	6	10	12	12	13	18	24	5.5

- ‘F-sharp’ below
- ‘B-flat’ above
- ‘F’ below
- ‘C-flat’ above
- ‘F-sharp’ below

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- 'C-flat' above
- 'B' above
- 'F-sharp' below

While the mean result for this question demonstrates that the majority of students were well-versed in intervallic construction, many students struggled with augmented and diminished intervals. In addition, a number of students appeared to try to calculate the intervals by counting semitones. This resulted in incorrect enharmonic equivalents, often involving double sharps or double flats. Stronger students clearly understood the ideas of interval size and interval quality. Fortunately, fewer students than in previous examinations changed the given note. Nevertheless, students and teachers are reminded that no mark can be awarded to an interval that features an alteration to the given note. Overall, the cohort performed better on the intervals constructed in the treble clef. Students and teachers are reminded that those attempting the examination must be able to construct intervals in both the treble and bass clefs.

Question 2 – Music theory – Scales and modes

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	14	0	12	0	15	0	23	0	34	5

- D Algerian ascending : 'D' (given), 'E', 'F', 'G-sharp', 'A', 'B-flat', 'C-sharp', 'D'
- B-flat Mixolydian descending: 'B-flat' (given), 'A-flat', 'G', 'F', 'E-flat', 'D', 'C', 'B-flat'
- C Minor Pentatonic ascending: 'C' (given), 'E-flat', 'F', 'G', 'B-flat', 'C'
- D Whole tone descending: 'D' (given), 'C', 'B-flat', 'A-flat', 'G-flat', 'E', 'D' (Note that enharmonic equivalents were acceptable in the construction of this scale)

Overall, the cohort was strongest writing the Whole tone scale and weakest writing the Algerian scale. A small number of students, particularly those who elected to write scales using the bass clef or tablature, wrote some scales in an incorrect direction – usually ascending where descending was required. Students should be reminded that music notation convention requires that accidentals be written prior to the note-head and be aligned on the relevant line or space.

Question 3 – Aural comprehension – Melodic transcription

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	2	6	9	11	11	11	10	8	7	6	4	5	3	2	3	2	6.1



Many students struggled with the melodic transcription question. This was evidenced by the mean score for this question, which was significantly lower than the 2007 result. Most students coped well with the first bar of the transcription; the straightforward rhythm and stepwise motion in this bar did not present a problem for many students. However, bars two, three and four proved very difficult for the majority of the cohort – many were unable to score many marks past the first bar and appeared to struggle with the pitch, rhythm and contour in these bars.

This question required students to draw together skills developed in other aspects of this outcome, notably those related to intervals, scales and chord construction. By using these skills to consider the implication of the given parts (in other words, the question prompt), it was possible for students to create a controlled framework that should have informed and acted as a 'proof' to their listening. Even though the given parts were designed to make the question more accessible, the majority of students appeared to ignore them. It was disturbing to see how few students were able to interpret the prompts provided by the three parts given. The following issues were problematic.

- Students were given the pitch set and mode of the transcription. The first and last chord of the excerpt was an unambiguous 'A' minor triad stated clearly in the three given parts. In addition, throughout the course of the excerpt, the given parts contained the pitch set of 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E', 'F-sharp' and G, making the excerpt in 'A' Dorian. As the study design does not permit modulation, these are the only pitches that could occur in the line that was to be transcribed. The number of students who wrote 'F natural' rather than 'F-sharp' in the third bar, for example, demonstrated that this aspect of the question prompt was either ignored or not interpreted.
- At significant points throughout the exercise, such as the first beat of each bar and the disjunct motion in bars two and four, the given voices provided a framework of triads and seventh chords to inform the students' pitch



selections. For example, on the first beat of the third bar, the 'D' to 'A' of the given parts created a perfect fifth; if students heard a major triad on this beat, then the pitch of the part to be transcribed had to be 'F-sharp' – this is confirmed by the fact that 'A' Dorian does not permit 'F natural.' In bar four, the three leaps contained in the first two beats of the bar, in isolation, presented quite a challenge. However, if students observed the E minor 7 provided by the given parts, then accessing the pitch in this section of the melody ought to have been more straightforward as each of the four notes in the first two beats of bar four belonged to the E minor 7th chord.

Students and teachers are reminded that the difficulties associated with the melodic transcription question can be mitigated by an awareness of how different elements of the area of study interact. This question was not designed to be an exercise purely in aural acuity; it also required a working knowledge of the music theory components of the study.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 4 – Music theory – Individual chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	5	7	10	17	25	35	3.6

- A-flat major 7: 'A-flat'–'C'–'E-flat'–'G'
- E-flat minor: 'E-flat'–'G-flat'–'B-flat'
- E minor 7: 'E'–'G'–'B'–'D'
- F augmented: 'F'–'A'–'C-sharp'
- C-sharp (full) diminished 7: 'C-sharp'–'E'–'G'–'B-flat'

This question was well answered with more than half of the cohort getting four or more of the chords correct. The E-flat minor and the C-sharp (full) diminished 7th chords caused the most difficulty; there was some confusion between E-flat minor and E-flat major, and a number of students omitted the 'B-flat' from the diminished 7th chord.

Question 5a. – Music theory – Diatonic chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	32	18	22	27	1.5

- Mediant chord of B-flat harmonic minor: D-flat augmented
- Subdominant 7 chord of D harmonic minor: G minor 7
- Leading note 7 chord of C major: B half-diminished

Nearly a third of the cohort scored no marks for this question. A small proportion of students incorrectly assumed that Questions 5a. and 5b. were optional questions and, as a result, left Question 5a. blank. A disturbingly large number of students attempted Question 5a. and got all three chords incorrect. This suggests that some students, while having an understanding of chord construction, were unable to place chords in a tonal or functional context. This question functioned as a theoretical primer for the aural 'recognition of a chord progression' question; students who did not have a good grasp of chord function and context inevitably struggled with the chord progression question.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	22	20	27	31	1.7

- Mediant chord of B-flat harmonic minor: 'D-flat'–'F'–'A'
- Subdominant 7 chord of D harmonic minor: 'G'–'B-flat'–'D'–'F'
- Leading note 7 chord of C major: 'B'–'D'–'F'–'A'

The cohort performed slightly better on this question. This suggests that there is a disconnect between the capacity of the cohort to name, as opposed to notate, a chord. The leading note 7 chord created the greatest amount of difficulty, with a number of students either incorrectly adding accidentals or omitting the seventh.

Question 6 – Aural comprehension – Recognition of a chord progression

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	1	1	3	8	9	12	14	11	9	7	6	6	4	6	4	1	7.3

1. D minor 2. B-flat major 3. E half diminished 4. C-sharp diminished 5. A dominant 7th 6. D minor

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or

Harmonic Grid

Bass note	D	B-flat	E	C-sharp	A	D
Quality	<i>minor</i>	Major	Half dim.	Diminished	Dominant 7 th	Minor

Students performed reasonably well in this question with a mean score similar to that of previous years' examinations. The majority of students correctly identified the tonality of the progression and clearly heard the authentic cadence at the end. The E half diminished and C-sharp diminished chords acted as discriminators as fewer students successfully identified these chords. Some students were inconsistent in using their chosen system of chord nomenclature; this was particularly the case for students using upper and lower case Roman numerals. While many students clearly indicated the relevant case for major and minor qualities, many wrote numerals that either lacked necessary details (such as the circle to indicate a diminished triad) or wrote the Roman numerals in such a way that upper and lower case were unclear. Students and teachers are reminded that this issue can be mitigated by either using the harmonic grid to answer the question or by writing out the quality descriptors.

Of concern was the tendency of some students to not distinguish between the various qualities of seventh. This was particularly a problem for the third and fifth chords in the progression. A significant proportion of the cohort was successful in identifying the roots of these chords and was also aware that the chords they heard were sevenths. However, this group went on to name the quality for the third chord as a diminished seventh and the fifth chord as a major seventh. While this group of students clearly possessed the aural acuity required to complete the task, their responses demonstrated that they had not made the connection between this question and the components of the study design that deal with the tonal context of chords. The study design stipulates that only chords in root position can be examined. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between the note heard in the bass and the possible qualities. For example, if a student was aware that the piece is in D minor, has heard the bass note 'A' for the fifth chord in the progression and believed the chord to be a seventh, then, ideally, sound knowledge of music theory would inform the student that the only possible quality was that of a dominant seventh as it is impossible to build a major seventh on scale degree five in minor in standard diatonic writing. It is vital that teachers impress upon students the links between the aural and theory components of the study design.

Section B – Analysis of excerpts of previously unheard music

While the majority of the cohort was able to complete Section B with confidence, some students lacked the necessary music terminology required to effectively deal with the relevant elements of music. Too many students relied too heavily on metaphor to describe elements, giving rise to two significant problems. Firstly, metaphor and non-music specific adjectives tend to displace a demonstration of specific music knowledge and insight that is most likely to achieve high marks. For example, some students used words such as 'spooky' to define tone colour and went on to structure their answer around this observation without further analysis or insight (ideally using specific music terminology). Such an approach did not score highly. Secondly, the use of metaphor often led to value judgements, albeit unintentional. This was particularly prevalent with regards to the Klaus Suonsaari Quintet's interpretation in performance of the Shostakovich Fifth Symphony, first movement and numerous students referred to the tone colour of this piece as 'seedy.' Once again, this observation does not reveal anything about the music.

Question 7a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	13	Average
%	0	1	2	4	6	11	13	17	15	12	10	6	4	7.3

Melody

- Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra: The melody of the A theme was interpreted to accentuate the dissonant and 'angular' characteristics of the line. Essentially a compound melody, the rigid interpretation of this idea contrasted with the more conjunct B theme creating an essentially call and response idea (perhaps antecedent consequent).
- Klaus Suonsaari Quintet: Although essentially as per the original scoring, this rendition is rather more embellished, with some use of improvisation, particularly in the middle of phrases. The timbre of the lead instrument perhaps caused the melody line to sound comical when compared to the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra.

Articulation

- Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra: The orchestral tuttis saw note values delivered in a very strict manner, with a very rigid and deliberately consistent approach to attack and decay (a kind of 'military' precision). In the



louder sections, the accents are much more strident than in the softer/smooth passages and the piece employed a full range of accents.

- Klaus Suonsaari Quintet: The note values were not as strict as the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra version and the rubato rhythm was accompanied by features of articulation, including slap-tonguing and the use of double accents. The attack slope of the melody instrument (saxophone) was not as quick as that of the strings in the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra version and came across as purposefully sluggish. This effect of articulation interacted with rhythm causing a drag on the tempo of the piece.

Rhythm

- Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra: Very precise. The doubly dotted rhythms delivered in a manner that accentuated a kind of ‘French overture’ style. Even in the smoother passages, the string lines were very precise rhythmically.
- Klaus Suonsaari Quintet: At times the rhythm was not exactly as per the originally scoring, and rubato and improvisatory gestures worked together to create a rather more relaxed sense of rhythm. This interpretation in performance also featured some additive rhythm resulting from embellishments and melodic extensions.

Many students performed less well because of a tendency to not focus on specific aspects of the question. Ideally, students should have had a plan in mind as to how each element was to be dealt with in order to avoid over-emphasising any one aspect. For example, some students dealt with melody in Question 7a. by discussing the ‘rhythm’ or the ‘tone colour’ of the melody. This resulted in a somewhat vague discussion of the element at hand and also left little for the student to talk about when those elements needed to be considered in Questions 7a. and 7b.

Of particular concern was the element of articulation as a significant proportion of the cohort did not demonstrate a clear understanding of this element. Too many students spoke about dynamics rather than issues of attack and decay, and fewer still had any command of the terminology required to craft a successful answer related to articulation. Metaphor and adjective were once again used to seemingly compensate for a lack of music-specific vocabulary with some students discussing, for example, issues of ‘sharp’ or ‘pointed’ articulation. While these kinds of answers sometimes had merit, the best responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the element and a command of the established music terminologies.

Question 7b.
Tone colour

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	2	4	6	13	20	17	21	11	6	4.7

Klaus Suonsaari Quintet: The low tessitura of the baritone saxophone was contrasted with the range of tone colours present in the ancillary instruments, particularly the variety of percussion instruments and piano. The saxophone delivered a variety of tone colours through the use of vibrato and modulations of the embouchure.

Many students devised effective answers to this question and the majority of the cohort demonstrated that they understood the concept of tone colour, with many using specific examples from the recording to elucidate their descriptions to good effect. The best responses defined the word ‘interest’ in the question as referring to contrast or development. Weaker students defined ‘interest’ as referring to what was specifically interesting to them. This gave rise to some ‘listening diary’ style responses that saw students detailing their emotional response to the interpretation. Others attempted to superimpose visual colours onto aspects of the performance. Where no meaningful connection was made between tone colour and the issue of ‘creating interest’, low marks were awarded. Students and teachers are reminded that while metaphor and extra-musical impressions can be relevant, particularly where the question permits a broader discussion of issues, the main tasks of Question 7b. were to identify characteristics of tone colour and describe how these characteristics worked to create interest.

Section C – Analysis of works from the Prescribed List of Ensemble Works

Nearly all students based their responses on works from the prescribed list. While there were very few instances of incorrect work selection, students and teachers are reminded that no marks can be awarded to students who answer questions in Section C using works or interpretations that are not on the prescribed list.

For the 2009 examination teachers and students are reminded that a new list of ensemble works has been mandated. Those studying *Lord Melbourne* should note that while the work is still on the list, one of the versions is different to that on the 2008 list.

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Question 8

Work chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
%	2	1	4	6	0	3	3	21	1	1	15	0	12	9	5	16

Question 8a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	5	13	24	24	20	10	3.6

This question required students to describe how melody had been interpreted in one of the interpretations in performance set for study. As for Section B, students continued to demonstrate a worrying tendency to deal with issues apart from melody. Regardless of which work a student chose, good responses to this question began with a description of melody, focussed specifically on issues such as range, pitch material (scale/tonality), phrase structure or other issues of horizontal pitch organisation, and continued with a description of how these aspects of melody had been interpreted. Mid-level answers often focussed too heavily on a mere description of melody without dealing with issues of interpretation. Weaker answers tended to display a fundamental misunderstanding of core concepts. For example, some students confused the idea of melody with that of a vocal line and focussed their descriptions on the lyrics. Other students, perhaps lacking the vocabulary or knowledge to deal specifically with melody, introduced other elements into their descriptions, particularly rhythm and tone colour. It should again be noted that descriptions that begin with phrases such as 'the rhythm of the melody...' or 'the tone colour of the melody...' do not, in terms of the requirements of the study design, constitute a description of melody.

Question 8b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	5	2	5	6	11	14	17	16	12	7	4	5.6

The 'discuss' stem of the question gave students the scope to deal with a wide range of issues associated with the chosen work and its two interpretations in performance. While the question required that an answer made reference to two of the listed elements of music, it did not necessarily follow that the discussion had to be entirely based around those two elements. However, this was the approach that the majority of students took, and some gained high marks, but, in many instances, students struggled to move beyond a simple description of the two selected elements. Good responses to this question used the quote provided as the starting point for an integrated response that used the selected elements as exemplars of an overarching argument. A number of students continued to essentially ignore the question that had been asked and instead provided a formulaic, prepared answer that often was not relevant. Another area of concern was the tendency of some students to refer to their chosen work in vague or general terms. Students are expected to have an intimate knowledge of the selected work, including an understanding of the treatment of all the relevant elements of music; knowledge of the role of instruments; the capacity to make a comparison of the two interpretations in performance; and an awareness of the contextual issues surrounding the interpretations. This knowledge should be backed up by specific examples (i.e. by quoting sections using bar numbers or some other descriptor). The best responses to this question demonstrated a breadth of knowledge that had been tailored to the specific question.

Question 9

Work chosen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
%	4	2	5	9	0	5	6	17	1	0	9	0	16	7	6	12

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	7	2	4	7	9	13	13	14	11	8	7	4	1	5.9

This question presented a challenge to many students, with a significant proportion either failing to complete a response or presenting a prepared response that did not meet the requirements of the question. A number of students did not clearly define the characteristics they had chosen as the basis for their discussions. Many students treated this question as an exercise in comparison between the two interpretations in performance. While the question did not preclude this approach, it did not require it. Those who decided to frame their discussions around a comparison focussed almost exclusively on differences as opposed to similarities. This often led to unhelpful hyperbole, particularly for those students who elected to answer this question using the works by Adams, Bartok and Stravinsky. The best responses clearly related the two characteristics of the interpretations to expressiveness. Students who only compared two interpretations often neglected to mention of the issue of expressiveness. This issue eluded a significant proportion of the cohort; expressiveness relates to the intentions of a performer – it can include the emotional impact of a work, but is not limited to that issue. Students often referred to texture in their discussion. While texture is not an element for music

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set for study, if a student chooses to discuss texture, an understanding of the concept must be clearly articulated. Many students confused the issue of texture with instrumentation or tone colour; in these instances the students would be better off confining their discussions to elements that are set for study.