2024 VCE Music Composition external assessment report

General comments

The 2024 Music Composition examination comprised four questions worth a total of 75 marks. The four questions were based on short excerpts of music from a variety of geographical and historical contexts.

* Class activities that include listening to a diverse range of styles and instrument combinations are recommended as effective preparation for this examination.
* Regular practice revising the key components of each of the elements of music would help students prepare for the examination by enabling a clear understanding of what to cover when asked for a specific element of music.
* Class activities that incorporate regular revision of the definitions of contrast, variation, repetition and transition, in conjunction with describing their use in a variety of musical examples, would provide effective preparation for this examination.
* Many students did not respond accurately to a question that asked them to describe the texture in an excerpt. Some of these responses tended to describe aspects of tone colour rather than texture.
* Students should be encouraged to refer to specific examples in the excerpt rather than making generalisations that are not supported by evidence from the excerpt.
* Teachers are encouraged to teach students the ‘RIDE’ analytical tool:
* Respond – with character
* Identify – elements involved
* Describe – how elements create character
* Evidence – locate instruments and describe what they are doing.
* Students are encouraged to practise reading and analysing questions to ensure they understand what each question is asking. In some instances, for example, responses described the use of unity and diversity when these were not posed in the question.

Specific information

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

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 5 | 1 | 94 | 1.9 |

This question required students to identify from the list provided two instruments that were not heard in the excerpt.

The two correct responses were ‘saxophone’ and ‘accordion’. Most students identified these correctly.

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 0.0 | 9 | 35 | 38 | 19 | 2.7 |

This question required students to describe how the vocal melody was accompanied in the verse.

To be awarded full marks, students needed to identify the instruments (drums, guitar, bass and backing vocals) and describe their roles in accompanying the lead vocal melody.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The vocal melody is accompanied by the backing female vocals in a high register, which compliments the high soprano range of the vocal melody. The outlining of chords and ornamentation in the bass and guitar fill out the lower end of the register, and imply the harmonic contour and progression in functional, resolving harmony to accompany the melody. Additionally, the drum kit holds a steady reference to the beat and the pulse in its rhythmic accompaniment, holding metric stability through the sections.

Question 1c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 2 | 22 | 43 | 25 | 8 | 2.2 |

This question required students to describe the role of rhythm and tempo in creating transition.

To be awarded full marks, students needed to describe the two transition sections, incorporating as much of the following information as possible.

* In the first transition, the drums perform a fill consisting of triplets, which gradually increases the tempo into the faster tempo of Section B. Metric modulation is used, where crotchets become quavers.
* The rhythm of the triplet fill becomes the new pulse/tempo of Section B.
* In the second transition, all instruments play on the downbeat of the new, slower tempo in rhythmic unison, establishing the quadruple feel of the chorus.

Responses that scored lower marks demonstrated some of the following characteristics:

* a description of the surrounding sections rather than the actual transitions
* a description of other elements that created transition, but did not mention rhythm and tempo
* a response that included misunderstandings and/or inaccuracies.

Question 1d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Average |
| % | 0.6 | 3 | 6 | 22 | 23 | 16 | 19 | 11 | 0.0 | 4.4 |

This question required an explanation of how texture and tone colour were used to create diversity between the sections of the excerpt.

Texture:

High-scoring responses were able to identify the instruments in most sections of the excerpt, describe their roles, and explain how the changes in texture and instrument roles contributed to creating contrast and diversity in the excerpt.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response:

The piece builds up texture from the beginning gradually in Section A, however in Section B a sudden increase in density is created, with the use of additional backing vocals, and a more erratic rhythmic pattern in the background, creating contrast and diversity between the two sections. Furthermore, the C section comes back to a more sparse, homophonic texture, compared to the previous almost polyphonic texture, as rhythms become more regular and the female vocalist becomes the main point of focus – creating diversity between the sections.

Tone colour:

High-scoring responses were able to identify the instruments in most sections of the excerpt, describe their tone colour and some aspects of how the tone colour was created, such as the use of articulation, register and dynamics. They were then able to articulate how the tone colour contrasted between the different sections, contributing to diversity.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response:

Throughout the excerpt, the use of different filters and dynamics contribute to contrasting, diverse tone colours. The guitar initially utilizes lots of reverb, with a hollow tone colour. Later, its fuller sound has a twangy tone colour, creating diversity. The use of drums and cymbals further changes the ensemble’s tone colour. In the intro, many cymbals are used, giving a metallic tone colour. In Section B a lot more snare and less cymbal is used, creating contrasting sharp tone colour, showing diversity in the drum part.

Question 2a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 40 | 22 | 18 | 14 | 6 | 1.3 |

This question required students to complete the blank section of the table to identify the structure of the second part of the excerpt. The correct response was:

* B
* A
* Bridge/Transition/B1 (D was also accepted)
* B

Question 2b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 0.6 | 9 | 26 | 30 | 24 | 6 | 5 | 3.1 |

This question required students to describe the use of repetition in the excerpt.

High-scoring students were able to note the repetition of themes A, B and C throughout the excerpt, with multiple repetition of the same themes and motifs, with slight variations. They provided specific examples of repetition, and identified the instruments involved.

Students who were able to fully describe the use of repetition with reference to specific examples in the excerpt were awarded the highest marks.

Question 2c

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 0.0 | 2 | 7 | 15 | 17 | 21 | 20 | 7 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 5.0 |

This question required students to select two elements of music from a list of three, and explain how they were used to create variation. High-scoring responses were those that demonstrated a clear and thorough explanation of how variation was created, using a thorough analysis of the selected element, supported by specific examples from the excerpt.

Lower-scoring responses displayed some of the following characteristics:

* described in general terms how variation can be achieved without referring to specific evidence from the excerpt
* demonstrated misunderstandings about the selected element, such as describing instrument sounds under the heading of ‘texture’, or describing variation in the melody under the heading of ‘tone colour’
* lacked specific examples of variation from the excerpt
* described the use of unity and diversity when these were not posed in the question.

The following is an example of a high scoring response:

Tone Colour:

Initially, the tone colour is quite woody due to the prominence of woodwinds in the mid register – this is varied as it becomes more reverberant through the addition of brass.

The nasal sound of the oboe playing the Section B melody varies with the muted, bright sound of the trumpet playing the melody afterwards.

The initial unified tone colour of Section A and B vary due to the exchange of melody with more brassy, rumbling instruments.

Texture:

The first 4 bars have a thicker homophonic texture in Section A than the following 4 bars where the instrumentation decreases rapidly to two clarinets, creating variation of the Section A melody.

In the final playing of Section B, a trumpet plays a soaring countermelody beneath the melody, creating a sense of polyphony, this adds variation to melody and texture of Section B.

Chimes and marimba provide countermelodies beneath the final playings of the B section, creating a busier, thicker texture in variation with the original thinner texture.

Question 3a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 0.0 | 1 | 3 | 22 | 28 | 46 | 4.1 |

For this question, students were asked to complete information in the table provided:

* to describe the role and musical contribution provided by the plucked bass from its entry at 0:04
* to identify one instrument / sound source that enters at 1:06, and describe its role and musical contribution.

Below is the table, with the correct responses provided in italics.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time code** | **Instrument / sound source (1 mark per response)** | **Description of role and musical contribution (2 marks per response)** |
| 00:00 | Hand claps | Provides rhythmic ostinato and rhythmic pulse |
| 00:04 | Plucked bass | *Outlines chord pattern / harmonic pattern (and/or)*  *Adds rhythmic and melodic interest* |
| 00:12 | Solo voice | Main melody |
| 01:06 | *1. Backing singers (1 mark) OR*  *2. Accordion (1 mark) OR*  *3. Drum kit (1 mark)* | *1. Sings in two-part harmony in a call and response with the lead vocalist. Creates chordal texture. OR*  *2. Plays sustained chords, following harmonic pattern of bass. OR*  *3. Adds rhythmic drive and interlocks with bass.* |

Question 3b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 0.0 | 8 | 14 | 39 | 40 | 3.1 |

This was a multiple-choice question. It required students to select four options that most accurately described the treatment of harmony.

Below is the table, with the correct responses provided in italics.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **A.** The harmony follows a 16 bar pattern, outlining chords I, IV and V  ***B.*** *The harmony follows a 12 bar pattern using chords I, IV and V* | **C.** Overall the harmony changes twice per bar  ***D.*** *Overall the harmony changes once per bar* |
| ***E.*** *The harmony outlines V7th chords*  **F**. The harmony outlines dissonant chords that change in each verse and chorus | ***G.*** *The harmony is outlined by the plucked bass*  **H.** The harmony is outlined by the solo voice |

Question 3c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 0.0 | 1 | 14 | 27 | 24 | 23 | 10 | 3.9 |

This question required students to describe the development of harmony and texture from 1:06 to the end.

High-scoring responses were able to describe:

* the thickening of the texture, with drums replacing hand claps, female backing vocalists entering and singing a call and response with the male lead vocalist, and the accordion playing sustained chords
* how later during the excerpt, the male lead vocalist and backing vocals swapped roles, and the accordion dropped out, varying the texture
* the development of harmony, with the backing vocalists singing in two parts and the accordion reinforcing the harmony with sustained chords.

Lower-scoring responses:

* mentioned texture and harmony only in general terms, without specific reference to the excerpt
* mentioned only one element
* contained misunderstandings or diverted to elements other than harmony or texture.

The following is an example of a high scoring response:

* The introduction of multiple backing vocals and the replacement of the hand claps with a drum kit develops texture by adding a call and response between the male and female vocal and by creating a lower dynamic, fuller tone colour with the kick drum.
* Harmony is also built in the female backing vocal, which harmonises with itself and the male vocals.
* The introduction of an accordion fills in a low treble range in the texture, also providing harmonies to the vocal melody.
* The verse after 1:06 maintains the drum kit introduced in the chorus, showing a development of the initial hand-clap accompanied verse.
* The layering of the female and male vocals develops a denser texture in comparison to the first verse.

Question 4a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 1 | 21 | 38 | 30 | 10 | 2.3 |

This question required students to describe the use of duration in the excerpt. The question was scaffolded, with aspects of duration such as rhythm, metre, beat/pulse and tempo suggested for inclusion.

High-scoring responses described many of the above aspects, including observations such as:

* changing and ambiguous metre often oscillating between 2/4 and 3/4
* lack of a clear downbeat
* fast tempo
* a wide variety of rhythmic ideas that included syncopation and polyrhythms.

Lower-scoring responses displayed insufficient understanding and/or familiarity with aspects of duration. These responses tended to be:

* brief and lacking in information
* lacking in accuracy, with statements that were not true of the excerpt.

Question 4b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 0 | 5 | 19 | 35 | 25 | 12 | 5 | 3.4 |

This question required students to describe the use of articulation and dynamics throughout the excerpt.

High-scoring responses included many of the following points:

* *p* with short crescendos to *mf* creates sudden interest.
* Sudden and sharp changes in dynamics add to a sense of unpredictability and drama.
* Glissandi in trombones crescendo to create dramatic effect.
* Solos are played forte while the rest of the ensemble reduces volume.
* Pizzicato in strings combined with marcato and staccato in flutes and oboes create playful character.
* Slurs and glissandi in the trombones and tenuti in the horns contrast with the short accents in the upper woodwind and triangle.

Lower-scoring responses tended to be brief and general, with little specific evidence that directly related to the excerpt. In some instances, misunderstandings were evident.

The following is an example of a high scoring response:

* Use of steep, ascending glissandos that crescendo in the trombone section
* Use of spiccato by strings to create dry and fast decaying notes
* Long legato lines in trumpet contrast to short staccato triplets in upper winds
* Pizzicato strings at a soft dynamic play short, arpeggiated interjections
* At the end, strings play fast, ascending glissandos at an mf dynamic
* Rolls are used in the timpani that constantly crescendo and diminuendo

Question 4c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Average |
| % | 0 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 9 | 14 | 17 | 14 | 12 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 0.6 | 6.2 |

This question asked students to discuss how the composer has used pitch, tone colour and contrast to create character in the excerpt.

High-scoring responses were able to discuss the different characters present at different points throughout the excerpt, and explain how these were created by different aspects of pitch, tone colour and contrast. Some of the following points were included:

* Use of ambiguous tonality helps set the scene for an introspective and anticipatory character at the opening.
* Sparse melodic fragments using a wide range of pitches contribute to a lack of predictability.
* Contrasting tone colours and melodic shapes assist in creating the various characters. Juxtaposition between the flute and trombone motifs, with contrasting interplay between the clarinet and oboe, creates a lively character and busy atmosphere.
* Contrasting shifts between the warm tone colour of strings and the bright, nasal tone of the oboe add to create a bright, energetic character.
* Contrasting melodic ideas using a wide variety of intervallic structures appear in the different string parts.
* Large triangle and Chinese cymbal add to tonal palette in creating a colourful and varied character.
* The excerpt gradually builds in tension and becomes more frenetic with the rapid overlay of diverse tone colours such as horns, bassoons and flutes, together with extreme registers and often dissonant harmonies.

Lower-scoring responses displayed the following:

* use of inappropriate language to describe character and/or tone colour
* selection of unsuitable character words. Exercises that build up a word bank of adjectives to describe different characters would be very useful for examination preparation
* the presence of misunderstandings and/or inaccuracies
* an inability to include aspects of pitch, tone colour, character and contrast, and a tendency to select only two or three of these
* a lack of specific evidence from the excerpt
* a brief response containing little information and/or relevance to the excerpt.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response:

* The character is somewhat humorous and playful at the beginning.
* Jumpy bright woodwinds in their high register contrast with the rumbling drone beneath – creating a sense they are almost playing.
* The glissandos of the trombone dip and slide up and down the register, contributing to a somewhat humorous character.
* Pizzicato strings in the mid-register carry a woody, muted tone colour. As it interplays with the woodwinds it creates a playful contrast with their high pitches – hence creating playfulness in the character.
* Then the piece transitions to a more foreboding, eerie character.
* The shrill, high strings carry an unpleasant sound due to the highness of the register – this creates a foreboding sense of danger.
* The deep rumbling timpani creates a murky tone colour that distinctly contrasts to the bright sound of the trumpet in its mid register, it makes the soloist sound eerie due to its lack of solid accompaniment.
* The bending of pitch by the glissandos by both the low register trombones and mid register strings contrast in pitch, as they are played simultaneously. This creates dissonance which contributes to an eerie character.