2024 VCE Music Inquiry written external assessment report

General comments

The 2024 VCE Music Inquiry aural and written examination was based on the key skills and knowledge found in the VCE Music Study Design (From 2023) and was consistent with the sample examination material published in 2023 and the 2023 VCE Music Inquiry aural and written examination.

The quality of responses varied greatly. The finest responses demonstrated students’ ability to analyse the use of the compositional devices, elements of music and associated concepts in the excerpts played during the exam. Further, the highest-scoring responses showed a practised use of language. High-scoring responses incorporated a pleasing range of terms that were specific to the study of music and demonstrated not only an understanding of the included excerpts, but also a broad understanding of melodic and textural structures in music and how these evoke emotions and ideas.

Lower-scoring responses included inaccurate observations about the excerpts. At times these responses relied too much on the contextual information gleaned from the tables and questions on the exam. These responses showed an insufficient understanding of the more sophisticated use of the elements of music featured in the excerpts that students heard. Overly brief responses were problematic, and, in these cases, students often did not reference a sufficient number of specific examples about the musical characteristics of the works.

Aural analysis, as mandated within Area of Study 3, is a skill that requires much practice. The 2023 and 2024 Music Inquiry aural and written examinations are excellent guides for future students and their teachers. They give insights into the variety of music that should be studied, the type of questions likely to be included on future exams and the amount of time that students should expect to complete responses.

When constructing their teaching and learning programs, teachers may choose to utilise the questions and excerpts found on earlier VCE music examinations. It is worthwhile noting that there have been changes to exam requirements over the years and teachers must be teaching to the current study design. However, these questions and excerpts represent some excellent teaching and learning resources that could assist students to improve their ability to aurally analyse and describe features of music works.

Specific information

Note: 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.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Marks** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **Average** |
| % | 0 | 0.5 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 13 | 15 | 20 | 22 | 19 | 7.8 |

This question called on students to identify and describe aspects of the excerpt from Journey by Lisa Young. Many students achieved full marks. Many students were able to determine the required level of depth from the pre-filled part of the table. Question 1a. formed a valuable precursor to students’ work on Question 1b.

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Marks** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **Average** |
| % | 0 | 0.5 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 15 | 16 | 12 | 15 | 15 | 12 | 6.9 |

This question featured a more open format, which was more challenging. Fewer students were awarded eight marks or higher.

To be awarded high marks, students needed to respond carefully. Responses needed to address the use of the element of music texture and its contribution to building musical interest. The abstract and affective nature of ‘interest’ should be noted. High-scoring responses not only used music specific terms, but were also able to suggest how the changes in texture impacted the listener. The following student response exemplified these characteristics. The balance between the analysis of texture and the contention around interest was notable.

The excerpt is polyphonic as there are multiple different melodic and rhythmic lines.

The repeating parts help to create interest

The texture is sparse at the beginning of the excerpt with the shaker, flute and first vocal line, but becomes more dense as the new melodic and rhythmic lines enter.

The shaker and flute are in the background

Vocal lines are in the foreground and are supported by the other instruments.

As the drums enter, they are in the middleground helping to keep time and rhythm

As the fourth and final vocal entry begins, it enters in the foreground adding a new idea and helping to change the musical ideas and concepts present already within the excerpt, it is a high vocal melody.

With each new entry in the excerpt interest is maintained by adding a new idea melodically and texturally and creating new ideas and themes with the excerpt.

The different timbre and range of each instrument helps to create an interesting textural dynamic within the excerpt.

A mysterious character.

Question 2a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 2 | 3 | 13 | 15 | 21 | 22 | 24 | 4.1 |

Question 2a. enabled students to choose and then describe the role of three of the six instruments / sound sources featured. Some descriptions of the role that may have been included are as follows:

* bass drum
* hits from the very beginning, consistent throughout excerpt
* its main role is to outline the beat as it plays on the first and third beat of each common time bar. It also includes variation throughout the ‘groove’ by including some syncopated hits
* snare drum
* constant eighth notes with a buzz roll heard on beat three, and an accented hit on the eighth quaver of each bar
* manipulated string instrument (possibly created by extended techniques)
* a distinct high-pitched sound
* the sliding/manipulated pitch is incredibly rhythmic and alternates rapidly between medium to high pitches
* triangle – plays a constant pattern from 0:05
* a consistent rhythmic pattern is used, accenting the off-beat quavers
* pattern is based on a rhythmic cell containing two semiquavers and a quaver
* nylon string guitar
* enters towards the end of this excerpt, utilising a repeated pattern with delay/reverb
* adds to the rhythmic layers and emphasises offbeats and the use of syncopation
* agogo bell
* adds an additional repeated rhythmic layer, creating a different point of interest by using a contrasting timbre on offbeats and syncopation.

Most students responded very well to this question. More than 45% of students were awarded five or six marks.

Question 2b

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Average |
| % | 1 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 17 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 5.9 |

As revealed in the table above, this question posed a substantially higher level of challenge for students. Less than 13% of students scored 10 or more marks.

In this context, the term ‘pitch’ warrants close attention from students and teachers. This element of music has a very specific definition within the study design. The definition on page 17 of the study design is extensive. It not only conveys the fundamental nature of pitch as ‘the relative highness and lowness of sounds’, but also goes on to incorporate individual definitions of melody, harmony and tonality.

Rather than analysing and describing the use of these concepts in a detailed and comprehensive way, many students completed a relatively surface-level analysis and described the relative ‘highness’ and ‘lowness’ of the musical material presented. Although this is an important concept, students should not have limited their

description to this point. High-scoring responses included many observations about issues such as melodic contour, motific development and tonality, as well as the composer’s placement of notes within instrumental ranges.

The table format gave students a structure to work with. This was evidently important as the best responses in both rhythm and pitch boxes were able to highlight the similarities and differences between the motif heard from the 29-second mark and the reiteration that occurred at the 38-second mark. Labelling the third and fourth boxes as ‘Version 1’ invited students to highlight use of the compositional device ‘variation’. This was presented in a small number of responses and was rewarded accordingly.

The following student response had many pleasing characteristics. In the pitch boxes, several concepts relating to melody and tonality were included, as well as one reference to harmony. Equally, the analysis of rhythms is factual and highlighted the variation between the two versions of the motif. Additionally, the response incorporated two notable uses of communication other than text in their work; namely, notated rhythms in the rhythm boxes and lines indicating melodic contour in the pitch boxes. These are acceptable and, indeed, encouraged. In this instance, they added depth and clarity to the description.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Section A | Complete the table below to describe the treatment of pitch and rhythm. |
| Initial motif0:29 – 0:38 | Pitch:Repetition of the ‘E E B C’ line in the consonant E Aeolian tonality; diatonicism. It is played by the bass strings in a lower register, with phrase lengths even and long  |
| Rhythm: for melody line (simple quadruple meter) The background percussive rhythm continues, ceasing at one instant to emphasise the melody line  |
| Motif – Version 10:38 – 0:54 | Pitch:Phrases stay even and long and contour stays the same  E B CSuspended 4th Chord played by high strings stepwise at end. ‘B C’ minor second interval is emphasised by the string section. |
| Rhythm:Change in rhythm –  For the melody line which is a variation on original motif.The consistent rapid tempo is conveyed by the triangle, agogo bells + snare playing many semiquaver and quaver syncopated rhythms. |

Question 3a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
| % | 17 | 15 | 22 | 19 | 15 | 7 | 4 | 2.4 |

This question asked students to describe similarities in the ways variation was created in Excerpts A and B. The two excerpts were a rich source of analysis and comparison; however, for both this question and Question 3b, many students struggled to complete cogent responses. This is reflected in the low number of students being awarded high marks in both cases.

The challenge in this question was mostly in relation to variation. In lower-scoring responses, students showed levels of confusion or a lack of demonstrable knowledge about variation. All the compositional devices set for study in the key skills and knowledge of the study design should be thoroughly covered by teachers.

Observations that were often included in high-scoring responses related to ‘additions’ to the repeated bass lines featured. Some points around this are as follows:

* both create variations over a repeating bass line
* both introduce a new melodic idea over the repeating bass line
* both have slight melodic variations in the repeating bass line
* both use changes in texture and tone colour to create variation.

Relatively few students made reference to the ground bass found in both of the excerpts.

Question 3b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Average |
| % | 1 | 3 | 17 | 15 | 18 | 12 | 18 | 10 | 5 | 4.5 |

Question 3b also proved challenging for many students. In many instances there was a misunderstanding about the nature of both the elements of music. Page 18 of the study design contains clear definitions of both these elements of music, and the list of concepts supplied is a valuable source of investigation for students.

In the following response, the student demonstrated a strong understanding of the two elements of music and the ability to discern differences between these two elements of music in relation to the two set works.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Excerpt A‘Chacony in G minor’(2 marks per response) | Excerpt BMeshugganah(2 marks per response) |
| Texture  | Thickness of texture stays relatively stable throughout the excerpt, but the Strings play in rhythmic unison, blending all lines together.Reasonably thin texture despite this due to much stronger focus on treble frequencies.Variation lies in the short blending of call + response fragments from different instruments to thicken texture somewhat.  | Greater presence of bass strings with the texture thicker overallInterjecting violin lines abruptly thicken texture to vary its densityViolas play ‘A’ notes on second and fourth beats which provides a more distinct harmonic line throughout  |
| Tone colour  | The arco strings provide piercing timbre which as violins ascend to higher register becomes more clarion and bright.Overall complimentary bright timbre. | Bass line is plucked pizzicato which creates a warmth and darkness to the line.The piercing timbre of violin from it playing sul ponticello – extremely high notes glissando down is a variation hereJuxta posing timbre of piercing, screeching strings with rounder plucked cello. |

Question 3c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 24 | 20 | 32 | 13 | 11 | 1.7 |

This question was much more capably handled with many responses garnering either three or four marks.

Students were free to choose any other two differences in relation to variation in the excerpts. It should be noted that students were required to refer to the same ‘treatment of variation’ in each row of the table.

Aspects of variation that could have been raised were as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Excerpt A‘Chacony in G minor’ | Excerpt BMeshugganah |
| * The main melody is introduced from the beginning and continues throughout the excerpt.
* The focus is on the main melody, with melodic imitation between parts and countermelodies used.
* Repeating bass line sits in the background and is less noticeable.
* Focus is on melody to create variation – with melodic imitation and countermelodies used to create variation and interest.
 | * Focus on bass line throughout, with other short, fleeting effects around it. Bass line sits in the foreground throughout.
* Repeating bass line dominates the texture and also incorporates some melodic variation into its repetition.
* Secondary melody only introduced halfway through – recurs in fragments interspersed with other electronic effects and short shrieks, tremolos, percussive effects and glissandi.
* No melodic imitation between layers or build-up of texture – focus on tone colour to create variation.
 |

Question 4a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 7 | 34 | 35 | 25 | 1.8 |

This question called for a description of tone colour. Any meaningful analogous terms supplied garnered marks in this instance. Full marks were awarded for an increased level of depth that may have included content such as methods of making sound and instrument classification. Sound points that may have been included in responses were:

* struck tuned percussion instrument
* metallic sound
* resonant
* sustained
* percussive quality
* idiophone
* bright.

Question 4b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 3 | 20 | 34 | 30 | 13 | 2.3 |

Question 4b was generally answered very well, with a large percentage of students awarded either three or four marks. Students could refer to a wide range of concepts related to melody and, in this instance, higher marks were awarded based on the level of detail and depth in the response. The following student response successfully described how the melody developed by referring to many aspects of the melody.

Scalic initially on tonality of E major with rapid ascending scale run: contour then ascending in arpeggios of the dominant 7th chord (Bdom7).

Range is roughly 2 octaves. Stays consonant with long, even phrases throughout (diatonic).

Melody tends to be in the high register of celeste, but also some lower-register notes played at start of scale run.

Question 4c

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Average |
| % | 0 | 2 | 4 | 13 | 17 | 13 | 9 | 13 | 12 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 6.0 |

Question 4c gave students the opportunity to complete an extended response, and as such this question was worth 12 marks – a significant number. Students were required to discuss how the layers of sound created character. When responding to questions that call for a discussion on character, students should make reference to the evocation or communication of plausible ideas or affective outcomes such as mood or emotions. As highlighted by the above results, many students did not respond well to the question. Students needed to improve the following skills:

* aurally analysing and developing a cogent contention about character in the excerpt
* demonstrating knowledge about the element of music texture and its connection to layer or sounds
* identifying the sounds of different instruments used by the composer and describing the roles of the instruments
* structuring a response using literary conventions such as a contention, linking sentences and a conclusion.

It should be noted that supplied information, including the titles of works, can be a rich source of information and serve as a suggestion for a contention about character. Some of the higher-scoring responses took note of the title of Matthew Hindson’s work and included a contention of an evocation of the celestial using contrasting layers of sounds.

The following student response had some fine characteristics. References were made to the roles of many instruments, and meaningful connections were made to other elements of music such as tone colour, dynamics and melody. Vitally, there was a clear contention on character. This contention was reiterated at key points in the response and connections to characteristics of the music were included.

The entry of muted horns and string section thickens the texture from monophonic to homophonic, which provides a deeper layer with increased bass and middle presence, establishing a character of dreaminess. Counterpoint harmonies with their own rhythms increase depth to the ethereal mood. Plucked bass guitar notes with its lower resonant notes have a duller timbre but provide an overall lush timbre in this section; creates a feeling or wondrous magic. Soaring high strings with a glissando (upward bend) occurs two times to create the uplifting atmosphere, each time driving the other instruments into a higher register. As this initially happens the bass instruments drop out, leaving only the middle and the treble frequencies. Sustained notes of the string section with an increase in dynamics from mf to f here provide an additional feel of dreaminess.

Texture thins out due to exit of bass guitar and due to focus on higher frequencies. Thins again when middle frequences exit to extremely sparse, but still homophonic at close.

At the end of the excerpt the piece closes on an unresolved A major chord to highlight the soothing dreaminess of the piece. The ritardando (slow down) of the celeste melody at the end of the excerpt creates a lullaby-like feel as the song drifts towards a sparse texture. The ending of Excerpt B finds all instruments (celeste, violin) playing in extreme upper register which creates a focus on treble frequences, accentuating the ethereal, dreamy character.