



2007 Music Styles GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2007 Music Styles examination consisted of three sections and comprised a total of 107 marks. All sections of the examination were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published in the 2006 Sample Exam. The question style and the length of the examination were also consistent with the published sample paper.

2007 was the second year of the reaccredited study design for Music Styles and students were, for the most part, well prepared for the requirements of the examination. However, although the vast majority of the cohort used appropriate works for Section B of the examination, a few used an inadmissible work for Question 8, which required the work to have been created since 1910.

Overall, students performed very well in the 2007 examination with the adjusted mean score for each question being higher than, or comparable to, previous years. Many students demonstrated an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge and a sound understanding of the concepts contained in the study design.

Several students used Sculthorpe's *Small Town* and the Queen song *Bohemian Rhapsody* as two of their selected works for Section B. Students and teachers should note that it is highly inadvisable to use any of the 15 ensemble works set for study in Music Solo Performance as options for Section B of the Music Styles examination. The focus of study in Music Styles is very different from the other music subjects and the readily available background material on these works is not geared towards the requirements of the Music Styles study design.

Students and teachers should note that the construction of the examination is directly linked to the marking scheme and the amount of time spent on a question ought to reflect the number of marks available for that question. Some students struggled to manage their time in the examination effectively. The following problems in exam technique were observed.

- A significant minority of the cohort did not distinguish between the differing types of question stem and some students dedicated too much time to the 'describe' questions and neglected the 'discuss' questions. Dot points, diagrams and succinct prose are the most effective approach to answering 'describe' questions and, although students may write essays for these questions, there is little benefit to be had in framing responses with introductions and summaries.
- Many students lost time beginning their responses with an introductory paragraph that merely rephrased the question or repeated aspects of the question prompt.
- Some students lost time in unnecessarily repeating points they had already made.
- Some students struggled to tailor their responses to the specific questions being asked and instead seemed to repeat everything they knew about a particular work, only some of which was relevant.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Section A consisted of five questions and represented 48 of 107 marks. An audio CD lasting approximately 51 minutes accompanied this section of the examination. The length of the CD corresponded to the weighting of Section A as set out in the Assessment Guide. Questions 3, 4 and 5 included additional 'prompts' that were designed to give students a context and/or terminology to assist in answering these questions. Extra time was allotted to these questions to give students the opportunity to read the extra material and students responded well to this additional stimulus.

A large proportion of the cohort handled Section A very capably and demonstrated high-order analytical aural skills. However, some students had difficulty in focussing their responses on the actual questions and instead wrote narrative descriptions of what they were hearing. While some of these 'listening diary' type responses were quite astute, they did not score highly where the salient points of the question had been overlooked.

Section A focussed on the elements of music and students were, for the most part, skilled in discussing and describing these concepts. However, texture and tone colour caused difficulties for some students. A great deal of the description and discussion relating to texture went to the issue of density: many students spoke of passages of music that use few instruments as featuring a 'thin' texture and suggested that the texture became 'thicker' as more instruments were added. While there is some merit to this approach, it reflects only one aspect of the concept of texture – issues related to monody, polyphony, homophony and heterophony were frequently neglected.

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Some students confused the element of tone colour with that of instrumentation. The differences between these two elements are outlined in the glossary on page 135 of the *Music VCE Study Design*. Responses that employed a list of sound sources as an attempt to describe tone colour could not score highly. In addition, students whose responses relied heavily on mere adjectives did not gain as many marks as those whose responses demonstrated actual knowledge. These students also risked, perhaps unintentionally, making unhelpful value judgements through the use of pejorative language. For example, while the description of a soprano's voice as 'shrill' does speak to the issue of tone colour, it does not demonstrate knowledge in the same way as a reference to vibrato and tessitura.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	0	2	15	23	24	36	4.8

This question elicited some good responses. However, while many students constructed very clear descriptions of the elements of music, few noticed the specific duplication of the melody several octaves apart. In addition to this, few students commented on the ornamentation in the violin line.

High-scoring responses featured a detailed description of instrumentation and tone colour that was clearly related to the compositional device of contrast and could include the following:

- an identification or description of the sound sources – violin, double bass and accordion
- a description of the role each plays (melody/accompaniment)
- comments related to the tessitura of each instrument
- a description of how the instruments were used in combination (for example, melodic doubling)
- vibrato and tuning issues associated with the idiosyncrasies of doubling
- a description of how contrast was achieved through additive orchestration and the changing role of the strings versus static accompaniment provided by the accordion
- comments related to the ornamentation in the violin line versus the unadorned melody in the double bass.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	0	0	0	2	7	15	21	26	20	8	6.5

While many students wrote fine descriptions of the three elements, a discussion was needed to address the requirement to consider the interaction of these elements. The element of texture was the least well handled, with most students only considering the dimension of additive density.

High-scoring responses featured a relevant discussion of the interaction of texture, tone colour and rhythm with at least one of the elements linked to a compositional device such as contrast, repetition or variation. Effective discussions focussed on the following aspects of the three elements.

Texture

- a discussion of the combinations of heterophony and polyphony
- pointillist accompaniment
- the density of the texture
- a discussion of the role of each part – for example, the function of percussion in denying the listener a regular pulse
- the textural contour created by overlaid descending lines

Tone colour

- an initial description of the sound sources
- issues associated with tessitura and how the composer used this to shape the piece
- pizzicato/arco; articulation in wind instruments as it varied the tone colour

Rhythm

- motivic use of rhythmic fragments
- canon/fugue
- motoric rhythm (rhythm based on one specific note value) in melodic lines versus irregular call and response punctuation in the percussion
- compound metre with cross rhythms resulting from overlaying melodic lines

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Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	0	0	2	1	5	13	17	21	23	17	6.8

This question produced some mixed responses with some students constructing a generalised discussion of the three elements rather than one that related to the musical effect.

High-scoring responses featured an in-depth discussion of how the three elements created the calm, peaceful effect of the gentle breezes in the Mozart trio and included aspects of the following.

Melody

- flowing conjunct motion, particularly in the instrumental lines
- use of a sequence to prolong the string accompaniment
- smooth 'bell-shaped' continuous melody in the vocal lines
- arpeggiation in the vocal lines
- the use of sequence in the vocal parts
- melisma
- tonality and references to the characteristics of the major scale

Harmony

- major tonality using mostly chords I, IV and V – with occasional use of dominant 7th/diminished 7th chords
- a discussion of how the chord progression sets up an expectation of resolution which is consistently met (hence a calm and peaceful effect)
- a discussion of the interaction of harmony and melody

Texture

- a discussion of the counterpoint employed by the vocal lines versus the homophonic texture of the accompaniment
- a discussion centred on the instrumentation and the role each part plays in making up the texture

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	4	24	36	36	3.1

The majority of students handled this part of Question 4 very well.

High-scoring responses generally featured four or more observations about how variation was used in the excerpt. Some students elected to give a more detailed description of fewer aspects of how variation was used – this was also a legitimate approach. Good answers included the following:

- variation in tone colour – acoustic piano versus the computer generated and sampled sounds
- melodic variation – the florid piano line acting as a more detailed variation of the Obrecht piece; melodic variation inherent in the Obrecht
- articulation changing in the piano part (high-end responses also related this to style)
- variations in style – the subtle changes in the behaviour of the piano part
- variation in the use of the piano and the changing voices in the tape part.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	1	6	12	18	20	24	12	7	5.0

Question 4b. functioned as a discriminator for Section A of the examination. In addition to aurally analysing the excerpt, students were also required to synthesise information provided in the question prompt. While this question elicited a broad spread of results, most students were able to interact with the question on some level.

High-scoring responses brought out the subtle changes in the use of the elements of music as one style transformed into another in the excerpt. Students did not need to be familiar with the various styles being 'parodied' in this excerpt: the best answers were those that highlighted the uses of the elements of music. These included:

- tonality/harmony – the juxtaposition of modes, major-minor tonality and occasional jazz changes

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- rhythm/time – straight semiquavers versus the suggestion of syncopation in the way motivic ideas were rhythmically presented
- dynamics/articulation – a description of how dynamics and articulation changed according to the differing styles presented in the piano part
- instrumentation/tone colour – a focus on the changing role of the piano and tape parts with reference to the voice changes in the tape part.

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	4	30	36	31	3.0

This question resulted in a mixed response from students: many spent too much time writing a narrative description of the piece rather than describing the texture. Some students used excessive terminology without demonstrating a clear understanding of the concepts they had defined.

High-scoring answers used the information contained in the question prompt to good effect and included issues such as:

- the concept of heterophony (students did not need to use the actual word to obtain full marks)
- a description of the diverse elements unified through the beat keeper
- an awareness of the accompaniment role of some parts versus an ‘obligato’ or narrative role of others
- a description of the sectional nature of the music employed in ‘story telling’.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	1	7	13	17	22	17	16	8	5.0

Question 5b. acted as the second discriminator for Section A. All students attempted the question and the results were very positive. Most students were able to recognise and speak intelligently about compositional devices in a work from a non-Western background. High-scoring answers included the following information.

Contrast

- contrasting use of the voice in percussive and lyrical ways
- the contrast inherent in the structure of the ensemble

Variation

- the modulation of voices and the changing effect of the voices used in different combination, with some mention of the virtuosity of the piece
- issues associated with metre – mostly duple metre with occasional cross rhythms

Texture /Dynamics

- a description of different vowel sounds working to influence/alter the texture of the music
- the use of dynamics to define the contrast and variation inherent in the structure

Section B

Section B consisted of four questions and represented 36 of 107 marks. These questions were linked to the works students had studied in Units 3 and 4, and primarily went to issues of context, style and, to a lesser extent, structure. One work in Unit 3 needed to be an Australian composition, while one work in Unit 4 needed to have been created since 1910.

Section B was, on the whole, very well answered and it was pleasing to see an increasing number of students tailoring what they had learnt to the questions being asked. The best responses were those that clearly related issues of style and context to the actual music studied rather than simply listing generalities about a style or a composer’s background.

It should be noted that, although the study design does not mandate **specific** terminologies beyond the elements of music and compositional devices, music terminology appropriate to the selected styles is an aspect of key knowledge. It was noted that some students struggled for want of a vocabulary to express various concepts related to the works they had studied. If, for example, a piece of early 20th century expressionism was set for study, it was greatly beneficial if the student was familiar with the lexicon of terms commonly used describe this style of music. Likewise, if a piece of jazz was set for study, students needed a working knowledge of the terminologies commonly employed by jazz musicians.

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Teachers are advised to be careful in selecting the works for study in Units 3 and 4. The works selected need to be rich enough to permit a discussion of all the elements of music and compositional devices, including contrast (for Unit 3) and repetition and variation (for Unit 4), as well as issues of style and context. A range of interesting and appropriate works were selected in 2007. These included, but were not limited to, the following.

Australian works

- John Antill: *Corroboree*
- Stephen Leek: *Island Songs*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Earth Cry*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Kakadu*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Port Essington*
- Peter Sculthorpe: *Sun Music I*
- Nigel Westlake: *Antarctica*.

Works composed since 1910

- Bartok: *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste*
- Miles Davis: *So What* and *Flamenco Sketches*
- Philip Glass: *Koyaanisquatis*
- Messiaen: *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*
- Respighi: *Pines of Rome*
- Stravinsky: *Symphony of Psalms*

While some students continued to present pre-prepared answers without tailoring what they had learnt to the specific questions of Section B, most showed a capacity to synthesise the material they had learnt in a way that was relevant and showed the breadth of their learning.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	2	3	3	7	9	22	18	34	6.1

This question was well handled by the majority of the cohort. Most students had a great deal of pertinent information to convey. Students were able to argue for or against the question prompt without penalty: there was no specific need to see the work in question as being representative of an 'Australian' style.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	1	10	8	13	22	45	4.8

In spite of being given the option to use a diagram, very few students elected to do this. On the whole, the descriptions of structure were of a high standard. However, there was a disturbing trend for some students to describe Sonata or First-movement form as 'ternary.' Students should be aware that while Sonata form does consist of three broad sections, it is unhelpful, and goes against the commonly agreed understanding of this structure, to describe it as ternary.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	1	4	9	10	8	15	15	34	5.8

A description was required here, not a discussion, and the best responses were those that clearly linked issues of style to the actual music studied. Students who dealt only in generalities were unable to effectively link style to a consideration of the two elements of music required by the question.

Question 9a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	7	2	9	12	13	20	37	4.3

Many students used a comparative table to good effect here. The main requirement of this question was to describe the context of the two works set for study in Unit 4. Students who elected to construct independent descriptions of context for each work were not penalised.



Question 9b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	9	3	8	8	11	13	20	14	14	4.9

Many students opted to structure the explanation required by this question as a 'discussion.' The best responses were those that built on, rather than repeated, the answers constructed for Question 9a.

Section C

Section C consisted of one question of three parts and represented 23 of 107 marks. The students who scored highly in this section presented a detailed and compelling picture of the short work they had produced in Unit 4. Vague and generic responses that gave no insight into the creative process undertaken by the student did not score as highly.

Two of the three parts to Section C required students to construct a discussion. These discussions allowed students to go beyond the basic mechanics of 'what they did' in creating their short piece to demonstrate their knowledge of the creative process in a broader context. This was particularly the case for Question 10c. Many students did not take advantage of this aspect of Section C and confined their responses to lower order descriptions of 'what they did.' While these narratives were quite capable, they often only partially met the requirements of the various aspects of the question.

Question 10a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	2	1	3	5	6	11	14	17	20	20	6.5

A number of students wrote cursory descriptions of the way various elements of music were used in their compositions/arrangements/improvisations without linking their descriptions to the broader issue of a creative process. High-scoring responses gave a detailed and lucid description of the specific work the student had created. Vague, generic responses that gave no insight into the actual music or the student's dealings with the creative process did not score as highly.

Question 10b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	10	5	9	16	21	21	17	3.7

This question elicited some excellent responses, with many students constructing capable discussions that went beyond the simple mechanics of how their music was preserved. As this was a 'discuss' question, students had latitude to refer to the wider aesthetic issues associated with the technologies and processes that are used to preserve a record of music. Many students did this very competently.

Question 10c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	8	3	10	9	12	13	21	11	14	4.8

High-scoring responses went into detail about what needed to be done to transform their work into a new context. This detail often included a discussion of what would happen to particular elements of music and how compositional devices could assist in the transformation.