

# 2015 VCE VET Music performance examination report

## General comments

In the VCE VET Music performance examination, students are assessed in relation to the following units of competency:

- CUSMPF301A Develop technical skills in performance
- CUSMPF402A Develop and maintain stagecraft skills

Students are also assessed in relation to either of the following units of competency, depending on the elective they have undertaken:

- CUSMPF404A Perform music as part of a group
- CUSMPF406A Perform music as a soloist

Each student/group is required to perform an artistic and cohesive program consisting of at least three works.

In 2015, high-scoring performances were typically:

- well prepared
- cohesive
- thoughtfully staged
- confidently performed.

Low-scoring performances were typically:

- underprepared
- short
- beset with technical difficulties through a lack a familiarity with equipment
- constructed with a lack of stylistic consistency
- lacking in energy.

## Specific information

### Criterion 1: Compliance with the requirements of the task

- i. OHS principles applied appropriately in the performance
- ii. Minimum of three works performed
- iii. At least one work performed from memory
- iv. Requirements for group and solo configuration and use of non-assessed performers (when needed) are met
- v. Performance Program Sheet completed and submitted prior to commencement of examination
- vi. Industry Statement Form completed and submitted at commencement of performance
- vii. Program performed in accordance with Industry Statement Form and the Performance Program Sheet

Most students performed well on this criterion and scored full marks. High-scoring performances were cohesive and consistent with the students' Industry Statement.

Students are encouraged to take care with their Industry Statements and Program Sheets as the clarity of these statements has an impact on other criteria. It is acceptable for all members of a group to have similar, if not identical, Industry Statements.

### **Criterion 2: Skill in performing with accuracy and control**

- Accuracy and control of the rhythm, pitch, articulation, timing and phrasing, tuning as appropriate to the instrument or voice and area of specialisation

Students presented with a relatively wide range of performance skills. Works with a wide range of difficulty levels were also presented. Performances work effectively when the skill of performance is well matched to the difficulty of the program presented. A poor performance of a very difficult song is still a poor performance. Students are advised to perform works that clearly demonstrate their skills and strengths, rather than expose weaknesses in their technique. This is also true of multi-instrumentalists and singers who accompany themselves on guitar or piano. As performers are assessed on all instruments on which they present, students should consider their skills on the instruments they plan to use. In several cases students would have scored higher for this criterion had they limited their instrument choices or employed the services of an accompanist, or even had another student more skilled on guitar or piano to accompany them.

High-scoring performers had obvious control of their instrument, a high level of technical dexterity, were appropriately tuned and had chosen works that played to their strengths.

Particular issues included:

- poorly tuned guitars and bass guitars
- poor intonation from singers, especially when songs chosen were obviously not within their tessitura
- inability to keep good time, especially drummers who played unnecessarily complex patterns but sat just behind the beat throughout the performance.

### **Criterion 3: Skill in realising the expressiveness and versatility of instrument(s) (or voice(s)) or technology throughout the program**

- This includes performance techniques such as maintaining a strict tempo, and artistic use of accent, crescendo, diminuendo, staccato, silence, legato, tenuto, rubato, ritardando, accelerando, pitch bending and other techniques as appropriate to the area of specialisation

The key words in this criterion are 'expressiveness' and 'versatility'.

Students who scored well for this criterion used the expressive elements listed to create interesting and expressive performances. They often had excellent technical ability, but were also able to choose works that enabled them to demonstrate the breadth of their technique.

### **Criterion 4: Ability to use a variety of rhythms, time signatures, beat patterns, rhythmic styles, scales, chord sequences and music systems relevant to the area of specialisation**

- Skill in using variety of duration (rhythm, metre, pattern) and/or melody and harmony (scales, chords, chord progressions) and music systems relevant to the area of specialisation

Some students seemed to have difficulty in this criterion in terms of finding variety within the 'area of specialisation'. Again, program selection plays a very important role. In some cases a seemingly unrelated selection was inserted into the program, simply to demonstrate a sense of variety, but this resulted in a program that was not cohesive.

In high-scoring performances, students were able to demonstrate variety in their area of specialisation through showcasing their knowledge of a style and the creative interpretation of the selections performed.

Low-scoring performers presented a limited range within a style, often relying on repetitive pop styles with standard chord progressions in 4/4 time at the same tempo.

### **Criterion 5: Ability to phrase and shape music appropriately**

- Skill in phrasing and shaping music in a manner appropriate to the area of specialisation

Many students performed with a strong sense of shape and phrase. They were able to shape phrases beautifully, creating a sense of movement, tension and release. These students were not only able to shape a phrase or a song, but also to shape their entire set in a creative and meaningful way, consistent with the area of specialisation being presented. Many students were able to perform in a mature and experienced manner.

Low-scoring performers often struggled with the technical aspects of their instrument and of their performance as a whole. Particular care should be taken with:

- avoiding consistently short (often 2-bar) phrases – this is particularly true for singers
- breathing in the middle (or just before the end) of phrases or even words (singers) unless stylistically appropriate
- playing the same drum pattern, at the same intensity, with no regard for structure for the entire song (or set).

### **Criterion 6: Ability to demonstrate originality and innovative approaches in interpretation within the requirements of the group or as a solo performer**

- Skill in interpretation and expression, and the ability to demonstrate appropriate musical nuance, an individual style of musical expression, and original and innovative approaches to stage performances relevant to the area of specialisation

Many performers had clearly developed an individual artistic 'voice' and presented a performance that was original and innovative. Although some of these performers presented their own compositions, simply writing your own material does not make it 'original' or 'innovative'. Indeed, a truly innovative interpretation of a classic song is more original than a completely derivative 'original' song that employs predictable chord progressions and simple melodic devices.

It should be noted that it is very difficult to achieve a high level of originality and innovation when performing with electronic backing tracks, especially lower-quality backings downloaded from the internet. Such backing tracks lock performers into keys, tempos, tempo changes and dynamic contrasts, and are designed to replicate the original performance rather than foster creativity.

### **Criterion 7: Group performance**

- Ability to listen critically to the performance of others and respond, interact and collaborate appropriately, adjusting the performance to achieve required outcomes relevant to the area of specialisation  
or

### **Solo performers**

- Ability to listen critically to one's own performance and continuously adjust own performance to produce the required outcomes relevant to the area of specialisation

In most instances this criterion refers to balance and the ability of the performer(s) to listen to their own performance, make judgments and adjust accordingly. Performers are allowed time to set up and complete a sound check before their exam. It is vital that this is done thoroughly.

Students using electronic backings are encouraged to learn how to normalise the volume of the backings or have preset volumes for each track to avoid significant differences in volume between different tracks.

It should also be noted that different performers sing and play at different levels. In some cases this year students 'swapped' instruments and/or mics during the performance, with no adjustments made to sound levels. In these cases, what had been a well-balanced soundscape became problematic, with some parts barely audible and others overpowering.

In high-scoring performances, the balance between parts and the ability of performers to adjust to the performance and performance space was smooth and seamless.

### **Criterion 8: Skill in presenting a cohesive program of music**

- Skill in presenting an authentic (in relation to the selected area of specialisation), dynamic and well-constructed program of music with appropriate sequencing of items and appropriate choice of repertoire

Most performers had a good grasp of this element of their performance, creating a set that was consistent with their Industry Statement and that had a sense of energy and flow throughout.

High-scoring performers structured their performance in a way that controlled the level of intensity and took the audience on a creative journey. Some performances even presented a theatre- or presentation-like show with a theme that tied the elements of their performance together.

Low-scoring performers presented a sequence of songs that were not all related, with little thought to energy or intensity.

### **Criterion 9: Ability to observe and maintain protocols appropriate to the area of specialisation**

- Skill in communicating effectively through original and innovative approaches to personal stagecraft, expressing appropriate dramatic nuance, while taking venue and style of performance into account

Many performers had obviously put great thought, care and effort into the staging of their performance. Movement, announcing songs, interaction with the audience and group members, and spoken pieces about the performance can all add to the effect of the performance. In addition to performing the musical program in an industry-appropriate style, these can all contribute to a performer's stagecraft style.

Elements of a poor approach to this area included:

- walking off stage to start the backing track for every song
- having to bend down to start a backing track for every song, especially while wearing clothes/shoes not suitable for this
- completing a long introduction to a song, and then re-tuning for it (perhaps another member of the group could speak while the guitarist re-tunes).

### **Criterion 10: Skill in presenting a confident performance through consistent focus and energy, and with pacing appropriate to the area of specialisation**

- Skill in applying a range of personal stage skills while performing a suitably paced and focused performance

Performances should relate to an industry context and as such should be conducted in a professional, industry-appropriate manner.

Performers who approached the exam with focus, energy and poise, and presented a professional-style performance scored well for this criterion. These students often had a very clear and specific Industry Statement that defined the style, purpose, venue and audience for their performance, and they presented a performance appropriate for this context.