

# Q&A

with Annette Olyslagers, student and Zoe Penman, teacher  
Ipswich Girls' Grammar School  
Music, Internal assessment 2: Composition

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## **Annette Olyslagers, student**

### **Q: What did you enjoy most about Music?**

*A: Senior Music was an incredible way to develop my skills and knowledge across the broad spectrum that music is. I loved exploring different genres and styles, and deepening my understanding of composers' intentions, how they were successful and how I could apply that to my own composing.*

### **Q: How did you prepare for this assessment task?**

*A: I prepared for this assessment by putting in 100% effort in all aspects of class, from major drafting checkpoints to small class activities. For me, it was a simple in-class composition activity, where I'd scribbled some notes onto a page that later evolved to become the choral piece it is now.*

### **Q: How did your teacher prepare you for this assessment?**

*A: For each innovation that we explored, our teacher had us write a small composition applying our knowledge of the innovative techniques. These tasks had us gaining familiarity with using innovations in composition and were really helpful for completing the assessment.*

### **Q: What made you choose the topic or method of presentation?**

*A: Composing music and sharing it with people is like taking a piece of your soul and broadcasting it to the world — it is not an easy thing to do, especially when people often have such strong expectations. I chose avant-garde as my genre for the assessment because there can be no expectations; avant-garde almost forces audiences to eliminate any expectations because composers explore music in such innovate and unpredictable ways.*

### **Q: What is most important to you when you are preparing a response to an assessment task?**

*A: When preparing a response to an assessment task, it is so important to get feedback from a range of different people. Music is so subjective and therefore it is critical to get multiple opinions and pieces of advice from a range of people. For me, I not only was seeking feedback from my teacher, but also my classmates, family and my private lessons teacher.*

### **Q: What are your thoughts about this assessment and the approach you took when responding to the task?**

*A: My piece was originally written just for soprano, alto and bass because I found it difficult to write the middle-ground harmony that tenors usually sing. My teacher encouraged me after drafting to add in a tenor line, which I did find challenging after having covered the harmonies I wanted with the other parts. But I am proud of how it turned out and I believe it was totally worth the time and effort, because that tenor line allowed for greater depth in the choral harmonies and was the perfect 'cherry on top' to finish off the composition.*

### **Q: How will you use what you have learnt in this subject?**

*A: I currently use a lot of what I've learnt in music as a self-employed piano teacher of four students. But I mostly use music for leisure: composing, performing and yes, even analysing. Music is the perfect way to express yourself in a creative, personal and passionate way. All that I have learnt in Music has allowed me to know music deeply, where I have gained new appreciations for it in a broad and specific sense.*

## Zoe Penman, teacher

### **Q: What was the purpose of this assessment and what key decisions were made in the design of the task?**

*A: The purpose of the assessment was to engage students in innovative compositional practices of the twentieth century, using a mixture of traditional and contemporary techniques to extend students' knowledge and understanding and enhance their own compositional ideas and experiences. The task was intended to be broad to encompass the multiple and diverse strengths of the cohort; however, students were encouraged to incorporate compositional techniques and styles of the 20th century.*

### **Q: How did your teaching and the student learning experiences prepare the students to complete this assessment?**

*A: Unit 3: Innovations was designed to give students a smorgasbord of concepts and ideas of the 20th century. This included emerging modernist movements such as impressionism, primitivism and the avant-garde to recording techniques and synthetic timbres of post-1950s popular music. Within each of these areas, students engaged in a class performance of an excerpt of work, an analysis of stylistic features within a key work and this then informed individual or group improvisations or compositional activities.*

*When studying the avant-garde, the students studied 'Time Piece' by Paul Patterson and The King's Singers. This a cappella choral piece highlighted the distinct and unique uses of vocal timbre and word painting to express imaginative text and demonstrated a combination of graphic and traditional notation. This study built on learning experiences in Unit 2: Designs in which students had analysed Stephen Leek's 'Great Southern Spirits: Kondalilla' which also included innovative approaches to vocal notation, duration and structure.*

### **Q: How does this assessment reflect the unique characteristics of your school and your students?**

*A: Through our large Performing Arts program, we have developed an appreciation of modern and traditional music, both being widely performed and accepted within the school. In all our ensembles, students are exposed to a diverse range of repertoire from different time periods and cultures, regardless of their skill level. There is also an established singer/songwriter culture where students learn to create and perform their own music in class and at open mic night events. This has provided a creative and positive space for instrumental and choral music to be accessible in the classroom, along with popular music.*

### **Q: Can you explain the exemplary aspects of Annette's response?**

*A: Annette chose to compose a choral work with a contemporary, avant-garde approach. To notate her ideas, she incorporated both graphic and traditional notation on the program Sibelius. This already proved her creative problem-solving as she aimed to remove so many preset constraints on the program, such as a lack of time signature or set rhythm values and a mixture of voiced and unvoiced vocal sounds. Annette also needed to be able to freely notate the more graphic aspects of the score.*

*This response demonstrates an outstanding understanding and synthesis of choral timbres, voicing and range and register. The creative use of word painting is explicit throughout, addressed through a treatment of duration, timbre, expressive devices, and pitch. The slight use of aleatory is highlighted in Annette's approach to duration. This demonstrates her thought beyond the composition, with consideration for what is dictated by the composition and what can be interpreted as a performer. Finally, the approach to harmony is unique, as lush added note chords are created between parts, but a unified tonal centre is not established. The piece remains cohesive and fluid but also unpredictable, and in doing this it also imitates the waterfall that the piece is about. These elements are discussed in detail within the compositional statement, such as the explanation of expressive devices and their distinct role in the piece, and therefore demonstrates how Annette has understood and been able to articulate complex ideas in relation to her work.*