

# Music Extension 2008

Sample assessment instrument and student responses

## Investigating: Improvisatory styles of Megadeth

This sample is intended to inform the design of assessment instruments in the senior phase of learning. It highlights the qualities of student work and the match to the syllabus standards.

### Criterion assessed

- Investigation of music sources

### Assessment instrument

The student work presented in this sample is in response to an assessment task.

#### **Task**

You are to select a music topic about which you will research, explore, analyse and synthesise evidence from a range of music sources (such as scores, audio and visual recordings, live performances, case studies, essays, lectures, journals or musicology surveys), and present your findings.

#### **Conditions**

You are to present your findings as an extended written response of 1200–1500 words.

#### **Purpose**

An investigation that informs your own practice as a composer, musicologist or performer.

#### **Approach**

- Devise a statement that will inform your investigation of your music topic.
- Employ a variety of investigative strategies to explore music sources relevant to your statement.
- Present your findings demonstrating detailed, accurate, informed and thorough research from your exploration of music sources.

## Instrument-specific criteria and standards

Student responses have been matched to instrument-specific criteria and standards; those that best describe the student work in this sample are shown below. For more information about the syllabus dimensions and standards descriptors, see [www.qsa.qld.edu.au/5936.html#assessment](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/5936.html#assessment).

Standard A	
Investigation of music sources	<p>The student work has the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>research findings are effectively <u>presented</u> and <u>supported</u> by <u>thorough analysis</u> and <u>insightful synthesis</u> of evidence from music sources.</li></ul>

**Note:** Colour highlights have been used in the table to emphasise the qualities that discriminate between the standards.

Key: Quality words  
Cognitive words

# Student response — Standard A

The annotations show the match to the instrument-specific standards.

Comments	<b>The Improvisatory Styles of Dave Mustaine and Marty Friedman of Megadeth</b>
<p>The student provides initial <b>analysis</b> and eludes to the purpose of this essay</p> <p>The student clearly outlines the purpose for the investigation</p> <p><b>Thorough analysis</b> of evidence from music sources</p> <p>The student <b>thoroughly analyses</b> the evidence from the music score</p> <p>The student <b>insightfully synthesises</b> the evidence, using specific music terminology to <b>effectively present</b> their findings</p> <p>The student displays <b>insight</b> into specific aspects of performance through the <b>thorough analysis</b> and <b>insightful synthesis</b> of evidence from music sources</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Expository Essay</b></p> <p>Thrash metal band, Megadeth, are renowned for their lead guitar prowess (Huey, S. 2012). From 1990 until Friedman’s departure from the band in 2000, Marty Friedman and Dave Mustaine have shared the role of lead guitarist. Mustaine’s improvisatory style encompasses the thrash metal elements of Megadeth whilst Friedman combines the band’s technical and progressive elements. Their diverging sounds are complementary to Megadeth, with each guitarist serving a specific purpose. This essay will investigate the improvisatory styles of Mustaine and Friedman by analysing technique, scales, and phrasing.</p> <p>Mustaine’s improvisatory technique is based on speed and efficiency. In his GuitarOne instructional DVD , he explains his technique and how it affects his playing. To improve the efficiency of his alternate picking, his plectrum is turned on a 45° angle to the string (see figure 1 and 2). As a result, it nudges, rather than plucks, the string. Furthermore, his right hand rests across the bridge of the guitar to mute the strings as he plays whilst his fingers anchor on the pickup ring. This stabilises his hand and allows muscle memory to help guide the plectrum to the correct string. This will increase the accuracy of string skipping guitar passages.</p> <p>Conversely, Friedman’s technique is used to increase clarity and achieve a particular tone. He employs an unusual right hand position to achieve this. As seen in figure 1, his wrist is rotated and bent, letting his hand rest below the strings. The plectrum strikes parallel to the string with this right hand position . In his guitar instructional DVD, The Essential, he states that parallel picking creates a clean, clear sound and prevents the scraping noise caused by angled picking. This is beneficial to Friedman’s style as it allows his arpeggios to be played with clarity (<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwP0gUBCVIU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwP0gUBCVIU</a>, The Essential DVD. 0:18 – 0:38). However, greater effort is needed to pick the string on this angle. Also, resting the hand beneath the strings will increase the risk of open strings ringing out accidentally.</p>
	<p><b>Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions</b></p>
	<p><i>Figure 1 — Dave Mustaine (left) striking the strings on an angle. Marty Friedman (right) using an unusual hand position to strike parallel to the strings.</i></p>
	<p><b>Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions</b></p>
	<p><i>Figure 2 — Plectrum turned on a 45° angle to the string. (left). Plectrum parallel to the string (right).</i></p>

### Comments

The student **thoroughly analyses** music sources and links the research findings to the purpose of the investigation as stated in the opening paragraph

The student returns to the purpose of the investigation and **effectively presents** research findings

**Thorough analysis** of evidence from music sources

Specific examples display **thorough analysis** and **insightful synthesis** of evidence from music sources

Mustaine's use of intervals and scales are an integral part of his sound. The blues scale (notated in figure 3), is his scale of choice when improvising (Mustaine, D. 2012). The addition of the diminished fifth interval gives the dissonant sound attributed to the heavy metal genre (Marshall, W. (1997). "Tri-tones are very dissonant. Because of its jarring sound, it was called the diabolus in musica (the devils' tone) in the Middle Ages" (Starr, E, 2007). For this reason, Mustaine has made extensive use of the interval. His solo on Megadeth's Mechanix demonstrates this. Notated in figure 4, he begins the solo with an ascending pattern of a 1,  $\flat 5$ , 8 triad. He begins on the low E string, repeating each successive triad on the next string. The triad is repeated on the four strings to create as much dissonance as possible.

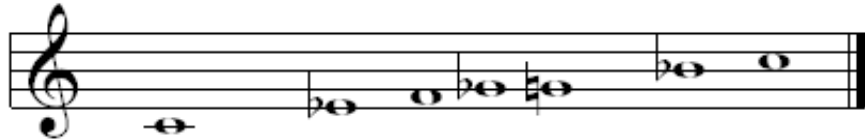


Figure 3 — C Blues scale. Similar to the C Minor Pentatonic scale with the addition of the  $G \flat$ .

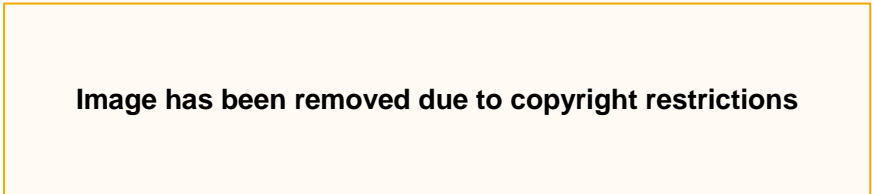


Figure 4 — Tritone pattern in Mechanix solo. Instead of playing a particular scale, Friedman's note choice is based on the chord he is soloing over. Arpeggios are used extensively to underline the chord progression. His solo in Holy Wars...The Punishment Due emphasises the G and  $B \flat$  major chord progression played by the rhythm guitar. As seen in figure 5, Friedman plays a G major arpeggio sweep then transitions to a  $B \flat$  major arpeggio to underline the chord change.

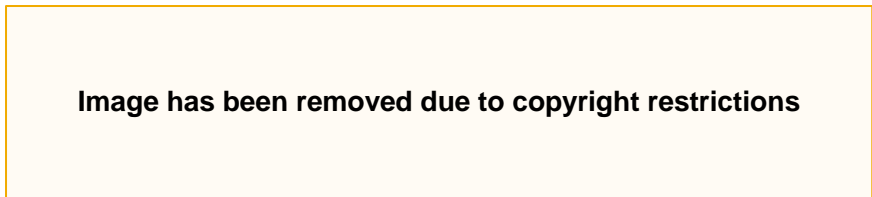


Figure 5 — G and  $B \flat$  major arpeggios following the chord progression of the rhythm guitar.

## Comments

The student has **insightfully synthesised** the evidence from music sources, linking this back to the statement of purpose for this investigation

The student **thoroughly analyses** the music source and **effectively presents** the research findings

The student provides detail on the constituent parts of the guitarist's playing style that supports their **insightful synthesis** of evidence from music sources

Many of Friedman's solos, however, are played over a guitar riff as opposed to a chord progression. On these occasions, Friedman opts for scales such as the Phrygian dominant scale as opposed to standard rock guitar scales such as the minor pentatonic scale. Notated in Figure 6, the altered Phrygian scale consists of a raised third and seventh (Hunter, D. 2005). Arabic and Egyptian music is typically based on this scale (Marcus, S. 2007), giving Friedman's solo a middle-eastern character. The song Hangar 18 demonstrates his Eastern influences. During the interlude of the piece, Friedman improvises in the D Phrygian dominant scale (notated in figure 7) over a guitar riff in D Phrygian. The scale gives a unique character to the solo that could not be achieved with the minor pentatonic scale.



Figure 6 — C Phrygian Dominant Scale.

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Figure 7 — Friedman's use of the Phrygian dominant scale in Hangar 18.

Mustaine makes wide use of semiquaver rhythmic patterns and phrases in his solos. His solos are typically played over riffs at a fast tempo rather than a chord progression. "Thrash tends to have an accelerating feel. Speed, pacing and time-changes define thrash metal," (History of Thrash Metal. 2012). He uses rapid but simple phrasing to capture the straight-forward aggression of thrash metal. This is demonstrated in the final guitar solo of Holy Wars...The Punishment Due. Mustaine accents the beat and rarely uses syncopations; the beginning of each phrase starting on the first beat of the bar. Much of the solo is based on four or eight note patterns. To build to the climax of the solo, he plays ascending groups of four notes, each group starting one semitone higher than last (Notated in Figure 8).

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Figure 8 — Ascending groups of four semiquaver notes, each group starting one semitone higher than last in the final solo of Holy Wars...The Punishment Due.

In contrast to Mustaine's rapid scale sequencing, Friedman plays intricate melodic lines and emphasises articulation. On his instructional DVD, Melodic Control, Friedman states that he uses a combination of different patterns when playing a guitar run. He prefers complex, long flowing runs as opposed to repeated scale sequencing. Subtle nuances in bending and vibrato make Friedman's solos instantly recognisable. The Tornado of Souls solo contains one of Friedman's signature bends. As notated in figure 9, he bends the note then releases it quickly before slowly bending it back to pitch. His bends are held for a beat before executing a wide vibrato.

## Comments

The student **effectively presents** a summary of the key research findings and **synthesises** this by referring back to the purpose of the investigation

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*Figure 9 — Opening 6 bars of Friedman's solo in Tornado of Souls.*

Marty Friedman and Dave Mustaine complement each other in their role as lead guitarist. They each have a unique and recognisable style. Mustaine specialises in thrash metal soloing, giving emphasis to speed and aggression. In contrast, Friedman incorporates technical and progressive elements into Megadeth's music. He is best equipped for soloing over chord progressions and offers a unique style to the band. Through the analysis of technique, scales, and phrasing, it is clear that Mustaine and Friedman's improvisatory styles complement each other and are well-suited to the different elements of Megadeth's music.

### Reference List

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## Acknowledgments

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