

# **Preparing for your Graduate Comprehensive Oral Exams**

## **Music History Portion**

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The Master's degree from our School of Music certifies that you have attained the knowledge and skills required as a professional in the field of music. As part of this new status you are required to demonstrate your understanding of musical time periods, styles, composers, forms, and genres at the appropriate level for a graduate student at the end of his/her studies for the Master of Music degree. Rather than a recitation of outlines or prepared definitions, we expect to hear you speak with confidence and competence about music history using the professional discourse of our discipline. In doing so, you will need to fluently use musical terminology and make meaningful references to concrete musical examples. You may not use notes during either part of the music history oral exam.

### **Part I**

You are required to prepare all of the topics listed below for the music history portion of your comprehensive oral exams. During the exam, we will select several for you to discuss. Should you demonstrate an inability to discuss these topics, you will need to retake the music history portion of your oral exam until expectations can be met.

#### **For Example:**

If we were to choose the topic, *Neo-Classicism*, as one of the topics for you to discuss, we would expect an explanation similar to the following. Notice that the discussion is concise, organized, focused on major points, and it includes relevant references to composers and musical compositions.

“Neo-Classicism was a style in the 1920s that sought to return to the ideals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Those ideals included emotional restraint, objectivity, clarity of form and balance. Neo-Classicism was a reaction against the emotional excess of late Romanticism and the progressive style of atonal Expressionism. Neo-Classicism began as a revival of Bach's music and the harpsichord. Although we consider Bach to be a Baroque composer now, the division between the Baroque and Classic periods was not yet so clearly defined in the 1910s when Neo-Classicism was a trend. Wanda Landowska was an important performer of Bach's music during this time and she helped to revive interest in the harpsichord, (although the instrument she used was heavier and not an 18<sup>th</sup>-century harpsichord). Landowska was the first person to record Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (in 1933) and she was the first person in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to publicly perform his music on a harpsichord. Neo-Classic music might exhibit traditional uses of form like sonata or rondo, tonality strongly rooted in diatonicism, 18<sup>th</sup>-century preference for strings and woodwinds, symmetrical phrasing, and a preference to establish a pull to strong cadences. Within these traditional aspects, a neo-classic composition might

include modern nuances, such as dissonances of a minor second, to juxtapose the Classic against the 20<sup>th</sup>-century style. One composer who is often mentioned in a discussion of Neo-Classicism is Igor Stravinsky, although he composed in several different styles. His *Octet for Winds* of 1923 reflects the goals of Neo-Classicism, and for Aaron Copland, at least, the *Octet* became representative of this style. Stravinsky's *Octet* uses forms such as fugue, sonata, and variations, but superimposes an extended tonality to incorporate style traits distinctly 20<sup>th</sup> century in nature. Stravinsky's *Octet* was not received well at first, and some even thought it was a mess of 18<sup>th</sup>-century styles and meant as a joke. But, it turns out that other composers were influenced by this objective style, and Neo-Classicism became a style in which many composers wanted to write. It should be noted that this is only one of several styles of music during the 1920s."

### Studying for Part I

If you feel rusty, or if it has been a while since you have taken music history survey courses, it might be helpful to begin studying by consulting the overview of musical styles, composers, genres, and forms in Murphy-Manley's book listed below. For a deeper investigation into particular topics, the 29-volume series, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, is an excellent place to start. Most topics are also covered in standard music history textbooks, although you will want to consult more than one source.

- Burkholder, J. Peter, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*. 9th ed. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2014.
- Murphy-Manley, Sheryl. *A Concise and Friendly Guide to Music History*. 3rd ed. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015.
- Sadie, Stanley, and John Tyrrell. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 29 vols. London: Macmillan, 2001.
- Taruskin, Richard, and Christopher H. Gibbs. *The Oxford History of Western Music*. College ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

In our *Survey of Music Literature* course for Freshmen and Sophomores, students create timelines of each musical time period showing which composers were active and what genres were most popular in each time period. Creating timelines at the beginning of undergraduate school helps students place musical styles, genres, and composers into context in the broader history of music. If you have never done such an exercise, we would suggest that you consider doing this as part of your study process. The generally accepted time periods include:

Medieval (Middle Ages):	~476 A.D. to 1420s
<i>Ars Nova</i> and <i>Trecento</i>	1300-50
Renaissance	1430-1600
Baroque	1600-1730s
Early Baroque	1600-1650
Middle Baroque	1650-1700
Late Baroque	1700-1730s/50
Classic Period	1730s-1810s

Nineteenth Century (Romantic)	1810s-1890s
Post Romanticism	1890s-1930s
Twentieth Century	1900s

(The 20<sup>th</sup> century contains many styles. For a general list and starting point, consult pages 24-31 in Murphy-Manley's 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, *A Concise and Friendly Guide to Music History*, 2015.)

There is no one particular manner in which to study. It has been our experience that when graduate students hold regular study sessions with one another, their understanding and interaction with the content is stronger. Bouncing ideas off one another and gaining feedback from your peers can be a beneficial way to study for your graduate degree. We suggest that as soon as your graduate career begins, you begin studying and digesting the content area in the field of music. For your studies in music history, if you were to take one topic below per week over the course of your two-year program, you would find that the information you learn, and the process of your learning, would benefit you in all of your graduate studies. We would suggest that you keep a notebook, study and discuss these topics with your colleagues, and approach your two years of graduate study in music with depth.

### Topics to Prepare:

- Gregorian chant in the Mass and the Divine Office up to 1100
- The development of notation: neumes, Guido of Arezzo, mensural notation, etc.
- Organum and earliest motets between 900 and 1300
- The *Ars Nova*: de Vitry, Machaut, and their innovations
  
- The beginnings of the Renaissance: Faburden, Fauxbourdon, Dunstaple, and Dufay
- Josquin: chansons and masses
- The frottola and the Italian madrigal: 1500-1580s
- The Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and Palestrina
  
- Developments around 1600: monody, recitative, basso continuo, and opera
- The madrigal after 1600 (including Monteverdi)
- Keyboard music in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italy and France
- The development of the da-capo aria in the 17<sup>th</sup> century
- Sonatas and concerti in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century
- Vivaldi (including the late Baroque concerto)
- Bach (including the Lutheran cantata, Passion, and the fugue)
- Handel (including opera seria and the English oratorio)
  
- The early symphony (including Sammartini and Stamitz)
- F. J. Haydn
- The orchestra and symphonies in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- The string quartet in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Opera buffa in the Classic period

- W. A. Mozart
- The solo concerto in the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Beethoven (including the French Revolution, symphonies, and sonatas)
  
- Biedermeier, the Lied, and early Romanticism
- 19<sup>th</sup>-century piano music (including Robert Schumann and his circle)
- *Bel canto*: Rossini and Bellini
- Verdi's operas
- Nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Richard Wagner (including the Leitmotiv, Gesamtkunstwerk, and his influence)
- Brahms and absolute music
- Programmatic music in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century
- Liszt, Strauss, and the symphonic poem
  
- Maximalism
- Impressionism
- Expressionism
- *Les Six*
- Henry Cowell and John Cage: innovations and philosophies
- Textural music: Varèse
- Integral serialism
- Electronic music studios in the 1950s and 1960s
- Minimalism and Post-Minimalism

## **Part II**

We will play several pieces composed between the years 1100 and 2000. After hearing the piece, you will need to make appropriate comments concerning the composition's style, instrumentation or voicing, and then determine a composer, genre, and date. Your professional level of conversation will demonstrate your knowledge of music history, its composers, styles, and genres. To study for this we suggest using recordings in the library (or *Naxos*, *YouTube*, *Spotify*, etc.) to review a variety of styles, composers, and genres (both instrumental and vocal) from 1100 A.D. onward. As you study for this, it would be helpful to apply information that you studied for Part I and to use your timelines for reference.

## **Part III**

Students pursuing a Masters Degree in Musicology will have an additional assignment for the exams, which will be assigned on a case-by-case basis.