

DMA PRELIMINARY ORAL EXAMINATION

Repertoire Portion

Topic:

Each DMA student must select a repertoire topic and submit it for approval by the DMA Committee no later than November of the first year of full-time study. The DMA Committee may request submission of a different repertoire selection if it feels that the student could benefit from an alternate choice.

The repertoire topic can be any substantial work, such as a suite, fantasy and fugue, theme and variations, sonata, quartet, symphony, song cycle, symphonic poem, or concerto (approximately 15-20 minutes of music). Students may also select subsection(s) of a longer work, such as an opera, mass, or particularly substantive instrumental work (approximately 15-20 minutes of music).

The **time limitation** (15-20 minutes) is meant to be a general guideline. Some appropriate compositions may be longer, and, in some cases, a particularly dense or complex work may be shorter but still appropriate (e.g. Webern Piano Variations).

The Preliminary Oral Examination is designed to assess *general* musical knowledge. To that end, in choosing a work for the repertoire portion of the exam, students should focus on music from the standard repertoire, and the composer should be a generally-recognized master, including (but not limited to) Monteverdi, Josquin des Prez, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Dvorak, Mahler, Schoenberg, Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, Prokofiev, Ives, Stravinsky, Messiaen, or Carter.

In addition, students need not limit themselves to works for their instrument. Indeed, the selection of a work from outside the repertoire of the student's major instrument is strongly encouraged.

Exam:

The repertoire portion of the exam lasts approximately 15 minutes. During this portion of the exam, the student must demonstrate his or her ability to respond to questions about the chosen topic. Please note that the student should not prepare a memorized presentation or statement, and written materials are *not* permitted.

The following are suggestions to assist students in their preparation:

- **Basic historical context** (e.g. when the piece was composed; what was going on in the world at that time; what other pieces the composer was working on at the time; what contemporaries of this composer were working on).
- **Form** (e.g. whether or not the composition follows any recognizable formal template; how does the form work; how, if at all, does the formal structure deviate from the structural norms of the time).

- **Harmony** (e.g. identify chords and key areas throughout the composition, including modulatory and unstable sections; identify non-tonal devices including modes, quartal harmonies, exotic scales, extended tertian harmonies).
- **Counterpoint** (e.g. identify and explain any aspects of contrapuntal techniques and textures).
- **Pitch organization** (e.g. explain systems of pitch organization including modality, tonality, atonality, serialism, pantonality).
- **Instrumentation** (e.g. how the instruments are used in the composition; their transpositions; non-traditional techniques).
- **Text** (e.g. translation; text setting).
- **Expression** (e.g. the character of the composition; the dramatic or narrative shape of the piece including its climax).
- **Critical view** (e.g. your opinion of the merits of the composition; substantive reasons that support your opinions).
- **Individuality** (e.g. explain why this composition is unique or special; identify any aspects which are groundbreaking for future works).
- **Performance issues** (e.g. particular performance issues involving scoring, balance, particular instrumental difficulties, performance practice, or interpretive issues).
- **Secondary sources** (e.g. familiarity with the ideas of other musicians and scholars about this composition).

Listening Portion

Exam:

The listening portion of the exam lasts approximately 10 minutes. One of the faculty examiners will play two musical excerpts, each 1-2 minutes in length. These excerpts may be from any era.

The student is not necessarily expected to identify each excerpt by title and composer. However, the student must be able to identify specific musical features of the excerpt (see below) and demonstrate critical thinking skills as a way of pinpointing style.

As an exercise in preparation, students are encouraged to listen to random musical excerpts and speak to the follow topics:

- **Harmony**
- **Pitch organization** (e.g., if tonal: stable vs. modulatory; traditional functions vs. more chromatic functions; triadic harmony vs. more seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords; consonance vs. dissonance; if non-tonal, phrases vs. isolated events; harmonic vs. linear events; single pitches vs. clusters; consonance vs. dissonance; modal vs. atonal vs. serial vs. chance; if modal, then which modes).
- **Harmonic rhythm** (e.g. steady vs. shifting; fast vs. slow).
- **Meter** (e.g., if clearly metrical, identify regular or irregular, stable vs. shifting; if not clearly metrical, then articulate how this is accomplished, e.g. fluidity of lines, no strong emphasis of a downbeat or no regular underlying subdivision or pulse).
- **Surface rhythm** (e.g. steady vs. unpredictable; close values vs. diverse values).
- **Phrasing** (e.g. periodic or unusual).
- **Melody** (e.g. long-breathed and lyrical vs. short and motivic; conjunct vs. disjunct motion; simple vs. compound motion).
- **Texture** (e.g. monophonic, homophonic, contrapuntal; if contrapuntal, imitative vs. free).
- **Genre** (e.g. solo, chamber, choral, operatic, or orchestral; introduction, body of work, cadenza, coda).
- **Instrumentation** (e.g. piano v. harpsichord; ‘cello v. gamba; recorder vs. flute; etc.).
- **Dynamics** (e.g. describe the dynamic content, range, and contrasts).
- **Performance issues** (e.g. vibrato, rubato).
- **Range and Register** (e.g. narrow vs. wide range; middle registers or extreme registers).
- **Formal organization** (e.g. repetition, variation).