

# PEABODY CONSERVATORY of the JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

## Entrance Exam in Music History SAMPLE

### Part I: Essay (40 minutes)

Write an essay upon one of the following topics:

- characteristics of the “classical” style
- J. S. Bach in Leipzig
- the lieder of Franz Schubert
- the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque
- program music in the nineteenth century
- the career of Josquin des Prez

### PART II: READING (40 minutes)

Choose one of the following passages, and write an essay that situates the passage in its historical context.

#### 1. Giovanni Maria Artusi on harmonic developments in the music of Claudio Monteverdi:

Such composers, in my opinion, have nothing but smoke in their heads if they are so impressed with themselves as to think they can corrupt, abolish, and ruin at will the good old rules handed down from days of old by so many theorists and excellent musicians, who are the very ones from whom these modern musicians have learned awkwardly to put a few notes together. But do you know what generally befalls works like these? ... In the end, since they lack a good foundation, they are eaten away by time and fall to the ground, and those who put them up are made a laughingstock.

Of course, I recognize that new discoveries are not only a good thing but a necessary one. But first tell me why you want such clashes as they have written? If you would answer, “I wish them to be heard clearly, but not so as to offend the ear,” then why not prepare them in the conventional way, as reason dictates? Now, even if you want dissonances to become consonances, they will always remain the opposite of consonant.... We have reached the point of absurdity, but it is altogether possible that these modern composers will so exert themselves that in time they actually will find a way to turn dissonances into consonances and vice versa....

Compositions like these, then, are the product of ignorance. For such composers it is enough to set up a great roar of sound, an absurd confusion, an array of defects, and it all comes from the ignorance which keeps them benighted.

#### 2. An 1823 account of the musical and personal character of Beethoven:

[Beethoven] has secured a name, and reached a height of renown, to which no other author, Handel, Haydn, and Mozart excepted, has attained. For though Rossini's name is, at the present

instant, more often pronounced than that of any other composer, yet his works, so far as they now extend, are not likely to confer on him a lasting reputation equal to that which the great German musicians have permanently gained.

Beethoven is as original and independent in his general modes of thinking as he is in his musical productions. A decided enemy to flattery, and an utter stranger to every thing dishonorable, he disdains to court the favor of every one, however wealthy or exalted in rank. The consciousness of his talents not being duly rewarded too frequently makes him vent his complaints in bitterest terms, and against individuals who, from their high station, have the power to obstruct his success in life. Thus he has for years resided in Vienna in open hostility with many, and in friendship only with the few whom the admiration of his great genius will not allow to take offense.... Till very lately he had hardly any other income than what his compositions procured him; and consequently he has too often lived in circumstances very unworthy of so great a genius.

### 3. Debussy on innovations in his compositional vocabulary:

[I have] no faith in the C major scale. The tonal scale must be enriched by other scales. Nor am I misled by equal temperament. Rhythms are stifling. Rhythms cannot be contained within bars. It is nonsense to speak of "simple" and "compound" time. There should be an interminable flow of both. Relative keys are nonsense, too. Music is neither major nor minor. Minor thirds and major thirds should be combined, modulation thus being more flexible. The mode is that which one happens to choose at the moment. It is inconstant. There must be a balance between musical demands and thematic evocation. Themes suggest their orchestral coloring.

### 4. John Cage on experimental music:

[N]oises are as useful to new music as so-called musical tones, for the simple reason that they are sounds. This decision alters the view of history, so that one is no longer concerned with tonality or atonality, Schoenberg or Stravinsky (the twelve tones or the twelve expressed as seven plus five), nor with consonance and dissonance, but rather with Edgard Varèse who fathered forth noise into twentieth-century music. But it is clear that ways must be discovered that allow noises and tones to be just noises and tones, not exponents subservient to Varèse's imagination.

What is the nature of an experimental action? It is simply an action the outcome of which is not foreseen. It is therefore very useful if one has decided that sounds are to come into their own, rather than being exploited to express sentiments or ideas of order. Among those actions the outcomes of which are not foreseen, actions resulting from chance operations are useful. However, more essential than composing by means of chance operations, it seems to me now, is composing in such a way that what one does is indeterminate of its performance.