

## **THE DMA PRELIMINARY ORAL EXAM**

Students take the Preliminary Oral Examination during the second semester of study. The exam is intended to demonstrate a student's ability to speak about a single substantial piece of repertoire, which is chosen by the student and approved by the Doctoral Committee in the first semester of study. The goal is to identify areas in which the student may need additional study. The exam is administered by members of the Doctoral Committee, which may stipulate remediation before the student sits for a retake.

The Preliminary Oral Examination is graded on a "pass/fail" basis. Students who fail part or all of the Preliminary Oral Examination are required to retake it at a date determined by the Office of Academic Affairs. All DMA students must pass the Preliminary Oral Examination in order to achieve Degree-in-Progress status.

### **Components of the Exam**

The Preliminary Oral Exam will test knowledge of a piece of repertoire, selected from a list of three to four pieces provided by the DMA Committee, as well as listening skills. Students will receive options for repertoire selection by the end of the fall semester, and the repertoire exam will take place in the mid-to-late spring.

## Exam Preparation

For the repertoire portion of the exam, students should be able to speak to the following topics:

- 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 contemporary composers were working on).
- Form (e.g., whether 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, pan-tonality).
- 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., performance issues involving scoring, balance, particular instrumental difficulties, performance practice, or interpretive issues).
- Secondary sources (e.g., familiarity with the ideas of other musicians/scholars.)

For the listening portion of the exam, students must respond to the following questions:

- When and where do you think this piece was written? Be reasonably specific, giving both a period (e.g., early Baroque, late Romantic, etc.) and approximate decades or time in century, (e.g., early 17th century, c. 1840-1860, etc.)
- What genre (i.e., symphony, string quartet, lied, aria, sonata, etc.), or possibly form, do you hear?
- Who might have been a likely composer?
- What are some musical specifics which led you to your answers, above? Use bullet points, not prose. Consider aspects such as, but not limited to, harmony, texture, phrase structure, timbre, etc.

Source: DMA Guidelines