DMA Examination in Music History Information Guide

Introduction

The Music History Portion of the Doctoral Comprehensive Exam consists of two parts: Historical Period Exam (120 minutes) and Essay Exam (60 minutes).

Part I: Historical Period Exam (120 minutes)

Historical Period Exam will be divided into five sections corresponding to major stylistic periods of Western art music: 1) Medieval/Renaissance, 2) Baroque, 3) Classical, 4) Romantic, 5) Modernism and Beyond. Students are required to take all five sections and score 60% or higher in at least three out of five sections to pass the exam. To prepare for this exam, please consult this study guide.

Part II: Essay Exam

Essay Exam will consist of a prepared essay based on a set of sample prompts that reflect the student's academic experience in **MUSC 744, MUSC 745, MUSC 749**, or any other special topics course at the 700-level taught by music history area faculty.

Information about the Procedure

Prior to the Exam

1. The Music History Area faculty will provide a set of sample essay prompts (typically 3 to 5) for the students to structure their study prior to the exam.
2. Ideally, the individual instructors of special topics course will prepare the essay prompts by the end of the semester when they teach the classes.
3. The Music History Area faculty will provide a grading rubric prior to the exam.

At the Exam

1. On the day of the exam, students will see the set of essay prompts prepared by the instructors. These prompts will be similar to the sample prompts given prior to the exam but may contain some minor alterations.
2. Each student will have the opportunity to choose the essay prompt.
3. Students are required to complete **one** essay.

Practical Concerns for Exam Taking

1. Students will have 60 minutes to complete the essay.
2. Student may bring prepared notes to help them respond to the essay prompts.
    a. Each student will be permitted to bring notes:
        i. one sheet of paper
        ii. front and back
        iii. in 12-point type
        iv. single spaced
        v. one-inch margins.
    b. If a student brings notes, they must submit them to the proctor at the end of the exam.

DMA Examination in Music History Information Guide

Sample Essay Prompts from Spring 2026

"Music and Festivities" (Allen, MUSC 744)

1. Discuss why or why not festivity, joy, and ritual can be effective means of social change. Explain as well how music enhances spaces for civic engagement and social movements. Identify at least two examples of social movements and/or civic engagement that demonstrate this and support your points with pertinent scholarly sources. Some of the readings from Units 1 and 3 may be helpful here, e.g., Andrew Snyder, Jack Santino, Aurélie Godet.
2. Explain how community can be enhanced or divided through festivity. Is hierarchy suspended or reinforced through such rituals? Identify at least two examples of festivity that demonstrate this and support your points with pertinent scholarly sources. Some of the readings from Units 1 and 4 may be helpful here, e.g., Jack Santino, Victor Turner.
3. Propose an imagined festive event and analyze/discuss it in relation to one of the three course themes: 1) Tourism, Leisure, and Business Interests; 2) Civic Engagement, Social Change, and Movements; or 3) Community, Joy, and Rites of Passage. Include references to key sources from the course to support your analysis.

"Takemitsu and His Contemporaries" (Hara, MUSC 744)

1. Discuss Takemitsu's relationship with the various musical genres and traditions from Japan, Europe, United States, and beyond. Identify at least **three compositions** by Takemitsu and explain how they reflect the composer's reactions to specific composers, genres, and/or traditions. (Strive to discuss different types of genres and traditions that impacted Takemitsu, i.e. do not only talk about Western avant-garde music or traditional Japanese music, etc.)
2. If you have a chance to teach Takemitsu's music to a group of students in a single 50-minute class, which **three compositions** would you choose? Would you choose differently for a class of music majors than for a class of non-music majors? What do you wish to convey to the students through these works? What are the likely challenges and difficulties you might face?
3. Identify at least **three themes or concerns** that Takemitsu explores in his music at different points in his life and choose a representative composition for each of the three themes. Explain how these themes and/or concerns are expressed in sound.

Sample Essay Prompts from Fall 2025

"Music, Gender, & Sexuality" (Carrico, MUSC 744)

1. Discuss how the intersections of gender and race/ethnicity have shaped the experiences and careers of women in the popular music industry in terms of genre categorization, access, and visibility. Support your analysis with three examples of woman musicians of color. Here it may be helpful to reflect on the scholarship of Birgitta Johnson and Maureen Mahon.
2. Briefly summarize the writing of musical canons by Marcia Citron, Susan McClary, Chanda VanderHart and Abigail Gower or any other prominent scholars who have explored this topic. Drawing upon this scholarship, address the following questions: What kinds of canons exist in music? What myths about canons persist in music history

as a field of study? Who has the power to decide what is in the canon? What advice do these scholars offer for addressing gender disparity as it exists in musical canons.

3. Develop a playlist consisting of at least five compositions on the topic of "Music and Masculinity" (include the titles and names of the performers/composers). Describe in prose how each composition relates to the theme of the playlist, focusing on what types of musical performance/labor have been coded masculine and how this may shift depending upon genre or cultural tradition. These pieces can be from any genre or musical tradition (Western art music, popular music, Turkish classical music). Include references to key authors on nostalgia.

"Music and Nostalgia" (Hara, MUSC 744)

1. Briefly summarize the history of the concept of nostalgia (in one paragraph). Give at least three contrasting examples of musical compositions or musical events that capture the developing idea of nostalgia.
2. Summarize the writings about nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, Jean Starobinski, Svetlana Boym, or any other prominent thinker on nostalgia. Elaborate on their ideas by applying them to musical compositions. (You are only required to address the ideas of **one** thinker.)
3. Develop a playlist consisting of at least five compositions on the topic of "Music and Nostalgia" (include the titles and names of the composers). Describe in prose how each composition relates to the theme of the playlist. Include references to key authors on nostalgia.

"Sonic Ecologies" (Stuart, MUSC 744)

1. The authors in this course examine listening at a variety of scales, from microscopic insect sounds to planetary atmospheres. How does listening, whether human, nonhuman, or technological, help us understand ecological interdependence? Compare at least three authors' approaches (for example, Dunn and Crutchfield's insect bioacoustics, Peterson and Brennan's sonic ethnography, and Gandy's "attentive observation") and discuss how listening functions as both a way of knowing and an ethical practice.
2. Drawing on Ouzounian's sound maps and the sonic urbanism of Cobussen and Di Croce, discuss how sound can shape more inclusive cities. How do these thinkers show that sonic design can both challenge and reproduce urban power structures? Can the "sonic commons" they imagine truly operate as a democratic space?
3. Propose a public-facing sonic project such as a soundwalk, installation, acoustic map, or eco-acoustic design that responds to a specific climate or ecological issue. Using ideas from the course readings, explain how your project uses sound as art, research method, or environmental intervention. Describe its goals, audience, methods, and how you would assess its impact.

DMA Examination in Music History Information Guide

Grading Rubric

High Pass (4), **Pass** (3), **Fail** (2 or below)

	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Poor (2)	Unacceptable (1)
Content (60%)	The essay contains ample information of uniformly excellent quality that addresses the prompt.	The essay contains ample information of good quality that addresses the prompt.	The essay contains some information of fair quality that addresses the prompt, but it is partially incomplete.	The essay contains very little information that addresses the prompt.
Organization (30%)	The essay contains a clear thesis supported by an argument that is logical and easy to follow.	The essay contains a clear thesis but the argument is not always easy to follow.	The essay is lacking a clear thesis but is well supported by the argument.	The essay lacks a thesis and an argument.
Style (10%)	The essay contains minimal errors in grammar and misspellings.	The essay contains minor but noticeable errors in grammar and misspellings.	The essay contains major errors in grammar and misspelling.	The essay is riddle with errors in grammar and misspelling and is incomprehensible.