

PhD COMMON MUSIC HISTORY EXAM
Spring 2026

The PhD Common Music History exam is a **four-hour** written examination for PhD students offered once each semester, with the components listed below. **Note:** PhD students will answer three of the four questions in Parts 1 and 2.

Part 1. BROAD TOPIC: a 1-hour essay devoted to a broad topic, such as a genre, a period, or a composer; you will select one of the two topics presented.

Part 2. FOCUSED ESSAY: 1-hour essay devoted to a focused topic (see below); you will select one of the two topics presented.

Part 3. RESEARCH TOOLS: a 30-minute essay on a specified research tool

Part 4. TERMS (30 minutes): concise, but thorough musical-historical definitions of six terms, selected from a list of eight.

ALL OF THE QUESTIONS WILL BE DERIVED FROM THE TOPICS LISTED BELOW.

THE QUESTIONS FOR THE GENRE, BROAD TOPIC, AND FOCUSED TOPIC MAY NOT BE FRAMED AS A SURVEY OR HISTORICAL OVERVIEW. THEY WILL BE ASKED IN A MANNER THAT REQUIRES CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT MUSIC AND ITS HISTORY WITHIN THE GIVEN CHRONOLOGY.

The broad topic (part 1) will be drawn directly from the topics below in sections A, B, and C (trace the genre, discuss the period or period junction, etc.).

The focused essay (part 2), will be derived from the topics in sections A, B, C, and D, and may draw from more than one of them (for example, if one of the genres is the tone poem, and the period junction were Classic/Romantic, you might be asked to discuss how the tone poem developed from the Classical to the Romantic period; if one of the genres is the motet/anthem, you might be asked to discuss how Josquin used *cantus firmus* in mass or motet).

The question on research tools will relate to one of the two listed in section E.

The terms to be defined will be related to the topics in sections A, B, C, and D. (See section F below.)

TOPICS FOR SPRING 2026

A. GENRES

You should be able to trace each genre from its origins through the beginning of the 21st century. You should be able to discuss specific composers and specific works, considering issues of form, style, instrumentation (where relevant), national character (where relevant), etc.

Instrumental:

- 1) Classical-Era Concerto
- 2) Focus on one chamber genre among the following:
 - String Quartet
 - Piano quartet/quintet
 - Wind Quintet
 - Brass Quintet
 - Percussion ensemble

Vocal:

- 1) Verismo Opera
- 2) Cantata

B. PERIODS AND PERIOD JUNCTIONS

You should be able to clearly define the period, being able to discuss the reasons for the traditional boundaries (and any aspects you believe argue against those boundaries), the style and formal characteristics of works from that period, national character, instrumentation, cultural and literary influences, etc. For period junctions you should be able to discuss what links the two periods and what separates them. You should, in both cases, be able to cite characteristic (and exceptional) composers and specific works.

- 1) Late 19th–Early 20th century (ca.1880–1930)
- 2) The junction between the Baroque and the Rococo

C. COMPOSERS

You should be able to discuss the composer's biography and his or her works, considering issues of style (and style periods), form, genre, etc. You should be able to discuss specific works from all the periods and all the important genres of the composer's output. You should also be able to discuss the chief research tools associated with this composer (biographies, thematic catalogues, collected works, etc.)

- 1) Giacomo Puccini
- 2) J.S. Bach

D. OTHER FOCUSED TOPICS

In preparing these topics, you should be able to consider specific composers and their works, discern key musical characteristics, describe the historical and socio-cultural context, as well as relevant aspects of representative musical examples.

- 1) exoticism/orientalism
- 2) Viennese Salon culture ca. 1800

For ethnomusicology-oriented students only:

- Chinese national opera (*jingju*)
- Balinese and Javanese Gamelan

E. RESEARCH TOOLS

For each of the types of research tool listed, you should be able to define its characteristics, functions, and typical organizations. You should be prepared to discuss specific representative examples in detail, including, where relevant, authors and editors, organizational or editorial principles, etc.

- 1) The New Bach Edition (German: Neue Bach-Ausgabe [NBA])
 - Note: The Neue Bach-Ausgabe (NBA), published between 1954 and 2007, is the monumental critical edition of J. S. Bach's complete works, produced under historically grounded philological principles and with unprecedented access to surviving sources. It became possible because a remarkable number of previously inaccessible or unknown primary sources surfaced in the mid-20th century, which exposed how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editors had reshaped Bach through their own assumptions. At the same time, it raised polemical questions about the limits of "urtext" ideology. For more, on these issues and debates, you should consult the NBA's own *Kritische Berichte*, the journal *Bach*, and secondary studies by scholars such as Alfred Dürr, Arthur Mendel, Peter Wollny, Robin Leaver, and Hans-Joachim Schulze.
 - The NBA can be found in the non-circulating collection in the Fine Arts Library under the call number: M3 .B1133.
- 2) RILM [Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale]

F. TERMS

The candidate will be required to write clear and concise definitions of 6 terms, which should include musical as well as historical specificity, including an explanation of the period or dates to which it applies, the repertoire with which it is concerned, and references

to specific composers, schools, genres, works, practices, or conventions to illustrate the term. As stated above, these terms will be related to topics in sections A, B, C, and D (for example, polytonality and quotation are terms related to compositional practices of Ives).