The Queen's College, Oxford
Trinity Term 2020
Collection: 3rd-year Music

COMPULSORY TOPICS

4 hours

Answer THREE questions, each from a different section.

A. SACRED POLYPHONY ON THE CONTINENT FROM JOSQUIN TO VICTORIA

1. What evidence is there that the relationship between text and music was a particularly strong concern of motet composers in the period?

2. Assess Stephanie Schlagel’s observation that ‘Josquin des Prez…unavoidably must loom large in any study devoted to music around 1500, as either the direct object of inquiry, or a benchmark by which to measure and validate the work of others’.

3. How and why did composers pay homage to one another – or compete with one another – in their Mass settings? You should discuss the works of at least three composers.

4. What were the functions of sacred polyphony in this period?

5. Have the effects of the Council of Trent on music been exaggerated?

6. What is typical and atypical about Victoria’s Officium defunctorum of 1603, in the context of pro defunctis polyphony of the period?

B. HISTORY OF MUSIC EDUCATION

7. Bruno Latour writes (2005) that Actor-Network Theory ‘simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call non-humans’.

Taking Latour’s view as your starting point, consider the implications of using Actor-Network Theory as the basis for a history of electronic music.

8. According to Julio d'Escrivan (2011), the microphone is ‘a transducer’. What are the implications of d'Escrivan’s view when taking account of the microphone’s place in the history of electronic music?

9. Peter Nelson suggests (2015) that the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre ‘presents space not as something to be theorised as given to our senses, but as a palpable material that is nevertheless created, shaped and formed by human action’.

Across the history of electronic music, how have loudspeakers been used to create, shape and form sonic space?

10. As Shelley Trower points out (2012), discourses of materiality allow us to think, ‘about how objects or things interact with humans in ways that supposedly move beyond clear distinctions between them’.

Taking Trower’s perspective as your starting point, consider magnetic tape’s place in the history of electronic music.

11. Herbert Eimert wrote (1955) that ‘electronic music is compelled to deal with sound phenomena unknown to musicians of earlier times…[leading to] new musical possibilities’.
Give an account of how the ‘synthetic’ has been theorized in the literature on electronic music and show how synthesis, in particular, has been used to create ‘new musical possibilities’.

12. The development of the microprocessor has led to distinct shifts in how electronic music is composed and performed. One shift can be seen in the advent of what might be called an interactive aesthetic. Focusing on musical performance of the past forty years, show how ‘interactivity’ has come to matter to composers and performers of electronic music.

C. BACH KEYBOARD MUSIC

13 How might we regard Bach’s keyboard music as representative of the values of The Enlightenment? Answer with reference to AT LEAST ONE of the Clavier-Übung publications.

14 In what ways can Bach’s attitude toward different national styles of music be inferred from his keyboard collections, and how does it compare to the views of his German contemporaries?

15 What evidence of Bach’s engagement with older music can we find in his keyboard publications, and where does his compositional practice sit on the axis between integration and juxtaposition of styles?

16 Bach’s engagement with instruments and instrument makers is well documented. To what extent can we perceive the influence of specific instruments on his keyboard music, and what relevance does this information have to our own performance practice?

17 What notable characteristics of Bach’s practice as a teacher can be surmised from his keyboard collections?


D. EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY OPERA

19 Martha Feldman (2015) proposes that ‘those castrati who attain pre-eminence through extraordinary musical and social performances come to represent the monarch or the “king’s men” not just by virtue of casting but by embodying, projecting, and indeed manipulating royal charisma and diffusing it geographically and temporally from city to city’.

How did eighteenth-century opera embody, project, and manipulate its social context? Illustrate your answer with reference to ONE work.

20 Is dramma per musica or opera seria the better term for Italian serious opera in the eighteenth century? Why?

21 Cynthia Verba (2013) notes that Rameau’s views ‘entail an expansive belief in music’s expressive and dramatic capacities’. How did these views manifest themselves in his operatic work?

22 Do you agree with Mary Hunter and James Webster (1997) that ‘opera buffa’ is interesting precisely because it is not canonic, and does not bear the cultural burden of Mozart’s masterworks’?
23 Should we see the various comic and national genres of eighteenth-century opera (opera buffa, opéra comique, Singspiel, ballad opera) as ‘peripheral’ to the story of opera’s development in the period?

24 Stefano Castelvecchi (2013) has proposed that late eighteenth-century operas that do not easily fit into generic categories are often seen as ‘weeds’ by music historians. How important was generic mixing to the development of opera in the eighteenth century?

E. MODERNISM IN VIENNA

25. Despite Schoenberg’s claim to have emancipated the dissonance, a late-Romantic, tonal musical language persisted throughout this period. Discuss the various ways in which Viennese composers adopted and extended tonality in their symphonies, tone poems and operas.

26. In what ways might new ideas about the unconscious mind, as discussed by Freud and others, have had an impact on the work of composers, artists, and writers in fin-de-siècle Vienna?

27. How helpful is the label 'expressionist' in coming to an understanding of the music, art, and literature of Vienna in the years before the First World War? Discuss AT LEAST THREE WORKS.

28. How did Schoenberg's approach to atonality compare with those of his pupils Berg and Webern in the same period? Illustrate your answer with detailed reference to AT LEAST THREE WORKS.

29. What role did opera have to play in the gender politics of early twentieth-century Vienna? Discuss in relation to AT LEAST THREE operas.

30. 'Once we grasp the possibility of multiple meanings, [Mahler's] music combines intellectual challenge with emotional catharsis' (Norman Lebrecht, 2010). Discuss this statement in relation to Mahler's symphonic output.

F. SCENES AND SUBCULTURES

31. In engineering science, signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) is a measure of signal strength relative to background noise. Thinking metaphorically, evaluate the strength of punk’s signal (sonic, social, cultural, political, or otherwise) relative to its noise (sonic, social, cultural, political, or otherwise).

32. Since the 1990s, Electronic Dance Music (EDM) has been thoroughly entangled with the notion of PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity, Respect). Is PLUR a fantasy or a reality? Discuss with reference to examples of your own choosing.

33. Does John Lydon’s role in a butter commercial make him any less punk? Discuss with reference to Bourdieu’s ‘Forms of Capital’ and/or post-Bourdieuian ideas.

34. In his seminal article ‘Subcultures, Scenes, or Tribes? None of the Above’, David Hesmondhalgh (2005) presents genre as a productive way of conceptualising popular music collectivities. Through a careful critique of pre-existing concepts and drawing upon specific examples, advance a new term for conceptualising popular music collectivities.

35. Discuss grime’s entanglements with the social web. To what extent is grime an ‘Internet-mediated music genre’ (cf. Born & Haworth 2018)?
36. Georgina Born’s ‘fourth plane’ of social mediation concerns institutionalised forms of sociality and the corporate infrastructures that construct and shape musical practices and economies. Discuss the significance of ‘fourth plane’ mediations in punk OR electronic dance music OR grime.