

FAQs for Ethnomusicology Graduate Programs at UBC

How big is Ethnomusicology at UBC and who are the students and faculty?

We are a small and scrappy ethnomusicology program located within the UBC School of Music, which is the major such school in Western Canada. The School as a whole prides itself on its excellent faculty and harmonious, supportive working environment. Out of 25 full-time faculty spread across eight divisions (Theory, Historical Musicology, Ethnomusicology, Composition, Voice/Opera, Strings, (other) Orchestral Instruments, and Keyboards) there are three tenured ethnomusicologists, Profs. Nathan Hesselink, Michael Tenzer, and Gage Averill. Prof. Hesselink's previous specialty was the music of Korea, particularly the folk drumming; currently he is interested in rhythm and British rock music, as well as issues surrounding musicality. Prof. Tenzer specializes in Balinese gamelan, but is also active as a composer, and teaches on African and South Indian music as well as seminars on cross-cultural music theory. Both teach theory, history, and methodology of ethnomusicology from numerous perspectives. Since 2010 the Dean of UBC's Faculty of Arts has been Dr. Gage Averill, an ethnomusicologist who specializes in Haitian and American vernacular traditions. Though not currently active teaching in the School of Music, we are well-supported with Dean Averill's presence.

Part-time and occasional professors include Norman Stanfield, an expert in traditions of Japan and the British Isles. Emeritus Professor Alan Thrasher is still active and generous with his expertise on the music of China. We have also had visiting artists such as *zheng* virtuoso Han Mei, who directed the Chinese ensemble, and Balinese gamelan leader Wayan Sudirana. Professor Kofi Gbolonyo, a master musician from Ghana, joined us in 2009 on a term appointment.

As of this writing (2014) we have 10 full-time graduate students—4 at the MA level and 6 at the PhD. We expect this number to remain relatively stable, which means admitting at most 2 or 3 students per year. Our current students are a diverse group working on topics as different as Afro-Brazilian musics (Juan Diego Diaz Meneses), sonic healing practices in North America (Rodrigo Caballero), Chinese opera and composition (Juliane Jones), Haitian popular music and local politics (Kevin Mason), Balinese ritual gamelan and language (Jonathan Adams), and Okinawan music and identity (Kirk King). Our most recent PhDs were awarded to Mei Han for contemporary trends in Chinese *zheng* performance, composition, and aesthetics; Wayan Sudirana for an analysis of ritual Balinese music and contemporary society; and Leslie Tilley for an in-depth structural analysis of Balinese improvisational drumming. The last MA thesis completed was Alex Kelley's account of the African music scene in Montreal.

Eight students have completed the PhD in the program since it began in 2002, and five more are close to completion. Not all our graduates opt to continue in academia, but recent PhDs have been appointed at Kenyon College (Ohio), the University of Waterloo (Ontario), The Institute of Indonesian Arts (Denpasar), Kwantlen University (Richmond, BC), and others. We work closely with our students to guide them in job searches. Graduates of our MA program have also gone on to doctoral study at the University of Toronto, Memorial University, Wesleyan University, The University of California-Los Angeles, the University of Chicago, and the University of London-SOAS.

We often invite prominent ethnomusicologists as guests for lectures and interaction. Past visitors include Bruno Nettl, Ellen Koskoff, Mark Slobin, Keith Howard, Simha Arom, Kofi Agawu, Dana Rappoport, and Marc Perlman.

Lastly, we are situated in Vancouver, a beautiful, sparkling city that is a gold mine of world traditions. Once here, few wish to leave.

Do we have an ideology or perspective that shapes an education here?

In their own research, Prof. Tenzer has gravitated over the past several years to music theory and analysis, while Prof. Hesselink concentrates more on analysis and collective aesthetics. Nevertheless, the division strives for balance among diverse aspects of ethnomusicology by stressing performance, music transcription, theory and analysis, social and intellectual history, and contemporary social practice equally. We collaborate regularly with music theory, historical musicology, and composition divisions in the School of Music, and are linked to Area Studies and other departments across the university. Our goal for every student is to communicate our dedication to and love for the musics of the world, and to encourage original, critical, and constructive writing on music that will enable graduates to contribute actively to scholarship, education, and the cultures of world musics around us. The ethnomusicology students and faculty comprise a small community, but our time together is intense and vibrant, and excellent work is being done.

What is required of applicants and what kinds of applications are likely to be accepted?

Admission is competitive and has been getting more so every year since we introduced our PhD track. In 2013 we were able to accept 3 out of 21 applications. In addition to the usual forms and transcripts, all applicants must submit a maximum of two papers dealing with a topic in music that is representative of work to date. Applicants are also required to complete a brief transcription exercise; please contact Prof. Nathan Hesselink (n.hesselink@ubc.ca) upon submission of your application for further instructions. Currently this exercise is emailed to applicants on a Friday in January; applicants have the weekend to complete and submit the transcription.

At the MA level we are open to considering applications from many quarters. If you apply, do not feel as though you need to present a focused research plan: your openness to new knowledge and perspectives counts a great deal. Students with strong training in Western music tools—repertoire, scholarship, notation, theory—will find much of that to be of continuing use as an ethnomusicology student. But people who lack such skills or need further training should not necessarily be discouraged. This could mean social science students with burgeoning interests in the world of music, or specialists in non-Western traditions with significant scholarly promise. The two bottom line considerations *in such cases* will be ability to write well in English, and the ability to hear and represent music in some kind of notation (not necessarily Western standard notation).

Students applying for admission at the PhD level, on the other hand, should demonstrate significant experience with the literature and practice of the field, and have a well-developed interest in a particular topic. Those with MA degrees in related fields (such as music education, composition, or theory) should consult with us before applying.

What scholarships and financial aid are available?

Graduate funding at UBC comes in several forms, and new initiatives are introduced by the University and government on a regular basis. Among the current (and, in recent years, consistent) possibilities are:

- *Graduate Entrance Scholarships* (for entering students only)
- *University Affiliated Fellowships* (full or partial support for year 2 and beyond, usually reserved for foreign students)
- *Social Science and Humanities Research Council/SSHRC Fellowships* (government awards available only to Canadians or Canadian Permanent Residents)
- *Research Assistantships*
- *Teaching Assistantships*
- *International Tuition Award* (50% reduction for foreign students)

Complete information is found at <http://www.music.ubc.ca/index.php?id=2128>

What is the usual path to the degree?

Although the MA is “on the books,” we are especially interested in students who make it clear that they aim to complete the PhD.

At the MA level, in addition to completing the required 32 course credits and language proficiency requirement (one language in addition to English), there are two pathways to advancement or completion:

- An M.A. thesis typically 60-100 pages in length. This can be based on local or international fieldwork, but may also focus on theoretical work or library research.
- *Acceleration*, after the first year of MA coursework and only upon approval of the faculty, directly into the PhD program and all credits taken since coming to UBC are counted toward that degree (for exceptionally strong students with clearly defined research goals)

PhD students take 21 credits. Then follows the comprehensive examinations, development of a dissertation prospectus, selection of an advisor and committee, and advancement to candidacy, typically during a second year. A period of fieldwork and the writing of the dissertation take two or more years beyond that. When the dissertation is complete the student presents and defends it at a final oral examination. At some point before the degree can be conferred, demonstration of one more language proficiency is required.

For the PhD comprehensive exams the student and the advisor jointly select five broad topics, which the student then investigates independently for at least several months. Closer to the exam date these topics are narrowed down to specific questions. At the exam itself, which takes place over two days, students are given two hours to address two of the questions in essay format. A third topic is given as a lecture to an undergraduate class, and the fourth is presented in the form of a professional conference paper. The last topic is written up in advance in the form of a fieldwork report and bibliography. At the discretion of the faculty, there may be a follow-up oral examination. (For more information consult Prof. Tenzer or Hesselink.)

What courses are typically offered?

Profs. Tenzer and Hesselink each teach 5 courses per year: 3 academic courses and 2 performance/ensemble courses. The courses offered (virtually) every year without fail are:

- Music 565 *Korean, Chinese, or Balinese music performance* (must be taken for both terms)
- Music 328 *World Music Cultures* (each September; an undergraduate intro)
- Music 529 *Ethnomusicology* (each September; the foundational course for new graduate students)
- Music 128 *Musical Rhythm and Human Experience* (an undergraduate course open to non-music students which can provide TA opportunities for ethnomusicology graduate students)

Among those offered in rotation are:

- Music 428 *Area Studies in Music* has been (or will be) offered as *Indonesian Music, Korean Music, African Music, North Indian Music* and others
- Graduate courses (open to upper-level undergraduates at the instructor's discretion) have recently included:
 - Human Musicality*
 - Ethnography and Representation*
 - Categories and Concepts in Musical Thought*
 - Compositional Fusion*
 - Periodicity in Music*
 - Transcription and Analysis*
 - Music Origins and Universals*
 - World Systems of Melody and Mode*
- Courses on Jazz and Popular Music are frequently offered from a variety of perspectives by Prof. David Metzger (historical musicology) and Richard Kurth (music theory), as well as by Prof. Hesselink and sessional instructor Norman Stanfield
- Musicianship courses on *Korean* or *South Indian Rhythm*
- Graduate students may also propose Music 512 *Directed/Individual Study* at any time

This list grows and changes as the years pass; we are constantly developing new course syllabuses and ideas, and are open to suggestions.

What else?

If your questions have not been answered, please write us! If you can visit our campus, you are welcome to sit in on classes or ensembles and discuss the program in further detail. If you wish to contact one of our students to get their impressions, we will be happy to arrange it.

Sincerely,



Michael Tenzer (michael.tenzer@ubc.ca)



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