Music

Information on the Cambridge Music course can be found on the University undergraduate study website, as well as the Faculty of Music website and in the Undergraduate Prospectuses.

The Cambridge music course will give you a grounding in history, analysis and harmony while also exploring the vast range of ways that music affects people’s lives around the world. There are also optional performance and composition strands running through all three years.

Music at Peterhouse

Peterhouse typically admits one student for the Music course each year. Our Director of Studies is Dr Jeremy Thurlow a Fellow of Robinson College. We also have our Director of Music, Dr Simon Jackson, who organises much of the music in College, including the Peterhouse Music Society and the Chapel Choir.

Course requirements

Most Music students will have taken A level Music or equivalent, but it’s possible to study Music at Cambridge without having studied the subject at A level (or equivalent); however, such candidates will normally need to have achieved a Merit or above at Grade 8 ABRSM Theory to be eligible for a place. Music Technology is not normally an acceptable substitute. Some degree of keyboard ability is useful, as there is a small keyboard element in the first year, and in several papers it helps if you are able to try out ideas on the piano. For these reasons, it is important that you have some keyboard ability – a minimum of Grade 6 is generally thought desirable. Applicants should be familiar with the Western classical repertoire and have experience of writing about music. A well-developed musical ear and some proficiency in harmony and counterpoint are also desirable, though few successful applicants have equal ability in all these areas.

The application process

We ask all our Music applicants to send us one recent essay on a music history topic that they have written recently as part of their school work, and also one musical exercise or piece: this can be a harmony and/or counterpoint exercise in some historical style (for example, in the style of Bach or Palestrina), or another exercise in a historical style, or an original composition. Applicants who have not written essays for Music A level can send an essay from another subject: please contact us for further information.
Applicants who play an instrument to a high level, or who sing, may also, if they wish, send in a recording of their playing or singing, in the form of an mp3. The piece(s) should not last more than roughly 10 minutes, or 15 minutes in total if the applicant wishes to send recordings on two different instruments (or instrument and voice). Mp3’s can be emailed to the Admissions Office. Sending in a recording is purely optional; those who choose not to do so will not be at any disadvantage.

We aim to interview all candidates with a realistic chance of admission – generally those on track to meet our typical academic conditions. Candidates will probably have two interviews. One of these will be a subject interview and will last approximately 45 minutes, conducted by Dr Jeremy Thurlow. The other may be a general interview (discussing your interest in your subject and any written work you have submitted) with an Admissions Tutor.

Before the subject interview you will be asked to sit a one-hour written paper. The paper will comprise two questions: a short excerpt from a chorale melody to harmonise in the style of Bach; and an essay title on a broad issue about music for which you should write the opening two paragraphs and then make brief notes outlining the rest of the essay. You will be given a wide range of choices for this question: the idea is to give you an opportunity to think about a general question and bring to it your own personal areas of knowledge and interest. Finally, after this written paper and before the subject interview you will be asked to spend 20 minutes or so looking carefully at some brief musical extracts which will be given to you: these will then be discussed as part of the subject interview. You may annotate the extracts if you wish.

The subject interview will typically cover the following:

- A level syllabus and how far through it you have progressed.
- Questions arising from the one-hour written paper.
- A discussion of the musical extracts.
- Some very brief aural tests (such as chords, intervals, rhythms) and keyboard tests (such as harmonising a melodic phrase, and playing cadences in different keys). Advanced piano skills are not necessary here and candidates who are not primarily pianists should not feel discouraged!
- General questions about music. These will not be esoteric, but will concentrate on the mainstream repertoire and on your particular interests.

At the end of the interview you can ask any questions you might have.
Typical conditional offers

Our typical conditional offer for Music is A*AA at A level. The A* doesn’t need to be in Music, though on rare occasions we do may make this a condition of entry. IB offers are usually for a minimum of 40-42 points, to include 776 or 777 at Higher level in relevant subjects. Offers are designed to be realistic, taking into account individual circumstances, and to reflect potential and likely levels of achievement. Most of those who receive offers will attain the grades required.