

Appendix 6
to the Regulations on the
Dissertation Council

REFERENCE

by the foreign scientific advisor

on the dissertation submitted by

Aizhan Kalibayeva

(full name of the PhD candidate)

entitled:

**« Versality of Creative Activity of the Modern Musician
(on the Example of Kazakh Composers)»**

(title of the dissertation)

submitted for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** in the field of:

Musicology

(area of science)

within the educational program

8D02101 – Musicology

(name of the educational program / specialization)

Disclaimer: This review is based on two English-language articles by the candidate that resulted from her dissertation (Kalibayeva et al. 2024, Kalibayeva et al. 2025) and technically assisted translated of the original Russian-language PhD thesis.

Kalibayeva Aizhan, and Kadisha Onalbayeva. 2024. "In Search of Universalism: The History of Music through the Prism of Musicians' Specialization." *Saryn International Peer-Reviewed Journal* 4 (4), 20–38. October 30. <https://doi.org/10.59850/SARYN.4.12.2024.219>

Kalibayeva, Aizhan, Valeriya Nedlina, and Anton Somov. 2025. "The Energy of 'Female' Music: Gender Statistics and Cultural Prerequisites for Gender Equality among Kazakh Composers." *Musicologist* 9 (1): 121–57. June 30, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.33906/musicologist.1368755>

Assessment

Vienna, 10. September 2025

1. Relevance of the research topic

In her dissertation, Aizhan Kalibayeva addresses the phenomenon of universalism in the creative activity of modern musicians, with a special focus on Kazakh composers, particularly female composer Gulzhan Uzenbayeva. The topic is highly relevant—especially to the field of gender-reflective Kazakh musicology—as it connects historical traditions of musical syncretism with contemporary requirements for artistic versatility in the Kazakh contemporary composed music environment, situated in both regional aesthetics and global logics of contemporary music. The gender perspective is a crucial component of the

thesis and adds to the relevance of this work, as Kazakhstan-specific gender relations in music are discussed. By combining perspectives from musicology, psychology, sociology, and gender studies, Kalibayeva explores a musicological topic of strong local significance that can also be useful in international comparisons. The study responds to the growing need for interdisciplinary approaches in music studies and seems to constitute pioneering research in relation to musicological gender studies in the Kazakh context.

2. Scientific validity and reliability of the results

The dissertation demonstrates a sufficient level of scientific validity through its solid methodological framework and well-structured argumentation. Kalibayeva combines musicological analysis with insights from psychology, neurocognitive studies, cultural sociology, and gender theory, which ensures that the research is approached from multiple disciplinary angles. This pluralism enhances the reliability of the conclusions, since they are not drawn from a single methodological lens but from the convergence of diverse perspectives. Methodologically, the reliability of the results benefits from use of quantitative methods, as in the statistical surveys of gender participation in composition. As an ethnographer, I want to emphasize the productive use of qualitative methods, especially explorative interviews with Kazakh women composers. Together with a hermeneutic analysis of musical works, this thesis presents a robust methodological toolkit that strengthens the results. In addition, the study introduces new empirical material into the scholarly discourse, including unpublished biographical details, critical reviews, and archival sources. The validity of the work is also demonstrated in its clear connection between empirical findings and theoretical models of universalism. Overall, the dissertation offers consistent, evidence-based results that withstand critical scrutiny.

3. Theoretical and practical significance of the findings

Theoretically, the dissertation makes an important contribution by clarifying and expanding the concept of universalism within musicology. It situates universalism not only as a professional characteristic of musicians and composers but also as a cognitive, cultural, and gendered phenomenon. The integration of neuropsychological perspectives on creativity with sociological and cultural analyses provides a useful lens for understanding how musicians navigate multiple roles. The dissertation would benefit from an even more pronounced critical evaluation of universalism and its pitfalls, in order to implicitly counteract opposing positions, however, this does not weaken the application of the concept. The dissertation also deepens scholarly discourse on Kazakh music by positioning local traditions in dialogue with global postmodern tendencies. In practical terms, the findings are also relevant to music education. The research underscores the necessity of preparing future musicians for careers that demand versatility in composition, performance, pedagogy, and scholarship. Educators may draw from the study to design curricula that nurture integrative skills. Furthermore, the analysis of Gulzhan Uzenbayeva's work enriches performance and teaching repertoires and provides models for stylistic synthesis between national traditions and international practices. Finally, the gender analysis offers practical insights for gender-sensitive cultural policy by highlighting the role of women composers in Kazakhstan and proposing frameworks for gender equality in the arts.

4. Shortcomings in the content and formatting of the dissertation

Lacking Russian language competence, I am not entirely comfortable assessing possible shortcomings of this dissertation. I am not able to comment the formatting, as I am not able to read the Cyrillic Russian alphabet. Regarding content, a minor issue is the occasional imbalance between theoretical abstraction and concrete analysis. In some passages, complex theoretical concepts are presented at length without immediate illustration from musical examples, which could challenge readers who are less familiar with interdisciplinary theory. Regarding the gender-specific theoretical approach, this thesis fulfils an important pioneering role, focusing on women composers within a given social strata of contemporary classical composition. The thesis is not heavily invested with analyzing the elite-specific affordances, resources, class positionalities and cultural capital of women composers. Recent gender theoretical concepts, especially those exploring the social construction of gender imaginaries are of peripheral relevance to the author. This might be related to the local Kazakh state of gender research, a strong focus on women's perspective that mirrors comparable approaches in previous musicological debates internationally. These issues, however, are minor and do not undermine the scholarly value of the dissertation. They rather reflect the geopolitical positioning of the research and tell us about epistemological traditions of music research in the given region.

5. Compliance of the dissertation with the requirements for a doctoral thesis

The dissertation meets the formal requirements for a PhD thesis in musicology. It presents an original, independent, and comprehensive investigation of a topic of scholarly relevance. The structure of the dissertation—with its introduction, theoretical foundations, socio-cultural analysis, detailed case study, and conclusion—demonstrates a logical progression of thought. The research shows the candidate's ability to identify a complex problem, select appropriate interdisciplinary methods, and derive well-substantiated conclusions. The dissertation makes a distinct contribution to the field by integrating Kazakh musicological perspectives into the international discourse (given the English-language articles that are based on the dissertation) and by offering empirically grounded insights into gender dynamics in composition. The breadth of the references and the author's engagement with both classical and contemporary scholarship confirm a high level of academic competence. Accordingly, the dissertation is compliant with the standards expected for the award of the doctoral degree.

6. Recommendation (or rejection) of the dissertation for public defense

Based on the above assessment, Aizhan Kalibayeva's dissertation represents a valuable and original contribution to musicology. It expands the scholarly understanding of universalism in musical creativity, while providing insights of broader cultural and educational relevance. Therefore, I recommend the dissertation for public defense and support the conferral of the PhD degree in musicology.



Ass. Prof. Dr. Marko Kölbl
Chair of the Department of Folk Music and Ethnomusicology
mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna

UNIVERSITÄT FÜR MUSIK UND
DARSTELLENDE KUNST WIEN
Institut für Volksmusikforschung
und Ethnomusikologie
A-1030 Wien, Anton-v.-Webern-Platz 1
Tel. 711 55-4201