

GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS

A

absolute music: instrumental music with no intended story (non-programmatic music)

a cappella: choral music with no instrumental accompaniment

accelerando: gradually speeding up the speed of the rhythmic beat

accent: momentarily emphasizing a note with a dynamic attack

accessible: music that is easy to listen to and understand

adagio: a slow tempo

alla breve / cut time: a meter with two half-note beats per measure. It's often symbolized by the cut-time symbol

allegro: a fast tempo; music should be played cheerfully / upbeat brisk

alto: a low-ranged female voice; the second highest instrumental range

alto instrument examples: alto flute, viola, French horn, natural horn, alto horn, alto saxophone, English horn

andante: moderate tempo (a walking speed; "Andare" means to walk)

aria: a beautiful manner of solo singing, accompanied by orchestra, with a steady metrical beat

articulation marks:

Normal: 100%

• **Staccato:** 50%

> **Accent:** 75%

^ **Marcato:** 50% with more weight on the front

- **Tenuto:** 100%

art-music: a general term used to describe the "formal concert music" traditions of the West, as opposed to "popular" and "commercial music" styles

art song: a musical setting of artistic poetry for solo voice accompanied by piano (or orchestra)

atonal: music that is written and performed without regard to any specific key

atonality: modern harmony that intentionally avoids a tonal center (has no apparent home key)

augmentation: lengthening the rhythmic values of a fugal subject

avant-garde: ("at the forefront") a French term that describes highly experimental modern musical styles

B

ballad: a work in dance form imitative of a folk song, with a narrative structure

ballet: a programmatic theatrical work for dancers and orchestra

bar: a common term for a musical measure

barcarolle: a boating song, generally describing the songs sung by gondoliers in Venice. Chopin, Mendelssohn, Fauré and Offenbach all wrote works imitating the form

baritone: a moderately low male voice; in range between a tenor and a bass

baritone instrument examples: cello, baritone horn, bass clarinet, bassoon, baritone saxophone

Baroque Era: c1600-1750; a musical period of extremely ornate and elaborate approaches to the arts. This era saw the rise of instrumental music, the invention of the modern violin family and the creation of the first orchestras (Vivaldi, Handel, JS Bach)

bass: the lowest male voice

bass drum: the lowest-sounding non-pitched percussion instrument

bass instrument examples: double bass, contrabassoon, tuba, sousaphone, bass saxophone

basso continuo: the back-up ensemble of the Baroque Era usually comprised of a keyboard instrument (harpsichord or organ) and a melodic stringed bass instrument (viol' da gamba or cello)

bassoon: the lowest-sounding regular instrument of the woodwind family (a double-reed instrument)

beat: a musical pulse

bebop: a complex, highly-improvisatory style of jazz promoted by Charlie Parker in the 1940s-50s

bells: see glockenspiel

berceuse: a lullaby; generally slow and undulating

Big Band jazz: see Swing

binary form: a form comprised of two distinctly opposing sections ("A" vs. "B")

bitonality: modern music sounding in two different keys simultaneously

Blues: a melancholy style of Afro-American secular music, based on a simple musical/poetic form. "Delta" blues began in the early 1900s; "Classic" blues in the late 1920s; "Rhythm and Blues" in the 1940s

bolero: a Spanish dance

brass instrument: a powerful metallic instrument with a mouthpiece and tubing that must be blown into by the player, such as trumpet, trombone, French horn, tuba, baritone, bugle

C

cadence: a melodic or harmonic punctuation mark at the end of a phrase, major section or entire work

cadenza: an unaccompanied section of virtuosic display played by a soloist in a concerto

call and response: a traditional African process in which a leader's phrase ("call") is repeatedly answered by a chorus. This process became an important aspect of many Afro-American styles

canon: a type of strict imitation created by strict echoing between a melodic "leader" and subsequent "follower(s)"

cantabile: a style of singing which is characterized by the easy and flowing tone of the composition

cantata: a composition in several movements, written for chorus, soloist(s) and orchestra; traditionally, these are religious works

capriccio: a quick, improvisational, spirited piece of music

carol: a song or hymn celebrating Christmas

cavatina: a short and simple melody performed by a soloist that is part of a larger piece

cello: the tenor-ranged instrument of the modern string family (an abbreviation for violoncello)

chamber music: music performed by a small group of players (2 to 10, one player per part). Each part bears the same importance

chance music: a modern manner of composition in which some or all of the work is left to chance

chanson: a French song, from the middle ages to the 20th century

chant: a monophonic melody sung in a free rhythm (such as "Gregorian" chant of the Roman Catholic Church)

character piece: a 1-movement programmatic work for a solo pianist

chimes: a percussion instrument comprised of several tube-shaped bells struck by a leather hammer

choir: a group of singers in a chorus

chorale: 1) a Lutheran liturgical melody; 2) a 4-part hymn-like chorale harmonization; 3) a hymn sung by the choir and congregation often in unison

chord: a harmonic combination that has three or more pitches sounding simultaneously; see also partial chord

chord progression: a string of chords played in succession

chorus: 1) a fairly large choral group; 2) in Jazz, a single statement of the main harmonic/melody pattern

chromatic: notes which do not belong to the diatonic scale. For example, in the scale of C major (the white notes on the piano), the black keys (sharps and flats) are the chromatic notes

chromatic scale: includes all twelve notes of an octave

chromaticism: 1) harmonic or melodic movement by half-step intervals; 2) harmony that uses pitches beyond the central key of a work

clarinet: the tenor-ranged instrument of the woodwind family (a single-reed instrument)

Classical Era: c1750-1820; a politically turbulent era focused on structural unity, clarity and balance. (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven). The music was spare and emotionally reserved, especially when compared to Romantic and Baroque music

Classicism: The period of music history which dates from the mid 1800's and lasted about sixty years. There was a strong regard for order and balance

clef: In sheet music, a symbol at the beginning of the staff defining the pitch of the notes found in that particular staff. Examples, alto, treble, bass

coda: (means "tail" in Italian) a concluding section appended to the end of a work

collegium musicum: a university ensemble dedicated to the performance of early music (pre- 1750)

col legno: an instruction for string players that indicates the wooden side of the bow should be used to hit the strings

coloratura: a type of decoration, usually in singing that is ornate and richly ornamented

computer music: music in which the composition and/or performance is controlled by a computer

concert band: a large (non-marching) ensemble of woodwind, brass and percussion instruments

concert master: the first violin in an orchestra

concerto: the general term for a multi-movement work for soloist(s) and orchestra (see "solo concerto" and "concerto grosso")

concerto grosso: a 3-movement work for a small group of soloists and orchestra

conductor: the leader of a performing group of musicians. The conductor indicates the tempo, phrasing, dynamics, and style by gestures and facial expressions

consonance: pleasant-sounding harmony

contralto: lowest female singing voice

contrabassoon: the lowest-sounding double-reed instrument of the woodwind family

cool jazz: a relaxed style of modern jazz, promoted in the 1950s/60s by Brubeck etc.

cornet: a mellow-sounding member of the trumpet family

countermelody: a secondary melodic idea that accompanies and opposes a main thematic idea

counterpoint: a complex polyphonic texture combining two or more independent melodies

countertenor: the vocal range of a male alto. Close in range to a female soprano

courante: a piece of music written in triple time. Also an old French dance

crescendo: gradually getting louder

cut time: see alla breve

cymbals: percussion instrument usually consisting of two circular brass plates struck together as a pair

D

da capo: (Italian "to the head") a written indication telling a performer to go back to the start of a piece and play either to the end (Da capo al fine) or to the sign, which looks like a stylized "S" (Da capo al segno)

deceptive cadence: a chord progression that seems to lead to resolving itself on the final chord, but does not

decrescendo: gradually getting quieter (see diminuendo)

development: 1) the central dramatic section of a sonata form that moves harmonically through many keys; 2) the process of expanding or manipulation a musical idea

diatonic: a melody or harmony based on one of the seven-tone major or minor Western scales

Dies Irae: a chant from the Requiem Mass dealing with God's wrath on the day of judgment

diminuendo: gradually getting quieter (see decrescendo)

diminution: to shorten the note values of a theme (usually to render it twice as fast)

dissonance: Harsh, discordant, and lack of harmony. Also a chord that sounds incomplete until it resolves itself on a harmonious chord

decrescendo: gradually getting quieter (see diminuendo)

disjunct: a melody that is not smooth in contour (has many leaps)

Doctrine of Affections: the Baroque methodology for evoking a specific emotion through music and text

dotted note: a written note with a dot to the right of it (the dot adds half the rhythmic duration to the note's original value)

double bass: the lowest-sounding instrument of the modern string family

downbeat: the first beat of a musical measure (usually accented more strongly than other beats)

drone: dull, monotonous tone such as a humming or buzzing sound. Also a bass note held under a melody

drum kit or drum set: a collection of drums and percussion instruments set up stands to be played by a one person. Typically made up of a snare drum, a bass drum, one or more toms, a hi-hat, and one or more cymbals

duet: a piece of music written for two vocalists or instrumentalists

duple meter: a basic metrical pattern having two beats per measure

dynamics: the musical element of relative musical loudness or quietness. Also the symbols in sheet music indicating volume

E

electric instrument: an instrument whose sound is produced or modified by an electro-magnetic pick-up

electronic instrument: an instrument whose sound is produced or modified by electronic means

elegy: an instrumental lament with praise for the dead

encore: a piece of music played at the end of a recital responding to the audiences enthusiastic reaction to the performance, shown by continuous applause

energico: a symbol in sheet music; a direction to play energetically

english horn: a tenor oboe; a richly nasal-sounding double-reed woodwind instrument

enharmonic interval: two notes that differ in name only. The notes occupy the same position. For example: C sharp and D flat

ensemble: a group of musical performers

episode: an intermediary (contrasting) section of a Baroque fugue or Classic rondo form

equal temperament: the standard modern tuning system in which the octave is divided into twelve equal "half-steps"

espressivo: a direction to play expressively

étude: (French): a "study" piece, designed to help a performer master a particular technique; often performed for artistic interest. Some of the hardest instrumental works are large scale etudes by composers such as Chopin and Liszt

euphonium: a brass instrument similar to a baritone horn

exposition: 1) the opening section of a fugue; 2) the opening section of a Classic sonata form (in which the two opposing key centers are exposed to the listener for the first time)

expressionism: an ultra-shocking, highly-dissonant modern style of music

F

false alto: a vocal technique that allows a male to sing in a much higher, lighter register (by vibrating only half of the vocal cord)

fermata: to hold a tone or rest held beyond the written value at the discretion of the performer

fifth: the interval between two notes. Three whole tones and one semitone make up the distance between the two notes

finale: movement or passage that concludes the musical composition

flat: Indicated by a stylised \flat sign, shows that the note before which it is placed should be lowered by a semitone. Flat can also mean that a note is out of tune, sounding lower than it should in this case

flat sign: a musical symbol that lowers the pitch one half-step

flute: a metal tubular instrument that is the soprano instrument of the standard woodwind family

form: the elemental category describing the shape/design of a musical work or movement

film music: music that serves either as background or foreground material for a movie

forte: a dynamic instruction meaning the music should be played loudly. The instruction appears as either: 'f' loud; 'ff' fortissimo, meaning very loud; or 'fff' extremely loud. The practice has expanded to allow for any number of 'f's, depending on how loud a composer wants something to be played

fortepiano: an early prototype of the modern piano (designed to play both "loud" and "quiet")

fortissimo: a very loud dynamic marking

fourth: the interval between two notes. Two whole tones and one semitone make up the distance between the two notes

French horn: a valved brass instrument of medium/medium-low range (alto to bass)

fugue: a complex contrapuntal manipulation of a musical subject. A composition written for three to six voices. Beginning with the exposition, each voice enters at different times, creating counterpoint with one another

fusion: a blending of jazz and rock styles

G

galliard: music written for a lively French dance for two performers written in triple time

gamelan: an Indonesian musical ensemble comprised primarily of percussion instruments

gavotte: a 17th century dance written in Quadruple time, always beginning on the third beat of the measure

genre: a category of musical composition (the specific classification of a musical work)

gigue: a lively dance form from the Baroque period, from the English jig

giocoso: meaning the piece should be played in a cheerful or playful way

glee: vocal composition written for three or more solo parts, usually without instrumental accompaniment

glissando: a rapid slide between two distant pitches

glockenspiel: a pitched-percussion instrument comprised of metal bars in a frame struck by a mallet. Also known as bells

gong: (also called "tam-tam") a non-pitched percussion instrument made of a large metal plate struck with a mallet

grandioso: word to indicate that the movement or entire composition is to be played grandly

grave: a slow, solemn tempo

grazioso: word to indicate the movement or entire composition is to be played gracefully

Gregorian chant: monophonic, non-metered melodies set to Latin sacred texts. Singing or chanting in unison without strict rhythm. Collected during the Reign of Pope Gregory VIII for psalms and other other parts of the church service

guitar: a six-stringed fretted instrument

H

habañera: an exotic Cuban dance in duple meter

half step: the smallest interval in the Western system of equal temperament

harmony: the elemental category describing vertical combinations of pitches;
Pleasing combination of two or three tones played together

harp: a plucked instrument having strings stretched on a triangular frame

harpsichord: an ancient keyboard instrument whose sound is produced by a system of levered picks that pluck its metal strings (common in the Renaissance and Baroque eras)

home key: see tonic key

homophonic texture: 1) a main melody supported by chord; 2) a texture in which voices on different pitches sing the same words simultaneously

horn: see French horn

hot jazz: a "Dixieland" style of jazz with a fast tempo promoted by Louis Armstrong

humoresque: a piece of music with a humorous feel

hymn: a song of praise and glorification. Most often to honor God

I

idée fixe: a transformable melody that recurs in every movement of a multi-movement work

imitation: a polyphonic texture in which material is presented then echoed from voice to voice

Impressionism: a modern French musical style based on blurred effects, beautiful tone colors and fluid rhythms (promoted by Debussy around the turn of the 1900s)

impromptu: a short piano piece, often improvisational and intimate in character

improvisation: "on-the-spot" creation of music (while it is being performed)

incidental music: music performed during a theatrical play

instrumentation: the combination of instruments that a composition is written for

interlude: piece of instrumental music played between scenes in a play or opera

intermezzo: short movement or interlude connecting the main parts of the composition

interpretation: the expression the performer brings when playing his instrument

interval: the measured distance between two musical pitches

intonation: the manner in which tones are produced with regard to pitch

introduction: the opening section of a piece of music or movement

inversion: a variation technique in which the intervals of a melody are turned upside down

J

jazz: a style of American modern popular music combining African and Western musical traits

jazz band: an instrumental ensemble comprised of woodwinds (saxophones and clarinets), brasses (trumpets and trombones) and rhythm section (piano/guitar, bass and drum set)

jig: a lively English dance, usually placed at the end of a Baroque suite

K

kettledrums: see timpani

key: the central note, chord or scale of a musical composition or movement

key signature: a series of sharps or flats written on a musical staff to indicate the key of a composition

keyboard instrument: any instrument whose sound is initiated by pressing a series of keys with the fingers; piano, harpsichord, organ, synthesizer are the most common types

Klangfarbenmelodie: The technique of altering the tone color of a single note or musical line by changing from one instrument to another in the middle of a note or line

koto: a Japanese plucked instrument with 13 strings and moveable bridges

L

largo: a very slow, broad tempo

leading note: the seventh note of the scale where there is a strong desire to resolve on the tonic

legato: a smooth, connected manner of performing a sequence of notes

leitmotif: a short musical "signature tune" associated with a person or concept in an opera

lento: tempo instruction meaning the music is slow

libretto: the sung/spoken text of an opera

Lied: a German-texted art song (usually for one voice with piano accompaniment);
plural = Lieder

ligature: curved line connecting notes to be sung or played as a phrase

lute: an ancient pear-shaped plucked instrument widely used in the Renaissance and Baroque eras

M

madrigal: a composition on a short secular poem, sung by a small group of unaccompanied singers (one on a part). The madrigal flourished in Italy from 1520 to 1610, and was adopted in England during the Elizabethan Age (c. 1600); A contrapuntal song written for at least three voices, usually without accompaniment

maestro: refers to any great composer, conductor, or teacher of music

major: one of the two modes of the tonal system. Music written in major keys have a positive affirming character

major key: music based on a major scale (traditionally considered "happy" sounding)

major scale: a family of seven alphabetically-ordered pitches within the distance of an octave, following an intervallic pattern matching the white keys from "C" to "C" on a piano)

Malagueña: a Spanish gypsy dance from the region of Málaga

marcato: performed with emphasis

march: a form of music written for marching in two-step time. Originally the march was used for military processions

marching band: a large ensemble of woodwinds, brass, percussion, and color guard used for entertainment at sporting events and parades (usually performing march-like music in a strong duple meter)

marimba: a pitched percussion instrument comprised of wooden bars struck by mallets that uses resonator tubes to enhance the sound; a more versatile version of the xylophone

Mass: in music, a composition based on the five daily prayers of the Roman Catholic Mass Ordinary: Kyrie, Glorias, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei

Mass Ordinary: the five daily prayers of the Catholic Mass: Kyrie, Glorias, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei

Mass Proper: the approximately two dozen prayers of a Mass that change each day to reflect the particular feast day of the liturgical calendar

mazurka: a type of Polish dance in triple meter, sometimes used by Chopin in his piano works

measure: a rhythmic grouping, set off in written music by a vertical barline

Medieval: a term used to describe things related to the Middle Ages (c450-1450)

medley: often used in overtures, a composition that uses passages from other movements of the composition in its entirety

melisma: a succession of many pitches sung while sustaining one syllable of text

mellophone: marching band version of a French horn

mellophonium: hybrid version of a French horn and euphonium, typically used for marching band

melody: the musical element that deals with the horizontal presentation of pitch

meter: beats organized into recurring and recognizable accent patterns (2/4, 3/4, 4/4, etc.)

metronome: a mechanical (or electric) device that precisely measures tempo

measure: a rhythmic grouping, set off in written music by a vertical barline

mezzo-: an Italian prefix that means medium or half; vocally, the voice between soprano and alto

mezzo-forte: a medium loud dynamic marking

mezzo-piano: a medium quiet dynamic marking

mezzo-soprano: a dramatic woman's voice that combines the power of an alto with the primary high range of a soprano

microtone: a non-Western musical interval that is smaller than a Western half-step

Middle Ages: c450-1450; an era dominated by Catholic sacred music, which began as simple chant but grew in complexity in the 13th to 15th centuries by experiments in harmony and rhythm

MIDI: an acronym for Musical Instrument Digital Interface; a protocol established in the 1970s that allows digital synthesizers to communicate with computers

minimalism: a modern compositional approach promoted by Glass, Reich, etc., in which a short melodic/ rhythmic/harmonic idea is repeated and gradually transformed as the basis of an extended work

minor: one of the two modes of the tonal system. The minor mode can be identified by the dark, melancholic mood

minor key: music based on a minor scale (traditionally considered "sad" sounding)

minor scale: a family of seven alphabetically-ordered pitches within the distance of an octave, following an intervallic pattern matching the white keys from "A" to "A" on a piano)

minuet: a popular aristocratic French dance in 3/4 meter from the mid-17th century to the end of the 18th century

minuet and trio form: the traditional third-movement form of the Classic 4-movement design, based on an aristocratic dance in 3/4 meter

mode: a scale or key used in a musical composition (major and minor are modes, as are ancient modal scales found in Western music before c.1680)

moderato: a moderate tempo

Modern Era: c1890-present; a musical era impacted by daring experimentation, advances in musical technology, and popular/non-Western influences. (Debussy, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Copland, Cage)

modulation: the process of changing from one musical key to another

monophonic texture: a single-line texture with no harmony

monotone: repetition of a single tone

motet: a polyphonic vocal piece set to a sacred Latin text that is not from the Roman Catholic Mass

motif: primary theme or subject that is developed

motive: a small musical fragment ("Lego" block) used to build a larger musical idea; can be reworked in the course of a composition (as in the 4-note motive in Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C minor)

movement: a complete, independent division of a larger work

mp3: a modern technology that allows digital CD-quality sound to be compressed into files that are approximately 8 times smaller than the original, with relatively little loss of quality

musette: a Baroque dance with a drone-bass

musicology: the study of forms, history, science, and methods of music

Musikdrama: a type of ultra-dramatic German operatic theatre developed by Richard Wagner in the mid-/late- Romantic era

musique concrète: music comprised of natural sounds that are recorded and/or manipulated electronically or via magnetic tape; a compositional approach promoted by Varèse in the 1950s

mute: a device used to muffle the tone and volume of an instrument

N

nationalism: musical styles that include folk songs, dances, legends, language, or other national imagery relating to a composer's native country

natural: a note which is neither sharp nor flat

natural sign: A symbol in sheet music that returns a note to its original pitch after it has been augmented or diminished

Neoclassical: an early 20th-century compositional style in which Classic forms and the aesthetics of balance, clarity and structural unity are combined with modern approaches to harmony, rhythm and tone color; crisp and direct

new age: a style of popular music in the 1980s/90s that rejected the hard-edged beat of rock music by focusing on nature sounds, sweet synthesized tone colors, acoustic instruments and short hypnotically-repetitive ideas

nocturne: (French for "night piece") a type of character piece for solo piano that evokes the moods and images of nighttime; romantic or dreamy character with nocturnal associations

nonet: a composition written for nine instruments

non-metrical: music without a regular beat or steady meter (you cannot tap your foot to the beat)

non-Western music: music from countries other than Europe and the Americas

notation: a system first developed in the 8th century for writing music down so that critical aspects of its performance can be recreated accurately

note: in music notation, a black or white oval-shaped symbol (with or without a stem/flag) that represents a specific rhythmic duration and/or pitch

O

obligato: 1) an instrumental part which is essential in a piece of music. Popular in the baroque period; 2) an extended solo, often accompanying the vocal part of an aria

oboe: a nasal-sounding double-reed instrument that is the alto of the standard woodwind family

octave: eight full tones above the key note where the scale begins and ends- eg: from the notes C to C or D to D; a musical interval between two pitches in which the upper pitch vibrates twice as fast as the lower

octet: a composition written for eight instruments

Ondes Martenot: An electronic instrument which produces sound using a keyboard which controls oscillating frequencies

opera: a large-scale, fully-staged dramatic theatrical work involving solo singers, chorus and orchestra

opera buffa: comic Italian opera (usually in 2 acts)

opera seria: serious Italian opera (usually in 3 acts)

operetta: short light musical drama

opus: convenient method of numbering a composer's works where a number follows the word "opus". For example, Opus 28, No. 4

oratorio: a large scale work for orchestra and voices, usually sacred in nature.

Oratorios are narrative in the same way as opera, but are performed without staging, costume, action or scenery

orchestra: a large instrumental ensemble comprised of strings, woodwinds, brasses and percussion

orchestration: the technique of conceiving or arranging a composition for orchestra

Ordinary: (see "Mass Ordinary")

organ: a wind/keyboard instrument, usually with many sets of pipes controlled from two or more manuals (keyboards), including a set of pedals played by the organist's feet (a set of mechanical or electrical "stops" allow the player to open or close the flow of air to selected groups of pipes)

organum: a type of early French Medieval polyphony dating from c. 1000-1200, featuring a slow non-metered chant in the lowest voice with one or more faster metrical voices sung above (in melismatic style—many notes sung on each syllable of text)

ornaments: tones used to embellish the principal melodic tone

ostinato: a short rhythmic/melodic idea that is repeated exactly over and over throughout a musical section or work

overture: a one-movement orchestral introduction to an opera or other large musical work. (Wagner, Bizet and other composers after 1850 use the term prelude instead to show dramatic unity between the overture and the theatrical drama that follows it)

P

parody: composition based on previous work. A common technique used in Medieval and Renaissance music

part: a line in a contrapuntal work performed by an individual voice or instrument

partial: a harmonic given off by a note when it is played

partial chord: a harmonic combination that has two pitches sounding simultaneously; see also chord

partita: musical suite, usually for solo instrument or small ensemble; often Baroque dances

passacaglia: a baroque dance form in which a short melodic phrase, usually in the bass, form the basis of the work

pastoral: a composition whose style is simple and idyllic; suggestive of rural scenes

pentatonic scale: a folk or non-Western scale having five different notes (consisting of the black notes on the keyboard) within the space of an octave

percussion instrument: an instrument on which sound is generated by striking its surface with an object

phrase: a small musical unit (sub-section of a melody) equivalent to a grammatical phrase in a sentence

pianissimo: a very quiet dynamic marking

piano: a soft / quiet dynamic marking

piano: (instrument) a versatile modern keyboard instrument that makes sound via fingered keys that engage felt-tipped hammers that strike the strings

pianoforte: the original instrumental prototype of the piano (late Baroque/early Classic eras)

pitch: the relative highness or lowness of a musical sound (based on frequency of vibration)

più: a term that can preface an instruction to mean 'more of'. 'Più vivo', meaning 'more lively', or 'Più lento', more slow

pizzicato: usually refers to a type of stringed instrument playing in which a string is plucked by the fingers

phrase: a small musical unit (sub-section of a melody) equivalent to a grammatical phrase in a sentence

poco a poco: a term that can preface an instruction meaning to follow it 'little by little'. For example, 'poco a poco crescendo', meaning, getting louder gradually, little by little

polka: a lively Bohemian (Czech) dance (traditionally for the common classes)

polonaise: a Polish nationalistic military dance used in some of Chopin's piano character pieces

polyphony: music with two or more sounds happening simultaneously; combining a number of individual but harmonizing melodies. Also known as counterpoint

polyphonic texture: when two or more independent melodic lines are sounding at the same time

polyrhythm: when several independent rhythmic lines are sounding at the same time

polytonality: when music is played in two or more contrasting keys at the same time

portamento: a mild glissando between two notes for an expressive effect

postlude: a concluding section (usually at the end of a keyboard movement)

prelude: 1) a free-form introductory movement to a fugue or other more complex composition; 2) a term used instead of overture (by Wagner, Bizet and other later Romantic composers) to show dramatic unity between the introductory orchestral music and the theatrical drama that follows it; a short piece originally preceded by a more substantial work, also an orchestral introduction to opera, however not lengthy enough to be considered an overture

prepared piano: a modern technique invented by John Cage in which various natural objects (spoons, erasers, screws, etc.) are strategically inserted between the strings of a piano, in order to create unusual sounds

presto: a very fast tempo

program music (or programmatic music): instrumental music intended to tell a specific story, or set a specific mood or extra-musical image

program symphony: a programmatic multi-movement work for orchestra

progression: the movement of chords in succession that functions similarly to a sentence or phrase in written language

Proper (Mass): see Mass Proper

Q

quadrille: a 19th century square dance written for 4 couples

quadruple meter: a basic metrical pattern having four beats per measure

quarter-tone: a division of pitches, smaller than a semitone, which is half a tone. Found generally in some music from the 20th Century

quartet: a set of four musicians who perform a composition written for four parts

quintet: a set of five musicians who perform a composition written for five parts

quotation music: (common since c. 1960) a composition extensively using quotations from earlier works

R

raga: a melodic pattern used in the music of India

ragtime: a style of piano music developed around the turn of the 20th century, with a march-like tempo a syncopated right-hand melody, and an "oom-pah" left-hand accompaniment

rallentando: often abbreviated as 'rall...', is an instruction to gradually play slower

range: the distance between the lowest and highest possible notes of an instrument or melody

rap: (hip-hop) a style of popular music developed by Americans in the 1970s, in which the lyrics are spoken over rhythm tracks

recapitulation: the third aspect of Classic sonata form; in this section, both themes of the exposition are restated in the home key (the second theme gives up its opposing key center); reprise

recital: a solo concert with or without accompaniment

recitative: a speech-like style of singing with a free rhythm over a sparse accompaniment

recorder: an ancient wooden flute

reed: a flexible strip of cane (or metal) that vibrates in the mouthpiece of a wind instrument

refrain: repeating phrase that is played at the end of each verse in the song

register: a specific coloristic portion of an instrumental or vocal range

relative major and minor: the major and minor keys that share the same notes in that key. For example: A minor shares the same note as C major

relative pitch: ability to determine the pitch of a note as it relates to the notes that precede and follow it

Renaissance: c1450-1600; an era that witnessed the rebirth of learning and exploration. This was reflected musically in a more personal style than seen in the Middle Ages. (Josquin Desprez, Palestrina, Weelkes)

reprise: to repeat a previous part of a composition generally after other music has been played

Requiem Mass: a dirge, hymn, or musical service (most times Roman Catholic) for the repose of the dead

resonance: when several strings are tuned to harmonically related pitches, all strings vibrate when only one of the strings is struck

retrograde: a melody presented in backwards motion

retrograde inversion: a melody presented backwards and intervallically upside down

rhythm: the element of music as it unfolds in time; played as a grouping of notes into accented and unaccented beats

rhythm and blues: a style of American popular music that flourished in the 1940s-60s; a direct predecessor to rock and roll

ricercar: elaborate polyphonic composition of the Baroque and Renaissance periods

rigaudon: a quick 20th century dance written in double time

ritardando: gradually slowing down the tempo, often abbreviated as 'rit.'

ritenuto: an instruction to slow down

ritornello form: a Baroque design that alternates big vs. small effects (tutti vs. solo); usually the tutti section is a recurring melodic refrain

rock and roll: an American style of popular music that emerged in the 1950s out of the combination of rhythm and blues, country-western and pop-music elements

rococo: a musical style characterized as excessive, ornamental, and trivial

Romantic Era: c1820-1890; an era of flamboyance, nationalism, the rise of "superstar" performers, and concerts aimed at middle-class "paying" audiences. Orchestral, theatrical and soloistic music grew to spectacular heights of personal, emotional, expressive, and imaginative expression. (Schubert, Berlioz, Chopin, Wagner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky)

rondo form: a Classic form in which a main melodic idea returns two or three times in alternation with other melodies (ABACA or ABACABA, etc.); the rondo was often used for the final movements of classical sonata form works

root: the principal note of a triad

round: a canon where the melody is sung in two or more voices. After the first voice begins, the next voice starts singing after a couple of measures are played in the preceding voice. All parts repeat continuously

rubato: a flexible approach to metered rhythm in which the tempo can be momentarily sped up or slowed down at will for greater personal expression; an important characteristic of the Romantic period

S

sackbut: an ancient brass instrument; ancestor to the trombone

saxophone: a family of woodwind instruments with a single reed and brass body; commonly used in jazz and marching band/concert band music

scale: a family of pitches arranged in an ascending/descending order

scat singing: a style of improvised jazz singing sung on colorful nonsense syllables

scherzo: pertaining to the sonata form, a fast movement in triple time; a movement from a work. Originating in the 17th Century, the form usually appears in a Symphony as a fast, light-hearted second or third movement

scherzo and trio form: a musical movement based on a country dance in triple meter; replaced the aristocratic minuet in the early 1800s as the usual third movement of the Classic 4-movement design

scordatura: the retuning of a stringed instrument in order to play notes below the ordinary range of the instrument or to produce an unusual tone color

score: written notation that vertically aligns all instrumental/vocal parts used in a composition

septet: a set of seven musicians who perform a composition written for seven parts

sequence: the immediate transposition and repetition of a melodic passage on a higher or lower pitch level

serenade: a lighthearted Classic instrumental chamber work written in several movements similar to a small-scale symphony; usually performed for social entertainment of the upper classes

serialism: a method of modern composition in which the twelve chromatic pitches are put into a numerically-ordered series used to control various aspects of a work (melody, harmony, tone color, dynamics, instrumentation, etc.)

sextet: a set of six musicians who perform a composition written for six parts

sforzando: play with sudden and marked emphasis

shakuhachi: a Japanese flute

shamisen: a banjo-like Japanese stringed instrument

sharp sign: a musical symbol that raises the pitch one half-step

shawm: an ancient double-reed woodwind instrument

sforzando: sudden stress on a note or chord

Singspiel: a traditionally low-level type of comic light opera, featuring spoken German dialogue interspersed with simple German songs

sitar: a long-necked stringed instrument of India

slide: a glissando or portamento. Also refers to the moving part of a trombone

slur: a curve over notes to indicate that a phrase is to be played legato

snare drum: a non-pitched drum with two heads stretched over a metal shell; the lower head has metal wires strapped across it to produce a rattling sound

solo concerto: a 3-movement work for a single soloist vs. an orchestra

sonata: a Classic multi-movement work for a piano (or for one instrument with piano accompaniment); music of a particular form consisting of four movements. Each of the movements differ in tempo, rhythm, and melody; but are held together by subject and style

sonata form (also called sonata-allegro form): the common first-movement form of Classic multi-movement instrumental works; essentially a musical debate between two opposing key centers characterized by three dramatic structural divisions within a single movement: Exposition (two opposing keys are presented), Development (harmonically restless), Recapitulation (all material is presented in the home key)

sonata-rondo form: a formal design that combines aspects of sonata form and rondo form: (an ABACABA design in which the opening ABA=exposition (two opposing keys presented in "A" vs. "BA"); C=development (harmonically restless); the last ABA=recapitulation (all material is presented in the home key)

sonatina: a short or brief sonata

song: a small-scale musical work that is sung (a German song is a "Lied"; a French song is a "chanson"; an Italian song is a "canzona")

song cycle: a set of poetically-unified songs for one singer accompanied by either piano or orchestra; a sequence of songs, perhaps on a single theme, or with texts by one poet, or having continuous narrative

soprano: 1) the highest ranged woman's voice or a high pre-pubescent boy's voice;
2) the highest- sounding instrument of an instrumental family

soprano instrument examples: flute, clarinet, recorder, violin, trumpet, oboe, soprano saxophone

sousaphone: an ultra-bass brass instrument designed for use in marching bands

Sprechstimme: a half-spoken, half-sung style of singing on approximate pitches, developed by Schoenberg in the early 1900s

staccato: short, detached notes

staff: made up of five horizontal parallel lines and the spaces between them on which musical notation is written

stretto: pertaining to the fugue, the overlapping of the same theme or motif by two or more voices a few beats apart

string instrument: an instrument that is played by placing one's hands directly on the strings, such as violin, viola, cello, double bass, harp, guitar, dulcimer, psaltery, and the ancient viols

string quartet: 1) a chamber ensemble of two violins, viola, and cello, devised in the early Classic era; 2) a multi-movement work (genre) for two violins, viola and cello

strophic form: a song form featuring several successive verses of text sung to the same music

subject: the main melodic idea of a fugue

suite: a loose collection of instrumental compositions

swing: a term to describe "Big Band" jazz music of the 1930s-50s

symphonic poem: a single-movement programmatic work for orchestra

symphony: a large scale orchestral work, usually in four movements, in which at least one is in sonata-form. The movements correspond roughly to a pattern of: Opening movement; Scherzo; Slow movement; Finale

syncopation: an "off-the-beat" accent

synthesizer: a modern electronic keyboard instrument capable of generating a multitude of sounds

system: a combination of two or more staves on which all the notes are vertically aligned and performed simultaneously in differing registers and instruments

T

tabla: a pair of drums used to accompany the music of India

tablature: a system of notation for stringed instruments. The notes are indicated by the finger positions

tala: a rhythmic pattern used in the music of India

temperament: refers to the tuning of an instrument

tempo: the speed of the musical beat at which a piece of music is played. Tempo indications are given either at the beginning of a piece, or within it. Sometimes tempo is indicated by strict beats-per-minute, or using terminology which can be more flexible

tenor: a male singing voice between baritone and countertenor. The highest of the ordinary adult male range

tenor instrument examples: trombone, tenor saxophone

tenuto: a note or chord held for its full time value or slightly more

ternary form: ABA design (statement, contrast, restatement)

tessitura: the range of an instrumental or a vocal part

texture: the element focusing on the number of simultaneous musical lines being sounded

theme: a melodic or, sometimes a harmonic idea presented in a musical form

theme and variations form: a theme is stated then undergoes a series of sectional alterations

through-composed form: a song form with no large-scale musical repetition

timbre: tone color, quality of sound that distinguishes one voice or instrument to another. It is determined by the harmonics of sound

time signature: a numeric symbol in sheet music determining the number of beats to a measure

timpani: various-sized kettle-shaped pitched drums; a tenor instrument of the percussion family

toccata: an instrumental work designed to display the technical prowess and proficiency of a performer

tonal: pertains to tone or tones

tonality: music centered around a "home" key (based on a major or minor scale); the tonal characteristics determined by the relationship of the notes to the tone

tone: the intonation, pitch, and modulation of a composition expressing the meaning, feeling, or attitude of the music

tone color: the unique, characteristic sound of a musical instrument or voice

tone cluster: a modern technique of extreme harmonic dissonance created by a large block of pitches sounding simultaneously

tone less: unmusical, without tone

tone row: an ordered series of twelve chromatic pitches used in serialism

tonic: the first note of a scale or key; also known as a keynote

tonic key: the "home" key of a tonal composition

transition: a bridge section between two musical ideas transposition: shifting a piece to a different pitch level

treble: the playing or singing the upper half of the vocal range. Also the highest voice in choral singing

tremolo: rapid repetition of a pitch (i.e.: bowing a string rapidly while maintaining a constant pitch)

triad: a three-note chord consisting of a root, third, and fifth (built on alternating scales steps- 1-3-5, etc.)

trill: rapid alternation of two close pitches to create a "shaking" ornament on a melodic note

trio: a composition written for three voices and instruments performed by three persons

trio sonata: a Baroque multi-movement chamber work for four performers (2 violins and basso continuo)

triple meter / triple time: a common meter with three beats per measure

triplet: a rhythmic grouping of three equal-valued notes played in the space of two (indicated in written music by a "3" above the grouping)

tritone: a chord comprised of three whole tones resulting in an augmented fourth or diminished fifth

trombone: a family of brass instruments that change pitch via a moveable slide (alto, tenor and bass versions are common)

trumpet: a valved instrument that is the soprano of the modern brass family

tuba: a large valved brass instrument; the bass of the modern brass family

tubular bells: see chimes

tune: a rhythmic succession of musical tones, a melody for instruments and voices

tuning: the raising and lowering a pitch of an instrument to produce the correct tone of a note

tutti: (Italian for "all" or "everyone") an indication for all performers to play together

twelve-tone music: music composed such that each note is used the same number

of times

U

'Ud: a lute-like, pear-shaped, fretless stringed instrument commonly used in music from the Middle East

unison: the rendering of a single melodic line by several performers simultaneously

upbeat: the weak beat that comes before the strong downbeat of a musical measure

V

variation: the compositional process of changing an aspect(s) of a musical work while retaining others

verismo: a style of true-to-life Italian opera that flourished at the turn of the 20th century

vibraphone (vibes): percussion instrument made of tuned metal bars played by holding two or four soft mallets and striking the bars. The vibraphone resembles the xylophone, marimba, and glockenspiel; one of the main differences between it and these instruments being that each bar is paired with a resonator tube that has a motor-driven butterfly valve at its upper end. The valves are mounted on a common shaft, which produces a tremolo or vibrato effect while spinning. The vibraphone also has a sustain pedal similar to that on a piano. With the pedal up, the bars are all damped and produce a shortened sound. With the pedal down, they sound for several seconds

vibrato: small fluctuations in pitch used to make a sound more expressive

viol: an ancient string instrument (ancestor to the modern violin)

viol' da gamba: a Renaissance bowed string instrument held between the legs like a modern cello

viola: the alto instrument of the modern string family

violin: the soprano instrument of the modern string family

violoncello: the full name of the cello; the tenor instrument of the modern string family

virtuoso: a performer of extraordinary ability

vivace: a lively tempo; to be played in a brisk, lively, and spirited manner

voice: one of two or more parts in polyphonic music. Voice refers to instrumental parts as well as the singing voice

volume: the relative quietness or loudness of an electrical impulse (see dynamics)

W

waltz: an aristocratic ballroom dance in triple meter where the accent falls on the first beat of each measure; flourished in the Romantic period

whole note: a whole note is equal to 2 half notes, 4 quarter notes, 8 eighth notes, etc

whole step: an interval twice as large as a half-step (Ex.: the distance between C and D on a piano)

whole-tone scale: a scale made of 6 whole steps that avoids any sense of tonality (Ex: C D E F# G# A#)

woodwind instrument: an instrument that produces its sound from a column of air vibrating within a multi-holed tube

word-painting: in vocal music, musical gestures that reflect the specific meaning of words; a common aspect of the Renaissance madrigal

world beat: the collective term for today's popular third-world musical styles (also called ethno-pop)

X

xylophone: a pitched percussion instrument consisting of flat wooden bars on a metal frame that are struck by hard mallets

A FEW HELPFUL MARCHING BAND TERMS

call time: the absolute latest time you should be in place and fully prepared for a band activity. Expect the band director to adjust call time often, so be prepared to be flexible. Band students plan in advance to arrive 30 minutes prior to published call times to prepare themselves and have a little time socializing with each other. (If you are 15 minutes EARLY for Call Time then you are on time; If you show up AT Call Time then you are late; If you show up AFTER Call Time, well, just please don't do that!)

dot: A full Marching Band Drill contains many pages with numbered dots on them. Each marcher is assigned one of these dots. In visual terms, a marcher moves in step during a performance just like the dot in the book does

drill & dot books: for Section Leaders, a drill book is a 3-ring binder and about 35 clear page protectors (purchased on your own) that will hold pages with the full marching drill (all the moves marchers make during a performance). A dot book is an inexpensive 3" x 5" (approximately) spiral notebook used by individual marchers to reference just their position in the drill

field marker: an object placed on the field so you can easily return to it during rehearsal. It can be anything small and relatively flat, like a small stuffed animal, a mini frisbee, a toy car, etc

flip folder: used to hold music, in a specifically sized page protector, while marching. Attaches to a lyre

lyre: a piece of hardware that connects a FLIP FOLDER to either an instrument or a flute player's arm to hold music while it is being learned

MSBOA: the Michigan School Band & Orchestra Association. An organized group of K-12 music educators across the state, MSBOA coordinates various competitions and activities. Students have the opportunity to participate in the following activities: Marching Band Festival, Band & Orchestra Festival, Jazz Festival, Solo & Ensemble, and Honors groups. MSBOA activities are organized by district/region and state