

# MUSIC GLOSSARY

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## A

**a cappella:** sung without instrumental accompaniment.

**AB:** a musical form consisting of two contrasting sections, A and B, each of which may or may not be repeated; also called **binary form**.

**ABA:** a musical form consisting of three sections, A, B, and A, in which A is the principal section and is repeated after the completion of the contrasting B section; also called **ternary form**.

**accelerando:** Italian tempo term meaning to gradually accelerate or speed up.

**accent:** stressing or emphasizing a note or chord, beat, or upbeat in music.



**accent mark:** the symbol in music notation that shows when to add stress to the sound. The mark is written above the note to be stressed.

**accidental:** the sharpening or flattening of a particular note not indicated in the key signature of a piece; the naturalizing of a note that is sharpened or flattened according to the key signature.

**accompaniment:** the subordinate music that supports the principal voice or instrument in a piece of music.

**acoustic instrument:** a musical instrument whose sound is not electronically modified or amplified.

**acoustics:** the science of sound and how it's produced.

**adagio:** Italian tempo term that means slow.

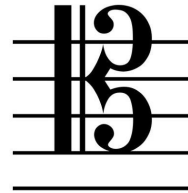
**aerophones:** the family of world instruments whose sound comes from the vibration made when air moves in a tube or across a sharp edge; includes flutes, reed instruments, instruments with cup mouthpieces (like trumpets and horns), and free aerophones (in which

there is no enclosed column of air that vibrates but instead air vibrates around the instrument as it travels through the air, as in a bullroarer).

**al fine:** Italian tempo term that means to the finish.

**allegro:** Italian tempo term that means fast, quick, and lively.

**alto:** the lowest female voice or unchanged boy's voice; also, a defining range of pitches of an instrument within a particular family of instruments (e.g., alto saxophone).



**alto clef:** a clef used by the viola that assigns the note middle C to the middle line of the staff.

**analog tools:** category of musical instruments and tools that are non-digital (i.e., do not transfer sound in or convert sound into binary code), such as acoustic instruments, microphones, monitors, and speakers.

**andante:** Italian tempo term that means a “walking pace”; moderate, at a leisurely pace, easily flowing.

**anthem:** a piece of religious vocal music; also, a song of praise, devotion, or patriotism.

**aria:** Italian word for song, mainly used to describe an opera song for a solo voice with orchestral accompaniment.

**arpeggio:** Italian term that means to play or sing the notes of a chord consecutively, one after another, rather than simultaneously.

**arrangement:** an adaptation or reworking of a musical composition, often done so that the music can be played by a different instrument or different combination of instruments than in the original.

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**arranger:** a person who creates alternate adaptations of existing music.

**articulation:** the characteristic way in which musical tones are connected, separated, or accented; types of articulation include legato (smooth, connected tones) and staccato (short, detached tones).

**atonal music/atonality:** music that does not have a tonal center or key; atonality is prominent in the works of many 20th-century composers.

**audiate:** to hear and comprehend sounds in one's head (inner hearing), even when no sound is present.

## B

**balance:** the state of equilibrium in which all the component parts of the music create a unified whole.

**ballad:** a folk song that tells a story.

**ballet:** a form of theatrical dance that combines music and dancing with formalized steps and poses.

**band:** any large body of instrumental players (e.g., brass bands, military bands, dance bands, jazz bands, etc.).

**bar:** a small section of music; bar lines are vertical lines marking off groups of beats into small sections.

**bar line:** a vertical line placed on the staff at the end of a measure; bar lines mark bars, or measures, of a particular length.

**baritone:** the range of male voice pitch that is deeper than tenor, but not so deep as bass.

**bass:** the deepest range of pitch of a man's voice; the range of pitch of an instrument within a particular family of instruments.



**bass clef:** a symbol placed on the five-line staff in traditional notation indicating the pitch of the notes and locating F on the fourth line from the bottom.

**beat:** the regular, repeated pulsation in music.

**binary:** a form or structure in music that has two distinct and contrasting sections (AB), each of which may or may not be repeated.

**bluegrass:** a style of music featuring various combinations of stringed instruments (e.g., banjo, fiddle, mandolin, guitar, bass, dobro) and vocals often sung in a “high lonesome sound”; takes its name from innovations in musical style introduced beginning in the late 1920s by Kentucky-born Bill Monroe, who named his band the Bluegrass Boys after his home state.

**blues:** early and basic jazz style of music with a predictable chord structure; not religious and usually slow in tempo.

**body percussion:** using various parts of the body to make musical sounds.

**bordun:** accompaniment created by sounding two tones, five notes apart, continuously throughout a composition; can be performed in varying ways, such as simultaneously or alternating.



**brass family:** the orchestra family of metal instruments that have valves or slides, a cupped mouthpiece into which air is blown, multiple tubing, and bell-shaped ends where the sound comes out (e.g., French horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba). (Above: trombone, French horn, trumpet.)

## C

**cadence:** a kind of harmonic punctuation mark (resting place in a musical phrase) that brings a piece or section of a piece of music to a satisfactory close.

**cadenza:** a section of a concerto movement that is reserved for a soloist. It was originally intended to be improvised upon the tune already heard, but most soloists plan their cadenzas ahead of performance.

**call and response:** a song style that follows a simple question/answer pattern in which one singer leads and a group responds.

**canon:** similar to a round, a musical form with two or more voices in which the melody is introduced in one voice and then imitated or echoed by the other voices.

**ceremonial music:** music that is written for/performed at celebrations, cultural rituals, religious services, or ceremonies.

**chamber music:** music written for a small ensemble of instruments and meant to be performed in a chamber or small space as opposed to a larger setting.

**chanson:** French term for song; the chanson was a French song of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

**chant:** most commonly, the rhythmic recitation of rhymes, or poems without a sung melody; a type of singing, with a simple, unaccompanied melody line and free rhythm.

**chart:** a jazz or popular music score, often abbreviated, with a melody (including key and time signature) and a set of chord changes.

**choir:** a group of instruments in the same family, playing as one unit (e.g., vocal choir, wind choir, or string choir).

**chord:** two or more notes of different pitch played simultaneously (sounding together).

**chord progression:** series of chords sounding in succession; certain progressions are typical in particular

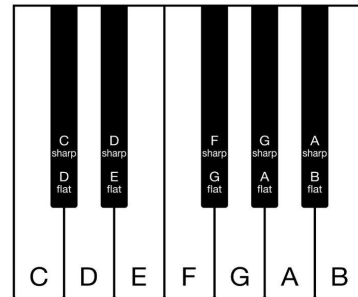
styles/genres of music.

**chordal:** music in which a melody is accompanied by sets of chords instead of a competing countermelody.

**chordophones:** the family of world instruments in which the sound is made by the vibration of strings; range from simple musical bows to the violin and piano.

**chorus:** a group of people singing (usually in harmony) together as one group.

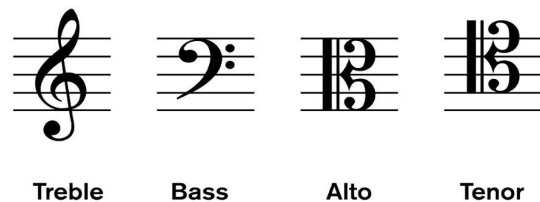
**chromatic modulation:** the process of changing from one key to an unrelated key in a composition.



**chromatic scale:** a 12-note scale consisting of successive half-steps.

**circular breathing:** a technique used to produce a continuous sound on a woodwind or brass instrument. The player breathes in through the nose while the cheeks push air out into the instrument, enabling the player to hold a note indefinitely since there is no need to pause and breathe.

**clave (*clah-vay*) rhythm:** a rhythmic pattern with roots in West Africa that is the foundation of salsa and Afro-Cuban music.



**clef:** a musical symbol or sign at the beginning of a line of written music to indicate the name and pitch of the notes on the staff. (*Above: Most common clefs used*)

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*in modern music. Treble and bass clef are most common, followed by alto and tenor clef.)*

**coda:** a few measures or a section added to the end of a piece of music to “round it off” or make a more effective ending.

**common time:** meter in which a measure consists of four beats with a quarter note as the value of one beat.

**complex formal structure:** musical form in which rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, and/or other musical materials undergo significant expansion and development and may be more distantly related across sections while remaining coherent in some way, such as sonata or other novel design with three or more sections.

**compose:** to invent or create music.

**composer:** a person who creates music.

**composition:** the act of composing or the work a composer creates.

**compositional devices:** tools used by a composer or arranger to create or organize a composition or arrangement, such as tonality, sequence, repetition, instrumentation, orchestration, harmonic/melodic structure, style, and form.

**compositional procedures:** techniques that a composer initiates and continues in pieces to develop musical ideas, such as fragmentation, imitation, sequencing, variations, aggregate completion, registral saturation, contour inversion of gestures, and rhythmic phrasing.

**compositional techniques:** approaches a composer uses to manipulate and refine the elements to convey meaning and intent in a composition, such as tension-release, augmentation-diminution, sound-silence, motion-stasis, in addition to compositional devices.

**compound meter:** music in which the beats divide equally into three parts; a dotted note will receive one steady beat.

**concert:** a music performance by a soloist or a group.

**concertmaster:** first chair violinist in a symphony orchestra.

**concerto:** an orchestral composition featuring one or more instrumental soloists.

**conductor:** director of a musical group.

**consonance:** a pleasing sound, a “sounding together.”

**contour:** the shape or outline; in music, the melodic contour refers to the upward and downward movement of the pitches in a melody.

**countermelody:** an alternate or secondary melody sung or played with and as a companion to the main melody.

**counterpoint:** multiple melodic lines played simultaneously; the term means “point against point” or “note against note.”

**country music:** a popular music form that evolved in the early 20th century out of traditional folk music forms of the southern United States. Today, the term embraces a variety of styles, from traditional country and western to rockabilly to heavily produced country music.

**crescendo:** Italian dynamic marking meaning to gradually get louder.

**cyclical structure:** musical form characterized by the return or “cycling around” of significantly recognizable themes, motives, and/or patterns across movements.

## D

**D.C. (or da capo):** from the beginning; indication to return to the beginning of a piece.

**D.C. al coda:** a term that means to repeat the music from the beginning but skip to the coda section of the music when the performer reaches the coda sign.

**D.C. al fine:** a term that means to repeat the music from the beginning and then stop at the word “fine” (the end).

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**D.S. (or dal segno):** indication to go back in the music to the dal segno symbol and repeat the music from that point.

**D.S. al coda:** a term that means to go back in the music to the dal segno symbol and repeat the music from that point then skip to the coda section of the music at the coda sign.

**D.S. al fine:** term that means to go back in the music to the dal segno symbol and repeat the music from that point and then stop at the word fine.

**decrescendo:** Italian dynamic marking meaning to gradually get softer; the abbreviation is *decresc.*

**descant:** a melodic part pitched higher than and concurrent with the melody.

**diatonic:** a seven-tone scale consisting of five whole steps and two half steps.

**digital environment:** a simulated place made or created through the use of one or more computers, sensors, or equipment.

**digital notation:** a visual image of musical sound created by using computer software applications, intended either as a record of sound heard or imagined or as a set of visual instructions for performers.

**digital tools:** category of musical instruments and tools that manipulate sound using binary code, such as electronic keyboards, digital audio interfaces, MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), and computer software.

**diminuendo:** Italian dynamic marking meaning to gradually get softer; the abbreviation is *dim.*

**dissonance:** a combination of tones that sounds discordant and unstable, in need of resolution.

**dot:** added after a note to lengthen the note by half of the note's original value.

**dotted note:** a note with a dot added afterwards; the dot lengthens the note by half of the note's original value.

**double bar lines:** two vertical lines placed on the staff to indicate the end of a section or a composition; also used with two dots to enclose repeated sections.

**downbeat:** the first beat; given by the conductor with a downward stroke.

**duet:** a piece of music for two performers.

**duo:** two performers.

**duple meter:** music with two beats in each measure.

**dynamics:** element of music relating to the degree of intensity or loudness in musical tones.

**dynamic markings:** words and symbols in a score indicating the degree of intensity or loudness in musical tones.

## E



**eighth note:** a note that gets one half of a beat in common time; there are two eighth notes in one quarter note.



**eighth rest:** the symbol for silence that equals one half of a beat in common time.

**elements of music:** dynamics, form, harmony, melody, texture, timbre, rhythm, and tempo.

**encore:** “again”; when performers perform another piece at audience request after the end of a performance.

**ensemble:** musicians performing as a group: traditional, large groups such as bands, orchestras, and choirs;



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chamber, smaller groups such as duets, trios, and quartets; emerging groups such as guitar, iPad, mariachi, steel drum or pan, and Taiko drumming.

**etude:** French term for “study”; a piece of music concerned with some aspect of musical performance technique.

**expanded form:** basic form (such as AB, ABA, rondo, or theme and variation) expanded by the addition of an introduction, transition, and/or coda.

## F

**fanfare:** a prelude or opening; a flourish, usually played by brass instruments.

**fermata:** Italian term that indicates to hold the note longer; a pause or hold of variable length determined by the performer or conductor.

**finale:** the last movement of a symphony or sonata; the closing part of an opera or performance.

**fine:** Italian term used in music to mean the end of a musical composition.

b

**flat sign:** a sign indicating that a note should be lowered in pitch by one half-step.

**folk instruments:** instruments associated with folk music such as banjos, harmonicas, spoons, and dulcimers.

**folk music:** a general term encompassing musical traditions, including songs, tunes, instruments, and styles of singing and playing. Folk music is understood to be the product of oral-aural information communication learned in face-to-face or small group contexts; folk music is the music of a country or a culture, and generally the composer is unknown.

**folk songs:** songs handed down from generation to

generation.

**form:** the overall structural organization of a musical composition (e.g., AB, ABA, call/response, fugue, rondo, theme and variations, sonata allegro, etc.) and the interrelationships of music events within the overall structure.

**formal design:** the large-scale framework for a piece of music in which the constituent parts cohere into a meaningful whole; encompasses both structural and tonal aspects of the piece.

**forte:** Italian dynamic term for loud.

**fortissimo:** Italian dynamic term for very loud.



**fret:** thin strip of material placed across the fingerboard of some stringed instruments, such as guitar, banjo, and mandolin; the fingers press the strings against the frets to determine pitch.

**fugue:** a musical composition in which one or two themes are imitated by successively entering voices and contrapuntally developed.

**fundamentals of music theory:** basic elements of music, their subsets, and how they interact; rhythm and meter; pitch and clefs; intervals; scales, keys, and key signatures; triads and seventh chords.

**fusion:** a type of music created by combining contrasting styles into a new style.

## G

**game songs:** songs sung while playing games and other recreational activities.

**gavotte:** a Baroque dance of French peasant origin that

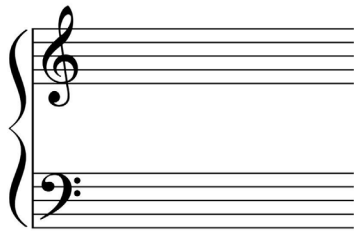
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is sometimes included in instrumental suites.

**genre:** a type or category of music (e.g., sonata, opera, oratorio, art song, gospel, suite, jazz, madrigal, march, work song, lullaby, barbershop, Dixieland).

**glissando:** a sliding effect, sliding from one pitch to another pitch.

**gospel music:** style of music associated with religion, evangelism, and popular devotion.



**grand staff:** a staff that includes the treble and bass staves and the ledger lines between.

**grave:** Italian term for an expression of mood that is solemn and slow in nature.

## H



**half note:** a note that gets two beats in common time; there are two half notes to a whole note.



**half rest:** the symbol for silence that equals two beats in common time.

**half-step:** the smallest interval in Western music; the interval from one pitch to the immediately adjacent pitch, ascending or descending.

**harmonic sequences:** a series of two or more chords

commonly used to support melody(ies).

**harmonization:** the process of applying stylistically appropriate harmony, such as chords, countermelodies, and ostinato, to a melodic material.

**harmony:** the element of music concerned with combining notes and parts simultaneously; chordal structure of a music composition in which the simultaneous sounding of pitches produces chords and their successive use produces chord progressions.

**heterophonic:** musical texture in which slightly different versions of the same melody sound simultaneously.

**historical periods:** periods of years during which music that was created and/or performed shared common characteristics; historians of western art music typically refer to the following: medieval (ca. 500-ca.1420); Renaissance (ca. 1420-ca. 1600); baroque (ca. 1600-ca. 1750); classical (ca. 1750-ca. 1820); romantic (ca. 1820-ca. 1900); and contemporary (ca. 1900-present).

**home tone:** a term commonly used for the first or key tone of any scale; same as tonic.

**homophonic:** musical texture in which all parts move in the same rhythm but use different pitches, as in hymns; also, a melody supported by chords.

**homophony:** music that has one melodic line supported by harmony in the other vocal/instrumental parts.

## I

**iconic notation:** representation of sound and its treatment using lines, drawings, pictures.

**improvisation:** music created and performed spontaneously or “in the moment,” often within a framework determined by the musical style.

**improvise:** to create music spontaneously.

**instrument:** an object used to make musical sound; instruments may be made of natural or manmade materials and may be acoustic, electrical, or digital.

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**instrument families:** in Western music, the four separate groups of instruments into which the orchestra is divided: string, woodwind, brass, and percussion.

**instrumental:** music using instruments only, with no words.

**interval:** the distance between any two tones and/or notes, named by counting all pitch names involved; harmonic interval occurs when two pitches are sounded simultaneously, and melodic interval when two pitches are sounded successively.

**intonation:** singing or playing the correct pitch in tune.

**introduction:** the beginning section of a musical composition that sets the mood for the remaining sections of the work.

**invention:** fairly short keyboard piece.

**inversion:** the process or result of reversing the relative position of the elements of an interval, chord, or musical phrase; mirror or upside-down image of a melody or pattern.

## J

**jazz:** a style of music created in the early 20th century by African Americans and characterized by strong, syncopated rhythms, particular chords and harmonic structures, and a large amount of improvisation.

## K

**key:** the basic scale and tonality of a composition.

**key signature:** the sharps or flats placed at the beginning of a composition or line of music denoting the scale on which the music is based.

## L

**largo:** Italian term denoting that music should be performed in a slow, broad, and stately manner; also, the name of a type of composition performed in that manner.

**lead-sheet notation:** system of symbols used to identify chords in jazz, popular, and folk music; uppercase letters are written above the staff, specifying which chords should be used and when they should be played.

**legato:** Italian term that means a smooth manner of playing or singing; the opposite of staccato.

**ledger lines:** short lines placed below, through, or above notes that are above or below the staff; used to extend the staff so that these music pitches can be easily read or interpreted.

**lento:** Italian term denoting that music should be played slowly.

**letter names:** one of the ways of identifying the pitches on a staff. The first seven letters of the alphabet (A,B,C,D,E,F,G) are used.

**libretto:** the words of a piece of music (e.g., opera, cantata, oratorio, etc.).

**lullaby:** a song to help babies go to sleep.

**lyrics:** the words of a song.

## M

**madrigals:** secular songs that originated in Italy in the 13th and 14th centuries.

**major:** tonality based on a major scale.

**major scale:** a scale built on the formula of an ascending pattern of two whole steps, one half-step, three whole steps, one half-step.

**march:** a style of music with a brisk tempo composed specifically to march to.

**measure:** a rhythmic grouping or metrical unit that contains a fixed number of beats, indicated by the placement of bar lines on the staff (the space between two bar lines is a measure).

**medley:** a musical composition made up of portions of melodies from various musical compositions.



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**melodic contour:** shape of a melody created by the way its pitches repeat and move up and down in steps and skips.

**melisma:** technique of changing the pitch of a syllable while it is being sung.

**melodic direction:** the high and low movement of pitches in a melody; pitches move by step, skip, or stay the same.

**melodic motif:** a short musical phrase used in development or imitation.

**melodic passage:** short section or series of notes within a larger work that constitutes a single coherent melodic idea.

**melodic pattern:** grouping, generally brief, of tones or pitches.

**melody:** element of music that deals with the organized progression of single tones or pitches; the horizontal or linear succession of pitches and silences moving through time (as opposed to harmony, the vertical aspect).

**meter:** the grouping in which a succession of rhythmic pulses or beats is organized, indicated by a meter signature at the beginning of the piece. **Duple meter** has two beats per measure; **triple meter** has three beats per measure.

**meter signature:** the indication of the basic rhythm of a bar within a piece. It looks like an arithmetic fraction: The upper number indicates the number of beats to a bar, and the lower number indicates how the beats should be measured.

**mezzo:** Italian dynamic term meaning medium; mezzo forte means medium loud; mezzo piano means medium soft.

**middle C:** the note C in the middle of the grand staff.

**MIDI:** acronym for Musical Instrument Digital Interface; standard specifications that enable electronic instruments such as synthesizers, samplers, sequencers, and drum machines from different manufacturers to

communicate with one another and with computers.

**minor:** tonality based on a minor scale.

**minor scale:** a scale built on a formula of an ascending pattern of a whole step, a half-step, two whole steps, a half-step, and two whole steps.

**minuet:** a court dance with three beats to a measure.

**modal:** music based on a mode other than major or minor.

**moderately complex formal structure:** musical form with three or more sections (such as rounded binary, rondo, or other novel design), in which section closure is somewhat nuanced and ambiguous and the rhythmic melodic, harmonic, and/or other musical materials across sections may be more distantly related while remaining coherent in some way.

**moderato:** Italian term denoting a medium or moderate tempo.

**modes:** seven-tone scales that include five whole steps and two half steps; the seven possible modes (Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Locrian) were used in medieval and Renaissance periods and served as the basis from which major (Ionian) and minor (Aeolian) scales emerged.

**monophonic:** musical texture consisting of a single unaccompanied melodic line.

**monophony:** music with one melodic line and no accompanying harmony; one example is a plainchant, which has a single unaccompanied vocal melody.

**mood:** overall feeling that a section or piece of music conveys.

**motet:** a composition with three or more voices, almost always to sacred text and sung a cappella.

**motif/motive:** brief rhythmic/melodic figure or pattern that recurs throughout a composition as a unifying element.

**movement:** complete self-contained part of a larger

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musical work.

**music:** an art, entertainment, or other human activity that involves the organization of sounds using the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, tempo, form, dynamics, and timbre.

**music theory:** the study of how music is composed and performed; analysis of the elements of music and the framework for understanding musical works.

**musical:** a play with songs and music; unlike an opera, in which all parts are sung, a musical combines songs and music with spoken narrative.

**musical idea:** idea expressed in music, which can range in length from the smallest meaningful level (motive or short pattern) through a phrase, a section, or an entire piece.

**musical range:** span between the highest and lowest pitches of a melody, instrument, or voice.

**musical work:** a piece of music preserved as a notated copy or sound recording or passed through oral tradition.

**musicality:** talent in, knowledge of, or sensitivity to music.

## N



**natural:** a musical sign that cancels a sharp or flat; a natural note is one that is neither sharpened nor flattened.

**nocturne:** literally means “night piece”; a musical piece that is generally quiet and reflective in nature.

**non-pitched (or unpitched) instruments:** instruments such as woodblocks, whistles, or electronic sounds, that do not have definite pitches or tones.

**notate:** to write music on the staff.

**notation:** the system used to write down music; the visual representation of musical tones.

**note:** a single sound of a particular pitch and length.

**note value:** the length or duration of a note based on the given notation symbol.

## O

**octave:** the distance between notes of the same letter name, eight notes higher or lower; from the Latin for eight.

**octet:** eight performers or a musical composition for eight performers.

**one-part formal structure:** continuous form, with or without interruption, in which a singular instance of formal closure is achieved only at or near the end of the piece; also known as through-composed.

**opera:** musical stage drama that generally is sung throughout.

**oratorio:** a large musical composition for orchestra, chorus, and vocal soloists, often with a biblical theme, that tells a story; differs from opera in that there are no costumes, acting, or scenery.

**orchestra:** a performance group of diverse instruments; in Western music, an ensemble of multiple string parts with various woodwind, brass, and percussion parts.

**orchestration:** the art of writing, arranging, or scoring for orchestra.

**ornamentation:** a note or notes added to an original melody line for embellishment and added interest.

**ostinato:** a musical phrase that is repeated over and over again.

**overture:** the music performed before a dramatic musical work. In musical theater, the overture is usually a medley of some of the songs in the musical. In ballets, operas, and oratorios, the overture is a composed piece that sets the mood for the work.

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## P

**part:** one voice in a multi-voice work; a single vocal melody.

**parts of the note:** note head, stem, flag, and beam.

**patriotic music:** instrumental or vocal music that demonstrates or inspires love for and allegiance to one's country.

**pentatonic scale:** five-tone scale; often used as a scale similar to the pattern of the black keys on a piano.



**percussion family:** the instrument family in which instruments make sound when struck, shaken, or scraped; examples include timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, xylophone, tambourine, triangle, woodblock, gong, and piano. (Above: *tam-bourine, drum set, woodblock*)

**phrase:** musical segment with a clear beginning and ending, comparable to a simple sentence or clause in written text.

**phrasing:** performance of a musical phrase that uses expressive qualities such as dynamics, tempo, articulation, and timbre to convey a thought, mood, or feeling.

**pianissimo:** Italian term denoting that music should be played very softly.

**piano:** Italian term denoting that music should be played softly.

**piece:** general, non-technical term referring to a composition or musical work.

**pitch:** the highness or lowness of a tone, as determined by the frequency of vibrations per second.

**pitch numbers:** the numbers one through eight

associated with the tones of the scale to assist in music reading and in ear training.

**pitch syllables:** the names of the scale: do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and ti.

**polyphonic:** musical texture in which two or more melodies sound simultaneously.

**polyphony:** Greek term for “many sounds”; interweaving a number of melodic lines or parts.

**polyrhythm:** two or more rhythmic patterns played simultaneously.

**polytonal:** music in which two or more tonalities (keys) sound simultaneously.

**popular music:** music belonging to any of a number of musical styles that are accessible to the general public and generally distributed commercially.

**practice:** the act of working on music or musical skills to improve singing or playing an instrument.

**prelude:** a short piece that precedes or introduces a more substantial piece; can also describe some piano pieces that are self-contained in their style.

**premiere:** the first performance of a work.

**presto:** Italian term denoting that the tempo should be fast.

**program:** presentation of a sequence of musical works that can be performed by individual musicians or groups in a concert, recital, or other setting.

**program music:** instrumental music that paints a picture or tells a story in the listener's mind.

## Q



**quarter note:** a note that equals one beat in common time, one-half the length of a half note and one quarter the length of a whole note.



**quarter rest:** the symbol for silence that equals one beat in common time.

**quartet:** four musicians performing together or a piece of music for four performers.

**question/answer:** a formal structure where each successive phrase or section is formed as a response to the preceding one.

**quintet:** five musicians performing together or a piece of music for five performers.

## R

**ragtime:** late 19th-century musical style characterized by highly syncopated melodies; contributed to the development of early jazz.

**range:** distance between the lowest and highest tones of a melody or the lowest and highest tones an instrument or voice can produce.

**rap:** a subgenre of rock in which rhymed lyrics are spoken over rhythm tracks.

**recital:** a public performance by one or more musicians.

**recitative:** the spoken words of the opera; music that is sung as dialogue in an opera.

**refrain:** also called chorus; the part of a song repeated at the end of each verse or section.

**rehearsal:** practicing music as a group (choirs, bands, orchestras) or in private to prepare for a performance.

**release:** the end of a musical note; the instant that the sound stops.



**repeat sign:** signifies that the music between double-dotted bars is to be repeated; where there is one repeat sign, music is repeated from the beginning.

**repeated notes:** singing or playing the same pitch; notes on the staff will stay on the same line or space.

**repertoire:** body or set of musical works that can be performed.

**resonance:** reinforcement and intensification of sound vibrations involving some sort of resonating chamber.

**rest:** a period of silence in music; rests are indicated by symbols which correspond to the various durations of notes.

**rhythm:** the element of music that deals with the beat or pulse and the distribution of notes within that beat.

**rhythmic durations:** refers to the length of notes; the combination of notes and rests of various lengths within a measure or measures of music (e.g., whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes).

**rhythmic passage:** short section or series of notes within a larger work that constitutes a single coherent rhythmic idea.

**rhythmic pattern:** grouping, generally brief, of long and short sounds and silences.

**ritardando:** Italian term that means to gradually get slower; the abbreviation is rit.

**rondo:** musical form consisting of three or more contrasting sections in which one section recurs (such as ABACA).

**round:** similar to a canon; a musical piece in which a melody is overlapped two or more times by singing the same melody but starting the beginning of the melody at different times.

## S

**sacred music:** music of a religious nature.

**scale:** a pattern of pitches arranged in ascending or descending order and identified by their specific arrangement of whole and half steps.

**score:** written notation of an entire music composition.

**section:** one of a number of distinct segments that together comprise a composition; a section consists of several phrases.

**secular music:** music not of a religious nature.

**sequence:** a pattern within a melody that is repeated at a higher or lower pitch.

**set:** sequence of songs or pieces performed together by a singer, band, or disc jockey and constituting or forming part of a live show or recording.

**setting:** specified or implied instrumentation, voicing, or orchestration of a musical work.

**setting of the text:** musical treatment of text as presented in the music.

**sforzando:** Italian term that means a note or chord should be played with strong emphasis.



**sharp:** a symbol notated before a note indicating that the note should be raised in pitch by a half-step; also used in key signatures to indicate the key of the musical composition.

**sight-reading:** first attempt to perform a notated musical work.

**signature:** the sharps and flats at the head of the staff indicating the key.

**simple formal structure:** musical form with a small number of distinct or clearly delineated sections (such as simple binary, ternary, or other novel design), using closely related rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic materials across the sections.



**sixteenth note:** a note that equals one fourth of one beat in common time (i.e., half the length of an eighth note and a sixteenth the length of a whole note).



**sixteenth rest:** the symbol for silence in music that equals one fourth of a beat in common time.

**skip:** one of the ways a melody may move higher or lower; the pitches skip from one line to the next line on the staff or from one space to the next space or skip across several lines and/or spaces.

**slap:** a technique for creating sounds in body percussion.



**slur:** to perform two or more notes legato; also, a curved line placed above or below two or more notes of different pitch to indicate that they are to be performed in legato style.

**solfege:** the practice of reading and singing with syllables.

**solo:** one musician performing alone or a piece of music for one performer.

**sonata-allegro form:** a form made up of an opening section called the exposition, in which major themes are presented; a middle section called the development, in which thematic material undergoes a variety of alterations; and a third section called the recapitulation, in which the material of the exposition is restated.

**sonata:** instrumental music composition in several movements for soloists or small ensembles.

**song:** a music composition with words that is performed by the human voice (can be accompanied by instruments).

**sonic events:** individual sounds or sound masses and silences whose succession forms patterns and contrasting units that are perceived as musical.

**sonic experience:** perception and understanding of the sounds and silences of a musical work and their interrelationship.

**soprano:** the highest range in pitch of a woman's voice; a defining range of pitches within an ensemble or family of instruments (e.g., soprano saxophone).

**spirituals:** religious folk songs of African Americans, often conveying strong feelings and emotions.

**staccato:** short, detached sounds indicated by a dot over or under a note; the opposite of legato.

**staff:** the names of the lines and spaces drawn horizontally in sets of five on which notes and rests are notated.

**standard notation:** system for visually representing musical sound that is in widespread use; such systems include traditional music staff notation, tablature notation (primarily for fretted stringed instruments), and lead-sheet notation.

**staves:** plural of staff.

**steady beat:** the ongoing, steady, repetitive pulse of music.

**step:** one of the ways a melody may move higher or lower; the pitch moves from one line to the next space on the staff or from a space to the next line.

**storyline:** extra-musical narrative that inspires or explains the structure of a piece of music.



**string family:** the instrument family in the orchestra that includes violin, viola, cello, bass, harp; string instruments have tightly stretched strings that are plucked with fingers (*pizzicato*) or played with a bow (*arco*). (*Above: violin, harp, cello.*)

**strophic form:** vocal music in which the music repeats with a new set of text each time.

**structure:** tonality of a musical work.

**style:** the distinctive or characteristic manner in which the elements of music are treated. In practice, the term may be applied to composers (the style of Aaron Copland), periods (baroque style), media (keyboard style), nations (French style), form or type of composition (fugal style), or genre (operatic style, bluegrass style).

**stylistic expression:** interpretation of expressive qualities in a manner that is authentic and appropriate to the genre, historical period, and cultural context of origin.

**suite:** a collection of pieces usually linked by some particular theme or idea.

**symbolic notation:** the system of expressing musical sounds through the use of written symbols called notes.

**symphonic movements:** sections of a symphony; the standard movements are 1st movement fast and dramatic, 2nd movement lyrical and slow, 3rd movement dance-like (a minuet or scherzo), and 4th movement fast, dramatic, and heroic.

**symphony:** orchestra composition of several movements; also used in reference to a group of instrumentalists.



**syncopation:** a temporary shifting of the accent in music so that the stress falls between the strong beats.

## T

**tablature:** system of standard graphic notation, commonly used for fretted stringed instruments, in which a diagram visually represents both the fret board and finger placement on the fret board.

**tarantella:** a piece written as a fast and lively dance; originated in Italy, where the dance was supposed to be either caused by the bite of a tarantula spider or be a cure for it.

**tempo:** element of music that refers to the rate of speed of the beat in a musical work or performance.

**tenor:** the highest-pitched male voice; the range of pitch of an instrument within a particular family of instruments.



**tenor clef:** a clef that assigns middle C to the 4th line of the staff; bassoons, cellos, double basses, and trombones are among the instruments that use the tenor clef in their upper ranges (they use the bass clef in their middle and lower ranges).

**tension/release:** musical device (musical stress, instability, or intensity followed by musical relaxation, stability, or resolution), used to create a flow of feeling.

**ternary form:** a form or structure in music that has three sections, with the first section repeated after the second section (ABA form).

**text painting:** musical technique in which the music mimics the literal meaning of a song (e.g., ascending scales in the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah* accompany lyrics about going up to heaven while descending notes accompany lyrics about the earth).

**texture:** the number of simultaneously sounding lines; the manner in which horizontal pitch sequences are

organized (homophonic, monophonic, polyphonic).

**theme:** the main musical idea.

**theme and variations:** a compositional form in which an initial theme is stated, then followed by various musical treatments of that theme.



**tie:** a curved line in music notation that connects two or more notes of the same pitch; the sound begins on the first note and is held through the succeeding notes without interruption.

**timbre:** often referred to as tone quality; the quality of sound that distinguishes one instrument or voice from another.

**time:** the division of the measure into equal parts.

**time signature:** the indication of the basic rhythm within a piece (see **meter signature**).

**toccata:** a virtuoso composition, generally for organ or harpsichord, in a free and rhapsodic style. In the baroque period, it often was the introduction to a fugue.

**tonal pattern:** grouping, generally brief, of tones or pitches.

**tonality:** the term used to describe the organization of the melodic and harmonic elements to give a feeling of a key center or tonic pitch.

**tonal syllables:** syllables used to facilitate singing or reading of the scale; the commonly used syllables are do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, and do. The practice of reading and singing with syllables is also known as solfege.

**tone:** a note; the basis of music.

**tonic:** the first tone or key tone of any scale.



**treble clef:** symbol placed on the five-line staff in traditional notation indicating the pitch of the notes and locating G on the second line from the bottom.

**triad:** three-note chord.

**trio:** three people performing together or a piece for three performers.

**triple meter:** music that has three beats in each measure.

**triplet:** a group of three notes performed in amount of time that two of the same kind of notes would normally be performed.

**tutti:** Italian term for “all”; describes a section for full chorus and/or orchestra.

**two-part songs:** songs written for performance by two distinct voices.

## U

**unison:** singing or playing the same notes by all singers or players, either at exactly the same pitch or in a different octave.

**unity:** presence of structural coherence within a work, generally achieved through the repetition of various elements of music.

## V

**variation:** a technique in which material is repeated in an altered form with melodic, rhythmic, and/or harmonic changes.

**variety:** presence of structural contrast within a work for the purpose of creating and sustaining interest, generally achieved through utilizing variations in the treatment of the elements of music.

**venue:** physical setting in which a musical event takes place.

**verse:** a section of the song that changes after each refrain or chorus section.

**verse-chorus or verse-refrain:** a song form in AB or ABA; one part is the verse and the other part is the refrain or chorus.

**virtuoso:** a performer of exceptional technical skill.

**vivace:** Italian term denoting very lively tempo.

**vocables:** audible sounds and/or nonsense syllables used by vocalists to convey musical ideas or intent.

**vocalizations:** vocal exercises that include no text and are sung to one or more vowels.

**voice:** the sound produced in humans when air passes over the vocal cords, making them vibrate. The most common singing voice parts are soprano, alto, tenor, and bass (SATB).

## W

**weak beat:** any beat in a measure that does not receive an accent or stress.



**whole note:** a note that is sustained over four full beats in common time.



**whole rest:** silence for four full beats in common time.

**whole step:** a distance of two half-steps in the same direction.

**whole-tone scale:** a scale made up entirely of whole steps.



**woodwind family:** in the orchestra, the family of instruments played by blowing air into them, either through a reed or reeds that vibrate (as in clarinet, oboe, English horn, bass clarinet, saxophone, bassoon, contra-bassoon) or by blowing air across an opening (as in flute and piccolo). (*Above: clarinet, saxophone, and flute.*)