

Don't know your Timbre from your Timbrel? Fear not - help is at hand

Accompaniment

The underlying sounds used to support a melody line

Acoustic

See Playing methods

Aerophone

An instrument which produces sound using air vibrations, without using strings or membranes

Arrangement

A new version of an existing piece of music

Arrhythmic

See Free

Backing vocal

An additional voice part that complements but is less important than the lead vocal (the main voice part)

Beat/pulse

Beat and pulse are used synonymously to refer to the regular heartbeat of the music – the 'steady beat'

Beatbox

Using your voice, mouth, lips and tongue to produce sounds to imitate the sounds of different instruments, such as the drum kit

Binary

A two-part structure in music is described as binary form: AB. The A and B sections are musically different from each other

Body percussion

Sounds which can be made using parts of the body, eg clapping, tapping knees, etc.

Break

An instrumental or percussion section or interlude in a song

Bridge

A passage of music that links two sections of music together

Call and response

A style of music in which a leader sings or plays a short melody (the call) and a chorus of singers/players respond with an answering short melody (the response)

Canon

When two or more voices or instruments play the same music, starting at different times (also called a 'round')

Chord

Two or more notes played at the same time

Chordophone

An instrument which produces sound using strings that vibrate

Chorus

The part of a song which repeats between the verses

Chromatic

A chromatic instrument is one which is capable of playing every note of the chromatic scale, which is a scale of twelve notes, each a semitone apart, the smallest interval in most Western music. The chromatic scale is: A, A# (Bb), B, C, C# (Db), D, D# (Eb), E, F, F# (Gb), G, G# (Ab)

Cluster

A group of notes that are close in pitch and sounded together

Coda

The end section of a piece of music

Conductor

The person elected to lead a group of singers or instrumentalists

Crescendo

Getting louder

Crotchet

A note that has a duration of one beat

Cumulative

A musical structure in which individual parts join in one by one. It can apply both to the structure of the music itself (as in a cumulative song such as The Twelve Days of Christmas), or to the voices/instruments playing (as in the gradual addition of instruments playing the music of Boléro)

Dimensions/elements

The inter-related building blocks of music (formerly referred to in the English National Curriculum as elements): duration, dynamics, pitch, structure, tempo, texture, and timbre (see definitions)

Diminuendo

Getting quieter

Dot notation

A simple form of Western staff notation. Dots are placed in height and distance relation to each other to indicate pitch and duration

Drone

A sound or sounds played constantly throughout all or part of a piece of music as an accompaniment

Duet

A song or piece of music for two parts of equal importance

Duration

The word used in music to refer to the length of a sound or silence

Dynamics/volume

The loudness of the music, usually described in terms of loud/quiet

Echo

When a musical phrase is repeated after itself, like an echo

Elements

See Dimensions

Expression

The emotion in music

Fanfare

A short piece of music usually played on brass instruments to announce a special event or occasion

Flash mob

A group of people who collect together in a public space and suddenly perform music or dance

Free/arrhythmic

Music which has no discernible steady beat

Glissando

A slide up or down from one musical note to another, in the manner of a rapid, sliding scale

Graphic notation

A form of notation in which the composer freely invents symbols which give an impression of sound

Graphic score

A score in which musical intention is recorded by means of graphic symbols

Groove

A short section of rhythmic layers, repeated over and over again

Harmony

The relation of two or more notes that are played at the same time

Hocket

One single melody shared between one or more voices or instruments

Idiophone

An instrument which produces sound using the instrument's vibration, without using strings or membranes

Improvisation

A piece of music which is created spontaneously

Improvise

To invent music as you go along

Interlude

An instrumental or percussion section or 'break' in a song

Introduction

The beginning section of a piece of music

Key

The 'key' of a piece of music refers to the scale on which the music is based and around which related harmonies are built. For instance a piece may be in the key of C major, meaning that its tonic, or home note, is the note C and the notes of its scale are C D E F G A B C

Layers

Individual lines of music performed together to create the texture

Lead vocal

The main voice part in a song – usually sings the melody

Leap

The space between two musical notes which is greater than a step (see Step movement)

Lyrics

The words of a song

Major

One of the most common types of eight-note musical scale. Often described as having a happy sound (see also Minor)

Melodic phrase/phrase

A small unit of a melody, often corresponding to a line of a song

Melody

A tune

Membranophone

An instrument which produces sound using a stretched membrane that vibrates

Metre

The grouping of beats into twos, threes, fours, etc, for instance in waltz music the beats are grouped in threes, whereas in march music they are grouped in twos or fours

Mickey mousing

A movie technique where music correlates with the action depicted on screen

Middle eight

A type of musical bridge – it is a short eight-bar passage in the middle of a song that links two sections

Minimalism

A style of composition based on the idea of simplicity that uses repetition and short and simple melodies

Minor

One of the most common types of eight-note musical scale. Often described as having a sad sound (see also Major)

Modulation

The changing of music into a different key

Notations

Ways of writing music down – examples include graphic notation and staff notation

Off-beat

See Syncopation

Ostinato (plural ostinatos/ostinati)

A short rhythmic or melodic pattern which is repeated over and over

Pentatonic

A five-note scale, of which there are many types. One of the most common can be played using only the black notes on a piano

Phrase

See Melodic phrase

Pictorial symbols

A simple form of notation in which a picture is used to represent a sound, eg car picture = motor sounds

Pitch movement

The steps and leaps by which a melody moves up and down in pitch

Pitch

Refers to the complete range of sounds in a piece of music from the lowest to the highest

Pizzicato

The technique of playing a string instrument, eg violin, by plucking the strings rather than playing them with the bow

Playing methods

Acoustic (non-electronic) sounds are made by shaking, scraping, tapping, or blowing a soundmaker

Pulse

See Beat

Quaver

A note that has a duration of half a beat

Rest

A silence

Rhythm pattern

A short section of rhythm

Rhythm

Patterns of long and short sounds played within a steady beat

Rhythmical

Music which is underpinned by a steady beat

Riff

A short rhythmic or melodic pattern that is repeated over and over (also called an 'ostinato')

Rondo

A structure that has a recurring theme (A) alternating with contrasting sections: A B A C A D A

Round

When two or more voices or instruments play the same music, starting at different times (also called 'canon')

Scale

A group of notes notated or played in order of pitch

Scat singing

A style of vocal improvisation which uses nonsense sounds (instead of words) to imitate the sound of an instrument

Score

A written representation of music designed to record a composer's intention

Sequence

Musical phrases or parts played individually one after the other

Solo

A piece of music for one singer or instrumentalist

Song cycle

A structure of music in which a group of songs is performed in a defined sequence

Soundmaker

Any sound source used as a musical instrument

Soundscape

A picture in sound

Spiritual

Songs created by enslaved African people in the United States. They are generally expressions of religious (often Christian) faith.

Stave

The set of five parallel lines on which notes are placed to denote pitch and rhythm

Step movement

Notes of a melody which move stepwise up or down

Structure

Most music is underpinned by a structure which may be as simple as beginning, middle and end

Symbol

Any written representation of a sound

Syncopation

Often used synonymously with 'off-beat'. Both refer to a rhythm that emphasises normally weak beats

Tempo (plural tempi)

The speed at which music is performed, usually described in terms of fast/slow

Ternary

A structure of music which has three sections, in which the first is repeated: A B A

Texture

Layers of sound, such as those created by a melody accompanied by a drum beat

Timbre

All instruments, including voices, have a particular sound quality which is referred to as timbre, eg squeaky

Tremolo

The rapid repetition of notes, producing a quavering effect. It can either be on one note or between two notes

Trill

The rapid alternation of two adjacent notes, producing a trembling effect

Tuned percussion

Percussion instruments which make sounds with a defined pitch, eg glockenspiel

Unison

When two or more voices/instruments sing or play the same melody at the same time

Untuned percussion

Percussion instruments which make sounds of indefinite pitch, eg hand drum

Verse

The section of a song which generally 'tells the story'

Volume

See Dynamics

Waltz

A piece of dance music in 3/4-time where the first beat is emphasised