

GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS

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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

adagio: a slow tempo

allegro: a fast tempo

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

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

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

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

ballet: (genre) a *programmatic* theatrical work for dancers and orchestra

bar: a common term for a musical measure

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

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; (see Double Bass)

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

basso continuo: the back-up ensemble of the Baroque Era usually comprised of a keyboard instrument

(harpichord 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

"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.

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, bugel

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)"

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

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

chamber music: (genre) music performed by a small group of players (one player per part)

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

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

character piece: (genre) a 1-movement *programmatic* work for a solo pianist

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

chorale: 1) a Lutheran liturgical melody; 2) a 4-part hymn-like chorale harmonization

chord: a harmonic combination that has three or more pitches sounding simultaneously

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

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)

Classic Era: c1750-1820; a politically turbulent era focused on structural unity, clarity and balance. (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven)

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)

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

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

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

conductor: the leader of a performing group of musicians

consonance: pleasant-sounding harmony

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

crescendo: gradually getting louder

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

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

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)

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

dynamics: the musical element of relative musical loudness or quietness

E

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

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

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

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"

étude: (French) a "study" piece, designed to help a performer master a particular technique

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

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

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: (genre) music that serves either as background or foreground material for a movie

forte: (*f*) a loud dynamic marking

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

fortissimo: (*ff*) a very loud dynamic marking

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

fugue: a complex contrapuntal manipulation of a musical *subject*

fusion: a blending of jazz and rock styles

G

gamelan: an Indonesian musical ensemble comprised primarily of percussion instruments

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

glissando: a rapid slide between two distant pitches

glockenspiel: a pitched-percussion instrument comprised of metal bars in a frame struck by a mallet

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

grave: a slow, solemn tempo

Gregorian chant: (genre) monophonic, non-metered melodies set to Latin sacred texts

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

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

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)

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

incidental music: (genre) music performed during a theatrical play

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

interval: the measured distance between two musical pitches

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

J

jazz: (genre) 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)

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

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

L

largo: a very slow, broad tempo

legato: a smooth, connected manner of performing a melody

Leitmotif: a short musical "signature tune" associated with a person or concept in a Wagnerian Musikdrama

libretto: the sung/spoken text of an opera

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

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

M

madrigal: (genre) 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)

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).

marching band: an large ensemble of woodwinds, brass, and percussion 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

Mass: (genre) in music, a composition based on the five daily prayers of the Roman Catholic Mass Ordinary: *Kyrie, Gloris, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*.

Mass Ordinary: the five daily prayers of the Catholic Mass: *Kyrie, Gloris, 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

marimba: a pitched percussion instrument comprised of wooden bars struck by mallets; a mellower version of the xylophone

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)

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

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"

mezzo-forte: (*mf*) a medium loud dynamic marking

mezzo-piano: (*f*) 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. (Anonymous monks, Pérotin, Machaut)

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 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: an aristocratic dance in 3/4 meter

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

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

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 (WAV files) to be compressed into files that are approximately 8 times smaller than the original, with no loss of quality

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

musique concrète: (genre) 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 sign: (♮) a musical symbol that raises the pitch one half-step

neo-Classicism: 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

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

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 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

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

octave: a musical interval between two pitches in which the upper pitch vibrates twice as fast as the lower

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

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

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

oratorio: (genre) a large-scale sacred work for solo singers, chorus and orchestra that is NOT staged

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: (genre) 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)

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

overture: (genre) a one-movement orchestral introduction to an opera (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

pentatonic scale: a folk or non-Western scale having five different notes 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: (*pp*) a very quiet dynamic marking

piano: (dynamic; *p*) a 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)

pizzicato: usually refers to a type of violin 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

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

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

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

prelude: (genre) 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

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"]: (genre) instrumental music intended to tell a specific story, or set a specific mood or extra-musical image

program symphony: (genre) a programmatic multi-movement work for orchestra

progression: a series of chords that functions similarly to a sentence or phrase in written language

Proper (Mass): see Mass Proper

Q

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

quotation music: (genre; 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

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 Afro-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)

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

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

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)

Requiem Mass: (genre) a Roman Catholic Mass for the dead

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

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

ritardando: gradually slowing down the tempo

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: a style of popular music that emerged in the 1950s out of the combination of AfroAmerican, Country-Western and pop-music elements

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 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.)

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

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

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

scherzo: a country dance in triple meter

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

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

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

serenade: (genre) a Classic instrumental chamber work 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.)

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 (sf): sudden stress on a note or chord

Singspiel: (genre) 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

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: (genre) a 3-movement work for a single soloist vs. an orchestra

sonata: (genre) a Classic multi-movement work for a piano (or for one instrument with piano accompaniment)

sonata form (also called sonata-allegro form): the common first-movement form of Classic multimovement 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)

song: (genre) 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: (genre) a set of poetically-unified songs (for one singer accompanied by either piano or orchestra)

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

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

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: (genre) a collection of dance movements

swing: a term to describe "Big Band" jazz music of the 1930s-50s
symphonic poem: (genre) a single-movement programmatic work for orchestra
symphony: (genre) a multi-movement work for orchestra
syncopation: an "off-the-beat" accent
synthesizer: a modern electronic keyboard instrument capable of generating a multitude of sounds

T

tabla: a pair of drums used to accompany the music of India
tala: a rhythmic pattern used in the music of India
tempo: the speed of the musical beat
tenor: a high-ranged male voice
ternary form: ABA design (statement, contrast, restatement)
texture: the element focusing on the number of simultaneous musical lines being sounded
theme: the main self-contained melody of a musical composition
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: another term for tone color
timpani: various-sized kettle-shaped pitched drums; a tenor instrument of the percussion family
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
tonality: music centered around a "home" key (based on a major or minor scale)
tone row: an ordered series of twelve chromatic pitches used in serialism
tonic: the first note of a scale or key
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
tremolo: rapid repetition of a pitch (i.e.: bowing a string rapidly while maintaining a constant pitch)
triad: a three-note chord 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 sonata: (genre) a Baroque multi-movement chamber work for four performers (2 violins and basso continuo)
triple meter: 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)

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

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

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

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

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

W

waltz: an aristocratic ballroom dance in triple meter that flourished in the Romantic period

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