

Music Glossary

Expression – the nuances of tempo, dynamics, articulation, phrasing, touch, etc. by which the combination and succession of sounds are transformed into a vital interpretation of a piece of music

accent – a stress or emphasis on a specific beat, tone, chord or movement

crescendo - (cresc.) – gradually getting louder

decrescendo - (decresc.) – gradually getting quieter

dynamics – the loudness and quietness of sound

fermata - a symbol placed over a note indicating the note is to be held longer than its normal metrical value

forte (f) – loudly (literally, strong)

fortissimo (ff) – very loudly (literally, very strong)

legato – smoothly; opposite of staccato

mezzo-forte (mf) – medium loudly (literally, moderately strong)

mezzo-piano (mp) – medium quietly (literally, moderately soft)

pianissimo (pp) – very quietly (literally, very soft)

piano (p) – quietly (literally, soft)

staccato – detached, short, disconnected; opposite of legato

Form – the aspect of music having to do with the structure and design of a composition

AB – a two part compositional form in which the second part differs from the first

ABA – a three part compositional form in which the first and last parts are the same and the middle part is different

call and response – a musical form that features a solo phrase that is answered by a larger group

coda – a concluding section of a musical composition

da capo (D.C.) – indication that the music is to be repeated from the beginning; "da capo al fine" indicates that the music is to be repeated from the beginning to the word "fine" (ending)

dal segno (D.S.) – indication that the music is to be repeated from the symbol

interlude – a section of music between themes

introduction – a musical passage prior to the main theme

refrain – a section of a song that recurs at the end of each verse; sometimes called a chorus

rondo – a classical form that includes two or more episodes (B and C) and a recurring theme (A) so that the resulting scheme might be ABACA

verse – a recurring melody with different sets of lyrics

Harmony – the simultaneous sounding of tones

chord – two or more pitches sounding simultaneously

interval – the distance between two pitches

partner song – two or more different songs that can be sung at the same time to create harmony

round – a song in which the melody is performed by different groups starting at different times

texture – the character of music which results from the ways in which the vertical and horizontal elements are combined

Melody – a succession of organized pitches having a definite rhythm

diatonic – the tones of the major or minor scale; distinct from chromatic

leap – motion from one pitch to another that is more than a whole tone away

phrase – a natural division of the melodic line, comparable to a sentence of speech

pitch – the highness or lowness of a tone

repeated notes – reiteration of a tone at the same pitch level

step – motion from one scale degree to the next, whether by a semitone or a whole tone

unison – identity in pitch; all singing or playing the same tone

Notation – a system of visual symbols used in writing music to indicate pitch and duration

bar line – a vertical line on the staff separating one measure from the next

bass clef - (F clef) – used to notate the lowest sounding notes; the two dots surrounding the fourth line indicate a note written on that line is "F"

circle of fifths – a graphic representation of the relationship of the key signatures in music

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flat – a symbol indicating that a tone is to be lowered by a half step

key signature – the sharps or flats appearing on the left side of each staff to indicate the key in which the music is written

measure – the segment of music contained between two bar lines

repeat sign – the symbols and calling for a repetition of the music enclosed by them

sharp – a symbol indicating that a tone is to be raised by a half step

slur – a curved line drawn over or under a groups of notes indicating that they are to be played legato

tie – a curved line joining two successive notes of the same pitch indicating that the second note is a prolongation of the first and not sounded separately

time signature – figures written on the staff at the beginning of a composition indicating the meter, or the kind and number of beat used in a measure

treble clef (G clef) – used to notate the highest sounding notes; the spiraling figure surrounding the second line indicates that a note written on that line is "G"

Rhythm – the organization of musical tones with regard to their duration as distinct from their pitches

beat – the basic unit of time and the underlying pulse in music; the basic unit within a measure

duple – meter in which the basic unit of pulse recurs in groups of two

note – a symbol used to indicate the presence of sound for a designated period of time

rest – a symbol used to indicate the absence of sound for a designated period of time

triple – meter in which the basic unit of pulse recurs in groups of three

Tempo – the pace at which a piece of music is performed

allegro – fast, lively tempo

andante – literally, "at a walking pace"; moderately slow tempo, between allegretto and adagio

largo – a very slow tempo, slower than adagio

presto – a very fast tempo

Timbre – tone quality, or tone color distinctive of a singing voice or a musical instrument

alto – low female voice; also called contralto, second highest part in choral or part music

bass – low male voice; lowest part in choral or part music, lowest range of pitches of an instrument

brass – a group of wind instruments made of brass and other metals and played by blowing through a cup-shaped or funnel-shaped mouthpiece; the chief brass instruments of the orchestra are the trumpet, trombone, French horn, and tuba

percussion – instruments which are played by striking, shaking, or scraping

soprano – high female voice; highest part in choral or part music, highest range of pitches of an instrument

string – instruments on which vibrating, stretched strings are the sound-producing agents, such as violins, violas, cellos, or bass viol

tenor – high male voice; third highest part in choral or part music

woodwind – a term used to refer to wind instruments, now or originally made of wood; instruments played by blowing across a mouth hole or into a whistle mouth piece or reed; principle members are the flute, oboe, English horn clarinet, and bassoon