

The Music Lexicon

Key - A series of seven tones arranged in alpha-numerical order.

Key Signature - A group of sharps or flats positioned just to the right of the clef, indicating the key of a piece.

Pulse - Equidistant points on a temporal (time) line. Also referred to as the "beat".

Tempo - The rate of a pulse, measured in beats per minute (BPM).

Meter - The grouping of a pulse, which results in a natural accent pattern.

Syncopation - The interruption of the normal pattern of metrical accents in meter.

Rubato - The relative expanding and contracting of note values within a pulse, for expression.

Dynamics - Varying and contrasting degrees of loudness or intensity.

Duration - The length of time a note is sounded, commonly counted in beats.

Interval - The measured distance between two pitches.

Triad - A three-note chord comprised of the root, 3rd and 5th degrees of a scale.

Melody - A single note musical line, usually (but not always) played in the soprano voice.

Counterpoint - Two or more single note musical lines sounded simultaneously.

Harmony - Two or more pitches sounded simultaneously.

Chromatic - Scale consisting of all 12 semi-tones in the Western musical system.

Cadence - A moment of harmonic tension followed by a moment of resolution.

Authentic Cadence - The V chord of a key resolving to the I chord of the same key.

Plagal Cadence - The IV chord of a key resolving to the I chord of the same key.

Half Cadence - The I chord of a key resolving temporarily to the V chord of the same key.

Tone - An audible sound consisting of pitch, loudness, timbre and duration.

Timbre - The type of sound an instrument produces, determined by the prominence of specific overtones.

Tonality - The relation of all the notes in a piece to one scale system built on a single tone.

Major - One of the two basic tonalities in Western Music, considered the "brighter" tonality.

Minor - One of the two basic tonalities in Western Music, considered the "darker" tonality.

Inversion - The re-positioning of tones in a chord into different intervallic shapes, in the closest proximity possible.

Voice - Name given to the individual notes of a chord, or single note lines within a harmonic progression.

Voicing - The re-positioning of tones in a chord into different intervallic shapes, regardless of their proximity.

Soprano - Name given to the highest sounding note of a chord, or single note line in a piece of music.

Alto - Name given to the 2nd highest sounding note of a chord, or single note line in a piece of music.

Tenor - Name given to the 3rd highest sounding note of a chord, or single note line in a piece of music.

Bass - Name given to the lowest sounding note of a chord, or single note line in a piece of music.

Augmented - Term for a type of triad with a raised (sharped) 5th degree.

Augmentation - Rhythmic term for doubling the duration of notes within a phrase.

Diminished - Term for a type of triad with a lowered (flatted) 3rd and 5th degree.

Diminution - Rhythmic term for halving the duration of notes within a phrase.

Harmonic Rhythm - The number beats, or measures that a chord change lasts.

Diatonic - Term given to describe the notes within a given key exclusively.

Tonic - Name given to the chord of a key built upon the first degree of a scale.

Dominant - Name given to the chord of a key built upon the 5th degree of a scale.

Subdominant - The chord of a key built upon the 4th degree of a scale.

Relative Key - A key having the same key signature as its major or minor counterpart.

Parallel Key - A key having the same tonic tone as its major or minor counterpart.

Secondary Dominant - A V chord borrowed from a key other than the initial key.

Modulation - The process of shifting from one tonality, or key, to another.

Transposition - The playing of a musical passage in a key other than the original.

Substitution - The practice of using one chord in place of another in a chord progression.

Ostinato - A repeating musical phrase or figure.

Phrase - A musical sentence; a complete musical thought.

Phrasing - The pace a performer sets in playing from phrase to phrase.

Anacrusis - The notes which precede the strong beat of a measure in a melody.

Arsis - The accented beat in a two-beat group.

Chord Tone - Any note in a melody which is one of the notes of the present chord.

Passing Tone - A non-chord tone in a melody, usually connecting two chord tones.

Auxiliary tone - A non-chord tone which moves a step from a chord tone.

Ornament - Compositional device using a tone or series of tones surrounding the original melodic note.

Sequence - The re-statement of a phrase, a step higher or lower than the original.

Imitation - The re-statement of a phrase, at a different interval than the original.

Theme - A musical statement which serves as the basis for a composition.

Variation - A re-statement of the theme, with slight rhythmic or melodic changes.

Recapitulation - The re-statement of the main theme at the end of a section.

Repeat - An enclosure symbol(s) which directs the performer to repeat the section (measures) within it.

Del Capo - A directive to return to the very beginning of a piece of music.

Del Segno - A directive to return to a previous section of music, marked by a sign.

Coda - Symbol marking the exit and entry points that lead to the end of a piece.

Tag - A common slang term for "Coda", usually a two or four bar phrase repeated multiple times.

Tacet - A term used to describe when an instrument remains silent for a number of measures.

Form - Term used to describe the sections of a song, and the order in which they are to be performed.

Verse - Main section of a popular song, usually repeated multiple times.

Chorus - Section of a popular song which usually contains the title or the "hook", and repeats multiple times.

Bridge - Section of a popular song which differs from the verse and chorus, usually occurring only once.

Staccato - A dot-like symbol placed above or below notes which are to be performed in a short, detached manner.

Legato - A form of articulation where notes are performed in a smooth, attached manner.

Accent - A symbol placed above the note as a directive to play the note in a stressed manner.

Rest - A symbol used to notate silence.

Crescendo - A hairpin-like symbol used as a directive to perform the notes in a gradually louder manner.

Diminuendo - A hairpin-like symbol used as a directive to perform the notes in a gradually softer manner.

Forte - Loud.

Piano - Soft.

Fermata - A symbol which when placed above a note gives the performer license to hold the note indefinitely.

Mode - Name for permutations of a scale, constructed by beginning the scale series from tones other than the tonic.

Pentatonic - Name give to several varieties of five-tone scales, namely major and minor.

Hits - Common slang term used to describe when members of a group accent certain beats in unison.

Breaks - Common slang term used to describe when members of a group or ensemble stop in unison.

Riff - Common slang term used to describe a repeating figure or phrase in a piece of music.