

Glossary

A

A capella

Singing without instrumental accompaniment.

A tempo

Return to the original tempo.

Accelerando

Gradually play faster.

Accent

Put more emphasis on this note.

Adagio

Play slowly

Added Note Chord

A chord that is made from a triad plus one non-harmonic note.

Aeolian Mode

The same as minor mode.

Alberti Bass

An accompaniment pattern where each chord note is played one at a time. The lowest chord member is played first, then the highest chord member, the middle chord member, and the highest once again. This was a favorite accompaniment pattern of Mozart. Example: C, G, E, G or D, A, F#, A.

Allargando

Gradually play more slowly.

Allegretto

Play moderately fast.

Allegro

Play quickly and brightly.

Alto

The second part in a four-part choir. It is lower than the soprano part but higher than the tenor part. The alto vocal range is usually from about G3 to E5.

Alto Clef

Sometimes called the C clef, this clef is most often used in viola music.

Ametric

Literally means “without meter”. A metric music has no time signature. Unlike metric music, it does not have a clear beat.

Andante

Play at a leisurely walking tempo.

Andantino

Play at a lively walking tempo.

Anticipation

A non-chord tone. This note does not belong to the chord with which you play it, but with the next chord. It “anticipates” the arrival of the second chord.

Appoggiatura

A melodic ornament that occurs on the beat and usually resolves to the next note by step.

Arpeggio

The notes of a chord played one after another. To qualify as an arpeggio the notes must be played in order, either ascending or descending.

Augmented Fifth

An interval comprised of eight half steps, or one half step bigger than a perfect fifth. Example: C to G#.

Augmented Fourth

An interval comprised of six half steps, or one half step bigger than a perfect fourth. Also called a tritone, this interval is so dissonant that it was nicknamed “the Devil’s interval” and banned by the Church for centuries. Example: C to F#.

Augmented Octave

An interval comprised of thirteen half steps, or one half step bigger than a perfect octave. Example: from C to the next highest C#.

Augmented Second

An interval comprised of three half steps, or one half step bigger than a major second. Example: from C to D#.

Augmented Seventh

An interval comprised of twelve half steps, or one half step bigger than a major seventh. Aurally this will sound like a perfect octave, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to B# (a perfect octave would be spelled as C to C).

Augmented Sixth

An interval comprised of ten half steps, or one half step bigger than a major sixth. Example: C to A#.

Augmented Third

An interval comprised of five half steps, or one half step bigger than a major third. Aurally this will sound like a perfect fourth, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to E# (a perfect fourth would be spelled as C to F).

Augmented Triad

A three-note chord consisting of a root, third, and augmented fifth, or two major thirds. Example: C, E, G#.

B

Baritone

Lower than tenor but higher than bass. The baritone vocal range is usually from about G2 to E4.

Bass

The fourth or lowest part in a four-part choir. The bass vocal range is usually from about E2 TO C4.

Bass Clef

Sometimes called the F clef, bass clef is found in the left hand part of keyboard and harp music. It is also commonly used in music written for cello, double bass, bass guitar, trombone, timpani, tuba, bassoon, contrabassoon, euphonium, baritone horn, and tenor, baritone, and bass voice parts.

Basso Profundo

Even lower than the more common bass voice. The basso profundo vocal range is usually from about G1 to C4.

Beat

The pulse of the music. If you tap your foot, you are tapping it to the beat.

Binary Form

A musical form that consists of two parts: an A section and a B section. The two sections are usually about the same length, and they often repeat.

Breath Mark

A mark in vocal music that indicates where to breath. It looks like a comma.

Bridge

A transition between two section of a song. It often occurs between the verse and chorus. There might be one bridge in a song or several.

C

Cadence

A chord progression that occurs at the end of a phrase.

Cadenza

A virtuosic section near the conclusion of a piece of music. Cadenzas are often improvised.

Caesura

A pause in the music.

Cantabile

Play smoothly and song-like.

Chord

Three or more notes played at the same time.

Chord Substitution

Playing a different chord than what is written to add more color or interest to a piece, or to create a different effect.

Chromatic Mediant Relationship

A chromatic mediant relationship is between two chords whose roots are far apart, but who share one common tone. Example: A G major triad (G, B, D) and a B \flat major triad (B \flat , D, F) are chromatic mediants because G and B \flat are a third apart and they share D as a common note.

Chromatic Mediant Chain

A string of chromatic mediants that occur as a sequence. Example: a G major triad followed by a B \flat major triad, then a D major triad, F \sharp major triad, and so on.

Chromatic Note

A note that is not diatonic to the key. That is, it does not fit in the key signature. Example: F \sharp is a chromatic note in a C major piece.

Chromatic Scale

A scale consisting of twelve half steps, or every note within an octave. Example: C, C \sharp , D, D \sharp , E, F, F \sharp , G, G \sharp , A, A \sharp , B, C.

Common Chord

A chord that is diatonic to two different keys. That is, it fits in the key signature and harmonic vocabulary of both keys. Example: An F major triad is common to the keys of both C major and A minor.

Common Chord Modulation

A modulation that uses a common chord as a bridge to transition from one key to another. Example: Using a D major triad to modulate from the key of D major to the key of G major. The D major triad will be heard aurally as a I chord in D major and a V chord in G major, making the transition smooth and easy.

Common Time

Another way of saying 4/4 time.

Common Tone

A note that is diatonic to two different keys. That is, it fits in the key signature of both keys. Example: G is common to the keys of both C major and E minor.

Common Tone Modulation

A modulation that uses a common tone as a bridge to transition from one key to another. Example: Using an F# to modulate from the F# minor to the key of B major. The F# will be heard aurally as the tonic in F# minor and the dominant in B major, making the transition smooth and easy.

Compound Duple

A type of meter where each beat is divided into three equal parts, and there are two beats per measure. Example: 6/8.

Compound Quadruple

A type of meter where each beat is divided into three equal parts, and there are four beats per measure. Example: 12/8.

Compound Time

A type of meter where each beat is divided into three equal parts. Examples: 6/8, 9/8, 12/8.

Compound Triple

A type of meter where each beat is divided into three equal parts, and there are three beats per measure. Example: 9/8.

Con Brio

Play vigorously.

Consonance

Intervals or chords that sound nice, smooth, and pleasing. They often come after dissonant intervals or chords. Examples: major thirds, perfect fifths, minor sixths, perfect octaves.

Contralto

Lower than an alto. The vocal range of a contralto is usually from about F3 to D5.

Contrary Motion

A kind of motion where two parts move in opposite directions. Example: there is an A in the soprano part and a D in the alto part. The soprano part then moves down to G while the alto part moves up to E.

Counterpoint

A type of polyphony where two or more voices move independently. Most counterpoint follows very strict rules regarding voice movement (no parallel or direct fifths, etc.).

Crescendo

Gradually play louder.

Cut Time

Another way of saying 2/2 time.

D

Deceptive Cadence

A type of cadence where a V or V7 chord is followed by a vi chord rather than the I chord that the ear expects to hear. This last minute trickery is aurally “deceptive”, hence the name.

Diatonic Note

A note that belongs to the key and fits in the key signature.

Diminished Fifth

An interval comprised of six half steps, or one half step smaller than a perfect fifth. Also called a tritone, this interval is so dissonant that it was nicknamed “the Devil’s interval” and banned by the Church for centuries. Example: C to Gb.

Diminished Fourth

An interval comprised of four half steps, or one half step smaller than a perfect fourth. Aurally this will sound like a major third, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to Fb (a major third would be spelled as C to E).

Diminished Octave

An interval comprised of eleven half steps, or one half step smaller than a perfect octave. Aurally this will sound like a major seventh, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to Cb (a major seventh would be spelled as C to B).

Diminished Second

An interval composed of, believe it or not, zero half steps, or one half step smaller than a minor second. Aurally, this will sound like a unison, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to Dbb (a unison would be spelled as C in both voices).

Diminished Seventh

An interval comprised of nine half steps, or one half step smaller than a minor seventh. Aurally, this will sound the same as a major sixth, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to Bbb (a major sixth would be spelled as C to A).

Diminished Seventh Chord

A four-note chord consisting of three minor thirds. Contains a root, third, diminished fifth, and diminished seventh. You could also think of this as a diminished triad with an added diminished seventh. Example: C, Eb, Gb, Bbb.

Diminished Sixth

An interval comprised of seven half steps, or one half step smaller than a minor sixth. Aurally, this will sound the same as a perfect fifth, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to Abb (a perfect fifth would be spelled as C to G).

Diminished Third

An interval comprised of two half steps, or one whole step. One half step smaller than a minor third. Aurally, this will sound like a major second, but the notes will be spelled differently. Example: C to Ebb (a major second would be spelled as C to D).

Diminished Triad

A three-note chord consisting of two minor thirds. Contains a root, third, and diminished fifth. Example: C, Eb, Gb.

Diminuendo

Gradually play softer.

Direct Modulation

The abrupt change from one key to another, without the use of any common chords, common tones, or other transitional techniques.

Dissonance

Intervals or chords that sound rough, tense, and clashing. They often resolve to consonant intervals or chords. Examples: minor second, diminished fifth, major seventh.

Dominant

The fifth scale degree of any given scale. Example: G is the dominant in the C major scale.

Dominant Seventh Chord (see Major-Minor Seventh Chord)

Dorian Mode

Similar to a minor scale but with a raised sixth scale degree. Example: D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D.

Double Flat

An accidental which lowers the note by two half steps, or one whole step.

Double Sharp

An accidental which raises the note by two half steps or one whole step.

Durational Symbols

Symbols that fill the required number of beats in each measure of music. Durational symbols include both notes and rest signs.

Dynamics

Indications of how loudly or softly one should play. Examples: piano, forte, mezzo forte.

E

Enharmonic Notes

Two notes that aurally sound the same despite being spelled differently. Example: F# and Gb.

Enharmonic Modulation

A modulation that uses one chord as a bridge to transition from one key to another. The chord will be common to both keys, but it will be enharmonically spelled so that it fits in the key signature of the second key rather than the first. The piece will then proceed in that new key. Example: Using an E major-minor seventh chord to modulate from the key of G# minor to the key of A major. The E major-minor seventh chord will be heard aurally as a German augmented sixth chord in G# minor and a V7 chord in A major, making the transition smooth and easy. The chord will be spelled E, G#, B, D, in keeping with the key signature of A major.

Escape Tone

A non-chord tone that is approached by step and resolves by leap in the opposite direction.

Espressivo

Play with expression.

F

Fermata

Hold the note for longer than its value. Double the value of a note. Example: Hold a half note for four beats, rather than two.

Figured Bass

A system of numbers and symbols that indicate what chords should be played in the bass line. Usually the bass note is notated in the music and the player will fill in the rest of the chord members on top of it, depending on what the numbers and symbols indicate. Very common in music from the Baroque era. Example: An E in the bass with a 6 written underneath it, indicating that a first inversion triad is to be played. That would be E, G, C.

First Inversion

Play the chord with the third in the bass, rather than the root. Example: E, G, C.

Flat

A note that is lowered by one half step.

Forte

Play loudly.

Fortissimo

Play very loudly.

Fortississimo

Play very, very loudly. Bring it, if you will.

French Augmented Sixth Chord

A chord comprised of the lowered sixth scale degree, tonic, second scale degree, and raised fourth scale degree. The distance between the lowered sixth and the raised fourth makes an augmented sixth interval, hence the name of the chord. Example: Ab, C, D, F#. Ab to F# is an augmented sixth interval.

Fundamental Bass

The root notes of a series of chords in the bass line. Fundamental bass refers only to the root of the chords, regardless of whether or not they appear in inversion.

G

German Augmented Sixth Chord

A chord comprised of the lowered sixth scale degree, tonic, lowered third scale degree, and raised fourth scale degree. The distance between the lowered sixth and the raised fourth makes an augmented sixth interval, hence the name of the chord. Example: Ab, C, Eb, F#. Ab to F# is an augmented sixth interval.

Glissando

A wavy line between two notes, indicating that the player should quickly slide over every note in between before arriving on the second note.

Grace Note

A general term for an ornamental note that is used as a melodic decoration, and is not part of the harmonic structure of the piece.

Grandioso

Play with grandeur.

Grave

Play very slowly and solemnly.

H

Half Cadence

A type of cadence consisting of any chord followed by a V or V7 chord. Usually the first chord is a I or IV, but it doesn't have to be.

Half-Diminished Seventh Chord

A four-note chord consisting of two minor thirds with a major third on top. Contains a root, third, diminished fifth, and minor seventh. You could also think of it as a diminished triad with a minor seventh on top.

Half Step

The distance from one note to the next key, whether it is black or white. Example: C to Db.

Harmonic Function

The way a chord is used in the piece to further the harmony. If a chord is used as a predominant chord, it is said to have a predominant function.

Harmonic Minor Scale

A scale that follows the same pattern as a natural minor scale but with a raised seventh degree.

Example: C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, B, C.

Harmonic Progression

The sequence of chords on which the harmony of a piece of music is built. Sometimes called the harmonic sequence.

Harmony

The resulting sound when one or more note is played at a time. The underlying chordal structure that supports the melody.

Head Motive

The chief or primary motive at the opening of a musical movement.

Hexachord

A series of six notes that create a sequence. Example: C, C#, D, E, G, Ab.

Hirajoshi Pentatonic Scale

A five note scale made from a minor scale with the fourth and seventh scale degrees omitted. Example:

C, D, Eb, G, Ab, C.

Homophony

A musical texture in which the parts are playing different notes but keep relatively the same rhythm.

I

Imperfect Authentic Cadence

A type of cadence that consists of a V or V7 chord followed by a I chord. Unlike a perfect authentic cadence, one or both chords may be inverted rather than in root position. The I chord may have the third or fifth in the melody rather than the tonic note.

Interval

The distance between two notes. Intervals can be melodic (when the notes are played one at a time) or harmonic (when the notes are played at the same time).

Inversion

A chord that is played with a note other than the root in the bass. The bass note could be the third, the

fifth, or the seventh.

Ionian Mode

The same as major mode. Example: all the white keys on a piano from one C to another C.

Italian Augmented Sixth Chord

A chord comprised of the lowered sixth scale degree, tonic, and raised fourth scale degree. The distance between the lowered sixth and the raised fourth makes an augmented sixth interval, hence the name of the chord. Example: Ab, C, F#. Ab to F# is an augmented sixth interval.

K

Key

The notes that are used in a piece of music. Keys are based on either a major or minor scale. Example: A piece that is based on the notes of the D major scale (D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D) is said to be in the key of D major.

Key Signature

The sharps or flats that appear in the music after the clef sign. If the key is C major or A minor, the key signature will be blank, with no sharps or flats present.

L

Largo

Play slowly, in a stately manner.

Larghetto

Play fairly slowly and stately. A little bit quicker than Largo.

Larghissimo

Play as slowly as possible. Slower than Largo. We're talking serious slow motion here.

Lead Sheet

A written-out melody with chord symbols that indicate which chords should be played. Sometimes referred to as a fake sheet.

Lead Sheet Symbols

The chord symbols that appear on a lead sheet. These symbols tell the performer which chords to play, rather than actually notating the chords. Example: Cm7.

Leading Tone

The seventh scale degree of a major scale, sometimes called a sub tonic. It usually "leads" to the tonic. Example: B is the leading tone in the key of C major. It leads to C, the tonic in C major.

Legato

Play smoothly.

Lento

Play slowly.

Locrian Mode

Similar to a minor scale, but with lowered second and fifth scale degrees. Example: B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

Lydian Mode

Similar to a major scale, but with a raised fourth scale degree. Example: F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F.

M

M.M.

Stands for “Metronome Marking” or “Maelzel’s Metronome”. Johann Nepomuk Maelzel first marketed the device in the 1800s and claimed it was his own design (hence the designation “Maelzel’s Metronome”). In reality, he actually stole the design from fellow inventor Dietrich Nikolaus Winkel. In any case, the M.M. marking is usually followed by an equals sign and a number on which to set the metronome. Example: M.M. = 120.

Major Pentatonic Scale

A five-note scale made from a major scale with the fourth and seventh scale degrees omitted. Example: C, D, E, G, A, C.

Major Scale

A scale that uses the following pattern: whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step. The scale that major keys are based on. Example: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C.

Major Second

An interval comprised of two half steps, also known as a whole step. One half step bigger than a minor second. Example: C to D.

Major Seventh

An interval comprised of eleven half steps, or one half step bigger than a minor second. Example: C to B.

Major Seventh Chord

A four-note chord consisting of a major third, minor third, and another major third on top. It contains a root, third, perfect fifth, and major seventh. You could also think of it as a major triad with an added major seventh. Example: C, E, G, B.

Major-Minor Seventh Chord

A four-note chord consisting of a major third with two minor thirds on top. It contains a root, third, perfect fifth, and minor seventh. You could also think of it as a major triad with an added minor seventh.

Example: C, E, G, Bb.

Major Sixth

An interval comprised of nine half steps, or one half step bigger than a minor sixth. Example: C to A.

Major Third

An interval comprised of four half steps, or one half step bigger than a minor third. Example: C to E.

Major Triad

A three-note chord consisting of a major third with a minor third on top. Contains a root, third, and perfect fifth. Example: C, E, G.

Marcato

Play with more emphasis. Like an accent, but a bit louder.

Marcia Moderato

Play moderately and march-like.

Mediant

The third scale degree. Example: E is the mediant in a C major scale.

Melodic Minor Scale

A minor scale that has a raised sixth and seventh degree when ascending and is the same as a natural minor scale when descending. Example: C, D, Eb, F, G, A, B, C (ascending); C, Bb, Ab, G, F, Eb, D, C (descending).

Melody

The main tune in a piece of music. The part of the piece that you can easily hum along with. Usually carried by the soprano section in a choir. Example: sing or hum "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" to yourself. You are singing/humming the melody.

Mesto

Play sadly, as if you are in mourning.

Meter

The pattern of beats that determine the rhythm in a piece of music.

Mezzo Forte

Play moderately loud.

Mezzo Piano

Play moderately soft.

Mezzo Soprano

A type of voice that is lower than a soprano but higher than an alto. Sometimes called a second soprano. The vocal range of a mezzo soprano is usually from about A3 to F5.

Minor Pentatonic Scale

A five-note scale made from a minor scale with the second and sixth scale degrees omitted. Example: C, Eb, F, G, Bb, C.

Minor Second

An interval comprised of one half step, or one half step smaller than a major second. Example: C to Db.

Minor Seventh

An interval comprised of ten half steps, or one half step smaller than a major seventh. Example: C to Bb.

Minor Seventh Chord

A four-note chord consisting of a major seventh and two minor sevenths. Contains a root, third, perfect fifth, and minor seventh. You could also think of it as a minor seventh triad with an added minor seventh. Example: C, Eb, G, Bb.

Minor Sixth

An interval comprised of eight half steps, or one half step smaller than a major sixth. Example: C to Ab.

Minor Third

An interval comprised of three half steps, or one half step smaller than a major third. Example: C to Eb.

Minor Triad

A three-note chord consisting of a minor third with a major third on top. Contains a root, a third, and a perfect fifth. Example: C, Eb, G.

Mixolydian Mode

Similar to a major scale, but with a lowered seventh scale degree. Example: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

Moderato

Play at a moderate tempo.

Modulation

The process of transitioning from one key to another.

Monophonic Modulation

A modulation in a piece of music where only one part is playing. Since only one note is sounding at a time, the harmonic progression is only implied.

Monophony

A musical texture in which there is only one part or all of the parts are playing in unison.

Mordent

A type of musical ornament where one note moves quickly to the note above or below it and then returns to the first note. Shorter than a trill.

Mosso

Play with motion.

Motive

A short musical idea that is distinct in a composition. Motives can be melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, or a combination of all three.

N

Natural

A sign canceling any previous accidental, refers to the white keys on a piano.

Natural Minor Scale

A scale that uses the following pattern: whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step. The scale that minor keys are based on. Example: C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C.

Neapolitan Chord

A major triad built on the lowered second degree of the scale. Often used as a predominant chord. Example: Dd, F, Ab forms a Neapolitan chord in the key of C major.

Neighbor Tone

A non-chord tone that is approached by step and resolves by step in the opposite direction.

Non-Chord Tone

A tone which adds color to a chord but is not part of the harmonic structure of the chord.

O

Oblique Motion

A kind of motion where one part moves while another stays the same. Example: there is an A in the soprano part and a D in the alto part. The soprano part then moves to G while the alto part remains on D.

Octatonic Scale

An eight-note scale that alternated whole and half steps. Example: C, C#, D#, E, F#, G, A, Bb, C.

Overtones

The pitches heard in any one tone. Example: if you play a C, the ringing sound you hear will be more than just C. There will also be Cs in other octaves and maybe some Gs, although will still be the “main” pitch that you hear.

P

Parallel Fifths

A type of parallel motion where two voices are a perfect fifth apart, then move in the same direction and remain a perfect fifth apart. Parallel fifths are generally avoided in part writing because of their undesirable aural effect. Example: There is an A in the soprano part and a D in the alto part, so they are a perfect fifth apart. The soprano then moves down to a G while the alto part moves down to a C. They are still a perfect fifth apart.

Parallel Motion

A kind of motion where two voice parts move in the same direction and remain the same interval apart. Example: there is an G in the soprano part and a D in the alto part, so they are a perfect fourth apart. The soprano part then moves down to F while the alto part moves down to a C. They are still a perfect fourth apart.

Parallel Octaves

A type of parallel motion where two voices are a perfect octave apart, then move in the same direction and remain a perfect octave apart. Parallel octaves are generally avoided in part writing because of their undesirable aural effect. Example: There is a high C in the soprano part and a middle C in the alto part, so they are a perfect octave apart. The soprano then moves down to a B while the alto part also moves down to a B. They are still a perfect octave apart.

Part-Writing

The process of writing and coordinating multiple musical parts, especially referring to four-part vocal writing.

Passing Tone

A non-chord tone that is approached by step and resolves by step in the same direction.

Passionato

Play with passion.

Percussion Clef

A clef that is intended for players of percussion instruments. This clef does not notate pitches, only rhythms.

Perfect Authentic Cadence

A type of cadence that consists of a V or V7 chord followed by a I chord. To qualify as a perfect authentic cadence, both chords must be in root position and the tonic must be in the melody of the I chord.

Perfect Fifth

An interval comprised of seven half steps. Example: C to G.

Perfect Fourth

An interval comprised of five half steps. Example: C to F.

Perfect Octave

An interval comprised of twelve half steps. Example: C to the next highest C.

Period

Two consecutive phrases. To qualify as a period, the cadence at the end of the second phrase must be stronger than the cadence at the end of the first phrase.

Phrase

A musical line, often four measures long. Phrases conclude with a cadence of some kind.

Phrygian Mode

Similar to a minor scale, but with a lowered second scale degree. Example: E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E.

Piano

Play softly

Pianissimo

Play very softly.

Pianississimo

Play very, very softly. Super softly. Ridiculously softly, if you will. The composer is not playing around with softness here.

Pitch

The sound of a note. C is one pitch, E-flat is a different pitch, etc.

Plagal Cadence

A type of cadence consisting of a IV chord followed by a I chord. Also called an "Amen Cadence", because this progression is used in the "Amen" sung at the end of many hymns.

Polychord

Two different chords that are being played at the same time. Example: A C major triad being played in the treble clef at the same time as an Eb triad in the bass clef.

Polyphony

A musical texture in which the parts are playing different notes and considerably different rhythms.

Polyrhythm

Two types of rhythms that are being played at the same time. Example: Eighth-note triplets in the treble

clef played at the same time as eighth notes in the bass clef.

Predominant Chord

A chord that proceeds the dominant (V or V7) chord. The ii, IV, Neapolitan, and augmented sixth chords are commonly used as predominants.

Prestissimo

Play very, very fast. Faster than Presto. As fast as possible.

Presto

Play very fast.

R

Rallentando

Gradually play slower, a bit more subtle than ritardando.

Retardation

A non-chord tone which resolves upward by step to a chord tone.

Ritardando

Gradually play slower.

Ritenuto

Play slower immediately, more abruptly than a ritardando.

Ritornello

An instrumental interlude during a musical movement, common during the Baroque and Classical periods.

Rhythm

The time aspect of music. How the melody and harmony progresses in terms of time.

Rondo Form

A form with either five or seven parts. One of the parts repeats often. Usually rondos follow a pattern of A-B-A-C-A, A-B-A-C-A-D-A, or A-B-A-C-A-B-A.

Root Position

Play the chord with the root in the bass. Example: C, E, G.

Rubato

Gradually play slower, then faster, slower, faster, etc. instead of keeping a steady tempo. The idea is to play rubato as evenly as possible, so the length of the piece stays the same. Example: a piece that is four minutes long when played at a steady tempo will still be four minutes long when played with rubato. The rubato version will just have more tempo fluctuations within that four minutes.

S

Second Inversion

Play the chord with the fifth in the bass. Example: G, C, E.

Secondary Dominant

A chord that is the dominant chord for a scale degree other than the tonic. Example: A D major triad is a secondary dominant in the key of C major, because it is the dominant chord in the key of G (the fifth scale degree in C major).

Secondary Leading-Tone Chord

A chord that is the leading-tone chord for a scale degree other than the tonic. Example: An F# diminished triad is a secondary leading-tone chord in the key of C major, because it is the leading-tone chord in the key of G (the fifth scale degree in C major).

Sequence

A series of repeated notes or chords.

Seventh Chord

A four-note chord consisting of a root, third, fifth, and seventh.

Sforzando

Play the note suddenly with more emphasis, then return to the previous volume.

Sharp

An accidental which raises the note one half step.

Similar Motion

A kind of motion where two voice parts move in the same direction but end up on different intervals. Example: there is an A in the soprano part and a D in the alto part, so they are a perfect fifth apart. The soprano part then moves down to G while the alto part moves down to a B. They are now a minor sixth apart.

Simple Duple

A type of meter where each beat is divided into two equal parts, and there are two beats per measure. Example: 2/4.

Simple Quadruple

A type of meter where each beat is divided into two equal parts, and there are four beats per measure. Example: 4/4.

Simple Time

A type of meter where each beat is divided into two equal parts. Example: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4.

Simple Triple

A type of meter where each beat is divided into two equal parts, and there are three beats per measure.

Example: 3/4.

Slur

An articulation mark shown as a line connecting two notes. Play the two notes smoothly, not detached.

Solfège

A system in which each scale degree is assigned a syllable: do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do. Have you ever heard the song "Do-Re-Mi" from The Sound of Music? In that song, Maria is using solfège to teach the Von Trapp children how to sing.

Sonata Form

A form that consists of three parts: an exposition, a development, and a recapitulation. The ending of the exposition and the development often modulate to another key, such as the dominant.

Sonata-Rondo Form

A cross between sonata form and rondo form. Usually the exposition follows a pattern of A-B-A, the development is the C section, and the recapitulation repeats the A-B-A sections.

Soprano

The highest type of voice. Usually carries the melody in a choir. The soprano voice range is usually from about C4 to A5.

Staccato

Play the notes in a short, clipped way.

Staff

The series of five lines and four spaces on which music is notated.

Static Motion

A kind of motion where two parts remain on the same notes; neither part moves. Example: there is an A in the soprano part and a D in the alto part. The soprano remains on the A and the alto remains on a D.

Stretto

Play more quickly.

Stringendo

Gradually play faster.

Strophic Form

The simplest of forms, with an A section that constantly repeats.

Subdominant

The fourth scale degree in any given scale. Example: F is the subdominant in the C major scale.

Submediant

The sixth scale degree in any given scale. Example: A is the submediant in the C major scale.

Supertonic

The second scale degree in any given scale. Example: D is the supertonic in the C major scale.

Suspension

A type of non-chord tone that resolves down to a chord tone by step.

Syncopation

A type of rhythm where the emphasis is not on the expected beat. Example: jazz music often uses syncopation to achieve their off-beat “swing” feel.

T

Tempo

The speed of the music, how fast or slow it is played.

Tenor

The tenor voice range is typically from about B2 to E4.

Tenor Clef

Also called a C clef. This clef is sometimes used in trombone, bassoon, double bass, and cello music.

Tenuto

Play with more emphasis on this note. This could mean play the note for slightly longer or slightly louder, depending on the musical context.

Ternary Form

A form that follows a pattern of A-B-A.

Texture

A way to describe how many different parts are in a piece of music and whether the parts move independently from each other or not.

Thematic Development

The practice of developing the theme by making slight changes, such as transposing to a different key, while keeping the main characteristics of the theme intact.

Theme

The main musical idea in a composition, usually a combination of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements around which the piece is based.

Third Inversion

Play the seventh chord with the seventh in the bass. Example: Bb, C, E, G.

Tie

An articulation mark shown as a line between two of the same note. The values of each note are “ties” together, hence the name. Example: two half notes tied together and held for a total of four beats.

Time Signature

The two numbers that appear at the beginning of a piece of music. The top number indicates how many beats are in each measure, and the bottom number indicates which note gets one beat. Examples: 3/4, 4/4, 6/8.

Tone Cluster

A chord consisting of at least three scale degrees that are right next to each other. Example: F#, G#, A#.

Tonic

The first note in any given scale. The note that the key is (usually) based around and from which it gets its name. Example: C is the tonic in the C major scale.

Transposition

The process of playing something in a key other than that in which it is written. Example: A piece in C major contains a C, G, F, E, F, G, and C in the melody. You transpose it to the key of A major by playing A, E, D, C#, D, E, and A.

Triad

A three-note chord comprised of a root, third, and fifth.

Treble Clef

Also called a G clef, this clef is used in keyboard and harp music and soprano and alto vocal parts, as well as many other high instruments.

Trill

A rapid alternation of a note with the note above or below it.

Tritone (See Diminished Fifth)

Tutti

Every instrument and/or voice part sounds together.

U

Unison

When two parts share the same note. Example: both the tenor and bass parts are on C#.

V

Vivace

Play fast.

Vivo

Play fast, with animation.

Vivacissimo

Play very fast.

W

Whole Step

The distance of two half steps, or skipping the next note whether it is a black or white key. Example: C to D.

Whole-Tone Scale

A six-note scale comprised entirely of whole steps, with no half steps allowed. A favorite scale of Impressionist composer Claude Debussy. Example: C, D, E, F#, G#, A#, C.