

CHAPTER 1

THE ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

You are embarking on an adventure through musical time, and this journey will be more pleasurable if you first become familiar with some basic musical concepts. Keep in mind that most new experiences require some initial adjustment and insight. The process is similar to visiting a distant country for the first time: You are instantly immersed in a different culture and surrounded by people who speak an unusual language or follow unfamiliar customs. This new experience could be either very exciting—or quite unbearable—depending on your perspective. If you were not prepared for this journey, your naive responses and actions might bring you embarrassment or instill the anger of others. Worst of all, you would get very little from a potentially rewarding experience.

These new ideas will be introduced gradually, systematically and actively, so for now, focus on learning the fundamental elements of music and their related terms. Listen carefully for these aspects in the music you hear, and—in time—you will attain a heightened understanding that will open your ears, mind and soul to the deeper levels of musical thought.

| ELEMENT | Basic Related Terms |
|--------------------|--|
| Rhythm: | (beat, meter, tempo, syncopation) |
| Dynamics: | (forte, piano, [etc.], crescendo, decrescendo) |
| Melody: | (pitch, theme, conjunct, disjunct) |
| Harmony: | (chord, progression, consonance, dissonance, key, tonality, atonality) |
| Tone color: | (register, range, instrumentation) |
| Texture: | (monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, imitation, counterpoint) |
| Form: | (binary, ternary, strophic, through-composed) |

RHYTHM

Rhythm is the element of "TIME" in music. When you tap your foot to the music, you are "keeping the **beat**" or following the structural rhythmic pulse of the music. There are several important aspects of rhythm:

- **DURATION**: how long a sound (or silence) lasts.
- **TEMPO**: the speed of the BEAT.

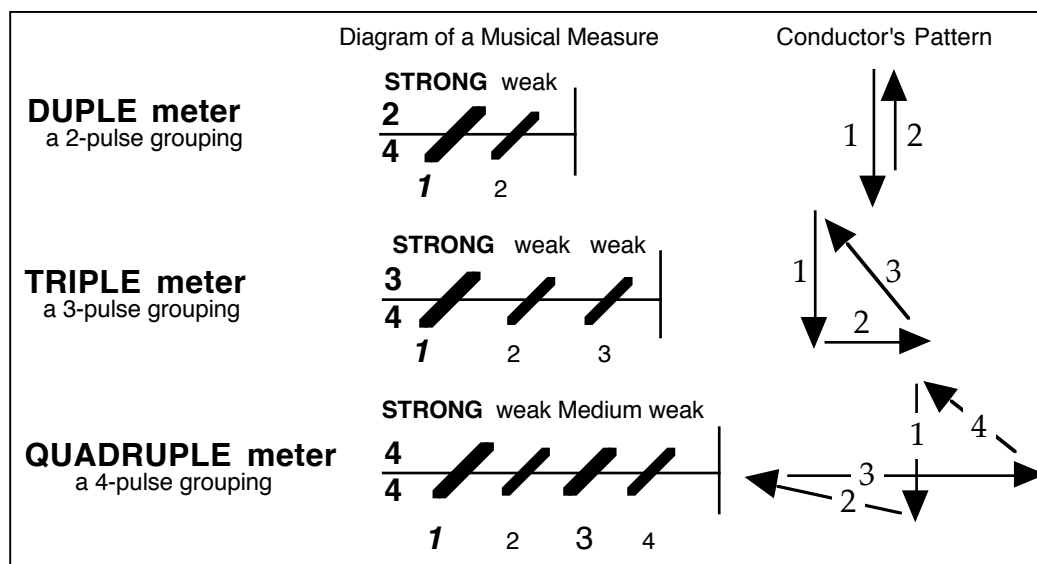
(Note: **Tempo indications** are often designated by Italian terms):

Largo = "large" or labored (slow)
Adagio = slow
Andante = steady "walking" tempo
Moderato = moderate
Allegro = fast ("happy")
Presto = very fast

| | ← SLOWER | | | FASTER → | | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| | Largo | Adagio | Andante | Moderato | Allegro | Presto |
| Beats per minute | 40-65 | 66-75 | 76-107 | 108-119 | 120-167 | 168-208 |

NOTE: These tempos are not specific—but RELATIVE to each other.

- **METER**: **Beats** organized into recognizable/recurring accent patterns. **Meter** can be seen/felt through the standard patterns used by conductors.



Other basic terms relating to **Rhythm** are:

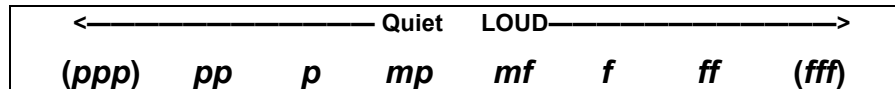
- **Syncopation**: an "off-the-beat" accent (between the counted numbers)
- **Ritardando**: gradually SLOWING DOWN the tempo
- **Accelerando**: gradually SPEEDING UP the tempo
- **Rubato**: freely and expressively making subtle changes in the tempo.
 (a technique commonly encountered in music of the *Romantic* era)

DYNAMICS

All musical aspects relating to the relative loudness (or quietness) of music fall under the general element of DYNAMICS.

The terms used to describe dynamic levels are often in Italian:

| | | | |
|--------------------|------|---|--------------------|
| <i>pianissimo</i> | [pp] | = | (very quiet) |
| <i>piano</i> | [p] | = | (quiet) |
| <i>mezzo-piano</i> | [mp] | = | (moderately quiet) |
| <i>mezzo-forte</i> | [mf] | = | (moderately loud) |
| <i>forte</i> | [f] | = | (loud) |
| <i>fortissimo</i> | [ff] | = | (very loud) |



Other basic terms relating to **Dynamics** are:

Crescendo: gradually getting LOUDER

Diminuendo (or decrescendo) : gradually getting QUIETER

Accent: "punching" or "leaning into" a note harder to temporarily emphasize it.



MELODY

Melody is the LINEAR/HORIZONTAL presentation of **pitch** (the word used to describe the highness or lowness of a musical sound). Many famous musical compositions have a memorable **melody** or **theme**.

THEME: a *melody* that is the basis for an extended musical work

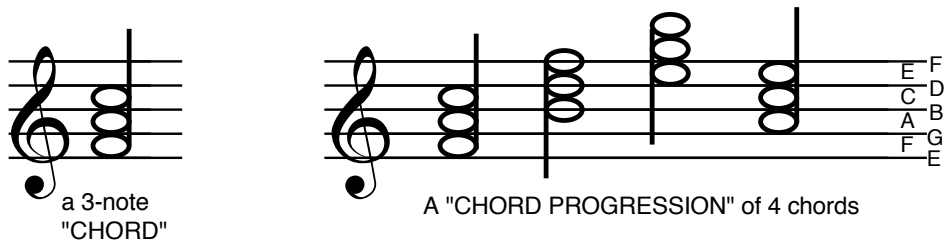
Melodies can be derived from various **scales** (families of pitches) such as the traditional **major** and **minor** scales of **tonal** music, to more unusual ones such as the old church **modes** (of the Medieval and Renaissance periods: c. 500–1600), the **chromatic scale** and the **whole tone scale** (both used in popular and art-music styles of the late 19th and 20th-century periods), or unique scale systems devised in other cultures around the world.

Melodies can be described as:

- **CONJUNCT** (smooth; easy to sing or play)
 - **DISJUNCT** (disjointedly ragged or jumpy; difficult to sing or play).
-

HARMONY

Harmony is the VERTICALIZATION of *pitch*. Often, harmony is thought of as the art of combining pitches into **chords** (several notes played simultaneously as a "block"). These chords are usually arranged into sentence-like patterns called **chord progressions**.



Harmony is often described in terms of its relative HARSHNESS:

- **DISSONANCE:** a harsh-sounding harmonic combination
- **CONSONANCE:** a smooth-sounding harmonic combination

Dissonant chords produce musical "tension" which is often "released" by resolving to **consonant** chords. Since we all have different opinions about consonance and dissonance, these terms are somewhat subjective.

Other basic terms relating to **Harmony** are:

Modality: harmony created out of the ancient Medieval/Renaissance **modes**.

Tonality: harmony that focuses on a "home" **key** center.

Atonality: modern harmony that AVOIDS any sense of a "home" **key** center.

TONE COLOR (or TIMBRE -pronounced "TAM-BER")

If you play a "C" on the piano and then sing that "C", you and the piano have obviously produced the same *pitch*; however, your voice has a different sound quality than the piano. Although the scientific principles of musical acoustics are beyond the scope of this course, it is safe to say that each musical instrument or voice produces its own characteristic pattern of "overtones," which gives it a unique "**tone color**" or **timbre**. Composers use **timbre** much like painters use colors to evoke certain effects on a canvas. For example, the upper **register** (portion of the **range** or **compass**) of a clarinet produces tones that are brilliant and piercing, while its lower register gives a rich and dark timbre. A variety of timbres can also be created by combining instruments and/or voices.

EXAMPLE of ORCHESTRAL TONE COLORS
BRITTEN: *The Young Persons' Guide to the Orchestra*
 See MUSIC GUIDE 1 (page 8)

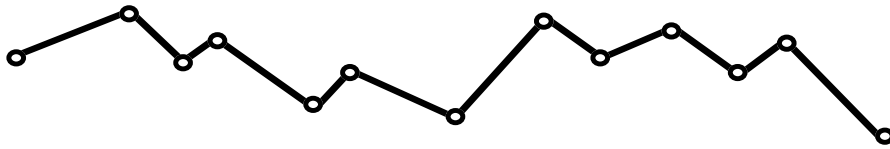
TEXTURE

Texture refers to the number of individual musical lines (melodies) and the relationship these lines have to one another.

NOTE: Be careful not to confuse the number of musical lines with the number of performers producing the musical lines.

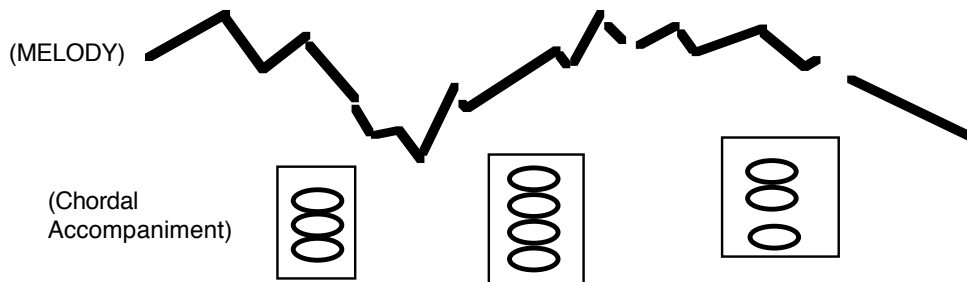
Monophonic (single-note) texture:

Music with only **one note sounding at a time** (having no harmony or accompaniment).



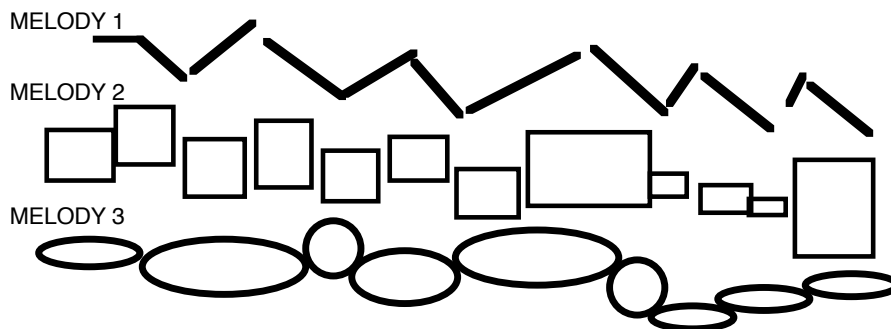
Homophonic texture:

Music with **two or more notes sounding at the same time**, but generally featuring a **prominent melody** in the upper part, **supported by a less intricate harmonic accompaniment** underneath (often based on homogenous chords—BLOCKS of sound).



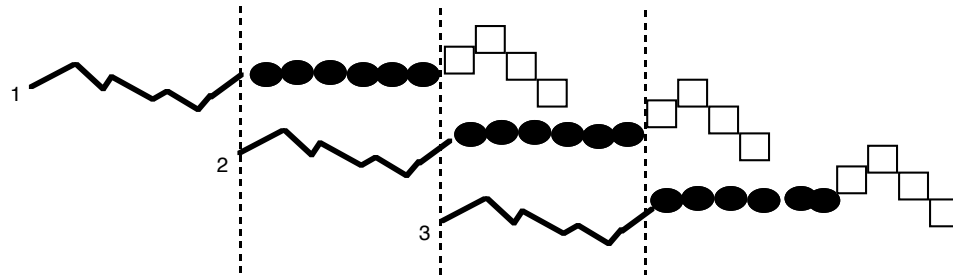
Polyphonic texture:

Music with two or more **independent melodies** sounding at the same time. The most intricate types of polyphonic texture—**canon** and **fugue**—may introduce three, four, five or more independent melodies simultaneously! **This manner of writing is called COUNTERPOINT.**



Imitative texture:

Imitation is a special type of polyphonic texture produced whenever a musical idea is ECHOED from "voice" to "voice". Although imitation can be used in monophonic styles, it is more prevalent in polyphonic art-music—especially from the Renaissance and Baroque periods.



MUSICAL FORM

The large-scale **form** of a musical composition can be projected via any combination of the musical elements previously studied. Traditionally, however, musical form in Western music has been primarily associated with the order of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic events (or the text) in a piece. Letters (*i.e.*, A, B, C) are used to designate musical divisions brought about by the repetition of melodic material or the presentation of new, contrasting material. Some of the most common musical forms are described below:

BASIC FORMS (*more sophisticated forms will be covered later in this book*)

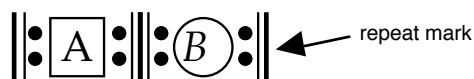
Strophic Form: a design in VOCAL music, in which the same music is used for several different verses (strophes) of words. [Example: "Deck the Halls" has many verses of words sung to the same music.]

Verse 1 . . . Verse 2 . . . Verse 3 (etc.)

Through-composed a structure in which there is no repeat or return of any large-scale musical section. [Example: Schubert's "Erlkönig".]

A B C D E . . .

Binary Form a two-part form in which both main sections are repeated (as indicated in the diagram by "repeat marks"). The basic premise of this form is CONTRAST:



Ternary Form a three-part form featuring a return of the initial music after a contrasting section. Symmetry and balance are achieved through this return of material:



MUSICAL STYLE

Knowing the unique style traits of particular historical eras can greatly enhance your musical experiences by offering clues about what the composer was trying to express, and what you should listen for when hearing a piece.

The Six Historical Style-Periods of Western Art Music:

Middle Ages (approximately 450-1450):

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. Leading composers of the later Middle Ages include Pérotin and Machaut.

Renaissance (approximately 1450-1600):

A more personal style emerged in this era with a greater focus on Humanism, and a rebirth of learning and exploration. During this "golden age of vocal music," the leading composers include Josquin Desprez, Palestrina, and Weelkes.

Baroque (approximately 1600-1750):

This era—the last great age of aristocratic rule—is represented by 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. Great composers of the late Baroque include Vivaldi, Handel and JS Bach.

Classic (approximately 1750-1820):

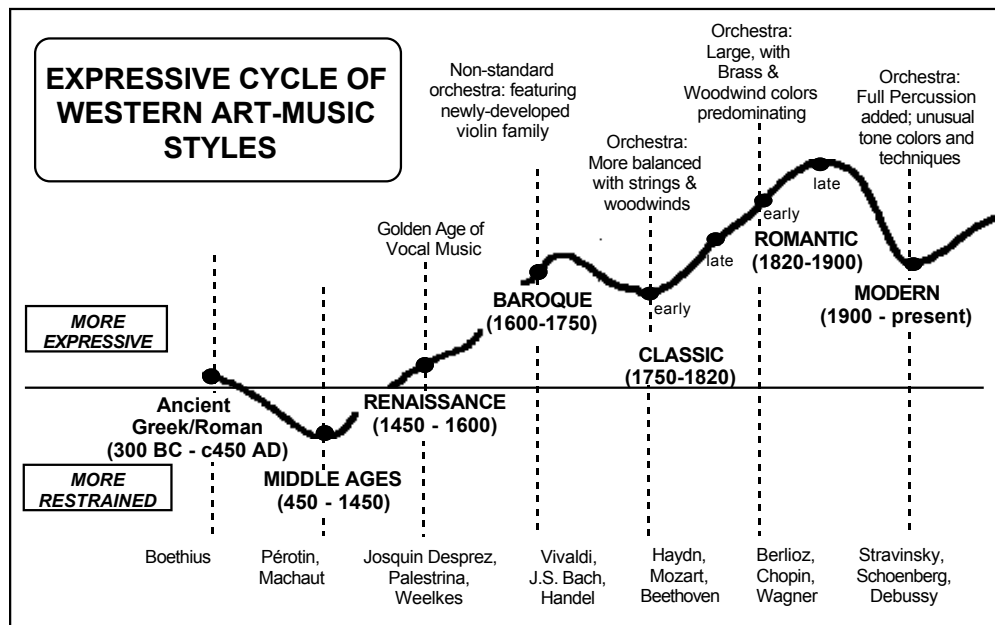
The music of this politically turbulent era focused on structural unity, clarity and balance. The new expressive and dramatic approaches to composition and performance that were developed in this era became the standards that all "Classical" music are judged by. Great composers of the Classic era include Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

Romantic (approximately 1820-1900):

This era witnessed an explosion 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. Among the leading Romantic composers are Berlioz, Chopin, Wagner

Modern (approximately 1900-present):

Since approximately 1900, art-music has been impacted by daring experimentation and advances in musical technology, as well as popular/non-Western influences. Leading composers of the early 20th century were Debussy, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, while many of the most prominent composers since 1950 have come from the US.



Misc.
Orchestral
1934

Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

by Benjamin BRITTEN (1913–76)

Music Guide



Outline of the structure of this work:

Theme (8-measure theme in D minor presented six times to demonstrate the full orchestra and its four main families):

1. Full Orchestra
2. Woodwinds
3. Brass
4. Strings
5. Percussion
6. Full Orchestra

13 Variations (each demonstrating a different instrument or combination of instruments):

Featured Instrument(s)

Accompanied by

Woodwinds:

Variation 1: Flutes and piccolo

Variation 2: Oboes

Variation 3: Clarinets

Variation 4: Bassoons

Violins, harp & triangle

Strings & timpani

Strings & tuba

Strings & snare drum

Strings:

Variation 5: Violins

Variation 6: Violas

Variation 7: Cellos

Variation 8: Double basses

Variation 9: Harp

Brass & bass drum

Woodwinds & brass

Clarinets, viola & harp

Woodwinds & tambourine

Strings, gong & cymbal

Brass:

Variation 10: French horns

Variation 11: Trumpets

Variation 12: Trombones, tuba

Strings, harp & timpani

Strings & snare drum

Woodwinds and high brass

Percussion:

Variation 13: various combinations

- Timpani, bass drum & cymbals
- Timpani, tambourine & triangle
- Timpani, snare drum & wood block
- Timpani, castanets & gong
- Timpani, whip and entire percussion

Fugue (based on a fragment of Purcell's theme, played in imitation by each instrument in order of the previous variations—*woodwinds, strings, brass, percussion, full orchestra*)

Benjamin Britten was the most important British composer of the 20th century. He wrote over 100 major works including operas, songs, string quartets and other chamber works, a violin concerto, choral works, incidental music, symphonies and other orchestral works. Of these, he is best known for the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Op. 34 (1934)—a sixteen minute work designed to introduce listeners to the various instruments and families of the modern orchestra. This work features a **theme and variations** design based on the melodic *theme* from the English Baroque composer Henry Purcell's incidental music to the play *Abdelazar* ("The Moor's Revenge").