Let’s make music simple. Here are the main words of music. Be sure that you fully understand the word you’re looking up, and are able to form sentences of your own using it.

A

A cappella

People singing without instruments.

Accelerando
Italian for "accelerating." To grow faster and faster.

Accent
When you are playing music, to accent a note is to make it stand out from other notes by playing it differently.

Accompaniment
Accompaniment is the music played by instruments that is heard behind the main performer. For example, singers might have "piano accompaniment."

Adagio
At first translated as comfortable, at one's ease, without hurrying, adagio has come to be accepted as the slowest tempo. Adagio is also used as a noun to designate a slow movement or work.

Alla
In the style of -- for example, "alla turca" means in the Turkish style.

Allegro
Italian for "happy." To play a piece in a lively manner, at a fast (but not too fast) pace.

Alto
A vocal range that is usually the lowest female voice in choral music. In choral music, there are 4 classifications of vocal range; soprano (the highest), alto (the next lowest), tenor (the next lowest, usual for a male singer), and bass (a low male voice). Alto is also used to describe the range of many instruments. The range is between F3 and F5.

Andante
Italian for "going." To play a piece at a moderate speed -- not too fast, not too slow.

Amplification

The process of making sound louder.

Arabesque
A short piano composition with extra musical decoration.

Aria
A vocal solo, with instrumental accompaniment, from an opera.

Arpeggio
Playing the notes in a chord quickly one after the other.

Arrangement
Changing a written piece of music so that it can be played by many different instruments.

Atonal
Music that has no key. All the notes are treated as equal.

B Bagatelle

A short, lively piece of music, usually for piano.

Ballad
A slow song that tells a story.

Ballet
A theatrical performance that tells a story using music, costumes, sets, and dance.

Banjo
A string instrument that is like a guitar, but smaller and round. A banjo has five strings, and they make different notes when plucked.

Bar
A made-up way of breaking down a piece of music into evenly spaced breaks. This makes navigating a piece of music easier (for instance, we can say to a whole orchestra, 'turn to page 6, bar 89 and let's go!). A bar is composed of a certain number of beats. The number and type of beats is denoted by the 'Time Signature'. Also called a measure.

Barcarole
A boating song from Venice that sounds like the rhythm of rowing a boat. e.g. "Les contes d' Hoffmann" by Jacques Offenbach

Baritone
A deep male voice, lower than tenor and higher than bass. In choral music, there are 4 main classifications of vocal range; soprano (the highest), alto (the next lowest), tenor (the next lowest,

usual for a male singer), and bass (a low male voice). Baritone sits between bass and tenor. From A2 to A4 on a piano.

Baroque
The period of music from around 1600 to 1750. Bach, Vivaldi, and Handel were famous Baroque composers. Collections of music from the Baroque period.

Bass
The lowest male voice. The word bass is also used to describe the lowest instruments.

Bass Clef
The bass clef is the bottom five lines in a piece of music, which make the lowest notes. The sign for the bass clef is a backward C followed by two dots.

Bass Drum
The largest drum. It stands upright and is hit on the side. It is used in both orchestras and marching bands.

Bassoon
A long, narrow woodwind instrument with a double reed. Blowing in it makes the reed move quickly and makes sound. The sound can be changed by opening and closing small holes on the sides.

Baton
A stick used by conductors to guide the musicians or singers.

Beat
A regular pulse that runs underneath a piece of music. Time is counted in music by using beats.

Bourrée
A quick French dance.

Bow
A stick with horsehair stretched along it, that is used to play instruments like the violin.

Brass
Family of wind instruments made of metal with a cup-shaped mouthpiece (the part you blow in). Examples of brass instruments are the trumpet, trombone and tuba.

C

Cadence
The notes at the end of a song. A cadence usually consists of two chords that provide musical punctuation at the end of a phrase.

Cadenza
A part near the end of a song where the performer plays by himself to show off his/her skill.

Canon
A song made up of different parts that copy each other. Each part uses the same notes, but they start one after the other until everyone is playing a different part of the song at the same time.

Cantata
A musical work sung by a choir with instrumental accompaniment and solo voices.

Canzone or canzona
A song whose words come from medieval poems. They may be sung with musical instruments playing in the background.

Capriccio
A type of music that is short, fast and humorous.

Carillon
Bells in a church tower that are played like an organ.

Celesta
An instrument that is played by striking a key (like a piano), which in turn, makes a hammer hit a flat steel bar to produce the sound.

Cello
An instrument with four strings, that is played by sitting behind the instrument and placing it between your legs with the bottom of the instrument resting on the floor. It plays medium to low notes by drawing a bow across the strings or plucking them.

Chaconne
Originally a French dance, chaconne now refers to a piece of music where chords are played over and over again, but keep getting higher and higher.

Chamber Music
Music written to be played by a small group of people in a small, private room. Today, chamber music is still played by small groups of three or four musicians, but it is played at larger concerts.

Chamber Orchestra
A small orchestra that plays in small concert halls.

Chanson
French for "song." Usually refers to an old French part song, similar to a madrigal.

Choir
A group of singers who perform together.

Chord
When three or more notes are played at the same time.

Chorus
1. A group of singers. 2. The music for a group of singers. 3. The section of a song that is repeated, usually after a verse. For example, in the song ‘Sorry’ by Justin Bieber, the chorus is the repeating part that begins with the words ‘Is it too late now to say Sorry...’

Chromatic
A music scale made up of 12 notes, each a semitone apart. For example, on the piano a chromatic scale is played by playing each white and black key between two notes with the same letter name.

Clarinet
A long, black woodwind instrument that has a mouthpiece with one reed and keys down the sides. You play a clarinet by blowing in the mouthpiece and moving the reed. The sound changes by pressing on the keys.

Classical
The term "classical" is often used to describe non-contemporary music or contemporary music that is not rock, pop, jazz or another style. However, there is also a Classical era in music history that includes compositions written from about 1750 to 1825. Music from this period is orderly, balanced and clear.

Clavichord
A keyboard instrument whose sound is made when hitting a key causes metal pins to hit the strings inside the instrument.

Clef
A sign put at the start of each line of a piece of music. The clef tells you what pitch the notes on the stave (staff) are in.

Coda
Italian for "tail." A passage added to the final section of a movement or piece of music to give a feeling of ending.

Coloratura
Very fancy vocal music that is sung by a woman with a high voice.

Concert
When any group of musicians plays in front of people.

Concertante
A part of a piece of music written so that a person can show off how good they are at playing an instrument.

Concertmaster
The principal violinist designated as the leader of an orchestra.

Concerto
A piece of music in which one or more solo instruments alternate with the larger orchestra, providing contrast and a the opportunity for virtuoso (fancy and impressive) performance. A concerto can be written for any instrument or groups of instruments.

Conductor
The person who makes sure that everyone in the orchestra or choir is playing or singing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. They stand in front of the orchestra and direct them when they play each song.

Consonance
A combination of sounds that give a pleasing effect, with a feeling of satisfation and rest.

Consort
A group of instruments of the same family or a group of singers or instrumentalists performing together.

Continuo
A way to play instruments together so they sound good. One instrument plays the bass line (the low notes), while other instruments play music that go along with the bass line.

Counterpoint
When there are two or more different sounding tunes in the same piece of music.

Countertenor
A male voice that is higher than a tenor. A countertenor sounds very similar to a female voice.

Crescendo
Italian for growing louder.

Cymbals
Circular metal instruments that are hit together to make sound. They can also be hit one at a time with a drumstick. The different sizes of the cymbals make different sounds, so a smaller one does not sound like a larger one.

D

Dampener/Damper

Two words for the same thing. A piece of soft material, usually felt, which sits on the string of a piano to stop it vibrating. The damper automatically rises when a note on the piano is pressed, allowing the string to vibrate and sound to be made. When a note is released, the damper falls, thus stopping the vibration and ending the note.

Decrescendo
Italian for "growing softer.”

Digital Piano

As pictured on the right, the digital piano is essentially an electronic keyboard in a wooden box. They tend to have better quality speakers, and weighted keys.

Diminuendo
Play softer. See Dynamics.

Dissonance
A harsh or disagreeable combination of sounds, or a combination of sounds that creates a feeling of tension needing to be resolved. Literally comes from the Latin word Dissonare meaning 'disagreeing'.

Divertissement
A song made up of pieces and arrangements of other well-known songs. Also called a 'mash up'.

Dolce
Italian for "sweet."

Downbeat
When the conductor moves his baton down to show which notes to accent.

Drum
Percussion instrument on which sound is made by hitting a skin pulled across a hollow space on a round frame with a stick (called a drumstick). There are lots of kinds of drums, and they all sound different depending on their size and shape.

Duet
A piece of music written for two performers.

Duo
Two singers or musicians.

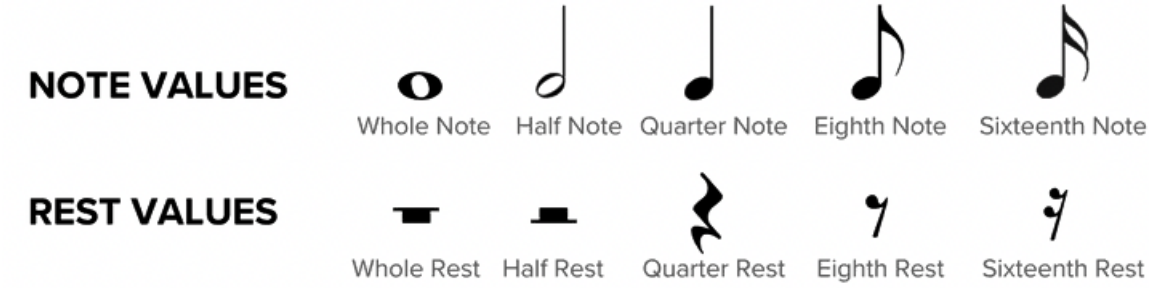
Dynamics
How loudly or softly to play a piece of music. Comes from the Greek word Dynakios meaning 'Power'. Here is a table of the most common dynamic terms and their symbols and meanings.

Dynamic Range
1. The range of acceptable or possible volumes of sound occurring in the course of a piece of music or a performance. 2. The range of possible volumes of sound an instrument or sound system can make from quiet to loud. Bigger ranges meaning a bigger span of volume possibility.

E

Eighth Note
A note that lasts 1/8 the duration of a whole note. See below chart for relative note lengths and rest lengths (periods of time where you don't play), and how to write them.

Term	Symbol:	Effect:
pianissimo	*pp*	very soft
piano	*p*	soft
mezzo piano	*mp*	moderately soft
mezzo forte	*mf*	slightly loud
forte	*f*	loud
fortissimo	*ff*	very loud
fortepiano	*fp*	loud then soft
sforzando	*sfz*	sudden accent
crescendo	<	gradually louder
diminuendo	>	gradually softer



Encore
French for "again." The call for a performer to continue playing at the end of a concert. Also the name for an additional piece of music, not listed in the program, that is played at the end of a concert.

Ensemble
A group of people singing or playing together.

Etude
French for "study." A piece of music originally intended to help a practice an instrument.

Expression

The life we breathe into music. It's not what is played, it is *how* it is played. **F**

Fanfare
A flourish of trumpets, or other instruments imitating a group of trumpets making an announcement.

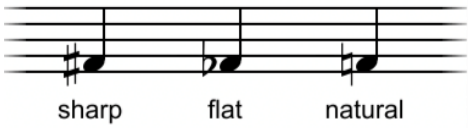
Fiddle
Another word for violin.

Finale
Italian for "end." The final part of a piece of music.

Fingerwork
The movement and positioning of your fingers on an instrument such that you can play a piece of music smoothly and comfortably.

Flat
A symbol (b) put in front of a written note in a piece of music to lower it by one semitone. All of the black notes on a piano are named after white notes, and have two names. They are sharps of the white note immediately below them, and they are ALSO flats of the white notes immediately above them. For example the black note one semitone higher than F is F# or F sharp, and is also G flat, as it is a semitone lower than G.

Flub
A slang word for a mistake.

Flute
A thin woodwind instrument held sideways to the mouth. It is played by blowing across the mouthpiece. The notes are played by pressing small keys.

Flutist
A person who plays the flute.

Form
The pattern of a piece of music.

Forte
Italian for “loud.” See Dynamics.

Fortissimo
Italian for "very loud.” See Dynamics.

Frequency
How many times an objects vibrates per second. It is measured in Hertz, written Hz, (named after a German dude Heinrich Hertz). For example, a string vibrating at 88 vibrations per second, would have a frequency of 88Hz.

Fugue
A composition with two or more voices or parts, in which the melody (called the subject), is played

by one voice/part and then replayed and modified by the other voices/parts. There are usually from two to five voices or parts.

G

Glissando
A rapid succession of notes, often played on the piano or harp by sliding the fingers quickly over the keys or strings.

Gong
A metal disc with a turned down rim that makes a loud, booming sound when struck with a mallet.

Grave
Italian for "slow and serious."

Grazioso
Italian for "graceful."

Gregorian chant
Church music with no rhythm and no harmony. Sung without music by a number of people. Named for Pope Gregory.

H

Half Note

A note that is played for half the time of a whole note. See chart on page 8.

Harmony
A collection of sounds that sound good together. We use scales to learn which notes sound good together. Comes from the latin word Harmonia meaning ‘agreement’.

Harp
1. A string instrument that dates back to 3500 BC. The modern harp has a large triangular frame with strings stretched vertically across the triangle. The strings are graduated in length, from longest/lowest pitches to shortest/highest, and there are foot pedals that can be used to raise the pitch of each string by a semitone. The sound is created by pucking the strings with the fingers.
2. The name given to the metal frame inside a piano, which looks like a harp laid on it’s side.

Harpsichord
A keyboard instrument that was an ancestor of the piano. When the keys are pressed, the strings are plucked by quills. Because of this, it is nearly impossible to make changes in dynamics (volume) playing the harpsichord.

Homophonic
Melody backed up by chords. All the notes are moving the same way, accompanying the same melody.

Hymn
A church song of praise.

I

Impressionism
A term transferred from painting to music. Instead of lifelike paintings with hard outlines, Impressionist artists used dots, or shades of colour to create the "impression" of a scene on canvas. Musical Impressionists used different chord combinations and scales to try and capture the same kind of mood in their compositions.

Improvisation
The art of composing music while performing it, without the help of a written score.

Incidental Music
Background music for a play, movie, or television show. It is used to set the mood and illustrate the action, and further the communication of the scene.

Instrument
An object used to make music. There three basic kinds of instruments: wind instruments, which use air to make the sound; percussion instruments, which involve something being hit to make the sound; and instruments with strings that are plucked or played with a bow.

Instrumentation
1. The act of writing music for an instrument. 2. Often used synonymously with ‘orchestration’ (which is the act of composing a piece of music for an orchestra, or adaptin

existing piece of music for an orchestra, done by writing each instrument’s part one a time, and fitting each part with the others such that all parts sound good and complete when all played together).

Interlude
1. A piece of music played between two other larger sections. 2. Music played between acts in a play or opera.

Intermezzo
Italian for "interlude."

Interval
The difference between two pitches. For example, pitches that are two steps apart (on a scale) are called seconds. Seconds, thirds, sixths, and sevenths exist as both major and minor intervals, the minor intervals being a semitone smaller than the major ones.

J

Jack

The hole which a plug is inserted into on electrical devices. For example the headphone jack is the hole a headphone plug is inserted into. It is the hole, not the plug.

Janissary music
The music of Turkish ensembles of wind and percussion instruments during the Ottoman Empire.

The instruments such as cymbals, triangles and bass drums - sounded very exotic to European ears and were used by composers such as Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven.

Jazz
American-born music that uses syncopation, altered scales (learned in the 'Scales Masterclass' programme on RidleyAcademy), specific harmonies, and improvisation.

Jig
An old, quick dance. The music in the second half of the dance is a variation on the music from the first half.

K

Kettle Drum

The only drum that can be tuned to produce definite pitches. The name comes from the large kettle-shaped bottom, over which the skin of the drumhead is stretched. The player uses a pedal to tighten and loosen the drumhead to change the pitch. Also called timpani.

Key
1. The scale on which a piece of music is based. The key gets its name from the first note of the scale. 2. The name for a lever that is pressed to play or control pitches on some instruments.

Key Signature
Sharps and flats written at the beginning of each staff of written music that indicate the scale, or key, in which the piece is written. So you know what notes you can and cannot play in the piece.

Keyboard
1. The levers on a piano or organ that the player hits with his or her fingers to make sound. 2. The name given to an electronic piano, which produces sound using keys which hit sensors which activate an in-built computer, and tell it to play the appropriate 'sample' (an audio recording of an instrument), or synthetic audio file (a computer-generated-imitation of the acoustic sound). Keyboards can play thousands of different instrument sounds.

L **Larghetto**

Italian for a slow movement in a piece of music. Not as slow as Largo.

Largo
Italian for 'consequently slow'. It's at a pace which suggest seriousness, and morbidity.

Lento

Italian for 'slow', not as slow as largo.

Legato
To play notes smoothly, without stopping between notes.

Leggero (Leggiero) Italian for 'lightly'

Leitmotif
These terms are used in opera and musicals. A motif is a musical phrase or 'theme', of any length of form, that represents a person, action or idea (e.g. when the witch walks on the stage, there's a certain musical phrase that plays that's haunting. Another great example would be the motif used in Mission Impossible to introduce the lead character.) A leitmotif is a repeating of this motif later, to remind the listener of it's earlier dramatic associations. So every time we hear the dramatic mission impossible strings jabs, we know something suspenseful and exciting is about to occur! This can be effectively used in non-theatrical music just as easily, for example in the choruses of pop songs, such as the instrumental phrase that comes in the chorus of the Justin Bieber song 'Sorry' after each line ('is it too late now to say sorry' *leitmotif*)

Libretto
The words of an opera, written in a little book.

Lid

A piano lid, is a sheet of wood which acts to either suppress sound waves from leaving the piano (thus making it quieter), or used to direct sound waves in a specific direction (towards the audience typically).

L'istesso tempo
L'istesso tempo, the same speed, is found as an instruction to the player to return to the previous speed of the music.

Lute
An old string instrument that you pluck. It is smaller than a guitar and has a body shaped like a pear. It was used mostly in medieval Europe.

M

Madrigal
A kind of vocal music, sung from the 1200s to the 1500s. These songs were based on poems about love and country life.

Maestro
Italian word for 'master', in the sense of 'one who is in control'. It is a term which refers to one who is a very skilled in an artistic subject, often referring to a teacher, or professional in the arts. Interestingly, the word was also used historically to denote the leader of a group.

Major
A type of scale; a series of notes. The pattern of a major scale is easy to learn. Just take any note, this would be the 'key note' (the note which indicates which 'key' our scale is going to be in). Then play the following sequence up the piano; tone, tone, semitone, tone, tone, tone, semitone.
(a semitone is the smallest possible movement you can make on a piano, i.e. there are no notes in between them. Examples: C up to C sharp, or C down to B are both movement of one semitone. A tone is just two semitones. e.g. C to D, or E to F sharp, or G flat to A flat)
**Important; watch the Scales section of the Piano Masterclass for a full explanation with video!*

Mandolin
A string instrument like the lute, but with a neck like a guitar. The neck is shorter, but the mandolin is played like a guitar.

March
Music used in parades. A march keeps to a rigid, repeated, evenly-spaced count (for example, "1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4") so that everyone moves at the same time.

Marimba
A percussion instrument from Mexico, the marimba is like the xylophone, but has wood boxes that you hit with a mallet.

Masterclass
An in-depth class which aims to really make someone able in a subject, as opposed to a superficial teaching which is just cute or interesting.

Measure
This is the space between two lines drawn through the music staff. You can tell how fast or slow a piece of music is by looking at how many beats there are in a measure.

Melody
Notes that are played one after the other to make a tune.

Meter
The rhythmic pattern or 'flow' made in music by putting together strong and weak beats.

Metronome
A tool to help a musician count the right number of beats. A little rod swings back and forth to count each beat. The speed of the metronome is set to the speed of the piece of music.

Mezzo
Italian for half. Examples: mezzoforte (written: *mf*) means half loud or moderately loud ('forte' means 'loud' in Italian); and mezzopiano (written: *mp*) means half soft or moderately soft ('piano' means 'soft' or 'quiet' in Italian).

Microphone
An electronic device that people speak, sing or play into that helps make sounds louder on radio, TV, and for concerts. Also used to help record sounds on tapes and CDs.

Middle C
The note C in the middle of the keyboard. On a piano or full sized keyboard, it is the fourth C on the piano, when counting from the lowest, or 'C4'.

MIDI Keyboard

MIDI is an acronym for 'Musical Instrument Digital Interface' (an interface is a computing term for a device which allows as user to communicate something to a computer).
Therefore a MIDI keyboard is simply a piano keyboard which allows a user to send information to a computer, i.e. what note they are playing, what velocity they are pressing the note, how long they are holding the note. They typically don't have speakers built in to them and produce no sound

directly. MIDI keyboards are used together with music production software. They are used to tell that software the musical information the musician is sending, via the MIDI keyboard.

Minor
A type of scale; a series of notes. The pattern of a minor scale is easy to learn. Just take any note, this would be the 'key note' (the note which indicates which 'key' our scale is going to be in). Then play the following sequence up the piano; tone, semitone, tone, tone, semitone, tone, tone.
(a semitone is the smallest possible movement you can make on a piano, i.e. there are no notes in between them. Examples: C up to C sharp, or C down to B are both movement of one semitone. A tone is just two semitones. e.g. C to D, or E to F sharp, or G flat to A flat)
**Important; watch the Scales section of the Piano Masterclass for a full explanation with video!*

Minstrel
A musician in the Middle Ages.

Minuet
A slow, graceful dance in 3⁄4 time that started in the 1700's in the French court. Gradually, the minuet began to be used as a musical form, especially as the third movement of symphonies.

Mode
A fancy word for Scale (see Scale).

Monophony
Having a single unaccompanied melody

Movement
A section within a larger musical work. It is usually self-contained and separated by silence from other sections.

Music
Sound organised by using 4 elements; melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre.

Musicology
The study of music.

Mute
The name of different tools used to soften the tone of instruments. For example, a drum mute is a piece of cloth spread over the top of the drum, and horn mutes are put in the bell so the sound is more quiet. On an upright piano, it is a piece of felt that can be lowered by pressing the left pedal, such that the felt sits between the hammer and the strings, dampening the vibrations.

N Natural

A sign used to cancel a sharp or flat symbol, so that the note that was sharp or flat is now natural.

Neoclassical
Literally means new classical, where modern composers write music in forms used during the Classical era of music.

Nocturne
A dream-like piece of music written for the piano, suggestive of the night. It comes from a painting term. In painting, a nocturne is a night scene. The composer Chopin wrote a very famous Nocturne called 'Nocturne No.2'.

Nonet
A fancy word used by pretentious people. It's just piece of music for nine instruments.

Notation
The symbols used to represent music when writing it down, such that we can communicate to other musicians how to play a song, and so other musicians can tell us how to play a song too.

Note
An specific individual unit of sound, or the symbol used to write it down. The easiest way to understand what a note is, is to press a piano key - that's a note! Good, now press a different key, that's a different note! You can sing a note, you can play a note. It's just an individual unit of sound.

O

Oboe
A woodwind instrument with a double reed at the tip. Sound is made when a person blows through the mouthpiece, and sounds are changed by pushing down keys.

Octave
An octave is a distance of 12 semitones, or 6 tones. A piano is best divided up into octaves, and this is what we do. In this way the piano doesn't have 88 notes to learn, but rather one 12 semitone pattern, which repeats and repeats up the piano.

Octet
A piece of music for eight instruments.

Opera
A play set to orchestral music in which the characters sing all their lines. Operas can also contain orchestral overtures and interludes as well as choruses.

Opera Bouffe
French for comic opera. This is a light, funny kind of opera.

Opera Buffa
Italian for comic opera. This is a light, funny kind of opera.

Opera Comique
French opera with spoken words, instead of singing.

Opera Seria
Serious opera. These operas are about heroes and myths.

Operetta
Like opera, an operetta is a play set to music in which the characters sing. However, in opera everything is sung. In operetta, there are spoken lines between the singing.

Opus
Opus means work. It is used by those who write music to keep their music in order. For example, their first piece of music might be called Opus 1, and their second might be Opus 2.

Oratorio
A piece of music for vocal soloists, chorus, and orchestra, that is usually based on a religious story, often with text from the Bible.

Orchestra
A mixed group of instruments, with a large number of string instruments, and wind and percussion too.

Orchestration
Putting together an arrangement of a piece of music for all the different instruments in the orchestra.

Organ
A keyboard instrument with many pipes made to sound by forcing air through them, and controlled by keyboards and pedals. Also called a pipe organ. Organs are used a lot in churches.

Overture
A piece of music played at the beginning of a play, opera or ballet in order to set the mood; also, an orchestral concert piece written as a single movement. These are also used in movies like the intro theme to James Bond, or Mission Impossible, which set a tone of suspense, excitement, danger and adventure.

Overturn

Simply a movement where the hand passes over the thumb when playing piano. There are 2 overturns, the first is when moving up a piano with the left hand. The second is when moving down the piano with the right hand.

P Part

The music that each person plays as a member of an ensemble.

Pastorale
Musical works about country life, often imitating the instruments and music of shepherds.

Pedals

On a piano there are 2 or 3 pedals; levers made to be pressed with the feet. Each pedal produces a different effect on the sound the piano makes. The easiest way to understand what each pedal does is to play a small phrase without the pedal, then press the pedal and see what difference it makes. Generally the right-most piano sustains the note (causes it to go on and on, by lifting the damper off the string, and allowing it to continue vibrating and thus producing sound). The left pedal tends to be a soft pedal, which softens the sound.

Pentatonic
A pentatonic scale only has five notes (unlike the major and minor scales, which have eight notes). Covered and taught in the Scales Masterclass.

Percussion
All instruments that are played by being hit with something are percussion instruments.

Philharmonic / Philharmonia
The adjective 'philharmonic' and noun 'philharmonia' are generally used as titles by orchestras or by music-loving societies of one sort or another. The words have no other technical meaning.

Phrase
A complete musical thought.

Pianissimo
Italian for "very soft." Written *pp* in written music, and it means to play very very quietly.

Piano
1. Italian for "soft" or "quiet." 2. A stringed keyboard instrument. Its strings are struck by hammers which are connected to the keys. There are 88 keys on a modern piano, and each one is a different note. Originally called pianoforte, because it could play both soft (piano) and loud (forte).

Piano Four Hands
Music composed for two people to play at one keyboard.

Pianoforte
An old name for the piano. This is because it can make both soft (piano) and loud (forte) sounds.

Piccolo
Italian for "little" (short for flauto piccolo, or little flute). A small flute that sounds an octave higher than a regular flute.

Pitch
How high or low a musical sound is.

Pizzicato
Italian for "pinched." To pluck, instead of bow, the strings of an instrument.

Polka
A lively dance in 2/4 time from Bohemia.

Polyphony
Music that has two or more independent melodies woven together. Also called counterpoint. Polyphony comes from the Greek words meaning "many voices."

Postlude
Traditionally used to mean a piece of music, many times played on the organ, to end a church service. Now often used to mean any ending/outro music.

Practise

The physical action of learning a song through persistence and repetition. It requires doing, not thinking about it. Effective practise is initially done at a much slower speed than the final performance, to give the musician time to work out what to do, whilst preserving the musical structure of the piece they are learning. The difference between practise and failure is giving up. If you don't give up you can't fail. If you persist, you will get it. Success is achieved by persistent practise. See the 'Practise like a pro' section to learn how to most effectively practise music.

Prelude
A musical introduction. Used in many different kinds of music. Organ preludes often introduce church services; instrumental preludes typically introduce operas; and movies often open with a prelude. They are used to set the scene and emotion of what is to follow.

Presto
Italian for 'quickly'. It means play fast!

Principal
The best player in a section of the orchestra. For example, there is a principal violinist and a principal flutist.

Q Quaver

A British term for an eighth note (a note length 1⁄8 of a whole note). See the chart on page 8.
Quarter Note

A note that is played for 1/4 the time of a whole note. See the chart on page 8.

Quartet
A piece of music written for four instruments (or the four musicians who play it).

Quintet
A piece of music for five instruments.

R

Ragtime
Music that uses syncopated rhythms -- that is, the accents in the melody are shifted away from the count (the even pulses, called 'beats' which underpin the song).

Rallentando
A gradual slowing of the tempo

Recital
A performance given by one musician or by a musician or singer with piano accompaniment.

Recitative
Where music imitates speaking.

Recorder
A woodwind instrument. It is held pointed down and blown into through a mouthpiece. By covering and uncovering holes on the recorder, the player can make different notes.

Reed
A thin piece of cane or metal that vibrates when air is blown over it. Used in woodwind instruments to make sound.

Refrain
Like a chorus, but for instrumental music.

Renaissance
French for "rebirth." The period of music history from around 1400 to the early 1600s that coincided with a revival of interest in art, architecture, literature, and learning throughout Europe.

Rest
Rests have the same time value as notes. When a rest is written in a piece of music, it means that the player pauses (stops playing) for that amount of time (the length of time indicated by the rest) before playing the next note.

Resonance
Literally comes from two words; re- (again) and sonus (sound). Is is the make sound again. Or to put it more precisely, it is the reinforcement (strengthening of) or prolongation of sound by reflection from a surface or by the synchronous vibration of a neighbouring object. Explained in the 'Orientation of a Piano' section of the Ridley Academy Piano Masterclass.

Reverb

Short for reverberation.

Reverberation

1. The persistence of a sound after the sound has been produced, through reflection of sound waves off hard surfaces, and then the eventual decaying of the sound as these waves eventually become absorbed or exhausted by various points in the environment. Larger spaces with harder surfaces will produce greater reverb. 2. An electronic reproduction of that effect.

Rhapsody
A free-form piece that takes different tunes and strings them together.

Rhythm
Rhythm simply states 1. When to play a note 2. How long to play them and 3. Which ones to stress. In other words, it is the pattern of musical movement through time, formed by a series of notes differing in duration and stress.

Romanticism
Romantic music came into its own at the beginning of the 19th century. Music from this era sounds almost boundless and free from any limitations of form. Much of this music uses sound describe something, perhaps a scene in nature, a story, or a particular feeling.

Rondo
Rondo is an Italian word that means round. A rondo is an form of instrumental music, with a refrain (chorus) that keeps coming back, and verses in between each refrain. Unlike the verses of a song, though, the music in a rondo changes between each repetition of the refrain.

Round
A round is a song with several melodies. One melody is started, and then another is started, and another. The melodies are sung over and over, and then end on the same note.

Rubato
Rubato (Italian: stolen) is a direction to the player to employ a measure of freedom in performance. It is nonchalant and carefree.

S

Scale
A series of notes played one after the other, either from the lowest note to the highest note or from the highest note to the lowest note. There are many different scales. Scales used to teach musicians which notes can be used together to give a specific emotional sound. For example the 'Major Scale' (a type of scale) is simply a collection of notes that when played together produce an emotion of happiness or inspiration or hope. By learning a Major scale, the musician learns which notes they can and cannot play in order to produce this emotion in their music.

Scherzo
An Italian word that means joke. It is a quick, fun piece of music.

Score
A copy of a piece of music that has the parts for all the instruments on it. This is what the conductor looks at.

Semitone

The smallest movement possible on a piano (i.e. where there is no other key in between). It is equal to 1/12 of an octave, and is the smallest movement possible on most western instruments. Examples of a semitone would be a movement from E up to F, or from E down to E flat.

Sempre

Sempre (Italian: always) is found in directions to performers, as in sempre piano ('always soft').

Senza

Senza (Italian: without) is found in directions to performers, particularly in phrases such as senza sordino ('without mute').

Septet
A piece of music for seven instruments.

Serenade
1. A piece of music written for an evening performance, usually outdoors (as opposed to

an Aubade which is a song written to be performed in the morning). 2. A piece of music in honour of someone or something. 3. (verb) To sing romantically to someone you love

Sextet
A piece of music for six instruments (or the musicians who play them).

Sharp
A symbol (#) used in written music, which raises a note by a semitone when put in front of it. A sharp note sounds a little higher than a regular
one. All of the black notes on a piano are named
after white notes, and have two names. They are
sharps of the white note immediately below them,
and they are ALSO flats of the white notes
immediately above them. For example the black note one semitone higher than F is F# or F sharp, and is also G flat, as it is a semitone lower than G.

Sinfonia
Italian for "symphony."

Snare Drum
A small double-sided drum with skin pulled tight over the top and the bottom. Metal wires (called snares) are stretched across the bottom skin, and rattle when the drum is struck.

Solo
A piece of music (part of a composition or a whole composition) written for a single voice or instrument.

Sonata
A piece of instrumental music written to be performed by a soloist usually, but not necessarily, consisting of several musical sections called ‘movements’.

Song
A short piece of music written for a solo voice, with or without accompaniment.

Soprano
A woman or boys highest range of singing voice; also, a person having this voice. It ranges from C4 on a piano up to C6 and beyond.

Sostenuto

Italian for sustained. 1. In a piece of written music, it means to play in a prolonged and sustained manner. 2. It is the name given to the pedal on a piano which produces this effect by lifting the dampers from the strings, allowing them to go on vibrating. Usually this is the pedal on the right.

Sound

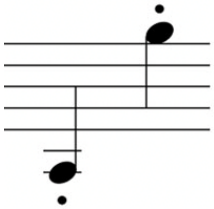
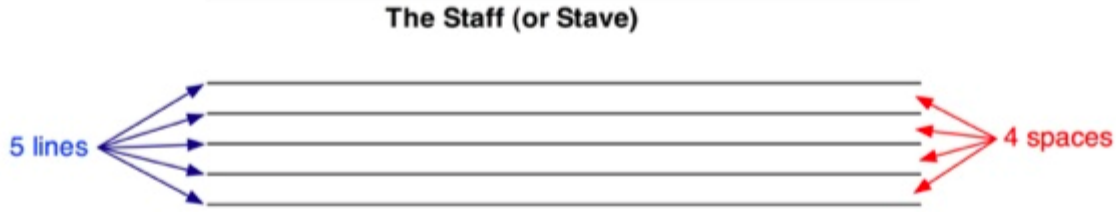
Vibrations (movements back and forth) that travel through the air or another medium and can be heard when they reach an ear.

Soundboard

A thin sheet of wood over which the strings of a piano or similar instrument are positioned to increase the sound produced, explained in full in the 'Orientation of a Piano' section of the Ridley Academy Piano Masterclass.

Spiritual
Music which reminds us who we are.

Staccato
A direction in musical composition telling musicians to play short, sharp, disconnected notes. Press a piano note as if it was very hot, this would be staccato! It is written by placing a dot above or below the note.

Staff
Also called a stave. A set of five lines and four spaces on which notes are written to indicate their pitch. A clef at the beginning of the staff tells which notes are on which lines.



Stage Piano

A type of keyboard, designed for pianists who play on stages and tour around and for whom having an acoustic piano would be a pretty inconvenient. Rather than having 5000 different sounds, a stage piano focuses on imitating an acoustic piano as best as possible, so typically has high-quality audio samples (recordings of a real piano played when keys are pressed), and weighted keys.

String
A classification of instruments. A string instrument has strings (wires or cords) that are plucked or picked or played with a bow. It also has a hollow body to make the sound bigger. Some string instruments are the guitar, violin, harp, and cello.

Suite
An ordered set of instrumental pieces that people dance to.
Historically, for example The Baroque suite, was a series of pieces of music which each had their own dance. People learned these dances, and then came together to do them together.
In modern times, DJs often design their performances into suites; where multiple songs are played one after the other which each induce a specific dance.

Symphony
An extended and elaborate work for orchestra, consisting of several movements (musical sections).

The symphony became the chief vehicle of orchestral music in the late 18th century. From the greek words *sun*- 'together' + *phōnē* 'sound.

Syncopation
1. Where the accented notes (i.e. the stressed notes) fall in unexpected places (before or after the beat of the music). It is extremely powerful; making music more interesting, giving it swing, and causes people to dance.
Tambourine
A small drum with pieces of metal on the sides. To play it, a person shakes, or hits with their hand.

T Tempo

The speed of a piece of music

Tenor
The highest natural adult male singing voice; also, a person having this voice. Ranging from C3 to C5 on a piano.

Tensile strength

The resistance of a material to breaking under tension.

Tension
1. (noun) the state of being stretched tight. 2. (verb) apply a force to something which tends to stretch it. It comes from the Latin word 'tendere' which meant 'stretch'.

Ternary Form
A piece of music for voice or instrument with three different sections.

Theme
A melody in a piece of music that is shorter than a movement. It is often repeated.

Theremin
An early electronic musical instrument controlled without physical contact by the performer. The device was originally called the etherphone, based on the method it used to convey sound

through the disruption of electronic current. It came to be named after the westernized name of its Russian inventor, Léon Theremin, who patented the device in 1928.

Timbre
The quality or colour of sound that makes one voice or instrument different from another. For example, a guitar, a child and a trumpet could all produce the same note, but they would have very different timbres. In composition, you can use instruments with the same timbres to emphasise a certain feeling in the music. For example, Enya uses breathy vocals, and airy electronic sounds, to create a dreamy feel. A lot of rock music uses very harsh tones, and distortion to produce a gritty, dirty feel. You can also mix different timbres to produce musical contrast in a piece of music. There are no rules. Just do what you think sounds good and enjoy!

Timing
The choice, judgement, or control of when something should be done.

Tone
1. A movement of two semitones (see semitones). 2. The quality and colour of a sound, more formally called timbre (see timbre).

Transcription
An arrangement of a piece of music for an instrument or voice other than the one for which it was originally written.

Transpose
To move all of the notes in a piece of music up or down by a chosen number of semitones. This is most commonly done for 2 reasons; firstly, so that singers can sing along with a song that would otherwise be too higher or low for them to sing along with, and secondly, to make the music feel different. A piece of music transposed just feels different. Try it and see!
Sometimes a piece of music transposes up by one or two semitones in the middle of the song. This creates a feeling of renewal, and builds excitement. This is often used in musical theatre and in pop ballads. It often allows for further repetition of a chorus, or theme, without it becoming boring and overdone. For example in the song 'You raise me up' by Josh Groban.

Treble
The highest voice in a piece of music written for several voices.

Treble Clef
The other name for the G clef. Clef is an Old French word meaning key. On written music, the treble clef is literally the 'G key', it is telling you where the piano's G4 is located on staff or stave, such that you can work out what notes the rest of the lines represent.

Tremolo
Playing a note again and again very quickly.

Trill
Quickly playing one note, then another note, then the first note again, and the second note again, and so on. The second note can be higher or lower than the first note.

Trio
1. A piece of music for three instruments. 2. A band with 3 members.

Triple
Music that is felt in groups of three beats.

Tuba
A large brass instrument, oval in shape with a mouthpiece and a big bell-shaped opening. The sound is changed by pressing valves. It plays very low notes.

Tuning Fork
A two-pronged metal tool used in making sure an instrument is playing the note it should be. When the tuning fork is hit, it gives off a tone that can be used to make sure that an instrument is in tune (has the right pitch when a note is played).

Tutti

Italian for ‘all’. Used in written music to indicate that a solo is over, and that everyone should play.

U

Una Corda

1. A fancy name for the soft pedal on a piano. Full information available in ‘Orientation of a Piano’ section on Ridley Academy Piano Masterclass.

Unison

Unison is the simultaneous sounding of the same note by two or more singers or players. Unison songs are not in different parts: all singers sing the tune together.

Underturn

Simply the movement of the thumb passing under the hand when playing piano. This occurs when moving down the piano in the left hand, or up the piano in the right hand.

Unweighted Keys

See weighted keys.

V

Variations
A piece of music that copies the theme played before it and changes it so that it has a different mood or sound.

Velocity
The force with which an instrument is played.

Vibraphone
A percussion instrument that looks like a xylophone but has metal bars on top and motor-driven hollow bars hanging straight down from the top bars so that the sound will last longer and contain vibrato.

Vibrato
A technique used by singers and various instruments which involves rapidly vibrating on a note, as a musical effect, often to produce a feeling of 'straining' or to increase the intensity of what is being said in the music.

Viola
The tenor instrument of the violin family. It has four strings.

Violin
A four-stringed instrument. Has a shallow body, and is played by holding it under the chin and moving a bow over the strings.

Virtuoso
An Italian word meaning 'skillful'. Used to refer to a very good musician. For example, a virtuoso violin player.

Vivace
Italian for 'full of life'. A lively tempo. Composers often used the term to designate a mood rather than a tempo, it's telling the artist how to approach to the performance.

W

Waltz
A ballroom dance in 3/4 time that became very popular in 19th century Austria. A beautiful example of a modern waltz is 'That's Amore' by Dean Martin.

Weighted Keys

Simple definition: An electronic keyboard with keys which emulate the feel of acoustic piano keys.

Full definition: Acoustic pianos are made with hammers and strings, the hammer strikes the strings, which then causes the string to vibrate. This vibration is what makes the noise and what we eventually hear as a note.
The hammer that strikes these strings is connected to the key by a lever type system. This lever has a natural weight or resistance which we can feel when we play an acoustic piano.

This weight automatically feels more ‘natural’ when we play a piano and helps us gauge how hard to press or hit the key to get the sound we want. Press softly and the note will resonant softer, press harder and the extra pressure plus the weight of the lever will cause the hammer to hit the strings harder, thus causing a louder sound.

With digital pianos and keyboards, we don’t actually need the weighted keys to get this form of expression, as the computer inside automatically detects how hard and how fast we press the keys, providing the correct sound, however nonetheless some digital pianos are made with weights built in to the keys to emulate the feel of an acoustic piano, to give a more natural playing experience for the pianist.

Other pianos are built without this weighting (unweighted keys), making them much more lightweight to carry but at the expense of having a nice-feeling weighted action. Many of the unweighted-key-keyboards are also not velocity sensitive.

Whole Note
A note which has an indicated value of 1. It actually doesn’t really have a specific length of time, it just shows relative time. All the different note kinds simply tell the musician how long to play a note for. Whole notes are held for twice as long as a half note, and 4X as long as a quarter note. See page 8 for how to write it.

Woodwind
A group of wind instruments made of a long hollow tube of wood or metal. The sound is made by blowing air through a very thin piece of shaved wood called a reed, or across a small mouthpiece; finger holes along the instrument are opened and closed to change the pitch. The oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and flute are examples of woodwind instruments.

End of dictionary.

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