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### An OER Western Art Glossary

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# **An OER Western Art Music Glossary**

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## **Fundamentals of Sound**

Pitch: speed of vibration of the sound wave, resulting in relative perceived highness or lowness. Faster vibration produces a high tone, slower vibration produces a lower tone

Timbre or Tone: quality of the sound wave, color of sound; a function of the harmonic spectrum of a sound.

Duration: how long a sound lasts. Patterns of duration result in rhythm.

Dynamics: amplitude of a sound, resulting in relative perceived loudness or softness.

## **Pitch**

Interval: the distance between pitches

Tuning: establishing frequency relationship between pitches. Usually based on acoustic observation, mathematical approaches, or a combination of both.

Temperament: the adjustment of tuning away from acoustic values for practical, musical, or cultural purposes. Most Western music since the 19th century employs twelve-tone equal temperament (meaning that the octave is divided into twelve equal half-steps)

Octave: the interval between two pitches where one has twice the frequency of the other; usually perceived as being the same pitch (or note name) but in a different register.

Scale: a sequence of pitches, generally ordered from low to high, and usually spanning an octave.

Chromatic Scale: a collection of twelve equidistant pitches within an octave

Half Step Interval: distance between two adjacent pitches in the chromatic scale

Whole Step Interval: interval equivalent to two half-steps

Diatonic Scale: a collection of seven pitches spanning including both half and whole steps.

Major scale: a diatonic scale featuring a major third above the root note, with intervals ordered in a W-W-H-W-W-W-H pattern.

Minor scale: a diatonic scale featuring a minor third above the root note, with intervals ordered in a W-H-W-W-H-W-W pattern.

Pentatonic Scale: a scale comprising five pitches within an octave; often, but not necessarily, does not feature any half step intervals.

Whole Tone Scale: a scale made exclusively of whole-steps; six pitches per octave.

Melody: a specific sequence of pitches and rhythms. Usually the foreground element of music.

## **Rhythm**

Rhythm: the relation between sounds in time, the pattern of sounds in time that is played and heard.

Beat: the pulse that is felt, but not necessarily played. When the pulse is regular, it is called a “beat.”

Meter: the hierarchical grouping of beats in regular units.

Accent: the emphasis of certain beats in a meter.

Syncopation: an accent placed against the normal metric accent. The meter must be clearly established for the syncopation to be perceived.

Tempo: the speed of the pulse or beat.

## **Texture**

Texture: The vertical complexity of music at a given time. Often determined by the number of (and relationship between) simultaneous melodies

Monophony: A type of texture with only one line of music.

Homophony: A type of texture with melody and accompaniment in a consistent foreground/background relationship.

Polyphony: a type of texture with two or more melodies with relatively equal importance.

Imitative Polyphony: Similar or identical melodies sounded against each other (usually overlapping)

## **Harmony and Tonality**

Chord: Two or more pitches played simultaneously. Often created by stacking third intervals.

Tonality: a musical system that relies on the establishment of a tonal center (“key”), and employing specific harmonic functions to move away from and back towards tonic.

Atonality: Music without tonality, where the tonal center cannot be detected.

Tonic: The first pitch or chord within the tonal musical system. In functional harmony, it is the “home” pitch or chord, the center of the universe.

Dominant: the fifth pitch or chord within the tonal musical system. In functional harmony, it leads back to the tonic.

Subdominant: the fourth pitch or chord within a tonal music system. In functional harmony, it usually leads away from tonic and towards the dominant.

Functional Harmony: System where pitches/chords have specific and different functions, creating motion between stability and instability.

Cadence: The moment when a series of chords create an ending to a phrase of music.

Modulation: Changing the tonal center from one key to another.

Consonance and Dissonance: relative measurement of stability and instability in harmonies; these concepts change over time and are very much dependent on tuning, context, and culture.

## **Styles, Forms, and Genres**

Medieval Period: ca. 700–1450. A long and diverse stylistic period, initially dominated by sacred/Church music. Development of notation and polyphony. Secular music examples not always notated, largely lost.

Plainchant: Church music from the Middle Ages, largely vocal, monophonic. Sung in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic church.

Antiphons: The simplest type of plainchant.

Sequence: An elaborate type of plainchant.

Gregorian Chant: aka plainchant, anachronistically named after Pope Gregory I, who is credited with the writing of several chants in Church lore.

Mass: The devotional music that accompanies liturgical worship in the Roman Catholic church.

Organum: The earliest type of polyphony in church music, the first important genre of notated polyphonic music. Most organum forms employed existing plainchant as its foundation.

Parallel Organum: A simple kind of organum, with the additional line shadowing an existing plainchant at a harmonic interval.

Florid Organum: An elaborate type of organum, with an independent, improvisatory-like ornamental line.

Chanson: Secular vocal music of the late Medieval Period, mostly in non-imitative polyphonic texture and developed into the late Renaissance Period in early homophonic texture.

Renaissance Period: 1450–1600. A stylistic period corresponding to the rise of humanism and a flourishing of secular musical genres. Development of imitative polyphony, eventual move towards homophony.

Madrigal: Secular vocal music of the Renaissance period, the most important secular genre to emerge in the Renaissance; known for expression and giving importance to words (word-painting).

**Word Painting:** a musical device found in madrigals and other Renaissance vocal forms, with the music “illustrating” the meaning of the text via imitation, onomatopoeia, and other means.

**Motet:** a Renaissance polyphonic form based on sacred texts.

**Baroque Period:** 1600–1750. Rise of functional harmony, opera, instrumental & dance music. Shared importance of both church and court composers.

**Basso Continuo:** a Baroque accompaniment practice consisting of a melodic bass line and accompanying functional harmonies. Usually performed by several musicians, such as a cellist, harpsichordist, and lutenist together.

**Fugue:** one of the most important forms in Baroque music. A style of imitative polyphonic composition for a fixed number of instrumental lines or voices, usually three or four, built on a single principal theme (called the subject).

**Concerto:** an instrumental work, generally in three movements, that features a dialogue or conflict between a single instrumental soloist and the orchestra.

**Cadenza:** improvisatory section that is performed by the soloist in a virtuosic display.

**Opera:** a kind of music theater with singers and musicians, where the story is told through singing. It first developed in Italy during the Baroque Period, then spread across Europe to become one of classical music’s most popular genres.

**Recitative:** a song form in opera that gives information about the plot, with a style of delivery that is closer to ordinary speech.

**Aria:** an operatic song form, expressing the emotions and inner thoughts of a character, usually with an elaborate melody.

**Opera Seria:** “serious opera:” a style of opera that developed during the late Baroque Period, with plots mostly based on mythology or ancient history, and extreme emotional contrasts.

**Opera Buffa:** “funny opera:” a style of opera that developed during the early Classical Period, as a reaction to Opera Seria with plots mostly based on every-day events and real-life situations, often with a degree of social criticism.



Classical Period: 1750–1820. a short stylistic period corresponding with the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution. Rise of the public concert hall, textural simplification, emphasis on balance, symmetry, order; development of symphonic orchestral music.

Sonata Allegro form: a compositional form consisting of exposition, development and recapitulation sections, with specific use of themes in two contrasting tonalities.

Sonata or Symphonic form: developed in the Classical Period with a standardized four-movement plan; typical structure includes: 1) Sonata Allegro 2) Theme and Variations 3) Minuet and Trio 4) Rondo or Sonata. Used in Symphonies, Instrumental Sonatas, String Quartets, and other chamber music pieces.

Chamber Music: music for smaller ensembles, normally from two to eight players of various instruments or voices.

String Quartet: an ensemble of two violins, viola, and cello, popularized in the Classical period. Usually compositions for string quartet are articulated in Sonata Form.

Symphony: an orchestra of strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. Also the name of the musical piece written for such an ensemble, especially since the Classical Period.

Exposition: the opening section in a sonata allegro form, in which the first and second themes and key areas are introduced.

Development: the second section in a sonata allegro form, in which the themes are articulated and elaborated with the exploration of different tonal centers.

Recapitulation: the final section in a sonata allegro form, where the themes are reintroduced and resolved in the first key area.

Rondo: an instrumental form featuring a returning section in alternation with contrasting sections; usually follows an ABACADABA pattern.

Romantic Period: 1820–1910. A musical style focusing on expressivity, the sublime, and the promotion of “art” or “absolute” music. Growth of instrumental forms and ensemble sizes.

Lied (pl. Lieder): a song form that developed during the Romantic Period in Germany, usually for voice and piano. The lyrics mostly set existing poetry. AKA “art song.”

Song Cycle: a composition with a set of songs, each lyric related by a common theme or taken from a single poetic work.

Strophic: a song form with repeating verses and/or refrains.

Verse: section in strophic song form with the same music but different words.

Refrain: section in strophic song form with the same music and same words (AKA a “chorus” in modern parlance).

Through-composed: a song form with different music for each stanza of lyrics. In instrumental music it is used to describe music that flows freely without repetition of sections.

Ballad: a song form, usually strophic in nature, that tells a narrative story. Became increasingly popular in the 19th century and contributed to the development of popular music styles. Many ballads have dark plots that revolving around death, murder, or the supernatural.

Music Drama: operatic form created by Richard Wagner, mostly with plots taken from medieval German epics and contains a leitmotif technique with extreme emotion and intensity; increased importance of orchestral sections.

Leitmotif: “Leading Motives,” the basic themes in Wagner’s operas, each corresponding to a particular character or concept in the plot.

Etude: an instrumental form that developed in the Romantic Period and focuses on one particular technical aspect of playing. Normally short in length and monothematic.

Nocturne: an instrumental form that developed in the Romantic Period, usually in ABA form. It attempts to evoke the mood and atmosphere of the night.

Modern or Twentieth Century: roughly 1900–present. Rise of avant-garde aesthetics, emancipation of dissonance, new scales and instruments.

Modernism: a broadly encompassing movement from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century focusing on progress, the renunciation of some Romantic aesthetics, and privileging “new” developments over tradition.

Impressionism: a musical movement from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, so-called for the surface similarities to the painting style by the same name. Somewhat restrained in emotional display, more focused on sensory/sonorous elements of beauty.

Expressionism: another modernist movement, originating in Germany and Austria at the turn of the twentieth century; it focused on expressing the inner reality of the artist and often embraced extreme human emotions.

Avant-garde: a multi-disciplinary movement that questions the rules and assumptions of established genres. In music, it challenges basic ideas about melody, harmony and tonality.

Dodecaphony: a system for musical composition developed in the 1920s by Arnold Schoenberg. Instead of employing a tonal center, all twelve chromatic pitches are given equal importance, with their relationships determined by a specific series of row, which is then manipulated with a variety of techniques.

Furniture Music: a concept developed by Erik Satie; using music as a background/ambient embellishment.

Aleatoric Music: a system of musical performance and composition developed by composers in the early 1950s; it employs chance operations (like flipping coins, throwing dice, or other more complex systems) to derive musical parameters and decisions.

Minimalism: a mid-century musical style based on repetition, extremely constrained materials, and gradual change.