

## Fundamental Music Terms

- 1. Sound Vibrations:** sound is produced when objects are struck, stroked or otherwise agitated, these vibrations produced are transmitted through the air, or some other medium and picked up by our ears.
- 2. Pitch (Frequency):** the perceived highness or lowness of a sound
- 3. Dynamics (Amplitude):** the loudness or softness of a sound
- 4. Dynamic Markings:** symbols composers use to tell musicians exactly how loud or how soft a sound should be performed
- 5. Crescendo:** gradually getting louder and Decrescendo: gradually getting softer
- 6. Tone Color or timbre:** the quality of a sound. The best one can do is use imprecise adjectives such as brassy, warm, ringing, thick, hollow and etc. to try and describe this quality.
- 7. Duration:** the time aspect of music
- 8. Rhythm:** a term that it's broadest sense describes the time aspect of music, more specifically the term can indicate the actual arrangement of durations in a particular piece of music or passage of music
- 9. Beat:** the basic unit for measuring time
- 10. Accents:** making some beats more emphatic than others, adding stress to a beat
- 11. Meter:** a recurring pattern of strong and weak beats
- 12. Measures and Bar Lines:** each occurrence of this repeated pattern is called a measure or bar, visually indicated by the vertical line separating one group from the next
- 13. Syncopation:** unexpected rhythmic stress
- 14. Tempo:** how fast or slow a piece of music is performed
- 15. Metronome Markings:** found at the beginning of a piece of music it tells musicians exactly how fast or slow to perform a piece
- 16. The Diatonic Scale:** The most standard way of dividing the octave. *Do, Re, Mi, Fa Sol, La, Ti, Do*. A stepwise progression of intervals that creates a central pitch, a pitch that all others "pull" toward.
- 17. The Chromatic Scale:** the division of the octave into twelve equal parts, built entirely of half steps (the smallest interval in western music). Because of its symmetry, the chromatic scale creates less of a tonal center, one in which the tones are more equal.
- 18. Intervals:** the distance from one pitch to another. (the space between things)
  - a. The Octave:** The interval of the 8th, where a doubling of the frequency occurs and the sound seems to repeat itself at a higher or lower level.
  - b. Half Step:** smallest interval in western music, from one note on the piano to its immediate neighbor.
  - c. Whole Step:** two half steps
- 19. Melody:** the most easily recognizable structure in music, usually in the highest register. A melody can evoke strong feelings. The term melody is a broad term and includes the concepts of tune, motive, theme and phrase.
  - a. Phrase:** a section of a melody or tune, often two, four, or eight measures long
  - b. Cadence:** a stopping or pausing place at the end of a phrase, section, or complete work
- 20. Tune:** the most familiar type of melody, simple, catchy and complete such as a folksong or a dance
- 21. Motive:** a distinct fragment of a melody or rhythm used to construct a longer section or work
- 22. Theme:** the "topic" or the basic subject matter of longer pieces; can be a phrase, motive or tune
- 23. Harmony:** refers to the vertical, or simultaneous relationship between pitches in a musical

work

- a. **Chords:** three or more pitches performed simultaneously
- 24. **Consonance:** chords or harmonies that sound resolved or at rest
- 25. **Dissonance:** chords or harmonies that sound tense needing to resolve
- 26. **Texture:** the blend of the various sounds and melodic lines occurring simultaneously in music
  - a. **Monophony:** the simplest texture, a single unaccompanied line (singing in the shower)
  - b. **Homophony:** one melody of real interest combined with other sounds of supporting or lesser importance
  - c. **Polyphony:** when two or more melodies are played or sung simultaneously
    - 1. **Imitative Polyphony:** like a “round” the same melody *layered* on top of itself
    - 2. **Non-Imitative Polyphony:** when two different melodies of equal importance are performed simultaneously
- 27. **Tonality:** the feeling of a home or central pitch, the diatonic scale creates a feeling of tonality (also called *key* or *tone center*)
  - a. **Major modality:** the diatonic scale from *do* to *do* creates this modality often associated with “happier” melodies
  - b. **Minor modality:** from *la* to *la* in the diatonic scale, often associated with “sad” melodies
- 29. **Keys:** the many different positions for the major and minor modes. For example if the C major mode is positioned on C, it is called the key of C major if it is positioned on D it is called D major. Likewise, if the minor mode is positioned on C it is called the key of C minor. If that same mode is positioned on the pitch of E it is called the key of E minor. Changing keys in the course of a piece is called modulation
- 30. **Musical Forms:** A sort of guide or template that a composer uses to help create a work. Two items are needed for successful perception of musical form. First a conscious awareness of the musical elements and structures of music. Second, to perceive significant changes in these elements and structures, one must cultivate a good memory for musical ideas.
- 31. **Musical Genres:** refers to the general categories determined by text, style, function and performing forces, categories that include symphony, opera, string quartet, Mass, oratorio, concerto, and so on. *Ask What is the function of this music?* (public or private entertainment, commercial, sacred, patriotic etc.) and *What are the performing forces?*
- 32. **Musical Styles:** the combination of distinctive, characteristic uses of musical elements and structures constitutes musical style. One can speak of a given style of a certain composer (Beethoven) or a school of musicians with similar aesthetic aims (second Viennese School or Bebop), or of an entire culture, past (Renaissance or Romantic) or present (American or North Indian).