



Glossary of Musical Terms and Forms

by Elizabeth Parks

A

a - for, at, in, etc.

a cappella - choral music without instrumental accompaniment.

a capriccio - in a capricious style

accelerando - gradually getting quicker

accent - emphasis placed on a tone or chord.

accidental - a sharp, fiat, or natural sign.

accompaniment - subordinate harmonic and/or rhythmic material supporting a principal melody.

accrescendo - getting louder

adagio - very slow

ad libitum - at the performer's liberty

affabile - in a pleasing manner

affettuoso - affectionate, with tender warmth

affrettando - hurrying

agitato - excited

air (ayre) - a melodious composition used in some classic suites, which was designed to accompany dancing, but it was not one of the standard dance forms such as the Gavotte or the Minuet. a vocal or instrumental melody.

al fine - to the end

al, alia, alle - to the - in the style of

allargando - gradually slower and broader

allegretto - slightly slower than allegro

allegro - lively, rather quick

allegro assai - very quick

allegro giusto - quick, with exactness

allegro modetaro - moderately quick

allemande - the first of the dances in the classic suite, written in duple time and played at a moderate tempo.

al Tedesca - in the German style

areabile - sweet, loveable

areore - tenderness and affection

ambitus - the range of a plainsong from its highest to its lowest tone.

amoroso - loving

andante - rather slow, at a moderate pace.

andantino - generally a little quicker than andante

andare - go on

Anglaise - an English country dance, sometimes part of the suite, in quick duple time, always starting on a strong beat.

anima (con) - with life

anime - lively , spirited
animoso - in a lively manner
anticipation - an unaccented nonharmonic tone which resolves by repetition.
antico - ancient
antiphonal - alternating choirs.
a piacere - at pleasure
a poco - by degrees, gradually
a poco a poco - little by little
appassionato - impassioned
appenato - grieved, distressed
appoggiato - leaning upon, drawn out
arabesque - a light and graceful piece with florid ornamentation in the melody.
arcato - played with the bow
ardente - with fire, vehemently
ardore - with love and warmth
aria - a melodic composition for solo voice with accompaniment - or, a song-like composition written in ABA form, in an opera, oratorio, or cantata.
arietta - a small aria in binary form, that is not having the middle section of the aria. **arioso** - in the style of an air
arpeggio - the notes of a chord played consecutively in a consistently ascending or descending direction.
assai - very, extremely
assai piu - much more
a tempo - in time
atonality - absence of key or central tonality.
attacca - go on to the next
augmentation - to double the note values of a melody.
augmented triad - a three-note chord consisting of two major thirds.
authentic cadence - a cadence concluding with the progression dominant to tonic (V I).
authentic mode - in plainsong, a mode which ranges above the final.
auxiliary tone - an unaccented nonharmonic tone approached step-wise from above or below a chordal tone to which it returns.
ayre - a song or polyphonic vocal composition; old English spelling of air.

B

bagatelle - literally, a "trifle" - a short unpretentious composition.
ballade - a piece of a romantic type, usually in ABA form, combining dramatic and lyrical characteristics.
band - a large ensemble consisting mainly of wind instruments. **barcarolle** - a lyrical boat song usually in moderate 6/8 or 12/8 time, and ABA form, supposed to be derived from the songs of the Venetian Gondoliers.
bar, barline - a vertical line drawn through one or more staves to indicate a measure. Bar also means measure (e.g., a four-bar phrase).
bar form - a form in three sections, the first of which is (AAB).
barocco - eccentric, bizarre
bass - a voice, instrument, or part in the low register.
bassa - low, deep
basso - the bass part, the lowest male voice

basso continuo - the instrumental figured-bass part in an ensemble played by one or more bass instruments and a keyboard instrument.

basso ostinato - a persistently repeated theme in the bass register.

beat - the unit of time in metric music. In time signatures, the upper numeral indicates the number of beats per measure.

ben, bene - well, good

bene placito - at will, at pleasure

ben marcato - well marked or accented

berceuse - a lullaby, a quiet piece generally in moderate 6/8 time, with a rocking movement in the accompaniment.

binary two-fold/binary form - a form of two divisions or sections (AB)

bis - twice - (the passage is to be repeated)

bitonality - use of two different keys simultaneously.

bolero - a quick Spanish dance in 3/4 time with accompaniment of castanets.

bourree - a French or Spanish dance, usually in quick duple time, starting on an upbeat; similar to the Gavotte, and often found in the old suites.

brass - wind instruments which produce tone by vibration of the lips,

bravura - spirit, skill

breve - a double whole note equal to two semi-breves or whole notes

brillante - bright, sparkling

brio - vigor, spirit

broken chord - the tones of a chord played consecutively, usually according to some pattern.

buffa, buffo - comic, humorous

burlando - in a playful manner

C

cadence - the harmonic or melodic progression which concludes a phrase, section, or composition.

cadenza - an ornamental passage near the end of a solo

calando - gradually decreasing the time and tone

calcando - hurrying the time

calmato - tranquility

caloroso - warmth, animation

cambiata - in the Renaissance, an unaccented nonharmonic tone approached downward by step and resolved, on downward, by skip of a third to a chordal tone, followed by stepwise upward progression.

canon - a composition in which each part has exactly the same melody throughout the piece, starting at different points. The strictest form of imitation.

cantabile - in a singing style

cantando - in a singing style

cantata - a work for choirs and soloists with orchestral accompaniment.

canto - song, melody

cantus firmus - a "borrowed" melody (plainsong, chorale, folk tune) to which other melodic lines are added in a contrapuntal texture.

canzonet - a little song or piece with passages of imitation, something like a madrigal.

capo - the beginning, the top

cappella - a church, a band of musicians that play in a church

capriccio (caprice) - a piece of light and humorous style, usually in irregular form.

carezzando - in a tender manner

carita - tenderness, feeling

celere - quick, rapid

cembalo - a harpsichord

chaconne - a slow dance, very similar to a Passacaglia, probably originally from Spain. Usually in a major key, in 3/4 time, with a ground bass and generally in the form of variations.

chamber music - an ensemble consisting of only a few instruments and usually only one instrument to a part.

chanson - French term for song.

chant - general term for liturgical song similar to plainsong.

choir - vocal ensemble, usually small church choruses. Also applied to groups in an orchestra: e.g., brass choir, woodwind choir.

choral - music for chorus or choir.

chorale - a German Protestant hymn tune, upon which larger compositions such as the CHORAL PRELUDE were based.

chorale prelude - organ composition based on a chorale melody.

chord - a combination of three or more tones.

chordal style - in vocal polyphony, a texture in which all the parts have the same rhythm and sing the same syllables simultaneously. Also called familiar style.

chorus - a large vocal ensemble.

chromatic, chromaticism - extensive use of accidentals in melody and harmony.

chromatic scale - twelve consecutive tones within an octave, one half step apart.

col - with the

colla voce - with the voice

coll'arco - with the bow

coloration - written-out ornamentation.

coloratura - ornamental passage in vocal music

come - as, like

come prima - as before

comodo - quietly, easily

compiacevole - agreeable

con - with (for various phrases beginning with con see other words)

concerto - harmony of voices and instruments

concerto - a composition for one or more solo instruments with orchestral accompaniment, usually written in three movements.

conjunct - stepwise progression in melody.

consonance, consonant - harmonic intervals (thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths, and octaves) which produce a sense of repose; harmony which consists only or mainly of these intervals.

con sordini - in strings, with mutes; in piano, with dampers, that is the damper pedal is not to be used.

continuo - without cessation

contralto - the deepest female voice

contrary motion - simultaneous melodic progression in opposite direction between two parts.

counterpoint, contrapuntal - texture consisting of two or more independent melodic lines.

courante (corrente) - an old dance in AB form, literally meaning "running". Usually in triple time, and the second of the standard movements of the suite. The Italian Corrente is much quicker than the more refined French Courante, which frequently shifted from 3/2 to 6/4 time.

crescendo - gradually getting louder

D

da - by, from, for, etc.

da capo - a sign at the end of a movement indicating that the player must return to the beginning.
abbreviation: D.C.

da capo al fine - return to the beginning and play to the word "fine"

dal, dalle, dalla - from the, by the, etc.

dal segno - repeat from the sign S

debile - weak, feeble

deciso - in a bold manner

decrescendo - gradually getting softer

delicato - delicately

deritta, deritto - the right hand

destra - the right hand

devoto - religious

di - of, with, from, etc.

diatonic - melody or harmony confined to the tones of the scale; the opposite of chromatic.

difficile - difficult

dignita - grandeur

diluendo - gradual dying away until no sound is left

diminished triad - a three-note chord consisting of two minor thirds.

diminuendo - gradually getting softer

diminution - to halve the note values of a melody. Also, a form of ornamentation.

di molto - very much

disciolto - skillful, dexterous

discreto - discreetly

disjunct - melodic progression dominated by wide skips.

dissonance, dissonant - harmonic intervals (seconds, sevenths, ninths, augmented and diminished intervals) which produce the effect of action or tension; chords which contain one or more of these intervals.

di sopra - above

disperato - with desperation

divisi - separated (half the players play the upper notes, and the others play the lower notes).

dolce - sweetly

dolente - sorrowful

dolore - grief, sorrow

doloroso - sorrowfully

dominant - the fifth tone of a diatonic scale, and the chord built on that tone.

dopo - after

doppio movimento - twice as fast

dotted rhythm - rhythmic patterns consisting of a dotted note followed by a note of the next smaller denomination (e.g., a dotted quarter followed by an eighth note).

double bar - two vertical lines drawn through one or more staves to indicate a major sectional division or the conclusion of a composition.

double fugue - a fugue with two subjects and, correspondingly, two expositions.

double stopping - playing two notes simultaneously on a bowed string instrument.

drammatico - dramatic

due corde - two strings - the una corda pedal is to be put half-way down

duo - two, in two parts

duolo - sorrow, sadness

duple meter - two or four beats to the measure.

duro - harsh, rude

dynamics - levels of soft and loud.

E

e, ed. - and

ecclesia - church

ecossaise - originally a slow dance in 3/4 time, allegedly of Scottish origin but not at all similar to the Scottish dance music, such as the reel. Later it became livelier and was written in duple time.

effretto - the effect of music on an audience

eighth note - one eighth the value of a whole note (♪)

equalmente - evenly, alike

elegante/eleganza - graceful, elegant

elegiaco - plaintive

eleventh chord - a chord of six tones, five superimposed thirds.

embellishment - short, fast ornaments such as trills, mordents, and turns.

emozione - agitation

energico - forcibly

enfactico - with earnestness

entre'acte - music played between acts of a drama

entree - an introduction, a march-like piece played during the entrance of a dancing group, or played before a ballet. Usually in 4/4 time.

ensemble - a performing group consisting of two or more players or singers.

epico - heroic

equabimente - mostly, evenly

espirando - gasping

espressivo - to be played or sung with expression

estinto - becoming extinct

estramamente - extremely

ethnomusicology - the study of music of different cultures, especially non-Western or non-European music.

etude - a study written for the purpose of practising and developing facility in a special problem of technique, or for displaying the technical skill of the performer.

F


facile - light, easy

familiar style - chordal style in polyphonic music.

fantasia - a movement free in spirit and form, rather like an improvisation.

fantastico - whimsical

fastoso - proudly, stately

fauxbordon - parallel first inversion chords in 15th-century music.
ferma - resolute, steady
fermata - a pause or hold 
fermato - firmly, resolutely
feroce - fierce
fervente - ardent
fervido - vehement
festivo/festoso - merry, gay
fiacco - feeble, weak
fieramente - boldly
figuration - recurrent melodic pattern.
figured bass - use of numerals and other signs accompanying the notes of a bass part to indicate harmony to be filled in on a keyboard instrument; used in the Baroque.
final - the concluding tone in a plainsong; the tonic.
finale - the last movement or concluding section of a large composition.
fine - the end
finement - acutely
fiabile - sad, mournful
flat - a symbol placed in front of a note to indicate lowering that note by one half step (*b*)
florid - ornamented, embellished, decorated,
form - the plan of organization of musical materials.
forte - loud *f*
forte-piano - loud, then immediately soft
forte possibile - as loud as possible *ff*
fortissimo - very loud *ff*
forza - strength, power
forzando/forzato - forced, usually on one note or chord
freddezza - coldness
frescamente - vigorously
fretta - increasing the time
funerale - mournful
fuoco - fire, passion
fugal - in the style of a fugue; use of contrapuntal imitation.
fughetta - a short fugue or a fugal section in a composition.
fugue - a contrapuntal form based on imitation of a subject (theme) written for two or more voices. It is based on a short theme or subject, stated at the beginning by one voice, and brought in by each of the others in turn.
furioso - furiously
furore - fury, rage

G

gaio - with cheerfulness
galante - boldly, gallantly
garbato - graceful
garbo - grace, elegance

gavotte - an old French dance form, stately and dignified, in duple time beginning on the weak half of the bar. Sometimes found in the old suites. It was often followed by another Gavotte or a Musette, and then repeated.

generoso - in a dignified manner

gentile - pleasing, elegant

gigue (jig) - a lively dance in 6/8 or 12/8 time, usually the final movement of a suite. It was contrapuntal in style with the second half frequently using the inverted subject.

giocando - cheerful, merry

giocoso - humourously

glissando - producing all pitches between two or more notes, as by sliding the finger along the string of a violin or the keyboard of a piano.

guibilazione - jubilant

guisto - equal, steady and exact time

giustezza - precision

glissando - in a gliding manner, slurred

gradevole - gracefully

gradualmente - gradually, by degrees

grandioso - grand, noble

grave - extremely slow and solemn

grazioso - in a graceful style

grosso - full, great

grottesco - grotesque

gusto - taste, expression

H

half note - one half the value of a whole note (d)

harmony - the element of music having to do with simultaneous sounds, the combinations of tones, chord structure, chord progression, consonance, and dissonance.

homophony, homophonic - a texture consisting of a single melodic line with subordinate accompaniment. Also, sometimes used to mean chordal style in polyphonic music.

hopak - a lively Russian dance in simple duple time.

hornpipe - a very lively English dance, first written in triple time but later in quadruple time. Now usually associated with sailors, but this apparently has no historical basis.

hymn - a religious song.

I

I, it - the

idiom - style appropriate to a specific medium, its capacities and limitations. Also used to mean style in general.

il piu - the most

im - in the

imitando - imitating

imitation - a theme or melody which appears consecutively in different parts in contrapuntal texture.

impaziente - impatient, hurried

imperioso - pompous

impetuoso - vehement

imponente - haughtily

impromptu - a piece that suggests improvisation, that has a feeling of informality. First used in the early nineteenth century.

improvisation - to create music extemporaneously. Also applies to unindicated ornamentation and to realization of a figured bass.

in - in, in the

incalzando - with growing warmth

inconsolato - in a mournful style

inquieta - restless, uneasy

istantemente - urgently

instrumentation - the instruments indicated in an orchestral score.

intermezzo - an interlude, a piece designed originally to be performed between the acts of a play or opera.

interval - the pitch distance between two tones, designated numerically as seconds, thirds, fourths, and so on.

intimo - expressive

intrata (intrada) - the name given to an opening piece of march-like character. The Italian equivalent of an Entrée or Prelude.

intrepidamente - boldly

invention - a short contrapuntal piece for two or three voices, in imitative style.

inversion - in melody, the interval-for-interval progression in the opposite direction, up for down and vice versa. In harmony, the root of a chord in some part other than the bass, e.g., first inversion (third of the chord in the bass), second inversion (fifth of the chord in the bass).

invertible counterpoint - counterpoint so designed that either of two melodic lines may be the upper.

irato - angrily

ironico - ironical

irrisoluto - wavering

istesso - the same

istesso tempo - the same time

J

jubiloso - exulting

K

key - the tonal center of a composition or subdivision thereof. The key of a composition is indicated by the letter name of its tonic. Also, the white or black surface on a keyboard instrument which produces a tone when depressed.

keyboard - the series of black and white keys of a piano, organ, harpsichord or similar instrument.

key signature - sharps or flats at the beginning of each staff to indicate the key of the composition.

L

lacrimoso - weeping, tearful

lamentando - mourning

lamentoso - mournful

landler - a popular German or Austrian dance in 3/4 or 3/8 time, thought to be the true origin of the waltz. It is very like a waltz, though slower.

languendo/languido - feeble, languishing

largamente - broadly

largetto - not as slow as largo

largo - slow and broad

leading tone - the seventh note of a diatonic scale and the chord built on that note.

legatissimo - exceedingly smooth

legato - smoothly

leggiero - lightly

leno - feeble, faint

lentando - with increased slowness

lento - slow

lestamente - quickly, lively

lesto - lively quick

libero - free, unrestrained

libretto - the text of an opera, oratorio, or cantata.

lied - German word for song; plural: lieder.

liederbuch - German book of songs.

line - the melodic component in a composition; melodic line.

linear counterpoint - dissonant counterpoint,

liscio - simple, smooth

l'istesso - the same

liturgical - music intended for performance in a church service.

loco - place; return to the written register after playing an octave higher through using 8^{va}

lontano - distant, a great way off

loure - a slow French dance in 6/4 time, sometimes found in the classic Suite.

lugubre - sad, mournful

lunga pausa - a long pause

lusingando - alluring, flattering

luttuoso - sorrowful

lyric - song-like, as opposed to dramatic.

M

ma - but

madrigal - a composition for unaccompanied voices. It originated in Italy in the fifteenth century, and was written in from two to eight voices.

maestoso - dignified

maggiore - the major key

main droite - right hand

main gauche - left hand

major - a diatonic scale with half steps between the third and fourth and between the seventh and eighth tones of the scale. Also, a triad consisting of a major and a minor third.

mancando - dying away

moniera - manner, style

mano - the hand

mano destra - the right hand

mano sinistra - the left hand

marcando/marcato - accented

march - a piece written in simple duple or quadruple time, strongly accented, used for accompanying marching (usually of soldiers).

martellato - strongly marked - hammered

marziale - in the style of a march

mazurka - a Polish national dance in moderate 3/4 time, with strong accents on the third beat, and sometimes on the second.

measure - a group of beats between bar lines; also, all the notes between two bar lines.

mediant - the third note of a diatonic scale, and the chord built on that note.

medium - the voices and/or instruments required for the performance of a composition; plural: media.

melisma, melismatic - a melodic passage sung to one syllable of the text; a melodic style of many notes to a syllable.

melody, melodic - consecutive tones; the linear or horizontal element of music.

meter, metric - the measuring of time in music according to a specific number of beats to the measure.

meno - less

mesto/mestoso - sad, mournful

mezza/mezzo - medium, half

mezzo soprano - a female voice lower than a soprano but higher than a contralto

minacciando - menacing

minor - a diatonic scale with a half step between the second and third notes of the scale; the upper tetrachord of a minor scale is variable, resulting in natural, harmonic, and melodic forms of the minor scale. A triad consisting of a minor and major third.

minuet (menuet) - a French dance in triple time, usually followed by a TRIO and then repeated. The early minuets were rather dignified and graceful but the later ones became faster and lighter in character.

misterioso - in a mysterious manner

misurato - in strict, measured time

mobile - changeable

moderato - in moderate time

modality, modal - melody and/or harmony based on one of the church modes.

mode - one of the eight church modes. Also refers to major or minor keys.

modulation - melodic or harmonic progressions which begin in one key and end in another.

molto - very much, a great deal

monody - early 17-century term for accompanied solo songs.

monophony, monophonic - texture consisting of a single melodic line without accompaniment.

morendo - dying away in time and tone

mormoroso - with a gentle, murmuring sound

mosso - movement, motion

motive - a short melodic and/or rhythmic fragment.

moto - motion (con moto - rather quick)

moto perpetuo - perpetual motion

movement - the complete and independent part of large works such as sonatas, symphonies, suites.

movimento - impulse, the time of a piece

multitonicity - music which shifts abruptly between two or more remotely related keys without modulation.

musette - a short French dance-tune of pastoral character, with a drone-bass, originally played on a bag-pipe. Found in some Suites usually following a Gavotte.

musicology - the scholarly study of music, especially research in music history.

N

natural - a symbol which cancels a previously indicated sharp or flat (♮)

neighbor tone - same as auxiliary tone.

negligente - unconstrained, careless

nel, nella, nell' - in the, at the

neomodality - modern melodic or harmonic material which makes use of a church mode or some new scale basis.

ninth chord - a chord of five tones, four superimposed thirds.

nobile - noble, grand

nocturne - literally "night piece". A romantic, dreamy piece for piano written with a melody over a broken chord accompaniment.

non - not, no

nonchordal, nonharmonic - a dissonant tone which does not belong to the chord with which it sounds.

notation - systems of symbols for writing music, mainly indicating pitch and duration of tones.

O

obbligato - indispensable

octave - the pitch interval between a tone and the seventh tone above it in a diatonic scale, or between the letter name of a tone and its recurrence above or below. The vibration ratio of an octave is two to one: if the tone A is 440 vibrations per second, the octave above it is 880 and the octave below is 220.

opera - a drama set to music for soloists, choirs and orchestra.

opus - work, composition

oratorio - a nonliturgical, nontheatrical sacred work for soloists, choirs and orchestra, something like an opera but performed without action, costumes or scenery.

orchestra - a large instrumental ensemble.

orchestration - the manner in which instruments are employed in an orchestral composition.

ossia - otherwise, or else

ostinato - continuous, unceasing rhythmic and/or melodic pattern.

ottava - an octave, an eighth

ottava alta - the octave higher

ottava bassa - the octave lower

overture - a instrumental prelude to an Opera, play or Oratoria.

P

parlando/parlante - accented; in a recitative or speaking style

passacaglia - a chaconne with a ground bass in slow triple time, and always in a minor key.

parallel keys - major and minor keys having the same letter name but different key signatures (e.g., G major with one sharp and G minor with two flats).

parallel motion, parallelism - two or more melodic lines which move simultaneously in the same direction and by the same intervals.

part - the single line in a polyphonic composition. One refers to the soprano part, the violin part, and so on.

partita - a word meaning either Suite or a set of variations.

passepied - a gay, spirited French dance in 3/8 or 6/8 time, sometimes in the German Suites.

passing tone - an unaccented nonharmonic tone between two chordal tones a third apart.

passionato/passionatamente - impassioned, passionate

pastorale - a piece written to imitate the music of shepherds, usually in moderate 6/8 or 12/8 time, a tender flowing melody, somewhat suggestive of a Musette.

patetica - pathetic

pateticamente - pathetically

pausa - a pause

pavane - a slow solemn dance in duple (or sometimes triple) time, of Spanish origin; generally in three sections, each one repeated.

paventato - fearful

pedal point - a sustained tone in the bass over which changing harmonies take place.

pentatonic - a five-tone scale (e.g., the black keys of the piano).

per - for, by, from, etc.

percussion - essentially rhythmic instruments such as drums, cymbals, gongs, and triangle.

perdendosi - gradually decreasing in time and tone

pesante - heavy

phrase - a musical unit, often four measures in length, which concludes with a cadence.

piacere - pleasure, fancy

piacevole - pleasing, agreeable

piangevole - mournful

pianissimo - extremely soft *pp*

piano - a keyboard instrument. Also, the indication for soft, a low dynamic level. Abbreviation : *P*

pickup beat - one or several unaccented notes of a melody preceding the bar line at the beginning of a phrase. Also called anacrusis.

piena, pieno - full

pieta - pity

pietoso - tenderly, pitifully

pitch - the vibration frequency of a tone.

piu - more

piu mosso/piu moto - more motion

pizzicato - plucking the strings of a bowed string instrument with the fingers

placido - calm, tranquil

plagal cadence - the progression subdominant to tonic (IV I) at the conclusion of a cadence.

plagal mode - in plainsong, the modes which range approximately a fourth below and a fifth above the final.

plainsong - liturgical Catholic monophonic song. Also called Gregorian chant, plainchant.

pochettino/pochetto - very little slower

poco a poco - little by little

poi - then, afterwards

poi a poi - by degrees

polonaise (polacca) - a Polish dance in moderate 3/4 time. The phrases end on the third beat of the bar, and there are many repetitions of short motives. It is not a folk dance, but originated from court ceremonies.

polychoral - the use of two or more separate choirs.

polyphony, polyphonic - a texture consisting of two or more independent melodic lines; nearly synonymous with counterpoint, contrapuntal.

polytonality, polytonal - The simultaneous use of two or more keys.

pomposo - pompous

ponderoso - massively, heavily

ponticello - the bridge of a stringed instrument

possibile - possible

precipitato - hurriedly

precipitando - hurrying

precisione - exactness

preciso - precise, exact

prelude - a piece designed to be played as an introduction, but also an independent short romantic piece in an improvised manner.

preparation - a chordal (consonant) tone which subsequently becomes a nonchordal (dissonant) tone, as in a suspension.

prestissimo - as fast as possible

presto - quickly, rapidly.

primo - first, principal

prima volta - the first time

program music - instrumental music which the composer intends to be descriptive of some action, scene, or story, and which carries a descriptive title.

progression - a sequence of tones in melody, or chords in harmony.

psalm - musical setting of texts from the biblical Book of Psalms.

Q

quarter note - one fourth the value of a whole note (♩)

quasi - in the manner of

quieto - quick, calm, serene

R

rallentando - gradually getting slower

range - the pitch distance between the highest and lowest note of a melody, voice, or instrument.

rapidamente - rapidly

rattenuto - holding back

realization, to realize - filling in the harmony of a figured bass.

recitative - a declamatory prose style of singing in operas, oratorios, and cantatas.
refrain - recurrent lines of text and music at the end of each stanza of a song.
register - the general pitch level of a part, voice, or instrument (e.g., soprano implies a high register, bass a low register).
registration - the combinations of stops used in an organ composition.
relative keys - major and minor keys which have the same key signature (e.g., C major and A minor are relative keys).
religioso - solemnly, in a devout manner
replicazione - repetition
requiem - a Mass for the Dead, set to music for solo voices and choirs.
responsorial - in plainsong, a section for solo voice followed by a section for chorus in unison.
rhapsody - a free fantasy, usually of heroic or national character, and often brilliant in style.
rhumba (rumba) - a Cuban dance with complex rhythm, much syncopation, and repetition of an eight-bar theme.
rhythm - the time element in music which is determined by accent and/or duration of tones.
rigaudon (English: rigadoon) - a seventeenth century Provençal dance in lively duple or quadruple time. Something like a Bourrée, with the phrases beginning on the last quarter of the bar.
rigore - strictness
rinforzando - reinforced (*rfz*)
ripetizione - repetition
risoluto - bold, resolved
ritardando - gradually getting slower
ritenuto - suddenly slower, held back
romance - a piece that is song-like, sentimental and tender in character.
rondino - a small or easy rondo.
rondo - French 'rondeau' a piece in which the main theme keeps recurring with different episodes between - ABACA. A more modern form is extended to ABACAB and coda.
root - the tone on which a chord is built.
rubato - robbed, taking a portion of time from one note and giving it to another
rustico - rural, rustic

S

sarabande - a dignified dance, probably originally from Spain. In 3/4 or 3/2 time, usually starting on the first beat. It moves along at a steady pace, with an accent or a prolonged note on the second beat. It is in AB form, with the phrases ending on the second beat. Commonly found in the old suites.
scale - a system of adjacent notes on which melody and harmony are based.
scherzando - playful, lively
scherzino - a little scherzo.
scherzo - (Italian meaning "joke") - a piece in 3/4 time which is sometimes playful and joking, but also can be moody, gloomy and dramatic, such as those of Chopin.
score - two or more staves with notes vertically aligned in vocal or instrumental part music.
schottische - a round dance in 2/4 time, something like a slow Polka, known in England as the German Polka.
schietto - simple, neat
sciolto - freedom, ease
se - if, in case, as

secco - "dry" that is staccato
segno - a sign S - dal segno - repeat from the sign
segue - now follows, go on with what follows
semplice - simple
sempre - always
sentimento - feeling, delicate expression
senza - without
sequence - a recurrent melodic pattern repeated at successively higher or lower intervals. In plainsong, a form of trope.
serenade - French for "evening music" - originally a love song sung under the window of a lady, by her lover now an instrumental piece of similar character.
serioso - serious
seventh chord - a chord of four tones, three superimposed thirds.
sforzando - strongly accented, suddenly loud
sharp - a symbol placed in front of a note to indicate raising that note by one half step (\sharp).
siciliano - a soft, slow peasant dance in 6/8 or 12/8 time, often in a minor key. Rather similar to a Pastorale, usually in ABA form. It usually has a melody in dotted rhythms, with a broken chord accompaniment.
simile - like
sixteenth note - one sixteenth the value of a whole note (f)
slargando - broadening
slentando - getting slower
smorzando - toning down to extinction
soave - gentle, soft
soleenne - solemn
solfeggetto - an Italian word meaning "little study".
solo - a composition for a single voice or instrument
sonabile - resonant
sonata - a work consisting of three or four independent pieces called movements, each of which follows certain forms and characteristics, written for one or two instruments. Similar works for three instruments are called TRIOS, for four instruments are called QUARTETS, and for orchestra are called SYMPHONIES.
sonatina - a small, easier sonata with fewer and short movements.
song - a vocal solo.
sonore - harmonious
sonority - qualities of texture: thick or thin, heavy or light, etc.
sordamente - softly, gently
sordino - a mute or a stringed instrument. Dampers on a piano
sostenuto - sustained
sotto voce - softly, in a low voice
spianato - smooth, even
spiccato - separated, detached. Played with the point of the bow.
spirito - spirit, life
stabile - firm
staccato - detached, separated
stanchezza - weariness
staff, staves - the five horizontal parallel lines on or between which notes are written.
stentando - heavy and retarding
stentato - forced, loud
stesso - the same

strascinato - dragged along
strepitoso - boisterous
stringendo - pressing onwards, hurrying
strings - instruments which produce tone by bowing or plucking taut strings (e.g., violins, guitars).
string quartet - a chamber ensemble consisting of two violins, viola, and cello. Also, compositions written for that medium.
strophic - song form in which all stanzas of the text are set to the same music.
style - the characteristic quality of music determined by the integration of all elements (e.g., rhythm, melody, harmony, texture).
su - above, upon
suavita - sweetness, delicacy
subdominant - the fourth note of a diatonic scale and the chord built on that note.
subito - suddenly
subject - the theme of a fugue.
submediant - the sixth note of a diatonic scale and the chord built on that note.
suite - a group of pieces consisting (in the classical form) entirely of dance forms, and all in the same key. The basic movements included were the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue, and then usually one or more others such as the Gavotte, Minuet, Bourrée, Passepied, etc. The suite was often preceded by a Prelude. Also referred to as an instrumental composition of numerous movements, often of a dance-like character.
sul, sull, sulla - on, upon the
supertonic - the second note of a diatonic scale and the chord built on that note.
suspension - a nonharmonic device in which a chordal (consonant) tone is held through a change of harmony to become a nonchordal (dissonant) tone which then resolves downward to another chordal (consonant) tone.
sussurando - whispering, murmuring
svelto - free, light
syllabic - a style of text setting in which there is a predominance of one syllable of the text to one note of the melody.
symphony - an orchestra, or a multmovement form for orchestra.
syncopation - a rhythmic device in which the normal accents of the measure are displaced by accenting weak beats, rests on strong beats, or tying notes over from a weak to a strong beat.

T

tacet - be silent
tanto - so much, as much
tarantella - a wild Italian dance in 3/8 or 6/8 time, which was supposed to cure the poisonous bite of the spider called the tarantula. It frequently alternated modes, and increased in frenzy towards the end.
tardamente - slowly
Tedesca - German
tema - theme or subject
tempo - generally, the speed of music; the rate of beats as indicated by such terms as allegro, presto, adagio, lento, and andante.
tempo giusto - in strict time
tempo ordinario - in moderate time
tempo primo - the original time
tempo rubato - robbed or irregular time

teneramente - tenderly
tenuto - sustained
ternary - a form in three sections (ABA).
tessitura - the average range of a vocal part
tetrachord - a four-tone section of a scale.
texture - the disposition of the melodic element in music. (See monophonic, polyphonic, homophonic); also means sonority.
theme - the melodic idea on which a composition is based. A theme may also include rhythmic, harmonic, and other factors.
thorough bass - see basso continuo, figured bass.
tie - a curved line connecting two consecutive notes on the same line or space of the staff; indicates the note to be held over rather than repeated.
timbre - tone color or tone quality.
time signature - numerals at the beginning of a composition, the upper figure of which indicates the number of beats in the measure, the lower of which indicates the kind of note which gets one beat.
timoroso - with hesitation
toccata - (Latin meaning "touch") - a virtuoso piece composed to display the technical skill of the player, usually with full chords, arpeggios and running passages, in a free fantasy style.
toccatina - a small short toccata - sometimes used as an opening to a Suite.
tonality - the sense of gravitation around a tonal center or key.
tonic - the first note of a diatonic scale, the note from which a key gets its name, and the chord built on that note.
tosto - swift, rapid
tranquillo - calmness, quietness
transcription - arranging a composition for a different medium.
trascinando - dragging the time
tre - three
treble - a relatively high-register part, indicated by the G clef or treble clef.
tre corde - three strings, an indication to stop using the soft pedal
tremolo - rapid reiteration of a single-note or rapid alternation between two notes.
triad - a three-note chord, consisting of two thirds.
trionfale - triumphal
triple meter - three beats to the measure.
triple stopping - playing on three strings of a bowed string instrument, simultaneously or in rapid succession.
tristezza - sadness, heaviness
trope - an interpolated section of melody and text in plainsong.
troppo - too much; non troppo - not too much
tune - A melody.
tutti - A passage played by the entire orchestra.

U

uguale - equal, similar
un, una, uno - a, an, one
unaccompanied - a solo part, passage, or vocal ensemble without accompaniment.
una corda - one string, the soft pedal is to be depressed

unison - two parts singing or playing the same note.

V

va - go on

vaccilando - irregular in time

vago - rambling, uncertain as to time or expression

variation - the modified repetition of a theme or melody without the loss of its entire identity; a form based on this technique.

veloce - swiftly

velocissimo - with extreme rapidity

vibrato - a slight varying of pitch produced by the rapid movement of the left hand on a stringed instrument

vigorouso - bold, energetic

violento - boisterous, vehement

virtuosity - prominent display of technical facility in performance.

vitamente - briskly, immediately

vivace/vivo - animated, briskly

vocal - music to be performed by the human voice or voices.

voice - the human organ of sound, classified according to registers (e.g., soprano, alto, tenor, bass). Also, a part in polyphonic music (e.g., a four-voice madrigal, a five-voice fugue).

volta - time

volta prima - first time

volta seconda - the second time

volti - turn over

volti subito - turn the page over quickly

volubilita - freedom of performance

W

waltz - a dance in triple time which probably originated from the German Ländler and is still a very popular form.

whole note - the basic unit of note values (♩)

whole-tone scale - a scale of six notes a whole step apart.

wind instruments - instruments which produce tones by a vibrating column of air when blown; woodwinds and brass.

woodwind instruments - wind instruments which generate tone by a vibrating reed (e.g., oboes, clarinets, saxophones, bassoons) or by a whistle-type mechanism (flutes, recorders).