

Glossary of musical terms

Articulators

The tongue, teeth, lips, soft palate, all areas of the mouth that affect how words are produced.

Ascending phrase

a pattern of notes moving from low to high in pitch

Crescendo

A musical term for dynamics direction; gradually getting louder.

Descending phrase

a pattern of notes moving from high to low in pitch.

Diction

The clear pronunciation of words. Good diction helps produce good sound, all singers should pay attention to it.

Diminuendo

Gradually getting softer.

Diphthong

Two vowel sounds joined in one syllable to form one speech sound. E.g. The 'ou' in found starts as an 'a' and becomes an 'ow' as the word progresses. In singing it is good practice to hold the open vowel sound, in this case the 'a' rather than the closed sound, 'ow'.

Drone

A harmonic or monophonic effect or accompaniment where a note or chord is continuously sounded throughout most or all of a piece.

Dynamics

Loudness or softness of a song/piece of music. Also refers to the musical terms or symbols defining volume in a song/piece of music.

Fifth

An interval of a distance of 5 notes.

Harmony

Two or more notes played or sung together. Can also refer to the study of chord progressions.

Improvise

Create and perform spontaneously or without preparation.

Interval

The distance in pitch between two notes.

Interrelated dimensions of music

The national curriculum for music aims to ensure that all pupils understand and explore how music is created, produced and communicated, including through the interrelated dimensions: pitch, duration, dynamics, tempo, timbre, texture, structure and appropriate musical notations.

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Legato

To be sung or played smoothly, the notes flow together.

Major Scale

A scale with notes separated by whole tones except for the 3rd, 4th, 7th and 8th. A major 3rd interval gives a major key its sense of 'brightness'

Melisma

Singing a syllable across more than one note.

Melody

A sequence of single notes that is musically satisfying; a tune.

Minor Scale

A scale with notes separated by whole tones except for the 2nd, 3rd, 5th & 6th. A minor 3rd interval gives a minor key its perceived feeling of 'sadness'.

Octave

Musical term referring to two notes that are 8 full tones apart, indicating the start and end of a scale.

Ostinato

Repeating musical motif.

Range

Refers to the notes that a given performer can sing comfortably.

Register

The range of notes available to sing.

Ternary Form

A piece in ternary form follows in ABA structure.

Third

An interval of a distance of 3 notes.

Timbre

The quality and character of a musical or vocal sound.

Tonic

First note of a musical scale, also called the keynote.

Tonality

Key of a piece of music, whether it is major or minor or where it is rooted.

Unison

Various singers or instruments singing or playing the same note(s) together.

Vamping

Repeat a short, simple passage of music to accompany, usually on a guitar or piano.

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