Important Musical Terms

Active Listening vs. Passive Hearing
How does music work?

The Four Main Ideas We Will Discuss:

1. Rhythm
2. Pitch
3. Timbre
4. Form
1. Rhythm

- Organization of **time** in music

- Perhaps the most important aspect of music

- **Ex:** Sing theme from “The Simpsons”
1. Rhythm

• **Beat**: An even pulse

• When clapping or tapping your foot to music, you are “keeping the beat.”

Ex: The Rolling Stones –

“Get Off Of My Cloud” (1965)
1. Rhythm (cont.)

- **Metre**: Grouping of beats into a measure or bar
  i.e.: 4/4, 3/4
- What is a measure or a bar?
- Most music is in 4/4
- Guitar examples
- Tip: Tap foot or hand to help feel the beat
1. Rhythm (cont.)

- 3/4 examples (waltz feel)

Ex: Malvina Reynolds – “Little Boxes” (1962)

Ex: Jimi Hendrix Experience – “Manic Depression” (1967)
1. Rhythm (cont.)

• Closely related to 3/4 is 6/8
• Often used in slow blues
• Can be counted in two ways

Ex: Albert King – “Funk-Shun” (1967)

Ex: Creedence Clearwater Revival – “I Put a Spell On You” (1968)
1. Rhythm (cont.)

• **Other time signatures:**
• 5/4 (each bar is a group of 5 beats)

Ex: Dave Brubeck Quartet – “Take Five” (1959)

• 7/4 (each bar is a group of 7 beats)

Ex: Pink Floyd – “Money” (1973)
1. Rhythm (cont.)

• Changing time signature on one song:

4/4 and 7/8

Ex: Led Zeppelin – “The Ocean” (1973)
1. Rhythm (cont.)

- **Tempo**: the speed of the beat.

- Fast songs tend to have quicker tempos, while slow songs have slower tempos. Not always.

- **BPM**: Beats Per Minute

- Or, Italian terms: andante, allegro, presto, etc.
1. Rhythm (cont.)

- **Accent**: A stronger beat within a measure
  
  (Ex: Guitar)

- **Syncopation**: Moving the natural accent to another “un-natural” accent
  
  (Ex: Clapping)

- **Polyrhythm**: More than one independent rhythm or metre happening simultaneously
  
  (Ex: Group drumming demo)
1. Rhythm (cont.)

• Swing feel

• Very common in blues and jazz, but used in all styles of music.

• Ex: Guitar demo

• Ex: James Brown – “Cross Firing” (1961)

• Ex: Creedence Clearwater Revival – “The Midnight Special” (1969)
2. Pitch

• Highness and lowness of sounds
• Division of notes (Western and Indian)
2. Pitch (cont.)

- Scales and Octaves

- 7 note Western scale (Guitar demo)
- Arrangement/pattern of pitches within an octave

- 8\text{th} note is the \textit{octave} (same as the first note)
- Ex: A 440 (vibrations per second)
- Men and women tend to sing an octave apart

- Ex: “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”
- Ex: “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”
2. Pitch (cont.)

**Melody**

- A linear series of pitches
- Usually based around *scales*
- **Horizontal** presentation of pitch (in most systems of written music)
2. Pitch (cont.)

**Melody**

- Two main types of scales: **Major** and **Minor**
  - **Major**: happy, bright, cheery, optimistic
  - **Minor**: sad, dark, somber, sinister

(Ex: Guitar)

**Ex: Fur Elise in Major and Minor**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-rZD2AsHbI

**Ex: “Every Breath You Take,” and in minor key**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JyFrIH2-ns
2. Pitch (cont.)

Melody

• Melodies can be described as:

• **Conjunct**: smooth, easy to sing or play; moves by steps, no leaps (Ex: Ode To Joy)

• **Disjunct**: jumpy, difficult to sing or play; moves by leaps (Ex: Somewhere Over the Rainbow)
2. Pitch (cont.)

Melody

• Melodies can also be described as:
  • **Tonal** and **Atonal**
  • 99.9% of popular music is tonal

• This means the melodies are organized around a central pitch (often starts and/or ends here)
2. Pitch (cont.)

Melody

• Atonal music has no central pitch

Ex: Arnold Schoenberg –

“Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11” (1909)
2. Pitch (cont.)

Harmony

• Combining pitches to make **chords**
• **Vertical** presentation of pitch (in most systems of written music)
2. Pitch (cont.)

**Harmony**

- Harmony and chords are often described as:

  - **Consonant**: Smooth, typically pleasing sound

  - **Dissonant**: Harsh sounding, unstable, tension
2. Pitch (cont.)

Texture

• Density and disposition of musical lines

• **Monophonic**: “one sounding,” unison or parallel octaves, no accompaniment

Ex: Hildegard of Bingen – “O Greenest Branch” (Gregorian Chant)

• Any solo singer will be singing in a monophonic texture
2. Pitch (cont.)

Texture

- **Polyphonic**: “many sounding,” 2 or more lines simultaneously

- Ex: singing in rounds (Row, Row, Row Your Boat)

- Dixieland:

  Ex: Kid Ory’s Creole Jazz Band – “Loveless Love” (1959)
2. Pitch (cont.)

Texture

• **Homophony**: “same sounding,” lines move at same time, block chords

  **Ex: folk style strum**

• Multiple notes move together, not independently, but **interdependently**
2. Pitch (cont.)

**Texture**

- **Heterophony**: Close to the same, ornamented melody

  Ex: two fiddles playing same song

  Ex: group singing “Happy Birthday”