

ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

- Keeping the alternating-scale-tones rule in mind, build a triad based on “re”; build a triad based on “la.” Notice that chords often share tones with one another. Triads built on “do” (do–mi–sol) and “la” (la–do–mi) have two tones in common. Triads based on “fa” (fa–la–do) and “do” (do–mi–sol) have one tone in common.

Timbre

Every sound has a particular color or timbre. It is through timbre that you can tell the difference between your grandmother’s voice and your girlfriend’s, a flute and a violin, and (if you listen carefully) even distinguish one violin from another. During the course of the semester we will find that timbre can identify not only the individual or instrument producing the sound, but perhaps also the particular culture from which the music derives. In vocal music, for example, certain cultures value purity of tone while others value tones that are grainy or strongly nasal. So too, some instruments have a harsher quality than others. An instrument’s timbre depends on a combination of three factors: 1) the size of the instrument, 2) what it is made of, and 3) how the sound is produced. Playing styles can also influence timbre.

DYNAMICS

Dynamics refer to the volume of a note or passage of music. In Western art music, Italian terms are used to indicate how loudly or softly to play.

forte (*f*) = loud

piano (*p*) = soft.

Other dynamic markings include:

fortissimo (*ff*), louder than *forte*


mezzo-forte (*mf*), moderately loud

mezzo-piano (*mp*), moderately soft

pianissimo (*pp*), softer than *piano*.

The term *crescendo* means to get louder; *decrescendo* means to get softer.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

Musical instruments are categorized in many ways, though the most common in the Western system is that used in the modern orchestra: strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The early 20th-century German scholars Kurt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel created a more formal classification system based on five large categories: chordophones (stringed instruments: guitar, violin, etc.), aerophones (wind instruments: flute, trumpet, etc.), membranophones (drums), idiophones (shaken or struck instruments: maracas, xylophones, gongs, etc.), and electrophones (synthesizers, radios, theremins, etc.).  2.9

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Do you see potential weaknesses in the above musical instrument classification systems?
- The first classification system presented above is based on the instruments' role in the orchestra. The second is based on how the sound is produced. What other systems might work?
- Where does an acoustic instrument leave off and its electric counterpart begin? Rock guitarists, for example, create many new sounds through electronic effects.
- Theater companies, TV and movie producers try to save money by reproducing the sounds of instruments electronically rather than paying musicians. What effect does this have on the music? On the musicians? On the economy?
- In the 17th and 18th centuries, the trombone was associated with the underworld and death. Are certain instruments associated with particular ideas today?
- Notice how people change the timbre and pitch of their voices when talking to babies, yelling at a sports referee, or talking in front of a crowd. How and why do you change the timbre of your voice?

MUSICAL GENRES

The word “genre” means “type” or “kind.” Most cultural artifacts (art, literature, cinema, music, etc.) are labeled according to genre (novel vs. poem; watercolor vs. oil painting, for example). The following list includes the more common genres of Western art music; those you are likely to encounter in a concert setting.

Song: a work for a solo vocalist, usually with piano accompaniment (note that the term “song” is not a generic term for all pieces of music. Generally, if you do not hear singing, you are not hearing a song. Use the terms “piece” or “work” as a good substitute for “song.”)

Symphony: a large-scale work written for a symphony orchestra, usually consisting of separate sections called movements.


Concerto: a work for a solo instrument accompanied by a symphony orchestra, usually in three movements.

Sonata: a multi-movement piece either for solo piano or for piano plus one other instrument. For instance, a violin sonata would be for violin and piano.

Opera: a staged drama told in music.

Chamber music: any number of instrumental combinations usually written for nine or fewer players. The most prevalent is the string quartet, written for two violins, viola, and cello.

Form

Form refers to the overall shape or structure of a piece of music. Composers generally have a basic form in mind before starting to write. Occasionally the form is the invention of the composer, but usually it conforms to a traditional structure. Examples of traditional Western art music forms include binary (two parts); ternary (three parts); and rondo, in which a familiar refrain alternates with new material. Forms common to Western popular music include 32-bar song form and 12-bar blues. Composers use their full arsenal of musical elements to distinguish different sections of a form, including: melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, and timbre. Through repetition, contrast, and development, composers can both set up and thwart expectations. They can create tension or relaxation, chaos or order. We will consider these forms in subsequent chapters.  2.11

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Why might composers use forms for their music? Why not just write whatever comes into their heads?

ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

- Find artworks or poetry (or create your own) that illustrate the equivalent of binary, ternary, and rondo forms. How are the different sections delineated?
- Experiment with writing your own music. Try to incorporate aspects of each of the musical elements discussed in the text.

Conclusion

This chapter equipped us with a vocabulary comprising the basic tools used to describe, order, and analyze our listening experience. In subsequent chapters we put these tools to use in making sense of our musical world. The repertoire is wonderfully diverse, but general analytical techniques can be applied universally. With practice we will hear new complexities within single compositions, as well as connections between different musical genres, musical cultures, and historical eras.

Key Terms

- 12-bar blues
- 32-bar song form
- alapana
- beat
- binary
- biphony (biphonic)
- composition
- conjunct motion
- consonant
- dominant
- disjunct motion
- dissonant
- downbeat
- drone
- form
- gamelan
- genre
- harmony
- heterophony (heterophonic)
- homophony (homophonic)
- kotekan
- measure (or bar)
- melody
- meter
- monophony (monophonic)
- octave
- phrase
- pickup
- pitch (or tone)
- polyphony (polyphonic)
- raga
- range
- rondo

- rhythm
- sarod
- scale (major, minor, chromatic)
- sitar
- song
- subdominant
- tambura
- tempo
- ternary
- texture
- timbre
- tonic
- triad