

Glossary of terms used in music analysis

Accidental - a sharp, flat or natural found within a bar of music (not in the key signature).

Aeolian mode - an ancient scale that is identical to the *natural minor scale*. See *mode*.

Alberti bass - a broken chord accompaniment style particularly associated with Domenico Alberti (c.1710-1746) and subsequently used by many composers in the Classical period. The typical pattern is C-G-E-G.

Alto - the lower voice of the treble staff.

Ambient minimalism - a style of music that is calm and meditative, with frequent repetition of a small number of musical ideas, emphasising atmosphere over formal structure.

Appoggiatura - a note that does not belong to the prevailing harmony (chord), and which moves by step (usually downwards) to a chord note. For example, in a C major triad, F could be an appoggiatura (resolving to E). The term comes from an Italian word meaning "leaning". Appoggiaturas are always played or sung with more emphasis than the note of resolution, and they make the music more expressive. In the Baroque and Classical periods, appoggiaturas were often written as grace notes.

Atonality - the absence of any recognisable key or tonal centre. In an atonal composition, all pitches are theoretically of equal importance, so there is no tonic.

Augmentation - to make larger, generally referring to rhythmic values. Hence, an augmentation of ♩ ♪ ♫ ♬ would be ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩

Augmented 2nd - two successive scale steps that are three semitones apart, e.g. F to G#.

Augmented sixth chord - a chromatic chord (i.e. one which uses accidentals without changing the key) containing a major 3rd and an augmented 6th above the root. There are three types: Italian, French and German. All augmented 6th chords contain a *tritone*, which resolves outwards by step. For example, in the augmented 6th chord built above a C, the E and A# would resolve to D# and B, respectively, in the next chord. Augmented 6ths are usually followed by a dominant chord, so are chords of "dominant preparation".

Augmented triad - a 3-note chord of superimposed major 3rds. There are only four unique versions of this chord: C-E-G#, D \flat -F-A, D-F#-A# and E \flat -G-B.

Auxiliary note - a note that does not belong to the prevailing harmony (chord), and which links two chord notes of the same pitch by step. Auxiliary notes can be *diatonic* (not requiring an accidental) or *chromatic* (requiring an accidental, and moving by semitone step). For example, in C major, C-B-C contains a diatonic auxiliary note, while G-F#-G contains a chromatic auxiliary note. Also called *neighbour note*. See *unessential note*.

Bitonality - where two different keys are combined simultaneously, e.g. having a different key for each hand in a piece of piano music.

Blues scale - a scale used in popular music. There are many versions of this scale; one of the most common is (if in the key of C): C-E \flat -F-G \flat -G-B \flat -C. The blues scale is an attempt to replicate the "blue notes" of African-American vocal music, where some scale notes, particularly the 3rd and the 7th, are sung at a pitch somewhere *between* major and minor (e.g. between E and E \flat , or between B and B \flat). String and wind instruments can produce this effect by bending the pitch of the note. Piano music in a blues style will sometimes use both major and minor 3rds and 7ths in order to try to capture something of the flavour of the "blue notes".

Cadence - a musical ending, consisting of a progression of two chords. Cadences help to confirm the key, and thus provide "evidence" of a modulation. The main types of cadence are:

V-I (or V-i in minor keys), also called a *perfect cadence*, *authentic cadence* or *full close*. This is the strongest type of ending, since the roots of the chords fall a 5th, and the leading note rises a semitone to the tonic.

V-vi (or V-VI in minor keys), also called an *interrupted cadence* or *deceptive cadence*, creating an unexpected turn in the harmony, and delaying the inevitable V-I (or V-i) cadence.

The *imperfect cadence*, *half cadence* or *half close* - ending on the dominant chord (e.g. I-V, ii-V, etc.), bringing a temporary sense of closure.

Cadential six-four - the second inversion of the tonic chord (or, strictly speaking, a double *appoggiatura* above the dominant note) which resolves to a root position dominant chord, making a strong cadential progression.

Canon - an imitative style of composition, like a round. Two or more voices (or instrumental lines) have the same melody, or a transposition of it, but one is always at a fixed distance (commonly one bar) behind the other. There are famous examples by Pachelbel and Tallis.

Chorale - a hymn tune, harmonised using a fixed number of voices (usually four).

Chromatic - relating to the chromatic scale, which divides an octave into 12 semitones. The term comes from a Greek word meaning "coloured". A chromatic note does not belong to the prevailing major or minor key, but usually moves by semitone step (as in a chromatic scale) to a note of the major or minor key. Chromatic harmony involves chords that require one or more chromatic notes. See also *diatonic*.

Chromaticism - the use of chromatic harmony, or of chromatic *unessential notes*. In such cases, accidentals do not necessarily indicate a modulation.

Circle of fifths - a progression of chords whose roots fall a 5th or rise a 4th, giving the music a strong sense of direction. Also called *cycle of 5ths*. A circle of 5ths is often used to lead to a cadence (e.g. vi - ii - V - I), and may make use of *secondary dominant* or dominant 7th chords (e.g. VI⁷ - ii - V⁷ - I, or A⁷ - Dm - G⁷ - C).

Cluster chord - a chord formed using every available pitch within a specified range.

Coda - the final section of a piece (literally, the "tail").

Codetta - a short concluding passage (not necessarily at the end of the piece).

Consecutive fifths or octaves - where the interval of a perfect 5th or a perfect 8ve is heard in succession between the same two voice parts. Also called *Parallel 5ths or 8ves*. Consecutive 5ths and 8ves are forbidden in *functional harmony*, because they cause the individual voices to lose their independence. However, they have been employed deliberately by some composers from the late 19th Century onwards, such as Debussy.

Consonance - a harmonious or restful sound, e.g. a 3rd, 6th, or perfect interval. See also *dissonance*.

Contrapuntal - a style of music that makes use of *counterpoint*. Similar in meaning to *polyphonic*.

Counter melody - a theme that is heard in *counterpoint* with the main melody. Hence, a *countersubject* is a theme that is heard in counterpoint with the *subject*.

Counterpoint - two or more lines of melody heard simultaneously, in a way that makes musical sense.

Cross rhythm - the simultaneous use of two different rhythmic groupings (e.g. 2 against 3).

Descant - a counter melody in the upper voice.

Development - where the melodic, rhythmic or harmonic components of a theme are broken down and reshaped to produce new musical material.

Diatonic - relating to a scale that contains five tones and two semitones, such as a major, minor or modal scale. Diatonic harmony consists of chords that are made entirely from scale notes, without containing any foreign notes. See also *chromatic*.

Diminished seventh chord - a chord containing three superimposed minor 3rds. There are only three unique versions of this chord: B-D-F-A^b, C-E^b-F[#]-A and C[#]-E-G-B^b. The diminished 7th chord can be used for dramatic effect, as in the beginning of Beethoven's *Pathétique Sonata*. It is also very useful in modulations, since any note of a diminished 7th chord can be treated as a *leading note*. The diminished 7th chord is usually followed by a dominant or tonic chord.

Diminished triad - a 3-note chord of superimposed minor 3rds, e.g. C-E^b-G^b.

Diminution - to make smaller, generally referring to rhythmic values. Hence, a diminution of ♩ ♪ ♫ ♮ would be ♪ ♫ ♮ ♩

Dissonance - a clashing sound, e.g. a 2nd, a 7th, or an augmented or diminished interval. In functional harmony, a dissonance must be followed by a *resolution*. Treatment of dissonance became much more liberal during the 19th and 20th Centuries.

Dominant - the 5th note of a scale. Hence G is the dominant note of C major, G-B-D is the dominant triad of C major, and G major is the dominant key of C major. The dominant chord (V) is the second most important chord in any key, after the tonic.

Dominant seventh chord (V⁷) - a dominant triad with an added minor 7th above the root. In F major, the dominant 7th chord would be C-E-G-B^b. The dominant 7th chord always contains a *tritone* (E-B^b in the example above), which usually resolves inwards (to F-A using the example above). The dominant 7th chord is followed by a *tonic* or *submediant* chord in *functional harmony*. The added dissonance in a dominant 7th chord makes the imperative of resolution stronger than is the case with a regular dominant triad. See also *secondary dominant*.

Dominant pedal - the sustaining or repetition of the dominant note, usually in the bass. A dominant pedal builds tension, as well as creating an expectation for the return of the tonic chord.

Dorian mode - a scale similar to minor, but with a raised 6th and no raised 7th note. See *mode*.

Enharmonic equivalent - an alternative name for the same pitch. So C[#] is the enharmonic equivalent of D^b. An example of an enharmonic modulation is in Chopin's *Raindrop Prelude*: C[#] minor to D^b major.

Episode - a contrasting section that is not based on the main theme or subject.

False relation - a clashing sound caused by two different notes with the same letter name (e.g. F^b and F[#]) in close proximity in different voice parts.

Fantasia - a passage that allows the composer to follow a "flight of fancy", not necessarily based on any previous thematic material.

French sixth chord - a type of augmented 6th chord containing an augmented 4th as well as a major 3rd and augmented 6th, e.g. C-E-F[#]-A[#].

Fugal - a *contrapuntal* style of composition in which each voice enters in turn with the *subject* (or a transposition of the subject).

Functional harmony - a harmonic system in which each chord has a particular function or role: the dominant chord leads to the tonic, chords ii, IV and vi prepare for the dominant, etc. Functional harmony was used in most European art music from 1700 to 1900.

German sixth chord - a type of augmented 6th chord containing a perfect 5th as well as a major 3rd and augmented 6th, e.g. C-E-G-A \sharp . A German 6th chord sounds the same as a dominant 7th (C-E-G-B \flat), but its resolution is different - the tritone (E-A \sharp in the example above) would resolve outwards, so the resolution of the chord above would be B-D \sharp -F \sharp -B, not F-A-C-F.

Half-diminished seventh chord - a chord containing two minor 3rds and one major 3rd (e.g. C-E \flat -G \flat -B \flat). See also *diminished 7th chord*.

Harmonic minor scale - a form of minor scale where the 7th note is raised by a semitone. This allows for a *leading note*, but creates an augmented 2nd interval between the 6th and 7th notes, which can sound awkward when used melodically.

Hemiola - a change in rhythmic grouping, e.g. from $\downarrow \downarrow$ to $\downarrow \downarrow \downarrow$; frequently used in the Baroque period, especially before cadences, and also often used by Brahms. Hemiola increases the frequency of the accented beats in a 3:2 ratio. Bernstein's *America* contains constant examples.

Homophony - a style of composition having a single melody line, with a simple accompaniment. Homophony was prevalent in the Galant and Classical periods, and was to some extent a reaction against the complexity of polyphony in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Imitation - where the melody or rhythm of one voice part is copied by another. Imitation may be strict (if the intervals of the original are preserved) or free (where some modifications are allowed).

Interlude - a short connecting passage.

Inversion - to turn upside down. This can apply to intervals, chords or melodies. When an interval is inverted, the pitch names remain the same (hence C-E becomes E-C). When a chord is inverted, the root is no longer the lowest sound. When a melody is inverted, the size of each interval remains the same, but its direction (up or down) is reversed. Hence, the inversion of C-E-D is C-A-B; this is referred to as *mirror inversion*.

Italian sixth chord - a type of augmented 6th chord containing a major 3rd and augmented 6th above the root, e.g. C-E-A \sharp .

Leading note - the 7th note of a scale, which leads by semitone step to the tonic.

Lydian mode - a scale similar to the major scale, but with a raised 4th note. See *mode*.

Mediant - the 3rd note of a scale.

Melodic minor scale - a form of minor scale having a raised 6th and 7th note ascending, and using the *natural minor scale* descending. This allows for a leading note in the ascending scale, without having the augmented 2nd interval found in the *harmonic minor scale*.

Mixolydian mode - a scale similar to the major scale, but with a flattened 7th note. See *mode*.

Mode - an ancient scale which divides an octave into five tones and two semitones. Modes were used for religious chants in the Middle Ages. Initially, the modes contained no sharps or flats, and so could be played using only the white notes of the piano. The principal modes include:

Dorian - starting and ending on D, with semitones between 2nd-3rd and 6th-7th notes.

Phrygian - starting and ending on E, with semitones between 1st-2nd and 5th-6th notes.

Lydian - starting and ending on F, with semitones between 4th-5th and 7th-8th notes.

Mixolydian - starting and ending on G, with semitones between 3rd-4th and 6th-7th notes.

Aeolian - starting and ending on A, with semitones between 2nd-3rd and 5th-6th notes.

Modes have been used by more modern composers (particularly from the time of Debussy onwards), and are also used frequently in jazz; in these instances, the modes may undergo transposition, which means that sharps or flats would be required to preserve the pattern of tones and semitones.

Modulation - a change of key during the course of a piece. The simplest and most common modulations are to the most closely related keys (e.g. dominant, subdominant or relative major/minor), which involve the fewest added accidentals. A modulation generally requires a dominant-tonic cadence in order to establish the new key.

Motif or motive - a short, recognisable musical idea, with a distinctive melody and/or rhythm.

Natural minor scale - a form of minor scale without a raised 7th note. The 7th note of this scale is called the subtonic; it does not progress to the tonic note as strongly as the leading note found in the harmonic minor scale.

Neapolitan sixth chord - a chromatic chord (i.e. one which uses accidentals without changing the key) built on the flattened 2nd note of a scale. It is generally used in first inversion (hence the designation 6th, indicating a 6-3 or first inversion chord). In C \sharp minor, the Neapolitan 6th chord would be F \sharp -A-D (a D major chord); this chord can be found in the first movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. The Neapolitan 6th chord is generally followed by the dominant chord, so it is a chord of "dominant preparation".

Neighbour note - see *auxiliary note*.

Neoclassical - the use of Classical forms or genres by composers of a later era, often with some deliberate violation of traditional practice. One of the prevailing musical styles of the 20th Century, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g. Stravinsky). Similarly (though less commonly), Neo-Baroque.

Ninth chord - a 5-note chord of superimposed 3rds. The most common of these are the dominant major 9th (e.g. G-B-D-F-A in C major) and the dominant minor 9th (e.g. G-B-D-F-A \flat in C minor).

Octatonic scale - an 8-note scale, consisting of alternating tones and semitones, used by various 20th Century composers. It is a "mode of limited transposition", since there are only three unique versions of the scale:

C-D-E \flat -F-F \sharp -G \sharp -A-B-[C], C \sharp -D \sharp -E-F \sharp -G-A-B \flat -C-[C \sharp] and D-E-F-G-G \sharp -A \sharp -B-C \sharp -[D].

Ostinato - a recurring musical pattern (i.e. something that is obstinate or persistent).

Parallel chords - a series of chords in which all notes or voices are moving in the same direction. For example, the following ascending series: C-E-G-B \flat , D-F \sharp -A-C, E-G \sharp -B-D. Chords moving in parallel do not obey the rules of *functional harmony*, since they involve *consecutive 5ths*, *consecutive 8ves* or unresolved *dissonance*.

Passing note - a note that does not belong to the prevailing harmony (chord), but which links two chord notes by step. Passing notes can be accented (i.e. on the beat) or unaccented, and can be *diatonic* (not requiring an accidental) or *chromatic* (requiring an accidental, and moving by semitone step). For example, C-D-E contains a diatonic passing note, D, while C-G \sharp -A contains a chromatic passing note, G \sharp .

Pedal - a sustained or repeated note, usually in the bass. Also called *pedal point*. The most commonly occurring are *tonic pedal* and *dominant pedal*.

Pentatonic scale - a 5-note scale. There are many versions of this scale, the most common being the one formed using the five black keys on the piano (used in the central section of Debussy's *Voiles*). Most pentatonic scales have no harsh dissonance between any of the notes.

Phrygian mode - a scale containing a minor 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 7th. See *mode*.

Pitch class - notes with the same letter name, regardless of octave register.

Polyphony - where several melodic lines are combined simultaneously. Similar in meaning to *counterpoint*.

Primary triads - the tonic, dominant and subdominant chords in any key. Some scholars consider only the tonic and dominant chords to be primary triads.

Relative major/minor - the major and minor scales having the same key signature, e.g. G major and E minor.

Reprise - the return of something that was heard previously.

Resolution - a consonance that follows a dissonance, with the dissonant note(s) usually moving by step (semitone or tone). The resolution releases the tension created by the dissonance.

Retrograde - when a series of notes is heard in the reverse order. So the retrograde of C-D-E is E-D-C.

Root - the note above which a chord is built. Hence C is the root of the chord C-E-G. In a root position chord, the root is the lowest note, which gives the chord a feeling of strength and stability.

Secondary dominant - a chromatic chord that temporarily functions as the dominant to a chord that is not the tonic. For example, in C major, the chord D-F \sharp -A could be a secondary dominant if followed by the triad G-B-D, without necessarily being considered a modulation. Also called *applied dominant*. The 7th is often added to the chord, making a secondary (or applied) dominant 7th. See also *circle of fifths*.

Sequence - the repetition of a musical pattern at a higher or lower pitch, e.g. E D C F \sharp E D G \sharp F \sharp E. If the melodic intervals are preserved exactly, it may be called a *real sequence*. If the intervals in the melody are altered but the chord pattern is preserved, it may be called a *harmonic sequence*.

Seventh chord - a 4-note chord of superimposed major or minor 3rds. These include the major 7th chord (a major triad with an added major 7th, e.g. C-E-G-B), minor 7th chord (a minor chord with added minor 7th, e.g. C-E \flat -G-B \flat), *dominant 7th* chord, *diminished 7th* chord and *half-diminished 7th* chord.

Soprano - the upper voice of the treble stave.

Stretto - the overlapping of subject entries in a *contrapuntal* piece. The term comes from the Italian for "drawn together", and can also indicate an *accelerando* when used as a performance instruction.

Subdominant - the 4th note of a scale. Hence F is the subdominant note of C major, F-A-C is the subdominant triad of C major, and F major is the subdominant key of C major.

Subject - a theme or melody; the term is particularly used to designate important themes in fugues or sonatas.

Submediant - the 6th note of a scale (a 3rd below the tonic). Hence A is the submediant note of C major, and A-C-E is the submediant triad of C major.

Supertonic - the 2nd note of a scale, a tone above the tonic.

Suspension - a prepared *appoggiatura*. The dissonance (i.e. non-chord note) must be prepared by being sounded in the previous chord. Sometimes the preparatory note and the suspension are tied together, though this is not mandatory.

Swing - a division of the beat into an "easy" three, so that ♪ would be played more like ♪³♪.

Syncopation - displacing the normal accent scheme by placing an accent or long note on a weak beat, or by having a rest or a tied note on a strong beat. Syncopation is used occasionally in classical music, and extensively in popular music.

Tenor - the upper voice of the bass stave.

Tierce de Picardie (Picardy third) - an alteration to the tonic chord in a minor key, changing the minor 3rd to a major 3rd to make a major triad. Commonly applied to the final chord of compositions in minor keys during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, as the major chord was considered to be more consonant.

Tonal centre - when a piece of music is not in a recognisable major or minor key, but still has an identifiable main note, this note is the tonal centre.

Tonic - the first, and most important, note of a scale. The tonic note is also known as the keynote, and the tonic triad is the “home” chord of any key.

Tonic major/minor - major and minor keys that have the same tonic note. Hence C major is the tonic major of C minor. Also known as *parallel major/minor*.

Tonic pedal - the sustaining or repetition of the tonic note, usually in the bass. A tonic pedal confirms or strengthens the sense of key.

Transition - a connecting passage, usually containing a modulation.

Transposition - where a given melody is rewritten in a different key. The characteristic shape of the melody is preserved, but it will sound at a higher or lower pitch.

Triad - a 3-note chord of superimposed 3rds. Triads can be formed above any note of a scale, and are identified by Roman numerals (uppercase for major, lowercase for minor).

Tritone - an interval spanning three tones, e.g. from C to F#. Also known as an augmented 4th or diminished 5th. It is one of the most dissonant of all intervals, and was called *diabolus in musica*, or the devil’s interval, in medieval times. Keys that are a tritone apart (e.g. C major and F# major) sound extremely distant harmonically.

Twelve bar blues - a 12-bar chord progression, using only primary triads, which is repeated to form the harmonic basis of certain styles of popular music. The basic chord progression is: I-I-I-IV-IV-I-I V-IV-I-I.

Unessential note - a note that does not belong to the prevailing harmony (chord), but which moves by step to a note of the chord. Examples are *passing notes*, *auxiliary notes*, *appoggiaturas* and *suspensions*. Unessential notes should be disregarded when analysing a chord or determining the key.

Whole tone scale - a 6-note scale, consisting only of whole tones. It is a “mode of limited transposition”, since there are only two unique versions of the scale: C-D-E-F#-G#-A#[C] and C#-D#-F-G-A-B-[C#]. Because there are no semitones in the whole tone scale, there can be no *leading note*, so the whole tone scale creates a highly ambiguous tonality.