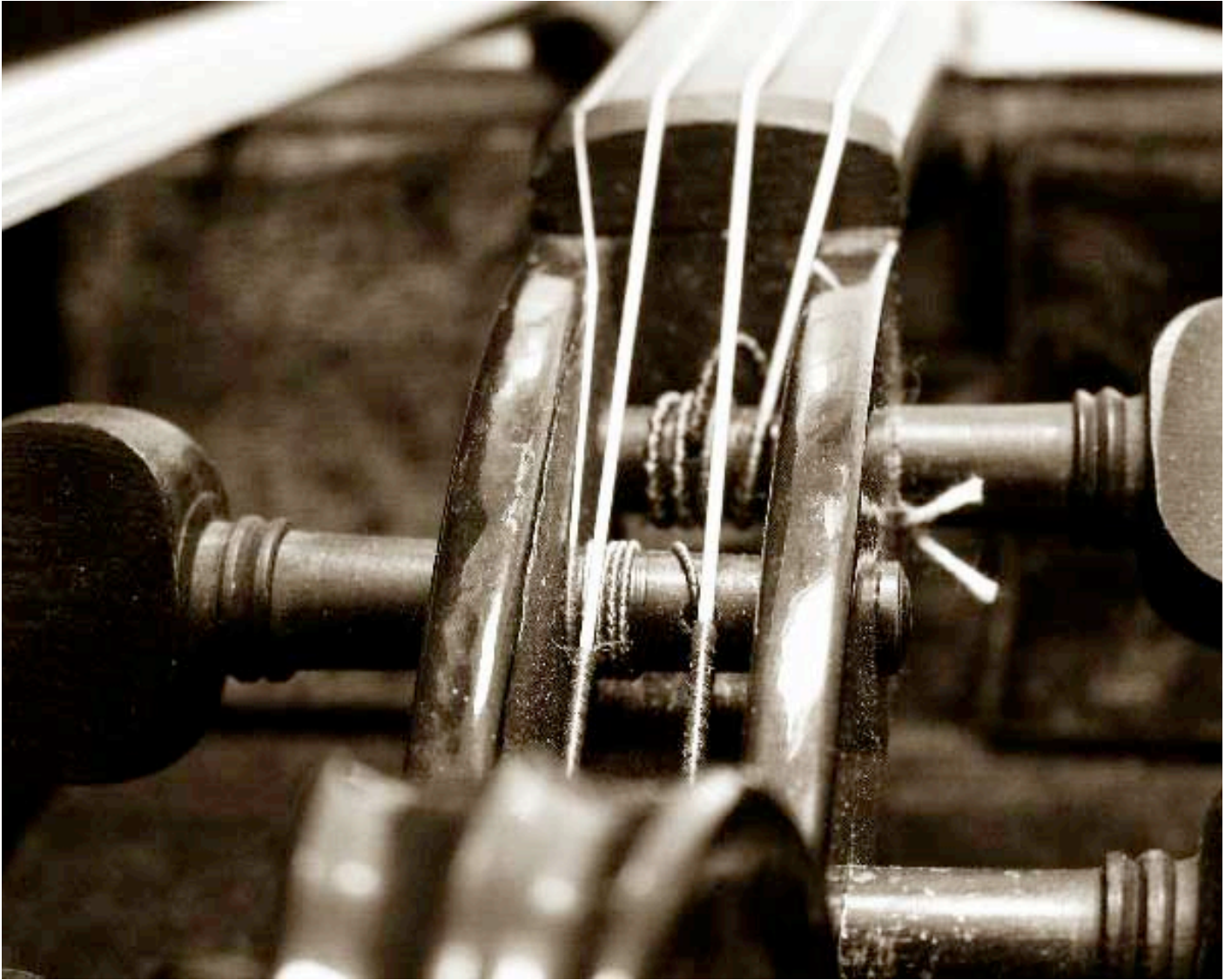


# *Aural Concepts*





## CONTENTS



How to Use this Booklet .....	3
Duration .....	5
Pitch .....	7
Structure .....	10
Texture .....	12
Dynamics & Expressive Techniques .....	14
Tone Colour .....	16
Unity, Contrast, Variety & Balance .....	18

# How to use this booklet



*Practice and practice analysing music. Choose tracks from your own CD collection and try to play the melodies, rhythms etc.*

## How to Structure my Answer?

As in an essay or formal argument, one must state a point/argument, and then provide some form of 'proof' to backup ones viewpoint. In an essay this is normally done through the use of quotes from a text, or reasoning from an excerpt of a text.

Apply this analogy to music, and in the aural exam you may follow a structure similar to:

**Introduction – Body** (with quotes of notations and graphs) –

**Conclusion:**

But always referring back to the question!

This means that you can answer in point form or long sentences, as long as it covers the basic structuring of an answer.

## Answer in this fashion →

- (1) Listen for the particular concept
- (2) Describe in detail what you hear, using graphs, notations, and correct musical terminology
- (3) Give the cause/effect/reason for what you have heard according to the concept(s) asked in the question

### **Just in case I missed something...**

- Where appropriate use (1) Essay Form; (2) Point Form; & (3) Diagrams – but be specific and clear
- Study the question Carefully and underline key words
- Always begin with a list of points in your working space (such as the Structure and Instrumentation of the excerpt) – then expand/build on these in your answer
- Make sure you answer the question without including any irrelevancies
- Always explain the Terminology you use (e.g. legato = smooth and flowing)
- Keep your discussion factual – always backup your opinions with factual reasons
- The drawing of pictures with your written answer to help show the examiner what you are hearing and thus commenting on is extremely beneficial
- Traditional Notation or Graphic Notation can both be used – make sure they are clearly labelled and relevant to the question
- Label any and all diagrams & always clearly identify the sections that you are writing about:

Remember → What? Did I hear

→ When? Did it occur - in what section

→ How? What played it, in what manner, with what technique

→ Why? Did the composer/arranger do it this way - unity, variety, tone colour etc

### **What you must do...**

- **Memorise** the following points for each question - they will act as prompts when undertaking Aural examinations
- **Make** your own study notes next to every point - give definitions, supply Italian musical terms or notate examples

- Think about what you are hearing, write it down, then give the Effect of what you hear with reasoning and
- Be able to write about each of the elements of Unity, Variety, Balance & Contrast – these terms will explain how a composer uses the elements in the composition process
- Be able to discuss the roles of the instruments as they are used in an extract, e.g.: their Rhythmic, Melodic or Harmonic function

# Duration



Whenever you hear or write the words 'percussion,' 'drum kit,' or 'syncopation' be prepared to notate some rhythms

## **Definition:**

*Relates to the flow of music in time, how long it takes, the types of notes/patterns used and the speed it moves at*

## **Metre & Phrasing**

- Time Signatures (Simple & Compound) eg: 2/4 3/4 4/4 6/8 9/8
- Absence of time signature
- Multi-metre
- Regular four bar phrasing or otherwise
- Balanced or imbalanced phrasing

## **Rhythmic Patterns**

- Metrical (normal accents)
- Syncopation
- Rubato
- Repetitive Patterns
- Rhythmic Ostinatos
- Cross Rhythms
- Polyrhythms
- Hemiola
- Motivic Development

## Tempo

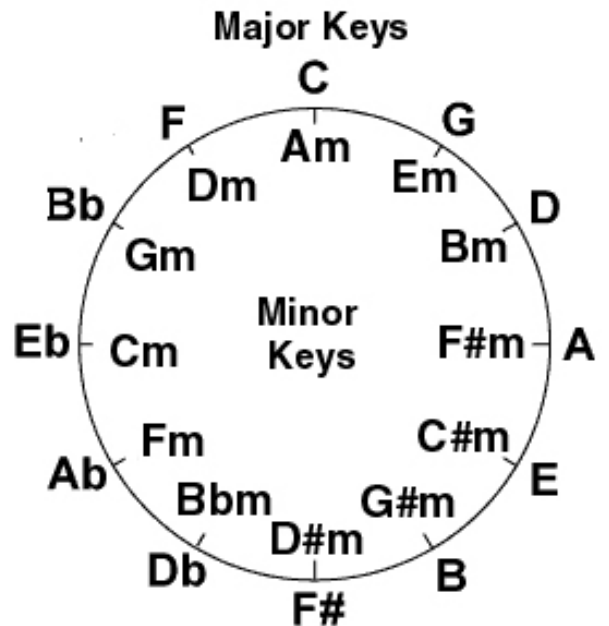
- All speeds – from very fast to very slow
- Changes in Speed
- What is the speed of the pulse/beat? (Use Italian terms)
- Are there changes in the tempo? Gradual, or Sudden?
- Are there any main pulses?
- What is the effect of any tempo changes?
- How does tempo and rhythmic changes relate to the other concepts?
- Describe the beat? e.g. steady, indefinite, strong/weak
- Are there accents? e.g. regular or un-regular
- Describe the Metre (bar lengths). e.g. changing, constant
- Is there syncopation? e.g. overall, across parts etc.
- What are the note values? e.g, sustained notes, dotted notes, runs and fast notes
- Are there rhythmic patterns? e.g. riffs, ostinatos, polyrhythms, cross rhythms
- Describe the mood? e.g. lively, animated, dramatic, constant motion
- **How does the rhythm relate to the other concepts?**
  - What is the rhythm of the melody?
  - Which instrument plays each rhythmic pattern?
  - How does the tempo affect the rhythm?
  - How does the rhythm fit into the texture?
  - What are the dynamics of the rhythm?
- In a Time Signature the top number tells us how many beats are in the bar – while the bottom number tells us what type of note/beat makes up the bar
- Duple Metre = beats that are divisible by \_\_\_\_\_.
- Triple Metre = beats that are divisible by \_\_\_\_\_.
- Simple Time = each beat has 2 equal subdivisions, e.g. Simple, Duple Metre's (such as 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 etc)
- Compound Time = each beat has 3 equal subdivisions, (Such as 3/4, 6/8. 9/8. 12/8 etc)



## Rhythmic Devices

- Things that can be used in rhythm eg. Syncopation, triplets, duplets, ties, anacrusis

# Pitch



*Memorise this important harmonic tool. Remember, Pitch is not just the melody - it is the harmony and bass line too!*

**Definition:**

*Refers to the 'highness' & 'lowness' of sound. The concept of 'pitch' has an included subgroup Harmony.*

**Melody**

- Is there a melody? Or a main Theme?
- Is there one main melody, or many different ones in succession?
- Is there a Countermelody? e.g. Descant
- Is there more than one melody playing at a time? If so, where does this happen?
- Is there Canonic Treatment or Contrapuntal Treatment of the melody?
  
- What is the shape of the melody? (Contour)
  - Movement by Steps (scale like) = Conjunct
  - Movement by Leaps (intervals) = Disjunct
  - Ascending/Descending
  - Linear movement (staying in a line)
  - Similar Motion
  - Contrary Motion
  - Oblique Motion

- Are there any regular or recurring intervals?
- What is the range of the melody?
  - Wide/Large
  - Small/Limited
  - Or name the intervals of the range?
- Describe the melodic interpretation
  - Lyrical, Cantabile, Staccato, Legato
  - Tormented
  - Angular or Distinct
  - Awkward
- Are there any patterns of melody which recur?
  - Riffs
  - Ostinatos
  - Motifs
- Describe the Phrasing
  - Balanced/Symmetrical
  - Number of different phrases
  - Question & Answer Phrases
  - Repetitive
  - Sequential
  - Contrasting
- Where does the climax occur?
- Is there melodic ornamentation? Trills, Glissandos, Mordents, Turns?
- Is the melody played throughout?
- Is the melody developed? Any Themes present?
- Describe the Tonality
  - Diatonic (major or minor)
  - Chromatic (When the music has many accidentals outside of a key or plays chromatic passages)
  - Modal (An old system of scales that are neither major nor minor)
  - Atonal (No definite tonal centre, or home 'key')
  - Centred on a particular note
  - Pentatonic ( a 5 note scale. eg: c,d,e,g,a)
  - Polytonal – more than one tonal centre
  - Indefinite pitch (sounds produced by non-pitched sound sources like spoken voice, the telephone, non-pitched drums)
- Clefs
  - Soprano
  - Alto
  - Tenor
  - Bass
- General Comments: Is it associated with a particular...
  - Nationality
  - Time Period
  - Dance Form
  - Popular Style
- **What is the relation of melody to other elements?**
  - How does it relate to formal Structure?
  - What is the Rhythm of the melody?
  - How does it relate to the Harmony?
  - What is the Tone Colour of the melody?
  - How does it relate to the Texture?
  - What Performing Media (Instruments) are used?
  - How does the Tempo affect the melody?
  - What is the use of Dynamics in the melody?



## Harmony

### Definition:

**A combination of notes sounded simultaneously, whether instruments, or voices**

### Tonality

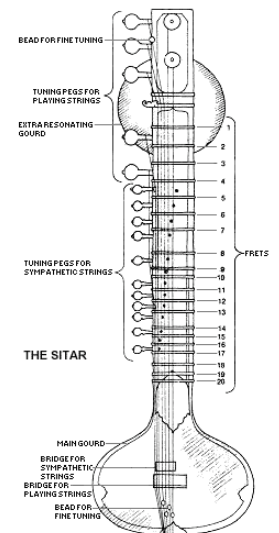
- Diatonic = belongs to Major & Minor chords and tonalities
  - Major = happy, bright, using tones and semitones
  - Minor = sad, dull, using a different arrangement of tones and semitones
- Polytonal = having chords belonging to more than one key
- Atonal = having no real key centre
- Modal Harmonies = from Medieval times, used in plainsong/folk tunes/Gregorian Chant
- Pentatonic = having only 5 notes which may be repeated in different octaves
- Jazz Harmonies (7<sup>th</sup>, b7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, etc) = 'Added On' chords typical of Jazz and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music
- Chromatic Harmonies = c c# d d# e f f# etc.
- Whole Tone = Debussy used this scale which consists of a whole tone between each note, eg. C D E F# G# A# C

### Chord Progressions

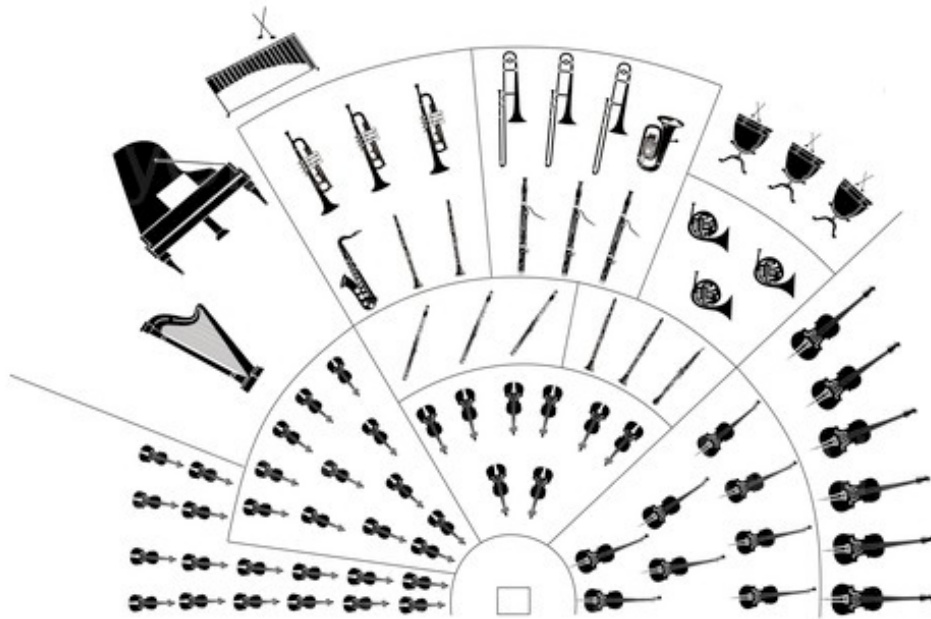
- Consonance vs Dissonance (this gives a sense of harmonic direction)
- Cadences:
  - Perfect: V - I
  - Imperfect: I - V
  - Plagal: IV - I
  - Interrupted: V - VI
  - Modulations – are these used? = Changing from one key to another
- Harmonic Rhythm (the rate of change of the chords)
- Ostinato Patterns
- 12 Bar Blues Chords (I, IV, V)
- Ground Bass
- Alberti Bass = a bass in broken chords (arpeggios)
- Part Writing = Such as writing for four voices in Soprano, Alto, Tenor Bass
- Oom – Pah – Pah = Like in waltz where the bass is the Oom, and the chords are the Pah – Pah. (Mostly a 3/4 or 6/8 Time Signature)

### Is there Dissonance?

- Resolved = next chord 'eases' the sound
- Unresolved = next chord does not 'ease' the sound but adds more discord
- Dissonance through unessential notes
- Dissonance through Polyphonic Textures
- Suspensions = Keeping a note of a chord or melody sounding/ringing against the next chord (thus creating dissonance or suspension), before it finally moves to the next chord making it 'resolve.'
- Pedal Point = A note held over in the bass while the rest of the chord(s) change above it
- Drone = Unrelated bass note(s) sounding throughout, but not belonging to the chords being used



# Structure



**Definition:**

*How the piece is constructed and how it is divided into sections or parts to create a unified whole*

**Initially** →

Phrases, motifs, riffs, and ostinatos are useful in discussing construction

**Identification**

- Identify the main motifs and where these motifs re-occur
- Identify the main themes and where these themes re-occur

A quick pencil sketch or brief verbal description will help identify these themes or motifs later in the extract

**Structural Analysis**

- Repetition of themes or motifs
- Development of themes or motifs
- Old material vs new material
- Label the themes eg: A, B, A<sub>1</sub>, C, etc.

## Naming the Form

- Binary Form (A B)
- Ternary Form (A B A)
- Rondo Form (A B A C A)
- Theme & Variations Form
- Sonata Form
- Fugal Forms (Fugue, Canon):
- Concerto Grosso
- Solo Concerto
- Symphony
- Vocal structures (strophic, through composed, cyclic, pop, antiphonal)
- World music structures (Ragas from India)

- Are there clear-cut divisions? e.g. AB, ABA, ABACA
- Is a new change indicated by a change in the music?
- Is there a theme with variations?
- Is this piece a part of a larger form? e.g. Symphony, Concerto, Sonata, Opera, Musical
- Is this a Fugue?

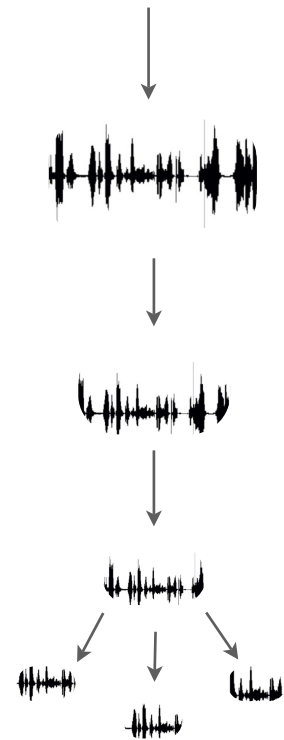
- Discuss the use of:
  - Repetition
  - Imitation
  - Variation
  - Contrast
  - Sequences
  - Phrases
  - Themes
  - Improvisation

- Does this work have an introduction and/or Coda?
- Is there a Blues Pattern?
- Is it Strophic Form? (verse, chorus, verse, chorus) e.g. A hymn
- Is it through composed e.g. a, b, c, d, e, f, g etc.

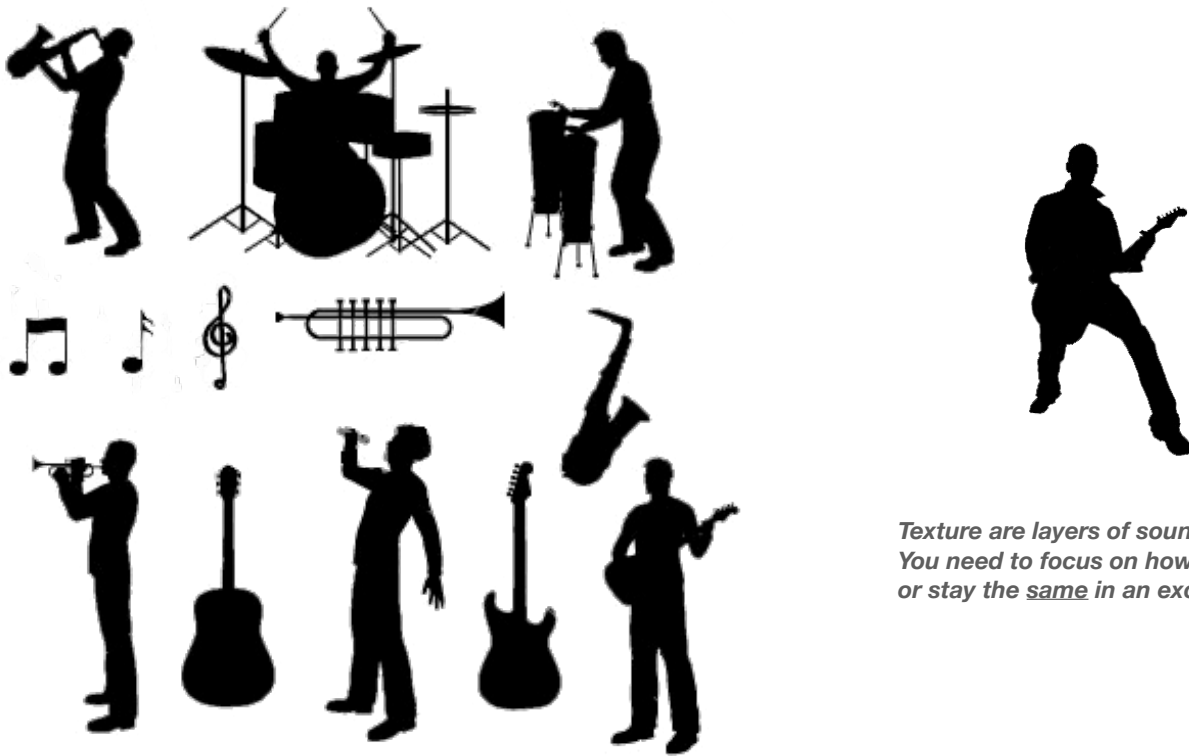
- **How does this concept relate to other concepts?**

- Does the Structure contribute to:
  - Unity: The repetition of melody, rhythm or sections, or features of the music which remain constant throughout
  - Contrast: Any features of the music which change or are different throughout
  - Balance: Aural features 'take turns' to play the melody etc or just with the layers of sound

*Remember that it is best to start big (with the overall structure) and gradually get more and more detailed*



# Texture



*Texture are layers of sound.  
You need to focus on how they change  
or stay the same in an excerpt*

**Definition:**

*Refers to the layers of sound in a composition*

**Layers of Sound**

- Monophonic Texture = One line of melody (like a Gregorian chant)
- Parallel = One line doubles another, moving in the same direction, a fixed interval apart
- Homophonic Texture = One line of melody with chordal accompaniment, often both parts will have the same rhythm
- Polyphonic Texture = More than one different melody playing at the same time
- Counterpoint = The lines or parts (each with its own melody) move independently
- Heterophonic Texture = One part closely doubles another, but with ornamentation and embellishments in the main part

### Other Textures in music

- Fugue = Polyphonic music where each line states the theme in turn, then accompanies other lines
- Canon = All parts have the same melody though starting at different times. Harmony is created out of independent melodic lines
- Imitation = One part imitates the material of another part in turn
- Tone cluster = A chord built on adjacent notes (banging your head on the piano)
- Unison/Doubling = Singing/playing by a number of voices/instruments of the same notes, at the same time may be the same pitch or in a different octave

### Densities of Sound (Layers)

- Rich, thick, full, dense, etc (give reasons)
- Light, airy, sparse etc (etc reasons)
- Changing densities/layers – identify the sections
- What is the degree of density? OR
- How many layers of sound are there?
- Describe the changes that occur in density
  
- What are the *Layers* of sound? e.g.
  - Foreground, Middle-ground, Background
  - Instrumentation
  - Voices such as Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass
  - Orchestral Layers
  
- What is the relationship between layers of sound? e.g. similar or contrary?
  
- Is the piece monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, linear?
- Is there contrast or variety? e.g. in Antiphonal effects
- Describe the texture using words relating to 'touch' e.g. smooth, silky, coarse, rough,
  
- **How does texture relate to the other concepts?** e.g. instrumentation, dynamics, structure

# Dynamics & Expressive Techniques



*Dynamics are more than just 'loud' and 'soft.'*

*To answer Expressive Techniques you need to know a little about how most instruments are played - or alter their sound*

**Definition (Dynamics):**  
*The strength or force of sound (= volume).*

**Definition (Expressive Techniques):**  
*Refers to how a performer plays and instrument, how the sound is created by various adaptations to give an effect.*

## **Dynamics**

**Remember you need to fill in the appropriate terms from research...**

- Volume levels
- Some common Italian terms
- Changes in volume
- Terraced dynamics
- Accents

### Expressive Techniques

- Articulation patterns – staccato, legato, tenuto
- Various accents e.g. > - sfz
  
- Instrumental techniques such as glissando, sul ponticello, spiccato, con sordino (with mutes), distortion, guitar pedal effects etc.
- Stylistic indications such as dolce, cantabile, conforza, tranquillo, rubato, & various tempo changes
- Loudness & Softness of the music, e.g. *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, <, >,
  
- Are these dynamic levels achieved by:
  - a) All the instruments playing loudly or softly
  - b) Adding or Subtracting instruments?
  - c) Terraced dynamics – the way the instruments are played
  
- Are there Terraced Dynamics? Abrupt changes from loud to soft in the music caused by the sudden addition or subtraction of instruments playing, e.g. Concerto Grosso (Baroque Period)
- What expressive techniques are used?

e.g. Articulation – are the notes played?

- Smoothly (legato)
- Short & Detached (staccato)
- Plucked (pizzicato)
- Bowed (arco)

e.g. Stylistic Indications – the style in which the music is to be played

- Maestoso (majestically)
- Cantabile (make it 'sing')

e.g. Ornamentation – decoration of notes

- Trill (*tr*)
- Drum Roll (\\)

e.g. Tempo – changes in the speed of music

- Rallentando (*rall*) or ritenuto (*rit*) – gradually getting slower
- Accelerando (*accele*) – gradually getting faster

e.g. Phrasing – marks the music with slurs to create subdivisions of the melodic line

e.g. Electronic Manipulation of sounds

# Tone Colour



*Tone Colour is an instrument's own sound.  
But this 'sound' can be altered through effects or special performance techniques*

**Definition:**

*Refers to the quality & 'colour' of sound created by various combinations of instruments/vocals etc.*

**Performing Media (Instruments)**

That is, sound source materials, combined sound sources, and sound production methods

- Solos – voices or instruments, accompanied or unaccompanied
- Small ensembles – duets, trios, quartets etc
- Large Ensembles – choirs, opera houses, various orchestras (chamber, string, symphony, studio), & various bands (brass, stage, military)
- Electronic Music – synthesisers, musique concrete, electric guitar pedal effects etc
- Cultural groups – Gamelan orchestras, various indigenous instruments such as didjeridu, sitar, koto, bouzouki etc
- Directions of playing – double or triple stopping, arco, pizz, harmonics, flutter-tonguing, mutes



### Objective Descriptions

- Sound Production – traditional and non-traditional (blowing, hitting, plucking, scraping, shaking)

Chordophones	• String sounds – plucked or bowed in various ways
Aerophones	• Reed sounds – single or double reeds • Wind sounds – recorders, flutes • Brass sounds – including various mutes • Vocal sounds – not just singing e.g. growls, whistles, chanting, melisma, diction, glottal stops, portamento etc
Electrophones	• Electronic sounds
Idiophones	• Percussion sounds – anything struck or hit
Membranophones drum	• Percussion – or just an instrument with a vibrating skin stretched over it e.g. dejembe
Metalaphones	• Instruments made from metal

### Subjective Descriptions (always supported by factual reasons)

- Dark, sombre, mysterious etc
- Warm, bright, clear etc
- Liquid, harsh, nasal etc
- Describe the sound source:
  - A. Voice type, e.g. male & female  
Or High (solo, duet, choral)  
& Low (accompanied, unaccompanied)
  - B. Instrument – specifically or by group
  - C. Unrecognisable – categorise into a similar group - describe as ‘sounds like...’
  - D. Electronic, e.g. Synthesiser, tape recorder, Mp3 recorder etc - remembering ‘digital vs analog’
- Consider the combinations e.g.
  - Solo vs Small Ensemble vs Large Ensemble
  - Rock/Jazz Band
  - Orchestra
  - Small Chamber Groups
  - String Quartet
  - Woodwind Ensemble
  - Brass Ensemble
  - Folk Group
- Consider the *Ranges* of instruments  
& the *Tessitura* of voices
- Comment on any unorthodox use of instruments e.g.
  - Prepared Piano
  - Strings Col Legno etc
- How does the performing media relate to the other elements? e.g.
  - Where do they play in relation to structure?
  - What is the tone colour produced overall, and separately in different sections?
  - Are the dynamics dependant on the types of instruments being used?
- Frame of Reference/Context/Style  
Style is the description of the distinctiveness of a piece of music, whereby it can be recognised.  
e.g. Category, Period, Place of Origin, Orientation (religious – Christian, Orthodox, Eastern; Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim)
- This also includes a detailed analysis of the elements whereby categories, periods, and place of origin can be recognised.
  - Describe the Category? – e.g. rock, jazz, pop
  - Describe the Period of composition? e.g. Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, 20<sup>th</sup> Century
  - What is the place of origin of the composition? e.g. Western, non-Western



Description of Use.....	19
Unity.....	20
Variety.....	20
Contrast.....	21
Balance.....	21

When asked to comment upon **Unity, Contrast** or **Variety**, you do so, using the concepts of music as your foundation.

For example...

If asked 'How is Unity achieved in this piece?' You go about answering the question by carefully analysing **each of the concepts** of music, and discuss them as relevant to 'creating unity in this excerpt.'

The procedure is the same for a **contrast** or a **variety** or **balance** question.

The important thing to remember is that Unity, Contrast, Variety & Balance are **not** musical concepts, but rather are created through the manipulation of the concepts of music.

So when dealing with a question based on these **effects**, deal with each one of the concepts thoroughly in relation to the question.

## **UNITY**

A sense of sameness or belonging to the one thing, ie: choosing the musical materials which make the individual sections sound as if they belong to the one piece.

Eg: Development of motifs

## **VARIETY**

Diversity or change, ie: introducing new material, or presenting old material in a new way.

Eg: Variation form, development sections, same material with changes in metre or tonality

## **CONTRAST**

Showing differences or opposites in the mood or character of the music (as they apply in any of the elements/concepts).

Eg: loud vs soft, long notes vs short notes, polyphonic texture vs homophonic texture

## **BALANCE**

Achieving a correct proportion in each of the musical elements/concepts.

Eg: new material vs old material, dynamic balance in the selection of instruments, the use or over use of a melodic/rhythmic motif

### Unity can be achieved by

- Repetition
- Repeating one melody and changing it to a greater or lesser degree:
  - Using inversion
  - Using different instruments
  - Changing certain intervals
  - Using ornaments
  - Changing between major and minor
  - Augmenting or diminishing the note values
  - Developing only a part of the motif
  - Using sequences
  - Using imitation
  - Using repetition
- Repeating a rhythmic motif
- Maintaining the same rhythmic 'feel'
- Repeating a harmonic pattern
- Repeating a harmonic ostinato
- Using a drone / pedal point
- Maintaining one performing medium
- Repeating sections of the music
- Using melodic sequences
- Maintaining one texture / layer = consistency
- Repeating a pattern of dynamics
- Repeating a pattern of changing tempi
- Repeating a pattern of changing tone colours



### Variety can be achieved by

- Using changes in Key Signature by modulation or change of tonality
- Using changes in time signature
- Using different instruments or tone colours
- Using different dynamics in contrasting sections
- Using new material, either motifs or sections
- Presenting the same material in a different way eg: developing a motif
- Changing the texture eg: thick/thin, homophonic/polyphonic
- Using different rhythmic patterns
- Using different chord progressions and/or harmonic styles

**Contrast can be achieved by**

- Repeating the same melody in different keys or registers
  - Introducing new musical data eg: new motifs or themes, syncopated rhythms etc
  - Melodic or rhythmic variation
  - Modulation to a different key
  - Changing the metre
  - Changing the accompaniment
  - Contrasting the tone colours
  - Altering the formal structure – different sections of music
  - Changing the texture / layers
  - Introducing a counter melody
  - Changing the dynamics, tempi etc
  - Altering methods of sound with an instrument = expressive techniques
  - Contrasting the phrase lengths
- 
- Melodies may contrast if one is conjunct and the other disjunct
  - Introduction of dissonance or consonance

**Balance can be achieved by**

- 



**My Notes...**