

Glossary of musical terms- GCSE Music

| Keyword | Explanation/What you need to describe in the exam |
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| Dynamics | How loud or soft the music is and any changes in volume |
| Rhythm | Different note lengths and devices used |
| Tempo | The speed of the music |
| Metre | The time signature of the piece e.g 4/4, 12/8 |
| Tonality | The key of the music, whether it is major/minor/modal/atonal and any modulations |
| Structure | The organisation of the music and the phrases within the piece |
| Melody | The shape of the tune and devices used to create the melody |
| Instrumentation | The instruments heard, it's role and any techniques used |
| Texture | How the layers of music are arranged |
| Harmony | How the different pitches sound together |

Key- BC= Bach (Brandenburg concerto) B= Beethoven (Pathetique) KQ= Killer Queen by Queen P= Purcell (Music for a while) DG= Defying Gravity by Schwartz SW= Star Wars by John Williams AC= AfroCelt soundsystem (Release) S= Samba Em Preludio by Spalding

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| Fortissimo | A very loud dynamic/volume. | SW |
| Sforzando/Sfz | Stress and emphasis on a note. | SW, DG |
| Varied dynamics | Eg fp, f, ,f, ff | B |
| Moderato | Tempo Marking – playing at moderate speed | KQ |
| Allegro | A fast tempo. | BC, B |
| Grave | A slow and solemn" tempo. | B |
| Rubato/Free tempo | Playing with expressive and rhythmic freedom | S, AC |
| Andante | 80-100 bpm = Walking Speed | SW |
| Rallentando | Starting to slow down. | DG |
| 4/4 Time Signature | 4 crotchet beats in the bar. | B, P, S, AC, SW (M.T) |
| 3/4 metre | 3 crotchet beats in a bar. | SW (R.B) |
| 12/8 | Compound time signature | KQ |
| 2/4 | 2 crotchet beats in a bar. | BC |
| Time signature changes | Change of time signature/change of the beat. | DG |
| Syncopation | Emphasising the off beat. | KQ, DG, P, S |
| Triplets | Playing three notes in the space of two of the same value. | KQ, BC, DG, S, SW |
| Dotted Rhythms | Rhythms that have dotted notes. | BC, B, DG, P |
| Semiquaver Runs | Passages of just semiquavers | BC, AC |
| Continuous use of quavers | Quavers/notes worth half a beat are used consistently throughout the piece. E.g LH Piano/Harpsichord | B, P |

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| Staccato Crotchets | Crotchets/notes worth one beat that are played short and snappy. | B |
| Pause Marks | Used at big moments where the instruments pause/hold onto a long note. | DG |
| Constant Crotchet Rhythms | Rhythms that use only crotchet/1 beat notes. | DG |
| Homorhythmic | When the instruments all play the same rhythm | SW, P |
| Fanfares | An introductory melody that is played by brass instruments that represent importance or royalty | SW,DG |
| Key Signature | BC-D major- modulates to A major and the relative minor (B minor) B- C minor- Eb major- Eb minor- F minor-G minor SW-Bb major then atonal and a bitonality section towards end KQ- C minor/Eb major P- A minor DG- D major/ambiguous tonality AC- C but Aeolian mode S- B minor | |
| Diatonic | When a piece uses notes of the key. (Opposite of chromatic) | BC, AC |
| Chromatism | Using notes not in the key signature. | DG, P |
| Ambiguous Tonality | The tonality/key signature changes frequently which makes it ambiguous. | DG |
| Tierce de Picardie | When a song in a minor key ends/ or uses the major I chord E.g In Am, playing an A major chord. | P |
| Dissonance | A clashing sound. | SW |
| Bitonality | The quality of two musical keys being played simultaneously. | SW B.51-60 |
| Verse Chorus Form | A form common with pop music, verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus. | KQ, DG |
| Ternary Form | A-B-A structure | BC, P, SW (main titles) |
| Sonata Form | Introduction, Exposition (1 st /2 nd subjects), Development, Recapitulation, Coda | |
| Ground Bass Structure | A structure that is influenced by a Ground bass. | P |
| Strophic/Verse Form | Verse form- without a chorus | AC, S |
| Vocables | When a singer sings nonsensical syllables not words, like 'Ba Ba Ba, Ba Barbaran' | KQ |
| Vocalisation | Using phrases in a piece such as 'ooh's' and 'aah's' | DG |
| Conjunct | When a melody moves stepwise (to the notes either side of it) | KQ, DG, S, SW, P |
| Unusual Phrase Lengths | When a melody has a phrase length (the number of bars it lasts for) that isn't a nice round multiple of 2 | KQ |
| Anacrusis | When a melody starts before beat 1 of a bar | KQ, SW |
| Scalic | When a melody uses flourishes of a scale | BC, B |
| Ornaments | Melodic decorations, to develop the melody and make it more interesting | BC, B, P, S |
| Trills | Common type of ornament, repeating 2 notes next to each other rapidly | BC |
| Sequence | Short melodic phrase is repeated moving up or down each time. | BC, DG, P |

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| 6 note motif | A melodic phrase that consists of 6 notes only. | B |
| Descending chromatic | A melody that descends/moves downwards by semitones (every note is next to each other on the keyboard e.g. C, C sharp, D, D sharp) etc. | B |
| Syllabic | Where the syllables match up with the melodic line | DG, AC, P,S |
| Melismatic | When there is one syllable for multiple notes. | P |
| Leitmotif | A musical phrase that represents a character or theme. | SW, DG |
| Ostinatos | A repeating pattern of notes. | DG, AC |
| Leaps | A melody that contains leaps, the notes are at a distance from each other. | SW, P |
| Rising Perfect 5th | The melody rises in pitch by 5 notes (Theme A) | SW |
| Rising 6th | The melody rises in pitch by 6 notes (Theme B) | SW |
| Contrary Motion | Two melodies move in opposite directions at the same time. | SW |
| Improvisation | Making something musical up on the spot. | AC |
| Glissando | A continuous slide up and down between 2 notes. | AC |
| Samples | When you add a short passage of music that originally comes from another piece into your piece of music. | AC |
| Arpeggios | A broken chord/the notes are played separately in the chord one after another. | AC |
| Repetition | When music is played multiple times, usually for emphasis | P |
| Word Painting | When the music reflects the lyrical content. E.g A descending melody on the word 'drop' | P |
| Tenor | A high male vocal range | KQ |
| Falsetto | When a Male vocalist uses the high end of his register (Also known as head voice) | KQ |
| Portamento | A vocal slide that is more subtle than a glissando | KQ |
| Distortion | A guitar effect from deliberately using too much gain. Sounds crunchy! | KQ |
| Wah Wah | A guitar effect where the player can change the sound using a foot pedal | KQ |
| Phase Shifter | A switch on some guitars that shifts the different pick ups in and out of phase with each other | KQ |
| Panning | A music technology device where different instruments are shifted to the left or right of the stereo mix. | KQ |
| Concerto Grosso | Literally 'Large Concerto'. A piece with a group of soloists and a string orchestra with a continuo part as well. | BC |
| Baroque Flute | An instrument that is made of wood and had finger holes similar to a recorder. | BC |
| Concertino | The soloists in a concerto grosso. Usually 2 violins, in this case a violin, the flute and the harpsichord | BC |
| Ripieno | The accompanying section in a concerto grosso Usually a string section with a continuo part (a harpsichord and one or more bass instruments) | BC |
| Virtuosic | When the parts in the piece are difficult to play. | BC, S |
| Harpsichord | An early keyboard instrument. Like a piano but pressing a key plucks a string, not hammers a string like in a piano | BC, P |

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| Continuo | An accompanying part, often consisting of a chordal instrument (like a harpsicord) and a bass instrument. The chords were improvised using figured bass | BC |
| Fortepiano | A piano, especially of the kind made in the 18th and early 19th centuries. | B |
| Virtuosic | Performing a piece of music that is more challenging/to a higher standard. | B |
| Tremelo Octaves | Rapidly switching from C-C at start of exposition | B |
| Tremelo/Tremolando | Rapid repetition on one note/the note sounds like it is 'trembling' | DG, SW |
| Closed hi-hat | When the hi hat cymbals are closed | DG |
| Cymbal Roll | Used as a fill or for dramatic effect | DG |
| Tutti | The whole of the orchestra plays their instrument | DG |
| Synthesizer/Glockenspiel | Tuned percussion | DG, SW |
| Tubular Bells | A percussion instrument that creates a high-pitched sound. | DG |
| Bass Viol | A predecessor to the cello | P |
| Arpeggiated Chords | When chords are broken up and played note by note instead of altogether | P |
| Ground Bass | A repeated bass line. A classical version of a riff | P |
| Realisation | The creating or 'realising' of music from the figured bass. The harpsicord player would be doing this to accompany the piece. | P, BC |
| Nonsense Lyrics | Lyrics such as 'oohs' and 'aahs' that do not create a sentence. | AC |
| Gaelic | Speaking/speaking in the Celtic language. | AC |
| African Chanting | Shouting/speaking in the African language. | AC |
| Low Tessitura | When the melody/ vocal part mainly uses low pitches. | S |
| Double Stopping | When a string instrument plays two notes at ones | S |
| Acoustic Bass Guitar | A bass guitar with an acoustic body. | S |
| Acoustic Guitar | A guitar that has a hollow body to generate it's sound without the need for an amplifier | S |
| Symphony Orchestra | A musical ensemble that uses all instruments from the musical families. | SW |
| Doubling of parts | A particular note in a chord is being played or sung by more than one voice or instrument. | SW |
| Piccolo Melody | A woodwind instrument which has a pitch an octave higher than a flute. | SW |
| Tam-Tam Stroke | A percussion instrument consisting of a metal plate that is struck with a softheaded drumstick. | SW |
| Monophonic | One line/one instrument of music playing. | DG, S |
| Monophonic passage | A section in this piece that only has one instrument/one line of melody playing. | B |
| Homophonic | Chordal texture, where all the parts are playing the same chords in a similar rhythm | KQ, B, DG, AC, SW |
| Polyphonic/ Contrapuntal | A texture with lots of independent 'lines' or melodies | BC, DG, AC, S |
| Heterophonic | 2 melodies played at the same time but one is a more elaborate version of the other. | AC |
| Melody Dominated Homophony | When there is a clear melody line with a chordal accompaniment. | KQ, B, DG, P, S, SW |

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| Imitation | Where one part copies another shortly after it | KQ, BC, SW |
| Layering | Bringing in one instrument after another and building up the texture | KQ |
| Antiphonal | Where groups answer each other from different positions then join together | KQ |
| Fugal | Special type of polyphony that uses imitation. Involves a 'Subject' 'Answer' and 'counter subject' | BC |
| Three Part Texture | A texture where there are three separate things (Melodies) going on | KQ |
| Two-part and four- part counterpoint | When there are 2 or 4 independent melody lines at once. | BC, P |
| Right hand octaves | On the piano, the performer is playing in the right hand a melody that consists of the 2 same notes but played 8 notes higher or lower than each note. | B |
| 3rds | The melody moves in distances of a 3 rd . | DG |
| Passage in thirds | A section that moves in intervals/melodic steps of 3rds. | B |
| Unison | Instruments play the exact same thing at the same time. | DG |
| Inverted Tonic Pedal | A pedal that is <u>not</u> in the bass. | SW |
| Ostinato Textures | A repeating pattern of notes. | SW |
| Diatonic | When music sticks to the key it's in | P, BC |
| Tonal | Music written using conventional keys and harmony. | S |
| Dissonance | Notes that clash! | KQ, DG, P |
| Functional Harmony | Harmony typical of the western tradition, where the chords follow a logical pattern and each chord has purpose and intent | BC, P |
| Quartal Harmony | Chords stacked entirely (or mostly) in fourths. | SW |
| Chromatic Chords | Chords that use accidentals/notes not in the key. | B, S |
| Chord Position | Root position, 1 st inversion, 2 nd inversion etc. Changing the lowest note in the chord so for C major, C –E- G having a C lowest is Root position, having an E as the lowest note is 1 st inversion. | KQ, SW, DG |
| Primary Chords | Chords I – IV and V in a scale | BC, KQ |
| Extended (7th) Chords | Basic triad with the 7 th added. | KQ, AC, S |
| Dominant 7th Chords | A major triad with a flat 7 th in it. Mostly played on the 5 th note of the scale. Resolves to the I | BC |
| Diminished 7th | dim7=root , minor third, diminished fifth, diminished seventh. | B, S |
| Circle of 5ths | Chord progression that moves down a 5 th each time. | KQ, B |
| Broken Chords | A chord has been broken/the notes play separately from each other but play one after another e.g. C major triad C E G, C E G are playing continuously one after another. | B |
| Perfect Cadences | V – I (5 th chord of the scale to the first) | KQ, BC, B, P |
| Imperfect Cadence | When a piece of music sounds unfinished and the progression ends on chord V | SW |
| Descending Chromatic Scale | Moving down a half tone each time | KQ, S |
| Suspensions | A Basic triad where you replace the 3 rd with the 4 th or 2 nd . Will usually resolve itself to the 3 rd or 1 st respectively. | BC, P |

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| Pedal Note | A long held or repeated note played on the tonic or dominant (first or fifth note of scale) | KQ, SW, BC, DG |
| Drone | A long extended note played throughout a piece. | AC |
| Alberti Bass | Alberti bass is a kind of broken chord, where the notes of the chord are presented in the order lowest, highest, middle, highest. | B |
| Octave jumps | Notes that are 8 notes apart- the same note but at a different pitch. | B |
| False Relation | A false relation is a type of dissonance that occurs in Renaissance music. It is a harmonic clash that happens when a note in one part is played or sung at the same or immediately before or after a chromatically altered version of the same note in another part | P |