

Term	Definition
12 bar Blues	Style of blues with a 12-bar repeating chord pattern (I-I-I-IV-IV-I-I-V-IV-I-I)
12-tone system	Schoenberg's composition system, which involves rearranging the 12 chromatic notes of an octave into a set order – also known as serialism
A capella	Singing with no instrumental backing
Acciaccatura	An ornament that's played as quickly as possible before the written note  sometimes called a 'crushed' note
Action song	A song in a musical that tells you what is going on – a bit like a recitative
Alap	The first phrase of a raga performance
Alto	Low female or high male voice. Signs roughly from the F below middle C to the F at the top of the treble clef stave
Ambient	Slow, chilled club dance music
Anacrusis	An upbeat
Antiphonal	A texture performed by two semi-independent groups in interaction, often singing alternate musical phrases. Like a Call and Response.
Appoggiatura	An ornament that clashed with the accompanying chord then resolves  This ornament takes half the duration of the note it is attached to. E.g in the above example both the D and the C are crochets/1 beat notes.
Arch-Shape form	A musical structure: A symmetrical structure based on a repeating A section. The most popular Arch-Shape is ABCBA
Arpeggio	See broken chord
Articulation	The way notes/phrases are played:  From left to right: Staccato, Staccatissimo, Marcato, Tenuto  Tenuto Hold the note in question its full length (or longer, with slight rubato), or play the note slightly louder. Marcato Indicates a note, chord, or passage to be played louder or more forcefully than surrounding music. Staccato Signifies a note of shortened duration: a detached note (Staccatissimo very detached note) Legato Indicates musical notes are to be played or sung smoothly and connected.
Augmentation	Making a note longer in duration
Aria	Solo vocal piece in an opera, oratorio or a cantata. Shows the characters emotions – also known as an air
Art music	Music that's written down (unlike folk music)
Atonal	Music that's not written in any key
Balafon	West African xylophone

Ballad	A song that tells a story
Bandish	A song that forms the final phrase of a raga performance. Known as gat if it's played only on instruments
Bansuri	A bamboo flute used in Indian Classical Music
Barbershop Quartet	A group of singers who sing in close harmony, often popular songs
Baroque	Musical style of the 17 th and early 18 th centuries. It has lots of contrasts in dynamics and ornamentation
Bass	Low male voice that can sing from about the F below the bass clef to the E above middle C
Basso continuo	A continuous bass part in Baroque music, often played on the harpsichord with cello
Bebop	A type of jazz characterised by complex harmonies and fast, syncopated rhythms
Bi-rhythm	Two different rhythmic cycles played at the same time
Big band	A band that plays jazz and swing music
Binary form	A musical structure: music in two distinct sections (A B)
Block chord	Chord played by sounding all the notes at once
Blue notes	Flattened 3 rd , 7 ^{ths} and sometimes 5 ^{ths} of the major scale
Blues	Style of the 20 th century music from America with a distinctive scale and swung rhythms
Blues scale	A major scale with flattened 3 rd and 7 th
Bodhran	An Irish framed drum used in Celtic folk music
Brass Band	An ensemble of brass instruments
Breakbeats	Electronic music that has syncopation or polyrhythms
Bridge section	A bit of music that bridges a gap between sections
Brass	The family of the Orchestra including Brass instruments: Trumpet, Cornet, French Horn, Trombone, Tuba
Broken chord	Chord that is played as a series of notes (also known as arpeggio)
Cadence	Pair of chords used to finish off a phrase (Perfect, Plagal, Interrupted and Imperfect)
Cadenza	Section of a piece where a soloist can really show off
Call and Response	A short melody (the call) followed by an answering phrase (the response)
Canon/Canonic	Where the same tune is played by two or more parts, each starting before the previous part has finished. Also called a round.
Cantata	Vocal piece made up of 2 or 3 arias, separated by recitatives
Celtic folk music	Western European folk music particularly popular in Scotland and Ireland
Choir	A group of singers. Made up of Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass in various combinations.
Choral music	Music written for choirs
Chorale	A hymn
Chorus	Piece in an opera, oratorio or cantata sung by the chorus
Chorus effect/Chorusing (electronic technique)	The layering of the same musical part over the top so that one voice/instrument sounds richer
Chorus number	A piece in a musical sung by the whole cast. Similar to a chorus in opera
Chromatic	Notes that don't belong to the main scale of a melody
Classical	Either any musitah't's not pop or jazz etc. or the period of western classical music from about 1750-1820
Close Harmony	Chords where the notes are often close together (e.g using many suspensions) creating dissonances and resolutions. African songs and Barbershop Quartet music often uses this harmony.

Cluster chords	Chords made up of notes that are really close together
Coda	A bit at the end of a piece that's different to the rest of it and finishes it off nicely
Codetta	A mini coda used to finish off a section of a piece
Comping	Chords played on the guitar or piano underneath and improvised solo
Compound time	A time signature or metre with a triple pulse within each beat E.g 
Con Arco	With the bow (stringed instrument technique)
Con Sordino	With the mute (stringed and brass instrumental technique)
Concept album	An album where all the tracks are linked by a theme
Concerto	A piece for soloist and orchestra, usually in 3 movements
Conjunct	A melody with notes moving mainly by step
Consonant harmony	Chords/harmony that sounds nice (the opposite is dissonant harmony)
Crescendo/Cresc. 	Get louder
Cross-rhythms	Two or more rhythms that don't fit together are played at the same time
Cyclic	A musical structure: Cyclic form is when a theme, melody, or thematic material occurs in more than one movement as a unifying device.
Cyclic rhythm	Rhythms which repeat continuously (used in African and Indian music)
Da Capo Aria	A da capo aria is in ternary form, meaning it is in three sections. The da capo aria is a musical form, which was prevalent in the Baroque era. It is sung by a soloist with the accompaniment of instruments, often a small orchestra. The da capo aria is very common in the musical genres of opera and oratorio.
Delay	Adds echoes to music
Development	The middle section in sonata form where ideas are developed
Diatonic	Notes that belong to the main key of the piece
Diminuendo/Dim. 	Get quieter
Diminution	Making a note shorter in duration
Disjunct	A melody moving with lots of leaps
Dissonance/Dissonant harmony	Chords with clashing notes (opposite of consonant harmony)
Distortion	An effect used on an electric guitar to distort notes
Dixieland Jazz	Music that was a mix of brass band marches, ragtime and blues that came from New Orleans at the start of the 20 th Century
Djembe	A single-headed African drum played with the hands
Donno	African drum, also known as a talking drum
Dotted note	A duration where the dot adds on half of the original duration. E.g A dotted Crochet lasts 1 ½ beats and a dotted Minim lasts 3 beats.
Double-Stopping	A stringed instrumental technique where more than one note is played at the same time (a chord).
Drone	Notes that are repeated under the main melody. Often used in Indian Classical Music
Drum machine	An electronic instrument used instead of live drums
Duet	A piece for two instruments or voices
Dundun	Double-headed African drum played with sticks. The three types are doudnoun, kenkeni and sangban
Ektal	A 12-beat tala

Electronic music	Any music that uses electronic devices or instruments to produce and alter sounds
Electronica	Music that obviously used electronic instruments
Enharmonic equivalent	Notes which sound the same but are written differently e.g. C# and D flat
EQ	Short for equalization. It amplifies or removes specific frequencies
Exposition	The first section in sonata form where ideas are heard first
Expressionism	A style of music and art from the early 20 th Century
Falsetto	When a male singer sings notes higher than his normal range
Feedback	The noise you get when you stand too close to a speaker with a guitar or microphone. Sometimes used deliberately in rock music.
Fills	An improvised rhythm or tune played between phrases. E.g by a drum kit at the end of each rhythmic cycle.
Flanger	A studio effect added to a guitar to create a swirly sound
Forte (<i>f</i>)	Loud
Fortissimo (<i>ff</i>)	Very loud
Folk music	Music played by ordinary people. It wasn't usually written down – it was passed on orally
Free jazz	A type of jazz from the 1950s and 1960s with lots of improvisation. It didn't stick to set tempos or rhythms
Free rondo	A piece of music whose structure is loosely based on rondo form
Gat	The final phrase or a typical raga performance, played on instruments rather than sung. Known as a bandish if it's sung
Ground bass	A musical structure: A strong repeating bass part as the main theme and different variations layered over the top.
Harmonic rhythm	Rate at which the chords change
Harmonium	A keyboard instrument powered with air pumped by hand bellows used in Indian Classical Music
Harmony	Two parts of music harmonise when they go together nicely
Harpsichord	A keyboard instrument shaped like a small grand piano. It was popular in the Baroque period. 'Twangy' sound.
Head	The main theme of a jazz piece
Hemiola	When the music feels like it's in 2/4 when it's actually written in 3/4
High-pass filter	'cleans' a sample by getting rid of low-pitched background rumblings
Hip-hop	Music from the hip-hop culture, with Jamaican and Africa-American influences and lots of rapping
Homophony/Homophonic	A type of musical texture where all the different parts move at the same time (in chords)
Hook	A short, memorable bit of tune
Imitation/Imitative	A texture where there is repetition of a phrase by one instrument or voice, or two or more, imitating each other
Improvisation	Music that's made up on the spot by a performer, often based on a given chord progression or set of notes
Incidental music	Music to accompany the action on stage or in an opera or musical
Inserts	A line of vocals sung in between the lines of a verse
Interrupted cadence	Chords V and VI played at the end of a phrase. Makes it sound like the ending has been interrupted.
Interval	The distance between two notes
Inversion	When the intervals between notes are turned upside down. Good melodic development tool.
Inverted pedal point	A pedal point in the top part
Irregular time	Music with an irregular time signature (not duple or triple) e.g 5/4 or 7/8

Jazz	Music with lots of syncopation, improvisation and quirky harmonisation
Jhala	The third phrase of a typical raga performance. Faster than the alap and the jhor
Jhaptal	A 10 beat tala
Jhor	The second phase of a typical raga performance. Faster and more rhythmic than the alap
Kagan	A small, barrel-shaped African drum
Kidi	A medium barrel-shaped African drum
Kora	West African harp-like instrument
Layered	When the texture has more than one layer
Libretto	The words of an opera or oratorio
Loops	Repeated sections of music
Low-pass filter	Gets rid of background noise
Major	A key that sounds happy and bright. Uses notes from the major scale
Mass	Piece of music sung as part of the Christian church service
Master drummer	Leads an African ensemble
Mbira	African thumb piano
Melismatic	A single syllable of text is sung over a succession of notes. The opposite is syllabic.
Melody with Accompaniment	A texture where the melody instrument is accompanied either by a single instrument or an ensemble.
Metre	The organisation of music into bars with Time Signatures
Mezzo-Forte (<i>mf</i>)	Moderately loud
Mezzo-Piano (<i>mp</i>)	Moderately quiet
Middle eight	Eight bars in the middle of a song with different chords or a different tune to keep it interesting
MIDI	Stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface – every note, instrument sound, key, tempo and any other musical direction is given a computer code
Minor	A key that sounds sad. Uses notes from the minor scale
Minuet and trio	A ternary form, often used in the third movement of a symphony or sonata
Modal	Music using an old type of scale called a Mode (Medieval and Folk music) Neither Major or Minor.
Modulation	When music changes key
Mordent	 <p>A mordent is formed by playing the note, the note above and then back to the first note</p>
Motif	A little bit of music that's often repeated
Multi-track recording	When tracks are recorded over the top of each other
Musical	Short for musical theatre. A lighter, 20 th century version of opera with more talking and dancing
Octave	Eight notes apart on the scale. You play the same note but higher or lower. E.g C (through DEFGAB) up to C
Octaves	A texture where different parts play music 1 or more octaves apart
Opera	A story set to music. Operas are secular
Opera buffa	A type of opera with light, everyday themes
Opera comique	Form of opera with some spoken recitatives

Opera seria	A type of opera with serious, often mythological themes
Operetta	A small opera
Oral tradition	Music that's passed on orally and not written down
Oratorio	Bible stories set to music. Oratorios are sacred. A bit like opera, but not acted out and with a religious theme
Ornament	Extra notes added to decorate a tune e.g. appoggiatura, acciaccatura, trill, mordent, turn
Orchestra	A large ensemble of instruments including Strings, Brass, Woodwind and Percussion instruments.
Ostinato	A repeated musical pattern
Overdub	Parts are recorded on top of each other
Overture	A one-movement piece for an orchestra, often an introduction to a larger work, like an opera
Panning	Changes which speaker the music comes out of (Left/Right)
Passing note	A linking note (usually between two chord notes) in a melody
Pedal point	A held-on note, often in the bass part. A Tonic pedal is a pedal on the Tonic note (1 st note of the scale)
Pentatonic scale	A five-note scale. A pentatonic melody is a melody that uses the notes of this scale.
Percussion	The family of the Orchestra including instruments which are struck, shaken or scraped E.g Timpani, Cymbals, Xylophone
Perfect cadence	Chords V and I played at the end of a phrase. Makes it sound finished
Phaser	Makes a 'whoosing' sound using a sample
Phrasing/Phrases	A musical sentence. Often 4 bar phrases in Classical music and Popular song. Here are two 4 bar phrases (like a question and answer). The arch-shape line shows the length of the phrase. These are called Phrase marks. 
Piano	Keyboard instrument invented in about 1700. Developments in the 19 th Century made it very popular with Romantic composers
Pianissimo (<i>pp</i>)	Very quiet
Piano (dynamic) (<i>p</i>)	Quiet
Pitch bend	An instrumental technique: A slide between pitches. Often used on stringed instruments. Guitars in popular genres (Rock) and Sitar in Indian music.
Pitch shifter	Plays a sample at different pitches
Pizzicato	Plucked (stringed instrumental technique)
Plagal cadence	Chords IV and I played at the end of a phrase. Often used to finish sacred music
Polyphony/Polyphonic/Contrapuntal	A musical texture where two or more different tunes weave in and out of each other, moving at different times.
Polyrhythms	Two different rhythmic cycles with accents in different places are played at the same time
Popular song form	A musical structure: a combination of Intro-Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge/Middle 8/Instrumental-Chorus-Outro
Power chords	Chords made up of the tonic and the fifth (without the 3 rd)
Prelude	A piano piece, originally the bit that came before the main piece. Romantic composers wrote some preludes as stand-alone pieces
Prime order	Basic order of notes for a piece composed using the 12-tone system

Pulse	The beat
Question and answer	A bit like call and response – one part sings or plays a phrase and another part responds
Rag desh	A raga used in the rainy season
Raga	A set of notes used in Indian Classical Music
Ragtime	A type of music popular in early 20 th Century America with syncopated rhythms. Jazz music came from ragtime
Recapitulation	The third and final section in sonata form where the ideas are repeated
Recitative	A song performed in operas, oratorios and cantatas. It tells the story and moves it along
Regular time	Music with duple or triple time signatures e.g 4/4 or 3/4 or 2/4
Requiem	A mass for the dead
Retrograde	Version of a tune where the notes are played in reverse order
Retrograde inversion	Version of a tune where the notes are played in reverse order with the intervals between them upside down
Reverberation/Reverb	Echo effect on guitars
Riff	Short repeated phrase. The modern name for an ostinato.
Romantic	The period of Western Classical music from about 1820-1900
Rock Band	An ensemble of instruments usually including an electric lead guitar, electric rhythm guitar, bass guitar and drum kit (often has many other combinations)
Rondo form	A musical structure: start with one tune, go to a new one, go back to the first one, on to another new one, back to the first one...as many times as you like: ABACADAEA...
Rubato (Free time)	Where the music does not fit into the Time Signature or given tempo but is played freely by the performer at any tempo they like
Rupak	A 7 beat tala
Sacred music	Church music or religious music
Sam	The first beat of a tala
Sampler	A piece of electronic equipment that loops and plays samples
Samples	Short bits of recorded sounds
Sarangi	A small, bowed string instrument with no frets used in Indian Classical Music
Sarod	An instrument like a small sitar with a fretless fingerboard used in Indian Classical Music
Scalic	A melody which moves using the notes of a scale (by step)
Scat	A type of improvised singing with nonsense words and syllables, used in jazz. Scat is an example of vocables.
Scherzo & Trio	The scherzo (meaning Joke and often played fast) is a binary form, but, like the minuet, is usually played with the accompanying Trio followed by a repeat of the Scherzo, creating the ABA or ternary form.
Secular music	Non-church music
Sequence	Repetition of a phrase at different pitches (melodic device)
Sequencer	A piece of computer software that tells you make loops of music
Serialism	Another name for the 12-tone system, invented by Schoenberg
<i>S</i> /Subito	Suddenly
<i>Sfz</i> /Sforzando	A sudden forceful, accent (loud)
<i>Sf</i>	Suddenly Loud
<i>Sp</i>	Suddenly Quiet
Shehnai	An instrument with a double reed like an oboe used in Indian

	Classical Music
Single Melody Line (texture)/Monophonic	A texture with one single melodic line. E.g a Solo Folk voice or violin.
Slide (Portamento/Glissando)	When a singer starts on a different note to the one written and slides to the correct note. Also called a portamento
Simple time	Simple metre or simple time is a metre in which each beat of the measure divides naturally into two equal parts, rather than three which gives a compound metre.
Sitar	A large, long-necked string instrument used in Indian Classical Music with between 4 and 7 strings. Up to 5 strings are plucked for the melody and the other 2 create drone notes
Solo character song	A song in a musical sung by one character. A bit like an aria in an opera
Sonata	A piece for soloist (or 2 players) in three or four movements
Sonata form	A musical structure made up of exposition, development and recapitulation
Soprano	High female voice. Sings roughly from middle C to the C two octaves above that
Static harmony	Slow harmonic rhythm – the chords don't change much
Steel Band	A group of Steel pans used in Caribbean music. Originated from Trinidad and Tobago.
Strings	The family of the Orchestra with stringer instruments: Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses
String Orchestra	An ensemble of stringed instruments (Violins, Violas, Cellos and Double Basses)
String Quartet	A group of 4 stringed instruments: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola and Cello
Strophic structure	Common structure of songs where the melody in each verse is the same
Sub bass	A very low bass line that makes the speakers shake
Swing music	A type of jazz from the 1930s and 1940s that could be danced to
Syllabic	Every syllable of text is sung to a single note. The opposite of melismatic
Symphony	A piece for an orchestra, often in four movements
Syncopation	Rhythm where the accents are shifted from the main beat to a weaker beat (off beat rhythm)
Synthesizer	Electronic device for creating new sounds
Tabla	Drums used in Indian Classical Music
Tala	Rhythm in Indian Classical Music with a set number of beats, played on the table
Talking drum	African drum used to send messages
Tambura	Similar in shape to the sitar, but with only four metal strings. Used as a backing instrument in Indian Classical Music
Techno	Club dance music with a very fast beat (120-150 BPM)
Tempo	Speed/Pace of the beat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lento</i> — slowly (40–60 bpm) • <i>Largo</i> — broadly (40–60 bpm) • <i>Adagio</i> — slow and stately (literally, "at ease") (66–76 bpm) • <i>Andante</i> — at a walking pace (76–108 bpm) • <i>Moderato</i> — moderately (108–120 bpm) • <i>Allegretto</i> — moderately fast (but less so than allegro)

Tempo (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Allegro</i> — fast, quickly and bright (120–168 bpm) • <i>Vivace</i> — lively and fast (140 bpm) (quicker than allegro) • <i>Presto</i> — very fast (168–200 bpm) • <i>Prestissimo</i> — extremely fast (more than 200bpm)
Tenor	High male voice. Sings roughly from the C below middle C to the G above
Ternary form	A musical structure: Piece in three sections. The first and last are very similar. The middle one's a bit different and in a different key (A B A)
Texture	The way chords and melody are woven together
Theme	Musical idea
Theme and variation form	A musical structure: A theme is played followed by a variation on it, followed by another etc.
Through-composed	A musical structure where the music does not have sections but can change all the way through. The music is means that the music is relatively continuous, non-sectional and/or non-repetitive
Tierce de Picardie	A cadence of a minor phrase where you expect the last chord to be minor but the 3 rd of the final chord is raised so that it becomes a major chord (a surprising effect!) E.g 
Timbre	The tone colour of an instrument or a piece of music
Tintal	A 16 beat tala
Tonal	Music that's written in a specific key
Treble	A boy soprano
Tremolando/Tremolo	A rapid repetition of a single note (Instrumental technique: usually on a bowed stringed instrument)
Triadic/Triad	A triad is a three-note chord which can be stacked in thirds. A triadic melody is a tune which uses the notes of a triad/chord.
Trill	 <p>A trill is formed by quickly playing the note and the note above it alternately.</p>
Triplet	Where 3 notes fit into the time of 2 notes.  E.g Here, 3 Crochets fit into the space of 2 crochets (2 beats).
Tritone	An interval or two notes that are three whole tones apart. Sounds a bit weird also called an augmented fourth
Turn	Another ornament. Notated like this:  sounds like this: 
Unison	A Texture: Singing or playing the same notes at the same time
Variation	Either a recognisable version of the main theme of a piece, or a self-contained piece of music in its own right based on a single theme
Verticalisation	When notes that appear horizontally in rows (in the 12 tone system) are written out vertically in the score
Vibhag	Group of beats within a tala. A bit like a bar of Western music but with different numbers of beats in each vibhag

