GCSE Music – Key Word Glossary

Melody

Anacrusis	A note (or notes) that come before the first strong beat in a passage of music. Sometimes called the 'up-beat' or 'pick-up'
Conjunct	Stepwise movement in a melodic line, i.e. scalic.
Disjunct	Angular musical movement that moves in leaps or contains intervals
Arpeggio/broken chord	When the notes of a chord are played separately and in succession, either ascending or descending
Scalic	When the musical line moves in steps, just like a scale (i.e. conjunct movement)
Low pitch	The lower sounding notes, i.e. bass clef
High pitch	The higher sounding notes, i.e. treble clef
Range	Refers to the span of pitches on an instrument or in a piece of music, ranging from lowest sounding to the highest sounding
Sequence	Repetition of a melodic or harmonic phrase in the same part, but at a higher or lower pitch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAyiidg25uE (from 7.08) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY1p-FmjT1M (9.55-10.35)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ioc6sdgugo
Imitation	A contrapuntal device, when a melodic idea (already stated in one part) is copied in another, while the first tine continues. It may only use the first few notes of the original idea
Repetition	When sounds, sequences, melodies, rhythms or sections are repeated
Contrast	When there is a difference in the music (e.g. melodic contrast, rhythmic contrast, harmonic contrast)
Leitmotif	A musical idea associated with a person, place, object, feeling or idea
Motif	A short music idea, melodic or rhythmic https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv2WJMVPQi8
Interval	The distance between any two notes
Inversion	Turning a melodic idea or interval upside down
Octave	The distance from one note to the next note with the same letter name
Semitone	The smallest interval between two notes (on a piano, the two notes immediately next door to each other, whether black or white, e.g. C to C#)
Microtone	An interval smaller than a semitone
Chromatic movement	When the melodic movement is in semitones, like part of the chromatic scale e.g. Minuet B, Trio A in Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
Pentatonic	A five-note scale, commonly used in folk music and found in music all around the world

Blue notes	The flattened notes in a blues scale
Trill/ornamentation/ decoration	Decorate or embellish the music: can often make it sound 'fussier'. Popular examples of ornaments are trills, mordents and turns.
Countermelody	This is an extra melody played the same time as the main theme
Answering phrase	A second phrase of music, which 'answers' or balances out the first phrase of music.
Thematic	The thematic material means the main musical idea – the important melody in a piece of music.
Fanfare	Usually played on brass instruments, this is a loud call to attention, like an announcement. Uses only a few pitches of one or two simple chords.

Harmony

Primary chords	Major triads I, IV and V in a major key
Secondary chords	Minor triads ii, iii and vi in a major key
Inversion	A position of a chord if not in root position i.e. when the root of the chord is not heard in the bass
Diatonic	Music based on the major and minor scale system
Tonic	The first degree of any scale and the chord that is built on the first degree
Subdominant	The fourth degree of any scale and the chord that is built on the fourth degree
Dominant	The fifth degree of any scale and the chord that is built on the fifth degree
Perfect cadence	Chord V followed by chord I at the end of a phrase
Imperfect cadence	Chord I, ii, IV or vi followed by chord V at the end of a phrase
Plagal cadence	Chord IV followed by chord I at the end of a phrase
Interrupted cadence	Chord V followed by chord vi at the end of a phrase
Chord progression/chord sequence	A series of chords following each other
Harmonic rhythm	The rate at which chords change in a chord progression
Drone	When one or more notes are held or repeated throughout
Pedal	A harmonic device where the same note is sustained or repeated, above (or below) which the chords change
Dissonance	When two or more notes sound together to create an unstable effect in terms of the harmony i.e. a clashing sound https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqbHfMMmIQ8 (1.04-1.47)
Power chords	The name given to a chord that uses the root and the 5th (i.e. no 3rd) – used by rock guitarists

Tonality

Major	A key (and scale) with a happy or bright sound
Minor	A key (and scale) with a sad or mournful sound
Pentatonic scale	A scale based on 5 notes – can be major or minor
Modal	A scale system in existence before the major/minor existence evolved – used in church music, jazz and rock/pop
Atonal	Music written with a deliberate absence of key – often harsh and discordant sounding
Modulation	The process of changing key in a piece of music
Chromatic scale	A scale based on all 12 semitones from one note to the note an octave above or below
Blues scale	A scale which flattens the 3rd, 7th and sometimes the 5th in any major scale

Form and Structure

Binary	A two part structure, i.e. A B (two related sections)
Ternary	A three part structure i.e. A B A (the final section may be an exact or a varied repeat of the first section)
Rondo	A recurring section (A) with alternating 'episodes' i.e. A B A C A
Minuet and Trio	Often movement 3 of a symphony or sonata. Both the minuet and trio are in binary form, each repeated before the minuet returns for a final time, giving an overall ternary form, i.e. A A B B A A
Repetition	When sections are repeated
Contrast	When there is a clear difference between sections
Theme and Variations	The theme is a melody (either original or borrowed) and a number of variations are created – sometimes simply decorated, sometimes more complex.
Strophic	This structure has verses that are musically the same each time. Only the lyrics change.
32 bar song form/AABA	A A B A (with each section being 8 bars long).
12 Bar Blues	A style of blues music with a repeating chord pattern that is 12 bars long.
Call and response	A short musical idea (the call) followed by an answering phrase (the response).
Ostinato	A continuously repeated figure or phrase ('obstinately' repeated)
Bridge	A piece of music that links two other musical sections together.
Break	An instrumental or percussion section that provides a 'break' from the rest of the song or piece.
Loop	When a musical idea is 'looped', i.e. repeated indefinitely.
Improvisation	Music that's made up on the spot by the performer.
Verse	A section of a song that has the same music when repeated but different lyrics each time.

Chorus	A section of a song that has the same words and music when repeated.
Middle 8	Eight bars in the middle of a song that provide a contrast, i.e. different chord progression.
Fill	A short musical idea that fills in the 'gaps' in the music at the end of a phrase.
Introduction	Opening part of a song or piece that 'introduces' the main ideas.
Outro	The concluding section of a song or piece, i.e. the 'last' part (same as coda). Only used in popular music.
Coda	The final section of a movement or piece of music.
Riff	A short, 'catchy' memorable idea or pattern found in jazz, rock or pop; the idea is repeated often in the music.
Phrasing (regular)	When the melody is divided up into shorter, well-balanced and symmetrical phrases.
Phrasing (irregular)	When the melody is divided up into phrases that are not symmetrically balanced.

Texture

Monophonic	Music in which there is a single line, whether for a soloist or for unison voices or instruments https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgWIurJujlw (2.23-2.27) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b24_rysm2S8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1SiaCV26aQ (0.00-0.53)
Homophonic	A melody + accompaniment texture https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1gGxpitLO8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5Mi6-AiXI4
Polyphonic	Two or more melodies, equally as important, played together (the same as counterpoint). e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAyiidg25uE (2.08-2.35) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leTVfMb2uME https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeYjiG0AywQ (20.53- end)
2, 3 or 4 part texture	Music written for 2-, 3-, or 4-part voices or instruments
Unison	When voices/instruments are playing at the same pitch, i.e. all parts sounding the same note. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgWIurJujlw (2.23-2.27) **Octaves - playing the same not 8 notes higher** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5Mi6-AiXI4 (2.23-2.27)
Chordal	When the style of the music is delivered through the harmony, i.e. the interest is vertical, and in the chords more than the melody
Imitation	This happens when the melodic idea presented in one part is stated immediately after in another part, i.e. where one part 'copies' another. .e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv2WJMVPQi8 (3.12-3.40) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqbHfMMmIQ8 (0.30 -0.55)
Layered	When several layers of sounds or musical lines are combined to build up the texture.

Melody and accompaniment	When the melody or theme is the main feature, and the other parts support, i.e. 'accompany' the melody.
Countermelody	A new melody, combined with a melody that has been heard previously. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leTVfMb2uME (0.00-1.11) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1SiaCV26aQ (2.12-2.35) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xO3k-S_pqK4 (0.11-0.21)
Descant	A decorative melodic line, higher in pitch than the main melody in a piece of vocal music, e.g. in a hymn, Christmas carol or similar vocal piece.
Round	A short vocal canon for unaccompanied singing (e.g. *Row, row your boat, Three Blind Mice*)
Canon	A compositional device where a melody in one part is repeated exactly after the other, usually with some overlapping.
Drone	Constantly repeated or sustained note(s). A drone with two notes usually consists of the tonic and the dominant notes (often associated with folk music).
Alberti Bass	A type of accompaniment figure that uses broken chords
Stab chords	'Staccato' (short) chord(s) that add dramatic impact in a piece of music. Usually lasts for one beat and played by horns/brass instruments. Found in various types of music, e.g. jazz and rock.
Walking bass	Type of bass that is continuously moving along. The notes are all on the beat the movement is mainly by step.

Tempo

Allegro/Vivace	Lively, brisk, rapid
Allegretto	Moderately fast, slower than allegro
Moderato/Andante	At a moderate speed/a 'walking speed' – not too slow
Adagio/Lento	Slowly, leisurely
Accelerando	Gradually increasing the speed
Ritardando/Rallentando	Slowing down
Rubato	A 'freer' approach to the tempo; when the performer gives an expressive interpretation of the music – not sticking strictly to time, but without altering the overall pace Rubato – speeding up and slowing down for expressive affect, often used in Romantic music e.g. chopin's piano music https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DD0JjcYv6Sg&safe=active
Pause	A pause sign is a symbol which means that the note should be held longer than the original value

Rhythm and Metre

Semibreve	4 crotchet beat note

Minim	2 crotchet beat note
Crotchet	1 crotchet beat note
Semiquaver	¼ of a crotchet beat note
Dotted	A dot placed after the note adds half the value of the note again. Dotted rhythms - sound like cheerful skipping https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOyAgjmtxiU
Syncopation	Occurs when the strong accents in a bar are shifted. For example, when: • The accent is placed on a normally weak beat • There is a 'rest' sign on the strong beat • A weak beat is 'held' or 'tied' over a strong beat • Part of a weak beat is held over to a stronger beat Syncopation – off beat rhythm e.g. melody of Since You've Been Gone https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1P17ct4e5OE
Swing rhythms	'Swing' is a type of music that originated in the 1920s/1930s. It involves the unequal performance of notes (e.g. swung quavers) that is characteristic of all types of jazz. It gives a triplet/dotted rhythm feel to the beat – known as a 'swing' rhythm. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDQpZT3GhDg
On the beat	When the notes emphasised are on the strong beats, e.g. the first beat of every bar.
Off-beat	A rhythmic effect, similar to syncopation, where the weak beats are accented, i.e. 'off the beat'
Triplet	A rhythmic device where three equal note-values are played in the time of two. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLNcsNrYAss
Chaal	This is the dotted rhythm found in bhangra; it is an eight-note rhythmic pattern.
Associated rests	The rest equivalents of the different note values
Driving rhythms	Rhythms with a relentless energy, moving the music forwards – 'driving' it on.
Dance rhythms	Characteristic rhythmic patterns linked with any dance (e.g. waltz, tango, swing, etc.) or the repetitive rhythms and pre-set percussion patterns associated with electronic dance music styles (e.g. house, acid, techno, drum 'n' bass, etc.)
Rock rhythms	Typical riffs/rhythms and rhythmic patterns associated with 'rock' music

Sonority

Instruments, Voices and Groupings

Strings	
Violin	
Viola	
Cello	

Double bass	
Harp	
Woodwind	
Flute	
Oboe	
Clarinet	
Saxophone	
Bassoon	
Brass	
Trumpet	
French horn	
Trombone	
Tuba	
Percussion	
Timpani	
Drum kit	
Snare drum	
Cymbal	
Hand held percussion	
Glockenspiel	
Xylophone	
Tabla	
Dhol	
Keyboard	
Piano	
Organ	
Harpsichord	
Classical or Spanish guitar	
Electric guitar	
Bass guitar	
Sitar	Large Indian string instrument with a long neck and frets.
Sarangi	Small Indian string instrument, with no frets.
Tumbi	Single string Indian instrument, plucked; associated with the folk music of Punjab, and popular in Western bhangra music.
Solo	A piece of music (or section of) with 1 main part
Duet	A piece of music (or section of) with 2 main parts
Trio	A piece of music (or section of) with 3 main parts
Soprano	High female voice
Alto	Low female voice
Tenor	High male voice
Bass	Low male voice
Backing vocals	Singers who provide vocal harmony or countermelodies for the lead vocalist
A cappella	Singing without any instrumental backing or accompaniment.

Chorus	• Section of a song or hymn • A vocal ensemble in a musical, opera or oratorio
Orchestra	Large instrumental ensemble which has four families of instruments: string, woodwind, brass and percussion.
String quartet	Group of four string instruments – two violins, a viola and a cello
Basso continuo	The name given to the continuous bass line in Baroque music often played by the harpsichord and the cello.
Pop/rock group	Small ensemble that performs rock/pop music. A common line-up would be lead guitar, rhythm guitar (one or both also doing vocals), bass guitar and a drummer.
Rhythm section	Part of a pop or jazz group that supplies the rhythm, i.e. bass, drums and guitar/keyboard (playing the chords)
Acoustic	• To do with sound as it is heard; the sound quality in a room or building • Musical instruments whose sound is not electronically generated through an amplifier

Technology

Synthesised/electronic	• An electronic keyboard with different sounds • A type of music that uses electronic devices to produce and alter sounds
Panning	The distribution of a sound signal into a multi-channel sound field. The panning control adjusts the sound through the left and right speakers.
Phasing	A delay effect in music technology.
Sample	A portion of a sound recording, often changed and reused in a new sound recording.
Reverb	An effect that adds an echo to the sound. It can be used on most amplified instruments and also voices.
Echo	The repetition of a musical phrase (or sound) that has less impact and volume than the original phrase or sound.
Amplified	Where the volume of sound is increased through electric or electronic means.

Performance techniques/Articulation

Humming	A vocal sound produced with the mouth closed.
Syllabic	Vocal music where each syllable of the text has been set to a different note.
Melismatic	Vocal music where a syllable of the text has been set to a number of different notes.
Scat	A style of singing in jazz music that is improvised, and where the voice is used in imitation of an instrument (i.e. no words, or using nonsense words).

Vibrato	A rapid, slight variation in pitch when singing or playing some musical instruments, which produces a stronger or richer tone.
Falsetto	Male vocal technique used to extend the voice into a higher range than usual.
Belt	The lower, more powerful part of the voice range.
Rap	A type of pop music originating from the USA where the words are spoken quickly and rhythmically against an instrumental backing.
Staccato	Detached notes, shorter than their full length.
Legato	An instruction for the music to be played smoothly
Sustained	Held on, i.e. a sustained note = a held note
Accent	Additional stress or emphasis placed on a particular note.
Pizzicato	'Plucked' (i.e. way of playing a string instrument).
Arco/bowed	The instruction for string players to play their instruments using the boat.
Divisi	The instruction in music for orchestral players reading the same musical staff to divide into two or more parts.
Double stopping	When a string instrument plays two notes at the same time.
Tremolo	Rapid bowing on a string instrument to produce a dramatic effect.
Distortion	An effect for guitar players that distorts the note.
Hammer on	A performance technique for a string instrument with frets, such as the guitar. It occurs when the guitarist brings his finger down sharply on the fretboard (behind a fret), causing a note to sound. (This technique is the opposite of the 'pull-off', where the finger on the threat is released after the note has been struck.)
Rim shot	A performance technique for percussion, when the sound is produced by hitting the rim and head of a drum with a drumstick at the same time.
Slap bass	A performance technique for bass guitar (or double bass) by bouncing strings against the fretboard to achieve a 'percussive' sound
Drum roll	A performance technique for drums that involves a rapid succession of beats. A drumroll is often used to build anticipation in the music.
Muted	A 'muted' effect is achieved when mutes are used to dampen or quieten the sound of string or brass instruments.
Glissando/slide	A slide from one pitch to another.
Pitch bend	When a performer changes the pitch of the notes by a very small amount (e.g. using the facility on a synthesiser).
Plucked	A way of pulling and releasing the string quickly on a string instrument to produce the sound (i.e. pizzicato).
Slurred	A style of playing two or more notes smoothly: joined with a 'slur' (legato).
Tongued	A performance technique used by wind instruments to define different notes (i.e. separating notes by stopping the airflow with the tongue).
Detached	A type of musical articulation which describes notes that have been shortened (i.e. staccato).

Musical styles and genres

Western Classical Tradition	Means music written between about 1650-1910
Baroque	Music typical of the period between 1600-1750 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etsCZ_ruxPY https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozEfJugPMe4
Classical	Music typical of the period between 1750-1810 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3k81__bwrM https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTNbclgU3h4
Romantic	Music typical of the period between 1810-1910 Romantic https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PU97k1_K3SE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag2K4BEnhNk https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s7A4Iy0Ba8
Chamber music	Music intended for a small group of performers, regarded as soloists on equal terms; music intended for domestic performance with one instrument per part.
Jazz	A genre originating from New Orleans which now has many types of styles; important features include syncopation, improvisation and interesting often complex harmonies.
Blues	A genre of music originating from American negro spirituals; important features include the 12-bar structure, 'blue notes', blues scale. Generally has a mood of sadness.
Musical Theatre/Musical	A musical play or drama in which singing, acting and dance play an important part. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1SiaCV26aQ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5Mi6-AiXI4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6qtHuntty0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqbHfMMmIQ8
Film Music	Music written especially for the screen, including underscore and thematic music that engages with the storyline and characters
Rock	Originated in the USA as 'rock and roll' in the mid-1950s.
Soul	A form of black music originating from the 1970s, influenced by gospel music
Hip-hop	Style of rap originating in 1980s, which added 'scratching' onto records
Reggae	A style of music originating in the West Indies, popular in the 1970s
Ballad	A type of song which tells a story (in rock or pop music, this is usually a love story)
Pop	A genre of music that originated in the USA and the UK in the mid-1950s. It uses ideas and musical elements from many different styles.
Bhangra	Fusion of traditional Indian/Pakistani music with modern club dance music
Fusion	Music in which two or more styles are blended (e.g. pop and Classical)

Minimalism	A 20th-century genre, characterised by the subtle varied repetitions of simple melodic, rhythmic or harmonic ideas (or cells).