

5.9 Additional Form Terms: A Glossary

This sheet lists a number of less common forms and form terms not covered by my other form sheets. Concepts covered on other pages are not duplicated here!

absolute music – Instrumental music that is not associated with an external picture, literary idea, or story. See also *program music*.

aleatory – Certain elements of the music are unspecified in the score and are determined by the performer's choice or chance operations such as opening a telephone book to find note numbers.

allemande – Dance form using moderate duple meter. The Baroque suite often began with an allemande.

arabesque – Composition based on embellishment and decorative material

arch form – Symmetrical form, like ABCBA

aria – Song for solo voice with orchestral accompaniment. Arias allow for the expression of intense personal emotion by characters in operas, cantatas, and oratorios. See *Da Capo aria*.

ballade – In the Middle Ages/Renaissance, French poetic form with courtly love texts. In the Romantic era, a lyric piano piece.

cadenza – Solo passage near the end of an aria or concerto movement. Cadenzas are virtuosic and often occur over a sustained cadential 6/4 chord. They end with a V-I progression and are often followed by a coda that closes the movement.

cantus firmus – In the Renaissance, a melody of very long notes based on a segment of Gregorian chant. A *cantus firmus* often served as the basis for a polyphonic composition.

chaconne – In the Baroque era, a series of variations over a repeated chord progression. See also *passacaglia*.

chamber sonata – See *sonata da camera*.

chorale prelude – In the Baroque era, a short organ piece based on a chorale melody.

church sonata – See *sonata da chiesa*.

concert overture – In the Romantic era, a one-movement concert piece for orchestra based on a story or program. Often uses sonata form.

concertino – The group of soloists in the Baroque concerto grosso form.

concerto – A genre for solo instrument(s) and orchestra, typically in 3 movements following the pattern fast – slow – fast.

concerto form – A special type of sonata form used in the first movement of concertos. Concerto form includes a double exposition, in which the exposition is stated once by the orchestra and once by the soloist before the development begins.

concerto grosso – In the Baroque era, a concerto genre using a group of soloists (the *concertino*) in alternation with the full orchestra (the *ripieno*).

courante – A stylized dance movement in moderate triple meter; one of the standard movements of the suite. See *suite*.

cyclic or cyclical form – The technique of using musical material (especially melodies) from one movement in later movements within the same composition.

da capo aria – Song for soloist in ABA form, often used in operas, cantatas, and oratorios.

design change – change in the surface texture, melody, accompaniment, local tonal center, and/or melodic materials, often indicative of turning points in form and/or structure

divertimento – In the Classical era, an instrumental genre for chamber ensemble or soloist. *Divertimenti* were often used as light entertainment at parties, etc. See also *serenade*.

double exposition – In first-movement concerto form, a special exposition in which the orchestra repeats the themes after the soloist states them.

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doubles – The name for each variation in a French keyboard suite. *See ordres.*

elision – An overlap in which the cadence chord terminating one phrase becomes the first chord of the next phrase.

étude – Study that focuses on a technical problem for a particular instrument.

fantasia – Extended instrumental piece (often Baroque) intended to sound like an improvisation.

fixed forms – A set of forms from medieval France based on fixed poetic structures. The fixed forms include the ballade, the rondeau, and the virelai.

French overture – In the Baroque era, an introductory movement for an opera, ballet, or suite, having a slow introduction followed by an allegro.

gavotte – In the Baroque era, stylized dance type in duple meter having a pastoral character.

gigue – An English Baroque dance in fast compound meter. The gigue was a standard movement in the Baroque suite.

ground bass – A melody that repeats in the bass throughout an entire movement. *See passacaglia.*

idée fixe – “ee-DAY feeks” A term coined by Berlioz and especially relevant to his *Symphonie fantastique*. An *idée fixe* returns in various movements and unifies a work. *See cyclic form.*

incidental music – Music intended to be performed with a play.

interlude – Music composed to stand between primary sections of a composition, opera, or play.

intermezzo – In the 18th-century, a comic interlude between the acts of an *opera seria*. In the Romantic era, a short, lyrical composition, usually for piano.

isorhythmic motet – In the Medieval and early Renaissance eras, a motet using isorhythm. Isorhythm is the technique of repeating a pitch sequence and rhythm sequence of different lengths throughout the piece. The rhythm sequence is called the *talea*, and the pitch sequence is called the *color*.

Italian overture – In the Baroque era, an overture with the sectional pattern fast – slow – fast.

Leitmotif – The basic recurring melody associated with a person, object, or idea throughout a Wagnerian opera.

Lied – In the 19th century, a solo art song with piano. (*Lied* is German for “song.”)

madrigal – In the Renaissance, a secular vocal composition with or without accompaniment and using a short love text. Madrigals were most popular in Italy and England.

march – A movement or piece with accented duple meter, repetitive rhythms, and a generally military character.

mazurka – Folk dance of Poland in triple meter. Chopin wrote a number of mazurkas for piano.

minimalist music – Contemporary style using extensive repetition of simple melodic or rhythmic patterns.

moment form – Form in which each instant of the composition stands on its own without any formal connection to the other sections of the piece.

monothematic – Composition or movement using one theme.

nocturne – A piece designed to evoke the peaceful tranquility of night. Chopin wrote many for piano.

open form – Contemporary approach to form in which the performer or chance operations (such as looking up numbers in a phone book) determine the order of the sections in the form.

oratorio – In the Baroque era, a dramatic composition for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra, intended to be performed in a concert setting (without scenery and costumes). Oratorios typically used religious or other serious texts.

ordre – *See suite.* Couperin coined this term and it was later used for some French suites.

ostinato – A short repeated musical pattern. Ostinati may be melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic.

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partita – See *suite*.

passacaglia – In the Baroque era, a piece in slow triple meter with a *ground bass*.

phasing – Contemporary technique in which performers gradually move “out of phase” then back “in sync” as they perform an ostinato together in unison and one performer speeds up slightly.

program music – Instrumental music that has associations with images, literary concepts, or a story. See also *absolute music*.

recitative – Solo vocal movement that attempts to recreate the rhythms and inflections of ordinary speech; in operas, canatas, and oratorios.

ripieno – In a Baroque *concerto grosso*, the large ensemble that alternates with the *concertino*.

ritornello – In a Baroque concerto, the tutti passage that recurs between solo sections.

sarabande – In the Baroque era, a Spanish stylized dance type in triple meter. The sarabande was one of the four standard movements of the German suite. See *suite*.

serenade – In the Classical era, an instrumental genre performed at evening social functions. Closely related to the divertimento and cassation. Perhaps the most famous is Mozart’s *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

sonata da camera – In the Baroque era, an instrumental suite of stylized dances. Also called *chamber sonata*.

sonata da chiesa – In the Baroque era, an instrumental work for church performance. Usually had 4 movements: slow—fast—slow—fast. Also called *church sonata*.

song cycle – Grouping of songs that share musical elements or textual relationships and are often intended to function as a single composition.

strophic form – Vocal form in which the same music is repeated with different stanzas (or strophes) of text.

suite – A multimovement grouping of contrasting dance movements, generally sharing a single key. Also called *partita* and *ordre*. Many Baroque suites consist of an Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue. This combination was commonly called a “German suite” form. French suites were less predictable.

symphonic poem – In the Romantic era, a single-movement composition for orchestra with a program (see *program music*). Also *tone poem*. Franz Liszt (1850’s) and Richard Strauss (early twentieth century) are important composers of tone poems.

symphony – Orchestral work in 3 or 4 movements. Typically, the first movement is in sonata form, the second is a slow movement, the third is a minuet and trio or scherzo and trio, and the fourth is a rondo or sonata form. Many variations of this basic template exist.

trio sonata – In the Baroque era, a chamber sonata with two melody lines and a *basso continuo* bass line. The *basso continuo* bass line would have been realized by a bass instrument (such as cello) and a keyboard player, yielding a total of 4 performers.

variation – The repetition of musical materials with alteration, but such that the source materials are still recognizable.

vocalise – A vocal melody without text.

waltz – Triple meter dance type. In the Romantic era, a stylized dance type often used for piano pieces.