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Glossary of Music Terms

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alla breve The meter signature [C] indicating the equivalent of 2/2 time.

articulation In performance, the characteristics of attack and delay of tones and the manner and extent to which tones in sequence are connected or disconnected.

classroom instruments Instruments typically used in the general music classroom, including, for example, recorder-type instruments, chorded zithers, mallet instruments, simple percussion instruments, fretted instruments, keyboard instruments, and electronic instruments.

dynamic levels, dynamics Degrees of loudness.

elements of music Pitch, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, texture, form.

expression, expressive, expressively With appropriate dynamics, phrasing, style, and interpretation, and appropriate variations in dynamics and tempo.

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form The overall structural organization of a music composition (e.g., AB, ABA, call and response, rondo, theme and variations, sonata-allegro) and the interrelationships of music events within the overall structure.

fretted instruments Instruments with frets (strips of material across the fingerboard allowing the strings to be stopped at predetermined locations), such as guitar, ukulele, and sitar.

genre A type or category of music (e.g., sonata, opera, oratorio, art song, gospel, suite, jazz, madrigal, march, work song, lullaby, barbershop, Dixieland).

intonation The degree to which pitch is accurately produced in performance, particularly among the players in an ensemble.

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level of difficulty For purposes of these standards, music is classified into six levels of difficulty:

- Level 1 --Very easy. Easy keys, meters, and rhythms; limited ranges.
- Level 2 -- Easy. May include changes of tempo, key, and meter; modest ranges.
- Level 3 -- Moderately easy. Contains moderate technical demands,

- expanded ranges, and varied interpretive requirements.
- Level 4 --Moderately difficult. Requires well-developed technical skills, attention to phrasing and interpretation, and ability to perform various meters and rhythms in a variety of keys.
 - Level 5 -- Difficult. Requires advanced technical and interpretive skills; contains key signatures with numerous sharps or flats, unusual meters, complex rhythms, subtle dynamic requirements.
 - Level 6 -- Very difficult. Suitable for musically mature students of exceptional competence.

(Published by the New York State School Music Association, 1991.)

meter The grouping in which a succession of rhythmic pulses or beats is organized; indicated by a meter signature at the beginning of a work.

meter signature An indicator of the meter of a musical work, usually presented in the form of a fraction, the denominator of which indicates the unit of measurement and the numerator of which indicates the number of units that make up a measure.

MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). Standard specifications that enable electronic instruments such as the synthesizer, sampler, sequencer, and drum machine from any manufacturer to communicate with one another and with computers.

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ostinato A short musical pattern that is repeated persistently throughout a composition.

staves Plural of "staff" (the five parallel lines on which music is written).

style The distinctive or characteristic manner in which the elements of music are treated. In practice, the term may be applied to, for example, composers (the style of Copland), periods (Baroque style), media (keyboard style), nations (French style), form or type of composition (fugal style, contrapuntal style), or genre (operatic style, bluegrass style).

technical accuracy, technical skills The ability to perform with appropriate timbre, intonation, and diction, and to play or sing the correct pitches and rhythms.

timbre The character or quality of a sound that distinguishes one instrument, voice, or other sound source from another.

tonality The harmonic relationship of tones with respect to a definite center or point of rest; fundamental to much of Western music from ca. 1600.

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