

PVS Musical Terms Study Guide

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| <i>a tempo</i> | “to time” - return to the previous tempo |
| <i>accelerando</i> | “accelerating” - gradually becoming faster |
| <i>adagio</i> | “slowly, gently” - a leisurely tempo |
| <i>agitato</i> | “agitated” or “restless” |
| <i>al fine</i> | “to the end” - generally used after a repetition |
| <i>alla breve</i> | also “cut time” - C or 2/2 time signature –half note counted as one pulse |
| <i>allegretto</i> | “somewhat cheerful” - slightly slower than allegro, often implying lighter texture and character |
| <i>allegro</i> | “merry, cheerful” - relatively quick tempo |
| <i>andante</i> | “ordinary, common” - at a moderate walking pace |
| <i>arpeggio</i> | notes of a chord played in succession to one another (as with a harp [<i>arpa</i> in Italian]) |
| <i>bel canto</i> | “Beautiful singing” – elegant Italian vocal style characterized by florid melodic lines delivered by voices of great agility, <i>legato</i> , and purity of tone. |
| <i>buffo</i> | in opera, a male singer of comic roles, usually a bass |
| <i>cadence</i> | a resting place in a musical phrase; music punctuation |
| <i>cadenza</i> | Virtuosic ornamental solo passage [improvised or written] performed by a soloist |
| <i>cantabile</i> | “singable” – in a lyric, singing style |
| <i>chromatic</i> | a melody or harmony built from the use of many, if not all 12 semitones of the octave |
| <i>coda</i> | “tail” – the last part of a piece, usually added to a standard form to bring it to a close |
| <i>con amore</i> | “with love” - tenderly |
| <i>con fuoco</i> | “with fire” |
| <i>contour</i> | the overall shape of a melodic line [i.e. upward, downward, arching, static, etc.] |
| <i>crescendo</i> | “growing” - gradually increasing loudness/intensity |
| <i>D.C. or Da Capo</i> | “to the top” - repeat from the beginning of the composition |
| <i>D.S. or dal segno</i> | “to the sign” - repeat from the sign |
| <i>decrescendo</i> | “shrinking” - gradually decreasing loudness/intensity |
| <i>dolce</i> | “sweet” - sweetly, usually also softly |
| <i>fermata</i> | “stopped” - a pause or hold referring to the stopping of a regular pulse or beat in the music |
| <i>fine</i> | “end” |
| <i>forte (f)</i> | “strong” - not necessarily loud |
| <i>grave</i> | “heavy” - grave, solemn |
| head voice | the higher register of the singing voice (above the principal <i>passaggio</i>) |
| <i>largo</i> | “wide, broad” - very slow and broad tempo |
| <i>legato</i> | “connected” - no separation between notes |
| <i>leggiero</i> | “light” - soft in character |
| <i>Lied [pl. Lieder]</i> | German for “song” [pl. “songs”] |
| <i>lunga</i> | “long” |
| <i>maestoso</i> | “majestic” |
| <i>marcato</i> | “marked” - an accent stressing the center of a tone |
| <i>meno</i> | “less” |
| <i>mezzo-forte (mf)</i> | “moderately strong” |
| <i>molto</i> | “very” |

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| <i>mosso</i> | “motion” of “movement” |
| <i>motif</i> | a short musical idea or melodic theme, usually shorter than a musical phrase |
| <i>passagio</i> | “passage” – key locations in the singing range at which slight adjustments must be made |
| <i>pesante</i> | “heavy” - often an indication of a slower, deliberate <i>tempo</i> or weighty <i>staccato</i> tones |
| <i>pianissimo (pp)</i> | very soft |
| <i>piano (p)</i> | soft |
| <i>pieno/piena</i> | “full” |
| <i>poco</i> | “little” |
| <i>portamento</i> | “carrying” the voice from one tone to the next through all the intermediate pitches |
| <i>presto</i> | fast, faster than <i>allegro</i> |
| <i>primo</i> | first or upper part |
| <i>rallentando (rall.)</i> | slowing down; the same as <i>ritardando</i> |
| <i>ritardando (rit.)</i> | slowing down gradually |
| <i>rubato</i> | “robbed” - accelerating or slowing down the tempo, which is then “paid back” |
| <i>secco</i> | “dry” – style of recitative with sparse accompaniment; sung with relative rhythmic freedom |
| <i>sempre</i> | “always” |
| <i>sforzando (sf / sfz)</i> | sudden stress or accent on a note or chord |
| <i>simile (sim.)</i> | continue to perform in a similar manner |
| <i>sotto voce</i> | “under the voice” - softly; with subdued sound; performed in an undertone |
| <i>staccato (stacc.)</i> | “detached” - crisply sung as though each tone is not connected (<i>legato</i>) to the next |
| strophic | describes a song where the stanzas are all sung to the same music |
| <i>subito</i> | suddenly, quickly |
| <i>tempo</i> | “time” - the rate/speed of a musical selection |
| <i>tenuto (ten.)</i> | literally “held” – fully sustained, occasionally even a bit longer than the note value requires |
| through-composed | song structure written without repetitions of large sections of musical material |
| <i>timbre</i> | French for “color” – the quality of sound which distinguishes one voice from another |
| <i>trill</i> | musical ornament consisting of rapid alternation between one pitch and the next |
| <i>troppo</i> | “too much” |
| <i>tutti/tutto</i> | “all” |
| <i>vibrato</i> | small fluctuation of pitch, an expressive device used to intensify the sound |
| <i>vivace</i> | lively, briskly |