

## Glossary of Musical Terms

### A

**a cappella** music for voices only, without accompaniment

**accent** stress or emphasise a note

**accidental** any musical symbol that alters the pitch of a note, eg. a sharp, flat or natural

**accompaniment** the music that supports the main melody

**arpeggio** a chord where the notes are played in succession rather than at the same time

### B

**bar** a rhythmic grouping consisting of the number and type of beats indicated by the time signature. Notated with vertical lines on the staff

**beat** the regular basic unit of length in musical time

**blue note** a particular kind of chromatic note which is characteristic of blues and jazz music (as seen in [\*This little light of mine\*](#))

**body percussion** using claps, stamps, slaps and tongue clicks etc. to create rhythmic patterns and sounds

## C

**call and echo** a question and answer pattern in which a solo voice sings a phrase, and then a group of voices copies this phrase exactly

**call and response** a question and answer pattern in which a solo voice sings a phrase, and then a group of voices responds by singing something different

**canon** two or more parts overlapping in exact imitation (as seen in [London's burning](#))

**chant** rhythmic speech

**chord** two or more notes played at the same time

**chromatic note** a note that is outside of the key (as seen in [Mexican counting song](#))

## D

**Da Capo (D.C.)** (Italian – ‘to the head’) return to the beginning

**D.C. al fine** return to the beginning and finish at ‘Fine’ (Italian - ‘end’)

**dotted note** where a dot is placed immediately after a note, indicating that the note’s rhythmic value is increased by half

**dotted rhythms** where a dotted note precedes or is followed by a shorter note, creating a characteristic ‘tum-ti-tum-ti’ rhythm (as seen in [Dr Knickerbocker ek, dho, teen!](#))

**downbeat** the accented first beat of the bar

**drone** a long sustained note or chord

**dynamics** the loudness or softness of the music

F

**flat** a musical symbol that indicates lowering the pitch of a note by a semitone

G

**glissando** a rapid slide swooping up or down (plural = glissandi)

I

**interval** the pitch distance between two notes

**intonation** the accurate pitching of musical notes (good intonation = being ‘in tune’)

K

**key** a tonal centre, based on one of the 24 major or minor scales. Some examples are C major or D minor

**key change** a change from one tonal centre to another

**key signature** sharps or flats, placed at the beginning of each system, to indicate the key of a piece of music

L

**legato** smooth melodic line

M

**major key** a tonal centre based on one of the 12 major scales

**major scale** a seven note scale with a characteristically joyful sound

**melody** a series of notes creating a distinctive and memorable sequence (often referred to as ‘the tune’)

**minor key** a tonal centre based on one of the 12 minor scales

**minor scale** a seven note scale with a characteristically melancholy sound

N

**natural** a musical symbol that cancels out any other accidental, indicating that the pitch of a note is neither sharp nor flat

O

**ostinato** a repeated rhythmic or melodic pattern

P

**pedal note** a note which is sustained against changing chords (as seen in [\*The animal fair\*](#))

**pentatonic scale** a five note scale

**percussion** instruments that create sound by being struck, scraped or rattled

**pitch** how high or low a musical note is

**pulse** the regular beat of a piece of music

R

**range** the interval between the lowest and highest notes of a piece of music

**round** another name for a canon

S

**scat** non-verbal vocal improvisation, eg. ‘doo-be-doo’ etc. Often associated with jazz music (as seen in [\*Sunshine in my heart\*](#) or [\*I wanna sing scat\*](#))

**scale** a series of notes in ascending or descending order

**Scottish snap** (or ‘scotch snap’) a kind of dotted rhythm where the short note comes first, followed by the longer dotted note. (As seen in [\*Roll the old chariot along\*](#))

**semitone** the smallest interval in Western music, eg. between E and F, or A natural and A sharp

**sequence** where a melody is stated and then repeated at increasing or decreasing pitches (as seen in [\*In the autumn\*](#))

**sforzando** a note or chord which is strongly accented, then fades away quickly

**sharp** a musical symbol that indicates raising the pitch of a note by a semitone

**slur** where a series of notes is played in succession, without separation. With singing, a slur is used when one syllable is sung to more than one note

**staccato** short, detached notes, indicated with a dot underneath or above the note head

**staff** (plural - staves) the five horizontal lines, divided vertically into bars, on which a melody is notated

**syncopation** where rhythms fall just before or after the strong beat, creating a dance-like feel (as seen in [Switching it on](#) and [Life is what you make it](#))

**system** multiple staves that are bracketed together, indicating that they are meant to be played at the same time

T

**tacet** where the accompaniment stops playing for a prolonged period of time

**tempo** the speed of the music

**time signature** numbers on the staff, located at the start of a piece, that show the number and type of beats in each bar

**triplets** a group of three notes having the time value of two notes of the same kind (as seen in [Wreck of the Sloop John B.](#))

**tune** a series of notes creating a distinctive and memorable sequence (also known as a 'melody')

U

**unison** where a group of voices are all singing together at the same pitch

**upbeat** a weak beat preceding a strong downbeat (as seen in the first beat of [A Keelie](#))

V

**vocal percussion** using the voice to imitate the sound of percussion instruments