

Texture and Structure

Texture

- Texture: refers to the number of parts (lines) in the music, and how they relate to each other, as well as the nature of the overall sound



Monophony literally means "one sound," and describes music consisting of a single melodic line. Whether it is sung/played by one person or many, as long as the same notes and rhythms are being performed, monophonic texture results. Think of "Happy Birthday to You" and medieval singing by monks. *Sounds thin, light, sparse, transparent, and simple.*



Polyphony literally means "many sounds" and describes music consisting of two or more independent melodic lines of relatively equal importance performed simultaneously. The technique of composing polyphonic music to a strict set of rules, making it sound more harmonious, is called **counterpoint** (J. S. Bach's fugues and chorales for example) – this type of polyphonic music is described as **contrapuntal**. It is important to note that a group of singers are required in polyphonic music, but polyphony can be performed on some instruments-such as the piano, organ, and guitar-by a single musician. *Sounds thin, light, sparse and transparent, but also complex.*



Homophony, literally means "same sounding" and describes music consisting of two or more parts that move together in harmony, usually using the same rhythm. The relationship between the parts creates chords and because of this it is also called **chordal** texture and is very common with choirs. *Sounds thick, heavy, rich, lush, opaque and dense.*



Melody-Dominated Homophony describes music that consists of a single, dominating melody that is accompanied by chords, or arpeggiated chords (alberti bass for example). It is the texture we encounter most often in Pop music, and in Classical and Romantic music. The important aspect is that the chords exist to serve the melody. *Sounds thick, heavy, rich, lush, opaque and dense, but with a strong melodic line.*



Heterophony is rarely encountered in western art music. It consists of a single melody, performed by two or more musicians, with slight variations from performer to performer. These variations usually result from ornamentation being added spontaneously by the performers. Usually happens in folk music (Irish and Scottish Traditional Folk Music). *Sounds thin, light, sparse and transparent, but with a rich diversity of melody.*

Structure (form)

- Structure: refers to the way in which musical ideas are organized, connected and interrelated. The two basic design features of all musical structures are repetition and contrast. They are both based on the length phrases that may be defined, for example, by a final long note or a breathing space in the music.
- Pieces used in the exam are quite short, therefore the examiner might ask:
 1. How many phrases are there in this section/piece?
 2. How many sections are there in this piece?
 3. What can you say about the length of each section?
 4. Describe the phrase structure in this piece?
 5. Was there any repetition of phrases, and if so where?
 6. Was there an introduction or a coda?
 7. Which section was different from the rest of the music – and what was the purpose of this section?
- The smallest level of structure (sometimes called a **passage**) concerns the way musical phrases are organized into musical sentences and "paragraphs" such as the verse of a song. The following verse is composed of two differently-rhymed couplets (AABB), and thus its organization is **binary** or "twofold".

(A) Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
(A) How I wonder what you are.
(B) Up above the world so high,
(B) like a diamond in the sky.

However, in the verse below, there is a rhyme repeated in the second line, then a variant in the third line, two half-lines sharing a new rhyme, followed by a final return to the first arrangement in the last line (AABA), and thus its organization is song form. **Ternary** form or "threefold" is (ABA).

(A) There once was a fellow from Leeds
(A) Who swallowed a packet of seeds.
(B) In less than an hour, he burst into flower
(A) And he died trying to pull up the weeds.

- The next level (sometimes called **sectional**) concerns the entire structure of any single self-contained musical piece.

There are several different types of sectional form

1. **Strophic Form** (AAAA...) – songs!
2. **Medley Form** (ABCD...) sometimes each section repeated – overtures!
3. **Binary Form** (AB) often each section is repeated (AABB) – dances!
4. **Ternary Form** (ABA) often first section is repeated (AABA) – da capo arias!
5. **Rondo Form** (ABACAD..) recurring theme always complete and in the same key
6. **Ritornello form** (ABACAD..) recurring theme in part and different keys – fast mvts of baroque concertos.

- The grandest level of organization may be referred to as **cyclical form**. It concerns the arrangement of several self-contained pieces into a large-scale composition. For example, a set of songs with a related theme may be presented as a song-cycle, whereas a set of Baroque dances were presented as a suite.