Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Fusion music with African and Caribbean music

Contents

1. African music
2. Caribbean music
3. Fusion
4. Key terms
5. Quick questions
6. What to do next

African music

- **Polyrhythm**: several different rhythms played at the same time. Cross-rhythms clash against the main beat.
- Drums lead: the **djembe** (a goblet-shaped hand drum), the **talking drum** (its pitch changes when the player squeezes it) and bass drums. A **master drummer** leads and signals changes.
- Call and response, repeated patterns (ostinatos) and improvisation. Music is learned by ear.
- Other instruments: the **kora** (a West African harp with 21 strings) and the balafon (a wooden xylophone).

Caribbean music

- Reggae (Jamaica, from the late 1960s): off-beat chords on beats 2 and 4 (the **skank**), a heavy, prominent bass line, a relaxed tempo, and the one-drop drum beat. Lyrics are often about social issues or faith. Bob Marley is the best-known artist.
- Ska came before reggae: faster, with off-beat guitar and brass.
- Calypso (Trinidad and Tobago): **steel pans**, syncopated rhythms, a cheerful major key and witty, topical lyrics.

Fusion

- **Fusion** music mixes African or Caribbean music with other styles, such as Western pop, jazz, funk, rock or electronic music.
- Afrobeat (Nigeria, 1970s, Fela Kuti) mixes West African rhythms with jazz and funk: long tracks, horn sections, interlocking guitars.

- Signs of a **fusion**: African or Caribbean features (**polyrhythm**, **djembe**, kora, reggae skank, steel pans) together with Western ones (drum kit, electric bass, synthesisers, verse and chorus, Western harmony).
- To tell them apart: layered **polyrhythms** and hand drums suggest Africa; an off-beat **skank** and heavy bass suggest reggae; **steel pans** suggest calypso.

Key terms

Polyrhythm	Several different rhythms played at the same time.
Master drummer	The lead drummer, who signals changes to the group.
Djembe	A West African goblet-shaped hand drum.
Talking drum	A drum whose pitch changes when its strings are squeezed.
Kora	A West African harp with 21 strings.
Skank	Off-beat chords on beats 2 and 4 in reggae.
Steel pan	A tuned drum made from an oil drum, from Trinidad.
Fusion	Music that mixes two or more styles.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is a polyrhythm?
2. What does the master drummer do?
3. What is a djembe?
4. How does a talking drum change pitch?
5. What is the kora?
6. In reggae, what is the skank?
7. Which part is especially prominent in reggae?
8. Where do steel pans come from?

Answers

1. Several different rhythms played at the same time
2. Leads the group and signals changes
3. A West African goblet-shaped hand drum
4. The player squeezes the strings on its sides
5. A West African harp with 21 strings
6. Off-beat chords on beats 2 and 4
7. The bass line
8. Trinidad and Tobago

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Your notes

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

Your notes