Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Rhythm, metre and tempo

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Note lengths and metre

- The **time signature** shows the metre: the top number is how many beats are in a bar, and the bottom shows the type of beat.
- Simple time divides each beat into two: 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4. **Compound time** divides each beat into three: 6/8 has two dotted-crotchet beats.
- Irregular metres have unusual groupings, such as 5/4 or 7/8.

Rhythmic devices

- **Syncopation** puts the accent off the beat, making music feel lively, as in jazz and pop.
- Dotted rhythms have a long note followed by a short one, giving a jagged feel.
- **Triplets** fit three notes into the time of two.
- Swing rhythms play pairs of quavers unevenly (long-short), as in jazz.
- Cross-rhythms play two different rhythms against each other at the same time.
- A hemiola makes two bars of 3/4 feel like three bars of 2/4.

Tempo

- **Tempo** is the speed of the music, often measured in beats per minute (bpm).
- Largo: very slow. Adagio: slow. Andante: at a walking pace. Moderato: at a moderate speed. **Allegro**: fast. Presto: very fast.
- Accelerando: getting faster. **Rallentando** (or ritardando): getting slower. **Rubato**: stretching the **tempo** for expression. A pause (fermata) holds a note longer than written.

Key terms

Time signature	Numbers showing the beats in a bar and the type of beat.
Syncopation	Accents off the beat.

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Compound time	Metre where each beat divides into three, such as 6/8.
Triplet	Three notes played in the time of two.
Tempo	The speed of the music.
Allegro	Fast.
Rallentando	Gradually getting slower.
Rubato	Stretching the tempo freely for expression.

Quick questions

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

1. What does syncopation mean?
2. Which time signature is compound?
3. How many beats are in a bar of 3/4?
4. What does allegro mean?
5. What does andante mean?
6. What does accelerando mean?
7. What is a triplet?
8. What is rubato?

Answers

1. Accents off the beat
2. 6/8
3. Three crotchet beats
4. Fast
5. At a walking pace
6. Gradually getting faster
7. Three notes played in the time of two
8. Stretching the tempo freely for expression

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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