Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Timbre, instruments and dynamics

Contents

1. Instruments of the orchestra
2. Playing techniques
3. Dynamics
4. Key terms
5. Quick questions
6. What to do next

Instruments of the orchestra

- Strings: violin, viola, cello and double bass. Woodwind: flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon.
- Brass: trumpet, French horn, trombone and tuba. Percussion: timpani (tuned) and snare drum, cymbals and bass drum (untuned).
- Voices: soprano (highest female), alto, tenor and bass (lowest male). Falsetto is a light, high male voice.

Playing techniques

- Strings: **arco** (bowed), **pizzicato** (plucked), **tremolo** (rapid repeated notes), double stopping (two notes at once), con sordino (muted) and vibrato.
- Brass: muted playing and glissando (sliding between notes, as on a trombone).
- Guitar: distortion, strumming, palm muting and bends. Music technology: reverb, delay, panning, sampling and looping.

Dynamics

- pp (pianissimo): very quiet. p (piano): quiet. mp (mezzo piano): moderately quiet.
- mf (mezzo forte): moderately loud. f (forte): loud. ff (fortissimo): very loud.
- **Crescendo**: getting louder. **Diminuendo** (decrescendo): getting quieter. **Sforzando** (sfz): a sudden, strong accent.
- **Terraced dynamics** change suddenly between loud and quiet, typical of Baroque music.

Key terms

Timbre	The characteristic sound of an instrument or voice.
Pizzicato	Plucking the strings.
Arco	Playing the strings with the bow.

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Tremolo	Rapidly repeating a note.
Crescendo	Getting gradually louder.
Diminuendo	Getting gradually quieter.
Sforzando	A sudden, strong accent.
Terraced dynamics	Sudden changes between loud and quiet.

Your notes

Quick questions

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

1. What does pizzicato mean?
2. What does ff mean?
3. What does p mean?
4. What is a crescendo?
5. Which instrument belongs to the brass family?
6. Which is the highest female voice?
7. What is timbre?
8. What are terraced dynamics?

Answers

1. Plucking the strings
2. Very loud
3. Quiet
4. Getting gradually louder
5. Trombone
6. Soprano
7. The characteristic sound of an instrument or voice
8. Sudden changes between loud and quiet

What to do next

Practise 11 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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