

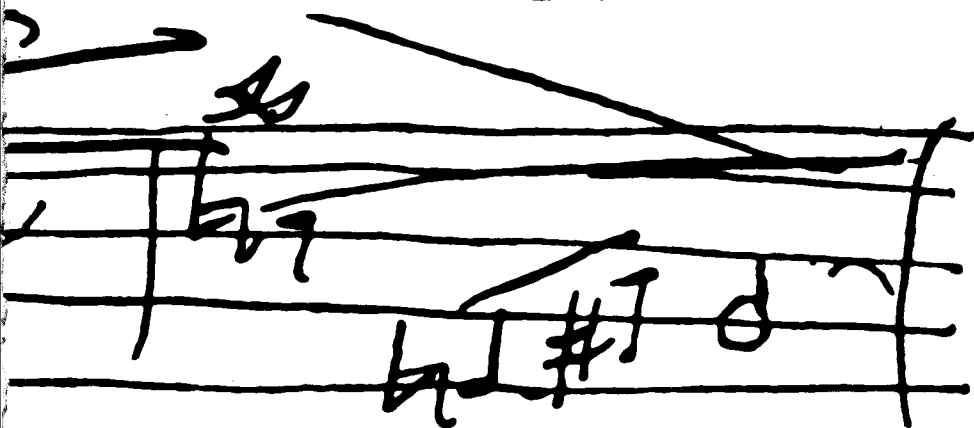
The Illustrated Dictionary of **MUSICAL TERMS**



musical Terms

Christopher Headington

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Illustrated Dictionary of
**MUSICAL
TERMS**

For Peter Corlett
and those other friends for whom
learning is a serious delight

A

A cappella

The unaccompanied choral style: literally, 'in church style'.

A piacere

Freely, as regards rhythm, dynamics etc.

A tempo

At the standard, established speed. Used after such markings as **Ritenu**to—i.e., temporary departures from the main tempo of a piece—it indicates a return to that tempo.

Absolute Music

Pure music, neither linked to words nor to other—e.g., pictorial—descriptive ideas. The opposite of programme music.

Absolute Pitch

Also called perfect pitch, this is the precise sense of pitch that allows some musicians to identify or reproduce any note without reference to another already identified. It is a gift and so not easily acquired by training. Among composers, Mozart possessed it, but Wagner and Schumann apparently did not.

Abstract Music

The same as absolute music, though some German writers give this term a pejorative sense implying the dry and academic.

Academy

A scholarly society or teaching institution. Recently the term has also been used in the sense of 'performing society' for chamber orchestras.

Accelerando

Getting faster.

Accent

The stress falling on notes that are naturally louder than others, such as the first beat of a bar. This is dynamic accent. It is less usual, but still correct, to apply the term to two other kinds of emphasis: agogic accent where the note is longer than others, and tonic accent where it is higher. All these may of course be combined.

Acciaccatura

A very short ornamental note leading to another, often immediately above or below.

Accidental

A sign placed before a note to raise or lower its pitch. The sharp raises by a semitone, the flat lowers by a semitone, and the natural restores the note to the norm. Less common are the double sharp and double flat which raise and lower respectively by a whole tone. The sharps or flats (key signature) at the beginning of a piece (and of each line) relate to the key and are not accidentals, which, as the name implies, mark departures from it—except in atonal music, where there is of course no key as such.



Accidentals (left to right): sharp, flat, natural, double sharp, double flat

Accompaniment

The musical support given to a principal part by a subordinate one—e.g., the harpsichord music that underpins the vocal recitatives in Mozart's operas. A solo song may have an accompaniment of this kind, but since Schubert the piano 'accompanist' in a song recital is more of a partner than the word suggests.

Acoustics

The science of sound. It is possible to consider all the physics of sound production under this heading: the way in which sounds are produced by a vibrating

Action

medium—e.g., a string, or the air in a wind instrument—and transmitted through the air to the ear-drum, or by electronic means through a loudspeaker. Besides this, the very nature of musical sound is itself a subject for detailed scientific study. The word acoustics is also often used to refer to the sonic characteristics of halls and other places used for the performance of music. Resonance, or sympathetic vibration, is an important factor, for just as a violin needs its body for the strings to give their best sound, so a hall needs its appropriate shape and choice of wall surfaces for music to sound well. A hall equally suitable for all kinds of vocal and instrumental combinations may be an unrealisable ideal, but all architects today take account of available knowledge in this relatively new subject. It is even possible to adjust the acoustics of a hall after it has been built, as has been done with the Royal Albert Hall and Royal Festival Hall in London.

Action

The movement of parts, usually in a keyboard instrument, though it can also apply to the key mechanism of woodwind and the pedal mechanism of the harp.

Ad libitum

'At will'—referring to permissible freedom in performing a passage so marked, also the omission (or inclusion) of a passage, instrument or voice.

Adagietto

A speed slightly less slow than *adagio*. Less often, a short *adagio* movement, as in Mahler's 5th Symphony.

The auditorium of the Royal Festival Hall in London, built in 1951. Its acoustics are ideal for orchestral music.



Adagio

A slow tempo, perhaps not so slow as *lento* or *largo*, though not all would agree on this. The Italian word merely means 'at ease' or 'relaxed'.

Added sixth

This chord is in effect a major triad plus the added colouring of the sixth note above its root—e.g., C, E, G, A—and may as such form the final chord of a piece. Examples of such endings include 'Venus' in Holst's *Planets*, Mahler's 'Das Lied von der Erde' and Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*. 'Rather too commercial', Stravinsky later commented wryly—a reference to the very common and facile use of the chord in popular music. The added sixth is often incorrectly 'explained' in reference books as an inversion of a seventh chord on the supertonic, but this is not the way musicians have used it.

Aeolian Mode

See **Modes**.

Aesthetics

The philosophy or psychological study of 'the beautiful'. Like life itself, music may be thought to have its standards, laws and even 'morals'. Thus, just as virtue is preferred to vice and order to chaos, in music we seek for emotional and intellectual pleasure, for some kind of enlightenment—as opposed to the negative qualities of muddle, ugliness or perversity. To be satisfying, however, music need by no means be 'beautiful' in the simple sense of 'pretty', especially if we think of it as a form of psychological drama. This point applies especially to the romantics and moderns; and he who prefers classical poise, elegance and shape may not share another's enthusiasm for a tough work like Berg's *Wozzeck* belonging to a different age and aesthetic climate. The demonstrable logic of Schoenberg's serial music does not necessarily please the aesthetic sense; for as with people, music can be respected but not actually liked—and the opposite. Among the philosophers, Schopenhauer

is perhaps the most valuable writer on musical aesthetics. Musicians themselves have so far contributed little to shed light upon this important aspect of their art; and as yet few universities offer teaching in this field, although there are signs that this may be changing.

Affections

The baroque doctrine of the affections was formulated by musical theorists in the early 18th century. 'Affections' here means emotions, of which some twenty were listed, together with a description of the appropriate music to express them—sorrow with slow, sighing melody, for example. It was therefore a theory of music as an emotional language, similar to ideas existing in ancient Greece (Plato wrote on music from this standpoint) and also in oriental music.

Affettuoso

Tenderly. In practice often used for vivid and passionate music while the alternative **Teneramente** is reserved for quieter passages.

Affrettando

Hurrying.

Agitato

Agitated.

Agogic Accent

See **Accent**.

Agréments A French term for ornaments or grace notes, mainly used of baroque music.

Air

A song. Alternatively, a song-like instrumental piece such as the so-called 'Air on the G String' from Bach's 3rd *Orchestral Suite*.

Alberti Bass

A left-hand accompanying figure in keyboard (usually piano) music, consisting only of broken-chord figuration and named after a composer (Domenico Alberti, 1710–40) who used it extensively

Alborada



Alberti bass

in his harpsichord sonatas. Even Mozart did not disdain this useful device, employed throughout the Andante of his C major Piano Sonata, K.545.

Alborada

A 'dawn song': the matutinal equivalent of a serenade, but usually an instrumental piece rather than a song. Originally, a Spanish piece for folk oboe and drum. Ravel's 'Alborada del gracioso' is the best-known piece bearing this title.

Albumblatt

A short instrumental piece, literally a 'page from an album'. Schumann's twenty short piano pieces of Op 124 bear this name.

Aleatory Music

Since about 1945, some composers have produced works in which chance elements are introduced, either during the composition itself (in one piano piece by John Cage, imperfections of the manuscript paper have been allowed to determine the course of the music) or more commonly during performance, where, for example, various sections may be interchanged or combined according to the player's will. Cage (b.1912) has been a pioneer in this field and an influential

An 'aleatory' passage in David Bedford's With 100 Kazoos in which the players are invited to 'interpret' the peaceful landscape and the sinister winged creatures in turn

From here until p34 players must try to interpret on their instrument the pictures assigned to them. Each picture interpretation should last about 20 seconds, but the conductor may extend or shorten this depending on how he feels the interpretation is going. Go from one picture to the next without a break

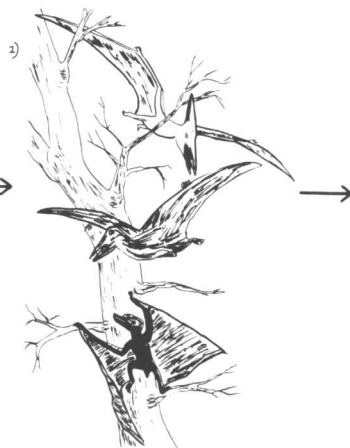
(N)

Flute, Horn, Viola, Cello



(N)

Clarinet, Trumpet, Vln 2, D-Bass



Allemande

figure. Others who have used aleatory techniques include Boulez, Stockhausen and Xenakis. Computers have been employed also in attempts to generate 'random music', a concept which is in fact quite difficult to realise since the instructions necessarily given tend to create obstacles to the randomness itself.

Aliquot Strings

These are sympathetic strings, not actually struck but serving to reinforce the tone of those that are, fitted by Blüthner among other manufacturers to the high register of pianos.

Alla Breve

The duple time of two minims (half notes) to a bar, indicated commonly by the time signature of Φ , though writing $\frac{2}{2}$ has the same meaning.

Allargando

Broadening out in speed, perhaps also with increasing fullness of tone.

Allegretto

Fairly lively—i.e., less so than **Allegro**.

Allegro

Lively. The Italian word means 'cheerful', but composers almost invariably use it simply to denote a brisk tempo. (Indeed Poulenc's Clarinet Sonata has an *allegro* first movement marked *tristamente*, sadly). Allegro is the commonest tempo for sonata-form first movements.

Alleluia

The Latin form of a Hebrew exclamation praising God. The alleluia, together with other liturgical words, is sung as part of the Roman Mass except during Lenten and Requiem services.

Allemande

Literally, a German dance. Alternative names include *alman* and *almayne*. As regularly featured in the baroque suites of Bach and others, it has four beats in the bar and a fairly brisk pace.

The allemande, danced in elegant surroundings, evidently permitted amorous badinage. Is the gentleman suggesting some later assignation?



Alt

Alt

'High'. A term sometimes used to identify notes in the first octave above the treble stave—e.g., 'G in alt' for the note one octave above treble G.

Alternativo

An old word for the middle section of a piece, later more often called a *trio*—or more loosely used to suggest the playing of two sections of music in alternation.

Alto

The meaning of 'high' is confusing when used for the low female voice, but is explained by its original use for the *male* alto voice. The alto range, some two octaves with the E above middle C at the centre, is the only one shared by both male and female voices, the male however (sometimes called 'countertenor') being quite distinctive in *timbre*. (The alternative term *contralto* is only applied to women's voices.)

Alto Clef

The clef used for the viola in orchestral and other scores, having middle C as its middle line. It is also met with in alto-range parts in older music—Palestrina, Bach etc. (See **Clef** for illustration).

Ambrosian Chant

The plainchant melodic style of the Catholic Church named after St Ambrose of Milan (4th century). Though largely superseded by the later re-ordering of church music called Gregorian Chant, it survives today in Ambrose's own cathedral at Milan.

Amoroso

Lovingly, warmly.

Anacrusis

An unstressed note or notes at the start of a phrase; an 'upbeat' effect before a stronger accent.

Analysis

The resolution of a piece of music into its component elements, showing its structure and organic shape. The ana-

lytical study of music is perhaps the most important single branch of academic—i.e., musicological—teaching in this subject. At its best, it aims for a fuller understanding of the essence of a musical style and indeed of musical thought itself. The consideration of thematic form (as with Tovey) is the easiest and commonest approach, but other things too—such as melodic and harmonic structure, texture, dynamic shape—invariably repay investigation. Though analysis cannot tell the whole story, it applies to a piece of music as does human physiology to an individual body.

Andante

Literally, a walking pace. As a tempo mark, something less quick than *moderato* but significantly faster than *lento* or *adagio*. *Più andante* should mean faster than *andante*, but occasionally means the opposite where the composer has taken the word just to mean 'slow'.

Andantino

Usually a speed rather less slow than *andante*. But there is some confusion about this (see the *andante* entry above) and the opposite meaning could apply. In Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, incidentally, the same metronome mark is given to two sections, one of which is marked *andante* and the other *andantino*.

Anglican Chant

The traditional chant to English words used in the Anglican (Church of England) service. Unlike plainchant, it is always harmonized, and the main tune is sung by the upper part, trebles or sopranos, sometimes together with the congregation. The tune is repeated with each pair of verses (or in the case of a 'single chant', each verse) in the psalms and canticles.

Animato

Animated, lively.

Answer

In fugue, the second (and in four parts, the fourth also) entry of the main theme.

It differs from the first entry (the subject, in the tonic key) by being at dominant pitch. Thus if the answer (second entry) is a fourth lower than a treble subject, the third entry or 'voice' may be one octave lower. The answer may be a slightly modified version of the subject—for example, to avoid modulation away from the tonic key. It is then called 'tonal', whereas a 'real' answer is note-for-note exact in its relation to the subject.

Antecedent

The first half of a phrase, the second being called the consequent. Alternatively the leading voice in a canon.

Anthem

A religious choral piece to English words: something of an Anglican equivalent to the Catholic (Latin) motet. Commonly there is an organ or other instrumental accompaniment. Sometimes the word just means 'hymn'—as in 'national anthem'. Purcell, Handel and S. S. Wesley are among the important

anthem composers.

Antiphon

A short sung passage that precedes and follows a psalm or canticle in the Roman rite, sometimes also standing on its own—e.g., on Palm Sunday.

Antiphonal Style

Alternate singing or playing by different groups.

Appassionato

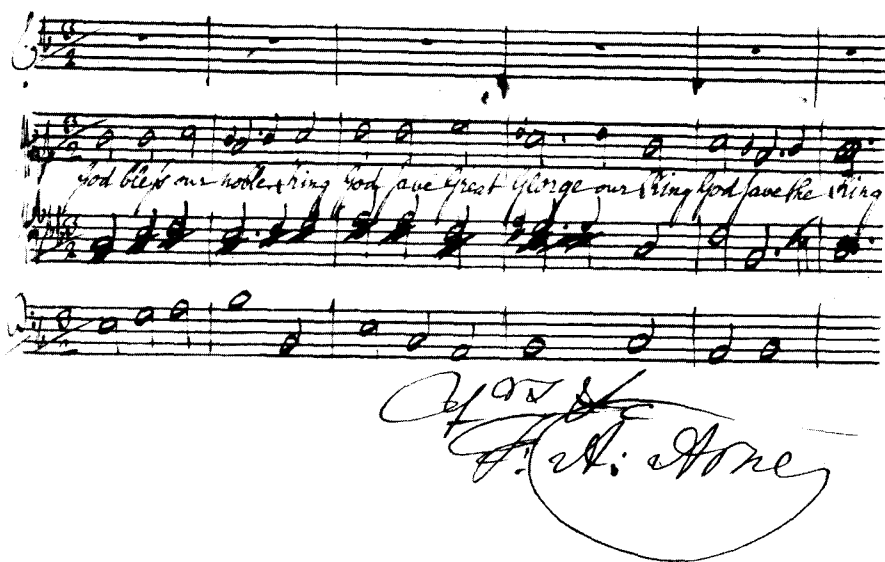
Passionately, with intense feeling.

Applied Music

Practical music, as opposed to academic or theoretical study: playing or singing instead of book-learning. An American term, mainly.

Appoggiatura

A dissonant ornamental note, leading to another which is consonant and immediately above or below. It falls on the beat and is unhurried in effect.



A 1745 version, by Thomas Arne, of the English national anthem (in America, 'My country, 'tis of thee'). The notation is rather

casual, the three flats of the E flat major key signature not being written out, and the tune is slightly different from today's.

Appreciation of music

Appreciation of music

This term implies an element of understanding going beyond the direct enjoyment of music that even a very young child can feel. It has therefore come to be employed for an educational subject, akin to visual or literary critical studies, in which history, analysis and ear training all play a part in enhancing the listener's ability intelligently to hear music. Such a listener is enabled indeed to follow a composer's thought processes with more insight than is possible without training of this kind.

Aquarelle

Literally, a water-colour painting. Applied to music—e.g., in Fenby's string orchestral arrangements of two Delius pieces—it suggests a delicate miniature.

Arabesque

An ornamental figure or flourish, the musical equivalent of the architectural feature so named. The arabesques for piano by Schumann and Debussy have a lilting and graceful character.

Arco

Bow. As a performing direction in string music, it tells the player to resume bowing after a plucked (*pizzicato*) passage.

Aria

Air—i.e., song. Commonly the term is reserved for opera and oratorio, recital songs being simply called songs. The aria form is normally ternary, with middle section and return, whereas recital songs are more often in strophic or verse form. In opera, the aria is a solo given to a main character; like a soliloquy in a play, it embodies an emotional state and provides a point of rest in the narrative action.

Arietta

A short aria, perhaps without the contrasting middle section of the full-length aria. In French opera, the term has been more loosely used and may imply some element of lightness or brilliance.

Arioso

A style of singing somewhere between the structured melodic phrases of aria and the highly informal recitative. Beethoven borrows the term for an instrumental passage of this melodic kind in his Piano Sonata Op. 110. Though an adjective in Italian, *arioso* is used as a noun to describe a section of music in this style.

Arpeggio

A broken chord—i.e., the notes of a chord played in sequence rather than simultaneously.

Arrangement

A reworking of an original piece of music. It may be for another instrument or instrumental combination, and even vocal pieces have been arranged for piano or orchestra. Or it may be a simplified version for the same instrument. More loosely, it can involve some elaboration and extension of the original notes—but this is nowadays more properly called a transcription, the word we apply to Liszt's versions for piano of operatic music by Verdi and Wagner. Some writers use these two terms indiscriminately however, and in America they can have the opposite meanings to those given here—i.e., the arrangement being the freer treatment.

Ars Antiqua

The 'ancient art' of early polyphonic composers around 1160–1300, beginning with Léonin and Pérotin who were consecutive choirmasters at Notre Dame in Paris. Their work, based on plainchant, is in from two to four vocal parts. The Latin motet is an important product of this period. Triple rhythms were also a feature of 13th-century style.

Ars nova

This term, used by 1325, denotes the fresh style in both sacred and secular music which followed that of the more formal *ars antiqua*. Duple rhythm and syncopation, as well as generally greater melodic freedom, are among features of the *ars nova*. Guillaume de Machaut

(1300–77) is among the most important musicians, composing the first complete Mass setting by a single writer. The Italian Landini (1325–97), a master of expressive harmony, and the Englishman Dunstable (1380–1453) are other prominent figures in a period of experiment which opened up the way to the wide-ranging Josquin des Prés (1450–1521) and the humanistic style of the Renaissance.

Arsin et thesin

Originally used of weak and strong accents—and still so used by some French and German theorists—this rather uncommon Greek term is now mainly employed in reference to a canon or other contrapuntal piece where either (a) the tune in the first voice is inverted in the second, or (b) the pattern of strong and weak beats is reversed in the second voice.

Articulation

Musical shaping and phrasing: the clear and conscious delivery of the notes that music needs if it is not to sound mechanical or lifeless. This is most obviously necessary for a singer, who must use accent, breathing, legato/staccato contrast, vocal colour and so on to 'put over' his text both verbally and musically, but it is not less essential for a solo instrumentalist. One of the chief functions of a conductor, too, is the imparting of an overall articulation to orchestral phrasing, and similarly the leader of a string quartet will guide the four players so that they phrase alike.

Assai

Literally, 'very'—thus *allegro assai* properly means a very lively tempo. But it seems that some composers, probably including Beethoven, used this word like the French *assez*, meaning 'fairly'. Thus the *allegro assai* of Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata for piano is less rather than more *allegro* in speed.

Atonality

The absence of tonality, of the use of a

key system; the musical style characterized by such a method. Music that fully embraces atonal methods belongs exclusively to the 20th century and its prophet was the Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) with such works as *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). Following upon the freely non-tonal writing of *Pierrot* or the Piano Pieces, Op 11, Schoenberg's later serial or twelve-note technique was systematically atonal and this new compositional method proved influential even though its wide adoption by composers (and acceptance by audiences) seems impossible.

Attacca

Go straight on—i.e., continue without a clear pause from one movement or section to the next.

Attack

Decisiveness, especially in beginning a phrase or single note. It may imply a vigorous *forte*, but in orchestral terms can equally mean a well-coordinated *pianissimo* entry. The French call an orchestral leader (concertmaster) the *chef d'attaque*.

Aubade

A dawn song: the morning equivalent of a serenade. Bizet, Rimsky-Korsakov and Poulenc have employed the term. Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* (1870), written to awaken his wife as a surprise present on her birthday morning, is the best-known of all aubades, even though not so-called.

Augmentation

The lengthening of note-values, usually by doubling them. Used in a fugue, normally towards the end, the device is applied to the subject (main theme) and lends breadth and dignity.

Augmented Sixth

A triad chromatically altered so that its outer notes form an augmented interval—for example, in C major the chord A, C, F (its outer notes forming a minor 6th) can become A flat, C, F sharp. Commonly the chord resolves outwards on to the dominant (G, B, D, G) and may

Autograph



then be followed by the tonic C, E, G in a perfect cadence.

Autograph

A manuscript copy of a piece of music in the composer's own hand.

Auxiliary Note

A non-harmonic—i.e., dissonant—ornamental melody note that is approached

Augmented Sixths (left to right): Italian Sixth, French Sixth, German Sixth

from the note immediately below or above and then returns to the note originally sounded.

Ayre

Old English spelling for 'air'. In theory the same as *aria*; but in practice an ayre is an English song, such as those with lute by Dowland (1563–1626) and others of his time.

CANTUS. X. Robert Jones.

Here is a Garden in her face, where Roses and white Lillies grow,
a heavenly paradise is that place where in these pleasurable bowes, Three cherries now which
sometimes buy all cherries ripe, they ripe/ripe ripe all.
ripe/cherries ripe, all. they ripe/ripe, ripe them when do crye:
all cherries ripe, all. they ripe/ripe, ripe them when do crye:

1. These cherries fairly do incline
Of Ceres' fruitful double crown,
Which when her lovely laughter shewes,
They make her heart blush'd with merriment.
Yet these no Pomegranate may be,
Which ripe themselves do crye.

2. Her eyes like Angels watch them full,
Her brow like bended towers dark and tall
Throning with piercing flutes us all
All this perfume with eye or hand
That inward cherries come out,
Till they ripe themselves do crye.

ALTO. Tenor. Basses.

Here is a garden in her face, where roses and white lillies grow, a heavenly paradise, is
that place where in these pleasurable bowes, three cherries now which
sometimes buy all cherries ripe, all cherries ripe, ripe them when do crye:
ripe/cherries ripe, all. they ripe/ripe, ripe them when do crye:
all cherries ripe, all. they ripe/ripe, ripe them when do crye:

1. These cherries fairly do incline
Of Ceres' fruitful double crown,
Which when her lovely laughter shewes,
They make her heart blush'd with merriment.
Yet these no Pomegranate may be,
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2. Her eyes like Angels watch them full,
Her brow like bended towers dark and tall
Throning with piercing flutes us all
All this perfume with eye or hand
That inward cherries come out,
Till they ripe themselves do crye.

The layout of this ayre by Robert Jones permitted performance by four singers seated around a table.

Ballata

B

Badinerie

A light-hearted dance movement, with two beats in a bar, mainly in 18th-century music. An example is the final movement of Bach's Suite in B minor for flute and strings.

Bagatelle

Literally, a trifling or slight piece of music. But those for piano by Beethoven are more serious in tone than the name implies and only slight in their duration. One might think that Beethoven's original German word *Kleinigkeiten* meant simply miniatures and had been mis-translated, but it is the exact equivalent of the French word *bagatelle*.

Ballad

Though this word, like 'ballet', is related to the Italian *ballare* (to dance), and did at one time imply a 'song for dancing', it now has nothing at all to do with the dance. It is used for poems and songs alike, the latter usually fairly simple, narrative and appearing in England from the 15th century. Ballads were sometimes printed just as poems with some such instruction as 'to be sung to the tune of "Greensleeves"' and then sold in the streets. In Victorian England the word was used for songs of a drawing-room kind like Sullivan's 'The Lost Chord'.

Ballade

No more a dance than the ballad (see above), nor a song, but instead a longish instrumental piece, commonly for piano solo. Chopin's four ballades are prototypes, akin to the poetic ballades of his compatriot Mickiewicz, their music being narrative and dramatic in feeling though without any specific literary programme. Later ballades include those

by Brahms, Liszt, Grieg, Debussy, and one for piano and orchestra by Fauré.

Ballad Opera

A theatrical piece in which songs and spoken dialogue alternate, popular in style and characteristic of the English stage in the early 18th century. The most celebrated of all is John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, produced in London in 1728. As the title suggests, it was something of a popular answer to the serious operatic style as exemplified by Handel (then busy writing operas for London audiences) and the music by Pepusch was arranged from popular tunes rather than specially composed. Later ballad operas include those by Arne (*Love in a Village*, 1726) and Vaughan Williams (*Hugh the Drover*, 1924). Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* of 1928 is a modern German reworking of *The Beggar's Opera* in jazz style; Britten also made a new version in 1948.



Harmony, with back turned, seems to repudiate the rough-and-ready goings-on in this lampoon of The Beggar's Opera. Presumably the elegantly dressed 'animals' on the stage are less than refined vocalists

Ballata

An Italian song form of the period around 1400, indeed perhaps the most important contribution of Italy to the *ars*

Ballet

nova period that preceded the renaissance. A ballata could be for one or more voices. Each verse had a pattern of musical phrases corresponding to its lines, viz. A, B, B, A, A.

Ballet

The most sophisticated form of dancing, performed with orchestra in a theatre before an audience, just as an opera is. Like opera, a ballet tells a story although without a spoken or sung text, this being achieved by dance movements involving the whole body and also by the character of the music itself. As the French name suggests, the origin of ballet is to be found in France, particularly that of Louis XIV and his court composer Lully. The *ballet de cour*, in which the King himself liked to dance, was a stately affair, but the *comédie-ballet* created by Lully and Molière together was more of a public spectacle. It was another Frenchman, Noverre (1727–1810), who created the real dramatic, story-telling ballet, the *ballet d'action*, establishing the full-length ballet performance and collaborating with Gluck and Mozart, whose *Les petits riens* dates from 1778. Noverre also wrote an influential treatise on his art.

Mozart's *Les petits riens* was produced in Vienna as well as Paris, and the ballet spread widely from France in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was in Russia that the most musically important of 19th-century ballets were produced, these being those with choreography by the Marseillais Marius Petipa (1822–1910) and music by Tchaikovsky—*Swan Lake* (1877), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and *The Nutcracker* (1892). After 1900, it was Diaghilev who created the celebrated *Ballets russes* who came to take Paris by storm in 1909. Stravinsky was Diaghilev's most important collaborator in the years immediately prior to World War I with *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*.

Ballet Rambert perform Glen Tetley's modern ballet, Pierrot Lunaire, with music by Schoenberg.

