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Pocket Guide to Music Forms & Styles

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PREFACE

Music Forms & Styles is an A to Z of terms from baroque to rock, polyphonic to punk and fugue to funk. A sound knowledge of musical forms and styles is the key to understanding the whole field of music, and a special feature of this pocket guide is the inclusion of styles central to the development and interpretation of 20th-century popular music. But what exactly is a form and a style?

Form is the structure around which style is created. It is rather like building a house; after deciding on the basic size, shape and plan, a house may be built in an ornamental baroque style or perhaps in an angular modern style. The same happens in music. A sonata is formed in three main sections, each with a particular role to play, but a Mozart sonata from the classical period would sound quite different to a sonata composed by Hindemith in the 20th century. The difference here is a matter of style. However, this pocket guide is not written for the music specialist alone but for anyone who has even a passing interest in the subject and wants to know more.

The book is also easy to use. Each headword is in bold type, e.g. **fugue** or **aleatoric music**. For every heading I have tried to include dates, characteristic points of style, analysis of form, and composers who wrote that particular type of style with examples of actual works. Within the entries there may be other terms in bold type which indicates that you can look up more information under that particular word. Italics are used for titles of works and songs and nothing is abbreviated apart from R&B for rhythm and blues in the popular music entries. Normally, the headword is in the most generally accepted form, e.g. **musique concrète** (French) as opposed to the English form 'concrete music'. Similarly, the titles of works are mainly given in the language of their origin.

Music never ceases to be fascinating with new developments arising constantly. This book will keep you up-to-date with modern terminology but will also remind you of music of the past which, as Stravinsky said 'animates and informs the present'.

Wendy Munro

List of Abbreviations

Am.	American
Brit.	British
Czech.	Czechoslovakian
Eng.	English
Fr.	French
Gael.	Gaelic
Ger.	German
Gk.	Greek
Hung.	Hungarian
It.	Italian
Lat.	Latin
Pol.	Polish
Port.	Portuguese
Prov.	Provençal
Russ.	Russian
Sp.	Spanish

A

✓ **absolute music**

The opposite of programme music, having no reference to any other art forms or emotions, e.g. literature, painting, etc. Most music is absolute, being written purely as music.

✓ **abstract music**

Same as **absolute music**. However, *abstrakte musik*, as used by German writers, indicates dry and rather insensitive music.

✓ **a capella**

See **cappella**.

acid rock

See **psychedelic rock**.

action song

Usually young children's song involving dramatic movement while singing.

act tune

A 17th- and 18th-century term to describe music between acts of plays. This music was often published independently. The modern term is *entr'acte*.

✓ **ad libitum or ad lib** (Lat., 'at will')

This term indicates that the performer may, according to the context, either (a) alter the strict rhythm or tempo, (b) omit or include an instrumental or vocal part, (c) omit or include an entire passage, e.g. a **cadenza**, or (d) include a cadenza and play what and how he pleases. See also **improvisation**.

✓ **aeolian mode**

One of a series of twelve modes, this one being based on A to A on white notes on piano. See **modes**.

agogic

agogic

In general, this term describes the natural musical expression one would use to play well, by varying the rate of movement, i.e. pausing, rubato, accenting, accelerando, etc.

air

This may describe either the melodic top part of a composition or a highly melodic entire composition, e.g. J.S. Bach's *Air on a G String*, now jazzed up and heard in a famous TV cigar advertisement of the 1970s and 1980s.

✓ air with variations

A highly popular form since the 16th century in which a melody or subject is stated and is then played over several times with slight changes on each repetition with the original identity of the melody never being lost.

alalà

Spanish folk song in the **plainsong** mould. Usually in four-line verses with a melody highly decorated by the singer.

✓ alberti bass

A broken chord moving accompaniment to a right hand melody characteristic of the classical period and most commonly found in keyboard music. It derives its name from Alberti, the Italian composer. Haydn and Mozart both used this formula.

✓ alborada (Sp., 'morning song'), aubade (Fr.)

Characterised by a freedom of rhythm, this term is now applied to bagpipe and side-drum music popular in Galicia. Ravel and Rimsky-Korsakov also used this style in their music.

✓ albumblatt (Ger., 'album leaf')

A 19th-century title given by composers like Wagner to short,

✓ aleatoric music (Lat. *alea*, 'dice')

Music containing chance elements, i.e. where the composer leaves music in an indeterminate state. This 'random element' may be controlled by writing sections which can be played in any order, or where chance really is central to the composition. The concept of aleatoric music began with Charles Ives who influenced Cowell, the American experimentalist who devised 'elastic notations' which were musical fragments to be assembled

andaluz

by the performers. John Cage began using 'chance operations' in the early 1950s, his later music leaving a great deal to chance. Other composers include Stockhausen who composed *Klavierstück XI* (1956) which is written as an assortment of fragments spread over a large sheet of paper to be joined freely by the player. 'Mobile form', as practised by Berlioz, involved whole sections being changed around according to choice.

✓ allemande

A term applied to two quite separate compositions but both originating in Germany. (1) A moderately slow dance movement often opening the baroque **suite** in 4/4 time. Usually in binary form each 'half' begins with a short note at the end of the bar. Highly decorated melodies and short note groupings are also features of this form. (2) A brisk dance in triple time, current in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. A prototype of the waltz.

ambient music

In the rock field this is a mid-70s style conceived by Brian Eno 'intended to induce calm and space to think', and to be a more sophisticated **muzak**. Influenced by John Cage, in writing music which could be easily listened to or ignored, this 'background music' incorporates synthesisers, life sounds, snatches of melodies and pleasing harmonies, all to wash over the listener. In art music composers include Erik Satie and Milhaud, whose furniture music, intended to be inconsequential, was playable both in public and at home.

~ ambrosian chant modes

A type of **plainsong** associated with Bishop St Ambrose of Milan at the end of the 4th century, who fixed upon four scales or modes to use for church composition. Using only the white notes on the piano, where the fifth dominates, and the root or bottom acts as a point of rest, the ambrosian modes are as follows:

D to D	with dominant A
E to E	with dominant B (later C)
F to F	with dominant C
G to G	with dominant D

Plainsong was established around these four modes. See also **gregorian modes**, which were developed later.

andaluz, andaluza (Sp.), Aadalouse (Fr.)

A term applied to several types of Spanish dance popular in Andalusia, e.g. fandango, malagueña and polo.

anglican chant

anglican chant

A type of harmonised melody used for psalm singing in the Church of England. A short melody is repeated to each verse of the text, with a 'reciting note', accommodating the varying number of syllables, appearing at the beginning of every line. Similar in principle to the gregorian chant.

✓ anthem

Generally a short solemn vocal composition, derived from the Latin **motet** of the Roman Church, included in Church of England services, but music is not necessarily set to a liturgical text. The anthem may have solo parts and organ accompaniment.

antiphon (Gk.)

Plainsong setting of sacred words sung as responses in Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox services. The term antiphonal derives from the practice of alternating performances between sets of singers stationed apart.

aquarelle (Fr., 'water colour')

A term sometimes applied to music of a delicate texture.

✓ arabesque (Fr., Eng.), arabeske (Ger.)

A short piece or melodic figure which is highly decorated (like ornamental architecture in Arabic style). First written by Schumann and later by Debussy and others who entitled whole pieces in this style.

✓ aria

An air or song for one or more voices now used exclusively of solo song in opera and oratorio. In the early 17th century the term was applied to structured more melodic vocal music in contrast to **recitative**. In the 18th century the form became clearer as a long vocal piece in three sections with the third merely repeating the first, and the second in a different key, more modulatory and offering variety of subject matter and mood. The third section was not usually written out, but indicated by the words *da capo*, thus the phrase *da capo aria*. It became a medium of vocal display in operas and many styles of arias were written, e.g. *aria cantabile*, *aria bravura*, *aria buffa* etc. Occasionally, this term may also be applied to instrumental pieces with song-like character.

✓ **arietta** (It.), **ariette** (Fr.)

A little or light aria, i.e. short song or instrumental piece, often with the middle section omitted. See **aria**.

✓ **arioso** (It., 'like an aria')

The term has various meanings. May be a more melodic, expressive **recitative** (much used by Bach and modern composers), a short, lyrical vocal solo, or an instrumental piece in vocal arioso style.

✓ **ars antiqua** (Lat., 'old art')

A term coined in the 14th century to describe earlier medieval styles of music based on **plainsong** and **organum**.

✓ **ars nova** (Lat., 'new art')

Breaking away from **ars antiqua** introducing duple time and much independence of part writing. It came to fruition in the Italian madrigal.

✓ **atonal music, atonalism**

Not in any fixed key. A style which began with Debussy and Wagner who disguised the tonal centre of music with increasing modulation. Schönberg was the chief figure in this musical evolution, devising the twelve-note system of atonality. **Serialism** and **dodecaphonic** music also refer to this style. Atonal composers include Berg, Webern and Stockhausen. See also **note-row**.

aubade (Fr.)

See **alborada**.

/ **augmentation**

A lengthened statement of theme, usually by doubling time-values of notes. The opposite of **diminution**. Often used in **fugue**.

ayre

A melodic song for one or several voices in 17th-century England.

B

bagatelle (Fr., 'trifle')

A short light piece often for piano.

ballad

A traditional song telling a story with the same music repeated at each verse. It became a sentimental drawing room song in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

ballade (Fr.)

Either, (1) a type of medieval French verse with refrain set to music, or (2) an instrumental romantic piece suggesting narrative, first pioneered by Chopin, e.g. his *ballades for piano* which were inspired by the Polish epic poems of Mickiewicz.

ballad opera

A type of opera popular in mid-18th-century Britain, featuring spoken dialogue interspersed with popular tunes of the day set to new words, e.g. John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728).

ballata

An Italian verse form of the 14th century, usually set to music with a refrain appearing at the beginning and end of stanzas.

ballet

A dance form of Italian origin incorporating drama, musical accompaniment and costumes. Established at the French Court in the 16th century, it led to the development of English **masque**, eventually evolving into an art form using orchestral music. Diaghilev (1872-1929) inspired composers such as Stravinsky and Ravel to write for the ballet and a revival led to scores from Vaughan Williams, Britten, etc. Choreographers even created ballets out of standard concert hall pieces. Now applied in Britain to any lengthy stage dancing with artistic purpose but in America the term is withdrawn for dances not based on 'classical' techniques.

basso continuo

ballett (Eng.), balletto (It.)

A vocal composition in several parts but **homophonic** in style. Prominent in England and Italy around 1600, and similar to the **madrigal** with a 'fa la' refrain. Lively and dance-like with symmetrical rhythm.

barber shop music

Originated in barber shops of the 16th-18th centuries when barbers or customers waiting in the shop picked up an instrument and made music. Now applied to amateur male quartets singing home-spun arrangements of sentimental songs.

✓ barcarolle (Fr. from It.)

A boating song originally sung by Venetian gondoliers and now applied to any piece of music in swaying 6/8 or 12/8 rhythm, e.g. the barcarolle from the third act of Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

✓ baroque

An architectural term of the 17th and early 18th centuries used to describe music of that time. Early baroque composers include Gabrieli and Monteverdi and late baroque composers include Scarlatti, Bach and Handel. The baroque style is typified by (1) **figured bass** or **basso continuo**, (2) the effect of harmony on melody and rhythm, e.g. when writing a **chaconne**, sequences of chords dominate, (3) balanced groups of bars in regular two, three or four beats, (4) use of clavichords, harpsichords and organs and (5) greater control over dynamic range. Ensembles were held together with keyboard accompaniment and suites and sonatas were written for this combination. The **concerto** was the characteristic orchestral form of the baroque era.

basse dance (Fr., 'low dance')

A French Court dance of the 15th and early 16th centuries. Of a serious nature where feet glided. Usually in two beats to a measure, although early examples have three beats. Instruments improvised around long notes featuring syncopations and rapid **figurations**. This dance was an ancestor of others like the stately **pavane**.

✓ basso continuo (It.)

Also known as 'figured bass' and 'thorough bass'. A bass line central to 17th-18th century composition (i.e. **baroque period**).

basso ostinato

Usually marked with figures indicating harmonies to be played on keyboard or other chordal instrument. Actual bass notes (not harmonies) were also commonly sounded by 'cello etc. **Basso ostinato** or **ground bass** is a persistently repeated bass line figure or rhythm.

✓ **basso ostinato** (It.)

Same as **ground bass**.

bebop, rebop or bop

A jazz style depending on modern harmony with dissonant chords influenced by musicians like Art Tatum and Lester Young. Rhythmically, bop was looser but more versatile and complex than earlier styles. The musicians accented measures on second and fourth instead of first and third beats or accented off the beats altogether. Harmonic rules were almost broken as more notes became acceptable and, therefore, a denser texture developed. New roles developed for instruments, i.e. the bass instrument shared the drum kit's time-keeping and progressed melodically while piano became lighter. Quintets of piano, bass, drums, reed instrument and trumpet became standard. References to known tunes were injected into solos based on another melody. With bop, jazz became recognised as a more serious art form for the first time. This style evolved into the 'modern' jazz of the 1950s and 1960s.

bel canto

Fine sustained singing in the Italian manner with emphasis on beauty of tone and agility.

✓ **berceuse** (Fr.)

A lullaby or cradle song, but may be applied to quiet instrumental compositions with 6 beats to the bar suggestive of a lullaby, e.g. Chopin's *Berceuse* for piano.

✓ **bergamasque** (Fr.), **bergamasca** (It.), **bergomask** (Eng.)

Originally a peasant dance from Bergamo, Italy. Also a tune and chord sequence from Bergamo widely used, e.g. as a **ground bass** in the 16th-17th centuries. In the 19th century it became a quick dance in 6/8 time similar to **tarantella**. Now used by composers without any special definition, e.g. Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*.

binary form

In two sections. Definitions have varied as the form has progressed. In the 17th century the first section ended either on the tonic key or subdominant key, or else on an other related key, i.e. dominant or relative minor, which later became standard. The second section always ended in the tonic. Thus, the first section resulted in modulation to a related key and the second in modulating back to the tonic. In the 18th century the second section became longer than the first since it offered room for development. This form developed historically into **sonata form**, which is alternatively called *compound binary form*. See also **ternary form**.

black bottom

A form of **foxtrot**, popular at American and European dances for a short time in the 1920s.

block chords

Style of harmony where chords move in 'blocks', i.e. simultaneously, as opposed to contrapuntally where parts of chords move in different directions. This style was used by Debussy and by many jazz pianists.

blue beat

British name for **ska**.

blue grass

Originally country mountain music played on the fiddle, banjo and guitar, it merged with bass and mandolin in the 1920s and 1930s. Also influenced by **blues** and **jazz**. The skills of three-finger banjo-playing Earl Scruggs, Bill Monroe (tenor), and the three- and four-part harmonies (exemplified by the Stanley Brothers) were characteristics of the style. Blue grass also used old ballads, religious themes and no electric instruments. This novel combination brought back the topic of black suffering previously heard in the blues. Blue grass was superseded by **rock 'n' roll** in the 1950s, but groups like the Everly Brothers sang blue-grass harmonies and Elvis Presley's early songs had the eight-bar grouping blue-grass bass. The style is also evident in **rockabilly**.

blues

In the 16th century blues was an abbreviation of 'blue-devils' or melancholia. In the 19th-20th centuries blues refers to black folk

bolero

music originating mainly in the deep south of the USA, describing a lonely, oppressed and hard existence. The blues flourished after the Civil War, developing from 'work songs' sung by negroes to relieve monotony and weariness in the cotton plantations. Lyrics were constructed out of three-line stanzas with second line repeating the first for emphasis often in iambic pentameter. Instrumentation was at first simple, with voice and perhaps acoustic guitar and harmonica, but became more complex as the style progressed. The melody was contained within twelve bars made up of three four-bar phrases. As blues developed other characteristics became evident, i.e. (1) flattening of thirds and sevenths (later fifths) in the diatonic scale (hence the expression 'blue-note') while accompaniment provided dissonance with traditional harmony; (2) 'breaks' appeared in the melody allowing performers to improvise, initially with phrases like 'oh laudy!' or 'oh baby!' and later with great instrumental embellishment. W.C. Handy (author of *The Memphis Blues* and *The St Louis Blues*) helped popularise this style of negro song throughout the country. Other great blues singers included Sophie Tucker, Bessie Smith, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday.

bolero

A Spanish dance in moderate triple time, often with triplet on second half of the first beat of the bar. Accompanied by castanets, but also including dancers' voices. Ravel's *Bolero* is not a true dancing bolero.

boogie-woogie

A piano jazz style developed out of guitar and piano blues traditions and the 'barrel-house' piano of southern US bars and brothels. This style was a rephrasing of the blues characterised by a bass line played eight beats to the bar. The technique has been described as 'trilling the treble and rolling the bass', i.e. flowing steady bass lines with the right hand playing grace notes, runs and trills. See also **stride**.

bossa nova (It., 'new bump')

A staccato, breathy style of Brazilian pop that plays down percussion and isolates the bass line, the vocal line and also a second independent melody line which may be played on guitar, piano or saxophone. Often the lyrics are bland, but the late Elis Regina performed some beautiful tone poems performed and

burlesque

sung by Brazilian poet and playwright Vinicius de Moraes. Similar to **cool jazz**.

bourrée (Fr.), **bore** (It.), **borry**, **boree**, **borree**, **borre** (Eng.)

(1) A French dance in quick double time, starting in the third quarter of the bar and probably originating in the early 17th century. In the baroque suite it became an optional dance movement inserted between the **sarabande** and the **gigue**. Often two bourrées were written to form a contrasted pair as was done with the **minuet** and the **gavotte**. (2) Dance in triple time still popular in the French Auvergne.

brindisi (It.)

A toast or drinking song. Applied to a jovial song in which health is toasted. Such songs may also be found in operas, e.g. the brindisi from Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833).

burlesque (Fr.), **burla** (It.), **burleske** (Ger.)

Literally, 'jest'. Short piece of musical farce, lively and frolicsome in character. Also applied to lengthier compositions of a similar nature. Often associated with late 19th and early 20th century music hall turns.