

Elements of Music

Terms

TEXTURE

Texture refers to the manner in which musical sounds/chords/lines/melodies are combined in a piece of music, and the relationship these parts have to one another.

Monophony or Monophonic Texture

Music with one note sounding at a time; a melody with no harmony or accompaniment

Homophony - Homophonic or “Song” Texture

Music featuring a prominent melody in the upper part supported by a less intricate harmonic accompaniment underneath

Chordal Harmony

Chordal Harmony is characterized by notes/chords occurring simultaneously and moving together with similar rhythm in a voice or group of voices; a clear vertical relationship is present among pitches.

Polyphonic Texture

Polyphony or Polyphonic texture occurs when two or more independent melodies are sounding at the same time. The most intricate types of polyphonic texture - the **canon** and the **fugue** - may introduce three, four, five or more independent melodies simultaneously.

This manner of writing is called Counterpoint.

Imitative Texture

A special kind of polyphonic texture called **imitation** or **imitative counterpoint** is produced when a musical idea or melody is “echoed” or passed around from voice to voice.

TONE COLOR

Tone Color or **Timbre** (“Tam-ber”) is the unique quality of sound produced by a voice or a musical instrument. Although the scientific principles of musical acoustics are beyond the scope of this course, it is safe to say that each musical instrument or voice produces its own characteristic pattern of “overtones,” which gives it a unique **"tone color"** or **timbre**.

Composers use **timbre** much like painters use colors to evoke certain effects on a canvas. For example, the upper *register* (portion of the *range* or *compass*) of a clarinet produces tones that are brilliant and piercing, while its lower register gives a rich and dark timbre. A variety of timbres can also be created by combining instruments and/or voices.

Please refer again to the “musical instruments” examples on the music 190 web page to review the unique tone colors of each individual instrument.