

The Lively Arts
Fall Semester 2009
Topic Guide

Topic # 1

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MUSIC IN YOUR WORLD

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John Montanari is the Music Director and classical music host at WFCR/88.5 Public Radio.

In today's lecture, we will listen to and discuss music in many styles and from many traditions to illuminate the most basic elements of music.

Melody: "Pitched sounds arranged in musical time." (Grove)

Listen for: The melody's contour, range and length. Are the notes connected or separated? Do the individual notes form phrases, and do the phrases form larger sentences? Do certain patterns or combinations recur?

Rhythm: "The aspect of music comprising all the elements (such as accent, meter, and tempo) that relate to forward movement." (Merriam-Webster)

Listen for: Pulse, pattern and accent. Does the rhythm produce a regular meter, i.e., can you clap along with it? Is the rhythmic flow regular and constant? Does one rhythmic idea predominate, or do several interact, either vertically (i.e., simultaneously) or horizontally (i.e., sequentially)?

Harmony: "The combining of notes simultaneously, to produce chords, and successively, to produce chord progressions." (Grove)

Listen for: Consonance (notes that blend) or dissonance (notes that clash); simplicity or complexity. What is the "harmonic rhythm" of the music, i.e., how rapidly do the harmonies change?

Texture: "The sound aspects of a musical structure...either to the vertical aspects of a work or passage, for example the way in which individual parts or voices are put together, or...attributes such as tone color or rhythm." (Grove)

Listen for: Which of the four basic textures predominates?

- Monophony: single melody, unaccompanied, or accompanied by drone
- Polyphony: simultaneous notes or melodies
- Homophony: either simultaneous notes moving together rhythmically, e.g., church hymn, or single melody plus accompaniment, e.g., singer and guitar
- Heterophony: the same melody performed in two or more different ways at the same time.

Timbre: “A term describing the tonal quality of a sound; a clarinet and an oboe sounding the same note at the same loudness are said to produce different timbres.” (Grove)

Listen for: the sound “color,” as the note begins, sustains and ends. How does the performer vary the timbres of his/her instrument or voice? How do different timbres combine to produce different effects?

Tempo: “Literally, the ‘time’ of a musical composition, but more commonly used to describe musical speed or pacing.” (Grove)

Listen for: speed and steadiness. Is the music fast or slow, pressing forward or holding back?

Dynamics: “The intensity of volume with which notes and sounds are expressed.” (Grove)

Listen for: not just the softness and loudness, but the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the dynamics. Are certain simultaneous sounds louder than others? Are certain notes in a melody or phrase louder than others, and why? Is the music getting softer or louder? At what pace?

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