

Musical Elements

Form – most (not all) music involves some repetition, and we find some patterns recurring in many pieces. You will learn some standard form labels for these patterns in class, such as 'binary', 'ternary', 'rondo,' and so on. If you decide that a piece is "non-standard," you need to list the series of letters that represent the repetition you hear (i.e., ABABCDCB). If you feel that the piece follows *any* pattern (standard OR non-standard), be sure to explain how you arrive at that conclusion (what makes 'A' different from 'B', etc.) In other words, **be sure to describe the differences** between all the sub-sections in your song.

Tempo(s) - literally 'speed.' Using Italian **terminology**, how fast or slow is this tune? Are there changes in the tempo? Are they gradual or abrupt changes? Do you feel the tempo in this particular performance is appropriate for the lyrics or mood? If not, should it be faster or slower? Who seems responsible for establishing the tempo?

Dynamic level(s) - literally 'volume'—how loud (*forte*) or soft (*piano*) is this piece? (using the Italian **terminology** we'll learn) Dynamics tend to fluctuate a lot in music, so how does this particular piece progress? Are changes sudden or gradual? What Italian terms are appropriate for the number? Do the dynamics enhance the song's meaning?

Mood - this is a subjective answer, but it should be supported by some of your other answers on this page. Sad songs, for example, usually aren't very fast!

Lyrics - how would you describe the poetry? Is it continually changing, or do you hear a lot of **repetition** of text? Do the words seem 'important,' or is the emphasis on the melody? How frequent are the **rhymes**? Is there patter singing?

Medium - the performers needed for the piece (both vocal and instrumental! Don't forget to notice any instruments or voices used in the **accompaniment**!)

Text Setting - is the poetry-to-melody association **syllabic**? or **melismatic**?

Text Expression - has the composer crafted the music (tempo, dynamics, etc.) to be appropriate to the meaning of the poetry? Does s/he use any devices such as **word-painting**?

Melody - we will discuss the terms '**conjunct**' and '**disjunct**'—which would apply? Does the melody seem memorable? What contour does the melody have? (I.e. Does it go particularly high or low, or does it stay in the middle of the singer's range?) Is there more than one recognizable melody? How do they differ? How long are the **phrases**?

Rhythm - Is the rhythm prominent? (Are your toes tapping?) Can you tell what the **meter** is? What is the subdivision? Why might the composer have chosen this meter or **subdivision**? Do you notice other rhythmic devices, such as **dotted rhythms** or **syncopation**?

Texture(s) - we will discuss several textures in class: '**monophony**', '**homophony**', and '**polyphony**'. Does the texture change at any point in the piece? What's the most prominent texture in the song?

Mode - is the mode major or minor in this piece? Does it change at all? Is the mode appropriate for the words?

Style - does the music seem to fall under a particular style label (i.e. jazz, swing, rap, ballad, rock, operatic, etc.)? What other elements create this style? (Text setting, instrumentation, etc.)

Action/Dance - does this function as a soliloquy, or dialogue, or does it contain some sort of action or dance? Is the action in the background, or does the singer(s) participate? Describe the setting as best you can.