

*Some Useful Musical Terms*

Below is a list of some musical terms that it will be useful for you to know when studying and writing about music. Please study this list, in addition to the terms on your CD-ROMs (definitions found at the back of your text book), terms given to you in class, and those found in your Lindeman piano books. Also make sure that you are familiar with the instruments of the orchestra, provided as directed on your instrument worksheet on the Kamien website.

**Beat** – the length of time it takes to tap your foot once.

**Cadenza** – a virtuosic solo passage in the style of an improvisation usually played at the end of a concerto movement, or end of an aria. It is originally designed for showing off.

**Chamber music** – music for usually up to ten players, with one player per part.

**Choir** – A group of singers who perform together, usually in parts, with several on each part; often associated with a church.

**Choral** – related to, or written for, or performed by, a chorus or choir.

**Chord** – three or more notes played simultaneously, which makes up the harmony.

**Composer** – The person who wrote the music.

**Concertmaster/mistress** – In an orchestra, the person that is the lead first violinist.

**Concerto** – A piece of music where the soloist or soloists sits or stands at the front of the stage, playing the melody, while the rest of the orchestra accompanies them.

**Conductor** – The person who, by means of hand gestures, leads the orchestra, band, choir, or other musical group.

**Dissonant** – harsh, dischordant. Sounds as though the notes are wrong.

**Dynamics** - the degree and range of loudness of musical sound.

**Glissando** – A musical technique in which an instrument slides up or down between notes rather than stopping on individual notes.

**Harmony** – simultaneous sounding of 2 or more tones – the vertical structure of the music that moves through time and supports the melody.

**Interval** – the distance between musical notes.

**Intonation** – tuning – being in tune or out of tune.

**Jazz** - A musical style created mainly by African-Americans in the early twentieth century that blended elements drawn from African musics with the popular and art traditions of the West.

**Lied** – a German type of song.

**March** - a piece of music for marching.

**Measure** – a basic unit of musical time, most often containing two, three, or four beats.

**Minuet** – An old, courtly dance in which every measure has three beats.

**Motive** or **motif** – A small musical idea, often made up of only two or three notes.

**Movement** – One of the contrasting sections of a symphony, concerto, sonata, or chamber piece. Movements are usually, but not always, separated by a pause. Typically the audience does not clap between movements, but instead claps at the end of the entire piece.

**Opera** – a music drama, in which all the text is sung.

**Rhythm** – the various durations or note values found in a piece of music.

**Scherzo** – Italian for 'joke'. A quick, boisterous movement, usually the third in a symphony or sonata.

**Sing** – I sing a song, or I will sing a song. **Sang** – I sang a song. **Sung** – I had sung a song.

**Solo recital** – a recital where there is one or two soloists who perform usually with piano accompaniment.

**Sonata** – A composition meant to demonstrate the sound and technique of a particular instrument, sometimes with piano accompaniment.

**Suite** - a series of movements, usually of dance music.

**Symphony** – Either a piece of music for a large body of instruments, usually consisting of four different movements, or the orchestra that plays symphonies.

**Tempo** - the speed of musical sounds and silences.

**Timbre, or tone color** – the characteristic or unique quality or color of sound of each voice, instrument, or sound source.

**Tonal** – refers to music that is in an identifiable key.

**Trill** – the quick alternation of adjacent notes.

**Vibrato** – a vibration that produces barely noticeable variations in pitch of a note, adding warmth to the tone of an instrument. **Melody** – a succession of sounds and silences moving through time – the horizontal structure of music.