

## IMPRESSIONIST DEFINITIONS

This section will present a number of definitions. Many of these terms are new to this Musical era. As well, many of these terms extend into 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Music works and are used in extreme and unconventional ways.

**Note:** Some of these terms will be repeated in the section on 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Music – Definitions. For the intent & purposes of this section on Music History however, I will be introducing them here, giving their definition, and showing their importance with regard to the music of the Impressionist era, and in some cases, how they led to the musical writings of the latter era.

### TERMS USED IN IMPRESSIONIST MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

Bitonality	Essentially a different tonality in both the upper and lower parts throughout the musical work, with or without the use of a key signature proper. For example, the top would be written in the key of D Major, whereas the bottom might be written in B Flat Minor.
Polytonality	The musical use of more than one key simultaneously. This can occur in either the upper range (Treble) or lower (Bass).
Parallel Chords	Traditionally, parallel chords are chords that are derived from parallel keys, keys that have the same tonic note (with the dominant chord in the minor mode being harmonic minor); in other words, keys like C Major & C Minor, G Major & G Minor, etc. Impressionism takes this a step further, where at times, chords from completely unrelated keys will be heard at the same time, for example, C major & E Flat Minor or E Flat Major and A Minor. By doing so, composers can use more dissonance in their compositions, sounds that are not pleasing to the ear.
Whole-Tone Scale	<p>An equal temperament method whereby the notes of the scale are divided essentially, into whole tones. By doing so, the traditional seven-note scale becomes six notes. By using Whole-Tone scales, two things can be noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Built on two augmented triads whose roots are a major second apart</li> <li>2. Any impression of tonality is essentially gone</li> </ol> <p>Composers from the Impressionist and 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Eras of music used whole tone scales when they did not want the listener to have any clear sense or direction of what the tonality actually is. As such, music which employs this can be very discordant and unpleasing to the ear.</p>
Pentatonic	A musical scale of 5 notes per octave. Traditionally, a pentatonic scale is made up of the first, second, third, fifth & sixth notes of the scale; that being said, it can slightly differ in varying cultures. The Pythagorean Tuning as well as the Harmonic Series for Pentatonic scales differs widely than that of a traditional Western scale. The terminology and formulas needed to understand this fully are beyond the scope of this website.
Tetrachord	Generally, a tetrachord is a series of 4 notes separated by three smaller intervals and always spanned the interval of a Perfect Fourth. However, in modern music, this definition changes. Now, it can refer to any four-note segment of a scale or tone row (essentially, a set ordering of the twelve notes of a chromatic scale – more on this in 20 <sup>TH</sup> Century Music) and does not have to be related to a tuning system in any manner.
Ambiguous Tonality	Bitonality & Polytonality fall into this term. Essentially, a way of tonality whereby the tonic or central key of the piece is not known, even when the

musical work has concluded. For example, a musical work may end with two seemingly unrelated chords, such as D Major and A Flat Major.

#### Extreme Chromaticism

The use of chromaticism to measures that were not previously used in other musical periods. This musical technique helped pave the way to 20<sup>TH</sup> Century atonality, serialism, quarter tones, and the use of double sharps & flats. More on this in 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Music – Definitions.

#### Quartal & Quintal Harmony

Quartal is 4, & Quintal is 5. Therefore, quartal harmony is the building of harmonic structures built from the intervals of the perfect fourth, the augmented fourth, and the diminished fourth; for example, C-F-B Flat. Quintal harmony, is built from the intervals of the perfect fifth; for example, C-G-D. Both led to the invention of polychords, which were used more so in 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Music.

#### Polyrhythms

Polyrhythms is where the number of beats varies by the bar length remains constant or fixed. Although polyrhythms were seen in music before the Impressionist era, it wasn't until this period when it became more apparent, and even more so in music in the 20<sup>TH</sup> Century. Polyrhythms are not to be confused with polymeter, which is the bar sizes differ, but the beat remains constant. An example of polymeter is where the upper staff is in 6/8 and the lower is in 3/4.