

Glossary

- accompaniment:** a vocal or instrument part that supports or is background for a solo part
- acoustic:** referring to a musical instrument that is not electronically amplified
- ballad:** a song that tells a story in short stanzas, usually with a refrain; a romantic or sentimental song
- banjo:** a four- or five-stringed musical instrument having a long neck and circular body topped by a tightly stretched skin or skin-like substance; usually plucked with the fingers
- baritone:** the vocal range of a male voice between tenor and bass
- Bill Monroe:** an early bluegrass musician, often called the “Father of Bluegrass Music”
- bluegrass:** a musical style stemming in part from Southern string bands and characterized by tight minor harmonies, rapid tempos and a high-pitched vocal and instrumental sound
- blues:** a form of African-American folk music characterized by minor harmonies, (usually) a slow tempo and melancholy words
- break:** a musical piece or section of a piece played or sung by one person
- camp meeting:** a religious gathering held outdoors or in a tent and lasting several days
- “chop” chord:** a chord, made by a very quick and strong stroke with a pick, which is stopped almost immediately by a damping of the strings, the musical effect of which is to turn the chord into a more percussive sound, similar to a drum beat
- chorus:** a musical phrase or set of phrases (accompanied by lyrics) repeated at intervals in a song, usually after each verse; also called a refrain
- clawhammer:** an “old-time” style of playing the five-string banjo, in which the strumming hand is positioned with thumb and fingers a little bit separate and stiff to strike the strings with a claw-like, “hammering” downward stroke; also called frailing
- debut:** a first appearance before the public
- dobro:** an acoustic steel guitar with an aluminum resonator, usually played while held flat in one’s lap; named for its inventors, the Dopyera Brothers
- downbeat:** the accented first or third beat in a musical measure; most often, it refers to the first beat of a measure; onbeat
- ensemble:** musicians playing or singing together; the instruments of such a group
- fiddle:** a small, long-necked, four-stringed wooden instrument played with a bow; the smallest, highest-toned instrument in the violin family, often referred to simply as a violin
- 4/4 time:** the grouping of musical notes into measures of four beats each within a piece; musical time based on a 4/4 time signature
- fret:** one of several ridged bands (often metal) which are fixed across a stringed instrument’s fingerboard to regulate the musician’s fingering
- genre:** a category or type of artistic composition
- gospel:** evangelistic religious music which evolved from spirituals and the music of African-American churches in the South; characterized by close-harmony singing
- Grammy:** any of the awards given annually by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for special achievement in the recording industry
- Grand Ole Opry:** a famous weekly live radio program, broadcast from Nashville radio station WSM, which has played an important role in the history of country and bluegrass music; the name refers to “opera” and contrasted the highbrow classical music of the day with the rustic old-time fiddle and string band music featured on the show
- guitar:** a musical instrument related to the lute but having a flat back and (usually) six strings that are plucked or strummed with the fingers or a pick
- improvisation:** the act of improvising; something that has been improvised
- improvise:** to simultaneously compose and perform on the spur of the moment, without preparation
- instrumentalist:** one who plays and performs on a musical instrument
- jam session:** an informal music session, often involving players who do not regularly play together, such as those meeting at a party or festival

jazz: a style of music, characterized by syncopation, heavily accented rhythms, dissonance, melodic variation, and unusual tonal effects on wind instruments; musical style originating in the 19th century with African-Americans in the South

lead: the leading part or main melody within a musical composition

lick: a melodic phrase, often quick, improvised and inserted between two longer musical phrases; usually associated with blues and jazz music

lyrics: the words that make up a song

major: referring to tonal patterns in which the intervals between tones are a half-tone larger than minor intervals; associated with music that sounds happy and celebratory

mandolin: a small musical instrument of the lute family with four to six pairs of strings stretched over a deep, rounded sound box

measure: the notes and rests contained between two vertical lines (bars) on a musical staff; the number of beats per measure is determined by the time signature

minor: referring to tonal patterns in which the intervals between tones are a half-tone smaller than major intervals; associated with music that sounds melancholy or sad

picker: a musician who plays bluegrass music, especially one with musical talent or prowess

rag: a ragtime musical composition

ragtime: a style of music popular from 1890–1920 and characterized by syncopation, improvisation (on occasion) and even time; influential in the development of jazz

reed instrument: a wind instrument which has a reed attached to its mouthpiece (e.g., clarinet, oboe, bassoon, saxophone); when vibrated by the breath, the reed produces a musical tone

refrain: a musical phrase or set of phrases (accompanied by lyrics) repeated at intervals in a song, most often after each verse; also called a chorus

repertoire: all of the musical pieces written by a certain composer or created within a certain genre

rockabilly: an early form of rock-and-roll with a strong country music influence

rural: referring to the country, non-urban environment; rustic

slide: 1) a smooth progression of tones, created by pressing a string on a fretless instrument's fingerboard, then sliding one's fingers along the fingerboard to create different tones; 2) a metal bar which is slid along a guitar or dobro's fingerboard to create different tones

solo: a musical piece or section of a piece played or sung by one person

stand-up bass: the largest and deepest-tone instrument of the violin family, plucked or played with a bow; also called a double bass

stanza: a group of lines of verse forming one section of a song, usually containing a regular pattern of rhythm and rhyme

syncopated: having syncopation, or accents shifted from their normal locations in a musical and/or rhythmic piece

tenor: a range of musical tones (usually from an octave below middle C to an octave above) between alto and bass in four-part harmony; the second to lowest part in four-part harmony

time signature: a sign consisting of one number over another, indicating the number of beats in the following measure(s) and the unit of measurement (a note of one beat duration, two beat duration, etc.)

upbeat: the weak or unaccented beats within a measure; most often, it refers to the second or fourth beats of a measure; offbeat

vaudeville: the branch of entertainment consisting of stage shows including comic skits, songs (some satirical), dances, acrobatics, pantomime and other theatrical endeavors

verse: a group of lines (or stanza) forming one of the divisions of a song, usually followed by the refrain

virtuoso: in music, a person demonstrating great skill in musical performance

vocalist: one who sings; a singer

waltz: a musical style characterized by a moderately-paced 3/4 time with accented first beats in each measure; a type of ballroom dance