

Performance Directions

Have you noticed there are often words written over music as well as the notes on the page? These are called *Performance Directions* and they tell us how to perform the music.

Often these directions are in Italian!

Why?

Well simply, because the Italian music theorists got there first!

This is why we say *forte* for loud and *piano* for quiet - both Italian terms.

Some musical directions are in other languages - common languages are French and German (and sometimes English!)

It's really important that we recognise these words and we can translate them. If we see the word *dolce* (sweetly) it would make us play very differently to if we saw *grave* (solemn).

So we've collected some of the most common words together for you so if you're not sure what something means on your music, you can look it up here!

This sheet is also helpful if you have a theory exam coming up.

Italian Words

a - at, to, by, for, in, in the style of

a cappella - unaccompanied (referring to choral music)

accelerando, accel. - gradually getting faster

adagio - slow

agitato - agitated

alla breve - with a minim beat

alla marcia - in the style of a march

allargando - broadening

allegretto - fairly quick

allegro - quick

amabile - amiable, pleasant

amore - love

andante - at a walking pace (medium speed)

animando - becoming more lively

animato - animated

appassionato - with passion

arco - bow of a string instrument

assai - very, extremely

a tempo - in time, indicating a return to the original speed

attacca - go straight on

brillante - brilliant

brio - vigour, animation
calando - getting softer, dying away
cantabile - in a singing style
con - with
crescendo, *cresc* - gradually getting louder
da capo, d.c. - from the beginning
dal segno, d.s. - from the sign
decrescendo, *decre*. - gradually getting softer
diminuendo, *dim* - gradually getting softer
divisi, *div.* - divided
dolce - sweet
energico - energetic
espressivo - expressive
forte - loud
fuoco - fire
furioso - furious
giocoso - playful, humorous
grave - very slow, solemn
grazioso - graceful
largamente - broadly
larghetto - rather slow
largo - slow, stately
legato - smooth
lento - slow
maestoso - majestic
marcato - emphatic, accented
meno - less
mezzo - half
misterioso - mysterious
moderato - at a moderate speed
molto - very, much
mosso - with motion
pesante - heavy
piano - quiet
pizzicato - plucked (strings)
poco - little, slightly
presto - fast (faster than *allegro*)
rallentando, *rall.* - gradually getting slower
ritenuto, *rit.* - held back
rubato - with some freedom of time
scherzando - playful, joking
segue - go straight on
sempre - always

senza - without
sordino, sord - muted
sostenuto - sustained
staccato - detached, short
subito - suddenly
tempo - speed
tenuto - held
tranquillo - calm
tremolando - trembling
tristamente - sad
troppo - too much
tutti - all, everyone
vibrato - vibrating
vigoroso - vigours, strong
vivace - lively, quick

French Words

à - at, to, by, for, in, in the style of
assez - enough
calme - calm, tranquil
cédez - yield, relax the speed
détaché - detached
en pressant - hurrying on
en retenant - holding back
fin - end
gracieux - graceful
joyeux - joyful
moins - less
mouvement - movement, motion
plus - more
sans - without
seul - alone
vif - lively
vite - quick

German Words

aber - but
als - than
Ausdruck - expression
einfach - simple

kräftig - strong
langsam - slow
lebhaft - lively
mässig - at a moderate speed
mit - with
noch - still
ohne - without
schleppen - dragging
schwach - weak
sehr - very
stark - strong
traurig - sad
wenig - less
wieder - again

Latin Words

ad libitum, ad lib.- at choice, perform passage freely or instrument can be omitted
quasi - as if, resembling
tacet - silent