

Written by  
The Editors of  
Encyclopædia  
Britannica

# heterophony

Article Free Pass

Read | Edit | View History | Fe

Article Web sites Bibliography Related Content Contributors

Citations  
Print  
Email

**heterophony**, in music, texture resulting from simultaneous performances of melodic variants of the same tune, typical of Middle Eastern practices as well as of a vast array of folk music. Balkan Slavic epic singers, for example, accompany themselves heterophonically on the *gusle* (fiddle). In Persian art music, instrumentalists are expected to vary the singers' improvised lines. A complex heterophony, with different types of variation assigned to different instruments, characterizes the gamelan (tuned percussion orchestra) music of [Indonesia](#). Medieval European monophonic song (unharmonized melody), too, appears to have been heterophonically accompanied on many occasions. Heterophony also occurs in jazz, especially of the Dixieland and Chicago varieties.

Britannica wants your stories!

Britannica Kids  
Information You Can Trust  
ACTIVATE MY FREE TRIAL

Next Page

QUIZZES LISTS

What made you want to look up heterophony?

## FEATURED QUIZZES



Name That Thing



True or False



Vocabulary Quiz

## MORE QUIZZES



Dance



William Shakespeare:  
Fact or Fiction?



Corn, Grains, and  
Wheat

See More...

Written by  
The Editors of  
Encyclopædia  
Britannica

# homophony

Article Free Pass

Read | Edit | View History | Fe

Article Web sites Bibliography Related Content Contributors

Citations  
Print  
Email

**homophony**, musical texture based primarily on chords, in contrast to [polyphony](#), which results from combinations of relatively independent melodies. In homophony, one part, usually the highest, tends to predominate and there is little rhythmic differentiation between the parts, whereas in [polyphony](#), rhythmic distinctiveness reinforces melodic autonomy.

Homophony does not necessarily suppress [counterpoint](#), however. The "Allegretto" in Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* offers an excellent example of essentially homorhythmic counterpoint, since it combines two distinct, yet rhythmically identical, melodies. An early genre featuring homophony of this sort is the 13th-century conductus.

In the 15th century, Italian secular compositions of popular derivation (*e.g.*, the frottola) were often homophonically conceived, as were numerous 16th-century pieces by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli and Carlo Gesualdo. Not until the 17th century, however, with such composers as the Italians Arcangelo Corelli, Claudio Monteverdi, and Giacomo Carissimi and the German Johann Hermann Schein, did homophony become dominant in Western music. *See also* [polyphony](#).

Day FREE Trial Today!

Next Page

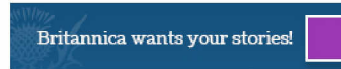
ORE:



QUIZZES

LISTS

It made you want to look up homophony?



## FEATURED QUIZZES



Name That Thing



True or False



Vocabulary Quiz

## MORE QUIZZES



Musical Instruments



Foods Around the World: Fact or Fiction?



Name that Mark

See More...

Written by  
The Editors of  
Encyclopædia  
Britannica

# monophony

Article Free Pass

Read | Edit | View History | Fe

Article Web sites Bibliography Related Content Contributors

Citations  
Print  
Email

**monophony**, musical texture made up of a single unaccompanied melodic line. It is a basic element of virtually all musical cultures. **Byzantine** and **Gregorian chants** (the music of the medieval Eastern and Western churches, respectively) constitute the oldest written examples of monophonic repertory. In the later Middle Ages in Europe, the primarily secular songs of Provençal troubadours, French trouvères, and German minnesingers and meistersingers kept the tradition alive, although their performances often featured improvised accompaniment.

Monophony is not to be confused with **monody**, a term reserved specifically for the accompanied solo song of the early 17th century, the so-called second practice initiated by the Florentine Camerata and perfected by the composer Claudio Monteverdi in a conscious effort to break with the vocal **polyphony** of the Renaissance era. Ironically, it was sacred **polyphony** in its highest manifestations (as by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina) that modeled itself aesthetically upon the monophony of the Roman Catholic church with its continuous melodic rhythmic flow untainted by metrical intrusions of secular derivation.

Britannica wants your stories!

Britannica Kids  
Information You Can Trust  
ACTIVATE MY FREE TRIAL

Day FREE Trial Today!  
MORE:

Next Page

RISK FREE  
Cancel at any time during your trial

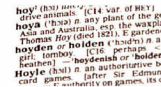
QUIZZES LISTS

What made you want to look up monophony?

## CHALLENGES



I'd Be Willing to Call These Places Home



I Always Mispronounce These Words



5 People I'd Pick for My Amazing Race Team

See More...

## QUIZZES



Sherlock Holmes: Fact or Fiction?



Play List



Pop Quiz: Fact or Fiction?

See More...

Written by  
Mark DeVoto  
Last Updated  
5-11-2014

# polyphony

Article Free Pass

Read | Edit | View History | Fe

Article Web sites Bibliography Related Content Contributors

Citations  
Print  
Email

**polyphony**, in music, strictly speaking, any music in which two or more tones sound simultaneously (the term derives from the Greek word for "many sounds"); thus, even a single **interval** made up of two simultaneous tones or a chord of three simultaneous tones is rudimentarily polyphonic. Usually, however, polyphony is associated with **counterpoint**, the combination of distinct melodic lines. In polyphonic music, two or more simultaneous melodic lines are perceived as independent even though they are related. In Western music polyphony typically includes a contrapuntal separation of **melody** and bass. A texture is more purely polyphonic, and thus more contrapuntal, when the musical lines are rhythmically differentiated. A subcategory of polyphony, called **homophony**, exists in its purest form when all the voices or parts move together in the same rhythm, as in a texture of block chords. These terms are by no means mutually exclusive, and composers from the 16th through the 21st centuries have commonly varied textures from complex polyphony to rhythmically uniform **homophony**, even within the same piece.

Polyphony, the opposite of **monophony** (one voice, such as **chant**), is the outstanding characteristic that differentiates Western art music from the music of all other cultures. The special polyphony of ensembles in Asian music includes a type of melodic variation, better described as **heterophony**, that is not truly contrapuntal in the Western sense.

Britannica wants your stories!

Britannica Kids  
Information You Can Trust  
ACTIVATE MY FREE TRIAL

Day FREE Trial Today!  
Mark DeVoto

RISK FREE  
Cancel at any time during your trial

Next Page

QUIZZES

LISTS

What made you want to look up polyphony?

## CHALLENGES



5 People I Would Invite to My Dinner Party



Historical Figures I Would Totally Follow on Twitter



5 People I'd Pick for My Amazing Race Team

See More...

## QUIZZES



An Odyssey of Grecian Literature



Physical Education



A Study of Musicians

See More...