

Minimalism



GCSE Music

Area of Study 2

What is Minimalism?

- Here is an example of minimalist art.



How would you describe this painting?

Origins of Minimalism

- Minimalism originates from **America** and developed during the **1960's** and **1970's**.
- It was a reaction to the 'rebirth' of serialism in western music after Schoenberg's death in 1951.
- The serial approach to composing did not let many minimalist composers express themselves in the way they wanted.

Some Famous Composers

- **Steve Reich**
- Considered to be one of the most important minimalist composers.
- Allowing the listener to be aware of gradual changes in his music was very important to Reich.
- Reich liked to experiment with tape loops and through this developed the 'phase shifting' technique.
- Clapping music is one of his famous pieces.

Some Famous Composers

- **Philip Glass**
- The only minimalist composer to be involved in theatre and opera.
- His music is deceptively simple using alternating notes and repeated broken chords.
- Violin Concerto is one of his famous pieces.

Some Famous Composers

- **Terry Riley**
- Riley was a friend and colleague of La Monte Young, who was the first composer to write in the minimalist style and considered to be the founder of minimalism.
- Riley experimented with tape loops of various sounds using delay and some instrumental sounds.
- He was also a solo performer who experimented with the echo device and used a lot of repeated musical material.
- One of his famous pieces is called 'In C' where the whole piece is based around the note C.

What is Minimalism?

- Minimalism is made up of short, simple repeated patterns called *loops*.
- These loops **change** a tiny bit gradually over time.
- There is no real tune – you can't sing along to minimalist music.
- The **harmonies** are made by **layering patterns** one on top of the other.

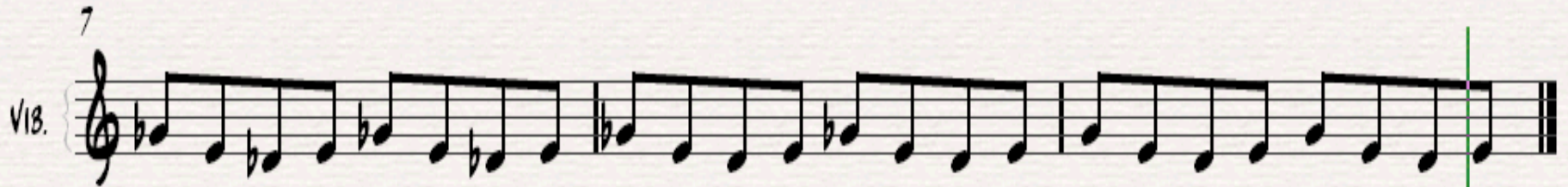
Change a letter – minimalist style!!!

- Get from the word *Tune* to the word *Dull* changing just one letter at a time.
- You will come up with 9 other words before you reach your destination.
- Clue – if you change U to O, the 2nd word becomes tone.
- Good Luck!!!

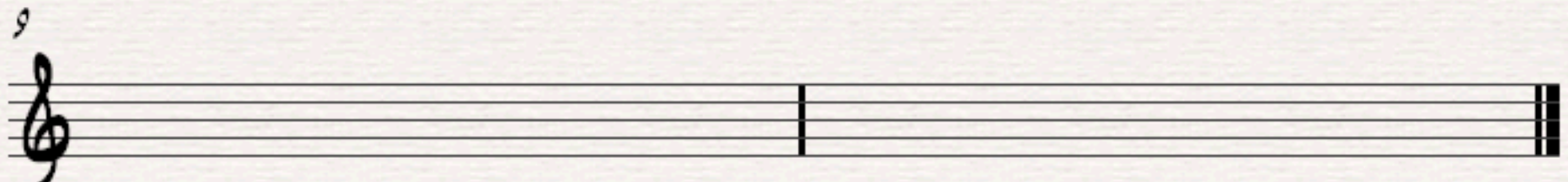
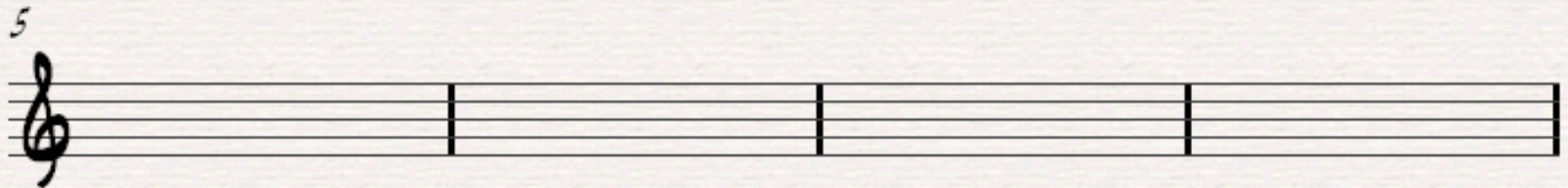
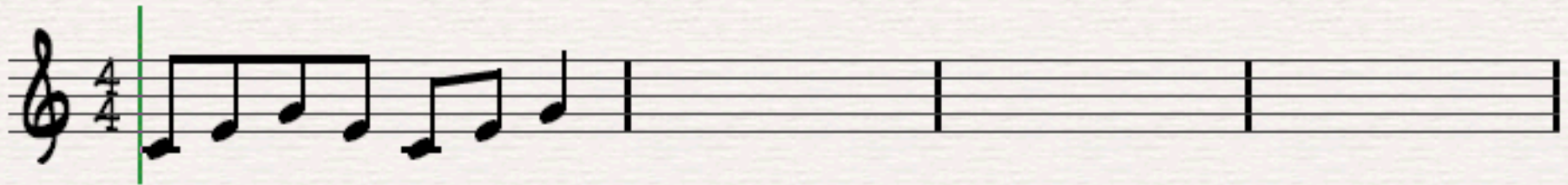
Metamorphosis

- This is where tiny changes are made over time to one note, or one bit of the rhythm.
- It has a similar effect to the word game you just played – a dramatic difference although it can often go full circle so the notes end up exactly the same at the end.
- See example on the next slide:

Metamorphosis - Example



Metamorphosis - Task



Music Technology



- Plays a big part in minimalism.
- Repeated loops used to be played using these old-fashioned tape recorders.
- Composers had to cut the tape then stick it back together to create loops.
- It would then be played over and over.
- This form of looping is like *sampling*.
- The different loops were put together using multitrack recordings. They were recorded, one on top of another, to create the layered sound.

Loops/Ostinato

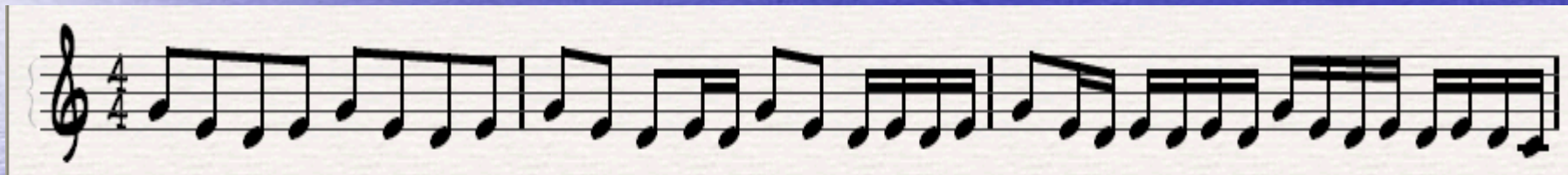
- Another word for loop is *ostinato* (repeated pattern). Below is an example:



- You can see that the first bar is repeated 4 times.

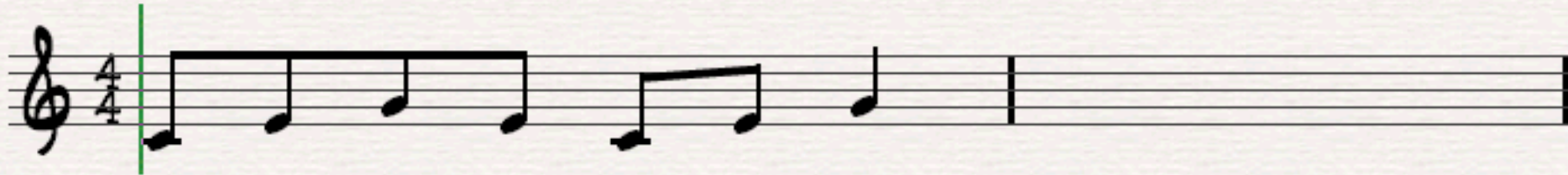
Addition or subtraction of notes

- Notes can be gradually added:

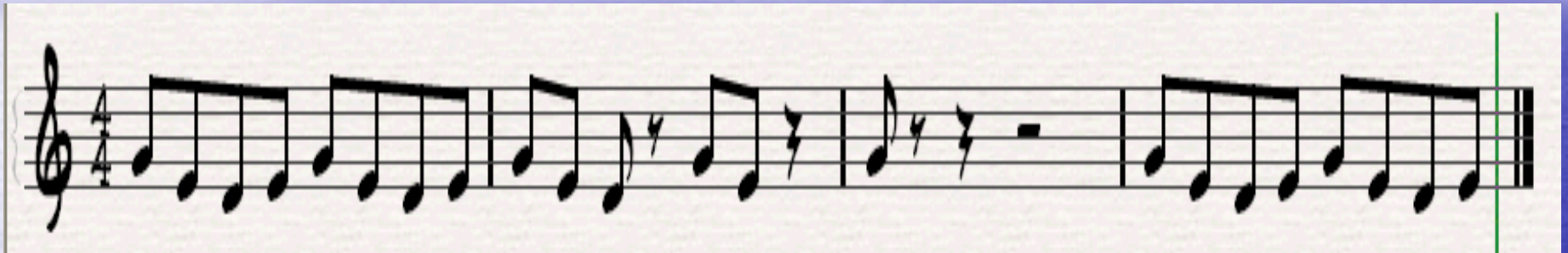


- In this example, one note is added in each repetition of the melody, and the rhythm is altered accordingly.
- The opposite can be achieved by adding rests. See example on next slide.

Addition of notes - task



Subtracting Notes



Here you can see that each time the simple 4 note motif is repeated, one note is omitted until there is silence in bar 3. Then the 4 note motif returns and repeats.

Subtraction of notes - task



Phase Shifting



- In this example, two performers start with the same pattern in the first bar.
- On each repeat, a rest is added to the 2nd part. This moves them out of sync and then gradually back in. This is known as phase shifting.

Phase Shifting Task



Layering

- Loops of different lengths in each part e.g. a 4-beat loop and a 5-beat loop played at the same time.
- You get a similar effect to phase shifting as the patterns move apart then back together.
- See Example on next slide:

Layering - Example

The image displays a musical score for three instruments: Glockenspiel, Vibraphone, and Glock. The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The notes are G, E, G, C, A, G, A. The score is annotated with red brackets and blue text. The first two staves (Glockenspiel and Vibraphone) have blue text 'G E G C A' written below the first five notes. The third staff (Glock) has blue text 'G E G C A G A' written below the first seven notes. Red brackets are drawn above the first five notes of the Glockenspiel staff, above the first seven notes of the Vibraphone staff, above the first seven notes of the Glock staff, and below the first seven notes of the Vibraphone staff. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Glockenspiel
Vibraphone
Glock.
Vis.

G E G C A
G E G C A G A

Layering Task

The first two staves of musical notation are shown in 4/4 time. The top staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, an eighth note B4, a quarter note C5, and a quarter rest. The bottom staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, an eighth note B4, a quarter note C5, and a quarter note D5. A green bracket is drawn above the first four notes of the top staff, and another green bracket is drawn below the first four notes of the bottom staff, indicating that these notes are to be layered together.

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The next two staves of musical notation are shown in 4/4 time. Both staves are empty, with only the treble clef and the 4/4 time signature visible. This section is intended for the student to layer the notes from the first two staves into a single staff.

Check your understanding!

1. Where and when did Minimalism originate?
2. Name a Minimalist composer?
3. Name at least one of the musical devices used by Minimalist composers? Can you explain how this device works?
4. How can music technology be used in Minimalism?

Key Words

- Drone – a *sustained* sound.
- Diatonic – notes belonging to a key.
- Tonal Harmony/Consonance – Notes that sound nice played together.
- Repetition – a repeated section of music.
- Ostinato/Loop – a repeated rhythm, melody or chord pattern.
- Motif – short melodic or rhythmic ideas used as a basis for development in a composition.

Key Words

- **Polyrhythms** – two or more different rhythms played together at the same time.
- **Phase shifting** – where two or more versions of a sound or musical motif are played simultaneously but slightly out of synchronisation.
- **Note Addition** – a method of developing cells in minimalist music by gradually adding notes to the original cell.
- **Note Subtraction** – a method of developing cells in minimalist music by gradually taking notes away from the original cell.

Key Words/Features

- **Layering**
- **Dynamics**
- **Timbre**
- **Tempo changes**
- **Complex Rhythms**
- **Texture**
- **Fading in and out**
- **Accents**
- **Alternating between notes**
- **Arpeggios**
- **Melodic or rhythmic transformation**