

Concept of dynamics in music

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Imagine you are listening to Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros close their concert with *Om Nashi Me*, and the whole band stops right in the middle of the song. Or you are watching The Avett Brothers open up their concert with *Paranoia In B Flat Major*, and by the end of the song, they are playing nearly twice the volume they started out at, and the crowd grew right alongside them. Music has the ability to produce feelings and energy that few things are capable of reproducing.

There are any different elements that bring life to these feelings, but dynamics are something that possess the power to change the mood of a song, and the person listening to it. Simply put, dynamics are "variation and gradation in the volume of musical sound." (Merriam-Webster) They are what make it possible for a song to be barely audible at the beginning, and crescendo into a powerful and moving composition. They can also change suddenly and drastically, for example a, *sforzando*.

Sudden changes in dynamics can be notated by adding the word *subito* (Italian for suddenly) as a prefix or suffix to the new dynamic notation.

Accented notes, which are notes to emphasize or play louder compared to surrounding notes, can be called *sforzando*, *sforzato*, *forzando* or *forzato* (abbreviated *sfz* or *fz*). There are two Italian words that are used to show gradual changes in volume, which are the opposite of accented notes.

Crescendo, abbreviated *cresc.*, translates as "gradually becoming louder", and *diminuendo*, abbreviated *dim.*, means "gradually becoming softer".

The alternate *decrescendo*, abbreviated to *decresc.* also means "gradually becoming softer". In addition to all of the volume indications have

mentioned, the execution of a given piece, for example the stylistic choices of staccato or legato are part of dynamics also. (Dynamics, music) When written in musical notation, for example in a band or orchestra piece, they are what allow for the whole band to be given very specific instructions on what the composer intended for an individual part to sound like” making dynamics just another word in the beautiful language that music is.

Although dynamics seem to be what makes music possible, music actually existed before the introduction of different dynamic levels. The harpsichord” which is “a keyboard instrument, precursor of the piano, in which the strings are plucked by leather or quill points connected with the keys”, (Merriam-Webster) could play only “terraced” dynamics, which are either loud or soft, but not in between. (Dynamics, music) To get around this dilemma, composers would use the trick of layering chords together to create a contrast in sounds, without a single note having to be louder or softer.

The Renaissance composer Giovanni Gabrieli was one of the first composers to indicate dynamics in music notation, and since him, it is hard to find a song that doesn't have variations in volume written in. (Dynamics, music) But, music is often left open to some interpretation by the performers or director, and dynamics are no exception to this rule. Dynamic indications are relative, not absolute. *mp* does not indicate an exact level of volume; it just indicates that the part marked as such is a little louder than *p* and a little quieter than *mf*.

In trying to decide what would be appropriate or best contribute to the sound as a whole group is part of what makes music great. Counting Crows has a

very wise song called Big Yellow Taxi that describes perfectly the idea of appreciating things more after the absence of them. The song says, " Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got til its gone. " (Big Yellow Taxi) I think this song applies to music Just as it applies to the seasons during the year.

When you're listening to a song that is very quiet, and radually or suddenly grows loud, that makes a much larger impact on the emotion of the song than if it had just started at the louder volume. Or, if you are listening to a song that has unexpected loud notes, that instantly makes it more interesting to listen to. This applies to the seasons, especially in Minnesota, that you think you appreciate summer weather, but after a long winter, you realize how much you had missed it and welcome it much more. Contrast and diversity are what make things beautiful in all things.

Whether its music, weather, people, religion, or any other xample. There is much to be learned from diversity of appearance, beliefs, experience, sound, or qualities. Early on, composers realized the power of dynamics and many uses of them in compositions have become iconic in a sense. An example is when John Cage took a chance and composed a song in 1952 that instructed the musician to go to their instrument and be silent for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. (4' 33')The idea was that in the absence of what the audience was expecting, they would hear all the environmental noise around them, and appreciate everyday sounds as music.

Another example of an iconic use of dynamics is in Beethoven's 5th symphony, which was written between 1804 and 1808. (Symphony No. 5

(Beethoven)). The song starts out really intense with the 4 note figure that everybody seems to know-- regardless of their music taste. It remains intense for about a minute only to back off, then build, alternating between loud and soft and finally end with an impressive crescendo. This constant variation makes it very interesting and emotional. Another iconic example is when Count Basie and his Orchestra performed All of Me in 1965.

It starts with a mooth piano and percussion line, then about a minute into the piece, almost startlingly sudden, the horns Join and instantly add life and excitement to the song. (Basie, Count) These musical geniuses, though they composed during very different stages of the development of music, all appreciated the effect dynamics could have on music. Music as definitely evolved over the years, as has the use of dynamics. There is a wide variety of musicians and bands that make dynamics a key element to their music.