

## Figures, theory of musical (Ger. *Figurenlehre*)

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In its German form, a term created by German musicologists, beginning with Schering and including especially Heinz Brandes, H.H. Unger and Arnold Schmitz, which stands for the interrelationship between rhetorical figures of speech and analogous musical figures. In classical works on rhetoric (for example by Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian), orators were taught how to embellish their ideas with rhetorical imagery and to infuse their speech with passionate language. The techniques involved figures of speech, the technical devices used in the *decoratio* (also called the *elocutio*), which was the third part of rhetorical theory. That composers enjoyed the possibilities of illustrating textual ideas and individual words with musical figures is extensively shown in both sacred and secular music from at least the early 16th century and can even be seen as far back as Gregorian chant. The madrigalisms or word-painting of the Renaissance madrigal are prominent examples of this kind of musical rhetoric. Only at the beginning of the 17th century, however, was an attempt made, by the German theorist Joachim Burmeister, to codify the practice and to establish a list of musical-rhetorical figures. For over a century and a half afterwards German writers continued his example of borrowing terminology from rhetoric for analogous musical figures, frequently employing different Latin and Greek names for the same figure. They also invented new musical figures unknown to spoken language. This basically German treatment of musical-rhetorical figures is therefore not unified, and no single systematic theory of musical figures exists for Baroque or later music.

*See Rhetoric and music for bibliography and for the various sources for, as well as definitions of, the most important musical-rhetorical figures.*

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## See also

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Composition, §7: Works, styles and ideas