

# On Time

---

Music has been defined as “sounds organised in time”, but the concept of “time” has always a problematic concept in physics and philosophy. Understanding what is meant by the word time in music can be an immensely helpful tool to get a sense of the different ways in which one can make music, both across various cultures and styles within individual cultures.

The first way to think of time is as recurring cycle of events, like breakfast time, lunch time and dinner time. This is a functional view of time, where each time is distinguished from the other by the role that it plays rather than when it occurs. The Geek word for sort of time is Kairos, meaning “supreme moment”, or right moment. Music that emphasizes this element is often characterized by a gap or hesitation which defines the style, and the music often has a distinct rhythmic flavour which defines it.

<http://youtu.be/UJkxFhFRFDA>

<http://youtu.be/ceDoC5gTZyw>

<http://youtu.be/5UqQl0CNNCY>

[http://youtu.be/9KE\\_I6d5m9E](http://youtu.be/9KE_I6d5m9E)

The second sort of time, known as dialogical time, is a sort musical collaboration. Think of it is as a “just in time inventory” management system for a company where a part used in the construction of a car is ordered so that it arrives when needed and you don’t have keep extras in storage. It is the kind of time keeping were the gentleman breaks his stride to allow the lady to pass through the door first. This way of thinking about time is crucial for contrapuntal music but is also prominent in African music. Music in which this sort of time can often be confusing to an outside listener, but is best enjoyed by following along with individual line of music as it moves with and against the other parts rather just basking in the mass of sound that can be the overall result.

<http://youtu.be/2DoioUweBLs>

<http://youtu.be/HiO7hUbUFJ4>

Finally there is the “Classical” way of thinking about time, known as chronological or synchronic time. This is measured, regular time of clocks; a time which acts as an external reference against which musical events happen. Because it is generally fairly regular and predictable it can be used to organise the forces of an orchestra (for example) without the music becoming a homogenous mass to the listener. Ironically, music the effect is often one of timelessness, an effect increasingly amplified the stricter the pulse.

<http://youtu.be/i1L6p4B2hBs>

<http://youtu.be/LRS13e5R8GI>

<http://youtu.be/Pjy1Zv8ZFdY>

<http://youtu.be/fXchqOO8xYY>

None of these ways are “correct” ways of thinking about music, and to some extent each way of thinking is present in all music, it is just that some music tends to emphasise one way of approaching time over another.