

Training Your Time: Is your time *good* OR is it *deep*?

It can be argued that the most useful skill a musician can have is their time. Having good time isn't just about playing on the click, it's about developing a deeper feel in relation to that time. Having deep time is the most direct way to connect to a listener. Even the simplest musical ear can feel the deepness between a walking bass and a ride playing quarter notes. They are locked in and it feels great to everyone listening.

The way I see it, there are so many amazing musicians but the thing that separates great from masterful is their deep time. You may be reading this and thinking... but what do you mean by deep?

Deep is a feeling through your heart and soul. It is a physical sensation... one of satisfaction and joy. I feel it in my heart and my gut. It is involuntary, like an adrenaline rush. Maybe you have felt it before and maybe you have not but in this chapter, we are going to discuss how to access that feeling through metronomic and meditative practice.

Step 1.

First, you must clean up your time. You can't have deep time if you don't have good time. Take your metronome out and put it to 70 BPM. Close your eyes and take deep breaths. The metronome is nothing to be afraid of. It is your friend and your tool to experience music in this new, deep way. Sit with the metronome and focus on it but don't count with it. Just watch the sound. Close your eyes and breath.

Now, feel the vibrations of the pulses. If you are wearing headphones this works, the best. Feel what the pulse feels like going into your ears and head. Do this until you feel complete relaxation.

Step 2.

Now, count with the metronome in your head. Start with 8th notes and then go to quarter notes when you feel comfortable. Use your mind's drum or at this point, you can tap with your hands. This *should* take a while to feel good. When I say it feels good, I don't mean you feel like you're on the beat. I mean it feels like the metronome is grooving. That metronome should make you want to dance.

If you are stuck on this step and the metronome doesn't make you groove after spending some time with it (like if you have been doing this for 30 min and you don't feel the pocket) you need to keep on working on tapping to the quarter note while subdividing in your head. Getting this down is a hard skill to master so start with that and move on when that *feels* good, not just is correct. You can make the metronome faster to make it easier for you.

Step 3.

OK! So, your time is clean now. Now it's time to develop the deepness. Still, without your instrument, take your metronome from 70 to 60 BPM. Do everything you just did but at 60, then 50, then 40, then 30. This is a meditative exercise as much as it is developing your time. ***TIME FEELS THE DEEPEST WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING FROM THE ZONE/SPACE/VOID OR WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT.*** You want to develop the skill of time from this meditative head place.

When 30 BPM quarter notes feel good, take out one of the beats. Some metronome apps have this capability where some do not. Pro Metronome is the one I use. I take out beat 4 and sit with that until it feels right. Then I do the same things for beats 2 and 3. If you are unable to do this at 30 BPM, raise the tempo and then bring it back down to 30 eventually.

At this point, also feel free to create syncopated rhythms in your mental practice. Create a rhythm that includes down beats and syncopated beats. People tend to rush syncopated beats so the down beats that follow them are very telling of how good your time is. You can also use polyrhythms to test how strong your time is. If you know when the sequence will line up again with one, you can use that as a marker to see how good your time is.

Step 4.

Now that your mind is conditioned to feel time in a bit of a deeper way, put on some music and tap to it. See how it feels. For me, when I do this, every single quarter note feels like the physical sensation in my heart that accompanies love and joy. When my brain is conditioned, every single song that I hear feels lush. If you don't even get hints of this, you need to continue doing the previous steps. If you do get hints of it, be your own detective... why do you feel it sometimes and not others. Usually, it has to do with a *deficiency* in time on your part or the musicians that you are listening to. Even the greatest musicians rush and drag. If your time is developed enough to detect the slightest *inaccuracy* in masterful playing, then I would say you're on your way. Keep in mind the inaccuracy can be used to the musician's advantage. We will get into this in a later step.

Step 5.

You are ready to get your instrument in your hands! First things first, get into your meditative state. You are trying to find the happy mixture of thinking about your time and listening to what you play. It is a hard thing to figure out and will start with a lot of back and forth between the two concepts.

Play quarter notes and eighth notes and feel the deep sensations. My met is usually still on 30 BPM at this point but now, it is up to you. Different speeds strengthen time in different ways. Now, the fun begins. Remember the rhythms that you created in step 3? Put notes (or drums) to them. *IMAGINE THAT THERE IS A FULL BAND BEHIND YOU*. This develops your awareness of all parts of a groove. Your time should feel very good now. You should be moving and grooving.

Next, use polyrhythms. I keep my met in 4 and I play in 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11. They will eventually line up with the 1 again and when that happens, it means you did well and you're steady as a clock. Feel free to do polyrhythms that are not based in 4.

Step 6.

The last step of this is to play with other musicians and prerecorded songs of your choosing. At this point, your mental time is so developed that it is time to strengthen it even more using your other senses.

1. Sight: Look at the drummer hit the high hat. Look at the bass player finger the string. Your sight will give you a lot of clues to what is happening and what will happen.
2. Touch: Feel the vibrations of the kick on the floor. Feel what the bass feels like through the walls and the air? Feel the vibrations of the chank of the guitar and how it lines up with the high hat.

3. Hearing: Don't think... just listen. Listen to everything that's around you before you play. Then say to yourself, "what would I want to hear a(n) [insert your instrument] player play here?"

So, that's extensive time work. Time is a skill that takes years to develop. If you do this kind of practice every day, you will bring out the best in everyone you play with. Those are the first call players.

Extra time work: I'm adding this here because I learned it after I wrote this paper and it has been a big help... Set your met to 30 BPM. That is now your new 1 of every bar. Fit 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13 between your clicks. Try retaining what each one feels like and switch between the different time signatures. Do different permutations of each time signature (9/8 can be one bar of 4 and one bar of 5, it can be the inverse of that, it can be three bars of 3, it can be one bar of 2, two bars of 3, and one bar of 1, etc...) do that for ALL of your odd meters.

GUITAR PLAYERS: IF YOU CAN HEAR YOURSELF EXTREMELY CLEARLY (when playing rhythm stuff), YOU ARE TOO HIGH IN THE MIX. IT IS NOT ABOUT YOU. YOU ARE ADDING OVERTONES TO THE DRUMS. YOU MATTER AS MUCH AS THE PERCUSSION.

BASS PLAYERS: SHUT UP AND PLAY POCKET. IF YOU PLAY TOO MUCH, YOU'RE GONNA LOSE THE FOUNDATION IN WHICH YOUR HOUSE IS ON AND THE WHOLE STRUCTURE WILL CRUMBLE TO THE GROUND.

KEYS PLAYERS: WHEN A KEYS PLAYER HAS CRAPPY TIME, IT IS VERY NOTICABLE. KEEP IN MIND THE VELOCITY IN WHICH YOU PLAY. LISTEN TO STEVIE AND WORK ON YOUR CLAVINETTE PLAYING!!!

HORN PLAYERS: IT TAKES MORE TIME FOR SOUND TO COME OUT, CONSIDERING ALL OF YOUR WIND HAS TO TRAVEL THROUGH THE INSTRUMENT. YOU NEED TO ANTICIPATE THAT IN EVERY SINGLE NOTE YOU PLAY. UNDERSTAND YOUR HORN AND HOW SOUND GETS OUT THE BEST.