

What is Music?

This question is inspired by one of my favorite documentaries titled *What is Music?*. I directed it to many of my friends in the summer of 2020. Their answers collectively celebrate the wonderful thing that is music.

“That which reverberates.” I think it works better in Japanese because the word for reverberate (響く) inherently carries a spiritual/emotional meaning as well (it’s often used to express something leaving an emotional impact or an impact on a greater scale like the effect of a new invention). Still, I think it sort of works in English, although it could be better worded perhaps as “That which echoes,” or better yet, “That which resonates.”

Several months later...

Beautiful music is not created; it is found. I felt this...when I was playing some melody I was trying to learn, and my hand just started “going.” I felt that I didn’t make that happen. It was where my mind and fingers went naturally... The melody itself was always sort of meant to be. I just found a way to latch on to that, like a surfer riding the wave. The wave is always there! But you have to have the technical skill to balance and ride the wave.

When music rejects you, it really hurts. But it makes it all the more special when we are able to find those days, those moments, when we can cleanly, smoothly ride the wave and play a beautiful melody.

- Mikey Nguyen

That is a very interesting question...I’ve been reading a book by Tolkien called *Ainulindale*; it’s some of the lore behind the *Lord of the Rings* series. In the *LOTR* lore they create the world by singing it into existence. And they said that the sound of water is an echo of the song that the gods used to sing the world into existence...

Music is the human experience put into sound: it’s a way of communicating to people, “I feel the things you feel; I think the things you think we’re together in this chaotic beautiful universe”; and so many other messages, stuff that spoken or written language can’t convey. That’s why produced pop music that so many people listen to just doesn’t seem to be musical: it seems to have lost its person-to-person aspect: it’s just a manufactured sequence of sounds that’s

designed to produce a positive chemical reaction in a human brain. Not even a positive one: an addicting one. From experience and as a Christian I reject that materialistic view of music; Music is so much more spiritual and personal and theological and a whole host of other things too.

- Nathan Leicht

Music—and this is a work in progress for me—is chaos in order. Music happens anywhere: it is just noise that creates a symphony. And any instruments that we have are just tools to organize that noise that surrounds us.

Several months later...

Perfection is not necessarily music. God gives us music, and we can play around with it. It's not meant to be perfect. It's like us! We as people are not perfect. We need to be held and saved because of our mistakes. And those mistakes also makes us special...those things truly differentiate music from just dots on a score. It is one thing to have a piece of sheet music...and play the right notes at the right time. But it's something completely different, to play the right notes at a right time with feeling. Or to play the right notes at the wrong time, or the wrong notes at the wrong time. It's all about feeling. The beauty of music, which is a language of its own, is that it allows us to express ourselves.

A few days later...

Today, when my alarm went off, I decided I was going to just listen to the melody. It's nothing interesting in a sense. Just a major scale...outlining a chord...but this time I just let the alarm ring...for two minutes...Usually I don't look for music where I don't think it is...It's such an eye-opener: we can find music in everything. I just sat still in silence, and I started thinking of all the places in times when I'm too blinded to hear the music. That has been a big part of my life. And not just for music, but for other things. Sometimes we're too focused on what we have to do in the moment that we miss the bigger picture—the true things we could be doing. Now, some of us may be looking for jobs or internships and sometimes we might be looking so hard for them that we miss some things along the way that are much more important, or at least as valuable.

- Daniel Byle

What is music? I wish I knew how to succinctly describe how music thrills, emotes, cries, excites, and allures. Fundamentally though, this is true of all great art no matter what the form. Carl Jung talks about these innate archetypes and stories we ALL hold within, of which the hero's journey is one of the most poignant. From Odysseus all the way the Avengers, we dress the same stories to our times and cherish them just the same. The hero's journey mirrors what we hope for in life! Starting as an incapable and unaware being, discovering the things that are worth losing everything for, facing tragedy yet emerging through undying pursuance, and returning from your journey with fulfillment, adoration, and contentment from having accomplished something worthy of your life and made the world a better place because of your existence. This is the hope of every person, even if the fruit of your whole life is raising and loving a child that will take your lessons forward.

Music and all great art reflects the hero's journey on two levels. Within the work or performance itself, it's almost ludicrous how closely say the Sonata form follows the hero's journey from exposition, development, glorious climax, and resolute recapitulation. If you think about it, even the humble 2-5-1 or 4-5-1 progression is a exposition, development/tension/resolution. You find these patterns in many many ways.

The 2nd level pertains to the masters and artists themselves. When hearing those with incredible musical connection whether it be Billy Joel, Jeffry Eckels, or Phil Woods, you hear their hours. You feel that they've dedicated themselves to this craft as if it were worthy of their whole lives. Through their mastery they're able to sonically articulate struggle, resolution, emptiness, peace, pain, delight, and all of the beautiful things that we all will invariably encounter in our own hero's journey. That's music for me!

- Austin Zhang

It's so incredibly hard for me to answer what music is... My initial reaction is that music can be found in any audio, from the most beautiful opera to the most static-y TV, and it's all dependent on the observer of the music to determine its beauty. But I'm not entirely satisfied with that answer, so I'll continue to think about this and give you an update at some point!

- Kurt Eggers

I would say that music is artists' expression of emotions and opinions through sounds and melodies.

- Collin Katz

Music is a record of where we've been and where our culture is going. And unlike other forms of communication, music is not one-dimensional.

- Camden Hunt

Music is a way of living in the moment.

- Cari Reinert

Music is in its spirit; in what the person behind it is trying to communicate. . . Even if you can't understand the words, there is a sense of trying to hear someone's soul behind music.

- Anna Schaeffer

Music is the sound of life.

- Mother Blues

Music is part of the beauty of life...A combination of the music, setting a mood, taking you to a place, and the lyrics telling a story or expressing an idea, it feels good...It feels really good to play music. And it feels even better to play music well.

- Stephen Houpt