

Lesson 13

The Heartbeat of Music

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Course	Read & Play Music
Book 1	Read and Play Simple Tunes
Part 2	Time
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PART 2:

TIME

Orientation: Starting Part 2

Here's a reminder of the 3 parts of **Book 1**. We're now starting Part 2:



Roadmap for Book 1.

In Part 1, you learned to read 12 *pitch*s (notes) and play them on your keyboard.

In Part 2, you're going to learn to read the *time* from printed music and play with accurate time.

Since music is made up of pitch and time, this will give you a basic foundation of musical skill on which you can build.

Introduction:

Time in music

Up till now, we've been focusing on *pitch* as the main thing in music.

The other important part of music is *time*, which we will now explore.

Some music emphasises time with little or no attention on pitch. Have you ever taken part in a 'drum circle', where a group of people sit in a circle playing various types of drum? Have you ever seen a musician in the street entertaining passersby by banging on wooden boxes and metal lids? And how about rap music?

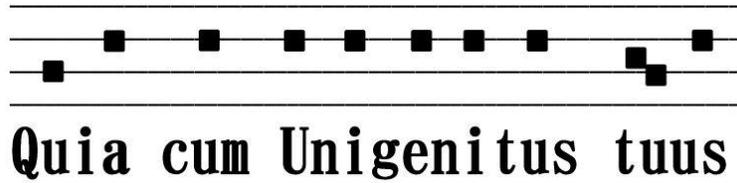
However, most of the music we know consists of *a series of pitches occurring over time*. In fact, that would be a pretty good definition for music.

By tackling pitch first and time second, we are mirroring the way printed music evolved. Our modern system of printed music, which you are learning in this course, had its roots in Christian religious music in Europe 1,000 years ago. Early printed music was very specific about how a song moved up and down in pitch, but gave little or no indication of timing.

Definition:

1. **timing** in *printed music* refers to all aspects of when the notes are to be played.
2. **timing** in *playing music* refers to the musician having control over all aspects of time, including playing each note at the correct moment in time.

This is what printed music looked like 800 years ago:



(The words under the music are in Latin, the language of the church at that time. They mean literally ‘Because when Only-begotten your’, or in other words ‘Because when your only Son . . .’.)

There are 4 lines in this staff instead of the 5 we have today. The square dots on the lines are notes that show exactly how the tune moves up and down in pitch. But the printed music tells us little about timing. The singers would get an idea of the timing from the Latin words they were chanting.

Then, 500 years ago, as Europe was going through the rebirth of the Renaissance, things changed. A style of music evolved in which precise timing became much more important. Composers wrote music to be played by a number of instruments playing different tunes at the same time, and exact coordination became essential.

Musicians developed a way of showing timing, and it worked so well that it has hardly changed in 500 years. Isn't that amazing?

And that's what you're going to learn about now.



LESSON 13:

THE HEARTBEAT OF MUSIC

Earlier, we saw that music treats *pitch* in a special way that distinguishes music from noise. Musical sounds have pitches of a specific frequency. Sounds made up of random frequencies are perceived as noise.

Music also treats *time* in a special way. Time in music is not measured in seconds and minutes. And how is it measured? That's what you're going to learn in the next few lessons.

Fasten your seat belt as you set off on this second part of your journey into the world of reading and playing music.

MUSIC THEORY

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Most music we are familiar with is based on regular timing called a ‘beat’.

Definition:

1. The **beat** is the regular pulsing of a piece of music.
2. One of those regular pulses is also referred to as a **beat**.

A ‘pulse’ is a short burst of energy.

‘Pulsing’ means repeating bursts of energy.

‘Regular’ means that the pulses occur with even timing, like the ticking of a clock.

Sounds such as traffic in the street or someone washing dishes occur with random timing, with no beat, and we perceive them as noise.

In some modern forms of music, you will hear a drum thumping out every beat. When the audience starts to clap, they instinctively clap ‘on the beat’. In other types of music, such as the music of Mozart, the beat is still there but it is not always emphasized so heavily. Dance music—whether disco, square dance or ballet—tends to have a strong beat so people can dance to it.

It’s a bit like your heartbeat. You go about your life, doing all the things you do—riding your bicycle, going shopping, eating your dinner, watching a film, sleeping—and all the time throughout these activities your heart keeps beating regularly.

In a piece of music, all sorts of things can happen—someone singing, a guitar playing, a change in mood, a part where the whole orchestra plays at the same time, a bit where all the musicians are silent for a moment—and all the time the beat keeps on going.

The diagram below illustrates the regular beats in a piece of music. Each star represents a beat. (The star is not a symbol used in printed music. I’m just using it for the purpose of this illustration.)



Like a heartbeat, the beat in music is regular and even, and it keeps on going regardless of whatever activities are happening.

Trivia question: Which rock group includes the word ‘beat’ in its name? (I’ll give you the answer in a moment.)

The beat comes before the notes

The beat exists in the awareness of a musician before he starts playing the notes. That is especially important when a number of musicians play together, so they are well coordinated when the music starts. Have you ever heard a band leader call out ‘1 2 3 4’ to establish the beat before the band starts to play?

The beat also exists in the awareness of a composer before he writes down all the notes that make up his new piece of music.

Creating a beat

Creating a beat is one of the essential skills in music-making.

If you are playing or singing on your own, you are responsible for keeping a regular beat going. If you're playing or singing in a group, there may be someone else indicating the beat such as the drummer in a rock band or the conductor of a choir. In that case you have to follow the beat he is creating.

In a moment you'll do an exercise where you will create a beat.

Answer to trivia question: Which rock group includes the word 'beat' in its name? The Beatles. They were called the 'Silver Beetles', the 'Silver Beatles' and 'Beat Brothers', before settling on the name 'The Beatles'.

PRACTICAL

BUILD YOUR SKILL

Exercise 1:

Feel your heartbeat

1 Feel pulse

1. Find a place where you can feel your pulse. You can use the fingertips of your left hand to press lightly on the underside of your right wrist. When you find the right spot, you will feel your pulse, the regular pulsing motion of your blood flowing as it is pumped by your heart.

2 Notice regularity

1. Keep your fingers there for a while. Notice that your pulse is regular and even and keeps on going. Assuming your heart is working normally, your pulse goes like this:
pulse-pulse-pulse-pulse-pulse.
It doesn't do this:
pulse-pulse [pause] pulse-pulse-pulse.

Exercise 2:

Join in with the beat while listening to music

An experienced musician is continuously aware of the beat in music. It is not something he has to think about or work at. It has become second nature, something he is simply aware of by instinct. He doesn't have to tap his foot or nod his head to keep track of the beat. He just senses it quietly. He has achieved that by years of practising and playing music.

Since you are just starting out, I'm going to have you do some clapping (and other things!) to start developing a feel for the beat.

1 Clap

1. Listen to a piece of recorded music. Start clapping your hands along with the music. You'll be clapping 'on the beat', meaning at the same time as the beats in the music. You might be clapping on every beat, or on every second beat. Either way is fine.

2 Knock

1. While continuing to listen to the same piece of music, knock on a table in time with the music, instead of clapping.

3 Tap

1. Tap your foot in time with the music.

4 Bang

1. Find something metal like a cooking pot, and bang on it in time with the music.

5 Different music

1. Now do the same with a different piece of music.
2. Try this with more pieces of recorded music. Do this until you see that you can easily recognise the beat and easily join in with the beat.

Exercise 3:

Establish a beat on your own

Reminder: the **beat** is the regular pulsing of a piece of music.

In the last exercise you joined in with someone else's beat. Now you're going to start creating your own beat, just as you will be doing when you play some music on your own.

1 Clap

1. Make a beat by clapping your hands repeatedly. Make the claps as regular as you can, like the ticking of a clock. Your clapping should be like this:

clap clap clap clap (all equally spaced)

not like this:

clap clap [pause] clap clap

2 Thump

1. Make a beat by thumping loudly on the table.

3 Tap

1. Make a beat by tapping your foot on the floor. Make sure the taps are regularly spaced, like the ticking of a clock.

4 Bang

1. Make a beat by banging on something metal like a cooking pot.

What you have just done is one step towards what an experienced musician is doing all the time while singing or playing music. He is continuously aware of the beat as he plays, and in fact he starts creating the beat before he starts playing. Of course he does not normally bang on a cooking pot before he starts performing!

Exercise 4:

Make a beat while reading ‘printed music’

This exercise is to get used to making a beat while looking at printed music.

We’re not using real printed music yet. We’ll get to that shortly. For now we’re using this diagram to represent a piece of music with 12 beats in it.



1 Look and clap

1. Look at the stars one at a time, starting from the left.
Each star represents a beat. As you look at each star, clap your hands once. That means you clap your hands 12 times, because there are 12 stars.

What's next?

You've learned about the beat that is present in nearly all the music we know. In the next lesson, you'll learn that all beats are not created equal.

Go on to your next lesson



Click the green box above,
or find Lesson 14 on your Book 1 Course Materials page at
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