

## On Music

It is a melody, designed to euphonious.

But then there are drums and rap. So it does not need a melody.

Or perhaps it is based solely on rhythm and cadence, on structure.

This would make sense of Beethoven's sonatas, but not of improvisational jazz that can break any sort of temporal rules.

Or maybe it is the art of sound. When we speak, it is music — accented melodies, flirtatious harmonies, subtle undertones. Even the occasional profanity and filler word to break the normal flow. Like ... what's it called...? *Dang it*. I forgot.

No. Syncopation. There it is.

As you can tell, it doesn't quite work in plain writing. You can see the words, but you can't see or taste or smell emotion. You have to *hear* it.

This is a piece to be read aloud. Go ahead, do it.

And out comes a crude and primitive — but fundamental — form of music. The drama. The theater. It is not just the music, but the art of using one's voice to convey emotion. Instruments only work to break the dull monotony of human speech by creating specialized noises, but all they do is tell a story.

It's the same rules. Melodies, harmonies, accents, undertones.

Either way, the idea of a practiced performance is another key idea. One cannot whisper or mumble true music, nor can one scream it as a toddler screams at his sibling for breaking his toy.

Not all sound can be art. Only artful sound is music.

So when Marina Abramovic sits in the Museum of Modern Art for seven straight hours a day without speaking, that is music too. The absence of sound can be used deliberately to tell stories, and this play on the ear has drawn many a people to a moment of quiet reflection. A more literal reflection of silence can be observed in the song, "4'33", literally four minutes and thirty-three seconds (of silence).

I have a bit of a grudge against conventional music, lyrical and instrumental. Too often does the music go past purely artistic means of sound. Pop music of today often ends up in intense screaming, and classical music often strays too little from a strict structure to be pleasing to the ear. They are more lessons in heartbreak and in classical structure, respectively, than in the art of music.

I have come across a few songs playing piano that would fit such a description. Aaron Copland's *The Cat and the Mouse*, for example, is a terribly descriptive piece that uses sound creatively to tell the story of an epic chase. Claude Debussy demonstrates the exhilarating lightness of a popular minstrel's show in his song *The Minstrels*.

I used to believe that all music sounded *good*. Unfortunately, I still believe so. Music includes that entire category of performance that our ears like. When it comes with a story or an emotion or a description, it is the more artful and interesting; but it is really the sound that is the distinguishing factor. Because music isn't quite music if it doesn't just *sound* good.