

## Some Definitions of "Music"

1. mu.sic (myoo'zik) *n.* 1. The art of organizing tones in a coherent sequence so as to produce a unified and continuous composition. 2. Vocal or instrumental sounds possessing rhythm, melody, and harmony.  
*The American Heritage Dictionary (Second College Edition)*
2. Music is wanted sound.  
**Larry Austin** (composer)
3. Music is the organization of sound and time.  
**Elliott Schwartz** (composer)
4. Music is nothing else but wild sounds civilised into time and tune.  
**Thomas Fuller**, *History of the Worthies of England* (1662), 'Musicians'
5. Music is a kind of counting performed by the mind without knowing that it is counting.  
**G. W. Leibniz**, *The Monadology* (1714)
6. Music is well said to be the speech of angels.  
**Thomas Carlyle** (Scottish writer), *The Opera*
7. Music is the house that sounds live in.  
Six year-old **Navarana Smythe**, as told to **David Reck** (composer)
8. Music is an innocent luxury, unnecessary, indeed, to our existence, but a great improvement and gratification of the sense of hearing. It consists, at present, of MELODY, TIME, CONSONANCE, and DISSONANCE.  
**Charles Burney**, *A General History of Music* (1776-89)
9. A method of employing the mind without the labour of thinking at all.  
**Samuel Johnson**, quoted by Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785)
10. It is the only sensual pleasure without vice.  
**Samuel Johnson**, quoted in Hawkins, *Johnsoniana* (1787)
11. Music is the moonlight in the gloomy night of life.  
**Jean Paul**, *Titan* (1800-03)
12. Music...is an invisible dance, as dancing is silent music.  
**Jean Paul**, *Levana* (1807)

## Definitions of Music, page 2

13. Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend.  
**Ludwig van Beethoven**, quoted by Bettina von Arnim. Letter to Goethe (1810)
14. Music is the occult metaphysical exercise of a soul not knowing that it philosophises.  
**Arthur Schopenhauer**, quoted in Shapiro, *An Encyclopedia of Quotations about Music* (1978)
15. Music is a sublime art precisely because, unable to imitate reality, it rises above ordinary nature into an ideal world, and with celestial harmony moves the earthly passions.  
**Gioacchino Rossini**, quoted in Zanolini, *Biografia di Gioacchino Rossini* (1824)
16. The only reality in music is the state of mind which it induces in the listener.  
**Stendhal**, *Life of Rossini* (1824)
17. Music is something innate and internal, which needs little nourishment from without, and no experience drawn from life.  
**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**, Letter, 1831
18. Who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite and lets us for a moment gaze into that.  
**Thomas Carlyle**, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841)
19. Music means itself.  
**Eduard Hanslick**, *The Beautiful in Music* (1854)
20. All music is what awakes from you  
when you are reminded by the instruments,  
It is not the violins and the cornets, it is  
not the oboe nor the beating drums, nor  
the score of the baritone singer singing  
his sweet romanza, nor that of the men's  
chorus, nor that of the women's chorus.  
It is nearer and farther than they.  
**Walt Whitman**, 'A Song for Occupations'
21. Music is a poor man's Parnassus.  
**Ralph Waldo Emerson**, *Letters and Social Aims* (1876) 'Poetry and Imagination'

### Definitions of Music, page 3

22. Music is another planet.  
**Alphonse Daudet**, quoted in Mencken, *Dictionary of Quotations* (1942)
23. Music is the arithmetic of sounds as optics is the geometry of light.  
**Claude Debussy**, quoted in *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations* (1980)
24. Music is the art of thinking with sounds.  
**Jules Combarieu**, quoted in Dent, *Mozart's Operas* (1913)
25. Music is another lady that talks charmingly and says nothing.  
**Austin O'Malley**, *Keystones of Thought* (1914)
26. Music is a sort of dream architecture which passes in filmy clouds and disappears into nothingness.  
**Percy Scholes**, *The Listener's Guide to Music* (1919)
27. Music -- that no one knows what it is --  
and the less he knows he knows what is is  
the nearer it is to music -- probably  
**Charles Ives**, 'Epitaph for David Twichell' (1924)
28. Music? It is the half-articulate art, the dubious, the irresponsible, the insensible. (Settembrini)  
**Thomas Mann**, *The Magic Mountain* (1924)
29. How can music ever be a mere intellectual speculation or a series of curious combinations of sound that can be classified like the articles of a grocer's shop? Music is an outburst of the soul.  
**Frederick Delius**, quoted in Fenby, *Delius as I knew him* (1936)
30. All music is nothing more than a succession of impulses that converge towards a definite point of repose.  
**Igor Stravinsky**, quoted in Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music* (1963)
31. If this word 'music' is sacred and reserved for eighteenth and nineteenth-century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term; organisation of sound.  
**John Cage**, *Silence* (1961), 'The Future of Music: Credo' (1937)
32. The plain fact is that music *per se* means nothing; it is sheer sound.  
**Sir Thomas Beecham**, *A Mingled Chime* (1944)

Definitions of Music, page 4

33. It's a Rum Go!  
**Ralph Vaughan Williams**, on being asked what he thought about music, quoted in Wintle and Kenin, *The Dictionary of Biographical Quotations* (1978)
34. Geometry in time.  
**Arthur Honegger**, *I am a Composer* (1951)
35. Music is the best means we have of digesting time.  
**W. H. Auden**, quoted in Craft, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship* (1972)
36. Music is a complex of activities, ideas and objects that are patterned into culturally meaningful sounds recognised to exist on a level different from secular communication.  
**Anon.**, quoted in Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (1964)
37. In its urgency to become sound, in its haste to come into the world, to make itself manifest, music by its very nature tends to make manifestos superfluous.  
**Hans Werner Henze**, *Music and Politics* (1982), 'Music as a Means of Resistance' (1963)
38. Music is a fluid architecture of sound.  
**Roy Harris**, quoted in Ewen, *American Composers* (1982)
39. Music is a safe kind of high.  
**Jimi Hendrix**, quoted in Green, *The Book of Rock Quotes* (1982)
40. A piece of music is simply a chunk of time you are paying attention to with your ears.  
**Barney Childs**, quote in Ewen, *American Composers* (1982)
41. Music is work.  
**John Cage**, *Empty Words* (1980)
42. Music is...well I know it's better than working in Ford's.  
**Ian Dury**, quoted in Green, *The Book of Rock Quotes* (1982)
43. You just pick a chord, go twang, and you've got music.  
**Sid Vicious**, quoted in Green, *The Book of Rock Quotes* (1982)
44. There are three worlds of music -- the composer's, the performer's and the critic's.  
**Erich Leinsdorf**

**Definitions of Music, page 5**

45. The ideal of all art...whatever, because...it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance...the subject from the expression.  
**Walter Pater**
46. An elaboration of emotional speech.  
**Herbert Spencer**
47. The sound of universal laws promulgated.  
**Henry David Thoreau**
48. After silence that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.  
**Aldous Huxley, *Music at Night***
49. The hardest of all arts to speak of is music, because music has no meaning to speak of.  
**Ned Rorem, *Music from Inside Out***
50. Music is that which we regard as music.  
**Martin Walker**
51. Music is Silence seeking Self-understanding.  
**Bryan Pezzone**
52. Music is sound wanting to be heard.  
**Bryan Pezzone**
53. Music is a hidden arithmetic exercise of the soul, which does not know that it is dealing with numbers, because it does many things by way of unnoticed conceptions which with clear conception it could not do. Those who believe that nothing can happen in the soul of which the soul is not conscious are wrong. For this reason the soul, although not realizing that it is involved in mathematical computation, still senses the effect of this unnoticeable forming of numbers either as a resultant feeling of well-being in the case of harmonies or as discomfort in the case of disharmonies.  
**Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, seventeenth-century philosopher and mathematician**
54. Plato says that music is the organizing function of the mind. In the *Republic*, and particularly in the *Laws*, he refers to education as gymnastics and music -- the body developed by graceful rhythms of physical activity, the mind developed by graceful rhythms of thought.  
from *Learning and Teaching* (Dean Brown)

**Definitions of Music, page 6**

55. "Music is not deception, but revelation. Its unique Power is to reveal to us elements of beauty which are not accessible by other means, the contemplation of which reconciles us to our lives not just for the moment, but for ever."

**Piotor I. Tchaikovsky**, from Holden's biography, pp. 158-159.