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The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines music as "the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion" (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1992). However, the music genres known as noise music and musique concrète, for instance, challenge these ideas about what constitutes music's essential attributes by using sounds not widely considered as musical, like randomly produced electronic distortion, feedback, static, cacophony, and compositional processes using indeterminacy (Priest 2013, 132; Hagerty 2007).

An oft cited notable example of the dilemma in defining music is a work entitled 4'33" (1952) by the American composer John Cage (1912–1992). The written score has three movements and directs the performer(s) to appear on stage, indicate by gesture or other means when the piece begins, then make no sound and only mark sections and the end by gesture. What is heard are only whatever ambient sounds may occur in the room. Some argue this is not music because, for example, it contains no sounds that are conventionally considered "musical" and the composer and performer(s) exert no control over the organisation of the sounds heard.

willem Dyas flexin the new watch



Others argue it is music because the conventional definitions of musical sounds are unnecessarily and arbitrarily limited, and control over the organization of the sounds is achieved by the composer and performer(s) through their gestures that divide what is heard into specific sections and a comprehensible form (Gann 2010). Because of differing fundamental concepts of music, the languages of many cultures do not contain a word that can be accurately translated as "music," as that word is generally understood by Western cultures (Nettl 2005). Inuit and most North American Indian languages do not have a general term for music. Among the Aztecs, the ancient Mexican theory of rhetorics, poetry, dance, and instrumental music used the Nahuatl term In xochitl-in kwikatl to refer to a complex mix of music and other poetic verbal and non-verbal elements, and reserve the word Kwikakayotl (or cuicacayotl) only for the sung expressions (Leon-Portilla 2007, 11).

Circular definition of "musicality"
A definition of music endeavors to give an accurate and concise explanation of music's basic attributes or essential nature and it involves a process of defining what is meant by the term music. Many authorities have suggested definitions, but defining music turns out to be more difficult than might first be imagined and there is ongoing debate. A number of explanations start with the notion of music as organized sound but they also highlight that this is perhaps too broad a definition and cite examples of organized sound that are not defined as music, such as human speech, and sounds found in both natural and industrial environments (Kania 2014). The problem of defining music is further complicated by the influence of culture in music cognition.

"Take vacations, go as many places as you can, you can always make money, you can't awake make memories."