In Edmund Spenser's words, “Musicke is wise words with time concentrated.”[1] Early modern writers knew that one of the main qualities that set music apart from its sister art, poetry, was time. Song is composed of words put not only into meter but also into time and space. Measure: In Pursuit of Musical Time, by Marc D. Moskovitz, explores the development of how humans have communicated and quantified musical time within the Western classical tradition. It is a meticulously researched yet accessible examination that guides readers through the historical and theoretical landscape of this singular aspect of music, from the heartbeats of Renaissance theorists to the advent of the smartphone.

Moskovitz has a knack for engaging storytelling, seamlessly interweaving historical anecdotes, musical examples, and the occasional performer's insight to create a narrative that is both enlightening and enjoyable to read. Measure is aimed at readers with a deep interest in music history but not limited to those with an academic background, much in the vein of Thomas Forrest Kelly's Capturing Music: The Story of Notation (2014). This success in catering to a broad readership sets Measure apart from explicitly scholarly or more philosophical monographs in this area, such as Jonathan Kramer's The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies (1988). Though written in a more accessible, imaginative fashion than a purely academic study, Moskovitz's work does not abandon rigor and detail, for example, in his discussion of Marin Mersenne and Harmonie universalle (1636). Complex philosophical and mathematical ideas are lucidly abridged with suitable levels of detail and primary source evidence, making this study a good starting point for student readers as well. I can also see this book appealing to readers who like “tinkering,” or understanding how contraptions work by taking them apart. Moskovitz also draws on visual culture wherever possible, which proves illustrative and instructive, particularly when faced with the challenge of visualizing in the mind’s eye some of the complex pendulums and devices discussed in the latter half of the volume. Indeed, many of these objects are not only practical tools but also things of beauty.

It seems appropriate in a book about musical time that the chapters unfurl in a chronological manner, beginning with touch and other early modern approaches to measuring a pulse from such figures as Galileo Galilei and Mersenne (thereby also drawing on wisdom from the ancients). These early subsections, titled “Hands” and “Pendulums,” are as much a history of physics and the nature of the universe as they are about music specifically, a reminder of how central mu-
sic was to philosophical and scientific understandings of the whole of the natural world. This also includes necessary background on the history of the early mechanics of timekeeping, including clocks. The third and final subsection, “Metronomes,” is an engaging series of case studies, mostly surrounding new inventions in metronomic timekeeping and composers’ varied responses to them.

In spite of such logical organization, I did not feel a strong urge to read this book chronologically. As it comprises short chapters and subsections surrounding different instruments and composers, I was compelled to jump around, reading sections as they caught my attention. Perhaps this is not what the author intended, but I thought this kind of reading experience was supported in the way the book was written, and I did not feel a great loss in terms of comprehension of the overall narrative. I appreciate how thoughtful organization and the tangible scale of the chapters allows for different reading experiences.

A tiny point: given his propensity for drawing together engaging anecdotes surrounding the mechanics of timekeeping, I was surprised Moskovitz did not mention the curious wooden hand at Ripon Cathedral. Still present on the organ case today, the “Ripon hand” was installed in 1695 and used to conduct the choir via a lever operated from the organ console. It came about because a rebuild of the organ at that time meant that the organist had to conduct the choir from the console at some distance. Though this solution did not catch on more widely, the hand is not only an example of a unique mechanical solution to aid timekeeping but also a symbol of musical time’s long-standing connectedness to touch, sight, and the body, themes of central importance to Moskovitz’s book. He never claims that his book is comprehensive, but this is exactly the kind of quirky anecdote of which this book is composed.

*Measure* demonstrates an understanding of the use and centrality of measured time but also its limitations. For example, he discusses how, after the composer’s death, Ludwig van Beethoven’s early editors fought to assert “authoritative” tempo markings. Moskovitz goes on to show how later composers, such as Igor Stravinsky, came to understand that “there was no such thing as a decisive performance tempo. Whereas an appropriate metronome indication may have once suited a particular environment or one’s taste at a given moment, it did not necessarily transcend the years” (p. 248). As the author indicates, one must balance the strict guidance provided by this useful tool, without it becoming a “detriment to healthy music making” (p. xix). Through its historical depth, vivid explanations, and engaging narrative, *Measure* provides a valuable resource for those seeking to think more pointedly about the history of and ideas surrounding musical time. With this book, readers will find a captivating journey into the heartbeat of music itself.

Note

[1]. Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queen* (1596), bk. 4, canto 2, st. 2.