City symphony films, which documented the vitality of urban modernity in the 1920s, appeared in the wake of a significant shift in the conception of time: the processes of industrialization and urbanization along with the shift to hired employment that took place at the turn of the 20th century brought about an abstract and uniform conception of time. Previously measured by the duration of actions (e.g. milking time or sleeping time), time became abstract when it was converted into the precise and impersonal measure of the clock. City symphony films are often regarded as a naïve celebration of modernity. A closer look at the role of time and tempo in those films suggests that they did not only respond to the emergence of the abstract modern time but also offered a unique alternative to it.