

The Colors of Music:

Sounds We
Can See!



**Atlanta
Symphony**
Orchestra

Stephen Mulligan
Conductor





When a painter steps up to an empty canvas, they have lots of choices to make. Painters choose between every color in the rainbow! And what should they paint with? A brush, a crayon, a pen, or maybe their hands? And what should be the subject of their painting? It could be a dramatic waterfall or a funny self-portrait. It could end up being realistic, something they see — or completely abstract, something that only lives in the artist’s imagination.

Composers do the same thing! Only instead of paint — they use music!

Colors have shades of intensity, from light to dark. And colors can blend and contrast, depending on the artist.

The same is true with music! Musical notes have shades and composers blend and contrast their choices, using different instruments and harmonies. The same musical note will have its own color depending on which instrument is voicing it. Each instrument might also adjust the “timbre” of a note so that it acquires a slightly different shade.

And just as painters might listen to music while they paint — composers look to paintings for inspiration when they compose.

See if you can identify all the different colors in this Concert for Young People.

Handel's Fireworks:



Everybody Loves Fireworks!

German composer **George Frederick Handel** (*George Frederick HAN-dul*) (1685 -1759) became court composer at quite an early age for King George II of Great Britain.

Handel was commissioned to write an oratorio for the King titled "Messiah" about the life of Jesus Christ. It includes the famous "Hallelujah Chorus," when everyone sings "hallelujah" over and over. The legend is that

when the work was premiered, King George was so moved by the "Hallelujah Chorus" that he stood — and if the king stands, everyone stands. The tradition of standing during the "Hallelujah Chorus" continues to this day.

When the king wanted a fireworks display to celebrate a peace treaty, he asked Handel to write music for the event. You can almost hear fireworks exploding inside the music! Handel wrote in the Baroque (Bah-ROKE) style. "Baroque" means artwork that is decorated with a lot of flair.

"How delighted I will be to ramble for a while through the bushes, woods, under trees, through grass, and around rocks. No one can love the country as much as I do. For surely woods, trees, and rocks produce the echo that man desires to hear." ~ LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

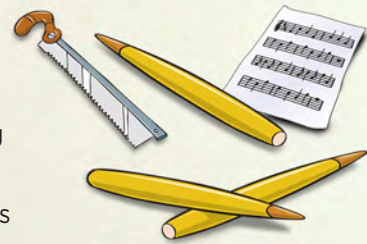
WHOOSH, POP, KAPOW!

It's easy to draw a firework! Take a colorful pen or crayon and start with a dot. Then draw lines going every which way from that dot. (There's no way you could make a mistake!)

Listen to Handel's music while you draw fireworks. The music could affect the way you draw your drawing. You might choose a specific color for a firework because it sounds like something in the music.

Beethoven's "Pastorale": Bright & Dark

German composer **Ludwig van Beethoven** (*BAY-toh-ven*) (1770-1827) started playing the piano when he was so small he had to stand on the piano bench to reach the keys! He grew up to become the most famous composer of his time. Late in life, however, Beethoven lost his hearing and became completely deaf. Even so, he continued to compose because he heard the music in his imagination! He was so determined to write music that he had the legs taken off his piano so he felt the sound vibrations coming through the floor.



Beethoven composed his 6th Symphony while he still had his hearing. In this work, he chose to write about nature, a subject as big as all outdoors. He took inspiration from long walks in the woods, listening to birds singing, trees rustling in the breeze, and water rushing over rocks in a small brook. He put all those sounds into his music! Beethoven's 6th Symphony is titled the "Pastoral Symphony or Recollections of Country Life." The word "pastoral" refers to shepherds in the fields — and "recollections" are memories. Today, Beethoven's 6th symphony is so popular that it is known simply as the "Pastoral."

Craft Activity & Listening Exercise

Feel free to frame your drawing with words. What words describe fireworks? Are fireworks exciting? Magical? Loud? And how do fireworks move? Do they sizzle? Do they burst? Do they dart? Do they spark?

What words describe Handel's music? It could be the same words that describe fireworks — but maybe not. Consider the words on your page and decide which ones describe fireworks, which describe the music — and which describe both!

Flash & Flair

The Ox-Bow (1846) by Thomas Cole

Thomas Cole (1801-1848) was an American artist, born in England, who became famous for his landscape paintings. His famous work, *The Ox-Bow*, was based on studies of the Massachusetts countryside. Cole liked to use bold effects of light and "chiaroscuro" (*kee-ar-uh-SKYOOR-o*) — an Italian word that combines *chiaro*, "light," and *scuro*, dark."



Compare & Contrast: Beethoven

In Beethoven's imagination, a pleasant country scene is interrupted by a sudden storm. The storm begins far in the distance but builds and gets stronger as the clouds approach. Suddenly the setting is overwhelmed by a terrible rainstorm, full of dark clouds, thunder and lightning. Notice how Beethoven's music distinguishes between "bright" sounds for images of birds, sunshine, and gentle breezes — and "dark" sounds for images of storm clouds, wind, and rain.

How does Beethoven do that? How can music paint such a clear picture of something like a storm? In part, Beethoven pitted instruments with a deep "dark" sound, such as the timpani, cello, and string bass,



against instruments with a high "bright" sound, such as the violin, flute, and trumpet. Beethoven also uses the dynamics of sound, meaning that the music might vary between soft, very soft, loud, and very loud — and the change can happen without warning. In addition, Beethoven allows the music to take big bold leaps between pitches for dramatic effect, not the small easy steps he chose to suggest birdsong.

You might also notice that Beethoven casts specific instruments to portray different aspects of the storm. The violins portray rain or raindrops, the cellos represent the wind, and the timpani offers the sudden crash of lightning.

Listen to Beethoven's 6th and make a list of three musical elements that sound like a beautiful sunny day — and then three musical elements that sound like a storm.

PROGRAM MUSIC: STORIES IN SOUND

"Program music" describes instrumental music with a "program" or a purpose — to tell a legend, describe a scene, or share a personal drama. Not all music is "program music." Much of classical music is "absolute" — meaning the composer is only creating a pattern of sound, not intending to depict anything other than music.

Mendelssohn's "Scottish



German composer **Felix Mendelssohn** (Felix MEN-dell-son) (1809-1847) began writing music non-stop at the age of 10. A musical prodigy, he was a trained pianist and a conductor as well. He was also an accomplished painter.

At the age of 20, Mendelssohn went on a walking tour of Scotland.

He was a particularly good painter and he liked to do drawings and paint watercolors of

the sights he saw during his trip. Several of his paintings are landscapes of Scotland with people or specific buildings.

On his trip, Mendelssohn happened to visit the ruined remains of Holyrood Chapel at the Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, a site full of coronations and assassinations from history.

Mendelssohn would later write: "We went, in the deep twilight, to the Palace of Holyrood, where Queen Mary lived and loved. ... Everything around is broken and moldering, and the bright sky shines in. I believe I found today in the old chapel the beginning of my Scottish Symphony."

In his "Scottish Symphony," Mendelssohn is clearly painting his memories of Holyrood chapel with the somber melody that introduces the work. Instead of the colors on his painter's pallet, however, he relies on the various tones and timbre provided by the oboes, violas, clarinets, and horns to paint the scene.

The composer also chooses for musicians to play the notes in a smooth, connected manner, known as legato (luh-gaw-toh). At other times, the composer instructs for the notes to be played in a short, detached, and disconnected manner, known as staccato (stuh-kah-toh). A painter could hear legato notes as long, even brushstrokes – and staccato notes as short, quick dabs of paint.

Compare & Contrast: Mendelssohn

Consider Mendelssohn's watercolor of the Scottish landscape. What words describe the setting and the mood of the painting?

Listen to Mendelssohn's "Scottish Symphony." What words describe the melodies? How would you describe the harmonies? What sort of instruments is Mendelssohn bringing into the music?

Look over your impressions of Mendelssohn's music and his art work. Did you use any of the same words in your descriptions? Or are they different?

Do you prefer Mendelssohn's painting? Or Mendelssohn's music? Why?

Symphony": Long & Short

Stravinsky's Firebird: Bright & Bold

Russian composer **Igor Stravinsky** (EE-gore Straw-VIN-skee) (1882-1971) almost became a lawyer to keep his parents happy. When he learned that one of his classmates was the son of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a world-class composer, Stravinsky arranged for private study with the master – and so long, law school!

It didn't take long for Stravinsky to get famous with his music. As a young man, his approach to rhythm and harmonics was seen as too "modern," too challenging, too controversial, and even revolutionary! Stravinsky wrote ballet music that didn't sound delicate and gentle at all! Instead, Stravinsky's music was aggressive, dynamic, and unlike anything anyone had heard before.

When he was still only 27, Stravinsky was hired to write a ballet titled *The Firebird*, his first large-scale work for orchestra. *The Firebird* tells the story of a noble prince who defeats an evil ogre with the help of a rare mythical bird. Stravinsky's score took familiar Russian folk melodies and combined them with rich, over-the-top orchestrations



In a way that reminded people of all the great Russian composers, including Stravinsky's mentor. Stravinsky would later describe *The Firebird* as "Rimsky-Korsakov with pepper."

Stravinsky challenged the way people listened to music. With this work, he planted one foot firmly among the traditions of Russian music – took a bold step with the other toward a radical new sound.

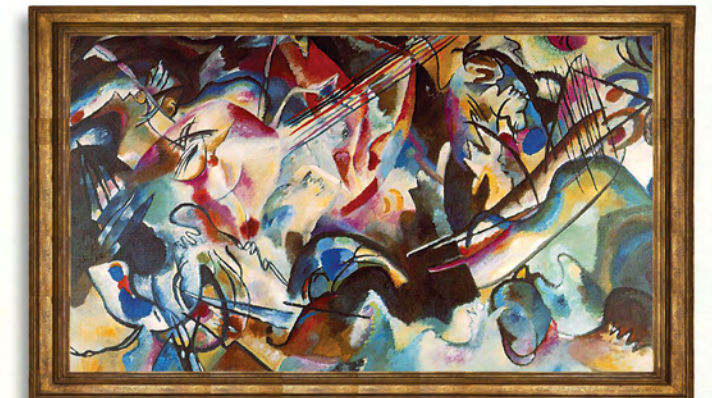
Kandinsky's Composition No. VI

Russian painter **Wassily Kandinsky** (VAS-sil-lee kan-DIN-skee) (1866-1944) was trained as a musician. He only became serious about painting when he was in his 30's. But he couldn't help approaching color as a musician! What does that mean? It means Kandinsky tried to make his paintings so colorful and vibrant that they sing!

Kandinsky spent almost 30 years working on a series of paintings called "Compositions." These were huge large-scale paintings that took all the time and care that composers put into composing major symphonies.

Kandinsky's goal was to challenge the way people look at art. Kandinsky tried to "abstract" or reduce painting down to the bare elements, just the painter's strokes of color and movement. He also used color to create a bold expression of his feelings – all his emotions, based on his own life. People began to talk about this approach to painting as Abstract Expressionism.

"Composition VI" is one of his landmark paintings. The colors are so vibrant that the painting almost shimmers with sound.



Compare and contrast: Stravinsky

Stravinsky made people listen to music in new ways. Kandinsky made people look at art in new way. Both men viewed themselves as artists who could change the world of painting or music. In their day, people often reacted to work from these artists with hostility. Are we more accepting today? If so, why? If not, why not?

It is easy to see the bold colors in Kandinsky's "Composition VI," but can you hear the bold colors in Stravinsky's "The Firebird?" One might hear a bold color sense in the bright, contrasting sound and timbres of the instruments that Stravinsky chose to represent the various flashy characters in the Firebird story. Stravinsky specifically picked the trumpet, glockenspiel, piano, and xylophone for their bright bold sounds. He also placed those sounds in bold contrast to create dramatic edges, rather than smoothing and blending the sounds together. Both Stravinsky and Kandinsky were bold in making big creative choices – and they were bold again in stacking their big choices against each other.



"Each color lives by its mysterious life." ~ WASSILY KANDINSKY

Ravel's "Fairy Garden":



French composer **Maurice Ravel** (*Moh-REECE Rah-VELL*) (1875-1937) was born into an artistic family that was happy to encourage his musical talent at an early age. As a composer, Ravel got to be famous while he was still young because his work seemed so perfect and polished. Ravel was wildly popular — and it might have been because he didn't take big risks. He did, however, write music that sounded like Ravel and nobody else.

The "Fairy Garden" section of his "Mother Goose Suite" imagines a happy ending, when the handsome prince awakens the sleeping beauty. Even when Ravel was composing music about childhood, however, it has a little bit of grown-up sadness, as though the composer still wishes he was a child!

Sure enough, Ravel's music in "Fairy Garden" rises to the occasion. Ravel does not attempt to strike a bright bold contrast of sounds, as Stravinsky does in "The Firebird." Instead, Ravel blends his sounds in a pleasing manner, allowing them to stir and swell into a richer sound. In this manner, the simple sweet melody swells into a huge finale with an extravagant orchestration.

Monet's Japanese Bridge

French painter **Claude Monet** (*Clod Moh-NAY*) (1840-1926) is most remembered as the founder of Impressionism. These painters were more interested in form and light than actual realistic depictions of things. Monet's "Japanese Bridge," for example, captures a shimmering view of a bridge and the water lilies below in one quick moment.

Monet painted this bridge over the pond many times. Each time, he chose a different moment in the day — so that he could study the passing sunlight and the different moods.) Notice how the greenery in the background was created with quick, up-and-down dabs of paint. The reflection on the surface of the water was created with broader sideways strokes in different colors.

Compare & Contrast: Ravel

Ravel used music to focus on something as small, simple, and enchanted as a Fairy Garden. Similarly, Monet brought his considerable skills to a painting of a small bridge over the pond. Monet created a moment of sunlight across a pond — by painting one dab of paint at a time. Ravel created a fantastical garden — by assembling one note at a time. Do you think they had a vision of the end result as they worked? Or did they immerse themselves in the creative process and hope for a good result?

Light & Air



Theofanidis's "Rainbow Body": All the Colors

American composer **Christopher Theofanidis** (*Christopher Theo-FAN-EE-dis*) (1967-) hails from Dallas, Texas. His work has been performed by leading orchestras all over the world. He has a long-standing relationship with the Atlanta Symphony and Maestro Robert Spano.

Theofanidis's "Rainbow Body" was inspired by two different ideas.

One is a spiritual belief held by Tibetan Buddhists. They believe that when an enlightened being dies, the physical body is absorbed back into the universe as light and energy — like a Rainbow Body!

Theofanidis took that idea and added a melody based on a chant created by a 12th century medieval mystic named **Hildegard von Bingen**. "Rainbow Body" imagines the moment when the body of an enlightened being returns to a rainbow state, one with the universe.

ALL ON YOU

Craft Activity

Perhaps your own artwork will be inspired by the colors of Theofanidis's "Rainbow Body." Try to capture the energy of the composition in your own artwork. You might start by identifying the creative choices in the music in terms of color, tone, energy, juxtaposition, and structure. You might then incorporate those same values in your own visual artwork.

Choose a medium — acrylic paints, watercolors, ink pens, oils, or even pencil. Let the music inspire you. Or experience the music and allow your own thoughts to inspire an image.

Once you are finished, you can submit your art work to your teacher — who will pass it along for consideration by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Several students will be selected to be shown during Concerts for Young People. It could be you!



The Colors of Music

Handel

Royal Fireworks Music: Overture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuG1t2smdCQ>

Beethoven

Symphony no. 6 in F, "Pastoral" IV Storm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JyRs1bdENE>

Mendelssohn

Symphony no. 3 in A minor, "Scottish"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUdd4CUNStU>

Stravinsky

Firebird Suite (1919) Infernal Dance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8MdwoQu57s>

Ravel

Mother Goose Suite V. Fairy Garden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UxsshA24cc>

Theofanidis

Rainbow Body

<https://youtu.be/eixilvIGSto>

Words to Know

Pitch: How high or how low a musical sound is.

Timbre: The quality or color of sound that makes one musical instrument or a voice different from another.

Dynamics of Sound: The volume, whether loud, very loud, soft, or very soft, produced by an instrument or voice.

Melody: A sequence of notes assembled using a variety of rhythm and pitches to create a musical statement. Typically, a mode is selected to create the mood of the melody. When more than one voice or instrument is involved, or where harmony is present, the melody is the dominant tune of the composition.

Tones: The particular sound of an instrument or voice, as well as the performer's particular coloring of that sound. For example, the tone produced by a certain clarinetist could be said to be rich, dark, and mellow; this is the result of the natural sound of the instrument, combined with the performer's particular technique of playing.

Mode: An arrangement of eight notes according to a fixed pattern of whole steps or half steps to create a certain mood. The mode used in a lullaby, for example, is different than the mode used in a victory march.

Rhythm: A repeated musical sequence in terms of long and short sounds.

Legato: An instruction to perform a specific passage of a musical composition in a smooth, graceful, connected manner.

Staccato: An instruction to play specific notes in a crisp, detached, separated, distinct manner.

Conductor: The leader of a musical ensemble who uses gestures and other physical movements to indicate how the music should be performed by the musicians.

Score: The printed or published document containing the combined instrumental and vocal parts of an entire musical composition, stacked together on a sequence of pages.

How To Put Things Into Words

When we describe how we feel, we often rely on "good," "bad," "happy," "sad" — but there are many other words that could express our feelings and we often forget to use those more descriptive words.

Use the classroom white-board to make a list of everyday words that describe emotions.

Choose one of the emotion words on the classroom list — and come up with different words that describe that emotion on "low" — or elevated to "very high."

Example:

What's a word for "very happy?" Turn it to "low" and imagine a word for just barely happy. What's a word for "very very angry" or "just a tiny little bit angry?"



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With Deepest Gratitude



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