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Music and Painting

When I was studying in France as a young man, I often attended concerts with friends, and my appreciation for music grew with each concert I attended. Once, the orchestra was performing Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. It began on a melancholic note, then rose to a feverish pitch. At the choral finale, blood surged through my body like boiling water and my emotions were so intense that I burst into tears — I felt as if both my mind and body had achieved a happy climax. This may sound strange as I had not studied much music back then and did not expect to have such a reaction. It is all because Beethoven’s music symbolises humankind’s common determination and fate. He would occasionally challenge darkness and call out to the light; he gives you warm consolation and fervent encouragement. It is clear how deeply music touches us, and how all art influences us through latent and direct means. To feel the influence we do not need theory or analysis, but constant contact: in time, this will lead to some kind of resonance.

Presently, many remark that modern art is difficult to understand. This is due to the fact that it is rarely available for viewing. If exhibitions of modern art were held a few times a month and you went to all of them, you would gradually fall in love with it. People often have the prejudice that showing art to an unschooled person is like “playing music to a cow.” Modern scientific experiments have proven, however, that if soothing music is played in the cowshed, more milk is produced. Thus, the concept underlying this idiom is no longer applicable.

Of course, with better education, one’s ability to appreciate art increases. It is also true that with a little more encouragement, one can even become addicted.

If a common man can appreciate music, it is certainly not a problem for an artist to do the same and more. This is because painting and composing music, though differing in method, have elements that are interrelated. Artists use line and colour, while musicians use sound and rhythm. Both produce the same emotional effect. The late nineteenth-century artist James Abbott McNeil Whistler once said, “It is insufficient for an outstanding painting to only describe objects. It should also invoke an understanding that would make one sing.” Modern sculptor Aristide Maillol also said, “I am using a
chisel to carve a poem from marble, and from the poem, a tune resonates.”

Modern music is known as a “Painting of Sounds” (声音的绘画), while popular contemporary abstract art is also called a “Symphony of Colours” (色彩的交响乐). Art and music are like a pair of inseparable twins.

Beethoven loved most to trek in the woods and stroll on a foggy morning or in moonlight to absorb the spirit of nature. Had his parents not asked him to play the piano when he was young but given him colouring materials, paper and brush, and allowed him to draw freely, I believe he would have become an outstanding artist.

Georges Braque, who like Pablo Picasso was a great artist of the Cubist movement, never stopped appreciating music. He once said that if he had held a violin instead of a brush, he would have become an accomplished violinist.

This essay hopes to link music and painting from various angles and make comparisons. Naturally, this includes some stories of musicians and artists.

Artists and music
In the history of Western art, a priceless and most popular painting is Mona Lisa (1506) by Leonardo da Vinci, one of the three masters of the Renaissance. The painting is a half-length portrait of a young woman, showing the profile of her head and body. Both her hands are crossed in front of her and laid on the armrest. Her hair is let down on both sides, creating a pleasant contrast to the veil that is draped over her chest. In the background is a scene of mountains and rivers. The entire painting gives a natural and simple ambience, making one reluctant to leave after admiring it, captivated. This is where the crux of the work lies: her noble and well-endowed face wears a sweet smile — although there is no muscle movement around the corners of the mouth and the brows, viewers can feel the smile which stems from an inner joy and contentment. Through the magical hands of the artist, viewers have entered the heart of the subject to share her joy. Art, when it is able to play such a function, can be said to have reached the peak of perfection. The crucial factor responsible for this outstanding disposition, apart from superior technique, is the nurturing of the soul. Da Vinci took four years to complete this painting. During this time, he did not paint every day because it was not appropriate for him to paint or for the subject to be painted when he was in a bad mood. However, when he was in a better mood, and to ensure that this was sustained, he would specially invite musicians to play charming and soothing tunes in an adjacent room. Thus, what viewers see is a colourful image and what they feel are emotions from without the painting. Music, on that occasion, had an unparalleled effect.

Eugène Delacroix, leader of the nineteenth-century Romantic Movement, was a music lover. He and the Polish piano poet, Frédéric Chopin, were on friendly terms. However, Chopin was shy by nature and disliked performing in public. Together with his close friends in the literary circle like Victor Hugo, Delacroix satisfied his desire to listen by waiting by Chopin’s window and eavesdropping when he practised behind closed doors. The richness of colour and lively brushwork in Delacroix’s paintings are a reflection of the piano’s sonorous rhythm and modulation.

30 years ago, the leader of the Fauvist movement, Henri Matisse, held an exhibition to commemorate his sixtieth birthday. On its opening day, apart from the President’s officiation of the opening ceremony, the biggest highlight was the hiring of a band. The red, blue, yellow and black of all his paintings were transformed into the notes Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La and Ti; the rapid rise and fall of melodies solidified into tones of varying densities. A high note was like a thick outline; a warm colour was like a group of sounds in harmony. Matisse’s guests were dazzled, unable to differentiate the paintings from the music. They only knew that every atom in the air consisted of sweet and beautiful colours, and pleasant music — the entire venue was elevated to a plane of heavenly bliss.

Paintings that portray music
From past to present, many great artists have used music as subject matter. Some expressed the appeal of music in their lives while others narrated the history of music; some portrayed instruments during a performance while others painted musicians. The characteristics are varied and impossible to list in detail. I shall now cite individual artists for a general overview.
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**Artists and music**

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1. Sanzio Raphael: *The Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (1514)
Raphael is also one of the three masters of the Renaissance. He was highly talented and his art is elegant. Unfortunately, he died when he was only 33. Saint Cecilia is the patron saint of Western musicians because she always uses music to praise God and is herself an expert organist. Here, she and her fellow saints look to the heavens and listen to the clear and innocent singing of the angels in the clouds. In a display of reverence, they have put their various musical instruments on the ground to listen attentively. This is why church choirs sing without the accompaniment of musical instruments.

2. Titian: *Venus with Organist and Cupid* (1548)
Titian [Tiziano Vecellio] is famed for his skill in outlining the female body. Some say that one can smell the scent of the female nude just by standing in front of the painting. It is immediately evident that his technique is very accomplished. In this painting, the goddess Venus is lying sideways on a long bench in front of a window. Outside the window are a forest and a spouting fountain. Venus is caressing a dog and enjoying the music. The organist is turning around to look at the voluptuous body of the goddess, but although her body is completely revealed, she is inviolable. Such an elegant treatment of sexuality makes this a truly outstanding painting.

3. Tintoretto: *The Concert of Muses*
This painting portrays a group of women who are either naked or covered, and who are playing music together in a deep forest. There are one or two men listening attentively. All of them are either sitting or standing with their backs towards us. Each of their postures is relaxed as they hold different musical instruments of different sizes — lively and natural, the subjects form an arc. The use of darkness blends with the music into a kind of tempo, thereby achieving a merging of sound and colour as one.

A young and beautiful girl is plucking the lute, almost as if the sounds are flowing from her delicate fingers. On the table in front of her are scattered musical instruments, a musical score, flowers in a vase and fresh fruits, adding to a sense of artlessness. The goddess seems to be in deep contemplation. Perhaps she is playing a sad tune.

5. Peter Paul Rubens: *The Education of Marie de’ Medici* (1624)
Rubens, famous for his majestic compositions and brilliant colours, was the stalwart of the Flemish Baroque movement. His portraits of figures are especially lifelike. This painting depicts Marie de’ Medici learning painting, music, poetry and other arts in a valley at the bottom of a waterfall. Apart from a scholar and musician, there are also three graceful and virginal goddesses — love, beauty and happiness — keeping her company, in case she feels lonely. With such a profound artistic concept and meaning, this is a masterpiece.

6. Georges de La Tour: *The Hurdy-Gurdy Player* (1632)
La Tour was a French artist who loved painting the lives of the common people. This painting portrays a blind man who makes his living on the streets by playing the hurdy-gurdy and singing. The work is exceptionally outstanding as people not only learn about this unique instrument, but are also touched by the man who sings weakly, his eyes closed.

7. Johannes Vermeer: *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (1675)
Vermeer, like his fellow Dutch artists, loved playing with interior lighting. As for the maiden who is playing the virginal, her graceful face and her body attired in luxurious clothing are set off by the dark background. She appears exceptionally beautiful and attractive. A cello leaning at the bottom left corner enriches the musical ambience.

8. Gerard van Honthorst: *The Concert* 
Van Honthorst of seventeenth-century Holland was an artist famous for using candles to illuminate subjects in his paintings. In this painting, the child is holding a candle in his left hand and a music score in his right. He is singing and displays an expression of excitement and happiness. As the candle is close to his face, part of his face is brightly lit, while the other part is shrouded in darkness, resulting in a strong contrast and an outstanding effect.

Another painting, *The Prodigal Son* (1623), also uses the candle as the focal point. Men and women are seated around a dining table, eating and drinking in full and drunken pleasure. Just as their merriment is waning, the musician begins to play lively music to
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Ingres, the leader of the French Classical movement, created a portrait for Italy’s most eccentric violinist, Paganini. One was an artist famed for his traditional sketches of delicate and clear lines, while the other was praised by Schubert as a magical violinist with crisp musical sounds and deft techniques. The two titans come together in an artwork where each complements the other.

11. Eugène Delacroix: *Portrait of Frédéric Chopin* (1838)
Delacroix and Chopin met when Romanticism was spreading over the European continent. The former was the leader of the French fine art movement and was trying his utmost to free himself from the restraints of formalism and move towards free expression. The latter was seen as Poland’s piano poet, a strong nationalist who loved to use folk art as source material for his compositions. When Poland was overrun by the Russian empire, Chopin fled to Paris. He befriended people in the literary and art circles. It was during this time that Delacroix drew a portrait of him. The brown and black, coupled with bold and heavy brushwork, forcefully capture Chopin’s heartbreak and depression. Although the original work is displayed in the Louvre in Paris, replicas have circulated to every corner of the world as they are popular with music lovers.

12. Édouard Manet: *The Old Musician* (1862)
Although Manet was a member of the Impressionist movement, his technique is closer to the Realist movement. He was exceptionally talented in the portrayal of human personality. Here, he has painted in detail the vagabond musician’s appearance, which speaks of suffering and weariness. This is an accomplishment that modern artists would find difficult to surpass.

13. Edgar Degas: *The Orchestra at the Opera House* (1870)
Many of Degas’ masterpieces are about dance and naturally, music associated with dance. This painting of an orchestra has, in the background, a group of ballerinas dancing on stage. The main theme is that of a group of musicians in deep concentration while playing music for the ballet performance. One only needs to look at the fingers that are accurately placed on the instruments, the faces that are puffed up with air, and the eyes that are focused on the music scores to feel the professionalism of these musicians. A happy, relaxing rhythm invariably emerges from the work. This painting is frequently used on the covers of music publications all over the world.

14. Vincent van Gogh: *Marguerite Gachet at the Piano* (1890)
Van Gogh was staying with Dr Gachet and discussing art with Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin and others when he painted this work. Van Gogh hardly used music as the subject of his works. If I remember correctly, this is probably the only one. The entire painting is almost taken up by Miss Gachet, with only the left side of the painting taken up by an old piano. The music scores and candle are placed on the piano, as if they have never been moved. Miss Gachet’s hands do not look delicate but appear nimble. They are suitable for playing hard-hitting tunes, but probably less so for tranquil and sweet melodies.

15. Mary Cassatt: *The Banjo Lesson* (1893)
Mary Cassatt was an American artist. A friend of Degas, she participated in several Impressionist exhibitions. Her gouache paintings were influenced by Degas; her skills, however, cannot quite compare. This gouache painting depicts a pair of sisters playing the banjo. Its composition is unconventional and its strokes are fluent. This should be one of her representative works.
celebrate their enjoyment of worldly charms. This time, the candle is cleverly hidden. We only see it illuminating the people’s faces, revealing an atmosphere of youthful happiness.

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16. Pierre Renoir: Two Girls at the Piano (1892)
Among the Impressionist artists, Renoir was most able to capture the gentle demeanour of a woman. He also used varied female poses as themes in his paintings. In *Two Girls at the Piano*, the two girls’ happiness during their piano practice is evident from the ends of their lips, the corners of their eyes, the tips of their fingers, and the postures of their limbs and torsos. With the addition of warm lighting and harmonious colours, one can almost hear the rhythmic and pleasing music from the piano.

Among modern artists, Matisse most often featured music as his theme. He has produced more than ten works just on the theme of *The Piano Lesson* alone, and even more works on other themes, such as in *Music* (1910), *Chorus*, and *The Joy of Life* (1905–1906), among others. He also painted portraits of musicians. The portrait of Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev is one that is commonly seen. As Matisse was partial towards East and North African art, his works are strong in colour, unrestrained in brushwork, and rich in the appeal of foreign countries. He was also adept at using decorative elements. The painting easily makes one think of Franz Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody*.

18. Pablo Picasso: musicians and instruments
Picasso surpasses Matisse when it comes to using music as the theme for his paintings. He uses Cubism to deconstruct, reconstruct and transform musicians and musical instruments. He draws them again and again, as if he wants to bore into their hearts. *Three Musicians* (1921) is a popular painting. As for musical instruments, the violin, guitar and mandolin are often depicted. The piano does not seem to appear at all. We shall never know if it is a matter of composition or personal proclivity.

The charcoal portrait that Picasso made for the composer Igor Stravinsky (formerly Russian, now a naturalised American) is a superior piece of work, whether as pure art or as a portrait. Today, this portrait is always used as an illustration for any articles on, or albums by, Stravinsky.

Braque and Picasso were both founders of Cubism. Not only do their styles resemble each other, they share a similarity in content, in their use of music-related subjects such as the violin, guitar and mandolin. The only difference is that Braque uses an additional instrument as subject matter, the piano. Braque most admired the father of Western music, Johann Sebastian Bach, and produced a painting in his honour. He also frequently celebrated Bach by creating artworks which complemented the latter’s music.

20. Raoul Dufy: The Band on Sunday
Unlike other artists, Dufy was not content with portraying just one musical instrument or musician. He wanted to portray the entire band, at times adding the audience, as with the painting entitled *The Band on Sunday*. In the centre of the painting is a bandstand, where some musicians are performing delightful tunes. Scattered in the surrounding open grounds are the supposed music lovers — women carrying babies chatting, young couples whispering sweet nothings, businessmen reading newspapers, and children riding bicycles in circles. Their indifference to the musicians’ dedicated performance makes for an amusing scene that is laced with great irony.

Dufy greatly loved the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and produced two paintings in honour of him, one with red as the main colour, and the other with blue for the background. In both, he used lines to define the contours of the piano, thereafter adding Mozart’s music scores to complete his work. Dufy’s works are lucid and straightforward, and not dissimilar to Mozart’s music. One cannot use reason to assess the merits of his works.

Chagall’s works, which embody the rich and mysterious colours of Russia, have a poetic dimension and religious air to them. This painting of a green fiddler was meant to be a portrait of his uncle. The fiddler wishes to bring man and God together through music. The fiddler’s green complexion symbolises his detachment from this temporal world; his feet, which are lifting off from the roofs that he stands on, are a concrete statement of his ascension. A man is shown flying in the clouds, intimating advancement from a
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20. Raoul Dufy: The Band on Sunday

Unlike other artists, Dufy was not content with portraying just one musical instrument or musician. He wanted to portray the entire band, at times adding the audience, as with the painting entitled The Band on Sunday. In the centre of the painting is a bandstand, where some musicians are performing delightful tunes. Scattered in the surrounding open grounds are the supposed music lovers — women carrying babies chatting, young couples whispering sweet nothings, businessmen reading newspapers, and children riding bicycles in circles. Their indifference to the musicians' dedicated performance makes for an amusing scene that is laced with great irony.

Dufy greatly loved the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and produced two paintings in honour of him, one with red as the main colour, and the other with blue for the background. In both, he used lines to define the contours of the piano, thereafter adding Mozart's music scores to complete his work. Dufy's works are lucid and straightforward, and not dissimilar to Mozart's music. One cannot use reason to assess the merits of his works.


Chagall's works, which embody the rich and mysterious colours of Russia, have a poetic dimension and religious air to them. This painting of a green fiddler was meant to be a portrait of his uncle. The fiddler wishes to bring man and God together through music. The fiddler's green complexion symbolises his detachment from this temporal world; his feet, which are lifting off from the roofs that he stands on, are a concrete statement of his ascension. A man is shown flying in the clouds, intimating advancement from a
Music that depicts paintings

Painting is a spatial and visual art that builds images with light and colour. People use sight to recognise the appearance of various objects. Music, on the other hand, is a temporal and aural art: invisible sounds vanish with each movement. However, musicians grasp the essence of the ever-changing natural world, and use the rise and fall in musical rhythm to create and paint an image for the listener. Painting is suited for expression; so is music. Yet, art is not an imitation of nature, but an expression of the spiritual. Thus, the closer it is to natural sounds, light, colours and shapes, the lower its value. It is that which is produced by those with the ability to absorb the quintessence of nature and create a personal distinct style that is of great value. Beethoven wrote on the original score of his Symphony No. 6: “The Pastoral Symphony — in memory of life in the countryside, with an emphasis on the expression of affection and not a descriptive painting.” Here, descriptive painting refers to pure replication, because in Beethoven's time, paintings in Germany were extremely objective and realistic, and similar to what we now refer to as "photographic depiction.” It is clear that Beethoven’s attitude towards composing music did not entail the ability to copy the natural world but the ability to express the archetype of the able, the perfect and the passionate. Although he is the founder of programme music, he never lost touch with “pure music.” This is why his art is outstandingly profound and eternally enduring, and why we must possess this perspective when considering all kinds of artworks, if we seek to thoroughly appreciate them.

Now, let us discuss a little the works of musicians which depict paintings.

1. Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony [Symphony No. 6 in F Major (Op. 68)]

The objective of programme music is to provide us with appreciable imagery. It has contour, colour and especially movement. It works with ideas and feelings, all things which you cannot touch, unlike physics and biology. It is special because it combines artistic concepts, literary narratives and painting-like descriptions that lead you into a transcendental world. This symphony by Beethoven induces men to praise nature and extol village life. The entire symphony is divided into five movements, each with a theme.

The first movement, “Awakening of Cheerful Feelings upon Arrival in the Country,” marks the end of spring; the sun is shining on the entire land, warm breezes sweep through the village houses, wild flowers and plants bloom everywhere, all creatures are moving about, and everything speaks of a desire for life and feelings of joy.

The second movement, “Scene at the Brook,” portrays a clear and gentle stream. Here, insects and fishes move at ease, grass and mud sway with the ripples; the nightingale, quail and cuckoo call from the woods, forming a trio in chorus.

In the third movement, “Happy Gathering of Peasants,” villagers are singing, dancing, merrymaking and celebrating the return of spring.

In the fourth movement, “Tempest, Storm,” thunder sounds ring from afar, followed by lighting and rain, sounding like a beast. The situation is frightful. Soon the rain stops and the sky clears. Here, it is fitting to mention Beethoven's ingenious technique in the transition of movements. You see, from the villagers' merrymaking to the disruption by the storm, and from the disappearance of the storm to the fifth movement, there is almost no trace of the shepherd giving thanks to God. Finally, the shepherds sing to each other. The music is transformed from being light and slender to firm and strong, and is expanded to a forceful rhythm. Suddenly, the music falls into silence, as if giving us an opportunity to breathe. Thereafter, pastoral songs sound again, gently and quietly from afar, symbolising the wish to seek peace until the symphony ends. Let us imagine this with our eyes closed. Immediately, a beautiful and animated painting appears, as if we were in it and personally experiencing the natural sights and joys of village life.

However, it is not possible to elaborate upon every point of the symphony — that would remain for the individual listener to interpret.

2. Modest Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition

After visiting an exhibition by his good friend Victor Hartmann, Russian composer Mussorgsky was suddenly inspired and composed this unique piano concerto
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describing his impression of ten of the paintings (it was in turn later transmuted by France's Joseph-Maurice Ravel into orchestral music). He used four “strolling” interludes as links. The subject matter of the paintings was quite varied, such as “Self-portrait,” “Dispute between Children at Play,” “Wandering Singer,” “Polish Cow Cart,” “The Set of a Ballet Performance,” “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuylé,” “Old Russian Thatched House” and “Kiev Castle” (“The Bogatyr Gates”), among others. Using complicated symbols, an elegant sound and a suitable tempo, Mussorgsky enabled each painting to illustrate the theme of the music. Naturally, the audience would not share feelings identical to the artist, yet the emotional changes one experiences when visiting an exhibition and moving from one painting to another are well captured by this composition.

3. Alexander Borodin: *In the Steppes of Central Asia*

Borodin was a doctor who used his spare time to dabble in music, becoming as accomplished as many professional musicians. His works are rich in Russian folk flavour, making them even more priceless. *In the Steppes of Central Asia* is a short composition with a concise and powerful theme. After its premiere, it was immediately praised by the art world, and Borodin’s fame spread. He dedicated the work to the king of pianists, Liszt. For explication, he added a caption on the score: “In the silence of the arid steppes of Central Asia, the refrain of a peaceful Russian song is heard. We also hear the melancholy sound of Oriental music, and the approach of horses and camels. A caravan, escorted by Russian soldiers, crosses the immense desert and goes undisturbed on its journey. The caravan moves onward steadily as Russian and Asian songs mingle harmoniously, their refrains dying away little by little in the distance.” This is a magnificent image the grandeur and meaning of which are not easily expressed by words.


In Western music, this symphony is richest in exotic flavour and could also be said to be the most colourful, like an audio painting with the most vigorous brushwork. It resembles a picture storybook that brings together different stories and pictures, as with the four movements of the suite. The first movement, “The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship,” the second movement “The Tale of the Kalender Prince,” the third movement “The Young Prince and the Young Princess,” and the fourth movement “Festival at Baghdad; The Sea; The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock Surmounted by a Bronze Warrior” all feature the use of lively colour brushes to paint vivid images, with relatively short overtures and intermezzos as clues between each movement that unify the entire symphony. The overtures and intermezzos were written for the solo violin, representing the image of Scheherazade narrating stories to the cruel sultan. Actually, the entire piece of music does not specifically indicate the actions of the various segments or the content of each picture. As individuals may respond differently, it may sometimes produce completely opposite results. Perhaps we should use the author’s comments to illustrate: “I do not wish people to find in my works an obvious storyline and details. Thus, when I republished the work, I completely erased the prompts on the scores and even the symbols on each music score. When I was composing *Scheherazade*, I added these symbols only in the hope that listeners may imagine by following the experience of my imagination. However, I give ample freedom to every audience — they can apprehend more concrete and detailed ideas based on their own state of mind. I only wish that the audience would consider my music a symphony to enjoy.”

5. Robert Schumann: *Spring Symphony*

Schumann borrowed from the spring of nature to sing of the spring of his own life. *Spring Symphony* reflects the musician’s marital bliss and was composed as a gift to his beloved wife. Schumann first used “Awakening of Spring” and “Farewell to Spring” as the titles for the first and fourth movements. Later, he removed it for fear that the listener would be constrained by the titles and inhibited from appreciating its artistic value. The entire composition is in fact a fervent exaltation of the charm and innocence of spring. After hearing her husband’s music, Schumann’s wife wrote in her diary: “I shall never forget the fragrant flowering branch, the tender young leaves, the trickle of the stream and the chirping of the birds... Which of these are not the source of youthful vitality?”

6. Claude Debussy: *The Sea*

The development of programme music peaked in Debussy’s hands. He interacted with contemporary poets and artists and applied developments and reforms in the realm of visual arts to the realm of music, earning a reputation as an Impressionist musician.
The Sea; The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock Surmounted by a Bronze Warrior” all feature the use of lively colour brushes to paint vivid images, with relatively short overtures and intermezzos as clues between each movement that unify the entire symphony. The overtures and intermezzos were written for the solo violin, representing the image of Scheherazade narrating stories to the cruel sultan. Actually, the entire piece of music does not specifically indicate the actions of the various segments or the content of each picture. As individuals may respond differently, it may sometimes produce completely opposite results. Perhaps we should use the author’s comments to illustrate: “I do not wish people to find in my works an obvious storyline and details. Thus, when I republished the work, I completely erased the prompts on the scores and even the symbols on each music score. When I was composing Scheherazade, I added these symbols only in the hope that listeners may imagine by following the experience of my imagination. However, I give ample freedom to every audience — they can apprehend more concrete and detailed ideas based on their own state of mind. I only wish that the audience would consider my music a symphony to enjoy.”

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not only sketched images, but also went a step further to absorb its essence and create a fantastical atmosphere. Debussy had a fondness for Chinese and Balinese musical rhythms. Hence, his works are elegant, with a refreshing serenity. His great composition, The Afternoon of a Faun, is his most outstanding exposition. The Sea is another of his masterpieces. It is divided into three movements: "From Dawn to Noon on the Sea." “Play of the Waves,” and “Dialogue between Wind and Waves.” It is not difficult, just by reading these subheadings, for soothing images to appear before one’s eyes.

Apart from the above musicians, there are also many outstanding personalities with many representative works. The 1812 Overture by the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is practically an oil painting on war. New World Symphony by Czech genius Antonín Dvořák conveys the full beauty of the Americas. The symphony of France’s Hector Berlioz, Harold in Italy, fully expresses the emotions of the Mediterranean people. The Blue Danube by Germany’s Johann Strauss charmingly depicts Europe’s most beautiful river.

Musicalisation in paintings

Painting is a spatial and visual art. Since time immemorial, all paintings have contained some musical origins, such as in the spectrum and intensity of colours, and gloomy or brilliant hues that would form rising and falling tempos. Lines uninhibited or restrained and compositions grand or simple all comprise emotional and harmonious rhythms. However, paintings in the past emphasised the depiction of objects. People were so rapt with the beauty of the surface that they neglected the potential of the musical quality within. This is an unfortunate development. When we stand before Michelangelo’s huge mural The Last Judgment (1541), we should not just observe the tight line-up of figures, the vividness of posture and movement, and the changes in muscular and facial movement. We also need to understand the interchanging rise and fall in hue, the rhythm creating contrast between light and shadow, the shift between the implied and the real in the composition, and the rhythm that is produced. It is just like how the melody of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 in C Minor (Op. 67) affects us. Similarly, when we concentrate on Raphael’s portrait of Madonna, the strength of the colours and the refreshing structure immediately conjure within the soul a concerto by Mozart. As for the landscape and still-life paintings of van Gogh and Matisse, their bright colours and liberated brushstrokes make one feel as if someone is hiding behind them, performing Liszt’s or Chopin’s rhapsodies and mazurkas. In summary, visual and audio perceptions have long been interrelated; they come together in paintings.

Since Wassily Kandinsky, modern paintings have formally used musical movement as a theme for creation and have distilled its essence. Kandinsky abandoned the depiction of all natural shapes and relied on the free combination of dots, lines, surfaces and colours to form a kind of two-dimensional abstract art. This is similar to musicians using notes to express their ideas and emotions, and arranging them into compositions, only painters seek a balanced structure of the picture, consistent colour tones, and a magical power to elicit resonance from the viewer. They consider this the objective of art. Both Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian were also experts in this area. Both were born to musical families and fully understood every musical syllable. Undoubtedly, their deep understanding meant greater accomplishments. Subsequently, Mondrian went a step further and developed a new creative art movement which had a great influence on architectural styles. That is another topic in itself.

There are particularly scientific and philosophical reasons for art to gravitate towards a kind of musicality. As modern life became increasingly hectic and emotionally unstable, man could only observe and appreciate the external appearance of things without truly satisfying his desires. Hence, he had to thoroughly pursue the physiology and psychology of all things. Abstract art was thus born. Even if abstract art disappears from the face of the earth one day, the presence of musicality in paintings will not change.

Music and painting are sister arts. The breadth of their scope and their intimate relationship should not be treated lightly. There are many topics worth exploring, such as comparing the changes they have undergone in history, differences in perspectives between the East and the West, and similar destinies of musicians and artists. Here, I am just making the first step, marking a milestone. The rest of this important responsibility will have to be assumed by you.
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The Definition of an Intellectual

An essay in *Time* magazine once stated, “A doctoral degree is no longer considered sufficient to qualify one as an intellectual. Even a university professor is not necessarily an intellectual. A scientist is considered an intellectual only if he meets certain criteria.”

The publication’s definition of intelligentsia was based on two hypotheses:

1. An intellectual cannot merely be a scholar — his soul must also possess an independent spirit and creative ability. He has to pursue a perspective for the sake of pursuing it. As Richard Hofstadter says, “An intellectual lives for the pursuit of a perspective.” And, in the words of Christopher Lasch, “An intellectual’s life is about thinking.”

2. An intellectual must be critical of society and its prevailing values, as was Socrates.

No matter how much education a person has received, as long as he is not sceptical and critical of fashionable views, prevailing customs and casually adopted values, he is nothing but a “living bookshelf.” An academic who goes with the crowd does not have a soul.

I think we may borrow these remarks to make a stand for artists.

If an artist who has spent his entire life painting does not have a pure and virtuous heart or the ability and energy to create, he is only a craftsman. He who fears to challenge convention and who holds on to the dregs of tradition is a homunculus, not a real human being.

Our society’s lack of depth is perhaps due to its heavy emphasis on economics. At the same time, our history is short, and the cultural cultivation of our people is substantially lacking. We have many good painters, but discerning and deep-thinking artists are rare. Despite the many good essays published, we have yet to see a serious and discerning critic. Many exhibitions have taken place, but very few artworks are really worth viewing. Ink painters show a lack of foundation in calligraphy, while oil painters are unable to produce stable and realistic sketches. It would be dreadful if this situation persists!