

## Absolute or Absolutely Not?

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A serene sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water's surface. Silhouettes of trees are visible along the shoreline, and their reflections are clearly seen in the calm water. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Absolute or Absolutely Not?

An exploration of absolute music and program music



# What is Absolute Music?

- Refers to the concept of music in and of itself, with no extramusical associations
- Applied to instrumental music because it has no words
- Idea developed and became widely known in the nineteenth century



# The History of Absolute Music

- The term was first coined by Richard Wagner in 1846, in reference to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony
- The term became popular with the increase of instrumental music in the 18th century; gained popularity throughout the 19th century with Romantic greats such as Chopin, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Brahms.
- Instrumental Romantic music, such as Chopin's piano ballades, mazurkas, nocturnes, and waltzes, could be thought of as absolute music- it could convey specific emotions as grief, joy, anger, and sensuality.





## Some Examples of Absolute Music

- Beethoven's 5th Symphony
- Chopin Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2
- Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor "Moonlight"
- Brahms' Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98





# What is Program Music?

- Refers to instrumental music that tells a story or depicts an event, characters, or ideas





# The History of Program Music

- This idea in music could be seen as far back as the 17th century during the time of Baroque masters Bach and Handel.
- Became popular in Europe during the Romantic period (19th century)





## Factors Influencing Program Music

- Commonly associated with nationalism as composers became increasingly nationalistic in their styles during the 2nd half of the 19th century.
- Also associated with exoticism, which also gained popularity during this era.





# Popular Nationalistic and Exotic Pieces

## Nationalism

- Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*
- Smetana, *The Moldau*

## Exoticism

- Bizet, *Carmen*
- Puccini, *Madama Butterfly*



# Genres

Many genres arose out of the development of program music

- Music drama (Wagner)
- Tone/symphonic poem (Strauss, Liszt)
- Art song (Schubert)
- Character piece (Schumann)
- Program symphony (Berlioz)





# Ravel's *Jeux D'eau*

<https://youtu.be/Temwd5s7Lj0>



- Composed by French Impressionist composer Maurice Ravel in 1901
- Impressionism- a movement among various composers in Europe (mainly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries); music focuses on mood and perception.
- *Jeux D'eau*-translates to "water games"
- Use of whole-tone scales, rushing scales, open fifths, fourths figures- evokes the sound and movement of water



# Some Questions to Ask Yourself

- *Could this be a character piece or a piece "for music's sake?"*
- *Does the music speak for itself, or does it evoke specific imagery to you?*
- *What have these categorizations of music (absolute and program) helped you learn about music?*

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