



## "Music Begins"

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*Do you know that our soul is composed of harmony? -Leonardo da Vinci -notebooks*

Okay, I admit it.

I am not very sophisticated.

I grew up in the seventies and the eighties with Rock and Punk and with the mainstream music of those eras. Supertamp, Jethro Tull, Yes, Aerosmith, Styx, The Stones and Led Zeppelin to name a few. I went to some concerts and some clubs back then. I've listened to Christian Music and Gospel, and instrumental guitar. I've gone through a period of the "New Age" music, and some Jazz. The selections changed with age and depending on what I was doing. More mellow at the drawing table, faster and harder when I was getting ready to compete or exercising.

But I never really listened to Classical Music.

Except maybe in movies.

Or elevators.

After almost 15 years as a sales rep in the insurance industry, I renewed my interest in Art, and at the time my avenue for the renewal came in the form of Calligraphy. As I was practicing or doing homework, I found myself always listening to music of all sorts. I would make playlists on my computer and sort them from "Rock" to "Drawing Table Music". And usually it was the more serene music that I was drawn to while creating.

Later, after my calligraphic training, and after the road had led me to the style of "themed paintings" that have directed me for the past three years I wanted to do a painting about Music. I wanted to do something about the root and the soul of music itself and the composers who gave us this treasure. I wanted to do a painting about Classical Music.

*O Music,  
In your depths we deposit  
Our hearts and souls.  
Thou hast taught us to see with our ears  
And hear with our hearts.*

*Kahlil Gibran (The Prophet)*



The movie "Amadeus"<sup>1</sup>, that unforgettable portrayal of the genius Mozart, made an impact on me. The music was immense, the acting excellent, the costumes stunning. It won multiple Academy Awards, and rightly so.

And so I turned back to this 15 year old film to get my start in preparation for this painting.

I watched the movie, then bought the soundtrack. I made classical music playlists on the computer... Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Schubert, Beethoven, Chopin, Verdi, Vivaldi, Strauss, Mahler, Bach and Beethoven. I listened, and read about them, and looked at photographs, and did some letterforms. Each time I heard a piece of music that I liked or that spoke to me, I'd get up and look at the composer. Mostly the ones that spoke to me at that time were Mozart, Beethoven's violin sonatas and romances and many of Schubert's pieces. I began to get a feel for what moved me.

I studied some painters who had interpreted Music in their paintings. The Masters used musical consonances in formulating their compositions<sup>2</sup>; Raphael, Leonardo, Botticelli, Titian, Giorgione. The modern masters painted music too: Klee and Kandinsky, Delunay and Richter, Braque and Picasso, Mondrian. All individual interpretations of Music, all variously having pattern and rhythm, coloring and shading, tone and reflection.<sup>3</sup>

I read about the relationship of Music and Mathematics, and Science, and astronomy.<sup>4</sup> I studied and searched for quotes about music, and began to compile references.

For two months.

And then it was time.

*Look out! Be on your guard because alone of all the arts, music moves all around you.*  
-Jean Cocteau

I had a large canvas tacked up to my studio wall, and with a large compass and a large brush began to make circles.

A piece that captivated me was Mozart's 25<sup>th</sup> symphony. As I listened to this, the sounds seemed to explode forward and surround me. I tried to visualize with the circles the pattern and color of the various parts that make up the symphony. They were created with energetic brushstrokes even as the sounds were created with great energy. The circles symbolize the way that music surrounds the listener and envelopes one in its call to them.



The colors are transparent, so that the “sounds” will blend and shade as they combine themselves into a cohesive unit. The colors themselves and the sizes of the circles symbolize differing sounds or different instruments, some higher and in front, some larger and lower and in the background. Different tones, different shades. And perhaps the most important element is the depth of the space in the middle, the pauses in the symphony, and the space around the composition allowing the “music” to come forward.

*Tone is light in another shape... in music instruments perform the function of the colours employed in painting. – Honore’ de Balzac*

The circles setting the tone for the piece, it was time to begin to add the thoughts to give articulation of thought to the soul of music and composition. One of the most important things to me was what the composer/artist was thinking when he wrote his music and this lead me to Beethoven’s explanation:

*"You will ask where my ideas come from. I cannot say for certain. They come uncalled, sometimes independently, sometimes in association with other things. It seems to me that I could wrest them from Nature herself with my own hands, as I go walking in the woods. They come to me in the silence of the night or in the early morning, stirred into being by moods which the poet would put into words but which I put into sounds; and these go through my head ringing and singing and storming until at last I have them before me as notes."  
-Ludwig van Beethoven, letter to a friend, 1823*

This first piece of text on the canvas is added as a vertical element which will begin to form a pattern or structure for the composition. As more verticals are added, they will begin to form the “beat” of the composition. Next to this was added Beethoven’s likeness, represented from the famous memorial in Vienna.

It was important to me to actually have music integrated on the canvas, and I chose that same 25<sup>th</sup> symphony of Mozart. The notes of the music themselves were done in a loose “s” shape to curve and blend and echo the basic circular structures already present. There are other fragments of music added to the composition later as highlights.

In another book that I had read called “the Piano Shop on the Left Bank”<sup>5</sup>, I learned of that basic rule that all musicians know but which I as an outsider was unaware, the circle of fifths. A musician friend of mine noticed that as I placed some of the other single lines of text they began to bisect these circles in the basic structures of music... halves and thirds and eighths and fifths and so on... some of these lines are short, and some are long, traversing the canvas even as there are recurring sounds that traverse the symphony.



*Music is not illusion, but revelation rather. Its triumphant power resides in the fact that it reveals to us beauties we find nowhere else, and the apprehension of them is not transitory, but a perpetual reconciliation to life. – Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky*

The images I chose for the painting were reflective of the solitude of the composer/artist/performer and listener. Some of the greatest symphonies the world has ever heard were conceived by the composer alone. Even though many people may come to a concert and listen to selections at a gathering, the listener experiences the sound within himself. And yet even when we are alone...

*Who hears music feels his solitude peopled at once – Robert Browning*

And so even as Beethoven's stern and somewhat tortured countenance reflects the "ringing and singing and storming" going through his head, the composer at the bottom left is pictured in full concentration in the act of writing music. (Although I used my own model, this image is directly influenced by the film *Amadeus*<sup>1</sup>, in the scene where Mozart is writing at the pool table).

The largest image (that of the listener), reflects the transport of music on our being. The listener is taken from the reality of the moment into places that reflect the beauty of the soul:

*Music takes us out of the actual and whispers to us dim secrets that startle our wonder as to who we are, and for what, whence, and whereto. – Ralph Waldo Emerson*

And so the journey of this painting for me comes to a conclusion, but leaves me with the desire to begin another... to go along the avenues of Jazz and Blues and more Classical music, to put the greatest thoughts from the greatest minds the world has ever seen into words to try to express what music does. And yet at some point, all of the rhetoric must be put aside and one must simply listen, because:

*Where words leave off, music begins. –Heinrich Heine*

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<sup>1</sup> "Amadeus" Warner Bros. ©1984 the Saul Zaentz Company

<sup>2</sup> "The Painter's Secret Geometry"; Charles Bouleau ©1963, Harcourt and Brace

<sup>3</sup> "The Sound Of Painting – Music in Modern Art"; Karin V. Maur, © Prestel Verlag Munich London New York 1999

<sup>4</sup> "The Universe", A Convergence of Art, Music and Science Edited by Jay Belloli ©2001 The Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena CA

<sup>5</sup> "The Piano Shop on the Left Bank; Thad Carhart, © 2001 Random House