



Smithsonian Associates

Music Inspired by the Natural World

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A painter can create entire worlds on a flat piece of paper. But where is a composer to start when seeking to represent the natural universe through sound? Centuries of exquisite nature-inspired concert works show just how well it can be done through direct imitation, allegory, and symbolism. Over time, composers have fashioned powerful musical vocabularies that guide our ears to imagine harmony as visual image.

In this 4-session course, we explore how such masters as Beethoven, Mahler, Wagner, Schumann, Vivaldi, Debussy, Vaughan Williams, Takemitsu, Saint-Saëns, and countless others composed beloved works that conjure our natural world.

British-born Rachel Franklin has been a featured speaker for organizations including the Library of Congress and NPR, exploring intersections among classical and jazz music, film scores, and the fine arts.

MAY 24 Earth: Its Creation, Seasons, and Landscapes

We begin with perhaps the most greatly loved example of the natural world in concert music, Beethoven's 6th Symphony, the "Pastoral." Both allegorical and descriptive, it creates an entire earthly landscape of peasants and animals, harvesting, stormy weather and golden sunlit fields. Following this triumph, other composers such as Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler led the way with further symphonic panoramas of mountainous and mystical terrains. We also explore many representations of weather, seasons, flora and fauna by Vivaldi, Piazzolla, Delibes, Schubert, Mark O'Connor, Janáček, Milhaud, Barber and more.

Works explored, media used:

L.V. Beethoven, 1770-1827: Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 "Pastoral", 1808

- Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwztfMeXGk4>

- Karl Böhm, Vienna Philharmonic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woZEKier3X8&t=2047s>

Pyotr Tchaikovsky, 1843-1893: "The Storm" Op. 76, 1864

- Antoni Wit, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMadC5A-0N8&t=112s>

Franz Liszt, 1811-1886: "Orage" from *Années de pèlerinage*. Première année: Suisse, S. 160, 1848-54

- Lazar Berman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSeps37NGjs>

Richard Strauss, 1864-1949: *Alpine Symphony*, Op. 64, 1915

- Zubin Mehta, LA Philharmonic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fS4Q2t4DAE4&t=2216s>

Gustav Mahler, 1860-1911: “*Ging heut' Morgen über's Feld*” from *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer), 1885

- Christian Gerhaher, Herbert Blomstedt, Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SI_0YaG-HsY

Antonio Vivaldi, 1678-1741: *Quattro Stagioni*, Concerto no. 3, *Autunno* (Autumn), Op. 8, RV 293

- Voices of Music, Carla Moore – baroque violin

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

Astor Piazzolla, 1921-1992, *Otoño Porteño*, The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires, 1969

- Soloist and conductor Liviu Prunaru, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9BWXWFYTJM>

Lepo Sumera, 1950-2000: *Seenekantaat* (Mushroom Cantata): III. *Carmen autumnus* (Autumn Song)

- Tõnu Kaljuste, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Talinn Chamber Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=artQL9Sk4uo>

Mark O'Connor, 1961: *The American Seasons (Seasons of an American Life)* for violin and orchestra, Summer, 1999

- Mark O'Connor, Scott Yoo, The Metamorphosis Chamber Orchestra

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf_KPcjVXQs

Samuel Barber, 1910-1981: *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*, Op. 24, 1948

- Dawn Upshaw, David Zinman, Orchestra of St. Luke's

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTR3oCCek74>

William Grant Still, 1895-1978: *Three Visions, Summerland*

- The Sylvan Winds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBqRNokzg1g>

Robert Schumann, 1810-1856: *Frühlingsnacht*, Liederkreis, Op. 39, 1840

- Wolfgang Holzmair, Imogen Cooper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqcq9swbUII>

Lili Boulanger, 1893-1918: *D'un matin de printemps*, 1918

- Yehudi Menuhin & Clifford Curzon

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbYIKmOIY_0

Leoš Janáček, 1854-1928: *In the Mists*, 1912

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974): *La Création du monde*, 1923

- Nicolas Chalvin, Orchestre des Pays de Savoie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg5GhEbSVcE&t=82s>

Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958: *Journey up the glacier*, from “Scott of the Antarctic” 1948

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b6BOI1jGBM>

Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 7, *Sinfonia Antartica*, 1952

- Andre Previn, London Symphony Orchestra, spoken excerpts Ralph Richardson

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

Franz Schubert, 1797-1828: *Heidenröslein*

- Arleen Auger, Erik Werba

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USNsanzD0iGc>

Léo Delibes, 1836-1891: *Flower duet*, Lakmé, 1882

- Sabine Devieille, Ambrosine Bré, Opéra Comique

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eqzh207ggY>