WATER in music
WATER
in music
Depicting Water in the Arts

What are the problems of representing WATER?

- Water is fluid, and thus seemingly “formless”
- While “formless,” water takes on many forms—droplets, sprays, currents, ripples, waves—so that there are many kinds of water to represent
Depicting Water in the Arts

- There are many bodies of water—oceans, rivers, lakes, streams, fountains—whose surfaces are constantly in motion: how do you represent the motion of water?
- On the other hand, there are bodies of water—pools, the depths of the ocean—that are seemingly completely still: how do you represent the stillness of water?
Before photography, painters developed different techniques to try to represent water.

In the case of Claude Monet (1840-1926) and the Impressionist painters, instead of trying to realistically depict water, attempted to give an impression of the movement of water with visible brushstrokes, as in Monet’s Impression, Sunrise.
Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise* (1872)
How can you depict WATER in MUSIC?
Water in Music?

- What is the sound of water? Drops, ripples, streams, splashes, waves—or even no sound at all?
- How can we give the impression of water using pitch, rhythm, meter, timbre, melody, and harmony?
Water in Music?

Musician playing “water” in Tan Dun’s Ghost Opera
Water in Music?

- What is the sound of water? Drops, ripples, streams, splashes, waves—or even no sound at all
- How can we give the impression of water using pitch, rhythm, meter, timbre, melody, and harmony?

USING METAPHORS
A metaphor is a connection between unrelated objects (water : music) using an analogy
An analogy is the mental process of attaching the information about one subject (water) to something else, such as language, images, or music...
What are the metaphors for water that composers have created?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WATER</th>
<th>MUSICAL METAPHOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depth of Water</td>
<td>Large Range (low to high)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep</td>
<td>Small Range (high)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Droplets, Rain</td>
<td>Short high notes, random rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jets of Water (Fountains)</td>
<td>Continuous fast, short notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waves</td>
<td>Notes moving from low to high to low again (up and down like a wave)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of Water Waves</td>
<td>Triple meter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Camille Saint-Saëns (1825-1921)
Camille Saint-Saëns
“Le Cygne”
[The Swan]
(1886)
Camille Saint-Saëns

"Le Cygne" [The Swan]
WATER = metaphor of something moving in Water
(the Swan swimming)
Le Cygne

- Triple meter = the sway of the ripples
- Two pianos playing arpeggios—“broken” chords—to represent the movement of the water, and the movement of the swan’s feet beneath the water
- Melody played by the cello to represent the swan, and the swan’s song
Swan Song

- There is an ancient superstition that swan’s are silent for most of their lives, but right before they die, they burst into a beautiful song.

- Saint-Saëns plays on this idea, by writing a beautiful melody for the cello as if it is the swan’s voice—its swan song.
Swan Song

- We also use the phrase “swan song” as a metaphor to something amazing or beautiful done just before someone dies:

  “The last album was his ‘swan song.’”
Swan Song

The famous ballet dancer Anna Pavlova commissioned a solo dance piece to the music of Saint-Saëns’ *Le Cygne* called *The Dying Swan* the plays on this belief.
Anna Pavlova in *The Dying Swan*
Saint-Saëns, *Le Cygne* [The Swan]

Anikó Illéyi, Cello; Gábor Cseke, Piano
Johann Strauss, Jr.
(1825-1899)
Johann Strauss, Jr.

- Johann Strauss, Jr. was a composer and conductor in Vienna, Austria, and was famous for his orchestra—the Johann Strauss Orchestra—that played dance music.
- Was known as “The Waltz King” because of the popularity of his waltzes (he wrote over 400).
Johann Strauss, Jr.

- The waltz is a triple-meter dance, that is done by a couple in “closed” position (the man embracing the woman).
- The dancers turn in half circles, and move counterclockwise around the dance floor.
The Waltz
Johann Strauss, Jr.

Strauss’ most famous waltz is *An der schönen blauen Donau* [By the Beautiful Blue Danube]
Johann Strauss, Jr.
An der schönen blauen Donau
(1867)
Johann Strauss, Jr.

- The Donau—or “Danube” in English—is a large river that flows through Europe, beginning in Germany’s Black Forest and ending at the Black Sea.
- The Danube flows through the center of the city of Vienna where Strauss worked, and the river is a kind of symbol (metaphor) for the city itself.
The Danube River

Vienna
The Danube River
Johann Strauss, Jr.

While all waltzes are in triple meter, Strauss uses the swaying rhythm of triple meter as a metaphor refer to the movement of the waters of the Danube
Musical metaphor of swayng water (the triple-meter WALTZ)
Johann Strauss, Jr.

- *By the Beautiful Blue Danube* is actually a series of waltzes—five in all—that are connected to each other.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waltz 1</td>
<td>00:00</td>
<td>“Blue Danube” Melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>00:38</td>
<td>Contrast melody in Woodwinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltz 2</td>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>Moving melody 2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:40</td>
<td>Singing melody in strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltz 3</td>
<td>2:14</td>
<td>“Viennese” melody 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:47</td>
<td>“Viennese” melody 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>3:00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltz 4</td>
<td>3:05</td>
<td>Broad melody A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:50</td>
<td>Broad melody B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>4:21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltz 5</td>
<td>4:31</td>
<td>“Yodel” melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:01</td>
<td>“Rowing” melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>5:36</td>
<td>Coda (An ending section)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An der schönen blauen Donau, Vienna New Year’s Concert
Léo Delibes (1836-1891)
Léo Delibes

- Léo Delibes is best-known today for his ballets *Coppélia* and *Sylvia*, and for his opera *Lakmé*.
- *Lakmé* takes place in colonial India, and tells the tragic love story of Lakmé, the daughter of a Brahmin priest, and Gerald, a British Army officer.
Léo Delibes
“Flower Duet”
Lakmé
(1883)
Léo Delibes

- Early in the opera Lakmé and her friend Malika gather flowers as they sail on the river in a small boat.
- As they pick the flowers they sing “Sous le dôme épais,” or as it’s better known, the “Flower Duet.”
“Under the dense canopy where the white jasmine, 
Blends with the rose 
On the flowering bank, laughing in the morning, 
Come, let us drift down together. 
Ah! Let's glide along Let us gently glide along 
with its enchanting flow 
Let us follow the fleeing current; 
On the rippling surface with a lazy hand. 
Come, let's go to the shore 
Where the bird sings, where the spring sleeps.”
Léo Delibes

- Delibes uses a triple meter to depict the swaying of the boat in the water: like Saint-Saëns’ *Le Cygne*, he is representing not only the movement of the water, but of something in the water (a boat).
- The *tempo* of the music is *slow*, representing the calm movement of the stream.
Léo Delibes

- Delibes also references something else—the type of songs that people sing when they are out boating—in this case, a kind of boating song called a **Barcarolle**
- Barcarolles are the songs sung by Venetian gondoliers, and are almost sung in a swaying triple-meter rhythm
A Venetian gondolier singing a barcarolle
Delibes, “Flower Duet” from *Lakme*

Sumi Jo (soprano) and Ah-Kyung Lee (Mezzo-soprano)
MUSIC to KNOW

O Camille Saint-Saëns, “The Swan” (Track 57, The 99 Most Essential Pieces of Classical Music)
O Johann Strauss, Jr., By the Beautiful Blue Danube (Track 28, The 99 Most Essential Pieces of Classical Music)
O Léo Delibes, “Flower Duet” from Lakme (Track 82, 111 Opera Masterpieces)
TERMS to KNOW

- Metaphor, Analogy
- Triple Meter
- Arpeggio
- “Swan Song”
- Waltz
- “Waltz King”
- Donau/Danube
- Tempo ("Time" = how fast or slow)
- Barcarolle, Gondolier