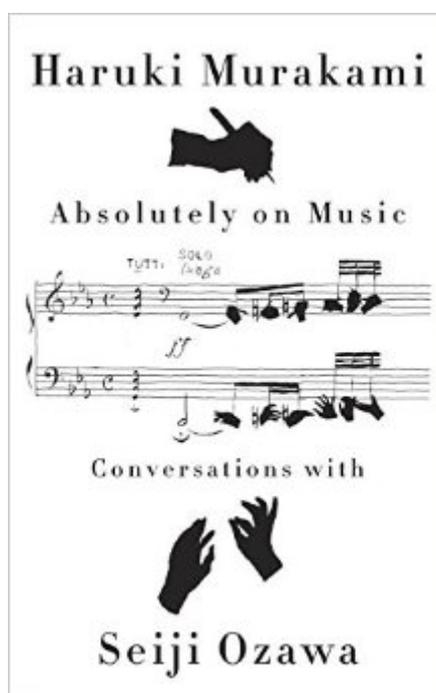


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# Absolutely On Music: Conversations



## Synopsis

A deeply personal, intimate conversation about music and writing between the internationally acclaimed, best-selling author and his close friend, the former conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Haruki Murakami's passion for music runs deep. Before turning his hand to writing, he ran a jazz club in Tokyo, and from The Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" to Franz Liszt's "Years of Pilgrimage," the aesthetic and emotional power of music permeates every one of his much-loved books. Now, in *Absolutely on Music*, Murakami fulfills a personal dream, sitting down with his friend, acclaimed conductor Seiji Ozawa, to talk, over a period of two years, about their shared interest. Transcribed from lengthy conversations about the nature of music and writing, here they discuss everything from Brahms to Beethoven, from Leonard Bernstein to Glenn Gould, from record collecting to pop-up orchestras, and much more. Ultimately this book gives readers an unprecedented glimpse into the minds of the two maestros. It is essential reading for book and music lovers everywhere.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Absolutely on Music, Conversations*, by Haruki Murakami with Seiji Ozawa translated from the Japanese by Jay Rubin delivers a stunning sense of what music can mean. Both Murakami and Ozawa are Japanese to the core, are about the same age, and both have received universal acclaim in the west. Murakami is someone who listens to multiple recordings of the same piece - and then hears it live multiple times - and can hear the differences, but he makes no music himself. Ozawa has been a conductor since he was a teenager and has handled the most complex and

demanding challenges of musical interpretation all over the world. The two are personal friends. The conversations took place during the period that Ozawa was recovering from esophageal cancer. The book speaks to different interpretations of the same music by different orchestras in different venues and by different conductors. We are offered insights into how conductors elicit a particular sound from their orchestras, and how gifted musicians are mentored. We are offered detailed descriptions of musical interpretations that are so well articulated that it enables the reader to become more astute at hearing and appreciating. The only complaint I have with the book is that there are no scores to look at, no music to hear, and no direct reference about how the interested reader could access that source material. We have to take on faith that what the two say is musical truth. The writing is so good that we hear the voice of each person. What they say is clear and forceful so that we believe them. However, it would be good to have an appendix or footnotes listing the specific recordings and the scores. The quality of the writing encourages readers to look at scores and hear the multiple interpretations of each piece. We are challenged to learn to enjoy music more, to hear better, with more discernment and greater appreciation. Ozawa speaks with his friend so clearly and with such deep appreciation, and Murakami listens, learns and writes so well that it enhances the reader's capacity to experience the musical universe. This book is a truly great gift.

Author Haruki Murakami and symphony conductor Seiji Ozawa first met socially in the early 1990s when Ozawa was leading the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Murakami also happened to be living in the city. While Murakami and his wife became friends with Ozawa's daughter and thus began to see the conductor more often, they never really sat down and had any friendly conversations about music or writing. Both of them were just too busy with their own lives. Things changed when Ozawa was diagnosed with esophageal cancer which caused him to have major surgery. The rehabilitation and recuperation forced Ozawa to take a break from his usual busy schedule and actually have some down time. This is when Murakami began to have conversations with him about music, life, and the different people like Leonard Bernstein who took a chance on the unknown Japanese musical wunderkind. At some point, Murakami decided that he wanted to share their talks with the world and turn it into a book. Murakami states his motive as "I simply wanted to bring out the ways that each of us....is dedicated to music." Right off the bat, I have to admit that even though I listen to a lot of classical music, it doesn't really matter to me who is conducting particular pieces I like. To me, I judge the quality of a particular performance more by the actual artists playing the music rather than the conductor. So I did not recognize the name Seiji Ozawa even though I feel like I SHOULD have known about him. At this point, probably a lot of classical

music fans are crying "You CLOD!". Oh well. At some point during the reading of this book, I began to lose the enjoyment I had when I first started it. To me the same conversations got repeated over and over again and it all seemed a bit superficial. It would usually go something like this: Murakami: Hey Seiji, have you heard the 1970 recording of The Prelude to the Afternoon of a Frog? Ozawa: That exists? Murakami: Yeah (They listen to track and comment on it in vague generalities, (the book does include minute marks so you can hear the exact music bits they are discussing)) Murakami: Hey Seiji, have you heard the 1975 version of the same piece? Ozawa: No, I bet it sounds different. Murakami: Yeah. And it just goes on and on like that. Even though I love Mahler, hearing their comments about his different symphonies made his music sound so boring and dry. To me, they never really got to the essence of any of the composers they discussed. They all end up about the technical aspects of conducting which was ok at first, but by the 200th page, they can begin to wear. I never really felt enlightened about anything they said. I felt like me and one of my friends could sit in a bar and go about as deep. Every once in a while, Ozawa would have an interesting anecdote about his life. For example, when he was young and married and poor in New York City, him and his wife would sleep in all night movie theaters to keep warm during the winter. It made me wish that Ozawa had chosen to write an autobiography instead of participating in the production of this work. It would have been more interesting. Murakami just seems constantly out of his depth talking to Ozawa and becomes more of a shadow supporting character who would have served himself better by stepping out of the picture entirely. I find this hard to recommend to Murakami fans or even classical music fans. The writing is just so dry and the conversations so banal to me. If you never read this, you won't be missing much.

Recommended for readers well versed in music - especially classical and jazz. There are references to classical composers, conductors, soloists, jazz musicians, and classical rock icons. If you don't know the difference between Beethoven and Brahms or who Alfred Brendel is, or Leonard Bernstein... then there will be a lot of head scratching. (These are just a few examples). This is an interesting book. It follows an interview style format: Murakami and Seiji Ozawa, the celebrated conductor from the Boston Philharmonic, have discussions about musical pieces. It helps for readers to have at least a passing knowledge of both Murakami's writing, and the pieces they discuss. They delve heavily into Beethoven and Brahms, as well as Mahler (whose music I cannot stand!). Their insights are interesting, and the pieces they discuss make a lovely background for reading. Except Mahler - no one should be subjected to Mahler (I'm joking - at least a little). But for the reader who is interested in music, this is a very good, very fast paced read. I consider myself

very well versed in classical music (season subscriber to the Oregon Symphony and a frequent attendee at the Portland Opera), and there were still a few folks (conductors or soloists) referenced that I wasn't familiar with. But these are few and far between - many are more international, often Japanese. But it helps to know the main composers: Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Liszt, Bartok, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Elgar, Mendelssohn, etc...Another recommendation: if you want to read it and discover the music, just hit the spotify app and queue up the pieces they discuss. It's a good way to discover amazing classical music, classic jazz, and more! With Murakami and Ozawa as your navigators!

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