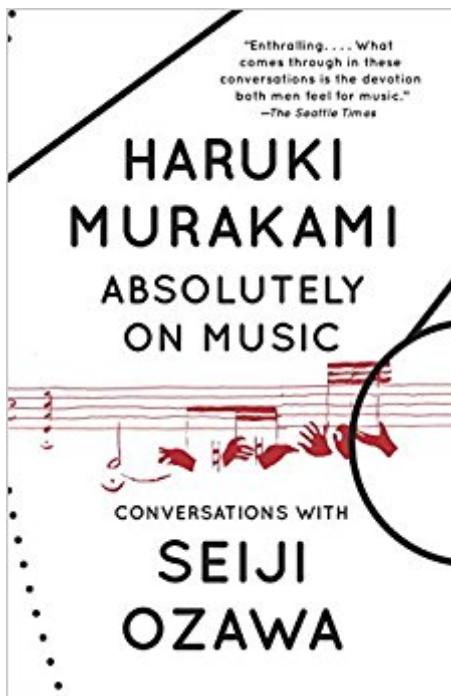


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# Absolutely On Music: Conversations (Vintage International)



## Synopsis

A deeply personal, intimate conversation about music and writing between the internationally acclaimed, best-selling author and the former conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In *Absolutely on Music*, internationally Haruki Murakami sits down with his friend Seiji Ozawa, the revered former conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, for a series of conversations on their shared passion: music. Over the course of two years, Murakami and Ozawa discuss everything from Brahms to Beethoven, from Leonard Bernstein to Glenn Gould, from Bartók to Mahler, and from pop-up orchestras to opera. They listen to and dissect recordings of some of their favorite performances, and Murakami questions Ozawa about his career conducting orchestras around the world. Culminating in Murakami's ten-day visit to the banks of Lake Geneva to observe Ozawa's retreat for young musicians, the book is interspersed with ruminations on record collecting, jazz clubs, orchestra halls, film scores, and much more. A deep reflection on the essential nature of both music and writing, *Absolutely on Music* is an unprecedented glimpse into the minds of two maestros. A selection of the music discussed by Murakami and Ozawa is available at [harukimurakami.com](http://harukimurakami.com).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Highly entertaining. . . . A book that opens a new side of [Murakami's] authorial persona.” •San Francisco Chronicle “*Absolutely on Music* is an unprecedented treasure. . . . Talking about music is like dancing about architecture, it’s

often said, but what joy to watch these two friends dance. The Guardian "Enthralling. . . . What comes through in these conversations is the devotion both men feel for music; the degree to which every detail of a work matters to them." The Seattle Times "Fascinating. . . . [Murakami's] preparation and curiosity draw out Mr. Ozawa wonderfully." The Wall Street Journal "An enviable word picture of the artistic life of two men at the top of their professional games. . . . [Absolutely on Music] offers so much that bears re-reading and considering." The Washington Times "Irresistibly seductive." Evening Standard "Refreshingly honest and enthusiastic, a mental sampler from both the writer and the musician." The Buffalo News "The book shines as a deep exploration into how a conductor does his job and how performer personalities, logistical factors, and mundane bureaucracies can change an orchestra's sound." The New Republic "Intriguing insights about the nature of music. . . . In some ways, these conversations are High Fidelity for classical music fans." Publishers Weekly "A strange and delightful book. . . . [Murakami] describes music with rich and suggestive metaphors and images that capture something essential about the spirit of the music." The Christian Science Monitor

Haruki Murakami was born in Kyoto in 1949 and now lives near Tokyo. His work has been translated into more than fifty languages, and the most recent of his many international honors is the Hans Christian Andersen Literature Award, whose previous recipients include J. K. Rowling, Isabel Allende, and Salman Rushdie. [www.harukimurakami.com](http://www.harukimurakami.com) Seiji Ozawa served as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for twenty-nine years, and was music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Ravinia Festival, and Wiener Staatsoper. With Kazuyoshi Akiyama, he formed the Saito Kinen Orchestra and is the director of the Seiji Ozawa Matsumoto Festival. Ozawa has been deeply involved in musical education through his work with the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, the Ozawa International Chamber Music Academy Okushiga, the Seiji Ozawa International Academy Switzerland, and as founder of the Seiji Ozawa Music Academy Opera Project, organizations which provide opportunities to outstanding students in Asia and Europe. Among his many honors, Ozawa has been awarded France's Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, the Japanese Order of Culture, a Kennedy Center Honor, and a Grammy for Best Opera Recording.

I enjoyed Ozawa confirming my suspicions about the styles of other conductors—particularly Bernstein. Murakami and I share a bewilderment on Mahler. I was happy to find this out.

Murakami and Ozawa together over tea, talking passionately about music, comparing different performances, reminiscing the conductor's life, youth and his journey and the people he has met, and Murakami with his admiration and wonder... When I read this book and listened to the music, I felt like I was with them, listening to their gentle beautiful conversation, in beautiful, classic Japanese proprieties. How musical their conversations must have sounded, I wonder, and how refreshing it must be to have someone, in mature age, to talk about something as pure as music when the world we live in is surrounded with so much evil, and lives filled with regrets. For someone like myself, who loves music but has about average or perhaps, just slightly above average knowledge, this was a huge inspiration and delight. It was fascinating to learn about how musicians, composers and conductors approach to music differently, and how each individual's history and experiences--such as Mr. Ozawa seeing Klimt and Egon Schiele--can deepen his relationship with music.

Classical music has scores with composers' notes and instructions; yet each performance, each conductor, each orchestra creates a different result. Soloists especially make a career out of their unique approach to the music. Novelist Haruki Murakami and conductor Seiji Ozawa, battling cancer, had a series of conversations on such subjects, as well as on Ozawa's life as a music director. This book, in translation, presents the interviews conducted over several years. Murakami happens also to be an avid collector of classical albums, CD and LP, and besides an extensive gathering of Ozawa's own recordings, he has multiple renditions of particular Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, and Berlioz pieces, which he played to further the discussion. Good familiarity of these core classical composers is necessary to appreciate the topics. No scores are presented but a website is given with samples of the compositions. For the classical music enthusiast, the easily and quickly read book provides insights into the art and also the duties of the conductor. Ozawa had training with Leonard Bernstein and Herbert von Karajan and subsequently has led numerous orchestras. I personally remember his youthful years as conductor of the San Francisco Symphony after Josef Krips. The entertaining and informative talks explain the ways of conducting and the interactions with musicians, and the extensive presentation on Mahler adds a new dimension to listening to his

symphonies. Murakmai proved to be a deep listener, who while not a musician himself, has an ear for subtle differences in performances of soloists and the orchestra at large. Thus, the two men could delve into specifics. The magic of a brilliant performance remains a mystery, but the reader will have gained greater understanding of its components.

Fascinating. never read anything like it. Murakami is such a fan, and such a good asker of questions; Ozawa is such a regular guy (considering he is a great conductor) and very good at reflecting on what he has played and what others have played. It is great that in this era we can listen to many of the performances mentioned without requiring an enormous record library. The book is entertaining and absorbing even for some one without extensive knowledge of classical music.

Nice insight if you are classical music lover. Conversation is between two great maestros in two different art world which makes it even more intriguing.

Murakami is also a writer that rarely fails; he has written the conversations he had with Seiji Ozawa, definitely the most important figure on Western music from Japan. But the conversations also are full of love (for Ozawa), and understanding and sympathy. Ozawa comes out bigger...and so does Murakami. Both come out of the book well, very well.

I am a Murakami addict. I knew Seiji Ozawa back in the 1960s when he was an assistant to Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic. It was fascinating and lovely to read about the conversations between these two giants. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to spend some special time with these two men. You will be glad you did.

What a remarkable lyrical open easy read. I have encouraged anyone who cares about classical music to read it. It's a gem!

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