

## What is word painting

Written by Jenn

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Word painting is a type of musical composition technique in which the tones, tempos, and dynamics of the notes reflect the subject matter of a given song. This method of music styling is also frequently called tone painting or text painting. Some examples of word painting date back to church music of the 10th century that included chants in rising tones to describe Jesus' resurrection. Experimentation with word painting in music continued into the baroque music era of the 1700s, and some of George Frideric Handel's pieces are good examples. One of the most common characteristics of tone painting is the use of low notes to describe grim topics and higher notes to convey optimistic ones.

The process of composing music with text painting typically involves writing notes that correspond to the feelings that a certain word evokes in listeners. Lyrics describing darkness and death are usually set to low-toned and even dissonant notes. Certain phrases can also be written with long and even notes or with short rapid ones depending on the words' meanings and connotations.

Once the baroque music era gave way to the classical during the late 1700s, word painting fell out of style among many composers who believed it was a musical cliché. Some popular music genres of the late 20th and early 21st century saw a minor word painting renaissance. Some artists began experimenting with creative ways of incorporating text painting when pairing their lyrics with melodies and harmonies. Many of their efforts resulted in songs that were memorable among listeners for these patterns of sound.

A visual application of tone painting to film is known as Mickey Mousing in reference to its frequent use in early animated films from the Walt Disney Company during the 1920s and 1930s. This musical technique pairs gestures or movements on the screen with the rhythms and notes of an accompanying instrumental score. Mickey Mousing was originally intended for comic effect and for emphasis, although it eventually fell out of favor with most audiences and critics due to excessive use. The purely instrumental scores used in Mickey Mousing films saw a decline soon after the adoption of spoken dialogue in both animated and live action films.

Additional appearances of word painting can be found in musical reservata, which is a form of a cappella singing that first gained popularity during the 16th century. This vocal music was composed specifically with extra tonal embellishments to emphasize certain words and phrases. Composing music with tone painting strictly for the human voice was usually considered just as challenging as doing so for musical instruments.

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