

Lecture 4 – Music and Colour

1. Music and Colour

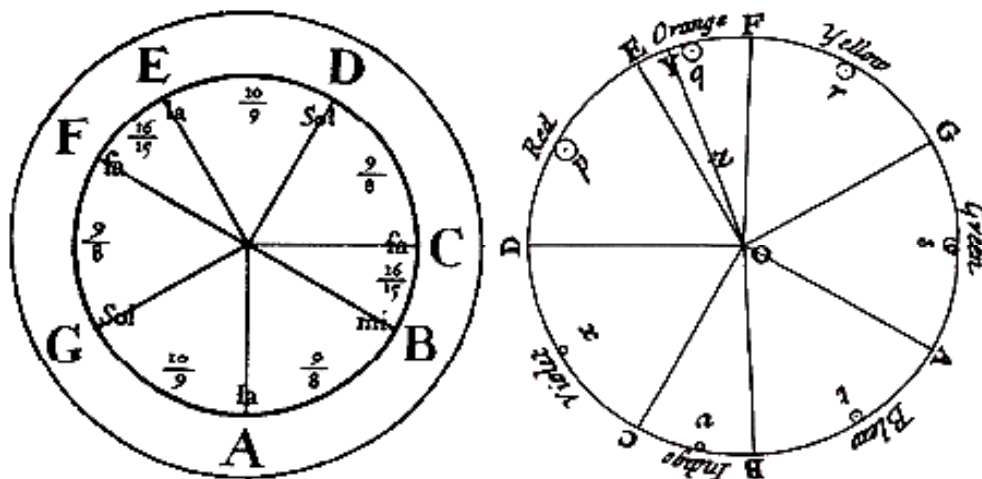
Q. What musical descriptions use colour (or visual) terminology?

Q. Is there a relationship between colour and sound?

Q. If music might be regarded as organised sound, what is the colour equivalent, and what is its relationship to music?

2. Physical and Historical Correspondences

Isaac Newton – *Opticks* [1704]



The Musical Cycle of Thomas Salmon & Isaac Newton's Colour Music Disc.

Salmon's circular arrangement of the musical scale (left) first appeared in *Vindication of an Essay* of 1672, and bears a striking resemblance to Newton's 1704 diagram (right), called Figure 11 in Proposition 6, Problem 2, in Book 1, Part 2, of *Opticks*. Though both have a precedent in circular scales of Descartes, published in 1650, they share one unique feature - the letter names for musical notes, prominently marked round the perimeter. Salmon follows the sol-fa syllables Newton used - sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi, fa, sol - though his run counter clockwise, starting from D. Both use the same just intervals, but most major and minor tones (9:8 and 10:9) swap places. Only Newton's scale was meant for colours, and displays an idealized symmetry about D (that Salmon's appears to, is due to simplified draftsmanship).

[<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~colmusic/opticks3.htm>]

Complementary Colours

The complementary colours are the three primary colours, red, blue and yellow, and their secondaries. Secondary colours are the colours obtained by mixing the primaries in all their combinations of pairs. So the three secondary colours are green, orange and violet. The complementary pairs are red-green, blue-orange and yellow-violet.

[www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=468]

3. A Change of Focus?

Schönberg: *Theory of Harmony* – Klangfarbenmelodien

Schönberg: 'Eine blasse Wäscherin' – *Pierrot Lunaire*
'Farben' – *Five Orchestral Pieces*

Webern: Slow movement – *Symphonie*, op. 21

4. Colour Organs

Louis-Bertrand Castel: 'Clavecin Oculaire'

Alexander Wallace Rimington: *Colour-Music – The Art of Mobile Colour* [1911]

A.B. Klein: *Colour Music: the Art of Light* [1926]

Thomas Wilfred's 'Clavilux'

[<http://images.library.yale.edu/madid/> and search for 'Thomas Wilfred']

5. Hearing Colours, Seeing Sounds

Synaesthetic composers:

Rimsky Korsakov
Alexander Scriabin
Arthur Bliss
Olivier Messiaen

Messiaen: *Music and Color* – 'Of Sounds and Colors'

Messiaen: *Chronochromie*

6. Painting Music

Wassily Kandinsky: *Concerning the Spiritual in Art; Point and Line to Plane*

Paul Klee: *Notebooks; Lecture Notes; Pedagogical Sketchbook*

7. Further Reading

P.A. Scholes: 'Colour and Music' in *The Oxford Companion to Music*
(London, 1938, 10/1970), 181–9