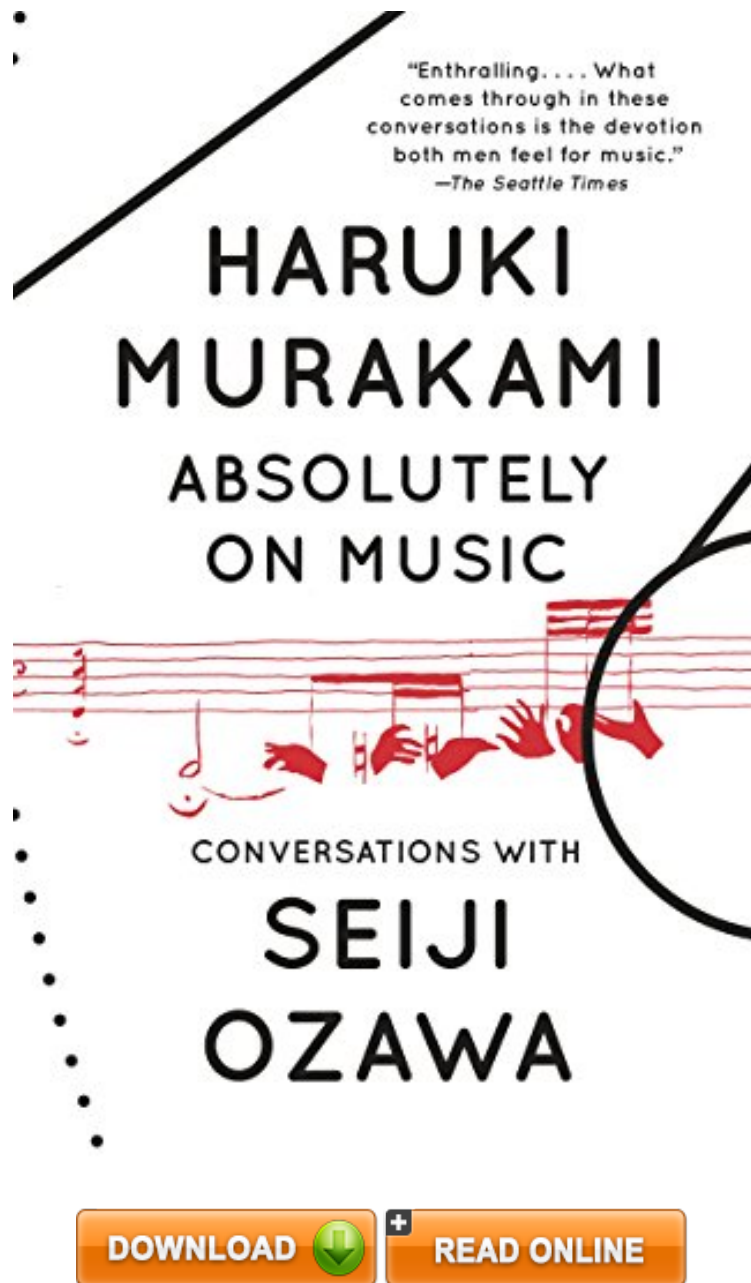


## Absolutely on Music: Conversations

*Haruki Murakami, Seiji Ozawa*  
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**Haruki Murakami, Seiji Ozawa : Absolutely on Music: Conversations** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Absolutely on Music: Conversations:

30 of 31 people found the following review helpful. The Conductor and The Deep Listener By Dr. Debra Jan Bibel 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. Murakami 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. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Surprisingly good By John Campbell 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. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting read By Noriko Meguro 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.

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 Bartok 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).

"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*

About the Author 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's 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 Francersquo;s Officier de la Leacute;gion drsquo;Honneur, the Japanese Order of Culture, a Kennedy Center Honor, and a Grammy for Best Opera Recording.Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Introduction My Afternoons with Seiji Ozawa nbsp; Until we started the interviews in this book, I had never had a serious conversation with Seiji Ozawa about music. True, I lived in Boston from 1993 to 1995, while he was still music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and I would often go to concerts he conducted, but I was just another anonymous fan in the audience. Not long after that, my wife and I happened to become friends with his daughter, Seira, and we would see and talk to her father now and then. But our acquaintance was casual and had nothing to do with either his work or mine. nbsp; Perhaps one reason we never talked seriously about music until recently is that the maestrorsquo;s work kept him so fully involved. As a result, whenever we got together to have a drink, wersquo;d talk about anything other than music. At most, we might have shared a few fragmentary remarks on some musical topics that never led anywhere. Ozawa is the type of person who focuses all his energy on his work, so that when he steps away from it, he needs to take a breather. Knowing this, I avoided bringing up musical topics when I was in his company. nbsp; In December of 2009, however, Ozawa was found to have esophageal cancer, and after major surgery the following month, he had to restrict his musical activities, largely replacing them with a challenging program of recuperation and rehabilitation. Perhaps because of this regime, we gradually began to talk more about music whenever we met. As weakened as he was, he took on a new vitality whenever the topic turned to music. Even when talking with a musical layman such as myself, any sort of conversation about music seemed to provide the refreshment he needed. And the very fact that I was not in his field probably set him at ease. nbsp; I have been a fervent jazz fan for close to half a century, but I have also been listening to classical music with no less enjoyment, collecting classical records since I was in high school, and going to concerts as often as time would permit. Especially when I was living in Europemdash; from 1986 to 1989mdash;I was immersed in classical music. Listening to jazz and the classics has always been both an effective stimulus and a source of peace to my heart and mind. If someone told me that I could listen to only one or the other but not to both, my life would be immeasurably diminished. As Duke Ellington once said, ldquo;There are simply two kinds of music, good music and the other kind.rdquo; In that sense, jazz and classical music are fundamentally the same. The pure joy one experiences listening to ldquo;goodrdquo; music transcends questions of genre. nbsp; During one of Seiji Ozawarsquo;s visits to my home, we were listening to music and talking about one thing or another when he told me a tremendously interesting story about Glenn Gould and Leonard Bernsteinsquo;s 1962 performance in New York of Brahmsrsquo;s First Piano Concerto. ldquo;What a shame it would be to let such a fascinating story just evaporate,rldquo; I thought. ldquo;Somebody ought to record it and put it on paper.rldquo; And, brazen as it may seem, the only ldquo;somebodyrdquo; that happened to cross my mind at the moment was me. nbsp; When I suggested this to Seiji Ozawa, he liked the idea immediately. ldquo;Why not?rdquo; he said. ldquo;Irsquo;ve got plenty of time to spare these days. Letsquo;s do it.rldquo; To have Seiji Ozawa ill with cancer was a heart-wrenching development for the music world, for me personally, and of course for him; but that it gave rise to this time for the two of us to sit and have good, long talks about music may be one of those rare silver linings that are not in fact to be found in every cloud. nbsp;nbsp; As much as I have loved music over the years, I never received a formal musical education, have virtually no technical knowledge of the field, and am a complete layman where most things musical are concerned. During our conversations, some of my comments may have been amateurish or even insulting, but Ozawa is not the sort of person to let such things bother him. He gave each remark serious thought and responded to each question, for which I was tremendously grateful. nbsp; I handled the tape recorder, transcribed our conversations myself, and presented the manuscript to him for corrections. nbsp; ldquo;Come to think of it, Irsquo;ve never really talked about music like this before, in such a focused, organized way.rldquo; This was the very first thing Ozawa said to me after reading the finished manuscript. ldquo;But wow, my language is so rough! Do you think readers are going to understand what Irsquo;m saying?rdquo; nbsp; Irsquo;s true, the maestro does speak his own special brand of Ozawa-ese, which is not always easy to convert to standard written Japanese. He gesticulates grandly, and many of his thoughts emerge in the form of songs. Still, whatever ldquo;roughnessrdquo; there may be in the way he expresses himself, the feeling he seeks to convey comes through with startling immediacy, overarching the ldquo;wall of words.rldquo; nbsp; Despite being an amateur (or perhaps because of it), whenever I listen to music, I do so without preconceptions, simply opening my ears to the more wonderful passages and physically taking them in. When those wonderful passages are there, I feel joy, and when some parts are not so wonderful, I listen with a touch of regret. Beyond that, I might pause to think about what makes a certain passage wonderful or not so wonderful, but other musical elements are not that important to me. Basically, I believe that music exists to make people happy. In order to do so, those who make music use a wide range of techniques and methods which, in all their complexity, fascinate me in the simplest possible way. nbsp; I tried my best to preserve this attitude when listening to what Maestro Ozawa had to say. In other words, I tried my best to remain an honest and curious amateur listener on the assumption that most of the people reading this book would be amateur music fans like me. nbsp; \*\*\*\*\* nbsp; At the risk of sounding somewhat presumptuous, I confess that in the course of our many conversations, I began to suspect that Seiji Ozawa and I might have several things in common. Questions of talent or

productivity or fame aside, what I mean here is that I can feel a sense of identity in the way we live our lives. First of all, both of us seem to take the same simple joy in our work. Whatever differences there might be between making music and writing fiction, both of us are happiest when absorbed in our work. And the very fact that we are able to become so totally engrossed in it gives us the deepest satisfaction. What we end up producing as a result of that work may well be important, but aside from that, our ability to work with utter concentration and to devote ourselves to it so completely that we forget the passage of time is its own irreplaceable reward. Secondly, we both maintain the same "hungry heart"; we possessed in our youth, that persistent feeling that "this is not good enough"; that we must dig deeper, forge farther ahead. This is the major motif of our work and our lives. Observing Ozawa in action, I could feel the depth and intensity of the desire he brought to his work. He was convinced of his own rightness and proud of what he was doing, but not in the least satisfied with it. I could see he knew he should be able to make the music even better, even deeper, and he was determined to make it happen even as he struggled with the constraints of time and his own physical strength. The third of our shared traits is stubbornness. We're patient, tough, and, finally, just plain stubborn. Once we've decided to do something in a certain way, it doesn't matter what anybody else says, that's how we're going to do it. And even if, as a result, we find ourselves in dire straits, possibly even hated, we will take responsibility for our actions without making excuses. Ozawa is an utterly unpretentious person who is constantly cracking jokes, but he is also extremely sensitive to his surroundings, and his priorities are clear. Once he has made his mind up, he doesn't waver. Or at least that is how he appears to me. I have met many different people in the course of my life, some of whom I have come to know pretty well, but where these three traits are concerned, I had never encountered anyone before Seiji Ozawa with whom I found it so easy and natural to identify. In that sense, he is a precious person to me. It sets my mind at ease to know that there is someone like him in the world. Of course, we are also different in many ways. For example, I lack his easy sociability. I do have my own sort of curiosity about other people, but in my case it rarely comes to the surface. As a conductor of orchestras, Ozawa is quite naturally in touch with a large number of people on a daily basis and has to act as the guiding member of a team. But no matter how talented he might be, people would not follow him if he were constantly moody and difficult. Interpersonal relations take on a great significance. A conductor needs like-minded musical colleagues, and he is often called upon to perform social and even entrepreneurial tasks. He has to give much thought to his audiences. And as a musician, he has to devote a good deal of energy to the guidance of the next generation. By contrast, as a novelist I am free to spend my life hardly seeing or talking to anyone for days at a time, and never appearing in the media. I rarely have to do anything that involves teamwork, and while it's best to have some colleagues, I don't especially need any. I just have to stay in the house and write alone. The thought of guiding the next generation has never crossed my mind, I'm sorry to say (not that anyone has ever asked me to do such a thing). I'm sure there are significant differences in mentality that come from such differences in our professional functions, not to mention innate personality differences. But I suspect that on the most basic level, deep down in the bedrock, our similarities outnumber our differences. Creative people have to be fundamentally egoistic. This may sound pompous, but it happens to be the truth. People who live their lives watching what goes on around them, trying not to make waves, and looking for the easy compromise are not going to be able to do creative work, whatever their field. To build something where there was nothing requires deep individual concentration, and in most cases that kind of concentration occurs in a place unrelated to cooperation with others, a place we might even call *daumlich*. Still, letting one's ego run wild on the assumption that one is an "artist" will disrupt any kind of social life, which in turn interrupts the "individual concentration" so indispensable for creativity. Baring the ego in the late nineteenth century was one thing, but now, in the twenty-first century, it is a far more difficult matter. Creative professionals constantly have to find those realistic points of compromise between themselves and their environment. What I am trying to say here is that while Ozawa and I of course have found very different ways to establish those points of compromise, we are likely headed in pretty much the same direction. And while we may set very different priorities, the way we set them may be quite similar. Which is why I was able to listen to his stories with something more than mere sympathy.