

CELESTE HEADLEE: Welcome back to Sound Thoughts on Art, an audio series from the National Gallery of Art. I'm Celeste Headlee.

When we engage with art, it kick starts our five senses. We hear music or feel the beat of a drum in our chests. We see the vivid colors of a photo. We take in the three dimensions of a sculpture. We savor the taste of fine food.

Sometimes you can smell the carved wood or the smeared oil paint.

But when there's crossover, when a piece of art activates multiple senses and they begin to interact and intertwine, that's when things really get interesting. When we listen to melody, what images flash through our minds? When we study the brushwork in a painting, what do we hear?

This podcast lives in that crossover, in the space at the center of our five senses Venn diagram.

In each episode, you'll learn about a work at the National Gallery and you'll hear a musician respond to that work through sound, creating a dialogue between the visual art and music.

Sound Thoughts on Art delves into our personal relationship with art and the unique response we have to beautifully made things.

This episode of Sound Thoughts on Art is a little different from everything else we've done for a few reasons. For one, the artwork we're focused on today, a Hieronymus Bosch painting titled Death and the Miser, is the oldest work we've discussed on this show, dating all the way back to the late 1400s.

And then, there's the fact that the music you're hearing now, which our guest musician recorded in response to this painting, is centuries old, but has never been recorded before— ever. And unlike our previous episodes, our pairing of musician to art expert didn't require that we make any introductions because our musician, Peter Sheppard Skaerved, already knew exactly who at the National Gallery of Art he wanted to work with.

They were already friends. And they chose this Bosch painting together. Which brings us to the third reason this episode is special, our expert voice on this Bosch and early Renaissance painting is none other than Kaywin Feldman, director of the National Gallery of Art. Together, you'll hear Kaywin and Peter make sense of this complicated piece of visual art through spoken history, a little bit of science, and, of course, through music.

As is so often the case with Bosch's work, there's a lot to unpack in Death and the Miser. Here's Kaywin describing the scene and some details you might miss on first glance.

KAYWIN FELDMAN: In this scene we see this very narrow room. And immediately, you notice that the man known as the miser is seated up in bed. His skin is ashen white and he has a black cap on his head.

And he's looking towards the door. And I like to think of this as a kind of macabre room service, where you see a skeleton with a shroud peeking around the door with an arrow, which is pointed right at the miser.

And so death's knocking. But then, kneeling behind the miser on the bed is an angel. And the angel has one hand on the miser's shoulder, so sort of showing that the angel is there with real influence and is pointing up. And if you look up to the ceiling, you can see there's light coming through the window. And there's a crucifix in the window. So the angel is urging the miser to give up his commitment to money and earthly possessions and to give his soul over to Christ.

And then, as a sort of funny moment, there's one of Bosch's little demon critters on top of the bed who is looking over the side to watch this scene— and then, another Boschian creature who is peeking under the bed clothes and handing the miser a bag of money.

CELESTE HEADLEE: He looks a little like the Creature from the Black Lagoon.

KAYWIN FELDMAN: There are lots of different critters in this painting. It's another thing to like about it, that some have funny faces and look like gerbils or animals, and others look more like a salamander or a lizard, and one looks like a little old man. They're very funny little guys.

And so in this central part of the scene, it's clear that the miser is at this moment where he can go in one of two directions— to give up his material possessions or remain committed to sin of avarice and perhaps usury. And it's interesting because we did research on this painting using infrared reflectography. And using that technique, we can actually see the underdrawing.

And with that, it shows that originally, Bosch painted the miser actually grasping the bag that the little creature offers him. And in the other hand, he held some silver chalices. And so when Bosch originally conceived of the work, the miser had already made his decision to go with worldly possessions. But he changed his mind and added that greater ambiguity. And so we don't actually know which direction the miser will go.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Which way do you think he's going to go?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: I do think Bosch had a bit of a pessimistic bent to him. So I'm not feeling too optimistic for the miser. And that is further emphasized by the scene at the end of the bed. And so we actually see two different moments in the life of the miser. And at the end of the bed, we see a chest, which is opened, and what we think is the miser in younger years, wearing this fabulous green cloak and turban.

And the miser is reaching towards a container filled with coins that one of these little funny creatures with a little hat just like the one the miser wears on the deathbed is holding. And there's more silver objects in the chest. And then, another funny creature underneath the chest who's offering up a piece of parchment

with a wax seal on it, which is probably a reference to usury. So it was probably a promissory note owed to the miser.

But the miser does have his rosary beads and a crucifix in his one hand. So there's a sense that he still could go in either direction. But I'm going to go with the pessimistic view.

CELESTE HEADLEE: There's an odd figure in the very foreground. You see the armor and the lance lying. And then, there's a lot of pink in this painting. And there's a little sort of almost death figure. But it's got beautiful, lacy wings. What figure is that?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: Unfortunately, we can never quite get into the mind of Bosch. So I think this fellow wearing a hood and cape with the sort of butterfly wings is another one of his little demon creatures. And it's almost like a little still life there at the very bottom of the painting with the clothing. And then, you can see the armor, which is probably tournament armor.

So it's a very expensive armor that was made to show off technical skills in the tournament ring and was very, very expensive. So this could be a reference to perhaps somebody who was hard on their luck or somebody who was pawning their armor with the miser.

Or more likely, I think, is that it's, again, a reference to vanity, and fame, and the preoccupations of a materialistic life.

CELESTE HEADLEE: For Peter, the presence of death wasn't that alarming. You'll notice that the music he chose certainly isn't funerary or mournful. As he tells it, that was a deliberate choice.

What do you like about the presence of death?

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: What do I like about the presence of death?

CELESTE HEADLEE: Yeah, I mean, you must.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: The presence of death reminds us that we're alive. Death, if you just see it from a musical point of view, a music doesn't work without dark and light, without high and low, without life and death, without birth and death. These are the things which make joy and sorrow equally possible. And I think the fabulous thing about the painting like this, the simultaneous good humor and the fate-filled side to the painting, if you like, what's fabulous about those is the fact that the recognition is all around us.

I think one of the things I really love about it is the fact that it refers to a specific moment in the Bible, which often gets confused. It's the moment from Thessalonians where the Lord comes as a thief in the night. Well, that's what's going on here. But of course, in order for the Lord to come as a thief in the night, we need Death to do his job for him.

And that's, if you like, the big joke about this painting. What's actually going on here? And so we have a big tradition in music, particularly with the violin of the "dance of death," right back to the Renaissance. Fiddles were the instrument of the devil. It's not just Paganini. It starts way earlier.

And if you look carefully, you often see, which we call them violin-shaped objects being scraped by skeletons and by Death and later by devils. The association of the violin with the devil is a later thing, of course, but in the later Renaissance on the early baroque period the violin was this was Death's instrument.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Yeah, although the death— the skeleton coming through the door is pointing an arrow at the miser.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Yeah, well there's a great thing going on there— it's not just pointing an arrow at the miser, but there's a great painterly joke, which is almost like a musical joke, a contrapuntal joke going on there, which is if you look behind the arrow the shadow of the arrow is coming to the miser quicker.

So there's a shadow on the broad cloth curtain there and it's whizzing towards him. And of course, the really fun thing is that Death is sinister. So Death comes in from the left hand side of the painting as we look at it. But of course, the miser, if he's having a moment of redemption which, who knows, is looking maybe or is being encouraged to look up to his right. So not to his left, to his right with our left, and up to his right is an equivalent of the dart of Death which is this ray of light coming through the window past the crucifix.

And the angel who has the same face as the angel on Saint John of Patmos in Bosch's painting. He's desperately trying to get the miser to look up, but the miser is perhaps more interested in doing that little deal with the sack of money being handed to him by the toad-like figure coming from under the curtain. So there are far more darts and points going in the painting as well.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Yeah, it is kind of funny that, at the same time, that there's this sort of eternal battle going on between the angels saying, look up, look up, look up. Look up to Christ. The miser is just transfixed with the image of Death coming through the door and his hand— almost as though he's not even paying attention to it, almost as though his hand is on its own behalf reaching out to the money.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Absolutely. And of course, the big question, of course, is whether the merchant figure by the chest in front is him as well— that these two figures, where the merchant is reaching into the chest where the strange rat who's wearing the same hat as the miser is checking on a sack of gold coins and a stack of pewter cups. So there's a kind of mirroring thing going on there. And of course, there is a figure who is not in the painting who is being hinted at, which I really enjoy, which is that, if the miser was not single anymore, if he'd still be married— if the wife was still there, that's her marital chest at the end of the bed. And as opposed to it being filled with her trousseau, it's been filled with his deeds of sale on contracts and a sealing wax and the money and the rat.

Which, of course, the rat is a complicated figure because it's a symbol of corruption, but also, in nearly every tradition, it's also the symbol of excess and plenty because rats only come when the harvest is good. All the way from medieval things about rats in German are medieval jokes and stories, all the way through to the rats as associated with Ganesh in the Hindu tradition. It's the same thing.

It's plenty, but it's also excess and corruption, which I find all of these contradictions in the painting— they work in the way that music works. In order to make something beautiful, for instance, to make a beautiful radiant line, we need to have roughness alongside it, otherwise it doesn't work. I feel like, at a very simple level, the painting is playing with that idea. And there were— I mean, as always with Bosch, there are so many jokes going on with it, you don't even know where to start.

[VIOLIN MUSIC]

CELESTE HEADLEE: Who was this painting made for?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: This painting actually is part of what we call a triptych, so originally there would have been a central scene, which unfortunately we have lost, and then two wings. And our painting is from the interior right wing. And the exterior and interior of the left wing are actually unknown, and there are three different panels in three different museums that were also part of this triptych.

And recent research has actually shown that they were all painted on oak panels from the exact same tree, and the tree was felled sometime after 1486. We know from, of course, tree ring-dating. So the triptych like this would have been on an altar or something in a church and/or private devotional space. And in a triptych the wings would have been closed most of the time.

So this painting wouldn't actually have been seen very often because it was the interior of the wing and it was just on sort of special days, feast days and what have you when the wings were opened. So it did have a liturgical role. But unfortunately, since we don't have the central panel, we don't know exactly what the overall theme of the triptych was.

CELESTE HEADLEE: We can assume that this panel, alone, is meant to be a cautionary tale about greed?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: Yes. It's also, though, it's part of a series of texts that were published around the first half of the 1400s called *Ars Moriendi*, or the Art of Dying, and there are two different texts published in Latin. And the purpose of them was to teach people how to die well. And they included five different stages of death, and in each one there's a demonic temptation and a kind of angelic inspiration, and so it's sort of a tutorial to teach people how to have both a happy death and salvation. And so that's exactly what Bosch is depicting here.

[VIOLIN MUSIC]

CELESTE HEADLEE: So that brings us to the music that this painting inspired for you.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Yup.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Did you hear things immediately? Did you get a sense of either melody or harmony when you first looked at it, or it did take a while of studying?

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: It doesn't really work like that for me. It's more a question of thinking more like what might sing in partnership or in counterpoint with it? And the thing which immediately came to mind is— OK. So one of the ways nearly all music and all art works is not just the layering you've referred to, which is the if you like the vertical layering within a score for instance, which is there even if you have a single melody line. And the pieces I've chosen, with one exception, are almost entirely just melody lines. But also, this works with the way that we deal with ideas of the past.

So back to the painting for a moment. So the painting is painted at the end of what in the medieval period we might refer to as the Gothic period. Well, what's fascinating about the room that the miser is in, is the room he's in is older. He's not in a 15th-century room. He's in an early medieval room, so it's looking back. Now music works like this the whole time. If you look at— I mean, what's amazing actually, about the late 1500s in, say, if you think about church architecture, it was a revival of complexity. And in the 17th century, exactly the same thing happened.

At the same moment, the architects, such as Christopher Wren or even earlier. Christopher Wren, for instance was making what we might call baroque or classical architecture, and at the very same moment, he was building faux medieval buildings, literally within yards of each other, so you could go to the Church of Saint Mary Alder Marie, which he built at the same time as— literally 200 meters away, he was building a faux medieval church imitating the style of the 1480s.

Now the reason I'm saying that is that the same thing was happening in the music of the mid- to late 1600s, which was that there was an evocation of the past going on, like this— the complicated word for it, which is we use a lot we'll say with the Bible, is typology, the idea that in order to have one idea from one period, you need to echo it in the past and echo it in the future.

And so I chose pieces which seem to be playing with that. Two of them are Italian, and one of them is an anonymous German piece and I loved that playing with a meaning from the past, gestures from the past, which seem to be doing what the painting was doing in my mind. It's entirely subjective, of course, and I promise you, that if I was to do the same exercise in two months time, I'd choose something totally different, of course, which is what the fun is.

CELESTE HEADLEE: It's interesting to me that you're choosing dances, so you're really picking up on the humor in this picture because I would imagine that if someone— if you said, Hey, what would a song called death and the miser sound like? They might choose something really kind of dark and slow and

ponderous and serious, and you're choosing an allemande, a sarabande. Those are relatively light pieces of music.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Well, of course, "light" is a loaded word, of course. But of course—

CELESTE HEADLEE: Yes. I mean, they can be danced to. You can imagine someone stepping sprightly to these pieces of music.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Yeah, if every depiction— if you go through them. It doesn't matter where you go to the church walls in Berlin or in Estonia or in Gothic churches in England. There's— back to this dance of death. Death is always depicted doing this. In the century after Bosch painted this, Hans Holbein published a series of engravings, Dances of Death, which at the end, were republished and pirated and in the late 1700s. And we have a whole series of Death dancing into the room meeting a bishop, meeting— there's a miser in there as well, meeting a young couple. And it's always a lot of fun. It always— it's in fact, that's— perhaps one has a reason for this, which is that until the 20th century, at least the 19th, the one thing which everybody did on a fairly regular basis was to ride or to dance. These were physical activities which were common to most people's life, and in many ways, to their daily life. If you think of the Renaissance Flemish paintings by— the post-Bosch generation— the people are depicted— their life is always depicted around dancing. It's one of the ways, to this day, we find our way into life or most of our significant occasions in life where weddings or parties.

Dancing is one of the ways which we express what we feel about things. And, of course, music is divided into two things, between song and dance, and the distinction between the two of them is not easy to make. They rely on each other to function, which I find very beautiful.

[VIOLIN MUSIC]

KAYWIN FELDMAN: Well, I think we like to think of Bosch as a rebel and I think that's part of his appeal today, but in fact, he really wasn't. I mean, he was inventive and created a new kind of visual vocabulary. But it's important to keep in mind that he was very popular at the time. He received some significant commissions and he was imitated for another 75, 100 years later.

And so, he actually was still showing the morality and the church as was the canon of the time, but he did it with a little more of a human focus and wanted us to see ourselves. And so instead of just showing the standard depiction of a scene from the Bible, he takes a twist on it.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Why does it look so sort of unique and kind of in some way spooky, sometimes modernist? Why does it look so different to us?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: I think that one of the reasons that Bosch is so popular even today is a few things. One, because he paints using symbols and objects from contemporary life and they tend to be things that we can still identify today— musical instruments and body parts and bowls and dishes and what have

you. And so I think for a modern viewer, who perhaps might struggle a bit more with paintings with that are sort of more strictly liturgical, we find a window in to his work.

And then I think another reason is that Bosch really holds a mirror up to humanity. He's showing us the humor and foibles of the human condition, and it's wonderful that it's true today, as it was when he created the works. And then I think another reason is that he was just so incredibly inventive and we sort of stop with astonishment at the configurations, the critters, the creatures, the way he puts his imagery together.

And in fact, on one of the drawings that he created, he actually wrote on the drawing, "Poor is the mind that always uses the inventions of others and invents nothing itself," and Bosch was truly inventive.

[VIOLIN MUSIC]

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Yeah, but the interesting thing, of course, is there are— so there are three pieces. One of them is a dance. So one is a dance, a barabano, which nobody knows quite what it means. It could even be the "dance of the bearded people." It's from these two Northern Italian composers, Giovanni Battista Vitali and Giuseppe Colombi, who were friends and they both worked in the Court of Moderna.

And so they both played in the same ensemble, and so close were they in the 1680s and 90s, that they actually both published music, the same music purporting to be each of their own. So they got confused about whose music it was, but the two pieces I chose for them are very different.

One is this wild D minor barabano, which has got that kind of death dance feel I'm talking about, literally the rattling of bones, the thing that Saint-Saëns was going to evoke when he wrote his danse macabre in the 19th century, which actually also evokes this medieval period as well, exactly the same thing. Even the idea of what the relationship that he makes in that piece between the violin and the xylophone. You know, "dem bones," kind of thing. It's exactly—

CELESTE HEADLEE: Yeah, also in a minor key, I think Danse Macabre is in G-minor.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Absolutely. Precisely. And then alongside that, I wanted to choose something— and this is where the death-in-life thing becomes exciting which is it's very difficult in all music to tell the difference between the music which is sensual, and music which is fatal. And there's no different— the sarabande is very much full of it.

You can play the same Bach sarabande, for instance, you can play it many times and I can be on stage, and I don't know when I'm playing it, whether or not I'm going to experience it, if you like, as being to do with to do with love, to do with physical pleasure. Or am I going to experience it in terms of mortality? And just the reaching chords of this Giuseppe Colombi sarabande made me just think of that the possibility— there's a moment of truth on the miser's face. His hand, yes, is unsure, but look close at the

face. The face which has been painted in what doctors used to call the *facies Hippocrates*, the face at the moment before death when there's this waxy quality and there is a moment of— exactly. There's a moment of truth of, if you like, almost an in between, a liminal moment on that man's face and that's really made me immediately think of this sarabande. By the way, it's this will be the first time any of your lists, any of you will have heard that sarabande. It has never been recorded. I am playing that from the manuscript.

CELESTE HEADLEE: I want to keep our listeners up with us by the way. A sarabande is a dance and it's in triple time— one, two, three, one, two, three— and it originated from a Spanish dance, I think.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Absolutely. Yes.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Originally done with castanets, so, yeah. I just want to make sure everyone stays with us.

[VIOLIN MUSIC]

So this is the first time this has ever been performed— or recorded I should say— why?

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: As a violinist, we have literally thousands upon thousands of pieces because, of course, all the way through the instrument's history, just like any popular instrument, composers— players have always been composers, so they wrote so much music.

And I'm somebody who spends my time digging around libraries and archives for this sheer joy, just like seeing a painting for the first time, of finding a piece of music and hearing it in my head as I read it often from a quite— sometimes illegible manuscripts and realizing that you are making contact with something which has not been heard.

And unlike a painting, a piece of music can't be seen if we can call it that, unless you're a musician, until it's made, is brought to life, effectively. So the musician effectively is involved in a bit of necromancy, to bring it out. This is music revenant.

CELESTE HEADLEE: That's a very Gothic way to put that.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Absolutely. Well, there was— I'm sure if Berlioz had ever seen this painting, he'd have loved that, too. Think of how the 19th century and Gothic artists— if I can call Goya— love the ideas of this and the composers who played with these ideas. Love these dark, dark- light ideas which fill a painting like this, and fill this kind of music as well.

The other piece, though, is even more mysterious. I'm fascinated— perhaps unhealthily fascinated— with unattributed music. Just as much as it wasn't until the generation really after Bosch that painters started actually signing their work. It only really starts, of course, with Durer running all over Europe, trying to make sure people didn't take money from him by stealing his work.

The same thing is very true with music. We have vast amounts of music sitting in dusty cupboards and store rooms all over the world, which are unattributed. And this strange allemande, which I finished with is, if we use that one last, is from a collection put together by a music copyist, who we just know as Rost, in the mid-1600s. The piece could actually be the earliest piece I've played in this. It could be as early as the 1640s, and it's for a detuned violin. It's tuned with different pitches, which means you get a very strange, unearthly timbre to it. And that's played on the oldest of the two violins. I'm playing on this a violin from probably about 1560, which is as early as a violin can possibly get.

CELESTE HEADLEE: Here's Sonatina for Scordatura Violin, by an anonymous composer, circa 1670, as played by Peter Sheppard Skaerved.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So I wonder what, as the director of the Gallery, I wonder what you make of the idea behind this podcast, which is that there's a real link between art that you absorb through your eyes and art that you absorb through your ears. Do you buy it?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: I'm a fan of the podcast and I'm excited about the various ideas that we explore and the connection between art and music and architecture. It's really more in our contemporary world where we see the arts so much more fragmented, and I think in earlier ages there was sometimes a competition between the arts, but they were all sort of recognized, I think, as the interrelationship of them.

CELESTE HEADLEE: What about this one? What music would you associate with this?

KAYWIN FELDMAN: This one I think I would— if I'm going to go for historically correct, I would go with liturgical music provided only by voices and an organ, which would have been sort of true of the period. Bosch was a member of a group called the Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Blessed Lady, and it was sort of a laymen's religious group founded around the cathedral, and as part of that, he would have performed in the rituals and then part of the liturgical music.

But Bosch has an interesting relationship to music, and while this painting does not include musical instruments, so many of Bosch's paintings actually do. And in these paintings, we see, again, some of his creatures performing with a variety of instruments. And we see trumpets and flutes and bagpipes and lutes and a harp and other kinds of musical instruments, but they're never actually quite successful in playing music.

I like a music scholar named Ian Pittaway wrote, "In Bosch's hell, music is punished by silence; the impossibility of playing or reduced to the agony of only one note; or blasted at painful, ear-splitting volume; and dance is diminished to a humiliating mockery." So I think Bosch was sort of turning his back on the minstrel plays and the popular music that happened in the streets and on lively festival days and was much more a fan of liturgical music used as part of worship. So if I were to think of a contemporary piece of music, I would go with John Cage's Four Minutes and 33 Seconds of silence.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: With all of the use of all of our senses, in order to use them, we always rely on other senses in order to make them function. So first, look if we to go back to the painting, and I was talking to a group of my young students at the Royal Academy of Music about this a couple of weeks ago. I said, let's just look at the materials in the painting. What do you see?

And if you go down the painting for the top— stone, wood, woolen cloth, linen. Keep going down, there's some gold cloth, and then there's someone started talking about the feeling of what would it feel like to have your hand on those materials, not just to look at them or to wear them, and it's very much the same with music.

So if you take— the way we listen to a piece of music will evoke different— if you like, physical sensations, you might evoke, say, the scratch of a violin bow on the gut string and has a relationship, for instance, to the feeling— I don't know. I would too quickly leap to it. It would be the feeling of your hand on the stiff bristles of a hairbrush, for instance, and in order to hear the music, we need to use these things.

It has a lot to do with the fact that as humans, in order to have symbols, we need to put two things together. The Greek word *sumballe* means to put two things together. In order to appreciate anything, we need another thing.

I went out for my wedding anniversary meal with my wife last night, and we had a wonderful meal, but part of enjoying the meal is the fact that we have beautiful taste, but also there was candlelight and there was— we were by the river, and so there's the glitter and the sound of the river outside and people moving around.

The taste relies on the other senses. Music relies on the other senses just as much— just as this painting is. This painting is asking us to imagine all kinds of things— the creak of the door opening, the sound of the money.

Even, for me, the touch of the two different materials. There's no cotton in this painting, of course, because these people, apart from the angel maybe, never encountered cotton. There is linen and there's wool. It's very likely that this man made his money in wool because the merchant at the case is wearing as much expensive cloth as they possibly can.

So it's that crossing over between— I don't like the word "multimedia," because it's tautologous. "Media" is already plural, so—

CELESTE HEADLEE: (LAUGHS)

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: It's a ridiculous thing to say.

CELESTE HEADLEE: (LAUGHS)

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: And all media, the way we express ourselves relies on this— it's why seeing music is so much more effective than just hearing it. And recently, I was in a museum, which was closed, and I was working there all day. It is one very famous museum, and the curator said, Oh, we have the museum to ourselves. Let's walk around.

And after about five minutes, we couldn't do it anymore. It's not interesting without people there. It just isn't. There's no interest for me in looking at a painting unless I have that dialogue with somebody else looking at a painting with me, and that's another thing which links to this. It's the idea of something shared.

So if you like, there's an analogy for me between playing a piece of music to somebody, sharing it with and hearing how they hear, and responding to a piece of art with a piece of music. These are similar crossing points, if you like, and that's what I love about the exercise.

CELESTE HEADLEE: You are the first person to bring up the idea— which I think is incredibly convincing— that seeing a musician perform music has a different impact than just hearing the recording. If there's ever been an argument of the connection between visual art and music, that has to be it.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Absolutely. I mean, think how many times in great art you are given the illusion that you're seeing or hearing something that you don't. So I'll give you an example of that would be in the film Alexander Nevsky, the Sergei Eisenstein film, there's a great battle on the ice.

And for about five minutes before the battle starts, Eisenstein repeatedly shows you the same shot of an amazing black and white shot of clouds, and the ice which wasn't ice of course because it was shot in roaring summer with wax instead of the ice. But anyway and you keep looking at it, and Prokofiev's music is just lumbering beneath the surface. And you start seeing things in the picture, which are not there just as much as John Williams convinces you there's a shark in the water long before you meet one. He's exactly—

CELESTE HEADLEE: It's so true.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Or the beginning of JFK— ba-dum bom bom, ba-dum bom. That amazing tattoo, which means you basically—

CELESTE HEADLEE: Or even Patton. I don't know if you've seen that movie.

PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED: Of course. Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely. And every great film composer understands this— less is more. And so for me, I'm passionate about recording, but I'm also passionate about the fact of the amazing thing that happens when we share things. And of course, it's not just seeing. It's the breath of the audience with you.

So on Sunday I was playing some 1600s music in a quite large concert hall here, a very simple piece by Torelli, a solo piece, and the few hundred people in the hall, while I was playing it, they basically showed me how to play it.

I wasn't looking at them, but they're all breathing and you get to a silence, and a silence experience with 200 people when you're playing is so different because the air in the room, the darkness— it makes you play in a different way. Even as a musician, it changes the way you play it. The shared senses. And so, that's why for me there is the relationship between music and painting and music and writing and music and sculpture, whatever, is not even something which needs to be justified. It's absolutely vital because all of these things refer to each other all the time. It's the most natural thing in the world.

[VIOLIN MUSIC]

CELESTE HEADLEE: Thanks so much once again to Peter Sheppard Skaerved for joining us. You can learn more about him, Kaywin Feldman, and Hieronymus Bosch and all of the people in art you meet on the show at the National Gallery of Art's website, nga.gov.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Sound Thoughts on Art is a production of the National Gallery of Art's music department. The show was created by Danielle Hahn, the National Gallery of Art's head of music programs, and it was mixed and produced by Maura Currie. To support the show, share Sound Thoughts on Art, and subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Spotify or wherever you listen. I'm Celeste Headlee. Until we meet again, be well.