*Response* Michael Torke

I really enjoyed our discussion of synesthesia during Carrie’s presentation. This interesting almost *mal*function of the brain brings up such an interesting question of everyone’s individual perception of music. It seems like with everything else we experience, our relation to music comes down to chemical reactions that occur in the brain.

I recently saw a *Nova* special on music in which they were even able to pin point on a scan how the host preferred Bach’s music to any other. The special also went on to discuss the healing power of music in therapy. Oliver Sacks’ book *Musicophiliam,* on which the special was based, also follows four specific individual and their personal experiences with music. One subject has Tourette’s syndrome and found release in drumming. Another is a blind, autistic man who is completely relient on others to take care of him but can play anything no matter how long or complex back to you after hearing it only once. There is also a women studied who has amusia, a condition which makes music sound like noise. She has no sense of rhythm either and therefore sadly cannot dance (this is how they discovered she had this syndrome). Finally, a heavy-metal loving surgeon who quit his job and developed an uncanny ability to play piano and compose after being struck by lightning.

I bring these up only because of their relevance to the neurological aspect of synesthesia. Specially, concerning synesthesia, I find it interesting that there is such disparity within this disorder as far as how it manifests in different people. For example, how Torke heard color through key while others like Messaien associate pitch with color. “I am ... affected by a kind of synopsia, found more in my mind than in my body, which allows me, when I hear music, and equally when I read it, to see inwardly, in the mind's eye, colors which move with the music, and I sense these colors in an extremely vivid manner... For me certain complexes of sound and certain sonorities are linked to complexes of color, and I use them in full knowledge of this.”

So despite these synesthete composers’s preoccupation with a completely new dimension effecting their composition they still manage to create music that reaches the greater majority who certainly would never see exactly what they saw in creation.