What is color in music?

2 DIFFERENT ANALOGIES:

TIMBRE

PITCH (HARMONY/SCALES)
TIMBRE

- SOUND QUALITY
- SOUND COLOR

Vocal music examples

**Gregorian chant**

American Shape-Note Singing, “Sherburne”

Solo vocal music from Ghana, “Marilli”
Vocal music examples “labeled”

Gregorian chant
- pure, no vibrato (fluctuation in pitch or volume)

American Shape-Note Singing, “Sherburne”
- forced, harsh

Solo vocal music from Ghana, “Marilli”
- complex, noisy, buzzy
TIMBRE

Instrumental timbres
[confounded categories]

**Strings** (string quartet – very blended)

**Brass** (Gabrieli, brass quintet – some subtle diff)

**Woodwinds** (Mozart, *Grand Partita* - mixed)

**Percussion** (C. Rouse, Ku-Ka-Ilimoku)
TIMBRE - brass

trombone, tuba, horn, trumpet
TIMBRE - brass
Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* – originally for piano, c. 1874

orchestrated by several different composers in history – the most well-known and frequently performed version is by Maurice Ravel, done in 1922.
Victor Hartmann’s exhibited pictures
Mussorgsky
TIMBRE and COLOR in everyday life

RED v. GREEN
OBOE v. TROMBONE
TIMBRE and COLOR in every day life

bed
bid
bod (baud, bawd)
bead
bad
bade
bud
bide
We sometimes refer to some harmonies or chords (combinations of pitches) with particular dissonances in them as being “colorful” – this is a good term to use, but do not confuse it with timbre, which is sound quality that is independent of pitch and harmony. The musical term “chromatic” – which applies to harmony and is a type of scale – explicitly refers to color as a metaphor.
Music by Messiaen is known for its colorful harmonies and colorful use of timbre.

Examples:
Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant Jesus, IV, Watch of the Virgin

- piano – harmonic color only

TURANGALILA-SYMPHONIE

- both harmonic and timbral (orchestral) color
COLOR CONCLUSION

• Color can be an important part of an artwork’s impact – notice it!
• Color can be optimized & analyzed for greatest effect

• Timbre in music is considered to be analogous to color in painting; some kinds of harmony and scales are also considered to be analogous to color in painting. They are DIFFERENT – try not to confuse them.
TIMBRE

Instrumental timbres
[confounded categories]

Strings (Barber, Adagio for Strings)
Brass (Lutoslawski, brass quintet)
Woodwinds (Dvorak, Slavonic Dance No 9)
Percussion (C. Rouse, Ku-Ka-Ilimoku)