

# What is a composer?

## ALCOS

K14; K.16; 1.15; 2.15; 2.17; 3.16; 3.19; 4.16;  
4.17; 5.16; 6.15; 6.16; 6.18

### Analyze

Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

### Interpret

Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators'/performers' expressive intent.

### Connect

Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

## I can:

- Describe what is a composer.
- Discuss facts about Johann Strauss, II.

## Introduction

- Ask the students what is their favorite song. After the students give responses, ask if they know who wrote their favorite song. Tell the students that their favorite song has a writer, even if they don't know their name. As a class read, "What is a composer?" (R-1).
- After reading, discuss the similarities between authors and composers.
- Discuss Johann Strauss' Jr. life. Discuss the timeline. The timeline highlights important events in Alabama history from 1825 - 1899 in blue and a few important events in Strauss' life in red.
- Ask the students if they have ever heard any of Strauss' music. Tell the students that they have probably heard Strauss' music, but they don't realize it. One of Strauss' most famous compositions has been used in the movies, television shows, and even commercials.
- Watch this [commercial](#). Ask the students if they have ever heard the piece of music playing in the background.
- Tell the students that the music in the background of the commercial was *The Blue Danube Waltz* which was one of Strauss' most famous compositions. The piece was written about the Danube River in Europe. Tell the students that composers write music about all kinds of things, places, and even people.
- Explain to the students that they will be learning more about Strauss and two of his most famous pieces of music, *The Blue Danube* and the *Tristch Tratsch Polka*.

### K-3 Activity

Discuss a place, close to where you live, that a composer could write music about.

Why do you like the place you chose?  
What is special about the place you chose?  
Draw a picture of the place you chose.

### K-3 Activity

Read "What's in a nickname?" (R-2). Have the students brainstorm and create an appropriate nickname for a teacher in the school. Think about what qualities the person possesses (kind, funny, helpful, etc.) and if they have done something to better the school. As a class, create a certificate for the person and find a way to award the nickname.

### All Grades

Research and make a list of composers from Alabama. Discuss the type of music they write and listen to examples. Did any of the composers write music about Alabama?

### 4-6 Activity

Read "What's in a nickname?" (R-2). Discuss and ask the students to brainstorm reasons why we give famous people nicknames. Have the students learn about Hank Aaron using [The Encyclopedia of Alabama](#). Have the students decide if Strauss and Hank Aaron's nick names are appropriate for their work.

### 4-6 Activity

*The Blue Danube* was not written for just instruments; the music also has lyrics. Look at pictures of [Alabama Rivers](#). Using [The Encyclopedia of Alabama](#), learn about one specific Alabama River. Use a tune like the "Alphabet Song" or "Mary Had a Lamb" and write new lyrics about one of the Alabama Rivers.

### Extensions

- There are several videos on YouTube of the *The Blue Danube* being performed in cartoons, with rubber chickens, and performances with ballroom dancing. View and compare and contrast different examples.
- Using the [Encyclopedia of Alabama](#), research authors from Alabama. What are some similarities between authors and composers?
- Discuss creator's intent. Explore different creators (composer, artists, etc) from Alabama.

# What is a composer ?

## Did you know?

During the 1800s it was popular to ask famous people for a lock of hair.

When Strauss visited America so many women wanted a lock of his hair he started giving them locks of his dog's hair! He eventually stopped giving out locks of hair because he was afraid his dog would be bald.

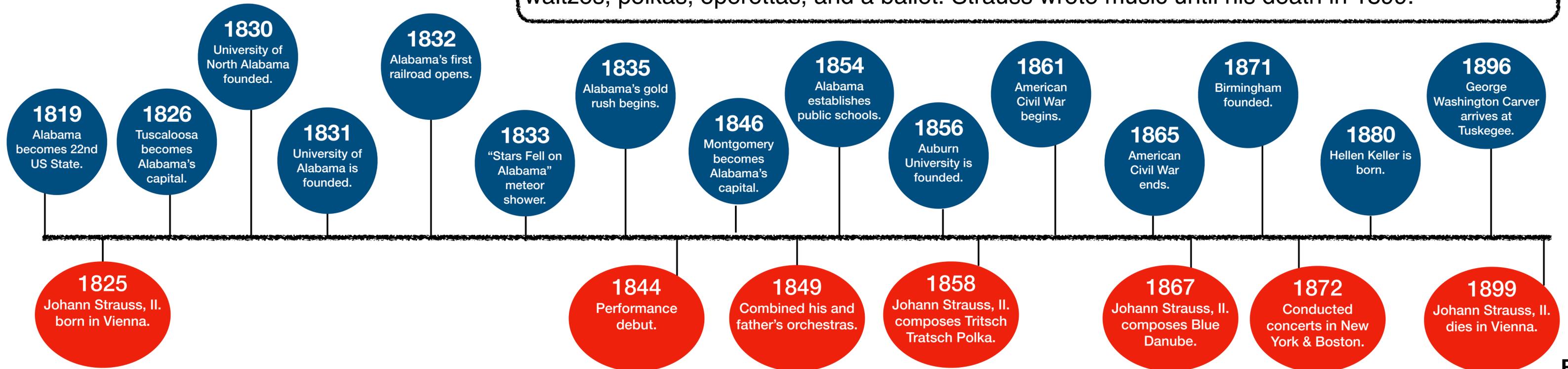


Johann Strauss, II  
1825 - 1899

Authors write books. **Composers** write music. Authors use words to craft their stories. **Composers** use sounds to craft their music. Authors write stories with different settings, time periods, and characters. Composers write music for different ensembles, different occasions, and to make you feel different emotions. As long as authors have written stories, composers have written music.

Johann Strauss, Jr. was a composer. Strauss was born in Vienna in 1825. Johann's father was a famous composer that developed the Viennese Waltz. Johann's father wanted him to be a banker and not a composer. Against his father's wishes, Johann became a composer. Johann's choice to become a composer started a feud with his father that lasted until his father's death in 1849.

Johann's father helped develop Viennese Waltz, but Johann made the waltz popular. When his father died, Johann combined his orchestra and his father's orchestra to tour Europe and eventually the United States. Strauss was such a popular composer of waltzes that he earned the nickname of "The Waltz King". Johann wrote a lot of music! In fact, he wrote over 400 waltzes, polkas, operettas, and a ballet. Strauss wrote music until his death in 1899.



## What's in a nickname?

Do you have a nickname? If you have a nickname, who gave it to you? Why is your nickname important? Do you know other people with the same nickname?

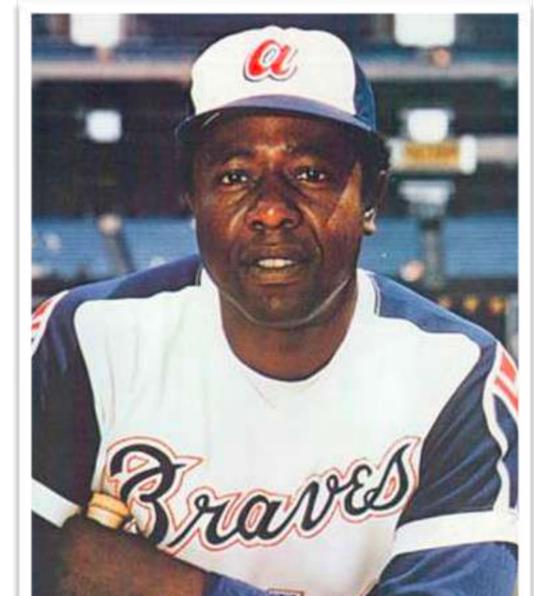
Nicknames are usually given to people for different reasons. Some people have nicknames as a sign of love. Some nicknames are given to a person to describe their character. Nicknames can highlight good or bad character traits. Some nicknames are given to a person in honor of something important the person has done. Even though they might seem funny, nicknames are given for good reasons!

Johann Strauss, II was nicknamed "The Waltz King" because he wrote over 400 waltzes. When Strauss was alive in the 1800s there was no greater composer of waltzes. Other composers studied and copied Strauss' waltzes to try and be as good as him. Even though many tried, there was only one "Waltz King".

Do you know any other important figures with nicknames? Learn about famous people from our state that have nicknames. How did they earn their nickname? What are they famous for? Maybe one day you will earn a nickname for doing something important!



Johann Strauss, II  
"The Waltz King"



Hank Aaron  
"Hammer"