



MUSIC AS AN INTEGRATED ELEMENT IN THEATRE

Prof. Ass. Msc. Mimoza Kurshumlia¹, Prof. Dr. Sonia Zdravkova Djeparoska²

¹University of Gjakova; PhD Candidate – Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje

²Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje

Abstract

This article examines the constitutive role of music in theatrical performance, positioning it as a structural and interpretive force rather than a decorative accompaniment. Music is approached as a central element in the dramaturgical framework, shaping rhythm, atmosphere, and the affective continuity of performance. By operating as an autonomous expressive system, it generates meanings that exceed verbal discourse and physical action, thus enriching both the interpretive depth and the sensory experience of theatre. The study highlights how music contributes to the construction of character, the modulation of dramatic tension, and the establishment of performative coherence. Through its temporal and emotional dynamics, music not only frames audience perception but also mediates between narrative progression and the broader artistic vision of a production. Such functions reveal that music does not stand in isolation but interacts dialogically with gesture, movement, and visual design, creating a multi-layered performative language. Building upon perspectives from aesthetics, performance theory, and interdisciplinary studies, the article argues that music should be reconsidered as a decisive dramaturgical pillar. It invites scholars and practitioners alike to move beyond reductive views of music as background and to engage with its generative power in shaping theatrical meaning. In doing so, the article reframes theatre as a multimodal art form where music emerges not as supplementary ornamentation but as a primary agent of coherence, interpretation, and audience engagement.

Keywords

Music In Theatre, Composer–Director Collaboration, Quantitative Research, Narrative Structure, Dramaturgy

1. Introduction

The relationship between music and theatre constitutes a complex and challenging field of study, where music is often perceived merely as a decorative element or narrative background. This paper aims to reassess such a perception by approaching music as a constitutive force within theatrical performance—a semiotic autonomous system that constructs narrative coherence and expands the interpretive horizon of the audience. Through its expressive autonomy, music generates meanings that transcend verbal language and physical action, engaging dialogically with gesture, movement, and visual design to create a multi-dimensional performative language. The objectives of this study are twofold: first, to analyze music's role in character development, modulation of dramatic tension, and organization of rhythm and temporal-emotional flow; second, to highlight its function as a dramaturgical pillar that strengthens interpretive coherence and the aesthetic reception of a theatrical production. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from aesthetics, performance theory, and music studies, this paper argues that music should not be regarded merely as an accessory to performance, but as a fundamental agent in shaping theatrical meaning and experience. Within this framework, theatre emerges as a genuinely multimodal art form, in which music, through its autonomy and semiotic capacity, integrates narrative, emotional, and perceptual dimensions, thereby reconceptualizing the interplay between sound, body, and visuality within performance. In line with aesthetic perspectives associated with Oscar Wilde, theatre can be understood as a living, multimodal organism in which music functions as a central agent in shaping and coordinating the performative experience. Its autonomy allows it to communicate subtleties that dialogue or movement alone cannot fully express, guiding audience attention, shaping dramatic tension, and reinforcing character development. In my professional reflection, I have observed that music interacts dialogically with gesture, stage movement, and visual design to create a multilayered performative language. Musical motifs and thematic structures do not merely accompany the performance; they serve as dramaturgical pillars that support narrative coherence, emotional flow, and interpretive

depth. Wilde's insight reminds us that theatre is not only a representational space, but a dynamic environment where all expressive elements—sound, movement, and visuality—coalesce to generate a living, immersive artistic experience.

At this intersection of ideas, William Shakespeare's reflection, "All the world's a stage," resonates as a natural continuation of Wilde's reminder. From my perspective as a researcher in this field, this thought illuminates the profound connection between art and life. If life itself is staged and the human being an actor within it, then music becomes more than an aesthetic embellishment: it is the very pulse of existence, shaping the rhythm of experience and granting emotional depth to every act. In this light, music cannot be confined to the physical boundaries of the theatrical stage. It transcends them, becoming an energy that permeates our daily lives, a force that gives continuity to emotions and meaning to shared experiences. For me, this realization emphasizes that music functions as a universal language—one that, in theater, serves the narrative by amplifying dramatic expression, while in everyday life it articulates the unspoken and binds the individual to the collective. Thus, I perceive music and theater not as two isolated artistic domains, but as deeply intertwined forms of human experience—modes of expression that mirror, interpret, and regenerate life itself.

These reflections clearly demonstrate that the relationship between music and theater extends far beyond mere aesthetic embellishment; it penetrates the very essence of how art and life are intertwined. The stage is not merely a site of performance but a metaphor for human existence, where music establishes the rhythm, depth, and emotional resonance of every lived experience. Yet, what has been presented here constitutes only a partial overview of an exceptionally broad field. Much remains to be discovered about the various ways in which music shapes theatrical structure and interpretation, and how theater, in turn, expresses music, giving it an expanded communicative dimension. This ongoing dialogue between sound and performance opens a rich and necessary field of study, offering endless opportunities for further research into the deepest intersections of human creativity.

2.Literature review

Within academic discourse on the performing arts, music and theatre are often addressed as distinct domains; however, a closer analysis reveals that they exist in a constant relationship of interaction. Music, beyond its aesthetic function, generates emotional and symbolic spaces, becoming a fundamental element in structuring the theatrical experience. It does not merely accompany dramatic action but frequently acts as its driving force, determining the rhythm, tone, and atmosphere of performance. In this sense, music can be understood as an internal mechanism that both produces dramatic tension and simultaneously constructs communicative bridges between actor and audience. Conversely, theatre, as a form of representing reality and human imagination, acquires from music an additional expressive dimension that transcends the boundaries of spoken word or physical action. In their interplay, a new artistic language emerges, where sound and stage do not operate simply as parallel components, but as elements that condition and transform one another. In this context, the existing body of literature sheds light on the ways in which music contributes to the creation of dramatic meaning and on its role within the narrative structure of performance. The following section will present an analytical review of theoretical and scholarly sources, with the aim of identifying the mechanisms through which music becomes an organic part of performance and of establishing a clear theoretical framework regarding the relationship between sound and stage action.

In examining the relationship between music and theatre, it is essential to consider the theoretical perspectives and practical approaches that have shaped this interdisciplinary dialogue.

The use of music within theatrical performance goes beyond functioning as an aesthetic addition; it also serves as a methodological and conceptual tool that reshapes how performance itself is understood. Scholars note that this expanded role is visible in the way musicality has been approached as a model for artistic creation, a working method, and even a metaphor for theatrical structure (Carlson, 2016, pp. 120–125).

Among the most significant contributors to this discussion is David Roesner, whose book 'Musicality in Theatre' (2015) explores musicality as a core element in training, directing, and performing. He emphasizes that music should not be regarded as an external supplement to dramaturgy, but rather as an underlying framework that provides rhythm and coherence to the entire act of performance (Roesner, 2015, pp. 10–15).

Other perspectives have highlighted different aspects of the relationship between music and theatre, such as the semiotic functions of sound (Féral, 2002, pp. 100–105), the role of music in shaping dramatic atmosphere (Lehmann, 2006, pp. 85–90), and its contribution to producing an integrated aesthetic experience for the audience (Abbate & Parker, 2012, pp. 12–18).

These perspectives not only enrich the theoretical framework but also provide a clearer understanding of how music has functioned as an innovative force in the development of theatre. In the following, I will present the key authors and theoretical contributions that have shaped the conceptualization of this dialogue between music and performance.

Meyerhold developed a clear sense of the overall composition, the general musical and rhythmical shape of the performance, which provided the framework for developing the individual scenes, actions, and characters.

He stressed that an actor must be aware of the composition of the entire production and “sound in harmony with it” (Meyerhold, 1969, p. 105).

Appia’s approach highlights music as a vital element that shapes both movement and space in theatre. He argued that music does not merely accompany performance but animates gestures and transforms the stage into a cohesive environment where rhythm and expression intersect. As he explains, “music creates a milieu in which the living body takes on artistic significance” (Appia, 1899, p. 40).

Mamet also underscores music as a transformative force in theatre. Beyond sensory pleasure, it organizes rhythm, energizes performers, and shapes the stage, serving as a medium through which theatrical meaning and emotional depth are realized. As he puts it: “Music is not just a massage for the senses. It is something through which the world can be transformed” (Mamet, 1997, p. 28).

Lowes’ perspective demonstrates that in Shakespeare’s plays, music is not decorative but plays an active role in shaping narrative and emotion. By intertwining with dialogue and action, it enhances tension and enriches character psychology. As he notes, “music in Shakespeare’s plays does not simply embellish the theatrical experience; it plays an active role in shaping the narrative”, (Lowes, 2017, p. 87).

Bowman emphasizes the difference between language and music, observing that while language structures thought, music structures feeling. In his words: “Music does for feeling what language does for thought” (Bowman, 1998, p. 200).

Underlying these reflections is an older tradition that linked human music to cosmic harmony. Rooted in Greek philosophy, this idea viewed earthly music as reflecting the order of the heavens, shaping both scholarly approaches to music and its representation in literature (Lindley, 2014, p. 7).

Music in theatre is not merely illustrative; it interacts with text, the body, and space to create dramaturgical meaning and rhythm. According to Nicholas Cook, musical meaning emerges from this interaction, providing structure and emotional intensity to the performance (Cook, 2001, p. 170-195).

Mamet highlights music as a transformative force, shaping perception and energizing performers. Lowes demonstrates that in Shakespeare, music actively guides narrative and character emotion, enhancing dramatic tension. Bowman underscores that while language structures thought, music structures feeling, translating internal emotions into shared experiences. From my perspective, music extends beyond sound to animate the performer’s body, shape the stage environment, and deepen audience engagement. Together, these insights reveal music as a central, co-creative element in theatre, essential for organizing rhythm, shaping performance, and enriching the overall theatrical experience.

The reviewed literature highlights the profound and dynamic relationship between music and theatre. Music is not merely a background element but an active force that shapes rhythm, emotional tension, and interpretive depth. It interacts inseparably with movement and dramatic text, creating a multidimensional performance that engages the audience on multiple levels. Music and theatre, therefore, function as interwoven forms of artistic expression, reinforcing one another and enhancing the richness of the performative experience. Positioned as an active agent on stage, music contributes to dramatic coherence and emotional resonance, making every performance an integrated and immersive artistic encounter. Understanding music as an essential partner in theatre underscores its role not only as an aesthetic component but as a critical dramaturgical element that shapes perception, interpretation, and the overall impact of the performance.

The reviewed literature identifies music as a key dramaturgical element in theatre, influencing narrative structure, emotional response, and the interpretative aspects of performance.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between music and theatre, with particular emphasis on music as a dramaturgical and performative element within theatrical productions. Following John W. Creswell (2014), quantitative methods allow for the identification of patterns and professional tendencies, providing a clear link between theoretical frameworks and practical application. Building on the literature review, the research examines how music contributes to narrative development, performance structure, and collaborative dynamics between composers and directors.

Empirical data were collected through a structured online questionnaire created via Google Forms, targeting theatre composers and directors. The questionnaire comprised two distinct sets of questions, designed specifically for each professional group to ensure methodological relevance and precision. The survey participants are from Gjakova and the surrounding areas, including the local theatre, with diverse professional experience in theatrical productions, a total of ten participants—five composers and five directors—completed the survey, providing quantitative insights grounded in professional practice.

The standardized instrument facilitated systematic data collection and enabled comparative analysis, supporting evidence-based conclusions. By integrating these empirical findings with theoretical perspectives, the study establishes a robust understanding of the functional role, integration processes, and collaborative interplay of music within contemporary theatrical performances.

4. Analysis and Results

Questionnaire for composers:

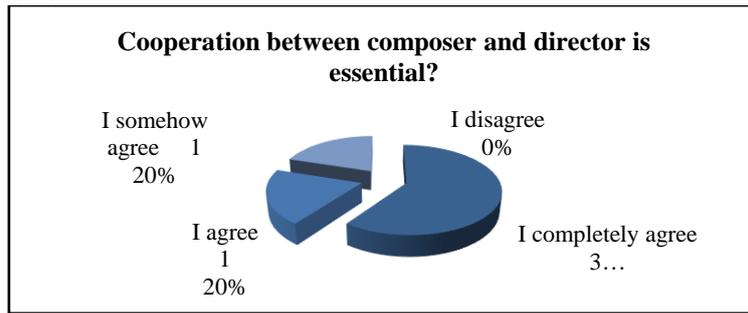


Fig.1 Composers and directors must cooperate.

In this figure it is shown that 60% of respondents think composers and directors must cooperate, 20% agree and 20% somehow agree.

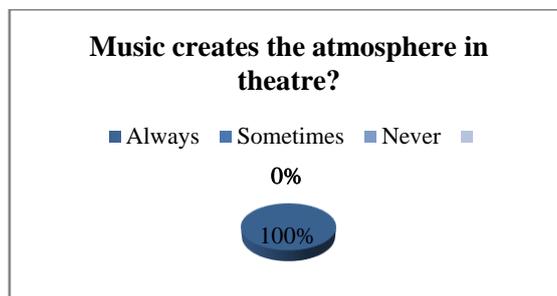


Fig.2 Music always creates atmosphere in theatre.

In this figure shows 100% agree that music always creates atmosphere in theatre.

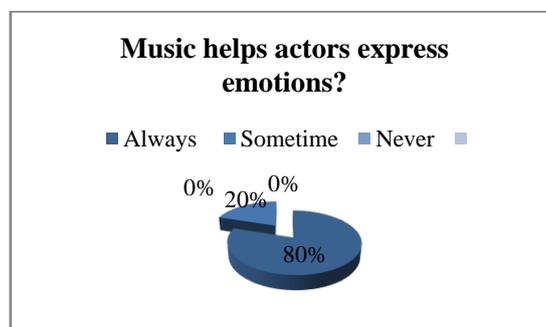


Fig.3 Actors' emotions are expressed more easily with the help of music. This figure shows that 80% are always and 20% sometime.

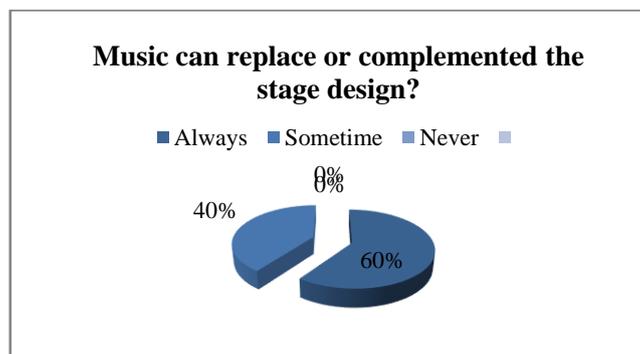


Fig.4 The stage design can be complemented by music This figure shows that 60% are always and 40% sometime

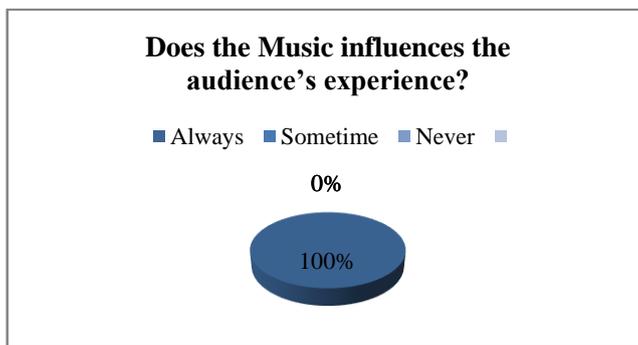


Fig. 5 Music influences the audience's experience

This figure shows that 100% are always

Questionnaire for directors:

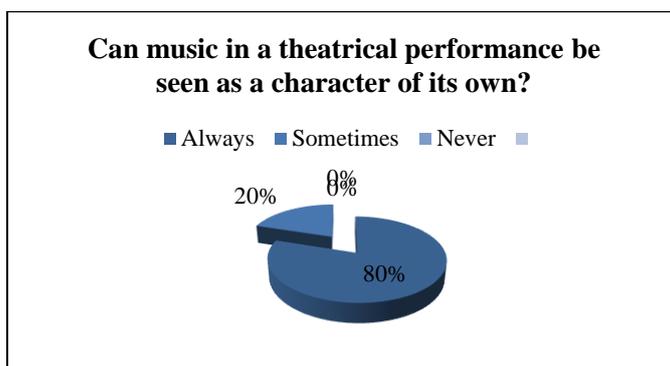


Fig.6 Music in a theatrical performance be seen as a character of its own

This figure shows that 80% are always and 20% sometimes

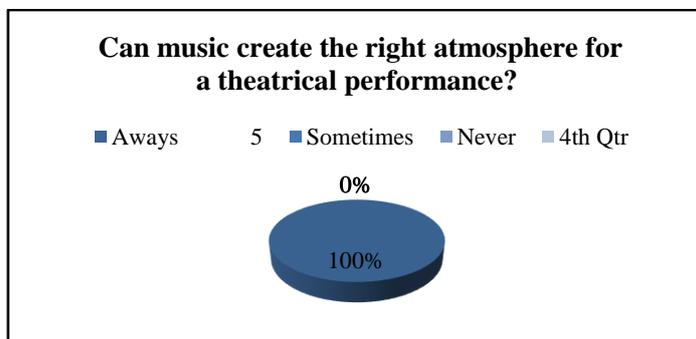


Fig.7 Music create the right atmosphere for a theatrical performance

This figure shows that 100% are always

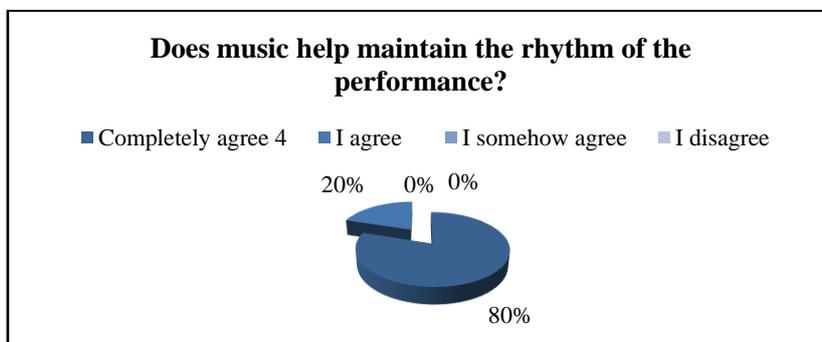


Fig.8 Music is a co-creator of the performance rather than just supporting tool

The figure shows that 80% completely agree and 20% agree

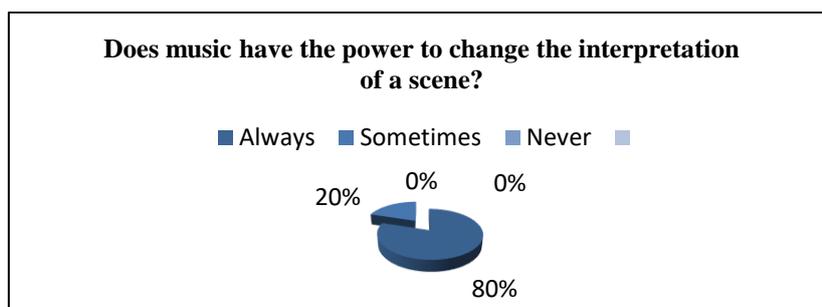


Fig.9 Music have the poqer to chnge the interpretation of e scene
The figure shows that 80% completely agree and 20% agree

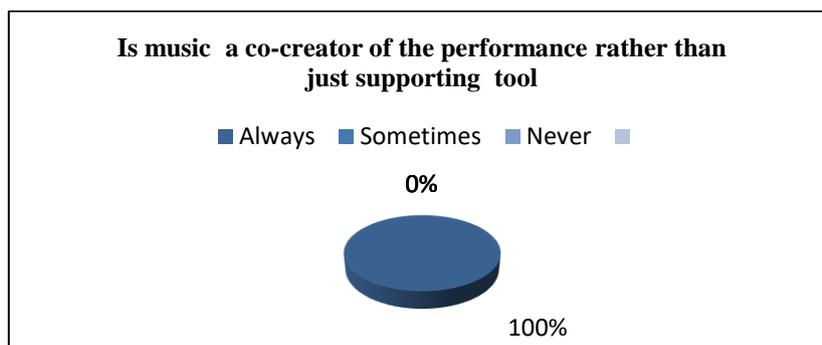


Fig.10 Music help maintain the rhythm of the performance
The figure shows that 100% completely agree

4.1 Interpretation of Results

The data collected from participants in Gjakova indicate that music plays a central role in shaping both the narrative and performative structure of theatre productions. Directors and composers emphasized the importance of close collaboration to integrate musical elements with the script and visual design, ensuring consistent artistic coherence.

The results highlight the structural, emotional, and perceptual impact of music, as well as how sound, movement, and visuality interact to enhance the overall performance experience. Music operates as a distinct semiotic system, shaping rhythm, atmosphere, and emotional intensity, while reinforcing the internal cohesion and continuity of performances. Through its interaction with dramaturgical and compositional elements, music facilitates the construction of a unified artistic framework that guides dramatic progression and enhances expressive meaning.

Quantitative insights from composers and directors further underscore music's co-creative role, directly influencing both structural and interpretative coherence. Participants emphasized the significance of interdisciplinary collaboration, highlighting that integrating musical and dramaturgical elements is essential for achieving effective performative unity. These collaborative processes allow music to transcend a purely illustrative function, acting as a catalyst for artistic innovation and experimental practice in theatre.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are suggested to further enhance the integration of music and theatre:

1. Develop professional training programs that integrate musical and theatrical practices.
2. Expand research on the relationship between music and theatre.
3. Strengthen collaboration between composers and directors.
4. Enhance interdisciplinarity in education and research

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the close and dynamic relationship between music and theatre, demonstrating that music is not merely an additional element but a dramaturgical and performative force that shapes the structure of a work and intensifies the emotional experience. The experiences and perspectives of the composers and directors interviewed indicate that creative collaboration is crucial for artistic coherence and the development of a performance. Through this research, it becomes clear that the intentional integration of music not only enriches dramaturgy but also stimulates innovation in theatrical practice, opening pathways for further research and professional development in this complex field.

The intentional integration of music stimulates innovation, heightens emotional impact, and strengthens collaborative creativity, opening pathways for new experimental practices and further research in contemporary theatre. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interdependence between music and theatre, offering guidance for scholars and practitioners, and highlighting that music is a transformative component essential for the development and enrichment of theatrical art.

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