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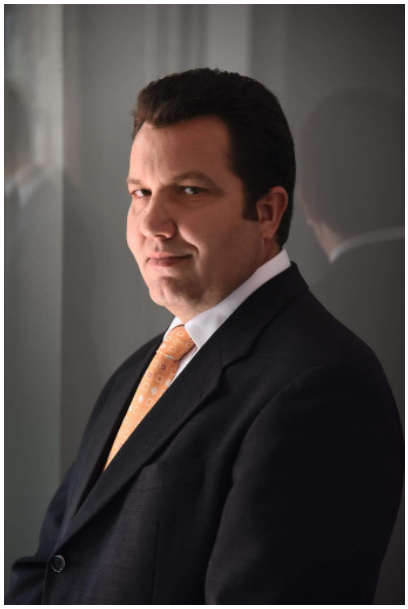
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LETTER OF WELCOME!

It is with great pleasure and pride that I welcome you to the 1st International Conference on Arts and Education (ICAE 2025), hosted by the University of Arts in Tirana.

This landmark event gathers a diverse and distinguished group of scholars, educators, artists, and researchers from across the region and beyond, united by a shared dedication to exploring the intersections of artistic practice and pedagogy. In a time when the arts are called upon to respond to rapid social, technological, and cultural transformations, this conference serves as a vital platform for exchange, critical reflection, and creative dialogue.

Our three faculties—Music, Performing Arts, and Fine Arts—have joined efforts to curate a program that highlights both heritage and innovation, theory and practice. The richness of the topics presented in these volumes attests to the depth of research and the vibrancy of artistic inquiry today. From discussions on cultural sustainability, digital preservation, and interdisciplinary education, to reflections on the evolving role of the arts in public space and mental health, the contributions collected here challenge us to reimagine the role of the artist and educator in society.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the organizing and scientific committees, to the editorial board, and to every participant whose intellectual and artistic labor has made this event possible. May the conversations sparked here inspire ongoing collaboration and continued commitment to the advancement of arts and education in our communities.

Welcome to ICAE 2025!

Prof. Dr. Erald Bakalli

Rector

University of Arts, Tirana, Albania

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Protest Art - The Visual Transformation From The Half Of The Twentieth Century Until Today

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Abstract

This research paper raises the issue of the visual message that activism, influenced by social and political movements, has conveyed to the audience and continues to convey through visual art throughout the decades. The hypothesis in this study seeks to demonstrate that the visual language of activism through protest art has changed over time. From a pacifist and unifying language to a more violent and divisive language in recent decades.
By analysing key historical moments during the second half of the twentieth century and the two decades of the twenty-first century, in which visual art was intertwined with activism and by studying the social groups that led or were impacted by these moments, this study aims to answer questions such as, "How has the activist message through visual language changed throughout history?", "What have been the most significant historical moments when activism and visual art have been intertwined, and how has this shifted the public opinion?" "What is how activism through art can evolve in the future?" "What could be the approach of the society in the future?" "What responsibility does visual art bear in this process?"
In an increasingly fierce confrontation between social groups, in a war of cultural models on issues of a broad spectrum, including those of environmentalism, ethnic/ racial/ gender/ religious identity, and human rights, the study attempts to conclude with the importance and responsibility of the role that visual art has in this unstoppable transformation. An ever-increasing relevance, also influenced by technology, is giving the "Image" a significant burden in culture, politics and the economy.

Keywords

anti-war movement, street art, human rights, feminism, protest art

Introduction

Starting in 2022 and continuing onward, my social media newsfeed began to fill with videos—or what we now commonly call "reels"—of individuals vandalising works of art, mostly paintings, by throwing paint or other liquids onto them. On February 14, 2022, an environmentalist movement named "Just Stop Oil" was founded with a primary agenda of opposing the British government's policies on economic agreements concerning the licensing and production of hydrocarbons—namely oil and its combustible derivatives. Just ten days later, on February 24, 2022, Russia launched the largest and most aggressive attack in Europe since the end of World War II—its invasion of Ukraine—marking the first war of territorial conquest by one state against another on European soil in over seven decades. Then, on October 7, 2023, in the early morning hours, a stream of news reports began that would continue throughout the day and beyond, following the incursion of Hamas militants into Israeli territory in what would later be called the October 7 Massacre—an event that sparked the Israel-Gaza War. (Zatat, 2016)

These three events—within just a two-year span—and others that followed and continue to unfold today, left a deep mark on my conscience. They prompted me to reflect on a society that, not only politically and economically had been simmering for nearly two decades like a pressure cooker ready to explode, but also culturally was sending increasingly explicit messages through ever more violent forms of activism. It is a mysterious puzzle that escapes everyday logic, yet remains present and echoes across temporally and geographically distant events, united by a common thread: tolerance, coexistence, and cooperation for prosperity—not war over ideology or myth. The first of these events, at least—"Just Stop Oil"—was directly linked to my analysis of a type of activism that has changed drastically from that of the 20th century, a shift I aim to explore in this study. In a global society where conflicts are igniting one after another—targeting ethnicities, political factions, and even divisions within the same cultural "tribes"—what role does art and activism through art play as a medium for conveying messages of reflection for a healthy society? (Zatat, 2016) In this study, I will analyse different cases in different times and observe how the activist message related to art has changed over time. When, to raise awareness, there is no longer any means other than overturning yesterday's values—especially through the destruction of artworks themselves, as seen with "Just Stop Oil"—what direction has society taken? Is art still necessary as a means to convey a message? (Zatat, 2016) Are we undergoing a value transformation, living in a new world, and what place will art hold in this world of new rules and new values? In this new reality, will art and activism as we know them cease to exist, or will these two forces continue to nourish new cultural values and to promote a new world order?

Flowers Against Bullets, or How to Love the Enemy

If we were to go back in time from today's vandalism of "Just Stop Oil" to Picasso's Dove of Peace, perhaps we would see the same world, always in conflict, but at least a very different activist message. One promotes peace and armistice. The other responds with a more violent approach, and I mean, above all, the message conveyed through activism to raise public awareness through art or cultural movements. (Zatat, 2016) If we go back in time to the Capitol in Washington D.C. during the 1960s and 70s, in addition to demonstrations and violent clashes

against the war, we would also see young men and women taking slaps and responding with hugs, or placing flowers in the barrels of police and military guns—as was the case with the activist movement "Flower Power," which raised awareness against the Vietnam War. The most remarkable peaceful protest during the war was that of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, which culminated in a series of performances called "Bed-in for Peace". Despite the couple's questioned religiosity, the images and symbols they used to convey the message of peace had deep roots in biblical Christian culture—particularly in that post-Abrahamic message from Christian doctrine: "love your enemy." According to Ono and Lennon, reciprocal violence was not the answer. If the system inflicted violence upon the protesters, the latter should not respond with violence. It made no sense to protest for peace using violent methods. "If someone strikes you, turn the other cheek"—this was the philosophy of their protest. To protest through love, not violence. The peaceful message conveyed through religious symbolism went beyond words. For Lennon and Ono, the image also had to match the words. Thus, they appeared in Bed-In performances in a completely wild, pure natural state, with uncombed and uncut hair. Naked or dressed simply, adorned with flowers. Even in their performance room "Bed-In for Peace," they carefully curated the surrounding environment. This room was not to be just a bedroom, but a sanctuary. It was decorated with messages, drawings, slogans, and objects they placed or received from admirers or protesters. This room had to be a Garden of Eden, blossoming with messages of peace. Surrounded by journalists and cameras, they appeared like an Adam and Eve who had traveled through time—taken from the primordial Earth and placed in front of a modern, curious, and analytical public that recorded, filmed, and investigated them, to understand something from this unusual couple, speaking out strange messages of love, who seemed to share nothing in common with contemporary society except their humanoid appearance. (Farber, 1994; Roszak, 1995) (Brockell, 2019; Time Staff, 2019; Bari, 2007) Just like Lennon's drawing "Two Virgins," which depicts a man and a woman simply drawn with lines like a child's drawing, a symbol of innocence and purity not only in the carnal sense but also psychologically. Two people stripped of clothing, weapons, hatred, and sinful thoughts. Indeed, they were called "two virgins" because they were free of sexual ambitions and carnal greed. It is another biblical image used by the couple to convey their message of peace in a world engulfed not only by the Vietnam conflict but also by the Cold War—a broader conflict that split the globe in two and was a total war: political, and above all, cultural.

The Great Fall – A Message for Reunification

By the end of the 1980s, both Eastern and Western Europe were undergoing dramatic political and social upheaval. The Soviet Union was on the brink of implosion, and the communist regimes of its satellite states were collapsing one by one. For 45 years, Europe was not considered a unified continent but divided into two parts: the West—with its democratic, capitalist, free market, and liberal art and culture model—and the East—with its socialist model, one of centralized economy, lack of private property, and state-controlled art and culture used as tools of party propaganda.

The border between two worlds divided not only states but also a city, which turned into the symbol of the Cold War: Berlin. Just as Germany was divided into the Federal Republic (West) and the Democratic Republic (East), Berlin, as the capital of Germany, was also split between the Western sectors controlled by the Allies and the Eastern sectors under Soviet control. This

city became the epicentre and the hottest point of the Cold War for over four and a half decades—not only politically and economically, but also artistically and culturally. For this reason, Berlin became the main attraction of a new tendency in the art and activist movements, street art through graffiti. The primary site of artistic activism became the very line that divided these worlds: the Berlin Wall, constructed by the Soviets in 1961. Over time, this wall transformed into a 'gallery' of protest street art, covered in thousands of graffiti from many street artists around the world. Among which the most famous piece was: "My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love" by Dmitri Vrubel. The mural depicts Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and East German leader Erich Honecker sharing a kiss on the lips. The artwork is based on a real photograph taken during a congress of Eastern European communist parties. In the original image, the kiss was meant for the cheek. However, the camera angle and the closeness of the two leaders' mouths—typical of the fraternal embraces among communist leaders—made the photo appear as a lip kiss. (Walters, 2021; Nelson, 2022; Borzenko, 2014; German History in Documents and Images, n.d.) (Borzenko, 2014) This iconic photograph inspired the artist to create a provocative graffiti work imbued with liberal overtones, serving as a response and an ironic and satirical commentary on a conservative, dictatorial regime where same-sex love was taboo.

Tiananmen Massacre

The year 1989 was not only a pivotal period for Europe but for the entire globe—especially in China, during the period from April 15 to June 4, when a massive protest erupted that would go down in history as the Tiananmen Square Protest and Massacre. It represented a clash between the Chinese people and the communist government, resulting in the deaths of around 300 Chinese citizens—more than 30 of them students—and injuries to over 6,000 others. This protest, which was not labelled a "revolution" as it did not appear successful at first glance, but which ultimately changed China forever, included demonstrations, civil disobedience, hunger strikes, and the occupation of Tiananmen Square in central Beijing. One of its key moments was the activist gesture by students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, who over four days built a papier-mâché statue, representing a woman holding a raised torch. The statue was inaugurated on May 30, 1989. (Tsao, 1999; Cherrington, 1991) The statue was a bold and open message to the Chinese communist government from students who were calling for the overthrow of the dictatorial regime and the beginning of a process of democratic and economic reform. It was a historic moment—perhaps the last—when art students, through their activism, carried out such a meaningful act, expressing themselves in the most authentic way they knew and felt: through art. It was not violence, destruction, or boycott—but creation. It was an act of building: a work that spoke louder than any words in the face of communist authority. A "Goddess of Liberty" that exuded the scent of the West and everything it represented—freedom of enterprise, freedom of speech, and above all, for these students: freedom of expression through art. A free art stripped of propaganda. That struck at the system most frighteningly—through the symbolism of its strongest rival: the United States of America. (Tsao, 1999)

I was eight years old at the time. I remember how that statue brought a single thought to the minds of the global public—and also to our minds in Albania—that the Chinese had created their own "Goddess of Liberty," inspired by the Statue of Liberty in New York. Today, when I revisit this work more than three decades later, with my experience as an art scholar and 17

years of experience as an artist and educator, I can read in that work layers of complexity—both contradictory and universal. It represents a blend of socialist realist aesthetics, a desire to break taboos, and a reflection of existential urgency in a critical historical context: an almost "cosmic" division of time—before and after Tiananmen. (Tsao, 1999) The statue depicted a woman holding a lit torch with both hands. I emphasise the past tense because the statue was destroyed after the protest. Even today, the Chinese government ensures the censorship not only of all academic material, chronicles, books, or images but also of collective memory itself—silencing a generation that lived through it and raising a new generation almost entirely uninformed about the events. The woman's hair in the statue was sculpted dynamically, as if moved by the wind—a symbolism often present in works of socialist realism. Similarly, holding the torch with both hands (unlike the New York Liberty Statue) was another feature of that art style, where the symbol of enlightenment and progress was not held individually but was a collective achievement. In this case, although the figure is a single person, the gesture suggests popular unity. Other details—such as the cloak the woman wore, which does not resemble a socialist worker's uniform but instead a Greco-Roman tunic—evoke the figure of the French Enlightenment goddess who also inspired the Liberty Statue. In this context, the activism of the Chinese students takes on another meaning: a revolt which, despite being brutally suppressed, had an extraordinary political and cultural impact—that changed China and influenced global developments. Something that did not happen in North Korea, and this difference is visible today between the two countries.

Another moment for reflection is the very social model that the Beijing art students fought for—especially when compared to today's student protests around the world and in Albania. What messages do today's protests convey? What alternative model do they offer in contrast to the existing system? Blocking roads, bridges, or lectures is a form of protest—but creating, protesting, and even bleeding in the face of the military for an artistic and humanist ideal is an act with historical resonance that transforms generations and nations.

The Great Death of Peace and Love – Banksy (Bengtsen, 2014; Ganz, 2015; Young, 2013)

A lasting symbol of the Tiananmen Square protest is the figure known as "Tank Man"—captured in a photograph by Jeff Widener of the Associated Press. It immortalised the moment when, as tanks rolled into the square to disperse protesters, a lone man stepped in front of them, using his body to block their advance. This powerful image became an icon of resistance in Western pop culture. It inspired later generations of artists and activists—most notably the activist artist Banksy, for whom anti-war criticism and resistance to oppressive systems are core themes. Between 2000 and 2010, Banksy produced a series of war-themed works. Among the most famous is "Love is in the Air." Much like the pacifist Flower Power movement, Banksy's protester also throws flowers—but with greater dynamism, as if hurling them with force. He holds a bottle of flowers, reminiscent of a Molotov cocktail, commonly used in violent protests. Another piece portrays the Mona Lisa wielding a rocket launcher. Dressed in military gear and ammunition belts, her gaze and pose—though identical to Leonardo's composition—are recontextualised to resemble that of a jihadist fighter posing for the press. This image reflects the visual landscape of the last two decades, shaped by U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the civil war in Syria. (Farber, 1994; Roszak, 1995) (Tsao, 1999; Cherrington, 1991) (Bengtsen, 2014; Ganz, 2015; Young, 2013) (Thompson, 2015)

In this way, Banksy reintroduces the iconic beauty of art history with a new aesthetic where war is glorified and violence justified. Many of his war-themed works show children wearing gas masks hugging bombs, or holding ice creams shaped like lit sticks of dynamite. He also targets pop icons like Mickey Mouse, suggesting that behind the glitter of prosperity and the spectacle industry lies a darker reality of profit from suffering. Banksy is a critic of Western hypocrisy—seeing the champions of liberty and democracy as deeply immersed in contradiction. This perspective culminates in his graffiti series featuring chimpanzees wearing placards with changing slogans. One says "Keep it real"—a colloquialism with layered meanings, calling for modesty, rationality, and reflection. Another reads: "Laugh now, but one day we'll be in charge," reminding us of our origins as a species. It's a long journey from our humanoid ancestors to our technologically advanced present, yet our unchanged thirst for domination persists—as it did when we had nothing but nature. The chimpanzee—not another primate—serves as a cautionary symbol. As our closest living relatives, only half a chromosome apart in evolution, they embody a mirror of who we are. Banksy warns that, given our destructive tendencies, we may soon regress or leave the world to be ruled by chimps in our place. (Bengtsen, 2014; Ganz, 2015; Young, 2013)

The Middle Finger

A series of works entitled "Fucking Tourists" by French photographer Nicolas Demeersman, widely shared on social media, presents portraits of people around the world, characters from various cultural and social backgrounds, united by one gesture: showing the middle finger. A sub-Saharan African, a Hindu woman, an Asian chef, an Iberian retired man, or a woman from the Andes – each of them challenges the viewer as an interlocutor because every flaw in the system is rooted in misunderstanding between people. Our prosperity is someone else's poverty. The injustice we experience is someone else's getaway. (Demeersman, 2014; Zatat, 2016) Demeersman recounted that the series originated when a local said, "'fuck off, I don't want to end up on a postcard'" and he then asked him to give the middle finger, which became the basis of the project (Zatat, 2016). The artist's message is direct, complex and adaptable to different contexts. The middle finger is what Spaniards are showing to tourists. It is what every taxpayer shows to a corrupt system that overtaxes the poor and spares the rich. The middle finger is failed globalisation – impoverishing locals while empowering multinational corporations. Thus, Demeersman's work is inspired by the inhabitants of places where the tourism industry has made local life nearly impossible.

Conclusion

The past two decades have shaken the foundations of what art and activism represented throughout the twentieth century, particularly in its second half. Art is no longer a call for tolerance and a proposer of progressive avant-garde values, but an aesthetic of violence and explicit expression. Activism no longer manifests for peace and understanding, but for mutual violence, suppression of dialogue with the opponent, denial of the other side's rights, and a goal of mutual destruction – of artworks, tolerant societies, democratic institutions, and critical thought. If in the past, activism and art – at their most extreme – represented the avant-garde of a liberal society where newness, tolerance, and dialogue were at their core, today's activism no longer pursues such aims. Today, activism calls for "intifada," for the destruction of art as

"unnecessary" in a world on the verge of the next environmental catastrophe. Today's activism is as radical as the "enemy" it fights. In today's world, the hippie would no longer throw flowers but bullets – and there would be a massacre at the Capitol. Today's activism takes sides and no longer invites parties to a truce, but to vengeance. The Black Lives Matter movement, which should have been a call for acceptance and inclusion, turned into a movement as violent as the "white supremacy" groups it opposed – extreme and radical forces. Today, activism has no neutral centre. The centre is gone, and only two radical extremes remain.

Thus, from flowers and love to the middle finger or soup thrown onto a painting, we see a great leap in a world that has been deeply transformed and now increasingly resembles something foreign to itself. The activist message in art is at a crossroads. Society today is at a crossroads. I would call it a crossroads of sacrifice – the sacrifice of peace, love, tolerance, acceptance, inclusion, sexual freedom, and the universal right to democracy and respect for the most vulnerable. These rights, won over centuries since the French Revolution, are now being sacrificed for economic, ethnic, religious, and political causes – for the ghosts of symbols and legends, for social models that, in the name of freedom, present the subjugation of others as emancipation. Even art and its activist message seem to have become a mirror of this society – an art that no longer offers flowers against bullets, kisses against slaps, or freedom and democracy in a tolerant environment against dictatorship. An art that seemingly no longer values acceptance and cultural exchange, but shows the middle finger instead. And an activism that, from the urgency of saving the planet and the appeal for respect and tolerance, now demands the eradication of an entire nation "from the river to the sea."

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AI and Generative Typography: A New Frontier in Design

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Abstract

A new wave in design is taking shape, driven by the evolution of typography through artificial intelligence and generative algorithms. This case study looks into how these technologies are beginning to reshape the world of type design—offering new levels of flexibility, adaptability, and creative possibility. Central to this research is Universal Sans, a notable example of a generative type platform that combines skilled design with cutting-edge technology. By examining its typographic features, AI-powered tools, user experience, and overall blend of creativity and innovation, this study explores how platforms like this can make custom font creation more accessible—without compromising on visual appeal or readability. The findings highlight the fact that designers are enabled to become co-creators through the use of user-centric tools and algorithms that are rigorously constrained. This allows designers to experiment with different stylistic variations and adjust letterforms in real time, ultimately pushing the boundaries of visual communication. The combination of human and machine creativity yields cohesive and functional typefaces tailored to specific needs, while also indicating a wider trend towards more participatory, inclusive, and innovative design processes in the era of artificial intelligence.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, generative typography, type design, digital typography, ethical AI in design

Introduction

Typography is not an exception to the big changes that AI and generative design have brought to all creative fields. Many projects couldn't afford custom typefaces before because they took a lot of time, money, and skill to make. Smart algorithms and variable font technologies are making these problems less of a problem. These technologies let you make parametric or automatic changes to different parts of type design. Generative typography is the name for systems that use AI algorithms or computational rules to make letterforms. This lets fonts be made in real time and in a way that is always changing. Designers can now tweak or even design a font algorithmically to fit their exact needs instead of picking from a fixed library of typefaces. The effects are big: typography is becoming a process that mixes human and machine work, using both creative intuition and precise calculations.

A well-known example of this cutting edge is the Universal Sans platform, which won a D&AD Black Pencil award in 2020 for its groundbreaking invention. Universal Sans is "a variable typeface system that allows users to customise the typeface in a web application with a selection of variables and alternative characters, then download the bespoke font they have created." In the following sections, we look at Universal Sans from a number of different angles: its typographic flexibility, the AI or generative algorithms that power it, the user interface and tools, accessibility and usability issues, and the overall blending of design and technology. We want to show with this case study how AI-powered generative typography may open up new creative possibilities while still meeting the standards of good design in terms of usefulness and rigour.

The Typographic Features of Universal Sans

Universal Sans is an extremely adaptable sans-serif typeface that works well with many different styles. It was once meant to be a single font family that could alter to seem like a lot of different sans-serifs, from modern geometric and humanist forms to classic grotesques. A design framework with six variable axes and a wide range of alternate glyphs makes it feasible for a single cohesive system to have "an infinite number of unique outcomes." In other words, the letterforms in the typeface can be altered along a number of dimensions, such as weight, width, x-height, stroke terminals, ink traps, and proportions. Even though there are seemingly unlimited permutations, the letterforms that make up the font follow basic typographic standards. This makes sure that each instance generated is coherent and useful as a typeface. This delicate balance between freedom and restriction is important because it lets the system create styles that are very different from each other, like a wide, heavy geometric style and a narrow, lightweight grotesque style, without ever breaking the basic rules of typography and readability.

One interesting thing is the range of stylistic options available. Users can give their custom font a certain tone or "flavour" by choosing different designs for important characters. For example, a designer can choose between different lowercase a forms (like a traditional double-story an or a simpler single-story), different capitals (like Q or G), and even different shapes for punctuation and numbers. Figure 1 shows some of these character variations. Each cube shows a letter in a different style, from more standard to more experimental ones. You can vary the

personality of the typeface in small or big ways by using these alternates, but it will still be a member of the Universal Sans family. This feature knows that small things, like a rounded dot on an i or a curved leg on an R, can change the way a typeface feels as a whole. Universal Sans gives designers direct control over these elements.



Figure 1. Example of the diverse stylistic alternates in Universal Sans.

Key characters like “a”, “g”, “y”, “t” (shown on different faces of these cubes) have multiple designs, ranging from classic forms (01) to more unique or modern variations (02, 03). By choosing different alternates, users can imbue their typeface with a distinct character while maintaining typographic cohesion.

Universal Sans is a professional typeface that meets all the technical and aesthetic standards. It may also be used in a variety of styles. The full version of the typeface has support for more languages (including Basic Latin, Latin-1 Supplement, and Latin Extended-A character sets) and advanced OpenType features like ligatures, fractions, tabular figures, and punctuation that is case-sensitive. The fact that a custom-made Universal Sans font works perfectly in multilingual settings and complicated typesetting situations is proof of how carefully it was designed and built. Users can make a Text version of the font that is better for small sizes (for example, by making the openings bigger and changing the spacing to make it clearer) and a Display version that is better for big headings or posters. You can also change the optical size of the typeface. The platform shows that it cares about both creative freedom and functional excellence by making these visual changes (such bigger counter gaps and smart ink traps in the Text version to make it easier to read at tiny sizes). In conclusion, Universal Sans’ typographic features combine the rules of good design with a wide range of expression. The system’s axes and alternates can be used to make almost any sans-serif style, and each result is still clear and refined enough to be used every day. This shows how generative typography may push the limits of inventiveness while still following the basic rules of type design.

The Generative Design Process and What AI Can Do

Universal Sans isn’t a “AI” in the sense of a self-learning neural network, but it does leverage automation and generative algorithms to do design work, which is what AI-assisted design is all about. The platform builds on the idea of variable fonts, which are a complex font format that combines multiple designs into one font file, and turns it into an interactive tool that lets

users create their own fonts. The technology is smart because it can easily handle complicated interpolations and make sure that every font instance it makes is technically sound. Using open-source font engineering libraries (like FontTools) and custom scripting, the process of making fonts is done automatically in the background. The program automatically figures out the new outline forms and spacing as the user moves sliders or toggles. It then makes a font file with those exact measurements right away. This level of automation, which makes a fully functional typeface in real time, is better than older methods of font design and requires overcoming very difficult technical problems. Universal Sans takes care of vector editing and production tasks for the user. It works like an AI that knows how to design and uses the designer's input (parameters and preferences) to make a custom typeface.

It's important to keep in mind that the "AI" part of Universal Sans is limited by design rules and rules set by people. Universal Sans's generative engine works within the safe limits set by type designer Briton Smith. This is different from a hypothetical machine-learning system that could create wholly new letterforms. This is part of a bigger paradigm in generative creative tools: algorithms don't replace human creativity; they are "an improved creative method" or an extra tool for designers. The user's gut feelings and decisions help them navigate the system's organised area of options. The people who made Universal Sans saw it as a way to give human designers more power by automating the parts of the process that take a long time, not as a way to make type design fully independent. Smith says that the tool is "limited in scope—it doesn't serve to replace traditional type design" and that "human touch will always be required" for more complex or innovative designs. However, he adds that "by removing the barriers of time and budget, it makes customised type more widely accessible." This means that the platform's AI capabilities are purposefully limited to complement, not replace, the knowledge of skilled type designers.

Universal Sans is a great illustration of how generative algorithms may help designers explore aesthetic options they might not have thought of on their own. Because the tool is interactive, users may try out strange or extreme combinations of parameters and observe what happens right away. The development team said that "using the site to experiment with the range of variability is a creative and rewarding experience" that lets you "stumble upon combinations and styles you might not have otherwise considered." These comments show that the system has a quasi-AI function: it generates valid interpolations throughout the design space, which allows it to suggest new design variations at the touch of a button. To sum up, Universal Sans's generative and artificial intelligence features come from its ability to autonomously build and change complex letterforms based on human input and algorithmic principles. It shows that algorithmic design tools may make typographic creative workflows a lot better by making them more exploratory, efficient, and inclusive without lowering the artistic quality of the process.

Font Generation and Customisation Tools

One of the best things about Universal Sans is the huge set of tools it gives you to make and change fonts. To use the platform, you need to go to a web app that walks you through the steps of making your own custom typeface from start. The interface is sophisticated enough to give professionals a lot of control, but it's also easy to use for folks who don't know anything about type design. The process begins with Step 1. The user changes the major design features

of the typeface in “Choose Your Base.” There are six sliders or inputs in the current version (Universal Sans 2.0) that show the six primary axes: Weight, Width, X-Height, Proportions, Terminals, and Ink Traps. You can change the skeleton and stroke characteristics of the typeface in many ways, such as making it bolder or lighter, narrower or wider, changing the proportions of lowercase letters, changing the shape or curvature of stroke endings, and changing the size of ink traps, which are tiny cutaway details that make the font easier to read at small sizes. Users can click on a question mark to get help with the options. The icon next to each option shows what it does. An “Advanced” mode or Interpolator panel lets users map any two variables onto a grid for bivariate interpolation, which lets them explore more complex things. If the number of options is too much, the interface has a “Basic” mode that focusses on a few important things, like weight and terminal style. In the interpolator, the user can drag a point inside the grid to see how the typeface shape changes in two dimensions. For example, one axis (X) may control weight while the other axis (Y) controls roundness or width. This interactive method successfully transforms the abstract idea of a multidimensional font into a tactile experience by allowing one to explore the entire range of design options and select a precise combination of characteristics.

The tool assists the user in choosing stylistic alternatives after establishing the base design (Step 2). Here, one can switch between the various character designs available in the typeface. Options for different letters and symbols are displayed on the interface, such as different variations of the letters “a” and “g,” choices for the numeral “1” or “7” styles, and whether punctuation marks have square or round dots. Because these alternates are previewed in context, the user can see the impact of changing a specific glyph right away. The platform is notably intelligent enough to manage related modifications. For instance, selecting a square-dot punctuation style will also apply square dots to i/j titles and even diacritical marks, guaranteeing uniformity throughout the typeface. By adding weights and styles, the user can then expand their custom font into a family (Steps 3 and 4). Additional weight instances can be created with a single click; for example, the interface may enable you to save the current design as “Light” and then use the weight slider to create a “Bold” variant, and so on. Likewise, an italic version can be added; Universal Sans automatically synchronises the alternate characters and features selected for the upright style with a default italic slant of 9° with modified letterforms. The effectiveness of the generative approach is demonstrated by the ability to create italics on demand, which is typically accomplished through a separate font design effort.

The platform lets the user name their typeface (Step 6) and download the font files (Step 7) once they are happy with the design and its variations. The naming feature is a fun addition that lets you add a preferred name to the font’s metadata, which makes you feel more in control and personalised. You can download it for free, but it only has a limited character set and is only for personal use. You can also buy a license for commercial projects. The backend automatically creates standard font files (like OpenType TTF/WOFF2) for the user’s particular build, complete with all chosen features, upon download or purchase. Hours of manual font engineering would be replaced by this procedure, which could only take a few seconds. In order to facilitate collaborative tweaking and future re-edits without having to start from scratch, the platform even encodes the entire configuration in a custom URL (a unique Build ID in the link) that the user can copy for later use or share.

These font generation tools are remarkably easy to use. Universal Sans is able to accommodate both inexperienced and experienced designers by offering immediate visual feedback and segmenting the customisation process into distinct steps (base properties, alternates, additional styles, etc.). While a typographically savvy user might dive into the Advanced interpolations and create a highly specific style with multiple weights, a novice might stick to the Basic mode and a few alternates to get a slightly customised font. The platform abstracts away the intricacy of font-making software and scripting in both situations; the user only interacts with sliders, buttons, and previews, while the "heavy lifting"—the algorithmic interpolation, outline generation, and font compilation—occurs behind the scenes. As a result, the designer can create a truly unique font in minutes with little technical overhead—something that was previously nearly impossible to do on a large scale. Universal Sans is a prime example of how generative typography can be operationalised into a useful design tool by offering such a toolset in a browser-based interface.

Design Interface and User Experience

The Universal Sans website exhibits excellent design from a visual and user experience (UX) perspective, which enhances its technical prowess. Typography takes centre stage in the interface's sleek, contemporary design. A sizable preview panel and a controls sidebar make up the layout's two primary sections. The preview area provides instant visual confirmation of each change by displaying the font in use, such as "Universal Sans" or custom sample text using the user's current settings. Conversely, the user interacts with the previously discussed settings and options in the control sidebar. In order to minimise glare and make the letter shapes—which are usually displayed in white or a colour with a high contrast—stand out, the design employs a neutral dark theme, which consists of a charcoal background with light text and subtle accents. This decision was made with the user's attention to detail in mind; a dark user interface reduces visual distractions and efficiently frames the typeface specimen. Important instructions or labels are presented succinctly, and the text in the user interface is set in a clean sans-serif font (probably the Universal Sans font itself). To lead the user through a logical progression, for instance, each step of the process is numbered and titled ("1. "Choose your base," "2. "Select Alternates," etc. Tooltips and informational pop-ups (started by "?") don't get in the way of the main interface. " icons" give you more information in simple language.

The preview area (left) shows the text "Universal Sans 1.0" rendered in the custom font as it is being configured. The controls panel (right) guides the user through steps: (1) adjusting base parameters of the typeface (with sliders for Weight, Terminals, Roundness, Skew in this version), with an interactive 2D "Interpolator" grid for exploring variations; (2) selecting alternate glyphs; and subsequent steps for adding weights, italics, etc. This interface design emphasizes clarity and interactivity, allowing users to see the immediate effect of each adjustment on the sample text.

Thoughtful features further improve the user experience. A tiny toolbar at the bottom of the preview area allows the user to change the preview content, such as viewing the entire alphabet, a pangram, a custom phrase, or text in various sizes. This enables users to examine their type design in situations ranging from single letters to paragraphs, which is essential for assessing the readability of the body text as well as the display qualities. The experience feels

fluid and captivating due to the responsive and seamless interactivity: moving a point on the interpolator grid or dragging a slider updates the text that is displayed in real time. According to the website's creators, utilising the tool should be "a creative and rewarding experience" in and of itself. In fact, the interface encourages experimentation and play; it's simple to spend time experimenting with different values to see what shapes appear; it's almost like a game for typeheads. The user is not burdened with technicalities and the front-end remains responsive despite the intricacy behind the scenes.



Figure 2. The Universal Sans web interface (screenshot).

Crucially, industry experts have praised Universal Sans's interface for its superior design. The site's design effectively combines aesthetics and useful functionality, as evidenced by its nomination for the 2020 Webby Awards in the Best Visual Design – Function category. The emphasis on "Function" shows that in addition to being aesthetically pleasing, the website is excellent at making it simple for users to complete the challenging task of creating fonts. In this sense, the partnership between a digital design studio (Twomuch Studio) and a type foundry (Family Type) is apparent; the end product feels in between interactive art and design software. Difficult concepts like variable axes were presented in an understandable way thanks to the site's feedback and refinement loop, which allowed design and development to proceed simultaneously with continuous trial and tweak. For instance, using a draggable node on a grid to depict two-axis interpolation (as seen in Figure 2) is a powerful visual metaphor that users can understand without having to know the underlying mathematics of font interpolation.

From the standpoint of user-centred design, Universal Sans skilfully adapts to various user requirements. Someone can probably accomplish that by directly modifying certain parameters if they have a clear idea in mind ("I want a font like X, but slightly more Y"). The interface, on the other hand, permits open-ended exploration if a user is only there to experiment, which could lead to fresh concepts (the team stated that one might "approach it with a certain concept in mind" but wind up discovering a totally unexpected style during experimentation). A positive user experience is facilitated by responsive controls, consistent visual language,

and unambiguous feedback. One drawback is that the website only suggests using a desktop browser at this time because of the intricacy of the interface and the possibility that the real-time canvas is not completely optimised for touch input or mobile screens. Due to the demanding nature of typography work, which benefits from a larger screen and precise input, it is currently less accessible on smartphones and tablets. However, in its intended setting, the Universal Sans interface is a powerful illustration of how to create an innovative web application that is both aesthetically beautiful and incredibly useful. It successfully fills the gap between a website intended for the general public and a professional design tool.

Accessibility and Inclusive Design Considerations

Though in multiple senses of the word, Universal Sans is motivated by an attitude of inclusivity and accessibility. The primary goal is to enable a larger group of designers and creators to access custom type design. The platform eliminates the usual obstacles of expense, time, and skill that have traditionally limited custom typography to high-end projects by automating the intricate aspects of font creation. In this democratising way, Universal Sans makes it possible for any designer, whether they work in small studios, are students, or are just enthusiasts, to get a custom typeface made for their project. Since more people can now afford (and possess the skills) to use custom fonts instead of the default system fonts, the significance of this cannot be overstated: it opens the door for more varied and customised visual communication. According to the author, the "main benefit of this approach is that it makes customised type more widely accessible by removing the barriers of time and budget." This is in line with the principles of inclusive design, which aim to eliminate needless barriers and enable a wider spectrum of individuals to engage in the design process. By granting users a sense of agency and control over typography, Universal Sans effectively welcomes users into what was once an exclusive realm.

Beyond this general accessibility, we can examine the platform's approach to readability and adaptability, two important aspects of inclusive typographic design. One such feature is the inclusion of the previously mentioned optical size variants (Text vs. Display), which guarantee that users can create fonts that are optimised for various viewing conditions, thus meeting the needs of readers with different requirements. Readers in less-than-ideal conditions (small text on screen, low vision, etc.) will particularly benefit from the Text version's larger apertures and more generous spacing, which improve legibility for everyone. Another subtle benefit for accessibility is that the system automatically adds ink traps when necessary (tiny notches in acute corners that help maintain clarity at small sizes). This makes it easier to read even at small sizes or low resolutions because the letters won't blob or blur as much. Additionally, Universal Sans offers linguistic flexibility because its entire character set encompasses all Latin-based languages, including those that call for special characters and diacritical marks. The platform acknowledges the value of catering to a worldwide user base by supporting extended Latin (and planning a future serif counterpart, possibly with broader script support). For instance, a designer working with Swedish, Vietnamese, or Polish text can depend on their generated font to contain ae, ẽ, or å, respectively. Because of its inclusive language support, the tool's applicability is expanded beyond English-centric design.

Although there are some considerations, the Universal Sans interface on the website seems to

have been clearly designed to benefit many users in terms of accessibility. Many users may benefit from the high contrast user interface (light text on dark background), but some people with astigmatism or contrast sensitivity may prefer a light background; an option to change themes could be a possible improvement. Comprehension is aided by the UI's text elements' appropriate size and straightforward language. Some features may be problematic for users with disabilities: for example, a screen reader might have trouble expressing the font preview's visual nature, and a blind user would not be able to participate in the design (since it's a visual task). The tool's audience is somewhat self-selecting, though, as it caters to users who are visual designers by profession. Since it doesn't require a lot of prior knowledge, its step-by-step guided approach and the inclusion of help icons and examples do make it usable by beginners, which is a type of cognitive accessibility. Instead of forcing users to keep the application open or risk a session timeout, the site features safeguards to prevent users from losing their work. For instance, the persistent URL with the design state allows users to save or share their designs for feedback with ease.

The tool's ability to be customised to fit particular needs is another way that the concept of inclusive design can be expanded. For instance, if a brand requires a few more distinct characters for clarity, the designer can make that; if a reader with dyslexia finds a single story easier to read than a double story, the designer can choose that option. This capability to adjust letterforms could be utilised to increase legibility for specific audiences, even though it isn't specifically promoted as an accessibility feature. In essence, the platform gives the user a lot of small choices that can improve the final typography's readability and context-based user experience. In conclusion, Universal Sans tackles accessibility in a number of ways: it gives a wider community the ability to design type, incorporates typographic elements that maintain readability in a variety of contexts, and offers a versatile framework that can be adjusted to different user preferences and languages. As it stands, Universal Sans is a prime example of inclusivity by transforming the once-rare privilege of creating custom fonts into a widely accessible resource. However, there is still opportunity for improvement (for example, expanding such tools to non-Latin scripts or enhancing mobile access).

Integration of Creative and Technical Elements

Universal Sans's ability to seamlessly combine computational innovation and design craftsmanship is what makes it so successful. Described by observers as "something between a typeface and a piece of software," the project lies at the nexus of art and technology. Type designersand software developers had to work closely together on every aspect of the project, and the result shows what can be achieved when these fields come together. From a creative standpoint, the core of Universal Sans is the condensed knowledge of sans-serif type design that Briton Smith has amassed via the creation of multiple typefaces. He came to the project with the idea of creating a single framework that could generate a variety of styles, effectively encoding the design intent of numerous modern and historical fonts into a single system. To guarantee that all intermediate states are aesthetically cohesive, this necessitated the painstaking drawing of master shapes and the definition of how those shapes morph along each axis. This task required a high level of design skill. To make this idea a reality, Twomuch Studio and the development team created a custom web application and automation pipeline. In order to ensure real-time performance of the interpolation engine, create an intuitive user interface for

an abstract design space, and script the generation and delivery of font files on demand, they had to innovate in a number of ways. Programming and UX design creativity were required to solve each of these non-trivial problems (variable font technology had never been used in such an interactive, public-facing way before).

The way the system's technical intricacy is subtly concealed behind an easy-to-use interface is especially effective. This harmony shows that the project's engineers and designers have a thorough understanding of one another. Despite being generative, the typography is as refined as one might anticipate from a traditionally designed font family; there is no "tech demo" roughness in the letterforms. On the other hand, the design does not limit or impede the technology; the site rarely feels restrictive, and the interface and algorithms are strong enough to handle any permutations the user requests. By striking this balance, Universal Sans shows that design practices can be improved by computational tools without sacrificing the designer's vision. This project's "unique form and function enabled by the use of new technology and automation" has been praised for radically altering the conventions surrounding typeface design. It has established a precedent that suggests customised fonts might no longer be static goods but rather adaptable services or systems. In granting the Black Pencil, the D&AD jury essentially recognised that this combination of craft and code was a paradigm shift, as it "fundamentally changes the rules of a category."

Additionally, Universal Sans draws attention to a crucial point in the discussion of AI in design: a mutually beneficial partnership between human creativity and machine capabilities frequently produces the best results. Universal Sans uses computational power in a directed manner, with the user directing the performance and the designer setting the stage, as opposed to depending on an autonomous AI to create a font from scratch (which could produce unpredictable or unusable results). It's an interactive dialogue where a human can evaluate and improve a new font instance that the algorithm has instantaneously materialised. A more exploratory and iterative creative process than was possible with traditional type design may result from this quick feedback loop. The project essentially exemplifies a co-creation model, wherein the end-user, software, and type designer all contribute to the final product. This method might serve as a model for future creative tools in typography as well as other design domains where parametric or generative design can be used, like architecture, product design, and generative art. As stated by the Universal Sans team, "there has been an explosion of new technology that has enabled more creative digital expressions... We like to look at the connection between design and technology, with a focus on typography. This concept is reflected in every part of Universal Sans, which combines the art of design with the power of technology.

In conclusion, Universal Sans's amazing combination of artistic and technical elements shows that design innovation is often a hybrid process. The website is both beautiful and highly functional, and the typeface system is both technically complex and artistically driven. Universal Sans sets the stage for the future of generative design by combining cutting-edge digital techniques with a deep respect for typographic tradition. It shows that using computer techniques doesn't have to take away from the human element; in fact, when done carefully, it can boost human creativity to new heights.

Conclusion

A fascinating story about the future of design emerges from the examination of Universal Sans and its setting in AI-driven generative typography. We have seen how a single platform can effectively transform what was once a static art form into an interactive experience by encapsulating a vast design space of sans-serif typography and allowing users to customise it in real-time. This accomplishment required careful preservation of the artistry and skill that underpin good typography in addition to technical innovation in algorithms and interface design. The resultant system demonstrates how AI and generative techniques can democratise creativity by enabling designers of all skill levels to produce distinctive, superior fonts. In an AI-augmented design process, Universal Sans is a prime example of how intellectual rigour and creative engagement can coexist. The system's inherent typographic principles and constraints provide rigour, while the tool's playful, exploratory nature fosters engagement. By keeping this equilibrium, the platform uses technology to improve human decision-making rather than falling victim to the dangers of ignorant automation. From its variable axes and alternates to its user-centric interface to its wide accessibility considerations, the insights gleaned from examining Universal Sans point to a "new frontier" in design where regular cooperation between intelligent tools and human designers is the norm. Designers in this field will increasingly act as curators or directors of dynamic, generative systems rather than as lone producers of static artefacts.

In conclusion, Universal Sans's use of AI and generative techniques with typography points to a future where design will be more flexible, inclusive, and immersive. As tools like these improve (maybe by adding real machine learning to make design suggestions or by branching out to other scripts and styles), the role of the designer will change. However, these tools won't make designers obsolete; instead, they will free them up to focus on more complex creative decisions and less on repetitive tasks. So, the frontier is about giving designers more powerful tools to improve their craft, not about having AI take their place. The Universal Sans case gives us a glimpse of a new era of typographic innovation that is both academically interesting and very engaging, showing how technology can be fundamentally improved when guided by design intelligence.

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The Birth of Performance Art in Albania – The Two Gullivers

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Abstract

The birth of performance art in Albania is closely tied to the pioneering work of Flutura Preka and Besnik Haxhillari, known as The Two Gullivers. Their innovative approach marked a significant shift in the Albanian art scene, which had been heavily influenced by socialist realism during the communist era. Until the early 1990s, Albanian art was strictly controlled, with no room for avant-garde or experimental practices. The Two Gullivers' first performance in Albania took place in 1998 at the Tirana National Gallery, marking a pivotal moment in the country's transition towards contemporary art forms. Their practice combines drawing, performance, and conceptual art, often blurring the lines between these mediums. Drawing serves as both a creative tool and a document of their performances, allowing for re-enactment and reflection on the artistic process. This approach not only introduced new artistic methods but also reflected a broader cultural shift in Albania, as artists began to explore themes beyond traditional forms of painting and sculpture. The Two Gullivers' work represents both a continuity with and a rupture from Albanian artistic traditions. By embracing international influences while maintaining a unique perspective, they have contributed significantly to the development of contemporary art in Albania, paving the way for future generations of artists to experiment with diverse mediums and themes.

Keywords

performance, contemporary art, Albanian art

Introduction

In the last decade of the 20th century, Albania's political and social system underwent a profound transformation that deeply affected the art scene, which was itself a vociferous agent fomenting change. Under the prior self-proclaimed socialist system, art in Albania was dominated by socialist realism, with artists coerced to produce works that glorified the workers party and its leader. According to the regime's doctrine: "The figurative arts of socialist realism grew, were consolidated and strengthened as contemporary arts completely opposed to and at war with the formalist and decadent bourgeois and revisionist arts. In the 1960s, while the Albanian art of socialist realism was on the path of its consolidation and achieving success in a completely new direction, bourgeois and revisionist art was entering a phase of deep crisis, of depravity and degradation" (Kuqali, 1988). The crumbling of the dictatorial regime in 1991 marked the end of this era of callous censorship and ideological clutch over artistic expression. The artists abruptly found themselves in a downright new cultural, political and economic terrain—one marked by both freedom and its illusion, by the desire of tasting the forbidden fruits of almost a century of modern and contemporary art and the fear of getting sick from them. Desire and uncertainty came as a conundrum that inhabited the minds of all artists and created a rocky dynamic that fostered the reinvention of the rules of artmaking and being an artist.

In this crucial transient moment of Albanian history, a new generation of artists, curators, and intellectuals emerged to redefine what it meant to be an artist in post-communist Albania. Central to this shift were a core group of Professors at the Higher Institute of the Arts in Tirana, a few formerly prosecuted artists as well as some of the recent graduates of the Institute. Together, they played an essential role in advancing a critical and more conceptual approach to art, starting to gradually distance themselves from the legacy of socialist realism while trying to fend off the onslaught of the temptations of consumer culture. These artists and curators initiated a dialogue with broader international trends and started to pave the way for Albanian art to remove the heavy weight of the Orwellian dogma from its shoulders. One of them, Edi Muka, the first Albanian curator of contemporary art, painted this moment with the most vivid word-strokes: "Today in Albania, making art means in a sense confronting utopia and the dream of the future: but in order not to fall back into the myth of brilliant progressive destinies, so dear to socialist realism, Albanian artists learned to erode utopia with the weapons of irony and meaninglessness." (Muka, 1999) Besides the full revamping of the content and concepts of artwork they were also eager to break free from the traditional mediums of painting, sculpture and printmaking, and, therefore, started to explore new media such as photography, video, installation, and performance art. It is the first emergence in the Albanian context of this very last one, performance art with Flutura Preka and Besnik Haxhillari, that is at the fulcrum of this essay.

Review

Nothing better than this all in caps "thank you" note in the first page of PamorArt Magazine (PamorArt, 1999) can depict the state in which the Albanian art scene found itself at the end of the '90-s: "THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ARTS PROFUSELY THANKS MR. ACHILE BONITO OLIVA, WHO DONATED TO THE LIBRARY A COMPUTER". Although this

does not take away from the generosity of the donor, it must be noted that the officials of the National Gallery of the Arts, tactfully, did not mention that the donated computer was used and outdated. This anecdotal episode was not just a sign of the deeply impoverished economy of the country but more of a metaphor of the overall sense of the instability that reigned at the time in Albania. Indeed, it was at that time when Edi Muka curated Onufri '98, which he wittingly entitled Permanent Instability. This was one of the first-ever curated exhibitions of contemorary art in Albania, and the very first curated international Onufri exhibition. Onufri had taken place annually at the National Gallery of Art in Tirana since 1993. This 6th edition of Onufri highlighted a profound epistemic transition, from the narrative of ideological modernism to a more fluid aesthetical and conceptual aproach.

Onufri '98, more than any other art exhibition up to that point in Albania, served as an institutional equalizer between the traditional art mediums of painting, sculpture and printmaking and the recently accepted and explored art forms, such as video, installation and performance art. While video and installation artworks had earned the rights of institutional citizenship in post-communist Albania a few years prior to this exhibition, performance art took a bit longer and made its debut in this very exhibition. Among the 33 participating international artists, were two young Albanian artists, Flutura Preka and Besnik Haxhillari, who under the art name "The Two Gullivers" partecipated with a performative artwork for the first time in Albania. Albania, that up to a few years prior was by far the most dictatorial country in Europe and beyond. That dictatureship did not simply enforce socialist realism in the arts, but it even considered to be degenerate and severely punishable by prison terms the mere consultation or promotion of any art movements from Impressionism to contemporary art. Both Preka and Haxhillari, although still very young, lived themselves under such a regime and studied art at the Higher Institute of Arts in Tirana during the last years of the dictatorship. While the severity of the enforcement of draconian rules towards the end of the system was certainly weaker, they were nonetheless fully exposed to its quasi dystopian modus vivendi. Before they graduated from the Institute of the Arts, the wave of democratic change that spread throughout Eastern Europe, finally reached Albania as well. As it was, Flutura and Besnik started their art higher education training in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and finished it in the Republic of Albania. As if this vertiginous multilayered system shift were not complicated enough, they decided to jointly leave the country to continue their studies in Lausanne. It was as students at the École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne in Switzerland where they experimented with diverse mediums and concepts and where they first started to employ performance art as one of their favorite forms of artistic expression. It was this newly found artistic ardor for performance that they would soon after bring to the Onufri exhibition at the National Gallery in Tirana. On December 1998, they were the first Albanian artists to realize a performance artwork in Albania. The performance was entitled "Gullivers' Sleep" and it consisted of the frame of their real matrimonial bed, covered by a green comforter and hanging vertically on the wall, more than two meters high from the floor of the National Gallery of Art. Both the artists had painted their faces green and and had their eyes closed shot, as if sleeping, while laying on the vertically hanging bed for the whole duration of the exhibition's opening ceremony. (see fig. 1) This is what the artists themselves wrote about their performance: "This vertical bed signified that we are not quite like other Albanian couples. We are a couple of artists, a couple of performers, and we often appear naked in public, like Adam and Eve during their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Our wall bed evoked the crucifixion of Christ, a virtually "global" subject, yet banned in Albania since the

Second World War and until 1991, with the fall of communism. The artists' intimacy and the religious subject thus came together, reminding the viewer that freedom of artistic expression had already become a reality in Albania, and was not just rhetoric. With our bed, we wanted to connect with the stories of Ulysses and Gulliver confronting the unknown on the road to exile." (Haxhillari, & Preka, 2022)



Figure 1. The Two Gullivers. Gulliver's Sleep. (1998). Performance, Installation. National Gallery of Art. Tirana, Albania

But how else can we read the first Albanian performance of Preka and Haxhillari? Doing research about any artwork in Albania during that time has many logistic hurdles, and doing so for an art performance complicates matters even further. So in order to succeed we will combine semiotic analyses with detective investigation. The first place to start is the photos of the performance of which there are very few left. In all of them, one can see several people in the foreground besides the artists themselves. Two of them are well known and recognizable but no longer living. One is Nermin Vlora, writer, academic and the grand daughter of Ismail Qemali, who was the founder and first Prime Minister of Albania. The other is Lumturi Blloshmi, one of the best contemporary artists of Albania. The third one is Ilir Haklaj, that currently works as a lawyer at the Ministery of State of Albania. There are also three other people in the photo that are not recognizable. So what unifies the academic, the artist, the lawyer, and the three other people caught in the photo in front of the performance? At a quick peek it is rather easy to see that none of them is looking at the artists hanging on the wall, none of them is looking at the performance, none of them is looking towards the camera of the photographer itself. They are not aware that they are being recorded. It is a genuine photo. It is not staged. The

lack of engagement with the performance and the two artists seems earnest. Or is it? Let's see it from a different perspective, though. Performance as a notion does imply some form of action. And sleep is on the oposite end of action. As Ovid succinctly wrote " What is sleep but the likeness of cold death?" (Ovid, 16 BC). Doing performance art within the first few years of post-communist Albania constituted a form of revolution. But doing performance through sleep is a soft revolutionary act. It does not break things, it is not violent, not forceful. It is mild and peaceful. It does not want to startle the public. It wants to enter the new arena almost without being noticed. It wants to put its roots without opposition. Sleep can be a Trojan Horse. This was a revolutionary act without the revolutionary means. And when someone is asleep you don't disturb them, you let them be. You behave like the six people caught in the photo. You respect the wish of the artists and let the performance be real not staged.



Figure 2. The Two Gullivers. The Place Where Gullivers Sleep (1998). Performance-Installation. National Gallery of Art. Tirana. Albania. Photo The Two Gullivers

And yet, was sleep the only trait that made this performance to have such a serene acceptance from the public of a society less familiar with these art forms? So let's go back to the picture and start zooming in by leaving out the public this time and looking at the artwork itsef. (see fig 2) The rectangular bed is hung on the wall in a conspicuously classical maner just as in the tradition of rectangular easel paintings. Furthermore, the wooden frame of the bed does not require any imagination to be perceived as the typical frame of a painting. If we continue to look at it from the perspective of a painting, then we can look at the composition: two very well balanced and symmetric portraits dominate over the centered stylized floral still life. Considering the use of color, the green painted faces are in perfect harmony with the green

flowers of the comforter – it is a monochromatic palette. If a painting were to ever breathe that would probably be the "Gulliver's Sleep". And if you were to challange the supremacy of painting through a performance without unleashing all the ire of the tradition, what better way than performing within a painting? And if you are motionless, and don't look anyone in the eyes by keeping your eyes shut, even better. The revolutionary act seem to have been fulfilled. Although this was a revolutionary act without the revolutionary means.

Instead of the Conclusion

Was this a performance that employed painting as a technique or was this a painting that used performance as a medium? Was this a live self-portrait with body colors or was this a still life with costume-made comforter flowers? Did this mark the last European country that realized a performance in Europe or were the Gullivers the first European artists to create the first performance in Albania? Or are all these questions non-questions because they don't exclude but feed each other? They are the moving parts of an important episode grounded in the history of contemporary Albanian art.

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Land Art as Architecture: A Sustainable Approach to Place-Making and Environmental Design

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Abstract

Land art, traditionally viewed as an artistic intervention in the landscape, has evolved into a powerful medium for creating architectural space that is both environmentally sustainable and deeply connected to its surroundings. This paper explores how land art can transcend its artistic origins to create architectural spaces that harmoniously integrate with the landscape, offering a sustainable alternative to conventional built environments. By responding to site-specific conditions, and embracing landscape design principles, land art fosters an immersive spatial experience that enhances a sense of place. Through a critical analysis of key land art projects and their spatial characteristics, the studyexamines how these interventions define place character, frame vistas, and facilitate human interaction with the landscape. Case studies of works by artists such as A. Goldsworthy, R. Smithson, A. Burri, etc and contemporary architects illustrate how land art functions as an architectural form that embodies sustainability, minimal environmental impact, and cultural significance. The findings suggest that land art can serve as a model for future architectural practices, promoting a symbiotic relationship between the built and natural environments while reinforcing identity and belonging within a place. This research ultimately positions land art as an alternative design strategy that redefines architecture offering innovative pathways for sustainable place-making.

Keywords

land art, landscape architecture, sustainable design, place making

Introduction

Land art is a genre of visual art, emerged during the 1960s, that used the natural landscape as a canvas to put outdoor installations. It challenged conventional art by moving artworks outside galleries, in the natural settings (Beardsley, 1998). This genre of art explores the relationship between humans and the land, and often addresses ecological themes such as environmentalism, sustainability, and the human impact on the Earth. One of the defining aspects of land art is how it responds directly to the unique features of a site—its terrain, geology,vegetation, etc. This site-specific focus is similar to the goals of landscape architecture, which objects respond to specific conditions of place, and aim to create designs that are meaningful and environmentally sensitive. As the need for sustainability is becoming a crucial issue, considering land art as architecture is more significant than ever. Today's architectural practice places a growing emphasis on sustainable approaches that reduce environmental impact and enrich the experience of space. Similarly, land artists consider the cultural and ecological context of each place, prompting us to think more deeply about how we interact with the natural world (Wang, 2023; Selanon & Cui, 2020).

In addition to environmental issues, land art addresses also cultural narratives such as the concept of place, identity, and anthropocentrism (Rigaud, 2012). As artist Marlene Creates expresses, *"The land is important to me, but even more important is the idea that it becomes a 'place' because someone has been there"* (in Lippard, 1997: 32). This statement captures the role of human presence in giving meaning to landscapes. Through minimal gestures land art invites to deeply engage with nature. This idea also aligns with architecture, which has the power to transform an empty space into a place filled with meaning, memory, and a sense of belonging. The philosophical ideas at the bases of land art are valid also for landscape architecture, emphasizing themes like reflection, memory, and the lived experience of place (Dang, 2021). This approach has blurred the boundaries between art and architecture. Once a radical artistic intervention, land art now plays a role in placemaking—contributing to the design of environments that are ecologically responsible and culturally resonant. As sustainability becomes a defining concern in architecture, land art offers useful strategies for integrating ecological awareness and spatial meaning into the built environment.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodological framework that integrates theoretical inquiry, case study analysis, and visual examination to explore the architectural potential of land art as a strategy for sustainable place-making. The study aims to synthesize conceptual insights from the fields of art history, landscape architecture, and environmental design with the practical and spatial strategies evident in selected works of land art and architecture. The methodological approach unfolds in three interrelated phases:

Theoretical Framework Construction
The research begins with an extensive literature review that critically engages with the conceptual foundations of land art, particularly its roots in conceptual art, phenomenology, and ecological thought. Key theoretical perspectives, including those of Lucy Lippard, Robert Smithson, Miwon Kwon, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and contemporary environmental aesthetics

scholars, provide the grounding for understanding land art not only as an artistic movement but as an architectural practice with implications for sustainability and place-making. This phase establishes the ontological and epistemological lens through which the subsequent analyses are conducted.

Case Study Selection and Comparative Analysis
Building on the theoretical foundation, the research undertakes a comparative analysis of selected case studies drawn from both land art and architectural practice. These include seminal land art interventions such as Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970), Michael Heizer's Double Negative (1969–70), Andy Goldsworthy's Walking Wall (2019), among others, as well as architectural projects by Herzog & de Meuron, SANAA, Maya Lin and others.

Visual and Spatial Analysis
Each case study is further examined through visual documentation and experiential descriptions. This analysis seeks to understand how spatial and material strategies are employed to engage viewers, frame environmental phenomena, and produce affective experiences of place.
The methodology emphasizes a dialogical reading of land art and architecture, treating them not as separate disciplines but as overlapping practices that co-produce meaning in landscape. By synthesizing findings across cases, the study identifies recurring patterns, aesthetic logics, and design principles that inform a broader understanding of how land art contributes to sustainable and culturally resonant architectural practice. The research concludes with a critical reflection on the transformative potential of land art in contemporary design, emphasizing its value in fostering ecological awareness, reinforcing site identity, and enriching the spatial and emotional experience of place.

Literature review

Land Art as Conceptual art

Land Art emerged in the late 1960s as a radical shift from traditional art forms, within the broader movement of Conceptual Art, which prioritizes ideas over objects. In The Dematerialization of Art (1968), Lucy Lippard and John Chandler described this shift toward artworks that focus on process, context, and meaning. Within this framework, Land Art investigates the relationship between humans and the natural environment, and in response, create actions, changes, often through site-specific interventions that transform outdoor landscapes. But Land Art is not merely conceptual in the sense of privileging the idea. It deals with temporality and entropy and the instability of form as highlighted in Robert Smithson's concept of entropy, which rejects classical notions of order and control. Instead of trying to control nature, Land Art works with natural processes like decay and change, showing that both the artwork and the site are unstable and always shifting and highlighting their blurring boundaries of the environment. Miwon Kwon, in One Place After Another (2002), redefines the "site" as a network of social, political, and cultural meanings, emphasizing the role of the context in shaping the artwork's significance. In this sense the environment becomes an active part of the creation and interpretation of the artwork. Land Art also resonates with phenomenological philosophy. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) ideas on embodiment highlight how these works require physical and temporal engagement, making the viewer an active participant. Land Art thus amplifies the experiential

and relational dimensions of Conceptual Art, extending them into the terrain of landscape and ecology. Scholars like Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis (Land and Environmental Art, 1998) underscore how Land Art brings ecological consciousness to the foreground, shifting from human-centered to ecologically entangled modes of thinking. In essence, Land Art is not simply about monumental gestures in the landscape. It is an intellectual and philosophical practice that explores impermanence, place, and ecological interrelation.

Land Art and Environmental Sustainability

Land Art, as a form of artistic and spatial practice in the landscape, offer a critical response to environmental degradation of industrial society. Rooted in deep ecology (Naess, 1973), it emphasizes the need for ecological awareness, sustainability, and low-impact design. According to Arnold Berleant (1992) and Allen Carlson (2000), this engagement with nature enhances how we perceive and ethically interact with the environment. Land Art encourages a multisensory understanding and respect for natural processes. While early Land Art involved large-scale earthworks that altered landscapes, contemporary practice emphasizes the need for more ecological responsibility and site sensitivity. As Suzi Gablik argues in The Reenchantment of Art (1991), artists are increasingly called to foster ecological and cultural healing rather than formal innovation. This shift reflects Land Art's evolving commitment to sustainability, moving from a confrontational approach to one of collaboration with nature. Overall, Land Art provides a valuable perspective for linking art and ecology. By working with natural processes and minimizing environmental impact, it plays a key role in promoting sustainability and is an important part of modern discussions on environmental design.

Land Art and Place-Making

Place-making is an important concept in architecture. It focuses on creating spaces that have meaning and identity. Land Art supports this idea by turning ordinary spaces into place through experiential, site-specific interventions. Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980) explains that a place is not just a physical space, but something we feel and experience, shaped by nature and human-made elements. Land Art helps create such places by working with the land's shape, direction, materials, and size to encourage meaningful and sensory experience. As Kastner and Wallis (1998) note, these interventions alter perception and deepen the human-landscape relationship. Lucy Lippard (1997) further argues that Land Art invites bodily interaction, allowing land to be navigated and reinterpreted in poetic ways. Like architecture, it combines aesthetic, spatial, and cultural dimensions, contributing meaningfully to the creation of place.

Case Studies: Analysis and Discussion

Building upon the theoretical frameworks established in the literature, this section examines a series of key case studies in both land art and architecture to reveal a shared vocabulary of environmental sensitivity, site-specificity, and experiential place-making. Through an analysis of works by artists such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Agnes Denes, Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, Nancy Holt, alongside architects including Maya Lin, Herzog & de Meuron, Peter Eisenman, Ryue Nishizawa, SANAA, Louis Kahn, and others, we examine how conceptual art practices have influenced architectural thinking, particularly regarding ecological engagement,

temporal processes, and phenomenological experience. Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970) (Fig. 1), constructed on the shores of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, is a foundational work in land art that reconfigures the traditional understanding of form and site. His massive spiral emerges and disappears with the lake's fluctuating water levels, emphasizing entropy, geological time, and the mutability of human intervention in the landscape (Iorga, 2013; Rigaud, 2012). Smithson's engagement with natural processes reflects a non-anthropocentric view of design, where form is not fixed but in dialogue with environmental forces. His approach has a similar concept to the Herzog & de Meuron's Dominus Winery (2000) in Napa Valley) (Fig. 2), which features gabion walls filled with local stone that regulate light and temperature. The structure performs as a porous, breathing organism, integrating the architecture with its geological context. Both works challenge static formalism, opting instead for material and experiential strategies that reflect nature's temporality and the embeddedness of place.




Figure 1. Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970), *Figure 2*. Herzog & de Meuron's Dominus Winery (2000)

Michael Heizer's Dissipate, (1968–70) (Fig. 3), carved into the edge of the Mormon Mesa in Nevada, interrogates the scale of human intervention in the landscape and the ideological implications of land manipulation. By using subtraction as tool for engaging with memory and place, Heizer removed tons of rock to create two massive voids, confronting viewers with absence as presence, and creation of meaning. The emptiness becomes the medium through which viewers confront scale, memory, and the ideological implications of altering land. A conceptual parallel emerges in Alberto Burri's Il Cretto di Gibellina (1984–89) (Fig. 4,5), which overlays the earthquake-destroyed Sicilian town of Gibellina with a concrete shroud, preserving the street grid as a fossilized scar. Both interventions transform trauma into spatial narrative, using voids and scars to inscribe memory and history into the land (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021). Their monumental scale reclaims loss and silence as architectural expressions, foregrounding the landscape itself as a medium of remembrance.

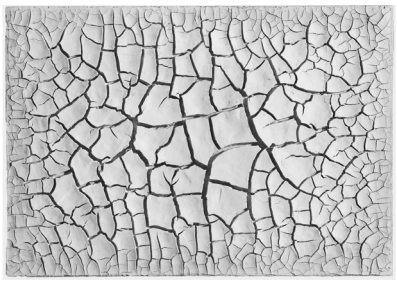




Figure 3. Dissipate, 1968–70, by Michael Heizer ,
Figure 4. Alberto Burri, Cretto - Installazione,
Figure 5. Il Cretto di Gibellina (1984–89) by Alberto Burri




Figure 6, Wheatfield – A Confrontation (1982) by Agnes Denes,
Figure 7 Eden Project (2001) by Grimshaw Architects

Artists like Agnes Denes expand the conceptual boundaries of land art by considering the landscape as a cultural and ecological canvas and including concepts of sustainability, public engagement, and visual activism (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021; Dang, 2021). In her landmark piece Wheatfield – A Confrontation (1982), Denes plants a field of wheat on a landfill in downtown Manhattan, juxtaposing nature and culture, sustainability and capitalism, provoking questions about land use, food production, and urban priorities (Dang, 2021). This performative landscape challenges viewers to reconsider the use of public space and the values embedded in the urban fabric. A comparable architectural gesture is found in the Eden Project (2001) by Grimshaw Architects, which rehabilitates a former clay pit into a regenerative site of ecological education. The biomes house diverse ecosystems, visually and symbolically contrasting organic life with the constructed geodesic structures as industrial remnants. In both works, the landscape becomes a transformative agent—capable of healing, educating, and critiquing dominant narratives of progress and productivity.

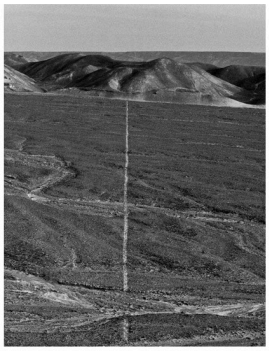




Figure 8. A Line Made by Walking (1967) by Richard Long,
Figure 9. Walking Wall (2019) Museum of Art in Kansas City by Andy Goldsworthy's,
Figure 10. Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) by Maya Lin

Minimal gestures by Richard Long likewise redefine the landscape through movement and materiality. Long's A Line Made by Walking (1967) turns a transient act into a spatial inscription

and invited viewers to contemplate the passage of time and the act of walking itself (Fig. 8). Similarly, Goldsworthy's Walking Wall (2019), a dry-stone wall that physically moved across the grounds of the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, redefines the role of built form (Fig. 9). As it "walked," the wall traversed roads, lawns, and architectural spaces, becoming a living installation that shifted perceptions of permanence and transition. Importantly, Goldsworthy's work also challenges anthropocentric authorship by emphasizing natural processes: gravity, weather, and decay are co-authors in the work's evolution. These ephemeral acts resonate with architectural practices that prioritize temporality, movement, and the lived experience of space. Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) (Fig. 10), ssimilarly transforms minimal form into profound emotional resonance. Sunken into the earth, the black granite walls bear the names of over 58,000 soldiers, creating a tactile, reflective experience. As visitors descend the path and see their own reflections among the names, memory becomes spatialized and embodied. Lin's memorial, like Long's line and Goldsworthy's wall, through a simple gesture, invoke collective memory, identity, and healing. Each of these works underscores the power of landscape—natural and constructed—as a site of intimate encounter and cultural reflection.

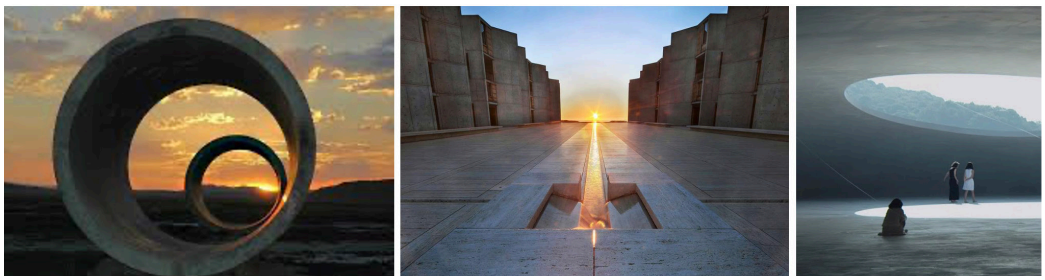


Figure 11. Sun Tunnels, 1976 by Nancy Holt, *Figure 12*. Salk Institute, 1975 by Louis Kahn
Figure 13. The Teshima Art Museum, 2010 by Ryue Nishizawa and Rei Naito

Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels (1973–76), situated in the remote Great Basin Desert of Utah (Fig.11), is a work of land art that responds directly to its context. Four massive concrete cylinders are oriented to frame the sun at solstices and pierce the desert sky with starlike constellations (Tiberghien, 1995). Their openings frame the sky and the desert horizon, while small holes drilled into the surface of the tunnels map out constellations, projecting starlike patterns of light onto the interior surfaces. Holt's intervention is minimal, yet it transforms the emptiness of the landscape in a place. The viewer's position within the tunnels becomes a site of cosmological awareness, merging personal experience with universal cycles.

A parallel architectural gesture is seen in Louis Kahn's Salk Institute (1959–65) in La Jolla, California (Fig.12),. Framing the Pacific Ocean with two symmetrical laboratory wings, Kahn creates a central plaza where a narrow water channel draws the eye toward the horizon (Brownlee & De Long, 1991). The interplay of light, shadow, and ocean breezes becomes integral to the experience of the place. Both Holt and Kahn celebrate light, sky, and orientation, not as abstract concepts but as guiding forces that give meaning to place.

Ryue Nishizawa's Teshima Art Museum (2010) (Fig.13), designed with artist Rei Naito, furthers this integration of natural elements and spatial perception. Located on Japan's Teshima Island,

the museum consists of a single, curved concrete shell that merges with the landscape. Its minimalist form is punctured by circular openings that admit light, air, and rainwater, blurring the boundaries between inside and outside. As water droplets move into the smooth floor, they become ephemeral artworks—reaffirming the museum as a living environment. This project exemplifies a sensorial architecture that prioritizes human perception, seasonal variation, and ecological awareness. In contrast to static form, the Teshima Museum is always becoming—shaped by climate, time, and nature (Tanaka, 2010). In this way, Nishizawa's Museum aligns with work of Holt and Kahn, both of which also use their designs to frame and enhance a direct, sensory connection with the environment—whether through celestial alignments or by framing panoramic views of the horizon (Frampton, 1995; Tiberghien, 1995).



Figure 14. The Floating Piers 2014-2016, by Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Figure 15. Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2009, London, by SANAA

This ephemeral approach to material and perception continues in Christo and Jeanne-Claude's The Floating Piers (2016) (Fig.14), which transforms Lake Iseo into a collective, walkable surface. Visitors traverse water in a surreal, sensory experience that collapses the boundary between built and natural. SANAA's Serpentine Pavilion (Fig.15), similarly floats above its site with a lightweight reflective canopy that interacts with weather, light, and human movement (Koolhaas & Obrist, 2010). Both projects offer reversible, low-impact interventions that frame the landscape rather than dominate it, fostering ecological awareness through subtle transformation. In both cases, architecture and land art converge not to build permanence, but to temporarily transform landscape into meaningful, sensorial, and poetic place.



Figure 16. Labirinto di Arianna, Sicily by Italo Lanfredini
Figure 17. Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe by Peter Eisenman and Buro Happold.
Figure 18. Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter, Trollstigen Visitor Centre (2009)

Italo Lanfredini's Labirinto di Arianna in Sicily (Fig.16) further exemplifies land art's introspective capacity. Rooted in myth, the earthen labyrinth invites tactile, meditative passage, integrating ritual, memory, and self-discovery within the land. Rather than framing the site, it integrates into it, cultivating a sense of ritual, memory, and self-discovery. Its use of natural materials and minimal intervention reflects a deep ecological consciousness in this intervention. This immersive engagement with site and symbolism was used by Peter Eisenman in his Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (2005) (Fig.17), where a grid rectangular concrete blocks produces bodily disorientation and spatial ambiguity. Despite its urban setting and architectural rigor, the memorial functions phenomenologically, using absence and repetition to evoke trauma and reflection (Young, 2016). The memorial's restraint—formally minimal and materially austere—further enhances its psychological resonance and spatial depth, aligning with land art's focus on experience over representation.

The Trollstigen Visitor Centre by Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter (Fig.17) extends these principles within a contemporary architectural and infrastructural framework. Set within the dramatic topography of Norway, the centre is embedded in the landscape both conceptually and materially. Corten steel and concrete structures echo the site's geology and weathering patterns, choreographing views and movement through a spatial narrative that highlights scale and temporality (Mollerup, 2013). Its ecological approach lies in its integration and durability, allowing the architecture to age with the site rather than dominate it. Together, these projects—demonstrate a shared approach to landscape as a medium of meaning, not backdrop. Through phenomenological engagement, material sensitivity, and ecological respect, they embody a convergence of land art and architecture, where space is not only seen but profoundly felt.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Land Art, as a conceptual and ecological practice, intersects meaningfully with contemporary architectural thought. Through a shared vocabulary of site-specificity, material engagement, and temporal awareness, both land artists and architects challenge conventional notions of form, permanence, and space. The examined case studies illustrate how landscape becomes a medium for reflection, memory, and ecological consciousness. Artists such as Heizer, Denes, and Goldsworthy, alongside architects like Herzog & de Meuron, Grimshaw, and SANAA, foreground natural processes, sensory experience, and contextual responsiveness in their work. These interventions not only engage with place as a physical site but as a cultural, political, and temporal construct.

By transforming space into place, and matter into meaning, Land Art offers critical insights into sustainable design, environmental ethics, and phenomenological engagement. As such, it provides not just aesthetic inspiration, but a conceptual and ethical model for architecture that aspires to be regenerative, place-based, and deeply attuned to the rhythms of nature.

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The Convergence of Art and Graphic Design: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Include Visual Art Diversity in Graphic Design Education

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Abstract

By their very nature, art and its expressions frequently elude the confines of specific definitions, categorizations, or interpretations, yet in education, a structured framework is essential for meaningful exploration and application. The concept of art is complex and multifaceted, it refers to a broad spectrum of creative, performative endeavors that evoke emotional, intellectual, or aesthetic responses in those who experience them. On the other hand, graphic design takes a more goal-oriented and communicative approach, often for the purpose of spreading messages, information, emotions and ideas in a visual way. As design challenges become increasingly complex and interdisciplinary, graphic design education must evolve to embrace visual art diversity as a core component of creative development. This paper explores a redefined educational framework that bridges artistic diversity and design thinking, fostering a more inclusive, innovative, and culturally enriched learning environment. Through pedagogical strategies, such as curriculum enhancement, studio-based learning, artistic experimentation, industry and community engagement and more, this paper highlights how this approach nurtures critical thinking, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and social awareness in design education. In an era where sustainability is a global imperative, graphic design education must evolve to integrate visual arts, so institutions can prepare students to push creative boundaries and shape the future of visual communication.

Keywords

design thinking, visual communication, educational challenges

Introduction

The arts and their meaning, the form and function of the visual components of expression and communication, have changed significantly in the technological era, especially in recent years - without a corresponding change in their aesthetics or their relationship with the educational system and society. Today's visual expression is a product of complex human intelligence and, in different circumstances, holds different meanings for different people. The goal is to expand the understanding and use of visual expression through a research - based process and rational analysis, and to suggest a variety of methods that recognize and integrate the diversity of visual expression structures into a broader educational and societal context. The greatest obstacle in this effort is the categorization of visual arts into the polarities of fine and applied arts. Throughout history, this definition has shifted, but the two constant distinguishing factors have remained: utility - the practical benefit of art to humanity - and aesthetic experience. From primitive, ancient, and contemporary cultures to today's highly developed production technology, basic human needs have changed very little. As in the past, humans still require the creation of a habitat in which they will be fed, work, and be protected, among other things. This habitat can be designed and aesthetically decorated, but aesthetic expression is initially limited by the learning process of the craft and the dictate of functionality.

The contemporary perspective on visual arts moves beyond the dichotomy of "fine arts" and "applied arts" toward issues of subjective expression and objective function, linking individual interpretation with creative expression in fine arts, and addressing purpose and use in applied arts. History is full of examples that attest to both the durability and fragility of this dichotomy. Therefore, it is important to establish a balance between the artist's subjective and objective approaches, a balance between pure artistic expression and purposeful utility.

Graphic design is considered a form of applied art. This classification is appropriate as it combines visual elements to effectively convey messages, often for commercial, educational, or informational purposes - unlike fine arts, which, according to existing definitions, are usually created for aesthetic or expressive purposes without a specific functional goal. The convergence of graphic design and visual arts has become increasingly important in contemporary creative practices. This paper aims to explore the synergies between these fields, examining how their interaction can enrich artistic expression, yield better educational outcomes, and consequently address more complex societal issues. To reach such interaction, we must first highlight both the common roots and differing objectives of these two creative fields. Their distinctions and intersections in terms of purpose and function, work process and intent, audience relationship, and the autonomy of the work in relation to serving a client can help us see how these two fields can complement rather than oppose each other.

Visual arts, primarily focused on personal expression, aesthetic experience, and conceptual exploration, are often autonomous and exist for their own sake, inviting the audience to interpret freely. In contrast, graphic design aims to solve problems in service of a client, to create visual communication, and to convey specific messages with clarity and efficiency to a targeted audience. While visual artists usually begin with a personal vision or emotional impulse, allowing their process to be exploration and open-ended, graphic designers start with a set of constraints, being bound to meet a client's objectives or to communicate a specific

message to the public.Despite their differences, these two fields are part of a broader creative spectrum that relies on a visual language with common elements and principles of organization, which are employed either out of a need to express or a need to communicate.

Literature Review

Integration of Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Education

Although recent studies emphasize the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches in education, aspirations for collaboration among different fields are not new. They can be found throughout history, even in the writings of ancient philosophers. The creation of curricula that would integrate knowledge from various disciplines has been a concern of universities since the 19th century. As a result of these efforts throughout history, today educational curricula face the dual mission of creating a solid foundation of general education and preparing students for future employments in new fields valued by a knowledge economy. In all cases, the goal is to work beyond the confines of a single field and benefit from alternative perspectives that shift traditional views on problem-solving.

Historical Context: The Role of Visual Arts in Graphic Design Education

Graphic design has gradually become an inclusive discipline, requiring not only the integration of knowledge and skills acquired from studying visual arts but also from studying other fields such as literature, history, psychology, anthropology, sociology, semiology, technology, business, etc. This approach can encourage students to engage with content through multiple perspectives, gaining deeper knowledge about the interconnections of human and natural systems and thus fostering and promoting holistic learning. Literature, for example, has a dynamic relationship with editorial design due to the visualization of content from literary genres, whether lyrical or epic, scholarly or educational, visualizing language through typography, etc. Semiology or semiotics is in a dynamic relationship with advertising graphics, which is a very important part of graphic design. By learning semiotic theory, graphic designers can create powerful visual communications that transcend language and cultural barriers. The integration of knowledge from studying visual arts into graphic design education is more natural than that with other disciplines, as it concerns the same visual language used for different purposes. Understanding elements such as line, shape, color, composition, or organizational principles like harmony, contrast, balance, rhythm, etc., is essential in graphic design education as much as it is for visual arts.

These components serve as building blocks for creating visually appealing and communicative designs. The inclusion of disciplines such as drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, etc., in graphic design curricula provides students with a strong foundation for integrating acquired knowledge in building effective visual communication. Whether creating a digital application or a data-rich publication, graphic designers, like visual artists, invite people to enter a scene and explore what is there. An interesting logo, page design, or public space is guided by design and communication principles to accompany users on dynamic journeys.

The Contemporary Context in Graphic Design Education

For most of the 20th century, the primary role of graphic design was to support the functional and emotional experience of the consumer through well-designed products. Technical mastery, originality, and individual authorship were values that shaped graphic design education. Today, a redefined educational framework is needed - one that connects artistic diversity and design thinking with emerging technologies, fostering a more inclusive, innovative, and culturally enriched learning environment. Such a framework would encourage students to explore possibilities beyond traditional design boundaries, promoting innovation and adaptability. The inclusion of technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) in the curriculum allows students to create immersive and interactive designs. These tools not only enhance the learning experience but also prepare students for the evolving demands of the design industry. A redefined educational framework that challenges conventional curricula and pedagogical strategies comes with implications, challenges, and limitations. Addressing these is essential to effectively incorporating innovation into educational programs. Graphic design education today must pay greater attention to human-centered and ethical approaches, cultural sensitivity, and inclusion, teaching students to prioritize user needs and experiences, ensuring that their designs positively impact diverse user groups.

Graphic design can involve the exploration of issues related to race, gender, class, and other identity-based themes, which require cultural sensitivity and an inclusive approach to ensure that marginalized communities do not feel uncomfortable or underrepresented when these issues are not handled with care and respect. As a field, graphic design is exposed to various cultural perspectives and narratives, which is why graphic design education must cultivate empathy, emotional intelligence, and an understanding of cultural diversity in students. This aims to foster a more inclusive mindset and greater social awareness.

Sustainability is now a global necessity, not just within graphic design education. Students should learn to consider the environmental and social implications of their work, promoting designs that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also environmentally responsible and socially impactful. The integration of new technologies and the use of digital platforms relevant to graphic design also require appropriate professional development for educators. Without the necessary knowledge or tools to effectively integrate new technologies and the diversity of visual arts into teaching, interdisciplinary collaboration may be superficial or ineffective. Addressing these challenges requires careful planning, professional development for educators, and institutional support to ensure that the convergence of art and design can be meaningfully and effectively integrated into educational contexts.

Methodology

This paper is based more on conceptual and theoretical research methodology regarding the integration of visual arts into graphic design education, rather than on a qualitative or quantitative methodology grounded in specific case studies. Instead of collecting empirical data, the paper synthesizes selected approaches from existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and educational models that can challenge the traditional roles of social communication, linking academic content with real-world challenges and contexts in the field of graphic design education

and broader societal development. The convergence of visual arts and graphic design should not only be used as a transformative tool in education but as a potential driver for fostering not only academic success but also the holistic development of students as conscious individuals critically engaged with social issues. It challenges them to think beyond commercial objectives and to explore the ethical, social, and environmental impact of design.

Research Approach

The aim of the interdisciplinary approach and analysis proposed in this paper is to assess the short-term impact of integrating visual arts into graphic design education on students' conceptual, emotional, and aesthetic development—beyond traditional education, which, aside from aesthetics, emphasizes problem-solving and client needs. As design becomes increasingly intertwined with emerging technologies and global crises (e.g., AI, climate change, data ethics, disinformation), educational curricula and instructors must seek to foster human-centered thinking and future-oriented creativity. "This was the first time I felt that design could be activism, a storytelling medium, and a philosophy at once. It wasn't about solving a problem—it was about starting a conversation." — Elira M., graphic design student

This quote is not taken from a publication or known source; it is a personal reflection by a student that relates to the academic or educational context being discussed, treating design as a multidimensional practice that challenges norms and provokes dialogue. Her statement pushes design beyond aesthetics and functionality toward a more inclusive realm of cultural and social impact. The literature review as a method is grounded in theories of art, design, general visual culture, pedagogical models, and analytical strategies in graphic design, which, through comparative frameworks, identify gaps in existing educational curricula and propose conceptual models that position visual arts as foundational—not supplementary—to graphic design education. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of artistic practices on student engagement with social change, as well as the role of specific pedagogical methods in reinforcing the integration of visual arts and design.

Results and Discussions

History recognizes important educational models in which visual arts have been meaningfully integrated into institutional philosophy and curricula. Bauhaus is the archetype of a historic design school and a highly influential movement in art and design that emerged in Germany in the early 20th century. Bauhaus sought to unify art, craft, and technology into a single creative expression. It rejected ornamentation in favor of clean lines, simplicity, and practicality. Despite its short lifespan, Bauhaus had a major impact on modern design, architecture, and educational systems. The ideals and vision of this school continue to shape the way design is taught and practiced globally. Integrating visual arts into graphic design education enriches the curriculum by linking conceptual thinking with technical execution.

Institutions that embrace this convergence produce professionals with a stronger grasp of visual language and aesthetics, greater sensitivity to the theory of figurative elements, less dependency on software, enhanced technical and manual skills, broader cultural and historical awareness, greater creative freedom, and more. While the integration has clear benefits, logistical issues

can limit the effectiveness of interdisciplinary collaboration. Curriculum redesigning and careful consideration of the various implications institutions may face during the adoption of these educational models are key factors for successful implementation.

Conclusion

The inclusion of visual art diversity in graphic design education is an interdisciplinary approach that envisions a possible future in which students are not merely providers of visual services solving user problems and needs, but active agents of change within their communities and beyond - agents who raise questions, provoke debate, and propose hypothetical scenarios about the direction society, technology, and culture may take in the future. This approach encourages collaboration and co-creation - collective action across various disciplines. Integrating interdisciplinarity into graphic design education equips students with more than just technical skills - it fosters critical awareness, ethical sensitivity, and imaginative thinking. This pedagogical shift is essential for preparing the next generation of designers not only to respond to change - but to lead it.

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Architecture as a Sensory and Artistic Experience: A Phenomenological Analysis Beyond Functionality

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Abstract

Architecture is not limited to its utilitarian function; it has the potential to transform into a form of art that impacts the sensory and emotional experience of its users. This study explores how a phenomenological approach in architecture can enhance space perception, going beyond its role as shelter and creating deeper aesthetic and emotional experiences. The research examines the influence of elements such as light, materials, and colors in spaces and how these aspects shape the perception and experience of users. The hypothesis of this study is that the integration of phenomenological principles in architectural design enhances the sensory and emotional experiences of users, creating spaces that contribute to their well-being beyond mere utilitarian function. The methodology includes a visual and sensory analysis of several spaces designed by the author, through which the impact of architectural elements and design on the perceptual and emotional experiences of individuals will be assessed. Participants will be invited to express their opinions regarding the impact of these spaces on their sensations and perceptions, allowing data collection to understand how architecture can shape profound sensory and emotional experiences. The results show that this study contributes to the discourse on the importance of the connection between art and architecture, highlighting the potential of spaces that go beyond functionality to create aesthetic and spiritual experiences. The Conclusion and recommendations aim to encourage architects and designers to consider phenomenological aspects in the process of creating spaces, treating them as tools to promote the well-being and inspiration of users.

Keywords

architecture as Art, phenomenology in Architecture, sensory design, emotional experience, space and well-being

Introduction

In the contemporary era, architecture faces the challenge of fulfilling not only the functional needs of shelter but also of creating spaces that deeply affect the emotions and spirit of individuals (Pallasmaa, 2005). This project, built upon the phenomenological principles of architecture, aims to analyze spaces that are more than merely functional; spaces that offer profound artistic and sensory experiences, connecting individuals with their surroundings and with themselves on a spiritual level (Böhme, 2017). Architecture, as an art form, is not merely visual; it is an experience that is felt (Zumthor, 2006), one that goes beyond the outward appearance of a building and enters the depth of perception and experience (Böhme, 2017). Phenomenology, when applied to architecture, emphasizes the user's sensory and emotional experience, treating architecture as an art that stimulates all the senses, from light and color to materials and textures (Bloomer & Moore, 1977). This paper explores how architecture, through the use of these artistic elements, can create spaces that foster a deeper and richer experience for individuals.

By designing spaces that employ the principles of art and phenomenology, this work aims to clarify the close relationship between art and architecture (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), offering spaces that encourage reflection and introspection. This is evident in projects such as the redesign of the university library, where elements and materials are not merely functional, but part of an artistic composition that influences the atmosphere and emotional experience of the users. Likewise, in other projects such as exclusive suites and meditation spaces, aesthetic elements like colors, textures, and forms are carefully selected to create an atmosphere that allows individuals to experience the space not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research approach, conducted through the visual and sensory analysis of twelve projects designed by the author. The main method used is in-depth self-analysis, a widely applied approach in artistic and design research to understand the relationship between the creator and the work (Bloomer & Moore, 1977). This method enables a sensitive exploration of spaces by linking the design process to personal experience and emotional perception.

The focus of the research is the user's sensory and emotional experience, analyzing the impact of elements such as light, color, materials, and spatial composition in creating an atmosphere. This atmosphere aims to establish a sensory and spiritual connection with the user, in alignment with the phenomenological principles of architectural design (Zumthor, 2006).

Each project is analyzed individually to assess how it reflects phenomenological principles and contains artistic sensitivity. This approach allows for an understanding not only of the functionality of the space but also of its aesthetic and emotional significance. The research seeks to demonstrate that design based on sensory experience can create spaces that are simultaneously functional, appealing, and transformative for users, reflecting Merleau-Ponty's (1962) idea that perception is a bodily process, not merely a visual one.

Results and Discussions

Project 1: "Redesign of the Interior Space of the University Library" (2025) presents an intervention in interior design that aims to go beyond the purely functional dimension of a university library, emphasizing the sensory experience, atmosphere, and the user's emotional connection with the space. This project is directly linked to the research framework, serving as a concrete example of the application of phenomenological principles in interior design.



Figure 1. Redesign of the University Library - Condition Before the Proposal.

The images present different viewpoints of the redesigned space, emphasizing materiality, atmosphere, and functionality. Although the existing library benefits from sufficient natural lighting, the environment fails to create a sense of welcome or comfort (Rasmussen, 1962). The entirely white walls, along with the dimensions and positioning of the furniture, made the space feel cold and uncomfortable for its intended function - a function that requires warmth, intimacy, and concentration. To overturn this sterile state, the redesign focused on creating a rich sensory experience, where material, texture, height, and color contribute to shaping the human experience within the space. The choice of wood as the dominant material not only for the furniture but also for other interior elements, serves to bring a warm tactile sensation, a soft visual tone, and a natural scent that evokes a connection with nature. This approach reflects Rasmussen's (1962) belief that architecture must be understood and experienced sensitively through the senses. This multisensory interaction is, in itself, a phenomenological strategy: to create a space that is "felt," not just seen (Pallasmaa, 2005).



Figure 2. Redesign of the University Library - Proposed Condition.

A deliberate design decision was the vertical scaling of furniture up to the ceiling height, which creates the sensation that the user is "dwarfed" by the space (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). This makes the act of reading more introspective and profound, shifting the focus away from the surroundings and toward the experience of the book. This "scale paradox" enhances the sense of immersion into the world of reading and contemplation. Furthermore, the raw textures of the walls offer an organic and honest feeling, giving the space character and grounding. The careful placement of decorative elements contributes to the visual and emotional balance of the environment. The existing windows and lighting have been deliberately preserved to maintain a connection with the building's original identity, creating a dialogue between the old and the new.

Project 2: "Boutique Retreat Guest Suite" (2025) - presents the interior design of an exclusive small resort located on the outskirts of Marrakech, envisioned as an intimate and experiential retreat where luxury coexists with simplicity and naturalness. This project aims to create an experience that blends a raw and natural feel with quiet and refined elegance. This approach is reflected in every element of the suite's design, where material, color, form, and texture are selected not merely for function but to evoke emotion.



Figure 3. Design of the Exclusive Resort Suite - Marrakech.

The plastered walls with visible textures, in warm tones, create an “earthy” and organic atmosphere. The use of organic and fluid forms ,seen in the bed frame, wall lamps, and even the door handle , creates an uninterrupted harmony within the space, a visual and emotional flow that brings calmness and warmth.



Figure 4. Details of the Exclusive Resort Suite - Marrakech.

The hand-crafted wooden wardrobe is one of the most sensitive elements of this project. It brings a sense of authenticity and hospitality, making the user feel not like a visitor, but like part of the place,whether local or tourist. This experience of connection with the local context aligns with Seamon’s (2000) views on the bond between person and place through phenomenological experience. Through materials, forms, and the feelings they convey, this connection is essential to the phenomenological approach of this project.



Figure 5. Incorporation of "Variation and Repetition" in the Exclusive Resort - Marrakech.

Although many of the materials are natural, the project does not hesitate to incorporate carefully crafted imitations and illusions as a means to achieve the desired atmosphere. This balance between tactile reality and visual perception becomes a conscious play with the user's senses (Pallasmaa, 2005), creating an environment that feels authentic, experiential, and emotionally charged.

Project 3: Living & Dining Room (2024) - is a project that does not simply aim to create a functional and aesthetically pleasing space, but to develop a sensory experience aligned with the phenomenological principles of architecture. Often, a space may appear "complete" through the visual selection of elements alone, but when it is designed with sensitivity to the bodily and emotional experience of the user (Pallasmaa, 2005), every element begins to carry individual meaning beyond its aesthetic role.



Figure 6. View of the Living and Dining Room Project.

In this project, the wall is the key element. Inspired by natural forms yet translated into a refined minimalism as requested by the client, it embodies a silent dialogue between nature and contemporary style. The Wabi Sabi aesthetic serves as the foundation for the softness and warmth that the design seeks to convey, not through perfection, but through controlled imperfection and

honest texture. The two semi-circular elements placed on the wall are not merely decorative details; they act as phenomenological anchors, creating visual structure and helping to unify the rest of the environment. The furniture, carefully selected for its soft edges and non-aggressive silhouettes, does not demand attention through visual imposition, but through its quiet and welcoming presence. This follows Böhme's (2017) concept of atmosphere as a present feeling, one that influences emotionally without being directly noticed.



Figure 7. Details from the Project - Dining Area.

Every element-from the wall lights, chairs, and sofas to the table- follows the principle of "variation and repetition," maintaining a sensory coherence that begins with the form of the wall, yet features subtle changes in shape to unconsciously stimulate the senses. This sensitive spatial order reflects Holl's (2000) notion of constructing experience through movement and sequence. If an element "calls out" for attention to itself, it disrupts the process of experiencing; but when it is part of a soft and varied rhythm, it activates the human sensory memory- the essence of phenomenological architecture (Bloomer & Moore, 1977).



Figure 8. View from the Project - Decorative Details.

Finally, darker tones have been used to balance the softness of the light, natural colors. They help create visual depth and prevent the monotony of an overly sweet atmosphere, adding emotional and visual contrast that enriches and completes the overall experience.

Projects 4-11: Surreal and Poetic Projects (Day X, Silence is Mine, Earthy Tones, Cozy Corner, Best Served Cold, AVION, One Down, LADY JANE). These projects function as sensory experiments, aligning with Junk's (2018) description of architecture as a creator of atmospheres and emotional experiences. Dramatic lighting, surreal forms, and symbolic textures are used to evoke deep spiritual feelings, solitude, or nostalgia (Pallasmaa, 2005). In particular, Silence is Mine, Earthy Tones, and Cozy Corner exhibit an existential inspiration that aligns with Norberg-Schulz's approach to the "dwelling" condition (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

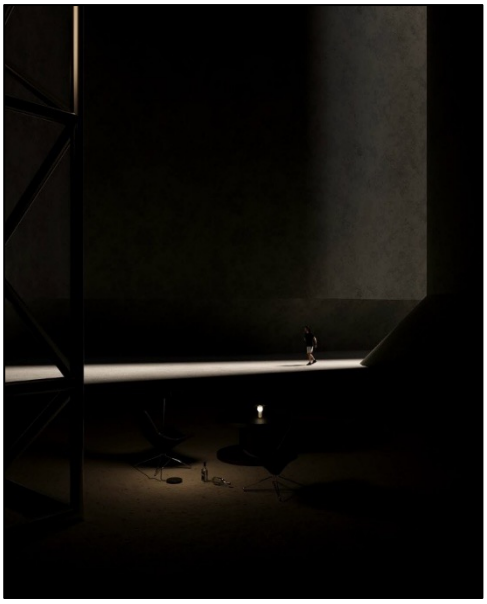




Figure 9. Project "Day X"
Figure 10. Project "Silence Is Mine"

4. "Day X" (2023), Surreal Spatial Experiment - Loneliness as a Spatial Narrative This visual experiment explores the emotional landscape of loneliness through architectural abstraction. The composition emphasizes the contrast in scale between the vast, minimally lit environment and the solitary human figure, evoking a sense of existential isolation. The careful use of dim light, dark tones, and negative space adds depth to the emotional experience, transforming spatial emptiness into a tool that reflects the inner state of the individual.

5. "Silence is Mine" (2023), Consciousness and Depersonalization through Experimental Architecture. This scene aims to represent consciousness - or even depersonalization - through a symbolic architectural composition. The person is situated in a dark space, observing a lit area in the distance, which represents how they perceive themselves: as something distant and detached. The truss embodies the contrast between strength and fragility ,the truss symbolizes external or mental strength, while its circular form expresses an inner emotional sensitivity. This spatial tension is intended to provoke reflection on identity and the experiences of human consciousness.



Figure 11. Project “Earthy Tones”
Figure 12. Project “Cozy Corner”

6. “Earthy Tones” (2023), Architecture of Memory - The Feeling of Nostalgia through Color and Materiality. This scene aims to convey a sense of nostalgia through a warm and carefully crafted aesthetic composition. The use of brown and golden tones, along with raw textures, evokes early emotions and blurred emotional memories. The shape of the walls creates an impression of flow, giving the space life and movement, in contrast to traditional static architecture. This effect is reinforced by the gentle movement of the curtain, which brings an air of intimacy and personal experience. Through these elements, the space becomes an internal reflection of memories and human feelings.

7. “Cozy Corner” (2025), Architecture of Inner Reflection. This scene represents an intimate space for inner reflection and mental stillness. Inspired by Bachelard’s (1994) poetry of intimate space, where feelings shape the spiritual structure of an environment. Through the combination of dark and warm tones, controlled lighting, and rich textures, an atmosphere is created that invites self-contemplation and silent reading. Elements such as the classic armchair, carefully positioned lighting, and the presence of plants symbolize the balance between the individual and their inner world. This composition demonstrates how architecture and design can construct spaces for rediscovering peace and spiritual intimacy.



Figure 13. Project “Best Served Cold”
Figure 14. Project “AVION”

8. “Best Served Cold” (2023), Emotional Duality in a Surreal Space. This visual experiment explores the tension between aesthetics and emotional coldness. The cool lighting in violet and blue hues creates an enigmatic and distant atmosphere, while the spatial composition with intricate structures represents complex relationships between individuals. The table positioned at the center implies a silent confrontation ,not always visible, but present through silence and tension. This project investigates how space can embody restrained emotions and unspoken interpersonal implications.

9. “AVION” (2024), Materialization of the Inner World through Surreal Installation. This scene addresses the contrast between an individual’s inner and outer worlds through a surreal installation. While the external environment appears simple, almost empty, but the ground within begins to take form, erupting into expressive structures that symbolize the individual’s unspoken thoughts, feelings, and ideas. This architectural approach materializes invisible sensations and the richness of an inner world that is not easily perceived by others. The installation serves as a visual metaphor for the spiritual depth often hidden behind an ordinary appearance.



Figure 15. Project “One Down”
Figure 16. Project “LADY JANE”

10. "One Down" (2024), Deconstruction of Structure: Architecture as a Reflection of a Solitary Individual. This scene represents an inversion of the traditional role of structural elements in architecture. Columns once symbols of strength and stability now lie on the ground, stripped of their primary function and transformed into decorative objects. Meanwhile, a single chair symbolizes the individual facing this silent setting, prompting reflection on the significance, necessity, and function of content versus form. In this minimalist and cold composition, architecture becomes a metaphor for the contemporary era: a visual space where form dominates function, and the individual stands in silence before it.

11. "LADY JANE" (2024), Interweaving Classical Art and Contemporary Architecture: A Space for Reflection. This scene is centered around the famous classical artwork The Execution of Lady Jane Grey, placed within a contemporary setting that creates a strong contrast between historical drama and constructed calm. The circular form serving as a visual entryway, combined with controlled lighting and the minimalist selection of elements like the seat and vegetation, gives the scene a meditative character. The painting is not merely decoration; the artwork becomes the spiritual core of the space, emphasizing themes of innocence, justice, and human uncertainty through an architectural approach that invites deep reflection.

Project 12: Phenomenology in Architecture - Museum with Exhibition Gallery and Botanical Garden, Pristina. Diploma Project (2021). By applying phenomenological principles in architecture, this project develops spaces of deep experience, museum and gallery that build connections between people and the ecologically shaped environment, such as the botanical garden (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).



Figure 17. Exterior View of the Project: Museum with Exhibition Gallery and Botanical Garden, Pristina. Diploma Project (2021)

Considering space as one of the few elements shared between architecture and science, this project explores its impact on the human mind and body. Since our thoughts and emotions vary depending on place and time, the project adopts a universal example of the beauty the mind seeks in space, borrowed from nature and translated into architecture (Heidegger, 1971).

At its core, the project centers around the question of how we can create architecture that is simultaneously sheltered by nature, protected from it, and yet maintains a connection with it (Heidegger, 1971). Different spaces affect the human mind in different ways, and this idea is thoroughly addressed in the narrative and spatial structure of the design. Ultimately, the aim of

the project is to create recreational, meditative, and healing spaces that offer more than basic utilitarian function, spaces that preserve authenticity through material expression, as proposed by Frampton (1995) in his concept of 'tectonic culture,' or spaces that touch the senses and soul (Pallasmaa, 2005).



Figure 18. Interior View of the Project: Museum with Exhibition Gallery and Botanical Garden, Pristina. Diploma Project (2021)

Phenomenology in architecture manifests through the manipulation of space, aiming to create an unforgettable encounter by impacting the human senses (Pallasmaa, 2005).
The experience of phenomenology in architecture can be achieved through:

- Light and shadow
- Color and transparency
- Texture and material
- Temperature and bodily sensation
- Scents / Smell
- Sounds, noise, silence
- Movement through space
- Proportion in relation to the human body
- Time and spatial transformation
- Spiritual sensation
- Connection to nature and memory

(Pallasmaa, 2005; Zumthor, 2006)

The botanical garden is conceived as a direct point of connection between humans and nature, a place not only to visit, but to feel, touch, and smell. A place that awakens the primary senses: sight, hearing, smell, and touch. But the project goes further. The experience deepens beyond the physical senses, reaching the mind, body, and soul (Pallasmaa, 2005). Together with the garden, integral parts of the project include the botanical museum and exhibition gallery, designed to reinforce the narrative of sensory experience and to build bridges between nature and human contemplation of it (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The building's facade goes beyond aesthetics; it acts as a deliberate psychological intervention that begins with a slight sense of confusion for the visitor. The first row of arches, located on the building's exterior gallery, creates the illusion of inverted arches when seen while walking. However, the moment the visitor stops in front of the building, the arches align with a second row to form complete circles. This "arch play" establishes a silent interaction with the brain, provoking pause, attention, and possibly the decision to enter the building. Even though the design is original, it shares a natural connection

with a moment described by Zumthor (2006) “when you feel drawn into a space through the atmosphere it creates.”



Figure 19. View from the Main Garden: Museum with Exhibition Gallery and Botanical Garden, Pristina. Diploma Project (2021)

This spatial manipulation serves as a gentle distraction, intended to draw the visitor away from the routines of daily life and toward a new experience. And if this exterior interaction succeeds, the interior space is designed to continue the narrative that is to create a temporary departure from the outside world, an oasis for reflection and deep sensory experience.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the power of architecture as a fully sensory experience, where spaces serve not only as shelters but also as mediums for generating well-being and emotional inspiration. Through the analysis of the included projects, it becomes clear that components such as light, materials, form, and spatial rhythm can be used beyond their utilitarian purpose, as instruments of expression and emotional connection. This analysis highlights the importance of consciously integrating sensory experience in the early stages of architectural design, so that every building is not only functional or aesthetic but also personally and emotionally meaningful. It is recommended that architects and designers cultivate a deeper sensitivity toward users’ individual experiences by integrating phenomenological approaches into the design of every space, regardless of its scale or function. In this way, architecture is transformed into a sacred medium, creating experiences that leave a lasting impression, encourage reflection, and connect the individual to the essence of self, to others, and to the surrounding world. This approach represents a crucial step toward a more humane, artistic, and mindful contemporary design practice. And, paradoxically yet profoundly, it is precisely through art, in this case, through a phenomenological approach, that architecture manages to reach the highest levels of science, directly influencing the human nervous system, perception, and brain response (Pallasmaa, 2005). Thus, the artistic experience constructed through architecture becomes, in itself, a reflective and research-oriented process, demonstrating that the most human and sensitive path toward the scientific dimensions of art and architecture lies precisely through lived experience.

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ANNEX I - List of Visualized Projects

This annex summarizes all the projects included in this study, along with relevant technical information and sources where they can be visually accessed. All projects were created by the author, using professional 3D visualization software to simulate the spatial atmosphere.

Nr.	Project Title	Year	Software	Project Link
1	Redesign of the Interior Space of the University Library	2025	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/225495919/Redesign-of-the-University-Library-Interior
2	Boutique Retreat Guest Suite	2025	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/226206195/Boutique-Retreat-Guest-Suite
3	Living & Dining Room	2024	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/206120975/Living-Dinning-Room
4	Day X	2023	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/185414641/DAY-X
5	Silence is Mine	2023	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/185413737/Silence-Is-Mine
6	Earthy Tones	2023	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/185414773/Earthy-Tones
7	Cozy Corner	2025	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/222572181/Cozy-Corner
8	AVION	2023	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/224047391/AVION-Surreal-3D-Scene
9	Best Served Cold	2023	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/185415293/Best-served-cold
10	One Down	2024	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/224047935/One-Down-Surreal-3D-Scene
11	LADY JANE	2024	3ds Max, Corona Renderer	https://www.behance.net/gallery/224046985/LADY-JANE
12	Botanical Garden	2021	ArchiCAD, Lumion,	https://www.inspireli.com/en/awards/detail/3164

Traditional and Contemporary Methods in the Documentation and Restoration of Traditional Clothing

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Abstract

The preservation of traditional clothing is very important for the cultural heritage, as it is closely linked to the history, identity, and craftsmanship of a society. However, significant threats are faced because the material can be degradated, improperly stored and the traditional handicraft skills maybe lost. The research problem of this study is the necessity for proper documenting and restoring the clothing. The aim it is to explore the ways of documentation and restoration as well as the challenges faced. The objectives are to identify and analyze the traditional and contemporary documentation and restoration methods of traditional clothing. The research question is: How do the technological advancements impact on documentation and restoration of traditional clothing? And the hypothesis is: The use of advanced technologies improves the accuracy of documentation and restoration. This article provides a literature review by using secondary data such as journal articles, conference articles, books, reports, studies etc. Findings emphasize that the technologies such as 3D scanning, multispectral imaging, and digital archiving, improve the documentation and restoration of clothing. However, there are ethical issues related to the way and level of intervention. Therefore, it is necessary the collaboration between conservators, historians, and technologists for better preservation.

Keywords

traditional clothing, Preservation, Challenges, Intervention, Collaboration

Introduction

The preservation of traditional clothing is essential for the promotion and heritage of cultural values of society, as they embody cultural identity, history and craftsmanship that can be lost over time. Traditional clothing is not only functional objects, but carriers of emotions and experiences that reflect style, and the socio-economic context of their time.
With the development of technology, the documentation and restoration of traditional clothing has evolved. The integration of the combined traditional and modern approach is not only practical, but also strategic for the ethical and sustainable preservation of heritage. It enables conservators to protect cultural values by preserving both the physical composition, as well as the symbolic meaning of traditional clothing.

Literature review

Historical development of the conservation of traditional clothing

The history of preserving traditional clothing is linked to the preservation of cultural heritage. Early approaches to the maintenance of traditional clothing and textiles were mainly functional, focused on their preservation through repair. These practices were often used from the craftsmen who created the traditional clothing.

The establishment of museums and collection institutions in the 18th and 19th centuries marked a significant change in the preservation of traditional clothing. Traditional clothing began to be appreciated not only for their functionality, but also for the importance of their historical and artistic value. The 20th century witnessed the professionalization of conservation as a separate discipline, with the development of specialized training programs, professional organizations and ethical guidelines.

The establishment of institutions such as the Textile Conservation Centre in the United Kingdom (1975) and the creation of textile conservation departments in big museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1973), reflected the growth of knowledge specialized in preserving traditional clothing. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2024), conservation practices began to include “the latest analytical equipment and methodology alongside traditional methods” that were used to study textile collections and develop strategies suitable for conservation. The combination of traditional and modern techniques ensures the maintenance, preservation and maintenance of cultural elements with important historical and artistic value for societies (Hidayani, 2024). The application of these techniques in the conservation process serves not only for preservation but also for the transmission of cultural heritage between generations, to ensure that this knowledge, traditional skills and values will not be lost (Berger et al., 2020)

Traditional Documentation Methods

Traditional methods of documenting textile artifacts have evolved over time in centuries, recording physical characteristics, creation techniques and cultural contexts of traditional clothing. These methods form the foundation upon which are based contemporary documentation practices that continue to provide access to valuable that complement modern technologies.

Description of works

Describing works with text, represents one of the oldest methods for recording information about textile artifacts. Textual documentation usually takes two main form: (Sharan et al., 2015). Narrative documentation provides detailed descriptions of traditional clothing, records of physical characteristics, creation techniques, condition and cultural importance. This approach allows documenters to capture observations and contextual information: such as recording the history, tradition and culture associated with traditional clothing. Technical or Structured Documentation uses standard forms and terms to ensure a sustainable and comprehensive record of information about traditional clothing. This method is very useful and helps in collecting data in a structured way, enabling comparison between different collections, according to the Textile Art Museum at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (Chauhan & Prajapati, 2019) Both methods of documentation require specialized knowledge of the terminology of the textiles and construction techniques and materials, so they rely on a vocabulary standardized classification ensuring clear communication between professionals.

Visual Documentation

Visual documentation methods provide direct views of the construction and condition of traditional clothing. Traditional visual documentation techniques include:

Photography, which has been a cornerstone of textile documentation since the invention of camera. Black and white and color photography was used to record the appearance of general characteristics of traditional clothing and textiles, as well as specific details such as weaving structures, ornaments and areas of damage. Photo in documentation used to illustrate structural details, size, colors, location of facility, damages and technical or analytical results (Sharan et al., 2015). The 'Marubi' photo archive represents an important source of documentation for clothing Albanian folk music, especially in the northern provinces. The photos from the end 19th century to the mid-20th century reflect traditional clothing (Onuzi & Ulcinj, 2010).

Illustration that highlights specific structural features or construction details that may be difficult to capture in photography. Technical illustrations may explain complex three-dimensional structures, such as clothing patterns, more clearly or weaving techniques, through simplified visual representations. The illustrations are also valid for reconstruction proposals and allow conservators to visualize potential interventions before implementation.

X-rays, although less common in traditional documentation, are used to examine the internal structure of traditional clothing and textiles complex without physical intervention. This technique is particularly valuable for the study of layered clothing, composite textiles or artifacts with metal components.

Audio-Visual Documentation

Traditional methods of audio-visual documentation emerged with the development of technology. of the film. Audio-Visual Recordings provide sequential visual documentation with accompanying explanatory text, allowing documentation of processes such as dyeing

or specialized weaving techniques. These formats were particularly valuable for educational purposes, making knowledge about traditional clothing accessible to the wide audience.

Traditional Restoration Techniques

Traditional clothing restoration techniques have been developed over the centuries. based on artisanal knowledge and natural materials, and continue to come to assistance to contemporary conservation practices, which aim for minimal intervention.

Repair techniques

Traditional repair techniques represent some of the most sustainable approaches to the restoration of traditional clothing, many of which continue to be used in contemporary conservation practice:

Sewing, an ancient method of repairing traditional clothing, involves creating a new structure woven within damaged areas using threads that match the original in material, color, and weight. It is the craft of joining or gluing cloth through stitches made with needle and thread (Anawalt, 2007). Masters in sewing can create almost invisible repairs that restore both aesthetic appearance and structural properties of a textile.

Patching involves adding a backing fabric to reinforce weakened or damaged areas. It is a way to extend the life of clothing (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021; European Commission, 2022). Traditional patching methods emphasized the selection of compatible materials, often taken from inner parts of the same garment or from similar textiles appropriate for the period. Hand-sewing techniques provided patches in ways that distributed tension evenly and minimized visibility.

Reweaving represents perhaps the highest level of traditional textile repair, which requires extraordinary skill and patience. This technique involves working with a needle and which imitates the original weave to replace damaged threads and/or areas or that are missing (Zhang et al., 2023). For rare and valuable traditional clothing, restorers traditionalists would do their best to create repairs as good and as close to the original structure.

Traditional Approaches and Materials in the Conservation of Traditional Clothing

Traditional methods for structural support of traditional clothing are related to placing natural fabrics such as cotton and linen on the inside of the garment, and which is sewn by hand with thin threads to distribute weight and strengthen the areas weakened. For exposure, supports shaped according to the structure of the textile to avoid damage. The materials used are natural fibers (e.g. silk, cotton, linen, wool) and natural dyes, which offer compatibility with original textiles. For the restoration of traditional clothing, thin needles and personalized tools are used.

Contemporary documentation methods

The digital revolution has transformed the documentation of traditional clothing, making introduced unprecedented capabilities for capturing, analyzing, and sharing information about textile artifacts. Contemporary documentation methods utilize advanced technologies to create more comprehensive, accurate and accessible data than was previously possible, while simultaneously addressing some of the limitations of existing approaches traditional.

3D Scanning Technologies

Three-dimensional scanning has emerged as a powerful tool for documenting complex geometries and surface characteristics of textile objects. Several approaches are developed, each with specific advantages for documenting textiles, as it follows:

Structured Light Scanning (SLS) projects light patterns onto an object and uses cameras to capture deviations of these patterns, which are then processed to create a 3D model. Montusiewicz et al. (2021) conducted research on the implementation of this technology in historical clothing. He noted that SLS offers several advantages such as: it captures accurate geometric data of the garments, creates high-resolution 3D models that preserves the details of the fabric's structure and construction, allows for contactless digitization, minimizing the risk to fragile textiles and enabling documentation 360° comprehensive coverage of clothing.

Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) provides accurate spatial data with precision millimeter, creating point clouds that can be processed into detailed 3D models. TLS is used experimentally to scan the shape and composition structural aspects of wearable clothing, especially to create accurate digital models down to the smallest detail in the fashion industry or in historic textile preservation projects. While it is mainly used for architectural documentation, Milosz et al. (2024) emphasized the value of TLS even for documenting larger textile installations or costume collections within their architectural context.

Photogrammetry Techniques, especially Short-Range Terrestrial Photogrammetry (TSRP), use multiple photographs taken from different angles to create 3D models of textile objects. This approach offers several advantages for documenting textile, including the requirements for relatively low-cost equipment, the ability to capture accurate information about color and texture and compliance with other documentation methods. As discussed by Ding and Liang (2024), photogrammetry can be combined with laser scanning data to create improved models that take advantage of the strengths of both approaches. These 3D documentation technologies address a fundamental limitation of traditional documentation methods: the challenge of recording the three-dimensional form of textiles, especially clothing and complex textile structures. Digital models that result preserve information about the fabric, volume, and construction that is difficult to capture through photography or illustration alone.

Multispectral and Hyperspectral Imaging captures information across wavelengths multiple wavelengths of light, revealing details that are invisible to the naked eye. Multispectral imaging uses fewer spectral regions and provides more information. general, while hyperspectral imaging captures many spectral regions and enables a more detailed and in-depth analysis of materials.

These techniques can identify different colors and pigments, detect repairs or changes to previous and discover faded or dark patterns and designs. For clothing traditional with complex color histories or conservation challenges, these methods imaging provide valuable diagnostic information that can guide us to the storage method.

Computed Tomography (CT) creates three-dimensional images of internal structures without physical intervention. Analyzes complex textiles by revealing construction, internal damage and hidden elements.

Digital microscopy enables detailed examination of the fiber structure, weaving patterns and damage, using different magnifications and cameras integrated for accurate documentation. This technology generates data that are analyzed with specialized programs to evaluate characteristics such as: thread count, density, colors and state of deterioration, helping in analysis and classification of textile elements.

Virtual and Augmented Reality Applications

Virtual and augmented reality technologies have created new opportunities for documenting and presenting the dynamic aspects of textile objects:

Virtual Reality (VR) for Fashion Heritage offers innovative solutions for display of historical clothing Angeletti et al. (2023). There are five advantages of important for documenting historical clothing: experiencing them in motion, 360° exploration of clothing details in optimal lighting conditions, providing cultural context, protection from physical damage to fragile textiles and virtual reconstruction of damaged or incomplete clothing.

Augmented Reality (AR) complements physical exhibits by adding digital information, allowing for demonstration of clothing in use and explanation of processes restoration without touching the artifact. These technologies limit traditional documentation, enabling them to see how the clothes would look when worn, to show the historical evolution of textile techniques or present the processes of restoration and historical context without physically altering the artifacts themselves. These technologies create more attractive and informative documentation that can serve both the scientific audience as well as the public one.

Digital Databases and Information Management

Modern documentation approaches include advanced digital systems for organizing, analyzing, and distributing information. Online accessibility, as in the case of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2024), has enabled the global distribution of collections that were once limited to physical archives. Digital information has limitations compared to traditional documentation in terms of accessibility information.

Contemporary Restoration Approaches

Modern textile conservation emphasizes preventive conservation, minimal intervention, and decision-making based on scientific evidence using advanced analytics to understand materials and damage, controls environmental conditions to slow down deterioration and respects the cultural history of the object, avoiding interventions unnecessary aesthetics.

Digital Restoration and Reconstruction

Digital technologies are offering new tools for virtual restoration, complementing physical conservation of textiles. Digital modeling allows visual reconstructions without affecting the artifact, while 3D printing does not directly deal with the treatment of original objects.
Virtual simulations help understand the use and appearance of clothing historical. These non-invasive approaches preserve material integrity and expand possibilities for interpretation and research.

Methodology

This study relies on a literature review to analyze the integration of methods traditional and contemporary in the documentation and restoration of clothing traditional. The methodological approach is of a qualitative nature and aims to identify the models, benefits and challenges that arise from combining these practices. The selection of study materials was done through systematic research in academic databases, institutional publications (such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art), and scientific articles covering the topics of clothing documentation and conservation traditional, textiles, technology in heritage preservation and cultural restoration.
The studies we have relied on are from recent years to reflect the most recent developments. new, as well as basic sources to provide the historical and traditional context of restoration practices. The literature analysis was conducted by making comparisons between traditional and contemporary in methodological, material, technological and ethical aspects. They are analyze the benefits and limitations of each approach, as well as their impact on conservation long-term storage of textile objects. This methodology aims to provide a balanced and in-depth understanding of the situation current state of the field, supporting recommendations for further development of integrated conservation practices.

Conclusion

This literature review examines the integration of traditional and contemporary methods in documenting and restoring traditional clothing, highlighting the way how they complement each other. Traditional methods, based on knowledge handicrafts and natural materials, offer important cultural and technical values that cannot be replaced by modern technology. On the other hand, approaches contemporary bring scientific analysis, digital technology and preventive strategies, enabling accurate documentation, minimal intervention and wide access to information. Their integration creates a new approach that respects both the material dimension as well as the cultural one of the artifacts. As evidenced by the practices of the key institutions, integrated approaches achieve results that would not be possible if only one method would be used. The future of textile preservation lies in the development of further development of this collaboration between tradition and innovation, while preserving the identity cultural for future generations. Integration of traditional and contemporary methods in the preservation of traditional clothing, although promising, presents its own challenges. It faces a number of technical, ethical, financial and institutional, which require balanced and collaborative approaches. Implementing integrated approaches to preserving traditional clothing faces challenges technical issues such as the mismatch between traditional and digital systems, the risk of losing digital data and lack of specialized skills. To overcome these obstacles, standardization, interdisciplinary training and

institutional investments are needed stable. Textile conservation involves technical, ethical and cultural challenges. Integrating methods requires respect for heritage and equal inclusion. The lack of standards makes implementation difficult. The solutions lie in cooperation, education and technology.

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The Zengo Dynasty, creativity intergenerational for two centuries

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Abstract

Artists, painters, photographers and iconographers who left their mark with their paintings in the history of art and at the same time became part of the cultural heritage. The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century brought a major development in Albanian iconography where a group of artists from the village of Dardha, Korçë, occupy a very important place. In this period, iconography underwent radical changes, departing from the immutable Byzantine rules. Artists of this period began to compose biblical scenes and saints with more authenticity and closer to reality by introducing volume and color. The central figure and the background was painted with the same dedication and details. The icons were no longer two-dimensional, but were closer to the presentation of religious paintings by the Italian Renaissance or well-known European authors, which, sometimes were copied rigorously. The Zengo dynasty, began with Nicola Zengo (the Elder) in the 18th century, continues with its main representative, Vangjel Zengo, who had great creativity and at the same time influenced the artistic education of the Zengo sisters, his daughters, who followed his way with dignity. The contribution of the Zengo Family, through generations, has dominated iconographic, mural, but also secular painting. They have been a direct part of these important changes in iconography and Byzantine art, becoming a role model for other contemporary artists. The National Museum of Medieval Art preserves a large number of masterpieces created by iconographic artists from Dardha village, where the iconography of the Zengos occupy the largest place.

Keywords

the Zengo Dynasty, Byzantine art, iconographic painting, cultural influence

Introduction

The Zengo family originates from the mountainous village of Dardhë, near the city of Korçë in southeastern Albania. Dardhë has produced numerous notable figures who have contributed significantly to the nation's intellectual and cultural life, particularly in the fields of science and the arts. Among these distinguished contributors is the Zengo family, whose artistic legacy has played an essential role in the enrichment of Albanian cultural heritage. The historical context in which the Zengo family flourished was marked by a national awakening—characterized by efforts to establish a distinct Albanian identity, achieve independence from the Ottoman Empire, and unify the Albanian people under a sovereign state. A pro-European orientation exerted considerable influence on many Albanians who had studied or lived abroad and who were deeply committed to the cultural, political, and educational advancement of their homeland. This progressive spirit was particularly vibrant in the city of Korça, where a strong intellectual and artistic movement took root. Artists, in particular, were integral to this movement, contributing to national identity through their visual representations and by promoting cultural emancipation.

Visual art, in its various forms—religious, patriotic, and secular—played a central role in this transformative era. Key milestones of the Albanian Renaissance, such as the establishment of the Albanian alphabet, the founding of the First Albanian School, the philanthropic efforts of prominent local figures, and the declaration of the autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church, were all indicative of a broader intellectual and cultural reawakening. These developments were made possible through the tireless efforts and sacrifices of numerous intellectuals and patriots committed to national progress. The Zengo family was deeply embedded in these progressive developments over several generations. Their contributions to the artistic and cultural life of the time extended beyond ecclesiastical service. Although closely connected to the Orthodox Church—an institution that was both influential and deeply rooted—they were also fervent supporters of the national cause. Their artistic repertoire included iconography, fresco painting, photography, woodcarving, and other visual forms, through which they articulated both religious devotion and national ideals.

During this period, members of the Zengo family, alongside other icon painters—many of whom also hailed from Dardhë—played a transformative role in the evolution of Albanian ecclesiastical art. They departed from strict Byzantine conventions, introducing stylistic innovations inspired by European artistic models. Their work reflected a shift toward greater realism and authenticity, achieved in part through the study and emulation of renowned European masters.

Zengo Family – Artists and Legacy in Albanian Iconography

1. Nikola Zengo (the Elder)

Active: Late 18th – Early 19th century. According to two manuscripts from 1781 and 1798—authored by Nikola Zengo himself and preserved by the Zengo sisters—it is evident that he, originally from the village of Dardhë, spent several years traveling and residing in Russia, Bulgaria, Thessaly, Constantinople, and other regions. In addition to documenting his biography, he produced approximately 95 sketches, primarily portraits and studies of the human figure.



Figure 1. Sketches by Nikola Zengo (part of the family archive, reproduced in "Iconographic Painters from Dardha," Balli & Naslazi, 2013).

2. Andon Zengo (d. 1888)

Son of Nikola Zengo
It is believed that Andon studied and practiced iconography on Mount Athos, where many artists from Dardhë had established workshops. There, they painted icons for export—particularly to Slavic countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Bulgaria—and trained the next generation of iconographers.

3. Papa Jani Zengo (1832–1912)

Son of Andon Zengo
Papa Jani initially trained in xylography before becoming a photographer and priest. The earliest known photograph attributed to him, dated 1876, depicts the village school of Dardhë and its residents. He also taught, painted icons, and mastered several languages, including Greek, Turkish, and Russian. Notably, he created a 33-letter Albanian alphabet--began translating the Gospels into Albanian.



Figure 2. "The Circumcision" is signed "Joan Andon Zengo" and is held in the National Museum of Medieval Art (NMMA).
Figure 2/1. Photograph of the Girls' School, Dardhë (Zengo family archive).

4. Nikola Zengo (the Younger) (1881–1932)

Son of Papa Jani Zengo
Nikola lived and worked in the United States, primarily as a fresco and secular painter. He trained in the workshop of Grigor Zdruli—renowned iconographer from Dardhë—alongside his brother Vangjel and other local artists. His work was praised by the Boston press at the time.



Figure 3 & 4. "The Crucifixion" and "The Birth of Saint Mary," NMMA Collection.

5. Evthim Zengo

Brother of Nikola and Vangjel
Trained by his brother Vangjel, Evthim worked on icons and frescoes, including those in the Church of Saint George (Dardhë) and the Mosque of Iljaz Bey Mirahori. The NMMA holds nine signed icons by him.



Figure 5. "John the Baptist," NMMA Collection.

6. Thanas Todi Zengo (d. 1920)

The NMMA holds several icons signed by Thanas Zengo.



Figure 6. "Ascension to Heaven," NMMA Collection.

7. Kristo Thanas Zengo (d. 1987)

Worked in Greece as an iconographer.

8. Vangjel Zengo (1875–1941)

Eldest son of Papa Jani Zengo
Vangjel was the most prolific and transformative member of the Zengo family. Educated in Grigor Zdruli's studio on Mount Athos, he helped initiate significant shifts in iconography—abandoning rigid Byzantine conventions in favor of more expressive, naturalistic compositions. He developed religious and secular works, painting frescoes in churches across Albania, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States.

Notable frescoes:
- 1906: Church of St. George, Dardhë (co-authors: A. Papostol Ziçishti, S. PapaIlia Dardha)
- 1921: Mosque of Mirahor, Korçë (with Evthim Zengo)
- 1921–1923: Church of the Annunciation, Tirana
- 1929 Church of St. Mary, Korçë
- 1930 Church of Hoçisht, Korçë
- 1930 completes the mural depecting of the church of St. Kolli, Bellovoda
- 1932 Church of St. Thanas, Korçë
- 1933 Church of the Holy Trinity, Korçë
- 1936 Church of the Life-Giving Source, Korçë, etc..

He painted 159 icons preserved in the NMMA, and others in Brixhford, USA, and abroad.
In secular art, Vangjel painted patriotic and monumental works. Noteworthy pieces include portraits of Fan Noli, Sotir Peci, and depictions of Skanderbeg, such as The Battle of Skanderbeg and Skanderbeg on Horseback.

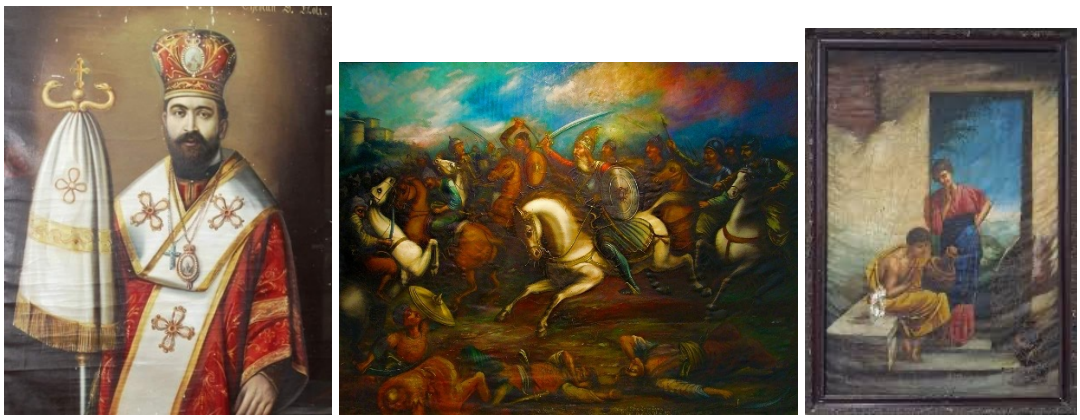


Figure 7–9. Portraits and historical scenes (NHM, NGA collections).



Figure 10–14. Icons by Vangjel Zengo, NMMA Collection.





Figure 15/1 & 15/2 – Vangjel Zengo with family; self-portrait.

The Zengo Sisters

9. Androniqi Zengo (1913–2000)

One of Albania's first professional female painters
Graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Athens. Known for impressionist secular works and for painting frescoes and icons. Nine of her icons are housed in the NMMA. She co-authored church frescoes alongside her father and sister.



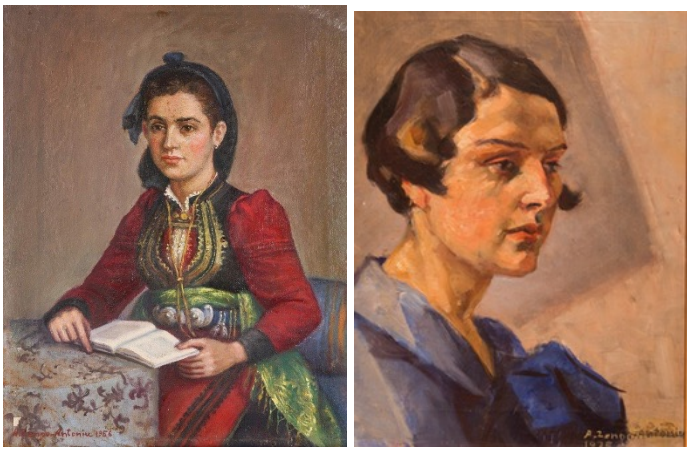


Figure 16–20. Icons and secular works (NMMA, NGA)

10. Sofia Zengo (1915–1976)

Powerful portrait and landscape artist
Sofia was co-author of icons and frescoes, and participated in several joint exhibitions. Seven icons signed by her are held in the NMMA.



Figure 21–25. Icons and self-portraits, (NMMA, private Collection, NGA)

11. Thomaidha Zengo (1905–1961)

Co-author of frescoes in the churches of St. Thanasi and Holy Trinity, Korçë. She emigrated to the U.S., where she continued painting frescoes in Boston churches. Seven icons in the NMMA bear her name.



Figure 26-27-28. "St. Mary," "Transfiguration," "St. Friday" (co-author with Vangjel Zengo), NMMA.

12. Sotiria Zengo

Specialized in decorative painting, inscriptions, and interior frescos for residences and public buildings.

Artistic Analysis: Icon of "John the Baptist" by Vangjel Zengo

To illustrate the transformation in Albanian iconography, the icon "John the Baptist" by Vangjel Zengo (fig. 30) can be compared with a similar composition by El Greco (fig. 31).
In contrast to traditional Orthodox portrayals—which feature the saint holding his severed head and a scroll, with wings symbolizing spiritual nature (fig. 29)—Zengo's work presents a full-bodied, naturalistic depiction. The posture, gesture, clothing, and gaze bear remarkable similarity to El Greco's rendering, reflecting Western influence and a move toward individual expression and realism.
This transition marks a break from the symbolic and flat two-dimensionality of Byzantine iconography, ushering in a more modern visual language in Albanian ecclesiastical art.



Figure 29. 18th century anonymous icon, MKAM
Figure 30. Icon by Vangjel Zengo, 20th century, NMMA
Figure 31. Icon by El Greco, 17th century

Conclusion

The 19th and early 20th centuries were pivotal in transforming Albanian iconography. While rooted in Orthodox tradition, many artists—especially the Zengo family—began to absorb European artistic trends, particularly Neoclassicism. This influence is evident in architecture, literature, music, and especially religious and secular art in Korçë.
The Zengo family, led by the visionary Vangjel Zengo, were central to this transformation. His work broke long-standing artistic conventions, introduced new compositional techniques, and reflected patriotic and intellectual ideals. His daughters, particularly Androniqi and Sofia, continued this legacy, becoming among the first and only female iconographers in the Albanian Orthodox world.
One of Vangjel Zengo's most notable contributions was the use of the Albanian language in icon inscriptions—a symbolic act of cultural and national affirmation that influenced many artists who followed.

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Restoration, the beginning of centurial longevity for heritage culture

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Abstract

The restoration of artworks is an essential process for preserving the cultural and historical heritage of any nation. This process has evolved over time, transitioning from traditional techniques to the application of modern methods and advanced technologies. Restoration aims to protect and maintain the aesthetic integrity and historical authenticity of artworks, preventing further degradation and ensuring their cultural value endures for future generations. A comparison between the two processes—restoration and reconstruction—reveals distinct differences.Restoration focuses on preserving the original elements of a work, while reconstruction attempts to create a replica of a lost or damaged object. This study examines the development of art restoration in Albania, with a particular focus on the restoration of a well-known painting by artist Nexhmedin Zajmi. The restoration of this painting serves as a clear example of the challenges and techniques used in the field of conservation, including the impact of unfavorable storage conditions and climatic influences. This process requires a delicate approach to retain as many original elements as possible while ensuring the artwork is preserved without losing its identity. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of restoration in safeguarding Albania's cultural wealth and the need for greater investment in this field. Restoration is not merely a technical process but also a means of preserving and transmitting a nation's cultural identity and values.

Keywords

traditional clothing, preservation, Challenges, intervention, collaboration

Introduction

Restoration represents a field of activity aimed at preserving cultural values for future generations for as long as possible. The ultimate goal of the restoration process is to prevent the destruction or loss of artworks due to natural aging or the impact of unfavorable storage conditions. The search for tools and methods to preserve artistic objects in the most unchanged state possible constitutes the main task of scientific restoration. In this context, restoration treats the object as a bearer of specific historical and cultural information.

In the restoration of paintings and decorative art objects, this is achieved through various operations such as: joining separated parts of the object, consolidating damaged original material, filling in missing fragments, removing dirt, cleaning off later layers and reworkings, eliminating deformations, and applying protective coatings. The execution of these procedures requires a wide range of restoration materials. Choosing the appropriate materials is one of the most important steps in the process, as there have been many cases where the use of unsuitable materials or incorrect technologies has led to irreversible damage or critical conditions in monuments of great cultural value.

The Evolution of Restoration Methods Outside Albania

The concept of modern restoration emerged in the 18th century and became a scientific and professional discipline by the end of the 19th century, in parallel with the development of natural sciences and technology in the preservation of artworks. Although interventions in artworks have existed since antiquity, they were often remodelings that did not respect the originality and aesthetic value of the works. Nevertheless, these interventions contributed to the formation of the principles of modern restoration.

Restoration in Antiquity

According to historical evidence, the ancient Greeks and Romans were particularly concerned with the preservation of works of art. From Vitruvius (De Architectura, Book VII) and Pliny (1st century AD), we learn that interventions such as the removal of frescoes were carried out. Some mural paintings were transferred from Sparta to Rome to be displayed in public squares where local election ceremonies were held. It was also common to clean and restore the patina on statues, as well as to reassemble broken fragments of sculptures.
As the scholar Cagiano de Azevedo noted, interventions in works of art during classical antiquity were intended as “Repairs of damages caused, which were more related to the subject of the work than to its artistic value.”

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance

In the Middle Ages, interventions in works of art were closely tied to the ideological and aesthetic needs of the time. Monuments were often adapted to suit the taste of the era, without being considered as historical works that needed to be preserved. During the Renaissance, damaged frescoes were usually replaced with new paintings or partially repainted in the contemporary style. One such example is the frescoes by Andrea Orcagna in the main

dome of the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, which were covered by the frescoes of Ghirlandaio. Restoration also took place in other areas, particularly in sculpture, through the completion of missing parts. One of the most well-known examples is the restoration of the statue group Laocoön, restored in 1506, for which several solutions were proposed for reconstructing the statue's arm—Jacopo Sansovino and Baccio Bandinelli suggested models based on the remaining fragments, but it was Montorsoli's version, featuring an outstretched arm, that prevailed, as it better matched the artistic taste of the time.

In the 16th century, Giorgio Vasari—one of the most important sources on the artistic thought of the time—was opposed to the restoration of ancient works. He wrote: "I would prefer these antiques to remain incomplete and broken, without heads, without arms, rather than be restored." He believed it was better for artworks to remain unfinished than to be restored, emphasizing that "It is foolish to try to redo things made by great men: better to leave alone what was done, rather than have it handled by those who know less."

Nevertheless, during this period, efforts to preserve artworks began to emerge, such as the preservation of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. In 1543, Francesco Amadori was appointed to clean them regularly, while later, Pietro Carnevale repainted a small portion of the fallen frescoes, imitating Michelangelo's style. Under orders from the Pope, Daniele da Volterra was tasked with covering the nudes of certain figures which, during the Counter-Reformation, were considered "shameful."

In the 17th century, interventions were often carried out by "remounters" (craftsmen who reassembled or repaired artworks). This practice was criticized by Baldinucci, who emphasized the importance of preserving originality. Meanwhile, Carlo Maratta and Giovanni Pietro Bellori promoted a classical approach, defending the educational value of the works of masters such as Raphael and Carracci. The first intervention by Carlo Maratta in 1693 on Carracci's frescoes in the gallery of the Farnese Palace (Rome) was a conservative restoration, carried out without aesthetic alterations.

In the 18th century, written records of restoration interventions multiplied, and a more scientific approach to art restoration began to develop. Artworks started to be valued for their historical significance, approaching the modern concept of a "monument." During this time, the technique of transferring paint layers from panel to canvas was improved. However, this method often resulted in the loss of the smooth and composed appearance that is characteristic of panel painting. Despite this, the technique gained widespread interest, particularly in France. Advancements in chemistry and physics supported the study of artistic materials, while archaeological discoveries in Pompeii stimulated research into ancient techniques. Restoration became a profession independent of painting, with Pietro Edwards in Venice emerging as a key figure. He introduced the modern principle of using reversible materials. The 18th century laid the foundation for restoration as a scientific discipline.

The 19th Century

Europe was experiencing a renewed interest in historical monuments and how this heritage should be treated. Two key figures—Frenchman Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and Englishman

John Ruskin—proposed completely opposite responses. Stylistic Restoration: Viollet-le-Duc's Philosophy — The Perfect Revival. Viollet-le-Duc, a renowned architect and historian, believed that restoration should go beyond mere maintenance. For him, a monument needed to be "restored" to a perfect version even if that version had never existed before. He viewed Gothic art as a perfect system and thought the restorer's task was to bring the building to such a state by removing any foreign elements. His work on the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris is a clear example where not only was the structure repaired, but new Gothic elements were added that were not part of the original design. For some, this approach was revolutionary; for others, it was a violation of history. Archaeological Restoration: Ruskin's Perspective — The Beauty of Ruins.

On the other hand, John Ruskin had a completely different philosophy. To him, monuments were like living beings going through their natural cycle: birth, aging, and death. Any intervention to "revive" them was considered impossible and wrong. Ruskin argued that the beauty of a monument did not lie in its perfection, but in the history it carried. Ruins, the patina of time, and damage were evidence of its true value. "A building reaches its peak after four or five centuries," he wrote, suggesting that decay was an inevitable part of its beauty.

As Europe was trying to define its approach to cultural heritage, the first restoration manuals appeared. The German pioneer Koster published his manual in 1827, followed by the Italian Lorenzo Bedotti (published in Paris, 1837) and Horsin Deon (in French, 1851). Later, Ulisse Forni and Secco-Suardo published their manuals in 1866 in Florence. The publication of these two treatises was linked to the restoration course organized by Giovanni Morelli at the Uffizi Gallery. Afterwards, the responsibility was given to Secco-Suardo, bypassing the official restorer of the Gallery at that time, Ulisse Forni.

Early 20th Century Developments in Restoration

One of the most important events in the field of restoration was the International Conference of Restorers held in Athens in 1931, where the progress of restoration activities was summarized and key principles were formulated: Respect for the traces of different periods, expressing the stance: "the style of no era should be erased."
Later, the need arose to draft a new document, which resulted in the Venice Charter of 1964.
Another significant document is the Code of Ethics, developed by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works in 1967. It establishes that:

- Restoration of historical and artistic heritage requires broad preparation and a special approach.
- A high sense of moral responsibility is necessary.
- The specialist is accountable before society and future generations.
- The restorer must ensure the highest level of treatment of the work, regardless of personal evaluation or the quality of the object. The quality of treatment must not depend on the condition or value of the object.
- The principle of reversibility: The restorer must avoid materials that may become irreversible, so that their removal does not damage the object. Methods that make it impossible to return the object to its original state must not be used.

These documents formed the foundation of modern restoration ethics, emphasizing respect for history, transparency, and responsibility towards the future.

Restoration in the Republic of Albania.

The Evolution of Restoration in Albania has been closely linked to the country's political, social, and cultural changes.

Early Period (Before the 19th Century)

In ancient and medieval times, Albania possessed a rich architectural heritage (Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman), but the concept of "restoration" in the modern sense did not exist. Ancient monuments (such as Butrint and Apollonia) were left in their natural state or used as sources of building materials. Medieval castles and churches (such as the Krujë Castle and Labovë Church) were periodically renovated, but without a scientific approach.

The Beginning of Restoration as a concept began after the country's liberation, with the establishment of the first institutions. These institutional organizations were small workshops with few and inexperienced specialists, carrying out their activities. The work done during this period laid the foundation for restoration as a new discipline previously unknown in our country.

In 1965, the Institute of Cultural Monuments was established, under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The primary task of the Institute was the protection, restoration, and revitalization of inherited cultural monuments. In 1969, the First Scientific Session was held, an important event for the future of restoration research. It demonstrated that the new scientific forces within the institution had gained valuable experience and were capable of solving difficult problems. The publication of the first issue of the journal "Monumentet" in 1971 marked another important milestone in the scientific life of the field. Alongside "Monumentet", the newsletter "Restauratori" was also published, primarily featuring sketches and diagrams of restoration intervention projects covering 41 cases. Achievements in conservation and restoration work on ancient monuments involved reinforcement and consolidation of specific elements that had lost their stability. Such works included the reinforcement of the architrave of the Temple of the Agonothetes with metal profiles, the architraves of the entrances to the gate with towers, and the Lion Gate in Butrint, among others. These interventions aligned with the goal of preserving the values and authentic elements of the monuments. In Albania, the 1987 Restoration Charter was replaced by the Albanian Charter of 2007, which clearly outlined the fundamental rules and criteria to be applied during restoration works on our cultural heritage sites.
This study examines the development of art restoration in Albania, with a special focus on the restoration of easel paintings by the artist Guri Madhi. Guri Madhi was born on May 15, 1921, in the city of Korçë. He devoted most of his time to drawing. He continued his education at the Industrial Technical High School, where he had 6 hours of drawing and 2 hours of sculpture, taught by Italian teachers. In the early 1930s, Nikolla Lako and Spiro Xega organized a drawing course in Korçë, where Guri received his first painting lessons. From 1950, he studied at the Leningrad Academy of Arts (today's Saint Petersburg, Russia), graduating in 1956. The sculptor Thanas Papa, in his memoirs about Guri, wrote: "At the Academy, when I attended,

he was spoken of with great respect as a student with great abilities; his name was mentioned everywhere in the atelier, by the administration, the professors, and the students alike." After successfully completing his studies, Guri Madhi began his professional career as an inspector at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Tirana. In 1961, he was one of the founders of the Higher Institute of Figurative Arts (today the Academy of Arts). Guri was the only Albanian artist to be expelled from the Communist Party in 1967, and later in 1976, he was honored with the title "People's Painter."

After taking a close look at the life and artistic journey of Guri Madhi, it's important to turn our attention to the current challenges his works face from a conservation and restoration perspective. Like many 20th-century Albanian artworks, Guri Madhi's paintings struggle with a range of issues—mostly due to unsuitable storage conditions, the materials originally used, and the lack of specialized infrastructure for their care. Visual inspections reveal various damages to the canvases: small tears appearing mostly in the center or along the edges where the canvas meets the stretcher frame. These damages likely stem from mechanical stress caused by insufficient tension or movement during transport. On top of that, environmental factors such as humidity, sudden temperature changes, and improper framing have led to deformations in the canvas itself. Works painted on cardboard show a different set of problems: cracks, folds, and even cuts—some caused by blades—along with warping due to moisture. When analyzing the ground layers and their adhesion to the supports, structural weaknesses become apparent. Many paintings exhibit missing ground in several areas, often paired with sections where the layer has detached from its base. We also see lifting or blistering—sometimes shaped like "closed roofs"—indicating a weakening bond between layers.

The surface paint layers aren't spared either. Cracks, known as craquelure, have developed due to the canvas shrinking, often accompanied by raised edges. Some of these cracks form circular patterns, a telltale sign of mechanical impact on the painting's surface. Alongside this, general scratches and abrasions appear across the paint film. One particularly important issue is the yellowing of the varnish layer, caused by the natural aging process and the buildup of impurities over time. This yellowing dulls the colors, reducing their vibrancy and clarity, which means restoration must be done carefully to bring back the original tones without harming the underlying layers. An interesting—and troubling—fact is that after the 1990s, some of Guri Madhi's works were cleaned using cut onions. This traditional method left behind tiny organic residues that, over time, darkened and stuck to the paint film. The result has been an unwanted darkening and loss of transparency in the paintings' surfaces. All these factors highlight the urgent need for specialized, careful restoration efforts. Any intervention must respect the original materials and avoid irreversible treatments that could permanently harm these valuable artworks.To gain a clearer understanding of the challenges and necessary interventions undertaken for the preservation of Guri Madhi's pictorial heritage, we will focus on the analysis of two of his works.

"Bajram Curri in the Dragobi Cave" (Russian title: "Борцы за свободу Албании," 1956) is Guri Madhi's diploma work at the Academy, highly praised by the Russian commission as one of the best works by foreign students. The composition is circular, featuring the central figure of Bajram Curri surrounded by fighters, with expressive and dynamic figures prominently placed in the foreground. The dramatic atmosphere is emphasized by the treatment of the rocks with

fractured planes and a play of light and shadow. The painting was brought back to Albania thanks to the author's efforts and today is held in his family's private collection. The work measures 190 x 140 cm and is executed on linen canvas. It is no longer preserved in its original stretcher frame. Due to improper tension, deformations and sagging of the canvas have been observed. On the back, there is a label with Russian writing, placed by the archive fund of the Academy. Additionally, in the left corner, a 7 x 7 cm patch has been applied to cover a small tear. The ground layer shows cracking with raised edges, some in circular forms caused by mechanical impacts. The paint film, composed of multiple layers, also exhibits pronounced cracking. The varnish has yellowed and is covered with surface dirt. At the request of the owners, the planned intervention involves consolidating the damaged layers and partially cleaning the yellowed varnish, without any aesthetic retouching or full restoration.

The work ***"Soldiers Shoulder to Shoulders with the People"*** (1967) is a painting in the style of socialist realism, where Guri Madhi addresses the theme of war with a rich palette and a warm dialogue between the figures. The composition centers on the main figure of a villager, who displays a psychological depth within the scene, while five soldiers sit around him. An interesting detail emerged during a conversation with the artist's wife, who revealed that one of the soldiers is a portrait of her late brother, who was a soldier at the time the painting was created. This personal connection adds authenticity and emotional depth to the work. The painting measures 80 x 110.5 cm. Vertical deformations and creases of the canvas are visible, mainly near the top edge, caused by the artwork being stored folded. A tear is also evident in the middle of the canvas. The absence of the ground layer and paint film is widespread, especially around the edges, with damages visible in the inner areas as well. The entire surface shows dirt accumulation, caused by aging and unprofessional cleaning using cut onions in past years. The applied varnish has yellowed, affecting the color perception.

The restoration process began with thorough documentation of the painting. Photographs were taken under various lighting conditions, and ultraviolet light was used to reveal damages in the canvas, ground layer, and paint film. Based on these observations, a detailed condition report was prepared. After identifying the damages, the tear in the canvas was repaired by adhering fine threads from a suitable second canvas, carefully aligned with the original threads to restore stability. Subsequently, the paint and ground layers were consolidated. Raised areas were stabilized using a water-based acrylic consolidant that preserves the original texture and helps prevent further detachment.

The entire painting was then reinforced with an organic adhesive derived from rabbit skin glue to ensure strength and flexibility. The artwork was removed from its old stretcher and placed on a flat surface. Using kraft paper edges, the canvas was re-stretched onto a temporary stretcher, eliminating the previous deformations and creases caused by improper storage. Surface cleaning was carried out carefully to remove dirt and onion residues using distilled water and mild solutions that do not harm the paint layer. The back of the painting was mechanically cleaned with a scalpel to remove hardened dirt layers. Finally, once fully stabilized, the painting was mounted on a new stretcher and protected with a damar-based restoration varnish, which restored its shine and provided protection for future display.

Conclusion

The restoration of these works was a conservation intervention—an effort to preserve them. Throughout this process, maintaining authenticity, using reversible materials, and thoroughly documenting every phase were essential. The primary goal of preservation is to slow down deterioration by minimizing the impact of environmental changes on the objects, while respecting the decisions of the artwork owners. Albania has made significant strides in improving restoration policies, particularly through collaborations with international projects. However, much work remains to be done to give restoration the attention it deserves. There is great potential for our country to become an important center of cultural heritage in the Balkans if all relevant stakeholders dedicate the necessary focus and care. "Every restoration is a dialogue with the past and a care for eternity."

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Traditional clothing, costumes from the Northern Regions of Albania. Influences from Eastern Culture over centuries (Traditional Costumes in The Lezha Region)

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Abstract

The history of clothing must be viewed as a material reality, without which the way of life would remain incomplete and lack the vibrancy that the manner of dressing imparts to the history of a country's social development. Another reason why scholars should study traditional costumes is their artistic value. With their variety of forms, vibrant colors, and numerous regional characteristics, traditional costumes testify to a developed aesthetic taste and a rich spiritual life among the broad working masses. The significant regional variety in costumes is not so much a result of structural differences but rather a product of colors, embellishments, and numerous combinations that create multiple variants from a few types. The decorative elements of traditional clothing are sometimes simple, sometimes more elaborate; in some places, softer colors are used, while in others, bold and vibrant hues dominate. According to tradition, the most decorated parts of clothing are women's garments, particularly shirts, headscarves, aprons, sashes, and socks, while in men's clothing, sashes and socks are the most adorned. The motifs most commonly used in decorating Albanian traditional clothing are, in most cases, geometric and arranged in ornamental bands. These do not form a dense patch of colors but are airy, with graduated transitions from the center outward. Clothing reflects both the unity and diversity of our traditional culture. By tracing the development of traditional costumes, one can clearly follow the process of forming common cultural traits on a national scale. The diversity in traditional clothing is an immediately noticeable feature, attracting attention with its variety.

Keywords

tradition, cultural heritage, costume typology

Introduction

Traditional costumes remain one of the fundamental characteristics in representing the customary traditions of a nation or community's culture, regardless of geographical or historical context. The ethnic specificity of a people is defined by a range of manifestations in its material and spiritual culture. Clothing, due to its functional role and utility, constitutes one of the most significant elements of material culture. When viewed from the perspective of its decorative elements, the artistic forms it takes, and the ornamental role it plays, clothing becomes a valued aesthetic element, thus integrating into spiritual culture as an integral part of folk art. "Various decorative elements with harmonious patterns have made traditional clothing distinctive and unique in the Balkans and beyond. These works have been extensively documented by both our scholars and foreign researchers, establishing regional connections and influences. These analytical studies form a foundation and part of our cultural heritage" (Hado).

It is worth emphasizing that the morphological structure of clothing and the distinctive character of its decorative elements reflect the national specificity of each people in this field. Thus, from any perspective, clothing remains one of the most powerful manifestations of popular culture, and for this reason, its study contributes to illuminating several important aspects of a people's history.

Methodology

In this paper, first and foremost, the conceptualization of the topic has been and remains of primary importance. This has directly influenced the content of the thesis we have undertaken to elaborate. Subsequently, the concept has been expanded, both in the historical and substantive dimensions. Further, relevant literature sources have been identified—those that have either approached or briefly touched upon the subject, but without conducting in-depth analysis. The paper is structured with all its essential components that shed light on the phenomenon under study. The focus, in particular, on the motifs of traditional folk costume in the Lezha region, is connected not only with what has been offered by existing studies and critical thought, but also with the experiences, analyses, and evaluations made by costume designers, various choreographers, numerous directors, as well as artistic directors and dancers from the area. These individuals have utilized and incorporated these traditional costumes in their work, recognizing and highlighting their distinctive features and cultural identity values during stage performances or televised representations of traditions, rituals, songs, and dances—through which this region has been culturally and artistically represented. So far, we maintain the view that this is not an exhaustive study, but rather a field that still offers ample opportunities for further in-depth research and interpretation at a scientific level, of this solid foundation of our cultural heritage.

Results and discussion

The clothing of the Albanian people has continuously evolved and transformed across different eras. This development has occurred not only based on the foundational substratum from which it originated but also in response to specific historical, economic, and social conditions in which the Albanian people lived and worked. Consequently, traditional costumes serve as a concrete

and rich source that aids in reconstructing significant aspects of the lifestyle of the broader populace across various historical periods.

“The integration of costumes into themes of tradition encompassed a broad perspective, including folktales, customs, laments, the bride’s farewell ceremony, dances, folk games, prominent moments of archaic life, the embroidery of a flag, the loom of a young bride, the tray with which a girl welcomed household guests, lullabies, market day, and more. In many of these, one does not merely see what is visible but a layered culture that was not formed in a short time. What is presented is not a random observation but an accumulated experience over years through learning and understanding, progressing to the decoding and application of the chosen material.”

“Folklore seems to me like an old man narrating tales and playing the lahuta, or like a beautiful bride who shines. Since childhood, I have wanted to capture this on canvas, to draw it, to paint it,” Buza expressed about folklore. Like Buza, the most sensitive painters took the initiative to redirect public attention toward inherited culture, which constituted the treasure of national identity (Toçila, 2025). Through the materials used for clothing, we can concretely understand what the broader populace produced within the household economy, the tools they used, and what they procured from the market. Through the cut and embellishments, we discern how the sense of beauty developed among our people, which body adornments and decorative methods were preferred. The great variety and numerous regional variants allow us to understand not only the creative abilities of rural communities but also how regional isolation was maintained. Nevertheless, the existence of common clothing types across wide areas indicates the degree of interregional and national convergence achieved in this field.

Clothing also reflects class distinctions, differences between various social strata, and religious differences, testifying to a society composed of diverse classes and social layers, as well as the relations of dependency and dominance among them. The history of clothing must be viewed as a material reality, without which the way of life would remain incomplete and lack the vibrancy that the manner of dressing imparts to the history of a country’s social development. Another reason why scholars should study traditional costumes is their artistic value. With their variety of forms, vibrant colors, and numerous regional characteristics, traditional costumes testify to a developed aesthetic taste and a rich spiritual life among the broad working masses.

The significant regional variety in costumes is not so much a result of structural differences but rather a product of colors, embellishments, and numerous combinations that create multiple variants from a few types. The decorative elements of traditional clothing are sometimes simple, sometimes more elaborate; in some places, softer colors are used, while in others, bold and vibrant hues dominate.

According to tradition, the most decorated parts of clothing are women’s garments, particularly shirts, headscarves, aprons, sashes, and socks, while in men’s clothing, sashes and socks are the most adorned. The motifs most commonly used in decorating Albanian traditional clothing are, in most cases, geometric and arranged in ornamental bands. These do not form a dense patch of colors but are airy, with graduated transitions from the center outward. Clothing reflects both the unity and diversity of our traditional culture. By tracing the development of traditional

costumes, one can clearly follow the process of forming common cultural traits on a national scale. The diversity in traditional clothing is an immediately noticeable feature, attracting attention with its variety.

But where does this diversity originate? It can be explained primarily by the varying degrees of economic and social development across regions. It is well known that in the past, their economic development, and consequently the material conditions of life, were highly unequal. This was influenced by the geographic isolation of remote areas, a pronounced lack of communication, and many other factors. As a result, even in the 19th century, there were regions where clothing was primarily produced within the household economy, following traditional models passed down through generations, occasionally supplemented with new elements adapted to the social demands of the time, market opportunities, and so forth. In these circumstances, the narrow local characteristics that are observed even in different periods flourished, distinguished by the preservation of elements of ancient origin.

In other areas where market relations were more extensive, the number of clothing items purchased ready-made from the market continued to grow, particularly for wedding attire. Under these conditions, most traditional costumes underwent spontaneous evolution, with one part of the clothing or another gradually moving out of household production and into the realm of artisanal production. With this decisive step, clothing gained new stability and was enriched with new forms and elements alongside traditional ones. The reciprocal influence between rural and urban areas increased, particularly through skilled artisans such as tailors, embroiderers, shoemakers, and jewelers. Cutting patterns for many clothing items spread, often transcending the small local differences that previously existed. This evolutionary process can be clearly observed, for example, in men's vests and sleeveless jackets, in the short woolen jacket and Cibu of many regions, as well as in sashes, caps, sandals, shoes, and especially jewelry. Artisans produced clothing that varied greatly in quality, responding to the economic capabilities of buyers, thus reflecting cultural and class distinctions in clothing.

Through this developmental process, certain uniform characteristics in clothing gradually emerged. Thus, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the appearance of Albanian traditional costumes, despite their great variety, had crystallized certain common traits across many regions and zones, or on a national scale. Such was the case, for example, with the kilt costume, which in the 19th century was still worn by various social strata across almost all of Albania, not only in the southern regions as some scholars suggest, but also more broadly, as noted by researcher Andromaqi Gjergji. It had become the "national costume" of Albanian men in the truest sense of the term.

In the numerous works of scholars and travelers who visited our country in various periods, expressions such as "the typical costume of Albanian men," "the complete Albanian costume," and so forth, all refer to the kilt costume. Later, from the late 19th century and into the first quarter of the 20th century, alongside the gradual phasing out of the kilt costume, another men's costume that transcended the boundaries of the areas where it was previously worn was the costume with white or black tirq (trousers). Similarly, one can note the type of women's clothing where, over a long shirt or dress, a woolen short woolen jacket was worn, a type that was widespread almost throughout Albania.

The national or ethnic specificity in popular culture consists not only of what is common among regions or zones of the country but also of the features that distinguish it from the culture of other peoples. This specificity is better appreciated when comparing our clothing with that of other peoples, particularly neighboring ones. The difference is immediately apparent, even to an impartial observer. Ethnic specificity in this field is expressed not only through the shapes and cuts of clothing, which are typical for our people and not for others, but also through a range of other indicators, such as the repertoire of decorative motifs used in clothing and the connections of many of these motifs with ancient local beliefs, a pronounced preference for certain colors, and their function in expressing age, marital status, or the social rank of the wearer. These indicators, when compared with the clothing of neighboring peoples on one hand and with medieval, ancient, or even older archaeological findings on the other, help reveal similarities and differences with the culture of other peoples and the genetic connections with the culture of our ancestors, the early Albanians, and further back to our Illyrian forefathers.

Clothing has always had a historical character, meaning it has continuously changed from one historical period to another. This development has sometimes been more dynamic and sometimes more gradual; it has followed the zigzags of our past, much like another chronicle of significant events. Due to the significant lack of historical sources for the medieval period that would help create a more accurate picture of clothing during that time, it was necessary to rely on indirect data, such as information about the raw materials used for clothing (leather, wool, linen, silk).

In her study Costume design in Art, researcher Merita Toçila states: “Painters always sought to translate into their works the metamorphosis of a backward world in slow transformation, but no one like Sadik Kaceli in Myzeqe Peasant used the art of light and shadow so beautifully to convey the antiquity of faded fabric, the grinding of woven thread in the bending of knees and elbows, the transformation of the cap’s color from its original shade. Critics rightly note that one of the most outstanding works of Albanian art was born” (Toçila, 2024).

Various scholars who have studied different aspects of traditional clothing identify four primary functions of costumes: practical, aesthetic, ceremonial, and ritual. These functions are closely interconnected, often interdependent, and allow for numerous combinations that follow the transformations a costume undergoes when transitioning from everyday to festive use, or vice versa. This is because, in everyday costumes, for example, the practical function predominates, while the aesthetic function is less pronounced. In wedding costumes, the ritual and aesthetic functions dominate, while the practical function is much less significant.

Furthermore, much evidence clearly shows that clothing also expresses the regional and national affiliation of the wearer, as well as their social-class status. There are also graduated differences according to age groups across the entire arc of life, from childhood to advanced old age, for both women and men. Most of these functions are more clearly expressed in festive (ceremonial) costumes than in everyday (work) ones, as some functions are tied to the costume as a clothing object, while others relate to the costume partly as clothing and partly as a sign or symbol, whether of social-cultural or ethnic affiliation, marital status, and so forth.

"The artistic mediums that utilized heritage as the primary impetus in compositions served as a mirror to reflect the philosophical and aesthetic concepts of the individual or group shaped by costumes, their architecture, the treatment of macro and micro symbols, and the expressiveness with which they were articulated. The artist who revived tradition observed real life and transferred parts of reality into the artistic work, using scenes or describing situations and specific objects to express emotions, aspirations, or demands. The resulting outcome implied a long history of material culture that began in primitive forms with leather, drawings on ceramics or stones, progressing to cuts and stitches in fabric, and further to embroideries and applications with a highly elaborated graphic system" (Toçila, 2025).

Clothing and Social Affiliation

Through clothing, even unintentionally, one can sometimes determine the wearer's social-class affiliation, cultural level, and so forth. However, clothing must also meet the demands of the social environment, respect its taste, and generally conform to the rules established by the collective. Innovations in traditional costumes cannot be made based on individual tastes but only after collective approval. Ethnographic material collected and field observations conducted in various regions of the country indicate that in the second half of the 20th century, peasants generally prepared special clothing for daily wear and others for festive occasions or going out. The everyday costume could be a simplified variant of the "fine" clothing worn in the respective region, often being a more archaic variant, either in its overall structure or in the development of its constituent parts. A specific example from the Zadrima region is that girls in Zadrima received three types of shirts as part of their dowry: a) for work, b) "fine" (i.e., for going out), and c) "the finest" (i.e., for the bride).

Clothing and Tools for Their Creation

Various scholars have focused primarily on the motifs, symbols, and various ornaments in the creation of traditional clothing and costumes. However, few have delved into the tools, implements, and instruments used to create these traditional garments. From this perspective, more thorough work has been necessary to provide not only information but also a clearer and more complete picture of the processes involved in constructing these garments across different periods. The renowned researcher Andromaqi Gjergji, in this regard, stated in 1969: "We have so far managed to secure the complete working tools of more than 25 different crafts" (Gjergji, 2004).

Clothing of Zadrima

In the earliest popular traditions, everything a person wore was intended to protect their body from cold and external elements while also presenting themselves as beautifully and elegantly as possible. In Zadrima, throughout Lezhë, and in the highlands, these are referred to by various names such as clothing, petkat (garments), or teshat (clothes). The terms clothes (apparel) and costumes (costumes) came into use later, alongside urban clothing. Within this context, Zadrima is a region located between the districts of Lezhë and Shkodër, and it can be confidently stated that it remains one of the areas where traditional clothing from Zadrima, Kallmet, the highlands, and Mirdita is still widely used.

Zadrima clothing, for both women and men, according to the popular tradition of past centuries, was primarily made by the women and girls of this region. The garments were crafted in accordance with local conditions and economic resources. Over the centuries, in the Zadrima plain and beyond, the freedom to create clothing has been cultivated. Wool from livestock was ubiquitous and used to make various parts of the clothing, or even the entire garment in earlier periods, depending on circumstances, wealth, or social status. There was never a shortage of specific elements purchased from the market as supplementary materials to create or adorn the clothing.

These garments were primarily made by women at home, using looms or as handmade work for certain parts, but there were also skilled tailors in villages and in Shkodër who crafted the main components of these garments, though not the secondary ones.

Women's Clothing in Zadrimë

Women's clothing in Zadrimë generally included: tlinta (breeches) reaching to the knee, originally made of wool or linen and later of cotton; a loose, white shirt, originally made of linen and later of cotton; a vest of linen or wool; a belt tied around the shirt; a headscarf for women, brides and girls; a breast piece worn over the chest; simple head wraps and shawls of linen or wool, with dense pleats only at the hips. The festive scarf was made for the bride and for holidays, entirely pleated and made of wool on a loom. The dollama, white or red, the vests, the jackets (xhamadana) and the koreti (a type of black wool jacket with pleats at the waist and red wool trim at the hem), a breast piece of wool or linen; leg wraps (kallmat) covering from the knee to the ankle, later replaced by extended trouser legs reaching to the sole, replacing the wraps. White socks were knitted from wool or linen. Headscarves were different: for brides, they were heavily decorated in bright colors - yellow and red - while for working or elderly women, they were simple and unadorned.



Figure 1. Zadrima Woman's Clothing, 20th Century
Photo from the Publication: Popular Clothing of the Lezhë District

The bride's attire is richly decorated with various embroidery techniques, featuring vibrant colors: red, yellow, white, and stylized symbols on the outer garment. The vest is adorned with numerous studs and various metallic embellishments. Jewelry elements are used as decorations, and the bride's forehead, neck, chest, and fingers are adorned with countless pieces of jewelry. She is like a showcase of jewelry, embellished with various types of silverwork. Among the adornments, five to seven rings can be seen on her fingers. This women's attire is rich and diverse in embellishments, distinguishing the Zadrima bride as a significant figure.

In comparison, a girl dressed much more simply, with a white shirt and breeches, a black vest, a black apron, a simple sash, and a white headscarf, without any jewelry. In the Zadrima bride's attire, many influences from the Shkodër market are evident, such as silverwork, colors, and embellishments. This attire has also adopted the red Shkodër apron, as noted by researcher Andromaqi Gjergji.

In the simpler and older elements of Zadrima women's clothing, there is significant overlap with Kallmet clothing. This includes garments made of wool or linen, woven on looms, in white and occasionally black, without additional colors or embellishments, and with minimal influence from the urban market.

Men's and boys' clothing in Zadrima was simpler, without heavy use of colors. It was primarily produced until the early 20th century from loom-woven fabric. The shirt was long, sleeved,

white, with minimal embellishments at the neck and chest, and white-on-white embroidery. Breeches were made of coarse linen, white or black, with a simple sash. The xamadan was made of woolen fabric, sleeveless or with short sleeves, and the winter cloak (gunza) was made of black or white woolen fabric. Sandals (opinga) were made of cowhide, sewn with lambskin strips. Socks were white and knitted, while the conical cap (këwhile) was imported from the urban market. Later, cloaks (mintanat) were introduced from the Shkodër market and other Albanian cities.

As recounted by Zadrima elders, in earlier times, men also wore tirq (trousers) and dollama, various woolen fabric pieces, but over time, these fell out of use due to the mild climate. In popular memory, Zadrima inhabitants are known for their origins from various highland areas of Mirdita and other eastern highland regions. Their oldest surnames also confirm this origin, tied to corresponding memories.

It is evident that both men's and especially women's clothing have undergone changes over time, evolving and exchanging elements with different surrounding costumological regions. These garments have been shaped and evolved through marriages, traditions, colors, and various clothing forms. Relations with fellow villagers and marriages have influenced the development of clothing, though they have retained their core identity. Each group has preserved its own clothing, adapting it to the cultural and social changes experienced.



Figure 2. Zadrima Men's Clothing, 20th Century
Photo from the publication: Popular Clothing of the Lezhë District

Kallmet Clothing

Kallmet clothing—especially that worn by women—is highly distinctive. White is the dominant color, later complemented with black and occasionally red. These garments share structural similarities with Zadrima clothing, particularly in their older elements, suggesting a very early typological connection between the two styles.

Girls, from early childhood until just before puberty, wore a long, simple white linen shirt with pleats at the waist, fastened with a sash—usually red or burgundy, or sometimes in black and burgundy. They also wore long linen breeches and a sleeveless woolen vest (xhamadan), white at the back with red panels at the front, decorated with braiding along the sides. At ages 14–15, girls wore a loom-woven linen shirt, pleated at the waist with a flared lower section, long white breeches, a red sash, and crisscrossed stitching from bottom to top. Kallmet women's clothing was complex, consisting of multiple layers and predominantly white in color. The shirt featured front and back panels with slits at the neck and chest, three side flares, and long, open sleeves extending to the feet. It was adorned with embroidery around the neckline and chest, often including floral and bird motifs, and woven from linen on a double loom.

The shawl (shagija), also woven from linen on a double loom, was wrapped around the body front and back and secured with a cord (bishtalec). The apron (përparësja) was made of wool or linen, long and panelled, decorated with bird and half-bird motifs and stripes. It was primarily worn by girls for adornment. Breeches, long and made of linen, were loom-woven with two panels. The chest piece (havuçja) was made from wool or linen on a double loom. It featured a central panel, parallel stripes, and three or four side pleats, extending above the navel.
The sash was made on a loom with four panels, featuring a black field with colorful ends and parallel stripes. It was worn over the cloak and shirt. The headscarf (pashnik), woven on a double loom from linen, had tufts on either end (one long, one short), and was decorated with colorful bird motifs and parallel stripes. It was wrapped around the head in distinctive styles, using bright colors—especially yellows near white—creating a highly attractive appearance.
The vest (mishta or xhamadan) was made of woolen fabric with four panels and decorated with five studs and seam braiding. It was short, unfastened in the front, and had loops at the sides. The strap (lisa)—woven in four panels—was used to secure the sash. The outer vest (anteria) had sleeves and was made of woolen fabric in four panels, with seam braiding. It reached the hips for winter use or was made of linen or cotton for summer, also woven in four panels. The skirt (xhupeta or xhupleta) was made entirely of fine wool thread, constructed with two panels and featuring seven to twenty pleats. It should not be confused with the xhubleta of Malësia e Madhe, as it differs in structure, usage, color (white), and form. Historically used throughout Mirdita, it predated the pleated cotton shirt. This garment remained in use until around 1960, primarily worn by virgins or young women. It may be related to the sleeveless xhup or zhgun of Mirdita women. The term xhupetë is still remembered and may have been a precursor to the pleated cotton shirt later worn by women in the highlands of Mirdita and beyond.

The cloak (gunëza or zhgun) was made of white woolen fabric in four panels, with black seam braiding along the sides. Sleeveless and extending below the knees, it was decorated at the neckline with red and black braiding. It resembles the koreti worn by Zadrima women and the xhup of Mirdita women. By the mid-20th century, it had largely fallen out of regular use and

was worn primarily by brides at weddings, though it was not a mandatory part of the dowry. In earlier times, the gunëza was worn by women of all ages—young, old, brides, and girls. The dollama (sleeved zhgun) was made of white woolen fabric, with four panels and long sleeves. It closely resembled the Mirdita zhgun (xhahengu), with black seam and hem braiding, and extended to the calves—longer than the gunëza. Embellishments at the cuffs were minimal. Socks, red or black, were made of wool or linen and hand-knitted with soles and an open top. Sandals (opinga) were crafted from cowhide, with twisted leather stitching and woolen straps passed through loops. Undershirts (fanellat) were worn by people of all ages, made of white or black yarn, hand-knitted by women.



Figure 3. Kallmet Women's and Girls' Clothing, 20th Century
Photo from the publication: Popular Clothing of the Lezhë District

The young girl is dressed in a long white shirt with pleats at the lower part, tied with a red sash. She also wears an apron, a vest similar to those worn by women, and a colorful headscarf. Older girls (age 14 and above) wore clothing that was predominantly white: a white shirt, white headscarf (pashnik), white shawl, a red sash, and black socks decorated with red and white bird motifs. These garments were typically unembellished, without embroidery. Girls did not wear the gunëza, havuçja (chest piece), or dollama.

Kallmet women's clothing is highly characteristic of this area and its four villages, bearing a close resemblance to Zadrima clothing. White is the dominant color, and the garments are traditionally made of linen and wool, woven on looms. The style is simpler and lighter, with the occasional use of various colors, silver adornments, and decorative elements.
The bridal attire of Kallmet is rich in both color and decorative components, especially for jewelry, though it is not as elaborate as that of Zadrima.

Due to the origins of the population and intermarriage, the region shows traces of influence from

Malësia e Madhe—particularly the use of the xhubleta—as well as strong stylistic influences from Zadrima and Central Albania. However, Mirdita-style clothing is the most dominant. The majority of the population in Kallmet descends from Mirdita, likely arriving one or more centuries ago.

Men's Clothing in Kallmet

In its main elements, men's clothing in Kallmet closely resembled that of the neighboring northern highland regions, while also reflecting notable influences from Zadrima, Shkodër, and Central Albania. Traditional local attire continued to be worn until after World War II. For some individuals, urban-style clothing began appearing during the period of Albanian Independence (early 20th century). By 1965–1970, traditional dress had been completely replaced by contemporary urban market clothing.

Traditionally, men wore short tirq—breeches extending from the ankle to just below the knee—fastened at the top with woolen side straps and secured using hooks or buttons. These were made of woolen fabric and decorated with black braiding. Over time, short tirq were phased out and replaced by long tirq that reached the ankle.
The shirt was loose-fitting and extended to the knee, with long, wide sleeves. Later versions included cuffs fastened with mother-of-pearl buttons. Pleats were added from the chest downward for greater detail and fit.

The sash (brez) measured 3 to 5 meters in length and 10–12 cm in width. It was double-folded and made of wool, woven on a loom with four panels. Initially, it was entirely red, but later versions featured black stripes and additional colors. In more recent years, narrower Gjakova sashes with multicolored patterns were adopted as wraps.

Men typically purchased a vest (xhamadan) made from white woolen fabric, constructed with four panels: one at the back and two at the sides. It was decorated with black braiding sewn along the seams, extended to the waist, and fastened in the front with decorative studs.
The outer vest (anteria) was similar to the xhamadan but featured elbow-length sleeves and slits at the armpits for ventilation and ease of movement.

The dollama—a long, coat-like garment extending to the knees—was made from white woolen fabric with four panels, long sleeves, sewn sides, and decorated with black braiding. Only a few individuals wore the dollama, and it fell entirely out of use after Independence.
The black cloak (xhurdia) was made of wool and featured a tufted collar at the back. It extended to the waist and was most commonly used during funeral ceremonies, worn by men standing at the side of the deceased.

Long breeches (tina) were originally made from fine linen woven on a two-panel loom and later from cotton. They extended from the hips to the ankles and were secured at the hips with woolen straps.Summer breeches (brekesha) were either white or black. Initially made of thin linen, they were eventually produced from urban cotton fabrics, similar to clothing developments in Zadrima and Central Albania.

The flat cap (këwhile served as a symbol of tradition. Men wore their hair shaved around the sides with only a long tuft at the top, hidden beneath the cap—called a perçe. This hairstyle and headwear combination was common until World War II. A different type of woolen cloak, also referred to as xhurdia, was worn by shepherds. This thick garment, made from goat wool, featured a collar and served as protection against rain and cold while herding livestock in the mountains.

Even as some traditional elements persisted, new urban influences gradually merged with the older styles. This syncretism resulted in hybrid outfits that incorporated both inherited traditions and pieces sourced from the growing urban market.



Figure 4, Men's and Women's Clothing in Kallmet, 19th–20th Century,
Photo from the publication: Popular Clothing of the Lezhë District

Pllana Clothing

As noted by Rr. Zojzi, two old clothing types from the Lezhë area have been preserved to this day. In fact, in specific neighborhoods, these two regions have clothing that has been preserved from ancient times, or rather partially preserved, but also mixed with other clothing as influences from the highlands and the market. In this region, which spans hilly-mountainous and plain areas, three distinct clothing types are present, primarily for women:

1. The early Pllana clothing
2. Mirdita clothing
3. Aliaj clothing, originating from Kastrati in Shkodër, influenced by Kurbin through marital ties, primarily among Muslims.

In women's clothing, old traditions are more strongly preserved, while men's clothing shows more noticeable changes due to local conditions and market influences. All clothing types, for both women and men, are a blend of elements from various regions. Pllana clothing, in both its hilly-mountainous and plain areas, exists in an environment that is a crossroads of regions and routes. These geographical conditions have influenced the development and evolution of clothing, creating an environment with distinctive characteristics.

Pllana Clothing



Figure 5, Women's Pllana Clothing 20th Century, Photo from the publication: Popular Clothing of the Lezhë District

The clothing of Mirdita women in the Pllana region will not be examined in detail here, as it closely resembles that of the highland areas, though it is somewhat lighter and more decorative due to market influences and environmental adaptations.

The authentic traditional clothing of Pllana women includes the following elements:

- Shirt: Made of coarse wool, constructed with four panels (sometimes two), and featuring long pleats (shtana) with loose sleeves at the wrists. A thick woolen panel covers the chest, embroidered in white and orange for elderly women and in multicolors for younger women. Multicolored silk tufts embellish the chest and sleeves. The shirt reaches the knees or below. Later versions were made from linen or cotton.
- Breeches: Initially woven from white linen on a two-panel loom and made at home by women. Later, they were made of cotton. The breeches extended from the hips to the knees

and were plain, without adornment.

- Dollama: A coarse woolen zhgun, made of four panels and extending below the knees. It differs from the Mirdita women's dollama in embroidery patterns and shoulder tufts. It was used primarily for weddings and rarely worn as winter attire.
- Zbani (xhup): A sleeveless version of the dollama, used for summer festivities.
- Vest (xhamadan): Made from woolen fabric, with four panels for winter use and two panels for summer. It could also be made from linen.
- Sash: Made of two panels for summer, using thin linen. Over this, a woolen sash with four panels was double-folded and wrapped around the waist. One end featured eight long, multicolored tufts shaped like brushes, known as the "big head," with smaller tufts hanging beneath a section called the bythec, adorned with additional colorful tufts.
- Strap (lici): A multicolored woven strip, produced on a four-panel loom, used to secure the sash to the body.
- Front Apron (futparça): Made of linen and later cotton, long and narrow. It was white for brides and red for other women. It featured decorative colored threads and long colored fringes along the sides.
- Back Apron (futprapça): Worn at the back beneath the bythec, similar to the futparça but without long side fringes.
- Headscarf (rida): Loom-woven and long, with tufts on both ends. It was tied around the head in the same style as in Kallmet, with the tufts left to hang down the back. Elderly women would often tie a black scarf over it.
- Socks: Hand-knitted with two needles, typically white with multicolored geometric patterns.
- Sandals (opinga): Made from cowhide, with twisted leather stitching and woolen straps—similar to those worn in both mountain and plain rural areas.

Aliaj Clothing of Bdhana

In the southern part of the region, women wore garments similar to those in the Milot-Kurbin area, including fitted shirts, xhoka, xhurdia, and nemte (a type of dollama), among others. These were adopted through intermarriage and cultural exchange with Milot-Kurbin families. Over time, they blended with the traditional women's clothing of this region, incorporating cross-regional influences based on the diversity of garments found throughout the Lezhë area.

Men's Clothing in Pllana

Men's clothing in Pllana evolved through interaction with styles from Mirdita, Zadrima, Kallmet, Malësia e Madhe, and Central Albania. Until relatively recently, men wore tirq, xhamadan, and woolen dollama, though these gradually fell out of use. White breeches were eventually replaced by black ones, which were better suited to the lowland and coastal climate. These styles were adopted from Central Albania, as was the xhurdia—a black woolen cloak with a collar and tufts—commonly worn during funeral ceremonies.

Men's clothing began changing significantly after World War II. By the 1960s–1970s, traditional attire had almost completely disappeared, retained only for special occasions or as cherished cultural memories. Women's clothing also underwent change, though more gradually and with more elements preserved into the late 20th century.

Highland Women's Clothing with the Xhubleta

Highland women's clothing featuring the xhubleta, with all its constituent parts, is similar to that of Malësia e Madhe, but it evolved and adapted to the new plain and coastal environment. Many of its elements have fallen out of use. The xhubleta was preserved only in very limited cases until the late 20th century.

Since the declaration of Independence, a garment known as the rasha has occasionally been used. It somewhat resembles the xhubleta—black and wide, but not open like the xhubleta. It was made of black velvet with pleats forming folds for girls and featured three white and three black accentuated stripes.

Of particular interest is the highland girl's guja, a thin white woolen shirt, woven on a loom in two panels, extending below the knees. This appears to be an element of ancient origin that coexisted with the xhubleta—a type of xhupeta mentioned earlier—a phenomenon that has survived in various forms since ancient times.

All types and variations of Lezhë clothing, for both men and women, belong to a symbolic universe and are a valuable treasure of Albanian ethnoculture. They represent very old phenomena that have persisted to the present day. At the same time, new influences—such as urban adoption and cross-regional clothing exchanges—have emerged, blending different elements, decorations, colors, forms, and symbols.

The costume map of Lezhë, like that of other Albanian regions, presents challenges, as populations of different origins often live mixed within the same territory. However, there are geographical groupings where specific clothing types still predominate. Based on this, the following divisions are proposed:

1. Zadrima Clothing: Worn in villages on both sides of the Drin River, where it passes through the Lezhë area.
2. Kallmet Clothing: Found in the villages of Kallmet i Madh, Kallmet i Vogël, Mërqi, and Raboshtë.
3. Pllana Clothing in Three Types:

- In the hilly-mountainous part of Pllana
- In the plain areas
- Among the Aliaj population, who arrived about 250 years ago from Kastrati (Shkodër), where women wear clothing similar to that of Milot-Kurbin.

4. Highland Clothing with Xhubleta: Found in Breg-Mat, Lezhë Island, Shëngjin Island, and also scattered throughout Zadrima villages.
5. Mirdita Clothing: Seen in Kashnjet (a highland area) and in the easternmost part of Lezhë District, known as Ana e Malit—a line of hilly-plain villages starting from Gosmiqja (outside Lezhë) and continuing along the eastern hills, where villages have limited plains for expansion. This population descends from the highlands of Mirdita and is involved in livestock farming as well as agriculture, orchards, and viticulture. Mirdita influence is also found in Breg-Mat, Shënkoll, and Rrilë.

The clothing of both women and men in these areas includes all components of authentic Mirdita attire, though many of the heavier elements were simplified during the 20th century. Women's clothing, especially bridal wear, was most influenced by urban fashion. (Gjergji, 2016)

Conclusion

The traditional attire of the Zadrima region has been extensively written about in the past by scholars and experts familiar with the clothing of the area. The richness of motifs, colors, and symbolic elements reflects a complex visual language that, over time, has come to be seen as a customary code—offering insights into the temperament of the local people, as well as the geographical and historical conditions in which men's and women's garments were created, whether for weddings or funerals. It also reveals the mechanisms and tools used to produce these costume typologies across all categories, age groups, and social strata.

Without hesitation, we can state that it is impossible for a single scholarly article to comprehensively describe all the indicative and explanatory features of the folk costumes of the Zadrima region. This subject will undoubtedly continue to serve as a worthy object of deeper study—not only of Zadrima's attire, but also of that from related or contextualized regions—as a sign of not only distinctiveness but also integration into the broader mosaic of Albanian ethno-cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, through this paper, I have aimed to offer a treatment based on concrete examples and scientifically demonstrable evidence, with the goal of presenting an analytical overview of the uniqueness that the traditional dress of this region represents within the broader framework of national costume design.

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The traditional wedding in Has-Albania

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Abstract

This article aims to present the wedding rituals of Has region over the years. The goal of this research is to analyze the traditions and rituals of the wedding of a Has woman a Has man. This study focuses on how these traditions have been preserved and practiced, as well as the impact they have had on the Has society. This preservation of rituals and customs, accompanied by a visible passion, continues to be present even today, where most of the rituals and customs, and traditions are passed down from generation to generation. This research analyzes the marriage process, starting from the Exchange of vows to the completion of the ceremony. It will also examine other important aspects of the Has wedding, including the games, dances, and songs that accompany the wedding nights. Another aspect that will be addressed is the bride's, which was crafted by hand or with a vek (Traditional tool). The research will also cover the costume design of the Has wedding, the traditional costumes, and their preservation up to the present day. Additionally, the study will analyze the rules followed during the ceremony. The methodology used in the study is the empirical method, as the research is conducted in its natural environment. This study aims to contribute to the documentation of the cultural heritage of Has had the preservation of Has traditions.

Keywords

wedding in Has, costume design, rituals, customs

Introduction

The Has region, from a geographic and ethnographic perspective, constitutes a well-defined unit. Known since the 16th century as the Land of Pashtrik, it stretches two parts divided by the state borders established in 1913; (fig.1 –Map Has Albanian-Kosovo) one part is located within that of Kosovo. (Bogdani, 2005) Below, we will examine how Has in Albania, as a distint ethnographic unit, presents historical, ethnographic, and folkloric interest. We can say that from this perspective, this region has been less studied and les known. (Bogdani, 1977) For this reason, and primarily to study its choreographic folkloric heritage, we will present the Hasjan Wedding.



Figure 1. Map Has Albanian-Kosovo

The Hasjan Wedding is a valuable heritage passed down from generation to generation, keeping traditions and customs alive, even though many rules and practices have changed. This text aims to explain the traditions and rituals that accompany weddings in this region. This presentation aims to analyze the customs and rituals related to weddings in these regions—events rich in tradition that encompass a wide range of activities, playing a vital role in preserving local traditions and customs.

The Girl's Wedding

During this period, marriages were arranged through matchmaking, and in many cases, the matchmaking began at birth or even before birth. Two men, in an effort to preserve their friendship, would say: "If you have a daughter, we will marry her to our son and keep our friendship alive." When the matchmaker went to ask for the girl's (bride's) hand, he would receive a payment from his friend (the groom's father), as he had worn out his shoes by going multiple times to the bride's father until he convinced him to give his daughter in marriage. In many cases, the matchmaker would even lie about the groom's age, wealth, or health. If the families agreed to form this alliance, the girl would prepare her dowry (called qejz) for the groom's family, without even knowing her future husband.

The matchmaker is given a symbolic gift to mark that the alliance has been finalized, which includes a crocheted pillowcase made by the bride. Once the agreement is made, the groom's family (the friend) provides the financial means for the dowry (qejz), which is prepared for the groom's entire extended family and distributed as gifts—such as socks, slippers, towels, soap, and handkerchiefs. The items are mostly handmade, using crochet techniques, and most of

them are made with a loom (fig. 2 – the loom), including the mattress. The dowry is packaged by the bride's family with the appropriate names and sewn together with a needle. Always during the work on the weaving frame, various songs are also sung (Fig. 3 Songs of the weaving frame). Below you will find an example performed by the "Pjetër Bogdani" Ensemble from Has. (Hoxha, 2024)





Figure 2. The loom, *Figure 3*. Songs of the weaving frame

At the moment when coffee is served, even if the guest or groom is not the right person, they cannot speak, because the families create enmity, and the girl must not be deceived. This is a symbol of enmity, because whoever takes the girl enters into this enmity. If after the marriage the husband dies, in most cases the bride marries the brother-in-law to preserve the friendship. This also happens even if the girl is still engaged.

Close relatives, such as the uncle (mother's brother), aunt (mother's sister), paternal aunt, and cousin, receive gifts, but even if the girl has relatives in the groom's family, they are also sent gifts. The girl, when her wedding day is set, is not informed until the moment it is finalized three days before the wedding, and she does not leave the room until the wedding procession begins.



Figure 4. The girl's outfit

The girl is dressed in the traditional girl's outfit: Mitani (vest), shirt, headscarf, opinga (traditional shoes), black belt, and shoka (fig. 4 the girl's outfit). One the wedding night at the groom's place, then the wedding canopy is brought to the girl. She enters the room accompanied by her maternal aunt or paternal aunt dressed in traditional clothing, embracing the guests and crying. In the end, the one who embraces her is one of the aunts or her sister and forces her to sit down, but she does not sit willingly to show that she does not want to become a bride. At this moment,

the girl sits down crying. The women separate into two groups: some sing to the girl about the time she will spend as a bride, while others curse the guest and the groom, asking the girl to stop crying.

Some of the songs that are sung are:

Come, girl, come with tears,
Come for the father who loved you dearly.
The girl is crying.
The bride's brother has made a vow,
I will cut down all the trees,
The rest of the women sing:
The in-laws are coming around the mountain circle,
They have lost the straw from the saddle.

At this moment, the girl stops crying. The wedding canopy is raised, and they take the girl's hand, but she pulls it back in protest. Then, they give her hand again and tighten the canopy. The women continue singing.
The canopy is raised, drop by drop.
Tonight, you become a flag among the girls.
This refersto Friday, when the girl leaves her family's home.
Besides singing, the women also dance at the wedding; it is a tradition that the daughters of the house are the first to stand up, and compared to the others, they dance and sing louder. (Bogdani, 1977)

The next day, the in-laws come to take the bride. When the girl leaves the house through the door, she is accompanied by two men who must have both father and mother (not orphans), usually her brother and uncle, or paternal uncle.



Figure 5. Bride with a veil

When the girl leaves the door, she protests by crying loudly and placing her hands on the door because she does not want to leave her family. The bride wears a veil on her head (Hoxha, 2024) (Fig.5 Bride with a veil), which is placed by the brother or the cousin (son of the maternal aunt)

Before she leaves, the mother gives the girl some advice:
"May your eyes meet without harm, may you never see misfortune."
"May your ears hear only peace, may you never hear harm."
"May your mouth speak peacefully, may you never speak harm."
She must respect the father-in-law, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and brothers-in-law. At that time, the bride washed the feet of all the guests who came to the house. Also, when bread was brought back, she offered everyone a bowl, a towel, and water to wash their hands.

Ahead of the bride walks a small boy who has both father and mother, to bring her a good life, leading to the horse the bride will mount. After the bride mounts the horse and is accompanied by her uncle and brother to the edge of the village, she remains hunched on the horse, crying. At the moment when her people say their farewells, the sister-in-law (the groom's sister) asks her to sit upright as a bride and to keep her eyes lowered.

When they come to take the girl, there are certain rules. The matchmaker and the in-laws must be a specific number (e.g., 300 people). If there are 301, they are fined; the same applies if there are 299. Also, if they start singing before crossing the designated place, they are fined as well. The fine is paid in the form of a pack of cigarettes, and the more cigarettes in the pack, the higher the amount of money given, which is handed to the girl's father. He then gives this money to the girl so she can buy something for herself.

Guests are welcomed with coffee, tobacco, and later rakia, by people designated by the bride's family. When the cigarettes are distributed, it is said: *"As a sign of respect from Nera of Filan."* The guest responds: *"May Nera grow for you and him."* The groom's sister is taken by the family members and brought into the bride's room, where she gives her a candy. She eats half, while the groom's sister-in-law eats the other half. After this, she throws a candy and some coins to the bride's head. The rice, candies, and coins are thrown after the bride mounts the horse, and the small children collect the coins and candies.

The Groom's Wedding

At the moment when the matchmaker brings the handkerchief (the marriage approval), before even entering the courtyard, he calls out loudly:
"O master of the house, so-and-so has accepted you as a guest!"
The master of the house fires three shots from his rifle, and immediately the girls begin singing accompanied by the tambourine:

The rifle fired, the flint cracked,
The bride has come to the house,
The wind blew, it hit the mountain,
May the grrom's bride be blessed,

The characteristic song that starts the wedding is:

Thank goodness for night and thank goodness for day, hoj, dado, hoj
How the bride is coming to our house, shining, hoj, dado, hoj

Thank goodness for night and thank goodness for day, hoj, dado, hoj
How we are receiving this sister-in-law, hoj, dado, hoj (Wikipedia, 2022)

This is the moment that marks the beginning of the wedding preparations. As a rule, the matchmaker is the intermediary who sets the date of the friendship (engagement). In this process, wise and experienced men are chosen to make important decisions, regardless of family ties, so that the decisions made are as mature as possible.
The wedding usually opens two weeks in advance, even if the master of the house is not yet ready. Neighbors come, offer their congratulations, and officially open the wedding. Every night, "masdarke" gatherings are organized, where men play traditional games such as: the cap game, biz, bat-bat, the soldier's game, the barber's game, and "Beqiri outside." Meanwhile, the women sing with tambourines and play games like the old man's game and the cricket's game. Besides the games, they also dance various traditional dances; the men's dances generally do not have specific names but are referred to by the names of the places where they are danced. (Bogdani, 1977) Those who are close relatives come as entire families, while distant relatives are represented by the husband and wife or the son if the head of the family is absent.

The night of the kulaq

On Monday, at the moment when day turns into night, the bride's kulaq is prepared. A girl, along with her two parents, sifts the flour without speaking to anyone. During this time, traditional songs accompanied by the tambourine are sung:
The kulaq is being sifted, being sifted, oh (fig. 6 sifting the flour)





Figure 6. Sifting the flour, *Figure 7*. The rifle barrel in the flour

Our house is growing, it is growing, oh.
The flour is sifted into a new wooden bowl,
May this bride be blessed for you, oh father.
The flour is sifted into a red wooden bowl,
May this bride be blessed for you, oh mother.

Then a boy who has both a father and a mother, without speaking, mixes the flour using the barrel of a rifle (fig.7 the rifle barrel in the flour). After mixing the kulaq, he steps onto the threshold of the house and fires three shots with the rifle, accompanied by singing and tambourine:

The rifle cracked and the mountain echoed,
May the kulaq be blessed for you, oh father.
May the kulaq grow thinner and thinner, oh
Our house is growing and growing, oh

The kulaq is baked and kept in a safe place until Friday, when the bride leaves her home. On Thursday, a night similar to the others is organized, with games and songs. The cooking is done by the women of the neighborhood or village. One man is chosen to prepare the main dishes, while the women bring bread. The food served at the wedding includes: stew, pies, layered pastries (laknur), beans with meat, and is accompanied by dairy products such as yogurt, milk, cheese, and buttermilk (tushi).

On Thursday, the men gather to appoint the wedding escort, who are carefully selected. The escort (krushqit) are organized in pairs and walk in rows while singing, led by a man on a white horse, who scouts the road ahead to avoid encounters with other wedding processions.

If a confrontation occurs and it is not resolved through dialogue, it can lead to bloodshed—even resulting in deaths, including that of the brides. Along the way, songs are sung accompanied by tambourine (def), flute (curle), and later also drums (tupan). Once they arrive at the host's house, the matchmaker (msiti) leads the way, followed by the uncle (daja), and everyone lines up to greet the hosts. The uncle sits at the head of the place, and no one speaks before him. Three dances are performed: the bride's side, the guests, and a mixed dance.

In the past, women and men celebrated separately; after the 1970s, the two genders began to celebrate together. The groom is assigned a person to watch over his shoes and jacket because they were often hidden or doused with water or eggs to cause laughter. The boys prepared themselves for teasing questions, such as:
"Did you come to take the rooster?" If the boy was prepared, he would respond: *"We have the rooster; we came to take the hen."*
The in-laws on the groom's side usually "steal" the coffee cup as a symbolic gesture. After the bride is taken, the in-laws fire rifles in celebration and sing:

The friend's house on a hill,
We will light it with a small firecracker.
We will notify just 2-3 houses,
Just to bring the bride for the groom.

On the return journey, the leader checks the path again to avoid meeting other wedding parties. The route is changed because the same road must not be taken twice. Shortly before arriving at the house, a call is made in the form of a shout:
"The horn is sounding from the mountain top," signaling the safe arrival of the bride. When she enters the courtyard, the master of the house fires his rifle, and the tambourine songs begin:
How beautifully our bride has come out,
Marshallah, Marshallah!

Before the bride dismounts from the horse, a child (boy) is placed in her arms to symbolize fertility. The bride gently pinches the child until he cries. After she dismounts from the horse, the boy throws sherbet, and the bride enters the house accompanied by the tambourine. The mother-in-law welcomes her with a cup of honey or sherbet, and the bride anoints her hands, then touches the door on the right, on the left, and at the top — a ritual that is also repeated inside the room.

When the groom enters the room, the daughters sing while the men tease him with laughter. The groom removes the bride's veil and sees her for the first time. When he asks her to take off her shoes, he offers his left foot to test her. The clever bride removes the right shoe instead.

In the morning, the bride is taken out of the room by her maternal aunt or sister-in-law and tested for her first steps. In the corridor, various items such as brooms, a sickle, ash, etc., are placed to see if she is a capable bride. The bride sits on the divan, and they symbolically divide the kulaq to determine who will lead the family. The groom's family often tries to cheat so that he wins. Then singing and dancing follow. The uncle gives the first gift to the bride, and the following song is sung:

The groom's uncle opened the pouch,
And gave the bride 100 lek.
The bride's dowry (qejzi) is displayed. The women divide into two groups:
The group that curses her:
For this dowry you have brought,
Your mother must have been out gathering wood.
The group that praises her:
Where did you get all this, oh bride?
In Shkodër, or in Tirana?
Neither in Shkodër, nor in Tirana,
It was made by the daughter with her mother.

The dowry (qejzi) is presented by the sister and maternal aunt or paternal aunt. The wedding the groom's and bride's families invite the bride to dinners throughout the year. She brings gifts, and the food served must be good so they won't be embarraddes. The bride sits last but stands up first. She does not eat much because the mother-in-law advises her: "Be careful, don't eat too much; when your foot steps down, leave the bread."

Traditional games during the Has wedding

During the wedding nights, the men and women of the village organized entertaining games accompanied by songs, dances, and humor. Among these traditional activities, which are widely practiced in Has and enrich its folk tradition, we can mention: the Cap Game, the Cricket Game, and the Old Man's Game. (Bogdani, 1977). These creations themselves constitute a unity and artistic interaction of choreographic, poetic, and melodic elements. (Wikipedia, Kultura e Hasit, 2022)

The cap game






Figure 8. The cap game, *Figure 9*. Wool for socks, *Figure 10*. Kendim i burrave

In this game, up to 30 people participate in total. The game starts with 2 players (fig. 8 The Cap Game), who take turns choosing friends from among the participants, each forming their own "team." (Hoxha, 2024) Both teams sit in a circle and take turns hiding a small bead inside woolen socks (fig. 9 wool for socks) or caps. The opposing team must find where the bead is hidden. If they find it, they earn points; if not, they lose some points. This continues for 1 to 1.5 hours. The team that accumulates the most points first is declared the winner. The winning team stands up and sings harsh words directed at the losing team. The first verse is sung by the winning player and repeated by their teammates.
A typical song at the end of the game:

Now we've leveled a hundred."
Go outside, you've become a disgrace!
At the end of the game, this was sung:
Do we forgive them, or do we not?
Let them go out, and may they take the mountain!
The mountain says: I don't want them!
The master of the house says: "Hit me,"
Because I'm sending them to chop wood!" (Bogdani, 1977)

The game "Beqiri outside"

The game leader would assign each participant a name, but instead of their real names, he called everyone "Beqiri." After tying a towel into a knot, he would shout, "Beqiri outside!" and start hitting everyone with the towel, causing laughter.

The cricket game

In this game, a group of women participate, but only one plays the main role. She is placed inside a sack and keeps the rhythm by clapping two wooden spoons together, while the surrounding women, accompanying with tambourines, sing:
"Come out, cricket, come out and play,
I will protect that good bride."
When the main player hears these words, she comes out of the sack and starts dancing joyfully, improvising with simple traditional women's dance moves or by imitating the cricket.

As the group of women continue singing, to entertain, they change the lyrics to:
"Come out, cricket, come out and play,
I will protect that bad old woman."
At this point, the "cricket" sits on the ground, takes out a "torokop" (a farming tool) from her waist, and, in anger, strikes repeatedly with it. (Bogdani, 1977)

The Old Man's Game

Among those who often performed this entertaining act is Zoja Isuf Sheta from Kishaj. When the women at the wedding say several times, *"Come on, let's do the Old Man's Game,"* addressing me, I then leave the room, dress up in traditional woolen trousers (tirq), darken my face with chimney soot, put on a white beard made from sheep's wool, and wear a white cap on my head. On one shoulder I carry a wooden rifle, and on the other a satchel. I also bring along a young bride, and then I go and knock on the door where the women are inside — *"Oh, master of the house!"* The door opens and I enter; the women laugh, and I rise to my feet. I take off the rifle and the satchel, and with the bride following behind me, I sit near the fire. I stir the fire with the rifle and begin to shiver as if I have chills, asking, *"What's all this crowd?"* The women reply, *"It's a wedding"*.

Then, out of joy, I strike the ceiling with the rifle. The older women say, "Come on, old man, dance for us," and I come out with the bride and begin to dance. Sometimes I dance like the men, with heavy steps. I hold the bride by the hand and don't let go — otherwise, the women might take her from me. While dancing, sometimes I hug the bride, and the surrounding women laugh and, while playing the tambourine, sing in pairs. (Fig. 11 – The Wedding Old Man)
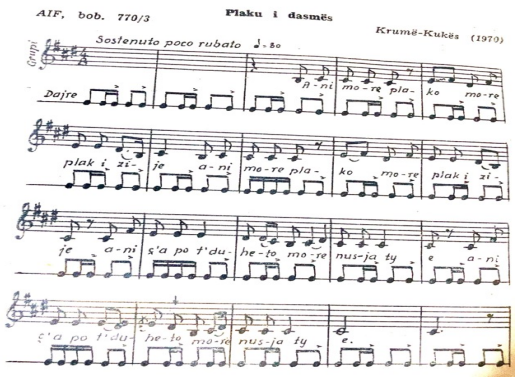


Figure 11. The wedding old man

Oh, old man, oh, dark old man
Oh, what do you need the bride for?
Oh, young bride, you are a pig!
Oh, old man, may your blood spill,
Oh, young bride, oh, dark old man,
Oh, what's on your head, that's turned gray?
Oh, the bride is not for you, old man,
Oh, grab the bride, hey, and carry her to the cradle!

And Zoja continues:
After them, whether dancing or not, I sing too, using words that are a bit harsh. The bride becomes embarrassed by these words, hits me lightly and says:
"Don't speak like that!"
Then I sing differently:
"*Oh, my beauty, come out to the hill, / You seem just a bit too small."*
Next, I fire the rifle at the ceiling and shout several times:
"I-ja!"
When the women take the bride and hide her from me, I fall to the ground out of longing—up to ten times—while the women sing:
"Oh old man, oh dark old man, / We've taken the bride from you."
Then I go searching for the bride among the women, hitting them lightly with the satchel. When I find her, I get excited. I scold her for running away, but she replies:
"You're old, I wanted someone younger."
When I hit her a bit harder (playfully), she says:
"I didn't go on my own—they forced me."
Then I say:
"Come back to me."
We go out and dance again. I embrace her more closely and we start dancing once more. This continues for about an hour, and so the game ends.
At the end of the masdarkë (evening gathering), to bid farewell to the guests, the following verses were sung:

Safe journey all the way to the field,
Don't forget tomorrow evening.
Safe journey to all of you,
May you welcome your own and marry them off.
Safe journey — may I never forget it,
May I repay it at your weddings. (Bogdani, Folklori koreografik i Hasit, 1977)

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is the empirical method. Empirical research refers to the investigation of phenomena in the very place where they occur. (Buzarovski, 2012)

Conclusion

The Has wedding represents a valuable cultural heritage that continues to keep alive the customs and traditions of this region, even though some rules have undergone changes over time. This presentation higlights the importance of weddings as events and the connection between generation through inherited ritals and customs.

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Stylistic Differences and Similarities in Greek, Slavic and Albania Byzantine Painting

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Abstract

The aim and objective of this study are to understand and present Byzantine iconography and mural painting, which represent an essential aspect of the cultural and religious life of the Eastern Orthodox Christian world. The stylistic differences between Byzantine, Greek, Slavic, and Albanian art are evident as well as cultural and religious influences.
The research question is: Do we find influential elements from neighboring countries in Albanian Byzantine art?

In reality, the stylistic features of Albanian mural painting often reflect a blend of local Byzantine influences, focusing on narrative clarity and emotional expression.
The results of this study will concentrate on a comprehensive comparative analysis of the traditions of Byzantine Greek, Slavic, and Albanian art, highlighting their styles, techniques, and distinctive cultural elements.

The unique characteristics of each tradition will also reflect the historical and religious developments of each country and their respective cultures. Byzantine iconography is rich in symbolic elements, where every color, gesture, and object holds profound spiritual meaning. The interpretation and analysis of symbolic elements in Byzantine, Slavic, and Albanian art constitute the cultural and artistic essence of each case study.

The conclusions will be based on the study and comparison of historical, religious, cultural, and artistic influences that contributed to the artistic growth and development of Greek, Slavic, and Albanian Byzantine art. The blending of Orthodox, Catholic, and Ottoman influences created a unique visual language that emphasized resilience, identity, and spiritual devotion.

Keywords

Byzantine iconography, mural painting, cultural/religious influences, Orthodox Church, Byzantine-Post-Byzantine influences, East-West

Introduction

Byzantine iconography and mural painting represent a significant aspect of the cultural and religious life in the Eastern Orthodox Christian world. The stylistic differences among Greek, Slavic, and Albanian Byzantine art reflect not only aesthetic preferences but also historical contexts, religious influences, and cultural exchanges.

This analysis will explore the stylistic elements, iconographic themes, mural fresco techniques, color palettes, and historical contexts that distinguish these three traditions. Greek Byzantine iconography is characterized by its adherence to the established canon of religious representation. The figures are often depicted in a frontal, elongated style, emphasizing spiritual rather than physical realism. The use of gold backgrounds is prevalent, creating a sense of divine light and other worldliness. Iconography in Greek art frequently features the Theotokos (Mother of God) and Christ Pantocrator, with an emphasis on their divine attributes. The technique of egg tempera on wooden panels is commonly employed, allowing for fine detail and vibrant color. (Baker, 2010) The historical context of Greek Byzantine art is rooted in the early Christian period, where the iconoclast controversies shaped the development of religious imagery, leading to a reaffirmation of icons as vital to worship.

In contrast, Slavic Byzantine iconography exhibits a more diverse stylistic approach influenced by local traditions and the integration of folk elements. The figures in Slavic icons often display a more robust and earthy quality, reflecting a connection to the physical world. The use of vibrant colors, particularly reds and greens, is notable, often symbolizing the vitality of life and the natural world. Slavic mural frescoes, such as those found in the churches of the Kievan Rus, often depict extensive narrative cycles that illustrate biblical stories and saints, emphasizing community and collective memory. The historical context of Slavic art is marked by the Christianization of the Slavic people, which led to the adaptation of Byzantine styles to local customs and beliefs, creating a unique synthesis. (Kostov, 2012).

Albanian Byzantine art, while sharing elements with both Greek and Slavic traditions, presents its distinct characteristics shaped by its geographical and cultural position. The stylistic features of Albanian mural painting often reflect a blend of Byzantine and local influences, with a focus on narrative clarity and emotional expression. The use of color in Albanian frescoes tends to be more subdued compared to the vibrant palettes of Slavic art, often utilizing earth tones that resonate with the mountainous landscape of Albania. The technique of applying frescoes on wet plaster allows for a certain fluidity in the depiction of figures, which can convey movement and dynamism. Historically, the Albanian context is marked by periods of foreign domination and the struggle for national identity, which is reflected in the iconographic choices that often emphasize local saints and historical figures. In summary, the stylistic differences among Greek, Slavic, and Albanian Byzantine iconography and mural painting reveal a complex interplay of artistic tradition, cultural identity, and historical context. Greek art maintains a strict adherence to the Byzantine canon, Slavic art incorporates local elements and narrative richness, while Albanian art reflects a synthesis of influences shaped by its unique historical circumstances. Each tradition contributes to the broader tapestry of Byzantine art, highlighting the diversity and adaptability of religious expression across different cultures. (Smith, 2014)

This analysis offers a comprehensive comparison of Greek, Slavic, and Albanian Byzantine art traditions, highlighting their distinctive styles, techniques, and cultural influences. Each tradition's unique characteristics reflect the broader historical and religious developments of the regions they emerged from. The Greek tradition's focus on spiritual transcendence, Slavic art's earthy realism and narrative depth, and Albanian art's emotional expression and regional identity all contribute to the rich diversity of Byzantine iconography and mural painting.

Greek Byzantine Art: Iconic Works and Symbolism

One of the most famous examples of Greek Byzantine iconography is the Christ Pantocrator from the Monastery of Daphni (c. 11th century).

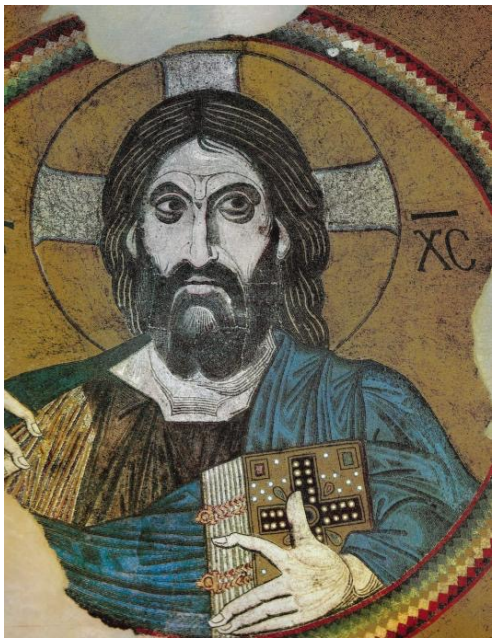


Figure 1

This mosaic presents Christ with a stern, commanding gaze, symbolizing divine authority and judgment. The gold background emphasizes His eternal presence, while the symmetrical composition reinforces order and divinity. The Theotokos Hodegetria icon is another prominent example, depicting the Virgin Mary pointing to Christ as the "Way." This icon emphasizes Mary's role as an intercessor, reinforcing the spiritual hierarchy central to Greek Orthodox belief. Greek Byzantine mural painting is also well-represented in churches like Hosios Loukas in Greece. Greek Byzantine mural painting and mosaic is also well-represented in churches like Hosios Loukas in Greece. These frescoes and mosaics depict biblical narratives with a focus on idealized, spiritualized figures, often framed by elaborate architectural elements that symbolize the heavenly realm. The post-iconoclasm period in Greece emphasized theological precision in imagery, ensuring each element aligned with Orthodox doctrine.



Figure 2

Slavic Byzantine Art: Iconic Works and Symbolism

Slavic iconography reflects the cultural blend between Byzantine influence and local traditions.



Figure 3 & 4

The Virgin of Vladimir icon (c. 12th century), one of Russia's most revered icons, presents a deeply emotional portrayal of Mary holding the Christ child. This icon emphasizes tenderness and compassion, reflecting the growing influence of human emotion in Slavic religious art.

Christian symbolism in the Cathedral

In mural frescoes, the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kyiv (11th century) offers a rich narrative style. These frescoes are notable for their vibrant color palette-deep reds, greens, and blues and their focus on community-centered storytelling. Biblical scenes are often arranged in cycles, providing worshipers with visual narratives that reinforce faith and collective identity.





Figure 5 & 6

With 13 cupolas and a central dome that rises 95 feet into the air, Saint Sophia is an imposing structure that served as a testament to the power and piety of its ruler. Elaborate mosaics decorate the sanctuary and dome. A mosaic of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, stands in the apse above the altar. Raising her hands in prayer, Mary is framed by a Greek inscription from Psalm 46: "God is in the midst of Her; She shall not be moved." The imagery and language are borrowed from Byzantium. Just as she was seen as a powerful divine protector of Constantinople, so now Mary protects Kyiv. The tall central dome is adorned with a mosaic of an all-powerful image of Christ, known as "Christ Pantokrator," who gazes down from his throne at his worshipers. The art historian Elena Boeck calls Saint Sophia "the most ambitious Orthodox Church built in the 11th century." The influence of folk art is particularly evident in Slavic icons, where decorative patterns, floral motifs, and stylized figures create a sense of cultural pride and uniqueness. (Bishop, 2015)



Figure 7

Albanian Byzantine Art: Iconic Works and Symbolism

Albanian Byzantine art is characterized by its distinct blend of Byzantine structure and regional identity. The frescoes in the Church of St. Nicholas in Moscopole (18th century) illustrate this synthesis.



Figure 8

The murals feature expressive figures with softer, more naturalistic facial expressions, reflecting a focus on emotional connection. The color palette often includes earthy tones like ochre, brown, and muted reds, aligning with Albania's mountainous landscape. Albanian iconography frequently emphasizes local saints and historical narratives. For example, images of St. Nicholas or St. George are often portrayed as protectors, symbolizing resilience in the face of foreign domination. This reflects Albania›s historical struggles and its attempt to preserve cultural identity through religious art.

Historical Influences on Artistic Evolution

- Greek Byzantine Art was heavily shaped by the Iconoclast Controversy (8th–9th centuries), which ultimately strengthened the role of icons in Orthodox worship. After this period, Greek iconography became more codified and conservative in style.
- Slavic Byzantine Art evolved following the Christianization of Kievan Rus› in 988. As Orthodox Christianity spread, Slavic artists adopted Byzantine styles but incorporated local folklore, resulting in a distinct artistic voice.
- Albanian Byzantine Art was deeply influenced by Albania›s position at the crossroads of empires. The blend of Orthodox, Catholic, and Ottoman influences created a unique visual language that emphasized resilience, identity, and spiritual devotion.

Byzantine iconography is rich in symbolic elements, with each color, gesture, and object carrying profound spiritual meaning. Let›s break down key symbolic elements common in Greek, Slavic, and Albanian Byzantine art, highlighting their unique interpretations. (Davis, 2018)

1. Colors and Their Symbolism

Color plays a crucial role in conveying theological messages across Byzantine traditions.

- Gold: Symbolizes divine light, eternity, and the heavenly realm. Common in Greek icons, especially behind Christ Pantocrator, gold backgrounds create a sense of timeless, otherworldly presence.
- Red: Represents divine life, sacrifice, and power. Greek art often uses deep crimson in Christ's robes to symbolize His divine authority. In Slavic traditions, red can also symbolize joy and celebration.
- Blue: Symbolizes the infinite, the celestial, and the Virgin Mary's purity. Mary is often depicted in blue robes with a red garment beneath, signifying her dual nature as both human and vessel of divine grace.
- White: Represents purity, holiness, and the divine presence. Christ's garments in scenes like the Transfiguration often glow in radiant white.
- Green: Common in Slavic art, symbolizing renewal, life, and the natural world. This reflects the strong connection between Slavic culture and the land.
- Black: Signifies death, sin, or the unknown. Monastic figures are often depicted in black robes to emphasize humility and spiritual detachment.

Earth Tones (Ochre, Brown, etc.): Prominent in Albanian frescoes, these colors reflect humility, grounding the divine narrative in a familiar, earthly context.

2. Iconographic Gestures and Postures

Gestures in Byzantine iconography are highly symbolic, often communicating theological messages.

- Christ's Right Hand in Blessing: Christ is frequently shown with fingers forming the letters "IC XC" (the Greek abbreviation for «Jesus Christ»). This gesture signifies His divine authority and role as the giver of blessings.
- Open Hands (Orans Position): Figures like the Theotokos often raise their hands in prayer, symbolizing intercession on behalf of humanity.
- The Tilted Head: Found frequently in Slavic icons, particularly in depictions of the Virgin Mary, this slight tilt conveys compassion, humility, and sorrow.
- Dynamic Movements in Albanian Frescoes: Figures in Albanian murals sometimes appear in active, fluid poses, symbolizing emotional intensity and narrative clarity.

3. Objects and Their Meaning

Objects in Byzantine art are rich in symbolic meaning, reinforcing spiritual themes.

- The Gospel Book: Often held by Christ Pantocrator, symbolizing His teachings, divine wisdom, and the Word of God. Open pages may display specific verses emphasizing judgment or mercy.
- The Cross: Represents Christ's sacrifice and the victory of life over death. Greek icons often depict the cross with intricate designs to highlight its sacred power.
- The Chalice: Common in Eucharistic scenes, symbolizing Christ's blood and the sacrament of communion.

- Scrolls: Often held by prophets and apostles, symbolizing divine revelation and the written Word.
- Swords and Spears: In Slavic and Albanian art, saints like St. George or St. Demetrius are often depicted wielding weapons, symbolizing their role as spiritual protectors.
- Architectural Elements: In Slavic murals, elaborate depictions of cityscapes symbolize the heavenly Jerusalem or emphasize community identity.

4. Halos and Divine Light

- Circular Halos: Represent sanctity and divine grace. Christ's halo often features a cross with the Greek letters «Ο Ω Ν» (meaning «He who is»).
- Square Halos: Found in Albanian frescoes, square halos are sometimes used to distinguish living saints or significant church donors.
- Radiating Light (Mandorla): The almond-shaped aura surrounding Christ in scenes like the Transfiguration symbolizes divine energy breaking into the physical world.

5. Facial Features and Expressions

- Large Eyes: Symbolize spiritual vision, wisdom, and inner enlightenment.
- Elongated Noses: Suggest heightened spiritual sensitivity, moving away from earthly desires.
- Small Mouths: Indicate silence, humility, and contemplation.
- Emotional Expression in Albanian Art: Albanian murals often feature deeply expressive faces, emphasizing empathy, suffering, and human emotion.

6. Animals and Nature

- The Dove: A symbol of the Holy Spirit, often seen in representations of the Baptism of Christ.
- The Lion: Often linked to St. Mark, symbolizing strength and courage.
- The Serpent/Dragon: Common in Slavic and Albanian art as a representation of evil, often being vanquished by warrior saints like St. George.
- Vines and Trees: In Slavic frescoes, these often symbolize the Tree of Life or the interconnectedness of creation.

7. Architectural Symbolism

- Domes in Church Frescoes: The central dome often features Christ Pantocrator, symbolizing His role as the cosmic ruler. The vertical arrangement of scenes from Christ above to saints and earthly figures below reflects the divine order of creation.
- Arches and Portals: Symbolize the transition between earthly and heavenly realms, reinforcing the sacred space within Byzantine churches.

Key Differences in Symbolic Focus

- Greek Byzantine Art: Prioritizes spiritual transcendence, using gold backgrounds, elongated figures, and fixed expressions to emphasize the divine.
- Slavic Byzantine Art: Introduces more naturalistic symbolism, with vibrant colors, folk motifs, and emotionally expressive icons.
- Albanian Byzantine Art: Blends Byzantine structure with regional identity, using earth tones, dynamic gestures, and expressive faces to convey narrative clarity and emotional depth.

1. Christological Symbolism

Byzantine iconography places Christ at the center of spiritual focus, with symbolic elements emphasizing His divine authority, mercy, and sacrifice.

Greek Example:
Christ Pantocrator (Monastery of Daphni, Greece, 11th century)



Figure 9 & 10

- Symbolism: Christ›s stern expression, frontal pose, and raised right hand in blessing reflect His role as the supreme judge. The IC XC gesture (Greek abbreviation for "Jesus Christ") signifies His divine authority.
- Golden Background: Symbolizes divine light, emphasizing Christ's eternal presence.
- Halo with Cross and «O Ω N» (He who is): Represents Christ's eternal existence as God.

Slavic Example: Christ Pantocrator (St. Sophia Cathedral, Kyiv, Ukraine, 11th century)




Figure 11 & 12

- Symbolism: While maintaining traditional Greek elements, this version features a softer expression and richer colors like deep reds and greens, reflecting Slavic artistic warmth.



Figure 13

- Ornamental Patterns: Surrounding decorations incorporate folk motifs, symbolizing cultural identity within a Byzantine framework.

Albanian Example:
Christ in Majesty (Church of St. Nicholas, Moscopole, Albania, 18th century)

- Symbolism: Christ's robe is rendered in earth tones with muted gold, blending Byzantine tradition with Albanian regional aesthetics.
- Dynamic Posture: Albanian depictions often show more movement, symbolizing Christ's active role in guiding and protecting the faithful.

2. Marian Imagery (The Theotokos)

The Virgin Mary holds a central role in Byzantine theology as the Theotokos (God-Bearer), often depicted with symbolic gestures and colors.

Greek Example:
Theotokos Hodegetria (14th century, Mount Athos Monastery)

- Symbolism: Mary gestures toward the Christ Child, emphasizing her role as the guide to salvation.



Figure 14 & 15 & 16

- Red Inner Garment and Blue Outer Robe: Signify her dual nature earthly (red) yet filled with divine grace (blue).
- Three Stars on Her Robe: Symbolizing her perpetual virginity (before, during, and after Christ›s birth).
- Slavic Example:
- Virgin of Vladimir (12th century, Russia)
- Symbolism: The Virgin's tender embrace of Christ emphasizes her maternal compassion, a characteristic more pronounced in Slavic art.
- Tilted Head and Softened Facial Features: Conveys deep emotion, a signature element of Russian iconography.
-

Albanian Example:
Theotokos Enthroned (Berat, Albania, 13th century)

- Symbolism: Mary is seated on a throne, surrounded by local saints, symbolizing her protective role over the Albanian people.
- Subdued Earth Tones: Reflect humility and resilience in a region marked by conflict and foreign rule.

3. Angelic Imagery

Angels in Byzantine art serve as messengers of God and symbols of divine presence.

Greek Example:
Archangel Michael (Monastery of Hosios Loukas, Greece, 11th century)

- Symbolism: Depicted in imperial armor, Michael embodies strength and spiritual guardianship.
- Golden Wings and Robes: Emphasize his divine origin.
- Sword and Shield: Symbolize his role as a protector of the faithful.

Slavic Example:
Archangel Gabriel (St. Cyril's Monastery, Kyiv, 12th century)

- Symbolism: Often depicted with a scroll, representing Gabriel's role as the bearer of the Annunciation.
- Green and Red Robes: Common in Slavic frescoes, these colors symbolize vitality and divine presence.

Albanian Example:
Angels in the Annunciation Scene (Church of St. Mary, Apollonia, Albania)

- Symbolism: Albanian frescoes often depict angels with dynamic postures and expressive faces, reinforcing emotional engagement with the viewer.
- Earthy Color Palette: Highlights the intimate, humanized qualities in Albanian depictions of heavenly beings.

4. Symbolism in Narrative Cycles

Byzantine mural frescoes often use visual storytelling to convey complex theological ideas.
Greek Example:
The Last Judgment (Chora Church, Istanbul, 14th century)

- Symbolism: The central figure of Christ Pantocrator dominates the upper tier, while angels blow trumpets, signaling resurrection. The righteous are depicted ascending to paradise, while sinners are shown in chaotic, dark scenes—a powerful warning about spiritual accountability.

Slavic Example:
The Creation of the World (Novgorod School, Russia, 14th century)

- Symbolism: Vibrant greens and reds dominate the scene, symbolizing nature's life force. Decorative folk motifs incorporated into the imagery emphasize a uniquely Slavic interpretation of Genesis.

Albanian Example:
The Martyrdom of St. George (Church of St. Nicholas, Voskopoja, Albania)

- Symbolism: St. George's victorious pose over the dragon symbolizes the triumph of good over evil.
- Narrative Clarity: Albanian murals often use simplified compositions with clear emotional cues to make stories accessible to local communities.

Key Observations in Symbolic Variations

- Greek Byzantine Art: Focuses on transcendence, with gold backgrounds, rigid postures, and symbolic gestures emphasizing divine authority.
- Slavic Byzantine Art: Uses vibrant colors, folk patterns, and expressive figures to create warmth and emotional depth.
- Albanian Byzantine Art: Blends symbolic precision with dynamic figures, muted colors, and emotional intensity, reflecting local resilience and cultural pride.

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A brief history of the Albanian artistic institutions

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Abstract

The journey of artistic institutions in 20th-century Albania was a dynamic experience of a special kind. Its understanding begins first with its placement in a temporal context, initially in Albania still part of the Ottoman Empire, and then with the efforts for genuine institutions, in the fragile structure of the Albanian monarchy. Thus, between the Saverio Polarolli School, the Drawing School and then the Artistic Lyceum and the Institute of Figurative Art, it seems that a relay has passed that is not necessarily linear, much less an institutional relay, which seems to be simply a cause and effect of the political and cultural dynamics that accompanied the country throughout its institutional phase. The history of Albanian artistic institutions is, in essence, a mirror of that strong dynamic that permeated a country under construction. It devel-oped in parallel in all possible formats, adapting to the reality it found. As such, this institutional history, with all its colors and curiosities, is nothing more than another history of the 20th century. It undoubtedly shattered all the wills, or ambitions, of a generation of intellectuals for an artistic atmosphere freed from political will, transforming itself in one way or another into an instrument for the implementation of power itself.

Keywords

Albanian history, art institutions, drawing school, artistic Lyceum, higher institute of arts

Introduction

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, visual art in Albania was as unfamiliar as the very profession of the painter itself. Concentrated mainly in cities and practiced by a handful of professionals or amateurs, it was understood more as an extension of craftsmen endowed with particular aesthetic skills than as a profession derived from formal training. In fact, during these decades, only a few artists—such as the Italian Pietro Marubbi (1834–1903) or the Shkodran Kolë Idromeno (1860–1939)—can be more accurately defined as all-around profes-sional craftsmen. They produced relatively few works of art, being more engaged as photo-graphers, painters, architects, or engineers. Even though Marubbi had graduated in painting from a lyceum, and Idromeno had carried with him a brief experience at the Academy of Arts in Venice, they primarily adapted to a market with almost no competition in any of these profes-sions. Initially painters and later photographers, they worked according to the demands of their clientele. Thus, their oeuvre should be understood not so much as driven by inspiration, but ra-ther by the concrete demands of a growing petty bourgeoisie of merchants, who sought for themselves and their cities a new, modern image.

Yet, within this reality, there also existed spaces where art could be learned. The first among them was established in Shkodër, under the name *Scuola d'Arte e Mestieri*, directed by the Ita-lian Saverio Polarolli. One of Idromeno's students, Simon Rrota (1887–1961), recalls that this elementary professional school was divided into three sections: mechanics, carpentry, and engraving (intaglio), as well as a painting section. The teachers were Gioacchino Perlin for mechanics, Angelini for carpentry, and Peppino Tommasini for engraving, while the painting sec-tion was taught by the director himself, Saverio Polarolli (Rrota, I write for myself.., pp. 91).
Despite these efforts, the meaning of art and the figure of the artist must be understood in their true value. It is enough to recall the shocking experience of the same Rrota, who remembered that only a few years earlier the profession of the artist was still deeply misunderstood, to the point where in the streets of the city "…people wrote… with their heads in scissors." According to him, this phenomenon was such a scandal that men from the neighborhood, frightened, would often threaten him with lawsuits "because, on his account, women were afraid to go out since he was drawing them" (Rrota).

Up until the early 1930s, only a handful of young people with artistic inclinations had received their first lessons in the studios of city artists or, when possible, attended secondary or higher institutions in neighboring countries. On a local level, there is evidence of a drawing course or-ganized by the Korçë painter Spiro Xega in his hometown, as well as mention of a "School of Fine Arts" directed by lawyer Duro Guri in the city of Gjirokastër.

The Society "Friends of Art" and the School of Drawing

The national institutionalization of artistic activity took fuller form only on May 10, 1931, with the creation of the society Friends of Art by Odhise Paskali and Qenan Meserea. With a proper statute and program, it was immediately supported by a new group of artists such as Vangjush Mio, Zef Kolombi, Abdurrahim Buza, and Lasgush Poradeci, as well as by the older generation of artists such as Idromeno and Xega. This artistic society, the first of its kind, was created

under the motto "…for the purpose of developing art in general, in all its manifestations," and was praised by the press of the time as an unexpected but successful initiative. Its formation represented the synthesis of the desire of many intellectuals who, from the local context, aspired to propose a new national spirit. With the creation of this society, the regional character that had until then defined Albanian art came to an end, while Tirana began to provide the conditions for the flourishing of an intellectual and progressive atmosphere.

Two weeks after its establishment, on May 24, 1931, the Friends of Art society organized the first national exhibition. Hosted at the "Kursal" café, it featured 15 of the most renowned artists of the time, including K. Idromeno, O. Paskali, V. Mio, Z. Kolombi, S. Rrota, N. Martini, S. Xega, and Q. Meserea. In the same month (May 1931) that the Friends of Art society opened its first national exhibition, the first Drawing Course of its kind was also launched in Tirana, initially directed by the painter Andrea Kushi and financed by the National Authority and the Committee of Arts. The event was received with great enthusiasm (Çika, A cradle of.., Miner-va,). About a year later, in January 1932, the School of Drawing was founded under the direction of the Italian professor Mario Ridola. In the press of the day, artists openly expressed their expectations, declaring that now "the Light of the Occident has begun to open our drowsy eyes… and the rising generation will cast many golden arrows toward the sky of our freedom" (Paskali, The creative poverty). After this, other drawing courses were ope-ned in district prefectures, and the most promising students were granted scholarships (Besa, 1932).

Moreover, in the years 1932–33, again in Tirana, at the "Harry T. Fultz" Technical Institute, under the direction of Zef Dajçi, a decoration course or class was opened, where several well-known artists such as Ibrahim Kodra and Andrea Mano received their first lessons (Zadeja, Dajçi, 1999).

The Artistic Lyceum

In the aftermath of the war, during the enthusiasm of the early years, the general atmosphere was somewhat more liberal, mainly as a result of the influence of Sejfulla Malëshova, Minister of Culture and one of the most prominent intellectuals of the time. Under his influence, in 1945, the first League of Albanian Writers (Lidhja e Shkrimtarëve Shqiptarë, LSHSH) was founded, along with the journal Bota e Re, which continued publication until 1946. After 1946, the tendency to control the artistic sphere, especially literature, gradually began to fall under state authority. Two years later (1948), state structures explicitly required that artistic activities should exclude individuals from the old social classes, who were to be replaced by elements of working-class or peasant origin. In line with this policy, the first Soviet specialists began to arrive, to assist their Albanian colleagues and to more clearly formulate the requirements that literature and art had to follow. Throughout this period, the arts were directed by the Ministry of Press, Propaganda, and Culture, based on the premise that "the People needed more bread, but also more culture and education" (Hoxha, 1977).

Investments in the visual arts soon followed. The first exhibition dates to April 1945, with the participation of 23 artists presenting 111 works (Kuqali). Presented as the first exhibition of the New Order, it clearly illustrates the aspirations of the new state for a dynamic artistic climate, the need to reflect the "glorious years" of the war, and the thematic orientation that would be further

consolidated in the following years. In addition to the succes-sive exhibitions, special attention was devoted to artistic educational institutions, such as the Artistic Lyceum "Jordan Misja," inaugurated in November 1946 with 12 students and 4 teachers, in the departments of painting, sculpture, and decoration. With teachers trained in so-me of the best Western academies, its students recall it as a serious school, with visible en-thusiasm, passionate teachers, and free from political influence (Kilica, 2010).

The Return of Students from Eastern Schools and the Higher Institute of Arts

"The Method of Socialist Realism," a term frequently encountered in every article published in the 1950s, had already acquired an improvised physiognomy in the early postwar years. Most artists became familiar with it through illustrations in Soviet magazines, trips they made to the USSR, or the few exhibitions brought to Tirana. Disoriented, they improvised based on examples of works favored in competitions, those debated extensively in the press at the time, or by partially "copying" classical examples of Soviet art.

Although they were clear about state directives, the difficulties they faced in materializing this method were significant. The Albanian state, aware of this, and due to the lack of specialists in many fields of art (and science), insisted on educating a selected generation of students who would be sent for higher studies in the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Within a decade, about 4,500 of them, chosen both for their quality and their social background and biography, were sent as "missionaries" to the "motherland" of proletarian communism and its satellite states. From the state's perspective, they would constitute a loyal arsenal both for implementing socialism in Albania and for properly materializing the state ideology. The first groups of graduates in the arts began returning in the second half of the 1950s, while a few, forced by the interruption of diplomatic relations, graduated from the Institute of Figurative Arts in Tirana. Artists such as Sali Shijaku, Kristaq Rama, Jakup Keraj, Guri Madhi, Zef Shoshi, Vilson Kilica, Kujtim Buza, Agim Zajmi, Llambi Blido, Rafael Dembo, Mumtaz Dhrami, Shaban Hadëri, and Thanas Papa studied in the USSR; Thoma Thomai, Hektor Dule, Ksenofon Dilo, Halim Beqiraj, and Llazar Myzeqari in Prague; Hysen Devolli, Perikli Çuli, Spiro Kristo, and Isuf Sulovari in Bucharest; Danish Jukniu and Shaban Hysa in Warsaw; Ab-dulla Cangonji in Sofia; and Aristotel Papa in Zagreb.

Their personal and institutional impact, even over a short period, proved successful. Kristaq Rama recalls that during his studies, Albanian students had a very good reputation at the academy, especially the painters. For example, the year Zef Shoshi arrived, a professor asked whe-re he was from, and when Zef replied that he was Albanian, the professor said: "Oh, surely a talent!" and did not examine his work at all. He assumed that Albania would always send talents like Sali and Guri (Kuka, Rama: 16). Regarding the form and structure of the studies, Kilica recalls that the program at this school was dominated by artistic subjects, which made up the majority of study hours, both daily and yearly. They had a cycle of theoretical-professional subjects related to painting, sculpture, and drawing, and a group of general formation subjects such as aesthetics and Marxist-Leninist philosophy, as well as the history of the Communist Party of the USSR. Some of the core subjects were painting, drawing, and composition—the three main professional subjects. Others, the theoretical ones, included anatomy, perspective, and art history, both world and Russian (Hoxha).

Many of the works created during their studies are still preserved in their families today. They show meticulous anatomical research, psychological investigation of the characters, and their placement in space, in the classic form of academic construction. Other evidence from their schooling years includes a series of realistic portraits, often distinguished by "Oriental colors" found on models provided by the school. Minor differences among them reflect the academic, cultural, and geographic diversity, as well as the student's personal talent and research. From the perspective of the totalitarian state, sending students to Eastern countries was an investment to ensure they could crystallize and implement the true physiognomy of the Socialist Realism method, as well as its foundational principles. Once returned, they were expected to fulfill their implied duty and bring to life an art for the masses—functional and free from "foreign mistakes and imitations."

In those early years away from the Eastern Bloc, some of them directed their contributions toward filling institutional gaps, such as establishing higher education institutions for art. Thus, on January 4, 1960, the Institute of Figurative Arts was inaugurated, which would later serve as the core of the Higher Institute of Arts (now the only institution where any domestic artist would graduate). Initially three-year programs in only two departments—painting and sculpture—the institute borrowed simplified programs from the Soviet school, while its first faculty members were themselves a product of this investment. While in the Artistic Lyceum at the be-ginning of the 1960s, many of the faculty were still former students of Western academies (Kaceli, Zajmi, Buza, Kodheli, etc.), in the Higher Institute, the supremacy of Eastern ideology was evident. The Institute was opened and directed by former students of Eastern countries, such as Vilson Kilica, Kristaq Rama, Mumtaz Dhrami, Guri Madhi, Shaban Hadëri, etc. From the state's viewpoint, these young professors (Kilica, the first director, was only 28) were equipped with the ideological structure and formal tools to clearly guide every student toward the physiognomy of Socialist Realism.

In 1961, due to the breakdown of diplomatic relations with the USSR, all Albanian students were forced to return home. The state had to take measures to survive the separation from the USSR, while the following decades would show that the state's insistence on the stylistic and aesthetic supremacy of the Eastern-educated generation would create what is now called Albanian Socialist Realism.

Structural Changes at the Higher Institute of Arts in the 1960s

The four-year system was set to begin in 1965. A year later, the merger of three higher art schools was realized: the State Conservatory of Tirana, the Higher Institute of Figurative Arts, and the Higher School of Actors "Aleksandër Moisiu." Thus, in 1966, the Higher Institute of Arts (HIA) was inaugurated, a name it would retain until 1990. The first director of HIA was Vilson Kilica.

The structural changes that followed in the Institute of Visual Arts concerned its didactic fomat, approach to mediums, and adaptation to the country's industrial development. These changes began in 1969 with the appointment of the head of the Faculty of Figurative Arts, painter Ksenofon Dilo, who, together with Danish Jukniu, had studied in Prague at a Bauhausstyle art school. Dilo proposed changes to this Russian-style school, which had focused solely on painting

and sculpture, by adding applied arts departments such as Textiles, Graphics, Monumental Painting, Ceramics, Glass, and Crystal (Hoxha).

Some of these mediums in the 1960s had been offered only as supplementary subjects, while their atelier-based format would become the core structure of the Faculty of Figurative Arts until the late 1980s. From the mid-1960s, the artistic teaching staff was enriched by new names such as Sali Shijaku, Danish Jukniu, Thoma Thomai, Hasan Nallbani, Hektor Dule, Perikli Puli, Pandi Mele, Zef Shoshi, Petro Kokushta, and Vasil Konomi. Theoretical subjects were taught by specialists such as Agim Duhanxhiu (art history), Petro Papadhopulli (anatomy), Maks Velo (descriptive perspective), and several craft specialists. This staff would continue to change sinificantly in the following years, both for artistic and theoretical subjects.

Important changes also affected the building itself. Initially, the Institute of Figurative Arts had been located on Kavaja Street, then moved to Elbasan Street at the Mihal Grameno School, before settling permanently in 1966 in the historic building at "Mother Teresa" Square. In the mid-1960s, more professional ateliers were established in new buildings designed by architect Mauricio Bega.

The first graduates of the three-year system at the Higher Institute of Figurative Arts in 1963–64 underwent a basic curriculum with a clear political orientation. The theoretical subjects included: History of the Communist Movement, History of the Albanian People, Art History, Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism, Aesthetics, Pedagogy, Political Economy, and the Russian Language. Meanwhile, the majority of study hours were dedicated to professional subjects, known as ateliers, which included Painting, Sculpture, Composition, Drawing, Perspective, Anatomy, and Technology. Supplementary subjects such as military education and physical education were also included.

From the academic year 1966–67, applied arts and new subjects were added, including tiles, watercolor, lettering styles, drama theory, literature, and more. The program culminated in a State Exam and the Defense of the Diploma.

In December 1969, the National Education Reform was approved, requiring a "revision of school documentation, plans, and curricula at all levels of education, bringing them toward extreme politicization." Henceforth, the entire educational and teaching process, programs, and subjects would be imbued with communist ideology. Within the framework of the reform, a new school structure was devised. Based on it, the education system would rely on three components: instruction, productive work, and physical and military education, all permeated by a Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation (ASHSH, 289).

Conclusion

The history of Albanian artistic institutions essentially reflects the intense dynamism that characterized a country in the process of nation-building. It developed simultaneously across all possible forms, adapting to the reality it encountered. Initially shaped by a group of foreign intellectuals, such as Polarolli and Ridola, and later by Albanian intellectuals educated in the West (Paskali and Kushi), the most significant changes occurred within its university-level

format, when the classical academic structure gave way to a clearly political orientation. This evolution was not the result of the personal will or artistic vision of the time's personalities but rather the unconditional subordination to the ideological line adopted by the country after World War II. As such, this institutional history, with all its nuances and curiosities, is nothing more than another chapter of the 20th century. It undeniably encompassed the ambitions and aspirations of a generation of intellectuals seeking an artistic environment free from political influence, yet ultimately transformed, in one way or another, into an instrument for implementing state power. Despite these constraints, professionals emerging from the Higher Institute of Arts—across all mediums, including visual arts, music, and performing arts—provided the highest possible level of artistic professionalism throughout the 1960s to 1980s. Although limited by a controlled pedagogical staff and censored literature, the institute contributed significantly to shaping a generation of artists who, upon the system's conclusion, had the opportunity to measure their "strengths" against the rest of the world. The successful careers of many of them can be attributed both to personal talent and to a maximized professional education. In one way or another, this constitutes the best way to define the contribution of an entire generation of educators and institutions, who, during an extremely challenging period, established the artistic physiognomy of the 20th century in Albania.

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Some beginnings of the presence of the naked body (artistic nudes) in the Albanian secular art

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Abstract

This paper probes into the initial emergence of the naked body (artistic nude) in the Albanian secular art. The initial nudes were partial and timid, finding expression in the medium of photography by the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The naked body appeared in the Albanian art as part of complete and in-depth academic explorations of the first Albanian students who attended the art academies across Europe in the 1910s and 1920s. An important initial historical moment was marked by the first nudes of Albanian painters in their postgraduate free creativity, and by the first Albanian model posing nude for the artist. This paper also seeks to answer questions about when the presence of the nude as part of art in outdoor spaces was first observed in Albania, and the exhibition of nude works to the general public. Given that this study aims to explore the initial moments of nude art in Albania, it will analyze the chronology of events and dimensions of the nude in the Albanian secular art, as an indication of the growing presence of the Western spirit in the Albanian urban culture starting from late 20th century and extending to the mid ‘40s of the 21st century.

Keywords

medium of photography, academic study, creative freedom, public exposure

Introduction

The history of the treatment of the nude in Albanian art can be said to begin with secular art of the late 19th century. This statement, however, should not contradict the well-known fact that depictions of the naked or partially covered human figures have been present in the art of ancient cultures produced in the territories of the Balkans inhabited by Illyrian populations.
In this ancient context, we know today of artifacts such as statuettes, figurines, vases, and statues representing the nude male or female body, dating back to:

- the late Neolithic period, copper age (4000–3000 BCE)
- the era of Hellenic colonies in southern Illyria (4th–2nd centuries BCE)
- the late Greek and subsequent Roman periods (1st–2nd centuries CE)

During the Byzantine period, artistic production was strictly canonized, dedicated entirely, both in iconography and iconology to Christian themes. This position rigorously prohibited representations of the human body in its physical, sensual form. Only partially nude depictions of the male body were allowed, most commonly of Christ or certain saints. However, these representations were conceived as metaphysical symbols, depicting the body as a nominal bearer of the soul, rather than the phenomenal body, i.e., the physical, biological, sensual body. In Albanian iconographic tradition, we encounter partial depictions of Christ's body, such as in the "Epitaph of Glavenica" (14th century), as well as in works by Onufri (16th century), David Selenica (17th century), and Kostandin Shpataraku (18th century), ect.

Development

The First Partial Nudes

In the second half of the 19th century, Albania (still under the waning Ottoman administration) received a "gift" from Western Europe: the medium of photography. Introduced by Italian photographer Pietro Marubbi and further developed by his successors Kel and Gegë Marubi, photography became an increasingly modernized technique and genre. It enabled the mimetic capture of multifaceted Albanian reality, starting with the first photographs dating to 1865.
Among the thousands of negatives produced by this century-long dynasty of photographers, a few rare examples depict partially exposed female figures. Two of these, created by Pjetër Marubi before 1900 (figs. 1, 2). Another later photograph by Kel Marubi at the beginning of the 20th century, is notable examples (fig. 3).

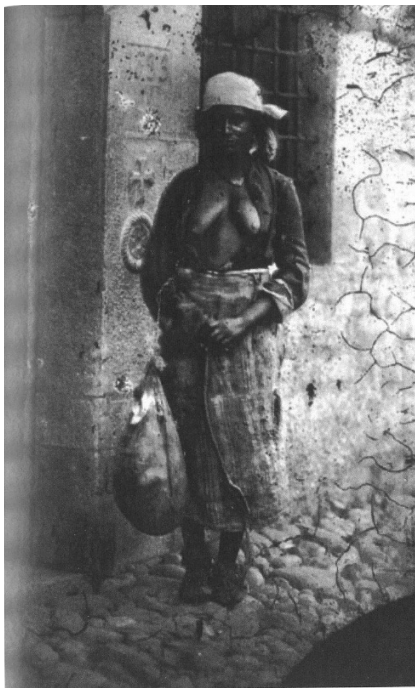


Figure 1, Pietro Marubbi, Çingije, end of the century XIX.



Figure 2, Pietro Marubbi, Beggar arriving in Shkodra, late 19th century.



Figure 3, Kel Marubi, Woman with thick coat, early 20th century.

The presence of the partially nude body also appears in the works of Kolë Idromeno, a multifaceted figure in Albanian art at the turn of last century 19th and the beginning of the 20th. In his process as a painter, Idromeno often referred to photography. Several photographs staged in his studio, used as studies for his paintings, such as "The false testimony" and "Irregular Marriage" of years 1892–1894, or the large composition "The two roads" of the 1896, Idromeno felt the need to make several trials for specific scenes of these compositions, by staging these situations in advance in his studio and photographing them. Among this typology of photographs are several examples depicting half-nude male figures, dramatically enacting the roles assigned by the artist (figs. 4, 5, 6).

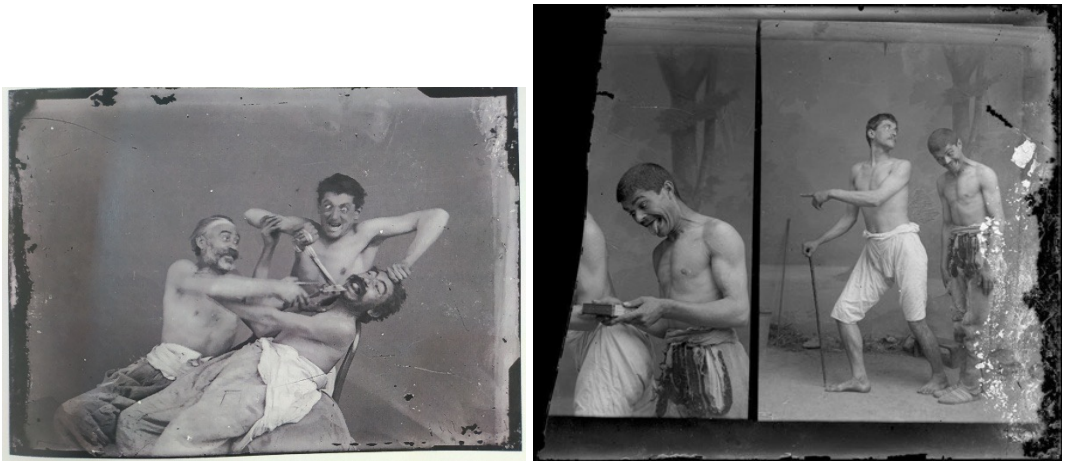


Figure 4 & 5, Kolë Idromeno, studio scenes, years 1892-1894, part of the work process for the compositional oil paintings The false testimony 1894 and The two roads 1896.



Figure 6, Kolë Idromeno, Swearing a lie, oil color, year 1892-1894.

According to Eleni Laperi's study "Kolë Idromeno, Founder of Albanian Realist Art", concludes, among other points, that based on the preliminary drawing Idromeno created for the painting The Inappropriate Agreement (also known as "The Irregular Marriage") (fig. 7), as well as the presence of numerous partially nude figures populating the composition of The Two Roads, it can be stated that he was the first Albanian realist painter to address the nude figure in his creative work (Laperi, 2022)."



Figure 7, Kolë Idromeno, preliminary drawing for the painting The Unsuitable Agreement (or otherwise "The Irregular Marriage") 1892-1894.

Other scholars in the field suggest that other artists of this period, the late 19th and early 20th centuries, may also have drawn and painted nudes; however, it is conceivable that these works have not survived to the present day or remain undiscovered (Shehu, 2000).

The First Complete Nudes – Academic Assignments in Western Art Academies

Much later than its Balkan neighbors, Albania broke away from Ottoman Eastern administration and gained its independence in 1912. An event that marks the beginning of modern Albanian history. During the years of Independence, an important turning point also occurred in Albanian culture. After centuries under eastern control and influence, painting in these years developed under the impact of cultivated western art… The first realist paintings, those that form the foundation of Albania's visual arts tradition, were created precisely under the radiating influence of the progressive European culture of the time. (Hudhri, 2018).

From the broader perspective of national civic, social, and cultural modernization, increasing importance was given during this period to the formation of a new Albanian intellectual elite educated in a Western European cultural milieu. Thus, from the 1910s through the early 1940s, a number of young Albanians, initially supported privately and later also with state assistance, had the good fortune to study in European, primarily Western, art academies. With their centuries-old academic traditions, these institutions offered well-structured programs of comprehensive artistic training. Among their core components was the study of the human figure in general and, in particular, the nude addressed through a wide range of classical and modern concepts and techniques. The school works of Albanian students who trained in these foreign academies clearly reflect these positions and distinctions, mainly formal and stylistic, in the artistic treatment of the human figure, clothed as well as nude.

One of the earliest Albanians to undertake formal art studies in Europe was Simon Rrota, who attended the Brera Art Lyceum in Milan from 1910 to 1914 (Varvarica, 2019). From this secondary-level art school in Milan (which Rrota himself, in his diary, refers to as an Academy) (Varvarica, 2019), there survive, among other works, three drawings (figs. 8, 9, 10) treating the male and female nude, now recognized as a fully legitimate artistic genre.

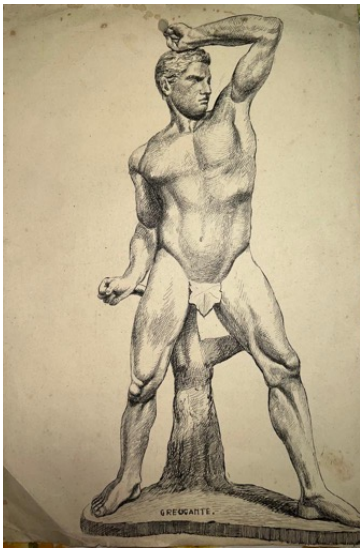


Figure 8, Simon Rrota, study for a Classical sculpture, pen drawing, made during art studies in Milan, 1910-1914.



Figure 9, Simon Rrota, sketch for a Female model, pencil drawing, made during art studies in Milan, 1910-1914.

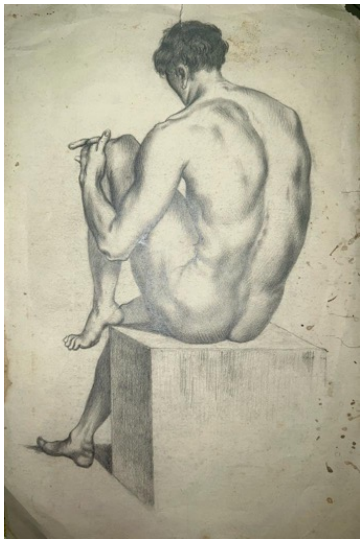


Figure 10, Simon Rrota, study: Male Nude with Back Turned, pencil drawing, school assignment completed during art studies in Milan, 1910-1914.

In the same year that the young Rrota returned home after his studies, another young Albanian, Vangjush Mio, began his own formative artistic journey, this time at the academic level. Mio enrolled in the National School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, which he attended for five years, from 1914 to 1919. The Mio family archive preserves numerous student works from this Romanian academic period, including a drawing of a standing female nude seen from the back (Varvarica, 2014) (fig. 11).

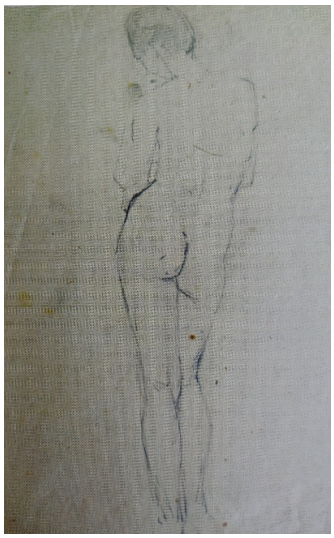


Figure 11, Vangjush Mio, Female nude with back, sketch made at the Bucharest Academy during the years 1914-1919.

After his initial Romanian training, Mio continued his artistic formation in Italy. From 1920 to 1924 he attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome and the Free School of the Nude. The School of the Nude functioned within the academy and existed specifically to train students in the study and refinement of the nude body. Critics regard Vangjush Mio as the most important Albanian realist impressionist landscape painter of the first half of the 20th century; he is also recognized as one of the first Albanian artists to produce nude drawings and paintings from live (foreign) models as part of the academic process in the schools where he studied abroad (fig. 12).



Figure 12, Vangjush Mio, Female nude, oil painting, school assignment at the Academy of Rome, 1923.

All of Mio's nudes were produced during his student years, especially at the Roman academy, … *where the spirit of the time increasingly leaned toward expressive freedom…. and open inquiry; working from the live model in drawing and painting created a bridge between classical tradition and modern sensibility by placing direct observation and the study of reality at the foundation of art*. (Damigella, 2022).

Mio's nude studies reflect precisely these programmatic and pedagogical approaches. As art historian Gëzim Qëndro observes (Qëndro, 2000) …*they aimed to form future painters through well-established classical principles: realistic drawing, convincing rendering of three-dimensional form, volumetric modeling across the pictorial surface, fundamental elements of composition, and disciplined training in faithful reproduction of the model before the student, ect*.

At the completion of his studies, Mio defended his diploma in 1924 with a painting whose subject is a female nude (fig. 13).



Figure 13, Vangjush Mio, Female nude, oil painting, Diploma work at the Academy of Rome, 1924.

The pictorial treatment of both figure and background is restrained in tonal range and coloration. In terms of figure-ground relationship, the artist adopts a traditional logic: the figure, bathed in a soft, warm light, stands out graphically against the dark background in which it is set.

Seventeen years later, in 1941, Kristina Koljaka, the first Albanian woman sculptor, who also studied at the Rome academy, defended her diploma with a female nude (fig. 14). By then,

however, the atmosphere had shifted, the academy appears to have absorbed the political-aesthetic influence of Fascist ideology regarding the representation of the "new man" in art. Emphasizing the importance accorded to nude studies there, she recalls: The nude was a major and essential assignment. … The human body, when male, had to present a strong, proud, far seeing psycho physical presence, fully muscled and powerful; when female, it was expected to embody a romantic, lyrical, idealized femininity. To achieve this, students trained every day … and any possibility of treating the figure under modernist interpretive tendencies was excluded. (Varvarica, 2002).

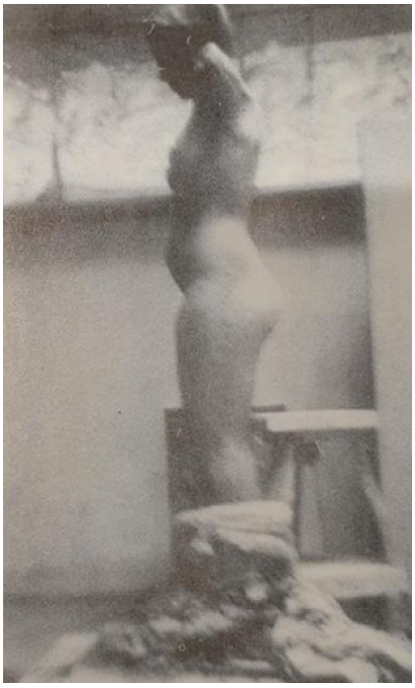


Figure 14. Kristina Koljaka, Female Nude, Diploma thesis at the Academy of Rome, 1941.

Although most of the student works created abroad by Albanian artists are removed from the more current aesthetic, philosophical, and moral concerns of European modernist practices of the time, they remain an important part of Albanian art history and constitute a valuable legacy. They mark the beginning of the cultivation of the realist nude genre by secular Albanian artists. They also stand as living testimony to their academic formation in Western countries, where they learned to live and create under the influence and intersection of diverse cultures.

The First Public Exhibition of Nude Works

Returning home after their studies confronted these young Albanian artists with stark contrasts. They came from Western Europe with cultural, artistic, and social experiences shaped at the heights of modernity. They returned full of dreams and passions, with a fresh and liberated outlook on the world, society, and morality, only to find their homeland a socially and culturally closed environment, still in its embryonic stages of emancipation.

Upon their return, these newly graduated students brought with them some of their academic

works. Among these collections were works featuring the nude, which they carefully hid and safeguarded in their homes. In some cases, however, such works, entrusted even to close acquaintances for safekeeping, were destroyed as a result of the prevailing backward mentality of The young man Abdurrahim, while returning to his homeland in the summer of 1933 after studying in Florence, he entrusted some school works, including several nudes, to the family of a friend in Gjakova for safekeeping for just a few days.

As his son recounts regarding this painful episode:
"My father could never have imagined that the nudes he had entrusted to his friend would be burned like garbage… set ablaze inside a home belonging to people who were warm and hospitable toward the artist himself, yet fearful and hostile toward his nude works. There was nothing personal in it, it was simply the mentality of the time." (Buza, 2023)
This unfortunate incident can be considered the first iconoclastic act against the artistic nude in Albania.

Despite their extensive knowledge and skills acquired in classical-realist academies, due to the mindset of the time, their creative experiences in Albania related to the representation of the nude body in art materialized only fragmentarily. As art historian Ermir Hoxha points out (Hoxha, 2014) …the history of the Albanian nude enters the 20th century hesitantly, always as a result of inherited moral codes, minimal educational levels, limited contact with the Western world, and all those other elements of backwardness that Albanian society endured up to the threshold of this new century."

After their studies, these artists devoted themselves seriously to artistic activity, continuing to explore a variety of themes and exhibiting their works in solo and group shows, both local and national. However, they generally did not present works featuring the nude to the broader public. Albanian society of that era did not accept the representation of the naked body in art; such depictions were considered "shameful," even "immoral."

Interpreting this fact, art scholar Gëzim Qëndro (Qëndro, 2006) raises a provocative question: Is it a coincidence that in the Albanian language the words trup ('body') and turp ('shame') are so similar? Without venturing into linguistic speculation - he continues - and lacking the proper scientific preparation to answer this question definitively (if such an answer exists), I would suffice by just saying that it suits the relationship that the Albanian patriarchal society had defined to the naked body.

This helps explain why, as far as is currently known, among all the exhibitions organized in Albania up to 1944, the nude appears on display only once. This was the June 1942 Exhibition, known as the "First National Biennial Competition for Painting, Sculpture, and Drawing." The event received extensive coverage in the press of the time, in Rivista d'Albania, Vatra Shqiptare, Shkëndija, Tempo-Koha, and especially in the newspaper Tomorri (M.M., 1942; Cilka, 1942), which published several articles about it.

The magazine Tempo/Koha (Koha, 1942) featured the exhibition with photographs—two of great importance, as they are the only images found that visually document the display of three nude works (fig. 15).



Figure 15, View from the exhibition hall of the Two-year national competition for painting, sculpture and drawing, opened in the halls of the Tirana Industrial Vocational School, 1942. Illustrative photo of the article Exhibition of Albanian artists in Tirana, TEMPO/KOHA magazine, no. 22, July 1942.

One was a painting by the Albanian artist from Ulcinj, Filip Vuçkoviq. The other two were sculptures. One of these sculptures was realized by Janaq Paço, depicting a standing female figure frontally posed, with one arm raised as if holding or grasping an apple (fig. 16). While the other sculpture work belongs to the artist from Kruja, Sabri Tuçi. It is a female torso by Sabri Tuçi, brought from Rome, where the sculptor was then a student (fig. 17).

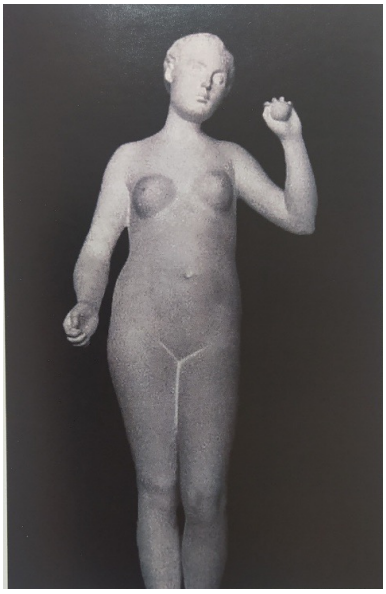


Figure 16, Janaq Paço. Naked, work exhibited at the Two-year national competition for painting, sculpture and drawing, Tirana 1942.

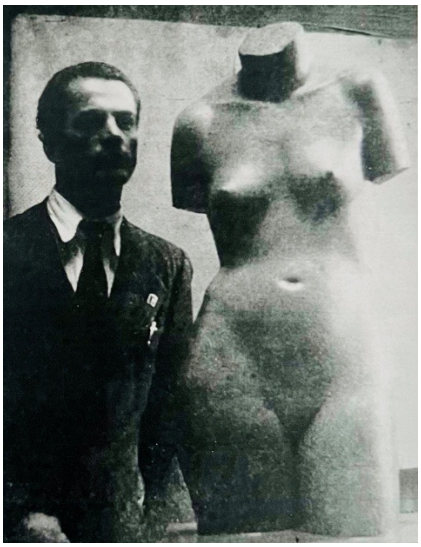


Figure 17. Sabri Tuçi, Female torso, school assignment at the Academy of Rome, 1941. Work exhibited at the Two-year national competition for painting, sculpture and drawing, Tirana 1942.

This exhibition-competition, evidently of considerable importance, was accompanied by the publication of a catalog under the auspices of the Ministries of Education and Popular Culture. Noting this document, it makes us how they are titled works with a nude subject. The works by Vuçkoviq and Paço are titled Lakuriq ("Nude"), while Tuçi's piece is listed as Studim torsoje ("Torso Study") (Katalogu, 1942). The reasons for this discrepancy are unclear, though it is interesting to note the attempt to translate the genre of the nude into Albanian as lakuriq.

Regarding the 1942 National Competition, the press coverage abounds with information, commentary, praise, suggestions, observations, and criticism. Yet the presence of works featuring the nude and the awarding of prizes to two of them, passed entirely without remark, as if perfectly ordinary. This leaves us in doubt as to whether this was indeed the first (and perhaps the last) public presentation of works with nude subjects, or, conversely, whether such occurrences were relatively normal in exhibitions organized at that time?!

The First Nude Artwork Based on an Albanian Female Model

Leaving aside the debatable conclusion regarding the first public presentation of the nude in Albania in 1942, we now turn to another "first" concerning the Albanian nude. This time it relates to the first nude artwork created as part of an artist's post-academic free practice, using an Albanian woman as the model.

Based on facts revealed after the 1990s, the earliest known nude figure produced in Albania by an artist, with an Albanian female model, is considered to be Meleke by Abdurrahim Buza, created in 1935 (fig. 18).

Regarding this work and its history, Buza's son, Kujtim Buza, recounts (Buza, 2023):
At home, there was a nearly life-sized painting of a nude woman, which I later learned was the figure of my mother, Lekë (Meleke), painted by my father in 1935, only a short time after they were married… The painting had been carefully cut into four pieces that were stacked on top of each other…

In an intimate conversation, my father told me that the nude was the painter's wife (his wife), in other words, my mother… He was pleased when I told him that I would reassemble the four pieces and exhibit the nude painting in the studio.

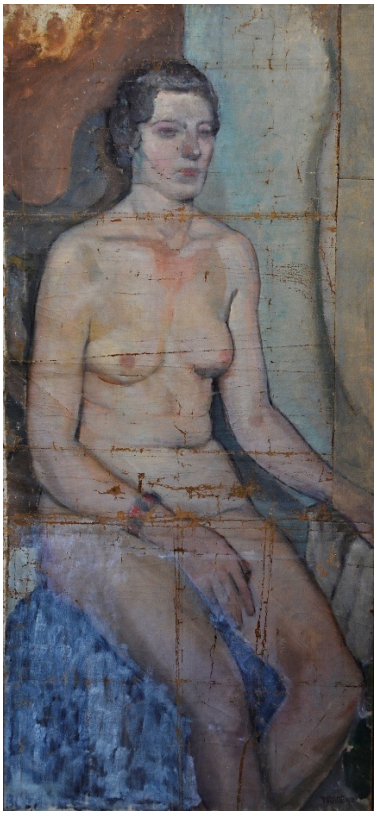


Figure 18, Abdurrahim Buza, Meleke, the author's wife, oil paint, 1935.

Among the considerable number of Albanian artists who, after completing their studies, returned to Albania and developed their creative activity there during the period 1914–1944, this appears to be the only such case. This cannot be stated with absolute certainty, since even this work remained completely unknown for decades, hidden away in the family.

The Nude as a Work of Art in Public Space

The earliest documented introduction of an artwork of this typology featuring the nude within a public space in Albania can be traced to 1928. This instance refers to a monumental female figure carved in marble by the Italian sculptor Gianni Remuzzi, positioned, according to architect Vittorio Morpurgo's design, at the very apex of the frontal façade of the imposing National Commercial Bank building in Durrës (Giusti, 2006).

Subsequent examples in which the nude figure appears in the realm of public art in Albania are likewise associated with the presence of Fascist Italy and were executed by Italian artists. Among these are:

- Several bas-reliefs created by the Roman sculptor Alfredo Biagini, integrated into the recessed façade of the Bank of Albania building in Tirana in 1938 (Giusti, 2006, p. 110).
- A large-scale relief installed in 1940 on the main façade of the Maternity Hospital building in Tirana, authored by the renowned Italian sculptor Giuseppe Gronchi (Giusti, 2006).

Similarly, the first publicly displayed nude created by an Albanian artist belongs to this same historical context of Italian influence in Albanian art and architecture. The work in question is a sculptural fountain situated in the gardens of the Royal Palace in Tirana. Its author, Odhise Paskali, conceived this complex composition with a dominant female nude figure, accompanied by two angels. The work, titled Fertility, was completed in 1940. The central figure demonstrates a high degree of technical mastery, modeled in a stylistic synthesis characteristic of the period an italianate amalgam of realism, classicism, and deco (fig. 19).



Figure 19, Odhise Paskali, Fertility, bronx, part of a water basin in the courtyard of the Tirana Royal Palace, 1940.

Conclusion

Although most of the works by Albanian artists who studied in Western art academies lack the aesthetic, philosophical, and moral imperatives characteristic of the latest European modernist approaches and practices of the time, they remain an important part of Albanian art history and represent a valuable legacy. They mark the beginning of the cultivation of the realist nude genre by secular Albanian authors. Furthermore, they constitute a reflection of their Western-oriented cultural emancipation, even though the academic experience in cultivating the artistic nude did not find suitable ground for further development upon their return to the homeland.
Other artists of the period under consideration (from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century) may also have addressed the subject of the nude; however, it is highly likely that such works have not survived to the present day or remain undiscovered. Consequently, the study of the nude in Albanian art remains an open and ongoing field of inquiry.

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Art in Architecture: Reclaiming Spiritual Inquiry for Sustainable Practices

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Abstract

Architectural practice, once rooted in the arts, has increasingly become a technical discipline, prioritizing material aspects, technical features, aesthetics and functionality. This study argues that the reconnection of architecture with its artistic foundations can help it to move beyond mere material aesthetics or functional innovation, and to promote a transformative academic and practical shift towards ecological and community-centered design. At the heart of our research lies the question: How can architectural education be redefined to include art as a spiritual dimension, to promote social and environmental sensitivity, and thus truly sustainable practices? Using a multilayered methodology, we employ historical and theoretical analysis to trace the evolution of architecture from a sacred art to a technical discipline, highlighting moments when spirituality emerged in response to social and ethical needs. We are also conducting qualitative case studies, examining how architecture curricula integrate artistic inquiry and assessing its impact on the discipline. In this first phase, we outline our research roadmap and present preliminary findings, identifying areas where technical and aesthetic priorities dominate, while also highlighting the latent potential in case studies that have successfully integrated art, spirituality and sustainability. These examples illustrate how spiritual dimensions can inform ethical design practices and curricular frameworks. This ongoing research argues that architecture can transcend contemporary paradigms and promote social and environmental awareness and speculates that reclaiming architecture's artistic-spiritual foundations is crucial to embedding sustainability as an ethical practice, rather than a material issue reflected in technological principles that are too often disguised marketing strategies rather than real pathways to a sustainable future. By redefining the social role of architecture through collaborative, incremental change, we hope this research will help lay the groundwork for curriculum reform and design methodologies that balance aesthetic, functional and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords

art in architecture, artistic inquiry in architecture, austainability in architecture, architectural education, spiritual inquiry in architecture

Introduction

Human beings are born with two inseparable components: body and spirit. From infancy, we are attuned to the emotional, atmospheric, and spiritual dimensions of the world. The spaces we inhabit (natural or human-made) deeply shape our well-being. Architecture, therefore, is never neutral; it communicates and affects the soul.

Profound emotional responses to sacred architecture are documented. Some visitors to holy sites, like the Kaaba in Mecca report involuntary weeping. Similarly, architecture students at the Pantheon have been moved to tears by its spatial qualities (Bermúdez, 2022). These examples affirm our spiritual nature and architecture's power to nourish—or disturb—our inner lives.
The spiritual dimension in architecture is not a new concern. Sacred architecture has long shaped cultural identity. Norberg-Schulz (1980) stressed architecture's role in expressing genius loci, or spirit of place. (Pallasmaa, 2000) described architecture as a medium revealing "how the world touches us." From Vitruvius to Le Corbusier, many emphasized architecture's capacity to endure, function, and uplift. Others, like Omer (2009) and Saoud (2013), advocate for spiritually and socially attuned spaces, while Read (1943) saw education and art as preserving the unity of consciousness and fostering social harmony.

Yet in recent decades, architectural education has become technocratic and detached from meaning. As Neri (2021) notes, architectural theory has long been suspended between expression and technical skill, between art and craft, but utilitarian and instrumental demands have historically prevented its full integration among the liberal arts, while Tobolczyk (2020) laments the loss of organic architectural understanding. Despite contributions from scholars like Pallasmaa, Zumthor, Fathy, El-Wakil, Norberg-Schulz, Nasr, Grimm, and others, spirituality remains peripheral in architectural education.

Few universities embrace a sacred or contemplative approach Notable exceptions include the Catholic University of America (Bermúdez, 2022) and the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), where spiritual values shape architectural education. Yet globally, technical, functional, and marketable aesthetic priorities dominate. Although architecture has historically embodied spiritual meaning, today it is often reduced to technical solutions and market logic. From the educator's perspective, as knowledge-givers and mentors, architects have a responsibility that goes far beyond technical instructions: to foster ethical awareness and inspire students to design with ecological, cultural, and spiritual sensitivity. In this light, the paper calls for the reintegration of spiritual inquiry into architectural education as a foundation for ethical, fully sustainable, and human-centered design. The main question is: how can architectural education be redefined to include art as a spiritual dimension and promote a socially and environmentally sensitive practice?

To explore this, the study adopts a mixed-method approach: a review of architectural history and theory alongside a comparative study of how art, ethics, and sustainability are taught in diverse contexts. Methods include curriculum analysis, interviews, and surveys. The findings aim to clarify how spirituality—expressed through the artistic values of architecture—can serve as a pedagogical tool for ethical design and guide curricular reform.

Literature Review

Throughout modern history, the concept of architecture has been divided between viewing it as a sacred art and defining it as a technical discipline, with artistic traits, dedicated to building dwellings. This division has widened over time, and we argue, along with many other scholars, that this split may be at the root of the discipline's current sustainability crisis.

From Vitruvius to Boullée, Ruskin, Le Corbusier, and many others over time architectural theory has often emphasized that building is not just a utilitarian act, but also a fundamentally expressive, moral and spiritual one (Boullée, 1976; Le Corbusier, 1931; Ruskin, 1903).

Nonetheless, despite acknowledging that "the architect is ultimately concerned with the cultural, spiritual and humane worth of their work, whereas the builder is primarily concerned with its physical structure" (McClintock & McClintock, 1968), modern architectural education and practice often prioritise technical performance and visual aesthetics, thereby marginalising the deeper ethical and spiritual implications of the artistic foundations of the discipline of architecture.

The Spiritual and Ethical Components of the Artistic Foundations of Architecture

As Adolf Loos masterfully expressed, "If we were to come across a mound in the woods that was six feet long and three feet wide, with soil piled up in the shape of a pyramid, a sombre mood would come over us, and a voice inside us would say: 'Someone is buried here'. That is architecture" (Loos, 1982, p. 84). This recognition reveals the link between architecture and its spiritual and ethical origins. These roots are also evident in prehistoric and Neolithic structures, where myth, ritual, and form were inseparable. Studies of the ontogenesis of architecture describe sacred enclosures and monumentalised huts that connected human settlements to the cosmos and the land (Giedion, 1981; Tobolczyk, 2016, 2020). From Göbekli Tepe to Uruk and on to Egyptian and Greek architecture, space was not merely shaped; it was consecrated (Giedion, 1981). The sacramental role of architecture has largely been lost in the modern era, as has the understanding of architecture as a cultural, ethical, and spiritual artistic act.

Spirituality, in this context, refers to that which pertains to the spirit or soul, as opposed to the material or physical realm (Ali Sina, 2012). Broadly understood, spirituality encompasses a relationship that connects individuals to a greater entity, often through belief, ritual, ethics, and learning, fostering meaning and purpose. In an Islamic context, spirituality is defined as the presence of a relationship with God that influences a person's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness to others and the natural world (Naṣr, 1987). More generally, spirituality is also commonly associated with one's search for meaning and purpose in life, contributing positively to psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Sawatzky et al., 2005). In this text, we mainly refer to spirituality as a "third axis" (vertical axis) of the human experience, distinct from the social proximity and social hierarchy dimensions, aiming for transcendence beyond material or social concerns. It involves virtuous actions elevating individuals towards the sacred, while selfish or degrading acts pull them downward. Across cultures, people intuitively perceive certain places, actions, and objects as either pure and uplifting or corrupting and wrong, even regardless of the belief in a God (Haidt, 2006).

The modernist rejection of historical continuity often resulted in the dismissal of the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of architecture. As Frampton (1995) and Stroik (1997) point out, the focus shifted towards technological innovation and formal abstraction. Although architects such as Gaudí, Wright, Le Corbusier, Kahn, and the members of Team X continued to incorporate ethical considerations and spirituality into their work, these were generally treated as personal or idiosyncratic expressions rather than as part of a systematic disciplinary framework.

Nonetheless, counter currents persist. Norberg-Schulz (1980) and Pallasmaa (2000, 2012) reintroduced phenomenology into architectural discourse by emphasizing genius loci, atmosphere, and embodied experience as bridges between perception and spirit. They advocate for reconnecting architecture with nature and human relationships through materiality, mystery, and context, linking spiritual awareness to sustainability. Frampton's critical regionalism complements these ideas, arguing that modern architecture, shaped by technological optimization, lacks significant urban form. Rooted in Enlightenment thought, he critiques the dominance of instrumental reason over cultural expression, where utility replaces meaning, resulting in "meaninglessness" (Frampton, 1995).

Since Kant (2008), philosophers have explored the deep connection between aesthetics and ethics, with Peirce (1931) asserting that ethics must draw on aesthetics to define the highest good. Ricoeur viewed architecture as both moral and perceptual (in Frampton, 1995) while Nathan Rogers accentuated that architecture must go beyond utility and form to synthesize beauty and meaning (in Neri, 2021). As Read observed, "The doctrines and institutions of educational practice have always been dependent on current philosophies" (Read, 1943), and this extends to architectural pedagogy too.

Architectural Education: Historical Perspectives

Historically, architectural education was grounded in sacred, symbolic, and experiential traditions. Vitruvius' triad—firmitas, utilitas, and venustas—embodied a balance of structure, function, and beauty, often linked to philosophical or divine ideals (Vitruvius Pollio, 1990). In Europe, education transitioned from medieval guilds to formal institutions, with Islamic, Gothic, and Renaissance traditions stressing the role of geometry, philosophy, and metaphysical order alongside technical skill. Architects were viewed as cultural stewards, expressing ethical and cosmic principles through form. However, modern education has increasingly embraced rationalism, sidelining spirituality in favor of a secular, materialist perspective.

Early knowledge was preserved by Masonic and religious guilds that emphasized mastery and secrecy. Renaissance humanism challenged these traditions, introducing intellectual inquiry and paving the way for the first academies. The Enlightenment further separated religion and state, disconnecting intellectual pursuits from inner spiritual life. In contrast, Islamic educational philosophy retains a holistic approach that integrates intellectual, moral, and social development. Education is seen as the ethical and spiritual cultivation of the individual within a community, guiding learners toward emotional, intellectual, and spiritual wholeness ((Binti Fatah Yasin & Shah Jani, 2013).

The founding of the Académie d'Architecture in Paris (1671) marked the institutionalization

of architectural education, grounded in Enlightenment rationalism. This tradition culminated in the École des Beaux-Arts, whose emphasis on classical form and artistic synthesis shaped education for centuries. However, by the mid-20th century, the model was criticized for its conservatism and dismantled following the student uprisings of May 1968 (Griffin, 2020).

On the other side, American architectural education, shaped by industrial capitalism and professional ambition, also transitioned from apprenticeships to a more formal approach. In the 19th century, institutions such as MIT (1865), the University of Illinois (1868) and Columbia University (1754) adopted German polytechnic and French Beaux-Arts models to provide formal architecture education. However, conflicting ideologies (craft versus science, individual creativity versus institutional norms) also influenced its development. Figures such as Sullivan and Wright promoted self-education, while Bauhaus pedagogy, which arrived in the 1930s, reoriented curricula around interdisciplinarity and material experimentation. Nevertheless, this soon defined another stylistic orthodoxy (Ockman et al., 2012). Despite its diversity, American education remained exclusionary and excessively technical, marginalising artistic, cultural, spiritual and ecological issues.

Institutions such as the Royal College of Art (RCA), the Architectural Association (AA), and Cornell University's College of Architecture, Art, and Planning promote artistic research and interdisciplinary learning. However, none explicitly use art as a tool for spiritual inquiry aimed at reorienting architecture toward holistic sustainability (Architecture, 2025; Department of Architecture | Cornell AAP, 2025). While their curricula engage ethical and environmental concerns through critical design and studio-based experimentation, sustainability is typically framed as a technical or theoretical issue, rather than one rooted in spiritually informed practice. In line with Read's definition, architectural education is framed as an artistic, integrative process. "A man who can make such things well is a well-educated man. If he can make good sounds, he is a good speaker, a good musician, a good poet; if he can make good images, he is a good painter or sculptor; if good movements, a good dancer or labourer; if good tools or utensils, a good craftsman. All faculties of thought, logic, memory, sensibility, and intellect are involved in such processes, and no aspect of education is excluded. They are all processes that involve art, for art is nothing but the good making of sounds, images, etc. The aim of education is therefore the creation of artists, of people efficient in the various modes of expression" (Read, 1943).

Modern architectural curricula have gradually abandoned their holistic roots. Twentieth-century modernism's focus on functionalism and technological progress sidelined spiritual and philosophical inquiry, as architecture aligned more closely with engineering and scientific models. This shift prioritized technical problem-solving over phenomenology, symbolism, and the designer's inner life. Critics like Pallasmaa (2012) and Silber (2007) argue that neglecting sensory and spiritual dimensions weakens architecture's capacity to foster meaningful spaces. The neoliberal university model has reinforced this trend, emphasizing market-driven outcomes over cultural, ethical, and existential values—resulting in visually refined yet spiritually disengaged designs and curricula that marginalize philosophy, ethics, and the arts.

Western educational theorists like John Dewey (1997) and Parker Palmer (2007) highlight the social and ethical nature of education, stressing critical reflection and participatory learning.

They believe that authentic education arises from the teacher's integrity and identity, connecting students' inner lives with their studies. Within this framework, the architect carries a profound educational responsibility, not only through the built work but also through ethical presence, reflective practice, and human values cultivation throughout the design process.

Recent Scholarship: Reclaiming Spiritual Inquiry

As De Botton (2007) writes, belief in architecture's significance rests on the notion that "we are, for better or worse, different people in different places," and that built space can help reveal who we might become. Historically, sacred traditions saw architecture as morally instructive, cultivating kindness and humility through beauty.

Recent scholarship affirms that architecture influences both environment and spiritual-ethical sensibilities. While Bermúdez (2022) and Crosbie note growing interest in spiritual inquiry, yet Crosbie warns it is often reduced to aesthetics rather than ethical substance. Professionalism has shifted the field toward materialism and metrics, sidelining values like compassion, impermanence, and interconnectedness (Barrie et al., 2015).

Ardalan (in Barrie et al., 2015) observes, the spiritual dimension has long inspired generations of architects and artists in their aesthetic quest. Truly sustainable design begins with a "culturally attuned, cosmic awareness" of human existence on both a phenomenal and spiritual level. This calls for a shift in pedagogy: away from a concept of architecture based on smartness or greenwashing, but toward architecture seen as an artistic quest aimed to a Socratic rebalancing of what beautiful and harmonious (kalos) with what is wise, and morally virtuous (agathos).

Sustainability, therefore, should not be viewed solely as a technical goal (e.g. Brundtland Report 1987), but as a principle embedded in the very roots of human life. Spirituality, in this sense, represents a mode of existential inquiry that engages questions of purpose, care, and meaning. Only within this expanded intellectual and ethical framework can a new pedagogy of architecture truly emerge.

Vesely (2004) and Harries (1998) highlight a crisis in architecture caused by the loss of intuitive and ethical grounding, warning that without it, architecture becomes mere spectacle. Both call for education that restores moral and metaphysical depth. Similar concerns arise in the arts: Vilchis Esquivel (2015) critiques positivism's dominance, urging deeper philosophical reflection, while Klinke (2014) emphasizes art's ontological role in expressing truths beyond language.

Within this framework, spiritual inquiry becomes essential, especially in postcolonial and multicultural contexts. Akpang's (2020) contextual epistemology situates artistic knowledge within lived, cultural, and affective experiences, challenging dominant rationalist paradigms that often fail to reflect social complexity and embodied life. Spirituality, far from being esoteric, emerges as a means of cultivating ethical and critical awareness. Boujaoudeh Khoury (2021) underscores that every design choice, spatial, material, or social, carries ethical weight, calling for architects to be reimagined as moral agents mediating between community, ecology, and built form. This perspective resonates with Ibn Khaldūn's aesthetics, where beauty itself

is epistemic, as a way of approaching truth through harmony, proportion, and balance (Lelli, 2020). In this view, aesthetics is not mere decoration but a foundation of knowledge and ethical formation.

Methodology

This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design comprising three phases. First, a systematic literature review examines the historical and theoretical evolution of architecture from sacred art to a technical discipline, generating a conceptual framework that integrates art, ethics, spirituality, and sustainability. Second, a multi-case qualitative study across ten leading universities in sustainable design education (from Europe, North America, Oceania, and Asia) gathers data from curricula, strategic documents, interviews, and focus groups or studio observations. Analysis is guided by five evaluative dimensions—curriculum content, studio culture, sustainability approach, pedagogical method, and institutional philosophy—each rated on a 5-point Likert scale to identify best practices and gaps. Finally, cross-case synthesis, matrix evaluation, and expert workshops inform a refined pedagogical framework and propose design guidelines for ethically grounded, sustainable architectural education.



Diagram 1: Sequential structure of the research.

Findings and Discussion

Though currently conceptual, this research offers critical insights into reframing architectural education through historical, philosophical, and pedagogical lenses.
The literature reveals a clear neglect of spiritual inquiry in contemporary curricula and underscores the need to restore architecture's role as a moral and meaningful practice. Rather than treating sustainability as a purely technical goal, a renewed pedagogy should foster ethical reflection, spiritual awareness, interdisciplinary integration, and studio cultures rooted in identity and introspection. Sustainability should be treated as a moral, not merely technical, concern.

These directions align with educators like Bermudez (2019), Harries (1998), and Palmer (2007), who stress the importance of self-enrichment in design education.
The next phase will empirically examine ten universities to assess how spiritual, ethical, and aesthetic values are addressed—ultimately informing curriculum reform toward a more human-centered architectural education.

Conclusion

This study has argued for the reintegration of art as spiritual inquiry into architectural education, positioning it as a foundation for ethical, environmental, and social sustainability. Our historical and theoretical analysis traced the evolution of architecture from its sacred

origins to a contemporary technocratic paradigm, highlighting how this shift has often reduced the discipline to technical problem-solving and aesthetic formalism, detaching it from deeper cultural and spiritual meaning.

The literature review underscores the enduring relevance of spirituality in architecture as a framework for fostering ethical awareness, social responsibility, and ecological sensitivity. Yet, our findings reveal that contemporary architectural education continues to marginalize these dimensions, prioritizing material and technical outcomes over holistic, transformative practices. To advance this research, our proposed methodology, merging theoretical inquiry with case study analysis, aims to identify pathways for curricular reform. By investigating institutions worldwide, we seek to develop a framework that redefines sustainability as a spiritual and cultural imperative, rooted in the architect's ethical and societal role.

Ultimately, this paper defines a research field and, more importantly, calls for a paradigm shift that reconnects architecture with its artistic and spiritual foundations. It envisions nurturing designers who are self-reflective, interdisciplinary, and ethically grounded. Such an approach transcends market-driven functionality, fostering built environments that inspire, heal, and sustain both individuals and communities. This is an invitation to educators, practitioners, and students to reimagine architecture as a transformative force for a more sustainable and spiritually attuned future.

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Taboos and Voyeurism as (Auto) Censorship in the representation of female body in Albanian Visual Arts

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Abstract

The process of the semanticization of the female body throughout history served as the foundation for the present study. Through this article, we want to study the aesthetic status of the female body in the tradition of Albanian arts (with particular emphasis on figurative arts). Our focus is also on theoretical analyses and the historical, ideological, social, and cultural implications faced by both artists and Albanian scholars when it comes to the representation of the female body. Whether as a thematic object or as an artistic subject. The experiences and practices from global art theory and history, we will primarily focus on Albanian art, which (judged from feminist and poststructuralist approaches or achivements) restricts the female body and transforms it into an artistic sexual motif. In Albanian art, this has occurred in the past and continues to happen today. Thus, even after the emergence of performance art in the second half of the 20th century, a true "liberation" of the female body from the semiotic burden of artistic culture and the provincial mentality of the Albanian people has not been achieved even today. Aware that the female body continues to remain one of the most controversial themes in visual arts that is sparking intense debates often linked to social taboos, objectification, and voyeurism. We will attempt to deconstruct the stereotypes and regressive norms of Albanian "societies." In these societies, shaped by layered and distorted subcultural elements, marked by immorality and a multiplicity of moral codes, the presence of various religious and ideological sectarianisms also gives rise to ambiguities within the artistic domain. Furthermore, all these unfavorable components nurture and sustain selfcensorship, both during the creative process and in theoretical and scientific discourse. Through concrete examples from global art, but primarily from the works of Albanian artists, we will construct the narrative of this discourse. The one that is not based solely on the norms of sexism, but also on the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the female body, whether as a theme or as an artistic motif. This is an immediate necessity for Albanian art, as the experience of a visual artwork is always dependent on a multitude of scholarly assumptions about art.

Keywords

art, taboos, sexism, female, obstacles, cultural discussions

Introduction

The naked body in art is often considered a "risky endeavor," yet despite this, many artists continue to admire the human form and they strive to transform it into fine art. However, when it comes to the nude female figure, whether in the past or today remains an artistically sensitive subject, as nudity in art is treated as a highly specific and frequently debated motif. Although the title signals is an exploration of the female body in visual arts—and since this notion encompasses all forms of art, in this paper, we will focus solely on the figurative arts, with particular emphasis on the representation of the female nude in Albanian art. Although the topic we are addressing is intended to explore taboos and voyeurism as (self) censorship in the representation of the female body in Albanian visual arts, we will first present examples of the challenges that the nude as an artistic motif has faced throughout the history of world art. The portrayal of the nude female figure began with the very origins of art that is starting from prehistory to the present day, which is including the famous Paleolithic "Venuses" all the way to contemporary performance art.

Historically, nudity has marked important moments in the history of art, as seen in the fate of "Adam and Eve," which remains one of the most discussed visualized themes. Similar reactions were provoked by the "Venuses" during the Renaissance. In the Romantic era, Francisco Goya shocked the art world with his nude "The Nude Maja," whose subject met a tragic fate that is signaling a new dimension for nudity in European art on that time.

Édouard Manet faced a similar reaction with his now famous painting Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe. The work shocked the public, but not just because it portrayed a nude woman casually seated beside two fully clothed men, but also because of the woman's bold, challenging look that seemed to challenge the viewer directly.

Much like in the past, sexuality remains a topic that is rarely spoken about openly. It often carries the weight of taboo shaped by the environment, traditions, cultural norms, and deep-rooted aspects of human behavior. For a society grounded in its principles, facing these taboos requires both honesty and courage. If they are ignored or left unchallenged, taboos can turn into barriers that hold back progress especially in fields like the visual arts, where freedom of expression is essential.

Over time, taboos surrounding nudity can begin to blur into forms of voyeurism. While voyeurism is clinically defined as a psychological disorder, in this context we view it as a deviant artistic response shaped by social boundaries. Both taboo and voyeurism often pave the way to censorship, one that eventually evolves into self-censorship. Sadly, this pattern has persisted throughout history and continues to pose a risk in the world of art. It affects not only the creators but also the audience, who frequently ignore, misunderstand, or even demonize the artistic depiction of the nude human body, whether female or male.

Taboo in art reveals itself in two important dimensions. First, within the artwork itself, the artist may break societal taboos by engaging with themes considered forbidden from inviting dialogue, questioning norms, and pushing the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable. Second, art also confronts the audience's perception of taboo. Even when art explores prohibited or

sensitive topics, it holds the power to shift public perception, opening a path toward reflection, empathy, and cultural change. In this transformative process, the female voice in art plays a crucial role, despite historically being excluded from dominant artistic narratives. Women artists have long strived to assert their presence is not only as subjects within art but as creators shaping it. Through their creativity, they have consistently challenged gender inequality, sexism, and the social expectations placed on women. Their work often reflects a struggle between personal identity and societal demands, especially those related to appearance, conformity, and traditional roles. Throughout art history, the female body has predominantly been portrayed through the lens of the male gaze, often reduced to an object of desire. In contrast, women artists have reclaimed that image offering depictions of their own bodies through their own experiences and perspectives. This shift has allowed for more authentic and nuanced portrayals of femininity, identity, and embodiment. In recent years, this effort has intensified. Activists and female artists have begun to actively challenge lingering taboos and voyeuristic portrayals by creating art that presents the female body in bold, complex, and empowering ways. Their goal is not only to dismantle the culture of sexualization and objectification but also to carve out a space where women can fully express their stories, truths, and identities on their own terms.
From the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, the idea of revolution existed in the minds of artists and various other groups. Some sought to change the world, while others aimed only to change art. Women's critiques against male-based gender discrimination paved the way for them to express themselves within a progressive movement. (Langer, 1991)

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the number of women artists and interest in their work experienced an inevitable increase. Their works often reflected personal experiences of oppression and subjugation, while offering a broader critique of systems that impose gender roles and stereotypes. (Kahr, M.M, 1982-1983)

The work of feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin, Carol Duncan, Griselda Pollock, and Rosalind Krauss has been crucial in shaping the discourse around women artists and their contributions to art. Their scholarship has inspired female artists to explore themes related to identity, the female body, and social roles, resulting in revolutionary works by prominent figures. (Nochlin, 1988)

The works of some female artists do not simply document their experiences as women; rather, they challenge viewers to reconsider their preconceived notions about gender and power. Studying these artists demonstrates how art can be a powerful tool to stimulate conversations about gender and encourage social change. For example, globally, artists such as Lee Krasner, Louise Bourgeois, Frida Kahlo, Judy Chicago, Barbara Kruger, Yayoi Kusama, Eve Sussman, and the Guerrilla Girls have addressed issues like sexism, bodily autonomy, and identity through their art.

The Nude in The History of Albanian Figurative Arts

In the history of Albanian figurative arts, the female body has served both as a rich source of aesthetic inspiration and as a complex subject shaped by social and political forces. Often depicted as a thematic object, it has illustrated ideals of beauty, morality, and national identity. Meanwhile, as a creative subject, women artists have worked within constraints imposed by

patriarchal expectations and institutional limitations. The aesthetic status of the female body both as a visual symbol and a means of expression that has largely developed at the margins of Albania's artistic and cultural systems, facing significant challenges rooted in patriarchal structures, the totalitarian ideologies of the past, and a persistent lack of stable institutional support. These factors have deeply influenced how the female body has been portrayed and received within official art discourse, making a critical reassessment of its role in Albanian art history and theory both necessary and urgent.

Within the Albanian context, the position of women in figurative arts has historically been undervalued and excluded from dominant art historical narratives. During the era of socialist realism, although the state promoted women's participation in cultural life, this inclusion was often tightly controlled and limited by gender norms dictated by ideology. Yet despite these constraints, several female artists succeeded in producing significant works that subtly challenged established modes of representation and brought attention to diverse social and personal realities beyond the official rhetoric.

In the 1930s, Albanian students were somewhat reluctant to experiment with the modern trends of the time. A typical case was Sadik Kaceli, who studied at the Paris Academy during the same period. Influenced by modern art during his studies, several of his artistic interpretations have survived. Some clearly show the influence of Expressionist tendencies, with the French artist Henri Matisse serving as a point of reference, both in concept and execution, as seen in the work Odalisque à la Matisse (1936–38). (Hoxha, 2012)



Figure 1, Sadik Kaceli, "Odalisque alla Matisse", 1936-38, (private collection)

In 1940, Odise Paskali created a striking public sculpture called "Fertility," which stands in the courtyard of the Royal Palace in Tirana. The piece features a female nude figure gently surrounded by two angels, capturing both beauty and symbolism.
Interestingly, nude artworks were rarely displayed in Albania before 1944. In fact, the only notable exhibition to feature nudes was the First National Two-Year Competition for Painting, Sculpture, and Drawing held in June 1942. At that event, sculptors Janaq Paço and Sabri Tuçi presented their own works depicting the nude form, marking a rare moment of openness in Albanian art at the time.

Before 1945, Albanian art was shaped by European styles, but depictions of the nude were extremely rare. This was largely due to strong conservative values and the influence of patriarchal and religious traditions. Even when nude studies were part of academic training, they remained private exercises, never meant to be shown to the public.

During the socialist realism era, nudity was almost entirely banned in art. The human body was expected to symbolize labor and strength—usually clothed and portrayed within the grand narrative of building socialism. Despite this, most visual artists were men. While many had training from both Eastern and Western schools, they rarely exhibited nude works. Artists like Kristaq Rama, Jakup Keraj, Guri Madhi, Simon Rrota, and Sali Shijaku created drawings of the human body during their studies, but these pieces were kept private. Nudity was seen as a moral issue, a taboo that kept such works out of public view.

Beyond classical academicism and the import of Eastern Bloc art schools, what later became more valued was the stylistic "search" of some students, oriented toward early 20th-century modernism. For the most part, this influence is evident, though it developed alongside academic assignments and never fully consolidated into a distinct style or genuine artistic inquiry. This alternative painting style will be remembered as a journey alongside the "heroes" of modernism—an adventure of forms and spiritual colors. (Hoxha, 2012)

The Female Nude In Albanian Visual Arts From Socialist Realism To Contemporary Expressions

Today, the National Gallery of Arts preserves two important oil-on-canvas works: Jakup Kerraj's Nude Girl in the Atelier (1955–57),) and Sali Shijaku's Nude (1961).

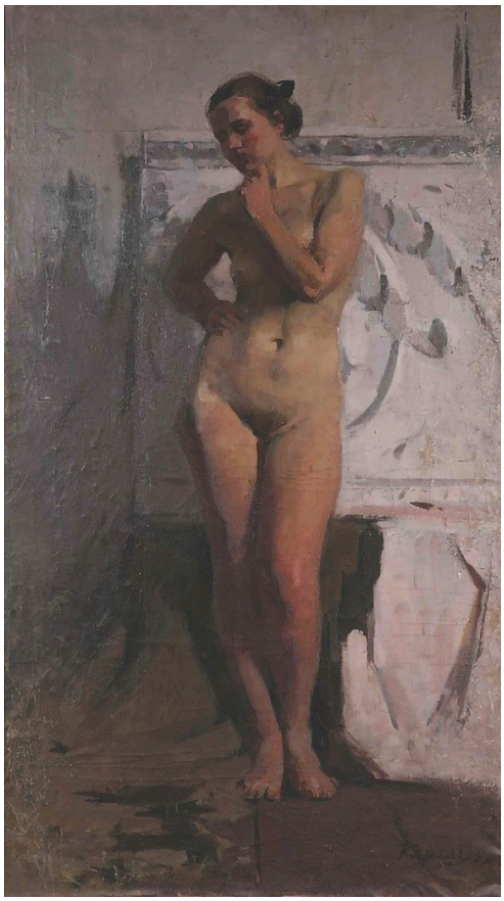


Figure 2, Jakup Kerraj "Nude-girl in the studio" 1955-57, (NGA)



Figure 3, Sali Shijaku, "Nude", 1961, (NGA)

Meanwhile, Guri Madhi's Nude Man (1954), seen in Photo 4, remains part of a private collection.



Figure 4, Guri Madhi, "Nude Man", 1954, (private collection)

In sculpture, artists also began reimagining the female body beyond ideological boundaries, embracing idealized forms and greater creative freedom. A striking example is the series of Nude sculptures by the renowned sculptor Janaq Paço, created in the 1960s.

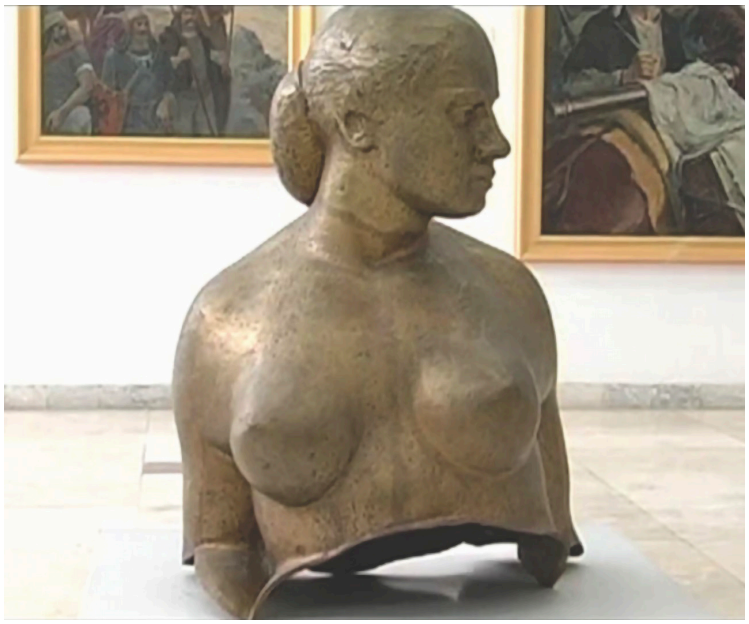


Figure 5, Janaq Paço, "Nude", 1963, (NGA)

The year 1973 turned out to be devastating for many of these works. During this time, the state launched a campaign against what it called “bourgeois decadence” in art and culture. Artists were given strict warnings and forced to destroy their own creations, including Nude sculptures, now labeled as “morally harmful” and “inappropriate for the socialist man.” In this atmosphere, the female body once a source of inspiration for Janaq Paço was reduced to a subject of censorship and creative limitation. Similarly, many of Abdurrahim Buza’s nude-themed works were also destroyed, victims of the era’s rigid and conservative mindset.

This approach changed after the fall of communism, when artistic expression liberalized and the nude returned as a form of free and symbolic expression it is not only for physical beauty but also as a symbol of individual freedom, breaking taboos, human sensitivity, and protest against social norms.

Despite extremely challenging realities, both gender-related and ideological, several women artists such as Kristina Koljaka (sculptor), Sofo Marko and Lumturi Dhrami (graphic artists), and Liliana Çefa (painter) managed to stand out in a male-dominated art scene. Even within a society defined by patriarchal norms, they created important works and became inspirations for future generations of female artists. Kristina Koljaka, educated at the Academy of Rome, addressed the female nude in sculpture for her diploma defense in 1941, a remarkably bold act for that time.

After the 1990s, as Albania opened up culturally and new artistic practices emerged, women began to take a larger role in the contemporary art scene. They engaged with various media and explored critical themes such as identity, the body, sexuality, and the role of women in society. Following this transitional period, a new generation of Albanian women artists started to depict their bodies in ways that moved beyond mere aesthetic objectification toward thoughtful and critical self-representation. Despite these advances, many challenges remain, including structural exclusion, limited representation in key institutions, and a lack of ongoing support.

During the 1990s, Albanian art developed a stronger conceptual focus. Within the country’s evolving cultural spaces, supported by pluralism and postmodern ideas, numerous associations, exhibitions, and artistic events were organized and continue to take place. Although traditional art forms still dominate, artists, critics, and art enthusiasts have made significant efforts to introduce diverse conceptual and ideological perspectives that help connect Albanian art with wider transnational movements.

One of the most important events in this period is the visual arts competition Onufri, which began in 1993 at the National Gallery in Tirana. This was the first major event of its kind in Albania and remains a key platform showcasing the newest contributions to Albanian art. Giancarlo Politi, who served as a jury member for Onufri ’99, highlighted the strong presence of women at the competition. He pointed out that contemporary art worldwide has been greatly influenced by female artists.

These exhibitions have played a vital role in bringing together cultures and arts that had been isolated for decades. They represent an important step toward building a shared identity within a more unified social and cultural space. Participants enter this space with clear goals while

showing respect for different cultures and artistic expressions. For Albanian artists, the early 1990s marked a newfound sense of creative freedom that became central to their artistic identity. One powerful example from this period is Mikel Temo's Lesbians (1992), which combines erotic undertones with an abstract and expressive portrayal of the female character's environment.

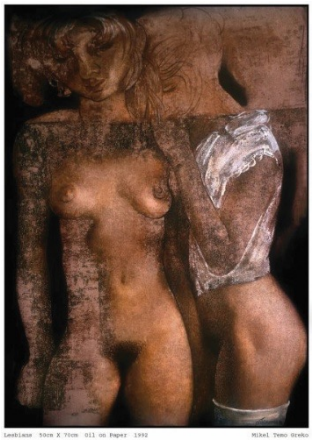


Figure 6, Mikel Temo, "Lesbians" 1992,

This work not only stands out for its artistic qualities but also boldly challenges the social silence surrounding topics often stigmatized, creating space for reflection and dialogue through art.

After the 1990s, many female artists used their bodies and nudity as forms of resistance against patriarchal norms, especially in conceptual art and performance. Lumturi Blloshmi, who lived from 1944 to 2020, is a significant figure in this movement. Working at a time when socialist realism imposed strict artistic rules, she developed a deeply personal and experimental style. She was among the first Albanian artists to use herself as a subject, breaking taboos by metaphorically exploring female sexuality.

In some of her self-portraits, Lumturi presents her naked body as both fragile and defiant, capturing her experience as a woman and artist living in a patriarchal society. During the 1980s and 1990s, she created several works where the landscape and the female nude became central themes. These paintings are marked by strong contrasts between light and shadow, which add depth and intensity. Notable examples include Lukovë, Washing Clothes (1991), Nude, Sarandë, Rock Slide (1990) (Photo 7), and Silver Nude (1995).

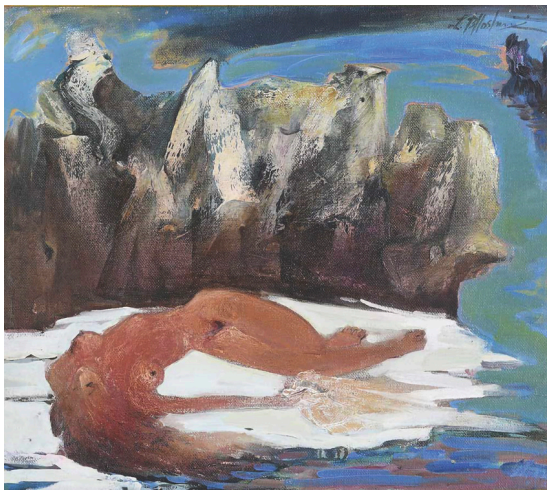


Figure 7, Lumturi Blloshmi, Nude, Saranda, landslide, 1990

Themes such as identity, dreams, resilience, violence, exodus, sacrifice, eroticism, political power manipulation, and the transformation of social and spatial relations are explored in Blloshmi's work, reflecting the changing horizons of Albania within a global network. (Isto, 2022)

She experimented with painting by integrating various materials such as textiles and everyday objects, filling her works with texture, relief, and depth. Blloshmi carved out her own space within a professional artistic sphere dominated by men, even though she was often overlooked by the main events shaping contemporary Albanian art. Blloshmi was one of the founders of the first association of women artists in post-socialist Albania, "LINDA," which was conceptualized in 1993 and officially established in 1994. Led by the artist and art historian Eleni Laperi, the group organized several exhibitions and eventually founded a center — the Cultural Center of Women Artists LindArt — in 2000. (Bonizzi, 2020)

As a member of the group, Lumturi Blloshmi not only participated in several collective exhibitions exploring female identity in art but also took part in workshops with the Serbian performance artist Tanja Ostojić in the early 2000s, which may have influenced Blloshmi's own turn towards performance art. (Bonizzi, 2020)

In 2003, Lumturi Blloshmi presented a highly imaginative exhibition to the public in Tirana, transforming her artistic activity through everyday life. Speaking openly about the Kama Sutra during the communist period was completely forbidden and considered a sin. Speaking openly about the Kama Sutra in post-communism is seen as less than normal or, as Lumturi herself says, "…most people trivialize the Kama Sutra, which is the opposite of pornography." (Kuka, 2003) For the artist, the initial artistic impulse behind the project "Menu Kama Sutra" was inspired by the cooking of frogs and their resemblance to the human body. Through a performance, the spectators became active participants in its development, accompanied by 15 photographs that conveyed, through the positional arrangements of the mature frog bodies and some of the Kama Sutra's codes.



Figure 8, Lumturi Blloshmi, Menu Kama Sutra, 2003

To understand the work "Kama Sutra" in the context of Albanian art, we first need to free ourselves from the prejudice that it is merely a banal description of sexual acts. At its core, the Kama Sutra is a philosophical and aesthetic treatise about love, relationships, and the spiritual and physical harmony between people. This work conveys a deep understanding of intimacy as an inseparable part of life and culture. To connect it with Albanian art, it is necessary to reconsider our relationship with the body, sensitivity, and sensuality in artistic expressions, freeing ourselves from inherited moralizations and seeing them as legitimate forms of aesthetic and human exploration beyond our imagination.

Meanwhile, in the 2004 exhibition held at the National Gallery of Arts in Tirana, curated by Edi Muka, Blloshmi exhibited two works in one room. On one wall, she placed the three-panel painting "Dekorata" (The Medal), depicting a nude woman lying on the ground with a medal covering her intimate parts and a brush penetrating her long braid.



Figure 9, Lumturi Blloshmi, "The Medal", 2004

On the opposite wall, Blloshmi had drawn her own silhouette with a thick red line, titled "Uncertainty", which represents an emblem of the difficulty in situating Blloshmi's artistic practice within both local and global art histories. The silhouette perhaps stands as the strongest metaphor for the artist's ongoing transformation, a revolutionary remodeling where the self and her identity remain central but always in a state of flux. (Isto, 2022)

According to art scholar Suzana Varvarica Kuka, Blloshmi noticed that the lack of receiving an art medal symbolized gender prejudice, as most medals were awarded to male artists. Therefore, she defiantly placed the decoration over her own sexual organ, highlighting the insignificance and diminished importance of these awards in contemporary society. (Kuka, 2022)

At the 59th Venice International Biennale in 2022, Albania was represented by a female artist for the very first time, although posthumously, through an exhibition of Lumturi Blloshmi's work. This presentation was also the first to be curated by a female curator, Adela Demetja. The exhibition offered the world a glimpse into Blloshmi's diverse body of work and highlighted her artistic versatility. Across her paintings and performances, there is a clear connection to the feminist politics of the neo-avant-garde, especially among female artists exploring the tension between socialist expectations placed on women's bodies and their objectification under capitalist consumer culture. Yet, Blloshmi's art goes beyond simply trying to recreate a "missing" avant-garde in Albania.

At the 59th Venice International Biennale in 2022, Albania was represented for the first time by a female artist — Lumturi Blloshmi, albeit posthumously. Also for the first time, the Albanian pavilion was curated by a female curator, Adela Demetja.

Through painting, photography, performance, and installation, Blloshmi's work offers a refined reading of the politics of the female body, situated in the tense mediation between socialist ideology and capitalist consumption. Her aesthetics carry traces of a neo-avant-garde shaped under conditions of isolation and censorship, silently dialoguing with international currents, while also articulating an entirely personal and irreplaceable language.

Blloshmi's work is more than just an effort to bring back a "missing" avant-garde in Albanian art. It creates a meaningful space where personal memories, political stories, and ideas about gender identity come together in a powerful way. Showing her work in Venice wasn't only a tribute to an artist who passed away; it was also a statement about the important place women hold in the history of Albanian and international art.

Lala Meredith-Vula, born in 1966, is an Albanian-Kosovar artist known internationally. One of her striking projects is a photography series called "Women and Water ".



Figure 10, Lala Meredith-Vula, "Women and Water", photography

In these photos, she captures women underwater, creating images full of poetry, freedom, and strength. These are not sexualized nudes but natural and expressive moments where the body flows with nature. The women swim or move freely beneath the surface without posing or trying to fit an ideal. Meredith-Vula's work shows how many women, especially in the West, who might feel limited by social expectations, can find a sense of release and connection with nature underwater.

She has also worked on another series focusing on intimacy, ritual, and female solidarity in spaces away from patriarchal society, like Turkish baths. Through her photography, Meredith Vula treats women as whole individuals, not just objects to be looked at. Her work honors their stories, their strength, and their natural beauty in a genuine and respectful way.

Zake Prelvukaj, an artist from Kosovo, is making a real mark on the Kosovar art scene with her unique style that blends neo-expressionism, pop art, and body art. Through her performances, she uses her own body to explore how society deals with violence and sexism, putting the female body front and center in an important activist conversation. She expresses the mental and emotional stress that many women face living in a society shaped by conflict and pressure. Her body becomes a way to speak out, breaking silence and showing what it feels like to live in a world where the female body is often controlled and violated.

Back in 1997, Zake became known for her performance series called "My Body Brush", where she painted her body in blue and black acrylics.



Figure 11, Zake Prelvukaj, My Brush Body, 2000

Even though body art was still new and sometimes controversial, she connected with audiences in a way that didn't cause scandal. People appreciated how she balanced expressing herself with keeping communication open and positive.

In these performances, she used her painted body to create powerful shapes and images. She was deeply involved in the whole process, turning ideas into something you could see and feel. Through her work, Zake showed both the strength and vulnerability of the female body as an artistic tool. By making her body the main medium, she highlighted women as creators and active participants in their own stories—something that had been missing, especially in Albanian art. Her performances challenged old ideas about what art should be while also tackling issues like objectification, the male gaze, and even sexism within feminism itself.

Also, in 2005, she held a provocative exhibition at the National Gallery of Kosovo titled "Sexhibiton I and II," responding to the phenomenon of the sale of women as sexual objects. (Prevlukaj, 2021) In 2005, the artist Zake Prelvukaj held a provocative exhibition titled "Sexhibition I and II" at the National Gallery of Kosovo.



Figure 12, Zake Prelvukaj, "Sexibiton I", 2005

The exhibition served as a critique of the way women are often perceived as sexual objects in public and cultural discourse, using sexuality itself as a tool to deconstruct taboos and expose the social control structures imposed on the female body. With a direct and provocative visual language, Prelvukaj placed at the center not only the body but also the ways in which it is viewed, interpreted, and instrumentalized in various contexts. Through a combination of liberated feminine acts and painted spots placed on female intimate organs, she expressed her reaction to this phenomenon. Overall, Zake Prelvukaj succeeded in challenging stereotypes and taboos in Kosovar Albanian art, creating new spaces for gender expression and reflection.

These artists, along with many others, challenged traditional gender roles and paved the way for future generations of female artists. Despite facing significant obstacles and iscrimination, their contributions to the art world continue to be celebrated and recognized today. (Waller, 1991)

Among contemporary Albanian artists, the painter Hajrush Fazliu stands out particularly for his bold aesthetic and conceptual approach to the female nude. As a scholar and a keen connoisseur of line, color, and form, his works are dominated by colors that appear almost in their full rich spectrum, forming surfaces, spots, or gradations of hues and shades. Through a measured imagination, this painter brings forth numerous figures, various nudes, and distorted female portraits—abstracted or stylized—that reflect clarity, balance, narrative, and irrationality. The "Nudes" in Fazliu's works, created with oval lines and treated as isolated forms or in group compositions, are placed against a fluid and mystical background that conveys a sense of mystery and transcendence, adding a dramatic tone as well as a spiritual presence to the sensual female figure. (Asani, 2023) This approach situates Hajrush Fazliu in a contemporary dialogue with the tradition of figurative expressionism and symbolism, where the human body is more than a form—it carries a deep existential and emotional experience.

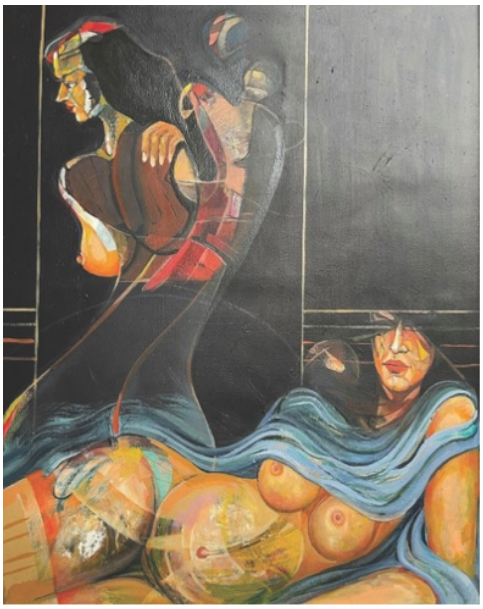


Figure 13, Hajrush Fazliu, "Nude", 2020

Driant Zeneli, in some of his videos, uses images that imply a sensual or erotic tension between subjects, portraying sexuality not directly but as a psychological structure and personal sensation, rather than as an object of visual gaze. Among the few Albanian artists in North Macedonia who address the female nude figure is the painter Edip Lloga, who has continuously explored the female being throughout his 40-year career. (Pollozhani, 2025) The treatment of the female nude is evident in many of Edip Lloga's drawings, watercolors, and paintings, where the artist neither restrains his emotions nor calculates the consequences, even though in the environment where he works—as in Albanian society at large—this motif remains a taboo subject. This is best expressed through his most recent composition titled "Erotica" (2025), which is likely a synthesis of a cycle dedicated to the female gender that he began before 2005. Although eroticism is seen as sacrilegious in Albanian society in North Macedonia, Edip Lloga, with his artistic approach, opposes the moralistic chorus and breaks the barriers of this (self)censorship.





Figure 14, Edip Lloga, Akt, 2025
Figure 15, Edip Lloga, Erotika,2025

Conclusion

In Albanian art, the female body is clearly present and is sometimes shown in fragmented or abstract ways without censorship. Sexuality is often expressed openly or in a provocative manner. The body is rarely displayed just for its beauty. Instead, it is placed in a complex relationship with its surroundings—sometimes wrapped in objects, other times facing itself—expressing an inner tension where eroticism, desire, or repression become part of a deeper human experience. For much of art history, the female body has been portrayed mostly from a male point of view and treated as an object. Women artists have worked hard to change this by showing their own bodies through their personal experiences and perspectives.

These efforts have not been easy. Gender inequality and cultural prejudices that have lasted for centuries continue to create obstacles. Women artists still face stereotypes, harassment, and exclusion from important professional networks. Despite these challenges, they have made strong and lasting contributions to their cultures. The history of women in art is a story of resilience, creativity, and determination. To truly value and celebrate their work, it is important to continue promoting gender equality in the art world. This will help create a vibrant and welcoming artistic community that embraces the talents and diverse voices of everyone involved.

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Textile Art in Contemporary Times

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Abstract

Textile creations are studied today as one of the oldest forms of art. In our country, they are included in folklore and ethnography, named as crafts or handicrafts, and have not been the subject of study in art. While in the categorization of applied art, textile art has not always been appreciated to the extent it should be and has only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. Albanian artists have involved handwork and craft in their research, and have examined the techniques and ornamental organization to interpret them in their creativity. These are made using fabrics, fibers or threads from natural sources or other synthetic materials and the presentations vary from the application of images and figures to shapes, reliefs and abstract compositions applied to surfaces, sculptural forms or installations. Their artworks prove that by utilizing the numerous artistic means and the rich archive that Albanian tradition offers, there are endless possibilities to create with fabric, yarn, textile accessories and handcraft techniques. At the risk of the disappearance of artifacts inherited from the past and the forgetting or deformation of old techniques by artisans with limited knowledge about our tradition who practice artisanal activities today, but also by the trend of globalization of popular culture, passionate textile artists are resizing the connection between art and craft by combining crafts with art. Their creativity reflects aspects of national culture and identity and reveals the connection between contemporary textile art and the continuity of textile history in the Albanian space. The execution process also develops new models for the transfer of knowledge and understanding about our heritage to new generations and encourages the exploration of the possibilities of applying textile art in society and further.

Keywords

visual arts, fashion, design

Introduction

Textile production represents one of the oldest forms of artistic expression within our civilization and within the Albanian tradition, owing to the diverse possibilities it offers for fabrication, structuring, and ornamentation. In the context of popular culture, it has historically been categorized under terms such as craft, artisanal work, and folklore, and has been further classified into various subcategories (Bihiku, 1977). Until the end of the 19th century, several important centers were known in Albanian territories in which high-quality textiles, clothing and accessories were prepared, valued as art work (Bido, 1991). "We have grown up with this heritage in ancient and ornate covers we are accustomed to perceiving the harmony of colors and lines". (Dushku, 1977), Since with textiles we are in contact with their products every day life that began at birth, from the clothes we wear, the layers and covers or the objects that decorate living spaces, etc. (Barthes, 2013) From the studies conducted by the Ethnography Sector, we are clear that if clothing has been able to occupy an important place and influence other aspects of our daily lives, this has happened, among others, thanks to master craftsmen. They have created beautiful and useful works from textiles that "have served to dress family members, to equip the sleeping area and other parts of the home", as ethnographer Afërdita Onuzi would say (Kultura Popullore, 2002).

At the Academy of Fine Arts (now the University of Arts) textile was studied as a branch of applied arts following the spirit conveyed by the Bauhaus Movement to connect craftsmanship, art, and technology. Professor Ksenofon Dilo, "with the enthusiasm that characterized him for the advancement of art", is credited with opening the textile branch in the years 1969-1972 with the teaching programs he brought from Paris (Dilo, 2019). The initiative to prepare artists who would be involved in the sphere of production and would interpret aspects of folk heritage in creativity to raise the artistic level of the products produced, resulted in satisfaction, as researcher Andon Kuqali assessed in 1977 that "the range of applied arts is very wide and the increase in production and continuous industrialization require the beautiful artistic presentation of production" (Nëntori 1977). At that time, artistic experience began to be applied in industry: in the textile combine, fabric and clothing factories, the production of traditional carpets, decorative works produced by the artistic enterprise "Migjeni" among others. However, textile art has not always been accorded the recognition it merits in certain sectors. As Agim Zajmi (Shqiptarja e re, 1987) noted in the magazine "Shqiptarja e Re" "greater emphasis was often placed on technical execution rather than on the artistic dimension of textile work" and this observation had more to do with clothing. While the public fashion show presentations were interrupted in November 1959 when the last fashion show with the autumn-winter collection was held and the poverty in the variety of styles was present between 1975-1990, although occasionally the ethnographer Yllka Selimaj (La conference Nationale, 1977) noted that on could talk about minor details adapted according to "our way". However, artistic developments "based on tradition" were constantly studied, the aesthete Alfred Uçi (La conference Nationale, 1977), at the "National Conference of Ethnography" in 1977, emphasized the necessity of supporting artistic expressions in folk heritage in order to preserve the national identity. Even in the "Consultations on the Problems of Art" organized by the "League of Writers and Artists of Albania" in 1986, the artists Ksenofon Dilo and Gjergj Marko called for increased attention to this art precisely because of its wide reach in everyday life and in all spheres of society (Nëntori, 1986).

It is important to note that Albanian artists have consistently demonstrated a sustained interest in integrating traditional handcraft techniques and skills into the realm of fine art. They have examined and interpreted it to exhibit it as an art work or applied to production. Before the 1990s, two notable figures Danish Jukniu and Tef Palushi awakened interest in textiles not only inside, but also outside Albania with their originality in fabric designs, skillfully combining tradition with painting in textile patterns for the production of fabrics (basma) (GASh 2002). Additionally, Zeqirja Rexhepi was among the first Kosovar artists to specialize in Eastern Europe in textile design. Influenced by avant-garde movements, Ibrahim Kodra, experimented with applications on ready-made textiles, revealing his dimension as an artist in constant search to enrich figurative language and explore plastic forms through innovative approaches.

A group of professional artists emerging after the 1990s—such as: Marjana Eski, Taulant Pustina, Diana Miziri, Mikel Temo, among others, played a pioneering role in the revival of fashion-related artistic activity in Albania. Albanian public television became a key platform for this renaissance, organizing artistic performances that showcased stylized clothing inspired by art, history, and traditional motifs. This marked the first serious and institutionalized initiative to reintroduce an artistic practice that had been banned since the late 1950s. This activity expressed the great desire to touch a field that was previously considered "bourgeois art", denying textile creators one of the most beautiful and diverse forms of artistic expression, that of modeling the body with fabric.

The efforts of these 1990s artists and emerging designers effectively opened the door for future generations, laying the groundwork for the evolution of contemporary fashion and textile art in the country. These artists created designs using a variety of fabrics and stylistic approaches, signaling to the broader public that clothing should no longer be viewed solely as a matter of technique—as it had traditionally been—but also as a legitimate form of artistic expression.

The stylization of clothing emerged as a conceptually driven process, carefully developed by the artist before being translated into material form through technical execution. This process reflected a reciprocal relationship between art and technique - one that could not succeed in the absence of either, nor if the quality of one element was compromised. Thus, thanks to these artists, textiles have today received the attention they, on the same scale as contemporary developments in Europe, where it occupies a central position in both artistic and scholarly research. (Dormer, 1997)

Contemporary approaches in textile art have varied and continue to vary—from the application of decorative motifs, pictorial images and figures, functional, sculptural and conceptual forms, to reliefs and abstract patterns, all the way to clothing as a medium—knowing no limits. They have been created using fibers from natural sources or other synthetic materials, ready-made fabrics, or materials that resemble them. The creative process employs both traditional and contemporary methods. Traditional techniques and tools—such as embroidery, knitting, crocheting, loom weaving, and various fabric manipulations including dyeing, tying, wrinkling, folding, and freezing—play a central role. Fabric cutting and sewing are used to construct garments or sculptural forms. Alongside these, contemporary technologies are embraced, incorporating digital printing, design, collage, and a variety of innovative approaches, including the reinterpretation and revitalization of traditional practices.

Thus, the tradition of craftsmanship as a history of textiles is revived in a new spirit and new forms through the syncretization of ideas, techniques and applications on canvas. An outstanding excellent example of the embroidery practice in textile art is the work "Çarçafët" by Stavri Çati, part of the National Gallery's collection. The artist dissolves the boundary between painting and embroidery, treating the working space as a canvas upon which he distributes, treating the working surface as a canvas with needle and thread, vibrant color tones to create an impressive composition of a Dropullite woman on a sunny day, gathering sheets in the garden. The compositional solution - richness of graphic elements, the interplay of light and shadow, the reduction of unnecessary details, along with his deep knowledge, skill and mastery of manipulating fabric - makes this refined interpreter of the tradition a point of reference for for contemporary textile artists.

Diana and Fatmir Miziri, Jakup Ferri, Anila Rubiku, Egla Memaj etc. use ideas from the genre of painting at different interpretative levels by exploiting traditional craft techniques as if to show that it is not only the painting as a medium that can realize a art work, but painting can be easily transferred to the endless possibilities offered by textile. In "Still life" by Diana Miziri, "Family" by Jakup Ferri and "Dance" by Fatmir Miziri, through the technique of embroidery and the combination of colors in a concentrated graphic situation, abstract compositions, still lifes and subjects of everyday life are realized. That's why on the white solid fabric a single red thread articulates with numerous twists a compositional richness, from two human figures to the delicacy of the newly embroidered flowers of Ferri's spring garden. The abstraction of folkloric motifs in Miziri's embroidery technique in subjects with references from the past, adds value to the artwork, considering Andromaqi Gjergji's observation that "the human figure appears rarely in traditional Albanian textiles and only in the oldest ones." (2004)

The aesthetic explorations of weaving on the loom by a textile pioneer like Valbona Zherka in Kosovo, or a contemporary artist like Xhevahir Kolgjini, where the work, can be "frequent or rare, dense or soft, with strong or pale colors, with or without errors in counting stitches, loops and symmetrical or not lines", also develops new models for transferring knowledge to new generations and encourages the exploration of the textile art possibilities and beyond. (Statovci, 1988) The organization of a composition only from thread into solid and wide textures by Kolgjini, continuing the tradition of weaving carpets and rugs in Kukës, brings back a tableau in a sophisticated ornamental system made of wool and cotton thread worked by hand. In its graphic and color structure, through ornaments with visible tonal differences, the feminine image appears as if embedded or superimposed there. The interweaving of two separate compositions into a single plane where Venus metamorphoses among textile ornaments, gives a multiple value to this artist's work. Or the experimentation with the weight of threads that go out from (and) outside the square and the length of the weave shown almost like a curtain flowing across the wall has brought a work of high artistic level in Miziri's compositions.



Figure 1. Stefan Taci, Dritare mesdhetare, (teknikë mikse) 2006



Figure 2. Xhevahir Kolgjini, Kompozim (lesh dhe pambuk endur me dore)



Figure 3. Diana Miziri, Natyrë me fruta (qëndisje)



Figure 4. Fatmir Miziri, Traditë (qëndisje)



Figure 5. Najada Hamza, Kompozim (teknikë mikse)



Figure 6. Xhevdet Xhafa, Kompozim (tekstil)



Figure 7, Petrit Halilaj, Hakmarrja (instalacion)



Figure 8, Lume Blloshmi, Alta Moda (performacë)



Figure 9, Mikel Temo, fustan me grep, spektakli "Rreth fatit për 12 javë" 1993.



Figure 10, Marjana Eski, Sfilatë, spektak- li "Rreth fatit për 12 javë", 1993

In other cases, the ready-made textile material is transformed into raw material for a two or three-dimensional composition. "Mediterranean Window" by Stefan Taçi is among the examples of the elegant inclusion of craftsmanship in the cultivated art, where a minimalist detail in a fragment of a window curtain with doves and flowers is moved from the situation it was meant to stay in to be turned into a subject in a painting.

The placement of elements from ethno-tradition in Xhevdet Xhafa's works shows that he refers to heritage as much as to contemporaneity and the borrowed fragments from them have enabled

him to create an individual style. Fatmir Miziri in "Ajour", a special type of work borrowed from handicraft, through the removal of threads from the textile creates a new graphic situation in the finished textile. Rhombs, squares, lines in their visible, semi-visible and transparent functions, removed threads which are overlapped in a square form enrich the worked surface. As in a monochrome painting, we can understand the artistic problems he poses in the way simple geometric figures are put in relation, not only by form but also by depth, transparency or soft volumes created on the surface.

Najada Hamza, Xhevdet Xhafa, Ledia Kostandini manipulate or completely transform the surface of the fabricated textile, sometimes by coloring and sometimes by constructing with the technique of collage or wrinkling flowers or human silhouettes or by reconstructing entirely fabric structures from scratch with leftover, damaged and worn out by time clothing pieces. The mixing of techniques, the use of thread, fabric, the intervention of color ultimately creates a new textile that can provoke new aesthetic solutions for other artists. The three-dimensionality of the modeled structure can provide a completely different perception of what it really is due to the relief that is created.

Installations such as "The Spinning of Time" by Emanuel (Sali) Koko, "The Two Gullivers" by Flutura Preka and Besnik Haxhillari, Miziri with "Nonsense-Epitaph", "Blood Feud" by Petrit Halilaj, "Cradle" by Zeni Ballazhi, "Blanket" by Sislej Xhafa, "I Think About You" by Alketa Xhafa etc., attract the curious public to explore the universe of their artistic story through selected textile materials and ethnographic objects for their evocative qualities. The white scarf hanging on a red fabric background in search of "blood forgiveness" or peace, the wool balls being spun, the quilt covering the two human bodies in the marital bed installed on the wall, the blanket gathered on the floor in the shape of a human body, women's clothes hanging on wires wires in a stadium, are elements known from everyday experiences that come as metaphors to allude to social or political issues. In such a conceptual situation where art and life do not have a clear dividing line, ready-made objects are transformed into art subjects with the weight of anthropological signs from the past to sensitize the visitor to the dramas and tragedies arising from the misinterpretation of the old Kanun custom, blood feuds, emigration, war, etc.

The attitude towards inherited materials and the way of manipulating them has made contemporary artists influence the wider public in thinking differently about the values of artifacts. They go even to the sign left on textiles or clothing - tapestries, carpets, pillows, rosettes made by anonymous masters - as Barthes (2013) calls it "a communication system", which is served to prove the continuity of national culture. The pictograms in the artworks of Naxhi Bakalli, Engjëll Berisha, Gazmend Leka, Ardian Kapo, Agron Mulliqi, Reshat Ameti, etc., become the reason for the expanding innovative research of executing symbols in a wide spectrum through Design, which has known the greatest spread.

But the most complex form of textile art is manifested in clothing or is the clothing itself. The artist Lumturi Blloshmi, in search of new mediums in the performance "Alta moda with AMC-Vodafone cards", presented a dress model formed from consumer elements with phone cards. In the aesthetic plan, her solution is close to experimental creations in fashion with strong and unusable materials. Knowledge of fields produces a syncretic product that becomes suggestive and attracts art lovers and practitioners towards finding new forms of expression and articulation of artistic language at higher levels.

Other performances in the following years were followed by young designers in their way toward creating a legacy. “Art and craft are in opposition to technology,” today there are several names whom practice in the field of textile art integrated with production, enriching the history of contemporary art. (Dormer, 1997) Among the young artists who bring quick products for consumer needs, there are those who cultivate true art with distinct individuality and among them are found very impressive creations. A more organized forms are the periodic presentations of students of the Textile Atelier at the University of Arts in Tirana, the Fashion Design Department in Kosovo and Tetovo, as well as exhibitions of the Textile Department at the Polytechnic University of Tirana. The latter in its vision and objectives aims to develop textile to another level of technological application with contemporary methods and toward the patenting of every original creation, enabling the orientation of future creators towards industry. Thus, at the risk of disappearing or distorting of old crafts and techniques by contemporary craftsmen with limited knowledge of tradition, but also by the tendency of globalizing popular culture, the connection of textile art and related crafts has begun to develop rapidly with passionate artists and specialists of this profile. The ethnographer Afërdita Onuzi presents in her paper “Traditional folk crafts and trends in their development today” some effective ways how traditional elements can be implemented in contemporary products (Tradita etnokulturore, 2011).

Fearing that after the changes in the 90s maybe the influence from tradition would be abandoned, and the relationship between contemporary textile art and the continuity of textile history in the Albanian context would be questioned, traditions, as part of the nation’s consciousness, “do not fade easily and after strong social turns they are renewed…with a new glow.” (Gjergji, 2004) The broad creativity of textile art in the Albanian space which constantly draws from heritage that traditional fantasy developed within some codes from the past and with those motifs that for a long time remained unchanged proves this. But, there is still a long way ahead.

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Art in public spaces: sculpture as an educational tool in Albania

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Abstract

During the 20th century, Albanian sculpture underwent significant transformations, moving away from traditional religious iconography towards modern public and commemorative statuary. The 1920s and 1930s marked a pivotal period in this evolution, characterized by the rise of political portraiture and the monumental representation of national figures. Influenced by European academic traditions and neoclassical aesthetics, these sculptures played a crucial role in shaping Albania's national identity. However, creative freedom was often restricted due to political and economic constraints. High production costs of materials such as marble and bronze, combined with authoritarian regimes, led to state-controlled commissions that dictated artistic direction. Many competitions resulted in unrealized projects, leaving behind a valuable collection of sketches and plaster models for historical analysis. A significant number of public monuments were created by foreign sculptors - mainly Italians, Croatians, and Russians - whose contributions remain underappreciated in the broader narrative of art history. These monuments, typically executed in bronze for its expressive potential or in marble for its neoclassical grandeur, were designed to endure as permanent symbols of power and memory. Politically motivated monumental sculpture became a dominant tool of propaganda, reinforcing state ideologies and constructing a heroic national mythology. Despite budgetary limitations, cities across Albania saw the proliferation of statues and commemorative works, transforming urban spaces into visual narratives of national pride. This research, based on archival studies and comparative analysis, highlights the intersection of art, politics, and cultural identity in Albanian sculpture of the interwar period. The findings underscore the dual role of these monuments as both artistic expressions and political instruments, revealing the complex dynamics that shaped public art in Albania. Future research should further explore the contributions of foreign artists and the socio-political implications of monumental sculpture in the region.

Keywords

political portraits, National, identity, monumental, Propaganda

Introduction

Public sculpture in Albania during the reign of Zogu I.

After the end of World War I and the consolidation of the first Albanian state with the coming to power of King Ahmet Zogu (1928), also known as Zog I, significant changes took place in the political, cultural and artistic life of the country. With the strengthening of the Albanian Kingdom (1928-1939), the importance of art and art education were emphasized by Albanian intellectuals, such as Father Gjergj Fishta and Odhise Paskali, through their writings in newspapers of the time such as Studenti shqiptar and Hylli i Dritës. Such writings tried to highlight the usefulness of art and its ability to convey beauty following mainly Italian school programs. The subject of natural drawing was introduced into the high school curriculum. The signing of a treaty between Italy and Albania in 1926, known as the "Pact of Friendship and Security", played a decisive role in the intensification of bilateral relations between the two countries. These relations continued, with ups and downs, until 1943. During the second half of the 1920s, Italy began to intervene in Albania, including in the artistic field.

Architects such as Florestano di Fausto and Vittorio Morpurgo were involved in the design of ministerial buildings. Armando Brasini also drew up a new regulatory plan for Tirana, including a large main avenue from north to south, which was retained in Gherardo Bosio's final project in 1939. In this context, Paskali played an important role, due to his deep knowledge of Italian culture and of its aesthetic currents (remember that he was trained artistically in Turin). He received commissions for certain public monuments for different cities in the country. In 1922, on the occasion of the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of Independence, the government wanted to erect a monument in honor of the leader of freedom Ismail Qemali in Vlora[1].

However, despite the fact that the bureaucratic procedures for its commissioning and execution were initiated (Central State Archive of Albania, 1922), it could not be carried out. However, 10 years later, on the occasion of the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of Independence, the necessary funds were found for its erection. The monument, designed by Paskali and paid for with the financial support of King Zog I[2] was located in the Flag Square of the city of Vlora and consisted of a simple rectangular base of white marble, under which the tomb of the hero was arranged, including a stele with the name of Ismail Qemali; at one end, on a high podium, the bronze sculpture of Flamurtari (The Standard Bearer) (Figure 1):
"…in national costume, represents the conscious people who guard the tomb of the great patriot, saddened by his death, holding in one hand the historical flag and in the other the rifle with

1 Ismail Qemali (1844 – 1919) was a leader of the Albanian national movement, founder of the modern state of Albania and prime minister from 1912 to 1914. He was a leading figure in Albania's Declaration of Independence and in the formation of an independent government in the country on November 28, 1912. This event meant the end of almost 500 years of Ottoman rule. Together with Isa Boletini and Luigj Gurakuqi, he raised the Albanian flag in Vlorë.

2 King Zog I could not be present, but he sent a telegram to the mayor of Vlora excusing himself that he was answered by the latter (Central State Archives, Fonds-152, Ministry of the Interior. File- 368, Year-1932, "Telegram. 1: Ministry of the Interior (Tirane 29. XI. 1932: Time. 14. 25). "Telegram No. 2: To His Majesty "Zog I". To the King of the Albanians, in memory of our nation's illustrious leader, Ismail Qemali, who twenty years ago, with unwavering devotion, raised the flag of freedom. It is an honour for me to express my sincere thanks to Your Majesty. With all my heart, the mayor of Vlora."

which he will protect it for life. I worked on Flamurtari's head at the same time as the statue and my desire was to make a kind of Labi..." (PASKALI, 1986).

And on the other hand, during the 1930s, various artistic competitions were held in Tirana that reflect the interest and participation of the community in art and culture. In 1931, numerous art and craft exhibitions were held on the premises of the Ministry of Justice, which attracted thousands of attendees to appreciate traditional and modern works of Albanian art[3].

In this context, there was a growing interest in Western culture, reflected not only in social changes that left traces in the daily life and behavior of the population (such as the new law of 1937 that criminalized women who hid their faces with veils), but also in the European and American orientation of many intellectuals who were trained abroad.Such is the case of the sculptor Dhimiter Çani who emigrated to America where he completed his training, returned to Albania as a true hero. This was reported by the press of the time in relation to the monument Lendina e lotëve (The Valley of Tears) that he designed in 1933 for the city of Korça (Figure 2): "... many young Albanians who have returned to the country after graduating abroad... are reviving our arts. Today we present the project of a 2-meter-high monument that Dhimiter Çani will donate to the city of Korça... his lordship has learned sculpture in America, from which he has returned with more patriotic feelings. He has seen how bitter it is for children to leave their mothers and homes and how bitter is the life they spend in emigration... All these feelings and many others were expressed by Mr. Çani's art." (VATRA, 1933).

In this work Dhimitër Çani reflected an artistic expression charged with patriotic feelings, symbolizing the suffering of Albanians who left their homes and emigrated in search of a better future.





Figure 1, Odhise Paskali: The monument of Ismail Qemali on the 20th anniversary of Independence. Vlora 1932. Central State Archives.
Figure 2, Dhimiter Çani: preparatory sketches for the statue, Lëndina e lotvet, 1933. Korça.

The sculpture represents a call for unity and solidarity among native Albanians. The

3 These events had juries composed of prominent individuals "from the world of art" such as the painter Qenan Mesareja, the sculptor Odhise Paskali, the poet Lasgush Poradeci and the singer Myqerem Janina; all important figures in the cultural life of the country.

westernization of the country was also reflected in major state architectural projects such as, for example, the new building of the National Bank in Durrës, designed in 1938 by the Italian architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo and whose exterior facades and interior spaces were adorned with sculptures, mosaics and other Western-style elements.

In this socio-political climate, King Zog I issued a special decree ordering that the main cities of the country, in their main squares and public spaces, be adorned with works of sculpture. The sculptor Odhise Paskali played a very prominent role in this activity, who was responsible for the first monuments of important cities such as Korça, Vlorë and Gjirokastër. These monuments, erected as means of political propaganda, were dedicated to extolling the image of the king along with other national figures and prominent personalities who contributed to Albania's independence (Central State Archive, 1934).



Figure 3, Kolë Shala: Hasan Riza Pasha (1934), marble. Archive of the Marubi Photo Library.

Figure 4, The day of the inauguration of Monument of Çerçiz Topulli (1934). In the center of the municipality, Mr. Sami Kokalari and political personalities of the time.

The Ministry of the Interior controlled the process and, especially, the characters to whom they were dedicated. This was the case in the city of Shkodra, which, in 1934, commissioned the sculptor Kolë Shala to[4] make a bust of Hasan Riza Pasha[5], a soldier of the Ottoman Empire

4 Kolë Shala and the aforementioned Dhimitër Çani, although these sculptors mainly oriented their productions to the creation of portraits of friends and contemporary intellectuals, as well as portraits of the Albanian royal family.

5 Born in Tosia in 1871, he held the position of governor of the province of Shkodra and became the architect of the city's resistance to the Serbian and Montenegrin offensive. Pasha led the defense of the city and stood out for his bravery and military skills in the face of enemy attack. His contribution and leadership during the siege left a mark on Albanian history, especially in the city of Shkodra.

who played a leading role in the defense of Shkodra in the Serbian-Montenegrin siege during the Balkan War (Figure 3).

However, after the mayor of the city informed the Ministry of the Interior by letter, the latter denied authorization for its erection, arguing that the character was a foreign military man from an empire that had subjugated the Albanian state. In response to this response, Mayor Zejnel Prodani (Central State Archive, 1934) sent a new letter to the Ministry, dated August 3, 1934, in which he categorically refused the construction of said monument, informing (Central State Archive, 1934)

"In reply to letter no. 504, dated 3/8/1934, received from that prefecture, I wish to express that the information provided is not only incorrect, but also absurd. In the historic city of Shkodra, which occupies a prominent position in the Albanian world, it has not yet been possible to erect a monument dedicated to the pioneers of the national idea. In this context, how can the construction of a monument in honor of a commander of a foreign state that kept our country under his yoke for five centuries be accepted or considered?".

The correspondence surrounding the construction of the monument to Hasan Riza Pasha reflects the tight control that the central state agencies exercised over the public monuments erected in the country during the 1930s[6].

After the incident in the city of Shkodra, the government issued a circular addressed to all municipalities informing them that the construction of monuments and busts would require the prior consent of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Ministry of the Interior. 1934). Specifically, on May 21, 1934, the government, through an official note addressed by the Tirana Correspondence Directorate, ordered all the municipalities of the country not to take any initiative in this direction without first obtaining the consent of the Ministry of the Interior:
"In reference to our circular no. 2883 dated 21/V/1934, we communicate again that the construction of various monuments or busts may be carried out once the consent of this ministry has been obtained. Therefore, all municipalities in the kingdom are instructed to refrain from taking any initiative to erect monuments or busts without first obtaining our authorization. In the event of non-compliance with this order, this ministry will take action against the promoters involved."

Therefore, any such initiative had to have the prior approval of the government to avoid future problems (Central State Archive, 1934). This measure sought to ensure that public works were in line with the government's policy and guidelines and thus avoid controversial situations. However, the main obstacle to the erection of these public monuments was the lack of economic resources. Certainly, the scarcity of state funds for these works led to many projects being interrupted or undergoing modifications in their original designs.

This was the case of the aforementioned project Lëndina e lotëve (Valley of Tears) by Dhimitër Çani which, after the site was indicated for its construction and the municipality took charge of the costs of its foundation, had to be modified when the requested state resources did not

6 He was one of the most prominent sculptors of the time, achieving his greatest success with the creation of the bust of King Zog I in 1931 and the sculpture Nëna Mbretereshë (Queen Mother) in 1934. These works brought him recognition in the Albanian art and cultural scene during those years.

arrive[7]. The lack of public funding had to be made up for by the search for private funds and the commitment and support of citizens and intellectuals who demonstrated their commitment to the erection of these monuments as tributes to patriotic and national figures. This was the case with the monument dedicated to the Çerçiz Topulli, where the local municipality of Gjirokastër was obliged to raise funds through a circular (Figure 4).

The work was commissioned from Odhise Paskali, and its cost reached 3,600 gold francs, a sum that was financed through contributions from all the town's residents and the Albanian community in the United States of America. "It reflects the deep respect and admiration of the local community for Topulli and his struggle for freedom" (KALLAJXHIU, 1934).

The figure of King Zog I and his family were considered of the highest priority by the State, along with the emblematic figures of the national hero Skanderbeg and Ismail Qemali, decorated as "Hero of the People of Albania" posthumously. In addition, an attempt was made to create a link between the king and Skanderbeg, commissioning portraits from the best painters and sculptors of the time to emphasise this connection (Central State Archive) . In an effort to revive historical memory and strengthen national identity, the government of the time had launched a campaign to highlight the figure of the King during these years.
This testifies to the Portreti në kalë i mbretit Zog I (Equestrian Portrait of King Zog I) ("Larousse", 1929), refers to an equestrian painting of King Zog I of Albania by the artist Mario Prayer[8].

This portrait, which captures the monarch on horseback, depicts an image of power and authority typical of equestrian portraits of political and military leaders. The work was created during the period when Zog I reigned in Albania, thus offering a visual testimony of his rule and his position as head of state. Through various cultural and artistic initiatives, it sought to highlight the legacy and influence of the monarch in the society of that time.

The presentation of the Bust of the King, the work of the prominent artist Kolë Shala, was part of this strategy. The sculpture, which evoked the majesty and leadership of the monarch during his reign, was received with great interest and appreciation by the public and critics of the time (Figure 6).

On display at the School of Drawing, this work not only celebrated the author's artistic talent, but also served as a reminder of the historical significance of Zog I's reign. This is how the correspondent of the newspaper Ora describes himself in his lines[9]:
"Mr. Kol Shala presented in the great hall a new work of his: the Bust of the King, carved in

7 The sculptor accepted this request and a jury was formed to evaluate the modified proposal. This episode reflects the effort of citizens and intellectuals of the time to actively participate in the creation of artistic works dedicated to patriotic and relevant figures of Albania. (Central State Archive, Fonds-152 Ministry of the Interior. File 176. Year 1934.

8 Mario Prayer (1887-1959) was an Italian painter known for his frescoes in churches and great halls. He trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice and Lyon with his brother Guido. They worked mainly in Apulia and Basilicata, painting works for the fascist authorities. His style shows influences from Art Nouveau or Liberty Style.

9 In other words, the work presented by the outstanding artist was admired by all; "… It gives us hope that in the future he will give us many more works, which, if done carefully, will honor us before foreigners who believe that Albanians are incapable in terms of sculpture," the newspaper's correspondent continues. ORA (1931): "Busti i Mbretit". No. 168; Pag-93.

white stone, one meter high and 60 centimeters wide. All those present were satisfied with this work made by the hands of a young Albanian artist. The bust represents the figure of the King, supported on a square pedestal, on which a delicate and elegant laurel wreath has been sculpted. On his chest he wears a beautiful eagle with the royal insignia on his head. The details of the pockets and belt are crafted in such a way that they appear to be real, demonstrating the talent and beauty that the artist has managed to convey." (LIMI, 1931, p. 93).





Figure 5, Mario Prayer: Portrait of King Zog I (1929). Central State Archives.
Figure 6, Kolë Shala: King Zog-I, marble. (Postcard of 1931). Archive of the Marubi Photo Library.

The unveiling of these monuments was often made to coincide with holidays commemorating important historical events for the nation[10].
For example, on October 8, 1932, on the occasion of King Zog I's birthday, a bust of the king was placed in Kukës (Central State Archive, 1932), a region in northern Albania. It was one of the first public works by the sculptor Odhise Paskali.

10 This government initiative sought not only to promote national pride, but also to generate a dialogue about the role and influence of the King in the society of his time. As the country moved into the future, the government hoped that the figure of the King during his reign would continue to be a source of inspiration and reflection on the values and history of the country at that time.



Figure 7, Odhise Paskali: Bust of King Zog I. Kukës (1932). Central State Archives.
Figure 8, Giandomenico De Marchis: Bust of Llesh Topallaj, Tirana (1932). Central State Archives.

The act of celebration and the placement of the bust was carried out on behalf of the people of Kosovo, wishing a long and fortunate reign for the Zog dynasty (Figure 7). This event was documented and recorded in the state's central archive. A few years later, in 1935, another bust of King Zog I was installed in the garden of the Civil Hospital of Tirana, also commissioned to the aforementioned sculptor Odhise Paskali (Central State Archive, 1933).

The letters exchanged between the Vlora autonomy and the Ministry of the Interior reveal the level of control and pressure that royal propaganda exerted on the administration and how projects that did not comply with official guidelines were dismissed or abandoned (Central State Archive, 1938).

Also, during the period between 1920 and 1938, other monuments were erected in honour of various important figures of the state administration, such as, for example, the bust of Major Llesh Topallaj, assistant to the king, in the city of Tirana Llesh Topallaj (Figure 8): "... he was assassinated in Vienna, on February 20, 1931, in an attempt against King Zog I by political exiles" (BAKIU, 2010).

As a result of his sacrifice, the State decided to honor his memory with a magnificent bronze bust. The process of applying for and approving the construction of the monument is documented in the writings of the time. It was requested that the monument should be erected in the triangular garden located between Mother Reina Street, International Hotel Street and the former Istanbul Hotel in Tirana (Central State Archive, 1932).The bust, cast in bronze by the Italian sculptor Giandomenico De Marchis, was inaugurated on February 21, 1932 and was placed on a marble base 2.5 m high, being one of the first public works in Tirana[11].

11 Giandomenico De Marchis (1893-1967) was an Italian sculptor trained at the Turin School of Art. During World War I, he served as an infantry officer in Italian-occupied Libya. He then worked

These public monuments honoring important figures of the time reflect the ruling elite's emphasis on building a national identity and promoting Albanian nationalism. However, with the fascist occupation of 1939 and the establishment of the subsequent communist regime, many of these monuments were removed or replaced due to the ideological and political changes that occurred in Albania. Such is the case of the aforementioned bust of Major Llesh Topallaj that was blown up with dynamite in 1945. "It is interesting to know that it was the first monument erected in Tirana and that it remained in place even during the fascist occupation; however, unfortunately, it was removed and melted down by the communists after World War II" (BAKIU, 2019).

It is evident that public sculpture in Albania during the monarchical period was significant and various works were made to commemorate historical moments and relevant personalities. However, with the arrival of communism to power, many of these monuments were destroyed or dismantled, as the communist regime sought to establish its own system of symbols and ideology[12].

The artist mayor: Qemal Butka (1907-1997)

Qemal Butka's architectural legacy was significant for the development of Tirana's infrastructures and aesthetics during the period of the monarchy. His efforts to provide the city with new public buildings and monuments with patriotic motifs reflect his commitment to Albanian identity and culture and left a strong impact on its urban landscape.

Qemal Butka was born in 1907 in Butkë, a small town in the then Ottoman Empire, now Kolonjë district. His father died during World War I, so he was raised by his uncle Sali Butka, who took him to Austria for his secondary education.

In 1931 he studied architecture and engineering at the Vienna University of Technology, later attending the Higher Technical School of Tirana, where he graduated between 1927 and 1931. During his stay in Vienna, he was a member of the Albanian patriotic society and collaborated with important Albanian literary figures in the publication of patriotic magazines.

In 1931 he won the international competition to design the monument dedicated to Sadijé Toptani, mother of King Zog, who had died in 1934, and which would eventually become the mausoleum for the rest of the members of the Albanian royal family. It was located on the outskirts of Tirana, on the hill called Kodra e Geshtënjës, in what is now Tirana Park, and was inaugurated on December 30, 1935[13].

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as a sports teacher at the Military Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, but in 1935 he devoted himself to sculpture. He traveled briefly to London, then to Spain, before returning to Rome. In 1947 he emigrated to Brazil. He was known for his medals and coin creations. His sculptures mainly showed the human body in motion and served the fascist understanding of art.

12 Such are the cases of Portret Gruaje (Portrait of a Woman), Skanderbeg, Luigj Shala or Eshref Frashëri, mentioned in the press of the time and of which only photographic evidence has remained.

13 She was born in 1873, the daughter of Emin Bey, who belonged to the prominent Toptani family. In 1891 he married Xhemal Pasha Zogu, who died in 1905. When his son Zogu came to power, Sadije continued to be an intelligent and valuable advisor to him. He passed away on 25 November 1934, leaving a legacy as an influential and powerful figure in the king's life (Gazeta shqiptare, 27 nëntor 1934. Sadije Toptani (1873-1934).

With a rationalist language, completely unornamented, it consisted of a square building covered with a large semicircular dome. On the outside, its main façade was made up of a simple rectangular door, crowned by a narrow and very elongated semicircular opening; all in the center of a smooth, slightly sunken wall (Figure 9).

Sadly, it was destroyed by members of the Albanian Communist Party in November 1944[14]. This is what Ismail Kadare, a renowned Albanian writer, notes in his book on the Marubi dynasty of photographers:
"… the mausoleum of the queen mother Sadie Zog, located on one of the hills surrounding Tirana, ... with the entry of the communists into the capital, in November 1944, one of the first orders given by the Albanian communist leader, Enver Hoxha (who would become the future dictator of the country), was to blow up the monument. The Communists had an extreme penchant for destroying ancient tombs and funerary monuments, as part of their policy of removing symbols from the monarchical and aristocratic past, and establishing their own system of symbols and ideology."(Kadare, 1995).

This act of destruction of historical monuments and tombs was common during the communist regime in Albania, as they sought to erase any vestiges of the monarchy and establish a new order based on the cult of personality of leader Enver Hoxha.

The destruction of monuments and the rewriting of history were common practices to consolidate the communist regime's control over Albanian society. In 1931 he joined the Ministry of World Affairs, from where, in the following years, he directed other important projects such as the Korça City Hall, the Shën Prokopi church.

In 1935 he was appointed mayor of Tirana, a position he held for only one year. In this city, in the New Bazaar, he designed the residence of the Kërçiku family, with a curved façade to be outlined to the front left contour of Avni Rustemi Square and the well-known Monument to Freedom, in which the Italian sculptor Prof. Antonio Bassi from Trani – Bari[15] participated. Standing 12 meters tall and in the shape of a triumphal arch, crowned by a double-headed eagle with open wings, the monument had great symbolic significance for Albania's national freedom. Under the arch was an altar of black granite and red Kruja stones surmounted by a cauldron, which added even more value and patriotic sense to the work (Figure 10).

Its inauguration on 31 August 1938 was an important event in the commemoration of the kingdom's 10th anniversary and was attended by prominent figures such as Princess Ruhije and Minister of the Interior Musa Juka.

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14 A replica was erected in 2012 to house the remains of King Zog, which were brought from Paris, as part of the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Albanian Independence.

15 Antoni Bassi (1889-1965). Son of the sculptor Nicola Bassi, he trained in Rome, Germany and Austria. Influenced by Expressionism and the Viennese Secession, his art reflects the influence of Gustav Klimt and Franz von Stuck. During the First World War, he was seriously wounded in 1917, but still exhibited his works in Bari. Close to fascism, he made public monuments in several cities and obtained honorary citizenship of Como. On September 18, 1944, he was taken hostage by German soldiers in Trani. He negotiates his release thanks to his knowledge of German. War inspires his works on social victims of the conflict. In the post-war period, he devoted himself to private commissions until his death in his hometown of Trani-Bari in 1965.

However, with the fascist occupation and the expansion of the square, the monument was dismantled and stored, while its eagle was moved to Skënderbej Square where it was reused. Qemal Butka's architectural legacy is truly remarkable, and his buildings are still admired even after almost a century. His distinctive style and solid execution make his works easily identifiable. In addition to his outstanding career as an architect, Butka also excelled in the field of philately, creating beautiful series of postage stamps, including some to commemorate the 25th anniversary of National Independence.



Figure 9, Qemal Butka: Mausoleum of Queen Sadijé Toptani, (1935). Today the pantheon of the Royal House. Central State Archives
Figure 10, The Freedom Monument, designed by architect Qemal Butka and sculptor Antonio Bassi. Inauguration Day in Tirana (1938).

Lapidarët: As a collective memory.

The Albanian government, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the country's Independence, resumed several initiatives regarding the erection of busts and commemorative monuments for patriotic purposes, this new form of sculptural expression was called Lapidarët[16].
The Lapidarët (term from tombstone) in addition to their artistic and historical value, are characterized by their durability because they were erected with solid materials such as concrete, marble, bronze or stone.

Generally speaking, they are a memorial or a monument that perpetuates a historical event or the work of a person or group of people with special patriotic, scientific, cultural, and educational

16 They were also developed during the period of the fascist invasion. A very interesting fact is that this form of artistic expression not only commemorated the fallen in war (Italian troops in this case) or prominent groups that contributed to the liberation of the homeland, but had a broader scope in its meaning and purpose.

values. They were erected in public squares or in places where events of historical, scientific and cultural importance occurred, immortalizing them. One of the sculptors who participated most actively in these projects was Dhimitër Çani (1904-1990). After studying at the French Lycée in his hometown, he continued his studies in the United States, specifically in the city of Boston. He was always attracted to the Fine Arts, assiduously practicing photography. In 1934 he moved to Italy, where he attended the British Academy of Fine Arts in Rome until 1935. Returning to Albania in 1936, he taught as a drawing teacher in the towns of Shkodra, Elbasan, Gjirokastra, Berat and at the Lyceum of Korça. At the same time he continued to devote time to sculpture. From 1950 he lived in Tirana, until his death in 1990. In 1937 he made the bust of Babë Dudë Karbunara, an Albanian language teacher and signatory of the country's Act of Independence in 1912. This work was placed in the center of the city of Berat, in a square that bears his name. It was no coincidence that he had commissioned this portrait in the city of Berat, since only two years earlier, in 1935, he had achieved great success there with the work entitled Deshmoret e Lirisë (Martyrs of the Nation) (Figure 11).

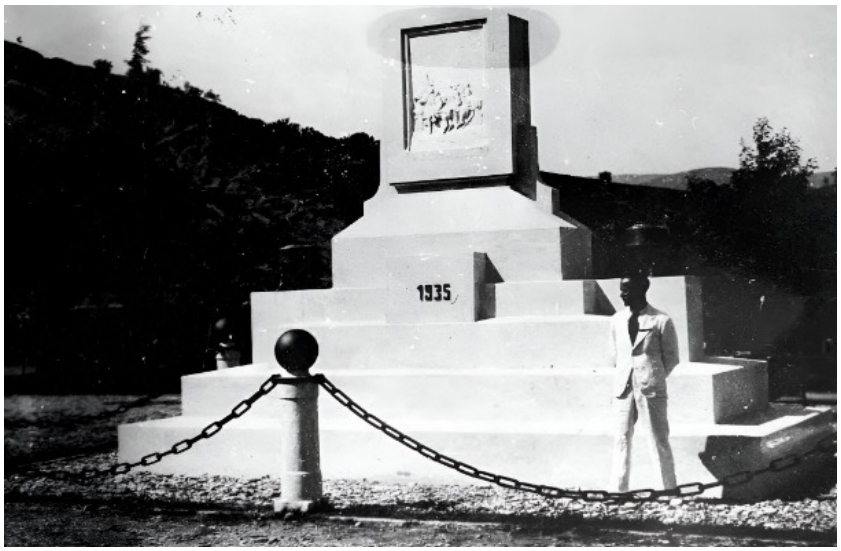


Figure 11, Dhimitër Çani: Monument of the Martyrs of the Nation, (1935) Berat.

Deshmoret e Lirisë is a parallelepiped with a square base raised on three steps, on the main front of which is written in large letters: "MARTYRS OF THE NATION - MUNICIPALITY OF BERAT, 1935"; on the opposite side, there is a bas-relief showing four horsemen walking next to the national flag.

The tombstone is constructed of white-painted concrete. It was inaugurated with a great ceremony organized by the Municipality on November 28, 1935, on the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of the Declaration of Independence[17], being reflected in the pages of the newspaper Minerva:

"Yesterday was the great day of the homeland that was celebrated with special splendor and, after concluding the prayers and speeches of the occasion, the people lined up behind the civil and military authorities, along with the schoolchildren and the paramilitaries with their flags.

17 As I mentioned earlier, in other chapters, it was customary to celebrate all kinds of official events on Independence Day, including the inauguration of monuments in city squares. The entire public administration, from the municipalities to the highest levels of the state, was involved in these practices.

The magnificent procession, after a few minutes, arrived at the park to inaugurate the monument erected by the municipality ... to perpetuate the memory of the Martyrs of the Nation: Baki Gjinokastra, Ismail Klosi, Hajredin Fratari of Mallakastra and Muharrem Lleshi of Berat" (MEHQEMEJA, 1935).

The enthusiasm shown by the thousand-year-old city of Berat during the inauguration was reflected in the aforementioned report of the newspaper Minerva with these words: "People die, but the ideals for which the heroes of a nation fight are nourished and grow with the blood of martyrs, and to keep alive the life of the ideals of these martyrs, this lapidary is also erected as a Guard of Honor."

These monuments were also used in commemorations of "more domestic" events, as was the case of commemorating workers who died accidentally on the construction site of the Tirana-Durrës highway[18].

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18 Continuation of the article: "Continuing in the race to Durrës, His Excellency the Lieutenant General stopped, for a short time, in the town of Ndroq and attended the inauguration of a monument erected in memory of three Albanian workers who died in the construction of the highway..." Source: Albania-Shqipni: (revistë e ilustruar politike, ekonomike, shkencore e letrare italisht dhe shqip) Year I, n°. 7, September 1940, p. 299.

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Albanian sculpture in public space during the 20th century

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Abstract

Albanian sculpture is one of the most important forms of visual arts in Albania. It presents itself to the public as a reflection of the cultural, political, and social developments of the country. For many scholars, sculpture has sparked interest in studying various aspects. The focus of this study is the evolution of Albanian sculpture in public space during the 20th century, its role in representing ideologies or social changes, as was the case with socialist realism in Albania, where sculptures of heroes and workers were present everywhere in public spaces. The research methodology used for this study will be qualitative. The collected data will be descriptive. The data sources will be conducted studies, writings, historical documents, manuscripts, interviews, written articles, as well as film materials. The study will concentrate on analyzing several key works in sculpture.

Keywords

history, political development, symbolics, memory, Albanian sculpture

Introduction

In the middle of the 19th century, painting and sculpture were not popular in Albania. But by the end of this century, decorative and ornamental folk art had grown. Even though Albania was still part of the Ottoman Empire at the start of the 20th century, the movement for national liberation had grown stronger and was becoming more important in social and cultural life. After independence, the revival of the arts was a key part of building a national identity, a society awared of its culture and love of country.

In 1928, the Municipal Council of Korça city summoned the young sculptor Odhise Paskali from Turin to commission the erection of a monument dedicated to the fallen fighters for the independence of Albania. He also took on the task of erecting other monuments, such as the "Flag-bearer" over the grave of Ismail Qemali in Vlora, among others. The monuments of the "National Fighter" in Korça and the "Flag-bearer" in Vlora were inaugurated on the same day, November 28, 1932. Some of these monuments, such as "Mihal Grameno", "Themistokli Gërmenjit" (Korça, 1932), "Çerçiz Topulli" (Gjirokastra, 1934), and "Scanderbeg" (Kukës, 1939), also defined the appearance of the city squares.



Figure 1 Odhise Paskali, Statue of a woman, exhibited in 1931
Figure 2 Odhise Paskali, National Fighter, bronze, Korça, 1932
Figure 3 Odhise Paskali, Flag-bearer, bronze Vlora, 1932
Figure 4 Odhise Paskali, Çerçiz Topulli, bronze, Gjirokastra, 1934

To honor significant historical figures and events-the people's struggle for freedom and independence, as well as the prominent patriotic figures of the National Renaissance a series of commemorative works, monuments, statues, and memorials were erected in several cities across the country.

Together with Andrea Kushi, artists and art enthusiasts, they founded the association "Friends of Art," which organized the Art Exhibition on May 24, 1931. The association also published a commemorative magazine with a single issue. Odhise Paskali was the creator of the first art school in Albania, the School of Drawing, (1932). (Kuqali, 1988)

Figurative art evolved with the liberation of the nation.

When it comes to public space in the 20th century, especially during the years 1945 - 1990, in the time of socialist realism, it was necessary to think about what characteristics public space had, and then what art works are.

Public spaces were often changed and adapted to reflect the changes in regimes and ideologies. In general, politics selected figures that were closest to it. It primarily chose the period of the Renaissance, individuals of particular importance in Albanian history, such as Isa Boletini and Ismail Qemali, portraying them as heroes who contributed to the national cause, the War of Independence, and the National Liberation War.

In sculptural compositions, the constructive work of the people and the socialist revolution led by the Party was celebrated. Art elevated the figure of the working man. Every artistic creation was in the service of the Party's and the people cause.[1] To reflect major events, other genres of sculpture developed, such as posters and memorials.

The artists' attention was focused on artistic mastery, but it had to serve politics. In this sense, public creativity did not have alternative proposals. Every artistic project placed in public space had to be approved by the authorities. The way the work would be composed was almost predetermined. The means, the symbolic elements of the work, the perspective, the horizon of the work, the levels of spectators' scrutiny all of it was defined so that the message and style of the art represented socialist propaganda. Thus, art was used as an "ideological weapon" in the service of the state.

First artistic institutions in the country

May 10, 1931, was founded the society "Friends of Art" by Paskali and Qenan Meserea.
May 1931, the Drawing Course was opened in Tirana, directed by painter Andrea Kushi and sculptor Odhise Paskali, with around 150 girls and boys enrolled.
January 1932, the School of Drawing is established, under the direction of Italian Mario Ridola, as the first art school in Albania.

In 1932, at the "Harry T. Fultz" Technical Institute in Tirana, a decoration course was opened, divided into two branches, drawing and sculpture. November 1946, the Artistic Lyceum (Jordan Misja) was opened, with teachers who have studied in the West, mainly in Italy.

I1950, the pinacoteca is established, marking the beginning of the Gallery of Fine Arts.
January 11, 1954, was opened the National Gallery of Arts. January 4, 1960, the Institute of Figurative Arts opens with a two-year program, in two branches, painting and sculpture. In 1966, the High Institute of Arts (ILA) is inaugurated in Tirana, a four-year university now known as the University of Arts. It was formed from the merger of three art schools: the State Conservatory of Tirana, the Higher School of Actors "Aleksandër Moisiu" and the Institute of Figurative Arts. The first teachers were former students who had just returned from studies

1 (1969) Figurative Arts in the People's Republic of Albania, published on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the liberation of the homeland and the triumph of the revolution, "Naim Frashëri" Publishing House, Tirana.

abroad. In 1972, is established the "Enterprise for Reproduction of Art's Works". Afterward, several national museums and other artistic schools were opened. October 28, 1981, was inaugurated the "National Historical Museum" in Tirana. November 1, 1982, was inaugurated the National Museum "Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg", in Kruja.

Sculptors over the years

The first generation of artists, sculptors, and teachers are those who studied outside Albania, in Italy, Greece, Soviet Union, Czech Republic, Rumania, Croatia, and China. Odhise Pasakli - Turin, Janaq Paço - Athens, Kristina Koljaka e Andrea Mano - Roma, Shaban Hadëri, Thanas Papa, Kristaq Rama, Muntaz Dhrami - Saint Peterburg, Dhimo Gogollari, Fuat Dushku, Hektor Dule, Thoma Thomai - Prague, Uran Hajdari - Beijing, Perikli uli - Bucharest.

Then comes the next generation of sculptors.
Kristo Kristiko, Mira Kuçuku, Idriz Balani, Genc Hajdari, Vasiliev Nini, Eli Xoxa, Suzana Varvarica, Niko Thana, Kreshnik Xhiku, Sadik Spahija, Ilmi Kasemi, Pjerin Kolonikaj, Besim Çaushi, Artan Peqini, Arben Bajo etc.

List of major works of monumental sculpture

- November 28, 1932, in Vlora was inaugurated the monument "The Flag Keeper" by Odhise Paskali.
- November 28, 1932, in Korça was inaugurated the monument "National Fighter" by Odhise Paskali.
- In 1932, was erected in Korça the monument of "Themistokli Gërmenji" by Odhise Paskali.
- May 5, 1949, was inaugurated the "Bust of Qemal Stafa" by sculptor Janaq Paço.
- November 29, 1949, in Tirana was inaugurated "The Partisan Monument" by sculptor Andrea Mano.
- In 1950, Odhise Paskali worked on the "Bust of Vojo Kushi."
- In 1953, reliefs and sculptures were installed at the New Albania Film Studio.
- In 1954, the "Monument of Stalin" was erected at the Textile Combine in Tirana, a work by Odhise Paskali.
- In 1959, was inaugurated in Tirana the "Monument of Lenin" by Kristina Koljaka.
- In 1959, was inaugurated in Kruja, the "Monument of Skanderbeg" by Janaq Paço.
- In 1966, the "Statue of the Revolutionary Spirit" by Mumtaz Dhrami was exhibited.
- In 1968, in Mathauzen, was established the memorial "Victor Partisan" by Odhise Paskali.
- 1968, in Kuksi was inaugurated, the "Bust of Shote Galica", by Kristaq Rama.
- August 1969, in Shkodra, were inaugurated the "The Monument of Vig's Heroes" and "Isa Boletini" by sculptor Shaban Hadëri.
- November 1969, near Tirana, the Mushqeta Memorial was erected with "In one hand the shovel and in the other the rifle", by sculptor Hektor Dule, co-author of the "Monument of 1920".
- October 1971, in Rrëshen, the "Monument of the Four Heroines of Mirdita" was inagurated, a work by sculptors Andrea Mano, Dhimo Gogollari, Fuat Dushku, and Perikli Çuli. (Unfortunately, completely destroyed in 1996).
- May 5, 1972, the monument "Mother Albania" was inaugurated at the Martyrs' Cemetery in

Tirana, while in November 1972, Vlora inaugurated the "Monument of Independence," by the same group of sculptors Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Mumtaz Dhrami.

- In 1974, the "Relief" was inaugurated at the Prime Minister's Office, a work by Kristaq Rama.
- In 1977, in Korça, the "Guerrillas" was erected by Kristaq Rama.
- In 1978, bronze busts of the "Frashëri Brothers" were erected by Odhise Paskali.
- In 1978, the "Commemoration of the First Assault Brigade" was established, by Perikli Çuli.
- In 1978, the "Lapidary of Priska" was erected, authored by Mumtaz Dhrami and Sofokli Koçi.
- In 1978, was inaugurated the "Attacker", the bronze relief of Thoma Thomai.
- In 1978, were inaugurated: "Mrs. Çurre", "Shkurte Vata", "Action Youth", "Avni Rustemi", and "Partisan" of Odhise Paskali in Përmet.
- In 1980, "The Calling Partisan" of Kristaq Rama, in the Martyrs' Cemetery, Tropoja.
- In 1981, in Vlora, was inaugurated the monument dedicated to "Hysni Kapos".
- In 1981, were worked sculptures for the National Historic Museum of Tirana.
- In 1982, the sculptures of the Kruja Museum, were worked by Janaq Paco and Genc Hajdari.
- November 1982, in Bajram Curri, was inaugurated, the "Statue of Bajram Curri", and Fuat Dushku.
- In 1984, was rised the monument "Ambush of Barmash", authored by Thoma Thomai.
- In 1984, Obelisk dedicated to the "First Brash Congress" in Helma's Skrapar.
- In 1987, in Lushnja, was erected the monument dedicated to "Agrarian Reform and Collectivization of Agriculture", by author Perikli Çuli.
- In 1982, Durrazo, by the sea was rised, "The Monument of Resistance".
- In 1988, Tirana, Korça, Gjirokastra, were inaugurated the five monuments of Enver Hoxha, worked by Sali Shijaku, Shaban Hadëri, Kristaq Rama, Thoma Thomai, Hilmi Kasemi, Hektor Dule, Mumtaz Dhrami. In 1991 these monuments were removed and destroyed, the moment that marks the beginning of democracy. (Velo, 2017))

The People's Artist Odhise Paskali, the father of Albanian sculpture.

He was born on December 22, 1903 in Kozan, Përmet. He completed his studies at the University of Turin's Faculty of Literature and Philosophy. In 1927, he defended his diploma in art history before the eminent historian A. Venturi. During his time in Turin, he studied sculpting in the studio of the Italian artist Rubino while also attending university. "The hungry man" was his first work and remains one of the masterpieces in Albanian sculptures. It originated in Turin in 1924.

He is the creator of more than 523 sculptures, some of which depict the patriotic spirit and national identity. Statues of historical figures include I. Boletini, L. Gurakuqi, Th. Gërmenji, A. Rustemi, the Frashër brothers, Q. Stafa, V. Kushi, A. Demi, V. Shanto, M. Mama, K. Karafili, R. Çollaku, A. Zeneli, and Commander Stalin. In 1965, he made the most developed form of Enver Hoxha's bust, which was reproduced in hundreds of thousands. His works include the monument to General Telini, the bust of B. Curri, A. Frashëri, and Mussolini; Reclining Nude; Spring; the Monument of Independence in Vlora; The Starving Man; Keti; The Highlander; National Fighter; and Naum Veqilharxhi in Korça. In 1968, Gjergj Kastrioti donated to the town

of Hora of Arbëreshë-Sicily, The Unknown Soldier, The Victory Partisan (Mathauzen, Austria), Fan Noli, Onufri, J. De Rada, P. Vasa, Zef Skiroi, Migjeni, and A. Zogu.

Throughout his life and labor, Paskali molded Albanian history into colossal works that live on in national memory. With the Skanderbeg Monument in Tirana, he elevated the patriotic subject of the Renaissance in terms of both content and visual expression. This is the most well-known and representative piece from all Albanian-speaking countries, made in partnership with Janaq Paço and Andrea Mano. It was inaugurated in 1968, on the 500th anniversary of the national hero's death.



Figure 5, Odhise Paskali, Janaq Paço, Andrea Mano Monument of Skanderbeg in Tirana, bronze, 1968



Figure 6, Odhise Paskali, Skanderbeg, 1968, Hora of Arberesh, Sicily

In 1965, he created the most detailed version of Enver Hoxha's bust. The image of the dictator in Odhise Paskali's sculpture continues to serve as a bridge between art and power, aesthetic

devotion and ideological coercion. In this conflict, it is difficult to determine where conviction ends and irony begins. Odhise Paskali receives recognition for being the first sculptor in Albanian art history to successfully integrate sculpture with architecture and urban space, providing Albanian towns with an enduring artistic and symbolic dimension.

Janaq Paço, the sculptor who immortalized the Skanderbeg's figure

Was born on March 14, 1914 in Konica - July 11, 1992, Tirana. One of the founders of Albanian realistic sculpture of the 20th century. He studied at the High School of Fine Arts in Athens (Greece). He stood out with his diploma work, which won first place in the Academy's constructionswho immortalized the figure of a marble portrait of his friends, Trilivia. He returned to Albania and, together with Odhise Paskali, was among the founders of the sculpture department at the Artistic Lyceum of Tirana.

In addition to family portraits, such as the head of his sister Angjelina, Girl with beads, Lidia, Amazona. During his lifetime, he created many works for well-known national figures, such as Qemal Stafa, Avni Rustemi, Fan S Nolit, Sami Frashërit, Vangjush Mio, Aleksandër Xhuvani, Aleksandër Moisiu, Hoxha Tahsimi and many others. During his long artistic career, he also created many nudes' figures, due to the system, Paço himself was obliged to break them.

In his artistic life, the renowned Albanian sculptor Janaq Paço created some of the most famous works dedicated to our national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg. He was the co-author of three important monuments that embody the heroism, pride and patriotic spirit of the Skanderbeg era.



Figure 7, Janaq Paço,
Monument of Skanderbeg in Kruja, bronze, 1968

The first of these is the Skanderbeg Equestrian Monument in Kruja, marking one of the first actions to create a magnificent public work in honor of the hero. In 1948, he won the competition for the realization of the monument, being chosen among many competitors and foreigners. The work would last 10 years, 1949-1959. The inauguration took place on November 27, 1959. This monument is a reference city point in Kruja, for all tourists and Albanians who visit. It is a place

of reflection, remembrance and national pride. Through it, Janaq Paço managed to create a direct connection between the image of Skanderbeg and the historical place where he was appeared. The monument stands not only as a heroism, but also as a living symbol between the past and the present Albanian identity, turning art into a testimony of collective memory. This work was followed by another creation of experience. Skanderbeg Monument in the center of Tirana (1964–1968), a great collaboration with the prominent sculptors Odhise Paskali and Andrea Mano. This monument has become a symbol of the national team and a cultural landmark for the capital. The sculpture reflects a Skanderbeg as a warrior and thinker, a defender and a symbol of hope. In 1973, Janaq Paço completed the monumental work "Gladiators", 3.5 meters high, conceived to open at the entrance to the ancient Amphitheater of Durazo.



Figure 8, Janaq Paço, Gladiators, 1973 Source: Arkiv i familjes



Figure 9, Janaq Paço and Genc Hajdari, Skanderbeg and the people, sculptural group, concrete, 1982

In later years, Paço also contributed to the beginning of the sculptural group "Skanderbeg and people" (1979–1982), together with the sculptor Genc Hajdari. This monumental work is located in the lobby of the Kruja National Museum "Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg" and reflects the connection of the ties between the leader and the people in war. Paço managed to combine the ideal with the national spirit, in his works it is felt the influence of the classical Greek school.

Kristina Koljaka the only female sculptor, with a public work

She was born on June 4, 1916 in Kavaja - October 21, 2005. She is one of the first girls in Albania to succeed in sculpture. She studied in the "Academy of Fine Arts of Rome", when artists were counted on fingers, there was not a single female sculptor among them. In 1951, she began teaching at the Lyceum "Jordan Misja" and in January 1960, as one of the lecturers of anatomy at the Institute of Arts. She leaft after 2 years, to deal only with teaching in Licee. She educated generations of artists until retired in 1968.

"At that time, they allowed me to teach only artistic anatomy, but I enjoyed working and talking to students about sculpture, just as experienced I had in Rome".

She has made many works like nude, boy portrait, Eros, St. John the Little Baptist, (1941) Portrait of Girl, Nerina, Nude (Diploma The Plable), Portrait of Shipion African, Fidan, Ballerina, (1951) Forest (Valued Prize), (1951) at the forefront of Selita, 1951) (1955) Children and Pigeon, (1957) Boy with Dolphin, (1958) Relief Collectivization, (1958) Shot putter, (1956) Doctor Shiroka who gave the title "Meritorious Artist". (1953) Gjok Doçi, (1954) Hajdar Tafa, (1955) Mustafa Matohiti, (1950, 1952 and 1981) Ali Kelmendi, (1964) New Engineer, (1974) Justina Shkupi and Tefta Tashko Koço, (1978) Dora D'Istria, etc.

Due to her skill and talent, in 1954, she was entrusted with the 4-meter-high Lenin monument. It was the first sculpture to be cast in bronze in the country. The monument was placed in front of the National Art Gallery. Janaq Paço, expresses himself as "A precious artistic work". The success of this work is primarily due to the serious work of the sculptor based on the very valuable experience of Soviet art, the most widespread art in the world..., her statue is set in motion.... she is an energetic figure".

In her artistic creativity, Kristina has built the image of a realistic sculptor that maintains close ties to real life, with the human model. It approaches modeling with warmth and empathy, turning plastic into delicate forms with deep emotional expressions and respect for human nature.



Figure 10, Kristina Koljaka, Monument of Lenin bronze, 1959 Tirana

Conclusion

A significant chapter in Albanian art and public space history is still the socialist realism era. It depicts a time when art was strongly associated with ideology, yet it also produced highly technical and potent social symbolism pieces that continue to spark discussion and investigation. Following the fall of the communist regime in 1990, space and public art in Albania went through a transformation process characterized by freedom of expression, aesthetic pluralism, and diversity of ideas. Artists were relieved of ideological restrictions and began to explore new forms of expression, influenced by contemporary international developments.
There was not easy, not always successful access, where different factors emerged. From the artistic-cultural and state institutions, there was no management of proposals provided by state and non-state bodies (various patriotic associations that wanted to evaluate different figures). So, it was a very mobile terrain.

The state has taken the initiatives several times, which tried to manage them but were very periodic; no structures with judgment standards on artistic creativity were created in terms of public spaces. There was no continuity to create true professionals, educational, to educate people in the field of professional judgment of public space, for a sustainable approach. While the will of the artists was a bright, living will because the artist continues to regard the public space as a great fate, to establish a work of theirs. There was no predisposition among cultural institutions that evaluate this work to establish an art criticism institution. Many artists focus their creative work within the studio, preparing for personal exhibitions and investing greater energy in their creations.

Public spaces are common spaces, administered by public entities or individuals who do not have professional training in the fields of urban planning, architecture, or public art, which affects the aesthetic, functional, and cultural quality of these environments. This often leads to wrong decision-making, where long-term vision is lacking for sustainable and comprehensive public space development.

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File\:Tirana,_Albania_%287367899994%29.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tirana,_Albania_%287367899994%29.jpg)

Monumenti i Skënderbeut në Krujë \[Photograph]. Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/48/Monumenti_i_Sk%C3%ABnderbeut_n%C3%AB_Kruj%C3%AB.jpg

Skënderbeu dhe luftëtarët shqiptarë në kalanë e Krujës \[Photograph]. Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Skenderbeu_dhe_luftetaret_shqiptare_ne_kalane_e_krujes.JPG

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Cultivation and Artistic Development of Lyrical and Epic Dance in the Republic of Albania

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Abstract

When talking about dances, their syncretic character must be taken into account. They are often linked to the artistic, musical and poetic beginning. The tendency to create choreographic figures or movements on the originality of folk creations constitutes an essential element in Elaborated Dances. Folk dances are created based on the sensitivity and naturalness of individual dancing, group execution, in the form of a circle or semicircle held by hands. During the research, I noticed that from the message that the dances convey, it was deemed necessary by Ethnochoreographers to have a division between Epic and Lyrical Dances. Having as an objective the differences and developments between these genres, we will also find reflections of the problems of cultivated dances which are important for the fact of how they have changed and evolved, while preserving the original motif. The first includes the choreographic movements of lyric dance which are calm, small jumps without much separation from the ground. While in the second we have the choreographic movements of epic dance where we distinguish, the emphasized displacements, the abrupt stops with one or both feet, as well as the strong collisions of the steps on the ground. In conclusion, we can say that the fact of how these dances are processed by different choreographers who often place lyrical dance motifs in the epic dance, which makes it difficult to define them later, is important. The difference of folk dance for each genre leads us to the division of the emotional idea that they define during the execution by folk dancers.

Keywords

folklore, gender, choreography, dance

Introduction

The existence of an institution such as the National Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances, which performs a wide repertoire of dances and musical compositions, is fundamentally rooted in the rich and diverse tradition of Albanian folk dance. This tradition serves as a crucial foundation for cultivated artistic expression. Furthermore, the ensemble supported by skilled and talented composers, dancers, and choreographers who have demonstrated their artistic capabilities both nationally and internationally. Equally important is the emphasis on musical creativity, wherein the folkloric tradition is just as abundant. Distinguished composers have been able to extract the essence of this tradition and refine it into successful artistic works. Nonetheless, this process naturally raises several critical questions regarding the challenges associated with the utilization of folkloric heritage in the realm of cultivated art. Which elements have been most frequently incorporated into staged or stylized folk dances? What specific characteristics define traditional Albanian dances? What is the emotional impact of these dances during stage performances? In what ways do thematic aspects influence their structure? Has field research contributed to the development of these choreographic works, and to what extent has it shaped the artistic sensibility of choreographers?



Figure 1. The Tower Dance; Archive: TKOBAP

To address these questions, this study will engage in a comprehensive analysis of the genesis and evolution of such artistic creations, examining their origins, the influence they have exerted, and the transformation of artistic elements during performance. This investigation begins by acknowledging the cultural bearers—those individuals without whom this extensive creative heritage in both music and folk dance would not exist. The transmission of movement from one bearer to another, through collaboration and shared knowledge, has played a pivotal role in the realization of choreographic works. The dynamic vitality and notable enrichment of Albanian choreographic folklore, particularly in the post-World War II period, has facilitated extensive and in-depth research in the field of ethnocoreology—a discipline dedicated to the study of dance. The process of understanding and studying this field has been grounded in the roots of folklore. In general terms, for Albanian scholars, folklore encompasses: folk prose and poetry; folk music—both vocal and instrumental—as well as traditional musical instruments; folk dances and movements; and folk dramatic art, which includes folk games, sketches, carnivals,

and, of particular importance, traditional costumes, as well as the temporal and spatial contexts in which these practices occur. The art of dancing is inherently dependent on music and on the narrative or message it seeks to convey. Choreographic realization is not possible without the interaction of these elements. Various studies have highlighted the influence of circular or semicircular dance formations, which in ancient times were associated with the worship of specific cults (such as the cult of fire, that of a slain animal, or the veneration of plants). These ritualistic elements have, over time, evolved into expressions of aesthetic thought. The semicircular formation remains the most commonly used artistic structure in the performance of the majority of traditional dances. In order to achieve a more stylized stage performance, it became necessary to aesthetically refine these dances, while ensuring that their original identity and cultural essence remained intact. Folklore scholars have addressed many significant issues related to the field of cultivated art in a substantial body of publications.((Bogdani, Ideo-emotional content of Albanian folk dance, 1989), ((Xhangolli, 2007), ((Uçi, 1981).

Literature Review

The history of the Albanian people is deeply rooted in creative expression, particularly in the realms of music, choreography, and costume design. The art of costume design holds significant importance in conveying folkloric motifs in an aesthetically compelling manner, serving as a highly valuable complementary element to folk dances. In conducting a broad review of the literature, including both Albanian and international sources, one notable and memorable work stands out by ((Kallamata, 1976). This text offers a particularly insightful account of the ideological underpinnings of Albanian folk dance, as interpreted by a foreign scholar who visited Albania in the early 19th century. The English traveler John Cam Hobhouse, who journeyed through Southern Albania during the years 1809–1810 under the rule of Ali Pasha Tepelena, provides a detailed description of Albanian dances in his travelogue A Journey through Albania and Other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia to Constantinople. Hobhouse observes that Albanian dances typically begin after long marches and during nights spent in the mountains, yet they also serve as a primary form of entertainment during village gatherings. He notes that among the various dances, there is a characteristic formation in which dancers hold hands behind their backs, each gripping a handkerchief. The dance typically begins slowly, with the group arranged in a semicircle and musicians—one playing the violin and the other the lahuta—situated at the center, moving back and forth as they accompany the dancers. The movements involve slow bending and unbending at the edges of the semicircle, with gentle foot stomps and occasional jumps. In the version accompanied by singing, often referred to as the "handkerchief dance," the dancers themselves provide the vocal accompaniment. In this case, the dance seems to follow the song, rather than the other way around. The lead dancer initiates the movement calmly, gradually transitioning into vigorous leaps forward, pulling the line of dancers into a circular formation. This is followed by spinning, kneeling simultaneously, and jumping up from the ground with a collective shout. Each dancer joins in by repeating the chorus of the song, mirroring the movements of the leader—who, after several rotations and leaps, yields his position to the next dancer. The new leader continues the same motions but seeks to surpass his predecessor in speed and expressiveness. This cycle continues for hours with brief pauses, drawing renewed energy from the ever-present song, which may vary only once or twice throughout the entire performance. To emphasize the vocal music, it is not uncommon for two or three of the group's elders to stand in the center of the circle and intone

the lyrics at the start of each verse, in unison with the dance leader—often accompanied by the sound of the lahuta. From Hobhouse's vivid description, one can easily recognize the authentic form of folk dance from the Labëria region. His account provides a rare historical insight into the performative, social, and ritualistic dimensions of Albanian dance during the early 19th century. To deepen the analysis further, we also refer to the work of ((Agolli, 1976)). In this study, the author focuses on specific observable features of the dances of the Dukat region—namely, the accentuation of lyrical lines accompanying the dance, the coordination of these accents with the dancers' steps, their stances, the choreographic motifs, and the procedural flow of the dancers through these motifs. Through this lens, Agolli successfully deconstructs the structural composition, content, and distinctive character of the valle labe (Labëria dance) of the Dukat community. It is important to note that this dance represents a regional variant rather than the entirety of the folkloric dance tradition of Labëria.((Kallamata, Our traditios, The pirouettes of the labe dances in an old edition, 1977). If we compare the features of this variant—or more precisely, its unique characteristics—with those described by Hobhouse 166 years earlier (as of the 1976 publication), we observe a notable degree of correspondence. This convergence appears in several dimensions: the form and physiognomy of the dance, its character, and its psychological function within its performative context. Of particular interest is the observation regarding the presence of musical instruments such as the violin and the lahuta, as well as the manner in which the musicians positioned themselves at the center of the semicircle formed by the dancers, who held each other arm in arm. Notably, the lahuta features prominently in the handkerchief dance and the Labëria singing style, played by one of three elders who separate from the group to lead the singing by reciting the song's lyrics. By the 1970s, however, these instruments were no longer in use, having been replaced primarily by the flute (fyelli), cyrlja, and the tambourine (dajrja).((Cane, 1977)



Figure 2. Dajra, Llahuta, and Fyej

Referring to the newspaper article, it is noted that, although somewhat unbelievable, it must nonetheless be acknowledged that significant losses of certain folk instruments have occurred in various regions of the country within a time span even shorter than when the author wrote his account (1809–1810). Bobla, an instrumentalist from Himara who functioned primarily as a leader in that region at the time, lost this role relatively recently. Later still, the daullja (drum) and zyrnaja—instruments that once played a central role as accompanists to Myzeqe folk dances and songs, as attested in older Myzeqe songs—also ceased to fulfill their primary functions. Another interesting element in the author's writing is his vivid description of solo dancing, or as it is alternatively called, the valle solo. He recounts: "We saw a 15-year-old boy who, with great ease, executed pirouettes and other difficult movements, delivering a highly enjoyable spectacle

during this solo performance." From this observation, we gain valuable information about the region's dance practices, specifically regarding solo dances that prominently featured pirouettes (rotations on one foot). The presence of pirouettes as an essential dance element in Albanian folk dances is indisputable. The manner of executing this movement varies only slightly from one region to another. In the circle dance of Mati, for example, the rotation is performed by sliding the soles of the feet smoothly across the ground while the body shifts sideways and remains upright. During the turn, the feet remain together along their entire length, and together with the extended arms—one slightly higher than the other—the overall movement creates the impression of a daring bird in flight. Yet, music remains foundational, serving as an inexhaustible national treasure that has developed extensively through instrumental accompaniment, without which the sounds would be hollow or would not exist at all. Researcher Bogdani conducted extensive fieldwork during his folkloric investigations both in urban and rural settings. After many years of dedicated work, he proposed a division of the folk dance genre into two main categories: lyrical and epic. Focusing on this classification, I will highlight how the choreographers at the National Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances (AKKVP) have worked to refine folk dances while adhering faithfully to these two genres. The concepts of lyricism and epic narrative will be elaborated upon through an analysis of the stylized dances crafted by the ensemble's artists. To properly address this issue, it is necessary to delve deeply into the aesthetic creation of these dances. Folk choreography represents a distinct artistic form. Like folklore in general, it is characterized by its collective, anonymous, and improvisational nature, embodying the spirit of the people and the nation. It is important to emphasize that within this genre, the unfolding of theme and subject matter in a performance is conveyed primarily through bodily expression, gesture, and movement. There are instances where dances are performed without musical accompaniment, accompanied only by poetry, or alternatively, solely by instrumental music. Regardless, the scope of artistic creativity within this field is broad, encompassing various types of execution (Bogdani R. H., 1977). Another essential and fundamental element is costume design. As an ethnic indicator with diverse regional characteristics, expressive radiant forms, and astonishing color combinations, traditional costume creates multifaceted aesthetic values. During choreographic movements, the folk costume acquires even greater significance. It appears that dance and costume are inseparable, as each derives life from the other. Foreign researchers have expressed admiration for certain types of traditional Albanian attire, notably the xhubleta and tirq (Sadik, 1999).



Figure 3. The Shepherds' Dance of Kukës (Panajot Kanaci, 1958; Archive: National Theatre of Opera, Ballet and Popular Ensemble)



Figure 4. The Dance Potato Planting (Gezim Kaçeli, 1988; Archive: TKOBAP)

Methodology

The primary components of choreographic movements include: body movements, bodily actions, hand positions, and head postures. When harmonized with one another, these elements create what is termed choreographic plasticity. In folk dance, choreographic movements function according to the folkloric genres of lyricism and epic narrative. Movements classified under the lyrical genre are characterized by being calm and gentle, involving small lifts with minimal detachment from the ground. These include subtle lifts on one or both feet, walking without doubled steps, simple steps resembling ordinary walking, delicate tiptoe movements, gentle turns or broad rotations, upright and graceful body postures, wave-like undulations during movement, elegant chain-like hand openings, wide and free arm movements, and serene, noble gazes. In contrast, there is a different manner of executing movements that distinguishes itself from those found in lyrical dances. These are performed in dances of the epic genre and are characterized by pronounced displacements or sharp stops on one or both feet, strong stomping of steps on the ground, intermittent tiptoe transitions, and large extended leg lifts, Semi-bent or airborne movements, vigorous jumps from the ground, and deep landings on one or both feet, sharp turns or energetic rotations, the pressing of dancers shoulder-to-shoulder within the group or proud postures in solo dances, abrupt bends or monumental body positions, strong grips of hands and arms or fluid movements, intense and piercing gazes, etc.



Figure 5. The Lyrical Dance Dredhja e të Rinjve (Ramazan Bogdani, 1966; Archive: TKOBAP)

Based on these defined criteria, epic and lyrical dances are sometimes found combined with each other. Within each genre, there are various subgenres or types of dances, which are also distinguished by their ideo-emotional content, reflected in the unity of choreography, music, and text. Compared to epic dances, lyrical dances occupy a broader place in our choreographic folklore. They are typically performed only by women, less frequently by men, or by both women and men together. Lyrical dances primarily employ elegant, simplified stepping and a profound expression of delicate poeticism. Lyrical dances have their own subdivisions—work lyrical dances, ritual lyrical dances, wedding lyrical dances, erotic-themed lyrical dances, humorous lyrical dances, and pantomimic lyrical dances.



Figure 6. Dance with Tropojë Motifs (Panajot Kanaci, 1961; Archive:TKOBAP)



Figure 7. The Lyrical Work Dance Endëset (Engjëll Tërshana, 1958; Archive: TKOBAP)



Figure 8. The Lyrical Festive Dance in Devoll (Agron Aliaj, 1974; Archive:TKOBAP)

It is common to find two subgenres within a single dance, but it is the choreographic plasticity that helps differentiate them from one another. Continuing further, epic dances, through their atmosphere, narrative, and choreographic plasticity, evoke the resonance of historical events from the past, the struggles, and battles of large popular masses against oppression and exploitation. Thus, epic choreographic creations generally take their starting point from the flow of historical events. Typically, those who perform them have been skilled warriors. Epic dances carry within them the temperament and emotional state of a long history of our people, encompassing economic and social conditions, geographical environments, and more. They manifest valor and heroism, while their narratives are imbued with an epic-heroic patois and monumental artistic figures, performed with a dynamic and optimistic spirit. Epic dances, rooted in their epic core with rich ideo-emotional content, diverse choreographic means, and high artistic interpretation, preserve ethnocultural originality and possess significant ideological and artistic value. Such creations shed light on the antiquity of our national culture. They are distinguished by the vividness and agility of men's movements and the elegant grace of women. Although these dances have fewer subgenres compared to lyrical dances, they still convey a broad dimension of movement. They are divided into – war dances and heroic dances. These express events with a more general martial spirit, embodying bravery, pride, grandeur, solemnity, and more through dance. In Albanian choreographic epic tradition, war dances echo an earlier epoch, including events from the Epic of the Kreshnikët, while heroic dances reflect feats and later events primarily from recent centuries. It should be noted that such dances share some elements with Balkan counterparts to a certain extent but maintain their unique identity. Epic dances are mainly performed by men, less often by women, or by mixed groups of men and women.



Figure 9. The Epic Dance Trimerishte Komitet (Engjëll Tërshana, 1966; ArchIVE:TKOBAP)



Figure 10. Epic Festive Dance: Dance with Motifs from Malësia e Madhe (Panajot Kanaci, 1983; Archive: TKOBAP)

Results

This classification of dances and their themes was determined based on the knowledge of historians as well as the subsequent influence exerted by the socialist government. There were numerous interventions affecting the thematic content, structure, formation, and even the ideology of the performances. The signs of nationalism were so pronounced that they often disrupted the balance within the rich folk creativity. Since every choreographer or creator was influenced by this nationalist spirit, a common creative climate emerged, where, in addition to utilizing folkloric elements, there was also an aim to achieve a unified thematic conclusion. This issue will be examined in greater detail by focusing on the works of choreographers before the 1990s and the changes that this creativity underwent following the regime change.



Figure 11. The Dance I Këndojmë dhe I Kërcejmë Partisë (Agron Aliaj, 1970; Archive: TKOBAP)

The classification of folkloric genres helped me distinguish the themes of the dances, the groups they belonged to, and the regions from which they originated. However, the question arises: why was there such extensive intervention in these elements, to the point of distorting the original idea and losing the authentic folkloric essence? It is certain that the early choreographers conducted a very long and meticulous research process to achieve these works. Given that folk creativity extended to every corner of Albania and beyond, where Albanians lived, they had to undertake extensive fieldwork. This process involved field studies, participation in folklore festivals, intensive studio work with bearers of traditional movements, and the processing of numerous recordings from the Institute of Popular Culture. The example of the Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances regarding the staging of the epic dance, without going into much detail, has also been followed by many other amateur ensembles across various regions of Albania. This has also influenced the performance of dances with lyrical movement qualities. In the first two decades following the establishment of the Ensemble, festive and optimistic epic dance continued to dominate.



Figure 12. The Electrification Dance (Agron Aliaj, 1968; Archive: TKOBAP)

It was only after the 1970s that relaxing lyrical choreography appeared on stage, which paved the way for choreographers to increasingly engage with this genre. The May concerts of 1977–1979 were particularly significant in highlighting the changes and thematic differences in folk dance presentations, both by the Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances as well as by amateur groups. What stood out was the thematic focus on work and the emotional spirit of the workers in general, which also attracted criticism at the time, as it was necessary to always portray a

positive socio-economic life (Nuri, Ansambli shtetëror i këngëve dhe valleve popullore mbyll sezonin 1972-1973, 1976), (Bogdani, Choreography and cultivated art, 1998). Another issue that emerged was the creation of a single dance from detached motifs or dances belonging to a large regional area, even though a broader choreographic form could have been developed. This was evident in the dance "Dance with Cham motifs," which incorporated elements from a mixture of three dances: "Dance of the Table," "Kaçak Dance," and "Dance of Osman Taka." This dance carries the mark of maestro P. Kanaçi, a well-known expert particularly in these regions, yet it was said that he exploited a considerable amount of dance material to label it as a macro-dance by including all of them in one. The elegant dancing of the women was beautifully adapted alongside the masculine and heroic male dance movements, thus combining lyrical and epic elements. This approach continues to be clearly utilized in other performances by the Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances, the most professional institution for cultivating traditional art. During the 1980s and 1990s, lyrical dances began to occupy an equal space alongside epic dances in the repertoire of the Ensemble and across cultivated Albanian choreography. However, it should be noted that an equal balance between lyrical and epic dances was not fully established, especially since, after these years, folk creativity experienced a rupture in further research and exploration of folkloric elements. Referring to historical facts concerning other ensembles, which also worked diligently to develop a rich repertoire, we find several correspondences in both musical and choreographic creations with those of our national Ensemble. For example, the Ensemble of the Republic of China, during their stay in Tirana in 1964, showcased repertoire themes centered on work, pure love, nature, and defense against the enemy — themes somewhat similar to those in our folk dance repertoire. They also shared structural elements of the dances, such as semicircle or full circle formations. Additionally, the Romanian Ensemble, which performed in 1972, emphasized that their dances generally carried optimistic themes and featured very fluid movements (Karadaku, 1972). Another notable ensemble that visited Albania was the "Shota" Ensemble, which stood out for its performances. In one of its shows in Tirana during the same period, it presented a concert that included the "Dance of Rugova," conveying a patriotic message, and the "Jatagana Cutting Dance," which beautifully portrayed the narrative of a young woman (Gërguri, 2014).



Fig 13. The Rugova Dance performed by the Shota Ensemble (1970)

Thus, what stands out in this Ensemble is the repertoire that contains a greater number of lyrical pieces (Këllici, 2007).

Conclusion

This study aimed to highlight the challenges involved in cultivating both epic and lyrical folk dances in terms of their content, the incorporation of emotional ideas, and the influence of social issues over time. The interweaving of these issues, alongside a comparison between dances performed by various professional ensembles that visited our country before the 1990s, further enriches the study. I do not consider this study to have a definitive conclusion, given that epic and lyrical folk dance are continually evolving art forms. I emphasize the encouragement of young choreographers in the field of folk choreography, drawing attention to the importance of original motifs in the development of stylized creative works.

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The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Choreography: A New Era of Movement

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming creative industries, including choreography, where it serves as a tool to generate movement, assist choreographers, and expand artistic possibilities. This research explores the integration of AI in dance, focusing on whether AI can enhance human creativity or if it risks diminishing artistic originality. AI-driven tools such as Google's Move Mirror, OpenAI's Sora, and Motion Capture AI analyze movement, suggest choreographic patterns, and provide new approaches to dance composition. However, the fundamental question remains: Can AI replicate the intuitive, emotional, and cultural depth embedded in human-created choreography? This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, including case studies of choreographers like Wayne McGregor, who collaborates with AI to push the boundaries of movement creation. By analyzing AI-generated choreography and comparing it to human-created performances, this research evaluates AI's strengths in generating movement variety and efficiency while also identifying its limitations in emotional expression and artistic decision-making. The findings suggest that AI introduces new possibilities for choreographic exploration but lacks the ability to fully comprehend cultural context, narrative intention, and emotional nuance. The paper concludes that AI is not a replacement for choreographers but a collaborative partner that can assist in idea generation, offer innovative movement suggestions, and expand the choreographic process. While AI continues to evolve, the future of dance remains rooted in the synergy between technology and human artistry, ensuring that creativity and expression remain at the core of performance. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on AI's role in the performing arts and its potential applications in choreography education and professional practice.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, choreography, dance technology

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of the performing arts, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a significant technological advancement influencing artistic creation and interpretation. While AI has been widely adopted in disciplines such as visual arts, music composition, and literature, its application in choreography represents a particularly compelling frontier. Choreography, traditionally understood as a deeply human and intuitive form of expression, is increasingly intersecting with algorithmic systems capable of analyzing, generating, and visualizing movement. This convergence prompts a reevaluation of the boundaries between machine intelligence and human creativity. AI's role in dance extends beyond experimental art projects; it is becoming a subject of academic inquiry and practical exploration. As digital tools become more accessible and AI systems more sophisticated, choreographers and researchers are exploring the creative potential of machine learning in the generation of movement, visualization of choreographic concepts, and interpretation of stylistic patterns. These developments raise important questions about authorship, originality, and the future role of the choreographer within technologically mediated creative processes. This study examines the integration of AI into choreographic practice through a critical and contextual lens. While acknowledging the innovative capabilities of AI, this paper asserts that such technologies can function as creative guides or tools but cannot replace the human choreographer. The emotional, cultural, and narrative dimensions of dance rooted in lived experience and artistic intuition remain fundamentally human. By analyzing current technologies, case studies, and artistic methodologies, the paper evaluates both the opportunities and limitations that AI presents for the choreographic process. Ultimately, the aim is to contribute to the academic discourse surrounding AI-assisted creativity and to consider how technological innovations may influence the future of dance as both an artistic and educational discipline.

Literature review

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into artistic practices has generated significant academic interest, particularly in recent years. Scholars have examined AI's capacity for creative production in fields such as music (Briot et al., 2020), visual art (Elgammal et al., 2017), and literature (Toivanen et al., 2020), noting the rise of generative systems capable of producing content that mimics human aesthetics. Within the context of choreography, however, the literature remains relatively emergent but increasingly relevant as artists and researchers begin to explore the creative possibilities and limitations of machine learning in movement generation.

AI's application in choreography is grounded in its ability to analyze vast datasets of human motion and generate sequences based on learned stylistic and spatial patterns. For instance, Google's Move Mirror utilizes pose estimation algorithms to reflect and remix users' movements in real-time, while OpenAI's Sora applies generative AI models to suggest creative outputs across multiple modalities, including dance. Similarly, works by Alemi et al. (2017) demonstrate how motion capture combined with AI can be used to create novel yet stylistically coherent movement phrases, making such tools attractive to choreographers seeking to expand their movement vocabulary.

Several researchers emphasize the value of these technologies as assistive tools, rather than autonomous creators. Guillem et al. (2021) explore the idea of AI as a "creative partner" in collaborative choreography, capable of offering inspiration but fundamentally reliant on human decision-making. Similarly, Ulyate and Bianciardi (2021) argue that the human body remains central to the artistic process, as AI lacks the lived experiences and embodied knowledge that inform choreographic meaning. Dance, as an embodied and often culturally situated form of expression, depends not only on technical execution but also on emotional depth, cultural symbolism, and narrative context dimensions which current AI systems cannot authentically reproduce.

Notably, choreographer Wayne McGregor has become a central figure in the dialogue around AI in dance. His work with Google Arts & Culture and Studio Wayne McGregor demonstrates an experimental but grounded approach to co-creating with AI. McGregor treats algorithmic input as generative prompts, not finished artistic products, maintaining that the choreographer's interpretive and emotional agency cannot be supplanted by machines (McGregor, 2019).
In addition, literature from media philosophy and aesthetics warns against the romanticization of AI-generated creativity. Boden (2010) differentiates between "exploratory creativity" (algorithmically generated variations within a defined style) and "transformational creativity" (radical shifts in artistic paradigms), suggesting that AI may be capable of the former but not the latter without human direction. Manovich (2020) similarly critiques the narrative of AI as a fully independent artist, arguing that creativity is deeply entangled with social, cultural, and personal histories.

In sum, while AI offers promising tools for choreographic innovation, current research emphasizes its role as a supplementary system, not a replacement for the choreographer. The consensus within the literature supports a hybrid model of creation, one in which human intuition, emotion, and cultural knowledge remain at the center of artistic authorship, with AI serving as a means to expand creative inquiry rather than define it.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in a case study approach, aiming to explore how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being integrated into choreographic processes. This method allows for a nuanced examination of the capabilities and limitations of AI when used as a tool in artistic creation. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, bridging technology, performance, and education, a qualitative framework is most suitable for capturing the interpretive and context-sensitive dimensions of this inquiry.
The research design includes three main components:

- Document Analysis of AI tools currently used in dance and movement generation, including Google's Move Mirror (released in 2018), OpenAI's Sora (released in 2024), and a range of motion capture AI systems used in digital choreography labs.
- Case Study focusing on the work of Wayne McGregor and his collaboration with Google Arts & Culture, recognized as a leading example of AI-human partnership in choreography.
- Review of Scholarly Literature on AI in the arts, machine learning and creativity, and philosophical discourse on algorithmic authorship.

The research is guided by the following questions:
- In what ways is AI currently supporting the work of choreographers?
- What are the creative and technical limitations of AI-generated choreography?
- Can AI play an autonomous role in the artistic process, or is human input indispensable?

The data consists of publicly available interviews, articles, video documentation, and published reflections on AI-choreography collaborations. The study draws upon documented processes and critical analyses from both academic and industry sources. The case of Wayne McGregor serves as the central example, due to the accessibility of his process and his leadership in AI-integrated dance.

The materials were analysed thematically, with a focus on recurring concepts such as authorship, emotion, improvisation, and the distinction between creative suggestion and substitution. While the research does not rely on empirical data, it provides a critical and informed synthesis of current developments in AI-assisted choreography, contributing valuable insight to the discourse on human–machine collaboration in the performing arts.

Results and discussions

The analysis of AI tools and case studies reveals that Artificial Intelligence holds significant potential in supporting choreographic practice. Technologies such as Google's Move Mirror and OpenAI's Sora demonstrate the ability of machine learning systems to generate diverse movement patterns, respond to user input in real time, and mimic stylistic elements of human choreography. In particular, AI systems trained on large-scale movement datasets are capable of producing sequences that are technically coherent, often surprising, and aesthetically compelling. These features position AI as a valuable resource for experimentation, inspiration, and problem-solving in the early phases of choreographic development.

The case of Wayne McGregor illustrates how AI can be integrated into artistic practice as a co-creative agent. In his collaborations with Google Arts & Culture, AI tools were employed to generate variations based on McGregor's movement vocabulary. These outputs, however, were not presented as finished works. Instead, they served as starting points for human refinement, allowing McGregor and his dancers to select, edit, and respond to the algorithmically generated material. This process reinforces the notion that AI can enhance creativity by offering unexpected movement combinations, but the interpretive and curatorial role remains with the choreographer.

At the same time, the limitations of AI in choreography are consistently emphasized in the reviewed literature. Unlike human choreographers, AI systems do not possess a sense of narrative, emotion, or cultural context. Their understanding of movement is based purely on data correlation, not intention. This often results in outputs that lack the expressive nuance or conceptual depth typically expected in professional choreography. Furthermore, while AI can replicate the form of a movement, it cannot replicate the meaning behind it, a distinction that is central to dance as an embodied and communicative art form.
A relevant example of AI's potential application can be imagined within a dance education setting. In a choreography course, students could use AI tools to generate movement prompts based on classical, contemporary, or urban styles. These prompts might serve as inspiration

for developing their own choreographic studies. For instance, an AI-generated sequence could be projected onto a screen or used interactively, and students could be tasked with interpreting or transforming that material through their personal movement language. In this context, AI becomes a pedagogical assistant supporting creativity while reinforcing the student's active role in making choreographic decisions.

However, such tools must be introduced with critical framing. Students should be encouraged to view AI as a suggestive mechanism, not a replacement for creative thinking. By emphasizing authorship, embodied knowledge, and personal expression, educators can ensure that AI enhances rather than dilutes the development of choreographic voice and artistic identity.

The findings of this study support a hybrid approach to choreography, one in which AI serves as a collaborator rather than a creator. When used thoughtfully, AI can extend the choreographer's imagination, offer novel stimuli, and support efficiency in the creative process. However, the artistic vision, emotional depth, and cultural literacy required for meaningful choreography remain fundamentally human. The relationship between AI and choreography, therefore, should not be seen as oppositional, but as complementary with clear boundaries of authorship and creative control.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the growing integration of Artificial Intelligence in choreographic practice, highlighting both its potential as a creative tool and its limitations as an autonomous artistic force. Through a review of literature, analysis of AI-based choreography tools, and a case study of Wayne McGregor's collaborative process, the study demonstrates that while AI systems can support choreographers by offering novel movement suggestions and analytical insights, they cannot replicate the artistic intuition, emotional intelligence, or cultural sensitivity required to create meaningful choreographic works.

The findings reinforce the argument that AI should be viewed not as a replacement for human creativity, but as a collaborative assistant, a digital partner capable of stimulating imagination, expanding movement vocabulary, and aiding experimentation. The choreographer remains central to the process, acting as the interpreter, curator, and emotional core of the creative work. The implications of this research are particularly relevant for arts education. As AI tools become more prevalent and accessible, educators must guide students in using these technologies critically and reflectively. Integrating AI into choreography classes can offer exciting opportunities for exploration, but must be framed within pedagogies that prioritize authorship, individuality, and artistic responsibility. Students should be encouraged to question the output of AI systems, reinterpret algorithmic suggestions, and maintain a strong connection to their own movement experiences and artistic voice.

From a research perspective, further studies could investigate how dancers experience AI-generated material in the rehearsal process, or how AI might be trained to better understand emotional expression or narrative logic. Additionally, future inquiries could explore how AI is influencing choreographic aesthetics across different cultures, genres, and generations of artists. In conclusion, while AI can enrich the choreographic process by offering new perspectives and

tools, it cannot replace the role of the choreographer. Dance, as an embodied, interpretive, and culturally rooted art form, requires human imagination, intuition, and intentionality. The future of choreography may indeed involve AI, but it will remain led by the artist.

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Aiming toward the creation of original national ballets

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Abstract

The aim to create a new, previously unseen tradition in Albanian ballet with original works came as a result of the experience accumulated in the 1950s through the staging of numerous ballets from global choreographic literature. This new phenomenon was the result of two factors:
a) the development of ballet itself as an art form, through its natural qualification and refinement over the years, and
b) the development of national culture in general, which regarded the inclusion of ballet as one of its conditions.
One of the particularities of its historical development was precisely the national ballets. The language they brought, the innovations, and the originality highlighted the way the relationship between the choreographic structures of classical ballet as a cultivated art and the choreographic structures of Albanian folklore, already refined and elevated to a new artistic status should be resolved. Although art is universal by nature, the distinctiveness of Albanian ballet, its national and ethnic character, made it stand out through the national works it produced. This distinction originated primarily from the musical scores composed by Albanian musicians, and subsequently from other elements such as the subject matter, the events depicted, the social settings, the choreographic concept, and everything related to the narrative, characters, customs, and anthropological traditions, etc. Of course, this was also a persistent demand of the political power of the time, but equally a historical necessity, that national ballets should find a language and form that would be as appealing as possible to the Albanian audience, something that naturally encouraged original creativity. Our ballet could not have forged its own artistic identity without achieving this aim, which enabled it to reflect certain distinctive aspects that created richness and diversity, both in terms of content and in form and style.

Keywords

ballet, language, national, distinctiveness

Introduction

The period from 1950 to 1973 was characterized not only by efforts to establish a professional artistic identity for the ballet troupe but also by a distinct drive to lay the foundations of a "national" ballet. This concept of national ballet encompassed original creative work in all of its constituent components: the libretto, musical composition, scenography and costume design, choreographic concept, the leading and cohesive vision of the ballet master, the dancers' choreographic execution, and all other integral elements.

Within this context, a central issue emerged: to what extent could the integration of national choreographic elements be effectively realized within the framework of a classical, structurally "resistant" choreography? Did this integration result in distortions, compromises, or disruptions of aesthetic harmony? If so, where, and to what degree? Conversely, what innovations did this approach introduce? These questions have been explored in numerous books and scholarly studies addressing this phenomenon, including in my own research, "Albanian Ballet 1950–1973".

Literature Review

In general terms, from the perspective of artistic language, books published prior to 1990 and the critical discourse of the time highlight that national ballets rooted in genuinely Albanian creativity primarily reflected the ideological imperative of the era, to "strengthen the national spirit" within the framework of socialist realism. This imperative extended to the art of ballet as well. Viewed from today's more critical and rational standpoint, it is arguable that this approach was neither the most appropriate nor the most effective. The notion of the national was often sought in external dance elements derived from ethnocoreological typologies, thus in amorphous, traditionalist, and unrefined forms.

In this regard, future studies in the field of choreography must further clarify the delicate interplay between two distinct languages and typologies: the Albanian ethnocoreological lexicon and the lexicon of classical ballet.

"As I noted more than a decade ago, while acknowledging the thematic and ideological limitations imposed on works created during the period 1950–1973, it remains essential to recognize the contribution made toward the development of national ballets, both in terms of musical composition and choreographic concept, as well as in the dancers' interpretative execution."

The critical and scholarly discourse has generally recommended that artists strive to explore and mine the rich well of Albanian folk traditions for original ethnocoreographic material, to be reworked and refined according to the intrinsic principles of ballet. However, the aesthetic thinking of the time did not promote the transformation of traditional, folkloric, and primitive structures into new codes and frameworks that could correspond with the language of classical ballet.

The state pursued a restrictive and puritan policy regarding international choreographic art, instead insisting that repertoires be filled exclusively with national works. While the encouragement of original Albanian creativity was commendable, in ballet it was often accompanied by a rigid ideological orientation rooted in the aesthetic canons of socialist realism, reducing art to a tool of propaganda. This resulted in the proliferation of formulaic patterns and clichés, such as the creation of utopian illusions of happiness, the concealment of dramatic truths, and their replacement with political cults and fetishes.

Although there was frequent discussion of the undeniable originality produced by the alternation of choreographic languages in various national ballets, less attention was paid to the issue of artistic language correlation, the fusion and interweaving of choreographic lexicons from two traditions and two models. This fusion gave rise to a hybrid language, an "amalgam" so to speak, yet there remains a lack of in-depth study regarding how Albanian ethnocoreographic material found room and potential to absorb, integrate, and harmonize the specific codes and idiolects of classical ballet.

This was a distinctly Albanian phenomenon, shaped by the overlapping influence of Marxist ideology and the nationalist policies pursued by the Communist Party, which actively encouraged the strengthening of national artistic expression. This was followed by a wave of publications, articles and prescriptive writings, rooted in the propaganda offices of the Party of Labour of Albania, the speeches of its leader Enver Hoxha, and Marxist-Leninist literature, all of which maintained a conservative and inflexible stance.

Numerous books by critics and scholars of the art form, such as "Choreography and the Cultivated Art" by Ramazan Bogdani, "This is how I met Panajot Kanaçi" by Albert Janku, "Ballet in Albania", and "Albanian Choreographic Folklore" by Skënder Selimi, extensively discuss the significant performances achieved by Albanian ballet during this period through original national works.

- Several conditions were necessary for the emergence of this original creative output, including:
- A decade-long experience in ballet that qualified the troupe through a repertoire selected from the international choreographic literature;
- The graduation of several dancers and choreographers from institutions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, who became the foundational core for training the new generation of dancers;
- The assimilation of advanced ballet practices from renowned schools, particularly the Russian school, which was among the most prestigious and authoritative globally;
- An increasing aesthetic awareness and the numerous efforts of artists to express themselves through this art form, creating the conditions and premises for the advancement of original choreographic creation in Albania;
- The emergence of a new generation of professionally trained musicians on the Albanian scene, enabling the conception and realization of high-quality ballet compositions;
- The development and refinement of the principal component of choreographic embodiment: the solo and ensemble interpretation of dancers.

Methodology

From a methodological standpoint, the dominant element is the examination and evaluation of the historical phenomenon of national ballets from both a synchronic and diachronic perspective. Equally important is the establishment of an interplay between research and synthesis, between the specific features of a concrete work and its outcome as phenomenology, as a historical occurrence, and as an artistic value of a given period. The issue of the "national" is viewed as a complex phenomenon, both historical and aesthetic in nature. Thanks to a cross-sectional analysis, the "national" in ballet has brought valuable and complementary resources, refining the choreographic work from both a formal and emotional standpoint. However, it has also occasionally produced negative impacts by rendering the work anachronistic. There have been cases where the national was regarded as an absolute, untouchable, and exclusionary principle. From an aesthetic point of view, the "national" should be conceptualized and implemented as a condition for enhancing the expressive power, impact, and beauty of a given work, by endowing it with identity and individuality. In several writings and theoretical arguments after 1990, the "national" was conceived as a conservative premise, as a reactionary force resisting innovation in artistic language. Only when serving clear aesthetic functions can it become a premise of artistic identity, as was the case in some of the most beautiful choreographic works. Consequently, critical analyses have identified signs affirming the natural intercommunication between two foundational forms, the codes of classical ballet and those derived from national ethnocoreology. This reflects the meaningful convergence of artistic languages that avoids manifestations of provincialism and archaism.

When examining national ballets in relation to the global ballet repertoire, one can observe a natural parallel, where similar ballet forms and typologies have been applied, such as: poetic ballets, comic ballets, children's ballets, choreographic tableaux, choreographic rhapsodies, performances and choreographic études. Indeed, various choreographic performances created in support of or as part of other theatrical or musical works, such as operas, operettas, musical comedies, and dramatic plays, can be classified as part of the canon of Albanian national choreographic forms. These include choreographic performances of various kinds that accompany the content of such works.

The same should be said regarding the evaluation of newer contemporary forms of theatre, such as Dance Theater, where elements from theatre are combined with choreography, dance, musical parts, and more. In such analytical approaches, methodological care has been taken to highlight how signs and codes from various artistic languages blend and unify, particularly those concerning the specific treatment of bodily plasticity, movement and dance, spatial composition, play with weight, focus, gestures with symbolic connotations, and the internal psychophysical tension. Notable examples include Gjergj Prevazi's performances of this type of dance (Dance Theater), such as "Tranzicion" and "Kontrast" (2000 and 2003), followed by "Njeriu në këllëf", "Parfumi", "Këpucët me zile", "S'po dëgjohet gongu", "Performance", "Makeover – Culture Clash II" (2014), "Lukja", and others.

Results and Discussions

1. The new phenomenon of creating national ballets began precisely in the 1960s, initially timid and on a small scale, as was the ballet "Anusha", with music composed by Çesk Zadeja and choreography by Skënder Selimi. This movement culminated on January 13, 1963, with the premiere of the first Albanian classical ballet "Halili dhe Hajria", consisting of three acts and seven scenes, based on the beautiful drama "Halili dhe Hajria" by Kolë Jakova, with music composed by Tish Daija and choreography by master choreographer Panajot Kanaçi. Later, Albanian critics would express their views and evaluate other ballets such as: "Delina", "Partizani", "Historia e një kënge", "Rapsodi koreografike", "Shqiponja sypatrembur", "Bijtë e peshkatarit", "Lart frymën revolucionare", "Fatosi partizan", "Cuca e maleve".
The focus of criticism at the time, as well as subsequent studies on these ballets, included:

- the plastic and rhythmic expression of choreographic action,
- the mosaic of movements and original dance structures,
- the rational and careful use of Albanian dance motifs,

the incorporation of original elements drawn from the rich popular folkloric heritage.

2. In a series of various works by choreographers and dancers, a multitude of choreographic elements with national characteristics were processed and executed with taste, transforming and adapting them into structures and specific markings that originated from the choreographic language of classical ballet. The effort that could be observed at that time in the concepts of our best choreographers (P. Kanaçi, S. Selimi, A. Aliaj) was related to harmonizing the two types of dance: folk and classical, while respecting the codes of the latter, i.e., classical ballet. Along with experimentation and testing, this also demonstrated an essential aspect of the originality of their creative work, conveying nuances, colors, and original choreographic connotations. This amalgamation and blending of expressive means and models of dance methods, motifs, plasticity, etc., created new and specific dance structures.

3. Without a truly national creativity, the art of ballet would not have reached its full development. This is the reason why the "national" aspect appears as an internal appeal and an immanent drive for the artists, a permanent motivation, not at all imposed, but rather as a substantial element of their aesthetic consciousness to create original Albanian ballets. Although art, as such, is universal, its distinctiveness, that is, the national and ethnic aspect, makes it distinguishable from the flows of world art in other parts of the globe. Thus, Albanian national ballets have reconstructed beauty and aesthetics through themselves. For this reason, Albanian choreography turned to its heritage, which came from folk dances of a clear quality and individuality, with distinct, archaic, original, and traditional dance forms and structures, as part of the creative spirit of the people, passed down through generations by our ethnocoreology. This vast, multifaceted, and fertile arsenal creates the premises and conditions for our choreographers to turn to this form of art, but by moderating, remodeling, and perfecting the choreographic elements of folk dance, that is, the language of our folk dance, the grammar of folk dance. Now, the algorithms no longer came in naive, unthought-out, and unprocessed forms. On the contrary, these algorithms gave the ethnochoreographic material a new illumination, a new quality, a new poetic dance, which was precisely linked to classical ballet. Not copies of folkloric elements and structures, nor mere repetitions, but intelligent and reasonable transformations and shifts from the established

codes in folk dance to the codes that function in ballet as a cultivated and elevated art.

4. The content of national ballets has been part of significant events, often of special and existential moments, of the dramas and tragedies of the nation, where historical national figures, legends, and chronicles of freedom-loving battles have found space and social and human affirmations. Most of them have realistic subjects, drawn from the best works of Albanian literature such as "Halili dhe Hajria", "Para stuhisë", "Tokë e pamposhtur", "Cuca e maleve", "Migjeniana", "Lumi i vdekur", "Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur", "Bijtë e peshkatarit", "Historia e njërës nga ato" etc. But there have also been ballets created specifically, such as "Anusha", "Fatosi partizan", "Joniada", "Vajzat e qytetit të gurtë" etc. Since the ballet of the socialist realism period strictly followed the principle of reflecting the historical truth of the known event, the character (historical or not), and the dramatic situation, this way a "format" that was welcomed by the censorship bodies was ensured. It is understood that their content was, so to speak, predetermined, meaning that in the events and narrative of national ballets of socialist realism, the so-called "deheroization" was excluded, thus eliminating introspection, the depths, the traumas, fears, and stresses of the "positive" characters. Heroes had to be "determined until the end," always proud and unyielding before the enemy, without the slightest wavering, doubt, or disbelief, always self-sacrificing. Pessimistic, depressive, and despairing situations were not allowed.

5. After the Fourth Plenary of 1973, there were weak, mediocre, and schematic works. However, in the 1980s, the majority of national ballets were characterized by quality and aesthetic integrity, especially this was seen with the scenic revivals after 1990, where new techniques were applied and classical dance elements were enriched and moderated with a more advanced lexicon. The social and cultural function of national ballets, their proximity to the issues of the Albanian spectator, with his troubles, concerns, joys, attitudes, actions, and customs, as well as the portrayal of events, subjects, and well-known historical figures from the nation's historical calendar, made them favorites. Many of them are valued not only as original works but also as an inseparable part of the contributions and genius of Albanian artists: choreographers, composers, librettists, dancers, set designers, costume designers, etc.
Most of the time, national ballets during the period of socialist realism demanded optimistic subjects, militant struggles, open political conflicts, without deep dramatic elements, especially tragic ones, lacking humane, personal, intimate, ethical connotations, or existential experiences, etc. In such cases, the model of the so-called "optimistic tragedy" was imposed, where the death of the hero or heroine, according to the prevailing slogan, had to turn "pain into strength and death into triumph." The creation of illusions of happiness, of a life that was simply beautiful in the village, in the mountains, in the fields, in construction sites, and everywhere, with always optimistic and triumphant tones, with the fictional happiness of young people going to remote areas and distant villages, caused great damage to the art of ballet, even banalizing and vulgarizing it.

6. In the criticism of the time, several sharp observations and remarks were made about national ballets, such as the ballet "Anusha," the pioneering work of Albanian national ballet; the ballet "Halili dhe Hajria," as a turning point and a landmark achievement in Albanian ballet in general; and further on, the ballet "Delina" which, in addition to positive evaluations, also had some shortcomings, flaws, and stylistic inconsistencies, particularly in the musical composition. One

of the peaks of Albanian ballet in the early 1970s, certainly from the historically referential points, was the ballet "Cuca e maleve" where a qualitative and professional rise in choreographic execution was observed. This ballet displayed stylistic richness, sharp contrasts and conflicts, typical Albanian costumes, settings, and a full arsenal of expressive means. Of course, "Cuca e maleve" could not escape the ideological layering of the time, which was manifested, from the content and ideas perspective, in the fabricated conflicts with the church and its clergy, anathematizing them as part of the dark, the evil, the reactionary, etc.

The first Albanian classical ballet, "Halili dhe Hajria" with three acts and seven scenes, of a broad dimension, with a libretto constructed based on the play "Halili dhe Hajria" by Kolë Jakova, is perhaps the most accomplished model of the preferred typology of national ballet before 1990. The plastic and rhythmic display of the choreographic action was conceived here in the form of a mosaic of dances, dominated by Albanian dance motifs, selected from the rich folk heritage. However, alongside this, the language of dance was refined, transfiguring and adapting folk motifs into the typical and characteristic markings of classical ballet. This ballet master, with his genius, paved the way for the creation of other national ballets. In this way, from the national ethnocorological structures, a plastic and rhythmic expressiveness was achieved, energy, especially nuances and shades of a truly Albanian dance area, without compromising the sacred code of classical ballet as a cultivated and refined art.

Conclusions

It is undoubtedly true that Albanian ballet has valued the presence of original Albanian works as a fundamental premise. However, the absolutization and return to the defining principle of the presence (only) of national ballets in the 1970s and beyond was a dominant concept, which turned into an imposition. Despite its good intentions, its mechanistic understanding placed ballet in a vicious cycle, leading to a narrowing of artistic freedom, thematic one-sidedness, and limitation. The power of art lies in its universal nature and space, not in closing it off within narrow perimeters, no matter how distinctive, interesting, specific, and preferred the ethnochoreographic and ethnocultural elements might be. This delicate, mobile, and dialectical relationship between art and its universalizing human power on one hand, and art as a "bastion" of expressing a completely "specific" material on the other hand, should be complementary and not exclusionary. In any case, national ballets have been exclusively sublimated into subjects, events, and characters from Albanian history, both historical and contemporary.

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Comparative Study of Scenographies for the Same Performances in Different Theaters

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Abstract

This study publishes and compares the scenographic approaches between the same theatrical act performed in two different periods at two different theatres, respectively in "Petro Marko" Theater of Vlora and "Bylis" Theater of Fier. The main basis of the study is to analyze how the scenographic solutions including concept, decor, use of spaces, lighting, visual elements that have been used by different scenic designers in the same theatrical performances through a comparative methodology from archival materials and articles published in the media and social networks, based on the analysis of photographic materials as well as direct observation and recognition of the works. The article identifies similarities and differences between two theatrical performances in both the solution and conception of scenography in function of the performance and the directorial solution. The focus is placed on the way in which scenography reflects the directorial vision, the artistic and technical context of each theater, as well as the importance of the figure of the scenic designer and his creativity in the realization of a theatrical performance. The findings also point out the critical role of scenography in shaping the narrative, in the interpretation of dramaturgy and theatrical performance. This paper aims to shed some light on the impact of scenography on the audience experience and in the construction of the theatrical atmosphere, highlighting the collaboration between the scenic designer and the director as one of the essential elements in the success of the performance. The study offers a valuable contribution that will serve as information for artists and researchers interested in the evolution of theatrical practices in our country.

Keywords

scenographic concept, theatrical performance, comparative methodology, scenic element, decor

Introduction

Theatre is an art that brings together several dimensions of speech, movement, sound and sight, and at the center of this interaction is scenography, an element that has the power to profoundly change the way the audience experiences a performance. Scenography is not simply a backdrop or decor, but a bridge that connects the director's vision with the emotions of the spectators, creating spaces and aesthetics that give life to the stories told on stage. In the context of district theaters in our country, where financial resources, infrastructure, and technical capabilities are often limited, scenography takes on even greater importance. It can be the factor that distinguishes a performance, becoming a determinant of its artistic and emotional success.

The history of theater in Albania is closely linked to efforts to build a cultural identity in historical and economic conditions that were not always favorable. Since its beginnings, Albanian theater has been a means of expressing and preserving national identity, often developing through amateur groups in different cities.

During the socialist period, especially from the 1950s to the 1980s, Albanian theater saw a more organized development, with the establishment of professional theaters in several cities. This period brought a greater focus on scenic aesthetics, but scenography remained constrained by ideology and a lack of artistic freedom. Scenic designers of that time often had to create spaces that suited state propaganda, often using realistic symbols and decor to convey direct messages. After the 1990s, with political changes and the opening of the country, Albanian theater entered a new phase, but not necessarily an easier one. On the one hand, opportunities were created to learn from Western theatrical practices and experiment with new scenographic forms. On the other hand, cultural budgets shrank significantly, especially for district theaters, making it difficult to engage professional scenic designers and the investment in stage technology.

In this complex context, scenography in district theaters often depends on the creativity and ability of individuals to work with few resources. Often, as we will see in the performances analyzed, the lack of professional scenic designers has led to minimal or utilitarian solutions, which may be functional, but which leave little room for imagination and emotional impact on the audience. At the same time, when scenic designers are present and when the collaboration between them and the directors is good, the results can be impressive.

This comparative study analyze the scenographic solutions of two theatrical works performed in two different theaters: Dy Dyzina me Trëndafila (titled as Misteri at the "Petro Marko" Theater in Vlora, 2011, directed by Jorgaq Tushe, this performance without a scenic designer, and at the "Bylis" Theater in Fier, 2017, directed by Dafina Llupi and scenic designer Gëzim Hajdini) and Profesionisti (The "Bylis" Theater in Fier, 2023, directed by Dritan Boriçi, without a scenic designer, and again the same performance at the "Petro Marko" Theater in Vlora, 2023, directed by Leka Bungo and scenic designer Drini Shehu). These performances were chosen to compare not only the differences between approaches with and without a scenic designer, but also to see how changes in time, space and technical conditions affect artistic solutions. The impetus for this study comes from the need to better understand the role of scenography in Albanian theater, especially in district theaters where technical and financial challenges significantly affect the

creative process. This paper aims to provide a comparative analysis that can serve as a basis for further discussions. The main goal is to study how scenographic solutions, or the lack thereof, affect the interpretation of dramaturgy and the experience of spectators.

The objectives of the study include:
1. Identify commonalities and differences in the scenographic concepts of the performances.
2. To highlight the importance of the role of the scenic designer in realizing the artistic concept of the work.
3. To analyze the collaboration between the scenic designer and the director in shaping the artistic vision.
4. To evaluate the influence of the technical and artistic context of the theaters on scenographic solutions.

The questions guiding the research are:
- Which are the main differences in scenographic approaches between performances with and without a scenic designer?
- How do scenographic solutions influence the reflection of the director's vision and the context of the theaters?
- What is the role of scenography in creating the narrative and atmosphere of the performance?

As will be seen in the paragraphs below, performances with professional scenic designers manage to create a more complete aesthetic and a stronger emotional impact on the audience. This paper aims to contribute to discussions on theatrical practices in Albania and into the role of scenography in theaters.

Review of the Literature

Studies on scenography describe it as a powerful tool that enriches the meaning of a performance through the design of space and lighting (Howard, 2009). According to Aronson (Aronson, 2018), collaboration between the scenic designer and the director is essential to achieve a coherent artistic vision, a point that takes on great importance in contexts with limited resources. In Albania scenography in district theaters depends too much on individual creativity and technical capabilities. Often, the lack of professional scenic designers in some productions is related to financial and infrastructural constraints. (McKinney and Butterworth, 2009) argue that carefully thought-out scenic design can completely transform the audience experience, an idea that this study tests through a comparison of Albanian performances. This article emphasizes the need for comparative analysis to better understand the impact of scenic design in different theaters, an approach that this paper rigorously follows.

Methodology

This study adopts a comparative approach to analyze the scenographic solutions of two works, Dy Dyzina me Trëndafila and Profesionisti, performed in two district theaters. Four theatrical performances were analyzed:
- Dy Dyzina me Trëndafila (Vlorë, 2011 - Fier, 2017)
- Profesionisti (Fier, 2023 - Vlorë, 2023)

Data were collected through several methods:

- Analysis of archival materials: Documents and photos from theater archives.
- Analysis of online materials: Articles and posts on social networks.
- Publications: Historiku i teatrit Vlorë, Josif Papagjoni, Dhimitraq Furxhi, Botimet Toena (2012)
- Visual analysis: Posters for information on the participating troupe in the performance as well as photographs from the performances and to study scenographic elements such as decor, lighting and costumes, etc.
- Direct observation: Knowledge based on engagement as a scenic designer in the performance Profesionisti (Vlorë, 2023).

The analysis focuses on five main aspects: scenographic concept, decor, use of space, lighting, and visual elements, comparing performances with and without dedicated scenic designers.

Results and Discussion

Dy Dyzina me Trëndafila

Theatre "Petro Marko" Vlorë (2011)
Production of 2011, titled Misteri and directed by Jorgaq Tushe, was staged without a scenic designer, resulting in a very minimalist approach. The poster of the show, with its yellow background and red roses, accompanied by shiny lettering, suggests a playful and comedic tone, but this visual vitality it doesn't seems to have the same reflection on stage due to the lack of a proper scenographic design. The poster includes the names of the director and actors.



Figure 1, Poster of Misteri Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Vlorë, 2011



Figure 2, Photo of scenography, Misteri Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Vlorë, 2011

Photos of the scenic show a simple decor, with white curtains, traditional furniture like red armchairs and a coffee table, and warm-toned lighting intended to create an intimate atmosphere. A stylized balcony and decorative lamps in the background attempted to add a sense of space, but the lack of a proper scenography made the design more functional than aesthetically appealing.



Figure 3, The dialogue scene in Misteri Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Vlorë, 2011

The photo shows another shot of the stage where the actors are shown in dialogue, sitting on red armchairs and around a table, with white curtains and stylized balcony elements in the background.



Figure 4, Salutation, Misteri Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Vlorë, 2011

The photo shows the actors greeting the audience, with the same minimal decor with curtains, a balcony, and decorative lamps in the background.

Theatre "Bylis" Fier (2017)

Theatrical performance of 2017 directed by Dafina Llupi and with scenography by Gëzim Hajdini, brought a symbolic and aesthetically rich approach, clearly different from the minimalism of the performance in Vlora. The show's poster, with motifs of red rose petals, reflects a playful and emotional tone, including the names of the director, scenic designer, music, manager, and actors.

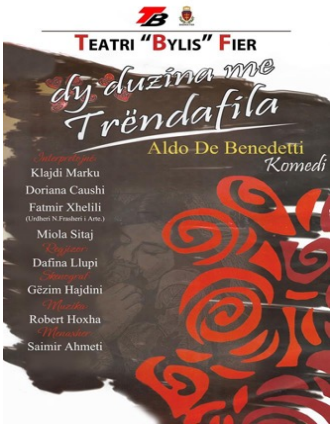


Figure 5, Poster of Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Fier, 2017



Figure 6, Photo of the scenography from the performance Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Fier, 2017

From the photos of the scene, a central decoration with a stained glass window with colorful nautical motifs can be seen, which add a symbolic and playful dimension to the show. The furniture, including the sofa and classic armchairs in strong colors like red and brown, create a warm and intimate environment. Soft-toned lighting emphasizes the emotional atmosphere, while the stage space is organized to highlight the interactions between characters, making the scenography a central element in the narrative.



Figure 7, The dancing scene in Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Fier, 2017

The photo shows the actors dancing, in a background with nautical motifs, with a sofa and classic armchairs.



Figure 8, Dialogue scene in Dy dyzina me trëndafila, Fier, 2017

Profesionisti

Theatre "Bylis" Fier (2023)

Theatrical performance of 2023 directed by Dritan Borici, was produced without a scenic designer, following a utilitarian approach that focuses more on performance than visual aesthetics. The poster of the show, with a monochromatic design and red text, as well as an abstract background, reflects the serious and introspective tone of Dušan Kovačević's comedy, giving it a modern but simple touch. The poster includes the names of the director and actors, as well as the release date.



Figure 9, Poster of Profesionisti, Fier, 2023



Figure 10, Photo of the scenography from the performance Profesionisti, Fier, 2023

Photos of the scene show a simple decor, with elements such as a table, chairs and an armchair, accompanied by an abstract digital background projected by a screen called ledwall installed after the reconstruction carried out in 2021. The images are diverse but noticeably lacking in visual or conceptual context, generally in shades of gray and blue, creating a modern but somewhat cold atmosphere. The lighting focused on the actors and the open space of the stage shift the focus to the dialogue and performance, compensating the lack of detailed scenography. Prop objects such as books, bottles, glasses, etc. are used to support the narrative, but the design remains mainly functional and lacking in aesthetic depth.



Figure 11, Dialogue scene in Profesionisti, Fier, 2023

The photo shows the actors in dialogue, seated around a table with books and a bottle, a dark abstract digital background with gray and blue tones. The open space and focused lighting emphasize the performance.



Figure 12, The interaction scene in Profesionisti, Fier, 2023

The photo shows the main character standing and interacting with another seated figure, with the same minimal decor and abstract background. Prop objects like a suitcase and a bag add narrative elements.

Theatre "Petro Marko" Vlorë (2023)

Theatrical performance of 2023 directed by Leka Bungo and with scenography by Drini Shehu, followed a modernist and symbolic approach, using clean lines and pale earthy colors to reflect the psychological tension of the work. The poster of the show, with a dramatic image and text in gray and yellow tones, reflects the comedy's heavy and introspective tone of the theatrical performance. It includes the names of the director, scenic designer, music composer, and actors.



Figure 13, Poster of Profesionisti, Vlorë, 2023



Figure 14, Photo of the scenography from the performance Profesionisti, Vlorë, 2023

The photos of the scene reveal a richly detailed decor, including a desk filled with books and objects, an armchair, and a backdrop with a large wooden-framed window, which creates a sense of isolation and space at the same time, where behind it stands a fifth character which is not described in the theatrical work, a somewhat shadowy figure lit in a mystical blue color that represents the character of the spy (Shadow) who stays on stage at all times along with the main character, a special detail that complements the decor and environment of the office, the transparent plastic membrane material, painted in dark tones used to wrap and the realization of this detail further enhances the condition and ideo-aesthetic complement of the props of the element and the scenography. It is also noted that the decor is seen in details, where the podium's upholstery is treated with wrinkles in such a way as to convey a confused situation, becoming part of the conveyance of the message and emotional atmosphere of the work. Lighting with strong contrasts highlights dramatic tension, while the stage space is dynamically organized to emphasize the interactions between the characters. Objects such as a suitcase and clothing scattered on stage add narrative elements, reflecting the emotional chaos of the characters and making the scenography an integral part of the story's narrative and an important mise-en-scene and directorial component.



Figure 15, Dialogue scene in Profesionisti, Vlorë, 2023

The photo shows the actors in dialogue, with a desk, armchair, and backdrop of windows and the prop character. The dramatic lighting and dynamic space emphasize the tension.



Figure 16, The interaction scene in Profesionisti, Vlorë, 2023

The photo shows the interacting actors, with the same modernist decor well placed in the stage space and contrast lighting. Prop objects, clothing and a suitcase further highlight the emotional state.



Figure 17, The scene of tension in Profesionisti, Vlorë, 2023

The photo shows the actors in a moment of tension, with the same decor and dramatic lighting amplifying the atmosphere.

Comparison of Scenographic Elements

Performance	Theatre	Year	Scenic designer	Concept	Decor	Space
Dy Dyzina	Vlorë	2011	No scenic designer	Minimalist	Basic	Functional
Dy Dyzina	Fier	2017	Gëzim Hajdini	Utilitarian	Nautical motifs	Intimate
Profesionisti	Fier	2023	No scenic designer	Modernist	Minimal	Open
Profesionisti	Vlorë	2023	Drini Shehu	Symbolic	Mono chromatic	Dynamically

Table 1, Comparison of Scenographic Elements

The comparison highlights clear differences between the scenographic approaches of the performances. In Vlora, in 2011, the lack of a proper scenic design resulted in a minimalist and functional design, but with little aesthetic depth, despite efforts to create a warm and intimate atmosphere (Figures 2-4). In Fier, in 2017, Gëzim Hajdini's scenography brought an aesthetic, utilitarian and cohesive decor, which, as shown in the photographs and poster, significantly enriched the narrative and the audience's experience (Figures 6-8). The performance "Profesionisti" in Fier (2023) followed a modernist approach, where the lack of a scenic designer shifted the focus to performance and dialogue (Figures 10-12). In contrast, the performance in Vlora (2023), with scenography by Drini Shehu, offered a symbolic and dynamic aesthetic, where scenic elements such as props, color, lighting, symbolism, and space were used to amplify emotional tension and narrative, as clearly seen in the photographs (Figures 14-17).

Conclusion

This study confirms the essential role of scenography and scenic designer in raising the artistic quality of theatrical performances, which should be noted since in various productions performed in various theaters ofthe country in recent years, is often noticed the lack of a scenic designer or in some cases even the absence of a scenography. Theatrical performances with professional scenic designers, such as those in Fier (2017) and Vlora (2023), demonstrated a more complete vision and a stronger emotional impact on the audience and the conveyance of the message and directorial concept compared to performances where there were no scenic designers.
Based on these findings, several steps for the future are proposed:

- Engaging professional scenic designers in every theatrical production to ensure a cohesive aesthetic and artistic value.
- Organizing training for young scenic designers, especially in the context of district theaters.
- Investing in the technical infrastructure of theaters to enable the realization of more complex scenographies.

Further studies could explore the role of scenography in other theatrical genres or in other district theaters in Albania, to better understand the evolution of these practices and the importance of the role of the scenic designer in the realization of a theatrical performance.

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Scenography and Costumes in the Early Years of Albanian Cinema

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Abstract

This study examines the role and impact of scenography and costumes in the creation of the identity of Albanian cinema, with a particular focus on the post-war period when Albanian cinema began to develop. Visual elements, such as scenography and costumes, contributed to the formation of a unique aesthetic and reflected the social and political realities of the time. Through an analysis of several well-known works from that period, the study will evaluate the importance of these two aspects in creating the atmosphere and reflecting the characters, conveying ideological messages and thus giving Albanian cinema a new artistic and cultural dimension. The analysis will focus on how these visual elements were closely linked to the themes and the social-political context of the time, offering a rich perspective on their impact on the formation of the visual identity of Albanian cinema. By studying the work of well-known artists in scenography and costume design from that period, the study will assess the impact of scenography and costumes on Albanian cinema, creating a visual language that served to articulate narratives and assist in transmitting the ideological messages of the communist regime, which rigorously controlled every aspect of cultural and artistic life.Scenography in early Albanian cinema was closely linked to the social reality of the time, often using traditional elements and influences from Albanian folk art, while attempting to reflect significant social and historical events and themes. In the early years of Albanian cinema, scenography was still an area that developed slowly, with limited opportunities for technology and resources.

Keywords

Albanian cinema, scenography, costumes, visual elements, aesthetic impact

Introduction

The Albanian cinema of the 1950s and 1960s is a complex reflection of Albanian society, which had just emerged from World War II and was trying to build a new socialist identity. It represents not only an artistic enterprise but also a powerful propaganda tool used by the communist regime to construct the new national identity and articulate the ideological messages of a society entering the era of socialism and consolidating its power. Beyond direction and scripts, two essential elements in building the cinematic atmosphere and strengthening the visual message were scenography and costumes. In this context, these visual elements played a fundamental role in creating a unique visual language that helped convey social and ideological messages.

Historical and Political Context of the Early Years of Albanian Cinema

This study focuses precisely on the role of scenography and costumes in the early years of Albanian cinema, analyzing how these two components contributed to the formation of the aesthetic and cultural identity of films from that period. It will particularly examine the early period of Albanian cinema. Through the analysis of films such as Fëmijët e saj (1957) and Tana (1958), we will explore how visual art intertwined with politics, social reality, and popular culture. These films are more than just artistic works: they are mirrors of the time, coded bearers of ideological messages, and instruments for building a visual language that remained powerful for decades.

After World War II, Albania entered a new phase of social and political construction, under a communist regime oriented towards the Soviet model, a system aimed at reshaping society and national consciousness according to Marxist-Leninist ideology. In this process, art and culture were powerful tools for mass education, with cinema playing a special role. They were placed at the service of ideology, promoting values such as labor, collectivization, honesty, and commitment to the homeland. Films produced during this period had not only artistic values but also political functions; they were tools for social education, conveying messages of solidarity, the role of labor, sacrifice for the homeland, class struggle, and the construction of socialism. In this context, scenography and costumes became key elements. As part of the visual appearance of the film, they were meant to reflect not only the reality and socialist idealism but also the model desired by the regime. They were charged with symbolism, where every element, from the bare walls of a poor house to the simple clothes of workers or the bright colors of the flag, had its function in conveying the message. The filmic environments and the way characters were visually presented were designed to depict a poor, yet proud Albania, simple but dedicated to new ideals.

Influences

Due to the proximity to Soviet models, Albanian scenography did not experiment with artistic stylizations but remained in the harsh socialist realism, where every element in the background had a clear ideological purpose.

Scenography: The Construction of the Filmic Space in Early Albanian Cinema

Scenography, as the art of constructing the filmic space, in the early years of Albanian cinema had two main sources: daily reality and popular heritage. In the early years of Albanian cinema, scenography faced several challenges: the lack of technology, lack of materials, and budget limitations. However, artists managed to create spaces that not only reflected social reality but also reinforced the ideological narrative of the films. The main characteristics included minimalism due to the lack of resources, the use of real environments, a focus on common spaces like rural or urban houses, and symbolism linked to honesty and progress. Simple villages, urban buildings, and muddy streets were used to create an authentic image of Albanian life and the symbolism connected to honesty and progress. But beyond realism, scenography aimed to highlight contrasts: the poverty inherited from the past and the optimism of building a new society, ruined village houses compared to new objects created by the cooperative, bare walls symbolizing sacrifice but also determination.

The Role of Costumes: Conveying Identity and Ideology

Costumes in Albanian films of this period had two main functions: to represent the social identity of the character and to convey the ideological messages the regime wanted to emphasize. Simplicity and modesty were essential, avoiding luxury. Characters in the films, according to their social position, were dressed in clothes that represented modesty, honesty, and labor. For example, workers and peasants were dressed in simple costumes, often in neutral colors, emphasizing their connection with the land and labor. In the case of the socialist woman, as seen in the character of Tana, the outfit was a blend of traditional folk elements and a new sense of modernity, marking her new role in society. Also, in films where 'class enemies' or figures representing the bourgeois past were depicted, costumes were more sophisticated, often rich in details that implied decadence and detachment from the people's reality.

Main Principles

- Simplicity and modesty, especially for positive characters.
- Work clothes and folk costumes to emphasize the connection with tradition and labor.
- Avoidance of luxury or sophisticated details that would be interpreted as signs of bourgeois decadence.

Analysis of the Film "Fëmijët e saj" (1957)

"Fëmijët e saj," directed by Hysen Hakani, with a script by Hysen Hakani, artistic direction by Namik Prizreni, and music by Tish Daija, takes place in a remote mountain village where a rabid dog bites Fatima's son. The woman must decide whether to take her son to the doctor or to Aunt Remja, an elderly woman practicing witchcraft. The film was produced during a period when Albania had begun building a socialist system, and Marxist-Leninist ideology was the basis of all cultural and artistic life. It is one of the earliest Albanian films that depicts the difficult reality of a single mother. The film serves as a mirror of that time, where art, including cinema, was used as an educational and propagandistic tool for building the "new socialist man."

In this context, scenography and costumes are not just visual embellishments; they carry ideological and aesthetic functions: they convey the atmosphere of the time, the social condition of the characters, and the messages the film aims to communicate. The scenography in this film is simple, built mainly on family closed spaces, where every object on stage has a clear symbolic function, reflecting social insecurity. The spaces are narrow, emphasizing poverty and lack of comfort. Interiors are simple, often with bare walls, minimal furniture, muddy streets, and dim lighting. All these elements do not serve only for authenticity, but create a heavy atmosphere reflecting a difficult life and a sense of pressure and sacrifice. These visual choices create an emotional atmosphere that expresses the inner tension of the characters.

Symbolism in the Environment

Every object placed on stage has a function: empty clay pots, a dress hanging on the wall, or an old chair serve as metaphors for lack, struggle, and sacrifice. Dimly lit windows and shadows in the background create a sense of isolation and a silent struggle with life.

Purposeful Simplicity

The costumes in "Fëmijët e saj" are minimalist and functional, but chosen with care. Women are dressed in dark dresses, often without embellishments, representing honesty, modesty, and resilience in the face of difficulties. Men appear in work clothes or traditional costumes. There is no symbol of luxury or decadence to maintain coherence with the philosophy of the "new socialist man." Children's costumes are also simple, often patched, but represent innocence and the struggle for life in a harsh reality. They symbolize a new generation growing up in the spirit of sacrifice, emphasizing their difficult economic situation. These visual details help create a portrait of honesty, which is essential to the ideological narrative of the film. This deep realism is part of the film's effort to present not only an individual story but also a portrait of Albanian society during that period.

Ideological Coding in Clothing

The film distinguishes between characters representing progress and those who remain in the old mindset. This is reflected in the colors, cuts, and cleanliness of costumes: positive characters are usually dressed in cleaner, more orderly clothes, while antagonists are more neglected in appearance.

The Dual Function of Visual Elements

Building Character through Costume

There is no clear division between scenography and costumes; both interact to build character. The appearance of the characters is in harmony with the environment: a woman dressed simply in a dark kitchen reinforces the figure of sacrifice and devotion.

Emotional Impact on the Viewer

Scenography and costumes emotionally impact the viewer by helping create a connection between the viewer and the presented reality. They build an atmosphere that evokes pain, solidarity, and effort, feelings that are meant to inspire in the audience a sense of responsibility and the construction of socialism.

Comparison with Later Films

Compared to films such as "Tana" (1958), which showcases more rural space and visual optimism, "Fëmijët e saj" remains more introspective and confined in its scenographic nature. In both cases, however, costumes and environments serve the same purpose of conveying the message: building a new world. But in "Fëmijët e saj", this new world arises from suffering and sacrifice.

An Aesthetic of National and Ideological Identity

Scenography and costumes in "Fëmijët e saj" are not merely technical elements; they are essential components in creating the cinematographic language of that period. They carry ideology, emotion, and national identity, contributing to the construction of a film model that became a standard for decades in Albania.

Analysis of the Film "Tana" (1958)

In contrast, 'Tana", directed by Kristaq Dhamo, written by Kristaq Dhamo and Fatmir Gjata, with art direction by Namik Prizreni and music by Çesk Zadeja, centers around Tana, a smart girl with progressive ideas. She falls in love with Stefan, who lives in a poor mountain village. Tana faces the outdated mentality of her grandfather and the jealousy of Lefteri. It is a love story directed toward progress. Known as the first Albanian feature film, it tells a different story, that of a village entering the new era of the cooperative. Natural landscapes play a central role the village, mountains, fields, and workspaces in the cooperative. These landscapes serve not only as a backdrop but also as symbols of the connection between humans, land, and nature, with more vibrant and optimistic imagery. Dark corners are replaced by open landscapes, fields of wheat, and groups of workers collaborating. The scenography emphasizes the connection between people and the land, highlighting the new social space being built. The interior of the cooperative is designed to reflect the modernization and progress of the time. The houses are brighter, more open, with decorative folk elements (rugs, ceramic dishes), presenting a village that, although poor, has a communal spirit and a hopeful future. Many scenes were shot in open fields, mountains, and near rivers, creating the feeling of a beautiful and vibrant Albania.

Socialist Realism in Scenography

The film is based on the principles of socialist realism, where the environment should reflect the everyday life of the working class. The scenography avoids any form of decorative aesthetics or styles that do not directly convey the ideological message. This visual scheme supports the film's ideological message: Albanian society is leaving behind backwardness and entering a new phase of development. Tana's costumes, the main female character, are symbolic: she wears elements of traditional Albanian clothing, but also displays a modern simplicity that makes her a symbol of the new socialist woman. The blending of tradition with modernity in her costume clearly conveys the message that Albanian society is leaving behind the past and building a new future, with lighter and fresher colors, reflecting the energy and hope of the new generation. The extras and villagers wear regional folk costumes, maintaining local authenticity. Folk costumes are not just decorative but a way to convey national pride and cultural continuity. Other young characters in the film are dressed in practical, simple costumes, representing the collective and unity. There is also no sign of luxury or decadence, maintaining coherence with the philosophy of the "new socialist man."

Ideological Coding in Clothing

The film distinguishes between characters that represent progress and those that adhere to old mentalities. This is reflected in the colors, cuts, and cleanliness of the costumes. Positive characters are typically dressed in cleaner, more orderly clothing, while the antagonists appear more disheveled.

The Dual Function of Visual Elements

Character Construction through Costume

In this film, there is no clear division between scenography and costumes; both interact to build the character. The appearance of the characters harmonizes with the environment.

Emotional Impact on the Viewer

The scenography and costumes have an emotional impact on the viewer and the reality portrayed. They create an atmosphere that evokes solidarity, effort, and a sense of responsibility and commitment to building socialism.

Aesthetics of National and Ideological Identity

The scenography and costumes in "Tana" are not merely technical elements; they are essential components in creating the cinematographic language of the period. They carry emotion and national identity, ideology, and contribute to the creation of a film model that became a standard for decades in Albania.

Characteristics of Period Scenography

- Minimalism, due to financial and technical constraints.
- Use of real environments.
- Focus on ordinary spaces: simple village or town houses, muddy roads, work offices, or workshops.
- Symbolism: poor house = honesty; land = basis of existence; new enterprise.
- Folk costumes are not just decorative but a way to convey the idea of national pride and cultural continuity.
- Natural environments and optimistic scenography are part of an ideological message saying that through collectivization, the country is heading toward a better future.

Comparative Analysis of the Two Films

When comparing the two films, the difference in visual approach is clear. "Fëmijët e saj" is introspective, dark in tone, and more focused on family life and interior environments. In contrast, "Tana" opens up to the exterior landscape and focuses on collectivity. The costumes in both films reflect generational and class differences, but also share a common simplicity and lack of luxury, reinforcing the ideological messages of the regime. In both films, the scenography and costumes are not merely aesthetic elements, but serve a clear ideological function:

- In "Fëmijët e saj", the simplicity and gloom of the costumes reflect the harsh reality, but also the dignity of survival.

- "In Tana", the natural beauty and folk costumes serve to build a hopeful narrative for the future of society.

In both cases, they serve as a "visual language" that helps the viewer understand not only the historical context but also the political and moral purpose of the film.

Symbolism

Element	"Fëmijet e saj"	"Tana"
Emotional Tone	Dark, dramatic.	Optimistic, hopeful.
Environments	Closed, poor, minimalist.	Open, lively, natural.
Costumes	Simple, without bright colors.	National, folk with colors.
Message	Struggle for survival, sacrifice.	Progress through collective labor.

Creation of a National Visual Identity

Through scenography and costumes, Albanian cinema built a unique visual identity that helped reinforce ideological messages and strengthen the emotional connection with the viewer.

Artistic and Cultural Impact

Beyond its ideological function, scenography and costumes were important elements in creating an artistic identity. The scenography and costume artists not only served as executors of ideological instructions but also as creators who helped shape the visual language of Albanian film. They created an aesthetic that, despite material limitations, had the power to build a film world with strong emotional and cultural impact.

Appreciation of Artistic Heritage

Although they may seem simple or poor today, these films represent a sincere effort to create a national cinema with its own identity. The scenography and costume artists, with many material limitations, managed to provide a visual language that remains recognizable and unique to the Albanian public.

Cultural Significance and Later Impact

These two films are not just documents of a specific period; they are also the foundation of a visual language that would define Albanian cinema for decades. The scenographers and costume designers of that time had the difficult task of combining reality with idealism, they had to reflect everyday life but also project a vision of the future that was in line with ideological guidelines. In this context, their work had great cultural significance. Through scenography and costumes, the Albanian audience began to form a visual identity that was separate from Western models and influenced primarily by the socialist countries. This visual identity would later be enriched with other films, but the foundations were laid in films like "Fëmijët e saj" and "Tana".

Analysis of Concrete Scenes

In “Fëmijët e saj”, one of the most meaningful scenes is when the mother sees her child suffering in the fields. The scenography is minimalist: a poor room with few pieces of furniture, emphasizing economic deprivation. The lighting is dark, creating a heavy emotional atmosphere.

In “Tana”, an iconic scene is when Tana, along with the young people from the village, works in the cooperative. The view is open, the natural landscape is filled with light, and the simple traditional costumes blend with new elements that symbolize hope for change. The camera often focuses on the characters’ faces, highlighting optimism and belief in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, scenography and costumes played an irreplaceable role in shaping the visual language of cinema. Through the analysis of the two early films, Fëmijët e saj and Tana, we can see how these elements not only served as a backdrop for the cinematic narratives but also as powerful tools for conveying ideological messages, articulating social tensions, and constructing a national visual identity. The scenography and costumes in the early days of Albanian cinema were not merely technical elements of film production but important carriers of ideological and artistic messages. Through them, Albanian films of the communist period built a new reality, where Albanian society was portrayed as honest, hardworking, and on the path toward socialist progress. In the analysis of films like Fëmijët e saj and Tana, it is clear how these elements contributed to the creation of a unique visual identity that remained in the cultural memory of the country for decades.

Illustrations

Below are several illustrations intended to reinforce the analysis of scenography and costumes in the films ‘Fëmijët e saj” and “Tana”. (Note: The images are symbolic and sourced from film archives).





Figure 1, View of the central scene in "Fëmijët e saj" (the poor mother's home)







Figure 2, Scene from the work fields in "Tana" (the cooperative and the group of young people)

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Italian constructions from the 1900s in the city of Gjirokastra, a western spirit that came from Italy

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Abstract

Historical evidences in the city of Gjirokastra, have brought to light day after day new facts that add value and charm to this city. Hidden in the dust of time, an equally important part of the city's architecture remains unexplored, a part which brought a western influence to the stone city. Here is precisely where this research work takes its impetus, aiming to identify and document the Italian buildings in the city, their history, the individuals who lived and worked in the city in the 1920s and 1930s, and their contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the city, and especially to the contemporary reconstructions and constructions with social functions, modern and completely with a Western oriented influence. But the question arises as to why and how these luxurious buildings such as bars, restaurants, banks, schools and residential houses, facilities with social and health functions, etc., were combined, starting from the red-tiled roofs to the innovative contemporary techniques used for the first time in the city, with the unique medieval architecture of the city of Gjirokastra. We say that Italian constructions in the city's infrastructure and architecture brought a new spirit to the city's development, thus bringing a different, contemporary Western approach while preserving its historical identity. This study was carried out through research in the citys library, in books and periodicals of the time, various chronicles and announcements with explanatory content, interviews with descendants of the most important families of the time. Also we researched in the archival fund of the Honorary Embassy of the Italian Republic in Gjirokastra. Constructions with a social and economic character in the city with a Western spirit have influenced the development and orientation of the city towards the West, without denying the cultural heritage, but have created a unique relationship of appreciation and preservation of identity.

Keywords

architecture, cultural heritage, inovation

Introduction

Talking about a city like Gjirokaster normally requires taking into account and evaluating many elements. The city does not ward of its medieval form, which also contains its strongest connection with its heritage. Gjirokastra carries some values which have not been studied yet. These values are the buildings of the 1900s that belong to the Italian architecture. The so called unappreciated values because these buildings have brought the "Western spirit" to the city. These buildings carried a great social value because, they touched almost all areas of life but also a great contrast with their shapes and volumes harmonized with the medieval part of the city, but especially with their contemporary functionality. During the dictatorship there was no genuine and complete study which would evaluate these buildings. After the admitionn of Gjirokastra in 2005 in UNESCO as a world heritage site, the interest and judgment for these buildings got a special perspective. However, after the 90s, groups of researchers have expressed their thoughts and judgments about some of these values. This influence began in the 1900s at the time of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the beginnings of economic and cultural exchanges with the West, where Italy was undoubtedly a reference. These changes and orientations were reflected very quickly in the city and also in its social life, becoming an integral part of it.

Literature review

Albania and Italy are two close neighboring countries which in the course of history have been forced to establish relations of various natures between them such as economic, social and political. The creation of an independent Albanian state was in the interest of Italy, due to its strategic geographical position. In 1915, an agreement was signed in London between Italy and the Entente at the Secret Conference of Ambassadors in London [1], according to which Albania would be under the protectorate of Italy. With the ending of the War of Vlora came an end to any Italian territorial claims over Albania. (Howard, 1941) The First World War brought only tragic consequences for Albania by destroying it both economically and socially. The 20th century finds Albania in a deep economic backwardness (Hobsbawm EJ, 1992). In absence of sources for the Albanian economy in the first decades of the 1900s, it is difficult to make an assessment (Selenica, 1928). Some data on the Albanian economy are found in the Bari Chamber of Commerce in 1927, a time when there was foreign trade. So through these data we see the growth of Italian influence in the Albanian economy (Economica, 1927). During the first years of the fascist occupation, what are called "major economic changes" occurred. This came as a result of the introduction of Italian state but also private capital. (Cici, 2002) "Banca d'Italia", "Banco di Napoli", etc. opened their branches in Albania. The most important works were carried out in Tirana, the Central Office for Urban Construction was created to develop plans for other cities in the country. In addition to the construction of houses, maternity hospitals, roads, etc., we emphasize the construction of water supply systems in various cities. (Villari, 2020) Amidst all this urban development that flourished in the 1920s, cities like Gjirokastra preserved their previous architectural and urban state by integrating constructions and innovations into their composition. In Gjirokastra, the construction of traditional-type housing had long been completed. So the general spirit of these years was the construction of

1 The Treaty of London was a secret agreement signed on 26 April 1915 by the United Kingdom, France and Russia on one side, and Italy on the other, with the aim of luring the latter into entering the Great War on the side of the Entente.

new-type housing. In the absence of sources for the Albanian economy in the first decades of the 1900s, it is difficult to make an assessment (Selenica 1928). Some data on the Albanian economy are found in the Bari Chamber of Commerce in 1927, a time when there was foreign trade. So through these data we see the growth of Italian influence in the Albanian economy. (Economica 1927). During the first years of the fascist occupation, what are called "major economic changes" also occurred. This came as a result of the introduction of Italian state but also private capital. (Cici, 2002) "Banca d'Italia", "Banco di Napoli", etc. opened their branches in Albania. The most important works were carried out in Tirana, and the Central Office for Urban Construction was created to develop plans for other cities in the country. In addition to the construction of housing, maternity hospitals, roads, etc., we emphasize the construction of water supply systems in various cities (Villari, 2020). Amid all this urban development that developed in the 1920s, cities like Gjirokastra maintained their previous architectural and urban state by integrating constructions and innovations into their architecture. In Gjirokastra, the construction of traditional-type houses had long been completed. So the general spirit of these years was the construction of new-type of houses.

With the establishment of the new Albanian state and political changes that followed, there was a need for administrative buildings that were not previously known as prefectures, municipalities, etc., but also buildings with a social - cultural - health - commercial character, we mention here hotels, schools, banks, apartments, etc. (History of Albania. Volume III), 1984). In the 1920s - 1940s, the city's merchants began trading with the West, especially with Italy and Greece. The itinerary that the Gjirokastrian merchants would follow was precisely Saranda - Brindisi - Bari and later throughout Italy. In the newspaper of the time Demokratia [2], advertisements for various travel companies indicate travel lines in Europe but also abroad, such as that of Avni Bey Delvina Saranda, where the representative for Gjirokastër was Mr. Ilia Bezhani, in addition to the main offices of Saranda. Italy is undoubtedly a destination of great economic importance. (Figure 1)



AXHENSI-DETARE

Avni Bej Delvina-Sarandea

LAJMERIM:

Lajm rojnë gjithë të interesuarve se ...

BRINDIZI

dhe çdo të Enjten ora m' 9 p. d. (egzakt) per ...

KORFUS-PATRE dhe PIRE

Në limanin e PIRESE ardhin të PREMTEN ...

para drekes regullisht.

Pranojnë udhetarë dhe mall tregtie per limane ...

e mali-shëmuara si per në STAMBOLL.

Pranojnë gjith'ashtu edhe udhetarë per në SUD AMERIKA me anën e FRANCES dhe të GJERMANISË me Transatlantike më të sigurta dhe më të mira të Evropës.

Per informata më të çdoqhiena drejtohuni në Axhensinë t'onë në SARANDE, dhe pran' Zotit ILI BEZHANIT përfaqesonjesit t'onë në GJIROKASTRE.



Shoqeri e Navigasionit me avull

"LLOYD SABAUDO" -- Genova

Vija Italiane shumë e shpejtë dhe me luks të math.

Vapore speciale për emigrantët, me luks të math dhe me kabina vetëm të klasit të tretë.

Nga Napoli në New York në 9 ditë, në Brazili në 12 ditë, në Plata në 14 ditë.

Emigrandët Shqipëtarë në Brindisi dhe në Napoli do kenë çdo lehtësi dhe pa të holla.

Për informata të interesuarit duhet të drejtohen: Në Sarandë tek Z. Cavaliere Luigi Mastroviti, në Korçë tek Z. KOÇOGRAMENO, në Gjirokastrë tek Z. Ilia Bezhani, në Përmet tek Z. Xhelal Bllaca & Sh., në Himarë tek Z. Thanas Bollano.

Figure 1 & 2, "Democracy" newspaper announcement

2 Demokratia (Democracy) was a weekly newspaper published in Gjirokastër, Albania, from 1925 to 1939. Demokratia was published and edited by Xhevat Kallajxhiu. He founded the newspaper in 1925. Politically, the newspaper had an independent editorial line.

Another company is "Lloyd Sabaudo" [3] in Genova, with a representative in Gjirokastra, Mr. Ilia Bezhani. (Figure 2)

Also worth noting is the fact that in our city for the first time there is a car company, where according to the newspaper there were 13 cars and one truck. The company had branches in different cities. (Figure 3)

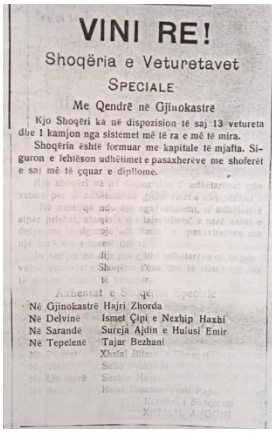
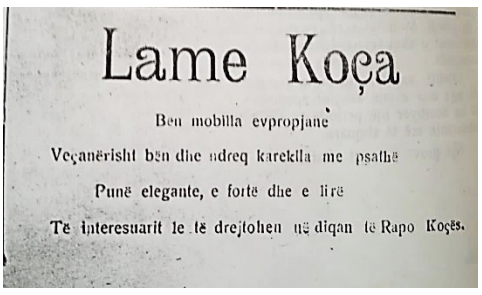
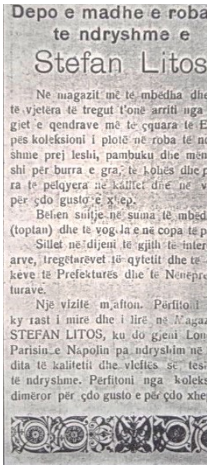

VINI RE!
Shoqëria e Veturetavet
SPECIALE
Me Qendrë në Gjinokastre
Kjo Shoqëri ka në dispozision të saj 13 vetureta dhe 1 kamjon nga sistemet më të ra e më të mira.
Shoqëria është formuar me kapitale të mjafta. Siguron e lehtëson udhëtimet e pasaxherëve me shoferët e saj më të çquar e dipllome.
Ne Gjinokastrë Hajri Zhorda
Ne Delvinë Ismet Çipi e Nexhip Haxhi
Ne Sarandë Sureja Ajdin e Huiusi Emir
Ne Tepelenë Tajar Bezhani

Figure 3 "Democracy" newspaper announcement

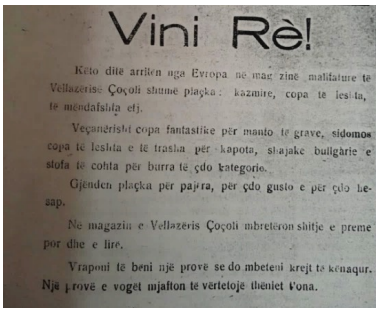
The changes are especially noticeable with the economic growth of some families which brings the need for new buildings that would soon be in function of the social side. This economic and cultural relationship also brings a change of mentality and judgment where the removal of the veil and the dressing of women in now represented with elegant European clothing, without forgetting that of men which already had the elegance of the time.
This was clearly felt in the city also in the handicraft sector such as tailoring, shoemaking, as well as in the furniture sector, as we find in the various announcements in the newspaper of the time "Demokratia". (Figure 4)


ROBAQEPËS
Special
Pas një praktike të gjatë që pa pranë
qepësve ma të famshëm të Stambollit, ardhi
hapi dyqan mi, vehte në, qytetetin t'onë me
ROBA-QEPËSIA SPECIALE z. Fotaq Qirko,
pret dhe qep kostume civile e ushtarake
spesialite të veçante dhe të modës së fundit.
P.r.a.
Në doni rroba elegante, t'u rrinë pas trupit
çdo gustoje, vraponi te:
Robaqepesi „Special"
Një prov' e vogel do t'u kenaqë


Lame Koça
Ben mobilla evpropjane
Veçanërisht bën dhe ndreq karekila me psathë
Punë elegante, e fortë dhe e lirë
Të interesuarit le të drejtohen në dïqan të Rapo Koçës.


Depo e madhe e roba
te ndryshme e
Stefan Litos
Ne magazit më të mbedha dhe
te vjetëra të tregut t'one arriti nga
giet e qendrave më të çquara të E
pës koleksioni i plotë në roba të n
shme prej leshi, pambuku dhe mën
shi për burra e gra; te kohës dhe
ra te pelqyera në kalliet dhe ne
për çdo gusto e xhep.
Bëhen sutjet në suma të mbed
(toptan) dhe te vogla e ne copa te p
Sillet në dijeni të gjith te inter
arve, tregtarevet te qytetit dhe te
keve të Prefekturës dhe te Nënpre
turave.
Një vizitë mafton. Përfitoni
ky rast i mire dhe i lirë ne Magaz
STEFAN LITOS, ku do gjeni Lon
Parisin e Napolin pa ndryshim ne
dita të kalitetit dhe vlefles se tes
të ndryshme. Përfitoni nga koleks
dimëror për çdo gusto e për çdo xhe

3 Lloyd Sabaudo Shipping Line was a shipping line formed in Turin in 1906. It began passenger service in 1907, expanding to connect Italy with ports in Asia, as well as North and South America. In 1932, it merged with several other Italian shipping lines to form the Italian Line.


Vini Rè!

Këto dite arriten nga Evropa në magazinë mallrafture të Vellazerisë Çoçoli shumë plaçka: kazmire, copa të leshta, të mëndafshta etj.

Veçanërisht copa fantastike për manto të grave, sidomos copa të leshta e të trasha për kapota, shajake bullgarie e stofa të cohta për burra të çdo kategorie.

Gjenden plaçka për pajtra, për çdo gusto e për çdo le-sap.

Në magazin e Vellazëris Çoçoli mbretëron shitje e preme por dhe e lirë.

Vraponi të bëni një provë se do mbeteni krejt të kënaqur. Një provë e vogël mjafton të vërtetoje thënien tonë.

Figure 4, "Democracy" newspaper announcement

The most evident change comes to this social class, which for almost two decades had close trade relations with Italy. Houses, villas but also hotels in the characteristic bazaar area stand out, commercial complexes and even banks, schools, administrative buildings, etc., some of which are still functional today.
An important part is also the insurance agency "Riunione Adriatica Di Sicurta Trieste", RAS S.p.A. [4] (Figure 5)



Figure 5, The historic headquarters of the RAS in Trieste

The company undertook life insurance, fire, hail, theft, and transport insurance. The general agent in Albania was Mr. Kostandin Harito. (Figure 6)


RIUNIONE ADRIATICA
DI SICURTA TRIESTE
FORMUAR ME 1838
KOMPANI E SHIGURIMEVE ME ÇMIME
TË GAKTUAR
Shoqëri Anonime me Aksione
Kapitali i Shoqërisë Lit. 100 milion
të derdhura 40 milion
Shigurime kunder: ZJARIT, JETES, TRANSPORTIMEVE, VJEDHJAVE E BRESHERIT
Mejtoni avenirin t'uaj duke shiguruar JETEN ne Shoqëria «RIUNIONE ADRIATICA DI SICURTA».
Çdo tjatër informacion mundeni t'a merrni nga Axhenti i përgjithëshme për Shqipëri z. KOSTANDIN HARITO NE SARANDE.

Figure 6, "Democracy" newspaper announcement

4 An acronym for Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà, it was an Italian insurance company, founded on 9 May 1838 in Trieste. Since 2007 it has been part of the Allianz group.

Methodology

For the realization of this study, the method of historical research and investigation was used in the city library, in books and mainly in periodicals of the time, chronicles and various announcements. Interviews were conducted with descendants of the most important families of the time, some of whom continue to live precisely in these houses. The research continued in the archival fund of the Honorary Embassy of the Italian Republic in Gjirokastra. The analysis is focused on the identification of these buildings, their style, functionality, value and the change they brought to its socio-cultural life.

Results and discussions

This change in the architecture of the city is not only visible at a quick glance and where the stylistic change that is adapted to the medieval city is normally evident, but also from a constructive point of view, where it should be emphasized that for the first time new principles of construction are established, as well as new elements such as concrete, iron, etc. The new elements provide a possibility of more efficient expression, shaping and greater modeling of the volumes of the houses. This influence would elevate concept and harmony to new contemporary levels. Italian specialists, with their professionalism and sensitivity, built functional environments with different social purposes while respecting the city's heritage to the maximum. The fact is that the Italians did not design the reconceptualization of the city center as they did in many cities in Albania.
Regarding the houses, some of them are:

1. Emin Kokalari house (villa) in the "Palorto" neighborhood 1931 – 1933, architect Vitalino Poselli.
2. Papavangjeli, villa in the "Varrosh" neighborhood 1937.
3. Tili Mihali (merchant), apartment and shop in the "Varrosh" neighborhood 1937.
4. Koço Kekezi (merchant), 4-story house in the "Varrosh" neighborhood
5. Aleks Ceci, 3-story house in the "Varrosh" neighborhood – former Radio.
6. Kallajxhi, 2-story house in the "Palorto" neighborhood 1930.
7. Taho Alite (merchant), apartment in the "Hazmurat" neighborhood.
8. Lito, house and shop in the Bazaar (no longer exists).



Figure 7, House of Emin Kokalari, Vila Papavangjeli, Tili Mihali, Banesa Kekezi



Figure 8, House of Ceci, Banesa Kallajxhi, Banesa Alite, Banesa Lito

In the houses built in those years we distinguish elements that make the difference with other buildings in the city. Starting from the facades where they stand out: balconies, verandas, shutters placed on the windows, wrought iron railings, doors built with iron material, etc. Structurally, the use of concrete columns and beams is evident, as well as the separation of floors with concrete slabs, the use of bricks placed in a semi-arch with steel rails. Another innovation is the use of simple and decorative tiles, marble in steps in the interiors of the houses. Another characteristic is the covering of the roofs with red tiles of the Marseille type. The incorporation of these houses was also harmonized with the placement of volumes in height with the city, without creating inharmonious differences. More specifically, in the city, one often encounters the person who is called the first specialist to open a design studio and construction enterprise in Gjirokastra in 1927, Vitalino Poselli [5].



Figure 9, V. Poselli in his studio

He built and reconstructed various objects, from social, commercial, residential, but also engineering works on national roads that had just begun to be built. Vitalino came to Gjirokastra as an architect and entrepreneur in search of the job market and managed to find it. The architect was inspired by the architecture of Gjirokastra. We see this in the construction of the "Kokalari" villa in the Palorto neighborhood where he was based on the functional structure of the traditional apartment. In it we find the sofa and the sub-sofa as well as the rooms connected with the same ratio. The sanitary parts of the house are in the same position in the plan as in the Gjirokastra houses. Vitalino has also provided great assistance in introducing new elements in construction, new technology and materials and especially in the refinishing works. He worked himself to teach local specialists this new technology. In his efforts to harmonize the plastics,

5 Vitaliano Poselli (Castiglione di Sicilia, 19 May 1840 – Thessaloniki, 23 September 1918) was an Italian architect, active at the end of the nineteenth century in Thessaloniki but also in Albania.

the volumes with the traditional part and to avoid constructions outside this form, there are attempts to stylize the characteristic architectural elements of traditional constructions with new ones. One such element is the entrance under an arch with a vertical emphasis, the window also with a vertical emphasis surrounded by a frame, the ratio of masonry and plaster with the exterior appearance, etc.



Figure 10, Kokalari villa

Other constructions in Gjirokastra designed by Italian specialists include roads, bridges, an airport, the total reconstruction of the high school, water supply, etc. Here we also find the names of the "Puricelli" [6] Company, specialized in infrastructure, bridges, roads, etc. However, we also have the names of local companies such as "Selfo" that implemented the reconstruction of the high school, the construction of the Catholic Church, etc. In the implementation of the reconstruction works of the high school, we find one of the most beautiful educational buildings ever built, undoubtedly one of the most important in the city, rebuilt according to the most advanced techniques of the time. Its reconstruction was carried out on the building of the former French High School of 1923, built by the people of Gjirokastra but severely damaged by the war. According to specialists, the Piacentinian [7] style was applied architecturally to this building. Structurally, we have massive walls, columns, beams and concrete slabs. We also have the flooring of the corridors and classrooms with granite tiles and the use of marble on the stairs. We also mention the volumes (cubations) in the classrooms. In this building, in its rear part we find objects that resemble the shape of silos, now there is the school gym, which were previously used for the branch of the technical school "Montani". The uniqueness of their construction with the methods of building industrial silos in the 1930s - 1940s with covers with steel trusses, braces and corrugated sheet metal supported on wooden layers. Also interesting is the stylization of the harmony of the roof on the basis of the frame with "Kokoshka" with cantilever stones as in the Gjirokastra houses. The reconstruction of the building was completed in 1942.

6 Piero Puricelli (Milan, 4 April 1883 – Milan, 8 May 1951) was an Italian engineer and entrepreneur. As early as 1914 he had founded the "Società Puricelli" which, during the First World War, collaborated with the Military Engineers in various supplies for the front.

7 The Piacentini style refers to an architectural trend during the fascist period, typical of construction in Albania of that period. It takes its name from the architect of the time Marcello Piacentini (8.12.1881 – 19.05.1960)

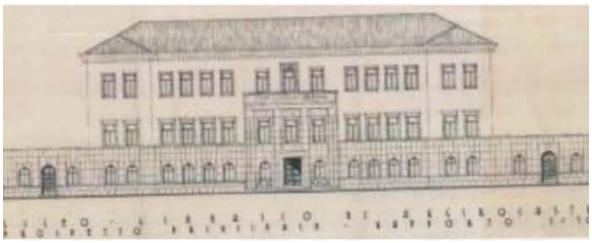


Figure 11, The main facade of the project

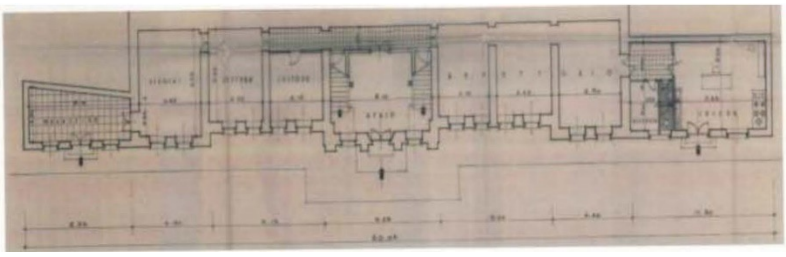


Figure 12, Gjirokastra High School ground floor plan

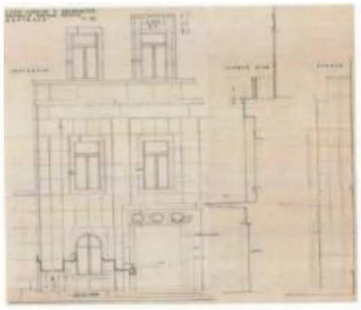


Figure 13, Gjirokastra High School entrance element



Current gymnasium (former Italian technical school)



Figure 14, Photo of the gymnasium (lyceum) today

This society also implemented constructions in the museum area such as the former Catholic Church on the hill below the "Obelisk". This object does not exist today because it was demolished in the 1980s. Based on the photographs, this object, which belongs to a special style, was very well harmonized with the part of the city realized by the "Selfo" Society.



Figure 15, Photos of the former Catholic church

Next we find commercial buildings such as the "Zigai" Commercial Complex in the Bazaar, which is a rare building and an example of a commercial center from the beginning of the last century. Another building is the merchant's shop and house of the merchant Th. Lito at Çerçiz Topulli Square, the merchant's shop and house of Tili Mihali which is located in the Varrosh neighborhood, 1937. Characteristic for this building is the balcony with decorative iron railings, the windows with grilles and the veranda in the upper part. While for the "Zigai" commercial complex, a rare model of functionality and architectural elegance is presented. In the structure itself we encounter the use of concrete in columns, beams and decorative iron in the railings and the numerous stairs that the building has. The lower part served as a warehouse and encountered metal railings. While for the commercial building Th.Lito at Çerçiz Topulli Square, which no longer exists because the "Çajupi" Hotel was built, had typical Italian architecture in all its elements. The ground floor served as a commercial space, while the upper floor served as a residence.



Figure 16, "Zigai" commercial complex, Th.Lito House, Tili Mihali House

In the 1930s, 2 banks were built and began their operation, "Banca Nazionale D'Albania"[8] and "Banco Di Napoli" . The first was behind the Savings Bank at the former old Cinema, while the second was positioned at the entrance to the bazaar. The design of "Banca Nazionale D'Albania" was carried out by Ferdinand Poggi .
Elements of these buildings are visible especially in "Banco Di Napoli" even today (partly) because during the dictatorship there was a change in the lower part of the first floor. However, we find in its origin balconies with railings made of decorative iron (which are still there today), also bars on the windows in the form of railings, heavy shutters and balustrades. In the interior

8 Surprisingly for a central bank, the National Bank was not only independent of the Albanian government, but was also a foreign institution, with its registered headquarters in Rome and headed by an Italian official.

spaces we have the functionality of the buildings based on the needs of the institution, but their decoration is striking. We mention heavy walnut tables and cabinets, the use of decorative tiles for flooring, and leather-upholstered armchairs and chairs.

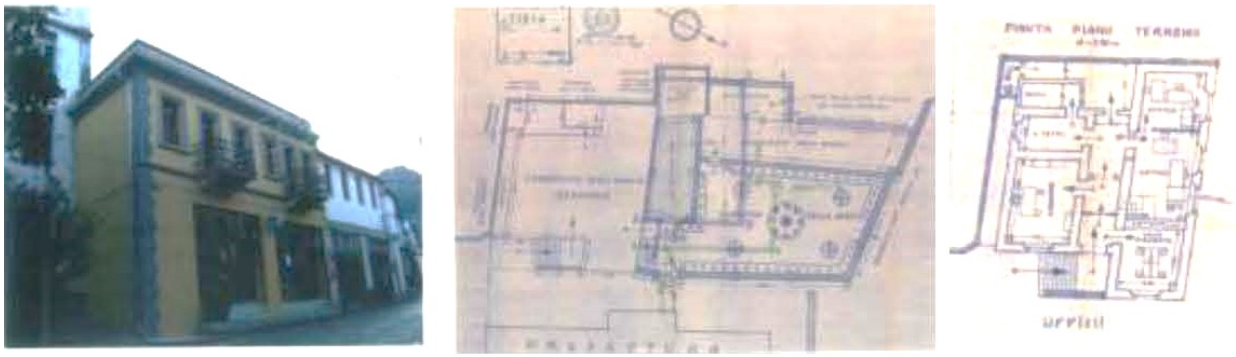


Figure 17, Former Banco di Napoli, Plan of Banca Nazionale d'Albania

Other buildings are administrative, including the former Prefecture and the former Municipality. The first building does not exist after it was burned. According to the photos, it was a structurally neoclassical building, in harmony with the city. While the former Municipality building was located at the end of the "Çajupi" Hotel on the side of the road to the existing Municipality. This building was integrated into the new construction of the "Çajupi" Hotel during the dictatorship.



Figure 18, Former Prefecture, Former Municipality

A contemporary innovation is the construction of hotels that no longer resemble other existing accommodation facilities in either form or functionality, conceived and built entirely in the Italian style but with a characteristic that we have also encountered in other apartments, maintaining an excellent ratio of volumes and proportions. Among these hotels, we mention Hotel "Royal" (today's Hotel "Sopoti") as well as Hotel "Savoia" former Pastry Shop "Tirana". Hotel "Royal" is the most luxurious building in the historic part of the bazaar. The bar and restaurant located inside it, very luxurious for the time, a contemporary expression. The rooms are of a Western standard and decoration. The interior decoration of the entire building is contemporary to the 1930s, where even today the spirit of that time is felt. According to specialists, elements of "Umbertino"[9] architecture have been preserved in this building, such as balconies with decorative railings, decorative window frames, carved corners, etc. The hotel has had several construction phases until its final form that we still have today, where it is enough to emphasize a fact such

9 The Umbertino style is a stylistic and architectural movement that particularly affected Italy in the late 19th century. The Umbertino style takes its name from the king of Italy at the time on the throne, Umberto I of Savoy.

as the construction of the top floor and its covering with a tiled roof and a skylight (sopra luce) that gives light to the entire internal staircase of the building. The famous Usta Kostandin Koçollari (Usta Nini) worked on the implementation of the project for the realization of the hotel, who comes from a group of families known in the city as "Mjeshtrok". Such families are like Lula, Dhoska, Llukani, etc., who are widely engaged in the construction and reconstruction of characteristic houses and unique cobblestones of the city, such as the two brothers Simi and Koçi Llukani. In the construction of the top floor of the hotel, master Nini meticulously implemented the elements that characterize the building without losing its uniqueness. The selection of this master was not accidental because his craftsmanship was impressive. At this point, we are giving another fact such as that of the contract established between the owners of the "Hadëri" family, the Municipality and the master himself, where the contract emphasized precisely the placement and preservation of the architectural side and other typical elements of the building in order to best preserve its unique character. Thanks to the master's craftsmanship and his excellent work, the building has its appearance and uniqueness that is evident today. Even in the "Savoia" Hotel, we still have elements of the "Umbertino" style with balconies with decorative iron railings, frames on the outside of the windows, the use of concrete slabs in dividing the floors and especially in covering the building. Even in this hotel, the interior decoration was in contemporary conditions of the 1930s.



Figure 19, Former Hotel "Royal"



Figure 20, Former Hotel "Savoia" Photo of the time Former "Banco di Napoli" and Hotel "Savoia"

Another important building for its time and function is the building of the former Electric Power Plant (S.E.S.A.), where thanks to the implementation of the distribution network with cabins and poles, the city was illuminated for the first time on November 28, 1932. But other buildings are also the former Mill, the Cigarette Factory at the end of the Varrosh neighborhood, etc., buildings with an industrial character. Also the construction of the Airport which is a new formation both in its modern aspect but also in its very contemporary function for the time when planes with different functions landed in the city for the first time.



Figure 21, Photo of the Power Plant (S.E.S.A) building Main and side view of the Power Plant (S.E.S.A) project



Figure 22, The city's electrical distribution network (S.E.S.A) as well as network elements (cabins and electric poles)

On the part of other Italian companies in the city, such as "Ozono", we have the design and implementation in 1939 of the city's water supply system. From the Italian company "Ansaldo"[10] in 1936 we have the realization of the Dragon Bridge as an expression of modern infrastructure. The "Puricelli" company, specialized in infrastructure, was also involved in these commitments.

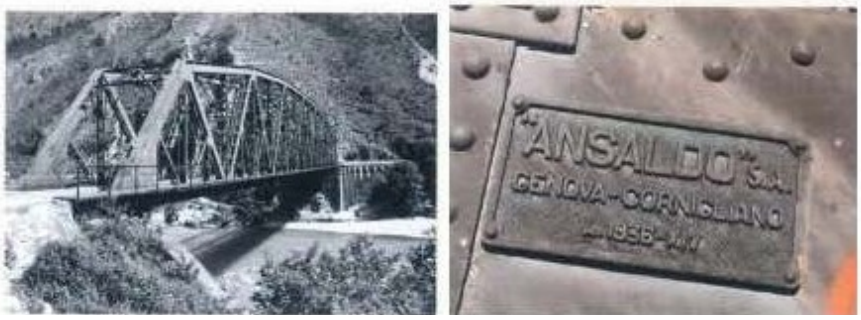


Figure 23, Dragot Bridge

10 Ansaldo was an industrial company founded in Sampierdarena (now Genoa) in 1853 under the name of Gio. Ansaldo & C. limited liability company. In 1993 it merged with the Finmeccanica group (now Leonardo).



Figure 24, View of the Gjirokastra water supply system designed and built in 1939

Some facilities were partially completed or remained only projects. As a grand and important project, the Gjirokastra Hospital Center, designed as a functional center with all elements such as the emergency room, infirmary, disinfection building, surgery pavilion, kitchen, laundry, autopsy pavilion, etc. Its design was made by architect Pietro Bartollini in 1940. In his design, it contained 18 buildings which were well defined in their functions.

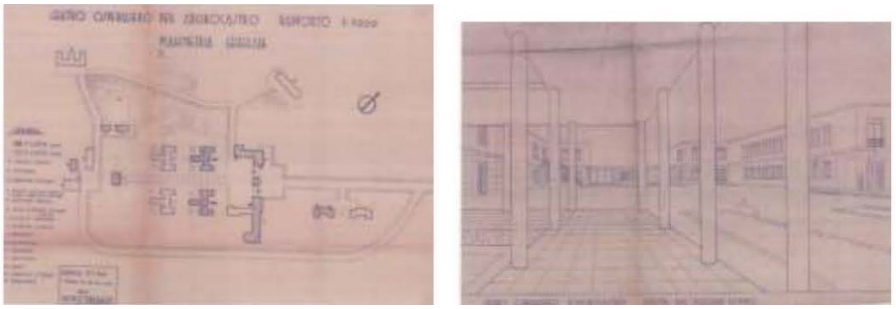


Figure 25, General layout of the Hospital Center, Perception of the Hospital Center

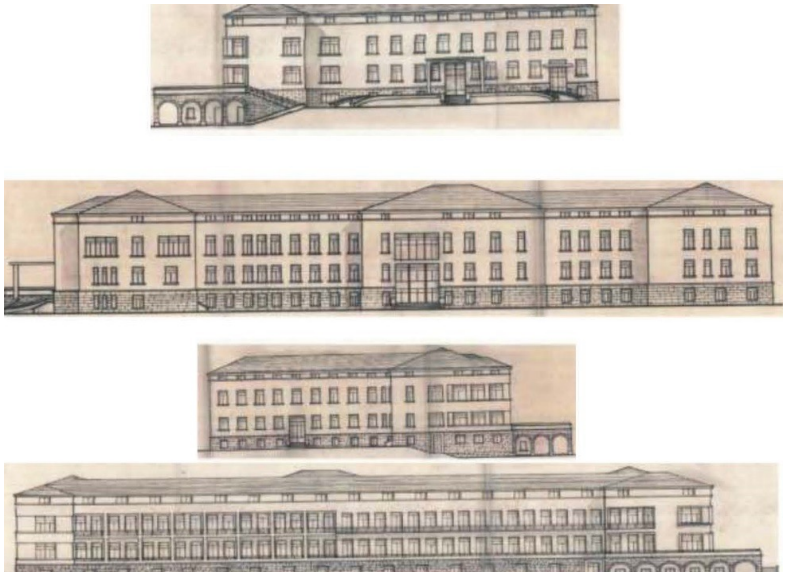


Figure 26, The designed facade of the hospital

Another project remains the construction of the Police Headquarters and Barracks. The exact location where it would be built is not known. Other projects include the Korça Beer Factory for Gjirokastra, another industrial construction.

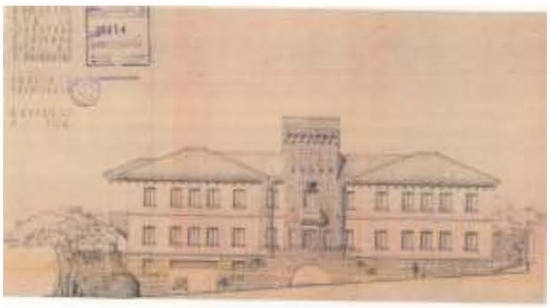


Figure 27, Gjirokastra Police Station and Barracks, view of the main facade

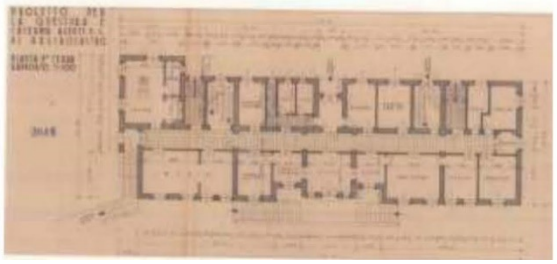


Figure 28, Ground floor plan

The beer production line stations are also well defined in the project.

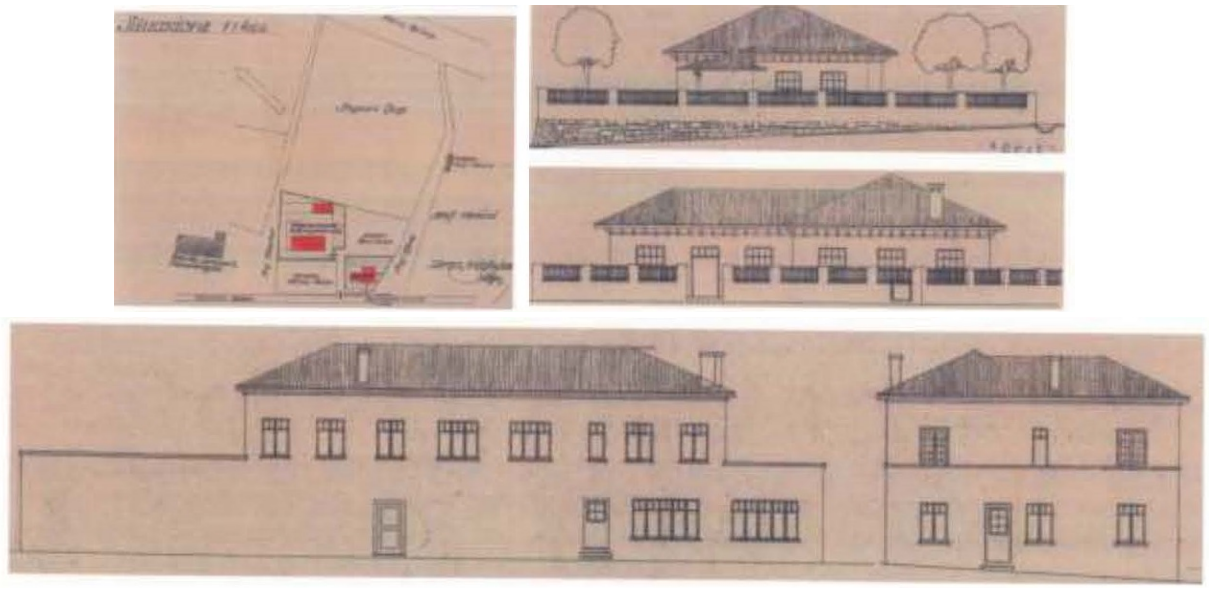


Figure 29, Korca Beer Factory (project for Gjirokastra)

An important place that should be highlighted and that opens perspectives for a contemporary future is the realization of the Aerophotogrammetric Cartography of the city of Gjirokastra, realized by the Military Geographical Institute of Florence in 1937 at the scale (1:5000). This cartography served the studies and development plans that were realized later. The cartography was realized on a general policy that King Zog had for the urban development of the country and its modernization.

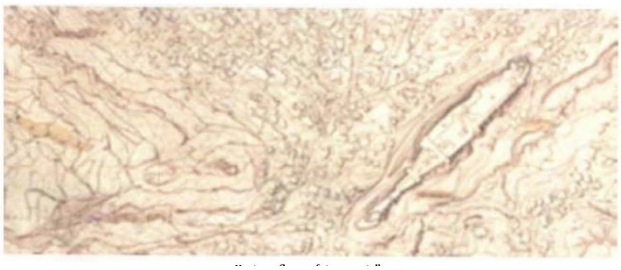


Figure 30, Aerial photogrammetric cartography

After the liberation of the country, according to researchers, many of these urban plans were based on regulatory plans.

Conclusion

So it seems clear that in our city the Western spirit which carried within it the social, intellectual, cultural side with all its development in all areas of life giving them the best contemporary charm and functionality and opening a new Western horizon for the city, which for the sake of truth comes from Italy. Italian constructions in Albania and especially in Gjirokastra in the 1900s are a turning point in the social and urban transformation of the city. We often encounter Italian influence both politically and economically in the Balkans, mainly in Albania, used as a strategy to expand regional influence. The emphasis falls precisely on the infrastructural and urban investments that Italy undertook mostly during the period of the Zog monarchy and the years of the fascist occupation of Albania. Specifically, the expression of this relationship appears in the city of Gjirokastra with Italian buildings where we highlight the uniqueness of construction and functionality for the time, such as the Banca Nazionale d'Albania, Hotel Royal, the reconstructed high school, or the "Zigai" shopping center.

The combination of new construction techniques, the great sensitivity shown for preserving aesthetics and harmonizing with the existing traditional architecture of the city, brought not only an innovation but a turning point in urban planning. The Italian architects who worked and lived in Gjirokastra in that period not only brought innovation in construction techniques, but a new spirit, philosophy in design, having in essence the preservation and respect of traditional architecture combined with modern elements of the West.The heritage of Italian buildings in Gjirokastra are an embodiment, modernization, functionality and a Western vision that influenced all spheres of urban and social life.

The evolution of theatre and scenography

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Abstract

The aim and object of this study will be an essential analysis from the simple forms of ancient Greek theater to the complex images and advanced technology of contemporary stages. Starting from the initial function of the theatrical space in antiquity for narration and ritual, the research examines the influence of artistic movements, technological developments, social and cultural changes on the evolution of theater. The study will follow a historical and interdisciplinary approach, examining important periods of theater: such as the theater of the Italian Renaissance with the invention of illusionistic perspective, the Baroque theater with its grandiose effects, the 19th century movements towards realism and naturalism, the avant-gardes of the early 20th century that challenged traditional conventions, and the integration of digital technologies in 21st century scenography. The methodology will include the analysis of the changing architecture of the theatre, which brings about a changing concept of theatre scenography. The expected results of this research aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the forces that have shaped European scenography, revealing key trends and technical innovations. The study will analyze how the evolution of scenography has influenced the perception of drama, the relationship between performer and spectator, and the potential of new forms of stage expression. The scientific question will be: What impact does the development of technology have on theater and scenography? The results of this study will focus on the history of theaters in Europe, from the period of antiquity to the present day and the personal realizations of various activities. This research has the potential to contribute to the field of theater and performance studies by offering a broad perspective on the development of a central element of European theater and its interaction with the historical, artistic and technological context.

Keywords

theater, scenography, history, performing arts, technology, evolution

Introduction

Theatre is one of the oldest forms of human artistic expression and has played a central role in European culture and society. In its beginnings, during the period of ancient Greek theatre, the theatrical space had a ritual and communal function, serving as a gathering place for the transmission of mythology and cultural values. The origin of theatre is closely linked to ancient cultures, particularly the Greek and Roman civilizations. Greek theatre, developed in the 5th century BCE, forms the foundation of many dramatic and scenographic elements still used today. Initially, theatre had a ritual and religious character, functioning as part of ceremonies dedicated to the gods - especially Dionysus.

Ancient Greek theatre marks the beginning of organized forms of scenography, where the stage space was mainly simple and symbolic, representing a place where storytelling and ritual were united. The use of architectural elements such as the fixed scene (skene) and orchestra were created to serve ritual and dramatic functions. At that time, scenography was very primitive and focused primarily on costumes and masks, which helped actors identify with their roles and express emotions. Decorations were minimal, allowing the audience's imagination to fill in the rest. Ancient theatre is often imagined as a simple art form, reliant solely on speech and the actor's performance. However, archaeological and literary evidence reveals an advanced use of technology as early as the 5th century BCE, serving various functions - from dramatic support to spectacular scenic effects. This research seeks to examine how technology functioned not only as a technical tool but as a dramatic instrument in constructing the theatrical experience.
Over time, technological advancements, social changes, and artistic developments have radically transformed theatre, shifting it from a purely ritual form into a complex multimedia experience. Scenography, as the art of creating space and atmosphere on stage, has been one of the most sensitive elements to these changes.

The evolution of theatre and scenography is a reflection of the cultural, technological, and artistic changes that have occurred throughout history. This topic aims to explore the journey of theatre and scenography from their origins in antiquity to contemporary technologies, highlighting the various influences and the ongoing significance these art forms hold in society. Theatre is one of the richest and most enduring forms of art, which for thousands of years has served as a means of expressing emotion, telling stories, and communicating social and cultural messages.

The aim of this study is to examine :

- What was the relationship between theatrical space and scenography in Ancient Greek theatre?
- How was theatrical space and scenography transformed in Italian Renaissance Theatre?
- How did theatrical space and scenography change during the Baroque Period?
- What occurred during the rapid transformations of the 19th century?
- What are the challenges of scenography in the 21st century?

The study will follow a historical and interdisciplinary approach, examining important theatrical periods such as: Ancient Greek Theatre, the Italian Renaissance Theatre with the invention of illusionist perspective, Baroque Theatre with its majestic effects, the 19th-century movements toward realism and naturalism, the avant-gardes of the early 20th century that challenged traditional conventions, and the integration of digital technologies in 21st-century scenography.

Methodology of the Study

Objective of the Study

The aim and objective of this study is to provide an essential analysis from the simple forms of ancient Greek theatre to the complex images and advanced technologies of contemporary stages. It aims to examine how the relationship between space, scenography, and technology has evolved - not merely as supportive elements of performance, but as structuring agents of the theatrical experience.

- To analyze the history and development of scenography in theatre.
- To identify the main technological and artistic influences on scenography.
- To explore different modes of interaction between stage and audience across various eras.
- To analyze changes in theatre architecture, which in turn lead to changes in the concept of theatrical scenography.

The study seeks to demonstrate the influence of technological developments in transforming the concept of scenography and theatrical experience, as well as the role of cultural and social changes in this evolution.

Research Questions of the Study

- How has theatrical space and scenography transformed from antiquity to the contemporary period?
- What impact have technological developments - especially digital technologies - had on stage design and the theatrical experience?
- How have social and artistic changes influenced the interpretation and use of space in theatre?
- In what ways does contemporary scenography change its relationship with technology?

Research Methodology

- This study employs a qualitative, historical - analytical approach to examine the evolution of scenography across different historical and cultural periods.
- Historical analysis : To trace the chronological development of scenography from antiquity to the 21st century.
- Semiotic and visual analysis : To interpret the aesthetic messages and symbolic functions of scenography.

Data Collection Methods

- Literature review: Analysis of academic sources and published articles on platforms such as JSTOR, OAPEN, Taylor & Francis, etc.
- Case studies: Examination of concrete examples from scenographers such as Giacomo Torelli, Giovanni Battista Aleotti, Adolphe Appia, Robert Wilson, among others.
- Visual documentation: Use of photographs, theatres, and recorded stage scenes to support the analysis.

Criteria for Material Selection

- Works published by recognized authors in scenography and various artistic performances.
- Representative examples from different periods (antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, modernism, digital era, etc.).
- Scenographic projects that are well documented at both theoretical and practical levels.

Methods of Analysis

- Comparative analysis: Comparison of scenographic concepts and techniques across different periods.
- Discourse analysis: Interpretation of how aesthetic and technological discourse is reflected in scenography.
- Contextual analysis: Scenography is placed within the social and cultural context of the respective period.

Limitations of the Study

- Lack of documentation for certain traditional scenographic forms.
- Difficulty in comparing stage forms that have not been physically preserved (e.g., pre-theatrical rituals).

Technology in Ancient Greek Theatre

This study examines the role of technology in ancient Greek theatre by analyzing the construction of stage space, the use of specialized mechanisms, and their impact on audience experience. Since the Archaic period of Ancient Greece, technology has been a fundamental element in the development of theatre. Through historical and comparative research methodology, the study sheds light on the technical innovations that shaped theatre as an art form integrated with technology.

Scenography, on the other hand, constitutes the visual element and environment in which theatrical action unfolds, creating the atmosphere and framework that helps the audience more deeply experience the performance. Beginning with the initial function of theatrical space in antiquity—as a place for storytelling and ritual - this research explores the influence of artistic movements, technological advancements, and socio - cultural changes on the evolution of theatre. Theatre in ancient Greece was not only an art form but also a remarkable example of the use of contemporary technology. It combined architecture, acoustics, and mechanical devices to create an extraordinary experience for the audience.

Theatrical Architecture – Theatron [1] (Greek: θέατρον) means " the place where one sees " and refers to the audience seating area in ancient Greek theatres. This zone, where spectators sat, was constructed in a semi-circular shape, often built into a hillside.

Orchestra the center of the theatre where the chorus stood and the main parts of the drama took place.

1 Theatron (Greek: θέατρον): Literally means " the place where one sees " and refers to the seating area for the audience in ancient Greek theatres.

Skene (Stage Building) a structure behind the orchestra used for scene changes and as a backdrop for the performance.

Stage Technology – Mekane [2] (Greek: μηχανή) was a wooden crane used to lift actors into the air, typically to depict the gods descending from the sky. It functioned as a hoisting device with ropes to lower actors from above - used for the " entrance of the gods." In ancient Greek theatre, violence was not shown on stage - especially in tragic scenes involving murder or its aftermath. This led to the creation of a rolling platform called the Ekkyklema[3] (Greek: ἐκκύκλημα), used to reveal scenes that had taken place inside the skene.

Special Effects included smoke, sound, and various props to create dramatic sensations according to the needs of the play.

Acoustics theatres had extraordinary acoustics—actors' voices could be heard clearly throughout the amphitheater. The circular design and materials used contributed to sound distribution. Masks with open mouths helped amplify sound.

Costumes and Masks used to distinguish between characters, including female roles (as all actors were men). Costumes were simple but symbolic, depending on the character portrayed.

Problem Statement

In this research, the core issue lies in the undervaluation or neglect of the role of technology in ancient theatre, which has influenced how the history of scenography and stage direction is studied and perceived. In the ancient period, theatrical space was closely connected to ritual and social function, while scenography was symbolic and metaphorical. While many studies on ancient theatre focus on the literary, ritual, or philosophical aspects of drama, the technical and technological dimensions of theatrical production are often overlooked - considered secondary or merely supportive. In reality, the technologies employed - from the construction of theatre structures to the stage effect mechanisms - were essential to the functioning of performances and the transmission of dramatic messages.

This study aims to reassert the significance of technology in the ancient stage - not merely as a technical aspect but as a fundamental tool for structuring the theatrical experience. It argues that technology facilitated an early coexistence between art and engineering.

In conclusion, the technology used in Ancient Greek Theatre reflects the intelligence and creativity of an ancient civilization. It served to create a rich cultural experience that continued to influence theatre for centuries to come.

2 Mekane (Greek: μηχανή): A wooden crane used to lift actors into the air, typically to depict gods descending from the sky.

3 Ekkyklema (Greek: ἐκκύκλημα): A wheeled platform used to reveal hidden scenes, usually those that occurred offstage or inside the skene.



Figure 1, Ancient Greek Theatre of Epidaurus

Technology in Italian Renaissance Theatre

During the Renaissance period (15th - 16th centuries), theatre experienced significant advancements not only in content and script but also in technical and scenographic aspects. Italy became the epicenter of theatrical technological innovations. With the Renaissance came a renewed importance of theatre, and major developments emerged across all its dimensions, including scenography. The Renaissance revived interest in the arts, sciences, and culture, encouraging a new exploration of human nature and the physical world.

In this period, scenography evolved substantially, becoming more complex and detailed. The use of perspective in set design became widespread, creating an illusion of depth on stage. At the same time, the construction of enclosed stage spaces and the application of new technologies - such as mechanisms for moving scenic elements - transformed the theatrical experience. Renaissance theatre represents a profound synthesis between technological innovation and the aesthetic concept of art. Inspired by classical Greco - Roman theatre, the Renaissance stage became a technically organized space designed to enhance the emotional and visual impact of the performance. The theatrical technologies of the Italian Renaissance laid the foundation for modern theatre. Innovations in scenography, acoustics, and special effects influenced European theatre development for centuries to come.

The Renaissance also introduced the construction of enclosed theatres, fundamentally transforming stage architecture. Theatres such as the Teatro Olimpico (Vicenza, 1585), designed by Andrea Palladio, represent one of the earliest enclosed theatres in the world and a classical example of Renaissance stage architecture. Similarly, the Teatro Farnese presented a new approach to audience experience by immersing spectators in a carefully crafted aesthetic environment.

The introduction of sloped stages, tiered galleries for spectators, and a functional division of the stage marked a new spatial concept. For the first time, the audience was positioned to be visually - but not physically - immersed in the theatrical events. One of the greatest innovations of the Renaissance was the use of the rules of linear perspective in scenography. In 1545, Sebastiano Serlio developed the first documented model of using perspective on stage, creating optical depth and painted spaces that visually deceived the eye. Painted scenery was used to create the illusion of depth by employing advanced techniques of linear perspective. The backdrops and side wings were painted in a way that gave the impression of a much larger space than actually existed. The development of movable wings and periaktos [4] allowed for rapid transformation of scenic backgrounds. These developments contributed to an increased rhythm of performance and the capacity to create dramatic contrasts between scenes.

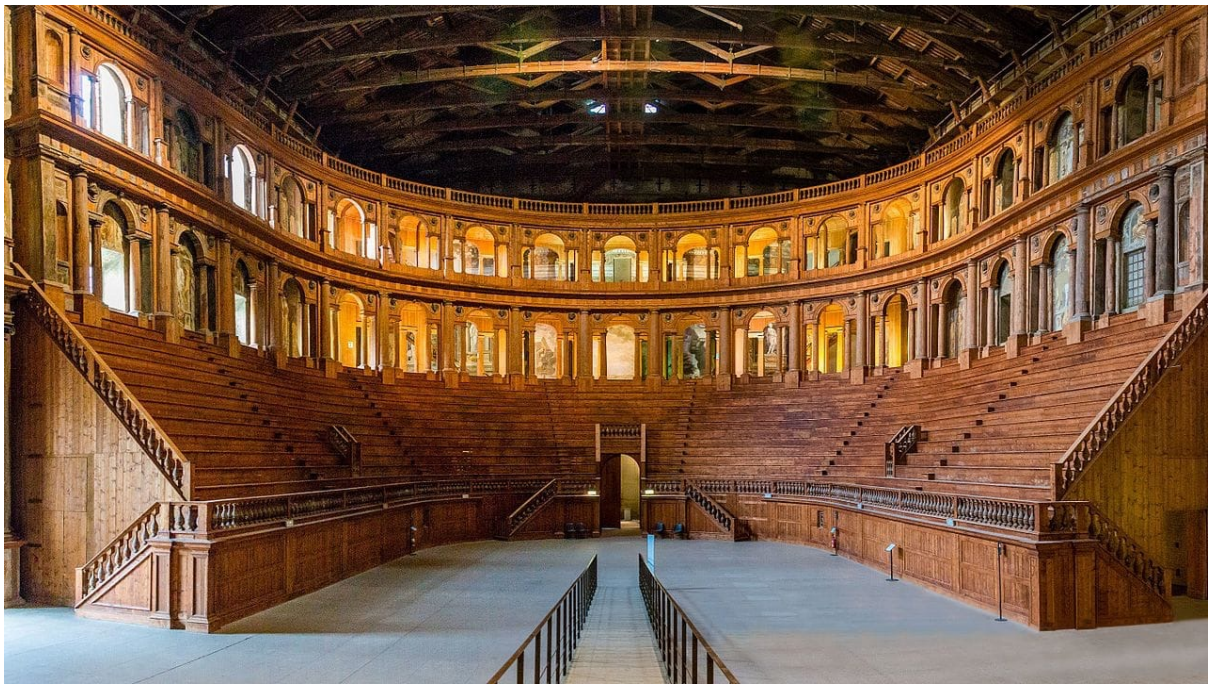


Figure 2, The Farnese Theatre in Parma

Technology in Renaissance theatre was more than a scenic aid - it became an integral part of the aesthetic and narrative language of the performance. The innovations of this period marked the beginning of a new era for European theatre and laid the foundation for contemporary stage design. During the Italian Renaissance, a revolution occurred with the invention of illusionist perspective, transforming space into a stage that imitated reality. This technique was applied to both the architecture and decor of theatres, introducing a new dramatic and visual dimension.

Technology in the Baroque Period

During the Baroque period (approximately the 17th century to the early 18th century), scenography experienced significant development due to advances in both technology and theatrical art. Emotion, grandeur, and dramatic effect emerged as essential elements of creativity.

4 Periaktos (Greek: περίακτοι - is a rotating triangular prism with three painted sides, each of which is painted with a different background.)

In this context, theatre transformed into an arena where visual art, music, and technology interacted to create an engaging and immersive experience for the audience. One of the most important contributions of the Baroque period to European theatre was the systematic use of linear perspective to create visual depth on stage. This development is also known as the " scena alla italiana [5]", a form of scenography and stage construction that emerged during the Italian Baroque period. It involved the use of linear perspective and painted scenery that extended to the background, creating the illusion of spatial depth. This approach first appeared in Italian theatre in the early 17th century. Artisans such as Giacomo Torelli and Giovanni Battista Aleotti designed the first scenographic systems with illusionistic depth, giving the stage a new spatial dimension.

Theatrical machinery during the Baroque era was essential for producing extraordinary visual and dramatic effects. Giacomo Torelli, the inventor of the " chariot and pole " system (developed around 1645), revolutionized the way scenes were changed - allowing fast and synchronized scene transitions. This mechanism consisted of wheeled platforms (chariots) and poles that moved beneath the stage, enabling the entire scenography to be shifted with a single coordinated system operated from below. Baroque theatre represents a culmination of the interplay between art, technology, and imagination. The use of perspective, the development of stage machinery, controlled lighting, and refined costume aesthetics turned the stage into a space where reality and illusion coexisted. These innovations not only defined a new era in the performing arts but also laid the groundwork for future technological developments in modern theatre.

During the Baroque period, scenography became more grandiose and theatrical, using powerful effects and the interplay of light and shadow to create emotional and atmospheric impact. In the 19th century, theatre moved toward realism and naturalism, with scenography aiming to represent real life and draw the spectator closer to the dramatic event. In later periods - especially during the Renaissance and Baroque - stage art became more formalized, and technology more sophisticated, often serving the goals of aesthetics and spectacle. The transformation of theatrical space and scenography reflects a progression from ritual symbolism to optical illusion, then to realistic naturalism, and finally to technological intervention and spatial experimentation.
This trajectory is a testament to the fact that theatre is an art form in constant dialogue with its time and with technology.

Technology in the 19th Century

In the 19th century, scenography underwent major developments due to technological advancements, industrialization, and the rise of realism in art and theatre. This period marked the transition from the ornate scenography of the Baroque to a more realistic and practical style, reflecting everyday life and natural environments. Realistic scenography began to imitate real spaces - rooms, streets, and interior settings with precise details. Real furniture, windows, functioning doors, and everyday objects were used on stage. By the mid - 19th century, gas lighting replaced candles, allowing greater control over stage lighting and atmosphere. Toward the end of the century, the introduction of electric lighting revolutionized stage illumination, greatly enhancing the emotional and dramatic articulation of performances.

5 Scena alla italiana is a form of scenography and stage construction developed during the Italian Baroque period, in which the use of linear perspective and the painting of wings extending to the backdrop created the illusion of depth.

The proscenium arch [6] - a structure framing the stage in front of the audience to give a " window – like " visual effect - became the dominant model. This frame helped create an illusion of depth and concealed backstage technology from the audience's view. In the 19th century, the focus shifted to realism, tighter technological control, and engaging the audience in a more authentic theatrical experience. The use of panoramic paintings and dioramas (a presentation technique using painted images and controlled lighting to create illusionistic effects - developed in the early 19th century by Louis Daguerre) helped produce realistic landscapes and a sense of expansive space. Dioramas were often used to depict the passage of time, such as day – to - night transitions. In the 19th and 20th centuries, theatre underwent extraordinary transformation. Experiments with various dramatic styles - such as realism, naturalism, expressionism, and later absurdism - demanded new scenographic solutions. Scenography was no longer a mere backdrop but became a vital artistic element that interacted with both actors and the audience. During this period, figures such as Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig emerged, contributing to the understanding of scenography as an independent art form. They emphasized the importance of light, space, and movement, creating environments that emotionally resonated with the audience.

Case Studies and Examples

One notable example is the use of augmented reality in contemporary performances, where scenography integrates with virtual elements that interact with both actors and spectators. This revolutionary technology changes how drama is experienced and can be used to emphasize various cultural and social themes.

Another example is the development of flexible theatre spaces, such as theatres – in – the – round - a form of scenography where the audience surrounds the stage. This setup creates a more intimate and interactive experience between actors and spectators, redefining traditional stage - audience relationships.



Figure 3, The Black Rider, Opera, 31.03.1990, Hamburg, Germany. Scenograph:Robert Wilson

6 "Proscenium arch " is an arch - like structure that frames the stage in front of the audience, giving the performance a " framed " visual effect - like a window into another world.

Technology and Contemporary Scenography

Today, scenography is a continuously evolving field, shaped by technological advancements. The use of LED lighting, digital projections, 3D animations, and real - time shape - shifting stage environments has brought about a revolution in how theatre is interpreted and perceived. Contemporary theatre often integrates digital media elements, creating a multi - dimensional experience. This technology enhances the effectiveness of message delivery and facilitates the creation of imaginary worlds that more accurately convey the complex themes of a performance. Theatre and scenography are not merely forms of art - they also serve as mirrors of the societies and cultures in which they emerge. Scenography often reflects the cultural identity and collective experiences of a community. Through theatre, societies communicate, critique, and reflect upon themselves.

In this context, scenography plays a vital role in conveying artistic and social messages, aiding in the understanding and interpretation of the text and performance.
At the beginning of the 20th century, avant - garde movements challenged traditional conventions, seeking new forms of expression - often abstract and symbolic - transforming space into a critical and experimental medium.



Figure 4, " The Hunt ", Almeida Theatre, London, 2019. Scenography by Es Devlin

Comparative Study and Analysis

Period	*Key Features*	*Technology*	*Audience Engagement*	*Example*
Antiquity	Symbolic, natural	Acoustics, natural environment	Open-air audience	Theatre of Epidaurus
Renaissance	Illusionistic perspective	Painted scenery	Passive mediation	Teatro Farnese
Baroque	Spectacular, theatrical	Stage machinery, candlelight	Emotional stimulation	Versailles Theatre
Modernism	Exposed stage, functionality	Electric lighting, structural design	Intellectual provocation	Adolphe Appia
21st Century	Immersive, technological	Projections, LED wall	Intense, multisensory experience	Es Devlin

Table 1, Comparison of Different Periods

The evolution of scenography directly reflects social and technological changes. There is a clear transition from static and one - dimensional spaces to dynamic and interactive environments. This shift affects not only the visual aspect but also the way actors and spectators interact. Throughout the history of theatre, stage space and scenography have progressed from ritualistic and symbolic forms to sophisticated technological structures. However, in theatrical literature, there is often a marked separation between aesthetic and technical analysis, creating a gap in the deeper understanding of the role of technology and space as co-creators of the stage experience.

Furthermore, technology has brought new challenges for scenographers, requiring multidisciplinary knowledge and close collaboration with experts from various technological fields. In this context, scenography is no longer merely decoration, but a core element of theatrical communication that can transform the meaning and perception of the performance.

In modern and postmodern times, space is often non - linear, interactive, and digital - yet there is a lack of clear historical understanding of how this transformation occurred and what theatre gained or lost during this evolution.

Conclusion

The evolution of theatre and scenography is a rich and complex history that reflects the cultural, artistic, and technological developments of humanity. From their simple origins in ancient ceremonies to contemporary digital stages, these art forms have consistently held an important place in social and cultural life. The study demonstrates that scenography has evolved in harmony with historical, cultural, and technological progress, gradually adopting increasingly complex and innovative forms. Digital technologies are opening new pathways for richer and more diverse theatrical experiences. Looking ahead, theatre and scenography will face new

challenges and opportunities closely tied to technological innovations and societal changes. Nevertheless, their essential purpose remains unchanged: to convey emotions, tell stories, and inspire reflection among audiences. It is recommended that theatre scholars and professionals focus on the critical integration of technological innovations while preserving and honoring the essential elements of theatrical communication and emotional expression. Special attention should be given to the education of scenographers, equipping them with both technical and artistic knowledge in order to meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern era.

This research has the potential to contribute to the field of theatre studies, to the transformation of scenography, and to the evolving relationship between technology and performance - offering a broad perspective on its development and interaction with historical, artistic, and technological contexts.

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The influence of the "Seventh Art" in Albania, from the First Cinemas to the "Socialist Realism" impact

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Abstract

The impact of cinema on Albanian-speaking society, and later on Albania itself, from 1897 to the production of the first Albanian short film, "Her children" (1957). While this film is recognized as the first Albanian short film, it is not widely considered the first Albanian film. Cinema played a crucial role in shaping a society deeply influenced by Oriental traditions, transforming it from its imperial past to embracing a Western vision and practices. This evolution was a natural movement from Albania's declaration of independence to the early stages of industrial capitalism in the late 1930s. Albanians, as both victims of visual propaganda and the socio-political and historical circumstances of the time, were influenced by the optimistic imagery from the former socialist bloc, which was later implemented in their own national cinema. The establishment of the Albanian Cinematographic Institution in 1953 symbolized the dominance of the new communist regime. The education of the first filmmakers allowed for the documentation of specific historical periods, highlighting the need to consolidate the Seventh Art as a social, rather than political, necessity. However, the artistic ambitions of this early period clashed with the mechanisms of state censorship. The Fourth Plenum of the Party of Labor in June 1973 marked the beginning of Socialist Realism as a dominant artistic doctrine. This period saw the imposition of strict censorship and the forced shaping of artistic expression by the one-party communist regime. The goal was to mold and control artistic creativity to uphold and promote communist ideology while fighting against liberalization, yet avoiding excessive conservatism—ranging from folklore to other artistic forms in Albania.

Keywords

Albanian Cinema, Socialist Realism, censorship, propaganda

Introduction

The influence of cinema in Albanian-speaking territories and later in Albanian society, from 1897 to the release of the short film Her Children (1957) — known as the first Albanian short film, but not as the first Albanian film — marks a profound cultural and ideological transformation in a society with an Oriental mindset and an imperial past. Cinema, from its earliest screenings at the end of the 19th century, had an immediate impact on Albanian society, which was just beginning to shape its national identity and detach itself from the influence of the Ottoman Empire. With the declaration of independence in 1912 and through ongoing contact with the West — primarily via Italy — Albanian society began to orient itself toward a more modern, urban, and secular vision. Cinema became an im-portant element in this process: it influenced lifestyle, fashion, behavior, and, later, even civic consciousness. (Elsie, 2010)

During the monarchy period and later under the fascist occupation, cinema in Albania functioned primarily as a tool of propaganda. However, it also represented a form of visual enchantment for a population with a high rate of illiter-acy. Through films, Albanians not only experienced different geographical and cultural realities, but also began to construct new images of themselves and of the world. After World War II and the establishment of the communist regime, the influence of cinema became institutionalized. Albanians, as part of an isolated world ideologically aligned with the East, were exposed to optimistic and idealized images of the socialist bloc, which began to be ab-sorbed into the emerging local cinema as well. The formation of the first Albanian filmmakers coincided with this period. They documented the realities of the time, often driven by the need to construct a collective memory that supported the new order. However, the early efforts to develop cinema as an independent form of art—one that aimed for more than just propaganda—could not escape censorship. Instead of becoming a space for creative expres-sion, Albanian cinema was drawn into a system controlled by the Party, where every narrative had to conform to the official ideology. The 1957 film Her Children marks not only the official beginning of film production in Albania but also the end of a relatively experimental era and the start of a period in which cinema would become the voice of propaganda — an art form that displayed only what was permitted to be shown. (Hoxha, 2023)

When did cinema arrive in Albania?

On December 28, 1895, the day the Lumière brothers held their first projection in the "Indian Salon" of the Grand Café in Paris, in the Albanian-speaking territories still under the Ottoman Empire, the art of photography had al-ready been present for over thirty years in the city of Shkodër thanks to the Italian Pietro Marubi, who arrived there as a Garibaldian persecuted by the Austro-Hungarians. Tirana, which would become Albania's capital 25 years later, was far from embracing the art of photography or hav-ing similar studios. Despite the particular social and political context, in Albanian-speaking regions struggling with issues of national identity—through education, the establishment of the first Albanian-language schools, economic conditions, and high illiteracy rates—the first public film projections took place only two years after the birth of cinema. These projections occurred mainly along the Durrës–Elbasan–Korçë–Florina–Bitola–Skopje axis, but also in other cities like Shkodër and Vlorë1. The first question that arises is: how were film projections possible in cities where electricity didn't yet exist? The Lumière brothers' device, called the "Cinématographe," used a carbon arc lamp system

powered by a portable battery as its light source. This made the projector functional without needing a direct electricity connection, making it more practical than other similar devices of the time.

It is important to understand that these were not projections in dedicated cinema halls, nor were they fully-fledged films. These screenings (we avoid the word "shows" so as not to imply theatrical performances, which were more common though not professional) were typically organized on special occasions—often tied to religious holidays, folk festivals, or by small entertainment groups traveling from one city to another. These rudimentary projections began with lantern or candlelight shows, using mirrors or projected photographs to narrate a story out loud by actors or, in some cases, accompanied by music. This type of activity did not take place in specialized venues but rather in tavernas, cafés, parks, and similar informal settings. (Tutui, 2017)

Political-Social Situation 1900–1912 and the "Cinematographic Adventurers"

In 1900, while Germany was producing the first "Mercedes" car and Max Planck was publishing the "Quantum Theory," the southeastern part of Europe, the Balkans, was facing state-building problems. In 1900, Albania (still not independent) was driven by a strong desire for identity and greater autonomy from the Ottoman Empire after more than four centuries of rule. Armed clashes and small revolts in the Dibra region, with the highlanders fighting against Ottoman military units, were also tied to religious affiliations, further fueling the sense of independence among the local population. After the 1908 Congress of Monastir, the teaching of the Albanian language became one of the most important activities of intellectuals and prominent figures of the time. The Ottoman Empire, weak-ened by internal conflicts, was trying to maintain its balance in the Balkans.

A more accurate piece of information comes visually from the photographs of the German historian and archaeolo-gist Karl Patsch, who traveled through several Albanian cities such as Vlora, Berat, and Myzeqe. In these photos, the inhabitants are mostly dressed in self-made clothes, and the main activity is agriculture with some trade.

These photos also reflect traveling musicians, suggesting that live music was one of the most common forms of entertainment. We should not forget the fact of a rich folk musical heritage, ranging from polyphony to the use of various musical instruments. Additionally, there is a wide variety of different musical forms within a relatively small geographic area. Geographically, Albania has always been at the crossroads of empires and civilizations, even though it also has often been isolated from the mainstream of European history. In the Middle Ages, Albania was once again a buffer zone, this time between Catholic Italy and the Byzantine Greek Empire. After its definitive conquest by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, it formed a bridgehead between Christian Europe and the Islamic Orient2. In short, this would be the picture of an Albania divided between those who were beginning to feel nostalgic for the Ottoman Empire and those who were thinking about independence from this empire.

In this atmosphere, some "adventurers" would attempt to introduce the latest invention of the Lumière brothers, for entertainment and profit by selling tickets. We can truly call them

adventurers because their investment in these lands, which were already focused on breaking away from five centuries of Ottoman rule, could also result in finan-cial failure.
One might deem Albania a western outpost of the Ottoman Empire and end it at that. Or one might consider the Albania of the League of Prizren, which brought Albanian national interests to the outside world, or of the 1908 Congress of Monastir, which standardized the Albanian alphabet. After 1912, Albania could have referred to the confines of independent Albania or to the broader Albanophone territories3. The first cinematographers of the Bal-kans were the Manaki brothers, Janaki Manaki (1878–1954) and Milton Manaki (1882–1964).

In the capital of Romania, we learned that cameras capable of making still photos move were being sold in France and England. Janaki could not escape the idea of returning to Bitola/ Manastir with a motion-picture camera. Even in his sleep, he dreamed of it. When I returned, he set off for London, where he bought a "bioscope camera".
This is what Milton Manaki recounts in one of his interviews. A decade after the Lumière brothers, the Manaki brothers would bring and begin filming with their Bioscope camera, model 300, in the Balkans.

Their first film, possibly shot in the spring of 1907 in Avdella (Greece), depicts their grandmother Despina among a group of women spinning wool5.. There is much debate over the origin of the Manaki brothers—whether they were Albanian, Greek, Romanian, or Macedonian—but this is not important, as today their photographic and historical heritage within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire is a Balkan treasure. They left behind evidence through their films, showing the Vlach population of Avdella, identified by their traditional dances and clothing, as well as foot-age from Monastir/Bitola, Thessaloniki, Dibra, Ohrid, etc. Even though it was a politically "heated" period, people still had time for entertainment.

What is most important is the positive approach of the population toward public screenings. In the footage taken during that period, it is interesting to see the relationship between people and the camera. They were somewhat fa-miliar with the art of photography, where one had to go to a studio dressed in their best clothes to have a photo taken as a memento. However, with the camera now going out into the streets, this relationship changes. The cam-era that films goes out into the streets and captures people as they are in their daily lives. Decades later, and even today, the curiosity that people feel when a camera is shooting is palpable. At the beginning of the 20th century, everyone around the camera and the cameraman, who is turning a crank, has one thing in common: they all look at the camera. Some with astonishment, trying to understand what is happening, others with a smile. There are also those who try to avoid it because they are afraid of this new and strange device. Those who look with surprise may not even understand the function of this box standing on a tripod. Those who smile know that their image is being captured on celluloid, and some of them take a posed position, making sure they are properly positioned before it.

We are dealing with the establishment of a new form of communication or language, which over the years will fur-ther develop. This will be the "Language" of cinema, which will try to communicate with the audience. A language that, after more than 100 years of history, continues to evolve. In some archival footage that I have used in a docu-mentary, it is clear that at one point, on a marketplace street, a young Muslim girl, half-covered with a scarf, when she notices

the presence of the camera, shows a look of surprise, and then quickly turns her back on the camera and walks away. Perhaps this girl had heard of this strange device, which can capture your image, and she might also have heard that if you stand before it, it could even steal your soul. According to researcher Abaz Hoxha, in Albania, as early as 1902-1903, the representatives of the British company Charles Urban Company were the first to film in Albanian territories, until 1912-13, during the Balkan Wars. In the Central State Film Archive, three to four frames dated 1913 are probably the first films shot in Tirana. One of these frames identifies the Et-hem Beu Mosque, indicating that the filming took place in the center of Tirana on a rainy day, even before it was declared the capital. In 1920, during the Congress of Lushnja, Tirana was declared the cap-ital of Albania. These films are certainly linked to the independence of Albania, which was declared in 1912. In these frames, some passersby look directly at the camera lens, but their posture is very serious, reflecting a time when this form of visual communication was still something new and unfamiliar to many people.

In the footage filmed by a cameraman from the "Pathe" company in 1913 in Shkodra, the same phenomenon can be observed. The scenes are related to the entry of the Montenegrin army into Shkodra after they had repelled the Turk-ish forces from the city and the fortress. At different moments during the filming, a Montenegrin soldier aboard a "Neptune" ship, moving on Lake Shkodra, draws the attention of other soldiers, making them aware of the presence of the camera. The soldier stands, adjusts his uniform, and assumes a military stance. This is also noticed by a few women sitting on the ground, who turn their heads for just a few moments.
What is more interesting is the fact that the Albanian Highlanders who fought in support of the Montenegrin forces, after the battle, pose proudly in front of the camera. It is difficult to say where they learned how to pose in front of the camera. Perhaps it was from the presence of the "Marubi" studio, which left thousands of photographic negatives taken over the years.
Yes, Albanians knew how to position themselves in front of the camera, and they also learned from what they had seen and heard by the end of the first decade of the 20th century. Just who was making films and who was viewing them? Such is the puzzle that surrounds the mere notion of an Albanian cinema. Defining Albanian cinema of the early years of the twentieth century would be as tricky as defining the Balkans themselves! And even if we arrive at a definition, there is yet another hindrance. (Hoxha, 2023)

This is because, from Korça and Dibra to Shkodra and down to Saranda, until 1912—before the creation of what would later be called the Albanian state—the region was merely the farthest outpost of a shrinking empire, weak-ened by internal conflicts and the growing resistance of Balkan peoples seeking independence from the Ottoman Empire. Albania was a remote corner of the empire, geographically closer to Italy and Europe, and more exposed to their economic influence. Trade and the movement of people by sea were becoming more frequent, and along with various goods, Italian, German, and British cinematographers arrived by ship, filming short newsreels and occasion-ally organizing film screenings.

1912-1939: Major Social and Political Changes

In 1912, on November 28, Albania declared its independence under the leadership of Ismail Qemali in Vlorë, even though Turkish forces were still present on the territory. There are no film recordings of this historic event—only a single photograph exists, and even that was taken

the day after the official declaration of independence. The years following independence were marked primarily by an increase in film screenings across various Albanian cities, though these were mostly accessible to a selected and privileged audience. The influence of cinema during this peri-od was undoubtedly strong. Wealthy families, inspired by the films they watched, began imitating actors in their clothing, makeup, and lifestyle—adopting a way of living different from before. Previously, this kind of cultural aspiration came through literature, but now it arrived with greater intensity through cinema.

This growing demand prompted merchants to increase their trade volume, primarily importing from Italy clothing, perfumes, soaps, sewing machines, fabrics, automobiles, sanitary products, and many other goods related to daily consumption. In the main cities, the alla-franga fashion (European-style fashion) became highly important. It was a way for individuals to express and showcase a new social status. At these screenings, the primary attendees were individuals with a high economic status, members of the diplomatic corps and their families, political and military figures, merchants, and others7. And all this influence was still innocent, not yet with a certain kind of propagan-da. Very quickly, within just a few years, the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union would understand the power of cin-ema, and with the rise of fascism to power, massive investments would be made in building a propaganda apparatus through both documentary and feature films.

Very soon, short educational films began to circulate—primarily focused on the importance of disinfection, protec-tive measures against typhoid, and collective hygiene. But the detailed portrayal of the disinfection process depicted in the film echoes the visual approach of multiple exhibitions prepared in the 1920s. This approach was utilized in other documentary films disseminated in Balkan countries with a predominance of Muslim populations, such as Turkey and Albania.

The screening and projection of many films in the following years would become increasingly tied to the opening of public venues that could facilitate this experience. The first public cinema in Albania was opened in Shkodër in 1912 by an Austrian, housed in Kol Idromeno's residence, and continued operating until the start of World War I. The First World War somewhat slowed this trend due to political instability within Albanian territory.

Nevertheless, foreign groups continued filming, though primarily focused on military formations moving through Albania, producing newsreels to capture, among other things, the consequences of these battles. With the rise to power of the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership, film production would become the most powerful tool of propa-ganda. Lenin understood that the language of cinema is universal—an ideal medium for a vast country like the So-viet Union, with millions of inhabitants and a high rate of illiteracy. Initially, he saw cinema as a means to unite people, and later as an essential instrument of propaganda.

Lenin was the first political leader of the 20th century to recognize both the importance of film as propaganda and its power to communicate quickly and effectively. He understood that audiences did not require literacy to comprehend a film's meaning and that more people could be reached through mass-distributed motion pictures than through any other medium of the time.

Until 1939, many cinemas were opened in various cities of Albania, largely due to the strong friendship and grow-ing exchanges with Italy. This was made possible by Ahmet Zogu, a controversial figure who initially served as Prime Minister of Albania from 1922 to 1924, then as President from 1925 to 1928, and later as self-proclaimed King until 1939. His actions also facilitated this development, as Ahmet Zogu worked to build a European profile for Albania. In 1937, by a parliamentary decree, he passed a law banning the use of the ferexhe (a traditional Islamic garment worn by women). This was a sign of Ahmet Zogu's Western-oriented tendencies, as he had lived in Aus-tria, but his reforms were half-hearted, and he led Albania into economic dependence on Italy and Mussolini. Private initiatives flourished during Zogu's reign, mainly due to the physical presence of Italians in Albania. With their money, many roads and bridges were built, partly for military purposes, but cities like Tirana, Durrës, and Shkodër began to take on an urban profile. Still, the figure of the Albanian filmmaker was missing, although various groups filmed across Albania.

In 1925, the first Albanian film company was established in Tirana by the Beshiri brothers, named the National Cinema-Theater Society. They requested the removal of customs duties on equipment and a subsidy of 20,000 francs. Their repeated requests were rejected by a decision of the Council of Ministers and the Chamber of Depu-ties. However, the society achieved its goals a year later.

Mainly, the films were shot by Italians, and Italian films were also shown in Albania. With the arrival of the com-munists to power, everything belonging to this family was confiscated, and the heirs were persecuted by the com-munist regime. Although they continued to live in a small house on Barrikadave Street near the "17 Nëntorit" cinema, which had once been their property, they were not interned like many other merchants. In 1922, Mussolini came to power, and two years later, the "Luce" Institute was established, where all of its creative output was put at the service of the fascist regime.(Barbier, 1940)

For the inauguration of the new headquarters of "Istituto Luce", an Italian film corporation created in 1924, the Fascist regime prepared a large backdrop showing Mussolini behind a camera, with these words below: 'Cinema-tography is the strongest weapon'. In a country where the illiteracy rate exceeded 35% and very few people read newspapers, cinema immediately became a very effective means of spreading information, a means that fascism would use with obsessive attention.

Under the umbrella of a strong friendship between Ahmet Zogu, initially as Prime Minister and later as King of Albania, such propaganda films began to be shown in Albania. This was also due to the fact that the communist influence, which had penetrated Albania, clashed with the regime of Ahmet Zogu. The films, where the villains were the communists and the communist movement, were just as effective as other films. Such films, often in the form of newsreels, were shown in cinemas before feature films. This marked a new phase in the relationship between the audience and the film. The film had its dedicated time, schedule, and announcements were made through post-ers, and its length had increased. Thus, the audience began to savor, reflect, critique, adopt, or even despise the film. However, it had started to become a form of spiritual nourishment that made you dream, hate, love, and iden-tify with the deeds, heroism, or events that came to the screen through various films and actors.

The relationship between Mussolini and Ahmet Zogu also became like a film with many behind-the-scenes twists. Ahmet Zogu, as King, opposed Mussolini's expansionist plans, which escalated tensions between Albania and Ita-ly. On April 7, 1939, the Italian army invaded Albania, and after a brief resistance in Durrës, they entered Tirana within 24 hours without facing any significant opposition. Ahmet Zogu and his people fled to Greece, where he stayed for a few days in Florina before leaving, never to return. The Italians would remain in Albania until 1943, when Fascist Italy surrendered.

Over the years, Italy has invested in Albania, as mentioned earlier, with both military and economic goals in mind. They built roads and bridges and established a small industry in Albania, primarily focused on exploiting natural resources like oil and chrome. To strengthen this friendship, the Italians filmed a movie with Italian actors that had an Albanian theme. "The Knight of Krujë" (1941) is the first film shot in Albania. Most of the scenes were filmed outdoors. The plot takes place during the Italian occupation of Albania, where an Italian journalist falls in love with an Albanian girl. Unknowingly, he becomes a blood brother with her brother, as per Albanian customs, by drinking each other's blood. When the girl finds out that the Italian has become a blood brother with her biological brother, she is devastated, and the Italian journalist realizes that according to Albanian customs, they cannot be together. However, this obstacle is overcome by the Italian occupation of Albania, and their love triumphs. In the September 7th edition of the newspaper "Tribuna", the article written about the film emphasizes that, for the first time, the Italian audience saw the customs and culture of the people on the other side of the Adriatic Sea.

Rich in genuine local color, popular festivals and rituals, dances, and songs, they are here and there the backdrop and commentary to the story — the film seemed to fully meet the intentions of its creators as well as the expecta-tions of the audience, which was to see for the first time, in the vivid function of the screen, side by side, our peo-ple and theirs. According to researcher Abaz Hoxha, the film was shown only once in Tirana, and its screening was contested by antifascist youth. Up until now, according to Abaz T. Hoxha, between 1920-1939, around 1,600 films were shown in Albania, with ticket sales reaching about 500,000. This is considered a small number of sales due to the limited number of theaters available for screenings. However, the "damage" caused by the influence of these films was sig-nificant. Tirana was a city that had started to establish its identity as a preferred place to live. This was due to the fact that many foreigners had settled in the city. Not only Italians but also doctors, engineers, and teachers from Macedonia and Greece settled in Albania. Dr. Kristo Kristidhi, born in Bitola (Macedonia), after studying medicine in Austria, chose Tirana in the 1930s, between Thessaloniki and Tirana, for the opportunities it offered to practice his profession. Going to the cinema was also very important for him to learn from the kino-journals about what was happening in the world and the advancements of the Italian army in Abyssinia and elsewhere. The Disney film Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs would arrive in Albania after being shown in Italy and would remain in the minds of the children who saw it in the cinema. In 1942, the film company "Tomorri" was established, which pro-duced several documentary films. Mihallaq Mone, the first Albanian filmmaker, directed the film Takim në Liqen (Meeting at the Lake). It is a short film featuring actor Kristaq Antoniu and actress Merita Sokoli. This film is the first Albanian film produced by the "Tomorri" film company. Unfortunately, to this day, there is no copy of this film. A copy may have been taken by director Mone to the United States, or it might have been destroyed after

1944 by the communists when they came to power. Currently, there are only testimonies about this film and some photographs. It may have been intentionally destroyed or lost because Mone had previously directed a documentary titled Bijtë e Shqipes (The Sons of the Eagle), which praised fascism. If director Mihallaq Mone had remained in Albania for this film, he would have been sentenced by the communists, just like many other intellectuals and en-trepreneurs. In September 1943, Italy capitulated, and its place was taken by Nazi troops.

The content of the newsreels in the cinemas that were still operating regularly was replaced with German army news-reels from the frontlines of the war. The cinemas continued their work, but the Germans created the Albanian Cine-ma Owners' Union. This was a movement to establish control over the films that were to be shown in Albanian territory. On November 29, 1944, the last German army units left Albanian territory. Control of Albania was taken over by the National Liberation forces. In December 1945, the Democratic Front, represented by the Communists, organized elections, denying the opposition participation in the vote. The people voted only for the candidates se-lected by the Democratic Front. Forty days later, on January 11, 1946, the People's Republic of Albania was estab-lished with a one-party system, led by the Communist Party of Albania.

1946-1953, the beginnings of Albanian cinematography.

After the Communist Party's consolidation of power, focused on establishing dominance in every sector, including cinema. However, there was a lack of experts in the field. As part of the country's reconstruction efforts, many Ital-ians, including prisoners of war, engineers, topographers, and simple soldiers, were engaged. Due to the strong per-sonal ties between Enver Hoxha and Stalin, many young people were sent to the Soviet Union for further training. In just a few years, the number of young people studying in socialist countries exceeded 3,000. Some of them went to Moscow to study cinematography and become specialists in the field.
In November 1944, the Photo-Cinematographic Service was established within the Ministry of Press, Propaganda, and Popular Culture of Albania. Less than three years later, the Albanian Cinematographic Enterprise was founded. (Keko, 2024)

Endri Keko, a former partisan, along with a group of young people, traveled to Moscow in 1950. Among them was Xhanfise Çipi, who would later become Endri Keko's wife and one of the best directors in Albanian cinema. This group was sent to Moscow to specialize in the production of newsreels. Endri Keko became a director, Xhanfise Çipi worked as a film editing director, Petraq Lubonja was a camera operator, Koço Tollko worked as a sound oper-ator, and Mihal Çarka specialized in film laboratory work. This group marked the first formation of professionals who would lay the foundations for what would later become Albanian cinema and the film industry. Initially, the newsreels were shot in Albania, and the processing and editing of the films took place in Moscow. Once edited, the newsreels were sent back to Albania and shown in cinemas in various cities. The propaganda apparatus was put into action to fill the visual vacuum. Radio and newspapers were the only means of communist propaganda after the liberation of the country. Now, this propaganda was being supplemented by a visual aspect. The new Albanian state was investing with determination in this field, with the help of the Soviets. With Soviet assistance, the construc-tion of Albanian film studios was also financed. In 1952, the "New Albania" Kinostudio was inaugurated by Enver Hoxha himself. In 1951, the

filming of "Skanderbeg", directed by Sergey Jutkevič, had already begun. This was a major film production for Albania, which at that time only had a few actors for the leading roles, with workers and locations such as Durrës, Petrelë, and Krujë. The film had a huge impact on strengthening national pride among Albanians. The film won two awards at the Cannes Film Festival in 1954. After 1960, following the breakdown of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the film was sporadically broadcast on Albanian state television until the early 1970s. It was later suppressed from domestic production. "Skanderbeg" began to be shown again in cine-mas after the 1990s for a short period, and today it is one of the most watched films on YouTube, often commented on with great pride by viewers. The first newsreel produced at the Albanian Kinostudio was shown on the day of the studio's inauguration. It was not yet an artistic film, but it was a film that was conceived, filmed, printed, and edit-ed in Albania by Albanian authors. Kinozhurnal No. 1 was shown on July 10, 1952.

The film "Her Children" – the first Albanian film

Seven years after the inauguration of the facilities of the "New Albania" Kinostudio, Hysen Hakani, a student from Prague, decides to shoot his graduation film in Albania. The script was written in Prague in 1956. On the first page, it is stated that it is a subject and script prepared for the graduation film. Looking at the film today, the loca-tions, actors, and the story make it a difficult film to shoot in Czechoslovakia. Educated with the spirit of Italian neorealism, Hakani could not modify it to shoot outside of Albania. Perhaps, for its time, a courageous act, because the Kinostudio still did not have the human experience and specialized departments to assist in the shooting of an artistic film. With the limited experience gained from shooting newsreels and working as the first assistant director on the film "Skanderbeg" by Soviet director Sergei Yutkeviç, director Viktor Stratobërdha, in addition to the two short documentaries he shot, also made several mini-films with educational themes. For the first time, we see the staging of amateur actors who also have dialogue. They are directed by the camera and speak. However, there was a prevailing impression that Albania would never be able to produce a truly 100% Albanian feature film.

The two directors before me and Hysen, V. Stratobërdha and G. Erebara, had an unfortunate fate, the former's being completely tragic. After completing studies in Moscow, working as an assistant on the film "Skanderbeg," directing two documentaries, and creating a short newsreel with the demands of a true artistic film, after the in-famous Party Conference in Tirana in 1956, he was sentenced and permanently removed from the film industry.

The history of Albanian cinema recognizes "Tana" (1958), directed by Kristaq Dhamo, as the first full-length Al-banian film. It has a script, professional actors, and is considered a significant milestone in the country's cinematic history. On the other hand, "Fëmijët e saj" is only a short film, not a full feature. From a cinematic perspective, Her Children marks a midpoint between the newsreels and documentaries that characterized the early films of communist Albania and the debut feature of Kinostudio.

Yes, Fëmijët e saj can certainly be considered the first Albanian film, but it is true that it was overshadowed when the film Tana was made later. The reality depicted in Fëmijët e saj does not meet the standards of agitprop cinema. The film presents a very naturalistic atmosphere

compared to Tana, where the main character walks in white sandals with high heels on the muddy streets of a village. Director Hakani chooses to tell an educational story but does not attempt to polish or idealize the reality. The message in this fiction is somewhat similar to that of educational films from the 1920s, which focused on hygiene and disinfection.

Synopsis of the film

The first shot is of the mountains in the north. Then we see a children's garden in a meadow. Fatimeja, a peasant woman (played by Marie Logoreci), is holding a child in her arms who refuses to be vaccinated, causing him to cry. A man and a nurse stand by a table where vaccination materials are placed. When the nurse asks the woman if the child is hers, she lowers her head and tells her that she has no children. The teacher (Naim Frashëri) tells the nurse what has happened to the woman. There is a transition between the teacher's portrait and a mountain shot.

Two small children, dressed in torn clothes, are standing at the threshold of a house. The older girl is feeding a younger one sitting on the ground. Suddenly, a woman appears, shouting, "The dog is mad!". The woman quickly ushers the children into the house. Three villagers with sticks in hand are chasing after the dog. The dog runs after a small boy and bites him. The teacher comes to his aid and takes him home to his mother. He advises her to take him to a doctor, but at first, she refuses, thinking the doctor will amputate his hand. Eventually, she is convinced. She sets off with the boy on a donkey, and on the way, she meets another villager who advises her to take the boy to a woman who may be able to heal him through magic. The woman changes her mind and takes her son to the folk healer. At the healer's house, who practices magic with smoke and words, the woman is convinced her son will be cured.

With a jump cut, we switch to the teacher, who is running and stopping a passing car. He pleads with the driver to take him to the city to see a doctor, as a child needs saving. At home, the woman is taking care of the boy, but when the doctor arrives, the child has passed away. The teacher is convinced the child was cured by a doctor, but the woman, upon hearing this, reveals the truth. She admits that she never took him to the doctor. She collapses on the ground, and once again, with a merging shot, we see the woman on the ground, but now she is playing with chil-dren. The teacher concludes the story by saying that thirteen years have passed since that time. Since then, the woman has taken care of the children in the kindergarten and calls them her own. (Dhamo, 2020)

Told in this way, the story is quite naive, and in general, the events unfold as if commanded by the script. From the beginning, the villagers chasing the dog seem as though they are after and want to kill some kind of lion or tiger. Their goal is reinforced by the teacher's words to chase and kill the dog, claiming he will take care of the child. The idea of a rabid dog causing death had a strong impact on the Albanian audience. Even many years after the film was released, parents would advise their children to stay away from stray dogs, fearing that they might be rabid. Similarly, children would discuss rabid dogs among themselves, even though they had never seen the film. Until the late 1990s, the relationship of Albanians with dogs and other animals, in general, was not very friendly, largely due to the influence of this film. The film was met with great enthusiasm when it was re-shown in 1995. It was re-released

to remind people of it, as it had been forgotten during the years of communism. At the time the film was produced, there was still no well-established censorship structure. Although it was a production of the Kinostu-dio "Shqipëria e Re," it was a film whose script did not go through the usual artistic councils and reviews, because it was a diploma film. Eriona Vyshka, an Archive Specialist at the AQSHF, explains that there is no official report for this film, only a script and four photos from the film. However, Vyshka says that this film has three important elements: first, the transition from documentary to artistic fiction film; second, the acting performance, transitioning from theater interpretation to camera interpretation; and third, it is a film produced at the beginnings of the Albanian film industry, with a 100% Albanian contribution. Therefore, it was produced independently from studios or labor-atories in Moscow. The investment in building the Kinostudio was based on creating a new propaganda apparatus and did not take into account that this industry could also produce artistic films. Director Hakani's "experiment" opened a new door for the production of long artistic films. A year later, "Tana," directed by Kristaq Dhamo, would lay the foundation for the beginning of Albanian film production. A few years later, in 1961, Director Hysen Hakani, along with Director Gëzim Erebara, would produce the film Debatik, a film centered on the theme of war. If you didn't know it was Hakani's second film, you might easily think it was produced by an Italian or Soviet neore-alist director. The Albanian audience was eager to go to the cinema, especially when it came to a film in the Albani-an language. This was also thanks to the publicity given by newspapers and radio stations, which highlighted the achievements of Kinostudio "Shqipëria e re" as part of the successes being accomplished under the leadership of the Communist Party, later known as the Party of Labour of Albania.

The illiteracy that existed in 90% of the population at the time of the end of World War II made films in the Albanian language even more accessible and beloved by the audience. Thus, being the only spiritual nourishment, this type of production, supported by the propaganda of the time, became the sole and best food for the people. In the early 1970s, the output of Kinostudio would increase to 14 artistic films per year, along with an equal number of documentary films and animated films, a production that lasted until the end of the 1990s. After the 4th Plenary on culture and arts, influenced also by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, most foreign film screenings were stoped, and thus the Albanian audience was forced to watch and re-watch only Albanian films. Films like Fëmijët e saj and Tana lost their shine as film production grew and became more artistically and historically refined, although it operated within the ideological and aesthetic constraints of Socialist Realism. The directors of these films suc-ceeded in creating high-quality art. Despite the presence of propaganda and schematism, a "handful" of films man-aged to become so beloved by the Albanian public that they are still watched today with great nostalgia.

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Children's Cinema of the 1960s-1990s: An educational tool requiring guiding strategies to communicate with today's children

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Abstract

In my early childhood, the significance of children's films broadcast on the sole national television channel was profound and indelible. Through these films, not only was the image of World War II shaped for me, but also the landscape of Albania, which could not be seen up close, thus transforming the screen into a magical space that served as an "unlived truth." Various studies discuss the importance of children's cinema as an educational tool. But can the same be said for today's children, who are presented with the same films? Do the internet generation and those exposed to global connectivity remain equally captivated by this form of cinema? These questions extend further: Does cinema educate in the same way across different eras? Albanian children's cinema is a national treasure within the country's cinematographic heritage. However, this study seeks to explore its significance, value, and function over time by comparing the messages and emotions of past audiences with those of today. To draw Conclusion, a sample group of children has been studied to determine whether this cinema remains educational today; whether contextual explanations or clarifications are needed when engaging with contemporary audiences; and whether certain films remain timeless or hold a museum-like educational value—which require a guide to explain the political, historical, and geographical contexts of these films. In addition to the data that will emerge from this pioneering study, the paper also offers recommendations for activities undertaken by the State Central Film Archive with children, as well as for educational initiatives conducted by other institutions of memory and history in Albania with various school-age groups.

Keywords

Film, education, new generation, messages, propaganda

Introduction

Children's cinema in Albanian socialist filmmaking was one of the most authentic and distinctive genres, standing out from film traditions in other countries. In many parts of the world, the genre of children's film is not recognized as a well-defined and independent category, as it is in European cinema and specifically in Albanian cinema. Often, films with child protagonists are classified as family films due to their thematic content and the entertainment or marketing policies of the respective countries.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, children's films have been classified as "family films" since the 1930s, whereas in Europe, the genre of children's cinema has been treated as independent. For example, Disney films that feature or focus on children have traditionally been categorized as "family films," showcasing child characters portrayed by young actors with appealing appearances. This approach has contributed to the creation of an idealized stereotype, which Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples critique as a tendency that distances children from their own reality (Bazalgette, 1995).

In contrast, the movement of children's cinema in Europe has advocated the notion that protagonists should not be "desirable" but rather reflect ordinary children, far from idealized models such as the "child star." According to Bazalgette and Staples, this approach is based on the idea that the young audience will only be able to identify with the protagonists if the latter accurately represent their real world (Bazalgette, 1995). This extends beyond the selection of actors and includes aesthetic elements such as lighting, cinematography, and editing, all of which should underscore the authenticity of the depiction.

In socialist children's cinema, the primary goal was to educate and shape the new socialist individual through themes promoting solidarity, collectivism, and discipline. In contrast, in capitalist children's cinema, the main objective was entertainment and financial profit. This contrast reflects the differing approaches of the two socio-economic systems to the education and entertainment of the younger generation, demonstrating that while in socialist societies children's films served a structured ideological function, in capitalist societies, their role was more commercial and entertaining. This also explains why the genre was categorized as "family film" rather than "children's film," as it was viewed as a more profitable genre due to ticket prices.

What is children's cinema at its core?

According to Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples: "This term can mean simply the exhibition of films for general audience containing some child ren; it can also mean the dedicated production of films for children. By 'children' we mean people under the age of about twelve" (Bazalgette, 1995). In the book What is Cinema?, André Bazin writes, "The artist who works spontaneously for children undoubtedly captures the universal" (Bazin, 2012). With this, we all agree that a good children's film can connect with an audience of any age, captivated by the innocence, sincerity, and unpretentious truthfulness of children.

As I read about this subject and watch children's films, I find myself similarly engaged, just like a curious child "settled" on the couch, awaiting the next adventure. I take notes on the behavioral norms mentioned, the way a good citizen is made, and how battles are won not by deceit but with bravery. In The Society of Cinema I, Julian Bejko writes: "The film is a fanatical keeper of the past, of historical evolution in the form of artistic representation, partly materialized in images with human life... The film is a magic machine in which the traveler must at once traverse the past... to bring new analysis and reflections" (Bejko, 2012).

Albanian children's cinema, from 1950 to 1990, began with the first film produced by Kinostudio "Shqipëria e re" the short film Fëmijët e saj (Her Children) in 1957, directed by Hysen Hakani. Then came Debatik in 1961, directed by Hysen Hakani and Gëzim Erebara. After about a decade of pause, production began annually and uninterruptedly, with director Xhanfise Keko, who dedicated her entire career to children's films, producing celebrated titles such as Beni ecën vetë (Beni Walks Alone) (1975), Tomka dhe shokët e tij (Tomka and His Friends) (1977), among others. In this genre, Dhimitër Anagnosti also stood out with his film Lulëkuqet mbi mure (Poppies on the Walls) in 1976, considered one of the best-made films in Albanian cinema from Kinostudio "Shqipëria e re".

The significant interest shown by filmmakers, alongside the high engagement of the audience, made children's films an annual objective for production at Kinostudio. The support from the Central Committee of the Party for this cinema gained great momentum once its impact on the public was recognized.

Is it possible to analyze a social era through cinema?

This is a question rightly raised by Julian Bejko in his book The Society of Cinema I. I borrow this question to present an argument: In children's cinema, during the years of totalitarianism, the regime found a pure tool of propaganda to shape the "new man" - a tool that went straight to the heart of society, to children - the future - to build an entire society in line with the ideals of the socialist society, including political, ideological, moral, and cultural education. For the regime, since its rise to power, the construction of cinemas and their repertoire became one of its primary priorities (Meta, Krasniqi, & Bello, 2018).

This was evident in the discussion about strengthening the unified front of education. The government's decision in 1972 gave a new boost to the expansion of material bases for the education and entertainment of children. In the volume Communist Indoctrination through Culture, Literature, and Art 2, in the chapter titled "Information on some issues raised in discussions about the film festival in Tirana on May 15, 1976," it is stated: "In the scientific session and during the discussion of films at the first Albanian film festival, it was emphasized that the success of our cinematography lies, first and foremost, in its sound ideological content, in the marked class bias, in strengthening the spirit of partisanship, and in further deepening of the realization... It is necessary for children to be depicted at their current level, and not to exaggerate with the naive thoughts that adults use to make them laugh."

Also, when dealing with children's themes, similar problems are seen, and often children are depicted as spoiled, as in the films Guximtarët (The Brave Ones), Beni ecën vetë (Beni Walks Alone), and Mimoza Llastica (Spoiled Mimoza)" (Meta, Krasniqi, & Bello, 2018). This last comment is based on the guidance provided earlier, in 1973 (but not only): "[...] writers should center their works on positive examples and positive heroes, as that is our socialist reality. This was emphasized because in some recent works there has been an influx of negative examples and heroes. First, this does not reflect our reality, and second, it indirectly hinders the education of children" (Meta, Krasniqi, & Bello, 2018). It is clear that ideological, class-based, and moral education was of paramount importance in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, particularly for children's cinema.

The Major Divisions of Children's Cinema: Capitalist Cinema and Socialist Cinema

The notion that adults might find amusement or entertainment in children's films, as inferred from the previous reference, may appear almost heretical. This perception starkly contrasts with the capitalist paradigm of children's cinema - commonly labeled as "family film" - where entertainment assumes a central role. In contrast, socialist cinema for children adheres strictly to ideological and educational purposes, aiming to mold the "new socialist man" rather than merely entertain.

To elucidate this distinction, one may compare the renowned series Our Gang Comedies, later popularized as The Little Rascals, with Albanian children's films scrutinized by the Supervisory Committee of the Education and Culture Sector. Originating in the United States in 1922 and continuing until 2014, Our Gang represents a prolific body of work consisting of approximately 240 short films that center on a group of children and their humorous escapades. The primary objective of this series was to create lighthearted, comedic content that would captivate audiences of all ages. As noted by Leonard Maltin, "The love showed, and the care showed; Roach comedies have unmistakable charm and style. They're comedies not only of slapstick and spectacular gags, but often of tender feeling and whimsy, too." (Maltin, 1984). Despite the series being acclaimed as the most celebrated of its kind, only one episode, Bored of Education (1936), directed by Gordon Douglas, received an Academy Award for Best Short Subject in 1937 (Maltin, 1984).

In contrast, Albanian socialist cinema, guided by the principles of the regime, deliberately distanced itself from entertainment-focused narratives, especially when such narratives might appeal to adults. The Supervisory Committee emphasized that children's films should refrain from eliciting adult amusement or depicting spoiled children, as these portrayals were perceived as ideologically misleading. According to Meta, Krasniqi, and Bello (2018), directives were issued to ensure that children were portrayed not as sources of comic relief for adults but as exemplars of ideological and moral correctness, in line with the regime's educational objectives (Meta et al., 2018). The capitalist approach to children's cinema, epitomized by Our Gang, highlights the pursuit of humor and emotional engagement, as the children's adventures often defy conventional expectations, offering new comedic situations in every episode while maintaining an undercurrent of affection and care. This intentional focus on lighthearted entertainment fundamentally differs from the socialist cinematic framework, where the primary focus is didactic rather than recreational.

The ideological commitment to cinema in the socialist context is further illustrated by the regime's determination to develop a robust cinematic infrastructure. For instance, a foundational meeting of the Party organization emphasized the necessity of fostering all art forms harmoniously, noting that certain genres, such as drama, music, variety shows, and children's literature, had lagged behind the novel, poetry, cinematography, and visual arts (Meta et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the evolution of Albanian socialist cinema led to notable achievements on the international stage. The genre of children's film, in particular, achieved significant recognition. For example, Mimoza Llastica was presented at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 1975, while Beni Ecën Vetë (Beni Walks Alone), directed by Xhanfise Keko in 1975, was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the Giffoni International Film Festival for Children in Italy in 1978. Dhimitër Anagnosti won the First Prize at the International Film Festival in Belgrade in 1980, for Red Poppies on the Wal (Lulekuqe mbi mure), Namik Prizereni and Kujtim Laro were honored with medals; later, Anagnosti received the Gold Medal at Giffoni, Salerno, Italy, in 1985 for the same film. Notably, although the director herself did not attend these events, the Kinostudio Directorate and the Directorate of Arts at the Ministry ensured representation, underscoring the state's strategic interest in promoting socialist cinema abroad.

In conclusion, the dichotomy between capitalist and socialist children's cinema reflects the divergent socio-political imperatives of the respective systems. While capitalist cinema prioritizes entertainment and commercial success, socialist cinema for children serves as a deliberate instrument of ideological formation, reinforcing political and moral ideals through carefully constructed narratives.

Cinema as an Educational Tool

Children's films are often described as works that predominantly present the world through children's perspectives. However, is this truly the case? In Days of My Life (Ditët e jetës sime) (2008), Xhanfize Keko reflects on some of the most significant evaluation committee notes (effectively, censorship remarks): "The film brings joy, it belongs to the world of children, everything is natural [...] the film has educational value, [...] some tight outfits should be shortened, and perhaps a word about the Party could be added at the end" (Keko, 2008). Such comments are present for nearly all of her films after their screenings for the political bureau, highlighting the pressure filmmakers faced and the imperative of embedding ideological propaganda in cinematic works.

But is cinema truly an educational tool? Does it genuinely impact a young audience? After carefully analyzing and repeatedly watching Albanian children's films, I have identified several of them as true "manuals" on social norms, emphasizing politeness, peer cooperation, and community or family rules. At the same time, these films also reveal, both explicitly and implicitly, the presence of ideological propaganda, often promoting the Party's teachings or the leader's messages. During the socialist period, Albanian children's cinema had a distinctly educational and ideological role, advocating values such as honesty, solidarity, and patriotism. In many of these films, children often play active roles as protagonists who resolve conflicts, assist others, and oppose injustice. Examples include A General Taken Prisoner (Një gjeneral kapet rob) (1980) and The Newest City in the World (Qyteti më I ri në botë) (1974). As

Rose Forman notes: Television, media (or cinema, in this context), in socialist countries, is employed as a tool to shape children in line with socialist ideals, encompassing political, moral, and cultural education. It functions as a distinctly educational medium that, while addressing entertainment needs, simultaneously transmits the regime's intended messages to the audience. (Forman, 1969). This leads to a fundamental question: To what extent are creators in socialist societies genuinely free to develop well-rounded citizens, rather than mere instruments serving the system? This issue can only be critically examined today, distanced from the ideological context of that era.

How Time and Perception Change: Children Then and Now

To assess the longevity and relevance of the educational purpose of these films, I attended an event organized by the Albanian National Film Archive (AQSHF) aimed at a child audience. During the screenings, I intentionally refrained from engaging with the cinematic experience, instead focusing on observing the children's reactions and interactions with the films.
Approximately 150 children from the "Skënder Caci" School attended, watching A General Taken Prisoner (Një gjeneral kapet rob) (1980), directed by Spartak Pecani, and A Small Delay (Një vonesë e vogël) (1982), directed by Xhanfize Keko. Despite variations in engagement levels influenced by the nature of each film and the age group of the audience, the unifying factor was the sense of "captivation" that the films managed to evoke among the children (Meta, Krasniqi, & Bello, 2018).

Regarding A Small Delay, written by B. Hoxha and Xh. Keko, the younger group (ages 7-8) showed a gradual but notable engagement. Their spontaneous laughter at lines such as, "The teacher has repeated each letter 10 times, but your head still doesn't get it," indicates that the film retains a universal appeal, maintaining its relevance even after more than 40 years. Nevertheless, despite the nostalgic aspect, I observed that poorly constructed or redundant scenes sometimes broke the immersion, causing the children to momentarily disconnect until the film managed to recapture their attention.

In contrast, A General Taken Prisoner (Një gjeneral kapet rob), scripted by S. Hasko and N. Tafa and directed by Spartak Pecani - despite Pecani not being particularly known for children's cinema - stands out for the authenticity of its characters and the distinctive atmosphere it brings (Meta, Krasniqi, & Bello, 2018). The slightly older audience (ages 9-10) exhibited quicker and more consistent engagement, maintaining focus from beginning to end, suggesting that the film's communicative strength remains robust. This observation raises a pertinent research question: What elements make a film appealing to contemporary children—is it the thematic content or the narrative? Moreover, could it be argued that A General Taken Prisoner (Një gjeneral kapet rob), has greater educational value compared to A Small Delay (Një vonesë e vogël)?

Through semi-structured interviews with the children, it became evident that they were particularly drawn to A General Taken Prisoner due to elements such as competition, strategic thinking, humor, historical and geographical references, and objects related to current educational themes (e.g., temperature, water, communication devices, and wooden rifles). The latter, in particular, proved exceptionally popular, alongside themes of group solidarity, cooperation,

entertainment, national symbols (the flag), and collective victory. These preferences were expressed with remarkable enthusiasm, reflecting the children's collective interpretation of the film's core messages. When asked what they disliked, they unanimously criticized the lack of female representation within the teams, Bato's resistance to rules, and his authoritarian behavior (Meta, Krasniqi, & Bello, 2018).

In a professional discussion with Eriona Vyshka, a specialist at AQSHF, I inquired about the criteria used for selecting films for child audiences and the most favored titles. Vyshka explained that for children aged 4-7, Mimoza Llastica is typically chosen, while for those aged 7-12, films such as When a Film Was Being Shot, Beni Walks on His Own, and Tomka and His Friends are preferred. These selections are made in collaboration with teachers, aligning with educational curricula and reflecting both pedagogical intent and audience preference (Vyshka, 2025).

A significant observation arises when comparing how children and adults perceive pre-1990 children's films. While adults often struggle to detach from ideological interpretations ingrained in these films, today's children approach them with remarkable spontaneity and without preconceived bias. This finding is both insightful and promising. As Bazin (2012) articulates, "Authors of authentic children's literature are educational only rarely and indirectly. […] They are poets who retain the privilege of remaining within the dreamlike realm of childhood" (p. 50). In this context, A General Taken Prisoner stands out as an adventure that immediately draws viewers in from the very first scene, unlike A Small Delay, which, while not lacking in quality, assumes a more prescriptive moral stance that tends to distance contemporary children.

Conclusion: Do Children Need Morality?

In the scholarly work Face to Face with Terror: Children in Cinema, Joe Kelleher notes: "Valet describes children's appearance in cinema as a representation that: sets up the relation of an order which is para-social, para-historical. The child ceases to belong to society and situates himself on the margin of the story where he is filmed. More than the reflection of a given period and certain customs, he becomes the living witness which speaks itself, concretizes itself, which remembers itself to us in its pure ontological truth, its absolute presence." (Kelleher, 1998). This theoretical framework challenges conventional interpretations of childhood portrayal in film by emphasizing the ontological purity and existential authenticity that children bring to the screen.

To illustrate this conceptualization, the film A Little Delay (Një vonesë e vogël) serves as a pertinent example. The child protagonists in this film function as witnesses to a socio-political era that valorizes the figure of the teacher, yet simultaneously portrays familial relationships as fragmented and distant. The solitude that characterizes the children's domestic lives gives rise to creative problem-solving, exemplified by the humorous scene in which the protagonist calls a telephone operator for assistance with an arithmetic problem.

Despite the entertainment value of such scenes, the film introduces critical ambiguities: What educational message is conveyed through the presence of a student character who covertly follows the children? How should contemporary audiences interpret the propagandist overtones of scenes in which children morally judge one another? Addressing these questions requires a nuanced pedagogical approach that contextualizes the film within both its historical framework

and contemporary educational discourse.

Such interpretive efforts are essential, particularly when examining cinematic works that simultaneously entertain and propagate ideological messages. Educational interventions—led by film scholars, archival specialists from the Albanian National Film Archive (AQSHF), psychologists, and educators—can facilitate critical engagement with these films, fostering media literacy and historical awareness. This approach ensures that children today develop an autonomous interpretive capacity rather than passively assimilating the ideological constructs embedded in historical cinematic narratives.

Similarly, the film A General Taken Prisoner (Një gjeneral kapet rob)—despite its adventurous plot, realism in character depiction, and incorporation of military strategies—presents an educational narrative that transcends didacticism. However, the ideological rhetoric, notably the use of terms such as "enemy" and "traitor," still necessitates critical examination. As William Hays, then-President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association of America and author of the renowned Production Code, eloquently stated:'We must have towards that sacred thing, the mind of a child, toward that clean and virgin thing, that unmarked slate - we must have toward that the same responsibility, the same care about the impressions made upon it, that the best clergyman, the most inspired teacher of youth would have.' (Bazalgette, 1995). This guiding principle is timeless and universally applicable. As educators and cultural mediators, we bear the responsibility of discerning the pedagogical implications embedded within children's cinema. By critically engaging with films from different socio-political contexts, we can better equip younger generations to interpret cinematic narratives within both historical and contemporary frameworks, thus fostering critical thinking and media literacy. Bazalgette and Staples, question why cinema is often excluded from school curricula in the UK and the US, unlike theatre, opera, or art galleries, and ask whether this omission is justified, (Bazalgette & Staples, 1995). Given that cinema combines multiple art forms, image, music, narrative, and performance, it offers an intense and multidimensional artistic experience. As such, film should be considered a valuable educational medium that enhances children's aesthetic development and understanding of the world.

To conclude, the American children's series Our Gang (The Little Rascals) represents a significant achievement in portraying children authentically, without mimicking adult behaviors - a common tendency in socialist cinema's moralizing approach. Even after a century, the series remains entertaining and educational, demonstrating an important lesson: educating children through natural, engaging entertainment is more effective than ideological propaganda, a principle contemporary creators should heed.

And, as articulated by Abbas Kiarostami: "We try to make films about children rather than for children, which seems to me more serious, more interesting and more important. It allows more understanding to develop between adults – particularly parents – and children" (as cited in Bazalgette & Staples, 1995).

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Petro Marko, a drama confronting criticism

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Abstract

The purpose and object of this study is the writer Petro Marko in relation to the critical thought of his time as a playwright, where his small contribution to this literary genre serves as a reference for the era and the challenges that drama faced during that period. Known primarily as a novelist and a significant literary figure of his time, Petro Marko is mostly classified among the censored authors, particularly in the dramatic genre. The central research question is: "What was Petro Marko's challenge in writing drama in the 1960s?" During this period, ideology and political demands had erected an insurmountable barrier for Albanian drama, allowing only works that aligned with the tastes and interests of the regime. Bora e kuqe, a dramatic work by Petro Marko and a version of the play Zonja Çurre, was never published. The results of this study will focus on the dramatic pieces written by Petro Marko, such as Guna mbi tela, which centers on the Vlora War, and Niku i Martin Gjinit, a drama inspired by the era of Skanderbeg. However, the latter carried implicit political connotations due to the "liberalizing" elements that permeated it, leading to its prohibition as an ideologically harmful work inconsistent with socialist realism. Both works thematically embrace a historical approach and evoke the theme of freedom. However, Petro Marko seems to engage with his time primarily through the metaphor of the individual's fate in moments of crisis. The Conclusion of this study will be based on the literary and critical findings of the time, highlighting how Petro Marko carefully entrusted the messages of his dramas to those who could decipher them. Both Zonja Çurre and the play inspired by Skanderbeg's era, beyond addressing national independence, clearly reference the concept of freedom. Freedom, as a universal metaphor, constitutes one of the most fundamental concepts in world literature throughout history.

Keywords

Petro Marko, drama, criticism, 1960s, Socialist Realism

Introduction

During the totalitarian period, when culture and artistic literature were generally under the visible pressure of ideological and political institutions, particularly the Party, literature could not escape its obligations to them. Unfortunately, this obligation was complex, controlled on multiple levels: from political institutions to cultural institutions, and a third, more severe layer, that of the official criticism of the time. In Albania, the trajectory and development of literary production were deeply influenced by the political, historical, cultural, and social conditions of the time.

From 1948 and for nearly a decade thereafter, until the 1960s, Albania adopted a full model from the Soviet Union. This influence was exerted with unusual force, especially on staged drama and dramatic writing, as it was considered a daily product of the country's socio-political development. This burden weighed heavily on a cultural product so vital for a country like Albania.

This oppressive context, particularly relevant to the current theme, is illustrated through the political line emphasized in the speech of the Fifteenth Plenum (June, 1965). Drama scholar Mexhit Prençi writes: "Ominous and terrifying was the orientation given regarding the definition of issues and themes about what playwrights and writers should write, how they should write, how proletarian communist partisanship should traverse the creative process, how revolutionary class character should be expressed, who could be positive characters and who negative, who could be considered heroes, how the superiority of positive over negative forces should be portrayed, and so on." (Prençi, 2010)

A vertical overview of Albanian dramatic production, especially from 1945 to 1973, shows that Albania had a remarkable cohort of playwrights who, despite lacking prior experience in this genre, managed to bring to Albanian theater a serious and cultivated form of communication through one of the oldest genres in human society.

Within this vertical overview, one notes a strong desire to bring to the attention of Albanian society historical events, even ancient ones, that resonated with the Albanian reality. These were topical themes that reflected internal realistic impulses: how Albanians were building their society, their well-being, their recovery, who they were and how they were, as people of a country increasingly governed by totalitarianism, in conditions of prolonged isolation.

Most of the programmatic speech from the 1963 Plenum clearly reflects political orientation, nearly to the point of rhetorical slogans: "Playwriting must contribute to the formation of the new man," "Drama must have revolutionary content," "Drama as part of the people's revolution", "Drama under the conditions of imperialist-revisionist encirclement", "Proletarian partisanship as the main ideological-artistic trait of drama", "Heroes of the drama must serve as positive examples for the audience." (Hoxha,1963)

Albanian drama of this period is diverse. Despite known shortcomings in character realization, as highlighted by criticism, it offered excellent models of protagonists, of human mentality navigating uncharted paths. Therefore, like drama across the entire history of humanity, it

constituted a vital intersection for enabling intergenerational communication, across historical eras and with perspectives different from those aspired to by the Albanian society of the time.

In all observations, studies, and critical reflections, whether regarding plays that were staged or remained unpublished, those supported by the regime's critics or the Party's political apparatus, or even those that never made it to print or to the provincial stage, one finds authentic testimony to the sacrifices endured by this genre, particularly during the final two decades leading up to Albania's regime change in the 1990s.

Albania was one of the smaller countries in the Balkans, historically marked by strong ties and cultural relations with Western Europe. Yet, in the post–World War II period, under newly imposed conditions, it aligned itself with the Eastern Bloc, primarily the Soviet Union. The latter, operating under a singular totalitarian system unlike any other in the world, exerted significant influence.

The Soviet Union and Albania had no comparable historical or contemporary indicators, nor could they serve as mutual reference points. There was no possibility of drawing analogies between their developmental paths, especially not in terms of cultural evolution. The ideological regime exercised a special degree of attention and imposition over dramatic literature. This pressure extended throughout the social and political fabric, resulting in a space of intense collaboration and conflict. The state exhibited meticulous control over every component of the dramatic complex: literary production, staging, directing, and other theatrical elements.

Given this environment, one decidedly uncreative and non-artistic, Albanian drama was forced into extraordinary survival. On the one hand, it carried the ideological burden of schematism, populism, and enforced conformity. On the other hand, it faced the impossibility of resisting totalitarianism until the very end of the 20th century.

As drama during this period evolved entirely within the framework of totalitarian governance and ideological orientation, its development was heavily constrained and directly tied to political developments in the country. Despite its prolific and highly problematic output, Albanian drama, though bound to serve the political agenda, still provides significant insights into social phenomena, character types, narrative conflicts, and the profiles of authors who shaped this genre.

Nearly the entire body of dramatic and theatrical material produced in that era can be regarded as analytical matter, raising critical questions inherent to its own existence. This study aims to highlight the practice of schematic treatment, the ideological homogenization of conflict, the repetitive traits of characters and heroes, the formulaic resolutions of dramatic situations, and the flattening of artistic levels under ideological pressure.

Operating within a particular socio-political environment, drama of this period constantly reflected its own constrained existence, locked in a conflicted relationship with itself. It was prevented from flourishing as an autonomous genre, meant to serve the theater and drama tradition as understood in world literary history, and from portraying genuine realities to the Albanian public.

No other form of literary creation, regardless of artistic ambition, aesthetic refinement, craftsmanship, or authorial talent, can substitute the communicative experience fostered by a good drama. This is not solely due to the playwright's script, but because drama is performed, it takes on physical, spiritual, emotional, and mimetic life through the actor on stage, in direct confrontation and closeness with the audience.

In this setting, the relationship between the drama, its events, and its characters unfolds in front of the audience, in sound and image. The viewer, in one way or another, lives through it, no matter how long ago the play may have been written. Regarding the development of drama, as literary history has often explained in relation to the connections literature holds with historical times, people, and events, whether describing or anticipating them, the genre that has consistently borne the heaviest consequences is drama and its playwrights.

Ancient drama, particularly that of antiquity, demonstrated to human society that the signals for their present and future come from writers, especially dramatists. Despite the specific societal structures of ancient civilizations, dramatic production, its conflicts, and its relationships with the state and the "emperor" already foreshadowed how future human relations would unfold, who their natural adversaries would be, and many other foundational questions.

The three great tragedians of antiquity caused such turmoil in their own time that their significance echoed through every future system and regime led by emperors, censors, and dictators. It is said that the emperor of the time, displeased by something in the art and metaphor found in the theater of Aeschylus, took revenge, and so fell the fate of the great tragedian. In the end, this shows just how vital the mission of drama has always remained.

Drama developed late in Albanian literature, whether among writers living within the country or in exile. This delayed experience had its own realities within Albanian cultural and literary life. Nonetheless, the history of Albanian drama represents a significant chapter in the broader history of Albanian literature, both in terms of the issues it addresses and the path it has followed in the Albanian context and within the genre itself.

Petro Marko does not represent a clearly defined or widely articulated phenomenon in the critical discourse of his time as a playwright. His modest engagement with this literary genre remains a point of reference for the era and the difficulties drama faced. Though better known as a novelist and a prominent intellectual in Albanian literary circles, Petro Marko is primarily counted among the forbidden authors, especially in the dramatic genre.

Prof. Dr. Kudret Velça, a prominent critic and a theoretical figure in dramaturgy (though not strictly a scholar of dramatic theory), in a later writing, one that does not follow the rules and doctrines of socialist realism, takes the opportunity to examine Petro Marko's dramatic output within a broad framework, recognizing him as a major figure of Albanian letters. Velça argues that Marko's dramatic works are not obscure due to neglect or lack of interest on the author's part, but rather "because of the dictatorship that ruled over us" during the period in which his literary creativity flourished and reached its highest peaks.

As a "rebel poet," a great writer, and a talented artist, Marko could not accept the rigid norms imposed by the method of socialist realism, norms that were more political and ideological in nature than aesthetic or artistic in essence. (Velça, 2009) Referring to the firsthand "memories" of the orientation and "violence" that politics inflicted on non-conformist literature and drama, within the framework of a study on Petro Marko's dramaturgy, Velça, one of the few critics of the totalitarian period who reviewed much of the dramatic work of socialist realism in the press, writes: "Many of his works (Petro Marko's), in poetry, prose, and drama, were banned because of his non-conformist and dissident positions, and were archived away. In the field of drama, this stance was even more radical." (Velça, 2009)

Writing drama in the 1960s was an even greater ordeal for Petro Marko. At that time, ideology and political requirements had built a towering and impenetrable wall for Albanian drama, defining the kind of content that would be acceptable or pleasing to the ruling power.
Bora e kuqe (Red Snow) (Marko, 1959), a dramatic piece by Marko and a version of the play Zonja Çurre, was never published. Subsequently, Petro Marko wrote the dramatic work Guna mbi tela (The Cloak on the Wire) (Marko, 1970), centered around the War of Vlora. This is the author's second play, structured around a historical event and populated with historical figures brought into the textual dimension. It concerns the 1920 War of Vlora, which coincided with the moment when a popular uprising, led by ordinary people, successfully drove the Italian army into the sea. (Gjoka, 2025) Among the legendary figures of that war, also present in the text of this drama, is Selam Musai, the popular hero who, as the song goes, seized the cannon by its muzzle. Alongside him are other protagonists of that heroic and unequal battle, set against the backdrop of extraordinary political and social upheaval. The play Guna mbi tela is composed of two main parts, subdivided into ten scenes in total. (Gjoka, 2025)

His other play, Niku i Martin Gjinit (Marko, 1973), draws its subject matter from the era of Skanderbeg. However, its underlying political tone, marked by a "liberalism" that permeated the text, led to its prohibition. It was deemed ideologically harmful and incompatible with the aesthetics of socialist realism. (Velça, 2009) In Niku i Martin Gjinit, Marko deliberately journeys into the era of the Great Time (Moti i Madh), through an imaginative escape to the fifteenth century. This temporal distance, away from the suffocating present, enables the historical event to acquire contemporary resonance. It is precisely this transposition that makes the appropriation of the play so complex within Marko's dramatic corpus. (Gjoka, 2025) "From an artistic standpoint, the play Niku i Martin Gjinit opened the path for the poetic drama in Albanian literature." (Velça, 1998)

This drama, with its meaningful title, places at the center of its narrative and dialogue the heroic spirit of the fifteenth-century Arbëresh (Albanian) people, an unexpected historical episode that undoubtedly attracted international attention then and now, serving as an emblem of the Albanian presence in this part of the world. (Gjoka, 2025) The extraordinary heroism of that era, otherwise known as the Great Time, is inextricably tied to the iconic figure of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, who stood against the Ottoman threat and carved his name into the memory of the Albanian people and European civilization. His resistance became a legendary act in the face of the Ottoman Empire, an act rooted in the courage of the Arbëresh, a people who have long defended their honor and homeland. (Gjoka, 2025)

Although the play invokes historical circumstances from the time of Skanderbeg, Niku i Martin Gjinit is not a historical drama in a conventional sense. Rather, those circumstances serve merely as a point of departure, as a narrative impulse to enter the psychological terrain of the drama, where the focus lies on the deeper influence of other factors, particularly the psychological destruction of youth, both then and always. The uniqueness of the dramatized heroism, the twenty-five-year battle between the Albanians and the Ottoman invaders, is rooted in the site of the most epic resistance of the time: the hearts of the Arbëresh, strengthened by the spirit of their legendary leader, then and forever.

Both of these plays adopt a historical thematic framework and evoke the concept of freedom. However, what truly emerges is the author's engagement with his own time, primarily through the metaphor of the individual's fate in moments of crisis. The critic emphasizes that Marko's drama focuses on portraying the fate of individuals and the depth of their characters, with the human being placed as the central figure of the dramatic narrative. Petro Marko knew both how and to whom to entrust the messages of his plays within the context of their time.

Across all dimensions of his dramatic works, both in Zonja Çurre and the play inspired by the era of Skanderbeg, the notion of liberty stands out as a recurring theme, alongside national independence. Historically, freedom has constituted one of the most essential concepts in world literature, embraced as a universal metaphor. Confronted with an impenetrable barrier, Petro Marko's dramaturgical trajectory was abruptly cut off. The author could not accept such a compromised relationship with the essence of drama, its mission, known since antiquity, nor could he reconcile with the kind of ideological subjugation demanded by the system, nor with the method of socialist realism, which necessarily required the reflection of the regime's current political agenda. The only play that survived the period or was accepted as such was Për lirinë e popullit (For the Freedom of the People), co-written with writer Shefqet Musaraj. (Hoxha, 1963) For the Freedom of the People, in terms of composition, is structured into three acts and consists of eight scenes. At its core lies the theme of war, specifically, the moment when Nazi Germans arrive in Albania, an episode clearly selected with intention within the framework of the text. The play intertwines the internal conflicts of the wartime years, namely the clash between nationalists and internationalists. This division is vividly portrayed across the scenes, always highlighting the victors, the communists, and underlining the alleged collaboration of nationalists with the Nazis. The drama emphasizes the supposedly progressive role of the communists, consistently shaped by the ideological principles of socialist realism. Equally striking is the harsh depiction of the Germans, presented in black-and-white tones, a stylistic decision rooted in the dogmas of the official socialist realist model. (Gjoka, 2025)

Conclusion

In closing, we may conclude the following: Art, culture, and literary production during the totalitarian period in Albania were subject to visible and pervasive pressure from ideological and political institutions, especially the ruling Party. Literature could not escape this obligation, which was complex and strictly regulated across various layers: political institutions, cultural institutions, and a third, more severe layer, that of the official criticism of the time. In Albania, the development and trajectory of literary production were deeply shaped by the political, historical, cultural, and social conditions of the era.

The full ideological experience Albania absorbed from the Soviet Union, from 1948 to nearly a decade onward and into the 1960s, was imposed with unusual force, extending heavily over drama, both as a staged art form and as literary creation. Drama, as a cultural product reflecting the socio-political evolution of the country, was severely burdened in a nation like Albania, where it could have played an elite and essential role.

Despite these conditions, talent always finds a path. Such was the case with Petro Marko, the writer from Vlora, who remains a distinguished figure in Albanian literature. Although his creative output was subjected to ongoing ideological revision and continuous surveillance and reprimand by the ideological structures of the time, his presence remained vital. A known writer and master of metaphor, Petro Marko's literary creativity reflects a strong tendency to position the human being within a universal relationship. Yet, the codified "law" of socialist realism did not allow the dramatist Petro Marko the artistic freedom he needed. Marko's literary profile carried a proven connection to the universal message of literature in general. For that reason, his phenomenon in dramaturgy could not properly unfold within the constraints of that era.

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The dramatic element in "Eposi i Kreshnikeve"

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Abstract

"Eposi i Kreshnikeve" or "The epic songs for the gentry of Jutbina", is a cultural and spiritual asset that represents a synthesis of specific forms of narration. In this cycle, are shown with a heroic spirit, the exploits of heroes who live in a world that is real and fantastic at once, who think objectively, but also accept any kind of image, action and unreal figure. In many interaction scenes, the way the characters are constructed and their typification, it is tangible the dramatic element, that is not rarely present in the epic genre and is especially distinguished in these songs. The dramatic element in epic creations has been identified since Aristotle, who defined this element through the ability of epics to create scenes and "to bring to the stage". The narration is interrupted to introduce both, real or unreal characters. The characters of the epic are described in a very scenic and performing way, in situations where they can talk to the fairies, take care of their children, but also in scenes where they fight their enemies, sometimes human and other times monster-sized. Epics have also been considered "theaters of timelessness", because they seem not to have the end, as a primary purpose. Epics are characterized by an extension that is interrupted by actions, there is no primary purpose, the resolution of the conflict or the discovery of a sense of mystery or conflict. They are more interested in the journey, itself and in the relationship complexity, than in their end. The heroes in these songs focus on unreal scenes, but also on scenes of fighting and action.

Keywords

drama, epic, antiquity, real, unreal

Introduction

Dramatic action

Epics are literary genres characterized by drama. In them, scenes where characters create the idea of direct action as in the theater, are very present. Epics, being action songs, have dramatic action as a strong compositional structure. The presence of action scenes, in which duels, armed battles for life, adventures, kidnappings and robberies of beautiful women are described, which are presented with so much detail that it seems that their narration aims to create the liveliness of something that the listener or reader gets the feeling as if he is seeing it before his eyes, as if he is a witness. In this way, it is intended to achieve what in a performance makes the spectator have a short communication distance. The songs of the "Valiant" are short, the narration and the analepsis and prolepsis of time are rare, which makes the dramatic action even more visible.

Character interactions

Conversations between characters are crucial in dramatic epics. These interactions reveal the characters' personalities, motivations, and relationships, adding layers of depth and complexity to the portrayal of relationships. The braves meet together in an assembly and there they speak and discuss according to the rules of the assembly. There they make decisions on vital issues to protect themselves from an attack or to attack a "Krajl", to protect a brave who has been imprisoned or whose wife has been taken captive, but also on issues such as going hunting in an organized manner. [1] [2] We find such assemblies in the song "Muji's wife kidnapping" in the song "Young Omer", in the song "Our Basho" etc. In the song "Muji's wife kidnapping", all the other "Agë" try to help Muji in a[3] dramatic situation. They show their willingness to put everything that was taken and burned into place, even to return his wife.

You live Mujo and Halil
And Mujo, don't get tired
Because we can make the towers better
And we can get the wife better
And we can find the house better
And we can buy the house better
And we can gift you things and wares

Dialogue

Dramatic dialogue is a distinctive element of all epics. Scholars and their studies have acknowledged that the dramatic dialogue in Homer's epics became the basis for the dialogue that would later be used in old Greek drama.
In the Cretan epics, characters often express their attitudes, thoughts, and feelings through dialogue.

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1 Folklore, Modern Koncepts, Dukagjini Peje p. 34-35
2 Aristotle, Poetics Naim Frashëri, Tirana 1961
3 The Visions of the Nation, Volume I II, Songs of the Saints and Legends, compiled and edited by Father Bernardin Palaj and Father Donat Kurti, Nikaj Printing House, Tirana, 1937, p. 82

Dramatic epics involve extended speeches and dialogues, often featuring strong rhetorical devices and emotional expressions. These speeches can be powerful and persuasive, sharp, adding dramatic value. Such is the dialogue between Gjergj Alez Alia and Bajlozi, whom he has summoned to the battlefield.

Conflict and tension

Dramatic elements often involve conflicts between characters, gods, or supernatural forces, creating tension and suspense. These conflicts can be physical, emotional, or moral, and they move the plot forward and engage the audience. (those who hear them sung with the lute)

Atmosphere

Dramatic epics use descriptions of settings, character emotions, and sound effects to create a specific mood and atmosphere. This can range from grand and heroic to intimate and personal.

Performance

Like the dramas of antiquity, but also other dramas include various musical elements in addition to words. Once through the chorus with its very important role, later with a primary role in musicals, music has been a constant accompanying part of various types in dramaturgy.
Music and song are an integral part of the epic. Some songs in the epic are structured to be interpreted with a message function, as in the case of the song in their language that Halili and Muji sing when they are in front of Krajli so that he does not understand them.

However, in the case of the Kreshnik epic, the elements of the song are essential for its existence. It has been preserved because it was sung from memory in front of an audience. Popular rhapsodies have served as a living memory of these popular creations. The epic was not preserved by being documented through writing on paper, but by memorizing it and singing it with the lute near the family fireplace, but also in front of many people in assemblies, and at festivals or at any important event. In this way, the lute player did not read aloud what was written, but interpreted aloud, and with mimicry, the songs of the epic, performing it, giving much of his soul, just as actors do in a theater piece.

The singing of the epic had several functions, that of entertainment, but also of showing pride in the past of their nation. Through the song, they conveyed a moral and historical code, a form of narrative that served as proof of identity and guidance for future generations. Interpreting with the lute is a way of protecting, conserving, but also the originality of those who perform it. Often, rhapsodists added verses for dramatic effect, adapting names, events or details according to the place, time and audience, turning these songs into a living tradition, not frozen in the past. But despite the changes on the surface, the essence remained intact: honor, faith, bravery and the collective history of a people that tells itself to itself.

The epic and Albanian literature

The “Epic of the Valiant” has influenced all Albanian literature in general and dramaturgy

in particular, serving as an intertextual source for the topic, for archetypes, for dramatic and narrative structures. Not infrequently, directors have brought to the stage plays with scenarios inspired by the epic, trying to bring back to the spectator the epicism and heroism of the world of the "Valiant". This happens even today, even as a form of contemporary theater.

Relapse of the subject from the epic or relapse of the characters

"Who brought Doruntina" is one of the most famous songs from the epic that has been dramatized many times, also due to the fact that it has been recovered as a subject and rewritten by well-known writers of Albanian literature such as Ismail Kadare. Gjergj Elez Alia's song has been dramatized and staged, even in the form of children's theater.

The influence of the epic on structure, spirit and style

The late development of Albanian dramaturgy encouraged writers to turn to the best models of world literature, but also of Albanian literature, in order to develop this genre. Franciscan and Jesuit writers in the first half of the 19th century, in developing all genres, as well as in dramaturgy, relied on oral literature, poetic language and the emotional and expressive system. The songs of the epic not only played a significant role in the spiritual life of man, but also served as a ground for written literature. These stories became the basis for many tragedies written especially by writers belonging to the Franciscan and Jesuit schools. Fishta, Zadeja, Prendushi, Harapi, Gjeçovi, etc. often based their dramatic narratives on the epic.

Divine intervention, the insertion of the world of fairies and sylphs with their rules, into people's lives is a recurring element in Albanian drama. The dramatic use of divine intervention, with its ability to direct and hinder the protagonists, was a powerful tool to create suspense and mystery. We find the conversation of human beings with supernatural beings such as fairies, sylphs, in Zadeja's "The Fairy of Albania", but also in "The civilised albanian" as well as the melodrama "Jerina or the Queen of Flowers", which is considered by studies to be the most ambitious work of this type.

The conversation of Sile, a 13-year-old girl from Shkodra with the Fairy of Albania, in "The Urban Albanian" is very similar to the conversation of the three children with the Fairy of Albania, in Zadeja's melodrama. In Zadeja's melodrama, the heroes speak with a certain declamation and emphasis that depends on the sometimes mystically colored subjects. Mythical Albanian figures, such as the Albanian Fairy , along with the regional fairies and the sylphs, are always present in the drama.

You are listening to the fairy and the dance
Full freedom, you are reporting today
In the regions of Albania
As is the order of God.

Moral dilemmas and ethical choices: in the dramas of the first half of the 20th century often resemble the solutions that the heroes make in the epics. These strong dilemmas indicate the complicated situations in which the country is going through and the need to change the

situation. The melodramas of Fishta and Zadeja often show elements of an attempt to give an educational and moralizing message, to preserve the ethnicity and develop the values of the nation. "Jerina, or the Queen of Flowers", is a drama built on the basis of the role and way in which the divine world of fairies and fairies can intervene in the world of people by building a special dramatic context.

Love for the country, for the family, for the language and culture in the epic are models. Often in the dilemmas that Albanians have in important historical situations and events, it is the solutions of Muji and Halili that clarify the values that they must protect. The influence of the epic will be felt in the construction of dramatic characters and taking archetypes from the epic as models. For the construction of heroes with strength but also with weaknesses and their motivation in the actions they perform. In the creation of the female figures Zadeja in the melodrama "Rozafa" and Fishta in the figure of Efigenia in Fishta's drama, "Efigenia n'Aulli", the figure of the heroine is given strong epic and hymnic notes, as Ajkuna, the sister of Gjerhgji Elez Alisë, is presented in the epic, creating human heroines, a girl, a painful mother, a woman and above all a person with a higher purpose for her country.

Albanian dancers, in most cases, sing in a group, replacing and playing the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy. The dances, as in the dramatic parts of Zadeja and in those of Fishta, play the role of commentators on the events that occur and demonstrate the ability to generalize about various historical events. While in Fishta the function of dance more often "passes to the level of didactic moralizing story, which develops in parallel with the basic dramatic action, slowing it down" in the case of Zadeja, the dances play a moralizing, commenting role, but are also interactive characters. They converse with each other, but also with human characters. Although sometimes they appear as not very found insertions, becoming conventional.

Language and style

Albanian playwrights in their tragedies and dramas will often be influenced by the epic language used in the epic. They will use words, phrases and poetic conventions as well as adapt the poetic style of the epic with the aim of creating a sense of greatness and love for the nation and ethnicity.

Methodology

This lecture aims to create a balance between concepts, theory and the object of the study. It also aims to analyze from a theoretical perspective, the connection between different literary genres such as epic and dramaturgy. We also aim to present, through the comparative method, the connections between the "Epos of the Valiant" and its influence on the development of Albanian drama. In this study we spoke in general about studies that show how epics have influenced all the authorial literary genres that followed them, in all the literatures of the respective nations. We also have analyzed in a specific way, how our epic has influenced our dramaturgy. Through the analysis, we have brought detailed examples that manifest this influence. These detailed examples deal with elements of the text, such as the intertextual recovery of the subject, character, action, style and language used.

Epics are considered a source of inspiration for all the literature that developed after them and among all the literatures of the world. This connection and influence from epics has been admitted since antiquity by Aristotle, but also Plato. Aeschylus said that his tragedies, compared to Homer's poems, are nothing more than "crusts from Homer's rich table".Divisions into literary genres, such as the division into oral literature and written literature, are a natural result of the developments of art in general, but also of coexistence and interaction. The problems, the issues, the ideas that have been synthesized in the oldest forms of artistic expression in epics will be inherited in the best literary forms.

"The Epic of the Valiant" is an extraordinary wealth, an asset, which appears as a special original phenomenon within a culture, but also is seen as a broad phenomenon, as a phenomenon without temporal or geographical limitations. Scholar and researcher, Vladimir Propp, would emphasize that even more: "The folk epic is characterized by stylistic consistency, and most importantly, by national-ideological consistency. The sum of the distinctive features in any folk epic is consistency, which is one of the most valuable features of an epic. The true epic always consists of isolated songs that people do not associate together, while these songs are inherent forms. The literary epic is outwardly uniform, while internally they look like a mosaic.In the epic, the narrative is a form of expression of the human world, as artistic communication and becomes a key element in influencing its mental and spiritual development. From these early narratives that man makes about everyday life, which arise as a spiritual need, various literary genres such as myth, epic, fairy tales, elric songs, theatrical plays, etc. developed and branched out. Different forms of thought also are correlated to different forms of linguistic expression. The development and refinement of narratives created the possibility of the birth of various literary genres.

Epics arose before dramaturgy, so it can be said that they are precursors and inspirations for other literary genres. Epics created models of artistic perfection that would remain so forever. Epics have influenced all literary genres, even dramaturgy. Epic narratives focus attention on the description of events, acts of bravery, courage, chivalry. Action is essential compared to the feelings that characterize lyricism. All attention is focused on the actions of the characters through whom they become models. In epic works, the density of such events will make the dramatic element visible.

Essentially, the dramatic element in an epic poem transforms it from a purely narrative text into a more engaging and interactive experience for the audience, similar to a theatrical performance. Aristotle used in his work "Poetics" a technical term "eisagein" that "defined the dramatic aspect in epic. While Plato in his work "The Republic" considered Homer the first among the poets of tragedy" and recognized him as the "hero in the field of tragedy". In the epic, the narrator speaks very little about himself, minimally involving his emotions in the events he is narrating. In an epic work, a simple introduction with minimal elements is needed, and then the narrative immediately begins about a character or several characters and the events related to them.

Conclusion

The epic of the Kreshniks is a source of subjects for dramaturgy, but also a model for the structure, language and themes that would shape the development of Albanian theater. The

epic's narrative, based exclusively on action, often helped establish literary conventions and dramatic techniques that would be used by playwrights in later centuries. Just as the Greek tragedies that had taken the mythical figures of the Homeric epic, Albanian playwrights will also take the mythical figures from the epic, who will interact with people. We find this model in Zadeja, Fishta, Prenushi, Harapi, Gjeçovi etc. The presence of songs and dances will appear in the drama, which is a strong tradition that comes from orality. The repetition of some words that become a refrain with songs as well as dance will be an element that will be constantly used as an intertext from oral literature.

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The visual dialogue between painting and contemporary film: References of visual art in international cinema

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Abstract

In contemporary cinema, there is a tendency to restore classical forms of visual art as an integral part of film narrative. However, detailed studies examining how these references influence the aesthetics, semantics, and emotional experience of the viewer are lacking. This study aims to analyze the way in which classical and modern painting is incorporated into the visual language of several contemporary films, by identifying cases, analyzing references, and exploring the interweaving of visual art language with cinematic storytelling. References to painting in contemporary film are not just aesthetic homages, but deliberate visual strategies to add narrative depth, cultural interaction, and emotional experience. The approach will be qualitative and analytical, with a focus on the comparative analysis of film scenes that reference specific paintings, analyzing contemporary international films by authors such as Kurosawa, Majewski, von Trier, Greenaway, etc. Both film frames and corresponding paintings will be analyzed visually and semiotically, relying on academic literature in the field of film theory and art history. These references enhance narrative comprehension, philosophical depth, and connection to the audience's cultural memory, evoking emotions and placing the films in an intertextual dialogue with classical art. The use of painting in contemporary films is part of an innovative interdisciplinary combination that enriches cinematic storytelling and pushes film beyond the linear medium, towards a new form of experiencing art.

Keywords

Film composition, visual narrative, image semiotics, classical painting in film, interdisciplinary dialogue

Introduction

In contemporary cinema, there is an increasing tendency among auteur filmmakers to deliberately incorporate references to classical and modern painting as part of their visual language. These are not merely represent aesthetic choices or artistic homages, but function as conscious mechanisms for constructing narrative, philosophical, and emotional meaning. The use of compositional, symbolic, and chromatic elements drawn from painting gives film frames a new depth, expanding cinema beyond a linear structure toward an interdisciplinary experience.

Rather than simply reproducing the visual forms of painting, these directors reinterpret them through cinematic means, assigning new semantic functions to the moving image. However, the existing literature often stops at formal comparisons, without analyzing the creative role of directors in selecting and integrating these references as integral parts of storytelling.

This study aims to analyze how directors like Kubrick, von Trier, Tarkovsky, Greenaway, Scorsese, and Kurosawa use painting to construct deeper meanings in their films. The focus is on films where artistic references are essential to composition and lighting, such as: Barry Lyndon (1975), Melancholia (2011), The Mirror (1975), Shutter Island (2010), The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover (1989), and Dreams (1990).

The objectives include: identifying scenes and painterly references; conducting visual comparative analysis; examining the aesthetic and philosophical strategies of the directors; and assessing the impact of these choices on the audience's experience. The key questions are: How does the pictorial reference function in constructing cinematic meaning? What role does it play in the cultural consciousness of the viewer?

The hypothesis is that references to painting constitute authorial strategies that enrich film aesthetics and create an expanded dialogue between visual media. The structure of the paper includes: an overview of the literature on the film–painting relationship; the analytical methodology; results with comparative analyses of the selected films; a discussion of the findings; and Conclusion with recommendations for further study.

Literature review

In contemporary auteur cinema, references to classical or modern painting do not simply appear as aesthetic homages, but rather as deliberate narrative and symbolic strategies. Angela Dalle Vacche (1996), in her work Cinema and Painting, emphasizes that filmmakers use painting to elevate the film frame to the level of a "moving gallery," imbuing it with layered meanings. Similarly, W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) considers the image as an active cultural agent which, when transferred from one medium to another, acquires new meanings through intermedial interaction. The contributions of Roland Barthes and Christian Metz in the field of semiotics offer valuable tools for analyzing these intersections. Barthes (1977) distinguishes between the functions of "anchorage" and "relay" in the text–image relationship, concepts that can be applied to the film–painting dynamic. Meanwhile, Metz (1974) views film as a system of signs, in which painterly references act as additional codes in the construction of meaning.

In this context, the role of the director as a visual author is essential. According to authorship theories by Peter Wollen (1972) and Andrew Sarris (1962), the director possesses a unique style through which they communicate ideas and sensibilities. The use of painting becomes an authorial gesture that contributes to building the atmosphere, philosophy, and semantics of the work. This is clearly evident in the films of Kubrick, Tarkovsky, von Trier, and Greenaway, where each frame resembles a carefully composed image, often inspired by well-known works of visual art.

Furthermore, according to Hans Belting (1994), images convey not only appearances, but also symbolic authority and collective memory. When a film scene evokes a recognizable painting, it activates a new layer of interpretation for the viewer, making the cinematic experience more complex and emotionally charged. Although some studies highlight specific cases of painting's influence on film, in-depth analysis is often lacking on how these references serve in the construction of film narrative, and the active role of directors as creators of visual language. This study seeks to fill that gap through a detailed visual and semiotic analysis of selected cases.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to examine the function of visual references to painting in the construction of cinematic narrative. The director is treated as an author who uses visual language to build meaning through the integration of compositional, symbolic, and chromatic elements borrowed from painting.

Selection of films and film frames

The corpus of analysis includes six contemporary auteur films that meet the following criteria: directors with a consolidated visual style; scenes that directly reference well-known works of visual art; use of the reference as a narrative device rather than a purely aesthetic one; and absence of biographical characterizations of painters. The selected films are:

- Barry Lyndon (Kubrick, 1975)
- Melancholia (von Trier, 2011)
- The Mirror (Tarkovsky, 1975)
- Shutter Island (Scorsese, 2010)
- The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover (Greenaway, 1989)
- Dreams (Kurosawa, 1990)

Analytical approach

For each film, specific frames are identified and analyzed through a comparative visual matrix, examining: composition, positioning of figures, lighting, color palette, and symbolism. The analysis is grounded in the following theoretical frameworks:

- Image semiotics (Barthes, Metz)
- Theories of composition and visual perception (Arnheim, Gombrich)
- Intermedial and intertextual approaches (Mitchell, Dalle Vacche)

- Directorial aesthetics and authorship (Wollen, Sarris)

The focus is on how painting serves not merely as a source of inspiration, but is transformed into a meaningful structure that shapes the audience's aesthetic and narrative experience.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the selected films shows that references to painting function as conscious directorial structures that enrich the visual language of cinema. These interconnections are not limited to superficial similarities; rather, they serve as tools to construct complex narrative, philosophical, and emotional meanings. In each case, painting acts as an iconographic code that influences the atmosphere, character development, and emotional rhythm of the narrative. Below, six representative case studies are analyzed, each demonstrating a different way this visual dialogue between film and visual art is conveyed.

Barry Lyndon (Stanley Kubrick, 1975)

Kubrick's film represents one of the clearest examples of using painting as both a narrative and visual structure. In collaboration with cinematographer John Alcott, Kubrick employs natural lighting and specially designed lenses to create frames that evoke the style of Rococo and Neoclassical painting. Inspirations from artists such as Gainsborough, Hogarth, and Wright of Derby are translated into a rigorous construction of composition, color schemes, and figure placement.

The painterly references are not decorative but act as semiotic signs that articulate criticism of the social structure and the moral emptiness of the aristocratic class. The omniscient narrator and static compositions reinforce this sense of detachment. Painting functions here as a "moral frame" that structures the meaning of the scene and positions the viewer before a frozen and critical depiction of reality.

Visual comparisons strengthen this approach:



Figure 1, Mr. and Mrs. Andrews by Thomas Gainsborough (c. 1750) compared with an outdoor frame from Barry Lyndon (Kubrick, 1975)

Comparison: The human figures placed in an open natural setting, the diagonal lighting, pastel chromatic harmony, and balanced composition—all of these elements are adopted by Kubrick in the landscape and portrait scenes of the characters outdoors. In both images, a couple is positioned at the edge of a vast rural landscape, illuminated by diffuse natural light, and dressed in ways that reflect emotional states (Barry's grey costume signifies a young man who has not yet aligned himself with the aristocratic class he aspires to). The landscape is expansive and symbolic, suggesting nature as a backdrop for relationships structured by hierarchy and control. The positioning of the bodies and the physical distance between them implies emotional dissonance and a tense relationship that unfolds further throughout the narrative.



Figure 2, Marriage A-la-Mode: The Marriage Settlement by William Hogarth (c. 1743) compared with an interior scene from Barry Lyndon (Kubrick, 1975)

Comparison: In this satirical series of six paintings, Hogarth denounces the aristocratic class as corrupt and devoid of genuine emotion. Kubrick adopts this same critical and ironic tone through a cold narrative style and interior scenes marked by pronounced symmetry, where characters remain physically and emotionally distant. As in Hogarth's work, the human figure in the film serves more as a social symbol than as an individual with free will, while the surrounding environment reflects the hypocrisy and emptiness of aristocratic status.



Figure 3, Penelope Unraveling Her Web by Joseph Wright of Derby (c. 1783) compared with the scene of Barry by his child's bedside under candlelight, Barry Lyndon (Kubrick, 1975)

Comparison: Both compositions depict a solitary figure in contemplation, immersed in low lighting and focused on a quiet act of devotion. In the painting, Penelope is seated and bent over her weaving, symbolizing patience, waiting, and sacrifice. Similarly, Barry is shown sitting alone, watching over his sick son—one of the few scenes in which he expresses genuine human sensitivity. The Baroque candlelight, the bowed posture, and the still atmosphere create a strong aesthetic and thematic parallel to Penelope, highlighting introspection, emotional depth, and unspoken commitment.

Melancholia (Lars von Trier, 2011)

Lars von Trier constructs a cinematic structure laden with visual iconography, where references to classical painting function as both narrative and emotional elements. The film opens with a slow, dialogue-free tableaux vivant sequence that clearly evokes the forms of Western painting and sets the mythical and existential tone of the artwork.

These references are not mere illustrations; they act as signs that articulate the psychological fragility of the characters and their position in the face of catastrophe. Justine appears in iconic poses, most notably in the scene where she stands submerged in water—a visual citation of Millais's Ophelia—conveying a sense of silent surrender. Meanwhile, the contrasts of light and shadow and the dramatic lighting in several frames recall the Baroque aesthetics of Caravaggio, heightening the emotional tension and spiritual atmosphere.

Von Trier employs the language of painting to structure the film's emotional narrative, transforming the cinematic image into an icon of inner experience and human helplessness before the cosmos. Thus, Melancholia represents a profound case of intermedial fusion, where visual art becomes a narrative and philosophical architecture.



Figure 4, Ophelia by John Everett Millais (c. 1851–52) compared with the frame of Justine in water, Melancholia (Lars von Trier, 2011)

Comparison: Both images depict a female body surrendered to water, in a passive but symbolically charged position. Von Trier uses this visual to express Justine's psycho-emotional state, while the approaching planet Melancholia acts as a metaphor for depression and impending, inescapable catastrophe.

The Mirror (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975)

In The Mirror, Tarkovsky constructs a poetic cinematic structure in which every frame functions like a living painting. Although the film does not directly cite specific works of art, it is permeated by a profound iconographic sensibility and a clear influence from Orthodox icon aesthetics and classical Russian painting.

The calm compositions, diffused lighting, and frontal positioning of the female figure—especially in scenes featuring the mother—evoke Byzantine icons of the Virgin Mary, where silence, patience, and emotional depth are conveyed through visual stillness. This iconographic sensibility is further enhanced by the use of soft lighting and dark tones in interior spaces like the kitchen or offices, reminiscent of the Baroque techniques of Rembrandt and, in some cases, the dramatic influence of Caravaggio in rendering light and the human face.

Tarkovsky does not reproduce paintings—he thinks like a painter. The camera acts like a brush that paints memory, emotion, and time. Through composition and a slow rhythm, the film becomes a contemplative space where the director's personal experience is elevated to a universal level. Memory, loss, and the collective soul are visually processed in a rare cinematic language, where painting is not an object, but a way of thinking.



Figure 5, The Mother in the Kitchen, The Mirror (Tarkovsky, 1975) compared with Theotokos Icon (12th century)

Comparison: The central figure of the woman, the soft light on her face, and the silent atmosphere create a composition with deep spiritual resonance. It implies devotion, sensitivity, and resilience—qualities that render the mother a near-iconic figure within the protagonist's memory.

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover (Peter Greenaway, 1989)

Peter Greenaway's film is an extreme example of intermedial fusion, where every frame is conceived as a moving painting. Trained as a visual artist and art historian, Greenaway constructs a Baroque cinematic universe in which lighting, color, symmetry, and bodies form deliberately composed images inspired by painters such as Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer, and the Flemish masters of still life.

The film's spatial structure is divided into three distinctively colored zones: the yellow-orange kitchen (warmth and art), the red dining room (power, violence, passion), and the blue restroom (solitude and reflection). The movement of characters through these spaces creates a narrative flow reminiscent of passing through different paintings, each with its own emotional and symbolic density.

Objects on the dining table—fruit, meat, utensils—clearly reference 17th-century Flemish still life compositions and symbolize consumption, decadence, and destruction. These are not merely decorative details but components of an iconographic framework that reinforces the film's core themes.

Greenaway composes each frame as a living installation, freezing characters in poses that evoke static paintings. The static or slowly moving camera respects the internal structure of the composition. In this way, the film is not simply influenced by visual art—it becomes a visual act itself, where painting and cinema coexist in a new form of storytelling.



Figure 6, Supper at Emmaus by Caravaggio (c. 1601) compared with the dining room scene (The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover, Greenaway, 1989)

Comparison: Both scenes are set around a long table, illuminated by a strong lateral light from an unseen source, and feature theatrically arranged figures whose gestures and postures carry narrative weight. Greenaway lights the human body and skin with dramatic precision, creating effects similar to Caravaggio's chiaroscuro—the contrast of light and shadow symbolizing violence, eroticism, and human conscience.

Shutter Island (Martin Scorsese, 2010)

In Shutter Island, Martin Scorsese uses visual aesthetics as a reflection of the protagonist's psychological state. The film constructs a hallucinatory space where reality and illusion coexist through indirect references to Symbolist, Expressionist, and Surrealist painting. Fragmented compositions, diffused lighting, and the use of muted or vivid colors serve as indicators of inner tension.

Visual elements inspired by Edward Hopper—empty corridors, isolated buildings, and solitary human figures—create a sense of emotional isolation and detachment from reality. These frames act as semiotic signs of spiritual lethargy and mental enclosure.

Meanwhile, the nightmare scenes, featuring twisted bodies and decomposing faces, evoke the sensibilities of Francis Bacon and Egon Schiele. Through visual distortion, Scorsese represents emotional disintegration and the impact of trauma on the protagonist.

The painting references are not direct but form an internal visual language that permeates the film. The stylized environments with Hopperian aesthetics reflect a cold and empty reality, while fantasies with warm lighting and gentle movement resemble the ornamental intimacy of Klimt. These visual contrasts symbolically construct the character's mental fragmentation—

between memory and denial, guilt and reality.
Unlike the structural approaches of Kubrick or Greenaway, Scorsese uses painting to explore consciousness. His camera is mobile, often subjective and emotional, creating a visual experience that does not reproduce painting but feels it as a psychological state.



Figure 7: The Kiss by Gustav Klimt (c. 1907–1908) compared with the dream scene with Dolores, Shutter Island (Scorsese, 2010)

Comparison: The scenes with Dolores (the protagonist's wife), bathed in golden, pale light and slowly consumed by flames, recall Klimt's aesthetic—especially in the use of textures, golden hues, and the iconic positioning of the figure. The woman appears as a symbolic presence—idealized yet unreachable—a sign of guilt and longing that scorches the protagonist's conscience.

Dreams (Akira Kurosawa, 1990) - "Crows" segment

The "Crows" segment from Dreams is one of the most direct examples of intermedial fusion between cinema and painting. In this episode, an anonymous character—representing Kurosawa himself—physically enters the visual universe of Vincent van Gogh, experiencing the painting from within.

This cinematic journey involves the recreation of some of Van Gogh's most famous works, such as Wheatfield with Crows, The Bedroom, and his self-portraits, rendered in a visual style that embraces the texture and chromatic palette of the original paintings. Kurosawa uses digital animation and color blending to create a space where the canvas becomes a filmic stage, and the film becomes a sensory experience of painting.

In this case, the painting is neither a reference nor an illustration—it is the very environment in which the narrative unfolds. Kurosawa does not recount Van Gogh's biography; instead, he transports the audience into the artist's emotional perception, through a wordless sequence constructed with a calm rhythm and poetic sensitivity.

The artist appears as a tragic and haunted figure (played by Martin Scorsese), while the protagonist experiences, through color and movement, what cannot be described in words: a painful relationship with nature, an obsession with color, and the power of art to capture the ungraspable.

““Crows” is a unique instance where film becomes a tool for entering the artistic consciousness of a painter. It is a clear example of the transformation of a painting into a cinematic sequence and demonstrates the potential of visual art as both narrative structure and emotional space.

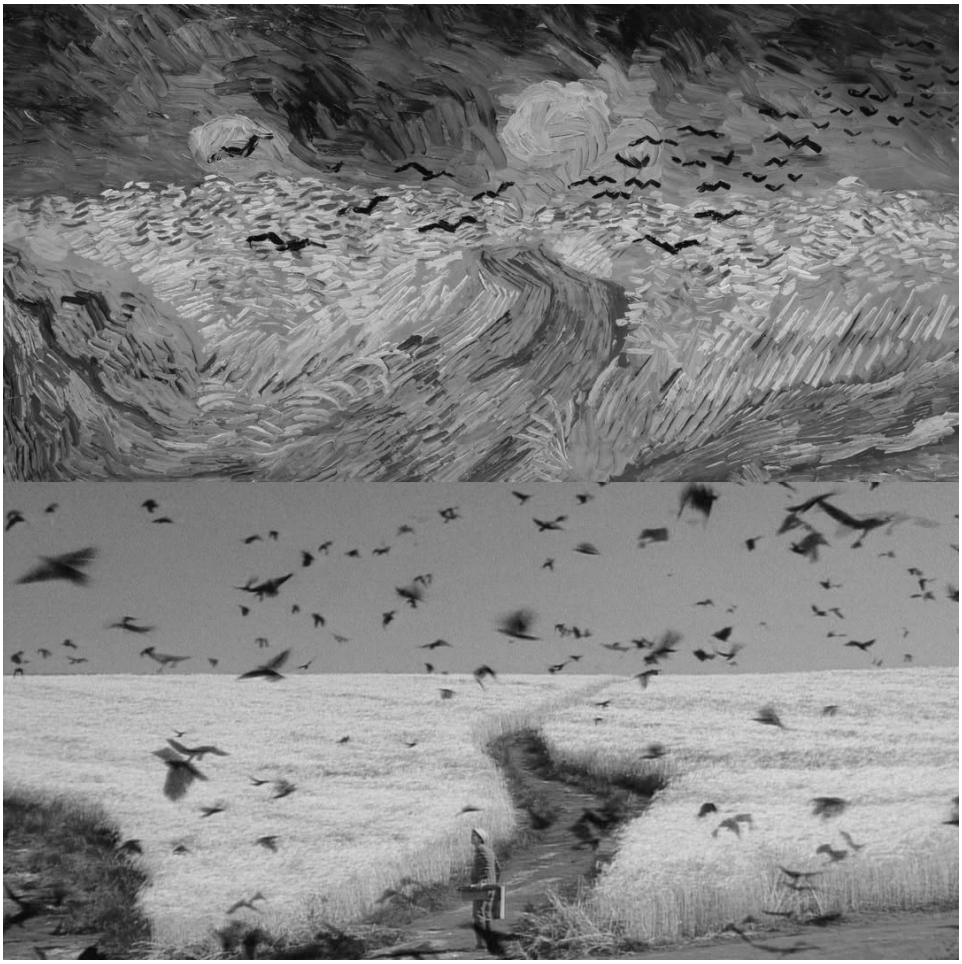


Figure 8, Wheatfield with Crows by Vincent van Gogh (c. 1890) compared with the “Crows” segment, Dreams, Kurosawa (1990)

Comparison: Kurosawa recreates the field and skies with intense colors and deliberate camera movements that mimic Van Gogh’s brushstrokes. This enhances the sense that the viewer is not merely watching a film but stepping inside the painting, experiencing the artist’s subjectivity firsthand.

Painting as narrative structure: reflections across directorial styles

In all the cases analyzed, painting functions not merely as a visual source but as a semantic and emotional structure that shapes the director's cinematic language. Auteur filmmakers use painting in different ways—from direct citation (Kubrick, Greenaway), to symbolic and emotional evocation (Tarkovsky, Scorsese), to full immersion within its universe (Kurosawa). These approaches reflect not only individual stylistic choices but also reveal how visual art interacts with cinema to construct layered meanings. Painting is thus transformed from a static image into an active narrative element, enriching the visual experience and creating an intermedial dialogue that reinforces the role of directing as an authorial act driven by aesthetic and philosophical awareness.

Conclusion

This study aimed to uncover how classical and modern painting is interwoven with cinematic storytelling in the works of contemporary auteur filmmakers. The findings reveal that references to visual art are not merely decorative elements or aesthetic homages, but integral components of the director's strategy for constructing visual, emotional, and philosophical meaning. The directors analyzed—Stanley Kubrick, Lars von Trier, Andrei Tarkovsky, Peter Greenaway, Martin Scorsese, and Akira Kurosawa—develop an active relationship with painting, transforming it into a symbolic language of narrative.

Through comparative visual and semiotic analysis of film frames and the artworks they reference, the study concludes that:

- Painting serves as an iconographic code that guides viewer interpretation and deepens the semantic meaning of the scene;
- Painterly references function as deliberate compositional structures that shape atmosphere, character development, and dramatic tension;
- This interaction generates a dynamic intermedial dialogue in which painting, as a static medium, produces new meanings through cinematic motion and montage.

The analyzed cases represent different forms of this visual dialogue:

- As compositional reproductions of well-known paintings (Barry Lyndon and Gainsborough);
- As emotional reflections of psychological disintegration and inner experience (Shutter Island with references to Klimt and Bacon);
- As direct immersion into the world of painting and its cinematic experience (Dreams – "Crows" segment);
- As the construction of a filmic installation with intentional references to Baroque painting (The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover and Caravaggio);
- As an aesthetic of visual and iconographic sensitivity that structures collective memory (The Mirror);
- As a mythical emotional architecture of inner states (Melancholia).

Through these forms, painting is transformed into an active narrative component that expands the function of the director as a visual author and fosters a complex interaction between artistic media.

Recommendations for further research

1. Broaden the analysis to include painting in commercial films, animation, and contemporary TV series.
2. Examine the impact of modern and contemporary visual art on postmodern cinema and emerging media like video installations and VR.
3. Study how audiences respond to art references—whether painting evokes emotional or cultural resonance.
4. Investigate gender representation in classical-style compositions, focusing on how the female figure's role changes from painting to film.

In conclusion, the interaction between painting and film is more than a process of citation or aesthetic resemblance. It represents a profound narrative and visual interweaving that gives auteur cinema a new aesthetic and philosophical dimension. This intermedial relationship positions film as a space of visual memory, personal experience, and cultural reflection—transcending the traditional boundaries of linear storytelling.

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From Words to Images: Visual Interpretation of Narrative and Emotion in Film

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Abstract

While words primarily construct meaning mainly in a linear and symbolic way, film creates meaning through manipulation of space, time, and the immediate power of the image. This paper examines how cinematography transforms words into images and explores the complex relationship between language and visual storytelling. Behind every expressive cinematic image lies a deep understanding of narrative structure. Filmmakers—specifically cinematographers—interpret not only the emotional tone of a screenplay but also its rhythm, central theme, and structure, translating key narrative moments and character relationships into images that clarify the story for the viewer. While the screenplay offers dialogue and description, it often leaves emotional nuance and rhythm open to interpretation. The cinematographers operates within this space, using their experience to guide decisions on the use of cinematic tools—such as lighting, composition, camera movement, lens choice, and more. More than just a technician—as often used mainly in academia—the cinematographer is, first and foremost, a visual storyteller. Their work is rooted in the screenplay, interpreting subtext and aligning their personal vision with that of the director. An internal emotional shift in a character may be reflected through a gradual change in lighting, while a climactic point may be emphasized through dynamic camera movement. These choices stem from an intuitive and analytical understanding of narrative structure. Drawing on examples from contemporary cinema and insights from professionals in the field, this paper explores how cinematographers blend visual instinct with narrative logic. It argues that the cinematographer's role is essential in transforming written emotion into a sensitive visual experience—turning the screenplay into something not only understood, but deeply felt.

Keywords

cinematography, storytelling, narrative, cinematic, technique

Introduction

The creative vision and interpretation of the cinematographer are fundamental to transforming a screenplay into a unique visual experience. As Brown (2016) points out "cinematographers are not merely image recorders - they create a visual language that conveys meaning, atmosphere, mood, and subtext in itself - without relying on narration, dialogue, sound, or further explanation.". Their work is crucial in bringing a story to life through composition, lighting, and movement, directly shaping how viewers perceive the film. This creative process is called "interpretation and visualization." It involves making creative decisions about the film's tone, atmosphere, and emotional impact, along with its deeper meanings. To explore how cinematographers turn a screenplay into a visual product, we look at how they interpret the script. They work closely with the director to develop the film's visual style and make visual choices that help tell the story. Mamet (1991) suggests that choices regarding camera angles, movement, and lighting significantly impact how audiences understand events. Elements like depth of field, color palette, and framing are fundamental to the visual presentation of a screenplay. By making these choices, the director of photography turns written words into a full visual experience, enhancing cinema's unique power (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). George Bluestone (1957) notes the main difference between novels and films is the medium used: novels rely on language, while films rely on visuals. Although music and dialogue add to the experience, he believes visuals is where the power of this medium lies. The strength of visual language in film lies in how it conveys abstract ideas, like hope or emotions, compared to novels which use the word. These ideas must be shown through actions, facial expressions, and visual details. Films focus on visible outcomes – actions and reactions stemming from inner desires and thoughts (Arijon, 1991).

Literature review

A cinematographer's job is to turn a story's emotions and ideas into something people can see and understand. This process starts right when the script is read, even before the sets are built or any technical plans on how to shoot are thought of. The director of photography needs to picture the entire script, bringing out its emotions and guessing how these will move the audience. It can be tough to explain their work because it combines art with complex camera techniques. Writers like Syd Field (1984), Robert McKee (1997), and Linda Aronson (2001) have explored how scripts are crafted, focusing on how acts and characters develop to make stories engaging. Following Aristotle's "Poetics" ideas, many experts view scripts as a mix of events and emotions, where every action and line are carefully placed to give the audience a specific experience. However, these studies often look at the structure and drama of screenplays but don't show how to turn these words into visuals. This paper aims to fill that gap by examining how emotions and tensions in a script are turned into film language. Experts like Carl Plantinga (2009) and Torben Grodal (1997) emphasize the role of emotions in shaping viewers' experiences. Films aim to create certain emotional responses, with Grodal noting how stories and visuals trigger these feelings. It's important to think about viewers' emotions from the first reading of a screenplay to guide how they will feel. Vivian Sobchack (1992) adds that viewers don't just see emotions in films but physically feel them through rhythm, lighting, and movement. All these scholars agree that films are understood through the senses, and viewers see moving images as a way to understand the story. Blain Brown (2016) and Gustavo Mercado (2010) discuss both practical

and theoretical sides of cinematography, considering the cinematographer as a co-author who sets the film's emotional tone by managing its look. They argue that cinematography involves not just technical decisions but also emotional and storytelling choices. This study suggests that as the script is transformed into visual experiences, it undergoes an emotional and creative process, making script analysis essential for interpreting and translating stories.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research approach, focusing on how the screenplay of a film is translated into aesthetic and technical decisions that convey emotional meaning. A qualitative research framework is employed to investigate and articulate how the emotions and narrative structure of a screenplay are shaped through visual language. The study applies descriptive content analysis, with a specific focus on the process of script breakdown. The primary objective is to explore how the words of a screenplay - particularly those expressing emotions, psychological states, and character development - are visually interpreted, emphasizing the cinematographer's role in this transformation. Central to this investigation is the analysis of the screenplay not merely as a tool for narrative structure construction, but as a conduit for communicating the characters' emotional experience at a visual level to the viewer. All forms of cinema, much like all film theory, envision an "ideal spectator," which implies a predefined relationship between the spectator and the specific features of the image on screen. Even though the apparent emphasis is often placed on concepts such as "meaning," "interpretation," and "appropriation," it is important to recognize that cinematic storytelling presupposes a particular spectator-image relationship (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015).

Results and Discussion

Movies tell stories using a series of images, which influence how we think and feel. A single image, called a shot, gains meaning from its composition, lighting, and depth of field. When two images are placed together, they can create a new meaning known as the "third meaning." Filmmaker Lev Kuleshov demonstrated this with his famous experiment, the "Kuleshov Effect." Juxtaposing images reveals meanings not present in individual shots, helping us follow movie narratives. In films with many images, their connections become complex, affecting not just adjacent shots but also those in different parts of the film. Each shot contributes to the film's overall meaning, enriching its storytelling based on the narrative context. In narrative films, every visual choice supports the story, unlike documentaries or reality shows, where events are less controlled. A film starts with a story, but its emotional impact depends on how it's visually presented. It's not enough to just have a plot; the story must feel real on screen. This reality is achieved through visual elements like lighting, camera movement, shot composition, editing rhythm, and the overall atmosphere. Characters and their desires, needs, challenges, and emotions are the heart of films. Analyzing a script this way reveals an emotional guide for visual decisions. You consider how close the camera should be or what lighting best conveys uncertainty, joy, or tension. For example, cold colors in lighting can show loneliness, smooth camera movement might suggest emotional ups and downs, and closed frames can indicate tension. For instance, if a character feels isolated, they may be shown in a tight shot with darkness and strong lateral lighting, visually expressing that feeling. This helps viewers connect with the character's internal experience. A crucial question is: from whose perspective the story

is told? - the narrative point of view. Usually, it's from the main character's viewpoint, but it can change. In Hitchcock's "Psycho," the protagonist dies midway, altering the perspective of the protagonist. It's essential to know whose eyes we're seeing through. Clarifying this guides filmmakers in choosing how to present each scene. Edward Branigan (Branigan et al., 2010) argues films shape how viewers experience them. Viewers have an active role and aren't just passive; they interpret films in their own way. This interaction means the film influences the viewer, and the viewer also determines how they interpret a story. A cinematographer approaches a film by asking, "What do I want the viewer to feel at this moment?" This question guides many choices, from framing to using music or playing it in silence. Shane Hurlbut, a respected cinematographer, says "If you make every choice as a cinematographer based on the character's emotions - whatever he or she is going through - you will hit a home run every single time. It is your guiding light. Everything about cinematography is emotion." (Hardy, 2013).

Text Analysis: The essence of a film's theme, regardless of its nature, is not always expressed through words. Often, it is the presence of emotional beats within the frame that imparts a deeper meaning. In this sense, script analysis becomes more than a technical reading; it demands sensitivity to what is not said but rather felt, to subtext. A detailed study of the text lies at the heart of its photographic interpretation. The cinematographer must always approach the script with the viewer in mind, focusing on the nuances of dialogue and underlying meanings. In fact, even when filming a seemingly straightforward interaction between two characters - a common occurrence in virtually every film - what is truly being captured is the essence of their relationship. Visually this essence may be conveyed through the camera's distance from the characters, the lens chosen, the presence or absence of camera movement, and a wide array of tools available in the cinematographer's arsenal.

Dramatic Structure: Movies are crafted with a rhythm that not only follows the sequence of events but also moves with the flow of emotions, which rise, fall, and sometimes burst forth. These high points of emotion, known as "beats," indicate shifts in emotion and help create tension and connection in the story. If these beats are clearly set in the script, the director can highlight them through camera work, editing, or sound. Breaking down the script's main ideas helps answer key questions like: What do we want viewers to understand after watching this movie? Why was it made, and what message does it convey? The main idea should be summarized in one or two sentences, often called the film's theme. This theme may be directly expressed in the dialogue, particularly but not always near the end of the film, and should capture what the story is about, regardless of how complex the plot is. Take, for instance, The Shawshank Redemption (1994). The character Red, played by Morgan Freeman, says, "Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane." This line captures the film's theme: hope is a powerful but risky emotion, especially in the difficult situations the main characters meet.
Director's Vision: The director, alongside the cinematographer and the creative team, reads the screenplay as an emotional score. Their focus extends beyond meaning to include rhythm, tone, and the internal pulse of the story. This explains why two films based on the same script may appear and feel entirely different because visual translation is a deeply interpretative act. Everyone who reads the screenplay during the pre-production phase engages with it by analyzing its structure, the characters emotional journey and the underlying themes and ideas. Although each professional's approach to analysis may vary depending on their role in the project, they all contribute to a shared vision of the text. Beyond the actors, the creative heads of the principal

departments in a film production dedicate significant attention to script analysis. The film's composer, for instance, spends a great deal of time studying the script and discussing it with the director to grasp the emotional arc of the protagonist. The cinematographer must possess a detailed understanding of the narrative and the emotional development of the characters to effectively apply visual techniques. The collective aim is the same: to narrate the same story through the unifying vision of the director. This detail may seem self-evident, but film contains so many structural and dramatic nuances that two different readers may conceive the same scene entirely differently. If, during a film's screening, a dramatic moment is perceived as comedic by the audience, such a misinterpretation would be unacceptable from a filmmaker's standpoint. For this reason, each collaborator invests time and effort in understanding and interpreting the screenplay as precisely as possible (Bang, 2022). The director must ensure that every creative department aligns with his/her vision of the script. The cinematographer, in turn, is responsible for maintaining that shared vision throughout all stages of production. As Dill (2016) observes, the cinematographer is the director's primary advisor for the visual narration of the story

Personal Sensibility: Cinematography is more than just turning words into pictures. It's a creative art form that involves interpretation, emotions, and careful visual choices. Cinematography tries to create meaning through scene arrangement, lighting, timing, and overall atmosphere. The cinematographer takes the script and brings it to life visually, turning its emotions into images. This process isn't simple; it involves technical and creative choices that affect the film's feeling and meaning. Together, these choices form a visual language that doesn't use words but can deeply move the audience. As Gordon Willis said, "A cinematographer is a visual psychiatrist, influencing the audience… making them think what you want them to think, painting pictures in the dark." (Fauer, 2014). Cinematographers bring their own life experiences, memories, cultural background, and emotions into their work. For instance, the concept of loss can look very different based on the cinematographer's background. One might use slow pacing and cool colors, while another might choose chaotic scenes and bright lighting. Skilled cinematographers often have visual patterns that appear in their films. Robert Richardson, for example, is known for using strong pools of lighting in movies like (Natural Born Killers, Born on the Fourth of July, Casino, Nixon). John Toll often uses shades of blue in night exteriors in films like (Braveheart, Legends of the Fall, The Last Samurai, Harriet, and Seraphim Falls). This personal touch is what gives a film its unique voice, making it not just accurate in telling the story but also true to its emotional core.

Conclusion

This study approaches the screenplay not merely as the textual basis for filming, but as a complex structure of emotions and rhythms that demands emotional translation through the image. This includes an investigation into why certain images are presented in a specific way and how they might have been constructed differently. Semiotics - established by Ferdinand de Saussure - provides a framework for this analysis, studying signs and their meanings within a societal context. Drawing from structural linguistics, semiotics examines how internal relationships shape the structure and function of sign systems. While language is the fundamental model, semiotic inquiry extends to all forms of visual, verbal, or hybrid communication, including myths, films, advertisements, and more. The objective is to understand how the emotional elements of a character embedded within a screenplay influence the visual decisions made

during the cinematic realization of the story. Lighting, camera movement, framing, and color are considered tools to emphasize or transform the emotions conveyed in writing. To fully grasp the role of cinema in society, we must examine how it constructs reality and generates meaning through the visual discourse. Through the analysis of concrete examples and theoretical references, this paper seeks to highlight the close relationship between screenplay structure and the film's visual form, as well as how the internal emotions of characters shape the cinematic language. It is based on the conviction that cinematic storytelling cannot be fully understood without considering how the written words in a screenplay are transformed into visual language. By treating script analysis not only as a structural reading but as an emotional interpretive process, this study emphasizes the collaboration between narrative content and the visual form it assumes on screen. Through an exploration of existing literature and the development of a theoretical framework linking emotion, structure, and image, this study aims to demonstrate that:

- The image is more than an illustration of the screenplay; it is an interpretive act shaped by how the filmmakers - particularly the director of photography - understands and emotionally perceives the characters.
- The emotions described in the script are not only functional to the development of the plot but also serve as guides for constructing the film's visual language. They act as signals for aesthetic and technical choices that shape the film's atmosphere.
- Narrative structure directly influences the visual rhythm and the way dramatic tension is presented through visual means.

In this study, we learn about the importance of really understanding a screenplay. It's about more than just the structure; it's about feeling the emotions and experiences it tries to create for the audience. By linking film theories with real-life filmmaking, this study helps us see films as a powerful way to show human feelings through images. It considers movie images as active creators of experiences rather than simple copies of reality. Films are not just about turning words into pictures; they create something new where language transforms into the art of seeing and feeling. Making a film requires collaboration among many creative individuals, technicians, and producers. Since creation by nature is personal, the collaborative process which stands at the core of realizing a movie can be challenging. Still, a professional must develop his/her ideas and also adapt them to fit the director's vision. The goal is to create a film that tells a story and offers an experience to the audience. The relationship between the director and the cinematographer is crucial in making a film. Along with the production designer, they are the main creators of the film's visual style (Brown, 2016). The cinematographer faces the challenge of balancing the director's vision with their creative ideas. They need to combine technical skill with artistic expression to make visual choices that support the film's themes and characters. Their interpretation should enhance the story while offering a new perspective that gives the film a unique identity. In an interview, when Quentin Tarantino asked director Terry Gilliam about how he achieves his distinct style in all of his films, Gilliam replied that he already has the vision in his mind. He just needs to hire, a skilled cinematographer, a skilled production designer, a skilled costume designer, and communicate his vision to them. Once he's done that, they take it further and raise it to the moon (Matthews, 2024).

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Macbeth: An Experimental Intervention in the Scene of King Duncan's Murder

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Abstract

This paper presents a practice-led research exploration of the directing practice of staging King Duncan's murder in Macbeth by Shakespeare, specifically the scene of King Duncan's murder, a tragic scene underplayed or staged in productions of the play. Based on professional directing practice and taking recourse to established practice in performance studies, this research addresses a significant gap in theatre practice: the practice of underplaying the dramatic potential of this central scene. By close textual and subtextual examination of Shakespeare's words, historical practice analysis of staging, and rehearsal-room experimentation records, this research builds and validates a general directorial model for the murder scene. Unlike Shakespeare, who for many reasons presents the murder of the king offstage and foresees its presentation to the audience onstage through the narration of others, the author of the work and the director of the work at the same time, has tested himself by bringing the murder of King Duncan directly to the stage. The research employs Schön's reflective practitioner approach to examine spatial configurations, temporal rhythms, psychological motivations, and technical elements that optimize the dramatic impact of the scene. Proxemics and the actor's physicality, greatly increase the audience's emotional action, rather than traditional interpretations that limit the murder to off-stage action, or so-called abstract movement. This paper demonstrates how such directorial choice-making brings thematic elements of guilt, ambition, and moral corruption at the center of Shakespeare's tragedy into focus. The contribution of the analysis is dedicated to theatrical practice and theoretical debate at a number of levels by bridging the gap between working stage practice and analytical research, offering directors a methodologically sound way of reconsidering the moments of violence in classical texts.

Keywords

dramaturgical intervention, transformation, scenic invention, proxemics, actor's physics

Introduction

William Shakespeare's tragedy "Macbeth" remains one of the most powerful works of world literature, challenging generations of directors, actors and scholars with its dramatic, psychological and ethical complexity. The scene of the murder of King Duncan, as one of the most culminating moments of the work, constitutes a key point not only for the development of the event, but also for the exploration of human nature, power and the consequences of violence. However, the staging of this scene has often been the object of different directorial approaches, ranging from symbolic minimalism to deep emotional realism.

This paper offers an in-depth directorial analysis of the scene of the murder of King Duncan, relying on an integrated approach that includes textual analysis, the director's reflective practice and direct experiments in the rehearsal process. The paper first examines traditional interpretations of scenes of violence in Shakespeare's plays, analyzing how these scenes have been treated in history and the impact they have had on the audience. This section draws on Schön's reflective theories and contemporary literature on the implementation of scenes of violence in theatre.

In the directorial analysis section, the paper provides a detailed look at the staging choices, including textual fragments, spatial configurations, temporal rhythms, the use of lighting and sound, and the actors' body language to convey emotions and dramatic tension. The discussion focuses on the impact of spatial configurations on the psychological tension of the characters, the importance of temporal rhythm for dramatic intensity, the use of technical elements to emphasize thematic and emotional changes, and the effectiveness of different approaches to violence on stage.

The paper also addresses the practical and theoretical implications of the findings, suggesting that staging violence in a conscious and reflective manner enhances the emotional impact and deepen the viewer's experience. Through this approach, the author aims to contribute to theatrical practice and academic discourse on the implementation of scenes of violence in classical works, by offering a new directorial model that transforms the way violence is presented in theater.

The research presents a new approach to the staging of King Duncan's Murder, placing violence at the center of dramatic and psychological attention, and challenging traditional practices that minimize or stylize it. The methodology used, based on reflection and direct experiments, provides a valuable guide for directors and scholars who aim to explore the depth and complexity of classical works on the modern theatrical stage.

Literature Review

Shakespearean drama, and particularly key scenes such as the murder of King Duncan in Macbeth, have been the subject of extensive analysis. Traditional studies emphasize historical practices of staging and textual interpretation (Brockett & Hildy, 2007; Cunliffe, 1982). These studies have followed the evolution of performance rules, but have often overlooked the critical insights that a director's reflective process can bring to the reinterpretation of scenes of dramatic violence in particular or in the staging as a whole.

At the heart of this research is Schön's Methodology of the Reflective Practitioner (1983). Schön's work describes how professionals engage in an ongoing process of reflection in action and reflection on action, a process that is deeply relevant to the art of directing. His framework helps to articulate the often intuitive decision-making processes that underlie creative practices. In the context of stage direction, reflective practice encourages directors to systematically analyze their creative instructions, from spatial configuration to actor movement, and to interactively refine their approaches based on rehearsal experiences and theoretical insights (Schön, 1983). Later scholars have expanded on Schön's ideas, emphasizing that reflective practice not only validates but also enhances artistic performance by bridging the gap between empirical observation and creative intuition (Finlay, 2008). This practice-based research tradition is particularly valuable in theater, where experiential knowledge, drawn from hundreds of rehearsals and performances, remains a critique in its own right (Smith & Fentress, 2018; Witts, 2001). By integrating textual analysis, historical context, and reflective methodological approaches, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive directorial analysis of the scene of the murder of King Duncan. The reflective practitioner model, in particular, serves as a framework for translating decades of practical directorial experience into structured academic research, thus ensuring that the integrity as well as the rigor of the rules of scholarly inquiry are maintained.

Methodology

This study uses a practice-based research methodology, integrating the analytical rigor of academic research with the experiential knowledge gained from experience in professional practice. The methodology consists of three interrelated components: textual and historical analysis, reflective practice based on Schön's framework, and a systematic evaluation of experiments conducted in rehearsal.

Textual and historical analysis

A careful reading of the play and the textual actions that explain the murder of King Duncan forms the foundation of this analysis. This step involves analyzing Shakespeare's language for dramatic, thematic, and emotional markers that inform staging suggestions (Greenblatt, 2004). In parallel, historical analysis of documented stagings (Brockett & Hildy, 2007; Cunliffe, 1982) is conducted to contextualize common practices and identify traditional approaches that prefer to leave this moment of violence in the background.

Reflective Practitioner Methodology

At the heart of this research is Donald Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner approach, which permeates the entire directorial process. Reflection in action is used during rehearsals on stage, where immediate observations and intuitive interventions are documented. Reflection on action is then carried out through detailed written diaries and analysis of video recordings during rehearsals, enabling a critical assessment of each directorial decision made during the process. This reflective process not only helps to refine staging choices, but also provides a methodological bridge that connects practical experience with theoretical analysis (Finlay, 2008).

Experiments conducted during rehearsals of the play

The methodological framework also includes systematic, evidence-based experiments that examine the impact of various directorial solutions, such as the actors' actions on the dramatic development of the scene of the murder of King Duncan, the experience of the event, proxemics, articulation, voice timbre, soundtrack absorption, atmospheric lighting reflection, and so on. Each experiment is designed to capture specific technical variables and to clarify their impact on stage language and audience engagement. Data from these experiments are recorded through rehearsal notes, direct observation, and reactions from the cast and specific audience during rehearsals. This ensures that the findings are empirically based and directly applicable to the practice of staging classical texts. Overall, this methodological approach enables a theoretical-practical analysis, converging two spaces, that of performing arts and scientific research.

Results and Discussion

The directorial analysis of the scene of King Duncan's murder in Macbeth represents the main findings of this practice-based research. Shakespeare's text provides important directorial cues that have historically been little exploited in the context of relegating the act of murder itself to the background.



Figure 1, Scene before the murder, Play "Macbeth", National Theater, Prishtina, 2024

Selection of text fragments
Scene VII, Act I, contains clear instructions on the manner of murder:

LADY MACBETH
"...When Duncan is asleep
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him, his two chamberlain's
Will I with wine and wassail so convinee.
That memory , the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeek only: when in swinish sleep
Their drenched nature's lie, as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
The unguarded Duncan ? What not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt Of our great quell?" (Shakespeare, 2009).

The scene preceding Duncan's murder (Act II, Scene 1) contains rich psychological material in Macbeth's soliloquy over the dagger:

"…I go, and it is done: the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven, or to hell…" (Shakespeare, 2009).

This hallucination creates a heightened psychological state that informs the subsequent event in the room where Duncan sleeps - the Aftermath. Similarly, Lady Macbeth's declaration that she would have killed Duncan herself:

"...Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't.. (Shakespeare, 2009).

The above textual arguments that come out of the mouths of the characters provide sufficient dramaturgical material to achieve the dramatic and emotional staging of the act of the physical execution of the king on stage.
Through a detailed textual analysis, it is identified that Shakespeare deliberately confronts the peaceful state of sleep after a party accompanied by a lot of drinking with the violent murder - a contrast that in this case has been used scenically to achieve absolute credibility and the most natural development of the play during the moment of execution.



Figure 2 (left) and figure 3 (right). The moment of the murder, and the moment after the murder of King Duncan, Play "Macbeth", National Theatre, Prishtina, 2024

Spatial Configuration and Proxemics

Reflective analysis of the evidence experiments revealed that the spatial relationship between Macbeth and Duncan during the murder scene significantly affects dramatic tension. Three spatial configurations were tested:

1. Distance/Disconnected Configuration: Macbeth positioned at a distance from Duncan, emphasizing the psychological load. Proving a metaphorical-symbolic method of murder.
2. Intimate/Close Configuration: Macbeth in physical proximity to Duncan, emphasizing his personal nature eager for violence.
3. Dynamic/Transitional Configuration: Macbeth moves from distance to proximity, physically manifesting his macabre nature and through proxemics, his psychological load.

The third configuration proved to be more effective in communicating the character's inner struggle. As noted in this analysis: "The physical approach from distance to closeness reflects Macbeth's psychological journey from hesitation to action, creating a visual metaphor for his moral deterioration" (Director's Notes, 2024). This finding is consistent with Hall's (1966) proxemic theory, which suggests that spatial relationships communicate psychological states, a theory that is rarely applied to the Shakespearean stage, namely in most works in which scenes of violence are not reflected in the play.

The Temporal Rhythm of the Murder Scene

The temporal structure of the murder scene has been a critical directorial consideration. Traditional settings often rush or completely skip this moment. However, experimental evidence has shown that a deliberately measured tempo, what Brook (1968) would call "sacred time", significantly enhances the impact of the scene. Three distinct temporal approaches were tested:

1. Compressed time: a rapid execution of the murder, emphasizing Macbeth's efficiency and determination.
2. Extended time: a deliberately slowed sequence, highlighting Macbeth's hesitation and internal conflict.

3. Rhythmic variation: alternating between moments of stillness and sudden action.

The third approach proved most effective, creating what Barba (1995) describes as "dramatic tension through temporal contradiction". This discovery challenges the conventional wisdom that violence in Shakespeare must be stylized, suggesting that this rhythmic complexity better serves the psychological depth of the scene.

Technical elements; lighting, effects and the integration of metaphors

The reflective practitioner methodology revealed that technical elements, particularly lighting and sound, play crucial roles in realizing the full dramatic potential of Duncan's murder. Experiments with lighting showed that the gradual transition from warm, yellow light (representing Duncan's peaceful sleep) to harsh, cold lighting during the murder effectively communicates the thematic shift from order to chaos (Director's Notes, 2024).

Instead of musical accompaniment, which tends to aestheticize violence, experiments with the delicate sounds of the owl through the sorcerers rely on the textual context of:

LADY MACBETH
"Listen! Quiet! That was the shriek of an owl
-an omen of death like the bell struck at
midnight by the night watchman
before the cell of a man
condemned to death." (Shakespeare, 2009).

Another symbolism is the sound of blue blood flowing from the king's "body." This approach allows the audience to experience the murder through Macbeth's heightened sensory perception, reinforcing the subjective nature of this violent act.

Proxemics of the actor

The physical execution of violence requires special attention in this scene. Therefore, three approaches to the murder itself were analyzed:

1. Stylized/symbolic violence: abstract movement that simply alludes to the murder rather than executing the murder.
2. Realistic/graphic violence: detailed physical execution of the stabbing.
3. Psychologically approached violence: Focus on Macbeth's physical transformation during the act, not the use of the dagger, but the strangulation of the king.

The third approach proved to be the most effective, with the actor playing Macbeth physically manifesting the character's psychological transformation through subtle changes in posture, breathing patterns, and muscular tension. This finding aligns with Lecoq's (2000) concept of the "body as primary text," suggesting that the actor's physique can communicate psychological states more effectively than stylized depictions through graphic means (fencing).

Compared to traditional staging approaches, the framework developed through this research shows considerable advantages. In a controlled rehearsal environment, two different stagings were presented to an audience of theatre professionals:

1. The traditional approach with the murder occurring offstage
2. The framework developed through this research

This comparative assessment confirms the central thesis that a psychologically and metaphorically nuanced staging of Duncan's murder enhances the dramatic depth but also the

emotional resonance of the scene, challenging the historical-traditional tendency to minimize this key moment in Shakespeare's tragedy.

Discussion

A directorial analysis of the scene of King Duncan's murder in Macbeth provides important insights that extend beyond this specific moment in Shakespeare's tragedy to broader considerations of the staging of violent scenes in classical plays, directorial methodology, and the integration of practice and theory. This discussion explores the implications of the findings, addresses limitations, and considers the possibilities of future staging for both theatrical practice and academic research.

The findings from this practice-based research challenge conventional approaches to macabre murder scenes in Macbeth and in Shakespeare's work as a whole, suggesting that the author's tendency to minimize or stylize this scene based on historical circumstances represents a missed opportunity for dramatic and emotional impact on the audience. The effectiveness of the proposed framework, with its emphasis on psychological transformation, proxemic relations, and temporal manipulation, supports Worthen's (2003) assertion that "performance does not simply 'express' the text, but actively constitutes its meaning". By bringing the murder into focus rather than relegating it to off-stage actions, this approach transforms what has traditionally been treated as a mechanism of plot and act of betrayal into a key moment of character development and exploration of dramatic action.

The success of the psychophysical approach to the scene of violence aligns with contemporary performance theory, particularly Barba's (1995) concept of the "positioned body" and Garner's (1994) phenomenological approach to embodied performance. As demonstrated in the test experiments, the actor's physical transformation during the execution of the murder on stage communicates Macbeth's psychological state and psychic transformation more effectively than the violence executed offstage. This finding suggests that directors should reconsider their approaches to scenes of violence which, in the context of the political circumstances of the time when they were written, are dramaturgically structured, perhaps even in forms that do not help the actor to achieve maximum credibility of his dramatic action and make it difficult for the director to achieve maximum emotional impact through their performances.

Conclusion

The essence of the research attempts to reexamine the treatment of violence in Shakespearean tragedy through an in-depth directorial analysis of the scene of King Duncan's murder in Macbeth. Using a practice-based research methodology that integrates textual and historical analysis, evidence-based experiments, and Schön's reflective practitioner framework, the paper offers a new perspective on one of Shakespeare's most important but traditionally underappreciated moments.

The findings reveal that a deliberate staging of Duncan's murder, emphasizing dynamic spatial configurations, temporal fluidity, and the embodied psychological journey of the actors, can transform the scene from a peripheral plot mechanism into a powerful tool for dramatic and

emotional expression. The integration of reflective practice not only legitimizes directorial intuition, but also provides a systematic platform for enhancing dramatic impact.
Moreover, the implications of this research extend beyond Macbeth to other classical texts where violence often plays a central role. Here, the potential of reflective, practice-based methodologies to bridge the gap between academic research and theatrical production is highlighted, thereby contributing to both scholarly discourse and practical direction.

In conclusion, this analysis reaffirms the importance of reimagining scenes of violence in classical texts, not as a simple shock tactic, but as a pivotal dramatic moment that, when staged with purpose, can redefine audience engagement and reshape interpretive narratives. Future research could further explore the applicability of this framework to different dramatic productions and contexts, paving the way for a richer integration of reflective practice into theatre study and performance.

Based on the findings, several recommendations for further research can be made that address the intersection of directorial practice and academic research. First, the methodology developed here could be applied to other moments of violence in Shakespeare's plays, such as the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear, the murder of Desdemona in Othello, or the murder of Julius Caesar in Julius Caesar, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how violence functions dramatically throughout this canonical piece. Second, longer (more voluminous) studies of full-length productions using this stage approach could provide insights into audience reception and the long-term impact of these directorial choices on the interpretation of Macbeth.

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Diaphragmatic Breathing, the starting point of the training path toward effective public and stage speaking

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Abstract

This paper will provide a detailed comparison between diaphragmatic breathing and instinctive breathing. The comparative methodology will be supported by two sample subjects, one person who has started vocal technique training and is currently working with diaphragmatic breathing, and another subject who has no knowledge on the topic and performs instinctive breathing for physiological functioning.
The thesis of the comparative viewpoints will be unfolded through the following questions:

- What are the effective and positive aspects of diaphragmatic breathing, and what is its visible impact?
- The importance of its correct usage and training for interpreting dramatic pieces on stage or delivering speeches and public appearances across various media.
- Breath control as a key to achieving successful performance—free of panting, gasping, or irregular breathing and exhalation patterns—also directly relates to the concrete work with the material being interpreted or read.
- The training journey toward achieving breath control and managing it across a range of physical and stage activities, whether in rehearsal or during live performance.
- The importance of body posture and preparatory exercises at different stages of the breathing process.

The aim of the paper is to provide a professional overview of the initiation of a working method toward full breathing through exercises and training sessions, using a comparative format that promotes effective stage and public speaking. The topic and the study are inspired by the misuse of language and the speech apparatus in stage and public discourse.

Keywords

vocal technique, diaphragmatic breathing, irregular breathing, instinctive breathing, physiological functioning.

Introduction

The meaning of the word “breathing”:
Frymëmárrj/e, -a — feminine noun; plural: -e(t) 1. the inhalation of breath through the lungs; the act of inhaling and exhaling air from the lungs: breathing pathways; light, heavy, deep, fast, frequent breathing.

The above is the definition of the word breathing from the Albanian language dictionary. The word breathing is widely used in everyday vocabulary across all social groups, age ranges, and professions. Doctors talk about breathing during medical check-ups with patients; athletes talk about breathing during training and matches; psychologists during therapy sessions; yoga instructors during their guidance, and so on. Breathing is a physiological act. Through it, oxygen is absorbed and carbon dioxide is expelled. This act is divided into two phases: the inhalation phase and the exhalation phase.

Inhalation causes the expansion of the rib cage, while exhalation causes its contraction. During the inhalation process, the following occurs in the body: the diaphragm contracts and lowers, the chest cavity enlarges, the abdomen is compressed and pushed outward, and the muscles involved in air intake—the throat and facial muscles—contract. The distance between the ribs increases, the chest protrudes forward, and the thoracic cavity expands while the lungs increase their volume.

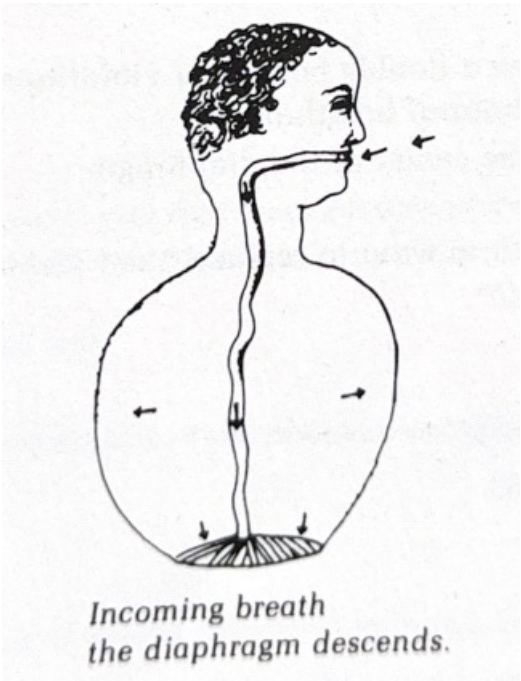


Figure 1. Lowering of the diaphragm during air intake

During Exhalation: The diaphragm rises, returns to its resting state, reduces the space in the thoracic cavity, and the abdomen returns to its original position. The ribs and sternum return to place due to their own weight, while the distance between the ribs decreases. The thoracic cavity narrows, and the lungs return to their initial position due to their elasticity and weight, pulling the rib cage and diaphragm back with them.

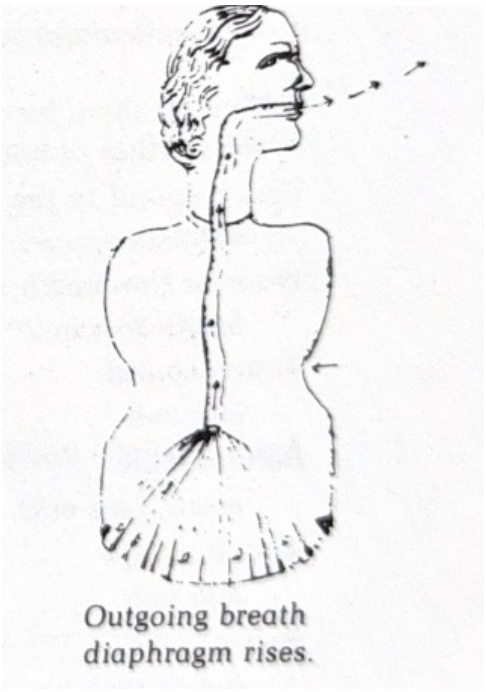


Figure 2. Raising of the diaphragm during exhalation.

Diaphragmatic breathing is achieved through the contraction of the diaphragm muscle, which leads to the increase and expansion of the chest in its vertical diameter. It is worth emphasizing that this is the natural form of breathing during sleep. Costal-diaphragmatic breathing, also referred to in professional terminology as artistic breathing, is considered the most effective form of breathing. This is because the expansion of the rib cage occurs in two diameters—horizontal and vertical—thus achieving far greater efficiency than any other form of breathing, while consuming significantly less energy. Unlike instinctive breathing, this method develops a refined breathing mechanism with endurance during stage speech.

Diaphragmatic breathing is essential in theatrical performance and is one of the fundamental techniques without which actors cannot master the profession. Its impact is direct on voice control, physical stamina, grounding of expression, and emotional power.

Methodology

To explain and provide a concrete example of the methodological approach mentioned in the abstract, I refer to a group of six first-year acting students, with whom I work as an external lecturer for the course “Speech Technique.”

The work with the students begins with a few games or exercises based on the instinctive breathing that every person naturally possesses. Once they become aware of this process, the path toward learning diaphragmatic breathing begins—most importantly, transforming it into their new normal for both practice and stage performance.

The work begins with posture:
Unlike any other profession, an actor does not possess an external working instrument. Musicians have their instruments, painters have their brushes and easels, and so on. The actor's only instrument is their own body, their own being.

Therefore, the training process begins with exercising how that instrument is held and positioned. The feet must be firmly grounded, the knees unlocked—this is essential to feel the true weight of the body and to allow the energy to flow freely throughout the body, which must remain balanced. It is crucial that the knees are unlocked—not bent or collapsed. The space between the feet should be equal to the width of the shoulders in order to find full body balance. The shoulders must be relaxed, not contracted.

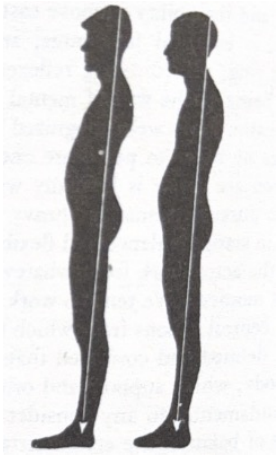


Figure 3. Comparative posture with locked and unlocked knees.

As Jerzy Grotowski states and is quoted in Freeing the Natural Voice by Kristin Linklater:

"You cannot be completely relaxed as is taught in many theater schools, because someone who is completely relaxed is nothing more than a wet dishrag." As also quoted in the same book: *"The goal is to eliminate unnecessary tension so that the muscles are free to respond to the impulse," as shown in the illustration.*

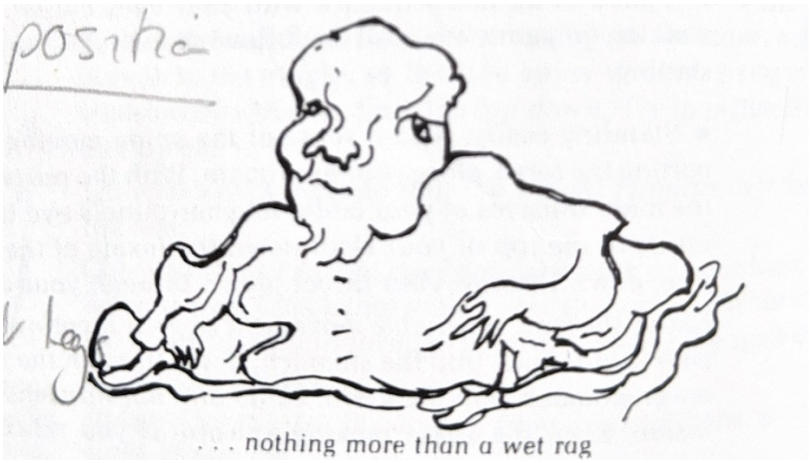


Figure 4. State of excessive relaxation.

To further release the upper part of the rib cage, we try the following exercise:
With knees unlocked, arms relaxed, gaze forward, and the spine and back held upright, we slowly begin to lower the head toward the chest as if it is being pulled down by gravity. First, the chin comes to rest on the chest, and then, focusing attention on the vertebrae of the spine, we feel each one dropping in sequence—like on an abacus—one after the other. The arms remain relaxed, hanging freely, until the fingertips of both hands touch the ground. At this point, we feel the full weight of the body surrendering to the earth. Breathing throughout the entire process continues to remain natural.

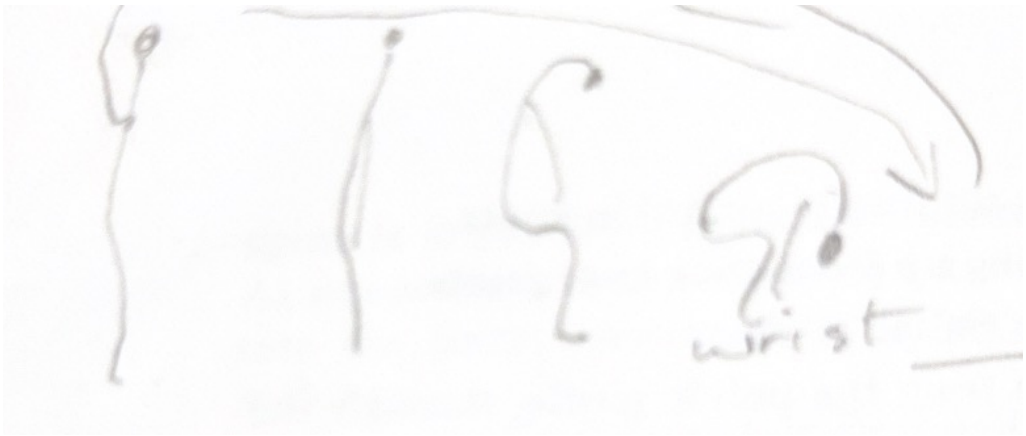


Figure 5. Vertebra-by-vertebra process.

After this position, we return to the starting posture by beginning the lift from the last vertebra of the spine that was lowered. The vertebrae are restored one by one into place; the head and arms remain relaxed until they too return to their natural position. The head is the last to come back up. At the end of this exercise, the body feels more relaxed, the head feels as if it is being pulled upward, and the body has taken on a new alignment, ready to engage with more focus and intention. After trying out this posture and training ourselves to get accustomed to this new

state and position, we make the first attempt at diaphragmatic breathing. We inhale through the nose and imagine that behind the nostrils lies an elevator, which fills with air, closes its doors, and descends as low as possible—then opens again to release the air into the diaphragm. Here, we will visibly see and feel the abdomen expand and push outward.

One hand is placed on the abdomen and the other on the chest, where we will clearly sense the difference in movement. The abdomen moves forward, while the chest remains still. After several attempts to begin internalizing this breathing, we notice that the amount of air taken in through diaphragmatic breathing is several times greater than the amount taken in through instinctive breathing. While learning and technically securing the air's path from the nose to the diaphragm, we then begin to release the air through the mouth with the sound "fff." A crucial next step after trying and understanding diaphragmatic breathing is breath reservation.

What is breath reservation and how is it performed?
Breath reservation is the conscious use of the air volume during speech, in order to preserve the energy of the breath to support a full sentence, phrase, or monologue—without interruption from panting, gasping, or inconsistent rhythm. During training, one of the most effective exercises is holding the breath for a few counted seconds (mentally) after fully filling the diaphragm, and then releasing it immediately with the sound "fff."

Another exercise consists of inhaling in timed segments until the diaphragm is completely filled—for example, "inhale one," "inhale two," "inhale three," and so on, practicing a linear and gradual intake of breath. Then, after the lungs are filled, we repeat the retention of the breath using the same timed segments—"hold one," "hold two," "hold three"—and finally exhale again with "fff." The exercise can also be done lying on the floor, where the spinal column and each vertebra are aligned flat against the ground, the shoulders are well supported, the knees are pointing toward the ceiling, the arms are relaxed, and the palms rest open against the floor. This position simultaneously serves as a relaxation exercise.



Figure 6. Timed diaphragmatic breathing on the floor.

We begin again by filling the diaphragm with air, and we will once again feel the abdomen inflate and expand. The inhalation is done in timed segments—"inhale one," "inhale two," "inhale three"—we hold for the same count, and then release with the sound "fff."

Another method tested with students for applying diaphragmatic breathing is the etude. Once the understanding and experience of the breathing exercises have been established, the etude becomes a more loaded and expanded form of practice. This involves selecting certain physical actions, imitating elements of nature or sounds of various objects, mechanisms, or actions that are sustained or accompanied by breath or by the sound "sh." In this format, the student who is training to learn diaphragmatic breathing and breath reservation has the opportunity to engage all elements of their working instrument in fulfilling a physical task. Placing the student in specific physical conditions that require training in order to avoid potential tensions or to test the amount of air needed to perform the actions becomes an effective and meaningful exercise.

Results and Discussions

After each practice exercise, a concrete discussion with the students focuses on distinguishing the difference between how things were before being introduced to the new term and approach, and how they are after practicing the exercise. The practical work with each individual follows the same conceptual structure, but the outcome varies from person to person, as the intellectual accumulation of knowledge and its actual execution naturally require an appropriate amount of time and space, depending on each individual's intellectual and physical capacity. At the end of a cycle of training sessions or instructional hours that carry a specific topic and terminology, the comparative model of "before the exercise" and "after the exercise" becomes clearly observable.

If we refer to the comparison between the initial posture at the start of training—with locked knees and an unrelaxed spine, where exercises like vertebra-by-vertebra roll-downs were completely unfamiliar to the group—now, the knees remain unlocked, the spine holds its proper alignment, and the physical readiness to act is significantly improved. The students themselves notice the results and express their satisfaction with this first step toward their professional journey. Surprising—and almost unbelievable—is the transformation that occurs after experiencing diaphragmatic breathing, when the control is no longer dependent on placing a hand on the abdomen, or when the breathing, outside of the exercise setting, becomes natural throughout the student's entire training and daily life process.

Its reservation and use in exercises—especially in etudes or games that demand full engagement of the breath and its controlled release to complete an action—show that fatigue is notably reduced compared to when the same exercises are performed using instinctive breathing. Take, for example, a game with a balloon, where students try to launch the balloon as high as possible by fully exhaling and emptying the diaphragm, coordinating the release of breath with the motion of the balloon.



Figure 7. Breathing combined with an imaginary ball kick.

The focus is on the full exhalation of breath, without contraction, without unnecessary tension in the arms, shoulders, neck, or jaw, but rather to dominate nature—just as Shakespeare says in one of Hamlet's monologues: "Training dominates nature." What we observe during the discussion, after trying the exercise first with the balloon and then imagining it without the physical object, is that the students' engagement increases—because once full control over the object is lost, they begin to improvise based on its imagined presence.

The Etude: A Concrete and Active Foundation for Applying Acquired Knowledge

Another active discussion arises during the professional studio work when students are given specific etude tasks—for example, finding a sound, improvising the noise of an object or process, and accompanying it with physical action and vocalized sound, activating the actor's entire instrument and involving elements of diaphragmatic breathing. This type of breath-based etude carries a different degree of difficulty than an etude developed within the actor's craft class, where the student physically interacts with a concrete object—identifying its weight, shape, color, function, etc.—and builds a narrative around it.

What becomes apparent in this process is the challenge of finding the key to the action and coordinating it with movement and sound, making the process more competitive within each individual. The effort to understand this as an important component in the preparatory exercise list for effective stage or public speaking begins here—with the full process of inhalation and exhalation coordinated with strong physical action, in order to determine the precise quantity of air required to activate the entire instrument, as well as the amount or force of movement needed. Rationalizing and economizing breath is the foundation of vocal technique.

Group Work and Individual Training

The beginning of this process is important to take place within a group because the participants often come from a different cultural background—one unfamiliar with this working model and the need for such specific and refined training, as described in detail throughout this text.

First, learning and processing these elements in a student group setting, where the exercises take the form of playful activities, lends a sense of discovery and enjoyment, uncovering a new dimension of fun—yet with professional intent and without the stiffness that might accompany a more formal, individual development process. Second, the interaction among students—most of whom had no prior knowledge of diaphragmatic breathing—builds trust and strengthens the learning experience from one exercise to the next. It also stimulates a healthy sense of competition, motivating students to progress from one phase to the next and to complete the full sequence of exercises. Third, group work supports and enhances each student's individual effort to achieve the desired results more efficiently. Fourth, the art of acting and theater develops primarily in relationship with a partner, so the new student who has just begun this journey benefits from discovering and experiencing these elements firsthand. This in turn reduces the likelihood of emotional blocks or discouragement during training. Fifth, practicing in a group setting fosters a more inspiring and dynamic studio atmosphere, as the energy invested by everyone increases its overall intensity—encouraging observation and mutual interaction. Sixth, the process of self-monitoring and exercise observation becomes simpler and more easily absorbed when students work in front of one another. They witness whether or not the exercise is functioning, and then test that same outcome within themselves. Seventh, the creation of a creative group dynamic lowers the level of muscular tension and reduces stage fright, allowing students to overcome the initial challenge of understanding and developing the exercise. Because, beyond every intellectual framework, the actor's art is the art of doing.

But can it be achieved only in a group setting and what role does individual preparation play? Without individual preparation and independent training, none of this is possible. This process demands special attention and focused concentration, which is another crucial element in this kind of work. The exploratory process, the continuous effort to make each element fully functional within the actor's personal instrument, leads to the most fruitful outcomes. Without ongoing individual advancement and careful observation—such as how much the diaphragm actually moves, how much the air volume changes from day to day, how the difficulty of breath reservation diminishes, how the breath becomes more natural through repeated practice, how well it coordinates with movement, the positioning of the knees, the placement of the shoulders, or the sensation and alignment of the spine before and after exercises—there can be no mastery. Recording and reflecting on all of these changes in memory or in writing helps ensure a more confident group performance and a clearly visible result.

Conclusions and Recommendations/Expectations.

At the beginning of the work—or after a few short sessions where the understanding of the elements begins to develop—the student, whether an aspiring actor or simply someone undergoing this speech technique training, often seeks immediate results and tends to form the belief that they already understand and master the element and this is where neglect often begins. The greatest challenge to overcome in individual work—both physical and cognitive—is precisely this: "Training dominates nature," as Shakespeare states. The tendency to minimize the implementation and reinforcement process of diaphragmatic breathing and other foundational elements reduces overall performance quality. The suggestion is for this work to become a short daily ritual—a few minutes each day in which attention and concentration are fully dedicated to the process of diaphragmatic breathing control, muscular release, and readiness for stage performance because these exercises are the starting point of what each person ultimately seeks in preparation for stage or public confrontation.

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Appendix

The images are taken from Kristin Linklater's book Freeing the Natural Voice and from the student practice process.

Directing and the Director on the Albanian Stage through the Work of Director Pandi Stillu

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Abstract

The purpose and focus of this study is director Pandi Stillu in the context of his time, as the first director of Albanian stage art, emphasizing the inclusion of Albanian women in acting, and offering a comparative analysis of the artistic works he brought to the stage. This will be done in reference to the challenges that stage art faced during that period. The central research question is: "What were the trials that Pandi Stillu faced in staging the first Albanian theatrical productions?" One of the most culturally difficult tasks was selecting actors, taking into account professional, gender-based, and cultural criteria. Furthermore, the importance given to the cultural dimension of female representation in stage art was delicate, as the audience perceived the actress not only as a personality but also as a capable interpreter of roles, developing the character of a drama or comedy. The findings of this study will focus on the theatrical works staged by Pandi Stillu, as the first Albanian stage director, highlighting the difficulties, obstacles, and challenges he encountered in presenting works within the context of socialist realism. All the analyzed works are thematically organized in chronological order and evoke the importance of founding the National Theatre, the challenges and journey of director Pandi Stillu in promoting the National Theatre, as well as his role as a promoter of Albanian dramaturgy. The Conclusion of this paper will be based on the findings from his artistic productions, creative work, and analytical reflections on these theatrical pieces, which, beyond their national significance, clearly refer to the concept of staging theatrical art irrespective of political and ideological contexts.

Keywords

theatre, female actress, stage art, political and ideological context

Introduction

After World War II, Albania was involved in a strong process of ideologization of art, where theater was conceived as a means of propaganda and education and plays had to convey clear political and moral messages. Directing was forced to operate within a narrow aesthetic framework, where spontaneity and experimentation were often considered questionable. The history of Albanian theatre after the Second World War is fraught with tensions, transformations and multiple challenges, reflecting the interplay between state ideology and demands for artistic development. In this complex context, the figure of director Pandi Stillu emerges as one of the most important and influential personalities of the Albanian theatre stage, not only for the innovations he brought to directing and theatrical aesthetics, but also for his progressive approach to the role of women in art. Pandi Stillu's artistic activity, with special emphasis on his contribution to the affirmation of female actors on the Albanian stage, through a critical and interdisciplinary approach, explores how his directorial works helped build a more open, inclusive and human stage, in a period when art was often limited by the rules of socialist realism.

However, within this reality, artists such as Pandi Stillu found fine and clever ways to construct a distinctive directorial language, which stayed true to the demands of the time, but at the same time, brought a psychological depth and an emancipatory spirit to the treatment of characters and themes.

The paper is built on a qualitative approach of historical research and cultural analysis. Archival sources from the National Theatre and documents written by Stilu's contemporaries, as well as interviews with actors and art researchers, have been used. Also, the contents of the theatrical works staged by him have been analysed, to identify the dominant themes and directorial methods that characterize his style. The use of narrative and biographical analysis helps to understand the formative role of his figure for the Albanian stage and theater school.

Pandi Stillu and his directorial philosophy

In May 1945, the Professional State Theatre was established, which would later be called the People's Theatre. Pandi Stillu contributed to the professional development of the troupe, organizing drama courses and carefully selecting the actors who would form the basis of the National Theatre. He did not stop only at the selection of actors, but built a work philosophy which emphasized cooperation, dedication and the demand for quality. Pandi Stillu was noted for a directorial approach that attached great importance to the construction of the characters, the internal rhythm of the work, as well as the close collaboration with the actors. He was a master of dramatic reading and interpreting text through a sensitive human and social lens. For him, directing was not a technical exercise, but a process of creation where the director became the spiritual leader of the troupe and the guide of the emotions that would be conveyed to the audience.

Stillu believed that theatre should speak to the soul and conscience, raising questions and not just providing answers. He paid attention to symbols, subtexts, silences, and constructions of dramatic tension through small but meaningful gestures.

Pandi Stillu returned to Albania in 1946 and immediately began working as a director at the People's Theater, deeply influencing the structuring and direction of this institution. The first group of actors were amateurs, mostly young people coming from several different areas of Albania and most of them were men and without professional education in the field of theatre. This group was initially named "Central Theatre Group", an organization which continued until 1947 when the theatre institution was named the People's Theatre (today the National Theatre), with the following actors: Mihal Popi, Gjon Karma, Mihal Stefa, Nrek Shkjezi, Liza Vorfi, Behije Cela, Ndoc Meshkalla, Hasan Reci, Prokop Mima, Nikola Panajoti, Besim levonja, Lazer Filipi, Andon Pano etc. During 1945, the Drama Course began to operate within this institution, a course for the professional improvement of amateur actors.

In 1946, the drama course began to be taught at the Artistic Lyceum in Tirana, which would be a direct contribution to the increase of the acting mastery of the new troupe of the People's Theater. The first founding actors of the People's Theater troupe and who passed the Drama course would be prominent names of Albanian Theater such as: Andon Pano, Prokop Mima, Besim Levonja, Olga Shuraja, Kadri Roshi, Lazer Filipi Naim Frashëri. The repertoire of the People's Theater from the beginning of its journey was inclined to foreign drama, since in these years the fund of Albanian drama was still fragile and unknown. The theater held four to five premieres per year with about 100 performances which were performed in repertoire and on tour.

Throughout his creativity, Director Stillu, attached importance to working with the text that further deepened it with the creative process, establishing a close collaboration between the opinions of the actors and his directorial concept. The director's approach to listening to the voice of ordinary people during the creative process demonstrates a profound will to build a living theatre, rooted in social reality and collective experience. The search for thoughts and suggestions from the theatre troupe not only enriched his directorial performance but also strengthened the connection between the work and everyday life. This direct interaction with the reality of the time becomes an essential element of artistic success, giving the stage not only authenticity, but also deep social meaning. Director Stillu created the mindset that every actor is an integral part of the troupe and for the play to be successful, everyone should walk at the same rhythm and each role has its weight and the roles complement each other.

Actor Lazër Filipi says this about the work of director Stillu: ... "He worked without noise, without screaming, without getting tired of taking the actor to the role without him/her realizing it. He studied in the Romanian theater, one of the best in the Balkans, and he demonstrated everything in our theater. Role-sharing is half the job. He did this brilliantly because he had known us and shaped us and accepted us for what we had achieved".

The role of women on the Albanian theatre stage

Pandi Stillu's Woman on Stage: From Presence to Protagonism

One of Stillu's most special contributions to Albanian theatre was the way he treated the figure of women. At a time when plays often presented female roles schematically or limited to predetermined functions (mother, working heroine, or faithful wife), Stillu sought to free women from stereotypes and give her fuller emotional, mental, and dramatic dimensions. Therefore,

he created roles for prominent actresses, helping them find their voice on a stage that often favoured male protagonism. Consequently, the actresses directed by him had the opportunity to explore new dimensions of artistic expression, becoming pillars of modern Albanian theatre. In his direction, the female was not an object of sight, but a subject of speech and action. He valued sensitivity as strength, beauty as an expression of inner complexity, and emotional freedom as an artistic necessity (Dervishi, 1995).

This approach not only helped affirm the female actor as an equal artist, but also contributed to the development of a more balanced gender aesthetic on the Albanian scene. Pandi Stillu, who came with the acting experience gained in Romania, where the system attaches a lot of importance to the recruitment of actors in the field, immediately starts the work on the selection of talents by participating wherever he can choose female talents. Among them, he chose Marie Logoreci, Besa Imami, Margarita Xhepa, Drita Agolli, Violeta Manushi, who are some of the prominent names that the director put on stage. Among the memories of the female actresses, we will highlight some of them.

Besa Imami:
..."At the time director Stillu discovered me, I was working in the prime minister's office with an amateur group they were preparing the play "Man is a man". It was by chance that they were missing a maid and they requested me to accept this role. I accepted. Pandi Stillu was looking for female actors. As soon as the play was over, he asked me not to give up my path. I couldn't decide on my own and he came to our house and begged my mother to allow me to become an actress, since, according to him, I was very talented. To be honest, my mother felt bad. She did not allow me to continue because, at that time, people did not look favorably at this profession. The director's insistence and my dreams convinced my mother to allow me to continue on this road" ... (Albanian heart, 2005

Margarita Xhepa:
More..."He was the pioneer of directing in the People's Theater. I came from dilettante groups, and it was Pandi who discovered me, extended his hand to me, and opened the door for me. He was intuitive, but above all he made us believe in ourselves, which was very important at that time"... (Koha Jonë, 1995)

Drita Agolli, when she talks about her first steps in the theater before starting her academic journey in theatre, emphasizes: ..." He worked by observing, selecting, encouraging us... He helped me at every step with the passion and humanity that characterized him... Every time I said I could not do it, he insisted on saying "You will do it"... (Dervishi, 1995)

Violeta Manushi says that:
... "In more than 30 plays that he staged, I have had the opportunity to work in 20 premieres with him. For me, from the very first moment, he was the director, the painter, the scenographer. He was everything. He was the father of the theater... (Dervishi, 1995)

Arsino Ligor (Poro) Bino is one of the first Korça women who studied at the Lyceum of Korça and later in Italy for literature. She wrote several plays and two of them were "New Blood" and "The Daughters of the Shephard". Arsino is the first female Albanian playwright in whom

director Pandi Stillu believed, convincing him that her works had value and deserved to be staged, although her plays were published only after the 1990s. He challenged the time with through the mentality of the female playwright and stage these plays in the Çajupi Theater. The influence of the spectator was powerful, but it was only after the 1990s that Albanian women would begin to freely practice the genre of drama and comedy (staged).

Pandi Stillu with the troupe of actors selected pieces not only from world dramaturgy, but also daring towards Albanian works in which he asked a lot, turning them into works that are still cited today for their direction. The promotion of women to the stage of popular theatre was also of great importance for the creation of the female spectator, absent in the Albanian reality. The participation of women in theatre also helped in the social emancipation of the Albanian society which witnessed the Albanian woman as a spectator in theatre halls since 1946. Female actresses broke taboos in the Albanian society of that time by going on stage and acting with a lot of passion and love which they learned every day from the master director Pandi Stillu. They began to be at the centre of the attention of the Tirana public, taking on a great weight of public opinion but also slowly entering the collective unconscious of Albanian society as beautiful women and stage artists. With his work ethic, the elegance of communication, Director Stillu gave a lot of importance to the formation of an actors' troupe who accepted and respected each other and where women were the protagonists. They influenced that the theatre hall was frequented by high school girls, married women, etc.

The works staged by him in the People's Theatre are numerous, while the first part with female debuts was set at the Aleksandër Moisiu Theater in Durrës "Girl from the Country
" written by Fatmir Gjata in 1953, the operetta "Dawn" at the Morava Theater Theater of the city of Korça, the stage of the TKOB theater on November 26, 1959 the opera "Mrika" with a libretto by Lazar Siliqi.

Directing as an Act of Emancipation: The Aesthetics of Care and Social Consciousness

In director Stillu's work, directing represented an act of emancipation, a form of cultural and human responsibility. He stayed away from sensationalism or unnecessary embellishment, embracing a restrained but deeply emotional style charged with ethical responsibility. He considered actors to be co-creators, not instruments of directorial will, and encouraged them to bring themselves to the stage.

This philosophy of "artistic care" created a working climate in which artists felt valued, heard, and free to contribute. In this way, the stage was no longer just a place of performance, but a place of identity-building, dialogue and emancipation – especially for women, who still faced prejudice inside and outside the artistic space.

In his creativity Pandi Stillu used the methods of the Soviet school (Stanislavki's system), as well as the Romanian system. In 1937, the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Bucharest (Romania) was influenced by the most important developments in the contemporary theory and practice of acting, with a marked influence from the Russian school, especially from the system of Konstantin Stanislavski. The following are highlighted:

- The realistic and psychological approach to acting was the foundation of actors' training.

- The emphasis was on emotional credibility, intrinsic motivation for action, and character analysis.
- Students were taught to create an inner life for the character through "magic siques" (if I were in that situation, what would I do).
- An in-depth study of the text, analysis of scenes, and careful work with the subtext were required.

In addition to the Russian influence, in Romania there were also influences from German and French theater, but also from expressionism. So, Pandi Stillu's method essentially represented a union of Eastern professionalism, Western influences and Albanian reality, transforming theater into a powerful educational and artistic tool for Albanian society.

What distinguishes his approach is his deep aesthetic sensitivity to the character and dramatic structure, as well as his rare commitment to acting preparation. Still's directing was never just a stage setting, but it was an act of performance packed with meanings, an attempt to make theater not only tangible, but also transformative.

Stillu was one of the first to understand that theater is not only an aesthetic product, but also a process of ethical and civic formation. Under his direction, the plays not only respected the structure of the drama and the technical requirements of directing, but also carried a spirit of social engagement, often challenging the ideological conventions of the time, within permissible artistic spaces. This is why his work continues to be studied not only for its artistic values, but also for its contribution to the creation of a critical and reflective spirit within Albanian performing art.

Artistic creativity, chosen repertoire and ideological influence

Pandi Stillu staged numerous plays from international and Albanian dramaturgy. Through his works, he not only chose important social themes, but also set new aesthetic and interpretive standards for the Albanian stage. Pandi Stillu's artistic creativity is divided into five moments: a) Works created under Russian influence; b) Works created with a national character; c) Works created with a social character; d) Works created with a comic character; e) Works from the world repertoire.

a) Works created under Russian influence. Emerging from the war, Albania was part of the Eastern camp and this fact made the Russian influence in the theater visible. Stanislavski, with his system known and appreciated by everyone, but also the work of critics such as Belinski, Lunacharski, etc., had a positive influence on the development of European theater. The newly created Albanian theater, in these years, was under Russian influence and Russian authors were a good support for the drama. Director Stillu chose plays which had an impact on the theatre spectator. Those plays also acceptable by the Albanian state such as:
Gogol's "Marriage" co-authored Sokrat Mio in 1946.
"For Those Who Are at Sea" by Boris Llavrenjev in 1948.
"The Time of Fathers' Youth" by Boris Gorbatov in 1950.
"Voice of America" by Boris Llavranjev 1951.
"The Leipzig Process 1933" by Lev Kompanjec and Leonid Kronfeld in 1955. (Dervishi, 1995)
In 1955, director Pandi Stillu staged the drama "The Leipzig Process 1933", a work loaded with

powerful dramatic tension and strong political messages, dealing with the Nazis-mounted trial against the Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov. But beyond the ideological significance of the work, director Stillu had a deep personal connection to the theme he was bringing to the stage, since in 1943, he himself was arrested by the Nazis and released after six months in prison. This dark experience of suffering and isolation had given him a special sensitivity to understand and express the drama of injustice and the spiritual strength of resistance. Thus, the staging of this work was not just a directorial act, but an act of deep emotion and personal memory, where art and life came together in a powerful testimony in the face of terror and oppression. This work was realized by the actor Andon Pano, relying on the naturalness of the performance. Thanks to the long and tireless work put in by the actor Andon Pano, the actor who interpreted Gjergj Dimitrov, be seen and identified with him. In these works, the director was careful that the interpretation was at the level of the time and the spectator understood and felt the work, intertwining his personal experience as a director with the requirements of the state.

b) Works created with a national character. Pandi Stillu was an unwavering supporter of the development of Albanian dramaturgy with a national character and managed to successfully impose its presence on stage. He attached importance to the national drama because he treated it with a lot of realism, relying on the role and influence that bravery has on the Albanian society. In his memoirs, the actor Vangjush Furrxhi stated that ...”director Stillu from the beginning tried to introduce national plays to the stage. He has the merit of leaving us the best dramatic works”... (Dervishi, 1995)

The drama “The Good Brave with Many Friends” by Sulejman Pitarka, staged on November 27, 1961, was the most prominent for its character and message that also goes to the philosophy of the time. For the first time Director Pandi Stillu uses an epic approach, where he works with historical and social psychology to bring the figure of Skanderbeg, not just as a historical character but as a symbol of national pride. He was also the director of the big scenes, because he gives a lot of importance to the dialogues between the characters to convey important historical values for the time, such as resistance or patriotism. Through this approach, Pandi Stillu emerges as an unwavering supporter of the development of national dramaturgy, managing to successfully impose its presence on stage.

c) Works created with a social character. With the drama “Our Land” Director Stillu marked an important turn in popular theatre, because it moves towards a new directorial concept by connecting the ideology of the time with the national and realistic character. After studying the work, he realized that the greatest strength lay in the use of the northern dialect (gegë), remaining faithful to the reality of the Albanian countryside after the war. Director Stillu attaches great importance to the moments where the whole village gathers in the meeting because only in this way could the circumstances of the time, quarrels, clashes, concepts on the old and the new and above all love for the land all related to the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini be understood. This work marks the culmination of stage performances, where the role of Loke, played by Marie Logoreci, continues to be alive today in the national historical memory for the strength and energy that a woman carries when she seeks to respect herself and marital and tribal morality. While the role of Tuç Maku, played by Loro Kovaci, was a brilliant performance, making the public of the time identify him as Tuç Maku.

d) Works created with a comic character. Romanian theater, immediately after the war, much preferred comedy as an artistic genre that helped to recreate positive emotions in the spectators who had been frightened and sad during the war period throughout Europe. Even in Albania, comedy was preferred for the very circumstances created after 1945, where the overthrow of the (Dervishi, 1995) added to the consequences of the war. Pandi Stillu's first play in the folk theater is "A Pot of Gold" a one-act comedy by Gjon Karma. This play was staged by Director Stillu on 3.06.1946 and required few actors. The author Gjon Karma, an actor who had interpreted many roles in theatre, was also a good connoisseur of the psychology of the time. Triggered by the deep message conveyed by Gjon Karma's comedy, the director decided to enrich the acting game with pantomimic sequences, which emphasized the visual aspects of the story. The work in question puts into play, with subtle irony, the merchants who feel hit by the high taxes that the new Party has imposed. This satirical treatment of reality turned into a source of entertainment for the ordinary public, who through humor felt a kind of compensation for the burden they carried in everyday life. The comedy was presented with simplicity and warmth in front of the Albanian spectator. The comedy "Carnivals of Korca" written by Spiro Çomora was staged on 23.01 1964 and is one of the most prominent comedies of the period of socialist realism. This comedy under the direction of director Pandi Stillu made the roles stand out for the naturalness based on the local identity of the characters of Korça, using their characteristic speech, behavior especially the posture of attitudes, jokes and psychological aspects of the time, where many characteristics of Albanian life before the Second World War were being overturned, especially the dowry (dowry with different characteristics among the Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims) to become a source of joy for the public.

With the comedy "Girl from the Village" written by Fatmir Gjata, director Stillu marks the official opening of the "Aleksandër Moisiu" theater in Durrës on January 11, 1953. In this comedy, actress Ferial Alibali also plays one of the rare actresses for her expression and stage plasticity, who stood out under the direction of director Pandi Stillu.

e) Works from the world repertoire. Studying in Bucharest, where the French influence was evident on arts and culture, helped Molier's Noble Bourgeoisie to be one of the Albanian director's most elegant comedy solutions. The director carefully handles the sarcasm conveyed by this work, pointing out the effect that the power of money has and the power it has over people. Stillus' directorial treatment brings this comedy to the level of the Albanian spectator and the politics that the state exercised in art and culture. Molier's "noble bourgeoisie" is another successful and important step in his directorial career. Aferdita Taçi, who had just finished her drama degree at the Artistic Lyceum, stood out in the role of Lucia, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Zhurden.

This work is still studied today, for three important elements:

1. The choice of actors attaching a lot of importance to the organic side of the performance.
2. The language used by the characters was studied and adapted for each character.
3. The role of Zhurden played by Mihal Popi where the pathological popular humor is perfectly mixed with the sarcasm of the work.

"King Lear " is another work that Pandi Stillu tried and successfully staged. With this play, Pandi Stillu relied on the Albanian psychology for family relationships, a phenomenon which highlighted the Albanian family which was still patriarchal. He focused on the figure of King Lir not only as a royal figure, but as a man with emotional problems, frail and at an advanced age, alone without his wife on his side, a king wounded by the rejection of girls, who blindly believed and this makes him completely lost in the search for true love. This line was chosen very delicately by the director because it fits the ideology of the time. The director's focus on King Lear, who at the end of his life realizes that he has lived in a world full of deceptions and family intrigues and has understood nothing is a directorial approach which creates the artistic tension that conveys all the scenes by connecting them in an unbroken line of artistic emotional tension.

Directorial Method and Pedagogical Impact

Pandi Stillu also has merit of shaping generations of actors. He is one of the three directors who established the "Aleksandër Moisiu" High School for Actors in 1959 at the National Theater, where he himself contributed to the development of one of the main subjects "Actor's Craft". He stands out in his students' opinion for his dedication, training and patience to discover in each of them the artistic personality of the actor. He attaches great importance to understanding and comparing systems, not stopping only at Stanislavski but bringing this school into the Albanian reality and context. His work with students was based on a detailed psycho-physical analysis and gave importance to the expression of feeling and the dynamics of emotions, so that students could understand and rely on the formation of the artistic figure by revealing oneself in the long process of formation and development of the theater actor. One of his students remembers him with these words: "A lecturer with a very approachable smile, but also with great simplicity and human cordiality." (Gjini, 2024) This simple but full of feeling description sums up the essence of Pandi Stillu's figure as a lecturer. He was a master who did not impose knowledge, but shared it with kindness, making the art of directing not an art of power over the stage, but a process of mutual construction, where the student and the master grow together.

Findings, Results, and Discussions

The analysis of Pandi Stillu's work highlights some important features:

- Founding of the first professional theatre troupe: As one of the founders of the People's Theater, he played a key role in consolidating actors and involving women on stage.
- The Inclusion of Women in the Performing Arts: He was among the first to affirm female actresses in full dramatic roles and took care of their education and integration into the stage troupe.
- Pedagogical approach: As a lecturer at the "Aleksandër Moisiu" Higher School for Actors he promoted a model based on Stanislavski's realistic method, but adapted it to the Albanian context.
- Directorial repertoire: Stillu experimented with Albanian and foreign dramaturgy. He brought to the Albanian stage authors such as Gogol, Shakespeare, Boris Llavrenjev, as well as Albanian works such as "The Good Brave with Many Friends" or "Our Land".
- The Emotional and Civic Impact of Art: His direction emphasized the emotional experience of the role and the connection with the social issues of the time. He believed that theater

should influence the moral education of the public.

- Affirmation of national drama and comedy: The plays "Carnival of Korça", "Girl from the Village" and "Mrika" are evidence of his ability to articulate national identity through theatre.

These findings testify to an integrated artistic and educational vision, where the role of the director extends beyond aesthetics to include cultural and civic impact.

Conclusion

Pandi Stillu remains a key figure in the history of Albanian theatre directing , not only for his stage mastery, but also for the lasting impact he had in promoting a theatre with a human face and inclusiveness. In a period filled with ideological limitations, he managed to build a directorial vision that gave dignity to the stage, the actor and especially the woman – as an aesthetic and social subject. Pandi Stillu's creativity and pedagogy represent a cornerstone in the establishment of the Albanian national theatre. His dedication to the inclusion of women in art, the formation of actors, and the multidimensional approach to directing make him an emblematic figure. His work remains a model for Albanian theatre-making and a reference point for further research in the field of performing arts and theatre education. The memory of him as a "silent master" remains a cultural asset that requires constant study and re-evaluation. His work testifies to the possibility that art, even in difficult circumstances, can remain inherently free and contribute to building a more just society. Through his careful and sensitive approach, Stillu brought to Albanian theater a model of directing that combines technical mastery with human feeling, an experimentation with tradition, and equality with beauty. He gave the Albanian scene not only new forms, but also new voices – especially that of the Albanian woman, who thanks to him, became more heard and more visible.

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The Drawer's Playwriting. The Return of Banned Works and the Expectations of the Post-Communist Audience

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Abstract

The goal is to: concretize the role of censorship in Albanian dramaturgy. Since every literary and artistic subject was subject to the propaganda and ideology of the regime, it is natural that drama would also be influenced by this. At that time, in addition to the censorship imposed by the system, was there also self-judgment or self-censorship? The question is: Does " The Drama of the Drawer" exist in our country? At a time when dramaturgy was primarily used as a tool to promote the regime, many playwrights discarded works that conflicted with the official narrative, out of fear of imprisonment or exile. Unfortunately, today we have no opportunity to engage with these works. However, it is crucial to determine whether there is still undiscovered dramaturgy that may exist, perhaps hidden in state or family archives. The results: will be based on the period after the 1990s, when works banned during the communist era returned to the Albanian stage. These works inevitably brought to light elements and events previously unknown to the Albanian audience. But did all these works fully represent the potential that the era demanded? Did they meet the expectations of the new, post-communist audience, eager for a theater free from the constraints of socialist realism? The conclusion: will rely on a thorough study of some of these works that were banned during the communist era but later resurfaced on the Albanian stage. Familiarizing ourselves with these dramas could provide a more accurate perspective on them.

Keywords

regime, theater, censorship

Introduction

In the history of Albanian literature and stage art, few periods are as heavily burdened by aesthetic and political tension as the era of the communist regime. During this time, ideological censorship was not merely a state control mechanism but an entire artistic philosophy that defined the acceptable boundaries of creativity. It was within this repressive climate that what is now referred as "drawer dramaturgy" came into being a form of creative expression that never saw the light for a variety of reasons, primarily due to its critical undertones or perhaps because it failed to align with the aesthetic of socialist realism?!

This paper examines the process of banning, preserving, and reintroducing these works following the political changes of the '90s. The focus lies not only on the historical dimension, but also on the sociological and cultural aspects, analyzing how these dramas were experienced by post-communist audiences, what staging challenges they encountered, and what messages they convey today.

Through an analytical approach, the aim of this study is to understand the importance of today's generation engaging with this legacy, as a means to understand the past, reflecting on the present, and contributing to the construction of a more socially conscious theatre. The return of "drawer dramaturgy" to the stage is not merely an artistic act – it is a gesture of remembrance, a political statement, and a testament to the enduring power of art to survive beyond time and repression. "Drawer dramaturgy," a now-familiar term in Albanian cultural discourse, represents not only a dark phase of censorship and self-censorship in dramatic writing, but also a testament to creative resistance in the face of ideological repression. At the core of this term lies the experience of authors who, constrained by state censorship during the communist regime, were forced to hide their plays in drawers, unpublished and unperformed, writing them in silence with hope for a freer future. The question of whether a dramatic work is primarily a literary piece or one that is shaped with a different kind of audience horizon also remains open for discussion. The dual nature of drama as a genre often conceals the true reasons behind this kind of dramaturgy.

This study aims to examine:

- How censorship and self-censorship functioned in communist Albania, and what consequences they had on theatrical development.
- Which works were banned and why.
- How Albanian playwrights coped with this reality.
- What occurred after the '90s, when these works began returning to the stage.
- How the post-communist audience received these works and what the current expectations are.

Through this treatise, we aim to understand not only the artistic drama of the past, but also the potential for its return as part of a once forbidden art. The revival of banned works is not merely an act of historical and cultural remembrance, but also a necessary way to initiate dialogue with the past—a dialogue still largely absent in Albanian academic and sociopolitical discourse.

Methodology of the Study

Purpose of the Study.
The aim of this study is to analyze the phenomenon of "drawer dramaturgy" in the Albanian context, with a particular focus on:

- How censorship influenced theatrical creativity during the communist regime;
- The role of self-censorship as a survival strategy;
- The return of these works to the stage after the '90s;
- The expectations and responses of the post-communist audience toward these revivals.
- This study seeks to demonstrate how a once forbidden cultural heritage can become a powerful form of social reflection and historical awareness in a democratic society.

Research Questions

1. What role did censorship play during the communist regime in shaping (or suppressing) Albanian dramaturgy?
2. How did drawer dramaturgy function as an act of symbolic and artistic resistance?
3. What aesthetic and thematic characteristics did these hidden works possess?
4. How were these plays reintroduced to the stage after '90?
5. How does the post-communist audience perceive these works today, and do they still hold cultural, artistic, and social value?
6. Were these works banned for aesthetic reasons, or political ones?

Research Method
This study uses qualitative research methods, focusing on:

a) Historical and contextual analysis:
Used to understand the political and social climate of Albania during communism and its impact on performing arts and literary creation.

b) Textual and thematic analysis:
Conducted on key banned or self-censored works (such as those by Dritëro Agolli, Kolë Jakova, Fadil Paçrami, Kasëm Trebeshina, etc.) to explore how messages were conveyed through symbols and metaphors.

c) Chronology of theatrical revivals:
Examines efforts by directors and theaters to bring drawer works to the stage after the '90s, and the impact these productions had on contemporary audiences.

Sources Used

- Albanian dramatic works written during communism (some unpublished or published post-1990)
- Archival documents, interviews, and articles on censorship and Albanian theater
- Academic literature on socialist realism, censorship, and art under dictatorship
- Comparative international studies on censored authors (such as Brecht, Ibsen, Dario Fo)
- Contemporary Albanian literary and theatrical criticism.

Limitations of the Study

- Lack of direct access to some original banned works due to their unpublished status or storage in closed archives.
- Absence of structured data on audience reactions in a statistical manner.
- Difficulty in clearly distinguishing between state censorship and self-censorship, due to lack of documentation.

Censorship in Communist Albania: Socialist Realism as Doctrine and Prison for Art

Historical Context

After the end of World War II, Albania entered a period of communist dictatorship led by Enver Hoxha. Under this regime, censorship became one of the central pillars for controlling thoughts and cultural production. The artist was no longer seen as a free individual reflecting on society, but rather as an "ideological soldier" in the service of the Party.

From the early days of the regime, it was decided that the only acceptable form for literature and art was Socialist Realism, a model imported from the Soviet Union. This enforced realism meant an idealized depiction of reality, where the positive hero was always a worker, peasant, partisan, or a communist figure—while any other aesthetic form was considered dangerous and hostile.

Dramaturgy, as an artistic form that communicates directly with the public, was particularly controlled. Every performance that appeared on stage had to be approved by state institutions: ranging from cultural councils to the Political Bureau.

Forms of Censorship: Institutional Censorship and Self-Censorship

In Albania, censorship operated on two levels:

- Institutional censorship, involved specific structures that banned, erased, or altered works that did not align with the Party line. Often, playwrights were forced to produce revised, more "suitable" versions to pass the censorship filters.
- Self-censorship, an internalized form of restriction. This emerged as a protective mechanism among creators themselves, fearful of the consequences: exile, imprisonment, isolation, or even execution. Self-censorship was often harsher than institutional censorship itself, as artists would limit their ideas from the very inception of the creative process.

Banned Playwrights

During this period, many playwrights faced bans, imprisonment, or exclusion due to their creative work. Some key figures include:

- Dritëro Agolli

One of the most important Albanian writers of the 20th century. He experienced periods where some of his works were censored or restricted by the communist regime due to content perceived as critical of the system or misaligned with the official ideology. "Mosha e Bardhë" (The White Age) is one of Agolli's notable works, addressing themes of change, hardship, and the effort to maintain hope and dignity in a troubled world.

- Kasëm Trebeshina

One of the most significant authors who openly challenged the aesthetics of Socialist Realism. He was considered an advocate of free, philosophically profound art. His dramaturgy was experimental, abstract, and often allegorical, making it unsuitable for the controlling structures. Most of his works remained in the drawer, such as the novel "Stina e Stinëve" (The Season of Seasons) or the play "Dashuri me Peng" (Love with a Burden), published only after the 1990s.

- Fadil Paçrami

A well-known figure in both Albanian art and politics, expelled from the Party after the 11th Song Festival on Albanian national television in 1972. Paçrami advocated for a more open, freer, and modern form of art. He co-authored many plays that were later banned. He was imprisoned for 17 years, and his works were removed from theatre repertoires.

- Minush Jero

He was a playwright and writer, known for his works that challenged the censorship of the communist regime. In 1968, Jero wrote the play "The Brown Stains" ("Njollat e murrme"), which was successfully staged at the "A.Z. Çajupi" Theater in Korçë and won first prize at the Theater Festival. However, after receiving praise from Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, Enver Hoxha harshly criticized the work, calling it a "black stain" on Albanian dramaturgy and banned it due to its "petty-bourgeois elements." On April 30, 1973, he was sentenced to 8 years in prison, following a period of surveillance for anti-communist activities and propaganda against the people's power.

- Skënder Luarasi

A prominent intellectual, translator, and scholar who faced continuous persecution due to his views on theatre and creative freedom. He was labeled a liberal and critical of ideological dogmas. His dramaturgy and translations were not promoted, and for many years he remained a silenced figure.

- Shpëtim Gina

He was an Albanian playwright and writer, known for his extraordinary talent and rich creativity despite his young age. His works, such as the plays "Enemies" "Armiq", "The Weight of Peace" "Pesha e Paqes", and others, challenged the norms of socialist realism and conveyed humanist and pacifist messages. Due to the critical nature of his work, some of these plays were banned by the regime. After his death in a suspicious incident, Shpëtim Gina's name was erased from the official history of the communist regime. His works were banned and never mentioned publicly again. His literary legacy remained unknown to most Albanians until after 1990.

- Kolë Jakova

Although initially promoted as a dedicated writer of Socialist Realism, some of his later works were deemed "revisionist" due to content that could be interpreted as critical of the regime. He experienced a significant downfall in his career and was erased from the public scene for a long time.

"Drawer Dramaturgy": A Form of Silent Resistance

The term "drawer dramaturgy" refers to works that were written but never published or staged due to censorship. This type of dramaturgy represents a form of intellectual and creative resistance. The authors, although fully aware that their works would not be performed, continued writing. They kept these texts hidden, both as personal testaments and as a hope for a different future. This kind of dramaturgy had no audience in its own time but was written with the belief that one day it would find its reader or viewer. It is important to understand that this was not merely an act of "artistic self-denial" but a deliberate act of resistance.

The Return of Banned Works and Their Impact on Contemporary Albanian Theater

The 1990s: An Artistic and Political Renaissance

Following the fall of the communist regime in 1991, Albania underwent a profound political, economic, and cultural transformation. For the first time in decades of isolation, freedom of expression was legally guaranteed, and with it began the process of bringing to light those works that had been kept "in the drawer."

This period was experienced by many artists as both a personal and collective liberation. Playwrights and directors began to explore materials that were once considered taboo. The banned works of the communist era regained the attention of critics and artistic institutions, while audiences in the '90s received these dramas as moments of truth, a confrontation with a dark reality long hidden.

Early Cases of Revival

Many of the censored works from the '60s, '70s, and '80s gradually returned to the stage. Some were found in handwritten manuscripts preserved in private archives, personal libraries, or in the families of the authors. National and local theaters began organizing public readings, partial stagings, and eventually full productions.

Some of the most important revivals include:

- "Shtëpia në bulevard" (The House on the Boulevard) by Fadil Paçrami – This play was restaged at the National Theatre in 1998.
- "Dashuri me peng" (Love with Hostage) by Kasëm Trebeshina – First staged in the late 1990s, this drama exposed the absurdity of repression and the suppression of human emotion through coded, allegorical, and philosophical language.
- "Monumentet" (The Monuments) by Fadil Paçrami – A play that depicts the conflict between past and present in the life of an individual subdued by propaganda. It was staged in the early 2000s as part of a retrospective on banned Albanian dramaturgy.
- "Fytyra e dytë" (The Second Face) by Xhavit Nezaj – Describes the duality of life under dictatorship and the concept of the "mask" that people are forced to wear to survive. This work was staged for the first time after 2005.

Audience Reaction

The Albanian audience, divided between those who lived under the communist regime and the younger generation that had not directly experienced the dictatorship, reacted to these plays in different ways:

- Older generations experienced a form of catharsis. For them, these dramas were a painful reminder but also an emotional release and an acknowledgment of a silenced truth.
- Younger generations viewed these works as historical evidence and interpreted them through a new lens of political education and national identity.

In both cases, the revival of these plays highlighted the urgent need for confronting the past and building a collective memory that had been suppressed during the dictatorship years.

New Directorial Approaches

Young directors and artists approached these texts with a contemporary perspective. Some employed experimental forms, blending documentary theatre with traditional performance, or using multimedia techniques to make the themes more accessible to a new audience.
Concrete examples include:

- The use of minimalist scenography to emphasize the universality of themes and avoid romanticizing the past.
- Linking the plays to modern contexts, drawing parallels with contemporary phenomena such as media control, political manipulation, and censorship on social networks.
- Rewriting original texts by directors themselves to highlight neglected parts of the manuscripts, opening paths for new interpretations.

Audience Expectations in the Post-Communist Era and the Perception of "Drawer Drama"

Changing Audience Approaches after the 1990s

After the '90s, the Albanian audience changed drastically both in structure and expectation. No longer was it shaped by fear and ideological uniformity, but rather it became a pluralistic society in the process of self-discovery within a new reality.
In this context, the previously banned works faced an audience that was no longer homogeneous:

- One segment of the audience had lived through the dictatorship and sought affirmation of the silent truths they had experienced.
- Another segment, especially the younger generations, viewed these works as a step toward historical education and critical emancipation.

The Conflict Between Memory and Distance

This generational divide created an emotional and interpretative gap:

- For the older audience, drawer dramas evoked memories, pain, and sometimes guilt – since many had been part of a system that had silenced or supported repression.
- For the younger generation, these dramas often felt distant, dark, or hermetic, lacking a direct emotional connection.
- In some plays, the original conflicts were no longer perceived as relevant, having been

shaped for a different audience and time.
This posed a significant challenge for directors and playwrights: how to build bridges between two realities so that they could understand one another?

Does today's audience understand why the "drawer dramaturgy" had to exist?

A question that continues to be asked is: Does it make sense to bring back these works in a reality where social and political issues are different? The answer can be yes, but only if they are properly contextualized. The value of these works lies not only in their political themes but also in their unique artistic expression:

- The symbolic code and metaphors used to avoid censorship are, in fact, a mastery of indirect communication that deserves to be appreciated even today.
- The message about individual freedom, the right to think differently, to exist beyond propaganda, remains relevant and valuable in any system.

The old in a new framework: Contemporary interpretations

Contemporary directors have chosen to rework these plays not only to "revive" them but to make them relevant today. Some techniques used to achieve this include:

- Real archival elements integrated into the staging.
- Using video projections and original audio from past political processes to deepen the theatrical experience.

Are these works still necessary?

The value of these dramas does not lie only in their historical aspect or as collective guilt, but in their capacity to help a society understand its roots. They are mirrors of another time, examples of creative courage. They speak of the desire to be free, even when everything else is forbidden. And this is a theme that does not belong only to the past.

Challenges of staging today and the role of "drawer dramaturgy" in collective memory

Difficulties in staging early dramas

The return of banned works to contemporary stages faces a series of challenges. These difficulties are not only technical or artistic but also touch on social, ideological, and educational dimensions.

A) Language and dramatic structure.
Many of these works were written in a language that today may seem heavy, coded, or archaic. The vocabulary, syntax, and construction of dialogues require adaptation to be understandable and sensitive to today's audience.

B) Ideological and historical references.
In many "drawer dramas," there are specific references to political figures, events of the time, or structures of the communist system that are unknown to the new audience. Without historical

contextualization, the message of the drama may be lost or not conveyed with the necessary power.

C) The pressure to "update."
Directors often feel compelled to update the play — to draw parallels with today's political or social reality. This process, although often fruitful, can compromise the authenticity of the work by altering the author's original message.

D) Polarized reactions.
Due to the strong political content and connections to the dictatorship period, some "drawer dramas" provoke public debate. Some consider this revival necessary, while others see it as a "step backward" or an attempt to stir up painful memories that should be left behind.

Collective Memory: Theatre as a form of testimony.

In societies that have experienced totalitarian regimes, theatre is one of the most powerful forms of preserving collective memory. In this regard, drawer dramaturgy plays a unique role.

A) From oblivion to awareness.
These works are testimonies to what was not written in history. They reflect feelings, fears, silent revolt, and the effort to preserve dignity in oppressive times. Their revival serves as a call not to forget, to reflect on what happened, and to learn from it.

B) Preservation of cultural identity.
Drawer dramaturgy represents a cultural heritage that is part of Albanian art history. Through it, we see how national identity was constructed secrecy, in resistance, in coded form — an identity that could not be expressed openly at its time, but today can help in reshaping Albanian history and art.

C) Building reflective theatre.
Theatre that brings these works to light is no longer just entertainment. It becomes a space for reflection, debate, and awareness. In this way, drawer dramaturgy serves as a connecting bridge between generations, preserving shared memory through the most humane and lively form of communication: performing arts.

The role of cultural institutions and theatres.

Unfortunately, many of these works are not systematically catalogued, published, or archived. This makes the process of reviving them difficult and uncertain.

- The archives of the National Theatre, scientific libraries, and the families of the authors have played a key role in preserving and discovering these manuscripts.
- The theatres of the capital and several theatres in major cities such as Shkodra, Korça, and Gjirokastra have organized retrospectives, staged readings, and festivals, presenting these works as important parts of Albanian artistic heritage.

What more can be done?

At the end of this reflection, the need arises for:
- Digitization and publication of the banned works.
- Inclusion of drawer dramas in the curricula of schools and universities as part of historical and aesthetic education.
- Training and international collaborations to help young directors and playwrights understand how theatres in other post-totalitarian countries (such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary) have dealt with banned works.

Conclusion: Drawer dramaturgy as memory, reflection, and cultural revival.

Drawer dramaturgy represents one of the most complex and richest chapters of Albanian theatre history. Born in secrecy, developed in silence, and survived through coded writing and symbolism, it was a form of cultural resistance against ideological dictatorship. Despite bans, self-censorship, and uncertainty, these works carry a value that transcends the time and system that oppressed them: the value of freedom of expression and human truth.

Their revival on the post-communist stage is an act not only aesthetic but also political and ethical. It offers Albanian society an opportunity to confront the past, build collective memory, and understand more deeply how censorship, fear, but also creativity function under repressive conditions. Today, in a time when freedom of speech is guaranteed, these works are no longer merely historical products — they are living testimonies of an artistic experience that still has much to teach us. They remind us that art, even in the darkest times, remains a powerful tool of resistance and a voice for the unspeakable.

In this context, drawer dramaturgy should not be seen as a closed chapter in Albanian theatrical history but as an open source for re-examination, reconsideration, and creative revival. Its role in educating new generations, building cultural sensitivity, and developing a conscious artistic identity is irreplaceable.

The Conclusion drawn from this dramaturgy are:
- Political pressure can be avoided for a certain time, but not forever.
- The thematic and aesthetic confrontation of creativity between two periods is a criterion of artistic truth.
- Self-censorship is a reality of societies under pressure, but not only them.

Therefore, the mission of Albanian theatre today is not only to produce new works but also to illuminate those left in darkness for decades through a careful, sincere, and informed approach. Only in this way will drawer dramaturgy live not merely as a relic of a past era.

Art in public spaces
Challenges and Opportunities for Exhibiting Art in Urban Environments

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Abstract

Is Art Meant to Be Elite or Closer to the Community? Did we develop new behaviors during and after the pandemic regarding the attendance (or lack thereof) of cultural institutions? Public art not only brings the audience closer to artistic expression but also enhances the city's aesthetic appeal, which in turn fosters the emotional well-being of its residents and stimulates tourism, ultimately impacting the country's economy. Creating art in public spaces—whether through multidisciplinary festivals like the Festival of Street Performers, book-shaped benches like the "Stolibër" project, installations like "Reja", murals, or initiatives like the Visual Park (Car-Free Day transforming neighborhoods into communal engagement spaces)—represents a form of artivism. These artistic interventions do not merely entertain or beautify urban spaces; they also serve an educational purpose by addressing themes such as architecture, cultural heritage preservation, environmental awareness, socialization, tourism promotion, economic sustainability, and more. Public space, as a shared domain, should be utilized by and for the community while also being protected by it—yet, it is often vandalized by the very people it serves. But where is the line between artivism in public spaces and vandalism? How can an artist make creative use of public space without damaging the city or violating legal regulations? Do laws governing public art exist? This research will examine municipal and ministerial regulations regarding public art, considering both local and central governance perspectives. Furthermore, it will explore the challenges and opportunities that urban public art offers to artists and communities alike. This analysis will be based on research into personal experiences from the aforementioned projects, as well as insights from collaborators and responsible institutions regarding the authorization, utilization, and preservation of public space for artistic purposes and bring some recommendations.

Keywords

artivism, Stolibër, The Festival of Street Performers, the Visual Park

Introduction

How does a journey with art in public spaces begin...?
After completing my studies in Theater and Show Direction at the University of Arts, I started working as an artistic curator for activities held at the first urban installation in Albania, "Reja – The Cloud." A space that welcomes and embraces different cultures, in a cloud that, for skeptics, seemed too avant-garde for its time and for Albania. This installation had previously been displayed at the Serpentine Gallery in London (Serpentine Pavilion, 2013), and was then relocated to our capital city (2016) under a temporary three-year contract. "The Cloud" was designed by Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, featuring a metal structure with plexiglass (acrylic glass). With great passion and limited means, this installation turned into a meeting point for artists and art lovers of all ages, genders, and nationalities. Through more than six years of work (beyond expectations), I realized the many challenges that outdoor art presents, but also the countless opportunities and emotions it brings—ones that don't stop there. This is just a part of my personal story, which has led me to choose my PhD research topic focused on creative productions, primarily in public spaces, tourism, and the economy, as well as the challenges and satisfactions they offer—not just for organizers, who must consider safety, but also for communication channels and marketing. The impact that art in public spaces creates is direct, exhausting, yet incomparable!

Understanding the Terms

When we mention public spaces from a linguistic content perspective, we are not necessarily referring to outdoor areas—what matters is that they are not private property. These may also include shared public property, such as stairwells in apartment buildings surrounded by private units, or even public institutions administered by the state. It may seem like a play on words, but legally, public space is defined as: "The external space, such as sidewalks, roads, squares, green areas, parks, and other similar spaces, serving the community, where management may be public and/or private. Public space includes public walkways and environments that are open to the public or serve public use, regardless of the legal regime of the land and beyond the definitions of public property, according to law no. 8743, dated 22.2.2001, "On immovable property of the state". Based on observations, shared property and public space before the 1990s were built and maintained collectively by urban residents or rural villagers. But today? The mentality regarding shared and public space seems to have shifted. Attitudes and reactions are not always positive, and in cultural terms, they may even manifest as vandalistic behaviors.

According to the Albanian Dictionary of the Contemporary Language, culture is defined, among other things, as:
1. The totality of achievements of a people and of all humanity in the fields of production, social and mental development; the level of these achievements and developments at a given stage; the field of social development that includes creativity in language, art, literature, science, and all spiritual life. Example: Development of the economy and culture. Physical culture physical culture. Cultural monument see MONUMENT,~I
2. Of culture (Fjalori i Gjuhës Shqipe, 2006-2025)
On the other hand, we observe individuals or groups who destroy cultural monuments and are labeled as: VANDALS (ASHSH, 2006):

3. A historical term; members of a Germanic tribe that in the 5th century invaded part of the Roman Empire and destroyed many works of art and culture: the Vandal invasions.

Is Street Art a True Art Form?

Street art is often confused with vandalism. Due to its high visibility—often more so than traditional art seen in theaters, galleries, or cinemas—street art is gaining popularity and can even be promoted on a larger scale, thanks to the important and timely themes it addresses in both urban and rural environments. Can we distinguish whether it's vandalism or artistic activism? In the case of the former Radio Tirana building, graffiti was photographed on its facade—graffiti being a discipline of street art. However, since the building is a Category II Cultural Monument (Institute of Popular Culture) (IKTK,2024), any intervention on its facade is strictly prohibited. Moreover, the painted letters (which are colorful in real life) convey no message, do not provoke discussion, and lack any rebellious approach to social or political issues. They do not serve as a voice for citizens or present an alternative viewpoint; instead, they harm the building more than they draw attention to it. In another case, graffiti was applied to the Pyramid of Tirana (prior to its restoration), where the message attempted to advocate for its preservation. This partially fulfilled the mission of street art to amplify civic voices. However, the marble surface of the structure was damaged. Even though the Pyramid is not officially declared a Cultural Monument, it is part of the cultural heritage ensemble along the "Dëshmorët e Kombit" boulevard. In this case, the graffiti—whether freehand or stencil—can be considered partly street art and partly vandalism. Both buildings have been or are undergoing restoration, and the graffiti has either been removed or is removable. This sets them apart from other visual artworks that are transportable and displayed in various galleries worldwide.



Figure 1, former Radio Tirana, (2018)



Figure 2, The Pyramid, before reconstruction

These deviant behaviors are often mistaken for street art, which in essence is based on rebellion, freedom of expression, creativity, and delivering messages in public spaces—often through guerrilla-style, unauthorized methods. Its purpose is to provoke critical thinking, deliver political messages, and spark reactions. Street art may be seen as "the voice of the city," speaking to the masses, in contrast to the elitist nature of traditional art. This artistic approach aligns with activism and the role of being an active citizen—leading to the term artivism. To understand the difference between destructive vandalism and street art that provokes thought and defends cultural heritage, we can refer to a mural by artist Franko Dine, created during the first edition of The Festival of Street Performers (2019), on "Kont Urani" Street in Tirana. It was painted on the surrounding wall of the former Radio Tirana building without touching the monument's facade. The mural draws attention to the building's value and history by depicting a radio microphone. Today, the building is undergoing restoration, thus resisting deterioration. Although the mural has faded over time, it served its purpose—becoming a landmark for photos promoting culture, art, the artist, the festival, and even raising awareness among decision-makers. At the time, there wasn't even a sign indicating the building's monument status, but it should have been protected regardless of ownership.



Figure 3, former Radio Tirana during The Festival of Street Performers, (2019) The child's portrait it is intentionally covered.

This is how the artist Banksy began—reportedly, when he first started doing graffiti in the early 1990s in Bristol, he would paint freehand, and if someone approached, he would flee, leaving the work unfinished. One day, while hiding under a garbage truck from the police, he noticed stenciled numbers on the vehicle's bumper. This inspired him to use pre-made stencils for his next graffiti work—allowing him to spray the design quickly and disappear within seconds with a completed piece (Syer,2023).



Figure 4, Banksy "Flower Thrower"

Art in Public Spaces or Art in Enclosed Venues?

Art in public spaces can take many forms, just like the functions or missions it may have. In this research, the primary perspective is based on personal experience through projects implemented with "DoART" and "Reja – The Cloud" installation. Since 2019, we have created and produced the Street Artists Festival, which brings together young and well-known artists from various disciplines—both Albanian and international—to perform near a Cultural Monument. The aim is to highlight architecture, cultural heritage, and history, while engaging the audience interactively and turning them into part of the experience. When organizing activities in open

spaces, we face numerous difficulties. Many of these challenges would not arise if the same events were held in certified indoor venues—but the unique opportunities offered by public space would be lost as well. Here are some examples:

In Public Spaces	***In Enclosed Cultural Institutions***
Requires a permit from the municipality's citizen service desk. Fees may apply per m^2/day/month.	Requires a request based on the institution's activity calendar. Rental agreements apply per hour of use.
Organizer is usually responsible for site cleanliness and portable toilets.	Venue staff are responsible for cleaning and restrooms are available.
Budget and time increase due to technical needs (distant power sources, weather-resistant stage/sound/lighting, sound dissipation over open areas).	Budget and time are reduced—indoor venues are equipped with ready-made systems and offer better acoustics.
Noise requires scheduling limits (by law and proximity to residential areas), and may disturb wildlife.	Good acoustic insulation allows for longer events without legal conflict, although vibrations can affect building wear.
During pandemics or flu seasons, outdoor events are safer and more comfortable (e.g., for people with claustrophobia).	Indoor events may increase infection risks and discomfort for claustrophobic individuals.
Free events in public space attract unexpected audiences, making crowd control difficult—yet they gather more people than venue capacities.	Controlled audience—participants reserve, purchase tickets, or hold invitations. The number of attendees is fixed.
More uncontrolled attendees require more professional staff, increasing costs and risks.	Better audience control means easier management and lower costs.
Random attendees may be educated, entertained, and exposed to new artists, encouraging future engagement with the arts.	Attendees are usually familiar with the organizer or venue. Fewer opportunities to reach new audiences.
Accessibility and inclusion must be carefully planned—transport and disability access are critical.	Most venues are accessible by public transport, but not all are equipped for people with disabilities.
Sensitivity is needed regarding program content, as public events attract diverse ages, genders, and beliefs.	Content can be more targeted. Certain age restrictions can apply more easily (e.g., 18+ only).
Weather plays a major role—heat, cold, or rain affect both attendance and equipment.	Weather impacts only audience arrival, not the event itself.
Outdoor events allow for more creative freedom—from location choice to stage design—which is both exciting and challenging.	Indoor venues impose spatial limitations (e.g., stage positioning) and have a fixed layout for audience engagement.
Planning is more demanding—more unknowns and emergencies to anticipate.	Fewer risks to plan for, making logistics simpler.

For large events, collaboration is needed with police, medical staff, and fire brigades.	Lower capacity means such support is often not needed, though emergency exits are not always guaranteed.
Installations must use materials resistant to weather and possible vandalism.	Installations must consider weight, size, and access routes for setup and removal.

The above comparison is based on a general, hypothetical event—not tied to specific content but focused on general organizational aspects. One real example is "Ëndrra mbi Livando - Dream Over Lavender" held in Kushovë village, Gramsh (2024). Organizing a concert in lavender fields required prior research, including consultation with local beekeepers to ensure safety for staff, artists, and the audience from potential bee incidents. Therefore, the challenges and emotions tied to open-air events are diverse and enriching. They broaden your perspective and develop your ability to manage a wide range of situations.



Figure 5, advices for the activity at lavender fields

Is the visual art the only form of art in public spaces?

In the following photographs, we draw attention to several forms of art in urban spaces, which can be multidisciplinary, such as visual arts – paintings on the ground or walls (murals), at bus or train stations, graffiti, mosaics, sculptures, installations; performing arts – theatrical performances, acrobatics, dance, music, projections, shows, festivals, fairs, parades, and more.





Photo 1, Murals, the first Albanian film
Photo 2, The first mural in Elbasan





Photo 3, "The Visual Park"
Photo 4, "Bodies in Urban Spaces"





Photo 5 and 6, "Reja – The Cloud" and a performance during The Festival of Street Performers



Photo 7, "Stolibër"

The Importance of Art in Public Spaces

Street art can be called the voice of the city and speaks to the masses. As a result, a city with a lot of street art can be considered a lively, free, and creative city—a city that values the voices of its citizens and encourages them to express themselves in any way they want. We must not ignore the fact that, besides social and political implications, street art makes neighborhoods and streets more vibrant. Street art inspires people living in areas rich with urban art to be creative, happy, and joyful.

- In Photo 1, as part of the 4th edition of the Street Artists Festival, we created a mural to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the former Kinostudio, highlighting the first Albanian film, Tana, near the building of the Central State Film Archive. This moved even the actress Tinka Kurti, who saw herself on the mural but in the role of Tana. This impact not only reminds us all to reconnect with our cinematography and its history but also emotionally touches individuals who are living parts of that history.
- In Photo 2, during the pandemic, we created the first mural in Elbasan as a tribute to medical staff and as a reminder of that difficult period for all of us. It features a stylized doctor in uniform shooting a three-point basketball shot—the ball representing the coronavirus. The title, "Is your heart beating?", reminds us all to be grateful for the life we live! On the other hand, such murals, graffiti, and other installations that remain relatively long in the city's memory also serve to orient people in everyday navigation. Moreover, public art increases the value of private property and the well-being of residents.
- In Photo 3, as part of the "Revitalization of Neighborhoods" project, we created the "Visual Park," which not only aesthetically beautifies the neighborhood but, especially on Halloween day, where we introduced pumpkins as both objects and paintings, it also encourages children to learn by guiding them toward schools—the place of knowledge. What I want to emphasize here is how the colors used, instead of white lines, catch drivers' attention, helping to slow down traffic and avoid possible accidents by increasing awareness and sensitivity.
- In Photo 4, the project "Bodies in Urban Spaces" with Austrian artist Willi Dorner draws attention to architecture and urban spaces we often overlook. By performing with actors/acrobat/dancers' bodies, these spaces no longer seem unused. For the public, the path they followed to watch the performance introduced or reminded them of other neighborhoods in

the capital.

- In Photos 5 and 6, we see the installation "Reja," a form of art in a public space, along with an acrobat performing as if on a stage. Here, two artistic forms are intertwined within urban spaces, increasing both artistic value and audience interaction, socialization, and the surprise effect of discovering different forms of art around the city, which also relates to tourism and the country's economy.
- In Photo 7, the "Stolibër" project not only beautifies the city with a new bench design, which is functional, weather-resistant, and somewhat vandal-proof for outdoor environments but also spreads knowledge. These benches, resembling open books, relate to Albanian authors and their works. The painted images on these benches represent ideas beyond aesthetic appeal for the city. "Stolibër," as a city bench, contains a code that, when scanned, allows reading some poems/stories by authors and students' perceptions of their literature in several languages. What also makes this project special is that the five benches installed in the capital are connected to each other and to institutions and/or attraction points to be visited by local and foreign tourists, creating a walking trail.

How does art function in public spaces in Tirana?

A quick look at the official website of the Municipality of Tirana shows the categories for which one can apply to use public spaces, but those relevant to art fall into three categories:

- Permit for use of public spaces for restorative and/or recreational activities
- Permit for use of public spaces for promotional, artistic, cultural, political, and other activities
- Permit for use of public spaces for fairs

The fees approved by the Tirana Municipal Council for these services vary by zone, as follows:

Zone	Fee for occupying public space
Zone A	1,500 lek/m^2/month
Zone B	750 lek/m^2/month
Zone C (City, Dajt, Farkë, Kashar)	400 lek/m^2/month
Other administrative units	200 lek/m^2/month

The fee for advertising space, according to decision no. 158, dated 26.12.2019 of the Municipal Council "On the approval of the system of local taxes and fees in the city of Tirana," amended (for restorative and/or recreational activities), and the fee for occupying advertising space for promotional, artistic, and/or cultural activities, as well as fairs, is 1,000 lek/m^2/day.

Summary

Art in public spaces is a true multidisciplinary art form, which impacts not only aesthetically and emotionally on the energy, mood, and well-being of its residents but also helps preserve the collective memory of the city and the people who made the country's history. It boosts tourist attractions and their promotion, which leads to economic growth, improves functionality for daily life, encourages empathy and increased care (such as slowing down vehicles in painted pumpkin zones), and stimulates critical thinking on various social and political topics through

artivism. It also raises the value of public and private property and provides orientation for various addresses. The challenges of creating art in public spaces are many, but the emotion and impact that art sincerely creates for the broad public—surprising, educating, entertaining, informing, socializing, and including everyone—make you "forget" the effort as an organizer because the value conveyed by art goes beyond financial costs. This artivism and desire for inclusive approaches, if not innate, must be encouraged somewhat, as a form of empathy but not only that…

Recommendations

To conclude, I would invite artists to be bold! Creating for public spaces does not make you a less capable artist than someone who chooses closed halls, but it brings you closer to the audience, adrenaline, and sincerity. However, this freedom can lead to overlapping dates/locations by many organizers. Therefore, I would invite decision-makers to review the law and find ways to ensure inclusiveness and geographical distribution, as well as to create maps and calendars with dates for art in public spaces. These tools would benefit not only the organizers but also audiences of all ages to be informed and follow/visit these artistic spaces, which directly relate to marketing, audience relations, tourism, and the economy.

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Artistic education, necessity or forgetfulness

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Abstract

Formal and informal artistic education and culture is undoubtedly one of the main goals that an educational system should have. This is due to the fact that education and the arts are one of the main ways that fulfill the internal dimensions of the individual, important dimensions in his human and civic formation. Artistic education can take on the role of fulfilling the internal needs of the individual to humanize his behaviors. In other words, the block of subjects that realize artistic formation, music, visual art, theater and dance, offers the individual human, intellectual, aesthetic, social, cultural and affective development. The purpose of this paper is to exhaust the concerns that artists and teachers of the arts have, arguing the importance, place and role that the arts should have in society. The research questions are: what is the place that the arts occupy today in the pre-university education curriculum? The comparative analysis was carried out through desk research, based on study reports and articles from recent years. The analysis focuses on three points: a) subjects within the field of arts; b) hours and the place they occupy in the curriculum in relation to other areas of learning; c) conclusions and recommendations. In conclusion, this analysis highlights the necessity of revising the curriculum, a document that places arts in the right place in relation to other subjects in the curriculum; the number of hours revised creates the possibility of better developing students' artistic skills by orienting students towards art and teaching professions.

Keywords

arts, curriculum, curriculum, lessons

Introduction

Artistic education is an essential component of the holistic development of the individual, contributing to the intellectual, emotional and social formation. Despite this, in the Albanian educational system after the 90s, the arts and artistic education have experienced an unstable trajectory, characterized by partial reforms and inefficient implementations. Artistic formation in and outside of school represents, without a doubt, one of the main goals that an educational system should have due to the fact that artistic education is one of the main paths that fulfils the internal dimensions of the individual, important dimensions in his human and civic formation. The Law on Pre-university Education and many other sub-legal acts that arise from this law, but also decisions, agreements or ratifications of various conventions create the possible and necessary spaces to realize artistic formation in Albania at European levels of formation. For the education, development and formation of the artistic skills of students, it is not enough to only implement the curriculum, but also to develop them in a creative and integrative way, bringing a suitable climate in the classroom, as well as an environment for encouraging talents and increasing their creative and intellectual abilities.

Today, artistic education has a very important role because a) it develops creative skills and critical thinking through the exploration of artistic concepts; b) it improves communication, using artistic expression as a means of social interaction; it promotes aesthetic and cultural awareness, strengthening the connection with national and world heritage; it prepares individuals for the challenges of the 21st century, by integrating the arts into models such as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics). Therefore, we notice that the arts today in the curriculum of pre-university education are being viewed as numbers of subjects and percentages and not for the role and importance they have in the education and formation of children and young people at school.

Literature review

Today's global orientations (UNESCO, 2015) give absolute priority to the human and social formation of the individual, where artistic education occupies a very important place. Trends today are developed, formulated and become present and so powerful that you cannot help but take them into consideration.

Artistic education: a) educates and forms through knowledge and concepts of art by developing creative skills and critical thinking; b) educates and forms through communication channels using techniques or resources from these fields, where students learn to communicate with others and respond in different ways; c) develops aesthetic awareness by developing imagination, critical sense and personal tastes; d) develops an awareness of our cultural heritage and that of others, by recognizing, studying and understanding this heritage. Also, "National Cultural Strategy (2019–2025) states that "arts and cultural heritage of Albania [are] a driving force for sustainable development" (Ministria e Kulturës, 2024). The vision of the National Cultural Strategy 2019–2025 is: "Arts and cultural heritage of Albania, as a driving force for the sustainable economic and social development of the country". One of the goals of this strategy is related to the design and implementation of an educational platform through art and cultural heritage institutions and the pre-university system. While the "Education through Culture"

program, implemented by dependent cultural institutions in close cooperation with educational institutions, aims to help the younger generation develop self-confidence, as individuals and members of different groups within society; to encourage them to develop a wide range of their skills and interests; to identify and promote their potential, as well as to develop their creativity. It also aims to recognize the values of the country's tangible and intangible heritage through various projects within the program. According to UNESCO, arts education is "a set of activities designed to promote the development of creativity, sensitivity and critical thinking through the arts" (UNESCO, 2006). UNESCO has approved in Lisbon, in March 2006, a very important international document titled "Road Map on Art Education". Legally supported by articles 22, 26 and 27 of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and articles 29 and 31 of the Convention "On the Rights of the Child", the document, which was also much discussed positively at the next UNESCO conference in Seoul in 2010, considered that culture and art are essential in education and in the support they provide to the holistic development of the individual through two directions: learning through knowledge of art and culture and learning through creativity in art and culture. The benefits that come from artistic education, especially for children, are extraordinary, as it plays an important role in cultivating artistic tastes and makes them open-minded and creative compared to traditional education, which has been proven to push children to copy instead of being creative and original (UNESCO, 2010). In 2024-2025, in the framework of the improvement of the Framework and Action Plan drafted by UNESCO on Education for Culture and the Arts, it is stated that: culture is defined as "the totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group, (UNESCO, 2010) [which] includes not only arts and letters, but also ways of life, fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs" as also adopted in the UNESCO MONDIACULT declaration in 1982 and 2022 where culture can be transmitted, expressed and experienced in time and space through words (literature, oral traditions, language), sounds (music, radio, media), images (visual arts, media), movements (dance, theater), monuments and objects (architecture, design, crafts), digital media of all kinds and traditional knowledge (local and indigenous knowledge systems, among others, cultural expressions of her).

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to exhaust the concerns that artists and art teachers have, arguing the importance, place and role that the arts should have in society. The research questions are: what is the place that the arts occupy today in the pre-university education curriculum? The analysis was carried out through a "desk research" research, based on study reports, Interinstitutional Action Plan, Strategy, Curriculum Framework, Lesson Plans, teaching programs and articles from recent years (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2024). From the analysis, we stop at three points: a) the subjects within the field of arts; b) the hours and the place they occupy in the curriculum in relation to other fields of learning; c) Conclusions and recommendations. Through a chronology of the years 1992 – 2025 we will observe the trajectory that artistic education/arts has followed in the Albanian pre-university system. During the years (1992 – 93') at the initiative of the Ministry of Education of that time, conceptual changes were made to the programs and textbooks for the subjects of musical and figurative education in school in the 8-year education and the subject "Art History" was introduced for the first time in high schools with a social profile.

During the years 2002-2003, the changes were developed through a new reform initiated by the Ministry of Education for the design of programs, the revision of texts, which aimed to improve the content of the subject, modernizing the content in the scientific-pedagogical aspect. This change began with the change of the name of the subject from "Music" to "Musical Education" and from "Drawing" to "Figurative Education". In both subjects that formed the block of artistic education at school, the programs received a new appearance, which was represented by new curricular components, goals, objectives, lines, and instructions for teachers, etc. In parallel with the development of the programs, new textbooks were also developed for students, which have been revised and reprinted several times. We are aware of the problems they have during the learning process, for various objective and subjective reasons, but they still have their own values. The curriculum is an important official document of educational policy, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), which determines the list of mandatory subjects/ fields and their weekly hours for each grade. The current basic education curriculum for grades 1-9 was approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture in June 2004. This is the first curriculum that corresponds to the 5+4 structure of basic education.

In Higher Secondary Education, for the first time in 2008, the field of arts was represented by 5 subjects: Visual Arts, Music, Dance, Theatre and Art History, where for the first time they became compulsory subjects in the core curriculum. During the years 2014-2015, another new reform was initiated by the Ministry of Education which aimed to develop 21st century skills, through a competency-based curriculum. In this reform, subjects are identified through learning areas, where the field of arts is represented by the subjects: Visual Arts, Music, Dance and Theatre in Compulsory Education, while in Higher Secondary Education (as a compulsory elective curriculum) they were represented by the subjects Visual Arts, Music and Theatre (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2014–2018). In the year 2024-2025, in implementation of the MES order no. 610, dated 20.12.2024 "For the approval of the Curriculum Framework and the plan of activities for the revision and updating of the curriculum package of pre-university education" the removal of the subjects Theatre and Education from the Basic Education curriculum was observed. This document has already legitimized unfair decisions at the expense of the field of arts because the subjects Dance and Theatre are now offered as modules in the school-based curriculum in the revised Basic Education Curriculum. The school-based curriculum is clarified in this Curriculum as serving as: modules for the development of cross-curricular topics related to social, cultural and natural issues.

Table 1 **-** The main changes that the arts curriculum underwent from 1992-2025

Period	**Main Changes**
1992-2003	- Introduction of the subject "Art History" in social-oriented gymnasiums. - Updating of music/drawing programs.
2003-2015	Program reform: - "Music" became "Music Education". - "Drawing" became "Figurative Education".

Period	Main Changes
2008	Arts became mandatory subjects in gymnasiums (visual arts, music, dance, theater, art history).
2015-2024	- The transition to a competency-based curriculum resulted in reduced hours for the arts (music).
2025	Theater and dance become optional modules, weakening their position

From the research we note what we call the challenges of Artistic Education in the Albanian education system, which have brought about several problems:
- Curriculum and Reduction of Artistic Education Hours.
- Problems in Teacher Quota.
- The decline of interest in the profession of art teacher and the decrease in the number of students at the University of Arts.

Reforms and Lack of Continuity

This quick look makes us affirm that: artistic formation in our school is in a deep paradox, with anaemic and non-existent realities, although in the legal spaces issued by different institutions this situation is read differently.
Unfulfilled Strategies
- The National Cultural Strategy (2019-2025) provides for an educational platform for the arts, but it is not implemented in practice.
- The "Education through Culture" program does not compensate for the lack of classes in the Curriculum.
- Community Centre Schools, although numerous in number, do not fulfil the mission they have as such?
- The National Program for Activities Outside the School Hours JOM, the development, quality and impact of the JOM (Outside the School Hours) activities remain questionable.

Comparison with Regional and International Standards

Key documents such as the **Road Map on Art Education** (UNESCO, 2006) and **Abu Dhabi Framework** (UNESCO, 2024) emphasize the integration of art in education. Some principles that guide "Arts and Culture Education" highlighted by UNESCO include:

a. Education as a common good (UNESCO, 2024)
b. Human rights-based education (UNESCO, 2015)
c. Gender equality (UNESCO, 2024)
d. Cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2024)
e. Inclusion and anti-discrimination (UNESCO, 2024)
f. Lifelong learning and blended spaces (UNESCO, 2024)



Figure 1. Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-time Compulsory Education in Europe – 2020/21.

Conclusions and recommendations/implications

So that artistic education in the pre-university system does not remain something transitory, we propose:

- to review the Action Plan for the development of artistic Education with both relevant ministries and educational and cultural institutions, harmonizing vertically and horizontally their interaction with all actors;
- to create an Artistic Education Committee which will discuss and suggest art and culture policies and their inclusion in pre-university and university education;
- to draw up policies for the financing and management of artistic educational institutions by the state;
- to create artistic institutions that educate children and young people about culture and art within educational institutions or as separate centres (formerly pioneer houses and cultural centres for young people);
- to review the Pre-university Education Curriculum 2025, for the field of arts, namely the subjects of theatre and dance that have passed modules in the school-based curriculum;
- to review the status of the norm of the arts teacher in school, enabling these subjects to be taught only by specialist teachers from grades 1 to 9.

- to enable professional development and capacity building of arts teachers at UART, as an institution that possesses the appropriate academic staff and prepares teachers of these profiles;
- to create a network with all educational and cultural institutions, enabling recognition of the situation, needs, definition of goals, objectives and the future of artistic education in Albania.

Conclusions

Artistic education is not a luxury, but a necessity for the development of a balanced society. Albania needs:
- A stable strategy that does not change every 10 years.
- Investments in infrastructure and teacher training.
- An integrative approach that connects the arts with other subjects.

Without a radical change, the education system will continue to produce students with an incomplete education, neglecting the creative potential of the new generation.

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The challenge of integrating dance art into school education and the national educational curriculum

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance and role of dance art in the pre-university system in Albania. This paper highlights the necessity of planning this discipline in the Albanian National Curriculum. The research questions seek to establish why dance art should be part of the curriculum in pre-university education in schools? How does this discipline affect the cognitive and emotional development of the student. The methodology that will be used in the development of this paper are: a) the method of analysing theoretical sources from different authors; b) consulting documentation in the relevant field; c) historical comparative analysis of reference materials; d) processing of the analysis of data obtained from the collected information; e) observation and personal research in the field. The conducted analyses conclude that the discipline of dance art helps the development of the individual, especially in his psycho-emotional and artistic-aesthetic direction. In conclusion, it proves that the art of dance in school is necessary for the development of
creative, intellectual and physical skills of students in school.

Keywords

process, method, planning, curriculum, dance

Introduction

The integration of dance into school education and the national curriculum is a complex challenge that requires special attention from educational authorities, teachers and researchers. In this context, the examination of theoretical, practical and institutional aspects is essential to understand the obstacles and opportunities associated with this integration. The attempt of dance to be present in formal education is a process that has received attention in many countries. Researchers have emphasized the ability of this art as an essential educational tool for the physical and emotional development of students (Smith-Autard, 2002). Therefore, in many international education systems, dance is now recognized as a discipline with multiple values, which offers a special way for students to express emotions and interact in a non-verbal environment, thus strengthening communication and social development (Hana, 2014).

In Albania, dance remains undervalued by official education programs. From a scholarly perspective, this art is seen by the choreographic community as one of the cultural forms to present artistic values and knowledge, but at the same time, as an element of the social civilization standard (Ibërshimi, 2021). On the other hand, this community has invested very little in expanding its reach in the formal education system. The lack of a serious method for its application in education, starting from teachers, the methodological-didactic side and up to infrastructure, has created a considerable gap that has affected the formation of students, both in the physical, emotional, cognitive and social aspects. While everywhere, more and more, it is being proven in the field of education that dance is a self-actualizing interdisciplinary field, where individuals can be transformed in a qualitative way (Bannon, 2010), the reality of dance in formal education in our country does not reflect the same interest. Researching the importance of dance in the holistic formation of students, and examining why this art should be included or integrated into the modern Albanian educational curriculum, constitutes the primary purpose of this material. While one of the reasons for its treatment is the introduction of dance art in the "Regulated Teaching Professions" at the end of 2023 (MAS , 2023), which showed the willingness of dance teachers to become part of the formal Albanian education system, but given the current situation of educational education in our country, the important fact of raising the awareness of the choreographic community to be part of it.

Theoretical-conceptual framework of the study and review of the literature.

The integration of dance into the educational curriculum has been and is a complex process that includes challenges of a pedagogical and artistic nature, policies and institutional strategies, and therefore the world literature has analyzed this journey precisely from these perspectives. This process in the world has not been the same, but has varied from country to country, depending on the development of the art of dance and its acceptance by educational systems.

As is known, for the first time dance in education comes as a concept in Europe from the publication of Rudolf von Laban entitled "Modern Educational Dance" in 1948, which had the support of teachers, as his ideas were original and with an individual approach (Foster, 2010). After the 1970s, researcher Jacqueline Smith-Autard presented the methods and concrete challenges of applying dance and the way of teaching this art in education, bringing numerous arguments for the role of dance art in artistic, aesthetic and cultural education. In

addition, its social impact was ascertained by Judith Lynnes Hanna in 1987, who emphasized that dance is the most primary form of non-verbal communication and that it is essential for social interactions in the educational environment (Hana, 1987). This theoretical corpus of that time, which constituted the public and intellectual voice for the integration of dance in education, imposed the consolidation of the changes that occurred for dance in the education system. Thus, in 1990, the choreographic community of the time in Great Britain, published the strategic methodological program "Dance in the National Curriculum", which was a highly sought-after product for dance teachers and which provided them with: a) arguments for the presence of dance in the teaching curriculum; b) maintaining the focus on dance education as an art form with an artistic, aesthetic and cultural purpose (Smith-Autard, 1996). Researcher Susan R. Koff, in her paper "Toward a Definition of Dance Education" articulated the view that dance education represents a democratic art form that allows for personal expression as well as cultivating a sense of belonging in the school, and where students learn to express thoughts or emotions through the body (Koff, 2000). Continuing her work and contribution, researcher Jacqueline Smith-Autard in 2002 explains that dance in education is not simply an artistic act, but a pedagogical process that helps in the development of the mind, body and emotions (Smith-Autard, 2002), thus positioning dance in education as an integral component in the development of active and creative learning. In her 2006 publication "Teaching Dance as Art in Education", Brenda Pugh McCutchen, regarding the question of what can be considered an arts education perspective, concludes that all arts are vital and complex subjects that deserve serious attention in education. Emphasizing that dance should be taught in the context of arts education in school curricula, McCuthen highlights that teaching it from an arts education perspective is different from teaching other models of dance education (McCutchen, 2006).

Further deepening this idea, Judith Lynne Hanna argued that dance education in schools is an engaging, emotional, and cognitive way to solve problems, communicating declarative and procedural knowledge, through various means of imaginative embodiment (Hanna, 2008). The treatment of the impact of dance art on children, based on systems methods that aim at education through personal experience, was analyzed by Theresa and Stephen Cone, in 2012. They concluded that children should experience dance as a form of personal exploration and building self-confidence through the body in movement (Cone, Th. & St., 2012). While Judith Lynnes Hanna in her 2014 publication, titled "Dance to Learn", examines dance as a medium of learning (Hanna, 2014). In her 2018 study titled "Dancing through Curricula: Integrating Dance in Elementary Classrooms", Kristi Duvall conveys the idea that integrating dance into the academic curriculum is important at the elementary level for the reasons that it involves building constructivist learning skills, increasing engagement in academic learning, recognition and memory, through the use of the kinesthetic learning style (Duvall, 2018). In the continuation of her scientific research, researcher Susan R. Koff, in the publication "Dance Education: A Redefinition" in 2021, states that dance education is essentially a student-centered process that engages the student in a holistic and integrated process of mind and body, offering him a full range of expressive skills (Koff, 2021).From what we have presented above, it can be said that based on this entire broad educational spectrum, the modern education curriculum, in recent decades, in many countries has integrated the art of dance as an important part of it. Artistic education through dance has concretized its results in improving learning by increasing the engagement of students in the development of fundamental skills of their formation such as self-confidence, creativity, cooperation and critical thinking.

But what is the degree of inclusion of dance in the Albanian educational curriculum over the years?

The presence of dance in our educational education system came when the goals of Albanian education were also linked to artistic education in school. Until these moments, dance has existed first as a profiled artistic education, which means with a presence only in educational institutions that developed the formation of dance art professionals (the Choreography branch at the former Jordan Misja Artistic Lyceum and ILA), and secondly as part of educational education in educational institutions that applied dance in their teaching curricula (IKF "Vojo Kushi" and then the Faculty of Educational Sciences at UE). In our country, the first national educational policies to make dance part of education began to be developed in 2007-2008, when the reform of the Education Strategy and the Teaching Plans and Curricula in Upper Secondary Education enabled dance to be represented in the Curriculum of this educational level, as a field of learning, being included as a separate subject in its Curriculum. According to the coordinators for the design of the curriculum and programs within the field of Arts at this time, it is confirmed that the Curricular Framework of this Reform did not aim at the development of professional artistic skills in students, but rather their cultural enrichment through artistic subjects and the development of basic skills in various artistic disciplines (Alushi, 2024). After 2014, dance as part of the field of arts in Higher Secondary Education was removed and this field was represented only by Visual Arts, Music and Theatre. However, the art of dance from 2012 to the 2024-2025 school year continued to be only as part of education in primary education, in the first and second levels of the competency-based curriculum. This curriculum defines dance in education as one of the artistic disciplines that seeks to equip the student with the diverse skills and language of movement raised in art (MASH & IZHA, 2012). The program presented dance as a component of aesthetic education, educational, social, psychological and physical development. Teaching dance at school, according to the program, addresses the recognition, understanding and application of dance through basic concepts, but also as a way of thinking and evaluating (MASH & IZHA, 2015). While the conceptual framework of the dance program deals with the core of building subject competencies and key competencies related to them (MASH & IZHA, 2016). All this result claimed in the papers should have been tangible and concrete as a benefit for students, only during a time span of 18 hours per year for the second grade and 35 hours per year for the third grade. The truth is that from a professional perspective, the theoretically claimed result is practically impossible both from a methodological-didactic point of view and from the necessary infrastructure. From research in the field of formal Albanian education, it results that dance as a subject is not applied in any case by specialized dance teachers, which does not guarantee the quality of artistic education claimed by the program. This lack of specialized human resources was also noted by the coordinators of the curriculum and programs within the field of arts at that time, who stated that the problem of implementing this program was not the content, but its implementation with professional teachers, something that does not happen even today after 10 years, except in private schools (Alushi, 2024). The continuity of dance as part of the subject curriculum of education in our education system may be jeopardized and the subject of dance may become an "optional module", which would extremely reduce the importance of the art of dance in education. This idea presented, but also claimed, by educational policy actors in our country, in a period where artistic education is globally considered an essential component in the development of the skills of the 21st century individual, is both surprising and shocking,

because it can be considered a step backwards in every direction. For this issue, you should refer to the International Conference on Education, Art and Culture in Abu Dhabi 2024, where it is emphasized that culture and the arts enable, expand and support learning spaces and communities (UNESCO, 2024).

What are the approaches, focus and levels of international models of dance integration in the education system?

Different countries in Europe and the world have experienced a different process of dance integration in their education systems, but it has nevertheless been accepted as a component of artistic education and has taken a deserved place in these systems. Dance in these schools tends to achieve a balanced development between body and mind, and moreover, according to a study published in the International Conference on Education & Educational Psychology (Sööt & Viskus, 2013) dance education is more of a means to an end than an end in itself. This process of dance integration is realized firstly through programs that strengthen its practice in schools through the analysis of choreographic forms in the classroom; secondly as a form of artistic expression that helps in the development of individuality and creative abilities of students; thirdly by providing opportunities for students to develop their artistic and expressive skills, not only in the basics of dance, but also in the creation of choreographies or group work; fourthly by including it in different levels of education, from early childhood education to higher education institutions; fifthly by providing standards or resources for teachers, with the aim of instilling a creative approach to teaching and learning (NDEO); sixthly by aiming to strengthen the connection between formal education and artistic practice; seventhly by including traditional dance as well as forms of creative or contemporary dance. This process of integrating dance into the international educational curriculum shows the positive impact that this educational activity has on the personal and social development of individuals, but also on the creation of a rich and multidimensional learning environment.

What is the situation and the problems in our country?

The tendency to compare the situation of our country with regional and European models helps to identify gaps and opportunities for reform. Our country is still not consolidating the continuity of a structured subject or module for dance in the national curriculum. It is mentioned as a general component of artistic education, but pedagogical guidelines, teacher training and infrastructure are missing. The graph of the presence of dance in the national curriculum has continued with a decline that perhaps warns of its final elimination from this curriculum and this is due to the lack of sustainable policies and strategies. The two interested entities that are the choreographic community and the state education institutions have not been aligned in their efforts and goals regarding dance in education over a period of more than 15 years. In 2008, our community itself possessed the artistic standard of stage performance and did not have the status of pedagogical preparation in teaching. This development was achieved only in 2014, when the University of Arts institution trained the first generation of dance teachers. However, at that time there was no legal basis for this art to be included in the Regulated Teaching Professions, a status that dance art received in 2023, and precisely at this moment there are all the premises that the idea of removing it as a curriculum subject and returning it to an “optional module” is not considered appropriate.

What are the obstacles that make it difficult to integrate dance into our education system?

The challenge of integrating dance into education is said to be closely linked to the perspective of artistic education on dance (Mc Cutchen, 2006), which in formal education represents an educational intervention with high potential to enrich the learning experience of students in the creative, physical and emotional direction. But we must emphasize from the beginning that the integration of dance into the education system faces several institutional, cultural, economic and pedagogical obstacles.

One of the main obstacles is the lack of National Strategies for the Integration of Dance into Formal Education and clear policies that define the role of dance in education and its recognition as an independent component in the curriculum. Generally, dance is perceived as a peripheral activity, often seen as a form of entertainment or as an extra-curricular activity and not as a means of psycho-social, cultural and educational development associated with key competencies.

The lack of specialized human resources is another element that hinders the integrity of teaching the dance curriculum. Most current teachers in public education are not professionally trained, but also the training programs that provide quality teaching in this discipline are insufficient. While the integration of dance modules in teacher training programs and teaching staff are minimal. Also, the lack of a standard curriculum with a clear structure affects the lack of didactic materials such as guides, lesson plans and pedagogical models that serve teachers in building dance classes. The lack of relevant infrastructure also has a significant impact, which discourages the regular inclusion of dance in classes. The traditional approach and the focus of education only on "strong" academic disciplines such as mathematics, often does not prioritize the emotional, physical or aesthetic development of the student. Studies have shown that the application of dance art in the in-depth acquisition of mathematical, linguistic and historical knowledge has been productive, confirming that engagement through dance offers rich ways to learn beyond the written word (Hanna, 2014). Educational institutions have little institutional cooperation with dance troupes or cultural institutions, which can contribute to bringing artistic quality and diversity to teaching or a practical experience in the classroom. As a final conclusion, it can be said that the lack of a national plan as part of long-term planning for dance education has negatively affected its integration into the teaching curriculum.

Conclusions

The substantive treatment of the topic, based on international studies and experiences, but also our own, confirmed to us the complexity that the challenge of integrating dance into the educational curriculum of every country represents. Comparing the situation of our country with the approaches and focus of international models, served us to identify the problems of integration and to update the efforts to establish missing standards. At the same time, determining the importance that dance has in the holistic formation of students, and examining why this art should be integrated into the modern Albanian educational curriculum, gave us the opportunity to understand the ability of this art as an educational tool in the physical and emotional development of every individual. We presented and confirmed the argument that dance in education has concretized its results in improving learning, increasing students'

engagement in developing fundamental skills of their formation such as self-confidence, creativity, cooperation and critical thinking, and considering it "a medium of learning". We also presented a panorama of the presence of dance in the Albanian curriculum, both in a historical and problematic sense, addressing the lack of competence in the professional development of the dance subject, which has not guaranteed the quality of artistic education claimed by the current program. We analyzed the benefits that dance offers in the overall development of each individual and came to the conclusion that dance education is not only an artistic activity, but a powerful instrument for the development of physical, emotional, social and critical thinking competencies. We also researched the obstacles that hinder the integration of dance into our education system and, above all, we identified that the lack of a national plan as part of long-term planning for dance education has negatively impacted its integration into the curriculum, and in conclusion, we are articulating relevant recommendations.

Recommendations to integrate dance into the Albanian educational curriculum.

1) Raising awareness among stakeholders for the development of a national strategy to define standards and levels of inclusion in the primary and secondary school curriculum for dance, accompanied by the creation of specific structured modules for dance, as an independent subject with extensive literature.

2) Professional development, training and certification of teaching staff, in collaboration with the University of Arts and Albanian choreographers. Building a network of dance mentors to assist schools in implementing artistic subjects, as well as creating a dedicated section for dance in the artistic education curriculum.

3) Building the necessary infrastructure in schools, providing dedicated spaces and adapting visual and digital tools for the development of dance classes.
4) Collaborations with cultural institutions, which will contribute to bringing artistic practice into classrooms.

5) Inclusion of dance in national and inter-school dance olympiads and competitions, creating a platform for evaluating and recording dance at all levels of the education system.

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Education through the museum, programming deficiencies in schools and the good example of the "Marubi" National Museum in this regard

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Abstract

This paper first presents theoretical views which, in conjunction with well-known theories, create a clear background. In this paper, it then elaborates, from the perspective of the theories elaborated above, the programs of different classes of the subject "Visual Art". The article provides an overview of the programs and brings with a critical eye suggestion that are related to the daily experience of teachers as well as to experiences from other countries in the region. The paper confronts the program of corresponding subjects in our schools and in schools in the region, especially in various schools in Italy. In conclusion, the article focuses on the good experience of recent years of the National Museum "Marubi" in terms of education through the museum in several directions. The activity of the museum in question includes several types of activities with children of different age groups. The paper has also foreseen a survey with children and young people regarding the knowledge they have about museums in Albania and abroad, their experiences and knowledge. Finally, based on theories, experiences, and the survey, the paper provides suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

Keywords

art, museum, education

Introduction

Throughout history, education has been closely connected to cultural institutions that serve as repositories of knowledge and identity. Museums, in particular, have long been recognized as valuable sites for informal learning, offering unique opportunities for experiential engagement beyond traditional classroom environments. However, despite their potential, educational programs within schools often fail to fully integrate museum resources into their curricula, resulting in a disconnect between institutional offerings and student learning outcomes. This gap raises critical questions about how educational frameworks can more effectively utilize museums to enrich understanding, particularly in light of the dynamic role museums can play—as exemplified by the "Marubi" National Museum, the case study of this paper. Situated at the intersection of historical preservation and community engagement, this museum illustrates both the prospects and the current curricular shortcomings in school–museum collaboration. Exploring these issues sheds light on broader challenges in educational policy, emphasizing the need for more cohesive strategies to bridge institutional and pedagogical divides

Educational institutions are increasingly recognizing the value of integrating museum resources into curricula as part of a broader understanding of lifelong learning that extends beyond conventional classrooms. Museums offer unique opportunities for experiential learning through direct engagement with artifacts and interactive exhibits, making abstract knowledge tangible and thereby enhancing understanding and retention. Despite this potential, many school programs remain underutilized or disconnected from museum offerings due to a lack of coordinated collaboration and insufficient involvement of key stakeholders, such as teachers and curriculum developers, in the educational design process. For example, the Botswana National Museum has attempted to bridge this gap but faces challenges stemming from a lack of awareness and limited participation in program development among educators and students, even as all parties express enthusiasm for partnership (Rammapudi, 2010). Similarly, other museums have expanded educational outreach through dynamic programming and multimedia content, reaching broader audiences and addressing contemporary educational needs (Krucoff, 2004). This contrast between available resources and their systematic use in schools highlights critical curricular deficiencies in current school–museum collaborations.

Literature Review

This article examines key concepts and studies on museum-based education. According to Hooper-Greenhill, (2007), museums are rich environments for fostering informal learning, offering object-based experiences that stimulate curiosity and critical thinking. Falk and Dierking (2000) emphasize the importance of visitor experience and contextual factors in learning processes. Other studies suggest that collaboration between schools and museums enhances students' cultural and visual competencies. Literature on typical student activities at the Botswana National Museum and the nature of its collaboration with schools has also been reviewed (Rammapudi, 2010). Regarding the educational activities of the "Marubi" National Museum, its official webpage was carefully analyzed using the link: https://marubi.gov.al/education. Additionally, the paper considers the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Barrett, 2018).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, case-study-based approach, using the "Marubi" National Museum as the primary site of analysis. Surveys were conducted, and data were also collected through direct observation and structured interviews with museum educators and primary school teachers. The primary goal is to identify existing practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in school–museum interactions.

The following research questions were posed:
- Does the school curriculum promote hands-on learning through the museum?
- Does the Marubi Museum have an educational experience?
- Have museum-based educational experiences in other countries proven effective?

The use of three methods—surveying, observation, and interviews—allowed for comparative triangulation to achieve accurate results. Interviews were conducted with seven primary school teachers, each with 12 to 25 years of professional experience.

Results and Discussion

I. Curricular Deficiencies in Schools

Despite ongoing efforts to improve educational quality, many schools continue to exhibit significant curricular shortcomings that hinder effective learning. These limitations often manifest through outdated curricula that fail to engage students or incorporate interdisciplinary methods, leading to stagnant classroom environments. Furthermore, standardized testing systems prioritize rote memorization over critical thinking and creativity, limiting students' ability to form meaningful connections with the material. Resource constraints further exacerbate these issues, as many institutions lack access to modern technologies or specialized training for educators—essential elements in fostering an interactive and dynamic educational experience. As a result, students are frequently deprived of opportunities to explore subjects beyond traditional classroom settings, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives and real-world applications. Museums such as the "Marubi" National Museum serve as vital educational supplements, addressing these gaps by offering hands-on learning experiences that re-engage students and broaden their knowledge horizons (Barrett, 2018.).

A. Curriculum Limitations and the Lack of Experiential Learning

Many educational systems continue to prioritize traditional classroom instruction, often restricting students' engagement with material to theoretical knowledge rather than practical application. This emphasis limits opportunities for experiential learning—a critical component in fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking skills. Within this framework, museums like the "Marubi" National Museum possess untapped potential to fill these gaps by offering interactive, immersive experiences that bring historical and cultural content to life. However, rigid school curricula rarely accommodate museum visits or collaborations as integral learning modules, thereby marginalizing the benefits of hands-on education. This disconnect not only reduces student motivation but also overlooks the development of visual literacy and interdisciplinary connections that museum learning can provide. Addressing these curricular

shortcomings requires a systematic reevaluation of curricular priorities to integrate experiential learning more effectively, fostering a richer and more engaging educational environment (Barrett, 2018).

II. The Role of the "Marubi" National Museum in Education

While educational institutions often struggle to provide comprehensive cultural and historical learning experiences, museums such as the "Marubi" National Museum play a critical role in filling this gap. Through inclusive exhibitions showcasing Albania's photographic heritage, the museum facilitates a unique, visual form of learning that enriches students' understanding beyond textbook content. Its programs encourage critical thinking and engagement with national identity through authentic artifacts and narratives. Furthermore, the museum's interactive workshops and guided tours offer practical educational opportunities often lacking in traditional classroom settings. Despite these strengths, integration of such resources into school curricula remains limited, reflecting broader programmatic shortcomings. Nonetheless, the "Marubi" National Museum illustrates how museums can serve as dynamic educational platforms, fostering deeper connections between students and their cultural history while advocating for more structured collaboration with educational systems (Laurìa et al.).

A. Analysis of Educational Programs and Initiatives at the Marubi Museum

Museums play a vital role in expanding educational opportunities beyond conventional classroom settings, promoting experiential learning through engagement with tangible artifacts and curated narratives. The "Marubi" National Museum offers a range of educational programs aimed at enhancing cultural awareness and historical knowledge, with a focus on photography and visual culture as unique pedagogical tools. Despite the transformative potential of these initiatives, challenges persist in aligning the museum's offerings with school curricula, resulting in missed opportunities for deeper collaboration and integration. Effective museum–school partnerships require educators to appreciate the distinct learning environments each institution provides, fostering more meaningful educational exchanges (Rammapudi TS, 2010). Furthermore, community engagement and strategic partnerships—similar to those described in other institutional contexts—can strengthen these programs by increasing participation and resource availability (Krucoff, 2004). Addressing these programmatic gaps is essential to maximizing the museum's role in supplementing formal education through dynamic, practical learning experiences.

B. The Educational Offerings of the "Marubi" National Museum

The educational programming at the Marubi National Museum is structured into several carefully designed pillars, created in collaboration with relevant ministries. These include:

- Education through Culture
- Marubi Digital Art Days
- Masterclasses
- Summer at Marubi
- What's the City Hiding?
- Workshops

The "Education through Culture" initiative is a joint program between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth, signed in 2016. It aims to encourage children's participation in cultural and artistic life by ensuring appropriate and equal opportunities, as well as fostering creative spaces and activities during leisure time. In this framework, the museum offers guided tours designed to enhance knowledge of the museum's collection and temporary exhibitions. Marubi Digital Art Days is a collaboration between the museum and Technosoft Albania, bringing digital artists closer to Albanian cultural heritage, inspired by ethnography, monuments, legends, and historical portraits from the Marubi collection.

The museum has also held a series of masterclasses for children and youth:

- MARUBI STREET ART, 07.06.2017
- COLORING BOOK, 28.03.2018
- MADE IN MARUBI, 18.04.2018
- MUSEUM GUIDES, 19.12.2018
- PYROGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHY, 16.10.2019
- BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOR, 04.05.2021
- THE DARK ROOM, 14.12.2023
- EXPLORING GREGORY CREWDSON'S VISUAL WORLD, 24–25.02.2025 and 03–04.03.2025

Each workshop involved at least ten students and was often carried out in cooperation with schools in Shkodër. These programs were closely supervised by young, enthusiastic mentors.
"Summer at Marubi" is an initiative aimed at raising youth awareness of the Marubi heritage—a cultural treasure that brings to light people, events, and moments from over a century of Albanian history through photography. It engages students during the summer in various museum activities, including visitor assistance, group guiding, and library support. Participants were trained by the museum staff and mentored throughout their practice. "What's the City Hiding?" is an educational activity first launched in 2018, aimed at fostering awareness among younger generations about cultural heritage. Inspired by the museum's archive, students discovered a "different time" in Shkodër, learning about buildings that have changed purpose or no longer exist, as well as monuments dedicated to national figures. The program engages students from grades 5 through 9, guided by educators, families, and community members, helping them explore narratives linked to lived spaces and neglected histories.

Conclusion

The analysis of educational programs in schools reveals substantial gaps that museums like the "Marubi" National Museum are uniquely positioned to address. Despite the critical role museums can play in enriching student learning, current school curricula often lack the depth and interactive engagement necessary to cultivate comprehensive understanding of cultural heritage and artistic expression. The "Marubi" Museum demonstrates how tailored museum experiences can complement traditional education by offering immersive, context-rich opportunities that foster critical thinking and empathy.
However, for such initiatives to be truly effective, a more integrated approach is required—one that establishes institutional collaboration and sustained engagement beyond isolated visits.

This calls for systemic reforms that recognize museums as vital educational resources rather than peripheral additions. Ultimately, leveraging the educational potential of museums can help mitigate curricular deficiencies in schools, cultivating a more interconnected and dynamic learning environment (Barrett, 2018).

The examination of museum education reveals clear potential for enriching school curricula through experiential learning and interdisciplinary engagement. Evidence shows that museums such as the "Marubi" National Museum provide unique opportunities for practical activities and interaction with authentic objects, enhancing students' knowledge and critical thinking skills beyond conventional classroom settings. However, integrating these resources into formal education systems requires collaborative efforts among educators, curriculum developers, and museum professionals to overcome curricular limitations. Successful models—such as those seen in Botswana—demonstrate that joint curriculum development fosters positive synergy between schools and museums, promoting lifelong learning among students (Rammapudi TS, 2010). Moreover, expanding educational services to engage broader audiences helps sustain public interest and institutional support, as illustrated by increased participation in programs tied to specialized museum galleries (Krucoff, 2004). To optimize this integration, schools must systematically incorporate museum-based learning experiences, supported by adapted curricula and ongoing collaboration with museum experts.

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Semiotics And Interpretation Of Artistic Works In Age Groups 3 To 18 Years Old

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Abstract

The purpose of this scientific research focuses on the interpretation of artistic creations of children and young people in the age group 3 – 18 years in education, through the science of semiotics. The relationship between the imaginative images of children and young people and the drawings they create is very close. Creation places them in front of two perceptions, that of creating imaginative images that are imitations of reality within their world and the realization of their drawings on paper. This research on artistic drawings, in turn, allows us to understand their symbolism in the recreation of reality according to the imagination and imagination that they have in relation to what surrounds them. For the realization of this work, a combination of scientific, theoretical and comparative analytical methodologies is used, which together will guide the elaboration of the topic in an exhaustive manner. They seek to trace the emotional and psychological state that children and young people convey through painted images, with the symbolism used to express themselves through images as well as the semiotic interpretation for the concretization of images. This scientific study draws some conclusions on the developmental process and the creative process that occurs in children and young people during the visualization of images and up to the concrete realization of artistic images, highlighting various issues for their creative temperament. This paper also recommends the use of semiotics in the interpretation of the artistic creative process by visual art teachers in the pre-university system.

Keywords

semiotics, drawings, teaching, visual art, psychology

Introduction

In the field of visual art studies related to that of education, semiotics – as the science of signs and their meaning – plays a central role in the analysis of the way in which children and young people express and interpret reality through artistic creations. In this field, the semiotics of children's artistic creativity, from the most spontaneous ones of preschool age to the most structured compositions of adolescents. Each creation contains a rich universe that reflects the development of the process of cognition, emotions and culture of the individual.

This study aims to the process of creating and interpreting images from a semiotic perspective within an age group that includes different stages of development (3–18 years). For the sake of scientific study, it is a research work spread over several years in time and one school of one year in a different school, in the educational school of the pre-university system in Albania. The three scientific fields on which this study is based: visual art, semiotics and psychology, which, in their interaction, have shed light on how to change the meaning of the visual in which the environments and contexts in which children find themselves at the moment of creation are. Semiotics, as the science of studying signs and their systems in communication, has gained a foothold in the analysis of the arts, especially when they are created by children and young people. The creations of the artistic group are not only aesthetic expressions in terms of the process of creation and approach to stylistics, but also in the reflection of knowledge, emotional, economic, social and anthropological. Visual arts, on the one hand, are a free means of communication and expression of the subconscious for the creative child who, what he cannot express in words, achieves in image. While on the other hand, the images created as a source of children's imagination, can be interpreted as "imaginative" that are signs rich in multifaceted meaning. The tracing, shouting and interpretation of these "image-writers" is made possible by the semiotic approach. According to Roland Barthes, such an approach commits children and young people to being used unconsciously more through the images they create, than through words, where he realizes the case of the works of Charles Baudelaire, Van Gogh and Pëtr Ilyič Čajkovskij (Barthes, 1967). This cognitive process helps us as researchers and interpreters of images to conduct constructivist analyses of cultural systems and teaching pedagogies, to interpret through semiotics their substantive meaning. Semiotics is the discipline that studies signs and communication processes, which has found wide application in the analysis of visual art, helping to understand how images convey meanings beyond their direct representation. In the context of visual art for the interpretation of children's artistic creations, semiotics aims to examine the relationship between: form, color, content and psychospiritual sensations. In this complex cognitive and interpretive process, semiotics has an essential role in the decomposition of the system of signs that make up the image created by children and young people. This approach takes on particular importance when applied to the interpretation of children's drawings, which constitute an important form of nonverbal communication and self-expression, in the early stages of their psychomotor development. Children's and young people's drawings are not only expressions of spontaneity or imitations of reality, but carry within themselves visual codes related to emotional experiences, cerebral development and cultural influences. By using semiotics as an interpretation tool, we can understand more deeply how children use graphic signs to construct their symbolic world, to communicate feelings, experiences and thoughts that often cannot be articulated through spoken language. This makes semiotics not only an analytical instrument, but also a bridge towards a more sensitive and meaningful

communication with children and young people. In this perspective, semiotics is the scientific field that studies the entire creative process of an artistic image, starting from creation = the original idea, use = the symbolic function and interpretation = the decomposition of the image through signs. Therefore, thanks to this trinomial CREATION – USE – INTERPRETATION, semiotics has a fundamental importance in the field of visual arts, as it is what translates the incomprehensible of the image into a content that is perceptible and understandable by everyone. At its core lies the idea that any image, shape or color can function as a sign, loaded with meaning. It offers a conceptual framework to decipher the way art communicates, not only through external form, but also through internal symbolic structures. This approach becomes particularly valuable when applied to the analysis of children's and young people's drawings, which represent a completely unique way of expressing imagination dictated by the emotional and social state in the early periods of their psychomotor development. In terms of intellectual development, the artistic creations of children and young people are not just a free activity to express themselves through images or a creative activity to transform the intangible in the depths of their subconscious into the concrete.

On the contrary, painting an image is for them a fundamental form of nonverbal communication. In the early stages of life, when the ability to structure thoughts through words is still developing, visual art offers an alternative channel to express feelings, desires and personal experiences, where without the semiotic analysis of images, it would be very difficult to reveal their meaning (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006). Semiotics helps to decipher this process and this "visual language", treating the artistic creations of the 3-18 age group as systems of signs that represent their worldview and subjective experience. In this sense, every element of the painted image – such as the choice of colors, the arrangement of figures, the use of space, the composition or the intensity of the lines used – can be analyzed as a sign that carries meaning, or a certain symbolism. For example, the repeated use of the color red can signal strong emotions, while the lack of detail in human figures can be related to aspects of the child's social or psychological development. This is the case when semiotics gives the art critic and the teacher a structured method to research, understand and interpret these signs, using the methodology of comparative analysis to trace the developmental and cultural source of the child, or student, in relation to the social, economic, religious and anthropological context in which he/she lives. All these elements are fundamental in the formation of the child's character and individuality, which is directly reflected in the images he/she creates. Also, semiotics is intertwined with developmental psychology, art therapy and pedagogy, enabling a multiple reading of the images painted by children and young people (Malchiodi, 1998). In this way, the science of semiotics not only helps in the substantive interpretation of images, but also in the construction of supporting strategies to promote further emotional and creative development in the 3-18 age group.

Therefore, this scientific study seeks to analyze, through the science of semiotics, all the mechanisms of the creative process in children and young people, where the images created by them are thus transformed into windows to understand their inner world. Each visual sign used in the depiction of the intangible within the imagination of creative children, in an image perceptible by all, has the potential to reveal important information about the psychological state, the social environment in which he/she lives and his/her abilities to think symbolically rather than empirically surreal.

Semiotics: the system of signs for interpreting visual art in children

Children begin to create simple drawings and shapes, which themselves contain signs that reflect their emotional and perceptual reality. Researcher Rhoda Kellogg identified in 1969 several universal patterns of children's drawings, which serve as the basis for the development of the visual language with which they are able to express themselves (Kellogg, 1969). During the 6-12 age group, children, thanks to life experiences and knowledge acquired up to that age, demonstrate new skills in mastering artistic tools, to the extent that visual art acquires new narrative and symbolic structures. Children begin to deal with events, feelings and large concepts such as: family, school, or nature, using simplified codes for structuring the image, but understandable to everyone.

In the adolescence period, which corresponds to the age of 13 to 18, the artistic creativity of this age group takes on a more introspective dimension and is often rich in diverse symbolism, where visual signs represent complex feelings within the subconscious, which emphasize elements such as social or identity concerns. According to Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, the images that children create in this age range should be interpreted according to their cultural and social context (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 1996). The role of semiotics in the field of visual art is essential, as it enables us to interpret signs and therefore their meaning. The artistic creations produced by this age group offer a very meaningful theoretical framework to trace and recognize the way in which children and young people interpret and represent what they carry within themselves in images, through visual art. In the first half of the 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce placed semiotics at the center of their studies, making us understand that semiotics conceives communication as a system of relationships between the **sign,** the **content** and the **meaning** of the artistic work created by young age groups (Chandler, 2017). From this perspective, the artistic image created by a child or a young person, according to Barths, has no meaning if it does not carry the lived experience and feelings of the one who creates it (Barthes, 1977). In the context of educating children in the visual arts, semiotics becomes an essential tool for understanding how children use visual language to communicate experiences, emotions, and ideas. Visual communication is therefore a system of signs that can be analyzed in the same way as spoken or written language – with structures, grammar, and conventions that are learned and interpreted. For children, drawing, coloring, building with different materials, or creating installations are not only aesthetic acts, but are also forms of visual linguistic expression through which they articulate thoughts and construct meaning.

According to artist Vecchi, semiotics in children's visual art is not just about recognizing ready-made symbols or signs, but about the ability to create meanings from each person's personal experience through a visual language that is built from experience, emotion, and the acquisition of new knowledge. Vecchi states: "Visual languages are not representations of reality, but constructions of meaning – complex symbolic forms through which children think, question, and express their understanding of the world." (Vecchi, 2010). Following this approach that Vecchi highlights, it is worth emphasizing that the interpretation of images and artistic works created by children and young people is not a linear or fixed, rigid, or unchanging process, but a creative act closely linked to the aesthetic perception, sensory experience and cultural interaction of the child/student between the internal and external environment. By

internal environment I refer to the child's relationship with the family within the perimeter of his/her home. While by external environment I refer to all the relationships that the child builds with all those who do not belong to the family members. Both of these environments are essential and fundamental for the formation of the child's individuality, which is then reflected in his/her artistic creations and behavior in relation to third parties. If the internal environment provides the child with the first cognitive mechanisms about everything that surrounds him/her in his/her daily life in the first years of life, the external environment after the age of 3, which is also the first "break" between the two dimensions of living: what he/she was used to mastering in the internal environment and what the external environment provides, places him/her in front of unwanted choices, challenges to face situations that he/she did not provoke and how to behave with others, creating a self-defense armor. This, like every element provided by the internal and external environment, directly affects the overall formation of the child's character and individuality. Both environments contribute mutually to the process of overall formation and what the child represents among the society or community where he/she lives. All this means that the expression of children and young people through visual art is in itself an active semiotic process, where material, color, form and structure are tools of a visual grammar that the child develops independently and sensitively to the temporal and anthropological context in which he lives. An inevitable process, since the child creates and expresses what he thinks, imagines and is encouraged to create that image, with that language, that content, that graphic sign, that composition and those colors of that creative moment, despite the fact that within the child are unconsciously layered life experiences, memories, events, or occurrences that have marked what we consider individuality. The creative child will have to go through a complex process to concretize his idea from the abstract "liquid" state within himself to that understandable and concrete for everyone. The key elements for the concretization of the original idea and its manifestation in a concrete image interpretable in semiotic terms are:

1. **Artistic language** – every artistic technique (drawing, color or monochrome painting, modeling, collage, black and white graphics, etc.) constitutes in itself a special semiotic system, which the child uses to interpret and communicate the meaning that the original idea carries in an abstract "liquid" state within his subconscious;

2. **Preparatory process** – for the creative child, the preparatory cognitive process of how and what to draw/paint/model is very important, where the meaning of the original abstract idea is built and developed during the creation of the artistic image, and not simply through the final interpretation of the work;

3. **Materials used** – each technique/material used (paint, clay, paper, cardboard, canvas, wood, etc.) has its own semiotic characteristics which, during the creative process, encourage children not only to acquire certain psychomotor skills, but also a dialectic that teaches them to read and use visual art as a "mediator" between two dimensions, what they feel and experience within themselves and what is outside them. The materials used to concretize the original idea into a concrete image, become a pure semiotic of communication. They give meaning to the imperceptible within the child's subconscious, as thanks to the use of a variety of materials, the child manages to develop a sense of distinction between situations, emotions, psycho-spiritual states that encourage him to communicate through visual art;

4. **Social interaction and dialogue as part of interpretation** – the meaning of the images created does not arise in isolation, but in conversation with others, whether with peers, with the teacher, or even with parents. Social interaction and dialogue with others who surround the child in his daily life is a continuous act, where meaning is not given once and for all, but is built openly through conversation and reflection. At the same time, it is very important that the child, after having completed the creation of the artistic image, explains it in front of other peers, listening to their comments on how they interpret his/her work. This relationship highlights three essential elements for the formation of his individuality: involvement, confrontation and activation of the child's interaction with others in a dynamic process of interpretation. Therefore, social interaction and dialogue not only help the child express the intended meaning, but also allow him/her to reflect on the very process of understanding the created image.

Developing the understanding of visual signs in children's creative process

The development of the ability to interpret visual signs is closely linked to the cognitive(cognitivo[it]) and socio-emotional development of the child. Vygotsky's constructivist theory emphasizes that meaning is constructed through interaction with others and through the use of cultural tools, including above all visual ones (Vygotsky,1978). The intersection of constructivism and semiotics is essential to understanding the fundamental role of symbolism and the development of thinking in children. Children learn to read and use visual signs within a given cultural context, and this interpretive experience is gradually built up through dialogue and reflection on the conditions and circumstances in which the child grows up. In his theory, Matthews emphasizes that the child is an interpreter of physical truth (Matthews, 1999). Therefore, in continuation of this reasoning and also based on my experience as a teacher of visual arts in the pre-university system in Albania (2012-2019), I highlight that for children and young people (students), drawing is not simply a replicative (mimetic) reflection of reality, where everything they see is accurately imitated, but a way to discover and recognize the symbolic relationships between the external world (external environment) and the internal experience in their subconscious dictated by the internal environment. The semiotic meaning of visual arts in children includes a number of aspects: the use of color as a symbol (e.g. blue for calm or sadness), shape as a metaphor (e.g. angular shapes for aggression, circular for kindness, linear for stability), while also influencing the selection of subjects to draw or paint which, according to their reasoning, should reflect personal emotions and experiences. Eisner, in his book "The Arts and the Creation of Mind", argues that visual art contributes qualitatively to the development of the intellect of young age groups in the pre-university system, directly assisting them in the general process of learning new knowledge (Eisner, 2002). Therefore, the role of visual arts is fundamental in the pre-university system in Albania, as it has an extraordinary contribution to the well-organization of expression through images, the acquisition of new knowledge and the development of the cognitive process as a whole in the age groups from 6 to 18 years old.

Semiotics in this process is fundamental thanks to the interpretation of graphic signs used by students to create their artistic images, which at the same time helps the teacher to understand the meaning of the images themselves. The creative process of children/students for Arnheim is not located on the periphery of the educational experience, but at its core (Arnheim,1974).

Therefore, the artistic creations of children and young people are one of the most fundamental ways through which they express their inner world and build meaning for the world around them. The visual signs (visual symbols) that children use during drawings are not only representations of objects, but forms of communication that serve as a bridge between thought and the visual language with which they create their images. The understanding of these signs involves semiotic knowledge, visual perception and cognitive skills, which develop progressively in accordance with the age and experience of each one. Graphic signs are visual elements that carry meaning. In the context of children, they appear in simple geometric shapes such as circles, lines, squares, triangles, human figures, or stylized objects. Initially, these shapes are imitations of reality, but later they take on symbolic meaning, serving as tools to build a narrative, concretize feelings and thoughts on paper.

Researcher Howard Gardner, who is known for the theory of multiple intelligences and its impact on artistic education and the creative development of children; emphasizes that the role of artistic expression in building intelligence and in the development of "visual language" is vital for young age groups, who, thanks to visual art, manage to reveal their psychospiritual state (Gardner, 1980). Visual signs are not immutable; they are dynamically constructed by children themselves in interaction with their physical, social and cultural world. Therefore, semiotics analyzes the way in which children's drawings reflect their cognitive and creative development and how they constitute an early form of symbolic language.
This entire process goes through several stages of development for the interpretation of the visual meaning of artistic creations in children, which are:

1. **The disordered stage (2 - 4 years old):** Drawings are indecisive, with spontaneous movements. The signs have no meaning for others, but are charged with emotions and sensitivity for the child;

2. **Symbolic stage (4-7 years):** They begin to use symbols to represent real objects. A circle with two dots can be a face. This is the stage, the period where the child begins to build a system of signs;

3. **Realistic stage (7-10 years):** Children try to imitate reality more accurately. Visual signs begin to be organized in a narrative way, respecting the principles of composition and spatial balance on the sheet;

4. **Visual reasoning stage (10+ years):** Awareness increases to draw and create in a reasoned way in the use of space, color, composition and perspective. Children begin to reflect on the meaning of the signs they use.

Another aspect that should be considered is the role of anthropology, composed of two elements: the environment and the culture in which the child lives. Anthropology plays a key role in the way children construct and interpret visual signs. The symbols they use are not universal; they are closely related to the territorial and cultural context that surrounds them. For example, a child raised in a city will use different signs than one raised in a mountain village. Visual education in the pre-university education system in Albania (although only one hour per week), profoundly influences the development of reasoning about how and what visual art represents

in the expression of feelings and psycho-spiritual state in students from first to twelfth grade. Knowing the stages of visual development and the meaning of signs helps teachers and parents to provide adapted support for the creative development of children. Artistic activities should be adapted in such a way as to encourage this fundamental process for the all-round formation of children's individuality from an early age. Education should foster an environment that values the process over the result, and creates spaces where students can express themselves freely, without fear, and reflect on everything they feel in their subconscious. These are signs that the child chooses intuitively, but that through interaction and education can become conscious objects of artistic reflection.

Art Education as Semiotic Practice

During the visual arts lesson, the teacher has the important and very delicate role of mediator between the inner world of the child/student and the broader system beyond that of visual signs that serve to create artistic images. Contemporary pedagogical approaches give special importance to the diverse artistic languages as how children manage to express what they carry inside themselves. Visual art for researchers Edwards, Gandini and Forman is one of the fundamental ways through which children manage to communicate what they cannot communicate verbally (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman,2012). This approach supports the idea that children and young people are not passive consumers of visual art, but active actors in the construction of meaning, who use semiotic language to communicate and share their own lived experiences over a certain period of time. The semiotic analysis of children's artistic works also allows visual art teachers to better understand the internal mental and emotional processes of the child/student. Reading children's artistic creations as semiotic texts allows us to notice and highlight symbolic patterns, cultural tensions, regional, economic, social, religious affiliations, or even the influence of media and advanced technology on the construction of expressive artistic signs. Nicholas Mirzoeff in his book "An Introduction to Visual Culture" addresses the ways in which visual signs are understood and interpreted in different cultural contexts, including their influence on the way children learn and create with the means of visual art (Mirzoeff, 2011). This type of analysis is particularly important in our time, as children today grow up exposed to a universe rich in images and require skills to decipher them, then lending them to the structuring of the images they create. For Freedman, this process serves to better and more accurately recognize the child's worldview during the creative act (Freedman, 2003). In continuation of this argument, there are also the risks of interpretive overload of artistic creations.

Although the semiotic approach offers a deeper interpretation of artistic images created by children and young people (therefore helping us to understand what they wanted to express), there is still the risk of misinterpreting them. The process of interpreting images is particularly sensitive in the young age groups from 3 to 6 years old, who often create spontaneously and unconsciously, without a clear purpose or intention of what they really want to communicate with the images they create. Anning & Ring's studies show that often educators in the preschool system, or visual art teachers in the pre-university system, project false, inaccurate or overly symbolic and superficial interpretations onto children's artistic creations (Anning, & Ring, 2004). All this happens due to cultural and technological influences, as the graphic signs used by children and students are increasingly complex, mixing global references with their local realities.

Conclusions

The artistic creations of children and young people can be analyzed as developing semiotic systems, reflecting the holistic growth of the individual thinking and sensitivity of each of them. The semiotic approach helps in the interpretation of hidden meanings, but care must be taken in its use and contextual awareness must be taken in interpreting the artistic creations of young age groups and young people. For a deeper and more sensitive artistic education, it is necessary to adopt an interpretive methodology that does not impose meanings, but allows children themselves to discover and explain their own graphic signs that have served to create the artistic image.

In conclusion, the semiotics of visual art represents a powerful tool for understanding and interpreting the ways in which children and young people in the pre-university system express their inner world. It turns the process of interpreting drawings from an intuitive act into a systematic and meaningful analysis. By reading the signs that children make on paper, we can get closer to their experiences, feelings, and ways of thinking. This approach not only enriches our understanding of child development, but also strengthens the connection between the educator, teacher, psychologist, and parent with the child, in a communication that goes beyond words. Semiotics, as a theory of signs and meaning, offers a valuable lens for understanding how children interpret visual art and use visual language to construct their reality. Through this theoretical framework, educators and teachers can develop pedagogical practices that support children's critical, symbolic, and creative abilities, treating visual art as a living language for interaction and self-expression. In this way, semiotics is not only a tool of analysis, but also a philosophy of learning through art. The development of visual sign understanding in children is a complex and multifaceted process, involving a continuous interaction between thought, feeling and visual expression. By understanding this process, we can improve the way we support their creative development and help children and young people build their own visual language with deep and completely personal meaning.

Therefore, this scientific study addressed key issues and highlighted essential elements for the interpretation of children and young people's artistic creations through the science of semiotics. A study based on three scientific theses, that of visual art, semiotics and psychology, serving to achieve the expectation of delving into the field of visual art study as a creative and theoretical dimension in the artistic creations of children and young people, as well as in the field of pedagogy of teaching visual art in the pre-university system in Albania.

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The role of music education in the edevelopment of young artists for the operatic stage

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Abstract

This study examines the importance of an integrated pedagogical approach in the education of people: soloist's or choristers, an important role in the emergence of emotional, physical, sentimental and cultural components that naturally intertwine with their artistic feelings. In a reality where performers are on the rise, the aim of the study is to analyse how music education contributes not only to technical skills, but also to the development of new cognitive, emotional and social skills of artists. Therefore, this study raises several questions: How are young artists prepared for the challenges of the operatic stage? What are some aspects that form the young artist beyond vocal skills? The research follows a qualitative methodology, including analyses and interviews with vocal music teachers, opera directors and active artists, as well as observations in teaching environments and rehearsals of vocal ensembles. The findings of the performance show that an integrated pedagogical approach balanced between artistic and artistic techniques creates optimal conditions for sustained performance that is aware of its own and social contexts. Such an experience fosters self-reflection, discipline, collaboration and the ability to communicate emotionally with the audience. This study recommends changes in the content of interdisciplinary and professional definition for a whole new generation of choristers and modern society for the challenges and humanities of the stage.

Keywords

vocal pedagogy, emotional development, artistic collaboration, aesthetic sensitivity

Introduction

In the modern world of stage performance, music education is no longer defined solely by vocal technique or the accuracy of the performance of scores (Meizel, 2006). In operatic art, where the singer is simultaneously a musical performer, actor and emotional communicator, a multidimensional approach is necessary for their preparation (Gaunt & Papageorgi, 2010). Young artists of today's scene are confronted with a rapidly changing reality (Wikström, 2020), where the opera stage is no longer just a space for traditional performance, but an arena that requires deep emotional involvement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and pronounced aesthetic and social sensitivity (Benedict et al., 2015; Dobson, 2010). In this context, musical education for soloists and choristers is very important for the formation of a well-rounded artist. A preparation like this goes beyond the development of the vocal apparatus; It influences the formatting of artistic sensibility, the development of creative personality and the ability to communicate with the public in an authentic way. The music teacher, tutor and director become co-travelers of this development process, contributing through an integrated, sensitive and inclusive pedagogy.

This places the study within a clear problematic framework: How does music education help in the development of young artists ready for the challenges of the modern opera scene? This question is at the heart of the analysis of this paper, which aims to reveal the ways in which emotional, physical, collaborative, and cultural components naturally intertwine in the preparation of young artists. The importance of this study lies in the urgent need to repair and strengthen the pedagogical approach in music education institutions in Albania, in order to prepare a new generation of performers who are not only technically skilled, but also sensitive, collaborative and creative. This work examines the mechanisms through which music education contributes to the formation of the opera singer's artistic identity, using interviews with music educators, opera directors and active artists, as well as direct observations of the educational process. The literature reviewed on the artistic preparation of opera singers (Zdzinski, 2013) summarizes some issues necessary for treatment and research:

- Learning through stage experience: Adult artists learn more through performance and reflection on it than through dry theory.
- The relationship between teacher and student is dialectical, not hierarchical – an important feature of advanced vocal teaching.
- Vocal and artistic identity is built through the process of self-interpretation and interaction with roles, repertoire and audience.

In reviewing the literature on this topic, Zdinski concludes that vocal music education plays an important role in shaping students' self-concept, especially through its emotional, social, and identity-building components. Zdzinski advocates more rigorous, longitudinal studies that use blended methodologies to further understand the developmental impacts of vocal music on individuals.

Integrating Comparative Studies into Literature Review

The findings of this study on the artistic formation of opera singers find clear support and parallels in international literature, which emphasizes the necessity for an integrated pedagogical and developmental approach in vocal education. A significant study (Sandgren, 2002) used qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the psychological experiences of 15 professional opera singers. The results showed that vocal performance is deeply linked to self-perception, emotional stress, and coping strategies, reinforcing the need for inner support and emotional development – an essential aspect in our study as well. Similarly, (Doğanayigi and Yiği's, 2023) study highlights the importance of using imagination and metaphorical language in the learning process, especially with body positioning and voice placement. This dialogical and creative approach emphasizes the interaction between teacher and student and active knowledge building, reflecting the constructivist approach embraced in this research.

Another important resource is the analysis of the identity formation of opera singers as a complex process related to stage consciousness and the relationship with roles and audiences (O'Bryan, 2015). This study shows that building self-concept as a singer is not just the result of technical training, but of an inner and reflective experience – an idea that lies at the heart of our analysis. In a more institutional context, a study on American operatic training programs reveals that education remains largely technical, yet there is a growing appreciation for emotional interaction and aesthetic formation through long-term pedagogical relationships (references to follow). A recent neuroscientific study on opera singers (2024) shows that vocal performance activates the "predetermined mode network" in the brain, confirming that performance experiences embody and influence the construction of personal consciousness – an observation that supports the concept of integrated preparation of artists.

Study	**Focus Methods**	**Significance**	
Identity-Focused Case Study	Vocal identity formation	Interview Narrative	Identity Exploration
Sandgren (2002)	Stress and health in singers	When+ When	Emotional Resilience
Imagination Techniques (2023)	Pedagogical strategies	Interviews	Creative Teaching
Quality Singer Identity	Roles of performers and teachers	Interviews	Narrative/dialogical approach
fMRI "voice as an instrument"	The Nervous Embodiment of Singing	Neuroimaging	Embodied learning
Training Programs in the USA	Pedagogy in Opera Education	Mixed methods	Integrated educational model

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the personal experiences of young opera singers in Albania, during their formative journey, with a focus on building artistic identity and acquiring the performing role. Within this framework, the following research questions have been elaborated:

- How do young artists prepare for the challenges of the opera scene, both vocally and emotionally? This question aims to find out how the singers themselves experience the formation process and what pedagogical strategies help build professional and stage safety.
- What are some factors that shape the young artist beyond technical vocal skills? The focus of this question is to identify the role of factors such as aesthetic sensitivity, body awareness, relationship with the teacher, emotional experience, and cultural inclusion in the development of a sustainable artistic identity. These questions are fully consistent with the constructivist approach, which does not aim to provide general data, but to truly understand the participants' personal experiences and understandings.

Methodology

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the role of music education in shaping young artists for the opera scene, focusing on the interaction of technical, emotional, and collaborative components in this process. To achieve this objective, a qualitative exploratory methodological approach was used, appropriate to the complex and subjective nature of human experiences related to art and education. Artists, directors, lecturers, and canto students were interviewed through a deliberate sample, contacting the participants directly according to their functions. Their anonymity has been achieved by not using their real names and referring to them as artist 1, 2, etc. The semi-structured interview contained several key topics of the conversation, and interviewees were encouraged to explain in detail, using concrete examples, the issues discussed.

Type of Study and Theoretical Perspective

In this study, a constructivist approach has been adopted as a theoretical framework to explore the personal experiences and formative pathways of opera singers, highlighting the meanings they construct about the learning process and professional development. Knowledge is not considered as readily available data, but as an active construction of the subject through interactions with the teacher, the repertoire, the stage environment, and the audience. For this reason, special attention has been paid to data collection through in-depth interviews and observation of pedagogical sessions and operatic rehearsals, allowing the voices of the artists themselves to be the main source of analysis. This approach builds on studies by (Gaunt, 2008), (Carey & Grant, 2014), and (Davidson, 2001), which emphasize that the process of advanced vocal learning is inherently intersubjective and reflective. For adult singers, stage experience, emotional communication, and the development of a lasting artistic identity are components that cannot be separated from the technical content of music education.

Therefore, in this research, special importance has been given to the artist's inner sensitivity, the way he/she experiences the learning process, and the way he/she builds personal meaning and security through performance practice.

The essence of the constructivist paradigm is the notion that knowledge is constructed through individual experiences and subjective understanding, rather than being seen as ready-made or universal realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This epistemological stance emphasizes the importance of interpreting reality from the perspectives of the participants, considering them as co-authors of meaning and not simply objects of observation (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). Qualitative research does not aim to find a single truth, but to understand how individuals constructed different meanings based on their life and social experience. The constructivist approach is particularly well-suited for fields such as education, art, and psychology, where emotional experience, empathy, and social interaction are essential for the learning process and personal development (Patton, 2002). In music education, especially in the training of performing artists such as opera singers, this approach prioritizes processes of personal reflection, pedagogical relationships and practical context, treating them as key factors in building artistic identity and assimilating professional roles. The focus of this study is not on measuring external or comparative outcomes, but on analyzing the internal process of shaping artists through music education, especially in the context of opera singers. This approach is based on the concepts of sensitive artistic pedagogy, which treat music education as a complex and multidimensional process. Eisner (2002) says that art education not only develops technical skills, but also the way individuals create aesthetic meaning and express their inner world. Green (2008) asserts that music education should cultivate personal experience and intuitive understanding of music, while McPherson and Welch (2012) emphasize the need to integrate technical development with the ethical and emotional formation of the performer.This position is supported by studies that focus on musical identity and pedagogical relationships, such as O'Neill (2002), which analyzes how young musicians build their self-understanding through artistic experience. On the other hand, (Carey and Grant, 2014) emphasize the importance of the dialogical relationship between teacher and student, which facilitates knowledge building through reflection and experience, especially in individual educational settings such as conservatories and advanced music institutions.

Participants and their selection

- 13 participants with experience and expertise in vocal education and opera performance have been deliberately selected (target sampling):
- Five vocal music teachers from the University of Arts in Tirana, each with more than ten years of teaching experience and individual training.
- 2 opera directors who have worked in productions with young students or soloists in the early stages of their careers.
- 6 young artists (from the age of 21 to 28), who have completed or are in the process of completing their Bachelor/Master level studies and are engaged in stage projects inside and outside the institution.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to share their experiences and represent different roles in the educational process.

Data Collection Techniques

Three different techniques were used to obtain rich and contextual data:

a) Semi-structured interviews, conducted with each participant, lasting an average of 30-45 minutes. The questions are built to explore:

- Pedagogical Approaches Used in Teaching
- Personal experiences of artistic development
- The Emotional Impact of Education and the Stage
- The relationship between the student and the teacher/leader

b) Direct observation

Participatory observation was done in 5 teaching/rehearsal sessions at the University of the Arts:

- Three one-hour private vocal technique lessons
- 2 ensemble rehearsals with director and choreographer

Observations have been documented through notes, focusing on the interaction between teacher and student, providing feedback, and approaches to the emotional aspects of interpretation.

c) Document analysis

A literature review on music pedagogy, emotional education in the arts, and opera training has been conducted to understand the theoretical background and compare empirical findings with internationally recommended practices.

Data Processing and Analysis

The data are analyzed through thematic analysis, a common method in qualitative research that allows for the identification of patterns, themes, and recurring meanings in the collected data. The process included:

- Transcript of interviews
- First code for finding important words and phrases and keywords
- Categorization of codes into thematic groups: pedagogical approach, emotional development, aesthetic sensitivity, collaboration, artistic identity, etc.
- Comparative analysis between participants to discover common points and differences

The reliability of the data has been maintained by triangulation (a combination of interviews, observation, and literature), as well as through the researcher's critical reflection throughout the analysis process.

Study Limitations

Some of the main limitations are:

- The relatively small number of participants, which does not allow for full generalization, but nevertheless gives a representative picture of the reality in the selected institution.
- Focusing on a single institution (University of the Arts), which can limit the diversity of perspectives offered.
- The subjectivity of the researcher, who, despite being subjected to a rigorous process of thematic analysis, does not eliminate the possibility that personal experience influences interpretation.

Results and discussions

The study on the role of music education in the development of young artists for the opera scene highlighted five main categories that constitute the foundation for the formation of a well-rounded artist: pedagogical approach, emotional development, artistic collaboration, aesthetic sensitivity and practical challenges of the stage. These categories are closely related and serve as pillars of the educational process. Pedagogical approach – from integrated training techniques.

One of the most emphasized elements in all interviews with lecturers was the need for an integrated pedagogical approach, so that it does not remain limited only to the teaching of vocal technique. The most well-known lecturers said that technique is the basis, but without interpretive, emotional and cultural training, the student cannot become a complete interpreter. Some of the most effective methods mentioned were:

- Combining Vocal Work with Literary Text Analysis
- Stage simulations and performance in front of the mirror or in open classrooms
- Using recordings of well-known performers from the past for comparison and discussion

In one of the observed classes, vocal pedagogy integrated a technical exercise with a discussion of the meaning of an aria's words. She asked the students to imagine how the character felt before they started singing. This kind of approach reflects the advanced education model that prepares an artist to be aware and not just a trained voice.

Model of an integrated pedagogical approach to vocal education

Components	Description	Practical Example
Vocal Technique	Exercises for breathing, articulation and resonance	Application of the method to classical arias
Emotional interpretation	Absorption of text and character through empathy	Reflection on the dramatic situation of the character

Components	Description	Practical Example
Aesthetic reflection	Discussion on the meaning of the work and personal connection	Analysis of the texture and style of the work
Stage collaboration	Building scenes with colleagues, interacting with the director	Rehearsal with ensemble for duet or choir
Self-assessment and feedback	Interpretation Video Observation and Error Analysis	

Emotional development and artistic personality formation

One of the most significant findings is that music education profoundly affects the emotional structuring and personal identity of the performer. Participants reported that through musical practice they have developed qualities such as self-control, empathy, concentration and patience. Some artists describe the experience of studying vocals as a "psychotherapeutic process," where dealing with technical difficulties helped them deal with their insecurities.

Meanwhile, the teachers felt it was very important to make the classroom a safe and welcoming place where people would not judge each other. They said that many students have doubts and anxiety, especially when they are preparing for public performances. As a result, a close, honest, and empathetic relationship between teacher and student is key to long-term progress. Similarly, Sandgren's (2002) study, which used qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the psychological experiences of 15 professional opera singers, found that vocal performance is deeply linked to self-perception, emotional stress, and coping strategies, thus highlighting the necessity for inner support and emotional development – an essential aspect in our study as well. The observations we conducted in this study showed that educators who promoted emotional reflection on text and performance evoked greater engagement and authenticity from students.

Cooperation as the essence of artistic and social formation

Music education, especially within the spheres of opera and vocal ensembles, requires close interpersonal collaboration. During the interviews, the students emphasized that working with directors and choreographers is essential – not only to sing, but also to listen, to assimilate collective narratives, and to respond dynamically to stage partners. These data are consistent with contemporary academic literature, which considers collaboration in music education to be essential for building performative identity and developing social skills (Fernández-Barros, Duran & Viladot, 2023); (Partti & Westerlund, 2013). The directors interviewed emphasized that artists with early collaboration experience were more receptive to directing and more adaptable on stage. In contrast, students who had received mostly individual training had more challenges in adjusting to group dynamics—an observation supported by research findings on composition and collaborative performance (Partti & Westerlund, 2013).

This fact emphasizes the importance of organizing of:

- Joint performance projects (ensembles, mini-operas, collective concerts)
- Interdisciplinary trainings with actors and conductors
- Open Scenes for Experimentation and Improvisation

These initiatives help develop collective artistic intelligence, which is an important skill for any professional performer (Gaunt & Westerlund, 2013).

Aesthetic sensitivity and awareness of artistic content

The findings of this study on the artistic formation of opera singers find clear support and parallels in international literature, which emphasizes the necessity for an integrated pedagogical and developmental approach in vocal education. One of the most delicate concepts identified in this study is aesthetic sensitivity, which goes beyond technical precision and relates to how the artist approaches the work, understands its depth, and creates an authentic emotional connection with the audience.

A significant study (Sandgren, 2002) used qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the psychological experiences of 15 professional opera singers. The results showed that vocal performance is deeply linked to self-perception, emotional stress, and coping strategies, reinforcing the need for internal support and emotional development – an essential aspect in our study as well. Similarly, (Doğanayigi and Yiği's, 2023) study highlights the importance of using imagination and metaphorical language in the learning process, especially with body positioning and voice placement. This dialogical and creative approach emphasizes the interaction between teacher and student and active knowledge building, reflecting the constructivist approach embraced in this research.

Another important source is the analysis of the formation of the identity of opera singers as a complex process related to stage consciousness and the relationship with roles and audiences ("We ARE Our Instrument!"). This study shows that building self-concept as a singer is not just a product of technical training, but rather a result of inner and reflective experience – an essential idea for our analysis. In a more institutional context, a study on American opera training programs reveals that education remains largely technical, yet emotional interaction and aesthetic formation through long-term pedagogical relationships are increasingly valued. This supports our observations about the importance of the pedagogical-student relationship in the development of students' artistic identity. A recent neuro-scientific study on opera singers (2024) shows that vocal performance activates the "predetermined mode network" in the brain, confirming that performance experiences embody and influence the construction of personal consciousness – an observation that supports the concept of integrated preparation of performers and aligns with our findings regarding students' personal experiences on stage. Further, (Dongmei, 2024) asserts that aesthetic music education cultivates students emotionally, intellectually, and socially, emphasizing maturity and interpretive empathy. (Gao, 2024) argues for the importance of developing vocal aesthetic sensitivity, not only in technique but also in musicality and emotional connection with the audience, while (Sahi, 2024) demonstrates that deep aesthetic interpretation can reveal hidden emotional layers within a work and strengthen

performative performance. A Frontiers study (2021) shows that students who have high aesthetic-musical sensitivity have better emotional intelligence and self-reflective skills.

Our students who were exposed to philosophical, historical, and poetic discussions, as well as creative methods of interpretation, showed a remarkable interpretive maturity and ability to create compelling characters on stage. One teacher called this an attempt to avoid mechanical interpretation: "I don't want my student to sing like a robot." "I want him to have something to say — something that comes from within." (Educator 1). This approach is consistent with international literature, which emphasizes that aesthetic and emotional formation is essential to create a real connection with performance and audience (Hu & Gao, 2024). This approach shows the need to reimagine study programs, including more subjects that foster reflection, aesthetic sensitivity, and the development of personal artistic language.

Real challenges and lack of regular stage practice

One of the most sensitive points encountered during this study is the lack of regular stage experience for students, due to limited resources, lack of spaces, lack of institutional collaboration with theaters, and lack of well-organized projects. The young artists called the first stage appearance a "shock", not because they were not vocally prepared, but because they had not had enough experience in communicating with the public, controlling emotions and taking stage responsibility. This practice gap reduces the chances of developing:

- Emotional self-control under pressure
- Skills to work together on stage with directors and instrumentalists
- Immediate reflection on mistakes and improvisation

The results from the interviews and observation show how important it is to change the way vocal education is organized in Albania so that being on stage becomes a natural and important part of the learning process.

Summary of the main results

Category	**Key Findings**
Pedagogical approach	Effective education occurs when technique is integrated with sensitivity and interpretation
Emotional development	Music helps to "emotionally form and face personal challenges"
Artistic collaboration	Stage performance requires collective intelligence and interaction
Aesthetic sensitivity	Artistic content and aesthetic awareness are essential for communication with the public
Stage Experience	The lack of a real scene limits the practical and emotional development of art

Conclusion

At the end of this study, it becomes clear that music education for young artists of the opera scene is a complex and multidimensional process, which cannot be reduced to technical sound training. Rather, it requires an integrated approach that combines vocal skills with the performer's emotional, social, cultural, and aesthetic preparation.

From the analyzes and interviews conducted, it is observed that:

- Traditional vocal pedagogy, focused primarily on accurate musical technique and reproduction, is inadequate to prepare an artist to meet the demands of the current stage.
- The integrated pedagogical approach, which includes empathy, emotional reflection, collaboration, and interpretation, proves to be most effective in cultivating conscious and mature artists.
- Music education helps a lot in the personal development of the performer, helping to form self-confidence, discipline, and empathy for others.
- Aesthetic sensitivity and interpretation of the meaning of the work are essential for creating a genuine emotional connection with the audience and conveying the art with integrity.
- The lack of regular stage experience and real opportunities to perform is a big problem for young artists who want to make a career out of it.

In this way, the music education of young artists cannot be seen as a linear and technical process, but as an internal and external development journey that requires a comprehensive approach, continuous support and an educational system that promotes art as a human, cultural and social experience.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this research, a series of recommendations are proposed aimed at increasing pedagogical approaches and organizing music education in higher artistic education institutions in Albania.

Development of integrated pedagogical approaches

- Promotion of a teaching method that links vocal technique with emotional analysis and stage performance.
- Creation of training programs for teachers in modern vocal pedagogy, which includes interpreter psychology and interdisciplinary approaches.

Strengthening personal and emotional education

- Adding special modules to the curriculum for emotional intelligence, stage fright management, and artistic self-reflection.
- Establishing mentorship groups between teachers and students for ongoing support throughout the study cycle.

Integration of collaborative and ensemble experiences

- Organizing joint workshops with actors, directors, choreographers, and conductors to build artistic interaction skills.
- Stimulating work in vocal groups, ensembles, and improvisational scenes that encourage sensitivity and immediate artistic response.

Development of aesthetic sensitivity and critical reflection

- Adding subjects such as: philosophy of art, aesthetics, musical poetics, to strengthen the understanding and deep appreciation of the works.
- Encouraging the analysis of the repertoire not only from a technical point of view, but also from a cultural, historical and social point of view.

Getting regular and meaningful stage experience

- Establishing sustainable collaborations with theaters, concert halls, and independent stage projects to provide students with real platforms to perform.
- Creation of mini-productions on campus every semester, where students take on different roles (singer, assistant director, coordinator, etc.).
- Using digital technology (recordings, online performances, video feedback) to help improve performance and keep track of progress over time.

Revising the curriculum to aid in the practice and development of life skills

- Creating a curriculum that balances vocal practice with artistic personality development, including subjects that prepare students for the professional world: communication, project management, stage ethics, etc.

Seeing the high potential of young artists and their desire to develop a strong scenic and human identity, it is essential for educational institutions to make a turn towards a new philosophy of education, which relies not only on tradition but also on a deep understanding of the current demands and challenges that the modern reality of the performing arts brings. If the above recommendations are implemented in a systematic and coordinated manner, it is envisaged that young artists will develop not only as talented voices, but also as sensitive, thoughtful and committed individuals capable of contributing to the national and international art scenes.

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The Impact of Vocal Pedagogy on Singers of Various Musical Genres

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the influences of vocal pedagogy on singing technique for singers of different musical genres. Despite the specific characteristics of vocal musical genres, singers need to sing with a clean vocal technique and appropriate vocal interpretation. Singing technique relies on the singer's existing vocal abilities, which allow them to use their voice optimally across various vocal genres. One of the research questions we aim to validate in this paper is: How does applied vocal pedagogy influence singing technique and vocal expression in singers of different genres? During the analysis and documentation of vocal technique usage according to different genres, we followed an empirical methodology involving multiple cases, before and after the effect of vocal pedagogical didactics, specifically the way of using the voice, regardless of the genre in which the singing process occurs, assimilating technical elements as common denominators of professional singing, such as: intonation, vocal range, voice stability, air control, articulation, and resonance. In conclusion, we find that the correct use of vocal technique among singers across all musical genres improves vocal technical parameters and raises awareness among singers regarding the professional use of their voice.

Keywords

vocal, musical genre, singing technique, pedagogical technique, singer

Introduction

Through a comprehensive and diverse education, singers can expand their vocal abilities and further develop their individual skills. A balanced training approach, encompassing techniques and styles from various singing genres, allows singers to respond flexibly to the demands of different musical styles and continuously improve their singing technique. Research into the selection of appropriate literature and the right timing for specialization can help identify optimal pathways for developing singing technique in singers. Vocal pedagogy plays an important role in the development of singing technique across many musical genres. The way singing is learned and trained can significantly impact vocal performance, tonal aesthetics, and vocal health. Therefore, studying the influence of vocal pedagogy on singing technique across all genres of music is of great interest. My experience at Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, Germany, introduced me to an analytical way of thinking about music. Coming from a Mediterranean mentality, I believed that a musician's profession was a privilege of talented individuals.

However, through the German working method, I realized that voice alone, musicality, passion, or temperament are not enough to become a professional singer. Professionalism is achieved through extensive, studious, and analytical work. The voice is the singer's only instrument, and unlike other musical instruments, it cannot be repaired with replacement parts. This organic instrument is the singer's sole capital. All biological systems are activated during singing: the respiratory system, blood circulation, nervous system, muscular system, etc. A singer aware of technique and vocal discipline can positively influence their voice and body by understanding these parameters. Based on my notes from years of teaching students, as well as my study of vocal analysis literature, I have analyzed vocal technique and concretized it through some illustrated exercises shown below.

By practicing and training the voice, we become aware of our individual vocal identity. No voice is identical to another. Everyone has their own unique voice that cannot be compared with others. This makes the technical orientation more challenging, but also simpler, because there are no ready-made templates to copy; we cannot just replicate someone else's voice. But how do we develop our vocal work when we don't have a ready-made form or template to follow?

Vocal work is based not only on perception through the sense of hearing but also with all other senses. In this broader perception, we experience the voice more comprehensively. Feeling how air passes through the vocal cords and causes them to vibrate makes us conscious through sensory perception. Imagine seeing sound as a color and noticing the direction it takes when it leaves our body—this develops the imagination. Listening to the sound with the inner ear, which dictates the melody before we sing, guides us through auditory perception. Working with the voice is beneficial for both the body and the mind. Practicing the voice also enhances our ability to observe our physical state. Breathing in rhythm and tempo influences the movement of various muscles: the diaphragm, lateral muscles, abdominal muscles, shoulders, back, neck, jaw, cheeks, etc., affecting blood circulation and nerve activation. You control your voice by perceiving it from within yourself, not from outside. This means orienting yourself with your vocal technique by feeling how your voice functions during singing. It is a fact that a person

hears their own voice differently than others hear it. On the other hand, you sing for those who listen, not just for yourself… right? So, how do we perceive our voice as others do? Many students often ask me this, and my answer is: Only by developing the ability to perceive your voice from the inside. In my opinion, working on the voice should be approached with moderation so that we can achieve good, healthy technique for correct singing across all genres.

The factors that define correct singing are:

- Good knowledge of anatomy and the physiological functions of the vocal apparatus.
- Working on the voice carefully, without straining the student's voice. Teachers need the ability to feel and follow the student's throat.
- Not rushing to determine the voice type at the beginning; the instrument develops through ongoing work.
- The repertoire for students should be adapted to their vocal stage and serve as material for technical breakthroughs.
- At the end of each lesson, the student should be clear and have answers to all questions regarding the lesson topics and how to practice new material.
- A proper lesson is also reflected in the vocal condition at its conclusion: the student should not feel fatigue or throat pain after singing.

One of the questions in this research is:

What are the fundamental principles and methods of vocal pedagogy for young singers across all genres?

The main principle is to justify the methodology convincingly for students. Let's pause for a moment on the term "Diaphragmatic Breathing" — it is somewhat confusing for inexperienced young singers. This term should not be misunderstood, because it does not mean that the breath fills the diaphragm. The diaphragm is not an organ of respiration, nor does it replace the lungs. The natural form of air movement in the human body is Inhalation – Exhalation. In situations of stress or insecurity, some singers fall prey to another form of breath management: Breathing – pause of air – exhalation. The period during which the air is held back—also called breath-holding—creates physical stress, which is transmitted into the sound of the voice.The voice needs smooth exhalation, not breath-holding. This is because only the gentle movement of air passing between the two vocal cords causes them to vibrate and produce a natural vocal sound. When singers hold their breath and do not release air for vibration, the vibration of the cords is generated by internal movement of the larynx, leading to continuous throat fatigue and poor control of pitch and tone. Regarding air control, the goal is to find the "golden middle" in releasing air, so that the vibration of the vocal cords has the ideal air pressure. Releasing too much air dominates the sound with excess air rather than voice. In this case, the sound becomes heavy and does not project well to the audience. This heavy sound, under the force of gravity, dominates, and the pitch can quickly become unstable. It is also important that the vocal cords be accompanied by the correct amount of air—not less than necessary. Excessive air is a result of breath-holding or breath restriction. Air exhalation should not be stopped during singing, as this causes vocal tension and stress. In such cases, the singer moves the musical function of the vocal cords (what the breath should do) through the larynx and the root of the tongue. These movements are unnatural and exhaust the throat excessively over a very short singing period.

Another question in this research is:
How does applied vocal pedagogy influence singing technique and vocal expression across different genres?
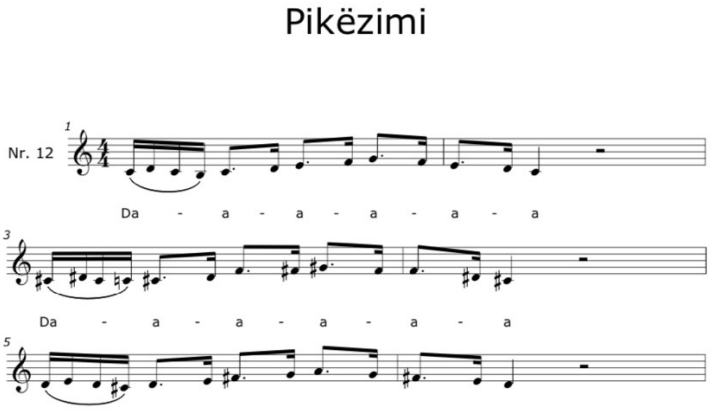
Vocal pedagogy applied to singing technique and vocal expression mainly influences the implementation of targeted exercises. For each vocal technique theme, an exercise specific to the technical problem should be identified. Let's consider the technical task: *Unification of vocal registers*. Everyone has their own visualization of the sound, but for most singers, it is the written notes that guide their vocal movement. Written notes visualize the vertical movement of the music, a movement that singers unconsciously follow with their body, even raising to the tips of their toes when singing high notes. The problem is not so much with the visualization, but with what happens to the function of the vocal apparatus. Synchronizing reading with singing causes the larynx to follow the note movement with continuous impulses in the vocal cords, elevating them to high notes. This lifting of the larynx raises the root of the tongue and blocks free sound emission.

Furthermore, this rise of the larynx disconnects the support and connection between the voice and the airflow driven by the diaphragm. With the rise of the larynx, singers think they cannot reach high notes or that their voice is not responding, leading to doubts about their vocal abilities. This is simply a technical problem, which can be solved by changing the visualization related to the function of the vocal apparatus. *The sound does not follow vertical movements but horizontal ones*. Visualizing the voice in a horizontal direction accompanies the sound across its entire range with consistent quality, intensity, and vocal force. Imagine if your voice had a color—how would you visualize its direction? The answer is simple and well-documented: When it is cold and you see vapor coming out of your mouth, the vapor goes straight forward and then rises, right? The voice is matter with an internal temperature similar to that of the human body. When it exits the body, it rises above the ambient air, which has a lower temperature than the human body. Therefore, the warm air of the voice ascends higher than the colder ambient air. Hence, we perceive the voice as if it comes from above, as we hear it. When the voice leaves the body, it follows a horizontal direction—from in front of the mouth. This means that it is not necessary to artificially elevate the voice "upwards" or raise the tongue when singing high notes. To avoid this technical issue, exercises must be performed to unify the registers.

Another delicate subject in vocal technique is *Intonation*. The voice is matter, and the technique of voice production is based on the laws of physics. Only technique can challenge the force of gravity. Regarding intonation, technique must facilitate balance in the voice. Vocal balance—like balance in sports—is created through movement. Therefore, the voice should be in motion and not restricted or over-controlled. While singing, remember that the last note of a phrase, played with the same intensity as the first, should sound the same. The final note of a phrase is important because it guides the next phrase, which orients itself by the interval with the last note of the previous phrase. If the note is released unsupported before the end of the phrase, the next begins with uncertain intonation; as a result, the played section falls noticeably in pitch. Only if you maintain the level of sound and continue the new phrase from the same point where you left the previous one will your intonation remain pure. The best display of virtuosity is *Perfection of passages*. The goal of exercises for this technique is to combine accurate intonation with the speed of passages, as well as to balance ease of sound with the
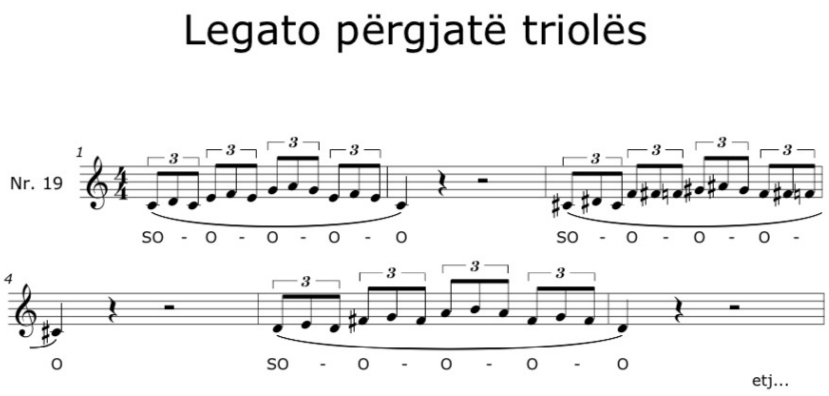
strength of support.
These four elements:
1. Passage speed,
2. Accurate intonation,
3. Ease of sound,
4. Support strength, are the main pillars of vocal virtuosity.

It seems that when talking about professionalism and perfection of passages, we are referring to classical music. However, in fact, all vocal genres require technical perfection of passages. In our traditional Middle Albanian folk music, there are many songs with virtuosic passages over a single vowel. Many well-known are the songs sung by Fitnete Rexha or Hafsa Zyberi, such as: "Kur pata nji lule t'bukur" (When I had a beautiful flower), "Si m'ke syte m'ke vetllat" (How your eyes and eyebrows are), "Të desha me hakikat" (I loved you truly), etc. Similarly, the so-called jaret from Shkodra are famous for their lyrical virtuosity, such as: "Për mu paska ken'kismet" (For me, it was destined), "Nat zaman t'njasaj furie" (A night full of fury), "Kenke nuri i bukurisë" (You are the radiance of beauty), among others. Another important genre where perfection of passages is highly essential is Musical. In the repertoire of musicals like: The Wicked, The Phantom of the Opera, Les Misérables, Sweeney Todd, etc., we encounter vocal parts of such technical difficulty that only a singer with professional training can perform vocally. Therefore, all technical elements must be practiced separately through specific exercises by all professional singers across all genres. In the following example, we analyze *the exercise of dotted notes*:
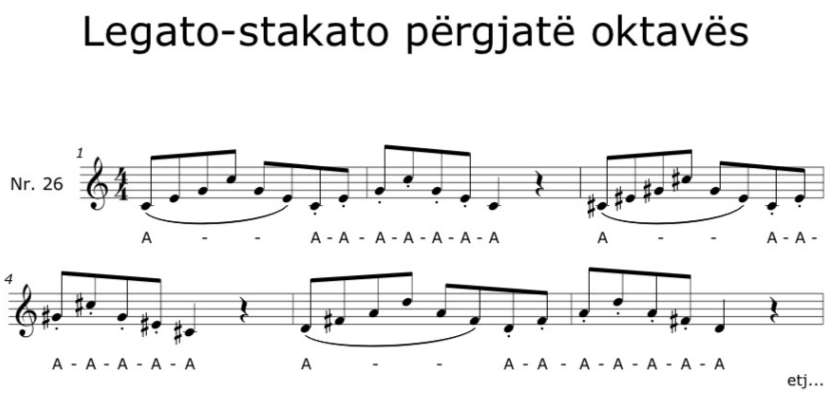


Musical example 1. Exercise of the dotted notes

This exercise is effective for training intensity along the entire singing line. Sing this exercise with the dotted eighth notes throughout its entire duration, up to the sixteenth note. The interval between one note and the next should be filled with sound. Sing the first group of four sixteenth notes on the syllable "DA," giving the tone of the voiced consonant "D." While performing this rapid movement, keep the larynx calm and still. The larynx should not control the movement of the notes. This is the job of the air, which should be expelled continuously, simultaneously with producing the sound. With this exercise, you also soothe the larynx, training it not to be involved actively in quick musical movements.
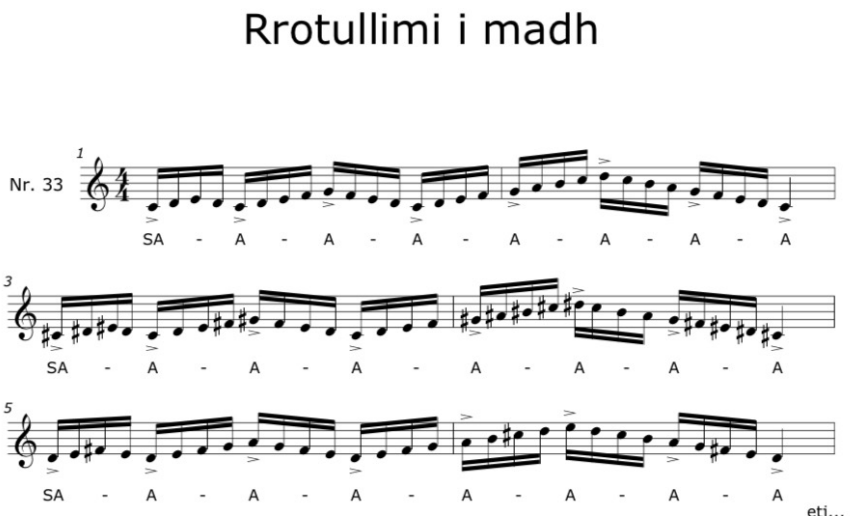


Musical example 2. Legato throughout triplets

For this exercise, I have chosen the syllable SO, but you can also practice this vocalization with other syllables. Sing the triplets gently and with caution, making sure not to emphasize any note more strongly than the others. The entire sequence with triplets should flow continuously, smoothly, without lifting the voice from one group of triplets to another. Draw the vowel O over the breath release in a balanced manner, maintaining the legato. With this exercise, you can also expand your vocal range in the upper register by combining legato-staccato techniques. Through light staccato, the voice can reach new notes within the range of your voice.
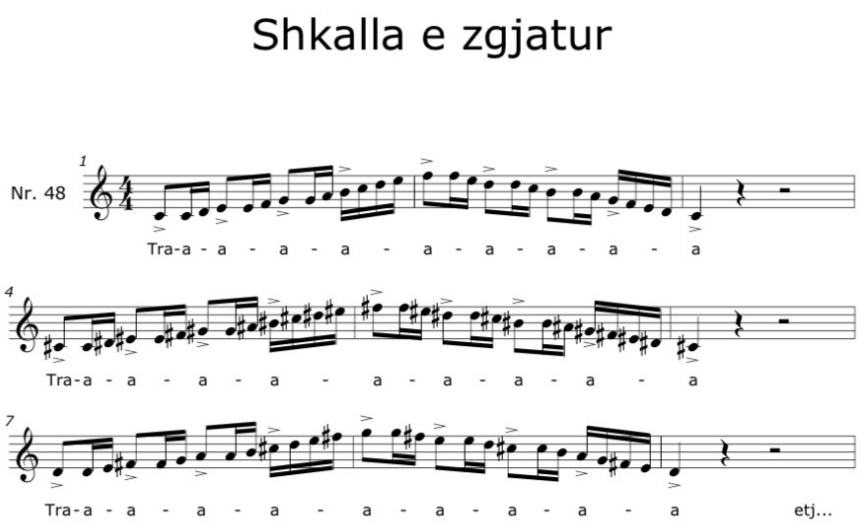


Musical example 3. Legato - Staccato across octaves

To achieve a clean technique in staccato, proper coordination of the vocal cords' tension with the appropriate amount of air pressure from the diaphragm is necessary. Start singing this exercise slowly to develop awareness of your individual parameters. Only accelerate the sequence, when you feel confident, that your voice is not straining and that there is no pressure in your throat. Be careful, that the tongue does not control the movement of the upper notes — rising and blocking the voice from coming out freely. Throughout the octave, add a minimal downward push with the diaphragm to avoid the tongue's tendency to lift upwards, which could restrict the voice. In this way, you further enlarge the space for pushing, and your voice will sound supported and resonant.



Musical example 4. The Great Roulade

This exercise is especially useful for arpeggio cadences, folk songs, and musicals. The cadence is a vocal element that embellishes the solo melody with virtuosity and brilliance (mastery) without instrumental accompaniment. Here, we are dealing with the art of vocal cultivation crafted in a filigree manner. For this art, requiring delicacy and technical precision, you need to perfect the even movement of the voice. Focus the sound only straight ahead, regardless of the upward or downward movement of the melody. This will help you avoid controlling the note movements with laryngeal movements. Let the larynx remain passive and guide the phrase solely with a continuous exhalation of air throughout the sequence until the following breath. This way of singing cadences is called in bel canto: sul fiato — on the breath. Therefore, the voice must be supported by the breath, not mixed with air. Try to clearly distinguish this difference in your vocal technique. Cleanse the notes from excess air by not blowing the vowels with too much air.



Musical example 5. Extended Scale

In this exercise, you practice agility (from Italian: agilità), or as called – the vocal dexterity. The combined vocal movement with eighth and sixteenth notes allows active engagement of the diaphragm during quick movements without any internal laryngeal movement. The sound breaks from one group to another throughout the musical sequence are air impulses commanded by the diaphragm. Give momentum to this movement by rotating the syllable TRA at the beginning of the sequence. This rotation focuses the sound forward into the resonance of the palate or, as lyric singers call it, the "mask." We can naturally utilize the resonance of the palate in each of us.The mouth serves as the resonating space in the palate, similar to the acoustic and architectural shape of the building's dome. This form makes it possible to produce a rounded, full tone. By tightening the palate during inhalation, you can further enlarge this space.

Complete the exercises thematically according to the technique you need for the parts of your program. During your study, keep your intonation under control with the help of an instrument such as a piano, keyboard, or phone applications. Helpful tools for study also include a mirror and an audio recorder. Singing in front of a mirror is useful for controlling the external muscles of the face, neck, jaw movement, mouth opening, lips, forehead, and body posture. It also helps improve stage presence. An audio recorder is very useful for recording your lessons or practice sessions. After your practice, the recording helps you better understand and evaluate your work. By working every day with your voice, you will quickly feel the progress of your vocal development. You will always feel more confident in your artistic awareness and will enjoy the satisfaction of your work. Another question of this research is:

How can the effectiveness of exercises before and after the training phase be measured?

The effectiveness of technical exercises is measured by the skills acquired by singers in mastering their professional craft, responding to the community of musicians they work with. What does it mean to make music?

This word is important for singers, as it helps them understand that the profession of a singer is not only about singing, but also about making music. It is about communicating through the language of music with other musicians participating in the work. Some singers even believe that the pianist is there solely to "accompany" them, and that their role as an instrument is of a service level. This is neither true nor professional. As we know from the experience of chamber music, many lieder are composed with much more challenging piano accompaniments than the singer's part. Here, the singer's melody part must harmonize with the accompaniment, which is also a very important dramatic element. Professional communication between the singer and the instrumentalists yields significant results for both the music and the artistic personality of the musicians. The same level of communication is needed with the orchestra and conductor. Performances across all music genres are teamwork. When making music together, the perfect dynamics with the right musical colors are found. Musical dynamics are relative, precisely because of this. There is no measuring unit for music that determines how much or how little we have made music together.

This is the artistic miracle achieved by those artists who do not use music for their personal ego but allow themselves to become part of the music they are making. How do we make music by adapting to our colleagues and also waiting for their musical responses? Be aware of your vocal instrument and use it with great delicacy and good artistic taste. Here, visualizing the voice in form and color can help you. Imagine, for example, that your voice is a painter's palette. Isn't it beautiful to use different colors while singing and let the voice follow the line of a brushstroke? Imagine that to sing a "forte," you need a thick brush, and for a "piano," a thin brush. How many possibilities in form do you give your voice by "painting" this musical shape you are singing? Let your imagination guide you through the art of singing!

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Arbërisht and standard albanian: Linguistic differences and the risk of extinction

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Abstract

Arbërisht is a historically significant dialect of Albanian spoken by the Arbëreshë communities in Southern Italy, descendants of Albanians who fled the Balkans between the 15th and 18th centuries due to the Ottoman expansion. Belonging to the Tosk branch of Albanian, Arbërisht retains numerous archaic linguistic features that have since disappeared from Standard Albanian. Simultaneously, it has undergone notable external influence, particularly from Italian and Greek, resulting in a unique hybrid of preservation and adaptation. Linguistic divergences between Arbërisht and Standard Albanian manifest in phonology (e.g., the substitution of the schwa sound "ë" with "a," and preservation of old locative forms like mbë), lexicon (including archaic terminology and frequent borrowings), and morphosyntax (such as older verb conjugations and definite article constructions). These elements collectively distinguish Arbërisht as a valuable linguistic and cultural heritage. Despite its historical and ethnolinguistic significance, Arbërisht today is critically endangered. The number of active speakers is rapidly declining, especially among younger generations, who are overwhelmingly assimilated into Italian-speaking society. The lack of a standardized orthography and limited presence in formal education systems further exacerbates its vulnerability. This analysis is based on a qualitative approach, through a comparative examination of linguistic and ethnographic sources. Written and spoken materials in Arbërisht (such as folk songs, prayers, poetry, and documented interviews) are analyzed in comparison with the structures of Standard Albanian. Additionally, previous studies in the fields of sociolinguistics and endangered language documentation are included to place Arbërisht within a broader theoretical and practical context. This paper explores the current status of Arbërisht, its primary linguistic distinctions from Standard Albanian, and the broader sociolinguistic implications of its decline.

Keywords

Arbërisht, dialect, linguistic differences, risk of extinction.

Introduction

Arbëresh represents one of the most important and distinctive variants of the Albanian language, both in terms of its linguistic value and the historical and cultural dimension it embodies. It is an archaic dialectal variant of the Tosk branch of Albanian, preserved and developed by Arbëresh communities settled mainly in Southern Italy following the major waves of Albanian migration during the 15th–18th centuries, as a consequence of the Ottoman conquest of Albanian territories. These communities, geographically separated from the main body of the Albanian language, have managed to preserve an early form of it, transmitting it from generation to generation under conditions of relative linguistic isolation.

Unlike Standard Albanian, which was codified relatively late (in the second half of the 20th century) through institutional and political processes, Arbëresh evolved in a natural and autonomous manner, preserving phonological, lexical, and morphosyntax elements that are today considered archaic. Precisely for this reason, Arbëresh constitutes a valuable source for historical and comparative studies of Albanian, functioning as a "living archive" of the medieval stage of the language.

Nevertheless, despite its extraordinary scientific and cultural value, Arbëresh today faces a serious risk of extinction. Processes of globalization, cultural assimilation, and the pressure of the majority language (Italian) have significantly affected its use, particularly among younger generations. This situation places Arbëresh at the center of contemporary debates on endangered languages and language preservation policies.

The current situation of Arbëresh is characterized by a continuous decline in its active use as a language of everyday communication. In many Arbëresh communities, the language is no longer systematically transmitted from parents to children, restricting its use primarily to older generations. This phenomenon, known in sociolinguistics as "intergenerational disruption," constitutes one of the main indicators of language endangerment (Fishman, 1991). A fundamental issue concerns the lack of a unified standard for Arbëresh.

Unlike Standard Albanian, Arbëresh exists in several local varieties that differ from one another in phonetic, lexical, and syntactic aspects. This fragmentation makes its use in formal contexts such as education, administration, or the media difficult, thereby limiting its social functions. Another problematic factor is cultural assimilation within Italian- and Greek-speaking host societies. Italian and Greek not only dominate public and institutional life but are also perceived as languages of higher social and economic prestige. As a result, Arbëresh is often viewed as a "family language" or a language of the past, lacking practical function in contemporary reality.

In this context, the pronounced differences between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian also create a communicative and identification gap. While Standard Albanian functions as a symbol of national identity and linguistic unity, Arbëresh remains in a peripheral position, often outside official Albanian language planning policies.

The main objective of this paper is to provide an in-depth and well-argued analysis of the relationship between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian, focusing on linguistic differences and

on the factors contributing to the risk of extinction of Arbëresh. More specifically, the study aims to:

- identify and analyze phonological, lexical, and morphosyntax differences between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian;
- examine the impact of long-term contact with Italian and Greek on the development of Arbëresh;
- highlight sociolinguistic factors that have contributed to the reduction in the use of Arbëresh;
- analyze the current role of Arbëresh in Arbëresh communities as an element of identity and culture;
- propose concrete strategies for its preservation, documentation, and revitalization.

This objective positions the paper not only as a descriptive study but also as a contribution to the contemporary debate on language policies and the protection of endangered languages. The significance of this study lies on several interconnected levels: linguistic, cultural, scientific, and social.

First, from a linguistic perspective, the study contributes to the documentation and analysis of a rare variant of Albanian, helping preserve data that are essential for historical and comparative studies of the Albanian language.

Second, from a cultural standpoint, Arbëresh represents a key element of the identity of the Arbëresh diaspora. Its preservation is not merely a linguistic issue but also an act of safeguarding collective memory, traditions, and ways of life within these communities.

Third, on a scientific level, the paper is constructed in accordance with contemporary approaches in sociolinguistics and endangered language studies, drawing on Fishman's theories (1991) and UNESCO's recommendations for the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages. This makes the study comparable to international practices and valuable to the academic community.

Finally, the social importance of the paper is related to raising awareness of the need for sustainable language policies, both in host countries and in the Albanian-speaking space, in order to guarantee the survival and functionality of Arbëresh in the 21st century.

Linguistic Differences Between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian

The analysis of linguistic differences between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian constitutes one of the main pillars of this study, as these differences reflect not only divergent historical developments but also distinct sociocultural influences and language contact situations. Arbëresh, as an isolated variant of Albanian, has preserved features that in Standard Albanian have either disappeared or undergone significant transformation.

Phonological Differences

At the phonological level, Arbëresh exhibits a range of archaic features related to the vowel and consonant systems. One of the most significant elements is the preservation of certain stress

patterns and intonations that are closer to earlier stages of Albanian. In some Arbëresh varieties, the preservation of long vowels and a more stable stress system can be observed, differing from Standard Albanian, where stress has undergone leveling and functional shifts. Furthermore, Arbëresh displays phonetic variants of consonants that have been unified in Standard Albanian. These phonological differences are not merely dialectal forms but constitute direct evidence of earlier stages in the development of the Albanian language, granting Arbëresh particular importance in diachronic studies.

- Preservation of older sounds such as "mbë".
- Replacement of "ë" with "a" in many cases, e.g., "nën" - "nan", "të mëdhenj" - "të madhinj".
- A more stable central stress and intonation influenced by Italian.
- Changes in intonation and stress patterns.
- Stress is more stable and usually falls on the first or penultimate syllable.
- Intonation is often influenced by Italian pronunciation patterns.

Lexical Differences

From a lexical perspective, Arbëresh presents a dual richness: on the one hand, it preserves an archaic lexical stock with words no longer used in Standard Albanian; on the other hand, it has adopted a considerable number of borrowings from Italian and, in some cases, from Greek. These borrowings have been gradually integrated into the Arbëresh linguistic system, adapting phonologically and morphologically.

Unlike Standard Albanian, which has followed deliberate policies of lexical enrichment through neologisms and terminological purification, Arbëresh has developed spontaneously, reflecting the social and cultural reality of Arbëresh communities. This contrast clearly illustrates the difference between an institutionally planned language and a language that evolves naturally under minority conditions.

- Numerous borrowings from Italian (e.g., bukëra for e bukur "beautiful," kambanella for këmbanë "bell," "klisha" (from Greek ekklēsía) - "kishë" "church").

From Italian (especially Southern dialects):

- Everyday vocabulary: krešu (from crescere, "to grow"), fare (from fare, "to do"), pena (from pena, "punishment, suffering")
- Ecclesiastical and cultural terms: messa (from messa, "Mass"), santuari ("sanctuary"), madona ("Madonna")
- Words related to administration and urban life
- Religious terminology and Christian concepts are often borrowed from the language of the respective church (Latin in Italy, Greek in Greece)
- Personal names and toponyms are frequently adapted according to the dominant languages.

Preserved Archaic Vocabulary

Arbëresh preserves words that have disappeared or have become rare in Standard Albanian. Examples: rrëfej - still used in the sense of "to tell" or "to narrate," whereas in Standard Albanian it is primarily used in the religious sense ("to confess"); fërfëllon - used to describe light sounds, a poetic term that has become rare in modern Albanian. Everyday vocabulary differs significantly from that of Standard Albanian.

Morphosyntactic Differences

At the morphosyntactic level, Arbëresh preserves grammatical structures that have been simplified or replaced in Standard Albanian. A more frequent use of analytic forms and greater flexibility in word order within the sentence can be observed. This flexibility is related to the oral tradition of the language and the lack of a standardized written form. Moreover, Arbëresh retains older case forms and verbal constructions that have become rare or have assumed different functions in Standard Albanian. These elements make Arbëresh an essential object of study for understanding the structural evolution of Albanian.

Older Forms of Articles

Arbëresh preserves early forms of the definite article and the infinitive.
Examples: libra - used for Standard Albanian libri ("the book"); du me shku - use of the infinitive with me, similar to Gheg Albanian

Compound Verbs and Archaic Forms

Verbal expressions with archaic forms:
- "jam mërrë" - used instead of "kam marrë"
- "kam ardhë" - commonly used in place of "kam ardhur"

Sentence Structure

Sentence construction often follows Italian word order.
Example: instead of "E mora librin", one may hear the construction "Libri e mora". The use of certain auxiliary forms or participles influenced by Italian intense formation (as in Arbëresh: kam vedit, from ho visto, instead of kam parë).

Use of Marked Forms of Gender and Number

The presence of different forms for singular/dual/plural that do not exist in the standard language. "vajzë" – "vajza" – "vajzat" - in Arbëresh, internal changes in the root or article may occur.

Aspect	**Arbëresh**	**Standard Albanian**
Phonology	mbë, nanë,- persistent accent	më, nënë, -more flexible accent
Lexicon	bukëra, kampana, preservation of archaic words	standardized vocabulary, limited external influences
Morphosyntax	jam mërrë, libra, me shku	kam marrë, libri, për të shkuar

Table 1, Summary of Differences between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian[1]

1 The examples in Arbëresh and Standard Albanian are presented in their original linguistic forms, without normalization or orthographic modification.

Aspect	Arbëresh	Standard Albanian	Examples
	Preservation of archaic sounds such as “mbë”	Loss of archaic sounds	mbë shtëpi vs në shtëpi
	Replacement of “ë” with “a” or its omission	Preservation of “ë” in most cases	nanë vs nënë, vajza vs vajzë, djala vs djalë
Lexicon Morphosyntax	Stable stress on the first or penultimate syllable	Flexible stress depending on the word	kàmbanë (stress on the first syllable) vs kambánë
	Loanwords from Italian and Greek	More standardized vocabulary with fewer loanwords	bukëra (bella) vs e bukur
	Preservation of archaic words	Loss or modification of certain words	fërfëllon vs fluturon
	Words created through language contact	Frequent use of standardized forms	klisha (kishë) vs kishë
	Older forms of articles (e.g., definite article)	Standard definite article forms	libra vs libri
	Older verb forms (e.g., “jam mërrë”)	Updated and standardized verb forms	jam mërrë vs kam marrë
	Word order influenced by Italian	Flexible word order	libri e mora vs e mora librin
	Use of different gender and number forms	Standard gender and number forms	vajzë vs vajzë (with dialectal variation)

Table 2, Comparative Table: Phonological, Lexical, and Morphosyntactic Differences

Arbëresh frequently uses older verb forms:
- Albanian: Ai shkoi
- Arbëresh: Ai vajti (an archaic form meaning “went”)

Use of fewer modern grammatical structures:
Limited use of the compound infinitive; Simpler syntactic structures (due to historical isolation).

Linguistic Level	Arbëresh	Standard Albanian
Phonology	Preservation of archaic stress patterns and sounds	Unified phonological system
Lexicon	Archaic vocabulary plus borrowings from Italian	Neologisms and standardized terminology
Morphosyntax	Flexible structures and older forms	Simplified and codified structures
Standardization	Lack of a unified standard	Institutionally consolidated standard

Table 3, Comparison of Selected Linguistic Features between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian

Language Contact and External Influences

The long-term contact between Arbëresh and Italian has had a significant impact on its development. This contact has not been solely linguistic, but also cultural and social, reflecting the gradual integration of Arbëresh communities into Italian society. However, unlike processes of complete assimilation, Arbëresh has managed to preserve its core structure, demonstrating considerable linguistic resilience. The influence of the majority language is manifested primarily in the lexicon and in certain syntactic structures, but not in the grammatical core of the language. This phenomenon supports the thesis that minority languages can survive for long periods, even under continuous pressure, provided that they maintain strong identity-related functions within the community.

Cultural Influences

Arbëresh includes words and expressions influenced by Italian, for example:
- "kam bërë festa" (from fare festa – meaning "not to work")
- "kam graçie" – meaning "I am grateful"

Long-term contact with Italian and Greek has had a substantial impact on the vocabulary, while phonology and syntax have been affected to a lesser extent. The grammatical core and basic structure of Arbëresh, however, have remained Albanian. This influence represents a vivid example of linguistic interaction in bilingual communities, while also illustrating the resilience of a linguistic identity in diaspora contexts.

Field	Arbëresh	Standard Albanian
Dialect	Old Tosk	Tosk (standard)
Sounds	Use of "a" instead of "ë"; preservation of "mbë"	More modern and standardized phonological system

Vocabulary	Archaic words plus Italian influence	More unified vocabulary with fewer external influences
Grammar	More archaic and simplified	More complex and standardized
Writing system	Non-unified; influenced by Italian	Albanian alphabet with 36 letters

Table 4, Comparison of Selected Linguistic Features between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian

Example 1: **Fragment of an Arbëresh Prayer**

Arbëresh:
O Atë i shenjtë, që je mbë qiell, shenjtërofçatë emri i yt, e ardhçatë mbretërija jote...
Standard Albanian:
O Atë i shenjtë, që je në qiell, u shenjtëroftë emri yt, ardhte mbretëria jote...

Observations:
- "mbë qiell" - an archaic form corresponding to "në qiell" ("in heaven")
- "shenjtërofçatë" - preserves an archaic imperative/subjunctive form
- "emri i yt" - inverted word order (in contemporary usage: emri yt).

Example 2: **Traditional Arbëresh Folk Song**

Title: *"Moj e bukura More"*
Arbëresh: Moj e bukura More, si të lashë nuk të pashë, më zu një mall i gjorë, e zemra m'u ba gur.
Standard Albanian: Moj e bukura More, kur të lashë nuk të pashë, më kapi një mall i rëndë, dhe zemra m'u bë gur.

Observations:
- "si të lashë" - used instead of "kur të lashë" ("when I left you")
- "më zu" - an older form corresponding to "më kapi" ("gripped me")
- "u ba" - an archaic form of "u bë" ("became").

Example 3**: Poetry by Jeronim De Rada (19th-century Arbëresh writer)**

Arbëresh: Ti më more ment' e mendjes, ti më cove ndër dëndësira, ku s'më mbeti asnjë shpresë, vec andrra që s'mbarojnë…
Standard Albanian: Ti më more mendjen, ti me cove në humnera, ku s'më mbeti asnjë shpresë, vec ëndrrat që nuk mbarojnë.

Observations:
- "ment' e mendjes" - a poetic archaic expression repeating the concept of "mind" for stylistic emphasis

- "dëndësira" - conveys meanings such as darkness or depth, with a more metaphorical nuance than in modern Albanian.

Phonetic and Phonological Notes

In Arbëresh, many words are pronounced more softly or show Italian-influenced features, for example:

- "dh" - is more frequently realized as "d"
- "ë" - is often replaced by "a"
- Nasal sounds ("n", "m") are more strongly articulated in certain areas.

The Risk of Arbëresh Language Endangerment

Arbëresh is currently classified as an endangered language according to the criteria established by UNESCO for assessing linguistic vitality. One of the most significant indicators of this risk is the interruption of intergenerational transmission, a phenomenon clearly observable in most Arbëresh communities. While older generations use Arbëresh as their first language, younger generations often possess only passive knowledge of it or do not speak it at all. This process is directly linked to the socio-economic changes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which have led to urbanization, internal and international migration, and the increasing dominance of formal education conducted in the majority language. As a result, Arbëresh is gradually losing its communicative functions and is increasingly confined to symbolic or ritual uses, primarily within cultural and religious contexts.

Another major factor contributing to the risk of extinction is the lack of institutional representation of Arbëresh. In many areas, the language does not enjoy official status within the educational system, which severely limits its structured teaching and use. Without institutional support, the language remains dependent on individual and community-based initiatives, which are often unsustainable in the long term.

Sociolinguistic Factors of Endangerment

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the risk of Arbëresh language loss can be explained through several interrelated factors. First, the social status of the language is relatively low compared to Italian and Greek, which function as the languages of education, administration, and social mobility. This status imbalance directly influences the language choices of Arbëresh families, who often prioritize the majority language in order to provide their children with greater opportunities for integration.

Second, language ideologies play a crucial role in the process of language shift. In some cases, Arbëresh is perceived as an "old" or "useless" language, which negatively affects motivation to learn and use it. This ideology is reinforced by the lack of contemporary materials, media presence, and digital technologies available in Arbëresh. Third, the dialectal fragmentation of Arbëresh makes it more difficult to construct a shared linguistic identity at the intercommunity level. While Standard Albanian functions as a symbol of national unity, Arbëresh remains confined to local spaces, thereby reducing its visibility and influence in the public sphere.

Strategies for Preservation and Revitalization

The preservation and revitalization of Arbëresh require a multidimensional approach grounded in the principles of language planning and international best practices for endangered languages. According to Fishman's model (1991), absolute priority must be given to the restoration of intergenerational transmission, as without this element any other intervention remains temporary. One key strategy is the integration of Arbëresh into the educational system, either as a subject of instruction or as a supportive language in preschool and primary education. Bilingual education can serve as an effective tool for increasing linguistic competence among younger generations while simultaneously strengthening cultural identity.

Another crucial aspect is the scientific documentation of Arbëresh. The recording of spoken language, the collection of oral texts, folklore, and literary traditions are essential steps in preserving linguistic heritage. Such documentation should adhere to contemporary linguistic standards and be made accessible to both scholars and the community. Furthermore, the use of digital technologies and social media offers new opportunities for promoting Arbëresh. Online platforms, educational applications, and multimedia content can increase the visibility and usage of the language in modern contexts, making it more attractive to younger speakers.

The Role of Academic and Cultural Institutions

Academic and cultural institutions play a key role in the preservation of Arbëresh. Universities, research institutes, and academies of sciences can contribute through research projects, academic programs, and international collaborations. These institutions have the capacity to build bridges between scholarly research and the concrete needs of Arbëresh communities. In this context, cooperation between Albanian institutions and those of the host countries is essential for the development of sustainable language policies. Arbëresh should not be viewed solely as a diasporic issue, but as an integral part of Albanian national heritage.

The Center for Arbëresh Studies represents one of the most important institutional mechanisms for the preservation and development of Arbëresh studies. It functions as a research and cultural platform aimed at the systematic documentation of the language, history, and culture of the Arbëresh. Through scientific projects, monographic publications, and the organization of conferences and seminars, this center contributes to raising both academic and public awareness of the risk of Arbëresh language extinction.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Arbëresh represents one of the most well-preserved yet simultaneously most endangered forms of the Albanian language, serving as direct evidence of the historical, cultural, and linguistic development of the Albanian diaspora in Southern Italy and beyond. The comparative analysis between Arbëresh and Standard Albanian showed that phonological, lexical, and morphosyntax differences are not merely dialectal deviations, but rather reflect deep processes of linguistic conservation and language contact. At the phonological level, Arbëresh preserves archaic sounds and structures that have disappeared from Standard Albanian, making it a valuable resource for historical studies of Albanian. At the lexical level,

the combination of archaic words with borrowings from Italian and Greek demonstrates a dynamic process of adaptation without the loss of the language's core identity. Meanwhile, at the morphosyntax level, the use of older verbal forms and simplified syntactic structures reflects historical isolation and the independent development of this linguistic variety.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the study confirms that the endangerment of Arbëresh is primarily linked to the interruption of intergenerational transmission, the dominance of the majority language in public life, and the absence of sustainable language policies. Arbëresh is losing its everyday communicative functions and is increasingly reduced to symbolic, religious, or folkloric uses, which constitutes a clear indicator of language shift.

Nevertheless, the analysis of preservation strategies indicates that extinction is not inevitable. Through coordinated interventions in education, documentation, media, and cultural policy, Arbëresh can be revitalized and regain meaningful functions within Arbëresh communities. This process requires not only institutional commitment but also community awareness and a reconceptualization of the language as a cultural and identity-based value.

In conclusion, Arbëresh should not be treated as a relic of the past, but as a living linguistic heritage whose preservation contributes not only to the protection of Albanian linguistic diversity, but also to the enrichment of European cultural heritage.

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The Architecture of Knowledge: Reimagining Museum and Urban Spaces as Territories of Creativity and Education

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Abstract

Urban public spaces are increasingly recognized as transformative environments for creativity, education as well as social engagement (Falk & Dierking, 2012; Sandell, 2011). This article explores how spatial design and curatorial strategies influence participatory learning and creative engagement within these spaces. By analyzing interdisciplinary approaches to museum, galleries and urban space design, the study aims to highlight how these environments foster critical thinking, multimodal learning, and social inclusion. The primary aim of this review is to synthesize existing literature on museum, art galleries education, urban pedagogy and creative spatial practices. Specific objectives include (1) understanding theoretical perspectives on the relationship between space and learning, (2) identifying innovative curatorial strategies that promote creative agency, and (3) exploring the role of technology in enhancing audience participation. The review is guided by key questions: How do spatial configurations impact creative and educational experiences? What interdisciplinary approaches engage diverse audiences? How can public and museum spaces serve as platforms for collective knowledge production? Methodologically, this study employs a systematic literature review approach, drawing on research in museum studies, educational theory, and spatial design. This paper synthesizes debates on participatory learning (Hooper-Greenhill, 2013), sensory engagement (Pallasmaa, 2012), and digital media integration (Parry, 2013). The findings underscore the importance of flexible, interactive, and inclusive spaces that foster creativity, while highlighting the constraints imposed by more traditional, rigid institutional frameworks. This review advocates for the reimagination of public spaces as dynamic, evolving knowledge ecosystems that support interdisciplinary, experiential learning and foster creativity, co-creation as well as social justice (Newman, 2016). These spaces not only act as sites of cultural preservation but as catalysts for innovation, critical thinking and serve as important tools in terms of supporting inclusive educational practices that advocate for empowerment.

Keywords

art education, creative pedagogy, participatory learning, interdisciplinary interactive environments

Introduction

In the recent decades, a growing attention has been dedicated to the entity of the museum and particularly to public creative institutions, serving not only as an artistic and educational space but also as a catalyser for social justice and community strengthening. The museum is seen through a critical lens as a socio-cultural hub for transformation also supporting critical thinking and social cohesion. Museums have been once seen as occupying a passive role in mainly offering a space for cultural preservation, while nowadays there is changing mentality that comprehends a paradigm shift towards viewing the museum as a participatory learning environment that acts as an educational mediator (Stuedahl, 2018; King & Lord, 2015; Hansson & Öhman, 2022).

This paper's intention is to provide exploration of the interdisciplinary intersection between pedagogy, spatial design and participatory learning practices when considering urban public spaces such as museums, art galleries or any other creative space. This paper strives to go a bit further in the details of examining the important facets involved in enabling these spaces to serve as facilitators for promoting inclusive educational practices as well as promote collective knowledge construction. Based on pedagogical theories, art education, in addition to employing architecture of the senses, this literature review investigates the contemporary advancements in terms of museum and urban artistic space reconceptualization as learning habitats that highlight creativeness and innovative sensorial approaches.

The study aims to reply to specific objectives that include (1) understanding theoretical perspectives in terms of the relationship between spatial configuration and learning experiences in museums, (2) identifying innovative and interdisciplinary curatorial strategies that aid in promoting creative agency and learning inclusivity , and (3) exploring how these spaces can provide a „protective umbrella" for social justice through inclusive educational practices and co-constructing knowledge. The review is guided by the theoretical argumentation that a reconceptualised architecture of knowledge, encompassing creativeness, inclusiveness and the idea of collaboration contributes to supporting the notion of the critically engaged citizen in the 21st century applied to reality. This inquiry resumes on theoretical insights stemming from museum studies, pedagogy and architecture (Hooper-Greenhill, 2013, Pallasmaa, 2012; Clover et al., 2016) in order to transform museums and public cultural institutions into lively learning spaces that engage the senses and the mind holistically.

Additionally, engaging with the very notion of inclusivity requires a fundamental shift and a change of mentality, which comprises a relatively significant transformation, requiring radical change in terms of working practices (Sandell, 2011) and making the museum space act as a social agent in charge of inclusivity and social equity.

The study's methodology employs a qualitative systematic literature review in order to determine and evidence how museums play a significant role in shaping educational landscapes in urban culture. This review provides a synthesis of interdisciplinary insights from different scholarly thought stemming from a variety of fields of study for the purpose of ensuring relevance and applicability.

Literature review

Rethinking the Educational Value of Museums and Public Spaces

The museum as a public space has been traditionally seen as occupying a rather archival role, putting an emphasis on preserving artworks and displaying them to the public in a classified way (Falk & Dierking, 2012). On the other hand, when considering the last evolving trends in the last decades, the role of the museum has undergone a shift that reimagines the museum as a rather dynamic space rather than a passive one, involving participation and learning from the visitors (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). This significant shift translates also in the new paradigm of conceptualizing the museum space through the employment of educational theories and urban studies that support the notion of participatory learning, involving knowledge production and co-construction in these creative space. Falk and Dierking (2012) offers a great overview of how museum acts as a mediator in educational practices and learning rather than being just transmitting facts. They articulate the complexity of the museum experience as being a influenced by many factors, including socio-cultural processes. Hooper-Greenhill (2007) articulates on the same direction showing how the learner interacts with everything present in the museum, objects, space and narrative and therefore constructs knowledge engaging in the process of meaning making.

This follows the ideology of Freire's pedagogy where empowerment stands at the centre, where agency, active participation and critical thinking are essential elements of social transformation (Freire, 1970). Pursuing this sense, the museum and art gallery space signifies more than just its appearance and surface, since public institutions are increasingly being recognised as tools for democratic movement and independent thinking (Sandell, 2011). Therefore, going beyond the notion of aesthetics and considering these spaces as essential in deconstructing and re-constructing knowledge in terms of art, culture and identity appears as a necessary first step for a significant narrative shift.

Spatial Design and Multisensory engagement

Architecture and design are essential elements that influence how a space is conceptualised and how it communicates with the environment. Learning is affected from emotional and cognitive dimensions where the environment has an important role. Juhani Pallasmaa (2012) articulates in The Eyes of the Skin on the importance of involving the senses such as touch, sound, smell, sight and proprioception in experiencing space and he gives a holistic critique when it comes to spaces that are designed to only appeal according to occularcentric dispositions. This is especially important and applicable when it comes to museums and art galleries, since the sensory experience of a space can influence the way in which a learning process happens and how overall an educational experience is absorbed. Following Pallasmaa's argumentation, museum experiences need to integrate a holistic approach involving sensorial stimulation, making the experience immersive and interactive, which contributes to the amalgamation of the traditional borders between individual, group of people, space and objects. Serota (2000) argues that the 21st century comprehends a new narrative where the museum is no longer just a place to be visited and just looked at, employing only visual elements, but rather should comprehend an experience where you are „being part of". This means going against dichotomies such as subject

versus object or public versus expert, adults versus children by stimulating rather an emotional connection and a participatory space where self-expression is encouraged. When thinking about Museums, considering especially children's museums such as the MACHmit! Museum in Berlin, both children and adults are encouraged to engage in a multisensory environment where stimulation and the museum experience is made fun and playful that involves intergenerational exchange and an opportunity to dissolve the boundaries between adulthood and childhood. This space provides touchable experiences with hands-on activities stimulating creativity. In a similar way, the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall offers interactive installations that involve the participants and the visitors of the museum space to engage actively. Such curatorial strategies are essential to engage the public into an educational process, embodying learning through the museum experience through an organically integrated process of sensory stimulation.

Participatory learning and community engagement

Participation comprehends a notion widely used and it denotes the ability to take part in something, be included and actively be involved in processes or decisions. Being involved in participatory learning means being engaged into a process of co-creating and collaborating between individuals and communities. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007) and Clover et al. (2016) articulate the necessity of shifting from exhibitions or art spaces that offer a static point of view of a didactic model of learning to a plural and diverse model of learning that encourages contextual and local knowledge construction. Participatory art and education initiatives spread the idea of being involved in producing something and inviting the public to co-create new narratives and co-author social and artistic spaces, which involves critical thinking and artistic expression. This not only enables a certain sense of liberation and empowerment and mentioned before through Freires pedagogy (1970) but also reimagines the public space as a sanctuary of co-constructed knowledge. The birth of the socially engaging museum space follows (Bishops, 2012) critique towards the autonomous practice of aesthetics by arguing that through a collaborative process the emphasis does not reside anymore on the artistic object but rather on the outcome or "social echoes" it generates. This reconceptualises the museum as a space for exchange and not as a sanctuary of authoritative knowledge and power.

Different museums around the world have taken the initiative to approach the museum experience as a learning one, offering educational programs as integral part of their curatorial strategies. The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago has introduced the "School at the Museum" initiative where learning is considered as part of the exhibition, tackled through a creative process. Other initiatives such as the Hamburger Bahnhof Family Sunday in Berlin involve families and children to be actively involved into the artistic spaces, permitting for more collaborative exchange, providing an enriching experience independent from age. (Sandell, 2011) argues how collaborative and participatory learning contributes to social inclusion, involving marginalized communities, enabling a space where their voices are heard. The initiative of Migration Museum UK for example offers a practical example of how curatorial practices are applied to achieve more participation and reach diverse audiences, supporting social justice and giving opportunities for self-expression to communities that have no chance to do so in other settings.

Interdisciplinary and creative pedagogies

Reshaping and reconceptualising the cultural spaces where artistic thought intertwines with education is composed by interdisciplinary elements that often intersect. Burnard and White (2008) articulate that in spaces where creative learning is applied the lines between creativity, art, science and knowledge in general are often blurred, making such spaces as interdisciplinary hubs where education is supports innovative and critical thinking as well as flexibility and resilience which are crucial qualities for nowadays learners. Involving creativity in everyday life and especially in public spaces dedicated to spread creative pedagogies means employing creativity and teaching about and through creativity (Craft, 2011). Involving such a mentality in everyday life means shifting practices towards more playful ways of conceptualising urban spaces which means involving practices such as art residencies, collaborative exhibitions, including learning spaces in order to make the urban art landscape diversified and fostering creative thought. (Falk and Dierking, 2012) argue that places such as museums integrate forms of learning that are informal, detaching from standard spaces where learning occurs that include formal education. Such spaces offer intrinsic motivation learning since the learning process is free and autonomous, and follows individual sense of curiosity without being forced into the learning process such as a standardized environment might offer. As a result, the museum offers a free space to experiment with free learning and offers in public spaces such as collaborative exhibitions or participatory learning gardens or collaborative murals etc., which offer a spontaneous and free learning choice and creative investigation. Additionally, with the emergence of new forms of technology, other shifts are possible in terms of available formats for exhibition spaces where learning can occur. Hybrid spaces are the new "canvas" where the learning experience can go beyond the physical dimension. Augmented reality (VR) exhibitions or other digital exhibitions can enable new horizons when it comes to the intersection of learning and creative thought.

Museums and Urban Spaces as territories of knowledge

(Lefebvre, 1991) argues that spaces are socially constructed, as well as actively engaging in shaping identities and interconnected with power structures that produce knowledge. In the case of institutions such as a museum or art gallery, these spaces not only have an impact in terms of constructing collective memories but also take part in the process of creating ecologies of power. (Falk and Dierking, 2013) argues that museums and public art spaces are recently being viewed as part of an extension of the educational landscape of neighbourhoods and cities, instead of existing as being isolated. These spaces provide context-related content and practices which make them interconnected and tied to the urban learning network. On the other hand, such institutions are not only bridges of learning, but also of identity construction and therefore shifting the narratives and reconceptualising spaces means paying attention to cultural sustainability and ethical aspects. (Newman and Mclean, 2006) argue on the idea of identity being moulded through the process of taking part in the museum space and engaging emotionally with the environment, which requires more attentiveness towards how these spaces are designed since they have extensive effect on the individuals that take part in the experience of that space. Initiatives such as UNESCO Creative Cities give an example of how such projects combine lifelong educational offers within cultural spaces and cities, which centre creativity as an important drive for urban development, aligning with Freire's pedagogy as well as with the constructivist approach.



Figure 1. Yoko Ono Participatory Installation “Refuge Boat Room” (Tate Modern 2024)



Figure 2. Yoko Ono Participatory Installation “Refuge Boat Room” (Tate Modern 2024)

Discussions

The literature puts an emphasis on the potentiality and benefit of reconceptualising museum spaces and art galleries as part of public spaces and urban development. The findings expose how cultural institutions and artistic spaces comprehend "more than the eyes can see", since they are involved in processes of meaning making, shaping how knowledge is constructed, how individuals experience and are able to share under their space realms. Drawing on Foucault's (1980) notion of power and knowledge, spatial environments can operate as a tool where construction and deconstruction of these notions is in constant negotiation with dominant power structures. Such power and hierarchical structures are reinforced through the way in which these spaces are organized and what they offer in terms of institutional and educational practices (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). When it comes to considering contemporary research this traditional role of the museum and the art space is perceived as limiting creative capabilities of individuals and communities, hindering participation and emancipation. (Sandell, 2011) and (Bishop, 2012) propose that including curatorial practices that are engaging the audience aid in creating diversified realities and truths by offering a place for open dialogue where multiple realities are coexisting, where participation is enabling learning and co-produced knowledge. As Constructivist theories would denominate, such knowledge is co-produced within a social experience, generated in addition to individual experience (Vygotsky, 1978).

The design of such artistic spaces plays an essential role in permitting or disabling social interactions. (Pallasmaa, 2012) and (Rendell, 2006) have put an emphasis on the effects of architecture in the embodiment of experiences and the influence of architectural dimensions in determining the engagement of individuals within museum and artistic spaces. Making a space sensory sensitive, flexible, as well as non-adhering to hierarchy, it enables engagement that is more creative and supports connection to the space. Artistic spaces that engage all senses and introduce exploration, play and movement challenge traditional ways of linear learning and having a passive visitor (Vecchi, 2010; Malaguzzi, 1996).

Public art that is widely accessible to everyone and the strategy to introduce urban pedagogies to public spaces offer great examples on how the construction of knowledge can be made outside of the institutionalized walls, challenging the politics of space and access to spaces of culture and education. (Foucault's, 1986) notion of heterotopias can be applied to this argumentation since, such places outside the institutional walls can function as spaces of "otherness", where limits pre-determined structures of conventional society are challenged. Art in this sense presents a form of heterotopia since it enables free exploration in spaces that are inclusive allowing for critical and creative endeavours.

Nevertheless, reconstructing new narratives and introducing new concepts can be quite challenging since this requires not only a reconceptualization of the space but also of the cultural institutions agenda. Awareness and ethical grounds must be respected especially since institutions could use the notion of inclusivity only for the sake of political or economic purposes, hiding behind benevolent guises of introducing inclusiveness (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). Therefore, the ability of institutions to indulge in self-reflexion is an element that should not be underestimated.

Often, cultural institutions tend to translate and reproduce hierarchical and elitist structures, which often exclude certain marginalised communities and therefore lack inclusivity. A gap can be also evidenced in terms of aligning with expectations of institutions to deliver outcomes considering bureaucratic constraints and pressure to deliver appreciable outcomes, which in turn reduces the ability to engage into experimentation and creativity. (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1991) articulate on how museums often reproduce narratives of power and hierarchical forms of culture by offering more privilege to those who are already familiar or who have already such educational background and accessibility options. Art that engages culturally should avoid falling into instrumentalization, in order to use art for the purpose to mask inequalities without analysing root causes and engaging in critical thinking (Bennett, 1995; Grigo & Laely 2022).

Additionally, aesthetics should not be just for the sake of pleasuring the eye and eclipsing the educational content, giving more priority to superfluous messages and branding rather than concentrating on local needs and strategies that put an emphasis on sustainability and community engagement.

Conclusions and recommendations

Museums and artistic spaces offer an immense opportunity in transforming urban spaces and their curatorial agenda as well as educational practices are not to be underestimated when it comes to the ecologies of knowledge construction and community empowerment. The museum space should not just serve a passive and static entity where creativity is paralyzed and dictated from traditional norms of spatial arrangement and lack of participation. The architectural elements of the space, as well as the curation of it should adhere not only to aesthetic and historical elements but it should reconsider adding elements that engage and connect the visitor with the emotional and sensorial dimensions in order to stimulate an integrated approach to offering a museum experience. Introducing diversity and inclusion appears as an essential element that museums and art galleries need to take into consideration in order to offer genuine educational platforms that speak to a wider audience and break with the rigidity of traditional forms, offering interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge production. This translates as including communities in processes that involve creativity and pedagogical strategies involving co-curation and collaborative methods, which allows for a re-imagination of these spaces enabling agency and empowerment. As demonstrated from research, reconceptualising these spaces under a participatory lens enables marginalized groups to have a voice, enabling problem solving skills and critical thinking for future generations through an empathic approach.



Figure 3. Yayoi Kusama Obliteration Room, Participatory Installation (Auckland Art Gallery, 2017)

Urban spaces when amalgamated with artistic and educational purpose offer an immense potential in terms of offering a place for culture, creativity, learning and dynamic community exchange. This means that different actors need to be involved such as artists, curators, educators, policy makers etc. in order to transform these spaces into a collaborative universe where knowledge is produced in a creative way reflecting collective thought. Some recommendations involve introducing participatory curation approaches which denotes involving local communities, children or young adults as well as unrepresented groups of society in order to make artistic and learning practices more inclusive and equitable. Another approach can be the introduction of emotional and sensorial design to make the space reply to different emotional needs and respond to diverse learning models. Collaboration needs to occupy a focal role and be encouraged between different individuals and groups involved in order to promote interdisciplinary learning and knowledge production. Another aspect would be to re-conceptualise the notion of public space fused with arts and education transforming urban spaces into holistic learning hubs in order to enhance accessibility to culture and education. Lastly, promoting critical thinking and institutional consciousness are elements that a healthy society needs to always re-consider in order to negotiate power dynamics and reconstruct social, pedagogical and artistic spaces. The entity of the museum and art gallery constitutes artistic spaces that are not only physical spaces, but they also comprehend mental spaces and identities, which are shaped by art and education, coexisting in a dynamic relationship. Employing adequate design approaches and making use of creativity and pedagogical tools as well as employing participation in curatorial practices can provide a significant enhancement of such spaces, evolving them into spaces that enable knowledge construction, diversity and community metamorphosis shaping futures creatively.

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The Symbolism Of Death In Dritero Agolli's Poetry

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Abstract

Aim: This study aims to elaborate on the symbolism of death in the poetry of the writer D. Agolli and its emergence in the Albanian poetic verses. Object: The paper intends to find, analyse, and promote the Agolli's poetic verses in the light of literary studies, and to promote its poetic aspect in the international arena through the magic of the verse dedicated to the symbolism of death in particular and in general. Methodology: includes a combination of theoretical, qualitative, and analytical methods, occasionally incorporating the interpretive historical-cultural method through historical data. Scientific issue: Why did D. Agolli include this element in his poetic verse before and after the 1990s? Dritero Agolli was a part of the group known as the "generation of the '60s" in Albanian literary history. Along with Ismail Kadare and Fatos Arapi, he contributed a new spirit to Albanian literature during the second half of the 20th century, one that tended toward a more qualitative literature in terms of artistic elements as well as on the expansion and enrichment of literary themes. Dritëro Agolli's poetic creativity changed the future of Albanian poetry. He sang of love for the land where he grew up, to the plain man, to the Albanian language, to the sincerity and human communication, to the spiritual feelings and human virtues, such as love, faith, hope, kindness, joy, generosity, passion, boredom, abandonment, and loneliness, but also the vital processes of man himself, such as childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and death. This paper elaborates precisely the symbolism of death, a predominant element in his poetry. D. Agolli as a poet was a name that placed verses over all his life systems. He wrote poems throughout his life. Thus, the poetry of D. Agolli embraces two periods: before and after the years 1990s.

Keywords

poetry, symbolics, time, death, irony

Introduction

The name of Dritero Agolli, his works, and his poetic contributions to Albanian literature are essential to Albanian poetics. Who is Dritero Agolli, though? With a lengthy background in this subject, Dritero Agolli was a significant character in Albanian literature. He was born on October 13, 1931, in Menkulas, Devoll, near Korça, and passed away on February 3, 2017, in Tirana. He received his first education in his hometown, continued his studies at the Gjirokastra gymnasium, and was granted the right to study philology in Saint Petersburg.

Upon completing his studies, he returned to his homeland in 1957 and worked for about 15 years as an editor and journalist for the newspaper of the time, "Zëri i popullit", where he wrote many articles in the field of journalism. Dritero Agolli's literary creativity extends to poetry, prose, drama, and beyond. Agolli appeared in the world of Albanian literature as a student, through publications in newspapers and magazines of the time, such as "Zëri i rinisë", "Pionieri" as well as in other journals. He entered the history of Albanian literature as a poet, where his closeness to his reader stands out; he was a poet who perceived pain, joy, and sadness as universal feelings, merging them with the philosophy of everyday life. Dritero Agolli was a writer who followed the best Albanian creative tradition, enriching it with genuine literary and cultural values.

Dritero Agolli was one of the greatest authors of contemporary Albanian literature, who stands out as an individual. His contribution to poetry and prose has placed him in the group of those creators without whom literature itself would not be at the levels it reflects today. Dritero Agolli belongs to that group that, in the history of Albanian literature, were known as the "Generation of the '60s", and together with Ismail Kadare and Fatos Arapi, he brought a new spirit to Albanian literature (of the second half of the 20th century), a spirit that tended towards a more qualitative literature concerning the elements of the artistic value, but also in expanding the enrichment of literary themes.

We recall that Albanian literature in that period was under the development of the socialist realism method, where literature had a more ideological and political character, but Dritero Agolli, even under these conditions, managed to bring genuine artistic and literary values to Albanian literature. Dritero Agolli's poetic creativity changed the future of Albanian poetry. He sang a love for the land where he grew up, of a random man, of the Albanian language, of sincerity and human communication, of spiritual feelings and human virtues as: love, faith, hope, kindness, joy, generosity, passion, boredom, abandonment, loneliness, but also the vital processes of man himself, as: childhood, youth, maturity, old age, death. The concept of death in Dritero Agolli's poetry is acceptable, and in this appeal of the inner call it will be appreciated in eternity with the works he left. The connotation of death, despite being tragic, makes it grey, giving it whiteness and a sense of experience, clinging tightly to the poetic moment, the strength of the soul and the beauty of life.

The literature review

The literary criticism of the period regards Dritero Agolli as a significant figure in Albanian culture and as an important intellectual within Albanian literature, particularly noted for his contributions in the political and social context. Agolli led the Association of Albanian Writers and Artist from 1973 to 1992, and he served as a deputy in the Albanian Parliament for over 30 years. He was recognized in the history of Albanian literature primarily as a poet, distinguished by his accessibility to readers. His work reflects a recognition of universal emotions such as pain, joy, and sadness, which he intertwined with everyday philosophy. As a poet, Agolli engaged with Albanian traditions, drawing heavily from national memory and folklore, which allowed him to move away from the constraints of socialist realism in literature.

The poetic works of the Albanian writer Dritero Agollo contribute to Albanian literature by incorporating various disciplines of Albanian studies, including archaeology, geography, ethnology, folklore, sociology and cultural anthropology. Dritero Agolli emerged as a poet rooted in Albanian tradition while employing new poetic techniques. His poetic creativity has a nerve; it is dynamic and inspiring. In his verses, he expresses the emotions of a lyricist with refined taste, showcasing the skill of a creator who takes care to shape the Albanian language artfully. Agolli has depicted the reverence for the land in an aesthetically pleasing manner, using artistic language and vivid imagery to bring it to life.

Methodology

This paper aims to elaborate on the symbolism of death in the poetry of Dritero Agolli and its literary and aesthetic manifestation in the Albanian poetic verse. The study of Dritero Agolli's poetic creativity is the result of scientific work and textual analysis. The readings, findings, discussions, re-readings, and conclusions reached, through textual analysis, will lead us on the right path to the study of Dritero Agolli's poetic creativity in general and this element in particular.

The symbolism of death in Dritero Agolli's poetic verse is an element elaborated by him as a natural process and in a traditional, ritualistic, philosophical, intellectual, and spiritual manner. The research question is: Why did Dritero Agolli include this symbolism of death as a literary and aesthetic approach in his poetic verse before and after the 1990s? Agolli's poetry was developed not in an urban environment, but in an "extra-urban" environment. (Berisha,1978). To create this new poetry in Albanian literature, Agolli relied mostly on folk poetry: "Agolli turned to folk poetry, because it was his concept of creating a poem with defined national colours and accents." (Gjokutaj, 2013). Dritero Agolli's poetic landscape also extends into a mosaic of themes and ideas, drawing on the course of life, the external and internal world of the individual. So: "Dritero Agolli's poetry was conceived in a very specific socio-cultural and political reality..." (Lila, 2018).

Therefore, love in Dritero Agolli's poems turns into a cult, as he describes the strongest human feelings as universal experiences. Dritero Agolli found his poetic muse in every corner and in every direction of Albania. His poetry constantly reflects spiritual warmth. "Albanian poetry of all times constitutes the essence of the matter of our national culture, because it represents more than other arts, the soul of the nation." (Gjokutaj, 2013).

Every time he changes his style, he remarkably preserves the artistic individuality and emotional content of the poem. "The indomitable Agolli's pilgrim is a kind of odyssey, who, although he has not lost his homeland, seeks and finds it wherever he goes in its space. His mission is to find and spread history, tradition, virtue, kindness, and joy, to help in the perfection of man…" (Kuçuku, 2014). This is because the poetry and the poet in Dritero Agolli stand so naturally with each other, congratulating and consoling, giving and receiving between them, inspiring and filling with emotion, sometimes the poet the poetry and sometimes the poetry the poet. So it can be freely said that: "Agolli remains one of the peaks of Albanian literature" (Aliu, 2018).

The values of Albanian tradition in Agolli's verses come through "the norms, practices, artifacts, and symbols that constitute ethnicity" (Baker, 2004). Referring to the titles of some of his poems, his influence from this tradition is noticeable, such as in the poems: "At Two Graves", "Pinochet Died", "The Dead Wise Men", "The Death of the Peasant in the City", "The Song of the Dead", "The Death of the Horse", etc. In the poem titled "The Dead Wise Men", Dritero Agolli sees death not as an end, but as a continuation of life, through spiritual, cultural, and intellectual heritage, as in the lines: "Isn't my grandfather dead too/ He left songs alive for me?" (Agolli, 2016). So he believes that the dead live on through the words they left behind, through their works, and the impact that these works of their ancestors will leave on future generations.

Dritero Agolli approaches death philosophically and spiritually. He values the knowledge and legacy left by the dead, calling them "wiser" than the living. In this poem, Dritero Agolli mentions Shakespeare and Homer, whom he calls eternal teachers: "Of course, I learn more from the dead/ There are few living teachers/ The teacher Shakespeare is dead/ With Homer at his head." (Agolli, 2016).

In another verse of this poem, Dritero Agolli remembers his grandfather, who left him songs and legends, as a living treasure that does not fade with death: "From whom, while still alive, I inherited/ Boxes full of legends and tales" (Agolli, 2016). In this poem, Dritero Agolli pays homage to great figures of world literature and culture, but also to the personal figure of his grandfather, who represents tradition, heritage, and folk wisdom. Mentioning Naim at the end, he honours the figure of the Albanian national poet: "Is there a wise man alive like grandfather Naim"? (Agolli, 2016). In the poem "The Death of a Peasant in the City," Dritero Agolli treats death as not only a biological process, but also a spiritual and cultural one, as in the lines: "He died, as we die./

He lived without a pulse for four days./ He whispered: Has not a cloud come up yet?/ This statement was numb./ He lived without a pulse for four days."(Agolli, 2016). In this poem, death is associated with separation from one's homeland, nature, and traditional way of life. The death of the peasant is not only physical, but also symbolic – he dies spiritually in a foreign environment, among concrete and far from nature, which constituted the essence of his life. "He died among concrete without rain…" (Agolli, 2016).

Dritero gives death a double form: the first, biological – the character "dies" in reality, but, more deeply, he presents a spiritual death, which begins the moment the peasant is separated from the land, the forest, the hazelnut trees, the hills. Death here is a consequence of separation from roots, from nature, and from oneself. This poem was dedicated to the figure of the ordinary Albanian peasant, displaced to the city, a stranger between concrete and modernity. Dritero Agolli gives voice to a generation that had to leave the village, to embrace another life, but that never found itself in that new reality.

In the poem titled: "The Death of the Horse," Dritero Agolli treats the element of death as a universal, yet deeply intimate and formative experience. "As a child, I saw the horse when it died/ one late spring night/ My father had friends, the brandy was swirling in the room" (Agolli, 2016). So Dritero Agolli sees death not just as the end of life, but as a moment that holds sensitivity, memories, pain, and a reflection of life. In this poem, the poet approaches death through the first experience of loss - the death of a horse. It is not a human death, but a death that shocks a child and confronts him with feelings of pain and sorrow. "At the head of the old horse with a lamp/ I stood full of sorrow that night/ Tears hung from his eyes/ on his long face." (Agolli, 2016).

Through the image of the horse, which symbolizes a loving, hardworking and honest animal, the poet creates a sense of respect and love, showing us that the death of a horse was similarly shocking as that of a human. "And for the first time, I saw tears in the eyes of a horse/ My father's room was full of friends/ my lamp extended to the horse's forehead." (Agolli, 2016). This poem is implicitly dedicated to childhood, pure memory, and the close bond that once existed between humans and animals in rural life. The horse symbolizes not just an animal, but a lifelong companion. This poem is subtly dedicated to childhood, pure memory, and the strong bond once shared between humans and animals in rural life. The horse represents not just any animal, but a true companion in life.

In the poem "The Song of the Dead," Dritero Agolli treats death as an irony of human fate, a path of no return, which even lost friends scold "The dead curse a friend/ with words without sound/ as he speaks underground." (Agolli, 2016).

In this poem, death is not treated with ordinary fear or sadness, but with a sarcastic and reflective tone, where the dead "curse" a friend who joined them, as if death were a "mistake" or "betrayal" to the living. Dritero Agolli concretizes death through a poetic dialogue between the dead and a friend who has just died. "The dead cursed a friend/ with words with the mildew of the grave/ where the world is silent there: "You were the first, you became like us"! (Agolli, 2016, gj).

Instead of an abstract description, he creates a vivid imaginary scene underground, where the dead speak in "soundless words," reproaching their friend for his death. This personification of the dead and the use of irony ("You thought you would remain vertical/ but horizontal they brought you to us") (Agolli, 2016).

The phrase: "You believed you would stay upright... but they brought you to us in a horizontal position" presents a distinctive perspective on death, which is both tragic and absurd, yet deeply humane. Dritero Agolli frequently dedicates poems about death to his close friends and collaborators who have passed away prematurely (serving as a means to contemplate life and loss), to everyday individuals who have faced life's struggles but have now fallen silent, and to the collective memory of the Albanian people, perceiving death not as a conclusion, but as a reflection of life and its errors.

Conclusion

Dritero Agolli is a prominent figure in Albanian literature. His creative output spans various literary genres and styles. He wrote about existence, his homeland, inner emotions, and human values such as love, faith, and hope. He approached these themes with a profound philosophical and spiritual perspective. In his poetry, death is illustrated not as a finality but as a natural occurrence intertwined with life and creation. He believes that the deceased continue to exist through the spiritual heritage they leave behind, serving as mentors for future generations through their cultural and intellectual contributions.
Artistically, Dritero Agolli employs irony and sarcasm to diminish the sorrow often associated with death. The symbolism of body orientation ("vertical" and "horizontal") acts as a metaphor for the collapse of idealism, conveying pain through simple yet emotionally resonant language. The repetition of the line ("The dead scolded a friend") creates a cyclical effect that intensifies the sense of gravity and the inevitability of fate.

The symbolism surrounding death is also connected to the grandfather figure, one's birthplace, the urban environment, and animals, which symbolize tradition, folk wisdom, the duty to live away from one's roots, and the bond between childhood and affection for animals. In summary, Dritero Agolli's poetry acts as a guide to understanding and accepting death as a natural part of life. He remains a notable figure in Albanian literature, having established an entire literary and aesthetic movement within Albanian literature and culture.

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Tefta Tashko Koço, the Albanian urban lyric singer in the digital age

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Abstract

In the digital age, the Albanian lyric urban music finds little space on platforms like Spotify and YouTube. Tefta Tashko Koço, despite her contribution to the Albanian music, nowadays is less known and less listened to by the young audience. The study looks at the presence of Tefta Tashko Koço's songs on YouTube and Spotify and simultaneously assesses the audience's interest. When searching on Spotify, only two of her songs are found: "Për një ditë kur del goca në pazar" with 0 clicks, and "Zare Trëndafile" with 3058 clicks, as of March 17, 2025. They are part of a playlist with 24 different Albanian folk songs with a total running time of 79 minutes: "Albanian Folk Songs",78 rmp recordings, Vol. 1, 2019, Golden Century Records. On YouTube, "Zare Trëndafile" appears in several videos, with the most viewed video having 73,375 views as of March 17, 2025. It is uploaded eight years ago by user Albanian History. The most viewed video when searching for "Për një ditë kur del goca në pazar", on YouTube has 8,492 views, as of March 17, 2025, uploaded by user Ajet Nallbani, 15 years ago. Despite the vast repertoire in Albanian urban lyric music, this study emphasizes the small number of Tefta Tashko Koço's songs and the low impact on the audience on Spotify and YouTube. This finding shows the need that the digital presence of her work should not be left only in the hands of casual internet users. State cultural institutions should take charge of promotion, by creating playlists on Spotify and YouTube, while bearing in mind the copyrights.

Keywords

lyric music, digitalization, Spotify, YouTube, promotion

Introduction

Music, like many aspects of our lives, is oriented towards digitalization and the use of electronic platforms powered by the Internet. Audio platforms have undergone a major transformation in recent decades. They have developed over time from terrestrial broadcasts to the advanced digital systems that almost all of us use today. It is a technological progress that has carried with it social and economic impacts, on one hand, but also the changing preferences of the audience that listens to music today (Journalism University, 2023). Digital technology has for years made it possible for music to be easily accessible to audiences around the globe, becoming an important component of the information age revolution. Since the commercial introduction of music on compact discs (CDs) several decades ago, this technology has undergone a remarkable evolution, introducing numerous methods, techniques, systems and formats that have allowed users to benefit from the reduction in the size of digital audio devices and their cost (Mourjopoulos, J.N., 2005). The development of digital streaming services in the music industry, such as Spotify or Apple Music and other platforms including YouTube, has revolutionized the way people listen to music. These platforms offer a diverse library of songs that can be accessed at any time and simply, if you are connected to the Internet. What preceded this phenomenon that we commonly encounter in our daily lives today was the transition from physical to digital, both library and of the way listeners access songs. With the traditional model, consumers purchased albums or songs individually, such as on CDs, cassettes, and vinyl. With the development of technology, it is no longer necessary to physically purchase them, but streaming companies offer monthly or annual subscriptions, and users can listen to the content anywhere and anytime (Guo X, 2023). The global trend of digital music was seen also in Albania over the past few decades, and it also changed the way of listening to music. What is noticeable is the use of online platforms, such as YouTube and Spotify, which offer both free and paid services. Composers, producers and singers use these platforms to promote their works and to see the impact they have on the audience through the number of clicks. While contemporary Albanian artists have been focused on online platforms, where they measure their success by the number of clicks and choose not to release their songs in traditional formats, even though vinyl have made a comeback, traditional Albanian urban lyric music is what requires special attention, precisely on online platforms. As a valuable heritage of Albanian culture, this genre of music should not only be accessible to the public but also promoted. The urban lyric song - the most prominent of the Albanian musical genres, has been consistently overlooked by musicologists in favor of rural folk music. Some commentators have implied that Albanian urban music was not as truly Albanian as the music of its mountains and villages. But it is no less a part of the country's musical history, especially in the twentieth century, and is just as pure; an expression of the Albanian spirit and culture. In an analysis of Albanian urban lyrical songs, seen as an artistic version of traditional Albanian urban songs, when these songs began to enter classical repertoires, pioneers of the 1930s suggested that, based on Albanian urban songs, the new genre should develop into urban lyric songs. Whatever its origin, whether from the Near East or the Southwestern Balkans, the composers-arrangers and lyric singers of Albanian urban lyric songs in the 1930s conceived them entirely as Western vocal and instrumental products (Koço E., 2004). One of the most distinguished names of Albanian urban lyric music is the soprano Tefta Tashko Koço. She began singing as a soprano in public in 1927, during one of the most prosperous periods of musical life in Korça, initially as a soloist at the Cathedral of Saint George, then at a concert at the École Normale and later at

another concert at the Lux cinema. Towards the end of nine years (1927-1936) of concentrated studies in Montpellier and Paris, France, where she had numerous successes in various concerts and competitions, in November 1935, Tefta Tashko Koço continued her concert tours, however this time not in France, but in Korça, Albania. The inclusion of Albanian lyric songs in the first recitals she gave in Korça, Tirana and Shkodër (a few months before graduating from the National Conservatory of Paris), is evidence of the soprano's patriotic devotion. This was how Tefta Tashko Koço aimed bringing different social classes closer to the lyric singer's stage. Her performance of urban songs was conceived in the style of the romance genre, and the embellishment of the melody based on a phonological appropriation of the Albanian language, expanded the vocal and aesthetic horizons by creating a professional agogic style of interpretation of urban songs. Songs such as Bilbil o i mjeri bilbil, Kroj'i fshitit tonë, Fryn veriu, Dashtnuer t'u bana and about sixty others from several areas of Albania, Tefta Tashko Koço were recorded in Milan in 1937 and 1942. The perfection of the types of songs (with a stylized urban nature) can be easily ascertained today thanks to the artistic finesse and poetic expression conveyed by Tefta Tashko Koço (Bello, 2012). Considering Tefta Tashko Koço's professional profile, the contribution she has made to Albanian music, especially urban lyric music, it is important that this legacy be passed on to the younger generations, who today listen to music on digital platforms on the internet.

Literature Review

It is important that this paper provides a clear overview of the development of how the music is distributed to the audiences. Therefore, literature reviewed includes studies that present the development of technology and the shift in the way of conveying music to audiences from physical, such as the purchase of vinyl, cassettes, CDs, to simply with a subscription on online platforms today, as an easy and accessible way to listen to the music. Choosing this literature is important to demonstrate a global trend, also present for years in Albania, that like every other aspect of our lives, which is now enabled or facilitated by the digital world and the internet, the way we listen to the music has also undergone a transformation. Also, the emphasis of this paper is the fact that Albanian urban lyric music has moved from the way of publishing and listening through physical means, to the digital one. Therefore, to provide context, the reviewed literature includes studies that explain what Albanian urban lyric music itself is, its impact to the listeners and its contribution to the music we listen to today. To illustrate an example of Albanian urban lyric music and its success, this study looks at the artistic career of the well-known Albanian soprano Tefta Tashko Koço. She is precisely the one who, with her concerts in Albania, was a promoter of Albanian urban lyric music. The literature used provides a profile of Tefta Tashko Koço as an Albanian artist who has studied and had trainings at the most renowned European universities, who at the same time has tried both the global and Albanian stages, to ultimately dedicate herself to the latter.

Methodology and results

This descriptive study looks at the presence of Tefta Tashko Koço's songs on the two main music listening platforms today, YouTube and Spotify, and at the same time assesses the audience's interest. The impact on the audience of an important name in Albanian urban lyric music is of particular importance, bearing in mind the fact that Tefta Tashko Koço during her

artistic career created a new reality in the field of vocal interpretation and when it comes to urban lyric song, this reality could be defined as superior, as sublime. This was the life that Tefta Tashko Koço lived and the legacy she left for those who came after her. The social impact of her participation in artistic activities bears also an historical meaning. For this reason, she represents a rare artistic and socio-human phenomenon of national cultural identity. When searching on the Spotify platform, which offers music only in audio version, only two songs by the artist Tefta Tashko Koço are found. Her name is written 'Kocho' and not Koço: "Për një ditë kur del goca në pazar" with 0 clicks (Spotify, March 17, 2025) and "Zare Trëndafile" with 3058 clicks as of March 17, 2025 (Spotify, March 17, 2025). They are part of a playlist with twenty-four different Albanian folk songs with a total running time of 79 min.: "Albanian Folk Songs", 78 rmp recordings, Vol. 1, 2019, Golden Century Records (Albanian Folk Songs, 78 Rpm Recordings, Vol.1, 2019). On YouTube, "Zare Trëndafile" appears in several videos until March 17, 2025, with the most clicked having 73,375 views, uploaded eight years ago by the user Albanian History (Albanian History, 2016). The most viewed video when searching for "Për një ditë kur del goca në pazar", until the same date, on YouTube results in 8,492 views, uploaded by the user Ajet Nallbani, 15 years ago (Nallbani A., 2009).

Discussions

The streaming services market has continued to grow exponentially in recent years. This is due to the massive change in the preferences of daily users. As of 2025, over 5.56 billion people worldwide use various social media platforms, and many are turning to digital streaming platforms to listen to the content they offer. In terms of music streaming, Spotify ranks first globally. According to data, 31.7% of users choose to access its content (Gaines, 2025). Spotify recently published its financial results for the first quarter of 2025, including an update on total listeners and subscribers, including people who pay for the Premium service, which guarantees streaming without advertising interferences. The streaming service had 678 million monthly active users as of March, up 10% from the same period last year. Meanwhile, its premium subscribers grew by 12% to 268 million (Dredge, 2025). A detailed look at the statistics from the other video content platform, YouTube for 2025 showed that over 2.70 billion people worldwide use YouTube monthly, according to a study by GMI Team. As of February 2025, India has the highest number of YouTube users in the world, with around 491 million users, according to Statista. Technically, YouTube is the second largest search engine, after Google. More than 122 million people access YouTube every day through its desktop website and its optimized smartphone apps. The Global Digital Overview Report for 2025 reveals that YouTube's potential advertising reach reaches 2.53 billion users. While YouTube's global advertising revenue for the fourth quarter of 2024 is $10.47 billion (GMI Research Team, 2025). While the services offered by YouTube, including its dedicated YouTube Music service, and Spotify appear similar, there are many subtle differences in online streaming services. This means that which option is better depends on what the user needs in a music streaming platform, what they prefer, and what they value. YouTube Music offers a diverse music library that includes official songs, music videos, and user-uploaded content. This platform has an advantage in live performances and song remixes due to its integration with YouTube (the parent company). Spotify has a large catalog of songs, albums, and playlists curated by computer algorithms and human music editors. Spotify has a strong focus on mainstream music, but it also includes a variety of independent artists. Many online reviews say that YouTube Music has

more songs: almost every song Spotify has, plus a few more. That's because YouTube Music allows users to listen to any audio from any YouTube video within the app. This means that any unreleased song, live performance, remix, concert, parody, or other music is available to listen to, as long as it's on YouTube. It can be harder to find these kinds of specialized recordings on Spotify. YouTube Music offers streaming quality up to 256 KBPS for Premium users and provides other video streaming quality options that may affect the audio. Spotify offers higher streaming quality options: up to 320 KBPS for Premium users. It also has a feature where users can adjust the quality based on their network conditions. Another unique feature for Spotify is the "connect" feature. Think of it as a kind of remote control or connection between devices, which can be very useful, but also difficult to learn. One can use this feature to switch between devices, such as when you are listening to music on your phone but want to pause it on your laptop. Or, you could be hosting a party and have your tablet connected to your Bluetooth speaker while you create a playlist on your phone. The ability to play the same song from two different devices at the same time can also be important. This is one of Spotify's main features and a feature that users say is hard to live without once you get used to it (Rosyadi A., 2024). All these factors need to be considered at a time when the way we listen to the music today is through different online platforms. Therefore, the number of clicks for songs by Albanian music star, Tefta Tashko Koço, should worry us, to analyze the factors that influence their lack of sufficient clicks. They may include poor visibility, lack of proper promotion, authorship by unauthorized persons to have these songs and who have uploaded them without copyright. The way we listen to the music today has changed from several decades ago and now online streaming platforms should be used to convey Albanian urban lyric music. In discussions about the presence and promotion of Tefta Tashko Koço's songs on digital streaming platforms, the fact that state institutions should make a greater contribution to the promotion of these songs on these platforms should not be overlooked. As a positive example that the involvement of state institutions in promotion has yielded results, is the case of the iconic singer from Kosovo, Nexhmije Pagarusha (Isufi, 2023). She belongs to a later generation of the artist Tefta Tashko Koço. On January 10, 2012, the YouTube channel of the communication and marketing agency, Koperativa, published the song Baresha from Nexhmije Pagarusha. 13 years later, the video of the song until June 4, 2025, has 3,914,424 clicks. (Koperativa, 2012). What is striking is that the production of this video was supported by: the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and the Museum of Kosovo. Also, a considerable number of state institutions are involved in this initiative, such as the Kosovo Ballet, the National Theater, the Municipality of Prizren, the Directorate for Culture, the Prizren Hamam, the "Rugova" Ensemble. A commitment at the institutional level, both in providing funds for musical materials, advertising on digital streaming platforms, and in maintaining digital song catalogs, would have a greater impact on the presence and access by users.

Conclusion

Despite the vast repertoire of Tefta Tashko Koço and her immense contribution in the Albanian urban lyric music genre, this study shows the small number of her songs and the low impact on the audience on Spotify and YouTube. This finding shows the need that the digital presence of her work should not be left only in the hands of casual users. State cultural institutions should take charge of promotion, by creating playlists on Spotify and YouTube, while complying with copyrights.

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Copyright and digitalization of artistic intellectual property

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Abstract

In recent years, we can say that the whole world is in a continuous revolution of using technology and distributing information quickly and efficiently, eliminating the previous barriers that existed between countries. Digitization is progressing with giant steps, in a world where distance is losing its effect and relationships are becoming concrete every time through the virtual and digital world. Technology in this aspect plays its indisputable role, since by perfecting its operation and methods, favorable conditions have been created for the creation and use of digital works. This exploitation and their use is not the same everywhere in the world, as in different countries the use of digital works is considered different and does not always constitute copyright infringement. Often these methods of reproduction of these works are not carried out according to the criteria defined by the legislation, but create conditions for abuse, infringing the rights of the real authors of these rights. For this reason, the right to personal use of digital works is very important in the virtual environment that surrounds us and in order not to create causes for abuse, it is necessary to familiarize ourselves with the most important aspects that it deals with. In this aspect, it is the duty of the state as a regulator, through concrete measures and reforms undertaken by it, to create conditions for the prevention of these violations and the regulation of concrete consequences on a wide scale for the protection of the intellectual product, and thë contract of the artisic copyright.

Keywords

copyright, intellectual property, legal protection, abuse, reproduction

Introduction

In recent years, we can say that the whole world is in a continuous revolution of using technology and distributing information quickly and efficiently, eliminating the previous barriers that existed between countries. Digitization is progressing with giant steps, in a world where distance is losing its effect and relationships are becoming concrete every time through the virtual and digital world. Technology in this aspect plays its indisputable role, since by perfecting its operation and methods, favorable conditions have been created for the creation and use of digital works. This exploitation and their use is not the same everywhere in the world, as in different countries the use of digital works is considered different and does not always constitute copyright infringement. Every individual is capable of creating a digital work and exercising the main rights arising from it, also taking all actions for the free and arbitrary use of this work. It is impossible that in a digital environment, there will not be creativity from many individuals, who in order to simplify the ways of life are influenced by taking various actions, which are related to their reproduction for benefit or relief effects. Often these methods of reproduction of these works are not carried out according to the criteria defined by the legislation, but create conditions for abuse, infringing the rights of the real authors of these rights.

For this reason, the right to personal use of digital works is very important in the virtual environment that surrounds us and in order not to create causes for abuse, it is necessary to familiarize ourselves with the most important aspects that it deals with. The rights of competition, and the right of intellectual property, are two important rights for any individual in their affirmation, that often collide with each other, thus creating conditions for unfair benefits and infringement of them by one another. In this aspect, it is the duty of the state as a regulator, through concrete measures and reforms undertaken by it, to create conditions for the prevention of these violations and the regulation of concrete consequences on a wide scale for the protection of the intellectual product.

Legal protection of copyright.

During the transition period in Albania, we can say that a number of copyrights, as well as the consequences of their infringement, have been sanctioned. This is best expressed in the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, which enshrines the freedom of creativity and guarantees its protection. Important amendments have been made upon the entry into force of the Criminal Code and the Civil Code, which in their provisions have addressed this institute. The protection provided by the provisions of the Criminal Code (Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, 2017), specifically in articles 148 and 149, which relate the criminal offense of publishing another's work under one's own name and the unauthorized reproduction of another's work, clearly provide a protection for this institute of law.

Whereas, from the provisions of the Civil Code (Civil Code of the Republic of Albania, 2010), that are related to causing non-pecuniary damage to the name, personality and work of a person, or to fraudulent publications made by subjects exercising their activity in the field of publications, another relationship between copyright and civil legislation emerges. So, as can be seen from these predictions, the moral and economic right of the author enjoys their legal

protection, as a very important right for society as a whole and for the individual in particular. In chapter IX of the law "On copyright", in article 50, it is determined that in case of violations of the rights defined in this law, the concerned can turn to the court, through a civil lawsuit or through a denunciation for criminal prosecution according to the provisions of the Criminal Code in the relevant bodies. The court examines the case based on the norms defined in this law and ultimately decides on both the moral and economic rights of the author. Legislation and its provisions on intellectual property in Albania guarantee the provision of adequate and efficient protection of copyright enforcement at the same level of protection of intellectual property rights as those existing in the European Union, as well as the continuous guarantee of harmonization level of protection in accordance with all international obligations and agreements to which the Republic of Albania is a party. To make this issue more concrete, let's concretely analyze some of the legal consequences that come from copyright infringement, specifically provided for in Law no. 9380 dated 28.04.2005 "On copyright and other related rights". While other provisions provide:

Article 31 - *"The author, whose works due to their nature can be reproduced without authorization under the terms of Article 72 through photocopying, ...authors have the right to reasonable remuneration, by a natural or legal person who provides photocopying services for a fee"*.

A reasonable remuneration referred to in this article will be the reward given by agreement, taking into account the possibility of damage caused to the author of the work, in cases where the work is reproduced without their authorization for private use or other personal uses, the application of protective technological measures, as well as other circumstances that may be considered fair in form and content for a reasonable remuneration.

Copyright Restrictions

When we refer to some copyright restrictions, we will consider the case when the work or its parts can be used by interested parties without obtaining the prior permission of the author. These limitation cases are taxing. In other cases, great care must be taken that the use of the work is fair. In some cases, the fair use is regulated by title by the author, in other cases it is considered fair and does not need a special authorization. The law provides for restrictions on the exercise of copyright and the use of the work without the author's permission provides that: "It is permitted to use a work without the approval of the author and without any remuneration, provided that the right of the author or the copyright holder on the work is not violated when:

a) During the reproduction of separate writings or detached parts of the work in daily publications, periodicals or in radio and television broadcasts, the name of the author and the source are mentioned, or when it is expressly provided otherwise;
b) During the reproduction of speeches held in public gatherings, published in daily publications or in various periodicals or broadcast to the public on radio or television, the date and place of the speech are cited, together with the name of the author;
c) Full or partial reproduction in a judicial or administrative procedure, but always to the extent justified by the purpose for which it is used and mentioning the source of the work and its author;

d) Reproduction in whole or in part is for personal use, provided that it does not affect the commercial exploitation of the work;
e) Reproduction of the work fixed in a sound and/or image carrier or in a graphic carrier, whether by a natural person, for personal or family use, without performing any direct or indirect action for commercial purposes;
f) Photocopying of public library works is for personal use within the library or for its services.
But what does the term "personal use" mean? According to the author Semini, the term "personal use" according to the "Copyright" law means a use of the work in the family, such as a reproduction of a painting, a carpet, etc., or their use in personal environments. The use for pedagogical, research and scientific purposes will also be introduced here.

Cases of copyright infringement

For copyright infringements, if an agreement is not reached between the parties, the interested parties can turn to the court to resolve the conflict in a civil trial.

In addition to the development of the civil process, within the framework of the protection of the copyright, due to the very importance it represents and the consequences resulting from its violation, the copyright is also protected through the development of the criminal process. The Criminal Code, in its provisions, makes a detailed provision of violations of these rights, where it is specifically provided for: Article 149 of the Criminal Code provides that:
- "Reproduction in whole or in part of a literary, musical, artistic, or scientific work belonging to another or their use without the consent of the author, when his personal and property rights are violated, is punishable by a fine or imprisonment up to 2 years (Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, 2017).

Whereas, Article 148 of the Criminal Code protects the moral right of the author to be recognized as the author of his work when it provides that: "The publication or use in whole or in part under one's own name of a literary, musical, artistic or scientific work belonging to another constitutes a criminal offense and is punishable by a fine or imprisonment of up to 2 years". Referring to these provisions, we note that criminal and civil legislation provide protection and deal with the consequences of copyright infringement.

Conclusions

From what we discussed above in this paper, we can say that the copyright legislation in our country deals with important aspects of its protection, also providing sanctions for anyone who violates them. This legislation has been drafted in accordance with the provisions of international legislation for this purpose, which must be acknowledged to have given a wide importance to this right. Under these conditions, Albania has ratified and incorporated a series of directives and conventions for the affirmation and further protection of this broad right, in order to protect anyone who is unfairly violated during the exercise of his copyright rights.

However, we can say that there is still a lot to be done and the legislation has room for further improvements, as well as for increasing the amount of punishment and sanctions, for anyone who violates these rights.

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The Modernization of Albanian Opera After 1990: The Existentialist Approach and Serialism in the First Modern Albanian Opera 'Dhoma' (The Room) by Ermir Dergjini

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the transformations of Albanian music after 1990, with a particular focus on the musical expressions and innovations that have influenced the modernization of Albanian opera. In this context, the opera "The Room" by composer Ermir Dergjini will be examined, exploring the musical elements, stylistic features, and compositional techniques that distinguish this work as a significant example of this development. The publication will be supported by a comparative and structural analysis of Dergjini's "The Room", examining the use of dodecaphonic technique and serialist principles in the musical construction of the work. For this purpose, various analytical methods have been applied, including: Score analysis – Studying stylistic elements and compositional techniques – Comparison with the works of composers such as Alban Berg and Anton Webern. The analysis will focus on how Dergjini has utilized contemporary experiences to create a new musical language, as well as the dramaturgical impact of the opera in the context of the evolution of Albanian music. From a critical and personal perspective, the work is seen as an important step toward the modernization of Albanian opera, while also raising questions about its accessibility and impact on audiences. Despite its complexity, Dergjini's music succeeds in creating a powerful emotional and dramatic connection with the text, demonstrating that musical experimentation can coexist with profound expressive depth.

Keywords

Opera "The Room", transformation, modernization, existentialism, serialism

Introduction

Following the socio-cultural changes of the early 1990s, the Albanian musical scene entered a phase of "aesthetic reconstruction," in which composers began to explore new creative languages beyond traditional paradigms. Ermir Dergjini's opera Dhoma (composed c. 1996) epitomises this turning point, integrating Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy with twelve-tone serial technique within a focused, innovative dramatic structure (with respect to the historical framework in question). The present article seeks to demonstrate that Dhoma constitutes a critical nexus in the modernization of Albanian opera: on the one hand, it affirms the emancipation of sound through atonality and serial organisation; on the other, it preserves the communicative potential of musical theatre, generating dramaturgical tension tightly interwoven with the text. This comprehensive analysis endeavours to evaluate Dergjini's contribution to forging a new Albanian operatic identity and to reflect on the challenges the work poses for its contemporary interpretation and reception.

Methodology and Literature

Clarifying and adhering to the most accurate methodology for analysing an operatic work proved a challenge in itself, given that opera studies—both historically and in the present—occupy a unique crossroads among multiple academic disciplines.

As a highly complex art form that fuses music, drama, visual art, and literature, opera demands a multidimensional analytical approach. Scholars such as Carolyn Abbate, in *In Search of Opera*, and Roger Parker, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, have underscored the necessity of integrating perspectives across these domains in order to grasp the richness of operatic works—"the meaning of opera resides not solely in the score or the libretto, but in their performative interplay." Yet despite a growing global interest in interdisciplinary inquiry, opera studies often remain fragmented, with musicology, literary studies, and performance theory tending to operate in isolation (Hutcheon, 2006).

Within opera's inherently interpretive and transient nature, Nicholas Till argues that the genre cannot be understood solely through the score or the text; its meaning is constituted in the act of performance—*in the dynamic relationship among performers, scenography, the director, and the audience (Till, 2012)*. For Till, every realization of an opera is a "*temporary re-writing*" of the original work—a creative act that reconstitutes meaning through the manner of its staging. This claim is reinforced by studies such as Clemens Risi's, which scrutinize the performative dimension of operatic productions and underscore that staging, stage rhythm, and the singers' embodied interaction with the visual space are integral components of the interpretive process (Risi, 2021).

Similarly, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography* emphasizes performance as an inherently "*ephemeral*" event, one that exists in the live moment and in audience perception. This reframes opera not as a fixed aesthetic object but as a communicative process unfolding between makers and spectators (Davis, & Marx, 2021).

Alongside these debates, a more recent line of research extends the discussion by linking interpretation to audience participation through new computational techniques (Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence, hyper-instruments, etc.). This trajectory underscores that the public is not merely a spectator but a co-creator of meaning: audience responses, emotions, and interpretive acts actively shape the production's aesthetic experience (Reason, Conner, Johanson, & Walmsley, 2022). That said, the question remains open, given the volatility of current practices and the rapidly evolving landscape of performance technologies.

Accordingly, *the research strategy* combines qualitative and comparative–structural analysis along two principal axes:

A. Internal stylistic–technical musical analysis: Full score examination, serial matrix construction, macro- and micro-formal organisation, timbral design, etc.
B. Dramaturgical and hermeneutic analysis toward a holistic understanding: Text–music relationship, existential semantics, stage practice, mise-en-scène, etc.

With attention to the following practical *steps and procedures*:

a) Serial deconstruction: Building the twelve-tone matrix and tracing motivic usage on both vertical and horizontal planes.
b) Timbral cartography: Graphic schematisation of clusters and colour-phonies to grasp their expressive dimension.
c) Dramaturgical correlation: Mapping musical events against the evolution of existential conflict across three narrative structures (introduction, confrontation, catharsis).
d) Empirical triangulation: Comparing analytical findings with performance evidence (direction, stage dynamics, lighting).

Results and Discussion — Between Metaphysical Hell and Modern Theatre: The Modernist Operatic Journey in Albania through Ermir Dergjini's 'Dhoma'

Owing to its multidimensional artistic form, opera provides a pronounced example for highlighting modernist innovations within this historical period in Albania. Through this creative freedom, artists were afforded the opportunity to experiment with a new musical aesthetic, modernising and enriching Albanian music with elements that organically reflected contemporary demands and developments. This is evident in *Dhoma*, where the composer, in creating and expressing his music, relied on Sartre's play *The Room*.

Regarding the written dramatic work, the author articulates his philosophical viewpoint through an in-depth reflection of Sartre's overarching philosophy and the narrative of The Room. Ermir Dergjini writes:

"In this work, the action unfolds in an isolated room, behind closed doors, in a space representing the world beyond—the realm of the dead and of soulless objects—namely hell. This metaphorical space embodies a reality that challenges the individual—circumstances he cannot choose, but which he is obliged to accept and endure.

Thus, Sartre defines hell as a reflection of broken human relationships, where the individual sees himself reduced to a soulless object, condemned to confront the consequences of his actions and decisions." [1]

The characters arrive one after another in a common space after death, each bearing a history laden with guilt and tragedy. First comes Garseni, a man who, after a life filled with marital infidelity and abusive behaviour, is shot twelve times because of his involvement with a pacifist newspaper during wartime. Next is Inesi, a manipulative, egocentric woman who persuades her cousin's fiancée, Florence, to abandon her husband and later involves her in his murder. Inesi exploits Florence for personal gain until both die in a gas accident. The last to arrive is Estela, a fragile and emotionally wounded woman. Involved in an extramarital affair, she drowns her illegitimate baby in a lake, prompting her lover's suicide; Estela later dies of a severe illness on her way home.

Each character carries profound spiritual torment, an inescapable guilt. In this space, laden with tension and perpetual clashes, they are condemned to confront one another without the possibility of escape, trapped in ongoing conflict, tedium and suffering. This endless cycle of quarrels and emotional coldness constitutes their greatest torture—a hell constructed from broken human relationships, where each is hostage to the others. The characters' subjective emotional experience, the alienation and social degradation of the human psyche, the expression of inner anxieties and fears, and the chaotic—almost surreal—conditions of their existence are conveyed through an entirely dissonant musical language that eschews traditional tonal concepts, eliminating consonant harmony as an affirmative musical phenomenon. This aligns the opera with early twentieth-century expressionist tendencies, particularly with the operas of Alban Berg and Anton Webern.

History teaches us that in atonal music no fixed rules exist for harmonic progressions, voice-leading conventions or melodic intervals; nevertheless, note selection must be made with particular care. In this context, one may observe that Dergjini's compositions, in the structural fabric of their musical writing, manifest a distinctly atonal character.

The flexibility of vocal forms—lacking a clear distinction between recitative and aria—in accordance with the work's dramaturgical narrative, relies predominantly on dialogue with fragmented, broken vocal lines, especially in Act I.

In structural-compositional terms, Dergjini adopts a liberal, expressively inflected approach to serial technique, far from the conservative dodecaphonic strictures of Schoenberg and the later refinements of Berg. Unlike the tightly systematized procedures associated with Messiaen and other postwar serialists, he fuses intuitive craft with thematic conceiving, yoking inherited practice to the new aesthetic climate of his time to forge a personalized, unencumbered musical idiom. As Ernst Krenek notes in his "Horizons and Limits of Serial Techniques", *Anton Webern and Olivier Messiaen emerge as seminal catalysts of the "new serial" imagination—both for the extraordinary reach of their work over the past decades and, above all, for Messiaen's experiments with rhythmic series and his "modes" (i.e., modes of limited transposition), whose*

1 Excerpted from the personal manuscripts of Ermir Dergjini. The material was provided by his family.

immediate impact is audible in composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen. (Krenek, 1960)

The findings are summarised as follows:

Modernist character of the score – Serial analysis revealed consistent use of a flexible twelve-tone row (P0 – I6 – R9) whose transpositions and timbral clusters create motivic cohesion throughout both acts. The tripartite form employed in arias and both final trios indicates that modernism does not necessarily reject traditional formal logic but re-contextualises it.

Chromaticism as expressive vector – Most melodic intervals are seconds (minor, major, augmented and diminished), creating a constant field of tension that mirrors the characters' existential angst.

Dramaturgy–timbre correspondence – Scenic climaxes are regularly preceded by metallic-percussion clusters that intensify the perception of a "sealed hell" and serve as acoustic signals for dramatic change.

Modernism–accessibility balance – Despite atonality, rhythmic ostinato motifs provide orientation points for the listener, proving that serial experimentation can retain communicative function.

Discussion

Modernization without severing tradition. Dergjini's serial language affirms the emancipation of sound, yet it is built upon classical "forms" (aria, trio, overture). This challenges the assumption that the Albanian avant-garde wholly abandoned historical dramatic models.

Existential dimension as cultural reflection. The integration of Sartrean philosophy with serial technique creates a space in which Albania's post-socialist reality is translated into stage metaphor; the opera thus legitimises modernization as an organic, non-imitative process.

Conclusions, Recommendations / Implications: Free Serialism as an Expressive Mode in 'Dhoma'

The creative methodology, grounded in a liberal twelve-tone technique, connects with the typology of serialism and the surrealist movement. Serialism in Dhoma governs the organisation of all musical parameters—pitch, rhythm, dynamics, vertical sonorities, vocal lines and instrumental textures—and conditions the architectural structuring of the work as a whole. Dergjini's entire theoretical and compositional experience finds full expression in this complex dramatic work, where numerous creative experiences converge under a new idiom liberated from every conservative constraint. The opera is constructed powerfully and profoundly on several planes—dramatic, expressive, conceptual, topical, philosophical and beyond.

What most attracted my attention during the detailed stylistic analysis for my PhD research is the composer's artistic awareness and precision in realising chromatic pitches within the

rows he employs. Even when the rows appear incomplete, their pitches emerge in the soloists' recitative segments, making chromaticism a constant and essential element in his creativity, especially in this work. This feature creates a dense musical texture in which sound becomes the primary expressive factor.

From an orchestral standpoint, Dergjini demonstrates a free and inventive approach, where the superimposition of musical lines creates rich clusters and contemporary sonorities. Although formally free, this sound construction rests on clear, consistent logic during polyphonic development, giving his music coherent structure and modern identity. Vertical orchestral elements often appear as dissonances and varied intervals, producing complete freedom in layering lines. This open attitude toward harmony and form produces a rich soundscape with strong emotional impact.

Regarding vocal structure and the overall organisation of the work, the composer departs from traditional forms, adopting a looser structure dictated by dramaturgical content and musical language development. He deliberately employs dissonant elements and an allegorical treatment of the word, granting the music deeper expressive dimension. A key feature of this work is the intertwining of musical elements with the poetic text, creating profound harmony between the characters' feelings and dramatic development. Through the composer's musical language, the poetic text acquires a philosophical dimension that penetrates deeply into the characters' emotions and thoughts. Artistic devices such as melody, harmony, rhythm and orchestration function as a bridge among these components, creating a distinct cohesion and aesthetic expression.

This musical treatment represents a significant development in Albanian music, positioning Dergjini among the first Albanian composers to boldly create a modern, individualised style in stage music. Through this innovative approach he unveiled a new philosophical and artistic vision reflecting the reality and topicality of his time. Although largely unfamiliar to Albanian music of the period, this new musical language introduced a creative dimension that also demanded advanced interpretative experience from Albanian performers. By challenging previous standards, the work elevated interpretative art to a higher level, further enriching the spectrum of Albanian stage music and opening new horizons for its development and diversification.

Structurally, Dergjini adopts a free approach to serial music, using it in a liberal, expressive manner far removed from Schoenberg's conservative dodecaphony and later Bergian techniques. Unlike the concise compositional methods of Messiaen and other serialists, he synthesises intuitive knowledge with thematic concepts of musical creation. This fusion of tradition with the new spirit of his era points toward a personalised, liberated musical expression. This can be illustrated by Ernst Krenek's writings in Extents and Limits of Serial Techniques: Anton Webern and Olivier Messiaen are cited as the most prominent generators of new serial thought, first for the extraordinary influence of their work over the last twenty years, and second—and above all—through Messiaen's experiments with "rhythmic rows" (or modes) and his immediate impact on composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen.

Stylistic–Compositional Conclusions

Free, non-dogmatic serialism – The work is grounded in twelve-tone technique without rigid Schoenbergian rules; the row appears complete, fragmented or transformed according to dramatic needs, placing the opera within the "open serialism" tradition.

All-encompassing chromatic atonality – Chromaticism functions as an expressive core: even when the row is incomplete, its missing notes are realised in recitative or orchestral layers, maintaining the ideal of the full twelve-note spectrum.

Tripartite structure as dramatic axis – Key formal structures (final trios, arias, orchestral blocks) are systematically built in three segments, creating a clear sequence of dramatic climaxes within a modern idiom.

Organic text–music linkage – Serial vocal lines mirror Sartrean existential psychology; specific timbral assignments (e.g., piccolo + bass clarinet for Ines's irony) reinforce narrative meaning.

Orchestral language of layered lines and clusters – Superimposed polyphony, clusters, glissandos, tremolos and percussion timbre–rhythm textures craft high-tension soundscapes, shifting focus from vertical harmony to horizontal process.

Contrapuntal stratification – Fugato segments (overture, Act I opening, etc.) display consistent row generation and counter-rows, providing motivic cohesion within an otherwise non-periodic music.

Innovation within the Albanian operatic timeline – Dhoma is the first Albanian opera to articulate a fully serial idiom; it inaugurates a modernist–postmodernist paradigm after 1990 and paves the way for new technical standards for performers and institutions.

Eclectic compositional method – Dergjini blends serial knowledge with thematic intuition and expressionist elements; he avoids integral total serialism, shifting focus from system to emotional expression.

Creative awareness and chromatic rigour – The composer consistently realises all twelve tones within major units, evidencing technical meticulousness and stylistic coherence.

Impact and perspective – The work offers a reference model for younger Albanian composers on integrating serialism into national narrative, while providing scholars with a primary case study on the aesthetic transition from socialist realism to radical modernism.

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The musical creativity of Zeqirja Ballata, a golden mean between folk music traditions and contemporary music

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to the composer Zeqirja Ballata, one of the most prominent Albanian composers of the 20th century, whose creative output has earned a deserved place in the repertoire of Albanian music. Through an analysis of his work, it will be argued that his music represents a rare balance between tradition and innovation. Elements of Albanian folk music coexist with advanced techniques of contemporary composition, creating a musical language that is both national and European. We will examine how Ballata's music relies on cultural folk heritage and how he uses it to explore new possibilities in harmony, rhythm, and formal structure. The article highlights how Ballata has managed to integrate traditional musical motifs, rhythms, and instrumental colors characteristic of Albanian music, transforming them within a modern context. He has combined authentic Albanian sounds with the most advanced European trends, including serialism, modalism, and aleatoric techniques. This process has created a unique musical language where Albanian identity is preserved and developed, becoming part of a broader artistic landscape. This intertwining has fostered a harmonious blend of traditional and contemporary elements, advancing Albanian music in Kosovo from its pre-professional phases to professional and modern expressions. A special focus in the article is placed on some of Ballata's most representative works, which are examined in detail, with a particular emphasis on how he has used folk material as a foundation for building a modern, innovative style with a clear identity. The article will document the significance of Ballata's contribution to the development of Albanian music in the 20th and 21st centuries!

Keywords

Albanian folk music, contemporary composition, modalism, serialism, aleatoric techniques

Introduction

This triptych includes works composed by Zeqirja Ballata: Këmbë Qëndrese – 1978, with text by the author Ibrahim Kadriu; Bir i Vendit Trimëror – 1981, with text by Enver Gjergjeku; and Pro Memoria 1462 – 1987, which is based on the "Baptismal Formula" of Pal Engjëlli – 1462. The score was approved for publication on June 20, 2012, by the Academy of Sciences of Ko-sovo, with editor Engjëll Berisha. This publication is part of the series "Special Editions CXXII, Arts Section, Book 15." Ballata's interest in vocal music is early. From what is known so far, Ballata began his vocal compositions in 1961, with a variety of types and voice combinations. In this study, I will briefly focus on the first two works of the musical triptych—to provide an introductory frame-work on their structure and thematic content. The main attention will be concentrated on the third work, Pro Memoria 1462, which will be treated in greater depth through a musical and contextual analysis, examining the historical message linked to its compositional features.

The term triptych, originating from Greek (initially used in visual arts to describe three interconnected panels), finds a significant expression in Albanian music through Zeqirja Ballata's work Three Vocal-Instrumental Works. Although this work comprises three distinct creations with independent identities, together they construct a single narrative. Each part conveys poetic and historical motifs reflecting the Albanian collective memory, building an emotional arc—from heroic resistance to religious sanctity.

Methodology

In this study, an analytical, comparative, and historical approach is used to examine how the composer Zeqirja Ballata has intertwined elements of Albanian folk music with contemporary techniques. The materials used include the original scores of the three selected works, archival recordings, as well as secondary literature from musicological studies and interviews given to the Albanian and international press. The analysis is based on formal, structural, and harmonic treatment of the works, using modern analytical methods and contextual evaluation of the poetic text and the historical message they convey.
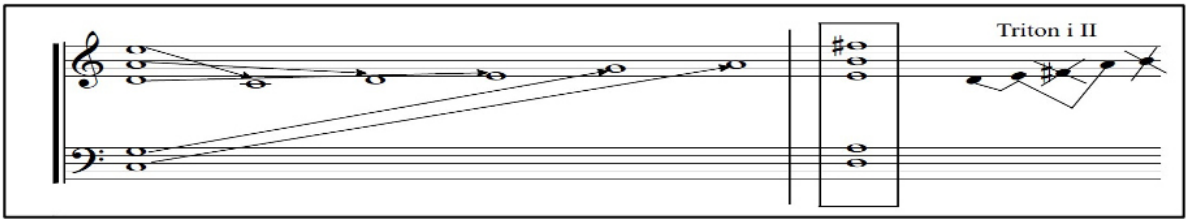
"KËMBË QËNDRESE" 1978

This is a work for soloist (bass), narrator, choir (S-A-T-B), and six percussion instruments. The composition is presented through a tripartite structure, where each part is carefully constructed with an internal musical logic serving the emotional content. The composer has chosen to build the musical form in close accordance with the poetic text written by the writer Ibrahim Kadriu (Kadriu, 2010).

The first section spans measures 1 to 35, the second from measure 35 to 60, while the concluding third part covers measures 60 to 84.

Part I, measures: 1–35	Part II, measures: 35–60	Part III, measures: 60–84
Gjithë stinët qershori i	*Me dhjetë të qershorit në*	*Nisi festë e zjarrtë fjala*
qenë	*Prizren rrahu kambana*	*forcë vjeli*
lënë në ruajtje	*Me fjalën e Abdylit për*	*Për ditë të mëdha të*
Për të larë mëkatë	*t'ia pre rritën*	*strehuara në histori*
Lumbardhi qe pak	*E erërave të jugut për t'ia*	*Me pëllumb në gjoks të*
Dhe rritë e kështjellës	*zënë pritën*	*luftëtarëve stoli*
donte çdo prak	*Për nisje të valleve të*	*Gjurmët u bënë kështjella*
Kënde në vend të këngës	*gjata në kopshtet tona*	*se këmbë qëndrese shkeli*
kishte vetëm vuajtje		

In this section, Ballata maintains a close relationship with the patriotic poetic text, dedicated to the League of Prizren, especially through dynamic treatment. He begins with pianissimo and reaches the maximal fortissimo (fff) at the climax of the recitation with the words: "se këmb' qëndrese shkeli." This emotional outburst emphasizes the poetic message through musical language, reflecting the importance that the Albanian League of Prizren held as one of the most decisive moments of Albanian national organization at the end of the 19th century (Hafezi, 2023). Taking a step towards analyzing this work, we observe that one of its most distinctive charac-teristics is the innovative use of harmony. Composer Ballata has chosen to interweave tradition-al Albanian music (primarily modal), enriched with chromatic sounds (12 semitones), extend-ing even to elements of dodecaphonic music. The use of modal harmony is clearly seen in the structure of chords and intervals, where we find particular relationships such as the augmented second (e.g., in measure 46, *C#-Bb* in the soprano line of the choir, as well as in the final movement of measure 74, where a vertical sonority occurs across all choir voices: *F#-Eb-A-F#-Bb*. Another case where the use of augmented seconds and traditional harmony is clearly observed is in measure 29, in the soprano and alto voices, where the sopranos have the notes B♭–C♯–B♭, while the altos have G♯–F–G♮. In the timpani, we notice a construction based on the pentatonic scale, where the intervals be-tween the notes *D–A–E*, are clearly articulated, referring to a close relationship of fifths. The pentatonic logic is also confirmed in the main melodic line of the work, which is revealed from the beginning through the bass solo *E-A, D-A-D*, clearly confirming the orientation toward the use of the pentatonic-Tritone 2 scale, as a distinctive expressive interval.



Musical Example 1. Second tritone

This stylistic choice is an integral part of the harmonic language of the work "Këmbë Qëndrese," where the departure from classical tonality creates a free flow and expressive intensity through internally generated chords. It can be stated that the work leans towards a "metatonal" approach, where the tonal center shifts and is absorbed by a multitude of different centers.
triptych, this harmonic freedom manifests as a fusion of traditional modes with modern structures, following Claude Ballif's concept of metatonality (Ballif, 2015). The use of elements such as chromaticism, enharmonic tones, along with characteristic intervals (4th - fourth, 5th - fifth, 7th - seventh, 2nd - augmented second) from Albanian folk music, enriches the work.
The harmonic structure, often featuring clusters of tones (as in measure 59), is closely linked to the formal construction of the work, which begins with a fourth interval in the timpani and a recitative instead of a song, gradually integrating the choir and soloist. This construction model is followed in all three movements of the piece. In the third *stanza*, Ballata employs a distinctive compositional technique by linking the end of one section with the beginning of the next. This is achieved through the fading echo of two choir voices, while the reciter immediately commences the concluding part, creating a natural connection between the segments. The same structure is used at the end of the work, which closes with a *recitativ*, imparting a cyclical form and a stable artistic closure. The work "*Këmbë Qëndrese"* has been regarded as one of Ballata's most representative achieve-ments, due to the way he integrates contemporary style with traditional Albanian material and the emotive power of the historical text. Contemporary criticism has emphasized that, through this work, Ballata succeeds in creating an authentic musical language that expresses Albanian identity within a modern European context (Bello, 1990; Ibrahimi, 2003; Puhar, 2011; Saneja, n.d.).

"BIR I VENDIT TRIMËROR" - 1981

It is a work for soloist (bass), narrator, choir (S-A-T-B), piano, and nine percussion instruments, based on the text of the writer Enver Gjerqeku, known as a lyrical poet of sonnet forms and styles, whose contribution is significant for the interpretation of this musical work. (1928–2008) (Ballata, n.d.; Križnar, 2003; Gjerqeku, 2016). This work is also constructed in a tripartite form (see Figure 1), but with a difference from the first work of this triptych (Këmbë Qëndrese), where the middle section is built as a standalone bipartite segment.

BIR I VENDIT TRIMËROR

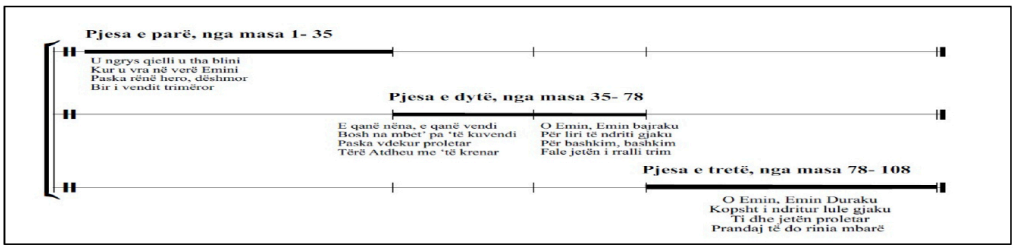
U ngrys qielli u tha blini
Kur u vra në verë Emini
Paska rënë hero, dëshmor
Bir i vendit trimëror

E qanë nëna, e qanë
vendi Bosh na mbet' pa
'të kuvendi
Paska vdekur proletar
Tërë Atdheu me 'të
krenar

O Emin, Emin bajraku
Për liri të ndriti gjaku
Për bashkim, bashkim
Fale jetën i rralli trim

O Emin, Emin Duraku
Kopsht i ndritur lule gjaku
Ti dhe jetën proletar
Prandaj të do rinia mbarë

Figure 1. Bir i vendit trimëror

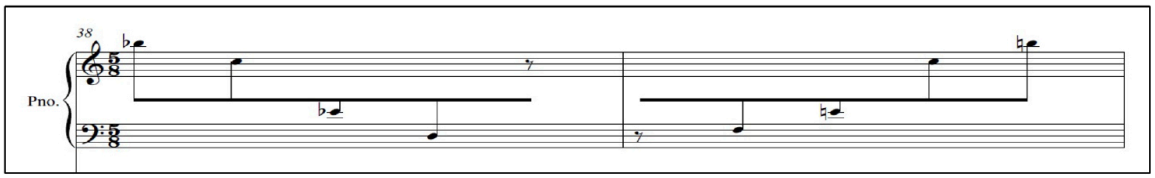


Musical Example 2. The Tripartite Structure, graphically.

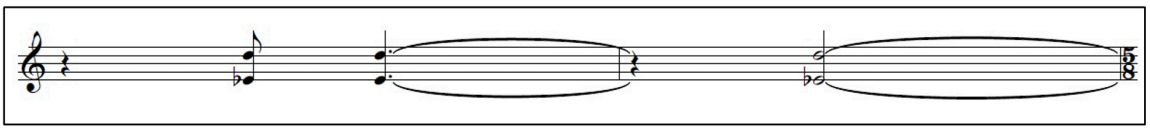
First part: measures 1 – 35; Second part: measures 35 – 78; Third part: measures 78 – 108.

As in the first work, composer Ballata has chosen to intertwine traditional Albanian music (modal music) with a profound enrichment of chromatic sounds. A characteristic feature is the construction of its motif across all voices, based on consecutive seconds. Right at the entrance, a section of the bass (choir) plays divisi and starts with the note F, as an ostinato, while the oth-er voices descend by seconds through intervals of 6, 5, and 4. Here, the composer employs a choir call on the vowel *"O", sustained for six measures*. Almost the same technique is used in the other voices, but with different notes: specifically, the alto voices again start in divisi descending by seconds, while the rest maintain an ostinato on the note G. In the tenor voices, the same technique is transposed to another pitch, where part of the voices hold the note E♭, while the others descend in seconds. A chordal sonority among three voices can be seen and heard (measure 8), creating a nonachord (A♭, C, E, G, B). How-ever, this chord results from the layering of the mode and modal structures. The soprano voices have a distinctive entrance technique, performing a recitative of the text (measures 9–11). An-other notable moment occurs at measure 15, where the entire choir sings in recitative, while the solo baritone, who begins between measures *13 and 15*, plays the main motif (again based on seconds).

Another characteristic of this work is the use of the piano and vibraphone, where the piano often plays sevenths and the vibraphone plays chordal harmonies within the interval of a seventh (see musicals)
3, 4). This complex harmony, employed by Ballata, along with the various techniques he applies, clearly demonstrates the use of a contemporary method in music composition.



Musical Example 3. Piano.



Musical Example 4. Vibraphone.

"Pro Memoria 1462" (according to the baptismal formula)

The work titled "Pro Memoria 1462" – composed in 1987 – was written for an ensemble con-sisting of four woodwind instruments, a soloist (bass), a narrator, a choir (S-A-T-B), two pi-anos, seven percussion instruments, and five string instruments. In 1989, composer Zeqirja Ballata was honored with the honorary title and the Annual Award from the Composers' Asso-ciation for this work. "Pro Memoria 1462" creates a solemn and meditative atmosphere, reflect-ing the spiritual power and historical symbolism of the text. (Ballata, December 5 (n.d.); Kraja, 1997; Olloni, 1997; Križnar, 2003).

This work exhibits a significant complexity of musical elements, such as the use of antiphonal technique in the Gregorian style, where the choir sings the verses of the psalm emphasizing and repeating words that the composer considered most meaningful: "përgëzonj p'rëmënit Atit e t'Birit" and "Unë përgëzonj." Equally interesting is the interplay between the soloist (bass) and the narrator (recitator), who in this work open and close the sequences (see Figures 9 and 10 for a graphical elaboration of the piece), creating the structure: Antiphon – Psalm – Antiphon. (McKinnon, 2000; LaRoche, 2016; McFarland, 2022).

Antiphony is a form of liturgical singing based on the alternation between two choirs or groups of voices, rooted deeply in early religious traditions, especially within the Western Church. This technique reached its most refined development during the Gregorian chant period (8th–13th centuries), becoming a fundamental element of the structure of the Divine Office and the Mass. Here, the musical and functional nature of antiphony will be addressed within the context of Gregorian chant, with a focus on its connections to liturgical structures, the aesthetics of monodic singing, and the musical developments of the Carolingian era. Within the liturgical framework, antiphony plays a fundamental role in fostering participation and creating a lively dialogue between the choir and the congregation, enriching the spiritual experience of the faith-ful. Even in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, antiphony continues to be employed as an expression of spiritual and aesthetic unity, although differences in interpretation can be ob-served due to historical, cultural, or stylistic factors.

Baptismal Formula

On November 8, 1462, Archbishop Pal Engjëlli wrote a church document in Latin, which con-tained the "Baptismal Formula" in the Albanian language: "Unë po të pagëzoj në emër të Atit, e të Birit e të Shpirtit Shenjt" ("I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"). This formula is considered the first written religious text in Albanian and is pre-served in the Laurentian Library in Florence. The document was first discovered by Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga in 1915. (See Figure 5, two original photos of the formula.)

During his pastoral visit to the parishes of the Archdiocese of Durrës, Archbishop Pal Engjëlli observed issues in the practice of religion by the local clergy. As a result, he wrote guidelines and regulations in Latin to assist priests in religious services. Archbishop Pal Engjëlli was a close friend and advisor to Skanderbeg, playing a significant role both in the religious and polit-ical spheres during the resistance against the Ottoman Empire.

PRO MEMORIA 1462

(Sipas Formulës së pagëzimit...)

(1987)

...

Un' ...

Përgëzonj...

P'r emënit Atit e t'Birit

Përgëzonj p'r emënit Atit e t'Birit e t'Trimit

Un' përgëzonj p'r emënit Atit e t'Birit e t'Trimit t'Arbënit

Përgëzonj p'r emënit Atit e t'Birit e t'Trimit

P'r emënit Atit e t'Birit

Përgëzonj Shqip

Un' Pal Engjëlli

1462

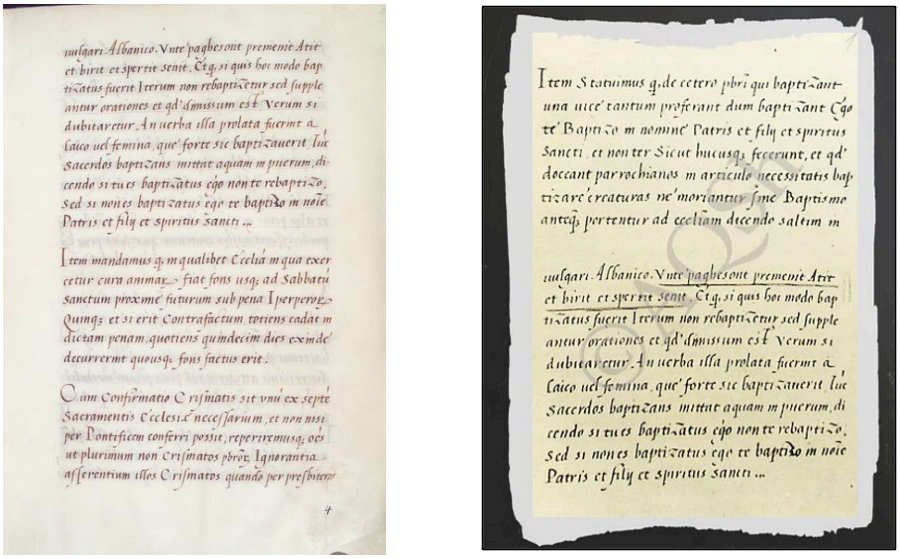
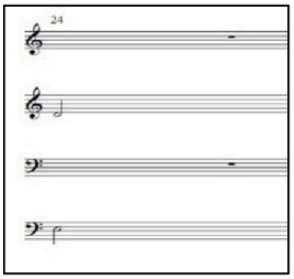
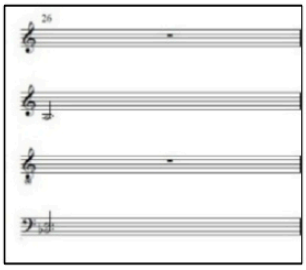


Figure 5. Two original photos of the baptismal formula.

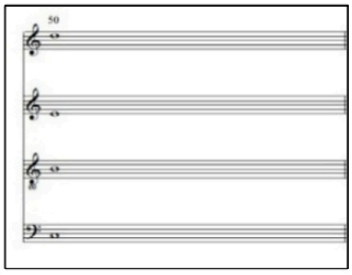
This is a work in which composer Ballata extensively experiments with aleatoric techniques, both in the vocal parts and other instruments, including prepared piano. We can say that this music features expanded harmony, atonality, spectral elements, and modal components, where intervals of perfect fourths, perfect fifths, minor sevenths, and major ninths are used densely (see Figures 6, 7, 8). Aleatoricism in music is a compositional technique where certain elements of the work—such as rhythm, pitch, or the order of sections—are left to chance or the free choice of the performer. This approach creates a level of unpredictability and variability, making each performance unique. Aleatoricism can be controlled by the composer, with some aspects left open for inter-pretation, or it can be complete, where all elements of a piece are free (Griffiths, 2010).



Musical Example 6.
Measure 24, Choir.



Musical Example 7.
Measure 26, Choir.



Musical Example 8.
Measure 50, Choir.

Conclusions

Viewed from a philosophical perspective, it is evident that Ballata has constructed a clear concept of a patriotic line extended through time, where through the three "texts" – Pro Memoria 1462, Këmbë Qëndrese, and Bir i Vendit Trimëror – uninterrupted patriotism is conveyed across centuries among Albanians.

These three parts, organically interconnected, represent three peaks of national resistance:

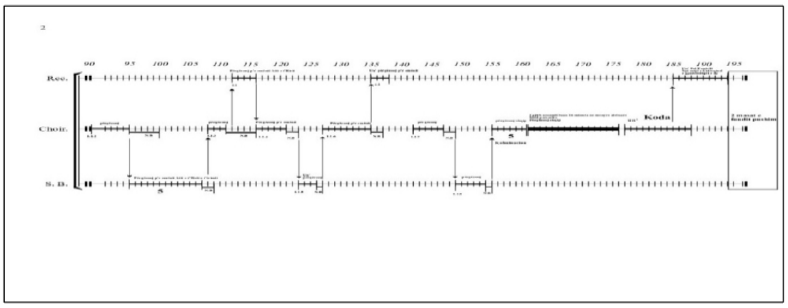
- *"Pro Memoria" 1462* (Part III of the triptych), the state of Arbër and the resistance of our National Hero, Gjergj Kastrioti. It is well known that during the period of Skanderbeg, Albania became a bastion of re-sistance against the Ottoman Empire, hindering its advance toward Western Europe for decades. Under the leadership of Gjergj Kastrioti, the Albanian principalities were unit-ed for the first time in a common front, laying the foundations of an Albanian state and an early sense of national identity. Through connections with the Pope, the Kingdom of Naples, and the Republic of Venice, Albania became engaged in the diplomacy of the time and transformed into a symbol of the defense of European values.
- *"Këmbë Qëndrese"* (Part I of the triptych), the League of Prizren, 1878. The League of Prizren, formed on June 10, 1878, was the first organized political and military effort to defend Albanian lands after the Congress of Berlin. It continued the tradition of Skanderbeg's era and united representatives from all Albanian regions in a common national forum, demanding autonomy and the preservation of territorial integri-ty. The League marked the beginning of the movement for independence and laid the foundations of the Albanian state, becoming a symbol of political awareness and na-tional unity under the Ottoman Empire.
- *"Bir i Vendit Trimëror"*, dedicated to Emin Duraku (Part II of the triptych), the Albanian Anti-Fascist Resistance (1939–1945). Emin Duraku, born on January 1, 1918, in Gjakova, was a prominent figure of the anti-fascist resistance during World War II and one of the national heroes of this struggle. Due to the prohibition of education in Albanian, he crossed illegally into Albania in 1932 to attend school. He played a key role in organizing the anti-fascist resistance and was killed by fascist forces on December 23, 1942, in Lipjan.

These three major moments in the history of Albania and the Albanians represent monumental reference points in the long path of state-building and the defense of national identity. They are not merely dates, but cornerstones in the historical and spiritual consciousness of the Albanian

people, which have inspired the composer Ballata to write this triptych in music.
An element that unifies the triptych, as conceived by Ballata, is the carefully chosen vocal-instrumental formation used by the composer in all three works. The structure is consistent, featuring a reciter, a male soloist (bass in *Këmbë Qëndrese* and *Pro Memoria* 1462, baritone in *Bir i Vendit Trimëror*), and a choir (SATB) in each part. The percussive instruments and the piano form the core of the instrumental structure. Particular-ly in *Pro Memoria* 1462, a timbral and orchestral expansion is evident, with four wind instru-ments (two flutes and two clarinets) and string groups (three cellos and two double basses), which deepen the drama and sensitivity of the work, making this piece the natural center of the triptych. This formal uniformity, interwoven with the functional and timbral differences of each part, not only creates structural cohesion but also gives the triptych a strong artistic identity, turning it into a musical testimony of the historical and spiritual resistance of the Albanian na-tion. Through this triptych, Ballata builds a living bridge between collective memory and musical art, where history is transformed into music.



Musical Example 9. Pro Memoria in graphical form, Measures 1–90.



Musical Example 10. Pro Memoria in graphical form, Measures 90–150.

Explanation of Table No. 1 regarding the distribution of the text among the voices, according to the two figures above;

Ch.N.R. – "Number of measures of rest for the choir" and B.N.R. – "Number of measures of rest for the bass."

Measures	The reciter	Choir	Ch.N.R.	Solo Bass	B.N.R.
2-9		Un' Përgëzonj			
			10-13		
10-14				Prgëzonj p'rrëmënit	
					15-16
15-17		përgëzonj			
			18-20		
20-23	Prgëzonj p'r emënit				
24-27		p'r emënit			
			27-29		
30-34		përgëzonj			
			34-35		
34-36				un' përgëzonj	
37-42		un' përgëzonj p'r emënit			
			42-44		
42-46	përgëzonj p'rrëmënit Atit e t'Birit				
47-50		un' përgëzonj			
			50-52		
50-55				un' përgëzonj	
					55-56
56-58				Atit e t'Birit	
					58-59
60-62				e t'Trimit	
					62-63
63-66		përgëzonj			
			66-70		
66-69				p'rrëmënit	
					69-70
68-71	përgëzonj p'rrëmënit				
71-73				t'Trimit	
					73-75
72-74	Atit e t'Birit				
75-79	e t'Trimit t'Arbënit				
80-89		The entire ensemble performs in an aleatory manner. The choir repeats *t'Arbërit* in the alto and bass voices.			
90-95		përgëzonj			
			95-100		
95-107					
				Përgëzonj p'r emënit Atit e t'Birit e t'trimit	107-108
108-111		un' përgëzonj			
			111-115		
112-116	përgëzonj p'rrëmënit Atit e t'Birit				
116-121		përgëzonj p'rrëmënit			
			121-122		
123-126				un' përgëzonj	
					126-127
127-135		përgëzonj			
			135-137		
135-138	Un' përgëzonj p'rrëmënit				
142-146		përgëzonj			
			146-148		
149-153				përgëzonj	
					153-154
155-161		Përgëzonj Shqip Kulminacion			
161-176		The entire ensemble performs for 16 minutes continuously. The choir repeats "Përgëzonj shqip."			
177-188		Un Koda			
185-194	Un' Pal Engjelli …				
194-195	Pause	Pause	Pause	Pause	Pause

Table 1. Explanation of Table No. 1 regarding the distribution of the text among the voices, according to the two figures above

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Introduction to the Scholarly Field and Musical Creativity of the Multifaceted Researcher, Composer, and Musicologist Edmond Buharaja

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Abstract

Edmond Buharaja (Durrës, 1963 – 2024) represents an extraordinary depth and diversity in the field of systematic musicology, musical analysis, and composition. The aim of this paper is to provide a general and clear reflection on the areas of study, as well as the theoretical and scientific parameters on which the analysis of Buharaja's creative and scholarly activity will be based. This analysis is grounded in a methodological confrontation defined primarily in two aspects:
a) The theories and major literature upon which Buharaja's remarkable contribution to the field of musical analysis and aesthetics is based.
b) The methodology used by him and the application of these theories both in his academic legacy and in his creative work in composition.
When discussing musical analysis, three distinct analytical theories must necessarily be taken into account: Schenkerian analysis theory, neo-Riemannian theory, and set theory regarding post-tonal music. In addition to these theories, important perspectives on the study of sonata form, such as Elements of Sonata Theory by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, and general analysis of musical forms, such as Analyzing Classical Form by William E. Caplin, must also be considered. Regarding musical aesthetics, the Albanian translation and use of Enrico Fubini's work on Musical Aesthetics as a university study text, along with a deep engagement with the studies of C. Dahlhaus, T. Adorno, M. Imberty, M. Baroni, R. Dalmonte, and others, clearly demonstrate the international scholarly sphere to which Buharaja referred. Considering that this paper constitutes only an introduction (synthesis) to a further and more in-depth study, it can be said that:
a) The results of this paper fulfill the above-mentioned objectives.
b) The conclusions drawn must demonstrate the depth of thought and the polyhedral study of Edmond Buharaja's work.

Keywords

Edmond Buharaja, analysis, musicology, composer, GATM.

Introduction

It has been a short time since September 12, 2024, the day when, in a painful and unexpected manner, we experienced the passing of the scholar, composer, and professor Edmond Buharaja.Every word dedicated to him is filled not only with sorrow and confusion but also with emotion and gratitude for a man who devoted his entire existence to the multifaceted study of musical art. Buharaja belongs to that category of intellectuals whose work transcends the ordinary boundaries of professional activity. The multifaceted nature of his professional endeavors is clearly reflected not only in the field of composition but also in the theoretical-analytical, historical-philological, and psycho-pedagogical domains.

We have reason to believe that his exceptional abilities in both his scholarly and artistic-musical fields are a result of an intellectual synthesis inherited from his two uncles: Vexhi Buharaja (1920–1987), a philologist, historian, translator, and scholar of Albanian Oriental culture, and Feim Ibrahimi (1935–1997), an Albanian composer, "People's Artist," and one of the leading figures of 20th-century Albanian music.

From Vexhi Buharaja, to whom he dedicated the monographic study "*Through the Currents of the Individual Psychology of Vexhi Buharaja*" (Buharaja, 2023), Edmond inherited sharpness of thought, visionary research, and the persistence of a committed scholar. From Feim Ibrahimi, with whom Buharaja studied composition both before and during his university years, he gained a solid and rigorous theoretical grounding as well as a broad understanding of the infinite expressive tools in music. Edmond would later dedicate to Feim Ibrahimi, in the first decade of this century, the monographic study "*Feimian Aesthetics*" and later, in 2013, the paper "The Poetics of a Concerto: Reflections on the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra (1981) by Feim Ibrahimi (1935–1997)" (Buharaja,2013), with which he would make his first appearance at the International Conferences of GATM (Italian Society for Music Theory and Analysis).

From this moment, Buharaja began, from solid and well-equipped academic foundations, a significant trajectory that would lead to his recognition not only in Albania but also on the international stage. Without hesitation, he would make available to his students—and to all those fortunate enough to have known or collaborated with him—this invaluable legacy, as well as the scientific expertise he would go on to acquire in the years to follow.

This paper, which serves as an introduction to a more extensive and in-depth study, will consider in general terms only three major aspects of his professional activity, specifically:

- The field of composition, through an overview of four works composed between 1987 and 2003: *Symphony "Alpine" with Interlude* (1987), *Eclipse* (1991), *Metamorphosis of the Crystal* (1992), and *Bye, Bye Gershwin*(2003);
- His scholarly contributions as an analyst and pedagogue in the fields of Music Theory and Analysis, as well as in Musical Semiotics, Semantics, and Aesthetics;
- His studies in the field of Albanology and the History of Albanian Music.

Edmond Buharaja began his career as a composer with a symphony, his diploma work in composition, with which he completed his studies in 1987 at the then-Institute of Higher Arts—today the University of Arts in Tirana. *The Symphony "Alpine" with Interlude*, structured in

five movements (with a total duration of 55 minutes), was composed in just eight months, from October 1986 to June 1987. In several handwritten notes on this work addressed to conductor and academic Eno Koço—which I had the privilege of consulting—Buharaja explains his attempt to depict, through the music, certain scenes from Albanian history belonging to the end of the medieval period, when Albania was dramatically severed from the European "trunk" to become part of the Ottoman Empire for half a millennium. From a philological perspective, the work is conceived as a grand "novel" containing themes and leitmotifs with various symbolic meanings, the most prominent of which include the theme of the "mountain" in the first movement and that of the *Dies Irae*, expressed in the interlude of the fourth movement. In his notes addressed to Eno Koço, Buharaja writes:

"Eno, if a parallel may be drawn, I would find it in *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, a work I had studied extensively at the time, drawn by the grandeur of its themes, the extraordinary breadth of its characters (over 500), the dramatic and tragic nature of its events, and the contrapuntal style of its narrative, etc." (Buharaja, notes p.5)

This reference also sheds light on the title Symphony *"Alpine" with Interlude*, which directly evokes the alpine imagery of another symphonic work—Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*—but to which Buharaja adds the component "*with interlude*", endowing it with distinct formal and semantic value. Without delving into detail, and while attempting to highlight the unifying thread that runs through all areas of Buharaja's creative work—namely, his ability to charge every measure of his score with meaning—I would recall a moment in which Feim Ibrahimi, his uncle and professor, anticipating potential consequences, firmly requested two changes to the symphony:
(i) to soften the harmonies throughout the work, and (ii) to remove the sound of the bell in the fourth movement (interlude) due to its religious connotation. It is important to emphasize that, at the time, Albania was a country with state-enforced atheism enshrined in its Constitution (with all the associated dramatic and penal consequences for violations), and the formalist content of "socialist realism" did not permit such an "aggressive" musical language.

Therefore, from a semantic standpoint, Buharaja's work may be seen as diverging sharply from and discontinuing the aesthetic and semiotic content officially imposed during that period. Buharaja, with remarkable courage, refused to comply with either of his professor's requests. He would later state in his notes: "Harmony, for me—at least in this work—is not conceived as a syntactic element, but as a morphological one. And so my sensibility demanded those sonorities, that lexicon, and I employed them, discarding everything I had learned about harmony."(Buharaja, personal notes)

This consideration of harmony (and not only harmony) as a morphological element reflects a tendency toward an expressive language that clearly privileges the symphony's aesthetic substance and message. The symphony would receive its world premiere 27 years later, in the hall of the University of Arts in Tirana on May 21, 2014, performed by the University of Arts Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Petrika Afezolli. Following this premiere, a second performance of the work took place in the same hall nearly a year later, on March 13, 2015, by the Symphony Orchestra of Albanian Radio Television (RTSH), again conducted by Afezolli (Afezolli, personal notes). *Eclipse – A Mozartian Reflection (1991)* is a work for eleven

strings composed using the twelve-tone technique, and it is dedicated to his longtime friend, the renowned Albanian violinist Florian Vlashi. The piece was written overnight between November 29 and 30, 1991, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of W. A. Mozart's death.

Structurally, *Eclipse* is conceived as a passacaglia based on the motif of Mozart's *Lacrimosa*, in which the idea of the genius's abandonment is musically realized through the loss of rhythmic sense in sections that gradually move away from the isorhythm of the unison, following the Fibonacci sequence.[1] The motif is subjected to transformations according to twelve-tone technique: retrograde, inversion, and retrograde inversion. As Arnold Schoenberg explains in his book *Style and Idea: Writings on Musicology* [1950, pp. 116–117]: "We have seen that the original series is used in mirror forms. From the fundamental series, three other series are automatically derived: 1) the retrograde; 2) the inversion; 3) the retrograde inversion. The use of these mirror forms fulfills the principle of absolute and unified perception of musical space."

The work was first performed at the "A. Moisiu" Theatre in Durrës on December 4, 1991, followed by a second performance the next day, December 5, at the National Opera House in Tirana. It was subsequently performed by the same ensemble during a nine-concert tour in Puglia, Italy, in June 1992, as well as by the *Grupo Instrumental Siglo XX* in La Coruña, Spain, during the Modern Music Festival on August 28, 1998 (Vlashi, personal notes).

1 The name of the Italian mathematician Leonardo Pisano, better known as Fibonacci (1170 – 1250), is associated with the so-called "Fibonacci Sequence," in which the third number is the sum of the two preceding numbers: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144… The ratio between the succeeding number and the preceding one begins with 1 and approaches 1.618033989…, known as the "golden number," the "divine proportion," or the "golden section." [Note by the author.]

The following poem, written by Buharaja himself, was conceived to be recited during the performance of two sections of the composition (F1 and F2).

«The *REQUIEM* is
For YOU! – oh people
who so swiftly abandoned me,
and for whom the path was only danger;
who confined me to 'exist' between life and death;
For YOU!
who forced me to survive in a world
of sorrows...,
disillusionments...,
ingratitude...,
humiliation...,
incompleteness...;
For YOU!
who threatened me with solitude;
For YOU!
enemies in that sliver of life,
and 'friends' only after my death;
For YOU!
whom I exalted so sublimely.
You deserved nothing of my self-sacrifice.
WRETCHED ARE YOU!
Chaos shall reign over you!
You will remain
The scream of the world,
its lament,
its sigh.
And in the cosmic darkness
there will be no one left to light your way;
thus, in any case,
with bitterness
I wash...
my...
hands... » (Buharaja, 1998)

"Metamorphosis of the Crystal", composed in 1992, is a work for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, dedicated to his uncle and composition professor, Feim Ibrahimi. The piece was first performed in 1994 during the "*Night of Albanian Modern Music*", an event organized by Ibrahimi himself. The quartet's instrumentation (clarinet, violin, cello, piano) mirrors that of Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps (Quartet for the End of Time)*, serving as a musical homage to one of the great composers of the twentieth century.

Buharaja states that the compositional technique employed in this work is twelve-tone (serialism), while the writing style integrates aleatoric techniques with more traditional approaches (Vlashi, personal notes). In this quartet, Buharaja's intent is not to present a "programmatic work"; the title is to be understood primarily in formal and metaphorical terms. The "crystal," a symbol of purity and beauty, possesses a periodic and orderly atomic structure—geometrically regular—that repeats infinitely in all three spatial dimensions, thus naturally forming a geometric and polyhedral shape. It is precisely this perfect but invisible internal structure of the crystal that serves as a metaphor for the composition's title.

In 2010, during the proceedings of the International Congress of Contemporary Music in La Coruña (Spain), the ensemble *Grupo Instrumental Siglo XX* successfully performed the work. "*Bye, Bye Gershwin*"(2003) is a composition for solo piano, conceived in the style of George Gershwin. It was performed by pianist Massimiliano Chiappinelli and released on CD by *Acustica Edizioni,* a publishing house directed by Buharaja himself during his extended stay in Lecce, Italy. The extensive liner notes accompanying the release (32 pages) include a detailed monographic study written by Buharaja on Gershwin and his music, anonymously titled "*Publisher's Notes*" (pp. 5–32). Later, in May 2005, this discographic publication was presented at the *Castello di Nemi* (Nemi Castle, Rome) (Buharaja). From 2010 onwards, Buharaja would devote himself almost entirely to the fields of music theory and analysis, as well as to musical semiotics, semantics, and aesthetics—areas in which he engaged with increasing depth and consistency—gradually leaving aside his compositional activity. From the 2011/12 academic year onwards, Buharaja began his pedagogical activity as the head of the Department of Musical Semiotics and Semantics at the University of Arts in Tirana (Buharaja).

These subjects, which had already been present for several years in the curricula of the Faculty of Music, were primarily developed in the form of musical rhetoric, thereby aiming at the identification and understanding of expressive figures conveyed through sound.

It is evident that such figures can activate emotional responses and/or effects that are either culturally determined or specifically oriented toward a particular type of listener. Under these conditions, the provision of a foundational text for the didactic treatment of this subject became a pedagogical necessity. The particular nature of musical language imposes a structured approach, unfolding in two directions: (i) a deepening of general theory, and (ii) its application to the art of sound.

The material developed and used over more than a decade, initially as part of a teaching project, was eventually compiled by the author into a two-volume work under the collective title "*Semiotics*", structured as follows:

- Volume I: *Foundations and General Principles*
- Volume II: *The Sign of Sound between Formalism and Structuralism*

These two volumes comprise a total of approximately 500 pages and include a bibliography of around 165 cited works. During this period, Buharaja also began to consider the integration of The History of Musical Aesthetics into the university study program. This led him to translate from Italian the two volumes of Enrico Fubini's *Musical Aesthetics*: *L'estetica musicale dall'antichità al Settecento* (Musical Aesthetics from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century) and *L'estetica musicale dal Settecento a oggi* (Musical Aesthetics from the Eighteenth Century to the Present) (Fubini, 1976). The Albanian edition of Fubini's work was published in three separate volumes: (i) Aesthetics I: *From Antiquity to the 1700s*, (ii) Aesthetics II: *From Baroque Rationalism to Romantic Symbolism and Positivism*, (iii) Aesthetics III: *From the Anti-Romantic Reaction to the Poetics of the Avant-Garde*. Enrico Fubini himself contributed a dedicated foreword to the Albanian edition, while Buharaja enriched the publication with an extended introductory study titled "T*he Doctrines of Aesthetics*."(Buharaja, 2018) Within the same pedagogical context, this time promoting the study of Schenkerian Analysis, Buharaja translated from Italian and published the book *Schenkerian Analysis (Analisi Schenkeriana)* by William Drabkin, Susanna Pasticci, and Egidio Pozzi (Drabkin, Pasticci, & Pozzi 1995).

In 2013, Edmond Buharaja initiated a collaboration with GATM[2] (the Italian Association for Musical Analysis and Theory), which in subsequent years would develop into a highly fruitful relationship. He presented at the 10th International Conference on Musical Analysis and Theory (2013) with a paper entitled "*The Poetics of a Concerto – Reflections on the Oboe Concerto (1981) by Feim Ibrahimi (1935–1997)*," a study he dedicated to his uncle and mentor. From that year onward, Buharaja's involvement and collaboration with GATM would become continuous and productive, not only within the framework of annual conferences but also as a peer-review consultant for the online journal of musical analysis, *Analitica*.[3] In subsequent years, he published several of his studies in *Analitica*, in *RATM*[4] *(Rivista Analisi e Teoria Musicale)*, a Class A journal and one of the most internationally recognized in the field, as well as in the *Quaderni dell'Istituto Liszt*[5] of Bologna. In 2017, Buharaja completed his first-level Master's degree in Musical Analysis and Theory, institutionalized by GATM and the University of Calabria, achieving the highest distinction (*cum laude*). Subsequently, he engaged as an instructor for several workshops within this Master's program, demonstrating a very high level of preparation and professionalism.

2 GATM – The Italian Society for Music Analysis and Theory is an association founded in 1989, composed of scholars from Italian and international universities and conservatories, dedicated to the study of music theory and analysis (www.gatm.it).

3 "*Analitica*" is an annual online, peer-reviewed, and open-access journal of music studies, founded in 1998 and published by the Italian Society for Music Analysis and Theory.

4 "*Ratm*" is a biannual, peer-reviewed journal published by the Italian Society for Music Analysis and Theory, listed as a class A journal according to ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Systems).

5 "*Quaderni dell'Istituto Liszt*" is a journal published by the Liszt Foundation, based in Bologna, featuring studies related to the figure of the composer and pianist F. Liszt (www.fondazioneistitutoliszt.it).

The renowned Italian musicologist and scholar, Professor Rossana Dalmonte, who co-supervised Buharaja's dissertation, remarked: «Edmond Buharaja's work, focusing on the analytical and stylistic aspects of mid-19th century Liszt and the perspective on issues related to the evolution of Romantic formal conception, is developed upon numerous and interesting bibliographical references and presents a high command of Schenkerian and post-Riemannian analytical techniques." (Buharaja, 2017) Buharaja devoted particular attention to the in-depth study of several of Stravinsky's compositions. Notably, he presented the paper "*The Formalization of Sound in Stravinsky's Sacrificial Dance*" at the 15th International GATM Conference (2018), as well as the chapter on Igor Stravinsky in the book *The Era of the Unheard* (Buharaja, 2018) , edited by E. Pozzi and G. Sellari — Anicia Edizioni (2022).

In the last three years, Buharaja focused his energies on completing his most significant study in the field of Analysis: "*The Totality of Morphological Polysemy — Liszt, Grande Sonate (1853)*." Several years earlier, he had already shown a special interest in researching a profound methodology for the structural analysis of this work, presenting the paper titled "*Le petite phrase (the small phrase) of the Sonata in B minor (S.178) by Franz Liszt: formal structure and octatonic implication up to the tonal consolidation of measure no. 32*" (Buharaja, 2019) at the 16th International GATM Conference (2019). This paper can be regarded as the definitive starting point for the development of this monumental work. In this study, Buharaja empirically determines the structure of Liszt's Sonata with precision, accomplishing this through: (i) the study and application of the concept of form in Liszt within an important historical timeframe, considering the significant legacy of the First Viennese School and especially Beethovenian heritage; (ii) detailed analysis of each segment in the structural composition of the Sonata, both in terms of thorough score analysis and in the semantic and semiotic content of the work. Buharaja (p. 13) asserts that « a considerable amount of the historical and analytical literature on Liszt's Sonata in B minor, largely investigated within the work, created a certain confusion due to the distances between scholarly perspectives and the conclusions reached ».[6]

Building upon a sound analytical and theoretical foundation, Edmond Buharaja's work "*The Totality of Morphological Polysemy*" offers a broad and compelling exposition of the interpretation of these perspectives and conclusions, synthesizing an authentic analytical viewpoint on Liszt's work.

Considering all the demands imposed by a monumental study of such scope, it is worth briefly mentioning only four principal analytical theories widely employed by Buharaja in this work: (i) *Classical Form* — the new theory of form (*Formenlehre*) authored by William Caplin, in its 1998 version and a more didactic edition from 2013[7] ; (ii) *Elements of Sonata Theory* (2006)

6 Buharaja not only demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the relevant literature but also enables a transparent and constructive dialectic in confronting various scholarly perspectives. [author's note].

7 *Classical Form:* Paraphrasing Prof. Antonio Grande, a profound expert in this theory, Caplin and his study have become part of the so-called "prestigious tradition" of Formenlehre, which begins with 19th-century theorists and passes through the theories of Arnold Schoenberg and Erwin Ratz. Caplin attempts to revitalize this prestigious tradition by supporting it on firmer and more sophisticated grounds, based on coherent principles and clear terminology. Caplin's theory adopts a bottom-up perspective, prioritizing the structure of the work. [Author's note]

by James Hepokosky and Warren Darcy[8] ; (iii) *Schenkerian Analysis* by H. Schenker; and (iv) *The Structure of Atonal Music* (Set Theory, 1973) by Allen Forte (Forte, 1973).

Buharaja's dedication to Albanological studies has always been intertwined with the musical expression in Albania and its diaspora, spanning from the early history of the country to contemporary times. For this reason, it is important to highlight two of his significant works: (i) the monograph "*Nicetas of Remesiana: His Theo-Musicophilosophy in the Nicaean Culture*" (Buharaja, 2024), published in 2019 by the Academy of Sciences of Albania, and (ii) "*The Historiography of the Art of Sound in the Albanian World*."

In 2016, Buharaja earned his Doctorate of Science with a dissertation titled "*The Historiography of Musical Expression in Albania and Its Diaspora from the Human Presence on Albanian Soil up to the 16th century* — cultural parallels from an aesthetic, semiotic, semantic, and anthropological perspective" (Buharaja). From this doctoral work, a further monumental project was developed, titled "*The Historiography of the Art of Sound in the Albanian World*," divided into six volumes:

- Volume I: *From Prehistory to Antiquity*.
- Volume II: *From the Middle Ages to the European Renaissance*.
- Volume III: *From Osmanization to Ottomanism*.
- Volume IV: *From Independence to World War II*.
- Volume V: *The Parabola of Socialist Realism*.
- Volume VI: *The Postmodernist Utopia after the 1990s*.

On November 14, 2024, at the premises of the Academy of Sciences of Albania, amidst the immeasurable void left by the author's absence, the first volume of this series—published by the Academy itself—was presented. Buharaja affirms that "following this first volume, the second and third are ready for publication, while the subsequent volumes are still in progress" (Buharaja, 2024). Unfortunately, he did not live to see the publication of the first volume, and these words now resonate as a solemn testament directed toward future scholars. These two works represent not only a profound understanding of the history of Albania and the Balkans but also constitute an important endeavor from aesthetic, semiotic, semantic, and anthropological standpoints in the reading and interpretation of the values, works, figures, and events that have marked not only the history of Albania but also all neighboring countries. In this context, Edmond Buharaja's commitment as a lecturer at the University "Haxhi Zeka" in Peja, along with his numerous participations in Albanological conferences at the University of Prishtina, represent a significant added value. In the epilogue to this introduction to the journey filled with studies, works, and teachings by Edmond Buharaja, it is important to mention a brief but highly valuable contribution of his: the notes in the booklet of the compact disc for violin and piano "*Balkan Masterpieces*"(Gjikondi, 2024), released in September 2024 by the Da Vinci Classics record label, just days after his passing.

8 *Elements of Sonata Theory* is a major effort to reconstruct sonata form theory from a rather modern, if not postmodern, perspective. Partially, it responds to Caplin's earlier study but contrasts it by adopting a top-down perspective, providing an overview from above before addressing particular issues. H&D's study considers the rhetorical nature of the composer's choices, whereas Caplin objectively describes different structural elements. [Author's note]

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Some reflections on the phonic representation of the storm. Rhetoric, aesthetics and didactic functions of a musical trope.

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Abstract

The object of this research is the study of the representation of the storm in music. Its manifestations and evolutions, observed in a period that goes from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, are of considerable interest in shedding light on that period in which, in some seventeenth-century treatises, the concept of musical rhetoric was born. Vivaldi is the first who manages to give mimetic form (in the Platonic sense) to this natural phenomenon. From that moment, from Il cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione of 1725, the fortune of a real musical trope begins that will cross the centuries and that will interest a very high number of composers, among whom Rossini, Beethoven, Liszt, Verdi and Strauss stand out. The aim of the research is therefore to reconstruct the stylistic-expressive areas of the representation of the storm in music, giving an account of its transformations. The methodology employed will focus on a formal, stylistic and harmonic analysis of the scores, according to a comparative methodological approach that takes into account both constants and historical variations. The result will be to reconstruct a reference canon of works in which the realization of the trope is particularly significant. Within it, notation systems and rhetorical-rhythmic figures that have remained unchanged over time will emerge, just as some structural and semantic complications will be evident that are especially evident in the transition from the Romantic to the late Romantic season thanks to the genre of the symphonic poem. Following the perspective adopted, it will finally be possible to superimpose technical-stylistic conclusions on philosophical questions, offering a starting point for the teaching of a subject that is often too theoretical such as the aesthetics of music.

Keywords

musical rhetoric, musical trope theory, programmatic music, musical aesthetics.
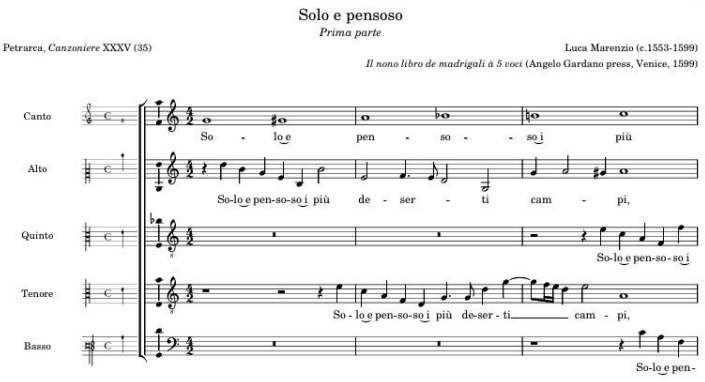
The Italian Madrigal as a Convergence Point of Text, Affections, and Music

In order to contextualize the Western musical topos of the storm, one must begin with an examination of the polyphonic repertoire of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (PERLINI, 2002). The madrigal genre, especially in its late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century development (LEDDA, 2012), displays a growing capacity to adhere to the poetic text with increasing mimetic precision (RATNER, 1980). The representation of the "soul in turmoil" becomes a recurring motif, nourished by contemporary epic poetry and the expanding focus on the psychological dimension of poetic expression. The madrigal thus becomes a privileged site for bold formal experimentation (KOFI, 1991), where music is consciously employed as a mimetic tool shaped by psychological realism. In the same historical context – early seventeenth-century Florence – emerges the melodramatic genre, developed under the aegis of the *Camerata de' Bardi* (CARTER, 2000). To represent internal emotional conflict, often likened to natural upheaval, composers who embrace the secular and flexible genre of the madrigal developed a repertoire of musical figures that imitate or symbolize emotional states, allowing for a sonic rendering of the imagery embedded in the text. Among the techniques employed to sonically depict inner turmoil are the following:

- Chromaticism, used to convey pain, lamentation, and emotional instability;
- Dissonances that violate conventional counterpoint rules, evoking torment and tension;
- Fragmented or interrupted phrases, suggestive of weeping, labored breathing, or psychological rupture;
- Tempo indications such as *agitato or concitato*, often paired with rapid rhythms, repeated notes, or virtuosic passages to suggest uncontrollable emotional agitation.

These expressive devices, many of which Monteverdi would later defend as essential to the «seconda pratica», as famously declared in the *Preface* to his *Fifth Book of Madrigals* (1605), can be illustrated through three notable examples drawn from the madrigal repertoire. From these excerpts, three rhetorical-musical strategies emerge as particularly emblematic: the descending scale; the use of chromaticism; and the mimetic-sonic portrayal of emotional conflict through agitation – expressed via syncopation and sixteenth-note figuration.

The first example comes from a madrigal by Luca Marenzio, who sets to music a well-known Petrarchan sonnet (*Solo et pensoso, Canzoniere, XXVIII*). In this piece, Marenzio employs a descending scale to convey psychological introspection and solitude, rendering the poetic image through subtle melodic descent.
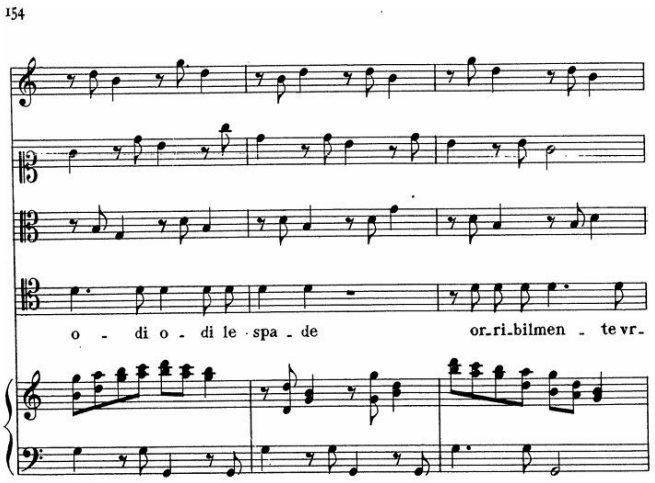


Musical Example 1. Luca Marenzio, *Solo e pensoso*. Madrigal, 1599.

The second example extends the mimetic possibilities of musical language and moves toward a striking depiction of internal emotional conflict. *In Moro, lasso, al mio duolo* (1613), Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa intensifies the expressive language of pain and despair through abrupt harmonic shifts, bold dissonances, and radical chromaticism. The utterance of the word «duolo» ("pain") serves as the rhetorical trigger for the musical representation of inner agitation.

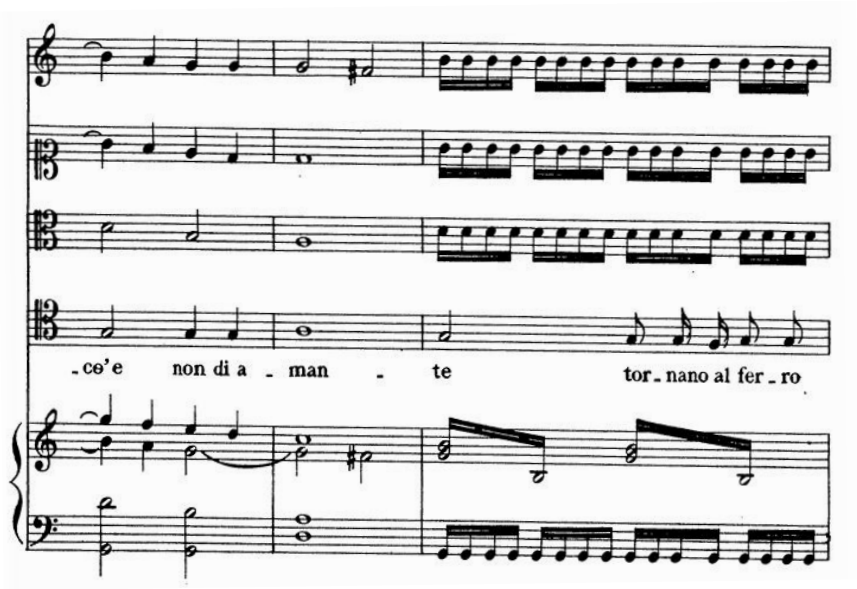


Musical Example 2. Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa, *Moro, lasso, al mio duolo*. Madrigal, 1613.

The final example brings instrumental accompaniment into a prominent expressive role. In Il combattimento di *Tancredi e Clorinda* (1638), Monteverdi evokes the battle scene and the clash of swords through agitated rhythmic figures and rapid sixteenth-note figuration in the strings. The vivid musical gestures reflect the violence of combat, integrating narrative and musical expression in an unprecedented way.



Musical Example 3a. Claudio Monteverdi, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. Madrigal, 1638.



Musical Example 3b. Claudio Monteverdi, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. *Madrigal*, 1638.

Monteverdi himself, in Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria (1640), develops this expressive style further by applying it to one of the earliest musical depictions of a sea storm. Here, the storm is portrayed through string tremolos and syncopated figures that evoke the movement of water. Originally conceived within a vocal and madrigalistic framework, these rhetorical strategies now extend into the orchestral realm, laying the foundation for a rhetorical framework that would codify recurring musical strategies for depicting stormy agitation (HATTEN, 2004).

Treatise Writing

Alongside this madrigalistic practice, a rich body of theoretical discourse also began to emerge. Throughout the seventeenth century, musical rhetoric underwent systematic development in treatises (BONDS, 1994), particularly within the German-speaking world, although it also drew heavily from late Renaissance and early Baroque Italian practices. Particularly relevant to the musical portrayal of tempestuous passions is the theory known as *Affektenlehre*, which sought to establish direct correspondences between specific emotional states and musical devices. The aim was to move the listener, just as an orator seeks to persuade his audience.

A number of treatises contributed significantly to shaping European thinking on musical expression of the passions. Among the earliest and most influential was Joachim Burmeister (1564–1629), who systematized music-rhetorical figures in his *Musica poetica* (1606), applying classical rhetorical categories to music and identifying analogous musical figures. Additional important discussions can be found in Chapter 73 of Zarlino's *Le istitutioni harmoniche* (1558) and Book X of Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), where analogies between music and the passions (*affectiones mentis*) are explored, along with the specific musical means required to express them.
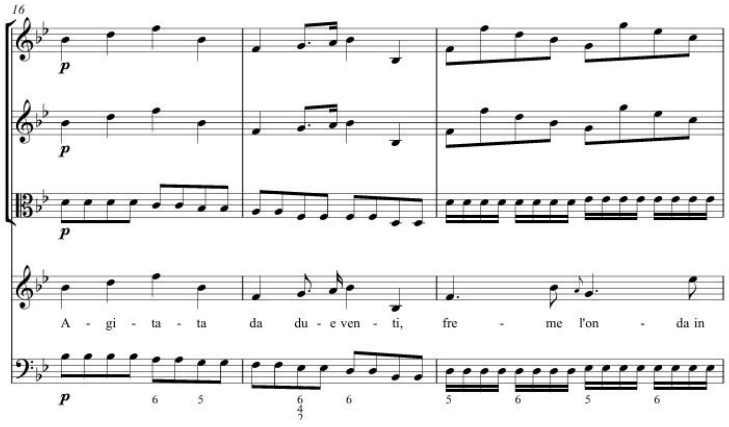
As a synthesis of this theoretical tradition, Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739) offers a detailed account of how music may represent a range of human emotions. As the last major exponent of *Affektenlehre*, Mattheson devotes considerable attention to the musical devices associated with agitation and inner conflict. Among these rhetorical strategies are:

- Agitated melodic lines with wide leaps and dissonant intervals, in place of smooth and pleasant melodies;
- Frequent dissonances, sudden resolutions, rapid modulations to remote keys, and unusual harmonic combinations that create tension and instability;
- Fast and irregular rhythms, syncopations, and complex figuration—often using sixteenth- or thirty-second-note values—to convey urgency and disorder;
- Stark dynamic contrasts, including sudden shifts from piano to forte, or vice versa, and rapid crescendos and decrescendos to simulate emotional volatility;
- The use of timbrally penetrating instruments or those evoking thunder or wind to enhance the overall sense of turmoil and drama.

Clearly, these theoretical contributions converge in a coherent intellectual project that promotes a codified rhetoric for expressing a wide range of dramatic affects. Within this system, the storm emerges as one of the most powerful tropes for drawing analogies between the agitated human soul and the violent forces of nature. The overarching rhetorical device is that of hypotyposis – a vivid and detailed description meant to create a powerful mental image in the listener's mind.

From Vocal Sorrow to Instrumental Storm

An exemplary synthesis of this extended practical and theoretical trajectory is found in the celebrated aria from Vivaldi's *La Griselda* (1735). In this piece – *Agitata da due venti,* sung by Costanza in Act II, Scene 2 – the character's inner turmoil is staged through virtuosic instrumental writing and dramatic vocal passages, echoing the structure of classical tragedy, in which conflicting duties and desires collide.
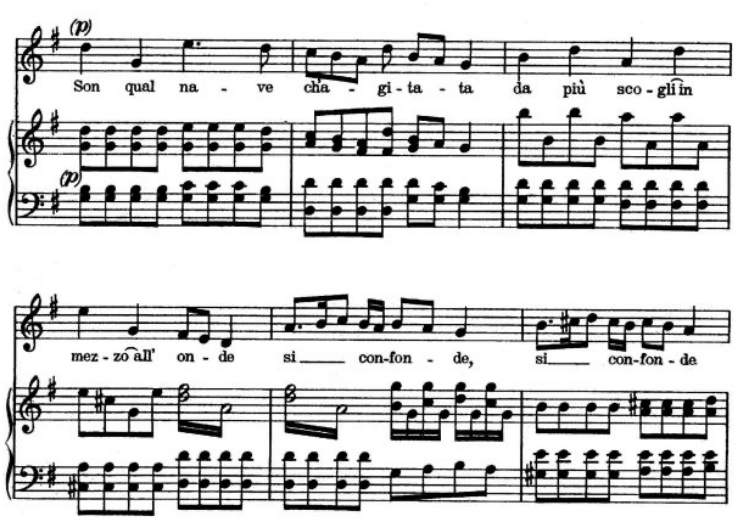


Musical Example 4. Antonio Vivaldi, Aria *Agitata da due venti* – from *La Griselda*. Dramma per musica, 1735.

The metaphorical language is strikingly clear (FINOCCHIARO & GIANI, 2017): the ship represents the protagonist's soul, the opposing winds signify the tensions between love and duty, reason and passion, while the harbor symbolizes the sought-after resolution. From the very first bars, the orchestra constructs a vivid sonic depiction of emotional upheaval. Rapid figurations, broken arpeggios, swift scales, and a driving rhythmic pulse evoke the image of a turbulent sea. Harmonic tension is maintained through seventh chords and chromatic progressions, while phrases are short, often ending in abrupt cadences that intensify the sense of instability. Sudden shifts between forte and piano reinforce the impression of unpredictability and emotional disorientation.

The figurations and string writing in this aria are notably similar to those in another Vivaldi composition: the Concerto in E-flat major, La tempesta di mare, composed in 1727. The transition from the introspective sorrow of the madrigal tradition to the vivid instrumental depiction of a natural storm is thus complete. This convergence between psychological turmoil and the agitation of the sea reflects a typically baroque metaphor, one also found in the aria Son qual nave, composed in 1734 by Riccardo Broschi – brother of the famous castrato Farinelli – and representative of the widespread use of this topos in eighteenth-century opera:

Son qual nave ch'agitata
Da più scogli in mezzo all'onde
Si confonde e spaventata
Va solcando in alto mar.
Ma in veder l'amato lido
Lascia l'onde e il vento infido
E va in porto a riposar.



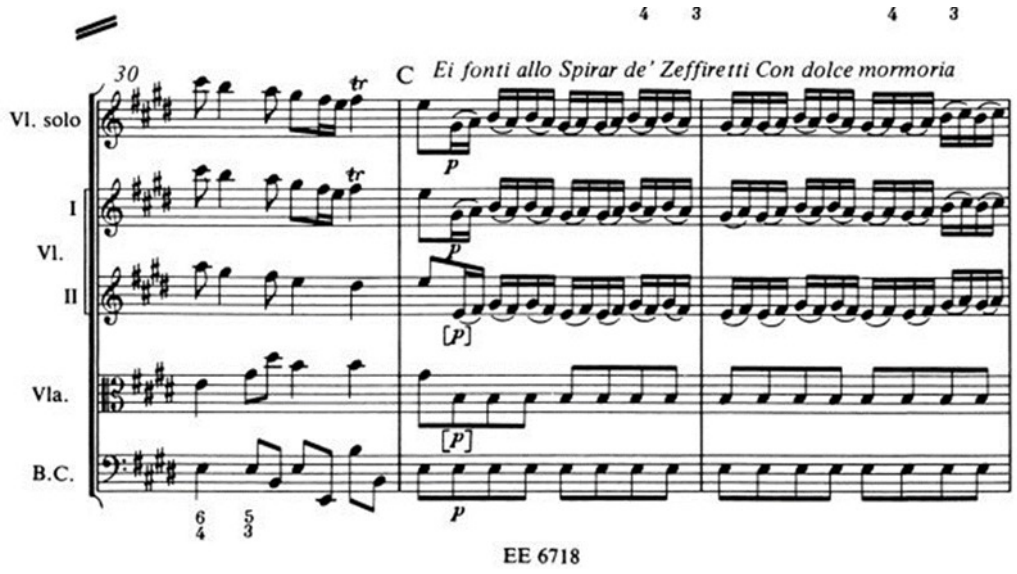
Musical Example 5. Riccardo Broschi, Aria *Son qual nave* – from *Artaserse*, 1734.

Storms in Music: An Enduring Topos

As we have seen, a profound connection emerged between rhetorical theory and musical language in relation to the theme of psychological agitation. Whether in madrigalistic practice or theoretical treatises, this theme was often dramatized through metaphors of the storm (BARILLÀ, 2023). When Vivaldi composed *Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione, Op. 8* (1725), complete with precise performance instructions in the score of The Four Seasons, he was already aware of the mimetic function of music as a vehicle for dramatic narrative. This collection represents one of the earliest fully integrated examples of program music.
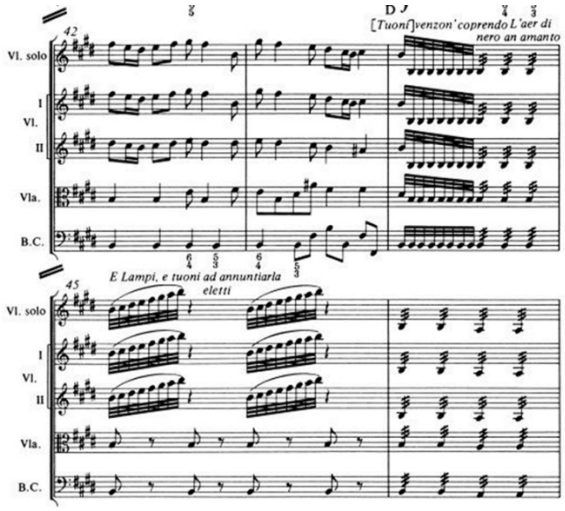
Historiographically, the origins of program music are often traced – somewhat problematically – to Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830) (RUSHTON, 2023). However, Vivaldi's precedent is clear: he not only composed music corresponding to a literary text but inserted the lines of the sonnet directly into the score to guide interpretation and performance.

Of particular interest here is the storm scene described in *La primavera*. The passage evokes rising winds and increasingly heavy rainfall, captured musically for the first time in striking detail. This initiates a rich tradition that would persist for nearly two centuries.



Musical Example 6. Antonio Vivaldi. *La primavera*, Concerto from *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione*, 1725.
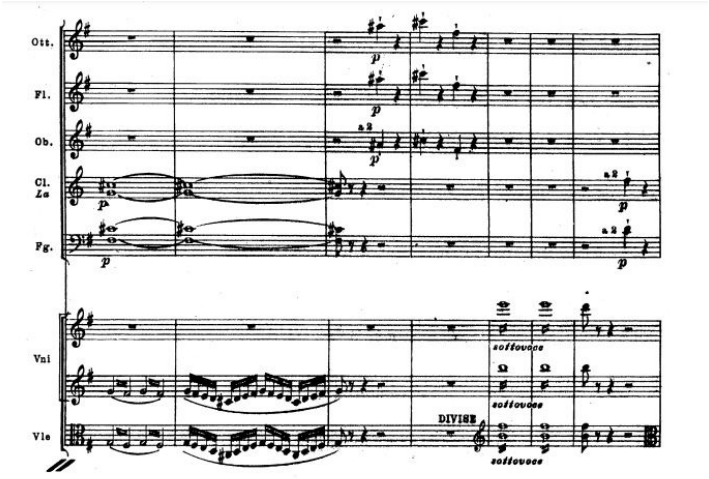
In a second excerpt, tremolos intensify the depiction of the storm, particularly at the moment the sky darkens and thunder is heard in the distance.



Musical Example 7. Antonio Vivaldi. *La primavera, Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione*, 1725.

Ascending scales and string tremolos thus contribute to defining an early instrumental cliché of the musical storm—a legacy inherited from Monteverdi's descriptive genius. Beethoven repurposes this idiom in the *Pastoral Symphony*, Op. 68 (1808), introducing a vividly onomatopoeic storm before a return to bucolic calm. Many of the expressive means employed—short note values, dynamic swells, and textural layering—are already present in Vivaldi and are further developed through Beethoven's orchestral mastery (TARGA, 2022).

Rossini's Guglielmo *Tell Overture* offers another iconic example. Here, string tremolos, rapid chromatic runs in the woodwinds, and fluttering piccolo notes imitate lightning, while a swaying effect is created by the strings. The storm breaks with the entrance of brass instruments – horns, trumpets, trombones – accompanied by bass drum and other percussion. The result is a tightly structured orchestral tableau of dramatic intensity, which stands out as a masterpiece of narrative sound and instrumental color.
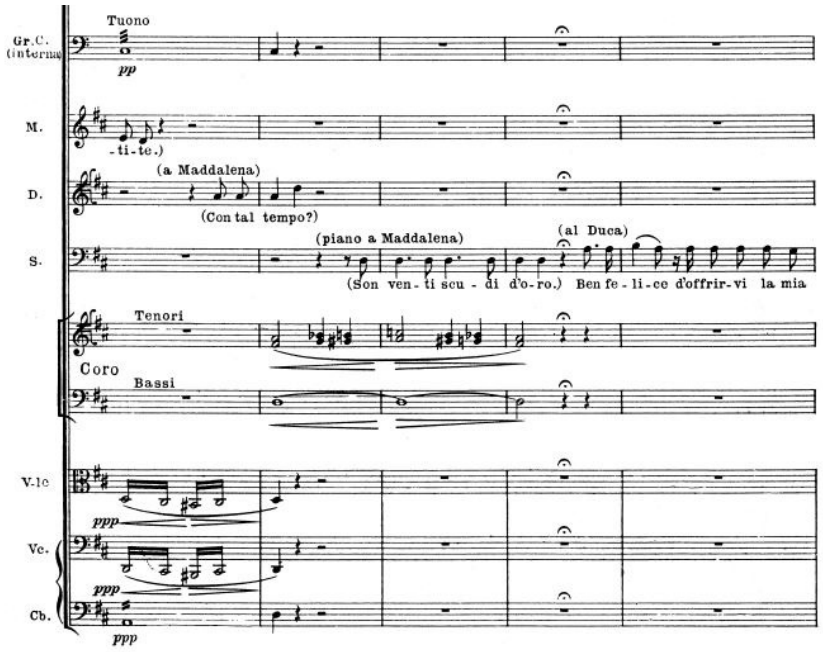


Musical Example 8. Gioacchino Rossini, *Ouverture Gugliemo Tell*, 1829.

The nineteenth century undoubtedly marks the golden age of the storm trope in music. While a more detailed discussion of the Baroque and Classical periods would be warranted – especially with regard to figures such as Haydn (YUST, 1991) – this overview focuses on key Romantic and post-Romantic examples that extend and transform the trope. Notable storm scenes appear in: Piano Sonata in D minor No. 17, known as Beethoven's *The Tempest* from 1800-02; the incipit of the piano cycle Lieder *Erlkönig*, written by Franz Schubert in 1815; the finale of *Der Freischütz*, Singspiel in three acts by Carl Maria von Weber, completed in 1821; the third movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, titled *Scène au champ* and composed in 1830; the symphonic overture in B minor for orchestra Op. 26 *Die Hebriden* "Fingal's Cave" written by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in 1832; the piano composition *Orage*, taken from *Années de Pèlerinage: Première Année, Suisse*, written by Franz Liszt in 1835 and published only in 1855; the beginning of the first act of the opera *Der fliegende Holländer*, written by Richard Wagner in 1841, along with the Prelude to the first act of *Die Walküre* from 1856, the second day of the *Ring des Nibelungen* tetralogy; the storm scene in *Les Préludes*, the third of thirteen symphonic poems composed by Franz Liszt and first performed in 1856 in its piano score form; the symphonic poem *Noč' na lysoj gore* (A Night on Bald Mountain) written by Modest Petrovič Musorgskij in 1867; Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovsky's *Symphonic Fantasia for Orchestra in F minor* from 1873; the incipit of *Dies Irae* in Giuseppe Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, also from 1873; the third tableau of the second suite of Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt* (Op. 55), titled *Prelude to Act Five* and completed in 1891; up to Gian Francesco Malipiero's *Sinfonia del Mare* from 1906 and the incidental music *Stormen*, Op. 109, composed by Sibelius for the Copenhagen Theater in 1926.

This non-exhaustive list highlights the durability of the trope throughout the long nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. Many of these works reaffirm long-established rhetorical practices while introducing new techniques. What stands out is the recurrence of consistent compositional patterns in terms of harmony, rhythm, orchestration, and figuration – patterns that evolved through advances in instrumental technique but remained rooted in a shared expressive vocabulary.

Among the most refined uses of the trope are two notable examples by Verdi (DE VAN, 1994). In *Rigoletto* (1851), the storm scene in Act III functions as a pivotal dramatic moment. Accumulated tension culminates in a storm that reflects both natural violence and the psychological turmoil of the characters. In addition to ascending and descending scales and tremolos distributed among the winds, Verdi introduces an extraordinary closed-mouth chorus of divided tenors and basses, singing in chromatic fragments. This eerie texture reinforces the tension and mirrors the inner storm of Rigoletto's mind, while also setting the stage for the fatal events to follow.



Musical Example 9. Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, A. III, *Terzetto e Tempesta*, 1851.

The brief overview of Verdian «rettorica del temporale» (rhetoric of the storm, in MILA, 2000: 410-416) – dispersed across several works (ROCCHI, 2002) – concludes with the opening scene of *Otello*, in which the audience tremblingly witnesses the return to Cyprus of the leader's ship, tossed right and left in a turbulent sea. The initial stage directions once again speak of lightning, thunder, and a hurricane erupting in the late evening hours. This is in 1887, but the expressive means remain unchanged; we have come to recognize them from Vivaldi's concise and symmetrical pages; here they are merely magnified by a score in which Verdi uses all the power and dexterity of the orchestra to create a vivid and terrifying sonic image of the waters. This grand orchestral style finds its final monumental expression in Richard Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie* (1916). Here, the storm scene is a true tour de force: the orchestra includes expanded woodwind sections, an enormous percussion battery (with thunder machine, wind machine, tam-tam, and more), and densely layered textures. Low-register instruments such as contrabassoons and bass clarinet provide depth, while high woodwinds and strings execute tremolos, glissandi, and fast runs that simulate gusts of wind and lightning. Brass accents, often doubled by piccolo, pierce through the texture in sudden, fortissimo bursts. The result is a vast and immersive soundscape – perhaps the last great romanticized storm in orchestral literature.

The virtuosic use of orchestral masses favors darker colors. The storm begins with heavy brass instruments creating a threatening atmosphere. Contrabassoons and bass clarinet are used to provide depth and weight. Fast and descending passages in the woodwind instruments (especially flutes and piccolo) and strings (tremolo and rapid glissandos) simulate the whistling and gusts of wind. The wind machine adds realism to an already majestic scene. The brass is used to create sudden and brilliant accents, often in Fortissimo and with sharp sonority, as if depicting lightning. They are often doubled by piccolo or other high-register instruments to achieve a more penetrating effect. It is, so to speak, a new gigantic affirmation of the theme, re-proposed with great style, almost as a farewell.

By the twentieth century, however, the expressive vitality of the storm trope began to fade. Though still employed, its inventive power diminished, and it came increasingly to be viewed as a conventional device – a return to an exhausted tradition.

Conclusion: Mimesis and Expression

In conclusion, this article has traced the implicit connections that, in the Baroque era—and especially within the madrigal tradition – were established between poetic text, emotional states, and the tempestuous turmoil of the soul. This nexus marked the beginning of a codified musical rhetoric (MUSUMECI, 2016), one that employed dissonance, chromaticism, and the descending scale as essential compositional devices. These techniques should be understood as mimetic resources, used in accordance with a shared cultural code, to portray psychological states reflected in the surrounding natural world.

With Monteverdi and, subsequently, Vivaldi, the tradition of storm representation in music evolved into a fully developed trope – one replicated through recognizable orchestral formulas. Among the primary devices to emerge were:

- Rapid figurations in short note values to suggest unrest;
- Tremolos in the strings, and later in the winds, to evoke turbulence;
- Ascending and descending scalar passages in instruments of the high woodwind register (strumentini);
- Thunder imitations through timpani, low percussion, or other resonant effects;
- Syncopated melodic figures to emphasize disorientation and agitation.

In this way, the trope of the storm stabilized and remained a vital expressive vehicle throughout the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth.

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The flute in chamber music ensembles and contemporary trends in this genre

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Abstract

Solo woodwind instrumentalists instruments in Albania were rare until the establishment of the State Conservatory of Tirana in 1962. Consequently, Albanian chamber music compositions for these instruments was quite limited. Over time, however, the demand for national works in this genre grew. This study aims, through the analysis of the typology and characteristics of Albanian chamber music involving the flute in various ensembles, to highlight the development of contemporary methods and techniques for expressing musical ideas. The comparison of the two selected works serves this purpose. In the Quartet for woodwind instruments (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon), the first of its kind, composed in 1985 by Aleksandër Vezuli, we observe a serious attempt toward this development. It is written in a neoclassical style, characterized by a clear program and tonal harmony, typical of the time. After 1990, with the introduction and experimentation of new compositional elements, there was an increased interest among composers in creating chamber music with new approaches, including various ensembles that incorporated the flute. The work "Alone" for Soprano, Flute, Cello, Piano, and Magnetic Tape (the reason for the selection) , composed by Nestor Kraja in 2003, presents an existential idea grounded in the structuralist experiences of contemporary music. This piece is atonal in style, with clear structuralist features, intertwined with electronic music. The methodology I have used is closely related to the nature of the work: The method of analyzing theoretical sources from various authors, scientific research methods, and a historical-comparative analysis of reference materials, all with the goal of presenting contemporary trends in Albanian chamber music composition. In conclusion, it is evident that the timbral qualities, dynamic range, and expressive character of the flute provide broad creative possibilities across different genres, with the implementation of new techniques introduced after 1990s.

Keywords

quartet, neoclassical, atonal, analysis

Introduction

The first attempts at composing chamber music for flute in Albania can be traced back to Ramadan Sokoli, who wrote a series of miniatures for two and three flutes. Among these works, a standout is the Suite for Two Flutes, composed in 1957 (Sokoli, 2024).

Up to the year 1990, the most notable example is the Quartet for Woodwind Instruments (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon), composed in 1985 by Aleksandër Vezuli. Although it is the first work of its kind in our country, it shows remarkable achievement in all aspects—compositionally, artistically, and, above all, instrumentally. The composer demonstrates a deep understanding of the woodwind instruments, using techniques that highlight their capabilities and suit the character of the piece.

After the 1990s, new compositional elements—once seen only occasionally in the work of bolder earlier composers—ushered in a period of renewal in Albanian music. This brought about a fresh approach to the expression of musical thought and ideas, advancing the development of a new musical taste. The piece Alone (Vetëm) for Soprano, Flute, Cello, Piano, and Magnetic Tape was composed by Nestor Kraja for the 2003 Festival "Days of New Albanian Music." Upon returning to Albania after his studies in Rome (Shupo, 2002), where he mastered both the technical and conceptual implementation of unity and coherence in contemporary composition, Kraja presented this work using new and modern expressive tools.

Methodology

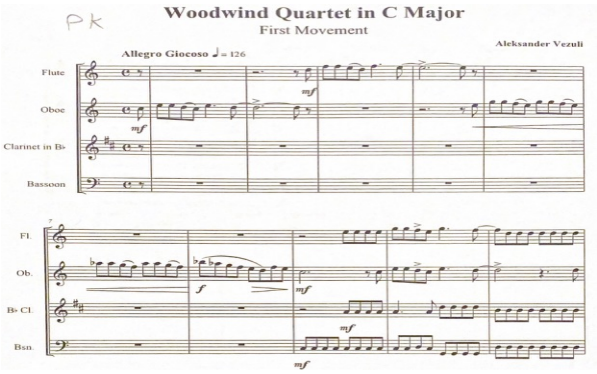
The methodology used is closely connected to the nature of the paper.
It involves a scientific research approach, in-depth study of the relevant literature, analysis of theoretical sources, and historical-comparative analysis of reference materials, among other methods.

Aleksandër Vezuli – Quartet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon

This quartet is written in a cyclic form consisting of three movements:
1. Sonata Form
2. Three-Part Form
3. Rondo Form (Caplin, E. William)

The principal part (Main Theme) is built in melodic C major, based on a two-measure thematic cell (measures 2–3), which develops in ascending sequential intonations reminiscent of children's ritual songs. This cell is repeated three times and concludes with a cadence in the tonic in the final two measures of the first phrase (measure 9) (Drabkin, William, Pasticci, Susanna, Pozzi, Egidio, 2017). The second phrase of the first period of the main theme mirrors the first but is more compact in its sonority, presenting a choral-like texture across the whole quartet. The thematic cell appears again, played in thirds by the flute and oboe. A new feature appears in the seventh measure of this second phrase, which acts as a bridge to the second period of the Main Theme, modulating to harmonic F minor.

The thematic material here is cleverly constructed: the cell is split into two elements performed by two different instruments, creating a lively and playful rhythmic texture.
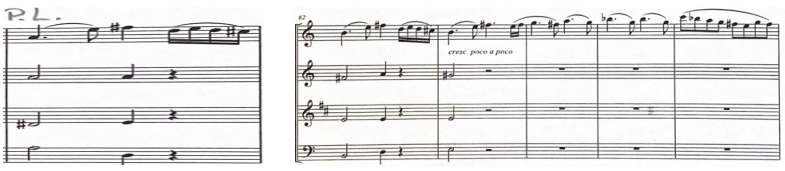


Musical Example 1.

From a harmonic perspective, the second period of the Main Theme is also thoughtfully constructed, supporting the idea of playfulness and joy. It begins in the minor subdominant of the first period of Main Theme and modulates to D major. This period is composed of 16 measures (17–32) and leads smoothly into the bridge (in B major), which prepares E major in measure 37—acting as the dominant of A major, where the secondary theme will develop (Dieter de la Motte, ASMUS 2000).
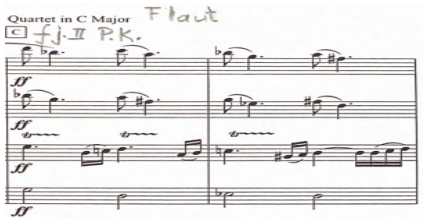
The thematic material of the Secondary Theme derives from the second period of the Main Theme. Like the Main Theme, the Secondary Theme is structured in a simple binary form with two periods containing closely related thematic material originating from the Main Theme. This ensures that the work maintains a unified sound even in the exposition.

In measure 61, the bridge section begins—it serves as a continuation of the Secondary Theme. However, in its final two measures (66–67), the thematic cell from the first phrase of the Main Theme reappears. This creates a logical connection between the Secondary Theme and the development section, which begins in measure 66. The development starts with the second period of the Main Theme in harmonic G minor, maintaining the melodic material but changing the instrumental coloring.



Musical Example 2.

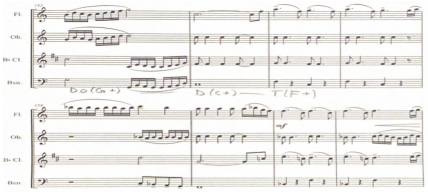
The development is structured into two main blocks: the first (measures 68–103) elaborates on the thematic material from the Main Theme, while the second (measures 104–124) explores the material of the Secondary Theme. In both blocks of the development section, the tonal plans are preserved, with themes built on melodic major (first period of the Main Theme) and harmonic minor (second period) (Rossen, 1972).



Musical Example 3.

The unison with the Principal Theme is very well placed (first phrase of the first period), expanded and then immediately gives way to the Secondary Theme. The Secondary Theme transitions into the tonal plane of the subdominant, followed by the bridge (measures 126–129) and then a preparation of the dominant G major, which leads into the recapitulation beginning in C major with the Main Theme.

In the recapitulation, the Main Theme returns unchanged both melodically and harmonically, though shortened by the omission of repetitions (Caplin, E. William, 1998). Unusually, the Secondary Theme reappears not in the home key of C major, as would be expected in classical sonata form, but in F major.

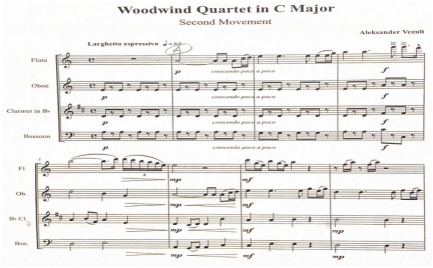


Musical Example 4.

At measure 145, a bridge section begins to prepare the dominant of F major (C major), using the following harmonic progression: VI (D major) – DD (G major) – D (C major) – T (F major) (Çefa, 1977). This progression continues through measure 154, leading to the Secondary Theme in the recapitulation, which extends to the CODA. The movement ends in the home key, with thematic material derived from the opening cell of the Main Theme.
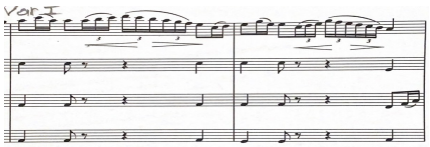
The second movement provides the calm center of the three-movement cycle and is marked Largo espressivo. It follows a composite ternary form (A–B–A1), beginning with a one-measure introduction.

Part A is based on a theme with two phrases. The first cell (measures 2–3) is repeated in the second phrase, though slightly altered to lead into the first variation. The first cell is built on the pentatonic scale: A–C–D–E–G, centered on A (Tole, 1999). This pentatonic line is later expanded into a complete minor scale, providing moments of tranquility amid the energy of the first and third movements.



Musical Example 5.
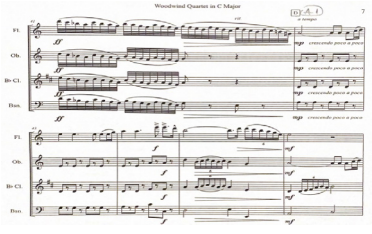
The first variation of the theme repeats only the first cell, et against supporting notes in triplets and duplets, accompanied by a chorale-like A pedal tone.



Musical Example 6.

The second variation focuses on the second phrase, with changes only in the accompanying parts. The entire A section is in A minor.

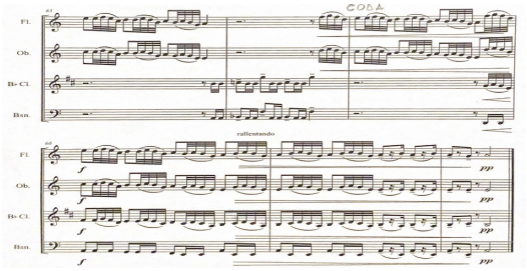
The middle section (B) begins with a unison line between clarinet and bassoon on a turbulent motif in D minor. This material is unstable and continuously seeks resolution, evolving freely through closely related keys such as F major, B-flat major, G minor, and C minor. It culminates in a flute cadenza in measure 38, which, like the entire middle section, traverses all these tonalities before arriving at the unison in measure 41, marked fortissimo.



Musical Example 7.

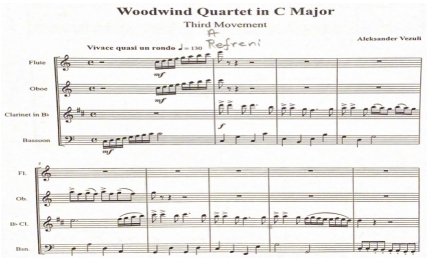
Measure 41, with a decrescendo from ff to mp, leads melodically and harmonically into the reprise. The reprise brings back only the theme and its first variation from Part A and transitions into the CODA. The thematic material of the coda appears to derive from the first variation

of the main theme in section A, while the lowered second degree, used in the bass, recalls the first movement with its melodic C major, thereby contributing to the overall unity of the work (Rossen, 1972).



Musical Example 8.

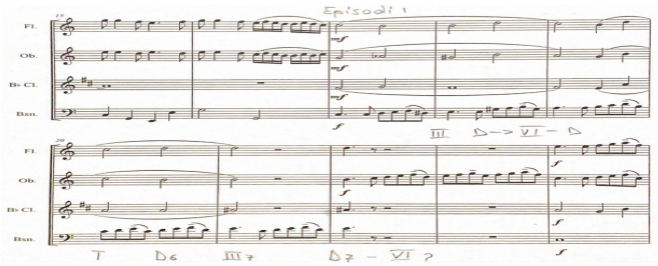
The Third Movement continues the playful character established in the first movement, following the restful interlude of the second. The chosen form—RONDO—and the lively refrain theme together create a joyful atmosphere. The first measure ascends over two octaves in C major, serving as an introduction that naturally prepares the entrance of the Refrain. This Refrain contains a thematic cell featuring a syncopated measure that descends sequentially through the chord tones of C major. The first phrase (measures 2–5) closes on the dominant, while the second phrase resolves to the tonic (C major), descending sequentially from G major (the dominant) to C major (the tonic).



Musical Example 9.

The refrain is written in binary form, with both parts being melodically and harmonically similar. The orchestration varies: the first period is played by the clarinet, and the second by the flute and oboe. The Refrain creates a highly cheerful atmosphere, achieved in part through the use of full and authentic harmonic cadences. This effect is further enhanced by the Refrain theme itself, which is original to the composer and underlines a sense of innocence, sincerity, and childlike joy (Dieter de la Motte, ASMUS 2000).
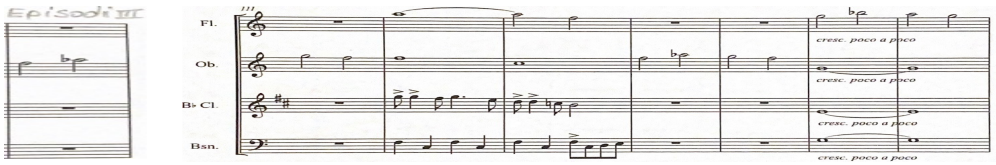
The first episode begins with a thematic cell in measure 17, which is unstable and moves through ascending sequences, creating a feeling of uncertainty. In its first seven measures, the cell modulates through several tonal areas close to C major. Everything becomes clear in measure 24 when the cell reappears strongly in C major, played in thirds by the flute and oboe, and reinforced through repetition.



Musical Example 10.
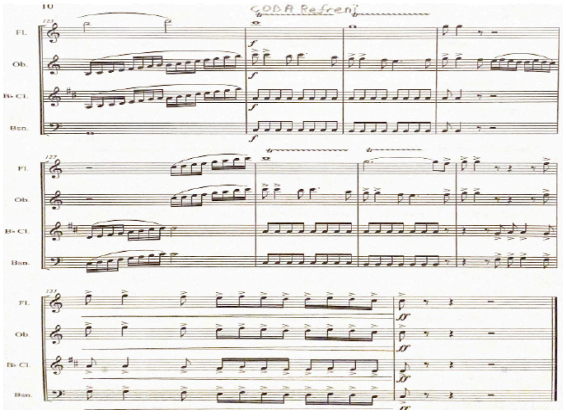
The Transition Section in measures 30–33, accompanied by chorale-style harmony following the harmonic scheme S–T–S–T–II–D–II–D–T, prepares the Refrain for its second appearance. This time, the Refrain is presented by the oboe and accompanied in chorale texture by the flute, clarinet, and bassoon. In this instance, only the first period of the Refrain is heard, at the end of which the secondary dominant of F minor is prepared—this being the key in which the Second Episode (measures 46–84) unfolds.

This Second Episode is in the form of a short fugue in F minor. The fugue culminates in a closing unison passage (measures 73–76), followed by another short bridge (measures 77–86), which prepares the third appearance of the Refrain. This return is identical to its initial presentation. At the conclusion of the third Refrain, an extended bridge begins, combining elements from the initial thematic cell and the fugue. The third episode is a musical dialogue between the fugue theme and the Refrain cell, lasting 10 measures (110–119).



Musical Example 11.

After this episode, a bridge leads into the final appearance of the refrain in the coda. This time, only the first phrase of the first period is played, ending in a cadence on the tonic (C major).



Musical Example 12.

Nestor Kraja – Alone (Vetëm) for Soprano, Flute, Cello, Piano, and Magnetic Tape

The text by the Romanian Symbolist poet George Bacovia served as a direct source of inspiration for the composer in the creation of this work. In the piece *Alone*, written for soprano, flute, cello, piano, and magnetic tape, the fusion of rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic elements forms, for the composer, the colored stone in the mosaic he seeks to create. All of these elements are employed in function of and serve to highlight the different and contrasting facets of the emotional landscape reflected in the literary text and its underlying idea.

The poem is translated into Albanian by S. Shupo:

Alone
Somewhere in an inn,
Even the innkeeper sleeps.
The streets lie deserted
Alone, alone, alone.

Rain, rain, rain...
Time says: "Drink."
Listen to the emptiness
What melancholy.
Rain, rain, rain.

No one, no one, no one...
Is that for the best, you say?
For so long now,
No one knows of me
No one, no one, no one.
.
I shiver, I shiver, I shiver...
Let those ironies
Remain with you
The night is bitter
I shiver, I shiver, I shiver.
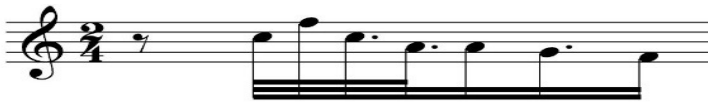
Forever, forever, forever…
Such wanderings as now
I will never find again
Over frost dreams
Forever, forever, forever.

Alone, alone, alone…
Time says drink…
Look how the rain goes on
What melancholy!
Alone, alone, alone.

These verses, of course, should not and cannot be interpreted as a realistic scene, rather must be viewed through a symbolist lens, an essential trait of the Romanian modernist poet.
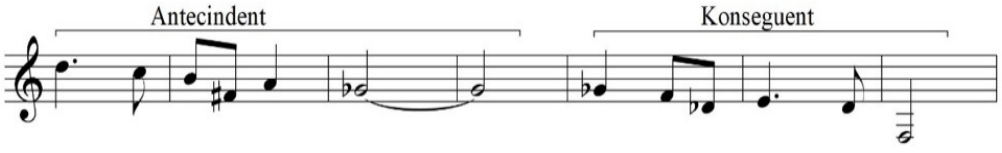
An analysis of Kraja's works post-1990 shows a clear artistic aim: to articulate deeply human and existential ideas. The choice of genre as a vocal-instrumental work serves to focus the idea that the listener can perceive and to create a distinct impression perceive. In the background lies the unique color of the magnetic tape, prepared using a synthesizer. The selection of timbres includes the voice, flute, cello, piano, and synthetic sounds.

The work is atonal, drawing on the familiar experience of musical structuralism, while also bearing the expressive and symbolic character of Kraja's personal style. At the center of the introduction comes a melodic figure played by the synthesizer, with irregular rhythmic structure and a descending melodic direction, which appears as a passage in rallentando:



Musical Example 13.

This figure appears in varied form in measures 2, 4, 6, 17, 27, 32, 51, 57, 67, 69, 83, 88, 118, and 136. Therefore, it is present throughout the work as an important expressive element. This element also appears in the lines of other instruments, such as the Piano (measures 16–18), maintaining the direction of movement and the rallentando rhythm; the Flute (measures 38–41), maintaining these same characteristics; and the vocal line (measures 19–21), where it forms the core of the vocal melo-thematic cell. This cell, built upon the opening verse, consists of two descending seconds, a fourth, a minor third, and a minor second, with a generally descending direction (with the exception of the minor third). The antecedent phrase also follows this descending direction, but ends on the lower interval of a major sixth.



Musical Example 14.

The transformations of this cell in the following verses are evident and sometimes change the direction of the final note, at times altering the direction of the final note, repositioning larger intervals at the beginning or end of the phrase, expanding or contracting the intervallic structure, or employing imitative techniques, among others. In general, the meaning of the words and their characteristics guide these transformations. In alignment with the emotional atmosphere of the text, the composer makes extensive use of parlato16 (measures 12–18, 48–51, 62–67, 96–100, 110–114), which also serves as an expressive integrated into the overall
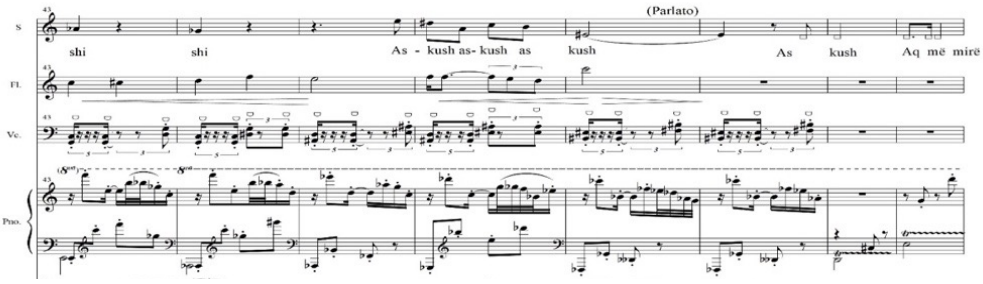
piece. The variety of parlando, in relation to the comprehensibility of the text, is changeable: at times whispered, at times voiced, at times declamatory, shouting, or trembling, responding to the structural variations or the meaning of the text, while remaining within of the overall unity.

The piece opens with a whispered parlando on the text: "Somewhere in an inn" and then continues with the phrase "No one, no one, no one" delivered with a heightened intonation and continues further with the phrase "I shiver, I shiver, I shiver" expressed with a trembling voice. hese text sentences are precisely the opening lines of the poem's stanzas, culminating in the words: "Time pushes you, drink. Look, the rain is falling. What melancholy," which forms the core of the idea of the piece.

Also, the technique of sound production techniques used by the instruments display its variability for example, the flute (measures 62–70 Con la Bochina), Cello (measures 28-31 pizz Bartok), or (measures 61–70 Con sord), or glissando and tremolo chords (measures 84–90); or Piano (measures (62) pizzicato within the strings, as well as (measures 84–90) glissando within the piano strings; and the use of several contemporary playing techniques in instruments or vocals.
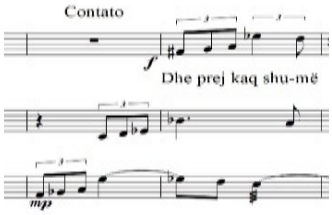
In terms of structure, the piece is organized into three segments:
1. Presentation (measures 1–80), (which ends with the climax in dynamics, rhythm, and fusion over the text Life - irony)
2. Development (measures 80–104)
3. Dynamic reprise, in which the techniques of sound thinning are applied, a phenomenon that affects all the participating sounds of the ensemble and aligns with the central idea of the work.

The compositional techniques are varied, and the composer has carefully considered, at every step, the use of elements capable of reflecting the emotions conveyed by the literary text. Among these is the creation of a musical texture involving the full ensemble on the text "Rain, rain," built upon the staccato figures of the piano and cello over an irregular rhythmic pattern (cello quintuplets and triplets). This pattern is identically repeated across 7 measures, spanning the extreme registers of the piano and cello, while the flute, in the central register, moves in an ascending chromatic motion that culminates in a outcry melodic phrase.



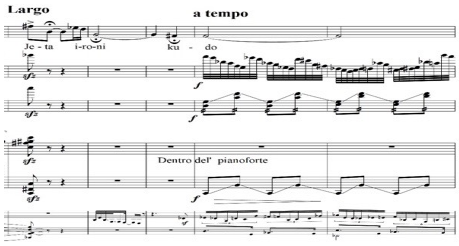
Musical Example 15.

The technique of imitation has often been as a unifying element within the work, creating close relationships between the instruments. This can be observed on page 7, in the interplay between the cello, flute, and vocal:
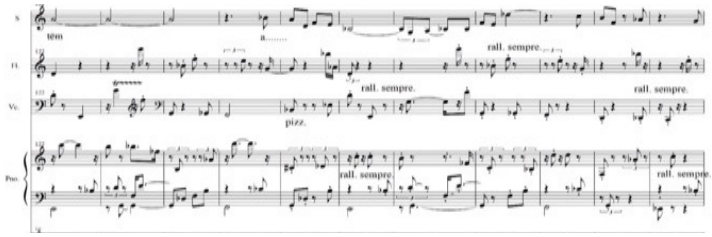


Musical Example 16.

Another technique appears, where a sonic web is created. The text reaches the climax of the work over the words: "Life is irony everywhere," and after the chorus, all instruments enter simultaneously, creating a heterophony18 of sound. The flute plays thirty-second notes, the cello performs tremolo with glissando, the piano executes glissandi inside the strings, and the synthesizer introduces sextuplets.



Musical Example 17.

The technique of rarefaction has been used in the reprise of the work, where the melo rhythmic lines from the exposition are thinned out by removing specific tones, and creating a more solitary sound covering than in the expository segment. This entire section is accompanied that gradually slows, in *rallentando*.



Musical Example 18.

Conclusion

The Quartet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, composed by Aleksander Vezuli, is a work in the Neo-Classical style, especially evident in the first and third movements. Moreover, the Quartet seems to be a programmatic piece, due to the clear manner in which it conveys its artistic message. The chosen theme is based on children's ritual songs, developed in a sequential manner. The harmonic structure features both authentic cadential progressions (T-D-T) and full cadences (T-S-D-T). The use of melodic major, along with staccato passages in the woodwind instruments, makes the first movement resemble a playground for children. The same thing happens with the third movement, which supports this content with the form of a Rondo. Meanwhile, the second movement introduces a lyrical-meditative theme, developed through variation technique in its first part. Despite the more introspective character, it retains childlike elements, supported by the effective and inventive combinations of the flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon.

The work "*Alone*", composed by Nestor Kraja for soprano, flute, cello, piano, and magnetic tape, is written in an atonal style, closely connected to human and existential themes, built upon a form of structuralism expressed through the creation of cells, always mobile and interwoven with electronic music. The dramaturgy of the piece is shaped precisely through the contrasts of selected musical elements, their interweaving, emotional rises and falls, and deliberate clashes, all serving to create vivid sonic representations of real-life experiences and inner emotional states.

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Early development of piano music in Kosovo

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Abstract

Given that Kosovan piano music is a relatively recent development, it is understandable that written materials on the subject are scarce. Precisely this fact serves as an incentive for a comprehensive analysis that includes the main composers, their works, performers, concerts and festivals, piano music education, and even the political and cultural factors and influences that have conditioned these developments. The purpose of this paper was to identify and trace the development of piano music in Kosovo, to examine the factors that have influenced its growth, the challenges encountered throughout its evolution, as well as to explore the elements that contribute to the qualitative advancement of piano compositions and their artistic interpretations. The methodology of this study involved conducting interviews with musicians, contacting music institutions, and collecting and analyzing recordings, posters, and concert programs, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of the development of piano music in Kosovo. Who were the pioneering pianists in Kosovo? How did piano music develop in Kosovo? What factors have influenced the development of piano music? How has it evolved, and can we speak of comparative developmental elements with the countries of the region or even beyond? These are some of the questions that this paper has addressed while presenting a more detailed overview of the development of Kosovan piano music, highlighting both composers and performers of piano works.

Keywords

Kosovan piano music, pioneering Kosovan pianists, piano, artistic performance, music institutions.

Introduction

Music has always been one of the most powerful forms of artistic expression, and within it, the piano as a musical instrument represents an essential medium of study that is indispensable in shaping the musical identity of musicians, including composers and conductors in particular. For a pianist, it is not merely a musical instrument but an expressive medium that enables them to communicate feelings, thoughts, and their inner world through sounds. For many musical artists, the piano becomes a constant companion in their artistic journey. In the context of creating a suitable environment for musical and artistic development, and especially for establishing a solid infrastructure to advance piano performance in Kosovo, many factors should be mentioned that have influenced Kosovan musical culture in general, as well as piano education in particular. These are prerequisites for fostering a broader pianistic culture, despite the social challenges and political circumstances that the Kosovan artistic community has often faced.

Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the development of piano music in Kosovo, analyze the factors that have influenced its trajectory, and explore the challenges encountered throughout its evolution. Additionally, the study aims to highlight elements that contribute to the qualitative enhancement of piano music, both in terms of composition and performance. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the enrichment of archival resources through the documentation of the artistic contributions of composers, performers, and educators. Furthermore, it seeks to foster broader discourse on the necessity of sustained support and advancement of piano music within the wider cultural and public sphere.

Literature Review

Music education in Kosovo: History and development

Given that the Albanian people have the fortune of a geographical presence spanning several Balkan countries (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Greece), it should be emphasized that this spread has contributed to a broader recognition of their national identity and the overall cultural richness of Albanians. Viewed through historical circumstances and other social developments, education and the educational system have not been without challenges, but as a nation, Albanians have consistently demonstrated their values.

Historical developments, events, and specific economic, social, and political circumstances—especially those faced by Kosovo in different time periods—have led to a developmental path distinct from that of Albania, the homeland, and distinct compared to other European peoples as well. In comparison, Albania was undoubtedly in a more favorable position regarding the advancement of educational capacities and the establishment of an earlier educational system due to its status as an independent state. In contrast, after World War II, Kosovo was annexed and functioned as a province within the other federations of the former Yugoslavia. Lacking opportunities for cooperation or any other connections with the homeland, Albania, Kosovo remained limited in terms of its development and national education, although the University of

Pristina was founded on November 18, 1969, when the Assembly of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo passed the Law on the Establishment of the University of Pristina. The founding assembly was held on February 13, 1970, and on February 15, 1970, a formal meeting was held, which was declared as the University of Pristina Day.

The establishment of educational institutions for music art, a prerequisite for artistic profiling
The University of Prishtina, which operated within the framework of the former Yugoslavia (1970/71–1989/90), despite the challenges and events of that time, played a decisive role in the education and emancipation of Kosovo. This university produced the first generation of professionals, not only in education but also in various other fields, who became promoters of comprehensive development. In this context, they also contributed to the development of general culture, which includes art, literature, music, and philosophy—foundations of a developed society.

Therefore, alongside general education, special importance was given to music education, which became a key pillar in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Regarding the development of artistic music in Kosovo, data sources are scarce and do not indicate much about an earlier development of artistic music prior to World War II. As a federal unit of the former Yugoslavia, artistic music in Kosovo began to be cultivated within the broader federal structures without any distinct specificity. The establishment of the first two wind orchestras in 1940—"Bashkimi," based in Skopje (today North Macedonia), and the "Gjakova Wind Orchestra," led by Palok Kurti—are considered the starting point of the early development of artistic music in the Albanian-speaking territories outside of Albania.

The operation of the choir and chamber orchestra within the "Agimi" ensemble, founded in 1944, and the opening of the first radio station in 1945 in Prizren were positive factors in the development of classical music, as it was closely tied to the first musical institutions.
Moreover, significant milestones for the benefit of classical music were the openings of the first music schools in two important cities, Prizren and Prishtina. These schools were opened in both centers in the same year—1948.

With the arrival of the first professionally trained music personnel, this genre of music began to gain momentum toward its development. A significant turning point occurred with the establishment of other key institutions, such as the Choir and Orchestra of Radio Television of Prishtina (RTP), marking a new and fruitful phase of musical progress. This period spans from the 1950s to the 1990s. Following this era, development stagnated due to the political circumstances that Kosovo faced. However, a strong revival occurred in the post-war years of 1999/2000, marked by renewed energy, the establishment of new institutions, and the emergence of numerous professional artists. These individuals are now demonstrating their talent on international stages, elevating the quality and growth of classical music in Kosovo to a level comparable with other European and global cultural centers.

In the context of the development and cultivation of musical art and the rise of professional standards, the establishment of the first two music schools must be emphasized. The "Lorenc Antoni" Music School in Prizren, founded in 1947, was one of the first music schools in Kosovo. In 1948, the secondary school of music was opened, followed closely by the establishment of

the “Prenk Jakova” Music School in Prishtina in 1949. In 1975, the Faculty of Arts was founded at the University of Prishtina, providing higher education opportunities in the field of music. Following a similar path, the Faculty of Arts at the “Haxhi Zeka”, University in Peja has also made notable progress.
In this same context, piano music in Kosovo must be seen as a unique form of emotional and expressive artistry, through which the artist conveys deep personal sentiment. These institutions have served as the foundation for generations of artists across various disciplines, who have significantly contributed to the professionalization of music in Kosovo.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the historical development and current landscape of piano music in Kosovo. The research is based on the collection and analysis of documentary and archival sources, interviews with musician and music institutions representatives, all of which offer valuable insights into the evolution of piano music across different historical periods. Materials such as concert programs, posters, photographs, institutional records, and audio-visual recordings were collected and examined to trace key developments, identify influential figures, and document the growth of musical institutions and performance culture in Kosovo.

Archival research was conducted through public and private collections, university archives, and festival documentation, helping to reconstruct the evolution of piano music practices and highlight significant landmarks and educational achievements. The study also incorporated a critical review of relevant literature, including books, academic publications, historical monographs, and media reports. These sources offered a theoretical and contextual foundation, especially in relation to the role of music institutions such as the University of Prishtina, the music schools in Prizren and Prishtina and “Haxhi Zeka” University, as well as prominent festivals like “Chopin Piano Fest” and “Pianisti i Ri”. A purposive sampling method was used to identify and include influential figures and representative works in Kosovan piano music, spanning early composers to contemporary voices.

The data were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring patterns related to compositional style, performance practices, pedagogical legacies, institutional support, and cultural identity. The triangulation of archival documents and literature enabled the construction of a nuanced and layered narrative. Through this methodology, the research highlights not only the artistic contributions of Kosovan composers and pianists but also the broader cultural, educational, and political contexts that have shaped the development of piano music in Kosovo.

Results and discussions

The piano music culture in Kosovo

Composers and piano works

Piano music in Kosovo has evolved into a meaningful cultural expression that reflects both national identity and artistic refinement. As (Pira, 2024) states:
In aesthetic discourse, the profession of the musician is considered inherently ennobling—a path that positively affects the psyche and behavior of the professional. And so it should be, provided there is a certain level of respect and ethical consideration for this art, which is, by its very nature, ennobling.

The first generation of Kosovan composers, who expanded their knowledge of musical art and composition through studies in major centers of the former Yugoslavia (such as Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia) and further specialized in various European centers (Austria, Germany, France, etc.), found inspiration for the creation of instrumental works, and certainly also for piano compositions. Undoubtedly, almost each of them has composed works dedicated to this widely used and highly popular instrument. According to (Hysi, 2010) on the work of Akil Koci, as cited in the newspaper Bota Sot:
To speak and to research the works of individuals who have made history in the field of musical art—and in the arts more broadly—is to acknowledge that they embody the alpha and omega of one of the artistic, scientific, and cultural domains. Their works, whether musical or ethno-musicological, have left a profound mark on the entire body of Albanian musical creativity.

Rexho Mulliqi is a composer who, in his Symphony No. 2, titled "Kosovare", masterfully uses the piano, creating a dialogue system between the orchestra and the piano throughout the entire piece. Although the work is a symphony and belongs to the orchestral form, the piano part is written with such mastery that it almost takes on the role of a solo instrument throughout the piece.

Mark Kaçinari "Suitë Ilire" was composed in orchestral form, it is also found written as a piano work. Additionally, there are several piano miniatures such as Elegji, Duart e Vogla, etc.

Vinçenc Gjini "Music is my life, and it makes me happy and content. I create out of love for my people and act without expecting a reward" — this is a reflection of our Albanian music (as cited in Koci, 2009). Valle Kosovare, Variations, and Sonatina for Piano are some of the most prominent works in his piano composition repertoire. Valle Kosovare, Variations, and Sonatina for Piano are some of the most prominent works in his piano composition repertoire.

Rauf Dhomi (1945) The first man of operatic music in Kosovo (21) – "It is not history that makes the man, but the man who creates himself in the course of history" (this is how Akil Koci described him in his article, 2010). In addition to the significance of his major stage works, such as the operas Goca e Kaçanikut and Dasma Arbëreshe, the ballet E Bukura More, and numerous orchestral, choral, and instrumental compositions, Dhomi's creative output also includes a substantial body of piano music. The composer dedicated a voluminous collection of

70 piano works, along with several piano duos.
Each of these composers brings their individualism and distinctive characteristics to their works, but a common thread among them is their composition of pieces in the spirit of neo-romanticism, while preserving and nurturing music with a national sound. This is achieved both through the incorporation of folk music motifs and through the retention of the originality of Albanian music.

Esat Rizvanolli is known for his piano works: Sonatina, Suita Dasmore, and Rondo Rustico.
Another group of composers who also composed works for piano, but with a style different from those mentioned above, and who should be mentioned, are:
Fahri Beqiri (1936 – 2021) with two piano compositions: "Alla Turka" and "Scherzo"
Gjon Gjevelekaj (1951), his piano repertoire includes several works, such as Elegji Për Piano, Scherzo Albanaise, and Rondeau Majesteux.

Undoubtedly, the composer ***Zeqirja Ballata*** (1943) remains known for his entirely unique compositional style. Although limited in number, his piano works are distinguished by their unique sound and the modernist spirit that characterizes his compositional approach. Notable among them are Sonatë, Solo Da Concert, Variationes Sensitives, and Valle.
In addition, Trimor Dhomi, Mendi Mengjiqi, Kreshnik Aliçkaj, Drinor Zymberaj, Dafina Nushi Zeqiri, and Liburn Jupolli are among the composers who have contributed piano works that reflect a contemporary stylistic and temporal shift in composition.In conclusion, the body of piano repertoire in Kosovo—and in the broader Albanian cultural context—has been significantly enriched by their contributions. These composers benefited from a strong foundation, having been guided by a generation of distinguished pedagogues who, in addition to their creative endeavors, left a lasting educational legacy. This legacy provided emerging generations with a clear artistic direction. Today, many of their works are performed on prominent stages across the world.

Piano music and the level of perfroming standards

As composer Rafet Rudi observes, music plays a unique and essential role in shaping human experience:
Music reveals the deep essence of issues, creating a new humanity (a musical being) through sounds. Its permanent role is to humanize people, but in a new, specific way, because music forms a new being, a new world. This should be a starting point toward the world of sounds (Rudi, n.d., para. 1).

In this context, the contribution of piano performers is vital, as the composed works and piano repertoire of our composers would remain in the shadows if not for the interpretation of pianists. These artists have established new standards in both the musical realization and interpretation of piano works from across the Albanian-speaking regions, including those by Kosovan composers. This artistic movement continues to grow stronger, thanks to a significant number of pianists who have represented themselves with dignity and excellence—not only as outstanding artists, but also as ambassadors of Albanian piano music, their nation, and its cultural values on both national and international stages.
Undeniably, professional training plays a crucial role in shaping an instrumentalist. In the

development of this new generation of pianists, special recognition must be given to the first two female pianists to graduate in Kosovo, whose pioneering work has left a lasting legacy in piano pedagogy.

Valbona Pula Petrovci is recognized as the first pianist to graduate in Kosovo, earning her degree in 1980. She initially studied under Russian pianist Evgenij Koroljov and later with Russian professor Iveta Sekulaeva-Dimçeska, who was based in Macedonia at the time. Since 1991, she has been engaged as a professor of piano (primary instrument/course) at the University of Prishtina. Alongside her academic work, she has held various important roles, including Chair of the Kosovo Association of Musical Artists (1999–2002), Head of the Piano Section, and coordinator of the Master's degree program. Her concert activity began early and spans the period when Kosovo was still a federal unit of the former Yugoslavia. As a soloist, she performed in many centers including Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Tirana, representing Kosovo in various festivals and cultural events. Nonetheless, her most significant contribution remains in the field of pedagogy, where she laid the foundational groundwork for the piano school in Kosovo.

Lejla Haxhiu Pula would follow the same path just one year later. She studied at the Faculty of Arts in Prishtina under the guidance of world-renowned Russian professors Evgenij Koroljov and Iveta Sekulaeva-Dimçeska. She completed her master's degree in 1986 in Belgrade, studying with Russian professor Igor Lasko, graduating with distinction and receiving a special commendation from a ten-member jury. She worked as a professor of piano (main subject) at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Prishtina until her retirement. Since her debut in 1981 at the international festival "Dubrovnik Summer Games," where she performed as a soloist with the RTV Prishtina Orchestra and received acclaim from contemporary music critics, she continued an active solo career both in Kosovo and abroad. She collaborated with various orchestras and conductors, held solo recitals in Germany, Austria, Croatia, and Macedonia, and founded Kosovo's first chamber ensemble, Trio Kosova. She also performed in duos (violin and piano), and after the war, established the Balkan Sextet and Trio Vivo. Following her retirement, she has remained active as the founder of the Chopin Piano FEST festival (Adapted from KOHA.net).

Before moving on to discuss other graduates, it is essential to acknowledge an earlier generation of dedicated music educators, whose unwavering commitment played a crucial role in shaping the first professional pianists. They are regarded as pioneers of piano education. For the contribution they made in training subsequent generations of pianists, they should be included in the historiographical records of the development of piano music in Kosovo. These teachers—Hadije Gjinali, Letafete Ballata, and Negjibe Bukoshi Elezi—although not formally trained at the university level for the piano, left their mark in the development of the first pianists, such as those mentioned earlier, and many others who followed the path they paved.

Teuta Pllana is the third pianist to graduate and also studied for two years at a Russian conservatory. Although she is no longer active as a pianist due to her migration in pursuit of better opportunities, she had an intense piano career in earlier years. Her performance with the RTP Symphony Orchestra, where they performed Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2, is still remembered, along with many other concert activities as a soloist and in collaboration with the

renowned Kosovar violinist Sihana Badivuku.

Ardita Statovci is a pianist who, from an early age, forged her pianistic identity and integrity in Europe, as well as in other continents such as America and Asia. Her contribution to Albanian piano music is indisputable, as her repertoire consistently features works by Albanian composers. Lule Elezi, in her concert performances, in addition to works by foreign composers, she is also credited for interpreting Kosovan works, especially the piano piece "Dardanian Impressions" by composer Rauf Dhomi.

Nowadays, there are pianists whose artistic activity is primarily focused on the works of Albanian composers. At this point, pianists such as Alba Muqolli Dehiri, Pranvera Hoxha Bryma, Lirika Pula -Kasapolli, Mimoza Pajaziti Drançolli , and the pianist/musicologist Syzana Jakupi should be mentioned. Since the latter also contributes to the field of musicology, it is essential to also mention pianist/musicologist Indira Çipa who continues to make contributions in musicology alongside her work in piano pedagogy.

There are also those whose activity is centered within the framework of piano pedagogy, such as Alberta Troni, Misbah Kaçamaku, Ilirjana Kuriu Mustafa, Jeta Dida- Bujari , Nezahate Shala, Zana Basha, Florita Raifi, —pianists who also continue to contribute to piano education and the development of young talents. Names such as Besa Luzha, Vlora Baruti and Agron Shujaku are closely associated with the field of artistic management, and through their work, they have contributed to the establishment of two festivals "Chopin Pianofest" and "The Young Pianist" whose quality and impact are recognized even at the European level.

Pianists of Kosovo - A rising golden generation

Owing to an already well-established foundation of the piano school in Kosovo—with a history that, while not very long, has been filled with challenges and hardships—a new generation of pianists has emerged. This group has contributed to raising new piano capacities, inspiring composers to create new piano works, improving the quality of piano performance in Kosovo, and fostering the prosperity of young pianists who today are taking confident steps and are internationally comparable. Names who are leaving their marks through piano music and moving toward a promising future include Anila Aliu, Lisa Sahatçiu, Fatjona Maliqi and Lir Hajrizi. In addition to their dignified representations, these pianists are contributing to the establishment of new standards in piano music at the nationwide level.

Conclusion

Piano music in Kosovo has developed a distinctive identity, shaped by the interconnection between Albanian cultural heritage and the influences of new compositional trends. Kosovan composers, through their creative works, have enriched the piano repertoire by experimenting with styles and musical elements that reflect both tradition and innovation. At the same time, Kosovan pianists, through their interpretation of local and international works, are serving as ambassadors of Albanian national music. By analyzing the performances and works of Kosovan composers and performers, the role they play in cultivating and advancing piano music can be better understood.

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Promoting the work of female composers worldwide through music festivals and recitals: A valuable experience for the Albanian music

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Abstract

Musical festivals and the solo recitals within them have served as key platforms for promoting the works of female composers, alongside initiatives such as activities by artistic associations and periodical publications. Historically, these works have faced challenges in terms of recognition, promotion, and interpretation. The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of international festivals and solo recitals that promote female composers works, examining editions of well-known festivals such as the Hartford Festival, LunArt Festival, Music by Women Festival, and Swiss Female Composers Festival, evaluating them as valuable experiences for the Albanian music scene, where the promotion of female composers works is almost non-existent. The main research question is: How do these festivals and solo recitals impact the promotion of female composers works, and what strategies can help improve their representation? The hypothesis of this study is that these festivals provide real opportunities for the promotion, interpretation, publication, and analysis of female composers works, transcending the borders of the countries in which they are held. Using a comparative and analytical methodology, supported by the analysis of concert programs, recitals, interviews, and open data, the study aims to propose recommendations for creating similar platforms in Albania and Kosovo. The results show that international festivals are no longer just promotional platforms but have transformed into musical institutions with an impact on cultural and educational policies. The conclusions emphasize that integrating the works of female composers into existing festivals and providing institutional support for the creation of new, similar platforms and dedicated spaces will contribute to increasing their representation and recognition as significant contributors to musical art.

Keywords

solo music, gender representation, musical works, feminism and musical art

Introduction

When one of the most prominent figures of european romanticism, the composer and pianist Clara Schumann, wrote: “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; A woman must not desire to compose – not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to?” (Litzmann, 1913), she was not expressing a lack of talent, but rather articulating the burden of societal norms that obstructed the path for women in composition. This statement captures the historical exclusion that women have experienced in the field of music, despite their extensive and meaningful contributions.

In reality, she was not the only one; since the 13th century, Hildegard von Bingen, one of the earliest voices of music written by female composers (Bowers & Tick, 1986) and later Ethel Smyth, Florence Price, Lili Boulanger and contemporary composers such as Sofia Gubaidulina and Kaija Saariaho, have proven that women continued to create with artistic depth and aesthetic courage, challenging gender constraints and contributing significantly to the development of music over the centuries (Citron,1993; Macarthur,2010). Despite social, racial, and institutional difficulties, these women built a legacy that is now being rediscovered and reevaluated with the seriousness they have long been denied. Women were not absent from the music history - they were absent from its official narrative and documentation (Neuls-Bates, 1996).

In response to this historical marginalization of the work of female composers, numerous cultural and academic initiatives have emerged that aim to create structured platforms for the promotion, documentation and revaluation of female composers work, by placing women at the center of musical artistic developments (Scharff, 2021). In this context, several international music festivals dedicated specifically to the work of female composers have been created, such as: Women Composers Festival of Hartford, LunArt Festival, Music by Women Festival and Swiss Female Composers Festival.

Meanwhile, in Albania and Kosovo, the lack of similar platforms points to a significant cultural and institutional gap that requires special attention, which will be addressed further in this paper through a comparative analysis.

The purpose of this study, aims to examine the historical position of female composers, addressing their lack of representation in the history of music and in concert programs, as a result of patriarchal structures, gender stereotypes and institutional obstacles (Citron, 1993; Macarthur, 2010). The paper also aims to analyze international models of promoting the work of female composers, examining the possibilities of applying these practices as a model for the Albanian music scene.

Literature Review

The work of female composers throughout music history has been extensively addressed by authors and studies that have aimed to reassess their role in the music scene. (Citron, 1993), in Gender and the Musical Canon, emphasizes that the absence of female composers from music history is not a consequence of a lack of contribution, but rather the result of social and institutional structures that have systematically excluded women from the official historiography

of music. This position is also supported by (McClary, 1991), who argues the influence of gender aspects in the process of artistic creation and interpretation.

Contemporary literature analyzes in depth the role of women in music and the institutional obstacles to them. In this context, de (Niese, 2018) emphasizes that the absence of female composers in music history is not related to a lack of talent, but is the result of a "constructed silence" by the institutional structure. Also, the importance of reviewing the selection of musical works that are promoted and the greater involvement of women in concert and educational life have been emphasized by several researchers (Hisama, 2001; Wood, 1995).

An important source for this study is the international organization Women in Music (2021), which is committed to supporting women in music and publishes regular data on their participation in music festivals, including the works of female composers.

In summary, the existing literature provides a strong theoretical and practical basis on the challenges and opportunities of female composers in the music scene. This review serves as a basis for the following analysis, which focuses on specific international festivals, their impact in promoting the work of female composers, as well as on the possibilities for applying similar models in the Albanian context.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodology, where through content analysis and a comparative approach, it aims to analyze how international music festivals that promote the work of female composers can serve as valuable models for the Albanian music scene. To achieve this, four relevant festivals have been selected as case studies: Hartford Festival, LunArt Festival, Music by Women Festival and Swiss Female Composers Festival.

Using the technique of content analysis, these festivals were analyzed through official documents, published concert programs, participant lists, performed works, and organizational structures, as well as through the review of a considerable number of secondary sources, including previous public interviews given by organizers and participating artists in these festivals. These interviews are available on open platforms such as: official festival websites, cultural media articles, online academic presentations, and have been used as core material for this study.

To broaden the analytical framework, relevant scholarly articles, critical reviews and publications addressing the impact of these festivals on the development of contemporary musical narratives and the advancement of the representation of female composers' work were also reviewed. A comparative thematic analysis was also applied to identify the different strategies employed by these festivals, including curatorial approaches, programs and institutional support policies.

The methodological approach of this study aims to identify successful practices and address key challenges, enabling the drafting of concrete recommendations for the development of similar festivals and platforms in Albania and Kosovo, with the aim of strengthening the voice of female composers in the national music scene.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of the selected festivals revealed several common features that positively contribute to the promotion of the work of female composers. The establishment of festivals such as the Music by Women Festival, LunART Festival, Women Composers Festival of Hartford and Swiss Female Composers Festival has played a transformative role in increasing the visibility and performance of works by women composers. Before the establishment of these festivals, solo recitals featuring exclusively works by female composers were extremely rare. These performances were usually limited to academic or activist circles and lacked broader institutional support. Since the establishment of these platforms, the percentage of recitals featuring works by female composers has increased significantly. Within the framework of these dedicated festivals, this percentage often reaches much higher levels, ranging between 60% and 100% of the overall program, demonstrating a direct commitment to gender equality in music (LunART Festival, 2023).

In addition to the aspect of gender awareness, festivals that promote the work of female composers contain a rich and multidimensional structure that directly contributes to the development of contemporary music. These festivals include concerts and recitals that often feature world premieres, professional workshops, and masterclasses that foster technical and interpretative development, as well as academic symposiums where researchers present studies on the contributions and history of women in music. In this way, these festivals serve not only as instruments for gender equality but also as important catalysts for innovation and enrichment of the contemporary music scene. They have become spaces for dialogue and reflection, not just platforms for performance (LunART Festival, 2023). In institutional terms, these festivals are often supported by universities, cultural foundations, and international organizations for gender equality, which shows the importance of strategic partnerships in their success.

Women Composers Festival of Hartford (Connecticut, SHBA)

Founded in 2001, the Women Composers Festival of Hartford is one of the longest-running events in the United States dedicated exclusively to the promotion of female composers work. The festival features a rich program of recitals, panel discussions, and workshops that showcase the work of women composers from different eras and countries around the world. One of the most distinctive elements of the festival is the “Music Marathon,” a continuous 12-hour concert featuring works exclusively by female composers, effectively transforming the festival into a “concert season in one day.” The festival welcomes an average of 300-400 participants in each edition, featuring approximately 15–20 recitals and musical events over its duration. Internal reports indicate a 25% increase in new compositions by female composers included in the program over the last five years. Additionally, around 30% of the participating composers are from different countries around the world, bringing a global diversity that has contributed to the expansion of the festival’s intercultural perspective (Women Composers Festival of Hartford, 2023).

Music by Women Festival (Mississippi, SHBA)

Founded in 2017 by the Mississippi University for Women, the Music by Women Festival has become one of the most important platforms in the United States for promoting the work of female composers. Each year, the festival gathers approximately 150–200 participants, includes 10–12 concerts and workshops over its two intensive days and 60% of the accepted works are original compositions by female composers (Music by Women Festival, 2023). The festival is organized annually and includes contemporary music concerts, workshops, scientific presentations and collaborative networks between composers, performers, and music scholars. A concrete impact of the festival is the increase in the number of musical recordings and publications of works by women composers that have been presented in past editions, as well as the creation of institutional partnerships that have influenced the inclusion of these works in the official repertoires of orchestras in the US and beyond.

LunART Festival (Madison, SHBA) - Founded in 2018 by flutist and artistic director Dr. Iva Ugrcic, the festival aims to promote and support women in the fine arts, with a particular focus on contemporary music. Each year, the festival brings together an average of 250 participants, about 15 recitals and concerts, along with public discussions, lectures, exhibitions and workshops that highlight the work and artistic voice of women. The festival's content is almost 100% dedicated to women. The special program Composers Hub selects 6 young composers each year, which has resulted in the creation of over 30 new works that have subsequently been performed at other prestigious festivals, positioning LunART as a successful model for gender inclusion in contemporary art (LunART Festival, 2023).

Swiss Female Composers Festival (Zurich, Zvicër)

The Swiss Female Composers Festival was founded in 2021 with the aim of documenting and promoting the work of Swiss female composers. Originally conceived as a one-day event, the festival has expanded to a ten-day format, including concerts and events such as discussions, exhibitions, symposiums and interdisciplinary activities. In its first edition, 18 works were performed that had never been part of major Swiss music programs before, showing the festival's important role in discovering and promoting the overlooked work of women composers. In the 2021 edition, the program included the orchestral concert "Pioneers of the Century", where works by female composers were performed, many of which were premieres. A key element is the inter-institutional collaboration with seven major music institutions in Switzerland, which have been officially involved in organizing and supporting the festival. This festival has directly influenced the revision of repertoires in Swiss conservatories and orchestras, contributing to the revaluation of the musical heritage of female composers and their inclusion in official programs (Swiss Female Composers Festival, 2023).

Inclusion of women in international music institutions

It is important to mention that until the end of the 20th century, the representation of women in prestigious musical institutions was almost negligible. For example, at the Vienna Philharmonic, no female instrumentalist was accepted as a regular member until 1997, after 161 years of operation. Another significant example is the famous Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, which

for decades was an exclusively male space, as well as at the New York Philharmonic in the USA, where harpist Stephanie Goldner was the only female musician, performing from 1932 to 1962 (Lijtmaer,2023;NewYork Philharmonic, n.d). This long-standing institutional exclusion created a deep gap in the professional development of female composers.

In recent decades, the involvement of women in international musical institutions has made significant progress. According to a 2023 report from the League of American Orchestras, women make up about 38% of the members in professional orchestras in the US, a considerable increase compared to only 5% in the 1970s (League of American Orchestras, 2023). The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which until 1997 had an exclusively male ensemble, now has 24 female musicians out of 145 members, which constitutes about 16.5% of its ensemble, while the Berlin Philharmonic has around 20.8% female members (AP News, 2023). Important institutions such as the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, which marked a historic moment by having four female conductors lead the orchestra in one week (AP News, 2023), are also some concrete steps towards gender equality. This approach has influenced the diversification of institutional structures and the changing public perceptions about the artistic authority of women in music.

Promoting the work of female composers in Albania and Kosovo

Albanian female composers have made an important contribution to the enrichment of artistic music on both sides of the border. In Albania, prominent figures such as Dhora Leka, the first Albanian female composer, followed by Lejla Agolli, Diana Ziu, Arbana Fejzo, Eriona Rushiti - representing different generations of Albanian female composers, have contributed to the development of Albanian music through experimentation with various forms and styles. In Kosovo, composers such as Pranvera Badivuku, Sevime Gjinali, and Seniha Spahiu have helped affirm women's musical works since the early post-war periods, while names like Donika Rudi and Dafina Zeqiri Nushi belong to a new generation experimenting with electroacoustic music and interdisciplinary forms, building bridges between tradition and contemporary international music (Tole, 2024; Agolli, n.d.; Badivuku, 2023; Zeqiri Nushi, n.d.).

These women composers represent a wide spectrum of creative voices; however, their promotion in Albanian-speaking regions, not only today but over the years, has been limited and fragmented due to the lack of a consolidated platform for representation and insufficient institutional support. Despite the significant contributions of many Albanian women composers, the inclusion of their works in the repertoire of musical institutions and artistic events remains limited and unsystematic. Cases where an entire activity has been dedicated exclusively to the work of female composers are rare and usually linked to independent artistic initiatives.

In Kosovo, festivals such as "ReMusica" or "DAM Festival" have occasionally included works by female composers from the local scene in their programs, contributing to their recognition and exposure in the contemporary music scene. However, these inclusions remain isolated and do not constitute a sustainable strategy for gender representation in the artistic program of these festivals (ReMusica Festival, 2009; DAM Festival Pristina, n.d.).

To advance in this field, musical and educational institutions should encourage more inclusion of works by female composers, by supporting regional collaborative projects and networks. The international experience of festivals dedicated exclusively to female composers shows that such models can serve as inspiration and guidance for building similar platforms in Albania and Kosovo, strengthening their role and recognition in Albanian music.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study highlights that international festivals dedicated to the work of female composers have significantly influenced the changing international music landscape. These platforms have not only enabled the representation of the work of female composers, but have also helped transform musical institutions themselves, which were once closed to gender inclusion. Through the extensive inclusion of female composers in concert programs, the organization of academic and artistic support activities, and collaboration with educational institutions, festivals such as the Music by Women Festival, Women Composers Festival of Hartford, LunArt Festival and Swiss Female Composers Festival have managed to create a long-lasting impact on the music world.

Alongside these positive developments on the international scene, the situation in Albanian-speaking regions remains more tepid. Although dedicated platforms for female composers work are still absent, several initiatives have begun to make an impact. These initiatives, however, remain isolated and without sustainable institutional support.
Therefore, at the conclusion of this study, it is recommended that:

- New festivals should be established in Albania and Kosovo with an exclusive focus on the work of female composers, following the models of successful international dedicated festivals discussed in the study.
- The integration of works by female composers into the repertoires of musical institutions such as philharmonics, universities of arts and music schools, through more inclusive selection policies.
- To encourage collaborations between universities, orchestras, and independent partners to organize thematic concerts that promote the repertoire of female composers.
- Integrating the repertoire of female composers into the curricula of educational institutions, as an essential part of the musical education of new generations.
- Creating digital archives and online platforms that document, distribute and promote the works of Albanian female composers.
- Supportive policies should be established by the Ministries of Culture, which through annual calls for projects, encourage initiatives that focus on gender equality in music.
- Organizing scientific roundtables, seminars and conferences that address the topic of gender representation in music, to raise awareness and institutional commitment in this area.

Recommendations for international collaboration and networking

- Strengthening international collaborations by inviting female composers and performers to participate in regional festivals and concerts, as well as through artistic and academic exchanges.

- Encouraging collaborative regional and international projects focused on the documentation and promotion of female composers work.
- To enhance international collaboration among dedicated festivals to create global networks for the promotion and mobility of female composers.
- Organizing joint roundtables with international universities focused on creating collaborative research platforms.

Name of festival	Location	Average Number of Participants	Number of musical events (recitals/concerts)	Percentage of Works by Female Composers	Activities
Music by Women Festival	USA (Mississippi)	150-200	10-12	60%	Concerts, masterclasses, academic publications
Hartford Women Composers Festival	USA (Connecticut)	300-400	15-20	~100%	Lectures, discussions, exhibitions
LunArt Festival	USA (Wisconsin)	~250	~15	100% (Gender-focused concept)	Recitals, Discussions, interdisciplinary collaborations
Swiss Female Composers Festival	Switzerland (Zurich)	150-200	10-12	~98%	Concerts, Discussions, presentations

Table 1. Comparison of international festivals dedicated to female composers

Note: The data has been compiled from the official festival websites and their public materials. The percentage of gender focus is calculated based on the representation of female composers in the artistic program of each edition.

Historical period	Percentage of known (documented) female composers
16th – 17th centuries	<1%
18th century	About 1–2%
19th century	About 3–5%
Early 20th century (1900–1950)	5–7%
The second half of the 20th century	10–15%
21st century	~20–25% (in festivals and publications)

Table 2. Percentage of female composers in the history of music (based on literature data)

Note: The data were compiled from the following sources: (McClary, 1991), (Citron, 1993), (Hisama, 2001), (UNESCO, 2019), (European Commission, 2022), archival data from festivals and music universities.

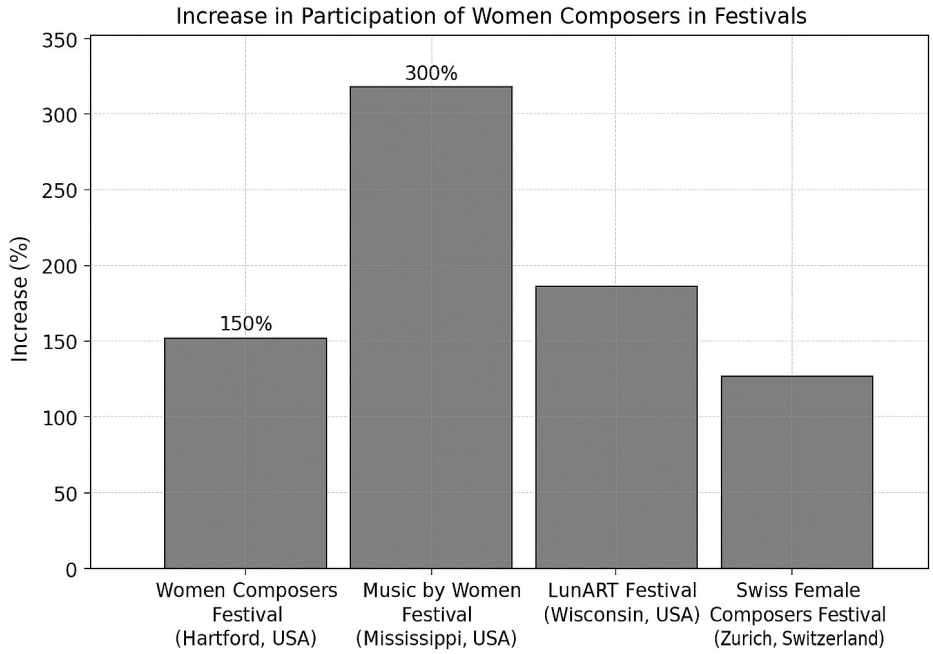


Figure 1. Comparison of international festivals dedicated to female composers

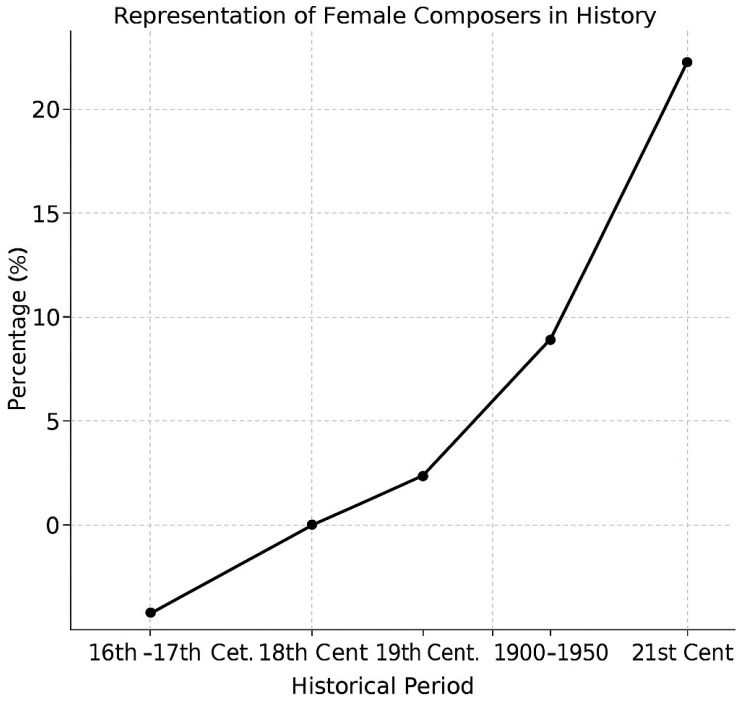


Figure 2. Representation of female composers in music history

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Albanian chamber music in the years 1910 – 1940. (Historical and analytical treatment)

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Abstract

This paper has as its object the developments of chamber music in Albania, aiming precisely to research the first processes of the production of this music in our country. As part of the musical creativity of the time, chamber music from the years 1910–1940 fundamentally retains a semi-professional character. In its historical and artistic context, it is inspired by the artistic and cultural movement of the National Renaissance, while its compositional orientation stems from the European classical-romantic tradition. In following this process through a historical-analytical methodology, representative composers and their respective works are examined. The first among them, Lec Kurti, holds the merit of being the first, during the years 1913–1916, to cultivate genres such as the sonata, trio, and quartet. After him, M. Gjoka wrote short pieces for mixed instrumental ensembles, primarily in the style of instrumental miniatures, while in 1937, Fan Noli authored a sonata for violin and piano. From the analysis of this body of work, the following conclusions emerge: 1) Chamber music occupies a limited place in the musical creativity of the time, determined by the professional level of the composers, the low public impact, and the lack of qualified instrumentalists; 2) The engagement with the genres is defined more by the instrumental composition than by their formal and dramaturgical standards; 3) Unlike the general orientation of Albanian music of the time toward the creation of a national music identity, chamber music works do not follow this line, but remain closely dependent on European tradition models from the 18th–19th centuries. These characteristics, along with the still insufficient professional mastery, define this body of work as belonging to a pre-professional stage.

Keywords

sonata, trio, quartet, Albanian musicians

Introduction

Albanian music historiography designates the years 1878-1940 (Shuteriqi. 2019) as the first period in the development of Albanian musical creativity. In reality, the new music that emerged in Albania in the last two decades of the 19th (Zadeja. 2006) century presents itself in all aspects as a pre-professional creative activity. In these early steps, the pioneers from Shkodër - Palokë Kurti (1860-1920) (Grove 2001) and his slightly younger contemporary Frano Ndoja (1867-1923), were engaged in the new urban musical life, inspired and nurtured by the ideology of the National Renaissance movement. With an almost entirely self-taught artistic background, their goal was to create the musical tradition that had long been absent in the country due to the significant delay in the civilizing processes of Albanian society. In their simple compositions - mostly songs and orchestral pieces for wind bands - two main musical directions, which would define Albanian music for more than a century, are clearly evident: reliance on the traditional European musical experience and the search for national musical expression. The surviving scores of Palokë Kurti clearly attest to this. As the leader, from 1880, of the first Albanian wind orchestra established in Shkodër, he composed a number of pieces based on standard wind band models - marches with an enthusiastic character, and polkas, mazurkas, and quadrilles in the style of entertainment music. These simple works implemented the characteristics of urban band repertoires, both in terms of genre and style. In this regard, and taking into account Kurti's very limited experience (these works date from 1881, when Kurti was just 21 years old), any effort to find even the faintest connection between these compositions and traditional Albanian music, folk songs, or urban popular music would be unfounded. However, Kurti found another path to approach local musical sources, primarily through the urban songs of Shkodër. In most cases composing both lyrics and music, he created dozens of songs in the folk style of the Shkodran aheng, (Gurashi-Sheldija. 1961) which have earned a place among Shkodër's most valued artistic heritage. Known among the people as "new songs," these works introduced reformative elements to the aheng repertoire (Zadeja. 2006). Even more significant are his two potpourris for wind orchestra, which, based on urban folk song themes, represent the first known case in Albania of arranging local musical tradition.

Frano Ndoja followed much the same path. Tonin Zadeja notes: "Frano Ndoja's musical activity is mainly tied to the wind orchestra, which, after many efforts, he managed to establish in 1898 and which the people rightly called 'Frano Ndoja's "drum" (Revista Nëntori. 1985).

Alongside these developments, the landscape of Albanian musical creativity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (up to the eve of the National Independence Declaration) also includes a new repertoire: the patriotic song. This genre initially took shape through borrowed foreign melodies, mainly from the Balkans, similarly to the emergence of the urban lyric song in Korçë during the same period (Koço. 2002). As one might expect, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the new musical activity in Albania was concentrated in the two main economic and cultural centers: Shkodër in the north and Korçë in the southeast. The core of this urban artistic movement with a Western orientation was the musical activity centered around wind orchestras - such as the "Liria" band, founded in Korçë in 1909 - and choral singing. In terms of musical creation, this period is characterized by a limited output in simple orchestral and vocal genres, and by the participation of only a small number of music practitioners.

After the Declaration of National Independence, and particularly with the consolidation of the Albanian state during the 1920s and 1930s, musical life and activity in the country experienced a significant revival. With the creation and expansion of Albanian-language elementary and secondary schools across the country (the first secondary school, "Normalja" of Elbasan, opened in 1909), Albanian society began to take important steps toward social emancipation and modernization. Alongside music education in schools (Lici. 2021), music was also practiced in cultural-artistic societies operating in the main cities. A generation of passionate youth with more systematic musical training became the protagonists of artistic life, either as instrumentalists in various ensembles or as participants in choral groups. In the 1930s, the first professional musicians appeared in Albania, trained in conservatories across Western Europe - among them singers Mihal Ciko (1902-1986), Jorgjia Filçe Truja (1909-1992), Tefta Tashko Koço (1910-1947), Maria Paluca Kraja (1911-1999); pianists Tonin Guraziu (1908-1999) and Lola Gjoka (1910-1985); violinists Ludovik Naraçi (1903-1999) and Baki Kongoli (1913-1980), and others - who brought about the beginnings of professional musical performance in Albania.

In this broader social and cultural context, new musical creativity took its most significant steps during the first half of the 20th century. From 1910 until the eve of World War II, one can say that Albania not only participated in musical performance activities but also developed a new compositional experience. This experience, in specific ways, links the two historical periods of Albanian music: the first and second halves of the 20th century. The protagonists of this process include several musicians, most of whom worked within Albania, while some others contributed from abroad. Among the most active figures of the time are: Lec Kurti (1884-1948), Father Martin Gjoka (1890-1940), Fan S. Noli (1882-1965) in the USA, Thoma Nasi (1892-1964) in Albania and the USA, Kristo Kono (1907 - 1991), Cardinal Mikel Koliqi (1902-1997), and Prenk Jakova (1917-1967).

Alongside these references, in completing this paper I have utilized materials from the periodical press of the time, the archives of the University of Arts library, the National Library archive, and the personal archives of L. Kurti's family. I have paid particular attention to comprehensive analyses of selected works, chosen for the purposes of this study, which has a historical-analytical role. Specifically, (harmonic, formal, aesthetic, and historical analyses have been conducted), as these are essential for accurately reflecting the compositional developments of this early period of chamber music in Albania.

The Beginnings of Chamber Music in Albania

The beginnings of chamber music in Albania are documented in the second decade of the 20th century and are linked to the name of the first Albanian composer to graduate in composition, Lec Kurti (May 9, 1884, Shkodër – (?) 1948, Rome, Italy), the son of musician Palokë Kurti. The latter passed on his love and passion for music to his sons, aiming to shape them into professional musicians by training them from childhood. The first among them, Lec, completed his higher musical studies at the Pesaro Conservatory (1909-1916) in Italy, while the second son (P. Kurti had five children), Zef, followed in his father's footsteps by directing wind ensembles in the city of Shkodër for many years, until his death in 1952.

Albanian music of the 1910s - 1940s includes a considerable number of works of various types, including songs and (few) romances, various instrumental and orchestral pieces, dramatic and stage genres or forms, and a significant number of religious scores, primarily for the Catholic Church ritual, with the main author being Father Martin Gjoka. In this composition, despite the compositional achievements, we witness the first efforts in cultivating some of the main traditional musical genres: attempts at creating the Albanian opera and symphony, compositions in known orchestral genres such as the rhapsody and symphonic poem, etc. Within these efforts, instrumental chamber music appears just as fragile as the overall musical creativity of the time. Nevertheless, from the first chamber-type works composed by Lec Kurti between 1909-1916, in one way or another, the representative composers of the time attempted to approach this refined tradition of musical art.

To reach a rational stance on the level at which Albanian chamber music presents itself in the first half of the 20th century, below are highlighted some of the main (and few) examples provided by the aforementioned authors. The first documented work of Lec Kurti is the Romanza Dramatica for voice and piano, composed on March 10, 1909, in Pesaro. In the following years, he wrote a series of other instrumental, vocal, and stage works, becoming the first Albanian composer to explore specific genres of music such as the vocal romance and chamber music, while also introducing the first attempt in the field of opera, with Arbëresha.

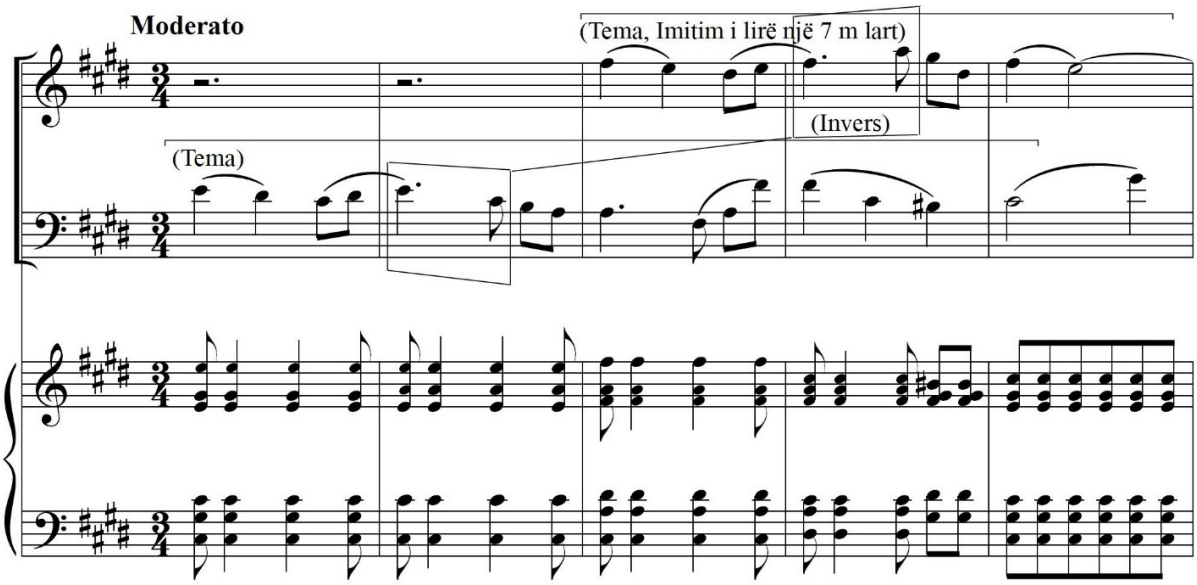
In the field of chamber music, Kurti's documented creative bibliography contains a number of works from different genres, written primarily during the years 1914-1915. From a careful observation of this preserved collection - kept by the composer's nephew, Albert Kurti - we have selected four works for a more analytical examination. The selection criteria of these compositions, each pioneering in its genre or formation in the Albanian chamber music tradition, are based on: 1) the early creation date; 2) the formation used; 3) genre affiliation; and 4) the level of musical realization.

The first three works from 1914 retain very similar features in terms of musical structure and, generally, harmony. They appear typically as student works that meet the academic program requirements of compositional training. During the years 1912-1913 (and partially in 1914), Kurti mostly wrote short piano pieces from the 17th–18th-century tradition (gavottes, preludes, scherzos, minuets); in 1914, his compositions, in addition to piano, begin to focus on string instruments and traditional chamber music formations such as the trio and quartet. The year 1915 marks a new step in Kurti's instrumental creativity: moving from simple forms to the dramatic form of the sonata, as well as the sonata genre itself. During 1915, alongside the Sonata for Piano in C minor, Venice, April 30, 1915, he is also presumed to have written two sonatas for violin and piano (in E major and D major, respectively), which are undated.

The Romanza for violin and piano (1914), the first analyzed work, is composed in a simple ternary form with introduction and contrasting middle section, structured as: (A – B – A1) (Chaplin, 2018). The tonal plan, corresponding to the three sections, is (T – D – T). The first section A, constructed as a period with introduction, is characterized by clarity and simplicity in the use of expressive tools and, above all, by the harmonic stability of the main key, E-flat major, alongside some close modulations toward stable harmonic functions. The second section B is a contrasting middle built with modulatory sequences and modulations, developed in a

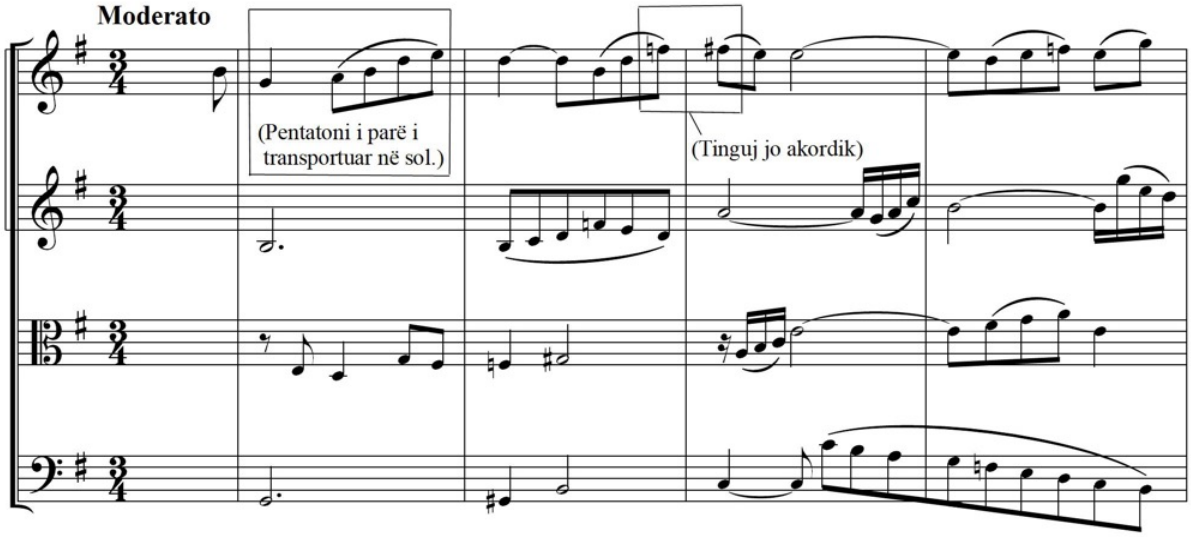
tonally distant independence, in E major. Simultaneously, there is a superimposed development of the melorhythmic structure of the thematic material introduced in the first section, using rhythmic value diminutions and irregular figures. The third section is a static reprise, with a slight variation in the reorganization of phrases. The static reprise comes as a result of the developments in the middle section with unstable modulations in distant tonalities, making the overall tonal unification essential.

The Trio for violin, cello, and piano (1914), composed in the same year as the Romanza for violin and piano, is a concurrent work. For this reason, the trio is also based on the simple ternary form with the traditional structure (A – B – A1); in the key of C-sharp minor.

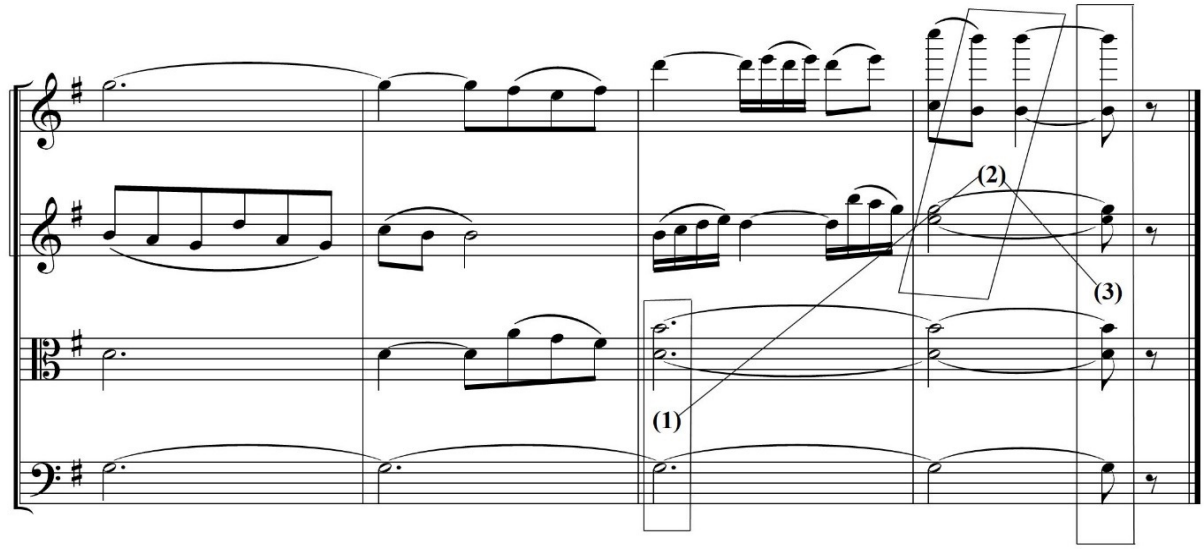


Musical Example 1: Lec Kurti, String Quartet, mm. 1–5

The same simplicity also characterizes the harmonic language, adhering to the standard tonal plan (T – D – T). The units remain proportional, and in some cases, harmony is enriched with modulations to distant tonalities, serving to alter the tonal base. The same can be said about the **String Quartet in G minor (1914)**, the third analyzed work, composed in the spring of 1914. However, unlike the Romanza and Trio, the quartet draws more interest due to its harmonic feature. The author, although titling the score Quartetto in Sol minore, avoids functional tonality in this work, exploiting the pentatonic system. Specifically, the first section (A), with two phrases, is based on the first pentatonic mode transposed to the fifth note (G - A - B - D - E) (Tole. 2005). The middle section (B) brings transpositions of the mode to different heights to increase harmonic tension, except for some isolated vertical sonorities and modulations that sound tonal. In the double reprise, the material returns transposed a perfect fifth higher on the fourth note (D) of the pentatonic scale, maintaining the initial melorhythmic structure. The final four measures serve as a short coda and vertically reinforce the full initial pentatonic. This closure comes from a dominant of the base note of the main pentatonic, thus creating the idea of a vertical superposition of the G major and E minor tonalities.



Musical Example 2 : Lec Kurti, String Quartet, mm. 1–5
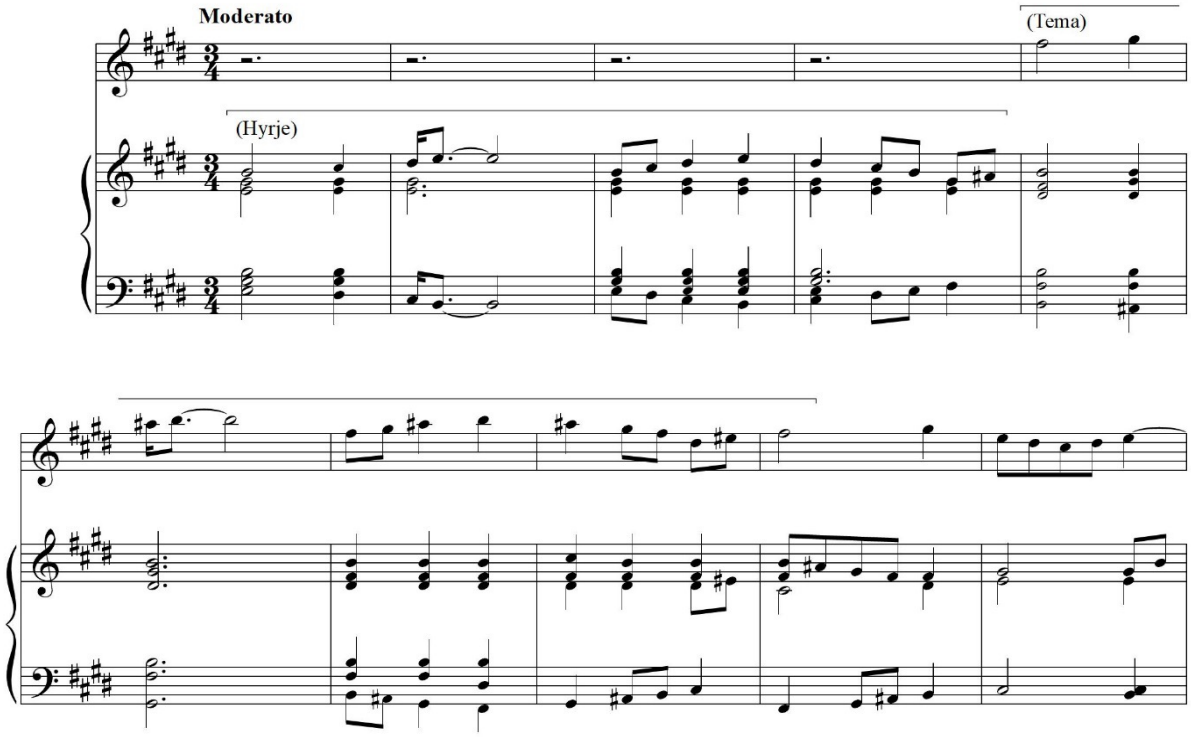


Musical Example 3 : Lec Kurti, String Quartet, mm. 26-29

It would be a hasty claim, as indeed has happened, that the presence of the pentatonic scale should be judged as the author's attempt to refer to the modal harmonic system of Albanian musical folklore. Kurti left Albania at a very young age, but even if it had been otherwise, considering the very limited possibilities of the time, he would hardly have been able to know the traditional music of Southern Albania, where pentatonicism is almost dominant. In 1914, when the work was written, Debussy in France had marked the anti-romantic spirit, among other things also by referring to modal harmony. Lec Kurti must have been informed about the new harmonic research of the time, since among his manuscripts there are also student orchestration works, including works by Debussy. Two years later (1916), his aim toward a

more pretentious musical language is verified by the fragment of the opera in progress Luisa di Charpentier, Quadro II (tableau II), where the author clearly appears influenced by Wagnerian post-romanticism.

The Sonata for violin and piano in E major (year ?), despite the gender classification, is not a work constructed according to the standard sonata form, as it lacks its main elements. The construction is presented with sections that maintain almost the same formal logic as other works. It begins in the key of E major in the form of a period with two introductory phrases, with connecting and closing elements and a clear harmonic structure. In the middle, it is built with sections, each equal in the number of measures to the exposition. The only difference is the absence of a reprise, which has no similarity with the exposition. So, here we deal only with seven sections, constructed in the form of a simple binary with modulatory connectors, where the final section is

Overall, for the four works examined, it should be emphasized that the chamber music written by Lec Kurti brings the first examples in Albanian music of the production of traditional prototypes of the genre. It was written specifically to respond to the authoŕs compositional formation process and, as such, retains a mainly didactic character. Kurti used traditional genre definitions for his chamber music works, such as trio, quartet or sonata. However, his approach to genres remains mainly linked to the instrumental formation used and not to the traditional standards of their compositional concept.
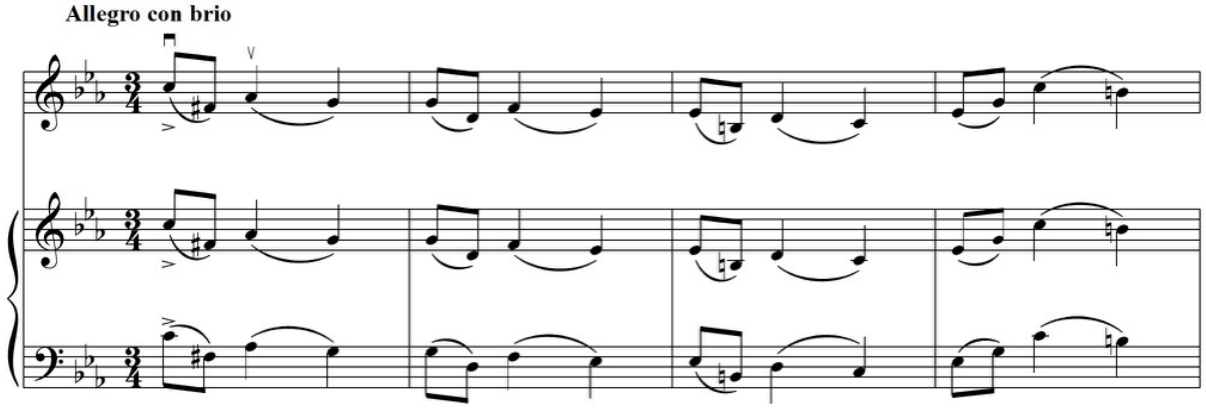


Musical Example 4 : Lec Kurti, Sonata for violin and piano, mm. 1-10

After Lec Kurti, Albanian chamber music appears almost negligible in the opus of composers who were active between 1910-1940. With the exception of Fan S. Noli, who during his university composition studies in Boston created, among other things, also a sonata for violin and piano, the other authors approached this field of music in an indirect or occasional manner (mainly At Martin Gjoka with some small pieces for mixed instrumental ensembles). Several factors influenced this stagnation, the main one being the insufficient professional training of the authors themselves. The main representative composers of the time, At Martin Gjoka, Fan S. Noli, Thoma Nasi, Cardinal Mikel Koliqi, Kristo Kono, and Prenk Jakova, except Noli, all in one way or another approached the art of musical composition through partial or insufficient training. At M. Gjoka, undoubtedly the most interesting composer of the era, besides his first music lessons with Frano Ndoja in Shkodër while he was a student at the Franciscan College, after finishing theological studies in Graz, Austria, also completed a one-year course in church music. Thoma Nasi and Kristo Kono graduated in conducting, respectively at the "New Orleans" Conservatory in Boston and the "Giuseppe Verdi" Conservatory in Milan. Prenk Jakova, (Alibali. 2001) was practically formed within the amateur artistic movement of the city of Shkodër, although he studied clarinet for one year at the "Santa Cecilia" Conservatory in Rome. Regarding Cardinal Koliqi, although he was a very knowledgeable musician who played piano and regularly attended classical music concerts and opera (Simoni, 2003) performances during his studies in Italy, he ultimately gave himself over to his religious vocation.

On the other hand, the initial stage in which Albanian music was found, not only as creativity but also in its relationship with the audience, made it still premature to cultivate such genres, characteristic for their more intellectual approach. In Albania during 1910-40, the experience of holding chamber music concerts was missing, except for musical evenings organized by Thoma Nasi during his stay in Korçë (Nasi stayed in Korçë during 1920-25, where he became a promoter of the flourishing artistic life of the city), (Koço. 2003) where he founded the Society of "Fine Arts." He himself played the flute, while his wife, Olimpia (originally named Olimbi), was a pianist. Together with some teachers from the French Lyceum of Korçë, as well as young instrumentalists of the city, they organized a series of chamber music concerts in public or family venues, mostly with foreign repertoire (Dodona. 2022). Other facts about the performance of chamber music in Albania during the 1920-30s are not known so far, although during this period, after graduating from European conservatories, several instrumentalists had come to the country, including violinists L. Naraçi and B. Kongoli, and pianists T. Guraziu and L. Gjoka.

Finally, it must be well noted that on the musical scene of the time, the presence of musicians capable of meeting the advanced artistic demands of instrumental performance was, if not negligible, still very limited. Based on these circumstances, our investigation of the cultivation of Albanian chamber music after Lec Kurti's student works is pushed about a quarter of a century later to Fan S. Noli, a prominent figure of Albanian culture who continuously showed visible interests in music. Since childhood, he played the flute, while as a publicist he wrote about personalities of musical art. He studied and graduated in composition and musicology (Jorgaqi. 2005), (1934-38) at the New England Conservatory, Boston. He defended his diploma in musicology with the historiographic study Beethoven and the French Revolution, and in composition with four works performed by the Symphony Orchestra of the New England Conservatory: the symphonic poem Scanderbeg, the Albanian Rhapsody, the vocal-orchestral

work Gaspari i varfër, and the overture with Byzantine themes. Among his musical legacy is also the Sonata for violin and piano (1937), (Kosturi. Ciko. 2009).

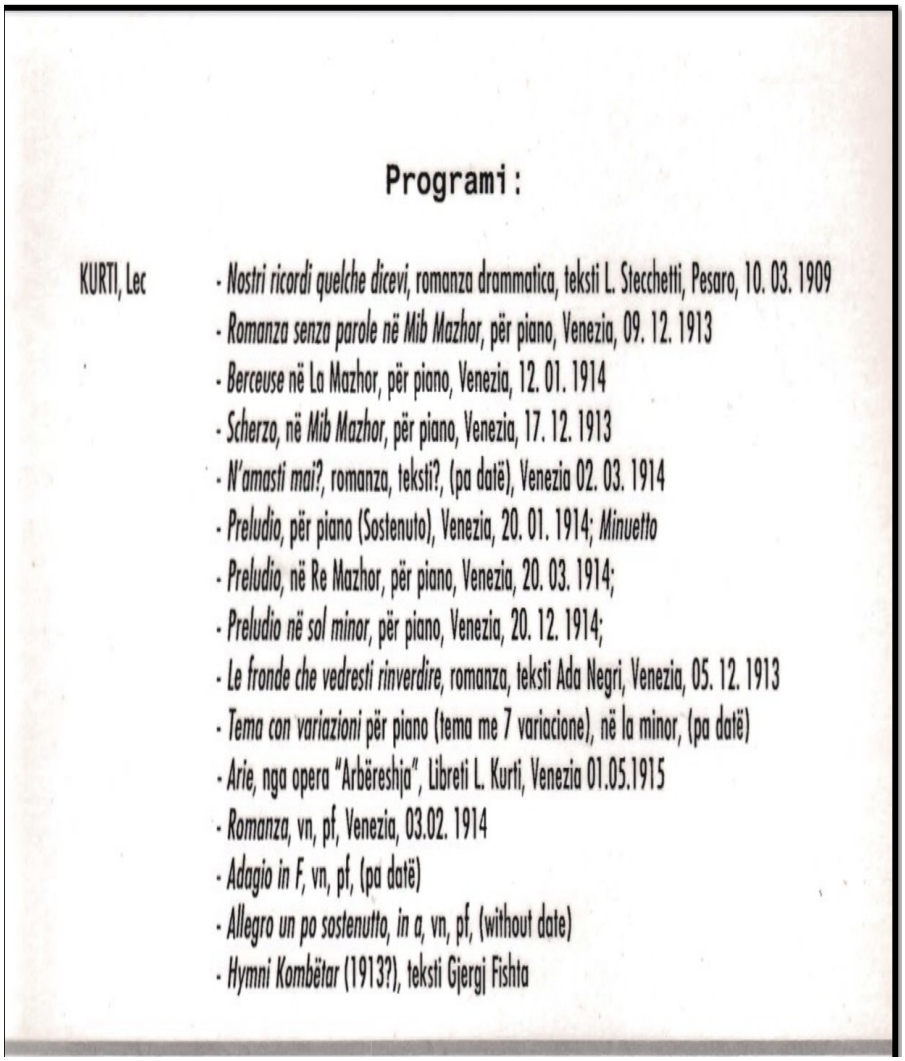


Although a scholastic work, placed in the context of Albanian chamber music of the first half of the 20th century, Noli's Sonata marks a certain relative development. The appropriate and only comparison in this case would be only the works of the kind examined above by Lec Kurti. Compared to Kurti, Noli has a somewhat clearer approach to the sonata form, although applied in a very didactic manner. If the sonata is judged against Noli's other compositions, certainly the evaluative notes remain low. A kind of comparison can be made with the symphonic poem Scanderbeg which, like the Sonata for Violin and Piano, refers to a large and dramatic genre of music. In both cases, Noli treats the form as a sequence of sections, thus bypassing its dramatic potential.

Conclusions

In the final judgment, it can be said that, compared to vocal works, and to some extent also orchestral works, in the field of chamber music the first period (1910-1940) of the development of Albanian music inherited very few works. In fact, the music written by Lec Kurti in the period 1909-16 is a clear indicator of knowledge gained from studies, clarity of thought, and precise use of compositional techniques. The Romance for Violin and Piano within the three main sections is noted for the simplicity of its musical construction, a very proportional development of basic units (phrase, period), without any striking originality. The Quartet in G minor, more than an approach to the local musical tradition, shows in its harmonic language more interesting sound claims, beyond the classical standard of the major-minor system. After the Sonata for Violin and Piano in E major, based on the presented works as well as others, it remains a historical fact that the chamber music created by Lec Kurti brings the first examples in Albanian music of cultivating prototypes traditional to the field. It was written specifically to respond to the compositional formation process of the author, and as such, it mostly retains a didactic character. Kurti used traditional gender (genre) classifications for his chamber music works, such as trio, quartet, or sonata. However, his approach to genres remains mainly related to the composition of the instrumental formation used and not to the traditional standards and their compositional concept.

His works did not become known either at the time they were created, perhaps due to the composer's own reluctance, nor during the years of the communist regime in the country, because of the author's political involvement during World War II as a high representative of the Balli Kombëtar movement. Published and partially performed in 2003-2008 (Shupo. 2008), except for special cases such as the hymn song Porsi fleta e Ejllit t'Zotit (1913), with verses by At Gjergj Fishta, Lec Kurti's works, including those of chamber music, today retain only historical interest. In this regard, the author is credited as the first Albanian composer to write in genres such as trio, quartet, or instrumental sonata. The same assessment stands even 24 years later for Fan S. Noli's Sonata for Violin and Piano, which suggests that Albanian chamber music did not record any significant development.



Programi:

KURTI, Lec

- *Nostri ricordi quelche dicevi*, romanza drammatica, teksti L. Stecchetti, Pesaro, 10. 03. 1909
- *Romanza senza parole në Mib Mazhor*, për piano, Venezia, 09. 12. 1913
- *Berceuse* në La Mazhor, për piano, Venezia, 12. 01. 1914
- *Scherzo*, në *Mib Mazhor*, për piano, Venezia, 17. 12. 1913
- *N'amasti mai?*, romanza, teksti?, (pa datë), Venezia 02. 03. 1914
- *Preludio*, për piano (Sostenuto), Venezia, 20. 01. 1914; *Minuetto*
- *Preludio*, në Re Mazhor, për piano, Venezia, 20. 03. 1914;
- *Preludio në sol minor*, për piano, Venezia, 20. 12. 1914;
- *Le fronde che vedresti rinverdire*, romanza, teksti Ada Negri, Venezia, 05. 12. 1913
- *Tema con variazioni* për piano (tema me 7 variacione), në la minor, (pa datë)
- *Arie*, nga opera "Arbëreshja", Libreti L. Kurti, Venezia 01.05.1915
- *Romanza*, vn, pf, Venezia, 03.02. 1914
- *Adagio in F*, vn, pf, (pa datë)
- *Allegro un po sostenutto, in a*, vn, pf, (without date)
- *Hymni Kombëtar* (1913?), teksti Gjergj Fishta

Figure 1: Concert program with selected premiere works by composer Lec Kurti, performed in the hall of the in University of Arts in Tirana, on 14.03.2008
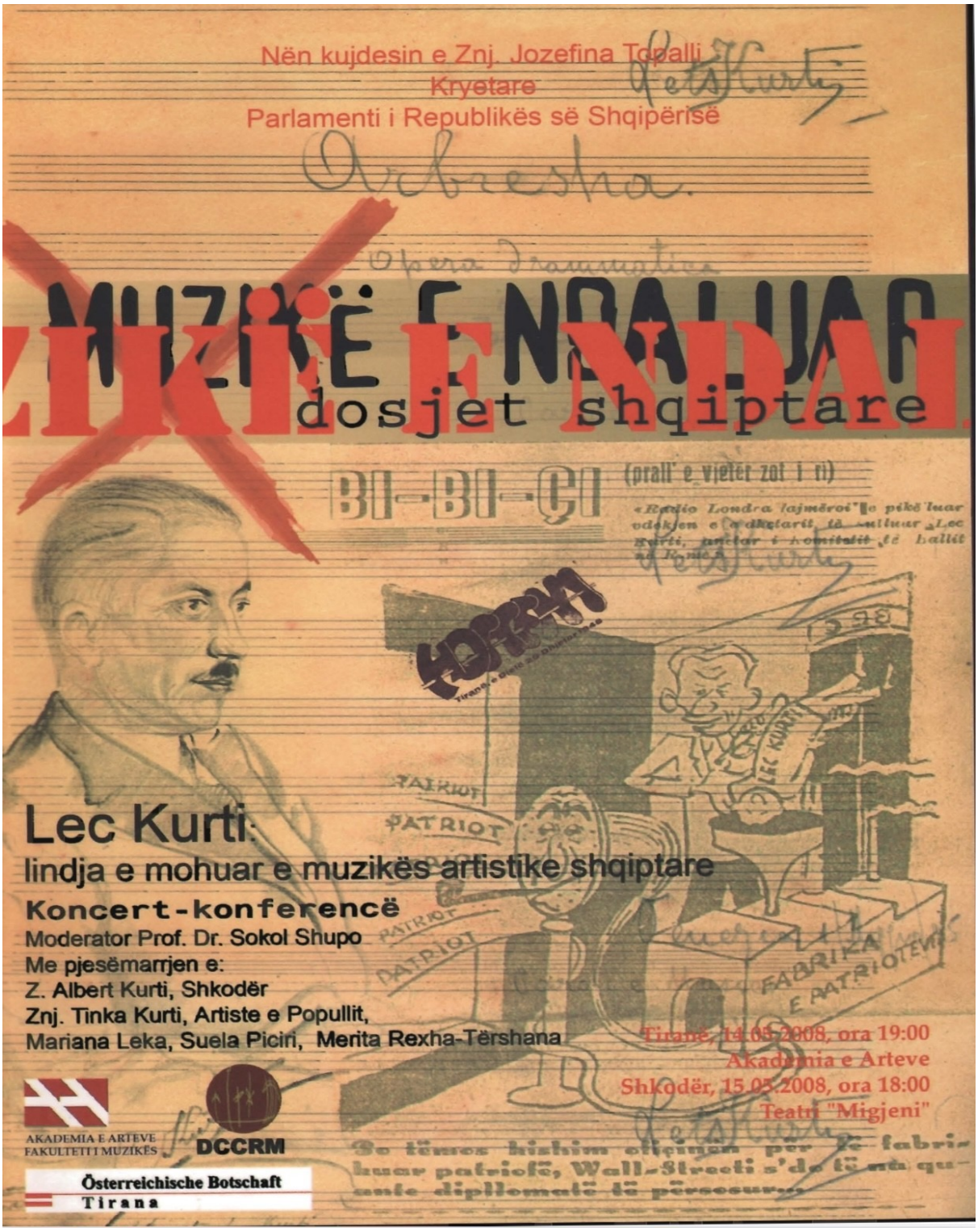

Nën kujdesin e Znj. Jozefina Topalli
Kryetare
Parlamenti i Republikës së Shqipërisë
dosjet shqiptare
BU-BU-ÇU
Lec Kurti:
lindja e mohuar e muzikës artistike shqiptare
Koncert-konferencë
Moderator Prof. Dr. Sokol Shupo
Me pjesëmarrjen e:
Z. Albert Kurti, Shkodër
Znj. Tinka Kurti, Artiste e Popullit,
Mariana Leka, Suela Piciri, Merita Rexha-Tërshana
Tiranë, 14.05.2008, ora 19:00
Akademia e Arteve
Shkodër, 15.05.2008, ora 18:00
Teatri "Migjeni"
AKADEMIA E ARTEVE
FAKULTETI I MUZIKËS
DCCRM
Österreichische Botschaft
Tirana

Figure 2

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The orchestral works of Father Fan S. Noli as a meeting point with Noli the poet, cleric, scholar, and statesman.

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Abstract

Father Fan S. Noli (1882–1965) is one of the most distinguished figures in Albanian culture, embodying a rare fusion of art, religion, scholarship, and politics. This study focuses on his four orchestral works: Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg, Byzantine Overture, Song for Tenor and Orchestra "Poor Gaspar", and Albanian Rhapsody, analyzing them as reflections of his multifaceted identity. The research aims to explore how Noli's music serves as a bridge between his roles as a poet, clergyman, scholar, and statesman, constructing a musical narrative that conveys his intellectual and national vision. The study will be conducted through a musicological analysis of scores, examination of archival documents, and interpretation of the titles and themes of these works in various historical and cultural contexts. Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg reflects Noli's vision of the national hero as an inspiring figure, Byzantine Overture embodies his connection to Orthodox and liturgical traditions, Poor Gaspar intertwines human tragedy with dramatic musical expression, while Albanian Rhapsody synthesizes folklore and national aspirations into a rich musical language. The research methodology follows a historical-analytical approach, combining the study of written sources with the aesthetic and stylistic analysis of Noli's music. The findings are expected to shed light on the cultural and ideological influences within his musical work, affirming his role as a unique figure in Albanian music history. The study's conclusions will highlight how his music, beyond being an artistic expression, serves as a key to understanding Noli as a poet, clergyman, scholar, and statesman.

Keywords

Noli, orchestral music, artistic identity, archival documents, musicological analysis.

Introduction

At Fan S. Noli (1882–1965) is one of the most distinguished figures of Albanian culture, representing a rare intersection of art, faith, knowledge, and politics. This study focuses on his four orchestral works: the Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg, the Byzantine Overture, the Song for Tenor and Orchestra "Poor Gaspar", and the Albanian Rhapsody, treating them as reflections of his complex identity. The research in this paper aims to analyze the ways in which his music represents the connection between Noli as poet, cleric, scholar, and statesman, constructing a musical narrative that conveys his intellectual and national vision. The study is developed through musicological analysis of the scores, examination of archival documents, and interpretation of the titles and themes of the works in various historical and cultural contexts. The Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg reflects Noli's vision of the national hero as an inspiring figure; the Byzantine Overture mirrors his ties with the liturgical and Orthodox tradition; Poor Gaspar intertwines human tragedy with dramatic music; whereas the Albanian Rhapsody synthesizes folklore and national aspirations into a rich musical language. The research method relies on a historical-analytical approach, combining the study of written sources with the aesthetic and stylistic analysis of Noli's music. The results shed light on the cultural and ideological influences in his musical creation, confirming his role as a unique figure in the history of Albanian music. The study's conclusions highlight the ways in which his music, beyond being an artistic expression, serves as a tool for a deeper understanding of Noli as poet, cleric, scholar, and statesman.

Methodology

This article is primarily based on analytical interpretation and personal scholarly conclusions, examining the personality of Fan Noli through multiple perspectives historical, political, cultural, and religious. The methodology of this study is grounded in a combined historical, analytical, and interdisciplinary approach, aiming to examine Father Fan S. Noli's orchestral works as expressions of his multifaceted identity as poet, cleric, scholar, and statesman. The research begins with a detailed musicological analysis of the scores, focusing on formal structure, harmonic language, melodic construction, rhythmic patterns, and orchestration. Each of the four works—The Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg, Albanian Rhapsody, Poor Gaspar, and the Byzantine Overture—is examined through the lens of its internal musical logic, allowing the study to trace how Noli constructs narrative, contrast, and symbolic meaning through sound. This analytical foundation is supported by extensive consultation of archival materials and historical documents related to Noli's creative activity. Manuscripts, score annotations, biographical sources, correspondence, and contemporary accounts form an essential part of the methodological framework, helping to situate the compositions within the cultural, political, and religious context in which they were produced. The integration of these documents enables a more precise understanding of the circumstances of composition and the ideological motivations underlying Noli's musical language. A central methodological pillar of the study is its interdisciplinary perspective, which treats Noli not merely as a composer but as a cultural figure whose artistic output is inseparable from his literary, theological, and political work. For this reason, the study draws on the analysis of Noli's poetry, particularly his lyric-simbolist style, as well as his liturgical experience and his engagement with Byzantine chant. These dimensions inform the interpretation of his music, allowing the research to identify

correspondences between poetic imagery, modal structures, and thematic symbolism. Similarly, Noli's political writings and his vision for national identity are used to contextualize the narrative and ideological layers embedded in his orchestral works. The methodological approach also involves a critical interpretive component, comparing Noli's compositions with Western traditions of the symphonic poem, the rhapsody, and the orchestral song. This comparative lens makes it possible to trace stylistic influences from late Romantic harmony, French symbolism, and Eastern modal practice, revealing a hybrid musical language that reflects Noli's complex cultural position. By examining how he negotiates these diverse influences, the study highlights the deliberate aesthetic choices that define his orchestral writing.

1. The Symphonic Poem "Scanderbeg"
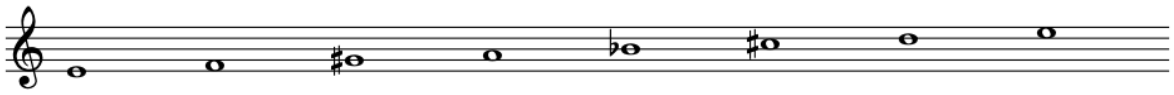
Development

This work was composed as Noli's diploma presentation piece at the New England Conservatory in 1936. It represents his attempt to affirm Albanian national identity through the means of Western symphonic music. Inspired by Longfellow's poetry, the poem intertwines free episodes in which musical themes evoke historical figures and emotions.
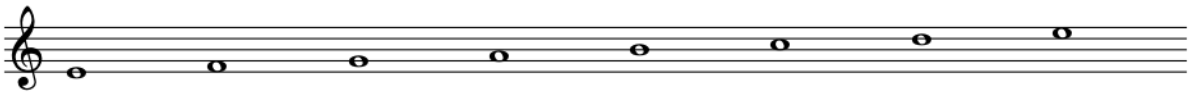
The work opens with a heroic theme reflecting the figure of Skanderbeg, followed by oriental motives evoking the Ottoman environment (Shuteriqi, 2019, Albanian Music). The use of a Bach chorale as a universal symbol of morality, as well as the folk themes such as "Edhe gurët e këtij sokaku," give the work both a universal and national dimension. The structure is free, with a rhapsodic character and a neo-romantic style.

Musicological Analysis

The symphonic poem Skanderbeg belongs to the romantic tradition of the programmatic symphonic poem, where the form is determined by the historical narrative rather than by classical formal schemes. The structure of the work is like a mosaic, built upon returns and thematic transformations (leitmotifs), which ensure internal unity. From a modal perspective, Noli deliberately uses the Phrygian and Byzantine modes, while occasional tonal references appear, creating a marked contrast between East and West, both aesthetically and symbolically. The insertion of the Bach chorale functions as an ideological and musical climax, representing European Christian solidarity and giving the work a universal dimension. The orchestration is narrative and illustrative: the woodwinds and the brass section, especially the trumpets, have a storytelling role, as they present the thematic materials, while the strings serve as carriers of dramatic tension and liturgical solemnity. The use of Albanian folk songs at the end of the work reinforces the national character and functions as an affirmation of identity. Overall, Skanderbeg represents Noli's conscious effort to construct a musical narrative in which history, religion, and national identity merge into a symphonic form with epic and symbolic character.



Muscial Example 1. Byzantine modal scale
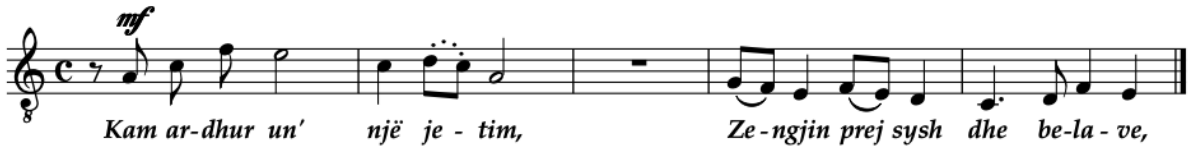


Musical Example 2. The Phrygian modal scale

2. "Albanian Rhapsody"

This work is based on Albanian folk themes processed in a natural way, without transforming them artificially. Fan S. Noli's Albanian Rhapsody represents a clear model of the rhapsodic form in orchestral music, where the thematic material develops freely, relying on contrasts of character, color, and cultural origin. The work does not aim to build a closed symphonic form, but to create a musical narrative that alternates solemn, lyrical, and dance-like states. The thematic core of the rhapsody is rooted in modal materials derived from Albanian folk tradition, particularly from the repertoire of the South. The use of pentatonic formulas and melodic structures linked to the polyphonic singing of the South creates a distinct ethnic identity, which appears from the opening and returns at key points in the work. These modal elements are not treated in a purely folkloric manner, but are placed in dialogue with Western functional harmony, creating a field of tension between modality and tonality. A fundamental aspect of Noli's musical language in this work is the use of non-diatonic intervals, particularly augmented seconds, which contribute to the creation of an archaic and historical atmosphere. These intervals serve not only as coloristic elements but also as structural tools for transitions between sections and for highlighting expressive climaxes. Formal contrasts are achieved through the introduction of episodes with a more pronounced rhythmic character, where themes with a march-like tendency and strong metric impulses appear. These sections are distinguished by dotted rhythms and the dominance of the brass instruments, which give the work a declarative and monumental dimension. In this way, Noli manages to balance the lyrical-modal element with the heroic and ceremonial one. The orchestration plays a key role in the dramatic construction of the rhapsody. The alternation of thin textures with dense orchestral masses, and the use of high registers, creates strong timbral contrasts. The return of the initial material at the end of the work, now enriched in orchestration, functions as a form of free recapitulation typical of the rhapsody. The conclusion of the work is built on a traditional dance theme, which synthesizes the rhythmic energy and folk character of the entire piece. This ending does not have a triumphalist character in the classical sense, but conveys a controlled and internal sense of movement, preserving the strong connection with tradition and with the ritual gesture of dance.

3. "Poor Gaspar" (Song for Tenor and Orchestra)

The work is based on Béranger's poem "Le pauvre Gaspar" and is constructed in a lyrical-dramatic form. Composed as part of his diploma in 1938, it intertwines lyrical sensitivity with social concern and political awareness (Shuteriqi, 2019, Albanian Music). The work is built as an inner narrative, where the music does not merely illustrate the text but serves as a tool to expand the meaning and psychological dimension of the figure of Gaspar. The orchestral introduction immediately creates an ambiguous and dreamlike atmosphere, avoiding stable tonality and relying on modal colors, primarily pentatonic. The use of non-diatonic intervals, particularly the augmented seconds of Byzantine-Oriental origin, establishes an expressive terrain that suggests a hybrid cultural belonging and a permanent sense of uncertainty. This harmonic language prepares the entrance of the vocal line, which appears with a lyrical character but with moments that at times become dramatic.



Musical Example 3.

The vocal score unfolds in a simple melodic line that follows the intonation of the poetic language, maintaining a close connection between the word and the music. The voice projects the emotional content of the text not through virtuosic passages, but through a controlled expression, often close to recitative. The orchestra, generally accompanying the soloist, acts as a commentator, reflecting and at times contradicting the emotional state of the protagonist (Koço, 2021, Noli Orchestral Works). An important structural element of the work is the insertion of thematic materials with strong symbolic charge, which serve as turning points of dramatic tension. The quotation of a theme with a hymn-like and historical character creates a sharp contrast with the intimate world of Gaspar, emphasizing the tension between the individual and society, between the collective ideal and the personal experience of failure. From a formal perspective, the song does not follow the traditional stanza–refrain structure, but develops freely, responding directly to the semantic flow of the poetry. The sections change according to the emotional intensity of the text, while the return of Byzantine modal elements at the end of the work creates a cyclical and unresolved feeling. Overall, "Poor Gaspar" demonstrates Noli's ability to synthesize various stylistic influences—French symbolism, the late Romantic harmonic language, and Eastern modal elements—into a personal and coherent form. The work stands out for its balance between vocal and orchestral expression, as well as for the psychological depth with which it treats the theme of solitude, sacrifice, and the search for meaning.

4. "Byzantine Overture"

Although less known in the Albanian repertoire, this work deeply reflects Noli's connection with the liturgical and Orthodox tradition. It intertwines elements of Byzantine style with

Western musical techniques, especially in modal and timbral aspects. The overture offers a summary of the author's spiritual world, where music becomes a bridge between East and West. The work is built upon a harmonic language that blends elements of Byzantine music (intervals with augmented seconds, the second plagal Byzantine mode, etc.). All these are interwoven with a personal aesthetic vision, reflecting the composer's interest in the history, culture, and spiritual identity of the region. The thematic material of the work is limited but processed effectively. What stands out is the use of simple motives that gain expressive weight through orchestral development and harmonic coloration. A characteristic element is the use of augmented intervals, especially augmented seconds, which give the music a typical Eastern color and link it to Byzantine and early Albanian traditions. The melodies have an archaic and ceremonial character, evoking an ancient world and a sense of solemnity. This approach creates a direct connection with the modal music of the medieval period, as well as with elements of local folklore, which do not appear directly as quotations but as stylistic inspiration. In terms of rhythm and orchestration, the work displays a controlled energy, where quiet moments alternate with more dynamic and dance-like episodes (Koço, 2021, Noli Orchestral Works). The orchestration is used to emphasize contrasts of character and to create a rich sound layer that reinforces the sense of solemnity and local color. Overall, the Byzantine Overture may be seen as an attempt to construct a musical identity that looks towards the past but speaks with a modern voice. Noli's music here does not aim merely at aesthetic effect but carries a cultural and symbolic dimension, reviving historical and spiritual memory through a conscious and intentional musical language.

5. Poetic elements in the musical structure

Poetic thematic content forms an essential pillar in the construction of Noli's musical works. In the Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg, the musical characters directly mirror the content of Longfellow's poetry: from heroic themes to elegiac fragments and oriental passages. The episodic construction of the poem is itself a poetic structure; each episode acts as a sonic stanza that emotionally describes the hero's life. In Poor Gaspar, the work is charged with deep lyrical sensitivity. The music follows the emotional flow of the poetic text, creating a parallel between the verse and the musical phrase. The intertwining of hymns and lyrical motives reinforces the poetic and humanistic message of the work. Likewise, Noli's own poetic style, known for its lyric-symbolist coloring and simplicity of emotional approach, is reflected in the musical structures of his orchestral works. In this way, music and poetry merge as two forms of the same spiritual sensibility.

6. Noli's music in the function of his clerical mission

The music of Father Fan S. Noli is deeply connected to his identity as a cleric and reformer. During the years when he translated and adapted the Orthodox liturgy into the Albanian language, Noli saw music not only as a spiritual tool but also as an instrument for affirming national identity. In his works, the influences of Byzantine music are present both in modality and texture, demonstrating the connection with his ecclesiastical experience. Poor Gaspar and the Byzantine Overture contain structures that evoke psalms and the liturgical atmosphere. The use of plagal modes, linear textures, and a spirit of solemnity is part of this connection (Koço, 2021, Noli Orchestral Works). Through the choir of the Albanian Orthodox Church in Boston

and through his harmonizations, Noli created a new tradition that united Eastern heritage with Western musical sensibility. In this way, music became a continuation of his clerical mission to build a national church and an Albanian spiritual consciousness.

7. Noli as statesman and scholar – influence on his musical creation

As a statesman and engaged intellectual, Father Fan S. Noli viewed music as a form of expressing his vision for a free, cultured Albania with a consolidated identity. Works such as the Symphonic Poem Scanderbeg and Poor Gaspar clearly reflect this mission. Music is not merely art but a platform for transmitting political, social, and educational messages. His musicological studies, especially the monograph Beethoven and the French Revolution, demonstrate a historical-philosophical approach to music. This logic, absorbed at a theoretical level, directly influenced the way he constructed his own works: with rhapsodic structure, intertwined ideology, and a consciously aesthetic form. In the Albanian Rhapsody, Noli processes Albanian folklore with a critical and methodical eye, treating it as valuable material for building a national musical school. He conceives composition not only as an aesthetic act but also as a formative act for the culture of a young nation seeking to give voice to itself.

Conclusions

The orchestral music of Father Fan S. Noli is a rare testimony to the interweaving of his roles as poet, cleric, scholar, and statesman. These works are not merely aesthetic expressions but manifestations of a cultural and spiritual program aimed at building national identity through art. In all the musical works analyzed, there is a clear tendency toward a communicative style, using modalo-tonal elements and a free, often rhapsodic structure. Noli avoids the modernisms of the era and relies on a musical language that aims to be meaningful to the Albanian public. His legacy in this field, although small in number, is extraordinary in content. It offers Albanian musicology an important foundation for better understanding the development of the national school and the role music can play in shaping the historical and cultural consciousness of a nation.

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"Fragments" of Byzantine music in professional Albanian music

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Abstract
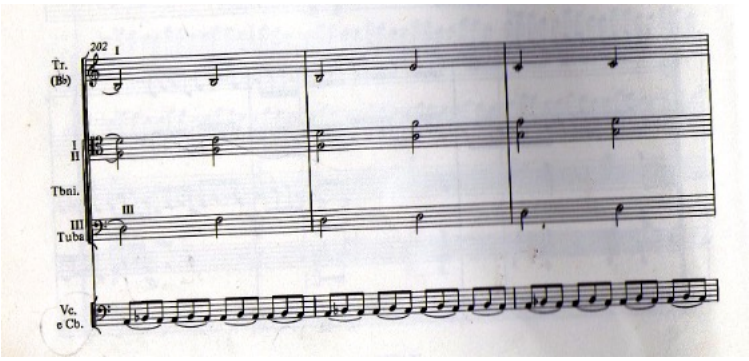
The object of this paper is an almost untouched aspect in Albanian musicology related to the 'interferences' of Byzantine music in Albanian professional music. This paper aims to highlight how this Orthodox liturgical music has 'penetrated' into Albanian professional music, before and after the 1990s. 20th century. Although not numerous in number, there are creations of Albanian professional music that have been influenced by the music or scales of Byzantine music. For this purpose, our paper begins initially with Noli, who, in addition to his multidimensional personality as a cleric, researcher, writer, publicist, politician, diplomat, translator etc., but also as a composer, has made a valuable contribution not only to the Orthodox Church with his adaptations for church choirs, but has also created other musical works, such as orchestral ones where the themes, musical scales and the very spirit of Byzantine music are present. Through the methodology of research and analysis, we will continue with other names such as K. Trako who elaborated and created for the Byzantine liturgy, H. Zacharian with arrangements, adaptations and citations of this music in his works, as well as Th. Gaqi with several arrangements for the church, but also with symphonic works, where sounds based on source materials with the Plagale Second Tone are sometimes observed, which testify to a 'intermediate' path that connects in this case folk music with Byzantine music and both together 'inspire' his Rhapsody No. 1 for symphonic orchestra. So, it will be concluded how some of our composers have approached this sacred liturgical music and how it has interfered in their compositions, thus testifying the meeting points between ancient and later musical cultures.

Keywords

Byzantine music, folk music, professional music, citation, Plagal Second Tone

Introduction

In parentheses, liturgical music has inspired many pre-classical, classical, romantic, and contemporary composers of the stature of Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Smirnov, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and others, who have written works for the Orthodox musical repertoire such as hymns, various masses, as well as cantatas accompanied by orchestra (Vako, 2009) instrumental and symphonic works. They have also referenced (in their non-sacred works) musical elements drawn from Byzantine liturgy. An example of the latter comes from Tchaikovsky in the first movement of his masterpiece, *Symphony No. 6* ("Pathétique"), precisely in the development section (its second phase)[1], where one can hear the church motif "Memory Eternal":



Musical Example 1. Phase II of the development section of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, featuring the church motif 'Memory Eternal', (Tchaikovsky-partitura, 1982)

Specifically, in the second wave of the development section, this motif emerges over a background of triplets, intertwining with the descriptive passages of the strings and creating a somber, funerary atmosphere. In the works of Albanian composers as well, there are compositions 'inspired' by Christian liturgy, though in a relatively small number[2].

Methodology

In this study, the methodology is based on research and analysis, taking into consideration the historical context of each composer discussed, as well as their connections with tradition - specifically with folk music and Byzantine music. The works composed by these authors will be examined, including the melodic quotations they employ, as well as the sections that have been arranged, adapted, or orchestrated under a Byzantine ecclesiastical influence. Furthermore, according to the period in which they were created, the study will analyze works or selected excerpts by various composers: – those from before the 1990s, when Byzantine influences penetrated indirectly through folk music - particularly in the region of Central Albania; - and the works created after the 1990s, when greater intercultural freedom made possible a more
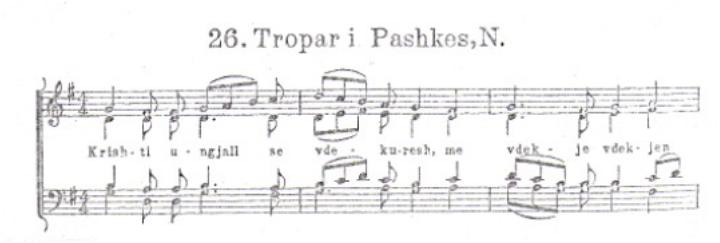
1 Development – the middle section of the sonata form (exposition – development – recapitulation) in which this passage is constructed.

2 Considering the campaign against religion and religious culture in general during the period 1967–1990, it would have been heretical to compose music under religious influence.

direct engagement with Byzantine music, even though such influences still remained limited in number.

Development
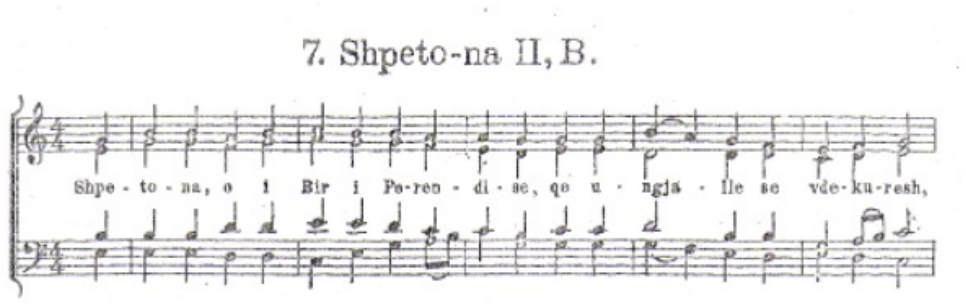
Thus, in the first half of the last century, one of the prominent Albanian personalities with valuable contributions in many fields such as theology, literature, politics, diplomacy, history, journalism, and music was F. S. Noli (1882–1965). He was simultaneously a cleric of the Orthodox Church, its Archbishop, and also a composer, with several works adapted or composed for the Orthodox ritual, as well as original creations in cultivated Albanian music such as *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, the symphonic poem *Skanderbeg, Albanian Rhapsody, Byzantine Overture*, and the vocal-symphonic poem *The Poor Gaspar* (for tenor and orchestra). These works were composed by intertwining elements of traditional music with those of neo-Romantic music - an effort to make at least a modest contribution in this field as well. In this context, it is worth noting that "Noli, at the age of 55 (in 1937), completed his studies at the New England Conservatory in Boston, graduating in composition with a series of symphonic works that were missing from Albanian music. And as if that were not enough, a year later, in 1938, he earned another degree in Musicology, also at the Boston Conservatory, with the monographic work *Beethoven and the French Revolution*" (Jorgaqi, 2013). Regarding the first aspect of his musical works related to Orthodox liturgy (specifically harmonizations or adaptations for the Orthodox ritual), one notable example is his "Tropari i Pashkës" (*Troparion of Easter*) for choir[3], created in the spirit of the troparia of Byzantine music of the Orthodox Church.



Musical Example 2. "Tropari i Pashkës", a work by Noli (Noli, 1936)
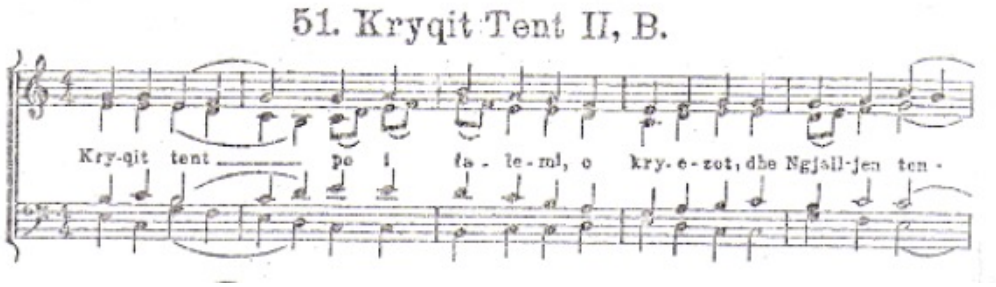
Meanwhile, in terms of harmonizations, arrangements, and adaptations, Noli carried out a meticulous and highly professional work, as presented in the collection *Hymnore* - a book of Russian and mixed liturgical music for choir (which also includes his aforementioned composition)—as well as in a traditional chorale such as "Shpëto-na" (*Save Us*).

3 Troparion – a church chant (or short hymn) sung on the feast day of a particular saint in the Orthodox Church.
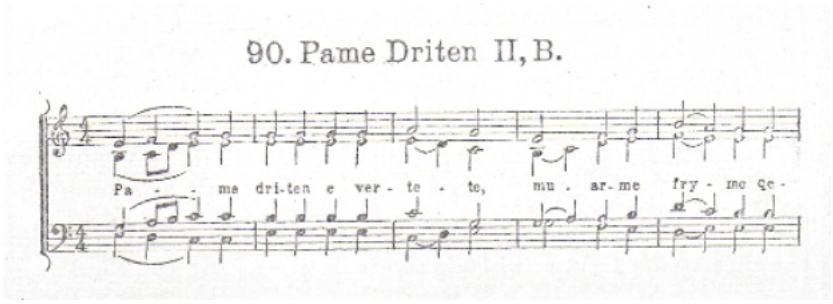


Musical Example 3. "Shpëto-na II", traditional Byzantine, for choir, harmonized by Noli (Noli, 1936)
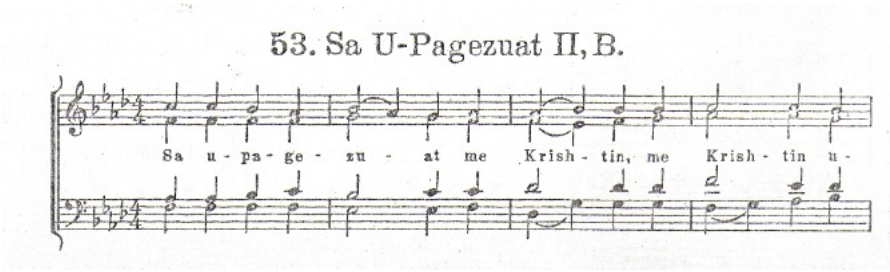
In this way, Noli also harmonized other Byzantine songs (hymns) for choir, included in the collection Hymnore, some of which are:



Musical Example 3. "Kryqit Tent II" (Your Cross), traditional Byzantine, for choir, harmonized by Noli (Noli, 1936)



Musical Example 4. "Pamë dritën II" (We Saw the Light II), traditional Byzantine, for choir, harmonized by Noli (Noli, 1936)
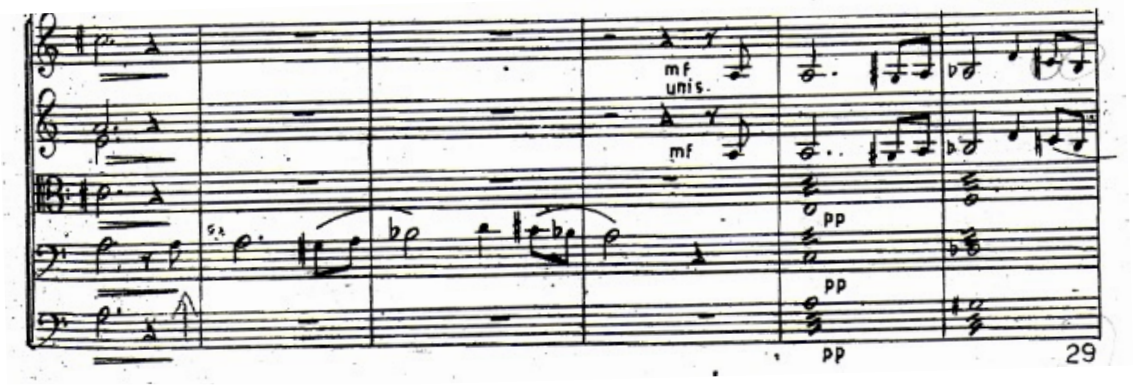


Musical Example 5. "Sa U -Pagëzuat II" (You just got Baptized II), traditional Byzantine, for choir, harmonized by Noli (Noli, 1936)
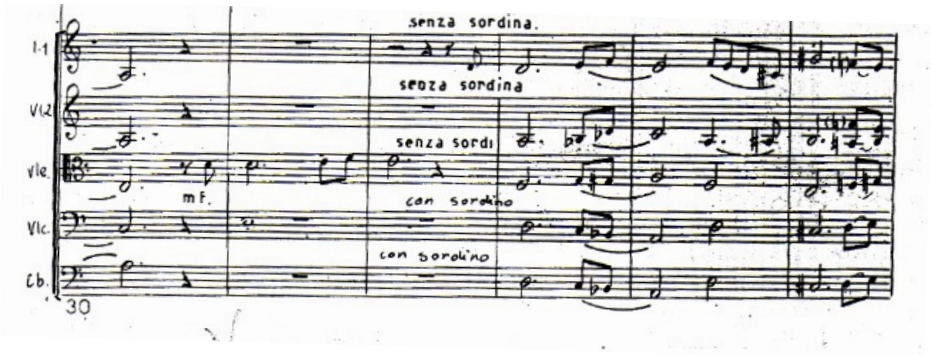
These harmonizations or arrangements for four-part choir demonstrate Noli's professionalism in the field of Orthodox church music. As a high-ranking cleric (archbishop) of this church and a formally trained composer, he carried out highly skilled work in this area.
Other works by him, created specifically for rituals or in the Byzantine spirit, include: Psalm 137 ("By the Rivers of Babylon") for mixed a cappella choir (1938); *Proulished* – an anthology of religious songs for the Albanian Orthodox Church in the USA; three books of religious hymns; and *Eastern Hymnal* (Boston, 1959) – a sacred musical composition for mixed choir (Noli, 1936)[4]. Meanwhile, other compositions of his created "outside the church" include orchestral-symphonic works such as *Byzantine Overture* (1938) – an orchestral composition with Byzantine themes, performed by the Boston Conservatory Orchestra (USA), as well as the symphonic poem *Skanderbeg* (1938), which Noli presented to the examining committee of the New England Conservatory (USA) and was performed for the first time by the student orchestra (Sokoli, 1978). Notably, even in this poem, "the liturgical spirit is felt through the use of themes and ecclesiastical *anthems*[5], which give this work a pronounced religious character" (Sokoli, 1978).

If the *Byzantine Overture* already indicates in its title that its content is based on Byzantine musical themes, in terms of the use of Byzantine scales, this usage can also be seen at the beginning of the symphonic poem *Skanderbeg*, specifically in the theme "The Call of Albania" (which is also the first episodic theme, corresponding to Material IV of the poem). Here, one can observe the concrete use of the Tërthori II Bizantin (*Plagal Second Tone*)[6] with augmented seconds in both tetrachords: first in the English horn and cellos in unison, answered by the clarinets and violins – Tetrachord I (starting on the note A), while immediately afterward it is completed with the second tetrachord (on the note E).
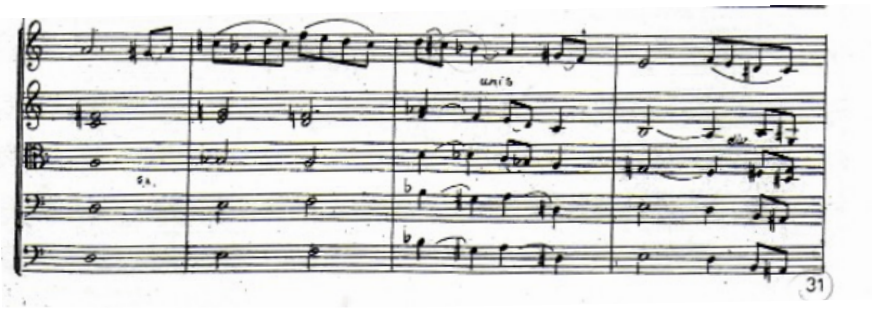
4 These are marked as "arranged by F. Noli".
5 This is what some religious songs of the Anglican liturgy are called, ibid.
6 A Byzantine scale that is also used in our traditional music.



Musical Example 6. The episodic theme of the development "The Call of Albania" – from Noli's symphonic poem Skanderbeg; the first phrase of this theme (original score)[7]



Musical Example 7. The second phrase of this episodic theme (original score)[8]



Musical Example 8. The continuation of this episodic theme (its second phrase), which completes the second tetrachord of the Plagal Second Tone (original score)[9]

7 The score of this poem – made available by A. Shalari (photocopy, 78 pages, coda missing). the first phrase of this theme.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

Thus, this episodic theme, constructed on the Plagal Second Tone, is built on A, with the following tetrachords:
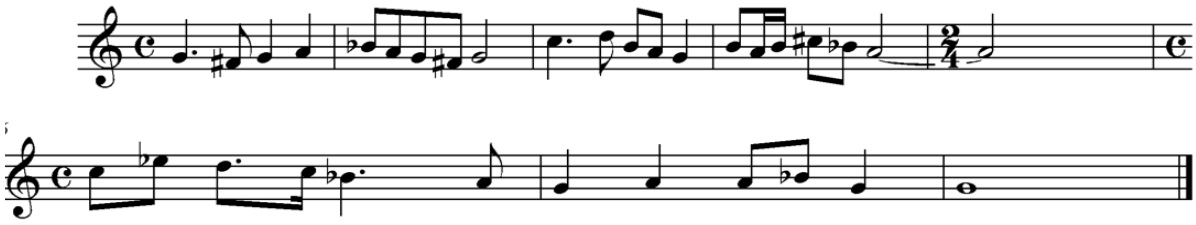
A, B♭, C♯, D, E, F, G♯, A
|_____|___|_____|
tetrachord I tone tetrachord II

The complete model/pattern of this scale, according to the sequence of semitones and tones, is:
½ tone +1½ tone + ½ tone + 1conjunct tone + ½ tone +1½ tone + ½ tone
|_____| |_____|
tetrachord I tetrachord II

Noli's use of Byzantine themes or scales in his musical works is, above all, a testament to his deep grounding in Orthodox tradition and culture, as well as his position as one of the highest-ranking clerics of the Albanian Orthodox Church in the diaspora. Noli's contribution, both as an archbishop and as a composer, developed in the United States, and only after the 1990s was his musical output - particularly his sacred compositions - "rehabilitated" and continues to be performed in our churches today. Meanwhile, his cultivated music reached the Albanian stage immediately in 1990, beginning with the vocal poem *The Poor Gaspar* (cited above), which was performed and recorded by the Albanian Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra. Turning our attention to Albanian professional music developed in Albania over the past century, a significant contribution was made by the conductor, pedagogue, and creator of vocal works Kostandin Trako (1919–1986), who was formed within an Orthodox religious culture. He studied at the National Orthodox Seminary "Apostle Paul" in Tirana (1931–1936), where, under the spiritual guidance of the clerical and lay staff—especially the esteemed and dedicated professor Dhimitër Beduli—he mastered the foundations of Byzantine music (Temo & Trako, 2008). K. Trako arranged the "*Eight-Mode Chants*" (Beduli, 1999), and also created "[…] compositions of Byzantine music for psaltes, for the Mass of Saint John Gojarti (harmonization, my note, H.S.), for mixed choirs, distinguished by their structure and tonal balance, the unity of content and form, pearls of Christian liturgy, in which the message of peace, goodness, and spiritual purity predominates" (Temo & Trako, 2008).

Other Albanian composers who have created both sacred pieces and works of professional music inspired by Orthodox church music include Th. Gaqi (1948), with several pieces sung at Easter (arrangements) for the church of Korçë, as well as H. Zacharian (1952), who arranged and adapted *The Lamentations of Christ* for string orchestra (during Holy Week). This work is conceived in two blocks: in the first block, the Byzantine melody serves as the first theme.

Theme I:

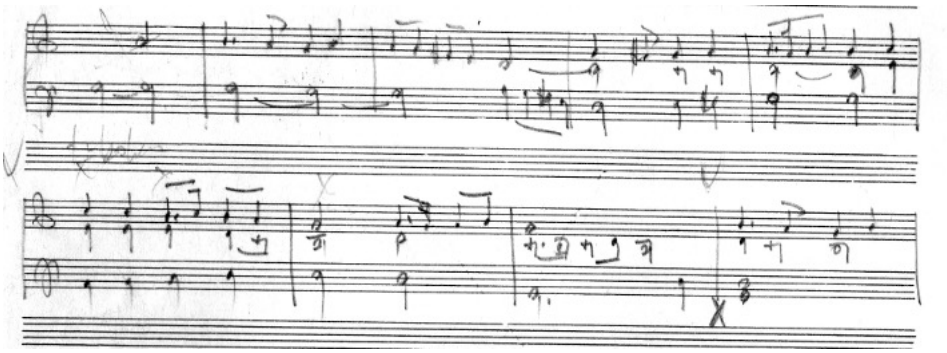


Musical Example 9.

In the construction of this Byzantine melody, it can be observed, specifically in measure 4, the augmented second between the notes C♯- B♭ in the descending line, where precisely this measure and measure 5 cadence on A, creating at this cadential moment the sound of the *Plagal Second Tone*.

Meanwhile, the second material of this block (Theme II) is a moment taken from the third stanza — "All Generations" (constructed in Mode III), a moment used as thematic material in the soundtrack of the film "The Night"[10].

Theme II:
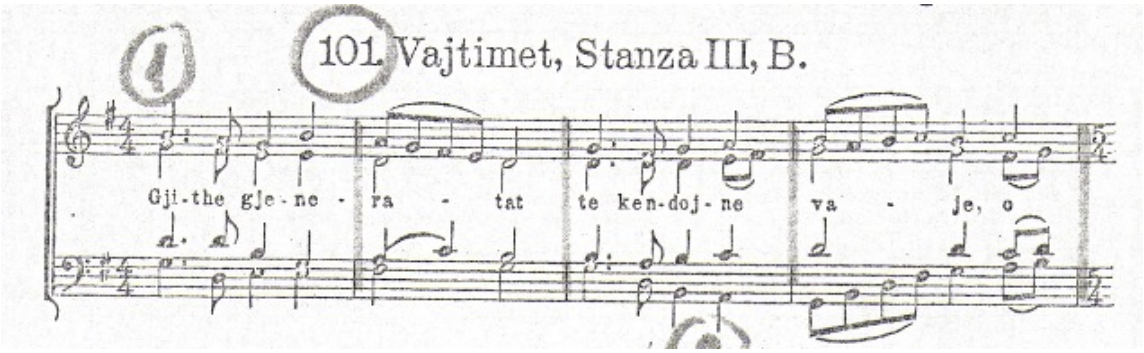


Musical Example 10. A passage taken from "The Lamentations of Christ" of Good Friday during Holy Week, specifically from Stanza III — "All Generations," arranged and adapted for string orchestra by H. Zacharian, and used as thematic material (with choir) in the film score he composed for the film "The Night" (original score)[11] .

10 The film "The Night", screenplay by R. Gjoza, directed by E. Mysliu, 1995.

11 Made available from the personal archive of the composer H. Zacharian.
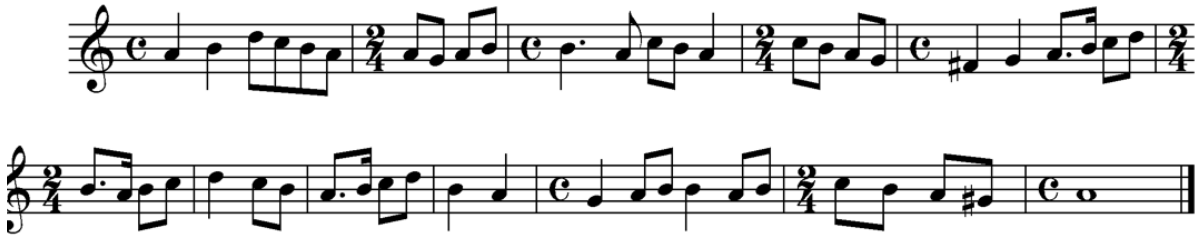
Specifically, Stanza III — "All Generations" (from the Lamentations) also appears harmonized by Noli in the collection *Hymnore*.



Musical Example 11. The opening of Stanza III (The Lamentations), harmonized by Noli (Noli, 1936)

Meanwhile, in the second block of the work in question, arranged and adapted by H. Zacharian, the solemn moment "Christ Is Risen" appears, taken from the "Mass of Easter Sunday" (constructed in Mode I).

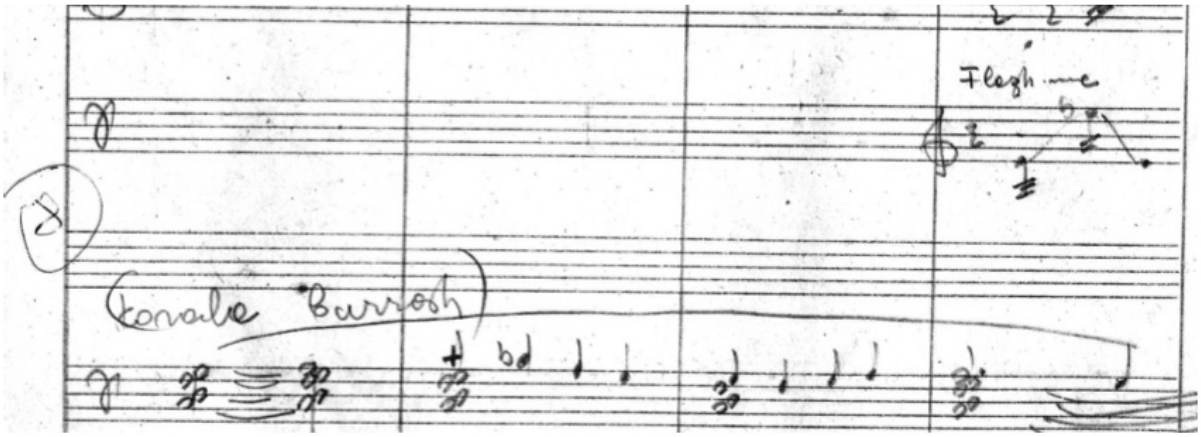
Theme:



Musical Example 12.

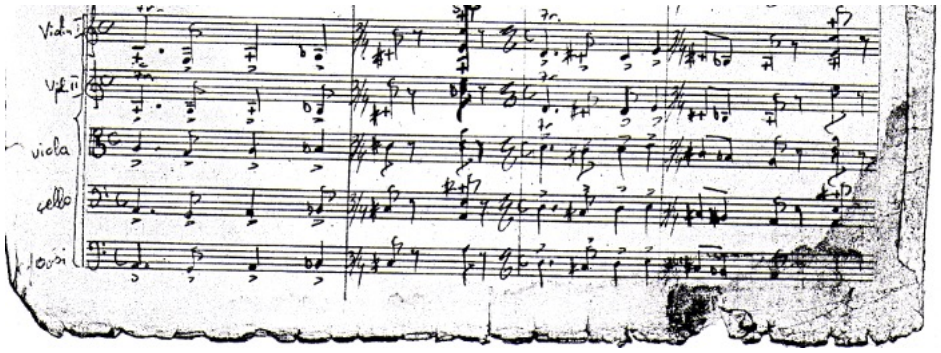
Furthermore, the composer H. Zacharian has also incorporated this same solemn moment, "Christ Is Risen" as a quotation in the excerpted episode from his Trio for violin, cello, and piano "The Cross and the Wind"[12] (though transposed to G), thus demonstrating his familiarity with this sacred liturgy and his professionalism in adapting such materials within his creative work.

12 A work composed and performed in 1994 at the "Festival of New Music."



Musical Example 13. The solemn moment "Christ Is Risen" from the Easter Sunday Mass, arranged by H. Zacharian (original score)[13]

Meanwhile, from the works of the composer Th. Gaqi, we highlight Rhapsody No. 1 for orchestra, "Albania in Celebration" composed in 1977, where the folk materials - used both as intonation and as quotation - are constructed precisely over *Plagal Second Tone*.
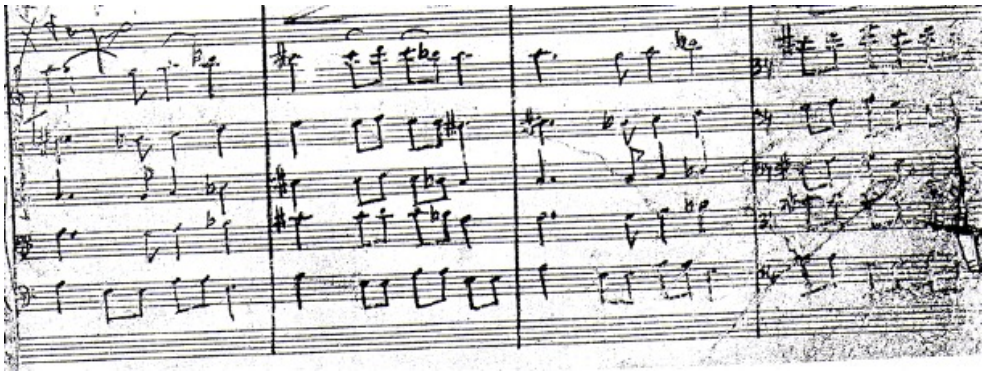


Musical Example 14. The opening of Th. Gaqi's Rhapsody No. 1 (original score)[14]

This rhapsody is conceived closer to a suite, while in its formal structure three main sections (blocks) can be observed, within which folk materials are generated. Thus, right at the opening of the rhapsody, the construction of Plagal Second Tone is evident, specifically through the formation of its second tetrachord: *A, B♭, C♯, D* (½ tone + 1½ tones + ½ tone).

13 Made available from the personal archive of the composer H. Zacharian.
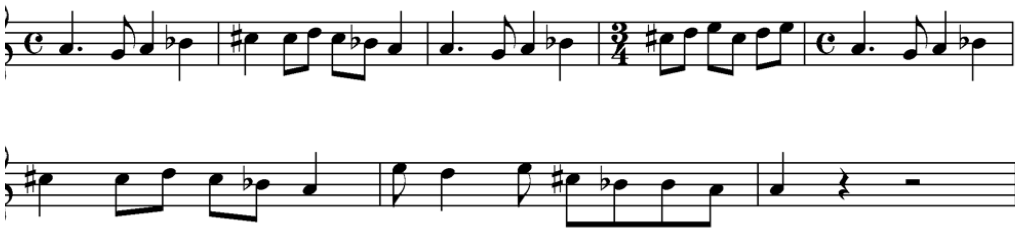
14 Provided from the file of original handwritten works by the composer Th. Gaqi, University of Arts Library.



Musical Example 15. The first theme of the first part of Rhapsody No. 1 (original score)[15]

The first theme of the first part (Block I), which emerges from the introduction, although composed by the composer based on folk intonations, creates a concrete association with the folk songs from Central Albania: "O ku po shkon moj goc'e vogël" and, subsequently, "Jelekun kadife."

The notated theme (complete):

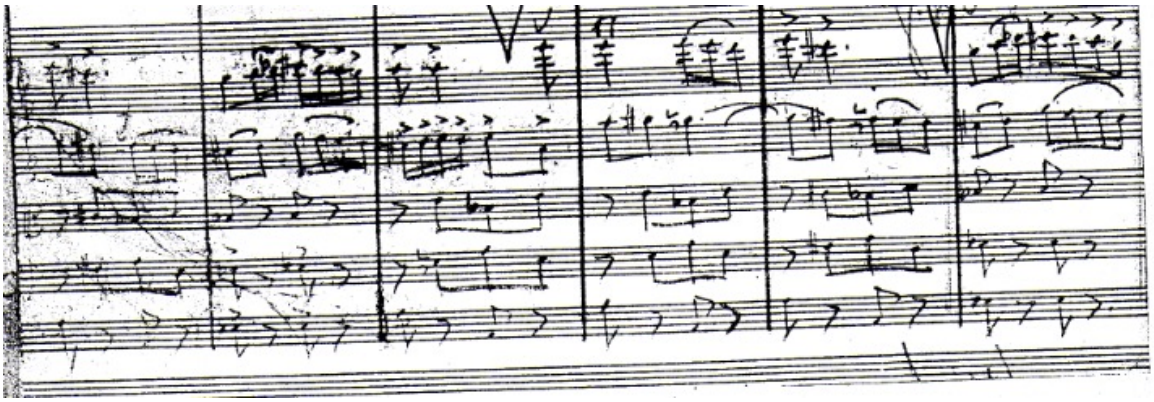


Musical Example 16.

This theme (in its two sections) is constructed, like the introduction from which it emerges, over Byzantine Mode II (A, B♭, C♯, D: ½ tone + 1½ tones + ½ tone). In the second block of the rhapsody, the composer relied on a folk song from Central Albania, "Çohuni djema shaloni atin" for the creation of the thematic material. This song itself, which serves as a reference for this material, is, as in the first part, again constructed on *Plagal Second Tone*, but placed on the note E (E, F, G♯, A: ½ tone + 1½ tones + ½ tone).
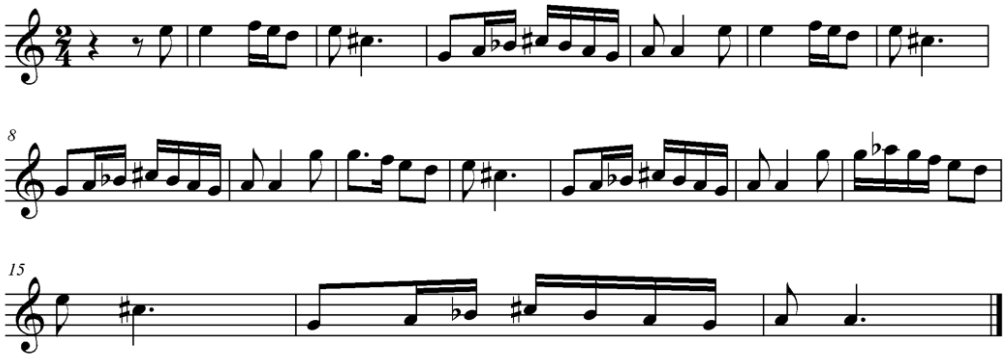
Meanwhile, in the third part (Block III), for the creation of the thematic material, the composer again drew on a folk song from Central Albania (Tirana), "Lake pupulake" also constructed on *Plagal Second Tone* on the note A (A, B♭, C♯, D: ½ tone + 1½ tones + ½ tone), which he utilized as a quotation in full (not as a recreation).

15 Ibid.
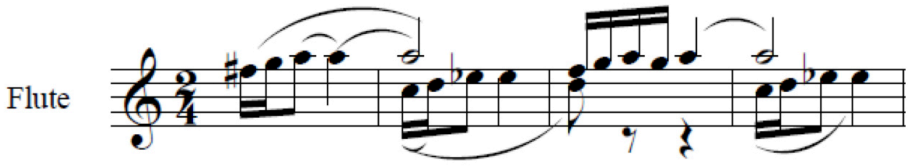


Musical Example 17. The theme of the third part of Rhapsody No. 1 (for strings), based on the folk song "Lake pupulake" from Central Albania (original score)[16]

The song "Lake pupulake" used as a quotation in Part III (Block III) of the rhapsody (fully notated):



Musical Example 18.

Even in the well-known "Vallja me dajre", Th. Gaqi again utilized Plagal Second Tone as in the original (on D), in the moments of the instrumental accompaniment, which creates an interesting lajt' intonation each time it appears (E–F♯).



Musical Example 19.

16 Ibid.

From this analysis of the main thematic moments of this rhapsody, the existence of a creative chain is evident, where the intersections between our folk songs and Byzantine music (especially through the use of *Plagal Second Tone* in our folk songs) have left their 'traces' even in cultivated (professional) Albanian music. Thus, the reliance on our folk music, specifically the songs from Central Albania, demonstrates the indirect influence of Byzantine music through folk music in a natural way within the works of our composers.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize that, beyond its function as research and investigation in our field of study on Byzantine music (also relying on studies of the musicological codices of the National Archives of Albania), this treatment opens a broader perspective on how our professional music has created bridges of connection with the Byzantine tradition - an area that, until now, has been almost entirely unexplored by Albanian musicologists in terms of its interferences in our musical culture. Although not numerous in number, the identified references demonstrate that Byzantine music penetrated even during the period when religious practices and church culture were banned in the country (before the 1990s), as a consequence of the dictatorship. These Byzantine influences often reached professional music indirectly, through folk music - particularly in the region of Central Albania. The case of Th. Gaqi's Rhapsody No. 1 serves as a clear example: several songs used in this work carry influences from Byzantine music, especially from its scales, *Plagal Second Tone*. Thus, the chain of influences follows a clear path: from Byzantine music to folk music shaped by it, and then to professional music, where both tradition - folk and religious - merge, imparting a distinct melodic and modal character to our creative output.

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File of original handwritten works by the composer Th. Gaqi, University of Arts Library.

The Role of Wind Orchestras in the Development of Cultivated Music in Albania

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine wind orchestras in Albania as the first institutions that enabled the learning of musical instruments in the country. Brass and wind instruments began to be used in the late 19th century, at a time when cultural influences, particularly from Italy, played a significant role in shaping Albania's cultural, economic, and social developments.
The central research question is: What contribution did wind orchestras make to the development and enrichment of art music in Albania? The study applies a combined methodological approach, incorporating historical, cultural, and sociological perspectives, to explore the impact of wind orchestras. The findings highlight the key role these musical formations played in the advancement of cultivated music in Albania. The adoption of advanced music literacy practices and the establishment of wind orchestras across cities and educational institutions contributes significantly to this progress. These developments foster the organization of national and international artistic events, such as meetings, competitions, and festivals, and influence the shaping of educational and cultural policies. The discussions and conclusions of this study emphasize the positive impact of musical formations on Albanian youth, bringing them together and connecting them with peers from around the world. Music functions as a universal language that facilitates intercultural communication and collaboration. In this way, learning a musical instrument becomes not only an educational process, but also a means of expressing the sublime language of music—one of the most powerful forms of human expression.

Keywords

history of music bands, musical formations, intercultural collaboration

Introduction

The first musical formations that used wind and brass instruments originated in the city of Shkodër. According to researcher Tonin Zadeja, the first wind orchestra in Shkodër, and indeed in the entire country, was established in 1878. It was founded with the help of the Franciscan missionary, the Arbëresh At Tom Marcozzi, and the contribution of the Shkodran magnate Mr. Filip Parruca. For teaching the instruments, the Italian master from Naples, Giovanni Canale, was hired. This ensemble consisted of 31 musicians (Zadeja, 2006).

The creation of this ensemble served as a guide for the formation of other groups in the city. In the years that followed, several other wind orchestras were formed, such as "Vllaznia," "Bogdani," "Antoniane," and others. Renowned musicians and conductors from these formations left a significant mark on the development of music in the country.

Figures like Palokë Kurti, Frano Ndoja, Zef Kurti, At Martin Gjoka, Luigj Prela, and Sulë Licaj played a foundational role in teaching and promoting these instruments among the youth of the time. The band formations and the halls where young people gathered to learn the instruments became the first informal music schools in this field. These early "schools," so to speak, nurtured some of Albania's most important future musicians, such as Prenkë Jakova, Çesk Zadeja, Tonin Harapi, Tish Daija, Ramadan Sokoli, Simon Gjoni, Pjetër Dungu, and many others who later contributed significantly to the development of Albanian music.

The long-lasting contribution of these artists supports the conclusion that these musical ensembles were de facto institutions where music and instruments were taught. These bands became full-fledged schools for the learning and performance of cultivated music in Albania.
In the city of Korçë, the efforts of local patriots and the establishment of cultural clubs enabled the creation, in 1908, of the "Banda e Lirisë" (Band of Freedom). This musical band had 40 musicians under the direction of maestro Pascal Anibale, an Italian who had come from Egypt, supported by local patriots and merchants. A significant detail is that in the band's charter it stated: "*The Society is obliged to spread music education to the schoolboys as well, who shall not pay any fee, and the instruments will be provided by the Society*" (Mato, 2004).

In a similar spirit, the "Afërdita" Musical Band was formed in the city of Elbasan in 1917, following the patriotic spirit inspired by the establishment of the Normal School. The Austrian maestro Anton Cimmfli was brought in to teach the instruments, funded by local citizens and merchants. A particularly notable contribution to the spread and teaching of brass instruments came from the "Vatra" Musical Band, which arrived from America in 1920 under the direction of Mr. Thoma Nasi. This musical group was created in 1916 by young Albanian emigrants in the U.S., part of the patriotic federation of the same name, "Vatra." The ensemble was composed of 29 musicians,all young Albanian emigrants. Its arrival enriched the artistic life of Korçë and other cities across Albania, where it gave concerts, even supporting fighters on the front lines during the Vlora War in 1920. The song composed by Thoma Nasi, "Vlora Vlora," became an anthem sung by fighters everywhere (Balli, 2006).

The music of famous composers like Verdi, Bizet, Wagner, Schubert, and others was introduced to the Albanian public through performances by this musical formation in town squares and

streets. In reference to this contribution, Faik Konica, using a concert poster of the Vatra Band that featured Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* and Wagner's *Tannhäuser March*, wrote: "A group of Albanians from America, the boys of the Vatra Band from Worcester, led by Professor Thoma Nasi, are striving to introduce good music in Albania" (Konica, 2001, Balli, 2006).

And further, he continued: "A band that dares to perform such elevated music deserves the sympathy and respect of every enlightened person. Poor, beloved Schubert! Your immortal Unfinished Symphony, a marvel of beauty and longing, in which destiny seems to converse with teary-eyed mercy, was finally heard in Albania. And Wagner's dignified march showed our people,too often accustomed to vulgar trivialities,a model of noble beauty" (Konica, 2001). Thoma Nasi, the leader of the Vatra Band, emerged as a key figure in the development of Albanian music. He distinguished himself as a composer and orchestrator of renowned repertoire, enriching it further with local musical works. Having studied flute at the Boston Conservatory, he made great efforts to establish a proper music school in Albania (Balli, 2006). Additional efforts in this direction were made in 1929 during King Zog's reign, with the creation of the Artistic Committee of the National Entity "Djelmënia Shqiptare" (Albanian Youth). One of King Zog's sisters, Princess Rukije, was involved in overseeing the committee's operations. In 1932, efforts began to prepare the documentation for the establishment of a music school, envisioned as the "Royal Institute of Music." Mr. Sotir Kozmo, a former music teacher at the Korçë Lyceum, was tasked with selecting young talents. There were even requests to hire foreign (mainly Italian) teachers, to be paid by the Albanian state. During this time, the subjects, departments, and study durations were also planned.

Unfortunately, the initiative failed, and by 1935 the efforts to establish Albania's first formal music school had come to an end, despite the fact that cultivated music was already being performed in the country.

These circumstances lead us to the conclusion that up until the end of World War II, the teaching of brass instruments in Albania was almost entirely autodidactic. During the monarchy, there were efforts to send some Albanian musicians abroad, mainly to neighboring Italy, to attend professional courses or schools for these instruments. One such case was Mr. Sulejman Gjevori, who studied trumpet in Florence. Upon returning, he initially contributed in Durrës and later in Shijak and Elbasan, helping to establish and direct musical bands and teach brass instruments.

Other notable Albanian musicians, such as Prenkë Jakova and Çesk Zadeja, studied at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome for two years. Another prominent figure from this period was Luigj Filaj, who studied with August Forster in Vienna. Their subsequent contributions became undeniably essential to the formation of Albanian music history and its various genres of artistic creation.

Taking a broader look at the state of music education, particularly in the field of instrument learning, we can confidently state that musical bands were the first schools for wind instrument education in Albania. Due to the nature of these ensembles, they also taught music theory, including reading and writing sheet music, laying the foundations for cultivated music in the country. Since there were no formal schools for learning these instruments, the conductors of these bands also served as the first music teachers. However, the professional level during this

time, both of those teaching and those playing, often did not meet the technical standards required by musical works. The repertoire was often carefully adapted to suit the limited technical skills of the musicians, usually consisting of simpler genres such as marches or patriotic songs.

This artistic process of learning musical works evolved within these ensembles, from writing and reading music parts to public performances in the streets and squares of Albanian cities.
The democratic nature of these bands had a significant educational impact on the broader population, who would hear these bands during their concerts. In this environment, wind and brass instruments were introduced and taught for the first time. Young people of the era learned how to read and write music, and music education progressed through the exposure to cultivated music composed by prominent international composers.

Teaching these instruments within the bands laid the groundwork for the pedagogy of wind, brass, and percussion instruments in Albania. The performance of numerous works by well-known composers by these ensembles testifies to the progress and improvement in the musicians' interpretative abilities. After Albania's liberation, many of these musicians contributed to the establishment of the country's first orchestras. In most cases, they became founding members and helped develop this newly established musical tradition.

Post–World War II Developments and the Institutionalization of Brass Education

Around 1950, with the efforts of self-taught musician Mr. Kristo Kote, the first formal class for brass instruments was founded at the Artistic Lyceum of Tirana. In this class, students learned trumpet, trombone, and French horn.

In 1953, a foundational orchestra was formed in Tirana from various instrumentalists. This group would later become the Orchestra of the Opera and Ballet Theater.
To meet the country's growing needs in 1958–1959, some brass students were sent to fellow socialist countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, where they studied in schools or courses modeled on military bands of the communist tradition.

However, following the breakdown of relations with Eastern Bloc countries in 1961,especially after Albania's exit from the Warsaw Pact,all students studying in these countries returned home. This marked the last contact that the brass class had with Eastern European conservatories. These students did not complete their full academic cycles abroad. It's important to note that between 1945 and 1960, there were no Albanian students studying music in Western countries. Those instrumentalists who didn't complete their studies abroad were later attached to the Higher Institute of Arts (founded in 1962 in Tirana, now the University of the Arts) and completed their degrees there.

In the early years of the institute's activity, the brass instrument class was led by trombonist Muharrem Bërxolli, who had received musical training in Bulgaria. After the graduation of Mr. Prokop Nishku (in 1967), who had studied trumpet in Czechoslovakia, the trumpet class was finally led by a professionally trained Albanian musician.

In the following years, the music education system in this field expanded with the establishment

of eight-year and secondary music schools in other cities across the country. Specialized schools for music and the fine arts were opened in Shkodër, Korçë, Elbasan, Berat, Vlorë, Durrës, Fier, and Gjirokastër, and more recently in Kukës and Peshkopi.

Many students who graduated from the Institute of Arts went on to become music teachers in these schools, contributing to the spread and teaching of musical instruments across the country. Meanwhile, orchestras in the capital city were gradually filled with university-trained instrumentalists. Among the most prominent students who took over teaching trumpet at the University of the Arts was Prof. Isak Shehu, whose contributions significantly elevated both the interpretative quality and the repertoire available for performance. He was also the first Albanian trumpeter to compose original works and perform them publicly, promoting the trumpet as a solo instrument for the first time in Albania.

As general education expanded across the country, in addition to students in formal music schools, many amateur instrumentalists began learning in local courses and Pioneer Houses established nationwide. This made it possible for many of them to start performing and eventually fill almost all municipal fanfares and musical bands formed throughout Albania.
In the main cities, alongside musical bands, philharmonic orchestras were also established. During this period, national musical gatherings were organized for these ensembles. The professionalization of these formations with trained instrumentalists raised the interpretative level of performance. This also introduced a competitive spirit among musical groups across cities. Most musical bands performed marches, partisan songs, and revolutionary pieces, repertoire closely aligned with the political ideology of the time. As a result, these formations often became megaphones for the regime's propaganda. The imposed schematism in repertoire selection limited the creativity of composers. The push to "Albanianize" all content led to an isolation from international music culture, both from the West and even, after the 1960s, from the East. This total isolation impacted the technical and interpretive standards of instrumentalists. Low-quality imported instruments and outdated teaching methodologies also contributed to the limitations in performance quality. Often, technical limitations and the inability to play across all registers of the instruments led to issues in interpreting musical works.

The lack of formal professional training among many band instrumentalists and the absence of regular practice meant that playing was often harsh, overly loud, and lacked tonal precision. Attempts to imitate Eastern European military band models were undermined by the lack of appropriate instruments and qualified personnel, often resulting in poor imitations. The rapid political, economic, and social changes at the end of the 1990s were accompanied by an opening in the field of art and culture. With increased contact with the world, mass emigration, and the rise of a free market economy, music professionals were exposed to new and unfamiliar methods and practices.

The arrival of conductors and instrumentalists, especially from Western countries, as well as the new repertoire being introduced, made it necessary to adopt modern methods and techniques for brass instrument performance. In this new social environment, the Albanian music education system, particularly the training of brass musicians, faced a significant challenge.
Currently, the system for teaching brass instruments in Albania still functions under outdated models inherited from the past regime. While the totalitarian system was rejected, the educational

structures that it left behind have not been effectively maintained or adapted. There is no clear vision or strategy guiding music education today.

Relevant institutions have failed to take steps toward implementing new music education policies like those adopted in developed countries. At the same time, the old system is no longer effective. If this transitional uncertainty continues, music education in Albania risks falling into crisis, with long-term consequences for national culture. The solution lies in implementing a new, modern system within the music education chain. It should begin by teaching a musical instrument to every child in Albania's elementary (9-year) schools. The selection of students who will study these instruments must be done carefully, under the guidance of qualified specialists. Learning brass instruments should be integrated into the official music curriculum, using international models, especially the American model of music education in schools. Starting from elementary schools, continuing into secondary education and universities, this approach would allow every 8-year, high school, and university institution to have its own musical band. This educational chain would ensure the identification and development of talented individuals, who could then attend regional or national professional music schools. Mass participation would raise the overall level of quality and lead to the creation of diverse musical formations. Such variety in ensembles would support the development of different musical genres and enrich the country's artistic life.

Currently, school music textbooks in Albania lack essential information about musical instruments. Music is taught for only one hour per week, which is neither adequate nor educational for the generations we are raising. Let us remember the heroic efforts of Albanian patriots who established the Elbasan Normal School in 1909. In that school's early programs, music was taught for three hours per week. Many of its graduates later became leading patriots and outstanding educators, making significant contributions to Albanian education. Teaching a musical instrument as part of the music subject requires passion, dedication, and time to bring it to life. The use of modern methodologies makes learning more enjoyable and accessible. In developed countries, renowned musicians often play instruments together with children, encouraging and motivating them. Many of these musicians also teach masterclasses to children in different countries. The goal of these initiatives is for children to love music and enjoy playing it. According to numerous scientifically supported theories, learning a musical instrument supports cognitive development in children.

"Playing a musical instrument automatically enhances self-discipline, self-expression, communication, appreciation of art and beauty, creativity, social interaction, motor skills, critical listening, and much more. Imagine a world without music" (Vizzutti, 2007). The relationship between a child and a brass instrument is not merely a musical activity, but can be compared to participation in a sport. The development of breathing and exhalation techniques supports the healthy growth of the lungs (Damrow, 2002).

Embracing new ideas and modern teaching methods used around the globe is the responsibility of the teaching staff. Continuous training of educators, the organization of annual meetings between teachers and students, and the exchange of ideas and experiences are essential for progress. Inviting renowned instrumentalists and professors from advanced music schools around the world would bring a spirit of collaboration and support the goals of such gatherings.

A comprehensive reform of the teaching system is urgently needed, including interventions in current methodologies and the implementation of progressive educational practices.

A major improvement would be shifting from learning a single brass instrument to learning the entire family of brass instruments. A student should not only study one instrument but should become familiar with the full spectrum of the brass family. The equipping of brass classrooms with modern didactic tools is a necessity. Teaching students how to use various mutes (sordinas) enriches the color and expressive effects of the instrument. These tonal nuances and effects, indicated in the musical scores, help convey to the audience the emotions the composer intended. The absence of mute usage in performance leads to incomplete musical expression and hinders the delivery of the intended message. The lack of proper use of instruments and mutes on stage reveals a lack of professionalism that must be addressed. Equipping orchestras with all necessary instrument types and accessories, including mutes, must become a priority for relevant institutions. This issue requires a swift and professional response, involving local and international experts. Facing the reality and adopting the best global practices will result in measurable progress.

To reform this system, it is essential to fill pedagogical staff gaps that currently exist in many schools. Ensuring an adequate supply of instruments and qualified, well-trained educators would also shift current mindsets. Teaching these families of instruments in schools and integrating them into diverse musical ensembles should happen as soon as possible. This would enhance the sound palette and improve the artistic quality of musical formations across the country. Establishing institutional connections with homologous schools and traditional music education centers worldwide, along with individual collaborations, masterclasses, and workshops, would accelerate progress. Exchanging experiences and facing global standards will support professional growth and elevate the field. The development of performance skills on brass instruments is directly linked to the quality and advancement of orchestral formations in the country.

Teaching music through instrument performance, especially starting with children, would place Albania on par with developed countries. Realizing this dream would mean that every school, university, and city could have its own orchestra or musical band. Such circumstances would allow for the organization of concerts, competitions, and festivals at the national or international level. Musicians and musical ensembles from Albania and abroad could participate, contributing not only to artistic exchange but also to educational and cultural policy development. The community of performers and educators must work together to raise awareness and find ways to support future generations. Performers, as a community, should unite in their efforts to change the current state of music education and advocate within the proper institutional frameworks.

Musical interpretation represents the final phase of a creative process. Through performance, musicians make it possible for musical creations to reach the audience. This gives the performer a central role in shaping musical taste and culture. When Albanian youth play music together, they connect with one another and with peers around the world. The shared musical alphabet makes the language of music a powerful and easy medium of global communication.

Ultimately, through the learning of instruments, we learn and speak the divine language of music. As Faik Konica once wrote in one of his articles on music: “For those who understand and love it deeply, music is not a pleasure, it is a religion.” (Konica, 2001).

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The beginning of professional music in Albania and its connection with the wind band movement in the city of Shkoder (1876-1946)

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Abstract

The wind band's movement in the city of Shkodra was undoubtedly one of the pioneering initiatives of artistic events, not at all usual and/or atypical, closely related to the time/ circumstance factor. Albanian professional music, compared to European countries, has not known the same dynamic of development. It was created amidst geopolitical phenomena of epochal proportions. Given this, the artistic events that took place in Albania in the late 18th and early 19th centuries can be considered completely extraordinary, to the limit of the unbelievable, in terms of artistic dimensions and the diversity of arts such as: music, literature, painting and photography as well as the speed of its spread from the city of Shkodra throughout the country. The beginning was the initiative of the American-Albanian composer Father Marcozzi and the musicians Giovanni Canale and Palok Kurti, culminating with the salutatory participation of the Wind Band "Vatra" in the battle of Vlora (1920). As can be seen from the research field, the goal is to reflect an extremely interesting reality and cornerstone in the history of the genesis of professional Albanian music. Naturally, the approach to socio-cultural and artistic factors will be both of a research and exploratory nature. For example, it undertakes to highlight the values of the most important contributions of musicians Sul Liçaj and Pavllo Zhvap or the role of patriots Hil Mosi and Ragip Gjylbegu in it. Under these conditions, our main intention remains the increased contribution to the topic we have undertaken to address, always seen through an analytical eye and enriched with new elements. In conclusion, it can be said that the chosen topic and its constituent elements, would arouse sufficient interest for both readers and researchers.

Keywords

Brass Band, Professional music, Shkodër

Introduction

The most important dates of the stages of development of professional Albanian music belong mainly to the 20th century, when "Albanian Music in a European Framework" (Hysi,1991) was formed, but almost all studies conducted so far agree with the fact that musical art could not have been - and in fact has not been - separated from the progress of other arts such as literature, painting, photography, architecture or other artistic vocations. It is a well-known historical fact that in Albania at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, extraordinary artistic events and happenings occurred, which probably or most likely did not occur in almost the entire western Balkan region. All of this, extended, spread or built and developed on a relatively broad artistic dimension, in terms of the diversity of the arts. All this, extended, spread or built and developed on a relatively broad artistic dimension, in terms of the diversity of the arts. So, "unusual developments" were noted both in the musical and literary realms, both in painting and in the art of photography, but also beyond, always viewed under the contextual orbit time/circumstance. But let us dwell a little on the impression that the expression "unusual developments" can create for us, and try to argue in a few words why we can consider these events or artistic events special, perhaps in the entire region mentioned above. We know it very well, given that we have well-documented a significant portion of historical events, what geopolitical issues and phenomena occurred in the Balkans and wider Europe at the turn of the 19th and 20th. The movements and efforts of Albanians for freedom and independence from the Ottoman Empire, the predatory intentions of Serbo-Montenegrins and Greeks towards Albanian territories, the wars and intentions of Balkan countries towards each other and other events that extended across almost our entire peninsula and even further, culminating or highlighted with the infamous Berlin Congress, the First and Second Balkan War, the First World War, the final division of Albanian lands at the London conference, etc., that anyway concluded, to us Albanians, and this is the most important, with the independence of our country won with blood and countless sacrifices, added here and the socio-economic factors that the country was experiencing at that time. Under these conditions, therefore, by analyzing under this orbit or perspective of time/circumstance contextuality, we understand and even convincingly appreciate what we would call "the beginning" or "where it originated" or "where the journey began". Where the first defining lines or contours were removed - as the basic unit of all arts - of the Albanian national school of music, or better defined: some of its essential constituent elements, which is also the interest of this research article. In these historical moments, of epochal importance for Albania and Albanians, patriotic and very talented people, devoted to very sensitive national issues, equipped with knowledge and culture, however "modest", visionaries of the future, men of the pen who tried to project - in a certain sense - the future of their nation, giving their best for the people's dignity. And this proved to be no a small feat, as the first foundation stones were laid upon which the architectural structure of the country's professional artistic and musical future was built.

The Methodology

The methodology followed is that of including with analytical and comparative methods numerous aspects in the research field as well as a rigorous approach to the temporal, historical, social and geopolitical context of our country for the period we study or talk about. The facts and artistic events have been analyzed, of course, faithfully to the chronicles and documentation

of the time as well as personal testimonies, taking into account here the bibliography and photo library used, which has helped a lot to further clarify the central idea of the work through the evidence, namely: the beginnings or where professional music originated in Albania.

Development

So, what were these professional music movements? What or where did they consist of? Where did they originate and then spread?

Wind Band movements in the city of Shkodra as one of the pioneering initiatives of major artistic events that took place at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

"The city of Shkodra, with its authentic choral and wind band formations, became the cradle where cultivated Albanian music originated and develop". - would wrote the composer Gjon Kapedani, and then it continues – "The birth of these formations is related to the historical moments that Albania was going through at that time, when the Ottoman Empire was in its final throes and when the Albanian issue required a solution. Their repertoire, which aimed mainly at music with pronounced national spirit, simultaneously awakened in the youth the desire for professional music, which until then had not even been thought of or talked about" (Kapedani, 2006). As we explained a little above, when we were talking about the "beginnings", or "where the Albanian professional musical art began its journey", at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the city of Shkodra, and then, among various Albanian regions and cities, aside others, the formations of the first musical groups that play together wind and percussion, which is universally known, for the period we are talking about, as the wind band. Nor should it be doubted at all, or overlooked the fact that it was mainly the civic band movements that, as far as musical art is concerned, appeared as an unusual and even unimaginable innovation for a country like Albania, since to find a similar reality due to the extremely unequal ratio of the time/circumstance coefficient we would have to advance geographically far from the countries bordering Albanian lands.

"Making music together means to create a common good.... We are not here to entertain the public, but we try to create and convey culture, which is the basis of civil coexistence in a society." (Muti, 2008) - says one of the greatest contemporary artists, the famous conductor Riccardo Muti. It is undoubtedly our goal, among other things, to identify the facts that led to one or another logical development of events, the causes that led to this or that phenomenon, the circumstances that influenced their progress or not, etc. In short, more or less reasonings of this type, always within the research field, preliminarily defined as well as the relevant topic as one of its derivatives. In this framework of reasoning and presentation of the events that actually occurred, the history of the birth and development of professional music in Albania necessarily passes within the walls of the Church, a very interesting fact, since the religious factor has been important even in the history of the beginning of cultivated music in Western Europe. So, we can confidently say that professional Albanian music originated between 1876 – 1878, the eve of the Albanian League of Prizren, when: "Father Gabriele Musati chose from among the congregation about 20 boys who had good voices and ears, and in August 1876 he opened a music school for them, and they began to sing so well with notes that they formed a regular choir. In August 1877, a beautiful academy with an orchestra was established, where three

selected musical pieces were performed. Father Luigi Mazza, Carlo Vasilico and another monk played the violins and clarinets, this is how the congregational orchestra first did .... and yet, two more times new instruments were ordered in bulk …. and the Congregational orchestra was completed. On Christmas Day of this year, at the midday Mass there were thirteen who played" (Saraçi, 2016). As and when another Franciscan priest and composer, Father Marcozzi "who collected the necessary money among the citizens of Shkodra and brought to Albania precisely a professional like the Neapolitan master Giovanni Canale, who with devotion founded and led the first wind band in Albania, to give way after four years of hard work to a musician like composer Palok Kurti" (Zadeja, 2006), while the renowned researcher Vaso Tole says: "It is a well-known fact that the very first creation of cultivated Albanian music was an orchestral piece titled "Bashkimi i Shqipërisë", written in Shkodër in 1880 by the composer Palok Kurti." (Tole, 2004).The music band evokes freedom, it walks and marches, runs through the streets and squares under the open sky, evoking morality and civic spirit. When you see it, the great aphorism that says: "The moral law within me, the sky above me" (Kant, 1781). And after the first swallow that heralds the spring of a renewed life in Shkodra and other Albanian cities - like in no other place within their borders -, one after another an impressive number of artistic associations, civic musical groups, choirs and mandolins were born, formed or created that distinguished this golden period such as: the first "buds" or "shoots", and more precisely as the "beginnings" of that "where it originated", of that "where the journey began", of where the first defining lines of the national school of professional music were drawn. There were numerous musical formations born in the city of Shkodra during this period: the wind band of the Cathedral Church, today the wind band of the municipality of the city of Shkodra, "Liria", "Vllaznia", "Bogdani", "Rozafa", "Antoniane" and "Illyricum" associations with their respective musical formations, the famous wind band of the School "Parruca", the "Konvikti i Maleve" wind band School, the "Garnizoni Ushtarak" wind and percussion band, etc. Talented and competent professionals knowledgeable in the field of professional music were the "Masters" who formed and directed these musical formations and who composed, adapted, and orchestrated for them. The first masters like Palok Kurti, Frano Ndoja, Zef Kurti, Luigj Prela, Martin Gjoka, author of the first Albanian symphony "Dy lule mbi vorr të Skanderbegut" and the first opera "Juda Makabej", lyrics by Father Gjergj Fishta, Sul Liçaj, an important figure in the pantheon of professional Albanian music like Prenk Jakova. etc., They contributed not only as founders and leaders of musical groups, but above all as creators, orchestrators and arrangers of many well-known Albanian popular themes. "It was these orchestral formations, together with church and secular choirs, that brought forth from their bosom an entire generation of artists with indelible contributions to the development of Albanian music of the future, that this wonderful movement from which such names of Albanian art emerged as: Pjetër Dungu, Çesk Zadeja, Tish Daija, Ramadan Sokoli, Tonin Harapi etc." (Zadeja, 2006). The same situation and the same artistic phenomena occurred in several other regions and cities of Albania, although it is easy to understand that not everywhere with the same intensity of events. However, in Korça, for example, during the period we are talking about, cultural and artistic societies were established such as: "Shoqëria e Arteve të Bukura", "Djelmëria Korçare", "Lyra", "Rinia Korçare", "Agroni" etc., music band such as: "Liria", "Vatra" (the Albanian branch), "Shoqëria Qytetare", "Shoqata Bashkiake" or the wind band of the "Garnizoni Ushtarak" etc., under the direction of Masters like: Pasquale Annibale, Thoma Nasi, Mihal Ciko, Misto Treska, well-known conductor and pedagogue Gaqo Avrazi, composer of the operetta "Agimi" the opera "Lulja e Kujtimit" and the symphonic poem "Borova" Kristo Kono.

In Elbasan, the city of roses and music - according to the famous Turkish chronicler Evlia Çelebi - under the leadership of the distinguished patriot and scholar Lef Nosi, in the first years of the 20th century, were established cultural and artistic societies, such as: "Vllaznia" end "Afërdita" but also society "Lahuta" headed by Thanas Floqi, wind band of the "Garnizoni i Ushtrisë" headed by Master Sul Liçaj etc. Such civic music formations were established throughout Albanian regions and cities, such as in Durrës, Vlorë, Kukës, Gjakovë, Shkup, etc. It is worth highlighting, as a very significant and meaningful fact, the founding of the Tirana Wind Band (1924), established and formed by perhaps the greatest Albanian intellectual figure, Father Fan Sebastian Noli, which later took the name Albanian Royal Band to be succeeded as the Albanian Imperial Guard Military Band, which also managed to make a very successful tour in Italy.

"On October 6, 1940, when the fog of war had covered all of Italy, the "exotic" Military Band of the Albanian Imperial Guards arrived in our cities, where their rich and splendid traditional Albanian costumes, aroused the great interest of the public that filled the squares of their concerts." (Besio, 1988). After the end of the war, important elements of this music band over the years, together with Masters: Gaqo Avrazi, Sul Liçaj, Kristaq Panduku, etc., supported and directed the Armed Forces Wind Band of Albania (OFFA) - named as such an entity on 18 October 1944 in the village of Priskë, Tirana - which continues to work today under the same name. Master Sul Liçaj, otherwise known as Tosku (1892 – 1968) His valuable historical contribution to the fondation of the musical bands in Albania.

The artistic and especially patriotic merits of the Masters, a terminology that is still mentioned today by Shkodra art lovers, or the artistic and especially musical merits of the founders and at the same time musical directors of the first musical formations in Albania, were both fundamental and significant, especially if we consider or take into account the factors, circumstances and events of one of the most important periods in the history of the Albanian people: that of state formation, freedom and independence. All of this, as explained above, came about thanks to the determination and heroism of Albanian fighters from all regions, but also the patriotism, knowledge and wisdom of intellectuals and philosophers, musicians and poets, painters and photographers. Educated in prestigious schools in Europe or America, they only awaited the happy moment of returning to Albania, thus resulting in being decisive in reflecting the highest moral and cultural values of the Albanian people: both in terms of strengthening the sense of patriotism, as well as in increasing collective awareness of invaluable national virtues and values, thus becoming co-promoters of the renaissance of our nation. In these historical circumstances, Master Sul Liçaj - nicknamed "Tosku" by the people of Shkodra, due to his southern origins – worked and contributed to the establishment and musical direction of many of the first wind bands. Born in Luzat, Tepelena in 1892, at a very young age he emigrated with his family to Turkey, where he was in the music educated at the Istanbul Military College. He stood out as a special talent, as he managed to play several instruments at once, but especially deepened his musical knowledge in the field of theory and masterfully mastered several wind instruments, such as Flugelhorns and Clarinets – inseparable parts of ensembles such as Wind and Percussion Bands or Military Wind Fanfares – and also received sufficient lessons in violin and mandolin. As an adult, immediately after completing his studies, he came into contact with elements of the Vatra Society, from whom he received instructions to immediately return to Albania to help establish the first Albanian musical formations, wherever was possible within

the Albanian territories. For this reason, he was recommended to a historically important figure such as the patriot, publicist and politician Hilë Mosi, who sent him to the city of Shkodra, the city where the first musical band in Albania was born and where, as we described above, an artistic movement incomparable to any other reality in Albania and even more so in the region, had begun to flourish. In Shkodra, the master Sul Liçaj forms, establishes or builds together with the musician Pavllo Zhvap, the wind band of "Garnizoni Ushtarak" of Shkodra (1922) and normally directs it. The band had the duty and purpose of holding parades and accompanying military forces, but it also had the duty to participate in various civic and national holidays. In 1930, with the help of Shkodra citizens, where the Geraj family, owner of the Geraj Travel Agency of Shkodra, stood out, but especially with the help of an important patriotic figure of the Shkodra civic movement, such as the prominent intellectual Hile Mosi, as well as the unsparing assistance of teachers such as Ragip Gjylbegu, Shefqet Muka, Mehmet Gjyli, etc., he established and formed the Wind Band of the Plotore Primary School of the Parruca neighborhood. The band, at first, counted in its ranks about 15 young instrumentalists - among them the flautist, composer and future researcher Ramadan Sokoli - but over time it expanded and reached more than 50 instrumentalists. Its repertoire was similar in content and message to that of other wind orchestras in the city of Shkodra.

Saraçi writes: "Their repertoire was constantly expanding, and in addition to choral, religious and civic songs, patriotic and folk songs adapted for wind bands, many selected pieces from relevant literature were also performed, which greatly enlivened the life of the city during the holidays." (Saraçi, 2016). The ethnic costumes characteristic of the southern regions of Albania - for this reason they were also called the "Banda e Fustanellave", a unique and significant fact in the context of national unity - that particularly characterized this orchestral group, were a very dignified performance that inspired and spread patriotism, national unity and love for the homeland throughout the city, especially among the youth. Here is what is written in the history of the former Plotore school: "In the academic school year 1930-1931, with the support of the teachers of the Parruca neighborhood School, the primary secular elementary school band in Albania was created. The students wore a formal suit and an ethnic one, such as the typical southern "fustanella" dress. This wind band has given performances on national and religious holidays in Shkodra, Tirana, Ulqin and Podgorica ..." and further it is written: "Moreover, they had the courage to hold an event in Ulqin, which caused a great echo". "This concert had the effect of a bomb…; comment of a Podgorica newspaper" (Hoxha, 2014). This musical band resonated so much throughout the city of Shkodra and had such an impact on its cultural life that, following the example of the Parruca neighborhood School, was formed the fanfare "Malet Tona" (1931) under the direction of Master Zef Kurti, son of Palok Kurti. After the city of Shkodra and under the very positive influence of the military Wind Band of the Army Regiment of Shkodra Master Sul Liçaj was invited to establish and form the Army Regiment Wind Band of the Durrës - Kavajë region and after it, the Army Regiment Wind Band which was located near the city of Elbasan, tasks, which he performs best and with complete success and high dedication and professionalism, significantly expanding musical and artistic activities in the cities mentioned above. With even greater dedication, Master Liçaj, around the mid-1930s, set off again for northern Albania. This time to the area Kukës – Gjakova or otherwise "Drinabardha", where he became a co-initiator in the formation of the musical band "Kosova" based in Kukës, but which extended its activity not only to the entire northeastern region mentioned above, but much wider still throughout Kosovo and Albania. For his activity,

his patriotic influence, especially on young people, and his high professionalism as a well-trained musician, he was called to contribute to the renowned "Royal Musical Band" until the occupation of the country, where although this entity under the name "Imperial Guards Musical Band" continued to exist and perform even abroad, it resigned in protest against the fascist occupation and retreated to the generous and hospitable city of Shkodra. With the reformation of the "Armed Forces Wind Orchestra (OFFA)", together with Masters Gaqo Avrazi, Kristaq Panduku, etc., thanks to his valuable contribution to the establishment and formation of musical bands and fanfares, he was called to Tirana to help in the recovery of this entity, where he ended and closed his rich artistic and patriotic career as an important character of the cultural and artistic movement in general, and the band movement in particular, in the city of Shkodra and further afield in the Albanian territories, one of the prominent personalities of what would be rightly called and considered as: the first "buds or shoots", the "beginning" of that "where it originated", of that "where the journey began", or "where the first distinctive contours were drawn", of the Albanian national school of professional music, thus resulting in being decisive in reflecting the highest moral and cultural values of the Albanian people, both in terms of strengthening the sense of patriotism and in increasing the collective consciousness towards the invaluable national virtues and values, and consequently, co-promoters of the renaissance of the Albanian nation.

Conclusion

At the end of this paper, we would conclude that it is difficult to find more significant evidence than what the renowned Shkodran composer and scholar Gjon Kapedani describes when describing such an important and fundamental reality, that of the birth of cultivated music in our country, when he says: "The city of Shkodra, with its authentic choral and band formations, became the cradle where cultivated Albanian music began." And further continues: "The birth of this formation is related to the historical moments that Albania was going through at that time, when the Ottoman Empire was in its final stages and when Albanian issues required solutions". (Kapedani, 2006). Or in the conclusion that researcher Vaso Tole deduces when he writes: "It is a well-known fact that the very first creation of cultivated Albanian music was an orchestral piece for one voice titled "Bashkimi i Shqipërisë", written in Shkodër in 1880 by Palok Kurti" (Tole, 2004). But, anyway, I would like to close with what I wrote above, talking about the "beginnings" or "where the Albanian professional musical art originated and began its journey", at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the city of Shkodra, and then among various Albanian regions and cities. Among other things, the art of music also saw the birth of the first formations or groups that played together on wind and percussion instruments, which are universally known - for the period we are talking about - as musical bands. Nor should be doubted the fact or forgotten that it was mainly the brass band movements that enabled the birth of professional music, appearing as an unusual and even unimaginable innovation for a country like Albania, because to find a similar reality - consider the time/circumstance ratio - We would have to advance away from the countries bordering Albanian lands.

Photos Gallery



Figure 1, The newly created band of the Plotore "Parruca" neighborhood school, Shkodër (1930) - photo online



Figure 2, The complete Band of the primary school of "Parruca" neighborhood with characteristic southern clothing's (fustanella) and its founder, Master Sul Liçaj, Shkodër (1930) - photo online



Figure 3, The 1st Wind Band in Albania, Shkodër (1878) - photo online



Figure 4, The 2nd Wind Band in Albania, and its founder Frano Ndoja, Shkodër (1889) photo online



Figure 5, The Musical Band of the Handicraft School and its founder Palok Kurti, Shkodër (1901) - photo online



Figure 6, "Bogdani" Society Musical Band, Shkodër (1919) - photo online



Figure 7, The Franciscan School Wind Band, and its founder Father Martin Gjoka (composer), Shkodër (1919) - photo online



Figure 8, The" Illyricum' Society Wind Band and its founder Father Martin Gjoka (composer), Shkodër (1922) - photo online



Figure 9, The Military Garrison Fanfare led by Sul Liçaj and Pavlov Zhvap, Shkodër (1922) - photo online



Figure 10, The Fanfare of the "Malet Tona" dormitory and its creator Zef Kurti, Shkodër (1931) - photo online



Figure 11, The musical band of composer Prenk Jakova, Shkodër {1936) - photo online



Figure 12, The Albanian-American Wind Band "Vatra", Boston, USA (1909) photo online



Figure 13, Fanfare "Liria" conductor by Pasquale Annibale, Korçë (1909), photo online



Figure 14, Wind Band "Afërdita", Elbasan (1919) - photo online



Figure 15, The Municipal Band of Tirana, founded by former Albanian Prime and the Bishop of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Fan Sebastian Noli, Tirana (1924) - photo online

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"The Dance with the Frame drum" by Th. Gaqi – Between Music and Symbolism

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Abstract

The object of this paper focuses on the musical and symbolic concept of the Symphonic Dance No. 2 by the composer Th. Gaqi. Undoubtedly, the history of Albanian music testifies to a number of quality works in the symphonic genre of all typologyes, but this widely interpreted symphonic dance is today a true artistic 'passport', as it was recently interpreted with complete success in one of the most prestigious halls in the world, Carnegie Hall (New York City). For its construction, all the characteristic musical elements of the Dance of Tirana (the sections) have been used, thus preserving the originality of this very special and interesting dance. This dance is better known as "Dance with the Tambourine", because the main element that sets the tone of the work is that of the "tambourine", with its characteristic rhythmic figure exposed from its introduction, which accompanies the entire work in question. In addition, looking at the work from a more careful formal and analytical perspective, but also abstracting with an imagined geometric figuration, it turns out that its figure would be linked again to a popular element (this time ethnographic), which is found in the handmade carpets of our ethnographic tradition – the figure of the stepped rhombus or 'baklava'. This symbolism also coincides with the musical form of the work, which through the sections comes with the scheme: a b c d c b a, which are also the 'steps' of the rhombus towards the culmination d (in the middle) and the descent to its other side, in reflexive reprise. In conclusion, it will be emphasized that this union of musical and ethnographic traditions in concept and structure has resulted in a highly artistically realized work that has transcended time and continues to be performed today, not only on Albanian halls, but also on international ones.

Keywords

dance, tambourine, rhombus, music, symbolic concept

Introduction

One of the most distinguished dances in the literature of our national music is the symphonic dance by composer Th. Gaqi, Symphonic Dance No. 2, also known as The Dance with the Frame drum. This symphonic work takes its title from the traditional percussion instrument frame drum, whose rhythmic presence shapes the entire musical development of the piece and serves to introduce, accompany, and conclude the dance.

Since its first performance in the 1980s, this work—thanks to the artistic value it carries and the emotional resonance it creates in the audience—has been brought back to the stage numerous times, becoming highly popular in the process. The composer drew inspiration from a traditional wedding dance of Tirana. Thus, both the emotional atmosphere and the structural design of the piece are rooted in this original folkloric source—the dance that narrates the journey of the wedding party as they go to receive the bride. Undoubtedly, the history of Albanian music bears witness to a series of high-quality symphonic works across all genres, but the Symphonic Dance Frame Drum today stands as a true artistic "passport," particularly after its recent and highly successful performance in one of the world's most prestigious concert halls, Carnegie Hall.

Before all else, a general historical overview of the development of this genre in our country is of interest. Thus, the symphonic dance—together with the rhapsody, fantasy, and overture—began its artistic path as early as the 1930s–1940s with Palokë Kurti, Martin Gjoka, Kristo Kono, and others, as distinct and appealing forms for the Albanian audience and listener. The connection with folk music, the simplicity of the musical language, the natural variation and elaboration of melodies, and the strengthening of expressive means elevated even further the professional and artistic level of these genres. Works by other renowned Albanian composers such as P. Gaci, S. Gjoni, and others represent significant achievements in our musical art. The composers sought to reflect in them emotions grounded in contrasts of rhythm and intonation. Among these we can mention Dance No. 1 by S. Gjoni, The Dance of the Eagles by P. Gaci, and others. In general, our symphonic dances are not constructed merely as collections of dance motifs; rather, several of them are grounded in the principles of symphonic development and elaboration. Referring to the distinguishing features of the creative output of composer Th. Gaqi—both in general and specifically in his symphonic and concert works—we observe a pronounced inclination toward Albanian folklore from all regions. Deeply valuing our musical tradition, the composer aims to absorb and creatively utilize its most characteristic, original, and expressive elements. This is evident not only in the present case but also in his other significant works, such as the "Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra."

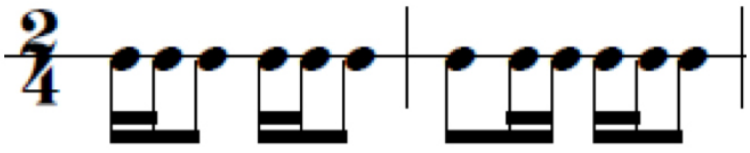
Methodology
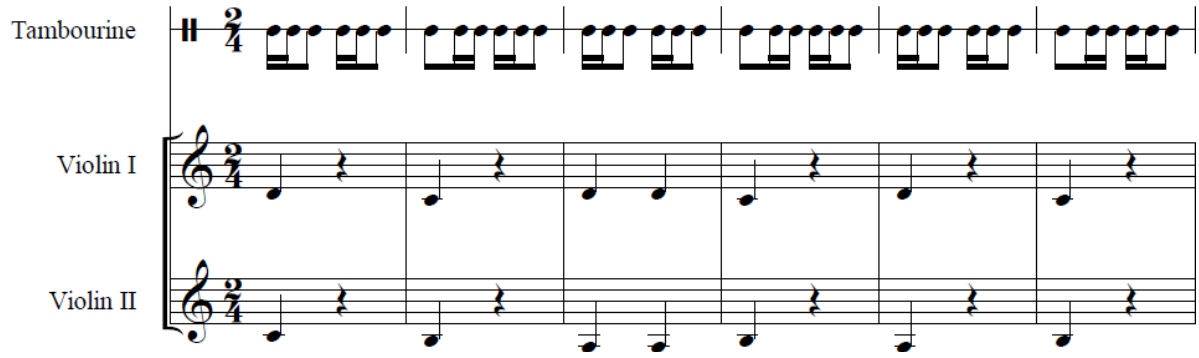
The methodology is grounded in the method of musical analysis, which aims to present as clearly and convincingly as possible the fundamental features of the creative concept and the internal formal structure of the work. Within this framework, the analysis is built upon a detailed examination of the formal process, the melodic–intonational development, the modal and harmonic language, and the manner in which these layers interact to create internal unity. Special attention is also devoted to the relationship between the source materials—whether

quoted or re-shaped—and the overall compositional cohesion, assessing the extent to which the composer integrates these elements into an organic and functional structure. Through this analytical process, the objective is to illuminate not only the compositional mechanisms, but also the ways in which the composer's individual style and his approach to tradition and innovation are reflected in this dynamic and highly characteristic dance. It should be emphasized that this study (this analysis) represents an entirely original contribution by the author (A. Brahimi) and, for this reason, does not rely on references to other authors. The analytical approach, evaluations, and conclusions presented here are the result of direct observation of the musical material and its critical interpretation, without referring to secondary sources or previous literature. This methodological choice aims to highlight the independence of the analysis and its value as a new study, grounded entirely in the author's personal and professional interpretation of the work under consideration.

Development
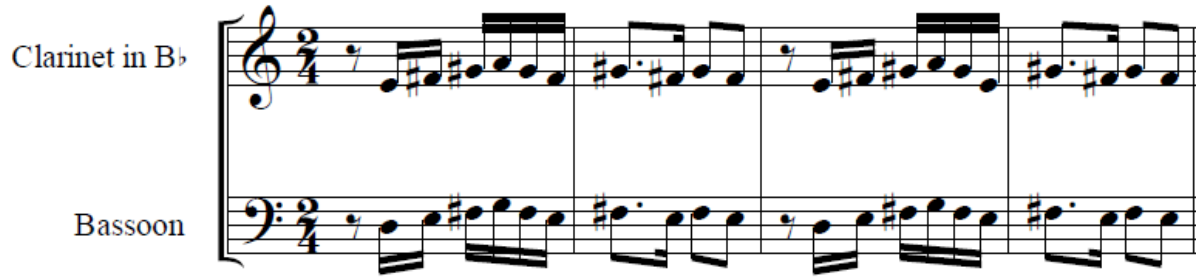
Returning to the main idea of conducting a concrete and detailed analysis of the "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi, this study will specifically refer to the musical score in order to engage more closely with this work of artistic value. From a formal perspective, this piece follows the structure of a loosely treated three-part form, which, in an overall view, begins with an introduction that gradually builds toward a climax, followed by a reflective unfolding of figures leading to the conclusion. In this way, it resembles the shape of a stylized rhombus, commonly found in traditional handcrafted rugs. This conceptual abstraction introduced by the composer, and simultaneously symbolic, demonstrates his vision and the connection between music (geometry—the rhombus figure) and ethnography—specifically, rug-making. Such an idea was highly innovative for its time. (Later, a similar sophisticated connection between music, geometry, and architecture would be explored by the composer and architect Iannis Xenakis). From a harmonic standpoint, this dance is constructed on the basis of the Mixolydian mode—not on G as in its natural state, but starting from the note D: D, E, F#, G, A, B, C, D (with semitones between degrees 3–4 and 6–7). The Symphonic Dance is conceived for performance by a full symphonic orchestra, which also includes the traditional folk instrument "frame drum". The piece is set in 2/4 time and marked Allegretto. The introduction of the dance immediately presents the tambourine rhythm in 2/4 meter, thus imitating the strokes of the frame drum (or using an actual frame drum), as seen in the comparison of rhythmic figures:
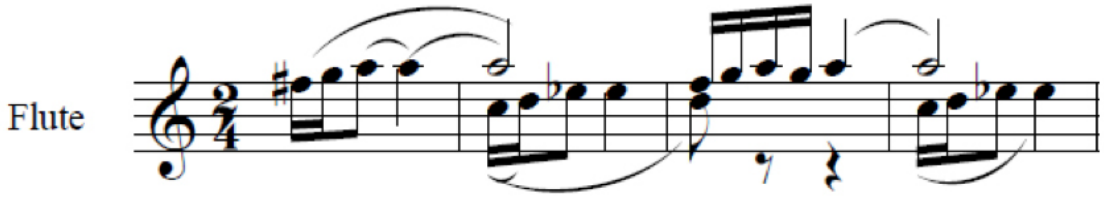




Musical Example 1. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi

The introduction (8 bars) from the strings and tambourine continues for eight bars in altered tonic (T) and dominant (D); it begins with a very soft (pp) entry from the folk instrument frame drum, which presents the accompanying rhythm in eighth and sixteenth notes, a pattern that remains prominent almost throughout the piece. Simultaneously, the "frame drum" is accompanied in the introduction by the pizzicato of the strings, which from the very first bars present a dissonant harmony with impure chords such as the tonic and dominant over altered D and A. Right from the start, clashes of seconds are noticeable, particularly between the second violin and the viola, as well as between the first and second violins. In this way, it becomes clear that this symphonic dance begins with a harmonically unstable state. Subsequently, the introduction gives way to the presentation of the main thematic material of the dance—section a (bar 9)—for the first time performed by the clarinet and bassoon over D.
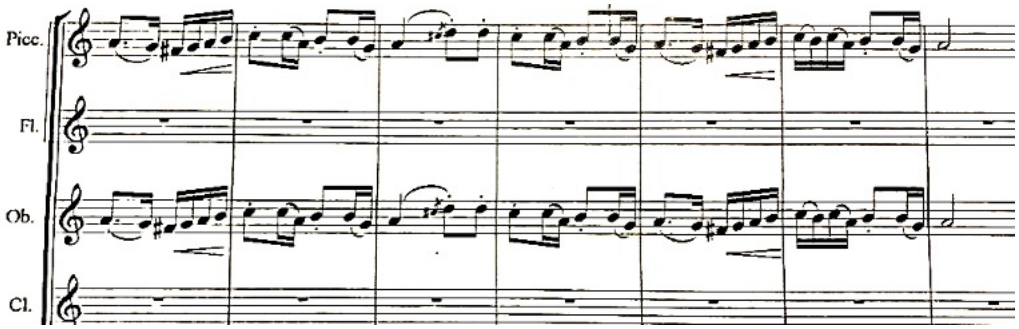


Musical Example 2. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi

Even at the beginning of section a, the accompanying string instruments continue to maintain a harmonically unstable texture, with clashes of seconds. After the presentation of the main motif, the introductory element reappears, serving as a connecting bridge for the second restatement of this section (a1), this time performed by the flute and clarinet. Following this second statement of section a1 in a timbrically varied form, the transitional passage (measures 32–36) appears for the first time. This transition is once again derived as a melodic element from the original dance, preserved in its instrumental continuation, but here realized through imitative writing in the flute. It is constructed on the Byzantine second tetrachord (D, Eb, F#, G, A, Bb, C#, D), specifically using its first tetrachord (D, Eb, F#, A).
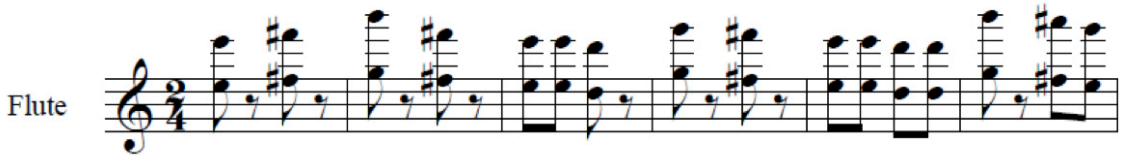


Musical Example 3. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi

Then, in measure 37, section b appears, performed by the piccolo and oboe, constructed on A, serving as a section that generates dynamic interaction between the materials (sections) of the first part, A, of the form.
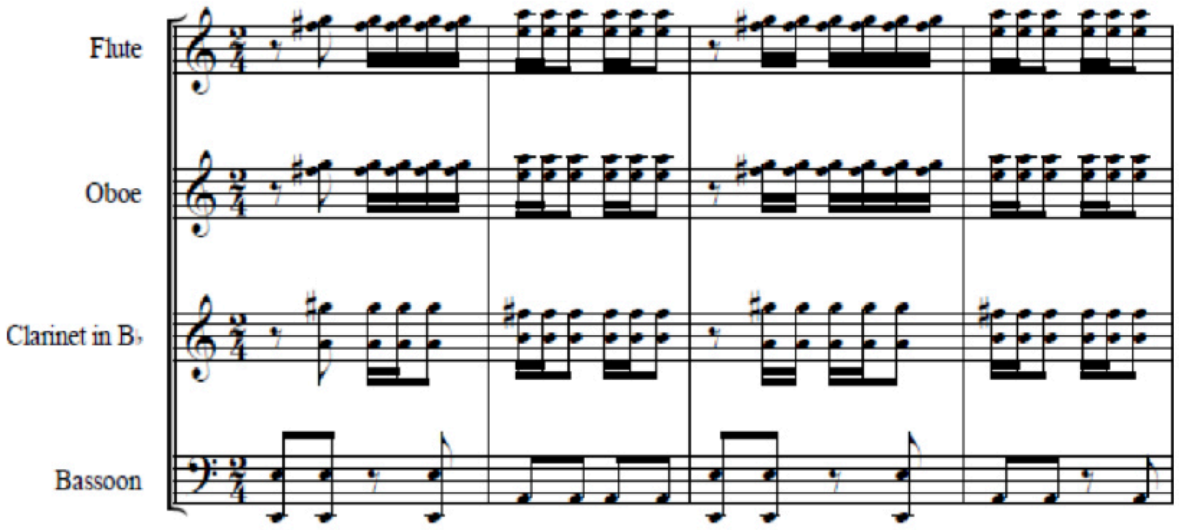


Musical Example 4. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi

The transition (with imitation) that appears again after this section is constructed from two parts: the first (4 bars) as a preceding imitative transition, followed by (8 bars) the entry of the strings and percussion featuring the frame drum figure. Next, for the third time, section a2 appears, performed by flute, oboe, and clarinet, this time reinforced through note doubling and gradually joined by the timpani under the accompaniment of the strings. It emerges as a double theme (8+8=16 bars), leading directly into the new section c (without the need for a transition), which continues in marcato sempre. This marks the first step of the climax, with a forte (later gradually increasing in dynamic progression to fortissimo in the middle and triple fortissimo in the reprise), during which the opening scale (D Mixolydian mode) is presented in the strings (bass).
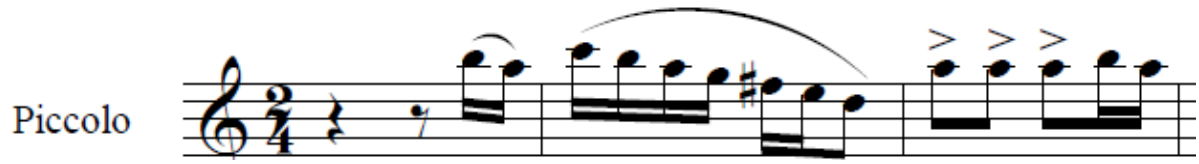


Musical Example 5. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi

Immediately afterwards, a varied version of the previous section (c1) appears, also creating a double theme (8+8=16 bars), followed by a transition that serves as the final moment of this first part (A) and facilitates the connection between this section and the middle section B.



Musical Example 6. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi
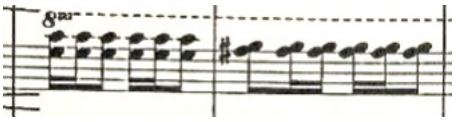
This moment in middle section B begins at ff with an introduction to the material that will be developed at the start of B. Then, in measure 105, the middle section B presents varied material taken from section c (c2) of the first part, also constructed on the same level of the Mixolydian mode, but this time over A. Following this, the material of section c (c1) is repeated once more, moving toward the conclusion over D, before transitioning into a new section d (measure 120), again built over A (coinciding with the ascent to the highest point of the stepped diamond).



Musical Example 7. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi
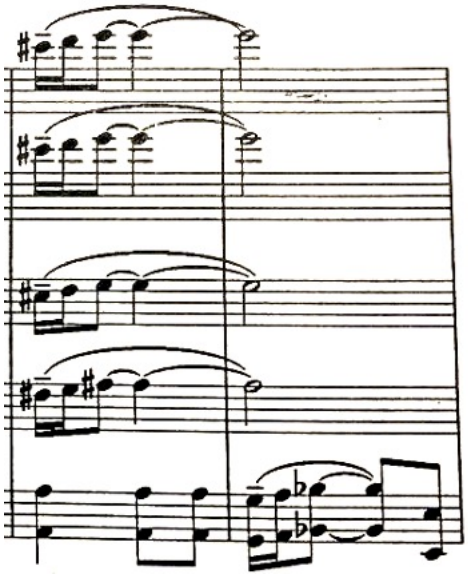
Thus, in this way, we observe (as noted at the beginning) that the harmonic centers on which the work generally rests are D and A, functioning as tonic and dominant. In measure 129, over A, section c appears for the third time (c2), followed by a transition with dominant harmony, including a D9 chord in measure 138. The introductory element remains present even after this section, with the intervention of seconds that we noted at the very beginning of the work, but this time appearing in the wind instruments. Next, the expository material of the work (a4) emerges in this middle section, but in a different harmony, namely over A (the dominant). Another distinctive feature of this presentation is that the section is performed not by the winds but by the strings, accompanied by the full orchestra in tutti. Following this passage, which

also features the complete percussion section in its function, the transition appears, initially with instrumental accompaniment based on the Byzantine second tetrachord, but here using its second tetrachord (A, Bb, C#, D).



Musical Example 8. (2 bars from the transition)

After these four measures, the passage continues to hover over the Dominant (D), acting as an extended prelude, with the entire orchestra performing the rhythmic figure in parallel fourths and seconds. This builds toward the climax of the work, which remains clearly perceptible even in the reprise. Indeed, all this preparatory material at the end of the middle section serves to achieve the powerful dynamic peak of the reprise at fff.



Musical Example 9. "Symphonic Dance" No. 2 by composer Th. Gaqi

Reprise A1 (measure 173) appears dynamically compressed, again realized through a descending sequence (from a3 at the climax, gradually descending through sections d, c, b, with the materials presented in reverse order). Section a3, as a double theme (8+8=16 measures), emerges quite dynamically, with the full orchestral participation in tutti, thus culminating at the very beginning of the reprise. From the outset, the clash of fourths and seconds in the horns with glissandi is immediately striking. Subsequently, and more precisely in measure 189, section d (d1) reappears in D for the second time; this had been a new section in the middle part. Following it, section c returns, but in retrograde (c1, c), leading into an imitative transition based on the first tetrachord (4 measures) and then the entry (4 measures) that guides us toward the conclusion of section a2, as in the initial A section of the three-part form.

Again, through an imitative transition based on the first tetrachord (4 measures), section b emerges over A, being the least "exhausted" section, as it appeared only once in the first A part; this is its second and final appearance. This very energetic reprise (with reversed presentation of materials, reminiscent of the reflective reprise in sonata form) presents, after section b, section a1 once more, as in the second variant of the section in the exposition, for flute and clarinet. After the final full statement of this section and 4 measures of transitional material on the tambourine (supported by four-note string figures), the Coda arrives (measure 253). Section a appears again for clarinet and bassoon, as at the beginning, but only its opening phrase. In the following 14 measures, it gradually "dissolves," leaving only the striking of the work's characteristic instrument—the tambourine—while the first rhythmic element is removed in the final measures. The music fades into ppp, ending with an impure D chord (D, G#, A, D) with the clash of the minor second G#–A in sfz. Viewed more formally, and imagining how the composer may have visualized it, this figure could be associated once again with a folk-inspired element—this time non-musical but ethnographic—found in handwoven carpets of our ethnographic tradition: the stepped diamond or "baklava" motif. In this case, however, the diamond is not perfectly symmetrical; the right side is shorter than the left.

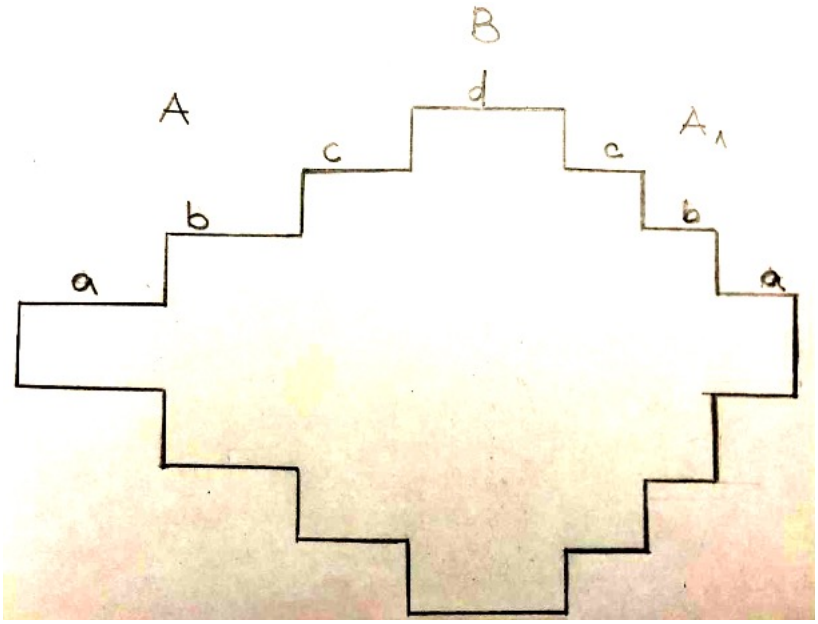


Image 1. Stepped diamond motif

In connection with this idea, from a structural perspective, the dance can be conceptualized as follows: The beginning of the diamond (the left side) represents the exposition of the main material A. This is followed by fillings with additional a sections as well as the tambourine's rhythmic figure, which is complemented by the strings, layered within the "interior" of the carpet below the steps, where sections b and c emerge sequentially (on the other levels of the diamond). At the final level of the diamond (its uppermost tier) lies the middle section B, which initially begins with materials from section c (the last to appear in the first A part) and a new, brief section d, heard only once in the middle, providing "more color in the hues of the carpet." The return of the main section (the initial a section) in the middle, now in the Dominant, marks

the final moment when the dynamic climax for the reprise bursts forth. Graphically, this moment corresponds to the "end step" of the diamond, as the portion that remains after the work's major climax (coinciding with reprise A1) is shorter than the first (steps descending to the right).
To make the above detailed analysis more comprehensible, a formal summary of the structural concept of the dance is helpful:

Section	Construction / Mode	Key/Tonal Center	Material
Introduction	in T (D) and altered D (A)	D and A	–
Part I – A	Built in Mixolydian mode with T in D	D (Tonic)	Sections a (D), b (A), c (D)
Part II – Middle B	Built on D in A	A (Dominant)	Section c (participation), new section d and a
Reprise – A1	Built in D	D (Tonic)	Sections a, d, and c (D), section b (A) and final a (D)
Coda	–	D	–

Table 1. General scheme of the structure and tonal plan of the work

Conclusions

The composer's figurative and abstract conception has also shaped the three-part formal structure (A–B–A1) treated freely in this work, where the functions of sonata form with a reflective reprise are blended with multiple returns of section a. This creates the idea—why not—of a refrain reminiscent of rondo form. Thus, the particular treatment of the material, within a structure envisioned according to a geometric vision, also relates to the design of this dance, with several returns of its sections (a feature common to dances in general, where materials are repeated). Here, the principal compositional principles are evident: simple or varied repetition, orchestral timbral variations, and symphonic development. The harmonic language of the dance is built on the Mixolydian mode, but this time not on G in its usual position; rather, it begins on D: D, E, F#, G, A, B, C. Throughout the harmonic development, chromatic alterations, harmonizations, dissonances with impure chords, and clashes of seconds (and to a lesser extent fourths) are employed. Polyphonic elements are present throughout the work, especially in the construction of the imitative connecting transitions, based on the tetrachords of the second Byzantine mode. Particularly striking is the contrast created between the tambourine, cymbals, and percussion, and the counterpoint generated between the tambourine's rhythmic figure and the orchestra with its other families.The stages of the work's climaxes (f, ff, fff, ff, f) are part of the dynamic development process of the dance, producing a rich and contrasting dynamism.

From the above treatment, it is clear that all the characteristic musical elements of a traditional wedding dance from the Tirana region (the dance of the bridegroom's party going to fetch the

bride) have been utilized, preserving its distinctive originality. Indeed, this work is most widely known as “The Dance with the Tambourine” because, as noted above, the tambourine is the principal element defining the character of the piece, with its characteristic rhythmic figure presented from the very opening in 2/4 meter, a meter that remains unchanged until the end of the dance.

In fact, the composer’s early engagement with folk musical motifs and modes, in order to later incorporate them into his works, is well documented, and this work represents a continuation of that compositional trajectory. In this dance, folk motifs are constructed on the D Mixolydian mode. It is notable that the principal motif of this dance remains unchanged throughout the work, serving as a guiding motif; likewise, the sections of the dance retain their original melodic form, essentially functioning as a quotation. The symphonic dance is conceived for performance by a full symphonic orchestra, which also includes the traditional tambourine as a featured instrument. From this musicological analysis, it can be concluded that Thoma Gaqi’s symphonic dance is one of his most professional and high-quality works, composed with a highly interesting technique and structural craftsmanship (reminiscent of an “Albanian Bolero”), and it holds a distinguished place in the finest corpus of Albanian musical literature.

The combination of Albanian folklore with new musical techniques and concepts in Çesk Zadeja's "Sonata for Violin and Piano"

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Abstract

The object of this paper focuses on new musical concepts, combined with elements of Albanian folklore in Çesk Zade's Sonata for Violin and Piano, which is one of the most qualitative works of the creative opus in the chamber music genre. The work was created between 1972-1974 and was performed for the first time by violinist Pandush Gjezi, accompanied by pianist Anita Tartari, in the concerts of the May Decade of 1974. The Sonata was not only considered the best work of the year, among the instrumental works of professional Albanian music, but also aroused a special interest for the new linguistic and structural qualities that it brought to our instrumental music. This paper aims to highlight the novelty and innovations that it brought through its musical language and mastery of compositional techniques. This work represents, not only an achievement in the composer's creativity, but it is also an important achievement of chamber music and, in particular, of all Albanian music of this period. The overall sound of the sonata announces a new and contemporary development in professional Albanian instrumental chamber music and beyond. While, from an analytical perspective, the sonata, with its new form and content, nevertheless pointed to a new path in instrumental musical creativity. In conclusion, it is concluded that Zadeja, in this work, more than anywhere else, manages to connect with great professionalism the wealth of the Albanian musical ethnos with a compositional weave very special for the time (with bitonality, bifunctionality, pentatony, mode, etc.), while simultaneously revealing new aesthetic aspects in the work.

Keywords

sonata, violin, piano, folklore

Introduction

Çesk Zadeja's Sonata for Violin and Piano is one of the most qualitative works of the creative opus in the genre of professional Albanian chamber music. The work was created between 1972-1974 and was performed for the first time by violinist Pandush Gjezi, accompanied by pianist Anita Tartari, at the concerts of the May Decade of 1974. It was awarded the first prize of the May Decade and was awarded the Republic Prize, 1st degree. The Sonata was not only considered the best work of the year among the instrumental works of professional Albanian music, but it also aroused special interest for the new linguistic and structural qualities that it brought to our instrumental music. With the novelty and innovations that it brought through its musical language and the mastery of compositional techniques, this work represents not only an achievement in the composer's creativity, but it is also an important achievement of chamber music and, in particular, of all Albanian music of this period.

The ideas conveyed by the work are expressed through its unusual cycle of two movements, of which the first movement, "Moderato", represents the most important part. Due to a very homogeneous construction, which stems from the principle of treatment based on the monomotive (the entire first movement is developed through the transformation of a basic, short motif), it would be difficult for the interpretation of its structure to adapt to a standard treatment. The overall sound of the sonata heralds a new and contemporary development in professional Albanian instrumental chamber music and beyond. While, from an analytical perspective, the sonata, with its new form and content, nevertheless pointed to a new path in instrumental musical creativity. This was a development that, for the time it was written, which was a politically indoctrinated time, was also the target of unfair criticism. In general, these criticisms were prescient, both in terms of its formal structure, and in terms of the expressive means and other techniques applied by the composer in the entirety of his work. Of course, with this work, although it was the first of the modern contemporary efforts of Albanian music, we cannot claim the actuality of new continental musical phenomena. These will be updated in Albanian music in a more complete and fair way, in a later period, which would be freed from the endless conditioning, initially, of the ideological level and then, of other formal, structural and consonant levels and others like these. However, within the thematic concepts of musical creation, but also within contemporary forms and techniques, it marked at that time, the peak of achievements for this genre in cultivated and professional Albanian music.
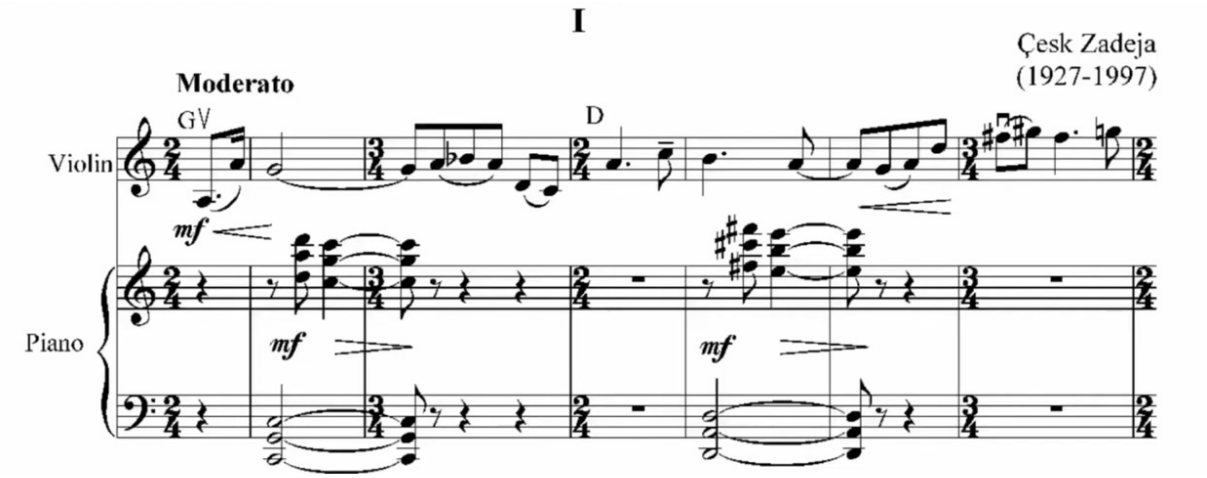
Methodology

The methodology of this study is analytical and interpretative; it is based on the direct examination of the artistic material and its critical processing through an entirely authorial approach. The study seeks to elucidate the phenomenon under consideration through an internal analysis of structures, meanings, and expressive functions, deliberately avoiding the reproduction of positions already consolidated in the existing literature. In this sense, the research represents an original contribution, built upon independent reflection and an individual analytical process. For this reason, the study does not rely on direct theoretical references or on an extensive bibliography, but rather aims to open a new scholarly perspective by offering readings and conclusions that stem from personal analysis. Nevertheless, particular attention will be given to the identification and analysis of the folkloric sources upon which the composer has drawn,

treated not as quotations or bibliographic sources but as fundamental creative material, organically integrated into the artistic process. These sources will serve as cultural and aesthetic points of reference, helping to illuminate the traditional roots and the ways in which they have been processed, transformed, and reinterpreted in accordance with Ç. Zadeja's compositional vision.

Development

The first movement of the sonata "Moderato", is conceived in the key of la minor and is characterized by a lyrical and meditative development, with vivid sound colors. Held in the musical movement of 2/4 time, it appears with a generally lyrical character and is permeated by a multifaceted emotional breadth. The thematic material of the first section, of the first movement, which is generally composed of three sections, is generated by a cellular motif, composed of two lever measures, which varies with all the possibilities it contains, both melodic and harmonic possibilities.



Musical example 1. The first movement of the sonata "Moderato", Çesk Zadeja

The characteristic essence of the motif is represented in the grouping of four notes, where the first three notes move gradually and the third jumps to the interval of a perfect fourth above or, more often, even a perfect fifth below. This characteristic group of notes is, apparently, one of the characteristic signs of Zadeja's compositional technique. This is supported, especially, by the harmonic elaboration of northern folk music and by the chordal composition of the çiftelia when it plays its specific repertoire solo, but also when it is destined to accompany diverse songs from the repertoire of their main northern regions. We reach this conclusion because it has appeared before, in the Concert for Piano and Orchestra no. 1, in Mi major. In this concerto it has appeared in different variants, both with complete inversions and with partial inversions, preserving the intervallic relationships of the group notes and putting them into a clear functional action. In general, the first movement, "Moderato", is written as a homophonic score, where the accompanying role of the piano is of particular interest. This interest is demonstrative, in terms of the overall structure of the piece's harmonic constructions and the close, organic functional relationships between the different chords and keys. It should also be emphasized that, in their
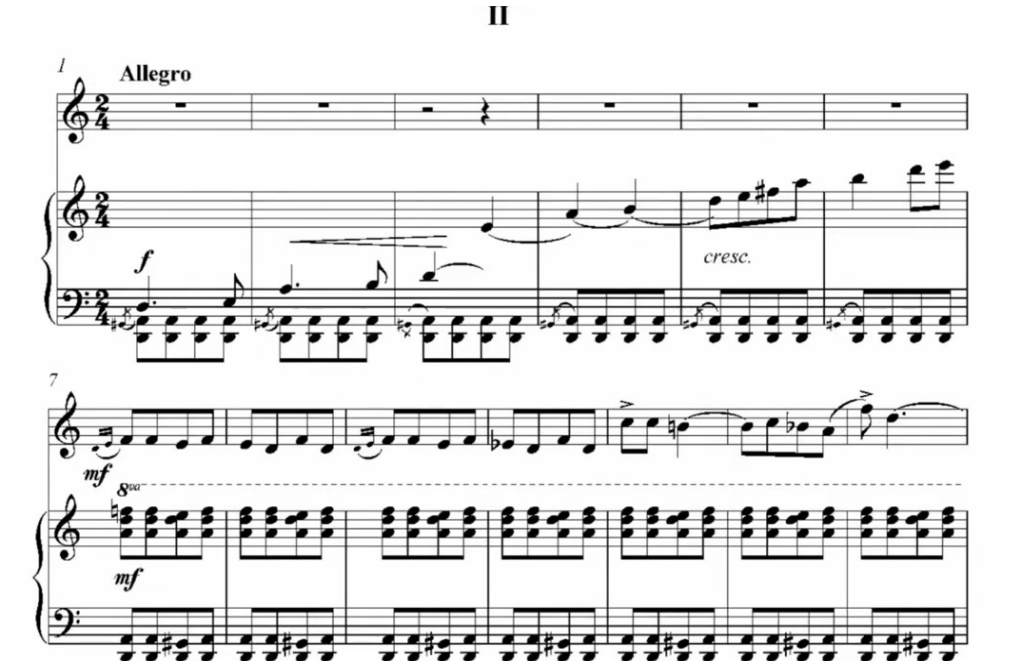
development, the relationships between the two important parts of the sonata, the violin and the piano, create a continuous organic duality, expressed on two levels: in terms of the texture of the sonata, but also in terms of its harmony. The texture of the violin is generally horizontal, that is, melodic, decorated with various flourishes of arpeggios and melodic developments, while the texture of the piano remains mainly vertical, that is, it remains something else.

More than the first, it is an accompanying chordal texture, which not only completes the entirety of the score's drawing, but makes it appear connected, unique and prone to natural developments. It remains an individualized and functional chordal texture, which is decomposed, according to the superposition of bifunctional harmonies (movement I) and the chordal superposition of other harmonies, where the left hand holds harmony in subdominant and the right hand has the harmony of the VI grade raised. The internal structure of the melo-harmonic composition of the theme is based on the pentatonic system of the folklore of the South of the country. This system is used from the first measures of the sonata, through the intensive and not so declarative use of the pentatonic, built on the notes "sol, la, si, re, mi", "la, si, do#, mi, fa#" and again, in the variant "sib, do, re, fa, sol". The basic musical material of the first section departs from all contemporary practices of violin creativity, being interpreted, in its repetition, only by the solo violin, without pianistic accompaniment. After the repetition of the main boulevard, the piano is activated, accompanying with seventh chords while, later, we see an overlap of chords, where the placement of notes held "do-la" in the left hand stands out. Also, as a result of this chordal logic, the tonic sextachord also becomes functional, but incomplete, without the fifth and the right hand is a distinct and specific sign of the harmonic construction, which clearly indicates the interval of the third of the second degree lowered. In the continuation, the harmony finds stability, relying on functional chords of the VI grade, the III grade and the dominant. In the general conception of the work and in the spaces that the composer creates for its development, with the functional harmonic placement, the last measures of the first section, connect it with the second section of the whole. They are accompanied by the lever piano instrument and this connection serves as preparation for the emergence of the II section of the sonata. The elaboration of the second section is characterized by further developments of the texture, melodic and harmonic plan of the sonata. While in the first section, the solo violin and the accompanying piano act independently of each other, in the second section, they are interconnected through a continuous counterpoint. In the all-tone aspect, the harmonic placements on the VIIth grade of the main tonality, la natural minor, are highlighted.

The second section of the first movement is the important construction part, because there the dramaturgical development has an evident character and brings the most prominent culminations of the developmental entirety of this entire time. The violin part of this section follows a melodic construction based on the characteristic intervals of the basic motif, mainly in ascending movement, in the upper register of the instrument, starting from the note "sol", below the pentagram and reaching the note "do" of the fourth octave, above the pentagram. Of course, all the notes participating in the construction of the structure are active notes and stimulating for new situations of development. After this climax, the musical subject of the violin part descends to the central register, continuing the free and calm development of the thematic material of this section. Following the development of this section, at its end, a short segment is placed, where the elements of both sections are highlighted in a clear and audible sound, accompanied by the piano with both hands. The third section, the reprise of the first

movement, "Moderato", of the sonata for violin and piano by Çesk Zadeja has a thematic material, which represents the reprise of the first movement, but, in contrast to the "A" section, in this output the thematic material is presented in a dynamic way in the form of its shortening, but also of its summary. At the end of the first movement, "Moderato", the violin part moves towards the upper register of the violin instrument, while the pianistic accompaniment focuses on the notes of the bass register of the instrument. Here it is important to emphasize the fact that this part of the sonata, which is intonationally placed in A minor, at its conclusion cadences in the major tonality, with the same name, that is, it cadences in La major.

The second movement "Allegro", of the sonata for violin and piano by Çesk Zadeja, is intonationally placed on the note "re" and in the meter 2/4. It is structured in the form of a sonata, with three development blocks: exposition, elaboration, and reprise, while with this reprise its two-time cycle is completely closed. The philosophical thought and dramatic sense that permeates the first movement, throughout its entire extent, in the second movement gives way to an optimistic dynamic atmosphere, which comes through scherzo-like movements, full of jumps and leaps and, often, through uniform movements, with a lyrical spirit. The thematic material of the main theme comes with a pronounced scherzo character and is distinguished by group-note movements, 4x1/8 of the violin.



Musical example 2. The second movement "Allegro", Çesk Zadeja

These and the chordal accompaniment with alternations that have the character of a toccata and the appearance of pronounced staccatos of the piano, with the same texture, as well as the solo instrument, make the entire structure that we presented above more lively and dynamic. The general sound of the thematic material of the main theme brings to mind the atmosphere of "Humoreska", from the ballet "Delina", by the same author.

All these phenomena have influenced the performance of an energetic atmosphere, full of nerve and charm, an atmosphere that permeates the development of the main theme throughout

its entire extent and in all its aspects. In the same atmosphere, the thematic material of the secondary theme is also developed in its performance after the main theme.

The secondary theme, or, in other words, the secondary part, in addition to the lively atmosphere, also contains distinct contrasting elements with the main theme. It, unlike the first, is permeated by lyrical notes that, at times, also take on scherzo forms, and give the sonata a light dance character. This theme is established intonationally and its pianistic accompaniment appears uniform, in one voice and, generally, moves legato, in the dynamics "espresivo un poco rubato". Both themes, during their development in the elaboration block "B", preserve the intervallic characteristics, displayed in the thematic materials of the first period. In this development block, they are dynamized step by step, in accordance with the dramaturgical development of the elaboration. The thematic material of the main theme, moving towards the end of the elaboration, begins to transform emotionally. Thus, in the changed repetition in "meno moso", its musical subject, with a scherzo character, takes a different emotional direction. In this segment of the elaboration, which is energetically carried out by the right hand, the theme approaches a melodic substance that has lyrical notes and moves freely. Alongside it, the basic melodic cell of the main theme is quoted by the left hand, in the low register of the pianistic accompaniment, in the octave. Following the elaboration, the secondary theme appears, which, after occasional developments with group notes (triplets), which move rapidly, paves the way for the reprise, "A1", which also takes the place of the coda. In this climactic segment, powerful fusional sounds appear, reminiscent of mobilizing marches with a festive character.

Conclusions

The Sonata for Violin and Piano, by the composer Çesk Zadeja, marks a peak of his entire creativity during this period. The work stands out, from similar and contemporary creations, for its outstanding originality and individuality. It is a synthesis of the author's long-standing research into finding an identifying musical language, with clear national features, heavily based on elements of Albanian folklore. Regarding this direction of the composer's creativity, many scholars have simply stated that the author's compositional mastery and creative experience in the instrumental music of the time are intertwined there. It is also an example that demonstrates the interweaving of the philosophy and intonations of folk music with the author's search for a new way of expression in the composition of contemporary music. In this outstanding work of chamber music of that period, the relationship with folklore consists in the search for a harmonic modo-tonal language that originates mainly from the polyphonic singing of Southern Albania. This way of singing and interpreting is a polyphonic presentation that conditions both the independence of the voices from each other, but it also conditions the unity that they create in their overall sound. The composer organically establishes and develops the consonances and dissonant clashes in a complex way and with a more distinct consequence than in his previous creativity of all genres. This is precisely what makes the new and contemporary trends of his music clearly distinguishable and unite them with the conceptual and general whole of their composer. In both the first movement, "Moderato", and the second, "Allegro", the harmonic consonances retain features of bifunctionality. The modo-tonal combining of the different parts are continuously altered with continuous elliptical forms. This is something that is achieved through the placement of the seventh chord of the VI grade, thus creating a sensitive instability, where the melodic material flows freely in its modulating path. The dense appearance of

chromatic elements in the melody, which in the composer's previous works represent more of an episodic development, in this work takes on a somewhat different meaning. They are not accidental compositional components, but operate systematically throughout its entire extent. This characteristic, more than any other, represents one of the most distinctive features in the totality of the sonata's content. For all these features and many others, Çesk Zadeja's Sonata for Violin and Piano marks the beginning of a new path in the development of chamber music genres, with contemporary psychology and national features. In fact, if we look at it in its entirety, Çesk Zadeja's creativity does not demonstrate this tendency for the first time, therefore it cannot be considered a completely new trend. In general, it permeates almost all of his creativity, and not only the instrumental one, but also the vocal and stage ones. The contemporary trends that are treated in the score of the work, constitute a surprise for the Albanian musical creative terrain of the time, a terrain that was drowned by well-known and repeated creative practices, according to the principles of the creative method of socialist realism. This new report takes the author to the peaks of the individuality of our instrumental music, turning him into an important precursor for all Albanian music, not only chamber music, but also any other type of music, from vocal to instrumental, vocal-instrumental and stage music of opera and ballet. Starting from its first performance, in the concerts of May 1974, Çesk Zadeja's Sonata for Violin and Piano, throughout all subsequent periods, has been present in the concert violin repertoire of chamber music, both in the concert repertoire and in the pedagogical repertoire of violin studies.

The First Albanian Works for Piano and Orchestra and their place in the Albanian music fund

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Abstract

Albanian professional music, during its relatively short existence, has experienced significant developments. These began at the end of the 19th century, but the period that ultimately determined the development of this music was the second half of the 20th century. This article focuses on the first Albanian works for piano and orchestra, which began their journey between 1959 and 1969, and answers the question of what were the main factors that defined the birth and development of this genre, as well as the establishment of the piano school. The methodology is based on working with archives as well as historical and analytical aspects of specific works. There are several factors in the development of Albanian concert pianist music, and among the most important, we highlight the professional and artistic factor, determined by the fact that musicians of all levels were trained through the establishment of a complete music education system in the country, which is a product of the second half of the 20th century. Since 1959, several concert pianist works have been created, each of them a testimony to the time in which it was composed, but it should be emphasized that the level of creative forces and artistic demands increased towards an active concert life, especially with the arrival of several composers from the former Soviet Union (e.g., Zadeja, Daija, etc.). The results of the paper focus on several important points, firstly on the innovations that the first works for piano and orchestra bring in concept and structure, also referring to the compositional techniques used for their creation, and reaching the conclusion of the historical weight that these works hold in Albanian musical art and their inalienable compositional values.

Keywords

composers, Albanian creativity, concert pianist music

Introduction

This article examines the emergence and development concert works for piano and orchestra in Albania during a decisive decade, 1959 to 1969, when the country's musical culture experienced significant institutionalization and artistic maturity under the strict ideological framework of a dictatorial state. Positioned at the crossroads of historical context, aesthetic evolution, and ideological function, this genre became simultaneously a reflection of Albania's politico-cultural identity and a platform for the artistic expression of its composers. Through a combined methodology of historical analysis, music-structural examination, and archival research, this study aims to shed light on foundational works in Albania's piano concerto literature, with a particular focus on the pioneering contributions of composers such as Vangjo Nova, Çesk Zadeja, Tonin Harapi, Pjetër Gaci, and Nikolla Zoraqi. By analysing the first concertos and rhapsodies for piano and orchestra by these composers, the article explores how their works encapsulate both the artistic ambitions and the socio-political conditions of the time. In doing so, the article not only reveals lesser-known historical and musical details but also provides a deeper understanding of the stylistic characteristics, technical innovations, and ideological foundations that shaped the development of this genre within Albania's tightly controlled, yet artistically productive musical environment.

Methodology

The methodology of this research paper is based on 1) historical analysis; 2) analytical treatment; and 3) archival examination. The historical developments will be directly connected to the periodization of the material, referring primarily to the determining factors, artistic, social, and ideological, which influenced the development of the process. Meanwhile, the systematic analysis of selected works will focus on aesthetic, structural, pianistic-technical, functional, and sociological perspectives, encompassing everything from structural musical analysis to the manifestation of artistic values in the public sphere. Ian Bent (British musicologist) writes that musical analysis "is the means of directly answering the question 'How does it work?'" (Bent & Drabkin, 1987). This question guides the inquiry into the functioning (or "operation," as Bent puts it) of our musical art within the genre of piano concertos written by Albanian composers. This article will shed light on and provide new insights into the first major works for piano and orchestra written between 1959 and 1969.

Historical and political context

Albanian professional music, despite its relatively short history, has undergone significant development. Its foundations laid at the end of the 19th century, but the period that marked the rise of musical professionalism was the second half of the 20th century. Several factors contributed to this development, the most important being;

1. Artistic factors, particularly the systematic education of professional musicians at all levels, through the creation of a comprehensive national system of music education, the formation of symphonic orchestras, and the organization of a planned concert life; and

2. Ideological factors, which dominated the entire socio-cultural landscape of the country, treating the arts—including music, and specifically concert music—as ideological tools of the ruling Party.

While other genres such as opera, symphony, rhapsody, and symphonic poem saw early experimentation as far back as the 1910s (continuing up to 1937, marked by the creation of the symphonic poem *Skënderbeu* by Fan S. Noli), Albanian concert music can be considered a true product of the second half of the 20th century. Following Pjetër Gaci's *Violin Concerto* in 1959, Albanian music produced dozens of piano concertos, each reflecting the historical moment in which it was composed. Different factors contributed to the development of Albanian piano concert music, but among the most important are the professional and artistic factors, defined by the fact that musicians at all levels were trained through the establishment of a complete national system of music education. It is worth emphasizing that the level of creative forces and artistic demands grew in parallel with an increasingly active concert life, especially with the arrival of several composers from the former Soviet Union (e.g., Zadeja, Daija, etc.). The history of Albanian music in the second half of the 20th century unfolded within the framework of one of Europe's most isolated and ideologically rigid regimes. This political transformation dramatically reshaped every aspect of cultural production, including music. The regime promoted a Marxist-Leninist worldview that regarded art and culture as tools for ideological education, national unity, and the formation of the "new socialist individual." As a result, musical creation, and performance in Albania during this period evolved under conditions of strict political control, with state institutions playing a central role in both artistic patronage and censorship.

The First Musical Institutions and Their Role

Before World War II, the orchestral ensemble of Radio Tirana, composed of musicians educated in Italy and led by conductor and violinist Umberto Rampi, was the most important musical formation in the country (Çollaku, 2013). In 1944, the People's Army Choir established under the direction of Gaqo Avrazi in Korçë. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, at a time when the new regime was beginning to organize and the communists were taking control of the country, the music school known as the "Artistic Lyceum" was founded, named after the war martyr Jordan Misja. This school was created by ministerial decree on December 20, 1946 (Lazri, 2009). Its first director was the choral conductor Kostandin Trako (1946–1949). The first teachers were distinguished Albanian musicians who had studied abroad, such as violinist Ludovik Naraçi (Vienna – Austria), pianist Tonin Guraziu (Bologna – Italy), pianist Lola Aleksi Gjoka (Sevastopol – Russia), Karmen Nako (Trieste – Italy), among others. Scholar Nestor Kraja, in *The History of Albanian Music* (Kraja, 2021), notes: "Thus, the music department was primarily supported by the traditions of the Italian school and, more broadly, the European tradition. Only later (1949–51) did specialists from the Russian school begin to contribute: Skabllov – cello, Utkin – violin, and Njizhnjikova – voice." The post-war period saw the rapid institutionalization of musical life in Albania. In 1950, the founding of the State Philharmonic—later becoming the Orchestra of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (Koço, 2012)—marked a decisive step in the development of orchestral music. The National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (founded in 1953) provided the necessary infrastructure for the development and dissemination of concert music, including large-scale forms such as

the concerto. In 1962, the State Conservatory (today the University of Arts) was founded, becoming the central institution for music education in the country. State institutions did more than just support performance and education—they actively shaped the content and direction of musical creation. Composers were state employees, and their work had been often guided by thematic mandates issued by cultural committees or party directives. Themes such as the anti-fascist struggle, industrial labour, collectivization, and patriotic sacrifice were frequent subjects of musical works. Even abstract instrumental music was expected to embody national values and optimism. Nevertheless, within this system, several Albanian composers succeeded in developing individual voices and contributed to the professionalization of musical culture. The concerto genre offered a valuable platform for this artistic development.

The First Albanian Works for Piano and Orchestra

Based on archives from the Library of the University of Arts, Radio Tirana, the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet, and the Jordan Misja Secondary Artistic School in Tirana, an almost complete list of Albanian concert works for piano during the period 1959–1969 has been compiled, presented chronologically by year of composition. This list has also been cross-checked with existing literature, including *History of Albanian Music* (1983), *Encyclopedia of Albanian Music* (Shupo, 2001), *History of Albanian Music* (Kraja, 2021), and the *Bibliography of Albanian Music* compiled by the National Library of Albania. The works composed between 1959 and 1969 are listed below:

1. Vangjo Nova – Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, 1959,
2. Tonin Harapi – Rhapsody No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra, 1967;
3. Nikolla Zoraqi – Rhapsody No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra, 1967;
4. Pjetër Gaci – Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra, 1967; performed by Johan Botka, conductor Simon Gjoni, Lyceum Orchestra, May Concerts 1967,
5. Çesk Zadeja – Piano Concerto, 1968;
6. Tonin Harapi – Piano Concerto, 1969;
7. Vangjo Nova – Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra (1969); titled "Tarracat e Bregdetit" (Terraces of the Coast).

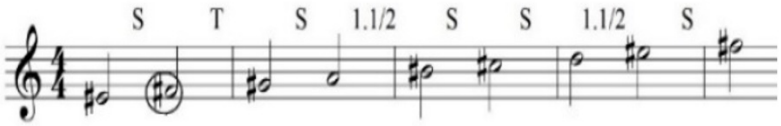
Early Rhapsodies in Albanian Music Literature

The development of music for piano and orchestra in Albania began with the genre of instrumental rhapsody, introduced by several prominent composers of our professional musical scene. These composers were Tonin Harapi, Pjetër Gaci, and Nikolla Zoraqi. Their three rhapsodies were all composed in 1967, one year before Zadeja's Piano Concerto. It is no coincidence that Albanian concert piano music began with the rhapsody genre. The ideology of the time required that art communicate directly with the masses. Since rhapsody was intricately connected to folk music and was naturally communicative, it became the ideal medium for composers of the period. It fulfilled the demands of the new political spirit, which called for cultural expression aligned with national identity and mass appeal. These were the years of the "Great Isolation," following Albania's break from the socialist bloc, and art became a key tool for stirring emotions and mobilizing people toward progress. For the purposes of this article, the rhapsodies by Harapi, Gaci, and Zoraqi will be analysed in detail. The rhapsody is a musical genre that, like its

literary counterpart, was initially conceived as an epic form, but in specific historical periods of its development, it acquired lyrical and largely improvisatory qualities. Historically derived from the Greek word *rhapsōdo* (Grove Dictionary, "Rhapsody"), in the 16th century it was considered an enthusiastic epic poem, whereas by the 18th century it became associated with music, often taking a three-part form with an improvisational character. Rhapsody developed its lasting identity as a large-scale nationalist epic work, particularly through the influence of Liszt, and later composers such as Dvořák, Lalo, Albéniz, Glazunov, Saint-Saëns, Enescu, Bartók, Vaughan Williams, Delius, Ravel, Casella, Janáček, Rachmaninoff, Gershwin, and others (Grove Dictionary, "Rhapsody"). Characteristic of the genre remains its improvisatory spirit and its epic-lyrical nature, often linked to features of folk music. These works also outlined some of the initial characteristics of concert piano music, such as being non-programmatic music, as well as the tendency to explore new technical possibilities of the piano, following the finest examples of Romantic music, especially that of the Eastern Europe.

Rhapsody No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra – Tonin Harapi

Rhapsody No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra, composed in 1967, was performed in 1968 at the May Concerts by pianist Anita Tartari, conducted by Roland Çene, with the Orchestra of High Institute of Arts (ILA). Although written in the key of F minor, establishes and is based on a mode that underpins the entire work.



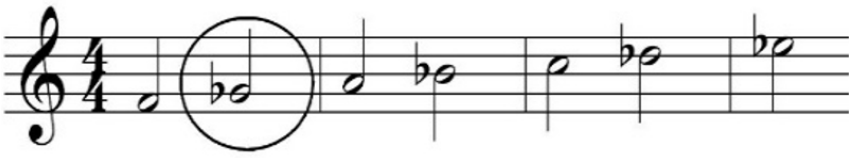
Musical Example 1. Theme, Rhapsody No. 1

Specifically, based on the harmonic concepts of diatonic scales (harmonic minor), the composer applies in the solo pianist's passage an improvisatory form of a scale with two augmented seconds—a characteristic element of the modal system in Oriental music, which had become part of the urban folk tradition of Shkodër. This phenomenon reflects the effort to unite the technical knowledge gained through global musical experience with the musical folklore of the homeland—a directive not only from the official ideology of the time but also a tendency in world musical traditions. The genre of the rhapsody was the most suitable form for such applications. Didn't Brahms do something similar? Didn't Korsakov, Khachaturian, Szymanowski, Enescu, and others do the same? These were the early stages of creating our professional music, and the connections with the great tradition of world music were focused on romantic experiences, as it could hardly have been otherwise. Our music could not develop into advanced professional stages without following the path of the great global tradition. In particular, it would have been impossible to follow examples from neoclassicism (Stravinsky), expressionism (Schoenberg, Berg, Webern), integral serialism (Boulez), and others. From an emotional perspective, Tonin Harapi remains a composer of the Romantic tradition, with a lyrical character full of inspiration and an inner pathos, a musical expression that stands out in our music with a broad melody full of lyrical cantilena, rich in pathos and emotional expression evoking the laments of Shkodër.

The work continues with a second theme in a lively 7/8 pace, built on pizzicato strings and based on an elegant dance with a linear development that becomes dreamlike within lyrical colours, revealing the sentimental and emotional aspects of the composer's style—a style in which dramatic clashes are foreign. Built in sonata form with a reflective recapitulation, the work ends with a triumphant and pathetically massive character, reflecting the spirit of the times and the demands those difficult years imposed on art. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Harapi unfolds a series of new pianistic textures in this rhapsody, beautifully blending in dialogues and monologues of the soloist with the orchestra, based on a clear melodic concept and a line full of contrasts. To emphasize this, the composer uses in the recapitulation the presentation of the second theme first, followed by the transformation of the main first theme into a magnificent form, set in orchestral unison accompanied by piano chords, after which a coda is placed that energetically recalls the main thematic elements of the rhapsody once again.

Rhapsody No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra — Nikolla Zoraqi

Rhapsody No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra by Nikolla Zoraqi, premiered in 1967, performed by pianist Nikoleta Nako and the RTSH Orchestra conducted by Ferdinand Deda. The piece is marked by a distinctive dramatic character, sometimes even extending beyond the traditional boundaries of the genre. It is based on musical material from the ballet Cuca e Maleve, which was staged a year later. In fact, in an article published in the newspaper Drita, the contemporary critic Spiro Kalemi briefly mentions this connection (Kalemi, 1972). The introduction is built upon a chromatic modal scale once again.



Musical Example 2. Rhapsody No. 1

Akil Koçi wrote at the time:
"*The Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra is the composer's best and most successful work. It holds an important place not only in his own oeuvre but also in the repertoire of Albanian instrumental music*." (1972, cited by Ciko).

Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra – Pjetër Gaci

Pjetër Gaci's Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra was premiered by pianist Johan Botka, accompanied by the Artistic Lyceum Orchestra under the direction of Simon Gjoni, during the May Concerts of 1967. Gaci's Rhapsody begins with traditional concepts of the genre. The first theme is weighty and epic in character, built on a chromatic modal scale. Initially slow and solemn, it gradually gains momentum, transforming into a dynamic and contrasting theme. This kind of gradual thematic transformation was a novel element in the music of the time. The change in character is clearly shaped through octave modelling in both hands on the piano. It

resembles a lens that, first focused on the heroism of a distant past, gradually zooms in on the energy of the present, all while retaining the same heroic spirit.

The second theme is lyrical, passionate, and deeply inspired. It is introduced by the string section (violins and violas) in a high tessitura, filled with emotional intensity. The development section builds primarily on the first, now highly energized, theme and its interweaving with the second. While the piano writing may be somewhat limited in melodic richness, the piece benefits from a well-constructed dramaturgy. The Rhapsody was composed in 1967, and although the original manuscript lacks the composer's signature, it includes the name of the copyist, Fatbardha Zejno, who also recorded the exact completion date of her work.

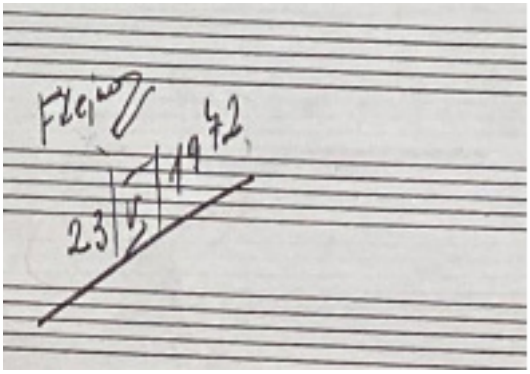


Figure 1. Notation in the Score – Archive of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (TOB)

The Development of the Piano and Orchestra Concerto Genre during the Period 1959–1969

In Albania, the development of concert music for piano emerged significantly later than vocal music and wind ensemble music. The advancement of this genre required essential conditions, such as a) the presence of professionally trained composers, well-versed in the traditions of instrumental and symphonic music, b) the formation of symphony orchestras, c) experienced pianists equipped with the proper concert-level technique. Until the 1950s, Albania had only few musicians dedicated to composing vocal works, and even fewer engaged in instrumental composition, none in the field of instrumental concert music. While vocal music had already gained popularity and attracted the interest of a handful of trained composers, instrumental music remained rare and was mostly limited to small and medium-sized forms. Examples include Albanian Rhapsody No. 1 (Kono, 1942) as well as a number of piano miniatures by Ramadan Sokoli, Tonin Guraziu, Tonin Harapi, Çesk Zadeja, and others. The first group of composers who studied abroad, specifically in the Soviet Union (modern-day Russia), included Çesk Zadeja and Tish Daija, both of whom studied there from 1951 to 1956. Later, Nikolla Zoraqi (1958–1961), Kozma Lara (1958–1961), and Tonin Harapi (1959–1961) followed them, among others. Educated within the compositional frameworks of Eastern European schools, these composers began contributing to the development of Albanian instrumental music. Their work coincided with a shift in Albania's political and aesthetic landscape, which gradually took shape over the following years.Within the specific genre of piano concertos, the earliest contributions came from Vangjo Nova, Kozma Lara, Tonin Harapi, and Çesk Zadeja—recognized as the pioneering composers of this genre in Albania.

The Early Piano and Orchestra Works

Koncert për Piano dhe Orkestë- Vangjo Nova

According to Grove Dictionary, Vangjo Nova's Piano Concerto was composed in 1959 (Grove Dictionary), which should make it the first work of this genre in Albania. In that year, composer Vangjo Nova served as assistant conductor to Kostandin Trako, the conductor of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet. However, at that time, Nova's technical and practical preparation was still limited, making him less prepared to compose a full piano concerto. In Gjovalin Lazri's book Liceu Artistik Jordan Misja në Vitet 1946–1991 (Lazri, 2009), it is noted: "At the high school… for theory students…, secondary piano lessons… were only one hour per week for four years." During those years, Vangjo Nova was known for several achievements in the vocal music genre. Albanian pianists capable of performing a piano concerto at that time included Tonin Guraziu (a teacher at the Jordan Misja Artistic High School).

However, there is no evidence in the activities of Nova or other pianists indicating that they ever performed a concerto by Vangjo Nova, nor are there any recordings or documents related to this concerto. It is only mentioned in the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians by Leotsakos (Grove Dictionary, 2001 & 2014) and in the Encyclopedia of Albanian Music by Sokol Shupo (Shupo, 2001). In the archive of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (TOB), several orchestral parts of a piano concerto are preserved, bearing some intriguing notes. On one of the pages, it is noted: "Vangjo Nova – Concerto for Piano and Orchestra", followed below by "Rikardo Filaj, 1969", who was known for frequently copying orchestral parts. On another page, from the first violins' parts, the following is written: "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in Three Movements. V. Nova", along with the date "May 10, 1959". Below that appear the names of the desk players: Namik Opara, Vilson Taja, and Jake Daja.

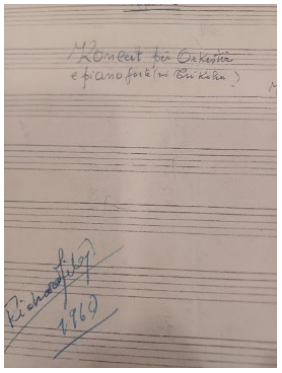
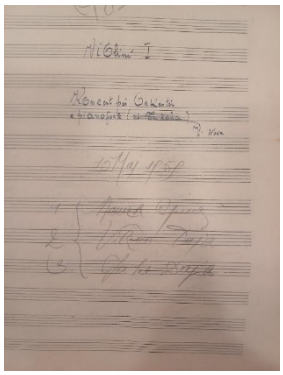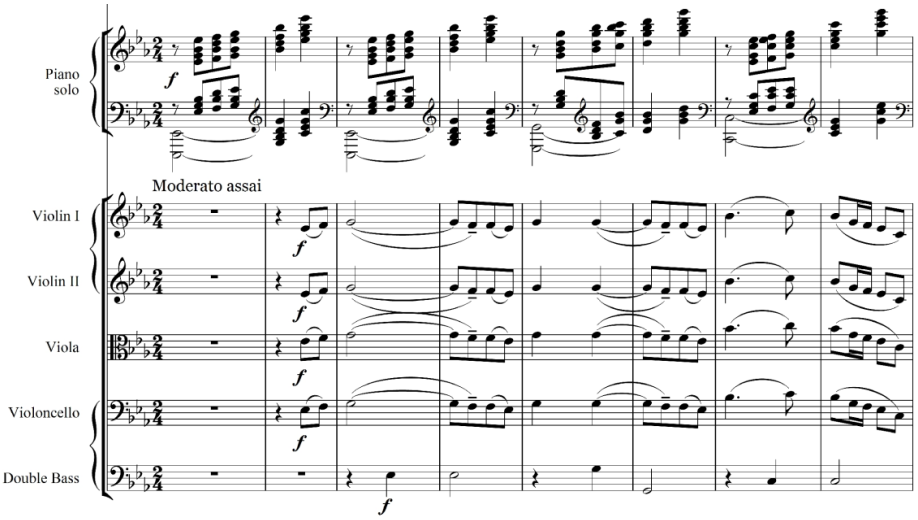



Figure 2 and 3. Part taken from the archive of TOB

It is difficult to believe that these parts would have been copied unless there was a real expectation the work would be performed, as copying orchestral parts incurred a significant financial cost. However, no concert poster or program for a performance of this concerto can be found in the TOB archive. In conclusion, it can be affirmed that Vangjo Nova attempted to compose a piano concerto in 1959. According to the recollections of Robert Radoja, the work

was not accepted for performance by the selection committee during his interview with him. Given the weight of the thematic material, the work's dramaturgy, the numerous orchestral doublings, and despite the absence of the soloist's part, we can conclude that the piece was a passionate attempt by the composer to engage with this genre. However, it ultimately fell short of the artistic and technical compositional standards expected at the time. The Piano Concerto-Fantasy was performed by pianist Lili Tafaj in 1969 during the May Decade Festival, accompanied by the Orchestra of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet under the direction of conductor Mustafa Krantja (Archive of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Lili Tafaj file, No. 52). The work is structured in the following movements: "Moderato," "Andantino," and "Allegro con brio."

In 1968, Çesk Zadeja composed his first piano concerto. He is one of the most distinguished composers of Albanian music. In addition to cultivating a wide creative output, he composed his piano concerto in 1968, which was performed during that year's May Decade by pianist Nikoleta Nako, accompanied by the Orchestra of the Tirana Conservatory under conductor Roland Çene. The concerto has been performed multiple times by various pianists, orchestras, and conductors and remains well remembered by audiences and within our tradition of piano concertos as a landmark work in this genre. This is partly due to the composer's long, rich, and unique creative career, which spanned nearly all genres of Albanian music except opera. The concerto is structured as a single movement titled "Moderato assai." Çesk Zadeja's Piano Concerto was written during his tenure at the Tirana Conservatory. It has remained a staple on the Albanian concert scene and beyond, admired for its beauty, clear form, and musical language that blends Albanian folk traditions with the finest romantic traditions of world music. Form: Sonata form with an introduction and coda framing the work.



Musical Example 3. The Introduction Theme, Concerto No. 1

The opening theme is lyrical and optimistic, built on the southern pentatonic scale. Theme I, closely related to the introduction, carries a lyrical character but features both horizontal and vertical development. The melody follows a pentatonic scale intertwined with the Mixolydian mode. Additionally, the ascending melodic direction and its powerful unison presentation aim

to reflect the optimism and vigorous spirit of the era, which the composer depicts through pure, strong chords in the piano part that harmonically support and follow the main orchestral melody.Following the opening theme comes the main theme, presented by the solo piano. This theme contrasts emotionally with the introduction but is connected to it by key points: 1) The first two notes use upbeats (a piano technique); 2) the tonality is E-flat minor; 3) repetition of internal segments expands the musical thought; 4) the rhythm is in 2/4 time. Harmonically, the theme follows a path rich in chromaticism, reflecting the composer's professional training. The second theme is dance-like, lyrical, and emotionally clear, based on the Mixolydian mode [E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D]. The use of the Mixolydian mode, combined with harmony and the placement of the natural G note in the melody and the cadence on the B note (the second degree of A major), makes this theme distinctive. This exemplifies the composer's intelligence, professionalism, and creativity, blending classical harmony with elements of Albanian folklore to impart a national colour to the work. The development section builds on both themes treated in distinctive ways. The first theme transforms into a broad descriptive character, featuring large intervals and sounding in the strings, supported by chromatic chordal backing from clarinets and horns. Meanwhile, the piano bursts into agile sixteenth-note arpeggios, emphasizing the first and third beats of each measure. The entire texture unfolds on the principle of waves (from A, transported to G, etc.). The thematic bubble motifs, characterized by intervals such as seconds and fourths, appear consistently across violins, cellos, woodwinds, and brass, creating a polyphonic sonic relief with a hymn-like quality. This overall crescendo quickly shifts the main theme into a festive, dance-like character. The cadence is built on the second theme, initially dreamy and later hymn-like, creating a dramatic highlight before returning to the recapitulation. Another concerto, also from 1969, was composed by Tonin Harapi and deserves further analysis in a separate article.

Conclusion

The emergence and development of the Albanian piano concerto between 1959 and 1969 reflect not only the artistic maturity of the country's composers but also the sociopolitical and institutional transformations that shaped the post-war cultural landscape of Albania. Within a decade, concert music for piano evolved from being non-existent to becoming a meaningful expression of national artistic identity, driven by the establishment of key institutions such as the Artistic High School, the State Philharmonic, and the Tirana Conservatory, as well as the systematic training of professional musicians. Despite operating within a rigid and isolated ideological regime, Albanian composers of this period succeeded in integrating technical skill, structural clarity, and national folk idioms into their works. The piano concertos and rhapsodies by Vangjo Nova, Çesk Zadeja, Tonin Harapi, Pjetër Gaci, and Nikolla Zoraqi demonstrate not only stylistic variety and aesthetic ambition but also an evolving individuality within the constraints of political expectations. These works laid the foundations for the subsequent development of instrumental concert music in Albania. The preference for rhapsodic forms and modal folk idioms aligned well with the ideological imperatives of the time, which demanded national character, accessibility, and immediate emotional impact. However, within this framework, composers cultivated distinctive voices and developed sophisticated musical languages. Their contributions mark the beginnings of a modern Albanian instrumental tradition—one that looked both inward, toward its cultural roots, and outward, to the broader heritage of European art music. Through historical contextualization, archival research, and analytical study, this investigation not only documents these early moments in the genre but also highlights the

broader significance of this period in shaping the trajectory of Albanian concert music. The piano concerto became more than a musical form; it became a vessel through which composers navigated and negotiated the complex interplay of artistic aspiration, national identity, and ideological limitations.

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Piano Technique and Albanian Music of the 1950s–1960s

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Abstract

Despite sporadic attempts during the first half of the twentieth century, Albanian piano music truly began to develop after the Second World War. This paper explores the evolution of piano technique during the initial phase of this development, tracing it from the earliest piano works to the concert pieces of the 1950s and 1960s. The research methodology combines analytical, historiographical, and comparative approaches, drawing on the experience of analogous studies in the international literature. The focus of the analysis centers particularly on the piano concertos of Çesk Zadeja and Tonin Harapi, beginning with a comparison between the techniques employed in their concert works and the broader global experience of the genre. Special attention is devoted to the influence of Romantic composers, with particular emphasis on the close connections between nineteenth-century Romantic piano technique and its application in Albanian musical works of the 1950s and 1960s. By analyzing the techniques employed in these compositions, the paper argues that Albanian composers of the 1950s–1960s creatively inherited and adapted essential elements of Romantic piano technique, further mediated through the Russian experience they absorbed during their studies in the Soviet Union. It concludes that the fusion of this experience with a rich foundation in Albanian musical folklore shaped the fundamental characteristics of Albanian pianism during this formative phase, creating a musical language that is at once individual and national.

Keywords

piano technique, romanticism, Albanian piano music, folklore, Çesk Zadeja, Tonin Harapi

Introduction

The development of cultivated Albanian music in the second half of the twentieth century is connected to the broader effort of building a national artistic identity—an endeavor unfolding during a time when foreign influences and the search for indigenous roots coexisted in a fragile balance. In this context, the repertoire for piano and orchestra assumes particular importance, not only due to its artistic and musical value, but also as a reflection of attempts to integrate European compositional and interpretive techniques with the spirit of Albanian tradition.

During the 1950-1960s, Albanian composers such as Zadeja and Harapi created works that marked a new phase in the country's musical history—works that not only represented the emerging national school of composition, but also articulated a distinctive pianistic language, one that combined technical craftsmanship with national sensitivity. The influence of the Soviet school—especially in terms of technical and structural elements—together with the legacy of Romanticism and the use of folk music elements, contributed to the formation of a new approach to the piano concerto in Albania.

This study aims to examine this decisive period through an analysis of two emblematic works of the time: the Piano Concerto by Çesk Zadeja and the Piano Concerto by Tonin Harapi. Focusing on technical, stylistic, and interpretive aspects, the analysis seeks to shed light on how pianistic technique developed and adapted in service of a national ideal, while remaining in ongoing dialogue with the European concert tradition.

Methodology

This study is based on a combined methodology that interweaves musical analysis, stylistic comparison, and historical contextualization. First, formal and structural analysis is employed to examine the thematic construction and development of musical material in each concerto. This includes a focus on elements of sonata form, thematic treatment, the use of tonality, and the organization of dramatic development. Second, the study analyzes pianistic technique through a detailed examination of piano texture, figuration, register usage, articulation, pedaling, and interpretative challenges in each work. This section includes direct comparisons with similar works from the European repertoire (Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev), as well as concepts drawn from modern piano pedagogy. Third, the interpretive and expressive dimension is evaluated by analyzing not only technical, but also emotional and rhetorical aspects required of the performer. For this purpose, comparisons are made with Romantic and modern interpretive styles, along with principles derived from the interpretative experiences of renowned pianists. Finally, a comparative analysis is developed between the two Albanian concertos and international models through a table summarizing technical, stylistic, and interpretative similarities and differences. This integrated approach serves to illuminate diverse compositional strategies and outlines a broader picture of Albanian pianistic technique during the period under study.

Piano concerto – Cesk Zadeja

Piano Concerto - Zadeja, composed in 1968, stands as one of the foundational works of the Albanian concert repertoire. It represents not only a pivotal moment in the development of cultivated Albanian music, but also a significant effort to shape a national musical language—one that merges modern compositional techniques with rich sources of Albanian folklore, processed in a stylistically refined and culturally profound manner.

This concerto is a symphonic-scale work constructed in a single-movement sonata form, featuring a stable structure and a dramatic tension that runs throughout the piece. The solemn introduction—built on powerful piano chords that rise from the lower to the upper register—resembles the monumental character of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1. The theme is introduced by the orchestra in unison, with clear musical ideas, immediately establishing a dramatic narrative.

The exposition contains two clear and contrasting themes:

- Theme I - introspective, composed of short phrases interrupted by expressive silences, requiring a controlled piano touch and a sensitive legato. Spiritually, it recalls the fragile lyricism of Schumann, but with a more modern internal tension expressed through chromaticism in the left hand—almost approaching a jazz-influenced style. Both the theme and the introduction are grounded in the pentatonic scale.
- Theme II - presented in the remote key of A major, brings a dance-like character, creating a sharp contrast in tone color and energy. This tonal shift, unexpected within a traditional formal structure, evokes the kind of dramatic modulations found in the works of Shostakovich or Prokofiev.

The **development** section is dynamic and emotionally intense. The two themes intertwine, transform, and grow in tension through the use of dissonance, arpeggiated figurations, and dense counterpoint. The pianist must navigate fast octave passages while maintaining clarity and avoiding heaviness in tone.

The **cadenza**, built on the second theme, is a brilliant passage that demands both technical mastery and aesthetic control. Unconventionally, it is placed at the end of the development section. Pedaling must be handled with particular finesse to preserve harmonic clarity and resonance transparency.

The **recapitulation** revisits the themes in a transformed way: the second theme returns in A-flat major, lending it a softer and more reflective hue. This return is not merely a repetition, but a reinterpretation charged with emotional depth. The coda closes the work with a solemn return to the introduction, ending with a philosophically rich atmosphere. This narrative technique recalls the return of the main theme in Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3.

Technical and Interpretative Aspects

Zadeja's concerto presents a complex challenge for the performer—one that goes beyond mere technical demands and requires full emotional and dramatic engagement. At its core, this is a concerto that calls for physical strength, discipline, and spiritual sensitivity, all balanced within a structure influenced by symphonic design. From the very beginning, the pianist is confronted with powerful ascending chords built on a pentatonic scale (E♭ – F – G – B♭ – C). The articulation must be precise, grounded in the weight of the arm rather than driven by physical tension. The construction of the introduction reveals technical similarities with other major piano works, notably Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1.

Although Zadeja's approach bears affinity with 20th-century Eastern European composers such as Prokofiev and Bartók, the opening in essence carries a lyrical quality that poses significant interpretative challenges. Within the forte dynamic, tension increases in parallel with the melodic ascent toward the piano's upper register—yet always remains within a melodic sensibility, without breaking into harshness or losing tonal clarity. Zadeja employs full-bodied chords and sforzando octaves that demand precision. The pianist must possess physical power and full control over hand weight in order to achieve dramatic effect without sacrificing the purity of sound. In numerous passages—particularly within the development and the cadenza—the composer uses rapid-moving or dynamically extreme octaves. These require not only strength and muscular stamina, but also accurate coordination of the shoulders and elbows, to avoid physical tension and ensure fluidity.

One of the most delicate aspects lies in pedaling—especially in passages with inner-line dissonances. Unlike Harapi, who allows for extended pedaling, Zadeja requires clear pedaling after each chord in order to preserve vertical harmonic structure. A distinguishing feature of this concerto is that each phrase carries a rhetorical character—not only in its form but also in its emotional and dramatic function. The pianist must intuit when a phrase is attempting to express something (a rise, a climax) and when it seeks to reflect or fall into silence. Dynamic fluctuations, intentional pauses, and changes in register all require an emotionally perceptive performer. The cadenza is one of the concerto's most significant moments, where the pianist must serve both as storyteller and architect. It contains brilliant, virtuosic elements that are always in service of reviving the thematic material and reflecting on the emotional journey of the work.
In dialogue with the orchestra, Zadeja often creates tension and contrast through rhythmic interruptions and strong orchestral responses. It is essential for the pianist to listen attentively to the orchestra and to balance the overall sound, so that the collaboration does not become a competition. This type of soloist–orchestra contrast is also found in the piano concertos of Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff, where the pianist is not above the structure, but rather an integral part of it.

The Piano Concerto by Tonin Harapi

Harapi's Piano Concerto is built upon a clear and traditional classical structure, but is developed in the direction of emotionally dense symphonism. Each movement of the work carries a specific dramaturgical function and within itself presents a distinct world of musical characters.

The first movement is constructed in sonata form and features two contrasting themes:

- Theme I, introduced at the beginning by the orchestra in unison, is based on the folk song "Bardhok Biba" and is characterized by an epic-heroic quality, with strong intervals (fourths and fifths), sharply defined rhythms, and a clear rhetorical direction.
- Theme II, presented by the soloist, is lyrical and introspective, played ad libitum, and evokes an atmosphere of reflection and hope, built upon a flowing melody in D major.

The development section is the most dramatic segment of the movement. Its climax is achieved through dense elaboration of the dotted rhythmic motif, sequential developments, and the interplay of the two themes in sustained tension.

The second movement uses the folk song "Te çezmat e Dropullit" as its foundational material. This theme unfolds over a tonic pedal, creating a calm atmosphere, yet not one of passivity. It transforms into a symbol of resilience and hope, especially when it reappears in the major mode as a second theme.

The finale does not represent a festive outburst, as in classical concertos, but rather an ideological and emotional resolution. The inclusion of the song "Tunde oj Parti, tunde" serves as a symbol of unity, triumph, and the construction of the future. This theme is interwoven with previous thematic material, giving the finale a reflective and affirmative character.

Analysis of Pianistic Technique

This concerto requires a high level of technical control and deep awareness of the narrative nature of the music. Dotted and rhythmic figures require precision, strength, and sharply articulated execution. Use of registers creates timbral contrasts: the first theme in the lower register demands power, while the second theme in the higher register calls for delicacy. Pedaling must be used sparingly and with care—especially in the second movement—where the resonance of iso-polyphony must be preserved without compromising the clarity of the melodic line. Frequent dynamic changes, ranging from forte to pianissimo, demand detailed control of nuance and emotionally expressive phrasing. Modern techniques, such as extended arpeggios, block chords, syncopations, and interrupted phrases, give the work a contemporary character in touch with twentieth-century aesthetics.

Interpretative and Expressive Dimension

The clear contrast between the two main themes—heroic and lyrical—requires two very different technical and interpretive approaches: For Theme I, with its epic and martial character, sharply defined articulation and full-body engagement are necessary to achieve volume, drive, and a sense of "weight" in the sound. This approach aligns with the Russian percussive school of piano playing, reminiscent of Prokofiev and Shostakovich. For Theme II, a lyrical cantilena is needed, shaped through long-breathed phrases, fluid dynamics, and refined pedaling—an approach consistent with the ideals of German Romanticism and the pianistic techniques described by Leimer. The pianist assumes the role of narrator, guiding the listener through an emotional journey—from heroism to reflection, and ultimately to collective affirmation. The

interpretive approach may be inspired by figures such as Arthur Rubinstein (for richness of phrasing), Emil Gilels (for harmonic depth and earthy sonority), or Vladimir Horowitz (for emotional intensity and dramatic sensitivity). This places Harapi within a lineage of composers who sought to build a national identity through music—much like Bartók did for Hungarians, Copland for Americans, or Enescu for Romanians.

Comparison with the Pedagogical Principles of Gieseking-Leimer and Neuhaus

In *The Art of Piano Playing*, Heinrich Neuhaus emphasizes the necessity of a personalized sound, one that originates from the hands functioning as an organic, not mechanical, unit. He insists on the intimate connection between emotion and articulation: "*You must play with your soul, not just with your fingers*."

- This principle is clearly applied in Zadeja's concerto, where strength does not arise from finger pressure alone, but from overall bodily balance. The arpeggios and octave-based passages in the cadenza should not be approached with excessive muscular force, but rather executed with a natural flow grounded in what Neuhaus calls the "weight of the hand."
- In Harapi's concerto, this same principle is particularly evident in the lyrical theme of the second movement, where the pianist assumes the role of narrator. The phrasing and dynamic nuances align precisely with Neuhaus's interpretive ideal.

According to Leimer and Gieseking, in their book *The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection*, every technical passage should be rooted in the internal visualization of sound before it is played. They emphasize *practice away from the keyboard* as a method for cultivating mental perception and precise control over musical phrasing.

- Zadeja's opening requires exactly this approach: the pianist must not simply strike powerful chords but must imagine an architectural sonic structure gradually ascending. The first theme of Zadeja's concerto is rich in pauses that should not be interpreted as "disconnected phrases" but rather as reflective musical ideas. The inner rubato and silences between phrases must be felt as rhetorical breathing—one of the essential traits of the German interpretive tradition.
- In Harapi's concerto, passages such as the extended arpeggios in the development section, transitions between registers, and syncopated dotted rhythms demand precisely the kind of motor memory and tonal visualization that Gieseking considered fundamental.

Neuhaus gives great importance to clarity of musical thought—especially in dense textures. Zadeja, particularly in the development of the first theme in a minor tonality, constructs layers of hidden voices and horizontal tensions, requiring vertical clarity and timbral balance. The pianist must manage the balance between arpeggiated figuration and melodic line—a technique Neuhaus describes as "clarifying the internal architecture." When viewed through the pedagogical lenses of Gieseking, Leimer, and Neuhaus, the piano concertos of Zadeja and Harapi emerge as works that challenge both traditional technique and the aesthetic maturity of the interpreter. They demand not only precision, but deep focus and emotional intelligence, inviting the pianist to be not merely an executor, but an artist, a storyteller, and an emotional spokesperson.

Albanian Piano Concertos and Analogies with the Global Repertoire

In the solemn opening of Zadeja's concerto—with powerful piano chords ascending toward the upper registers—it is impossible not to recall the beginning of Tchaikovsky's *Concerto No. 1*. In both works, the introduction functions as the presentation of a vast emotional state, a kind of breath that prepares the listener for the internal world of the concerto. Even the key of E♭ major adds to the sense of heroic affirmation present in both pieces.

Zadeja's first theme is built upon a pentatonic scale, immediately evoking how Bartók employed Eastern European folk material—not as direct citation, but as the melodic and modal fabric of the music itself. It is not merely an Albanian melody; it becomes an original language, reminiscent of the thematic construction found in Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra or Mikrokosmos*.

The pianist's cadenza is one of its most distinctive moments: theme II is developed freely, in a virtuosic and lyrical manner. In terms of approach, this section clearly recalls the rhetorical brilliance of Liszt, where virtuosity is not for display but in service of an idea. The resemblance to Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 3* is particularly evident—especially in the placement of the cadenza at the end of the development section, with a rhythmic and internally dynamic structure. The use of rubato here is not simply expressive, but a tool for dramatic organization. Similar uses of the cadenza in unconventional moments can be found in Liszt, who employed brief cadential episodes to bridge movements.

On the other hand, Harapi's concerto begins with a unison orchestral statement, where the folk song "*Bardhok Biba*" emerges from the first notes as an epic figure. This strong and solemn beginning is reminiscent of the openings in Shostakovich's symphonies, where folk-rooted themes are elevated to a monumental level. In this respect, Harapi creates a figure that represents the people in a dramatic manner, just as Shostakovich does in his *Symphony No. 5*.

The dotted motif that appears in the first theme recurs throughout Harapi's concerto as a dramatic motor, developed through forceful rhythm and syncopated tension—a technique comparable to how Prokofiev uses rhythm as a thematic driver in his piano concertos. Harapi's second theme is lyrical and narrative, performed *ad libitum,* very much akin to the flowing, emotionally resonant themes Rachmaninoff develops in his *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Here too, the use of pedal is essential—not merely to add color, but to prolong the breath of the phrase and to create a profound spiritual atmosphere.

In the development of the first movement, Harapi places his themes in dramatic confrontation. The first motif, with all its rhythmic structure, influences the character of the second—a strategy reminiscent of Beethoven's treatment of thematic material in his late sonatas, where the main motif seems to "absorb" every other musical idea.
The final movement is not merely a virtuoso climax; it represents a conceptual conclusion, incorporating the song "*Tunde oj Parti, tunde*" not only for musical purposes but as a symbolic gesture. As in Shostakovich's work, the folk song becomes a vehicle for conveying a social vision, a shared ideal, and a collective spirit.

The Fusion with Albanian Musical Individuality

These influences were not adopted mechanically. Albanian pianists, trained in foreign schools, adapted the principles they learned to the specific musical language of Albanian composers. In the works of Zadeja, for instance, even in passages of high technical tension—such as the cadenza or rapid arpeggiated developments—what is required is a dramatic sensibility and emotional understanding of the thematic material. This aligns with Neuhaus's (1973) philosophy, which affirms that "*the pianist is not an athlete, but a poet who thinks with their hands*."

In Harapi's music, the elegance of the melodic line and its nocturne-like approach demand a highly sensitive use of pedal technique and subtle rubato—translated by the pianist not as imitation of European styles, but as an expression of distinctively Albanian emotionality.

Piano technique in the interpretation of Albanian concert works is built upon the foundations of the great European and Russian schools, but it attains full meaning only when it becomes a vehicle for expressing the inner world of Albanian music. This fusion is precisely what gives the repertoire its unique value: it is at once universal and national.

Thus, pianists performing the works of Zadeja and Harapi must strive not only for technical mastery, but also for deep awareness of the roots and aesthetic trajectory of these works—from Neuhaus and Leimer to Shkodra and Tirana, carried forward through their own hands.

Conclusion

The piano concertos of Çesk Zadeja and Tonin Harapi represent foundational pillars in the formation of a distinct interpretative and creative identity within the history of Albanian music. While Zadeja offers a more dramatic, densely structured, and symphonic approach, Harapi brings a lyrical, emotionally profound, and intimate perspective to interpretation.

From the standpoint of piano technique, the two concertos pose different challenges: Zadeja demands powerful articulation, precise weight control, and dynamic elasticity in dramatic phrases; Harapi, by contrast, calls for refined pedaling, inspired phrasing, and rich legato. In both cases, the pianist must master technical execution while demonstrating deep aesthetic sensitivity.

Performing Zadeja's concerto requires not only precision, but also the ability to sustain dramatic tension across sections—similar to the interpretative challenges found in Prokofiev's Concerto No. 2 or Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 3.

Harapi, on the other hand, develops a musical language that intertwines the emotional lyricism of Romantic tradition with powerful epic gestures and collective sentiment. His melodic style is often introspective, but does not shy away from dramatic tensions, heroic thematic development, and the evocation of Albanian symbolic figures—all of which imbue the work with deep emotional and social weight. The interpretation is more inward, requiring great sensitivity in phrasing. The pianist must possess a delicate legato, long-breathed lines, and well-crafted pedaling to support the harmonic colorations.

When compared with international repertoire standards, both concertos exhibit qualities that render the Albanian piano literature of the 1950s–60s fully deserving of a place in concert programs and scholarly studies abroad. Zadeja's writing reflects a modernist, formally absorbing style, with syncopated character and ongoing dramatic tension akin to Bartók or Prokofiev. Harapi's voice is closer to late-Romantic poetics, with stylistic similarities to Schumann in how he constructs emotional counterpoint between melody and harmonic support.

Another critical dimension is the pianist's interaction with the orchestra. In Zadeja's work, this relationship is often built on contrast, requiring quick and assertive responses to rhythmic interruptions and orchestral tension. In Harapi's concerto, the piano-orchestra dialogue is more supportive, fostering a shared timbral and emotional space. This necessitates continual listening and a nuanced interplay between the pianist and the broader orchestral structure.

These works demonstrate that Albanian pianistic development in the 1950s–60s was not an isolated effort, but part of a broader dialogue with European music. Through the composers' training in advanced conservatories—particularly in the Soviet Union—and through a deep integration of folkloric materials, Albanian composers created a language that is simultaneously national and universal.

These concertos should be included in academic curricula as essential works in the training of the next generation of performers. Their international promotion would contribute significantly to the recognition of Albania's musical heritage. The organization of performances, publication of critical editions of the scores, and the production of professional recordings would help this repertoire transcend national borders and attain the recognition it deserves in the European concert landscape.

In conclusion, the piano concertos of Zadeja and Harapi are vivid testaments to the creative potential of Albanian music and represent a valuable contribution to the evolution of piano performance both within Albania and beyond.

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Impact of jazz in Albanian pop music during the socialist era (1945–1973)

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Abstract

Originating from the United States, jazz was identified as the music of the countries of the capitalist bloc and viewed as a "foreign influence" in the socialist era in Albania. This study seeks to shed light on the efforts of some of the composers and performers who found the courage to incorporate jazz elements in pop music but still faced censorship and consequences from the regime of the time. The first audio recordings of the Albanian pop music made by Tirana Radio in the early 1950s show evidence of a significant number of songs that contained elements of the jazz music. They are rather distinct also in the first and second edition of the Festivali i Këngës (Song Festival) organized by Tirana Radio, as well as in the notorious 11th edition of the same festival organized by the Albanian Radio and Television (RTSH). For that purpose, a chronological order has been applied to identify the influence of this genre during a time spanning from the early post-war years up until 1973 (when the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Albanian Labour Party took place) based on the testimonies of some key personalities extracted from books, newspaper articles and interviews. Analytical methods of jazz music and theory have been employed to point out all the typical jazz elements that were applied to those songs, instrumentation, style, form, performance, rhythm, harmony, scales, and modes. This study is important as it seeks to bring to the surface the impact jazz had on the Albanian pop music, despite it being censored and banned from being formally performed after the example Western musicians.

Keywords

Festivali i Këngës, Radio Tirana, 11th Festival by the Albanian Radio and Television, Jazz and Totalitarianism, Socialist Realism in Albania.

Introduction

By the mid-20th century, jazz music had completed its cycle of global dissemination, extending from the United States across the world (DeVeaux & Giddins, 2015). In Albania during the 1930s and 1940s, due to socioeconomic and cultural underdevelopment, jazz remained accessible only to a narrow elite, despite the peak of its international success. Furthermore, American jazz was officially prohibited during the periods of Fascism and Nazism. Nevertheless, elements of this genre were integrated into the repertoire of Italian musica leggera and dance music (Martinelli, 2013), as well as German counterparts (Kater, 1989), which were also broadcast by Radio Tirana during the occupation period (Radio Tirana, 1939–1943; Bleta, 1944). The performance and listening to jazz were also banned during the socialist totalitarian regime in Albania. This repressive approach is clearly reflected in reports of the State Security (Sigurimi i Shtetit), which document the rigorous monitoring of Albanian students studying in Eastern Bloc countries (Imaj, 2017). Compared to Albania, these socialist states applied a significantly more liberal approach toward Western cultural influences. With the emergence of Albanian pop music (muzikë e lehtë) in the mid-1950s, jazz exerted an influence on several composers and performers, who integrated its elements into their music. Identifying these "clandestine" elements proved difficult for governing bodies and censorship institutions, as art critics and even musicians themselves lacked knowledge of jazz theory and harmony. Moreover, the dogma of Socialist Realism provided guidance only regarding thematic and ideological content. On the other hand, syncopation and swing rhythm had become empirically rooted among certain Albanian musicians, including those aligned with communist doctrine, such as Baki Kongoli (Kongoli, 2010) and Gaqo Avrazi, a colonel and conductor of the Army Ensemble.

Sources and Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating historical research with empirical musical analysis. The historiographical phase is provided on the examination of primary and secondary sources, including monographs (Këlliçi, 2003; Slatina, 2004; Tochka, 2017), musical scores published by local authors (1957), official documents published in online periodicals (Imaj, 2017; Kaloçi, 2025), and a transcript published in the journal Nëndori (1955). A significant contribution is provided by the testimonies of protagonists from that era (Xhaçka, 2009; Stambolla, 2011; Këlliçi, 2012; Bejko, 2017). These events are analyzed chronologically, spanning from the initial postwar openness toward jazz to the repression that followed the 11th National Song Festival (1972). A fundamental part of this work is the research into songs containing jazz elements, recorded at Radio Tirana during that period. These recordings have been digitized and are held in the RTSH (Albanian Radio and Television) Archive. Although access to these sources remains limited due to the lack of a formal research infrastructure, a portion of the materials is available through heirs or publications on online platforms. The digitization of magnetic tapes is still ongoing, leaving open the possibility of discovering additional songs with jazz elements. The empirical musical analysis of the audio recordings was conducted using theoretical and analytical methods of jazz (Mulholland & Hojnacki, 2013; Gridley, 2014; DeVeaux & Giddins, 2015), identifying specifics elements in arrangement, style, melody, rhythm, and harmony.

The influence of jazz on the first recordings of Albanian pop music

In the immediate period following World War II, Radio Tirana became the central institution of cultural reference in Albania, broadcasting both national and international music. Western music, including American and British works—and consequently jazz, which had reached the pinnacle of its global success during the Swing Era—was initially broadcast when Albania's political positioning within the Eastern Bloc was not yet officially formalized (Këlliçi, 2003). According to the testimony of Vitori Xhaçka, one of the first singers and simultaneously an announcer at Radio Tirana, Albanian pop music after the country's liberation, was characterized by a lyrical style and relied primarily on motifs from folk heritage. During her career (1946–1986), Xhaçka—who was also involved in selecting musical programming—asserts that, over the years, international music began to be filtered through the ideological criteria of the regime. Due to official censorship, Radio Tirana excluded jazz from its broadcasts, along with any composition clearly identified with the genre (Xhaçka, 2009). During the 1950s, a need arose at Radio Tirana to enrich the archive with pop dance music. According to a proposal presented at the Plenum of the League of Artists by Abdulla Grimci—a composer trained in Italy and head of the radio's music department—the practice followed in the Soviet Union for this musical genre should be taken as an example (Nëndori, 1955). In 1957, the Ministry of Education and Culture published three volumes of dance music in lead sheet format, containing songs by local authors in Western styles such as tango, foxtrot, slow fox, waltz, slow waltz, rumba, and samba (Autorë të Vendit, 1957). This fact highlights that, although jazz was officially prohibited, the treatment of foxtrot and slow fox styles was permitted, which historically had been danced to the swing rhythm of jazz. A similar situation had occurred during the fascist era in Italy, where it was sufficient not to sing in English and to avoid mentioning the term "jazz." In November of that same year, the first institutionalized ensemble of Albanian pop music was created for recording songs in the radio studios: a quartet consisting of Agim Prodani (accordion), Injac Guralumi (double bass), Mehdi Prodani (guitar), and Mustafa Zyberi (clarinet), without the inclusion of drums due to technical recording difficulties. The direction of the quartet was entrusted to Prodani, who was also one of the composers of those songs. With the improvement of recording technology, the ensemble gradually expanded to include drums, piano, string instruments, and others, leading to the formation of a full orchestra. Thus began the institutionalized discography of Albanian pop music produced at Radio Tirana. Gramophone records were also sold in Eastern Bloc countries, China, and Korea, often accompanied by concert tours (Stambolla, 2011). The recorded songs adhered to standard pop music forms, primarily featuring an instrumental introduction, verse, chorus, and instrumental interlude. Distinctive jazz elements are evident, especially within foxtrot and slow fox compositions characterized by a swing-feel rhythm.

Title	**Composer**	**Singer/s**	**Style**
Shkonte vasha	Agim Prodani	Anida Take	Foxtrot
Vashës sime	Agim Prodani	Anida Take	Foxtrot
Të pajtohemi	Agim Prodani	Anida Take	Two-step (with jazz elements)
Në mes gushës ke një pikë	Agim Prodani	Anida Take & Pjetër Gjergji	Foxtrot

Fustan i bardhë	Agim Prodani	Agim Prodani	Foxtrot
Djali simpatik	Abdulla Grimci	Anida Take / Pavlina Nikaj	Foxtrot
Vetëm një po	Baki Kongoli	Rudolf Stambolla	Foxtrot
Çapkëne	Mexhit Daiu	Zihni Berati	Slow fox
Dëshirë pranverore	Koço Uçi	Zihni Berati	Slow fox
Falmë e dashur	Koço Uçi	Rudolf Stambolla	Slow fox
Në sytë e tu	Gaqo Avrazi	Pjetër Gjergji	Foxtrot
Dashuria e parë	Tahsim Hoshafi	Rudolf Stambolla	Foxtrot
Takimi i parë	Llazar Morcka	Kujtim Cela	Foxtrot

Table 1. Songs with jazz elements identified (RTSH Archive, 1950–1960)

The influence of jazz on the Festivali i Këngës (Song Festival): 1st and 2nd Editions

In 1962, the first edition of the Festivali i Këngës at Radio Tirana was held, conceptualized after the model of the Italian Sanremo festival and organized by the music department under the direction of Abdulla Grimci. In the absence of a consolidated national recording industry, cultural authorities aimed to stimulate the production of national popular music. This became even more imperative following the severance of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, which led to the cessation of broadcasting music recorded in the Eastern Bloc countries and created a significant void in the radio programming (Këlliçi, 2003). Twenty songs participated in the competition, each performed in two versions by different singers: one for a symphonic-rhythmic orchestra conducted by Kristo Kote and another for a rhythmic ensemble conducted by Agim Krajka (Slatina, 2004). The influence of jazz was evident in thirteen of the songs, and in some cases, a contrasting mixture is observed between Socialist Realism themes in the lyrics and jazz elements in the orchestration. As innovations for the time, the use of the electric guitar and the samba style in the orchestration stand out.

Title	**Composer**	**Singers:** **(v.1) symphonic-rhythmic orchestra;** **(v.2) rhythmic ensemble;**	**Style**
Lumturi	Tasim Hoshafi	(v.1) Luigj Gurakuqi / Violeta Simoni; (v.2) Sulejman Çela / Violeta Simoni	Foxtrot
Në brigjet e tua atdhe	Tasim Hoshafi	(v.1) Sami Bakalli; (v.2) N/A;	Foxtrot
Porsa çel agimi	Kolë Gjinaj	(v.1) Luiza Papa; (v.2) Xhavit Xhepa;	Rumba, samba (with jazz elements)

Jeta e re na pret	Kristo Kote	(v.1) Florinda Gjergji; (v.2) Gjoni Athanas, Ibrahim Tukiçi, Avni Mula;	Foxtrot
Një minut	Llazar Morcka	(v.1) Sami Bakalli, Sulejman Çela; (v.2) Pjetër Gjergji;	Two-step
Mos më qorto	Vath Çangu	(v.1) Qemal Kërtusha; (v.2) Violeta Simoni;	Foxtrot
Lum kush dashuron	Baki Kongoli	(v.1) Luiza Papa / Gaqo Çako; (v.2) Hiqmete Pazari / Violeta Simoni;	Foxtrot
Erë pranverore	Tish Daija	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Pjetër Gjergji;	Waltz (with jazz elements)
Inxhinieres	Nexhmedin Doko	(v.1) Sami Kumi; (v.2) Pjetër Gjergji;	Foxtrot
Vashëzo	Koço Uçi	(v.1) Meliha Doda; (v.2) Qemal Kërtusha;	Foxtrot
Lemza	Agim Krajka	(v.1) Ylber Gimjani; (v.2) Vaçe Zela;	Foxtrot
Në stadium	Agim Prodani	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Qemal Kërtusha;	Two-step (with jazz elements)
Fëmija i parë	Abdulla Grimci	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Qemal Kërtusha;	Foxtrot

Table 2. Songs with jazz elements in the 1st edition of the Festivali i Këngës (RTSH Archive, 1962)

The first edition enjoyed widespread success both with the live audience and through radio broadcasting. However, in the months that followed, an extensive debate emerged concerning artistic professionalism, the national identity of popular music, and its thematic content. This debate involved, on the one hand, artists with Western or local training who drew upon Western popular music and, on the other hand, artists recently returned from the Soviet Union, who insisted that the creation of popular music should follow the same compositional approach as serious music while simultaneously relying on indigenous folklore in order to preserve its national character. In the call for participation for the second edition of the Festivali i Këngës, an expansion of themes according to Socialist Realism models was requested, along with the use of folk music intonations and the creation of songs easily singable by the masses. These guidelines, however, proved to be vague, as they did not define the compositional methodology or the manner of orchestration (Tochka, 2017).

The second edition, held in December 1963, essentially maintained the structure of the first edition, but the orchestra was expanded with instruments in the saxophone and brass sections. The number of participating songs increased to thirty, eighteen of which exhibited jazz influences, primarily in the orchestration. Alongside styles with a swing-feel, contemporary

styles such as samba, twist, boogie-woogie, R&B, and rock ‘n’ roll with jazz elements were also employed.

Title	**Composer**	**Singers: (v.1) symphonic-rhythmic orchestra; (v.2) rhythmic ensemble;**	**Style**
Në tren	Mustafa Bylo	(v.1) Margarita Pjetri; (v.2) Rudolf Stambolla;	Two-step (swing)
Endëses	Gaqo Avrazi	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Qemal Këртusha;	Slow fox & two-step (swing)
Vitet e rinisë	Mexhid Daiu	(v.1) Pavlina Prifti; (v.2) Pirro Dilo;	Foxtrot
Kënga të ushtojë	Ndok Pistulli	(v.1) Meliha Doda; (v.2) Nikolin Gjergji;	Twist (with jazz elements)
Majlinda	Abaz Hajro	(v.1) Violeta Simoni; (v.2) Elvira Daço;	Foxtrot
Vasha	Pjerin Ashiku	(v.1) Paulina Nikaj; (v.2) Burhan Mesi;	Foxtrot
Mos vono	Pjetër Gaci	(v.1) Dionis Bubani; (v.2) Sami Kumi;	Two-step
Nëse ti mua më pyet	Nexhmedin Doko	(v.1) Sofika Hodo; (v.2) Besnik Taraneshi;	Foxtrot
Dallëndyshes së parë	Leonard Deda	(v.1) Florinda Gjergji; (v.2) Nikolin Gjergji;	Samba (with jazz elements)
Nuk e fshehim dashurinë	Kristo Kote	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Sami Kumi;	(v.1) Boogie-woogie (v.2) Foxtrot & boogie-woogie
S'di të vallzoj	Llazar Morcka	(v.1) Rita Vako; (v.2) Fatbardha Bengu;	Fast rumba (with jazz elements)
Turni i natës	Tasim Hoshafi	(v.1) Bujar Mersini; (v.2) Violeta Simoni;	Foxtrot
Flakë e borë	Tish Daija	(v.1) Nikoleta Shoshi; (v.2) Rita Vako;	Boogie-woogie
Baba ti shkon në shkollë	Vath Çangu	(v.1) Pavlina Prifti; (v.2) Fatbardha Muço;	Two-step (swing)
Ëndrra ime	Baki Kongoli	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Qemal Këртusha;	Waltz, R&B-12/8 and foxtrot
S'është ëndërr as çudi	Abdulla Grimci	(v.1) Anita Take; (v.2) Besnik Taraneshi;	Two-step (swing)
Djaloshi dhe shiu	Agim Krajka	(v.1) Vaçe Zela; (v.2) Besnik Taraneshi;	Rock 'n' roll (with jazz elements)

S'të fal	Agim Prodani	(v.1) Anita Take; (v.2) Qemal Këtusha;	Two-step (swing)

Table 3. Songs with jazz elements in the 2nd edition of the Festivali i Këngës (RTSH Archive, 1963)

Skifter Këlliçi, a journalist at Radio Tirana and the announcer for the second edition of the Festivali i Këngës, recalls: "It was emphasized that the festival also included songs of a cosmopolitan character, as well as songs that were not based on the intonations of Albanian music" (Këlliçi, 2012). These official positions led to the dismissal of the head of the music department Abdulla Grimci and the exclusion of singer Besnik Taraneshi from all musical activities. In the years that followed, for nearly a decade, the swing-feel element was eliminated, and other successful contemporary influences of Western music became extremely rare in Albanian pop music. Consequently, composers were forced to reshape their musical language, drawing inspiration primarily from classical-romantic serious music and Albanian folk music.

The short spring: The 11th edition of the Festivali i Këngës at RTSH

In the early 1970s, an impression of social and cultural liberalization emerged within Albanian society, prompted by initiatives of the leader Enver Hoxha himself, who called upon institutional authorities to expand entertainment activities for young people. Signs of liberalization were also evident in the tenth edition of the Festivali i Këngës. This edition incorporated R&B styles, the use of the electric organ, an expanded brass section, and the employment of blues scales in songs such as "Ne të dy," "Përmes dritash," and "Bardhësi," composed by Agim Krajka, Kastriot Gjini, and Vakthi Sheme. The bossa nova version of the song "Bardhësi," performed by Ilira Çarçani, features a muted trumpet solo with a motivic development comparable to the practices of international jazz artists (RTSH Archive, 1971). For the organization of the eleventh edition, Todi Lubonja—the newly appointed director of RTSH—in addition to investing in technical and scenic innovations, approved the involvement of the RTSH Pop Music Orchestra formed approximately two years prior under the direction of trumpeter and arranger Gaspër Çurçia. This orchestra was essentially a big band and had carried out several musical activities, including the recording of the soundtrack for the movie Odisea e tifozëve (1972), with music composed by Aleksandër Lalo.

The 11th Festival broke significantly from previous directives. The authors of the twenty participating songs expanded the themes beyond the dogma of Socialist Realism, while the performance style, attire, and scenography clearly adopted the Western spectacle models. A sharp turn toward Western styles was noted in the compositions and orchestrations, including swing, pop, rock, R&B, funk, and progressive rock. Jazz, by then developed into numerous stylistic branches globally, was reflected in the festival through the fusion of jazz elements with contemporary styles. The almost imposing placement of the big band on stage alongside the rhythm section, combined with the positioning of the symphonic orchestra in the orchestra pit, constituted a notably bold approach within the context of the period. The orchestrations for this ensemble were entrusted to Gaspër Çurçia, who was well known for his affinity for and competence in jazz music. Consequently, jazz-oriented songs by Agim Krajka, as well as works

by prominent composers of Albanian serious music such as Tish Daija and Çesk Zadeja, were adapted for big band under Çurçia's orchestration (Bejko, 2017).

Title	Composer	Singer	Style
Në ekranin e televizorit	Agron Xhunga	Justina Aliaj	Medium swing
Shoqja më e mirë	Çesk Zadeja	Dorian Nini	Funk
Rruga e dibrës	Alfons Balliçi	Sherif Merdani dhe Kompleksi i Elbasanit	Progressive rock (with jazz elements)
Kur dëgjojmë zëra nga bota	Françesk Radi	Françesk Radi	Pop-rock (with jazz elements)
Vajza e qelqeve	Tasim Hoshafi	Hilmi Hoxha	Progressive rock (with jazz elements)
Vajzat dhe kompozitori	Aleksandër Lalo	Suzana Qatipi	Pop-rock (with jazz elements)
Mbrëmja e fundit	Enver Shëngjergji	Bashkim Alibali	Funk-rock (with jazz elements)
Natën vonë	Tish Daija	Vaçe Zela	Medium swing
Udhët janë të bukura	Agim Krajka	Lindita Sota	R&B dhe rock 'n' roll

Table 4. Songs with jazz elements in the 11th edition of the Festivali i Këngës (RTSH Archive, 1972)

It remains unclear whether the liberalization encouraged by Enver Hoxha was part of a premeditated strategy to identify individuals influenced by contemporary Western culture—and thus perceived as destabilizing to the system—or whether the modern spirit introduced by the 11th Festival was the result of a situation that had spiraled out of control. In the months following the festival, the regime launched a calculated escalation of attacks that culminated in June 1973, at the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the PPSH, where dictator Enver Hoxha severely condemned the festival's artistic direction. The punitive measures against the artists and organizers were carried out through a systematic campaign, beginning with dismissals from official positions and continuing with transfers to remote rural areas, forced labor in construction sites and mines, and ultimately, imprisonment or internment (Kaloçi, 2025). This repressive campaign extended across all spheres of art, labor, and social life, targeting any manifestation of "foreign influences" (shfaqje të huaja). Through this regime-defined concept, the authorities condemned "imperialist-capitalist" or "Soviet-revisionist" influences, as well as all forms of modern art and Western fashion. This included aesthetic elements such as sunglasses, bell-bottom trousers, jeans, miniskirts, and prominent jewelry, alongside strict grooming regulations for men, prohibiting long hair, beards, and sideburns. Consequently, jazz elements and modern Western styles remained marginalized from Albanian pop music until the mid-1980s, a period that coincides with the gradual weakening of the regime.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that, despite official prohibition and ideological censorship, jazz exerted a sustained and identifiable impact on the development of pop music during the socialist period in Albania. The stylistic, melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements of this genre were primarily integrated indirectly, masked through diverse and often sophisticated orchestration techniques (Table 5). This phenomenon was not merely marginal, but rather an underground resistance that challenged the dogma of Socialist Realism and served as a "code" for modernity, leaving an indelible mark on the professional structure of Albanian musical creativity.

Stylistic elements	**Arrangement elements**
• Swing-feeling • Notated dixieland style • Dance - musical styles with jazz elements: foxtrot, slow fox, two-step, waltz, rumba, samba, bossa nova, R&B, rock 'n' roll, twist, boogie-woogie, funk, rock, progressive rock • Metric and stylistic changes during the song	• Rhythm section • Big band sections (reeds, trumpets, trombones) • Double bass played pizzicato with two beats per measure • Walking bass (in four) • Four-to-the-bar rhythm guitar • Drumming with brushes and sticks • Latin percussions • Muted trumpet • Trading fours (written) • Homophonic texture • Call and response between sections • Stop-time • Choir harmonization with chord tensions
Harmonic elements	**Melodic elements**
• Sixths and sevenths chords • Tension chords • Augmented and diminished chords • Altered chords • Harmonic chromatism • Modal interchange • Unresolved dominant chord on the tonic (I) and dominant chord on the subdominant (IV), elements derived from the blues form • Tritone substitution • Turnaround progressions • Modal harmony in Aeolian, avoiding the dominant, which is replaced by a minor chord on the fifth degree (v)	• Modes used outside of tonal function (Dorian, Aeolian, Mixolydian) • Scales: Pentatonic, Minor Blues, Major Blues, Whole-Tone, and Mixolydian Bebop • Blue notes in vocals and instruments • Chromatism in melody and accompaniment • Two-voice parallel chromatism in the melody • Instrumental solos over harmonic changes • Free jazz instrumental solo in stop-time • Pronounced vibrato in vocals and instruments
Rhythmic elements	

• Melodic syncopation • Rhythmic-harmonic syncopation • Polyrhythms • Repeated riffs • Simulation of scat singing with repeated syllables and words

Table 5. Jazz elements identified in Albanian pop music (1957–1972)

The roles of composers, arrangers, and institutional leaders—particularly Abdulla Grimci and Todi Lubonja—prove to be key in this mediating process. Meanwhile, the repression of artists following the 11th Edition of the Festivali i Këngës highlights the strict ideological boundaries within which artistic experimentation could be pushed. In contrast to other totalitarian regimes where jazz was partially tolerated, an almost absolute ban was applied in Albania, making this case unique within the context of European cultural history.

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Music on Radio Tirana: A cultural heritage

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Abstract

Radio Tirana was first established as an institution in 1938 and since then has provided an extraordinary heavy-lifting support in the development of the Albanian music. The music programs, music records and recordings, music bands and ensembles like the Symphony Orchestra of the Albanian Radio and Television, these are are only a few examples to illustrate the major role that Radio Tirana played in the development of Albanian music. Their existence leads us to think of this institution not only in terms of a media entity, but also as an institution of cultural heritage. Hence, it is important to go more in deep in the study of its history and its particular features. In this paper, I want to present a general overview, highlighting the elements of this heritage and how we can approach them from the perspective of cultural anthropology, that is, from the perspective of music as culture. Due to the quantity of materials available, we will focus on the second part of the 20th century when this institution has been consolidated as such. This period also happens to be the richest in quantity but at the same time heavily impacted politically and ideologically from the dictatorial regime. So, what have we inherited from Radio Tirana to date in terms of music? How can we approach those artifacts and structures? What is the human contribution on this heritage (the presence of people who contributed)? Where are the documents/artifacts located? How can we classify them? These are the questions to be discussed in this paper, as the first step towards a more systematic study.

Keywords

archive, artifact, radio-archive, recordings, history, dictatorial regime

Introduction

The role of Radio Tirana, as the most influential and powerful media institution in Albania, – at least prior to the 1990s, – was undoubtedly one of the main influencing factors in the development of Albanian society while also serving as a testimony of the country's political and historical reality. Nevertheless, despite the propagandistic ideologies of the regimes it once served, it must be emphasized that Radio Tirana using its programming, remained the sole official public medium that offered and enabled the audiences to be satisfied with both information and entertainment, although this communication was presented and mediated by a totalitarian state.

King Zog inaugurated on November 28th, 1938 the first radio broadcasting station in Albania during a formal ceremony. It operated with a three-kilowatt capacity on 40-meter short waves and it was baptized Radio Tirana. Many renowned names and voices of the Albanian art and culture echoed through the microphones of this Radio, including Marije Kraja, Tonin Guraziu, Tefta Tashko Koço, Merita Sokoli, Lola Gjoka, Dhora Leka, Kaliopi Plasari, Haki Bejleri, Viktori Xhaçka, Kristaq Antoniu, Mihal Ciko, Gjergj Bubani, and plenty of others.

During the 1940s, the music programs occupied a central place in the radio's broadcasting schedule, becoming the main promoter and cultivator of artistic musical tastes of the Albanian public. In fact, according to a report found in the RTSH's Archive, during the 1950s-1960s, the programming ratio was composed approximately by 40% spoken-word programs and 60% music broadcasts. Most notably, Radio Tirana also served as the country's first music recording studio, where various artists, invited by the Radio's directorate, would record songs, instrumentally performed parts, or orchestral music which were used in future broadcasts.

A further added value of Radio Tirana was the founding of its music archive around the 1940s, and both of them, – in a truly symbiotic relationship, the archive and the Radio have functioned as a cultural entity of the country and also as an ambassador for the dissemination of the arts in general.

This research on Radio Tirana has been inspired and stems from my earlier post serving as an editor at the Radio's Music Archive, which enabled me to become closely acquainted with it and to also directly become involved and engaged with this particular archive. That experience raised my awareness about the extraordinary value it holds – not only regarding the historical memory of Radio Tirana's music programming, but also of the nation's artistic activities. These documents constitute what could be considered the most significant part of Albanian music history. The archive holds an immensely particular importance due to three main reasons: Firstly, due to the early date of its foundation; Secondly, for the vast quantity of music materials it contains (around 62,000 documents); and thirdly, because of the high technical quality in which these materials have been preserved to this day. Keeping in mind this very particular significance, the archive can now be considered and approached as a form of cultural heritage.

The study methodology

This study about the role of music in Radio Tirana as cultural heritage is drafted by using an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical research methods, conducting a cultural analysis, and documentary evidences as well. The methodological framework includes the following:

Archival and documentary research

Primary sources that were consulted belong to the Radio Tirana phonotheque, including broadcast programs, musical recordings, and internal documents relating to programming and aesthetic policies. A particular attention was paid to materials from the 1950-1990 period, during which Radio Tirana played a central role in Albania's musical life.

Musical content analysis

Various recordings of light, folk and classical music broadcasts by the Radio were carefully analyzed in order to clearly identify characteristic features of the repertoire, as well as the criteria and ways used to select and broadcast. The principles of musicological analysis were applied to examine the style, function, and educational impact that the repertoire featured and produced.

Interviews

In order to supplement documentary data, interviews were conducted with former Radio Tirana staff members, who provided their personal testimonies about the processes of musical selection, artistic challenges, and the institution's influence on the Albanian public.

Theoretical and cultural approach

Aiming to interpret the data, the study relies on theories of cultural heritage and education through art, by dealing with Radio Tirana not only as a broadcaster and media outlet, but also as an educational and formative institution in the country's musical culture.

Some theoretical aspects

Among the first scholars to write about radio, music, and their study was Theodor W. Adorno. Although his views have undergone critical scrutiny over time, they remain fundamental for understanding the significance of radio in modernity and how it transformed musical experience. Adorno argues that radio is not merely a tool for broadcasting music but a technology that has altered the very nature of listening and the individual's relationship with music.

As the national broadcasting institution, Radio Tirana has represented for decades in a row, a privileged space targeted the establishing, developing, and disseminating the Albanian music in all its forms, beginning from traditional folk music to urban light music and the professional classical repertoire. Its activity was not simply an act of transmission, but rather a complex

process of constructing national cultural and musical identity within the context of socialist modernity (Lelaj 2015) by continuously reflecting the aesthetic, ideological, and institutional developments of the time. In this framework, the Radio Tirana's music archive stands out and represents an irreplaceable fund of Albania's collective auditory memory. During recent times, there has been and increasingly growing scholarly attention paid to sound as an object of cultural heritage (Minga, 2020). Most notably, authors and scholars such as Lonán Ó Briain, writing in his book *Voices of Vietnam: A Century of Radio, Red Music, and Revolution,* explores alongside the century-long history of radio in Vietnam and the role it played in shaping national and cultural identity, while offering and providing a theoretical approach to understanding radio as a sonic medium that contributes to the construction of collective memory and cultural heritage in Vietnam. Through his analysis of broadcasts, music, and radio production practices, Ó Briain's book deals with the sound not only as a means of communication, but also as an archive of historical experiences and national identity. Ó Briain considers and deals with the radio as a space where memory, politics, and culture as well are articulated by using practices of recording, broadcasting and listening, while placing the sound at the center of both the material and immaterial heritage of the twentieth century (Ó Briain, 2021).

While Anna Snaith in her book Sound and Literature, reviews the complex interaction between sound and literary writing, focusing on how literature not only describes sounds but also absorbs and reproduces them as a form of cultural memory. Snaith considers sound, – including music, the human voice, and environment sounds as well, – as a fundamental component of literary experience and cultural heritage that transcends the boundaries of the written medium. She argues that in modernist texts, the sound is used and becomes a means for articulating cultural affiliations and preserving inherited musical forms, while placing literature in an interdependent relationship with acoustics and historical performance (Snaith, 2020).

Other scholars who have written on this topic are: Xiaobing Tang, in *Radio, Sound Cinema, and Community Singing: The Making of a New Sonic Culture in Modern China*; Alasdair Pinkerton, in *Radio: Making Waves in Sound*; Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher, in *Radio Fields: Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the 21st Century*; Rebecca P. Scales, in *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921–1939*; Martin A. Doherty, in *Nazi Wireless Propaganda: Lord Haw-Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War*; Morten Michelsen, Mads Krogh, Steen Kaargaard Nielsen, and Iben Have, in *Music Radio: Building Communities, Mediating Genres*; Shawn VanCour, in *Making Radio: Early Radio Production and the Rise of Modern Sound Culture*; Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, in W*ired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*; Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck, in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory, and Cultural Practices*. However, the most important voice among these scholars is Mark Katz, who in his book *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, approaches recorded sound as a new form of cultural heritage, emphasizing that recordings are not merely reproductions of live performances but cultural and historical objects in their own right. He writes: "*This*," I declared, "*has changed the way we listen to, perform, and compose music*." And: "*I should say that I am hardly the first to realize that recording does more than record. What I am offering here is to expand the discussion by focusing on how and why recording influences musical life. I do this through the concept of the phonograph effect*." (Katz, 2004).

From early musical ensembles to the Symphonic Orchestra of the Albanian Public Broadcaster

The professional musical life in post Second World War Albania is inseparable from the emergence of state-supported cultural institutions – among which, Radio Tirana played a crucial role. It was exactly during this particular period that the first musical ensembles were founded to meet the needs of building an artistic national identity and to satisfy the demand of a daily radio broadcasting characterized by a high quality.

Initially during the early years (1944–1950), small instrumental ensembles were founded within Radio Tirana, gathering in their midst and including professional musicians who have returned home from their studies abroad, originating from cities that could count upon their historical musical traditions such as Shkodra, Korça and Gjirokastra. These formations recorded arranged folk music, part of the classical repertoire, and also composing of Albanian authors.

Orchestral performance in Albania began with the operation of an orchestra with mainly foreign members during World War II, to be transformed in December 1944 into what would be called the Radio Orchestra, which functioned until 1950.

In this year (1950) this Orchestra, together with the choir and the dance group (ballet), would form the Albanian Philharmonic and three years later, in 1953, on this basis the Opera and Ballet Theater would be founded. It took 12 years from the cessation of the activity of the first Radio Orchestra to be reorganized once again in 1962 as the Radio Symphony Orchestra or a few years later as the Radio and Cinematography Orchestra. With the growth and strengthening of Radio Television, the Orchestra took on the weight of what is called today, the Albanian Public Radio Television Symphony Orchestra (Koço, 2015).

The artistic life of Albania through Radio Tirana

In the context of the construction of cultural institutions in Albania and the institutionalization of music during the 20th century (Minga, 2018), Radio Tirana constitutes a paradigmatic/ illustrative case of the combination of mass communication functions with the functions of production, preservation and artistic education. Radio Tirana was not limited to the dissemination of information, but built through its organizational structures such as the music editorial office and musical ensembles a complete system of musical life, functioning simultaneously as an organizer, broadcaster and archiver. At this point in the paper, we will present the three elements of this contribution: light music, popular/folk music and classical music, with the aim of illuminating the influence of Radio Tirana in shaping the national musical culture.

• Light music and the founding of an urban musical identity

During the last decades of the last century, in the absence of other major media and a free music market, Radio Tirana was the main gateway for conveying Albanian music to the public. One of the most popular and most followed formats was the organization of music festivals on Radio and then on Albanian Television, culminating in the Song Festival on RTSH, which became a national cultural event. These festivals were not only a platform for Albanian singers

and composers, but also an exhibition area for musical creativity that reflected the life, spirit and ideology of the time. The organization of these festivals has always been closely linked to the structures of Radio Tirana and later of the Albanian Radio-Television (RTSH). They were prepared with a high level of professionalism, where every detail of the musical production was treated with special care. In this context, one of the most important artistic pillars of these events was the Albanian Radio-Television Symphony Orchestra, an institution with a long history, which served as an instrumental basis for the interpretation of a wide musical repertoire – from folk music to light music and the most complex works of classical and contemporary Albanian music. The RTSH Symphony Orchestra not only performed in the studio and on stage the works of Albanian composers, but often actively participated in the artistic elaboration of these materials, giving them a high musical quality and a professional appearance that represented the highest level of the art of interpretation in Albania. It was, and remains, an important nucleus of institutional musical development in the country.

Radio Tirana has played an important role in the artistic life of Albania. It has been the main promoter of music festivals, the supporter of artistic interpretation through the RTSH Symphony Orchestra and has served as the main source for the broadcasting of artistic works throughout the country. This role of its remains to be examined today, in an era of technology and mass communication, as a living memory of Albanian musical culture during the 20th century.

• Folk Music: From Documentation to Institutional Performance

In addition to the festivals of light and classical music, another essential dimension of Radio Tirana's artistic activity has been the support, organization and broadcasting of folk music festivals, which have had an extraordinary importance in the preservation and promotion of the Albanian cultural heritage. Among these, undoubtedly the most prominent place is occupied by the Gjirokastra National Folk Festival, which, since its first edition in 1968, has become a major event of Albanian culture. Radio Tirana, in cooperation with other state cultural institutions, has played a central role in the organization of this festival. The responsibility of broadcasting the festival also fell on the shoulders of Radio Tirana, which ensured that the program was listened to in every corner of Albania – and beyond them. Radio Tirana not only broadcast this festival in real time, but also recorded and archived each participation, creating an archive of what was considered Albanian folk culture during the second half of the 20th century. Through these recordings, it became possible for the interpretations to be preserved as sound documents.

In addition to Gjirokastra, Radio Tirana has also supported and broadcasted regional folk festivals, such as those held in Berat, Lezha, Tropoja, Elbasan and many others, which often prepared the ground for representation at the National Festival. These festivals helped to highlight and encourage new talents, as well as to promote local motifs from different regions. It is also worth noting that the Folk Songs and Dances Ensemble, supported by RTSH, have masterfully interpreted and elaborated many of these songs and dances, presenting them as a high form of stage art and adapting them for professional radio and television broadcasting. Thus, Radio Tirana has acted as a cultural architect, preserving and building the bridge between tradition and modernity, between the provinces and the center, between the old and the new generations.

• Classical music and the establishing of an academic musical tradition

In its historical journey, Radio Tirana has not only been a medium of information and education, but a deeply cultivated institution in the service of national art and culture. Among its many cultural commitments, classical music has occupied an honorable place, being treated as a common asset of European civilization that should also be cultivated in the Albanian reality. Since the first decades after the Second World War, Radio Tirana took bold steps to create professional structures that would give life to this artistic genre in Albania. Thus was born the Radio Tirana Symphony Orchestra, which later became an integral part of the Albanian Radio Television (RTSH). This orchestra represented the culmination of institutional efforts to build a serious classical music scene in the country.

The RTSH Symphony Orchestra was and remains an elite formation, composed of carefully selected instrumentalists, many of whom were educated at the best conservatories in Eastern and Western Europe. It performed a wide repertoire, which included the works of the greatest composers of the world classical tradition – such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Debussy or Stravinsky, – but also creations of Albanian composers such as Çesk Zadeja, Tish Daija, Tonin Harapi, Pjetër Gaci, and later Aleksandër Peçi, Vasil Tole, Feim Ibrahimi, etc.

Radio Tirana regularly organized symphony concerts, recitals, interpretations of works for soloists and orchestra, as well as special musical events which were broadcast live on the radio and later on television. These concerts were often held in the Concert Hall of Radio Tirana, in the premises of the National Opera and Ballet Theater, or in special spaces of the University of Arts. Their live broadcast created a lively connection between the stage performance and the Albanian listener, who often had no other opportunity to encounter this sophisticated art form. Furthermore, a considerable part of the symphonic and chamber music repertoire was recorded in the Music Archive of Radio Tirana. Through this archive, not only a tradition of high-standard performance is witnessed, but also an entire history of the development of serious music in Albania.

Radio Tirana also promoted new composers through its airwaves, invited them to create new works, encouraged them to experiment with modern forms, and often offered them space for their premieres. Thus, organically, an Albanian school of classical composition was born and nurtured, which contained elements of national folklore elaborated in advanced musical forms. On the one hand, educational concerts broadcast on the radio, where composers, eras, forms were presented and works were analyzed, helped the Albanian public to create a refined aesthetic sensitivity towards classical music. On the other hand, through these broadcasts, entire generations of young musicians were formed, growing up under the influence of a serious musical culture and aspiring to become part of it.

The Music Archive of Radio Tirana:

A historical consciousness and national acoustic memory

One of the most enduring and less visible pillars of Radio Tirana's activity has been the construction of the music archive, a rich fund that represents an acoustic memory of the Albanian nation. This archive is not simply a repository of sound recordings, but a systematic documentation structure, encompassing decades of musical creativity in various genres: light music songs, interpretations of folklore from all regions, works of Albanian and world classical music, as well as interpretations by renowned national ensembles.

Archiving at Radio Tirana did not occur as a passive process. On the contrary, the selection of materials for recording, the method of cataloging, and the preservation policy were guided by artistic, ideological, and aesthetic criteria, which also reflected the cultural and political developments of the time. In this sense, the musical archive is a living document that preserves not only sounds, but also values, aesthetics, and ideological orientations of certain historical periods. Through this archive, it is possible today to reconstruct:

- The stylistic profiling of light music in Albania in the 1960s-1990s;
- Changes in the way folklore is interpreted, from authentic forms to institutionalized variants;
- The evolution of cultivated Albanian music, from the works of Çesk Zadeja and Tish Daija, to modern creations by contemporary composers.

In the archive we also find unique recordings that do not exist anywhere else: performances of prominent artists who are no longer alive, rare forms of traditional music performed in the field, or early versions of works that were later changed or lost. At the present day, the Music Archive of Radio Tirana contains about 62,000 unique recordings as well as copies of these recordings.

It continues to be located in the Radio building, but no longer in the underground floors as it used to be, but in a completely reconstructed, standardized environment and in optimal conditions for the storage of musical materials. The audio materials of the RTSH archive are currently still produced on reels. The reels are on magnetic tapes with different speeds, through which the technology of the time was able to produce music, or audio material. The reels are divided into several types, with CPR or LGR tape and with 76, 38 and 19 speeds. Each of the reels has its own labeling on the protective box.

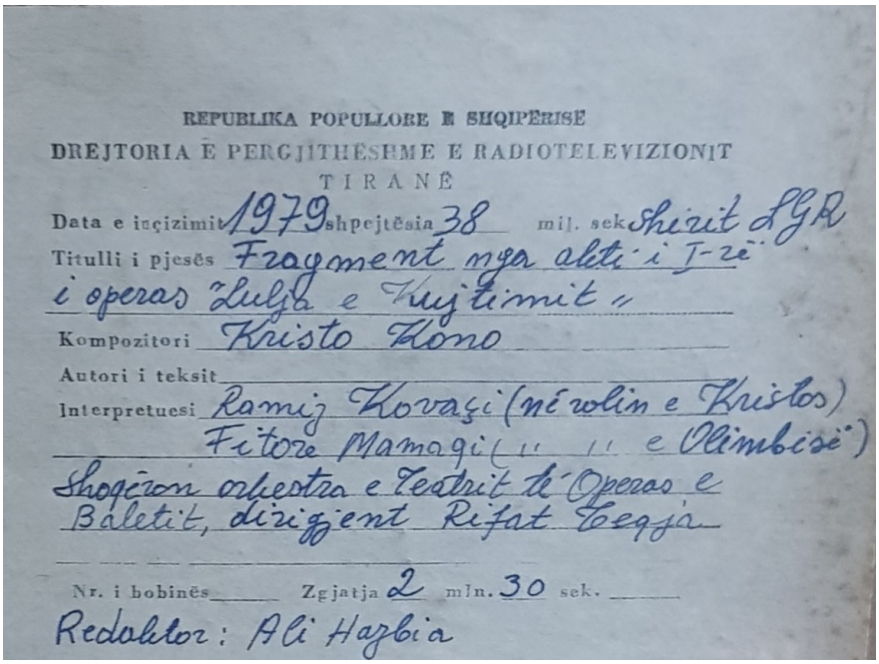

REPUBLIKA POPULLORE E SHQIPËRISË
DREJTORIA E PËRGJITHËSHME E RADIOTELEVIZIONIT
TIRANË
Data e inçizimit 1979 shpejtësia 38 mil. sek Shkurt LGR
Titulli i pjesës Fragment nga aleti i I-rë i operas "Lulja e Kujtimit"
Kompozitori Kristo Kono
Autori i teksit
Interpretuesi Ramiz Kovaçi (në rolin e Kristos)
Fitore Mamaqi (" " e Olimbisë)
Shoqëron orkestra e Teatrit të Operas e Baletit, dirigjent Rifat Teqja
Nr. i bobinës Zgjatja 2 mln. 30 sek.
Redaktor: Ali Hazbia

Figure 1. Example of how a reel at RTSH Archive is labeled

Cataloging of the Archive

The archive's structure includes various musical materials as well as programs with musical themes or subjects. The entire music collection is divided into three major sectors:

1. Classical Music
2. Light Music
3. Folk Music

Each of these sectors has subdivisions, titles, and corresponding years.

Classical music

The concerts of the RTSH Symphony Orchestra (1963–2018); Albanian feature film music (soundtracks) (1965–1997); Albanian operas and foreign operas performed by Albanian artists (1954–1991); Albanian ballets (1967–1990); TKOB Orchestra (1967–1994); Instrumental classical music (1979–2008); Chamber music (1984–1997); Various classical music (1945–1996); Classical music – Diploma concerts and performances at ILA (1962–1991); Music secondary schools in the regions – Regional Symphony Orchestras – Festival of Pedagogical Secondary Schools (1967–1997).

Light music

RTSH Song Festival (1962–2010); Mays' Decades/Mays' Concerts (1967–1990); Musical Surveys (1967–1990); When Spring Comes/Seasonal Songs (1985–2002); Festival of

Performers of Our Songs (1983–1987); Light Music Festival in the Regions; Wind Orchestras in the Regions (1972–1989); Soldier's Song Festival, Army Ensemble (1966–1990); Amateur Artistic Ensembles in the Regions; Student Song Festival; Young Voices Competition (1967–1995); Pioneers' Festival Shkodra and Children's Festivals in the regions (1965–2001); Government Concerts (1966–1987).

Folk music

Gjirokastra National Folk Festival (1968–2003); Berat Folk Festival (1995); Songs and Dances from the Regions (1972–1998); Amateur Artistic Ensembles/National Amateur Festivals (1966–1974); Various folk singers and groups (1969–2001); Festivals and Concerts with Folk Songs (1963–2013).

An integral part of the archive is the broadcasting book as well as the entry book. The broadcasting book is a type of register prepared by the editor responsible for a particular musical sector — for example, the editor of classical music, light music, or folk music.

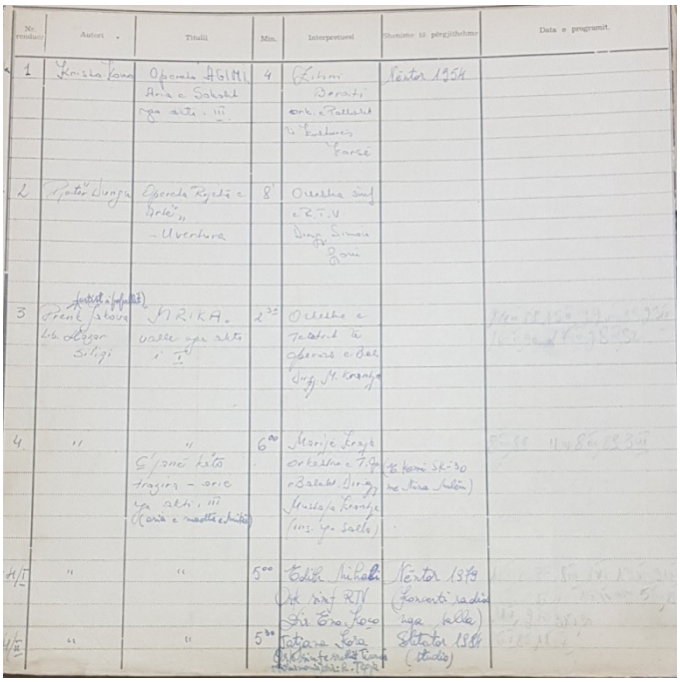


Figure 2. Example from a classical music broadcasting recording book at RTSH Archive

In the example shown above, in the column for the serial number, the notation **4/1 and 4/2** is observed. This is called an **index**. The index is assigned when a musical work is restaged (e.g., with a new cast of performers). In the column for program dates, the dates when the materials were broadcast are indicated. This is done to help the music editor avoid repeating the same program on subsequent days, serving as a form of orientation.

Alongside the broadcasting book, there is also the **entry book**. The entry book is maintained by the archive staff. Unlike the broadcasting book, where materials are recorded according to musical genre, the entry book registers all materials that have entered the archive in chronological order. Here, the large reel ("mother reel") is recorded, which contains several different materials within it.

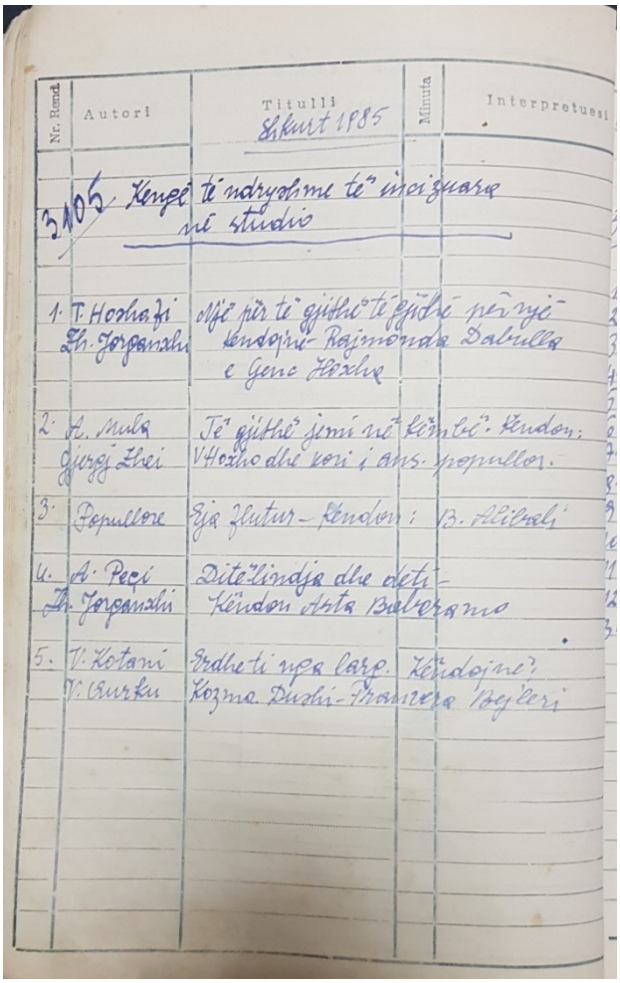


Figure 3. Example of recording materials in an entry book of RTSH Archive

Conclusion: Radio Tirana's acoustic memory as musical Heritage

The radio as an institution serves to create communities; thus, through the transmission of music, its aim has been to build identities and a sense of belonging. Consequently, the acoustic memory represented by this archive must be treated as an essential component of the national cultural heritage. *Re-conceptualizing it as heritage, rather than merely material for broadcasting from the past*, requires clear policies for preservation, digitization, and public access to this material, enabling researchers, musicians, and the broader public to reengage with this cultural asset. Only in this way can Radio Tirana continue to play its role as a bearer

of acoustic memory and as a sustainable source of Albanian cultural identity in the future.
It is important to emphasize that this is a research project still in its early stages, and the issues presented above are preliminary results based on investigations conducted so far. Moving forward, the goal is to deepen and enhance the understanding of how this acoustic archive was built and to examine the human presence and its effects in its midst.

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The music system in the Italo-Albanian communities of Calabria. A study assisted by new technologies

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Abstract

The historical presence of Albanian communities in southern Italy, particularly the Arbëreshë, is well documented, originating from sustained migratory movements that began in the late 15th century. These communities have preserved a rich cultural heritage, among which multipart singing occupies a central role. The most prominent and distinctive musical form within the Arbëreshë tradition is the Vjersh (or Vjesh), a genre of polyphonic singing typically centered around themes of love. This repertoire is characterized by several core features: a predominantly diaphonic polyphonic texture; the use of consonant thirds as the foundation of the counterpoint; a preference for parallel motion and homorhythmic textures in thirds; frequent cadences in unison on the finalis and other structural degrees of the scale; a strophic organization combining melodic and textual elements; and a final cadential passage at the end of each strophe, marked by an extended unison tone on the finalis that exceeds the regular rhythmic framework. To examine the deeper compositional logic of the Vjersh and to test hypotheses formulated in previous scholarship, this study employed analytical methods supported by Opusmodus, a software platform developed to assist in musical composition and analysis. Through this computational approach, the research aims to elucidate the structural and stylistic foundations of this unique polyphonic tradition.

Keywords

multipart singing, Aural Pedagogic System, collective code, formulism

Introduction

The presence of Albanian communities on Italian soil is well documented as early as the 15th century. Although, according to Francesco Altimari (Altimari, Bolognari & Carrozza, 1987), evidence of their existence can be traced back to the 13th century. However, it is widely recognized that it was only at the end of the 15th century that a more substantial migratory movement began, leading to the permanent settlement of numerous Arbëreshë groups in various regions of Southern Italy[1]. Given that this society historically relied on oral traditions for the transmission of cultural knowledge, it is plausible that it developed a form of "pedagogical system" deeply embedded in musical practices. These practices have played a fundamental role in the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage, utilizing at least two distinct auditory "codes" - verbal language and song, that is, poetic texts combined with melody. This process of inculturation begins in early childhood. Lullabies, rhythms, childhood games, fairy tales, sayings, proverbs constitute the first "paraphernalia" that will be used to "read" the sound world and will be enriched in future sociality. As my Maestro, Roberto Leydi, used to say, "the function of lullabies is not only to lull children to sleep, but also to initiate the process of inculturation of the newborn, not only musical inculturation... through lullabies, in fact, children begin to know the linguistic structures, the use of words and idioms, the characters, the habits, the traditions of their own family and cultural environment, immersing themselves - provided with a guide - in the symbolic universe of meanings that will surround them as adults" (Leydi & Mantovani, 1979). In this sense, lullabies serve as vehicles for the natural - rather than imposed - acquisition of both the ethnomusicological heritage of their culture and broader cultural values and symbolic representations. These are often tied to existential constants and patterns of natural relationships. Maria Montessori[2] also emphasized the foundational role of orality in the development of human culture. In her teaching, she employed a visual aid known as the "black strip of time," a long strip of fabric unrolled during lessons on the history of human evolution. The first segment -approximately three meters in length - was black, symbolizing the extensive period of human history that preceded the invention of writing and coincided with the emergence of all other forms of life on Earth. In contrast, the final centimeter of the strip was red, representing in proportional terms the much shorter historical span following the advent of writing—from the earliest pictographs to the present day.

Multipart singing

Multipart singing holds a position of great significance within Arbëreshe communities. Unlike other musical traditions in Southern Italy - where vertical, homorhythmic structures, often resembling the falso bordone style, are predominant - the Calabrian-Albanian musical culture is characterized by a predominantly horizontal texture. This distinction highlights the unique structural and stylistic orientation of Arbëreshë multipart vocal practices. Archaic elements frequently coexist and intersect with more recent influences, whether these derive

1 In Italy, there are currently about fifty communities of Albanian origin, distributed in seven southern regions, from Sicily to Abruzzo. Calabria hosts as many as 32 of them, located mainly in the province of Cosenza. This interregional and supranational grouping of people, cultures and traditions has been called Arbëria for some time.

2 Maria Montessori (Chiaravalle, 1870 - Noordwjek, 1952) was an Italian pedagogue who renewed teaching by developing a particular method, known as the Montessori Method.

from heterogeneous musical imports from neighboring Lucanian and Calabrian traditions or emerge as organic developments within the internal logic of cultural evolution. In this regard, the extensive documentary corpus collected in the 1950s[3]- alongside more recent ethnomusicological research – renders the sonic heritage of the Albanian-speaking communities of Calabria particularly suitable for diachronic analysis. Such analysis enables the identification of long-term processes and patterns of transformation within the tradition. While the multipart singing repertoires exhibit localized stylistic distinctions and structural idiosyncrasies that differentiate them from one another, a common substratum remains discernible across the entire cultural area, independent of specific sub-traditions. For more information on the peculiarities of this complex tradition of singing on "unspecified occasions", I refer readers to an LP record and its accompanying booklet –published way back in 1990 (Unesco, 1990) – and to my more in-depth analytical study, published in 1993 in *Quaderni di Musica/Realtà (De Gaudio, 1993)*. These resources - especially the methodological approach outlined in the study, the audio materials contained in the album and its digital formats[4], - offer valuable insight into the issues discussed in the following sections. Indeed, these recordings and studies, more than any verbal description or theoretical analysis, are best positioned to illuminate the core themes and focus of this essay.

Oral sources are oral. Everyone who deals with them is quick to declare that the real document is the recording (and not the transcription), but then they work mainly on the transcriptions, and it is these that are published. […] transcription transforms sound material into visual material, with inevitable effects of reduction, manipulation, or transformation (Portelli,2017).

In the present context, we argue that the musical tradition under examination evolved primarily through the presence of an aural pedagogical system - one rooted in oral transmission, or the passage of knowledge "from mouth to ear." This tradition is characterized by the use of modal scales, untempered tuning systems, and, most notably, by the employment of sophisticated techniques of [re]composition. It also exhibits a high degree of proficiency in both macro and micro-level extemporaneous variation. As such, any serious study of this musical culture must take into account the aural musical code and the pedagogical system underpinning oral education - beyond its ancient, popular, and intercultural dimensions. Understanding that oral cultures transmit knowledge primarily through sound - through the spoken word - while literate cultures rely predominantly on the written word, perceived visually and spatially, is essential. In oral cultures, there are no written documents; instead, knowledge is preserved and conveyed through memory and specific mnemonic devices. These include the structured organization of speech (e.g., fixed themes, formulaic expressions, proverbs, and rhythmic patterns), the preference for narrative modes of discourse, and the use of strongly characterized figures and typifications

3 Collection 22 of the Ethnomusicology Archives (formerly the C.N.S.M.P. - National Centre for Popular Music Studies) of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, containing 78 documents; this corpus was recently digitised and published in Musica arbëreshe in Calabria. Le registrazioni di Diego Carpitella ed Ernesto de Martino (1954), edited by Antonello Ricci and Roberta Tucci, with 2 CDs, Roma, Squilibri Editore, 2006.

4 INNOCENZO COSIMO DE GAUDIO Fund, digitized at LEAV (Laboratory of Ethnomusicology and Visual Anthropology, Director, Prof. Nicola Scaldaferri. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pS6pdiAHda-wMYeqj4JBtH32BGIgx546s/view?usp=drive_link https://drive.goo-gle.com/file/d/1jLFdElSKfAJxze5XsPSX9MuB8wzhd-loa/view?usp=drive_link

that facilitate memorability. Equally significant in the analysis of oral musical traditions is the role of physical activity and embodied learning. For example, when a student imitates the teacher's bowing gestures during the performance of an epic song - accompanying themselves with a lautha or gusla, even in the absence of the actual instrument - this embodied replication reveals additional techniques intrinsic to the pedagogical strategies of oral transmission. Such practices underscore the multisensory and performative dimensions of oral education, in which learning is not only auditory but also kinesthetic and visual, integrated into a holistic system of cultural apprenticeship. Vincenzo Caporaletti (Caporaletti, 2022) brings together in this large and 'illiterate' musical family

[...] those in which musicians are dominated by a cognitive/formative modality that I call, with a neologism, 'audiotactile': jazz, rock, pop, world music, etc. But also traditional music (distinguished from the former by further criteria). These, in turn, differ from so-called 'classical' music, where another type of cognition comes into play, which I call 'visual'. This classification is the result of an interpretative perspective that emphasises ways of conceptualising, perceiving and making music, rather than relying, as is usually the case, on formal and external differences between types of music.

The use of the term *extemporisation* in place of improvisation serves to avoid the negative connotations that have become associated with the latter term, both within academic discourse and in common usage. Nevertheless, accurately describing the intangible processes of composition and realization that occur *in situ,* during the moment of performance, remains a complex and challenging task. Consequently, in this paper, I will confine myself to referencing and drawing upon established concepts, definitions, and methodologies - many of which stem from diverse and, at times, contested theoretical and methodological frameworks. These will be adapted, where applicable, to an analytical approach based on a "neutral" application of tools and principles, which I will outline in detail later. In this context, I adopt key concepts and investigative terminology from the work of two eminent American scholars, Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord. Their foundational research on the [re]composition of oral epic poetry offers a methodological framework through which to attempt the reconstruction and elucidation of the compositional "codes" - both melodic and verbal - that underpin each specific performative instance within traditions of archaic orality.

In epic poetry, there is no copyright

In the 1930s, Parry and Lord spent long periods studying peoples who were then still referred to as 'Southern Slavs'. In those frontier cultures, a rich tradition of illiterate epic singers still persists today. The focus of the research by Parry and Lord, eminent Greek scholars, was not music, but rather an attempt to resolve and clarify the long-standing and thorny 'Homeric Question', which saw supporters of different theories pitted against each other: *Separatists vs Unitarianists*; Homer (and the authorship assigned to him by a long tradition of earlier studies) vs Oral, collective wisdom, based on aural cognition, transcribed only after the fact in a text crystallised in a definitive form, through the technology of writing. From the study of that oral tradition, handed down 'from mouth to ear' by the ancient bards, a copious set of mnemonic techniques and a great compositional/performative skill emerged, based on extemporaneous reworking, in the sense of [re]invention, based on recurring characteristics in the collective

code, of stereotypical formulas and cells, epithets and clichés, to [re]give life to epic and mythical themes (Bates Lord, 2005). It is likely that a process - along with compositional and performative techniques - closely resembling those that gave rise to the two monumental epic poems of antiquity, *The Iliad and The Odyssey*, also underpins the musical practices discussed here. It is important to recall that these foundational texts of Western literature were originally sung rather than written. The epic poetry of the ancient world, and its attributed "authors" (?!?), emerged and thrived within an oral and performative cultural context. Only centuries later did these works become transcribed into written form. The punctuation - alternating question marks with an exclamation mark - symbolically underscores a crucial distinction between the nature of authorship in cultivated (i.e., literate) musical traditions and that in oral cultures. In the case of art music, authorship is unambiguously assigned to a specific individual who is formally recognized and legally protected as the creator. In contrast, within aural, neo-aural, and hybrid musical cultures - including traditional music, jazz, popular, and rock genres - issues of authorship are often more complex and contested, particularly when no written, recorded, or legally registered form of the work exists. A striking historical example of such contested authorship is the dispute between Jelly Roll Morton - who declared himself the "inventor of jazz" - and the semi-literate Nick La Rocca, over the authorship rights to the iconic composition *Tiger Rag*. In defending his claim, La Rocca referred to his own "baggage of memory," comprising a repository of "wandering motifs" - melodic fragments and familiar musical phrases - that had accumulated and crystallized in his mind since childhood. These motifs were part of the shared sonic environment of early 20th-century New Orleans, performed and enjoyed in various communal settings and constituting a collective musical reservoir. However, this creation emerges from and operates within a collective aural-cognitive framework - shared by the community - that obviates the need for written documentation in the transmission, recreation, and preservation of myths and stories. This supra-individual compositional and perceptual code allows for the spontaneous generation of performance within a tradition grounded in memory and shared experience. Mastery of this oral tradition - especially in the absence of written tools - requires a prolonged and rigorous apprenticeship. Only after years of intensive training and immersion can a performer acquire the skill and authority necessary to sustain an audience's engagement, often for an entire night, through a performance characterized by dynamic interaction, real-time feedback, and shared cultural expectation. Remarkably, these neo-aural bards accomplish this with the accompaniment of a simple monochord string instrument: the gusla in Serbian tradition, or the lautha in the Albanian context.

The concept of 'originality' in oral tradition

In literate and text-centered cultures, the impulse to search for an "ideal" version of a text - or even to identify a singular "original" - is often regarded as a normative scholarly practice. From this perspective, variability or transformation across performances may be perceived as an anomaly or a source of fascination, particularly when familiar melodies appear in conjunction with different poetic texts, sometimes exhibiting divergent metric structures. However, within the framework of oral composition, the very notion of an "original" becomes conceptually irrelevant. Rather than pursuing an unattainable or nonexistent urtext, ethnomusicological inquiry is better directed toward uncovering the underlying compositional codes, grammars, and implicit rules that inform and govern specific performances. From this vantage point, each performance must be regarded as original. Every act of performance simultaneously embodies

a unique instantiation and a generalized expression of a broader collective tradition. What the listener hears is not simply a "version" of the song - it is the song. Each performance constitutes a moment of [re]creation, not merely execution, and thus reflects both individual agency and communal knowledge.

The oral performer draws on a system of shared and often implicit knowledge. A collective and supra-individual poetic-musical system. This "code" can be conceptualized as a set of overlapping grammars and operating codes which, although often not explicitly articulated, are nevertheless actively employed in performance. This competence functions in a holistic and modular way, allowing for the integration and intersection of multiple stylistic and structural elements.

The formulas

The use of formulaic elements in oral musical traditions functions as both a combinatorial and encyclopedic system. On the one hand, the formula operates within a kaleidoscopic matrix of recombination, enabling performers to generate variation within recognizable boundaries. On the other hand, each formula carries a rich connotative load, drawing on cultural references that simultaneously reflect the autobiographical imprint of the performer - manifested in vocal timbre, stylistic nuance, and technical skill - and the collective memory of the tradition to which they belong. Yet, it is often in moments of departure from the stereotyped structure that the performer's creativity reveals itself most clearly: improvisation cannot be improvised in itself: it requires mastery of a system before it can govern the unpredictable, the imponderable, which inevitably requires adaptation in real time. Even so, for communication to remain effective, especially in oral and participatory musical contexts, the improviser must continue to draw upon and reference a body of shared material - what might be termed a déjà écouté. These familiar sonic cues help orient the audience and maintain a sense of continuity amid innovation. In this context, truly extemporaneous creative acts often serve to re-anchor the performance through the insertion of "reassuring" references - formulas, motifs, or rhythmic figures - that can be taken up by fellow musicians or singers. Consider, for example, the intricate balance maintained by an individual voice in multipart polyphonic traditions, or the responsive interplay among jazz musicians during improvised segments. In both cases, the ability to interact instantaneously with others - through recognition of shared patterns and cues—is central to the success of the performance.

Over repeated listening, it becomes possible to discern how each performer draws on a common inventory of formulas and motifs, yet deploys them in ways that are uniquely personal. This individualized usage reveals not only a distinctive stylistic signature but also the trajectory of the performer's artistic formation - their negotiation between inherited tradition and creative reinterpretation. In this sense, formulaic language in oral musical cultures is not static; it is a dynamic expressive resource through which performers articulate both cultural continuity and individual identity.

The collective code

These collective codes are not necessarily universal, closed, definitive, or enclosed within the sacred confines of the ne varietur, but are socially determined and shared. The 'supra-individual' code underlying every specific performance, although prescriptive, prohibitive and standardised in nature, is realised in a shared, socialised and [re]modularisable perspective, in which each individual, through their creative contribution, can help to modify, innovate or, in extreme cases, even overturn it. Musical improvisation finds in the formula, in the cliché, not an obstacle to creativity, but on the contrary the right means to manage enunciation in real time: a creative activity in the present. It is therefore absolutely possible to speak of the richness and originality of the performance formula, in the same way that Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests with regard to bricoleurs in The Savage Mind (Levi- Strauss,1964). As Davide Sparti (Sparti,2005) points out, when referring to the intertextual bricolage of the improviser, it is more important to look at the resourcefulness, the ingenuity of the musician, than at the resources themselves, and it is precisely in the extreme case of a remarkable scarcity of resources that the originality of the artist can reveal itself in the most astonishing way[5]. There is no shortage of ad hoc research on formulaic composition in African-American Hollers, Kalevala narrative songs, Kantele and, as already mentioned, Montenegrin, Serbian and Albanian epic songs and various repertoires of oral tradition (including Gregorian psalm centos), which are based precisely on formulaic techniques. Stereotypical melodic cells of variable length can be found in specific sections of melodic segments (intonatio, middle and/or final cadences), or even entire pattern-tracks, which are adapted to similar melodic-verbal contexts, but also short melismas with an ornamental function (embroidery, passage). A compositional logic, therefore, based on the techniques of micro-variation and the correct concatenation of pre-existing melodic material; on the use of a set of formulas, designs and musical motifs, which are at the heart of many improvisational mechanisms related to performance and serve as basic elements for melodic [re]creation or [re]production. Presenting the technique of aural or neo-aural composition as the result of a simple and banal recourse to the contents of the 'memory reservoir' would not do justice to the extraordinary creative abilities of singers, instrumentalists, composers and performers. Improvisation and extemporaneous variation are substantiated in performance according to the principle of 'knowing while doing' 'while it happens' (Damiani,2010) Any posthumous crystallisation (a transcription, a recording, a performance) becomes the recorded text of a specific creation in the making.

The analysis

The analysis was conducted on the most widespread genre in the area of interest: the bivocal Vjersh. A documentary corpus, which I had previously investigated[6], in order to confirm and/or refute the results and hypotheses relating to permanence and occurrences in the 'deep structures' of the meta/supraindividual specific compositional code already identified(Arom,2000). Given the presence of untempered sounds, even in conjunction with melodic cells identified as fundamental to the 'formulaic system', the process of checking, control and verification

5 MICHELE PEDRAZZI, La pratica dell'improvvisatore. Sapere a disposizione e disposizione del sapere, PhD thesis in Semiotics M-FIL 05-XIX CICLO, University of Bologna.

6 I.C. DE GAUDIO, Tecniche polifoniche in un repertorio polivocale di tradizione orale: i Vjersh nelle comunità albanofone della Calabria, cit.

was carried out in stages, treating the audio material with OM in order to work on individual motivic parameters. For the sake of brevity, we refer the reader to a more comprehensive essay published in the magazine 'auditoriuM', published by the Conservatory of Cosenza (De Gaudio,2024).

Conclusions

A comparison with other Arbëreshë songs in the collection has confirmed the formulaic use of certain standard cells, which form the basis of the technique of differentiation of the melodic-verbal material of the strophic songs of this tradition: the melodic segments are differentiated and perceived as non-conclusive or final articulations, due to the presence of formulaic clauses (cadences) of temporary or conclusive suspension of the melodic-verbal strophic articulation (intermediate and final cadential formulas). The profile and presence of the "cadential nucleus" as a conclusive formula has been confirmed at the end of each conclusive module of the melodic-verbal articulation of the strophe, with a descending motion from the third degree towards the finalis, while the lower voice counterpoints it, note for note in direct motion, descending to the seventh degree below and then rejoining the upper voice on the finalis, in contrary motion.

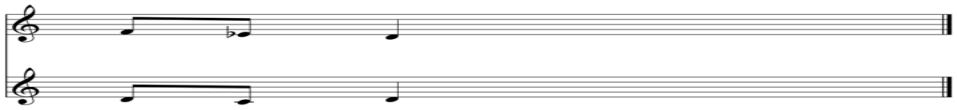


Figure 1. Final cadential nucleus in its simplest form
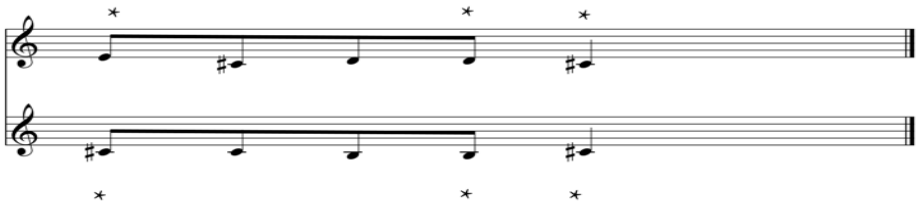


Figure 2. Final cadential nucleus in a rhythmically varied form

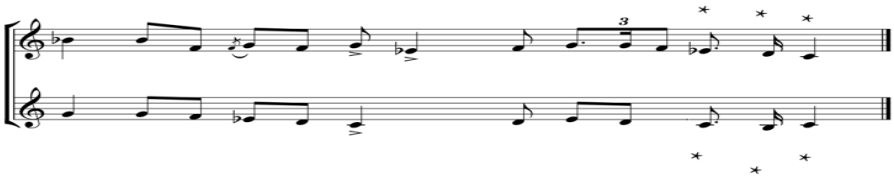


Figure 3. 'Ornate' cadential nucleus'

Final note

The repertoire examined has provided us with the opportunity to verify, in brief, that the formulas are not simple and rigid clichés, crystallised in definitive forms, but rather true 'stereotypical melodic cells' capable of taking on ever-changing forms and contours; mutations that often transform them into new and kaleidoscopic cells. The analysis with OM has allowed us to describe how they work, as well as how they coalesce or split in the temporal flow of musical and verbal rhythm, even in 'difficult' cases such as those just presented: untempered intonation, emission techniques, ornamentation, complex micro-variations, in a web of 'mosaic tiles' with fluctuating chromaticisms. In conclusion, we turned our attention to the individual songs of the corpora, aware of the fact that, in a real sense, in every specific performance, each piece is different from any other performed on other occasions, even by the same singer and with the same melody: each performance is, in fact, a unicum. The only concrete form that bears the distinctive mark of its composer/poet/singer – a creative artist – albeit firmly anchored in tradition and the collective aural and/or (neo) aural code.

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Video link: https://youtu.be/yKBlQqn9aB0

Artificial Intelligence and Soundscape: an innovative experience at the Conservatory of Cosenza

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the way we create and perceive music. The Conservatory of Cosenza is exploring the possibilities of AI in the creation of innovative soundscapes to be used in different and heterogeneous fields. The project combines, in addition to a demo-anthropological study, algorithmic composition and sound synthesis techniques to generate unique and immersive soundscapes. The goal is to create new musical experiences that challenge traditional conventions and open new perspectives for musical creativity within educational and production structures (audiovisual, sound environments, electronic music). The report will be based on the three-year doctoral project, started in the academic year 24/25 at the Conservatory of Music of Cosenza, which involves 3 scholarships and which makes use of the new Hub Laboratory of Cerisano (Cs). The project is divided into a study on sound environments, through the reproduction, in the Kontatk system, of Calabrian organology, with particular reference to musical Calabria in its specific sound, geographical and musical characteristics. The Algorithm on IA Music will then be modulated for a reconstruction of specific Landscapes in the Calabrian area that will provide roads for future objectives. The objectives will be over a three-year period: Conservation of specific sound designs; Use of particular musical structures (midi pattern) in professional audiovisual environments / Creating new innovative musical experiences / Developing new pedagogical methodologies / Exploring the new possibilities of AI also in pedagogical and clinical environments. Finally, actions on sound ecology and contamination of typical and proximity environments that are currently experiencing situations of ambiguity and transformation will be evaluated.

Keywords

VST/plugin, perception multimedia, landscape, soundtrack

Introduction

When considering the possibility of experimental research development, it is always necessary to ask a fundamental question: What research methodologies should be adopted, and for what purpose?

In the academic year 2024-25, the Conservatory of Cosenza has initiated a three-year doctoral research program of great interest and innovation, unique in Italy within the AFAM (Higher Education in Art and Music) sector. The program is titled *Practices, Sciences, and Technologies of Tangible and Intangible Musical Heritage*. *Specifically, it features three research paths: VST Libraries of Calabrian Heritage, AI in Soundtrack Creation, and Immersive Soundscape*.

The idea is founded on the concept of using and developing new technologies in a historical period of great transformation, and on the certainty that:

[…] future generations will never know what an exclusively analog, offline, pre-digital reality was like. We are the last generation to have experienced it. (Floridi,2021)

This is a tripartite project that attempts to combine analog and digital languages as an opportunity for the development and revitalization of various technological applications in music, extending beyond the mere sphere of archiving.

On one hand, it is possible to develop new applications in the field of music for audiovisual media, creating new *Virtual Instruments, Sample Libraries, Effects, and identity-defining Patterns*—never before realized—based on the organology and performance practices of Calabrian oral tradition music. On the other hand, there is an opportunity to expand the sphere of creativity in sound engineering, with objectives related to the ecology of the soundscape and acoustic ecology within the broader landscape. Furthermore, it has potential applications in the clinical field for certain pathologies involving cognitive memory disorders.

We extend our thanks to the Rector, Prof. Dr. Erald Bakalli; Prof. Pjeter Guralumi, head of the Cooperation Projects office; and the Scientific Committee of the Conference for their invitation. We hope that this may soon lead to common developments for systematic research within a marvelous shared musical and artistic heritage (Calabrian and Arbëreshë), which is of secular importance and has, over time, forged unique lines of sentiment, concepts, communion, and community. The Universiteti i Arteve of Tirana and the Conservatory of Cosenza are signing, for the coming years, a memorandum of understanding aimed at the research of common artistic lines and the development of new paths concerning the musical identity between our two peoples.

Identity-Defining Soundscape

Technology, specifically AI, has the merit of being adaptable to multiple types of analysis and for various cross-disciplinary uses. Within the realm of performative oral tradition music and the soundscape—understood as an identity-defining and local soundscape—one of the priorities is to define new planning tools and practices to enhance the management and protection of the

landscape, giving space to the roles attributed to it in identifying new models for managing territorial resources.

Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

The concept of landscape expands to encompass all that constitutes a territory and, more specifically, includes sound as an integral part of its identity. To listen to a landscape is to know it, to have a memory of it that is not only visual, and to develop it with diverse applications for future generations.

The Concept of Memory: Identity Beyond Written History

The concept of "memory—collective memory" is almost always linked to that of the landscape, which logically does not only concern the geopolitical aspect. Every memory has its own landscape, its own scene, its own visual and sonic setting, imbued with meaning.

In reference to musical culture, traditions, executions, and performances are memories of a typical landscape and are embedded in the **anthropological and collective memory of a place**. When we speak of memory, our reflection turns to that corpus of knowledge, wisdom, values, know-how, and practices that a community transmits from one generation to the next, not only through written documents or formal recordings but primarily through oral channels, rituals, myths, symbols, and performances. It is the living, oral memory of a people that has manifested itself over time with its own language, musical traditions, crafts, and gastronomy. Historically, it has always presented itself as a truer, more real alternative to documentation, at times even refusing to become part of archival documentation and literature itself. The evident dichotomy between oral tradition and written documentation has been a communication problem over time, with both following different paths.

Writing, considered as a manufactured product, is deeply inert. Interrogating a text yields no answers other than those contained within the words themselves. […] Plato regarded writing as a technology in the same way many people today think of the computer. (Ong,1982)

Writing is stratified by conventions and by mental and intellectual structures, in contrast to speech, which appears more natural. Orality, even in the 21st century, represents a living context for elaboration, although the objective naturalness of the multimedia approach in new generations has de facto modified the DNA of interpersonal communication. Certainly, historical and cultural orality as an element of preservation can be found in field recordings. This is a musical memory that, particularly in Southern Italy, is rediscovered thanks to the ethnomusicological journey of the post-WWII era undertaken by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella, passing through Ernesto De Martino. This research contribution demonstrated a rich and varied popular musical tradition in Italy and the Mediterranean basin, in stark contrast to the development of the record and music industry, which was not only Italian but predominantly tied to and supported by international majors.

Although there is much confusion between ethnic music, popular-style music, artisanal music, and mass music, the authentic ethnic tradition is the very opposite. […]. To this must be added the symbolic character of the songs, which makes them maximally "open" and susceptible to infinite meanings depending on who sings them. (cf. De Simone, 1991)

The concept of orality has a specific value that goes beyond simple "history" in the academic sense, which is more tied to documentary sources and the chronology of events. Anthropological memory is closer to "oral history," made up of facts, thoughts, rituals, myths, and all that intangible heritage crucial for understanding the profound identity of a community.

Memory and history are by no means synonyms; everything opposes them. Memory is always in evolution, subject to all uses and manipulations; history is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of that which is no more. Laden with feelings and magic, memory feeds on hazy recollections; history, as an intellectual and secularizing operation, demands analysis and critical discourse. Memory places remembrance in the realm of the sacred; history unearths it and renders it prosaic. (Nola, 2009)

History is a public space that must necessarily coexist, in its collective construction, with a memory that regenerates and contaminates itself. Memory lives, modifies itself within the sociological sphere, and finds collective similarities.

Collective thought exists and is a heritage that is ever-growing: it is like civilization […] and has been propagated and transmitted to us, and it will be transmitted, growing, into the future, because evolution, from biological, becomes psychic; from psychic, social; from social, historical. (Rossi, 1898)

The non-static nature of a culture of memory, which nevertheless requires preservation, is of interest.
The theater of everyday life is inseparable from the narrative of our existence, and the meaning that it autonomously expresses ends up being part of what we accept ourselves to be and what we aspire to be. (Socco, 1999)

Non-literate music and words play on references from oral tradition, in which sound and gesture are the semantic connotations for reclaiming the sacredness of a genuine, more natural popularity.

One might think that written words speak as if they had intelligence; but if you question them, wishing to understand them well, they always say only one and the same thing. (Plato)

Far from semiological considerations, the reflection on the fixedness of the word is a constant element. "Writing is passive, out of context, in an unreal, unnatural world." (Ong, p. 1982)
The rediscovery of myths and archetypal figures from the classical mythology of the Mediterranean basin is now central to be rediscovered and protected, not in a museum vision, but for a form of re-creation that is both artistic and cultural.

And so, orality is the instrument and language of a collective memory.

Anthropological Memory Today: The Risk of Extinction

In the age of modernization and globalization, anthropological memory is severely tested. The loss of oral traditions, the abandonment of rural areas, and the cultural homogenization driven by mass media endanger its survival.

Modern life is saturated to the point of nausea with music and so-called music. I am not speaking of the dizzying number of concerts and recitals that we may or may not attend. But even while having a coffee, we are forced to continually endure the noisy interference of loudspeakers and jukeboxes; […] on buses, on trains, they fill us with catchy and sentimental little songs. […] Civilized men have become voracious hearers, but they no longer listen. (Sachs)

Oral tradition music has never been based on written scores or recordings; instead, it has been handed down from generation to generation through listening, repetition, and community participation, which has attributed to it a sense and a meaning, a precise social function. If this transmission process is interrupted or weakened, this type of culture risks disappearing or, at the very least, being modified across generations. This entails a loss of sense and meaning, which are transformed into other structures, myths, and symbologies. It is surely an inevitable process of modification and variation in an ever-faster, more rapid, liquid, and unstable time—from the disappearance of witnesses to physiological crystallization, from social and cultural changes to problems of authorship and provenance, and finally, to the impossibility of reconstruction and social function. The need for a work of reconstruction emerges, as in the case of the musical heritage of Calabria and the Mediterranean in general, which must take into account a necessary intermediation with writing and everything needed for conservation. If the syntax of orality linked to the myth-ritual has almost entirely disappeared in contemporary society, it is now necessary to link the process of modification with an accommodation between orality and writing. Nearly a century after the first structured recordings and expeditions by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists around the world, the idea of musical recovery has completely changed. It is no longer seen as mere cataloging but as an operation of reactivation and dialogue with the present. The task of researchers, musicians, ethnomusicologists, and cultural operators is to "fix" a repertoire on the verge of extinction, not to fossilize it in a museum, but to make it accessible and fertile for new generations. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognized traditional music as a fundamental element for cultural diversity and sustainable development.

"Safeguarding" means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

Anthropological memory, therefore, is not only what has been, but also what can still be. It is an inexhaustible resource for understanding the roots of our identity and for building a conscious and pluralistic future.

This radical immersion in the meta-historical and cultural quid of places is the aspect I care about most: rehabilitating inland towns, rehabilitating the mountains, looking at the center

from the unprecedented and profoundly human perspective of the periphery—this seems to me to be one of the paths to salvation for the entire national system, […] of remaining in one's own places. (Teti)

Throughout the 20th century, studies in ethnomusicology and anthropology, especially in Italy, highlighted the need for data preservation through significant studies and recordings, which often flowed into important sound archives and databases. This was done to protect against the unequivocal process of memory loss.

Collective memory is transcendent with respect to the individuals who compose it because it is the collective within which individuals exist and relate to one another. (Halbwachs)

Over time, studies, re-enactments, concerts, musicians, and record releases have highlighted a richness that was then actualized in music and in performances, historical or micro-historical events, biographies, and essays. In Italy and the Mediterranean basin, there are many forms of dissemination of the demo-anthropological heritage that remain useful for a deeper understanding of oral culture. Furthermore, various strategies implemented in recent decades have prioritized the documentation and archiving of data, the involvement of communities, inclusive teaching in educational contexts, workshops in schools, and regulatory recognition. Research has often been considered a recovery of the resilience of the memory of the self. A community has always possessed a micro-history, often undocumented, that lives and continuously modifies itself, enriching itself with relationships and self-regeneration.

The 21st century raises several reflections:
1. Orality and writing as a necessary relationship of coexistence.
2. Interrelation with AI for new semiological and artistic paradigms.

Land- and Soundscape: Is It an Identity-Defining Process?

When we evoke a memory and when we specify it, localize it—in short, when we complete it—we sometimes say that we connect it to what surrounds it. This actually happens because there are other memories around us—in the objects, in the beings among whom we live—or within ourselves that are related to each other: points of reference in space and time, historical, geographical, biographical, political notions, data from current experience, and familiar ways of life. And so we are able to determine with increasing precision what was previously only the empty schema of a past event. (Halbwachs)

Remembrance as collective memory becomes a soundscape that does not necessarily need:
[…] a musical sense and indifference to grades, as in school; no need to curry favor with critics, jury members, and impresarios with packaged and carefully calibrated programs. In a tribe (community), everyone participates in the musical experience. (Sachs)

The contemporary world has lost the collective experience of the event, the real experience hic et nunc, in favor of an unreal and digital-virtual reality where, instead, one finds oneself ever more often. This matrix-world is enriched with experiences, comments, posts, reels, and photos that become a projection of reality, a new "wanting to be" versus "being," changing identity,

physiognomy, name. It is a non-place where images, music, and words circulate, in which one lives one's real time, where one witnesses the liquefaction of social bonds, the absence of human references, neoliberalism, the loss of job stability, and the transformation of the citizen into a consumer.

The destruction of a community's own culture is lamented, replaced by a forced civilization that has disrupted its authenticity. (Bordoni, 2017)

There is increasingly a real experience of "non-being," and it becomes difficult to understand what is from what is not, from fake news to the creative experience of AI. It is an epochal revolution in which it becomes necessary to also lay the foundations for a social and behavioral ethics. A world that has gone from a contact-based, physical experience with matter to becoming liquid at the beginning of the millennium, and then passing into the ethereal and gaseous state of today. Is it still possible to determine and circumscribe an identity-defining landscape as real, or are new sonic paradigms, expressive of a gaseous society, emerging?

If a few decades ago a lived experience was necessary to understand and associate a soundscape (concerts, performances, voices, songs, musical instruments, dialects, onomatopoeic sounds, etc.), today what generates sound is unreal, not live, due to the use of virtual instruments, real-time processing by AI, and socialization spaces entrusted to the web. The concept of hardware, of the solid, of the concrete, no longer exists; everything is software. The new soundscape is constantly reconstructing itself. We are witnessing a continuous and inexorable process of identity-related alienation linked to the non-geography of socialization places, of the here and the elsewhere. Does a soundscape still exist?

Gemini responds:
The identity-defining and local soundscape today is no longer defined only by the sounds we hear walking down the street, but by an augmented sound ecosystem. It is an intertwining of physical sound and its digital trace, between passive listening and active participation. The real challenge is not to fear the digital, but to use it consciously to narrate, preserve, and enrich the infinite sound identities that make up our territories.

One is struck by this statement, in the sense of its cold and objective reflection on reality. The Landscape becomes hybrid, augmented, in a dimension of data sharing, of mixed use of sounds in virtual places, of digital creations, of new Soundmaps projects. Hypothesizing new scenarios is still very complex, considering that for millennia a landscape has been identity-defining for a culture, a history, an artistic literature, and a sensory use of reality, generating cultural and social conflicts. Man has always related to the outside world through the multisensoriality of his own being. Today, the outside world, also composed of what is not real, could limit or at least modify the use of the senses themselves.

The Project of the Conservatory of Cosenza

The "S. Giacomantonio" Conservatory of Music of Cosenza has established, for a three-year period starting from the academic year 2024/25, three doctoral scholarships in *Practices, Sciences, and Technologies of Tangible and Intangible Musical Heritage*. Specifically, these

are three research paths: *VST libraries of Calabrian heritage, AI in soundtrack creation, and immersive soundscape*.

This program, unique for the Italian AFAM world, is developed along two distinct themes:

First Doctoral Line: *VST libraries of Calabrian heritage*
1. To catalog and record the sounds of the Calabrian organological tradition.
2. To create new VST libraries for use in the world of composition and audiovisuals.

Second Doctoral Line: *AI in soundtrack creation and immersive soundscape*
1. To record and analyze the identity-defining Calabrian Landscape.
2. To create new algorithms aimed at the production of identity-defining soundscapes and acoustic design.
3. To develop applications in the multimedia, audiovisual, eco-music engineering, and clinical fields.

In both research lines, there is a focus on training new professional figures and on research lines that impact:
1. The sound world of the Calabrian territory.
2. The awareness of a multi-dynamic path.

The objective is to rethink an augmented sound ecosystem. It is the soundscape that we not only hear with our ears, but that we explore with our devices and build with our participation. The boundary between a physical place and its digital representation blurs. “Plaza Y” is not only the ground one walks on, but also the sum of all sonic content connected to it, even in a transcendence of spatio-temporal limits.
- **Augmented Landscape:** Being in a square (physical reality), in a place of memory, and, with a dedicated app, re-hearing the recording of a famous speech given in that same square 50 years ago, or a piece by a local artist inspired by that place (digital augmentation layer).
- **Overcoming Spatio-Temporal Limits:** Living, for instance, in New York and listening in real-time to the sound of a patron saint’s festival in a Calabrian village (overcoming space), or listening today to the sound of a Cosenza market from 1960 (overcoming time).
- **Being Multi-layered:** The same physical place can have infinite layers of sonic meaning. You can listen to the current sound, the historical one, the artistic one, and the purely personal one (e.g., the recording of a grandfather’s voice in that place).

There are several potential critical issues in this line of reasoning, not only technical and programming-related but also concerning work ethics.
- **Homogenization:** The algorithms of large platforms tend to promote global trends, risking the marginalization of more niche and local sonorities.
- **Authenticity:** The digital representation of a sound can become a stereotyped or “folkloristic” version of it, losing the complexity and rawness of reality.
- **Digital Divide:** Not everyone has access to the tools and skills to actively participate in this new digital dimension of the soundscape.

The humanization of results through the use of AI is another complex factor in this process. Is it only Production, understood as creative capacity, or only reproduction, understood as obtaining specific results with a computing power unthinkable for a single human being? Today, speaking of the humanization of a process, understood as an equivalence to our intelligence and sensitivity, is frankly very distant. The experiential uniqueness of each individual remains unattainable.

Currently, AI is objectively:

Reproductive; it seeks to obtain by non-biological means the outcome called output and to solve problems or perform tasks successfully with a goal in mind. (Floridi, 2021)

The initial data on the VST (Virtual Studio Technology) frameworks are expected to be ready starting in 2026, at which point they will be implemented into the Kontakt sampler plug-in by Native Instruments. This phase will also initiate the training of the algorithms focused on the 'identity landscape.' The core challenge of this research is to devise a programming methodology founded on the recognition of identity parameters that are asemantic and non-linguistic. These parameters, while devoid of semantic meaning, are characterized by their unique sonic and environmental features.

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