

Timeless Harmonies: The Symbiotic Flourishing of Music and Literature

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ABSTRACT

Music and literature are two of the earliest and most basic forms of artistic expression in all of human history. From their very birth, music and literature have been intertwined, together forming a great story of human spirit. From the chanting rite of primitive tribes to the grand tragic choruses of ancient Greece, from the lyrical verses of Tang poetry and Song lyrics to the expressive nature of modern opera, music and literature have been fused together since ancient times through the entire course of human artistic history. In order to probe the essence of music literature as a cross-art domain, this study aims to trace its symbiotic evolution from antiquity to the present from olden days till today. It analyzes their deep interpenetration in form, content, and aesthetic experience, and shows its unique value for understanding human emotion and shaping culture.

KEYWORDS

Timeless harmony; Music and Literature; Interwoven symbiosis

1 Tracing back: the shared origins of poetry and music in the echoes of antiquity

In the very beginning of art, music and literature were inextricably linked, to separate them is very difficult, "Ge yong suo xing, yi zi sheng min shi ye (As Shen Yue put it, 'Songs and chants arise with the very birth of the people')." (Shen Yue, Book of Song: Essay on Xie Lingyun") expresses that there is a universal truth about the origins of art is about the connection between poetry, music and dance. In ancient Grecian times, the blind poet Homer would recite the Iliad and Odyssey; and in the rhythms of the dactylic hexameter itself there lies a strong sense of cadence as well as internal melodic structures that were specifically created so as to allow for musical accompaniment whilst reciting. In "The Republic", Plato attaches great importance to music education and the molding of the soul.^① He uses the term *mousikē* broadly, comprising poetry, melody, and rhythm. Plato regards it as a complete art form which include poetry, melody and rhyme, and considers poetry to be a fundamental part of music.

In China, the "Book of Songs", the earliest anthology of poetry, already reveals the close interrelationship between music and literature in its three sections: "Feng" (Airs, folk songs), "Ya" (Odes, courtly ceremonial music), and "Song" (Hymns, ancestral temple ritual songs). The "Shi zhe, zhi zhi suo zhi ye, zai xin wei zhi, fa yan wei shi. Qing dong yu zhong er xing yu yan, yan zhi bu zu, gu jie tan zhi; jie tan zhi bu zu, gu yong ge zhi; yong ge zhi bu zu, bu zhi shou zhi wu zhi, zu zhi dao zhi ye (Poetry is where the intent of the mind goes. In the mind it is intent; expressed in words, it becomes poetry. Emotion stirs within and takes shape in words. If words are inadequate, one sighing ensues. If sighing is inadequate, one sings/singing ensues. If singing is inadequate, unconsciously the hands dance them and the feet tap them out)." ^② Since 'The Book of Songs', literary works such as Chu Ci, Han Yuefu, Tang poetry, and Song lyrics, as well as the heroic epics and narrative epics of other ethnic minorities, all fall under the category of musical literature. And the literary history of China may also be called the history of Music Literature. These classical discourses, they vividly reveal the natural sublimation of emotional expression from words (literary forms) to singing (music), and then to dance, paving the way for the profound Chinese classic tradition that "poetry and music are one".

2 Interpenetration: A deep integration of form and content

When art classifications are being refined, music and literature develop independently, yet they always penetrate and nourish each other, forming all sorts of intertextual terrains in both form and content.

2.1 Musicality in literature: the rhythm and meter of words

On the phonetic level: Poetry is a concentrated embodiment of the musicality in literature. Whether it is the strict tones, antithesis, and rhymes of Chinese classical poetry, such as Du Fu's "Ascending High," which includes lines like "The wind is fierce and the sky high; apes cry mournfully. The islet clear with white sand; birds fly back." "The endless falling

^①Plato. The Republic [M]. Northern Literature and Art Publishing House, 2023.

^②Hao Jing. Original Interpretation of the Mao Poems: Preface to the Mao Poems [M]. Zhonghua Book Company, 2021.

leaves rustle down, while the Yangtze River flows endlessly." Likewise, in Western verse the interplay of stress and metre—e.g., Shakespeare's iambic pentameter—creates an intrinsic musicality, giving the text itself an audible quality imbued with melody and rhythm..

Structural level: Literary works' composition structures often take inspiration from music structures. In the same way that Joyce's "Ulysses" uses sonata form and Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" uses a fuguelike polyphony, the rhythmic cadence of the chapter headings of Chinese classical novels' chapter headings in "To know what happens next, please listen to the next part" reflect storytelling art in the same way. There are also other ethnic minorities with well-organized and completely structured mountain songs and folk rhyme. The musicalization of literary structure imbues narrative with rhythm and tension along the temporal dimension.

Imagery and Synesthesia: Writers use music to convey feelings and create moods; for instance, it would be Bai Juyi's wonderful portrayal of the pipa in "Pipa Song", or by using synesthesia which turn sounds into visual and touch ones (Baudelaire's "The Harmony"). In his essay "Tonggan," Mr. Qian Zhongshu offers an incisive analysis on this point, saying that good descriptions of music establish synesthetic links between sound and sight.^③

2.2 The literary nature of music: narrative and lyricism in sound

From Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," which vividly depicts the natural scenery of

spring, summer, autumn, and winter – capturing spring's vitality, summer's fervor, autumn's bounty and joy, and winter's shivering chill – we see a musical poem of nature. In Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique" he adds characterisation through titles and textual descriptions as well as in specific musical diction. The composer uses imitated sounds like a bird or a storm to give his music description, story and drama which will make people think of books.

Vocal art: This is the most direct carrier of the literary quality of music. Art songs (Lieder), operas, oratorios, musicals - these are genres that blend poetry or drama with music. Schubert wrote music for poems by Goethe and Heine and made art songs like "Erlkönig" and "Die Forelle". Though Verdi and Puccini's operas are based on literary originals like Shakespeare and Alexandre Dumas fils, their music makes these characters more soulful, more emotionally charged, making music the most incisive language for emotional narrative.

Depth of expressive emotion and intellect: Even if it's a pure instrumental piece without any title, it has an emotion and thought. The "fate theme" in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony marks the start of the symphony, which represents the battle against fate, and it is as dramatic and rich as the plot of a great epic. Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony is an expression of the highest tragedy of life. It is an emotional lamentation that echoes literary investigations into these kinds of dilemmas

3 Symbiosis: cross-art practices and theoretical construction in a modern perspective

Music and literature intertwine and become more integrated right in this precise moment, in a deeper and broader way, and their fusion has become even more varied and avant-garde.

3.1 New explorations in creative practice

The Musical Adaptation and Interpretation of Literary Works: Classic literary works are constantly being adapted into opera, and other musicals, like *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. Also, film soundtracks, like the huge symphonies of *The Lord of the Rings* in Peter Jackson's series which add to Tolkien's vast world, and even symphonic poems/suites, like *Don Quixote* by Richard Strauss.

Music-Inspired Literary Creation: Writer Romain Rolland's "Jean-Christophe", taking Beethoven as the spiritual prototype, Milan Kundera's novels such as "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" are deeply influenced by polyphonic musical structures, emphasizing the "polyphony of the novel"; Chinese writer Yu Hua candidly admits the considerable influence of music, especially Shostakovich on his creative rhythm and structure.

Pioneering experiments: Concrete poems lay out words as visible images; John Cage's "4'33'" challenges the conventional definition of music by incorporating ambient sounds into "music," blurring the boundaries between art/life and even literary description; electronic music and multimedia art make things mix texts, sounds, sights into whole new kinds of cross-media art.

^③Qian Zhongshu: Synesthesia (included in Seven Collections)

3.2 Deepening theoretical research

Comparative Art studies and cross-disciplinary arts research: scholars break out of the shell of separate art genres to explore the common and special aesthetic principles, expressive styles, and reception psychology shared by two separate art forms such as music and literature. Regarding art, Susan Langer's theory "Feeling and Form" which states "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling". This forms a common ground for interpreting symbols present in various forms of art, which symbolically represents human emotions.^④

Semiotics & reception aesthetics: using semiotics to examine how musical signs (i.e., melody, harmony, rhythm) and literary signs (i.e., literary language, images, structure) mean, while the former is concerned with similarities and differences in listeners' and readers' "horizon of expectation and aesthetic experiences" as consumers of music-related literary works.^⑤

"Musicality" as a category of literary criticism: Literary criticism, "musicality", it is an essential part of studying and analysing poetry and prose in regards to rhythm, meter, tone and structuring to produce a set of different impressions to audiences emotionally.

4 Significance: harmonies that resonate within the human spirit

The millennium-long symbiosis and incorporation of music and literature are much more than an exchange of artistic technique; it originates from the most fundamental human desires for self-expression and observation.

The dual reinforcement and deepening of emotional expression: Language is good at describing and analyzing, but it sometimes can't fully show how strong, complicated, and direct people's feelings are; but music, because it isn't made of words and is abstract, can touch people's hearts very deeply. When literature's emotional content mixes with the emotion-producing ability of music, we end up with a beautiful art or operatic song which has a wonderful opportunity to take an in-depth dive into, or express, the emotional universe of humanity. Music lends wings to literary emotion, while literature provides the substance for musical feeling.

The Complementarity and Extension of Spatiotemporal Arts: Literature excels in unfolding narratives, shaping characters, and constructing worlds within the linear flow of time; music is essentially an art form rooted in time that creates structure and emotion through the organization of sound over temporal dimensions. The combination of the two exponentially enhances the expressive power of time-based art; music can instantaneously create atmosphere, reveal inner emotions, and drive dramatic conflict, significantly expanding both the temporal and emotional capacity of narrative. At the same time, the abstract and fluid nature of music can transcend the specific temporal and spatial limitations of literature, pointing towards more universal and formal spiritual meanings.

The richness and height of an experience of beauty: The literary nature of music, much like vocal art, or program music, brings with it an experience of listening which is also seeing. This sort of experience is one that's filled with myriad senses and dimensions, it grabs ahold of the audiences emotional and cognitive involvement, causing a far better and longer lasting sense of beauty and spirit.

Unique carriers of cultural memory: Many works that integrate music and literary forms, such as the Book of Songs, Homer's epics, folk songs, ritual chants, and national operas, carry the collective memory, historical emotions, values concepts and identity recognition of a nation or group. They are living cultural genes, passed down through generations by the symphony of poetry and song.

5 The tradition of music literature and contemporary development in the chinese context

The traditional Chinese belief that poetry and music are one offers a resource for musical literature. Starting from the unbroken tradition of singing the "Shijing" and "Chuci", to the realist singing in Han Yuefu expressing emotions of sadness and joy, from Tang poetry and Song lyrics that anyone can sing along with, to Yuan drama which combined music, song, dance and performance perfectly, from the elegant Kunqu opera from Ming and Qing dynasties to the flourishing modern Chinese operas such as Peking opera, Yue Opera, Huangmei Opera and so on, the interweaving of music and literature is always a major manifestation of China's artistic spirit.

In contemporary China, this tradition has been inherited and promoted:

The Integration of Modern Poetry and Music: Contemporary poets create works with intrinsic musicality, some of which have been set to music and sung, such as Xu Zhimo's "Occasionally," Yu Guangzhong's "Nostalgia," and Xi Murong's

④Susanne K. Langer:«Feeling and Form».

⑤Carl Dahlhaus:«Esthetics of Music».

"Father's Prairie, Mother's River."

Exploration of National Opera: From "The White-haired Girl" to "Sister Jiang" and "The Wilderness", it draws on western opera forms, integrates elements of Chinese opera and folk songs, and tells Chinese stories.

The Pursuit of Literary Quality in Popular Music: The works of outstanding lyricists such as Qiao Yu, Lin Xi, Fang Wenshan, and Jidi Majia possess significant literary merit in their own right. Featuring rich imagery, emotional depth, and social contemplation, their lyrics constitute an important part of contemporary musical literature.

Film scores and literature interaction: The music in films and TV series plays an important role in enriching the plot, character shaping, and thematic connotations of the film. It is closely related to the audio-visual literary script.

6 Conclusion

The harmony of music and literature is an eternal concert in the human heart. It exists from the ancient ritualistic homological symbiosis, to the deep interpenetration between form and content throughout the entire continuum of the history of art, as well as in today's various differentiated cross-art practices and theoretical constructions, the coexistence has always been a forceful and tempting force in art creation and aesthetic experience. This sort of fusion adds to the expressiveness of art, treading on the commonness of people's emotional show, the many-dimensionedness of temporal and area perception, along with the perplexing nature of the spirit globe. Music, with its abstract but direct appeal, gives wings to the emotions and imagination of literature; literature provides an environment and direction for the emotional currents of music via its concrete and profound storytelling and reflection. They illuminate each other, they mutually enrich each other, and together they enlarge the horizons of mankind's creative expressions, contained within is an endless reverberation that rings inside the most secret and hidden chord of our souls. Music and literature coming together is a dialogue that goes beyond how we see things, it's when reasons and emotions team up, and mankind has been fighting forever to catch those big, invisible worlds in small, solid shapes. The study and appreciation of music literature is an investigation of the meaning of art itself, as well as an in-depth reflection, even more infinite longings for the human spiritual home.

About the Author

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