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(Ariel)

MUSIC IN ART¹

Abstract

In this article I shall describe the various roles and meanings of music in selected works of different artists, styles and periods, from the basic level of imitating and portraying reality to more covert meanings. The choice of works was based on the starting point of the centrality of music or the role of the musical instrument, or both as a key to understanding and interpreting the painting.

Key words

music, styles, roles, symbol, soul, harmony, rhythm, earthly, ethereal

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INTRODUCTION

Music is known as one of the oldest arts in the world. In the Bible, Jubal is mentioned as the forefather of this art: “the first of all who play the harp and flute” (Genesis 4:21). According to the definition of the Hebrew Encyclopedia, the concept of “music” derives from the Greek *mousikē*, “the arts of the Muses” – in other words a unity between sound, word and movement. The Greek term was used broadly to include the arts presided over by the nine Muses – all branches of education aimed at developing the mind as opposed to developing the body². In the ancient world, music was a broader concept than it is today, since it related to the universal language of nature. Musical sounds were perceived as an expression of the divine order – harmonious laws and relationships that constitute the universe. This order is reflected in the arts of the Muses – music, dance, theatre, poetry, architecture and more. Pythagoras (582-496 BCE), the father of mathematics and the theory of music, was one of the most important and influential philosophers in Greece and in the West in general. He established the famous school where many pupils worked diligently on the art of listening and observing in order to become simpler and better people. While many ancient traditions related to the connection between music and the laws of nature, Pythagoras was the first to scientifically define the connection between sound, number and mathematical ratio. He perceived there to be analogic regularity between nature, man and music. These laws could be reduced to mathematical proportions or numerical relations. He also discovered the connection between a “musical interval” and a “mathematical ratio”. In other words, if one converted a mathematical ratio into a particular note, it would be possible to discern whether this ratio would be harmonious, creating a sense of completeness and balance, or dissonant. The Pythagoreans were of the belief that every experience in the universe had a sound and that all entities sang a song of praise to the heavenly architect, the *dēmiourgos* – creator of the world. Hence all in the universe is connected via mathematical ratios to everything else. Man cannot hear this harmony of the ethereal spheres, since he is trapped in the illusion of the material world; however, his role is to absorb the harmonious ratios that are an expression of ethereal music, and express them in himself and in the world. We know that Euclid (born c. 325 BC) and Ptolemy (c. 100-170) wrote mathematical treatises about music. Later on in

² Hebrew Encyclopedia, 22, p. 538.

the Middle Ages, the writings of Johannes Kepler (1571- 1630) included music as one of the mathematical arts alongside arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. In contrast, in the modern world, music ceased to be a central part of mathematics despite its mathematical nature. Christian philosopher Boethius (480-524) defined three levels of music³:

1. *Musica instrumentalis* – the music we are familiar with and can hear – the lowest level of the abovementioned “ethereal music”.

2. *Musica universalis* – the music of the spheres. These are the mathematical ratios that exist among the planets. By translating these ratios into sounds, we can “hear” the harmony of the planets’ movements.

3. *Musica humana* – the harmonious relations within the human body and soul.

Music is the science or the art of pleasing and expressive sound combinations that can be sensed by both one’s emotion and one’s mind. In the 18th century, philosophers began to try to define this concept: Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) believed that the affective aspect of music lay mainly in the human voice, where the instruments merely accompanied its moving intensity⁴. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) believed that the source of language was actually an imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of animals and instinctive human cries accompanied by signs and expressions. He claimed that prehistoric man first used his voice to produce musical cadenzas in song, like the gibbon monkeys⁵.

In an attempt to translate music into the language of painting, one must turn to the theory of German scholar Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). Painting was considered the “art of place” because it is experienced with immediacy and because it continues to exist after it has been observed. In contrast, music, like poetry and literature, is perceived as the “art of time”, since it is perceived through a series of consecutive moments, and the melody is heard but then vanishes. The elusive sound is produced but then becomes a thing of the past immediately after it is heard, or to paraphrase Lessing: the arts of time do not represent a single “suggestive moment” in the plot from which one can understand what preceded it and what followed, but rather ongoing processes the perception of which is spread out over time. What the eye encompasses in one glance the author unfurls before us very slowly, and it often happens that upon reaching the end of the description, its beginning

³ Strunk 1950, p. 76.

⁴ O’Dea 1995, p. 2.

⁵ Darwin 2009, p. 76.

is often forgotten. As for the eye, the parts it has observed are always present and it can review them again and again; but for the ear, the parts are lost, unless they are committed to memory⁶.

As mentioned painting and music share much in common:

1. Harmony and a number of elements that compose the complete work: lines, shapes and colours – rhythm, notes and scales.

2. Modulations: shades of colour – range of notes.

3. Composition: the conscious part of the work that unites and organizes its various parts into a single entity.

Various artists engaged in the research and implementation of interdisciplinary arts. During the Renaissance they stressed the study of art, knowledge and science, unlike the specializations of the modern era. As early as the 16th century, the artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593) studied the relations between different hues and the different pitches of types of musical notes. He tried to apply the results of his studies to the art of painting, as well. Romantic artist Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) loved music and even played the violin. In his journal⁷ he described the reciprocity between music and painting by comparing the sketched preparations with musical improvisations as well as the link between painting and the playing of the violin.

In the 20th century, particularly well-known in regard to music and the attempts to integrate it into the art of painting are two painters: artist and violinist Paul Klee (1879-1940) and painter and theoretician Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944). The two met in 1900 and became close friends and fellow teachers for over 30 years. Philosopher and archaeologist Hajo Düchting (1949-2017) stressed that their works were very similar at first glance, but that each brought different approaches, perspectives and philosophies to their works⁸. This notion was shared by writer Mark Roskill (1933-2000), who claimed that they were partners in a musical partnership, even though the styles of their performance were cast quite differently⁹.

Rushworth Kidder¹⁰, claimed that Paul Klee sought the visual parallel to music since there was a profound link between the two arts, and that he focused his efforts on integrating the two: he drew his inspiration for his abstract art from musical rhythms and structures, developing and translating

⁶ Lessing 1983, p. 109.

⁷ Delacroix 2006, p. 252.

⁸ Düchting 1997, p. 17.

⁹ Roskill 1922, p. 16.

¹⁰ Kidder 1985, *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 7.

them into the painting as he wove series of themes, signs and symbols into it. Klee preferred the classical composers such as Mozart and Bach to the modern composers and particularly the latter's Fugue in E minor which was reflected in his works. Some of his works were inspired by certain musical pieces and he even gave musical names to some of them such as Harmony, Rhythm, Fugue and so on. Klee believed that colour exists not only in paintings but also, metaphorically, in music and that the instruments in the orchestra are the palette of the musical piece. Among his best-known paintings is "Polyphony" (1932) about which Brenda Leach¹¹ commented that polyphonic music has many overlapping musical lines and in a polyphonic painting there is an overlapping of visual forms and colour. There are at least two separate melodies harmoniously integrated while each retains its linear character. From the 1920s, Klee produced a series of imaginary colourful structures he named "magic squares" to which he applied his theories. In "Polyphony" he uses colour to express his musical ideas. Blocks of colour in the background resemble the deep basic chords of the musical composition and on the surface of the painting he places tiny dots in different luminescent colours acting in counterpoint – Bach's polyphonic musical structures.

Wassily Kandinsky claimed that the most sublime art is abstract, meaning the more spiritual – music. In his two famous books: "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" and "Point and Line to Plane" he claims that authentic art is created out of an "inner need" that is the foundation upon which the harmony of shapes and colours is created.¹² He believed that it was the principle by means of which effective interaction is created between form and the human soul¹³. The process through which a work of art is created out of that "inner need" is mysterious and sometimes even mystical, and from that moment on, the piece becomes an independent entity. As a theoretician, he even based his paintings on his research. He divided his works into three categories: impressions, improvisations and compositions, and gave them names influenced by the domain of music, which was considered avant-garde and original for his time.

One of the basic links between painting and music, according to Kandinsky, was that colour had a direct impact on the soul¹⁴ and, like music, acted upon all the senses. Observing a colour palette, the first sense that comes into

¹¹ Leach 2015, p. 82.

¹² Kandinsky 1977, p. 38.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 25.

play is vision, which creates joy in the heart of the beholder. However, he goes on to say that through these colours, one can penetrate deeper into the soul and cause vibration, a kind of “cerebral resonance” that is at a much higher level than mere seeing – rather a purely spiritual phenomenon. From this, his overall definition of art is derived: “constructing a harmony of form and colour¹⁵”.

Kandinsky made a connection between visual colour and tonal colour, believing that colours possess human qualities, as he drew parallels between them and musical sounds, matching different instruments to each colour. He claimed, for example, that pale blue matches the sound of a flute, dark blue that of a cello and the deep dark blue, the contrabass. He matched yellow with a trumpet, orange with the warm sounds of the viola, red with the tuba, purple-violet with the bassoon, and green with the violin¹⁶. Kandinsky believed that it was about the degree of warmth or coldness of the hue of the colour and its degree of clarity or murkiness: warmth was a tendency towards the physical yellow, while coolness was a tendency towards the spiritual blue; clarity was a tendency towards quiet, deep and absolute white, while murkiness was a tendency towards black, signifying a void, destruction, a lack of options and hopeless eternal silence – death¹⁷. His studies yielded somewhat “scrambled” energetic, highly abstract colourful works which became his signature, and the colour-sound legend he created enabled observers to decipher how his painting expressed music.

In the impressive reliefs of the “Cantoria” in The Opera del Duomo Museum in Florence – a combination of architecture and sculpture – created by Luca della Robbia and Donatello (Fig. 2) in the 1430s, music is given prominent standing among the arts. The two artists portray children dancing, singing and playing instruments. Della Robbia demonstrates the importance of the children in the realistic style of Renaissance Florence, while Donatello shows the influence of the ancient motif of the *putti* – angelic unattired, children. Della Robbia’s “Cantoria” relates to Psalm 150, *Laudate Domini*, and the reliefs show delightful children, as befits the Renaissance, some partially robed, dancing and swaying to the sounds and rhythm of cymbals. In other panels, graceful girls dance while boys play wind instruments, the harp, the mandolin and the tambourine. The artist’s attitude towards the children and the instruments is mimetic, tending towards ideali-

¹⁵ Kandinsky 1979, p. 9.

¹⁶ Leach 2015, p. 79.

¹⁷ Kandinsky 1979, p. 25.

zation with an emphasis on their feelings and movements. In Donatello's "Cantoria", what is highlighted is the children's energy and dynamism.

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) believed that of all the arts, music is considered to express the deepest emotion: "After silence that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music¹⁸".

In the work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) entitled "The Musicians" 1595 (Fig. 3), otherwise known as "Concert of Youths", the artist brings the beholder closer to the space in which the scene takes place and eliminates the barrier between art and life, so that the real world of the beholder and the world portrayed become intertwined¹⁹. Caravaggio uses the musical instruments and the young players to express the magic of love. Evidence of this is the yearning of the faces of the four young boys and the moist eyes and slightly open lips of the main figure holding the lute. This work is considered one of his more puzzling and secular works²⁰. The four young men are arranged in a complex, interesting and Mannerist composition, in a dream-like melancholy ambience. They are probably engaged in rehearsing for a concert of madrigals – secular love songs common in the Renaissance, quite in contrast to the religious singing prevalent in the churches, describing the pain of love rather than its joy. The central figure is tuning his lute, the violinist is looking at his sheet music – both these instruments have a feminine shape; the third is holding a horn – an instrument typically seen as masculine. The fourth, plucking a grape from the cluster before him, is connected to love since he resembles the winged Cupid with his full quiver of arrows²¹. According to Holgar Bertrand Flottmann (1946), in order to reinforce the topic of love, the latter is engrossed in the cluster of grapes – a symbol of erotica and temptation²². The theme of grapes first appears in Ancient Egypt where they produced wine, which symbolized romance. Even before the delicate sparkling drink was produced, the fruit was symbolically linked to fertility and virility. The Romans are known as the first culture to have vineyards and produce wine, the symbol of Bacchus, the god of passion and fertility. Even before then, it was a tradition among

¹⁸ Huxley 1931, Preface.

¹⁹ Christiansen 1990, p. 28.

²⁰ Dixon 2011, p. 124.

²¹ Ovid 2010, p. 134 Book 5: "Cupid typically has two kinds of arrows: Arrows with a sharp golden tip, which can fill someone with uncontrollable desire, and arrows with a blunt tip of lead, which can fill someone with aversion and the desire to flee. Cupid seems to have the latter type of arrows here".

²² Flottmann 2013, p. 48.

the Greeks to serve clusters of grapes to a couple at their wedding ceremony in the belief that the grape seeds would be a sign of many offspring. Similarly, since grapes-wine lift the spirits, Caravaggio hints in this work that music will have a similar effect.

Although the painting offers a mimetic rendition of music, it can be interpreted as an allegory for the music of love, given the presence of Cupid. Peter Robb (1998) comments that the proximity of the boys to the beholder creates immediacy and intimacy in this allegory, which properly conveys the pain of love and the emotion of the music.²³ The connection between the two is expressed in the words of Duke Orsino in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Act I, Scene I:

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again!....

The semi-classical loosely tied white togas only partially covering the boys' bodies and the vibrant red cloth also contribute to the sensual, perverse atmosphere aroused by emotional and erotic music. That same sensuality, in addition to the feminine tendency, the sweetness and delicacy in the boys' expressions, raises the possibility of a homo-erotic explanation. Robb goes on to claim that in support of this notion, Caravaggio places the left knee of the boy reviewing the sheet music in preparation for the madrigal singing, between the bared legs of the lute player facing him²⁴. Caravaggio reinforces this interpretation by inserting himself next to his life partner, Mario Minniti, the lute player²⁵.

One of the serious issues preoccupying the artists of the 17th century was the paradox of passing time. Man's inability to overcome the elusiveness of time and the harm it causes, eventually leading to death, burdened many philosophers in the Baroque era. Artists expressed this, for example, with still life paintings containing skulls, hourglasses, rotting fruit and the like. Typical sayings of that period were *carpe diem* – "seize the day" since it passes so quickly; *memento mori* – "remember that tomorrow you die"; "all is vanity, for beauty fades"²⁶.

²³ Robb 1998, p. 57.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 58.

²⁵ See Caravaggio's madness 2019. Caravaggio moved to Rome in 1593 and found protection in Cardinal Francesco Maria del Montee who gave him shelter and helped him with his career. In 1594, he met Mario Minnitti, a twenty-year-old, and took him to live with him. Caravaggio had relationships with other men, but his relationship with Minnitti was considered that of a couple.

²⁶ Gaarder 2015, p. 223.

In his painting “Singing Boy with a Flute” 1623 (Fig. 7), Frans Hals (1582-1666) chose as his focus the theme of music, which as mentioned, is included in the category of the art of time. This painting expresses the notion of the elusiveness of time. The flute is on the diagonal and the turned head of the sensual, charismatic and energetic boy with his red lips suggest movement that expresses time. His left hand is raised in a gesture that can be interpreted in four ways: 1. The hand is moving in time with the song he is singing; 2. A gesture of thanks to his audience applauding him at the end of his performance; 3. A request from the audience to understand that the song has come to an end and he can play no more; 4. A signal of attention. His smiling face and parted lips also denote calm. Frans Hals developed an original and innovative technique to illustrate the handling of passing time which inspired impressionist artists of the late 19th century: short, light, rapid brushstrokes used to paint the boy’s hair and the dramatic white feather in his cap, his collar and left hand. This was alongside the more commonly accepted technique of that period as used for the boy’s clothing. Through the use of chiaroscuro so typical of the Baroque, Hals heightened the effect of the passing moment by emphasizing the vanities of this world and its superficial pleasures, such as youth, which is ephemeral.

One of the more psychological topics in the Bible is the complex relationship between the reigning King Saul and David, the future king of Israel. It is not by chance that Rembrandt chose to paint on two occasions (the first in 1630) Saul’s state of extreme depression.

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669), whom Johann Wolfgang von Goethe named *der Denker*²⁷, should also have been given the title of “psychologist”. In “David Plays before Saul” 1656 (Fig. 6), the artist’s profound understanding of Saul’s psychological state, which lies at the core of the relationship between the two, is revealed. The painting depicts Saul’s unstable mental state, as he is highly emotional and in tears: “Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him” (Samuel I. 16:14). He sheds a tear, wiping it away with the dark, heavy drape that isolates him while separating him from David. “Another, more sinister feeling is stirring within him. His uncovered eye, wide open and darkly brooding, betrays his inner torment²⁸”. The problematic relationship between David and Saul emerges from the confrontation between the

²⁷ In the writings of the philosopher Goethe published in 1832, we find in Vol. 44 an article on Rembrandt written 80 years after the painter’s death, in which he called him “the philosopher”.

²⁸ Schama 1999, p. 228.

King of Israel, who takes up some two-thirds of the picture, filling its space, but with no self-awareness or condescension, and the young David recently taken away from his flock, seated modestly hidden away in his corner. The body language of the two highlights the contrasts between them: the bent over king bespeaks of sorrow, despair, depression and surrender, as he stares out into the distance. David, on the other hand, is calm, concentrating on his playing and his facial expression is focused and attentive. Saul's shoulders slump forward and his arm points loosely downwards over his spear, as opposed to David's relatively large hands – symbolizing the action of plucking his lyre. Saul's condition improves only through the healing action of the music emanating from David's lyre. Perhaps Saul's tears stem not only from the melancholy that overwhelms him, but also from the emotion and sense of release he feels thanks to the sounds of the music plucking at his heart-strings²⁹.

17th-century Holland was an economic, political and cultural power, in which the art of painting had already been flourishing since the Renaissance, reaching its noteworthy peak in the 17th century. This cultural atmosphere played a key role in the importance of music in the Netherlands at that time. Hints of the abundance of musical instruments are evident in the paintings of several artists such as Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667), Jan Miense Molenaar (1610-1668), Dirck van Baburen (1624-1695), Gerard Ter Borch (1617-1681) and others. Prominent examples in the baroque paintings of the 17th century in Holland are those of Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), which also relate to music and musical instruments. In some 36 of his paintings we can find appearances of the lute, the harpsichord, the viola, the virginal, the guitar and the trumpet.

In "The Music Lesson" 1662-1665 (Fig. 4), an enigmatic picture filled with an atmosphere of mystery and intimacy, a young woman is standing with her back to the viewer at the virginal, an early form of the cembalo, with a blurred reflection of her serious face shown in a mirror hanging above the instrument. Beside her stands an elegantly dressed man, presumably her teacher, attentive and focused, with his mouth open as if he might be singing. In the tradition of the genre in the 17th century, Vermeer details the day-to-day items in the room, which are divided into two groups: straight lines and angles – the floor tiles, the chair, the windows, the wooden ceiling beams and the virginal itself – masculine shapes often associated with logic. The

²⁹ Landsberger 1946, p. 170.

second group consists of rounded shapes: the pitcher and the tray beneath it, the decoration on the table tapestry – feminine forms often associated with emotion.

With the use of black, white and Vermeer's favoured yellow and light blue, the soft light gently enveloping the entire scene, the way the composition is arranged, with the masculine virginal and the sensually feminine viola da gamba, the artist creates balance and harmony in this scene, particularly between the man and the woman – the teacher and his pupil – in an era when there was no harmony of gender in art. Harmony is defined as a balance between tensions or contrasts, a balance between dissonance and consonance. The term originates from the Greek verb *harmonozein*, meaning to fit together. This harmony is forever connected to the relationship between two essences or entities as it combines and connects them creating a shared resonance. The enigma in Vermeer's painting is expressed, among other things, in the reflection of the woman's head, turned towards the man, where her expression suggests her interest in him or attraction to him, as the angle of her head in the mirror does not match the angle of her head focused on the keyboard in the reality of the picture. One gets the impression that in this scene there is a certain restraint in the relationship between teacher and pupil, which might be hiding the sexual tension between them. Vermeer hints at this tension by placing the chair, the table and the instrument at the rear part of the room and between the two figures, in order to create a separation and allow them an intimate encounter in their private space. In the mirror we see the reflection of the legs of Vermeer's easel, probably to denote the artist's presence outside the painted space, in order to involve the real world with the one the two figures create between them by way of the music. The special ability of music to connect between opposites and create harmony is evidenced in the Latin motto etched onto the virginal – partly lit up and partly in shadow – which includes two aspects: Music is a companion in pleasure and a balm in sorrow³⁰. This motto suggest the nature of the relationship between the man and the woman, in addition to the two musical instruments also hinting at the pleasures the two share: a deep emotional relationship may have the elements mentioned of pleasure and sorrow, and likewise, enslavement and liberation, opposites that are reinforced in Dirck van Baburen's painting "Roman Charity" 1623 (Fig. 5), hanging on the wall in "The Music Lesson". The painting depicts the story of Roman Valerius Maximus, who wrote in the

³⁰ Wheelock Jr. 1995, p. 87.

years 37-14 BC: Cimon, an aged father chained in a prison cell is condemned to die of starvation. His daughter, Pero, who has compassion for him manages to find him and feed him with the milk of her breasts. Thanks to the impression this generosity made on his jailers, her father was set free. This story deals with enslavement and liberation; two elements that are often found together where strong feelings of love exist. In *The Music Lesson*, one discerns the harmony created in the relationship of the man and the woman through music reflecting Vermeer's view of the relations between the sexes.

In "Mezzetin" c. 1719 (Fig. 8), by Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) the character is playing his guitar and serenading as one would expect from the Rococo style of the 18th century, seated in an elegant garden in the tradition of the splendid *Fêtes Galantes* of the "leisure classes" and the aristocracy of the period – a picturesque style invented by the artist. At these parties, elegant ladies and gentlemen passed their time in conversation, music and flirtation as they sought noncommittal romantic liaisons in a pastoral setting, such as found only in dreams. These parties included plays, performances, amateur dramatics, dancing and masked balls. Mezzetin is one of the familiar characters from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* common in the 16th century and still popular in Western Europe some 200 years later. Originally, he played the character of the clown who is always doomed to fail, particularly when it comes to affairs of the heart. The other characters usually mocked and scorned him, but in this instance the viewer is spared that. His rather splendid and elegant striped costume is shown in pastel colours, the golds, greens and pinks typical of Watteau and his period, made of shiny satin, as are his stockings and cloak. His collar and cuffs are white, his shoes are decorated with flowers and he has a bonnet on his head. His expression is one of yearning and pain leaning towards sorrow, pleading and even melancholy, and the music bursting forth from the guitar strings is heart-rending, expressing his loneliness since his feelings are unrequited. This is symbolized in the female figure (Venus?) either made of stone or a painting of a statue on the theatre stage, turning her back, refusing to accept his efforts at courtship. His yearning for love is heightened by his particularly expressive angular arms and hands.

The same melancholy atmosphere that lies in wait beneath the background of the celebration of youth, love, spring and summer, and beneath the hedonistic atmosphere of superficial vacuous entertainment so typical of the Rococo derives from the understanding that youth will slip away with laughter and life itself.

This painting is ambivalent, since its style is entirely Rococo but in terms of content it reflects an emotional and psychological depth worthy of the Baroque. Watteau was enchanted with the style and design of the period and broadened the horizons of the Rococo beyond architecture, interior design and sculpture, to painting and dazzling landscapes. He tended to paint scenes in which there were unclear, ambiguous relationships with complex layers of reality.

Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) understood and presented Paganini's enigma after hearing him play in concert. In his dark and intimate painting "Nicolo Paganini" 1831 (Fig. 10), he depicts the figure of the composer, one of the greatest violinists of all time. As befits the Romantic tradition of painting, the artist chooses the figure of a genius, an individual, a virtuoso. Paganini, who was physically ugly, the object of wicked gossip and rumour, became an adored star, whose ugliness was forgotten during his electrifying performances on stage. He amazed and bewitched his audience, who were astounded by his wild, unbridled appearance, but no less stunned by the variations he was able to generate out of well-known melodies. The wavy, jittery body of Paganini in this painting, and in particular his violin and the way he is holding it illustrate the uniqueness of the music he wrote and performed. The music he wrote was highly complex to play and remains so today. He was one of the first to appear as a soloist accompanied by piano. His works included sonatas, concertos, string quartets, and particularly his 24 caprices.

It seems that the figure of Paganini in the painting of the enchanted Delacroix, expresses, beyond the buoyancy inherent in the caprices, his tortured soul emerging rather like a ghost³¹. Paganini's body moves back and forth and seems to merge with his violin as the artist conveys this almost impossible technique on canvas. There is a legend about Paganini's supernatural talent and skill, that as each of the strings of his violin broke, one by one, Paganini continued to play until he was left with a single one – the G string; hence the aura of mystery surrounding him, suggesting he had made a pact with the devil. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe found him to possess demonic powers and Heinriche Heine claimed that this figure of a vampire with a violin emerged from the netherworld³². Paganini's violin was able to express every kind of temptation in which there was evil and his himself symbolized

³¹ Dubal 2001, p. 159.

³² Ibidem.

more than anything the demonic elements of the era of the Romantic Movement, which glorified “violence, sex, and immoral sensationalism³³”. All this is expressed by Delacroix in the dark background and figure and the overall blurriness of the painting. With the pale and illuminated hands, head and face – the focal points of his unique talent – he seems like a ghost. The role of the music in this painting is to emphasize the presence of Paganini’s magical violin, the musician’s powers of composition, his virtuoso performance and the ability of the music to conquer and bewitch his listeners. Paganini influenced the development of violin-playing technique and inspired musicians and composers of his time and those that followed: Frederic Chopin was persuaded to write his 24 études; Franz Liszt who was deeply depressed, was revived back into life after the “shock” that overcame him when listening to Paganini, saying “What a man! What a violin! What an artist! What suffering! What misery! What tortures from those four strings³⁴”!

In the centre of the composition of “The Old Guitarist” 1903 (Fig. 9), by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and old and weary musician holds a guitar, his sole possession. His expressionless face is shadowed, his hollow cheeks deeply lined with suffering. His body language and sitting position suggest withdrawal. It seems he lacks the strength to raise either his drooping head or his bent shoulders and neck, symbolizing his introversion. His skinny body from which his shabby, torn clothes hang bespeaks of severe hunger. His prominent bones and sharply angular skeletal fingers and particularly long arms hint at muscular strength of days gone by. Despite their roughness, his fingers are delicate and sensitive, as are his slender toes. He resembles a ghost. From these disproportionate limbs, one gets the impression that the guitar player is dying of ongoing malnutrition and his closed eyes testify to his blindness, which isolates him from his surroundings but not from the music he is listening to. Picasso uses a monochromatic palette: a cold, melancholy, alienated blue. This is his best-known painting from his Blue Period (1901-1904), reflecting his own condition while suffering from economic distress and deep mourning of the loss of his friend Casagemas, who took his own life due to unrequited love. In those years, when he himself was on the verge of bankruptcy, Picasso identified with the beggars, the oppressed, the sick, and those on the margins of society, and sought to immortalize them: “The piece signifies an autobiographical moment in Picasso’s early life as a street artist in

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 166.

struggle³⁵. This is all against a backdrop of modernism and the industrial revolution, which led to terrible working conditions and swelling unemployment. Thus the painting became an allegory for the human condition. Miller (2002) claimed that the painting expressed the life of the lone artist and his struggle to survive financial hardship. Thus art became a burden isolating him from the world he depended on. In this painting, instead of the musical instrument uniting people, it separates them, and music becomes a symbol of rejection and loss of contact with the other who is left outside³⁶. Only the guitar is painted in a warm brown colour, and thus it becomes the visual focus of the painting. The realistic technique Picasso used to portray it and the way the old man is holding the instrument highlight the fact that for him it constitutes a lifebelt, an anchor. Music, despite its notes of despair, is his whole world and in its company he is almost unaware of his poverty and blindness. On the other hand, the sorrowful sounds produced by the guitar strings enable him to penetrate his own soul. The blindness that has struck him and isolated him from the world, strengthened his inner vision, some might even say “divine vision” into the depth of things³⁷. Distorting the figure by lengthening the limbs contributes to its spirituality, which is reinforced by his quiet and concentration – spirituality filling his inner world – music; that same deep contemplation in which the guitar player is enveloped heightens the air of mystery surrounding him.

This is a painting of sorrow and loneliness; depression and despair; sadness and misery; emptiness. In his analysis of *The Old Guitarist in the Blue Period*, author and sculptor Denys Chevalier claimed that this piece is the epitome of isolation and Picasso’s own fear of blindness, illness, poverty and death³⁸. Only the guitar is truly alive on this canvas.

Inside the studio, illuminated by a soft, pale, impressionist and lyrical light, Edgar Degas (1834-1917) places three dancers and the leg of a fourth whose body is outside the picture frame in his painting “Rehearsal” 1879 (Fig. 12). Degas is a subversive painter when it comes to composition and human psychology and so his paintings contain visual surprises. He often heightens the illusion of movement by concealing some of the participants at some point, for instance, a dancer concealed behind a closed screen or her profile is “cut off” by the edge of the canvas. Others are partially hidden by

³⁵ Hamilton 2011.

³⁶ Miller 2002, p. 110.

³⁷ Hamilton 2011.

³⁸ Chevalier 1969, p. 36.

a figure in the forefront of the painting. They have mask-like faces that are almost a caricature, ugly and expressionless. In this painting, the dancers are placed in a sophisticated and daring modern composition. Degas creates movement and balance with the parallel arms and legs that form an identical movement and by upsetting and restoring balance by positioning a leg opposite the nose of the girl with the yellow neck ribbon. Unlike the dancers themselves, their glittering transparent organza dresses through which light pours, add beauty, movement and impressionist lightness.

Alongside the impressionism, Degas' basic treatment of the topic is realistic and critical. For the most part, he does not choose to paint an impressive performance or its highlight. As Berger (2011) explains, Degas preferred to set aside the poetry and the illusion of the ballet and present the boredom and fatigue, the toil, sweat and tears involved in preparing for it. He was fascinated by the simple and less impressive, such as a neck resting on a knee. His sketches even included the teacher's comment about the awkwardness of his pupil: "she looks like a urinating dog"³⁹. He was passionate about rehearsals, hard work, exercises, the stretching and bending, the tying of the shoes, arranging the tutu, the itching, the rubbing of the aching muscles, standing on points, and so forth. Sometimes the dancers' geometric stance and positions look like letters of the alphabet. He does not see them as the realization of glamour and fame, nor of nobility and refinement, but rather, an opportunity to conduct experiments by focusing on angles on movement, positions, perspectives, unusual and even radical variations, including the cutting of a picture at the edges. This tendency of his and his imitations of movement in his paintings was greatly influenced by the development of the camera and cinematic photography at that time, pioneered by Eadweard Muybridge⁴⁰.

The focus of Degas' interest is the impoverished and boring world of the black-suited violin player. The only colour in his world is the surprising red of the dancer's provocative tights visible above his head and under his left arm. The violinist situated at the bottom of the canvas, in contrast with the age and size of the slender young dancers, represents lethargy, exhaustion, the dreariness of the music he keeps on playing daily. It is boring, "mechanical" music, played without attention to the beauty and excitement of the melody it contains. His countenance bespeaks of despair and he seems pensive. His face

³⁹ Berger 2011.

⁴⁰ Phippen 2016, film, July, 24.

is turned to the right, away from the dancers, while their gaze is focused on a point beyond the painting to the left. He does not really take part in the rehearsal or in the general atmosphere. His legs are outside the frame and his hands, are large and clumsy, not like a violinist's. His psychological state derives partly from the fact that while the dancers change from time to time, for obvious reasons, he remains stuck in the same position. The violin and the music emanating from it symbolize a routine that no longer excites him. For him it is just a job about which he can no longer be enthusiastic, and the glamour of the stage is a thing of the past.

A recurring motif in the works of Chagall is the violinist on the roof, first seen in 1908 in "The Dead Man" and "The Seated Violinist". The profession of the *kleizmer* is one of the key occupations in the *shtetl*, the Jewish village, since the musician is witness to and accompanying with his joyful Hasidic melodies the happy events of life and with sad melodies – the funerals. The *kleizmer* will typically have a beard and side-locks, wear a small *tallit* and a long traditional coat, a cap and will be holding a violin that sometimes, wails and weeps like a human being'. Chagall's attitude towards the *kleizmer* apparently stemmed from his dream of becoming a singer, a violinist or a dancer. In fact, he did study singing with a cantor, took violin lessons and danced at weddings⁴¹.

Hasidic music, with its mixture of sadness and joy, expresses the yearning for the glorious past and the hope of redemption from the hardships of life in the Diaspora. It is based mostly on long notes, and when sung, it has a single word or meaningless syllables that serve to express to the Lord a sentiment that is too delicate or intimate to be expressed in an ordinary utterance. It is executed in "ecstatic fervour"⁴². It was the Ba'al Shem-Tov who first treated Hasidic music in this manner – an approach adopted by his followers, especially Rabbi Schneour Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Habad movement. This movement was popular in the region of Vitebsk, where Chagall grew up, a town to which his family belonged and which devoted particular attention to the connection between music and ecstasy. Another source that connected Chagall to the violin and to music was his uncle Noah of whom he said that all day long he led his herd to the cowshed, tying their legs and dragging them but in the evening played the songs of the rabbi⁴³.

⁴¹ Chagall 1957, p. 34-35.

⁴² Wullschlager 2008, p. 351.

⁴³ Chagall 2011, p. 18.

This kind of combination between physical work and emotional-spiritual realms was encouraged by the Habad movement. A typical Hasid aspired to unite with God by perfectly executing the tasks of the material world and by maintaining the laws of religion and the commandments⁴⁴. In her book, “The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism”, Rachel Elijor (1949) notes that there are two souls that make up the human mind: the animal and the divine. The former represents the manifest earthly-material inclinations, while the other is the inclination to rise up towards the hidden divine essence⁴⁵.

We know that some of Shalom Aleichem’s writings would not have been strange to Marc Chagall and it was thus possible the painter read and perhaps was even influenced by them. This information is presented as fact by the artist's granddaughter, Bella Mayer⁴⁶. Shalom Aleichem, described his experiences as a child, listening to the violin. He wrote that he could hear poetry, sighing, weeping, wailing, speaking and roaring - all kinds of strange sounds he had never heard before. He described them as sweet as honey, smooth as oil, flowing straight into his heart. He felt his soul soar far and away into another world, into a paradise of pure sound⁴⁷.

“The Green Violinist” 1924 (Fig. 11), is one of a number of paintings dealing with music which highlights routine, flees from it and rises above it as experienced by a *kleizmer*. The size of his body is disproportionate to his surroundings, as he fills the picture, standing atop the pointed cubist roofs of the town. Beneath his feet is the reality of lacklustre, uninspiring, sharply-lined houses in shades of brown and grey, like the musician’s dissimilar shoes and trouser legs. Even the edges of his coat are angular and pointing downward. His face and his right hand are green – symbolizing the banal reality in Chagall’s symbols of colour, also expressed in the barren tree.

The violinist is focused on his playing and on the music bursting forth from the strings of his violin – orange and yellow – mystical colours of the sun. Jewish music, which originates from folk music, is moving and uplifts the spirits of the *kleizmer* into spheres of ecstasy evident on his face; he is swept away by his imagination and boundless enthusiasm which is discerned in the distortion of his mouth and eyes, as well as his wild side-locks. This kind of music recounts the fate of the Jew, as the melodies emerge from the

⁴⁴ Elijor 1993, p. 13-14.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 33-34.

⁴⁶ Huttner 2003, Daily newspaper Forwards.

⁴⁷ Aleichem 1921, p. 114.

violin's strings and flow with melancholy pathos. The human voice of the instrument produces a prayer, a pleading, and heart-wrenching sighs. And the listeners' hearts are flooded with emotions and tears.

Thanks to the music and its inspiration, the *kleizmer* undergoes a transformation: the linear-angular reality below becomes rounded above: His curved cap, located among the soft, round puffs of cloud, is quite the opposite of his pointed coat-tails. Above him floats an angel/muse in purple, the colour of his coat, Chagall's colour for lyricism and creativity. His white right hand is also an indication of spiritual spheres. Music, like the other arts, is cathartic. Like Shalom Aleichem, Chagall, too, described how he felt while listening to the resonating strings of his Uncle Noah's violin, borne away into other worlds: his light head floated around the room, the ceiling was transparent, clouds and blue skies penetrated as did the scent of the fields, the stables and the roadways⁴⁸.

The final two paintings concluding this article are Picasso's, the most prominent modernist of the first half of the 20th century. They offer us music merely as an idea, a concept, a representation of the topic or the instrument – nothing more. Picasso treats the subject in his most revolutionary style – cubism – known for its sharp lines and flatness of image which he developed together with Georges Braque (1882-1963) in 1906-1907. Their aim was to challenge the superiority of art that represents reality.

In synthetic cubist style, Picasso portrays two string instruments in his "Mandolin and Guitar", 1922 (Fig. 13). These string instruments, which for the most part can be used to express lyrical and sensitive music, or alternatively, stirring and wild, have become merely a concept. He wished to show them from the top, the side, inside and out, through distorted and disjointed shapes. Here there is no connection between the music and the instruments, the latter being merely an excuse for the brilliantly constructed composition. They could be replaced by any other still life such as a vase, fruit and so forth. Music is no longer heard, and thus has also become nothing but a concept.

This approach is the product of synthetic cubism, the aim of which was not to "copy" the world but to "construct" it. This style removes any sign of the realistic three-dimensional space painted since the Renaissance; rather the space is flattened. Picasso commented on the transition from analytic to synthetic cubism, saying that they no longer wanted to mislead the eye; they wanted to mislead the brain⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Chagall 2011, p.19.

⁴⁹ Croix and Tansey 1996, p. 1050.

In his famous painting, “Three Musicians” 1921 (Fig. 14), which may be said to conclude, one way or the other, synthetic cubism, Picasso denotes music by way of three instruments and three musicians, where it is difficult to discern where one starts and the other ends, since the figures cross and overlap each other. Since these are familiar figures from the *commedia dell’arte*, Pierrot, Arlecchino and the friar – it is expected that music would “be heard” in the painting. But that is not the case: in a flat painting that looks as if it is made of paper cut-outs or thin strips of plywood, Pierrot appears in white and blue, holding a clarinet. Beside him, Arlecchino, in his traditional chequered costume, holds a guitar, and to his left, the dark-robed singing friar is holding music sheets. As an artistic joke, there is a dog stretched out beneath Pierrot’s seat, his tail between Arlecchino’s legs, while his front legs and head peek out like a silhouette on Pierrot’s right. The question that comes to mind has to do with the veracity of the masked figures and the visual game the artist is playing with his audience. The main point of the painting is its flatness, its tight composition, its separate parts and how they are merged together. The clarinet lies along Pierrot’s body, which is missing an arm, but the table on which a pipe lies close to the base of the instrument, joins Arlecchino, whose blue stripe for his eyes reaches Pierrot. Arlecchino’s guitar connects him to the friar, holding the sheets of music that connect him to Arlecchino below the guitar: separation on the one hand and connected shapes on the other. Parallel to this there is also reference to the music in the break in the music sheets, where continuity is broken by a blue stripe; syncope, dissonant and disjointed music. The experience of music in the painting is lacking; there is just the notion of it.

SUMMATION

It is customary to define each domain of art as independent, but alongside this definition there is a tendency to integrate arts with hidden and manifest bonds between painting and poetry, architecture and dance, and especially between painting and music. Deeper bonds between the arts exist when the phenomenon of synaesthesia occurs, experienced by a select group of people i.e. the sharing of the senses. Marks (1978) explained this unity of the senses as a psychological-physiological phenomenon where a stimulus in one sense is felt via another namely, there is a cognitive merging of different senses or

the blurring of the boundaries between them⁵⁰. This sharing enables an intensification of the artistic experience that renders it a total one. The Dictionary of Psychology (edited by Howard C. Warren), defines synaesthesia as: “a phenomenon characterizing the experiences of certain individuals, in which certain sensations belonging to one sense or mode are attached to certain sensations of another group and appear regularly whenever a stimulus of the latter type occurs”. In reference to synaesthesia as hearing colours and seeing sounds, Wassily Kandinsky wrote that colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the many-stringed piano, and the artist is the hand that touches the keys in order cause the vibrations in the soul⁵¹. But long before that, the Bible tells us that the people of Israel experienced synaesthesia while in the desert at Mt. Sinai: “And all the people saw the thunders... and the noise of the trumpet” (Exodus 20:18).

MUSIC IN ART

Summary

The journey of this article, from the mimetic, the beautiful and the perfect – in terms of both concept and technique – from the reliefs of Luca Della Robbia (1400-1482) and Donatello Donato di Niccolò di BettoBardi, (1386-1466) to the cubist paintings of the revolutionary Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) – will surprise the reader with the broad range of manners in which one can shape, work with, modify, and even distort, music as a theme. This is achieved by transferring music from an auditory art to a visual one through the brushstrokes of each artist according to his own style, the norms of the period, the artistic milieu and the Zeitgeist. The range of paintings before us indicates that from the pinnacle of emotion that music can generate, the viewer is confronted with a mere concept. We are therefore not surprised to hear the words of Gertrude Stein as she looked at the vivid colours, angular shapes and flat patterns in Picasso’s painting “Three Musicians”: “Finally, I understand. The painting was meant to be still life⁵²”.

⁵⁰ Marks 1978, p. 9.

⁵¹ Kandinsky 1979, p. 2.

⁵² [online]. Picasso [access: 2019-03-21]. Available at: <<https://www.pablocassio.org/three-musicians.jsp#prettyPhoto>>.



Fig. 1. Luca della Robbia, Cantoria⁵³



Fig. 2. Donatello, Cantoria

⁵³ The source of all paintings is Google's free of rights search engine.



Fig. 3. Caravaggio, The musicians



Fig. 4. Vermeer, The Music Lesson



Fig. 5. Dirck van Baburen, Roman Charity



Fig. 6. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, David Plays before Saul



Fig. 7. Frans Hals, Singing Boy with a Flute



Fig. 8. Antoine Watteau, Mezzetin



Fig. 9. Pablo Picasso, The Old Guitarist



Fig. 10. Eugène Delacroix, Nicolo Paganini



Fig. 11. Marc Chagall, The Green Violinist



Fig. 12. Edgar Degas, Rehearsal



Fig. 13. Pablo Picasso, Mandolin and Guitar



Fig. 14. Pablo Picasso, Three Musicians

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