

MUSIC AND THEATER: COMMUNICATION AND EMOSION



*T*he world of communications offers us infinite ways and means to send and receive messages, from the most simple and natural systems, such as gestures and words, to the most sophisticated technological ones.

Two of these means are music and theater—communication instruments that have not been overpowered by today's new technologies, but have instead been amplified and enriched by them.

What does music add to a text, to a message? And what does an actor's interpretation of a role add to a story? Above all, one extremely important element: emotion. Emotional "codes" allow us to not only receive, decode and understand a message, but to also interiorize it, make it our own, fix it in our memory. This significant aspect of communication should not be overlooked.

Music, a universal language, goes beyond verbal speech and communicates through vibrations, that is to say, combinations of sound, rhythm and tempo. To listen to music, create it and reproduce it with others is a human activity whose origins are lost in the shadows of time. It is a part of not only the cultural life of a people but also the emotional life of each person. It contributes to an individual's intellectual, communicational and emotional-affective development. For this reason, it is important that even very small children be taught to appreciate music and to decode its language correctly, without neglecting its many other potentials, particularly the first instrument at our disposition: the voice. It is not by chance that "one who sings prays twice," as the famous saying of St. Augustine goes.

Music serves as an important means of formation from early childhood onward: it facilitates both socialization and appreciation of the individual. We frequently lack an education to music, especially from the aspect of formation. The famous Hungarian composer and music teacher, Zoltan Kodály, summed up the possibilities of this discipline with the motto: "One should not only be educated 'to' music but also 'with' music." And precisely because it bypasses the more traditional routes of communication, an appreciation of music should be transmitted to a child "nine months before birth." To sing a lullaby to a newborn calms the infant and induces sleep because the mother's tone of voice transmits a sense of peace and protection. This image illustrates well the effects music can have on a person.

The human voice is one of the many elements of another important instrument of communication: theater. But it is certainly not the sole, or even the most essential, one.

Facial expressions, intonations, gestures, movements: the whole body is involved in the dramatic arts. In ancient times, theater came into being as a rite, and inasmuch as it is a means of expression- communication, it requires someone to perform it (an actor) and someone to view it (a spectator).

Theater, too, is an exceptional instrument of general formation: it helps people get to know themselves and others, makes them more keenly aware of their physical movements, and is able to convey messages not only to the audience, but also and especially to the performers themselves.



The history of theater offers us a vast panorama of styles, techniques and genres that have evolved and changed over time, but which continue to be studied, re-examined and utilized. Theater is an art with a powerful anthropological imprint, precisely because it springs from the human need for self-expression and communication.

If we wonder how theater ever survived the advent of cinema and television, the answer lies in its unique mode of communication. In fact, theater requires the simultaneous presence of both broadcaster and receiver—here and now, “live.”

People should not only attend theatrical performances frequently but should also, if possible, take part in plays. They should be taught to do this beginning in childhood, in educational environments such as parishes and schools, which are often the only places with enough space available to accommodate crowds. Acting out stories and events with others is not simply an enjoyable pastime. It contributes significantly to the overall development of the human personality. It involves rediscovering our natural inclination to “set a scene” by making the most of whatever is at hand. It is a way of getting to know something through physical analogy, that is, imitation.

What themes can be treated in a song or in a theatrical performance? Many—indeed, any. Even subjects useful for evangelization, such as the story of Jesus, the great themes of faith, existential questions and civic/ethical values. Naturally, the language must be suited to the art form: a topic treated in a classroom setting will not be treated the same way in a theater performance because the situations are very different. It is easy to picture how different the impact will be on a person who receives a message communicated by a teacher in a classroom and one who receives the same message in a play he/she attends. Often, the second form of communication is more meaningful and is more successful in reaching the depths of the person.

Music and theater are, then, timeless instruments of communication. From their remote beginnings up to our own day, their purpose and uniqueness have not been lost, even though to a certain extent they have been transformed.

The world is changing rapidly and today’s new technologies allow us to convey our messages in an ever more advanced way. But let us never forget that the most effective message—the one that penetrates the depths of our being and changes us—is the one that touches not only our head but also our heart.

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