

A ARTISTIC TRANSFORMATION OF MONOLOGUE MUSIC THROUGH MIDI CONTROLLER: A CASE STUDY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF “BALADA SUMARAH” BY TENTREM LESTARI, 2ND PLACE WINNER AT PEKSIMINAS 2024

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Abstract: This article examines the artistic transformation in the creation of monologue illustration music through the use of MIDI Controllers, with a case study of the performance of Balada Sumarah by Tentrem Lestari, which won 2nd place at the 2024 PEKSIMINAS event. The research focuses on how MIDI Controllers—as digital musical devices—can replace the conventional role of physical instruments in building a dramaturgical atmosphere and supporting the emotions of a single actor in a tragedy-genre monologue performance. The main objective of this study is to analyze experimental music composition strategies in contemporary theater performances based on realistic scripts. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, supported by direct observation techniques, in-depth interviews, creative process documentation, and literature studies. The results show that the use of MIDI Controllers provides technical and artistic flexibility in shaping emotional narratives, supporting transitions between scenes, and creating an effective and resource-efficient musical atmosphere. MIDI not only plays a supporting role, but also acts as an active dramaturgical element that contributes to building unity between the text, actors, and stage atmosphere. These findings make an important contribution to the practice of creating digital technology-based theater music, especially in the context of minimalist yet expressive productions in student performing arts competitions.

Keywords: monologue, illustrative music, MIDI Controller, musical dramaturgy, digital theater, Balada Sumarah

1. INTRODUCTION

This The development of digital technology in the performing arts has opened up new opportunities for artistic exploration, including in monologue performances, which traditionally rely on minimal technical elements and the centrality of a single actor. In this context, illustrative music plays a crucial role not only as an accompanying element, but also as an atmospheric marker, an emotional enhancer, and a builder of dramaturgical structures that synergize with the narrative. One of the musical instruments that marks the digital era in art creation is the MIDI Controller, a digital interface-based sound processing device that enables flexible, efficient, and economical multitimbral music production. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in competitions such as PEKSIMINAS (National Student Art Week), where efficiency, resource constraints, and artistic quality must be balanced within a limited time frame.

Studies of contemporary performing arts in Indonesia generally still focus on conventional forms of music use in theater or dance, while exploration of MIDI technology in monologue practice is relatively rarely used as a research subject. Most previous studies have highlighted the role of illustrative music from the perspective of conventional composition, collaboration between musicians, or the

use of acoustic instruments, but have not yet discussed the integration of MIDI as a single medium in the creation of musical structures to support monologues with high emotional complexity. This gap is important to bridge, given the need for concise and adaptive artistic solutions in student theater practices and experimental theater communities.

This study uses *Balada Sumarah*, a tragic monologue by Tentrem Lestari that won second place in the 2024 PEKSIMINAS competition, as a case study. This performance not only successfully articulates the narrative of violence and oppression against women, but also presents an innovative approach to musical illustration through the use of a MIDI Controller as the sole musical instrument. In this case, MIDI does not merely serve as an accompaniment to the atmosphere, but becomes an integral part of the performance's dramaturgy, blending with the emotional rhythm of the actors and the structure of the scenes.

This study aims to analyze the artistic transformation in the use of MIDI Controllers as the main medium for creating musical illustrations in the monologue performance of *Balada Sumarah*. The approach used is qualitative-descriptive with a case study method, relying on performance observation, interviews with the composer and director, documentation of the creative process, and a literature review of musical dramaturgy and experimental composition theories.

This study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of methods for creating digital technology-based theater music, particularly in the context of monologues as a form of expression that emphasizes psychological depth and narrative unity. Theoretically, this research expands the understanding of the role of digital music in the dramaturgical structure of theater performances; methodologically, it offers an adaptive and minimalist model for creating illustrative music; and practically, it provides new inspiration for artists and arts educators to develop cross-disciplinary creativity using a technological approach. Thus, this article positions the MIDI Controller not merely as a tool, but as a medium of artistic expression with transformational power in contemporary performing arts.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine in depth the artistic transformation of music in the monologue *Balada Sumarah* by Tentrem Lestari, which was performed at PEKSIMINAS 2024, focusing on the relationship between MIDI Controller technology, dramaturgical structure, and the creation of emotional atmosphere in contemporary student theater. The research was conducted in the production environment of the FBS UNESA Performing Arts Education Study Program until the final performance, with subjects selected purposively including the composer (who is also the MIDI operator), director, actors, artistic team, and selected audience members. Data was collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, audio-visual documentation, and literature review over three months, then analyzed using musical dramaturgy analysis combined with an interpretive phenomenological approach to examine the relationship between sound and actor expression as well as the audience's affective experience. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources, member checking, and critical reflection by the researcher to minimize interpretive bias.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This study demonstrates that the implementation of MIDI Controllers in the theatrical performance *Balada Sumarah* extends far beyond their conventional role as digital sound production devices. Instead, the MIDI Controller functions as an integral dramaturgical component that actively participates in shaping the narrative, emotional progression, and aesthetic experience of the performance. The findings indicate that the presence of the composer on stage, operating the MIDI Controller in real time, establishes a visible interaction between music production and theatrical action. This visibility allows the audience to perceive the musical accompaniment not as an external background element but as an organic part of the dramatic event itself.

Unlike conventional theatre music that is often performed from behind the stage or pre-recorded, the live manipulation of MIDI sounds creates an immediate relationship between the composer and the actors. Every musical cue is adjusted according to the actors' tempo, emotional intensity, and stage movement, resulting in a dynamic interaction rather than a fixed accompaniment. This collaborative relationship enables music to respond organically to the unfolding dramatic situation while simultaneously influencing the actors' emotional delivery.

The musical composition developed for *Balada Sumarah* was organized using a modular compositional structure. Instead of presenting a continuous linear composition, the music was divided into independent musical modules that could be triggered and layered according to the progression of the performance. Layering techniques were extensively employed to gradually build emotional intensity through the addition or subtraction of musical textures. Ambient synthesizer sounds, digital orchestral instruments, reverberation effects, and electronic soundscapes were combined to create spatial depth and psychological atmosphere throughout the performance.

The overall composition was divided into six major sections, each representing a distinct dramaturgical phase within the narrative. These sections include the Introduction, Opening, Four Stages of Conflict, Anti-climax, and Resolution. Each section was characterized by specific musical materials, instrumentation, and expressive techniques that corresponded directly to the emotional development of the story.

The Introduction serves to establish the emotional atmosphere before the narrative begins. Soft ambient synthesizer textures accompanied by low-frequency drones create a sense of uncertainty and anticipation. The sparse musical texture encourages audience concentration while foreshadowing the tragic nature of the story. During this segment, reverb and delay effects are used extensively to produce a spacious sonic environment that reflects the psychological isolation of the main character.

The Opening introduces the central narrative and the trial setting in which Sumarah becomes the focus of accusation. Here, flute and cello sounds generated through MIDI instruments dominate the musical texture. The flute presents lyrical melodic phrases that symbolize innocence and vulnerability, while the cello provides sustained harmonic support that conveys emotional weight. Slow

legato articulation reinforces the dramatic tension and allows the dialogue to remain clearly audible.

The conflict is divided into four sequential stages, each reflecting increasing emotional and dramatic intensity.

The first conflict stage accompanies the courtroom proceedings and interrogation scenes. Musical materials remain relatively restrained, employing sustained pads and subtle rhythmic pulses that build suspense without distracting from the dialogue. Low dynamic levels allow the audience to focus on the actors while maintaining underlying dramatic tension.

The second conflict stage portrays flashbacks of Sumarah's personal life and emotional memories. During these scenes, melodic development becomes more prominent. Digital flute and piano textures are layered with atmospheric synthesizer sounds to distinguish the temporal transition between present reality and memory. Longer reverberation and softer articulation create a dreamlike quality that differentiates the flashback sequences from the courtroom scenes.

The third conflict stage depicts scenes of torture and psychological suffering. Interview findings indicate that this section required the closest collaboration between the composer and performers. Low-frequency synthesizer drones, distorted ambient textures, and gradually intensifying sound layers create psychological discomfort rather than literal representation of violence. The use of dissonant harmonic intervals and sustained bass frequencies enhances the audience's emotional engagement by evoking fear, anxiety, and emotional instability.

The fourth conflict stage reaches the dramatic climax through the execution sequence. Cymbal ride accents, intensified bass frequencies, and sequencer playback combine to produce rhythmic momentum that reflects the inevitability of Sumarah's fate. Musical dynamics increase progressively before abruptly decreasing immediately after the execution, allowing silence to function as an expressive dramatic device. This contrast significantly strengthens the emotional impact of the final scene.

Following the climax, the Anti-climax section gradually releases accumulated dramatic tension. Musical layers are progressively reduced, leaving only soft synthesizer pads and sustained cello tones. This reduction of sonic density symbolizes emotional exhaustion and provides psychological space for the audience to process the preceding events.

The Resolution concludes the performance by reintroducing melodic fragments previously heard during the Opening. This cyclical musical approach reinforces thematic unity while emphasizing the tragic message of the narrative. Gentle ambient textures combined with sustained harmonic resolution create a contemplative atmosphere, encouraging reflection rather than emotional closure.

The instrumentation throughout the performance consists entirely of digitally generated sounds controlled through the MIDI Controller. These include flute, cello, bass, sequencer playback, cymbal ride, ambient synthesizers, and various digital orchestral patches. Although no acoustic instruments were employed, interview data indicate that careful sound design successfully produced expressive timbral variations capable of supporting theatrical storytelling. Legato articulation was primarily utilized during reflective and emotional

scenes, whereas accentuation techniques highlighted moments of conflict, dramatic transition, and narrative emphasis.

The findings further reveal that the exclusive use of MIDI as the audio source offers considerable technical advantages. The system enables rapid switching between instruments without requiring multiple performers or extensive stage preparation. Modular sound organization allows the composer to respond flexibly to variations in acting tempo, unexpected pauses, or changes in stage movement. Consequently, the production achieves greater efficiency while maintaining musical coherence throughout the performance.

Interviews with the composer, director, and performers demonstrate a significant transformation in the composer's role. Rather than functioning merely as a musical accompanist, the composer becomes an active dramaturgical collaborator involved in constructing emotional pacing, dramatic timing, and narrative interpretation. The composer's continuous observation of actors' performances allows musical responses to emerge organically, creating reciprocal interaction between sound and performance.

Actors reported that live MIDI-generated music substantially influenced their emotional engagement during performance. In highly emotional scenes, particularly those depicting torture and execution, deep synthesizer drones, prolonged reverberation, and evolving ambient textures enhanced their psychological immersion into the characters. Rather than serving only as background accompaniment, the music acted as an emotional stimulus that supported character embodiment and performance intensity.

Audience responses similarly suggest that the integration of live MIDI performance contributes positively to the theatrical experience. Participants described the performance as cinematic, immersive, and emotionally engaging. The precision of digital sound production enabled smooth musical transitions between scenes while preserving narrative continuity. Many audience members noted that the visible presence of the composer performing on stage strengthened their perception of the relationship between music and dramatic action, making the performance feel more integrated than productions relying solely on recorded soundtracks.

Despite these advantages, the study also identifies several technical and artistic challenges. One significant limitation involves potential synchronization delays resulting from MIDI processing latency, particularly when multiple virtual instruments and layered effects are activated simultaneously. Although such delays were generally minimal, they required careful technical preparation and optimization before each performance.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of this performance approach depends heavily on the operator's technical competence and artistic sensitivity. Because the composer performs live while simultaneously responding to actors' emotional expressions, any delay in triggering musical cues or adjusting dynamics can affect dramaturgical coherence. Consequently, successful implementation requires not only technical mastery of MIDI systems but also a deep understanding of theatrical rhythm, narrative structure, and performer interaction.

Overall, the findings indicate that MIDI Controllers can successfully function as both technological instruments and dramaturgical media within contemporary theatre performance. Their integration into *Balada Sumarah* demonstrates that digital music

technology is capable of enriching narrative expression, strengthening actor-musician collaboration, enhancing audience immersion, and expanding the artistic possibilities of theatrical sound design despite existing technical limitations.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of MIDI Controllers in the theatrical performance *Balada Sumarah* represents a significant shift in the role of digital technology within contemporary student theatre practices. Rather than functioning solely as a technical device for generating musical accompaniment, the MIDI Controller operates as a form of **technoperformativity**, in which technology actively participates in the construction of dramaturgical meaning. This concept reflects a collaborative relationship between human performers and digital systems, where technology becomes an inseparable component of theatrical expression rather than merely supporting it. Consequently, the musical system contributes directly to the development of dramatic tension, emotional atmosphere, and narrative progression throughout the performance.

One of the most significant findings is the visible presence of the composer on stage while operating the MIDI Controller in real time. Unlike conventional theatre productions in which musicians are often positioned offstage or hidden from the audience, the composer in *Balada Sumarah* becomes part of the visual composition of the performance. This visibility transforms the act of music production into a performative event that audiences can witness directly. The audience is therefore able to perceive not only the resulting music but also the creative interaction between the composer, digital technology, and the actors. This interaction strengthens the dramaturgical function of music because musical decisions emerge simultaneously with the dramatic action rather than being predetermined and fixed.

The performative presence of the composer also expands the relationship between sound, the actors' bodies, and the narrative structure. Every musical response is produced according to the actors' emotional intensity, vocal expression, movement, and timing on stage. As a result, music no longer functions as an external accompaniment but becomes an active participant in shaping the rhythm and emotional trajectory of each scene. The findings indicate that this reciprocal relationship creates a more organic performance in which sound and acting continuously influence one another throughout the theatrical event.

Another important finding concerns the dramaturgical organization of the musical composition. The composition follows the structural principles of classical tragedy, progressing systematically through exposition, rising conflict, climax, falling action, and resolution. Each musical section is intentionally designed to correspond with a particular dramatic phase, ensuring that music develops alongside the narrative rather than existing independently of it. During the exposition, ambient textures and sustained harmonic materials establish an atmosphere of anticipation and emotional uncertainty. As the conflict intensifies, additional instrumental layers, rhythmic elements, and harmonic tension gradually increase, supporting the dramatic escalation experienced by both the actors and the audience. At the climax, dynamic intensity, accentuation, and dense sonic textures

reach their highest level before gradually dissolving into quieter musical passages during the anti-climax and resolution.

This structural relationship demonstrates that digital music technology can preserve the fundamental principles of classical dramaturgy while simultaneously offering greater artistic flexibility. Through MIDI-based performance, the composer is able to manipulate tempo, dynamics, instrumentation, sound layers, and audio effects in real time. Such flexibility allows immediate responses to unexpected variations in dialogue delivery, stage movement, or emotional expression without disrupting the continuity of the performance. Unlike fixed musical scores that require strict adherence to predetermined timing, MIDI performance enables adaptive musical interpretation that remains synchronized with the actors' performances throughout the production.

The findings also reveal substantial practical advantages of adopting a MIDI-based musical system compared with conventional ensemble-based theatre music. Traditional theatrical music production often requires several musicians, multiple acoustic instruments, extended rehearsal schedules, and complex stage coordination. In contrast, the MIDI Controller enables a single composer to manage multiple virtual instruments, layered textures, sequencer playback, and digital audio effects simultaneously through one integrated performance system. This significantly reduces production costs, logistical complexity, and rehearsal requirements while maintaining consistency in sound quality across performances.

Such efficiency is particularly valuable within university theatre environments, where productions frequently operate under financial, technical, and human resource limitations. The ability to perform complex orchestral arrangements using virtual instruments allows student productions to achieve artistic results that would otherwise require substantially greater resources. Consequently, MIDI technology democratizes access to sophisticated musical production by enabling small-scale theatre groups to produce immersive and emotionally engaging performances despite limited institutional support.

Beyond production efficiency, the modular nature of MIDI composition substantially expands opportunities for creative sound exploration. Digital synthesizers, orchestral libraries, ambient textures, electronic soundscapes, and audio effects can be combined in numerous ways to produce highly individualized sonic environments. Rather than imitating acoustic instruments alone, the composer is able to create entirely new sound identities that reflect the psychological states of characters and the symbolic dimensions of the narrative. This capability broadens the aesthetic vocabulary available to contemporary theatre composers and encourages experimentation that extends beyond conventional theatrical music practices.

The findings therefore contribute to the broader discourse surrounding digital theatre and contemporary performing arts. Previous discussions of digital technology in theatre have frequently emphasized technical innovation, multimedia presentation, or stage automation. However, this study demonstrates that digital music technologies can also function as dramaturgical media capable of shaping emotional communication, narrative interpretation, and collaborative performance processes. The MIDI Controller becomes an expressive artistic instrument that participates actively in storytelling rather than functioning merely as technological infrastructure.

From an educational perspective, this study identifies considerable potential for integrating MIDI Controllers into performing arts curricula. The technology encourages students to develop interdisciplinary competencies that combine musical creativity, digital literacy, theatrical understanding, and collaborative performance skills. Students are required not only to master digital music production software and MIDI programming but also to understand dramaturgical structures, actor-musician interaction, and live performance management. Such interdisciplinary learning reflects the evolving demands of contemporary performing arts, where technological competence increasingly complements traditional artistic training.

The educational implications extend beyond technical instruction. The flexibility of MIDI-based composition provides opportunities for students to experiment with various musical languages, sound design techniques, and performance strategies. Through real-time manipulation of digital instruments, students can investigate how changes in texture, dynamics, rhythm, or spatial sound influence audience perception and emotional response. Consequently, MIDI technology serves not only as a production tool but also as a pedagogical medium that supports artistic experimentation and reflective creative practice.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that digital music can strengthen the communication of socially relevant themes presented in theatrical performances. In *Balada Sumarah*, the exploration of ambient textures, low-frequency synthesizers, dissonant harmonies, and gradual dynamic development reinforces the representation of violence against women, legal injustice, psychological trauma, and institutional oppression. Rather than illustrating these themes literally, the musical design constructs an emotional environment that enables audiences to experience the psychological consequences of oppression through sound. This immersive sonic approach deepens audience engagement and enhances the overall impact of the social criticism embedded within the performance.

Despite these contributions, the study also identifies several limitations associated with live MIDI implementation. One of the principal challenges concerns the dependence on the operator's artistic judgment and technical expertise. Because musical decisions are executed in real time, the composer must continuously interpret actors' performances while simultaneously operating multiple digital systems. Any delay in cue execution, inappropriate dynamic adjustment, or synchronization error may weaken the dramaturgical coherence of the performance. Therefore, technical proficiency alone is insufficient; successful implementation also requires highly developed dramaturgical awareness and performance sensitivity.

Technical issues such as MIDI latency, software stability, audio routing complexity, and hardware reliability also remain important considerations. Although these problems were generally manageable within the present production, they highlight the necessity of careful technical preparation, equipment testing, and contingency planning before live performances. As digital theatre practices become increasingly sophisticated, the development of standardized workflows and technical protocols may further enhance the reliability of MIDI-based theatrical productions.

Overall, the findings suggest that the successful integration of MIDI Controllers depends not simply on technological advancement

but on the ability of artists to transform digital systems into expressive dramaturgical partners. When technology is employed as an active participant in theatrical creation, it expands the possibilities of narrative construction, enriches actor-composer collaboration, strengthens audience immersion, and contributes to the evolution of contemporary theatre practices. Accordingly, this study reinforces the view that digital technology should be understood not merely as a production tool but as an integral component of artistic creativity and theatrical meaning-making.



Figure 1 Instrument Midi Controller

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of MIDI Controllers in the performance of Balada Sumarah significantly shapes artistic transformation in monologue illustration music, both in terms of dramaturgical function, composition patterns, and collaborative practices between creative elements. MIDI is not merely a digital sound production tool, but actively functions as a dramaturgical instrument that builds atmosphere, guides emotional rhythm, and expands the depth of expression of a single actor. The application of MIDI in the performance structure shows how technology can be creatively and strategically integrated into the creation of contemporary theater performances, especially in higher education environments with limited resources.

Contextually, the results of this study answer the initial objective of examining how MIDI Controllers change music production patterns in monologue performances and respond to the challenges of efficient yet expressive artistic needs. These findings show that MIDI enables the emergence of a flexible, experimental, and highly affective model of performance music creation, while redefining the composer's position as a co-creator within the dramaturgical structure of the performance.

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Yohanes Christian Manullang acted as researcher and author of the article, while Arif Hidajad acted as companion, reviewer, and article revisions.

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