
INTERPRETATIONS

Article received on January 30th 2025

Article accepted on June 17th 2025

Research report

UDC 78.011.26

78.036.9

DOI: 10.5937/newso2565145O

Lazar Ostojić*

Ph.D. candidate

University of Arts in Belgrade

Faculty of Music

Department of Music Theory

THE (UN)IMPORTANCE OF LYRICS IN SONGWRITING

Abstract: By examining a range of examples from renowned artists, this paper argues that, in many cases, music dictates the direction of songwriting, with lyrics adapting to fit the established musical structure. Through detailed analysis of song creation, the study demonstrates how musical elements take precedence, while the lyrical components often serve to complement rather than define the overall music-making process. This research challenges conventional opinions on the importance of lyrics in such processes, asserting that music-making is fundamentally guided by its inherent qualities, with sung or spoken words serving a secondary, yet significant role. Ultimately, the paper underscores the power of music to shape and influence the lyrical content, offering a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between music and lyrics in popular songwriting.

Keywords: popular music, lyrics, songwriting

* The author's contact details: lazar.ostojic@live.com

Music or Lyrics?

Popular music often emerges as a harmonious fusion of musical and lyrical elements. Across countless genres, these components complement each other, creating a distinctive and immersive experience for listeners. Music's abstract qualities act as a driving force, amplifying the meaning of lyrical messages. Interestingly, one might argue that the reverse is also true: it may as well be that lyrics enhance the expressive resonance of the music itself.

Whether it is blues, metal, or funk, the interplay between music and lyrics remains fundamental, with both elements cohering to amplify the expressive potential of a song. Together, they contribute to the overall aesthetic impact, elevating the listener's experience.

However, it is essential to recognize that music and lyrics are not equivalent in their expressive nature. Each operates within its own domain of communication, offering unique contributions to creative processes. For the purposes of this research, these two components will be analyzed separately to better comprehend their respective roles in shaping a song's identity and overall impact. The analysis will be based on transcriptions and sheet music written by the author, allowing for a more detailed view of music flow, while lyrical content will be interpreted through artist interviews, public statements, and published materials that reflect the intent and creative process behind the lyrics. It is also important to mention that not every artist places equal importance on lyrics. Some significant musical groups, such as Pink Floyd, King Crimson or The Allan Parsons Project, have an unconventionally large number of instrumentals and/or songs with minimal lyrical components. Yet, we cannot take these groups into consideration, for they are disproportionately rare and do not fall under regular conventions. Popular music is, first and foremost, a vocal-instrumental practice in which lyrical components are almost always present and function in close integration with the musical material.

Observations from various sources suggest that artists frequently modify, rephrase, rewrite, shorten, or even omit lyrics to align them with the musical flow. The prevalence of such practices has led to the formulation of hypotheses regarding the secondary role that lyrics often assume in the compositional process. I acknowledge that there are undoubtedly songs where lyrics served as the foundational building blocks of the composition, and this paper does not aim to refute that approach to music-making. Rather, it seeks

to underscore the opposite perspective: the central importance of music itself in shaping the songwriting. It is vital to emphasize, however, that the purpose of this paper is not to diminish the significance of lyrics but rather to delineate their function within the creative practice of music-making. By examining this dynamic, the research seeks to provide a nuanced comprehension of how lyrics interact with musical structures in the act of composition.

Throughout the history of global popular music, artists have been inspired to place their words in a diverse range of contexts. While love-themed lyrics have become almost ubiquitous over time, musicians and lyricists have also explored numerous conventional and unconventional topics to accompany vocal melodies. During my childhood, an important musical group existed in my locality, one that had ceased to be active long before I became aware of their work. Known by the acronym EKV, which stands for ‘Catherine the Great’ (Ekatarina Velika), the group became particularly renowned among their dedicated fanbase for the depth and symbolism of their lyrics. According to a well-documented band history, the lyrical inspiration predominantly stemmed from the creative genius of the frontman, Milan Mladenović, who served as the driving force behind most of their compositions (Vesić, 2008). His abstract inspirations often contextualized sung words and reflected on the phenomenon of the metropolis. As Aleksandar Žikić noted in his biography of Milan Mladenović (Žikić, 2014, 64): “That city (Sarajevo) was the city of Milan’s childhood, which he had borne in his soul his whole life, with some of his deepest, most painful wounds.” Žikić also cited a former bandmate, who stated that “Sarajevo had a tremendous symbolic significance in Milan’s life” (ibid.). The lyrics of EKV’s songs often resonate with a blend of early memories of Milan’s hometown and the vast, dynamic landscape of Belgrade, infused with abstract meanings. Furthermore, more than ten of EKV’s songs are explicitly city-themed, reflecting urban narratives that strongly resonate with fans. Many listeners find themselves drawn to the urban ‘vibe’ the band so vividly conveyed, making their lyrics a solid exploration of both personal and collective metropolitan experiences.

When interviewed on Serbian national television, Mladenović was naturally asked about the nature of the band’s lyrics. What he explained in response was not particularly what fans might have expected: “Lyrics have never been made to serve as poetry, nor should they be interpreted separately from music.” As he continued, he stated that “some words in songs are sounded” (TV Poster 1992), implying that music elevates lyrical content into

a new, non-lyrical dimension. When words are sounded, they are transformed to contribute to the sound. By this, he meant that words are melodized and rhythmicized, reshaped to integrate seamlessly into the music. This perspective underscores the primacy of music in the creation of songs, positioning lyrics as components that must adapt to musical elements. It is intriguing that an artist celebrated for profound and symbolic lyrics would assert their secondary role in the creative process. Since a song is fundamentally a musical entity adhering to the principles of music, and since lyrics are a non-musical component interpolated into this structure, they must be re-defined into a musical format – they have to be ‘sounded’.

The (Un)importance of lyrics

What comes first – music or lyrics? It is indeed an intriguing question, and whichever of the two the reader argues for, the answer to this is not simple and should thus be scrutinized before concluded.

The inspiration for this paper arose from a YouTube interview with Ritchie Blackmore (Ravenscroft, 2015). In this documentary, Blackmore provides insight into the creation of *Smoke on the Water* by Deep Purple, composed in a hotel room in Montreux during the early 1970s. Blackmore describes the songwriting, stating that he would “always come up with ideas for (vocal) melody simultaneously with guitar riffs”. He elaborates by explaining that he would “sing along while playing the guitar, imagining how the guitar should accompany the vocals”. The next critical step in the composition process, according to Blackmore, involved recording these ideas and passing them along to Ian Gillan, the lead vocalist, who would only then write the lyrics. Blackmore further asserts that this method of composing – simultaneously developing guitar and sung melodies to later be lyricized – was his consistent approach. This suggests a clear hierarchical structure in Deep Purple’s composing process, where the instrumental and melodic components take precedence, with lyrics added as a subsequent stage. When an artist of Blackmore’s stature – one of the founding fathers of British Hard Rock – explicitly states that music takes priority and that lyrics serve as a mere complement to the composition, it offers a compelling endorsement of the notion that lyrics are, in many cases, secondary to the music itself.

rock and metal tracks, the music came first, with lyrics as a secondary consideration. The fact that such a defining piece of the genre was conceived without lyrics highlights a critical point: music is often the driving force in composition, with lyrics merely serving to complement, rather than dictate, the musical framework.

In his book *The Song Machine – Inside the Hit Factory*, John Seabrook emphasizes the primacy of music over lyrics when discussing the first major hook-based hit by Ace of Base, *All That She Wants*. He quotes renowned Swedish producer Denniz Popp, the man behind the song, who explains: “The first line of the chorus – ‘All that she wants is another baby’ – sounds at first as if the woman wants another child, an odd desire to hear in a pop song. Of course, ‘baby’ means ‘boyfriend’, but the usage is slightly off” (Seabrook, 2015, 41–42). Seabrook then makes a pointed observation: “Though it’s rare to have a pop hit without lyrics, the lyrics don’t need to mean anything much; the disco era had shown that ... song lyrics don’t need to be poetry; they need only to tell you what you are supposed to feel when you hear the music they accompany.” (Seabrook, 2015, 42). This statement strongly affirms the aforementioned, adding that the superior role of music in songwriting is not confined to any particular genre, but rather reflects a fundamental principle in the creative process, where music serves as the primary framework upon which lyrics are constructed.

One could argue that the significance of lyrics in the compositional process lies not in their construction or the act of writing itself, but in the message they deliver. Listeners frequently engage with lyrics on a deeper level, seeking metaphors embedded within the words. In some cases, they even attribute meanings and interpretations that the artists themselves never intended to convey. While musicians often navigate interviews carefully to avoid alienating their audience, there are those who have been candid about the reality of their creative process.

Kurt Cobain of Nirvana was one such artist. In an interview conducted a year before his death with the Canadian TV station MuchMusic, Cobain remarked: “I just noticed how people expect more of the fanatic angle with our music, you know, they always want to read into it. And before, I was just using the pieces of poetry, and just garbage, you know... Just the stuff that would spit out of me at the time, and a lot of times that I would write lyrics is just the last second.” (MuchMusic TV, 1993). Despite the profound connection that Nirvana fans have with the band’s lyrics, Cobain’s statement reveals the spontaneous and sometimes arbitrary nature of their creation, challenging the notion that every word carries intentional depth or meaning.

It becomes apparent that music is often constructed through its coherent expressive elements. Melody, rhythm, harmony, and other components work together to create a unified whole. This collaborative process forms a solid foundation upon which lyrics can be added. Once the music is composed, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to reverse or significantly alter it, with the artist often willing to sacrifice the integrity of the lyrics in order to preserve the unity of the pre-existing musical structure. A prime example of this can be observed in Queen's video-recorded studio sessions for *One Vision*.² During the sessions, guitarist Brian May sings along to the pre-composed melody, attempting to fit various lyrics onto it. Meanwhile, drummer Roger Taylor offers words as suggestions, while lead singer and frontman Freddie Mercury observes. The resulting recording clearly demonstrates the process of music-text transcription, where the music remains central, and the lyrics are shaped to fit within its established framework:

Example 2:

Roger: One god-damn 'something' decision was good, man.



Freddy: Does the script fit?

Roger: It does...



Roger: Well, it sounds like you tried it once...

Freddy disagrees with Roger: No, it won't fit! Because you go:



Freddy insists that melody line be unchanged.

Brian May sings along confirming the written melody with Freddy.

After a while comes Roger with another idea, modifying the melody:



Freddy and Brian burst into laughter together over the idea.

Freddy (laughing): Of course it fits like that!

² Rudi Dolezal and Hannes Rossacher, *The Magic Years. Vol. 1. A Visual Anthology*, London, E.M.I. Records, 1987.

In an attempt to transcribe musical patterns in detail, I sought to emphasize how crucial it was for Freddie Mercury to preserve the integrity of the melody line, as it represented an essential component of the song's artistic value. None of the three attempts by the band's drummer to alter the melody in favor of the lyrics were accepted in the final version of the song. Instead, the verse melody was retained exactly as Mercury had originally composed it. He prioritized the syncopated rhythm and melodic flow above all else, willing to sacrifice other elements to maintain its integrity. Remarkably, the writing session for this song was captured on video, providing a rare and compelling glimpse into the creation and the decisions Mercury made to uphold the primacy of music over words. As part of content creation on my brand's YouTube channel, I offer readers a visual supplement to the studio session discussed above.³

A comparable position is articulated by David Byrne, the frontman of Talking Heads and an influential voice in contemporary reflections on songwriting. In his book *How Music Works*, Byrne describes a compositional approach in which lyrics follow the musical structure rather than initiating it. Reflecting on his own practice, he writes: "I knew that in the future this meant I might be able to write words that responded to and were guided by prerecorded music, instead of getting all bent out of shape trying to get the music to fit – not just melodically, but sonically and texturally – prewritten lyrics."⁴ This statement captures a broader songwriting methodology in which the expressive material of the music precedes, and in many ways dictates the verbal content. Rather than positioning lyrics as the core vehicle of meaning, Byrne treats them as adaptive elements – components that conform to the phrasing, sound texture, and emotional charge already embedded in the music. His reflections offer tangible support for the central theory advanced in this paper: that music assumes expressive primacy over lyrics. They confirm that it is the musical framework – its rhythm, harmonic movement, and timbral identity – that carries the weight of artistic communication, while words operate as a secondary, post-applied layer shaped by what the music has already established.

³ Dark Industry, *Renowned Artists Agree: Music First, Lyrics Later*, YouTube video, 12:25, posted June 2025, <https://youtu.be/pMIHm4cdfhw>

Segment at 7:10 ("You can't argue with the melody") features excerpts from Queen's aforementioned studio sessions, accompanied by a personal reflection and concluding remarks on the topic.

⁴ David Byrne, *How Music Works*, San Francisco, McSweeney's, 2012, 110.

This adaptive relationship between music and lyrics is not limited to art-pop or rock music contexts. A similar process is confirmed in an interview with Corey Taylor, the frontman of the American metal band Slipknot. When asked about the upcoming album *We Are Not Your Kind*, Taylor clearly delineated the creative roles within the band, distinguishing the music-making done by his bandmates from his later involvement as the lyricist (loudwire.com, 2018): “It’s been great watching the process and getting involved with the process, finally. Hearing the music that Clown and Jim and Jay and Alex and everybody else in the band has been really working on, and being able to listen to it with fresh ears and come at it from different standpoints.” This demonstrates a collaborative dynamic in which music serves as the initial creative framework, leaving space for Taylor to contribute lyrics later in the process. Notably, Taylor has reiterated on multiple occasions that he approaches the music with “fresh ears”, immersing himself in the pre-composed material to craft lyrics that align with and enhance the band’s musical vision.

In a comparable approach evident in the case of Metallica – another seminal band in the metal genre – frontman James Hetfield has consistently emphasized the expressive/semantic nature of lyrics. In a 2023 interview, Hetfield explained: “I want the words to just be as powerful as possible. I don’t want to write too much. I want it to be as poetic as possible – a little more poetic and easier to digest, and still bring people in.”⁵ Although not an explicit commentary on composing chronology, Hetfield’s statement nonetheless reveals a pragmatic lyrical shaping: he deliberately avoids overcomplicating the verbal content, aiming instead for immediacy. His emphasis on making lyrics “as powerful as possible” while “not writing too much” suggests an intentional restraint – an ethos that privileges musical impact over semantic density. In this light, lyrics function not as the narrative centerpiece but as a layer of meaning, designed to reinforce the surrounding music material. When considered alongside earlier comments in which Hetfield described song titles as preexisting (without lyrics shaped around them), a consistent compositional strategy emerges – one in which music sets the aesthetic foundation and lyrics are tailored to support it. This perspective further underlines the view that (particularly in Metallica’s music) the structural and aes-

⁵ James Hetfield, “METALLICA’s JAMES HETFIELD On His Lyric Writing: ‘I Want The Words To Just Be As Powerful As Possible,’” *Blabbermouth*, May 24, 2024, <https://blabbermouth.net/news/metallicas-james-hetfield-on-his-lyric-writing-i-want-the-words-to-just-be-as-powerful-as-possible>

thetic primacy of music limits lyrics to an adaptive, supplementary role. This is consistent with the frequent ambiguity in Hetfield's public commentary on lyrical meaning. Across numerous interviews, his responses to questions about lyrical interpretation are often tentative, indirect, or expressed with hesitation – further reinforcing the notion that, for him, lyrical content functions more as an emotional extension of the music than as a standalone semantic statement. To further support this observation, I reference a 1991 interview between James Hetfield and a Japanese reporter, in which Hetfield is asked to interpret the meanings behind several songs from *The Black Album*.⁶ Over the course of nearly 20 minutes, his explanations remain general and emotionally framed, often lacking precise verbal articulation – demonstrating the extent to which even the lyricist does not prioritize literal interpretation as the primary communicative goal.

While this division of roles underscores the precedence of music in Slipknot's creative process, it also highlights the critical function of lyrics as a means of adding depth, narrative, and emotional resonance to the finished work.

An intriguing case study in this context is the software known as *Tra-la-lyrics*, which aligns closely with the ideas discussed earlier, and which has been written about in the article "The Style of Pop Song Lyrics" (Kreyer, Mukherjee 2007, 31–58). Version 2.0 of *Tra-la-lyrics* was analyzed from multiple perspectives, including semantics, poetry, and linguistic creativity. The primary aim of this software is to develop a program capable of generating lyrics tailored to given melodies. Researchers strive to produce contextually logical and meaningful phrases that align with specific musical notes. This serves as yet another example that, once music is established, lyrics can be crafted to complement the pre-existing musical structure. The study, while still in development, shows promising results and underscores the inherent primacy of music in songwriting, even when approached from an IT perspective.

Personal remark

As a songwriter and band consultant specializing in heavy music genres, I develop content that showcases creative strategies in music-making and sound shaping. One of the insights shared on my YouTube channel is the observation that, in a songwriting context, music is constructed prior to the

⁶ *Metallica – James Hetfield Interview (1991)*, YouTube video, 19:57, posted by Metal人, June 15, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_GPzbv_IeE

development of lyrics. In a short-form video, I demonstrated this by composing a song demo in which I improvised nonsensical words sung over a pre-established melody. In the following part of the same video, I offer the song's mastered version where word phrases from the demo are replaced by articulated lyrical content, while keeping the melody line intact.⁷

This demonstration highlighted how the focus during the initial stages was the melody, rhythm, and overall musical arrangement. As I presented an A:B comparison between the raw demo and the finalized version of the song featuring entirely rewritten lyrics, it became evident that altering the lyrics – no matter how drastically – had little to no effect on the song's overall expression and perceived quality. Despite the significant lyrical changes, the music retained its original essence, proving that a song's expressive identity is often rooted in its musical foundation.

This example underscores a broader principle in songwriting: while lyrics contribute to the narrative and emotional impact, it is the music that sets the stage and drives the process. By prioritizing the musical arrangement, bands can ensure their sound remains authentic and cohesive, even as lyrical content evolves.

The secondary role of lyrics in music remains a subject of ongoing debate among musicians, music critics, and theorists. It is often claimed, for example, that The Beatles placed great emphasis on their lyrics, which are viewed by some as central to their artistic identity. However, such claims are difficult to reconcile with the fact that a significant portion of their songs revolve around simple, repetitive phrases such as "I love you". While acknowledging The Beatles as arguably the most influential popular music group of the 20th century, this paper suggests that many theoretical perspectives tend to underplay the complexity of the composing process. Arguments that place lyrics above the music frequently rest on interpretations detached from the practice of songwriting, and as such remain unconvincing when viewed through the lens of compositional practice.

Music, at its core, is an empirical art form. Without firsthand experience in music-making, one cannot fully appreciate the challenges artists face when creating music, nor can they grasp the elements that work against the creator in their efforts to establish a song. This paper approaches the subject from an

⁷ Lazar Ostojić (Dark Industry), *Improvised Lyrics over Prewritten Music – Songwriting Demo*, YouTube Shorts video, 0:58, posted March 2024, https://youtube.com/shorts/_3F3ryicWMU

analytical standpoint, arguing that in many cases it is the musical material itself that determines the trajectory of the compositional process in popular music. Through examples drawn from transcription analysis and artist commentary, the study demonstrates how musical structures often precede and condition the development of lyrical content.

Another interesting hypothesis worth considering is whether we can just as effectively shape music around lyrics and still produce a coherent song. This reverse order of creation is certainly possible, particularly in genres where the spoken word predominantly conveys the artistic message, such as in hip-hop or certain strands of related genres, where the accompanying musical layer is intentionally kept minimal or rhythmically simple to allow uninterrupted verbal expression. Additionally, in some collaborative songwriting settings, lyrics and music may emerge through joint effort, or they may originate from different individuals working separately. In such cases, it is not uncommon for lyricists to present pre-written sketches that require little to no adaptation before being integrated with music. We must however remember that regardless of the approach – whether the lyrics are written before or after the music creation – those lyrics must be “sounded” as aforementioned. In other words, they are transformed to align with the music in a way that integrates them into the overall composition. Given this transformation, how can something that is reshaped to achieve melodic qualities be considered of equal or greater importance than the music itself?

As mentioned earlier, the goal is not to defy, but to define the role of lyrics in popular music songwriting. However, genres such as hip-hop – where spoken word takes precedence over melodic phrasing – fall outside the scope of this analysis due to their fundamental nature. In these genres, lyrics are often spoken rather than ‘sounded’, meaning they do not inherently align with the musical flow in the way sung melodies do. But even within rap-related genres, we can observe tracks that strongly adhere to melodic song development.

One such example is T-Pain’s 2008 track “Holla Holla”, which notably features a B-major melody, sung rather than rapped. The vocal line is harmonized through 5/3 and seventh-chord progressions that enhance the musical foreground, while (auto-tuned) phrasing provides stable pitch references. In *The Musical Artistry of Rap*, Martin E. Connor asserts that “Holla Holla comprises a deeply melodic logic... the track actually does have a melody that falls fully within a musical key”. He further explains that “all of T-Pain’s vocals on

Holla Holla appear squarely within the key of B major”,⁸ while also noting that T-Pain “maintains his respect for the linguistic rules of human speech... unifying the defining elements of rap with the defining elements of singing”. In other words, T-Pain’s delivery merges melodic structure with speech, allowing his vocal performance to float around the beat while still respecting syllabic stress and conversational rhythm. Connor concludes that T-Pain “overturns the binary dichotomy” between rapping and singing by showing how some rap tracks can indeed meet traditional melodic standards. This example demonstrates that even in stylistic spaces where the spoken word appears dominant, melody can play a foundational role in shaping the vocal expression.

While examples like this demonstrate the expressive flexibility of the genre, they also challenge the boundaries of what qualifies as a “song”, and it remains debatable whether they fully meet the traditional criteria of the term. According to *Grove Music Online*, a song is defined as “a piece of music for voice or voices, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, or the act or art of singing”.⁹ This definition highlights the extent to which certain spoken-word-based genres diverge from conventional song structures. While there may be musical styles that do not entirely conform to the conclusions drawn in this paper, the body of evidence presented here provides a clear perspective on how numerous renowned artists approach songwriting. Many of these artists, whose work I consider exemplary, have demonstrated a music-first approach to composition. This does not, however, suggest that the opposite method is inapplicable, nor have I disregarded examples that follow a lyrics-first approach.

References:

- Byrne, David: *How Music Works*. San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2012.
Chew, Geoffrey et al.: *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
Chew, Geoffrey et al.: “Song”, in: *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.
Connor, Martin E.: *The Musical Artistry of Rap*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2018.

⁸ Martin E. Connor, *The Musical Artistry of Rap*, Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, 2018, 84.

⁹ Geoffrey Chew et al., “Song”, in *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

- Croatia Records 1992: *TV Poster – Milan Mladenović*. Zagreb: Audiam (Publishing), Song-trust, and 3 Music Rights Societies.
- Dark Industry. *Renowned Artists Agree: Music First, Lyrics Later*. YouTube video, 12:25, posted June 2025, <https://youtu.be/pMIHm4cdfhw>
- Dolezal, Rudi; Hannes Rossacher: *The Magic Years*. Vol. 1. *A Visual Anthology*. London: E.M.I. Records, 1987.
- Hetfield, James: “METALLICA’s JAMES HETFIELD On His Lyric Writing: ‘I Want The Words To Just Be As Powerful As Possible’”, *Blabbermouth*, May 24, 2024, <https://blabbermouth.net/news/metallicas-james-hetfield-on-his-lyric-writing-i-want-the-words-to-just-be-as-powerful-as-possible>
- Hit Parader Magazine*, 282, March 1988, Derby–Connecticut, Charlton Publications.
- Kanowitz, Barbara: *Biography, season 24 – Black Sabbath*. New York: A&E Television Networks, 2010.
- Kreyer, Rolf; Joybrato Mukherjee: “The Style of Pop Song Lyrics”, *A Corpus-linguistic Pilot Study*, 125(1), 2007, 31–58.
- Metallica – James Hetfield Interview (1991)*, YouTube video, 19:57, posted by Metal 人, June 15, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_GPzbv_IeE
- MuchMusic TV: *Profile – Kurt Cobain*. Seattle: MuchMusic Inc., 1993.
- Ostojić, Lazar: (Dark Industry), *Improvised Lyrics over Prewritten Music – Songwriting Demo*, YouTube Shorts video, 0:58, posted March 2024, https://youtube.com/shorts/_3F3ryicWMU
- Ravenscroft, Alan: *The Ritchie Blackmore Story*. Blackmore Productions. Eagle Rock Film Productions, 2015.
- Seabrook, John: *The Song Machine (inside the hit factory)*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.
- Thompson, Dave: *Smoke on the Water: The Deep Purple Story*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2004.
- Vesić, Dušan: *EKV – Kao Da Je Bilo Nekad*. Beograd: Theatre of Art, DVCAM Film, Multimedia Records, 2008.
- Žikić, Aleksandar: *Mesto u mećavi* (priča o Milanu Mladenoviću). Beograd: Laguna, 2014.

Web References:

- <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>
- <https://youtu.be/pMIHm4cdfhw>
- <https://blabbermouth.net/news/metallicas-james-hetfield-on-his-lyric-writing-i-want-the-words-to-just-be-as-powerful-as-possible>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_GPzbv_IeE
- <https://loudwire.com/corey-taylor-new-slipknot-lyrics-most-shared-years/>
- <https://youtu.be/tPGCmxA-Hmc>
- <https://youtu.be/2V7NgL-dtUo>
- <https://youtu.be/achqXtLAWzk>
- https://youtube.com/shorts/_3F3ryicWMU

Summary

Popular music-making in the 20th and 21st centuries has ushered a noticeable insight into compositional and other creative processes thanks to the great number of available sources from books to documentaries and artists' personal statements, at times even recordings from studio sessions. This article offers results from research into the compositional hierarchy between music and lyrics in the arrangement work-through. While both elements contribute to a song's final aesthetics, the research emphasizes that in many songwriting contexts, across various genres, musical material serves as the structural and expressive foundation, with lyrics subsequently adapted to fit the melodic and rhythmic framework. Drawing from artist interviews, biographies, and recorded material, the paper analyzes selected examples from artists such as Queen, Deep Purple, Nirvana, Metallica, a number of pop music producers etc., all of whom articulate a music-first compositional approach in their creative practice. Certain statements are further supported by song transcriptions produced by the author, which illustrate the precedence of musical form and later development over verbal content.

The study also addresses broader methodological issues, noting that music and lyrics, while coexisting in the final work, operate as separate communicative domains. It is argued that lyrics often function more as interpretive overlays or textural complements to the already defined musical framework. In saying so, attention is given to genres such as hip-hop, where the dominance of spoken text complicates the traditional definition of a "song." The analysis includes counterexamples, such as T-Pain's *Holla Holla*, to demonstrate how melodic structure can still play a central role in vocally-driven tracks such as in rap music. Through a synthesis of theory, compositional practice, and critical listening, the article aims to redefine the perceived parity between music and lyrics by presenting evidence that music, more often than not, dictates the compositional direction of a song.

The paper also highlights the need for closer musicological attention to the actual practices of songwriting, which often reveal a disconnect between theoretical assumptions and the lived realities of musical creation.