TTRPG as a tool for a theatre composer

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Abstract

In "TTRPG as a tool for a theatre composer", I explore the phenomenon of tabletop
role-playing games and identify characteristics that could be applied to a composer's work
for theatrical productions. I investigate how these games have evolved, particularly its
mechanisms toward storytelling. I examine three key features, the improvisational approach
in story development involving the entire ensemble; the management of expectations at the
start by way of exchange and immersion in the story material; and the building of structure
through different beats, allowing analysis of the story and its turning points to be identified. I
offer a close reading of my own work and the way these principles outlined have influenced
my process. I also present detailed interviews with five theatre practitioners from different
roles, in whose works I find manifestations of these identified features. The main question I
address is, how exactly can the TTRPG experience help the composer? What techniques of
this hobby can be applied to role-playing? My goal is to find out how TTRPGs can serve as a
platform for learning certain skills which can then be translated by a composer working with
musicians and actors.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This work is based on my own experience as a composer and storyteller. As a storyteller, I bring my stories to life in the genre of **tabletop role-playing games (TTRPG)**. It is my longest and most beloved hobby. In this genre, also referred to as "pen-and-paper", participants take on the roles of characters and experience the adventure together by telling the story. Pen and paper are almost always used to write descriptions of the roles, and to take notes as the game progresses, hence the naming. Going forward, I will provide a description of tabletop role-playing games and talk about this genre in more detail.

Ever since I started doing composition for musical theatre, I have discovered various parallels between storytelling skills and music writing. I've always been interested in working not so much on the compositional part, but more so on the story itself, and I have sought the help of music to tell the story. I notice the details of what happens on stage, I consult with the director and often my ideas are valuable enough for the director to adjust the development of the action on stage. I think it is my experience as a storyteller that helps me in working on music for a play, allowing me to see the story more deeply. My habit of thinking in terms of the development of the plot, the role of the characters, and my practice in interacting with participating players during the game has greatly influenced my work in theatre as a composer.

Nevertheless, musical composition and role-playing seem to be very distant genres. **So how exactly can the experience of a TTRPG storyteller help a composer?**

This is a key question for my work, and I see the practical benefit especially for myself in systematising my experience and identifying exactly how the work of a composer can be related to storytelling skills. I am convinced that the role of the composer should be more than functional. The composer is a fully functional participant in the creative process and by exploring the relationship of the composer's work to role-playing I am looking for a way to deepen the role of the composer in the process of working in the theatrical field.

So then more practical questions come up. Are there certain techniques in TTRPG and what are they? How and when can a composer apply them? These are the questions I intend to examine in this work.

To that end, I am going to first analyse literature related to tabletop role-playing games. Most of these books and articles are written by game designers for players and storytellers. They give a broad overview of techniques and numerous tips on how to make games better. I am also going to draw on my own experience as a storyteller and composer in this study and give examples from my own work.

At the beginning of this research, I feel it is necessary to give an overview of the TTRPG genre, describing its history and highlighting its main features. I will then consider how and at which points these features can be applied to the work of a theatre composer. I will conclude with interviews with directors and composers regarding their productions, which I believe embody features I have identified in my analysis of tabletop role-playing games. For this purpose, I interviewed Sebastian Androne Nakanishi, Till Löffler, Sergei Okunev, Stephan Teuwissen and Peter Zundel.

There is another important question I consider worth answering as a preface. Why study theatre from the perspective of a genre that is somehow a product of theatre? Isn't it easier to study the characteristics of theatre itself and find all the answers there? Valid as this is, I find my reverse approach particularly interesting. If tabletop role-playing games are simplified from theatre and reduced to its basic principles, examining them more closely can help us expose such basics that could otherwise be hidden. Furthermore, tabletop role-playing games is a young genre that provides a unique perspective of a phenomenon as vast as present day theatre. Imagine how many ideas an analysis of ancient drama can provide when combined with the experience of a modern cinematic playwright! This approach strikes me as genuinely interesting and noteworthy.

What is TTRPG?

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of human activity that has served many purposes. Stories were part of rituals and were used to teach and pass on important experiences and knowledge. They also served to entertain.

Initially, the telling of stories was primarily an oral tradition. Professional storytellers were in close proximity to their audience, with listeners seated around the narrator. Storytellers often used music, gestures, or dance to both enhance the emotional effect of the story and to make it more memorable. But stories also began to be written down a long time ago. We have had the opportunity to study texts as old as the ancient Egyptian Westcar Papyrus. It is

a recording of five stories told by the sons of Pharaoh Khufu in his court, containing not only the plot, but also the process of telling the stories itself.

Traditional verbally conveyed stories such as fairy tales remain in use to this day. But one could argue that even the simple act of sharing information in the form of a story makes one a storyteller. Many people strive to improve their storytelling skills by increasing their repertoire of stories and practising in front of audiences. According to writer Josepha Sheman, storytelling "serves the audience as well as the teller. For the audience, the storytelling event offers a moment of play, a shared experience, a bonding". [1]

In the modern world, storytelling has enormous applications. Through social media, people tell stories about their experiences every day, turning themselves into characters in stories and having a huge set of tools to make the story more vivid. Computer games actively use storytelling tools, developing the concept of an open world that reacts to players' actions and changes according to their decisions. Storytelling is actively used in psychotherapy, allowing clients to explore their own lives in the form of spontaneous role-play, solving personal problems and getting to examine themselves as characters. Among modern theatrical trends, Playback Theatre[2] develops this idea in the form of actors embodying stories told by the audience through improvisation.

The desire to step into the shoes of a character in a story is also vividly manifested in tabletop role-playing games. This format, in its mainstream form, involves a company of people gathered at a single table, whether tangible or digital. Players jointly choose the setting of the story, which can most often be based on pop-cultural genres such as fantasy or Sci-Fi, but can nevertheless be absolutely anything. The number of players usually ranges from 3 to 8, excluding the storyteller. That said, many TTRPGs consider 5 players to be the optimal number for a party. Together, the players decide in which genre the story will take place, what themes it will address, and most importantly, which characters will be its protagonists. Each participant creates their own character, who will then be played out over the course of the story by having the corresponding player verbally describe their actions.

Players often describe their actions in first person, like actors in theatre, but it is also quite common for a player to describe his character's actions in third person. In this way, players also take the position of storyteller, observing their character's actions from the sidelines.

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[1] Josepha Sherman (ed.). *Storytelling. An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore,* 2008.
[2] Playback Theatre is a format of improvisational theatre, where the audience shares personal stories, and the actors bring them to life on stage.

The story is the responsibility of a specific participant, referred to as the Dungeon Master (in D&D), or Storyteller (in Storytelling System games). After the players have decided on the setting, genre and characters, the Game Master's job is to come up with a storyline and plan events that will happen to the characters. A given game consists of play **sessions**, meaning instances in which the storyteller and players gather in the same location to host a game involving their characters. Multiple sessions that encompass a single story are what is referred to as a **campaign**. In this way, sessions are much like chapters, whereas a campaign is the whole book or play. Over the course of the campaign, the storyteller verbally describes what surrounds the characters, what happens to them and plays those characters that the protagonists meet as the plot develops.

Every game involves a set of rules, also called systems. Many tabletop role-playing game franchises have their own rule systems and are published in book form. Some systems available on the market are Dungeons & Dragons, Storytelling System, FATE Core, Powered by the Apocalypse (PbtA), as well as many others. Many game systems use dice with a varying number of faces to provide randomization in situations where the outcome is uncertain. The dice roll is affected by various character traits or other circumstantial modifiers, thereby also affecting the chance of success on a given dice roll, whether in the heroes' favour or not. As a result, the flow of the story in conjunction with a degree of gamified randomness could lead the player characters to triumph or demise.

History of TTRPG

The tabletop role-playing game industry dates back to 1974, when the American company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) published the original edition of **Dungeons & Dragons**. Gary Gygax and his friend Don Kaye released various TTRPGs and many other games, as well as magazines, comics, and fiction novels in the fantasy and science fiction genres under the D&D brand.

Wargames

But D&D had precursors in the form of so-called wargames. These strategy board games which persist to this day simulate realistic armed conflict in which two or more players command opposing forces. Many wargames recreate specific historical battles and can cover either entire wars and campaigns, or individual battles within them. Wargames were invented in Prussia in the early 19th century, and eventually the Prussian military adopted

wargames as a tool to train their officers and develop military strategies. Following Prussia's victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1871), wargames became popular with officers in other countries as well. Many enthusiasts also played wargames for fun, but for a long time it was a niche hobby.

One of D&D's direct predecessors was "Braunstein", developed in 1969. This wargame was set in the fictional German city of Braunstein during the Napoleonic Wars. Game creator David Wesely took the role of referee, assigning individual roles to players, which included non-military roles (such as mayor, banker or university principal). Players were supposed to communicate only with the referee in a separate room. But unexpectedly, players began using their characters to communicate with each other and travel around Braunstein City. When two players unexpectedly challenged each other to a duel, David Wesely had to improvise the rules for the duel on the spot, as he had not anticipated this development of the story.

These findings were later developed by Dave Arneson, one of the creators of D&D, in the game "Blackmoor" in the 1970s. There were more roles, characters were able to advance and become stronger, which encouraged cooperative movement toward success. Crucial to the development of role-playing games were **further codifying each player as being represented by a specific character**, as well as **open rules that allowed players to attempt any action,** the outcome of which was determined by a referee.

"Braunstein" and "Blackmoor" may have served as tools of storytelling, but in the end, that was not the main intent behind their design. These games still remained closely tied to wargames. There included no tools specifically geared towards creating a story in the game, and no plot was implied by design.

The path to storytelling

The initiative to turn D&D into a storytelling tool came from the players themselves! It was the players who began to produce the first stories based on this system. For example, members of the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), an international group organised in 1966 that studied and recreated medieval European culture, actively used D&D as a storytelling platform.

Initially, TSR took this initiative negatively and aggressively defended their intellectual property, forbidding the publication of stories that were based on their system. Nevertheless,

realising the huge interest of players, in 1975, they officially published the first setting based on D&D, *Empire of the Petal Throne*, created by Professor M.A.R. Barker, who developed the fantasy world of Tékumel, its culture, and even invented the languages of that world.

Gradually, tabletop role-playing games began to diverge from wargames, formulating a unique genre. **Players began to utilise tabletop role-playing games primarily for storytelling.**

The 80's saw an impressive breakthrough for the genre. Authors began to take all sorts of genres such as westerns, mysteries and superhero stories and designed games around them. Their goal was to help players tell stories about their favourite genre heroes, with rules tailored as a means to convey tropes of the genre and embody stereotypes about heroes.

The ultimate reflection of the storytelling element and emphasis on aesthetics was the setting *Vampire: The Masquerade (1991)*. The game used the term "Gothic Punk" to describe the contradictory atmosphere of the setting; players are invited to immerse themselves in an atmosphere of Gothic horror on the one hand, and a rebellious dystopian world on the other.

Instead of the Game Master, the term Storyteller is used, which removes the association with the function of a referee. Moreover, it is specifically stated that "whenever rules and story conflict, the story wins. Use the rules only as much - or preferably as little - as you need to tell thrilling stories of terror, action and romance". [3]

New approaches to TTRPG

Nevertheless, wargame logic did not completely disappear from the games. It was still present and influenced the stories the players told. And only by the 2000s did it become clear to game developers that they needed to fundamentally change the mechanics. **New game systems had to simulate literary elements and moral growth of characters**. For example, in the role-playing system "7th Sea", players take the roles of heroes of a cloak and dagger novel. Unlike D&D, here the player character is virtually immortal, constantly surviving the most incredible collisions until the player himself decides when his character should perish. The system also rewards the player for describing the hero's actions in beautiful and creative ways, with the game system explicitly encouraging improvisation. The FATE Core system changes the rules even more radically in an effort to tie game mechanics

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[3] Vampire: The Masquerade. Revised Edition. *White Wolf Publishing, 1998*

to narrative. The very moment of character creation in this system sets the direction for story development. The character's qualities, the so-called aspects, determine how the character will solve problems, his backstory, and motivate the narrator to build the story around them. Systems such as Powered by the Apocalypse (PbtA) go so far as to further develop the extent of player involvement in shaping the narrative. The game creates opportunities where the player can describe what will happen, thus making the role of storyteller more fluid and distributed among participants.

A curious example can be found in a game *Dogs in the Vineyard* by David Backer. Here the roll of the dice decides not success or failure, but who gets to describe what happens next in the story, the player or the storyteller.

We will focus next on recent trends in role-playing and highlight some of the features that can most naturally be correlated with a composer's work in theatre. Of the many elements in TTRPGs, I would like to focus on the following three specific ones - Improvisation, Managing Expectations and Story Structure.

Features of TTRPG

TTRPGs imply an active role of all participants in the development of the story. Players are co-storytellers because their decisions and perception determine how the characters of the story will act. It is the Storyteller's job, in turn, to respond to any decisions made by the players, ensuring that the story responds accordingly.

American game designer Zeb Cook gives the following explanation: *"The players in a game aren't passive viewers. They don't sit still to be told a story. They don't act parts in a story. They take part in creating the story. Quite simply, characters take actions. Those actions become the story of the game, not the plot the GM initially created"* [4].

Already it's possible to see similarities to a composer's work with musicians. If we take the musician not just as a performer, an instrument who plays at a certain moment, but as a character who also creates a story, we can achieve interesting results and avoid unfortunate mistakes. For instance, a musician might play only a few times during the entire production and spend most of the time waiting their turn. Similarly, an individual player in a TTRPG might be receiving less spotlight than their peers, and less room to develop their character in

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[4] Zeb Cook. "The Art of Letting Go" *Kobold Guide to Plots and Campaigns, 2016*

a compelling way. Whether an expectant musician or an expectant player, giving them more focus and visibility creates new opportunities.

Such interaction between Storyteller and players (just as between composer and musicians) brings us to an important element of any tabletop role-playing game: improvisation.

Improvisation

You simply can't tell a story without improvising. By engaging in dialogue on behalf of their character or describing their actions, the player improvises. The narrator, in turn, does not have all the power over the development of the story, no matter how detailed their initial notes may be. They cannot predict all actions in advance, nor can they dictate to the player what to say. Players have freedom of interpretation, expression and choice. Each player is free to interpret information the narrator gives them the way they want and react accordingly. For example, players may refuse to take on a task that the storyteller offers them in their story, in which case, the only option is to improvise. Curiously, the more rigidly the Storyteller has designed the story, the more they will have to improvise if the players decide not to follow the suggested route.

Conveniently, it can be compared to my experience as a composer. In my production of *Freylekhs* [5] I had prepared the pieces in advance and although some of them successfully fell into place, one of the scenes played less successfully with the movements of actors. As such the scene had to be disassembled, and during rehearsal I had to improvise to build a new sequence and find suitable material.

In TTRPG some game systems deliberately encourage the Storyteller to leave room in the story for improvisation, and the players to be more imaginative in describing their characters' actions. The FATE Core role-playing system, for example, allows players to intervene in the course of the story by suggesting unexpected events that help or even hinder their characters.

PBtA encourages improvisation to an even greater extent. For instance, if a player gets a high score on a dice roll, the system offers abstract descriptions like: "Force someone into a situation where they must make a decision. You can describe the situation and give them their options, or you can show that their current situation is untenable and let the player

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[5] "Freylekhs", Lev Terner, Luca Vincenzi, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, 2022

decide what decision they make". [6] This result is applicable to any setting and allows the Storyteller to adapt the details to their story with ease.

However, improvisation is not always easy. Although some players of TTRPGs have theatrical experience (apparently early D&D was already influenced by improvisational theatre), it is not easy for everyone to come up with story twists on the fly.

Writers and game designers have come up with many suggestions to address this issue. Kevin Kulp suggests a somewhat radical approach to using improvisation "the best way ... is to hold an occasional game where you do absolutely no preparation at all. At the start of the game, ask each player what their hero's current goal is. Then build the game session on the fly to help at least one hero move closer to their goal. You'll have to pull monsters out of the book, but you'll learn more about pacing for your personal group than you would from a published adventure". [7]

Improvisation tips for a storyteller

Some tips and rules for improvisation are given by game designer Zeb Cook in his article "The Art of Letting Go". They are listed below along with the way they might apply to a composer's process.

"It's about trust" - reminds us that players are not foes to be defeated, and the storyteller is not a tyrant who forces the players' choices and pressures them. This applies perfectly to the composer-artist relationship. The composer should not impose their decisions and perceive the musicians and their initiative as a problem to be overcome and defended against. Trust in the artists is an important component not just of good improvisation, but of generally effective work on a production. Openness to suggestions, willingness to take the score in an unpredictable direction rely on a good relationship between the artists and the composer. The musician may not have an idea of the entire structure of the work, but they know their instrument and can suggest things that the composer would not have thought of.

"Setup is everything" - the storyteller needs to set each scene with a hook and material for players to react to, much like Stanislavsky's given circumstances. A composer can similarly create hooks for improvisation. During my work on "Freylekhs", this manifested in the setting up of a relationship between different instruments, likening their interaction to "small talk",

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[6] James Iles and Douglas Santana Mota. *Legacy. Life among the ruins. 2nd edition,* 2018
[7] Kevin Kulp "Tricks from the Oral Tradition". *Kobold Guide to Plots and Campaigns,* 2016

trading improvisations based on specific patterns. Elements of the score were established as part of a conversation, giving an extra layer of setup to the interaction between musicians.

"NO is the enemy" - advises the storyteller not to reject the players' ideas. The players' ideas are the seed from which an interesting element of the story can grow, and the storyteller's job is to give it a chance to germinate. A composer always retains the right to steer the performance of their score in the most suitable direction, but they are still advised not to reject the artists' suggestions altogether. Instead, they can be used to enhance the initial idea.

"Listen" - suggests that we listen to the desires and expectations of the players and build on their feelings. To a composer, this is an invitation to focus not only on the musical texture, but also the human aspect of the artists themselves. While part of a score may theoretically sound expressive on an instrument, the comfort of the person behind the instrument can directly influence the way the production is received on stage. Exertion from playing a technically complicated part may well translate into a scene that doesn't call for a sense of tension.

"Do, don't say" - recommends increasing the drama or comedy in the development of the game scene, creating additional difficulties or unexpected changes. To a composer, this can be taken to mean stepping away from templates. Being open to adding to the score "here and now" can result in more creative iterations. This implies a willingness to come up with abrupt alterations, directly and repeatedly participate during improvisation, then save the most successful experiments for the final version. This suggestion also leads well into the final rule.

"Have fun" - recalls the obvious but easily forgotten rule of having fun in the process. This is true for a composer as well. Participating in the improvisation process is much more fun and fulfilling than only controlling the ensemble from the sidelines.

The tenet of preparing for improvisation is still in force, and the Storyteller will still require a firm grasp of building blocks from which the story will be constructed. This includes the rules and mechanics of the game, or at least the understanding of ways in which they could be adjusted. It is not uncommon to prepare specific plot twists or pre-written non-player characters that can be introduced to the game as required and punctuate events key to the story.

Knowing this, could a composer build their improvisation around flexible use of templates, sketches, prepared techniques and interchangeable parts? I would certainly hope so.

Managing Expectations

The game rulebook *Vampire: The Masquerade. 5th Edition* describes the starting point of the story as follows: "The first thing you need is a concept. What is your chronicle about? Who are the characters and what do they do? What is the experience you wish to build?" [8] Many rule books of many different systems suggest that storytellers begin setting up their game by answering these very questions.

It is very important for participants in the game to form a general approach to the story. The storyteller can't know initially what their players are interested in, so one of the first steps is to manage shared expectations. The article "Managing Expectations as the Basis for Fun" [9] by Uri Lifshitz and Eran Aviram gives a detailed sequence of how the storyteller and the players work together on all stages.

First of all, it is important for the storyteller to define his idea of what story they want to tell, to specify the genre of the story and the setting. It is better to have a detailed description. Where one might simply refer to one's story as a "detective mystery", they would instead benefit from a more expansive summary, for instance, "a mystical detective in a futuristic noir city". In a similar fashion, a composer would not stop at labelling his work as simply "jazz", but would instead expand his description, i.e. "early New Orleans-style jazz".
It is important to identify what properties of the genre are relevant to the story. Will it be a superhero action movie in which the character is not afraid of any wounds or a realistic drama, where one shot can be fatal? One then goes on to decide what exactly the characters will be doing in the story. They might be detectives investigating a crime, a crime family facing strong opposition, street musicians ending up in the wrong place at the wrong time, etc.

Often, by choosing a game system, the storyteller receives a certain set of conventions that are included in the rules. In which case, it is important to find out whether all participants in the game perceive these rules in the same way.

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[8] *Vampire: The Masquerade*. 5th Edition. White wolf entertainment, AB, 2018
[9] Lifshitz, Uri. Aviram, Eran. *Managing Expectations as the Basis for Fun*
https://www.uptofourplayers.com/2016/06/rp-tools-managing-expectation/

For the composer, such synchronisation will also be very important. For the play "Freylekhs" in which there was no text and the musicians and actors had to use music, plastique and pantomime to lead the story forward, I was looking for actors and musicians both skilled and interested specifically in this kind of theatre. From the very beginning, I described what our creative task was. At the time the musicians could not exert influence - all they could do was say yes or no. Given the opportunity, a composer can give more freedom to the people under their direction. The benefit of such an approach will be discussed when we examine how tools taken from TTRPGs can aid a composer.

Determine the extent of freedom

Having chosen a system and genre, the next step is to decide on what freedom the players and, by extension, their characters can exert. Would the players be able to change the story? How significantly would they be able to change the plot that the storyteller creates? Would the player be able to make up elements of the environment that the storyteller has not described (e.g., add a tree that can be climbed where there was none) and what would the restrictions, if any, be? The extent of freedom afforded to the players should be clear, such as establishing which elements of the world and story are immutable, and which instances instead, have room for initiative and bold improvisation.

American game designer James Jacobs draws attention to this stage, "When you start a new campaign, your players represent characters who grew up in a world that only you know. Think of your campaign not as a surprise party but as a big movie event, one that everyone at your table wants to attend because they all saw the preview for the movie and are excited by what they saw. Even a mysterious or confusing title is better than expecting someone will want to spend two hours of their life watching a movie they know absolutely nothing about other than the fact that you want them to watch it with you".[10]

It's important to run through what the game will be like and what the main types of scenes are planned to be. Whether the storyteller plans to emphasise dialogue scenes or else include an abundance of action scenes. In the realm of composing such points of negotiation may include the extent of improvisation, the mood of the general production, and stylistic and genre staples.

One recommendation posed by Uri Lifshitz and Eran Aviram is for players to pause and discuss any disagreements and conflicts that may have arisen during play. Whether any of

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[10] James Jacobs "Beginning a Campaign". *Kobold Guide to Plots and Campaigns,* 2016

the players were bored, whether anyone was taking up too much spotlight and timing with their character's personal story without involving others, whether players were paying attention to elements of the story the storyteller prepared for them. This helps identify issues and adjust them before proceeding.

Rule systems and managing expectations

Many systems try to incorporate the process of managing expectations into their rules. While they often allow for multiple variations of stories, the system does demand that you clearly agree on a specific variation. *Vampire: The Masquerade. 5th edition* [11] does this via so-called Chronicle Tenets. These are general principles that characters adhere to and agree upon at the beginning of the game, recording them in the process. *FATE Core* is built on an element called Aspect. An Aspect is "a phrase that describes something unique or noteworthy about whatever it's attached to".[12] While they typically apply to characters in the story, Aspects can also be given to the game world itself, thus working with the players to set the rules for the story.

In *Legacy. Life among the ruins*, a post-apocalyptic game setting based on the PbtA system, players work with the storyteller to determine the game's aesthetic, the geography of the fictional world, and the conflicts, completing a detailed questionnaire and selecting options. In *Blades in the dark*, a game setting inspired by Victorian London and Gothic fiction, players work together to invent a gang. Options are varied and the chosen gang determines the genre and challenges that will arise during the game.

Some of these ideas can be applied within the **context of a composer's work.** For example, the mechanics of Chronicle Tenets of "Vampire: The Masquerade" and Aspects of "FATE Core" can be applied at the start of a production by capturing elements of musical language that a composer, along with the ensemble, see as important to the story. This could be a particular system of scales, recommended intervals for improvisation, or an important core theme reappearing throughout the production, giving musicians freedom to improvise using its motifs.

The ideas we find in "Legacy" and "Blades in the Dark" can be interpreted in a different way. Instead of a questionnaire, have a meeting with free improvisation, where the only direction from the composer involves images they want to find. As the ensemble improvises, the

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[11] *Vampire: The Masquerade*. 5th Edition. White wolf entertainment, AB, 2018
[12] Fate Core System. Evil Hat Productions, LLC. 2013

composer can highlight individual elements, ask for them to be repeated, and move on until a specific result can be developed. Said result can then serve as a starting point, a general mood that the ensemble has discovered together with the composer. I learned this technique from the Russian director Vladimir Pankov and applied it while working at the Center for Dramaturgy and Directing in Moscow.

Ultimately, all the above methods and rules come down to social convention. A storyteller can create as flexible or rigid a plot as they want and outline the terms as long as the players agree to them. Many books say that a storyteller can break the rules of the game. For example, FATE Core describes the "golden rule" of TTRPG this way: "Decide what you're trying to accomplish first, then consult the rules to help you do it...In other words, don't look at the rules as a straitjacket or a hard limit on an action".[13] But bypassing the rules should only lead to a better story and the overall enjoyment of the participants.

Of course **composers are authors of their own sets of rules** compiled for each new work. As such, their set of rules is malleable by nature. Even rules made by oneself are subject to alterations and adjustments for the benefit of one's creative work and cooperation with the director and performers.

Story Structure

The structure of stories for tabletop role-playing games often has a strong literary basis. Exposition, Development, Climax, and Resolution are phases that can be found in a huge number of games and published stories.

Nevertheless, tabletop role-playing games have their own characteristics that distinguish this genre from works of literature. The game does not have to use the same steps listed above, in fact no system imposes a structure within its rules. In fact an important quality of the structure of any tabletop role-playing game is its narrative seriality. Rarely do stories begin and end on the same day. A single campaign can take from several four-hour play sessions to multiple years during which the same group of players spends time together continuing the same story. In this way, the tabletop role-playing game appears as a social phenomenon and player communication in-between sessions turns out to be just as important to the process of play. In addition, what happens during downtime - jokes, or sharing impressions from the story - can influence the campaign's content, changing the story in the process.

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[13] Fate Core System. Evil Hat Productions, LLC. 2013

One can interpret rehearsals from a similar perspective. A composer presenting material and organising rehearsals is comparable to a roleplaying group planning out their game sessions. While working on *Freylekhs*, I began rehearsals with vivid dance numbers in order to create a bright, festive mood and gradually lead up to the lyrical numbers. Electronic music, which was a last moment addition, was only featured in the latter parts of the rehearsals. As such, artists had an opportunity to be surprised, much like a group of roleplayers might be surprised by a plot-twist. By presenting it and gauging their impressions it also became possible to evaluate its effectiveness in impressing the audience.

James Jacobs also suggests, "rather than a passive, tired first scene, consider starting your campaign with a bang... From this point on, the game should proceed as normal".[14] Some storytellers also recommend privately working out the ending of the story from the start, laying the groundwork for the climax. American game designer Wolfgang Baur writes that "the game master can also decide on the finale before the campaign or major adventure even begins - and this can produce very surprising, dramatic, memorable results". [15] He suggests inventing some significant element for the world of the game and then deciding how the story finale will affect and possibly change that element. In this way the musical score for a production often contains a significant element, such as a leitmotif, recurring with different arrangement or placement in the story. This in turn affects how it's perceived by the audience and what emotional weight it contains. A theme heard during the opening of a play may have a completely different meaning by the end of the story.

Structural elements

Now let's look at structural elements of a story. According to writer and lecturer Robert McKee, the structure of a story is "a selection of events from the character's life stories". [16] Robert McKee also says: "Story events are meaningful, not trivial".

If one were to suddenly hear birdsong in a quiet forest, it is an event, but there is nothing surprising about it. If, however, we then see the main character studying and communicating with birds, and the birds respond to his voice, then the event becomes more significant and conveys more about the character.

McKee places great emphasis on the meaningfulness of events by introducing the concept of values, "Story values refer to the broadest sense of the idea... (they) are the universal

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[14] James Jacobs "Beginning a Campaign". *Kobold Guide to Plots and Campaigns,* 2016
[15] Wolfgang Baur "Choosing an Ending First" *Kobold Guide to Plots and Campaigns,* 2016
[16] Robert McKee Story. 1997 p.33

qualities of human experience that may shift from positive to negative, or negative to positive, from one moment to the next". [17] Love and hate, life and death, strength and weakness, and similar dualities are examples of story values.

If we go back to the example above, if the hero walks through the woods and studies birds then suddenly finds not a bird, but a lone abandoned child with wings for arms, then the value of the scene greatly increases.

Every event in the structure of a story manifests itself through a scene. A scene, according to McKee, "is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance". [18] In each scene there is a meaningful change in the life situation in which the character is involved, but from event to event, the degree of this change can vary widely. Individually, scenes imply rather small, though important, changes, whereas a sequence of scenes allows you to show a more significant, decisive change.

The smallest element of a scene is the **beat**. McKee describes it as "an exchange in the behaviour between characters as part of their actions or reactions". [19] A scene consists of a sequence of beats.

So in our example, first we hear the sound of a bird singing, then we see the character walking with binoculars and looking at the birds, calling them by name. Suddenly he sees a little girl with wings in place of arms in the bushes. He rushes over to her, picks her up, and calls out to the forest, "Who lost her?" The birdsong falls silent. This scene is the beginning of the play *Ptishka* [20], the music for which I composed. There are four beats in this sequence that gradually change the tension of the scene, marking a change in the life of the character.

In terms of TTRPGs Wolfgang Baur also gives a definition of a beat, "no matter how minor an encounter might seem, give it a story spin that reinforces the sense of events happening in the game world. Hollywood screenwriters refer to this technique as story beats, and video game designers turn to that tool as well. A story beat is simply an action that has consequences for the characters". [21]

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[17] Robert McKee Story. 1997 p.34
[18] Robert McKee Story. 1997 p.35
[19] Robert McKee Story. 1997 p.37
[20] "Ptishka". Taisiya Kanygina, Lev Terner. Center of Dramaturgy and Directing, Moscow, 2019
[21] Wolfgang Baur. "Pacing, Beats, and the Passage of Time". *Kobold Guide to Plots and Campaigns* 2016

A detailed and diverse **classification of beats** is given by the writer and game designer Robin Laws in his book *Hamlet's hit points* [22]. In it, he proposes tools with which to analyse the structure of a story. If a storyteller has difficulty developing a story and players lose concentration and interest, such tools would help analyse mistakes retroactively and identify weak points. Repeatedly analysing their stories, storytellers learn to see the beats in the game.

Robin Laws divides beats into two components:

Type - specifies what purpose the beat serves in the narrative. Beats can serve multiple purposes, especially at key moments.

Resolution - indicates the emotional state that the beat evokes in the audience at the end of the narrative. In describing Resolution, Laws highlights the two main emotions that guide the viewer - fear and hope. They govern and constrain all other emotions. At any point in the story, there is hope that the situation will resolve favourably for the character and fear that it will not.

Manipulating these opposing impulses engages the narrative. If the viewer is neither hopeful nor fearful for the characters, he will not care what happens. Both reactions are easily exhausted - too much hope and the viewer gets bored. Too much fear and he falls into despair and disconnects from what is happening. It is the rapid, unpredictable alternation of hope and fear that keeps the suspense going.

Now let's take a look at different types of beats. This will help us discover how composers and storytellers alike can identify beats when analysing a scene.The first two: Procedural and Dramatic are the main building blocks of the narrative.

Procedural beats have to do with the pursuit of the characters' external tasks, the practical task. They get closer to what they want or farther away from it, risking failure. For this reason, this beat usually evokes a sense of tension, which may be both intense or barely perceptible.

On the contrary, the **Dramatic beat** is associated with the personal aspirations of the characters and their desire to resolve internal conflicts. This beat is inevitably associated

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[22] Laws, Robin D. *Hamlet's Hit Points*. Gameplaywright Press. 2010

with the expression of feelings, the demands of feelings from other characters, or resistance to such demands.

The other beats are somewhat less common:

A **commentary beat** pauses the characters' movement toward their goals in order to comment on what is happening or explain motivation. This beat often uses secondary characters, observers, who can act like a Greek chorus.

An **anticipation beat** creates an expectation of impending success during the procedural beat. This beat does not move the story, but makes you freeze in anticipation of change and success.

A **gratification beat** allows us to have fun, joyful emotions, and laughs. Often this beat floats freely out of the main narrative and punctuates breaks between the main elements. Such a beat does not develop the story, but it is a pleasure to watch.

A **bringdown beat** is a negative emotional moment that flows out of the main narrative. It can be a moment of defeat for the characters, in which the surroundings emphasise and comment on this situation.

A **pipe beat** gives us information that will become clear later and does not warn us of its importance. In an ideal situation, the viewer does not pay attention to this beat until everything suddenly falls into place.

A **question beat** creates a mystery that the viewer wants to see solved. It often arises when characters are searching for information, in the course of a procedural beat. But unlike a procedural beat, a question beat usually arouses curiosity about something that has already happened but was not clear to us.

Finally, a **reveal beat** provides the information we wanted in the previous beat, or gives entirely new information that may come out of the blue. This beat can complete a chain of pipe beats and give information about their true purpose.

By analysing a scene using the classification from *Hamlet's hit points* [23], a composer can see exactly how it builds up the story and influences it. Let's go back to the example from the play *Ptishka* and see what beats can be found there and how they can be emphasised using a composer's tools.

1. The scene begins and we see musicians on the stage. They are acting as if they were trees in the woods, and make bird sounds with whistles. We hear birdsong, but the meaning of it will only become clear to us later. This is a **pipe beat** for which I used the whistle leit-timbre. It escalated in the moments leading up to the unusual origin of the bird girl heroine.

2. The main character appears, looking at the birds, walking through the woods. He's funny and this evokes smiles, the mood rises, we are assured that all is well. This is a **gratification beat.** During the gratification beat, I used a looper to record the whistles and transform them into a forest-like audial background. While I didn't introduce new instruments at this point, I emphasised the transition from beat to beat by altering the timbre.

3. Punctuated with the sound of a vibraphone, the hero notices a girl with wings for arms (presented as a puppet on stage, operated by the actor himself). This is a **procedural beat** and the mood changes, the audience is worried. During this beat, the leitmotif of *Ptishka* - the little winged girl is introduced. It consists mostly of vibraphone and electric guitar. It's a fluttering theme, with short agile motifs that freeze at points, leaving space for speech, then filling in the pauses. Introducing new timbres emphasises the importance of this beat.

4. The character calls out, but no one responds. Finally, he decides to take the little girl home and care for her. This is a **dramatic beat** and as we learn in the next scene, the hero and his wife have always wanted children. This beat was left without music, instead filling the space with the hero's voice and its ensuing echo amplified with a delay effect.

5. The scene slows down and the musicians address the audience, commenting on what happened. It's a **commentary beat**, and the mood becomes hopeful again. For this beat, I give a new leitmotif, the most important one for the play, related to the new parents of "Ptishka". It gradually leads us into a new scene and is performed by a larger cast, the vibraphone and guitar are joined by cello.

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[23] Laws, Robin D. Hamlet's Hit Points. *Gameplaywright Press. 2010*

Robin Laws stipulates that it is a rather simplified and subjective system. The main question is what exactly we can count as a beat, and what an element within the beat is. Following his practical logic, Robin Laws highlights beats only in the event of serious changes in character interactions or their objectives.

The Beats didn't tell me exactly what to do. But as I analysed the scene using them, I saw structural points that I felt I had to respond to as a composer.

TTRPG as a Compositional tool

How might the features of tabletop role-playing games help a composer in their work on a theatrical production? How, specifically, can storytelling skills be applied to their work? We have been asking these questions while we examined the characteristics of TTRPGs in the previous sections, and now we will bring together all the ideas. Then I will demonstrate how these features can manifest themselves in productions and what difficulties you may encounter if they do not manifest themselves. To that end, I will be using examples from interviews with directors and composers.

Rather than focusing on the result, ie. the final theatrical product itself, I would like to focus on the working process instead. The reason for this lies in the distinction between the role of a storyteller in a TTRPG and a composer in a theatrical production. TTRPG involves the storyteller's participation throughout the entire process - at no point does the storyteller relinquish his work to be consumed without his direct involvement. The composer takes part in the creation phase and then frequently distances from direct participation in the theatrical production following their contribution. I therefore believe that storyteller skills prove most relevant to a composer while working on a project.

When discussing the features of TTRPGs, we singled out Improvisation, Managing Expectations and Story Structure. Now let us examine each of these features in turn and see how they apply to theatre.

Improvisation in Theatre

Improvisational techniques when working on a theatrical piece are often referred to as **devised theatre**. This method proposes the collective work of the entire ensemble to create a script or score for a theatrical work.

An ensemble usually consists of actors, but often other participants play an important role in the collective creation process: the artist, composer, choreographer, and musicians. Musicians can play just as important a role as actors, participating equally in the theatrical action. This trend is embodied in a genre such as **instrumental theatre**, though its elements are not exclusive to it. These can include musicians being free to move around the stage, having greater acting freedom, and using body language and speech while on stage. This kind of agency given to musicians helps enhance their role and the artistic effect of the piece.

In many cases, participants' contributions can go beyond their professional qualifications. Indeed, it is difficult to expect a musician to be a professional actor or an actor to be a virtuoso on a musical instrument. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the mutual influence of all participants on one another or the desire of many artists to improve their performing or acting skills in the course of working on a play. For example, while working on "Freylekhs", actors more trained in plastique and pantomime helped musicians find the right positioning and movement for scenes. And in "Ptishka", two of the actors also played musical instruments, successfully combining both functions with some help from fellow musicians.

A director and composer can improvise together with the creative ensemble and then process the material, turning it into a script and score. It should be noted that this method of work takes a long time. Improvisation is usually used only in the process of creating a theatrical piece. By the time it's presented to the audience, it already has either a fixed or partially fixed form.

In the genre of **improvisational theatre**, however, the entire performance is built on improvisation techniques, some of which may also be useful in a devised theatre approach. The improvisers define the action of the scene together in a process of co-creation. Any action, sound played or phrase spoken becomes an offer that defines an element of reality of what is happening on stage. Participants must accept an offer from their colleagues. They add a new offer, which can be related to the previous one. This technique is called "Yes, and..." and it is what helps develop the scene. Participants agree to the offer, and then, based on the proposed material, add new information to the narrative. Refusing to accept an offer is called denial and it hinders the development of the scene, just as asking a question in response to an offer. While the "Yes, and..." technique is good for starting an improvisational scene, director David Alger of Pan Theatre (Oakland, California)

recommends developing the scene further by constantly revising and adding detail, focusing on the characters' relationships.

It may seem counterintuitive for composers to delegate some functions and leave intentional blank spots in their score. This is where experience as a storyteller in TTRPG can help. By focusing on the performers as players who have their own right of interpretation, the composer's own perception of the music gains enormous creative potential. It is often more advantageous for a composer to make room in the score for the musicians' potential to unfold rather than demand perfect execution of a particular part. This means having a detailed "setting" consisting of various building blocks such as sketches, timbral solutions and rhythmic elements, which can be used at any moment.

Managing Expectations during work on a production

A composer starts out with the general understanding of the style and genre of the upcoming production. This understanding needs to be shared among the ensemble, which is where techniques for managing expectations come into play. For specific stylistic tasks, a composer converses with musicians in the ensemble, identifying their knowledge, skills and understanding of the intended style, often before rehearsals even begin. This dialogue enables one to navigate between every actor's personal aptitudes, interests and talents.

Establishing the rules of process and adjusting the role of improvisation can be very important. In TTRPG, a storyteller can hold a trial meeting to test how much interest everyone really has in the intended system and story, based on prologue or overall concept. A small meeting where a composer can test their ideas, improvise with the ensemble, and build connections can help advance the work.

Such a preparatory meeting is like a reading session conducted by actors. Musicians can read from the score sheet the composer brought, discuss the general approach to the music of the play, and look for the first time at the improvisation materials the composer might prepare. The composer informs the ensemble of the main type of music planned for the play and potentially highlights the most challenging parts of the score. Bringing a fragment of an episode that is the most difficult to perform may be a good decision - that way the composer can assess the skills of his ensemble and take it into account during future work.

But a fair question arises - why form expectations in the theatre at all? For example, many directors prefer the opposite - to deal with a tabula rasa and use the most unbiased, raw

impressions of the ensemble as they work on the performance. I am certain each author will find their own answer and a more comfortable approach. Our analysis and the storyteller's position nevertheless leads to the following thought. The ensemble's lack of information will make their work more passive. In such a situation, their opinion is not requested, and their creativity manifests itself only in how exactly to play the music written by the composer. If you put musicians in this situation at the very first stage, there is a danger of initially creating difficulties in communication and losing the opportunity to create freely as a group.

Giving the performers more freedom while expectations are being formed, allows each participant to bring something of their own based on their individuality, rather than just perform a given function.

In this way, the play *Ptishka* was created with two actors who also played the guitar and could switch roles over the course of the play, turning into different characters that the main characters meet and returning to the musical ensemble at certain points. Their personal skills and interest in this kind of stage behaviour motivated me and the director to make this a major feature of the play, where the musical ensemble would play the parts of all of the secondary characters. Such a creative solution was made possible by conveying to the ensemble that their various skills and interests could come into play, letting them know that thinking and acting outside the box was welcome.

In a situation where a composer is working with a specific ensemble, they can lean on the experience, preferences, strengths and interests of all participating musicians. Much like a TTRPG storyteller working on a future story, a composer should propose roles for each of the artists. This can refer to identifying those who would be interested in and capable of playing solos, those who are the most artistically trained, and so on. Personal details can improve the story if a composer takes this into account during the preparation phase. And in order to tap into said details, we manage the actors' expectations, indicating the extent of their initiative and areas in which it can be implemented.

Work on the structure of the performance

Every art medium utilised in theatre exists and performs in the context of a story. This includes a composer's work which doesn't simply follow the director's wishes or musical logic. These sources of guidance alone do not result in theatrical quality. This is why storytelling experience is so beneficial for a composer, forming an understanding of where music will be most effective and appropriate to the action. As we have discussed before, the

perspective of tabletop role-playing implies an understanding of story structure and even provides tools to tailor the experience to be story and genre-appropriate.

The beats system that Robert Laws offers helps the composer to structure the action on stage and highlight key moments. However, it does not become a guide for the composer to write a score. There is no need, for example, to associate any of the beats with a singular theme or instrument although technically, the composer can use a specific leitmotif or timbre combination of instruments to emphasise one of the beats.

The main benefit of this technique for the composer is to synchronise his work with that of the director and ensemble. The composer can use the beats system to analyse the story, identify its turning points, and work on the score from there. The very fact that the beat changes can be a cue for the composer to introduce a new element into the musical texture or conversely, interrupt the music and allow space for speech or silence.

Moreover, music itself can become a beat in a scene. It is very emergence can change the mood of characters in the scene, heighten the sense of tension, or switch to a dramatic beat. A composer who understands and observes the logic of the scene can respond to nuanced changes, using tools at their disposal to enrich the production.

We have already examined improvisation both in TTRPGs and theatre, but it is important to note that both these types of improvisation retain structure, if a flexible one. Writing stories for TTRPG campaigns teaches us that our plot will most likely not be rigidly followed. Instead, they will be heavily affected by improvisation. Perhaps the most overt manifestation of such an approach to storytelling occurs in **immersive theatre**. Often, this genre uses venues not originally designed for performance. They are chosen on the basis of their ability to form a more vivid image and enhance the story, and it can be a factory floor, a city street, or an open field. A traditional theatre hall may also be suitable, but only if it is transformed to resemble some other space, losing traditional elements such as seats and a stage. In such spaces, audiences can be encouraged to move freely.

Key to this genre of theatre is the extent of audience participation. Members of the audience can pick up props, talk to the actors and give performance suggestions. They can even become characters in the play. They may also be asked to participate in changing the course of the play through a collective vote to steer the plot in a new direction. The audience is involved in co-creating the play, which introduces brand new beats that can turn the performance in unexpected directions. This applies even to something as simple as the

audience choosing what to observe. Sometimes immersive performances have multiple storylines, each developing in a specific location. The audience chooses which one they want to follow.

This flexibility of an immersive theatre production bears very strong resemblance to the malleable flow of a TTRPG campaign that can shift in unexpected ways based on choices made by the participants. In both of these fields, beats can be identified and used as guiding points to maintain an overall narrative. In conclusion this shows us an overlap between all three tools we have discussed. The audience's expectations are expanded to include ways in which they can take part in the performance. This results in a naturally improvised story which remains coherent through the use of structural points such as the beats proposed by Robert Laws.

Examples of some TTPRG processes in the Arts

Interview with Sergey Okunev

Sergey Okunev is a young Russian director. His account of the play "Rape Me" staged at the Yermolova Theatre (Moscow, 2020) was interesting in terms of improvisation and preparation of the creative space for the actors. Together with the composers, he was able to implement many vivid sound ideas that could complement or create events in the scene. The actors also became co-authors of the music during the performance, using various musical instruments and mundane objects and improvising with the soundscape.

"This production is based on a contemporary Russian play by Irina Vaskovskaya. It tells about the everyday life of middle-class people, discussing the crisis of modern youth, a generation unable to find a purpose in life and find themselves in this world. It is important to me that the play is about people I know. They are a different kind of people, a new lost generation who have everything but the main thing - the meaning of life. They don't understand why they're here, and they don't understand all the laws that society dictates. You can't pretend that these people don't exist - they do, and it's very important to let them speak out.

Work on the play began in 2019 and went on for a total of about 9 months. That was before the pandemic and when it hit the premiere was postponed. In August 2020 I invited two composers and sound designers, Oleg Buyanov and Grigory Rakhmilovich. The sound

changed completely from its initial concept from when there was no real theatrical solution. Their involvement produced an incredibly strong artistic effect.

We began by managing expectations, looking for a solution for the production. We concluded that the score would consist not of music, but of the sounds of the characters' surroundings. Actors took part in this discussion, all of us thinking together how we could convey the intent of the play. In this way we discussed every scene to find the best option.

During rehearsals with the actors, composers recorded the dialogues and then, at home, they matched the sounds to the scene, choosing the exact moment when a certain sound should appear. Our musical instruments actually included things such as a bag from IKEA or a pill dissolving in a glass of water, all amplified with the use of microphones.
Together with the composers we prepared a musical world on stage for the actors. A living world with different devices and instruments that they could interact with at their own discretion, using them in the story.

For example, we purposely bought smartphones. But they were loaded with samples with chaotic sounds that you could scroll back and forth through at will. Then during the rehearsals we tried for a long time to understand the limits in working with the phones, but we found a certain approach to this instrument, changing something in the process.

There were even more creative suggestions. The composers proposed using microwave popcorn noises. Even an old Soviet dryer with a rotating drum became our instrument.

One of the heroines is a very animated young girl. The composer (Oleg Buyanov) took the beginning of an Allj song (a Russian hip-hop artist), cut the track and swapped the parts. The result was a dance beat in the spirit of Lorenzo Senni, which does not develop, stands still. The heroine walked around with her headphones exposed, turning the volume up and down, all with this annoying melody. That was the kind of musical direction she picked herself."

Sergey gives interesting examples of actors improvising in the soundscape created by composers:

"Actors in general often found themselves in the role of musicians. For example, we had a rather tense scene of characters conversing, and the character observing the conversation created the musical background: she put a tattoo needle to a wooden stencil, the way one learns to make tattoos. We amplified the sound and it made for a great backdrop.

Another example is a conversation between the heroine and her partner. He has a glass of wine in his hand. We put a microphone next to him and the moment he drinks the wine and says something into the glass, we would use frequency filters to turn it into a high-pitched squeak that was built into the score.

Or the scene where all the characters get together, there's already so much going on between them, and they pretend it's okay. And the heroine, who is watching from the sidelines, is sitting on stage with a midi controller, extracting recorded sounds, clips of sounds from comedy television, laughter, applause and other such noises. She created the atmosphere and context, emphasizing the idea with commentary and laughter from the sidelines.

The composers brought ready-made ideas, but then tested them with the actors. One scene depicted a house party. It had good lyrics, but the composers came up with a solution that changed the scene a lot in the end. They put in a subwoofer, and a tray of glasses was brought out on it. Next to the glasses stood a directional microphone. The heroine would come up during the scene and put her glass on the tray, squeezing all the glasses together. The composer would then turn on the bass and the glasses would rattle around, blocking out the dialogue. The composer used a lot of different bass tracks, he wanted to create the effect of a musical track that seemed to be playing behind the wall, appearing then disappearing to let the audience hear the dialogue again. And there were a lot of variables: how to place the glasses, what angle to put the microphone at. And it was always unpredictable.

In the same scene, during a rather unpleasant, intimate conversation between the characters, the composer suggested using a jazz vinyl record with a piece of duct tape. The hero would put the record on, and when the needle reached the duct tape the needle would pop off, creating a loop, so the characters' conversation would also start going in circles. Curiously enough, the actor who put the record on knew when to put it in, but not when it would loop."

Talking about the final stage of rehearsals, Sergey draws attention to how elements of improvisation were reduced but did not disappear completely from the performance.

"We negotiated the rules of interaction at rehearsals, and two weeks before the premiere all the instruments were prepared, we cleaned up volume levels and ran sound checks during rehearsals. At which point we weren't improvising as much anymore.

The actors' state affected the performance. Whenever they weren't at their best, the score would also collapse. Other times things would match perfectly, each sound placed exactly where it needed to be. For example, the dryer was set on a timer, and sometimes it would go off exactly as the heroine was leaving the stage. It worked very well!

Of course, we tried to make everything work according to plan, but everyone knew there was an element of chance. In fact, it pleased us. While that may have made the performance messier, that moment of unpredictability pleased the troupe, especially when everything worked out with perfect timing, almost by magic."

Interview with Peter Zundel

Working with children's theatre director and playwright Peter Zundel gives an outstanding example of a collaborative creative work where all participants are given a great extent of creative freedom. It highlights the importance of dialogue, encouragement and emphasizing the significance of everyone involved in the process.

"In my life and work, no matter what I do I have an important concept in my mind - the loom. A huge frame on which the individual threads appear first and then form a picture. I feel like such a frame, but where to get the threads from. Then I started asking people, going to them with an open heart, like an open door. But how do I open the hearts of the people around me?

I begin my work with nothing but my experience in my baggage and see myself as nothing more than a servant of a creative work. It is a kind of gratitude and quiet humility to be part of the process. I put down a blank sheet of paper and ask others to imagine a picture on it. And then I take the story out, thread by thread, and then go left and right along my frame, connecting the dots. If in the process I tell you who to be, you would be lead astray. You have to be yourself first, love yourself and help others open up. In the end we create our shared tapestry, a story."

As an example of his method, Peter talks about his work on the children's opera *Eyas Entdekung.*

"The children's opera *Ayas Entdechung* was a project of the Primarschüle Münsterplatz in Basel, for the end of the school year. I was invited as a storyteller and screenwriter to create a story with the children. By then I had already done over 50 workshops both in groups and individually, and had developed a specific method.

We created the story over the course of two evenings. On the first day, I put a large paper sheet in front of the children and asked everyone to look at it. A special light was put up and I suggested that they cover their eyes slightly and look at the sheet. Children began to fantasise, some saw yellow at first. We began to think what it could be, fire, maybe the sun or a giraffe? There was a real argument, and the paper remained blank. It was very important not to interrupt this process, to let it flow. Finally, we found a solution and it took about 45 minutes.

For the next meeting, I asked them to draw a picture of what we were discussing. The children brought in 50 pictures with the same image, all of them accepting the beginning of the story. Then I would take the picture, put it in front of them, and we would decide if it was the beginning, the middle, or the end.

And then we made up stories for every detail the children drew in the pictures, whether it was a flower or a dragon. They would talk and I would repeat what they said. And with each repetition, if they agreed it stayed and we moved on. We would add a new element, discuss where it came from and I would repeat everything again along with the new element. The last repetition I wrote down on paper.

Finally, when the children had drawn different parts of the story, I asked them to name all the characters. It is very important to then bring the children back to reality. If you work for three hours with the story and do not bring them back, it may be problematic; they will be over-excited by their own imagination.

In the last stage, at home by that point, I combine and structure the material. The next day we discuss the story and if everyone agrees, the story is ready.

This is when we started working with the composer, Johannes Schild. I thought we could use my approach in making music and after discussing it, I found a complete understanding. He invited the children to stand in a circle around a sheet of paper with my lyrics. And then the composer told them not to read it, but to sing it! Of course, they were embarrassed, because how could they sing if they didn't know the melody? But he said the melody was

already in them! That's what I told them when we were doing the lyrics. The kids started singing, and Johannes sat at the piano and immediately caught their tunes, played them and harmonised as they went along. And once he started playing, the kids got braver, the details and colours came out. In as little as 30 minutes the song was on paper!

For me, working with the composer was exciting and interesting. I found a great deal of confidence in what I was doing and he gave me the opportunity to be a part of the process. I helped establish communication between the children and the composer, motivated them to sing more boldly, helped them not be shy, but I didn't influence the music itself."

Peter sees overcoming prejudices and fears as an important detail for improvisation during co-creation. This process is shared between theatrical work and TTRPGs, where reconciling differences between concepts, motivations, views on the story and genre is a crucial condition of a successful production or campaign respectively.

"An interesting aspect was overcoming prejudice. After all, the fear of being ridiculed or criticised by others after boldly putting forward an idea can greatly slow down the process. Here it is important to "conjure" and "give" each participant a sense of being part of a whole with its own strengths and weaknesses. In essence, it is always about love, trust and respect. And I said don't be afraid, be brave, you are part of a story.

Here's one story we came up with. We made up a story with the kids about a girl and a boy who had toys, an elephant and a tiger. And then we decided which child had which toy. We decided: The girl has the elephant and the boy has the tiger. Then one boy in the group started crying - he wanted the boy to have an elephant. The children argued with him, because we had already decided everything and there were more of them. But I stopped them, saying that if he is crying, it means it is very important. I sat down with him and asked him to tell me why it was so important for the boy to have an elephant. He looked at everyone, he was scared because he had something very personal to say. So he said he had an elephant himself. Then everybody agreed. Before it was just an idea, but when the kids realised it was something personal, they easily agreed. There were a lot of personal moments that came up during the work and the kids would start arguing and I always tried to find an opportunity to hear everyone."

Interview with Sebastian Androne Nakanishi and Stephan Teuwissen

Larger projects with a tighter hierarchy can make it more difficult to apply the features we've seen in TTRPGs. We had a conversation with composer **Sebastian Androne Nakanishi** regarding his work on the music for the play *Nosferatu* (Konstanz, Germany, 2022). In our conversation we touched on the subject of improvisation and Sebastian gives this definition:

"Improvisation is a muddy creative act. You are allowed to improvise, but you need structure, as Lutoslawski said, you need certain limitations to make improvisation interesting and consistent with your intention."

When he started work on the music, he received detailed advice and stylistic recommendations, which were prescribed by the playwright in the text of the play. For this incarnation of *Nosferatu* it was decided to turn to the genres of Charleston, traditional Romanian folk music and to work with the tropes of the horror genre. The musical ensemble consisted of brass and woodwind instruments, as recommended by the director and playwright.

For all the limitations in the text, the composer feels free to improvise and interpret the themes in his work on the music.

"The playwright did not want stylistic perfection, but he wanted people to feel like they were in the 20s."

For example, while working on the Charleston, Sebastian creatively changed many of the typical parameters of this dance.

"I used swing, played with chords from the later jazz era and made music in minor to achieve the feeling of contaminated dance, tainted by a vampire."

In expressing his understanding of improvisation, Sebastian also says the following:

"I had all these limitations, but inside it I definitely improvised. What does it mean to improvise for me? It's playing with very abstract things. For example, I took the names Dracula and Vlad, and I made a motif based on these names. I worked with both intuition

and reason. In other pieces I had text, which was supposed to be sung. Here the improvisation factor is much smaller, because I am even more constrained. I follow a more direct approach in the act of composing."

During work on the play, there were a number of blockers. The composer did most of his work on the score at home, and then could not attend all of the rehearsals. The composer was counting on performers trained to perform contemporary music, but the performers did not meet all of his needs. Sebastian notes:

"I did not know my ensemble, because we were introduced one month before the premiere. The musical director sent me a recording from the first rehearsal and I was not pleased with the result."

In the end, even with the composer's presence at rehearsals, it turned out that he lost some of his influence on the final realisation of his music. The musical director worked with the ensemble and it was he, together with the director and screenwriter, who made most of the changes on stage. The problem is that the composer is not always consulted in making decisions:

"Everything was happening too fast, the director and music director were making decisions quickly and I didn't have a chance to react."

Nevertheless, Sebastian set some rules for improvisational work, following the idea of the overall musical language of the piece.

"For me, the entire thing needed to be united with the same musical genetic code. Sometimes the musicians were asked to emphasise the horror trope and I recommended choosing specific intervals for these improvisations."

Regarding the structural organisation of the material and the use of scene beats Sebastian says:

"To me beats function as turning points that mark a change in direction. I don't think it's something achieved with my music, but rather by the writer."

Although most of the beats/changes in direction were made through writing, and the writer even made notes about the music, Sebastian still wasn't completely detached from the act of

telling a story. The technical assignment allowed Sebastian to set expectations and allowed him to select and process material appropriate to the playwright's idea. Sebastian's knowledge of the theme allowed him to emphasise certain elements of the story and incorporate personal preferences into the score.

"I think I was telling a lot. I used material from Dracula, used Wojciech Kilar theme from the soundtrack of Dracula by Francis Ford Coppola. For one part I even used some personal material - a children's song from my son."
Sebastian concludes our interview by saying:

"I created another layer of the story. Although it was subtle, I felt like a storyteller too."
This thought allows us to conclude that anyone involved in the process has a chance to tell part of the story with the tools specific to them.

We also had a chance to speak to the playwright for the same production, **Stephan Teuwissen**. Commenting on his recommendations to the composer, Stephan says that detail never becomes an obstacle to improvisation.

"In a way, I wrote what kind of music I would expect in that place or that moment. Those footnotes were very precise. For example, I said I would like to have very cliched folk music here or something that tastes like Alban Berg. And it was always correlated dramaturgically to the things going on the stage. But when I write something like this, that leaves a composer a lot of room."

Nevertheless, in some situations the composer as well as the rest of the ensemble have to take into account the conditions of the production and put up with restrictions. Especially when it comes to big productions.

"When there's not enough time and based on the abilities of the ensemble, you have to scale back and fall back on things that you are convinced will work. It comes down to a strategic decision for the production to succeed."

Stephan points out how important it is to be able to give up possibly good ideas in order to make the most productive use of the resources you have.

"You may think that the solution is to simply replace musicians who don't bring what you need to your score. But instead you have to adapt, to scale down brutally. The goal is not

that they should perform the exact music you write. It's to make wonderful music. If wonderful music is very simple and contains only one 10th of what you began with - so be it!"

It's worth following what the actor has to offer or being willing to rework your material to suit them. The playwright, like the composer, is in constant creative dialogue with the performer.

"You write music and then you discover that this actor is very good, or very bad in doing something and you start rewriting or recutting or it takes too much time or too much energy. And then you have a dialogue going on. What can they do with my music or my text?"

Stephan describes the following situation at a performance as an example:

"As a writer, I discovered that there is one actor I liked a lot and he spoke fluent French. So I've started to rewrite his part and added phrases in French into the play. And I did it in such a manner that you can understand what he is saying even if you don't speak French. The context explains the text. And it's exactly the same thing that you do with music - scale it down, rewrite it, adapt it."

While working on the piece, the composer decided to use the theme from the film Dracula by Wojciech Kilar. Here is what Stephan says about this decision:

"Elements of Wojciech Kilar's theme from Dracula created a wonderful riff, although to me it was very strong and prominent and more dramatic than I wanted for the play. But it was still included, because I like to have some friction with my own ideas."

The theme remained and even the contradiction between the screenwriter and the composer did not prevent elements from eventually reconciling and coexisting in the same work. This example is also emphasized in TTRPGs, where the storyteller may sometimes accept even the most contradictory suggestions of the players, which may not correspond to his vision, if they turn out to be strong enough and important enough for the players themselves.

In describing scene work, Stephan talks about how the interaction between action and music can be approached from different angles. The action can adapt to the music, but the music can also adapt to what's going on in the scene.

"There is no right or wrong but you have to adapt because of the mise en scene, because it has been done on the stage some things have to change or to develop. The same problem

with a mix - when music sounds and actors are talking at the same time. You can of course lower down everything so you can understand the text. But you can also reduce the bass or higher frequency and that changes the music you hear on stage."

Speaking about whether the serial story structure in TTRPG applies to the way rehearsals are organised in a theatrical production, Stephan says:

"I would not call this storytelling, that's kind of strategy management of rehearsals. In theatre, usually you have a table reading, everyone sitting around the table, they read the text, the director gives comments and information, they listen to the mockups and the ensemble gives the general mood. During the next two or three days the director chooses two or three selected scenes to work on their details to give a taste of how it will work."

We can see that while the series of rehearsals and sessions of a roleplay campaign are somewhat similar, theatrical rehearsals do not aim to tell the story chronologically. Their task is to structure the material and develop a strategy for working with it.

In his last statement Stephan brings up a curious preference when it comes to theatrical productions:

"From my point of view, I would prefer to have less technique. Big theatre productions are constructed like a machine: joke-scene-stage effect. These are used as a medium, but they aren't limited to fun or entertainment."

When asked how this could have been avoided, Stephan says:

"I would rework the play and the rehearsal to avoid the mechanical aspect from becoming too strong. I would work harder to explain that there is more to the play than just entertainment. I would make it less perfect."

Stephan stresses that imperfection can be much more interesting and it fascinates him more as an artist. In TTRPGs stories are inherently imperfect, too. Players will never follow a certain path, and their decisions will be made on the spot. In this way the storyteller's quest for perfection might only ruin the fun of the game.

Interview with Till Löffler

I spoke with composer and teacher Till Löffler about the peculiarities of a composer's work in theatre and how exactly the peculiarities we identified in our analysis of TTRPG can find application in a composer's work. Till gives many examples of working on managing expectations, improvisation during ensemble rehearsals and the mutual influence of an ensemble, and working with beats and creating them through music.

In discussing the improvisational approach to work on material, Till says that form follows content first and foremost.

"Every theatre play and ensemble creates its own rules, and every work takes place between people. It's important to specify the topic or provide relevant references. Your ensemble needs to be aware of the extent of improvisation you're looking for, in which case their freedom may well extend beyond rehearsals to the on-stage production. It's important to feed them a lot of information, including so-called secondary literature. The primary literature would be the play, the text we are dealing with. Secondary literature covers information on the topic of the piece: what is behind the story we are telling. For example, you told the story about a Jewish wedding and you needed to explain what a Jewish wedding is, because there is a tradition of 1000 years, there are dances, there are specific rhythms, etc. There are two reasons why we inform our ensemble. One is of course to ensure they know what we are talking about, but our second goal is to create common knowledge. So we all heard the same dances, and we all discussed the same topics. We, as a group, experience a lot of music during the rehearsals and then we have a common basis on which we can improvise."

While important, there are different approaches to managing expectations. A director's creative vision may in fact demand a degree of spontaneity rather than thoroughly informing the ensemble.

"Usually, if it's possible I invite musicians to the reading session so they are already part of a group. Some directors want all the actors to have already learned the text by the very first rehearsal, and be able to spell it without the paper in their hand. Other directors might say "I don't want you to learn any of these words because I believe if you learn the words you will learn your interpretation as well and then you will come with a fixed idea. And if you are stuck on a fixed idea there is no room for working together". Instead, we would have to filter out all these ideas that the actor created in their living room at home. With so many different

ways of working, I think one has to define a goal for their work. To say what kind of theatre project they want to create and why is it important for them to have the improvised parts with the musicians, to have the musicians feeling very free."

Till brings up an important paradox in the matter of musicians' freedom on stage.

"In music, freedom is found in the opposite direction. The more you know and the more exactly you know the sheet music, letting you play exactly what is written, the more freedom you get. The safer you are, the more you will have practised it, and the more freedom you create.

Others say it's the other way around: "No, no, don't practise it exactly, just get the idea and then let it become a new piece every evening". No repetitions - that's the only rule. Don't repeat everything you did yesterday. Do you see the opposition?

There isn't one rule that is better than the other. But there could be a rule that is better for one as an artist and as a person, one's preferred way to work."

Till emphasises the role of social contract among members of the creative team and its impact on further work on the production:

"Some groups work very well together with a defined person who is directing and has an overall perspective and is creating the whole thing on stage. But there are groups of artists that work together without having any hierarchy, so the stage designer is as involved in the creation of the story as the musicians, the actors, etc. The way you want to work defines the rules. And if you work in an ensemble without one director, then they are all directors, all writers, and all providers of creative impulses. So a kind of democracy in an art group. Then you involve all the people in the creative process and that's, of course, the process that needs much more time, it takes much longer. But in the end you pool together the creativity of not one person directing all the others, but instead, if you are a group of 10, you have the creativity of 10 people. Potential for something 10 times more fantastic, than based on the creativity of just one person.

But it shouldn't be an argument against directing because there are very good directors who involve the whole ensemble in the process but know where it is more important to lead and where it is more important to give freedom. A couple of months ago I did a premiere of a comedy play with a friend of mine, a small theatre project, and there was a director, stage

designer and someone who created the whole production. We created it all together with the same level of influence. So I wrote some texts, the actors would sometimes direct scenes, the director also chose the music and she gave comments on what I prepared for the play. So that was really created together."

An important detail Till notes is the scale of the production and the limitations it imposes. Just as in games, where the storyteller usually cannot play with a large number of players at the same time, in theatrical production the features of TTRPG cannot fully manifest themselves in a large group.

"I think like in any democracy - the bigger the ensemble the more time you need to get a good result. Of course, it's much easier if you are a couple of people creating something together. My personal experience is to involve all the people in all decisions. Therefore it's very important that all people are open-minded and know when to step back a bit when they see a person who is truly an expert in something. You could be working in a group of 10 and the other 9 might not have experience in music, composition, in arrangement. So they might not know how to make it sound good on the stage the way you know it. If I were an actor in your ensemble, I would be happy to mostly give the responsibility for music to you. I am always happy if you are open-minded and take my ideas seriously, but you are the composer and the musician so in the end the responsibility is yours. Just as for the stage designer it's light. If everyone was talking about light, that would go nowhere, because some might have a good eye, but not know how to use the instruments to create what they want to see. It's about convincing the ensemble and leading them. If you are serious in your argument and everyone feels that you are an expert they all will allow you to make those decisions. That makes a democracy. I know that I have my own opinion and can speak out against a decision, but in the end, as in democracy, I am happy if the decisions are made by those who are competent.

We make decisions much sooner than we think. For example, by inviting a violin, accordion, bass and clarinet to your ensemble, you can invite those four for everything you want, they are all on stage. At this point it's already a clear artistic decision. Even if you give them a very open and wide frame for improvisation, it won't be that huge, because you already framed it by choosing the four instruments."

Till gives an interesting example of preparation and collaborative improvisation. Here the composer set the parameters, directing the creative work, but it was the ensemble that came up with the ideas for the musical material.

"Very often I prepare the material or means to convey an atmosphere. For example, once I did music for a theatre play in Zurich and the first scene took place in a restaurant on the landside. We thought about how to create this atmosphere. During the first rehearsals, they were improvising a bit and sitting around, trying different approaches and cliches to construct it. Then I thought, what if the atmosphere of the restaurant took place only in the heads of the audience and we showed nothing of the cliche? We would just make it hearable. The ensemble was on board with that idea, they liked it because they didn't feel very comfortable playing out these cliches. And now the frame was clear and all of the actors prepared for the next day a noise or a sound that each of them had a personal interest in playing and creating. So each of these 13 actors brought something the next day, some even brought the whole kitchen with them. What was nice - it created freedom for fantasy. All were experimenting at home and they all found something and brought it to the stage. And in the end, we had the scene where the curtain opened and the whole ensemble of 13 actors were sitting on the stage with their backs to the audience, so we saw just 13 silhouettes. But everyone had something in their hands, like a cup and a spoon, and they produced noise and made sounds with their mouths to create an atmosphere of a crowded restaurant, laughing, chattering. And with 13 people doing this you get a taste of the place without seeing it.

I balanced sounds, their dynamics. We created space for little solos and a specific order - when A created something B reacts, when A becomes lower, C raises up their volume with their instrument. So it's not only one layer, it was very animated. Some of the laughter was extremely loud. And what was really nice, you didn't see movement, but still completely felt the atmosphere."

Commenting on the idea of beats, Till gives an example of his approach. He shares his fascination with the sense of time on stage and how music can affect it, creating a unique beat with every instance of change.

"What I always find interesting in scenes of theatre play is the possibility to change the inner view and the outer view of the characters. For example, if you have a scene and they are all acting and then you stop the movement and let them sing a four-voiced choir. It slows down the tempo. Not really the tempo of the scene but you can immediately change the acting in a kind of dialogue. I'm talking to you, expressing myself outside of me with my words and my gestures. And singing immediately brings the scene into my inner view. When everyone is doing the same thing to the same beat, it means that you don't have individual characters

and feelings at that moment, you bring them all together. That's a very nice way of changing or interrupting a scene because it is always very funny if after the choir part everything goes on as if there never was a choir. But it is less about the effect that interested me as a composer, it was more about changing the perspective of the characters, giving a view on them by making time stand still. You change the perception of time, the sense of it for the audience. Music can make time disappear. I did a scene where men were going to the sauna, where it was hot and they were sweating. But then they started to sing, and on the one hand it was resolving the heat, on the other it united them. And the sense of time for the whole scene changed immediately. And when the choir fell silent, everyone was back in real-time, in the silence of the sauna."

To summarise, Till returns to the composer's preparation phase once again. The tendency to keep one's mind open to ideas from the sidelines is no reason to neglect the composer's usual work on a score.

"I found that for me it is always good to be as well prepared as possible. I try to do my homework, but I always have the aim in advance of the first rehearsal to leave the homework in the drawer. I try to be very open-minded to what is there, I have ideas and suggestions because I prepared. But if I realise that we are stuck, then I open the drawer in my head and I can take something I prepared for the rehearsal. I found out that for me personally, it is a good way of working. Because it's not so strict that I come for the rehearsal with my score. It's more about being as open-minded as possible, but it also means being as well prepared as possible."

Conclusions

While researching tabletop role-playing games, I tried to find the features that were most interesting to me. I analysed my experiences as a storyteller and composer and used the features I found to analyse my own work. Over the course of my research, I relied on role-playing game literature written by game designers, books about the work of screenwriters, and books and articles about theatre to identify shared principles between these fields. I also conducted five interviews with composers, directors, and screenwriters in an effort to find common features.

Among the various qualities of TTRPGs, three were key to me: Improvisation, Expectation Management, and Structured Use of Beats. We traced the application of all these qualities through different examples in role-playing games and in theatrical productions.

An important conclusion has to do with the applicability of TTRPG features in contemporary theatre. From the similarity in scale and examples provided by our interviewees, we can conclude that TTRPGs and by extension, their techniques, apply best to small theatrical productions.

Just like a storyteller, the composer must devote time to each of the participants, and if the theatrical production includes an orchestra, it will certainly be quite difficult to dedicate an equal amount of time to each of the musicians.

Nevertheless, even in large productions, there are some practices that can lead to a healthy creative process that may well produce promising results. We saw these examples in the work of Peter Zundel, who used collective improvisation and synchronisation of expectations in his work with a large group of children. It was also evident in Stephan Teuwissen's work on *Nosferatu* which followed the skills of the performers by adapting and changing the script for them, and Sebastian Androne Nakanishi, who prepared a system of interval relationships for improvisation by performers.

For small ensembles, I believe the application of the features found in TTRPGs encounters fewer obstacles and is met with more enthusiasm, as we have seen in the examples of works of Sergey Okunev and Till Löffler.

The time allocated to production probably serves as the only serious factor that determines the extent to which the skills and features found in TTRPG are utilised.

Another conclusion that can be drawn when analysing the application of features of TTRPGs in contemporary theatre is the difference in experience between the members of a theatre ensemble and a group of players. The ensemble in theatre is not homogeneous in skill sets. It brings together specialists from different disciplines who are called upon to perform their professional tasks to the best of their ability. In turn, TTRPG players are united by shared experience and common tasks. In the end, even the difference in roles between the storyteller and the other players is not as significant as the difference in tasks of the musician and the actor. Mutual influence and co-creativity occur more easily and naturally when the participants have less of a gap in experience and speciality. Nevertheless, as we

learned from interviews with Sergey Okunev and Till Löffler, participants can find ways to overcome these differences.

It depends on the personal interest of project managers (director, screenwriter, composer, and others) in applying these techniques during the work first, and the external circumstances of the production, which guide the organisers in preparing for rehearsals second.

It is important to note that the features we have found are not exclusive to tabletop role-playing games. The goal of this thesis was not to find something unique to TTRPGs that could be applied to the work of a composer in the theatre. To me, the storytelling experience becomes a kind of lens through which I look at work in contemporary theatre.

The improvisational approach and collective creativity, the practice of managing expectations and revealing the interests of participants, and the focus on the structural development of scenes through the analysis of beats are not found exclusively in TTRPGs. They exist in theatre in their own right and find active application and development. Most of the people I have spoken to, in whose storytelling I have identified these features, either have no knowledge of TTRPG, or have heard of but not experienced them as a player or storyteller. Nevertheless, many of their experiences perfectly illustrate the interplay between composer and ensemble as being easily comparable to that between storyteller and players. These experiences, skills, and their translations into specific ways of working exist independently.

So how can TTRPG experience help a composer?

TTRPG can be the kind of hobby in which you gain these skills and experiences while having fun. Tabletop roleplaying games imply a high level of involvement from all participants while also giving a great degree of creative freedom. Such games are built around collaboratively experienced stories and rely on dialogue and negotiation between players and storyteller. This, in my opinion, marks some close similarities with creative work. Features of TTRPG outlined in this research are universally included in the process. This makes them a viable training ground for all those skills. As such, I view it as a useful resource and a highly engaging platform for any member of the theatre ensemble and especially the composer.

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