

# FASHION'S SHORTHAND OF EMOTION

Exploring the ways we interpret energy through sound, and its effectiveness in communicating the message of the collections season after season.

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There was a moment during Christian Dior's Spring Summer 2023 Haute Couture show, where Beverly Glenn-Copeland's operatic voice reverberated through the halls – or rather, through my screen – of the show space. His words “My mother says to me, ‘Enjoy your life’” rang out as the models gathered along the runway for the finale, tributing Josephine Baker and the profound impact she had on the world. There are few moments like these on the runway that can conjure such visceral emotion through a computer screen, but there I was, on a weekday morning, staring at my monitor feeling as though I was having a spiritual experience with Dior's YouTube channel. All thanks to Beverly Glenn-Copeland and his transcendental vocal cords.

The House of Dior has always had an intrinsic relationship with music, and a knack for expertly choosing the right music for a show, whoever is at the helm. Who could forget John Galliano's Dior Spring Summer 1998 Haute Couture debut, where he took over the Paris Opera and had models navigate the sprawling marble staircase to a live orchestra in their seminal couture looks. For many, there are a hundred aspects of a show that must be considered before the music, but when things feel right, when it is as expertly chosen as it was at Dior's Spring Summer 2023 Haute Couture show, it is vital to the formulation of the context that so many designers need to convey their message.

It is an idea that can feel increasingly forgotten in the digital age. As moments from shows are transformed into ten-second clips for TikTok, and overlaid with trending sounds instead of their intended composition, the framework for a specific intention or perspective is lost

in the void – leaving us with a diluted sense of a designer's message. When context is kicked to the curb and internet armchair critics are around every turn, it leaves one ruminating on the way we experience runway shows in this current paradigm, and the lack of care that shows, as the complete bodies of work that they exist as, are offered when the cheap thrill of a viral cut is around the corner.

“I'm always aware of when music elevates a show, but I'm not always struck by when music brings a show down,” Tim Blanks recently mused on an episode of *The Business of Fashion* podcast. It was an observation that stuck because, in the middle of a Fashion Month breakdown where, together with Imran Amed, Blanks ran through countless bites of show reviews, he still managed to stop and consider the impact of a poorly-chosen soundtrack. How it effects the interpretation of a collection and the energy in the room, and when misplaced, how things can so easily feel flat, jarring, ponderous. “It made me really think this season: what's the purpose of a fashion show?” Ahmed chimed in, and it was then that Blanks made a note about fashion, now, being one to three experiences: the live one, the video, and the stills. The former two are always where the message is best conveyed.

Because there is always more of the message with shows. They exist not only to present the technical work that those in the ateliers have been working on for months, but to connect with the consumer in a meaningful way. What are you trying to say? What has your process been like? What is making your creativity feel particularly charged right now? Whose ear do you want to whisper into? These are the questions we ask designers to answer for us when they send their looks down a runway. When the noise quiets and the celebrity fans' screams die down, which melody is left, if at all?

Last year, for his Fall Winter 22 collection, Giorgio Armani made the decision to hold a show in complete silence as a sign of respect to those in Ukraine, where, during the span

of Milan Fashion Week, Russia had officially waged war on the neighbouring country. At the time, the message of solidarity was more important than whichever track Mr Armani and his team had planned for that particular show, and in turn, we were able to find a point of connection during a week that felt, at times, redundant in the scheme of things.

Mr Armani's sonic decision (or lack thereof) was directly informed by world events, but show music doesn't always need to relate to something bigger than a collection to communicate what it needs to. Sometimes sound just needs to be arranged in the right way to signal who the girl of the season is. Take Nicholas Ghesquiere's Fall 23 Louis Vuitton show as a recent example, where models walked almost silently to the sounds of Paris. It was a soundscape of intermittent hurried footsteps, police sirens, the violin, cell phone ringtones and thunderstorms, and in a simple cacophony of sound, it became imminently clear that Ghesquiere had the French woman on his mind while making the collection. This is the impact that sound has on such presentations. So much so, that there was one fashion moment in particular, that went down in history for its use of sound.

In 1991, Michael Kors staged a runway show in a dilapidated loft in midtown during New York Fashion Week. Once the show began, and the music started thumping – a particularly heavy bass line was apparently the culprit – pieces of plaster started falling from the ceiling (into Suzie Menkes' hair, no less), and the roof almost caved in onto the models and guests in attendance. It caused such a ruckus that it was deemed *the* moment that the central NYFW location of Bryant

Park and the subsequent organisation of fashion week, was born.

It's moments like these that leave us wondering where fashion might be today without sound, and how vital music has always been within the language of the landscape. How would it make us feel if we didn't have these auditory filaments to bind us to meaning? What was the first show you recall whose sound probed the pleasure centre of your brain and brought you close to understanding why we do all of this?

Was it Florence Welch in the giant seashell at Chanel Spring Summer 2012? Jane Birkin in the audience at Gucci Spring Summer 2019? Sonic Youth at Marc Jacobs in 2009? Did BFRND's techno-symphonic trance at any number of Demna's Balenciaga shows inspire you to get lost in another identity, or was it Labrinth's voice at the top of the Spanish Steps for Valentino Fall 22 Haute Couture that helped you realise the significance of Pierpaolo Piccioli's singular vision of the future of couture?

We are becoming increasingly aware of music's effects on the brain and the myriad ways that it can alter our neurology and the way we experience certain feelings. With this in mind, it begs the question: where would we find the feeling in fashion if not for the music? More importantly: where would we find the fun? What would we have to aid settling on the feeling of the season if sound were out of the equation? A humble piece of card scrawled with show notes? Our mere intellect?

The ways in which music and fashion have influenced each other can be witnessed and traced back to practically every decade of the

last century. From Flappers to Mods, Punk to Grunge, each era was defined by a musical landscape that acted as a cultural timestamp to how we understood the world to be, and how we wanted to be understood in turn. As we navigate the 2020s, the rise of the digital age, and the fall of subcultures and their influence on the trend cycle, we are left with the feeling that music's link to fashion has never felt more important to preserve. For what can communicate feeling more succinctly than the

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bow of a violin or the sound of a synth? Try as they might, few expertly cut suits or clever accessories can offer the immediacy of feeling that sound can.

Tolstoy described it as the “shorthand of emotion,” and where shows are concerned, there couldn't be a more valuable currency than the need to establish a direct dialogue with an audience. It echoes in our ears, paws at our hearts, allowing us to crawl between the notes and find the resonance of the message. Where is she going? Who does she want to be? What does she want to say? Listen, and you'll find the answer in the anthem. 🎵

From top: LOUIS VUITTON FALL 23, DIOR SPRING 23, GIORGIO ARMANI FALL 22, VALENTINO FALL 22, DIOR SPRING 23, LOUIS VUITTON FALL 23.

