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ARTICLE

SCENOGRAPHIC MODELS OF CONTEMPORARY KAZAKH BALLET: TYPOLOGY, NATIONAL SPECIFICS, AND MEDIA PRACTICES

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KEYWORDS

Scenography, ballet, Kazakh theaters, typology, correspondence map, national production, media dramaturgy, tradition, innovation.

ABSTRACT. This study summarizes the scenographic designs of ballet productions by three leading Kazakh theaters – the Abai Kazakh National Opera and Ballet Theater, the Astana Ballet Theater, and the "Astana Opera" State Opera and Ballet Theater – across 40 performances from the 2016/17–2024/25 seasons, considering repertoire dynamics and scenographic solutions. The goal is to identify consistent scenography typologies and establish their relation to musical dramaturgy. Methods include a comparative analysis of classical, national, and contemporary productions; content analysis of visual assets (sets, costumes, lighting, video); mapping the "musical score ↔ visual score" correlation; and verification via programs, press releases, and reviews. Materials were compared using uniform criteria, and recurring techniques were isolated. Three stable typologies are identified: Academic, Ethnic, and Multimedia-Experimental. Growth in multimedia practices in contemporary ballets and their targeted use in national productions is noted. A universal "correspondence map" of key musical nodes and visual solutions (exposition, development, climax, denouement) shows the scene's shift from static background to dynamic participant. The study's novelty lies in the unified typological framework for the three repertoire blocks and the operationalization of media dramaturgy concepts through practice-oriented correspondence maps. The discussion stresses balance between tradition and innovation, the risks of technological redundancy, and personnel and infrastructural limits. Practical steps: early inclusion of media dramaturgy, digital libraries of ethnic codes (ornaments, palettes, lighting/projection presets), phased equipment renewal, and specialist training. Prospects include expanding performances, audience surveys, and piloting AR/VR for the development of a hybrid scenography model.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORS

Saida Sattybayeva – conceptual design of the study; setting goals and objectives; development of methodology; collection and organization of empirical material; "Introduction", "Materials and Methods" sections preparation; initial version of the text.

Nartay Yeskendiroy – methodological verification; analysis of results and preparation of figures and tables; "Literature Review", "Discussion" and "Conclusion" sections preparation; editing and revision of the text; bringing the manuscript into compliance with the publication requirements.

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МАҚАЛА

ҚАЗІРГІ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ БАЛЕТ СЦЕНОГРАФИЯСЫНЫҢ МОДЕЛЬДЕРІ: ТИПОЛОГИЯ, ҰЛТТЫҚ ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕР ЖӘНЕ МЕДИАПРАКТИКАЛАР

Авторлар қолжазбаның соңғы нұсқасын оқып, мақұлдады және мүдделер қақтығысы жоқ деп мәлімдейді.

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Дәйексөз үшін

Саттыбаева, Саида, және Нартай Ескендиоров. «Қазіргі қазақстандық балет сценографиясының модельдері: типология, ұлттық ерекшеліктер және медиапрактикалар». *Saryn*, т. 14, № 4, 2025, 95–116 б.
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Тірек сөздер

Сценография, балет, қазақстандық театрлар, типология, сәйкестіктер картасы, медиадраматургия, дәстүр, инновация.

Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеуде 2016/17–2024/25 маусымдары аралығындағы 40 спектакль бойынша репертуардың жаңару динамикасы мен сахналық-техникалық шешімдері ескеріле отырып, Қазақстанның үш жетекші театрындағы – «Астана Балет» театры, «Астана Опера» мемлекеттік опера және балет театры және Абай атындағы Қазақ ұлттық опера және балет театры – балет қойылымдарының сценографиялық шешімдеріне қатысты материалдар жинақталады. Жұмыстың мақсаты – сценографияның дәйекті типологияларын анықтау және олардың музыкалық драматургиямен байланысын көрсету. Зерттеу әдістері классикалық, ұлттық және заманауи қойылымдарды салыстырмалы талдауды; визуалдық құралдарға (декорациялар, костюмдер, жарық, бейнематериалдар) жүргізілген контент-талдауды; «музыкалық партитура ↔ визуалды партитура» қатынастарының картасын, сондай-ақ деректерді театр бағдарламалары, пресс-релиздері мен рецензиялары арқылы тексеруді қамтиды. Материалдар біркелкі критерийлер арқылы салыстырылды және қайталанатын әдістер анықталды. Сценографияның үш тұрақты түрі анықталды: академиялық, этникалық және мультимедиялық-эксперименттік. Қазіргі заманғы балеттерде мультимедиялық тәжірибелердің өсуі және олардың ұлттық қойылымдарға мақсатты түрде енгізілуі атап өтілді. Музыкалық құрылымның негізгі түйіндері мен визуалдық шешімдердің (экспозиция, даму, кульминация, шешім) арақатынасын айқындайтын әмбебап «сәйкестіктер картасы» ұсынылады; ол сахнаның статикалық фоннан әрекеттің динамикалық серіктесіне айналу үдерісін көрсетеді. Зерттеудің жаңалығы үш репертуарлық блокқа арналған бірыңғай типологиялық шеңберді қалыптастырумен және медиадраматургияны тәжірибеге бағдарланған сәйкестік карталары арқылы операционализациялаумен айқындалады. Талқылау дәстүр мен инновация арасындағы тепе-теңдікті, технологиялық артықшылық тәуекелдерін, персонал мен инфрақұрылымдық шектеулерді атап көрсетеді. Қорытындыда практикалық қадамдар көрсетілген: сахналау үдерісіне медиадраматургияны ертерек енгізу, этнокодтардың цифрлық кітапханаларын (ою-өрнектер, палитралар, жарық пен проекциялардың мінез-құлықтық пресеттері) құру, жабдықтарды кезең-кезеңмен жаңарту, мамандарды дайындау. Перспективалары – спектакльдер корпусын кеңейту, көрермендерге жүргізілетін сауалнамалар және сценографияның гибриді моделіне арналған AR/VR технологияларын пилоттық сынақтан өткізу.

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СТАТЬЯ

СЦЕНОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ МОДЕЛИ СОВРЕМЕННОГО КАЗАХСТАНСКОГО БАЛЕТА: ТИПОЛОГИЯ, НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ И МЕДИАПРАКТИКИ

Авторы прочитали и одобрили окончательный вариант рукописи и заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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Саттыбаева, Саида, и Нартай Ескендиоров. «Сценографические модели современного казахстанского балета: типология, национальные особенности и медиапрактики». *Saryn*, т. 13, № 4, 2025, с. 95–116. DOI: 10.59850/SARYN.4.14.2025.317. (На английском)

Ключевые слова

Сценография, балет, казахстанские театры, типология, карта соответствий, медиадраматургия, традиция, инновации.

Аннотация. В настоящем исследовании обобщаются материалы сценографических решений балетных постановок трёх ведущих казахстанских театров – Театра «Астана Балет», Государственного театра оперы и балета «Астана Опера» и Казахского национального театра оперы и балета имени Абая – по данным 40 спектаклей сезонов 2016/17–2024/25 гг. с учётом динамики обновления репертуара и сценотехнических решений. Цель работы – выделить устойчивые типологии сценографии и показать, как они соотносятся с музыкальной драматургией. Методы исследования включают сопоставительный анализ классических, национальных и современных постановок; контент-анализ визуальных средств (декорации, костюмы, освещение, видео); картирование связей «музыкальная партитура ↔ визуальная партитура» и проверку данных по театральным программам, пресс-релизам и рецензиям. Материалы сопоставлялись по единым критериям, фиксировались повторяющиеся приёмы. Выделены три стабильных типа сценографии: академический, этнический и мультимедийно-экспериментальный. Отмечен рост мультимедийных практик в современных балетах и их точечное внедрение в национальные постановки. Предложена универсальная «карта соответствий» ключевых музыкальных узлов и визуальных решений (экспозиция, развитие, кульминация, развязка), показывающая переход сцены от статичного фона к динамичному соучастнику действия. Новизна исследования заключается в единой типологической рамке для трёх репертуарных блоков и операционализации медиадраматургии через практико-ориентированные карты соответствий. В обсуждении акцентируется внимание на балансе между традицией и инновациями, рисках технологической избыточности, кадровых и инфраструктурных ограничениях. В заключении работы сформулированы практические шаги: раннее включение медиадраматургии в постановочный процесс, создание цифровых библиотек этнокодов (орнаменты, палитры, поведенческие пресеты света и проекций), поэтапное обновление техники и подготовка специалистов. Перспективы – расширение корпуса спектаклей, опросы аудитории и пилотирование AR/VR для гибридной модели сценографии.

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Introduction

Scenography shifted from 19th-century decorative backdrops to 21st-century digital media: in the 20th century, under Adolphe Appiah and Edward Gordon Craig, the stage was conceived as a volumetric lighting system; mechanization, new fixtures, and film/video projections made it an active participant. In the 21st century, mapping, AR/VR, and algorithmically controlled lighting turned rigid sets into interactive environments responsive to movement and sound – marking a move from backdrop illusion to a dynamic partner in choreography (Howard; Hann). This evolution forms the conceptual backdrop for the analysis of Kazakhstani material in the present study.

Persistent problems: limited integration of ethnic codes with dramaturgy; uneven technical infrastructure beyond flagship venues; dependence on canonical plots; shortage of media-design and interactive-light specialists; budget constraints for original scores and scenography; aesthetic clichés that exoticize nomadic imagery; weak preservation/archiving of digital scenography and choreographic notation; fragmented collaboration among choreographers, composers, and visual teams; insufficient audience development; and a thin critical discourse that slows canon renewal:

- institutional – limited production budgets, dependence on government subsidies;
- personnel – a shortage of set designers with competencies in AR/VR and media design;
- technological – incomplete equipment of the sites with equipment for projection mapping and interactive systems.

Thus, Kazakhstan's specificity boils down to finding a balance between the careful preservation of national cultural traditions and the active implementation of digital scenographic technologies. This tension between continuity and innovation shapes the institutional context and simultaneously serves as a central framework for interpreting scenographic and musical-dramatic choices in individual productions.

Despite existing histories of Kazakh ballet/scenography, no study integrates classical, national, and contemporary productions within one methodology. While English-language scholarship advances "performative design" and "scenography as a second text," a practice–theory gap persists in Kazakhstan, evidenced by: absence of a comprehensive "musical score ↔ scenography" correspondence scheme for ballet; insufficient empirical comparisons across stylistic scenographies; poorly described mechanisms for embedding national codes in digital stage environments. Accordingly, an approach is required that purposefully "translates" theoretical concepts into an operational framework for analyzing specific performances.

In this regard, using case studies of six performances from three leading venues – the Abai Kazakh National Opera and Ballet Theater (Abai KazNOBT), the Astana Ballet Theater, and the "Astana Opera" State Opera and Ballet Theater – is a reasonable approach, allowing us to identify consistent patterns and formulate practical recommendations. The chosen cases are treated not as isolated examples, but as material through which the proposed typology and the concept of the "visual score" are put to empirical verification. From a total of 40 productions, six of the most informative and contrasting performances were selected. These, taken together, represent all three scenographic vectors – academic, national-ethnic, and multimedia-experimental –

as well as three venues with permanent ballet companies and symphony orchestras. The focus on the Abai KazNOBT, Astana Ballet and Astana Opera is due to the fact that these institutions systematically produce full-length narrative ballets and maintain extensive scenographic documentation (photo and video archives, programs, reviews), providing a comparable and sufficiently rich empirical basis for analysis. Other significant actors in the Kazakh dance landscape are not examined in detail and are outlined as independent areas for subsequent specialized research.

The aim of this work is to characterize the specifics of scenographic solutions for Kazakhstani ballet productions in classical, national, and modern styles and to trace the evolution of their interaction with musical dramaturgy and technological innovations.

Research questions:

- What types of scenography – academic, ethnic, multimedia-experimental – predominate in the repertoire of Kazakhstani ballet theaters?
- How do lighting, sets, and multimedia relate to musical dramaturgy and influence audience reception?
- How are national codes being introduced into digital scenography, and what opportunities does this open up for hybrid forms?

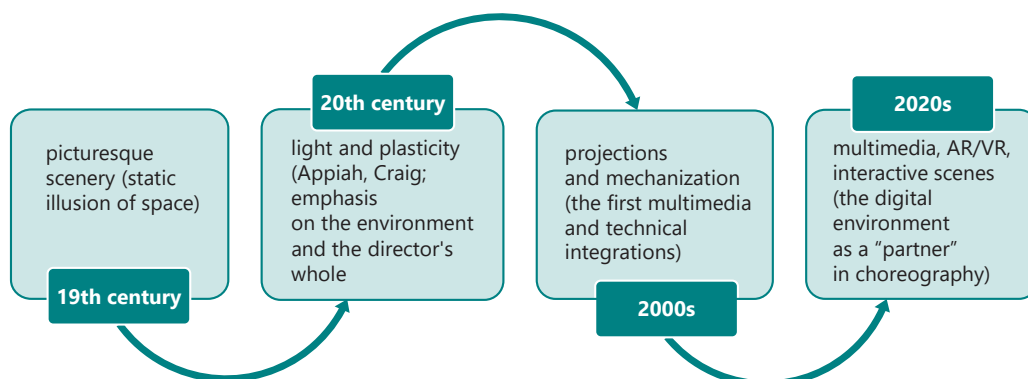


Fig. 1. Scenography: the path from static design to an interactive environment¹.

Fig. 1 captures the stages of transformation: 19th-century painted backdrops → 20th-century light sculpture → early 21st-century mechanized and projection-based solutions → 2020s multimedia interactive formats. This is the transition from an “illusory backdrop” to scenography as an independent dramatic entity, where technology and space co-perform and enhance the musical and choreographic structure. In the next sections, this overall trajectory is specified through the analysis of particular works rehearsed and staged in Kazakhstan.

The study builds on historical-theoretical scenography and Kazakhstan’s ballet context, where academic tradition, national codes, and multimedia intersect. Addressing the theory–practice gap, it undertakes a systemic analysis and a six-production case study across three leading theaters to model evolutions and ground practical recommendations for reconciling tradition and innovation.

¹ This and the following figures and tables (except Fig. 3) were developed by the authors themselves.

Materials and methods

Empirical base: 40 ballets at Astana Ballet, Astana Opera, and the Abai KazNOBT, 2016/17–2024/25. Unit of analysis: scenographic version (premiere or revised with set/light/video changes); unchanged revivals excluded. Exclusions: concert numbers, training shows, touring guests. Sources: programs and press releases, poster archives, photo/video materials, reviews.

The following criteria were used to organize the material:

- Style: classical / national / contemporary;
- Genre: romantic, epic, symbolic, experimental;
- Scenography: static / dynamic / hybrid;
- Degree of multimedia use;
- Level of symbolism;
- Functional role of the scenography: background / supplement / integration into the action;
- Dramatic coordination with the musical score.

Six representative productions were selected for comparative analysis:

- Classical: *Giselle* (Astana Opera), *Swan Lake* (Abai KazNOBT);
- National: *Kyz Zhibek* (Abai KazNOBT), *Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu* (Astana Ballet);
- Contemporary: *Touch the Light* (Astana Ballet), *Bolero* (Abai KazNOBT).

The selected examples demonstrate three established types of scenography: academic, ethnic and multimedia-experimental. For each production, an identical analytical scheme is used: stage composition, materials, costume and make-up, lighting and projections, symbolic layer, the dynamics of transformations, and, most importantly, their alignment with the key musical-dramatic phases (exposition, development, climax, denouement).

Methodological framework: comparative analysis (traditional/national/contemporary); content analysis of sets, costumes, lighting, multimedia; mapping musical reference points to a visual score; interpretation for dramatic integrity. Reliability ensured by uniform classification criteria and consistent operationalization. This methodological uniformity helps to avoid fragmentary description and positions each production within a wider typological and dramaturgical framework.

A representative corpus and clear classification enable fair comparison across classical, national, and contemporary scenography. Six case studies support detailed analysis of three stable models and their dramatic functions. Combining comparative and content analysis with a “correspondence map” yields a holistic reading of stage space, with scenography integrated to music and choreography. In other words, the empirical section acts not as an illustrative appendix, but as the main space for testing theoretical premises at the level of specific visual and musical solutions.

Results and discussion

Contemporary scenography treats the stage as an interdisciplinary environment of image, sound, and movement: Appia privileges spatial and luminous plasticity over painterly illusion (125), while Craig asserts the director’s artistic primacy over text (Palmer 93). These ideas establish the stage as an “environmental composition” in which light, texture, scale, and tempo-rhythm cohere into a single dramatic organism.

In English-language discourse, Pamela Howard defines scenography as the “organization of meanings” via space, props, costume, light, and sound (25); Rachel Hann shifts attention to eventfulness and distributed authorship (107); Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer trace the turn from décor to performative design across theater, dance, exhibition, and hybrids (76, 94); Arnold Aronson underscores the visual’s autonomy and its productive frictions with narrative (55); and Christopher Baugh reads 20th-century technology as a developmental pivot (98). Together, they frame ballet analysis as a synthesis: music provides temporal grid, movement a kinetic structure, and scenography an environmental context. The triad of score, choreography and environment serve as the backbone of our correspondence map and underpins the subsequent case studies.

Projection mapping, AR/VR, and algorithmic lighting radically extend ballet’s expressivity: millisecond “live” mapping on mobile costumes aligns digital layers to bodies; high-frequency, markerless tracking stabilizes staging and deepens immersion (Stuart and Curson 261). Theory posits “live immersion” and a dual bodily presence – physical and on-screen – reframing composition, scale, and audience focus (Lee 185; Milovanović 130). Practically, this recasts light and projections as choreographic partners and necessitates media dramaturgy, rehearsal-based setup tests, timecode calibration, and a media operator as co-performer. In leading European and Asian venues, these solutions have already formed a recognizable standard of media-saturated ballet staging, and it is against this background that the Kazakhstani developments considered in this article should be viewed. These international scenographic practices act as both a technological and conceptual benchmark for Kazakhstani theaters: the introduction of mapping, AR and interactive lighting follows global tendencies, but is mediated by local infrastructural and training limitations, which corresponds to recent analyses of post-digital choreography and digital performance environments (Milovanović 131). At the same time, the Kazakhstani material shows not only the borrowing of tools but also their reworking – for instance, immersive light environments are used to highlight national mythopoetic motifs rather than for purely abstract experimentation.

These tools also reset decision frameworks: the engineering layer (media dramaturgy, timecodes, roles) must match ballet’s semiotics. Live mapping, generative graphics, and interactive lighting succeed when semantic motifs become controllable digital structures – ornament libraries, stable color-light palettes, behavioral presets, and synchronization rules with choreography. Thus, technology shifts from end to means, actualizing tradition and localizing theatrical language. From a Kazakhstani vantage, this is a turn “from technology to meaning”: digital media articulate ornament, mythologemes, and epic poetics, redirecting research toward integrating ethnocode into contemporary scenography. In the empirical part of the article, this logic is followed through specific choices – where lighting cues reflect leitmotifs, projections track melodic development, and ethnic symbols are woven into digital textures rather than applied as superficial ornament.

In the Kazakh perspective, the technological turn is read through a cultural-semantic code: ornament, steppe mythologemes, epic poetics, and color-light solutions form a scenographic “dictionary” to be integrated into contemporary stage language (Omarova 44). Sangul Karzhaubayeva and Kabyl Khalykov systematize domestic scenography,

highlighting its philosophical-cultural context and stylistic stages (408); materials on Shara Zhienkulova document the early linkage of national plasticity and stage form, setting a stable visual tradition (costume, textures, ornament, color) (Orazbekova). In the post-Soviet frame, this aligns with post-dramatic practices and “minimal” stage aesthetics (light–body–space). For Kazakhstani stages, two strategies follow: preserve a recognizable ethnic code; translate it into digital scenography (projections, generative graphics, interactive light) to avoid “museumization.” The following cases demonstrate that both strategies coexist: some productions rest on conservative ethnographism, while others experiment with translating this code into multimedia environments.

Amid a substantial English-language corpus on scenographic theory and performance design, research on Kazakhstani ballet scenography remains fragmentary. Existing articles, reviews, and proceedings on national choreography/scenography and biographical sources lack: a holistic “music–choreography–environment” model applied to specific Kazakh ballets; a comparable corpus of classical, national, and modern productions assessed by uniform criteria (light, projections, texture, symbolism); empirical perception data (viewer/expert surveys, attention metrics in media-rich scenes). Recent scholarship on digital and technology-mediated scenography adds further detail to this picture. Studies of media-intensive theater highlight how networked and screen-based environments redistribute authorship and audience attention, advancing the idea of “interconnected dramaturgy,” in which digital layers organize shared experience rather than simply embellish it (Patti). Practice-based research on interactive dance reveals the frictions that emerge when motion tracking, projections, and sensor systems are woven into choreographic work, underlining the need for close cooperation between artists and technologists and for iterative “fine-tuning” of media during rehearsal (Barros 133). Design-oriented work on technology-mediated theater extends the spectrum of potential audience layouts and interaction formats, presenting digital scenography as a field of participatory experience rather than solely visual attraction (Esaki and Nagao). A broader historical overview of digital scenography reconstructs three decades of experimentation with projections, real-time graphics, and responsive environments, showing how these tools have moved from marginal trials to a recognized international model of performance design (Jović et al. 421). Against this background, the Kazakhstani cases examined here can be seen as a specific version of this global turn, in which emerging media-dramaturgical practices are systematically anchored in national visual codes and epic plots rather than developed in culturally “neutral” settings. This deficit defines the study’s aim: a unified-method case analysis of productions by Astana Ballet, Astana Opera, and the Abai KazNOBT to describe patterns of synthesizing national codes and digital technologies and to propose practical recommendations for media dramaturgy and the artistic integrity of stage space. Thus, the theoretical review not only outlines the topic but also directly informs the empirical design, which concentrates on how scenography, understood as a “visual score,” interacts with the musical dramaturgy of specific works.

Analysis of 40 productions at Astana Ballet, Astana Opera, and the Abai KazNOBT shows stable patterns: classics ≈40% (*Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*) with predominantly static scenography aligned to musical-dramatic logic;

national works ≈25% (*Kyz Zhibek, Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu, Zhussan, Alem*) with ethnic scenography – ornament, stable color codes, costume textures – recently hybridized via projections and yurt symbolism; contemporary experiments ≈35% (*Touch the Light, Nine, Bolero, Love Fear Loss*) employing dynamic multimedia – video art, light installations, mapping – integrated into dramaturgy. Here, the quantitative ratios are understood not only in statistical terms but also in dramaturgical ones: each segment corresponds to a distinct way of “reading” and organizing the musical score in space.

The dynamics of multimedia are indicative: in the 2000s, techniques were episodic, but in the 2020s they are already recorded in ~60% of contemporary ballets and are penetrating the classics (e. g., *Cinderella, Carmen Suite*), shifting the balance towards hybrid forms in line with global trends in scenography.

Table 1. Distribution of productions by types of scenography (summary data from three theaters; N = 40)

Scenography Type	Number of productions	Share (%)	Examples of performances
Classical Static	16	40 %	Giselle, Swan Lake, The Nutcracker
National/Ethnic Static	6	15 %	Kyz Zhibek, Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu
National with Multimedia	4	10 %	Zhussan, Alem
Modern Minimalism/Symbolism	6	15 %	Bolero, Love Fear Loss
Modern Multimedia	8	20 %	Touch the Light, Nine
Total	40	100 %	–

As Table 1 indicates, each scenographic type is linked to particular dramaturgical functions: classical productions stabilize and “frame” the canon, national pieces articulate identity, and contemporary multimedia projects probe the boundaries of immersion and formal experimentation. This pattern lies behind the subsequent choice of six key cases.

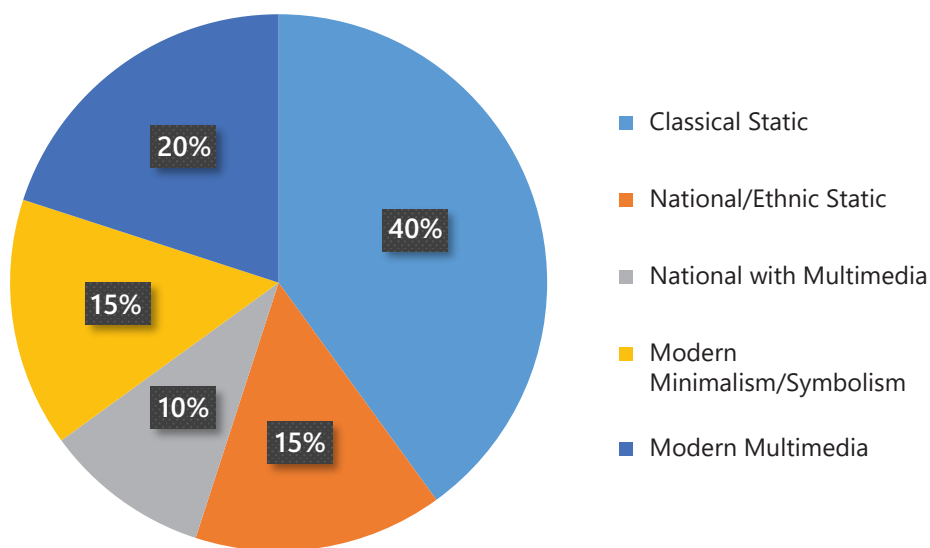


Fig. 2. Diagram of combinations of scenographic principles (based on 40 productions).

The diagram (see Fig. 2) indicates a dominant classical, static scenography (40%), evidencing repertoire stability. Contemporary works (35%) – multimedia/minimalist – are the main innovation channel. The national segment (25%) splits into “purely ethnic” and “hybrid with multimedia,” showing Kazakh codes’ integration into digital scenography. Overall, tradition–innovation balance holds, with multimedia consolidating and shaping new practices.

Kazakh ballet balances classicism and innovation: multimedia complements rather than replaces tradition, shaping a distinct cultural code. A six-production analysis (classical, national, contemporary) maps scenographic solutions across composition, materials, costume/make-up, lighting/projections, symbolism, dynamic shifts, alignment with musical-dramatic logic, and audience perception. In this way, the overall typology is anchored in specific stage events, making it possible to shift from aggregate statistics to a more detailed dramaturgical reading.

1. ***Giselle*** (Astana Opera) is a classic with a static set design (premiere – June 14, 2019). Music – Adolphe Adam; Choreography/Direction – Altynai Assylmuratova; Set Design – Ezio Frigerio; Costumes – Franca Squarciapino; Conductor – Arman Urazgaliyev. The stage space is built on traditional picturesque scenery (a forest, a village), creating a stable background. Costumes and makeup are strictly maintained in the aesthetics of 19th-century Romanticism. Lighting is predominantly static, with a soft palette. The symbolic level is built on the contrast between the “earthly” and “otherworldly” worlds. Changes are rare and smooth. The set design fully follows the musical dramaturgy, maintaining a romantic intonation. The audience is impressed by classical integrity and immersion in tradition. Within the correspondence map, the exposition and development are accompanied by even, low-contrast lighting, while the climax of the “white act” is singled out through a cool palette and pronounced spatial depth, visually prolonging Adam’s harmonic tension and the transition into the supernatural realm.

2. ***Swan Lake*** (Abai KazNOBT, updated version – November 27, 2016) is a classic, static set design. Music – Pyotr Tchaikovsky; Choreography – Marius Petipa, Lev Ivanov (classical version); Edition/Choreographer – Gulzhan Tutkibayeva; Set and Costume Design – Vyacheslav Okunev; Music Director – Askar Buribayev; Lighting – Yuliya Karakayeva. The sets present picturesque panoramas of the castle and the lake in an academic manner. The contrast of white swans and black images emphasizes duality. The lighting solution accentuates the alternation of day and night. The symbolic series is built on the images of water and swans as metaphors of purity and tragedy. The dynamics of the changes are moderate. Tchaikovsky’s musical dramaturgy is supported by smooth lighting accents. The viewer’s experience is one of strong emotional involvement thanks to the combination of music and symbolic scenography. The dramaturgical curve of the score – from lyricism to catastrophe – is echoed in the scenography: the bright, open exposition of the court scenes is progressively replaced by more contrasting, shadow-filled night-time tableaux, so that the final episodes visually compress the musical crescendo into a sharp confrontation of light and darkness.

3. ***Kyz Zhibek*** (Abai KazNOBT, ballet version) – national, static/ethnic; premiere – December 26–27, 2020. Director – Mikhail Pandzhavidze (Russia); Dance Choreography –

Aigul Tati; Dance Production – Gulzhan Tutkibayeva; Conductor – Kanat Omarov. The stage composition relies on ethnographic elements (yurt, carpets, ornaments), which form a stable background. Costume and make-up are stylized as traditional wedding and military outfits. Warm, natural-looking lighting enhances the ethnic flavor. Symbolism is conveyed through color, ornament, and attributes (dombra, yurt), creating an expressive cultural code. The dynamics of changes are minimal, the stage is predominantly static. The scenography organically follows the folk song dramaturgy. The viewer is left with an immersion into the national epic and historical context. Here, the exposition aligns with the lyrical opening songs through a calm, warm palette; as the conflict grows, denser stage compositions and more saturated colors draw focus to key dramatic points, while the denouement returns to a single dominant symbol (yurt, ornament) that “condenses” the musical resolution.

4. *Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu* (Astana Ballet) – national, static/epic; premiere – July 2–3, 2021. Music – Aktoty Raimkulova; Choreographer – Georgy Kovtun; Set Designer – Andrey Zlobin; Costumes – Anna Ipatyeva; Video Design – Dmitry Shamov. The stage composition is designed for a large scale and epic scope. The sets combine ethnic motifs with symbolic images of the steppe and sacred signs. The costumes are vividly ethnographic and meticulously detailed. The lighting solution is contrasting, enhancing the drama. The symbolic layer of the epic is read through mythologemes (the steppe as a sign of eternity). The dynamics of the scenes are limited, but built on lighting contrasts. The correspondence to the music is high: the set design accentuates the dramatic peaks. The viewer is impressed by the heroic-romantic structure and the feeling of being involved in national mythology. The score’s alternation of lyrical and battle episodes is highlighted by transitions from open, horizontally built stage images to densely filled vertical compositions, so that the scenography signals the shift from intimate motifs to public, epic ones and strengthens the musical form.

5. *Touch the Light* (Astana Ballet) – contemporary, dynamic/multimedia; premiere – June 28–29, 2024. Music – Philip Glass; Choreography – Ilya Zhivoy; Video Design – Pokras Lampas; Lighting – Konstantin Binkin; Costumes – Sonya Vartanyan. The stage composition is built on abstract light installations and calligraphic projections. The costumes are extremely laconic to emphasize the light pattern. Light and multimedia act as the central construct of the space. The symbolic plan is light as a metaphor for energy and movement. The dynamics are high: the stage is constantly transforming. The musical score is accompanied by visual improvisations. The audience experience is an immersive effect and a stay in a “live” digital space. Glass’s repetitive patterns serve as a framework for the media dramaturgy: recurring musical cells set off variations of light calligraphy, so that the climax aligns with the highest density and speed of this visual “writing,” while the denouement is signaled by the progressive “erasing” of projections, mirroring the musical fade-out.

6. *Bolero* (Abai KazNOBT) – contemporary, dynamic/minimalistic; premiere – April 27–28, 2019. Composer – Maurice Ravel; Libretto – Otávio Coral based on the poems of Bodies in Bolero; Choreography and Staging – Ricardo Amarante (Brazil). Set and Costume Designer – René David Salazar (Brazil); Lighting Designer – Yuliya Karakayeva. The stage design is an open space where the main role is played

by corporality and movement; scenery is minimal, the stage is shaped by light and plasticity. The costumes are simple, monochromatic. The lighting is dynamic and emphasizes the rhythmic structure. The symbolic layer is extremely laconic: the emphasis is on the pure energy of movement. The dynamics of changes are high and follow the escalation of the music. Ravel's score is visually supported by the escalation of light. The viewer's perception is a strong emotional effect with a minimum of expressive means. In this instance, the correspondence map is nearly direct: each surge of orchestral crescendo is matched by heightened light intensity and more intricate spatial patterns, so that the scenographic peak aligns exactly with the final orchestral climax.

Table 2. Comparison matrix of six cases based on key criteria

Ballet	Scenography Type	Multimedia	Symbolism	Functionality	Dramaturgical Correspondence	Overall Effect
<i>Giselle</i> (AO)	Static, classical	No	Earth/ otherworld dichotomy	High (stable backdrop)	Full alignment with the romantic score	Harmony, "classical illusion"
<i>Swan Lake</i> (KazNOBT)	Static, classical	No	Swan/ water as metaphors	Medium	Support of Tchaikovsky's contrasts	Emotional engagement
<i>Kyz Zhibek</i> (KazNOBT)	Static, ethnic	Partial (limited projections)	Ornaments, yurt, traditions	High	Complete match with folk motifs	Immersion in the ethnic epic
<i>Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu</i> (AB)	Static, epic	No	Mythological images of the steppe	High	Support of climaxes	Heroic-romantic effect
<i>Touch the Light</i> (AB)	Dynamic, multimedia	Yes (projections, lighting)	Light as energy	High (stage changes with the music)	Partial match, with visual improvisation	Immersion, "living" space effect
<i>Bolero</i> (KazNOBT)	Dynamic, minimalist	No (lighting only)	Energy of movement	Maximal (space = body + light)	Absolute match with the musical crescendo	Strong emotional impact

The matrix in [Table 2](#) indicates that, despite stylistic variation, all six productions exhibit a clear logic of coordination between visual and musical scores. Static academic scenography anchors the canonical structure; ethnic scenography intensifies the semantic layer at key musical points; multimedia and minimalist approaches shift part of the dramaturgical burden onto light and projections, which start to act as co-authors of the musical development.

A comparison of six productions reveals three models of scenography:

- classical – static, without multimedia, precise adherence to the music (*Giselle*, *Swan Lake*);
- national – ethnic symbols and epic imagery with moderate dynamics (*Kyz Zhibek*, *Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu*);
- modern – dynamics, multimedia and minimalism, where light and projections are independent dramatic elements (*Touch the Light*, *Bolero*).

Overall, the balance of traditions and multimedia practices forms a multilayered cultural code and expands the expressive possibilities of ballet. Thus, the empirical

analysis refines the initially stated typology and shows how each scenographic model reshapes the relationship between choreography and musical dramaturgy. In comparative perspective, these three models broadly align with international scenographic trends – academic revivalism, heritage-focused national productions, and media-saturated experimental formats – but the Kazakhstani case reveals a distinct configuration: the national–ethnic strand is not a peripheral niche but a structural core that is gradually hybridized through digital media. This sets the local trajectory apart from many European and North American contexts, where multimedia experimentation often develops in stylistically “de-nationalized” settings and only weakly engages with identity codes.

A summary analysis of performances at three theaters reveals consistent principles and typological models of scenography that reflect a balance of three vectors: academic continuity, the integration of national codes, and the active implementation of multimedia innovations.

1. Classical academicism presupposes picturesque scenery, historical costumes and lighting, strictly coordinated with the musical and dramatic canvas.
2. The national-ethnic style is based on traditional motifs – ornaments, costumes, symbolic images – which emphasize the Kazakh cultural identity.
3. Modern minimalist and symbolic aesthetics are based on the utmost laconicism of forms, the reduction of decorative layers, and the promotion of light and the plasticity of movement as the main means of expression.
4. The multimedia scenography uses projections, light installations, digital backdrops, and video art to create a fluid, transformative space.
5. The synthetic approach combines classic and contemporary elements, translating ethnic motifs into digital form and creating a hybrid expressive language.

Table 3. Scenographic principles in the productions of Astana Ballet, Astana Opera and the Abai KazNOBT

Scenographic Principle	Characteristics	Examples of Ballets
Classical Academicism	Realistic sets, period costumes, traditional lighting design	<i>Giselle, The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty</i>
National–Ethnic Style	Ethnic motifs, ornaments, traditional costumes and symbols	<i>Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu, Kyz Zhibek, Zhussan</i>
Contemporary Minimalism/ Symbolism	Abstract forms, minimal sets, emphasis on light and movement	<i>Bolero, Love Fear Loss, A Fuego Lento</i>
Multimedia/Digital Scenography	Use of video installations, projections, light graphics, digital backdrops	<i>Touch the Light, Nine, Alem</i>
Synthesis of Styles and Genres	Combination of classical and contemporary means; hybridization of tradition and innovation	<i>Romeo and Juliet, Carmen Suite, Cinderella</i>

The set design of Kazakhstani ballet is poly-stylistic: from established academic style to experimental multimedia, with a key national component. Looking ahead, the synthetic model is likely to be strengthened: classical heritage and ethnic motifs are given a digital interpretation, and new technologies are organically integrated into the language

of the performance. These principles illustrate how the synthesis operates at the level of specific artistic choices rather than remaining on a purely declarative plane.

Kazakhstani productions “translate” national codes into stage visuals: ornamentation is carried over to costumes and projections; blue-green and gold palettes evoke the steppe and tradition. Symbols of the yurt, dombra, and sacred signs function as props and digital graphics. Thus, folklore merges with technological aesthetics, forming a code where tradition seamlessly integrates into the innovative language of the stage.

Multimedia – projections, video graphics, 3D lighting – go beyond the confines of the set and become a dramatic force in their own right: a “second character” that heightens emotion and atmosphere. In *Touch the Light*, projections partner with the choreography; in *Bolero*, the escalating light echoes the musical swell. Technology ceases to be a backdrop and becomes an active element of the narrative, expanding the ballet’s expressiveness.

Table 4 presents a universal “correspondence map” between musical dramaturgy and scenographic techniques, summarizing six cases: *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Kyz Zhibek*, *Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu*, *Touch the Light*, *Bolero*.

Table 4. Correspondence map between musical nodes and visual solutions of the cases under consideration

Musical Dramaturgy	Stage Composition	Sets / Materials	Lighting / Projections	Costume / Symbolism
Exposition	Static backdrop	Traditional elements	Restrained color palette	Historical / ethnic stylization
Development	Changing compositions	Symbolic accents	Gradual lighting transitions	Enrichment with symbolism
Climax	Dynamic shifts	Contrasting sets	Bright contrasts, multimedia effects	Maximum expression
Denouement	Minimalism	Limited details	Calm lighting solution	Return to a symbolic detail

The set design follows the musical dramaturgy: the exposition is static and traditional; the development is symbolism and smooth transitions of light; the climax is contrasts, multimedia, and maximum expressiveness of costumes; the denouement is minimalism and restrained symbolism; the visual score is a parallel layer, reinforcing the narrative. In practice, this scheme turned out to be suitable for all six case studies, which confirms its heuristic value for further research on media dramaturgy in ballet.

The scenography of Kazakhstani ballets is a multilayered synthesis of tradition and innovation: academic and ethnic continuity is combined with multimedia, transforming the stage into an independent dramatic component; a poly-stylistic model is formed in which classical, national, and contemporary approaches mutually reinforce each other, expanding artistic possibilities and global integration. In this way, theoretical notions of performative design and digital scenography “come back” into practice as instruments for describing and structuring specific stage solutions.

The results are consistent with the findings of foreign authors regarding the need to combine tradition and innovation: according to Howard and Hann, scenography

is increasingly becoming a “second score,” which is confirmed by Kazakhstani productions, where light and multimedia perform dramatic functions. At the same time, the material reveals an important divergence from many international cases: while Western studies focus on experimental, immersive forms that often loosen ties with stable cultural codes (Murray and Keefe 115), in Kazakhstan technological integration remains spotty and is frequently anchored in national motifs. This combination of partial digitalization and strong ethno-symbolic anchoring forms a distinctive model of hybrid scenography rather than a direct replication of foreign patterns. Our material suggests that the next step is a more deliberate media dramaturgy, in which choices about projections and light are made not ad hoc, but in direct coordination with the musical structure and semantic layers of the work.

Even with the expansion of multimedia practices, theaters face the following problems:

- Finance – production budgets often do not allow for the full implementation of advanced digital solutions;
- Personnel – there is a shortage of set designers and lighting designers with expertise in AR/VR and projection mapping;
- Infrastructure – many venues are not technically prepared for the stable operation of multimedia systems;
- Preserving Tradition – there is a risk that excessive technologies will “overshadow” ethnic and classical codes.

Therefore, a balance is needed: digital means should enhance artistic expression, and not replace the cultural basis of the performance. In this respect, the correspondence map and typology put forward in the article can function as practical instruments for calibrating this balance already at the planning stage of new productions.

For Kazakhstani audiences, the set design is a bridge between national culture and contemporary forms: ballet becomes a visual statement, where solutions translate epic, myth, and ethnic imagery into tangible symbols. Ethnically oriented set design provides recognition and connection, while multimedia provides novelty and a heightened emotional response; the audience remains a bearer of cultural memory and a participant in a visual and technological experiment.

Methodological guidelines: integrity – elements function as a single organism; functionality – sets and multimedia support the performance and blend seamlessly with the choreography; symbolism – visual solutions convey meaning and draw on cultural codes; digital technologies are integrated in a way that does not blur the classical and national heritage. These guidelines crystallize the connection between the theoretical bases of scenography, the empirical examination of particular productions, and the practical recommendations formulated for theater practitioners.

The matrix (see Fig. 3) identifies four trajectories: academic without multimedia – stability and continuity; national without technology – preservation of the ethnic code; multimedia without a national component – innovation and immersion; hybrid – national ballets with multimedia, where symbols are enhanced by digital means. The greatest potential lies with the hybrid model, which combines cultural identity and technological innovation, creating a competitive international product.

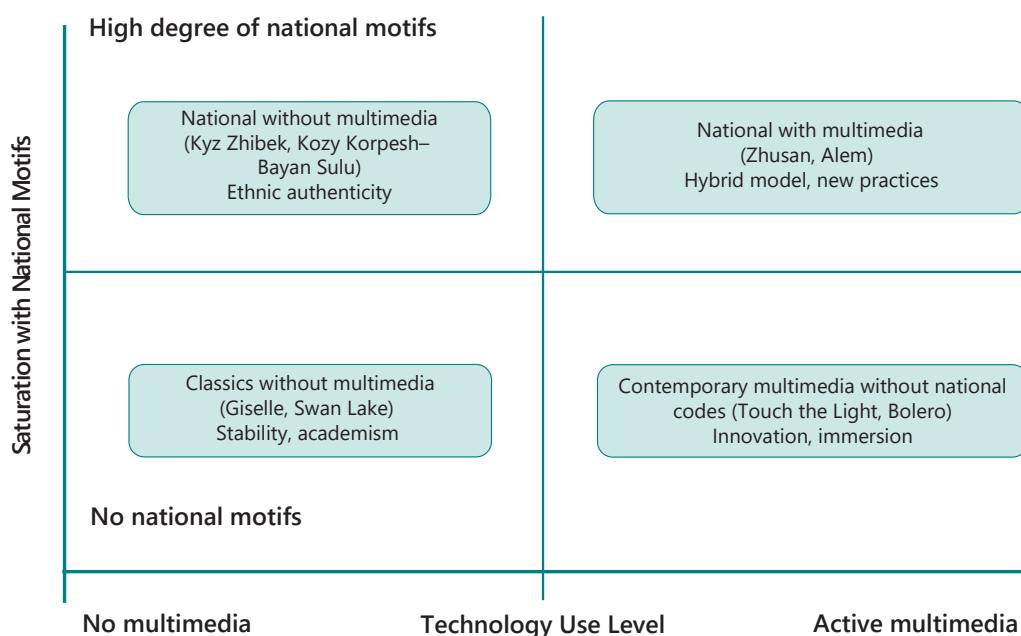


Fig. 3. Matrix of the relationship between national motifs and technologies³.

Results: The set designs of Kazakhstani ballet theaters are shaped by a blend of continuity and innovation; preserving the academic and ethno-national foundations supports the cultural code and audience engagement, while multimedia expands expressiveness, transforming the set designs into an independent dramatic resource. In terms of the research questions, this means that academic, national and multimedia scenographies not only coexist, but also redistribute dramaturgical functions between music, movement and visual layer. Within this configuration, the hybrid model that combines national motifs and a digital environment emerges as the most productive: it preserves identity and creates a competitive, contemporary image on the international stage.

Conclusions

The scenographic practices of three venues (Astana Ballet, Astana Opera, and the Abai KazNOBT) across 40 productions (2016/17–2024/25) have been systematically classified, which made it possible to trace a poly-stylistic trajectory: the parallel existence and mutual influence of academic, national-ethnic, and multimedia-experimental scenography. A comparison of six representative examples reveals the stage's shift from a static backdrop to a "co-performer" of choreography: light, projections, and digital graphic layers assume autonomous dramatic functions while maintaining cultural continuity. In aggregate, this directly answers the research questions: it identifies the dominant

scenographic types, shows how they correlate with musical dramaturgy and audience perception, and explicates the ways in which national codes are introduced into digital scenography.

³ To construct a matrix of the relationship between national motifs and technologies, this artificial intelligence (the GPT-4o model) was used to provide a visual comparison of the levels of technological sophistication and the saturation of national motifs in the scenography of Kazakhstani ballet productions.

Key findings can be summarized as follows:

- The academic tradition remains the mainstay of the repertoire: motionless scenic sets and historical costumes maintain “classical integrity” and a stable connection with the score.
- National-ethnic scenography translates ornamentation, textures, and symbols (the yurt, dombra, steppe metaphors) into a stable visual code of identity; with the selective use of multimedia, it creates hybrid solutions without losing authenticity.
- The modern trend shows an increasing role of light and digital media: from minimalism and symbolism to immersive formats with highly dynamic stage transformations.
- The “correspondence map” of musical nodes and visual devices (exposition–development–climax–denouement) has proven its practical usefulness as a tool for coordinating media dramaturgy, lighting, costumes, and stage composition with musical time.
- The key vector of development is a hybrid model: the translation of ethnic code into digital forms (ornament libraries, color-light palettes, behavioral light/projection presets), where technology enhances meaning rather than replaces it.
- Existing constraints – budget, lack of AR/VR competencies, and infrastructure gaps – require strategic measures: a phased upgrade of technology, targeted training of specialists, and the inclusion of media dramaturgy in the standard production process.
- Compared to international scenographic practice, where multimedia often develops in relatively “neutral” visual environments, the Kazakhstani material demonstrates a different configuration: the digital layer is consistently tied to ethnic symbols and epic imagery. This linkage of media technologies with a strong cultural code constitutes the main contribution of the study and enhances its academic novelty.

Overall, the scenography of Kazakh ballet follows a mature formula of “tradition and innovation”: academic and ethnic foundations support cultural stability, while digital technologies expand the expressive potential of the stage. In this perspective, hybrid scenography that digitally rearticulates national codes while relying on academic technique becomes the key direction of development, simultaneously strengthening national identity and enhancing the international competitiveness of Kazakh ballet. By connecting theoretical ideas of scenography as a “second score” with a systematic analysis of particular productions, the article narrows the distance between conceptual discourse and stage practice and proposes a framework that can be used both for academic reflection and for concrete scenographic planning in Kazakhstani theaters.

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