Linguistic, Metrical and Cognitive Implications in Sung Verse

An International Conference hosted by "Sapienza Università di Roma"

(Rome, 23-25 February 2012)

The expression "sung verse" covers a wide variety of metrical-melodic forms which are found across time and space in all human cultures. They span from folk songs to Opera, from counting-out rhymes to epics, from courtly songs to rap.

While in spoken verse the metrical pattern is grounded in the prosody of the language in which it is composed, in sung verse the overall metrical structure results from the matching of specific prosodic units of the text (moras, syllables, stress, etc.) to the rhythmic-melodic structure provided by the tune. This matching thus requires the coordination of two cognitive mechanisms, i.e. the musical and linguistic competence.

The aim of the present conference is to bring together specialists from different research areas to discuss issues regarding the regulated, formal organization of sound and speech in sung verse.

Taking a broad approach to the theme, we welcome papers focusing on one or more of the following topics:

1. Sung verse in oral and writing cultures
2. Text-to-tune alignment: constraints in textsetting
3. "Translation" in vocal music
4. The role of formalizing devices in constraining memory and cueing recall
5. Melodic contours in music and speech

Keynote presentations will be 45 minutes long, with time for questions and discussion.

Contributed papers in English are allocated 20 minutes, followed by approximately 10 minute discussion.

Accepted papers will be published in the conference proceedings.

If you would like to present a paper, please send an abstract of approximately 20-30 lines (not including title and references) focusing on one of the following topics:

1) Sung verse in oral and writing cultures

Sung verse is found in cultures with primary as well as secondary orality. While in the former type of culture the formal organization of sung poetry is characterized essentially by composition in performance and oral transmission, in the latter it also reveals the effects of some degree of interaction with literacy. The reduction of the primacy of the mnemonic form of storage due to the introduction of writing and printing, and to other technologies in more recent times, have had some long-lasting effects on the way in which sung verse is composed, perceived and represented.

2) Text-to-tune alignment: constraints in textsetting

The process of aligning linguistic and musical material is commonly referred to as *textsetting*. As other forms of human creative process, textsetting is subject to both cognitive and cultural constraints. As to the former, they govern the interaction of speech units and musical structures in the structuring of words in vocal music, both at a general and case-by-case level. Instead, cultural constraints relate specific properties of the text-to-tune alignment to such notions as style, musical idiom, imitation etc.

3) "Translation" in vocal music

When the "translation" process involves a complex semiotic object such as a song - with its combination of text and tune -, at least two levels of representation must be regarded: the syntactic and the semantic. Syntactic questions concern melodic-rhythmic and verbal structures, and bear upon the relation between individual textual and musical phrases, and between verbal and musical accentuation patterns. Semantic questions, on the other hand, involve the relation of the setting to the meaning of the text and are thus of central significance in discussions of musical meaning.

4) The role of formalizing devices in constraining memory and cueing recall

The regulated formal organization found in vocal music, and involving rhythmical, phrasal and melodic organization, have had various adaptive advantages in human evolution, both at social and cognitive level, in that it favours coordination in collective actions, improves segmentation and temporal discretionality and functions as a support to verbal memory. Besides, the systematic patterning of sound in terms of timing, accent and grouping on the one hand, and in terms of segmental features, tones and durations on the other, may have cognitive reasons pertaining both to perception and memory ability.

5) Melodic contours in music and speech

Musical melodies are characterized by a number of statistical regularities that appear cross-culturally. One well-known regularity is the predominance of small intervals

between successive pitches. Based on experimental evidence concerning the listeners' expectations for pitch patterns, it has been suggested that this may reflect universal Gestalt principles of auditory processing. In contrast, comparative speech-music studies have shown that the preference for small intervals in music arises out of experience with speech, thus suggesting that the implicit learning of prosodic patterns influences the creation of tonal (as well as rhythmic) patterns in music.

Abstracts (preferably in PDF or Word format) should be submitted to:
sungverse@gmail.com.
Submissions should reach us by **September 20th, 2011**. Notification of acceptance will be sent during October, 2011

Practical Information:

Venue:
Sapienza Università di Roma
Piazzale Aldo Moro 5
00185 Roma (Italy)
T (+39) 06 49911

Where to accommodate:
Participants will benefit of special discount rates at some hotels in the neighborhood of University (subject to availability)

All updates relating to the conference will be posted on the main page of the review 'Cognitive Philology' (http://padis2.uniroma1.it:81/ojs/index.php/cogphil/) and on the conference website http://sungverse.wordpress.com/. The definitive schedule will be published by October 30, 2011.

For further information, please write to: sungverse@gmail.com

The Organizing Committee
Paolo Canettieri (Sapienza Università di Roma)
Teresa Proto (Collegium de Lyon)
Gianluca Valenti (Sapienza Università di Roma)