

# THE SUNG UNITS OF THE FOLK SONG, THEIR RELATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

## SUMMARY

The first chapter, entitled "An Apology for a Polemic, Comments, and Questions", is in the nature of a foreword. The author justifies his decision to investigate contentious issues and problems that others have already proposed solutions to, as well as questions that have been the subject of debate (these appear chiefly in the third and fourth chapters).

The second chapter, "The Folk Song as an Exclusively Sung Utterance", begins by asking whether the title is in fact justified, since a song need not always be sung: it may merely be played, or whistled, or recited, or the text may be written down or even embroidered. The author answers these objections by pointing out that there is always a subconscious awareness of the song as a special "double entity" — a form that is not just verbal, not just musical, but both simultaneously. Both elements are closely and indeed indissolubly linked precisely — and uniquely — when the song is sung, when words and music are one. The only "instrument" capable of dealing with both at the same time is the human voice, with its ability to articulate. It alone has the magical power to unify the verbal and musical systems, it alone shapes the utterance which in specialized terminology is called simply vocal music. Hence if we wish to discover the units that constitute the sung utterance, a complex approach must be employed. The chapter continues with the definition of a number of terms the author intends to use (line, stichos, musical line; period, colon, etc.), moves on to a section on the way in which sung forms are fashioned, which pays particular attention to the differences between strophic and non-strophic forms, and ends with a discussion of the basic structural unit of the strophic folk song. Every strophic song — insofar as there is more than one verse — is made up of similarly arranged sections (stanzas) that can be sung to the same melody. The stanza of a song is not, therefore, merely a collection of lines in which sound and meaning form a whole whose metric pattern and perhaps pattern of rhyme are repeated, but at the same time a unit determined by the fixed form of a repeating melody, a more or less similarly formed regular number of sung syllables occurring in smaller units — musical lines. As was pointed out by the poet and song collector Karel Jaromír Erben (1811 — 1870), every stanza must have at least two lines. But not even in the folk song (at least generally) is the stanza merely a rhythmic and intonational whole, as might seem to be the case when one hears it spoken or sung; it is primarily a thematic whole. In terms of the theory of poetry, the stanza is a stylization of the paragraph in the sense that it is a standardized form of the paragraph, and hence it repeats. Some songs cannot be divided any further in terms of these units. These are referred to as single-stanza songs; the whole song corresponds to one stanza. Hence the stanza is not merely the basic structural unit in the strophic song; in many cases it also exists as a self-sufficient song form.

Moreover, many stanzas of folk songs appear in a number of different songs, creating varied combinations and playing a basic role in the development of different versions. All these features — pertaining to form and content, words and music — indicate that the sung stanza in the strophic folk song can be termed the primary organic and basic structural unit.

The third chapter, “Strophic Families in the Lyrical Song”, presents a detailed analysis of one song family, referred to by the words with which it most frequently begins: “Třeba su já dcerka” (“Even though I’m a daughter”). (The gist of the whole stanza — denoted “a” — is as follows: I am poor, and my mother is poor, but I don’t care for just anyone.) To describe the family, the following symbols are used in the text of the study and in the diagrams and tables: P1 — P20 indicate the individual versions of the song (P = píseň [“song”]), the small letters a — v indicate the separate stanzas, and the Roman numerals I — VIII indicate the starting points of self-sufficient wholes (and in some cases self-sufficient stanzas). As diagram 2 and table 1 make clear, the family in question comprises 20 different versions with a total of 93 stanzas, but these 20 versions are made up of only 21 different stanzas (that is, 22.5 per cent of the total number of stanzas). Of these 21 different stanzas, approximately one half — 10 — occur only once (g, h, l, m, p, r, s, t, u, v), while 11 (only 11.8 per cent of the total number of stanzas) are found in two or more songs (a, b, c, d, e, f, i, j, k, n, o, representing 83 stanzas, or 89.2 per cent of the total). And it is the fact that these stanzas permeate the individual songs that makes of them a family: the more often a stanza is found, the more significant its role in the shaping of the family. A glance at diagram 2 or table 1 reveals the makeup of the individual songs (P1 — P20) and gives a complete picture of the strophic combinations within the family as a whole. A study of stanzas b, c, e, f, g, h, k, m, o, r, s, u, v shows that all thirteen are linked to a preceding stanza; not a single one can stand on its own without having to be considered a fragment, nor can any one function as a self-sufficient whole. On the other hand, stanzas a, d, i, j, l, n, p, t, marked by Roman numerals, are capable of this. These are stanzas that can lead to further narrative development, or that can exist independent of other stanzas. They can be recognized without a comparison of variants, since they are in fact small autonomous wholes which can begin a song or which can be sung without any continuation, and yet are not felt to be fragments. Other stanzas or even larger wholes (made up of several stanzas) may come before them, and they may also end a song of several stanzas. It is typical of some of these independent stanzas that they can be linked together in various combinations; see diagram 3, where two combinations known from actual songs are followed by various hypothetical possibilities (cf. P?). Diagram 3 shows possible divergent and convergent combinations, and diagrams 4 and 5 show the links between stanzas or larger wholes. The figures followed by “x” indicate how many times the connection in question appears in the family under study. Table 1 is entitled “Classification of songs, stanzas, and their combinations”. It has three parts, in each of which one kind of class is examined (T, T’, T’; T = třída [“class”]). The author comes to the conclusion that analysis of the strophic elements makes possible the formulation of more general rules concerning the ways in which higher cohesive units are created in lyrical folk songs and that research in this direction should gradually lead to a clarification of the syntactic laws — or, to put it more modestly, the syntactic tendencies — governing the consolidation of individual stanzas in larger wholes. On the basis of an analysis of the actual longer and shorter strophic cycles at the level of each separate stanza in the minutely analysed family “Třeba su já dcerka”, the following hypothesis can be made: there exist as many strophic cycles as there are self-sufficient stanzas. Diagram 5 shows that the self-sufficient stanzas can be thought of as magnets whose strength and direction of attraction vary. Hence in one case they attract more elements and in another fewer; hence too they sometimes draw more from above, and sometimes more in the opposite direction.

The fourth chapter, “Division into Melodic Lines”, is based on numerous examples and analyses; generally the author looks at the number of syllables in the melodic line, rhymes and assonance, and the rhythmic and melodic organization of the melody. He defines the melodic line as the lowest formal unit, which, from the point of view of the study in

question, cannot be subdivided. Examining several textual variants of song 9a, whose stanza has only eight syllables and which, from the purely poetic point of view, consists of one textual line, the author shows how four-syllable sections can form two-line (9a), three-line (9b), four-line (9c), and five-line (9d, 9e) melodic forms, and finally a six-line refrain (10). He points out where the main caesurae in the melody fall, and in particular how in practice the folk singer deals with these short four-syllable sections, how he breaks the textual line down into melodic lines, how melodic line is added to melodic line, and how they can be repeated. And these are the important factors in deciding how to divide the sung forms into the smallest formal units. This enables us to get the clearest view of the differences between the individual variants. But in addition this approach also makes it possible to predict some variant procedures. For example, in 9a, the third and sixth bars (second and fourth melodic lines) can be left out; in this way a five-line sung stanza is transformed into one of three melodic lines that has its own textual and melodic logic. The author explores similar relationships in further examples. It may be objected that this detailed system of division, which could be termed over-atomizing, ruptures the natural flow of the music and text. But in example 10, has this natural flow not already been destroyed by the fact that in the refrain a group of syllables linked with the second melodic line and anticipating the last melodic line intervenes in the second-last melodic line? In the section "Optical illusions", the author deals with the rhymes in some songs where verbally-oriented folklorists see a multisyllabic passage as one line, whereas from a rhythmic and syntactic point of view it can be interpreted as two lines, or where stanzas of some songs without a definite strophic textual character are felt to be one long line, so that a free number of lines can be linked by one rhyme. However, these conclusions are only possible if the question is approached from the point of view of the given literary stylizations, and no consideration is taken of what these stanzas actually sound like when sung. For examples 24, 25a, and 26 the author presents to the right of the text four different possible ways of evaluating the rhymes and assonance. Column 1 gives rhymes at twelve-syllable intervals, column 2 elements of rhyme in the individual songs, column 3 rhymes in the given sung stanzas of two melodic lines, and column 4 the rhyme scheme as it would appear if the pairs of these sung stanzas were joined up. The underlined symbols in the individual columns mark final elements in the wholes under study. It all depends, therefore, on what framework we choose to observe and evaluate the rhymes within. Just as the concepts above-below, right-left, forward-backward, etc. are merely relative, so statements about rhymes in various folk songs are also merely relative. The author then investigates the inner structure of the strophic song by looking at forms with refrains. His method is not to link up the refrains to the individual melodic lines, and he works on the assumption that for purposes of classification it is necessary to treat the refrains as separate and special musical lines; songs with refrains could be the subject of special study. On the basis of the syllabic variation in the refrains of related songs (27a—27g), he introduces the rule of treating as a separate musical line even two-syllable sung passages which either have the character of a refrain themselves or are connected with a longer refrain in some way. As can be seen from examples 28—43, the removal of refrains and the repeating passages reveals the sung forms of the individual stanzas, like a nut that has been hulled, proving once again that in practice folk song often works with passages shorter than the textual line. The author emphasizes that this detailed study of the structure of the melodic lines of the stanza in no way implies the disappearance of higher formal units, since they can easily be identified by the repeating groups of basic elements in the individual formations. The well-known rule in musical theory that higher units are shaped by the mutual submission of two or more lower units, applies to these subtle microstructures as well. But if the musical lines are studied in their relationship to higher units, major terminological problems arise. The concepts work, phrase, motif, movement, section, etc. cannot always be ranked in a hierarchy, since they either belong to different categories, or have not been precisely defined. The author adds several glosses in this connection, one of which should be mentioned here. A phrase may sometimes coincide with a musical line, but this is far from being always

true. Phrases, as units of performance, need not be only longer than musical lines. Cases exist — though they are rare — in which the phrasing bears little correspondence to the musical lines, when a single phrase is much longer than the line, while other phrases are shorter. And here the author returns to the examples presented under no. 12, and particularly to examples 12c and 12g. Though the musical phrasing in 12g corresponds perfectly to the four-line division of this stanza (all the musical lines are divided by a long note, and in some cases by pauses as well), 12c shows great divergence from its division into four musical lines. Up to the present, interpretations of this song have varied a great deal, and in one case the same author divided it differently after an interval of some years. This stanza was first explained as a long extended one-line form, but then detailed musical analysis led to the conclusion that it had three parts; other scholars considered it to have two parts. After dividing the seven examples 12a—12g into four-syllable sections, in which — as can be seen clearly from the examples — the textual syllabic sections repeat in five ways (I—V), the author concludes by suggesting the likely source of all these different interpretations. What is reflected here is not only the actual phrasing (when sung), but also different ways of playing about with ideas about it; cf. the divisions a, b, c, d in example 12c or the divisions 1, 2 in example 44a. But in making divisions into musical lines, the differing divisions of the text in the variable musical phrase need not obscure the basic structure of the verbal text, which, in the great majority of cases, is respected in folk songs when they are sung. No cleverly constructed theory is valid for the division into musical lines of sung forms, for here “The golden tree of life grows green” (Goethe). But it is necessary to be consistent, to ensure that units of varying qualities and varying degrees do not mix. Hence musical lines are defined as the smallest formal unit. In the text and the melody of the song they are a consequence of the actual singing and a whole complex of accompanying factors. They need not always be self-sufficient as ideas. On the contrary: sometimes they flow freely into one another and create a closed form. In the music, the musical line can sometimes be no more than a single bar, just as in the text, according to the new rule proposed here, it can form even a two-syllable refrain. In strophic and non-strophic forms, lines follow from mutual similarity, interchange, development, contrast, symmetry, and asymmetry, are determined by such things as intonation, the alternation of shorter notes with longer ones, the appearance of pauses or rhymes, obligatory interverbal divisions, refrains, etc. In order to determine the formal organization of sung utterances, one cannot depend on the versions which collectors or compilers of collections have given to the songs. In this respect, it will often prove necessary to criticize printed versions, while in future it would be advisable to stick very strictly to the new system of line division proposed here in the editing and publishing of folk songs. This would provide a firm basis for research into the formal side of sung utterances, the differentiation and classification of which has so far been obscured in a cloud of misunderstanding.

The fifth and last chapter, “A Contribution to an Ongoing Discussion”, is based on a comparison of the division of the musical line with the structuring of the musical text in the UNSAKAT computer programme devised in Yerevan, where precise but artificial syntactic categories have been worked out for division. Their usefulness in the specific computer project has best been proved in practice in Yerevan. But would it not be possible to bring this type of division, which in the system in question is determined by rigid rules, closer to that of the division of musical lines in songs? It is quite realistic to speak of this, if the natural division of the songs were transformed into the categories of the UNSAKAT project with the aid of a special program.