

Music Encoding Conference
University of Vienna 29 May – 1 June 2019

poster session

Title: The *Baudelaire Song Project*: Database and Digital Analysis

Abstract :

The *Baudelaire Song Project* (2015-2019), based at the University of Birmingham (UK), has set out to collate and analyse all the song settings ever of the verse and prose poems of major nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867). So far, the project has found nearly 1600 songs composed from the nineteenth-century until nowadays, spanning 20 languages and 40 different music styles. The aims of the project are: 1- to catalogue information on the song settings in an online database (available to the public in March 2019), providing links to music scores and audio files when possible; 2- to analyse specific sets of songs through digitally-enabled techniques; 3- to provide interactive resources for researchers, musicians, secondary school teachers, language learners, and French and English speakers interested in poetry and music. The proposed poster will present the digital methods used by the project to **collect** and **analyse** songs.

The poster will show statistical graphs from our dataset based on our online database. The system architecture is built using Symfony PHP framework, querying an Elasticsearch index and a MySQL database which functions as a song catalogue; it is searchable by keywords, dates, names of composers, titles of poems and songs. A large number of the songs are tagged and linked to online scores, audio files, data tables or visualisation tools.

The poster will also explain the digital methodology used to analyse songs. The *Baudelaire Song Project* has developed a ‘thick method’ for analysing song comprising four stages of analysis: schematic analysis; statistical analysis (using an Excel spreadsheet proforma, devised and released by the project team: www.baudelaire song.org/data-tables); Sonic Visualiser analysis (using open-source software devised initially for the analysis of historical/comparative recordings); and

contextual analysis. The poster will particularly focus on the analysis results obtained through Sonic Visualiser, which is an open-source program developed by Queen Mary University of London allowing us to mark an audio file through specific annotation layers. The *Baudelaire Song Project* team has designed a set of parameters to analyse specifically song settings of French poetry and extract time-bound data. This method allows us to analyse simultaneously text and music, by considering ‘song’ as an entity, a networked product which relies on a combination of connections such as metre/prosody, structure/form, sound repetition, semantics, live performance options. The data extracted from Sonic Visualiser can be visualised on graphs and analysed to compare different song settings in order to understand if a poem has inherent qualities leading to similar patterns of musicalisation, if a composer setting several poems to music follows the same processes, or if completely different musical styles setting the same poems have commonalities.

The ‘thick method’ developed by the project proposes an innovative way to understand how words and music interact as song. Instead of looking at the assumptions that a song ‘completes’ or ‘distorts’ a poem, the project has built a digitally-enabled analysis allowing us to pay attention – in the sense of ‘ecology of attention’ proposed by Citton (2014: 254) – to the full array of song materials. In this poster, we propose that the digitally-enabled ‘thick method’ analysis of a highly networked inter-artistic product combining words and music affords significant new insights, as well as provoking fresh questions in music encoding debates.

Prof. Helen Abbott & Dr Nina Rolland (University of Birmingham)

References:

Abbott, Helen (2017), *Baudelaire in Song 1880–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Ardrey, Caroline, Mylène Dubiau, Helen Abbott, ‘Entre musique et lettres: vers une méthodologie numérique pour l’analyse de la mise en musique des poésies de Charles Baudelaire’, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 12 (1).

Citton, Yves (2014) *Pour une écologie de l’attention* (Paris: Seuil)
