

FRENCH SONG, A MULTICULTURAL MARRIAGE BETWEEN TWO MUSICAL SYSTEMS

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Phonetics analyses speech from two different points of view:

- segmental, i.e. the succession of vowels and consonants
- suprasegmental - or prosody, which includes intonation, accentuation, rhythm, pauses and timbre and is mainly depicted by the 3 parameters that govern music: duration, pitch and intensity. Respect for the subtlety of the text set to music commands that this second level cannot be disregarded, although it is very often thought - especially in French - that these values are dissolved in the music of the song. This is indeed true as far as pitch is concerned but intensity and duration remain vivid in the singing of the text and the major remaining factor can be regarded as accentuation. It is worth noting that the root of the word *accent* itself means *song*. Likewise, a fine analysis of the segments will also take account of their musical features.

Consequently it is sensible to consider that a singer - independently from the semantic approach to poetry - is actually exposed to two different musical systems. Their constitution differs considerably and deserves to be thoroughly analysed and contrasted from a phonetic, musical and neuroscientific point of view - starting from the creation of our western musical system.

In French, the musical nature of the language is frequently ignored by speakers, especially natural accentuation which doesn't affect the meaning of the word. There is much to be explored and taken into account in the subtlety of the musical aspect of oral French and its numerous phonemes in the teaching of an intelligible, beautiful and moving diction, as well as a rewarding vocal artistry, fully respectful of sound breathing technique.