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APPENDIX

Observations on the Melody of a Kejaman-Sekapan Oral Narrative

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This appendix is intended to offer some ideas about the vocal melodies used when performing the Kejaman-Sekapan wa. Matusky, in a wide-ranging survey of the music of the Kajang, Kayan and Kenyah-Badang, briefly compares excerpts of vocal melody from wa performances' in the Punan Bah and Sekapan traditions (1986, transcriptions pp. 222-3; analysis pp. 203-6). Here we will consider the melody of a few verses of the Kejaman-Sekapan wa which has formed the basis of this study.

These comments are presented with a note of caution, since they lack the vital viewpoint of the Kejaman-Sekapan practitioners and audience. However, an etic analysis might offer some useful observations for two reasons. Firstly, working with a transcription of both words and melody, we are able to explore the relationship between the two for the first time. Secondly, by comparing the melodies of three verses we are able to go beyond broad generalisations to consider some of the variety found in disparate examples.

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by

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The notations

The notations will be found at the end of this appendix.

Rhythm

In most passages the rhythm is free, with no apparent pulse or metre (a little like a Western recitative). The written rhythmic values are therefore approximate. Sometimes a rhythmic value – of, for instance, a crotchet versus a quaver – could be assigned to a given syllable only as a rather subjective estimate.

¹ Matusky (op.cit.) refers to the wa by the term mo'a, which is the verb form.

In a few passages, a clear pulse does seem to emerge. This is indicated above the staff in question.

⌒ [A semicircle with a dot under it] is a 'pause sign', a standard convention in Western staff notation, indicating a note held for longer than its notated value.

Rit.... indicates ritardando or gradual de-acceleration.

Pitch

Verse 1 is notated at the approximate pitch at which it sounds on the tape, with the lower cadential note – which ends each phrase – as G below middle C.

Verse 126 sounds about one tone lower, Verse 683 about a further semi-tone lower. Only these three verses have been musically transcribed. It is therefore not known how much the pitch-level varies throughout the performance. The variation between these excerpts may or may not be intentional *metabole* (or unconscious but significant). However, the later verses are notated at the same pitch as Verse 1 in order to facilitate comparison.

Tuning does not conform to the usual domain of staff notation, Western 12-tone equal temperament. However, the pitches are generally near enough for the notation to make sense to a Western musician who is hearing the recording. Where a pitch differs markedly from its Western equivalent this is indicated by an arrow above the staff: an upward arrow for a sharper pitch; a downward arrow for a flatter pitch.

Text

The text is notated as in the main text² – which was transcribed with the help of a native speaker – but with the following exceptions:-

A syllable enclosed in 'wavy' brackets – e.g. {**mu**} – is in the text but I could not hear it on the tape. (It is presumably audible to a native speaker.)

Any syllables enclosed in square brackets – e.g. [**na**] – are audible to me but not notated in the main text. These may be nonsense syllables, as will be discussed in the analysis.

Sometimes one syllable seems to encompass the end of one word and the start of another. The two words are then separated by a vertical line as in '...**a-n** | **a**...'. A double diagonal slash after a word indicates the end of a line of text.

2

However, the form [3] occurring word-initially and word-medially in the musical transcriptions in this appendix is written /y/ in the approximately phonemic script of the main text.

The i' refrain

This wa performance, like the one considered by Matusky, is sung by a group of women consisting of a solo singer plus two singers of a refrain, known as i7 (1986, p. 203).³ "Without the i7, a singer of wa would refuse to perform" (Strickland 1988, p. 68). Since it is a crucial element, it may be useful to offer the reader some impressions of this i7.

Matusky's comments (op. cit., p. 206) are remarkably pertinent for the i7 considered here. In both cases, the i7 refrain may be sung separately or simultaneously with the solo part. (In the present transcriptions, the i7 is sung separately at the end of verse 683, and simultaneously with the solo for lines 9-11 of that verse.) The refrain starts with one voice which enters in the register an octave above the solo part and descends to the note an octave below its initial note. The one or two other members of the chorus join in midway through in unison, or in simple heterophony (i.e. with simultaneous, slightly different ornamentation and timing in rendering the same underlying melody). In this second half of the refrain – where the first member of the chorus is joined by another voice or voices – there is a close melodic resemblance between the three refrains in Matusky's example and the two refrains in Verse 683.⁴ Each refrain is ornamented by grace notes and some sliding between pitches. It "is melismatic" (op. cit., p. 204) mainly to the syllable i7. However, one element not previously described is that the chorus singers sometimes sing other words. For instance, in the second half of line 11 of Verse 683, the undeciphered words are represented by 'x'. The word *akan* which ends this line of the solo is clearly audible towards the end of this refrain, perhaps suggesting that the chorus may comment upon the narrative.

Solo melody

Though the refrains are remarkably similar in Matusky's example and the present case, the solo melodies display considerable differences. Let us first consider melodic contour. In Matusky's example, the "melodic lines exhibit a strong tendency toward the contour of an 'ascending-descending' line as can be seen in nearly every melodic phrase notated" (1986, p. 206; & Item 7b p. 223). Of the

3

Where we write "i7" Matusky writes "e" (op. cit., p. 203).

4

The relevant contexts are: In Matusky 1986, p. 223: the second phrase of the first line; and the phrases on staff#3 and the bottom staff marked "All voices". In Verse 683: the phrase of the refrain accompanying Line 10 of Verse 683; and the final phrase of refrain after the end of that verse.