

# MUSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF TEXTUAL PATTERNING IN ESTONIAN *REGILAU*L

JANIKA ORAS  
PhD, Researcher  
Estonian Folklore Archives  
Estonian Literary Museum  
Vanemuise 42, 51003 Tartu, Estonia  
e-mail: janika@folklore.ee

## ABSTRACT

The article\* analyses the marking of song text patterns by means of musical devices in the performances of Estonian *regilaul*. The article examines which variants of musical rhythm and melodic contour are preferred by four singers in their performance of verses that have different functions within the song structure. In both the text and the musical rhythm, a greater number of syllables, and the attendant changes in musical rhythm, mark the verses that have an initiating function and which communicate entirely new information. In performing such verses, rather than the extension verses of parallelism groups or verse repetitions, in the short melodies with narrow pitch range, the singers prefer more “intense” variants of melody contours in which the higher notes of the scale are predominantly used. In two-line melodies, the singer’s patterning of the song text is largely determined by the musical logic, attempting to align the beginnings of the melodic strophes and verse groups.

KEYWORDS: runo song • Estonian *regilaul* • musical variation • textual patterning • verse parallelism

This article examines the relationships between music and words in Estonian *regilaul*, focusing on ways in which musical devices, such as melodic contour and musical rhythm, have been employed to mark the structure of song text. The Estonian *regilaul* is a part of the old Baltic-Finnic song culture, the runo song. The structure of a runo song is not symmetrical, i.e. the song does not consist of strophes of equal length, but is made up of groups of verses the lengths of which vary. The textual structure of runo songs has been investigated in greater depth within the framework of ethno-poetical analysis, and scholars have identified the syntactic and rhetorical features regulating the text’s structure as well as hierarchies that emerge between verses and verse groups (Anttonen 1994; 2004; DuBois 1994). What has also been underlined in ethno-poetical analysis is the importance of auditory or paralinguistic features employed by the performers in order to draw attention to certain meanings of the text or create entirely new meanings (Tedlock 1983; Foley 2002: 33–36). In the context of the present research material, some specific musical features of song performance could also be regarded as paralinguistic features.

\* This research is supported by the Estonian Science Foundation, grant no. 7795.

When discussing a song performance, which is born in cooperation between music and words, so to speak, it must be borne in mind that both means of expression have their own rules and logic. Within the runo song tradition alone, which can be said to share a relatively similar musical language, there are different ways in which texts relate to melodies.<sup>1</sup> Different ‘collaborative outcomes’ of word and music may also be triggered by regional peculiarities of the performance manner as well as the structure of verbal texts. For instance, the variation principles of Estonian two-line melodies spanning a fifth or a sixth seem to differ from those of Karelia. The Finnish ethnomusicologist Heikki Laitinen has offered a detailed analysis of the relationships between musical and textual features of a performance by Anni Tenisova, a singer from Karelia, and has explained that Tenisova’s two-line melody spanning a fifth is relatively loosely connected to the structure of the song text: “there are seven independently meandering lines cruising in the song that are progressing in time as if horizontally; these lines cross and depart from each other again” (Laitinen 2004: 183; see also Laitinen 2006: 77–79; Huttu-Hiltunen 2008: 188–236). What the author refers to here is the melodic contour and six different formal features of the poetical text. In Estonian songs, which share a quite similar melodic structure, quite often the occurrence of the so-called broken verses systematically influences the melodic contour.<sup>2</sup> It may be hypothesised that it is a certain dissimilarity of the textual structure between Finnish-Karelian and Estonian songs (Sarv 2008: 171–174) that contributes, among other things, to the different ways in which variations are produced in Estonian and Karelian melodies.

When discussing the relationships between music and words in Estonian *regilaul*, it is the melodic contours that are used in performing broken verses that have received the most thorough scholarly attention since these contours differ considerably from the melodic contours associated with ‘regular’, or normal-trochaic, verses. In their writings, however, several Estonian researchers have also pointed to the possibilities of the musical marking of the song text structure as a whole (Sarv 1977: 77; Kolk 1984; Särg 1998). In this paper, I analyse statistically whether and in what way four singers mark the structure of the song text by means of musical devices, or more precisely, ways in which these singers foreground ‘more important’ verses, or verses which start the sub-units of the song structure and also contain (more) new information. Since in *regilaul* one of the musical markers – musical rhythm – is directly connected to the verse structure,<sup>3</sup> I will also take a closer look at the number of verses. The other integral aspect of the verse structure – the occurrence of broken verses and their distribution in the song structure as a whole – is not included in the present examination as it seems to me, based upon empirical experience, that the broken verse is of minor consequence on the level of the song’s content-related organisation.

The musical material that I have selected for my analysis are wedding tunes that have a narrow pitch range (a third or a fourth) – two one-line melodies and one two-line melody of the form AA1, in which both phrases have a melodic contour that is similar to the one-line melody. The melodic movement within the phrases of all tunes either follows an ascending-descending pattern, or is just descending. Such melodic contours have been considered to be very close to the sentence intonation of the Estonian language (Tampere 1961: 243; Rüütel 1986; 1999: 101). The melodies are ‘simple’ and progress, for the most part, in a stepwise motion using three to four notes; they also vary considerably. Therefore, these tunes are perfectly suitable for an analysis of the musical features which are involved in the marking of the song structure. The tunes that I have

selected are performed by four singers from two regions in Estonia – Helmi Vill (born in 1904) came from Urvaste Parish in Võrumaa in southern Estonia, while western Estonia is represented by Liis Alas (born in 1850) and Olga (Reet) Sutt (born in 1877) who came from Kihnu Island, and by Liina Irdt (born in 1890) who came from Tõstamaa. The reason why it is expedient to proceed from the musical systems of specific individuals is that even within the same region, different performers interpret the same melody in different ways, to a certain extent. Either they use slightly different melodic variants, or if they use the same variants, it is not with the same frequency. Therefore it is difficult – and even impossible – to distinguish precisely those features that may be associated with the marking of the song structure. Among the historical records of *regilaul* there are only a few cases when multiple performances of the same tune have been recorded by the same singer. Therefore, the song collections which have been analysed are not statistically sufficiently representative, unfortunately: from Helmi Vill there are twelve song performances with a total of 146 song lines; from Liina Irdt we have 13 performances with a total of 443 song lines; Liis Alas and Olga Sutt have sung the same melody individually as well as together; these twelve songs include 583 analysable song lines.<sup>4</sup>

In my analysis I attempted to establish the principles of the musical marking of the song's textual patterning by searching for the correlation between verses which have different functions in the song structure and some features of variation of song melodies. As for the musical aspect, I only included variations on the level of structural rhythmic figures and pitches. Differences related to a more detailed level (changes in duration and intonation, grace notes, etc.) as well as the agogic and dynamic peculiarities of the performance were ignored.

The principles of textual patterning were examined on the level of syntactic-semantic verse parallelism characteristic of the *regilaul*. Although from the perspective of a song's content-related organisation, the structural units of a lower level are usually composed of combinations of single verses and parallelism groups (cf. Anttonen 1994: 129), this study is confined only to verse parallelism as a relatively distinct level of song structure. From the perspective of verse parallelism, one can distinguish two classes of verses in a song's structure:

1. Single verses (which do not belong to any parallelism group) as well as the initial verses of parallelism groups – henceforth, I will use the term 'beginning verse' to denote both kinds of verse;
2. The extension verses of parallelism groups (verses following the initial verse in a parallelism group).

As for the informational content of the verses, the beginning verses communicate first and foremost primary or new information. The extension verses of parallelism groups do not contain any entirely new information, but communicate above all poetic or secondary information (Metslang 1978: 106; 1981; Sarv 1999).

Some of the performers (in some performances) made use of a song structure that is typical of traditional group performances – the repetition of song lines. When singing in chorus, one singer performs individually a verse line which will then be repeated by other singers. Thus I have also distinguished verses of a third class which contain no new information whatsoever:

3. Verse repetitions.

## THE RHYTHM

As already mentioned, one can distinguish, in a song's structure, the so-called beginning verses (single verses as well as the initial verses of parallelism groups) and the extension verses of parallelism groups. The structural characteristics of Estonian *regilaul* parallelism have been statistically analysed by Helle Metslang and Mari Sarv. Their studies show that the initial verses of parallelism groups contain on average more words. Most probably, the reason is the ellipticity which is characteristic of parallelism: some words belonging to the initial verse, most often the verb, are not repeated in the extension verses (Steinitz 1934: 147, 217; Metslang 1978: 50–64; Sarv 1999; 2002: 222–225). The beginning verses, which contain more words, may also have a relatively larger number of syllables than the extension verses of a parallelism group (Särg 1998: 111; 2001). In runo songs, the relative multitude of syllables marks the verse boundary – at the beginning of a verse, in the first verse foot, there may be three or four syllables; in the following verse feet, there are two. As the relative multitude of syllables is a marker of a verse boundary, it could also serve as a marker of the beginning of a higher level division, that of a verse group. Therefore, verses containing more syllables than usual could belong to the class of beginning verses. The usual eight-syllable structure would rather characterise the extension verses of the parallelism group.

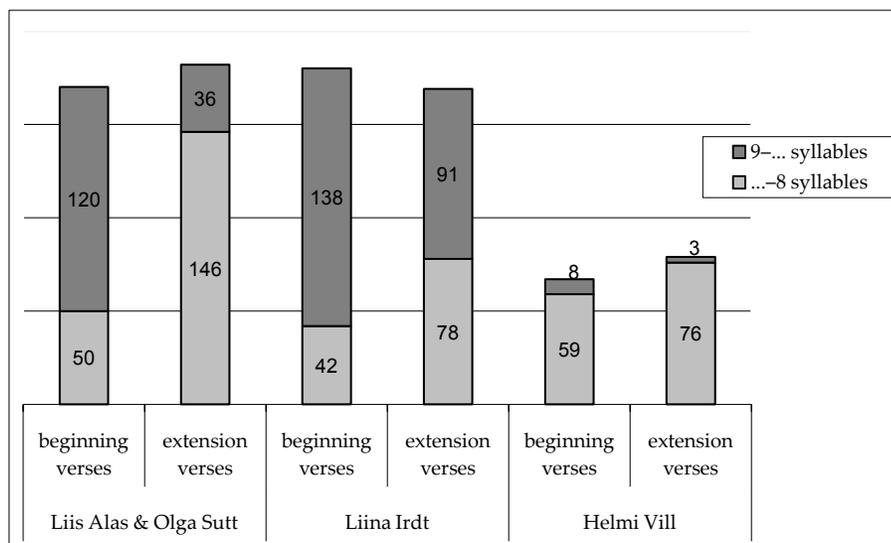


Figure 1. The distribution of beginning verses (single verses as well as the initial verses of parallelism groups) and the extension verses of parallelism groups in the verses with up to eight syllables and in the verses containing nine or more syllables in every song group.

The chart (Figure 1) presents the data of three song groups side by side – songs performed by two Kihnu singers, Liis Alas and Olga Sutt, songs performed by Liina Irdt and songs performed by Helmi Vill. The chart shows the distribution of the beginning verses and the extension verses of parallelism groups in every song group (verse repetitions have been left out). The three song groups have some differences: Liina Irdt's

songs contain a relatively large number of verses with more than eight syllables, in Helmi Vill's songs such verses are quite rare. The average number of syllables in Helmi Vill's verse lines is manifestly smaller than that which is found in the songs of singers from more northerly areas. This can be explained by the peculiarity of the verse structure of *regilaul* from Võrumaa where it is common that one long syllable fills two verse positions (in more northern areas this occurs only in certain kind of words containing a long vowel or a diphthong; see, for example, Sarv 2008: 32–35, 173–174).

The tendency to use more syllables in the beginning verses (verses containing new information, or initiating a new content unit in the song) than in the extension verses (verses with supplementary information of a more poetic character) is present in the songs of all performers: verses containing nine and more syllables are more frequently the so-called beginning verses, and verses with up to eight syllables rather function as extension verses.

The number of syllables in a verse is directly reflected in the rhythm of the *regilaul* melody. The typical rhythmic figure of the *regilaul* is a melody line of eight notes which corresponds to a verse line of eight syllables. If a verse contains more than eight syllables, there are two ways to perform it:

Firstly, one can use two fast notes instead of a normal one to sing the additional syllables (Figure 2):

8 syllables:		
	lam - ba tak - ka tal - le - ke - sed	pääv so - eb su - las - te päi - da
9 syllables:		
	vee jä-tad ven - na nai - se sil - mi	ei o - le ae - ga pää - väl vier - dä

Figure 2. The first possibility of performing verses with more than eight syllables: two fast notes are used instead of one note of normal length.

The other possibility is not to use fast notes, but to lengthen the melody line – by up to one eighth note (one metric unit). This option is used by Helmi Vill to perform longer verses (Figure 3):



Figure 3. The second possibility of performing verses with more than eight syllables is lengthening the melody line (in the first and third song lines: in the first line, the word *suur* fills two verse positions and is sung, respectively, on a long note).

What is characteristic of the beginning verses sung by Helmi Vill is not as much the number of syllables in a verse, as a longer than usual melody line, which exceeds eight metric units (Figure 4). Although in most cases the singer lengthens the melody line by adding syllables to the beginning of the verse, this need not be reflected in the number of syllables in the whole verse because of the peculiarity of the verse structure of *regilaul* from Võrumaa (in Figure 3 there are three syllables in the first verse foot of both the first and the third song line; however, the number of syllables in the first song line is eight as the word *suur* fills two positions).

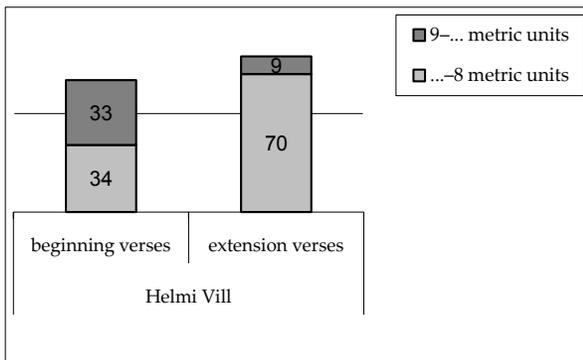


Figure 4. The distribution of the beginning verses (single verses as well as the initial verses of parallelism groups) and the extension verses of parallelism groups in the melody lines of up to eight metric units, and in the melody lines of more than eight metric units (lengthened lines) in the songs of Helmi Vill.

Both musical patterns – use of faster notes or the lengthening of the melody line – are fairly distinct against the background of the eight-unit norm. The lengthening of the melody line by one metric unit is a particularly conspicuous feature used, for instance, by performers from Karksi and Muhu parishes as well as Setomaa (Oras 2001; 2002: 132; Särg 2001). Although the melody variants from these districts have not been statistically

analysed from the viewpoint of the song structure, it may be said that empirically, the unusually long melody line often seems to belong to the beginnings of verse groups, or the structural (sub)units of the song.

### THE MELODIC CONTOUR

Different contour variants of the same melody can be preferred when performing either the beginning verses or the extension verses of parallelism groups.

In Helmi Vill's one-line melody with a refrain, it is generally possible to identify three different types of melodic contours (Figure 5): firstly, the contour, which descends to the main reference pitch not earlier than in the third melody segment (the melody segment corresponds to the word-accentual group – in Figure 5, notes have been gathered into such groups by a beam); secondly, the contour, which descends to the main reference pitch by the beginning of the second segment and which continues with the repetition of the main reference pitch; and thirdly, the contour, which starts with a segment ascending from the main reference pitch and continues with the repetition of the main reference pitch. The analysis showed that the first contour with several descending segments is most frequently connected to the beginning verses (Figure 6). The second and the third contours are preferred by Helmi Vill when singing the extension verses of parallelism groups. The third contour with a low beginning tone is used, without exception, to sing the extension verses.



Figure 5. Three different types of melodic contour in the songs of Helmi Vill.

model	beginning verses	extension verses
1	55	7
2	10	53
3	0	14

Figure 6. The preference of different contour types in performing different classes of verse in the songs sung by Helmi Vill.

A more intensive use of the higher part of the scale in some contour variants indicates greater intensity of expression. Therefore, it is logical that the singer prefers those con-

tours when performing the verses which are more important from the viewpoint of the song's development and which communicate entirely new information.

One can detect the same tendency in the contour variants of the two Kihnu women: the contour variants which make greater use of the higher part of the scale are more frequently connected to the beginning verses, while the contour variants which remain on lower pitch levels, are associated with the extension verses, or with repetitions of the same verse.

One of the Kihnu singers, Liis Alas (Figure 7), prefers the contour which stays on the fourth scale degree in the second and third metric units and descends to the third degree in the fourth metric unit most frequently when performing the beginning verses, and less often so when performing the extension verses, and rarely in the case of verse repetitions. The second contour of hers moves from the third scale degree to the second degree earlier than the first contour. The connections between the second contour and different verse classes are inverse: this contour is most frequently used to repeat the verses. The third contour of Liis Alas (in the diagram, two variants of identical meaning which use the second or the first scale degree in the third metric unit have been brought together) seems to be neutral – the singer has used this to a more or less equal extent in all verse classes.

no.	models of melodic contour	beginning verses	extension verses	verse repetitions
1		51	31	9
2		6	11	22
3		51	69	56

Figure 7. The preferences for different contour types in performing different classes of verse in the songs sung by Liis Alas. The first note – in the diagram, without the notehead – is G or C (in different song performances), represented equally frequently in all models of melodic contour.

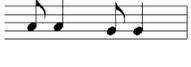
no.	models of melodic contour	beginning verses	extension verses	verse repetitions
1		62	66	52
2		4	17	44
3		37	27	9
4		34	62	83

Figure 8. The preferences for different contour types in performing different classes of verse in the songs sung by Olga Sutt in the first (models no. 1 and 2) and second half (models no. 3 and 4) of the melody line. The first note – in the diagram, without the notehead – is G or C (in different song performances), represented equally frequently in all models of melodic contour.

In the song performances of the other Kihnu singer, Olga Sutt, the most frequent variant of the first half of the melody is one in which the fourth note is higher, ranging from the third to the sixth degree, the most common being the third and the fourth (Figure 8). When performing the beginning verses, but also in the extension verses, Olga noticeably prefers this contour to the other beginning variant in which the second scale degree is used in the fourth metric unit. This singer most frequently uses the latter variant of the first half of the melody in verse repetitions. The second half of the melody clearly shows the hierarchy of preferences: a higher start is associated rather with the beginning verses, while the lower one, with verse repetitions. Between these two opposites, there are extension verses where a lower note is preferred at the beginning of the second half of the melody, but this use is not as frequent as it is in verse repetitions.

The above examples presented one-line melodies where the variants of the melodic contours exhibiting different characteristics do not alternate regularly.

Against the background of one-line melodies, it is interesting to observe the correlation of text and music in the next song group, in which the melodic strophe consists of two phrases to which two verse lines of the text correspond. The performer is Liina Irdt, a singer from Tõstamaa (Figure 9). The first and second lines of the melody are relatively similar, only the last three notes differ. In addition to this difference, it is very common to use the fourth scale degree for singing the second note of the melody (the fourth degree is most frequently used as the second component of melisma) in the variants of the first melody line. This never occurs in the variants of the second melody line. Here, a parallel can be drawn with the two previous song groups: the contour of the first melody line starts in a more intense manner; the higher part of the scale is used in this one rather than in a more ‘peaceful’ contour of the second melody line. In the one-line melody, the choice of different types of contour variants is irregular and it is, to some degree, influenced by the text’s structure. In the two-line melody, the choice of different types of contour variants is determined by the logic of the musical form: the more intense beginning is associated with the phrase starting a melodic strophe, and the lower, more ‘peaceful’ beginning, is associated with the second phrase ending the melodic strophe.

model

1st melody line	2nd melody line
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(208 variants)



or (16 variants)



Figure 9. The melodic contour variants in the two-line melody of Liina Irdt.

When examining ways in which the song text has been framed into this two-line melody, it can be seen that in Liina Irdt’s performances, music has a strong influence on the text’s structure (Figure 10). Since the singer performs individually, it is possible for her to choose whether to repeat a verse or not. Therefore, the singer’s perception of the song

structure is reflected in her performance, as is her decision on how it should be adapted to a two-line melody (the length of which is two verses).

All the initial verses of parallelism groups, as well as the majority of single verses, coincide with the first melody line. The extension verses of parallelism groups are divided between the first and the second melody lines; they are sung more frequently using the second melody line. Liina Irdt repeats a verse only with the second melody line. It follows that the singer repeats a verse in order to avoid starting a new unit of verbal information in the middle of a musical form and to align the boundaries of the parallelism group and the melodic strophe.<sup>5</sup>

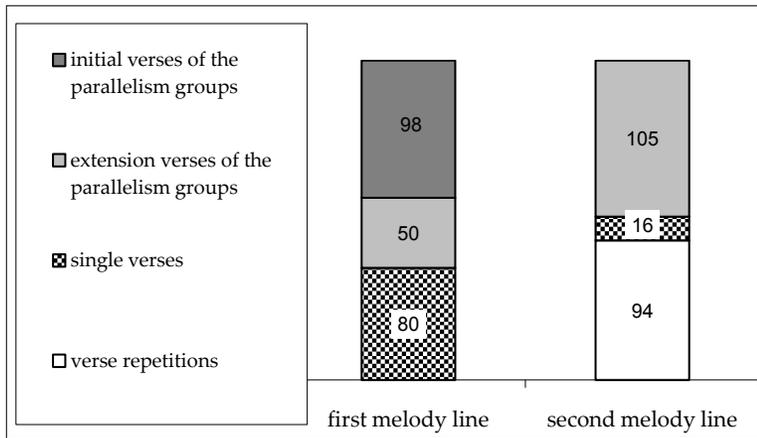


Figure 10. The distribution of verses in two melody lines in the songs of Liina Irdt.

Such arrangement of the text differs, for example, from that of the Viena Karelian performers, Anni Tenisova and Domna Huovinen, which has been described by the Finnish researchers Heikki Laitinen and Pekka Huttu-Hiltunen (Laitinen 2004: 172–175; Huttu-Hiltunen 2008: 162–164, 214–216). Quite often, the singers begin a new parallelism group in the middle of a melodic strophe – with the second melody line – and correspondingly, make a more random use of the option of repeating the verse and of thus bringing together the boundaries of textual and musical units.

## CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, it must be recalled that the present results reflect the textual and musical idiolect of four specific *regilaul* performers; however, it may be assumed that these idiolects indeed reveal some generally operative principles. Secondly, there can be no talk of any absolute rules with regard to the present performers, but rather of tendencies, stronger or weaker, to prefer certain rhythmic and melodic figures in the song structure when performing verses that have different functions. If the connections that have been pointed out with regard to the present material – particularly those which concern changes in the melodic contour – could manifest themselves in any other musical performances, it would most probably be short, constantly repeated tunes with narrow pitch range in which the melody predominantly moves stepwise in an (ascending-)descending direction.

The textual patterning of *regilaul* is connected to the number of syllables in the songs of all the performers. The single verses and the initial verses of parallelism groups contain a relatively greater number of syllables than the extension verses. Thus, the relative multitude of syllables is one boundary marker of a verse group that sets apart the verses carrying entirely new information in the context of the song. The multitude of syllables is manifested in the musical rhythm. Hence, strategies such as use of fast notes and the lengthening of the melody line to some extent serve as musical markers of the song's textual patterning.

When performing verses containing new information (the single verses and the initial verses of parallelism groups), more 'intense' melodic contours – contours which make relatively more frequent use of the higher part of the scale – are preferred; while in the extension verses, and especially in verse repetitions, melodic contours using the lower part of the scale are given preference. The downward endings of the Estonian *regilaul* melodies can meaningfully be associated with the sentence intonation of the Estonian language since declination as a universal linguistic feature is also characteristic of Estonian (Mihkla, Meister 2002: 176; Asu 2004: 63–66). Proceeding from this human universal, it may be hypothesised that the tendency described here to use more intense melodic contours at the beginning rather than the end of a *regilaul* parallelism group (or a verse group essentially forming a whole), resembles the intonation of a compound declarative sentence in the Estonian language.

In performing a two-line melody, the logic of the musical form carries an important role both in the musical variation and the formation of the text structure. This logic is directly associated with the preference for the variants of melodic contour that became manifest in the one-line melodies: at the beginning of an integral musical unit, or in the initial part of the two-line melodic strophe, Liina Irdt prefers contours with higher notes, while in the concluding part, she prefers a more 'peaceful' contour beginning with lower notes. The performer considers it necessary to align the beginnings of musical and textual units. If the boundaries of the units do not coincide when singing consecutive verses, the singer repeats the verses. Juxtaposing the variation tendencies of the melodic contour of the one-line melody and the two-line melody, it may be concluded that the boundary between one-line and two-line melodies of a similar range can be rather indistinct (if we do not take into account the occurrence of melody line endnotes). Bearing in mind that in Estonian *regilaul*, parallelism groups of two verses are the most common (Sarv 1999, table 2) and that in choir performance the verse is repeated, what may emerge in the course of the performance of a one-line melody (in case the melodic contour variants described here are preferred) is as if a temporary two-line structure, i.e. a regular alternation of two melodic contours of different character.

## NOTES

1 See, for example, Rüütel 1998; Lippus 1995 for a fuller discussion of the main characteristics of the runo song and its melodic tradition.

2 With regard to the verse structure, the runo song is divided into the so-called 'regular', or 'normal-trochaic', and 'broken' verses. In normal-trochaic verses, word accents coincide with the metrical stresses, while in broken verses, word accents are in a weak verse position (for example, Kohronen 1994; Leino 1994; Sarv 1998). For further examples of systematic variation of two-line

melodies when performing broken verses in Estonian *regilaul*, see Lippus 1977; 1995: 66–67; Oras 2001; 2008a: 155–158; Särg 2004; 2005: 168–199.

3 One note usually corresponds to one syllable, and only one or two different note lengths, as a rule, are used in a *regilaul* rhythmic system that consists of eight rhythmic units. Hence, Urve Lippus has referred to the *regilaul* rhythm as “a prosodic rhythm” (Lippus 1995: 28–60).

4 The results of the analysis of Helmi Vill’s performances are published in Oras 2004a; the results of the analysis of a Kihnu wedding tune sung by Liis Alas and Olga (Reet) Sutt are published in Oras 2004b and 2008b. All sound recorded performances of the Kihnu melody, including the performances of Liis Alas and Olga (Reet) Sutt, are published in Kõiva, Rüütel 1997; 2003.

5 This model of fitting together text and music is usual in solo songs (for example, Tampere 1932: 131), but not without exceptions (for example, Oras 2008a: 228–229).

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