Live music and translation: The case of performances involving singing

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the multicultural and multilingual context of live music today in relation to translation, focusing primarily on a European context. A first section examines the complex relationship of music and translation, arguing that in many respects, music is a form of translation. The article then focuses on the case of vocal music and/in translation, before considering accessibility in relation to music and how it is understood in this article. Past and current traditions and expectations of translation in live music are discussed in the next section. Two more sections explore respectively contemporary audiences' preferences, and artists' engagement with their public, as well as the solutions they find to communicate with their audiences and convey the verbal content of their songs. The conclusion draws on the findings of these sections to emphasise the importance of lyrics translation in the live music scene. It also outlines the key role that music can play in translation, particularly in the cosmopolitan context of live musical events.

KEYWORDS

Vocal music, popular music, live music, song translation, lyrics translation.

1. Introduction

The ways in which music has been produced, disseminated and consumed in the last fifty years have been evolving constantly and rapidly, particularly in the popular arena. The industry focus has been on prioritising portability, so that listeners could access and interact with music individually and ubiquitously. One of the characteristics of popular music is that, with the exception of some electronic dance music (EDM), nearly all its mainstream genres, including pop/rock and rap, are vocal (Every Noise at Once no date). Until recently, most successful vocal items (singer songwriters' songs apart) were in English, but in the last five years or so, a trend towards a more diverse music consumption has emerged, measured by the main streaming platforms such as Spotify. This means that vocal music is no longer systematically in English (Spotify Newsroom 2019). This is very noticeable: in France, for example, 19 of the 20 top albums listened to on the main streaming platforms in 2018 were by French artists (SNEP 2018) and in Britain, even Welsh hit a one million plays record in 2018 (BBC 2018). Viral successes such as pop singer Luis Fonsi's "*Despacito*" (2017) or Mexican indie artist Ed Maverick's "*Mix pa llorar en tu cuarto*" (2018) have revealed a global interest in songs in Spanish for a few years, but this interest is spreading beyond a Latino fashion, and also appears in live music events. The Glastonbury Festival, one of the largest and oldest popular music festivals, the programme changed noticeably in the last few years. In 2019, for instance, many non-English or bilingual acts were given prominent spots and stages: the Langa Methodist Church Choir singing in English and Xhosa; BABYMETAL, faithful to Japanese, but with titles and

some singalongs in English; the Latino-British Grupo Magnético alternating English and Spanish; Christine and the Queens, with her enigmatic choruses in French; and Fatoumata Diawara's songs in Wassoulou.

While recorded music is still the primary source of musical consumption, with global streaming revenue accounting for nearly half of all music revenues in 2018 ("IFPI Global Music Report 2019"), live music attendance has not only increased worldwide in the 21st century in spectacular ways, but large live events, now often streamed live, are proving to influence what is being listened to (Maassø 2018). This boom in live music has been hit temporarily by the 2020 pandemic of course, but is not expected to slow down in the near future: in 2017, in the UK, nearly 30 million people from the UK and abroad attended live music events in the British Isles ("Live UK Music" 2018); 26.6 million people did so in Spain (Statista 2019a), while in the USA, 52% of the population presently attend live music shows (Nielsen Music 2018). Although the 2020 pandemic has put a temporary halt to live events, studies of the music industry predict a growth rate for live music until 2023 and beyond (Music Business Association 2020; Statista 2020). Festivals have been the principal winners of this live music upsurge. They offer music lovers diversity (dozens or hundreds of bands can be sampled in a couple of days) as well as a multimodal, sharable and personalised experience. In the last five years, livestreaming platforms, partnering with large music events have also emerged as a new companion to large events, facilitating the possibility of adding information such as lyrics subtitles. In spite of this technology though, in spite of the fact that every live music event goer is motivated by sensory and aesthetic experiences, and in spite of the fact that it is primarily vocal, textual support with regards to lyrics is not prioritised in musical performance settings in most cases. While, non-translation may be deliberate and welcome in some cases, as discussed in Section 3 and Section 7, this conspicuous absence is worth investigating.

This article attempts to draw an initial map of the current landscape of translation provision from the complex geography of live musical events. Section 2 examines the important relationship between music and translation, arguing that in many respects, music is a form of translation. The article then discusses the case of vocal music, before considering accessibility in relation to music and how it is understood in this article. Past and current traditions and expectations of translation in live music are explored in the next section. Two more sections explore contemporary audiences' preferences and artists' engagement with their audiences, as well as the solutions they find to communicate with them. The article concludes with the reasons why lyrics provision is meagre in the sphere of popular music.

2. Music and/as translation

Whether it is vocal or instrumental, music needs to be deciphered, translated or interpreted in order for it to come to life. Even a musical improvisation is based on existing musical elements, be they melodic, harmonic or rhythmic, which are at the basis of its creation. Jazz improvisation, for instance, for all its spontaneous creativity, is based on a predetermined chord progression and often on an existing melody. Hence, even before it is performed or listened to, music is essentially conceived as the mutation and transformation of an existing tune, rhythms, timbres or other aspects of the musical language. In this respect, music is built on variations on a known referent. In addition, it relies on intercultural and interlinguistic exchanges not only for production and composition, but also for dissemination and consumption.

For all these reasons, translation is more than a metaphor for music. In many respects, music *is* translation, if the latter is understood in its widest sense. This is particularly noticeable in contemporary popular music. The process of translation is complex and linked to economic, aesthetic and socio-cultural motives. For instance, the incorporation of traditional African music idioms into mainstream Western music was initiated by Afro-American slaves in the 18th century as a coded language. It became an outlet for resistance but also led to a form of integration into mainstream society. It gave birth to new creative genres and styles, from jazz to spirituals, which enriched music worldwide in ways that are still present today. Nevertheless, as theoreticians like Theodor Adorno (1991/2003) argued, these idioms were also reterritorialised by the music industry into the common language of contemporary popular music in ways that impoverished it. They could be systematically incorporated into mainstream music to produce pieces aiming to have a global appeal but often leading to formulaic music. The main stance of post-Second World War popular music was to break the ivory tower image of classical music and make music accessible for all to play, sing and listen to, regardless of their musical skills. This, of course, had mostly very creative consequences. New and old idioms from all over the world were used against the stereotypes of hegemonic discourses, using strategies that Edwin Gentzler (2008: 101) equated to "cannibalistic translation," which allowed the killing and creative reappropriation of existing traditions. This is best exemplified by the music of the Tropicália movement, led by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil in the 1960s, which has served as a model for many musicians in the world music and fusion areas in the late 20th century. Veloso and Gil used the translation of key poems as well as established music genres and styles to create new meaning through a hybrid Euro-Brazilian language, thus introducing Brazil to non-Brazilian audiences, as I have discussed elsewhere (Desblache 2019: 74-76). Technology developments also facilitated the incorporation of different styles and rhythms into new pieces and allowed musical

dissemination to be global and instant, all of which accentuated these effects of translation.

3. The case of vocal music

As mentioned in the previous section, all music translates and is translated, but vocal music also depends on words, which means that translation exists at several levels: the transformation of musical language, the translation of lyrics and the mediation of a combination of idioms, from purely semantic to purely musical, as Klaus Kaindl (2005) has discussed in detail. While in some areas such as classical, jazz and film, instrumental music is prominent, "99.9% per cent of pop and rock music is vocal" (Byers 2009). Although a large proportion of music performed and listened to in the world is in English, streaming servers' statistics show that not only listeners increasingly enjoy listening to songs in their own language, as was stated in the introduction, but that in some English-speaking countries, nearly 40% of music lovers listen to songs in languages that they do not speak, at least some of the time (Statista 2019b).

Of course, words in songs, be they listened to live or not, do not always need to be translated and may be meaningful through non-translation: Ella Fitzgerald's scat singing; nonsense pieces such as Charlie Chaplin's mock song in *Modern Times* (1936), a parody cover of the 1917 *Je cherche après Titine*, translated into a gibberish version of French, Italian and Spanish for comic effect ("Chaplin Modern Times 'non-sense song'" 2012); songs in fictional languages such as Mary Poppins' famous Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious song, or Enya's songs in Loxian (*Amarantine* 2005); items in rare languages used for exotic effect, geographical association and virtual travelling (*The Lion King*'s opening of the "Circle of Life" in Zulu for instance) are all famous examples of this. Many pop songs also rely on repeating a few words which are key to the 'hook' of the song: the first worldwide live broadcast of "All you need is love", in 1967, did not require a translation then and still does not (see also Desblache 2019: 185-195).

However, in a large number of cases, the lyrics of songs are semantically meaningful in ways that interconnect with the music and their understanding can lead to a deeper appreciation. Even when they are sung in their own language, most listeners struggle to understand all the words, as every song lover knows. Moreover, with the prominence of hip-hop as a tool for voicing anger against social injustice and creativity in 21st century urban countercultures, lyrics have gained not only complexity but also visibility on the mainstream stage, and are challenging to translate intralingually, interlinguistically and intersensorially, given the frequent complexity, intertextuality and double-entendre of the original words. They also require sensitive awareness of who the target audience is. For instance, the opening line of Stormzy's (2019) "Vossi Bop", "My bruddas

don't dab, we just Vossi bop," needs to be mediated differently for many audiences who require translation at a range of levels: explicitated or adapted intralingually for listeners unaware of the Vossi Bop dance that is at the centre of the song or of London grime slang; interlingually, for non-English-speaking grime fans for instance, or, more widely, for a general audience, a shared platform such as Musixmatch, a music forum, or in view of a performance in another language; finally, the translation could be intersensorial and aimed at a blind, deaf or deafened public. Contemporary audiences seem to appreciate a range of translations, including those that are not intended for them.

For instance, at the 2019 Glastonbury Festival, not only did a black British solo artist, Stormzy, headline the main stage successfully for the first time, but the virtuosity of Tara Asher, his British Sign Language interpreter, seduced many audiences against all expectations. In fact, sign language interpretations, at Glastonbury, have recently been sources of interest and discovery as Aimee Cliff (2019) notes, emphasising that "what makes such translations consistently go viral is the sheer emotive power of the performances, stemming from the visually expressive nature of the language". Overall, a taste for diversity seems to be emerging, fuelled by a music streaming industry which encourages and provides it.

While music is getting cheaper and more widely available with streaming and various internet platforms, and while audiences clearly show a stronger interest in how one language can be transferred into another beyond the verbal, verbal provision of information related to music, including the translation of lyrics for songs, is much worse than ten years ago. In this respect, CDs, with their inside booklets, were a major improvement on LPs which occasionally printed the lyrics of songs on the back cover. Today, information about artists and their work is scant, if available at all, even in English, let alone via translation into other languages. Even streaming services priding themselves on editorial information, such as Qobuz, provide a mediocre input. At best, 'copy and paste' paragraphs are included, sometimes in main languages (in French for Apple Music French subscribers for instance). In popular music, which is not always released in an album format, it is left to listeners to take the time to research the song's background, or lyrics of which transcriptions and translations have been provided free of charge by other listeners on large platforms such as LyricsTranslate or Musixmatch. Some may find it surprising that requests for lyrics translation or even for transcription have not been made more loudly at live music events. This is perhaps because it is supported by the very extensive database of song transcriptions and translation that has been built by fans and volunteers in the last two decades. It is in the field of recorded music that volunteer translation was pioneered, on music forums and early social networks, as transcriptions, interlingual translations and discussions on songs, on their creators and performers, have been offered since the very dawn of the 21st century.

4. Vocal music and translation: past provision in a live context

Before technology made music reproduction and amplification possible in the 20th century, popular vocal music was perhaps sung in translation as often as in its original language. As musicians, singers and entertainers travelled, their songs were adapted for new audiences. This is the reason why different variations of folk songs, based on similar themes and/or musical content, exist in different countries. The French song *Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre*, whose origins cannot be traced precisely, is an excellent example of this. Although it recounts the military exploits and death of John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, at the Battle of Malplaquet, its facts are inaccurate since the battle took place in 1709 and the Duke died in his bed in 1722. It was perhaps wishful thinking on the part of the French and their allies who lost that battle and the War of the Spanish Succession. One of Queen Marie-Antoinette's favourite songs, *Malbrouk*, starts appearing in a range of cultural products in the last decades of the 18th century, in plays, poems, volumes of songs, and as instrumental variations. Its popularity crosses borders quickly in the 19th century, once it is printed widely, and it is found from America to Russia (Leterrier 2003), often with translated lyrics which have a different meaning from the original. In Britain, for instance, it became a drinking song, "We won't go home till morning," before becoming the celebratory "For he's a jolly good fellow" that everyone knows today (Fuld 1966: 192-193). The example of this 18th century song shows that the principles of a cover song, which is to remediate a successful song for another context, be it cultural, linguistic, aesthetic or political, have long been established, even if new technologies have expanded their possibilities.

In high culture, musical texts have always tended to be more fixed, either through (generally sacred) rituals and/or because they were printed more systematically. In some cases, such as in religious music for instance, the words to be sung also had an autonomous status, such as mass liturgy, for instance. With the rise of professional musicians and the internationalisation of the musical stage, famous opera singers were travelling performers and tended to learn their repertoire in the original language, which was initially limited to Italian, French and German. International casts could therefore perform in one language, and bilingual, sometimes multilingual libretti were offered to the audience for purchase. As opera became more popular in the 19th century and was composed on libretti written in a wider range of languages, the most prestigious houses programmed performances in the original language, while the more provincial ones staged works sung in translation.

This led to essentially different ways of providing translation in the popular and classical spheres, which are still visible today. The world of classical music and opera, in fact, has tended to evolve more slowly. As Renée Fleming, an opera star also performing in light music and trying to bridge

the gap between the two, stated, "the opera world is increasingly small. We've been presenting it in the same way for so long that it's ceased to be relevant" (Armistead 2019). Not only did it cease to be relevant to most people, but, with the rise of popular music in the decades following the Second World War, as audiences engaged with music more freely, the world of opera became perceived as arrogant. This meant that it needed to become more accessible in order to receive public funds and ensure its survival, as I have argued elsewhere (Desblache 2013). In brief, it needed translation in a range of different forms. And it provided it. Opera may still seem elitist or extraneous to some, but it has always excelled at providing textual support for its audiences who asked for it. Since the 1980s, opera has revolutionised the way sung texts have been provided for audiences, be it interlinguistically, intralinguistically or intersensorially. It has pioneered surtitles, support for the blind in the performing arts (audio description, audio introduction and touch tours), and opened its doors to a wide range of audiences, from school children to people with special needs. It continues to be at the forefront of developments with respect to translation and accessibility. Music live streaming, now common at popular music festivals, as will be mentioned below, was first developed on a large scale in the form of live digital cinema opera and ballet performances. However, it is not so widespread in the classical sphere in free format, although when it does take place, such as at the Ojai Music Festival for instance, translation provision is included in the streaming.

5. Current translation provision for live popular music

Traditions and expectations established in opera and classical music events have largely been adopted for musicals in recent years. Stage musicals, initially an Anglo-American genre which has become increasingly popular in the world since beginning of the 21st century, have benefited from the operatic surtitling trend. At present, in Europe particularly, large co-productions often mean a single show in English with surtitles in the non-English speaking countries. This has been the case for Sondheim's (1971) *Follies* for instance, which has remained in English in its performances in French. However, the strongest trend now is to provide musicals sung in the language of the country in which they are performed, a tradition initiated in Spain, as Marta Mateo (2008) has shown, but now widespread, particularly in Belgium, France and Germany (Mac Donald 2012; Martland 2017). As for performances in English-speaking countries, musicals in languages other than English such as *Les Misérables* (Schönberg 1985), have always been sung in translation. Until the end of the first decade of the 21st century, surtitling musicals was limited to very few performances and provided by disability charities such as Stagetext in Britain, Accès Culture in France or the Prescott Studio in Italy, to name but a few, but it is now widespread and increasingly organised by an accessibility manager appointed directly by theatre companies.

While they are increasingly popular, and while they represent a section of the live music sector which provides translation consistently, musicals are expensive, and are not attended regularly by most people. The 2017 UK Live Music Census report (Webster *et al*. 2018: 25) suggests that, following the analysis of a survey of over 4000 participants held in various cities in the UK, 47% of respondents spend more than £20 on tickets for concerts/festivals each month, 37% on gigs and small venue events (taking place in places as varied as bars and pubs, the most popular spaces, to places of worship), while only 25% spend the same on recorded music. The survey also shows that younger audiences spend more on live than on recorded music than older ones.

In spite of this interest, textual provision of song lyrics or even detailed information regarding the programme is extremely limited. Programmes provide line-ups, schedules and general information. In the last ten years, the situation has even worsened in some respects. Glastonbury performances, for instance, when broadcast by the BBC, used to include subtitled lyrics, sometimes visible on the main stages live, but now they seem to be only provided when hip-hop or a similarly lyric-heavy song is involved. All large festivals provide an app which offers information on local facilities, on the coverage of events, and the possibility of interaction with other festival goers, but nothing on the content of songs. Festivals encourage the use of existing internet platforms for information, including information on songs. Latitude Festival, for instance, one of the largest in Britain, states that "We're working with the Google Assistant to get you into the festival spirit early with your very own personal assistant on your phone using just your voice" and advises that "Even if you don't know the name to a song you like at Latitude (We don't expect you to know every single song!) just ask your Google Assistant to help you: "Hey Google, What's this song?" (Latitude News 2019). Presumably, Google Assistant, or direct access to established music apps such as Musixmatch and Shazam are expected to provide information about the song lyrics transcriptions or translations if requested. Yet having a consistent Wi-Fi connection and keeping a phone charged at all times at festivals are not always possible, so putting the onus on the festival goers for tasks such as finding out information on songs and their lyrics may not be reasonable.

Since about 2014, live streaming of popular music events has also been expanding exponentially, making it possible for listeners to enjoy events simultaneously from their electronic device. With live music becoming a major source of income, streaming sites are seen as a palatable teaser for potential audiences, and can also include a merchandise section. The 2020 pandemic has also fostered new approaches. It is too early in this fast development to know which live streaming services and technologies will stay and which will not. However, trends are emerging. The options tend to be the following:

- Some major music festivals, such as Coachella in California, organise their own free live streaming and archiving of recordings made. Festivals hit by the 2020 pandemic are also endeavouring to increase viable distance access. For example, the artistic director of the Unsound Festival in Krakow, scheduled for October 2020, Mat Schulz is planning for the event to take place in hybrid form (Szatan 2020).
- Some music festivals have a dedicated partner who disseminates their events live and archives them, such as the Glastonbury Festival, which works exclusively with the BBC.
- Large streaming and social network companies such as LiveList, Livestream, YouTube Live and Facebook Live specialise in streaming events live and free. They work in partnership with radio stations, music broadcasting platforms or television channels such as Boiler room, Medici.tv, Live for Live Music which all feature extra material related to concerts (performers' interviews, list of musical events, interactive forums…) but are generally extremely poor at lyrics provision and their translation. For instance, Medici TV, which specialises in classical music, do not make surtitles visible to their internet viewers. I contacted LiveList with questions regarding accessibility and textual provision on screen, but could not get an answer.
- A number of platforms, such as Periscope, are available for musicians to self-stream their music. The 2020 pandemic has also led to many homespun productions.
- Finally, some live streaming services operate on a paid subscription. The Berliner Philharmoniker's Digital Concert Hall thus functions on a subscription model (although free during the 2020 pandemic period). Of all live streaming sites which I explored, it is the most multilingual and comprehensive as regards translation. It also provides a wealth of contextual information on performances offered and interviews with composers, performers and other artistic agents. In this respect, it stands out as an exception, and it no coincidence that it is devoted to classical music, a sphere in which translation provision is expected.

6. Accessibility and music

Music, at least in the Western world, has had troubled relationships with accessibility in all understandings of the word since the late modern period. As it became increasingly created for virtuoso performers and listeners who listened (and watched) in awe of their performances, it led to exclusion and to perceived attitudes of elitism, attitudes that popular music started to put into question in the pre-Second World War period and dissolved more comprehensively from the 1950s onwards. As Alex Lubet (2011) has argued, for a music maker in the classical and jazz spheres, it is extremely challenging to have any disability, as outstanding physical functionality is expected of performers in most respects. Organisers of classical music events have made and are still making superb efforts to render them more

accessible to wide audiences, both in live and recorded contexts, as was mentioned earlier. However, the majority of people relate more naturally to popular music, as they identify themselves more easily with their performers, and are encouraged to participate to events through dancing, singalongs and a range of vocal or bodily responses.

Institutions such as the UN and the EU have brought in legislation and conventions stating the rights for anyone to "to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life" (United Nations 2016). Yet in popular music accessibility developments are acutely needed, both as regards general audiences and audiences with special needs: the deaf, blind and visually as well as hearing impaired, and people with restricted mobility. While this article is primarily focused on issues concerning the provision of lyrics for general audiences, this section will briefly outline the situation for music lovers with special needs, particularly deaf and deafened ones.

Some charities, such as Shape Arts and Attitude is Everything in the UK, have been working hard at changing this landscape, and musical events have been more inclusive of music lovers with special needs since the second decade of the 21st century, particularly in Western Europe. According to a 2015 survey (Attitude is Everything 2016), the number of deaf and disabled fans attending live music events in Britain was up 26% that year. This improvement is most visible in large festivals. Music promoters, such as Festival Republic in the UK for instance, often manage several festivals, which implies that once a large festival offers accessibility provision, others often follow suit. While some small festivals provide facilities for people with special needs and some even create events with a focus on special needs, such as the Fest'Dif Festival or Hip Opsession in France, and while my encounters with some small festival organisers show that they are sympathetic to the idea, small events in general do not offer specialist provision such as audio description for the blind or sign interpreting for the deaf.

When it is available, provision takes many forms: in addition to facilities for people with reduced mobility, there can be a dedicated space for the deaf or deafened patrons. Glastonbury, for instance, offers a DeafZone Tent for instance with BSL interpreters and workshops which can be booked in advance. Most provision seems to serve deaf patrons more comprehensively with sign language interpreting and/or lyrics subtitles and in some cases, sensorial accessories such as luminous columns or vibrational rug sack synchronised with sound output. As Mélanie Hénault-Tessier, Thibault Christophe and Nathalie Negrellive (2018) note, enjoyment of music by deaf participants is heightened by the combination of all these tools. Audio-described musical touch tours and audio description of events for blind people are common in opera but rarer at popular music events.

Strictly in relation to the lyrics of songs, on which this article focuses, when accessibility provision is made, the translation of live musical events for special needs audiences can entail scripted text (for instance song lyrics that can be known and prepared in advance of the live event and made available intra or interlingually, generally as sub or surtitles) or unscripted events (off the cuff interviews with performers for instance). Unscripted events are usually respoken with the help of a respeaking software, while traditionally scripted events are cued in with a pre-prepared script, as is usually the case for sub or surtitles. With a trend towards more automatic translation, respeaking techniques are becoming more prevalent, especially in the televised broadcast of live events.

In some countries, such as in the UK, where an organisation supplying a service to the public is bound to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that a disabled person's experience is as close as possible to that of someone without a disability ("Equality Act 2010" 2010), support can be demanded for this experience to happen, and sometimes is. In September 2017, Sally Reynolds and two deaf friends booked tickets for a concert of the group Little Mix and asked the organisers, LHG Live, to provide a sign interpreter for the concert. When they refused, threats were made to take them to court and "hours before the hearing was due to take place, LHG Live agreed" to the provision (Coleman 2018). Provision, of course, should not be made under such fraught circumstances, but it is a legal duty, in the UK, to provide it.

The growth of specialist support brings forth an important question: is the 'universal design' perspective that is intended to benefit a wide range of users not feasible? In the case of access to the song lyrics, universal access is not possible with one type of provision. When surtitles appeared, they were celebrated as a tool that allowed wide access from people who struggled to hear the words being sung, to the hearing impaired and to those who cannot understand them because they are in a foreign language. But they are not the preferred choice for deaf audiences, who communicate with the sign language in use in their country. Laws such as the Equality Act 2010 prioritise specific provision rather than support which can reach a wide range of users. More inclusion for people with special needs is, of course, crucial, but it is interesting to see that this trend towards access is not paralleled for the general public, for whom no access to lyrics in transcription or translation is given in most live popular music events.

7. Audiences' preferences

Since the beginning of the 21st century, vocal music has evolved to prioritise genres – a slippery concept (see Holt 2007 and Tagg 2013: 266-269) – that give particular weight to words, such as hip-hop and its relatives. Google's Music Time Line (no date) and Every Noise at Once (no date) have made remarkable attempts to map musical genres**,** in spite of the difficulty

to delineate them and show their recent evolution, which makes such a statement possible. Thanks to data gathered by streaming companies such as Spotify, much is also known about which type of music is being listened to and where. The themes of lyrics and their psychological and social impact on listeners have been studied widely (see for instance Pieschl and Fegers 2016; Napier and Shamir 2018), and even though it is not an entirely new phenomenon (Wolther 2008), both the growth of live music events and a widespread use of streaming platforms have recently fostered a taste for diversity and for the appreciation of more local artists, as was stated in the introduction. Yet little is known regarding the importance that music lovers give to lyrics and how much they focus on them when listening to vocal music. No large-scale survey exists of audiences' opinions concerning how much they value information on popular music concerts and lyrics provision or their translation. By contrast, several large opera houses conducted surveys asking whether audiences enjoyed surtitling, and their answers were unanimously positive (Mele Scorcia 2018).

In 2016, I conducted a small survey on audience preferences regarding the textual provision of lyrics at live music events. Gathering answers from Belgium, Italy, Germany and the UK, it included questions relating to all genres, from opera to punk and church music. While the sample of 72 respondents was too small to draw general conclusions from, it was extremely varied demographically with a small majority of students (56%), while other participants' professional activities were in varied sectors from retail to education and the arts to administration. Their age range varied from 20 to 68 years of age and musical tastes extremely diverse. They spoke 11 different native languages. A few were disabled, and 10 were members of a choir, hence with some musical knowledge and interest. Results of this survey, which were partially published (Desblache 2019: 87-90), were relevant in spite of the small size of the sample: 27% of respondents were undecided as to whether they wanted lyrics provision/translation at live events and 24% wanted them in a specific context such as if the song supported a story, or if an unknown language was involved. But 49% were in favour of song translation and/or transcription at all events, giving a preference for surtitling over other display formats. As mentioned earlier, the sample is too limited to justify overarching statements, but the rift between the classical and the non-classical audience as regards their wish for lyrics support may not be as wide as it seems.

We know that listeners, in both the classical and popular music spheres, struggle to understand the lyrics of songs, even in their native tongue (see for instance Lachno 2014). This comprehension challenge is exacerbated by the fact that many songs are performed in a language which is not in the listeners' native tongue. Yet classical music audiences expect (and demand) full textual support, while popular music lovers seem to enjoy either listening to songs they know, or discovering new items from a fresh

perspective, with no or little textual support, as my discussions with many popular music festival participants suggest. Neither does what seems to be indifference to the provision of lyrics in the context of live popular music tie in with the growing enthusiasm for subtitling by all users and across all media content which, according to Ofcom, the UK government-approved regulatory and competition authority for the broadcasting, telecommunications and postal industries, is linked to the fact that more and more people watch programmes or videos on commutes on their mobile devices (Davies 2019).

Such a contrasting attitude is interesting. Is it due to the age of the participants? To habit and expectations? To the longer and often more challenging content of the operatic libretto and poetry used in art songs, which summons more textual support? To the strong narrative content of opera which gives more importance to storytelling? To the fact that popular music audiences often use apps such as Musixmatch to looked up the words on their devices? All these reasons probably come into play, but two other important ones relate to what audiences want to do. First, most of live popular music events attendees know the songs that they are listening to and are familiar with their words. Second, their priority seems primarily participatory: they are focused on uploading and sharing their experience digitally much more than on downloading information on the songs they are listening to. Their motive for understanding the words is also strongly participative: a survey made in November 2017 by the data and research company MIDiA Research for LyricFind (no date) in the UK, the US and Germany, reveals that although 88% of respondents look for lyrics on various apps and 68% would like lyrics playing in time with the song, 72% of these music consumers obtain the lyrics of songs in order to sing them along (Mulligan 2017). While this survey was undertaken in the context of music streaming, it gives a good indication of the importance that listeners give to lyrics and how much they like to engage with them. Social networking services have been quick to respond to music lovers' desires. Following lip-sync mobile app TikTok, Instagram offered a new feature in June 2019 which allows lyrics to be added (and edited) on screen as a song is added to an account. Companies such as LyricFind, who describe themselves as "the world's leader in legal lyrics solutions," increasingly provide lyrics transcriptions/translations in real time, as the song is playing. They also power the content of lyrics search sites such as SongMeanings (no date) while others openly enrol fan transcribers and translators.

In a live concert situation, in most cases, popular music listeners and viewers, if they wish to be informed on performance content or access the lyrics of songs, are expected to do their own research prior to a concert or use their phone as they listen, using their favourite application in order to access original lyrics, their translation(s), other related content, or exchange information live with fellow music fans. This may involve artists' sites, dedicated websites and applications or forums such as the ones

discussed above. Many of these platforms, such as Musixmatch, work on a system of points which contributors acquire in order to be promoted as 'lyrics curators,' which gives them certain rights. Many of these platforms also offer guidelines in different languages on how to present texts. The enthusiasts who take part also frequently contribute to populating the content such application and fan sites with lyrics and their translations. While some artists, such as Alicia Keys, demand to enforce a ban on mobile phone use during their live shows, in most popular music concerts, participants interact with their smart phone to take pictures or segments of film, share information, images or emotions on social networks as they take part in the event (Bennett 2012; 2016). In an era when verbal language is only part of an array of communication tools, in the context of the concert itself, aspects other than the verbal content may be prioritised. Moreover, the growth of music streaming and its influence on all aspects of music listening cannot be underestimated. As Mark Mulligan (2017) notes, the battle for recognition in this area took place around playlists until 2017, but at present, "added value features such as lyrics and video" are becoming crucial in attracting and retaining customers, and as lyrics become "a core component of streaming music behaviour," expectations will also change on the live music scene.

8. Artists' solutions

As suggested above, listeners' expectations are evolving. While famous bands and singers still top the bills of many festivals, a strong interest in local festivals and events which also host local artists, and a renewed focus on local cultural life are increasingly visible, at least across Europe (Négrier *et al*. 2013: 29; Hann 2019). As Beverley Whitrick, Strategic Director of the Music Venue Trust, states in an interview for the 2018 European Festival Report ("European Festival Report 2018" 2018: 37), "both artists and audiences are getting more vocal about the value of live music to communities, local economies and health and well-being". This means a richer array of languages in vocal music offered in live events throughout Europe.

Artists are also listeners, of course, and are very aware of these changes. In live events, concerts organisers and promoters are the ones who usually decide the level of support offered as regards media accessibility, and this can include surtitles, signing for deaf viewers and other services. As mentioned above, although progress is slow as regards support for music lovers with special needs, be it with respect to mobility or musical content, it is happening. By contrast, audiences who do not request a specialist service in advance do not expect any textual provision in live settings, and rely on their own devices to access and share information from music applications or singers' websites. It is surprising that artists themselves, overall, do not seem to request lyrics provision for their audiences in live concerts. They are keen to convey the verbal, aesthetic and emotional

content of their outputs, both in live and recorded contexts of course, but do not seem to emphasise the importance of lyrics provision.

The ways they use words in songs is extremely diversified and different ways would warrant different priorities in ensuring verbal comprehension. Some, including many rappers, use words enhanced by music as vehicles to denounce social injustice; others consider lyrics primarily as multimodal elements that bounce off beat and melody, rather than for their strictly linguistic and poetic meaning; they can also integrate a few words as exotic components intended to be attractive to audiences, particularly for songs that are not in English, although aimed at a global audience. Moreover, performers play with different communication strategies on stage in order to interact with their public. This can include introducing the content of a song, when they know that it will be unknown to their listeners, or highlighting the relevance of its main themes in the context of their performance.

This penultimate section will highlight some of the strategies they offer, arguing that the ways in which singers communicate the verbal content of their songs to their audiences, particularly in a live music context, is creative and emotionally engaging, but not always efficient as far as lyrics comprehension is concerned. Surprisingly, for instance, the tendency for vocal artists today seems to streamline their websites and no longer include the lyrics of their songs as part of it. World-leading names such as Madonna, Adele or George Ezra, for instance, do offer the lyrics of their songs on their sites and often, on the official videos of the songs they release. By contrast, up-and-coming singers, especially English-speaking ones, such as Tom Odell, for example, in spite of the strong focus they give to lyrics in their songs, prioritise clips from their personal or professional life, and tend to neglect lyrics provision. The case of Christine and the Queens, or Chris, as she has called herself since 2018, merits discussion from this point of view. The French singer's lyrics are not only complex and deliberately ambivalent in places, they can be bilingual, or even trilingual ("Follarse" 2018). They are also produced in two versions (which are loose translations of each other, although they are choreographed in the same way and written on the same instrumental score), one in French, and one in English. Until 2018, Chris's website was extremely well provided with lyrics, translations and information about her different albums. However, her most recent website, constructed on the model of many contemporary popular artists, gives no space to lyrics transcription or translation. While the visual and choreographic production of some of her songs such as "La Marcheuse/The Walker" deliberately works on a slow pace, matching careful vocal delivery to give more visibility (and audibility) to words, no help is given to those who may not understand all the lyrics. Yet the words, which, in the case of "La Marcheuse/The Walker," evoke the courage it takes to be oneself and how it involves transgressing traditions in the process, are examples of sung poetry that are challenging to understand,

even for native speakers. Some singers, such as the French singer Zaz for instance, populate their performance with subtitles in different languages when releasing clips of new songs. But the only help offered on the Christine and the Queens Youtube channel are auto-generated subtitles, which, given the complex nature of her lyrics, make no sense in transcription, let alone interlingual translation, as they are not accurate. When the video clip of "La Marcheuse" was released ahead of her album *Chris*, it was originally offered in French only, but although the lyrics are crucial to the overall meaning of the song, it became immediately successful with non-French speaking audiences. The words of Kevin Apaza (2018), a blogger on the Directlyrics music site, will dismay some song lovers, myself included, but his reaction seems to be that of many:

> "La Marcheuse" is another of a stunner laid-back track. You may not understand any of the lyrics if you don't speak French, but that's ok. It's Christine's beautiful singing that will make you understand the whole story and put you in the right mood in your head only with the VIBES of the song (original emphasis).

Such fans' responses may explain why so many vocal artists neglect to provide lyrics on their sites, which have been driven commercially in the last decade, with more emphasis given to franchised products for sale, and which also respond to music lovers' desire for more visual content. Interestingly, as Francis Mus (2018: 240) has observed, discussing Leonard Cohen, this was also common in the 1960s and 70s:

> [French music critics] considered the English language at once as a barrier (hindering textual understanding), yet also as an inessential carrier of a broader musical experience. Dans la salle, peu de gens saisissent parfaitement les textes de Cohen: pourtant, dans le labyrinthe apparent de ses phrases les spectateurs suivent les mots. (Baqué 1972: n.p.) [In the room, few people understood exactly the texts of Cohen: however, in the apparent labyrinth of his sentences, the spectators followed his words.].

Today, some artists publish their lyrics on a separate site altogether, or in a discrete volume. Jay-Z (2010), for instance, started a trend in complementary information available to listeners when he published *Decoded*, a volume intended to explicitate the rapped poetry of his albums.

Other strategies are also used. The most common is probably a singer's reappropriation of an existing song, which can be from their own repertoire and will be familiar to most listeners (Sheryl Crow's 2019 recreated version of her own 1996 "Redemption Day," sung by Johnny Cash before his death). Strategies can also have a cultural purpose. For instance, unlike Christine and the Queens, who frequently insert foreign words to obscure the sexually explicit and at times aggressive content of her songs (e.g., "Follarse" 2018), some singers use bilingualism or multilingualism to repeat information and introduce unknown languages to their listeners in relation to known ones. This is the case of Nigerian artist Rokia Traoré, who unveils the richness of her country by singing in her Bambara language, with lyrics repeated in global languages, such as French and English, so that Bambara

can become familiar to their ears. By contrast, to engage audiences with a language they do not know, non-native English-speaking singers can insert a few English words as a 'hook' into their song, while singing most of their piece in their own language, as many K- and J-pop singers do. Finally, singers communicate emotionally with their audience on the stage. American singer Lizzo thus communicates with her public, not only sharing the moods of her songs, but interacting with her listeners on stage and driving her listeners to positive thinking and feeling.

Vocal music is meaningful in many ways of course, and the lyrics of songs are only one channel of how significance is expressed: bodily movement, voice register, aesthetic quality, lighting and stage production, choreography, instrumental score and singer's personality are all key elements of a song's meaning, particularly when it is performed live. Yet I believe that famous lyricist Yip Harburg was right when he wrote: "Words make you think a thought, music makes you feel a feeling, a song makes you feel a thought" (Hyman Alonso 2012: 226). Ensuring that lyrics are given prominence and that they are understood is therefore key to the full enjoyment of a performance. Today, information can be reached and shared after a few clicks, but the use of mobile phones or other devices can be challenging in festival settings, as discussed earlier. The myriad of services available to music listeners such as comments, shares, opportunities given to create and share song lyrics and to sing along to songs, can also distract from concert enjoyment. For more information on music events and songs to be given to concert goers, both audiences and artists need to raise their voice.

9. Conclusion

In the 2016 survey on live music and translation discussed in Section 7, 51% of respondents either did not wish to have translation provision in song lyrics, or only wanted it in specific circumstances, generally when it involved a story being told. In some contexts, such as in dance music, a focus on the words can be intrusive or unnecessary. In this survey though, half of respondents were keen to have access to lyrics in all circumstances, be it in different formats, from content on their phone, downloaded at their convenience, to subtitling on the stage, tailored to the circumstances. Furthermore, young audiences are increasingly keen to have access to lyrics, and although no figures exist for live events, a cross-European survey undertaken by the large MIDiA Research group shows that 88% of streaming music subscribers look for lyrics, and that synchronised lyrics provision is becoming a key factor in the choice of a music streaming service (Mulligan 2017). Changes are happening on streaming platforms, but few are visible in live events.

The transcription and translation of songs is not only important for music. Music is also important for translation. Live musical events, and particularly

music festivals, which mushroom in the summer seasons throughout Europe year after year, act as cosmopolitan spaces for the local community:

> Through their emphasis of the local and, at the same time, the international together with their integrating emotional power, music festivals act as translation spaces towards and for universality. Hence they support cosmopolitanism, that is, they forge trans-local identities and cultivate curiosity for the other (Giorgi *et al*. 2011: 8).

Music plays a key role as an agent of interaction between local and international interests. It does not only allow the expression of fluid identities in an era of "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000); it allows this expression to be shared across borders and beyond the verbal. Beyond the verbal, though, does not mean without the verbal. Music can function with or without other languages, be they visual, choreographic or verbal. Songs have the ability to enhance the power of words. Yet the latter often remain hidden behind a musical shield. Artists, concert organisers and producers, music audiences and translators all have a role to play in promoting their meaning to the widest possible audience.

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Biography

Lucile Desblache is Professor of Translation and Transcultural Studies and Director of the Centre for Research in Translation and Transcultural Studies at the University of Roehampton. She conducts research in two areas, Animal and Environmental Studies and Audiovisual Translation Studies. Recently, she has worked across the two areas, investigating how music can be an agent of translation for the natural world. She is the author of *Music and Translation. New Mediations in the Digital Age* (2019 Palgrave Macmillan).

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