

An Analysis of the Structural Layout and Artistic Conception Creation of Contemporary Erhu Performance Art

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Abstract: Erhu, as the most representative traditional stringed instrument in China, is deeply loved by the audience for its unique timbre and rich expressive force. With the rapid development of China's literary and artistic undertakings, contemporary Erhu performance art has not only formed a relatively standardized and complete structural model, but also created a beautiful artistic conception in the process of performance, fully reflecting the charm of contemporary Erhu performance art.

Keywords: Erhu, performance art, structural layout, artistic conception creation

Introduction

Since the 20th century, many composers have continued to inherit Mr. Liu Tianhua's traditional creative approach in the creation of Erhu music, applying a fusion of Chinese and Western techniques to combine traditional and modern creative methods. Through the research and analysis of traditional and modern Erhu works, the author has found that most works share common characteristics in terms of structural layout and artistic conception creation. For example, the thematic melodies in the works are often singable; the structure of the music is typically based on a ternary form; the tonal layout is clear and concise; and the creation of artistic conception has a strong sense of atmosphere. These commonalities fully reflect the typical characteristics of contemporary Erhu works.

1.The tonal layout of contemporary Erhu performance art

The creative techniques of contemporary Erhu works have broken through the previous single tonality in terms of tonal layout, and adopted the flexible use of multiple tonalities that transform each other. The modulation rarely uses altered notes, and usually employs pentatonic scale and heptatonic scale to reflect the stylistic characteristics of traditional music.

For example, in the second part of *The Narrative Song of Lan Huahua* titled *The Beauty of Lan Huahua*, this section is divided into three subsections, and the third subsection is further divided into two musical phrases.^[1] During the performance, the tonality changes from C in the first phrase to F in the second phrase. The melody of the first phrase is beautiful and energetic, portraying the lively, cute, innocent, and virtuous image of Lan Huahua. The modulation in the second phrase further develops and varies the melody of the first phrase. During the performance, one can clearly sense that the melody becomes more extensive and the change in musical mood becomes more intense. The changes in the dynamics and range of the left and right hands make the melody more extensive and passionate, expressing the protagonist's true feelings towards pursuing a better and happier life. It can be seen that a reasonable tonal layout not only

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gives the melody more tension and breadth, but also makes the melody more beautiful and singing-like.

2.The structural melody layout of contemporary Erhu performance art

For an excellent Erhu performer, proficient skills are the foundation for becoming a virtuoso, and mastery of the overall structure and local details of the music is also crucial. A correct understanding of the musical structure, which is the performer's correct psychological interpretation of the work, is also a psychological skill. The skills we often talk about do not only refer to finger skills, but psychological factors are also part of the skills. Only by correctly understanding the musical structure psychologically can the performer bring their instrumental skills to the utmost.

For example, when performing *The Narrative Song of Lan Huahua*, we should first know that it is a narrative Erhu piece adapted by composer Guan Ming based on the folk song *Lan Huahua* from the northern Shaanxi region. The piece uses the female character of *Lan Huahua* to depict her strong and unyielding character in the face of the stubborn forces of the landlord class in feudal society. Pure and kind-hearted, she ultimately resisted the landlord class with her life in pursuit of a free life. The piece consists of five parts. The first part, "Introduction," praises the protagonist's purity, kindness, beauty, and liveliness, serving as a transition to the theme music.^[2]

The second part, *The Beauty of Lan Huahua*, consists of three subsections: medium-paced, allegretto, and free-rhythm. The medium-paced section further comprises three small sections, each with varying tempos and emotional expressions. The first small section presents the theme music of the narrative piece, describing the protagonist's beauty and innocence through two corresponding phrases. The second small section further expands the theme music, expressing the protagonist's aspiration for a free life. The third small section once again enlarges the theme melody, with a singing melody that fully embodies the protagonist's beauty not just in appearance but more importantly in her pure and kind heart. The allegretto section serves as a foreshadowing for the sudden appearance of the free-rhythm section, forming a stark contrast with the emotional expression of the preceding melody. The joyful mood suddenly turns into panic and anger.

The third part, *Forced into the Zhou Family*, is divided into three small musical phrases, which are interconnected and form the climax of the entire piece. As the amplitude and intensity of the musical melody gradually increase, the rational use of rolling and pressing techniques fully embodies the protagonist's helplessness and suffering after being forcibly taken into the landlord's family.

The fourth part, *Escape*, borrows the expression techniques of the traditional opera music "fast-paced" in the composer's creation, further expanding the tension of the melody structure. It expresses the protagonist's stubborn character in vowing to fight against feudal forces to the end. During the performance, attention should be paid to the coordination of the left and right hands.

The fifth part, "Coda," is a reprise of the theme music, expressing the praise of the people for Lan Huahua's indomitable spirit. Therefore, in Erhu performance, players need to repeatedly practice and gradually mature over time. This means that during performance, they should set aside the constraints of physical skills and no longer consider their instrumental abilities. Only by doing so can they truly feel the essence of the music and fully utilize their psychological skills. Therefore, during daily training, whether practicing scales or melodies, players should treat them as an artistic enjoyment. Combining technical training with aesthetic appreciation is the best training method and a prerequisite for performers to reach the ideal state of "mastery."

3.Creating artistic conception in contemporary Erhu performance art

For Erhu performers, artistic conception is the product of the fusion of their subjective emotions and objective things, requiring them to achieve a self-forgetting state where the music comes from the heart and the strings are moved by the heart during performance.

3.1 Imagination in the art of Erhu performance

During the process of Erhu performance, rich imagination can create beautiful music. Both the composer's works and the musician's music cannot be separated from musical imagination. Rich imagination is a prerequisite for creating and performing works. Imagination is the human brain's reaction to objective things, which can be divided into positive and negative emotions based on different objective things. This allows performers to form different emotions during their performances and perfectly express the composer's intentions. However, this kind of musical imagination is not inherent; it is accumulated through practice. It requires performers to actively imagine during their performances and repeat it over time until it becomes natural. The richer, more vivid, and clearer the representations in the performer's mind during the performance, the more accurate, vivid, and wonderful the performance effect will be.

For example, the piece *Spring Scenery of Jiangnan* mainly presents a beautiful picture of the return of spring, with everything competing for the spring, birds singing, and the footsteps of spring approaching us.^[3] It expresses the beauty of the water towns of Jiangnan and the love for the mountains and rivers of the motherland. The introduction of the piece depicts the early spring morning in the vast fields of Jiangnan. We can imagine: a green landscape, birds singing, beautiful mountains and rivers, and the sound of running water, all of which make us feel the breath of spring. With this beautiful and spring-like imagination, the performed work will be more apt. The emotional changes in the music of these works are controlled, sometimes bright and full, sometimes quiet and ethereal, creating a space of ethereal and deep tranquility. By exerting their imagination and injecting their own emotional experiences into the performance, the performer deeply moves each listener and creates a strong resonance.

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3.2 Emotion in the art of Erhu performance

As we all know, music is a perceptual art, and the expression of emotions is like telling many moving stories. All performing arts strive to move people with emotion. The expression of emotional connotation in music is a process. Through understanding the work, the performer is required to immerse themselves in the situation and experience the emotional expression of the work, ultimately expressing this emotion through the melody.

Then, how can music be used to express the emotional atmosphere of a piece of music? This process requires two steps. First, the transformation from the artistic conception of the work to the artistic conception in the performer's heart. Merely expressing a work according to the score belongs to the surface level of performance. The emotional atmosphere of performance is the understanding of the background of the subject matter, the analysis of the musical content, and the comprehension of the spiritual connotation of the work. It is necessary to grasp the sound effect in the performer's heart. Only when the performer truly understands the spiritual connotation of the work can he accurately express the artistic conception of the music. Second, the leap from the sound in the performer's heart to the actual sound effect. This includes the first-degree creation and the second-degree creation. The first-degree creation refers to the composer's creation of the work, which only stays on the notes on the score. The second-degree creation refers to the transformation of these notes into music, which must be completed by the performer.

A performer should possess good artistic conception qualities and superb performance skills in order to express the content of the work more authentically, express the music, and penetrate into the inner world of the audience, thus evoking resonance. This is the true meaning of music and artistic conception creation.

4. Conclusion

As a traditional stringed instrument with a long history in China, the erhu has a unique structure and layout in its performing art. On one hand, it should achieve the balance of "having measures in the piece, having pauses in the sentences, and having emphasis in the words". By combining playing skills with the emotional structure of the music, it can produce beautiful and rhythmic melodies, fully demonstrating the beauty of Erhu performance. On the other hand, Erhu performance should focus on expressing the charm and emotional atmosphere. To shape good emotional expression, performers need to possess not only excellent musical emotional qualities, but also superb playing techniques. Only through the organic combination of emotion and technique can the emotional connotation expressed by the musical work be interpreted more accurately.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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