

Research on the Integration of Traditional Ethnic Instrumental Techniques and Modern Popular Music Arrangement

Zhe Wang

Beijing Quju Opera Troupe, Beijing, China

Abstract: Traditional ethnic instrumental music is an important part of Chinese music culture, carrying the accumulation of art and culture. The modern music industry is developing rapidly, and popular music has become mainstream. This article explores the integration path of traditional ethnic instrumental music techniques and modern popular music orchestration, using literature, case studies, and comparative research methods to sort out core techniques, analyze orchestration rules, and explore innovative models. Research has shown that fusion can enrich expressiveness and enhance value, and fusion needs to follow aesthetic principles. This strategy provides feasible paths for creators.

Keywords: traditional ethnic instrumental music; Pop music arrangement; Fusion of techniques; Music innovation; cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Chinese traditional ethnic instrumental music has unique performance techniques and expression systems, such as the pipa wheel finger, which constitute the unique identity of ethnic music. Modern popular music dominates the contemporary market, and the combination of traditional and modern music has become a creative trend, but scientific integration faces challenges. The modern application of ethnic instrumental techniques requires organic integration, and there are essential differences in music thinking and expression between the two, which increases the difficulty of integration. Existing research mostly focuses on individual case analysis, lacking a comprehensive examination and systematic exploration[1]. This article is based on the depth of master's research, sorting out the principles and strategies of integration, and providing theoretical references for related research.

2. Analysis of the Characteristics of Traditional Ethnic Instrumental Music Techniques System

2.1 Diversity and expressiveness of performance techniques

Traditional ethnic instrumental music has diverse playing techniques, with different instrument techniques and unique sound effects. The plucked instrument pipa has techniques such as finger rotation and rich sound levels; The erhu, a stringed instrument, achieves pitch changes and emotional expression through glissando and other techniques; Playing wind instruments such as flutes and creating varied melodies with tongue patterns. These techniques are the core carriers of musical expression. Ethnic instrumental music emphasizes "technique is close to the Tao", emphasizing improvisation and individual expression. Different performers of the same piece may have vastly different performance effects.

2.2 Tone System and Melody Features

Traditional ethnic instrumental music is based on the pentatonic mode, with the five tones of Gong Shangjiao and Zheng Yu forming the melodic framework. Compared with the Western seven tone scale, the pentatonic mode lacks chromatic relationships and presents jumps between notes in whole and minor thirds, forming a unique sound color and mode sensation. The development of melody is mainly based on progression, supplemented by jumping, emphasizing the smoothness and completeness of melody lines[2].

The melody creation of ethnic instrumental music emphasizes the structural logic of "beginning, continuation, transformation, and combination", and achieves the organic development of music through techniques such as theme unfolding, variation, and repetition. Decorative and transitional notes are often incorporated into the melody to enhance the expressiveness and charm of the music. Unlike Western music that emphasizes harmony as a support for melody, ethnic instrumental music centers around melody and places harmony in a subordinate position, reflecting the characteristics of monophonic music thinking.

2.3 Sound Concept and Sound Aesthetics

The pursuit of timbre in ethnic instrumental music has unique standards, emphasizing “timbre variation” and “expression of charm”. Different playing techniques produce different timbre effects, and the same instrument presents different timbre characteristics in the hands of different performers. Ethnic instrumental music pursues natural harmony, avoids excessive decoration and artificial processing, and emphasizes the true presentation of the inherent timbre of the instrument[3].

The aesthetic of ethnic music emphasizes the artistic realm of “the interplay of reality and virtuality” and “the combination of movement and stillness”, emphasizing the use of blank space and rest in performance, and creating musical tension through the contrast between sound and silence. This aesthetic concept of sound contrasts with the pursuit of rich and full-bodied sound effects in modern popular music, and requires balanced processing in the fusion process.

3. Analysis of Modern Pop Music Composition System

3.1 Basic rules of harmony arrangement

Modern popular music is based on the Western functional harmony system, emphasizing the functional progression of main subordinate chords. The harmony vocabulary of popular music is relatively simple, often using extended harmonic forms such as fourth chords, hanging chords, and lingering chords to enhance the color and sense of the times of the music. Pop music harmony arrangement focuses on the contrast of harmony between paragraphs, enriching the language of harmony through techniques such as mode switching and chord replacement. Harmony determines the harmonic skeleton of a song, providing support and background for the melody. The common main chorus structure in popular music often corresponds to different harmonies, with the chorus part having richer and more open harmonies, forming the climax of emotions. Pop music composition emphasizes the coordination and unity of harmony, rhythm, and melody, which together construct a complete musical expression.

3.2 Rhythm patterns and orchestration features

The rhythm pattern of popular music is mainly 4/4 beats, emphasizing the emphasis on stress on strong beats and the stability of rhythmic movements. The combination of modern electronic drum sets and acoustic instruments forms a rich rhythmic hierarchy, with basic elements such as base drums, snare drums, and cymbals forming the rhythmic skeleton. The rhythm design of popular music focuses on rhythm and dance, enhancing the dynamic rhythm through techniques such as syncopation and dotted rhythm. In terms of instrumentation, popular music adopts standardized band compositions, including core instruments such as electric guitar, keyboard, bass, and drum sets. The widespread application of electronic and sampled tones enriches the selection of sound sources, while synthesizer tones add a modern touch to the work. The orchestration emphasizes the distinction and hierarchical division of timbre between different instruments, achieving clear sound texture through the arrangement of frequency, volume, and spatial position.

3.3 Form Structure and Development Logic

The structure of popular music is mainly based on the main theme and chorus, and common structures include the main theme A section, chorus B section, interlude, and bridge section. Pop songs usually follow the emotional logic of “introduction development climax ending”, achieving unity and change in music through repetition and contrast. Modern popular music has a more flexible structure, incorporating elements such as intro, intro, and coda to enhance musical integrity. The rise of electronic music has broken through traditional limitations in song structure, incorporating paragraph designs such as Drop and Build up to enhance the dynamic contrast and anticipation of music. The musical structure serves emotional expression, and the arrangement of the structure needs to be coordinated with the content of the lyrics and the development of the melody.

4. The Integration Strategy of Traditional Ethnic Instrumental Techniques and Modern Popular Music Arrangement

4.1 Basic principles of integration

The integration of traditional ethnic instrumental music and modern popular music should follow the principle of unifying “ethnicity” and “modernity”. Ethnicity is reflected in preserving the core technical features and timbre characteristics of traditional instrumental music, ensuring the ethnic cultural attributes of the work. Modernity is reflected in the use of popular music’s orchestration techniques and production techniques to make works meet contemporary aesthetic needs.

4.2 Specific Path of Technique Application

The application of ethnic instrumental techniques in popular music composition can be achieved through various means. At the melodic level, the backbone of traditional instrumental music can be integrated into the creation of popular song melodies, using ethnic tonal scales to construct a melodic framework and maintain the stylistic characteristics of ethnic music. At the level of harmony, we can try to reconstruct popular harmony using ethnic harmony thinking, exploring the compatibility between pentatonic modes and functional harmony. At the orchestration level, ethnic instruments can be incorporated into popular bands as color instruments, such as guzheng, pipa, flute, etc. The use of these instruments in popular music has formed a mature orchestration pattern. The combination of ethnic instruments with electronic timbres and acoustic instruments requires consideration of the coordination of timbre frequencies and clarity of sound levels. At the rhythm level, it can absorb the rhythm forms of ethnic instrumental music, such as the rhythm combination and rhythm design of percussion instruments, to enhance the cultural characteristics of music.

4.3 Precautions in Creative Practice

Fusion creation requires attention to the naturalness of mode conversion and harmony connection. There are differences between traditional pentatonic modes and commonly used modes in popular music, and transitional measures need to be taken during the modulation process. There are slight differences between the pitch of ethnic musical instruments and the twelve tone temperament, and when used in conjunction with fixed pitch instruments such as keyboards, the issue of pitch accuracy needs to be considered. During the production process, attention should be paid to the quality control of the recorded timbre of ethnic instrumental music to ensure that the recording effect meets modern music industry standards. The mixing process needs to balance the primary and secondary relationships between ethnic instruments, electronic timbres, and vocals to avoid ethnic instruments being submerged or too abrupt. The overall sound design should serve music expression, and technical processing should not conceal artistic connotations.

5. Conclusion

The integration of traditional ethnic instrumental techniques and modern popular music composition is a dual need for cultural inheritance and innovative development, which can enrich the vocabulary of modern music and explore the application scenarios of traditional instrumental music. Integration requires creative transformation, balancing uniqueness and modern aesthetics. In the future, we can explore more integration models, establish theoretical systems, expand their expression space, and help promote cultural development.

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