

On the Analysis of the Style and Feature of Wang Zhixin's Vocal Music Composition

LIN Hong^{[a],*}

^[a]Lecturer, School of Music and Dance, Xihua University, Chengdou, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 14 April 2017; accepted 8 June 2017

Published online 26 July 2017

Abstract

Wang Zhixin is a famous vocal music composer and conductor in China. He has created hundreds of renowned vocal composition in his past forty years of musical art career, for instance, *Lan Huahua* (The Flower of Orchid), *Meng Jiangnv* (The Legend of A Loyal Widow), *The Spring of China*, *Mei Huayin* (Ode to the Plum Blossom). All of these mentioned above are his most representative works. He absorbs not only the singing methods from the folk tunes and traditional Chinese opera, but also the composition skills on modern vocal music. His composition, thus, is full of multi-nationality, particularity of times and multi-variety. This paper will elaborate on the above three aspects to analyze the Style and Feature of Wang Zhixin's Vocal Music Composition.

Key words: Wang Zhixin; Vocal music composition; Feature

Lin, H. (2017). On the Analysis of the Style and Feature of Wang Zhixin's Vocal Music Composition. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 13(7), 34-36. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/9725>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9725>

INTRODUCTION

Wang Zhixin, the vocal music composer and conductor in China, has created hundreds of excellent masterpieces since 1980s. Some are based on China's history and legend, such as *Lan Huahua* (The Flower of Orchid), *Cowherd and Weaver Girl*, *Zhaojun Leaves Our Country*" (The Legend of a patriotic woman who sacrifices her

personal happiness for sake of our nation); Some are based on the reality, for example, "My Mount Everest" and *Nostalgia on Family and Homeland on Double Ninth Festival*; others are adapted based on poetry, for instance, *Farewell to Plague* and *I Am Willing to Be a Lingnan People*. No matter what type of music it is, his works are integrated with multi-art elements and are embodied with profound local color and ethnic flavor. In addition, his music can always keep pace with our time, which is the manifestation of a comprehensive art containing multi-nationality, particularity of times and multi-variety. His vocal music compositions are not only favored and recognized by the amateurs and educationists, but also compiled into the teaching materials of contemporary advanced music and art institutions. This paper will explore the style and feature of his work from different aspects in some of his representative works so as to provide implications for us all.

1. THE MULTI-NATIONALITY IN WANG ZHIXIN'S VOCAL MUSIC COMPOSITION

The most evident feature in Wang's vocal music composition lies in the strong multi-nationality. His composition not only uses a large quantity of local language in lyrics, but also absorbs many classic tunes in folk songs. To be specific, first is the rich use of local dialects. Singing is combination art of music and language. Hence, language occupies a pivotal position in vocal music art. During the course of history development, language, influenced by various regional and human environments, has undergone several changes, which forms different local dialects. Different dialects contain different tone features and language flavors, which can not only exert a positive effect on conveying emotions, but also reflect the original living status of its people. Wang is fully aware of this and puts a lot of distinctive dialects in his works, shortening the distance between audience and

composer and adding charm to his works. Shanbei dialects are embodied in his composition “Lan Huahua” (The Flower of Orchid). Shanbei people are inclined to use the repeated Chinese character while speaking. So the lyrics entails repeated Chinese characters, “qing xianxian”, “lan xianxian”, “lan huahua”. Apart from it, the specific shanbei way of pronunciation—rhotic accent is also added in the singing process. For instance, the lyrics “qing xianxian” should be sung as “qing xianxian er” and the Chinese phonetic “xia” should be sung as “ha” according to shanbei’s dialects rules. Second is the absorbing and utilizing of tunes in folk songs. Folk song is the byproduct of the labor of working people, and conveys the people’s various feelings, such as hardworking spirit, joy of harvest, the fulfillment of life and so on, is the most important way for our Chinese people to express their emotions and pass down the cultural heritage. Wang Zhixin adds several folk music materials into his vocal music composition. He retains the most original feature of folk music’s tone and tune, and then adapts it to meet the development trend of our times. Take the song *The Red Peach and the White Prunus* for example, this song was composed in 1996 and shall be sang by sole women. It was adapted according to the tune and tone of Shanxi folk song. At the very beginning of the song, it used the musical mode of Shanxi folk song *Kaihua Diao*” (The mode of Blossom) and shows the flavor of Huangmei Opera and Yue Opera, making it a pleasant and lovely song. While in the middle part, Wang Zhixin integrated the melody mode of Shanxi Zuo Quan folk tune “Hui Gege” (Meeting My Lover) into it and changed the traditional 3/4 time into 3/8time so as to ensure the consistency of the lyrics and tunes. Based on these, Wang combined the two different folk modes and used ABA-style structure to make it run together, ensuring the integrity of this composition and adding vitality and vigor to traditional folk song.

2. THE PARTICULARITY OF TIMES IN WANG ZHIXIN’S VOCAL MUSIC COMPOSITION

Music and the times are inextricably linked with each other at all times and in all over the world. Any musician’s masterpiece belongs to the specific time and embodies the spirit of that time. Hence, the particularity of time is another important feature of Wang’s work, which can mainly be manifested in the following two aspects: The first is the modern music performance techniques. Wang has formed a set of vocal music composition skills in which the Chinese and Western elements are combined and the old tradition and novel creation are interwoven by means of inheriting the basic traditional Chinese mode, skillfully absorbing the western and modern composition techniques, and using some modern creation skills

and creative music performance forms. Apart from it, Wang spares no effort to learn from the modern musical performer, such as guitarists, shelves drummer, electronic pianist so as to deepen his understanding of modern accompaniment of musical instruments and pop music and appropriately add these elements into his own music composition. The song *Mother River* is the manifestation of combination of western style and traditional ethnic tone. The first sentence is a typical traditional C-tone while the second one is changed into the western major style accompanied by the folk mode, and the climax of the song is the classic western major style. This kind of integration of modern western style not only retains the rustic ethnic feature, but also presents a broad, popular and innovative style. Again, the song *Zhaojun Leaves Our Country* (The Legend of a patriotic woman who sacrifices her personal happiness for sake of our nation) adds rock color into the first and second part of the rhythm, showing the spectacular scenes where the Chinese minority Huns meet Wang Zhaojun. The second is the new interpretation of history stories. Wang is sure to be a talent in doing this since he not only covers the theme of material that reflect the society or reality, but also the music work that is centered on the historical heroes who are recorded by folk legend, for instance, *Meng Jiangnv* (The Legend of A Loyal Widow), *Mulan Joins the Army for Her Father* and *Longfeng Chengxiang* (The Loyal and Harmony Love Story in Ancient China) and so on. Based on these myths and historical stories, Wang endows new meaning and new spirit of our times so as to interpret the social ethics and traditional virtues by modern aesthetic value instead of using them as they are. Only in this way can his work keep pace with our time and better accepted by the audience. The song “Meng Jiangnv” (The Legend of a Loyal Widow) expresses more the beautiful vision of present life than describes Meng Jiangnv’s tragic life, calling on us to cherish our beautiful present life.

3. THE MULTI-VARIETY IN WANG ZHIXIN’S VOCAL MUSIC COMPOSITION

Music is a comprehensive art form that contains various art elements and various beauties. The modern and contemporary music composition contains various elements. Wang’s vocal work is no exception. The feature of multi-variety is embodied in the material selection, techniques and the plot of the story. This paper tries to probe into this feature in the following aspects: The first is the multi-variety in material selection. Wang’s selection of material in vocal music composition is extensive, which can be roughly classified into four sections, historical stories, folklores, reality and ancient poetry. The historical stories and folklores are mainly well-known historical allusion and myths or legends. This type usually has a sense of strong intimacy and pride and exhibits Chinese

people's unyieldingly national spirit. Vivid examples can be found in these songs *Mulan Joins the Army for Her Father*, *Zhaojun Leaves Our Country* (The Legend of a patriotic woman who sacrifices her personal happiness for sake of our nation), *Lan Huahua* (The Flower of Orchid), *Cowherd and Weaver Girl* and *Meng Jiangnv* (The Legend of A Loyal Widow); the works related to our reality gives a new perspective to the contemporary social life and reveals the sincerity, kindness and beauty in our society through showing a strong sense of national responsibility and patriotism, eulogizing our new times. The representative works are *The Spring of China*, *The Westward Motorcade* and *Mount Everest*; the composition based on the ancient poetry combines the ancient poetry and modern music works, thus giving a unique cultural charm and ideological connotation of our nation, such as *Long Last Our Friendship*, *Farewell to Plague* and *I Am Willing to Be a Lingnan People*. The second section is the multi-variety in the composition techniques. Wang always makes the most of various music composition techniques when he composes the vocal music. This has produced a good music effect. On the one hand, Wang is excelled at borrowing classical melodies to start the plot of the story. In order to express the unity of Hans and Huns and show Zhaojun's sacrifice, Wang uses the melody of classical music *Frontier Song* and *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River* to show the theme. On the other hand, Wang makes a reference to the folk song elements to highlights the ethnic features in his vocal music composition. The song *Sea of Flos Sophorae* is endowed with the Chinese shadow puppetry that is popular in the east of Hebei province and is full of the regional feature. Apart from it, Wang also exhibits the art and techniques of opera and folk and in his works, changing the specific music voice according to different situations. These songs *Mulan Joins the Army for Her Father*, *Lan Huahua* (The Flower of Orchid) and *Meng Jiangnv* (The Legend of a Loyal Widow) all enroll

these opera elements, presenting a brand-new art image and strengthening the artistic expression of vocal music composition.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as an outstanding Chinese vocal musician, Wang occupies a pivotal position in China's vocal music circle. His lifelong pursuit for the art of vocal music and great enthusiasm creates a unique feature and enrich the diversity of our nation's music treasure. This paper also hopes that the contemporary vocal music learner and amateur can inherit Wang's spirit, absorbing the useful while abandoning the unnecessary, combining the west and China as well as the ancient and the modern, so as to push our nation's vocal music art into a new height.

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