

On the Role of Emotion in Vocal Music

Ji Lu^{[a],*}

^[a]Associate Professor, Department of Vocal Music, School of Music, Jiangnan University, Wuhan, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Based on the theme of emotion, and arguments of vocal training methods and emotion application, this paper systematically and uniquely explains that a scientific training method is the best way for a singer to grasp the emotion and realize a second creation.

Key words: Emotion in singing; Vocal training; Training method

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INTRODUCTION

China's ancient literature *Music* begins with, "All sounds originate from people's hearts. Changes in people's hearts are caused by objects. People respond to the changes of objects and express their emotions by sounds". This passage illustrates three levels of logic relationships: Firstly almost all sounds originate from people's hearts; the second is the changes in people's hearts are caused by objects; thirdly hearts will respond to the changes of objects and will be manifested by the sounds. In short, music's generation lies in realizing people's emotions. At the same time, the ancient literature also affirms the importance of music as an artistic expression of emotion. A philosopher once said that if human did not

have emotions, human truth could never be found in the past, present and future. When people's awareness is permeated with emotions, the people will be engaged in artistic creation of singing, and perfectly express human emotions with a beautiful singing. Only when a thing can touch the heart of oneself, it can really enter the hearts of others. Cultivation of emotion in singing has become a very important thing. However, in the current vocal music, we have focused more on singing skills, but haven't fully understood the positive effects of emotion. Therefore, the aim of this article is to draw attention to emotion in singing, especially to the use of emotion in vocal training so as to add wings to our singing!

The famous French singer Henry. Ferdinand. Tanzania said: "Emotion is the soul of singing, and only when sound and emotion are the same perfect, singing can be considered as an art." There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between emotion and singing skill. Excellent skill can lay a solid foundation for us to better express emotion, whereas whole-hearted singing also has a positive role in promoting our skill training. A song is like an article, which has a content and emotion to express. How a singer can effectively capture and properly express the thoughts and feelings of the creator becomes an indispensable part of singing.

In China or elsewhere, in modern or ancient times, whether theoretical writings which explore vocal music, or successful practitioners engaged in vocal performances, they display that "emotion" is an indispensable factor in vocal skills and performances.

On this basis, we further believe that not only vocal music works need to express emotions, vocal skill training also needs emotions—which is determined by the fundamental purpose of vocal training and vocal music art. For this reason, the author will discuss this on four points.

1. PERCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF VOCAL ART

The purpose of art is not to amaze but touch people. Touch, means being touching emotionally. How can we achieve this? Firstly, it requires the singer put himself to enter the role, touch himself so as to sing emotionally and resonate with the audience. The ultimate goal of art is to touch people, singing is no exception. Being touching requires us to input our emotions, sing with passion, manifest the real thoughts of the creator, and express the deeper meaning of the work.

Definition of emotion refers to the positive or negative psychological reactions to external stimuli, such as fondness, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate and so on. Emotion is each people's inner experience and feelings, is subjective. One hundred readers would have one hundred Hamlets. Emotion in singing has been formulated by the creator in creative process, which requires the singer to express pursuant to intention of the songwriter. To be short, we should have a second creation to express the specified emotion. Emotion is the soul of singing, is the core of singing, and is the key of singing ... A song without emotion is like a deadpan people, seemingly alive, but has no energy and spirit for the characteristics of people. Emotion is the "tonic" to energize life. Emotional investment in singing is to bring vitality and vigor to the song, and can even be said to sow the seeds of life to the song. Singing with emotion can make a song suddenly alive and vigorous, emitting a beautiful lively atmosphere. Singing is not to show off skills, but outstanding skill can lay a foundation for emotional singing. Emotional expression is the starting point and destination of singing. The moving part of singing lies in expressing emotions. Appropriate emotional expression is the core of singing, and is the key of the moving part.

Art is an organic product of human comprehensive mental activities including knowledge, emotions, ideals, thoughts, and is the specific performance of people's real life and the spirit world. Art is characterized by emotion and imagination, and singing art is no exception. Emotion is one of the characteristics of singing art, and is the most important part of all characteristics. A singer should integrate full emotion into the entire process of performance, and if he expresses appropriately he will resonate with the audience. Emotion in singing is subjective, is invisible, and is from the heart of the singer. Therefore, only when a singer is full of emotions, he can truly express in his singing. Although emotion is abstract, people are able to clearly feel its presence. It is because of its abstraction and subjectivity, we have a broader space to perform singing. However, each song has its unique emotional tone, we should interpret it based on a grasp of its basic emotional tone! Emotional expression in singing has a certain predetermination but also a possibility of free performance. The moving place of singing lies in

resonating with the audience, and the fundamental way to resonate with audiences is to convey emotions.

2. PREREQUISITE OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE IN VOCAL MUSIC ART

Art comes from life, and is also higher than life. Emotional singing and life are closely related. The feelings we experience in life are a source of emotional singing, and experience is the source of our direct feelings. Therefore, we should experience a variety of emotions in life, and enrich ourselves in the society. At the same time, we should have an open and active mind to really feel all kinds of emotions, and it is these feelings enriching our experience, deepening our views of things and emotions. True feelings in life are a source of creation, but art is higher than life. The creator can achieve the combination of sensibility and rationality only based on the experience in life. Creation is life refining and sublimation, which require us to reject the dross and assimilate the essence so as to discard what is false and keep what is genuine.

2.1 Improve Cultural Cultivation by Reading Literature Works

Emotional expression in singing is to selectively express emotions which have been stored. Emotional expression is an output, emotional storage is an input, and input determines output. Therefore, what to input is very important. If we want to be able to make a wonderful speech, we have to input relevant materials. We can feel a variety of emotions indirectly through reading literatures. Although don't have a personal experience, we can indirectly experience a variety of emotions in description of words. Reading literary works can improve our ability to understand, broaden our horizons, and cultivate our good characters. It's impossible for us to experience everything, but literature provides us with a possibility of vicarious experience, so that we can go to experience the world from the perspective of others, and understand the world from many different angles.

2.2 Analyzing Music Background Helps Accurately Express a Song's Emotions

The analysis of the cultural background of a song is a necessary prerequisite to accurately express its emotions. The artistic charm of a song is much more than a simple combination of tones, but a product integrating certain background of times, music philosophy and artistic style. An outstanding vocal music work is not only a simple and straightforward expression of emotions, but reflects the profound social, ideological and cultural connotations. Many singers or vocal music learners often blindly pursue sound intensity and clearness, but ignore the emotional contents of music works, leading to the opposition of our desire.

For example, the artistic song *Xing Hua Tian Ying* is an enduring song in the concerts of major music academies. The song is from the *Baishidaoren Album* translated by musicologist Mr. Yang Yinliu, showing that the author traveled to Nanjing by boat, viewed the multifarious scenery along the waterway, and caused the complex inner feelings depressed in the heart. This is a typical literati music work, characterized by subtle, deep emotional tones and a melodious classical style. However, in order to show vocal skills, many singers pursue loud, bright timbre and passionate emotion, which are obviously a misunderstanding of the music work. It should be noted that the best emotional state is to be appropriate rather than to be exaggerated. Analysis of a music work is essential to make an optimal emotional expression.

3. CONTENTS AND METHODS OF EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE IN VOCAL EXERCISES

Normally professional singers need to vocalize before singing, which is usually said as open voice, whose purpose is to adjust the voice state before singing. The vocalization we mentioned here is aimed at the vocal music lovers in the learning process. We usually conduct staged vocal training to students, and help them gradually establish voice states which are suitable for performing a variety of styles of vocal music works. Such training is also an exercise to singers' singing ability.

Vocal exercise is to solve a variety of technical problems in singing. If treated it as a purely technical exercise, we might become sound machines which can only perform simple mechanical actions. If we carry out vocal training with emotions, we can make faster progresses. Vocal exercise usually consists of a few simple notes, such as commonly seen coherent, cheerful and jumping notes... Despite vocal exercise has no lyrics, we still need to take it to heart to practice, and grasp emotions pursuant to different characteristics of each vocalization. For example:

1 = b-d2 4/4 12 34 54 32 | 1 - - - ||
Ma -----

This is a coherent vocalise, which we can sing in a mood of compliment and vision, and sing in crescendo and diminuendo alternately, in crescendo upward and diminuendo downward so as to have contrasting levels of sound. If we just concern about skills when vocalizing, our sounds will become stiff and like there is no sense of flowing; but if we sing with imaginations, our sounds will be added with a variety of colors and a vitality of life. Take another vocalise for example:

1 = b-d2 4/4 1 5 5 5 | 5 4 3 2 1 - ||
Ya ha ha ha hahaha ha

This is a skipping note vocalise which can be sung with a sense of hearty laugh. Such a vocalise allows us

to understand the fundamental nature of singing skipping notes, wherein the power has been used in the abdomen and the throat muscle can naturally get to relax, namely achieve effective training. Filling simple text into vocalise is another effective way for us to realize emotional experience. We can experience emotions pursuant to the textual content directly so as to achieve the purpose of vocalization.

Training of emotional singing needs to start from scratch, and vocalization gives us a good opportunity to train emotions. Long-term implantation of emotional elements during vocalization enables us to transfer emotional memories in vocalization into real singing, so that we can integrate strong emotional characteristics into singing actions, singing states and hearing, so as to promote formation and stability of emotions and expressions in singing.

There is a view of "sincere emotion generates music" in the ancient China, showing the truth that people sing by being touched. That "emotion is the foundation of sound, and sound is the shape of emotion" is an important aesthetic thought in the traditional Chinese singing. The famous poet, Bai Juyi, is an important representative of this aesthetic thought. As long as we make a sound we should input our emotions, no matter it is a vocal training or singing a song. Vocal training with emotions shows our positive psychological states, because attitude determines everything, and a positive attitude is the prerequisite to solve every problem. In vocal training emotional investment is the reflection of our positive attitudes, and is the premise of solving singing skills. Consummate skill takes time. We spend so much time on exercising is because of our passion, which supports us to go forward without retreat in front of several singing skills needing to be addressed. Active emotional investment is the prerequisite to improve singing skills, and is also an important source of motive force. Singing skill is conducive to better expression of emotion. We have often encountered such a situation that we were not able to fully express our feelings in performances due to inefficient skills. Therefore, singing technique is the basis of emotional expression, and the emotional investment, in turn, helps smoothly solve singing skills.

4. THE TRUTH AND VALIDITY PRINCIPLE OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

4.1 The Truth Principle of Singer's Emotion

The famous Chinese vocal music educator Zhou Xiaoyan once said that the aesthetic criteria of singing should make "truth" a priority, wherein the "truth" referred to true emotion, truth beauty and true heart. True emotion from the heart is the foundation of emotional expression, and true things can arouse sympathy of others. Truth is sincerity rather than false display of affection. False

affection is like a lie which will be detected eventually, but true things can last eternally, such as truth, goodness and beauty. True emotion is the beautiful experience of life, is our infinite passion for life, and is the source of our emotional expression in singing.

Therefore, truth of a singer's emotions is the prerequisite for the successful implementation of emotional expression. Only when we have emotions for the song and can firstly move ourselves, the audience will hear the emotions which we want to convey. Only when our hearts have been touched, the audiences' hearts can be touched. True emotion enables us to move others inadvertently. We need to devote to sing mood at the moment that the accompaniment sounds, and remain or change the mood according to the different needs of the song.

4.2 Continuation Function of Self-Imagination on Singing Emotion

Imagination in singing includes vocal imagination and emotional imagination. Vocal imagination is our imagination to the beautiful voice, which is conducive to find the right vocal feeling. Thinking always directs and coordinates with vocal organs' activities. The internal hearing in the form of imagination unconsciously dominates voices and breaths. To deal with a note, we must have a clear and complete imagination of the note, thus an accurate vocal imagination in mind is extremely important. Reasonable imagination can add wings to sing, enabling the singer to fly into the scene of the song. Infinite imagination can move us constantly.

Imagination is the bridge to enter the singing mood, and our imagination provides an atmosphere and a great environment suitable for the mood of the song.

4.3 The Effectiveness Principle of Emotional Concentration

Finally, I would like to stress the effectiveness principle of emotional concentration. Concentration, focus is the

foundation to effectively express emotions. Absent-minded or distracted singing is bound to affect the quality of our expression of emotions. Singing wholeheartedly helps us give full, hearty and pleasurable expression to our emotions. When we concentrate on singing we will feel like to be on the scene of the song, and only when we enter the mood of the song ourselves, we can put listeners into this mood. Concentration enables us not to be distracted, and maximize the effectiveness of the emotional investment.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, all good voices in singing are inseparable from the word of "emotion". Cultivation of emotion cannot be realized overnight, but should be integrated with deep insights to the world, experiences and cultural accomplishment. As long as practicing attentively, we believe that every singer who is devoted to singing can open up a different new world.

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