

Study on Rationality and Passion in Choral Conducting

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Abstract

Chorus is an elegant art of music. Perfect chorus can purify people's soul and bring a huge spiritual shock to people. As the chorus leader, the chorus conductor directly determines the quality of choral performance, so the chorus conductor must command the degree of rationality and passion and achieve the coordination and unity of rationality and passion so as to incisively and vividly show a choral performance. This paper analyzes the roles of passion and rationality in choral conducting as well as the relationship between them, states the factors which determine the rationality and passion of choral conducting as well as the significance of such factors, and summarizes concludes how to correctly grasp rationality and passion.

Key words: Choral conducting; Rationality; Passion; Environment

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INTRODUCTION

The chorus conductor, which plays an important role in a chorus, not only is responsible for chorus rehearsal but also takes charge of regulating and controlling the state performance, so the perfect exhibition of a piece of choral works depends on the chorus conductor to a certain degree. Since rationality and passion play important roles in showing the connotation of works, only grasping the

relationship between rationality and passion and achieving the mutual integration and coordination of them can fully express the connotation of works, strike a chord of audience and bring enlightenments and shocks to the heart of audience.

1. ROLES OF RATIONALITY AND PASSION IN CHORAL CONDUCTING

There is an important viewpoint in Confucianism that "people feel things and speak out". The so-called "people feel things and speak out" refers to that the voice made by people comes from their innermost feeling; voice creates a matter under the guidance of consciousness and a matter also affects the changes in voice. The theory not only states the relationship between emotion and music but also emphasizes the role of music in people's emotion. It is thus clear that music, which is a carrier for people to express their emotion and thought as well as a form of artistic expression, can affect people's inward world.

As a type of sound art, music is also an artistic form. Composers express their emotions through music while audiences can not only understand the connotation of works but also achieve their inner enhancement through music. Thus, it is clear that music is a medium, which can achieve the purpose of emotional interactions between the composers and audiences. As it was, music is a form generated from human's striving, production and life, so it can exhibit human's social life.

Chorus is a musical form with a great difficulty in its performance. In the process of performance, the emotion of works can be expressed via mouth-shape changes, both hands, facial expressions and other body languages. In the process, a chorus conductor shall clearly hit the point with clear lines as well as free and easy movements, which exactly show the rationality. Based on the understanding

and emotion of works, the conductor integrates his own imagination into passion and communicates with chorists by body language so as to deliver his passion to the chorists and thus stimulate the passion of the whole chorus. In the conducting process, the chorus conductor can use controlling before releasing, playing hard-to-get, contrast, foreshadowing as well as many other means and control the speed and intensity to make sharp contrasts of ups and down, movement and quietness, crudeness and fineness and forcefulness and tenderness, which will add more artistic colors in the works.

An excellent conductor will show both passion and rationality. Only in this way, the charm of works can be exhibited sufficiently.

2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RATIONALITY AND PASSION

There is a correlation and reciprocal inhibition between rationality and passion. Psychologically, rationality is not only a concept but also a way of thinking, so it requires certain ability of judgment and inference. Rationality, which is the highest level of knowing things by people, also contains emotion, which is more "calm" than the emotion of passion; meanwhile, rationality is the premise of emotion in passion. A successful chorus requires that chorus conductor to rationally analyze the choral works, control the whole performance based on rationality, and make the works more special and the performance more passionate in the condition of rational conducting. Therefore, lack of rational judgment or passion in chorus will result in the failure of incisively and vividly exhibiting choral works as well as an unsuccessful performance.

Emotion of passion, which is a form of artistic presentation, has a strong artistic characteristics. In the process of choral performance, the chorus conductor needs to integrate his own emotion and communicate with chorists with facial expressions and body language etc. so as to make the performance more sentimental and passionate and touch the audience. Chorus conductor's emotion is one side; the other side is to grasp the composer's connotation and emotion expressed in the works, because only passion given in the works can break the constraint of rationality and make the performance more passionate. Therefore, the rationality of chorus conductor determines the passion expressed in the works; meanwhile, passion can also react upon rationality; thus, the two are interdependent and supplement each other. Excessive expression of rationality in the performance of works will lead to the lack of passion in performance while the only focus on passion will lead to the lack of connotation of works during performance.

3. FACTORS WHICH DETERMINE RATIONALITY AND PASSION IN CHORAL CONDUCTING

3.1 The Style of Choral Works Determines the Rationality and Passion of Chorus Conductor

To show the artistic features of chorus, it is required to sing the works. The singer and chorus conductor need to mutually coordinate with each other and then perform on the stage after repeated rehearsal. During rehearsal and performance, the chorus conductor needs to fully exhibit the connotation of works and, meanwhile, innovate the works. It is required to command the style of works during the innovation process, because the emotions expressed must be different in works of different styles. The premise of diversified styles of works enriches the conductor's rationality and passion, which will show the charm of music.

As for the slow-paced works, the chorus conductor needs to be more rational and to control the rhythm of conducting during the process of conducting. For instance, the chorus of *Half a Moon Climbs Up*, which is a slow-paced works with a high artistic conception, mainly expresses the dim affection between a boy and a girl, so it is required to sing it in a weak voice. Therefore, the chorus conductor needs to reduce the input of passion and increase the color of rationality to enhance the artistic conception of works as well as fully show the connotation of works.

The chorus conductor is more passionate in the fast-paced and passionate works. It is required to strengthen the expression of body language in the conducting process. For instance, the chorus of *Yellow River Cantata* should be bold and unconstrained because *Yellow River Cantata* is an impassioned works, which reveals the power of mighty force. The chorus conductor needs to increase the expression of passionate emotion and use the passionate and vehement conducting method to create a high-spirited atmosphere, bring a spiritual shock to the audience and strike a chord. Therefore, focus on the rational expression in such type of works is likely to cause the lack of shock power in works and affect the performance effect of chorus.

3.2 The Environment Determines the Rationality and Passion of Chorus Conductor

The environment not only is an important determinant of the development of human civilization, but also determines the development of artistic chorus works, so the chorus conductor needs to combine the performance environment when expressing emotions. Meanwhile, respective environments shall be taken into consideration when rationality and passion are shown in rehearsal and performance.

Environments include the natural environment and social environment, both of which play important roles in the expression of chorus art. Because of the unpredictably changeable and magnificent natural environment and the numerous nationalities in our country, the customs of all nationalities are different. Therefore, the cultures of choral art are vastly different on the background of different environments and customs. The endless prairie formed the rough and bold style of works; the beautiful and idyllic Gangnam formed the delicate and tender style of works. As the natural environment formed varied styles of works, the chorus conductor is required to have diversified styles of conducting. Thus, the chorus conductor needs to be passionate and powerful when conducting a piece of artistic work of the prairie style, and needs to be rational to make the chorus euphemistic and implicit when conducting a piece of artistic works of Gangnam style.

Changes in the social environment determine the development orientation of choral art, so different eras and social environments will cause varied choral arts. As a form of expressing people's feelings, the choral arts can directly reflect the etiquette and thought in the society at that time. People's aesthetic standard, emotional awareness, psychological features and cultural life are all affected by the environment, so the morphological difference shown can reveal people's aesthetic psychology as well as the social formation at that time. Therefore, the social environment determines people's emotional expressions, outer emotions and mental activities in chorus; that is to say, the social environment is closely bound up with the exhibition of choral art. In the performance of chorus, the expression of rationality and passion fully reflects the emotional awareness and aesthetic taste at that time. In view of the unique style of chorus created by a specific social environment, the chorus conductor needs to conduct the chorus by using a targeted method. For instance, in the phase of "May 4th Movement", on the background of anti-Japanese movement, the choral art became a call of unifying the people of our motherland to jointly fight against invaders. On such social background, the chorus conductor paid more attention to the expression of passion so as to stimulate people's fighting spirit. Later, in the "1970s and 1980s", the gradual development of social environment in our country brought more new opportunities for choral art and gave more artistic value to chorus, so people enhanced their artistic accomplishment and cultivated their taste via chorus. On the background of dramatic social development of our country, people made more requirements for choral art, so the skills used by the chorus conductor shall also meet the artistic requirements as well as the requirements of the time. In the conducting process, it is required to use both rationality and passion and harmonize them to better reveal the choral art.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF AND MEASURES FOR CORRECTLY COMMANDING THE "DEGREE" OF RATIONALITY AND PASSION

As a performing art, chorus aims at highlighting the connotation of works and realize the emotional exchanges and communications between performers and composers. A composer created a piece of choral works through a long-term life experience. Therefore, only when the chorus conductor and the chorus team try to figure out the composer's feeling and understand his life experience, can they understand the works better and perfectly combine rationality with passion in the performing process.

Passion is not only an emotional state but also a kind of emotion. The passion in chorus comes from two levels. One level means chorus conductor's innermost emotion after comprehending the works; the other level means the emotion passed on by the conductor to the chorists in the conducting process. The chorus conductor needs to high-spiritedly grasp the emotion expressed in the works, use the passionate way of expression and communication, closely connect all links in the process of rehearsal so as to strike a chord of chorists, excavate their potential and improve the performance quality of choral works. Chorus rehearsals are required to improve the chorus quality. As a chorus conductor is the soul of a chorus team, he must put his heart and soul in the conducting, forget himself and translate his understanding of choral works into the specific connotative facial expressions and body languages. In this way, the chorists can concentrate and get into the characters rapidly to position themselves. Only after the chorists get into characters can they fully stimulate their inner emotion and integrate passion into the works so as to realize the heart-to-heart communication. The chorus conductor can help the chorists to better show the works only after sufficiently comprehending the works. The completion of communication between the conductor and the chorists in a "passionate" way reduces the distance between chorists and conductor, forms a favorable cyclical effect, realizes their integration, relieves the conductor's stress, and creates a relaxing and pleasant rehearsal atmosphere. The "passionate" communication between the conductor and chorists can reduce the process of rehearsal, promote the improvement of choral rehearsal efficiency, and, meanwhile, increase the vitality and appeal of choral works.

Rationality is an artistic thought. The rationality in chorus mainly comes from the chorus conductor's understanding of the connotation of works. A chorus conductor must learn the creation background of works to fully understand the connotation in the composer's works; in the meantime, the chorus conductor must deliberate and try to figure out the connotation concealed in the works and immerse himself in the thought of works so as to better conduct the chorus. After understanding the tracks, figuring out the emotions, deeply understanding

the creation background, taking rationality as the premise and controlling passion in works, the chorus conductor can achieve the integration of rationality and passion.

For this reason, during choral conducting, passionate rehearsals must be done to realize the mutual integration of rationality and passion. The lack of passionate rehearsal will result in the lack of soul and appeal in the choral performance, which will then lead to an unsuccessful performance. An excellent chorus conductor must be aware of the functions and necessity of rationality and passion, do more practices in the process of rehearsal to correctly understand the emotion, and control the emotion based on the style of works so as to improve the quality of chorus and better raise the artistic effect of chorus.

To enhance the entire quality of chorus, the chorus conductor is required to correctly grasp the “degree” of rationality and passion. The specific measures include the following.

4.1 Cultivate Good Psychological Quality and Physiological Function

None of arts can be separated from the seizure of “degree”, so choral art is just the same. In the choral conducting process, a chorus conductor must firmly command the degree of expression of passion. If not, the performance won't be successful. For instance, a chorus conductor excessively focused on the expression of passion and sung simultaneously in the choral conducting process; when the tenor began to lead the chorus, the chorus conductor was still immersed in his own world neglecting the role of tenor, which resulted in the poor sense of depth and affected the audience's audiovisual effects. Some conductors even are even excessively immersed to cause the incongruity between conducting and music rhythm and a series of problems, which exert adverse effects on the quality of chorus.

Therefore, the chorus conductor is required to cultivate his own psychological quality and physiological function. The psychological quality has an important influence on people's innervation. A psychologically passive state is likely to cause one's body stiffness, which goes against the conducting of a conductor, so the chorus conductor needs to cultivate his psychological quality and physiological function in the daily rehearsal, focus on the combination of “voice” and “emotion”, and, meanwhile, communicate with chorists through body language and facial expression so as to relieve his own stress and enhance the artistic effect of chorus.

4.2 Pay Attention to the Cultivation of Cultural Quality

The cultural quality is crucial for the chorus conductor to grasp rationality and passion. The so-called cultural quality refers to the accumulation of cultural knowledge and life experience. The chorus conductor can better control rationality and passion in the conducting only by

continuously improving his own artistic accomplishment and the level of cultural quality.

The chorus conductor must continuously improve his level of cultural quality so as to set a good example for the chorists. The function of choral conducting is reflected not only in the performance process but also in the rehearsal process. Repeated rehearsals are required to achieve a perfect performance on stage. However, rehearsals are usually affected by some factors such as the different conducting levels, chorists' low quality etc. Besides, the differences in each chorist's character, feature and other aspects to increase the difficulty in the conductor's rehearsals. Under the circumstances, the chorus conductor needs to constantly improve himself, enhance his chorus knowledge, choral music and his own artistic attainment, make a reasonable rehearsal method based on the personalities of chorists so that the chorists can fully comprehend the choral works and express their true emotions in the process of chorus.

At the same time, the chorus conductor needs to analyze the choral works in many ways, improve his own music appreciation ability and have more communications with the chorists to enhance the team's level of cultural quality. Moreover, the chorus conductor also needs to learn the choral works of different styles, in different regions and of different nationalities and discuss with the chorists to arouse the chorists' enthusiasm and enhance their artistic accomplishment.

4.3 Improve Their Own Aesthetic Ability

Chorus, which is an elegant art, not only reveals people's aesthetic taste via the integration of emotion and voice but also reflects the styles and features of an era. To grasp the “degree” of rationality and passion, a chorus conductor must improve his own and the whole chorus team's aesthetic judgment. At first, a chorus conductor needs to enhance his own aesthetic judgment and then the aesthetic judgment of the whole team. The so-called aesthetic appreciation does not mean the simple appreciation but the analysis on connotation and thought through the works. Only in this way, the chorists' appreciation ability can be improved. The grasp of the composer's emotion and connotation to realize the leap from sensibility to rationality during the appreciation with “silent changes” contributes to the control over emotion in the conducting process. When figuring out and analyzing the works, the conductor needs to grasp the unique beauty in the works as well as the emotions and lasting appeal expressed in the works by means of melody, lyrics, rhythm and many other aspects.

CONCLUSION

As rationality and passion are the key points of choral performance, only when the chorus conductor controls rationality and passion well can he guarantee the success of performance and bring spiritual shock to the

audience. There is an action and reaction relationship between rationality and passion, so excessive focus on rationality or excessive pursuit in passion will influence the exhibition of artistic effect of chorus. Therefore, the chorus conductor needs to enhance his own cultural quality, cultural accomplishment, psychological quality etc., strengthen the communication with the chorists and grasp the “degree” of rationality and passion so as to perfectly reveal the choral art.

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