

Brief Discussion on the Significance of Music in Dance Creation

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Abstract

Music and dance are destined to be artistic twins from their birth. Dance is a comprehensive art and music is its most important part among the numerous forms of related sister arts. During dancing creation, music is the most influential element so success or failure of dance works is related to the musicianship. Therefore, dance creators should lay importance to the creation or selection of dance music and endeavor to enhance their musicianship so that they can transmit the most profound connotation of dance works to the audience.

Key words: Dance; Music; Creation; Significance

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INTRODUCTION

As an indispensable important part of dance works, music is the basis for the behavioral performance of dance. Besides, the music element also exists in the presentation process of dance art at all times. Whether the dance creation is stimulated by music or music is selected during dance creation, the creator will firstly consider music as the most important element; music is also the first component involving in the conception of dance creation. The inseparability between music and dance determines the comparable importance of music in dance creation while the rhythm, melody and emotional trend also determine the plot trend in dance creation.

During a process of dance creation, music is just like a lingering phantom, which always convolves in the soul of creator and leads dancers to dance lightly and gracefully.

1. MUSIC AND DANCE ARE INSEPARABLE ARTISTIC TWINS

1.1 The Origin and Development of Art Make Dance to Be Inseparable With Music

Since the birth of a human being, the hearing and seeing has become two important ways for one to perceive the world and are also two great instincts, on which human beings rely to survive and develop. People know and understand the world through hearing and seeing. With the development of social productive force and progress in human civilization, the voice and body movement further developed into music and dance, so arts were generated from human's two great instincts to thus open the door of the place of art in human beings. The two forms of art show people's inner feelings most directly, fiercely and meticulously. The voice can be transmitted for a long distance while body movements can more express the concrete content of information. Primitive communication was usually made with both voices and movements. As the saying goes, "if one cannot express himself in words, he can sigh with emotion; if signing fails to express his feeling, he can sing; if singing still fails to sufficiently express his feeling, he can dance." (Yang, 1996)

With the continuous development of human society, all sorts of arts have been gradually refined and systematized; besides, music and dance have also were divided into relatively independent art types gradually with such a development. Music systemizes the melody, rhythm, musical form, mode and multilateral contexts and forms through the flow of notes on the time shaft, so it is an art

of time. However, dance more utilizes the law of spatial motion, uses a human being's body and expression as carriers, and, meanwhile, accommodates music, painting, literature, philosophy and many other elements to form a particular all-around multilateral type of synthetic art; thus, generally speaking, dance is an art with time-space as its carrier. Nowadays, dance not only includes the content of body movement, but also contains music, stage design, smoke, lighting etc. in it, so it shows a more abundant expressive force and stronger expression. Nevertheless, when we appreciate a piece of dance works, music will be the non-dance element which is most easily be noticed.

"Undoubtedly, the basic principle of organic musical form will immediately be identical with that of organic dance form; besides, they will grow in a root." (Yang, 1996) The development of art also leads to the increasingly prominent function of music in dance. Since the 19th century, a lot of composers have been creating music special for dance dramas, so excellent dance dram music emerged in large numbers, such as the *Firebird* of Stravinsky, *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake* of Tchaikovsky. Johann Strauss composed numerous waltzes with universal praise for the Vienna dance. In China, the combination of music and dance is in complete harmony; besides, poem, dance and music has been always interweaving with each other. *The Music of Xiliang*, *Music of Qiangshang* and other classical palace dances were named with music. Since the establishment of New China, many outstanding music works have been created particularly for dances, such as *The Mermaid*, *The Red Detachment of Women* and *White Haired Girl*.

No stage and lamplight can be allowed for dance, but it is difficult to imagine the dance without music. For instance, if you are watching a videotape of a dance with no idea that the producer forgot to record the audio track in the videotape, you certainly will subconsciously adjust the volume of your TV; when you find there is no sound in the videotape, perhaps you will turn off the TV or continue watching it with some music for the dance in your heart; of course, the music is just imagined by you. In everyone's subconsciousness, music is absolutely required for dance. For thousands of years, numerous dancers dance lightly and gracefully, expressing their joy, anger, sorrow and happiness.

The time mobility of music is consistent with the advancing process of dance. Besides, another important factor to connect them is their shared way of expression – "rhythm". Just like human's breathing, music needs to control the fluctuations and sections in time with the rhythm and dance also must follow this principle, so rhythm plays a commanding role in the two's expression processes. During the performance, the beat, speed, style and other rhythm information can be delivered to and

touch the audience so as to deepen their understanding of the dance works.

However, on the road to pursue arts, dance creators also continuously try to make innovations and pursue individualized performances. As the times advances, there are some dance works without accompaniment or with a large segment of silence dance. The proper application of silence dance can create a new emotional appeal and real works so that it will become individualized and leave a more vast imagination space for the audience. However, it seems that there is no accompaniment in this kind of dance, but actually dancers also follow a certain rhythm in their heart; this rhythm is just like a rest in music and also expresses a specific emotion in a pause. When the music starts after a segment of silent dance, the dance, which will be like the breath after suffocation, will be unstrained, bright, free and fulminant; therefore, this more highlights the leading role of music rhythm.

As the dance art develops, there is not only a simple relationship of dependence between music and dance. In dance works, music has become a constituent of the dance nomenclature due the deeper integration of music and dance in feeling delivery, emotional expression and artistic demonstration etc..

1.2 Music and Dance Are Mutually Sublimated Sister Arts

"One can express his ambition by singing and his emotion by dancing." (Yu, 2002) Even though music and dance belong to the performing arts, they can be conveyed to the audience in different physical ways. Music, which stimulates people's hearing through sound vibration transmission, attracts people's attention in all directions to arouse people's emotional changes. However, the melody and rhythm of music do not like the language which has very clear information content pointing; as a matter of fact, not everyone can easily comprehend the music's abstract means of expression. Dance stimulates people's hearing with the propagation of light ray, so its greatest characteristic is directivity; namely, people can only feel those within their range of visibility. In addition, dance forms some models and changes by human body's imitation and the images are mostly those frequently seen in people's life and labor, so dance's means of expression is relatively visual and concrete and the emotional transmission is easier. However, it is difficult to reach this through music.

Due to its abstract artistic image and fuzzy means of expression, the information conveyed to the audience is not complete and concrete and this is the uncertainty of music. Even though music is uncertain, it has the potential quality of dance ability; when this quality is adopted by dance, the dance ability will become a reality and be upgraded; in this way, its uncertainty will be reduced accordingly. With the interpretation of music,

the dance is led and commanded and their rhythms can be complemented and strengthened mutually. Thus, the audience will be easily touched by the emotion of dancers and the connotation of dance will be more easily understood and accepted by the audience. On the other hand, since dance is accompanied with music, the uncertainty of music can be restrained by dance and its emotional expression becomes clear with the expression of dance; then, the music will tend to have a more certain property; besides, the music's emotion which cannot be definitely understood by the audience will be concretized by the performance of dance so that the music will be provided with the intelligibility. For this reason, in the fusion process, music is supplemented and solidified by dance, which also gives concrete connotations and interpretations of music.

1.3 Function of Music in Dance

As for a normal person, hearing and seeing exist simultaneously, so one's emotion can be maximally influenced when one feels the dance and music at the same time. It is rather difficult to imagine that a piece of dance works without music can fully convey the dancers' emotional world to the audience.

Just as a gourmet's pursuit for the color, scent and flavor of food, people's pursuits for the visual art and auditory feeling are also simultaneous. Music provides the audience with the clues, scenes and atmosphere for the plot development so that the audience can perceive the sentiment and realm of dance, which then will directly touch the audience and help the audience to get closer to the innermost being of dancers. Besides, music strengthens the emotion of dance and helps the audience to comprehend the connotation of dance, makes dancers' emotional expression to be more easily accepted and also perfects the performance of dance.

During a dance performance, music plays an important foreshadowing and guiding role in dancers' body movement, stimulates dancers' inner throbbing and gives more passion to dancers, so that they will have the strong desire for performance. In addition, in the process of dance, music also plays the roles in adding shading around the story atmosphere and shaping a figure etc.. Besides, music also shoulders the task of explaining and showing a story.

Music can stimulate the desire for creating dance. Excellent music works can never escape from the dancer's acute ears. During dance creation, a choreographer's inspiration and motive of creation are usually stimulated by music. A piece of excellent music works can arouse numerous choreographers' uncontrollable creative desire because the drama structure and dance plots hidden in excellent music works provides the choreographer with story clues and advancing directions.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSIC IN DANCE CREATION

The internal relation between music and dance is clearly defined through the discussion above. As a matter of fact, it is obvious that music also plays a vital role in the creation of dance. Even, we can say that selection of appropriate music plays a decisive role in dance works to a large extent.

2.1 To Offer a Huge Imagination Space for Dance Creation

The reason why music is exciting and leads a person to endless aftertastes is its uncertainty. Music directly stimulates the hearing with its rhythm but it has no specific information like a language. When composing a piece of music works, the composer will not clearly tell us the contents expressed in his works, with only a little positioning of the music name and style. As for audiences, different people have different feelings for the same music works; one person will also have different understandings and feelings for the same music works under the control of different emotions. On the other hand, the audience will have different understandings for the same melody which are performed with varying rhythms or varied musical instruments.

This uncertainty of music exactly provides a large imagination space for dance creation. Dance creators can reposition the connotation of music according to the basic style, form and rhythm etc. of music, finally explain the music concretely and solidify the emotion of music in their dance works. Besides, music can give infinite play to people's imagination while dance creates concrete plots for this imagination space to express a specific emotion.

2.2 To Offer Rule-Based Supports for Dance Creation

Music has a strong expressive force. Compared with dance, music has a larger space for divergent thinking. As for music, a composer will also unconsciously imagine a corresponding scene according to the content expressed in the music and all elements of dance are contained in the scene.

Hou Baojian's *Continuance of Descendant of the Dragon* is an epic music piece in itself. It starts from an eternally immutable cycle and narrates that people make choices repeatedly in nature but helplessly succumb to Nature and fate; they experience the identical process for everyone and can never change the ending; they have doubts but have to give in, fight and integrate into nature; this music piece explores the significance of the survival of mankind and sings an endless paean for life. As such a music piece shows a strong sense of pictures in itself and a remarkable plot trend, it is an extremely excellent material for dance adaption.

The piano concerto, *Yellow River*, was adapted from the song, *Yellow River Cantata*. The technique of expression of western classical piano concerto is adopted in the works; as for the musical form and structure, the shanty and other traditional folk musical elements of China were integrated into it to completely show the emotional fusion of strong will and tenderness of Chinese people. Therefore, it is a music piece with power and emotion. With the epic narrative technique, magnificent skills, abundant connotations and moving and tragic realm, it has become the most famous concerto in China's history of world music and also the creation material preferred by many dancers. The dances created based on the *Yellow River* include the *Yellow River* for classical dancing, *The East Is Red* for folk dance, the *Yellow River* for ballet and *We Saw the River Bank* for modern dance etc.. Although different dancers interpreted this remarkable music through a great variety of dance vocabularies and means of expression, it is the powerful expressive force of music that stimulated the dancers' souls, their creation impulse and creative enthusiasm without exception.

2.3 Proper Music Selected in Dance Creation Can Increase the Audience's Sense of Identity for Dance Works

We can say a piece of works is completed only after it is published and there is no exception in dance works. Namely, we can say this creation is finally finished only after the dance is shown to the audience. In this sense, the audience is also a part of dance creation because the final goal of dance creation is to express and convey the emotion and thinking of the creator; for this reason, a dance is unsuccessful if it cannot be understood and recognized by the audience. Thus, a dance creator should firstly consider the audience's feeling during the creation and should consider how to make the audience to understand and resonate with the dance as the primary element.

In addition to the noumenon elements of dance, the dance music is the most attractive one for audience when they are appreciating dance works, because hearing can feel the most comprehensive and real-time information among a human's sense organs; people usually are easily affected by the emotion in music and experience it as their own emotion.

Dance and the music used in dance should be in "harmony", which not only is shown in the dance creation but also runs through the dance performance. Besides, the audience's appreciation for dance works is also based on this "harmony". There is certainly a theme and content that the creator wants to express in a piece of dance works, so a piece of proper dance music created or adopted can not only reinforce this theme and content, but also can easily arouse the audience's resonance in the publishing process. In this way, the audience can have a

sense of identity for the dance works and thus the goal of dance creation can be attained.

2.4 Training the Music Accomplishment Can Enhance the Dance Creator's Comprehensive Abilities

Because of the mutual fusion, complementation and interpretation of music and dance, the excellent dancers are mostly enthusiasts for music, love and revere music incomparably, so they usually initiatively integrate music into the creation process of dance with a strict and active attitude. From this perspective, a dance creator's music accomplishment determines the quality of his dance works as well as the audience's acceptance of his works. It is unimaginable that one who knows nothing about music can create a piece of excellent dance works; it is also unimaginable that one who has no musical sensibility can show the perfect rhythm with his body.

Regardless of pop music, classical music, national music, world music, guitar minor and symphony, all musical forms have their inherent themes and extrinsic features of expression, so it is a dance creator's necessary basic accomplishment to deeply understand such musical forms. Only when one understands the basic law of musical expression, can one have a high musical sensibility and correctly understand the connotation expressed in the music; only when one understands music can one read the connotation of music; then, one can perfectly use music in his dance creation and performance and cannot mismatch the music selected.

The rhythm of music is down to the bone and the body movement is a shout and expression of this rhythm. This is the synaesthesia of music and dance in our heart and this synaesthesia stems from the neural intercommunity between human's hearing and seeing. Training one's musical accomplishment can help to harmoniously unify the two senses to maximally give play to the function in creation.

If we compare dance to pure and tasty tea, music is exactly the clear sweet spring. Dance, which is an all-around comprehensive art, cannot show its full charm like a dried-up tea leaf, without the guidance and support of music. Undoubtedly, music plays a vital role in dance creation. Regardless of creation, adaption or direct selection of music, a dance creator should understand all emotions contained in the music, comprehend the emotional connotation of music, and closely grasp the rhythm trend of music so that music can better realize its guiding function in dance movements. Meanwhile, with the improvement on a dance creator's musical accomplishment, he can have a more profound understanding of the specific means of expression of music, feel the inherent harmony and conflict between music and dance diligently, reach a consensus on the

synaesthesia between music and dance, and thus create better dance works.

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