

# The Performance of National Characteristics in Vocal Music Singing

Xiaolan Xie

College of Music, Hengyang Normal University, Hengyang, 421002, China

## Abstract

Compared with the historical style, the differences of the national style are more reflected in the temperament system, the tone scale, the specific rhythm type of "musical idioms" and the overall structure of music. For example, compared with traditional Chinese music, the timing and pitch of alto in European music are much more precise. Chinese music is not only much more free in terms of timing length, but also has many more "running tones" around stable pitch. Another example is that the harmonic function of the major and minor scales in European music does not exist in the music of other nations. These factors are related to the overall nature of the music acoustics structure and form the main discrimination basis for the differences in the styles of folk music.

## Keywords

Vocal music singing; National characteristics; Performance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main force on which style is maintained is musical aesthetic preference. This aesthetic preference can be reflected in a region or ethnic group, as well as in individuals. From the perspective of region and nationality, it can be reflected as a tradition -- people in a region or nationality have a common aesthetic preference due to the common living and cultural environment, which in turn constitutes a cultural environment, thus affecting the aesthetic preference of the young generation. Tradition is the embodiment of the maintenance and development of this aesthetic preference in time. From such a point of view, it will be clear that the concept of "national style" and "tradition" of musical art has a certain identity, but the former emphasizes the unity of form, while the latter emphasizes the unity and stability inherited in the process of time. We can study the national characteristics of art songs from the process of their development.

With the pace of The Times, another vocal music genre appeared, that is, in the 19th century in Austria and Germany, the rise of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf, Mahler, Richard Strauss and other composers as the representative of the art songs. Although the singing of art songs also use bel canto, but its singing style is different from opera.

## 2. ART SONGS DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

### 2.1. The Combination of Poetry and Music

The song is composed according to the meaning of the original poem and the cadence of the original poem, so the song presents the composer's subjective view of the poem.

## **2.2. To the Accompaniment of the Piano (Solo)**

Art songs are often performed with a piano accompaniment rather than with a large band, so there is no need for loud volume. The status of piano accompaniment is as important as the melody of vocal music. The piano accompaniment not only plays the role of harmony and rhythm foil, but often uses specific tone type or more complex, more delicate texture to express the artistic conception and connotation of the song. For example, the piano accompaniment to Schubert's songs is of high artistic value.

## **2.3. The Structure Is Exquisite**

The structure of art songs is generally short and exquisite, which is a highly concentrated musical sketch. It is necessary to pay great attention to details when appreciating or singing, because every word and every sound are specially arranged.

## **2.4. The Content Is Rich**

Because the lyrics are the works of famous poets, so the connotation is rich, with high artistic value.

## **2.5. The Singer Is Required to Have Higher Singing Skills and Artistic Accomplishment**

The characteristics of art songs determine that the singer must have good sound quality, exquisite voice line, clear articulation and appropriate emotional expression ability. Therefore, whether the singer can sing art songs well is an important sign to measure a qualified singer. The emergence of art songs is enough to prove that the singing style of vocal music is very national characteristics, and it is a vocal music style enough to be equal with opera or church music. Along with the rise of the art song, there also emerged the freelance singers who made their living by singing in concerts and singing styles that were different from opera singing. Romanticism style and strong national flavor can be found everywhere in the works of composers from all over the world. German art songs are called "Lieder", French art songs are called "Melodie", and Russian art songs are called "Romance".

# **3. DIFFERENT SINGING STYLE OF ART SONGS**

Although they have different names and styles, they all belong to the category of art songs in terms of genre. Because the art songs of each country are mostly drawn from famous poems or folk music and sung in their own languages, the art songs of each country have their own national characteristics.

## **3.1. Singing Style of German Art Songs**

Germany is the hometown of art songs, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms is the outstanding representative of German vocal art. Due to their different historical background, living environment and personal experience, the singing styles of the works are also different.

Schubert was poor and neglected all his life, and was in a depressed, sad and painful state of mind for a long time. But he was a musician who had the courage to fight against life's misfortune and inner pain. This unique and profound personal feeling is bound to be reflected in his works. A large number of his works reflect his infinite deep feeling for nature, his yearning for a better life, his longing for an ideal society and his pursuit of love. In his works, there are not only the true expression of feelings, but also the signs from his works. Schubert once said of this shift in emotion: "When I wanted to sing of love, he turned to grief. When I want to sing of sorrow, he turns me into love." It is precisely because of this struggle with life that Schubert's art songs show profound ideological connotation and touching artistic charm. Schubert is a poet temperament and spiritual songwriter. The singing style of his works is delicate and sentimental, which requires not only emotional depth, but also intensity of expression and technical

difficulty. Schumann was Schubert's first successor. It is also the representative of the second group of art songwriters after Schubert. However, he is different from Schubert in that he has his own unique experience and creative characteristics formed from it. During much of his music-writing activities, Schumann was severely affected by illness. Schumann's personality is more introverted and his psychological activities are more complex. Therefore, to sing Schumann's artistic songs, we should deeply understand the change of inner feelings, focus on the tone and strength, and feel the author's will from the music. Brahms is comparable to Schubert and Schumann in creation. During his lifetime, he composed nearly 400 songs and published more than 200 works, most of which were solo songs accompanied by piano, but also quite a few adapted folk songs. He carried forward the creative tradition schubert, schumann's art songs, is a blend of 19 th-century art songs all the features: complete structure, elegant melodies, apt accompaniment, freedom of imagination and strong enthusiasm, keen feeling and so on, his vocal music works structure rigorous, profoundly, melody is broad, smooth and rich in originality, sincere, emotional psychology, form concise, solo part and accompany part one integrated mass, has a distinctive national style. His songs are not suitable for low-key singing, because he often uses the lower part of the piano in his accompaniment, which would otherwise affect the music. As a result, Brahms' works require singing in the original key more strictly than those of other writers.

### 3.2. The Singing Style of French Art Songs

Another European art song oddity must be France. The beginning, development and prosperity of French art songs are from the middle of the 19th century to the early stage of the 20th century. Berlioz, Fray, Debussy and other famous composers have made great contributions to the development of French art songs.

Although the singing style of French art songs varies from composer to composer, compared with the singing style of other countries' art songs, there are also his common and main characteristics:

#### 3.2.1 National character

The French national character does not like excessive exaggeration, but prefers to express delicate and implicit feelings in concise and diversified structural forms. The conciseness and elegance of French art songs are just the reflection of this national character. French poets and composers often use vague expression techniques, such as only some artistic conception, mood, hint, impression or symbolic, ambiguous, slightly sad emotional color, there is little romantic fanatical emotional outbreak. Therefore, in singing, we should pay attention to voice control, which is not unrestrained but natural and smooth, but implicit and inner and passionate, which is fine, pure and not delicate. The most fundamental thing is to grasp the clarity and sense of proportion. In terms of rhythm, we should pay attention to its rigor. Where the composer does not indicate, we should not speed up or slow down at will, or even add lengthened notes at will. This is a mistake that should be avoided. In addition, when singing a coherent phrase, it must be kept pure and clear, and not sung as a glide. As for the phrase clauses and the structure level of the whole song should be clear and unambiguous in order to achieve artistic perfection. The French love beauty, so they also study the formal beauty of music, the pursuit of soft and coherent voice, concise harmony, concise musical structure, soft tone transfer, colorful effect, accurate intonation, rhythm, beautiful melody lines.

#### 3.2.2 The close relationship between French art songs and language

The close relationship between French art songs and language is very prominent, the delicate, elegant, handsome and loud French poetry can only be expressed in French incisively and vividly. Its musical lines are shaped by the cadences of the French language. The French language is more abundant in vowels than other languages. The French script has only one

vowel per syllable, no compound vowel, and only one pronunciation when it comes to double initials, which provides favorable conditions for a clear singing style. In addition, French has a very special nasal sounds, chanting and lively rhythm, which also makes French complex and colorful music. The melody of French art songs is often closely related to the ups and downs of French intonation. Before singing, the lyrics must be recited repeatedly to master the rhythm, tone, charm and artistic conception of the words. In particular, we should pay attention to the use of Lianchanting, which is different from the usual speaking or singing of folk songs. It is used more and more meticulously, which is closely related to the performance style, taste, phrases, clauses and cultural accomplishment. Another prominent feature of the French language is that the tonic stress is not obvious. Both German and Italian have strong tonic stress, which composers must take into account when composing music for these languages, while French has a weak tonic stress, which imposes few constraints on the composer and also gives the singer more freedom to think about the technique of expression.

### 3.2.3 The Elegant Temperament

The elegant temperament of French art songs is also one of the reasons for the unique style of French art songs. The French art songs are basically related to the folk song tradition and have nothing to do with the popular songs. In contrast, the German art songs of Schubert, Brahms, Mahler and others are closely related to the folk songs. As a result, French art songs often contain aristocratic elegance and the flavor of the intellectual class but lack of rustic atmosphere.

Anyhow, performer at the French art song, must keep a kind of soft lyrical style, this sentiment is to have control of, any excess and deficiency (such as excessive control, too exaggerated manner, sad excessively, intonation is not friendly, expression is too cold, dull or hot, etc.), are not French art songs.

### 3.3. National Characteristics in Opera Singing Style

In fact, the singing style of the opera art also embodies the characteristics of the national character everywhere. Such as romantic late folk music opera. In 1848, revolutions broke out in many European countries one after another, and the struggle for national liberation began to surge. All these promoted the awakening of national consciousness and the development of national art in European countries in the second half of the 19th century, which was reflected in the rise of national music school in the field of music. For example, Russia's P.I.Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), influenced by the progressive thoughts of the 1960s in Russia in his music creation, showed the basic tendency of pursuing brightness, clarity and optimism. Especially, his later works were deeply tragic and expressed his understanding of the meaning of life. His opera works are good at describing the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the conflicts and expressing the inner experience of the characters, organically combining the Russian folk music style with the Western European music creation skills, with beautiful and clear melody, full of originality and drama, which are excellent works in the Russian and European vocal art. He created "Yevgeny Onegin" and "Queen of Spades" and so on, have become the Russian nation's masterpiece. Another example is the Czech Republic, which has the most musical tradition in Eastern Europe. In the 18th century, Czech became one of the developed countries in European music. Jilly Banda (1722-1795) made a positive contribution to the cause of national opera with a number of outstanding comic operas and one-act operas. In the 19th century, Czech music creation flourished unprecedentedly, and the progress of national opera was recognized by the world. Smetana is an outstanding representative of Czech national opera.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

A country or nation needs a rich and colorful musical culture, and the richness of musical culture is often created by musicians with different styles. No artistic personality, the lack of individual artistic style of the work is boring. Personality is the life force of an artist. Without a rich artistic personality of the artist group, a country's artistic and cultural life can not be truly prosperous. This argument is not only confirmed by artistic practice, but also has profound aesthetic theory basis.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Zhao Meibo. The Art of Singing [M]. Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Press, 1997.
- [2] Li Jinwei. Li Jinyuan. Shen Xiang Vocal Music Teaching Art [M]. Beijing: Huale Press, 2003.
- [3] Li Xiaoyi. National Vocal Music Singing Art [M]. Changsha: Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2004.
- [4] Zou Changhai. Vocal Art Psychology [M]. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2000.