

The Vocal Ideology of Master Xiang Shen*

Xinqiao Liu*, Hao Chu

Department of School of Music, Qufu Normal University
xinqiaoliu@126.com

Abstract - Professor Xiang Shen was a famous dramatic tensor singer, and a master of vocal music education. In his more than 40 years of teaching, he has supervised many outstanding singers. In this paper, we summarize his life and vocal ideology, and hope to give some help for contemporary vocal teaching.

Index Terms - vocal, vocal ideology, vocal, music education, teaching

1. Brief Introduction for Master Xiang Shen

Shen Xiang was born in November 1921 in Tianjin of China. Very coincidentally, in this year, the famous Italian singer Caruso died. Shen Xiang was affected by his father, in his childhood, he loved music and Western opera, and dreamed to be a singer like Caruso. In 1933, Shen admitted

Nankai Middle School. As a musical mentor, Jiansheng Xu gave a good guidance for Shen.

In 1947, Shen would like to apply for Shanghai Conservatory of Music. But his father did not agree. He had to apply for other universities. After receipt of offer letters from Yenching University, Fu Jen University and Tianjin Industrial & Commercial Institute, he chose Yenching University since there is Music department in Yenching University. He studied English language and literature, and also enrolled in music lessons. He laid solid foundations on vocal the American vocal music teacher Ms. Tianxiang Fan.

By the end of 1941, the Pacific War broke out, Shen transferred to Department of English Literature at St. John's University of Shanghai. In the same year, he was admitted to the Shanghai National Music Academy to learn vocal music supervised by famous Russian Professor Shilin Su. Nextly, Shen studied vocal music under instruction by German mezzo-soprano singer professor Rapp, Especially in the German art songs aspects, Shen got a great harvest.

On May 12, 1944, Shen held his first solo concert in Shanghai Lyceum, had a great success. Mainstream media commented that he was an excellent tenor. At that time, he was less than 23 years old.

In 1945, Shen graduated from St. John's University and returned to his hometown of Tianjin. He held several solo concerts in Peiking and Tianjin. He has been a famous tenor.

By the end of 1947, he was invited to teaching vocal music in Department of Music at Beijing Normal University. The embarrassedly said to him, "Although you were famous, but you were too young to gave you the position of a full professor now. How about a associate professor?" Shen asked, "What then the lower position?" "The lecturer." "I came this! After all, I am less than 26 years old, I do." From then on, His teaching life

began, at the same time, He frequently participated in various of performances.

During the summer and autumn of 1949, Central Conservatory of Music was founded in Tianjin. In November, Shen entered the vocal department of Central Conservatory of Music.

In 1956, the "National Music Week" was held in Beijing. Shen attended the performance of Central Conservatory of Music team. He served as a tenor in the chorus singing, which is his first public performances after the liberation. This performance got a great success.

In the late 1950s, Shen had to be transferred out Central Conservatory of Music several times. In this period, he studied national and folk singing methods, and he also applied to listen the courses of the Beijing Opera School.

In the early 1960s, he spent four years for studying voice therapy cooperated with the people in ear-nose-throat department at Temple to study. Some opera actors, drama actor and singers were cured.

In 1962, the Central Philharmonic held a symphony concert in the Beijing Concert Hall. They invited Shen as tenor. This is his last appearance on the stage.

During the Great Revolution time, Shen involved in a bigger dilemma. His home was raided. His accumulated records more than 40 years were all destroyed. He was examined in isolation, not allowed to go home for three years.

In 1972, representatives of the military declared that Shen was innocent at the students and faculty staff meeting.

In 1976, Shen went to Hangzhou, and in there, he met Dahu Chen, a Peking Opera master. They talked about comparative study of Western art and opera singing every day and tried to explore the possibility of learning from each other of the two art forms.

In 1978, Opera Department was founded in Central Conservatory of Music, and Shen was the director. He was promoted to associate professor in 1979, was promoted to professor in 1982.

In 1983, graduate students of opera department held a reporting performance. The staged three operas "Death Mourning", "The Marriage of Figaro", and "La Traviata" (selected tunes) which caused a great sensation.

In 1984, Shen led a delegation to attend the Finnish Miriam Hailin First International Vocal Competition. Two of his students, mezzo-soprano Ning Liang won the first of women's group, and Coloratura soprano Dilber won the second. Finnish public opinion commented. "The future belongs to

* The work was partially supported by key project of Department of Culture of Shandong Province

China, the western musical art flower has not only been living in China, but also released a dazzling colorful brilliance.”

In 1985, at the second BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, bass Yue Liu won the third place. In 1987, Jingma Fan was awarded a Certificate of Excellence at the same competition. Baritone Da Cheng won the third in the International Vocal Competition held in 1989 in Chile. Tenor Haitao Hei, in 1991, won the first in Verdi International Vocal Competition. The same one teacher taught including male and female voices five parts all can have awards, which is rare. In addition to winning the International Vocal Competition, Shen also trained a lot of excellent singers in China. Such as Jinwei Li, Tielin Jin, Shuzhen Guo, Zhi Cheng, Xiumei Yin, Mucun Guan and so on. From 1987-1992, Savonlinna Opera Festival and Finnish National Opera invited Shen to hold “master classes”. In his lecture, his enthusiasm and genuine talent won the respect of foreign musicians. They said he could Midas touch, was a world-class vocal teachers.

From 1991 to 1992, he was invited to teaching at master class of Estonia Opera opened.

In 1992, Shen was invited to lecture in Opera in Stockholm, Sweden, and was invited to participate in the European vocal teachers conference. National television of Britain and Finland also shot a feature film “Chinese songs.”

In 1988 he went to Italy as the third Maria - Callas International Competition, singer, and presided over the award ceremony.

1987 - 1991, he has been in the judging panel of Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

Shen had no music college diploma. However, he systematically mastered the bel canto singing and was proficient at English, Italian, French, Russian and German. He acquired profound traditional culture, and was familiar a large number of western vocal literatures. Shen has accumulated a wealth of experience, formed his own unique style of vocal music art and teaching system.

If we say that an artist's biography was written by his work, then, the success in education on vocal music of Shen is the most glorious part.

Due to overwork, master Shen died on October 4, 1993 in Beijing.

2. Main vocal ideology of Shen

(1) Shen proposed that “Head”, “heart” and “body” (HHB) must be combined into a harmonious unity [1].

Shen pointed that a good singer must have three conditions. The first is the “head”, i.e, ideology, thought, and intelligence; the second is “heart”, that is. Emotion and feeling; the third is the body (one's own condition), that is, voice, that singing instrument to coordinate the development of the three indispensable.

He said, “Singing is a combination of poetry and melody which is the use of the instrument can speak to express the views of poetry. Only if one can catch this point, singing can be called singing art. For the use of breathing, resonance, pronunciation body and cavity are all the problems of the technical issues [2].”

In his opinion, for singing, the first is thought, that is, one must have heartfelt feelings. All successful singers, in addition to the conditions necessary for vocal learning, all have a good ideology, which can provide a comprehensively, dialectically developmental viewpoint to treat themselves and their own learning. With the right way of thinking, we can straighten out the relationship between the local and the global. For complex complete vocal problems, we must have concept (or form the complete concept gradually). Thus, we can deal with the relationship between artistic expression and technical training, language and sound, breathing and resonance. We can neither put them in isolated or against each other, nor emphasize on the local issues while ignoring the whole. With the right way of thinking, we can straighten the relation between the immediate and the future. Vocal learning needs progressively, step by step. Even one with good talent can not be rushed. We must emphasize on basic skills and not aim too high, step by step, we can reach the ideal situation.

All good singers in HHB aspects are balanced. When a singer is singing, it needs to be the whole person singing, and the relation among all parts must be balanced. He or she must have good understanding and expressiveness. These three aspects must be complete. Singing itself is not only artistic creation, but also a physical sport. Singing includes music, melody, harmony, melody, words and feelings, all these are in artistic area. On the other hand, singing itself is physical sport, it has dynamic, articulation, resonance et al. A singer is as same as an athlete or a dancer, he or she first must have a desire, a competitive state to sing. The state before singing should be in both positive and relaxed, such as playing volleyball, When the ball is coming, the occasion of “waiting”, the state if neither stiff nor loose, such loose-and-tight state is called concentration.

Among all singing elements, psychological element is active and at the first leading position. Other physiological factors of singing such as respiratory, speech organs, resonance organs, lips, teeth, tongue, teeth and throat, these voice formation organs, are in passive subordination. Their movements are dominated by mental activity. Therefore, when we learn to sing, we should have not only good voice, but also have a good mind.

Learning vocal music needs to find “sense” [1]. The “sense” is a kind of mental activity including hearing, vision and so on. The vocal training is to train the “inner hearing” and “inner vision” such that one can hear their sound resonance inside one's own cavity, rather than just hear the sound in the room. If there is no feeling of “inner hearing”, one cannot find the resonance position. The basic elements of singing, including breathing, phonation, resonance and the language of four parts, which restricts each other in singing activity between them, they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing and indispensable. The process of singing training is to making these opposing elements gradually achieve a unified equilibrium processes. For instance, breathing and vocalization are opposites. If there is no proper singing breathing, then there is no good sound. Singing breathe can not exist lonely, it must be built up associated with

singing process. Thus, the four elements must be of unity of opposites.

Moreover, Professor Shen also noted that singing skill is a necessary means for artistic expression for singing. Singers must pay attention to techniques training in order to achieve the perfect art. Whatever styles of foreign, national or folk, good singing is never out of content. The relationship between technology (skill) and content should be clear. Technology is always as service for the content. Singing is not only a combination of words and notes, more importantly, it is used to expressing feelings and exchanging ideas. Therefore, singers should not only to master the perfect vocal skills, but also stress the training of music and literature, pay attention to the accumulation of life. The heart is more substantial, the content is more. The higher the better for skills, but more important is the musicianship. Singer constantly improve their artistic accomplishments and noble art of morality is an indispensable condition for the success. These views of Shen with the Cristy have the same purpose [3].

Tielin Jin, one of his student, generalized the HHB as "sound, emotion, character, taste, performance, and culture. This seven words can be a standard to judge singers [4].

(2) Stressing the training for middle register

Shen pointed that the middle register is very important since most of the sound of a song are in the middle register, while bass and treble are relatively little. As the middle register is similar with the sound of the natural human voice. Hence, when one sings in the middle register, the muscle of sing organ is not tensional. The strength of supporting point of breath is easy to be controlled. The training of the middle register is the first and main content for singing. When the foundation of middle register is solid, the low-sound ranger and high-sound are easy to be extended. Singers must sing smooth, relaxed, mellow, comfortable voice in the middle register, which is a prerequisite for training soprano. Training in the sound area is the main content of vocal music teaching. If one has no good foundation for middle register, while singing difficult songs, then the problems as frequent ventilation, unnatural soprano and inappropriate emotional expression will appear. Therefore, in vocal teaching, we must first solve the principal contradiction.

(3) Shen did a deeply study on true voice and falsetto, constructed the discipline of phoniatics, and instructed the first postgraduate on phoniatics.

Shen pointed that the voice throat is a pair of vocal cords. The voice throat has two basic functions, the so-called true voice and falsetto [5]. For not be well trained people, both men and women, true voice sound and falsetto fight are not harmonious. The true voices of men are on the top, it is difficult for them to sing the treble. On the contrary, the true voices of women at the bottom, it is difficult for them to sing the bass. In fact, the true voice and falsetto have no good cooperation. So-called good singing method is the method that can be used in a lifetime. Mixed sound are in all good methods. For a pantaloone in Beijing opera, she thinks that she uses the true voice.

However, she cannot sing the high-sound if she uses true sound. A good pantaloone's voice is mixed. If she really uses true voice to sing for a long time, "polyps" will be appeared in her throat. In Beijing Opera, maids are always called "small voice throat", in fact, a good maid, the main voice uses falsetto, but the true voice function is in the inside, so the voice was soft and pleasant. If a maid always uses falsetto to sing for a long time, a small "knot" will be appeared in the throat. Therefore, whatever bass and soprano, Bel Canto uses mixed sound.

From the early 1960s, Shen cooperated with the researchers in ear-nose-throat department at Beijing Tiantan Hospital to study voice therapy. They cured many drama actors, singers and voice teachers. Based on this, he constructed the discipline of phoniatics in China, and instructed the first postgraduate on phoniatics. Currently, this postgraduate have been the director of vocal Research Center of Central Conservatory of Music.

(4) Shen cleared the responsibility of vocal teachers

He believed, during the full teaching process, the responsibility of a vocal music teacher is to introduce the right singing road for the students on the basis of the existing conditions [6]. The so-called "teaching" is to help, guide and introduce students to study, but not to foist. Teachers should not think that they have a "doctrine", a set of "theory", and all their students must follow them. Some teachers do not teach students to sing, but let students sing for teachers, for teachers' own "doctrine" sing, this teaching is not feasible. Shen advocated that everyone had his own style. Of course, students can be influenced by teachers inevitably. But we cannot erase the students' different characteristics, i.e., teaching needs to be individual treatment.

3. Conclusion

Shen has ever told the people around him, "Give me five years. No! No! Not enough, give me 10 years, I will go to many places, mentor young teachers. They make progress, can instruct more students. In fact, obtaining award in the international competitions is not my ultimate goal. I seek to improve the musical level of the whole nation!" [7]. This is Xiang Shen, a great virtuoso, we will not forget him forever.

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