

Analysis on the Artistic Creation of Modern Group Dance "Children of the Stars"

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ABSTRACT

"Children of the Stars" is a work of dance art focusing on children with autism. This article analyzes and elaborates on the genre, dance conception and dance pictures of the modern group dance "Children of the Stars" and makes a detailed analysis of this artistic creation from four levels: the excavation of movements, the clever use of props, the projection of light and shadow, and the precise selection of talents. From the material selection to artistic conception to the creation and successful presentation on stage, all demonstrate the artistic accomplishments of the choreographer and the exquisite skills of the performers.

Keywords: Group dance, "Children of the Stars", Children with autism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern group dance "Children of the Stars" is a rolling funded project of the National Endowment for the Arts of Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 2019, and the project host is Jiang Shudong. This work has won the Silver Award in the Modern Dance Group of the 10th Chinese Dance "Lotus Award" and the Choreographer Gold Award of the 6th Liaoning Province "Lotus Award", and has completed 20 national tours. This is a dance work that interprets the reality and inner emotions of children with autism. The choreographer group adopts the expression form of modern dance that can reach people's hearts and convey the inner activities of characters most. The use of the prop "cloth net" shows the theme of the dance work well. Putting aside the complicated stage art installations and stripping away the gorgeous costumes and accessories, ten ballet students with an average age of 13 only wear nude-color tight-fitting body suits, and they are enclosed in a very small space with a transparent "cloth net" that is extremely elastic. In the following, the author will analyze the artistic creation of the modern group dance "Children of the Stars" from four levels: the excavation of movements, the clever use of props, the projection of light and shadow, and the precise selection of talents.

2. THE EXCAVATION OF MOVEMENTS REVEALS THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER COLOR OF THE CHARACTERS

The group dance "Children of the Stars" is a distinctive modern dance style work. Modern dance is a new dance type that was designed to overthrow the stylized ballet dance movements in the early 20th century and advocated trying to use free body language to see through the heart. Its openness, thoughtfulness, and experimental nature will inevitably be favored by dance circles in various countries. The protagonists of this choreographer's creation are a group of autistic children, so it is inevitable to use modern dance body language to excavate movements. Through interviews with the host of this project, it's learned that the inspiration for creating the dance work came from an oil painting, the author of which was an autistic child. The choreographer walked into the welfare houses many times to care about the autistic children, and refined typical dance movements based on their living conditions and inner feelings.

Looking at the entire work, it can be seen that the choreographer first positioned the work's motivational movements very accurately when creating: The performers' body posture is mainly curled up, which can not only express the state of

each child being conceived in the mother's body, but also reveal the "closed" state of autistic children. On the basis of this motivational movement, phrases or pases full of emotions are developed and changed. The motivational movement fully reflects the character's characteristics. The action material comes from the choreographer's exquisite observation of children with autism over a long period of time, and then the choreographer organizes it to avoid threadbare movements that can be accomplished overnight. And at last, the determined movements after repeated denial are enough to show the characters' distinctive personality. In the development and change of motivational movement techniques, techniques such as motivational repetition, changes in the rhythm of movements, and coordination of multiple joint movements of the body are used. The repeated use of motivation plays a role in strengthening emotions and deepening impressions. The change of the movement rhythm depends on the development and change of the characters' inner activities. The coordinated technique of multiple joint movements of the body is based on the original motivation to exaggerate and enlarge, following the principle of remaining essentially the same despite all apparent changes. For example, at the beginning of the work, the actors sit on their heels in a curled up position. The first movement performers shrug their shoulders one by one, with larger inhaling and exhaling, and repeat their motivational movements. With the repeatedly use of "Canon"-style shrugs and "sobs", the audience can interpret their inner grievances, sadness, and anxiety. Then the performers quickly shrink into themselves like a "hedgehog" full of thorns, not wanting others to approach... Here, the motivational movement is not only reproduced, but the acceleration of the speed strengthens the inner emotions of the characters and can directly touch the hearts of the audience. Sometimes the performers are in a kneeling position and looking up at the starlit sky, seeming to ask God: "Why are we such special children?" Here, on the basis of motivational movements, the coordination of multiple joint movements of the body is mobilized. But no matter how it develops and changes, from beginning to end, every performer dances in his or her own "cloth net" space. This unique and precise creative technique reproduces the realistic conditions of children with autism enclosed in their own space.

In addition to the basic techniques for the development and change of motivational

movements, the excavation of movements also needs to combine the creative techniques of time, space and strength to form pas in order to better portray the characters' distinctive personalities. This creative technique uses repeated, exaggerated, contrasting, and layered technical applications in terms of time, space, and strength. In terms of time, it mainly changes the time rhythm of the movements, which can produce rhythmic changes and contrast before and after the movements, but it is also unified. The use of this technique can not only attract the attention of the audience, but also sublimate the dance theme to a certain extent. In terms of space, it strives to maximize the spatial contrast between movements: On one hand, it is to seek various possibilities for the development of the body, and on the other hand, it is to create the effect of ups and downs in space. The use of this technology can bring a strong visual impact to the audience, and is beneficial to the performance of the characters' distinct personality and complex emotional changes. In terms of strength, it changes the strength of the movements, either fierce or soft. The use of this technique plays a role in emphasizing, promoting and even expressing emotions. Sometimes it is used in the development and change of emotions, and sometimes in the turn of pas. It is true that the choreographer organically combines the creative techniques of time, space and strength when performing movement excavation. For example, in the beginning, the performers try to push the "barriers" in different directions, different heights, and different angles on the ground once, eager to see the beautiful world outside. But it seems that no matter how hard they "push, pull and tear", the "cloth net" still covers them tightly... So they stand up, use the second space to break free from the "chain" on their bodies with larger amplitude and greater intensity, and then stand up, fall, stand up, and fall. Repeatedly, even though these performers can sometimes struggle to free their heads, and sometimes release their hands, they still can't take off the "cloth net" on their bodies and still can't have a gentle dialogue with the outside world... Then they frantically struggle and get rid of the cloth net with perseverance, intertwined with large-scale left and right, back and forth, and up and down movements of the main limbs, and their whole body strongly express their voice at this time. It can be seen that the movements of this pas use repeated, exaggerated, and layered technical applications in time, space and strength to portray the distinct personality of the characters. Needless to say, just by following the abundant emotions and externalized action language of the performers, the

audience can accurately perceive what they think and want... The struggling dance comes and goes, replaced by a slow posture that contrasts greatly with it. The performers stand in a row, slowly and lightly spread their arms, and with the breath filled their bodies, they gently retract their arms, just like a group of butterflies longing to fly freely in the sky, but they are so weak that they can't fly out of their "imprisonment"... Here, the processing of movements in time, space and strength has taken a significant turn with the changes in the characters' personality color. Therefore, the entire pas is based on the development and change of motivational movements and closely focuses on the technical application of time, space and strength, and vividly portrays the characters of the group of autistic children, so that the audience will be moved when watching the dance...

3. THE CLEVER USE OF PROPS HIGHLIGHTS THE THEME OF THE WORK

The clever use of props can make dance works have a certain unique creativity, rather than a single "group gymnastics" performance. The props that the author refers to here are definitely not the props that are not very effective when they are put on the stage being deliberately mystifying under the influence of the market economy, but refer to the props in the professional field that are based on the needs of the dance theme and are beneficial to the excavation of dance movements. Traditional dance can reproduce the regional folk culture and the background of the times in the use of props, while the range of props for modern dance is wider. In addition to the common props, it can also collide with different types of media such as art, film and television.

The "cloth net" prop used in modern group dance "Children of the Stars" is very consistent with the choreographer's attempt to portray a group of autistic children. Its relatively flexible and transparent material is conducive to expressing the external development and change of the dance language of the performers' inner heart. The precise selection and clever use of props make the audience admire the choreographer's wise decision. For example, at first, the gauze wraps each performer tightly, with only the performer's head being exposed. Performers sometimes look up at the sky, and the audience can interpret from it that they are bound by the inner "barrier" and sigh why they are such a group of children... Another example is that

their hands are rapidly doing upward and forward impulse in the "cloth net", and their heads are completely covered by the "cloth net". While struggling to free them to the outside world, it seems that they only want to be immersed in their own "small world". In their respective "cloth nets", their personal rhythms from small to large, from slow to fast, combined with the "struggle" dance in different spaces, present the image composition of wanting to "break the cocoon into a butterfly". The ingenious use of the props is extremely close to the theme of the work, and it strongly touches the hearts of the audience. This special group of children with autism is eager to release their "shackles". In the meantime, the performer's hands and heads are weaving inside and outside the "cloth net", which shows their inner contradiction: they want to break through their "self" but also "enclose" themselves. With this repeated cycle, the organic blend of movements and props just rightly sublimates the theme... In the dance, the performers gather quickly, leaning forward, with their arms curled on their chests and their entire limbs tightly wrapped in a "cloth net", and their heads look up, as if they are all looking for their own direction in life and way of survival. Then everyone slows down the rushing rhythm. Under the "white cover" of the "cloth net", along with the dragging steps under their feet, they repeatedly stretch out their hands diagonally upwards, seeming to be looking for their own sky. During this period, some performers fall and climb up one after another, and the repetitive rhythm reaches the depths of the audience's heart, motivating quite deeply... It can be seen that the choreographer's clever use of the "net cloth" props not only makes the dance pictures unique, but also effectively highlights the theme of the work.

4. THE PROJECTION OF LIGHT AND SHADOW REFLECTS THE INNER DEMANDS OF THE CHARACTERS

As everyone knows, the use of stage lighting is an important part of dance works that can't be ignored. It not only has the single function of lighting the stage, but more importantly, it is ingeniously coordinated with the dance, which can allude to the inner demands of the characters in the dance works very clearly. This is why the choreographer has to communicate with the lighting engineer before the performance. This process may seem simple but it is complicated. If one accidentally makes a mistake, the creative intention of the choreographer will be wasted. If the

lighting is used strictly and accurately, then for the dance works, it will play a role of making the dance better and even more powerful. The distinction between the local and the overall lighting reveals the growth of the performers' inner emotions. The transparent and dim aperture invisibly reflects the character's distinct emotional changes. The use of follow spot focuses the attention of the public most, revealing the typical meaning. The light and shadow flashing in different areas can express the scene switching of different time and space, and can express the inner demands of characters in the same time and space... It is true that both simple and clear indications and thought-provoking hints serve to expose the theme of the work and convey the inner emotions of the performers. In terms of light and shadow projection, this work uses cool-tone dark green, dark blue and incandescent light in sharp contrast. In the lighting pattern, it mainly adopts two shapes of rectangle and circle, and adopts the method of freeze-frame and tracking in the follow spot. Undoubtedly, these light and shadow projection technologies have played a role in reflecting the inner demands of the characters.

The group dance "Children of the Stars" only gives a rectangular column of follow spot to a performer at the beginning. This performer lowers his head and bends down in a double kneeling position, but only his insteps support the ground and his knees are off the ground. The author feels that children with autism are full of inferiority and fear. And that rectangular beam of light envelops him, implying that he encloses himself in a very small space, doesn't want to contact the outside world, and doesn't want the outside world to disturb his "small world". Then, this rectangular beam of light illuminates four, six, ten children in the same shape... This kind of artistic method seems to say that there are many such special children in life, which inevitably makes people feel pity... The light of each rectangle is extremely dim dark green, and the color tone is very consistent with the inner state of autistic children, permeating loneliness, helplessness, and fear... Afterwards, the whole stage shows dark blue faint light, which clearly outlines the state of their attempts to break free in the transparent "cloth net". The dim elaboration of cool tone renders the atmosphere of the entire situation, accompanied by the synthesis of wind bells, depicting the inner inferiority of autistic children and the dilemma of them being unable to communicate with the outside world. When the five performers stand up and do push and pull movements in the "cloth net", brighter incandescent

light lights them, and under each performer's feet, another performer curls up and shakes his whole body in the faint light. The strong incandescent light here has a strengthening effect, and it seems to be a metaphor for the two inner states of children with autism: When they try to break through their own "fetters", their inner fears arise spontaneously. This can also be interpreted as one group of children who are more determined and brave and eager to break out of the "barrier", while the other group of children are timid and dare not go beyond... In the dance, ten performers all stand up and "struggle" with the "cloth net", but in the end all fall down, leaving only one person standing in the middle. When the follow spot lights up this person, at this time, his inner state is most typically and most directly conveyed to the audience. The audience can only see him raising and opening his arms in the "cloth net", but slowly retreating with a difficult pace. At the same time, he curls up his back and slowly retracts his hands. At this time, the audience feel the fear in his heart. This emotion is infinitely amplified and frozen at this time... Until the climax of the work, they stand in a row, and a large rectangular incandescent beam of light lights up all of them. They frantically try their best to break free from the "cloth net", bursting out infinite power in a limited space, and pushing the artistic appeal to a climax. At this time, this beam of light is no longer a cold tone color but an incandescent light full of passion, expressing their true feelings most powerfully. When they gather quickly, their hands repeat the gesture of "reaching" diagonally upward, and the large circular aperture moves slowly following their steps, showing their long-cherished desire to find the light of hope. Another example is that a performer is standing and tearing the "cloth net", and other performers around are shivering on the ground. At this time, a large aperture of incandescent light is used to freeze the frame. This shiver shivers the personality defects of children with autism, shivers their spiritual "barrier", and shivers the public's conscience to concern and care for this special group. However, the scene that makes the audience crying is nothing more than the performers huddling together, shaking their hands back and forth in front of their chests, coupled with the strong breathing rhythm in the body, looking up at the sky, and constantly praying for God. This art proposition that is close to life directly walks into the hearts of the audience. At this time, the identity of artistic aesthetic taste is undisputed. Here, it still uses a large freeze-frame incandescent light aperture, which closely links the hearts of the audience with the inner demands of

the performers. At the end, all the performers still stand in a large incandescent light circle, bending over and shouting to the audience feebly. A shout accompanied by a large tremble of the upper torso from the inside out, seeming to be calling their mother. Such an audiovisual ending is very meaningful... The heart-wrenching shout expresses the realistic condition of children with autism, and conveys their living conditions, making the audience's hearts ups and downs, surging and trembling with the emotions of the performers... It can be seen that the projection technology of light and shadow can convey the inner demands of the characters to the sensory system of the audience, and deliver them to the central nervous system to produce strong emotional resonance.

5. THE PRECISE SELECTION OF TALENTS CREATES THE SUCCESS OF THE WORK

Usually, to create an outstanding dance work, a choreographer with comprehensive cultural and artistic skills is the first and necessary condition. First of all, the choreographer uses his keen observation to adopt the "dancing" thinking, and then goes through the process from the thoughtful artistic conception to the innovative creative process, and finally presents the complete dance work on the stage. However, it is far from enough to have an outstanding choreographer. Excellent performers are also needed to interpret the essence of the work. The modern group dance "Children of the Stars" is originally created by the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. It doesn't hesitate to focus their attention on the children of the attached middle school in the precise selection of performance talents. The age of the children in the attached middle school is very appropriate to interpret the dance theme of autistic children. Their eyes are clear and bright, naturally revealing innocence, naivete and purity... Through interviews with the choreographer, the author learns that the selection of talents is limited to the age range with more than two years of training, and finally, ten performers from 12 to 14 years old are chosen. Indeed, children at a very young age not only have insufficient dancing skills, but also can't presume the creative thinking of the choreographer. Then why doesn't the choreographer choose talents in the subjects of national folk dance and classical dance but choose the children from the subject of ballet? In the industry, it's generally known to all that excellent modern dance performers usually have a strong foundation in ballet basic training. The basic

training of classical dance was originally a "classical dance posture" for the upper body and a ballet training method for the foot. The stylized basic skills training of ballet seems boring, but in fact it has trained the dancers to have super soft opening degree, control and other skills. Therefore, the choreographer's unique vision focuses on these ten ballet children with an average age of 13 years. The success of this work is inseparable from the wonderful performance of this group of children. On the basis of understanding the creative intention of the choreographer, they add their own feelings for a second creation, and finally can vividly show the realistic dilemma and inner real activities of autistic children.

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, the modern group dance "Children of the Stars" adopts relative core technical techniques in the excavation of movements to reveal the distinctive personality of a group of children with autism, the ingenious use of the prop "cloth net" in the perspective of the theme can strongly hit the deep heart of the public, and the technology of light and shadow projection vividly depicts the inner world of children with autism. It can be seen that from the selection of materials to the artistic conception to the creation and the successful presentation of the work on the stage, all demonstrate the artistic accomplishments of the choreographer. Of course, the superb skills of the performers also play a vital role, so as to finally achieve the artistic effect of causing the audience to reflect and appeal to the public to be concerned with and care for the special group of children with autism.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This article is independently completed by Qian Lu.

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