



Experimental Teaching in Contemporary Music Practice

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Abstract. Contemporary musical art is an important branch of human culture since the 20th century. It is not only the fruit of the Self-Discipline in art music, but also the artists' expression to present world, society and civilization. The innovation drives contemporary artists to deviate from the musical traditions of "common practice", the music becomes extremely dissonant, uncertain, mathematical and by all means of unconventional. The striking contrast of aesthetic makes people's study, reception, performing and other practice less more involved, which is lagging behind the composition. This undesirable situation means related education of contemporary music practice is imbalanced. This article advocates that experimental teaching will stimulate the practice by focus on the contacting approach to contemporary music and the cultivation of modern aesthetic. The experimental teaching will make a solid foundation to promote the prosperity of practice and development of the whole contemporary music in future.

Keywords: contemporary music, experimental teaching, modern aesthetic, practice experiment

1 Introduction

Contemporary music is a kind of spiritual wealth of art music evolved from various music styles. It represents the ingenious co-creation of composers, performers and theorists since 20th century, which is also a profile of modern human culture. As we all know, the world has undergone great changes in society, politics, science, technology, economy and other aspects since the 20th century, it evokes the artists' new ideas and aesthetics. The traditional aesthetic has gone from deviation to rebellion during this time. The modern composing technique and sonority is very different from the characteristics of "common practice" periods, for examples: the twelve-tone music, series music, aleatory music, simplistic music, timbre music, etc. All of these music consist of dissonant pitch manipulation, complex rhythm grouping and divers texture organization. Behind the avant-garde, abstract and grotesque surface, the composition is highly rational, innovative and advanced in construction. This breakthrough of the musical tradition is not only the practice of Self-Discipline in art, but also the mission entrusted to musicians in the new era ^[1]. However, the change of esthetic has an impact on the practice of modern music, many related activities such as performing and listening are

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heavily decreasing. This article will address related issues how experimental teaching effecting the practice of contemporary music, in order to improve the current situation of contemporary music practice.

2 Reflections on the present situation of contemporary music practice

2.1 The dilemma of contemporary music practice

Compared with the prosperity of modern composition, the lack of practice resulted in an unbalanced overall music environment. Through the large quantity and tendency of the modern composition, the education of the modern music composing is proved to be rather successful. It also confirms that the conditions and nutrients for the generation of this artistic phenomenon are very abundant. On the other hand, it shows people could possess innovative abilities after fine cultivation. Therefore, the practitioners need the change of attitude and cultivation of related modern music experience. However, whether it is in professional colleges or daily lives' concerts, music albums or other medias, contemporary music practice remains a low exposure. This shows the evidence that studying, performing and promoting is far behind the composing. It leads to the reality that most people still favor classical music.

2.2 Reflection on the educational situation of contemporary music practice

The poor practice reflects the lag of teaching in cultivating process firstly, it indicates that specialized education requires renovating. Currently, the education of practice is still rooted in the musical background before early 20th century no matter in professional level or universal education. There is no corresponding proportional expansion of the modern theory and contemporary repertoire in the courses. Moreover, the educators themselves are not familiar with the contemporary works and couldn't evaluate the practice precisely. Therefore, the training program, teaching syllabus, examination system, stage performance evaluation and other educational steps have not been followed up accordingly. As a result, composition and practice are gradually separated, making the composition move towards the clique of elite while practice is always immersed in classical music. As we can see, the development of contemporary music is out of balance, which is disadvantageous to music long-term development. More importantly, the lack of practice will affect the cultivation of modern aesthetics of contemporary audiences. The modern aesthetic demands that the reception of music should get out of the old habit and explore the expression of modern sensations. Furthermore, contemporary music based on the art of self-discipline especially challenges practitioners to have the quality of aesthetic reason, which is the pure observation (Schauen)^[2] upon the works. In order to help people gradually understand the beauty of contemporary music and the culture of modern art, so as to respond to the responsibility entrusted to music practitioners by The Times, we must experiment and explore the teaching of contemporary music practice. It is expected to help establish a more sys-

tematic and standardized educational model for the teaching of contemporary music practice in the future.

3 The experiment of contacting approach to the contemporary music practice.

3.1 Experimental changes in contacting approach

Before discussing the aspects of experimental teaching about modern music practice, the writer believes that there is a prerequisite question need to be experimented firstly. This issue comes from audiences' direct reaction to contemporary music, critics received are always "weird sound, hard to get, don't want to listen again" and so on. Due to the direct auditory contact without any understanding preparation ahead, it results in a resist and negative experience about contemporary music. This passive contacting approach cuts off the intention for further practice. So, what if we took an experiment on contacting approach to contemporary music with practitioners? That is to exclude listening, playing and such activities which producing actual sound in contacting the music. Instead, the new approach encourages reading of music, analyzing, deconstructing and similar activities of involving pure observation (Schauen). After understanding the basic musical language, style and concept, the anticipation of sonority arises simultaneously. Then, the expectation is refilled with real sound for an integral experience of modern music.

3.2 Feasible analysis on the experiment of contacting approach

This experimental teaching is based on the fact that music itself is non-semantic and non-visual, which has always been considered abstract and rich in multi-interpretation^[3]. Even in the "common practice" period, people gradually established aesthetic principles to promote the experience and perception of music. For example, people have specific aesthetic norms for the connotation of melody, the progress of harmony and the perception of structure in different musical periods. Practitioners have clear, tacit expectations and evaluation criteria for each element in music. Therefore, the practitioner approaches this kind of music by auditory sensation first will have a better experience. That's the reason why many classical works are entitled "beautiful, famous, classic" and are spread widely. On the contrary, the modern music deliberately took the traditional elements away, which invalidating the old aesthetic principle. Modern music is moving towards a purely acoustic world without reference. In particular, the contemporary composers insist on the innovation of ideas, the unconventional technique and the favor of technical rationality. It makes the form of sound itself become the ontology again, rather than the content and emotion triggered by it. The form of combining musical sound has evolved into the form of combining sound in contemporary times. Thus, the experimental teaching should involve the understanding activities such as analysis of motives and clarification of sound design as the first step. After the formation of the "transcendental" feeling and "intuitive" impression, the

expectation of actual sound will smoothly introduce the specific practice such as listening or playing. This approach will bring the distance between practitioners and contemporary works much closer, and will also establish the basis for the acceptance of works.

3.3 Case studies on the patterns of approach to modern music

Taking Schoenberg's twelve-tone music an example, the music is constructed in certain mathematical rules with limited musical elements ^[4] which sounds very avant-garde and abstract. If the practitioners don't recognize the tone series, the manipulation of the patterns and analysis of pitch-class sets, what is left for the hearing is just a chaotic and confused sound phenomenon. Practitioners are also unable to perceive the subtle connection between 12-tone technique and traditional polyphony, and the quality of pointillism. Taking another famous example, "The Rite of Spring" has become a famous event in modern music because of its premiere failure. Due to the aesthetic conflict and deficient understanding, it was difficult for people to accept the work and staged a farce. However, the sound of the work itself did not change, and as people deepened their understanding of the work, it soon became an important representative of modern music. This fully demonstrates the importance of the premise of understanding and analysis in the reception of contemporary music.

3.4 Samples of experimental teaching based on the understanding approach

Fortunately, many universities and music community have paid attention to the particularity of contemporary music. They successfully initiated some experimental forms of the modern music practice based on the understanding. For example, the form of lecture-recital is very popular in contemporary music practice in Europe and America. It is not only a preferred form for many academic performers to publicize contemporary works, but also the requirement of graduate students especially the doctor students major in music in the U.S. It's a kind of concert with the speech before and the performance after. The lecture is based on the practitioner's comprehensive analysis of the work and the performance is the interpretation of the work. The lecture-recital as a graduation exam itself is also a kind of assessment, requiring the thorough understanding of the work and the interpretation to reach a high level of professionalism. It is an important experimental exploration of the research, practice and promotion of contemporary works. There are also many other experimental forms of practice, such as the short film before concert, interview program and multimedia concert which all have good reference value.

4 The experimental cultivation of contemporary music aesthetics.

4.1 Two aspects of aesthetic ability in modern music

Although the understanding approach to modern music will promote the acceptance and expectation, the music enters the human senses by its unique sound form and evokes direct experience ^[5]. When practitioners face a large number of dissonances, irregularity, uncertainty during the music, what should they appreciate? The writer thinks that the experimental teaching should start from the music itself, which is the form and content. That is, practitioners should consciously listen to these dissonant sounds and take the initiative to experience the modern feelings.

4.2 Experimental cultivation of modern hearing

Through various music streams since 20th century, melody was abandoned and atonal sonority becomes the fundamental background. The discordant characteristics in all aspects of music is the main feature. That is to say, the acceptance and aesthetic of dissonance is the critical factor. Looking around our modern living environment, the discordant sounds actually have long been everywhere in our daily lives. For instance, the crossed noise from traffic and the ubiquitous industrial noise are experienced by us subjectively or passively for a long time. So, it's not that we're intolerant of dissonant sounds, it's that our expectations of art music are still in the context of consonant. We just don't expect dissonances appear in the music which we have habitual anticipation. Therefore, the teaching of contemporary music practice firstly needs to enhance the tolerance of discordant sound, so that practitioners have a broader range of expectations for sound. In specific experimental teaching, we need to design the study plan of works with diversified sound styles during different phases. The various music experience during early stage will have an impact on the aesthetic habits. The teaching should select more contemporary works for aesthetic purpose, and apply dissonant pieces in skill training system against those students who are intend to be professional. Poly-tonality etudes, twelve-tone pieces, atonal polyphony and the representative modern works should be included in the stand repertoire. It will help establish modern hearing, touch and logic, as opposed to the traditional teaching system rooted in the tonal convention.

4.3 Experimental cultivation of modern sensibility

In the traditional classical music, the melodic shape, harmonic color, musical image and other composing methods can easily arouse people's resonance. Practitioners could initiate emotions, imagination and thinking by the synesthesia during music. However, due to the limitations of The Times, the old world view of traditional classical music can no longer express modern people's feelings on the changing society, technology, culture and other aspects. But, the experience of modern human's feeling is another important aspect of contemporary music aesthetics. The spiritual nourishment of con-

temporary composers' is in the modern social environment, and many categories of feelings have expanded and changed within The Times. For examples, the modern sense of anxiety, boredom, the perceptual contradiction itself and so on. The famous contemporary artist Ligeti said: "I'm fascinated by the enigma of painting, the perceptual contradiction, that sort of thing, and you'll find the growth and the metamorphosis of those structures in the building elements of my music, but they're always dominated by emotional elements" [6]. Taking his masterpiece "Atmosphere" an example, through the innovative construction of a "Web" texture, each finely crafted micro detail is melted into a specious and vast sound network, reflecting the expression of perceptual contradictions such as accuracy and vagueness, motion and static [7]. The experimental teaching should associate with people's sensation of modern world as synesthesia hub to experience the "web" music. For instance, each individual seems to be in a huge invisible "Web" in today's society, connected by network, interests and other social factors. As a consequence. we are alienated and dissolved accordingly at the same time [8].

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the article analyzed the issues of contemporary music practice, draw out the importance of relevant teaching and discussed the directions of experimental teaching. In experimental teaching, practitioners should firstly change the contacting approach to modern music and try to understand the sound phenomenon. In the direct experience with modern sonority, the aesthetic ability is the key. Experimental teaching should start from the form and content of the sound itself, to cultivate the acceptance of the discordant music and feel the transition of modern human's sensation as the experimental path. The experimental ideas and patterns will provide a reliable reference and foundation, to promote a systematic and mature contemporary music practice teaching system. It is expected to contribute to the prosperity and development of the entire contemporary music in the future.

Finally, the self-discipline art and innovation of contemporary music demand people's progressive understanding and appreciation of music. Art practitioners are also participants in spiritual creation, shouldn't descend into satisfactory with comfort of sense [9]. Music is not the consumer product [10] and the practitioner should always explore the artistic nature of the work itself. Contemporary music practitioners especially need to understand and reveal the innovative quality, it is the spirit of art and the ultimate goal of experimental teaching in contemporary music practice.

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