An Analytical and Pedagogical Study of Audio-Visual Imagery in Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*

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Abstract. This paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the audio-visual imagery and pedagogical inquiry in work No. 62, *Spring Song*, from Mendelssohn's piano solo collection *Songs without Words*. A musical analysis was conducted on *Spring Song* to study its audio-visual imagery in detail. A teaching analysis of previous literature and interviews with music teachers in the high school stage was conducted to deeply explore the integration of audio-visual imagery into teaching practice. The important concept of audio-visual imagery in this article refers to the associations that listeners have when they listen to musical works and the visual perception brought by the music. This article will analyze the audio-visual imagery of music in detail from the aspects of musical characteristics, thematic melody, accompaniment texture, and special patterns, and explore its integration into teaching.

Keywords: Mendelssohn; Song of Spring; Audio-visual imagery.

1 Introduction

The current research on Mendelssohn's *Spring Song* is mostly focused on performance analysis, while others tend to combine it with other fields, and there are few articles discussing music education from the perspective of audio-visual imagery. Most of the discourse primarily focuses on the holistic interpretation of the musical composition or the exploration of its audio-visual imagery characteristics from a psychological perspective [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. The focus of this article is on the concept of audio-visual imagery. In his article, Chen elaborates on the application of audio-visual imagery in music analysis. In a narrow sense, audio-visual imagery refers to the description of a picture through music, and when the listener listens to a musical work, through full association with it, it seems as if a vivid and lifelike painting is displayed before them. But in a deeper understanding, it is more inclined to present the spiritual connotation and emotion of the work from two perspectives: the mood of the music and the three-dimensional visual effect created by the work. In a nutshell, the essence of audio-visual quality lies in conveying emotions through sound and image [1]. This article will conduct a musical analysis of *Spring Song* from the perspective of audio-visual imagery,

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link audio-visual imagery to music education, and ultimately elaborate on the author's teaching philosophy.

2 From Motivation to Structure

Spring Song is in A major, tempo of Allegretto grazioso, 2/4 time. The piece is relatively short, consisting of 90 bars. This piece is a reenactment of a single trilogy with an epilogue. Hou concluded in his analysis that the piece is not just a single trilogy; it expands the scope of the single trilogy [6]. The use of sonata form in the wordless song is a complex vertical and horizontal development based on the reproduction of the single trilogy form. Unlike other sonata forms, it adds more of Mendelssohn's personal style and further develops the sonata form by expanding the musical motives of the content and title of the work. The specific structure is divided into A (1-15) - B (16-49) - A' (50-71), Coda (72-90).

Section A is an 8+7 passage in A major, mainly composed of descending third tones decorated with ascending arpeggios and semitone step-up ascending tones.

The B section is divided into several stages. The first stage, measures 16-35, continues the theme of the A section in the first two measures, still in A major, and then expands on it, changing to E major, and then becomes closer to the theme of the A section, but still in E major. (see Figure 1)

Fig. 1. The first phase [7].

The second stage is a connecting section, with bars 36-49 divided into two seven-bar phrases. The first seven measures are mainly modulated with semitone ascending and descending thirds of pitch, which is also the expansion of the beginning of the piece, in E major. The last seven measures can be seen as the theme of the beginning, and the tonality returns to the main key A major. (Figure 2)

Fig. 2. The second phase [7].

A' section (mm. 50-71) is the recapitulation. The first section is expanded in structure and is an 8+14 section. The first phrase is A strict reproduction of the first phrase of the first section, and the second phrase is an expansion of 7 bars compared to the second phrase of the first section, in A major.

3 From Motivation to Piano Texture

The *Spring Song* features a fluid accompaniment texture that runs through the entire piece from beginning to end. It basically employs a unified pattern, making the rhythm flow and thus vividly depicting the musical image of spring. Its texture is mainly composed of decorative notes of broken chords, which are fixed on the second and third eighth notes of each measure (Figure 3). The left-hand accompaniment texture of this piece partially overlaps with the range where the melody is located, thus integrating with the melody, which gives the music a light and lively auditory feeling. It is in line with the vigorous musical image of spring. Wang said that in the broken chords of *Spring Song*, the use of pedals makes the embellishments sound like harps, evoking images of the revival of all things and the blooming of flowers in spring [8]. So the force control of the pedals is also very important in this piece of music.

Fig. 3. Ornamental notes are reflected [7].

The position where the thirty-second note embellishment appears makes the ordinary melody flow, and it is always an upward melody. This not only makes the melody of the piece upward, but also the subsequent development part with the embellishment of the thirty-second note, along with the increasing intensity (Figure 4), further emphasizes the melody, making it not just flowing at the beginning, but more lively and dynamic, and also the difference between the development part and the beginning, highlighting the characteristics of spring.

Fig. 4. The upward melody is reflected [7].

4 The Manifestation of Audio-Visual Imagery

Audio-visual imagery is not only reflected in the works, but also in the composer's mental journey and life. The two most prominent features of the *Song Without Words* in its composition are the singing quality of its melody and the diversity of its musical textures. Mendelssohn used these seemingly simple two points to create the poetic *Song Without Words*, using them to record his life, travel experiences and mood [1]. Botstein also pointed out that Mendelssohn was not only a composer but also an excellent painter, so he was particularly adept at combining music with visuals to showcase his unique musical beauty [2]. Krieger mentioned that Mendelssohn created a purely melodic posture by omitting the lyrics, and at the same time, through the title of the wordless songs, he further enhanced the aesthetic that was unique to Mendelssohn [5]. So through the study of the background in which Mendelssohn wrote this piece and the entire work, one can gradually sense the audio-visual imagery of it.

In harmony design, audio-visual imagery is reflected in the perception of color brought about by the changes in tonality. With A major as the main key throughout the piece, the contrast of tonal colors intensifies the emotional fluctuations of the music when it transitions to E major in the middle section: the dominant nature of E major brings about a brief instability, which, in conjunction with the development of the melody, implies a brief spring storm. When the recapitulation returns to the main key, it stabilizes the tonality and enriches the musical mood by expanding the phrase, as if the spring scene has returned to tranquility after a brief fluctuation. The connecting section builds a sense of anticipation through the transition between the dominant sustained note in E major and the broken chords. This tonal transition technique simulates the

gradual change of light from dark to bright in a natural scene, setting the stage for the return of the reenactment section and creating the 'contrast of light and shadow' in the audio-visual narrative.

Moreover, the audio-visual imagery is also reflected in the texture of the piano. The octaves and ascending ornamentation throughout the piece, characterized by the continuous flow of thirty-second notes (see Figure 5), mimics the pattering of spring rain while hinting at the emergence of life through the uniform movement of the rhythm. The textural changes in the middle section further reinforce the development of the sound and picture. In the accompaniment section, the rhythm in the low and middle registers continues to drop, while in the high registers, cadenza segments are added. This texture contrast simulates the rumbling of a spring thunderstorm and the density of raindrops, and then the reenactment returns to a light texture, creating a 'fresh and new' image after the storm.

Fig. 5. Octave harmony intervals and ascending embellishments [7].

The design of musical expressions also embodies the audio-visual imagery. Lin said, "The theme of spring brings to mind that the work should be handled with a weaker force, but the composer has used f and even sf forces in many places in the piece, creating a sharp contrast. The entire piece also uses a lot of diminutive and vigorous-intensity variation terms." [9]

Jing pointed out that *Song Without Words* perfectly combines instrumental and vocal music, reflecting the vocal characteristics of instrumental music. "The works are mostly drawn from life, natural scenery, etc. The melodies are smooth and beautiful, fresh and elegant, giving the audience a feast for the eyes. Its distinct theme, which is titles-like, reveals the fundamental characteristics of Romantic music." [10] Zhang Yehua also pointed out the instrumental vocal characteristics of the piece and analyzed it specifically. The singing form of this piece is reflected in the melodic texture of the high pitch, which enters and advances the music through sixteenth notes to drive the entire piece. Each phrase is connected by lines [11]. Therefore, the vocalization of the instrumental and the background of the material are more in line with the beauty of audio-visual imagery, allowing the listener to feel the scene in the piece.

To sum up, through the overall notation, the particularity of the fusion of texture and melody in this piece, as well as the analysis of the integration of the definition of audio-

visual quality in this article, the melody is integrated with the continuous development and change of the spring scenery. The most prominent feature of *Spring Song* in its composition is the singing quality of its melody and the diversity of its musical textures. It is the combination of these that creates the poetic and picturesque *Spring Song*, and it is Mendelssohn's use of piano miniatures to record his life, travel experiences and moods.

5 The Audio-Visual Imagery Inspired Music Pedagogy

This article is about integrating audio-visual imagery into the classroom and guiding students to have the ability to perceive music as a teaching concept for music appreciation classes. The overall focus is on the direction of aesthetic perception in order to achieve a deep understanding of the work. Through the analysis of the work and its audio-visual imagery in the first half, it can be known that audio-visual quality is mainly perceived through the flow of patterns, melodies, etc. Qian Zhimei pointed out that the piano solo suite *Song Without Words* has created a touching musical image with its rich lyricism, beautiful melody, fresh technique and paint-like colors. These vivid piano pieces are the best teaching materials for cultivating students' 'musical sense' and are of great teaching significance [12]. Xie Jun proposed to experience the humanistic connotation of musical works [13]. Cultivating students' musical perception is in harmony with the humanistic connotations in musical works. When students experience the main emotions of the composer through perception, and then through their own understanding and cognition, associate and imagine the artistic conception of the music, they can enhance their spiritual world. Therefore, audio-visual quality is essential, and it is necessary to achieve the requirements of the curriculum standards and the development of students' musical perception through the association of images and the understanding of the detailed expressions in the pieces and the emotions contained by the composers in the pieces [13].

The importance of audio-visual imagery in teaching was also demonstrated in conversations with high school music teachers."After understanding the meaning of audio-visual imagery, I felt that this piece was very suitable for the application of audio-visual imagery. If you want to use it in teaching, you can enjoy the music by making a video and showing pictures of spring. Seeing pictures of spring and the accompaniment of *Spring Song* at the same time allows students to sense the theme of the piece without having to explain it in a complicated way, simplifying the complex to help students understand." (personal communication, Feb. 27, 2025)

6 Conclusion

The audio-visual quality is of paramount importance in this piece of music. Through its unique timbre and melodic texture, it also presents a flowing and lively spring scene. Also, through literature review, based on previous analyses of the work and the background of the creator Mendelssohn, it can be concluded that Mendelssohn composed this piece through the breath of all things felt in spring and added his own ingenious

ideas, so he named it *Spring Song*. It is also a highly title-like piece. The sound and picture quality of music is not just the result of the listener's imagination of it, but more so through the analysis of the melody, the particular pattern, and the background of the creation. And this piece, as a highly title-like feature, can convey a strong sense of spring, which is what makes it unique in terms of sound and picture. Integrating audio-visual imagery into teaching can make students more vividly appreciate the beauty of the music and the theme of the piece. audio-visual imagery involves both auditory and visual sensations, and thus has a certain degree of interdisciplinary potential, and research on this might provide more inspiration for music education in the future.

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