

Research on the Impact of Sound Concept Aesthetics on Singing Skills

Taking the Academic National Singing as an Example

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Abstract—Today Chinese society develops rapidly. Chinese national vocal music also generates and develops different styles of singing. The most representative is the "academic national singing". Currently most Chinese national singing scholars focus on the problems of sound techniques, such as, breath, position, channel, articulation and so on. But in fact, the aesthetic misunderstanding on national singing will have an impact on the concept of sound, which will then affect the vocal skills of national singing. Therefore, this paper focuses on the analysis of this impact, summarizes five major problems on sound concept due to aesthetic deviation, and puts forward some suggestions to help learners of national singing solve these problems.

Keywords—academic singing style; sound concept; sound aesthetics

I. INTRODUCTION

China is a multi-ethnic country. In the river of nearly 5000 years of cultural history, the spiritual cultures of minorities of China have been transmitted to the present, and the national vocal music has made considerable progress in its development. We have developed the academic national singing style from modern national singing, which is the research object of this paper. For the concept of academic national singing, Du Yaxiong pointed out: after 1930s, it absorbed the element of "Bel Canto" on the basis of traditional folk songs and opera singing and formed the academic national singing style [1].

At present, academic national singing scholars in China focus on the problems of sound techniques, such as, breath, position, channel, and articulation. There is no research on the influences of sound concept aesthetic misunderstanding on the voice skills of national singing from the prospective of aesthetics on sound concept. This paper relies on vocal music education theory research of the vocal music educators, and discusses and studies this problem from the sound concept aesthetics of the national singing.

II. THE IMPACT OF SOUND CONCEPT AESTHETICS ON SINGING SKILLS

The right or wrong sound concept is related to the sound aesthetics of people. The right "sound concept" refers to vocal

music learners' right and normative aesthetic cognition on singing sound, right understanding on scientific singing methods and basic principle of natural sound production, discrimination, correct awareness and ability on wrong or non-standard sound production [2]. In learning vocal music, individual auditory aesthetic differences will lead to individual aesthetic preference. Without sharp sound discrimination ability and correct sound environment, learners cannot distinguish or correct wrong or non-standard sound production, even if they understand scientific sound production principles. The biased aesthetics will lead to wrong sound concept. Under the wrong sound concept, the problems of singing skills inevitably arise. This is what is discussed in this paper and why this study has its significance. According basic research literature, this paper summarizes the possible deviations, wrong sound concepts and the impact of wrong concepts on singing skills. There are the following several points:

A. Blindly Pursue Large Volume

The Purpose of singing is to express the works of vocal music. Good musicians or singers often can accurately express "emotion and ideas" through simple music language [3]. Thus, the sound is a singer. Only pursuing large volume is a manifestation of the lack of music culture, which is a wrong music aesthetic idea. If singers neglect their voice characteristics in singing, ignore the characteristics and expression intent of national vocal music works and only pursue large volume, it is impossible to express the connotations of the works correctly. A vocal music works will not stay on the climax to be expressed through large volume. It certainly has a gentle, lyrical part which needs to use appropriate volume to bring audience into the atmosphere of works. It is absolutely wrong and absurd to use one volume to express all emotions of the entire vocal music works. The audiences will be numb. This kind of expressive means is just a superficial flaunt of singing skill. There is no other reason to do so. In terms of control of volume, the weakening of high pitch is more difficult than purely singing a brilliant high pitch. From this, we can see that the blind pursuit of large volume and taking it as measuring standard are not just an aesthetic deviation, but also a manifestation of lack of vocal music knowledge.

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The volume is not only related to the physiological structure of the singer, but also related to the singing method and breath of singer. If the singing method is not scientific, or the singer is in the primary stage of vocal learning, and blindly imitates, and pursues the sound effect of large volume, it is most likely to put energy wrongly. If singers cannot add the strength of breath, they will add strength into throat and cause singing problems.

B. Untimely Pursue Bright Tone

Chinese audiences have a very important aesthetic standard on national singing that is bright tone. This is the hearing habit of Chinese audiences. In terms of singing skills, Chinese national vocal music has experienced three stages. The first stage is that singers basically use “true voice”, “straightly” and “purely”, to sing the full range without uniform vibrato, taking “bright” and “sweet” tone as primary. The second stage broke through the sound restriction of the first stage. Singers no longer sing with “true voice” of throat in full range. They use a mixture of true and false voice, and the vocal range is broader than that of the first stage, and the sound performance is richer than before. The third stage made a breakthrough on sound standard of the first two stages. Singers use uniform vibrato and rich tone. They have improved and strengthened in singing ability, and ability to control difficult skills. Thus it can be seen that with improvement of the national vocal singing skills, and the progress of the times, the mass are no longer satisfied with bright tone in sound aesthetics. They have other aesthetic standards, such as, good resonance and uniform vibrato, which can bring the audience with high artistic feeling and emotional resonance.

A lot of people, in the study of folk singing, have an imitation stage. They mainly mimic the bright tones of the great singers. This imitation is harmful and profitless, because in the learning stage, learners haven’t established a right auditory concept that can distinguish between right and wrong sound. In the face of bright tone, they cannot distinguish that the sound is produced due to the use of resonance or squeezing throat. High-quality bright tone is the result of correct sound production. Only through long training, can learners get it. Learners cannot get it in a short time. So, if learners pursue bright tone in this stage, it will only increase the strength of throat and cause squeezing, stuck sound and hold-back.

C. Make Excessive Articulation

The academic national singing style attaches great importance to articulation. The measuring standard is clear articulation, a mellow and full tone. But how can learners reach this standard? Learners cannot get it only by putting forth strength to make articulation. In fact, learners don’t need to make excessive articulation. Many national vocal music singers put the whole words in mouth. The strength will be concentrated in the mouth, and the voice cannot enter the singing channel. In addition, some singers are used to find volume and tone through excessive articulation. It only increases the strength of throat, leading to squeezing, stuck sound and hold-back. It is contrary to the production of relaxed and bright sound with rich resonance.

Thus, before the firm establishment of the channel, learners will lose singing coherence to put more attention on articulation and try to keep each word’s articulation part, mouth pattern and rhyme correct. It will destroy the singing channel, produce singing problems, and unable to reach the effect of clear articulation, a mellow and full tone.

D. Stress High Pitch and Ignore Low Pitch

In addition to the popular standard of bright tone, Chinese audiences also have another aesthetic standard on national vocal music. That is sonorous sound. Therefore, the national vocal singers very value the singing of the high-pitch area. Especially beginners often take it as the measuring standard of singing ability.

Singing is an integral whole. In a song, the low pitch and the high pitch are all used to express the meaning and emotion of the song. So, they cannot be treated differently.

In vocal training, if we only pay attention to the training of the high-pitch area, we may be eager to sing the high-pitch works in singing. It will affect the establishment of the channel and the use of breath. Every sound in each range should be trained. Low-pitch and alto area and high-pitch area need the establishment and support of channel, position and breath. The low-pitch and alto area is the basis of vocal music. If a learner rises his/her breath in low-pitch and alto area, he/she will be unable to lower down breath in high-pitch area. Only learners sing each note in low-pitch and alto area correctly, can they lower down the breath and sing the high pitch naturally. Otherwise, it will appear squeezing, stuck sound and hold-back and rise of breath in singing high pitch.

E. Stress Sound and Despise Music Character

A lot of academic national singing learners may stress singing skills and despise the music character of singing works in singing. They think the vocal skills are above the music character of the national vocal music works. This aesthetic deviation may cause wrong sound concept. If singers are confident in their singing skills, they will put their attention on singing skills rather than the music character and emotion of works. It will produce in-coordination between sound and emotion, and skill flaunt. For example, in singing the opera excerpt of “Farewell Song”, singers first should understand its background. Chan Juan took Qu Yuan as her teacher. She was also his girl servant. When Qu Yuan was persecuted and imprisoned in prison, she risked her life to save him. She mistakenly drunk the poisoned wine that prison clerk sent to Qu Yuan. And still she felt gratified that she could save Qu Yuan, and defend the truth and justice. After drinking the poisoned wine, Chan Juan became very weak. The introduction of music uses syncopation to describe this state. At the end, Chan Juan was closer to death. She mumbled to herself by fits and starts, and called Qu Yuan sorrowfully. The music ends with the weakest sound on g minor and with primary chord. In singing this excerpt, singers should pay particular attention that the character sang this aria and ensemble in dying. Especially the melody at the end has been processed into broken form by composer deliberately. It was to highlight the impending death. Therefore, the singing sound should be not so bright, and the breath should be not so full.

Singers should deliver the sound far but weak. The sound should be weaker and weaker. Even in some places, the on-and-off processing of phrase can express the weak woman's strong will, noble character and beautiful image [4]. Through this song, we can see that skills are to serve music works; the sound is to serve the image of character and works. In singing this song, if singers ignore the weakness of Chan Juan before dying, sing the song gloriously and coherently, and show perfect sound skills, they will destroy the mood of the song. It only reveals that the singer has no artistic accomplishment, and no basis knowledge on this song.

Therefore, even if singers have perfect voice skills, they should put the music character of the works in the first place. The voice is only a means. Music is the theme of expression.

Another situation is that when a singer has no confidence in his/her singing skills, he/she is bound to be nervous when he/she focuses his/her attention on the technique of sound. The worry of sound skills has become a burden of the singer. The more afraid the singer is to make mistakes, the more nervous he/she will be. The psychological stress can affect the fall of breath. The rise of breath leads to squeezing throat and pinch, resulting in tension of the vocal organs. If singers' mouth and throat use strength, the breath will be inflexible. It leads to in-coordination between voice organs and breathing muscles, increasing the difficulty of singing.

III. SUGGESTIONS ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CORRECT CONCEPT OF SOUND

The academic national singing has standard aesthetic principles. Jin Tielin pointed out that there were four national vocal aesthetic principles, scientificity, nationality, artistry and times. We need a good sense of hearing to distinguish whether it has the four qualities. Mr. Shen Xiang said: "human voice and musical instruments need to sing high pitch and range, but also sing songs pleasant to ears and conveying feelings and ideas. Singers' throats are not tired, and they can play their music skills to the utmost and express inner feelings. The standard is the correct sound concept, and our ears. Music is an auditory art, so is singing. It is the key to success whether person engaging in this field has discrimination ability, and can distinguish the subtle changes of good or bad, right or wrong sound" [5].

How can we establish such a sense of hearing discrimination ability? First, listen more. Listening is very important. Without listening, ear training is empty talk. More listening means to listen frequently and repeatedly, listen both men and women voice, both Chinese and foreign works. Listen concert and record. At same time, pay attention to the mouth and singing state of singers in the video. Listen more, and then we can distinguish the good and bad [6].

Thus, the process of learning academic national singing is also a process of establishing the discrimination ability of the hearing.

The following are some suggestions based on the analysis of aesthetic deviations on the concept of sound:

- To Solve the Problem of the Deliberate Pursuit of Large Volume and Tone: The large volume and good tone are formed through the scientific training. Regardless of learning stage and difference of individual physiological structure, blindly pursuing large volume and tone would produce singing problems. Therefore, in the learning stage of the national singing, we should establish correct aesthetic standards on the concept of sound, and correct learning attitude, and be not anxious for success. We should put more emphasis on the basic skills of singing, such as breath training and establishment of channel. The learners who pursue large volume and tone have a common singing habit: sing by hearing own voice. Human hearing is divided into inner ear and outer ear. To hear own voice relies on the inner ear. The sound seems very loud in own ears, but it is very small in other ears. So, it is easy to produce error to adjust the singing state by relying on own hearing. We should feel the right physiological state of singing and form a habit of singing.
- To Solve the Problem of Excessive Articulation: Because of the particularity and the complexity of Chinese language, a lot of experts have ever discussed whether to express music according to the words or to express words according to music. With the progress of the times, and the rapid development of Chinese national vocal music art, the works of national singing highlights the times and the integration of singing to a higher degree. The larger the range is, the more difficult the singing is. So, to sing scientifically is very important. The academic national singing, represented by Jin Tielin, advocates solving the commonness of singing and then solving the personality of singing, and values the integral training. Thus it can be seen that at this stage we can focus on the use of channel and breath in training, and sing vowels in the channel. In this way, we can unify the words and solve the problem of excessive articulation. When learners have a stable singing channel, they can express words flexibly, show their skill of articulation and sing with clear articulation and a mellow and full tune.
- We should realize that the sound production of vocal music is an integral whole to correct the wrong sound concept that "stresses high pitch and ignores low pitch". When we grasp basic skills in breath and channel, we can improve our singing integrally. And then we can lower down breath in singing high pitch and rise breath in singing low pitch. If there is still such problem, it must be caused by wrong sound production method. Thus it can be seen that only by establishing correct concept of sound, can we value the correctness of each note and the integral training.
- As a national vocal music singer, we should sing with our emotions in order to correct the wrong concept of "stressing sound and despising music". From the beginning of the music, we should enter the role, and invest emotion and keep this state to the end. Do not be affected by the interference of the surrounding

environment. Be full of confidence, and sing with true love and deep feeling [7].

If we produce sound with emotion, we will be excited and our vocal organs will be active. Han Xunguo said: “adjust the physiological performance of external organs to obtain a 'physiological feeling' that conforms to the law of the development of sound, and indirectly control the internal vocal organs”. That is why there are a lot of problems in training of sound, but they disappear in singing.

To sum up, we can see the learning of academic national singing is a gradual process. The misunderstandings and aesthetic deviation on sound concept may produce a lot of problems. The paper has listed five major of them. The paper is intended to find the roots of wrong sound production, solve the problems in singing skills fast and quickly through researching the athletics of sound concept regardless of pure technique problems. It is the innovation of this paper and the research significance of this paper.

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