

An Exploration of the Singing of Xinjiang Songs

-----A Case Study of “Qumandi” and “Playing the tambourine and singing”¹

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Abstract: Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, located in the northwest border of China, is one of the five ethnic minority autonomous regions with wide area in China. There are 47 ethnic groups, including Uygur, Han, Kazakh, Hui, Mongolian, Kirgiz, and Russia and so on. Xinjiang songs are influenced by the local culture of various ethnic groups, forming dominate music based on the Uygur music, with distinctive characteristics of the Xinjiang song system, which has a rhythmic and lively, beautiful melody, symmetrical structure neat, warm and lively features. Most of Xinjiang songs utilize natural seven tone mode. There are some new songs using pentatonic mode, b7, # 1, # 2, # 4, # 5 and other changes in the use of sound, varied as well as colorful. The main accompaniment instruments include tambourine, dobro, and rewrap. After years of development, Xinjiang songs share not only the precipitation of traditional songs, but also the imprint with the development of time, and meanwhile they hold distinctive national characteristics. Therefore, if the singer would like to grasp the emotion of Xinjiang songs more accurately and better interpret the connotation of Xinjiang songs, it is necessary to dig the potential meaning of the songs in depth, to understand the background of the song and to learn the unique Xinjiang singing style in order to meet the singing needs.

The most prestigious branch of Xinjiang songs is Uighur music. Uygur music has a great and far-reaching impact on Xinjiang songs. Xinjiang ethnic music has a long history. After years of development and the influence of multi-ethnic culture, it forms a quite unique music system, which Uygur classical music “twelve mukamu eighty-two songs” is a collection of more than 340 Xinjiang folk songs, which greatly influences the later Xinjiang music. Compared with the Han and Mongolian music, Xinjiang songs own the distinctive national characteristics. With a lot in common, there are also many similarities and differences mainly in the singing methods, cultural background and song melody and so on. Therefore, before singing Xinjiang songs, the singer should actively survey the background of the song creation, and learn unique way of singing Xinjiang songs, and try to grasp the song with their own unique understanding, and then deduce the Xinjiang songs with the emotional and cultural connotations

A brief introduction of Xinjiang songs

Xinjiang, with a wide range of ethnic minorities, is rich in local characteristics. Xinjiang is located in the northwest border of China. Affected by the region and history, it has not been influenced by the traditional culture of Central Plains, thus forms its own unique ethnic culture. Compared with the Central Plains, Xinjiang region exhibits warmer, more cheerful, unrestrained freedom, which naturally affects the music style of the region as well. Xinjiang Uygur music in the most famous music, but other ethnic music style is also clear, and specific, showing a warm and meaningful connotation, lively and vibrant Xinjiang music style.

Xinjiang music is more direct in the expression of songs. It is good at express inner feelings with no modification and reservation. It vividly demonstrates the unique beauty and enthusiasm of people from the western region. The melody of songs is catchy, and the rhythm is cheerful and lively with soothing narratives. Xinjiang songs content involves a variety of aspects, including people's lives,

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scenery appreciation, sustenance and other contents. Xinjiang songs have a long history. It not only contains the ethnic songs of national circulation, but also the outstanding creation of artists in the new era. It is the embodiment of wisdom and art talent in Xinjiang people and Xinjiang songwriters, with a high artistic value.

A brief introduction of Qumandi as the representative Xinjiang ethnic song

Qumandi is a song that its author the lyricist Xi Tong creates on the basis of Xinjiang folk song of the same name. The author changes the lyrics into a Xinjiang song, with distinctive characteristics of Xinjiang ethnic songs. Qumandi mainly expresses the praise of flowers, and rhetorically expresses the praise of lovers. Whether its vocal language or melody structure all show distinctive characteristics of Xinjiang music, with a high appreciation value.

(1) Melody structure of Qumandi

Qumandi is a Xinjiang folk song with lyric character. It is a single period song structure composed by a number of phrases. The concrete structure is as follows:

1、 The first phrase

Qumandi includes the 1-4 section with moderate tone. This part is mainly about the growth environment of Qumandi flowers and the geographical location. This phrase mainly uses half note and two-eight rhythm, with the repetition and recycling use of this rhythm, it exhibits a melodious singing like chant music style.

2、 The second phrase

The second phrase of Qumandi includes the 5-6 section. The tone converts into allegretto. This part uses the rhythm of weak beginning and ending and the strong middle form, so that the rhythm is short, expressing a jumping, lively, and cheerful emotion, which makes the music more enthusiastic and plump, with explicit Xinjiang characteristics.

3、 The third phrase

The third phrase of Qumandi includes the 7-12 section. The first half of the tone is slow while in the second half, its tone turns back to allegretto. This part is a fully use of the conversion among tones of the voice so that changes in the song is much more abundant, and more people are engaged are deeply immersed in the music with an impulse to dance to it.

4、 The fourth phrase

The fourth phrase of Qumandi includes the 13-16 section, and the tone is consistent with the change of the third phrase. As the end of the song, the content of this part, by repeating the two rhythms of the way forward, highlights the expectation of love through the expression, and then transforms into the unique cutting rhythm of Xinjiang songs, to further perform the emotion in the song.

(1) The language connotation expressed by Qumandi

The lyrics of Qumandi are divided into two sections, with different meanings expressed in each section. The first paragraph mainly describes the praise of Qumandi flower, and from the flowers to people, expressing the praise of lovers. “Fragrant and beautiful, Qumandi flowers blossoms sweetly.” This sentence repeats itself, focusing on the expression of the praise of flowers. Then “beautiful my beloved, my words cannot express my mind” this sentence expresses the praise of the flowers, and then it transfers to the praise of lovers perfectly, to express love and loyalty. The second paragraph is at the same time in praise of flowers and love, but this praise once again extends to labor, showing the people's simple ideals and love of labor. In the line “Come on, my beloved, we work and sing”, three words “Come”, “beloved”, “labor” fully express love of labor in the song.

(2) Specific skills in singing Qumandi

With distinctive Xinjiang song features, the song Qumandi uses the way of cutting rhythm and figurative method, which is commonly used in Xinjiang songs. In the singing of such songs, the singer should pay attention to the following points:

1、 Master the basic emotion of the song

As a cultural form of people's expression of ideas, the master the basic feeling of songs is vital in a good interpretation of a song. In the case of Qumandi, this song is extended to the praise of lovers, love and labor by the praise of the flower, showing a rich emotion. And by controlling the rhythm changes, the overall change in music has a degree of relaxation, which makes the expression of the song more full of emotion. Therefore, in singing this type of song, the singer should immerse themselves into the song, into the expression of the situation by putting more emotions, to achieve the resonance of the song with love, and then improve the charm and meaning of the song. At the same time, the singer should pay attention to the emotional changes and the development of the song, and adjust the severity of the singing to the sound, such as the light and heavy accent and timbre. If there is no change in the interpretation of the song, it will lead to the lost spirituality in the song, and it will look boring. In addition, the singer also needs to pay attention to the unique style of Xinjiang songs. In the process of singing, keep the breath sinking, without the pitch change, and be always with free moving and smooth sound, to express the features of being subtle, warm, lively and elegant in style.

2、 The details of the song processing

In addition to master the emotion of the song from macroscopic aspect, the singer should still put more effort in the details of singing. Singing details and techniques are what singers should explore and should be familiar with in terms of the song rhythm, lyrics, pitch. Take Qumandi as an example, in the beginning, the word "rose" is to sing with an open wide mouth, light sound, with "a" feeling. Although this is a starting tone in singing, it has a certain degree of large change and thus has a certain degree of difficulty in singing. This requires the singer to practice before singing. Quickly after the start of the word, that is, sing "mei gui(rose)" while trying to resound with the word "hua'er(flower)", and then to support the next "hua'er(flower)" which is of two high degree of singing, with diaphragm outward expansion, while paying attention to the "li(inside)" which end up releasing the vowel "ei" . Another example is the lyric "qu man di hua kai xiang you tian(fragrant flowers in qu man di blossoms sweetly)", the cutting rhythm, which is a commonly used technique in XinJiang songs, is applied here. This requires the singer to highlight the rhythm of the strong beat, and then show cheerful, active features of the song. When comes to stanza of "Ah", the singer needs a long breath. While singing "a", "o" should be added simultaneously with backward suction. The sounds should be issued from the middle of two eyebrows with breath evenly distributed, which will deliver its roundness and richness. This lyric is the difficulty of the song, with the pitch increasing, the resonance point should also change, and therefore more rehearsal should be emphasized. And the following lyric "fen fang you mei li (fragrant and beautiful)" where the rhythm once again changes from slow to fast. In order to control the change of the rhythm, the singer should commence on pronunciation and articulation.

3 A Brief Introduction to the New Generation of Xinjiang Songs

With strong imprint of the times and ethnical style, composed by the famous musician Shi Guangnan, "Play the tambourine while singing" can be said to be the representative of modern Xinjiang songs. During the Cultural Revolution, Shi Guangnan was suffering from a variety of unfair treatment, but he did not give up the pursuit of art, which can be reflected from "Play the tambourine while singing ". In this song, we can feel his yearning for and confidence in good life .This song combines several elements of XinJiang songs which greatly enhance the artistic value of the song. Thus the artist should pay attention to the following points in interpreting this song.

(1) The basic emotion of "Play the tambourine while singing"

Although the "Play the tambourine while singing" was created during the Cultural Revolution, but the song expresses looking hope for bright future and love of great motherland and show the lyricist's firm belief . At the same time, the title indicates the content of this song. The song features XinJiang songs' enthusiasm, passion, generosity and cheerfulness most vividly. Therefore, in interpreting this song, the singer should be positive, enthusiastic and active and show the emotion through the control of the voices. For example, when starting to sing the first lyric "da qi shou gu chang qi ge, wo qi zhe ma'er guo shan po (playing the tambourine while singing, I rode the horse

over the hillside)", the singer should be full of excitement, and set the emotional tone of the whole song. In addition, although the "play tambourine while singing" basically expresses enthusiasm, passion and cheerfulness, the singer should nonetheless still need to pay attention to the emotional gradation and have a good command of the change from the general to the climax.

(2) Melody features and brief introduction of singing skills

With obvious XinJiang musical style, the melody of the song "Playing the tambourine while singing" is simple and catchy. The whole melody is based on the structure of the western melody, and the change of the "5-3-2-1" is realized. The progressive melody of Xinjiang song and dance is actualized by the shift from the start to the following, then to the transference and finally to the conclusion. It is a song with distinct characteristics of Xinjiang. In the song, the first lyric is the subject sentence which is also the start; the second lyric is a shift from the start to the following; the third is the transference part, in which the lyric highlights the "indulging in singing" melody by adopting the progressive melody technique in order to display obvious melodic changes; the fourth sentence is the conclusion or the end of the narration. The author employs the winding melody in the climax part of the "lai lai lai ..." which fully expresses the theme of the song "Playing the tambourine while singing". In the refrain of the song, a seven sound scale typical of newly constructed songs was applied here. It shows distinctive characteristics of XinJiang songs.

In summary, in interpreting this song the singer should pay attention to the continuity of the structure "start-following-transference-conclusion". That demands ingenious ventilation skills to maintain adequate breath. For example, in the first sentence of the concert, the singer starts from the midrange area, and to ensure the thickness of the sound and lightness of the melody the singer should not change breath to guarantee the consistence of the melody. When it comes to the third transference part the singer should pay attention to changes in the melody and the strong and weak contrast between the previous and the following. In the conclusion part, great importance should be attached to the emotional intensity and vigor of the singing by enhancing them step by step, which prepares for the next climax part. In addition, the singer should pay attention to the articulation position should not be too front as it will result in too light tone which can not deliver the meaning of the song.

(3) Characteristics of the rhythm and brief introduction to the singing skills

As a Xinjiang song "Playing tambourine while singing" is typical of XinJiang ethnic style. The author created the song by adding a large number of Xinjiang traditional song elements such as the "attached point rhythm", "before and after the six" and "weak rhythm". In general, the rhythm of "playing the tambourine belongs to the cheerful short type, with each lyric employing the form of sixteen notes the in the latter half. The rhythmic changes occur in the transference part with the overall rhythm of the song compacted.

As the overall rhythm of this song "playing tambourine while singing" tends to be fast, it requires the singer have a good sense of the rhythmic changes, and to avoid the chaos due to the fast rhythm, the singer should command the relatively steady to show continuity of the song. In addition, the singer can find the inspiration by following the beats of the tambourine played by the Uygur ethnic people.

Explore the XinJiang song singing by analyzing the singing of "Qumandi" and "play tambourine while singing"

By analyzing the singing of "Qumandi" and "play tambourine while singing", we can see that the key and difficulty lies in the emotion, rhythm, beats, the detail techniques and the delivery of the meaning. The emotional expression requires the singer have a certain understanding of the song, assume himself or herself in the scenes described in the song and fully involved himself or herself in the song. Only in this way can the singer have a sympathetic resonance with the song and have an accurate command of the emotion of the song. The melody and rhythm are important reference for distinguishing between Xinjiang songs and other types of songs. The melody of Xinjiang songs is greatly influence by the local minorities' ethnic customs which are mostly cheerful, warm,

unrestrained and lively. This is in line with the characters of the local people. Therefore, the singer need to pay special attention to the coherence, integrity of the song, and to show respect for the characteristics of Xinjiang songs, the singer should also take the initiative in the articulation and pronunciation of the song through making adjustments to meet the requirements. In addition, unlike other songs, Xinjiang songs employ their ethnical accompaniments musical instruments. The singer can commence with the beats and melody of the unique accompaniments musical instruments to grasp the melody and rhythm quickly. The detailed techniques are the detailed adjustments by combing the requirements of the singing and the singing habit of the singer after a certain degree of understanding of XinJiang songs. This part involves the singer's individual understanding and the adjustments of the song through the pronunciation, emotion, articulation, singing skills, which will bring out its own feature and end up displaying its fullness and vividness. The theme is the soul of a song and it also fully reveals the wisdom and arts of the composer. For this aspect, the singer can comprehend carefully and can add his/her own understanding as he/she improves his/her singing level, meanwhile inheriting the culture of XinJiang songs.

Conclusion

Xinjiang song is created by the masses of people in Xinjiang and composers of XinJiang songs, which embodies their wisdom and art and is the treasure of Chinese song culture. Xinjiang song is well-known because of its cheerful, lively melody, its exuberant life atmosphere, rich sincere feelings and broad meanings. By analyzing the singing of "Qumandi" and "play tambourine while singing", we can see that the key and difficulty lies in the emotion, rhythm, beats, the detailed techniques and the delivery of the meaning. Therefore, the singer should commence with the above mentioned aspects to enhance the singing level, and thus promote the further development of Xinjiang songs.

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