

Analysis and Reflection on the Song "Half a Lifetime of Fireworks" and Its Performance

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Abstract: The song "Half-Life Fireworks" is characterized by sincere, delicate, tender, and beautiful emotions. This paper analyzes and studies the musical characteristics, emotional expression, and the use of singing techniques and skills in "Half-Life Fireworks." By examining the song's musical ontology, thematic content, and singing techniques, this analysis aims to achieve a more complete and accurate expression and interpretation in stage practice. This will improve the understanding of the work, enhance singing ability, and stage control, and further contribute to the performance of other songs of the same type.

1. Overview of the song "Half a Lifetime of Fireworks"

The song "Half a Lifetime of Fireworks" is a three-part composition inspired by the life story of the renowned writer Zhang Ailing. It is a thematic piece that reflects on the glamorous yet lonely artistic life of Zhang Ailing. Although it is a composed song, the lyrics possess poetic qualities, expressing Zhang Ailing's reflections on life and imparting wisdom to the listeners. The song laments the fleeting nature of life, transient encounters, and the profound regrets left behind amidst the hustle and bustle of the world. It speaks of the inevitable separations and unfulfilled desires experienced in the journey of life, leaving behind a sense of deep longing. The composer's creative approach is influenced by the recent trend of "Chinese classical poetry art songs," drawing from Western art song and chamber music traditions. The composition emphasizes the expression of personal emotions and the revelation of inner experiences, with an intricate interplay between the melody and lyrics. The song features a rich and sophisticated musical arrangement, with well-crafted transitions and nuanced emotional development throughout the piece. [1]

2. Analysis of the Work

2.1. Music Analysis

The music of this piece follows a ternary form and is written in the Yayue Gyu mode, with a 4/4 time signature. The entire composition consists of 78 measures, spanning almost two octaves in range. The composer employs various rhythmic patterns such as dotted notes, staccatos, and triplets throughout the piece.

The first four measures serve as an introduction, followed by the first section, which spans

measures 5 to 31. Within this section, measures 5 to 21 comprise the A section, while measures 22 to 31 form the B section. The second section spans measures 32 to 54, with measures 32 to 44 representing the C section and measures 45 to 54 revisiting the B section. Measures 55 to 63 serve as an interlude, leading into the final section from measures 63 to 78, which also features the B section.

Throughout these sections, the A motif undergoes variations during repetitions, while the B motif recurs after each A and C section, as well as in the interlude. The introduction begins with the tonic chord but employs the tonic ninth chord instead of the tonic triad, enriching the harmonic palette and emphasizing the Chinese musical style. [2]

The main melody starts with the fourth degree of the scale, accompanied by the tonic major triad, enriching the harmonic texture and emphasizing the Chinese flavor. The use of the major seventh chord as a sustaining note echoes the introduction and reinforces the tonic. In the sixth measure, a unique harmonic progression is introduced, utilizing the major chord of the fourth degree, followed by the ninth and eleventh chords, evoking a sense of distance and melancholy.

Subsequent harmonic progressions in the following sections follow similar patterns as the first section, with occasional variations to add complexity and maintain interest. The interlude section introduces tension, leading to a climax before transitioning back to the repetition of the B section. This intensification of emotions reflects the composer's skillful manipulation of harmonic and melodic elements to effectively convey the thematic content of the piece.

In summary, the composition demonstrates a well-defined structure with a rich harmonic palette and intricate melodic development, showcasing the composer's mastery of Chinese musical idioms and expressive techniques.

2.2. Lyrics and Language Analysis

The lyrical aspect of this piece falls under the category of music literature, resembling sung poetry with characteristics of art songs. Due to its accompanied nature, not entirely independent as a piano piece would be, it does not solely fit into the category of art song composition but rather aligns with the creation of songs that pair poetic lyrics with melodious tunes. Therefore, during the performance of this song, performers should pay careful attention to the poetic language, emphasizing logical stress, rhyme, and clear pronunciation. The accuracy and appropriateness of lyrical expression play a crucial role in conveying the thematic content and emotional development of the piece to the audience.[3]

For the performance of lyrics resembling poetry, they should be delivered with a recitative or chanting-like quality. The phrase "The distance of a thousand mountains and rivers" should convey a sense of cohesion, yet it describes two separate entities, essentially depicting the meetings and partings of two individuals. "How many times" needs to emphasize a questioning tone. When singing "A gentle song," the word "gentle" requires contemplation and taste in its delivery. Memories don't simply come to mind but "crawl" onto it; thus, in this phrase, "crawl" serves as both a focal point and a challenge in singing. "After the joys and sorrows, the separations and reunions" holds profound meaning—is it the meeting of "joy and sorrow" with "separation and reunion," or the meeting of "you" and "me"? Singing with different situations and mindsets, questions like "How many times" and "Who" delve deeper into emotions, with intonation and emphasis serving as effective ways to express feelings and directly resonate with the audience. "The end" serves to echo "seeing through," but the tone, pauses, or rather, the breath control at these points are certainly different. Starting connected and then breaking off is a reasonable and appropriate choice here, forming a contrast that echoes what came before. The adverbs of degree "too" and "all" appear later, requiring an understanding of how to express and sing with emotional development at this stage more accurately and movingly. Pay attention to the expressions "less than" and "tending towards"; the verbs "entangle" and "fall" are also very visual when used. "Not yet" here is a complex and multilayered exclamation.

[4]. The ending part needs to be more cohesive, requiring that the language becomes more coherent under the influence of music, all in one breath.

3. Analyses and Thoughts on Singing the Piece

In singing this piece, which belongs to the elegant and ancient gong mode, special attention must be paid to the tendencies and colors of the altered notes. Breathing should be managed in sentence units rather than dictated by rests, which indicate pauses in tone or emotional shifts. Employing a technique where the voice breaks but the breath does not is crucial. This approach demands high control over one's breath for stability, requiring the singer to prepare ample breath in advance and maintain consistent and unified vocal placement—a technical demand necessary to meet the music's requirements and thematic content.[5] This not only requires accurate understanding from the singer but also targeted and repeated training.

Another aspect of high technical demand for the singer, reflecting the difficulty of the piece itself, arises in phrases such as "Life is too short, stories too many, missing someone unique like you." Firstly, the wide interval leaps, often an octave with only a perfect fourth or fifth for transition, pose significant technical challenges. Secondly, moving from the middle to the high vocal register and sustaining it tests the singer's breath control and vocal placement. The highest note in the first section occurs on the vowel "i," where the closed vowel "ni" (you) stretches over two and a half beats, truly testing the singer's capabilities. Syllables like "duo," "nian," "chan," and "yuan" appearing in the high register are among the technically challenging aspects of the singing process.

Another difficulty of this piece lies in its musical and emotional transitions between sections. After section B and an interlude, instead of reverting to section A, it progresses to section C, potentially influenced by the singer's habitual return to the emotional state of section A, making emotional preparation crucial for the musical development. The transition between sections B and C, assisted by the piano, serves as a moment to accumulate emotion and propel the music forward, necessitating even more thorough breath preparation.[6] For longer notes exceeding two beats, careful consideration must be given to applying either crescendo or decrescendo. For instance, "Turning into memories that crawl into the heart" and "The end of love and hate" should be treated differently; the former either diminishes or maintains, while the latter requires a degree of crescendo. Singing all long notes at the same dynamic level should be avoided to prevent the music from becoming monotonous and stale.

Throughout the performance, it is essential to maintain low breath support. Shallow breathing with excessive breathiness can lead to poor phrase coherence and a style that leans closer to colloquial speech. For singers focusing on ethnic or bel canto styles, it is crucial to carefully consider and select appropriate voice and breath usage. This, of course, depends on thorough vocal technique training and adherence to correct vocal aesthetics.[7]

The development of the music and the expression of the lyrics must remain consistent, with the music interpreting emotions and thoughts while emotions and thoughts dictate the direction of musical development. Whether performing this piece or others, a rigorous and accurate understanding of the essence of music is essential. Regarding the portrayal of content, character images, and the selection of vocal techniques and timbres, more thoughtful exploration, analysis, summarization, and repeated practice are necessary.[8]

4. Conclusion

Starting from the background of the creation of the song "Half a Lifetime of Fireworks," this paper has explored and analyzed various aspects, such as the plot and character traits generated by the song. Through research, it was found that the lyrical poetry inspired the composer's creativity, indirectly

reflecting the influence of Chinese classical poetry on the thinking and creative process of song composition.

The paper further conducted a thorough analysis of the entire musical composition, including its formal structure, distribution and application of harmony, changes in tonality, characteristics of melodic development, and rhythmic variations. This provided a clearer understanding of the music itself, laying a necessary and accurate objective foundation for how to sing the song and better express the work's thematic content.

Detailed and precise analyses were provided on intentional arrangements and variations in harmony, melody, and rhythm used in specific musical phrases, enabling singers to intuitively and profoundly grasp the work. The analysis also delved into the song's lyrics, which are essential for comprehensively understanding its thematic ideas and accurately conveying its emotional message.

Finally, building on the detailed analyses in earlier chapters, the paper offered guidance on performing the piece, particularly addressing challenging and nuanced aspects. It presented instructive and constructive viewpoints that directly assist singers in their performance, prompting further reflection on the analysis and performance of similar songs. This paper holds significant theoretical and practical value in the study of music interpretation and performance.

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