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Cultivation and Application Methods of Piano Accompaniment Ability in Vocal Performance

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ABSTRACT
In music skills examination, piano accompaniment plays an important role in the performance effect of performers. In addition, vocal performers may affect the integrity of the presentation of their works due to their own reasons or external factors. At this time, an excellent piano accompanist can remedy the deficiencies in the presentation of the works, so the ability of piano accompaniment is of great significance to the performance of vocal works. Through personal experience and some related research results at present, the author summarizes the situation that piano accompaniment often encounters in vocal performance, analyzes the ability that piano accompaniment should have, and finally summarizes some effective methods to cultivate piano accompaniment ability.

KEYWORDS
Piano accompaniment ability; Vocal performance; Practical application

1 The ability of piano accompaniment

1.1 Playing ability

1.1.1 Timbre control

When accompanying vocal works, it is necessary to adopt different key-touch techniques for different works. For example, Rossini's opera has vivid description of life, vivid characterization, intense development of drama plot, rich melody, quick rhythm and full of changes in strength. Take his opera aria Make Way for the Busy Man in the City as an example. This work uses Rossini's crescendo and urgent password techniques to create a hurry and tense atmosphere. Therefore, when we play, we should use a light, flexible and jumping key touch to set off the performer's singing.

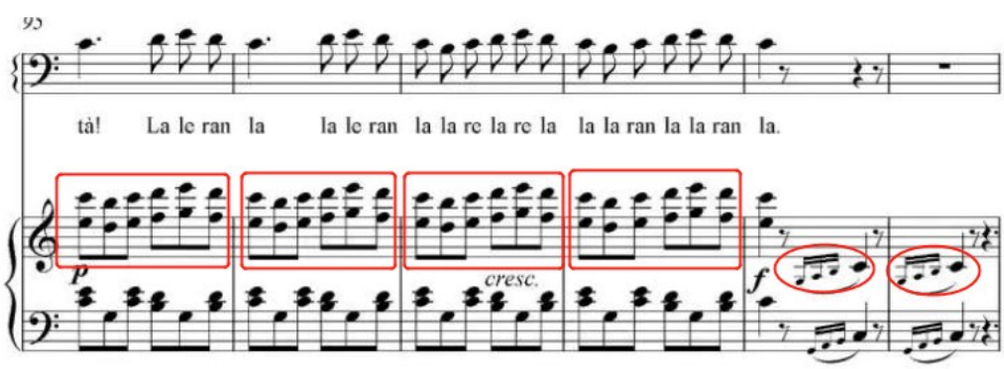

Figure 1 «*Largo al factotum della città*»

Largo al factotum della città is selected from the opera *The Barber of Seville*. It is an aria written by baritone Figaro for the opening appearance of the Roman carnival. The whole song is 6/8 beats, with a cheerful rhythm and a triumphant state. The lyrics in the example are to the effect of I'm coming, I'm coming, and the main melody notes are relatively dense. The piano accompaniment uses sixth interval progression, repeated in four consecutive bars and gradually stronger, which sets off a feeling of haste and pride. The back door uses decorative sounds, which reflects Figaro's happy mood.

1.1.2 Grasp of style

Every historical period has its unique features, for example: the music of the Renaissance is mostly of religious themes, with solemn, clear and harmonious style; In the 16th century, instrumental music gradually became independent, which inspired people's imagination of pure music without lyrics. The music of the mid-17th century is referred to as Baroque-period music, which embodies an emotional, decorative and energetic style that advocates sound. The 18th century is called the classical period. Three classical masters, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, appeared. Music became rational, logical and pleasant, and emotions were moderately and perfectly expressed.

Therefore, when you get a work first, you should know the background of the work and the style of the repertoire. Only with a big framework can the musical expression of the song be more accurate.

1.1.3 Sight-reading

Sight-reading is a fundamental skill that every piano student must master, as it helps improve sight-playing ability. If one were to simply begin playing a new piece without paying attention to the tempo markings, key signatures, and expression symbols in the sheet music, the result would likely be atonal music. Therefore, it is essential to carefully review the important information in the sheet music before performing. Without solid piano fundamentals, sight-reading ability cannot be developed. When sight-reading piano accompaniment, the eyes must remain on the sheet music. If one tries to look at both the sheet music and the keys simultaneously, it will disrupt the continuity of playing and reduce efficiency.

An excellent piano accompanist must possess outstanding sight-reading ability to quickly understand and master a piece, thereby fulfilling demanding performance tasks with greater perfection.

1.2 Aural skills

Music is a unique sensory art form that relies on the ears to perceive auditory, temporal, and emotional elements. Through aural skills, one can stimulate sensory and emotional appreciation, discern different styles and techniques of works, and elevate emotional experiences to a climax. Therefore, aural skills are crucial for progressively listening to and distinguishing various rhythms, dynamics, pitch accuracy, and harmonies, and effectively reinforcing and enhancing them.

1.2.1 Rhythm

Rhythm in music is inseparably linked to human emotions. Different rhythmic patterns reflect distinct emotional content, often serving as a summary or abstract expression of a particular mood. When playing sheet music, one must pay attention to whether the rhythmic pattern is a smooth triplet, a vigorous flowing quaver-semiquaver rhythm, or a rhythmic dotted note with a sense of leap. Fast rhythms and dense rhythmic patterns can evoke positive emotions such as excitement, joy, and enthusiasm; Conversely, slow and sparse rhythms can evoke negative emotions such as aversion, sorrow, or sadness.

1.2.2 Dynamics

The strength of the performance affects the musical effect and the interpretation of the work's content. For example, lullabies are typically performed with a soft and gentle tone to convey a gentle and warm atmosphere; marches, on the other hand, are typically performed with a stronger dynamic to create a lively and passionate atmosphere. Piano accompaniment should sense the dynamics of the piece—whether it is strong, weak, diminuendo (gradually fading), or crescendo (gradually growing). When emotions are intense, how should the piano accompaniment drive the piece forward? When emotions are calm, how should the piano accompaniment handle the piece? Choosing appropriate dynamics and touch techniques for different pieces is essential to presenting the musical effect of the piece more perfectly.

1.2.3 Harmony

When performing, it is important to accurately convey the harmonic color. For example, in major keys, the lowered third, lowered sixth, or minor fourth create a dull tone that evokes sadness and tranquility; while the first, fourth, and fifth degrees produce a bright, uplifting feeling. Similarly, when playing ethnic-style accompaniments, the interplay of seconds and fifths carries a strong traditional Chinese ethnic musical flavor.

For all performers, "listening" involves discerning the tempo, pitch accuracy, harmonic progression, and melodic flow of a performance. Building on this foundation, piano accompanists must also carefully listen to the tempo, pitch accuracy, harmonic progression, and melodic flow of vocal performers during their performances to provide timely cues and reminders in case of errors.

1.3 On-the-spot adaptability

Piano accompanists must be able to make on-the-spot emergency responses to unexpected situations. This ability directly reflects their exquisite technique and overall quality, and is also related to the quality and level of a stage performance.

On-the-spot adaptability refers to the ability to respond passively to unexpected situations. Without warning or preparation, piano accompanists must think quickly and respond calmly and appropriately to sudden changes. For example, during a piano accompaniment performance, if a vocalist's pitch inaccuracies affect the performance quality, the

piano accompanist can promptly use cue sounds to correct the vocalist's pitch issues and capture new emotional changes. As a piano accompanist, one must possess strong ability and psychological resilience to remain calm, composed, and flexible in "rescuing the situation" during crises, thereby assisting the singer in successfully completing the performance.

2 The significance of piano accompaniment skills in vocal performance

2.1 Leading rhythm and tempo

Rhythm and tempo are crucial to a musical piece; they are the soul of the work. Accurate expression of rhythm is the fundamental interpretation of the piece, while the speed determines the emotions and musical effects conveyed. The piano accompanist plays the vital role of "leading rhythm and tempo." First, during the prelude, the piano accompanist begins to build emotional momentum upon receiving the singer's signal, playing the prelude music to guide the vocal performer into the intended mood and signal the start. Second, during the singing or playing section, the piano accompanist maintains a stable rhythm and appropriate tempo, guiding the vocal performer to fully interpret the piece and reach its climax while achieving harmonious blending of timbres and creating a pleasant auditory experience. Finally, in the closing section, some works end with the piano accompanist and vocal performer concluding together; some works end with the piano accompanist playing the coda alone; others end with the vocal performer singing or playing solo, etc. The closing typically slows down and fades out gradually, though in rare cases it may end abruptly and forcefully. This requires the piano accompanist to closely follow the singer and their understanding of the piece to execute the closing performance.

2.2 Tips on pitch and tone

In vocal music, the written score accompaniment rarely features the main melody. However, singers may occasionally encounter issues such as inaccurate pitch or forgetting the next note or even a section due to physical or psychological factors during live performances. In such cases, the piano accompanist should add one or two melodic notes while maintaining the normal accompaniment to help the singer find the melody. A composed mindset and a thorough understanding of the song's melody and tonality are essential for the piano accompanist to assist in presenting the work in its most complete form.

2.3 Setting the emotional tone

Music is an art form that uses sound to create imagery and express thoughts and emotions. During stage performances, an excellent piano accompanist plays a crucial role in setting the emotional tone of the music. The prelude lays the groundwork for interpreting the music's emotions, while the phrases leading up to the climax propel the vocal performer into the work's artistic realm, enabling them to express their inner emotions and fully convey the work's intended artistic vision, thereby achieving a certain musical effect.

3 Skill development and application methods

3.1 Sight-reading ability and score-reading techniques

To develop rapid sight-reading ability, consistent practice is essential. First, a solid foundation in theoretical knowledge is necessary, enabling the application of learned concepts to sight-reading. This involves quickly analyzing the significance of the next note and the harmonic progression, rather than merely playing the notes on the page. The stronger the theoretical foundation, the greater the ability to anticipate the musical direction, and over time, sight-reading ability will gradually improve. Secondly, to date, the keys we frequently use are the 24 major and minor keys. For piano accompaniment, the ability to play the scales, arpeggios, and chords of the 24 major and minor keys fluently is a foundational skill. Finally, to quickly connect to the notes on the sheet music, during practice, we can focus on quickly identifying notes and rhythms during the first sight-reading, without overly emphasizing the piece's tempo or emotional expression. In simple terms, the integrity of the piece is our primary focus during initial practice, even if there are mistakes, we can ignore them and quickly adjust moving forward. Through extensive practice, sight-reading ability will significantly improve, and it will also boost confidence in practical piano accompaniment.

After improving sight-reading ability, we also need to master page-turning techniques. In stage performances, page-turning is crucial. One must fully master the flexibility and balance of page-turning movements to maintain the integrity of the performance, prepare in advance, and avoid mistakes that could interrupt the performance. Piano accompanists

should prepare in advance for page turns based on the final measure of the page to be turned. For example, before turning the page, place the hand free during a rest on the upcoming page; after playing the final notes of the page, quickly turn the page. If both hands are still playing notes on the final page, assess the importance of the notes in the upper and lower staves within the entire piece, then lift the hand that has a slightly lesser impact on the performance and quickly turn the page. Throughout this process, the piano accompanist must maintain concentration and a calm, composed mindset.

3.2 Appreciation and analytical skills

Music is an abstract art with thoughts and feelings. It is not easy to be perceived, but it has certain rules to follow. Every work is based on a certain material culture and has its unique style. To cultivate the ability of appreciation and analysis, we must first have a good musical sensitivity. For piano accompaniment, knowing how to feel music is the first step; Secondly, we must have certain cultural literacy. Profound cultural heritage can help piano accompanists deeply understand the meaning of the lyrics, appreciate the composer's creative intention and his inner feelings, and be able to tap the connotation of the works to the maximum extent at a higher level; Furthermore, it is necessary to have certain artistic accomplishment. If you want to deeply feel an excellent music work, the music knowledge, life experience and life experience possessed by the feeler can lay a good foundation for his feeling music. Finally, piano accompaniment should pay attention to the relationship between music score and playing music, listen, feel and play more, and fully understand the connotation of music.

3.3 Cooperation awareness and cooperation ability

In acting, collaboration is very important. Different people have different understandings and treatments of the same work. As an auxiliary, piano accompaniment needs to follow in the footsteps of the performer. The accompanist can't overwhelm the host, and needs to adjust his playing methods and feelings in time.

Under the stage, as a piano accompaniment, you need to listen to the performers' views and analysis of the works first, and then put forward your own opinions. Starting from their respective feelings about the works, find the basic point of cooperation, think about the expression of the works around the emotions, analyze the examples, and start practicing after reaching a consensus, so as to better interpret the works.

Piano accompaniment plays a different role in each part of a vocal work. When the piano accompaniment serves as the lead part. For example, the prelude, interlude and epilogue, and piano accompaniment are all in independent parts. This part is equivalent to the theme or introduction of a work, which needs to be boldly expressed and led; When the piano accompaniment is performed together with the vocal part, as a foil and assistance, must not overshadow the main performer. It is necessary not only to control one's own performance, but also to achieve the effect of unity of piano and sound with the performers. The two sides coordinate with each other and have a tacit understanding with each other.

4 Conclusion

From this point of view, piano accompaniment plays an important role in vocal performance, and the ability of piano accompanist always affects the quality of a musical work and is always related to the success of stage performance. As a piano accompanist, you not only need to be able to "read four lines at a glance": the piano score accompaniment, the lyrics, and the melody, but also pay careful attention to the changes of vocal performers. That is to say, we should not only pay attention to the horizontal ups and downs of the melody and the vertical harmony, but also carefully watch the stage performance of the performers, so as to make appropriate on-the-spot responses.

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