

Exploring the Evolution of Classical Music: A Comprehensive Analysis of Compositional Techniques and Stylistic Developments

Henan Li

Capital Normal University musicology, Beijing 100048

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the evolution process of classical music, focusing on the development of its composition technology and style. Through the combing of historical context, this paper reveals the transformation of classical music from origin to maturity, and how the composer responds to social-cultural changes through technological innovation and style evolution. The article not only reviews the origin and early development of classical music, but also explores the formation of music in the classical period, and the contribution of representative figures and works to the history of music.

KEYWORDS

classical music; composition technology; style development; historical evolution; music aesthetics

As an important part of the history of western music, classical music has experienced a long process from medieval times to modern times. Starting from the origin of classical music, it gradually analyzes its characteristics in different historical stages, the innovation of composition technology and the evolution of music style, and finally forms a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of classical music.

1 The origin and early development of classical music

Classical music, as an important part of Western art music, has a long history and covering a wide range of musical works from the Middle Ages to modern times. It particularly emphasized the development and transformation of music from the Renaissance to the early 20th century. Classical music covers a wide range of categories, including not only instrumental music and vocal music works, but also various forms of musical expression, such as opera, symphony and chamber music^[1].

Tracing back to the origins of classical music, we can go back to the medieval period. At that time, most of the music had a strong religious color, mainly chants and hymns. These musical works, often in the form of mono parts, are simple and simple, but full of piety and solemnity. As time went on, especially with the advent of the Renaissance, classical music began to inject more secular elements, and multi-voice music and early harmony practices gradually emerged, laying the foundation for later musical development. Entering the Baroque period, classical music ushered in an important turning point. The music of this period is famous for its complex harmonies, sharp dynamic contrast, and highly decorative melodic lines. In terms of composition technology, the musicians of the Baroque period made bold innovations and developed the technology of playing bass, polyphony

and contrast structure, so as to make the musical works more rich and three-dimensional. Subsequently, the classical period music was born under the influence of the Enlightenment movement. The musical aesthetics of this period, emphasizing clarity, balance and symmetry, embodies the beauty of reason and order. In terms of composition technology, the musicians in the classical period further improved the sonata, symphony and string quartets to make the musical structure more rigorous and orderly. Representatives of early classical music, such as Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven, their works became models of classical music. Haydn's symphony, Mozart's opera *Le Figaro's Wedding* and Beethoven's *First Symphony* not only show the musical characteristics of the classical period, but also set the stage for the arrival of romantic music^[2].

Through analyzing the origin and early development of classical music, we can find that the evolution process of classical music is complex and rich. It not only reflects the continuous innovation of composition technology, but also shows the close interaction between musical style and social and cultural background. The development of classical music has left countless precious cultural heritages for later generations and exerted a profound influence on modern music. Today, when we listen to these classics, we can still feel the charm of music across time and space.

2 The rise of romantic music and the transformation of composition technology

2.1 Philosophy and aesthetic basis of romantic music

The emergence and subsequent rise of romantic music signify a pivotal transformation in the annals of musical history, heralding the dawn of a new era characterized by a profound emphasis on emotional expression. This particular period in music history is distinguished by its focus on the uninhibited articulation of personal feelings and an intricate portrayal of the natural world's beauty and grandeur. Composers of this era were deeply driven by a quest for the poetic dimensions of music, striving to immerse their listeners in a realm where the boundaries between reality and imagination blurred. The works produced during the romantic era placed a heightened importance on the direct conveyance of emotion and the dynamic shifts in musical coloration. These compositions are frequently imbued with a fervent passion and a distinct sense of individuality, effectively embodying a spirit of rebellion against the constraints and formalities that defined classical music. This rebellion and the subsequent transcendence of those traditional forms and rules are hallmarks of the romantic movement, which sought to expand the emotional and expressive horizons of music^[3].

2.2 Expansion of harmony and tonality: from classical to romantic

As the romantic era in music began to gain momentum, composers like Frederic Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner embarked on a daring journey to explore uncharted territories within the realms of harmony and tonality. These innovative musicians pushed the boundaries of traditional classical music by employing more complex and sophisticated techniques, such as the manipulation of chord progressions, the exploration of distant tonal relationships, and the introduction of tonal ambiguity. Through these methods, they managed to transcend the harmonic constraints that had previously defined the classical period.

Chopin's delicate touch on the piano, for instance, brought forth a new world of expressive possibilities, while Liszt's virtuosic performances and compositions showcased the dramatic potential of music. Wagner's operas, on the other hand, wove intricate webs of leitmotifs and harmonies that conveyed deep emotional narratives. Together, these composers expanded the palette of musical expression, enriching it with a newfound depth and emotional intensity^[4].

Their bold experiments with chordal structures, such as the use of augmented and diminished chords, allowed for a more nuanced exploration of tension and resolution. The manipulation of tonal relationships, moving beyond the familiar keys to more distant and exotic ones, created a sense of surprise and wonder in the listener. The introduction of tonal ambiguity, where the key was not always clear-cut, added an element of mystery and complexity to the music.

This expansion of harmonic and tonal language not only broke free from the confines of the classical era but also paved the way for future composers to express a wider range of emotions and ideas. The romantic composers' innovations provided a much broader canvas for musical expression, allowing subsequent generations to paint with a richer and more diverse palette of sounds. Their legacy is a musical landscape that is more emotionally resonant and technically varied, offering endless possibilities for those who seek to convey the depth of human experience through the universal language of music.

2.3 Theme development and form innovation: the change of sonata style and variation style

During the Romantic era, which spanned from the early 19th century to the early 20th century, composers exhibited an extraordinary level of innovative spirit in the realm of musical composition. Among these composers, Johannes Brahms and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky stood out as two pivotal figures who, drawing upon the foundational elements of the traditional sonata form and the principles of variation, infused their works with fresh creative elements and personalized processing techniques. This approach allowed them to push the boundaries of conventional musical structures, rendering them more adaptable and varied.

Brahms, in particular, was known for his meticulous craftsmanship and his ability to blend traditional forms with innovative ideas. His compositions often featured intricate counterpoint and rich harmonic textures, which added depth and complexity to the sonata form. Tchaikovsky, on the other hand, was celebrated for his ability to evoke powerful emotions through his music. He incorporated nationalistic themes and programmatic elements into his works, which not only expanded the emotional palette of the music but also provided a narrative dimension that was less common in earlier classical compositions.

These composers' innovative approaches did not merely serve as aesthetic experiments; they had a profound impact on the evolution of musical language. By breaking away from the rigid structures of the Classical period, they paved the way for a more expressive and dynamic form of musical expression. Their works allowed for a greater range of emotional conveyance, enabling composers to communicate a broader spectrum of feelings and ideas to their audiences.

Furthermore, the innovations of Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and their contemporaries did not go unnoticed by future generations of composers. The legacy of their work can be seen in the compositions of the 20th century and beyond, where the exploration of new forms and the integration of diverse cultural influences have become hallmarks of modern musical expression. Thus, the Romantic period composers' contributions to the evolution of musical form were not only significant during their time but also continue to resonate and inspire in the contemporary musical landscape.

2.4 The innovation of orchestral method and the progress of musical instrument technology

During the Romantic era, the orchestral approach experienced profound transformations and groundbreaking developments. The evolution of instrumental technology opened up a plethora of

new timbral possibilities for composers. Visionaries like Hector Berlioz and Richard Strauss harnessed these advancements, employing innovative techniques to blend and juxtapose sounds in ways that had never been heard before. Their masterful manipulation of the orchestra's palette resulted in a richer and more vibrant array of colors, which in turn significantly enhanced the dramatic impact and emotional expressiveness of their compositions. This transformative exploration of timbre not only revolutionized the way music was composed and performed but also laid the groundwork for the distinctive and enduring style that characterizes Romantic music.

2.5 Representative composers and works of the Romantic period

The Romantic era, which spanned the 19th century, was a time of great creativity and emotional expression in the world of classical music. It witnessed the emergence of numerous composers whose works continue to captivate audiences to this day. Alongside the renowned Frederic Chopin, who is celebrated for his expressive piano compositions, and the innovative Franz Liszt, whose technical prowess on the piano redefined the instrument's capabilities, there was also Richard Wagner, whose operas revolutionized the genre with their dramatic storytelling and complex musical structures. However, the Romantic period was not solely defined by these three giants. Other exceptional musicians such as Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, and Anton Bruckner also made significant contributions that have left an indelible mark on the classical music tradition^[5].

Felix Mendelssohn, a child prodigy who later became a masterful composer and conductor, composed timeless pieces that are still beloved by music enthusiasts around the globe. His Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream, inspired by William Shakespeare's play, is a prime example of his ability to capture the essence of a story through music. The overture is a vivid and enchanting piece that perfectly encapsulates the magic and whimsy of the fairy-filled forest in the play.

Robert Schumann, known for his deeply personal and introspective compositions, brought a new level of emotional depth to classical music. His Spring Symphony, also known as the "Spring" Symphony, Op. 38, is a vibrant and energetic work that reflects the joy and renewal associated with the season. The symphony is a testament to Schumann's innovative approach to orchestration and his ability to convey a wide range of emotions through his music.

Anton Bruckner, a composer whose works are characterized by their grandeur and spiritual depth, composed symphonies that are considered some of the most complex and challenging in the classical repertoire. His symphonies, including the monumental Symphony No. 9, showcase his unique blend of traditional harmonic structures with innovative tonal experiments. Bruckner's music is a profound exploration of the human experience, filled with rich textures and a sense of awe-inspiring vastness.

The works of these composers, including Mendelssohn's Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream, Schumann's Spring Symphony, and Bruckner's symphonies, are quintessential examples of the Romantic style. They are characterized by their emotional richness, a break from traditional forms in favor of innovative structures, and a diverse palette of timbres that expanded the possibilities of orchestration.

3 The budding of modern music and the musical exploration of the early 20th century

3.1 The diversity and genres of music in the 20th century

Entering the 20th century, music art ushered in an unprecedented era of diversification. The music of this period is no longer satisfied with the shackles of tradition, but explores various

possibilities and new ways of expression. From impressionism and Expressionism to twelve-tone technology, serialism, to the revival of neoclassical and nationalist music, the language and form of music have undergone profound changes. The rise of these genres marks a major turn in the history of music.

3.2 The characteristics of impressionism and expressionism of music

Impressionist music, such as Claude Debussy's *Moonlight* and Morris Iavel's *Polero*, successfully depicts the artistic conception and atmosphere of music with its unique harmony blur and delicate timbre processing, as if to draw a vivid picture on the canvas with notes. Expressionist music, on the other hand, pays more attention to the expression of emotion and the depiction of the inner psychology, such as Arnold Schoenberg's works, which often have a strong personality and emotional explosion.

3.3 The rise of twelve-sound technology and serialism

The emergence of twelve-tone technology was a revolution in the history of music in the 20th century. The technique, pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg, completely abandoned the traditional principles of tonal music and instead used twelve chromatic sequences to construct musical works. This technique had a profound impact on later composers, such as Anton Webburn and Albanberg, and gradually developed into a more complex serialism.

3.4 The revival of neoclassical and nationalist music

Neoclassical music advocates the return to the musical forms and styles of the classical period, with representative works such as Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*, which not only inherit the tradition, but also integrate new creative ideas. At the same time, nationalist music emphasizes the use of ethnic characteristics and of folk musical elements, such as the works of Bela Bartok and Jean Sibelius, which combine native musical traditions with modern compositional techniques to create a unique musical style.

3.5 Representative composers and works of the early 20th century

On the music stage of the early 20th century, there were many outstanding composers and their classical works. In addition to Debussy, Ravel, Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, there were great musicians like Dimitri Shostakovich and Bela Bartok. Their works, such as Debussy's *Shepherd Afternoon*, Ravel's *Polero*, Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* and Bartok's *Dance Suite*, not only reflected the exploration and innovation of 20th century music, but also laid a solid foundation for the later development of the music. These works are still the treasures of music history and are constantly appreciated and studied by people around the world.

4 Evolution and future trends of contemporary classical music

4.1 Diversity of technology and style of contemporary music

In today's era, classical music presents an unprecedented diversity of technology and style, which has become one of its most remarkable features. Modern composers are no longer satisfied with following the traditional mode of music creation, but bravely integrate electronic music, computer music and other modern technology means into their creation, thus opening up a whole new world

of music creation. These composers not only made bold explorations in the new field of music, but also skillfully combined the essence of traditional music with modern elements to create musical works with multicultural characteristics. These works not only show the wide inclusiveness of musical art, but also highlight the infinite possibilities of musical creation.

4.2 The rise of electronic music and computer music

With the continuous progress of science and technology, electronic music and computer music have gradually become the indispensable branches of contemporary music creation. With the help of various electronic devices and computer software, composers are able to create unprecedented sound effects and complex musical structures, greatly expanding the expression of music. For example, composers like Karl Heinschstockhausen and Christopher Pandreecki, whose works are a milestone in the field of electronic music and computer music, not only break the boundaries of traditional music, but also bring unprecedented auditory experience to the audience, leading the future development of musical art.

4.3 Integration of music and multimedia art

In today's era, music is no longer limited to a single art form, but closely combined with visual art, dance, drama and other art forms, forming a cross-field art work. This cross-field integration not only greatly enriches the expressive force of music, but also makes the audience group and experience mode of music get unprecedented expansion and enrichment. The combination of multimedia art provides a new perspective and means of expression for music creation, making music become a more comprehensive and three-dimensional art form. Through visual, auditory and interactive and other sensory experiences, the combination of music and multimedia art brings a brand-new artistic enjoyment to the audience.

4.4 Innovative techniques and works of contemporary composers

In the contemporary music world, composers such as George Benjamin, Kayazali Ajo and Philip Glass, their innovative techniques and works represent new trends and new directions in contemporary music. These composers, through their unique musical language and forms, deeply explore the deep connection between music and human experience. Their works not only reflect the complexity and diversity of contemporary society, but also show the profound connotation and broad prospects of musical art.

4.5 Inheritance and future prospects of classical music

The inheritance and development of classical music is a process of continuous evolution and evolution. In the contemporary society, classical music is faced with new challenges and opportunities such as digitalization and globalization. Looking ahead, classical music will continue to combine with modern technological and cultural trends to evolve and innovate. It will adapt to the changing social and cultural environment while maintaining its core artistic values and charm for

5 Epilogue

The evolution of classical music is not only reflected in the innovation of composition technology, but also reflected in the interaction between musical style and social and cultural

background. From the classical period to the modern period, the musicians constantly explore and innovate, which makes both the musical language and the form undergo profound changes. The development of classical music has left a valuable cultural heritage for the later generations and exerted a profound influence on modern music. Despite its many challenges, classical music still plays an important role in contemporary society. It not only continues to develop in the traditional field, but also combines with modern technology and culture to show new vitality. Looking into the future, classical music will continue to move forward in the inheritance and innovation, and constantly adapt to and influence the changing social and cultural environment.

References

- [1] Zhang Y. A Study of Linear Thinking in Music Analysis Approaches[J]. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 2023, 5(14).
- [2] Sangiorgio A. Tradition and Creativity Combined: Undergraduate students' use of western classical music as a source of ideas for collaborative improvisation and composition[J]. *Creative Interactions*, 2023, 167.
- [3] Auerbach B. *Musical Motives: A Theory and Method for Analyzing Shape in Music*[M]. Oxford University Press, 2021.
- [4] Dai S. *Towards Artificial Musicians: Modeling Style for Music Composition, Performance, and Synthesis via Machine Learning*[D]. Stanford University, 2023.
- [5] Khachatryan V. Re-Assessing Rachmaninoff's Legacy: The Piano Concertos and Evolution of His Musical Style[J]. 2021.