

The integration practice of emotional expression techniques and artistic guidance in art songs

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ABSTRACT

As music education in higher institutions continues to deepen, art songs serve as a vital bridge between literature and music, and their teaching methods are increasingly valued. This article explores the application of five different strategies to enhance students understanding and performance of art songs. It aims to provide valuable references for teachers in music departments at universities, promote the development of art song instruction, and simultaneously stimulate students creativity and artistic cultivation.

KEYWORDS

art song; emotional expression; artistic guidance

In today's field of music education in universities, the teaching of art songs has become a topic of great interest. As academic research on performance practices deepens, more and more researchers and teachers are beginning to recognize the unique role of art songs as a bridge between literature and music. Art songs, as a highly personalized and poetic form of music, skillfully combine poetry, melody, and vocals, aiming to convey deep emotional experiences through the interaction between these elements. For students majoring in music, mastering this technique of emotional expression is crucial, as it is key to transforming technical skills into artistic performance. Accurately understanding and interpreting the emotions intended by the composer is a goal pursued by every artist and one of the important factors in whether an audience can be moved by a work. In light of this, this article explores five teaching strategies: understanding the text background, enhancing vocal techniques, applying body language, fostering collaboration skills, and encouraging improvisation. The aim is to help students gradually develop a keen artistic sensitivity and confident performance ability during their learning process, enabling them to better adapt to and showcase the unique charm of art songs when facing different cultural contexts.

1 Understand the background of the text in depth

Art songs are often based on literary works, especially poetry. Therefore, understanding the textual background behind the lyrics is crucial for correctly interpreting the song. The text is not only a carrier of notes but also a key medium for emotional transmission. Teachers should guide students to research the source of the lyrics, the historical context, the authors intentions, and the relationship between the poem and the music. This helps uncover the deeper meanings hidden beneath the words. Through in-depth analysis of the text, students can gain richer interpretive perspectives, allowing them to more authentically convey the emotional nuances embedded in the work when performing.

For example, in a teaching session of "The Erlking" (Der Erlkonig), the teacher can assign each student Goethes original poem and its English translation, and assign a preparatory task, which requires students to prepare brief reflections. At the beginning of the class, the teacher can play a recording of a Schubert art song, followed by a sharing session where students share their personal impressions. Through these initial exchanges, students can examine the work from multiple perspectives. Subsequently, the class moves on to an in-depth discussion of the social and historical background of Goethes creation of this poem and how it influenced Schuberts musical expression. Specific historical events and cultural changes are cited as examples, such as the rise of German Romanticism at the end of the 18th century, which provides a broader cultural perspective for understanding the poem. Next, the teacher can shift the focus to a detailed analysis of the lyrics sentence by sentence. This goes beyond the surface meaning of the words and includes exploring metaphors and symbolic meanings, such as the "Erlking" figure in the poem, which is not just a fictional character but also symbolizes the threat of the adult world to the innocent hearts of children. To help students better grasp this deeper meaning, the teacher needs to explain in detail the psychological changes of each character and demonstrate how these changes affect the ——— such as pitch and timbre. The methods of expressing different emotional fluctuations through ——— intensity and speed. For example, when describing a father trying to soothe a frightened child, a relatively calm yet firm voice is used; whereas, when portraying the seductive words of a demon king, a softer but slightly mysterious tone is employed. Such demonstrations allow students to intuitively experience the powerful impact of the interweaving of music and literature,

while also deepening their understanding of language expression and musical interpretation.

2 Strengthen voice and voice training

Good vocal techniques form the foundation of art song performance. Proper breath control, selection of resonance points, and clear articulation are all essential elements. Moreover, since art songs often feature complex sentence structures and irregular rhythmic patterns, special attention must be paid to the coherence and accuracy of pronunciation. Teachers should emphasize the supporting role of breath, instructing students to use diaphragmatic breathing to maintain a steady flow of sound, ensuring that every syllable is fully expressed. At the same time, practicing lip and tongue flexibility can help students overcome language barriers, making their pronunciation smoother and more rounded.

For example, in a German art song class, the teacher can arrange a session specifically for improving pronunciation. At the beginning of the class, the teacher can provide a detailed explanation of the characteristics of German consonants and vowels, and demonstrate through practical demonstrations how to produce standard German sounds using different parts of the mouth. For instance, when explaining the distinction between the voiceless consonants /p/, /t/, /k/ and the voiced consonants /b/, /d/, /g/ in German, the teacher can emphasize the importance of tongue position and breath control. Then, the teacher selects several representative segments from German art songs as practice materials, including Schumann's "Eulogy" (Dedication). This piece is not only widely loved for its beautiful melody but also has complex linguistic structures in its lyrics, making it very suitable for training pronunciation skills. Students are then divided into groups and guided by the teacher in pronunciation exercises, focusing on correcting common pronunciation errors. Each group receives specific instructions, such as pronunciation demonstrations for easily confused German letter combinations like "ch" and "sch," which the teacher provides and students repeatedly practice until they can pronounce them accurately. To ensure that every student receives adequate attention, the teacher needs to rotate among the groups, promptly correct pronunciation issues, and offer guidance. Personalized suggestions. Afterward, the teacher needs to invite students to the stage to showcase their pronunciation practice results. Each time a student completes their presentation, the teacher immediately provides feedback, pointing out what was done well and where adjustments are needed, while personally demonstrating the correct pronunciation method. This immediate interactive teaching model not only helps students build a solid foundation in German pronunciation but also enhances their understanding of the style of works, enabling them to accurately convey the meaning of lyrics and better express the emotional layers of music during performances.

3 Pay attention to body language and facial expressions

Body language and facial expressions are crucial components of emotional expression. While art songs primarily rely on sound to convey messages, appropriate physical movements and facial expressions can enhance the authenticity and appeal of performances. Teachers should encourage students to design reasonable stage actions based on the content of the song, making the body an auxiliary tool for expressing emotions. At the same time, through self-reflection in front of a mirror or reviewing recordings, students can clearly see their strengths and weaknesses in performance, allowing them to make corresponding improvements. Such practice helps boost students' confidence, enabling them to present their personalities more confidently on stage.

For example, in the rehearsal class for a student graduation performance, the teacher can specifically set aside one lesson to practice body language. At the beginning of the class, the teacher introduces several commonly used stage gestures and postures, detailing their applicability in different situations. For instance, the teacher can explain how subtle hand movements can convey gentle emotions or how body tilts can express inner struggles and conflicts. To help students understand more intuitively, the teacher can refer to classic gestures from ballet as references, showcasing the commonalities between art forms. Next, the teacher can use Richard Strauss's "The Last Four Songs" (Four Last Songs) as an example, guiding students to conceptualize appropriate body movements based on the lyrical imagery. Each line of this poem carries profound meaning and needs to be interpreted through carefully designed actions. Subsequently, students will take turns on stage for a trial performance. After each student takes the stage, they start with a brief self-introduction, summarizing their understanding of the song and the body language strategies they plan to use. Then, the teacher guides the students to incorporate pre-prepared movements during singing, striving to ensure that every expression and turn is perfectly synchronized with the music. When all students have completed their presentations, the teacher then provides individual comments, pointing out which movements were too exaggerated or unnatural, and offered specific suggestions for improvement. For example, regarding a student's overly stiff arm movement in the "spring" segment, the teacher suggested moving the arms more fluidly, as if gently caressing the breeze. This meticulous

feedback helped students recognize the importance of subtle details, thereby enhancing the overall quality of their performance. This exercise not only deepened the students' understanding of the work but also taught them how to tell stories through their bodies, enriching the layers of the performance and making emotional expression more vivid and compelling.

4 Strengthen the ability of cooperation and communication

Art songs often involve piano accompaniment or the cooperation of other instruments, so good collaboration and communication skills are crucial for a successful performance. Teachers need to teach students how to build rapport with their peers, understand each others' intentions, and work together to create a harmonious musical atmosphere. Effective communication also includes the exchange of non-verbal signals, such as eye contact and subtle body cues, which are key factors in ensuring synchronization during performances. To achieve the best results, teachers can also organize ensemble practice sessions, allowing students to experience the joy and challenges of teamwork firsthand, learning the importance of teamwork.

For example, in the choir rehearsal class for Mozarts Mass in C minor (Missa in C minor), the teacher can arrange a special session focused on collaboration. At the beginning of the class, the teacher should first explain the historical background and unique choral arrangement of this work, emphasizing how Mozart integrated the complex counterpoint of the Baroque period with the elegant melodic lines of Classicism in this piece. To help students better understand the characteristics and challenges of each movement, the teacher should also provide detailed information about the social and cultural context during the composition of the Mass in C minor and significant events in Mozarts' personal life, which profoundly influenced the emotional expression of the work. Subsequently, the teacher will divide the students into several groups, each responsible for rehearsing a specific movement. Group members must closely collaborate, define their vocal roles, and discuss how to coordinate tempo, dynamics, and other musical elements. For instance, when rehearsing the "Kyrie" movement, one group needs to address how to highlight the solemnity of the solo part while maintaining overall harmony; in contrast, another group focuses on mastering the techniques of rapid rhythmic changes and intense emotional contrasts in the "Gloria" movement. During rehearsals, the teacher will circulate and provide guidance, addressing any issues that arise and facilitating communication between groups to ensure everyone is on track. The transitions between sections were smooth and error-free. One student encountered pitch issues during the performance, which were corrected through immediate individual guidance; another student significantly improved the stability of long notes after mastering the correct breathing technique. Ultimately, all groups were reassembled into a complete choir for a full ensemble practice of the entire piece. This rehearsal not only tested the results of previous group exercises but also prepared for the upcoming formal performance. Throughout this process, teachers needed to guide students to pay special attention to the transitions between different movements and the overall emotional coherence, ensuring that each student could accurately grasp their role and work collaboratively with other members. This class not only enhanced students' teamwork skills but also laid a solid foundation for the upcoming formal performance. Through such practical teaching, students not only deepened their understanding of "Mass in C Minor" but also learned how to find their place within large choral works through hands-on practice, improving the quality of collective performances.

5 Cultivate improvisation and personalized expression

Despite the fixed musical notation and traditional performance methods of art songs, encouraging students to engage in a certain degree of improvisation and personalization can stimulate their creativity, making their performances more distinctive. Teachers can provide open practice opportunities, allowing students to experiment with different tempos, dynamics, and tonal color changes, exploring new possibilities for expression. At the same time, teachers should respect students' unique perspectives, offer positive feedback and support, helping them find the most suitable way to express themselves. This approach not only increases students' interest in music but also enhances their problem-solving skills.

For example, in a class on Italian art songs, the teacher can organize a special session titled "My Version." At the beginning of the class, the teacher first introduces the basic principles of improvisation to the students, emphasizing the importance of incorporating personal creativity while maintaining the original structure and emotional core of the work. To help students better understand this concept, the teacher can cite some classic cases from music history, such as how Beethoven demonstrated a strong personal style while strictly adhering to classical forms. Next, the teacher can choose a classic Italian folk song adapted into an art song as a model — "O mio babbino caro" (Dear Father). This piece has become ideal teaching material due to its widely known melody and simple yet heartfelt lyrics. During the lesson, the teacher needs to demonstrate various possible interpretations, from traditional performances that strictly follow the score to versions with modern elements and personal interpretations. For instance, in one demonstration version, the teacher

creates a more dramatic effect by changing the rhythm pattern and timbre processing; in another version, the accompaniment is simplified to highlight the purity and directness of the vocal parts. Afterwards, the teacher can invite students to share their thoughts based on their own understanding and feelings, And design a unique opening for the song. Students take turns to present, while others listen attentively and offer constructive suggestions. This interaction not only fosters communication among students but also helps each person express their musical ideas more clearly. For example, during the presentation, one student might try to introduce with a gentle piano prelude to create a warm family atmosphere; another might opt for a string quartet format, giving the piece a grander narrative feel. Observing students provide valuable feedback, pointing out which aspects enhance the performance and where improvements can be made. This teaching activity ensures that every students innovation is fairly evaluated, encouraging diverse thinking and practice.

This class greatly stimulated the students enthusiasm, allowing them to experience firsthand the diversity and fun of art song performances. Through this approach, not only did it boost their confidence and creativity, but also deepened their understanding of Italian art songs, making them realize that even classic works can be rejuvenated through a unique personal perspective. Such teaching methods not only ignited the students passion for music but also laid a solid foundation for their future studies and performances.

6 Conclusion

The integration of emotional expression techniques and artistic guidance in art songs is a multidimensional process, involving text interpretation, vocal techniques, body language, collaborative skills, and improvisation. Through carefully designed teaching activities, university teachers can facilitate students comprehensive development in this process, not only enhancing their professional skills but also fostering their love and pursuit of art. As globalization accelerates, art songs, as a universal language, will continue to play a crucial role in connecting hearts and conveying emotions.

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