

Original Paper

Analysis of the Style and Characteristic of Zhao Jiping's Film

Score

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Abstract

Zhao Jiping is a famous contemporary Chinese composer. In his film music creation, he pays great attention to the grasp and application of national style. Besides, he is renowned for his bold and advanced artistic conception, organic combination with film pictures as well as strong psychological shock brought to the audiences. All of these form the unique artistic charm of Zhao Jiping's film music.

Keywords

Zhao Jiping, film score, style and characteristic

Zhao Jiping is a famous contemporary Chinese composer. His creations involve almost every field of music creation: semichorus, performance singing, national orchestra, symphony music, opera, dance drama, opera music, etc. His various kinds of creations reflect his extensive creative talent and profound artistic foundation, especially some excellent film and television music works, such as Red Sorghum, Qiu Ju Goes to Court, Raise the red lantern, Farewell My Concubine, etc. His creation are full of strong national characteristics and Chinese boldness, which shows his unique artistic charm and makes him deeply loved by the audiences. Therefore, Zhao Jiping is praised as "the composer with the most distinct Chinese national cultural spirit".

1. The Utilization of National Folk Music Material

Most of Zhao Jiping's music materials are directly drawn from the folk. A large number of traditional national instruments, such as the erhu, the suona, the pipa and the flute, are used in his film score. What's more, he also draws nourishment from various forms of folk arts, such as operas, Qin Opera and so on. These traditional forms of national music have deeply impressed his film music with

nationalization. In his first film music creation *The Yellow Earth*, the score echoes the film style: at dusk, a melancholy song of girls floats over the Loess Plateau. In the song, “the ice of Yellow River doesn’t melt in June, my father forces me to get married. The beans are the best in the five cereals (rice, two kinds of millet, wheat and beans), and girls are the poorest in all people”. The sorrowful lyric makes the characteristic in the film vivid. In this film, he directly quotes folk song material as the theme song, which is more plain and fresh with no accompaniment. The mild voice seems to be full of the flavor of loess for thousands of years, which more profoundly depicts the heroine’s sorrow for the poor life. The melody of *Girl’s Song* uses the tone structure of “Xintianyou”, whose rhythm is free and melody is open. This kind of style is appropriate for the beautiful and sad image for the girl in distress. The music at this time and the film’s regional and contemporary backgrounds are integrated and complemented with each other, which increases the artistic charm of the film and makes the audience more attracted by the scene. In order to create the music integrated with the film style, Zhao Jiping trudged the Loess Plateau in Northern Shanxi Province in person, lived in the dairy Chemadian and farmhouse filled with yellow sand, and searched for creative inspiration in this environment. Finally, with the theme of “Xintianyou”, a tone in Northern Shanxi Province, he created some film music which give warm praise to human nature, such as *Girl’s Song*. And *Girl’s Song* has also become a well-known song in Northern Shanxi Province because of its catchy style of “Xintianyou” tone.

2. The Addition of Chinese Opera Elements

With Zhao Jiping becoming more and more matured in film music creation, he further explores the essence of national music, and elaborate the advantages of opera music more effectively and more accurately. For example, his movie *Lifetimes Living*, tells a story that a nobody has his ups and downs in the history of great changes. He cannot control his own destiny, with misfortunes and struggles always haunt him. Nevertheless, he never gives up his belief in living, and he has boundless great hopes for life and the future. By using shadow play, the composer combines the music with the fate of characters, and applies this element with a strong sense of folklore perfectly. The film score is very good. It absorbs the material of the Northwest Qin Opera, and in the endless space where the melody gets up, all kinds of helplessness of life flow out. The film reveals that the individual is in opposition to the times. Under the pressure of the times and history, the individual is at the mercy of the times and is unable to resist. The film depicts the joys and sorrows of the nobody as well as the absurdity of the times. What the film reflects is Chinese History situation in the Middle Period of the 20th Century: War of Liberation, Great Leap Forward, Attacks on the “Four Olds” (old thoughts, old culture, old habits, old customs), the Cultural Revolution, etc. Every strike has an implicit relationship with the times, showing the insignificance of people in front of the society.

In his famous work *Raise the red lantern*, accompanied by the gongs and drums at the beginning, the Peking Opera percussion music “Rapid Wind” at the first indicates that a good play in the deep house courtyard will begin! This piece of music takes the entrance of Peking Opera “Xipi Running Water” as

its creative material, and adapts it into a cyclical and repetitive dominant music by rearrangement. Set off by Peking Opera percussion music and female vocal function words chorus, and accompanied by the development of dramatic contradictions, the repetition and display of the music renders a strong tragic atmosphere.

The addition of traditional Peking Opera music brings audiences familiar features of antiquity, obsolescence and depression. Besides, it is recreated symphonically, which provides the atmosphere and background of Chinese traditional culture for the film. The expressive charm released by his music in the film is the high integration and embodiment of traditional and modern cultural concepts. Meanwhile, through the form of movies, the traditional Peking Opera music is endowed with new expressive breath and vitality.

3. The Utilization of Modern Musical Techniques

When using modern music techniques for reference, Zhao Jiping does not simply copy, but to find and absorb useful things from them, digest them and then use them. Thus, using new techniques for reference can be innovation, and digging deep roots and nutrition from tradition is also innovation. It is having a better grasp and pursuit in these two aspects, that Zhao Jiping gradually forms his own unique film music language. He likes the “mixing” of the national instruments of the western orchestra. He is a professional composer, and he has a perfect command of the use of the western orchestra. Since he graduated from Music Collage, he has been engaged in the composition of traditional opera for more than 20 years, which accumulates rich experience for his opera music writing. In the course of film and television music creation, Zhao Jiping has been creating fresh sound through orchestration. In the film *Red Sorghum*, he invents Chinese style of block writing. Four high and middle school bass Shengs play seven natural tone blocks within two octaves as the background. Thirty suonas blow out five ornamental bands in parallel within eight degrees, plus the roar of swordrums and drums, which produces a unique and impressive effect.

In the film music of *Red Sorghum*, it is a great success of the adaptation, transplantation and application of Suona music in the Central Plains region. All musical performances simply use several Chinese national blowing instruments—Suona, Sheng and drum. For example, in the scene of “My Grandpa” and “Yehe” of Jiu Er, the score uses music block to simulate the cry of life, which is very powerful. “Ah—sister, you go ahead boldly”. This piece of music uses thirty suonas, four Shengs and one Chinese big drum to play, which gives full reflection to the cry of life.

4. The Use of National Characteristic Musical Instruments Gives Music the Spirit of New Age

Zhao Jiping uses distinctive national musical instruments to play the main part in film music. The sound quality and characteristic of these instruments are not only in harmony with the overall conception of the film, but also shows the composer’s keen sense of color and innovative exploration spirit. For example, the suona in *Red Sorghum*, the *xun* in *Ju Dou*, the guqin in *Heart Aroma*, the Jinghu

in *Farewell My Concubine*, the banhu in *Lifetimes Living*, the pipa in *Loving Tragedy*, the sanxian in *Things We Lost in the Fire*, the morin khuur in *Moonlight Valley*, the waist drum in *The Yellow Earth*, ect. The use of these national musical instruments greatly enriches the magnificent color of film music, and gives it a fresh flavor of the times.

In the film *Farewell My Concubine*, based on the national cultural characteristics, Zhao Jiping skillfully integrates the traditional Chinese opera and national musical instruments (such as the bass bamboo flute and the Jinghu) with the Western string orchestra to form a new complex sound style. The Jinghu theme appears many times in the film, and develops according to the fate of the protagonist Cheng Dieyi. For example, Xiaodouzi's mother cuts off her son's redundant finger, put his thumb print on the contract, and the high-spirited of Jinghu theme appears at this time, which foreshadows a change in his fate. When Mr. Zhang comes to the theatre to select roles, Xiaodouzi's mistake disappoints him and he is about to turn around and leave. At that time, the elder brother angrily grabs the cigarette stick in the master's hand and stirs it in Xiaodouzi's mouth. The theme of Jinghu sounds quickly. With blood in his mouth, Xiaodouzi reads out the opera lyrics completely, and finally gets the chance to perform. Accompanied by Jinghu and percussion music, *Farewell My Concubine* sung by the brother pleases Mr. Zhang. Since then, Xiaodouzi's fate has a great turning point, he begins his career in opera. After the Great Cultural Revolution, they return to the theater and play *Farewell My Concubine*. Cheng Dieyi kills herself, the theme of Jinghu resounds again, and it stops abruptly at the moment when the sword falls to the ground. It represents the end of Cheng Dieyi's life. The composer uses a national musical instrument to vividly express the heroine's life fate.

Zhao Jiping's film music score deeply explores the essence of national music, and accurately takes the advantages of national music. It pays great attention to the grasp and application of national style in film music creation, and combines its bold and advanced artistic conception and organic with film pictures. His music works are closely combined with the film theme, which reaches a highly unified level and be famous for the strong psychological shock brought to the audiences.

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