Research on the Stage Practice for “Song of Bashan Back-carriers”—Combination of Singing Skills of Bel Canto and Song of Bashan Back-Carriers

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Abstract. Borrowing bel canto to sing “Song of Bashan Back-carriers—the folk song of east Sichuan”, it is to improve the theatrical process of it. Actually, its purpose is to save and inherit the national intangible cultural heritage-the salvation move done by Song of Bashan Back-carriers doesn’t intend to compare the good and bad between them. They are the same art form generated from two different cultures with totally different performance means. We are here to take the advantages of bel canto to offset the “estrangement” in people’s mind and enable people to accept and love “her” from the deepest heart. So that it can be inherited and carried forward. It follows the pace of “reform and opening up” and practices the eight words policy of “making the past serve the present and taking advantages from foreign goods”.

Use “Breathing” Skills of Bel Canto in Singing Bashan Bei Er Songs

The Breathing Skills in Bel Canto
Breathing is one of the basic skills for our nature people to survive in this world. While the breathing skills in bel canto, which is a specific singing skill, is such a hard method for us people to grasp and use in singing. Breathing is the so-called motive power for singing. I have some knowledge to breathing skills after more than ten years’ study and research. And I will list them for the readers:

Three Types of Breathing Method we Known is the Chest Breath, the Abdomen Breath and the Combination of Chest and Abdomen Breath.

(1) The chest breath: using the limited expansion in chest to produce draught head between the chest cavity and outside so as to compell the air coming in and out of the lung lobe. However, there’s two big disadvantages in this kind of breathing method: one is that the breath is not deep and the timbre is hard to control only by the limited expansion of ribs; the other one is breathing in little air cannot guarantee a lasting singing quality. Therefore, very few people sing by this kind of breathing method.

(2) The abdomen breath: to inflate the lung lobe by pushing down the thoracic diaphragm to make the pressure in chest become less than the external pressure and then to make the pressure in chest become more than the external pressure by using the abdominal muscle groups push the thoracic diaphragm upwards to force the air expelling from the lung. But the disadvantage in this method is that the breath can be easily rigid when singers only pay attention to the abdominal distension and changes in muscle tissue.

(3) The combination of chest and abdomen breath: this breathing method combines the chest breath and the abdomen breath, which greatly improves the breathing efficiency and guarantee lasting quality for singing at the same time. Therefore, this method is one of the most recognized bel canto techniques today.

There are Some Related Practice Skills in the Combination of Chest and Abdomen Breathing: Quickly Breathe in and out, Slowly Breathe in and out, Quickly Breathe in but Slowly Breathe out, the Breath Support and so on

(1) Quickly breath in and out: you can learn from the dog’s breathing way when doing this exercise. We all know that in hot summer days, dogs will put their tongues out and breathe quickly to excrete
heat in their bodies and we can use this method to practice the quickly breathing in and out. This breathing method is good for singing a quick rhythm song as well as the cadenza of coloratura soprano.

(2) Slowly breathe in and out: Practitioner is requested to image how to smell the fragrance. Breathe in slowly and deeply to make sure you gather enough air and keep the air for seconds then breathe out slowly. It’s better to pronounce “si” during the breathing out process to help you keep the air and breathe out evenly, and the longer you pronounce “si” in one breath the better.

(3) Quickly breathe in and slowly breathe out: this exercise requests the practitioner to experience the feeling of being shocked — the sense of breathing a cool and deep air, and keep in mind that you should finish this breathing in moment in a very short moment. Then, just like what we mentioned above, the practitioner should breathe out slowly and pronounce “si” during the whole process and the longer you pronounce “si” the better will be.

(4) Breath support: this exercise requests the practitioner to breathe deeply and keep the air for some seconds then breathe out also, the practitioner should keep the state of breathing in in the whole process and experience the strength confrontation of muscle group between “breathe in” and “breathe out”. This exercise can strength the voice plumpness of singer and can really sing from breath.

**How to Use This Skill to Sing SONG of Bashan Back-carriers**

The original singing of Song of Bashan Back-carriers also puts attention to the usage of breath but there’s no systematic practice skills and scientific literature to support it like the bel canto. How to use this technique to sing Song of Bashan Back-carriers? Let’s take an look at below music. (music 2-1) “清早起来走梁”, this song is from the southern district and “houguai” is a dialect for Song of Bashan Back-carriers. This song starts from high B-flat and then rises to C. It can’t be achieved by a normal singer without singing techniques, and the breathing skills come first because the high pitch need support from strong breath. The two breathing skills of “quickly breathe in and slowly breathe out” and “breath support” are frequently used in this singing. Firstly the singer takes a deep breath and then sings the words of “ye... ye” while breathing out, just like pronouncing “si” in the method of “quickly breathe in and slowly breathe out”. This lyric should be sung from the breath or the singer may lose the voice or lead to cracking voice easily. From lyrics of “清早起来(嘛上呃)走(哦)上梁(嘛)” the singer should experience the strength confrontation of muscle group between “breathe in” and “breathe out” in the method of breath support. The stronger the strength confrontation, the more beautiful and stable of the song. More importantly, the singer shouldn’t shout to reach a high pitch when start any phrase of a song but should gently start the singing from breath. A lot of the original singers will choose to sing loudly, which will affect the singing life of the original singer.

**The Usage of the “Open up” Skill from Bel Canto in Singing Song of Bashan Back-carriers**

**The “Open up” Skill in Bel Canto**

“Open” in this article represents open your throat. This is a very abstract concept, because people's throats cannot be felt in the human body and can’t be seen let alone opened. The whole “open” process can only be felt in the singer's mind. Once the throat is opened, the singing way is opened and the voice from it will be more beautiful. The extent of opening should be noted: if the opening is too large, there will be problems of strong breath but weak voice, the voice coming from deep back and sounding old etc. If the opening is too small, there will be problems of heavy voice but weak breath, voice squeezing, and tough voice etc. Our eco-singers often open up too small which make their voice sounds thin and squeezing. Then, how can we open up the throat properly? The writer will tell you some exercise to open up your throat following:

(1) “Yawn”: People often yawn when they are sleepy. The steps of yawn include raise your head, open your mouth wide, breathe in cool air then breathe out warm air. But our “Yawn” in this exercise is quite different that you don’t need open your mouth wide but keep your mouth small or even closed
then feel the yawn in this way and speaks in this situation, which means you have opened up your throat.

“close glottis”: Some people regard this process as finding a supporting point, this is just different understanding from different persons, but the process and method is same. Then how to find this supporting point or “close glottis”? People withhold cough caused by upper respiratory tract infection, this experience is just like“closing glottis” Singers make voice under this situation, imagining and feeling the voice is coming from heart, then this is the support point you find.

(2) Imitation: It’s not asking you to imitate all kinds of voices but only imitate the attractive voice and feel it.

(3) Extreme emotion: People cry bitterly when they are extremely sad and laugh back when they are extremely happy. This two extreme experience can help to open up throat.

(4) Look up: Looking up properly can relax your throat and it good for opening up throat by acting this frequently.

Pleas take note that all steps should be done and practised based on your own understanding and feelings.

How to Use This Technique to Sing Song of Bashan Back-carriers?

Let’s see this music score of 3-1 before we talking about this issue. “天上落雨地下稀” is a Bashan Bei Er song singing in Xuanhan district and there’s not so much high pitch as in the music of 2-1. In this song, most rhythm are alto voice. But I still have the slight feeling of squeezing when I hear an eco-singer singing this song at my first time and the voice in the whole song are too sharp and not round enough. One of the causes for this problem is that the singer didn’t open up the throat. The singer should open up his throat before singing the lyrics of “天上落雨(哪)地上稀(耶), 岩窝麻黑(嘛)去投宿(呦)。” And how to open up? Stand straightly and look up properly, seeing far and up. Start the voice on the breath, in the state of “Yawn with mouth closed” and “hold cough”. Once you have a good start, you can sing well in following with correct feeling. The feeling of holding and squeezing should be avoided in the whole song. The singers should experience by themselves on how to sing very word clearly and how to singing easily in setting state and how to display the special characteristic of Bashan Bei Er song. This is the key tip of how to open up throat and sing Song of Bashan Back-carriers. (note: This tip cannot be explained in detail considering different singer has different feelings and one tip can’t represent all. )The sharp voice and squeezing voice can be prevented if sing this song by this way.

How to Utilize “Cavity using” from Bel Canto when Sing Song of Bashan Back-carriers

Skills of “Cavity using” of Bel Canto.

From the sound process of the human body, it is concluded that the cavity body used in bel canto include bronchus and trachea, larynx, pharynx cavity, oral cavity, nasal cavity and sinus, etc. Bel canto makes use of resonance caused by the cavity tremors. The bronchi and trachea can provide a so-called “chest resonance” for the singer. So why not the chest cavity is included in cavity system by he writer? Because the thorax is not a cavity filled with air or nothing, it is filled with the heart, lungs and other soft meat organs, which not amplifying but weakening the voice. Therefore, it cannot be classified as a resonant cavity. As a resonator, the larynx is important because the vocal cords are there. The rising of voice is done on the premise of cavity resonance. There is no doubt that the pharyngeal cavity is a resonant cavity in bel canto. Although someone abandon to describe the pharyngeal cavity but only emphasize the head resonance in teaching, in fact, the head resonance is just a indirect process to reach pharyngeal cavity. As the most important resonator, the pharyngeal cavity is connected with thorax and oral cavity and nasal cavity. The cavity resonance can be controlled freely by study and practice. The main function of the oral cavity as a resonant cavity is to cooperate with the pharyngeal cavity and nasal cavity and make sound. The nasal cavity acts as a
relatively large resonant cavity whose main function is to connect the oral cavity and sinus to improve
tone. Many sinus play a role as resonant cavity such as Frontal sinus, sphenoid sinus, paranasal sinus,
the left and right sinus and so on to improve and enhance the voice, making it sounds like metal. The
frequency on using these intangible and invisible resonate cavities depends on individual’s pitch and
mind. The base region needs more “chest cavity resonance”, while the alto voice needs more oral and
pharyngeal cavity resonance, and the high pitch requires more head cavity resonance which include
the nasal and sinus cavities. But we can't sing with a single resonance. The using proportion of each
cavity resonance is just theoretical and not fixed. In the process of singing, we should pay attention to
the overall resonance and reverberation resonance. There are many ways to achieve resonance. For
example, relax and shake your chin while doing vocal exercises to get a better resonance. “Roll up
your tongue like a hook shape”, take note to relax your tongue in your mouth and roll it up like a hook
while doing vocal exercise; “imagine”, imagine yourself as a loudspeaker to make three-dimensional
sound once you open your mouth. But make sure to sing in relax and not roar.

**How to use this Skill to Sing Song of Bashan Back-carriers?**

Before we go into that, let’s see two music of 2-1 and 3-1. By comparison, we can easily find that
there are many high pitch in the song of 3-1“早起起来走上梁” and the rhythm is slow while in the
song of 3-2 “天上落雨地下稀”, the rhythm is faster than 3-1 but with much alto voice. Now let’s see
how to use resonance in singing these two songs. The first piece of “耶~~~那早上起来嘛上呃走哦
上梁嘛” in the song “早上起来走上梁”is in high pitch, in particular, “耶~~~那”as the beginning of
the sentence should be started steadily in a high B pitch. This requires the singer to use the resonant
cavity (nasal cavity, sinus) to sing with a sense of a flower blooming over head. The second half lyric
of “耶~~~那梁上嘛有个呃亲家母儿啊，大啊堰塘啊耶” are not so high as the first halt, but the
entire half sentence is wandering in the middle tone area, This require the singer to use resonance
cavity in middle segment (larynx, pharynx, nasal resonate cavity )more frequently, singing like
speaking naturally. The whole song of “天上落雨地下稀” stays in middle tongue, therefore, the
resonance in middle segment((larynx, pharynx, nasal resonate cavity) should be used frequently. T get
a better resonance, the singer is proposed to waggle the jaw or groove the tongue as mentioned in
previous section. However, it is necessary to achieve the overall resonance rather than the partial
resonance no matter in singing in base, middle or high tongue. Even though the Song of Bashan
Back-carriers culture requires partial resonance, our singers should try to achieve more partial
resonance. This point refers to the proportion of using different cavities but not meaning which
individual cavity should be used. Hope the readers can understand this and it is more important to
remind the reader that this part is only about the use of the cavity. It is not a comprehensive
description of the overall technical skills of singing. Please don’t take a part as a whole.

**How to use “Reverberation” Technique of Bel Canto in Singing Song of Bashan Back-carriers**

**The “Reverberation” Technique in Bel Canto**

Reverberation is a mixture of real Tone and falsetto, which is also known as Reverberation resonance.
This technique is one of the most important symbols of bel canto which can distinguish it from other
singing skills. So it is not included in the previous chapter of “cavity” but elaborated in a separate
section. People’s voice can be divided into real tone and falsetto objectively. The skill is to combine
the two voices closely together without a trace. We know that the real tone is the bass and alto voice
which are mostly overtone producing by the resonance of “whole vocal cords”. The sound is full,
bright and firm but the voice range is not wide. While falsetto is the relatively small sound that people
tend to make in high pitches, producing by resonance from the edge of vocal cords. The sound is not
as full as real tone and the tone is relatively dull. The technique of reverberating the real tone and
falsetto is to integrate the advantages of these two tones in proportion for different tones and make the
sound full, bright and flexible and sing with a wide voice range.
How can we practise this technique? Here the writer introduce the method for practising this skill:

(1) “Hum quietly”: This practice is to relax your throat as much as possible when you hum in life. The key point is breath when you do this exercise and make sure you hum on the basis of sigh, otherwise your hum will become rigid. Moreover, keep your tongue flat in a natural way and relax your chin and neck while the upper and lower teeth are slightly parted, you can feel the slight vibration of nose, teeth and lips. The sound of “hum” should also be concentrated on the top of the eye, preferably on the top of the eyebrows.

(2) Sing real tone in the falsetto position: We often hear the word high position when we are learning vocal music. And falsetto give good expression to the concept of high position. When we sing falsetto, our throat is relax, open and our breath is smooth, so the sound is soft, full and smooth and unified but the not strong enough. If the real tone can be made on the basis of falsetto, the sound will become strong, smooth and unified. You should start from high pitch in your first practice because it’s easy to find the falsetto position. Then, the real tone can be added step by step into the falsetto position, but pay attention to the depth and support of the breath, otherwise the sound will be false.

(3) Phonation practice of vowel: It is well known that vowels are the key to the “singing language”. Being able to sing a vowel sound is an important prerequisite for a good song. The vocal vowels commonly used in vocal music teaching are a, e, I, o, u. We can convert those vowels into ma, me, mi, mo, mu or na, ne, ni, no, nu when we do “hum” practice. The falsetto should be involved when you pronounce this vowels from base area and the voice position is better to exceed your eyes position. At the same time as the falsetto sound, the breath should be “deeper and more supported.” Try to make the singing round and full with a clear pronunciation as much as possible.

How to use This Skill in Singing Song of Bashan Back-carriers

Here we take music 2-3 and 2-1 as examples to explain how to use “Reverberation” in singing these two songs with different voice range. The rhythm of 2-3 is in bass and alto and can be achieved by real tone purely but the sound will be harsh and lack softness. The melody of “清早起来走上梁” in 2-1 are around in high pitch which can be done by falsetto only. But too much falsetto will affect the smoothness and firmness. Most of the original eco-singers I heard in the eastern part of the country had the same problems when they were singing the two song, which is also a big issue should be solved in the staging process of Song of Bashan Back-carriers. This problem will be solved by using skills of combining the real tone and falsetto. For example, the melody in the first phrase of “我弯弯背架像张弓, 这拐子抱在我怀中。” should be started in high position although it’s not a high pitch. The word “我” should be pronounced in high position with the feeling of pronouncing mo or no. Always start softly on the feeling of sigh and keep it and never start harshly. As long as you feel relax, smooth and free, you can keep this state and finish the whole singing. Anther example of 3-1 “清早起来走上梁”, the melody of “耶～～～那” is high and must be started in high position by falsetto. But when singing, you should also pay attention to the “deep hold” of the breath and properly open the throat, which is to magnify the falsetto, otherwise the sound will be less penetrating and strong. All the next words are floating in the high pitch, on this occasion, we should keep the feeling of “roar tone” and sing the song in this way. Here, I want to remind the reader that the above is just a general use of sound techniques. If you want to get a better sound effect, personal feelings should be integrated into the song with regards of the meanings of lyrics. As it is said that a definitely beautiful song should be sing with simplicity and attention.

To Control the Tone by use of Related Skills in Bel Canto

The Skills of Tone-control in Bel Canto

The control of tone in bel canto requests a good use of resonate cavity and singing breath, it is individual feeling generated from a deep understanding of the songs. The tone in bel canto can be soft,
full, bright, light, generous, warm, concentrate and brilliant and so on. To achieve specific, you should get a well-known of your physiological condition of voice, the basic condition for singing. Soft and bright tone belong to lyric small tenor, strong and brilliant tone belong to Dramatic large tenor. Light and soft tone belong to soprano, generous and warm tone belong to male and female bass. After know this, it will be much easier for us to develop our ability to control the tone of the voice. Generally speaking, when we practice a single sound, we should go from the weakest “dark” tone to the strongest “bright” tone gradually, then go from the strongest “bright” tone to the weakest “dark” tone gradually and take this as a cycle then gradually reach the level of control at will. This exercise must be supported by a strong breath, while ensuring the proper opening of the throat and the proper use of the cavity. (Note: The techniques of breath, throat opening and cavity use have been elaborated in the previous sections.) 

**How to use this Technique to Sing Song of Bashan Back-carriers**

We also illustrate this issue by example 2-1 and example 2-3. The melody in 2-1 “清早起来走上梁”has been floating in the high area, so the basic tone of the whole song is bright. But we can't ignore the important features of soft, rounded, strong and brilliant tones and only want” bright” tone. The important thing in controlling tone is the starting. Every start should be soft. For example, The first “roar”: The melody of 耶~~ belong to “roar” tone but we mustn’t sing it by roaring. It should be started softly in an instant. Then every melody should follow this. Which tone should arrive to and how to adjust the tone, all of these are depend on the understanding of the song by singers. Let’s move to music of 2-3, this melody is in the middle and low range but we should not sing it by “white throat” tone. Starting from high position as we mentioned in previous section is critical here. Clean, bright and soft tone can be reached by using this and it’s also the key to improve the performance of singers in singing Song of Bashan Back-carriers. As for the first paragraph of this song, “我弯弯背架像张弓，这把拐子抱在我怀中。” the start should be in high position and so do the following lyrics. Singers control tone according to his own understanding of the work and this can promote the artistic image of the singer. The clean and round tone enable audience to have a strong interest on the singing and finally fall in love with the performance of singer. Which means that, the tone-control is not achieved through techniques only but also need the emotion of singer according to his deep understanding of the work and the true feelings showed by the work. As it is said, “emotion makes voice and the two spark together” It is only when we do this that we can better send out the true meaning of our “Song of Bashan Back-carriers”, thus infecting the “ear” and “heart” of the world.

The text is coming to the end. And the central idea of the text is : In order to promote the theatrical process for Song of Bashan Back-carriers—the east Sichuan folk song, bel canto is used in singing it. This is saving the national intangible cultural heritage of Song of Bashan Back-carriers from dying out, also is protecting and inheriting it, not tending to compare the good and bad between them. The two types of song generating from two different cultures are belong to same art form with totally different performance means. Taking the advantages of bel canto is to decrease the estrangement between people and Song of Bashan Back-carriers and enable people to accept and love “her” from heart. So that it can be inherited and carried forward. It follows the pace of “reform and opening up” and practise the eight words policy of “making the past serve the present and taking advantages from foreign goods”.

**Appendix**

Spectral case 2—1
60. 清早起来走上梁

1 = ³⁄₄

背二哥

Music instance 2-2

背二哥

Music instance 2-3

背二哥

Music instance 3-1
References


