Harmonies and Emotion Expression in Piano Works – Based on Sigh in Piano Works by Joe Hisaishi

Zhengchang Zhou¹

Abstract

Piano is a type of western musical instrument. Since its creation, people have been deeply attracted by its melodious sound and elegant temperament. In order to express emotions better with the piano, a lot of musicians and music amateurs have made joint efforts to create many piano playing skills, wherein harmony is a typical representative. Enjoying high fame in the world, Japanese animation has become one representative culture of this country. Success of Japanese animation is attributed to many factors. Except for real emotional expression as well as abundant and varied styles, the exquisite background music has played a dominant role. Joe Hisaishi is a Japanese pianist and composer enjoying the high reputation. He cooperates with Miyazaki Hayao, a Japanese cartoon master, very tacitly. Close relations have been built between them based on the win-win goals. Application of sigh in Joe Hisaishi’s piano works can accurately express ideals and emotions of figures, forming a unique style in his music works. The paper researches harmony application and expression of ideas and emotions in piano works based on application of sigh in Joe Hisaishi’s works. In order to realize in-depth study, the paper also introduces the cartoonist Miyazaki Hayao who is closely related with Joe Hisaishi. Through combination of them, readers can understand the research more easily.

Keywords: Joe Hisaishi; harmony; sigh; emotional expression

1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to Joe Hisaishi, people will inevitably recall the Japanese cartoon master Miyazaki Hayao as their tacit cooperation has become a legend in the animation circle. Music created by Joe Hisaishi is most featured by the thorough emotional expression which effectively highlights the plot atmosphere and makes grand contribution to transforming Miyazaki Hayao’s cartoon into animation. It is fair to say that half the successful animation-oriented transformation of Miyazaki Hayao’s cartoon is attributed to music created by Joe Hisaishi. Joe Hisaishi mainly adopted piano music as the background music in cartoons because harmonies in piano music have very good effects of expression. For example, harmonies can assist in shaping a figure’s characters and motivating progress of plots. Thanks to the cooperation, Joe Hisaishi and Miyazaki Hayao created a lot of well-known representative works. The most famous works include Spirited Away, Kikujiro No Natsu and Laputa and Castle in the Sky, etc. Miyazaki Hayao’s animation Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea,

¹School of Music and Dance, Qujing Normal University, 655011
which was created in cooperation with Joe Hisaishi in recent years, also obtained huge success as expected [1].

2. Joe Hisaishi’s Overall Mastery of Works

Emotions can be expressed accurately through piano playing. However, piano is only a carrier and bridge for emotional expression. A player needs to involve real feelings. Realness is the foundation of emotions as only the sincere emotions are touching. Emotions of the player are not generated from nothing, but demand certain simulating factors such as specific events in life or inspirations flashing in contemplation. Joe Hisaishi is a background music master for animation and films, so his music shall satisfy another special requirement: music must conform to emotions expressed by the works. Only in this way, both the background music and the work can bring out the best in each other. Hence, before composition, Joe Hisaishi tried to obtain an overall mastery of the work in order to better express the emotions. Specifically, mainly the following two parts shall be taken into account: selection of harmony nature and consideration of harmony texture. We will make specific introduction and analysis as follows.

1. Natures of Harmony
1.1 Selection of Harmonies with Strong Functionality

Different harmony natures can express different music images. Harmonies with strong functionality can manifest the energetic and fortitudinous music images very perfectly; shaping of indistinct senses requires the harmonies with strong colorfulness. At first, we will talk about music representatives with strong functionality. HANA-BI is taken as the case. It is the background music for HANA-BI – a film produced by Kitano Takeshi. This song has an urgent melody, which is quite suitable with the artistic conception of HANA-BI. There are many functional harmonies, wherein the major harmony vocabulary is based on a major-minor system. The melody brings out the theme at the beginning and then mainly applies loopback reciprocating to highlight the theme. Seventh chord is adopted. Nevertheless, the essential nature of chord mainly concentrates on the functional triad. With outstanding creativity, Joe Hisaishi is a composer who can carry out extreme expression of harmonies. Hence, in the HANA-BI, Joe Hisaishi made use of features of highly functionally harmonies, namely “stable”, “solid” and “distractive”, so as to highlight the courageous and fortitudinous image of film hero. The background music and the film convey the same ideas and emotions.

2. Selection of Harmonies with Strong Colorfulness

Harmonies with strong colorfulness have a very distinctive characteristic – to create a mysterious and indistinct artistic conception. Here, we take the first melody in Piano Stories as the case. Conciseness and colorfulness are the basic features of the melody vocabulary. With regard to tonality selection, Joe Hisaishi made necessary indistinct processing on purpose, which is mainly manifested in the setting of harmonies, namely resetting of non-tierce. Due to such unique setting, tonality of the melody becomes more indistinct, while an indistinct and mysterious artistic conception is created. Fundamentally, natures of harmony can be divided into two types: mode tonic chord and subordinate functional chord. There are only two types of chords, but they still create the indistinct melody style thanks to the
complicated structure of chords. Harmony at the beginning of melody is set to have certain instability. Then, different tones are combined and substituted in different manners. These combinations have two functions: lowering the functionality of harmonies and enhancing colorfulness of harmonies. In other words, they weaken the power sense of melody and enhance the comfortable and mysterious style of melody. This is exactly the indistinct style to be manifested by the melody. Appreciating this melody, listeners would have the illusion of entering a fairyland. In this way, Joe Hisaishi realized the ultimate goals of colorful harmonies. A part of music score of the melody is displayed below:

![A Part of Music Score of First Melody in Piano Stores.](image)

Figure 1. A Part of Music Score of First Melody in Piano Stores.

3. Emotional Expression Course in Piano Music of Joe Hisaishi

The unique style of each successful musician is not accomplished in an action or gifted by god. Instead, formation of the style requires a development course. Joe Hisaishi started adopting harmonies in piano music very early. As time goes by, he could select and apply harmonies more skillfully and has gradually formed his unique style. In addition, he could express emotions more sincerely and combine music with films and animation works more perfectly [2]. In general, one melody is divided into beginning, process and ending, all of which are very important for the whole melody. Hence, Joe Hisaishi would carefully study each melody part. We will make detailed analysis as follows.

1. Beginning of Melody

From both the musical and literal perspectives, the beginning of a melody plays a very important role. At first, the keynote of whole melody is determined and the subject of melody can be confirmed. When the melody is used as background music, the composer must take into account these aspects. As a successful pianist and background music master, Joe Hisaishi always has unique considerations and selections for adoption of harmonies at the melody beginning. For example, in the melody Ballade created for the film Brother, harmonies were used at the beginning of melody. In this way, emotions to be expressed by the whole melody were determined, and the keynote for film progressing was also confirmed. Decomposition of triad was adopted in specific harmony setting, which greatly enhanced colorfulness of harmonies. In addition, decomposition of sextuplet was also selected to realize echoing with thirteenth chord, deepening the calmness and sadness in work atmosphere and assisting in development of film plots and shaping of film figures.

2. Process of Melody

The middle part is called as the process of a music work. Generally having a long length, it is the best place to solve emotional contradictions in music works. Equivalent to the
framework of a melody, it supports existence of the melody and is the best approach for a composer to enrich the melody and enhance its tension. Hence, harmonies shall be selected rigorously and cautiously for the melody course. Joe Hisaishi is good at processing such long course. He’s able to express the story contained in the melody and match it with the work very perfectly. We can take the melody *The Wind Forest* in the animation work *My Neighbor Totoro* by Miyazaki Hayao – the most tacit partner of him as the case, so as to make specific analysis. The melody mainly aims to express the nice natural scenery, and highlight the calm and happy countryside life of protagonist, namely the easy and comfortable living environment of Totoro. Hence, Joe Hisaishi selected down chords; adopted the accompanying type of broken chord through cooperation of left and right hands; and applied the difficult octave performance so as to fully manifest the beauty of nature.

3. Ending of Melody

Ending of a melody generally plays a part in summarization and sublimation. Hence, a wonderful ending can leave a deep impression on people. Joe Hisaishi has made unique arrangements of harmonies at the melody endings so as to sublimate music emotions and perfect personalities of figures in the works. For example, in the piano music *Labyrinth of Eden*, a typical style of Joe Hisaishi is manifested. The whole melody style is very calm and comfortable. E-flat major was adopted for most harmonies, but C major was adopted for the harmony in the end. Instead of bringing a very abrupt feeling, such setting forms complete echoing with the beginning, so that the whole melody could express emotions more completely.

4. Conclusion

Honored as a top-grade composer in Japan, Joe Hisaishi also enjoys high reputation all over the world. The tacit cooperation between him and Miyazaki Hayao is also worthy of juniors’ learning. His works are most featured by the application of harmonies in emotional expression, which is highly valuable in later researches and reference.

References
