Application of Timbres of National Musical Instruments in the Performance of Chinese Piano Works

Zhengchang Zhou¹

Abstract

Piano and national musical instruments symbolize the understanding and interpretation of different cultures, races and regions for music. However, music is the art of sound. Both piano and national music instruments reflect sound art. Similarly, both of them blend with and affect each other. For instance, some excellent piano works in China inherit national culture and fuse western music techniques. Timbres of national musical instruments present the music characteristics of combining Chinese elements with western elements and integrating with each other in piano performance.

Keywords: National Musical Instruments; Piano Performance; Sound Art

I Introduction

Different musical instruments show different timbres. Timbres of national musical instruments are a reflection of art artistic charm in China. Each timbre is a kind of special musical notations. National musical instruments are the symbol of Chinese music art while piano is the representative of western music culture. The integration of national musical instruments and piano presents a scene of blending Chinese and western music art to the audience.

II Imitation of Timbres of National Musical Instruments in Piano Works

One function of timbres is to shape musical image and reflect the sound artistic effect of music. Therefore, timbres play an important role in the performance of piano works. Timbres of national musical instruments are the mock object of timbres in China’s piano performance. As a result, the key to playing a piano work well lies in grasping the application of timbres. Timbres have a great influence on the performance of a piano work and make higher demands on the aesthetic value of Chinese piano music. Among various kinds of piano colleges at present, imitating the timbres of national musical instruments and referring to the manifestation mode of traditional music to adapt piano music endow newly adapted piano music with strong national features and a sense of modernization. In some modern piano works, players should associate a picture in which arms keep a good balance between tension and relaxation and move up and down in the process of playing the Guqin when the timbre of Guqin, a national musical instrument, is imitated in playing the piano. In the meanwhile, players should touch keys and move lightly and use the power of fingertips to show ethereal music effect easily and naturally.

¹School of Music and Dance, Qujing Normal University, 655011
The imitation of timbres of national musical instruments in modern Chinese piano music works is mainly embodied in the imitation of performance skills and sound of musical instruments. Main mock objects of musical instruments are Chinese lute, Guzheng, Guqin, dulcimer, Erhu, Chinese vertical bamboo flute and so on. Take the imitation of different timbres of playing the Chinese lute as an example. In the aspect of performance skills, there are a variety of methods. Each performance skill presents different timbre effects to the audience. In order to present crisp and lively music, piano players have to put the concentrated power of wrists and arms on the final tone. In order to show trill, piano players have to raise arms and wrists, relax body and mind and focus their attention on the position of fingertips.

As a kind of musical instruments with a wide range in national musical instruments, Guqin is not as clean and crisp as Chinese lute in the aspect of timbre, but has rich expressive forces. Therefore, piano players have to increase the contact area of fingertips and keys and press keys slowly and powerfully if they want to imitate the diffused sound of Guqin. When imitating the overtone of Guqin, piano players should master some performance skills, namely softly touching keys, raising wrists, avoiding the contact between palms and keys and pressing keys lightly and slowly so as to present ethereal and empty sound effect.

Let’s talk about Erhu after introducing Guqin. Erhu is the most common musical instrument with the richest national characteristics and Chinese temperament among string instruments. With warm, beautiful and soft timber, Erhu is suitable for playing exceedingly sentimental and lyrical music art works. When imitating the timbre of Erhu, piano players need some techniques to show the full and mellow timbre of Erhu. For example, the famous Erhu music The Moon over a Fountain is adapted into a piece of piano music. It simulates the glissando of Erhu through professional performance skills and uses methods including the strength of pressing strings and the direction of glide to achieve the goal of different changes in timbre in the process of piano performance.

### III Important Means of Changing Timbres in the Performance of Chinese Piano Works

Chinese piano works have always been pursuing the change of timbres. One important reason for importance attached by Chinese piano music to the change of timbres is people’s inherent aesthetic orientation of music in the development process of Chinese music. Traditional music aesthetic taste determines that Chinese piano music goes with the tide. The performance of piano music has to not only turn to the performance techniques of national musical instruments, but also transform and change timbres based on timbres of national musical instruments. In particular, modern Chinese piano music works apply a lot of artistic conceptions and performance techniques similar to the music art of Guqin, a national musical instrument, in the process of creation and create the artistic conception beauty of piano with Chinese characteristics totally different from western piano music art.

All friends who have learned the piano know that the sound made by piano mainly turns to the sound effect caused by the speed and change of touching keys. Different methods of touching keys present different timbre effects. Thus, it can be seen that the method of touching keys plays an important role in changing the timbre of piano performance. In a similar way, music creators need to not only possess the solid knowledge of music theory, but also have...
rich experience in music creation and a deep understanding of piano music art in order to create piano music works with new meanings. If music creators can match timbres of Chinese musical instruments with western classical instruments, it will not be so hard to imitate the ornament of performance characteristics of national musical instruments, get rid of the stale and bring forth the fresh, and create unique oriental piano music works.

IV Application of Timbres of National Musical Instruments in the Performance of Chinese Piano Works

National musical instruments and western piano music present totally different music styles and artistic charm to the audience. Both of them reach the same goal by different means. However, two independent music media including national musical instruments and western musical instruments are not perfect. The combination of the two will totally be another expression form of music. There should be detailed examples to explain the application of national musical instruments in China’s piano performance. The following examples typically embody the application of timbres of national musical instruments in Chinese piano music.

1. Flute and Drum at Sunset Created by Li Yinghai

*Flute and Drum at Sunset* is a piece of piano music adapted by Li Yinghai according to the archaic music of Chinese lute and also a representative work of imitating timbres of national musical instruments in China’s piano performance. The creator simulated some timbres and performance characteristics of Chinese musical instruments with the method of piano performance, which not only endows piano performance with more Chinese charm, but also makes people associate a picture in which the sun sets and the afterglow of sunset shines upon river water in spring under the infection of sound effect. This method of piano performance imitating timbres of national musical instruments reflects not only a music artistic style with Chinese characteristics, but also Chinese people’s aesthetic taste of music art. In the part of introduction, *Flute and Drum at Sunset* masters the rhythm of being quick after slow imitates the drumbeat from slow to quick, shows drumbeat and the sound of Chinese vertical bamboo flute, Chinese lute and Guzheng and achieves the effect of free transformation in timbres of different musical instruments through simulating the timbre of Chinese lute, Guzheng, Chinese vertical bamboo flute and other musical instruments and applying some performance skills like adopting the method of lightly touching keys.

2. Liuyang River Created by Wang Jianzhong

*Liuyang River* is famous folk song. Wang Jianzhong created the piano transcription *Liuyang River* based on the original melody of the folk song. The whole piece of music is equipped with rich singing characteristics of local folk songs in the aspect of both tone and rhythm. In the aspect of performance skills, this piece of music also adopts the method of simulating musical instruments to realize the innovation of piano performance music. In addition, this piece of music adds some personalized musical elements, integrates folk song, national musical instruments and western musical instruments and presents a spectacular auditory “feast” to the audience.
3. *Hundreds Birds Worshipping the Phoenix* Created by Wang Jianzhong

*Hundreds Birds Worshipping the Phoenix* is a piece of famous folk suona music, with cheerful and lively music rhythm. Mr. Wang Jianzhong adapted the original suona solo into a piano solo. Suona is one of national musical instruments, with loud, clear and melodious timbre. Without such timbre, piano can also simulate the timbre of suona through using some performance skills. For instance, this piece of piano music applies a lot of ornaments to transform the original performance timbre of piano and adopts new timbre techniques based on traditional skills of piano performance to complete the simulation of timbre, which not only reproduces the sound of cuckoos’ calling, but also uses the performance method of combining high pitch with low pitch and forms the sound effect of interaction between two birds.

4. *The Second Xinjiang Music* Created by Ding Shande

*The Second Xinjiang Music* is a piece of piano music with national features. The player realizes the effect of imitating the timbre of tambourine and tomtom in Xinjiang Uygur through some professional performance skills, reflects the enthusiastic national character of Uyghur people in the whole piece of music, uses the rhythm of percussion music in Uyghur and non-melody simulation, highlights sound effect and enables the audience to experience the unique charm of piano music art more deeply in the process of listening.

V Conclusion

For most of piano players, it is not easy to make the best of timbre simulation of national musical instruments and present the music effect different from original music. Firstly, players should make sure about the timbre features and performance skills of national musical instruments. Secondly, players should form a profound understanding of meaning of music. Only by realizing the above two points, can players present music works with vitality and improve the charm and appeal of Chinese piano language art.

References


