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Performing the Ordos Short-Tune Folk Song 'Bridal Procession Song' with Chinese Folk Singing Techniques: Practice and Exploration through Baritone Performance

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Abstract

In the new era of cultural exchange, how can Mongolian folk songs stay relevant to contemporary times, maintain the essence of their origins, innovate in form, and be expressed through scientifically informed singing techniques? Previous research has already offered some theoretical support for these methods. 'Bridal Procession Song' from Ordos is selected as a representative Mongolian folk song in this paper. Based on theories of Chinese folk vocal music and musicology, scientifically grounded methods of Chinese folk singing can be used to create a new artistic form for this Ordos short-tune folk song while retaining its original style. This is also the research objective of this paper.

Keywords

Short-tune folk songs; Chinese folk vocal music; Baritone.

1. Introduction

Mongolian folk songs are an important part of grassland culture. They contain the unique historical and cultural memories of the nomadic people. The four main kinds of music are: long-tune songs, short-tune songs, choor and uliger storytelling and singing. There are many types of court ceremonial music, wedding music, songs of praise, songs about nature, and narrative singing. Over a long period of time, this culture has formed slowly. As a typical Ordos short-tune folk song, 'Bridal Procession Song' has carried the culture of traditional Mongolian wedding ceremonies. It shows the parents' sadness about leaving their child and their good wishes for the bride. It has a flowing tune and tender, heartfelt emotions, and is also rich in local colour and art. Based on the musical characteristics and cultural connotations of Mongolian music, this paper studies how scientifically grounded singing methods can be integrated with the style of traditional folk songs through breath control, diction and vocal register. It hopes to provide a practical reference for the inheritance of Mongolian short-tune folk songs and new interpretations today.

2. The Development of Ordos Short-Tune Folk Songs

Ordos short-tune folk songs gradually developed from the traditional Ordos long-tune songs through exchanges between farming and nomadic cultures. As society developed, the nomadic people gradually settled down. Farmers and herders continued to move to this area from Shanxi and Shaanxi. Mongol and Han peoples have been in contact for a long time and live together. Through these exchanges, music in Ordos gradually formed a type of culture under the influence of local social, political, economic and cultural conditions. Traditionally, long-tune folk songs were used to express the life of nomads and had free, broad rhythms. With the settlement of the people and changes in their life, these songs gradually developed into short-tune songs with regular structures, clear rhythms, and a short length. Thus, a unique style of music emerged that combined nomadic origins with elements of farming culture.

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Short-tune folk songs are fundamental to the culture of Ordos 'Nair'. Together, they have formed a special type of performance with music and dance. Nair is usually accompanied by the four main instruments in tradition: sihu, sanxian, bamboo flute and yangqin. The small ensemble usually plays in unison and accompanies joyful dances and group songs. Musicians and singers occasionally add variations and ornaments spontaneously. Thus, each Nair has been given a vivid sense of daily life and is highly relatable. Repeated performances of short-tune folk songs continue to absorb folk wisdom and creative ideas. Due to their unique artistic characteristics, they have gradually developed a clear style and are now recognisable musical symbols of the Ordos region.

Ordos folk songs have a large number of themes and are rich in content and strong in character. The main types are banquet songs, love songs, religious songs, wedding songs, narrative songs and songs about current events. In terms of the link between folk songs and social customs, many local activities are associated with Nair. These are Naadam, worship activities, weddings, funerals, festivals, celebrations, drinking and entertainment. Many songs about folk customs have emerged from these various activities.

3. The Melodic and Stylistic Features of 'Bridal Procession Song'

Ordos wedding traditions began in the Mongol-Yuan period and have continued to the present day. A typical wedding generally has a series of set rituals and activities, such as confirming the engagement with a khata, fetching the bride while carrying a bow, blocking the doorway to welcome the groom, inquiring about the birth date and name, parting the bride's hair before departure, purification by sacred fire, and having the bride serve tea. Music is used during and after the ceremony to engage the guests. Singers and musicians create the mood through music. Music is therefore important in the wedding activities.

Mongolian folk songs have a strong and unique regional character. They gradually emerged based on the foundation of traditional pentatonic modes. Over a long time, they developed their own style of grassland music. Their melodies are too different from those of other ethnic groups to be confused. This also shows that folk songs are closely linked to the life and work of the people on the grasslands.

3.1. Melodic Features

Ordos short-tune folk songs have a rich character, light rhythms, strong emotions and short structures. They are easy to learn and sing, and therefore very popular with the public. A characteristic feature of the tunes is the use of large leaps. Intervals of a sixth or higher are common. Syncopation and dotted rhythms, along with small melodic ornaments, create the rhythmic features of these songs.

According to the lyrics: 'Mount the fine, dark-red horse, set off for Zantan Temple; how beautiful the golden world is, may all beings be happy, safe and well; the lake is frozen, and its icy surface is smooth, a silver-spotted white horse gallops, jewels sparkle with a radiant glow, and my daughter is beautiful and bright.' They describe the bride's clothes and ornaments before the wedding, her feelings about leaving home, and her wish to visit the lamas at the temple for happiness, peace and security.

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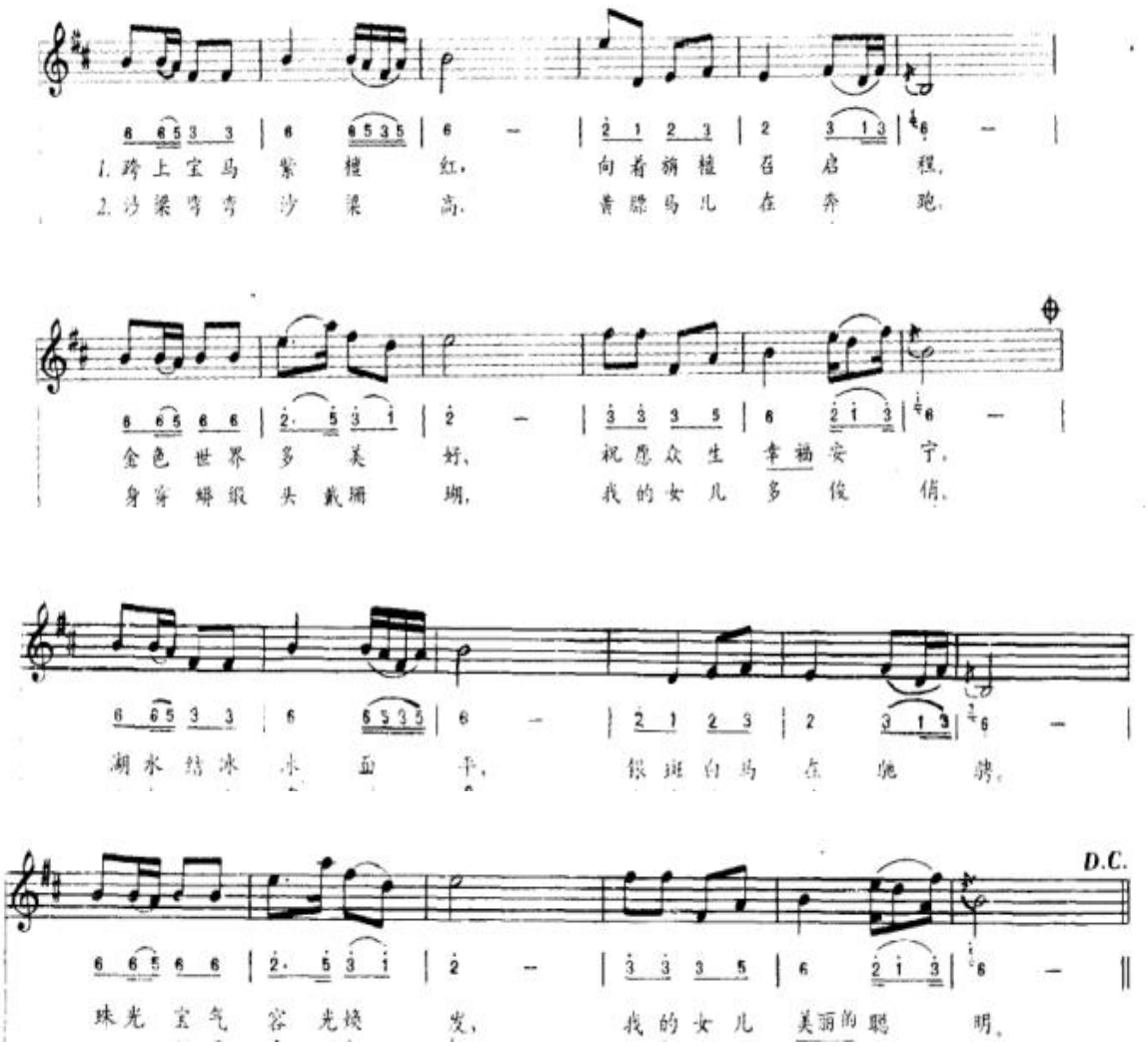


Figure 1. Bridal Procession Song

The four stages of this single-part piece of the 'Bridal Procession Song' are: Introduction, Development, Contrast and Conclusion. It uses a traditional pentatonic mode with the scale D-F♯-G-B-C♯-D. This is a D-yu pentatonic mode of the B-gong system. Sadness and helplessness in the melody can be expressed by using the tonal colours of the yu mode. The melodic line has a hump-like shape. The highest note of each phrase or small phrase unit is in the middle. First, a low note is played; next, a high note is played; finally, it is gradually lowered. Smooth, stepwise movement includes small jumps in the opposite direction, and occasionally a large jump. Leaps of a sixth and a seventh are particularly prominent. They create a sense of melodic tension and disrupt the smoothness of the music in Ordos folk songs. Several verses use the same melody. The melodic framework does not change with each repetition; only grace notes, dynamics and breath-based vocal ornaments are different. Thus, the emotion is enhanced and the listener is more drawn to the music. It is also a feature of orally transmitted folk songs that every repetition is slightly different.

3.2. Stylistic Features

As one of the representative local wedding folk songs, 'Bridal Procession Song' has a simple but touching tune of sorrow and happiness. Its simple grassland character is based on the wedding tradition of Ordos. Rich or poor, the families need three days and three nights for all the ceremonies. These ceremonies have an important ceremonial function. As a necessary part of

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the wedding ceremony, the 'Bridal Procession Song' is sung to express parting and good wishes among relatives.

'Bridal Procession Song' is a necessary component of the bridal send-off at the wedding ceremony. What is special about this wedding song is that it is used for the send-off at the bride's family home. It will be in time with the wedding procession. The changes in the melody of separation show different emotions and reflect the order of the wedding ceremony. The song is more than ceremonial music. There are several emotions in this work: the sadness of the bride leaving her family, her longing for home, and anxiety and sadness about life after marriage.

Folk performers use a deep tone and are reserved in their expressions of emotion. They do not show strong emotions at the time. Therefore, the sadness of parting is shown in a long, flowing melody. It is suitable for the reserved and simple character of the local people, and a style of ritual and lyric expression can be created. It has retained the ceremonial nature of traditional customs and preserved a touch of deep emotion from the grassland people. Oral teaching also introduces the characteristics of regional culture to the song. All the tunes in the song are expressions of the nomadic people's love for home and family. Thus, there is a style with rich folk culture and deep emotions. It is a typical case of how folk customs and lyrical expressions are combined in Ordos short-tune folk songs.

4. Applying Chinese Folk Singing Techniques to 'Bridal Procession Song'

Chinese folk vocal music has a long and rich cultural history. It is a system of melody and expression for the ethnic group. Singers need to learn scientifically based singing techniques and improve their diction. The features of Chinese folk singing are: clear lyrics, a smooth tone, emotional expression, distinctive style, a bright tone, and adherence to traditional styles. Based on science, breathing and resonance can be combined to present the unique ethnic emotions and artistic qualities of the work in depth. Professor Jin Tielin once said, 'Ethnic character means that vocal art should carry on the essence of music and reflect the style and spirit of ethnic music' [1]. Singers who use only their own voices or traditional folk methods in their performance of 'Bridal Procession Song' may have limitations in range, breath control and resonance. Therefore, to carry forward the tradition of Chinese folk singing and develop new interpretations, it is necessary to integrate scientific methods with traditional performance experience.

Taking the performance practice of a baritone as an example, this paper will introduce three aspects of the application of scientifically based singing methods: breath control, diction and consistency in vocal registers. Singers need good singing skills, and planning the emotions in a song is also necessary. The two general types of expression of emotion are inner expression and scene description. Changes in the volume, colour, rhythm and tempo of music can express various emotions and create different scenes. Singers should also have good diction and control their voice to change the pitch and volume of different sections of the song [2].

4.1. Breath Control

The foundation of singing is breath control. Combined chest and abdominal breathing is used in Chinese folk singing to provide stable breath support for Ordos short-tune folk songs, and the melody of 'Bridal Procession Song' is long and flowing with frequent leaps of a sixth and seventh. Therefore, good breath support and regulation must be employed. For the long, drawn-out opening phrases of the song, provide support for the singing with chest and abdominal breathing and release the breath steadily and evenly. Therefore, the long melody can be maintained, and the sadness of parting is expressed. In areas of a large leap in the music, the waist-and-abdomen muscles need to work together flexibly. Provide immediate breath

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support and regulate the extent of the effort. Thus, the large intervals can be sung to create a sense of tension without being jarring, and various emotions in the music can be expressed.

4.2. Diction and Articulation

The goal of 'clear words and a smooth tone' in Chinese folk singing is also to meet the performance requirements of Ordos short-tune folk songs. The lyrics of 'Bridal Procession Song' express heartfelt emotions and cultural connotations of wedding ceremonies. Unclear diction will reduce the effectiveness of narrative and emotion. Based on the pronunciation features of the Chinese and Mongolian lyrics, the singer should pay attention to where to place emphasis on initial consonants and which parts of the vowels to prolong. Words with the main emotions of the song should be slightly stronger. At the same time, the melody should be smooth; otherwise, too much attention to diction will disrupt the flow of the music. Thus, the listeners will be able to feel the emotions and cultural meanings in the lyrics better. It also fully retains the original melodic expression and local character of Ordos short-tune folk songs, and combines the meaning of the words with the beauty of the melody.

4.3. Consistency of Tone Quality

Baritone singers need to connect their vocal registers smoothly and, for example, in the 'Bridal Procession Song', they should be able to sing softly and expressively in the middle and lower parts, as well as powerfully in the high notes. The modification of tone colour and strength should be gradual and consistent. Adjust the singer's resonance. Oral and chest resonance are the foundation; a small amount of head resonance is added in the high register. Thus, the rich middle- and low notes can be connected smoothly with the bright high notes. Therefore, by blending the registers of the voice, a baritone sound can be maintained. It can also show the rising and falling of the melody of the song in various ways to express emotions differently.

Before singing, the performer should also plan the general shape of the vocal line and prepare for changes in volume, tone colour, etc. It is especially necessary for a song in a single-part form. It is not always loud or quiet. Singers should be aware of the expression indicators in the music and add their own emotions to the performance as they develop. Only then can they sing the song well.

With the inheritance and development of Chinese folk vocal music, Ordos short-tune folk songs have already moved away from their original folk contexts; for instance, 'Bridal Procession Song' is no longer solely a function of a wedding ceremony. It is now an independent vocal work with cultural value and artistic merit. Now, many places outside of their original cultural contexts host professional concerts, vocal competitions and intangible cultural heritage exhibitions for traditional folk songs. Now there are professionally trained Chinese folk singers, as well as professional folk singers and traditional artists. Scientifically based vocal techniques and rich musical expressions have given Ordos short-tune folk songs new artistic qualities and broken free from the constraints of oral folk performance. The transfer of folk settings to the stage, from oral transmission to scientifically based performance, and from local audiences to a broader audience has not lost the original charm of these songs. It can be used to preserve the cultural essence of traditional folk songs and present them in a new artistic form that is popular today.

5. Conclusion

According to the traditional theory of Chinese vocal music, 'the tune serves the words; the words direct the tune; words lead the voice; and the voice carries emotion'. Good diction is also required for singers. Vocal music uses the voice to express emotions. If the listeners cannot understand the words, singing loses its meaning. In 'Bridal Procession Song', the sadness of parting and the hope for a new life in the lyrics require strong breath support and appropriate

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diction and consistent tone. They can turn the meaning of the words into musical pictures for listeners to experience. Therefore, the clear words and a smooth tone of voice can be used together to express one's emotions.

Although the scientific system of Chinese folk singing is now used to transmit 'Bridal Procession Song', the traditional mode of singing has not been replaced. It can help spread the culture of the people and reach more people through this well-known folk song. Breath support is needed for the extended, sustained sections; precise articulation is required to present the charm of Mongolian words; and a stable tone throughout can be adapted according to the emotions of different registers. At the same time, the original folk character of the song should be preserved.

At folk banquets and on professional stages, the transmission of 'Bridal Procession Song' has been focused on themes of parting and well-wishes. Whether it is taught orally by folk artists or performed by students of Chinese folk vocal music, the end goal is for listeners to experience the ethnic memories and emotional tension in Ordos short-tune folk songs through clear articulation, full breath support and sincere tone colour. The foundation of singing techniques should be used to preserve the original cultural spirit of traditional folk songs in contemporary vocal music.

In the cultural context of the new era, scientifically based methods for Chinese folk singing can be employed to enhance and innovate traditional folk songs. This has also brought new life to the inheritance of Ordos short-tune folk songs today. By combining scientific methods with traditional expression to preserve the original regional features and emotions of this classic song, we can also make it more appealing to listeners. Maintain the tradition and add some new developments. It helps listeners feel the profound cultural inheritance of the grasslands and provides a practical path for the transmission of Mongolian short-tune folk songs and new interpretations. Thus, the traditional folk songs have received new artistic life in the new era.

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