

Interpretation of “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris” by Shang Deyi

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Abstract: The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris” is adapted by Mr. Shang Deyi from the world classic “Notre Dame de Paris”, and the song contains profound philosophies, rich ideological connotations, and an infectious power that reaches the hearts of people. In this paper, we take Shang Deyi’s song “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris” as the object of study, starting from the composer Shang Deyi’s life and the background of the song, then analyzing the music through the song’s composition structure, lyrical features, melodic characteristics, and combining our own singing experience to analyze the song in detail from three aspects: breathing and bite, strength and speed, emotional expression and stage presentation.

Keywords: The bell-ringer of Notre Dame; Vocal interpretation; Musical analysis

The song “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris” was adapted by Mr. Shang Deyi from the world classic “Notre Dame de Paris”. It took Mr. Shang Deyi two years of revision and embellishment to complete this enduring classic. By using clever musical language, he vividly and imaginatively recreates the tragic fate of Quasimodo in Notre Dame de Paris, and portrays the spiritual life world of the main character Quasimodo in a sorrowful and furious tone (Jerome. HANES, J, 1996). The music of the song is filled with dramatic effects, touching and heartfelt. Under the guidance of the tutor, the author repeatedly sings and polishes the work, and has a deeper experience and perception, on top of which the singing skills of this song are analyzed and explored.

1. Shang Deyi and “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame

1.1 Shang Deyi’s life

Mr. Shang Deyi was born in the 1930s in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, and is a famous composer, musician and educator in China. In the course of Mr. Shang Deyi’s music composition career of nearly half a century, he has composed many excellent music works, such as art songs, flower songs and choral songs, in a wide range of genres (Victor Hugo, 2010). His representative works include “The Joy of Torch Festival”, “The Spring of Science Has Come”, “Teacher, I Always Think of You”, etc. His works have been loved by the people and professional singers because of their distinctive national cultural style and strong atmosphere of life in the times. Some works have been selected for concerts and major events.

1.2 Overview of “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame

The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris is an adaptation by Mr. Shang Deyi of the world classic Notre Dame de Paris (Shang Deyi., 2000). Notre Dame de Paris, a literary work, was written by the great French poet and dramatist Victor Hugo in the 1830s, his first major romantic novel and first full-length novel. Notre Dame de Paris artistically recreates the history of the reign of King Louis XI of France four hundred years ago, when two dark forces, the Church and the Court, united to oppress the masses of the people, and the scenes in which the people fought heroically. This novel reveals to the audience the hypocritical religion, the good and evil of human nature as well as the vivid and colorful romanticism, and celebrates the good sentiments of those ordinary and small people.

2. Musical analysis of The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris

2.1 Structure of the piece

The whole work is a single triplet with prelude and coda, with 60 bars. The structure of the piece is as follows:

Table 1 Structure of “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris

markl:	prelude	A	interlude	B	C	:lcoda
theme materials	a+b+c		d+d1	e+e1		
sections	2	8	4+4+4	2	4+4	4+4 20
interval	1-2	3-10	11-22	23-24	25-32	33-40 41-60

The whole piece is in the key of F minor, with a moderate tempo ($q=68$) and a rhythm of 4/4 beats. The song is accompanied by a variety of weaves, with main chord decomposition arpeggios and syncopated accompaniment (Li Xiuming, 2010). The harmonies are rich and varied, with the use of triads, sub triads and seventh chords. The piano accompaniment uses a lot of column chords to imitate the sound of bells, which is infectious. The melody itself is rather simple and western in color.

The introduction (bars 1-2) uses bass column chords, with the dominant note rising a semitone, which has a sense of dissonance, and begins with the imitation of two bells, which echoes the song and brings people into the music, rendering the atmosphere of the song.

The prelude (bars 3-10) starts from the genitive and picks up the upward fourth to the main chord, using alternating decomposed chords and arpeggios. The mood is gradually pushed out, and the angry, strong musical theme shows the narrator's grief and anger.

The A section (bars 11-22) is composed of three phrases a b c, all three of which begin with a weak starting bar and have smooth melodic changes, mainly in progressions. The tonicity is f natural minor, with a temporary change to f harmonic minor in bar 13, and the accompaniment is a decomposed arpeggio.

The B section (bars 25-32) consists of two phrases, d and d1, with the same melody at the beginning and a different melody at the end, called the same head and different tail structure. Both phrases begin with an octave jump and the accompaniment is in continuous transposition upwards.

The C section (bars 33-40) is a variation of the A section, with a reduced intensity and a syncopated rhythm, accompanied by broken chords.

The coda (bars 41-60) is partly composed of the liner notes and partly developed from the C section, reflecting a balanced and symmetrical beauty, and ends with a major triad chord, which is colorful (Zou Shuzhen, 2007).

2.2 Lyrical features

The lyrics of this piece are simple, clear, and catchy. The lyrics are straightforward: “Although he is ugly on the outside, he has a beautiful and kind heart” is a line that uses contrast to portray the character of Quasimodo concisely. The lyricist captures the relationship between “beauty and ugliness”. “Although he is always silent, he sees the world clearly and genuinely. He is noble and pure, but he has never escaped his miserable fate.” These two lines are not exactly the same as poetry, but they contain the rhythm of a prose poem. The song culminates with seven “ah” words, which are profoundly meaningful. This is the most touching, tear-jerking, deepest and most soul-stirring part of the song. The lyric “ah” itself has no meaning, but plays a complementary role to the previous emotions. The lyricist distills the essence of the literary classic “Notre Dame de Paris” and uses simple and plain language to vividly portray the bell-ringer with romantic colors.

2.3 Melodic features

The melody as a whole is smooth and neat, with a dramatic character. The song is basically composed of harmonic minor, and the syncopated accompaniment is used in bars 3-5. The right hand accompaniment has a high octave melody, and the left hand accompaniment is constantly transposed upward, creating the atmosphere of the roaring bells. At the end of bar 5, the melody takes a sudden downward turn, as if the narrator is telling a sad story with a silent convulsion, pitying the tragic fate of the bell-ringer. The melody comes out with a deep sadness and immediately brings people into the story, which shows how powerful this piece is. After a four-beat arpeggio in bar 6, the melody tapers off in bar 7 and continues with a syncopated rhythmic pattern in bars 7-9, with a sense of flow (Li Xuefeng, 2007). The accompaniment in bar 10 is in four sixteenths, similar to the Bach mean-measure prelude accompaniment pattern, instantly transporting the listener's mind to the 15th century religious period. The story of the bell ringers is told in a relaxed and smooth melody. The piano accompaniment uses diminished seventh chords to imitate the mellow sound of the bells, using leaning notes and constant transposition upwards to set the musical mood and enhance the magnificent acoustics, bringing the whole song to a climax.

3. Analysis of the singing of “The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris

3.1 Breath and bite of singing

Breath is the core, and a sense of line is only possible when the breath is coherent. Even if there are rests in the phrase, the musical line is long and coherent, so don't let the presence of rests interfere with the singing habit. In bars 24-32, there is an octave jump upwards, and it is important to pay attention to the unity of the voice during the singing process and to keep the voice in a high position(Zhou Chang,2003). The words "how the bells sound" are held in the high f, and the muscles become tense if the breath is not sufficient.

From bar 33 onwards, the melody becomes relatively light and lively, so it is important to be relatively expansive and lyrical when singing these lines.

The breathing is especially critical in this part of the song "Ah" in the 41st bar. The presence of the Legato between the first "ah" and the second "ah" indicates that the tones should be coherent and smooth. When singing the high notes, you must open your mouth and throat to create a dreamy, ethereal feeling. The trill in bar 44 should be sung lightly and quickly, and a weeping accent can be added to convey a poignant atmosphere.

3.2 The strength and speed of singing

When the accompaniment sounds, the singer should accurately grasp in his mind the strength, speed and rhythm of the three elements, ready to sing. At the end of bar 10, the theme starts weakly and the intensity mp is medium to weak. When singing these two lines, the singer should position himself as a narrator and speak softly in a calm tone. In the 15th bar, "Although his appearance is ugly, he has a beautiful and kind heart." These two lines are a strong turn, the second half of the song should be stronger than the first half of the sentence, the contrast between the strong and the weak can highlight people's pity and sympathy for him.

The tempo of the whole piece is Moderato alto, with medium speed. After the two chords in the introduction imitate the sound of bells, the tempo gradually increases with the emotion, suggesting the sorrow and anger of the whole piece, and then slows down in the last two bars of the introduction to prepare for the narration of the A section.

The melody of the four lines of the B section "how thick and loud the bells are, how deep and furious the bells are, the bells shake the sky and earth, the bells touch the soul" is similar, but the speed should be slightly different, especially "The tempo of the C section starts at bar 33, "The bell transmits his sincere love and tells his buried hatred", using syncopation to strengthen the rhythm. The singer is able to repair his strength during the long phrase and cope with the next part of the song.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame de Paris contains a profound philosophy, a rich ideological connotation, as well as an infectious power that reaches the hearts of people. As the saying goes, art knows no borders, and the composer has cleverly used the perspective of Chinese oriental artists to interpret this Western classic, which is a historical precedent in Chinese art songs. The composer's unique compositional approach makes the melody, piano accompaniment, and lyrics blend into one, making it a classic of songwriting that has profoundly influenced the creation of Chinese art songs. I have come to the following conclusions about the interpretative study of "The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame": First, the melody of this work is undulating, the lyrics are meaningful and long, the structure is standardized and neat, and the song is full of sincere emotion, moving voice and excellent singing skills, which is worthy of being a classic work in American singing.

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