

On the Unique Artistic Style of Brahms's Musical Works: "Piano Rhapsody op79no2" as an Example

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Abstract: Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was one of the greatest composers in the Romantic period, a defender of classical values in the Romantic period, and one of the four masters of German Austrian late Romantic music. During the period when the music in the form of romanticism emerged one after another, Brahms' music had a unique and rigorous style. His music works were rich in philosophy, ingenious and rigorous in design, and at the same time, there was no lack of romantic emotion. It skillfully combined classical techniques with romantic music connotation, forming its own unique artistic style. His work "Piano Rhapsody op79no2" was once praised by critics as "the most famous music that can best reflect the characteristics of Brahms music, has the most own taste, and has been played the most". This is also the work of Brahms' few rhapsody genres. This paper takes Brahms' piano work "Piano Rhapsody op79no2" as an example to further explore Brahms' unique artistic style and performance skills.

Keywords: Brahms; Style of Art; Playing Skills

Introduction

Brahms, together with Bach and Beethoven, is known as the "Three B's" in German music history, which also shows the status of Brahms' music. During his childhood studies, under the guidance and encouragement of his mentor Eduard Maxson, the young Brahms began to experiment with composition and to study in detail the structure of works by Beethoven, Schubert, Mozart and Bach, which made Brahms attracted to classical forms from the very beginning and was an important factor in his classical orientation. Brahms continued to study and learn from Beethoven's compositional techniques throughout his career, and he also made good use of Bach's writing techniques, especially polyphonic thinking.

In nineteenth-century Europe, influenced by the Romantic literary trend, Romantic music was on the rise, and the classical way of thinking was gradually broken. However, Brahms determined that it was necessary to look to the past and learn from tradition in order to open up the future. The author takes Brahms' piano work "Piano Rhapsody op79no2" as an example, and through analyzing Brahms' artistic style and performance skills of classical and romantic fusion, I hope to help readers better understand and play Brahms' piano works.

1. Artistic style

The Piano Rhapsody op79no2 shows Brahms' unique musical style. The rousing emotional expression and rigorous approach of this piece also reflect the dual character of Brahms' music. His rigorous pursuit of musical structure, vivid portrayal of melodic lines and superb writing skills are also well demonstrated in this work.

1.1 The embodiment of classical connotation in Piano Rhapsody op79no2

Although "Piano Rhapsody op79no2" is a musical genre of rhapsody, it has a strong classical connotation in the structure of the piece and the writing technique, and we can see the shadow of classicalism which is more concerned with the symmetry of the structure of the piece and the technique of polyphonic composition.

1.1.1 The rigorous structure of the composition

This work has the characteristics of a three-part sonata form, consisting of four parts: Presentation (1-32), Development (33-85), Reproduction (86-116), and Coda (117-124).



Figure1-1

The presentation part consists of three sections, in which the main theme of the presentation part, bars one through eight (Figure 1-1), makes a melodic modal progression, forming two symmetrical phrases, a and b, which again emphasize the theme of the music. The theme of the music is emphasized. The thick bass octave contrasts with the high right-hand voice, achieving a good evenness, and at the same time setting the work's agitated, contradictory style.



Figure1-2

The unfolding section is an unfolding variation of the main part (Figs. 1-2), which is still a development of the high, middle and low voices in the vocal part, where 41-48 is a modal progression of bars 33-40, and the unfolding ending section is another variation of the development of the main thematic material. The rhythmic balance and the regularity of the structure reflect the rigor of classicalism.

1.1.2 The use of polyphony

Brahms' music is also influenced by Bach's fugue. In the main theme of the presentation section, in addition to the melodic voice and the low voice, the triplets in the middle voice make the music fuller and change with the change of harmony, giving the music a sense of drive. In the connecting part of the presentation (Figure 1-3), the left and right hand triplets form a staggered rhythmic pattern, making the music enthusiastic and lively, which leads to the soft secondary theme and promotes the change and development of the music style.



Figure1-3

1.2 Romanticism characteristics in "Piano Rhapsody op79no2

1.2.1 Symphonicity

This piece uses a lot of expressions of intensity, and opens with a weak starting bar off, which is a common Romantic writing technique, and such a weak starting also appears in the connecting part and the secondary theme. In the unfolding section, the intensity even covers the range from Pianississimo (very weak) to Fortissimo (very strong). In bars 61-62, the intensity levels from Piano (weak) to

Fortissimo (very strong) to Piano (weak) appear (Figure1-4), creating a colorful, three-dimensional sound effect. In bars 9-13 the connecting section, the alternating rhythmic patterns of the left and right hands in triplets and the weaving of left-hand octaves and right-hand chords show the symphonic colors of the piano polyphony. In bars 120-124, the crescendo begins with Pianissimo (very weak) and ends with Fortissimo (very strong). The mood shifts extremely quickly so that the piece ends in an agitated mood, and the way it ends in a strong note is a feature of the Romantic period.

In the presentation section, the main theme and the secondary theme form a sharp contrast in character, eventually returning to the conflicting, indecisive mood of the closing section. The contrast and transformation of the character's character are somewhat symphonic, revealing the expression of the author's subjective emotions, and the embodiment of Brahms' musical romanticism.



Figure1-4

1.2.2 Variation of rhythm

The treatment of rhythm is also an aspect of the Romantic character of Brahms' music. The presentation begins with *Molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro* (very passionate, overflowing, not too fast allegro), and in the main theme there are two treatments of the elastic rhythm rit (slowed down) (Figure 1-1), which underlines the emotion of hesitation and makes the melody interesting. The rit (slowing down) is followed by a return to in tempo (at the original tempo), which adds a sense of rhythmic freedom and stretch, allowing for better expression of feelings.

In the closing section of the presentation (21-32), it is a three-to-two rhythm with a left-hand octave with a dotted chromatic progression, giving the music the character of a march and a firmer musical style, in contrast to the softer secondary theme (Figure1-5).



Figure1-5

2. Performance skills

2.1 Playing of the accompaniment voice

2.1.1 The performance of triplet

The triplets should be played in different parts to produce different sound effects. In bars 1-8, the triplet should be stronger and weaker according to the melody, and in bars 9-13, as a lively connecting part, it should be played with a sense of dynamics, and the first note of each beat should be played with emphasis, and the palm power should not be scattered to produce a clean effect. The theme of the sub-part of the presentation is played with a relaxed wrist in a large span of left hand legato, where the hidden melodic voice can be played (Fig. 2-1). 21-32 bars and the middle voice of the unfolding part should be played with a close key, and the voices should be played clearly.



Figure2-1

2.2 The use of pedals

2.1 The modulation pedal

Here, the use of the pedal changes according to the harmony, and in bars 14-20, the pedal is switched to keep the melody

In bars 14-20, it is important to keep the melodic continuity when switching pedals, so that the sound is not disconnected, and the legato line here is clear and unambiguous. In the coda (fig. 2-2), the complex notes and long legato lines require the use of a shaker pedal to keep the sound clear and coherent.



Figure2-2

2.2 Weak pedal

The weak pedal (soft pedal), which changes both volume and timbre. There are many places in this piece where the volume changes a lot in a few bars. In bars 61-65, the soft pedal can be gradually depressed in bar 63 in order to make a natural transition from Fortissimo (very strong) to Pianississimo (very weak). Likewise, in the coda (Figure 2-2), the combination of the soft pedal and the damper pedal is needed to achieve a slow sinking effect from Fortissimo (very strong) to Pianissimo (very weak).

3. Conclusion

During the Romantic period, Brahms maintained and guarded the musical connotation of Classicalism by himself, but he achieved a perfect fusion of Classicalism and Romanticism with his own musical talent. To grasp and play Brahms' music well, we also need to understand carefully the background of his time and life experiences. His inner solitude, pessimism and emotional instability make his music have a double character and make many performers empathize with him. Brahms was more painstaking and rigorous than the geniuses Beethoven and Mozart, and the music he left behind was well thought out. Brahms is undoubtedly a unique and shining presence in the world of music.

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