

The Influence of Traditional Chinese Composition Concepts on Kunqu Opera Vocal Composition

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Abstract: This article explores the application of traditional composition concepts in modern Kunqu opera vocal creation and its optimization strategies. By analyzing the problems of rescue, inheritance, and innovative development, theoretical and practical disconnection, and low audience acceptance in Kunqu opera vocal creation, it proposes optimization strategies such as strengthening the combination of traditional theoretical learning and practice, expanding communication channels and audience cultivation, strengthening interdisciplinary research and international cooperation, which can help improve the artistic level and audience foundation of Kunqu opera vocal creation, and promote the inheritance and development of Kunqu art. The traditional composition concept is of great significance in the creation of modern Kunqu opera singing style. By implementing optimization measures, it can promote the rescue, inheritance, and innovative development of Kunqu art.

Keywords: Kunqu Opera Vocal Composition; Traditional Compositional Concepts; Optimization Strategies; Rescue Inheritance; Innovation-Driven Development

Introduction

Kunqu Opera is one of China's traditional cultures, which has a history of more than 600 years since its emergence in the Kunshan area of Jiangsu Province in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties (i.e. the mid-14th century). Therefore, it is known as the "ancestor and teacher of the Hundred Operas". It is not only a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, but also a global intangible cultural heritage; On May 18, 2001, Kunqu Opera was announced by UNESCO in Paris as one of the first representative works of the "Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". Kunqu Opera carries profound historical and cultural heritage as well as artistic value. In modern society, the creation of Kunqu opera singing faces many challenges, such as the balance between preserving inheritance and innovative development, the disconnect between theory and practice, and factors such as low audience acceptance. These issues affect the inheritance and development of Kunqu art, and also limit its dissemination and influence in modern society. This article explores the application of traditional composition concepts in modern Kunqu opera vocal composition and its optimization strategies, providing useful references for the dissemination and development of Kunqu art.

1. The infiltration of traditional compositional concepts into Kunqu opera singing style

1.1 The classical beauty constructed by the "ink wash tone"

The melodic structure and unique classical beauty of Kunqu Opera (also known as Ink Tune) deeply reflect the aesthetic expression of traditional Chinese music. Kunqu Opera's singing style is magnificent, graceful, and full of charm. The ups and downs of the singing melody contain rich emotional expressions; For example, the melody creation method of Kunqu opera (a vocal work written in the commonly used Kunqu opera tune) is closely related to the "beginning, continuation, transformation, and combination" technique in Chinese classical music. The melody of Kunqu leads the whole piece with melodious opening sentences, unfolds emotions through delicate connecting sentences, and then promotes the development of the plot with obvious turning sentences. Finally, the entire musical section is wrapped up in sentences, forming a complete and layered musical structure. The melodic construction method makes Kunqu music more in line with the aesthetic needs of contemporary people in terms of auditory perception, while also fully expressing emotions. The beauty of the melody in Kunqu opera lies not only in its external smoothness and ups and downs, but also in the perfect combination of its internal structure and emotional expression. The aesthetic pursuit of classical music has made Kunqu opera a treasure in traditional Chinese music culture.

1.2 The uniqueness of harmony and mode

The harmony and mode processing of Kunqu opera singing deeply reflect the concept of harmony in traditional composition. Kunqu opera generally adopts the pentatonic or heptatonic scale, which reflects the pursuit of natural harmony in traditional Chinese music and provides rich possibilities for harmonic processing in Kunqu opera. In terms of harmony processing, Kunqu opera singing often uses interval relationships such as the fifth degree of emptiness, the fourth degree of purity, or compound harmony to create an ethereal and harmonious musical atmosphere. The harmony processing method conforms to the aesthetic principle of “harmony in diversity” in traditional Chinese music, making Kunqu opera singing more gentle, beautiful, and moving in terms of auditory perception. In the creation of Kunqu opera singing, creators deepen their understanding of traditional Kunqu opera theory and delve into the essence of traditional composition concepts. They combine harmony and mode processing with the unique charm of Kunqu opera art, presenting a more diverse, harmonious and unified Kunqu opera singing art.

1.2.1 The selection of harmony in Nanqu (*Kunhua's Nanxi*)

In the southern music of Kunqu, Gupai and Nantao are very common. Due to the characteristics of fewer characters and more melodies, and the fact that most of the lines are based on pentatonic scales, they often express beautiful and tender emotions. Therefore, traditional pentatonic ethnic harmonies are often used in orchestration to better integrate orchestration techniques with vocal melodies. Harmony cannot be strange, nor can it deviate from the emotions of the singing style. The starting point of harmony follows the principle of “avoiding foreign and strange”.

1.2.2 The choice of harmony in Beiqu (*Kunhua's miscellaneous drama*)

In the northern part of Kunqu opera, there are very few isolated pieces, but there are many complete sets of Northern style pieces. Due to the characteristics of Northern style pieces with multiple characters and few tones, and most of the lines are dominated by seven tone levels, the lines are passionate and full of ups and downs. Therefore, when arranging, both dynamic harmony systems and compound chords can be used for arrangement; At the same time, traditional pentatonic ethnic harmony can also be appropriately applied as needed; Harmony cannot be separated from the emotions of the singing voice.

1.3 The use of rhythm and eye movements

The rhythm and key elements in Kunqu opera singing deeply reflect the “beauty of rhythm” in ancient music theory. There are approximately four types of rhythm “key elements” in Kunqu opera singing: quarter beat, quarter beat, quarter beat, and Rubato key elements; The rhythm pattern enriches the artistic expression of Kunqu opera singing, and also makes Kunqu opera singing more layered and fast-paced in the performance of actors. The arrangement of the key elements in Kunqu opera singing is particularly meticulous, and through precise rhythm control, Kunqu opera singing becomes more delicate and nuanced in expressing emotions. The rhythm and the use of rigid eyes in Kunqu opera singing follow the ancient music theory of “rhythmic beauty” and achieve irreplaceable artistic effects in performance. In the creation of Kunqu opera singing, creators should deeply study and apply the characteristics of the speed of the “monkey skin and tendons” in traditional Chinese opera. Through precise rhythm control and eye arrangement, Kunqu opera singing can achieve a high degree of unity and coordination in melody lines, emotional expression, and other aspects. Kunqu opera performers should also pay attention to the grasp of rhythm and size in their performances, and through delicate performance techniques, perfectly combine the rhythm beauty of Kunqu opera singing with the performance beauty of Kunqu art.

1.4 The fusion of band accompaniment and vocal instrumentation

The selection and application of musical instruments in Kunqu opera singing is an important part of showcasing traditional composition concepts. The main instruments of Kunqu opera, such as Qudi, traditional sheng, and Xiaosanxian, each have unique timbres and expressive power, and play an indispensable role in harmonious coexistence in Kunqu opera singing. By combining precise performance techniques with singing melodies, Kunqu Opera creates a unique musical atmosphere. In Kunqu opera accompaniment, the Qu flute, with its melodious and clear tone, often serves as the most important lead instrument to lead the entire singing style; The traditional sheng mainly wraps around

the timbre of the Qudi, and its melodic lines should be basically consistent with the singing melody of the Qudi, adding a delicate and distinct sense of hierarchy to Kunqu opera singing; Xiaosanxian provides stable decomposition and sound for Kunqu opera singing with a relatively granular tone, making the entire singing structure more fluid and full from an auditory perspective. Creators should conduct in-depth research on the timbre characteristics and performance techniques of various instruments when arranging Kunqu opera vocal arrangements. Through clever instrument combinations (orchestration), they can achieve a high degree of harmony and unity between the band accompaniment and vocal melody in terms of timbre, rhythm, emotion, etc., better showcasing the unique charm of Kunqu art and the essence of traditional composition concepts.

2. The Problems of Traditional Composition Concepts in Kunqu Opera Vocal Composition

2.1 The Fault Between Tradition and Modernity

In the field of Kunqu opera vocal composition, the gap between traditional and modern vocal compositions is a significant issue. Under the impact of modern aesthetic demands, traditional compositional concepts have become inadequate in some aspects, leading to a series of challenges in Kunqu opera vocal composition. The lack of “listenability” in the creation of singing melodies is a prominent problem in current Kunqu opera singing creations. Some creators rely too much on traditional melody lines in the creation process, lacking decorative changes in the “main melody” of Kunqu opera while retaining the original style, and decorative writing of lyrics. The conservative suite of melodies leads to works appearing monotonous and boring in melody, making it difficult to attract the attention of modern audiences. The conservatism of traditional Kunqu opera bands is also an important factor restricting the development of Kunqu art. Kunqu traditional bands in various theaters across the country mostly perform traditional opera singing in a “grand ensemble” state; It is obvious that in modern music auditory aesthetics, this conservative playing style appears too singular and lacks auditory impact.

2.2 Balancing the rescue of inheritance and innovative development

In the practice of Kunqu opera vocal composition, the issue of balancing preservation, inheritance, and innovative development is particularly prominent; On the one hand, as a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, Kunqu Opera’s unique singing style, melody, and performance style constitute a unique artistic charm that needs to be fully inherited and preserved in the process of practice. On the other hand, with the changing times, the audience’s auditory and aesthetic needs for music are also constantly changing. How to effectively incorporate new elements and techniques into Kunqu Opera while maintaining its original flavor has become an urgent practical problem to be solved. In terms of specific implementation, the issue of balance is reflected in multiple aspects: creators need to consider how to cleverly enrich Kunqu’s “word based and line based” singing style while maintaining the traditional melody of Kunqu opera, and how to enhance the expressive power of Kunqu opera singing style; How to avoid cultural distortion caused by excessive commercialization in the process of innovative development is also a highly valued issue. Some creators, in pursuit of market effect, overlook the artistic essence of Kunqu opera singing, resulting in the loss of its original cultural connotation and artistic value in the process of commercialization.

2.3 The disconnect between theory and practice

In the practice of Kunqu opera vocal composition, the disconnect between theory and practice is an issue that cannot be ignored. Vocal writing is not limited to single choice writing; Today’s Kunqu music creation requires learning relevant professional knowledge, including Kunqu vocal melody writing, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and other highly specialized subjects; However, in the actual environment, there are only a few high-quality Kunqu opera creators, and the vast majority of creators lack professional knowledge reserves and the ability to connect theory with practice is stretched thin. The theoretical research on Kunqu opera vocal composition focuses on the in-depth exploration and analysis of traditional vocal composition concepts, as well as the analysis of the characteristics of Kunqu opera vocal instruments; There are many difficulties in applying these theoretical achievements to practical creation; On the one hand, most creators do not have a deep understanding of Kunqu opera theory knowledge; On the other hand, due to the professionalism and uniqueness of Kunqu opera vocal composition, theory needs to be adjusted and transformed in practical creation to meet the requirements of different script themes.

2.4 The issue of audience acceptance

In modern society, traditional Kunqu art faces the problem of low audience acceptance, which is caused by the interweaving of multiple factors. Among the more than 300 theatrical genres in the country, only Kunqu Opera can best combine traditional Chinese opera with literature, and the depth of literary language is a difficult problem that cannot be ignored; The lyrics often use classical literary language, such as classical Chinese or ancient poetry. For modern audiences, it forms a barrier of understanding and appreciation. Modern audiences are accustomed to using language that is easy to understand and close to life, while traditional Kunqu opera singing and recitation use Zhongzhou rhyme as literary expression. The profoundness and obscurity of the lyrics make it difficult for the audience to resonate during the appreciation process, which also affects the acceptance of Kunqu art. The difference in music aesthetics is also an important reason for the low acceptance of Kunqu opera singing by the audience. With the changes of the times, modern people's music aesthetic concepts have undergone changes. Compared to the classical beauty and simplicity pursued in Kunqu opera singing, modern audiences prefer music forms with strong rhythm, rich harmony and auditory effects, and personalized expression. The aesthetic differences in music make Kunqu opera singing incompatible in the modern music market, making it difficult to attract the attention and love of a large number of young audiences.

3. Optimization Strategies of Traditional Composition Concepts in Modern Kunqu Opera Vocal Composition

3.1 Strengthening the integration of traditional theoretical learning and practice

In the context of modern Kunqu opera vocal composition, strengthening the combination of traditional theoretical learning and practice is a key aspect of optimizing strategies. Kunqu Opera, as a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, is deeply influenced by traditional compositional concepts in its vocal composition. Strengthening the learning of traditional composition concepts in Kunqu opera teaching is an important way to rescue and inherit traditional culture, as well as the foundation for enhancing students' ability to create Kunqu opera vocal styles. Kunqu opera teaching should cover the essence of traditional composition concepts, such as melody writing, harmony, polyphony, and the integration of band orchestration. Through systematic theoretical learning, students should have a deep understanding of the inherent laws and unique charm of Kunqu opera vocal composition. Encourage students to apply theoretical knowledge to creative practice, deepen their understanding and mastery of traditional composition concepts through the creation of Kunqu opera singing styles. To achieve this goal, Kunqu opera teaching can adopt teaching methods such as practical teaching and school academy cooperation, allowing students to learn and practice theater creative projects through theater practice, forming a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion between theory and practice. Activities such as Kunqu opera vocal composition concerts, workshops, and the establishment of Kunqu opera societies can also be held to provide students with a platform to showcase their talents and exchange experiences, further stimulating their creative enthusiasm and innovation drive.

3.2 Expand communication channels and cultivate audiences

In the promotion and inheritance of modern Kunqu opera vocal composition, expanding communication channels and cultivating audiences have become crucial optimization strategies. With the rapid development of digital technology and network platforms, Kunqu opera art has ushered in development opportunities. By utilizing advanced technologies such as high-definition recording, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), etc., high fidelity recording and immersive experience of Kunqu opera singing can be achieved, enriching the dissemination forms and audience experience of Kunqu opera art. Online platforms such as social media, live streaming, and short video platforms provide a wide range of channels for the dissemination of Kunqu opera beyond geographical limitations, allowing more people to access and understand Kunqu art. On this basis, it is very important to carry out popularization education activities targeting audiences of different age groups. For the youth group, interest and curiosity can be stimulated through campus Kunqu lectures, Kunqu fan workshops, and other forms; For middle-aged and elderly audiences, the community can organize activities such as watching performances in theaters or holding Kunqu opera appreciation events to meet cultural needs and spiritual enjoyment.

3.3 Strengthening interdisciplinary research and international cooperation

Kunqu Opera, as a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, involves professional knowledge of musicology in its vocal composition and is closely linked to multiple disciplines such as literature and history. Encouraging interdisciplinary research can deepen the cultural connotation and artistic value of Kunqu opera vocal composition, and provide new theoretical support and creative inspiration for Kunqu opera vocal composition. Exchange and cooperation with international music culture is also an important way to enhance the level of Kunqu opera creation. Through exchange and cooperation with the international music industry, Kunqu opera creation can learn from and absorb excellent elements of other music cultures, enrich its artistic expression and creative techniques. International exchange also helps Kunqu opera works to reach the world stage, enhancing the international influence and popularity of Kunqu opera. In the creation of Kunqu opera singing, it is necessary to actively establish interdisciplinary exchange platforms and international cooperation networks, providing broader space and resources for Kunqu opera creation, and promoting the inheritance and development of Kunqu art in contemporary times.

Conclusions

This article explores in depth the application of traditional composition concepts in modern Kunqu opera vocal composition and its optimization strategies. In response to the challenges of salvaging inheritance and innovative development, theoretical and practical disconnection, and low audience acceptance in Kunqu opera vocal composition, multiple effective optimization strategies are proposed, including strengthening the combination of traditional theoretical learning and practice, expanding communication channels and audience cultivation, and strengthening interdisciplinary research and international cooperation. These measures aim to enhance the artistic level and audience base of Kunqu opera vocal creation, and promote the inheritance and development of Kunqu art. Through practice and research, we have come to a profound understanding of the importance of traditional composition concepts in contemporary Kunqu opera vocal composition, while also recognizing the potential for the dissemination and development of Kunqu art in modern society.

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