



## Necessity and Practical Research of Integrating Piano Duet in Piano Teaching in Advanced Normal Schools

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Received 28 March 2015; accepted 6 June 2015

Published online 26 July 2015

### Abstract

For the students of music education major in advanced normal schools, strengthening the cultivation of comprehensive quality is especially important. As a compulsory course, piano lessons not only need to improve the skills, but also to cultivate the comprehensive application ability on piano keys. This requires the students to have a keen sense of hearing, and fluent sight-reading, stereoscopic multi-part thinking, precise voice quality control ability, and especially some certain abilities in cooperation and coordination, etc.. All these abilities need more effective teaching methods to improve and strengthen, and the piano duet is a feasible way.

**Key words:** Piano duet; Piano Teaching; Music

Yu, Q. (2015). Necessity and Practical Research of Integrating Piano Duet in Piano Teaching in Advanced Normal Schools. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(7), 93-97. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/7205>  
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7205>

### INTRODUCTION

As one of the long-standing piano duet forms in western countries, piano duet originated in England in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1777, London officially published four sonatas written by Charles Burney. This unique art form flourished in Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Bach, as the pioneer of the Piano Duet works, successively created no.15 and no. 18 ensemble. In Classical period, Haydn wrote a conversational style of piano duet variations “teachers and students” while

Mozart not only wrote and played a lot of piano duet works, but also attached great importance to it and promoted this form in the teaching. Although Beethoven has only 7 piano duet works, however each of them are of great value in teaching and art. To the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the creation of the piano duet ushered an era of unusual brilliance. Schumann wrote OP. 85 “12 piano album for teenage and children” for teaching, which has a strong teaching purpose. Weber of the cotemporary period is also composer who is keen on the creation of the genre of the piano duet. He created three sets of works (OP.3, OP.60 and OP.10) for teaching purpose. Romanticism musician Schubert greatly pushed forward the piano duet. From waltz to large ensemble, this genre ran through all of his creative period, and his most outstanding works is the “Fantasia in F minor” (d940). While Mendelssohn’s most famous piano duet works “brilliant allegro” (OP. 92) is the classic of piano duet. In addition, the composer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has created many enduring piano duet works, such as Faure’s “Doll”, Debussy’s “Petite Suite”, Debussy’s Ravel’s “Mother Goose”, Brahms’s “Hungarian Dance”, Rachmaninoff’s “Waltz”, and Dvorak’s “Slavonic Dances” and so on. To the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, multiple music culture became prosperous. The composer pursued innovation on skills and techniques, and the creation of piano duet was on the way from prosperity to decline.

### 1. CURRENT DOMESTIC TEACHING OF PIANO DUET

Although piano duet has a long history of development in foreign countries, while, until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it widely drew piano teachers’ attention and research in China. In December, 1997, the first national double piano competition was held in Shenzhen. In 2005, the “KAWAI cup” national youth piano competition was held in Kulangsu, in which piano duet, double piano and etc.

were set up. Since then, in all kinds of piano competition, the piano duet gradually became one of the competition items. For example, the “double piano and piano duet play exhibition games” since 2006 in Shenzhen, “Helen Cup (Hong Kong) Chinese piano works competition”, “Hope Cup” teenage children piano competition sponsored by the Capital normal university, and “Shanghai international youth piano competition”. The most notably one is the “Helen Cup” national university music education professional piano teacher competition, which has held four sessions since 2007 with piano duet in each session. Success of such events has drew attention of the domestic piano fiels, greatly promoted the teaching and research of piano duet, thus promoting the development of this form domestically.

Music professional colleges and universities have realized the necessity and importance of piano duet in the piano teaching, although not so much, but some colleges and universities have begun to set this form of chamber music in the teaching course. In this respect, the one that started piano duet teaching earlier is the Capital Normal University, in addition, beside the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Xinghai Conservatory of Music, Wuhan conservatory of Music and Tianjin Conservatory Of Music, the Nanjing Normal University, Sichuan Normal University, Shanghai Normal University, East China Normal University specially set up the quartet course, the piano duet was included in the teaching practice. In piano quartet courses, the quartet course has a teaching convenience and can gain good teaching effect, which made it greatly possible in gradual promotion and popularization of piano duet in amateur and professional piano teaching.

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## **2. THE IMPORTANCE OF PIANO DUET IN PIANO TEACHING IN ADVANCED NORMAL UNIVERSITIES**

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For a long time, piano teaching in normal universities is mainly in form of solo. For students major in music education, professional diversification requires comprehensive quality. The setting up of electrical piano collective classes, group classes and one-to-one classes in normal colleges and universities provides a great possibility and convenience for piano duet teaching.

### **2.1 Stimulate Interest in Learning, Broaden Horizons on Music**

A well study habits firstly must show an interest in learning. The student shall be willing to learn and could learn consciously. As a quartet playing form that concentrated chamber music and orchestral music, piano duet gives more rich and vivid expressions, improve students' interest in music performance, and arouse the enthusiasm of learning. The repertoire not only contains original but also a lot of adaptations. For example, Bach's

Tocatta and Fugue in D minor, Rachmaninoff's Polka Italiane, Tchaikovsky's Waltz of Flowers, Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite, and Strauss's the blue Danube, etc.. And there are also rich adaptations with Chinese tune, such as Happy for the Sun Rise, Red Rope, Defend the Yellow River, Happy Female Warrior, Spring Festival Prelude and so on. The teachers could choose adaptations of the classic music with beautiful melody, merry mood and strong sense of rhythm so that the students could pleasantly learn and consolidate different piano key-touching methods from playing ensemble works with fewer technical burdens. Also they could understand the solo works by of, pleasant to learn and, touch the keys and solo by ensemble, thereby expand music playing and broaden field of vision.

### **2.2 Strengthen the Ability to Analyze, Understand the Works Correctly**

The success of piano duet play depends on the joint efforts of two people. Before individual practice, the players should firstly study it together like a bandmaster. They shall have a unified recognition from formal structure (phrase division, cohesion of music segments, comprehensive structure of music), modal tonality, melody, texture, to breathe, rhythm, timbre, dynamics, pedals and style. And respectively recognize the viola part, the accompaniment and the concertato. Only in this way can they have an accurate grasp of the entire works, and also could get familiar with voice part of each other, which is essential to good cooperation, and then with these requirements to solve the problem of personal skills and music. After that is more ensemble practice of two people. They could check each other and adjust previous design and arrangement, and find a solution for body contact during play, and even have a consensus on who shall turn the music book.

In teaching the teacher could make further expansion to get students research and discuss the works background, music style, music performance means, etc. to put forward their opinions and basis, stimulate students' thinking, so that the students could change from passive learning into active participation to have the right understanding of music. In addition, in the classroom the teacher could play original song of piano solo or tape of the band, and compare them to the piano duet play, or observe the cooperation between teacher and student or between students to find themselves any shortfall in the play. Finally, let the students to prepare a piano duet concerts to consolidate the teaching achievement, let more people feel the charm of piano duet play.

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## **3. IMPROVE THE ABILITY OF HEARING AND SIGHT READING, CULTIVATE SENSE OF RHYTHM**

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During piano duet play, the player shall not only listen to the voice part of them, but also listen carefully the

partner's play, and consider the ensemble effect at the same time. These are the skills that college students lack. At present, too many normal universities lack the conditions to set up the chamber music courses, and too many students are relying on playing accompaniment, a single form to practice their hearing. Teachers should choose works with strong melody and clear accompaniment texture, and require students learn to listen to others' play, and organically integrate his or her voice part into music image created by cooperation of two people and the overall effect produced thereby. Normally, the students should listen to at least four voice parts to improve the listening difficulty, which is also a kind of challenge to listen practice, and then to adjust the fingers touch keys and pedals, etc. according to the auditory effect.

Students with strong ability of sight-reading can effectively improve the efficiency of practice. Reading abundant works so as to learn, feel creation style and features at different times by different composers and even different theme music. In practice, teachers can select the works that students could play and continue despite wrong tune to keep partners synchronization, and practice the resilience and cooperation ability. Even if it is sight-reading, the players shall try their best to accomplish clear in levels, rich in tone and unified in style. When finish his voice part play, the two people could exchange with each other, which not only increased the novelty but also familiar with each other voice parts at the same time in the practice of sight-reading.

The importance of rhythm training for music is well known. For ensemble, a uniform rhythm is a priority. As a musical instrument with clear pronunciation, piano, and compare with other musical instruments such as string, wind or vocal ensemble, it's hard to distinguish the slight difference on the sound head. Either long, short, liaison, staccato, grace note, rests, or beginning, CLS, connection, end, or the elasticity change of speed shall maintain a high level of consistency. This require the player firstly practice alone to solve skill difficulties of their own and then practice together greatly on hard points such as beginning, CLS, connection, end, elasticity of the speed change etc. the more important is tacit understanding cultivated in the long time strict practice between each other, especially the soul consistence. Everyone has his own rhythm of the heart, but they must make corresponding adjustment in cooperation to fade out self for uniform.

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#### **4. PRACTICE POLYPHONY PLAYING SKILLS, IMPROVE FINGER CONTROL ABILITY**

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Different tones on at least four voice parts of two people could guarantee the voice parts balance and clear level. This requires each player control tones of two or more

voice parts of his own be clear of the position of his voice part in all voice parts through analyzing the song together, and listen carefully the tune of voice part of the other so as to control his voice part well. During practice, like exercise polyphony, the player shall practice the right hand with soprano and right hand with basso at the same time; and then right hand with soprano and left hand with basso at the same time; and then left hand with soprano and right hand with basso at the same time, and finally left hand with soprano and left hand with basso at the same time. Finally practice together again, so as to achieve the balance between the various voice parts. This could avoid different voice parts compete with each other like a wall, which not only increases the difficulty of the hearing, but also added the difficulty on the play, and could better practice polyphony. In addition, for the use of the pedal, normally the basso player step on firstly for basso is the harmony skeleton of the music; some others contend that the soprano player step on firstly for soprano player mainly play the main melody; more people suggest to combine them together to step on in turn according to actual situation. In either case, the player must be familiar with each other's music and know each other's needs all the time. At the same time, both should consider each other to step and coordinate the pedal, and to determine how to operate the pedals in careful listening.

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#### **5. STRENGTHEN THE COOPERATION ABILITY, DEVELOP THE COMPREHENSIVE QUALITY**

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The ability to coordinate and to communicate is necessary for normal university students who engaged in primary and secondary school education in the future, as well as one of the important contents in cultivating comprehensive quality. Although piano duet play requires certain artistic accomplishment and playing skills of two people, but a good harmony and cooperation is much more important. After long term cooperation, the player can get familiar with the personality traits of each other, understand playing habits of each other, and tacit understanding will naturally cultivate gradually. Therefore, in the partner selection, the player should try to choose the one who has similarity in skills and understanding of music. In the world, too many successful partners are husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, or good friends. Because their perceptions of the art are interlinked, and their tempers are well acquainted after long term living. The tacit understanding could make it much easier to reach spiritual consensus. Hence, for those works with greater speed elastic change, their play will be more fit and harmonious. Even so, the difficult points should be practiced more. During practice, the player should pay attention to the subtle movement of companion's head, hand, elbow, wrist and arm with split vision. At the

same time, during play the music “dialogue” with body language such as eye seeing could make the play more interesting, and also can keep synchronization with each other. During piano duet, the accompaniment is by no means dependent, and the presided is not a protagonist. In fact, they are a kind of partnership that complementary, trust and tolerant mutually.

## 6. EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS, ENHANCE SELF-CONFIDENCE

In terms of skill difficulties, most piano duet works are lower than solo works, especially for those works that rewrite three or more voice parts to five or more voice parts. The difficulties in scattered, also the difficulty reduced. When play it from the heart burden is reduced naturally. In addition, piano duet requires two collaborators shall have same proficiency and technical level, and the emotional and psychological changes are matching. During playing the player shall concentrate the energy and listen to themselves and each other’s voice parts. Making a perfect cooperation will help to ease the tension of each other, reduce playing errors, so the player can easily build up confidence on their play. That is to say, all the difficulties in the show are no longer alone but faced and shouldered by each other, this will make players have good mental health factors, and self-confidence will be built.

To sum up, piano duet requires achieving mastery through a comprehensive study of the music theory, harmony, impromptu accompaniment, works analysis, sight singing practice, polyphony courses, etc.. This can also make training on coordination ability, improve the psychological quality, and achieve a better teaching effect.

## 7. COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS OF PIANO DUET AND TWO PIANOS

Compared with double pianos, the easy factor for piano duet is that piano duet partners could sit side by side, and subtle movements like breathing, or lifting wrist, could be captured by the other. Compared with double pianos collaborators who sit face to face, tidy and unity is much easier to achieve. However, the difficulty also will come. Too close will cause the overlapping voice parts and body touch. So, when the voice parts are overlapped, the fingering should be designed in advance. In order not to affect each other, sometimes the basso player will extra use 3, 4, 5 finger than high-pitched voice player to avoid the “fight” between each other; and whose hand in the above, whose hand pick up below should also be arranged; In case some note duration can not keep with the hand, the note should change to the other side to play, or rely on the pedals for help. After design, diligent practice is required to achieve freely cooperation.

In addition, in terms of music book compiler, piano duet works are mostly partito type while double pianos works are scores type. So, the double pianos players could both hear and see the content of the companion’s play, while piano duet only could rely on hearing. In this way the play is much harder, and both partners should get familiar with the music book of each other to achieve overall grasp so as to achieve harmony and consistency in playing.

In conclusion, a good piano duet is consistent in breathing, neat in rhythm, balance in voice part, be compatible in pedal and unified in style. The players should not only have a skill and sense of music soloist, but also take special training in quartet to adjust and compromise with each other, so as to achieve a high level of integration and unity.

## 8. THE USE OF PIANO DUET BOOKS

At present, in the domestic and foreign countries, no matter the original or adapted version, too many practical teaching materials were published for students in each age level, which include both imported excellent classics and domestic textbooks compiled by music workers in our country. The ones that deserved to be recommended is the piano duet classical music album (Sheng Yuan), the “Radetzky march, Excellent Syncopation, Waltz of the flowers “piano duet (Xiong Daoer), and the piano duet famous album (Li Weiming). These materials include the classical works of piano duet by greatest composers in western countries at each time. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that, In the Journey-Chinese Piano Duet Creation, Chinese melody Piano Duet album, Chinese style piano performance works selection-piano duet and double pianos are rewritten by Chinese melodies. All these works are rich in harmony, diverse in texture, stereo, wide in tune range, different in style, is very useful for students to understand Chinese works ensemble.

Although the piano duet has drawn widespread concern and attention domestically at present, the number of related articles is not enough and the content is not comprehensive and in-depth enough. And a systematic and scientific teaching system is lacking. In higher normal colleges, research on piano duet playing and teaching is a field that needs broadly developed and researched in urgent. Originally it has a profound historical accumulation, and now, we should review and evaluate its role in the music education. The author has attended three sessions of piano duet and double pianos contest by piano teachers from national higher normal colleges and universities. He was moved deeply and research and practice in teaching, and found a good teaching effect in piano duet. But high level of piano duet teaching has its own systematic and scientific system and method, which have a big space for improvement and need deep research. Meantime, this requires a more highly comprehensive professional quality for teachers. For expansion and innovation of

traditional classroom piano, the teacher shall, combining characteristics of normal universities, especially in combination with standard of primary and secondary school curriculum reform, to explore the way of piano duet teaching, gradually perfect the teaching system, and develop diversified teaching; bring students new emotional experience, so as to achieve a satisfactory teaching effect.

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