

Singing: Resonance Between the Soul and the Body on the Unity of Different Music Styles and Singing States

ZHONG Xiaohong^{[a],*}

^[a]Associate Professor, School of Music, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

This paper explores how a singer can arrive at the best singing state and how the singing state can best serve the expression of music styles through a discussion of the four elements of the singing state, namely physiological, psychological, cultural and technical elements. From an academic prospective, it gives a synthetic analysis on how a singer's soul and skills can form a perfect unity with the expression of songs.

Key words: Singing; Singing state; Music style; Singing skill

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INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous eminent singers in human history. Some are well-known while others are only influential in some regions. Among them, those who can be categorized as great singers share one thing in common, for whom singing is not a profession, but the whole life. What they sing is resonance of the soul and the body, such as Michael Joseph Jackson, Teresa Teng and Madonna.

There are countless research papers and books on singing skills of different music systems, which are mostly summarizations of different singing experience,

providing multiple approaches to various singing skills. Meanwhile, people find that knowing much about singing does not mean we can sing. Particularly for those who are determined to learn singing and those students of singing, the more they know about singing skills, the more reserved they become while they sing and thus the more puzzled they are about theories. For many teachers who have been teaching singing all their lifetime and have summarized their singing experience, they find it not easy to arrive at the best singing state and capability, which are regrettable and hard to interpret with common sense. On the contrary, some amateur singers, old and young, have been singing all the lifetime in a good state and giving their best in performance. This phenomenon is worth pondering over by professional music educators.

This paper does not talk about specific singing skills or music styles, but explores what the most ideal singing is composed of, and how singers and singing educators acquire singing competence and develop a good singing state on the whole. It is a synthetic analysis of how to achieve a perfect unity between the singer's soul and skills.

1. FOUR MAJOR ELEMENTS OF SINGING STATE

Human singing whatsoever is decided by the singer's physiological state, psychological state, cultural state and technical state. These four elements decide on the singing level of a singer.

1.1 Physiological State

Physiological state consists of two aspects: one is the biological state of the singer's body, such as conditions of voice or vocal cord, oral cavity, posture, stamina and others. For instance, a person's vocal cord structure determines the tone and range of the voice, which forms the objective standards. The physiological conditions

are objective and innate. Though they can be utilized effectively, the objective attributes cannot be changed. For instance, we can never make our vocal chords thinner, wider or longer. However, some physiological conditions can be modified, such as stamina. A thin and weak person can become stronger, which is good to one's singing endurance and explosive force. The other aspect is the physical state of the singer while singing, which refers to the physiological condition of the singer, such as whether or not he or she feels fatigued, hungry or fed up, whether a woman singer is in her periods or has some kind of illness. In a word, the physiological state is objective and innate, which seems to be easy to understand. However, everyone has different physiological conditions which are innate. For instance, people are different in their physiques. The weight, the shape of teeth and mouths as well as the thickness or thinness of lips are all innate. What's more, living habits formed in different environment will develop different physiological responses which can be displayed while singing. For example, people living in the highland of northwest where the wind is strong and the weather is frigid must talk in a louder tone in order to make their voices heard. As time passes by, people there will have loud and strong voices which are helpful to utter words loudly and easily. This physiological response formed by natural environment will certainly be displayed while singing. On the contrary, people living in the south where the weather is good and streams murmur speak in a soft way. This also reflects the characteristics of southerners' lifestyle, language and music. Thus it is environment and people's physiological conditions that create people's singing capability. The physiological condition can also be built and influenced after birth.

1.2 Psychological State

Psychological state refers to the state of mind of a singer in singing, such as whether or not he or she is moderately excited, stressed out, confident, fearful, overexcited, or has the desire to sing. Naturally, the psychological state of the singer varies in different occasions when he or she faces different audiences. Moreover, the state of mind of a singer is closely pertinent to his/her performing experiences, which are crucial to the singing state. For example, a singer with rich singing experience can definitely acquire a stable state while singing. However, long-time professional trainings may also lead to less excitement or over-casual mind of state. The innate psychological makings and hard work later on as well as the familiarity of the content of the song all touch the state of mind of the singer. Psychological state also relies on a good physiological state. Ample sleep, appropriate diet and enough stamina all impact directly the psychological state of singers. Singing content, as the cultural state, also has an influence on singers. For instance, whether the content is quite familiar or strange, whether it echoes with the singer or not as well as the music style and individual

temperament will contribute to producing different state of minds in singing. In a word, the psychological state of singing is a synthesis of a singer's state of mind, cultural state and singing situation at that time. The psychological state of singing can also be divided into several aspects such as singing state, practice state and learning state.

1.3 Cultural State

Cultural state refers to the singer's cultural experience and accumulation of the songs. The more experience of the cultural connotations of the songs a singer has, the more vividly he/she can express the content, which is the general principle of art. Chinese artistic workers used to attach great importance to life experience. They all needed to experience life no matter in artistic creation or performing. Today, this life experience is to enable singers to acquire a cultural state. Take the singing of the folk songs of northern Shaanxi Province for instance. If you spend a period of time in the plateau of northern Shaanxi, undoubtedly you are sure to grasp the music style and cultural ethos of the folk songs. The cultural state of singing is that only when the singer has as much experience and understanding of the cultural connotations of the songs by internalizing the cultural connotations of songs into his or her own spiritual world to display them while singing, can he/she arrive at the best singing state. However, today's singers, singing learners and even singing tutors tend to neglect this aspect. Most of them only try to approach the songs from lyrics. What they lack is in-depth understanding and experience of the cultural background of the songs. There are plenty of ways to get access to the cultural state of singing. Singers should look up a large quantity of literatures including not only the literary literatures but films, paintings, dances and other cultural expressions instead of just reciting lyrics. Cultural elements including history, geography and customs in particular are very essential ways for singers to acquire cultural state. The cultural temperament, artistic styles and delicate expression of singers are all derived from their cultural accumulation and their capability to appreciate which is the basis for a cultural state of singers.

1.4 Technical State

The technical state of singing refers to a singer's control over singing competence. A singer, whether he is well-trained or self-taught, must have his own technical understanding and experience of singing. Some singers acquire the singing ability from imitation while others are trained by teachers to get it. In a word, a good singer can always show his great singing skills. Otherwise he can ill afford to express the singing content. The goodness and badness of a singer's singing skills should be both measured by his specific singing performance and the song. If an excellent bel canto singer sings pop music, he may not express its style to the hilt. It would be also the case when an excellent actor of Kunqu Opera sings

Western operas. However, there are some elements which are the most basic and universal in singing skills such as breathing and articulation. All singing styles are given great importance to, thus techniques always serve the artistic style. The capability of controlling singing techniques can be displayed by a singer who can adopt different singing techniques according to different artistic styles of songs. This, mind you, is not showing off but integrating techniques perfectly into the expression of artistic works. Natural style singing is often ignored by many professional teachers. A good amateur singer is actually a set of perfect technical systems which has not been interpreted. There are plenty of technical resources of singing in the folk which we do not pay our necessary attention to. Say, an amateur singer from north of Shaanxi province who controls a very good breathing, uses a perfect transition of singing resonance and combination of real-and-falsetto voices. He may also display a high level of union between words and sound as well as the unique charms of musical styles and cultural temperament he expresses.

A good singer or vocal work is actually the perfect combination and comprehensive demonstration of these four elements which are inalienable. The absence of any one of them will hit a severe impact on the singing effect. Thus all good singers or singing teachers will do their utmost to pursue and create the perfect combination of the four states both in their artistic and teaching practice.

2. UNITY OF SINGING STATES AND MUSIC STYLES

What is the most difficult for most vocal learners is that the learners may be imparted a long-time misconception by some vocal teachers that they can master one kind of singing technique once for all. After singing several songs basically well, the learners will find the vocal techniques not universal in works with different styles. Even the songs with similar styles include many different elements. That is to say, the employment of singing skills fully depends on the songs. It is the song that decides the application of singing techniques. So, we cannot solve all the singing problems by just mastering one. For example, if we are to sing original folk songs, we must try our best to have a clear picture of how people sing in their daily life instead of remembering the singing techniques we are taught. We should let the song styles resurface in our life as the most accurate way of expressing it. When Chinese people learn to practice bel canto, they should put in more time and energy in reciting the lyrics such as Italian, German, French, Spanish and so on. They should read like they are reading the verses of Chinese poems. Only in this way can they acquire the true feeling of singing western songs in bel canto. What keeps puzzling us is that the singing of traditional Chinese opera is not

taught in Chinese Conservatories of Music. Chinese opera is the most striking in its style among all Chinese songs and operas with different type are all sung in regional dialects. Though the tones and rhythms of Chinese folk songs have strong regional and national colors, Chinese operas are much more typical in this respect. The global popularity of pop music, to a large degree, consists in the inconspicuousness of languages in regional characteristics. The rhythms and music styles are inclusive and confluent and the ideological and emotional content it pays attention to are also very universal and popular. Thus there are many conditions in it for cross-cultural spread. No matter you are a folk singer, a Chinese opera actor or a bel canto singer, you must abandon spontaneously all the singing techniques you learned or adjust your pre-learned techniques to the styles of pop music, if you want to sing pop music. Of course you can also take in some elements of your singing techniques to create your own style. The singing technique can be used both universally and independently as long as it helps express your musical style. What we can ill afford to do is to put the cart before the horse: Screw up the music style in order to safeguard the so-called dignity of one singing technique.

Then what is music style? This question can be both easy and difficult to answer. A Russian theorist wrote in his book named *Artistic Principles of Music Style*: the style of music is the supreme unity of art. At the same time, the word style is also multi-manifold in concept. One can talk about international style of history, the national style of a certain school or individual style of an artist. But in all the cases, the style refers to the complete and objective artistic unity after being observed in multi-aspects (Skrebkov, 2008). However, the style can be categorized into many aspects in the real artistic society such as historical style which refers to the style presented at different historic stages or the consistent styles. National style refers to a particular musical feature in a nation's culture and art. Geographical style refers to the music characteristics of a certain region formed by environment. The style of schools refers to similar or universally common music forms established by a certain music group. Individual style refers to personal music characteristics a person formed while creating or singing songs. The whole style refers to all kinds of music forms with both individualism and wholeness after combining the same or similar music. Comparative style then refers to a certain kind of music that sounds relevant after combining two music forms which are uncommon or totally different in styles.

3. RESONANCE STATE BETWEEN SINGERS AND AUDIENCE

We know an excellent singing can strike an echo with people, but if a singer can ill afford to interact successfully with the audience, he or she is not a good singer indeed

no matter how skillful his or her singing techniques are and how good the artistic quality is. This is because the singing content and personal condition of a singer are definite while the audience varies constantly while singing which will also cause the variation of a singer's state. For instance, the singer must be stressed out while facing the masters of music circle. If the singer attends a singing competition, he or she will also be under much pressure facing the judges. However, if the singer happens to meet his or her old friends as the audience while singing, he or she will be relaxed. Another example may be when the singer sings about his or her fans, then the singer might ascend to an immersion experience of singing as if worshiped by them. Under such circumstances, the singer can fully express and unleash his or her artistic understanding and inner emotions. Some pop singers often interact with the audience either before the performance or during it. Proper interactions can echo with the audience and give himself a sense of unbosoming which are one of the common ways used in pop music. However, classic music or opera in particular requires actors to indulge themselves in the play to display the emotion of the role which is another way of interacting with the audience. At any rate, singers and actors interact with their singing which is for sure and face-to-face. If the singer cannot feel a sense of resonance aroused among the audience, then the performance is every inch not successful. A singer with a good artistic quality and influence can give the audience a rush of singing atmosphere once he or she sets foot on the stage. The audience will be either screaming or keeping silent to listen to the songs. This can be often felt by us in concert halls or performing stage.

4. RENDITION AND DAILY LIFE STATE OF SINGERS

You might ask: Does the daily life of singers has anything to do with singing? This is because a real good singer or an excellent artist actually sings in his or her artistic culture on the one side, on the other side, he or she sings by personality cultivation which is formed in the daily life. The daily life of a singer consists of two aspects: One is for those well-known singers who have already established their public figure which is part of their stage singing. A good singer must have a good social image which can bring more to the public. On the contrary, a singer can ill afford to sing on the stage if he or she has a bad social image. Since artists are also public figures, their daily life also consists of their artistic career which

is inalienable. Some people say: Can an unknown singer live unscrupulously without considering his or her social influence? I think the answer is No as long as you want to be a successful singer on the stage, because this is all connected inherently. Since the artistic reputation of the singer is closely related to his or her social reputation, the daily life cultivation and situation are the integral parts of the singing. From the perspective of history, a singer cannot rise to fame overnight. Being famous is just an opportunity which embodies years of years of accumulation and hard work. In this respect, people in the previous years talk about it from one's morality and attach great importance to being excellent both in performing skills and moral integrity. The paper holds the idea that these two qualities are difficult to separate.

CONCLUSION

The thought and emotion a singer expresses are the soul of music. It is contained in the music style which is a perfect synthesis of cultural elements and artistic forms. The body is a singer's instrument. The singer sings in his or her throat and body to express inner spiritual emotions which are a perfect combination and resonance between soul and body. Singing is the resonance between soul and body which can be also displayed in an integration of a singer's personality, singing content, music form and interaction with the audience. This is an optimal way to achieve his or her singing.

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