

The Analysis of Opera Teaching Methodology in Vocal Music Major in College

YANG Leping^{[a],*}

^[a]Associate professor. School of Arts, Taishan University, Tai'an, China.
*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Opera plays an important role in the study of college students majoring in vocal music. From the analysis of opera works, musical structure, emotion and stage practice. This paper puts forward its own views and expounds how to teach opera.

Key words: Colleges and universities; Opera; Teaching

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INTRODUCTION

Opera derives from the theatrical music in ancient Greek theater. Opera is a kind of comprehensive musical art form, which combines drama, poem, music, dance and art together and appears in Florence, Italy around 16th century. Singing opera can effectively inspect students' vocal singing skills, and promote students' ability of controlling the musical techniques and musical emotion. Thus, opera takes an important role in Vocal Music-major students' study. As Vocal Music teachers in college, we have to deeply understand the importance of Vocal Music teaching, keep innovation in teaching concepts, deepen recognition of Vocal Music teaching, create new teaching methods, reinforce guiding students, and promote students' opera singing ability comprehensively.

1. GUIDING STUDENTS LEARN BACKGROUND OF THE ART WORK

The appearance of an opera is in accordance with the specific politics, life and culture at that time. An excellent opera is a microcosm of that certain period of time, which expresses historical background and social environment and exhibits the life, economy and other aspects at that time. Meanwhile, musical composers will incorporate actual feeling, emotion and thoughts towards that certain period of time into the work. Hence, only guiding students learn creating background, content, thought, and connotation of an opera can help them perform the work in a better way. For example, the opera *Don Juan* depicts the realistic life in late 18th century and early 19th century in Europe. The composer castigates the *Holy Alliance* and European oppositions, and calls on the people to fight for freedom and overthrow tyrant by comparing the past revolutionary experience with the reality at that time. Scenes, appearing in the opera one after the other, reveal and satirize the money-worshiping produced by both British aristocrat and bourgeoisie. Only knowing deeply the content expressed by opera and mastering the creating background, can students perform accurately in singing.

2. ANALYZING MUSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ART WORK

Before singing the opera, beside knowing the creating background, it is also necessary to analyzing the musical structure beforehand, as different musical structures will express different musical emotion developments. For instance, one-part form expresses monotonous sentiment in general; binary form, AB musical structure, represents certain contrast or progress in emotion between two periods but normally no dramatic changes; ternary form, presenting- developing- reappearing structure, represents

contrast and conformity in musical emotion. So, analyzing the musical structure accurately can help us interpreting the work much better, and elevate our singing skills into a more rational level. For example, *The Unfortunate Life* from the opera *Mourning the Past* is a compound ternary form. The whole song consists of overture +A+B and intermezzo +A1, minor key f to major key F in tonality, and back to major key F in recapitulation in the end. Period A is entering with ascending melody and ends the first sentence with descending melody, and the second sentence is in the same sequence with the first one, which introduces mournful and miserable sense of the whole song. Period B is the most conflicting but the most special part in the work. Turning from minor f to homophonic major F, getting open and relaxing in melody and rhythm, the whole music has changed obviously on style. With highlights of major key, the music also changes from mournful and hesitating before into decisive, which expresses the journey of emotion development. The last period of song, recapitulation part, repeats period A, and the music goes back to beginning part covered by a miserable and helpless sense again, which further exhibits Zijun's hopeless and desperate feeling to destiny. As we can see, analyzing the musical structure is really important, which contributes to performing emotion development accurately in the song. So, performer has to fully understand emotion of heroine, and sing in a heart-breaking and crying way to showing all the pains Zijun endured in an unfortunate life.

3. ANALYZING THE MUSICAL EMOTION

Not only analyzing the background and musical structure of work, perfectly singing music selections in opera also requires dealing with emotion precisely. The ultimate goal of musical art is to express emotion and exhibit life. Expressing emotion is the core of opera singing and also the most invisible element to show, which largely determines the technical changes in singing. Still taking the opera selection *The Unfortunate Life* as an example, starting from minor key, this aria needs a quiet and soft entering in the beginning, which expresses grief, repression, and depression of Zijun and sets off pathetic and plaintive emotion. In the aria B period *The Farewell*, for showing Zijun's desperation to love and fear to realistic life, the singer has to control the sound accurately, fully immerse in with a desperate mood, and sing with crying and trembling. After period B and into recapitulation of period A, the emotion again goes back to sorrowful and helpless sense at this moment. Differently, comparing to period A, recapitulation period displays heart-breaking suffering and despairing in fighting with destiny, which is even more painful and mournful in emotion. During performance, the singer has to take herself as the heroine, combining herself deeply with the character, and expressing the emotion following the true

meaning in lyrics and melody. The general emotion lies in this aria is mournful, helpless, and desperate, hidden with unwilling to part with love life, despairing for Juansheng's ruthless leaving, and fearing of realistic life. Thus, the singer needs to pay attention to real emotion and feeling showed by each phrase and each period, and express the song in all-round with the ups and downs in tone, aria, and emotion. Only showing complicated emotion in various expressing methods could perfect the art work singing and create resonance with audience.

4. STAGE PERFORMANCE TEACHING TO STUDENTS

Characterizing different personalities in opera singing, teachers not only need to guide students adjusting tone and singing tune, and enhancing singer's performing ability, but also to cultivate their performance style, harmonious singing, psychological quality and performing ability. Meanwhile, providing students more practicing opportunities, opera rehearsal teaching will eliminate psychological barriers in students' mind, and drive them to develop facial expressions and body movements to adapt to vocal music performance requirements in new era. Hence, opera performance practice could further promote vocal music-major students' comprehensive abilities.

4.1 Selecting Classic Periods From Operas

Opera performance is mounding an integrated figure both visually and acoustically. When audiences are listening the singing, they are also infected by singer's facial expression and body movement. And these are "performing" effect. Generally speaking, college students cannot differentiate between vocal music singing and vocal music performance. More often, they emphasize on elevating singing skills rather than strengthening performing professions or moulding visual and acoustical images. Thus, after practicing several pieces of songs well, teachers could select some classic opera vocal music in each teaching stage and give some assignments which require students following and imitating the opera video, then organize students having some rehearsals on stage setting. Such as, the classic selections from opera *La Traviata*, *Don Juan*, and *Romeo and Juliet* etc. And excellent national opera selections from *Mourning the Passing*, *Struggles in an Ancient City*, and *The White Haired Girl* etc.

4.2 Training Harmonic Thinking Ability and Improving Perceiving Ability on Music

For college students, music perceiving ability is an essential part in both further understanding in vocal music and improving composing ability. Involving opera practicing in vocal music teaching can assist in training students' perceiving ability. In college vocal music class, teachers always put emphasis on vocal music teaching

with the selection of arias. And in most cases, ensembles in opera are neglected with appreciation of monophonic singing. In fact, ensemble performance is always more important and rich than monophonic singing like arias or recitative. In opera, when the plots and character's emotion develop onto climax, and many characters need to express their emotion, ensemble is always coming out and showing at this moment, which is of a great importance and splendor with an incomparable advantage. In our daily singing or drama, merely two or three character will sing or speak simultaneously. Only in opera, ensemble could offer audiences two or three melodies at the same time, which not only presents a beautiful harmonic effect but also helps audiences understand the characters relation and plots development. So, opera practice teaching could help vocal music students form multi-voice thinking ability which is recognizing different musical styles with mode altering and tone altering, and expand their vocal range, try different tones and elevate singing profession in studying opera music.

4.3 Involving into Character and Enhancing Performing Ability

The ultimate goal of studying vocal music is not to sing in piano room or classroom but to perform and sing. So vocal music students has to be equipped with certain performing ability. After class, teachers need to organize character-playing teaching, not only asking students to practice same program but also assigning characters to students with the purpose of performing opera, either an episode or the whole opera given some good opportunities. The students need to be fully prepared with affluent amount of time, and teachers should explain the opera structure, content and performing requirements in this preparing process. After getting into the character, students will experience how to sing emotionally themselves, and combine this emotion into character to accomplish the performance. Undertaking character performance and vocal music sing at the same time is a great challenge for students, but is also a motivation which is a key help for them adapting into job position in future.

4.4 Guiding Students to Elevate Recomposing Ability

Recomposing ability is really important in vocal music singing. In performance, singer shows original composer's requirements as well as adding his personal emotion and personality unconsciously, which is called recomposing.

Students' recomposing ability will determine the quality of singing directly. Opera is an art form combining western music and dance together, which requests performer to have proficient skills. In college opera practice teaching, teachers should guide students experience more connotations in opera, let students understand expressing techniques, performing features and emotion-expressing methods, help students deepen recognition of opera performance. Thus, students could perform vocal music proactively and strengthen recomposing ability which could make students appropriately express tensivity and emotion in opera.

CONCLUSION

As a vocal music teacher in colleges and universities, we should deeply realize the importance of opera teaching. Continuous innovation of educational concepts, deepening the understanding of vocal music education, innovative education teaching method, strengthen the guidance to students, promoting the comprehensive progress of students' opera singing ability.

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