

On the Development of Chinese Opera-from White-Haired Girl to Gray Prairie

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Abstract: Opera combines the plot in poetry, the melody in music, vocal music, artistic conception and atmosphere in fine arts, and has irresistible artistic charm. From White-Haired Girl, the foundation work of national opera, to Gray Prairie, the peak work in the history of Chinese opera. We can deeply understand the efforts and changes made by Chinese opera in absorbing the nutrition of traditional art and expanding the forms of opera expression. Nowadays, with the rapid development of society, the living standard is improving day by day, and the improvement of cultural taste is also an inevitable trend. Looking at the existence and development of Chinese opera in the past century, its development path is full of twists and turns. This paper probes into the stage creation of operas from the aspects of director art, characterization, choreography and dance design of the operas “White-Haired Girl” and “Gray Prairie”, analyzes the reasons why the two operas have achieved success in stage art creation, and tries to provide some enlightenment for the creation and future development of contemporary Chinese national operas.

1. Introduction

There are many kinds of Chinese art forms and all kinds of flowers are blooming. All the achievements have been developed through tortuous paths. China’s new national opera started with “White-Haired Girl” and recently “Gray Prairie” was the climax of Chinese opera performance [1]. Nowadays, with the rapid development of society, the living standard is improving day by day, and the improvement of cultural taste is also an inevitable trend. Looking at the existence and development of Chinese opera in the past century, its development path is full of twists and turns [2]. In this case, it is necessary to get out of the conventional way of thinking only about opera techniques and combine creation and performance styles with changes in social and cultural environment [3]. Since the birth of China’s new opera, there has been a constant coordination and balance between the two development directions: one is the development path based on national music, using the singing, reading and doing forms in opera, and using music creation dedicated to special music as a means [4]. The other is to learn more from western creative techniques and conform to the development path of modern Chinese aesthetics. “Gray Prairie” not only highlights the eternal theme of patriotism, but also, more importantly, the outstanding achievements of this opera in many aspects, which indicates that the Chinese national opera has reached a very mature stage in the 1990s [5]. The development of anything is not smooth sailing, which is a truth that people have agreed on and an objective existence.

With the introduction of western music culture, on the basis of absorbing and drawing lessons from the artistic forms and achievements of western operas, and with the exploration, creation and efforts of generations of musicians, China’s opera has built a Chinese national opera building which combines Chinese and western cultures and has its own unique national style [6]. “White-Haired Girl” and “Gray Prairie” are both subordinate to the overall structure of opera in terms of vocal music form: the content includes solo, chorus, chorus and various instrumental music [7]. They are developing towards the same goal, the aim is to establish Chinese national opera and develop national opera, but they have different roads, styles and styles [8]. Chinese opera in the long river of social history will also be dominated by the common laws of social and cultural changes [9]. All successful opera works reflect the social and cultural characteristics of the time. In comparison, the two operas White-Haired Girl and Gray Prairie have their own specific forms of application [10]. This paper probes into the stage creation of operas from the aspects of director art, characterization,

choreography and dance design of the operas “White-Haired Girl” and “Gray Prairie”, analyzes the reasons why the two operas have achieved success in stage creation art, and tries to provide some enlightenment for the creation and future development of contemporary Chinese national operas.

2. Comparison of Writing Styles between White-Haired Girl and Gray Prairie

The research on the development and evolution of Chinese new opera is related to a series of strategic issues such as the historical evaluation, realistic fate and future development direction of Chinese opera. From the early liberation to the reform and opening up, the society was low in productivity, poor in materials, and the nationality of music was limited by narrow regions. Popular aesthetic interest is mainly reflected in the high acceptance of opera and singing and performing methods based on local national tones. On the basis of absorbing national music, “White-Haired Girl” creates characters familiar to the working people in the liberated areas, which can arouse the sympathy of the audience with tragic fate and arouse hatred towards the old society with heroic resistance. The large-scale migration in history makes the creation of opera “Gray Prairie” must have epic style. Gray Prairie, because of its epic style, requires the singer to have a grand and majestic voice performance, with a wide range of sound, great tension of sound and rich contrast of timbre, volume and timbre. “White-Haired Girl” is precisely based on the development of the plot and the need to accurately select songs to portray characters. It directly transplants folk tunes and applies them to operas through technical treatment. Style, as a stable and systematic feature, its formation is a symbol of the maturity of opera in a certain period, and it is also a reflection of the characteristics of the times in opera works [11]. Opera, as a field of humanities and arts different from natural science theory, has its own characteristics and laws in research methods.



Figure 1 Opera “White-Haired Girl”

Musicians’ understanding of society and life and their aesthetic imagination are unique symbols of opera creation under the background of the times. They are unique features presented from the unity of the content and form of works, aesthetic spirit and artistic expression. Social mass production and the formation of the global economy naturally move the spread, evolution and change of national culture. In the process of free flow of labor resources, music resources are also spread and generalized among regions. In the opera Gray Prairie, the director’s artistic treatment is extremely creative, with exquisite, superb and indirect methods. For example, the prologue used lama chants, people’s weeping and the sad voice calling for the dead of relatives in the gloomy lights and smoke to make the atmosphere of the opera always appear solemn and unusual. The actor’s second creation is an important means for opera to appear on the stage. The opera “White-Haired Girl” uses long solo melodies and uses bright music themes to shape a strong character who does not succumb to fate and dares to struggle. When we compare operas of different styles in different times, we need to put the comparison objects in a unified standard. The actors in the opera “Gray Prairie” follow the artistic rules. They have made great efforts in singing, performing and other aspects and have achieved good artistic results. The stage creation of opera “Gray Prairie” is inseparable from the main actors’ portrayal of opera characters.



Figure 2 Opera “Gray Prairie”

3. Analysis of Internal Factors Affecting Chinese Opera Style

3.1 Establishment of Chinese Opera Style

For the two classic opera works “White-Haired Girl” and “Gray Prairie”, we describe the clear evolution track of Chinese opera style in the development process of many years along the time axis through the comparison of creation style differences at the skill level. The creation of “Gray Prairie” is different from “White-Haired Girl” in that it is developed from the second way of western opera. The author pays great attention to deal with the relationship between emptiness and reality, freehand brushwork and realism, macro outline and detail description when drawing materials for plot, planning layout and arranging scenes. Opera, as a performance art of music drama with songs as the main part, embodies the importance of opera music creation. Opera has diversity, and only by seeking the opposite sex in artistic style can the prosperity of opera be created [12]. Gray Prairie and White-Haired Girl both reflect the recovery of exploited and oppressed human nature and their yearning and desire for a better love and a happy life. At every stage of social development, a specific opera creation style will always be taken as the mainstream style and will be recognized by most audiences in the society. In order to further develop Chinese opera in these aspects, music workers have made unremitting efforts and pursuits. The artistic achievements of the two operas “White-Haired Girl” and “Gray Prairie” have very profound practical significance.

In the development of Chinese opera in the new era, no matter which way to go, what kind of expression technique to use, and what kind of composing technique to use, there is only one purpose, that is, to create more and more good Chinese operas that are popular and popular. Under certain social conditions, if the musicians of personal style are influenced by social thoughts and aesthetics of the times, they are likely to follow the same ideas as other musicians in the same background, presenting similar or similar styles. Whether in music creation, singing style or performance mode, the influence of Chinese folk songs, rap, and traditional opera on Chinese opera is obvious. The creation of Chinese operas strives to express music rich in Chinese national characteristics, while at the same time striving not to break away from the expressions of learning opera music. Although China’s new opera has learned and borrowed the form of Western opera, it has always walked a completely different path from the national opera. For the breakthrough and change of the mainstream of opera in each stage, we must not only explore the creation techniques and formal tastes, but also explore the internal reasons that contain profound social forms and aesthetic consciousness through phenomena. In the process of exploration, Chinese musicians have accumulated rich experience in creation and singing, and have formed their own strong national style. The Chinese opera placed in the long river of social history, together with other cultural references, has a clear development context and is dominated by the universal laws of social and cultural changes.

3.2 Influence of Cultural Trend of Thought on Opera Music Expression

From the early days of liberation until the reform and opening up, the productivity of the whole society was relatively low and the materials were poor, not to mention the rich and colorful entertainment modes. We can deeply feel the evolution of vocal performance techniques in different times through the representative singing style of *White-Haired Girl*. The nationality of music was limited by narrow regions, and the popular aesthetic interest at that time was mainly reflected in the high acceptance of operas and singing and performing methods based on local national tones. The Chinese audience served by Chinese opera grew up under the influence of a long-standing traditional opera art. At that time, the popular entertainment methods were mainly traditional opera and local rap art. Not only has it formed a deep-rooted aesthetic habit of drama, but also it is not satisfied with the existing routines of traditional drama with the development of the times. For opera, no matter the content or music style, the performance methods such as singing and stage are needed to show the dramatic conflicts and shape the characters [13]. “*White-Haired Girl*” is more directly transplanting ethnic folk tunes, and it is applied in opera in a little technical treatment. The stage rhythm and atmosphere of every movement of the opera have strict requirements. The general principle is to abandon the truth of life details and pursue the truth of poetry. At the same time, we must pay attention to the overall sense of opera and create a beautiful form. The formation of large-scale social production and the global economy has naturally mobilized the spread, evolution and change of national culture.

Composers want to let the public accept the art form of Chinese opera, and make this art form suitable for the aesthetic taste and appreciation habits of the Chinese nation. Playwrights and songwriters must inevitably create opera through the art forms familiar to the public. Once created, the life and soul of a opera is given, and the second creation of vocal performance can bring a distinct and rich character to this life. In the “*Gray Prairie*” singer, more of the vocal singing method, whether in the tension of the sound, or in the rich contrast of the sound, volume, sound quality, is enough to support a very epic, dramatic grand framework. In the process of free flow of labor resources throughout China, music resources have also been spread and generalized among regions. The theme, musical composition and artistic form of opera should be carefully designed to suit the taste of the Chinese people, respect their appreciation habits, satisfy their aesthetic taste, conform to China’s national conditions, and have Chinese style and characteristics. Different from the lyrical expression methods in early operas, which mainly used individual aria, *Gray Prairie*, a grand and solemn epic scroll, contains more complex and sharp dramatic conflicts, so its sound modeling must have particularly rich dramatic tension and sharp contrast. The innovative re-creation of some music with regional characteristics is the artistic representation of the transformation from regional cultural characteristics to national cultural characteristics.

4. Conclusion

Entering the new century, China has been deeply integrated into the global diversified and unified economic and cultural patterns. Opera combines the plot in poetry, the melody in music, vocal music, artistic conception and atmosphere in fine arts, and has irresistible artistic charm. If you want to show the musical image and drama completely, you cannot do without the artist’s artistic treatment of the aria. From the perspective of time, “*White-Haired Girl*” and “*Gray Prairie*” are milestones in the development of Chinese opera and epitomize the artistic style of operas in various periods. This paper makes a detailed comparison between the two, and combines the key features of the key art style turning point opera, a complete review of the development track of Chinese opera. Chinese operas must pay attention to the one-sidedness and narrowness of the nation, and always take an open attitude and develop a vision. It is necessary to adhere to the Chinese style and the Chinese style, but also to absorb and draw on the valuable artistic experience of Western opera, and seek development in reference. No matter which kind of singing style and singing method, as long as it meets the appreciation needs of different audiences, it will achieve the success of the performance. When we deeply implant the roots of creation into the fertile soil of our Chinese

nation, our opera will finally stand at the top of the world opera hall.

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