

An Analysis of the Performing Skills of Kabalevsky's "Rondo in a Minor Op.59"

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Abstract: Written in 1958, "Rondo in a Minor Op.59", it is a piano piece for Tchaikovsky Piano Competition by Kabalevsky against the background of the Soviet Union War and using folk music as material. The musical composition is known for its "fiery emotions, gorgeous prestos, melodies as beautiful as songs, and rich and colorful harmony." Based on his life experience and creative style, as well as the creative background of the work, this thesis explores and analyzes the performance skills of the musical composition.

1. Introduction

In the history of piano music, Russian piano music occupies a certain position in the world on the intensity of its unique performance skills and musical style. Russian piano music formed its own music genre in the 19th century, and on this basis, Russian piano music in the 20th century, influenced by the revolutionary ideological trend of the Soviet Union, presented two major characteristics: rational lyricism under the inheritance of national culture and vigorous enthusiasm under the impact of revolutionary ideological trend.

"Rondo in a Minor Op.59" is created against the background of war. Kabalevsky emerges the scene of war through musical notes, expressing his denunciation of war and his call for peace. This thesis wishes that by analyzing this piece of work, we can deeply comprehend the emotion and meaning of the work, and endeavor to play the composer's conception and the connotation of the work.

2. Kabalevsky's Life and Creation Style of Piano Music

Dmitry Balsovich Kabalevsky was born in St. Petersburg in 1904, and he was a well-known composer, pianist, music educator and music social activist. At the age of 6 years old, he began to learn piano, but when he was a teenager, his road to learning music was bumpy and tortuous; when he was 14 years old, he was admitted to Scriabin Music College to study. After four years of study, he was admitted to the piano class and composition class of Moscow Conservatory of Music and studied piano from Scriabin and composition from Jakovski. After seven years of unremitting efforts, he created an outstanding graduation work "Brahms Piano Concerto No.1" and was able to take office in the school.

Kabalevsky created "Symphony No.2" in 1934, which aroused a sensation in music circles and made him rise to fame. In 1938, he created the movie music "Shoals" and the suite "Clown" and was appointed professor of Moscow Conservatory of Music in the same year. From 1949 to 1952, he served as Deputy Director of the Music Department of the Institute of Art History, Soviet Academy of Sciences, and made contributions to the research of the Soviet art history. Since 1962, he had led the Committee on Music and Art Education for Children and Adolescents, which is closely associated with the genre of music creation for children and adolescents. After 1970s, with the support of the Music Education Department of Moscow Education University, the "Kabalevsky Education System" was established and the "Kabalevsky Syllabus" was compiled. After that, he resigned as a professor in the Conservatory of Music, devoted himself to music education in primary and secondary schools, and was appointed Honorary Chairman of International Society for Music Education in 1974. Since 1981, he had been Chairman of Russia's quarterly "Music Teacher" and died in 1987.

In his life, Kabalevsky created a large number of piano works, such as “24 Preludes”, “Rondo in a Minor Op.59” and “Piano Sonata No.3 in F Major Op.46”. As a pianist in the 20th century, his piano music got rid of the shackles of the original harmony and became more free in the application of harmony, thus producing a relatively novel harmony effect; in respect of performance skills, his creation avoids large segments of ostentatious skills. Although there are also some difficult performance skills, his creation aims at enriching the content of the work rather than showing off skills; in the use of materials, he often drew inspiration from folk music and enriched his creation by using the national music tunes and rhythms; the choice of genre is mostly based on the real life in the Soviet Union, with clear music color, distinct rhythm and beautiful lyric melody. His music is a combination of realism and Soviet national music, which fully exhibits the life of the Soviet people and the patriotic feelings of the Soviet people.

3. Creative Background of the “Rondo in a Minor Op.59”

Along with the outbreak of the October Revolution in Russia, the establishment of the Soviet Union and Russian music were strongly impacted by the revolutionary trend of thought. Different from the impact of liberal and democratic ideas in the enlightenment era, the revolutionary spirit of communism was brought into music. Russian piano music in the 20th century was full of revolutionary passion and patriotic enthusiasm while retaining the rational expression of traditional piano music. Especially in the 30s-50s, fueled by the beginning of the upsurge of Soviet construction and the coming of war, the creation and performance of Russian music, especially piano music, during this period was full of passion.

Under such an era background, Kabalevsky's piano music creation ascended to a new stage. His works reflect great historical events, depict cruel wars, and reveal the heroic spirit of the Soviet people in defending their country. “Rondo in a Minor Op.59” is a piano piece for the first Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in 1958 against the background of war. This piece is a typical Rondo for playing. It not merely boasts a structure in which the principal part and the inserting part of the Rondo alternate, but possesses the characteristics of the principal part, the unfolding part and the reproduction part of the sonata form. Different from the typical Rondo, the inserting part of the Rondo forms a sharp contrast with the principal part in material, tonality and character.

Kabalevsky puts a high premium on the richness of harmony color. In his piece of works, he not merely employed the traditional harmony function, but made innovation and development. In this piece, Kabalevsky adopted a large number of creative techniques, such as parallel intervals and parallel chords, horizontal semitones, different tonality opposites of the same tonic, accompaniment texture of broken chord, complication of chord external sounds, application of lingering sounds, etc., which greatly enriched the harmony function and harmony language color of the work.

Through its rich texture, changeable rhythm and novel harmony, Kabalevsky displayed the soldiers' high spirits before going to the battlefield, their cries, grief, struggle and cheer in the war, as well as their mixed feelings after the war, expressed his sympathy for the soldiers and denunciation of the war, and also showed the heroic spirit of the Soviet people in defending their motherland as well as Kabalevsky's own high heroic temperament.

4. Performance Skills of the “Rondo in a Minor Op.59”

(1) Forte (see Music Score Example 1) is the beginning for the introduction of the 4 bars, and the first beat is the stressed tone. When playing, the palm is closed and supported, the thumb of the right hand is matched with the left hand, and the stress is popped up when the arm falls down; the wrist is lifted to drive the remaining 3 tones, and the fingers are quick and dexterous. The pedal is released quickly after the first beat of each bar is pressed. On the whole, it can be gradually strengthened, and with the progress of four times, it is gradually strengthened to the first beat of the principal part. The timbre needs to be bright, giving people a sense of sonority and intensity.

Music Score Example 1



(2) After the introduction, it officially enters the principal part, which consists of material a and other two variants from Bar 5 to Bar 54. This part embodies a group of soldiers who are full of energy, ready to start and enthusiastic about music. Generally speaking, the right hand is songlike (see Music Score Example 2), and attention should be paid to melodic coherence and hierarchical processing of inner and outer voice parts. When playing, the ring finger and the little finger should stand firm, put more intensity on these two fingers, highlight the outer voice part, and control the lower key intensity when playing the inner voice part. The accompaniment texture of the left hand is in the form of broken chord. It is elastic and dynamic, giving people a positive and resolute feeling. When playing, the palm should be supported and the touch key should not be stiff. The first beat of the first bar has an stress on the introduction, then quickly turns to piano, playing lightly and wittily.

Music Score Example 2 (Material a)



The first bar begins to intensify to the first beat stress in the third bar (see Music Score Example 3), then rapidly weakens and makes another strengthening to the first beat stress in the seventh bar. When playing chords, the palm supports and the fingers stand well, especially the ring finger and the little finger, highlighting the external voice part, attaching importance to the coherence of melody, while pressing the key quickly, the whole is full of elasticity and vitality.

Music Score Example 3



After the first beat, the stress quickly fades back (see Music Score Example 4), gradually strengthening and ushering in the climax of the principal part. The player needs to press the key quickly to play the sixteenth note, making it highly grainy. The first note of each bar needs to be highlighted and played by the left hand. The pedal and the left hand switch quickly in the first beat, but the whole sentence still needs to be formed. The prominence of the left hand and the switch of the pedal cannot destroy the integrity of the connection.

Music Score Example 4



(3) The first inserting part starts from Bar 55 to Bar 129. This part consists of material b and its

three transposition changes, the connection with the introduction material, and the supplement formed by material b, which embodies the soldiers' sudden tense situation from time to time during careful marching.

At first, it is played by piano (Music Score Example 5), which is quiet but lively. The right hand highlights the outer part, while the inner part has two tones neatly and lightly. In the second bar, the left hand has a gradually stronger sixteenth note, and then a big jump to the stress of the third bar. The pedal is gradually pressed as the left hand gets stronger until the stress in the first beat of the third bar is completely pressed, then released quickly to create a tense atmosphere, and then returned to piano quickly to form a strong contrast. When playing, 1, 2, 3, and 1 fingers can be employed to run the left hand's sixteenth note to prepare for the next big jump.

Music Score Example 5 (Material b)



This paragraph is the second transposition change of material b (see Music Score Example 6). The second bar of the right hand is a 16th note, only the first note needs to be highlighted while playing, and the other notes are the inner voice part, which is lighter and cannot destroy the coherence of the melody because of the running of the 16th note. The melody that needs to be highlighted on the right hand is the same as the material b before the change, so the first beat of the third bar should also attach importance to controlling the volume, and the following semitones should emphasize highlighting the first tone of each group. Part of the tone of the left hand changes from a single tone to an octave, which is mezzo-forte at this time. There is no emphasis on the tone mark, so it is not necessary to emphasize deliberately. The sound effect of the octave will naturally be stronger than that of the previous single tone.

Music Score Example 6



(4) Bar 113 to Bar 129 are the connection between the first inserting part and the principal part. They are made up of semitones going up step by step and changes in the introductory material, describing the soldiers' excitement before the war and their firm belief in defending their country.

Music Score Example 7



The semitone starts with piano (see Music Score Example 7) and then gradually intensifies to forte. When playing, the left and right hands attach importance to the first tone of each group. In the variant part of the introduction, the first sound in each bar of the right hand is the stress, which needs the support of the palm, the small thumb stands firm, the stress is popped up by falling the arm, and the pedal is released quickly after being pressed. The left hand only has stress in the first beat of the first bar, and other sounds should be played evenly in rhythm and intensity. The left and right hands can lift their fingers high and practice slowly. The low key is pressed quickly, and the

grainy feeling pops up. The last four bars are the octaves of the left and right hands going in opposite directions to gradually intensify. Naturally, there will be great tension in the sound. The last three tones are stresses, requiring thick and bright timbre.

(5) Bar 157 to Bar 199 are the second inserting part. The music speed of this part is slower than that of the principal part. Its music mood forms a strong contrast between mild and broad and tense conflicts, and its music image embodies the soldiers' shouting, sadness, helplessness and cheer in battle.

The first phrase is in E Major (see Music Score Example 8), the right hand is monophonic melody, and the left hand is octave double-tone accompaniment. The gentle lyrical melody and deep and heavy accompaniment blend with each other to form resonance, giving people a bright and quiet feeling, and the end is weakened to pave the way for the mood of the second phrase.

Music Score Example 8



The second phrase is in A Major (see Music Score Example 9). As music proceeds, the music has changed from bright to dim and sad. The right hand is still a monophonic melody like a song, while the left hand is changed from octave to column chord texture, and the tremolo at the bass is added, forming three parts: high, medium and low. Pay attention to the layering of the voice part when playing. The high voice part is full of emotional singing softly, The playing of chords in the medium voice part should be quite gentle, but the harmony should not be ignored. Where the left and right hands are switched, remember not to change the sound along with the switching of hands. The tremolo in the low voice part suddenly appears and then fades from strong to weak, which is in sharp contrast to the high and medium voice parts and is similar to the second bar in the first inserting part.

Music Score Example 9



At the end of the phrase, the sound gradually grows stronger and slower (see Music Score Example 10). The right-hand melody scale goes up, the left-hand accompaniment octave goes down, and the power goes down, making the sound more full and gradually pushing it to the third phrase.

Music Score Example 10



The third phrase is the reappearance of the change of the first phrase (see Music Score Example 11), which brings the audience back from melancholy to light. It starts to return to its original speed, then gradually slows down in the third bar, and gradually weakens in the last bar, which corresponds to the first phrase. The melody is the same as that of the first phrase. The left hand adds the voice part of the right hand melody to the original octave, making the melody more prominent.

Put a premium on the melody part of the left hand when playing.
 Music Score Example 11



The fourth phrase is highly expressive (see Music Score Example 12). At first, it is calm and soothing. As the music advances, it gradually gets excited. After several transposition changes, the mood pushes to the climax of the fifth phrase. This phrase is a change and reappearance of the second phrase, but on the original basis, the left hand changes from the original chord texture to two-tone and single-tone, providing a larger space for the following emotional development. After that, a large number of parallel octaves are employed to reverse the melody of the right hand, forming musical tension and pushing the mood to a high point.

Music Score Example 12



The fifth phrase is also a variation reappearance of the first phrase (see Music Score Example 13). After two developments of the first phrase, on the basis of the original left-hand octave bass, both the left and right hands have added octaves and chords to intensify the melody part. The use of a large number of chordal overtones not merely does not disturb the development of music, but also intensifies the harmony color of music, incisively and vividly displaying the soldiers' fighting a bloody battle and their complicated feelings despite of an eventual victory. This phrase is also the climax part of the second inserting part, in which a large number of octaves and chords exist. When playing, the hand should be supported well, the key should be pressed quickly, the large arm should be relaxed to lower the power, and then the hand should be lifted up by using the reaction force of the piano, which makes the sounds played more three-dimensional, echoing the passionate emotion of this phrase.

Music Score Example 13



(6) Bar 200 to Bar 240 are imitations of the principal part (see Music Score Example 14), which play a connecting role and depict the soldiers gradually recovering from grief to celebrate the victory of the war. This section mainly needs to attach importance to the progression of emotions and the volume control of the inner part.

Music Score Example 14



The last part of this paragraph is an octave tremolo (see Music Score Example 15), which is pushed to fortissimo with the left hand getting stronger. The octave of the right hand can be played with 1 or 3 fingers, which boasts stronger volume than that of 4 fingers. Put a premium on playing evenly.

Music Score Example 15



(7) Bar 241 to Bar 277 represent the principal part (see Music Score Example 16). This paragraph depicts the soldiers getting ready to go to the next battlefield after the war. It is followed by a three-bar connecting part, which transits to the third inserting part. The connecting part appears many times in the third inserting part.

Music Score Example 16



(8) The third inserting part ends from Bar 282 to Bar 368 (see Music Score Example 17). This section embodies that the soldiers miss their hometown and relatives, but the cruel war requires them to pay attention and not relax. Musically, the songlike, soft material c is combined with the introductory material, and a tense melody is suddenly inserted into the gentle music. The two are in sharp contrast and conflict, creating a strong auditory impact. The right hand has two voice parts, the outer voice part is melody while the inner voice part is accompaniment texture with three beats and four consecutive tones, and the left hand is parallel octave of the right hand melody, which intensifies the melody.

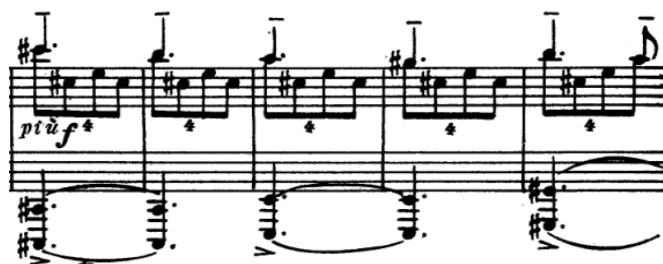
Music Score Example 17 (Material c)



At the beginning of the fourth phrase (see Music Score Example 18), the single tone of the left hand becomes octave, and in the fifth phrase, the rhythm of the left hand octave and the right hand beat appears to form cannon. There are two voice parts in material c with the right hand. Pay attention to placing the power on the fingers of the outer voice part when playing. When changing the fingers, the power transfer method should be adopted, and meanwhile, the back pedal should be employed, and the volume of the inner voice part should be controlled to ensure the coherence and naturalness of the melody. After that, the connection made up of the introductory material is strong and fast. When playing, it needs to be in sharp contrast with the material c. The pedal is released

quickly after the first beat is pressed.

Music Score Example 18



(9) Bar 368 to Bar 382 represent the climax of the principal part, showing the heroic and grand scene of the final battle.

(10) The last is the end of the whole piece, which consists of the main material and chromatic scale. It shows the soldiers recalling the excitement, sadness and pain brought by the war after the war, and their joy of returning home to share the victory with their loved ones.

The reappearance of the principal part continues the previous fortissimo (see Music Score Example 19), and the right hand changes into a column chord, which intensifies the harmony effect. The inner part of the sixteenth note enriches the whole phrase. Pay attention to highlight the melodic sound in the chord when playing. The pedal should be released immediately after the first beat of each bar is pressed.

Music Score Example 19



The semitone process brings a sense of tension to people (see Music Score Example 20). As the left-hand octave reverse semitone process, it finally comes to a complete end on the primary chord in Minor A, drawing a perfect full stop to the war.

Music Score Example 20



5. Conclusions

Taking the war as the background and using folk music materials combined with modern composing techniques, Kabalevsky has created an excellent work “Rondo in a Minor Op.59” for us. By understanding the author's life, creating style and writing background, this thesis analyzes the music image to be displayed and the emotion to be expressed by the author, and expounds the performance skills in the work, such as the playing of octaves and chromatic scales, the emotional changes and the use of force during performance, the use of pedals, etc., wishing to provide some help for the vast number of players.

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