

## **A Brief Talk on the Second Movement of the Piano Sonata No. 2 in B Flat Minor Op.35 of Chopin**

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**Abstract:** "Poet of the piano" Frederick Chopin, regarded as an outstanding representative of romantic music, has made great contributions to romantic music. There was an article commentary, "the contribution that Chopin made to the piano is as much as what Schubert made to singing." Consequently, Chopin plays a decisive role in the history of Western piano music. Chopin composed a total of three sonatas and Piano Sonata No.2 in b flat minor, Op.35 is the most popular one of them. The second movement is SCHERZO, Chopin's scherzo is different from general genres, it is not purely frolic and playful, but contains a wealth of profound ideas. It is not a careless move that Chopin arranges the scherzo as the second movement of this sonata, but has great significance.

### **1. Introduction**

Romantic music follows the style and tradition of classical music, and makes continuous development and bold innovation on the basis of classical music, then perfectly presents the poetic, colorful and emotional characteristics of music. As an outstanding representative of romantic piano playing style, Frederick Chopin has made great contributions to romantic music. There was an article commentary, "the contribution that Chopin made to the piano is as much as what Schubert made to singing." It can be seen that Chopin plays an extremely important role in the history of western piano music. Chopin composed a total of three sonatas and Piano Sonata No.2 in b flat minor, Op.35 is the most popular one of them.

The second movement of the piece is Scherzo. Scherzo is also known as witty music, originated from the 17th century. The initial scherzo forms were vocal music, they began to be used as the genre of instrumental music after the Baroque period, usually a short piece of music with a fast triple time. The word "scherzo" is expressed of humorous and lively interests in music. But it is well known that Chopin's scherzo is different from general scherzo genres. It is not purely frolic and playful, but contains a wealth of profound ideas. It is not a careless move that Chopin arranges the scherzo as the second movement of this sonata, but has great significance.

First of all, this scherzo has extended and expanded to the music development of the first movement due to its special genre. And at the same time, it foreshadows both the third movement "Funeral March" and the tragic end of the fourth movement. Such an arrangement is fully in line with the dramatic logic of the whole sonata, which makes the music plot full of twists and turns to a great extent, and the work becomes much more gripping and attractive; Secondly, Chopin is not the first person who uses scherzo as the second movement of sonata suites. Beethoven has set the scherzo as the second part of the Symphony No. 9 in d minor before. The two composers are different in approach but equally satisfactory in result.

### **2. The first part of the second movement**

Chopin's scherzo is a three-part musical form, the music of the first part is high-spirited, the rhythm is strong, and the beginning part has a continuous octave chromatic scale in the bass, and it appears especially deep with the cooperation of the high voice, so that people can be naturally associated with the fierce war scene and the determination of heroes who want to fight till the end.



Figure 1 The octave in the first bar should be played as follows.

Therefore, when we play the octave in the first bar(which is shown in Figure 1) , our fingers should adhere to the keyboard; Secondly, in order to contrast with the crescendo of the following melody, there is no need to add too much strength when playing at the beginning, but with the help of flexible wrists and the elasticity of the keyboard itself to make the sound full and thick. At the same time, the treble of the octave played by the left and right hand should be prominent, the purpose of this is to make the level of the sound more clear and the tone color more abundant. Besides, we have to control the breath inside, promote the music to a higher level with more intense emotion, and to prepare and lay the groundwork for the emergence of the second-level melody. Next, it should be noted that although the third octave of bar 14 is the same as the one of bar 15, the tone color is completely different. (which is shown in Figure 2.)



Figure 2 The tone color of the octave is different.

The first octave is in the end of the sentence, which should be played slightly just like a small sigh. You should naturally lift your wrist and drive your fingers away from the keyboard, so that you can play a soft and concrete tone. But the octave in the bar 15 is at the beginning of the sentence, we should slow down the playing speed and push forward with our forearm, so that the voice is firm and calm like the composer's unshakable heart to his motherland. Besides, the bass of these two bars is pause, but silence is better than sound at the moment, which is so-called "There is an end to the words, but not to their message."All works of art have implicit characteristics, it is impossible for composers to fully express their feelings in their hearts, so performers should try their best to understand and realize the feelings and artistic conception hidden in them, that is the "overtone" that we often say. Huai Nan Tzu says," someone who listens to the tone of no tone is wise", the tone here means overtone.The bass octave from bar 17 to bar 20 should be played smoothly and consistently.(which is shown in Figure 3.)



Figure 3 Pay attention to the line of the octave.

Therefore, we can practice the smooth movement of the single tone and then the strength transfer of the octave, which is helpful to our control of fingers and wrists. At the same time, the right pedal should be changed according to each note, that is "syncopated pedal". We have to ensure that there is no gap between the notes, this requires us to keep the fingers consistent as much as possible, and then form a melody line with the aid of the connection of the pedal. Then the development of music from bar 31 to bar 36 raises first then falls.(which is shown in Figure 4.)



Figure 4 From bar31 to bar36.

Strong contrast of the melodies from the bar 32 to the bar 34, which makes the emotion changes of music more abundant. Therefore, in the performance of the octave from bar 34 to bar 36, we should relax our shoulders, push forward with the force of the big arm, and form a magnificent and splendid sound effect.

In bar 37, stress appears in the melody as a sharp warning and foresees that the struggle would become more and more dramatic.(which is shown in Figure 5.)



Figure 5 Pay attention to the mark “fz” in bar 37.

This tense atmosphere is further rendered by the subsequent two-hand ascending chromatic scale. Our right hand should stick to and hold the keyboard to ensure the consistency of the harmony. From bar 45 to 49, we should play at one stretch with the breath inside and rush to the top with a powerful force, so as to create the image of heroes moving forward with enthusiasm(which is shown in Figure 6).At the same time, we should clearly distinguish the difference between the connected octave phrase in the right hand and the staccato. We need to play with the elasticity of the wrist and the thrust of the arm, and listen carefully to the differences in strength and color of each sound. The rhythm from the 50th to 55th bars of the music suddenly becomes a little bright, which reminds us of Chopin's Polonaise.



Figure 6 The pianists should play as follows.

Among them, there is a slight width between the first two notes of bar 51 and bar 53, in this way, music can be relaxed, easy to put away, and also can be played systematically. Next, from bar 73 to the chord jump in bar 77 seems to be the most exciting moment in the war(which is shown in Figure 7).When you play, you have to work hard with all your strengths. In practice, we can also take the method of quickly grabbing each chord with our fingers, relaxing and then quickly jumping to the next chord to ensure that every keyboard is accurate and the sound is full in the quick playing. When we play the octave in bar 79, the value should be increased under the extension of the right pedal. At last music is gradually disappearing in the low-pitched sound, as if the smoky sky in the fire gradually drifts away and finally becomes clear. The first part of the scherzo is over here.



Figure 7 From bar 73 to bar 80.

### 3. The middle of the second movement

The next is the middle of the scherzo. In contrast to the mood of the first part, the melody of the middle part is more soft and dreamy, and the rhythm in the slow triple time seems to be full of a good vision after the victory of the war. From bar 85, a dream world without pain and sadness slowly appears in front of people, and the melody of the high voice is as soft and transparent as "the small lotus just show its sharp angle." (which is shown in Figure 8.)



Figure 8 Differentiate different parts while playing.

We should try our best to connect the notes with our fingers, wrists and arms. This is what we usually call the use of "finger pedal". Only when our hands can not maintain connection, can we use the right pedal to connect the notes ; At the same time, the pedal can not be completely stopped, this slightly unclear sound effect can create an atmosphere of "look at flowers in fog". Besides, within the basic rhythm range of the triple time, the moderate width and gap between the melody notes in high voice(that is, the use of "rubato") makes music more flexible and full of life. From bar 93(which is shown in Figure 9), music has been developed to the second melody, but between the first and second melodies, there should be a suspense, instead of switching too fast, the purpose is to make the rhythm to go easy.



Figure 9 The melody becomes more soft.

As if people don't want to move forward because they're obsessed with the beauty of the scene. Such a careful performance describes the music image vividly, people seem to be personally on the scene and cannot help but thinking of the famous poet "Like a Dream" by Qingzhao Li: "I still often remember traveling to the pavilion, playing till dusk, deeply intoxicated, and forgot to return. All the way playing, returning to the boat, but lost into the depths of lotus root. Race, fight, startle a beach of gull egrets."

Music continues to go forward layer by layer in the steady rhythm. When we play this part, if the left hand can not reach the keyboard, we need to play by the right hand; At the same time, we should control the playing power of each finger and ensure that the quality and thickness of the sound are coherent. Besides, we should keep the chords of both hands clear in softness and full with calm. In the process of practice, it is necessary to think carefully about the role, meaning and

distribution of each note in melody, and avoid playing irregular or unclear notes.

Besides, the speed of changing the pedal must be fast instead of cutting the melody into small sections. On the one hand, the slightly unclear sound effect can create a kind of dream-like beauty, on the other hand, it makes the change of light and darkness more distinctive and attractive. The music from bar 109 to 120 further depicts the beauty of this "paradise". (which is shown in Figure 10.)



Figure 10 From bar 109 to bar 120.

Pay attention that the ornament of the right hand of bar 113 needs to be played simultaneously with the bass of the left hand. At the same time, we should control the steady transfer of fingers power when turning fingers, so that each note is strung into a long line like a crystal pearl, shining in the bright moonlight, dazzling but not glaring, which can not be "uneven". In addition, the moisturizing effect of the right pedal can make the light and darkness of the music more colorful.

From bar 144, there seems to be another beauty in the music. It is important to note that the chord of the right hand does not exist independently, but moves forward with the eighth note of the left hand, like a slender and transparent silk thread affecting people's emotions. When playing this part, the fingers must slowly fall on the keyboard, cooperating with the push of the wrist, and then highlights the chord treble. When playing, we should carefully listen to whether each note is gently embedded in the melody, and feel a quiet beauty from nature. In addition, it is necessary to play with different falling speed and touching areas of fingers to differentiate the tone color of the high voice and the middle part of the right hand clearly and accurately. Especially the falling speed of the thumb can not be fast, otherwise the parts and levels will be mixed. For example, the first high note of bar 156 and bar 157 is the same, but the third note in bar 156 belongs to the middle part, while the third note in bar 157 belongs to the high voice.(which is shown in Figure 11.)



Figure 11 The same notes in different parts.

So the timbre of the two notes is very different. A performer must first intently reads the score, and then carefully touches the keyboard to complete the music work very well. In addition, the eighth note of the bass from bar 144 to bar 160 are both short and delicate, as if the petals strung on the silk thread are light and soft. So when we play, we have to pay attention to the long and short sentences and the carrying relationship between them, then increase the touching areas of fingers and adjust the strength of pushing and kneading with the wrist and forearm at the same time, so that the change of timbre can be more flexible and the emotional expression can be more natural. Finally, our breath should fluctuate with the melodic lines to make music full of rich expression, as a result, the whole music image becomes interesting and animate.

From bar 161 of the movement, the singing music returns to the beginning in the middle of the scherzo, as if people have gone back to the world they had dreamed of. Then in bar 184, the gentle and graceful melody becomes an accelerating dotted eighth note, which immediately makes people feel nervous suddenly. When playing this section, our two hands need to firmly stand on the keyboard and push forward with the strength of our arms, so that the sound can break out from the keyboard. As the "crescendo" changes layer by layer, people's thoughts are pulled back to reality little by little, this also indicates that the fierce struggle is about to begin again.

#### 4. The ending of the second movement

The movement enters the ending of the scherzo from bar 189, this part reproduces the tense and dramatic music in the first part and mercilessly breaks the serenity in the middle section. This dramatic contrast satirizes the cruelty of the war. Then starting with the "p" mark in bar 265 of the movement, the passionate music naturally transits into the lyric theme of the middle section in "smorzando".(which is shown in Figure 12.)



Figure 12 Pay attention to the dynamic changes.

After this, the music is no longer as sweet and pleasant as before from bar 273, which is mixed with melancholy and sadness. The melody of the right hand is weaker and weaker under the semitone of the left hand, as if the hope of victory is being swallowed up bit by bit by the cruel reality, becoming more and more remote, and finally disappearing. Next, two deep octaves are used in bar 284 and bar 285 of the movement just like someone is lingering out, declares the failure of the war.(which is shown in Figure 13.)



Figure 13 Bar 284 and bar 285.

Finally only the lingering sound of the chord in the right hand reverberates in the air for a long time as the smoke of gunpowder, which makes people feel so sad. The second movement comes to an end.

#### 5. Conclusion

Camille Mauclair, a famous French aesthetician and art historian, calls Chopin the author of “the great, arrogant and tragic Sonata in b flat minor.” It shows that this sonata plays an inestimable role in the history of western piano music and makes Chopin an unparalleled composer in the 19th century of Europe. Chopin fully integrates the music characteristics of Romantic period into the second movement of the sonata (especially the application of "rubato" in the music sentence), and expresses his personal emotions in a bold and innovative way, which gives the work profound ideas. Therefore, both the music and emotion are maximized in the work.

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