

Musical Characteristics and Performance Techniques of "Children's Play" from the Perspective of Piano Performance

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Abstract: "Children's Play", the third piece of Zhu Jian'er's suite "Impressions of the South", is based on the Hani folk rhyme "Going to the Market" from Yunnan. It integrates ethnic musical language with modern piano composition techniques, becoming a piano piece with both artistic value and practical difficulty. From the perspective of piano performance, this paper first analyzes the core musical characteristics of the work, including the derivation and development of the folk rhyme theme, the innovative use of ethnic modes, the hierarchical construction of polyphonic texture, and the childlike expression of rhythmic melody; then focuses on the core technical difficulties in performance, such as the clarity control of fast note groups, the balance and coordination of left and right hand textures, and the timbre shaping of ethnic charm; finally puts forward targeted technical processing strategies to realize the organic unity of technical breakthrough and musical expression, providing practical reference for piano performers and educators.

Keywords: Piano Performance; Musical Characteristics; Technical Processing; Ethnic Charm

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1. Analysis of the Core Musical Characteristics of "Children's Play"

1.1 Derivation and Development of the Folk Rhyme Theme

The core theme of "Children's Play" is derived from the Hani folk rhyme "Going to the Market". The theme melody is concise and lively, based on the pentatonic scale, full of childlike innocence. Zhu Jian'er adopted a "derivative development" strategy in handling the theme: the original folk rhyme theme is directly presented at the beginning, with a clear melody line and small interval jumps, mainly step progression and small leaps, simulating the innocence of children; then the theme is transformed through variation, sequence, expansion and other techniques, such as transposing the theme melody an octave higher in the middle section, paired with a thickened harmonic texture to enhance the sense of musical hierarchy; the coda returns to the original theme, but forms a structural closed loop of beginning and end echoes through rhythm compression and timbre changes. From the perspective of performance, different presentation forms of the theme put forward differentiated requirements for touch methods and timbre control, which require accurately grasping the emotional connotation of the theme in different sections.

1.2 Derivation and Development of the Folk Rhyme Theme

The work is based on the unique pentatonic scale (do, re, mi, sol, la) of Hani music, and incorporates modern harmony techniques, forming an interweaving characteristic of "ethnicity and modernity". In terms of mode, through modal conversion within the same palace system (such as shifting from C palace mode to G palace mode), the fluidity and color change of music are created; in terms of harmony, it breaks the traditional functional harmony framework and adopts modern techniques such as non-tertian harmony and added-tone harmony, which not only retains the pure charm of ethnic music, but also enhances the tension of music. For example, in the theme repetition section, the left-hand accompaniment adopts quartal harmony, which not only avoids the heaviness of traditional harmony, but also echoes the right-hand melody, highlighting the lightness of children's play. This innovation of mode and harmony requires performers to balance the clarity of ethnic music and the sense of hierarchy of modern harmony in timbre processing.

1.3 Hierarchical Construction of Polyphonic Texture

The texture structure of "Children's Play" is mainly polyphonic texture, simulating the interactive scenes of

children playing through the interweaving dialogue of multiple voices. There are double polyphonic relationships in the work: one is the voice dialogue between the right-hand melody and the left-hand accompaniment, and the other is the multi-voice superposition within the melody (such as two-part counterpoint in the middle section). For example, in bars 16-24, the right hand splits into two independent voices: the upper voice continues the theme melody, the lower voice simulates the running rhythm of children with fast sixteenth notes, and the left hand provides harmonic support with stable chord accompaniment, forming a polyphonic texture of "three-voice interweaving". This texture structure requires performers to have a clear sense of voice hierarchy, clarify the primary and secondary voices in performance, avoid voice confusion, and highlight the sense of dialogue among multiple voices through dynamics control and timbre changes.

1.4 Childlike Expression of Rhythmic Melody

Rhythm is the core element of "Children's Play" to shape the childlike atmosphere. The work adopts rich rhythmic patterns, such as syncopation, dotted rhythm, alternation of legato and staccato, etc., to simulate the agility and liveliness of children playing. For example, the opening theme adopts a legato rhythm of "eighth note + sixteenth note", paired with occasional syncopation, breaking the rigidity of regular rhythm; the middle section uses dense sixteenth notes to simulate the rapid rhythm of children chasing and playing; the coda ends with dotted rhythm, forming a "gradually slowing down and calming down" effect, as if the tiredness and satisfaction of children after playing. In addition, there are a large number of tempo rubato marks in the work, requiring performers to make appropriate flexible speed adjustments on the basis of strictly following the basic beat, enhancing the vividness of music.

2.Core Technical Difficulties in Piano Performance of "Children's Play"

2.1 Control of Clarity and Fluency of Fast Note Groups

The middle and coda sections of the work contain a large number of fast sixteenth note groups, such as the right-hand fast scale-like progression in bars 32-40, which has a large range span, high note density, and requires maintaining the clarity of each note while keeping the speed stable. The core of this difficulty lies in the independence and flexibility of the fingers. If the fingers exert force improperly, it is easy to have blurred notes and chaotic rhythm; at the same time, the performance of fast note groups needs to take into account the fluidity of music, avoiding the breakage of melody lines due to overemphasizing individual notes.

2.2 Balance and Coordination of Left and Right Hand Textures

The texture structure of "Children's Play" is complex, and the left and right hands often assume different musical functions: the right hand is mostly the melody voice or fast note groups, while the left hand takes into account both accompaniment harmony and counterpoint voice. For example, in bars 20-28, the right hand plays the theme melody (mf), the left hand includes both the bass voice (f) and the counterpoint melody in the middle range (mp), and the three need to form a clear dynamic hierarchy. The common problems in performance are: the left-hand bass voice is too loud to cover the melody, or the counterpoint voice is confused with the melody voice, leading to blurred texture hierarchy; in addition, the synchronization of the left and right hand rhythms is also a major difficulty, such as the superposition of syncopation and legato rhythm, which is prone to rhythm dislocation.

2.3 Timbre Shaping of Ethnic Charm

The ethnic characteristics of "Children's Play" require performers to get rid of the traditional timbre concept of Western piano performance and shape the timbre in line with the charm of Hani music. The melody line of the folk rhyme theme needs to present a "clear and bright" timbre, simulating the pure voice of children; while the fast note groups in the middle section need to maintain a "light and agile" timbre, avoiding excessive heaviness. However, as a Western instrument, the inherent timbre of the piano is different from that of ethnic instruments. How to restore the ethnic charm through adjusting the touch method is the core difficulty in performance. For example, the

"close-touch" in traditional piano performance can ensure a soft timbre, but it is difficult to present the brightness of Hani music; while the "high-lift finger touch" is prone to rigid timbre, so it is necessary to find a balance between the two.

3. Technical Processing Strategies for Piano Performance of "Children's Play"

3.1 Technical Processing of Fast Note Groups: Finger Independence and Force Control

To solve the problem of clarity and fluency of fast note groups, it is necessary to start with finger training and force application methods. First, in the basic training stage, adopt the "slow decomposition practice method": split the fast note groups into phrases, practice with slow speed and high-lift fingers to strengthen the independence and granularity of the fingers, ensuring the clear pronunciation of each note; at the same time, pay attention to the "weight transfer" of the fingers, avoid excessive force of a single finger leading to muscle tension, and realize the natural transmission of force through the coordination of arms and fingers. Second, in the speed improvement stage, adopt the "gradient acceleration practice method": on the basis of solid slow practice, gradually increase the speed, and maintain stable practice for at least 2-3 days for each gradient increase, avoiding haste. In addition, performers need to pay attention to the relaxation of the wrists during performance, drive the finger movement with the wrists as the fulcrum, reduce the arm burden, and predict the direction of the note groups in advance through sight to ensure the fluency of performance.

3.2 Technical Processing of Texture Balance: Voice Hierarchy and Dynamics Control

To achieve the balance and coordination of left and right hand textures, it is necessary to establish a sense of voice hierarchy with "distinct primary and secondary". First, clarify the dynamic relationship between the melody voice and the accompaniment voice: the melody voice is mainly from *mf* to *f*, while the accompaniment voice is controlled from *p* to *mp*, highlighting the melody line through dynamic contrast. For example, in the three-voice texture section, the theme melody above the right hand is played with slightly stronger dynamics and bright timbre, the lower counterpoint voice is played with medium dynamics, and the left-hand accompaniment is set off with soft timbre, forming a hierarchical structure of "prominent melody, clear counterpoint, and stable accompaniment". Second, distinguish different voices through touch methods: the melody voice adopts "legato touch" to ensure the coherence of the line; the accompaniment voice adopts "staccato touch" or "half-legato touch" to enhance the lightness of the texture; the counterpoint voice adjusts the touch according to the melody direction to form a sense of dialogue with the theme. In addition, during practice, the "separate voice practice method" can be adopted: practice the melody voice, counterpoint voice and accompaniment voice separately, then gradually superimpose them to ensure the accurate rhythm and dynamic balance of each voice.

3.3 Technical Processing of Ethnic Charm: Timbre Shaping and Touch Adjustment

To restore the ethnic charm of the work, it is necessary to adjust the touch method and timbre control in a targeted manner. First, for the clear timbre of the folk rhyme theme, adopt the "half-close touch" method: the fingers are lightly attached to the keys, mainly exerting force with the finger pads, avoiding excessive pressure from the arm weight, and controlling the key striking speed at the same time to make the timbre soft and bright, simulating the pure texture of Hani folk rhymes. Second, in sections with rich harmonic colors, enhance the ethnic charm through "precise use of pedals": adopt "syncopated pedal" or "split pedal" to avoid harmonic blur, extend the resonance of the bass voice, and highlight the harmonic characteristics of the pentatonic scale; for example, in the modal conversion section, emphasize the timbre contrast brought by modal changes through short pedal pauses. In addition, in the melody section simulating children's cries (such as bars 28-30), adopt "staccato touch", where the fingers touch the keys quickly and then leave immediately, forming a short and bright timbre, enhancing the sense of musical imagery.

3.4 Technical Processing of Rhythmic Flexibility: Rubato and Detail Control

In the processing of rhythmic flexibility, it is necessary to follow the principle of "overall stability and local

flexibility". First, clarify the scope of application of tempo rubato: it is mainly concentrated in the theme transition section, coda closing section, and phrases simulating the pauses of children's play (such as bar 15, bar 36). Avoid overusing rubato in fast note group sections to ensure the overall fluency of the rhythm. Second, the processing of rubato must be based on accurate beats: during practice, first play at a fixed speed with a metronome to clarify the basic rhythm framework, then in sections marked with rubato, moderately slow down or speed up. When slowing down, maintain the coherence of the melody line; when speeding up, ensure the clarity of the notes. For example, in the theme recurrence section, you can slow down slightly at the beginning of the phrase, and gradually accelerate during the phrase progression, forming a "gradually accelerating" rhythm change to simulate the excitement of children playing; the coda gradually slows down the speed, paired with weakened dynamics, creating a quiet atmosphere of "end of play". In addition, for the alternation of staccato, legato and staccato, it is necessary to distinguish the texture of different note types through changes in finger touch force and key release speed. For example, legato needs to maintain the coherence of the fingers, staccato needs to be short and powerful, and staccato is between the two, enhancing the sense of rhythm hierarchy and childlike expression.

4. Conclusion

As a representative work of Zhu Jian'er's ethnic music innovation, "Children's Play" has musical characteristics that both contain the ethnic heritage of Hani folk rhymes and integrate modern piano composition techniques, putting forward dual requirements for performers' technical ability and artistic understanding. From the perspective of piano performance, the core challenge of the work lies in how to balance technical accuracy and artistic expression, and realize the organic unity of ethnic charm and childlike innocence. Through the research of this paper, it can be seen that the key paths to interpret the work are the finger independence training for fast note groups, the voice hierarchy control for texture balance, the timbre shaping for ethnic charm, and the detail control for rhythmic flexibility. Performers need to deeply analyze the musical characteristics of the work, clarify the technical difficulties of each section, and combine technical breakthroughs with musical expression through targeted technical processing strategies, not only restoring the ethnic cultural connotation of the work, but also vividly reproducing the vivid scenes of children playing, allowing the audience to feel the unique charm of ethnic music and childlike innocence in the timbre of the piano. Future research can further combine teaching practice to explore the application value of "Children's Play" in piano teaching, providing more practical references for the piano teaching of ethnic music works.

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