

Research on Local Instrumental Music in Tianshui City, Gansu Province

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Abstract

The Chinese nation boasts a rich history and profound traditional culture, with instrumental music ranging from the pre-Qin bone whistle and Jiahu bone flute to contemporary instruments like the Erhu and Banhu. Ancestral contributions have left behind an array of national instrumental music, performance forms, and a vast repertoire of pieces that play a significant role in reflecting people's thoughts, feelings, aesthetic taste, and are beloved by many. Tianshui City in Gansu Province is one of China's important birthplaces for civilization. Its deep historical roots and unique natural conditions provide fertile ground for developing instrumental music while preserving local traditions. This paper analyzes Tianshui's cultural elements through excavating its musical heritage from historical perspectives to suggest ways to inherit and develop Tianshui's instrumental music culture so it can be shared across China or even worldwide.

Keywords

National instrumental music; Performance ; Inheritance.

1. Instruments and the development of modern music

With the continuous progress and development of society, pop music has increasingly entered people's field of vision. Particularly, young individuals are captivated by this genre while gradually overlooking the advancement of national instrumental music. Currently, pop music plays a dominant role in the music industry, especially among young people. As time progresses, people's lifestyles undergo significant changes and national instrumental music is influenced by various modern musical elements such as electric guitars, R&B, and MTV. These products of the new era align with societal development and integrate into the high-tech society, reflecting the fast-paced lives of modern individuals. Under the influence of foreign culture and social transformations, ethnic instrumental music appears less frequently on various social media platforms. Meanwhile, young people who are attracted to pop music become increasingly fanatic about celebrities; thus highlighting the growing neglect towards ethnic instrumental music culture. The reform and opening up policy have opened up new horizons for our spiritual life. In China, television programs that gain immense attention usually revolve around popular singers' competitions. While everyone pursues these mainstream artists fervently, they pay little attention to the development or excellence within national instrumental music domain. Even in the eyes of younger generations today, national instrumental music symbolizes outdatedness; thereby indicating its diminished status in contemporary times. Now let us analyze why pop music is so popular: Firstly it is highly commercialized and caters to public preferences through various means; secondly social media tends to prioritize entertainment over other aspects; thirdly Chinese national instrumental music lacks a mature marketization operation mechanism; finally Chinese national instrumental has experienced slow growth in recent years.

2. Instrumental music: Banhu of Tianshui

By the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the Clapper opera in the north developed vigorously, and the sound of the beautiful Banhu showed its artistic characteristics. During the performance of the Clapper opera, Banhu occupied an important position and was called "the first stringzi". With the development of various national instrumental music, the types and forms of Huqin are gradually enriched. According to its structural specifications, pronunciation level and scope of use, it can be classified into treble Banhu, tenor Banhu and tenor Banhu. In the modern Banhu music performance, skillful techniques are the prerequisite elements, full devotion is the soul of performance, and unique playing style is the key to performance, which adds greater artistic effect to Banhu art.

It is often stated that "the sound originates from the qin and commences with the bow." Among various art forms, each possesses its own distinct characteristics and performance rules. Within the realm of ethnic stringed instruments in the Tianshui region, bow technique holds great significance, as it determines whether a performance can captivate and stir emotions. Timbre and volume serve as manifestations of Banhu's bow method, which encompasses both holding and carrying techniques. Precise mastery of these techniques enables the conveyance of soulful expressions within a musical piece; without skilled bow technique, Banhu would struggle to produce varying effects such as fast or slow tempo, urgency or gentleness, lightness or heaviness, strength or weakness. Simultaneously, achieving desired sound effects becomes challenging while expressing joy, anger, sadness, melancholy sentiments along with thoughts and feelings like suppression or liberation cannot be fully conveyed artistically. The appearance of every artwork is shaped by a specific historical context that imbues it with its essence; thus understanding its connotation solely through manufacturing and portrayal of visual imagery proves difficult since each work carries within itself the era in which it was born in terms of form and content. Whether depicting characters or describing scenery even through lyrical narration or artistic conception - all reveal inner emotions experienced by their creators. Consequently, Banhu players must adjust their mental state prior to performing in order to achieve an artistic effect that seamlessly blends scene depiction with sound expression and emotional resonance throughout the playing process. How can these artistic effects be achieved during performance? In my opinion, one should not only possess proficient technical skills but also enhance their cultural literacy encompassing comprehension of performance's cultural background alongside consulting seasoned folk artists.

3. Erhu of Tianshui Instrumental music

The erhu, a highly popular folk instrumental music in Tianshui, represents one of the most distinctive pull-playing instruments. It exudes a profound national allure and possesses unique stylistic characteristics. As an integral part of Tianshui's instrumental music tradition, the erhu is renowned for its delicate and lyrical melodies that evoke the beauty of human vocals. Abing, an esteemed artist and creator of the erhu, has successfully preserved and propagated his masterpiece "Erquan Reflecting the Moon," which has garnered widespread acclaim and adoration from audiences. Whenever I listen to this enchanting composition, it feels as if Abing himself is performing before me with closed eyes. His artistic expression transcends mere musical performance; rather, it resembles storytelling that captivates all who hear it.

The playing techniques of the Erhu are highly diverse, each possessing its own distinct characteristics. They can be broadly categorized into two groups: fingering and bowing. Fingering techniques include glissando, kneading strings, picking strings, trills, and more; while bowing techniques encompass jumping bows, stopping bows, picking strings, breaking bows, among others. Among these techniques, the glissando and kneading string skills performed by the left hand stand out as particularly distinctive in Erhu performances. A proficient Erhu player

not only requires exquisite technical skills but also needs to adhere to a regular and scientific approach in their performance.

4. Conclusion

The development and preservation of Chinese folk instrumental music has been a subject of great interest among scholars. Despite the relatively sluggish progress of Chinese folk instrumental music in the face of popular music's influence, notable achievements have emerged within this context. Regarding the advancement and safeguarding of Chinese national instrumental music under the impact of pop music, a diverse education approach will undoubtedly facilitate mutual learning between Chinese national instrumental music and its counterparts in the realm of popular music. This will enable Chinese national instrumental music to assimilate various musical elements and incorporate them into its own repertoire, thus allowing it to keep pace with contemporary trends and evolve towards greater diversification.

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