

On the Timbre of Clarinet

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Abstract

The clarinet is a woodwind instrument with a widest musical rang and has a unique sound feature. Its timbre can regulate the interpretation of music works. Band, chamber music, solo works and some other music works with different forms can be played by the clarinet flexibly. The timbre is not immutable and frozen. When the music needs a new form of performance, the new performing skills will appear, and affect the continuous development of the performance timbre. Clarinet since its birth has changed greatly in the structure. The range and timbre have also evolved. Clarinet gradually becomes a very expressive dramatic instrument with great tension, beautiful tone, convenient fingering and various modes.

Key words: Clarinet; Timbre; Performance

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INTRODUCTION

Timbre, the color of sound, is not only one of the most important factors in the sound, but also a vital means of musical expression for clarinet players. Good timbre can enrich the expressive force of music language. Since clarinet possesses beautiful timbres and a broad range of voice, music master Berlioz has once praised it “could have a valuable property of being like far-reaching misty, valley echo, lingering sound, faint dusk or desert and other effects.” Due to different cultures, playing habits,

etc., the timbre of clarinet has formed the characteristic of the coexistence of several kinds of timbre: “German-style” fullness and richness, “French-style” freshness and clearness and “English-style” broadness and relaxation.

There is a higher requirement on the performing skills of Clarinet nowadays. With the development of Chinese musical and cultural enterprise, the composers composed some excellent works on clarinet under the influences of Western and Chinese academic attitude. The composers have positive attitudes towards the expressive forces of the clarinet. The clarinet can be used to play different musical works with a strong expressive force. The performing timbre of clarinet has a widest musical range and has a unique sound feature. Its timbre can regulate the interpretation of music works. As an excellent clarinetist, one needs basic playing skills and needs to grasp and control its tone. The performance timbre is not immutable and frozen. When the music needs a new form of performance, the new performing skills will appear, and affect the continuous development of the performance timbre.

1. THE PERFORMANCE SCOPE OF THE TIMBRE OF THE CLARINET

Clarinet since its birth has changed greatly in the structure. The range and timbre have also evolved. Clarinet gradually becomes a very expressive dramatic instrument with great tension, beautiful tone, convenient fingering and various modes. In the whole process of tectonic evolution of the clarinet, clarinet family is growing, and now it has developed into a common instrument including orchestra, band, and chamber music. Because clarinet can meet a variety of adjustable performance, it is favored by the composers. It provides more abundant expressive force in the creation of sound works for the composers. Clarinet’s bass area deep and full, the median area pure and beauty, the treble area crisp and bright, the

composers kept on studying the expressive force of its timbre on those characteristics and created clarinet works in different periods and with different styles, establishing the position of clarinet in performance, such as Mozart's works Clarinet Concerto. This clarinet concerto is played with tune A whose timbre sounds softer and more elegant compared with tune B, which is clearer and brighter. The best registers of the clarinet are the Holzblaser Fagott Tiefe Lage and the Holzblaser Fagott Hohe Lage, which are known as registers of expression. The particular sounds and timbres of the Holzblaser Fagott Tiefe Lage cannot be replaced by those of any other woodwinds. The timbres, especially the timbres of the few lowest notes, are rich and full with a little dramatic and intensive feeling. On the contrary, the clearness along with a feminine tone and expressive personality in Holzblaser Fagott Hohe Lage is fully expressed by Mozart in his Clarinet Concerto.

The sound performance of clarinet is expressed mainly through the following aspects: its sound, tone and expressive force. First, try to express it through the sound — from ppp to fff. This kind of pronunciation cannot be done by other woodwind instruments. Second, try to achieve different sounds from the expressive force, so its performance can be blue, distant, and grotesque and so on. Third, it can be expressed through its tone. Clarinet performance can make use of the different characteristics in its musical range so that the timbre can be more full, bright and vigorous.

Take Mozart's "A clarinet concerto" for example, timbre contrast between passages appears many times between bright treble and bass mellow area in this piece of music, which is a clear treble and bass area dialogue nature of the phrase. In the view of its strength, it can vary from the strongest voice to the weakest one with less breath consumption, especially in the same tone; the effect of change of the strength works most. Especially in the third chapter, it shows the people's festive mood in the form of a kind of passion. At this moment, just imagine that you were in the classical period, standing in rural farms, leaving the usual politeness, dancing happily without any restriction. In addition, only mastering basic performing techniques, making the voice of the range of the whole instrument unified can he be said to have mastered the technology to control the sound.

2. THE INNER SENSE OF THE TIMBRE OF CLARINET

Timbre is actually the abstract aesthetic appreciation of voice for humans. As for the tone, everyone has a standard on the aesthetic appreciation, which is one of the means of interpreting musical works. The clarinet has a variety of changes of tone and music expressive force. For the players, the purpose is to get the inner sense of

the sound, and through performing, accurately to transfer it to the audiences. It is particularly important to choose the timbre to play, and the selection of the inner timbre can be realized on the basis of the analysis and research of the scrutiny and understanding of works. Composers in different periods would have different characteristics of timbre, and in the process of pursuing inner hearing, they would satisfy the more and more detailed requirements of performance. Timbre can only be sensed by hearing. The timber of the players' connoisseurship and timbre auditory (including aesthetics) has a very big effect on identifying the sound qualities, precisely, art taste and hearing.

If we want to constantly improve their own inner sense of hearing, you need to listen to the works in different stages, to cultivate and improve the inner tone hearing on the interpretation of many different versions. Different style works bring us different inner sense of hearing: Some of the works, clear, simple and pure tone with moderate tone; Some of the musical expression more emphasis on extending the dramatic tension, in order to achieve a rich multi-level emotional description. There are a number of the color of harmony and timbre as a major means of expression. On the hypothesis of the inner sense of hearing generated by the tone, through the actual performance, let the playing affection as much as possible close to the inner sense of hearing of the sound, so that you can constantly move forward in the pursuit of the perfect art sound on the way. Only through the different logical analysis of the works, through the content and artistic expression on the composer creation, can the tone be used with goals, and finally we can make the perceptual and rational achievement a unity.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF PERFORMERS' SKILLS ON TIMBRE

The relationship between performance skills and timbre is a kind of interdependence, mutual promotional one. Clarinetist skill directly affects the tone. With the development of the times, the clarinet structure technology continues to improve. With the brand new skills needed for performance, the clarinet sound has different levels of development. Different music in different stages contains different styles of music. The connotation of clarinet playing skill is not static, and it is a process of alienation. When we are in the pursuit of new playing techniques, we are actually promoting the development and progress of music instruments.

The acquirement of good timbre is due to many factors, in addition to the quality of the instruments and the right way to play, I think the most important thing is the control of the mouth, the use of breath, and the adjustment of the oral cavity.

First of all, for clarinet player's skills, there are certain requirements on the mouth, hands, and ears. Its most basic

skill is mastering the mouth type when playing. Clarinet playing musical instruments is inseparable from the natural to mouth type requirements, although the steps are simple, but because the player physiological conditions exist difference, thus affecting the tone. Want to get the perfect tone, to find the suitable conditions of mouth: The first, spring and the lower teeth at about 45 degrees angle of the best; Second, is to find the optimal control of reed, which is particularly important, because the reeds have thick points, including the flute head depth will directly affect the reed vibration, so be sure to flexibly control the reed in the effective range; Third, directly affect the position of the head of fixed with flute timbre, in the actual playing process, if the lower lip pad is too small, there will be between the teeth and the reed is too sensitive, when blowing soprano convenient, interval but playing fright is good control and grasp, when playing bass tone is also very easy to disperse, another a little lower lip pad too much, this will cause the timbre is stuffy, because the reed vibration affected, resulting in playing soprano is very laborious, therefore need to find an ideal, and is suitable for the performer's best lip position, to play with sound; Fourth, while playing the chin must be leveled, easy to mouth can intelligent control of the whole zone, through the upper and lower teeth bite force to fine tune the muscles around the mouth, control of gas flow, avoid mouth leak or flow is not concentrated and directly affect the tone; Fifth, mouth type requires a steady arm support force, it can guarantee the sensitive when playing pronunciation, tone invariant compact.

Secondly, to play the clarinet, tongue position is also crucial, because the tongue triggering reed way and position have different impacts on the sound. The tongue is in the oral cavity when making any activity. Different players have different tongue shapes, sizes, so one needs to pass some oral pronunciation to assist to find tongue movement and the tongue position. The height of the tongue in the oral cavity will change the timbre, so one should keep the flute head into the mouth to maintain good mouth type and keep stable air pressure to ensure the sound.

Thirdly, control the breath well in the process of playing, because the use of breath is a fundamental way to play woodwind. The diaphragm elastic level directly has an influence on the high and low air pressure and when air flow has been directly influenced, the volume and tone will change. When playing, one needs to control the pressure and air flow according to the music, timbre, pronunciation with different expressive force. Try to avoid the three tensions while playing: The first is trying to relax the neck when taking breath, and avoid the flute head compression of the neck. Making airflow presented and maintaining smooth breathing normally are the basis. Then, don't expand the hardtop in the abdomen when playing, but breathing fast and

fully, chest and diaphragm bags at, so as to control the change of pressure time which will be very flexible. And the entire shoulder and arm muscles cannot be nervous, which will lead to pleural tension. And in the non natural state, it will make playing feel aspiratory effort, shortness of breath, and make the tone to become tight, stiff fingers. So we have to make the whole body relaxed, maintain the natural shoulders sinking in playing. Overall relaxation will make the sound and quality improved, so when playing, the body should keep the state of relaxation, which is very important.

Besides, how to control breath is a skill one performer has to master due to its essential importance. In the early 18 century, a renowned clarinet performer put that "I believe a person an excellent one who can play an exact tune in 20s other than someone who can play 20 tunes within 1s." From this remarks, we can notice that it is not good to try so hard to keep a tune for a long time but focus on the characteristics of sections, which is premise for performers' improvements.

Although each register of clarinet possesses the peculiar characteristic of timbre, we need to unify them so as to make every of register sound balance. When playing music scales, high pitch and low pitch are supposed to be nearly splendid richness, in the meanwhile one has to keep the mouth soft and keep the airflow and pressure stable with the strength of abdomen, and when changing the register, one should keep his mouth with his air fluent and fingers should also be used in a very soft way at the same time, especially when one is playing a high pitch, he has to get the feel of playing alto with air provision. There is no musical instrument which can make unified voice since it is made, so voice should be controlled, and sometimes we also need to unify different tunes by the use of other devices.

Fourthly, influence of the hearing on tone quality is obvious, and consciousness of the timbre is abstract, but this kind of inner sense of hearing has a clear direction. Hearing is an important factor to adjust the tone, so the tone adjustment is completed in the auditory cycle. Players in the course of practice need to pay their attention to the mouth, tongue and arm, but also pay their attention to the training of hearing. Hearing acuity force will play an active position. On the contrary, it will let players to keep in a passive state. Participating in the chamber music and symphony performance, the hearing is particularly important, for hearing can resonate, coordinate between the balance of voice intonation and tone of the tendency, which has the function of adjusting the auditory timbre biases. In other words, hearing can be called a bridge connecting the objective performance and subjective consciousness.

Whether you can get a good timbre is determined by the right way to control breath, the right shape of mouth and high qualified tone.

CONCLUSION

Clarinet is a reflection of all aspects of the comprehensive quality of performance, and the musical function is to give people the enjoyment of beauty and expression of emotion. Based on the above analysis we know that, the sound of the clarinet playing is decided by many factors, including not only the affection of the mouth, tongue, flavor, but also the sense of hearing and the player's own understanding of the works. With sound's expressive force and flexibility, playing music in many forms of performance from a firm footing, whether it is a symphonic works, chamber music, solo works or works, clarinet can be perfect deduction. If the players want to play high-quality sound, they must

need the repeated practice opportunity time peace hard exercise, in order to ultimately achieve the high degree of harmonization of mental process and mental and physical technology on.

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