

On the Singing Styles and Features of Folk Songs in Northern Shaanxi from the Perspective of Driving Livestock

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Abstract: In a long process of development, Chinese folk music continuously exudes attractive fragrance with its unique national characteristics and charms. As the most basic content in the field of national vocal music, Chinese folk songs include local folk songs and ethnic folk songs, as well as adapted folk songs and newly created folk songs. Rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese folk music, it is closely related to the production and life of the working people, directly reflecting the people's life and spiritual world. The singing of folk songs with a unique national style is the innovation from tradition to modernity, which contributes Chinese folk songs to a shining star on the stage of the world's national music. Northern Shaanxi is the cradle of Chinese folk songs, as well as a place where folk songs gather. It smells the fragrance of the mud on the yellow earth, and flows with the most popular vocabulary and the brightest passion of the descendant of the Yellow River. At present, the folk songs of northern Shaanxi, still retaining its unique charm, are marching toward the world's national music forest with a heroic and passionate posture.

1. Introduction

Many kinds of Chinese folk songs, with distinctive local and national characteristics, are outstanding for their traditional and modern performance. As the main content of Chinese national vocal music, the singing of folk songs has grown into a big tree of national vocal music through the efforts of several generations of literary and art workers in the past period of time, and it has continued to blossom and bear fruit. At present, in most professional art academies, the singing of Chinese folk songs is not just a way of expressing emotions in the past, but as an independent major course for collecting, editing, singing, and further research on folk songs, to carry forward and develop Chinese national music culture by inheriting various styles and features of folk songs. The folk songs of northern Shaanxi, the national music with the most obvious local characteristics of Chinese folk songs, have spread a large number of folk songs with strong rustic flavor and simple style, and they have been continuously developed and innovated with the progress of the times, which are popular with the audiences across the country.

1.1 Styles and Features of Folk Songs in Northern Shaanxi

Northern Shaanxi is the cradle of Chinese folk songs, as well as a place where folk songs gather. Folk songs of northern Shaanxi can be divided into three categories: labor chant, Xintianyou (a kind of Shaanxi local melody) and minor, among which Xintianyou is the most characteristic and representative. Whether standing on the top of lofty mountains, walking on winding mountain roads, or traveling on the wide expanse of flat roads, you can hear the melodious singing with the downwind everywhere, not only sang by women in weeping and whispered voice, but also loudly resounded by the young fellows in herding the sheep and cattle. These are the folk songs of northern Shaanxi. It was born with the labor life of the people, the history and the folklore activities of northern Shaanxi, and it has been passed down to this day. Emotions can be triggered by life scenes such as plowing the land, serving with a donkey or a mule, grazing, drinking, celebrating festivals, building houses, celebrating birthdays, weddings and funerals and temple fairs, which can be improvised with the main themes of love and marriage issues, gradually forming a high-pitched, unconstrained, rugged and melodious style in a magnificent and beautiful way. It comes from the life of the working people in northern Shaanxi, and at the same time it truly reproduces life. The folk songs of northern Shaanxi are unique in style, and the double-fourth overlapping tones are used extensively, so that the big jump intervals in the melody can be seen everywhere. Only by unique techniques can the folk songs of northern Shaanxi be sung accurately. The folk songs of northern Shaanxi are mainly sung in flat, but high-pitched, while the use of false voices is also common, and the proportions of true and false voices used in different zones should be adjusted appropriately. In addition, the singing of folk songs in northern Shaanxi mainly uses of straight tone singing, portamento singing, vibrato singing, broken cavity singing and lining words and lining up singing, etc. In the past period of time, many folk artists in northern Shaanxi sang folk songs in northern Shaanxi, allowing more people to learn about this loess land of the Loess Plateau by listening to the folk songs of northern Shaanxi. At the same time, with the diversified development of music culture, nowadays a large number of young folk song singers in northern Shaanxi have emerged, and they sing adaptations of northern Shaanxi folk songs that are advancing with the times and have entered the hearts of the people, becoming a beautiful scenery of Chinese folk music.

2. Styles and Features of Singing the Folk Song Driving Livestock in Northern Shaanxi

2.1 Origin of Driving Livestock

In the western part of China, whether it is the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau in the southwest with green mountains and clean waters, or the Loess Plateau in the northwest with deep mountains and ditches, the natural transportation is inconvenient, and the main transportation depends on the livestock, with caravan in the southwest, camels, donkeys and mules in the northwest. Therefore, there emerged many folk songs related to the livestock and the porters who drive the livestock. For example, in Yunnan Province, the *Driving Horse Tune* and *Herding Horse Folk Songs* drifting along the Ancient Tea-Horse Road; in the northwestern region, the famous *Long Tone of Porters* of Huaer (a mountain song of Gansu, Qinghai and Ningxia Province) widely circulated in Gansu and other places, etc. . But in northern Shaanxi, the mountains and ditch are deep, and the roads are rugged and blocked, so livestock, such as horses, cattle, donkeys and mules, are necessary for traveling a long journey and transportation. In order to survive and trade, porters who drive livestock came into being. The people who drive livestock created this song *Driving Livestock*, incorporating their diligence, wisdom and love for life into this song. It truly reflects the life of the people in northern Shaanxi. In the vast desert and Loess Plateau, a person alone drives few livestock or a group of people drive some livestock, walk on a long road, eating and sleeping in the wildness.

This kind of life is very hard, boring and lonely. ^[1] The women and children at home miss their relatives and look forward to their early return.

2.2 Musical Structures and Emotional Features of Driving Livestock

This is a very famous Xintianyou in Northern Shaanxi. The first person to sing this classic folk song was Bai Bingquan, a singer from the Shaanxi Provincial Song and Dance Theater. The whole song depicts that a woman standing on the loess hill and looking at the porters who are driving livestock in the distance, is touched by the scene and sings loudly.

The whole song is divided into three paragraphs, each of which is composed of four phrases interlocked with each other, and the emotions are getting stronger and stronger. The first paragraph is a vivid picture depicting the driving of livestock. ^[2] When singers sing this passage, they should express it in the form of narration, as if they saw a scene of a group of porters returning from driving livestock, and the voice should be smooth. The padding syllable “aiyo” should be sung with a special skills to reflect the mental activities. In the second paragraph, it's time for emotional expression. This is also a vivid picture: a white-necked pug, barking toward the south, as if seeing the procession of driving livestock slowly coming by. At this time, the character's heart is filled with a kind of expectation and joy, looking forward to the return of the relatives. This passage should be sung very vividly, and a very joyful feeling should be expressed in the voice. It seems that the woman in the song tells others that her beloved is back, and the expression of excitement is beyond words. The melody of the song has a big jump of seventh and octave, so it must be sung clearly. The next third paragraph talked about seeing the procession of driving livestock, but not seeing the beloved, so anxious and frustrated emotions come. The lyrics “If you are my beloved, wave your hands” expressed the anxious feeling, eager to see the sweetheart. “ The lyrics “If you are not my beloved, take your way.” turned the joy into a feeling of loss and disappointment when the woman doesn't see her sweetheart. This is a turning point from hope to disappointment, so when singing this part, singers must also express such an emotion with voice, in order to interpret the artistic conception of the song well and impress the audience.

2.3 Pronunciation, Accent, and Charm of the Folk Song Driving Livestock in Northern Shaanxi

The language in the song is based on the dialect of northern Shaanxi, which has unique local characteristics. The loess land with high hills and steep slopes gave birth to Xintianyou in Northern Shaanxi, which is a good interpretation of the real life of the people in Northern Shaanxi, and at the same time reflected the language characteristics of Northern Shaanxi. So when we sing folk songs in northern Shaanxi, we must use the elements of northern Shaanxi music as much as possible to express the style of the work. The “I” in the song cannot be sung as “wo”, but as “e” in the northern Shaanxi dialect. In “the pug with the white neck”, the “white” here needs to be read “be”, and “that” is read as “nei ge”. In “take your way”, “road” should be read as “lou”. The pronunciation of the language is a major characteristic of the style of this folk song. If it is sung in standard Mandarin, it will not be able to properly express the charm of this song, and it will not have the regional characteristics of northern Shaanxi. This folk song is high-pitched and tactful, especially the seventh and octave jumps highlight the direction of the melody. It is also a kind of expression of shouting in the folk songs of northern Shaanxi, which well reflects the style and features of the work. The vast loess land is sparsely populated, the land is barren, and the life is poor. The use of shouting appropriately expresses the side of their emotions that they need to shout and pour out. At the same time, it is also the embodiment of their stubborn, unyielding and courageous character. When singing this song live, singers should hold the breath and make the voice out loudly and

clearly. The accents in the song are also full of charms. Some of the padding words that express special emotions, such as “dei”, “luowei”, “aiyo”, etc., must be sung with an emotional tone, which highlight the folk song, so they should be clear and light. The addition of padding words turns a folk song with a simple melody into a ballad-like song full of characters and emotions. Singers are required to have psychological activities and the ability to control and deal with the feelings of songs, otherwise the song will be empty and short of artistic appeal. The timbre of the folk songs in northern Shaanxi requires high-pitched and loud voice with the local dialect, to create a lively scene of lives. This song *Driving Livestock* well shows the features of folk songs in northern Shaanxi. It can be accepted by the world with its short and succinct lyrics and simple and clear melody. It has been sung for a long time, and has become a well-known classic folk song which are popular among the household.

3. Times Creating a New Style of Folk Songs in Northern Shaanxi

3.1 Adaptation and Singing of Folk Songs in Northern Shaanxi

The singing of folk songs is not static. It is slowly evolving from traditional to modern, from simple melodic textures to more complex musical structures, in order to adapt to the requirements of the development of the times. Nowadays, many musicians and composers, who are dedicated to researching and sorting out Chinese folk songs, have adapted and created some vocal works in order to adapt to the needs of society and the times. Some are adapted from some local folk songs and folk art forms, and some are newly created. These vocal works have injected new vitality into traditional folk songs to a certain extent. Together with the performance of the singers, the content of the folk songs is enriched and the emotions are expressed deeper. Take the adapted folk song *Lan Huahua* as an example. It is an adapted narrative folk song in northern Shaanxi, sung in a beautiful, smooth, open and powerful Xintianyou tune, absorbing narrative techniques, and using the form of segmented songs to create an image of a woman who resists feudal ethics. The lyrics of the song are profound, the language is sharp and powerful, and the emotions are simple and vivid, with many elements of northern Shaanxi. First of all, its storyline is adapted from a real story that took place in Yan'an, northern Shaanxi. The sound of the whole song is high-pitched and loud, with Xintianyou's high-pitched and slammed tunes. The local characteristics of Northern Shaanxi manifest themselves in the smooth and free rhythm, and the simple and touching language. At the beginning of the tune, there were two four-degree jumps and four-degree slams. The whole song is divided into two parts. The first part depicts the appearance and character of a girl named Lan Huahua from northern Shaanxi, and the second part is about the brave behavior of Lan Huahua against feudal love and breaking free from the feudal cage. It is not a simple “small song” that eulogizes emotions, but a “big song” with a narrative, dramatic and artistic manner, which expresses emotions by portraying characters. They possess a strong ethnic style, so when sung, importance should be attached to the local language characteristics and pronunciation skills. Many singers who learn vocal music use one feeling to sing and use one tone to complete such works, so the unique styles and features of this kind of folk songs cannot be presented, which leads to similarity in the styles and features.

4. Conclusion

The singing of Chinese folk songs echoes and complements each other with its own style and features. The style of folk songs is reflected in different regions, nationalities, eras and languages.

When we sing Chinese folk songs, like folk songs in northern Shaanxi, we must grasp the style and features of the songs so that we can express our feelings well, and can spread and inherit our excellent traditional culture.

References

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