

Opinions on the Ornament Technique of the Pipa with Left Hand

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Keywords: Pipa, Aftersound, Verve, Playing Technique

Abstract: Pipa was first introduced to the Central Plains from Persia, which is deeply influenced by Chinese music aesthetic thought. Whether it is delicate and elegant literary music or fierce martial music, pipa embodies the essence of traditional Chinese music thought aesthetically. In the continuous evolution of the pipa in the past 2,000 years, it has reached an unprecedented height in terms of shape, vocal range, and playing technique. If the playing technique of the right hand is the skeleton of lute music, then the playing technique of the left hand of the pipa is the soul of pipa music. This article will introduce the common techniques of the pipa with the left hand, and analyze the use of different techniques in the corresponding representative works.

1. The Awareness of Aftersound

1.1. An Overview of the Aftersound

As a plucked instrument, the vocal characteristics of the pipa are presented in the form of “dots”, and there are aftersounds after the “dots”. The aftersound is the foundation of pipa performance, and in the poems of many men of letters, the “aftersound” style can always be experienced, such as in “Liezi Tangwen”, “The music lingers in the air for a long time, and it does not stop for three days.” [1]Therefore, the good saying of “the music lingers in the air long after the performance” also fully reflects the endless pursuit of artistic beauty in Chinese music. Another example is the Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi’s “Pipa Xing” in “Silence is better than sound at this time”, which reflects the beauty of blank in traditional Chinese art. It can be seen that the aftersound is a comprehensive sense of beauty, which can be left a blank, ornamented, changed, and beautified. These include connecting, disconnecting, extending, and prohibiting, which can be done by means of left-hand ornament techniques. [2] They are not only a matter of performance technique, but more importantly, the aesthetic concept and aesthetic value it contains. [3]

1.2. The Sustain Awareness of the Aftersound

After the pipa “dot” sound is made, the aftersound will gradually fade, and the player can achieve the purpose of prolonging the aftersound through playing techniques. Then this requires the

player to make changes in the aftersound. For example, the left-hand “Vibrato” technique. “Vibrato” is an important means of ornamenting the aftersound and adding verve. And “verve” is the essence of traditional Chinese music, and it is also the highest level of artistic charm of Chinese music works. The reasonable use of the “vibrato” technique is not only to prolong the aftersound, but more importantly, it can beautify the timbre, set the atmosphere of the music. The means of prolonging the aftersound should be chanting and vibrato, such as Mater Tianhua Liu’s song “Xu Nai” composed in 1929. [4]It is a moving piece, which is lonely and void, but full of life. The music draws on the playing style of the three strings and the guqin, giving people a sense of quaintness. The main means is the chanting and vibrato technique of the left hand. Through the chanting and vibrato of the aftersound, it is extended and changed, and the melancholy and complexity of the author’s heart are more prominent (Figure 1).

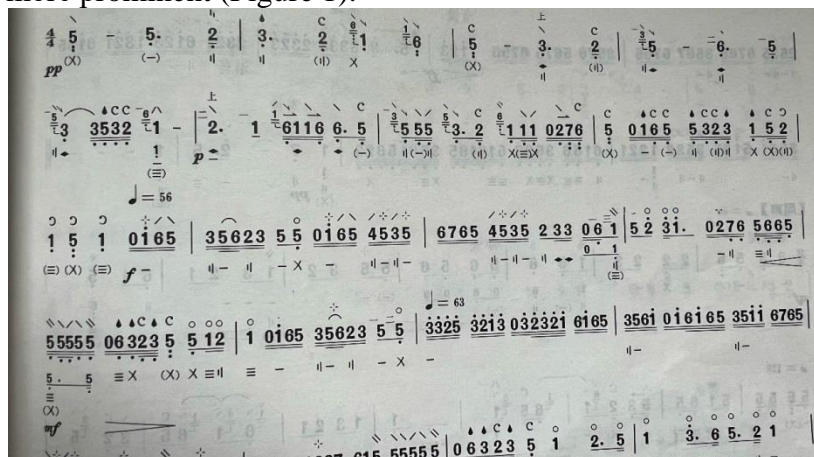


Figure 1: “Xu Nai”

In addition to using chanting and vibrato to prolong the aftersound, it can be prolonged by resonating overtones. For example, “Dance of the Dragonfly”. This song is a ditty in “Yingzhou Ancient Tune”, and the style is light and playful, imitating the light posture of dragonflies flying. In the passage of the resonant overtones, the overtones here can not only express the agility of the dragonfly when flying on water, but also enhance the resonance and prolong the aftersound effect through the overtones. [5](Figure 2).

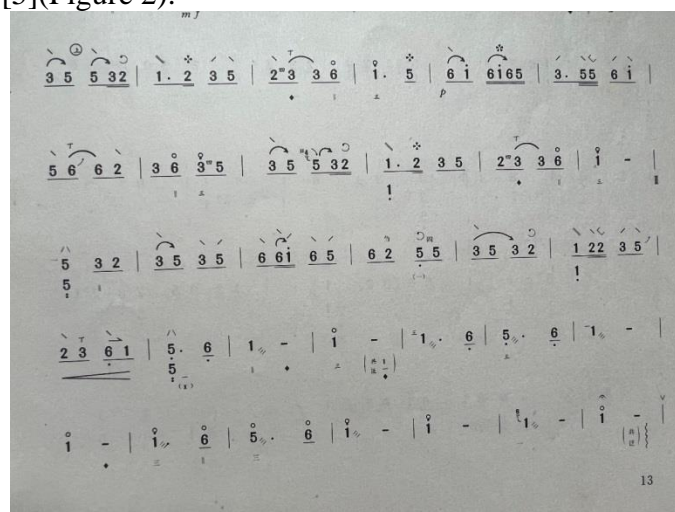


Figure 2: ditty

1.3. The Silence Awareness of the Aftersound

Music is not only the art of sound, but also the art of silence. As the art of sound, the reason why silence is needed is because silence has a special function and can express effects that sound cannot achieve. Audible and silent, “sustain” and “silence”, are opposites and unified, and they are constantly alternating to complete the musical tension required for the composition. Silence is the beauty of blank in music. It is the pursuit of “verve” in traditional Chinese music, and in Bai Juyi’s musical thought, the beauty of silence has been involved many times. For example, in the poem “Zheng”, it is written that “During the lute interval, the emotions it conveys are still constant and continuous.[6] At the end of the song, it leaves an endless aftertaste for the audience.”; In “Ye Zheng”, there is also a chanting “The sound of the strings is condensed, the soft fingers are clear, and the tranquility of that moment tells a thousand heavy affection.” These poems vividly show the silent victory at this time.

1.4. The Consonance Awareness of the Aftersound

The right hand technique of the pipa can be roughly divided into two categories, dots and lines, and “dots” roughly include flicking, shielding, rebounding, sweeping, etc. The “lines” here include wheel fingers, rolling and shaking fingers. Under our pursuit of the beauty of national music, whether it is line technique or dot technique, we should strengthen the sense of continuity of each music while maintaining an accurate rhythm. Then in addition to the use of left-hand ornament techniques, it is also necessary to pay attention to the impact of right-hand techniques on the aftersound, so as to do a good job of uninterrupted resonance. For example, Master Dehai Liu’s masterpiece “Swan” in his “Life collection”, this song has a beautiful melody and rich musical layers. Starting from the 262 bars of the song, the right hand uses the Feng Dian Tou technique to connect the notes.[7] “Feng Dian Tou” requires the thumb and middle finger of the right hand to touch the string together, and the finger and wrist are combined with one force, with the fast shaking speed, forming a linear sound group. The effect of connecting the aftersounds is achieved through the high-frequency “Feng Dian Tou”, showing the picture of the swan flying freely in the sky (Figure 3).

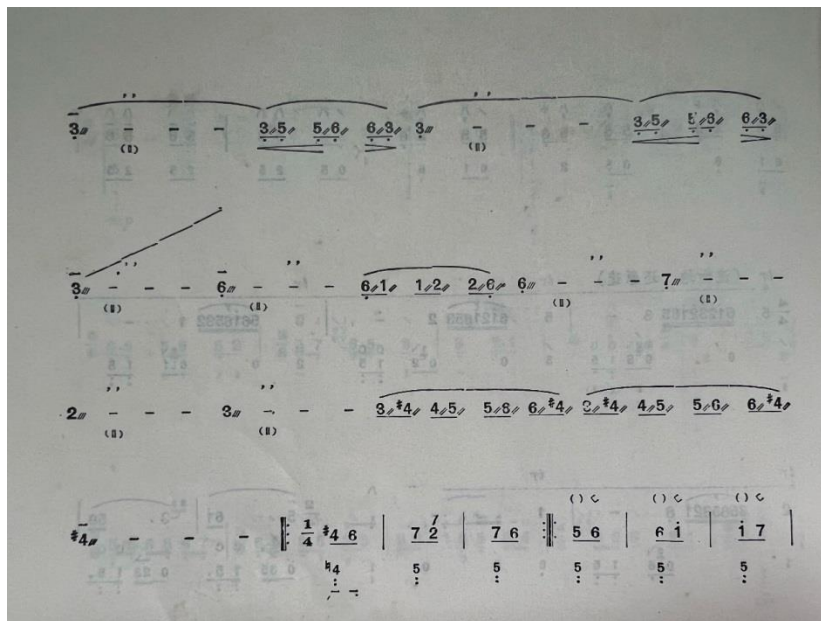


Figure 3: “Swan”

1.5. The Staccato Awareness of the Aftersound

The disconnection of the aftersound corresponds to the connection of the aftersound, and it is also an important state of the concept of the aftersound, which is according to the needs of the musical will, and its staccatos of the aftersound or silence is an inseparable content of the performance, then it can be said that the staccatos and the silence of the aftersound require the player to play intentionally, and its performance form is mainly staccato and jumping tone. Staccato, a term in music, is a way of playing by shortening the time value of a note and making it incoherent between tones. [8] Then the time value of the jumping tone is shorter than the staccato. The staccato and jumping tone are played in a staccato effect obtained by pressing the note with the left hand and instantly leaving the string.

2. Ornament Techniques with Left Hand

2.1. An overview and Playing Methods of Pushing and Pulling Techniques

The music of the push-pull technique is rich in expression, it can be mournful, it can be tough, it can be soft, and it can be sad. Especially in expressing the unique style and verve, it is one of the indispensable left-hand techniques of the pipa.

“Push and pull tone” is also known as “push and draw tone”, “push” sound is the left hand press the tone finger to push the string inward to raise the tone; The “pull” sound, also known as the “draw” tone, is to pull the string out of the string by pressing the finger of the left hand. “Push and pull” represents two different glides, up glide and down glide. [9]

The up glide requires the player to press his finger on any fret, and when the right hand makes sounds, push or pull the string to the desired pitch, that is, the change of pitch from low to high or from high to low through the finger. Among them, the first sound produced by the combination of the right-hand technique is a real tone, and the second sound completed by the left hand is called a virtual tone.

The down glide is the process of pushing or pulling out the string with the left hand pressing the finger first, and then hitting the string with the right hand while restoring the fingers of the left hand.

2.2. An Overview and Performance Methods of the Technique of Shaking and Note

In the long process of historical changes, there have been more than 70 techniques so far, of which the left-hand technique mainly includes pushing, pulling, chanting, vibrato, shaking, note, hitting, banding and overtones, etc. These techniques can add rhyme and enrich the timbre, among which, the “shaking and note” technique is one of the techniques with characteristic charm. Its name and method, derived from the guqin, are based on the basic technique of pressing the lute, and the fingers drag up and down between the frets, taking advantage of the glide effect of the string length change. The “note” technique has flexible ornament and imitation functions, and its rich and varied playing methods make the music at the pipa playing place full of unique charm.

Records of the technique of “shaking and note” first appeared in the early school of pipa, the Pudong School. According to the records in the genealogy fingering table, the “Yang Zheng Xuan Pipa Score”, which was compiled by Haochu Shen and sorted by Shicheng Lin, has a beat mark and definition similar to the “shaking and note” technique. [10]

The so-called “shaking” is to glide from the bass level to the high pitch. The method of “shaking” is to keep the fingers basically pressing the shape of the hand while gliding direction from top to bottom, the pitch changes from low to high, and the gliding speed is determined according to the

needs of the song. During this period, it is necessary to pay attention to the rapid and coherent music connection, with soft and delicate timbre. This gliding interval can be large or small, the short coherence of the music formed by the line contrasts with the monophonic music, often has the function of decorating the aftersound, the large span gliding can not only make the interval coherent, but also play a role in facilitating the change of handles.

The so-called “note” is to glide from the high pitch to the low pitch, and the pitch changes from high to low, and the “note” technique is that the music is connected quickly and smoothly, and the tone is relatively hard. It is the same as the technique symbol of “shaking”, and the range span and effect are also roughly the same as the “shaking” technique. The use of the beat-map can be distinguished by the sound of “shaking” or the sound of “note” according to the pitch of the tone.

2.3. An Overview and Playing Methods of Chanting and Vibrato Techniques

The playing techniques of the pipa are extremely rich, and as far as the left hand is concerned, there are more than ten techniques that can express the “sound cavity” of Chinese music, such as pushing, pulling, chanting, vibrato, hitting, bending, and shaking. Among these techniques, the most difficult to master is chanting and vibrato. “Chanting and vibrato” is an important technique to express the “verve” of Chinese music cavity. “Verve” is an important spirit of Chinese music aesthetics, which seems to express the realm that can only be understood and cannot be conveyed. It stems from the player’s own emotional understanding of the work, as well as the use of right-hand techniques, and more importantly, the change of our left-hand ornament sound. The “chanting” and “vibrato” of the lute are aimed at improving the sound quality, beautifying the timbre, and enhancing the artistic effect. It can be atmospheric or tear-jerking, and it is very musically appealing.

The chanting of the pipa draws on the same fingering methods of Western stringed instruments, and combines the characteristics of the pipa and the sound column. It is a conventional means of note ornament, which has a great effect on the timbre and expressiveness of the performance, and is also one of the techniques with left hand that players must master. As a tasteful instrument, the pipa is chanted mainly by swaying from side to side of the note, causing a subtle change in the pitch of the pronunciation.

The chanting is a vibrato of tension, through the finger joints to do flexion movements, so that the strings are high, low, fast and slow, and different in size. The specific method is to use the tone finger as the benchmark to flex and extend the fingers on the strings by pressing the tone finger. The flexion and extension action is large, and the sound amplitude is large. The flexion and extension action is small, and the sound wave amplitude is small. In the music, chanting is a comprehensive use, it can be slow or fast, it can be large or small, it can be slow and then fast, it can also appear after the up or down glide. They are to achieve the cavity and musical tension required by the music according to the needs of the music and through the embellishment of the music(Figure 4).

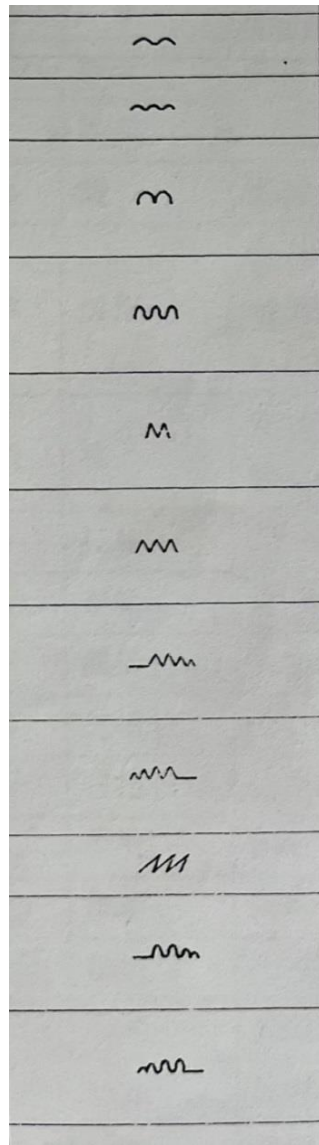


Figure 4: vibrato techniques

2.4. An Overview and Performance Methods of Hitting and Banding Techniques and Their Application in Music

Hitting and banding are left-handed articulation techniques that can be pronounced independently without the right hand hitting the strings, or in conjunction with the right hand. Hitting sounds, which do not require the hitting of the right hand, can make sounds completely through the fingers of the left hand. Sound is often used after a real sound, with the help of the aftersound generated by the vibration of the real sound. In the case of the upper finger pressing the tone or the empty string, the sound made by the lower finger pressing the string hard. Its movement requires that the thumb of the left hand support the back of the pipa, and after one joint of the hitting finger is kept upright and raised, it quickly hits the fret. The band often appears after the sound, the main point of action is that when the three joints are raised, plus the flexion and extension action of one or two joints to drive the finger belly to make sound, the sound finger can be the second finger of the left hand, whose sound effect is tougher. It is also available to use the three figures of the left hand, which is softer(Figure 5).

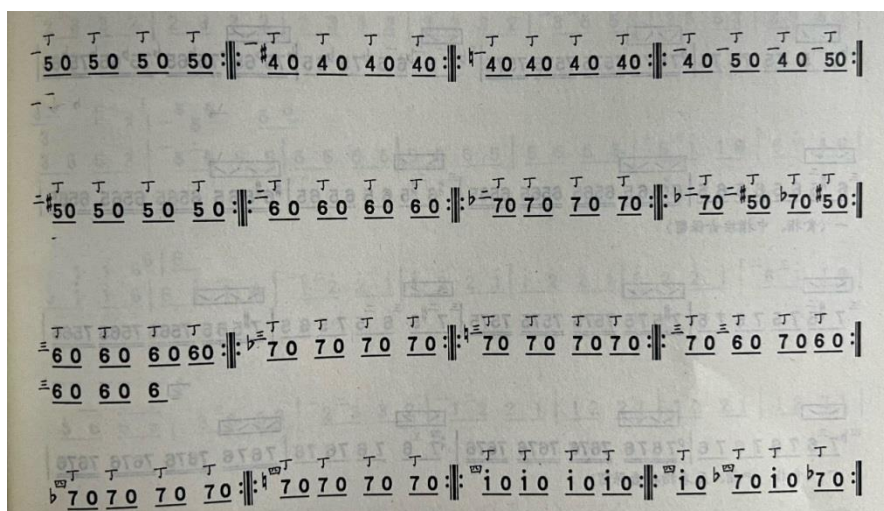


Figure 5: More prominent.

3. Conclusions

Discover the beauty of the aftersound and create the beauty of the aftersound. It is the first lesson in pipa ornament skills, and it is also an important lesson in traditional music aesthetics.

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