

# *Analysis of the Works and Singing Skills of the Opera "Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City" Selected Song "Can't Be Filial to My Mother"*

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**Keywords:** "Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City"; "Can't be filial to my mother"; Singing skills

**Abstract:** As a tenor aria, the song is sincere and full of emotion, touching and heartfelt, containing the deep and complex guilt of the actor Yang Xiaodong towards his mother, and also reflects the fearless spirit of fearlessness and self-esteem and self-improvement in the blood of Chinese children. The song is difficult for tenors to sing, so we will take the background and music analysis of the song "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" as the starting point to explore the singing skills and character performance of the bel canto song in this excerpt, and analyze the breath, resonance cavity, and articulation in order to better sing and perform the song for reference.

## **1. Introduction**

The opera "Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City" is an opera that depicts the heroic struggle of the people during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in China. Among them, the song "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" has won the love of the audience with its deep emotions and unique artistic expression. The lyrics of "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" have far-reaching artistic conception and rich theme connotation. He expressed his deep longing for his hometown and relatives and his protest against the war. The imagery in the lyrics is vivid, such as the image of "Wildfire Spring Breeze", which symbolizes the destruction and hope brought about by war, and shows the tenacity and perseverance of the people in the war." Can't Be Filial to My Mother" is a work of high artistic value, which shows the devastation of war on the people and arouses people's yearning for peace with deep emotions and unique artistic techniques. For singers, mastering their singing skills can not only improve their artistic level, but also deeply understand the historical significance and humanistic care behind the works.

## **2. Background analysis**

### **2.1 The background of the song**

"Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City" is an opera adapted from Li Yingru's novel of the same name, which tells the legendary story of a heroic resistance to the enemy in North China during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. The original work was adapted from the

novel of the same name, "Wild Fire Spring Wind Fighting the Ancient City", which was published by China People's Publishing House in June 1962.. In September 2005, the General Political Song and Dance Troupe put the novel on the stage of the opera. By depicting the heroes Yang Xiaodong and Yinhuang and other heroes who bravely resisted the war, the opera shows the heroic and indomitable national spirit of the Chinese sons and daughters in the face of national danger. This work has an important position in the history of Chinese opera and is known as one of the representative works of "new opera".

"Can't Be Filial to My Mother" is a classic song in the opera "Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City", co-created by famous songwriters Wang Renjie and Zhang Pingya. The song is based on the background of the protagonist Yang Xiaodong's farewell to his mother and joining the anti-Japanese battlefield, expressing Yang Xiaodong's feelings for the cause of national liberation at the time of the national disaster.

## 2.2 Social impact

The thoughts and social history reflected in the opera "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" have important reference value and learning significance for today's society. In today's society, the fast-paced life and the invasion of materialism have made the culture of filial piety gradually neglected. And this opera just reminds us to carry forward traditional culture, attach importance to filial piety, and care for our families, and educate us to cherish the happy life in front of us and cultivate our own and even the society's patriotic consciousness.

## 3. Analysis of song works

### 3.1 Musical analysis of the work

#### 3.1.1 Curved structure analysis

The style of the singing section fully adopts the important materials such as opera, quyi, and folk songs in Hebei region, and forms five small music sections that are very closely related to each other and progressively layer by layer, with the plate structure of "loose board→ adagio→ middle board→→ allegro, and scattered board", which are composed of five small music sections that are very closely related to each other and progressive layer by layer, we analyze the whole singing section, and can divide the work into three parts, which belongs to a single trilogy structure without reproduction.<sup>[2]</sup>

The structure of the song is complex and layered, reflecting the composer's superb skills. There are 144 measures in the whole section, of which the intro has 9 measures at a faster pace, the A section has 33 measures with a slow tempo and a large melodic fluctuations, the interlude is 16 measures, the interlude is 28 measures, the B section has a total of 44 measures, although the tempo is also relatively slow but slightly faster than the A section, and the final C section is faster overall. The song also shifts from G major to bE major.

#### 3.1.2 Melody and rhythm analysis of the work

The whole excerpt is mainly lyrical, with smooth melodic lines and large ups and downs, which perfectly shows the turbulent waves in Yang Xiaodong's heart. In terms of harmonic treatment, the excerpts are dominated by alternating between major chords and genus chords, creating a broad and lyrical atmosphere. In the climax of the song, the harmony is increased to three chords or even seven chords, making the music more tense and further highlighting Yang Xiaodong's inner

contradictions and struggles.

In terms of rhythm changes, the excerpts adopt a variety of rhythmic forms, such as the long lyrical rhythm of A and B, and the compact and fast rhythm of C. These tempo changes not only enrich the expressiveness of the song, but also vividly depict Yang Xiaodong's emotional fluctuations.

The whole excerpt is mainly lyrical, with smooth melodic lines and large ups and downs, especially the large melodic lines of the C section perfectly show the turbulent waves in Yang Xiaodong's heart. At the beginning of the song, the melody is gentle and soothing, with occasional big jumps, as if the protagonist is crying about his longing for his mother. With the gradual sublimation of emotion, the melody also becomes more passionate, especially in the climax of section A and C, the melody uses continuous fourths and octaves to jump, making the song reach the highest point of emotion, showing Yang Xiaodong's inner contradictions and struggles and deep pain for his mother. In addition, the melody at the end of the C section also uses a variety of ascending scales, making the song more expressive and refreshing. In terms of the tempo changes of the songs, the composer skillfully uses a variety of rhythmic forms to give the songs a rich emotional color. The long lyrical rhythm and the tight narrative rhythm are intertwined, which not only shows the turbulence of Yang Xiaodong's inner emotions, but also makes the song present a distinct drama.

In the lyrical rhythm part of section A and B, the song tells Yang Xiaodong's memories of childhood life and expresses his longing for his mother, father and child in a soothing rhythm, so that the audience can feel the softness and fragility of Yang Xiaodong's heart. In the narrative rhythm part of section C, the tight rhythm depicts the tension and urgency of the battle, showing the struggle between the protagonist's family and family. These tempo changes not only enrich the expressiveness of the song, but also make the music and lyrics more closely combined, further deepening the audience's understanding of Yang Xiaodong's emotional contradictions.

### 3.1.3 The presentation of the main theme

The main theme of "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" presents a variety of characteristics in the excerpts. Throughout the excerpts, the main theme is mainly lyrical, using the pentatonic mode common in Chinese folk songs. The main theme of the song is repeated in different passages, emphasizing the inner emotion of the protagonist Yang Xiaodong. Especially in the climax, the main theme is presented in a gradually rising register, which makes the song reach the highest point of emotion.

This way of presenting the main theme not only shows the drama of the song, but also highlights the hatred of the protagonist Yang Xiaodong for the Japanese to bully her mother.

Throughout the excerpt of "Can't Be Filial to My Mother", the musical theme runs throughout, playing a role in unifying the entire work. Whether in terms of melody, harmony or accompaniment, the musical theme plays a cohesive role. With the theme of the music running through, the individual musical fragments are organically connected together to form a complete storyline. At the same time, the running of the musical theme also reflects the composer's high grasp of the integrity of the song.

### 3.2 Analysis of accompaniment patterns

The accompaniment of "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" is unique, and the combination of national instruments and vocals adds a rich sense of layering to the song. Guzheng, pipa and other national musical instruments can play accompaniment melodies while playing harmony, making the music more three-dimensional.

In this accompaniment, the instruments and vocals are intertwined to present a beautiful musical picture. The melodious timbre of the guzheng and the sonorous rhythm of the pipa complement each other, creating a strong national atmosphere for the song. At the same time, the accompanying instruments subtly highlight the climax and transition of the song in the changes in timbre and volume, making the music more dynamic.

### 3.3 Analyze the resulting character image and social significance

The music that the composer composed for him, melodic and passionate, shows his strong conviction and deep emotions. The overall structure and musical layout of the opera are rigorous. The whole play is divided into three acts, which show the different stages of Yang Xiaodong's life. The composer skillfully integrated musical elements into the plot, making the music closely integrated with the plot and promoting the development of the plot. The character traits of the opera's protagonists are profoundly reflected through music. Yang Xiaodong is a loyal, filial and upright young man who has always stood firm in his beliefs in the face of difficulties and pressures. The character's childhood life and the background of the story in which the song takes place are also clearly revealed, the character's childhood life is difficult and poor, his father was killed by the landlord at the age of seven, and then he lives a wandering life with his mother. The background of the story in which the excerpt takes place is that the mother and son met in the enemy base camp but both became prisoners, which was extremely sad and painful.

## 4. Anatomy of singing skills

### 4.1 Singing skills

#### 4.1.1 Breath analysis

In singing, breath is a particularly critical point, for the treble and singing coherence has a very important role, in this excerpt singing the biggest difficulty is the use of breath and support, the breath is more difficult to control, the rhythm in the excerpt changes are larger, the melodic fluctuations between the relationship between the sections are also larger. As the piece progresses, the melody gradually changes. For example, at the end of the phrase, the three words "and mother" are 41 beats long, and the end part of each long note in the singing "love my mother, love my mother" is the place where the breath is spoken, and we need to actively ventilate so that the soft mouth cover can be opened and sucked up, "sue" and "intestine" are the places where the long phrase is ventilated, and the last sentence is breathed in front of the highest note of the "pro" at the end of the section.<sup>[4]</sup>

As shown in the picture above, in the A section of the piece, the display of multiple fourth-degree jumping treble la pushes Yang Xiaodong's feelings to the first climax, and the breathing intensity should be from weak to strong. Don't start singing with all your might. After that, there was a seventh-degree jump in the B section from the year to the disaster, so the breathing strength needs to be gradually weakened, mainly to set off the sad atmosphere, the breathing strength of the phrase "heart meat" has changed from slightly stronger to stronger, and the sound of the meat word should be smooth and strong, the sound is rich and strong, and some covering techniques can be used, so that the treble has a better metallic feeling, and the deep relationship between Yang Xiaodong's mother and son can be seen from these singing details. In the last section, the breathing of the long phrase should be controlled so that the melody of the piece can be interpreted in a gripping way.<sup>[1]</sup>

### 4.1.2 Resonance cavity analysis

As for the change of the resonance cavity, section A is about Yang Xiaodong's crying about his mother's relatives, so we need to use more chest cavity to produce a thicker sense of crying, and in section B, the protagonist recalls that his childhood life is so sad and hazy, but at least he can still rely on his mother, so we need to reduce the use of the chest cavity and increase the use of the head cavity to make the voice slightly thinner, so as to show the image of a child and Yang Xiaodong's heartache of recalling living with his mother. In section C, which is the climax of the piece, we need to make the sound shorter and more powerful in some places, such as two kneeling in the sky, and in the ascending scale of the last string, we need to make the sound more three-dimensional, so we need to fully integrate the head cavity with the chest cavity to obtain a mix to sing better high notes and express the emotional image of the character.<sup>[5]</sup>

### 4.1.3 Singing articulation analysis

In the process of singing "Can't Be Filial to My Mother", we must bite every word well, reasonably use the strength of lips, teeth, tongue, and throat, and clearly distinguish the initials and finals of each word and use different singing techniques. In particular, it is necessary to pay attention to the rhyme of the postnasal consonant ng of the words "Niang" and "pain" in a row, and the rhyme of ng should continue to the beginning of the next word, and it is necessary to pay attention to making full use of the power of the posterior pharyngeal wall. The prefix of the word must also be noted, the weight of the prefix has an important role in the expression of emotion, for example, the two "love" words in the song section B "how many times the mother and son depend on each other to complain about the intestines, the first word "love" is in the middle and low vocal area, it is to sing with a sense of telling, so don't read the "q" sound very heavy. The second word "love" appears in the high note, which is a kind of emotional catharsis, so it is necessary to stress the "q" sound, "q" is the tongue sound, and the air and bite are lighter, and it is sung to people's hearts. At the end, the treble of "only kneeling heaven and earth and mother's kiss" falls on the "pro", it is not an open sound and appears in the higher vocal range, so when biting the word, it is necessary to quickly transition the word "q", and then use the strength of the waist and abdomen and the vocal cords to close and expand the extension of "in", and send the word from a high position, so that it is easier to deal with it in singing.

### 4.1.4 Character emotions and deduction methods

The whole song can be divided into three parts for interpretation, the A section of the whole song Yang Xiaodong after seeing his mother hurt by the enemy, we can use actions such as bowing his head, clenching his hands, and touching his chest to show the heaviness and helplessness in his heart. His eyes were dull, revealing deep remorse. In the B section, as the music brings us into the memory time, we can use movements such as looking up and stretching our hands, and our eyes are soft with tears, expressing our longing for our mother. In the first half of the song, we can use actions such as pacing back and forth, raising our hands, etc., to show the anxiety and uneasiness in our hearts, and the pain and contradiction in our eyes. In the final clip, the protagonist begins to repent and express his determination, we can fold our hands, kneel and bow, etc., with firm eyes, to express our determination to defeat the enemy.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 4.1.5 Timbre changes and innovative breakthroughs in opera excerpts

In the excerpt "Can't Be Filial to My Mother", vocal music is not only a carrier of music, but also a brush to portray the inner world of the characters. This opera, which focuses on filial piety, vividly

shows the inner contradictions and struggles of the characters through the unique expressiveness of the characters' singing. The protagonist's voice design is very ingenious, and the timbre of the tenor not only shows his innocence as a son, but also reveals his inner pain and struggle. In the C section of the core singing section, the three words "ashamed of the mother" are particularly prominent, and the singer changes the timbre by changing the singing position to the front and back, and progresses complex emotions such as guilt, self-blame, and helplessness. The tearing sensation in the high register and the choking sound in the low range form a strong emotional contrast, making the audience deeply feel the inner torment of the characters. In the aria of "Filial Piety and Responsibility" in section B, the singer sings in a crescendo and fades in breath, vividly expressing the characters' swing between morality and reality. The performability of this opera breaks through the stylized expression of traditional opera, and creates a new form of performance through the fusion of modern vocal techniques and traditional opera elements.

#### 4.2 The importance of singing skills in opera performances

In opera performances, vocal technique plays a crucial role. First of all, vocal skills help actors better interpret the inner emotions of the characters, making it easier for the audience to immerse themselves in the plot; secondly, vocal techniques improve the artistry of the performance, making the opera more ornamental; Finally, vocal techniques help the actor and the band to work together to ensure the smooth running of the performance. Through the analysis of the singing technique of the play, the importance of vocal skills in opera performance can be discovered.

#### 5. Conclusion

The affection and filial piety embodied in the song are the core themes of the song. In the song "Can't Be Filial to My Mother" has a pivotal position in the opera "Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City". It not only shows the growth and transformation of the protagonist Yang Xiaodong, but also infects generations of audiences with its beautiful melody and profound theme. Today, this song still has strong practical significance, it reminds us to cherish family happiness, inherit the culture of filial piety, and at the same time, we must devote ourselves to the great cause of national construction and national rejuvenation with a firmer faith.

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