

Exploration of the Integration of Ethnic Music Elements into Modern Piano Art Creation

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Abstract: Piano originated in Western countries, so a large number of Western cultural elements are used in piano art creation, mainly to present Western humanistic thoughts and spiritual cultural cores to the audience. In recent years, with the modernization of piano art and culture in China, many Chinese listeners have begun to demand more ethnic and folk piano pieces with Chinese characteristics. In order to meet the audience's pursuit of modern Chinese piano art, more and more creators are integrating ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation. This article explores the integration significance of ethnic music elements in modern piano art creation and the current situation of Chinese modern piano art creation, and finds that ethnic music elements have positive help in enhancing the novelty, ethnic characteristics, and timeliness of piano art creation. Based on this, this article proposes several strategies for integrating traditional ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation, including adapting traditional ethnic music elements, creating pentatonic tunes, and modifying work titles. The aim is to provide references and inspiration for the development of Chinese piano art creation and culture.

Keywords: Piano; Modern art creation; Ethnic music elements

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1. Introduction

Since China's reform and opening-up, there has been a deep exchange of Chinese and Western cultures. As an artistic expression type of Western culture, the piano has entered China for a hundred years. Early Chinese piano artists explored how Chinese ethnic music elements could be integrated with Western piano as a musical form of expression. With the progress of the times, modern piano artworks with Chinese national style are becoming increasingly diverse^[1]. The main goal of the construction and progress of China's music and art industry is to deeply root modern piano artworks in excellent traditional Chinese ethnic music. Modern piano artworks that integrate ethnic music elements have completely different artistic presentation effects and spiritual and cultural connotations compared to Western piano art. They are a collision of Chinese ethnic music culture and international music culture and an effective path for the innovative development of modern piano art. Therefore, how to integrate ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation has become a key issue facing the sustainable development of modern piano art and culture.

2. Integration significance of ethnic music elements in modern piano art creation

Integrating ethnic music elements into piano art creation is an effective way to inherit and develop Chinese ethnic music, and one of the measures to innovate the content and spiritual core of Chinese piano artworks. Chinese piano music works can be used to convey Chinese ideas and culture well. In fact, integrating ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation is to combine the melody, rhythm, timbre, and other aspects of traditional Chinese ethnic music with Western performance techniques, and showcase them through the piano. No matter how superb the performance skills are, the spiritual core of piano artworks that do not contain ethnic music elements is still Western art, which makes it difficult to evoke emotional resonance and artistic recognition among Chinese people^[2]. It can be seen that incorporating ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation is an effective path for the sustainable development of Western art and culture in China. It is a recreation of Western piano art and has a certain promoting effect on the progress of world piano art.

Firstly, integrating ethnic music art into modern piano art creation is conducive to the widespread promotion and popularization of Chinese piano art, allowing the world to listen to the Chinese national spirit in modern piano artworks. It is an effective way to establish a good image of China and convey the story of China to the outside world. Integrating ethnic music elements with modern piano art creation can achieve a transformation from Chinese single-tone composition thinking to multi-tone work thinking, which is positively helpful for promoting the innovative development of traditional Chinese ethnic music. Secondly, integrating ethnic music elements with modern piano art creation can also enrich piano performance skills. For example, when playing piano pieces that contain elements of Chinese ethnic music, performers can use the “minor third five-tone level fingering” to enhance the communication effect of music art. This performance method is not available in Western piano playing techniques. Thirdly, incorporating ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation is conducive to enhancing the familiarity of Chinese audiences with piano art and improving their acceptance of Western piano as an artistic expression. At present, many artists have borrowed the timbre, rhythm, and tone of traditional Chinese ethnic instruments in modern piano art creation^[3]. Taking *Sunset Flute and Drum* as an example, this piano piece references the tone of the Chinese classical instrument *pipa* and the rhythm of the *guzheng* for artistic creation, which to some extent deepens the skills and effects of modern piano performance. It is beneficial for Chinese audiences to increase their familiarity with the piano instrument, reduce cultural differences between the East and the West, eliminate obstacles in artistic aesthetics and music creation, and have positive significance for promoting the progress of world piano art.

3. Current situation of modern piano composition in China

Chinese modern piano art has a profound development history, and the artistic characteristics presented in different development periods are different. It is precisely because it has undergone multiple periods of development, optimization, and improvement that modern piano art and culture with Chinese characteristics have been formed at this stage.

3.1. At the beginning of the 20th century

The early 20th century was the initial stage of integrating piano art creation with ethnic music elements. During this period, piano artworks mainly imitated Western works. By integrating Western piano music works with early Chinese ethnic music elements, the Chinese characteristics of piano music were strengthened. Taking the piano piece *Sawing the Big Vat* created by Rongshou Li in 1922 as an example, this piece references the musical rhythm of the Henan folk song *Wang Daniang Repairs the Vat*, achieving an organic integration of

Western piano performance skills and Chinese ethnic music elements. In addition, Youmei Xiao's piano piece *New Nishang Feather Clothes Dance* is also an important embodiment of incorporating ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation in the 20th century.

3.2. Around 1934

After a long period of exploration and practice, China incorporated ethnic polyphony into modern piano art creation in 1934^[4]. Luting He's *Shepherd's Flute* is a typical representative, which introduces the Chinese ethnic instrument flute in piano art creation, vividly depicting the scene of shepherds playing the flute and playing in the fields for the audience. After China entered the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the main theme of piano artworks was the Red Revolution. Although the number of works was relatively small, they were widely circulated. The piano artworks of this period vividly reflect national emotions.

3.3. After the establishment of the new China

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, major music and art schools have emerged, and China has entered a period of independent development. The types and quantity of piano artworks during this period greatly increased, and a large number of widely circulated piano pieces emerged. For example, Wanghua Chu's *The Day of Turning Over* and Shengjing Liao's *The Night of Torch Festival* are important manifestations of the integration of modern piano art and ethnic music elements during that period.

3.4. After the reform and opening-up

After the reform and opening-up, Chinese piano artworks contain more diverse ethnic music elements. Taking Huwei Huang's *Jialing River Fantasy Song* and Lisan Wang's *Dongshan Kuiyi Paintings* created in 1979 as examples, both works present the aspirations of the general public for future life and convey positive and upward thoughts and emotions. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the rapid progress of the social economy, the contradiction between people's material living standards and spiritual civilization needs has become increasingly intensified. The continuous growth of spiritual civilization has accelerated the vigorous progress of China's piano art creation industry.

4. Integration strategies of ethnic music elements in modern piano art creation

4.1. Adapting original ethnic music elements

Adapting original ethnic music elements is the simplest way to incorporate ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, most piano artists in our country have started to use Chinese classical music as the foundation, and have achieved the nationalization of modern piano artworks by imitating the melodies and rhythms of ethnic instruments. In the process of adapting traditional ethnic songs, romantic and realistic techniques were used, resulting in piano artworks with unique ethnic charm and Chinese musical style. Taking Jianzhong Wang's *Plum Blossom Sannong* as an example, this piano work is an adaptation of the traditional *guqin* folk music *Plum Blossom Yin*, using the piano to imitate the tone and rhythm of the *guqin*. For example, in the process of artistic creation, *Sunset Flute and Drum* created and edited ancient Chinese *pipa* repertoire, deepening the beauty of artistic conception in piano works and truly achieving the organic integration of Chinese and Western cultures.

4.2. Creating based on traditional pentatonic tunes

To effectively highlight ethnic music elements in piano art creation, creators should start with the melody

of the music. The melody of a piece of music determines the overall tone of a piano work and influences the communication of ethnic culture in the work. Chinese traditional music presents a pentatonic scale, characterized by simple relationships between notes and a high degree of harmony. In this regard, traditional pentatonic notes can be integrated with piano harmony performance to address the differences between Chinese pentatonic notes and Western seventh scales. For example, the reason the piano piece *Two Springs Reflecting the Moon* is popular among the audience is mainly because it inherits the five-tone melody from traditional Chinese music, which is more in line with the artistic appreciation level of Chinese audiences. Integrating the five-tone melody with the vertical harmony and horizontal line processing in piano performance can create a unique artistic beauty for the audience. In the process of creating pentatonic tunes, creators should also pay attention to introducing ethnic sound effects to depict a magnificent and prosperous musical atmosphere for the audience. Taking the *Zhuang Township Suite* as an example, this piano piece integrates pentatonic and European Baroque music components, conveying the warm and hospitable scene of the Zhuang people to the audience through piano performance.

4.3. Nationalizing the title of piano artworks

The titles of modern Chinese piano art compositions often exhibit characteristics of intuitiveness, summarization, and nationalization. These titles can be further divided into the following three types. The first type is freehand ethnic titles. This type of piano adaptation often uses music as a tool of expression to depict a poetic and picturesque scene. Listeners will involuntarily engage in associations while listening to piano works, thereby gaining a better auditory art experience. For example, modern piano pieces such as *A Hundred Birds Facing the Phoenix*, *Night of Torch Festival*, and *Sunset Flute and Drum* fully showcase the artistic conception contained in piano pieces. Listeners can feel the ethnic music elements contained in them simply by reading the titles. The second type is using narrative titles to convey ethnic music elements in the modern piano repertoire. This type of piano repertoire mainly focuses on historical and folk legends as creative themes, using the changes in musical melodies to encourage listeners to feel the ups and downs of the story plot and expand their imagination. *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Story of the Western Chamber* are both typical representative works. The third type is modern experimental ethnic piano titles. This type of title mainly integrates the avant-garde concepts contained in Western art and culture with elements of Chinese ethnic music, in order to achieve the modernization development of Chinese piano artworks. For example, works such as *Wu Kui*, *Tai Chi*, and *Blue and White Porcelain* directly display the content of musical works in the title, facilitating the audience to better understand the artistic culture and spiritual ideas conveyed by piano works. This type of title can effectively highlight ethnic music elements, bringing great convenience to the performance, appreciation, and dissemination of modern piano works.

5. Conclusion

In summary, integrating ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation is an important measure to promote the innovative progress of Chinese piano art culture, and has a certain positive effect on promoting the development of world piano art. By adapting original ethnic music elements, creating based on traditional pentatonic tunes, and nationalizing piano art titles, ethnic music elements are integrated into modern piano art creation, truly achieving the goal of learning from Western art and culture while preserving the elements and charm of Chinese ethnic music and promoting the vitality and innovative development of modern piano art. The integration of ethnic music elements into modern piano art creation aims to seek a balance between Western piano performance techniques and Chinese ethnic music elements, showcasing Chinese unique culture to the

world through the piano, and assisting in the construction and development of Chinese cultural undertakings.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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