

The Application of Piano in Chinese Pop Music Arrangements

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Abstract: By exploring the application of piano in Chinese pop music arrangements, this article aims to enhance the understanding of the position of piano in pop music and provide useful insights and references for the future development of Chinese pop music. Starting from the unique position of piano in Chinese pop music arrangements, the article analyses in detail the specific applications of piano in Chinese pop music arrangements. The analysis finds that the piano has been deeply integrated into the bloodline of Chinese popular music and become an indispensable part. From simple melodic embellishments to complex arrangement ideas, the piano has injected endless vitality and vigor into popular music with its unique timbre and expressive power.

Keywords: Piano; China; Pop music; Arrangement

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1. Introduction

Since the birth of the piano, an ancient and elegant instrument, in 1709, it has not only occupied a pivotal position in the field of classical music but also demonstrated its infinite charm and wide application in the course of modern music development, especially in the arrangement of Chinese pop music. With the changes of the times and the continuous evolution of music, the role of the piano in Chinese pop music arrangement has become more and more important, which not only enriches the form of musical expression but also profoundly influences the emotional communication and aesthetic experience of pop music.

2. The unique position of piano in Chinese pop music arrangement

2.1. A bridge of emotional resonance

With its clear and bright tone and rich expressive power, the piano has become a bridge connecting the creator and the listener. In pop music, the piano can delicately depict the ups and downs of emotions, whether it is a cheerful rhythm or a deep melody, all of which can be fully demonstrated through the performance of the piano. For example, JJ Lin's "Jiangnan" is arranged with the piano as the core, with a melodious and delicate emotion, which

resonates with people as if they were in the misty Jiangnan water town. This ability of the piano to convey emotion makes it an indispensable emotional carrier in pop music ^[1].

2.2. A driving force for arranging innovation

With the development of popular music, the piano has become increasingly important in arranging and has even become a driving force for arranging innovation. With its unique timbre and rich harmonic ability, the piano provides a wide space of imagination for music creation. Through different performance techniques and harmonic arrangements, arrangers have made the piano show a variety of faces in popular music. For example, Jay Chou's "Nunchucks" combines traditional folk instruments with modern electronic music elements, while the piano plays an important role as harmonic and melodic support, making the entire song both novel and infectious. This innovative arrangement not only enriches the expression of popular music but also promotes the diversification of music styles ^[2].

2.3. A cornerstone of music education

As an important part of music education, piano lays a solid foundation for cultivating musical talents. In China, piano education is widely popular, and the piano is an indispensable learning instrument for children's enlightenment to professional training. Through learning the piano, students can not only master basic music knowledge and skills but also develop musical literacy and aesthetic ability. In addition, the piano learning process is also an exercise in patience, perseverance, and creativity. Therefore, the cornerstone role of the piano in music education cannot be ignored, and it has trained many excellent creators and performers for popular music arrangements ^[3].

2.4. A medium of cultural integration

After the piano was introduced into China as a Western musical instrument, it gradually fused with the local Chinese culture and became a medium of cultural exchange. Chinese composers, while drawing on Western musical techniques, have deeply explored the rich and diverse local musical materials from all over China for creation and adaptation, giving piano music a Chinese character and style. For example, the piano music of northern Shaanxi Province uses the fluttering technique to express the high and cool musical colors; the piano music of Xinjiang adopts the unique beat design and rhythmic division of Xinjiang to interpret its exuberant and enthusiastic cultural atmosphere. These works not only show the unique charm of the piano but also promote the exchange and integration of Chinese and Western cultures. In addition, the piano has also become a bridge connecting different regional cultures. By playing piano works with regional characteristics, people can better understand and appreciate the cultural landscape of different regions.

3. Application of piano in Chinese pop music arrangements

3.1. Application of piano in preludes

3.1.1. Repeated use of piano accompaniment patterns in preludes

In the introductory chapters of pop music, the piano often plays a crucial role, and it cleverly lays down the emotional undertones and stylistic tone for the entire song by virtue of specific accompaniment patterns. These carefully designed patterns are both simple and recognizable, instantly grabbing the listener's attention and leading them into the mood of the song. As the song unfolds, these iconic patterns often run through different passages, forming a coherent musical vein that not only strengthens the overall coherence of the song but also becomes a key element in deepening the listener's memory. Specifically, the piano's expression in the intro is varied and

vivid: sometimes, it flows slowly with delicate breakdown chords, like a light veil on the face, creating a warm and dreamy emotional atmosphere; while on other occasions, the piano may use smooth arpeggios or jumping breaks to highlight the song's cheerfulness and spirituality with energetic rhythms ^[4]. The clever repeat of these patterns not only makes the prelude part layered and attractive but also lays a solid foundation for the arrangement structure of the entire song, showing the indispensable artistic value and unique charm of the piano in pop music arrangement.

3.1.2. Using piano to express the main theme of the song to enhance the identity of the prelude

In many Chinese pop music compositions, the piano is often skillfully used as a medium to directly interpret the core melody of the song, greatly enhancing the uniqueness and identifiability of the intro. With its pure and distinctive tone combined with the performer's virtuoso skills, the piano's main melody can touch the hearts of listeners from the very beginning, creating an unforgettable first impression. This artistic technique not only gives the prelude a meaning beyond the simple transition but also makes it the direct sounding board of the song's emotion and the distinctive flag of the music's personality. For example, in warm and romantic love songs, the piano slowly spreads out with its lingering melody, as if gently narrating a moving love chapter; on the contrary, in exciting and inspiring songs, the piano may jump with powerful notes, instantly igniting the listener's heart of the fighting spirit and the light of hope. Regardless of the varying styles of the song, the piano can always accurately capture and convey the deep emotional connotation and the main spirit of the song with its extraordinary interpretive power.

3.1.3. Contextual intro with piano

Contextual intro refers to the creation of a specific scene or atmosphere through the depiction and rendering of music, guiding the listener into the world depicted in the song. In Chinese pop music arrangements, the piano, with its rich expressive power, has become an important tool for shaping contextual intros ^[5]. The piano can simulate various sound effects, such as raindrops tapping on the windowpane and a breeze blowing through the treetops, through different playing techniques and timbre changes, thus creating an immersive feeling. In addition, the piano can paint a vivid picture and scene by cooperating with other instruments. For example, in some ancient songs, the piano may combine with other traditional instruments such as guzheng and flute to create a simple, elegant, and tranquil atmosphere; while in some modern pop songs, the piano and electronic synthesizers may create a sci-fi and mysterious sense of the future. These contextual preludes not only enrich the song's expression but also bring listeners a richer and deeper listening experience.

3.2. Application of piano in interludes

3.2.1. Types of interludes

- (1) Steady transition piano interludes: Steady transition piano interlude mainly serves to connect different parts of the song, keeping the music smooth and steady when the passage changes by maintaining the continuity of melody, harmony, or rhythm ^[6]. This type of interlude avoids violent fluctuations in mood and sudden changes in tempo and instead subtly guides the listener to cross the musical passage boundaries without realizing it. In the steady transition piano interlude, the melodic line often has subtle echoes with the preceding and following passages, which maintains the overall unity and fluency of the musical work; the harmonic development is particularly smooth, avoiding any possible abrupt tonal shifts or chordal jumps; at the same time, the tempo is maintained in a relatively constant state, with very few large fluctuations in tempo or sudden changes in rhythm.

Taking Leehom Wang's "Things You Don't Know" as an example, the interlude section skillfully employs the piano. The melody and chord arrangement, though simple, carry profound meaning, continuing the song's emotional tone while seamlessly introducing melodic lines from the acoustic guitar. This approach ensures a natural flow between sections, preserving the song's coherence and laying a solid foundation for the subsequent musical narrative. Moving on to Yanzi Sun's "Rainy Day," the piano interlude in the track similarly demonstrates the essence of a steady transition. With the piano as the lead, its melodic design is rich in instrumentalized beauty, first rising in a lilting manner and then slowly descending, ultimately drawing on the harp's gentle descending scales to seamlessly link into the song's section. This treatment not only reflects the smooth transition characteristics of the interlude but also further deepens the delicacy and coherence of the song's emotional communication, making the listener's listening experience more fluent and full of emotional resonance.

- (2) **Contrasting piano interludes:** Contrasting piano interludes form a sharp contrast with the preceding and following passages by changing musical elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, or timbre. This type of interlude can give the listener a strong auditory impact and emotional changes and enhance the sense of musical hierarchy and expressive power. Its characteristics are mainly manifested in two aspects, one is to form a clear contrast with the preceding and following passages in terms of melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, etc.; the second is a richer and more varied expression of emotion, which can quickly change the atmosphere and mood of the song.

For example, the first interlude of Hung-ming Yau's "Flower Butterfly" uses a contrasting type of interlude, with a complete change in tonality, orchestration, weave, melody as well as harmony. Piano and ancient piano are used predominantly here, creating a very classical atmosphere that contrasts sharply with the preceding and following passages. In the second interlude of Jay Chou's "Double Blade," the same contrasting piano interlude is used. This interlude uses the piano, which has not been used throughout the previous orchestration, and the juxtaposition of the rock song and the Mozart-style piano piece is a creative idea, which not only cushions the ear from the pressure of the previous rock but also adds a sense of anticipation for the subsequent development of the music.

- (3) **Propulsive piano interludes:** Propulsive piano interludes promote the climax of the song's emotional development mainly through the enhancement of the music's dynamics and tension. This type of interlude tends to use more intense melodic lines and tighter harmonies to stimulate the listener's empathy and emotional involvement. This type of interlude has the following characteristics: the melodic line is more intense and compact, with propulsive characteristics; the harmonic progression is more compact and powerful, which enhances the tension of the music; the emotional expression is more intense and direct, which can quickly push the song to the climax.

The second interlude of A-Mei's song "I Want Happiness" uses the propulsive type of interlude, in which the piano plays broken down chords in the treble clef and other instruments play in concert, resulting in the upward movement of the overall mood and driving the song towards its climax.

3.2.2. Methods by which the piano drives the mood of the music in the interlude

- (1) **The use of melody and harmony:** On the one hand, the piano interlude can directly guide the listener's emotional direction by constructing a unique and expressive melodic line. When the melodic line goes up, it can often stimulate positive emotions in the listener; while when the melodic line goes down, it may trigger contemplation or sadness in the listener. On the other hand, harmonic changes are one of the most important means of driving the mood of the music. In piano interludes, different musical atmospheres and

emotional colors can be created through harmonic transitions, tonal changes, and the rich use of chords ^[7]. For example, shifting from major to minor can instantly change the mood from bright to melancholic.

- (2) Control of rhythm and tempo: Rhythm is the skeleton of music and an important means of expressing emotion. In a piano interlude, changes in rhythm, such as speeding up, slowing down, and contrasting strengths and weaknesses, can guide the listener's attention and promote the development of musical emotion. For example, in the part that needs to emphasize the emotional climax, the piano interlude can adopt a faster tempo and stronger intensity to enhance the tension and infectiousness of the music. In addition, tempo is one of the key factors in the emotional expression of music. Piano interludes can create different emotional atmospheres by controlling the speed of playing. A fast performance can stimulate the listener's excitement, while a slow performance may trigger the listener's contemplation or sadness ^[8].
- (3) Treatment of timbre and intensity: The piano has a rich tonal expressiveness, and through different ways of touching the keys and using the pedals, it can produce a thousand different tonal effects. In the interlude, the piano can create different emotional atmospheres by changing the timbre, such as bright, warm, dark, etc., in order to promote the development of the musical mood ^[9]. In addition, the control of intensity is one of the important skills in piano playing. In the interlude, the piano can emphasize the key parts of the music, guide the listener's attention, and promote the development of musical emotion through the reasonable arrangement of intensity. For example, in the part that needs to emphasize the emotional climax, the piano can adopt stronger intensity to strengthen the expressive power of the music.
- (4) Emotional resonance and guidance: A piano interlude, as a transitional part in a musical work, often needs to form an emotional resonance with the preceding and following passages. Through clever melodic design, harmonic arrangement, and rhythmic treatment, the piano interlude can guide the listener into a specific emotional state, paving the way for subsequent musical development. In addition to forming emotional resonance with the preceding and following passages, the piano interlude also undertakes the task of guiding the emotional development of the music. Through reasonable emotional guidance, the piano interlude can gradually drive the listener's emotion to the climax, so that the musical work is more complete and profound in emotional expression ^[10].

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the application of piano in Chinese pop music arrangements is extensive and in-depth, and its unique tone, rich expressiveness, and varied playing techniques have injected new vitality and creativity into pop music. With the continuous progress of music technology and the constant change of people's aesthetic concepts, the application of piano in pop music arrangements will continue to expand and innovate, bringing us more diversified and infectious music works. Therefore, in-depth research and exploration of the application of piano in pop music arrangement not only helps to better understand the essence and charm of music but also injects new impetus and direction for the development of pop music.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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