

Research on the Interaction and Value of Opera and Symphony

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Abstract. In the vast field of western classical music, opera and symphony, as two very representative art forms, carry rich cultural connotations and historical traditions. Although the two have obvious differences in expression techniques, constituent elements and performance forms, they rely on each other and blend with each other to create rich artistic expression. This paper takes the combination of opera and symphony as the research object. Firstly, it gives a basic introduction to opera and symphony by analyzing their historical development and structure, and then analyzes the combination of opera and symphony from four aspects: historical evolution, cultural background, music language and composition techniques. This paper makes a profound analysis of the interaction between opera and symphony from these four aspects, and finally comes to the conclusion that ---- when the two are fully combined, music works can convey a richer sensory and emotional experience to the audience, and show a more complete system of artistic works.

Keywords: Opera; symphony; history; culture.

1. Introduction

Opera originated in Italy during the Renaissance and was originally created for entertainment in the courts of the nobility. It combines singing, drama, dance, visual arts and other elements to tell a complex and changeable story through the performance of actors and the accompaniment of an orchestra [1]. The structure of an opera usually includes the prelude, the recital, the aria, the chorus and the intermezzo, each of which carries the important task of promoting the development of the plot and showing the character and emotional changes.

As a representative of pure music, the development of symphony runs through the entire history of western music. It is usually composed of multiple movements, each movement has its own unique musical form and expression content, such as sonata form, complex trilogy form and so on [2]. Through different instrument combinations and timbre contrast, symphony creates rich acoustics and deep emotional expression, which is an excellent stage for composers to show their musical talent and creativity. Although the two are different in the form of expression, they are closely linked in the pursuit of art, cultural expression and musical innovation, which together constitute the two indispensable pillars of Western classical music. This paper takes the combination of opera and symphony as the research theme, at first analyzes the historical development and the structure of opera and symphony respectively, and then analyzes the combination of opera and symphony from four aspects: historical evolution, cultural background, music language and composition techniques.

2. Opera and Symphony

2.1. Opera

Opera is a unique art form known for its distinctive combination of music, drama, and visual spectacle, which has captivated audiences for centuries. Originating in late 16th-century Italy, this dramatic genre blends song, orchestration, and performance, sometimes including dance, to convey narratives that encompass a wide range of themes from love and tragedy to politics and mythology. The richness and diversity of opera make it an essential part of the global cultural heritage.

2.1.1 History of Opera

The roots of opera can be traced back to the Renaissance, when composers sought to revive the dramatic elements of ancient Greek theater. The first recognized opera, "Dafne," was created by Jacopo Peri in 1598, marking the birth of a new genre that evolved over the following centuries [3]. The essence of opera lies in its melodic expression and the ability to convey profound emotions through music. Renowned operas such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro" and Giuseppe Verdi's "La Traviata" exemplify how composers utilize music to enhance storytelling and create unforgettable characters that resonate with audiences [3]. Throughout its historical development, opera has transcended geographical and cultural boundaries. While Italian opera laid the foundation, other countries have made significant contributions to its evolution. French opera is known for its emphasis on ballet and visual effects, giving rise to masterpieces such as Georges Bizet's "Carmen." German opera, particularly the works of Richard Wagner, introduced groundbreaking concepts, especially the idea of the "total artwork" (Gesamtkunstwerk), which combines all elements of performance into a unified whole [4]. Today, operas are created in various languages and styles, reflecting contemporary issues and enriching this art form.

2.1.2 Structure of Opera

Opera is not just a musical endeavor; it is also a dramatic one. Visual elements, including stage design, costume design, and choreography, play a crucial role in bringing the story to life. Directors often interpret the libretto---the text of the opera---in innovative ways, using creative staging and technology to enhance the audience's experience. This multifaceted nature of opera requires collaboration among various artists, including composers, singers, directors, and set designers, to create a coherent and immersive performance. The structure of an opera typically involves multiple acts, interwoven with arias, recitatives, choruses, and orchestral interludes. Arias are solo vocal pieces that often explore the inner thoughts and emotions of characters, providing insight into their psychology. In contrast, recitatives advance the plot through a more dialogue-like musical form, allowing for interaction and conversation between characters. Choruses provide a collective voice that reflects societal emotions or comments on actions, thereby enriching the narrative [5].

2.2. Symphony

Symphony holds an important position in the realm of classical music, renowned for its grandeur and ability to evoke a variety of emotions. The term "symphony" itself refers to a large work composed for an orchestra, but it also represents a broader artistic concept that encompasses the collaboration of musicians, composers, and conductors to create a coherent and profound musical experience.

2.2.1 History of Symphony

The roots of the symphonic form can be traced back to the late 17th century with the emergence of orchestral suites and concerto styles. However, it was during the late 18th century in the Classical period that the symphony began to take shape as we know it today. Composers such as Haydn and Mozart played a key role in refining the structure and form of symphonic music. Their works established a framework consisting of multiple movements, often featuring contrasting rhythms and themes, which became the standard for future compositions [6]. As the 19th century progressed, the symphonic form continued to undergo transformations, particularly with the rise of Romanticism. Composers like Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky expanded the emotional and thematic range of the symphony, incorporating innovative instrumentation and novel harmonic techniques [7]. During this period, the emergence of the tone poem allowed composers to express specific narratives or ideas within a less rigid structure, further enriching the symphonic repertoire.

2.2.2 Structure of Symphony

The core of the symphony orchestra is made up of different sections of instruments, traditionally divided into strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The string section typically consists of violins,

violas, cellos, and double basses, serving as the backbone of the orchestra, providing the foundation for melody and harmony. Woodwind instruments include flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, adding richness and color to the sound, often carrying important melodic lines. Brass instruments such as trumpets, trombones, and French horns contribute power and brilliance, while the percussion section, including timpani, snare drums, and cymbals, enhances the rhythmic dimension and provides dramatic emphasis.

3. The Interaction of Opera and Symphony

3.1. The Historical Evolution

The interplay between opera and symphonic music has evolved significantly throughout history, reflecting broader cultural and artistic trends. E. T. A. Hoffmann's assertion in 1809 highlights the transformative power of the symphony, particularly through the contributions of Haydn and Mozart, elevating it to an esteemed form of instrumental narrative akin to opera. This perspective underscores the profound impact these composers had on the evolution of symphonic music [8]. Initially distinct forms of musical expression, opera emerged in the late Renaissance as a dramatic art form that combined music, singing, and theatrical performance, while the symphonic tradition began to crystallize in the Classical period, characterized by instrumental orchestration and musical form. Over time, these two types began to merge, especially during the Romantic period, when composers like Wagner and Verdi incorporated symphonic elements into their operatic works, creating a rich tapestry of sound that enhanced emotional expression [9]. This synthesis was not merely stylistic; it also fostered a greater narrative depth, allowing for complex characters and themes to be conveyed through both vocal and instrumental means. Consequently, the historical evolution of opera and symphony can be viewed as a dynamic dialogue, enriching the Western musical canon and inviting audiences to appreciate the interconnectedness of various art forms.

3.2. The Cultural Background

The interplay between opera and symphonic music manifests distinctively across various cultural and social contexts, significantly influencing audience reception and engagement. In certain traditions, such as Italian opera, the integration of orchestral elements serves to enhance the dramatic narrative and emotional depth, often fostering a more immersive experience for the viewer. Conversely, in cultures where instrumental music is paramount, such as in German symphonic traditions, the orchestral textures can lead to interpretative nuances that may overshadow vocal components. This divergence reflects broader societal values regarding music and performance, where operatic grandeur may evoke feelings of nostalgia and identity in one setting, while in another, the orchestral complexity may stimulate intellectual appreciation. Thus, the synthesis of opera and symphony not only enriches artistic expression but also shapes the collective experiences, expectations, and emotional responses of diverse audiences.

3.3. The Music Language

The synergy of musical language between opera and symphony is characterized by the complex interaction between vocals and instruments. The lyrics of opera and the instrumental expressions in symphonic music exhibit a captivating interplay of language and sound. In opera, the lyrics serve as a medium for conveying emotional depth and character development, often reflecting the psychological state of the characters. At the end of the 16th century, Italian opera creators focused not only on music but also on the selection of themes for the libretto. Opera, with its rich forms of expression, influenced the art and culture of the time. The operas of this period explored human emotions and social issues, evoking resonance among audiences through dramatic presentations [10]. This linguistic expression is skillfully complemented by orchestral arrangements, enhancing the dramatic effect and highlighting the thematic elements of the narrative. The use of specific instruments can evoke particular emotions; strings often incite passion and intensity, while

woodwinds may convey a sense of lightness or melancholy. This dynamic interaction allows composers to cultivate a rich tapestry of musical expression, where the orchestral backdrop not only supports but also enhances the vocal narrative. By deftly manipulating timbre, volume, and thematic development, both opera and symphonic works can convey profound emotional nuances and dramatic tension. Consequently, the collaboration between instrumentalists and vocalists fosters a multidimensional auditory experience, inviting the audience to engage more fully with the emotional and narrative depth of the music. This integration ultimately enriches the overall aesthetic experience, highlighting the unique ability of both musical forms to express the complexities of human experience.

3.4. The Compositional Techniques

The examination of composers' techniques in the creation of operas and symphonies reveals several notable similarities, particularly in their use of motivic development, harmonic manipulation, and contrasting elements. Both forms of composition utilize motivic development to provide thematic cohesion and to evoke emotional responses, as composers often transform and reintroduce motifs throughout their works. The final movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony is filled with the use of grace notes, which serve not only as traditional Baroque embellishments but also play a dense motivic role in this section, alluding three times to Wagner's "Parsifal" and its motif of the Savior's lament. Although there is a wealth of research on Mahler's Ninth Symphony, the role of grace notes as a reference between motif and text has been largely overlooked [11]. Additionally, harmonic choices play a crucial role; the application of innovative harmonies can enhance the narrative in operas, while in symphonies, they serve to deepen the structural complexity. In William Schuman's Sixth Symphony (1948), a specific harmonic duality can be observed, operating on two levels: on one hand, there is a contrast between vaguely defined color tones and natural sound elements; on the other hand, this opposition is focused through two forms of "chords with added tones." [12]. This exploration highlights the intricate interplay of these techniques, underscoring the shared compositional philosophies that underpin these distinct yet interconnected genres.

4. Conclusion

The interplay between opera and symphony represents a profound fusion of vocal art and orchestral depth. This integration is reflected in the remarkable evolution of opera and symphony history, the different cultural and social contexts, the synergy of musical languages, and the skill of composers in creating operas and symphonies. This combination makes the music experience rich and colorful, the narrative power of the voice and the broad emotional landscape of the orchestra complement each other, so that the audience can deeply feel the emotions that these music works want to convey in various aspects and resonate with them more easily. It is precisely because of this combination that the art form is not limited to separate appreciation, but is conveyed in a form that combines singing, drama and instrumental performance, which not only enrich the audience's sensory experience, but also greatly develops the charm of this art. This study still lacks some research materials and evidence of actual investigation. In the research of future scholars, field visits to different Musical Instruments or operas may be added for further research.

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