

Talking about the Artistic Features of the Dance Drama "If Life Could Just Be Like First Meeting"

Renwen Yan*

Luoyang Normal University, Luoyang 471000, China

Abstract: The dance drama "Life Is Just Like the First Meeting" takes the love affair between Nalan Xingde and Lu Shi and the friendship with Gu Zhenguan, Cao Yin and Kangxi as the main content, and runs through the whole text. The traditional elements of the Han and Mongolian peoples are integrated and displayed on the stage using unique and novel stage art techniques. This paper mainly analyzes and discusses the artistic features embodied in "If Life Could Just Be Like First Meeting" from three aspects: the dance image, the narrative art and the comprehensive use of the stage.

Keywords: Dance Drama; "If Life Could Just Be Like First Meeting"; Artistic Features.

1. Introduction

The dance drama "If Life Could Just Be Like First Meeting" is directed by Liu Zhen. The drama uses poetic dance to express not only the deep affection between Nalan Xingde and his wife Lu, but also the profound friendship between Nalan Xingde, Cao Yin and Gu Zhenguan. The dance drama consists of the prologue "Life is like the beginning", "There are other roots and sprouts", "For whom is spring?", "Where is the deep love", and "who is the side".

2. Intuitive and Beautiful Dance Image

(1)The intuitiveness of dance images

The dance image is an intuitive artistic image that is mainly perceived through people's visual organs. [1]The dance image is formed by the choreographer through artistic refinement and processing of people's postures and expressions in daily life. Therefore, the intuitiveness of the dance image is the key to whether a dance drama can be accepted by the audience. At the beginning of the dance drama "If Life Could Just Be Like First Encounter", in order to show that Nalan Xingde was gifted and intelligent when he was young, he was immersed in the world of poetry and books. Let the young Nalan wave his brush and run with arms outstretched to the soundtrack. In the falling pear blossoms, Nalan waved his brush and began to write the glorious chapter of his life. [2]Later, in the three-person dance with Cao Yin and Kangxi, the three people's movements were sometimes consistent, and sometimes Kangxi was the main focus, and the two of them held Kangxi up and walked forward. This more intuitively reflects that there is not only friendship between Nalan and Kangxi and Cao Yin regardless of rank, but also the sincere heart of being a subject and assisting the king wholeheartedly.

In addition, the intuitiveness of the dance image also lies in the real and accurate positioning of the characters, which is not only another artistic feature of this work, but also the subtlety of character creation. The characters in the dance drama "If Life Could Only Be Like First Meeting" have all found their own precise positioning. Each character is typical and real, and has found the perfect balance, making each character bright while serving as a foil and contrast for characters with different images. The arrogant Manchu warriors who bullied the Han literati were portrayed vividly

on the stage, while Nalan, who stood up and bowed to the dancers, formed a sharp contrast with them. This not only shows that although Nalan Xingde was a Manchu, he respected Han culture and had good moral qualities of being humble and respectful to Han literati, but also paved the way for Nalan Xingde to pass the imperial examination and be appreciated by Emperor Kangxi.

(2)The plasticity of dance image

In dance drama, graceful and typical dance postures are not uncommon. However, in order to highlight that Nalan Xingde was a typical example of a Manchu who still respected Han culture, "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" created a dance style for the actor who played Nalan that had both a Mongolian heroic style and a scholarly dance style with a literary demeanor. The different transitions between the two styles of dance further highlight the personality traits of Nalan Xingde. While Nalan was touring the frontier on the ancient road outside the Great Wall on behalf of the country, his wife Lu died of complications during childbirth at Sangyu Manor. [3]The female dancer's body is lying strangely on the chair, with her legs and head hanging on both sides of the chair. This shape accurately captures the physical details of people after death and presents them on the stage by capturing typical movements.

In addition to dance shapes that use the human body as a carrier, there are also shapes composed of formations. Usually our dance formations, which consist of a large number of people, are more to set off the environment in which the main characters are located, the formation modeling in the dance drama "If Life Could Only Be Like First Meeting" not only accurately conveys the characters' environment to the audience, but also materializes the characters' inner sense of loss by adding a slight swing to the static formation modeling. For example, when Nalan was missing Lu, the graceful figure of the girl in his dream appeared by the lotus. A group of dancers surrounded Nalan and used lotus flowers to make a lotus pond. This vividly showed Nalan Xingde's longing for Lu and made the image of the lotus pond more vivid.

(3)The rhythm of dance image

The dynamics of dance cannot be separated from the element of rhythm, because it moves according to the laws of dance art, rather than being disorderly and chaotic natural dynamics. This is why the dynamic image of dance is said to

be a rhythmic dynamic image. In dance, rhythm is generally manifested in the strength, speed, and energy of dance movements, through which different emotions and feelings can be expressed, reflecting different rich contents. [4] The rhythm in dance must serve the content and emotions that the dance wants to express. The dance drama "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" is a dance drama with a tragic theme as its main theme. Therefore, except for the dance segments that reflect Nalan Xingde's high-spirited spirit, the rhythm of the rest of the dance segments is mainly lyrical and gentle.

In the first act of the dance drama, there is a scene where Master Nalan and many other candidates are taking the tense imperial examination. The dancers are waving their pens exaggeratedly and wantonly in front of the desks. In this scene, the dancers' large-scale body movements and constantly waving writing brush convey to the audience the tense atmosphere of the imperial examination and the scene where the candidates speak freely, express their lofty ambitions in governing the country and are willing to shed their blood for the country. It is precisely because this set of movements perfectly grasps the strength and energy of the dance movements in the rhythm that, although this set of dances does not have complex movements and formation changes, it still gives the audience a very strong sense of picture, and they can clearly grasp the content and emotions that the choreographer wants to express. Secondly, in the third act, when the enemy country keeps provoking conflicts on the border between the two countries, the fast and intensive dance movements of the imperial soldiers accurately show the speed of the dance movements in the rhythm. The fast and intensive dance movements will give the audience a sense of urgency visually, thus reflecting that the situation on the border is not optimistic, and also indirectly hinting at the necessity of Nalan Rongruo's tour.

3. The Narrative and Lyric Art of the Dance Drama

(1) Clearly layered spatial narrative

The "time and space" of the dance drama is not a purely objective reality, it also means the construction of the plot. It is not only the place where the characters act, but also participates in the narrative and depiction itself as a cultural context. This is reflected in the time and space structure of the dance drama, which requires an extension of the visual and auditory conception. While the dance drama refines and summarizes life, it also selects, expresses and renders the real space from different directions and angles. [5]

A dance drama is usually presented on a stage, so if the stage can be used flexibly, it will make the work more eye-catching and more able to catch the audience's attention. In the third act of "If Life Could Only Be Like First Meeting", the back half of the stage is filled with soldiers from many enemy countries on the border. During the continuous dance, their numbers gradually increase and they move step by step towards the center of the stage, symbolizing the ambitious desire for aggression. In the first half of the stage, Nalan Xingde walked firmly towards the minister who read the imperial edict. The pregnant Lu put a cloak on him and watched him go away. This scene divides the stage into two parts, front and back. Although the dance is not performed at the same time, the connection is more compact as they are on the same space. Compared with the mode of one stage ending

and another stage starting, this double level of space can better highlight the reasons and urgency of Nalan's expedition, making the plot more compact and less dragged out.

Reasonable stratification and utilization of space can not only make the plot connection more compact, but sometimes also highlight the passage of time. For example, in the last scene, the elderly Cao Yin and Gu Guanzhen sit together in the lower right corner of the stage, while the center of the stage is designed to be a group of young children reciting Nalan's poems, and the two look back. The old man and the child, a group and two people, appear on the stage at the same time, and the sharp contrast they form gives the viewer great visual conflict. The two old men's action of looking back expressed their nostalgia for Nalan and their lament for their own aging. Afterwards, the upper left corner shows the scene of Cao Yin, Gu Guanzhen and Nalan Xingde taking the imperial examinations and entering officialdom. The young men at that time were full of vigor and ambition, which compared with the hunchbacked and staggering old man now, highlights that Cao Yin and Gu Guanzhen still miss the days with Nalan very much.

(2) Rich and full of body narrative

Dance itself is a form of emotional expression and narrative lyricism that uses the human body as a language, so the dancer's body movements become an important bridge connecting the audience and the dance drama. The dancers' body movements in the dance drama "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" accurately express emotions without being stiff, but rather have a kind of charm in them. In the creation of the dance drama, the main means of expression is to poetically process the body language. The body movements of the dancers in the play and their performance state are the most suitable expressions of body language for this context. [6]

In the second act of the dance drama, Nalan Rongruo, who passed the imperial examination, dances in a large group with many other dancers. The dance moves are grand and open, occupying the maximum space; at the same time, the formation is a large scattered formation that covers the entire stage. This form of movement allows the dancer to maximize the use of his or her limbs, thereby expressing to the audience Nalan Rongruo's joy of being on the list. Secondly, in the scene where the dancers gathered inward with Nalan Rongruo as the center to watch Master Nalan writing his name on paper, Nalan Rongruo's upright posture formed a sharp contrast with the dancers around him who were looking up at him; his powerful and large-scale brushstrokes accurately grasped the character's inner emotions and expressed them with concise but not simple body movements.

Furthermore, in the third act of the dance drama, when performing the dance sequence of Lu's difficult childbirth, the actress lay strangely on a chair, her legs shaking constantly, one hand still holding her husband's poem, and the other hand stretched out five fingers and slowly stretched them towards the sky; when the maids held the quilt in front of Lu, Lu knelt on the ground, her upper body passed over the quilt that was standing in front of her, and one hand stretched forward vigorously, these confrontational movements using body language are more tense and impactful, while also conveying the story of Lu's difficult childbirth. For example, when pregnant Lu was seeing Nalan off to the war, she leaned forward and moved her hands restlessly, silently expressing her worries. There was no exaggerated expression, only gentle body movements, giving people a poetic and restrained

emotion.

4. Comprehensive Application of Dance Drama Creation

(1) Use of Music

The language that makes up a dance is not real compared to the complete dance itself. When the words are removed and only the body language of dance remains, the expression itself is given a kind of "poetic" lyricism, making people feel that dance has a greater space for imagination. It is precisely because of this language feature that the dance drama composed of unit dance segments can flexibly transform time and space during the performance, and narrative and lyrical dances can be interspersed alternately. [7]

Dance drama is a comprehensive form of artistic performance, and a successful dance drama is inextricably linked to beautiful music. The dance music in a dance drama is an important part of the dance. "The dance generated by the lyricism, narrative and conflict of dance drama music is an effective factor in the dramatic expression of dance drama, and plays a positive auxiliary role in the dramatic presentation of dance drama." [8] What is novel and eye-catching about the music of the dance drama "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" is that the theme music of the dance drama uses Nalan Xingde's poems as lyrics. "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" is a poem by Nalan Xingde, and this song runs through the entire dance drama. By using the poems of historical figures in the dance drama to compose music and perform throughout the entire dance drama, the audience can be brought into the drama and feel as if they are actually experiencing it, not just as a bystander. When appropriate music appears in the right dance segment, it will make the expression of emotions more intense. Lu died in childbirth, and Nalan was heartbroken. When performing the excerpt from "The love between man and ghost is not over", the sad melody of the theme music, coupled with Nalan Xingde's already sad poems, further highlighted the regret and misery of Nalan Xingde and Lu's love.

One of the important purposes of a choreographer in creating a dance is to highlight his or her own emotional characteristics and to express these characteristics through movements, situations, and other forms, thereby achieving a higher level of artistry. [9] Therefore, many dance professionals prioritize appropriate music during the creative process and then determine the rhythm of the dance. Once confirmed, the melody of the music and the rhythm of the dance will be adjusted to promote a higher level of integration. With short and catchy lyrics, beautiful and simple melody, the theme music with its different variations and changes becomes an important auxiliary force in promoting the development of the plot. "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" is a tragic dance drama about Nalan Xingde. Therefore, its music theme must not only express the character's ambition and passionate experience, but also express the character's lofty spirit and sad experience, thus forming character images convey different character emotions in various plot narratives. The music is mainly based on a large tragic string group. On this basis, the rhythm and instruments are added and subtracted according to the needs of different dance segments in the dance drama, thus creating an atmosphere of different emotions, which plays a good role in setting off the actors' emotional expression.

(2) Use of stage settings and props

Dance props are one of the modeling methods of dance stage art. In Li Qiuping's article "The Wonder of Props Is Indescribable: On the Expressive Function of Dance Props", it is mentioned that "props are an important means of expressing the dance environment and creating atmosphere." [10] The clever use of props can often help a dance drama to express its meaning more accurately. Therefore, using stage backgrounds and props is often the most intuitive choice for a dance drama to introduce the location where the story takes place. In the second act of the imperial examination, a group of young men are writing furiously. The background is the furnishings and layout of the palace hall, which clearly expresses the place where the young men are. Secondly, the lanterns held by the girls beside the boys are more in line with history, allowing people to instantly understand the environment and location in which the current dance segment takes place.

In addition to giving people the most intuitive feelings, stage settings and props can also be used as metaphors to assist the plot of the dance drama. They are a bridge between creating an atmosphere that can only be understood but not expressed in words and conveying emotions. After Lu's death, in the pas de deux scene where she danced with Nalan as a ghost, the silk hanging high above the stage was festive red when Nalan and Lu met again, and when Lu's ghost left at this time, the satin turned pale white. One red and one white, symbolizing happy events and funerals, implying that Lu's soul only returned briefly, and nothing has changed after Nalan Xingde woke up from his dream. The silk hung high is also ingenious. Whether it is a wedding or a funeral, silk is a must and is always hung high. The director cleverly uses the color of satin and restores the use position of satin in life, adding a strong sense of contrast to the excerpt. The red in the first part of the excerpt forms a strong contrast with the appearance of white at the end, further exacerbating the sense of emotional gap.

(3) Use of Dancer Costumes

The dancers' costumes in a work are often the first thing people notice. The dancers' costumes can usually give the audience a preliminary understanding of which ethnic group and dynasty the dance or dance drama belongs to. For example, in the dance drama "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting", in the first act, during the imperial examination segment, there are many dancers dressed in typical Qing Dynasty ministerial costumes: wearing the Qing Dynasty's unique top hats and blue court robes. At the same time, each dancer is accompanied by a maid with a banner-shaped hairstyle and holding a lantern. This scene is extremely accurate in capturing the typical characteristics of costumes of each dynasty. Therefore, as soon as this scene appears, the audience can clearly understand the historical background of this dance drama.

In addition, the dancer's costume, as one of the auxiliary props of a dance work, must be in line with the content expressed by the dance itself. It is also an indispensable and important part of the dance work. It also plays an important role in helping to promote the development of the story. In the first act, when Nalan Xingde returns from riding and shooting, he encounters Han literati who are oppressed by Manchu warriors and stands up for them. The changes in Nalan Rongruo's costumes closely follow the story content and also cleverly advance the plot development of the dance drama. When Nalan Xingde returned from riding and shooting, he was wearing hunting clothes unique to the Manchus. After

he stood up for the Han literati, the dancers around him took off his outer clothes for him. Nalan Rongruo's attire changed from simple hunting clothes to flowing robes favored by literati. This change not only highlighted Nalan Rongruo's noble qualities, but also promoted the development of the drama plot.

5. Conclusion

First of all, the dance drama "If Life Could Always Be Like First Meeting" is extremely typical in terms of the use of music, dance movements and props. The director's unique choreography and the reasonable and ingenious stage setting are the main factors for the success of this dance drama. The director artistically refined and processed the legendary historical figure Nalan Xingde and brought it to the stage, presenting the characters in the book in a three-dimensional and vivid way to the viewers. Secondly, the dance drama pays more attention to "poeticization" and the expression and communication of emotions. Therefore, in addition to the dancers' body movements, the dance drama has higher requirements for the use of props, music and scenery.

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