The Symbiotic Composition of Dance and Music: Analysis of the Musical Structure and Body Semantics of the Dance Drama "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party"

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ABSTRACT

"Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" is a large-scale original dance drama which is produced by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of Yunnan Province and created and performed by the Yunnan Provincial Song and Dance Ensemble. It was created in the purpose of congratulating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. The whole work bases on the revolutionary history of Yunnan, use the red spirit as the main thread of emotions, and express the changes of era such as the land revolution, the War of Resistance against Japan, the founding of the country, and the reform and opening up, etc., from the perspective of common people in different historical phases. Especially in the design of actions and music structures, it peruses the aesthetic unity of artistic language, and uses the "synchronous advancement" of emotional rhythm to achieve a strong narrative tension and expressiveness. This creation mode of dance and music collaboration not only shows the comprehensive level of the contemporary dance drama production, but also points out a topic worthy of in-depth study. In narrative dance drama, how does music become the logical beginning of the movement? How does the movement find emotion anchors in the music? And how do the two together construct the emotional experience and historical memory of the audience?

This thesis takes the "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" as the research text, studies this drama's collaborative mechanism for choreography and music creation from three aspects: "the synchronous alignment of dance movements with the musical structure", "the emotional concerto between movements and music", "the intertextual relationship between body semantics and melodic culture".

Keywords: *Dance drama, "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party", Musical structure, Body semantics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Dance and music as two art forms with clear temporal nature and emotional expressiveness, keep close connections with each other in the dance drama production. The music creates an emotional atmosphere through the melody, rhythm, timbre and structural changes, while the dance relies on body movements, spatial arrangement and dynamic rhythms to transform abstract musical perception into concrete and visible artistic images. The combination of the two is not a simple matter of actions corresponding to beats, but the interact relationship formed in the aspects of time organization, emotional expression and meaning generation, etc. Especially in narrative dance drama, music not only serves to create an atmosphere and drive the plot forward, but also participates in shaping the characters' emotions and the stage imagery; while dance, through body language, gives music a more intuitive visual expression, allowing the auditory and visual elements to interweave with each other to jointly complete the artistic narrative of the work. Therefore, how to understand the internal connection between dance and music and explore the mechanism through which the two transition from formal coordination to emotional resonance and cultural expression, is the important entry point of analyzing contemporary dance drama art's creation.

Against the background of continuous development in contemporary Chinese dance drama creation, Red-themed dance dramas not only serve to artistically represent the revolutionary history and pass on the spirit of red culture, but also impose higher demands on the expressiveness of dance language and the narrative quality of music structure. Bases on this, this thesis takes the dance drama "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" as the research object, starting from the internal connection between music structure and body semantics, and conducts the analysis from three aspects: "reconstruction of rhythm", "emotional resonance", and "construction of imagery". First, it explores the synchronous congruence relationship of dance movement and music structure in rhythm organization, time variation and dynamic processing; next, it analyzes how music melody and body movement realize the artistic shift from individual emotion to group spirit through emotional concerto; finally, starting from the intertextual relationship between body semantics and melodic culture, it explores how the dance and music together convey the history memory, shape the cultural image and deliver the spiritual connotation. Based on the above analysis, this thesis aims to reveal the artistic expression method of this drama that combines dance and music, as well as its inner logic, and to further understand the music and body language's aesthetic value in red-themed dance drama narrative, provide certain references for the research on the artistic creation and dance music relationship of contemporary Chinese dance dramas.

2. THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RHYTHM: SYNCHRONOUS ALIGNMENT OF DANCE MOVEMENTS WITH MUSIC STRUCTURE

In "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party", the directing team has deep understanding of the body philosophy of "action is time", and well combined the rhythmic handling of dance movements and the time structure of the music. Traditionally dance is regarded as the servant of music. Its rhythm is restricted by music beats. But the dance movements in this dance drama not only can change along with the changes in the music, but also can actively influence the rhythm's changes in many paragraphs, forming a complex mechanism of either action drive the music or two-way construction.

Take the song of "Farewell" in the first act as example, the violin's melody together with the piano's accompaniment create a gentle and composed atmosphere. The dancer uses an extremely slow tempo as the standard, and employs many "freeze — slow movement — release" structural segments to express the tension of the body. In each long note, it gradually unfolds, allowing the dance and the music to breathe together. The director employs the "staccato breathing" movement design in this part, it means the dancer group suddenly come to a complete stop at a beat point, then restart the movements' rhythm with a very slow speed, thus the "intermittent-continuous" pattern of the body and the "staccato-legato" pattern of music produce a synchronous effect. Music is not only the clue of time, but also the trigger of movement and emotion. It not only concretizes the melancholic feeling of parting, but also enables the audience to feel the heaviness of time and the restraint of emotions at every pause of their breaths.

Such structure of "Music — Movement — Emotion" combined together is further developed in the second act: the "Long March" paragraph. This part of music uses rapid drumbeats and intense rhythm to promote the development of plot. The dancers depend on the shifts of the center of gravity, the group's running and the interweaving of spaces to produce a strong sense of advancing. The movements are no longer the direct vent of emotion, but the thing that is physically presented by the logic of space and the flow of time. It should be noted that the director dies not simply apply the synchronous mode of "strong beats corresponding to strong actions", but intentionally displace the action from the music — producing a sense of physical energy that is "super-musical". The conventional cooperation method is the advanced narrative techniques of the ballet. The audiences not only "hear" the rhythm of the march, but also "see" the process of an identity struggling and persisting in the tide of history.

While in the third act: "The Dawn of the Plateau", the cooperation of dance and music becomes soft handling. This part starts from original ecological female singing of the Zang nationality, creating a mood of revering nature and yearning for the future in a quiet environment through the low-pitched flute sounds and banjo plucking. When the dancers transition from group dance to duet dance, the body language uses "breathing-like" microwave-like movements and

minor body changes to coordinate with the "inhale—exhale—return—rise" in Zang nationality music, regarding music as the leader of the flow of physical and emotional energy.

Therefore, it can be seen that it has the "structural rhythm alignment" model. Music is not only the arranger of time, but even the inter principle of movement production; dance is also not only the carrier of musical visual presentation, but even the physical manifestation of the rhythm structure of music.

3. THE EMOTIONAL RESONANCE: THE EMOTIONAL HARMONY BETWEEN ACTIONS AND MUSIC

3.1 The Expression of Physical Emotions Driven by Melody

The most touching part in the dance drama "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" is not only its grand historical narratives and rich regional cultures, but also the emotional progression and spiritual resonance it forms in details. The emotional tension comes from the coordination between dance movements and musical melodies, and realizes in the way of the emotional concerto. It means that the dancers' bodies serve the function of narration and is also an organic container for emotions. The music melody is no longer the situation's background, but the engine of emotional flow.

The fourth act "A Letter of Reply", uses the letters written by Red Army soldiers during the Long March to depict the contradictory emotions between longing and faith. The music is played by the piano and the violin. The melody is very plain and conveys a touch of sadness. It creates a mood that is both sorrowful and warm by using the E-flat major. It is precisely in this acoustic environment that the dancers use a large number of compound movements consisting of inward curling, expansion, pause, and re-curling to express the entanglement and elevation of their inner emotions.

It must be pointed out that the "action semanticsization" used in this part of dance is very intensive. The so-called "action semanticsization" means the movements not only have rhythm and beauty, but can also serve as a way to express emotions. The "A Letter of Reply" clearly demonstrates the characteristics of the mature body language system. The dancers use methods such as the variation of the center of gravity, the change of movement amplitude, and the local control of body parts to make the emotional changes in music more concrete. Therefore, after the musical emotion is translated by the body, dance becomes an indispensable emotional channel for music, but not its appendage.

3.2 The Formation of the Stage from Individual Emotions to Collective Emotions

In the musical theme of the fifth act "Tutti", the main melody of the entire play makes its first appearance, namely the variation of "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party". The initial usage form is the single-key piano. The melody is slow and soft, just like a soft murmur from a distant memory. But when human's voice and instruments' layers continually appear, the melody becomes increasingly intense and rises in volume, until it resulted in a climax that was like a "choral performance of body and voice". The dancers' movements also transform from the original individualized and fragmented form to a more integrated and symbolic one. A large number of "collective imagery" type movements featuring coordinated group actions, significant horizontal shifts, and vertical ascents emerged. The choreography was expanded, and the music and sound were layered, jointly forming a spiritual peak of "collective belief".

What is most touching is during the climax of the "chorus", the dancers no longer "precisely synchronize" with the music. Instead, in the stage of "corresponding to the free rhythm", each dancer, according to the different melodies and emotional intensities, slightly advances or delays the timing to complete the same sequence of movements. This kind of seemingly complete but not entirely so, seemingly uniform but not exactly so performance style breaks through the conventional "uniformity of movements" that brings about the military aesthetic, and instead pursues a more humanistic and emotional "resonant isomorphism". It not only keeps the group beauty of the movements, but also highlights the characteristics of individual inner flow. In the process of appreciating, the audience can not only feel the grandiosity of history, but also the warm and reality of identity's emotion.

4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF IMAGERY: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BODY SEMANTICS AND MELODIC CULTURE

In the contemporary dance drama creation, it is always a question about how to combine "Individual experiential bodily expression" and "collective memory's cultural image". The dance drama "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" has high artistic consciousness and aesthetic strategy awareness of this relationship, and it also performed extremely well in terms of handling. It not only conducts an in-depth exploration of the body language resources within the regional culture of Yunnan, but also transforms music into a device for evoking a sense of cultural identity by means of the imagery processing of the melody and the emotional regulation of the historical context. The symbiotic intertextuality of body and melody symbols can not only improve the work's artistic appeal, but also reflect the collaborative power of dance and music in achieving deep cultural construction.

The "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" itself is a wide-spread revolutionary song. Its melody archetype a has strong folk song flavor, especially the common pentatonic scale structure and the prolonged final notes in the high pitch range found in Yunnan folk music, giving it a strong flavor of folk songs. In dance drama, it is repeatedly used, varied and restructured. It is not only the theme melody but also the sound mark of cultural memory. The design of dance movements also starts from this musical image. From the initial expression of emotion and the elaboration of mood, to the final group chorus and the dance climax, it consistently maintains consistency with the melody in terms of tonality, rhythm, and mood.

The body language of dance drama does not mean the movement itself, but means the externalized body language of "cultural emotional schemas". Just as what the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai points out in the research about cultural manifestation: "Body is the place for memorizing, and also the explicit interface of culture." While in the dance drama, the physicalization of memory is achieved through the intertextuality of melodies. The movements of "Turn the wrist—make a fist—raise the head" recurring repeatedly appearing in the drama are all come from the movements in the authentic life and labor of the working people. In the performance on the stage, they become the symbol of resolute, loyal, and hopeful, and they form a perfect echo with the upward-swinging part of the melody of "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party". The design of movement semantics basing on the cultural memory lets the audience to recognize the collective emotions and historical context represented by the actions through both auditory and visual means at the moment they are seen, and then forms the "image association—emotional arousal" chain of stage symbols.

Therefore, this thesis believes that in "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party", dance and music have the relationship of mutual citation formed through cultural memory and body semantics. The music melody endows the movements with emotional connotations, while the movement language enhances the cultural significance of the melody. They together form the artistic expression of "Chinese bodies, Chinese melodies, Chinese memories", reflect the practical meaning of Chinese contemporary performing arts in the construction of national cultural identity.

5. CONCLUSION

The dance drama "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" is not only the presenter of the red history and revolutionary spirit, but also the exemplary case of contemporary Chinese stage art engaging in in-depth dialogue and reconfiguration among "body and melody", "tradition and modernity", and "locality and globality". What is presented in this work is a creative concept that is deeply rooted in the national soil: using the dance language of the Yunnan regional style and the musical system based on the pentatonic scale, the revolutionary memories and the national spirit are transformed into an artistic form that can be experienced and perceived. It is neither the empty propaganda, nor the formal grandeur, but a kind of artistic expression that has warmth, depth and bones and muscles, deeply embedding the word "faith" within the body and the rhythm of the melody.

In the present era of globalization, how to tell Chinese stories well and to respond to the world, touch the world, influence the world with "our own body and voice", is the underlying question what every Chinese art creator faces. The "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" gives a possible answer by using a unique blend of dance and music approach, that is, dance cannot follow the rhythm of the music, and music cannot serve the structure

of the dance. In the symbiotic relationship between dance and music, emotions are generated, cultures are conveyed, and spirits are evoked. This is something that even transcends techniques and is of a deeper nature. It is the rhythm of faith, the soul of the nation, and also the aesthetic direction that Chinese stage art can continuously explore and expand upon in the future.

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