

Typical Problems of Piano Playing of Students Majoring in Music in Normal University

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Abstract—Students majoring in the music of the normal university have many problems in piano playing, which makes them frequent hit the bottleneck while learning. Centering on the typical problems of the students in piano playing, this paper analyses the root causes, puts forward solution suggestions for each problem based on the opinions of experts and the author's years of teaching experience, and proposed appropriate piano practicing method to avoid these problems, in a bid to provide reference for students' piano learning, and help students avoid detours in the learning the piano.

Keywords—piano playing; typical problems; solution suggestions; effective piano practicing

I. TYPICAL PROBLEMS AND ROOT CAUSES

Not intended to cultivate musical talents, music major in normal colleges shoulder the mission to educate personnel for the grass-roots illuminative music education. As its core course, the Piano has been favored by many parents, and the number of kids learning the piano has multiplied. That is to say, the quality of music teachers trained in normal universities is directly related to the piano playing of tens of millions of children in the future. As a piano teacher in the normal college, the author has found through the test for the freshmen, the problems of students who have learn the piano for years. The problems are listed as follows.

A. Poor Sense of Rhythm

The sense of rhythm mainly refers to the sense of rhythm in western music, that is, the periodic strong and weak relationship generated by music. In students playing, the relationship between strong and weak is confused, without the logical stress position or the tendency of expression stress. For example, the first line is extracted from Merkle's Butterfly, but it is played into the second line.



Students are generally unaware of the stress changes caused by the lines. In some Xinjiang style dance music that are full of syncopated rhythm, the performance is heard like tumbling as the stress did not play on the syncopation.

The poor sense of rhythm is common among the amateur player, which can be attributed to not only the teaching, but also the aesthetic psychology of the Chinese nation. That aesthetic psychology is uncertain, generating less organized works as the western music pieces. The domestic works are generally random in terms of stress which is closely related to pronunciation and accent, while western classical music is more rigorous and has definite rhythm.

B. Obscure hierarchies

Even the students that have learnt the piano for years would play almost all the notes in the same strength, oblivious of the accident that the accompaniment drowns the melody. They are not sensitive to the dialogue between the textures, not clear of the master-subordinate relationship between the musical planes, or the color change and sentence pattern function of the color change and sentence function of the sound accompaniment. For example, here is a segment from Tchaikovsky's Snowdrop, when theme moves from the top to the medium part, the two-handed chords rumble while the melody in the medium part disappears.



The paper is the phased achievement of The First Batch of First-Class Undergraduate Professional Construction Sites in the Sichuan MinZu College. Case No. CMYF [2019]68

As the Chinese music pieces are generally compiled on the basis of the single line, most people don't have the ability to think with multiple voices. Therefore, they cannot comprehend thoroughly the western music pieces that are composed of multiple lines interwoven or alternated. However, the piano is a multi-voice instrument, and without thinking ability of multi-voice, it is impossible to play the piano music with rich layers and three-dimensional sense. That is why many students who have played the piano for many years still play dully without any hierarchy.

C. Random pedaling

Quite a few students have only a smattering of piano pedal, often confusing the pedaling and the beating or replacing the pedal, resulting in the break of the sound. There are also countless mistakes committed due to the lack of the ability to distinguish texture functions and sound types, for instance, pedaling without breaks gives rise to the cloudy stereo. All these can be attributed to the disinterest in the study of relevant music theories. In the piano grading examination in Britain, America and other countries, theory test is compulsory, and in addition to music theory, there are many common senses on harmonies. However, only a few regions have this requirement for piano grading in China.

D. Rough music reading and bad sight-playing

Students have difficulties in both the quality and the speed of music reading. As far as the quality is concerned, many students just read randomly and begin to play, only paying attention to the pitch and the approximate time value. When getting familiar relying on the inertia of the fingers, they no longer look at the staff, just follow their own experience and feeling to play. They even follow their own inclinations to play legato, skip, staccato, martellato, not to mention some expression terms and speed marks.

Sight-playing ability is generally poor. Many students who have been learning the piano for seven or eight years can't even sight-play the pieces about the Czerny's 849 level, because they have never read the music carefully, or received exclusive sight-playing training.

E. Lack of expression and unable to grasp the style of the work

The performances of many students are plain, just as the match of the notes and keys. The masterpieces of different musicians like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin are all played in the same way, hard for others to distinguish. Indeed, without the careful staff reading, how can one master the style control? It is little known to students that music, as an art, has not only its own laws and principles, but also the differences between the characteristics of The Times and the styles of the Schools, and at the same time has a close relationship with the composer's personality, preferences, and even the psychological activities. In fact, most students only pay attention to the learning of skills, and are indifferent to the vast amount of information behind the works. Having not been willing to make efforts to study the works, how can they interpret the works perfectly?

II. SOLUTION SUGGESTIONS TO TYPICAL PROBLEMS

A. Rhythm – to find out the types of stress

To express rhythm correctly, one should first understand the type and position of the stress. There are three types of stress: the beat stress, that is, the law of strength of the beat; the tone stress caused by the structure, line, syncopation of musical sentence, the entrance of sound pattern, and so on; the genre stress. Not all the stress is on the first note behind the bar line. Many mazurkas of Chopin stress on the second beat, and Gavotte on the third beat. The stress should also be dealt accordingly with the specific situation of the music. Some lyric songs should not overemphasize the beat stress, but the tone stress, such as to high or long notes. Some dance music, such as some dance music in Xinjiang, changes the stress due to the syncopated rhythm, while some dance music, march or folk songs with regular rhythm should be taken care with regard to the beat stress.

Although the domestic music originated early, it is quite different from the western one in aesthetics. Chinese people emphasize the melody of the lateral line, instead of the rhythm of music or the law of strength valued in the western music. Therefore, students should be reminded of these when playing the western works.[1]

B. Hierarchies – to establish multi-voice music thinking by practicing polyphonic music

The excellence of a piano piece is represented in both the rich, organized content and the rich music horizontal layers. However, it is said that one of the most productive yet most difficult tasks is the formation of multiple layers of sound. Learning polyphonic music is the main means to play the level of music clearly, so we should pay enough attention to students from the beginning of learning polyphonic. When playing polyphony, one should make all parts of the voice smooth and display their distinct levels.[2] The voice parts in polyphonic part are usually very complicated. The performer needs to find out their rules and distinguish between the major and minor parts, guide the fingers with the ears to control the development of the parts, and apply the rule to each piece by analogy.[3]

C. Pedaling – based on solid harmony

American pianist Arthur Rubinstein once said that the pedal is the soul of the piano. The use of pedals is influenced by many aspects, and it is the most difficult and flexible part of the performance. Normal university students only need to master two kinds of commonly used pedaling: rhythmic pedaling and syncopated pedaling. The former was commonly used in Baroque Period and early classical works. Step on the pedal with the harmony or downbeat, release before the next harmony appears, and then pedal with the next harmony or downbeat, and so on. This rhythmic pedaling is relatively simple for students to learn at the beginning. As for the most common syncopated pedaling, the pedaling starts later than finger movements, and the pedal is quickly changed before the next harmony, which can make sound rich and continuous and clean and clear. However, this pedal method is difficult to master, for that in addition to hand and foot skills, students need to have a certain harmony knowledge and, on this basis,

to establish the texture shape sense and sense of sound type¹. [4]

Western music is built on harmony theory, therefore, no matter what kind of pedal method is built on a solid harmony theory basis. What's more, the beauty of western music is built on stereo hearing, so we should ask students to understand western music through harmony knowledge, acquire the correct pedaling to enrich sound.

D. The speed and quality of music reading – to practice reading

Careful score reading is the basis of performance. Before learning a piece of piano music, one should make a detailed exploration of the staff. However, good reading habits can't be achieved overnight. Rich knowledge of music history and certain knowledge of harmony, musical form and polyphony are needed to pave the way.

Before getting a new work, teachers should ask students to make clear the name of the music and the composer, and guide students to understand the style of the work and the basic information of the composer through various ways. Then, students should be reminded to distinguish the expression terms, tuning, timing, speed and so on before playing. Moreover, students should pay attention to fingering, playing, stop and the music structure, etc., as well as the beat and speed changes. Teachers should ask students to take the initiative to check the creation background of the work and related music basic knowledge after class, and guide students to make a simple analysis of the work.

In addition to the accuracy and comprehensiveness, the speed of score reading also affects students' learning progress. To become proficient in sight-playing, one need to view a large number of works so as to know fairly well some common melody direction, accompaniment sound pattern and harmonic texture, and be quite familiar with the keyboard, which depends on the accumulation of basic skills in daily life, such as correct fingering, relaxed playing state and accurate sense of space. What's more, the brain's response to the score should be enhanced, and the eyes should react earlier than the hands. [2]

E. Styles – to work diligently for comprehensive self-enrichment

Students cannot grasp the style of the work, apart from the technical reasons, part of the reason is that they are not clear what the style of the work is, or they just follow their own inclinations, and want to display individuality. If unfamiliar with the style, students should be required to have a detailed and comprehensive understanding of piano and piano music, such as the history of piano music art and the typical characteristics of piano music of various important nationalities and countries, such as the piano music style in Germany, Austria, Russia, China, Italy and other countries. They also need to know something about the important, representative musicians or composers like Johann Sebastian Bach, Scarlatti, Franz Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van

Beethoven, F.F. Chopin, Franz Liszt, Robert Schumann, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Sergei Vassilievitch Rachmaninoff. In addition to the main idea of the work, students should also understand the composing background and composer's temperament, and conduct a comprehensive study of it with the art history of piano music, so as to interpret a work correctly, comprehensively and perfectly. [5] For those students who perform as they wish, the teacher should let the students fully understand the attitude that a learner should have. The display of personality must be based on the rules and the loyalty to the original music. Any accomplished pianist came through in this way step by step, so students should never aim too high.

III. PRACTICE EFFECTIVELY AND AVOID MISTAKES

Many mistakes in piano performance are formed in the long-term low-quality practice. If we pay attention to the practice process and prevent these mistakes from happening, we can save time, energy and efficiency. For how to practice the piano efficiently, there are several methods for reference.

A. Preparation for practice

Practicing the piano is a complex mental exercise that requires one to practice playing skills under conscious control and to accurately express the thoughts and emotions of the song. This requires preparation for practice. Some tools can assist in practice: a music dictionary where one can find out the meaning of every term in the music; a pencil with which one can mark the key points or difficult points that are prone to ignore; a metronome which can help practice from slow to fast speed and build a reliable sense of speed; a voice recorder to record the play for problem analyzing.

B. Correct piano practicing

The most taboo is to start over and over again when practicing. Practicing with goals, key points and difficulties in a planned way can get twice the result with half the effort. First, one can play the whole music once or twice to get a general idea of the music, and then practice it paragraph by paragraph, and find out the difficult points, and exercise with musical sentences or even bars as a unit, and then carry out the overall practice. Different methods of key touching can also be applied to practice. In this way, score memorizing is a breeze, especially by sections. [6]

C. Self-examination of practice effect

When one gets proficiency with the music, he can start the self-check procedure. Is the speed reasonable and even? Is the hierarchy clear? Are hierarchies and priorities clear? Is the playing method done as required? Are the stresses clear? Are paragraphs and phrases clear? Is the usage of the pedal clear and reasonable? Is the music style correct? Is emotional expression appropriate?

IV. CONCLUSION

To recap, piano playing is an art combining theory and practice. While learning the piano, students may encounter various problems because of many reasons. However, what disappoints us is not the problems themselves but that we do not have the determination or method to correct them. In a word, students should not only be careful when learning, but

¹Please refer to The Diary of Studying Piano (updated edition), page 278, written by Lin hua, Shanghai Music Publishing House, April 2011, the second edition.

also need to examine themselves at any time, look for solutions to problems and solve them with determination and patience. Only in this way can students achieve better learning effects.

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