

A Brief Analysis of Chinese Bamboo Flute Ensemble Art

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Abstract: Bamboo flute is a traditional Chinese instrument. In the long history of China, the performance of bamboo flute has been used to express and transmit emotions, enriching the spiritual world of the Chinese people. Nowadays, with the continuous progress of spiritual civilization construction and the unprecedented enhancement of Chinese national cultural confidence, the development trend of the bamboo flute art has been more clear. This paper makes an in-depth analysis of the development history and characteristics of bamboo flute ensemble and the significance of its practice, and shares the author's opinion on the practice of bamboo flute ensemble, so as to enrich the research theory of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art and make contributions to its development.

Keywords: Chinese Bamboo Flute; Ensemble; Art; Bamboo Flute Ensemble Practice

1. Introduction

In modern times, China has adopted an active, open and inclusive development policy for folk music, which has promoted its development. At the same time, the boom of national economy, the promotion of China's international status and the prosperity of national culture have made Chinese people generally establish cultural confidence. Therefore, they can face the development of Chinese traditional folk musical instruments in the light of justice and development, which makes the development trend of Chinese folk musical instruments more clear. As a Chinese traditional national musical instrument with a long history of development, bamboo flute has experienced inheritance and changes, and has become an indispensable artistic existence in Chinese people's life. The study in this paper focuses on Chinese bamboo flute play art, which may enrich the current relatively scarce theoretical research results on bamboo flute play art and hence have a certain theoretical significance.

2. The Development of Bamboo Flute Ensemble Art

Bamboo flute has been a greatly common and popular ensemble instrument since its long development. It usually undertakes the leading or leading task in ensemble performances, and hence its importance is obvious. Meanwhile, bamboo flute has a long history of development. The jiahu bone flute unearthed in Henan province is one of the earliest known musical instruments in China. [1] From the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BC-220 AD) to the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties (220 AD-581 AD), bamboo instruments had

become an indispensable part of blowing and playing combined music. In the Tang Dynasty (618 AD-907 AD), there was a widely spread legend of a skilled bamboo flute player. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties (960 AD-1368 AD), the flute became an important accompaniment instrument for playing Sanqu (a kind of local classical music popular in Yuan Dynasties) and Southern Opera (a kind of local classical opera in South China). In the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368 AD-1912 AD), it had become an irreplaceable accompaniment instrument for the four major operas of Ming Dynasty and all kinds of folk music. From the development history of bamboo flute art, bamboo flute playing in ancient times of our country has enriched people's spiritual life and become artistic pursuits and emotional expression of celebrities and scholars as well.

However, bamboo flute ensemble was not fully developed in ancient China. Folk music, which takes folk artists as the main body of creation and performance, already has the consciousness of ensemble, showing a very important feature: in folk instrumental ensemble, there is a certain ensemble relationship between various instrumental parts. For example, in Jiangnan Sizhu Music in Jiangsu Province and Jizhong Concert in Hebei Province, musical instruments perform in unison and against each other, all vocal parts cooperate with each other and are independent of each other. The relationship between vocal parts is sometimes complex and sometimes simple.

In the meantime, the art of bamboo flute ensemble was greatly influenced by western music, which gradually formed the embryonic form of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble. It was not until 1955 that the "First National Mass Amateur Music and Dance Performance" was successfully held in Beijing. Two bamboo flute duets,

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"Resident in the Clouds" and "Shuanghe Feng", played by Wei Yongtang and Yuan Zhiwen from Shandong Heze, made their debut. This performance is an important event for bamboo flute ensemble to perform on the professional stage for the first time since the founding of New China, which opens a new chapter for Chinese bamboo flute ensemble. In 1956, the Bamboo flute duet from Yongnian, Hebei Province, was performed in the first "National Music Week" in the form of "unison, in opposition, and in rotation" in Beijing, which was warmly praised by the audience. In 1959, during the 7th World Youth Festival in Vienna, Austria, the flute duet "Back Talk" played by Liang Peiyin and Liu Liren from Hebei Provincial Song and Dance Theater won the silver medal, which was also the first time the bamboo flute ensemble appeared on the international stage. [2] In 1956, the *Flute Textbook* compiled by Jiang Yonghe included two pieces, "Back Talk" and "Double Harmony Phoenix". This textbook was "the first professional bamboo flute textbook in New China, which had an important impact on the bamboo flute playing teaching in the early years of the founding of new China". This was also the first time for bamboo flute ensemble to be recorded in a professional textbook.

Through continuous development, people was paying increasing attention to music, and bamboo flute ensemble has gradually been attached importance. The repertory of bamboo flute ensemble has entered the stage of professional creation from the stage of arrangement and adaptation, which makes more and more bamboo flute ensemble works constantly pouring out, for example, Liang Xin's bamboo flute duet "Camping Road" in 1970, Bao Aofa's "Celebrating" in 1976, Yu Xunfa's "Happy News Coming" in 1979, Huang Xilin's "Busy Spring" in 1980, Qu Xiang and Qu Guangyi's "Collecting Lotus" in 1983, Lu Chi's "Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law" in 1984 and so on.

In the 21st century, bamboo flute ensemble has been further developed. In 2001, the bamboo flute duet "Land Boat Running", co-created by performers Ma Di and Zhang Yanwu, was recognized and welcomed by the audience and has been reproduced in professional concerts and various flute industry activities for many times. Throughout the new period of the 21st century, while the main composition of bamboo flute ensemble was the performer, the composer gradually participated in the creation process relying on his own composing advantages, which made the development of bamboo flute ensemble more diversified, for instance, Wu Zhuoxian's bamboo flute septette "A Gust of Wind" (2007), Guo Wenjing's terzetto "Zhuzhi Poem" (2010), Qin Wenchen's quartet "July Firefly", "Far Away Song", "Red Blowing" (2010-2011), Li Chang's bamboo flute and string quartet "Daguling" (2010) and duet "Antiphonal Singing" (2011), Zhu Xiaogu's quartet "The Song of Four Bamboos" (2014), Luo Pengxiang's octette "Green Bamboo and Breeze Shadow" (2017), Qiang Weihao's quartet "Four Bamboos" (2019), Gao Yinbo's ensemble work "Western Style Suite" (2019) and his quintet "Do You Know" (2019), and Li Bochan's duet "Encounter of Passion and Indifference", etc. These bamboo flute ensemble works injected modern composing techniques and continuously integrated new international elements into the traditional

Chinese bamboo flute work, greatly enriching the diversity of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble repertoire and music subject matter and hence accelerating the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art.

3. Development Characteristics of Bamboo Flute Ensemble Art

From the perspective of music creation, the first bamboo flute textbook (Jiang Yonghe's *Flute Textbook*) published in 1956, which included two pieces of bamboo flute ensemble, gave bamboo flute ensemble a good start. [3] After that, more and more etudes and works of bamboo flute ensemble came out and were compiled into professional books on bamboo flute. Even though a number of bamboo flute ensemble pieces are compiled into books on bamboo flute, the number of bamboo flute ensemble pieces is still far less than that of solo works. Compared with the booming development of bamboo flute solo art, the development of bamboo flute ensemble art lags behind obviously, which makes bamboo flute ensemble art hindered in different degrees. In addition, by observing and listening to the bamboo flute ensemble works, it is found that although the bamboo flute ensemble gradually gains gradual attention along with the overall construction of the bamboo flute professional discipline and the difficulty of the repertoire increases, a great number of ensemble works still lacks Chinese traditional musical flavor, and some are even so "westernized" that it was difficult for the public to understand what the music expressed. In the creation of works, composers should not forget the traditional style while developing, create a large number of music works that people like to listen to, and truly do "back to the tradition and face the modern" [4], which means that there is still much room for bamboo flute ensemble to develop and mature in its creation.

From the perspective of theoretical research, through network screening and research, it is found that the hysteresis of bamboo flute ensemble is mainly manifested by the lack of academic research on bamboo flute ensemble. For example, the retrieval results of academic papers with "bamboo flute ensemble" as the keyword on CNKI (China National Knowledge Internet) are only 30, while the retrieval of academic papers with "bamboo flute solo" as the keyword are 278. Compared with the richness of the theoretical research results of bamboo flute solo, bamboo flute ensemble is a little insufficient. Meanwhile, it is found that there are few research results on the artistic theory of bamboo flute ensemble through reading the papers and monographs of famous artists, which is extremely unfavorable to the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art and even Chinese traditional folk musical instruments. This is because, for one thing, the theoretical research on bamboo flute ensemble art can provide reference and support for the education of bamboo flute ensemble, cultivate more professional talents for the development of bamboo flute, and help the bamboo flute ensemble art get rid of the development predicament. For another, the research can also provide theoretical reference for the creators of bamboo flute

ensemble music, so that more professional or non-professional people can understand the bamboo flute art through a series of achievements. Make bamboo flute play art known to more people. Therefore, art colleges and universities should actively guide teachers and students to carry out theoretical research on the art of bamboo flute ensemble, enrich relevant research results, and gradually form a scientific theoretical system for the development of bamboo flute ensemble art.

4. The Significance of Bamboo Flute Ensemble Practice

The practice of bamboo flute ensemble is one of the important practice forms of bamboo flute performance. It is very necessary to develop bamboo flute art from a single national wind solo art form into an instrumental form emphasizing cooperation and rich content. [5] The practice of participating in bamboo flute ensemble is conducive to the cultivation of performers' artistic quality, which is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

To begin with, the practice of bamboo flute ensemble is beneficial to mature performer's professional competence. The practical training of bamboo flute ensemble can improve players' ability to mature the use of playing skills. Players should follow the correct use of breath, air mouth position, unified sound quality, precise and steady rhythm, clear and clean use of lips and tongue, the performance of strong and weak music and the emotional expression of music works. These key elements are experienced in the practice of bamboo flute ensemble. While playing, the performers constantly finds detailed problems in themselves and solves them in repeated practice, which helps to promote the continuous maturity of their professional competence. Meanwhile, the performers can cultivate their multi-voice thinking when playing the ensemble works, grasp the special "linear" multi-voice law in the folk music works, and mature the professional ability and quality of the performer with the three-dimensional thinking mode gradually formed in the ensemble practice. [6]

Furthermore, the practice of bamboo flute ensemble is conducive to improving performer's musical aesthetic ability and accomplishment. Music is the language of the senses. Musicality is the concentrated embodiment of musical understanding and expressive force, and the ability to perceive, discover and express beauty in music, which is based on certain musical aesthetics. [7] When players have a certain professional performance ability, they not only lay emphasis on playing skills, but also pay more attention to the understanding and performance of musical works. Performers play lots of ensemble works and meanwhile feel a variety of musical works with different styles, which does good to improve the players' musical aesthetic ability and quality. While having such quality, they constantly play new musical works to form a virtuous circle of "perfection". Therefore, the practice of bamboo flute ensemble can improve the musical aesthetic ability and accomplishment of players.

In addition, the practice of bamboo flute ensemble contributes to cultivating performer's comprehensive

ability. In the practice of bamboo flute ensemble, at least two or more people need to coordinate and cooperate with each other. In order to achieve good and accurate effects, players need to have high comprehensive ability. In the process of playing the ensemble, attention should be paid not only to the way of individual performance, but also to the coordination and cooperation with others, emphasizing cooperation and group consciousness. When performers get together to play a piece of work, they may have different ideas from themselves, or even conflicts in various aspects. In this situation, for one thing, performers need to put group consciousness in the first place, keep calm, reserve opinions and readily obey the majority opinion. For another they should communicate with fellow performers afterwards, choose the most reasonable way of expression to convey clear ideas to each other, rehearse in line with the principle of "shared goals, shared weal and woe" [8], control oneself not to bring personal emotions into the rehearsal and performance, and avoid personality publicity. Hence, the practice of bamboo flute ensemble can improve the players' comprehensive ability.

5. My View on the Practice of Bamboo Flute Play

5.1 Performers need to have solid professional skills

Chinese contemporary Xun player, composer and educator Mr. Lu Jinshan once profoundly summed up the "Eight Keys of playing an instrument", that is, "the rhythm and the intonation should be controlled; the timber should be pure and changed often; the strength and the speed should accurate; the style depends on the breath, fingers and tongue; the state should be relaxed; the mood should be bold but cautious; the emotion and the posture should be properly played; the performing technique should be skillful." [9], which summarizes the playing essentials of wind instruments and stage performance. This is also true in the practice of bamboo flute ensemble, which requires the performer to deal with all aspects more strictly and pay attention to the rigor of rhythm, intonation, strength, speed, timbre, volume, breath, lip, finger, tongue, etc. At the same time, A good performance of each bamboo flute ensemble requires an in-depth understanding and exploration of the creation background, which is the basis for the performance and analysis of the works and makes it possible to examine and feel the works from the perspective of the composer, better understand the core of the composer's creation thoughts and feel the charm it brings. This paper chooses the perspectives of creation background, rhythm and intonation to discuss in detail, which are as follows:

Taking "The Encounter of Passion and Indifference" (bamboo flute due composed by Li Bochan in 2019) as an example to analyze its creation background, this work is a representation of dialectical philosophy and traditional music aesthetics. The ideological core of this work is more inclined to the expression of the inner state of mind, which reflects the composer's self-understanding and self-adherence to the dialectical materialist values and

philosophical views. From the perspective of music, it is a sound interpretation of Chinese traditional dialectical philosophical thinking. The work is mainly composed of four parts: *adagio*, *allegro*, *largo* and *presto*. The composer harmonizes organically these four parts with a gradual speed and forms the overall layout of the whole piece, which fully reflects the beauty of the plate cavity in Chinese traditional music and forms the unique aesthetic characteristics of Chinese music. This work also reflects the musical language style from the perspective of modern composing techniques. The composer pays more attention to the combination and application of modern composing techniques and forms bamboo flute music with unique musical charm and musical language style characteristics, fully reflecting the collision between traditional music and modern music.

In the performance of this work, the complex rhythm rhythm change is its focus and difficulty, and also the embodiment of the art of the work. The requirements put forward by the complex rhythm and beat changes to the players can not be solved through the efforts of one performer, but through the perfect cooperation of two players to make the complex and changing rhythm perfect presentation. In the meantime, the continuous change of the beat in the music also puts forward higher requirements for the performer, who needs to accurately understand the change rule of the beat, according to the change rule of the beat, prepare breath and spit in advance to better show the change of the beat, so that the audience can feel the emotional change and sincere expression of the music.

This modern work, "The Encounter of Passion and Indifference", makes full use of the semitones in the bamboo flute playing techniques. The semitones in this work are $\sharp 4$, $\flat 7$, $\flat 3$ ($\sharp 2$) at most. In practice, it is necessary to strengthen the grasp and attention to the details, and it is very important to control the intonation of the semitones. In practice, performers should pay more attention to avoid missing blowing phenomenon, otherwise it will affect the integrity and emotional expression of the music, which is often called "being tainted by other odour". For example, when playing the ending part of bamboo flute duet "Land Boat Running" (composed by Ma Di and Zhang Yanwu), performers need to control the intonation and timbre of a large number of continuous semitones, normalize the performance of bamboo flute and carry out some special extended exercises in order to achieve the expected performance effect.

5.2 Professional bamboo flute Orchestra should be established

The artistic development of bamboo flute ensemble art needs to rely on the media of professional bamboo flute orchestra. Meanwhile, performers need rich and multi-sound practical performance opportunities as well as the medium of bamboo flute orchestra. Whether the performer's performance level is high is not only reflected in the form of solo performance, but also in the practice of bamboo flute ensemble. This hence in a certain sense forms a situation that bamboo flute ensemble art, bamboo

flute orchestra and performers can not be separated from each other, which restrict and depend on each other. (See Figure 1)

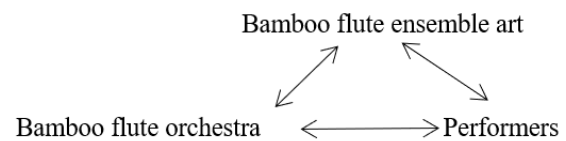


Figure 1. Which restrict and depend on each other

The development of bamboo flute ensemble entered a new stage when Professor Zhang Weiliang established China Bamboo Flute Orchestra in Beijing in 2012. The orchestra holds an original concert every year to bring new auditory and visual feast to the audience, writing a brilliant chapter in the development history of bamboo flute ensemble. In addition, this orchestra not only performs in theaters in major cities of China, but also sets foot on many countries and regions such as Europe, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The ancient sounds of China can be heard all over the world. The establishment of China Bamboo Flute Orchestra marks a leapfrog breakthrough of bamboo flute ensemble. [10]

At the beginning of 2013, Bamboo Flute Orchestra of Shanghai Conservatory of Music was founded. The head and artistic director of the orchestra is Professor Tang Junqiao, a famous Chinese flute player from Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Since its establishment, the orchestra has been adhering to the development concept of backing the tradition and facing the modern era, and using the free formation mechanism, forming a variety of different parts in the orchestra to maintain the diversity and vitality of the orchestra to the greatest extent. Similarly, the orchestra not only performs in major concert halls, but also tours in Singapore, Malaysia and other countries, constantly promoting the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art. Since then, many bamboo flute orchestras have been established under the leadership of major music academies in China. For example, "Fenggu Chang'an" bamboo flute group initiated by Zhao Xun of Xi'an Conservatory of Music in 2013, "Loong's Song" the first flute and Xun Orchestra of Central Conservatory of Music planned and established by Professor Dai Ya of Central Conservatory of Music in 2016, and "Zhu Yun Chufeng" Bamboo Flute Orchestra of Wuhan Conservatory of Music founded by Zhang Yingying in 2016, the first ten-hole bamboo flute professional orchestra in China founded by Chen Ran from Sichuan Conservatory of Music in 2018 -- the Ten-hole Bamboo Flute Orchestra of Sichuan Conservatory of Music, and the Qiantang Bamboo Flute Chamber Orchestra founded by Zhao Qi from Zhejiang Conservatory of Music in 2020, etc. The establishment of these bamboo flute orchestras not only promoted the skill maturity of the players, but also promoted the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art.

To sum up, the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble cannot be separated from the guidance of the

pioneers of bamboo flute players, and in a sense, bamboo flute ensemble art, bamboo flute orchestra and performers are inseparable and interdependent. The establishment of bamboo flute orchestra is not the ultimate goal, but to enable players to constantly improve their musical skills and accomplishment in the practice of bamboo flute ensemble, so as to promote the development of Chinese bamboo flute art. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the development of bamboo flute ensemble. Brilliant bamboo flute performers or educators take the lead in establishing professional bamboo flute orchestras and cultivate the players' multi-voice concept, harmony concept, intonation, sense of rhythm and sense of music to constantly expand the skills of players, hoping to promote the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble

6. Conclusion

Bamboo flute ensemble is an significant part of bamboo flute art and occupies a very important position in the long history of bamboo flute art development. The development of bamboo flute ensemble art is of great significance to the composition, performance and education of bamboo flute. Besides, The development of bamboo flute ensemble art is a particularly important part of the professional development of bamboo flute music, which is also very consistent with the historical background of the integrated development of contemporary art. However, the current development of bamboo flute ensemble is relatively backward, especially in the two aspects of repertoire creation and theoretical research. This paper analyzes the significance of the practice of bamboo flute ensemble, which can not only improve performer's professional ability, but also improve performer's musical aesthetic ability and comprehensive ability. In the last part, this paper also shares experience in flute learning, suggesting that only through continuous practice and solid theoretical foundation of bamboo flute playing and high level of appreciation for traditional and world music, can the performer make a breakthrough in the art of bamboo flute, so as to present people with better music works.

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