Reflections on Several Performance Techniques in Piano Teaching - Beethoven Sonata Op.14 No.1 as an Example

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Abstract. In the long history of European music, Beethoven's music in the Classical period and even the Romantic period has had a great influence. Beethoven in his life created a large number of excellent works. As for the creation of sonatas, Beethoven carried his compositional style through the Baroque period, the Classical period, and the Romantic period. His works fully interpreted his inner feelings, so that people can feel the strong emotional fluctuations. However, during the teaching process and students' practice in class, some students fail to grasp the essence of the piece in terms of playing technique and emotional expression. This is due to a lack of mastery of the appropriate performance techniques and a lack of understanding of the composer's message. Using the literature review method, this paper describes the problems that students have in playing piano works in terms of performance skills at this stage, and proposes solutions. Uses case studies to explore the use of performance techniques in the work and suggests ideas and methods of practice.

1. Introduction

The literature related to the research of this paper can be divided into two main areas, one is the case study research of the work. This type of essay analyzes the entire work by analyzing the compositional deconstruction of the work and the performance techniques of the work to make an analysis of the work to understand the overall style of the work. Another aspect is the study of the compositional background. This type of study analyzes the stylistic changes in Beethoven's works by analyzing the stylistic fluctuations brought about by inner emotions in the context of different eras. Bai Yusuan {2023} suggests that: comparing Beethoven's early and late musical careers, we can see how his musical style went from traditional classical to Romanticism, and that he brought music into a new direction, and that the compositional structure, playing speed, intensity ups and downs, melodic line direction, musical expression of emotion, and playing techniques of his early works are all very different from those of his late works [1]; Yang Gege {2023} Beethoven's compositions have unique characteristics, and his compositions have strong and obvious changes in intensity, reflecting his passionate, exuberant and fiery emotions. His works are very rich in emotional notation, and the contrast between strength and weakness is quite distinct [2]. Wang Hong, Qian Zhou {2023}, Wang Pengchun, Wang Xiaoman {2023}, and Chen Ben {2023} analyzed the works to explain the importance of piano playing techniques in performance on the emotional expression of the works [3][4][5].

From the above, it can be seen that in the process of music performance, performance techniques and different techniques derived from different times are very important to the expression of the whole work. However, at this stage, students are not able to play the piece well enough to perfect the playing techniques involved in the piece. Many students are still at the "play it down" stage of the work and do not have a thorough understanding of the entire score. This study will take Beethoven Sonata Op.14 No.1 as an example to make a summary of the performance techniques appearing in the work, and through the actual score examples, explain more specifically how to master the correct playing method as well as the expression of the mood of the score [6].

2. Background of work

Beethoven's compositional style has a lot to do with his early life experiences. Beethoven experienced his father's strict education as a child, and although he laid a solid musical foundation through his studies during this period, he was also oppressed and disciplined by his father for a long time, which led to Beethoven's character being more sensitive and agitated, and stubborn and headstrong. Beethoven then dropped out of school to work in an orchestra, and at the same time began his journey as a composer. At the age of 13, he officially published a Piano Variations, which became a milestone in Beethoven's creative path [7].

An early sonata work by Beethoven, the first movement of the work is dominated by a bright and cheerful melodic line, beginning with a single triplet pattern combined with octave intervals that enhance the mood of the music. The chorus then begins with a couple of stanzas in the form of a canon, followed by a song-like melody that resembles a polyphonic pattern. These melodies reflect Beethoven's early compositional style.
Due to the influence of the Baroque period, Beethoven's early compositions have the requirements for performance inscribed on the score, which should be strictly adhered to when playing this piece [8]. This piece makes extensive use of legato playing, non-legato playing, octaves, chords, and other strumming techniques. Where non-contiguous playing can be further categorized into broken and skipped playing. The composer presents his perception of life and the emotions he wants to express in a three-dimensional way through different performance techniques. Musical emotion and piano playing skills go hand in hand, and the expressive power of a piece of music can be brought out without any obstacles through skillful playing techniques. It is only through the combination with the feeling of music that the soul of the whole piece can be fully depicted. Playing skill is like the foundation of a building, only with a solid foundation can a building be built high and stable, and only with skillful playing skill can the emotion of the piece be expressed in combination with the sense of music. The importance of technique is obvious [9].

3. Playing technique

3.1. Coda

Breaks, as the name implies, are played by breaking off each note. It is played in two ways: one is a tone that is played by falling by gravity; the other is a tone that is produced by lifting the finger up and dropping it down again in a prepared manner [10].

The first method is the falling finger, which is commonly used in the introductory stage of the piano, and is played by relaxing the arm, raising it, and then dropping it naturally; the second method is the high lifting finger technique, which is commonly used in the introductory stage of the piano, and is simply a matter of lifting the finger up on whichever note you play. Hammer your fingers down like a small hammer. Pay attention to the 2 joints of the fingers and the metacarpal joint. Try to keep your fingers elevated during this process. Open the metacarpal joints fully. Keep your fingers in a rounded shape during this process to avoid breaking them.

3.2. Trip-hop (bassoon)

There are three types of skipping strumming in playing: finger skipping, wrist skipping, and arm skipping.

3.2.1. Finger skipping

Finger skipping, is the most light and sensitive kind of skipping playing method, this kind of skipping playing method requires the fingers to be active, dexterous and independent, touching the keys and leaving the keys should be active and rapid, and the wrist and arm remain stable. It is generally used in repeated homophonic (finger-wheeling), weaker and faster single-note progressions, and, depending on the actual effect of the performance, in some weak playing of diatonic and chordal patterns. Finger skips are generally used in very fast melodic runs. This method is the most commonly
used and the simplest. Finger skipping is the playing of skipping notes through rapid finger movements for. To make the skipping sound clearer, you can cross your fingers slightly, which will increase the flexibility and accuracy of your fingers. When playing finger skips, you need to be careful not to let your wrist or arm move up and down, as this can make the sound unclear.

The skip playing in Figure 3 requires the use of finger skips because of the playfulness of the melody, which needs to be played with a sense of animation. At the same time, it gradually builds up to a climax in two bars, paving the way for the emotional outburst that follows, which requires the student to incorporate a combination of one joint and the wrist in the process of playing the jumping notes. Make a crescendo effect by superimposing forces from different parts of the body.

Fig. 3. Phonetic symbol 3

3.2.2. Wrist syncopation

Wrist skipping is the use of the elasticity of the wrist to play skipping notes. This method requires a relaxed and flexible wrist, as well as slightly cocked fingers. When playing wrist skips, care needs to be taken not to move the wrist or arm up and down, but to play the skips through a lateral movement of the wrist. Wrist skips are usually used where there are a lot of chords. Teachers should ask students to play skipping with a fixed hand shape and wrist when they are playing continuous fast chords and octaves (this includes many fast repeated chords and octaves).

The melody in Figure 4 consists of continuous triplets in the left hand and octaves in the right hand. The left hand's downward triplets accompany the melody in a distinctive and colorful manner, while the right hand uses simple octaves to drive the overall melodic direction, creating a joyful and enthusiastic atmosphere through the stark contrast of legato and skipped tones, and the gradual strengthening of the musical expression mark (cresc).

Fig. 4. Phonetic symbol 4

3.2.3. Arm skipping sound

Arm skipping is the use of the weight and inertia of the arm to play skipping notes. This method requires the arm to be completely relaxed while the fingers are slightly cocked. When playing arm skips, care needs to be taken not to move the wrist or arm up and down, but to play the skips through a lateral movement of the arm. Arm skips are generally used where there are jumping chords or octaves.

Figure 5 in the octave plus three groups of consecutive chord skipping can be played using the arm skipping method, the practice process need to pay attention to the chord position, through the gravity of the arm drop and the muscles of the lower arm for force, in the key at the same time, the finger joints to hold, play a neat and bright tone, which is also known as the "key grasping".

Fig. 5. Phonetic symbol 1

In addition to these three common ways of playing skips, there are many other techniques and methods that can be used to play skips. Different players can choose the method that suits their situation and characteristics. It should be noted that when playing skipping notes, it is necessary to keep the hand shape correct, the fingers naturally bent, do not fold the fingers or over-tension, so as not to affect the playing effect. In addition, in order to make the skipping sound clearer, you can practice repeatedly on the piano and gradually master various techniques and methods.

4. Legato

The purpose of legato playing, also known as legato, is to produce a singing sound, which requires flexible wrist movements to make the sound more rounded and coherent, and to make the melodic lines of the phrases clearer and more pronounced. There are two general ways of playing: one is to touch the keys with the fingertips. The second is to touch the keys with the belly of the finger (sticking to the keys). In teaching, if you want students to master this technique, you can start with a simpler exercise to get a feel for it: take the example of a two-note legato, where the first note descends in a non-legato manner, and while holding the first note, you lift the second finger, as if you were walking, and lift the right foot when the left foot hits the ground, and lift the left foot when the right foot hits the ground, and in this way connecting the notes to each other.

Key points of the exercise: change the part of the finger that touches the keys, the height of the keys, and the speed of the keys. The speed of keystrokes should be slow; faster keystrokes will affect the strength of the sound.

Practice method: You can practice by using drop rolls, also known as small ties, which are a very important method of playing and are inevitably used when playing works from the classical period. Practice by dropping the first note naturally by dropping the finger, and the second note by connecting the two notes with a wrist drive.

The faster legato phrases are usually played with fingertip touch, which requires the palm of the hand to be
relaxed during playing, through a pattern of force generation in the first and metacarpophalangeal joints.

Figure 6 in the 16th notes of the running phrase formed by the musical effect is similar to running water, the need to minimize the gap between the notes, the way of touching the keys is fingertip touch, and in the process of playing, you need to pay attention to the expression of the notation p, where the strength of the weak, the player can control the distance between the fingers and the keys to control the strength of the fingers emitted, the closer the fingertips before touching the keys to the keyboard, of course, the volume of playing will be the lower, the strength of the keys will naturally become smaller accordingly.

Fig. 6. Phonetic symbol 6

The slower legato passages are usually played with fingered keys, which require the palm of the hand to be open during playing, using finger tension and wrist thrust to connect the notes.

Fig. 7. Phonetic symbol 7

The two-tone legato in Figure 7 needs to be played by using the fingertips to touch the keys. The four bars here require a two-bar crescendo and a two-bar crescendo, finally resolving the harmonic effect on mi-sol-mi, while the power is completely withdrawn. In teaching, it is necessary to pay attention to the skillful use of the thrust generated by the wrist drive and the different strengths generated by the speed of the fingers touching the keys: the first two bars are gradually strengthened by the wrist drive and the weight of the fingers, and the last two bars are closed by the closing of the fingers and the change from "fast downstrokes" to "slow downstrokes" for the power to be closed.

5. Conclusion

This paper describes some of the pedagogical aspects of the Beethoven sonatas through a detailed analysis of their performance techniques, incorporating an emotional grasp of the works. Beethoven's works are filled with his own inner emotions and want to perfectly interpret the connotation of the need to continue to hone their own playing skills and their own musical perception, which can not be achieved overnight, all we can do is to continue to move forward on this road.

References