

Reminiscence of Classic Music for the Youth Reviews on *the Homecoming of Heroes* Concert by the China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra

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ABSTRACT

The Homecoming of Heroes Concert is one of the series by the China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra for the purpose of showing reminiscence to the Shanghai Animation Film Studio. Classic music of movies for the youth by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio were elaborately selected and performed in order to bring an unforgettable experience and recollect the childhood memories to the audience. This paper briefed the backgrounds and presented main characteristics of the concert, and generally sketched out the trends and existing problems on the audio-visual concert.

Keywords: *The Homecoming of Heroes* Concert, Audio-visual concert, Shanghai Animation Film Studio.

1. INTRODUCTION

The night of June 24, 2023 witnessed *the Homecoming of Heroes* — the reminiscence of classic music for the youth of Shanghai Animation Film Studio¹ by China Broadcast & Film

Symphony Orchestra² — the audio-visual concert at Yunnan Grand Theater, which was the only audio-visual concert performed at the theater in June. Kunming, the Spring City, enjoyed the wonderful performance by the China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra, which brought a more brilliant and refreshing night for the audience in the summer. The dramatic musical interpretation by the orchestra showed its unique style and flavor, revealing the its profound perception on the film soundtrack of Shanghai Animation Film Studio.

The arrangement of the repertoire showed originality and professionalism. In the first half of the performance, the orchestra and the children's

1. Shanghai Animation Film Studio was founded in the year 1957. Its establishment opened a new chapter for the Chinese animation. The first series of its animations, exemplified by *Little Tadpole Looking for Mummy*, made the film studio an unattainable status compared with other counterparts. It is an art film production base with long history, abundant film productions and numerous intellectual property rights in China. The artists of the studio are constantly exploring new path of integrating traditional Chinese culture with animation art. With their strong enthusiasm on creation, the studio have created and forged romantic and unforgettable childhood memories for Chinese children, attained countless unmatched heights in the industry, and drove the Chinese animations to the top among the world's animation entertainments. Producers of the studio made lots of classic works such as *Havoc in Heaven*, *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* and *Calabash Brothers*, accompanying the youth and growth of generations in China. The studio is internationally renowned for its animation genre featured "Chinese School" and established a benchmark of animation aesthetics with Chinese characteristics. The works of Shanghai Animation Film Studio have created a colorful fairy tale world with Chinese feature, in which countless classic animated characters presented memories to generations of Chinese, and referred as monuments recorded in animation history.

2. Founded in 1949, the China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra is one of the earliest national symphony orchestras in the People's Republic of China. A large number of well-known musicians and works, for example Qiming Lü and Zushan Bian and their music pieces, have emerged and gleamed in this orchestra. The orchestra has forged a lasting friendship with music lovers and is committed to promoting the art of symphonic music. Its genre is more focused on film music, pop music, and its performances are all over the world, which are enjoyed by a wide range of audiences. Its energetic performances have earned a high reputation among music lovers. This audio-visual concert, *the Homecoming of Heroes*, embodies the mission of China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra — to create and perform excellent literary and artistic works to entertain the audience.

choir presented the song *Snow Kid*, followed by two songs, *Three Monks* and *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King*, composed by Mr. Fuzai Jin³. In the second half, after the film music series *Little Tadpole Looking for Mummy*, *Shuke and Beita*, *Dirty King Adventure*, and *Calabash Brothers*, the orchestra played the well-known piece of *The No-brain and The Unhappiness*, which was arranged by pianist Shiyue Zhang⁴. Besides, the orchestra brought the most famous *Havoc in Heaven* (the Monkey King creates a tremendous uproar in the heavenly palace) for grand finale. The repertoire of the whole audio-visual concert was varied in genres and its musical written time spanned decades. From the performance by pure modern western musical instruments to the mixture and blending of Chinese traditional musical instruments, the audience not only appreciated the aesthetics of western symphonic music but tasted the classical charms in the Chinese traditional instrumental music, and witnessed various and different musical characters and roles in films. Huge challenges can be seen for the orchestra to accustomed and adapted to the huge changes of the genres of these pieces in an audio-visual concert in order to make the cohesion smooth and natural, and to be unanimous and consistent with the music and the animation on the screen.

In addition to the pictures and paintings with unique traditional Chinese aesthetic style, the music of each animation produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio was also highly ingenious, exemplified by the historical charm of the thousand-year-old chimes in the performance of *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King*, the profound *Zen* (deep meditation) meaning by the wooden fish (a traditional Chinese instrument) in *Three Monks*, and the unique charm of the Beijing opera gongs, drums, and percussion music in *Havoc in Heaven*, which were perfectly integrated with the expression and actions of the Monkey King creating a tremendous uproar and chaos in the heavenly palace. These background film music and the animations each improved by association with the other and achieved greater success in audiovisual effects. These classic musical works for youth were

unremittingly innovated and recomposed by the excellent composers Fuzai Jin and Yingju Wu, the seniors and older generation of Shanghai Animation Film Studio. These classic masterpieces achieved a high degree of harmony and unity in both vision and hearing, representing the peak level of Chinese animation.

2. THE BLENDING OF DRAMA AND EMOTION

“Life is like a play”, but the opposite of the saying is also true. The animator brings her characters life and soul, so that these virtual images possess emotions and feelings. However, when the characters become living individuals, it also means that they may lose something meanwhile. For instance, the cartoon *Snow Kid* combined the innocence of childhood with kindness and courage, and guided the audience to think about current life in the interweaving of drama and emotion.

The cartoon *Snow Kid* was the “overture” of the concert, whose original song was composed by Fuzai Jin and later arranged and adapted into symphony. This performance also invited the children’s choir of Yunnan Grand Theater for joint display. “The music begins when words ends, and it may imply and suggest what cannot be expressed in mere words”. [1] The soundtracks in cartoon works were often narrative besides bringing people auditory enjoyment, and Fuzai Jin’s works carry more hidden and latent emotions besides the surface meaning of the lyrics in the animation. His apperceptions on friendship, bravery and kindness are more profound and convincing than those in animations. In the song *Snow Kid*, the orchestra depicted some classic pictures, and told the audience the story about the pure and warm friendship between the Snow Kid and the Rabbit, and finally when the Rabbit was engulfed by accidental fire, Snow Kid was determined and desperate to save his friend. As for the interpretation for deeper subtle psychological changes and emotional impulses for the two characters, the children’s choir was invited to elucidate in their singing performance.

The performance of *Snow Kid* presents a great challenge for the orchestra and choir in the precise grasp of emotional changes in the original animation. The dramatic and complicated emotions in the song was adequately amplified in the stage, and the entanglement of many emotional factors, like the pure friendship between the Snow Kid and Rabbit, the panic and grief during the accidental

3. The Composer Fuzai Jin was born in 1942 in Zhejiang Province, China. He graduated from the Composition School of Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1967 and later worked as a composer for Shanghai Animation Film Studio.

4. Shiyue Zhang is a young composer and pianist. He graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music, majoring in composition and piano, and studied under the guidance of Xiaogang Ye and Yuan Sheng. He is now the composer of the China Broadcasting Performing-Art Troupe.

fire, the calmness, anxiety and sympathy of the orchestra, were all composed and presented as a clear narrative logic under the contrast performance of strong or weak, dynamic or static tone by the chorus. There were two classical pieces in *Snow Kid* — *Skiing Song* and *Building a Snowman*. *Skiing Song* set the background scenes with bright and breezy music: snowy night, the family of white rabbit and the Snowman. The choir sang with lyrics such as “*La-La-La*”(onomatopoeia for giggling), showing the ease and happiness of building a snowman. The tone of the music was mellow and sweet, symbolizing the childhood without sorrow and anxiety. Accompanied by the melody of *Building a Snowman*, the Snow Kid was enthusiastic to help the frostbitten birds return to their nests.

However, with the suddenly-mute performance, the audience realized that the danger was approaching. The tone of music changed from soothing and airy to a rapid and pressing sound, and some dissonant intervals appeared. Subsequently, all the instruments of the orchestra joined in the performance and the music became increasingly rapid, showing the urgency of the current situation. At this moment, Snow Kid was unable to wake up his friends trapped in the accidental fire, and the music slowed down its pace, revealing his anxiety and helplessness. As Snow Kid rushes into the ablaze room to save his friends, the rhythm became increasingly rapid and the sequence repeated. The kettledrum and bass drums blare at the same time, as if banging the drum to show support for the Snow Kid and praising his courage. After the rescue mission ended, the pianist played ethereal music in the upper register. At the same time, Snow Kid floated in the air and met the rabbit family again. The innocent and clear voice by the children’s choir touched the soul of the audience, tears coursing down their cheeks.

3. INNOVATIVE USAGE OF COMPOSING TECHNIQUES

The past composing techniques used in animation music were generally traditional and conventional, while young composer Shiyue Zhang adopted the latest modern composing techniques to recompose Mr. Fuzai Jin’s *Three Monks* and Dong Zhang’s *The No-brain and The Unhappiness* into very beautiful and humorous orchestra music.

Unlike the apparent emotions and thoughts expressed in *Snow Kid*, the philosophy in *Three*

*Monks*⁵ that “Everybody’s business is nobody’s business” (literally it means “To drink water one should carry it by himself, to drink water two would carry it together. Unfortunately, there would have no water if there are three people.”) was presented implicitly. The orchestra’s presentation and interpretation of the song was comparatively innovative. In *Three Monks*, Banhu, a Chinese national musical instrument, was used to imitate the kid monk, who was charmingly naive; a bamboo flute was employed to imitate the thin monk and a trombone was applied to imitate the fat monk. These instruments contained much Chinese national features, immersing the audience into the traditional Chinese aesthetic atmosphere. Although the three instruments played the same melody, their timbres were quite different, revealing diverse characteristics and personalities of the three monks. The tone of Banhu was sonorous and solid, with great penetrability, symbolizing the lively and lovely character of the kid monk; the sound of bamboo flute was emotional and tactful, showing the stable personality of the thin monk, and the tone of trombone was brilliant, solemn and magnificent, and its voice was loud and powerful, which was in accordance with the image characteristics of the fat monk precisely. One of the highlights in this music performance was that instead of the conventional instrumental performance, the trombone player stood up and came to the front of the orchestra to imitate the maneuver of the fat monk crossing the river, making the audience break into bursts of warm applause. The audience wandered through the extremely delicate timbre changes, and finally realized that the different personalities of the three monks have been perfectly presented by the orchestra unconsciously. Some audience praised the composer’s well-constructed composition and the superb performance by the three Chinese instrumentalists.

After series of performances on film musics like *Little Tadpole Looking for Mummy*, *Shuke and Beita*, *Dirty King Adventure*, and *Calabash Brothers*, the orchestra presented one of the most contemporary works in the concert, *The No-brain and The Unhappiness*. Shiyue Zhang made an innovative musical adaptation, merging the genre of jazz together with traditional Chinese instruments. It was a concerto with piano and the whole orchestra. The conductor warmly reminded that

5. The story of *Three Monks* is that if there was a monk, he would fetch water for himself. If there were two, they would fetch water together. But if there were three or more, no one would take the initiative to fetch water voluntarily.

around 80% of attention could be paid to the performance by the pianist and the left 20% to the orchestra as coordinating and supporting background music. This piece had a unique style, with a large number of dissonant intervals and uneven sound beats, requiring the orchestra to perform as flawless as possible in both sound harmony and dramatic presentation. The ever-changing and pictorial music not only represented the different temperaments of the two children but highlighted the orchestra's integral capabilities of handling animated characters, providing a refreshing and unforgettable experience to the audience.

4. AUDIO-VISUAL AESTHETICS WITH CHINESE FEATURES

Nezha Conquers the Dragon King and *Havoc in Heaven* are two representatives in traditional Chinese fairy tales. These two animations produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio are deeply welcomed and appreciated by audiences at home and abroad, accompanying generations of children until nowadays. At the beginning of the performance *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King*, the orchestra used the sound of the Chime-bells of Marquis Yi of the Zeng State⁶, and traditional national instruments were applied in *Havoc in Heaven*, bringing the ancient Chinese culture and music to the audience.

Nezha Conquers the Dragon King, without a doubt, was the highlight and climax in the first half of the concert. It was a performance full of Chinese characteristics and cultures, containing lots of elements in Peking Opera, and the animation itself also contained many pictorial and touching scenarios. Many Chinese musical instruments were applied in this performance, introducing the audience into the charm of the combination of Chinese and western musical instruments. Suona, a traditional Chinese musical instrument like trumpet, was used in this performance. Although sound made by Suona was loud and clear, and not easy to be covered and shielded by other instruments, the western musical instruments could miraculously cooperate well with it and create harmonious composition. Accompanied by the loud and penetrating sound of Suona, Nezha, the lead character in this animation, appeared with the

“Ring of the Universe” and the “Ribbon of the Heavens”. More Chinese musical instruments were applied in the exciting fighting scene of climax part: Chinese drum, bass gong and small gong. The sound effect created by these instruments was similar to the background music in the martial arts of Peking Opera, bringing the audience to feel as if personally on the scene of Peking Opera. In the animation, Nezha's complicated and confusing life experiences presented the romance of Chinese mythology. When Li Jing (Nezha's father) heartbreakingly killed Nezha in the animation, the audience were moved by soft and poignant accompaniment on Peking opera fiddle. When Taiyi⁷ helped Nezha come back to life with elixir, the audience was as though brought into the fairyland with piano played in upper register and the ethereal sound of the traditional bamboo flute.

Havoc in Heaven was the representative performance in the audio-visual concert; most of the audience were looking forward to this composition. It was a colorful animated film produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio in 1961, telling the mythology of the Monkey King creating a tremendous uproar and chaos in the dragon palace and heavenly palace. The performance vividly told the legendary experience of the protagonist Sun Wukong (the Monkey King) and his spirit of unyielding resistance. The film music was adapted by Shiyue Zhang and a large number of percussion was adopted to make the rhythm of animation more exciting and heart-shaking, and the mixture of Suona, bamboo flute and Peking opera fiddle increased the Chinese features into the music. The whole performance presents a strong oriental mythological charm in musical structure, orchestration, melody, and harmony etc. For instance, the cheerful string music brought people back to the paradise where the Monkey King was free and unrestrained in his birthplace, the Huaguo Mountain; the soothing timbre of bamboo flute and Peking opera fiddle suggested the legendary pleasure of “One day in the heaven equals one year in human beings' world”. When the fight scene appeared in the animation, the Suona played the classic prelude in Peking Opera. Soon afterwards, various musical instruments made their maximum volumes, creating deafening sound in the concert hall. In the end, the Monkey King, who had been seized and then “forged” by the alchemy furnace, beat and overturned the

6. The Chime-bells of Marquis Yi of the Zeng State is a set of large ritual and musical instruments used by the monarchs of Zeng State in the early Warring States period (around 476 BC to 221 BC) in China.

7. He is a Taoist priest by the name of Taiyi the Immortal.

authorities in the heaven with the accompaniment of winning cheer. For those who were familiar with the TV series *Journey to the West* (the 1983 version), the music of *Havoc in Heaven* was eye-catching and memorable: Shiyue Zhang's composition was magnificent and full of mythological Chinese features, showing the indomitable and unwilling spirit of the Chinese.

Metaphors and personifications are often used in traditional Chinese art forms with a typical characteristic of “None of the characters in the performance were real humans, but all animated characters contain or imply human characteristics or personalities”. Although there present no real human lives in the animated cartoon of this concert, through every picture and each music piece, the audience may taste profound philosophies and traditional Chinese cultures. As the dramatist Shen Hong's saying: “The essence of art is ‘life’, and the task of art works is to record life, explain life and reflect life.”[2] In this respect, the China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra not only delivered the concept of “people-oriented” in the form of traditional Chinese instruments, but also grasps the essence of art, hence organizing this passionate concert in a series of characters with different styles.

5. CONCLUSION

While marveling at the success of this audio-visual concert, one couldn't help but wondering what made *The Homecoming of Heroes* — the reminiscence of classic music for the youth of Shanghai Animation Film Studio by China Broadcast & Film Symphony Orchestra— the audio-visual concert impressive and reminiscent? Why is it that even today, when instant music videos are available and popular, there are still many audiences who are willing to come to the concert hall to appreciate the animated music of the last century? Musical works are the products of specific historical period, containing historical features and aesthetic values of the specific era, and also continuing and developing under the contemporary context. Children need healthy, optimistic and aesthetic film and television works on the cultivation of their quality, morality and health. The animation works of Shanghai Animation Film Studio housed unprecedented ideological and literary values. Behind delicate emotions in those animation works, there still contains enlightenment under specific conditions, and reflects different character relationships and psychological states. From this angle alone, the

emotions expressed in the animation soundtrack itself and the feelings expressed in drama are different in approach but equally satisfactory in result. Besides expressing the emotions of the animation itself, the orchestra makes necessary and appropriate adjustments or supplements, presenting the optimal and complete underlying expression of the music work.

For the orchestra, it is not enough to mechanically present the notes sentence by sentence or word by word. Successful performance asks creative supplement and the interpretation of aesthetic values between works by both the conductor and the orchestra. The authenticity of interpretation is the basis of the presentation of works, and the creative value is the key to the moving music. The faithfulness or fidelity in interpretation is the basis for the presentation of music works, while the creative originality in composition is the key to express the underlying aesthetic values of the music. This requires the performer to constructively explore the profound meaning under culture, aesthetics and the characteristics of the times beside delivering the basic information of the music work, presenting performances in consistent with contemporary aesthetics.

Audio-visual concerts are popular and welcomed in nowadays China. However, behind the superficial prosperity, many professionals in the industry have different degrees of concerns. For example, some orchestras lack enough rehearses, resulting in inconsonant and inharmonious frequencies between the music and animation; some works are hackneyed and stereotyped in selection, and the orchestra did not make appropriate adjustments in composition, making the performance monotonous. From this audio-visual concert, several characteristics for a successful audio-visual concert can be summarized: first, classical repertoires shall be carefully selected by the orchestra, and shall be innovatively adapted by experienced composers; second, the conductors are required to be familiar with each work and may offer audiences warm guidance in the process of presentation; Last but not least, after rehearsal, the orchestra could not only accurately represent the music but also deliver personalized interpretation under current cultural context. Summaries above are hoped to promote inspirations and originality for current music workers in the promotion of audio-visual concerts.

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