

Analysis of Piano Accompaniment Art in Schumann's "Women's Love and Life"

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ABSTRACT

Schumann, as one of the representative composers of the Romantic period in the 19th century, had a high proportion of art songs in his works. Among them, "Women's Love and Life" is one of Schumann's most representative vocal suites, occupying an important position in the history of German Austrian art songs. The piano part of this work has rich texture and beautiful melody, which complements the vocal part and fully reflects Schumann's superb compositional techniques, greatly enriching the musical genre of art songs. This article will take this work as an example, aiming to delve into the artistic characteristics of piano accompaniment, better interpret the composer's intentions, and provide assistance in understanding similar styles of works.

Keywords: "Women's Love and Life", Art songs, Schumann.

1. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF SCHUMANN'S "WOMEN'S LOVE AND LIFE" CREATION

Robert Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was born into a family with a strong literary atmosphere. His father was a literary publisher, and he was deeply influenced by his father during his childhood. He had a passion for literature and writing, which gave him a good literary cultivation. As an adult, Schumann became obsessed with music and aspired to become a pianist. However, due to improper practice, he damaged his fingers and shifted his focus to composing. Schumann is one of the most important composers of art songs after Schubert. Due to his profound literary background and cultivation, as well as his romantic plot like a poet, he is adept at perfectly combining poetry and music in the field of art songs, thus endowing poetry with more artistic colors, which is very rare among composers.

The work "Women's Love and Life" was created in 1840, the year when Schumann and Clara's long-standing love finally came to fruition. It was in this joyful mood that Schumann created over a hundred art songs, such as "Peach Blossom Girl", "Women's Love and Life", and "Poet's Love", hence 1840 is also known as Schumann's "Year of Art Songs". Among them, "Women's Love and

Life" is one of Schumann's most representative vocal suites. This work uses eight poems by German poet Adelbert von Chamisso (1781-1838) as lyrics, depicting the process of a woman and her beloved meeting, secretly falling in love, getting engaged, getting married, having children, and parting ways. The piano part of this suite holds a high position, with rich preludes, interludes, and endings. The composition techniques are diverse, and the texture is rich, extending emotions that vocal music cannot express in some places.

2. MUSIC ANALYSIS OF "WOMEN'S LOVE AND LIFE"

The first piece "Ever Since I Met Him", 3/4 beat, is in a strophic form. Schumann used a continuous line of the entire bar at the beginning of the piece, but it included staccato and blank beats, vividly depicting the girl's uneasy mood when facing her beloved, like an irregular heartbeat. In the second section, the vocal part enters, as if a girl is muttering to herself. In the fourth section, it turns to C minor, and the piano overlaps with the vocal melody. In the seventh section, there is a slowing down process, and then the music reaches an emotional climax. The piano accompaniment and harmony become heavier. In the ninth section, the same melody is repeated, but the piano melody lines are hidden in the middle part, giving a

completely different listening experience. At the end of the music, the piano slows down and stays at the main tone of the mode.

The second piece "Ever Since I Met Him", 4/4 beat, is in a trilogy style. The music begins with consecutive octave chords, depicting a scene of a young girl praising her beloved. The left octave progresses in half steps, constantly driving emotional development. In the 6th and 7th bars, the left hand responds to the vocal part in the form of a Canon, which runs through the entire piece in a polyphonic form, with the piano constantly imitating the melody. At the beginning of the 25th bar, the accompaniment changes to a columnar chord, with continuous modulation and dissonance. Starting from the 38th bar, the piano and vocal music continuously rotate, and finally reach the climax of the entire piece in the 42nd bar. In the 54th bar, the piano performs the theme phrase three times in a row and gradually strengthens. At the end, the use of three part polyphony technique gradually slows down the speed. This work is passionate and full of girls' praise for their loved ones.

The third piece "I Don't Understand or Believe", 3/8 beat, is in a single trilogy style, has a fast pace and no prelude. The accompaniment is a gradually strengthening chord skipping, as if the girl was surprised to find out that her lover also likes her. When the music reaches the 16th bar of section b, the rhythm slows down, accompanied by a continuous chord, and there are two gradually slowing steps in bars 21 and 34. It is a girl's confession to her beloved, unwilling to wake up in a beautiful dream. At the end, the piano solos for 8 bars with increasing intensity, finally ending in the same tonic C major, implying the beauty of the next movement.

The fourth piece "The Ring on My Finger", 4/4 beat, is in the Rondo form, makes it difficult for every girl to suppress her happiness when her lover proposes to her. This work adopts a polyphonic writing style, with a German Austrian folk melody, word by word, and piano playing the same melody as vocal music. The accompaniment type is very similar to the second movement of Beethoven's 8th Sonata, making it the most beautiful piece in the suite. At the beginning, there is a four part accompaniment with the same melody as vocal music, warm and sweet. Starting from the 9th bar, the accompaniment changes to broken chords, sometimes accompanied by vocal music, and sometimes sung together with vocal music. At the

25th bar, the speed increases and the accompaniment becomes a columnar chord, which is the girl's hope for a better future life with her husband. It is the climax of the whole song, and the accompaniment continuously promotes the development of emotions. The piano solo in the concluding section plays a beautiful melody, highlighting the beautiful and happy tone of the entire piece.

The fifth piece, "Dear sisters, Make Up for Me", 4/4 beat, is in the Rondo form. This work has a very distinctive rhythm, with a dotted note at the end of the bar, which is very similar to Schumann's other work "Dedication". The broken chord arpeggios depict a passionate and joyful scene at a wedding. Starting from the 9th bar, the accompaniment changes to four parts, and vocal melodies are added to the high parts. In the 27th bar, the piano part becomes a columnar chord, and the left hand plays an octave to match the direction of the melody. The theme of bar 41 reappears, but the harmony becomes dim and sad, which makes the girl feel sad when she thinks that she will be separated from her sisters after marriage. In the concluding section, Schumann used a melody similar to the "Wedding March" to enhance the overall wedding atmosphere and present a solemn wedding scene in a church.

The sixth piece "Darling, Why Are You Panicking Like This", 4/4 beat, is in a single trilogy style. In this song, the girl's character becomes a mother, and the change in this character makes her feel sweet and happy, while also having a hint of tension and worry about her future life. The work begins with a short motivational chord that runs through the entire A section. The last half of the second bar is offset from the vocal section, which better leads to the next bar and enhances the fluidity of the song. The B section begins to shift to C major, and the piano part changes to columnar chords. The melody on the left hand echoes the vocal music, constantly driving the development of emotions. Starting from the 32nd bar, the speed of the song accelerates, and the girl becomes excited when she learns that she has given birth to a new life. The melody that occasionally appears on the right hand reflects the beauty in the girl's heart. At the 38th, the left bass level reached its climax and reached the climax of the entire song. In the last three bars, the mood of the song is continued, and the second to last section is slowed down, as if the girl is longing for a happy life as a mother, better highlighting the changes in the next song.

The seventh piece, "You in My Arms, in My Heart", 6/8 beat, is in the variation form. This song is full of enthusiasm and is the fastest in the entire song, depicting the excitement of a young girl becoming a mother for the first time. At the beginning of the work, there are two dominant chords with obvious strong and weak contrasts, followed by the decomposition of the dominant chords into arpeggios. The rhythm is cheerful, reflecting the mother's love for the child in her arms. Starting from the 18th bar, the speed of the song gradually increases until the 26th bar, when the speed becomes the sharpest and the accompaniment changes to a column chord on a retake, full of vitality and rhythm. The playing style of skipping notes further promotes the development of emotions. Starting from the 31st bar, the chord gradually decreases in scale, slows down in speed, and finally, with the ending, the mood gradually becomes calm.

The eighth piece, "You Finally Bring Me Infinite Sorrow Now", 4/4 beat, is in a strophic form. This piece has undergone a huge change in emotions compared to the previous one. After learning that her husband has passed away, a woman on the brink of collapse only has memories of her beautiful life in the past. The whole song has a strong tragic color, and the use of narrative style highlights the pain in the woman's heart. At the beginning of the music, a highly penetrating d minor tonic chord announces the beginning of tragedy. Starting from the 7th bar, the piano displays a large number of dissonant intervals of minus seventh, highlighting the tension. Starting from the 11th bar, the bass part of the piano goes down halfway, with reduced intensity, vividly depicting the woman's low mood and murmuring about her own fate after experiencing a huge upheaval. In the 22nd bar, the tragic accompaniment's openness ends, and then it switches to B-flat major. The melody is consistent with the first piece "Ever Since I Met Him". Schumann creatively designed a solo melody that lasts for 21 bars, just like the beginning, as if it were a portrayal of a woman's life of love, bringing the listener's thoughts back to that initial time. The girl's shyness and excitement when she met her crush, and ultimately love turned into nothingness after experiencing many beautiful moments.

3. ANALYSIS OF PIANO PERFORMANCE IN "WOMEN'S LOVE AND LIFE"

The theme of art songs has developed over several centuries, from the earliest lyrical songs in the German Austrian region, through love songs and polyphony, the accompanying instruments gradually changed from plucked instruments to keyboard instruments, and eventually developed into the piano, becoming the most important accompaniment instrument in art songs. In the process of the development of art songs, the status of piano accompaniment continued to rise. During the Romantic period, the themes of art songs had new developments in Schubert's hands. The position of the piano in art songs was no longer equal to vocal music, and "piano accompaniment" gradually became "piano voice". The form of piano accompaniment was no longer simple harmony, and many contents and emotions that vocal music could not express needed to be supplemented by the piano, which was particularly prominent in "Women's Love and Life". In this work, the piano part has rich texture and beautiful melody, with strong artistic value. At the same time, Schumann arranged a prelude or epilogue in each work. In actual performance, it is not limited to the notes themselves, but requires multiple aspects such as multi voice processing, key touching, timbre, and coordination with the singer to perfectly express the composer's intended effect.

3.1 Voice Part Processing

In the work "Women's Love and Life", a rich and heavy melodic texture with symphonic characteristics is one of its major features. Polyphonic techniques such as counterpoint and canon are commonly used in the creation, as well as polyphonic techniques to enrich the musical image. At the same time, Schumann also had his own characteristics in rhythm. He often used dots and syncopates to blur the stress, and at the junction of bars, syncopates would make the bar stress inconsistent with the melody stress, giving people a sense of instability, while enhancing the fluidity and singing ability of the music. Therefore, in the actual performance of this work, it is crucial to handle the harmony relationship of each voice part well.

In the seventh section of the first piece "Ever Since I Met Him", the piano accompaniment plays the same melody as the vocal part. The

accompaniment part is a polyphonic chord with multiple parts of both hands, and the highest part of the melody is played. At this time, the right little finger should highlight the melody. In the 9th section, the melody of the vocal part is the same, but the accompaniment of the piano part changes. The melody sound appears in the middle part, and when playing, the melody sound should be played coherently on the index finger and middle finger of the right hand. In the 11th to 14th bars, both parts of the right hand have staccato sounds and connecting lines. When playing, players should pay attention to the sense of musical lines and avoid pauses between bars, allowing the piano to continuously push the vocal part forward. The fourth piece "The Ring on My Finger" is a typical German Austrian folk accompaniment type. When played, the high voice should sing like a flute, the middle voice should be coherent and elegant like a viola, and the low voice should be solid and stable like a bass. The three voices have their own characteristics and complement each other, like a small chamber orchestra. In this work, there are often connecting lines spanning two or three bars, and the role of the middle part in linking is particularly important during performance. Breaking down chords requires playing them with fluidity that drives the development of music, while not affecting the melody. Each finger needs to have good independence. The fifth piece, "Dear sisters, Make Up for Me", depicts a happy wedding scene. The two hands of the piano part break down the arpeggios to show a good sense of atmosphere. When playing, players should pay attention to the accurate rhythm of the last note of each bar. In the 9th bar, the piano part adds the same melody as the vocal part, and the accompaniment becomes three parts. When playing, the volume of the middle part should be controlled reasonably, and the high volume part needs to be driven by the arm to better highlight the melody.

3.2 Touch Key and Timbre

Thanks to the favorable cultural atmosphere of Schumann's childhood family, his cultural literacy and poetic imagination are the most significant differences from other composers. In his works, there are few themes that praise natural scenery, but rather praise love and reflect on oneself. In the work "Women's Love and Life", there is not only a girl's longing for love, but also murmuring to herself during unrequited love. Each piece expresses different emotional content, so different touch keys and tone processing are used when

playing this work to better express the characteristics of each piece and thus express drama.

In the first song "Ever Since I Met Him", it is necessary to express the girl's feelings when she first meets her crush. When playing, she needs to use her fingertips more to play, control the volume to remain in piano, and slowly press the keys to the end to imitate her nervous and uneasy mood. The third piece "I Don't Understand or Believe", section A is about the girl's surprise when she learns that her lover has also fallen in love with her. In order to better highlight her surprise, she plays chord skipping with a relaxed and elastic wrist, and each chord is short and powerful. In the 16th bar, the speed slows down and the piano changes from skipping to legato. When playing, more pedals are needed to clearly express the harmony changes and create a hazy sound effect. The seventh piece "You in My Arms, in My Heart" is composed of rapidly breaking chords and arpeggios, creating a cheerful overall atmosphere. The piano part of this piece has fewer melodies, more like creating an atmosphere for vocal music. When playing, it is important to keep fingers light and touch keys quickly, without dragging mud or water, to better promote the development of music. At the same time, Schumann also added melodies to the piano in the details. In the 6th bar and the 26th bar of the recapitulation section, the vocal melody and the low pitched melody form a response, and the left little finger should focus on playing the corresponding melody to form a clear correspondence between the parts.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the vocal suite "Women's Love and Life" fully embodies Schumann's extraordinary compositional talent. His profound literary background and extraordinary imagination perfectly match the theme of artistic songs. In this work, he breaks away from the traditional harmonic progression of the classical period, and the harmonic modes become rich and colorful. At the same time, the title greatly enhances the drama of the song. At the same time, the piano gradually changed from "accompaniment" to "concerto", with rich preludes, interludes, and endings in each work, not only highlighting the characteristics of the work, but also silently rendering the emotional atmosphere, better expressing the subtle changes in the female protagonist's heart. In-depth analysis of the artistic characteristics of piano accompaniment in Schumann's art songs can better understand the

composer's creative intentions, enhance the accompanist's artistic appreciation ability, establish correct accompaniment thinking, and have significant help in playing music works with the same theme.

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