

A Brief Discussion on the Cultivation of Singing Expressiveness

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Abstract: Singing is a highly expressive art form. Performers must understand the work and, using scientific vocal techniques and accurate emotional expression, engage in a 'secondary creation' of the piece. As a middle school music teacher, I deeply understand the importance of developing singing expressiveness. Singing expressiveness refers to the ability to sing a song with both voice and emotion, a comprehensive skill that bridges humanities and music. In recent years, educational reforms in this field have made the development of singing expressiveness a key goal in classroom teaching. This article aims to clarify the concept of singing expressiveness, highlight its significance, and systematically explore strategies and methods for cultivating students' singing expressiveness, drawing on my own teaching experience. I believe that singing with both voice and emotion is not difficult. With the right training methods, children can become little birds who love and excel at singing, confident and charming young artists.

1. Achieve "rich in emotion" and clarify the concept and meaning of singing expressiveness

1.1 Musical expressiveness and vocal expressiveness

Music is an art form that expresses emotions, fundamentally reflecting human thoughts and feelings. Musical ability forms the foundation of musical creation. It comprises two key components: musical sensitivity and expressiveness (the power of perception and expression in music). ^[1]Among these, expressiveness refers to the emotional impact conveyed through artistic works, encompassing rich inner imagery, rhythm, melody, and taste.

The new music curriculum standards emphasize that enhancing the cultivation of musical expressiveness is an essential component. Musical expressiveness is the soul of vocal instruction. It refers to the specific manifestation of musical expressiveness in singing. In teaching, teachers should aim to enhance students' musical expressiveness as a key objective, focusing not only on training their singing skills but also on developing their professional artistic qualities and musical expressiveness. In vocal instruction, I believe that teachers should not limit themselves to teaching students to sing songs; they should also inspire students to use their voices accurately and vividly to convey the emotions of each song, deeply understand and appreciate the artistic realm of the songs, and thus perform them with heartfelt expression. However, how can we achieve the goal of

cultivating students' musical expressiveness? Before delving into this question, let's first clarify the significance of vocal expressiveness.

1.2 The importance of singing expressiveness

The expressiveness of singing is like an 'additive'; a singer's perfect musical expression can make the music more engaging, enrich the vocal colors, and bring the musical and character images to life. Many singers lack this expressiveness, reciting songs mechanically with loud voices without considering the song's deeper meaning. From start to finish, listeners feel only fatigue, not the presence of music. Even when the music is strong, it feels weak; when it is fast, it feels slow; and when it is slow, it feels fast, lacking any emotional impact. Mr. Teng Shichu, a renowned Chinese conductor, once gave an example: the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is very high, but when we actually stand on it, we don't feel its height because we are standing on flat ground, losing the contrast and thus not feeling its height. Music is similar; once the sound loses its contrast in pitch and intensity, how can it convey the emotions of the music? Vocal performance requires a combination of superb singing techniques and skillful tone color to create artistic images. It is evident that enriching the emotional experience and aesthetic appreciation of vocal students, and fostering their confidence, boldness, and accuracy in expressing and creating music, should be one of the key goals of vocal teaching reform.

2. Use scientific methods to lay a solid foundation for little singers

Although singing performance is influenced to some extent by innate genetic factors, on the other hand, it depends to a great extent on the education received after birth. ^[2]

The development of singing expressiveness should primarily be guided by innovative teaching approaches, shifting from a didactic to an inspirational approach. By employing comprehensive and systematic methods, students' singing expressiveness can be activated, enabling them to deeply understand the essence of the songs from within. Through precise and varied forms, they can convey the emotional core of the music, create a musical atmosphere, and successfully reinterpret the music.

2.1 Scientific singing voice method is the "cornerstone" of good singing performance

First of all, we should induce students' strong desire to sing, so that students can enter the state of music performance and pursue and explore the beauty of music. This requires teachers to effectively arouse students' emotional resonance with full enthusiasm, vivid expressions and movements and scientific vocal techniques before teaching singing. Specifically:

(1) Correct singing posture is the beginning of good singing habits

Whether sitting or standing, students are required to keep their bodies straight, keep their heads positive and facing forward, relax other parts of the body, sing with full spirit, concentrate on their thoughts, express themselves naturally and enter the mood of the song.

(2) The correct breathing method

The correct method of singing breathing is gradually developed through training. Teaching aims to help students build confidence, demystify the process, and explain that the correct method of singing breathing is part of everyday physiological habits. If students can understand singing breathing from these physiological actions and make it a subconscious habit, they will have a basic grasp of the method of singing breathing. This allows them to more effectively control the intensity and breath changes in their singing, enhancing the expressiveness of their performances.

(3) Scientific ways of speaking

The scientific approach to vocal production is a crucial aspect of singing technique training and forms the foundation for better musical expression. Currently, both domestically and internationally, the head voice method is widely adopted. When using the head voice, the edges and connections of the vocal cords vibrate, which helps prevent fatigue during prolonged singing. This method produces a clear, clean sound with accurate pitch and a bright, beautiful tone. The sound can travel over long distances from the front of the mouth and can be sung at very low volumes, giving the head voice method rich musical expressiveness. Additionally, using the head voice can shorten the voice change period and help maintain a good vocal condition after the voice changes.

(4) Speak clearly

Singing is an art that combines music and language. The clarity of articulation directly affects the expressiveness of singing. ^[3]Due to the different emotions and styles of singing, the methods of articulation should vary. For example, when comparing the song 'The Little Girl Picking Mushrooms' that students often sing with Schubert's 'Serenade,' the former is light, lively, and cheerful; the latter is deep, beautiful, and gentle, expressing affection for a baby. In terms of articulation, the differences in style result in variations in the transitions at the beginning, middle, and end of words. The former requires a quick transition at the beginning, middle, and end of words, without being drawn out. The latter, however, requires a slower transition at the beginning, middle, and end of words to enhance the sense of gentleness.

2.2 The shaping of artistic image depends on the deep understanding of the work

The musical image depends on the singer's interpretation and re-creation of the song. Teachers should have a strong sense of responsibility and love for their students, which should be demonstrated by their unreserved dedication to their energy, talent, and knowledge. The cultivation of students' musical expressiveness should be integrated into the study of each piece. Teachers should first understand the historical context, genre, and style of the works they teach. This helps students clearly understand the performance requirements for different periods and styles of music. ^[4]We should pay attention to the distinction between Chinese and foreign songs, classical and modern songs of different nationalities and styles. Teachers should guide students to listen and appreciate before singing, so as to improve their perception ability, understand the singing requirements of relevant music types, and put appropriate "music labels" on them in their minds.

2.3 The mastery of the form structure is the "catalyst" for the emotional sublimation of songs

To better perform a song, one must understand its creative techniques, structural features, and the song's beginning, development, climax, and conclusion, to create a complete artistic image. The song 'My Motherland' is a familiar lyrical piece. This song is a sectional song with a lead vocal and a chorus. The first section (the lead vocal part) is lyrical, consisting of four musical phrases, which is a section with the characteristics of introduction, development, transition, and conclusion. Each phrase in this section ends with the same note as the beginning of the next phrase, forming a 'fish-tail' structure. The melody is smooth, beautiful, and intimate, expressing deep love for the motherland. The second section (the chorus part) changes the genre, alters the singing form, speeds up, and intensifies the power, making the entire latter part express a grand and heroic mood, showcasing the heroic spirit of the Chinese people. By analyzing the structural characteristics of the song, students can fully understand and master its main features, performance techniques, and ideological content, thereby elevating their emotions in actual singing.

2.4 The accurate grasp of the characteristics of song style is an essential means for classic singing

One of the key reasons why an excellent song remains popular over time is its unique style and characteristics. Teachers should help students understand the main features of a song, such as its tempo, dynamics, mode, rhythm, and melody. For example, 'Red Plum Praise' is a medium-speed, lyrical song that praises and uses the seven-tone mode of Chinese folk music, giving it a strong national flavor. It draws on the prolonged tones from traditional opera, making the melody more beautiful and lyrical. The song frequently uses ornaments and dotted sixteenth notes, which finely convey the emotional depth of the song. The repeated octaves enhance the song's uplifting image. Therefore, when training singing, students should be taught to handle prolonged tones delicately, use dotted sixteenth notes accurately, apply ornaments softly, and produce full octaves. By understanding and mastering these stylistic features, students can sing more vividly.

3. Absorb "nutrients" from sister arts, integrate art and humanities, and add singing beauty

Without a broad and comprehensive artistic foundation, it is challenging for vocal performers to achieve a high level of professional excellence. In the arts, different genres are interconnected, much like how appreciating paintings can inspire poetry, and reading poetry can lead to composing and singing. To more perfectly convey musical images, one should enhance their artistic cultivation in various areas, such as reading poetry, appreciating paintings, watching dances, listening to operas, and watching films and TV shows. For instance, when performing the song 'Volga Boatmen's Song,' one can connect it with the oil painting 'Barge Haulers on the Volga.' Both works depict the labor scenes of ragged barge haulers pulling heavy cargo ships and the inner resentment and resistance of the barge haulers. By linking these two works, one can appreciate the charm of the song being a painting and the painting containing the song. Encouraging students to appreciate and understand other arts can broaden their horizons, enrich their imagination, and enhance their sensitivity, gradually enabling them to compose poetry with their voice and paint with their sound. The saying 'more skills do not burden the body' holds true here. Practical experience shows that absorbing 'nutrition' from other arts, broadening one's thinking, stimulating inspiration, and combining it with mental exercises, yields better results than isolated practice. Therefore, enhancing artistic cultivation is an effective method to improve students' musical expressiveness.

4. Experience with the heart to make the beauty of singing shine

To touch others, one must first touch oneself. Therefore, before singing, it is essential to fully understand the theme and message of the song. Only by doing so can one convey the emotions embedded in the song through their voice. Teachers should inspire students to engage their emotions, encouraging them to sing from the heart and express the inner feelings of the song, thereby enhancing its performance. The author suggests using the method of situational reconstruction, encouraging students to put themselves in the shoes of the song's protagonist, using their intuition and instinct to shape the image of the lyrical character, aiming for each student to sing from the heart in a specific scenario.

5. Plug in the wings of imagination, let the seed of "meaning" of music grow freely

The essence of art lies in its individuality and innovation. Just as real life is a vibrant tapestry of unique elements, art should reflect this diversity, showcasing individuality in the colorful world it portrays. True art is always distinct from the mundane; individuality brings vitality, and vocal music

is no exception. Singing is a secondary creation in the process of musical appreciation. This means creating new interpretations while maintaining the original work's style and characteristics. Therefore, it is called re-creation. A vocal performance does not have to be identical to the original or bound by previous performances. Rigid adherence to conventions can hinder students' ability to imagine and interpret musical images. Given that musical imagination is creative, it allows for diverse expressions, even with different interpretations and understandings. This suggests that teachers should boldly encourage students to express their own interpretations of the works, fostering independent thinking and encouraging them to explore new elements within the music. Only through innovation can one truly showcase their artistic personality.

Music performance is a form of secondary creation. In teaching practice, it can create an ideal, suitable, and warm learning environment for students, which helps to stimulate their imagination and inspire creativity. Additionally, by using other teaching devices to play various music backgrounds and real-life scenes, a positive atmosphere can be created for students, allowing them to understand the background of the work's creation and the emotional expression. Once students grasp the creative intent behind the music, they can appropriately integrate their imagination and thinking into the music, thereby stimulating their creative thinking and effectively cultivating their musical performance skills in vocal singing. Imagination is crucial for creating realistic scenarios in the teaching process and for students' learning. Therefore, it is important to focus on training and developing imagination in teaching. So, how can we stimulate students' musical imagination? ^[5] The author believes that music, as a situational art form, possesses a unique artistic conception. The concept of 'artistic conception' we discuss here is closely related to the concept in the humanities. In the appreciation and performance of music, artistic conception primarily encompasses two aspects: aesthetic imagination and emotional atmosphere. In practical teaching, we can use new media to present the artistic conception of music to students, allowing them to experience it as if they were there, thereby naturally stimulating their imagination and creativity.

6. Build a beautiful stage, and use performance and competition to activate creativity

Practical activities are a vital method for developing students' musical expressiveness. Teachers can set up small stages in the classroom, adapting to local conditions, and encourage students to participate in performance practices. On these small stages, students will gain valuable training, with teachers encouraging them to use their own choreographed movements. Other students can respond with rhythmic movements. Additionally, students with the ability and resources can be encouraged to use simple instruments to accompany the performers. Through these performances and interactive games, students' musical expressiveness will be significantly enhanced, and they will gain more aesthetic pleasure and spiritual enjoyment from singing. ^[6] While organizing and carrying out performance activities, teachers can make full use of games, competitions and other means to stimulate students' strong desire for self-expression. Through games and competitions, students will gain a great sense of achievement and enhance their enthusiasm for active learning.

Singing, as a true art form, should not be confined to technical aspects but should also integrate personal emotions. The author believes that the concept of 'harmony of voice and emotion' should not remain at the level of theoretical research but should be actively explored in practice and should be a key goal in vocal instruction. Both 'voice' and 'emotion' are essential elements; one involves the scientific training of vocal techniques, while the other involves the cultivation of emotional expression based on a deep understanding of humanities. By addressing both aspects simultaneously, the realm of harmony between voice and emotion can be achieved. The expressiveness of singing will gradually grow and flourish through the interaction of these two forces, becoming a white dove freely soaring in the sky of art.

7. Conclusion

In summary, the cultivation of singing expressiveness is crucial for enhancing students' musical literacy and fostering their artistic growth. It not only demonstrates a rich and expressive singing ability but also highlights interdisciplinary comprehensive qualities. In secondary school music education, teachers should fully recognize its importance and focus on scientific vocal techniques, in-depth understanding of works, mastery of musical forms and structures, and grasp of style characteristics to build a solid foundation for students. Additionally, by drawing inspiration from sister arts, deeply experiencing the emotions of songs, stimulating musical imagination, and activating students' creativity through performances and competitions, we can help students achieve a perfect blend of 'voice' and 'emotion' in singing. This will enable them to become confident and charming young artists, allowing the beauty of singing to shine on stage.

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