

The Value of Piano Teaching in Schumann Three Romances, Op.28

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Abstract: Schumann's piano work, three romances, is a classic of piano works during the romantic period. It is also one of the 'compulsory pieces' for many piano students. From the perspective of the technique of the piece, three romances has moderate difficulty and typical characteristics of the rhythm in melody and texture; and from the use of pedal and the interpretation of the emotion of the work, we can see that it challenges the learner with musical expression, which will be worthy of using with teaching purposes.

1. Introduction

As an important carrier of Schumann's emotional expression, piano works embody the artistic characteristics of Schumann's personality and artistic pursuit. The Three Romances represents Schumann's melody, harmony, rhythm, and emotions in a compact scale. Within this work, Schumann also presents a unique musical language style. In the piano teaching, the work has extraordinary educational significance both in the training of students' performance skills, and in the understanding and interpretation of the music style.

2. The Rhythm in the Performance of Three Romances:

Three Romances reflects the Schumann's creative style in rhythm; However, there are not many difficulties in terms of technique. Most of the passages are filled with fixed rhythm type. When you play it, you only need to master the logic of the rhythm of this entire piece in order to overcome some places that are not suitable for the rhythm.

2.1 The First Movement - the Continuity and Unity of the Rhythm:

The first movement is shrouded in the rhythm of the continuous sixteenth note. The rhythm in the left hand of the A-segment accompaniment is more consistent. While playing, you have to pay attention to the balance between the notes, and to avoid the overlapped octaves getting too loud. In order to maintain a consistent tempo and a certain degree of softness during performance, you can take finger pulps to touch the piano in order to control the sound transmission and master the rhythm balance. The rhythm of the right-hand melody is dominated by the quarter note in coordination with the left hand. It is necessary to pay attention to the dotted rhythm in the middle of the phrases so that two hands can cooperate smoothly.

The left-hand part rhythm of section B is basically the same as that of section A; however, the right hand adds an eighth note on the original basis. In the early stage of the two-handed practice, it is necessary to practice slowly, and establish the sound impression of the combination of the two parts of the rhythm.

The starting part of the A1 segment is completely repeated. And the original rhythm point in the latter change is canceled, which becomes the passing phrase of the eighth note. Here, in practice, it is best to use the rhythm of the left hand part as the leading voice. The right hand joins after repeating it several times, then you can grasp the rhythm of this phrase.

2.2 The Second Movement - Three Staves Notation:

The second one uses a three-staves notation, and the rhythm of the left-hand accompaniment is still in consistent sixteenth note. The lyrical part of part A is in the lower staff, but the notation of

the grand staff does not increase the complexity. The performer only needs to pay attention to the combination of the first and second staff, and also pay attention to the fingering of the left-hand's large-span intervals. The right-hand part needs to pay attention to the correspondence the rhythm in the first and third staff. There is a simple rule to improve the efficiency of the two hands. The two parts are filled with the sixteenth note and the dotted rhythm of several bars, so the rhythm is consistent. By looking at the second staff with the same method, it will be easier to combine the first two staves together. The rhythm of left hand's lower voice of the section A b part is reduced to a single-line melody with the quarter note and the eighth note, which is easier to grasp after the rhythm is relaxed. The right-hand part is similar to the a part; on the other hand, the left-hand part is driven by the rhythm of the right-hand part. There is a strong sense of pulse on the first of each measure, and the rest of them are weak beats. The part a of the B section is basically the repetition of the A section, so the practice remains the same.

In the segment c, there is a new textural material that combines the development of the monophony and polyphony. There is a variety of rhythms with no rule to follow. When playing, you need to give up the rhythm of the fixed mode, and practice two hands separately, and establish an accurate sounding memory of the rhythm in each part.

2.3 The Third Movement - Keep the Section a in Mind:

The third movement is in rondo form in 2/4, with eighth notes per pulse. The overall rhythm pattern is not completely repeated. In fact, the development of the theme in the third movement is basically derived from the A segment. Most of the rhythms are thematic variants. While practicing, you only need to keep in mind the rhythmic pattern of the A segment, and you can improve on the practice by comparing the other segments of the recapitulative part with the effectiveness of the A segment.

3. The Melody and Texture in the Performance of Three Romances:

The melodic line of Three Romances is not long, and the development of the melody conforms to each other. The theme and variation is basically be adopted, as it is also the basic rule of the melody of the work, and chords applied to this piece are not too complicated nor tricky alignments on the texture. Some sections use thick chords to increase the tension and the use of polyphonic technique in the second movement also enriches the whole text. Overall, it is not too difficult to understand the piece from the perspective of melody and texture.

3.1 The First Movement - the Expression of the Question and Answer Sentence:

The melody line of the first A segment is longer, and the phrase is repeated at the returning point. The phrase with dotted rhythm is marked as a passing sentence, and then it is repeated. The melody is basically moving step by step, and the sense of syncopation caused by the connection across the bar lines needs attention. To avoid breaking fluency when playing, the right hand should always follow the rhythm of the left-hand part to maintain consistency.

The B segment makes an obvious change compared to the A segment. The first repeated segment has a transitional melody. The melodic trend starts from the descending stepwise motion and then moves up with a big leap, followed by another descending stepwise movement. A significant change is made after bar 33. The melody firstly starts with a downward leap and then moves up which comprises the question sentence, and then turns to the downward stepwise answer sentence. Thereafter, the melody is advanced by consistent eighth notes with descending step-by-step movement, which is the development of the previous response sentence. The latter sentence is the imitation of the A-segment theme, and the answers to the B-sentence questions are summarized. The melody line is long and full of sense of pulse. When playing, it should be regarded as a whole, showing the different meanings of the phrase, especially the difference between the interrogative sentence (light and comfortable) and the answer sentence (deep and full). In the A1 part, attention should be paid to the upward seventh leap that appears in the melodic line from measure 91.

3.2 The Second Movement - the Homophony and Polyphony:

The second part A is written with three staves notation, and the melody is hidden in the second staff, but the thickness of the texture is not increased. The overall alignment of the sound is clearly presented, and the melodic part is enhanced. This paragraph reflects the classical and rational side of Schumann's composition. The phrase is more square, but it is not necessary to play as square as Beethoven or Mozart's slow-motion movements. The clauses deal with the breathing and coherence between the sections. Part A b returns to the grand staff notation, and the melody is in the right-hand. Descending stepwise motion follows by upward third cross-jumping. The sense of lyrical line is strong and the interval is condensed. The thickness of the left-hand part of this section is enhanced, and the right-hand melody needs to be pushed by the left-handed bass line. However, since there is no dynamic marking in the bass clef, it is necessary to control the intensity evenly in the performance, and do not follow the treble clef part's melodic line to alternate the intensity.

In segment c of section B, homophony and polyphony are combined to form a new texture. The voice part of the polyphonic texture needs independence of two hands. The piano students should practice two hands separately. Musical terms should be noticed while playing in a polyphonic manner.

3.3 The Third Movement - the Practice of the Presto Part:

The third movement with rondo form is longer, and the melodic lines and textures are also extremely rich and thick, but the whole material is basically developed from the first thematic material.

The A-segment melody contains a large number of rests and ornaments, and the melody with pick-up is more clear in the alternation of two hands. Besides, the ornaments should be emphasized when playing, because it is integrated into the melody. This section needs to maintain the flexibility of the wrist and increase the elasticity of the sound by quickly pushing the fingertips.

The B-segment melody is a compression of the A-segment melodic material, which replaces the rest with a bar line to make it more smooth under the original frame, and presents a full three-voice or even four-voice texture. This section should be kept smooth, paying more attention to the continuity of the connection and short phrases between the lines, and as well pay special attention to fingering and slow practice while playing two hands together.

In the B1 segment, the development of melody is obvious, but the thematic materials all derived from the first two bars of A-segment's theme and variation. The motive is initiated by the first tone, followed by the melody with pick-up. The basic line is in the shape of wave. The left hand rest increases the sense of pulse, and the tempo of Presto makes the movement as a whole. While practicing, you should silently draw a small section, and pay attention to the relaxation of the arm and the quick attack of the fingers to present fluidity and singing. The motivation is repeated, and the octave from the left-hand part is developed, and the overall thickness is enhanced. At this time, it is necessary to pay attention to the continuous sound of the bass part. When the motivational variation is performed simultaneously with the inverted left-hand part and the right hand, accurate breathing of the right hand is taken as the standard, and the density of the two parts is reflected.

What should be noted in section C is a descending scale in the melodic line hidden in the high register, which is a shifting retrograde variation of the A-segment theme. Here, the texture is often added by melody, chords and intervals. In addition to paying attention to the melody, the chords and intervals are full. Pay attention to the strength of the right hand thumb and index finger during practice, and the way of attacking the keys should be solid.

4. The Use of Pedals and Stylistic Interpretation in the Performance of Three Romances:

One of the main styles of piano performance in the romantic period is the use of the pedals, although there are no pedal marking in the Three Romances, reasonable pedal use can greatly optimize the musical expression.

The first movement needs to follow the shape of the melodic part of the sentence in the pedal

operation, and takes care of the left hand's sixteenth notes. The pedal should be changed frequently. The bass part with the line across the bar lines should be changed each beat per time, and the rest of the measures can follow the melody flow pedal. There is no excessive delay in left hand part while practicing and listening. The second movement is more lyrical, and more suitable for the treatment of shallow pedals, especially in the polyphonic section towards the end of the movement where the performer needs to reflect the softness and coherence of the music. The third movement's structure is relatively large; therefore, the pedal method should be changed according to the characteristics of different sections, and the overall use is more restrained. The frequency of changing the pedal in the A segment is increased compared to the previous two movements; however, the sense of coherence is not strong. Therefore, the pedal should not be used frequently. It is only necessary to step on the pedal on the long notes across the bar lines in the bass part, or where the chords appear. There are many chords in the B and C sections. It is best to use the after-note pedal to make the sound soft and singing.

Op.28 is written while Schumann is going through the legal proceedings with Clara's father, Wieck. It is also in the transitional work of Schumann's compositional stage. Although there is no literary title in the works, the romances have given certain stylistic hints. There are the key changing, structural transformation, frequent appearance of the dynamic markings, the use of the secondary dominant chords among other compositional techniques throughout the entire work. Therefore, you should control the strength of your fingers when playing, and pay attention to finger retraction and concentration during the gradual change of strength. In the first movement of the work, the arm should be relaxed as much as possible to reflect the "poetic beauty"; the second movement should pay special attention to this point as well. The third one is longer and the emotions are changeable. When playing, you must grasp the overall style and play it like a children's playing scene. At the same time, the frequent interspersed themes need to be masters with different personalities, and perform with anthropomorphic treatment to express the child's movements and demeanor in different emotions. It is best to use your imagination to practice in the way that we talk above so that you can accurately interpret them in the style of the work and the mood of Schumann when he composed this piece.

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