

### WAYS OF COMBINING THE TRADITIONS OF CHINESE FOLK MUSIC AND EUROPEAN VIOLIN ART

The problem of integration of Chinese traditional and European professional music has become a topic for many art history studies in the last decade. Musicologists analyse the musical material and characterise the means of musical expression, which testify to the peculiarities of combining Western European and Chinese traditions in Chinese art. One of the most famous and original musical works in this respect is The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto. According to scholars Y. P. Medvedeva and Mu Quanzhi, this work determined "the ways of further development of the violin concerto genre in China" [1]. The scholars argue that "Eastern worldview and national musical material are combined in it with the traditions of European romanticism" [ibid]. In this regard, the purpose of this article is to examine the history of the creation of The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto and to analyse its musical material.

In examining the developmental characteristics of Chinese violin works, the violin concerto "Butterflies in Love" undoubtedly stands as a milestone. As an exemplary piece that integrates both Eastern and Western musical features, an in-depth analysis of its creative background and formal structure holds significant importance for understanding the nationalization process of Chinese violin music. Begin by exploring the origins of "Butterflies in Love", followed by a systematic analysis of its formal structure, aiming to reveal the artistic implications of this classic work and its crucial position in the history of Chinese violin development.

**The main part.** The Violin Concerto "Butterflies in Love" belongs to composers He Zhanhao and Chen Gang. The concerto is one of the most famous works of Chinese academic music. Written in 1959, the concerto is based on an ancient Chinese legend about two lovers, often compared to the story of Romeo and Juliet. The legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai is set in the Western Jin Dynasty. "Butterflies in Love" develops upon the foundation of the Chinese Zhi mode, unfolding through sonata form and national modal development principles. The performance incorporates Chinese playing techniques, making significant contributions to the development of Chinese music.

The first section, the exposition, encompasses several crucial elements including the introduction, main section, connecting section, secondary section, and closing section. The introduction immediately demonstrates the composer's ingenious creation of spatial and atmospheric sensibility: the timpani and double bass establish a profound pianissimo, steady and substantial like the earth itself; subsequently, the harp gently plucks five ascending notes from the middle to high register, colorfully drawing the audience's attention from earth to sky. The flute responds in the high register with bird-like, nimble tones, instantly sketching a picture of bright spring sunshine with birdsong and fragrant flowers.

The oboe's entry acts as a gentle narrator, slowly unveiling the prologue to the legendary love story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. This scenically evocative musical design isn't merely a simple arrangement of instrumental timbres, but rather establishes a light, expansive, and bright aesthetic foundation through progressively ascending pitches and the interplay of various orchestral instruments, allowing listeners to enter this poetic, dreamlike spring environment within an extremely short time. Notably, the main theme played by the oboe is derived from the interlude music of the Yue Opera "Butterflies in Love", through which the composers naturally bridge opera and symphony, cleverly reproducing the "Yue Opera genes" of the main melody within Western orchestration.

Following the introduction comes the formal presentation of the main section's theme. This melody is crucial to the entire concerto, serving not only as the core melodic material that runs throughout but also as the classic "Butterflies in Love" melody repeatedly performed in practice. When presented in the violin solo part, the orchestration employs light yet dynamic combinations like harp and clarinet for accompaniment; the violin, with its undulating high and low registers and highly lyrical timbre, renders the love theme of "Butterflies in Love" with tender, lingering emotion.

As we move towards the end of the main section, through the ornamental melodies and the relative ensemble playing of the orchestra, the music suggests the achievement of emotional resonance and fusion between the two characters. However, the connecting section that follows serves as a "bridge" in form, continuing the emotions of the main section and moving into the second. The composers conceived a free cadenza in measure 50, which is usually freely performed by the solo

violin while the orchestra is temporarily resting. The rhythm here is no longer confined to strict rhythms, but seeks emotional release and technical demonstration.

Next comes the presentation of the secondary theme, whose musical style contrasts sharply with the main section. In terms of plot, this corresponds to the beautiful period of "studying together", with tempo and mood accordingly shifting to light and bright. The secondary section combines variation form with rondo elements and a three-part structure, using *allegro* (approximately) to depict the protagonist's daily interactions at the academy and their budding feelings with vibrancy and joy.

The third part, from measures 208 to 243, returns to recapitulate the phrases from the first part, reinforcing thematic unity and completeness. Notably, in the latter half of the secondary section, the composers boldly incorporate expressions from Chinese traditional instruments: for instance, the string section combined with harp sweeps imitates pipa plucking, the violin's rapid *pizzicato* or finger slides imitate the guzheng, and even the woodwind section's *staccato* imitates string playing, all evoking scenes of students reciting and playing in a Jiangnan water town, naturally highlighting the innocence of young scholars studying together and their inner stirrings of emotion.

After the *allegro* ends, the music returns to a lyrical, subtle *adagio*, forming the closing section of the exposition. The plot naturally develops to Zhu Yingtai completing her studies and needing to leave the academy, with Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai facing separation, hearts full of reluctance yet unable to speak. Here, the composers cleverly use silence and string tremolo, developing the melody in an ethereal manner, vividly conveying the emotions of wanting to speak yet holding back, of lingering reluctance to part. The violin in this section often employs lyrical *legato* and moderate vibrato, making the timbre particularly soft and plaintive, while the cello provides accompaniment with broad, sustained low notes, enhancing the melancholy and somber mood.

The second section is the development, representing the most intense and dramatic portion of the entire concerto. Here, the composers primarily interpret the dramatic downturn in the characters' fate and the intense emotional collision through "resistance to marriage" and "meeting at the tower." First, the "resistance to marriage" section typically begins with a somber *poco largo* introduction, established by the sudden strike of the timpani and repeated accompaniment of the gong and drums, establishing a dark, heavy foundation.

As the plot further develops, the music transitions from *poco largo* to *allegro*, with the sudden acceleration reflecting the mounting pressure of forced marriage and Zhu Yingtai's psychological progression from panic to determined resistance. The full orchestra continuously intensifies strong dynamic contrasts and rhythmic conflicts, portraying "feudal oppression" as ruthless while highlighting Yingtai's unwavering determination and brave resistance for love. After intense brass unison, a suddenly brighter melody appears, seemingly recalling the romance of the "eighteen miles of farewell," creating a brief expectation of "perhaps there might be a turning point". However, this beautiful moment is short-lived; with the return of the drums, the dark atmosphere resurges, truly indicating the irreversible tragic fate.

Following "resistance to marriage", the music transitions to "meeting at the tower". In the plot, Liang Shanbo now learns that Zhu Yingtai is a woman and is being forced to marry into the Ma family. They meet at the tower, confiding in each other, yet unable to change the arranged marriage. This section slows in tempo, becoming plaintive: the violin solo portrays Zhu Yingtai's melancholy and helplessness against fate, while the cello, like Liang Shanbo's voice, is broad and deep, yet full of powerless passion. The two string melodies sometimes merge, sometimes separate, like two people sharing their grief, with tender affection mixed with endless sorrow. Here, the composers again juxtapose the timbres of cello and violin, symbolizing the different personalities of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, and also symbolizing their mutual understanding yet near helplessness against feudal constraints. In performance, the violin needs to focus on combining *legato* and vibrato, infusing each note with sighs of grief; the cello, through heavy lower positions and occasional position-changing glissandi, creates Liang Shanbo's image of deep sorrow, making the entire melody seem to weep.

When the meeting in the tower ends, the story moves towards an increasingly tragic denouement: Zhu Yingtai is ultimately unable to escape her father's orders and is forced to marry into the Ma family, and Liang Shanbo dies. To create a poignant, urgent and tragic atmosphere, the composers use the sudden appearance of wooden bells and the imitation of traditional gong and drum patterns through the timbres of *sheng* and *suon*. The composers skilfully combine the Peking Opera techniques of "reverse rhythm" and "fast playing, slow singing" with fast string contrasts. Several passages using glissandi strings and accented

notes particularly realistically mimic the sobbing and wailing of the human voice, creating the feeling of being transported to an opera stage overwhelmed with grief.

Finally, under extreme emotional tension, the orchestra forms an intensely tense and dense allegro, with gongs, drums, and strings playing together, the violin solo crying out like shattering in the high register, symbolizing the heart-stopping moment of Zhu Yingtai throwing herself into the grave. The music's dynamics are extreme here, presenting a huge test of both technical skill and emotional expression for the performers, while audiences are often deeply moved by this powerful sonic impact, their heartstrings strongly resonating. It is precisely this shocking moment that indicates the heartlessness of the human world and the cruelty of feudal constraints reaching their extreme.

The third section is a reprise, returning to the thematic melodies of the introduction and main section, but with very different implications. Zhu Yingtai follows Liang Shanbo. Their love story ends in tragedy, but in another world they transform into colourful butterflies flying from wing to wing, leaving a romantic finale. The music here recreates the peaceful, serene atmosphere of the introduction, the flute and harp seeming to lead people back to a springtime paradise with birdsong and the fragrance of flowers, only this time the musical idea carries an extra layer of dreamy haze, no longer representing the earthly knowledge of the two people, but rather a more transcendent spirit after their transformation into butterflies and departure from the mortal world.

Due to its significance to the entire concerto, conductors or performers often interpret this recapitulation more lyrically, more warmly, and with greater sanctity. Finally, the full orchestra's grand ensemble pushes the love theme toward a magnificent yet hopeful ultimate climax, with ascending string melodies seeming to herald vitality and freedom, bidding farewell to the previous oppression and pain. After the sound gradually diminishes, the music leaves an evocative resonance, and the image of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai's transformation into butterflies is etched into every listener's heart.

**Conclusion.** The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto can be viewed macrostructurally as a sonata form structure blending Chinese and Western elements, while fully embodying many elements of Chinese traditional music's Zhi mode and Yue Opera and folk instrumental music. From the introduction through the main section, secondary section, and closing section, the composers skillfully use orchestral texture layers and timbral distribution to successfully create the interrelationship between characters' psychological activities and environmental atmosphere. In the development section, they present an almost epic depiction of the severity of feudal forces and individual resistance through tremendous dramatic conflict. As for the reprise, through the return and transformation of the themes, the entire tragedy of the work achieves a release of tension and there is calm in the mythical realm of the butterfly's transformation.

Centered on the "operatic" playing techniques of the solo violin, the work integrates various distinctively Chinese methods including vibrato, glissando, portamento, and détaché bowing, making one feel as if listening to Chinese string music or operatic singing, yet without losing the grand scale of Western symphony. It combines traditional pentatonic scales with Western harmonic language, and also integrates Yue Opera singing with cadenzas and variation form, allowing people to feel the pulse of traditional opera in the familiar violin sound, and further witness a brilliant exploration of Chinese music's internationalization in the dialogue between national music and Western symphony. One could say that "Butterflies in Love" is not only a concerto of high artistic standard but, more importantly, represents the significance of Chinese-Western cultural exchange and the creative reshaping of operatic musical material. It is precisely for these reasons that this work has remained enduringly popular for decades, widely performed on countless stages domestically and internationally, continuously emanating its unique charm.

Through this in-depth analysis of the creative background and formal structure of "Butterflies in Love", we can clearly see this work's important value in the development of Chinese violin music. It not only successfully integrates Chinese traditional musical elements with Western symphonic forms but also blazes a new path for later Chinese violin works, combining national characteristics with modern musical language. This innovative exploration lays a solid foundation for the integration of performance techniques and expressive forms to be discussed in the following text.

#### List of cited sources:

1. Medvedeva, Y.P. Between East and West: The Scriptive Concert By He Zhanghao And Chen Gang "Loved Babbles" ("Liang Zhu") / Y.P. Medvedeva, Quanzhi Mu // Actual Problems of Higher Music Education. – 2018. – №2 (48).