

ADAPTATION AND INNOVATION OF CHINESE POP SINGERS IN MUSICAL THEATRE PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Chinese musical theater market has developed rapidly, and musicals have gradually become an important part of domestic stage art. More and more popular singers have also begun to enter the stage of musicals. However, due to significant differences in vocal techniques, breath control, range switching, resonance application, dramatic expression, and stage performance between popular singing and musical theater singing, many popular singers face challenges in adapting to musical theater singing. This study analyzes the current development status of Chinese musicals and popular music, explores the main difficulties encountered by popular singers in performing musicals, and summarizes the key issues for popular singers to adapt to musicals through research methods such as literature reading, interviews, and classroom observations, combined with their own practical experience, and proposes targeted solutions. The research results indicate that through resonance adjustment, vocal transition training, and dramatic expression training, popular singers can effectively enhance their singing ability on musical theater stages., Propose corresponding solutions, this study aims to provide reference for Chinese pop singers to better adapt to musical theater singing, and provide teaching references for musical education institutions and vocal teachers.

Keywords: Pop Singers, Musical

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, musicals have played an increasingly important role in the performance market in China, and are a relatively active component of the commercial performance market, with new development and opportunities. According to the "2024 Annual Report on the Chinese Musical Theatre Market" jointly released by the China Performance Industry Association, Beijing Tianqiao Art Center, and Lighthouse Professional Edition, from January to October 2024, there were 13600 musical performances in China, with 5.8213 million viewers and a box office of 1.396 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 26.7% compared to 2023. Based on box office data from 12000 musicals in 121 cities across the country, the report conducted an in-depth analysis of the market situation and predicted that by 2024, the number of musicals performed in China will reach 17000, with an expected audience of over 7 million and a box office of over 1.6 billion yuan. Based on the above data analysis and Ju Hong (2017). The research on the dissemination of musicals in China (doctoral thesis, Southeast University) shows that currently, the performance market and development of musicals in China are basically divided into three categories: foreign original production teams, localization of foreign music scripts, and Chinese original musicals. The foreign original production team's repertoire can be divided geographically into "Butterfly Dreams," "Elizabeth," and "Les Mis é rables" by the German original production team, which focus on world classics as the narrative mainline; "Notre Dame Cathedral," "Rock Mozart," and "Rock Red and Black," which emphasize the tension of modern dance expression by the French original production team; "Cats," "Phantom of the Opera," which emphasize the combination of drama and song and dance and focus on contemporary social issues by the British original

production team; and "Chicago," "" Mamma Mia, "which emphasize popular and life oriented by the American original production team. In terms of style, there are rock, jazz, classical, etc., which are basically determined by the musical style of the play and the singer's singing style. From the perspective of themes, Chinese musicals can be basically divided into four categories: local original works, domestic literary and film IP adaptations, localized adaptations of foreign musical works, and adaptations of foreign literary and film IP. This indicates that domestic creative teams are increasingly adept at using musicals as a comprehensive stage art form, which can enable Chinese musicals to carry a rich and diverse range of themes.

Talents in the field of musical theater are insufficient in both teaching and performance, and some musicals require support from other majors, such as pop singing. Jilin (2019). Joint interactive teaching between popular music and performance majors in universities - A brief analysis of the creative rehearsal of the original musical "A Midsummer Night's Dream" According to Drama Home (03), with the development of domestic drama education, musical theater performance has become the core of drama creation. Higher art colleges are gradually offering musical theater majors and drawing on various forms of expression in Western musicals. In terms of talent cultivation, it is no longer only required that actors have dialogue and performance abilities, but more emphasis is placed on improving their comprehensive qualities such as singing, dancing, and facial expressions. The original musical rehearsal of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" mentioned in the study, through the joint interactive teaching of popular music and performance majors, enables students to learn from each other, complement each other's strengths and weaknesses, and deeply study the script in interdisciplinary cooperation, providing useful exploration for the cultivation of comprehensive musical talents, and has been highly recognized by school leaders and industry experts. Therefore, it can also be concluded that students majoring in popular music are suitable actors for performing musicals and can successfully perform musicals.

More and more researchers are beginning to study the relationship between musical theater and popular singing, emphasizing the close connection between musical singing techniques and popular singing, and pointing out the mutual influence between the two in the development of music. Wang Songhan (2018) proposed that the relationship between musical theater singing techniques and popular singing is worthy of in-depth research in the music industry. Xi Wang (2019) believes that the two have similar origins due to their common style characteristics. Kou Dan (2021) pointed out that popular singers often draw on musical theater singing techniques to enrich their singing skills and enhance their artistic expression. Overall, the singing style of musical theater not only has technical reference value for popular singing, but also enhances the expressiveness and artistic quality of singing. The two are intertwined and inseparable in practical applications.

Pop music is a type of music that emerged in the 20th century with the development of mass media. It is characterized by strong melody, concise structure, and intuitive emotions, aiming to quickly attract listeners and generate widespread resonance. Musical Song is a core component of Musical Theater, whose function is to promote plot development, deepen character emotions, and shape the theatrical atmosphere. Musical songs combine the expressive power of drama and music, possessing both musicality and serving to express the plot. The main features of musicals include narrative and dramatic elements.

The similarity between popular songs and musical songs lies in their emotional expression in music, both emphasizing emotional expression and requiring singers to convey a sense of authenticity in emotions; Both have high requirements for melody lines and singing pitch accuracy in terms of the importance of melody. In terms of diverse music styles, both popular songs and musical songs show a trend of integrating multiple styles.

Pop songs and musical songs also have certain differences in their creative methods, singing styles, and musical structures. In terms of creation, the melody creation of popular songs is relatively simple, usually using repeated chords and melodic lines, which is easy for singers to sing and also convenient for listeners to learn and spread; However, the songwriting of musicals is more complex, often containing long repetitive phrases, and its essence is drama. The creation of songs needs to be arranged reasonably according to the needs of the plot and characters, so techniques similar to the musical motive variation in symphonies are used. In terms of singing style, popular songs have diverse singing styles, but they are

usually easy to understand, have short structures, sincere emotions, are easy to spread, and have strong timeliness; The singing style of musical songs originates from bel canto singing, which requires high vocal quality and singing ability. Musical theater contains elements of opera, with large vocal segments in the plot that require performers to possess certain performance skills. These vocal segments often drive the development of the plot and depict the personalities of the characters. In terms of musical structure, popular songs usually have shorter structures, simple chord and melody lines, and are easy to remember and learn. Musical songs have complex structures and intricate melodic lines, presenting significant challenges and artistic value.

I have both a bachelor's and master's degree in pop singing. Currently, I am teaching pop singing majors at Xinghai Conservatory of Music, where students perform musicals. While studying pop singing, I have been conducting research on musical singing and performance. I have publicly performed musicals multiple times and have also guided students in rehearsing special musical performances. I have served as the chief director for four musicals. Through the problems encountered in singing and performing musicals, as well as the problems discovered in teaching students, it is summarized that popular singers encounter three main difficulties when singing musicals: firstly, the differences in singing awareness among popular singers when singing musicals. Pop singers tend to present themselves in the form of solo and duet performances, with a greater emphasis on personalized expression and free improvisation. Musical theater is an art form of teamwork, which requires more rigorous performance skills and teamwork to drive the presentation of singing voice through performance and character shaping. The roles in musicals are diverse, and singers need to possess various performance styles and emotional expressions. So they need to learn and adapt to the performance requirements of musicals, including understanding the script, interacting with other actors, and changing the psychological emotions of the characters, in order to adapt to the roles they perform. This puts higher demands on their understanding of singing consciousness.

The second is about the application of singing techniques by popular singers when performing musicals. Pop singing and musical singing have different training backgrounds, vocal techniques, performance styles, and musical elements. Pop singing emphasizes a natural and casual style, pursuing personalized and distinctive sound. Typically, singers can rely on sound equipment such as microphones to enhance sound effects, without high requirements for vocal fold closure and sound position support. The singing technique of musical theater requires singing in an open theater, using a headset for recording, and demanding high vocal position support and closed vocal cords from the performer to ensure clarity and volume in the theater environment. At the same time, musicals include various singing styles, including the Legit singing style based on classical and bel canto singing skills, which emphasizes the contrast and transformation of sound, and the Belt singing style that is suitable for performing intense emotions and focuses on high pitched performance. Popular singing techniques and musical singing techniques can be mutually borrowed and used to help singers perform better.

The third aspect is about the current development status of the musical industry in China. At present, the domestic musical industry is greatly influenced by fan culture, with popular stars dominating and opportunities for actors with academic backgrounds relatively limited. This may lead to more challenges for students majoring in pop singing when entering the musical theater industry.

Through the process of optimizing the learning and teaching of song performance, and continuous communication with multiple relevant teachers, and drawing on the singing and teaching experience of multiple people, the methods to solve the difficulties faced by popular singers in singing musicals mainly include the following aspects: firstly, musical theater teachers need to have a clearer teaching cognition in the construction of musical singing methods. Firstly, the singing techniques of musicals include various types such as Legit, Belt, etc. Mastering these singing techniques is the key to getting started with musicals. Teachers engaged in musical theater teaching should follow more professional teachers to learn and study relevant singing techniques before imparting them to themselves, because learning singing techniques requires professional guidance, and incorrect singing techniques can form bad habits. Secondly, due to the fact that the repertoire of foreign works currently used in music theater teaching in universities is mostly in English, and the requirement for overseas students applying for music theater majors to use English singing for their portfolios is also high, it is necessary to solve a precise problem

of English pronunciation and spelling. We need to seek professional English tutors for pronunciation guidance and improve the accuracy of pronunciation through extensive imitation exercises. Finally, students with different vocal cord structures and personalities should choose works that are more suitable for their vocal cord structures and reflect the authenticity of their personality expression for learning and singing, in order to showcase their personal characteristics and highlight their strengths. For example, students with dance skills can choose some works that sing and dance at the same time to present. The second is to cultivate the comprehensive performance awareness of musical theater actors when performing musicals. Musical theater is not only about vocal performance, but also includes dance and performance. Vocal performance should focus on the performance effect, and vocal music and performance should be synchronized. In terms of dance, one should start practicing from the basics, persist in practicing every day, and gradually improve the flexibility and coordination of the body. At the same time, it is important to stimulate the desire to sing psychologically, believing that one can overcome various fears that cannot be overcome in singing, and adapt to the stage environment through practice. Stay calm and enjoy the joy brought by the stage. The third aspect is that cultivating musical theater actors requires regular and planned daily exercises and simulated stage practice. Persist in practicing correctly at a fixed time every day, including vocal training, track practice, and stage simulation. This article focuses on the singing aspect of musicals and will not delve into the details of dance, performance, and text related to musicals.

OBJECTIVE

21. Analyze the problems encountered by Chinese pop music singers when performing musicals.
22. Exploring the adaptability and optimization strategies of Chinese pop singers in musical theater performances.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts qualitative data analysis methods, combined with literature review, questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation, to comprehensively explore the problems encountered by popular singers in musical performance. Firstly, the literature review method is adopted to systematically sort out relevant literature on popular singing and musical theater singing in China, analyze the differences in singing techniques, training systems, and teaching models between the two, summarize the main problems faced by Chinese popular singers in cross-border musical theater singing, and compare the international musical theater singing training system to find suitable adaptation strategies for Chinese popular singers; Secondly, using the questionnaire survey method, a questionnaire survey was designed for popular singing majors to understand their technical challenges and adaptation situations when learning musical theater singing. The questionnaire data was analyzed to summarize the main difficulties that students face in breath management, range conversion, dramatic expression, stage adaptation, and other aspects; Then, through semi-structured interviews, two groups of people were interviewed: one was musical theater actors with a background in popular singing, to gain a deeper understanding of their adaptation process and difficulties encountered in musical theater singing; the other was to interview musical theater teaching teachers to explore their teaching difficulties and coping strategies in guiding popular singers to learn musical theater singing techniques; Finally, through classroom observation, observe the performance of popular singing students in learning musical theater singing, record their adaptive changes in singing skills, emotional expression, stage performance, etc., and combine teacher guidance and student feedback to analyze effective training methods and existing problems in the teaching process.

The research subjects of this study include music learners (students) majoring in popular singing, popular singing background actors engaged in musical performances, and popular singing teachers teaching musical performances, ensuring the diversity of data sources and the universality of research conclusions.

Sub-Section 1. Interview Form

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with three musical actors with popular singing backgrounds and three musical teaching teachers specializing in popular singing, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the core problems, adaptation strategies, and teaching practices they encountered during the musical singing process. The first part interviews musical theater actors with a background in popular singing, focusing on their personal challenges and coping methods when singing musicals, including breath support, vocal range conversion, dramatic sound shaping, stage performance adaptability, and analyzing their improvement methods in professional practice. The second part interviews musical theater teachers with a background in popular singing to gain a deeper understanding of their teaching difficulties in guiding popular singers to learn musical theater singing, as well as how they use teaching strategies to help students overcome technical bottlenecks and improve their stage performance abilities. Through interviews at these two levels, this paper aims to explore how popular singers can adapt more efficiently to musical theater performances, and summarize musical theater teaching methods applicable to students with a background in popular singing.

Sub-Section 2. Questionnaire

This study designed a musical performance ability survey questionnaire for popular singing majors, aiming to comprehensively understand the specific problems they face in the process of musical performance. The questionnaire will invite fifty popular singing students aged 18-24 with a certain foundation in singing and musical theater learning experience to fill out, covering multiple dimensions such as singing techniques, breath control, vocal range conversion, voice expression, character shaping, and stage adaptation. The aim is to summarize the main challenges faced by this group in musical theater singing and the key factors that affect their singing performance through data analysis.

Sub-Section 3. Review literature

The researchers read and organized relevant literature on the relationship between popular singing and musical theater singing to analyze the main difficulties and influencing factors of popular singers in musical theater singing. By analyzing relevant literature on teaching models and techniques for popular singing and musical theater singing both domestically and internationally, it was found that the main difficulties faced by popular song performers in musical theater singing include breath management, range conversion, resonance adjustment, dramatic expression, and stage adaptation. These difficulties mainly stem from the differences in vocal style, singing style, and performance requirements between popular singing and musical singing, and are influenced by the current teaching system.

RESULTS

Research has found that popular singers mainly face the following five challenges when adapting to singing musicals. Firstly, there is a lack of breath support. Popular singing usually relies on microphones, while musical singing requires stronger breath support to complete microphone free singing. Many popular singers have unstable breath when singing long sentences, which affects their vocal performance; The second challenge is the difficulty of vocal register transition. Pop singers have relatively free vocal range transitions, while musicals require smooth transitions between chest voice, mixed voice, and head voice. Many pop singers appear unstable in the high or low range; The third issue is resonance and projection. Pop singers are accustomed to using discursive vocalizations, but musicals require enhanced resonance and expanded sound projection. Pop singers who lack resonance adjustment tend to have weak voices and lack penetration on stage. The fourth aspect is in terms of articulation and articulation. Musical theater requires clearer articulation of lyrics, while popular singing often adopts a casual approach. Musical theater emphasizes clear voice rhythm and dramatic articulation, and popular singers face adaptation difficulties in expressing their lines. The fifth is the integration of acting and singing. Pop singers tend to highlight their personal style, while musicals require a high degree of integration between singing, character development, and theatrical expression. Many popular singers find it difficult to balance both vocal and physical performance during stage performances. From Table 1.

Table 1
The problems that pop singers face when singing musicals

No.	vocal technique	problems	Embody
1	Breath Control	Insufficient breath support	unstable breath during long sentence singing, weak voice, and easy to break or sink the final note.
2	Vocal Register Transition	The conversion of chest sounds, mixed sounds, and head sounds is not smooth,	the high notes are tense or the low notes are unstable, which can easily cause breakage or sound distortion in the sound changing area.
3	Resonance Adjustment	Unable to accurately adjust the resonance position	resulting in hollow or stiff sound, lack of tonal hierarchy, and insufficient stage penetration.
4	Diction & Articulation	The rhythm of the voice is not clear, and the lines are not clear enough	resulting in vague lines during singing, which affects the expression of the plot.
5	Singing & Acting Integration	Unable to balance singing and performance at the same time	resulting in a disconnect between voice and emotional expression, lacking dramatic tension

Research has found that adopting diversified vocal training methods can effectively improve the adaptability of popular singers in musicals. Linklater Voice Training, Speech Level Singing (SLS), and K-POP Vocal Training each have their own advantages in enhancing the ability of popular singing majors to perform musicals. Linklater voice training method helps students liberate their voice and enhance their performance perception; The SLS sound training method focuses on vocal techniques to enhance sound quality and expressiveness; The Korean style K-POP training method emphasizes the cultivation of comprehensive literacy and enhances the overall level of stage performance. Three training methods provide effective and comprehensive training from three dimensions: natural sound liberation, sound zone stability, and stage explosiveness, helping pop singers better master musical performance. From Table 2.

Table 2
The role of Linklater voice training method, SLS voice training method, and Korean K-POP training method in singing musicals

No.	Main Function	Key Capability for Musical Theater
1.Linklater Voice Training	Releases natural voice, enhances emotional expression, improves speech clarity	Strengthens textual storytelling and enhances the authenticity of emotional expression
2.SLS (Speech Level Singing) Training	Balances vocal registers, enhances mixed voice, improves high-note stability	Facilitates smooth transitions between vocal registers and effectively expands vocal range
3.K-POP Vocal Training	Enhances vocal power, strengthens rhythmic sense, improves stage presence	Stabilizes the integration of singing, dancing, and acting for comprehensive stage performance

Emotional authenticity (Linklater)+Technical stability (SLS)+Stage performance (K-POP)=Comprehensive musical performance ability. So the problems that pop singers often face when singing musicals, such as lack of drama, unstable high notes, and single emotional expression, can be improved through these three targeted training methods. At the same time, modern musicals integrate various styles such as pop, rock, and R&B, and the teaching system that combines these three singing styles can also allow singers to flexibly adapt to different types of musical works. Therefore, combining Linklater's voice training method, SLS voice training method, and Korean K-POP training method can help students majoring in pop singing improve their skills, strengthen their emotions, and enhance their

expressiveness, thus more comprehensively mastering musical singing and presenting more professional, moving, and dynamic performances on stage. I will conduct more in-depth research on these three singing techniques in my future studies and research.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study systematically explores the adaptability and innovation of Chinese pop singers in musical theater performances. By analyzing the current development status of Chinese pop music and musicals, it is found that although Chinese pop singers have certain advantages in the field of musicals, such as good pop music singing skills, strong personal styles, and market influence, they still face many challenges in adapting to musicals. These challenges mainly manifest in aspects such as breath management, sound zone conversion, dramatic expression, resonance adjustment, and stage adaptability.

In response to these issues, this study combines relevant theories and practical experience from both international and domestic sources to propose a series of targeted training programs, including strengthening breath training, optimizing vocal zone conversion techniques, enhancing dramatic singing expression, improving resonance control ability in musical theater singing, and enhancing singers' comprehensive performance ability through diverse stage practices. Research has shown that through scientific and systematic training, popular singers can gradually overcome technical difficulties, achieve a smooth transition from popular singing to musical singing, and form a more personalized singing style on the musical stage.

For future prospects, the first step is to deepen interdisciplinary integration. Future research should further promote the interdisciplinary integration of popular singing and musical performance, explore more scientific training methods to help popular singers adapt to musical performance needs more quickly and efficiently; Secondly, it is necessary to establish a personalized training system. In the future, layered teaching research should be carried out among different types of popular singers, and personalized training plans should be developed based on individual vocal characteristics, music styles, and singing needs to make training more precise and targeted; Finally, we need to strengthen practical experience and international exchanges. In the future, we can help Chinese pop singers expand their international horizons, learn about the development trends of musical performances worldwide, and enhance their competitiveness on the international musical stage through domestic and international musical performance practices, professional workshops, international master classes, and other forms.

In summary, the adaptation and innovation of Chinese pop singers in musical theater singing is not only a breakthrough in traditional musical theater singing concepts, but also an important path to promote the further development of the Chinese musical theater market. Future research and practice should focus on scientific training methods, personalized teaching models, and international development strategies to promote the deep integration of popular singing and musical arts, and to drive innovative development in the Chinese musical industry.

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