

A Research Study of the Application of Digital Music in Taiwanese Films

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The Asian Conference on Media & Mass Communication 2014
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The rapid progress of today's digital technology has made a great impact on the music creation in the film industry. Today, musicians create their musical pieces using modern-day software and hardware to replace the traditional ways of writing music notation and performing by the orchestra or musical bands. It is more and more popular and has become a trend in the film industry to use digitally created music in the movies. Taiwanese musicians Giong Lin and Summer Lay have long been focused on the creating and producing movie soundtracks in many Taiwanese films. Their creation and production feature is the use of digital music technology in the movie soundtracks. This article will discuss two musicians working with Taiwanese film directors in using today's digital music technology to present the special meanings of Taiwan's film culture and the correlation between film texts. Finally, this article will explore the current situation of digital music in Taiwan film soundtrack and discuss its future development and vision.

Keywords: Digital Music, Taiwan New Movie, Rhythmic, Dramatic, Lyricism, Giong Lin, Summer Lay

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The International Academic Forum
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Introduction

Due to the rapid development of the digital information related industry in recent years, Digital Music has become an indispensable element in movie soundtrack. The flourish development of computer technology has made all kinds of musical creation, production, and sound processing technique easier and more convenient. The early day digital music was not widely popular due to slow internet speed, user interface and limited amount of available songs or musical pieces. The electronic synthesized music began to rise during 1980s. Musicians tried to use electronic synthesizer to create and arrange their musical work and eventually used that technique in the creation of movie soundtrack. Thanks to the quantum leap of computer technology during 1990s, the digital music became popular, especially in the film industry. The digital technology was widely applied in sound processing and soundtrack production. The film music first appeared around 1930s when movies began to have sound or some simple forms of music. Since then, composers have been constantly searching for ideas of creating new form of music; from traditional element or creating new or combining two together. Their purpose is to lead the audience into the story of the movie through songs, sounds, or even few simple musical notes in the soundtrack. The importance of the film music is to help the film itself. The spirit is to enhance of story of the film by emphasizing the power of the plot through music. Regardless of feeling of sadness or happiness; the rhythm of musical notes allows movie scene or story to be more appealing (or convincing) to the audience.

Digital Music

The term of Digital Music usually refer to the use of electronic synthesizer, sound effect devices, interface, and computer musical software and hardware to produce electronic sound. There is wide range of application of the digital music such as film soundtrack, advertisement music, or pop songs. Development of digital music can be traced back to 1950s when composers used simple analog electronic device such as a tape recorder to pre-record the surrounding sound of great nature as the material of their music creation, or used electrical equipment such as oscillator to produce pure electronic sound for their musical work. In 1980s, with increasingly sophisticated electronic technology, music creation gradually moved from analog environment to the digital world. (曾毓忠:2014) Nowadays, the digital music, generally means the music is created using tool such as digital synthesizer; even though without any analogy or musical instrument. (吳君薇: 2014)

Taiwan New Movie

The rise of New Taiwan Movie was the turning point of the changing of Taiwan film music. Led by *“Madam Yu-Chin”* and *“Daughter of the Nile”*, both directed by Hung-Yi Chang, the film music is no longer just music, it has become a “theme music” that is direct related to the story of the movie. After that, more and more films had music or songs created just for the films themselves such as *“Dust In the Wind”* and *“The Puppet Master”* by Ming-Chang Chen. Gerald Shih’s *“The Heroic Pioneers”* was created with Chinese epic orchestra music genre, and Jim Shum mixed Chinese genre into a Taiwanese folk song *“missing”* in the movie *“Farewell China.”* Giong Lin and Summery Lay were once considered as the leading pioneers of new model of digital music creation in Taiwan music industry.(藍

祖蔚:2002) Both Lin and Lay have long been careered and awarded in creating and producing movie soundtrack in many Taiwanese films. Giong Lin's "*Goodbye, South, Goodbye*", "*Millennium Mambo*", "*Do Over*", and "*A Touch of Sin*" won Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Festival's best original film song and best original film score. His "*Yang Yang*" won the 11th Taipei Film Festival's best musical award for the feature film, and "*Deep in the Clouds*" won the 13th Shanghai International Film Festival writer Music Awards. Summery Lay's "*Taipei Exchanges*" won 2010 Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Festival's best original film song.

The diversity of today's music genre, music composers are able to select different musical patterns and use them in the film soundtrack production. This diversity also gives today's film music a whole new different atmosphere. Taiwan's films soundtrack seldom used electronic music element in the past. In general, it was mostly the type of chamber music using instruments such as piano, violin, flute, cello, etc. The music creation was more of classical style or orchestra type of music. Another type film soundtrack represented more of unique and local Taiwanese characteristic.

Taiwan's film music had a big change during 1980s when Taiwan's pop music began to change its trend, for example the rise of Disco music and electronic synthesized music. This emerging trend offered an additional choice for the film directors who have always been in favor of using classical or local music as the film soundtrack (林譽如、黃怡玫:2014). However, digitally created soundtrack was still considered minority during 1980s. It wasn't until 1990s, the booming of the digital soundtrack taking its center stage in Taiwan's film industry.

Music Language

In "Le langage ciném atographique", Marcel Martin mentioned three characteristics of music in the film, the Rhythmic, the Dramatic, and the Lyricism. Professor Hsiao-Lay Hang in Beijing Film Academy professor Hsiao-Lay Hang further classified these characteristics in his book "Film Director Tutorial". This article will discuss in more details of these three characteristics using several Taiwanese films as examples.

The Rhythmic

"*Goodbye, South, Goodbye*" was Giong Lin's first time involving in film soundtrack production. Directed by well-known Taiwanese film director Hsiao-Hsien Hou, "*Goodbye, South, Goodbye*" was filmed with an unique and local Taiwanese grass-root style. "Self-destruction" is the opening song of this movie. Under the famous long shot techniques by director Hou, the Pingsi train shuttling through the mountain cave, along with the heavy rhythm of the opening song, the camera lens reflecting characters walking in the farm village, countryside, and mountain; Giong Lin used the rhythmic features of electronic synthesizer and electrical drums mixing with the sound of train and moto cycle in the film to create a "sound echoing" effect to emphasize the style of rhythm. Giong Lin's opening song in "*Goodbye, South, Goodbye*" with strong grass-root character opened the conversation between image and music. Giong Line as the film soundtrack producer, the theme song was created not only with his electronic tone style, but also the collection of Summer Lay's drama

as well as the LTK Commune's rough rock. This mixing rhythm style was a unique and somewhat adventure musical work at that time.

The "*Millennium Mambo*" was Giong Lin's second film working with director Hsiao-Hsien Hou. This was the first time Giong Lin attempt to create the soundtrack using Mambo genre that was associated with the title of the film. The movie began with the leading actress walking on the sky bridge in the dark night; monologue-style electronic music plus voice-over from the leading actress. It was the memory (with music) that narrated her past. By taking into account the rhythm of the music of Mambo, Giong Lin, in the production of music, fused his own music style with Mambo into special a rhythm that would meet director's interpretation about film. The movie theme and soundtrack of "*Millennium Mambo*" were very similar to Taiwan's 1970s disco genre. Some of background music was created live by the DJ's mixer. The electronic music style interpreted the young men and women's lost and wandered emotion; the strong and dynamic rhythm exhibited the young and frivolous personality traits. Lin once mentioned that one of theme songs "A Pure Person" was a well match to the scene because the song was created with the elements of electronic music and dance music; it felt like a four-four beat note; or just like leading actress, Vicky's youth but with a feeling of tradition as well. (黃婷:2001)

The Dramatic

In the movie "*Exit*", the actress released her repressed emotions through Tango steps. In the world of dance music, Tango music has the inherent advantage. It appeared quite early in the Europe and when people fighting for the turf or women, dance (Tango, in particular) was often used to show the relationship between powers. Summer Lay's Tango presents a sense of flirting like a warm welcome, yet sometimes close to the edge of violence. His Tango music has a strong tension, like a serious drama story. Taiwanese musician and song writer Whitney Chang believes Summer Lay has strong ability to control "voice". He can piece together a complete musical image with the "voice" he created and allows the melody to be filled with unique mood and imagination. (瓦瓦:2014)

Giong Lin chose a different approach for his soundtrack style in the movie "*Do Over*". Giong Lin used a low profile style of music to reflect humanity's loneliness. The dialogue of the image, music and sound effect mixed with electronic synthesized sound presenting an illusory scene. In this movie, the elegant and light melodic music beautify the physical conflicts among actors. It was in a way a dramatic yet smooth and easy to follow the story. In "*Yang Yang*", director filmed many actors' facial features, expressions, and body close-up. These close-up shots allowed audience to directly feel the powerful protagonist complex emotional changes. Giong Lin's music in "*Yang Yang*" utilized simple but precise instrument, along with digital music's virtual instrument effects to present an intense and dramatic style of music.

Giong Lin has unique style and mastery of the use of a variety of digital sound and rhythm of music. He likes to use electronic music to produce unique sound waves to bring out different forms of creativity. He believes that the sound waves from the digital music creation can expand and reach a new level of musical style, and can explore the unknown possibilities of the future digital music world. (吳君薇 2013)

The Lyricism

Giong Lin began his cooperation in film or soundtrack production with director Hsiao-Hsien Hou in 1993's *The Puppet Master* where he played the young age puppet master Tien-Lu Lee. He also played the roles in the films like *Good Men, Good Women* and *Goodbye, South, Goodbye*. He believes that his job is to convey the feeling that director wants. Once he achieves such basis, he will then further communicate with director about the ideas that he see (or feel) through a musician's perspective. The goal is to create a "chemical reaction" between music and image to enhance the "storytelling" of the film; it's like the bold texts in an article or the lyrics of a song. (吳君薇 2013)

In *Millennium Mambo*, the opening theme song "A Pure Person", a similar to the electronic dance music style, was a rare combination of Taiwanese singing and dance music elements. The soundtrack of this film originated from 1970s Taiwan disco music genre; some of background music was in fact a mixer created live by the DJs. *Millennium Mambo* was filmed mostly in the dimly lit or nosy Pub. Giong Lin used electronic rock style music to interpret younger generation's confused emotion; voices mingled with sound of music, representing the atmosphere of young people's addiction to the self-liberation inside the metropolitan.

Giong Lin's soundtrack work carries a message of lyricism with a quality that expresses his deep feelings or emotions in a work of art (i.e., films). Some of his soundtrack work are artistically beautiful and have profound influence to the younger generation of song writers.

Conclusion

Today, the form of digital music is very diverse and freedom. It incorporates the movie image to develop a broader perspective of different music. Taiwanese musicians Giong Lin and Summery Lay both have long term commitment and devoted their efforts in experimenting digital music creation; in which, their work utilize current frequently used digital music technology such as digital sound effect, virtual instrument and synthesizer. Their musical products not only successfully combining the movie and music but also presenting Taiwan film music's new vision.

Giong Lin is mastery in using digital music's unique virtual instrument and synthesized sound and music style to create unique level and atmosphere of the film script. He utilizes the changing of the sound from the musical instrument to emphasize or create characters psychological fineness. Using musical passages connection, he can easily establish the continuity of the scenes. He elaborates the melodies as background music to fill the void of dialogue, so that the film has the feeling, when it ends, it ends perfectly.

In addition to his special style of using digital instrument to create his musical work, Summer Lay will also add, in due course, element of traditional instruments in his work. This is different from Giong Lin's style. Studies have shown that even though their approaches are somewhat different in many ways, their influences are obvious and profound. They utilize current digital technology to produce some of most noticeable piece of work that represents Taiwan film culture's special meaning.

Younger generation of song writers or composers follow their foot step and create new style of digital music for the film soundtrack. The possible future work beyond this research study can focus on the different type of music creation in Taiwan music or film industry.

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