

# Applied Research on Counterpoint Creation of Musical Theatre Dance--Analytical Research Based on "Chicago"

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**Abstract:** "Counterpoint" refers to a polyphonic creation method. This article defines the concept of counterpoint creation in musical theatre dance by analyzing the research on counterpoint in different art fields. The purpose is to demonstrate the counterpoint creation relationship between the choreography and the theme, characters and plot in the musical "Chicago", so as to explore the way of counterpoint creation. Through the analysis of different versions of "Chicago", the conclusion is that the counterpoint creation of musical theatre dance is a flexible creation method, which requires the creator to perform counterpoint creation from the perspective of thinking and the audience's aesthetic logic. Counterpoint creation can make the theme Vivid, three-dimensional characters, rationalized plots, and maximized commercial value.

**Keywords:** Counterpoint creation, Chicago, Musical Choreography

"Counterpoint" refers to a polyphonic creation method that combines two or more independent melodies into a single harmonic structure, and each melody maintains its own line and horizontal melodic characteristics. "Counterpoint" is a manifestation of thinking more, building different elements together to better serve the theme and provide new possibilities for music creation. With the help of the concept of "counterpoint", this paper studies the value of dance elements in the musical "Chicago" to the development of the theme, characters and plot, and explores an effective way to choreograph the musical.

## 1. Definition of Counterpoint

The musician Jia Daqun once put forward the concept of "Structural Counterpoint", which means that "the structural elements such as pitch, rhythm, harmony, timbre and sound in music will form a certain element as the center and establish a relationship with other elements, and produce a holistic structure"<sup>[1]</sup>. Elements form a structure through logical relationships<sup>[2]</sup>. Xu Mengdong and Hu Baoshuai's "Counterpoint of Temporality" Research, Emphasizing the Vertical Combination of Counterpoint<sup>[3]</sup>. Yang Jing studies the relationship between audiovisual and narrative structure in Tan Dun's "Nu Shu" through counterpoint analysis<sup>[4]</sup>.

There is a "Counterpoint structure" in literary research, which means that in a novel, one point of view turns into another completely different point of view, but they echo each other, complement each other, and share the same theme<sup>[5]</sup>. The researchers analyzed the principle of counterpoint structure proposed by Bakhtin in "Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics", emphasizing the "one-to-one" echo and opposite relationship, and applied "the law of pitch change in music" to in literature, "singing the same topic with different voices and different keys" extends "Counterpoint" to polyphony, incongruity and unity.

In educational research, there is "Counterpoint Research Method", which refers to the coordination between the research media and the psychological cognitive characteristics and the attributes of the knowledge system of learners under a specific teaching mode, so as to improve the quality and efficiency of the corresponding knowledge and information received by learners with the support of certain media<sup>[6]</sup>.

In film studies, there is "Audiovisual Counterpoint", which is a kind of montage, which refers to the harmony of sound and picture<sup>[7]</sup>. Some scholars use the method of "Counterpoint" analysis to study the performance category of family melodrama<sup>[8]</sup>.

Maohui's research clarifies that the formation and interaction of various artistic symbols are realized in the form of surface counterpoint and latent level counterpoint, and counterpoint is the principle therein. The symbolic counterpoint of dance can be as small as a single dance, as large as the internal structure of the dance drama, the composition of dance components, etc.<sup>[9]</sup>Through the above research, it can be found that "Counterpoint" research can cross different art categories.

Contrapuntal creation in the category of musical theater refers to a creative way that effectively combines the stage languages such as music, aria, dialogue, dance, modeling, and stage design, and complement each other, so as to express the theme, shape the characters and promote the development of the plot. The counterpoint of musical choreography is based on the expression of the work, using musical thinking and combining with the audience's aesthetic logic, and reasonably using different dance languages and choreography techniques.

Vision is often more intuitive than hearing. Action language can cross language boundaries and can be both lyrical and narrative, visual interpretation of lines, and externalized expression of subtext. Mayerhold believed that: "Movement is the most powerful means of expression in the creation of dramatic performance, and the audience can see the actor's ideological motivation from his various movements, gestures and facial expressions." Counterpoint creation is a process of stage language design. It is the dominant creation when narrating or presenting pictures through dance, and it is auxiliary creation in dialogue or aria.

Musical theatre is one of the forms of popular entertainment. The expression is easy to understand. In the presentation of background, modeling, music and action, accurate positioning and counterpoint design are very important. This paper studies the application value of counterpoint creation by analyzing different versions of Chicago, such as the movie version, the 2011 Broadway version, the 2016 Harbor Theater version and the Hungarian version.

## **2. Application Analysis of Counterpoint**

"Chicago" has won Tony Awards, Grammys and Oscars, can be called the representative of musical and musical films. Satire and critique reality in a light and humorous way, dance language takes into account the functions of narrative, lyrical and scene effects, and plays a vital role in shaping the theme, portraying characters and promoting the development of the plot. The success of "Chicago" reflects the importance of commercial operations in the creation, and the number of performances and box office reflects the degree of audience recognition. The success of "Chicago" reflects the importance of commercial operation in the creation, and the number of performances and box office reflects the degree of audience recognition. Therefore, using musical theatre thinking, based on the audience's aesthetic point of view, use various stage languages (music, dance, dialogue, choreography, modeling, etc.) to carry out reasonable counterpoint creation.

### ***2.1 Counterpoint Creation Expression Theme***

"Chicago" is based on real events that happened in Chicago in 1926. It debuted on the screen in 1928 as a silent film. Afterwards, a theatrical version and a Broadway musical were created in 1942 and 1975, respectively. In 1996, the musical was rehearsed again, and in 2002 it was adapted into a musical. It has been translated into many languages and performed in many countries for decades, and the theme and background of the works remain unchanged. From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, known as the "Jazz Age", in Fitzgerald's words, "It was an age of wonder, an age of art, an age of lavish spending, and an age of irony. " The musical counterpoint of "Chicago" is jazz, and the extravagant hedonic counterpoint is stage presentation and use of props. Under the characteristics of the era of ridicule and play, reality and illusion are expressed by combining virtual and real.

The counterpoint of the dance should be in line with the audience's cognition of the times and match with the music. "Chicago" focuses on jazz dance, and integrates the vocabulary of tango, ballet and modern dance on the basis of combining the characteristics of the characters. The creative method is mainly based on the choreography of modern dance, and the creation strives to present the "real" history to the audience through counterpoint creation.

The opening "All That Jazz" is the main tone of the work, under the counterpoint effect of environment, music and dance, it depicts the characteristics of hedonism. Both musicals and movies superimpose the two heroines, and through the primary and secondary switching of dance scheduling, the stories of the two women are presented to the audience. The sexiness and freedom of jazz dance are

in line with the characteristics of the times. The Chicago nightclub where Velma performed is the epitome of the society at that time, and her lyrics express the demands of people at that time. However, Rosie expresses the pursuit of individual desires through behavior. Groups and individuals expand due to desires, and then use violence to solve them due to the destruction of desires. The thematic characteristics of the "desire" era penetrate deep into the hearts of the audience.

From the perspective of choreography, dance counterpoint creation is reflected in three aspects, namely, female characteristics, primary and secondary changes on the stage, and metaphors. First of all, the female characteristics, the dance movement design fully integrates the female characteristics with the unique shoulder and crotch movements of jazz dance. Seemingly reserved is actually a hypocritical attitude; it seems sexy and beautiful, but in fact, there are opportunistic and greedy human desires hidden under the beautiful appearance. Secondly, the primary and secondary changes in stage scheduling. When Wilma appeared in "All That Jazz", the dancers passed by alternately in front of her, focusing the audience's vision on her, emphasizing her dominance on the stage through lifting movements. In "We Both Reached For The Gun", Rosie and Billy are at the front of the stage, and Rosie is controlled by Billy, highlighting Billy's dominance in the event. The switch between primary and secondary, which not only emphasizes the performance of the protagonist but also enhances the visual effect, enables the audience to form a stronger three-dimensional cognition combined with the "scene" effect while understanding the theme expression. Once again, it is a metaphor. The creator makes full use of the characteristics of body language that can only be understood but not expressed in words. Billy's "manipulation" of reporters and judge is vividly portrayed through counterpoint dance performances. In "Cell Block Tango", the creator uses the tango's upper body to keep a distance, the lower body's steps and the dance posture of the head looking left and right to express the inner waves of the characters, and the counterpoint of tap dancing to metaphorize Billy's heart.

Dance shows the theme through counterpoint creation, which requires the creator to be familiar with the dance movements and cultural connotations used. Even if they are both jazz dances, the themes expressed in different movement dynamics, rhythms and performance spaces are also different.

## ***2.2 Counterpoint Creation Portrays Characters***

"Chicago" revolves around the murders of two women, involving a variety of "Jazz Age" characters. There are five representative characters in the work, namely nightclub dancer Velma, Rosie who has a star dream, lawyer Billy, prison guard Morton and Rosie's husband Amos. Velma's dancer status makes the dance part important, and the stage presence in "All That Jazz" is effortless and confident, and the stage is her life, showing that she wants to be in control of her own life. The long-term nightclub life has made her accustomed to extravagance and falsehood, thus reflecting her indifferent personality. The creator designed a lot of neat movements for her, showing her decisiveness in her character, and a lot of lifting movements show that she knows how to take advantage of the situation and seize the opportunity. In the film version of "Cell Block Tango", a short three-person dance was designed for Velma, with strong and direct movements, expressing anger at betrayal, and therefore more indifference to life.

Rosie's character changes with the development of the plot. In order to perform on stage, she betrayed herself; in order to make Amos take the blame, she deceived him; in order to gain freedom, she betrayed herself. After she thought she was famous, she kicked Billy away. When she saw the female prisoner being executed, she begged Billy to help her. Her undulating psychological changes were accompanied by greed and unscrupulous means. In the movie version of "Roxie", through "frivolous" dance steps and a lot of small movements, it depicts the inner restlessness, and the use of multiple mirrors enriches Roxie's greed for desire visually. The second half of the men's dance with the coordination of the more highlighted her vanity nature. The creators of the Hungarian version used wire to hoist Rosie to form a visual contrast with her husband, which enhanced Rosie's sense of oppression against her honest husband. In the Broadway version, visual contrast was also used to emphasize the sense of inequality. Through multi-angle characterization, the three-dimensional Rosie is displayed in front of the audience.

Billy's dress is bright and his expression is exaggerated. When he comes out, he shows a kind of luxury. Whether it is the "luxury car" composed of female dancers or the feather fan in his hand, he portrays his greedy side. In "We Both Reached For The Gun" and "Razzie Dazzie", because he is familiar with the "rules of the game" of the big era, he played with the media, public opinion and law in the palm of his hand, confusing right and wrong. In this big "show" in Chicago, he is a skilled "actor", he's the "director" behind the scenes, he leads people's thinking, catering to the public curiosity, in his

heart there is no right and wrong, only interests.

Morton emphasizes "reciprocity". In the film version, she is holding a feather fan and the hand movements hidden in it, depicting the difference between her outward expression and her heart. The Hungarian version highlights her strong indifference through the leather coat and whip, and shows her use of female prisoners with the cooperation of the group dance; the attentive massage of the group dancers reflects her control of her own rights and expresses that she knows how to use the rules very well.

Many characters in musicals create three-dimensional characters in the arias and dialogues. The creators will fully consider the gender, age and personality of the characters, so they design body movements for them to visualize the characters in front of the audience.

The counterpoint creation of characterization is mainly manifested in three aspects. The first aspect is to design body movements that conform to the characteristics of the characters. Through the refinement of life-like movements, the characters are more three-dimensional. The second aspect is the action designed to assist in the expression of the content, which has the effect of interpretation or amplification. The third aspect is to set off the characters through group dance, contrast or amplify the personality characteristics of the characters.

### ***2.3 Counterpoint Creation Advances the Story***

In classical ballet, the dance that is stable in structure and can promote the development of the plot is called plot dance, which is usually completed by the leading actor and the group dance. Dance often gives the impression that people are "more lyrical but clumsy at narration". However, in *Chicago*, the creator uses the intuitive effect of dance to coordinate the body movements with the dialogue (lyrics), which not only crosses the language barrier but also enhances the audience's understanding of the plot development. At the same time, the body language conveys subtle effects that can only be understood but not expressed in words.

From the perspective of dance function, the counterpoint of the dance sections in *"Chicago"* lies in the visual function of compatibility with narrative, lyricism and scene. For example, in *"Cell Block Tango"*, six women narrate their experiences through dance, expressing their dissatisfaction with male infidelity and greed. The group dance not only shows a strong visual impact on the screen, but also expresses the "scream" of dissatisfaction with the "status quo" through the strength of the movements. In the film version and the Hungarian version, the dance of "female prisoners" and male dancers promotes the integrity of the plot expression, while "weakening" the violent murder scenes, implying that these women are also victims.

The movie version and the Hungarian version of *"We Both Reached For The Gun"* Billy manipulates Rosie and the reporter, and the confusion between right and wrong is vividly expressed. The dancing posture of Rosie puppet and Billy's manipulation form a counterpoint. Although Billy didn't speak, every word Rossi said came from Billy's will. Using the puppets to show that the reporters are at the mercy of Billy, what he gives is exactly what the reporters and the society need, and the manipulated public opinion is the "thread" in his hands, playing with every "ignorant" person.

Every action and stage arrangement designed by the creator or to highlight the characters, or to reflect the drawbacks at that time, the "freedom" shown by improvisation is actually arranged and manipulated, so everyone in the *Chicago* show is controlled. The seemingly scattered shapes on the stage are actually the bumpy upward road of the characters in the play, with sarcasm in the humor, feeling the hypocrisy of the "Jazz Age".

## **3. Conclusion**

Through the above research, this paper analyzes the counterpoint in different art fields, and defines the concept of counterpoint creation in musical theatre dance. Combining the theme display, character depiction and plot promotion in different versions of *"Chicago"*, it is demonstrated that there is a counterpoint creation method in musical theatre dance. Counterpoint creation is a flexible creation method, which requires creators to carry out counterpoint creation from the perspective of thinking and audience aesthetic logic, and to effectively integrate through commercial operation to meet the audience's "pleasant" needs. Through counterpoint creation, the theme can be sharpened, the characters are three-dimensional, the plot is rationalized, and the commercial value can be maximized.

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