

# Performance skills and artistic conception of Chinese Zither music "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"

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**Abstract:** *"Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night" is a Chinese Zither with piano accompaniment written by famous Chinese composer Wang Jianmin according to the famous poem "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night" written by Tang Dynasty poet Zhang Ji. The characteristic tunes of Kunqu Opera, Silk bamboo, Jiangsu folk songs and other music are integrated into the music, which makes people who hear it feel as if they are in an ink painting with Jiangnan customs. The music mainly highlights the ancient literati's worries about home and country, their thoughts of staying away from home, and their worries about living in troubled times without a home. When creating this modern Chinese Zither music, Mr. Wang Jianmin used different playing techniques to perfectly combine the traditional Chinese Zither musical instrument with the original poem, and the original poet's mood was vividly displayed. In this paper, through the analysis of the creation background and performance of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night", the beauty of artistic conception combining Zheng with poetry is explored.*

**Keywords:** Wang Jianmin, "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night", The beauty of artistic conception, Playing skills

## 1. Introduction

Chinese Zither is a splendid treasure among many Chinese national musical instruments and plays an important role in the inheritance of national music. Today, the development and inheritance of Chinese Zither music can not be separated from composers and performers. Since the 20th century, many new music works have appeared. These works have greatly reflected the expressive force of Chinese Zither, while composers have seen the plasticity of Chinese Zither in music works. In the creative process of modern Zheng music, it has become the creative idea of modern composers to absorb the styles and essences of various genres, which are the combination of East and West, tradition and modernity, nation and the world. These characteristics show the sincere heart and open mind of Chinese Zither players and composers, who explored the art of Chinese Zither music.

Since 1980s, composers such as Xu Zhenmin and Li Yinghai have created symphonies and vocal music with this theme. In 2001, Wang Jianmin created the Chinese Zither concerto with the ancient poem Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night in Tang Dynasty as the background—"Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night". The music absorbed a lot of musical elements of Chinese traditional music, including Kunqu Opera, Silk bamboo in Jiangnan, etc., which made the tenderness of Jiangnan water town perfectly interpreted by Mr. Wang Jianmin.

Classical lonely Jiangnan moonlit scene and Chinese traditional literati's personality spirit blend in this piece of music, and the creative thinking of modern music is also well displayed in this piece of music. On the basis of fine extraction of traditional music materials, the composer innovated the musical vocabulary and successfully expressed the image of the original poem with freehand brushwork, which can be called the classic work of Chinese Zither music. In the past ten years, with the wide spread of this Chinese Zither concerto in the professional performance field, its influence has gradually expanded. However, because the concerto was created by drawing lessons from Chinese classical culture tradition and adopting modern music creation techniques and piano concerto, Chinese Zither's playing techniques are also extremely innovative, such as changing points and opposing arpeggios with both hands. This will make it more difficult to play songs. Especially in the Chinese Zither competition in recent years, some contestants only showed their playing skills, but the core elements of this song, such as melody, timbre processing, speed, dynamic changes, and even the presentation of style and charm, have been ignored. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to study and discuss the performance skills and musical implication of this piece of music.

## 2. The creative background and characteristics of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"

### 2.1 Creation background

Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night was written by Zhang Ji, a poet of Tang Dynasty in China. When facing the night scene in late autumn in Jiangnan, the poet expressed his inner sadness, loneliness, loneliness and anxiety with precise and delicate words. In this poem, the author summarizes the scenes such as the moonlit crows crying alone, frosty nights, maple fishing fires along the river, and lonely boat tourists. The scenes are integrated, the images are bright, the pictures are rich, and the content is easy to understand, which has a certain influence on the later modern poetry creation and has become a classic handed down from generation to generation in Tang Dynasty.

In 2001, composer Wang Jianmin created the Chinese Zither song Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night, which is another comprehensive art form produced by the composer combining music and other arts in literature. It is a typical "title music", which has a far-reaching impact on the development of Chinese Zither performance.

The material of this piece of music comes from Silk bamboo and Kunqu Opera in Jiangnan. Among them, Kunqu Opera is one of the oldest operas in China, also known as Kunshan tune, Kunqu Opera and Kun tune. As early as the end of Yuan Dynasty, it was produced in Kunshan, Suzhou, with gorgeous and beautiful singing, delicate performance and elegant reading; The bamboo of Jiangnan Silk is new and lyrical, and its playing style is beautiful. Mr. Wang Jianmin made full use of the timbre characteristics of Chinese Zither to show some Chinese traditional folk music features such as Kunqu Opera and Jiangnan Silk bamboo Music to the fullest.

It can be seen from the score that the piano and Chinese Zither are played together, but different from the general Chinese Zither concerto, Chinese Zither plays the piano as an accompaniment, but uses the form of "dialogue between Chinese Zither and piano" to tell the scenery depicted by the original poet and the sadness and loneliness in his heart. The music uses the structure of the western trilogy with introduction and ending, besides, it also uses the unique national mode of creation to create a lonely atmosphere in late autumn night, which combines the characteristics of traditional Chinese Zither music that pays attention to artistic conception, and integrates the spiritual artistic conception in the poem into the work. It can be described as a combination of Chinese and Western, and it is a rare perfect work with rich cultural background and beautiful sound.

### 2.2 Musical structure

This song adopts the musical elements of Kunqu Opera, a traditional Chinese opera, with artificial mode and string setting. Artificial mode, which is different from traditional mode, is a new mode designed by composers according to the needs of composing. It was originally a composing technique created by modern western composer Mei Xian. Artificial modes are not inherent in nature, but created by people, and contain a wide range of contents. When creating modern Chinese Zither music, the composer will design the musical train according to the style and needs of music, thus forming a string sequence different from the traditional pentatonic scale, which is an important way and symbol of modern Chinese Zither music creation.

*Spectrum example 1: The fixed string of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"*



Chinese Zither music "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night" is a western traditional trilogy, and the last paragraph is the reappearance of the theme. The music style is quiet and sad, and Allegro is short and fast. From the perspective of creative technique, it adopts the modern expression form of "classical songs and dances in the East". The structure is as follows:

	Introduction	A	Connecting section	B	Connecting section	A1
Section:	1—2	3—35	36—37	38—82	83—93	94—128
Mode:	C2	C2—C6	C6	C6—F6—C6	C6—F2	G2—C2

### 3. Playing skills and handling of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"

#### 3.1 Performance and processing of the introductory part

There are few notes in the introduction, but the artistic conception conveyed to people is far-reaching and memorable. The composer adds a lot of "blank space" in this paragraph to render the silence of the environment, which makes people daydream. The initial four chords rendered the darkness of the night, and then the appearance of overtones showed people the silent late autumn night in Jiangnan water town expressed in the poem: the deep autumn night was shrouded by moonlight, and the boat moored on the shore was shrouded under the frost of the sky, rendering a bleak meaning, and everything seemed to be natural. The sorrow of the guests is set off bit by bit with the overtones of Chinese Zither. The quiet environment makes the atmosphere of late autumn more rich and desolate, and the candlelight of fishing boats swaying with the autumn wind, which aggravates the poet's sadness.

This part takes Kunqu Opera as music material, which is composed of two parallel phrases, and four chords are also played with particular attention. The first harmonic is dealt with weakly, and the bass of the left hand plays with the little finger belly to make a rich sound effect. The second harmonic needs to be different from the previous harmonic, and be dealt with strongly to form a sharp contrast. And then a series of notes gradually from slow to fast, from weak to strong, so that melancholy slowly emerged in my mind. The composer adopted the skill of combining reality with reality, and the combination of overtones and real sounds showed a quiet but somewhat sad night in the south of the Yangtze River to the audience. The tremolo of the piano voice set off this atmosphere to the extreme, giving the audience more room to imagine.

*Spectrum example 2: Introduction to "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"*

The musical score is presented in two systems. The top system is for the Zheng (Chinese Zither), and the bottom system is for the Piano. Both systems are in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The piece is marked 'Rubato' and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Zheng part starts with a series of chords and a melodic line that includes various ornaments and a final flourish. The Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and a tremolo effect in the right hand.

#### 3.2 Playing skills and handling of adagio

Before entering adagio, there are four tones in the piano voice, which are used to imitate the distant bells of Hanshan Temple. The left hand of the Chinese Zither theme is arranged with continuous tones, like the sound of wooden fish in Hanshan Temple. The bells are accompanied by the sound of wooden fish, striking the poet's lonely heart one after another, giving people a feeling of being there. Then, with the entry of the left hand scraping, the poet's mood was pushed to a climax, which made the sad atmosphere in the music more intense. Then a series of arpeggios in the left hand were more like monologues in the poet's heart, which were very exciting. This paragraph shows indifferent sadness as a whole, so the playing strength should not be too great, and the arms and wrists should be relaxed at the same time. With the rising of melody, the timbre should be bright, the melody should be compact, and the undulating and faint state should be highlighted on the basis of soft timbre, smooth rhythm and lightness.

According to my own performance experience, the author thinks that although there is not much technical difficulty in this paragraph, the depth of emotion is difficult to grasp. Seven-tone tone mode is used in the passage, and two partials, fa and si, are added. The sorrow of Seven-tone Elegance is just in line with the connotation expressed in this passage. Pay attention to the flow of breath, tone color processing, intensity and so on when playing. This passage unreservedly describes the feelings of sadness and tossing and turning.

*Spectrum example 3: Sections 7-10 of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"*
**3.3 Playing skills and handling of light Allegro**

This paragraph is a bE mode with four regular sentences and eight sections. Theme b adopts the traditional Chinese composing technique in melody — "Fish bites tail", compared with the previous period, the music at this time is more like a mirror. With the flow of melody, the poet's thoughts float in Chang 'an City, and there is a lively and happy atmosphere everywhere. Looking back at my present situation, I can't help but have mixed feelings.

The performance of theme c not only tests the player's finger explosive power, but also tests the proficiency of quick fingering and rotation. The composer uses Chinese Zither to play up and down octaves to add tension and passion to the melody. Pointing is a proper noun in Chinese Zither's playing skills, which refers to the skill of playing with both hands alternately and quickly, and is often used to describe intense atmosphere. In this part, there are strict requirements on the angle and speed of finger touching strings, which should not only highlight the theme, but also ensure the fluency of melody and the granularity and stability of notes. The rich texture of piano accompaniment echoes the large-scale point play, showing the inner struggling emotion. After that, the songwriter changed the texture again, from weak to strong, the melody continued to rise, and the emotion accumulated and gushed out. With the stop of scraping and six-couplet, it seemed as if the dream suddenly started, and the poet's thoughts were pulled back to the real world.

*Spectrum example 4: Sections 38-44 of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"*
**3.4 Playing skills and treatment of reproduction part**

This passage is a reproduction of the theme of adagio, and its playing skills are basically the same as those of adagio. The only thing to pay attention to is to express emotions. The emotion of "only frowning, but going to my heart" is the main content of this paragraph, and it is also a poetic picture with the meaning of "sorrow". When the music returns to the main tone, the speed changes from the richness of the previous paragraph to indifference. No matter from tonality or speed, music will return to its original state, music continues, sadness continues, and the melody of the right hand moves from the midrange to the treble, which makes the music expression more delicate, the desolation in reality still lingers, and the bleak picture of autumn water is also presented in front of us.

*Spectrum example 5: Section 99-106 of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"*

At the end, the Chinese Zither echoes the piano. The Chinese Zither voice uses a series of overtones, just like the distant bells of Hanshan Temple, hitting the hearts of travelers again and again; it is also like the faint ripples of the flowing river, depicting the traveler leaving by boat and drifting away until he is silent.

In this overtone performance, attention should be paid to scientifically grasping the intensity and correctly handling the timbre, so as to better show the scene where the poet who is full of melancholy leaves slowly. This simple and solemn Chinese Zither music reproduces a poem and painting of Chinese literati for thousands of years, which enables modern people to have a dialogue with the ancients through time and space today.

*Spectrum example 6: Sections 123-125 of "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"*

Generally speaking, the player's understanding of a work should be based on two aspects: on the one hand, it is rational to understand the cultural background of the work on the basis of the musical composition structure and basic framework, and then decide the timbre, intensity and speed of playing; On the other hand, it is emotional. Only by understanding and feeling the cultural connotation and creative materials of the repertoire, breathing and injecting emotion into the performance process, can the music really have vitality. Only on the premise of the integration of rational analysis and perceptual performance can the music played be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people.

#### 4. "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night"—The beauty of artistic conception in the combination of Chinese Zither and poetry

##### 4.1 Tang poetry and Chinese Zither

The Tang Dynasty is a period of rapid development of Chinese civilization in the past 5,000 years. Throughout history, this period is at the peak of various cultures. Wei Zhuang, a poet of the Tang Dynasty, mentioned in his poem that "this is the only way to know the infinitely beautiful fairy cave in the sky, but also like this incomparably luxurious rich family on earth." This shows that the Tang Dynasty was rich, so it was called "the prosperous Tang Dynasty" by later generations. At the same time, the prosperity of

Tang Dynasty also promoted the development of poetry and music art, during which many outstanding literati emerged, and the creation of Tang Dynasty poetry reached an unprecedented peak, which had a long-standing influence on the history of world poetry.

The cultural depth of Tang poetry and the creative inspiration given to modern music creators are far beyond people's imagination. For example, composer Zhou Yuguo's "Yun Chang Su" originated from Li Bai's poem "Qingpingdiao" in Tang Dynasty. In addition, Chinese Zither's works "Changxiangsi" (Wang Jianmin's tune), "Qin sangqu" (Zhou yanjia's tune), "Changgexing" (Tommy's tune) and "Kongho Yin" (Zhuang Yao's tune) are all based on the emotional artistic conception in classical poetry. This shows that Tang poetry is a powerful background pillar of Chinese Zither's music creation. It can be said that there is music in poetry, and there is poetry in music, which are mutually tolerant, mutually promoting and developing together.

#### ***4.2 The beauty of artistic conception in the combination of Chinese Zither and poetry***

Zhang Ji is famous for writing the poem "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night". The creative background of this poem is quite controversial. Some people say that this poem was written by the author on the way to Gusu City after he failed the exam in Beijing. There is another rumor that this poem was created during the Anshi Rebellion, and the author drifted in the Jianghuai area for refuge, and was touched by the scenery in front of him, so he wrote this eternal swan song. The author overflowed his pen with the scenery he saw, the sound he heard and the sorrow in his heart. Dreaming back to the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Ji, a poet with a bumpy career, left this eternal swan song while passing through Hanshan Temple, which has been praised by people so far.

At moonset cry the crows, streaking the frosty sky,

Dimly lit fishing boats neath maples sadly lie.

Beyond the city wall , form Temple of Cold Hill,

Bells break the ship-borne roamers dream and midnight still.

Today, thousands of years later, Mr. Wang Jianmin felt the poet's longing for the journey, his sorrow for the country and his great love for troubled times. While conveying the theme of sadness and romance, he also noticed the connotation of Zhang Ji's "worrying about the country and the people, so he couldn't sleep at night". In order to accurately interpret the perfect fusion of Chinese Zither's song "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night" and poetry, the author analyzes it from four angles: "opening, development, transition, and conclusion".

“Opening”——When it comes to rendering the atmosphere, the notes are very sparse, but the artistic conception conveyed to people is far-reaching. This is also the "blank space" technique often used in traditional Chinese ink painting, which plays the role of opening the topic and rendering the atmosphere. The effect of several chords is very subtle, and there is a trace of sadness in indifferently. The overtone tone subtly expresses the sense of quietness in the poem and presents a misty night view of Jiangnan. The composer skillfully used several groups of chords and a series of weak and strong change points to give people a feeling of loneliness and coldness, paving the way for the "Development" paragraph;

“Development”——On the basis of the previous paragraph, consolidate the theme by changing and repeating. The main melody of Chinese Zither's right hand is accompanied by the syncopation of the left hand, which seems to be under the frost of the crow's crow in the moon. The fishing fires in fishing boats are looming and flickering, which makes the scenes of "the moon falls", "the crow crows" and "the frost sky" vivid. After that, scraping and shaking fingers in the right hand part make the hero's mood look even more sad. Just a few phrases seem that the poet's mood has experienced thousands of ups and downs. With the gradual fading of scraping and shaking fingers, the following phrases are accompanied by the glide in the bass area, which makes the emotion more full and full, and at the same time, depicts the hero's sad, lonely and depressed thoughts heartily. The scene depicted in this passage just cleverly corresponds to the poem "at moon set cry the crows, streaming the frosty sky, dimly lit fishing boats ninth maples sad lie.";

“Transition”——The rhythm of the development theme turns suddenly, and the speed and intensity are gradually improved and strengthened, which makes the music more impassioned. This paragraph is in sharp contrast with the previous two paragraphs, and the large span of point play adds a sense of magnificence. Through the transformation of time and space, the dialogue between Chinese Zither and piano makes all the backlog of emotions overflow, and the protagonist's emotions become more and more



high and excited. The Chinese Zither voice was submerged by the emergence of piano voice, which seemed to be the poet's sorrow and the warm and festive atmosphere of Chang 'an City in the past. Against the background, the poet's mood seemed more lonely and desolate;

“Conclusion”——Ending the whole piece of music "told even more in silence than they had told in sound", which is the perfect embodiment of the ending part, the composer has changed the tone again and sublimated the theme. The ancient temples echoed in the whole night sky of Fengqiao in the bells of Zen Buddhism, while the melancholy pervaded people's hearts penetrated the empty silence, which made people immersed in the emotion that they could not extricate themselves. This paragraph is the reappearance of the "Development" paragraph. The composer used implicit Chinese Zither music to match the extremely weak tremolo of the piano, aiming at echoing the poem "Beyond the City Wall, Form Temple of Cold Hill, Bells break the ship-born roars dream and midnight still. "The music ends in a series of overtones of Chinese Zither, just like the bells of Hanshan Temple and the sound of wooden fish, giving people room for imagination.

Chinese Zither's song "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night" has changed its tone many times, sublimated the theme, and used a variety of techniques to blend with poetry perfectly, just like a stroke of genius to create a beautiful and moving artistic mood. Mr. Wang Jianmin puts himself in the scene depicted in the poem, interprets the poet's bleak mood with Chinese Zither music, and embodies the beauty of artistic conception combining Chinese Zither with poetry, which is one of the most representative works of modern Chinese Zither music.

## 5. Summary

Traditional culture is endowed with distinctive value by modern Chinese Zither music, and at the same time, it is filled with the connotation of Chinese Zither music. Chinese Zither's song "Mooring by Maple Bridge At Night" is based on Tang poetry, absorbing the musical forms and tone characteristics of Kunqu Opera, Suzhou folk music, Jiangnan Silk bamboo, etc. The whole song presents elegant and poetic ink style, and the faint melancholy in poetry is perfectly interpreted.

In the composing technique, the C6 seven-tone elegant music mode and the E5-down mode, which are extremely rare in Chinese Zither music creation, are used to combine western composing techniques with traditional Chinese music elements. This technique originated from the concerto in Baroque period, and the traditional Chinese Zither music and western concerto body are skillfully combined. This work is not only rooted in the traditional music of the Chinese nation, but also absorbs the creative ideas and techniques of western music. There is the classical charm of Chinese traditional Chinese Zither music and the atmosphere of western music; It has magnificent symphony and title, and also has profound cultural heritage.

The elements of the East are organically intertwined with the creative skills of the West, which is a great breakthrough in modern Chinese Zither music. Because of its rich emotion and connotation, performers must combine the creative background of the music, the artistic implication of the song and the profound meaning of poetry, so as to truly interpret the aesthetic artistic conception of this Chinese Zither song. While improving our playing skills, we also need to understand the long history and culture, so that we can understand the essence of music itself and play the works more deeply.

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