

Analysis of the Conducting Techniques of Chinese Choral Conductor Zhang Xin

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were: Analysis of the Conducting Techniques of Chinese Choral Conductor Zhang Xin. It is qualitative research. Research Methodology : This study adopts a qualitative research method, taking Zhang Xin as a case study, combining literature analysis, video observation, and interviews to explore the uniqueness of his conducting skills. Literature analysis: Collect Zhang Xin's works and academic reviews. Video analysis: Select his representative work "The seventh movement of the Yellow River Cantata defends the Yellow River." for conducting, analyzing the techniques of gestures and handling of vocal parts. Interviews: Plan to interview Zhang Xin and 3 members of the Lingnan Women's Choir. The study found that: Zhang Xin is a renowned choral conductor and music educator in China, dedicated to the promotion and teaching of choral arts for a long time. His conducting style is known for its delicate emotional expression, rigorous technical handling, and profound musical attainments, contributing significantly to the progress and development of choral music in China. Conductor Zhang Xin believes that a conductor must first possess a solid theoretical foundation and excellent professional skills, while also having a spirit of dedication. He always emphasises: "There is no 'I' in the choir, only 'we'." A conductor who creates beautiful sound together with the choir members is a competent conductor.

Keywords: Conductor, conductor Zhang Xin, choir, choir members, Lingnan Women's Choir

Introduction

Research background.

Chorus is a multi-part form of musical performance that blends different timbres, pitches, and rhythms to create a rich and varied harmonic effect. In the middle school music class, students participate in the process of choir singing, you can feel it deeply by listening to and singing the melodies of different voices. The layering and three-dimensional sense of music broaden the aesthetic vision of music. Chorus is not only about singing the notes accurately, but also requires students to convey the deep emotions and artistic conceptions of the work through their voices. Especially in the hop in singing teaching, in order to show the emotion and momentum of choral works, students need to have strong artistic expression. (Mou Lingling, 2025). Professor Zhang Xin, a member of the Chinese Musicians Association, a director of the Choral Alliance of the China Music Association, the choir conductor of the Xinghai Conservatory of Music, the guest conductor of the Shanxi Song and Dance Theater, the guest conductor of the Hebei Song and Dance Theater, the permanent conductor of the Guangzhou Choir, and the permanent conductor of the Guangdong Radio Choir. In the past 20 years, he has been awarded the "Excellent Conductor Award" by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture. The famous conductor Professor Yang Hongnian commented that the choir he trained "has considerable strength and standard". Professor Jin Xiang, a well-known composer, conductor and music critic, commented that his conducting is "extremely infectious and has good conducting quality". Olaf Koch, a famous German conductor and professor at the Cologne Conservatory, commented that his conducting is "delicate and rational". The famous musician Fu Gengchen commented that his conducting is "passionate, atmospheric, and infectious".

As an important carrier of aesthetic education, choral art is known for its cooperation and participation, sexual and cohesion characteristics. In different historical periods, it has played a role in education, mobilization, and cohesion of heart and other important roles. With the development of the times, choral art needs to be constantly innovated to adapt to the aesthetic needs of modern society. Popularisation is not only able to expand the influence of the choral arts, but also to promote the diversification of its art forms. For example, in 2022, for the first time, the 19th Stars Awards included the mass chorus in the scope of the award, and it injected new momentum into the development of mass chorus art. In recent years, more and more choral works have been presented which show the characteristics of instrumentalisation, sound, symphony, and behaviour, and pay attention to the combination of sound, stage, shape, and table, which not only enhances the current force of choral art but also makes it closer to the aesthetic needs of modern audiences, bringing a richer audio-visual experience to the audience. (Qin Wenjing, 2025).

Pitch training in choirs plays a crucial role in choral rehearsals. The importance of pitch training can be summarised in three points: Firstly, pitch is the foundation of choral performance. Only when each choir member accurately controls their pitch can the choir achieve overall harmonic unity. Inaccurate pitch can lead to deviations in tone, disrupting the coordination between voice parts, affecting the overall sound quality, and undermining the aesthetic appeal of musical works. Secondly, pitch training helps enhance team cooperation and cohesion: as a collective musical activity, pitch training not only aids in the precise control of individual pitch but also promotes collaboration and teamwork among members. Through systematic group training, choir members can achieve a high level of coordination in pitch, rhythm, and expression, resulting in a unified and harmonious sound. Thus, training is not only a technical exercise but also a cultivation of team spirit and cooperation awareness, helping to build mutual trust and understanding among team members. Lastly, pitch training not only enables choir members to achieve accurate pitch control during performances but also heightens their sensitivity to pitch variations and rhythmic feel, thereby enhancing their overall musical literacy on a deeper level. Through systematic pitch training, members can better cultivate their musical perception abilities, thereby improving their understanding of the emotional expression and structural composition of musical works, offering a more precise and expressive interpretation in performances. In summary, good pitch training plays an important role in choir members' emotional expression and comprehension of the connotations within musical works. With precise pitch training, members are able to more profoundly understand and convey the emotions of musical pieces, making their performances more vivid and impactful. This unique musical style and vocal characteristic not only enhances the choir's expressiveness during performances but also helps it stand out in intense artistic competition, attracting more audience attention and appreciation. Pitch training is significant not only for improving the singing quality of the choir and enhancing team collaboration but also plays an indispensable role in shaping a unique musical style. Through continuous pitch training, the choir can consistently elevate its performance level and artistic effect, presenting even more brilliant and moving musical interpretations. (Dong Yanna, 2024,).

In Conclusion, Zhang Xin is a well-known choral conductor and music educator in China, who has long been committed to the promotion and teaching of choral art. His conducting style is known for his delicate emotional expression, rigorous technical handling and profound musical accomplishment, and has an important influence on the Chinese choral circle.

Objectives

To Analysis of the Conducting Techniques of Chinese Choral Conductor Zhang Xin.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study can be divided into three main components:

Introduction to the concept of the conductor.

- 1.Introduction to the background of conductor Zhang Xin.
- 2.Study of the choral conducting skills of conductor Zhang Xin.



Analyse choral works:

selecting the representative work 'Yellow River Cantata', analyse conducting techniques and vocal part handling. Study how to conduct the song's lines and musical expressiveness.



Interviews: Plan to interview 2-3 members of the Lingnan Women's Choir.

- 1.Introducing the Lingnan Women's Choir led by conductor Zhang Xin.
- 2.Interview Zhang Xin himself to inquire about his conducting philosophy, techniques for training, understanding of choral music.
- 3.Interview three choir members who have worked with him.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative research to gather data.

This study focused on:

An analysis of the conducting techniques of Chinese conductor Zhang Xin. The author explores the uniqueness of Zhang Xin's conducting skills through literature analysis, video observation, and interviews. Literature analysis: collects works and academic critiques of Zhang Xin. Video analysis: selects his representative piece "The seventh movement of the Yellow River Cantata defends the Yellow River." for conducting, analysing gesture techniques and vocal part handling. Interviews: plans to interview Zhang Xin and three members of the Lingnan Women's Choir.

Data collection location

Data were collected from:

Zhang Xin's performance conductor work 'The seventh movement of the Yellow River Cantata defends the Yellow River.'

Xinghai Conservatory of Music, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China

3 members of the Lingnan Female Choir

Conductor Zhang Xin

Date and time of data collection

The data collection process took place between 2025 to 2026, and was divided into the following periods:

Weeks 1-2: Interviews with Conductor Zhang Xin

Weeks 3-4: Analysis of Zhang Xins conductor work 'The seventh movement of the Yellow River Cantata defends the Yellow River.'

Weeks 5-6: 3 members of the Lingnan Female Choir

Weeks 7-8: Synthesizing results and writing the research report

Research instruments

A variety of research instruments were used to collect data to obtain comprehensive information. A variety of research instruments were used to collect data to obtain comprehensive information:

Analyse Zhang Xin's choral work: select the representative piece 'The seventh movement of the Yellow River Cantata defends the Yellow River', analysing conducting techniques and part handling.

Conduct in-depth interviews with choir members and the conductor to understand the daily training of the choir, as well as to learn about Zhang Xin's conducting philosophy, training techniques, and understanding of choral music.

Validation of the research instrument by having 3 experts check the validity and reliability of the research instrument before it is put into practice.

The validation of the research instrument was carried out by 3 experts:

1. Tu Yuliang is a famous young pianist, Kaiserburg artist, teacher of the piano department of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, and teaching consultant of Pearl River Piano Art Center

2. An outstanding musician from Yangcheng, recipient of the 'Star of Science and Technology' and 'Musical Instrument Craftsman' awards in China's musical instrument industry.

3. Dr. Fueanglada Prawang Carlson--She is currently working as a singing teacher and lecturer at Mahidol University.

Data analysis employs descriptive analysis and statistical analysis, with qualitative data undergoing content decoding.

Results



Figure 1 Conductor Zhang Xin
Image source. (Wang Lu).

Before starting to sing pieces, Conductor Zhang Xin will explain three necessary "homework": understand the background of the creation of the piece; listen to the prelude first and feel the rhythm and emotion of the prelude; as soon as you open your mouth to sing, you must fit the connotation of the prelude, and your thoughts should flow with the prelude. Zhang Xin said that each piece has a different connotation and style, and understanding the background of the creation of the piece is to better rehearse and interpret. The prelude is an important part of showcasing the connotation of the piece, and it must be grasped accurately. The conductor should not only solve problems at the technical level and at the musical level, but also impress themselves and the audience in terms of the breadth and depth of the piece. He asked the troupe members to integrate rhythm and tempo when performing pieces, and to infuse the knowledge learned in other subjects into themselves and integrate and apply it flexibly, so that they can understand more ways to interpret the essence of the pieces. Zhang Xin shared his teaching methods and experience with everyone through two teaching modules: voice practice could have multi-vocal thinking and high comprehensive musical ability. He tweaks the team's timbre by "figuring" the sound. In order to allow the members to "see" the sound more clearly, Zhang Xin vividly depicts the sound as a common object in life. With comparison, the members were able to create a more beautiful sound in a more natural and simple way. He said that he should try to diversify the unchanged vocal practice methods as much as possible, so that the boring vocal practice becomes lively and interesting.

The seventh movement of the Yellow River Cantata defends the Yellow River was composed during the Chinese War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. The composition consists of 8 movements. The musician Xian Xinghai created a musical epic for the Chinese nation during this era. The piece uses the Yellow River as a symbol of the spirit of the Chinese people and solemnly praises the heroic spirit of the tenacious and unyielding struggle of the Chinese nation. In 2025, at the choral concert commemorating the 120th anniversary of Xian Xinghai's birth, conductor Zhang Xin will take up the podium, and research has found the following regarding the gestures used and the handling of voice parts in the choral piece 'Defending the Yellow River':

1. Voice processing: One beat before the entry point, his left hand cooperates with a small but clear 'inhale' upward movement, leading the contralto to sing neatly and forcefully, 'Hedong Hebei sorghum is ripe'. When all four voices are in (measure A), he maintains a clear beat point with his right hand to control the overall tempo, while his left hand constantly 'patrols' between the voices, and uses the palm downward to gently press the voice to prompt the non-dominant part (such as the tenor at the time) to control the volume to ensure that the main theme (soprano) is clearly dominant. And 'in 'Defend the Homeland!' Defend the Yellow River! ...', Zhang Xin emphasizes the first word of each sentence (the word 'bao') through exaggerated downward strokes to ensure that the rhythm is accurate. At the same time, he gestures with the palms of both hands pressed down flat throughout, asking the four voices of the choir to sing in a solid, full, yet highly integrated 'block' tone, with special attention to suggesting that the bass part provides sufficient base support.

2. Gesture Usage: Zhang Xin's control of the precise entry of each voice in the fugue section (measures 50-75) of "Defending the Yellow River" is a prominent manifestation of his conducting technique. Take the tenor voice imitation entry as an example (measure 58, "waving a big sword and spear"): at the end of the phrase (the last beat of measure 57) it is sung in the contralto voice, Zhang Xin's right hand continues to maintain the basic tempo, and the left hand is clearly pointed at the tenor voice area two beats in advance, with the palm upward to make a preparatory gesture, while his gaze is locked on the tenor voice leader at the same time. In the weak position of the first beat before the entry point (the first beat of measure 58), his left hand works with a small but clear vertical lift (accompanied by a synchronized inhalation mouth shape) to precisely guide the tenor voice into the sound with a uniform, powerful volume and clear attack. Video audio analysis shows that this part

enters with a high degree of uniformity, and there is a close connection with the end of the previous contralto voice. When all four voices are in (approx. measure 65), Zhang Xin's right hand maintains a clear beat to control the global tempo and stress, while his left hand is active between the voices, adjusting the volume balance in real time through palm-down, unequal amplitude suppression gestures (especially for inner and imitation voices) to ensure that the main melody line (usually the first entry or high voice) is always clearly dominant over the complex texture. This technique of relying on independent foreshadowing with the left hand, precise eye positioning, synchronous breathing guidance, and continuous vocal balance control is the key to Zhang Xin's effective mastery of the movement's difficult polyphonic passages.

To sum up, Zhang Xin's conducting of this version of the Yellow River Cantata shows the remarkable characteristics of precise and elastic beats, extremely strong dynamic contrast and rich layers, and special attention to the breathing sense of the musical phrases and the clarity of the vocal lines. His gestures are both structurally powerful and deeply emotionally expressive, especially when dealing with grand dramatic scenes and delicate inner monologues. In terms of vocal processing, he has always pursued the overall balance between the chorus and the orchestra, and meticulously crafted the independence and integration of each voice in the polyphonic passages, so that the musical texture is layered and the emotional expression is full and three-dimensional.

Conclusion

Through the study of conductor Zhang Xin's conducting skills, the following conclusions are drawn: Fusion of technique and expression: Zhang Xin's conducting skills are not simply gestural techniques, but the perfect crystallisation of his deep musical understanding and precise body language. His gestural language, such as clear and precise beats, elastic and singing lines, delicate and varied dynamics and speed control, always serves to express the meaning of music. "People-oriented" rehearsal method and stage charm: Zhang Xin's conducting skills are not only reflected in the moment of the stage performance, but also throughout the rehearsal process. Its efficient and heuristic rehearsal method emphasises the in-depth explanation of the background and connotation of the work, focuses on stimulating the musical imagination and initiative of the singers, and guides the choir to meet the artistic requirements through accurate feedback and demonstration. On stage, his passion, strong aura and expressiveness integrated with music not only effectively guide the choir, but also deeply infect the audience, realising the conductor's dual role as "musical interpreter" and "emotional communicator". Outstanding Contribution to Chinese Choral Art: Zhang Xin has greatly promoted the improvement of China's professional choral art. It has set a new benchmark for choral art in China; Through its unique conducting teaching, it has cultivated and influenced a large number of outstanding choral conducting talents and choral groups; It has made an indelible contribution to the enrichment of Chinese choral literature and the enhancement of its artistic expression.

Discussions

The results of this study are consistent with Liu Siyu's (2020) view in 'The Roles, Positions, and Relationships of the Conductor, Pianist, and Choir in a Trinity'—taking the choir of the School of Arts at Guangdong Ocean University as an example—that modern conductors are no longer merely mechanical performers of spatial beat and bodily movement, but can perform with the choir as if they were playing their own instrument, conducting the choir not only according to its intentions but also vividly expressing their own personality. They hold the same status as soloists of other instruments. An excellent choir conductor can enhance the choir's artistic appreciation, influence the choir to improve its artistic cultivation and refine its singing technique with their vast personal knowledge, and guide the choir to grasp the musical context and essence of the piece, thereby

allowing for a secondary creation of the choral work. Therefore, the conductor is the core, soul, and recreator of the choir.

The results of this study are consistent with Liu Jianpeng's (2018) views in 'The Division of Labour Among Conductors, Leaders, and Piano Accompanists in Choirs.' The conductor is the core of a choir, playing a leading role in training the choir and during stage performances. Firstly, an excellent choral conductor should possess a solid foundation in music theory and have a deep and accurate understanding of the works performed by the choir. They must grasp the essence of a piece by understanding the composer's creative ideas, background, and style, enabling the choir to brilliantly interpret outstanding choral works. The conductor must not only have a full understanding of the works sung by the choir but also, based on this foundation, combine their own aesthetic ability to conduct a deep analysis of the pieces, thus being able to interpret the works more accurately, comprehensively, and profoundly. Moreover, during the practical process of conducting, they should skillfully use body language to communicate most effectively and directly with the choir, which allows the conductor to thoroughly understand the musical pieces and convey this understanding smoothly to the choir, profoundly inspiring the singers and playing a crucial role in creating the best artistic realm for the entire choir performance.

The results of this study are consistent with Liu Xinxin's (2025) "Research on the Problems and Countermeasures of Children's Choir Conducting Teaching". As a form of collective vocal performance, the core feature of choral singing is the interpretation of a musical work through multi-part collaboration, usually presented in accompaniment or a cappella form. This artistic practice requires a multi-dimensional level of professionalism for the participants: firstly, they need to master systematic vocal techniques, secondly, they must have a keen sense of auditory perception, and at the same time, they need a solid foundation in music theory and precise vocal coordination. The core training modules in the teaching system cover a variety of areas such as breath control, vocal skills, pitch training, rhythm control and artistic expression.

knowledge gained from research

Zhang Xin is a renowned choral conductor and music educator in China, dedicated to the promotion and teaching of choral arts for a long time. His conducting style is known for its delicate emotional expression, rigorous technical handling, and profound musical attainments, contributing significantly to the progress and development of choral music in China. Conductor Zhang Xin believes that a conductor must first possess a solid theoretical foundation and excellent professional skills, while also having a spirit of dedication. He always emphasises: "There is no 'I' in the choir, only 'we'." A conductor who creates beautiful sound together with the choir members is a competent conductor.

Suggestions

1. Research on the Conducting Characteristics of Western Conductors.
2. Research on the Development and Evolution of Choral Conducting.

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