

Bohemian Rhapsody and How Does a Classical Music Represent the World of Pop Music

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Abstract. The famous music live show Live Aid in 1985 was a milestone in the development of the 20th-century music industry and entertainment. The song Bohemian Rhapsody was featured as one prominent reason for this success. This study chooses the song as a research target with classical music analysis and pop music performance. The performance of this song differed in several live conditions while the core identity of the song remained the same. By depicting the attributes of this single as both a classical music masterpiece and modern music industrial production, this research also synthesizes the core motivation of whole complete album named Night at the Opera. It is argued that the design and plot for the original soundtrack were fundamentally classical with some tricks to mime a quasi-operatic style, however, the complexity did not agree with the style of live performance so several changes and adoptions were.

Keywords: Live Aid 1985; Night at the Opera; Bohemian Rhapsody.

1. Introduction

Bohemian Rhapsody is a classical work by Queen at its peak. It is from the album "Night At The Opera", which was released in 1975. In the Album, four musicians of Queen cooperated on the grand and magnificent Bohemian Rhapsody, which was the highest-selling single in British history [1-3]. The structure of the song is grand and complex. The song style is a combination of rock music and opera, which is known as "artistic rock". The music is composed by the band's lead singer Freddie Mercury. With Freddie's operatic vocals, the combination of classical piano and instruments, and the dreamy harmonies of other musicians, it is the first time that rock music leaves an impression of elegance, purity, complexity, and shock to everyone. There are many disputes about the connotation of the lyrics of Bohemian Rhapsody. The lyrics are literally about the repentance and hopelessness of a delinquent teenager, but the true meaning was never answered with the death of the composer in 1991.

Just one peer on the whole work of Night at the opera, people would be astounded by its multiple stylizations [4]. The featured song takes both a serious plot for a holistic operatic style and mimics one. For certain music bands, the chord and collaborations among different musical elements or instruments are determined by rehearsals and communications of band members [5-7]. The album and the very song Bohemian Rhapsody would be a little bit different. The inspiration for the song was independently captured by Freddie Mercury during his isolation from other members of the band. So did almost all other singles in the same album. When it came to the show, the actual life and performance considerations would become much more decisive and members of the band would try their best to work out together. That would be the reason that can explain the differences between the versions of the original one and the live ones.

It is not always the case that a successful popular music production bears a coherent identity within the relatively long duration of its world tour performance. So did the single Bohemian Rhapsody. A bipolar interpretation would be fine with the live aid performance, however, it is much more fascinating to put a structure that can collide the style of classical music and modern popular entertainment production in one single song. The Bohemian Rhapsody analysis in this study would be a possible try-out for this purpose.

2. The reason why Bohemian Rhapsody can be classic

The piece combines a variety of musical elements, using major accompaniment instruments such as guitar and piano, and a variety of styles such as opera arias, chorus, and rock with both classical chorus parts and powerful electric guitar solos. Is a classic representative work of genre-switching. Bohemian Rhapsody has promoted the development of traditional suits of pop music. Unlike most popular songs, it is not a common continue song, with a structure of "verse chorus verse chorus bridge". Instead, it puts the elements that usually appear in three or four different songs in just six minutes. The six minutes includes the introduction part (0:00-0:49), balled (0:49-2:35), opera (3:02-4:047), hard rock (4:07-4:54), and coda (4:54-5:55).

In the introduction part, the song begins with a five-part Cappella in B flat major. The protagonist in the story drifts between reality and fantasy sometimes trapped in the cage of reality, sometimes capricious, and does not care about anything. The composition of this short section also shows the beauty of harmony. The melody's first phrase is the same note with different harmony. In the second phrase, it switches to Dorian mode, using the C7 chord which could add transposing. In addition to the interesting harmony design, the rhythm of the song is also worth analyzing. After "caught in a landslide" filled up the entire 4/4 beats of bars, "no es" fills in an extra beat. It is seeming to be structured but lets the 5/4 beats of rhythm interspersed with it. After that, the chords' change is rich. In the two bars from "easy come", the chord changes once per beat, and the notes only move a half tone each time. It is called whine bass which gives expression to plaintive, miserable, sentimental people. In particular, the phrase "little high, little low " not only matches the use of chords, but also involves mixing:" little high " is in the left track, and "a little low " is in the right track, which again blurs the boundary between the fantasy and the real in the interlacing. The whole intro has already had the embryonic form of opera. It has both a multi-voice chorus and a very story-like harmony. It creates a somewhat contradictory character in the lyrics.

The entry of John Deacon on bass guitar and piano accompaniment in B flat major marked the beginning of the balled chapter. Freddie sang the most familiar melody with the harmony of 1625, but he used the method of modular progression (Bb6-Gm9-Cm9-F7) in the construction which made the harmony more colorful. However, a change occurred in the last two bars as the harmony was repeated for a second time. The root of the chord went down all the way, and the song naturally shifted from B flat major to E flat major when Roger used the cymbal slowly to let the drum break in. After entering the E flat major, it seemed to be another progression of 1625. But it was still variable. The root notes descend from F to D in the second-level chord Fm. It was marching that it used the rhythm pattern starts with an eighth note then comes two sixteenth notes in the next bar. The harmonic progression turned into 1564 and then note D was used into the root of the fifth chord. It showed the whole trend going downward. After that, the fourth chord came into harmonic minor which is A flat minor chord. The common harmonic progression left audiences with an impressive memory. In the earlier part, the B flat major used the method of the root going down to turn into the E flat major. But now the harmony went back to B flat major with a chromatic down strategy on the third note from the fourth chord A flat. Finally, the song was repeated from the harmony of 1645. At the end of this part, Brian's guitar solo came in and the familiar notes came again at the end of the solo. The roots descended from D flat to B flat and finally slide into the A chord of the next chapter. In this chapter, the protagonist of the story called Freddie's mother to repent for the murder committed, but it was too late. In the face of reality, he had to face it and nowhere to hide. Therefore, his soul flew to the land of no man and accepted the judgment of the gods.

In the following opera part, in this place where life and death meet, thunder and lightning flash, the gods argued about where the fact of the protagonists should go. The lyrics quoted "Scaramouche", "Fandango", "Galileo Galilei", "Figaro", "Beelzebub", and other operatic words which did not have real meaning but made it sound more operatic. In terms of music, Freddie used a lot of halftone and transposition techniques so it was difficult to recognize what the current key was. The song got into A chord with the piano, which was the first time to change the key. The last section had the key in E flat major, while the chord A wandered completely outside the key, seeming into A major. All of a

sudden, a lot of chromatic techniques started to appear. Although the root note of this part still was A note, the melody took the lead at this moment. The harmony followed the chromatic, matching the corresponding chords (D-A-Adim). A second transposition occurred in the phrase "Thunderbolt", only two chords (Db, Ab), appeared in this tune, so briefly that the transposition was not unnoticeable. However, the D flat chord used the root note A flat, so it could be considered a descent to the key of A flat major. Then, in the phrase "very very frightening", the harmonic progression changed again, which was C chord to E chord. It could be seen as a third transposition to C major although it is brief. The E chord shifted to a harmonic minor at first glance, but it was meant to lead to the following chord. The fourth transposition came immediately after, at "me" it returned to the A chord, and if considering the chord A as the first degree, we found that the E chord in front of it essentially acted as a fifth degree. It bridged the C major and A major perfectly, which was known musically as "perfect cadence". After the chromatic composition "Galileo", a Cm7 chord appeared. Following the B flat note corresponding to the "fi", the vocal sang a descending scale on the "co" starting with B flat and ending with B flat, which led smoothly to the B chord. This peculiar transposition technique would appear once more later on. Immediately afterward, the chord moved up and down a semitone around B flat and a fifth transposition occurred. The Cm7 chord contained both E flat and B flat. It could be connected smoothly to B flat or E flat major that also contained these two notes, but it was not so clear what key was here. The next lyrics, "He's just a poor boy from a poor family" made the tone even clearer. Although the melody was still presented in semitone, the chords were all in E flat at the root, and the A flat chord was a fourth in E flat but was tonicization in B flat. It made this passage more like an E-flat major. Then the perfect cadence technique was introduced again in the heated argument between "not let you go" and "let him go", with a lot of V-I progressions and interlocking B flat chord and E flat chord that continue until the last "never let me go". In this "go", the technique used in the Cm7 chord was used again. The vocal started with D flat and ended with D flat on the "go", then the D flat raised a semitone to the next chord which became the Bm close position, shifting the key to D major. It was used V-I again to start a frenzy of transpositions on this occasion (A-D, Db-Gb, Bb-Eb). It came back to E flat major again and had two more transpositions in just two bars. This operatic section which lasted only a minute had eight times transpositions and three tempo changes, making it become one of the most complex sections of the song. The section ended on a fifth chord B flat. This part not only showed Freddie's wild imagination but also pushed the limits of recording technology at the time. The band was using a tape recorder that could only record up to 24 tracks, but Freddie, Brian, and Roger's vocals have overlaid a total of 180 times. The entire recording process took two to three weeks to complete, forming a strong wall of sound. As with Intro, the more complex operatic parts were extremely difficult to reproduce in performance. So later on, the opera part was also presented live in the orchestra usually through a play-by-play format.

3. Bohemian Rhapsody and its continuous representation as an epic in the pop music

The media and post-modern mass media had crowned the performance of 1985 with the participation of Queen band as one of the most classic performances of Bohemian Rhapsody - 1985 Live Aid. To be clear about the background of 1985 Live Aid, people have so much to say. The Live Aid 1.0 was the first and largest scale in modern human history. The performance contained 16 hours and 14 satellites around the world, thousands of ground stations supported. Even NASA broadcast the show live to the astronauts. At the same time, 95% of countries broadcast, more than 1.5 billion people watch the show and raised 125 million dollars that day alone. While politicians were still making bogus statements, these rock stars who were considered decadent, dissolute, and ridiculous by people at that time created the miracle of love by taking actual actions [8].

At that time, people first time first felt the power of music; music can change the world and save lives! In 1984, English singer Phil Collins saw a report on the news about Ethiopia, Africa. The report is about one of the biggest droughts and famines of the 20th century, civil strife and poor health care

caused the death of 1.2 million people. The children are extremely thin, old people with not a single piece of clothing on their bodies, and the human bodies lay on the streets. It was just like the end of the world...It was no internet just like nowadays, people from other countries didn't know there is a country suffering such painful stuff. So, in 1984, Phil Collins came up with an idea about making an album to sell as a charity sale donation. Then, Bob Geldof served as convenor to make a song called Do They Know It's Christmas and he invited dozens of popular artists named Band Aid to sing together. The reputation of this song was great, around 3.2 million copies were sold in UK and US. It was a good start in the UK, and the US started to move aggressively. In 1985, some insightful musicians found Quincy Jones, who is the producer who produced the highest-selling album for Michael Jackson [9]. He suggested that they should invite Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. They agreed and hit it off, and two legendary stars started writing, which is the popular public welfare song: We Are The World. After they released the album on 7th March 1985, this song sold 8 million copies and got 10 million dollars in donations. At that time, Bob Geldof went to Ethiopia and saw the scene that was such as hell. Bob Geldof realized that it was not enough to draw attention to the famine in Africa, he expressed that they are going to solve cognitive absurdity and moral problems through the universal language of the earth, not English, but rock music. The Live Aid charity concerts in London and Philadelphia were born. The concert's logo features a guitar, a staple of rock music, in the shape of a map of Africa. In the live show version, Queen didn't use the intro with a piano solo in the studio version, the reason the Queen wanted to let people watch the main part early to light their passion. In the live show, the dynamic of the whole song is harder, which means that the Queens wanted to bring a better auditory effect to the audience [10].

4. Conclusions

It is reported in the analysis that the entire recording process took two to three weeks to complete, forming a strong wall of sound. As with Intro, the more complex operatic parts were extremely difficult to reproduce in performance. So later on, the opera part was also presented live in the orchestra usually through a play-by-play format. The classical representation of the single did not fall into the category of classical for the sake of classical music. The decorative elements confirmed that observation as the lyrics quoted "Scaramouche", "Fandango", "Galileo Galilei", "Figaro", "Beelzebub", and other operatic words which did not have real meaning but made it sound more operatic. It is argued that the design and plot for the original soundtrack were fundamentally classical with some tricks to mime a quasi-operatic style, however, the complexity did not agree with the style of live performance so several changes and adoptions were. One of the questions remains unsolved after this study depicts the pure music attributes and the performance ones of the single Bohemian Rhapsody. That is the question how does popular music constantly represent the classic? A bipolar interpretation would be fine with the live aid performance, however, it is much more fascinating to put a structure that can collide the style of classical music and modern popular entertainment production in one single song. It is argued that to look from the basic design of the music, the single did a good job in participating and practicing the ideas of classical music while for the actual vocal collaborations the single turns into some symbolic usage and popular adoptions of modern music formula. When it turns out to be more considerations involved, such as to answer the influence of changes in modern media, and Replica of 1985 Live Aid in Bohemian Rhapsody, a musical biography film released in 2018, The Bohemian Rhapsody analysis in this study would be a possible try-out for people to learn how the traditional elements of music were intertwined with new forms with modern spirits.

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