

# The Emotional Expression of the Violin Song "Zigeunerweisen Op.20"

Xuan Liu

School of Creative Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China

**Abstract:** As living conditions get better, so does the need for musical knowledge and skills. In the past, people's understanding of violin performance was limited to whether the piece was good or not, and whether the performance was good. People usually don't go to a deeper level to understand the emotional expression of music, let alone look at a performance from a philosophical point of view. In this paper, we will use key signatures, melody, and rhythm to conduct research, and analyze different players. This paper examines the emotion and expression of the violin piece of Song of the Wanderer, the emotionalism and cognitivism of existence, and how the performers use emotionalism and cognitivism. Based on people's understanding of performance, this paper analyzes Zigeunerweisen Op.20 and musical emotions from a philosophical perspective, and explores the meaning and value of life. Research has shown that "Zigeunerweisen Op.20" is not only a virtuosic violin piece, but also a musical work full of philosophical implications. Therefore, this is not only a musical work, but also a philosophical text worthy of in-depth study and discussion.

**Keywords:** Philosophy; Violin; Zigeunerweisen Op.20.

## 1. Introduction

"Zigeunerweisen Op.20" is Sarasati's most representative work, and the famous Hungary violinist Orr said: "This piece is based on the theme of Hungary style melody, is the most brilliant of all the pieces to date, and is one of the most recommended excellent works"[1]. This piece not only shows a wealth of musical skills and melodies, but also contains complex emotions, including loneliness and sadness, and at the same time it also demonstrates a yearning for freedom and a passion for life, even if you don't know anything about the violin, you can feel the emotions expressed by the author from the technique and melody, so this piece is worth studying from the perspective of musical emotion.

In the philosophy of music, this study shows how Western classical music conveys emotions through specific musical structures or expressions through the analysis of the violin piece "Zigeunerweisen Op.20", which is closely related to the theory of emotional expression in Western music philosophy, and can promote a deeper understanding of musical emotions.

This study answers three research questions: 1. How does the Wanderer's Song violin piece express emotion. 2. The emotionalism and cognitivism that exist in this piece. 3. How do the performers use emotionalism and cognitivism.

## 2. Zigeunerweisen Music Analysis

The Zigeunerweisen Op.20 is made up of four parts, and there are many elements in the piece that show off the

emotions that the piece is trying to express. I came up with the key signatures, the melody, and the rhythm.

### 2.1. Key Signature

Judging from the key signature of the piece, the minor key usually expresses sadness, heavy emotion, and its harmony has a gloomy feeling, C minor is one of them, and C minor is often used in Western classical music to express sadness. In "Zigeunerweisen Op.20", the first three parts are in C minor, reflecting the wanderer's inner loneliness, while the drama of C minor reflects the difficulties that the wanderer may have encountered during the journey. The final part, from C minor to C major, represents cheerfulness and lightness, giving an uplifting feeling, so this change is the climax of the whole piece, depicting the wanderer's desire for a peaceful home, achieving emotional sublimation.

### 2.2. Melody

The ebb and flow of the melody can reflect inner fluctuations, and its sudden shift may also suggest conflicting moods. For example, at the beginning of the first part of the piece, the violin adds a repetition on the G string, followed by an ascending compact minor scale melody, and finally falls back to the bass, the ascending scale often expresses a desire for the future, but the sudden drop in the part sounds a great contrast and gives a sense of sadness, and this change helps the listener understand the inner world of the characters and the course of their emotions.



Figure 1. melody

The repetition of a melody deepens the audience's understanding of the music, and when a melody is repeated,

it not only makes the listener feel familiar with the melody, but also deepens the attention to the emotional theme, and when the listener is familiar with a melody, it may associate

with the emotional experience associated with it. For example, in the second part, the violin is dominated by variations on the main theme, and the repetition of the melody can make the listener feel that the wanderer is struggling incomparably, as if he is constantly telling his story. This section has left-handed plucking and overtones, which not only enhance the layering of the music, but also present an ethereal feeling, and the two techniques are intertwined to make the whole piece of music feel lonely and increase the emotional resonance.

### 2.3. Rhythm

Mastery of rhythm can directly affect the expression of



Figure 2. rhythm

In the fourth part of the piece, sixteenth notes interspersed with various difficult tricks are basically fast jumps. This rhythm has a cheerful, energetic feel that contrasts sharply with the slowness that precedes it, rendering the picture of the gypsies dancing cheerfully, leading the audience to the climax of the whole piece. This rhythm also reflects the character's inner fortitude and bravery, showing a kind of breaking free from bondage, hope for the future, and longing for freedom.

## 3. Zigeunerweisen Op.20 and Musical Emotions

As a unique art form, music has the power to directly touch people's hearts and evoke deep emotional resonance. Many music philosophers and theorists believe that composers translate personal emotional experiences into concrete musical works through musical language such as melody, rhythm, and harmony. This creative process is not only an expression of inner emotions, but also a bridge of emotional communication with the audience. For example, in *Zigeunerweisen*, the composer conveys feelings of sadness and loneliness through specific melodic directions, rhythmic changes, and the use of harmony. "These musical elements do not exist independently, but are intertwined so that the listener can empathize, a situation known as emotionalism[8]." These emotions are perfectly expressed through the melody and techniques of the violin, allowing people to feel the infinite charm of music in emotional expression[2]. The balance between emotion and reason is often seen as a pair of opposing categories in philosophy. However, *Zigeunerweisen Op.20* demonstrates the harmonious coexistence between emotion and reason. Emotionalism is the belief that the listener can not only recognize an emotion, but also feel it[5]. In the view of emotionalists, melody, rhythm, harmony and other elements in music exist to express a certain emotion, and emotionalism reveals the deep emotional connection between the musical work and the listener, emphasizing the uniqueness and universality of music as an emotional expression. Through music, the emotional resonance between the composer and the listener is realized, making music an indispensable and important element in the communication of human emotions. This song not only expresses emotions, but also demonstrates precise control over techniques and

emotions. The third part is one of the most moving parts of the piece, his tempo is in Adagio, with slightly different notes from the previous ones, and this rhythmic pattern is combined with slow kneading to bring the sadness to its peak. The use of dotted notes creates a lonely atmosphere, making the expression of emotions in the music more diverse, and the inner description of the characters more rich and three-dimensional.

structure, making people think about how to find a balance between emotions and rationality.

"There are some opinions that music can express emotions, but this is related to the audience's recognition of musical emotions, music moves us with its beauty, happiness, etc., that is, sad music moves us, but not sad[6]." Such an idea is called cognitivism. "At the heart of the cognitivist approach is the insistence that expressive properties are intrinsic to music[3]." Listeners are able to detect these expressiveness displayed in the music content by identifying them. When listening to "*Zigeunerweisen Op.20*", the audience needs to perceive the emotional changes in the work from loneliness and sadness to hope for the future through the melody, rhythm, harmony and other elements in the music, and these emotional experiences are combined with the listener's own cognitive structure to form their unique understanding and cognition of the musical work. "This cognitivism argues that the subtle and complex emotional fragments we experience in the process of engaging with music are essential to our understanding of the expressive content of music[4]." Through music, we are not only feeling emotions, but also re-examining and understanding our inner world.

"Konečni, V. J. (2007) states that both emotionalists and cognitivists believe that music can express emotions, and that the key difference lies in one of the forms of expression, especially with regard to the possibility of emotion-inducing[7]." The emotionalist stance implies that music has a universal capacity for emotional induction that can elicit similar emotional responses across cultural and personal differences. This view is that music is an "emotional machine" that elicits pre-set emotional experiences regardless of the listener's background. Cognitivists, on the other hand, emphasize that the likelihood of emotional induction is influenced by the audience's background, knowledge, and experience. Different people may have different emotional responses to the same piece of music because they have different cognitive frameworks and emotional experiences. This diversity makes the emotional expression of music more complex and rich. Through my research on the performance videos of some musicians, I have found that they have their own unique ways of dealing with the fusion and conflict of emotionalism and cognitivism. The performers I watched were Jascha Heifetz, Itzhak Perlman, and Anne-Sophie

Mutter's versions, and I had some feelings about their performances as a listener.

Heifetz played at the fastest pace and was more frightening. His playing was very fast from the start, including the final section, but every note he played was clear and the timbre was particularly good, and I also observed that his kneading range was slightly larger than that of other players. Overall, his playing style is rigorous and almost error-free. From an emotional point of view, the emotional expression of the climax makes people feel very passionate. As a listener, when I listen to him, I pay more attention to his rhythm, speed and intonation, and I feel some harshness from sadness during the listening process.

Perlman is able to navigate difficult trick sequences with ease, and his rhythm is relatively free, with portamento between each sentence to connect with a singing quality. In the third section, he slows down significantly, makes full use of kneading, and in the final section, he doesn't move as fast as Heifetz, but he changes his tempo more and brings more ups and downs to the music in this section. Emotionally, the melody of the third part is impressive, and when listening to this one, one is immersed in the loneliness and sadness of the gypsies.

Music is a magical art, with strong infectivity and expressiveness, containing rich connotations. Mutter's playing is known for his deep emotional expression and delicate technique. Her performance in "The Wanderer's Song" is full of feminine tenderness and delicacy. With a smooth and natural mentality, she played the weak side of the gypsy's heart, showing a beautiful melancholy. I think Mutter plays with a clever blend of emotionalism and cognitivism. Through her exquisite technique, she interprets every note in the music with full and rich color. At the same time, she can deeply understand the emotional connotation of the music, and vividly express the helplessness and longing for freedom of the gypsy people.

Through listening to different virtuoso's versions of "Zigeunerweisen Op.20", I deeply appreciated the diversity of the same piece under different interpretations. The unique approach of these performers not only shapes their own playing style, but also has a profound impact on the listener's experience. Each performer's interpretation contains their understanding of the music and their emotional pouring, giving life to the work. As the audience listens to their performances, they will understand the emotions in the work according to their own cognitive and aesthetic preferences, so as to gain different perceptions. From the perspective of music philosophy, music is not only a direct expression of emotion, but also a guide that prompts the listener to find a delicate balance between emotion and reason. From the perspective of music philosophy, music is not only a direct expression of emotions, but also a guide for listeners to find a subtle balance between emotions and reason.

## 4. Conclusion

In the violin piece "Zigeunerweisen Op.20", we not only see the rich emotional expression of music, but also deeply experience the organic combination of emotionalism and cognitivism. Through the analysis of key signatures, melody and rhythm, we found that these musical elements not only convey the loneliness and longing of the wanderer, but also provide the listener with space to think and reflect on the meaning of life. Then, through the discussion of the different interpretations of the three virtuosos, we further demonstrate the fusion of emotionalism and cognitivism. Although each performer has different emotional expressions and technical techniques in their interpretation of the same piece, they all work together to promote the exploration of the deeper meaning of the work. This diversity not only enriches the expressive power of the music, but also allows the listener to find a balance between emotional experience and rational understanding. "Zigeunerweisen Op.20" is not only a moving musical work, but also a philosophical reflection on the interweaving of emotions and cognition, which reminds us that the power of music lies not only in the emotions it expresses, but also in the thinking and resonance it evokes, providing us with a deeper understanding.

## References

- [1] JIANG Wanyi. A brief analysis of Sarasati's violin work "Zigeunerweisen Op.20" (Master's thesis, Qingdao University) (2019). <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202001&filename=1019671181.nh>.
- [2] Garvin, L. Emotivism, Expression, and Symbolic Meaning. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 55(3), 111–118. (1958). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2022253>.
- [3] Di Bona, E.. On the Relationship Between Music and Emotion. *THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO MUSIC, MIND AND WELL-BEING*, 22. (2018).
- [4] Koopman, C. [Review of Philosophy, Music and Emotion, by G. Madell]. *Mind*, 112(448), 759–762. (2003). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3489058>.
- [5] Gehring, A. The Expression of Emotions in Music. *The Philosophical Review*, 12(4), 412–429. (1903). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2176743>.
- [6] Davies, S. [Review of Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions, by P. Kivy]. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49(1), 83–85. (1991). <https://doi.org/10.2307/431655>.
- [7] Konečni, V. J. Music and emotion: An empirical critique of a key issue in the philosophy of music. In *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference "Person-Color-Nature-Music"* (pp. 31-40). (2007).
- [8] Vempala, N., & Russo, F. Exploring Cognitivist and Emotivist Positions of Musical Emotion Using Neural Network Models (Version 1). Toronto Metropolitan University. (2024). <https://doi.org/10.32920/25413277.v1>