



# Copper Sparrow Locking the Beautiful Woman, Dancing together to Break the Long Romance —On the Creative Art of the Dance Drama “Bronze Sparrow Opera”

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## Abstract

When you see dancers dancing gracefully like they have been resurrected from Han Dynasty stone carvings, you will be immersed in Mr. Sun Ying’s large-scale dance drama “Bronze Sparrow Opera” created in the 1980s. The whole drama consists of more than 20 dance segments, and uses dance to compose heart wrenching songs between simple character relationships. It was premiered in 1985 and is still worth savoring. This article starts with interviews and second-hand literature, focusing on the imagery of the 1985 premiere version of “Bronze Sparrow Opera”. It will discuss the creative art of the dance drama from three aspects: character shaping, dance and music repetition, and the idea of seeing the big picture from the small, in order to explore the narrative meaning of the dance drama and strive for better dance creation to express Chinese stories.

## Subject Areas

Culture

## Keywords

Bronze Sparrow Opera, Dance Drama, Dance Creation

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## 1. Character Shaping: Breaking through Flat Images with Diversity

### 1.1. Drifting in Search of Roots, the Flying Canopy

As the main character of Kabuki Zheng Feipeng, this drama revolves around her life. As soon as she appears, Feipeng, wearing a double bun, exudes the delicate and lively charm of a young girl, as well as the innocence and naivety that have

not been tamed by palace rules, through pitching, running, and holding her head high. The classic dance moves of “Tuoyue style” and “Tiaoge style” imply Feipeng’s identity as a Kabuki, and are destined to have a tragic fate of wandering and wandering among people. The shadows of the trees sway, time passes by, and as the flying canopy ties up her hair, her dance moves become increasingly exquisite. The continuous front axle, light drumming, and the momentary shift of center of gravity between kicking and rotating legs all seem just right. The beautiful appearance and outstanding dance skills not only attracted Wei Siniu, a childhood sweetheart, but also impressed Cao Cao, a high-ranking official. And Feipeng’s attitude towards Cao Cao was even more subtle. She was not pure like a fierce woman guarding a bamboo horse, nor was she promiscuous like a prostitute being molested by the powerful. She was anxious and passive during the first encounter at the banquet, shy and exploratory during the service in the bedroom. Her habitual kneeling and entangling movements showed that lower class women had no choice but to please the powerful. However, the actions of kicking her chest and biting her beard were Feipeng’s exploration and enlightenment as a woman. As a low-level dancer, from Cao Cao to Cao Pi, and then to the border soldiers and guards, Feipeng never had a choice, and the fear of life and death and the disparity in status entangled her until the end of her life. However, she was not always bound to Weisinu and became a symbol of simplicity, tragedy, or heroism. In her wandering, she explored what fame and fortune, love, and self were. The relationship between the two eventually sublimated from a simple dance partner to a sincere love in the course of time [1].

### **1.2. Blind Drum Number Tianzhinu**

If Zheng Feipeng is gentle yet resilient, then the shaping of Wei Sinu is full of powerful restraint. His action vocabulary incorporates the corner elements from the “Hundred Plays” of the Han Dynasty, with his arms folded like bronze tripod legs in a fixed position, showing his toughness, but turning into a soft finger when facing Zheng Feipeng. What is particularly touching is the scene of the duet. As Zheng Feipeng steps on the drum and dances, Wei Sinu always lifts his toes in a semi kneeling posture, and the temperature of his palm and the coldness of the ground form a metaphor: he is a floating wood within her reach in the abyss of imperial power, but also a prisoner bound by the chains of power. His sudden rise from the kneeling crowd briefly broke the shackles of class, but it led to eye gouging torture, reinforcing the tragic color. After losing his sight, he once again beat the drum and danced, the drum turning heavy, his limbs curled up, and his movements slowed down, which was the collapse and silent accusation of his spiritual world as a lower class people [2].

### **1.3. The Cao Family, the Executioner of Power**

The dance language and style of Cao Cao and Cao Pi are completely different, but both are undoubtedly the ultimate embodiment of feudal power aesthetics. Cao

Cao's movements were mostly characterized by large arm raises, chest bulges, and big eight character strides, showcasing his bold and heroic demeanor. In the duet with Zheng Feipeng, he grabbed Feipeng's long sleeves and dominated the entire dance with tight and rough drum beats. At this moment, the drums became a powerful weapon, and Cao Cao flipped over several times to beat the drums. Feipeng had to dodge to the left and flash to the right, feeling a bit confused and helpless. Compared to Cao Cao, Cao Pi had almost no significant dance movements or body movements. Instead, he focused on "stability, heaviness, and slowness" and only raised his hand and stroked his beard, demonstrating the indifference and ruthlessness of the ritual and legal order, as well as the "pseudo gentlemanly" demeanor. Power is transformed into an invisible hand on the stage, and rulers hardly need any extra actions. With just one glance, they are like slaves, living like weeds, everything is their fate, and they are completely powerless.

## **2. Dance and Music Repetition: Changes and Development in Reproduction**

### **2.1. Drums Are Human, Not Human**

The entire dance drama revolves around Zheng Feipeng multiple times with drum related dance segments, driving changes in plot and emotions through similarities. The duet of Zheng Wei in "Inspiring Tiancheng" is truly exquisite, breaking the traditional "contact" thinking of the duet. There are almost no lifting movements, but a natural understanding is revealed through the sound of hand drumming and foot stepping on the drum, as well as the cutting and distribution of high and low positive and negative spaces. The continuous diagonal flow of the two pairs also maximizes the tilted weightlessness of the Han and Tang dance forms. The entire duet uses the drum as a medium and delicately depicts the pure and lovely relationship between Zheng and Wei through "non-contact", fitting the young man's initial love; The dance of Zheng Wei in "Inspiring and Changing People" was suddenly interrupted by Cao Cao, and their mutual cooperation turned into passive catering. The rapid shaking and face covering dodging of the flying canopy all reflected the fear of facing the superior [3]. In the "commissioned competition", Feipeng was carried by two performers, with stiff sleeves, rigid dance movements, and lifeless eyes, which further threatened the powerful and separated him from the bamboo and horse; In the "Encouragement Reunion", Feipeng appeared in full dress, wishing to dance with Snu again with joy. However, during the once harmonious dance, he realized that the person he used to be with him was already blind, falling, climbing up, and embracing each other time and time again. Feipeng realized that his companion was like a companion tiger, and his heart belonged to that young man; Finally, Feipeng held the drum at the border and missed his lover. Unable to bear the humiliation, he fled back to Weisnu's side and sent a strand of green silk to the drum face to return to Wei's hand. The entire dance drama is based on the drum as a clue, which is a prop used during singing and dancing and also points to Zheng Feipeng. The drum has al-

ways existed, but Feipeng has dissipated in this twists and turns.

## 2.2. Zijin's Shallow Song

The song “Qingqing Zijin, Youyou in My Heart” has appeared three times in dance dramas based on the music created in the pre Qin “Book of Songs • Zhengfeng • Zijin”. In the “Group Dance Performance” of “Inspiring and Changing People”, the dance performers wearing silver hairpin crowns and red and white wide sleeves dance gracefully on the plate, with multiple movements and twists. The gentle and long movements are displayed between lifting the sleeves and looking back, and the restrained movements showcase the elegance and appropriateness of the palace female performers; The “Xianghe Song” of the “Encouragement of Heavy Meetings” only features hairpin pearls and flowers, a deep robe, and steps, strokes, kicks, and jumps in the same music, with a tilted and varied posture that is carried through through the large sleeves, waist folds, and tilted towers. The overflowing drum surface is the warm and bright performance of folk women [4]; The female voice was still singing behind the scenes in the “Inspiring Eternal Technique”, but both Zheng and Wei had taken off their fancy clothes. The damaged two trembled and could not recognize each other. As Fei Peng walked step by step towards the execution ground under the blood red, Wei Siniu seemed to feel the beating of the drum as if it had become a funeral bell for his beloved, leaving only sadness. The lyrics were sung three times, from melodious to bright and then to desolate, creating an atmosphere for the development of the plot and also fitting in with Feipeng's inner thoughts.

## 3. Seeing the Big Picture through Small Things: Using Zheng Wei to Criticize Class Oppression

Zheng Feipeng and Wei Sinu, whose names are not difficult to associate with the “Zheng Wei Zhi Yin” that once opposed classical music, originated from the folk music of the Zheng and Wei kingdoms, inheriting the lively and vigorous artistic characteristics of commercial music. They are deeply loved by people for their bold, passionate, and romantic emotions, as well as their fresh and lively style [5]. The emotions of Zheng and Wei are also as strong and passionate as Zheng Wei Zhi Yin, but difficult to accommodate at the top. But it was not only Zheng and Wei who were not accepted. At that time, being born lowly was wrong. Like Zheng and Wei, the joys, sorrows, and lives of low-level Kabuki depended on the likes and dislikes of those in power. Although Zheng and Wei had fought, how could a mayfly shake a tree? Most of them were oppressed. Therefore, Mr. Sun Ying often uses music scenes to contrast the sadness in his choreography, tearing apart the beauty and causing viewers not only to be heartbroken by the emotions of Zheng Wei and his two companions, but also to focus on their tragic fate and the underlying causes, expressing sympathy for the grieving songs of the lower class, praise for the kindness and bravery of the people, and dissatisfaction with the dark governance [6].

## 4. Conclusion

With the blood red curtain falling, Zheng Feipeng followed the accompanying executioners with firm steps towards their return. Under the rhythmic drumming of Weisinu's blind eyes, the audience's thoughts were gradually drawn into reality. Zheng Wei's experience has come to an end, while the lives of future generations continue. How to learn from history and avoid the same tragedy from happening again is a question left over from "Bronze Sparrow Opera". This article combines Mr. Sun Ying's own creative summary and the appreciation of various practitioners in the dance industry to explore and analyze the character images, dance stage design, and ideological themes of the dance drama. It strives to be detailed but still has many shortcomings, which is precisely the charm of "Bronze Sparrow Opera" that transcends simple art and is constantly explored by people.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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