Postprint: Analysis and Reflection on Directing Techniques for TV Variety Shows

Authors: Li Xiaoli

Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

Watching television constitutes one of the essential entertainment choices for individuals during leisure time. Currently, audience demands for watchability, entertainment value, and related aspects of television programs have increased. However, traditional variety galas suffer from fixed formats and monotonous types, demonstrating certain deficiencies in variety entertainment value, thus requiring continuous innovation and improvement. When broadcasting variety galas across various platform satellite television channels, the application of specific broadcast directing techniques is essential to enhance the gala' s variety entertainment value, strengthen audience interest, present high-quality television variety galas, improve broadcast directing effects, and elevate the gala' s ratings.

Full Text

Thoughts and Analysis on Directing Techniques for TV Variety Shows

Li Xiaoli (Yulin Media Center, Yulin, Shaanxi 719000)

Abstract: Television viewing stands as one of the essential entertainment choices during leisure time. Currently, audience demands for TV programs' watchability and entertainment value have increased significantly. However, traditional variety show formats remain fixed and monotonous, lacking sufficient entertainment appeal and requiring continuous innovation and improvement. When broadcasting variety galas across major network platforms, directors must employ appropriate directing techniques to enhance entertainment value, stimulate audience interest, and deliver high-quality TV variety shows, thereby improving directing effectiveness and boosting program ratings.

Keywords: TV variety show; directing techniques; camera positioning technology; camera adjustment technology; switching technology

CLC Number: G222
Document Code: A
Article ID: 1671-0134(2022)01-109-03
DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2022.01.033

TV variety shows differ fundamentally from traditional gala formats, demanding higher-level directing expertise. Personnel must possess not only technical proficiency but also the ability to control live situations. The final images presented to audiences represent a composite creation by directors who capture live footage, adjust audio effects, and integrate post-production special effects. Through directing techniques, directors can skillfully intersperse long shots, medium shots, and close-ups from the live venue, enabling audiences to enjoy a visual feast.

1. The Importance of Applying Directing Techniques in TV Variety Shows

Television programs encompass diverse genres, and the development of variety shows has introduced new presentation categories to the medium. Variety galas feature comprehensive artistry and unique innovation, combining multiple program types—including song and dance, skits, crosstalk, acrobatics—alongside hosting segments, interviews, and VR playback for live interaction.

The integration of different program categories in variety galas, presented to audiences through television broadcasting, introduces possibilities for spontaneous on-site changes. Therefore, the scientific application of directing techniques in TV variety shows proves crucial, requiring directors to possess artistic cultivation and innovative thinking. Program control must be conducted from an artistic perspective for broadcasting, while simultaneously employing professional technical means to present the live show' s audio-visual elements to both on-site and home viewers, ensuring smooth broadcast and guaranteeing program quality.

As audience demands for visual, auditory, and sensory experiences in variety galas continue rising, requirements for directing techniques increase correspondingly [1]. From start to finish, directing techniques permeate every aspect of variety galas, playing vital roles. For instance, recording various programs such as song and dance, skits, and comedies requires configuring different camera positions to ensure clear, substantive images, while precise picture switching and intercutting of various shot sizes all demand professional directing expertise.

2.1 Rational Application of Camera Positioning Technology for High-Quality Visuals

Television programs present both picture and sound, requiring cameras to capture both elements. With continuous scientific development, cameras now incorporate numerous functions, enabling directors to produce excellent image

quality using advanced equipment. Through effective application of directing techniques and rational use of camera positioning technology, directors can accurately control angles, ensuring cameras capture complete scenes. Combined with cinematography, this achieves 360-degree shooting without blind spots, gaps, or overlapping coverage, maximizing camera functionality and laying a solid foundation for post-production. For example, large-scale variety galas often require more than fifteen cameras. Camera positioning technology must consider different shooting angles between cameras, then divide them by zone, potentially incorporating mobile shot techniques to assist in complete show recording [2]. Variety performances can thus be fully presented through these cameras, facilitating post-production and creation of key content.

Furthermore, when positioning cameras throughout a variety gala, scientific application of positioning technology must incorporate both indoor/outdoor environments and weather conditions. Sunny versus overcast conditions produce different lighting effects in images, so camera placement must fully consider lighting conditions to ensure appropriate illumination and guarantee picture quality.

For example, in a TV variety gala' s group dance performance "Go," the stage design featured two layers: an ice-and-snow decorative stage and a real ice surface. The decorative layer primarily hosted group dance performances, while the real ice layer featured group skating. The program' s highlight was the real ice surface, where lighting projected a Go board pattern. Skaters wearing Go-piece costumes transformed into chess pieces, dancing across the ice and presenting different game positions. The design core aimed to showcase Chinese Go to audiences, but incomplete fixed camera positioning might compromise the board' s overall presentation. Directors must address potential issues such as inadequate top-down fixed camera coverage, while considering comprehensive shooting requirements for large-scale galas. This necessitates increasing camera numbers appropriately, avoiding venue limitations, and rationally applying directing techniques to effectively utilize camera positioning technology. Proper distance and placement between cameras and stage must be ensured to guarantee shooting effects and present high-quality variety show performances.

Additionally, mobile camera positions prove essential in TV variety galas. Directors should scientifically apply directing techniques to ensure full and rational utilization of camera positioning technology, increasing utilization of mobile track jib cameras and shoulder-mounted cameras to enhance operational flexibility [3]. For instance, during opening stage performances in a TV variety gala, directors must consider audience-stage distance to ensure appropriate jib camera placement, maximizing their effectiveness. Effective application of directing techniques ensures comprehensive picture content, fully expresses scene characteristics, and demonstrates the richness of stage performances.

2.2 Combining Precise Camera Adjustment Technology for Smooth Switching

Although camera operators handle cameras during TV variety galas, directors uniformly determine and control camera settings before the show. These parameters include aspect ratio, recording format, white balance, etc. After directors implement unified parameter control, camera operators receive unified direction during the show. Through rational application of directing techniques and camera adjustment technology, directors ensure precise adjustments and smooth switching, enhancing program broadcast quality and effectiveness.

For example, when performing situational dramas in TV variety galas, actors use costumes and props to portray life scenes involving tasks, situations, and work. To ensure smooth picture switching and optimal color and image quality, directors must complete unified parameter settings and effectively employ camera adjustment technology. Combined with professional directing techniques, this ensures color consistency between panoramic shots and different camera positions, avoiding obvious color differences, preventing picture layering issues, maintaining uniform color across all camera positions, ensuring white balance unity, reducing color differences in lighting shots, and guaranteeing superior program picture quality.

The significance of camera adjustment technology lies in directors' ability to debug photographic images according to live situations during broadcast, facilitating later program editing and production. Therefore, camera adjustment technology plays a major role in TV variety galas while serving to evaluate picture quality.

For instance, during a variety gala, if a shot angle appears skewed—such as when an actor enters from the left but another camera position lacks side or rear images of that actor—the entire picture appears incomplete and incongruous. This creates visual discomfort and poor viewing experiences for audiences. When such situations occur, directors must promptly apply camera adjustment techniques to enable cameras to capture clear, accurate images with continuous, gap-free action. After rational application of camera adjustment technology to reposition cameras, editors can perform continuous switching based on adjusted footage during post-production, optimizing audience viewing experiences [4]. Additionally, the adjustment process requires attention to details: communication terminology and gesture meanings among directors must be unified to ensure smooth communication, preventing disruption to camera adjustment work and avoiding impact on broadcast quality.

2.3 Employing Precise Switching Technology to Ensure Picture Fluidity

The images presented to audiences result from multiple cameras working in concert. Therefore, directors must employ switching technology to precisely control

picture transitions, requiring technical control of camera signals and continuous technical control of images to ensure audiences see seamless footage. For example, each program segment in variety galas features corresponding sub-themes and overarching unit themes. Different themes suit different demographics and ages, presenting varied imagery. Directors combine switching technology to precisely switch pictures, effectively presenting program themes while interspersing on-site atmosphere and audience interaction segments to control the gala' s rhythm, enabling both live and home audiences to experience the venue' s atmosphere. Furthermore, variety gala directors require not only on-site control capabilities but also multi-angle consideration and rational application of switching technology. For instance, thinking from the viewer' s perspective and considering the entire gala' s needs from the audience standpoint allows rational use of switching technology. Combined with facilities such as the SE-2800 high-definition/standard-definition switcher, this ensures smooth transitions between pictures, creating more beautiful visuals and providing spectacular visual feasts.

First, to avoid jump cuts during shot assembly, directors should follow the technical standards of "motion-to-motion" and "static-to-static" transitions. Simultaneously, cinematographers must employ professional, standardized shooting techniques using visual language to provide directors with high-quality pictures and beautiful shots for selection in a timely manner. Considering potential issues during camera movement such as unstable pictures or flickering brightness, directors must set camera movement patterns and speeds to align with audience visual habits, applying professional switching technology to adjust and ensure smooth transitions between different pictures, avoiding jump cuts [5]. Second, when directing variety gala programs, complex on-site environments with numerous camera positions may cause premature picture cutting, exposing audiences to abrupt images. Therefore, during normal gala broadcasting, directors must continuously monitor displays while establishing secondary and tertiary director positions. Secondary directors perform screening while tertiary directors combine switching technology for adjustments, preventing the problem of pictures arriving before cameras are ready. Finally, with continuous video technology development, variety gala video special effects have multiplied, intensifying audience visual experiences. However, directors must rationally utilize video technology and scientifically combine it with switching technology to improve program broadcast effects, avoiding visual fatigue and preventing chaotic program effects. For example, the "dissolve" effect suits lyrical song-and-dance performances in variety galas, creating soft sensory effects, but generally should not be used in high-energy dance numbers to avoid affecting program broadcast.

2.4 Scientifically Utilizing Rehearsals and Production Scripts to Improve Directing Techniques and Gala Quality

Multiple rehearsals must be conducted before organizing galas. Summarizing issues encountered during rehearsals not only helps predict and solve potential problems but also identifies new innovative points based on actual on-site condi-

tions, comprehensively improving directing techniques and effectively adjusting programs. Therefore, directors use multiple rehearsal opportunities to communicate more effectively with staff and performers while becoming more proficient in picture processing techniques, enhancing their own directing skills. This ensures that performances presented in pictures merge with on-site atmosphere during recording, creating more perfect and successful gala effects. Additionally, new directing technologies such as mobile directing systems can be integrated—for instance, integrating 12-channel directing facilities into 8U flight cases to obtain recording, communication, and other directing functions. Rehearsals ensure mobile directing technology can be rationally applied in galas, perfecting directing effects.

The director' s production script forms the foundation of variety gala broadcasting. A comprehensive production script can reflect the director' s detailed design for program broadcasting methods, transmission techniques, gala timing control, program flow, camera audio-visual effects, and special effects, serving as the communication basis between directors and all departments. Directors must continuously refine their production scripts. After multiple rehearsals, the director' s script becomes increasingly detailed, resembling a director' s shot-by-shot script. This enables smooth program sequencing, ensures reasonable allocation of all crew roles, combines effective application of directing techniques, improves picture broadcast quality, fully demonstrates the director' s overall layout of the gala site, and guarantees successful variety gala broadcasting.

During gala recording, unexpected situations frequently occur. Directors must possess excellent emergency response capabilities and a stable mindset when facing emergencies. For example, when encountering situations such as camera directions opposite to actors' turning directions or stage lighting not adjusted according to specifications, directors must make on-the-spot adjustments to camera positions and picture switching. For sudden incidents, directors need to communicate effectively with team members while combining rehearsal experience and previous gala experience to predict emergencies and prepare solutions for contingency. Once emergencies occur, directing techniques must be scientifically and effectively applied to ensure timely processing during recording.

Furthermore, when encountering emergencies, directors must maintain composure, handle situations calmly, and resolve incidents with the fastest and most effective solutions. Directors' ability to respond to emergencies relies on professional knowledge accumulated through long-term work and solid operational skills, as well as effective communication with all departments. For instance, if an on-site host' s voice becomes abnormal, directors must promptly determine whether the issue stems from the host or technical malfunction, then apply professional techniques such as picture masking or transition according to their judgment. Directors must synchronize thinking and operation to ensure flawless picture presentation. If relevant personnel cannot perform, directors must immediately communicate with on-site producers to implement backup solutions. Simultaneously, directors instruct cinematographers to avoid non-performing

hosts or actors, using portable directing classroom live streaming equipment for timely analysis and employing shot switching techniques to effectively resolve such issues. Therefore, directors' improvisational abilities provide the strongest guarantee for emergencies and represent the key to ensuring successful gala execution.

In summary, numerous directing techniques are employed in TV variety galas. These techniques require continuous practical application, reflection, and innovation to perfect directors' functions in variety galas, mature their skills, and present spectacular performances for both live and home audiences.

2.5 Integrating Shot Size Technology to Perfect Directing Coordination Effects

Directors must apply different shot size treatments to variety gala broadcast pictures, scientifically utilizing shot size technology to enrich audience visual experiences, improve program artistic effects, and create visually impactful photographic images.

First, long shots. Long shot size technology is most frequently used and highly effective in gala broadcasting. Through long shots, audiences can clearly see relationships between stage characters and scenery, serving functions such as presenting program connotations and enhancing atmosphere. Directors must implement reasonable and appropriate control for different gala programs during coordination, generally achieving better effects in song-and-dance programs. For instance, variety galas feature relatively numerous song-and-dance programs with many performers and complex stage settings. Directors should preferably use appropriate small long shots from suitable camera positions to ensure optimal audience viewing experiences.

Second, medium and close shots. Unlike long shots that present overall picture effects, medium and close shots focus more on program details. For example, medium and close shots in song-and-dance programs showcase multiple performers' movements, expressions, and costumes, creating intimate viewing experiences for audiences. Other program types primarily use medium and close shots to highlight characters and performance techniques, requiring appropriate usage duration. Medium and close shot size technology is mostly applied in language-based programs, highlighting actors' character connotations and demonstrating program significance while avoiding push, pull, or pan techniques that may cause unclear program effects and poor audience experiences.

Third, close-ups. Close-up shots provide the closest visual distance, maximizing details. Optimal close-up timing occurs at program climaxes or peak moments of character performance. For example, close-up shot technology is commonly used in music programs to highlight key elements for audiences and can also be applied in song-and-dance performances to reflect actors' expressions and emotions, resonating with audiences. In summary, directors should follow the principles of starting and ending with long shots, appropriately employing medium and

close shots, and rationally applying close-ups, scientifically combining directing techniques to bring spectacular broadcast pictures to variety galas.

Additionally, variety gala broadcast pictures are presented directly to audiences, requiring directors to employ certain techniques in framing stage aesthetics and program themes. For stage highlights, directors must guide cinematographers in shot composition, combining camera technology to endow pictures with aesthetic and textural qualities. Composition content should reflect program dynamics, integrate musical rhythms, and continuously utilize shots for rational framing. Directors leverage high-tech stage aesthetics, combining special effects and lighting effects while mastering rendering timing to guide camera operators in capturing highlight shots, creating rich, full, and artistically appreciable images [6]. At variety gala sites, framing must address not only stage effects but also audience dynamics. Combining professional framing techniques, directors use interaction time and cameras to capture pictures at any moment, integrating audience viewing states into broadcast pictures to enhance on-site atmosphere. Notably, when broadcasting audience audio, directors should adjust cameras appropriately, add audience shots reasonably, and adjust shooting angles and duration properly to ensure program integrity.

2.6 Perfecting Directing Techniques to Enhance Emergency Response Capabilities for Unexpected Situations

Unexpected situations frequently occur during gala recording. Directors must possess excellent emergency response capabilities and a stable mindset when facing emergencies. For example, when encountering situations such as camera directions opposite to actors' turning directions or stage lighting not adjusted according to specifications, directors must make on-the-spot adjustments to camera positions and picture switching. For sudden incidents, directors need to communicate effectively with team members while combining rehearsal experience and previous gala experience to predict emergencies and prepare solutions for contingency. Once emergencies occur, directing techniques must be scientifically and effectively applied to ensure timely processing during recording.

Furthermore, when encountering emergencies, directors must maintain composure, handle situations calmly, and resolve incidents with the fastest and most effective solutions. Directors' ability to respond to emergencies relies on professional knowledge accumulated through long-term work and solid operational skills, as well as effective communication with all departments. For instance, if an on-site host' s voice becomes abnormal, directors must promptly determine whether the issue stems from the host or technical malfunction, then apply professional techniques such as picture masking or transition according to their judgment. Directors must synchronize thinking and operation to ensure flawless picture presentation. If relevant personnel cannot perform, directors must immediately communicate with on-site producers to implement backup solutions. Simultaneously, directors instruct cinematographers to avoid non-performing hosts or actors, using portable directing classroom live streaming equipment for

timely analysis and employing shot switching techniques to effectively resolve such issues. Therefore, directors' improvisational abilities provide the strongest guarantee for emergencies and represent the key to ensuring successful gala execution.

In summary, numerous directing techniques are employed in TV variety galas. These techniques require continuous practical application, reflection, and innovation to perfect directors' functions in variety galas, mature their skills, and present spectacular performances for both live and home audiences.

References: [1] Liu Ying. On the Qualities of Directors in TV Variety Galas [J]. News Outpost, 2019(4): 79.
[2] Li Peng. Research on Artistic Strategies for TV Variety Show Directing [J]. West China Broadcasting TV, 2020(11): 109-110.
[3] Zheng Jie. "Essential Knowledge and Skills" for TV Directors [J]. Research on Transmission Competence, 2019(18): 37+39.
[4] Li Kai. Research on Visual Presentation of Multimedia Technology in TV Variety Galas [J]. China Media Technology, 2019(4): 57-59.
[5] Hao Danning. Creative Trends of TV Variety Galas Under Media Convergence—Taking the 2018 Shenyang Cultural Spring Festival Gala as an Example [J]. China Media Technology, 2019(9).
[6] Zhou Wan. Discussion on Recording Techniques for TV Directors in Large-Scale Events [J]. Reporter Observation, 2020(23): 157-158.

Author Biography: Li Xiaoli (1983-), female, from Danfeng, Shaanxi, Senior Engineer. Research interests: TV program packaging, large-scale gala directing, and integrated media live broadcast directing.
(Corresponding Editor: Hu Yang)

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.