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“Music imitating the style of the Touhou Project. Frequently uses distinctive trumpets, excited piano, and a melody reused in many different combinations of same and different instruments”

On Bilibili’s (and NicoNico’s) “Touhou-style Original Track” tags, the description is something like this. The famous video “Experiment: Can piling symbols together make a Touhou style track?” also defined several “symbols” of Touhou-style original tracks.

This series of definitions and specifications have more or less pointed towards the Touhou Project’s original tracks, i.e. ZUN’s composing style, defining Touhou-style original tracks as those imitating it and its unique qualities.

But, does this really cover all of what a Touhou-style original track is?

New Definition: Touhou-style≠Zun-style

I didn’t come to this conclusion on a whim, but this has always been my philosophy of composing. As everyone can see, in the humble 5.5 years I’ve been composing Touhou-style original tracks, not once have I intentionally written ZUN-style, considering all of my works as a whole.
Because of this, other than using good and cheap sources SQ, VG, EZD (here good and cheap means good bang for your buck and it sounds good, not because ZUN has used it) and SD-90 to provide necessary orchestral backing, trumpets, and saxophones, I’ve pretty much never used the sources ZUN has used.
When I compose, I never think “Should I compose in Ten Desires style or Subterranean Animism style?”. Regardless of style, it’s enough to communicate what I want to express, and create an atmosphere.
My composing style has gradually departed from ZUN, developing in my own direction. I started to wean myself of my reliance on trumpets, crazy piano, and restless chaotic drums, turning to a composing method I personally find more fitting and easier to control.
With regard to this, I’ve been denounced by quite a few people, but I can honestly say that I have never strayed from my initial intention of making Touhou-style original tracks.
I want to be an innovator, not an imitator.

Is it not Touhou-style without ZUN-style?

After talking so much about myself, I want to explain the above in a deeper and broader way.

First, the word “风” (lit “wind”, fig “style”) in “东方风自作曲” should not be distorted.

The phrase “东方风自作曲” (“Touhou-style self-composed track”) is directly taken into Chinese from Japanese, like “物语” (monogatari, story) and “手帐” (tetchou, notebook). A more accurate meaning would be “original tracks carrying the style of the Touhou Project”.

And the phrase “carrying the style of X” is food for thought. Here by style we’re not referring to the musical schools (e.g. jazz, rock and roll, etc.), but pure “style”. So easily we can see the difference in meaning between “carrying the style of X” and “similar to X”.

How to do this?

I’ve remembered a comment from many years ago that said **“not ZUN’s style, but as soon as you listen you can tell it’s Touhou”.**

This is what a Touhou-style original track is.

Audio sources, note writing methods, mixing, these things that are all easy to see and master ~~(actually not easy to master)~~, are the critical elements to constructing a musical style. But these are not absolute elements: Using ZUN’s elements results in an imitation of the Touhou Project’s original tracks; using ZUN’s elements and combining them according to ZUN’s methods results in an imitation of ZUN’s music. Unquestionably, this is “style”, but “style” is not limited to just this.

In a musical style, the most important thing is still the core, the philosophy of the composition and the creator’s thoughts.

In these years, the thing I’ve come to deeply understand is that the charm of Touhou-style original tracks is focused on three points: freedom, compatibility, and artistic mood.

Freedom means using any method to compose music to communicate emotion, with no concern for how certain instruments should be written. You can write instruments way out of range, use bass instruments as the treble...this kind of freedom is unlike that of any other music.

Compatibility means it can be combined with any style of music without issue. You can use folk music to write Touhou style, yet also use rock and roll to write Touhou style, you can even write folk and rock and roll in Touhou-style, then add some orchestra.

Artistic mood comes from Touhou-style original tracks’ origins as game BGM. It has a unique strength in describing scenarios, in describing characters, relationships, and stories.

These points form the core of Touhou-style original tracks, form its creative philosophy, and can achieve “not ZUN’s style, but as soon as you listen you can tell it’s Touhou”.

Next, we should look at this from a cultural perspective.

Touhou-style original tracks are thoroughly home-bred and home-grown Japanese music. After coming to China there'll definitely be some changes. Looking back at the history of China, what kind of culture has been able to diffuse into China yet remain unchanged?

We have had many interactions with Japanese composers. Besides Wanwan and 深苍穹 and others who have more distinctive styles, most of them stick tightly to ZUN style, picking the style of a specific game and delving deep into research and imitation.

But in China, everyone has their own style, each wildly different from ZUN's. Perhaps this is because Chinese culture is more geared towards "freehand", or because these are the sparks that inevitably occur when two cultures collide.

I haven't listened to many Touhou-style tracks from the West, but I can still feel the unique qualities of Western music. There, there's also very few people who stick tightly to ZUN style.

Perhaps, when people are composing they will more or less include some of their own country's qualities, and since Touhou-style original tracks are Japanese music, then obviously it'll change less in the hands of Japanese composers. Besides complimenting them on their ZUN-style, we should think for a moment, perhaps they are writing ZUN-style, and **we are writing Touhou-style**?

Lastly, after saying so much, I'll voice some complaints.

I've said so in posts before, trumpets are not a necessity. Similarly, crazy piano is not, neither are any of ZUN's original instruments. **The only necessary thing is the philosophy of Touhou-style original tracks.**

I will not make ZUN-style tracks, many Chinese composers won't. If you approach these tracks from the perspective of "Touhou-style", you'll definitely have a different experience.

Lastly lastly, please respect content creators.

I've always disliked comments such as "Master 11 is so good". Many of us composing Touhou-style original tracks also don't like them. If these comments appeared on every track, then what's the difference between that and saying "X was here"?

We hope that more insightful comments appear, not shallow comments under the pretense of praise.

Additionally, if you have your own thoughts on creators' creations, we welcome suggestions, but not demands.

Additionally x2, we welcome interest and curiosity towards the thoughts and feelings of content creators, not guesses disguised as definite conclusions.

Anyways, all that I've said may not be fully correct.

If I've misspoken, feel free to point it out, but let me say one last time, please retain common decency, do not bait or feed trolls.

The picture at the top I chose randomly lol.