

PEER REVIEW

under the competition for the academic position “Associate Professor”
under Professional field 8.3 “Music and Dance Arts”
specialty “Folk Choir Singing with Choir Science”

by

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Only one candidate – Chief Assistant Dr. Rada Slavinska, participates in the competition announced by Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv, Department of Musical Folklore. Her creative biography follows a consistent path of development in the field of choir art. In the years after receiving a Master’s degree in Music Pedagogy at the Academy (1986), R. Slavinska gained experience in various positions in Plovdiv choirs – from accompanist and second conductor at the Angel Bukureshtliev Singing Society and “Detska Kitka” Representative Choir to chief conductor and chief artistic director of renowned choirs, such as the Philippopolis Ensemble and especially the Evmolpeya Girls’ Choir Formation with the Plovdiv Municipality. Her conducting practice includes over 600 concert performances and dozens of international tours and festival participations. Simultaneously, the activity of R. Slavinska as a lecturer in “Folk Choir Conducting on Piano, Folk Orchestra on Piano and Folk Choir Singing” at the Academy, where she obtained the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” (2012) and was awarded the academic position “Chief Assistant” (2016), is extensive. Her musicological research is again related to the field of choir art through specialized analytical work on the “folk choir song” genre. This topic is developed by her both in the dissertation “*The Songs of Krasimir Kyurkchiyski for Folk Choir - Specificity and Significance*” and in two monographs – “*Chronology and Characteristics of the Songs for Folk Choir Genre*” (2009) and “*Prerequisites for the Emergence of the Songs for Folk Choir Genre*” (2019). In the field of author’s musical creativity R. Slavinska is a composer of solo songs, choirs, and instrumental works. She has also had numerous publications on musical performances in periodicals with music criticism and journalism.

The reference to the scientometric indicators and the attached evidence show that the uniform state requirements for occupation of the academic position of “Associate Professor” are met both quantitatively and qualitatively, covering equally three types of activities – research, educational, creative and artistic.

Central research result of the scientific work of Chief Assistant Dr. R. Slavinska is the monograph “*Prerequisites for the Emergence of the Songs for Folk Choir Genre*”, presented as a habilitation thesis. I appreciate the publication as a contribution in many ways. The research is a new line in the reflections on scientific issues that intrigued R. Slavinska in the development of her dissertation and in the previous monograph. After defining the parameters, scope, and characteristics of the genre, in her latest book the author addressed the conditions and grounds for its appearance in Bulgarian music and highlighted the “attitude towards folklore and the ways of its inclusion in professional art”. The topic covers an interesting period of Bulgarian cultural history (from before the Liberation to the middle of the twentieth century), insufficiently studied in the aspect chosen by R. Slavinska. The research is focused on issues that are essential both for the musical and historical knowledge and for the comprehension of the modern processes in the musical creativity on the basis of folklore.

The logical structuring of the text follows the chronology of the studied processes – from the organic presence of the folk song in the traditional culture of the Bulgarian, through its transformation in the changing socio-economic and cultural conditions during the development of the young Bulgarian state, to its presence in the creative achievements of Bulgarian composers in line with European musical aspirations.

Attention to adequate and precise use of terminology is a characteristic quality of the text. According to the researcher, the key to revealing the required prerequisites for the emergence of the genre is the term “interactivity” introduced by her, which refers to composers “changing the approach and ways of transforming Bulgarian folk songs into works of different genres” into a two-way relationship between society and composer. The changing content of the term “folk choir” is also explained, as well as the inapplicability of today’s understanding of “processing” of folk songs to the Bulgarian composers’ work during the studied period.

The European context in the transformation of folk song into professional music is presented in the study by highlighting the interaction between them, established in the musical history of Europe. Composers’ works are created and defined as “arrangements” and “adaptations” of musical material from folklore. The lost memory of medieval Bulgarian musical culture and the expression of identity mainly through folk songs is in contrast to the natural ascending development of European musical cultures. On the basis of folklore the awareness of the Bulgarian national and cultural separateness developed, and the folk ideas became a support of the Bulgarian literature. The factual information and interpretation presented by the author regarding the entry of European musical art among the urban population is interesting – the Revival and urban popular song borrowed foreign melodies, but also contained intonations in an organic connection with our rural folklore. As a summary of the pre-liberation period, the main paths to the use of song folklore are highlighted, among which are the folklore sound of the authors song creation and the change of the harmonic sense of the old modes to the major-minor system. An original author’s contribution is the highlighting of factors that helped the emergence, development, and ideology of the “folk choir song” genre after decades.

The Revival principles and ideals were followed in the musical professionalism of the first generation of Bulgarian composers after the Liberation, which followed the European traditions of support in folklore. Their musical creativity is considered in parallel with other cultural phenomena – literary, artistic, and architectural trends and the creation of cultural and educational institutions. Biographical explanations for composers have not only cognitive value, but also unite in comparison the general processes in the creation of the national school of composers. Special attention is paid to the predominant song creation – children’s, school, choir songs “in the folk spirit”, “folk motifs”, and the spirit of urban or rural song. The research interest in the recording and theoretical interpretation of folklore samples stands out.

The work of composers between the two world wars is seen as a continuing expression of democratization and the pursuit of “native art”, which led to the emergence of bright works in deep connection with folk songs. The author characterizes specific approaches to the use of a folklore source from different creative personalities. Various directions have been formulated in relation to the authentic Bulgarian song. The concert activity during the period of folk singers, musicians, and instrumental groups with their attempts to preserve Bulgarian folklore and present it to the public is announced as one of the essential prerequisites for the emergence of the “folk choir song” genre. The presented reasoning and conclusions are well thought out and convincing. The author demonstrates a high research culture and erudition in the broad field of musicology and culturological knowledge.

Among the scientific production of Chief Assistant Dr. Rada Slavinska stands out the interesting specialized publication in the Ukrainian academic edition (2018) about the Plovdiv Valhorn school in the person of the teacher Prof. Stoyan Karaivanov.

The creative and artistic activity of Rada Slavinska reflects her multifaceted musical experience as a choir conductor, instrumentalist, and composer. Among her significant concert performances as a conductor are the solo concerts of the Evmolpeya Choir on renowned stages such as the Sofia Music Weeks International Festival, the Autumn Salon of Arts in Plovdiv, the concert on the occasion of the closing of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in Podgorica, Montenegro, etc. Recognition for her conducting achievements is documented in diplomas, certificates, and thank you letters from international and national festivals and events.

The author's compositional work of R. Slavinska is also highly appreciated by the audience and the music circles. Among her vocal works, the "Missa Liliun", defined as the first Bulgarian mass, which took a deserved place in the choir repertoire and became a research object in a publication of Boris Mirchev in an academic edition (2019) is impressive. The originality of the author's musical thought is expressed in the combination of the Latin text with Bulgarian folk song "quotes" woven into the melodic construction and in the unification of performing groups – representatives of different musical styles (jazz, folklore, classical). The work is promoted through the recording of a CD and a TV movie. The creative connection with the folk music is also manifested in the instrumental work Rumeliya Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. An unusual combination of her own musical and literary work with educational methodology is the complex author's product of R. Slavinska entitled "Obarkvatsiya" – a collection of poems for children, a music supplement with poems by verse (for music educators), and sound carrier of recorded songs.

The educational activity of Chief Assistant Dr. Rada Slavinska at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy is versatile and fruitful. The teaching-methodical manual "Short Course in Choir Science" developed by her is intended for the students – a contribution to the literature for the respective discipline. The educational process is also supported by the compiled collections – the two-volume "Bulgarian Folk Songs for Chamber Ensembles" (by Nikolay Kaufman), and collections of songs for mixed folk choir and male folk choir. The results of the educational academic work are presented at student concerts, choir meetings, and productions, performed by her in a fascinating way and with an appropriate repertoire. Under her scientific guidance at the Academy a dissertation (by Ivan Georgiev) was successfully developed and defended.

The overall activity of Chief Assistant Dr. R. Slavinska is distinguished by a high level of professional competence and presents a wide range of awareness, theoretical depth, and long-term practical and creative results. She is a valuable and established specialist in conducting practice and in the research field of musicological knowledge. The occupation of the academic position of "Associate Professor" under Professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Arts", specialty "Folk Choir Singing with Choir Science" by Chief Assistant Dr. Rada Slavinska is more than well-deserved and I strongly recommend her candidacy.

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