

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Zoya Mikova, PhD

(*Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv)
in connection with a competition for the academic position of ‘Associate Professor’
in the professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, major
‘Musicology – Ethnomusicology’ at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* AMDFA - Plovdiv

This opinion is prepared in connection with the order of the Rector of *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* AMDFA - Plovdiv No. RD - 27-119, under the procedure for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in Musicology - Ethnomusicology. Sofiya Ruseva Ruseva is the only candidate. The required documents and materials for the election are available, which certifies the eligibility of the candidate.

For the competition, the candidate submits a monographic work entitled ‘*A Look at the Humorous Folk Song of Kotel*’ (2023). Already in the introduction Ruseva emphasizes that the text deals with the peculiarities of local models, but she also shares the opinion that the work can become the basis for bringing out specific features of an ‘understudied category’ of songs that ‘for one reason or another have remained ‘side-lined’ from the focus of research studies (p. 5).

The content of the monograph is spread over a total of 160 pages and is structured in an Introduction, a Brief Literature Review, two Chapters, a Conclusion, References, Abbreviations used, an Appendix with a list of informants, music examples and tables with a distribution of the musical models analysed according to different indicators.

The choice of the theme of the monograph and the interest in the issues are inspired by the emotional attachment and local belonging of Sofiya Ruseva, who ‘was in touch’ with this musical and poetic material at an early age. Thus, the proposed work is also a kind of continuation of the candidate’s observations and conclusions on this problematic, which precede the present procedure. In support of her work from the very beginning of the monograph, Ruseva applies the observations and documented information of eminent researchers and scholars related to the humorous songs of Kotel region. As of a result of this, it becomes clear that the object of her study possesses a distinctiveness, originality, and colourfulness that distinguish it from other specimens within the boundaries of musical-folk dialect. In the words of the author - this is an attempt to clarify the peculiarities of this genre.

Already in the introduction, the research methods and approaches for the work are selected. The results in the study are based on personally documented vocal songs as well as on examples from various collections. In the literature review and in the first part of the text, sources from various fields of knowledge are used - local history publications, ethnographic, historical-demographic studies, etc. These references are echoed in the first chapter of the study. By presenting various accounts of events and facts, by providing information on historical and geographical features, livelihoods, cultural activities, calendar and family rituals, etc., Sofiya Ruseva attempts to clarify the circumstances and context in which musical images were formed, functioned and developed in the settlement.

The centre of the monograph, which directly reflects the tasks set, is chapter two of the study. The research concept followed by the author is argued right at the beginning. Also in this section Ruseva presents information about the mechanism of creation, ‘bringing out’ this group of songs, which are provoked by real persons, incidents, events or other circumstances. In this part of the text,

information is also added about a 'special category among the humorous songs of Kotel region' - the so-called 'unsuitable' songs (p. 61).

The song material is approached through theoretical analysis - the songs are analysed according to various indicators: function of the tunes, melodic organisation (type of sound order, function of the individual degrees in the sound order, ambitus of the sound order), metrical rhythmic development, structure and form, etc., and the results of this approach are presented in five tables in the appendix (p.143). By analyzing and systematizing the musical material according to different classifiers, Ruseva aims to derive common elements and features of humorous songs from Kotel, as well as to discover the presence of regularities and mechanisms in the development of these musical models. As a result of her work, Ruseva concludes that humorous songs are a manifestation of a later, complex musical thinking. The conclusions drawn by the author overlap with earlier observations by fieldwork scholars and researchers, who share that the examples can mainly be dated to a later stage in the existence of folk models, namely in the conditions of increased interaction between 'urban' and 'rural' musical culture. An example of this complicated thinking and the generalized specific features of the humorous songs of Kotel region is attached in the conclusion of the monograph. At the end of the text Ruseva brings out her observations, discovering the presence of a wide tonal volume of the melodies - up to ninth interval; a specific organization of tones and melodic variety with a predominance of diatonic sound sequences; the presence of heterochrony in the metrical rhythmic structure, the predominance of a complex seven-temporal three-section metrum with a three-temporal group in the third section; an aspiration to overcome symmetry in the structural construction of the musical form, etc. (p. 114).

Ruseva's statement that it is difficult to find and document songs and other examples by different performers in modern times is confirmed by the availability of the 58 examples attached for analysis. Although I find the number of songs brought for analysis insufficient, I appreciate the presence of material personally collected by the candidate, correctly deciphered, analysed and systematised in the appendix of the study. I believe that the author's observations on the contemporary state of this genre, as well as its interaction with other song cycles, can be further developed, and I recommend that they be supplemented in the second part of the work. This would not only contribute to enriching the content of the thesis, but would also change the reader's initial impression of inequalities in the different sections of the monograph.

In connection with the present procedure, Sofiya Ruseva also applies a monograph based on a defended dissertation¹, in which her affinity for music theory and the use of a music-theoretical and analytical approach to the object of study is evident. This is clearly evident in the five papers from scientific conferences and forums that have been published in specialist arts journals and periodicals. Three of the texts are related to the proposed habilitation thesis and two are a continuation of the candidate's dissertation.

The high level of activity in artistic creation and participation with supportive artistic performance in collective product in the field of arts as a chorister in the *Gaudeamus* Academic Chamber Choir is also noteworthy. Evidence of 19 artistic performances is presented under this indicator. It is evident from the attached documentation that Ruseva has experience in project management and is actively involved as a participant in various academic initiatives.

Conclusion

I positively evaluate the overall activity of the candidate with the presented scientific, applied, artistic and organizational achievements indicated in the competition documentation, with

¹ 'Structure and form of dance folk songs (Northeastern, Central Northern and Northwestern Bulgaria)'

which Sofiya Ruseva proves her theoretical training and expertise. The documents comply with the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and its Implementing Rules. The abstracts clearly reflect the content of the texts and the contributions are correctly presented. This gives me grounds to vote in favour of her election in the competition for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in Musicology - Ethnomusicology in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art for the needs of the Faculty of 'Music Folklore and Choreography' at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* AMDFA - Plovdiv.

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