

PEER REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rada Borislavova Slavinska

Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv

Regarding the proposed contributions of Chief Assistant Dr. Vasil Milchev Vasilev, for his participation in a competition, announced in State Gazette, Issue 18 of 04.03.2022, for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, specialty: “Shepherd’s Pipe and Chamber Instrumental Ensembles”, faculty: Musical Folklore and Choreography, for the needs of the Musical Folklore Department, under Professional field 8.3 “Music and Dance Arts”, in accordance with the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquisition of scientific degrees and occupation of academic positions at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By Order No ПД 27-033 dated 03.05.2022 of the Rector of Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv I was appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury in relation to the competition for occupation of the academic position “Associate Professor”, under Professional field 8.3 “Music and Dance Arts”, specialty: “Shepherd’s Pipe and Chamber Instrumental Ensembles”. The candidate Vasil Vasilev has submitted a set of documents (on paper and on magnetic media) related to the application procedure for the academic position “Associate Professor”, of specialty “Shepherd’s Pipe and Chamber Instrumental Ensembles”. The submitted documents are the following:

- a sample application to the Rector for participation in a competition for the academic position “Associate Professor”, specialty: “Shepherd’s Pipe and Chamber Instrumental Ensembles” and a curriculum vitae with emphasis on the most important publications and projects;
- a diploma for a completed Master’s educational-qualification degree;
- the necessary documents in relation to the procedure – a medical certificate, a criminal record certificate, a certificate of his work experience in the specialty and a report on his academic workload during the past academic year;
- a completed scientometric table and a document on the contribution moments in the indicated theoretical publications;
- a representative sample of Vasil Vasilev’s concert performances, as well as two certificates in the additional list of contributions.
- evidentiary material on the scientometric table.

I have no objections to the presented documents and materials.

2. Brief biographical, pedagogical and creative data of the candidate

One of the most impressive aspects of the candidate's biography in the context of his candidacy for "Associate Professor", specialty: "Shepherd's Pipe and Chamber Instrumental Ensembles", is the fact that he is a hereditary shepherd's pipe player. His grandfather, the famous soloist of the Plovdiv Radio Folk Music Orchestra Vasil Milev, as well as the family musical environment, predetermine the interests, development and professional orientation of Vasil Vasilev. Brought up with the authentic musical tradition during his childhood years, he graduated from the National School of Folk Arts – village of Shiroka Laka in 1998 with a specialty "Shepherd's Pipe", and in 2005 graduated with a Master's degree in "Performing Arts – Shepherd's Pipe" at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts.

His performing talent was noticed at the beginning of his studies at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, and from the second year he was appointed as soloist-artist to the Academic Folklore Ensemble at the Academy. After graduation, he continued to work in the Orchestra, while at the same time he was a part-time teacher of shepherd's pipe in the specialties "Instrumental Art – Folklore" and "Pedagogy of Music Education". In 2015, Vasil Vasilev successfully defended his dissertation on the topic "Characteristic Features of the Contemporary Shepherd's Pipe Performance Art" and obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". Only two years later, after a defended competition, he occupied the academic position Chief Assistant in Shepherd's Pipe and Chamber Instrumental Ensembles at the Musical Folklore Department.

For many years, Vasilev has been teaching in the secondary education system as well, namely in Lyuben Karavelov Secondary School. In addition to complementing the pedagogical image and achievements of the candidate through the achievements of his graduates, this shows his skill as a charming lecturer, loved by his students and serving as an example with his performing activities. Vasil Vasilev has performed dozens of concerts in Bulgaria and abroad as a soloist of the Academic Folklore Orchestra, the Academic Folklore Ensemble and the Mystery of Bulgarian Voices Vocal Ensemble. Over the years, he has made numerous recordings for the Bulgarian National Radio – together with the Folk Music Orchestra, as well as recordings for the Bulgarian National Television. Vasilev also participated as a soloist in the instrumental pop and jazz formations Lamico Band and Ethno Folk Jazz. He is the winner of numerous awards from competitions and festivals, the most prestigious among them being: Grand Prix from Folklore without Borders International Youth Competition – Albena/Dobrich and First prize from the New Bulgarian Folk Music competition – Chepelare.

3. Contributions of the habilitation work

With regard to the shepherd's pipe performance art Chief Assistant Dr. Vasil Vasilev has long been recognized as a master. His virtuoso technique, deep knowledge of the authentic stylistic diversity of Bulgarian instrumental folklore, numerous concert appearances in the country and abroad, recordings of dozens of works, as well as articles on various specific problems, define him as one of the great connoisseurs of the shepherd's pipe practice in modern times. The choice of the topic of his habilitation thesis "The Shepherd's Pipe in

Bulgarian Musical Practice” is also not accidental. Relying on his own expertise, on his performance and pedagogical expertise tested in real life, as well as on 51 profiled works, most of which cited in the theoretical work, Vasil Vasilev presents us with a deeply thought-out and systematized panorama of the application of the shepherd’s pipe instrument in Bulgarian musical practice since recent times. The work shows a competent and theoretically supported attitude to the problem, as well as a refraction of other people’s experience through personal, verified in concert, pedagogical and sound recording practice. Vasil Vasilev skillfully uses the accumulated empirical and theoretical knowledge on the problem, successfully applying it in the development of the various sections and in the interpretation of the cited scientific statements. He demonstrates fluency with specific terminology. In the course of the work, his extremely good practical training and professional approach to the researched topic are evident.

The monograph is constructed with an introduction and four sections. From the very beginning, the author introduces us to the main reasons for the creation of the work – the attempt to answer the difficult questions regarding the spread and dominance of the Thracian-Strandzhan style in the development of the shepherd’s pipe art in Bulgaria. The time range of the study is also fixed – after the 60s of the XX century, defined as *“a new moment of development, a new higher stage of the treatment of folk instruments in our folk music”* [p. 25]. The emphasis of the development is on the music performed by the shepherd’s pipe and its use as a solo and orchestral instrument in the composition of the folk orchestra. As Vasilev himself says in the introduction, *“through the analyzes of various shepherd’s pipe melodies, the discovery and productive understanding of the outstanding specific features of instrumental music for the considered period of development is sought – from the ordinary folk song to the melodies in the modern stage”*. [p. 27]

In the first section – “The Shepherd’s Pipe and the Development of Bulgarian Folk and Instrumental Music” – the author examines the stages of the development of the authentic shepherd’s pipe practice, the ways of enriching the instrumental melodies from the simplified duplication of song samples, through their ornamental enrichment and the compositional evolution of the purely instrumental episodes, such as the overplaying games – to the independent unfolding of shepherd’s pipe melodies, distant from a specific vocal prototype. The systematization of various shepherd’s pipe techniques such as “caressing”, “oiling”, “sliding”, “knocking”, “pretzel finger”, their theoretical explanation and the deciphered sheet music illustrating the different techniques, leads to meaningful – from the position of a performer, lecturer and researcher – conclusions about the development and formation of the shepherd’s pipe style.

The second section – “Shepherd’s Pipe Players of the 20th Century and Their Role in the Development of the Shepherd’s Pipe Instrumental Folk Music” – begins with a reminder of the most important, according to Vasil Vasilev, shepherd’s pipe players for the development of the instrumental style of the 40s and 50s of the XX century, namely Georgi Kehayov and Dragan Karapchanski. Their “successors” Nikola Ganchev, Tsviatko Blagoev, Vasil Milev, Nikola Kostov and Stoyan Velichkov are examined with their most characteristic features of their performing handwriting, with the specific techniques remaining in the general instrumental practice of their playing and influencing the formation of the new paths in the shepherd’s pipe practice. The constellation of distinguished middle-generation shepherd’s

pipe players was also not overlooked in the research, as the paths and different directions in the playing of two extremely distinguished instrumentalists – Matyo Dobrev and Theodosii Spassov – are personally examined. On the basis of a comparison in playing, the use of techniques, selection and/or composition of melodies, Vasilev defines the paths in the development of the modern shepherd's pipe style, proves its intonation connection with the Thracian-Strandzhan shepherd's pipe practice and defines the stages through which the process passes, which is an undisputed contribution of the study. Thus, he reaches the definition of the current stage of development, which is characterized by a distance from a specific song prototype and *“is entirely the fruit of individual or group creativity. The entire piece almost loses ... its genial structure, partially loses its ladotonal structure, breaks away from its stylistic determination.”* [p. 112]

Although short, the third section of the monograph – “Usage of the Shepherd's Pipe in Folk Music Chamber Groups” – is definitely innovative. The instrument has not been considered in the music-theoretical literature in this perspective until now.

The fourth section – “Usage of the Shepherd's Pipe in Modern Folk Music Orchestra” – completes the entire palette of the use of the shepherd's pipe in musical and folklore practice. The monograph's contributions are also complemented by the fact that applied-pedagogical aspects of solo and ensemble instrumental practice are also considered. The study of modern shepherd's pipe paths of development contributes to the discovery of new aspects of current instrumental practice, dynamics in shepherd's pipe training, as well as the development of adequate pedagogical and teaching methods. The results of the development of the habilitation work on modern shepherd's pipe practices complement and place a new level of knowledge on the shepherd's pipe art in Bulgaria. Since the narrowly specialized scientific and pedagogical literature on the shepherd's pipe instrument is still too small, the present monograph fills in the knowledge of some aspects of the shepherd's pipe performance that have not been examined at all until now.

4. Contributions to other habilitation materials

As part of the habilitation materials, Vasil Vasilev applied the published scientific report “Usage of Shepherd's Pipe and Bagpipes in Chamber-Instrumental and Vocal Folklore Ensembles”. The report examines rarely touched aspects of folk chamber music such as stylistic, melismatic and intonation unification of individual instruments and performers in order to achieve ensemble behavior, as well as rules and ways of building the form – theoretically formulated accents, reached empirically and valuable precisely because of their high practical and applied value.

In Section D Vasilev also applies evidentiary material of three concert performances with a high contribution weight. These are Concert-performance “10 years Academic Folklore Ensemble at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts” of 01.08.2018; concert with the Folk Five group of 29.01.2019 in Vinkovci (Croatia); a concert on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of the birth of Nikola Vaptsarov with the special participation of Vasil Vasilev – Shepherd's Pipe of 07.12.2019 at the National Palace of Culture. These concerts with their radically different program present the ability of the

candidate to masterfully and successfully integrate himself into the roles of a solo instrumentalist, a member of a chamber group and a soloist of a folk orchestra and show his deep practical knowledge about the specifics of the positions for which he is applying.

In Section E, item 17, Vasil Vasilev applies four citations from his different publications in specialized forums. These are citations from the published dissertation work “Characteristic Features of the Contemporary Shepherd’s Pipe Performance Art” and from the article published in the specialized publication “Musical Horizons” – “The Shepherd’s Pipe Player Vasil Milev and His Contribution to the Development of the Thracian Musical Style”. The fact that three of the four citations are in different theoretical developments of the doyen of modern shepherd’s pipe art – Theodosii Spassov, speaks for itself about the value of the proposed materials and their usefulness.

In item 19 of the same section, a review by Theodosii Spassov about the concert dedicated to the 110th anniversary of the birth of Nikola Vaptsarov, published in the academic publication “Art Spectrum” in April 2021, is attached. *“The challenge for Vasil Vasilev was not only to play the specified melodies from the respective songs, but also to make the appropriate improvisations on them, respecting their character and style in order for them to be in sync with the verses. I definitely think that Vasil Vasilev did an excellent job with this difficult task, fully revealing his performance capabilities – perfectly sound extraction, wonderful ornamentation and instrumental technique”* [Theodosii Spassov, Art Spectrum, Issue 54, pp. 20-21]. Listening to the recording of the concert, I admit that Theodosii Spassov’s words accurately and correctly formulate the difficulty of the undertaking and the wonderful performance embedding of Vasilev, but knowing Vasil Vasilev’s performance capabilities for a long time, I believe that these words describe in their entirety the candidate’s concert appearances.

Item 28 presents the study guide “Non-Measured Melodies from the Repertoire of Popular Master Players” in the joint compilation of Prof. Lyuben Dosev and Vasil Vasilev. The 50 solo pieces for unaccompanied shepherd’s pipe, deciphered personally by the composers, are collected from various archive records of private sound libraries, many of which are offered in the educational literature for the first time. In addition to helping students, this manual complements the repertoire of many shepherd’s pipe players and contributes to the maximum preservation of the authenticity of style, melodies and melismatics. In addition, evidentiary materials are offered for two workshops on shepherd’s pipe, which presents another side of Vasil Vasilev’s activity – the competent teaching activity and the proven value of his teaching work. Because these are only two of the numerous public “classrooms” in which this wonderful shepherd’s pipe player participates!

CONCLUSION

I have known Vasil Vasilev for more than two decades. I have observed both his development as a student and his growth as one of Bulgaria’s prominent shepherd’s pipe players. I have formed an opinion about him as an exceptional instrumentalist-performer, a wonderful lecturer and organizer, and a conscientious researcher and connoisseur of the

specific subject matter. He is well known and accepted by the folk performance, jazz and pedagogic community. As a colleague, I would say that he is disciplined, well-intentioned, fair and absolutely dedicated to his students and his work. Proof of this is the wonderful yearly productions of his shepherd's pipe class and his instrumental groups, the respect of the students, his inclusion in all initiatives of the Musical Folklore Department, as well as the good relations with his colleagues at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts.

For this competition, it is important that the candidate fulfills the requirements determined by the minimum scientometric indicators set by the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for occupation of the academic position "Associate Professor", as follows: According to group of indicators A – 50 points; According to group of indicators C – 100 points; According to group of indicators D – 145 points, upon necessary 120; According to group of indicators E – 50 points, upon necessary 40; According to group of indicators F – 70 points, upon necessary 50. The candidate meets the minimum requirements in sections A and C, and exceeds the minimum in the other sections. With a national requirement for occupation of the academic position "Associate Professor" of a total of 360 points, Vasil Vasilev applies with an activity corresponding to 415 points from the table with the minimum scientometric indicators.

After thoroughly familiarizing myself with the documentation provided by Chief Assistant Dr. Vasil Vasilev for his participation in this competition, I believe that the candidate meets and exceeds the point requirements for the scientometrics indicator groups of the National Center for Information and Documentation. The presented evidentiary material, illustrating the scientific and artistic production for occupation of the academic position "Associate Professor", presents the candidate in many ways as a serious performer, educator and researcher.

Based on what has been said so far, I give my positive assessment and suggest to the respected members of the Scientific Jury in the competition for "Associate Professor" to select Chief Assistant Dr. Vasil Vasilev for the academic position "Associate Professor" in Higher education field 8 "Arts", Professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Arts", for the needs of Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv and the Musical Folklore Department.

Plovdiv, 13.06.2022

Prepared by:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rada Slavinska)