

## PEER REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Veselka Toncheva

*under procedure for occupation of the academic position “Associate Professor”  
Professional field 8.3 “Music and Dance Arts”, Specialty “Ethnomusicology” for the needs  
of the Musical Folklore Department, Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography at  
Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – City of Plovdiv*

**Only candidate: Chief Assistant Dr. Zoya Mikova**

From a formal point of view, the candidacy of Chief Assistant Dr. Zoya Mikova contains all of the required documents. The demonstrated results in her various spheres of activity meet the minimum national requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and she is a suitable candidate for the competition announced by the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts for occupation of the academic position “Associate Professor”.

The *scientific research activity* of the candidate includes her dissertation work for the acquisition of her “Doctor” degree, defended in 2015. The different ethnic and confessional communities in Plovdiv have repeatedly been the subject of research with different focus and tools in different disciplines, but the contribution of Dr. Mikova consists in documenting and deciphering music/song samples and classifying them not only by ethnicity but also by functional character, as well as in revealing similar moments in traditional musical practices of individual communities, which is interpreted as a key to understanding the differences.

The scientific production with which Z. Mikova participates in the competition includes one monograph and eight publications – three of them are related to the monograph; three are on the topic of the dissertation research; one examines the question of the relationship between traditional culture and its importance for education in the present, and one has a methodological character – it relates to the preparation of an ethnomusicological field study.

The monographic work of the candidate “*Milkovitsa – History, Ethnography and Culture*” fills a gap – it is the first of its kind for this village and fits into the complex settlement type of studies, part of the detailed outline of the ethnographic, musical and folklore and dialect specificity of the different regions in Bulgaria. Particularly interesting is the “dual” image of the population of Milkovitsa as “Wallachian” (foreign name) and as being of Bulgarian origin (rather in self-determination and self-awareness), which puts the author to

the challenge to draw her conclusions only through an insight into the traditional culture, holiday system, music and dance.

An important point in this study is the position of Z. Mikova herself – her origin is from the village of Milkovitsa, which raises the question of her point of view at the same time as an “internal” participant and an “external” observer, experiencing this culture, but also distancing herself so that she can study and analyze it. In some cases, the parallelization of these two positions may be problematic, but the candidate successfully manages her role as a scientist who has thoroughly researched her subject (albeit strongly stating in the beginning and in the conclusion her family and emotional attachment to the village, as well as to some places, and using first-person singular as a “storyteller” with her memoirs – for example, pages 40-41, 135-136, 143, 148, etc.).

The work is based on the fieldwork of the author, realized over a fairly wide time span: 1992 – 2019. It is noteworthy that Z. Mikova is an excellent terrainist who consistently and consciously tries to “exhaust” all aspects of the traditional culture that the terrain offers (her first field trials date back to her students’ years, when she participated in field studies and student expeditions in the villages of Iskra, Parvomay District; Yavrovo, Asenovgrad District; Ravnogor and Rozovo, Bratsigovo District, etc.).

The book is structured in three chapters with an introduction, a conclusion and an appendix, a DVD with archive photos and some of the documented music samples. Based on a number of different written and oral sources and documents, the first chapter’s introduction provides diverse information on the history, geography, ethno-demography and language of the settlement (in particular bilingualism in relation to the establishment of the personal and community identity of the people from Milkovitsa), as well as the religious, cultural and educational institutions (church, school, community center, club, museum) and their role in the life of the village.

The second chapter is devoted to calendar and family rituals, reconstructed through the stories of the interlocutors. In those customs known throughout the ethnic territory of Bulgaria, parallels are sought with the practices in the Middle North, Northwest and Northeast Bulgaria, while in others the specificity of their realization is pointed out in the village of Milkovitsa. Among them stand out the *Male Lazaritsa: Katsa-Matsa* and *Kalush* in the calendar cycle and “*Razlivane na voda*” /*Water spilling*/ and “*Pomana Prizhive*” of the family rituals. The “other practices” include “*Sedyanka*” and the “*Evening of the National Costume*” on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. However, it seems to me that these are practices of a different order and this should be pointed out – “*Sedyanka*” from the village of Milkovitsa is represented

through the memories of the local people in its traditional form (with the games “*Tsar Zapovyada*” /*The King’s Commands*/, “*Prastencheto*” /*The Little Ring*/, “*Ilenush*” and the dance “*Pelenitsa*”, while the celebration on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March is “created” in the present – related to the presentation of the local costume and of stage performances on holidays. Its functioning is symptomatic of the need for the people of Milkovitsa to be recognizable to others by their own festivity. I would point out that this chapter is largely descriptive, not so analytical, but its contribution is in the high saturation of the information gathered by the author, which is also present in the music and dance element – the subject of the next chapter of the text.

The third chapter contains information on the personal and professional life of distinguished musicians and performers from the village of Milkovitsa – individual instrumentalists and singers, as well as participants in various orchestral formations, such as brass and jazz, and vocal groups such as the amateur male choir, the children’s vocal group to the school and the Milkovchanka Folk Group. The dance ensemble to the Community Center and its repertoire are also presented. This chapter also contains an analysis of particular song examples, as well as of instrumental tunes (traditional and “unconventional”, i.e. relating to Western European musical culture), with the author identifying common features with the North Bulgarian musical folklore dialect, but also the presence of the musical folklore from the territories of neighbors and close kinship with the districts of Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania. This analysis could be both more extensive and a little more systematic. At the end of the third chapter, the traditional costume from Milkovitsa is presented in detail, which is another ethnographic “accent” in the work. The annexes to the text enrich everything written with visual and musical material.

I paid particular attention to the monograph of the candidate, but her other activities are no less important. The *pedagogical, educational and methodological work* of Z. Mikova for the 2018/2019 academic year at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts includes the teaching of 6 fundamental ethno-musicological disciplines – “Musical Folklore”, “Music Theory”, “History of Folk Performing Arts”, “Bulgarian Ethnography”, “Collection and Decoding of Musical Folklore” and “Music Elements Theory”. Here again the candidate’s attitude towards the fieldwork is actively manifested – she not only prepares the students for such activity, but also organizes and conducts field studies with them, which is especially important as a practical experience in their training at the Academy.

Along with the organization of exhibitions, concerts and composing, the project “The Unknown” Cultural Seminar, which was realized in 2016 and in 2018, is particularly

prominent in the candidate's *artistic and creative activity*. It is a kind of continuation of her dissertation research, but in scientific and applied terms – with a theoretical and practical module. Z. Mikova is the organizer of a very important forum, attracting representatives of the communities she has examined as participants (Armenians, Jews, Turks and Roma in the first edition), teachers, students from universities all over Bulgaria, people from different fields of art and culture, as its main aim is to get to know one another, to communicate, to have intracultural exchange, and to promote traditional music and practices.

All this confirms the overall image of the candidate Z. Mikova as a successful teacher and researcher, who is committed and responsible to her work. This gives me reason to propose to the Honorable Scientific jury to award Z. Mikova with the academic position “Assistant Professor” under Professional field 8.3 “Music and Dance Arts”, Specialty “Ethnomusicology” for the needs of the Musical Folklore Department, Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography at Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – City of Plovdiv.