

PEER REVIEW

of a dissertation for award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” under Professional field “Music and Dance Arts”, scientific specialty “Musicology and Music Art” (Code 8.3)

Topic of the dissertation: “Contemporary Trends in Conducting when Working with Orchestra of Folk Instruments”

Author: Dimitar Hristov Hristov, PhD student, Musical Folklore Department, Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv

Scientific adviser: Prof. Milcho Vasilev (Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts)

Reviewer: Prof. Ventsislav Dimov, Doctor of Sciences (Sv. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University, Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

1. Presentation of the doctoral student

Dimitar Hristov is a bright name among conductors, leaders of formations, and artists in the field of modernized folk music. His autobiographical reference eloquently confirms this with professional and academic education and specializations, with rich and long-term concert and sound recording activity, with leadership and conducting of authoritative formations (Pirin Folklore Ensemble, Trakiya Folklore Ensemble, Folk Orchestra of the Bulgarian National Radio, etc.), as well as with impressive discography of 24 original albums. The theoretical work presented for review is part of the artistic and creative doctoral program, which includes six concerts, realized with different orchestral formations: Folk Orchestra of the Bulgarian National Radio, Academic Folk Orchestra at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv, and Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra, with special participation of soloists from Trakiya Folklore Ensemble, in 2017 and 2018. The concerts present various practical aspects of the work of the contemporary folk orchestra conductor and together with the reviewed theoretical development is a kind of diptych for me.

2. Content of the dissertation

The dissertation has a total volume of 96 pages. The text, as mentioned, is a theoretical part of a complex artistic and creative doctoral program, which includes six concerts, which present various practical aspects of the work of the contemporary folk orchestra conductor. The theoretical part is structured in an introduction, an exposition of three chapters, a conclusion, and a list of references.

In the Introduction (p. 5-7) the choice of the topic is substantiated, and the subject and the object of the research, the goals and the tasks of the scientific work and the research methods are

indicated. In another separate part, which the author has called “Theoretical Review” (p. 8-11) and which can be accepted as part of the Introduction, an attempt is made for an analytical reading of Bulgarian research and publications on a wide range of issues related to the topic of labor – the treatments and debates related to them, the orchestra with folk instruments, conducting problems (publications of B. Abrashev, T. Prashanov, V. Todorov, V. Atanasov, M. Vasilev, K. Buradzhiev, D. Hristova, etc.).

Chapter One, entitled “The Conductor of an Orchestra of Folk Instruments until the 90s of the XX Century” (p. 12-42), is a brief historical account of the emergence, separation, and recruitment of the orchestra of folk instruments. Prominent instrumentalists, orchestras and conductors are pointed out, as the review begins chronologically with the first groups of folk instruments in Radio Sofia from the second half of the 1930s, continues with the creation of the first amateur and professional ensembles in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and reaches the orchestras from the early 1990s. Emphasis is placed on the contribution of the conductors Boris Petrov, Kosta Kolev, Aleksandar Kokareshkov and Hristo Urumov.

Chapter Two – “The Contemporary Conductor of an Orchestra of Folk Instruments” (p. 43-62) presents the author’s observations on the work of folk music orchestras over the past 30 years and brings out the brightest conductors, embodying contemporary trends in conducting orchestras of folk instruments: Milcho Vasilev, Hristofor Radanov, Georgi Andreev, Vladimir Vladimirov. Hristov makes an attempt at his own typology of the multifunctional figure of the conductor: manager, composer, arranger, pedagogue, and mediator.

Chapter Three – “Sound Recording Activity – an Integral Part of the Portrait of the Contemporary Folk Orchestra” (p. 63-86) is dedicated to one of the specific activities of the contemporary conductor: the sound recording activity of the orchestra of folk instruments. Here Hristov is in his element – the main problems in the preparation and realization of a sound recording with the participation of soloists, vocal groups and choirs are presented convincingly and in detail, as well as the problems in the notation and when working with obscure works, taking into account the different compositional, orchestral, and stylistic skills of the authors.

The conclusion (p. 87-90) summarizes the content of the work and highlights its contributions.

The appendices are included in the text and defined by the author as “minimum number of graphic illustrations – 11 musical examples and 101 explanatory notes below the line”, at the expense of the actual appendices left outside the text – the concert performances in front of audience.

The bibliography includes 87 titles – the rubric “Bibliography” includes mixed scientific, pedagogical, educational and methodical, together with popular scientific and applied texts in Cyrillic.

The abstract (43 pages) correctly conveys the content of the dissertation. There is no list of publications on the topic, but the attached file with the autobiography indicates the author's music albums as publications.

3. Contributions

The personal contributions of the doctoral student and the work are listed in a self-report and indicate that the dissertation is contributing in two directions: as a systematization and approach (4 contributions) and as a pioneering work (8 contributions). The systematization of the development processes is also diachronic from the position of the contemporary conductor of an orchestra of folk instruments. The analytical readings of the conductor's activities (concert, recording, the conductor as a composer, arranger, pedagogue, mediator, and manager) are from the positions of "active practicing conductor". The author insists that in his dissertation many things are done "for the first time": a detailed analysis of the work of the conductor of an orchestra of folk instruments, analysis of the activity of bright conducting figures from the present, classification of the functionality of the conductor of an orchestra of folk instruments, description of a complex of rehearsal, concert and recording activities as a task of the conductor, author's systematization of the various conducting activities related to the work of the orchestra of folk instruments, a detailed picture of the rehearsal and recording process of the orchestra of folk instruments from the position of the conductor, an attempt for systematization of the problems of the notation in the scores for an orchestra of folk instruments, as well as derivation of the production activity as an integral part of the modern activity of the conductor of an orchestra of folk instruments.

Other achievements of the doctoral student can be added to the contributions indicated in the self-report. The choice of the topic is important because it combines the personal motivation and competence of the author. The approach – to combine reading of previous texts with personal practical experience and to look for the typology of phenomena through knowledge and cognition – is a success of Hristov, who convinces us in his vision of the conductor as a synthetic figure uniting the qualities of musician, mediator, and art manager. The research is up-to-date – dynamic and current phenomena and processes are placed on analytical reading. The text supports and consolidates the main, artistic, and creative part of the doctoral dissertation and proves that Hristov has competence and expert qualities in the researched problem. Perhaps the greatest merit of the work is its resources for practical applicability – the processes and problems of conducting in orchestras of folk instruments gathered in the research focus would be a valuable guide for both conductors and anyone interested in the realization of stage and media transformations of traditional music in the contemporary situation.

4. Notes and recommendations

These contributions can be specified. Perhaps the typology of the many contributions would have been a more appropriate approach to consolidate and present more convincingly in several observable areas the positive aspects of the dissertation.

The so-called “theoretical review” at the beginning of the text is incomplete (for example, among the authors who problematize the treatments and debates around them in Bulgarian science, key names and texts are omitted, such as Nikolay Kaufman, Todor Todorov, Todor Dzhidzhev, Lozanka Peycheva, etc.) and eclectic (the diversity of theoretical, journalistic, educational and methodical texts is not articulated, from different fields of research of traditional music: theoretical, on the issues of folklore modernity, organology, etc.; and practical, related to the practice of recreating modernized and written traditional music). It is not well enough substantiated and it is not clear why “the most directly corresponding to the topic of the present work” (which is focused on conducting when working with an orchestra of folk instruments) is a monograph on choir, sharing the personal experience of the choir leader of “The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices”.

The common denominator “bibliography” includes scientific literature, popular texts and journalism, manuscripts and periodicals. The sources entered as a footnote are missing in the reference to the sources at the end of the text. These Internet resources are not suitable for scientific work (instead of articles from Wikipedia, more convincing texts could be sought for reference and argumentation).

Finally, the author of the text, unlike the artist-conductor, who is in the spotlight in the concert part of the dissertation, remains hidden, perhaps because of some unnecessary modesty or presumption of objectivity. I think as a researcher that for those tempted by the anthropology of music, its personality, and socio-cultural and media functioning, a monograph in which a conductor and artist, at the same time a bright media figure like Dimitar Hristov, would be present as an object of research and self-monitoring, would be valuable. Such is my wish for the future fate of this work – edited, expanded and in-depth, to be published as a book, and why not with an audiovisual application containing an extract from the concerts not only as part of the procedure but also as part of the study.

5. Conclusion

The dissertation “Contemporary Trends in Conducting when Working with Orchestra of Folk Instruments” by Dimtar Hristov Hristov, doctoral student at the Musical Folklore Department, Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv meets the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. The reviewed work is part of a large-scale artistic and creative work, explores important musical and folklore issues, develops and enriches existing knowledge, fills existing gaps in the study of modern orchestras with

instruments, and introduces for the first time as a main research object the conductor and his complex activity. My assessment of the work is positive.

City of Sofia, 15.08.2020

Prof. Ventsislav Dimov, Doctor of Science