

PEER REVIEW

of the dissertation of Dimitar Hristov

on the topic: “**Contemporary Trends in Conducting When Working with Orchestra of Folk Instruments**”

for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”,

Scientific specialty 8.3 “Musicology and Music Art”

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The dissertation proposed for defense concerns current scientific issues dedicated to conducting of an orchestra of folk instruments. From the very beginning it should be noted that as an active participant in the observed processes the doctoral student in depth knows this area and this is evident from his biography. This position gives him an “inside” view, which makes the present study particularly valuable in terms of his many years of practical experience and competences. This explains the motivation of D. Hristov for the work on the topic, moreover, that there is a lack of sufficient research on these issues, which is the conclusion made in the part “**Theoretical Review**” as brief overview of existing publications on the dissertation. In it D. Hristov points out that the scientific literature concerning the conducting in folklore performance is still extremely scarce and this is where I see an important contribution of the dissertation proposed for defense.

Chapter One of the text is dedicated to the conductors and the historical development of the orchestras of folk instruments in the period up to the 90s of the XX century. Theoretically, and with reference to various authors, a typology of this type of orchestras is proposed – by function (purpose), by size, and by genre affiliation of the performed music. In the latter type, the candidate notes that nowadays orchestras of folk instruments often perform music that can hardly be called “folk”, as it is the result of genre hybridization, globalization and commercialization, leading to increased expectations of the audience. Drawing different points of view, in the summary to this part D. Hristov comes to the conclusion that in order to perform Bulgarian folk music, today there are no strictly defined parameters for combining instruments – any combination of instruments is possible and permissible if done professionally and if a balance has been achieved.

On page 16 D. Hristov also mentions the brass bands popular in Central Northern and Northwestern Bulgaria, which as he writes “worthily replace the function of the Thracian wedding orchestras”. This statement needs to be clarified, as the comparison with the Thracian orchestras requires the registration of the different time layers in which these phenomena are located – the wedding instrumental formations were created relatively later by the brass bands in Northwestern Bulgaria (registered in the late XIX century) and there is no way for the latter to “replace the function” of the Thracian orchestras. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that they have similar functions.

In the brief historical review, the candidate turns to the history of the Bulgarian National Radio, pointing out the figures of the conductors who conducted the folk music orchestra, as well as the many guest conductors – all of whom left a bright mark in the musical orchestral tradition. Separate, and according to Hristov important, figures of conductors are presented – Boris Petrov, Kosta Kolev, Aleksandar Kokareshkov, and Hristo Urumov.

At the end of Chapter One the main activities of the conductors of folk orchestras for the considered period are outlined – D. Hristov makes the important observation that in the specific socio-cultural context in most folk ensembles a set of regulated professional positions with a clear profile of activities facilitating the work of conductor has been developed. And it, in turn, remains directly related to the cast, its functions, and stage needs. There are three possible conducting activities in the structure of the ensembles that the candidate performs, namely “playing conductor”, “rehearsal conductor”, and “concert conductor”.

Chapter Two of the dissertation text focuses on the conductor of the orchestra of folk instruments nowadays, and the current state and trends in this field. From the brief historical review of the development of folk orchestras from the last 30 years it is clear that the political changes and the new economic situation in our country after 1989 had a predominantly negative effect on the existence and activity of folk music orchestras. However, the author points out the positive “opening” of Bulgarian music culture to the world, as well as the free access to information in the global network, which undoubtedly leads to new opportunities for development in the field of orchestral music researched by D. Hristov.

Like the previous chapter, here the candidate presents bright figures of conductors, but from our time – Milcho Vasilev, Hristofor Radanov, Georgi Andreev, and Vladimir Vladimirov. Thus, the construction of the image of the conductor is convincingly supported by concrete examples of individuals with their creative path, approaches, and contributions. This demonstrates the ability of D. Hristov to understand beyond the specific biographical data and to bring out and highlight features and specifics.

The next part of Chapter Two covers the complexity of conducting, which is far from being just artistic and creative. The “roles” of the conductor are defined as “multifunctional” (p. 52). The need for the conductor to be a *manager* and to carry out business activities related to the performances of the orchestra is imposed, according to D. Hristov, by the low interest in the management of folk music in our country. The conductor’s function as a *composer* and *arranger* is especially important, as he or she takes responsibility for the selection and realization of the repertoire of the orchestra – along with the music literature published and written especially for the orchestra, the repertoire must include compositions and arrangements by the conductor. The role of the conductor as a *pedagogue* is presented by the candidate in the context of the teaching activity in the specialized secondary and higher schools for folk music, indicating the names of bright conductors of educational and representative orchestras. Another new role of the conductor is defined by D. Hristov – that of a *mediator*, whose task is to include in the orchestra’s repertoire the new modern forms, combining folklore genres with other modern musical styles. Last but not least, the conductor should also be a *director*, because it is on him or her that the construction of each concert program with its specific parameters depends.

Chapter Three is the last chapter of the dissertation and offers a look at a less researched field, which, however, is an integral part of the activity of the contemporary folk orchestra – the recording activity. I will emphasize again that this detailed view of the specifics of this activity is possible only on the basis of many years of experience of the candidate and his high professionalism. And since the soundtrack highlights the extreme accuracy and precision in the performance, D. Hristov focuses on the characteristic score problems in different groups of instruments – pipes, bagpipes, fiddles, tambourines, etc. The analysis is supported by specific musical examples, which makes it more complete.

Although at first glance a little off topic, this part discusses the role of the producer in the recording business, which is argued by the fact that quite often and to a very large extent in most folk ensembles the function of a producer is performed by the conductor of the orchestra of folk instruments.

In the next 3 sections of this chapter the candidate presents specific problems in the recording of different ensembles: soloists-singers, soloists-instrumentalists, chamber vocal formations, and folk choirs. Special attention is paid to the possible problems in interpreting and recording soundless melodies, in which the clear and definite gesture of the conductor is extremely important for achieving synchrony in the orchestral sound.

As for the influence of the recording activity on the style and methods of work of the conductors, D. Hristov concludes that it leads to an increase in the precision and professional level of both the conductor and the orchestra, which in turn increases the quality of the concert performances. The summary of this section presents the various contemporary challenges faced by the conductor of an orchestra of folk instruments, and here is an important conclusion expressed for the first time in the text, namely that one of the most serious contemporary difficulties for the conductor of an orchestra of folk instruments is the *constant requirement for premieres*.

The abstract of the dissertation correctly reflects the main accents of the content of the text. The 6 obligatory concerts realized by D. Hristov as a conductor meet the requirements of the Regulations for the conditions and the order for acquisition of scientific degrees and occupation of academic positions at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts during the realization of artistic and doctoral studies.

In conclusion, the dissertation is based on the serious conducting experience of the author and has its practical and scientific value, as it introduces important new observations into scientific use and would certainly be of interest to professionals in this field. Based on all that has been said and the outstanding qualities of the candidate, I call on the esteemed scientific jury to award Dimitar Hristov the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, Scientific specialty 8.3 “Musicology and Music Art”.

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