

## **REVIEW**

by

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for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor to

**Dimitar Yuliyarov Nakov**

in Professional Field 8.3 Music And Dance Art

in scientific specialty "Music Studies and Music Art”

in the Faculty of Music Pedagogy, Department of Piano and Accordion

on the topic:

**THE PIANO IN THE SOLO PIANO AND CHAMBER-ENSEMBLE WORK OF IVAN  
SPASOV  
(THEORETICAL AND INTERPRETATIVE ASPECTS OF THE KEYBOARD  
ARTICULATION)**

I know Dimitar Nakov as one of the most prominent alumni of Academic of Music Dance and Fine Arts “Professor Asen Diamandiev”. During all his years of study as a student and later a doctoral student at the Department of Piano and Accordion, he established himself as a brightly talented young pianist with an enviable concert (solo and ensemble) repertoire, persistent and bold interpreter of piano music from the most new generation.

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Dimitar Nakov is among the pianists who are actively performing on the concert stage. At the same time, he has a degree of composer – one of the last graduates of Prof Dimitar Tapkov. A significant role in his professional growth is played by the two specializations, which he had in the period of his education as a student and doctoral student of AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”: In 2008 he specialized in composition at the National University of Music in Bucharest, and in 2015-2016 he conducted a one-year piano training at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna.

I can confidently say that for Dimitar Nakov his training as a full-time doctoral student at our Academy was an enriching and full-blooded period of professional growth, paving his way for an individual artistic worldview and personal piano profile. Undoubtedly, Prof Roxana Bogdanova is of paramount importance for this – the academic supervisor, whose unconditional dedication and care “shot” her young colleague into the orbit of Spasov’s piano works, with which she naturally identifies herself.

This artistic and creative doctoral dissertation is balanced and substantial in both its components – theoretical and performance. The empirical experience of the rich series of recitals presenting the piano solo and chamber works of Ivan Spasov has found a true reflection in the analytical work. From the very first pages we are left with the impression of a methodology that reflects personal and much focused performance processes. The actual practice as performer is the basis of what is written, it inspires extremely interesting and at the same time, marked individual reasoning and gives way to curious authorial hypotheses.

The dissertation is structured in the following sequence: Introduction, three chapters, Conclusion, contributions, bibliography and two appendices.

The introductory article presents the main motives, clearly defines the object and subject, goals and objectives of the research. In it, Dimitar Nakov pays tribute to the teachers, the main mentors in building up his affinity for the work of Ivan Spasov: Prof Roxana Bogdanova, Prof Nedyalcho Todorov, Prof Petko Radev, Prof Georgi Petrov - all of them actively performed and presented in the best way the instrumental works of Ivan Spasov. Moreover, they did that with the clear conviction that they perform music of national and international importance. The topic of articulation as a fundamental performing technique, according to the author, is a poorly researched territory. In it, Dimitar finds "his truth" about the composer, finds the problem that makes the research worthy of dissertation, and for the professional pianists – an intriguing, bold and to some extent risky. The author clearly states his desire for a personal creative position, based on maximum specificity, dictated by the musical text and its interpretation. “The dissertation”, he says, “does not contain biographical information about the composer, nor notes on the reflection of his life in his music. It does not aim to explore his place in contemporary Bulgarian and world music and does not reveal the characteristic features of his creative personality. All these aspects of the life and work of the composer Ivan Spasov are available to everyone to read in the already existing publications, unlike the key theme of articulation, which is discussed in this study” (p. 7)

**The first chapter** of the study is titled “Formal-structural analysis of works for piano and chamber ensembles by Ivan Spasov. Some features of the means of expression. The

integrally performed piano and piano-ensemble work of the composer is divided into 4 groups, according to the characteristics of the genre and the ensemble:

First section: Solo works for piano ("Small Bulgarian Suite", the three sonatas for piano, 24 piano etudes, "Six portraits of one image", 24 bagatelles and a small piece in folk style)

Second section: Here Dimitar Nakov focuses on the Spasov's iconic Piano Concerto, of which he is the third performer (after the author and Roxana Bogdanova).

Third section: Chamber works (Sonata - concertante for clarinet and piano, Sonata for viola and piano, Micro Suite, Bagatelle *Contrasts* for flute and piano, Burlesque for cello and piano, Sonata Quasi variazione for cello and piano, Trio for violin, cello and piano, *Creation, Death and Reconciliation* for two pianos).

Fourth section: Here Dimitar Nakov discusses a large number of the composer's songs, composed exclusively for high female voice and piano.

The very listing of such a wide range of works "for" and "with the participation" of piano, creates a precondition for "scattering" in the analytical approach. Contrary to this possibility, the author of the dissertation is maximally focused on the most characteristic, the most defining of each work. Structural analysis is naturally "interwoven" into the artistic suggestions, and they, in turn, are presented elegantly and unobtrusively. I want to clearly express my admiration for such a sparing but meaningful way of presenting Spasov's works. This suggests a real insight, unintentional handling of extremely expressive musical expression, such that comes from each compositions. Dimitar Nakov's approach is impressive because it is "foreshadowed" as the only possible for the object of study – a creative phenomenon that generates philosophy and feelings, with "painful" thrift and at the same time "giving zealous importance to detail".

In the **Second Chapter** of the dissertation Dimitar Nakov focuses on the essence of the research. It is entitled: "Keyboard articulation in the music of Ivan Spasov and its basic forms". Here the author builds the basic theoretical basis for the object of the study, giving a preliminary overview of what has been written over the centuries: from the German composer and theorist Johann Mattheson, through the musical vocabulary of Meude-Monpas, the theories of Abraham Schultz and Daniel Turk, to contemporary theories of Clive Brown. (I take the moment to recommend: in a future publication of the work, all cited names of known or unknown authors should be enclosed in parentheses with the respective years. This will bring specificity and clarity to the analysis and prove the researcher's clear orientation towards historical processes in keyboard theory.) Here the candidate formulates the obvious:

expression, style, phrasing and formal-structural features of the work. Over the centuries, the keyboard theory offers a basic connection of the articulation with the rhetoric, the speech, the punctuation, and musically it is subject to the artistic expression, the style, phrasing and formal-structural features of the work.

This chapter also addresses the issues of the “key touch” in physical, motor, psychomotor and aesthetic terms. Based on his personal practice as performer, Dimitar formulates the following: “In Ivan Spasov’s music for keyboard, where the role of the timbre is emphasized, the attitude to the key touch and the individual approach to all its aspects are one of the main factors (p. 52). And further: “Particularly characteristic of Ivan Spasov's music are the sudden contrasts associated with changes in dynamics, articulation, texture and other musical elements, and hence a different approach to the key touch. The transition from percussive to non-percussive attack, from high to low speed of pressing the keys and vice versa, from including or excluding different parts of the hand from the process of sound extracting and with different activity, often has to take place suddenly without time for readjustment of the musculoskeletal system“.

Dimitar Nakov considers in depth and again based on his personal experience, the main articulation techniques - staccato, legato, non-legato, according to the peculiarities of the many-faceted suggestions in the music of Ivan Spasov. Thus, considered empirically, the piano articulation in Spasov’s works is brought out by the doctoral candidate as a major factor on the way to the true interpretation. I respect and appreciate the courage of these statements. Articulation problems are comprehensive, complex and risky enough when they become a scientific focus. That is why I support the confident and bold analysis of the young musician. I believe that profound science is born where the freshness of feeling is the engine of thought. And with Dimitar, it is clear.

The **third chapter** deals with the interaction of articulation with other musical elements. In the first place, the author focuses on the connection between articulation and caesura in the piano opuses of Ivan Spasov. The candidate rightly defines the caesuras as dissecting, but also connecting elements of the piano texture. After them, according to Dimitar's observations, there is a new rhythmic movement, a new contrasting dynamics, a new emotional impulse, which in principle depend on the general artistic context. All these expressive transformations are supported by numerous examples (The Art of the Series, Sonata № 3, "Six Portraits of an Image"). However, the author of the work rightly shares the stipulation: "The way in which Spasov records his musical material creates particularly good preconditions for varying the temporal relations at the moment of interpretation". (102 p.)

Accurate reasoning, which suggests a precise practical approach to the various compositional "provocations" of the great composer. In the piano fabric freed from metric organization, Dimitar Nakov points out stable landmarks and these are the time relations that make the caesura an indispensable content and structure-forming element.

The article on accentuation is also extensive. With numerous textual examples, the doctoral candidate presents the thesis of the liberated interpretation of various semantic, and hence outlining forms of "emphasis" in the piano music of Ivan Spasov (the cycle *Games*, 24 Bagatelles, 24 studies, etc.).

The cluster forms often found in the works under consideration are thoroughly studied - simultaneous and those whose tones sound through accumulation and pedal restraint. The effects of the "silent" clusters are also well represented – an almost patented means of expression from the huge palette of Spasov's timbre fantasy. It should be emphasized that Dimitar Nakov subjects to an astonishingly detailed explanatory regime all articulation techniques and the artistic results of their use.

In his **Conclusion**, the author of the dissertation successfully summarizes his theoretical and instrumental experience, making a clear reckoning: "The aesthetics of the works, the creative ideas with emotional parameters and the exceptional richness of image saturation are decisive for the piano creativity, despite the deepening laconicity of the expression". (131 pages)

In support of all the conclusions and conclusions drawn in the work, Dimitar Nakov published a series of interviews, most of which with prominent interpreters of the instrumental and vocal work of the composer Ivan Spasov. The aesthetics of the works, the creative ideas with emotional parameters and the exceptional richness of images are decisive for the piano works, despite the growing brevity of the expression". (p. 131) In support of all the conclusions and deductions drawn in his work, Dimitar Nakov published a series of interviews, most of which with prominent interpreters of the instrumental and vocal work of the composer Ivan Spasov.

In conclusion, I accept the contributions of the dissertation, both in its theoretical and in its executive side. I am well familiar with the published recordings of the pianist's recitals and I am sure of their cognitive significance. I am also sure of the benefits of a future publication of the research. That is why I address the esteemed scientific jury with a proposal to award Dimitar Yuliyarov Nakov with the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

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