

# OPINION

by

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Teacher of Piano and Piano Accompaniment

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for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor to

**Li Minhui**

in professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

scientific specialty Music Studies and Music Art

Faculty of Music Pedagogy

Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts,

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titled:

## ***COMPARISON OF THE SINGING STYLES OF COUNTERTENOR AND NANDAN OF THE PEKING OPERA***

Li Minhui is one of these doctoral students of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev", who will leave lasting traces of her fruitful studies not only with her leading teachers, but also for everyone who witnessed her development as singer and stage appearances. Counting myself among those who have repeatedly experienced the joy from the contact with the young singer's exquisite and stylish talent, I believe that I can confidently express my personal impressions of the high professionalism, technical skills, incredible upbringing and sense of duty to the vocation of the classical musician. Even more awe-inspiring is Li Minhui's diligent attitude towards the dissertation, which is a continuation of her successful development in another field - that of the serious vocal science.

The thesis *Comparison of the singing styles of Countertenor and Nandan of the Peking Opera* unfolds within 156 pages with an Introduction, five chapters, a Conclusion and Bibliography. The introductory article clearly indicates the main goal of the work - to compare the two types of singers with similar vocal characteristics, similar singing methods, who appeared in the conditions of absolute geographical, historical and cultural differences. We can see that Li Minhui's dissertation works on a solid bibliographic basis. It is primarily the seminal book *Change in Peking Opera* by the Chinese opera theorist (Western European graduate) Qi Rushan. The documentary film from 2000 *The Worlds of Mei Lanfang*, dedicated to the great Chinese Nandan singer, is also an important starting point for the doctoral candidate. Here we should also include the long list of films and literary sources about the European countertenors. Observation and comparative analysis are the concrete **methodological basis** of the research, and the **expected results** are wonderfully formulated and mainly ambitious - the

achievement of greater opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual penetration on the cultural markets.

I perceive the **first chapter** (*The Castrato Singer - Predecessor of the Countertenor*) and the **second chapter** (*The Countertenor*) of the dissertation work as a broad and sustainable historical-aesthetic and vocal-methodological foundation, on which Li Minhui relies in building her scientific thesis. I must immediately mention some of the merits in the approach to the researched topic:

- **Rich historical knowledge.**

The doctoral student has clear reference points for the cultural-aesthetic processes and the reasons that shaped the importance and long-lasting fame of the castrati and the countertenors. She skilfully uses the information from European historical monuments and logically integrates it in the shaping of the time frames, the essential features and even the flaws of these artistic phenomena. Li Minhui knows the historical development of the European opera, the biographies of the great singers and the composers who created the rich Baroque arsenal for this type of voice. Last but not least, the doctoral student skilfully traces the religious dogma that played a major role, both for the rise and for the "decline" of this vocal "magnificence". At the end of the second chapter she makes a logical transition to the historical status of the countertenor art in China. An art which is new and "young" because of its century-long existence, but also "powerful" because of its energetic pursuit of development.

- **Rich methodological knowledge**

The author demonstrates good understanding of the processes of sound formation in the countertenor and the castrato singer. Li Minhui places the breathing technique at the heart of the phenomenal vocal achievements that have become a benchmark for the rapid development of the early Italian opera singing. She discusses the problems of working on the sound evenness, which includes fusion between the "leading" and the "real" voice of the countertenor. According to the doctoral student all these methodological conclusions concerning the building of such type of vocal virtuosity, are the main theoretical basis in shaping the principles of the singing technique in the Bel Canto style.

- **Rich stylistic knowledge**

Li Minhui traces in depth and with detailed examples the characteristic artistic features in the interpretation of vocal samples from the Baroque era. She concretizes her observations through the Handelian performances of the world-class Italian countertenor Angelo Manzotti. She also lists a rich set of basic requirements such as: control of breathing and vibrato, construction of long phrases and cadences, execution of jumps at large intervals, distinctness and connectivity, accentuation, etc.

The **third chapter** of the dissertation is entitled the *Nandan actor of the Peking Opera*. It presents information of great scientific value, especially for the European reader. It is about an art that originates in the deep antiquity of the Chinese social and cultural system (around 2000 BC). Intelligently and thoroughly, Li Minhui analyzes the essence of the profession *nandan of the Peking*

*Opera*, as well as the socio-historical prerequisites for its centuries-old affirmation. According to her, "nandan" is inextricably linked to traditional Chinese ethics: "*We can say that the root of the artistic development and flowering of Nandan is to some extent a practical expression of the male discourse dominant in feudal society, a visible manifestation of the voiceless female principle, an artistic compromise of gender dominance. The rulers in a patriarchal society secure their power with various forms of restraint and oppression, and based on the binary opposition of male-female they establish relations of opposition and balance as a demonstration of stability in rule*" (cit. p. 57).

**I would like to mention the wonderful style of expression, presenting the scientific-historical information about all the vicissitudes through which *nandan* has survived to this day. The author offers a competent, reliable and multidirectional analysis, based on the available written documents, but at the same time it is interesting and fascinating. In this sense, I am convinced that Li Minhui's dissertation should be published in Bulgaria.**

I consider **chapter four** (*Prerequisites for the exchange of ideas between countertenors and nandan*) and **chapter five** (*Differences between countertenors and Chinese nandan performers and ways to overcome them*) to be the main highlights regarding the undoubted contribution value of the work. Here, the author presents her own vision of the interpenetration of these phenomenal performing professions in time and art in the contemporary global world. The analyses of the similarities and differences outline solid vocal-methodical knowledge, excellent aesthetic orientation and, above all, the creativity of a young professional who combined the traditional values of her native opera art with the European vocal-classical education. Behind all this is the essential contribution of the academic supervisor - Prof Toni Shekerjjeva-Novak, a singer and vocal educator who, behind the strictly professional work, saw the possibilities of modern artistic thinking. The merits and "utility" of the dissertation are visible and truthfully reflected in the self-assessment of the contributions of the research. In summary, I will point out some of the most significant achievements of Li Minhui as a young and promising vocal theorist with a conscious sense of duty to the Chinese opera art:

- She compares and analyzes intelligently, accurately and comprehensively
- She brings forth truthful and logical theses, which she supports with valuable historical documentation and modern specialized research
- She makes an attempt to build an innovative vocal-methodical system for professional exchange between the European and the Chinese traditional opera art
- She provokes theoretical thinking about the extended and accelerated penetration of cultural processes in the globalized world.

Based on all of the above, I declare to the esteemed scientific jury my full conviction in awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Li Minhui.

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Plovdiv

Reviewer:  
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