

REVIEW

by

Assoc. Prof . Lyudmil Borisov Petkov, PhD

of

dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree **Doctor**

Professional field **8.3. Music and dance art**

Doctoral program **Music Studies and Music Art**

titled

The Theme of Mystical Love in the piano cycle *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*, by

Olivier Messiaen

Author: **Malina Lyubenova Malinova**

academic supervisor Prof Julian Kuyumdzhiev

1. General presentation of the procedure and the materials presented for review

The documentation of the procedure for the defense before a scientific jury of a dissertation work with author Associate Professor M. Malinova is completely in order. The following statutory mandatory documents are presented:

1. Order No RD-27-077/19.06.2023 for the appointment of a scientific jury by the Rector of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv.
2. Certificate of academic title No. 26190 of 26.04.2010.
3. List of the author's publications related to the dissertation - 4 in number
4. Dissertation work consisting of 222 pages. The work is structured in Introduction, Three chapters, Conclusion, Contributions, Bibliography (86 sources, of which 28 in Cyrillic, 39 in Latin and 19 Internet sources), 2 Appendices and 4 author's publications related to the topic. Also 34 sheet music examples, 17 tables and 2 figures.
5. Order No. RD-27-072/04.11.2019, Plovdiv for discharge, based on the decision taken by the faculty council at the Faculty of Music Pedagogy - Protocol No. 29/30.10.2019
6. Autobiography of Malina Malinova.
7. Author's publications of the doctoral student in the relevant publications.
8. Reference for the contributions of the dissertation work.
9. Author's abstract consisting of 52 pages with subsequent Contributions, Bibliography and List of author's publications.

2. Brief biographical data for Malina Malinova

Assoc. Prof M. Malinova was born in Plovdiv. She graduates the Music School in Plovdiv, at the top of her class with full honors, a gold medal and an award for active concert activity. She continued her education in the instrumental department of the Bulgarian State Conservatory, majoring

in piano in the class of Prof. Mara Petkova. After her graduation, M. Malinova worked as a full-time teacher at National School of Music and Dance "Dobrin Petkov" – Plovdiv, and as an accompanist at the Department of Conducting of Music Academy, Plovdiv. In 1987, after passing a competition, she was appointed a full-time assistant at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv. Since 2010, she has been an associate professor of piano at the Department of Piano and Accordion at the Academy.

Malina Malinova's concert activity is wide-ranging. It includes a significant number of solo, chamber and orchestral concerts. She has participated in prestigious festivals, reviews, anniversary concerts, etc. M. Malinova has collaborated with many famous Bulgarian musicians and realized a large number of premiere performances. She has recordings at Bulgarian National Radio - Sofia, Radio and TV Center, Plovdiv, National Cable TV Eurocom and TV Eurocom Plovdiv. Her scientific work is in the fields of piano interpretation, psychology, medicine and music criticism. Her habilitation thesis on the topic *The Piano Fugue of JS Bach - from the point of view of the composer's religious-philosophical consciousness*.

3. Relevance of the topic

The characteristics related to the subject chosen by Assoc. Prof Malinova correspond to this constant spiritual-practical timeliness, which extracts culture from very distant temporal layers and homogenizes it in the present.

The work and personality of Messiaen are the subject of many and different in their focus studies, of which Malina Malinova identifies the possibility of a new complex scientific research in the part with the polemic set forward. The O. Messiaen phenomenon is an achievement of the world culture, and the results that illuminate and enrich the mechanism of "the happening" and its regularities are a permanent and timely affirmative form of this.

4. Expediency of the research methods used to achieve the set goals

M. Malinova has described the research methods she adheres to in the following order and type: survey, comparison, analysis and synthesis. The chosen research methods allow to fully reveal the possibilities for the adequate achievement of the solution to the goal set in the dissertation - focusing attention on mystical love as a fundamental aspect in the theological concept of Messiaen's. The set of methods used invariably preserves throughout the entire scientific work its rational framework, purposefully built in the direction and in support of the important condition of operational independence, as a prerequisite for a predictable and successful scientific result.

5. Evaluation of the dissertation

M. Malinova perfectly knows the matter that is the subject of the study. Her inner disposition towards the subject is clearly noticeable in the way she derives and arrives at the research result. The consistency with which she creates the pedestal and builds her research is impressive. Every detail of the rich exposition, focused on the historical, musical and cultural context of the era in which

Messiaen's complex creative gift developed and evolved, presumably through family and subsequently education, is logically grounded and accordingly subordinated to a convincingly resolved problematic in its conclusions, synthesized in the key for the first part of the work task: illumination of the creative work of Messiaen, which led to his colossal masterpieces *Three Small Liturgies of the Divine Presence* and *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*.

In the **first chapter**, *The Beginning of Time*, M. Malinova argumentatively reveals the influence on the composer of one of the most renowned Catholic authors (theologians) Saint Thomas Aquinas and Dom Columba Marmion, of the personality of his mother, the poetess Cecile Sauvage, and nuancedly deduces, from the complex fabric of the extravagant in terms of names and powerful cultural currents French culture, the role Messiaen's teachers: Marcel Dupre - organist, Maurice Emmanuel - music history teacher and Paul Dukas - encyclopedist, teacher of orchestration and composition. By referring to texts from multiple reliable sources, using precise proportions to adhere to a rhythm necessary for the sequence of the exposition, and through in-depth commentary, the author boldly asserts her own opinion and insight into hitherto unclear or unanswered questions.

Chapter Two, **Theology of Hope**, of the dissertation examines Messiaen's religious concept influenced by Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and the sermons of Dom Columba Marmion. The chapter discusses the philosophical-aesthetic and technological-compositional concepts presented in his treatise *The Technique of My Musical Language* (1944), his synesthetic gift and the embedding of the "divine rainbow" in his musical language where "*the listener will be subdued by the 'strange' fascination of impossibilities*", by the "*tonal omnipresence in non-transposability*", by the "*unity of movement where beginning and end merge because they are the same in their irreversibility*". The comparisons of the statements of a number of religious thinkers, the clarification of terms that appear essential (for example, simultaneous succession), the establishment of differences and similarities in ideological platforms, as well as the level of concreteness in the transformation of the Christian doctrine in a series of works mentioned: *Three Small Liturgies for The Divine Presence*, *Quartet for the End of Time*, *Saint Francois of Assisi*, *Visions of the Amen*, *Twenty Contemplations...*, and many others provide theoretical and spiritual knowledge about the conceptual integration of the mentioned factors in the overall work of the composer, giving him the opportunity with each new opus to touch and exalt the deepest layers of his inner identity.

Chapter Three **Before the Altar of Mystical Love** comments on the numerological symbolism in relation to the *Contemplations*, overcoming its borders imposed by the difference of national cultures.

In the subsequent direct analysis, the doctoral student's knowledge of the complex musical form, the connectedness of the musical rhythm, the used registers and dynamics included in the individual texture layers, as well as the differentiation of the personified sound-thematic-spiritual aspects of the Divine and personal archetype is impressive. The leading moments in the direction of the tradition of the ancient Greek metric and its permutations and of the ancient rhythmic formulas

collected in the treatise "Ocean of Music" by the Indian theorist Sarangadeva are highlighted. The comparative tables reflecting the formal structure in the *Contemplations*, the places of intonational similarity and the transformations of the melodic pattern are very clear. The musical motifs in them are considered as symbolizing the spiritual intention of the composer and are revealed as a resonance of complexly constructed sensations. Excerpts from Messiaen's comments on the recording of the *Contemplations* by Michel Beroff, are subject to impulses, continued and developed lavishly and illustratively persuasively by the doctoral candidate, including the discourse of Messiaen's synesthetic gift as a regulation restraining the distortion of essences that are unclaimed in the field of meanings, but important for the composer.

The main sources of inspiration and support for the writing of the piano cycle *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus* are revealed, the four main themes of the cycle are analyzed in detail: Theme of God, Theme of Stars and Cross, Theme of Chords and Theme of Mystical Love and contemplations, through which they pass.

6. Contributions and significance of the thesis and the relevant publications

The scientific work of M. Malinova is consistently built and very carefully thought out conceptually. The author has definitely attempted to be as comprehensive as possible on the subject. The compositional-technological introductions in the given creative period of the composer are systematized, and the analyses of the parts of the *Contemplations* are of deep theoretical meaning and depth. The credibility of the exposition is based on solid sources with a wide scope of research and angle of vision.

I accept the following results as **contributing**:

1. This is the first study in Bulgaria of such nature, related to the life and work of Messiaen in the integrity of his professional and religious-philosophical ideology.
2. This study is the first to focus on the **Theme of Mystical Love**, symbolizing the third person of the Holy Trinity - the Holy Spirit, manifested in the piano cycle *Twenty Contemplations...* and its function and place as a main theme in the cycle.
3. The manifestation of synesthesia in Messiaen is analytically justified, directly related to his creative approach.
4. The musical thematism of the cycle in its theological interpretation is connected with Don Columba Marmion's *Christ in His Mysteries* in their excellently emphasized presupposition.

7. Critical remarks and recommendations

I will note very minor corrections to be taken into account and to facilitate the implied mandatory publication of this serious scientific work as a book.

1. Figure 2 described in the list of figures and tables is on page 206, not page 207.
2. Slight editing is needed for words that are written fused, but are suggested with a dash.

3. There is a missing letter in a repeated word (transcendent).
4. I would recommend the *theological titles* in the second paragraph on page 52 to be replaced with *theological works*, which is a more accurate description of the embedded meaning in the subsequent periodization.
5. Regarding the Bulgarian transcription of the name of the composer Messian (Messien), I have certain reservations.

8. Abstract

The abstract presented by M. Malinova corresponds to the content of the dissertation and preserves its logic and consistency. The structure and the levels of comprehensibility of the dissertation work are well preserved in the abstract.

9. Conclusion

Assoc. Prof Malinova's work *The Theme of Mystical Love in the piano cycle Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus, by Olivier Messiaen* is an independent, meaningful and creatively resolved scientific study, written with style and a richly nuanced language that reveals to a high degree the subtleties of thought.

I accept that the content of the work in its details and entirety, has contributing and upgrading merits and clearly traceable reasoned completion.

I confirm the qualities shown by the doctoral student for independent conduct of scientific research and I confirm its high scientific and theoretical value.

Therefore, I give a positive assessment and confidently suggest to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "**DOCTOR**" in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, doctoral program **Music Studies and Music Art**, to Malina Lyubenova Malinova.

16.08.2023

Plovdiv

Reviewer:

Prof Ludmil Petkov, PhD