

REVIEW

by
Prof Filip Hristov Pavlov

of a dissertation work

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance

doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art

with author

Assoc. Prof Malina Lyubenova Malinova

titled

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

Olivier Messiaen

academic supervisor Prof Julian Kuyumdzhev

The procedure for this competition was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Titles, implemented in accordance with the Regulations of Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev", and meets the objectives of the Academy related to the development and growth of the academic staff.

The package of the received defense materials is complete and contains all required necessary documents, the thesis, order from the Rector and a protocol from the scientific jury. The theoretical research is expertly constructed and structurally satisfies the development of the chosen thematics, presents and summarizes the results of the research work carried out by the doctoral candidate.

Her biography shows that Assoc. Prof Malinova has become a professional pianist, passing through all levels of musical and artistic education and development. Her successful work as concert pianist spans many years, both as solo performer and as a chamber partner to distinguished musicians. The wide repertoire she mastered is a condition for a future career, but unfortunately it ends too early due to physiological reasons. Despite this, her development as a piano teacher - first at National School of Music and Dance "D. Petkov" (1981-84), and subsequently her work as an accompanist in the choral-conducting class of the AMDFA, are a prerequisite for her career in professional pedagogy. Since 1987, Malina Malinova has been a full-time piano assistant, and in 2010 she was awarded the title of Associate Professor in the Department of Piano and Accordion. Her university work is related to teaching the disciplines piano, chamber music, piano duets and pedagogical practice. It can certainly be said that her professional teaching career unfolds on an impressive scale that is not possible for many coworkers.

Although appearing episodically on stage, her performances receive high praise from music critics and from other performers in chamber events. Her festival appearances in many prestigious forums are a wonderful and representative opportunity to further prove herself as a solid and virtuoso

pianist and satisfy her unceasing performing ambition. She has played under the direction of great names of our time and has partnered with renowned Bulgarian musicians.

It must be emphasized that the doctoral candidate's scientific interests extend to other fields of knowledge: medicine, psychology, music therapy, which presents her personality in different and broader dimensions than the traditional pedagogical commitment. Perhaps it is precisely this complexity of personal interests that is the reason for focusing on the chosen topic in the presented scientific research. Her aspirations for a certain encyclopedic knowledge of music are highly meaningful and are evidence of a wide personal education.

The dissertation work is related to the name and the specific work of the outstanding 20-century composer Olivier Messiaen – as we write it in a Bulgarian translation. I do not comment on the pronunciation of the name in French, but I will use our approved transcription later in the review.

A significant representative of the contemporary musical art, who leaves to the next generations fundamental theoretical developments in various research fields. They explain a number of his approaches in numerous genre-diverse opus created, and clarify the figurative sphere that excites the composer, to which he subordinates the thematic musical language in his spiritual creations, presented with a deep religious confession.

There is no doubt that the topic is relevant and offers interesting possibilities for its clarification in different perspectives of the musical knowledge. The music of the last century has brought so many new ideas, interpretations, spaces for placement and development of the sound emission, which will be the object of research for a long time, because they have their vivid reflection in contemporary musical performance.

The subject, object and purpose of the study convince that they are logically presented and derived from the essence of the theoretical approaches and works of the creator of this musical masterpiece. It is perfectly correct for the doctoral student considers them based on the spiritual ideas of the author presented in them. The credibility of the concepts, scientific conclusions and technological examples used for the analysis is proven by the proposed bibliographic materials. They provide a broad basis for constructing and proving various statements, through which Malinova reaches her theoretically important conclusions.

The content of the dissertation is very well structured and in a precise sequence offers an analysis of essential aspects of the research. Its focus on the essence of the problem creates logical connections in the sequence of thematic development.

In extremely detailed and circumstantial detail, the author examines each part of the piano cycle and substantiates her conclusions derived from the instrumental texture, from the lineal melodic and rhythmic development, not excluding at any moment the importance of the harmonic vertical structure. Although the composer has an attitude towards the use of new - his own and inspired by eastern influences - musical and technological elements, they quite naturally fit into his author's

language, which professes the presence of the three eternal components of music - rhythm, melody and harmony:

- ✓ rhythmic figures and their figural retrogradation, forms of increase and decrease of rhythmic patterns;
- ✓ certain melodic formulas originating from other people's work, but preferred by him, themes with meditative content;
- ✓ harmony and modes with limited transposition etc.

All the specified meaning components of Messiaen's music are successively examined and analyzed in their individual and complex action, through which his author's music is built. Often times, however, I am left with the impression that the facts in a significant number of moments/ details of the dissertation work are too much, and essentially prevent more general/ unifying conclusions about the author's stylistics and the technological approaches. Summarizing them is not a problem, because in essence this issue has been consistently examined and accurately described, but in a wider laterality in the work.

I present only an moment that can be used to clarify and summarize details of the melodic stylistics in the use of the linear structures of Messiaen's compositional style: the musical example presented by the author under #37 (*Theme of the Kiss* in *Contemplation No. 19*), presents the essence of a stable linear structure in melodic exposition. It is embedded as a connecting element in a number of other *Contemplations* and is built from the note interval sequence: whole tone - semitone - whole tone - semitone - whole tone.

(And here the summary may continue) Already in example #2, it exists in given melodic sections; also found in No. 3 - *Theme of the Kiss*; in Example 42, however, its final tone is addressed by the melodic line in the bass. The author defines the *Theme of the Kiss* as (I quote): "*A hybrid form of the Theme of God and the Theme of Love in Contemplation No. 20*".

Based on Messiaen's unusual thinking and the stylistics of his personal compositional style, it is not without reason to claim that certain technological combinations exist at all as intuitive models in the artist's mind and in the construction of imagery, which plays a generalizing meaning-bearing role.

From the structuring of the dissertation, and then during the construction and development of her research, the doctoral student shows that she has mastery of the considered problematic in its diverse aspects, which she accurately presents and convincingly explores. All the conclusions reached by Assoc. Prof Malinova, emphasize the serious scientific basis of personal knowledge and correctness in the presentation of this difficult analytical matter – I mean, for example a fragment pp. 86-90, where heterogeneous chords, modes and transpositions, mode and metrical symmetry are commented on – essential components of scientific analysis. The reference to the specificity of the author's fingering in certain piano sections is interesting, such as fingering in spatial mirror symmetry (p. 192-93), the presented structural organization of the piano cycle (p. 208) also looks very curious.

The dissertation work presents in depth the relationship between scientific language and literary stylistics and fully fits into the essence of the realized research work.

The **significance** of this work is unquestionable, as is its contribution to the field of musicology. The **publications** on the topic are an essential part of it and fully satisfy the requirements for scientific activity.

The **abstract** accurately reflects the content of the dissertation and presents its essential points.

The **contributing points of the scientific research** are presented in 6 points and are an integral part of the development of the dissertation material. They constitute the scientific basis of this thesis and present the research achievements.

I must point out that the scientific supervisor Prof Yulian Kuyumdzhiev also has an important role for the neat and stylish organization of the dissertation, and for the scientific theses presented and defended in it. Congratulations to both of you.

I am tempted to conclude by quoting a fragment logically related to the defense of the scientific Thesis, which forms the basis of the developed evidentiary material: *"The theme of Love constitutes a foundation around which the entire architectural edifice of the cycle is built. And this proves the extremely important dramaturgical role of the Theme of Mystical Love as the main idea in Messiaen's compositional idea"*. (p. 209)

Conclusion

The topic of the present scientific research is of certain interest for the Bulgarian musicology, it presents an unusual specificity of modern piano creativity, it is based on a stable scientific foundation, it reveals a specific spiritual content and has contributing qualities in an analytical aspect.

I recommend to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to award Assoc. Prof Malina Lyubenova Malinova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art.

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