

## OPINION

by

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on dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.3

Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art at the Department of Piano and

Accordion at AM DFA Prof. Asen Diamandiev - Plovdiv with

author: Assoc. Prof Malina Ljubanova Malinova

(PhD student – individual form of study)

titled *The theme of the mystical love in the piano cycle Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus,*

*by Olivier Messiaen,*

academic supervisor Prof Julian Kuyumdzhev

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

The dissertation work *The theme of the mystical love in the piano cycle Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus, by Olivier Messiaen* is the first serious theoretical study of the work in Bulgaria, in the context of the religious-philosophical views in the composer's life and work. The doctoral candidate has made conscientious and in-depth studies of the published analytical books and publications of European, American and Russian authors on the subject, as well as many author's translations, which I appreciate. The thesis was developed under the scientific guidance of the respected researcher and teacher Prof Julian Kuyumdzhev.

### **2. Brief biographical data of the candidate**

We are witnesses of a long creative career that has started in 1981 at National School of Music and Dance "D. Petkov", Plovdiv, and since 1984 as an accompanist at Department Conducting of Higher Music Institute - Plovdiv. Since 1987 (age 36) Malina Malinova has been a member of the Department of Piano and Accordion at the Academy in Plovdiv. She teaches the disciplines of piano, chamber music, piano duets and piano teaching practice. Her performance includes a significant number of solo and chamber concerts, as well as concerts with orchestra conducted by Emil Tabakov, Georgi Dimitrov, Grigor Palikarov, Plamen Parvanov, Charles Fast (Canada). The pedagogical achievements and creative activity of Assoc. Prof Malinova are listed in the documentation and deserve respect.

Her scientific work is related to theoretical studies concerning the problems of piano interpretation, and her habilitation thesis on the topic *The Piano Fugue of JS Bach - from the point of view of the composer's religious-philosophical consciousness*. This fact seems to logically prepare her for the doctoral thesis on Messiaen.

I am also impressed by another aspect of the professional activities of Assoc. Prof Malina Malinova – her joint work with doctors from the Medical University Plovdiv on numerous co-authored articles, such as: *Influence of music on foetal behaviour; Effect of music on foetus; Music therapy in complex care for patients with advanced and metastatic cervical carcinoma; Effect of music on restlessness during childbirth; The works of classical composers and their diseases*, etc. Published articles are cited in international journals with an impact factor (IF).

### **3. Relevance of the topic**

In a time of cultural decline and real war at present, O. Messiaen's words on faith, sound very relevant - "[it is ] *the only alternative against the spiritual deprivation of modern society*". The composer believes that the mission of an artist must be to deliver society from its infirmities through the means of music /in this case of "new music"/. In the preface to the piano cycle *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*, Messiaen consciously leaves us the key to the hidden meaning of his language – the "language of mystical love", possessing a quasi-occult power. Another interesting point is the research on the colours woven into the spiritual vision of the musical score - "*For me, certain sonorities are linked to certain complexes of colours, and I use them like colours, juxtaposing them and putting them in relief one against the other, as a painter enhances one colour with its complement.*" (Claude Samuel)

"Thus, in turn, Messiaen will be able to instil a sense of colour in the audience through the richness of his tonal palette."/quote from *The Eternal Music of the Rainbow*": *The Phenomenon of Synesthesia and its Manifestation with Olivier Messiaen*, an article by the candidate included in the Spring Readings.

The text part of the doctoral studies has a total volume of 222 pages. It consists of: introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, bibliography, 2 appendices and 4 author publications related to the dissertation. Contains 34 sheet music examples, 17 tables and 2 figures. The list of used literature includes 86 sources, of which 28 in Cyrillic, 39 in Latin and 19 Internet sources.

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

The author uses research methods such as: survey, comparison, analysis and synthesis. I completely agree with Assoc. Prof Malinova that the achievement of a synthesis in the integration between the musical analysis /study of the compositional structure/ with the religious context of *Twenty Contemplations* "allows Messiaen's work to be perceived as a kind of "musical theology", and his interpretation to be transformed into a kind of "musical sermon".

#### **5. Evaluation of the dissertation - knowledge of the problem, content and structure according to established norms, credibility of the material, analytical approach and derived results**

The entire work shows the good competence and erudition of Associate Professor M. Malinova, her in-depth attitude to the subject under consideration. The author has expert and detailed knowledge of the researched problem, manages to analytically read foreign scientific contributions, and has her own hypotheses.

The topic of the research is formulated clearly, the content of the paper corresponds to the title. The text in terms of content and structure correspond to the established norms.

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

I accept all the contributions of the dissertation work presented by Assoc. Prof M. Malinova, as well as the publications on the topic in several directions, marks as "first":

- This is the first study of the piano cycle *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus* with a focus on the Theme of Mystical Love, which symbolizes the Third Person of the Holy Trinity - the Holy Spirit. This is also the first theoretical study related to the life and work of Olivier Messiaen in religious-philosophical context.
- The author offers a scientifically based explanation of the phenomenon "synesthesia" and the peculiarities of its manifestation in the mechanisms of the creative process at Messiaen.
- There is an attempt to integrate the musical thematic of the cycle and its theological interpretation with the spiritual sermons of Dom Columba Marmion in *Christ in his Mysteries*.
- The author presents interpretive analyses of the *Contemplations*, through which the four main themes of the cycle pass: *Theme of God, Theme of the Star and of the Cross, Theme of Chords and Theme of Mystical Love*.
- The function of the *Theme of Mystical Love* as a main theme is explained by tracing its development from its "conception" in the "fabric" of the *Theme of God* (in No. 1) to its

triumph in No. 20, culminating as a "hybrid" form in the final synthesis - union with the *Theme of God* (in the Coda).

### **7. Critical remarks and recommendations**

With a wish for a future article, performer comment or announcement /ad libitum/ on the performance and piano issues of the cycle *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus* and the recordings mentioned in the text /rare discography/ of Yvonne Loriod, Michel Belloff and others, bearing in mind that the author of this scientific thesis is one of the few specialists in Bulgaria with expertise in the piano works of Messiaen and the specifically considered work.

### **8. Abstract**

The author's abstract consists of 58 pages and corresponds correctly to the content of the work.

### **9. Conclusion**

Based on everything positive written so far, I confidently propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "**doctor**" in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art to **Assoc. Prof Malina Lyubenova Malinova.**

Sofia, 11 August 2023

Prof Evgenia Simeonova, PhD