

OPINION

by

Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak, PhD, lecturer at AMDFA Prof Asen Diamandiev, Plovdiv

in professional field 8.3 Music and dance art,

for dissertation work with author Assoc. Prof Malina Lyubenova Malinova,

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

Jesus, by Olivier Messiaen, with academic supervisor Prof Julian Kuyumdzhiev, PhD, for awarding

the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

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Asen Diamandiev - Plovdiv.

The dissertation work of the candidate Malina Lyubenova Malinova, titled *The theme of the mystical love in the piano cycle Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus, by Olivier Messiaen*, is developed in accordance with the regulatory requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and consists of an introduction, three chapters (12 subchapters), conclusion, contributions, bibliography, 2 appendices and 4 author's publications, related to the dissertation, in a total of 222 pages. The work was discussed and proposed for public defense by the Department of Piano and Accordion of the Faculty of Music Pedagogy, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv at a meeting held on 13.06.2023. The three chapters of the work are titled respectively – **1. The Beginning of Time**, **2. The Light of Faith** and **3. Before the Altar of Mystical Love**. The study proves the capabilities of the doctoral student Malinova for thorough and precise research. The scientific text is based on references to 86 correctly used sources, of which 28 in Cyrillic, 39 in Latin and 19 on the Internet. 34 examples, 17 tables and 2 figures are also presented.

I emphasize the relevance of the chosen topic, as well as the in-depth knowledge of the researched problem, and right here I would like to highlight **several important moments from the biography of the researcher**, whom I have known since I was a student at the National Music Academy "Prof Pancho Vldigerov", Sofia and as a distinguished pianist from the stages of Plovdiv and the country. M. Malinova initially studied piano with Mrs. Stella Hadzhipetkova, giving her first recital at the age of 13. In 1971, she was admitted to the Music School, (now National School of Music and Dance "D. Petkov") in the piano class of Liliana Stoykova. Her active concert activity starts during this period. In 1976 she was awarded a diploma and a prize from the First National Review of Chamber Art in Plovdiv and the same year she gave a concert in Budapest, Hungary, and in June she made her debut on the stage of the Plovdiv Philharmonic with a *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* by L. Pipkov, conducted by Emil Tabakov. She graduated from high school as top of the class with full honors, a gold medal and an award for active concert activity. In 1976 M. Malinova was accepted Bulgarian State Conservatory (now NMA), in the class of Prof Mara Petkova. In this period, she participates in integral performances of works by J.S. Bach, L.V. Beethoven, R. Schumann, J. Brahms,

S. Rachmaninov, S. Prokofiev, P. Vladigerov, V. Stoyanov. Probably, these integral performances are important for the appearance of her habilitation thesis on the topic *The Piano Fugue of JS Bach - from the point of view of the composer's religious-philosophical consciousness*. I will allow myself to skip a very large period of her artistic and pedagogical biography and I will focus on her extremely interesting publication and very different in its directions research activity. What intrigued me, already in 2016, are her reports co-authored with Prof Maria Malinova, MD and other eminent scientists from the field of medicine, presented at national and international congresses and conferences, also published in the FOLIA PALLIATRICA journal, etc., from 2016 to 2021. Published articles are cited in international journals with an impact factor (IF). **Total IF 19.522 Personal IF 8.058**, a fact that deserves special attention. As I mentioned above, her habilitation thesis is titled *The Piano Fugue of JS Bach - from the point of view of the composer's religious-philosophical consciousness*. And now I will try to substantiate my claim about the relevance of the topic of her doctoral dissertation. In fact, the researcher herself explains her choice: "Thirty years after his death (April 27, 1992), the spiritual aspect of his aesthetics does not cease to intrigue and command respect. Faced with the nightmarish challenges of the 21st century, today more than ever we need the mystical light of this exalted person whose "Music of Love" is a conduit for the invisible presence of God and a path to our salvation." (Abstract, p. 4)

The subject of this study is the Theme of Mystical Love in the piano cycle *The theme of the mystical love in the piano cycle Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus, by Olivier Messiaen*, which the researcher examines in the context of the other main themes and their interaction. The **subject** of the study is the piano cycle *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*, paying particular attention to the parts that present the main themes: *Theme of God* (Contemplations No. 1, 5, 11, 15), *Theme of Mystical Love* (Contemplations No. 6, 10, 19, 20), *Theme of the Star and of the Cross* (Contemplations 2, 7), *Theme of Chords* (Contemplations 13, 14, 17).

Assoc. Prof Malinova aims to focus the attention on the *Mystical Love*, as a fundamental aspect in the Messiaen's theological concept. "More than in all my previous works, I sought here a language of mystical love, at once varied, powerful, and tender, sometimes brutal, with multicolored prescriptions". (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vingt_Regards_sur_l%27Enfant-J%C3%A9sus)

Chapter One - *The Beginning of Time*, outlines Messiaen's early creative period, the artistic and intellectual environment in his family, the composer's exceptional relationship with his mother. Malinova explores the creative evolution in the early stage of O. Messiaen's career, which culminated in the two masterpieces *Three Small Liturgies of the Divine Presence* and *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*.

The **second chapter** of the dissertation named *The Light of Faith* is a territory in which the dissertation examines the religious concept of Messiaen. The ideas of theologians contributing to the formation of this concept are affected. The composer is a zealous researcher of God and "...with exceptional skill...navigates the labyrinth of religious postulates related to Catholic doctrine." (p. 14

of the Abstract) Messiaen's theological concept, which synthesizes the ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas in his work *Summa Theologica* and those of Dom Columba Marmion in his book *Christ in his Mysteries*, the creation of *Visions of the Amen* (1941), for two pianos and the object of study of this dissertation – *Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus* (1944), which make the piano the focus of Messiaen's work. This chapter also discusses the composer's synaesthesia, his ability to perceive colors when he hears certain musical chords. Colors that, with their combinations, are important in his compositional process.

I believe that the **Third Chapter** – *Before the Altar of Mystical Love* is particularly important for the dissertation. Here, the aesthetic, philosophical and religious sources that played a decisive role in creating *Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus* are explored. Very curious is the commented numerological symbolism, in relation to the object of study: "*Messiaen's mystical attitude to numbers is in sync with their sacred role for the cosmic pattern of development in archaic traditions*". (p. 20, *ibid.*) A kind of peak in the work is the analysis of the four main themes in *Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus* and their connection with the *Contemplations – Theme of God* (Contemplations No. 1, 5, 11, 15), *Theme of the Star and of the Cross* (Contemplations 2, 7), *Theme of Chords* (Contemplations 13, 14, 17), *Theme of Mystical Love* (Contemplations No. 6, 10, 19, 20). The author reveals the interrelationship between *Theme of Mystical Love* and *Theme of God*, and outlines its transformation as the main theme of the cycle *Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus*.

I am of the opinion that the study is extremely thorough and large-scale, based on a serious study of a huge amount of literature, developed in accordance with the normative requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The scientific text is argued with references to a considerable number of authors. I emphasize the relevance of the chosen topic, as well as the in-depth knowledge of the researched problem. I accept the contributions of the dissertation as formulated by the author. The abstract correctly presents the main points of the text of the dissertation. The four publications are quite sufficient and complete the study.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the doctoral candidate and her supervisor, Prof Yulian Kuyumdzhev, for the outstanding result achieved, as I confidently propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury, to award Assoc. Prof Malina Lyubenova Malinova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in a professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

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