

REVIEW

by **Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak, PhD,**

lecturer at AMDFA Prof Asen Diamandiev, Plovdiv

of

dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor

in professional field 8.3. Music and dance art

doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art

Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts

Faculty of Music Pedagogy

AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv

Titled:

The Relationship between the Bebop Idiom and the Scat Improvisation in the Musical Language of Jazz Vocalists

Author: **Marina Ivanova Gospodinova**

Academic supervisor: **Prof Borislav Yassenov, PhD**

By order No RD-27-001/04.01.2024 of the Rector of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev"-Plovdiv, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury, and for the preparation of a review according to the procedure established by the law and other normative acts, for the doctoral work of Marina Ivanova Gospodinova, a doctoral student in the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts, with academic supervisor Prof Borislav Yassenov, titled *The Relationship between the Bebop Idiom and the Scat Improvisation in the Musical Language of Jazz Vocalists*.

Brief biographical presentation of the doctoral student:

Marina Gospodinova graduated with a Bachelor's degree in pop and jazz singing at the Vocal Faculty of National Academy of Music "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov" - Sofia, in 1996. The same year she won the 2nd Prize for young performer at the international festival Golden Orpheus. She received her Master's degree in 2015, again at NAM "Prof Pancho Vladigerov", Sofia, in the Faculty of Theory, Composition and Conducting, majoring in Music Education Pedagogy. Her master's thesis is titled *Bosa Nova –the Brazilian Wave in Jazz*, defended excellently.

In 2005 she is a participant in the spring and summer master class of Viki Almazidou and Milcho Leviev, organized by the New Bulgarian University, Sofia. Then Marina had the opportunity to draw on the knowledge and energy of these two great names. Vicky Almazidu says about her "*She sings with the ease with which she breathes, and in my opinion she is one of the remarkable names of today's Bulgarian jazz scene*". With this remarkable recognition, in 2010 Marina Gospodinova started working as a vocal teacher in Pop and Jazz singing, at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv.

As one of the most popular jazz performers in Bulgaria, M. Gospodinova successfully combines her concert activity with her work as a vocal teacher in pop and jazz singing. She works with the most prominent jazz musicians of Bulgaria and collaborates with many formations. I will highlight the more important collaborations that she mentions in her biography:

In 2014, she was a special guest on the European tour of the Grammy-nominated virtuoso bassist Juan Garcia - Herreros (Colombia). She is a frequent guest in the educational project of the trumpeter Ventsislav Blagoev - Jazz for Children. She is a guest in the studio albums of *Vasil Petrov sings Gershwin* (2000).

She is the leader of numerous projects, such as The Golden Years of Jazz, Jazz 'n' Groove Tales, Celebrating Billie Holliday, Bossa Nova-Nova Bossa and others. The project that makes her especially popular is Jazz in Bulgarian (Jazz & Poetry), in which together with the pianist and conductor of the Big Band of the Bulgarian National Radio Antoni Donchev, Ventsislav Blagoev and the poetess Maria Doneva, present some of the most beautiful jazz standards with original texts in Bulgarian language.

In 2020, she released her first author's song *Bez* (without), and at the beginning of 2021, the song *July*. Both songs are based on poems by Maria Doneva. The tandem – Marina and Maria, set the trend of creating original Bulgarian texts for classical compositions, a lasting trend in Bulgarian jazz, which is already clearly expressed in the repertoire of our leading jazz vocalists.

Marina Gospodinova has a number of records with the Bulgarian National Television and Radio.

In 2019 she is admitted as doctoral student at AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv.

Scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation

- *The Bebop Style - the Embodiment of Classical Modernity in Jazz* - 2020 Yearbook of AMDFA, pp. 65-76
- *General Characteristics of Scat Singing in Jazz*, at the Third International Scientific Conference in AMDFA "Science, Education and Innovations in the field of art", Plovdiv, 2021, AMDFA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev", pp. 199-206, volume 1

Content of the dissertation

The work was discussed and proposed for public defense at a departmental meeting on 06.12.2023. It consists of 180 pages. The exposition is structured in an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, reference of the contributions, publications on the subject, appendices, a bibliography including 20 sources in Cyrillic, 36 in Latin and 12 Internet sources, 141 musical examples, 6 photos and 2 tables.

The **relevance of the topic** is indisputable. Knowledge of the issues is evident from the overall research. The research tools used are comparative, analytical-chronological and theoretical analysis based on the empirical experience of the doctoral student.

The **introduction** is well organized and systematized. The relevance of the research is commented on, the main goal of the dissertation is stated. The research is focused on the introduction of this new means of expression, "*called 'scat', which became an important element of performance, ... and a challenge for improvising singers in the bebop idiom*" (p.6). The aim is not only to find the relationship between the bebop idiom and the scat improvisation in the musical language of jazz vocalists, but also to systematize the steps in the training process of modern singers, "*which should help them acquire the skills of improvising musicians in the bebop idiom*" (ibid.) The **object** of the study is the relationship between the bebop idiom and the scat improvisation. The **subject** of the dissertation is the model methodology for learning the language of bebop and its inclusion in the vocal language of the scat improviser. By formulating the purpose of the research, Associate Professor Gospodinova sets herself the following tasks:

- Theoretical consideration of the elements of the bebop improvisation and respectively the scat improvisation.
- Introduction to the phrases, sentences and forms characteristic of this music.
- Analyzing the solos of prominent bebop artists and building a process for incorporating this material into one's own expressive possibilities.
- To find the possible application of scat singing in the educational process in higher educational institutions of music, by building a model methodology for scat improvisation.

The historical analysis of the process of the emergence of jazz until the appearance of modern jazz, is the focus of the **first chapter** of the dissertation. Gospodinova gives a brief overview of the main movements in jazz that preceded bebop, (Ragtime, New Orleans - New Orleans style, Dixieland, The Jazz Age (1920 - 1930), The Swing Era, Bebop and modern jazz) presents the main performers (Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan) and the types of vocal improvisations, defines the concepts of scat and vocalization as the main means of expression.

The **second chapter** is titled *Fundamentals of the vocal performance work in contemporary music*, as here the emphasis is placed on the basic steps for knowing and mastering the vocal apparatus: (Organs supplying the matter (respiratory system), elements of the vocal apparatus, singing breathing, phases and types of singing breathing, position of the body when singing. Organs producing the voice (vibratory system) – larynx and vocal folds, structure, conditions for producing the initial laryngeal sound, position of the larynx during phonation, beginning of voice production, pitch attack, types of attacks. Organs processing the basic laryngeal sound. Resonator system of the human voice, articulation and diction. This part of the thesis is particularly interesting to me personally, as a teacher involved in the methodology of teaching singing. Marina Gospodinova is one of the few doctoral students treating the matter in this extremely academic way. The differences in the mechanism of

sound extraction in classical and non-classical styles are examined. In conclusion, Gospodinova correctly draws the following conclusion, which I fully share: *in order for the singer to freely implement his improvisational ideas, good vocal technique and knowledge of how the vocal instrument works are essential*. Here, as in the entire work, the enviable competence and erudition of Marina Gospodinova, her in-depth attitude to the subject under consideration is evident. She possesses expert and detailed knowledge of the researched problem, manages to analytically share various scientific contributions and create her own hypotheses.

The **third chapter** entitled *Bebop Idiom - characterization, representatives, analyses*, is essential to the study. Gospodinova's analyses clarify the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic characteristics of bebop. Four types of improvisation in jazz are presented - melodic paraphrase, harmonic outline, motive development and modality. This chapter has a certain contributory nature. Charlie Parker's solo on his composition *Confirmation* is analyzed, Ella Fitzgerald's and Sarah Vaughan's scat solos are also analyzed. The author examines the vocal improvisation within the context of bebop and its artists, as well as the choice of syllables. "*When the singer is a beginner, it is difficult for him to choose which syllables to choose, therefore, in my practice as a teacher, I give etudes with written combinations of syllables, which are a base for the future improviser to lean on at a later stage, before developing and upgrading his scat language*", concludes Gospodinova. (p. 34)

The theoretical classification and analysis of selected examples from the history of jazz in this chapter is a prerequisite for the study of the foundations of the methodological principles discussed in the **fourth chapter** of the dissertation, called: *Possible application of the scat singing in the educational process in higher music schools. A model methodology of scat improvisation*. This part deals with the possible application of scat singing in the educational process. Gospodinova argues that "*improvisation is a freely usable set of different means of expression in the context of a given musical tradition, giving the performer the freedom to decide what follows at each moment of the construction of the improvised piece during the performance*." (p. 37)

The proposed scat improvisation methodology includes:

- Technical improvement of the voice, through a set of arpeggios, scales, patterns, etc.
- Mastering intervals, scales, old modes, internal scales of harmonic and melodic minor and major, and their relationship to chords.
- Learning and understanding rhythm, pulse, meter, beat and tempo.
- The difference between diatonic and tonal harmony, functionality and tonal centre, through a piano exercise.
- Musical repertoire.
- Mastering assigned musical interpretations, signature solos and etudes addressing specific issues in the bebop language.
- Variability in presenting the thematic material through manipulation of text, rhythm and melody.

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

The doctoral candidate has formulated the following contributing points in her research:

1. Historical tracing of the processes that have led to the emergence of modern jazz (Bebop).
2. The main representatives of vocal jazz, as well as the types of vocal improvisation, are examined. The concepts of scat and vocalization are defined, in the context of vocal jazz improvisation, as basic means of expression.
3. The steps for knowing and mastering the voice instrument, as well as the differences in the mechanism of sound extraction of classical and non-classical styles are examined.
4. Analyses of solos by Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan.
5. An attempt has been made for a complete and systematized methodological guide in Bulgarian, as well as for studying vocal improvisation using the scat technique.
6. The study has theoretical and practical applicability, as a methodical guide, both for singers and for instrumentalists and teachers.

The **abstract**, consisting of 50 pages, is structured in accordance with the academic requirements, reflecting correctly and accurately the structure and synthesized content of the dissertation work, as well as its contributing nature.

I congratulate the candidate Marina Gospodinova and her supervisor Prof Borislav Yassenov for the valuable and extremely precise work and recommend that the work be published. I give my **high evaluation** for the research and **propose to the respected scientific jury to award the doctoral student Marina Gospodinova the educational and scientific degree "DOCTOR"** in the professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art.

March, 2024

Prof Toni Shekerzhieva-Novak, PhD