

REVIEW

by Prof Lozanka Peycheva, D.A.

on the dissertation work of

Paolina Vasileva,

doctoral student at the Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev", Plovdiv

Title: **Folklore instrumental practices in Varna and some settlements in the region**

for awarding educational and scientific degree **Doctor** in Professional field 8.3. Music and

Dance Art; Doctoral program Musicology and Music Art

Academic supervisor: Assoc. Prof Vladimir Vladimiroc, PhD

As can be seen in the attached documents, Paolina Vasileva is born in 1993 in Varna, where she graduated Anton Strashimirov Primary School in a class with extended study of folk musical instruments and folk songs. In 2012 she graduated National School of Art "Dobri Hristov" - Varna, after which she receives Master's degree in Pedagogy of Music Education at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv in 2017. She was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in 2018 at the Department of Musical Folklore at the Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev". She was discharged with the right of defense by order of the Rector No RD-27-044 / 14.07.2021.

Paolina Vasileva's dissertation work is dedicated to an important topic that coincides with the professional experience and interests of the doctoral student. The text discusses relevant issues related to the peculiarities of the folk instrumental music in Varna and some villages in the region. This music acquires new dimensions in our time in connection with the relevance of the processes of maintenance and development of folklore practices and professional instrumental performing arts.

The dissertation consists of 176 pages and is structured in introduction, three chapters, conclusion, reference to the contributions, bibliography, list of informants. It is illustrated with photos, map, music examples, and diagrams.

In the **Introduction** the author demonstrates her personal commitment and motivation for choosing the topic, and states the main reasons for the research enthusiasm. The goal and the tasks assigned to it are clearly and precisely formulated. The research object is outlined - "purposeful study of the instrumental folklore practices in Varna and the villages inhabited by Vayats and Gagauz". Special emphasis is placed on amateur playing, organized amateur art activities, professional ensemble "Varna", training in folk instruments in the city, as well as the more famous now wedding orchestras with folk instruments in Varna. The chronological timeframe of the research is highlighted - from the 1950s to the present day. The literature review, without being exhaustive, provides a concise overview of various publications on the topic, which are used as the main sources of information in the dissertation. The choice of research methods is well justified: observation, interview, analysis and

synthesis. There is preliminary terminological explanations of basic working concepts, with which the doctoral student operates productively in the dissertation.

First Chapter *Ethno-demographic characteristics of Varna and the region. Instrumental practices* – is logically oriented towards tracing historiographical and ethno-demographic data about Varna and the region. Brief information about the historical development of the city of Varna, about the changes in the ethno-demographic composition of its population is presented. Special attention is paid to some migration processes and some changes in the demographic composition of the population in Northeastern Bulgaria. In addition to tracing the historical chronology of demographic changes over the centuries, an overview of the main ethnographic groups in the study area was made.

After outlining the diversity of ethnic groups living in Varna, the author focuses on the rich and multifaceted urban music culture and the existing instrumental practices in the city. Paolina Vasileva has managed to study information about the specific musical formations created for various institutions (societies, churches, schools, etc.) of the Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities. The development of the musical life in Varna from the end of the XIX century to the beginning of the XXI century is also briefly outlined.

The candidate presents the main performing groups (orchestras, dance ensembles, ensembles, etc.) which are actively involved in the musical life of Varna. She also summarizes that as a result of centuries of coexistence in the city "today (early 2000s) it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the population in ethnic terms" because representatives of these groups do not identify themselves as such.

The doctoral candidate pays special attention to the main ethnographic and ethnic groups that inhabit the villages in the Varna region. She focuses on the settlements studied in the dissertation research, located northwest of the city of Varna, formed mainly by migrants - Vayats and Gagauz.

There is information about the Vayats and the Gagauz, to which the author pays special attention. As a result of the study to identify the two ethnographic groups and the comparative analysis of musical practices in the studied villages, Paolina Vasileva came to the assumption of a relationship between Vayats and Gagauz, established due to the relocation of the Vayats in areas northwest of Varna, territories considered to be "native to the Gagauz". According to the doctoral student, as a result of the coexistence of the two communities after the 1950s, their music, culture and traditions intertwined under the influence of several factors: the marriages they concluded with each other and the holidays they celebrated together. The historical and ethno-demographic review presented in the first chapter helps to understand the important role of the ethnic and ethnographic communities in the musical life of Varna and the studied villages in the region.

The **second chapter** - *Amateur playing and amateur artistic activity* – outlines the characteristic features of amateur playing and amateur art activities in the studied region. Here the author sheds light on the state of amateur playing in several villages in the studied region (Beloslav, Brestak, Valchi Dol, Cherventsi and Topoli). The doctoral student is searches and studies amateur playing, practiced by self-taught musicians playing for pleasure. During the field work in settlements

inhabited mainly by Gagauz, or where Gagauz were interviewed (Brestak, Valchi Dol, Cherventsi) were found and analyzed data on local musicians from the early twentieth century to the present day (players of flute, bagpipes, rebec, accordion, in some cases - ocarina, violin). The field research covers settlements where interviews were conducted with local musicians who identified themselves as Vayats (Beloslav, Topoli). The dissertation introduces data on various musicians (bagpipers), representatives of amateur music making in these villages, and comments on their participation in various instrumental practices.

The study further focuses on the organized movement of amateur art in the studied region after the 1950s. The doctoral student focuses on folk ensembles and other ensembles created at various institutions (community centers, enterprises, schools, etc.). Paolina Vasileva clearly highlights the role of amateur art in the period of the Socialist state and emphasizes that after 1944 amateur art became a major element of the cultural life of the people in the region.

The **third chapter** - *Professional folk instrumental practice practices in Varna* - is focused on a specific problem - the development of professional folklore instrumental practices in Varna after the 1950s. The material has been studied, considered and organized in three directions: professional folk ensemble art; training in folk musical instruments and playing in wedding orchestras.

The reading of the creation, development and success of Folk Song and Dance Ensemble – Varna, proposed by Paolina Vasileva, is consistent with the outlined three stages of the ensemble's existence: as an amateur folklore ensemble of the City Council (1961-1976); as a professional ensemble with municipal status (1976-1991); as a non-profit association (after 1991 to the present).

The pedagogical activity related to the training of folk musicians, developed in the city community centers, music schools and specialized schools for folk arts, is especially outlined and it is precisely noted that the city of Varna, with its three schools where folk instruments are taught, is “a kind of leader in this training”. Using the of collected source materials the author manages to highlight the folklore education in three established prestigious educational institutions in the field of musical folklore (Primary School "Anton Strashimirov"; National High School of Humanities and Arts "Konstantin Preslavski"; National School of Arts "Dobri Hristov"), and to successfully convey in a clear way the various methods of teaching folk music, approved by well-trained, dedicated and committed teachers of folk instruments in Varna: kaval (Nikolai Doktorov, Venelin Mutafchiev, Dimo Zhelezov), bagpipe (Nedko Tsarev, Dragni Dragnev; Nikola Georgiev), rebec (Simeon Simeonov, Gencho Stoyanov), tamboura (Georgi Manovski, Daniela Indzhova). The inclusion of individual statements of some of these teachers, who reveal important moments from their pedagogical experience, is also very valuable.

Later in this chapter, Paolina Vasileva chooses as a specific object of focus the wedding orchestras from the city of Varna. She presents new information on the existence of various wedding orchestras in Varna. The author traces the early appearance of wedding orchestras in the city of Varna and emphasizes that their role, influence and authority increased especially after the 1980s and 1990s. The importance of the Varna wedding orchestras is presented by highlighting the specifics of the

studied instrumental ensembles: Aksakovo Folk Group, Orchestra Varna, Orchestra Kamchia, Orchestra Zdravets, Orchestra Breeze and Orchestra Orchids. Analyzing the data from the video-sharing platform YouTube, the author comes to conclusions about the popularity of the studied Varna orchestras.

The **Conclusion** summarizes the results of the dissertation research.

The research is based on field work, which can be considered as a personal achievement of Paolina Vasileva. She has collected a variety of relevant material, interviewed musicians connected with the studied region, who shed light on various aspects of the peculiarities and development of instrumental folk music and its inseparable practices.

The author has formulated 5 contributions, which correctly reflect the main achievements of the dissertation work, related to supplementing and expanding the regional studies on folk music and contemporary performing arts in Northeastern Bulgaria.

In my opinion, the dissertation has other contributing moments, the result of the individual work of Paolina Vasileva. Unsearched materials, collected and organized from various sources, have been introduced into scientific use, and this moment of discovery can be assessed as a contribution. The included material provides a unified picture of the instrumental formations and practices in the studied region.

Three author's publications related to the topic of the dissertation are presented, all published. The publications contribute to the promotion of the results of the research.

The abstract is 57 pages long. It presents in summary the main points of the dissertation and objectively reflects its structure, content, main conclusions.

As far as I can afford some recommendations, they relate to the future work of the doctoral student. It is noteworthy that the recorded field materials are described but not attached to the dissertation. In my opinion, the work would benefit if the transcripts of the interviews conducted in the field work were included in it. This would give greater integrity and density to the study. My second recommendation refers to some noticed inaccuracies, which should be corrected (for example, on page 10 the name of Zhenya Pimpireva is written incorrectly as "Sonya Pimpireva"). The bibliography needs to be written more accurately, which in its current form is incomplete – in some places there are quotations of authors who are not included in the bibliography (Eduard Alekseev, Carol Silverman). These recommendations do not diminish the importance of what has been achieved in the dissertation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the work submitted for review is a valuable study of the instrumental folklore practices in Varna and some villages in the region. The dissertation meets the legal requirements of Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations and the Regulations for its implementation. On this basis, I give my

positive assessment and vote in favor of the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Musicology and Music Art" to Paolina Vasileva.

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