

OPINION

by

Prof Ermila Schweitzer, PhD

NMA „Prof Pancho Vladigerov”

on the dissertation of

Yingying Hou

– full-time doctoral student

in Professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

Doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art

at the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts

at AMDFA, “Prof Asen Diamandiev” - Plovdiv,

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on topic:

THE SYNTHESIS BETWEEN BEL CANTO AND POP SINGING IN THE VOCAL ART OF THE MUSICAL

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

On the grounds of a decision of the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Music Pedagogy dated 17.04.2024, to open a procedure for the defense of the dissertation work of Yingying Hou, I was provided with the following materials: CV of the candidate, dissertation work, abstract, a reference to the contribution nature of the dissertation, list of publications on the topic.

Brief biographical data for the candidate:

Yingying Hou received a Bachelor's degree in Popular Vocal Music from Shenyang School of Arts, Shenyang Conservatory of Music in 2007, and a Master's degree in Pop Vocal Singing from the same conservatory in 2014. Since 2015, she has been appointed as a teacher in the Department of Musical Theater, of the same conservatory, and since 2021 she is an associate professor in the Department of Musical Theater. She is the winner of numerous awards for teachers of pop singing, her students have also been awarded many times. Since 2014, he has also acted as an assistant director and director of various musicals. She is the author of three monographs and numerous publications in the field of musical vocal art.

The presented work is relevant with its theme, dedicated to the processes of combining the two singing styles, bel canto and pop singing, as part of the vocal mastery in the musical. Topics such as the artistic specificity of the musical and its stylistic vocal features are touched upon, also related to the features of the development and spread of this genre in China.

The research methods include the study of a considerable amount of material, the existing literature on the subject in China (the bibliography contains only Chinese authors, which is a pity),

related to the different types of vocal techniques that are applied in the performance of a musical. A comparative analysis of the two styles of singing - bel canto and pop singing, as well as fragments of classical works in the genre of the musical, is made, with the author relying on her own experience and observations regarding the innovations and development of singing skills in the musical in China.

Yingying Hou's dissertation is an analytical-comparative study that examines the historical origins of the musical and the entry of this genre into China in the 1980s. The path of the genre's emergence, as a derivative of opera buffa and operetta, is traced. The author expresses the exotic idea that "*credit for the points of contact between the opera and the musical, must be given to one outstanding person: Richard Wagner*" (p.15), something with which I cannot agree. Landmark works are noted that shaped the way of its development in the two world theater centers of Broadway and the West End, for example the musical comedy *A Gaiety Girl* (1893), produced by George Edwards, with music by Sidney Jones (the show that took the genre overseas).

In a separate chapter, the doctoral student analyzes and looks for similarities and differences in the styles and in the vocal technique of bel canto and pop singing, and comes to some conclusions: in terms of breathing, there are no differences, in terms of sound extraction – in pop singing, it is not necessary to raise the soft palate to achieve a higher resonance, there is a difference in voice power, due to the inclusion of more resonances in bel canto singing, there is a difference in the position of the larynx, which in bel canto singing is lower.

Thus, it is logical to arrive at the use of these two styles in the musical. "*One of the most characteristic features of the musical is the variety of vocal styles.*" (p.85). According to the author, these vocal styles are: bel canto, the so-called "complex sound extraction" - pop singing based on the bel canto system, "mixed voice" - a singing technique that combines bel canto, natural voice and genre singing. A classification of musicals is made according to the predominant style of singing - musicals in the operetta style, jazz style, country style, rock and roll style, etc. Special attention is paid to the need for performers in the musical genre to master the bel canto technique: "*The musical inherits and assimilates many of the formal-content aspects of the Western opera, and in this sense bel canto is part of its musical fabric*" (p.113). The candidate argues her thesis with specific examples from iconic musicals: *Cats*, *Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, as well as musicals by Chinese composers. In a separate sub-chapter, the author analyzes the vocal prowess of famous singers in the musical genre: Sarah Brightman and Elaine Page, and tries to discover the secrets of the synthesis between bel canto and pop singing.

Six contributions of the work are indicated, formulated by the author in two directions - theoretical and practical. The theoretical one includes the study of the history, development and spread of the musical in China, and the practical one - a theoretical framework is proposed for the study and practical application of the synthesis between bel canto and pop singing in the genre of the musical.

The publications on the topic of the dissertation work are sufficient and testify to serious research interest and accumulated professional experience. The submitted abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

Yingying Hou's dissertation is an analytical-comparative study, with emphasized practical value, detailed analyzes and well-formulated conclusions. Based on what has been said so far, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Winging Hou the scientific educational degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art.

Sofia, 26.06.2024

Prof Dr. Ermila Schweitzer