

## OPINION

by

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on the dissertation of

Wang Ye – full-time doctoral student at

at the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts

at AMDFA, “Prof Asen Diamandiev” - Plovdiv,

with academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerjewa – Novak

on topic

***A Comparative Analysis between the Peking Opera Jingju and the Italian Opera***

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

**Biographical Data:** Wang Ye is a baritone with Bachelor’s degree in Vocal Music and Singing from Quanzhou University, China (2006-2010), a Master’s degree in Opera Singing from the Conservatory of Music Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Fermo, Italy (2011-2015), and started the doctoral program in Classical Singing at AMDFA Plovdiv, in 2018, the result of which is this dissertation work. The short biographical reference lists numerous participations of the doctoral student during his studies in Italy and Bulgaria in concerts and performances, as well as several prestigious awards from competitions - Anita Cerquetti International Vocal Competition (2017), Montefano International Vocal Competition (2018), International competition for musicians Pietro Argento (2018), a gold medal at the festival of Slavic Vocal Music in Bulgaria (2019) and first place in the Bel Canto group at the International Vocal Competition Euterpe in Italy (2019). These facts of Wang Ye's creative work prove his desire and ambition to develop and improve in the field of classical singing, and this, in my opinion, combined with his background, leads to the logical choice of the topic of the dissertation - a comparative analysis of the Peking Jingju opera and Italian opera, which are examined by the author in different perspectives.

The dissertation *A Comparative Analysis between the Peking Jingju Opera and Italian Opera* is structured in an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, bibliography, including 30 titles in Eastern languages, 7 titles in English and Italian, 1 title in Bulgarian and appendices. The total volume is 176 pages.

The **introduction** states the main purpose, reasons for choosing the topic, methods, structure and expected results of the research: *“This text is a comparative analysis of two operas emblematic of the Eastern and Western culture - the Peking and the Italian opera. It outline their origin and development in the context of the historical, cultural and philosophical differences typical of the place of their emergence. The structure of the plots in the Peking and the Italian operas and the artistic images, as well as the specifics of the music and vocal performance in them, are analyzed and*

*compared*"(page 4).

In the **first chapter**, the author makes a historical review and analysis of the origin and development of the Peking and the Italian opera. A large amount of information has been collected about the appearance of the first musical-theatre productions in China, as the first written evidence of the existence of the predecessor of the Peking Opera – the Kun Opera appeared in 1600-1620. Then there is a chronological tracing of the development of this art, until reaching its apogee in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The biographies of four very significant artists whose names are associated with the flourishing of the art of Peking Opera are presented – Mei Lanfang, Chen Yenchiu, Xun Huisheng and Shan Xiaoyun. It also offers a historical review of opera in Italy from the time of its emergence during the Renaissance, and of some of the significant composers whose work is connected with the further development of opera art - Alessandro Scarlatti, Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, Giuseppe Verdi , Giacomo Puccini, all the way to composers of the 20th century - Wolf-Ferrari, Respighi, etc.

The **second chapter** makes a comparative analysis of two specific works, the author defines them as characteristic works of the Peking and the Italian operas - *The Drunken Concubine* and *Madame Butterfly*, comparing the plot, artistic images, stage art and music. The comparison leads the candidate to the conclusion that "*...the history of the Italian opera is a history of the development and growth of the composers, while the Peking Opera can be seen as a history of the development of the actors*" (p. 24).

The **third chapter** is central to the research and is an in-depth comparative analysis between the two musical-dramatic arts – the Peking Opera and the Italian Opera. The first basis for comparison is the cultural situation at the time of their origin. The opera in China, according to the author, is inextricably linked with classical aesthetic principles and demonstrates the dialectical philosophical ideas of "*abstract and real*", "*hardness and softness*" and "*density and lightness*" (p.25). The aspiration in the Italian opera art has another point of departure - it "*... pays greater attention to the reproduction and imitation of the objective world*" (p.26).

A second comparative criterion is the philosophical concepts on which the two arts stand. According to the author, it is very characteristic of the Chinese philosophical thinking to focus on the wholeness - "*the unity in dualism, the opposition in unity, to realize the deep integration of the two, their mutual complementarity, to ensure balanced development and pursue harmony and unity*" (p. 27). The Western philosophical concept, in contrast, "*places more emphasis on the dualistic oppositional consciousness, man and nature, spirit and matter, subject and object, it divides the world into two, with clear boundaries, strongly emphasizing their opposition and coexistence*" ( p. 27).

The next criterion for comparison is the forms of expression. The author concludes that the Peking Opera is a "unity of song and dance" performed by a single artist, with simple accompaniment, while in the Italian opera there is a combination of vocal and instrumental music combined with visual stage performances, scenography, sets and costumes, which is a significant difference.

Another significant difference according to the candidate is the way the music is composed - in the Peking Opera, the music is transmitted "*with verbal explanations and showing of elements*" (p. 30), without a specific author. In the European tradition, it is the composer who determines the entire score of the performance down to the smallest detail.

Regarding the vocal parts, it is characteristic of the Peking Opera that they are divided not by the scope of their vocal range, but by the nature of the role - male, female, painted, comedians, etc.

Especially interesting and contributing to the research, in my opinion, are the author's observations on the general and the different aspects in the vocal performance, since he himself is a professional singer. The comparison of breathing, phonation, use of real voice and falsetto and their blending are thoroughly discussed and explained.

Another major difference discussed by the author is in terms of the plot and the dramatic structure. While in the Peking Opera the driving force of the action is the actor, who through specific techniques and schematic movements and poses expresses momentary states of mind, the Italian opera inherits the traditional concept characteristic of the ancient dramatic art, for which the plot is the course of events, the overall unfolding of the story - introduction of a conflict situation and its resolving.

In a separate subsection (3.5), the author compares the ways of inheriting and teaching the art of opera in the two different cultures. The Chinese musical-educational tradition, as well as the Italian one, from ancient times to the present day is examined in detail, and the author comes to the conclusion that what both systems have in common is the successful use of the "teacher-student" format. (p. 41).

In the **fourth chapter**, the author examines the situation of the opera art in the age of modern technologies. According to him, filming opera performances and streaming them live is one of the ways that contribute to the preservation of this art and introducing it to a wider range of viewers, outside the opera houses. The doctoral candidate also emphasizes the role of the Internet, seeing indisputable advantage in "*...the overcoming of the limitations of time and space, which allows the audience to leave the auditorium and actively observe the words and actions of the actors from a close distance, brought about by the rapid development of technology.*" (p. 44).

The candidate also examines the so-called "idea of convenience and companionship" when it comes to opera art in the modern times. It's about being able to enjoy an opera performance on radio, TV and any kind of mobile device anytime, anywhere.

In the conclusion, the author draws conclusions in support of the thesis that the study of similarities and differences between the two performing arts will contribute to their popularization and encourage exchange between the two cultures, both academically and on a wider socio-cultural level. And the following observation could be a starting point for further scientific developments: "*The Peking opera expresses the subtle, euphemistic and improvisational aesthetics so inherent to the Orient, in contrast to the Italian opera, which expresses the aesthetics of perfection and realism.*" (p.

48)

Three contributions of the dissertation are listed that I fully support. The author hopes that his research will expand the knowledge of both types of opera art and contribute to a better understanding of both cultures as a whole.

The dissertation work of Wang Ye is a historical-comparative scientific study, with a thorough approach to the issues under consideration, detailed analyzes and logically formulated conclusions. I congratulate the author and his scientific supervisor - Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak, and I confidently propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award Wang Ye the scientific educational degree "Doctor" in professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

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