

REVIEW

By Prof. Ventsislav Dimov Dimov, PhD

Regarding the application of Senior Asst. Prof. Nikolay Stefanov Gurbanov, PhD

In competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 8.3.

Music and Dance Art (Folk Choir Conducting)

Announced by *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv in

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Information on the applicant and the documentation

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Music and Dance Art, major: Folk Choir Conducting at the Department of Music Folklore of *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts has attracted one applicant. Based on the submitted curriculum vitae, I shall outline the principal aspects of the professional profile of the candidate, Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Stefanov Gurbanov, PhD.

Born in the city of Varna in 1993, he completed his music education at *Konstantin Preslavski* High School of Humanities and Arts in his hometown. He subsequently earned the Bachelor's and Master's degrees (2017) in Conducting Folk Ensembles at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv. At the Academy, Mr. Gurbanov has served as a part-time lecturer since 2017 and as a full-time faculty member since 2020. He is Assistant Professor of Folk Choir Conducting and Folk Orchestra Conducting, teaching core courses within the Conducting Folk Ensembles programme. Since 2023, he has been Conductor of the Academic Folk Choir of *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, with more than thirty concert performances in Bulgaria, Spain, and the Netherlands. In 2021, he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk Instruments*, thereby obtaining the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD). During the past fifteen years, he has pursued an active artistic and scholarly-applied career, having released four solo albums as a singer and accordionist (2006-2016), one album with the *Boryana* Choir under his direction (2019), and two albums as arranger and conductor with the Academic Folk Choir of *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts (2025-2026). In 2012, he founded the non-profit organisation Bulgarian National Youth Folklore Union, of which he continues to serve as President. The organisation has initiated and organised dozens of youth festivals, competitions, and

concert events, among the most notable of which are the *Orpheus Talents - Plovdiv* competition and the National Folklore Forum *Bridge Between Generations - Elena's Singing Bridge*, organised jointly with *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts*. Since 2015, he has also been a soloist with the *Bulgare National Folklore Ensemble*.

The candidate has submitted all documents and supporting materials required under the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and the relevant institutional regulations governing the procedure. These include a curriculum vitae; diplomas certifying completed higher education and the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD); medical and criminal record certificates; certificates verifying professional experience and teaching activity; a scientometric report; and an author's statement of scientific contributions, publications, and citations. The competition dossier contains documentary evidence corresponding to the minimum national requirements under indicator groups A, B, Γ, Δ and E. According to the submitted scientometric report, the candidate fulfils the national minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field of Arts, with numerical indicators significantly exceeding the required thresholds, as follows: Indicator A (doctoral dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD): *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk Instruments*, Diploma No. 069/03.11.2021) - 50 points; Indicator B (*Realised Original Artistic Product in the Field of Arts and Leading Artistic Performance in the Field of Arts*) - 450 points, against the required 100 points; Indicator Γ (scholarly publications and artistic achievements) - 465 points, against the required 120 points (225 points for scholarly publications and 265 points for artistic achievements); Indicator Δ (citations) - 80 points, against the required 40 points; Indicator E (research projects, teaching materials, and masterclasses) – 100 points, against the required 50 points.

The following analytical and interpretative section of this review has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Chapter Three, Section III of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA).

A . Research Activities

The materials submitted for review by Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD may be classified into two groups: 1). Scholarly publications; and 2). Citations

1. Scholarly Publications (Group Γ Indicators from the table)

The scholarly output submitted by Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD, both in terms of its thematic profile and volume, fully satisfies the requirements of the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor. The submitted publications comprise: a scholarly monograph based on his successfully defended doctoral dissertation - *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk Instruments* (Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, 2022, 212 pp.; reviewers: Prof. Svetla Kaludova-Stanilova and Prof. Mariyana Buleva-Petrova, DSc) - and nine scholarly articles published in proceedings of national and international scientific conferences and in peer-reviewed academic journals during the period 2013-2024. The author demonstrates a sustained research interest in the following fields: composition and performance practice for Bulgarian folk choir and folk orchestra; conducting of folk ensembles; and ethnomusicology, with particular emphasis on the traditions, identity, rituals, and dances of the Gagauz community.

Three of the submitted articles revolve around conducting practices and approaches to the interpretation of scores for Bulgarian folk ensembles. Gurbanov's debut article, '*Tranke, Tudorke, Cherna Chiresho*' by Krasimir Kyurkchiyski through the Prism of Conducting Education for Folk Ensembles, was written during his first year of undergraduate studies and published in the *Spring Scientific Readings* (2013, Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv). His article *Mastering and Learning the Score for Folk Ensembles through the Perspective of the Novice Conductor* (*Spring Scientific Readings*, 2017, Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv) presents a reflective account of a young conductor who has acquired fundamental theoretical knowledge and practical skills, describing his first independent professional experiences in working with a folk choir or a folk orchestra. Particularly noteworthy within this group of publications is the article *Artistic Perspectives in the Conducting Interpretation of Works for Women's Folk Choir*, published in the collection *Art Studies Readings*, Vol. II – *New Art*, issued by the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2024 (a publication peer-reviewed and indexed in the international scientific database Web of Science). In this study, Gurbanov offers a comparative analysis of several arrangements for women's folk choir in order to interpret the approaches adopted by different conductors to the organisation of musical time through the relationship between the unfolding of the non-metrical melody and the rhythmic succession of vertical sonorities. The study further delineates the artistic symbiosis between the composer of the work and its interpreter - the conductor.

Two of Gurbanov's articles present the results of his systematic research on the orchestral suites of Kosta Kolev. The article *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk*

Instruments (with Examples from *Pleven Suite* and *Pazardzhik Suite*), published in the electronic scholarly journal *Musical Logos* (2020), introduces the suites as an object of scholarly inquiry, proposes a classification, and offers a methodological framework for the structural analysis of these works. It also clarifies a number of specialised terms, including *strophic form*, *rhythmic accompaniment*, *single-layer accompaniment*, and *double-layer accompaniment*, among others, in order to identify the compositional techniques that distinguish Kosta Kolev's individual style in writing for the Bulgarian folk instruments orchestra. The article *Issues of Terminology in the Study of Music for Bulgarian Folk Instruments Orchestra* (based on examples from the orchestral suites of Kosta Kolev), published in the academic journal *Bulgarian Musicology*, Vol. 3 (2021), indexed and peer-reviewed in ERIH PLUS and CEEOL, proposes a terminological model for the analysis of Kosta Kolev's works that is applicable to the music for folk instruments orchestra by Bulgarian composers in general. The study constitutes an original scholarly contribution through its analytical methodology for the investigation of composed music based on folklore material, as well as through the proposed theoretical model of compositional style in music for Bulgarian folk instruments orchestra.

The ethnomusicological component of Gurbanov's scholarly output comprises a series of articles devoted to the unique ethnographic group of the Gagauz in Northeastern Bulgaria (a Turkic-speaking, Eastern Orthodox community with a Bulgarian ethnic identity): *The Gagauz Wedding Custom in Northeastern Bulgaria under the Influence of the Folklore of the Surrounding Local Population*; *Varna Dance, Varna Kyuchek, Bulgarian Kyuchek, or Kashik Avası and Kadındja*; *Bilingualism among the Gagauz and Its Impact on the Naming of Their Songs, Dances, and Instrumental Pieces*; and *The Gagauz of Northeastern Bulgaria: Hypotheses on Their Bulgarian Origin*. A common feature of these publications is the author's direct engagement in fieldwork, during which he collects ethnographic information and musical repertoire in their authentic cultural context. Equally significant are his attempts to compare and analyse his own field data in relation to the findings and interpretations presented in the existing scholarly literature. This area of Nikolay Gurbanov's research has already yielded further substantial results which, although not included among the materials submitted for the present competition, are reflected in two books: *Minko Kostadinov – Master of the Two-Voiced Bagpipe* (2013) and *In the Home of the Gagauz: Field Recordings and Notes from Fieldwork* (2025).

2. Quotations

Among the candidate's most frequently cited scholarly works are his monograph *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk Instruments* (Plovdiv, 2022), which has received five citations, and the article *Issues of Terminology in the Study of Music for Bulgarian Folk Instruments Orchestra (based on examples from the orchestral suites of Kosta Kolev)* (*Bulgarian Musicology*, Vol. 3, 2021), which has received two citations. These publications have been cited by Bulgarian scholars whose research focuses on transformational processes in Bulgarian musical folklore, as well as on composition and the arrangement of folk music.

B. Teaching (Pedagogical and Educational-Methodological) Activity

Senior Asst. Prof. Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD has submitted for review materials that demonstrate the close relationship between his scholarly research in the field of folklore studies and its educational applications in practice. His pedagogical and educational-methodological activities, as outlined in his curriculum vitae, are closely intertwined with his artistic and creative work. Evidence of these activities is provided under Section E, item 24 - Leadership of a National Research, Educational, or Artistic Project, the candidate reports two projects carried out in cooperation with Malko Tarnovo Municipality and directed by him: the organisation of a Summer University involving students and academic staff from *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts* - Plovdiv (2023), and the implementation of field research for the collection and transcription of authentic musical folklore material (2024). Under Section E, Item 27 - Published University Teaching Aid or Teaching Material Used within the School Education System, the candidate presents the music edition *Folk Songs with Piano Accompaniment*, Part I (2013). The candidate also demonstrates active engagement in the delivery of masterclasses, workshops, and practical training sessions in the field of arts (Section E, Item 28), as evidenced by the agreement for a masterclass (workshop) conducted by Nikolay Gurbanov in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, in 2024.

C. Artistic and Creative Activity

The materials submitted for the present competition demonstrate that the artistic and creative activity of Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD constitutes the principal dimension of his diverse professional achievements. It is closely interconnected with his teaching (pedagogical and educational-methodological) activity, his artistic engagements, as well as with his research interests and scholarly-applied accomplishments. The emphasis placed on the candidate's artistic achievements in a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Folk Choir

Conducting is fully consistent with the provisions of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and the relevant implementing regulations. It is in accordance with Article 15(4) of the DASRBA, which stipulates that *‘in higher education institutions and faculties in the fields of the arts and sports, applications for academic positions may be based on artistic and creative or sporting achievements specific to the respective field’*, as well as with Article 27(5) of the DASRBA, according to which *‘for academic specialities in the field of the arts, artistic and creative activity may be evaluated in place of research activity.’*

The scientometric table submitted by the candidate, together with the supporting documentation, presents a number of authored products and artistic achievements which are comparable in scope and significance to a habilitation work. Under Group B Indicator, Item 4 - *Realised Original Artistic Product in the Field of Arts* (film, performance, exhibition, concert, etc.), two musical albums by BORYANA women’s folk choir are listed: *Charm* (Sunrise Marinov, 2019) and *Songs for Soloists* (Sunrise Marinov, 2022), comprising a total of 24 recorded songs. In these productions, Gurbanov is credited as arranger, conductor, and producer. The materials submitted for the competition include audio recordings, production contracts, and album annotations. Under Group B Indicator, Item 5 - *Leading (Solo) Artistic Performance in the Field of Arts*, the candidate presents documentation (invitations, contracts, posters, airline tickets, among others) evidencing a total of ten solo concerts and artistic projects realised by Gurbanov and the choirs conducted or led by him - *Boryana*, the Academic Folk Choir of *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, and the chamber formation *Charodeyki* - in Bulgaria (Plovdiv, Varna, Stara Zagora, Kalofer, Sozopol, Burgas, Malko Tarnovo), as well as in Russia and the Netherlands, during the period 2019-2025.

In Section Г, in addition to the publications mentioned above, Gurbanov presents, under Item 13 - *Leading (or Solo) Artistic Performance in the Field of Arts*, three concerts of the Academic Folk Choir of *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, which he conducted. This section also includes, under Item 14 - *Supporting Artistic Performance or Participation in a Collective Artistic Product*, sixteen concert appearances of ensembles conducted by Nikolay Gurbanov. Among these, particular distinction is given to the concerts of the Academic Folk Choir featuring violinist Vasko Vassilev in Tokyo (Japan) and Valencia (Spain).

D. Summary and Conclusion

I would like to share some personal impressions regarding the candidate. I have followed the development of Nikolay Gurbanov since the earliest stages of his education and artistic career. I am

not acquainted with another young artist who, in such a short period of time, has managed to establish himself in such an ambitious and convincing manner - as a performing artist, as an author of scholarly and applied research publications, and as a public figure and organiser of cultural events. My personal observations and assessment fully correspond with the results of the candidate's overall activity, as well as with his scientific, applied, teaching, and artistic achievements and contributions presented in the competition documentation. These clearly indicate that Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD, as a diligent researcher of Bulgarian traditional music and its artistic reinterpretations; as a practitioner with pedagogical experience as a university lecturer; as a participant and/or leader of national and international scientific, educational, and artistic projects; and as an artist and conductor, is a highly suitable candidate for the announced academic position of Associate Professor. The submitted evidence fully complies with the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA) and its implementing regulations. This provides sufficient grounds for a high overall evaluation of Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD, as a candidate in the competition, and for recommending that the scientific jury vote in favour of his appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 8.3 Music and Dance Art (*Folk Choir Conducting*) at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev* Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv.

Sofia, June 7, 2026

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