

OPINION

by **Prof. Vesela Ivanova Geleva, PhD**, lecturer in Choral Conducting at the Department of Music Pedagogy and Conducting of the Faculty of Music Pedagogy at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv*

for **Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Stefanov Gurbanov, PhD**, candidate in the competition for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in the major 'Folk Choir Conducting', professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv*, Department of Music Folklore, announced in the State Gazette, issue No. 16 / 10.02.2026.

Nikolay Gurbanov was born in 1993 in Varna, where he completed his secondary music education. In 2017, he obtained the educational qualification degree of Master in the major: *Folk Ensemble Conducting* at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv*, and was appointed to the Academy as a part-time lecturer in the disciplines *Folk Orchestra Conducting with Piano Accompaniment*, *Folk Singing*, *Performance in a Folk Orchestra*, and *Ensemble Class*. Since 2020, he has held a full-time academic position at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv* in the major: *Folk Ensemble Conducting*. In 2021, he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk Instruments*, on the basis of which he was awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD). In the period 2019-2023, he was the conductor of *Boryana Women's Folk Choir* and *Charodeyki Chamber Vocal Ensemble*, with which he achieved successful performances in Russia. Since 2023, he has been the conductor of the Academic Folk Choir at *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv*, with which he has realized concerts throughout Bulgaria, as well as concert tours in Japan, Spain, and the Netherlands

N. Gurbanov is the founder of the association 'Bulgarian National Youth Folklore Union', through which numerous concerts, international youth festivals, and competitions have been realized, including the *Orpheus Talents International Competition* for Music, Dance, and Fine Arts in Plovdiv. Since 2024, together with *Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv* and the Bulgarian National Youth Folklore Union, he has co-organized the National Folklore Meeting '*Bridge Between Generations - The Song Bridge of Elena*'. He has released compact discs as an accordionist, singer, arranger, and conductor of folk choir, folk orchestra, and folk ensemble. He has also served as a member of artistic juries in various music forums. Since 2015, he has been a soloist performer with *Bulgare National Folklore Ensemble*.

The documentation submitted by the candidate regarding compliance with the minimum national requirements demonstrates a multifaceted and active professional trajectory that significantly exceeds the required minimum score threshold. Through his doctoral dissertation, subsequently published as a monograph under the title *The Suites of Kosta Kolev for the Orchestra of Bulgarian Folk Instruments*, he establishes his scholarly

focus on issues related to folklore. For the first time, Kosta Kolev's contribution is comprehensively examined across all major domains of his compositional activity, as well as in relation to the collection, recording, and dissemination of Bulgarian musical folklore. A theoretical and terminological model for analyzing his compositional style in music for the orchestra of folk instruments has been developed; the original folk song sources and performers of the melodies contained in the suites of the instrumental-song type have been identified and verified; and interviews have been conducted with individuals who had close professional relationships with the composer.

In the indicator 'Realized Original Artistic Product in the Field of Arts', the candidate presents two recorded albums. The first is the CD *Obayanie (Charm)*, performed by *Boryana Women's Folk Choir* and released in 2019. The album includes fourteen emblematic choral works - folk arrangements by St. Mutaftchiev, Kr. Kyurkchiyski, K. Stefanov, N. Kaufman, Ivan Spasov, K. Kolev, and others. The songs originate from different folklore regions and areas and are characterized by a high level of performance difficulty and artistic expressiveness. The programme was prepared for a concert tour in Russia and therefore includes representative examples of the choral repertoire within the genre. The performances are characterized by rich tonal colour, fresh timbres, dynamic vitality, and expressive emotionality.

The second album, *Arrangements*, is the result of N. Gurbanov's work as arranger and conductor of a folk choir, orchestra, and vocal-instrumental ensemble. The ten works included comprise music performed by a folk choir and folk orchestra for the creation of a dance production; music performed by a solo singer accompanied by a folk orchestra; one arrangement for women's folk choir with soloist (a cappella); and two arrangements for women's folk choir (a cappella). The arrangements are based on diverse vocal and instrumental material from various folklore regions, including Thrace, Strandzha, Pirin, the Shopluk region, and the Pazardzhik-Ihtiman sub-region, and they reflect the characteristic musical features of the respective regional traditions.

As leading artistic achievements in the field of arts, the candidate has listed ten concerts with the *Boryana Choir*, *Charodeyki Academic Chamber Ensemble*, and the *Academic Folk Choir at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv*. Among the listed performances, those in Novodvinsk, Arkhangelsk Region, Russia, the concert in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, and the author's project *Aquarius* by Nikolay Gurbanov, presented in Sozopol, Burgas, and Malko Tarnovo, stand out. The repertoire combines a folk music programme with examples of Church Slavonic Orthodox choral music.

As scholarly publications of contributory character, Gurbanov presents nine publications on diverse topics. The first of these, *Artistic Perspectives in the Conducting Interpretation of Works for Women's Folk Choir*, offers an insightful comparative analysis of several arrangements of songs for women's folk choir, as interpreted by different conductors. The study examines the conductor's approach to the shaping of musical time through the relationship between the unfolding of the non-metrical melody and the rhythmic articulation of vertical sonorities. The aesthetic solutions identified, resulting from the interaction between the composer's intent and the conductor's interpretative role, provide guidance for further performance approaches and interpretative concepts.

A particular research interest for Senior Assistant Professor Gurbanov, PhD is the folkloric heritage of the Gagauz community and Northeastern Bulgaria, where he has conducted field research in selected settlements. The outcome of this work is reflected in the following publications: *The Gagauz Wedding Custom in Northeastern Bulgaria and Its Influence from the Folklore of the Remaining Local Population*; *Varna Dance, Varna Kyuchek, Bulgarian Kyuchek or Kashik Avası and Kadindja*; *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*. Encounters with informant-respondents have enabled the candidate to collect, transcribe, analyze, and process the gathered material, on the basis of which he formulates conclusions and scholarly hypotheses, while also drawing on established authorities in the relevant field of study.

The paper *Mastering and Learning the Score for Folk Ensembles through the Perspective of the Novice Conductor*, presented at the National Scientific Conference of Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts - Plovdiv, *Spring Scientific Readings*, has a practical orientation and reflects the experience of the novice conductor in applying the fundamental knowledge and technical-practical skills acquired during training in real-life professional contexts. The text is supported by references to theoretical works of established conductors and leaders of folk ensembles, which further enhances the credibility of the conclusions drawn.

In the appended list of supporting artistic performances, the concert tours with Vasko Vassilev in Japan and Spain stand out. The unconventional performance approach and the integration of the folk repertoire within these productions, as well as the symbiosis between classical, folk, ethno, jazz, and pop music, are characteristic of the eclectic nature of the contemporary soundscape. Such an experimental form of musical interpretation represents a useful, innovative, and refreshing experience in the artistic practice of the female student-singers in the Academic Folk Choir.

The candidate has eight citations in non-indexed peer-reviewed publications, the leadership of two projects, one published teaching aid (*Folk Songs with Piano Accompaniment*, Part I), as well as masterclasses in *Singing in a Folk Choir* conducted with the Academic Folk Choir in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, and in Varna.

In evaluating the submitted materials and on the basis of all the above, I support the candidacy of Senior Assistant Professor Nikolay Gurbanov, PhD for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor in *Folk Choir Conducting*, professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, and wish him success in his further work as a pedagogue, conductor, and performer.

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Prof. Vesela Geleva, PhD

Plovdiv