

REVIEW

by

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on the dissertation work of

Elvira Todorova Mateva

titled

Chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* by Modest Mussorgsky - genesis and development of the medieval macabre plots in the context of the sonority-intonation relation

Academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak

1. General presentation of the procedure and the materials presented for review

The documentation of the procedure for the defense before a scientific jury of a dissertation with author Elvira Mateva meets the requirements. The following legally required materials are presented:

1. Order No RD-27-090 of 25.06. 2024 for the appointment of a scientific jury by the Rector of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv;
2. Order No RD-27-039 of 26.05.2022 for enrollment, based on a decision taken by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Music Pedagogy – Protocol No. 21/26.05.2022
3. Order No RD-27-039 of 28.02.2024 for discharge, based on a decision taken by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Music Pedagogy – Protocol No 18/ 28.02.2024.
4. The dissertation is 196 pages. The structure of the work is introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, and bibliography. The cited literature includes 85 titles, of which 24 are Internet sources.
5. The abstract is 45 pages, in which the structure follows the logic of the dissertation: introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, and bibliography.
6. List of the author's publications related to the dissertation - 2.
7. Creative resume.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Elvira Mateva is a teacher of chamber music and interpretation and an accompanist of vocal classes with many years of experience at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv since 1994 up to the present moment. She received her education in Plovdiv – secondary education at National School of Music and Dance "Dobrin Petkov" and higher education with two majors – Music Pedagogy and Performing Arts at AMDFA. She actively works as concert performer in Bulgaria and abroad. As a pianist-accompanist, she has been awarded many times for high pedagogical achievements and high-artistic accompaniment.

3. Relevance of the topic

I consider the chosen topic to be extremely relevant. The vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*, one of Modest Mussorgsky's most profound, philosophically saturated and vividly affecting works in the chamber genre, opens a whole new spiritual dimension in the reading and interpretation of his meaningful aesthetic suggestion and compositional decision. Until now, it has not received a full, comprehensive and competent scientific reading in Bulgaria. This dissertation is the first attempt in our music-research literature, aiming not only to shed light on the music-dramaturgical problematic of the work and to share a personal performing concept, but also to cover those important parameters and perspectives that illuminate the eternal theme of death in art. This makes the dissertation research "*relevant both in terms of the summarized factual and analytical material and because of its practical-cognitive focus, allowing the construction of a performance concept and overcoming musical-dramaturgical problems*", as E. Mateva writes.

4. Expediency of the research methods used to achieve the set goals

The research used: "historical-chronological method, comparative-analytical method in relation to medieval plots, analysis of musical-technical and conceptual-image means in the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*. Given the specifics and direction of the work, I find that they adequately cover all the commented spheres and elements of it.

5. Evaluation of the dissertation work

The present study is the result of a strong personal interest and affinity for Mussorgsky's work and all the symbolic-metaphorical energy it radiates. In the introduction, E. Mateva summarizes the goals and objectives of her dissertation - to delve into "the musical-poetic and musical-dramaturgical expression" of the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*, through an analysis of the work and in the way of covering the macabre plot of the Middle Ages to its impact and influence on the world of art – literature, music, visual arts. This predetermines the careful and logical construction of the work.

The first chapter builds a clear historical picture of the time when M. Mussorgsky composed his works and evaluates the importance of his works in world musical literature. The figure of the artist is a traditional object of attention for every researcher. Through it, we "check" the ideas about his personality - the power of his works, his mission, survival, victory over time... I accept this chapter as an important starting point for further development of the research. All the important angles are covered – the composer's belonging to the ideological family of The Mighty Five, innovative visions and originality in his artistic language. It shows the ability of E. Mateva to systematize specialized literature, to summarize, and to set the direction of the research.

The second chapter focuses on the essence of the death as a plot in all its manifestations and implications. As the author says: "Death has always been and still is a subject that preoccupies the mankind." This is no accident – death is the final arbiter of the human life. In fact, in art, this theme has much more complex semantic tasks – it unfolds a wide range of feelings, it is an occasion for reckoning, it tests the abilities of man, it is the connection with the beyond, the unknown. This symbolic potential allows for the development of a philosophical view of the artist on the dynamics

and drama that the macabre plot creates (remember Schubert's vocal ballad *The Forest King* – a masterpiece in music or the *Isle of the Blessed* by P. Slaveykov in literature). In this chapter, E. Mateva summarizes, but in sufficient detail, the presence of the macabre as a theme in art by describing its aesthetic manifestations and tries to clarify the reasons for the fascination with the theme and the inspired creative achievements. The chapter bridges to the heart of the study - Mussorgsky's cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*. The author elaborates key socio-cultural problems, logical mindsets, notions of values and forms of sensuality.

The third chapter focuses on *Songs and Dances of Death* – a philosophical culmination of Mussorgsky's vocal work. The chapter explains the historical genesis of the work, the process of clarifying Mussorgsky's dramaturgical plan. Emphasis is placed on the spatial role of the background, as an important tool in the dramatic picture and a means of psychologizing the image. From the intimacy in (*Lullaby*), through the impact of the expanding space of the urban atmosphere (*Serenade*) and the natural picture in (*Trepak*) to the last song *Field Marshal*, in which the action unfolds in the space of the battlefield cycle gradation is traced and covered. In the finale, as the author mentions, "*the dramatic and dramaturgical concentration reaches its apotheosis of generality and universality, depicted through the scene of a common human tragedy.*" Mussorgsky's ability to create rich musical images, portraits, paintings, psychologically saturated and deeply nuanced is well thought out.

6. Contributions and significance of the dissertation work

The choice of topic – well motivated by E. Mateva – gives due credit to the importance of Mussorgsky's work. The specific "plot" and content in *Songs and Dances of Death* allow her to construct and develop an original scientific study that logically systematizes the constituent elements down to the smallest detail. All the important aesthetic-philosophical directions and aspects in the musical realization of the cycle are covered – genre characteristics, the role of compositional means of expression as a means of personifying images, the integrating fusion of music-text, dramaturgy and theatricalization in the cycle, the presence of sound-thematic references to religious works, dealing with the theme of death. Artistic-interpretive solutions are proposed according to the subjective view of the researcher.

The work reveals E. Mateva's professional dedication to the chosen topic, and the fact that it was inspired by her practice work as an artist, emphasizes its value and the possibility of benefiting future performers and researchers. As V. Stefanov says - "the hermeneutic stake of any interpretation is to overcome the foreignness of the distant and to make it close, its own".

I accept the contributions of this research summarized by the candidate.

7. Recommendations and critical notes.

A logical recommendation for a worthwhile study is to publish it.

8. Abstract

The abstract fully and truly reflects the content of the main work and gives visibility to the characteristics of its meaningful context.

In conclusion: The results achieved during the research give me the reason to vote “in favor” and to propose to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "DOCTOR" in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art to doctoral student Elvira Mateva.