

## REVIEW

by Prof Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, PhD, New Bulgarian University

on the dissertation work of **Elvira Todorova Mateva**,

doctoral student at Faculty of Music Pedagogy, Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Arts,

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv

Academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak, PhD

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

for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor

in Professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

### **Biographical data**

Elvira Mateva is a teacher of chamber music and interpretation, as well as an accompanist for vocal classes at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv (1994-2024). She has graduated National School of Music and Dance "Dobrin Petkov" (1987) and AMDFA (1993) majoring in Music Pedagogy and Instrumental Art - Piano in the class of Prof Roxana Bogdanova. Mateva's more important performances in the last years include: participation in the 56<sup>th</sup> International Chamber Music Festival - Music Academy Plovdiv (2021); premiere performance for Bulgaria of the cycle "First Songs" op.5/op.47 by Fazil Sai at the Cultural Center of Radio Plovdiv with the baritone Alper Yunlütürk (2020); concert with Irini-Zoe Christodoulou and Christina Roumelotti in Xanthi, Greece (2019); concert with vocal duo Liliana Gurska and Anna-Maria Fabrello (Poland) in the hall of AMDFA Plovdiv (2018); charity concert with Stefan Mitrevski in Skopje, North Macedonia (2016); concert of teachers and students from AMDFA in Edirne, Turkey (2014); first performance in Plovdiv of the mono-opera *The Human Voice* by Francis Poulenc with Ralitsa Goranova (soprano) in the hall of AMDFA (2005); etc. In the period 1993 - 2024 Elvira participated in concert and competition performances of students from the classes in which she accompanied, and in the period 2016 - 2024 she has performances with graduates of the House of Musical Magic "Divizi" in Plovdiv. **As a teacher** and accompanist, Elvira Mateva **has received a number of awards**: Diploma for high pedagogical achievements and high-artistic accompaniment from the Eighth National Academic Competition "J. S. Bach and His Contemporaries" – AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv (2021); Diploma for highly artistic accompaniment - Fifth International Competition for Chamber Music and Individual Artists "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Art Borovets Festival (2021); Diploma for artistic accompaniment - Festivals of the Arts "Borovets 2020"; Diploma for the best piano partnership from the 6th National Academic Competition "J.S. Bach and his contemporaries" in

AMDFA (2019); Diploma for contribution to the discovery and development of young talents - XIV international competition for young performers of classical musical instruments - Pernik (2019); Diploma for high artistic accompaniment in the 7th international competition "Eugen Coca" Chisinau, Moldova (2002); Diploma for High Artistic Accompaniment in the 4th International Competition for Young Trumpeters - Ohrid, North Macedonia (1999); Diploma and title of graduate of the 2nd international brass instrument performance competition "Nizhny Novgorod - Brass" - Nizhny Novgorod, Russia (1996).

### **Content of the dissertation**

The dissertation was discussed and proposed for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" on 20.06.2024. It contains a total of 196 pages, which include: introduction, three chapters<sup>1</sup>, conclusion, contributions of the dissertation work, a bibliography of 85 sources - 61 books (mostly in Bulgarian and Russian, only one is in Latin) and 24 electronic (Internet) resources, of which 11 are in German, French, English and Polish. There are two scientific publications. The dissertation also includes two appendices: 1). Translation of the song lyrics of the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* and noting the editorial change made by the composer Modest Mussorgsky. 2). Translation of the poem dedicated to Modest Mussorgsky - "M. P. Mussorgsky" by Arseniy Golenishchev-Kutuzov.

### **Precisely formulated objectives and tasks of the dissertation**

The chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* is defined as one of the "pearls" in Mussorgsky's vocal work. With its high artistic value, the cycle is a vivid expression of the world's chamber-vocal heritage and is among the emblematic works whose conceptual basis are the medieval plots *Danse Macabre* and *The Triumph of Death*. The **subject** of the dissertation is the chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* by Modest Mussorgsky. The **object** of the work are the specific distinctive features of pictorial-aesthetic picturesqueness and the sound-imaging components, transforming the idea of the macabre imagery. The **objective** of the study is the analysis of the musical-poetic and musical-dramatological expression in the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*.

The author sets the following **tasks**: 1). Historical study of the macabre medieval imagery - formation of the image of the dancing Death in *Danse Macabre* and *The Triumph of Death*; 2). A study of the influence of the medieval allegory on the European culture – literature, art and music; 3). Synthesis of historical information related to the creation of the work *Songs and Dances of Death*; 4). Study of the

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<sup>1</sup> **First chapter. Historical significance of Modest Mussorgsky in the Russian and the world music** (1.1. The Russian musical culture at the beginning and middle of the 19th century; 1.2. The Mighty Five – artistic family. 1.3. Modest Mussorgsky: artist-innovator; life and career; features of the creative style). **Second chapter. Medieval macabre plots** (2.1. Cultural-historical study of the main medieval macabre plots: *The Three Living and the Three Dead*, *The Triumph of Death*, *Danse Macabre*. 2.2. Influence of macabre plots in the world culture of modern times: Macabre aesthetics in fine art; Macabre aesthetics in literature; Macabre aesthetics in music). **Third chapter. Chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* - Modest Mussorgsky** (3.1. Chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* - history of creation: Golenishchev-Kutuzov - biographical sketch. 3.2. Analysis of the songs - musical-structural and executive analysis: Serenade; Summary and conclusions).

conceptual-artistic image of Death through the prism of the poetic and musical text; 5). Artistic-structural and performance analysis of the parts of the cycle in relation to the macabre imagery; analysis of the compositional and image-intonation features; 6). Time-space transfer of emotional and associative affects during the interaction: work – interpreter – listener; 7). Translation of the lyrics of the songs in Bulgarian.

**Methodology** of the scientific research: historical-chronological method; a comparative-analytical method regarding the medieval plots (*Danse Macabre* and *The Triumph of Death*) and the compositional-aesthetic approach of Modest Mussorgsky; analysis of the musical-technical and conceptual means in the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* in connection with the achievement of the creative compositional task.

### **Significance and relevance of the researched problem**

The vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* is the subject of various studies, which are presented in articles or parts of collections and books with panoramic-summarizing or specifically concrete analytical information. The studies emphasize the analytical-theoretical problems, mainly related to structural organization and harmonious language. An important point related to the literary sources is the absence of information on the subject in Bulgarian. Most materials are presented in foreign language, mostly in Russian. The present work synthesizes the available research information and deepens the artistic-semantic analysis of the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*. The **focus** of the study is the genesis and development of the Medieval basis of the cycle's artistic-ideological plot, discovering the proximity and consonance with the Western European imagery - *Danse Macabre* (in particular *The Triumph of Death*), as well as an analysis of the innovative approach to the macabre allegory in Mussorgsky's work. The dissertation work is **relevant** as a supplement of factual and analytical material in musicology. It also brings practical-cognitive benefits when building a performance concept and overcoming musical-dramaturgical problems, consistent with the peculiarities of musical-technical and form-forming means of expression.

### **Degree of knowledge**

The relevance and contributions of the present work unfold in the scientific-theoretical and interpretive-practical fields. Being the first in Bulgaria in-depth study of the chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* by Mussorgsky, the dissertation introduces an asset on which the research interest in specific elements of compositional organization can be built and complement, expand, it even challenges the performer's interpretation of musical-semantic and emotional context. The main conclusions for the musical realization of the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* by the doctoral student are:

1. *Prominent genre (lullaby, serenade, dance, march) basis for presenting the specific plot setting and the individualized image of death. The substantive essence of the genre is a basis*

*on which Mussorgsky activates the sharp opposition of diametrically contrasting forces: life-death, reaching a concentrated grotesque-dramatic narration.*

2. *Maximum manifestation of the musical expressive means (dynamics, tempo, harmonic, metrorhythmic decisions, tonal organization) for pulsating impactful musical-scenic pictures, both in the philosophical opposition life-death, and in the personified representation of death with the provocative absurd manifestation of pure human feelings and emotions.*
3. *The literary foundation is the basis for the manifestation of the composer's improvisational thought through: interaction between a continuously unfolding vocal form and variant-variation, rondo and bar forms; relief-sculpted vocal lines in which recitative and melodic beginnings are balanced; a synergistic interpenetrating synthesis of the two ingredients of chamber-vocal music – voice and piano.*
4. *Introduction of motifs from religious works, thematically related to death - Dies Irae and Rest with the Saints, as well as thematic material of the Polish revolutionary song Z dymem pożarów. The recognisability of these works enhances the meaningful emotional expression of the musical macabre realization.*
5. *"Theatricalization" of the songs. Each song appears as a miniature musical-stage picture, which provokes the creative imagination of the performers and activates the interpretive ensemble consensus and the unconditionally necessary partner communication in building the emotionally saturated musical-poetic imagery. (citations from dissertation)*

### **Correctness in citation**

Elvira Mateva e is accurate in her quotations.

**Assessment of the compliance of the abstract with the main points and contributions of the dissertation work:** The abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

### **Scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation work**

1. Mateva, E. *Chamber-vocal cycle "Songs and Dances of Death" by Modest Mussorgsky - history of creation.* In: Yearbook of Thrace University, Faculty of Education, Stara Zagora: 2022, No. 19, pp. 266-275, ISSN 1312-286X.

2. Mateva, E. *Danse macabre" - compositional and sound imaging perspectives.* In: collection Spring Scientific Readings, of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, 2023, pp. 30-36, ISSN 1314-7005, ISSN 2738/7720.

Elvira Mateva is active in her work as a teacher and accompanist. In the last 5-6 years alone, she has won a number of awards. A large part of her activities are related to **national and international projects** in which she participates, and which can be part of her doctoral studies, namely: "Application

and research of the concept of microlearning in English language work with students from vocal classes” (2024); Erasmus + 'Facing Challenges and Finding Solutions in 21st Century Music Education for Young Learners' (2024); "Stage of Dreams", financed under the "Socially Engaged Arts" program of the National Culture Fund; beneficiary Divizi EOOD (2023); Concert - European Night of Scientists 2023, financed by the European Union under the program "Horizon Europe, Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (2023); SYMFODECA, financed under the "Program for the recovery and development of organizations in the field of amateur art", NCF; beneficiary Divizi EOOD (2022-2023); "Meeting of the Worlds" - hall AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" under the K-TRIO Project - European Researchers' Night (2022); **Children in the Orchestra of the National Culture Fund**, beneficiary Divizi EOOD (2020-2021); "Music in the library" - a series of children's educational concerts in cooperation with House of Musical Magic "Divizi" and the "Ivan Vazov" National Library (2020); "Night / Plovdiv" - a joint project of the Open Arts Foundation, Divizi and Art Gallery "St. Cyril and Methodius" (2019).

#### **Contributions of the dissertation**

1. The dissertation is the first analytical-scientific study of the chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* by Modest Mussorgsky in the Bulgarian musicology. A musical-stylistic (compositional organization, means of expression) and interpretive analysis of the work is done.
2. A translation of the lyrics of the songs was carried out, supporting a deeper and conscious understanding, explanation and interpretation of the musical-intonation presentation of the "theatrical miniatures".
3. A brief historical overview of the influence of the medieval macabre plots (*Danse Macabre* and *The Triumph of Death*) in the European culture - literature, fine arts and music.
4. A brief presentation of biographical in Bulgarian data and specifics of the literary style of the poet Arseny Arkadievich Golenishchev-Kutuzov.

#### **Critical remarks**

I would allow myself to recommend the following to Elvira Mateva:

The first basic rule when writing a dissertation or a scientific work is to not abbreviate names (neither in Latin nor in Cyrillic). First names are not abbreviated because this would make subsequent scientific searches difficult!

Second: the text needs serious formatting as well as a proofreader before it is sent to NACID or published somewhere, in order to highlight the author's idea and the quality of the research.

In **conclusion** of this Review I will end with the following assessment:

The work of the doctoral student corresponds to the scientometric indicators for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", according to the Law on the development of the academic staff of Republic of Bulgaria.

The dissertation of **Elvira Todorova Mateva**, doctoral student at AMDFA Plovdiv, 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**, together with its scientific and applied contributions, as well as the publications on the subject, I consider sufficient to give my **positive assessment** and propose to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art to **Elvira Mateva**, according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

22.07.2024, Sofia

Prof Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, PhD