

OPINION

By **Prof Vessela Ivanova Geleva, PhD** – professor in Choral Conducting at the Department of Music Pedagogy and Conducting, the Faculty of Music Pedagogy of Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts “Prof Asen Diamandiev” Plovdiv.

for **Elvira Todorova Mateva** – candidate for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, in the field of higher education 8. Arts; professional field 8. 3. Music and Dance Art; doctoral program: Music Studies and Music Art, at the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Arts, AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”.

Elvira Mateva is born in 1968 in Plovdiv. In 1987 she graduates the National School of Music and Dance "Dobrin Petkov". She receives her higher education at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev", where she graduates in the specialties of Pedagogy of Music Education and Instrumental Art - Piano. From 1994 until now, she has been working at AMDFA as a teacher of chamber music and interpretation, and an accompanist for vocal classes. Among her numerous creative performances are stage appearances with various concert programs in Poland, Germany, Russia, Greece, Turkey, Macedonia, Moldova and Bulgaria. Elvira Mateva successfully performs as a soloist with the Plovdiv and Burgas Philharmonic Orchestras. She has been awarded many times with prestigious awards for highly artistic accompaniment from various musical forums: Eighth National Academic Competition "J. S. Bach and His Contemporaries" – AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv, Fifth International Competition for Chamber Music and Individual Artists "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Art Borovets Festival, 7th International Competition "Eugen Coca" Chisinau, Moldova, 4th International Competition for Young Trumpeters - Ohrid, North Macedonia, 2nd International Competition for Performing Brass Instruments "Nizhny Novgorod - Brass" - Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, etc. Elvira Mateva participates in a number of prestigious national and international projects, and for her many years of teaching activity, she has been awarded with awards for excellence.

The dissertation 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* is total 196 pages and contains an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, bibliography, list of scientific publications and two appendices /free Bulgarian translation of the songs in the cycle and of the poem by Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov, dedicated to the composer/. The cited literature includes 85 titles in Bulgarian, Russian, German, French, English and Polish, of which 14 are Internet sources. The dissertation and the abstract meet the legal requirements for structure, volume and content. There is also the necessary number of publications on the subject, which is dissertable, up-to-date and contains potential for further theoretical developments.

The **introduction** presents the motives, subject, objective and tasks of the scientific work. The doctoral student has many years of serious experience in the field of chamber music making, which

allows for in-depth research into the chosen topic. The **objective** of the work is to analyze the musical-poetic and musical-dramaturgical narrative of the vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*, in connection with which the following **tasks** are set: historical research of the medieval macabre, research of the influence of the medieval allegory in the European culture – literature, fine art and music, research of the history and conceptual-artistic image of the death through the prism of the poetic and musical text, artistic-structural and performance analysis in relation to the macabre imagery; analysis of compositional and image-intonation features, etc. The research **methods** are historical-chronological, comparative-analytical, analytical in terms of structure, compositional means, musical language, artistic symbolism, interpretation, etc.

The subject of the **first chapter** is the historical significance of M. Mussorgsky in the Russian and the world music culture. The doctoral student makes a historical overview that traces the various political, economic, social and cultural preconditions that led to the evolution and flowering of the Russian musical art in the 19th century. The author indicates as the most characteristic signs of the process of Europeanization and progress the establishment of the first musical institutions – conservatories, operas, musical theatres and schools, the emergence of music criticism, which forms and educates the public taste, unfolding of the creative potential of the Russian composers, the rethinking of the Western European traditions in the context of the specifics of Russian folk music, etc. Special attention is paid to the Mighty Five, which became the catalyst of the Russian national musical art and its unprecedented rise. Elvira Mateva presents Mussorgsky's life and career, focusing on the vocal music, whose innovation encompasses all elements of the musical fabric. She emphasizes the unity of music and speech, the presence of a new emotional-psychological accent, the harmonious integration of Romanticism and Realism, etc.

In the **second chapter** the author makes a cultural-historical study of the medieval macabre plots from their origin to modern times. Interesting are the parallels between the different arts – literature, music, dance, fine art, as well as the connection of plot with philosophy, ethics, religion and morality. The eternal theme of death, transience and the transformation of life into its supposed antithesis, is presented fascinatingly and with the necessary erudition. The illustrative material is rich and demonstrates the variations of the human imagination in interpreting the inevitable end. Analyzing the reflections of the sinister in the field of music art, the author examines the sequence *Dies Irae* as the oldest in Europe, which is unambiguously present as an eternal symbol of the fear of God's retribution and justice in modern music as well. A special place is reserved for Romanticism, when masterpieces with unattainable emotional impact and penetration were created. Mateva presents iconic works by Schubert, Liszt, Saint-Saëns, Shostakovich, Messiaen, Honegger and others. As she herself notes, the topic of Death in Art is vast and provides opportunities for further original scientific developments not only in music, but also in cinema, theater, architecture, visual arts, contemporary literature, etc.

The **third chapter** of the work contains the main contributions of the study. The history of writing the cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* is presented in detail and comprehensively, which Mateva rightly calls "*philosophical culmination of Mussorgsky's vocal work*", and his orchestral transcriptions by Rimsky-Korsakov, Shostakovich, E. Denisov and Alexey Larin /vocal-oratorio transcription for soloists, choir, two pianos and percussion instruments, 2007/. Recognizing the cardinal importance of poetry in the vocal-chamber music, Elvira Mateva dedicates a special place in the exhibition to a biographical sketch presenting the little-known work of the poet Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov. This subsection, as well as the Bulgarian translations of the lyrics of the songs, complement and enrich the actual analysis of the cycle and explain its strong emotional impact, penetrating psychology, painful frankness, merciless realism and dramatic depth. The musical-structural analyses of the four songs are presented with theoretical skill and comprehensiveness. Particularly valuable are the performance guidelines for highly artistic interpretation that can serve future performers-singers and pianists. They touch upon essential problems of dynamics, tempo, metrorhythm, strokes, pianistic touch, sonorous effects and timbre in relation to the recreated imagery, pedalling, balance between the vocal part and the piano, and much more. The expression, the mimicry of death in its various roles, as well as the eerie theatricality that makes this Mussorgsky cycle unique in its content and significance are conveyed and convincingly argued. The doctoral student's theoretical summaries and analytical conclusions are based on a consistent and serious study of the composer's style, philosophy and musical language. To this, Elvira Mateva adds her extensive performance experience and the artistic perspective of a contemporary interpreter.

Among the contributions of the study, the following should be highlighted:

- The dissertation is the first analytical-scientific study of the chamber-vocal cycle *Songs and Dances of Death* by Mussorgsky in Bulgarian musicology.
- It is the first musical-stylistic (compositional organization, means of expression) and interpretive analysis of the work done in Bulgarian;
- The doctoral student makes conclusions and generalizations about the development of Mussorgsky's piano work, according to the researched problems, and supports them with analyses of interesting facts supported by evidence and literary sources.
- The author has done a translation of the lyrics of the songs in connection with the deeper and conscious understanding, explanation and interpretation of the musical-intonation presentation of the "theatrical miniatures".
- The author offers a historical perspective of the influence of the medieval macabre plots (*Danse Macabre* and *The Triumph of Death*) in the European culture – literature, visual arts and music. The choice of researched repertoire in the chosen topic is professionally argued and illustrates the directions and trends for the development of this type of plot in the various arts.

- A contributing point is the artistic view of the doctoral student in her capacity as a piano performer and an artist who emotionally empathizes with art, which adds additional value to the researched topic.

- Given the absence of data in Bulgarian about Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov, a brief presentation of biographical data and specifics of the poet's literary style has been made.

The dissertation presented for review fully achieves the aims and objectives of the research set out in the introduction. It can be used by performers, musicologists, academic teachers, students, pupils, professional musicians, school teachers and piano enthusiasts, making it suitable for publication as a book. Last but not least, I would like to share my personal impressions of my colleague Mateva, whom I have known for many years. Her ability to work, responsiveness, artistry, ethics and benevolence are highly appreciated in the academic circles, and the achievements of her students confirm the high professional level of her work.

Considering the above, I propose to the respected scientific jury to award to Elvira Mateva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in: field of higher education 8. Arts, Professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art; doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art in the department Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Arts, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" and I wish her success in her teaching, research and performance career.

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Prof Vesela Geleva, PhD