

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 **Guo Rui /PRC/**, candidate for awarding 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 of Piano and Accordion, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev"

Guo Rui graduated from Harbin Normal University with a major in piano. In 2016, she entered the Harbin Normal University as a Master of Arts, she also studied at the Harbin Conservatory of Music. Since 2017, she has been teaching piano at the National Instrumental Music Department of the Harbin Conservatory of Music. In 2018, she joined the Professional Piano Committee of the Chinese Heilongjiang Musicians Association. In 2019, she taught piano at Yibin College in Sichuan Province. She was enrolled in full-time doctoral studies in February 2020, when she began her studies at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" in Plovdiv under the supervision of Assoc. Prof Velislava Karagenova. She actively participates in the concert activity of the academy and is a prizewinner of the "Bach" competition organized by AMDFA /November 2021/, Second prize at the ART-DUO International Music Competition for violin and piano in Prague, Czech Republic /2021/, Second prize in the Piano category from the International Competition for Young Musicians in Zagreb, Croatia /2022/, Gold medal for duo piano and violin from the International Competition "Orpheus Talents", Plovdiv, etc.

The dissertation is entitled *Universal and National in the Piano Music of China in the 20th Century*, and is 182 pages long and includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, contributions, references. The cited literature includes 76 titles, 66 from Chinese sources, 6 from Bulgarian, 1 from English and 3 from the Internet. The paper and abstract meet the legal requirements for structure, volume and content. There is also the necessary number of publications on the topic, which is dissertable, relevant and contains potential for further theoretical developments.

In the introduction, Guo Rui presents the motivations and purpose of the study: to trace the development process of the Chinese piano music in the context of the formation of its national characteristics after a thorough and multifaceted analysis of the historical, social, political and cultural prerequisites that influenced the creation of the phenomenon. The scientific methods used are analytical, comparative, empirical, as well as a review of selected theoretical and musical samples directly related to the context of the research.

Chapter One examines the piano as a factor in the sociocultural life of China and begins with the introduction of the clavichord into the empire in the 17th century. The role of the Western European missionaries in the musical education and more specifically the beginning of piano training in China is highlighted. Special attention is given to singing training, which at this stage is a repertoire

of popular Japanese, European and American tunes with adapted Chinese lyrics. The doctoral student traces the evolution of the song genre, which is gradually enriched with reworking of Chinese folk songs and the creation of original works by Chinese composers - Shen Xingun, Li Shutong /the first piano professor in China/, Zeng Jimin, Sinhan, etc. The importance of the first founders of professional piano training in the country, as well as their active work for the institutionalization of the piano art, is examined.

In **Chapter Two**, Guo Rui examines the first of the three periods of development of the Chinese piano culture /1915-1949/. This is the time when professional music institutions are actively opened, higher general education colleges and independent higher music schools are established, among them the professional music school at Peking University and the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music. The doctoral student points out the role of the Russian piano school and its prominent representatives, who contributed to the establishment of a solid methodological, theoretical and practical foundation in the person of Boris Zakharov, Valentin Aleksandrovich Shilov, N. Dmitrievskay, etc.

Guo Rui examines two sub-periods in the Chinese piano music: 1915-1934 and 1934-1949. She dwells in detail on the prerequisites, features and repertoire guidelines of each of them. Early works for piano include Zhao Yuanren's *March of Peace* (1915), which was also the first officially published work for piano, *Little Idea* (1917), which included ethnic elements for the first time, and *Children's March* from 1919. The iconic works of Xiao Youmei were also presented, in which the interaction of classical-romantic and national folk art is observed. In the second sub-period, the doctoral student marks the first peak in the Chinese piano music, evidence of which is the expanded genre range - variations, sonatas, dances, suites, fugues, as well as the first public concert appearances. Detailed analyzes of the works of He Lutin (1904-1999), an eminent composer, music pedagogue and theorist are presented, as the work *Cowherd's Flute* is indicated as a turning point in the search for an authentic national musical language, the piano style. The piano piece *Color Drum* by Chu Yuei is analyzed as an emblematic title according to the aesthetic categories of the Chinese art.

The subject of **Chapter Three** is piano music from 1949 to 1976. Here, too, the doctoral student analyzes two sub-periods. The first (1949-1966) was determined by a general change in the political status quo, affecting strongly the arts as well. The reasons and results of this are indicated: establishment of institutions and colleges, new pedagogical piano system, new system of teaching composition, international cultural exchange, giving opportunities to learn current trends in pedagogy, composition and performance. Guo Rui analyzes the most important piano samples of the period /Xinjiang Dance No 1 and No 2, *The Girl of Lan Hua Hua*/, which illustrate the evolution of the piano music and the ethnic influences on musical language in terms of melody, harmony, rhythmic, metric, timbre, emotional suggestion, etc.

The last decade of the period/1966-1976/ is examined in the context of the Cultural Revolution and the catastrophic consequences that wiped out much of what had been achieved. The dissertation

examines the effects of the political coup on musical art: the dominance of adaptations of Chinese traditional music, the impossibility of development and progress of musical thinking, the prohibition of innovation and the need for creative compromise. In the analyzes of the works *Moon's Reflection upon a Spring* and *Xiao and Drum at Sunset*, new directions in the piano composition work are identified: rediscovering the possibilities of the piano and the new technical skills, through which a new palette of sound is achieved, search for new timbre richness, phonism, exotic harmonic color, etc. The analysis of sound-imaging and onomatopoeic pianistic techniques, through which an artistic analogy of Chinese traditional instruments and their timbre specificity is achieved, is interesting.

The **fourth chapter** presents China's piano achievements from 1976 to the present day and the inclusion of world trends and evolution. Guo Rui explores the characteristics of the New Music Wave, in which the composers deny the principles of tonality and the functional harmony and use aleatoricism, dodecaphony, search for new original sound effects and compositional techniques such as natural sounds and noises from everyday life, electronic, multimedia technologies, etc. Along with the innovative attitude to sound in general, she analyzes the emergence of piano works where the twelve-tone system interacts with the musical dance forms of ethnic minorities, "pantonality" is used, the purely musical is enriched and supplemented with dance plasticity, theatrical masks, etc. According to the doctoral student, the topic of national musical style and the role of the folklore is modified, modernized and deprived of elementary literalism, including a higher interpretation based on philosophy, emotional suggestion and spiritual energy.

Some of the **contributions** of the work include the following:

- The dissertation contains a systematic description of the historical development of the Chinese piano music in the 20th century, placed in the context of a search for national identity and conditioned by numerous social, political, cultural, philosophical and aesthetic factors.

- The doctoral student makes conclusions and generalizations about the development of piano music, according to the selected themes, and supports them with analyzes of interesting facts supported by evidence and literary sources.

- The dissertation offers a detailed analysis of representative piano works with important significance in the development of the studied processes. The selection of the researched repertoire is professionally reasoned and illustrates the directions and trends for the development of the Chinese music in the 20th and 21st centuries. Guo Rui's personal attitude as a pianist and an emotionally empathetic artist should be emphasized, which adds additional value to the subject under consideration.

- The study is based on a large number of piano works that have permanently entered the concert repertoire of Chinese pianists and teachers. In this sense, the presented panorama of piano works complements and enriches the already existing scientific developments, giving new ideas, and stimulates the deepening of young performers' interest in China's national piano past and present.

The presented dissertation 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.

Considering all of the above, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Guo Rui the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in: 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 of Piano and accordion, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" and I wish her success in her further musical-theoretical work.

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