

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof Eduard Sarfyan

on a dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in a professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, scientific specialty Music Studies and Music Art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art with author

Xiao Lei

title of the dissertation

A Comparative Study of Aesthetic and Interpretive Problems in the Performance of Chinese, German and Austrian Art Songs

Academic supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak

Brief biographical reference

Xiao Lei was born in November 1987 in the city of Wuhan, People's Republic of China. He graduated from the vocal music department of the Wuhan Conservatory of Music and obtained a Master's degree from the Conservatory of Anhui Pedagogical University.

He is currently Assistant Dean of the Department of Music at Wuhu University, Head of the Musicology Department, and Deputy Director of the Vocal Teaching and Research Section.

As a doctoral student at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" he is involved in a number of artistic practices, participates in numerous concert projects and takes an active part in scientific research projects. He has published more than ten articles in major Chinese academic journals in his field of expertise.

An interesting fact is that the candidate is the recipient of numerous awards, such as:

1. Gold Medal at the 6th National Song of China Vocal Competition, Anhui.
2. Award for finalist at the Romanian International Vocal Competition "Hariclea Darclee".
3. Award for excellent performance at the "Renato Bruson" International Vocal Competition, China.
4. First prize for baritone in "Omega Concert Project" in Sofia in 2022.
5. Winner of a gold medal in the vocal category of the European Music Competition for metallophones 2022 and many others.

The dissertation submitted by Xiao Lei is structured and formatted according to the requirements. The text is 193 pages, which include an introduction (integrated in the first chapter of the work), five chapters, a conclusion, contributing points and used literature including 43 titles mainly in Chinese and 2 Internet sources. The **object** of the research are the German-Austrian and the Chinese art songs, which are subjected to a comparative analysis in terms of the cultural context, the course of development of the genre, the historical setting, artistic characteristics and musical styles. The work impresses with the consistency, comprehensiveness and attention paid to the study object in each of the aspects specified by the author.

In the **Introduction** the author presents the reasons for choosing the topic, defines the tasks and the significance of the research, and makes an overview of the literature on the topic of the dissertation work, which gives a clear and concrete idea of the relevance and timely appearance of the present work with a practical-applied character in the scientific research field.

The author substantiates precisely and unequivocally the main research method contained in the title itself, to which he adheres, namely, that it is based on the principle of looking for "differences in similarity and similarities in difference". It is also obvious that, in addition to his deep knowledge and interests in the researched problems, Xiao Lei possesses remarkable scientific writing qualities, which can be traced from the titles of the individual chapters thus formulated and their subdivisions in the content of the dissertation, through the actual analytical text, to the **Conclusion** in which adherence to the goals and objectives set at the beginning leads to relevant conclusions of significant cultural, artistic and theoretical value. In other words, the doctoral candidate demonstrates excellent analytical skills, a personal attitude, and a high scientific writing style.

In the interests of the research, the author examines the features of German and Austrian, French, Russian, Italian and Chinese art songs, compositional styles and achievements. At the same

time, he does not fail to pay due attention to the poetic texts and the piano accompaniment as essential elements of the artistic form that synthesizes speech and music. Following the principle from the general to the particular and guided by the fact that the Chinese art songs were mainly influenced by German-Austrian ones, the author focuses his attention on the parameters of similarities and differences between them, proceeding from the eloquently formulated conviction that: “*The art songs have a three-dimensional complex artistic characteristic composed of thoughts, emotions and artistic images*” (p. 112). The dissertation also contains the relevant sheet music and poetic texts, which serve as examples where necessary and facilitate the construction of a clearer idea of the contained information and author's interpretations in the analyses. In addition to tracing the compositional approaches and personal creative pursuits of the composers, the author examines the issue in the light of prominent world-renowned performers of art songs in different eras.

The **first chapter** of the dissertation is a kind of introduction, in which the doctoral student presents the tasks of the research, the current state of the topic under consideration and the methodology of the researched problems.

In the **second chapter**, the candidate gives a general overview of the European folk song, tracing its historical development, examining the main styles and trends, focusing on German, Austrian, French, Russian and Italian art songs.

The **third chapter** is based on an overview of Chinese art songs through their historical development fragmented into three main stages: initial, transitional and heyday period. On the other hand, the author examines the compositional and performance features of the Chinese art songs

Chapters four and five are based on the principle of comparative analysis between the German-Austrian and the Chinese art songs in terms of both structure and performance.

Contributions and significance of the dissertation

From a theoretical point of view, the presented work is the first systematic comparative study in micro and macro perspective, dedicated to German-Austrian and Chinese art songs.

In practical terms, the presented research builds on the achievements of previous generations of researchers and further develops them, analyzing the musical style of German-Austrian art songs on the one hand and Chinese art songs on the other. Examined and illustrated with examples are representative works of the great masters of the genre. Subjecting the various elements to a thorough analysis, the author reaches the essence of the German-Austrian art song and proposes a path for the development of the Chinese art songs that is adequate for the future by combining modern Western compositional techniques with Chinese cultural characteristics and developing a certain theoretical basis to create more quality works at the height of the modern age that meet the spiritual needs of the public.

In view of the above, I give my positive assessment to Xiao Lei's dissertation work *A Comparative Study of Aesthetic and Interpretive Problems in the Performance of Chinese, German and Austrian Art Songs* under the expert scientific guidance of Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak. I believe that the dissertation fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Xiao Lei an educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

23.08.2024
Plovdiv

Reviewer:
/Assoc. Prof Eduard Sarafyan /