

## OPINION

by

Prof Elena Karaliyska-Trapkova, PhD  
National Music Academy "Prof Pancho Vladigerov"  
on the dissertation of

**Xiao Lei**

doctoral student full-time study  
in professional field 8. 3. Music and Dance Art  
Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Arts  
at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv  
academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak  
titled

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

for awarding educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

On the grounds of a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Music Pedagogy (Protocol No. 3/ 25. 06. 2024), to open a procedure for the defense of the dissertation work of Xiao Lei, the following materials were provided to me: the candidate's CV, the dissertation, an abstract, a report on the contributions of the dissertation, a list of publications on the topic.

### **Brief biographical data of the candidate**

Xiao Lei graduated from the Wuhan Conservatory of Music with a major in singing. He obtained a Master's degree at the Conservatory of Anhui Pedagogical University. After completing his education, he taught in the Department of Music at Wuhu University - he was the head of the Musicology major and the deputy director of the Vocal Teaching and Research Section.

Xiao Lei has won awards at national and international competitions: Silver Medal of the 9th Golden Bell of Chinese Music Vocal Competition in Anhui City, China, Silver Medal of the 10th Anhui Provincial Arts Festival Vocal Competition, Third Prize of the 3rd National College and University Music Education Vocal Competition, Gold Medal of the 6th National Song of China Vocal Competition in Anhui City, Silver Medal of the Teresa Belloc International Vocal Competition - Italy, Outstanding Performance Award at the International competition for vocalists Renato Bruson - China, First prize of the Omega Concert Project competition in Sofia in 2022. He is a finalist at the international vocal competition Hariclea Darclee - Romania. Xiao Lei is also the leader of the research projects: "Research on the Aesthetic Function and Value of Dangu Folk Songs", "Research on the Way to Build a Music Vocational Program for Higher Education in Civic Education and Policy", "Research on the use of the Kodaly method of teaching music in the music education of pre-school students". He has also published articles in Chinese and Bulgarian academic journals.

Xiao Lei is a full-time doctoral student at AMDFA, "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv with scientific supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak. During his studies at the university, he participated in numerous concerts, as well as in the academic opera theater's production of *L'elisir d'amore* by Donizetti in the role of Dulcamara.

The comparative study of the aesthetic and interpretive problems in the performance of Chinese, German and Austrian art songs is relevant with its subject matter. The historical facts, musical styles, genre definition, linguistic features of the considered works have been exhaustively and systematically traced. Through a comparative analysis of the Chinese and the Western cultural contexts and musical elements in German-Austrian and Chinese art songs, new aspects of the knowledge and understanding of this genre are offered. A path is sought for the development of the Chinese art songs in the direction of creating highly artistic works that meet the needs of the modern era. The options for synthesis between the German-Austrian art song and the Chinese classical music culture are explored, as well as the successful realization of this synthesis on the world stages.

### **Content of the dissertation**

The dissertation *A Comparative Study of Aesthetic and Interpretive Problems in the Performance of Chinese, German and Austrian Art Songs* is structured in an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography including 43 titles, three publications on the subject. The total volume is 193 pages, of which 186 are the main text. Also attached are 19 sheet music illustrating the analyses.

In **chapter one**, Xiao Lei sets out his reasons for choosing the topic, the tasks and significance of the research, its content, methods and objectives, as well as the applicability of the results achieved.

**Chapter two** offers a general overview of the European art song: historical development, styles and directions.

**Chapter three** contains an overview of the Chinese art songs. In three sections, the author presents the main theoretical views of leading musicologists on the Chinese art songs. Their historical development, genre and thematic diversity, compositional and structural features, as well as performance features are traced.

**Chapter four** (105 pages) is structured into three sections in which Xiao Lei makes a comparative analysis between the German-Austrian and the Chinese art song. The socio-historical environment and its influence on the artistic songs in Europe and China is studied in detail and in depth. The literary characteristics and themes are outlined. Musical styles, musical-poetic expression, structural and harmonic features are analyzed. Xiao Lei's conclusions about the deepening of the synthesis between the Chinese and the European song styles are: *"Over the nearly hundred-year history of the Chinese art song, its musical form is the result of a continuous process of combining and blending Chinese and Western vocal styles, which is the basis of its constant evolution and development. The influence of European classicism, romanticism and impressionism is clearly discernible. The general problem that the Chinese composers try to solve is how to use foreign forms, such as harmonic language and harmonic technique in the Chinese art songs so as to match the manner of expression and aesthetic habits of the Chinese people. To this end, native composers of the modern era have made a number of successful attempts to add a Chinese flavor" to European harmonies and to Chineseize them (p.151)."*

**Chapter five**, composed of three sections, provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the German-Austrian and the Chinese art songs **from the perspective of performance**. For this purpose, the genre-stylistic differences between art songs and arias and the specifics of their performance are examined. The stages in the preparation of a given chamber-vocal work are indicated: *"...The performance of the art song must be preceded by a musical analysis, which is a thorough study of the musical characteristics, the compositional techniques used and the musical language, so that the musical images are convincingly sculpted and the audience is captivated" (p.163)*. In the third section, the author analyzes and systematizes the differences between the German-Austrian and the Chinese art songs in terms of interpretation. The conclusion offers insights in support of the author's understanding of the creative concept of the art song: *"...True art songs must draw from the depths of national culture and reveal life and artistic truths. The true art songs should be based on real human experiences and unfold the spiritual qualities and inner meaning of the poetic text using a variety of musical methods and techniques. To reveal the beauty and romance of life, to which a person invariably strives" (p. 187)*.

I fully support the clearly and precisely formulated contributions.

Xiao Lei's dissertation is an in-depth scientific study, both in terms of the problem under consideration and in terms of its analysis and the conclusions drawn. It discovers new points of contact between the European and the Chinese culture and contributes to the development of relations between Bulgarian and Chinese scientific units.

The abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

The publications are three in number and are evidence of scientific interest and a serious research approach.

I congratulate the candidate and his academic supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak and I propose to the honorable Scientific Jury to award Xiao Lei the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 8. 3. Music and Dance Art.

20.08. 2024

Prof Elena Karaliyska-Trapkova, PhD