

REVIEW

by
Prof Svilen Raichev, PhD

on dissertation work for awarding
educational and scientific degree *Doctor*

to

Li Minhui

titled

COMPARISON OF THE SINGING STYLES OF COUNTERTENOR AND NANDAN OF THE PEKING OPERA

academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak

Li Minhui is born in China. She receives Bachelor's degree at Tianjin Conservatory, China, where she studied Vocal Music and Singing.

She graduates the Master program of Conservatory of Music Giovanni Battista Pergolesi in Italy. Since 2018, she has been a full-time doctoral student, paid training in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art at the department of Classical and Pop-Jazz performance art of Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv.

She was discharged with the right of defense by order of the Rector No RD-27-40/26.05.2022.

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"-Plovdiv, held on 07.07.2022.

In addition to her native Chinese, she is fluent in Bulgarian, English and Italian.

She has some pedagogical experience in China, Italy and Bulgaria.

She has participated in numerous concerts and performances in Italy and Bulgaria. She has won prestigious awards in a number of singing festivals and competitions:

2020 - Moscow International Vocal Competition - Third prize

2021 - Moscow International Vocal Competition - First prize

2020 - Arts Festival Borovets 2020 - First prize

2020 - Seventh National Academic Competition for Performance of Works by JS BACH and Baroque Composers - Second Prize

2021, - I International Music and Arts Competition in London - First Prize.

etc.

The dissertation contains a total of 176 pages, which include an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, bibliography, appendices and a list of scientific publications on the topic of the study.

I am impressed by the way the dissertation was conceived and constructed - academically, with an excellent style.

The main goal of this work is to make a systematic comparison of the countertenor and the Nandan of the Peking Opera from the point of view of culture, singing and performance style.

The idea of thorough research of the controversial notions surrounding the "counter-tenor" is in itself a big challenge, because the exact parameters of this type of voice, both for the general public and for a large part of professionals, are extremely unclear. Since the counter-tenor as a solo singing is a relatively modern phenomenon, even globally there is not enough professional experience to lean on. Noting the frank ignorance in respect to this phenomenon in Bulgaria and the lack of tradition in the Bulgarian vocal-teaching school, as well as specialized scientific works on the subject, I consider this work to be relevant and useful, especially when comparing it with the Chinese Nandan. Starting from ancient times and reaching the present day, the author traces the changing public attitude towards this vocal phenomenon and the reasons thereof. In this sense, I applaud and support Li Minhui's choice to devote her work to "bringing to light" the countertenor's status by comparing it to the Nandan. Due to geographical and cultural barriers, there is almost no scientific comparative research on the countertenor and the Nandan of the Peking Opera.

Using comparative analysis, the author summarizes the similarities and differences in the historical background. She also analyses the phenomenon of *Castrato* as a predecessor of the countertenor and the influence of the castrato singers on the birth and development of the Italian opera. The reasons leading to the appearance of the countertenor with its singing characteristics, the interpretation of the Baroque music by countertenors, as well as advice for studying baroque music and timbre requirements in baroque opera are brought out.

The third chapter offers a detailed analysis of the historical origin, the need from and the style of Nandan in the Peking Opera, as well as the different trends in this style and the modern development of Nandan.

In the separate parts of the dissertation, the principles and difficulties in solving the specific tasks in the performance of the countertenor in the European and Nandan in the Peking opera are highlighted and brought out. The doctoral student also examines the prerequisites for the exchange of countertenors and Nandan, and in the fifth chapter she emphasizes the differences, recommending ways to overcome them.

As an advantage of the dissertation, I would also note the presence of appendices and the photographic and musical material from various sources, with which the work only benefits.

The dissertation is not just a historical, chronological study of a particular genre or era. This is an analytical reflection of the author on the traditions of the European and the Chinese music and on how young people should prepare to perform works in this style. The dissertation work is very useful and will be useful for young people who are learning this kind of art.

The dissertation thus presented enriches our scientific literature and can serve with its ideas for new scientific researches, also as a valuable guideline for the benefit of both countertenors and Chinese Nandan who begin their artistic journey with the intention of conquering the world stages, as well as their educators.

The work is very practical in its nature. In this sense, it is a natural link with the past and the prospective development of both the European and the Chinese vocal music.

With a laconic, clear and unambiguous thought, the doctoral candidate poses the questions, and everywhere, without sometimes being expressed in words, subtextually her personal view and attitude on the topics concerned are visible. For her research she has used numerous works classified according to the historical period of their origin. She also dedicates a special part to schools or authors who are particularly important and who are unfortunately little known in our country.

The conclusion makes an attempt to summarize the problems and to bring out the contributing points in the text.

This research serves as a guide in finding a stylistically correct interpretation not only of the performance of the countertenors and the Nandan, but also of the vocal music in general.

I fully agree with the contributions of the dissertation work listed by the author.

The candidate also has the necessary scientific publications on the subject.

As a conclusion, I want to say that the work has the necessary contributing qualities of a dissertation for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

I am convinced that the dissertation of Li Minhui has a contribution nature, both in a theoretical and an applied sense. With her overall work and contributions, the candidate meets the requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

Prof Svilen Raichev, PhD