

## REVIEW

By Prof. Dr. Borislav Alexandrov Yassenov

Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv

On a dissertation work for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor"  
of Romyana Nikolaeva Petrova on the subject

**"The role of ensemble playing in early learning on orchestral instruments"**

Professional direction 8.3. Music and dance art

Doctoral program "Musicology and musical Faculty of Music Pedagogy"

Department "Classic and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts"

Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv

Research supervisor: Associate Professor Kiril Ivanov Chaplikov

By order No. RD-27-024 of 17.02.2023 of the Rector of AMTII "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, I have been appointed as a member of a scientific jury, to ensure a procedure for the final defence of a dissertation work on the topic "The role of ensemble playing in the early stage of learning orchestral instruments" for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor", in the field of higher education 8. Arts, professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art, Musicology and Musicology Doctoral Program.

The author of the dissertation work is Romyana Nikolaeva Petrova - full-time doctoral student at the Department of Classical and Pop and Jazz Performing Arts, Faculty of Music Pedagogy at Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev", Plovdiv, with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Kiril Chaplikov.

The set of materials presented to me includes the following documents: resume, dissertation, abstract, scientific publications.

Romyana Petrova graduated from Musical Academy with a Master's degree in Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts - Plovdiv (now AMDVA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev") with a specialty in Music Pedagogy, and then she obtained a second Master's degree in Performing Arts at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, which also predetermined her creative path as an active performer and educator. The doctoral student supplements this extremely effective combination with research activities leading to the current dissertation work.

Petrova's professional experience passes through three continents - Europe, North America and South Africa, which leads to the enrichment of professional activity with various practices arising from the socio-cultural environment and national predeterminations.

The artistic activity of the dissertation student is extremely active and is expressed in: a five-year professional experience as orchestra player in the symphony and opera orchestras

of Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban in South Africa, since 1999 in the USA she has held the position of viola principal in a chamber orchestra and played in a string quartet, over 15 major concerts as a chamber musician and soloist at Carnegie Hall in New York, as well as many tours in Washington, D.C., Boston, Miami, and other cities on the East Coast of the United States. After returning to Bulgaria (2008), she participated as a performer at the most prestigious Bulgarian music festivals - IMF "Varna Summer", IMF "Sofia Music Weeks" and IMF "March Music Days" (Ruse). In 2019, she received an honorary plaque from "Sofia Music Weeks" for the implementation of a long-standing joint activity between the above-mentioned festival and "Varna Summer".

She also works as a performer in the sound recording field, realizing numerous recordings for the Bulgarian National Radio, as well as two released CDs with her own music. She received rave reviews as a performer from the international magazines STRAD and GRAMOPFON, the national newspaper KULTURA, etc.

The pedagogical work of R. Petrova is dynamic and includes: a ten-year teaching activity at the Brooklyn Conservatory in New York and at the Stradivari Music School in Miami, she actively promotes Bulgarian music abroad, for which in 2003 she received the Annual Award of the "Bulgarian Virtuosi" Foundation", in the period 2008-2018 she was a teacher of viola, chamber music and orchestral performance at "Dobri Hristov" National art school - Varna. The pedagogical achievements of the doctoral student are indicated by numerous first prizes of her students from national and international competitions, as well as by the successes of the graduates studying today in prestigious music academies at home and abroad.

The revival of the activity of the Youth Symphony Orchestra of National art school "Dobri Hristov" - Varna by R. Petrova is of extreme importance, for it helps the professional and musical-aesthetic development of young musicians. According to the doctoral student, the group currently performs over 8 concerts a year, which is a remarkable achievement. Petrova launched a joint project between National art school "Dobri Hristov" and the Municipality of Varna expressed in a series of educational concerts under the title "Varna summer for children", by children-performers for an audience of children and their parents. The project is extremely successful, indicative by the fact that it has been held for more than ten consecutive seasons, as well as the interest shown by Bulgarian National Television, which films and broadcasts all concerts on the national media. For the project, Petrova was awarded the Grand Prize for overall achievements of BAROK (the Bulgarian Association of Employers in the Field of Culture) for 2019.

In the period 2012-2014, the dissertation student led European projects with the participation of the "Dobri Hristov" National art school - Varna under the "Comenius" and "Leonardo da Vinci" programs.

Petrova's professional activity also includes: host of the weekly radio show "Festivals" on Radio Varna, work in the Culture Directorate of the Municipality of Varna as manager of the "Varna Summer" International Music Festival. On the occasion of the festival's 90th anniversary, KULTURA newspaper wrote: "Varna summer is in a renaissance under the management of Romyana Petrova."

Since December 2019, Petrova is the director of National art school "Dobri Hristov" - Varna.

The topic's relevance of dissertation work "The role of ensemble playing in the early stage of learning orchestral instruments" is determined by the dynamics in the development of modern musical art and the need to examine, analyse and renew the approaches in the teaching methodology, as well as their practical application according to the socio-cultural prerequisites. The research is dedicated to the ensemble approach in instrumental music making, the benefits for the formation and growth of young musicians, and also as a philosophical platform - a professional and educational methodology related to a specific stage of the students' development.

The object of the research is developing young musicians studying orchestral instruments in music schools, with the prospect of continuing their professional training in music academies and professional realization. Under "early stage of training", the doctoral student specifies the level at which the young instrumentalist has acquired basic instrumental skills and is about to develop as a musician.

The subject of the study is ensemble playing at an early stage of learning and its role creating musical-aesthetic taste, instrumental and personal qualities in young instrumentalists, as well as the necessary motivation leading to successful academic and professional achievement in the field of musical art.

The author's goal is, on the one hand, to prove the benefits of ensemble playing, and on the other hand, to share certain ideas and examples of its successful implementation in the curricula of art schools in our country.

The methods used in the work are theoretical and empirical. The research toolkit is predetermined by the teaching activity of the dissertation student, experimenting with different approaches in music education adopted and applied in Europe, Asia and America, through comparative analysis combining elements of best practices.

Petrova's thesis is that ensemble playing at an early stage of training is the leading one in the formation and development of budding young musicians, which is why she focuses on this topic in her research. According to the PhD student, this type of musicianship is used in both professional and amateur musical instrument training and is a preferred form of musical education for many reasons: the motivating effect on young instrumentalists, the assumption of responsibility by assigning creative tasks requiring complex skills and working in team, building a creative psycho-climate, increasing students' self-esteem, improving discipline and organizational skills, applying and improving already learned techniques, developing a sense of synchronicity, improving a sense of intonation, a sense of rhythm, attention to detail, sense of balance, enrichment through new sound nuances when mixing timbres.

The fact that playing in an orchestra helps to build interpersonal relationships in a social aspect - connection, trust and mutual assistance between the participants in the ensemble is of extreme importance. This kind of learning leads to effectiveness in pedagogical work and is also a prerequisite for musical, academic and emotional growth.

In her capacity as a teacher at National art school "Dobri Hristov" - Varna, the author carried out a ten-year experiment, which included observation, data collection and analysis of

the behavior of young instrumentalists who attended ensemble playing classes after the fourth or fifth year of individual training in orchestra instrument. The doctoral student reports differences in the performance of students who do not participate in ensembles and those who practice ensemble playing and is emphatic in the findings regarding the following indicators - ensemble improves sense of rhythm, sense of intonation, confidence on stage, and also that those involved in orchestra are more likely to pursue academic education.

In the introduction to this comprehensive study, the doctoral student introduces the subject, object, purpose, and states her scientific hypothesis.

In the first chapter - "Children's orchestral practices from the Baroque to the present day", certain successful world practices related to the application of ensemble playing at an early stage of musical education and upbringing from the Baroque era to the present day are described (The Red Father's Pedagogical Practice Antonio Vivaldi, The Suzuki Method and El Sistema) and children's orchestral practices in Bulgaria from the recent past (Pioneer Philharmonic and other youth ensembles) are targeted.

In chapter two - "Publications on the topic", the dissertation examines publications investigating playing in an ensemble and its influence on the formation and construction of personal qualities, as well as learning skills, from the point of view of psychology. The opinions of well-established pedagogues, authors of methods for teaching orchestral instruments, regarding the role of ensemble playing in the educational process are presented.

The main part of the work is the personal practice and research of Petrova, presented in the third chapter, tracking the feedback of the participants in a youth orchestra on the one hand, and of their teachers, on the other, through surveys and interviews conducted regularly within a ten-year period. On this basis, the author summarizes in comparative tables the assessment of the respondents regarding the benefits of playing in an orchestra in terms of various aspects of instrumental growth and acquisition of certain professional qualities and tracks how this assessment changes within the target period. Through the interviews with the teachers of a special subject of the participants in the orchestra, regarding the issues under consideration, valuable points of view are added in support of the author's thesis. In conclusion, the results are analyzed and conclusions are drawn from the conducted research.

From the reference for scientific publications, it is clear that they are three in number and are directly related to the topic of the dissertation work, which logically finalizes the doctoral student's scientific research until now. The posts are:

- "Functional literacy among young musicians - some problems and solutions" - report presented at Spring Scientific Readings - AMDVA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv (2020);

- "Ensemble playing in the initial stage of training for orchestral instruments as a technique for the formation of lasting professional competences", doctoral readings at the National Academy of Music "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov" – Sofia (2020);

- "The role of collective youth creativity as a tool for dealing with the consequences of social isolation" - III International Conference "Science, Education and Innovation in the Field of Art" (Volume I) - AMDVA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev", Plovdiv (2021).

The paper meets the requirements for creating a dissertation. R. Petrova analyzed and systematized a huge volume and quality of content using the deductive method - from certain successful world practices related to the application of ensemble playing, through publications examining this form of music-making and its influence on the formation and construction of personal qualities and skills for learning, to Petrova's personal practice and research on the role of ensemble playing for the musical-aesthetic, professional and emotional growth of young musicians. Prerequisite and philosophy of ensemble music-making as a basis for its application as a methodology and, in particular, its identification in pedagogical practice in the training of emerging instrumentalists.

The dissertation work has an indisputable contribution character determined by the author's practice and affinity to the issue under consideration. It is significant that the PhD student conducts the research in a dynamic environment, collecting, analyzing and classifying data, as well as applying new concepts in practice. Experimenting with different approaches when working with the youth orchestra contributes to the achievement of valuable conclusions applicable both in theory and in practice leading to successful results.

The thesis proposed and analyzed in the development will lead to the enrichment of the competences of music educators.

The dissertation's contributions are expressed in the following:

- the study presents an updated point of view to the application of ensemble playing in the early stages of training for orchestral instrumentalists, related to the theory of the musical-educational process;

- the author poses the question of the adequate career orientation of the young musician with a view to successful professional realization;

- important elements for the proper integration of ensemble playing into the overall musical-educational process are argued - a contribution related to the practical application of orchestral instruments;

- from the point of view of didactics, through the present work the doctoral student hopes to provoke further research on the topic, as well as to contribute to the creation of a methodology for the systematic study of ensemble playing in the early stages of instrumental training, in accordance with modern curricula for music schools in the country.

In this work, a large volume of information has been collected, analysed and systematized in a volume of 164 pages. Explanations are substantiated with relevant examples - 6 images of fragments of scores, 2 reproductions of photographs, 11 tables and 14 graphs, contributing to creating an even clearer idea of the subject under consideration. The bibliography includes 69 sources, of which 25 in Cyrillic, 39 in Latin and 5 internet pages. The dissertation includes 3 applications:

- Surveys with participants in the Youth Symphony Orchestra - Varna;
- Interviews with teachers of orchestral instruments from NAS "Dobri Hristov" - Varna;
- Recommended literature for working with children's orchestras.

The abstract is prepared according to the requirements and gives a clear idea of the content, object, subject, purpose, tasks, research tools and reflects the main results achieved in the work.

I am convinced that the methodological work, based on a complete and detailed study and personal practice of the doctoral student, will provoke further scientific research and development in relation to the subject. This is the reason it would be beneficial to publish the work in order to make it available to a wider readership.

In conclusion, I will point out that Romyana Petrova's dissertation work on the topic "The role of ensemble playing in early learning on orchestral instruments" impressed me with the choice of topic, the depth of the issues under consideration, the analyses and the scientific-theoretical justification, written in a professional and at the same time accessible language. From the facts presented in the work it becomes clear that Petrova is a musician with a solid musical-theoretical training, creative thinking and active performing and pedagogical practice. I believe that the theoretical development meets the requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" set forth by the ZRASRB and the Regulations for its application. This gives me the reason to propose to the respected scientific jury to award Romyana Nikolaeva Petrova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 8. Arts, professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art, Musicology and Musicology Doctoral Program.

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Prepared the review:

(Prof. Dr. Borislav Yassenov)