

REVIEW

by

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on Dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

Professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art

Doctoral program Choreography

Author: **Sun Xiaofang**, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv,
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Title: *Principles of Teaching in Choreography – Theory and*

Academic supervisor: Prof Zhelka Tabakova, PhD

1. General presentation of the procedure and the materials presented for review

This opinion is prepared on the grounds of Order RD-27-144/ 21.10.2024 of the Rector of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv, regarding the approval of a scientific jury and presented by the doctoral candidate: enrolment order, discharge order, dissertation, abstract, curriculum vitae, contributions and three author publications on the topic (two in Bulgaria and four in China).

The dissertation is 210 pages. It consists of introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, bibliography (79 literary sources, 5 internet sources), list of analyzed performances in the work - 7.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

The autobiographical data presents a complete profile of the doctoral student. The acquired education and participation in seminars fully correspond to the subsequent professional development. Sun Xiaofang is dedicated to her profession as a teacher at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Department of Dance, Shenyang City, China. Her scientific and research work is distinguished, expressed in three published monographs, nine publications, participation in three scientific and research projects. Seven awards for original works are a reflection of and a testimony to her work. The defense of the doctoral title in the field of choreography is a logical continuation of Xiaofang's career development.

3. Relevance of the topic.

Regarding the relevance of the topic, I fully trust the doctoral student and her scientific supervisor, given the fact that the educational environment of dance in higher education in China is being studied. My arguments are rooted in: “*This text is based on my many years of experience in teaching and artistic practice from the perspective of a choreography teacher in a higher art educational institution.*” This experience suggests that a problem is defined and requires scientific justification, which determines the relevance of the topic.

4. Expediency of the research methods used to achieve the set goals

The author has built a logical structure in order to derive the main research problem (*to study the qualities and skills that a dance teacher and a choreographer must have*), related to the specific object (*methods of teaching choreography and the requirements for teaching skills*) and the subject of the work (*problems in the training of choreographers in current higher educational institutions in China*).

The set goal and tasks fully correspond to the desire to defend the author's thesis, clearly reflected in the introductory words of the work.

The research methodology is correctly chosen, according to its specificity. The methodological toolset with qualitative characteristics is described in detail and argued (pp. 6-9).

5. Evaluation of the dissertation work.

Chapter One. *Professional Characteristics of the Choreography Teacher* (35 pages). The study begins with the definition of the choreography teacher in **Paragraph 1.1**. In defense of her arguments on determining his personality with a dual character, which includes - a comprehensive understanding of the art of dance and pedagogical skills, the doctoral student refers to Wu Bei, Han Yu, Zhang Qian and the National Standards for the quality of music and dance education in ordinary higher educational institutions. In **Paragraph 1.2. Structure of the knowledge that the choreography teacher must have**, the author defines four main areas of knowledge: dance performance; theoretical knowledge of choreography; knowledge in the field of music and in the field of culture. **Paragraph 1.3. Professional duties and public functions of the choreography teacher**. Here, in the system of signs in the first part, the author highlights – professional duties; demonstration responsibilities; directorial responsibilities of the choreographer and in the second part – preservation and popularization of dance culture; cultivation of choreographic personnel; promotion of intercultural exchange and dissemination and service to society and enhancement of public aesthetic perception. The profile of the choreographer is supplemented in **Paragraph 1.4. Professional and teaching skills of the choreography teacher**. In this part, the classification is upgraded with a distinction between skills and characteristic specifics. The professional skills include – basic professional skills; the ability to feel life and to elevate beauty; practical skills of the choreographer for arranging dance. The teaching skills include - the ability to analyze in three aspects; the ability to design teaching in two aspects and the ability to apply teaching methods. **Paragraph 1.5. The current situation and development of choreography teaching in modern Chinese higher education institutions**. After brief historical

reference, the author presents the choreography teaching at the Beijing Dance Academy in terms of gradual improvement and perfection of the teaching system; the Department of Choreography at the Shenyang Conservatory in terms of continuous improvement and professionalization of the teaching staff; the Department of Choreography at Jiamusi University in terms of comprehensive improvement and personalized development of the quality of students. Following the examples given in the sequence of reasoning in the work, prospects for the future of the choreography specialty in the Chinese higher education institutions are offered in several clearly justified directions: **optimizing** professional positioning; **improving** the construction of the teaching staff; **reforming** teaching methods and tools; expanding employment channels; promoting cooperation between industry, university and scientific research.

Chapter two *Professional skills that a choreography teacher must have* (55 pages). Xiaofang develops this part of the thesis in four main paragraphs and one summary. **Paragraph 2.1. Developing aesthetic skills in dance art**, presents interesting arguments that stand out in several directions: (1) Aesthetics related to understanding the movements in dance art. Dance is presented as an art that combines physical movements with deep emotions and in it the choreographer uses both imitation of real movements and abstract forms to express certain ideas and to create a unique artistic image. (2) Aesthetics in the skills of expressing lyricism in dance art with several accents – **Emotion** is the core of dance, the main driver of dance art and regardless of the style or the technique, the dance always expresses certain feelings and emotions; **Lyricism** is what distinguishes dance from other art forms and makes it unique. (3) Aesthetics in the skills of controlling rhythm in dance art – The author emphasizes the fundamental role of rhythm in dance and its complexity. She explains that rhythm is not just a mechanical repetition, but a creative tool that allows dancers to express themselves and convey uniqueness in the artistic work. The author claims that contemporary dance is a particularly good example of how rhythm can be used to create innovative and expressive dance works. It becomes clear that there are three main characteristics in terms of rhythm: irregular rhythm (not completely matching the music), free rhythm (determined by the dancer), and integration with time (creating a sense of fluidity and the passage of time). (4) Aesthetics related to skills for interpreting the virtuality in dance art – Virtuality is presented as an essential characteristic of dance art, which distinguishes it from other forms of art. Virtuality in dance is understood as a transformation of reality. An example is given with the Chinese classical opera, which had a significant influence on the development of virtuality in the Chinese dance. It is noted that the stylization of movements is a key characteristic of this style, with movements becoming symbols carrying a certain meaning. (5) Skills for expressing aesthetics in dance art – The role of aesthetics in dance art and the dance teacher as an important figure in the development of aesthetic perception in the dancers and in the creation of beautiful and captivating dance works is emphasized. In **Paragraph 2.2. Skills for choreographing dance vocabulary in different dance styles**, the author presents an in-depth analysis of the choreographic skills necessary for the creation of dance works in different styles – ballet, Chinese classical dance,

contemporary dance and Chinese ethnic and folk dances, and specific examples are given. The exposition highlights common skills for all styles: understanding dance styles; composition skills; ability to express emotions and ideas; innovation and respect for traditions. **Paragraph 2.3. Ability to perceive dance thinking.** The dissertation in this part has a philosophical overtone. The following accents are highlighted: (1) Characteristics of dance thinking with a focus on movement, figurative thinking and emotionality. (2) Materials for dance thinking - Tangible materials (life situations) and Intangible materials (the psychological states of the performer). (3) Process of dance thinking - Transformation of reality, Interaction between form and content and Innovations and traditions. (4) Results of dance thinking - Innovative choreography, Deep expression of emotions, Diversity of artistic styles. In the process of developing her arguments, Xiaofang gives clear examples. **Paragraph 2.4. Skills for recognizing the structure of dance.** The author presents the concept of "structure" in the context of dance art, revealing its dual nature, functions and importance for the creation of a dance work. She claims that the structure is the connecting line between form and content. Functions of the structure are derived. Time and space in the structure are presented. Of course, the figure of the choreographer is at the center in its construction.

Chapter three Skills for professional practice that a dance choreographers must have (79 pages) has an applied nature in the development of the researched topic. At the beginning of the chapter, the author shares that creative techniques in dance choreography can be universal and specific. In **Paragraph 3.1 Use of creative techniques in the process of dance choreography and teaching**, the presentation continues with **Teaching of basic techniques for creating dances**, where the emphasis is on the diversity of techniques, the purpose of techniques, the interaction between techniques. The author stresses on the fact that knowledge of the creative processes is necessary for the choreographers in order to create interesting dance compositions. **Requirements for the learning process**, highlights three main aspects that must be taken into account when teaching basic dance techniques: understanding the theoretical basis, combining theory and practice, and developing creative skills. Here, the goal is for students to be able to develop their creative skills to create their own dance compositions. In **Choosing teaching methods**, Xiaofang argues that successful teaching of dance techniques requires a variety of approaches that meet the different needs and learning styles of the students, and that the combination of lectures, demonstrations, analysis, discussions, and peer assessment creates a stimulating learning environment that encourages the development of creative abilities. **Teaching creative solo dance techniques** emphasizes two main aspects: dynamics and the level of development of the movement. In **Requirements for training at the action choreography level**, the author emphasizes the importance of integrating the physical and creative aspects in teaching dance movements, by focusing on spatiotemporal power, movement quality, and expressiveness, dancers can reach a high level of performance and create memorable works. **Selection of teaching methods** presents a systematic approach to teaching solo dance, emphasizing the importance of the gradual development of the dancers' skills and creative abilities. **Teaching creative techniques for**

duets and trios, presents the main characteristics and specifics of duet and trio dance, as well as the requirements for training in these forms. *Training content* provides a detailed analysis of the specifics of duet and trio dance training, emphasizing the key differences and similarities between these two forms. *Teaching Requirements* focuses on the teaching of duet and trio dance. It is stated that a comprehensive approach is required, which includes both technical aspects and the development of the dancers' creative abilities. Successful teaching depends on the teacher's ability to create an environment in which dancers can develop as individuals and at the same time work effectively in a group. *Teaching methods* - the text covers two main methods for teaching creative techniques in duet and trio dance: explanation of knowledge and demonstration. In *Teaching creative group dance techniques*, an in-depth analysis of teaching group dance is presented, the study focuses on the specific characteristics, methods and requirements of this type of dance. The paragraph concludes with reflections on *Teaching techniques for choreographic creation of dance performances*. The author emphasizes dance drama as a synthesis of arts, the structure and content of dance drama, requirements and teaching methods necessary for creating dance drama. **Paragraph 3.2.** *Dynamic analysis of the creative process and dance vocabulary in the process of dance choreography training*, the author provides an in-depth analysis of the process of teaching choreography, covering both creative aspects and theoretical ones - key directions in the teaching method, stages in the process of creating a dance, teaching methods. Special attention is paid to (1) Dance vocabulary – the specific movements and techniques characteristic of different dance styles (ballet, modern dance, folk dance). (2) Force efficiency – a theory developed by Rudolf von Laban, which analyzes body movements based on four basic elements: gravity, space, time and smoothness. (3) Qiyun – a concept from Chinese aesthetics that describes the harmony between form and spirit in art. (4) Analysis of works – a systematic study of existing dance works to identify their strengths and weaknesses. **Paragraph 3.3.** *Analysis of classical dance works*, offers a multi-faceted analysis of three works: *The Nutcracker* - emphasizes the importance of music, highlights the diversity of dance styles and the symbolism of the scenography. *The Four Seasons* – reveals how dance can explore philosophical questions and evoke deep emotional experience. *Wing Chun* - demonstrates how dance can be used to promote cultural heritage/ martial arts.

The **conclusion** is developed in twenty pages and synthesizes the dissertation work in three directions - (1) dance art is increasingly integrated with other arts and technologies, creating new forms of expression; (2) today's choreographers balance between preserving traditional values and experimenting with new ideas; (3) the training of choreographers is crucial for the development of dance art and the challenges of the new era provide more opportunities for creative realization.

The summary paragraphs in each chapter act as a kind of transition.

6. Contributions and significance of the thesis and the publications on the subject of the dissertation

I accept the scientific contributions presented, but I believe that they could be more clearly formulated and reduced to five.

The publications presented reflect the topic of the dissertation and publicity has been achieved among interested circles.

7. Critical notes and recommendations.

I don't have any.

8. Abstract.

I believe that the abstract provides information on all parts of the dissertation work.

9. Conclusion.

It is clear that Sun Xiaofang's work *Principles of Teaching in Choreography - Traditions and Modernity* has contributed to the development of the dance education in the higher education in China. It is this and the above that is the reason for me to give my **positive assessment** of the research topic and to propose to the Scientific Jury to award the doctoral student the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Choreography.

12.12.2024

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