

REVIEW

by

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professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

on the dissertation of

Yang Chang

titled

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BEL CANTO STYLE AND ITS USE IN VOCAL PERFORMANCES IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

in a professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

academic supervisor: Prof. Dr. Toni Shekerjieva-Novak

The dissertation work was discussed and proposed for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performing Arts at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev", the city of Plovdiv, held on 01.07.2021. It has a total volume of 180 pages, organized into introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, acknowledgments, bibliography and appendix. The bibliography includes 70 titles in several languages. The actual research part of the work, as well as the analysis of the chamber-vocal works, is supported and illustrated by 56 sheet music examples and illustrative figures.

Yang Chang has an impressive resume. Born on 23 May 1994, in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, China. She receives Bachelor's degree at the China University of Media and Master's degree at the Academy of Music in Rome, Italy. She is currently working as a soloist at the Chongqing Opera, China.

She is a doctoral student at the Academy of Music and Dance Art in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, under the supervision of Prof Toni Shekerjieva-Novak.

She has participated in numerous opera productions and concerts, including performances of Rossini's *Stabat Mater* at the Church of San Nicola da Tolentino in Rome; the role of Flora in Verdi's *La Traviata* at the Sala Academica, Rome; collaboration with the Arcus Regalis Orchestra in Albano, Italy to perform Vivaldi's Magnificat-KV611 and Gloria-RV589.

She collaborated with the University of Rome Symphony Orchestra "Muse" during the 14th Music Season 2018-2019 in Viterbo, Rome's conference center and university, where she played Carmen; collaboration with the Chongqing Symphony Orchestra to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in D minor as mezzo-soprano; and appearing in original Chinese national operas *Coming*

Down the River Clear Water and *When the Dust Settles* as Han Yuying and Tusi's Wife. She also participated in *Nabucco*, *Suor Angelica*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and other operas.

Along with her work as performer, Yang Chang also has significant awards:

- First place at the 2nd National Music Competition Giulianova City Trophy
- First place in the 13th and 14th China Golden Bell Opera Singing Competition
- Third place at the New York International Opera Competition, 2020.
- Excellent Award at the First Classical Chinese Song Contest

Obviously, the doctoral student's interest in bel canto performance in different languages determined her choice of the topic of the dissertation. In-depth knowledge and experience in execution is an additional prerequisite for this choice.

According to the author, this dissertation aims to trace the evolution of bel canto, focusing on its impact and adaptation in different cultural contexts.

The dissertation consists of introduction, three chapters, conclusion, contributions, acknowledgments, bibliography and appendices. The introduction determines the choice and importance of the topic, not forgetting the fact that "*due to the differences in the body structure of different races, there are different approaches in the use of bel canto*" (p. 5 of the dissertation), which speaks of a sense of the details.

Chapter one mainly presents the development of the bel canto vocal technique, with its roots going back to Antiquity. An overview of ancient poetry and theater is made, passing through ancient Roman Theater, secular and religious music to reach the beginnings of bel canto and the emergence of the Renaissance. The importance of Giulio Caccini book *Le nuove musiche* as one of the program texts for building vocal technique on solid foundations is highlighted (p.37). A special chapter is devoted to the baroque music, as it is emphasized that "*the most characteristic Baroque vocal genre of religious themes is the oratorio*" (p.40).

Then there is an overview of the birth of opera as a genre.

The second chapter focuses on the principles of bel canto vocalization. "*The process of singing is a mutual combination of several dynamic actions: breathing, pronunciation, resonance, and articulation*" (p.51). Following this thesis, the doctoral student provides numerous schematic diagrams of the respiratory system, larynx, vocal folds, etc. I would recommend using the term "vocal folds", instead of "vocal strings", adopted in Prof. Maksimov's textbook *Phonology*. The process of sound formation is presented in detail and analytically.

A special place is devoted to breathing, comparing the natural and the singing breathing in defense of the thesis about the need to master bel canto. "*The natural breathing is usually relatively free, while special breathing in bel canto singing is often powerful. The breath inhaled by the singer is like a magnetic field with a strong attraction that has a strong explosive force and can help him fulfill*

his purpose, providing the opportunity for changes in pitch, timbre, intensity, etc. while singing" (pp. 53-54).

The practical part also includes exercises for using the bel canto technique. Arias from different eras are analyzed.

Chapter three examines in detail the use of bel canto in vocal music works in different languages, namely Italian, Russian and Chinese. The doctoral student gives in detail, illustrating with musical examples, solutions to phonetic and vocal challenges faced by the singer. The structure of the Italian language is analyzed to serve as a basis for using bel canto to other language and singing schools. In essence, the entire chapter contributes to a better understanding of the subject under consideration and could serve as a handbook for singers engaged in professional opera singing.

The candidate has the following publications on the topic:

1. *The Birth of Opera* Yearbook 2021

pp. 185-193-10.

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Art "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv ISSN 1331-6526(Print), ISSN 2738-7712(Online)

2. *Breathing in Bel Canto*

SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND ART INNOVATION, 2023

pp.154-159,

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Art "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv ISSN 2738-8956(Print), ISSN 2738-8964(Online)

3. *Vocal Music during the Renaissance* - Collection of reports

Spring Scientific Readings, 2024

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Art "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv ISSN 1314-7005(Print), ISSN2738-7720(Online)-in print.

In conclusion, my opinion on Yang Chang's dissertation work *Historical development of the bel canto style and its use in vocal performances in different languages* is that it is a large-scale, comprehensive and in-depth work with undoubted scientific and applied value and a valuable contribution to the performance and teaching practice in Bulgaria, China and other countries. Sincere congratulations for the job well done and to the academic supervisor, the respected Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak, whose singing school is a source and example of bel canto singing.

Based on everything that has been said so far, I strongly suggest to the respected scientific jury to award Yang Chang the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.3. – Music and Dance Art.