

REVIEW

by
Prof Svilen Raychev, PhD

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

to

Yang Chang

titled:

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

with academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva – Novak

Yang Chang is born on 23 May 1994 in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, China. She received Bachelor's degree from the China University of Media and a Master's degree from the Academy of Music in Rome - Italy. She is a soloist at the Chongqing Opera in China.

She has participated in numerous opera productions and concerts:

Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, the role of Flora in Verdi's *La Traviata*, Vivaldi's *Magnificat* and *Gloria*, the role of Carmen in Bizet's eponymous opera - Viterbo Music Season 2018-2019, the mezzo-soprano part of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, she also participates 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.

Awards from singing competitions:

- 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.
- Special Award at the First Classical Chinese Song Contest

Since 2021, she is a full-time doctoral student, paid studies in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, doctoral program Music Studies and Music Art at the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Art at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv.

She was discharged with the right of defense by order No RD-27- 085 of 25.06.2024.

The dissertation was discussed and proposed for public defense at a meeting of the Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performance Arts at AMDFA "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv, held in June 2024.

The dissertation contains a total of 180 pages, which include introduction, three chapters with subsections, conclusion, bibliography, contributing points, appendices and list of scientific

publications on the subject of the study. It covers various aspects of bel canto singing, including a total of 71 different sources. Explores the historical development of the bel canto style and its application in vocal performance in various languages, focusing specifically on Italian, Russian, and Chinese compositions.

The main aim of this work is to trace the evolution and adaptation of bel canto in different cultural contexts, studying its influence and integration in these diverse traditions. The research expands our understanding of vocal techniques, which is useful for performers and teachers in classical and contemporary opera. A comparative analysis of the use of bel canto in different language contexts, can fill an existing research gap by increasing the academic community's understanding of vocal education and intercultural communication. The dissertation is an innovative study of the different uses of the bel canto technique in view of the characteristic features of different languages.

In the separate parts of the dissertation, the principles and difficulties in solving the specific tasks when performing in the bel canto style are emphasized and brought out.

Chapter One examines the origins and early development of vocal art and the importance of musical education in Ancient Greece and Rome, and points out that opera emerged from the ancient Greek and Roman theatrical tradition, which combined poetry, music and dance. Religious and secular music played a significant role in the increasingly pronounced independence of music, but the author pays special attention to the role of the Renaissance and subsequent eras in the undoubted maturation of vocal art and its spread, and an increasingly strong emphasis is placed on the precision of the vocal technique.

The second chapter is titled *Vocalization Techniques in Bel Canto*. It emphasizes the mastering and controlling the technique of singing breathing and the voice production process, optimal use of resonators and correct articulation. The various aspects of achieving and improving vocal technique, especially legato and coloratura, are examined. Attention is also paid to the hygiene of the vocal apparatus and the use of modern medicine and rehabilitation technologies to restore and reduce the risk of trauma, emphasizing the individual approach of each singer. At the end of the chapter, the author summarizes that the use and improvement of bel canto techniques actively influence the improvement of the quality of interpretation of vocal music and the construction of a truthful artistic image.

Chapter three. *Use of bel canto in vocal musical works of different languages Italian, Russian and Chinese*, compares, studies, and in-depth explores the use of the bel canto technique in vocal works in different languages, focusing primarily on Italian, Russian, and Chinese. Using a comparative analysis, the author offers comprehensive characteristics of the phonetic structure of the pronunciation of vowels and consonants in the three languages.

The various phonetic features and language structures have a profound influence on the use of bel canto technique. Through the analysis of Italian, Russian and Chinese vocal works, the candidate

emphasizes the common features and peculiarities of the bel canto technique in the different languages and offers relevant teaching methods and technical guidelines. These studies not only enrich the theoretical basis of the bel canto technique, but also provide valuable guidance for vocal education and performance practice.

Quite naturally, in view of the author's background, her attention is focused more on the historical roots and stylistic characteristics of the development of bel canto in China, which, under the influence of the Western musical education and cultural exchange, gradually introduced the bel canto technique and integrated it into the local musical culture in combination with elements of the traditional Chinese music. I quote: "*Musicians try to use the bel canto technique to perform Chinese folk songs and revolutionary songs, keeping the characteristics of bel canto but adapting them to the aesthetic preferences of the Chinese audience.*" page 32 of the abstract.

Yang Chang summarizes the reasons why the international exchange between China and Europe is well developed: first, it is due to the active promotion of music culture and exchange by the Chinese government and the governments of the European countries; secondly, it is due to the active participation of professional artistic groups, music academies and other institutions, as well as the media. Cultural exchange is the best way for culture to open up and develop.

In the conclusion, an attempt is made to summarize the issues and bring out the contributing points in the text. The research focuses on how the bel canto style has been adopted and adapted by artists and educators in different countries to meet the cultural and linguistic characteristics of each country.

The dissertation is an analytical reflection of the author on the traditions of the European and the Chinese vocal music in the Belcanto style 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. Through the analysis of specific examples, the dissertation examines how singers adapt their techniques to respond to linguistic peculiarities.

The dissertation thus presented enriches our scientific literature and can serve with its ideas for new scientific developments, also as a valuable guideline for the benefit of both singers and instrumentalists who begin their creative journey with the intention of conquering the world stages, as well as their teachers.

The work is practical in nature. In this sense, it is a natural link with the past and prospective development of both European and Chinese vocal music. The research reveals how the bel canto style has adapted and evolved in different cultural and musical traditions and how this style has influenced vocal education and performance in different countries.

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

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

As a conclusion, I would like 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 Yang Chang has a contribution nature, both in a theoretical and an applied sense. With his overall work and contributions, the candidate meets the requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

Prof Svilen Raichev, PhD