

OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, New Bulgarian University,

on the dissertation work of **Yang Chang**

full-time doctoral student at Faculty of Music Pedagogy, Department of Classical, Pop and Jazz Performing Arts of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts „Prof Asen Diamandiev” – Plovdiv

with academic supervisor: Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva – Novak

titled

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

for awarding educational and scientific degree Doctor
in Professional field 8.3 Music and dance art

Yang Chang is born in 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 currently works as a soloist at the Chongqing Opera in China. She is a full-time doctoral student with academic supervisor Prof Toni Shekerdzhieva-Novak. She has participated in different projects: 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; realized joint performances with the Symphony Orchestra of the University of Rome as 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*, etc.

She has received the following 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. **The candidate Yang Chang's work and dedication to opera and music is evident.**

Content of the dissertation

The dissertation contains introduction, three chapters¹, conclusion, contributions, bibliography with a total volume of 181 pages and an appendix (Angelina's aria "Nacqui all'affanno... Non più" from Gioachino Rossini's opera *La Cenerentola*). The dissertation covers various aspects of the bel canto singing, including a rich bibliography on the subject from 71 different sources: in historical and cultural contexts from Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome (10 in number) such as *Ancient Greece* (2019) and *Ancient Greek and Roman Literature'* (2016). Some sources, such as *A History of Western Music* (2002) and *Renaissance Art* (2016), provide an in-depth look at the history and development of the Western music during the Renaissance and the Baroque periods (15), which have had a significant impact on the formation and evolution of bel canto. In terms of techniques and methods, the sources focus on the study of the bel canto vocal techniques, including breathing methods, vocal training and performance techniques (20 in number) such as *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy* (1986) and *Research on Natural Breathing and Special Breathing in Bel Canto Singing* (2016), which examines the key techniques in the bel canto singing and offers rich guidance for theory and practice. Some of the sources used explore the use of bel canto in different languages and cultures (10 in number) such as *History of Western Vocal Art* (2005) and *The Influence of Russian Vocal Art on the Development of Chinese Music* (2018) which analyze the specific uses and challenges of the bel canto techniques in Italian, Russian and Chinese. These studies show the adaptation and development of bel canto on a global scale. The modern use of bel canto is also discussed in some of the sources used (16 in number) such as *Contemporary Chinese Music* (1997) and *Realizing Vocal Potential* (2010). They provide information on the practical use and effect of bel canto in contemporary vocal training and highlight its key role in training a new generation of vocal artists. The sources used in the dissertation also include some classical works and contemporary studies on the vocal art (10 in number) such as Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell's *New Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2004), *Solutions for Singers* (2004) by Richard Miller, as well as resources on various singing techniques and teaching methods such as *How to Train Baritone and Bass*, which provide a practical guide for vocal teachers and students. The used bibliography provides a solid theoretical foundation through the review of multi-faceted and multi-level studies, a valuable resource and a great starting point for developing a doctoral dissertation. I think this is particularly important in the dissertation and preparing its contributions.

Precisely formulated objectives and tasks of the dissertation

The bel canto vocal technique is recognized as one of the highest art forms worldwide. Originating in the 17th and 18th centuries in Italy, it continues to influence vocal pedagogy and vocal performance today. The history and development of bel canto is closely related to the evolution of the European opera and the vocal art. But over the centuries, this technique has been adapted and applied in different cultures and musical styles, with each nation and language bringing its own specifics and

¹ Chapter One: Historical Development of the Bel Canto Style. Chapter Two: Vocalization Techniques in Bel Canto. Chapter Three: Use of Bel Canto in Vocal Music Works in Different Languages - Italian, Russian AND Chinese.

nuances to the performance. Researching the historical development of the bel canto style and its use in vocal works in different languages is essential to broadening its understanding. The dissertation aims to trace the evolution of bel canto, focusing on its impact and adaptation in different cultural contexts. The analysis includes an in-depth look at Italian, Russian and Chinese vocal works, exploring their unique characteristics and specific challenges in using the bel canto technique. The present study is useful for music educators, performers, and students, as well as anyone interested in the development of the vocal art and its future.

The **aims of the study** are to clarify with examples the approaches differentiated in technical and vocal aspects in the performance of bel canto in works of different styles and in different languages. The research demonstrates how language and culture influence forms of vocal performance, providing practical methods and theoretical support to scholars and artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, increasing their competitiveness and innovative capabilities on the global artistic scene. The **tasks** set in the dissertation are: what is the process of formation and development of the bel canto technique; what is the use of bel canto in various vocal musical works; what are the possibilities for the use of bel canto in view of the human physiology; how to use bel canto when performing Italian, Russian and Chinese vocal works.

Significance of the researched problem and relevance

The real significance of the dissertation topic lies in its contribution to vocal pedagogy and the art of *beautiful singing*. How does bel canto adapt to the phonetic structures and vocal habits of different languages? Does this knowledge improve our understanding of the vocal technique? These are basic questions to which a scientific answer is sought in the dissertation. The benefit for performers and teachers in classical and contemporary opera and the promotion of cultural exchange, emphasizing the importance of adapting vocal techniques to meet the specific needs of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is particularly relevant today in the time of globalization. Innovation in specific comparative analysis, especially in addressing unique challenges such as the tonal nature of the Chinese language and complex consonant clusters in the Russian and significant research contributions. This comparative approach provides new opportunities for understanding the adaptability and resilience of bel canto, contributing to a broader understanding of vocal performance and the integration of cultural diversity.

The **research methodology** extends from the analysis of historical documents, musical works, critical articles and archival materials; analysis of bel canto musical works from different periods and in different languages to examine their musical structures, melodic lines, harmonic treatment and aesthetic characteristics; a comparative study of the bel canto style in vocal performances in different languages, which may also include a transcultural analysis; visiting various music academies, opera houses, observations and interviews with singers and teachers; resolution of different cases in specific

cases in different languages; combining theory and practice, the transformation of the bel-canto style in modern vocal training.

Knowledge of the doctoral student

The dissertation systematically examines the use and adaptation of the bel canto style in vocal works in different languages with an emphasis on Italian, Russian and Chinese. It includes a combination of history and theory, cultural comparison, providing practical guidance for teaching faculty and students, and promoting international exchange. The study highlights the influence of the language characteristics on the use of the bel canto technique, for example: "*the open vowels and smooth rhythm of the Italian language, which are highly suited to the bel canto singing style, while the tonality and complex consonant clusters of the Russian and Chinese languages present specific challenges*" (quote from the dissertation). The dissertation examines how singers adapt their techniques to respond to linguistic peculiarities, "*for example by adjusting breathing and voice projection to overcome language barriers.*" The study analyzes how bel canto is taught in different cultural environments, including teaching methods and the adaptation of teaching materials to local conditions. These analyzes improve the understanding of the bel canto singing style and expand its distribution, providing new perspectives and practical experience for the international exchange and development of vocal education and art.

Correctness in citation

Yang Chang is correct in her quotations.

Assessment of the correspondence of the author's abstract with the main positions and contributions of the dissertation work. The abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation

The doctoral student has three publications on the topic:

Yang Chang. *The Birth of Opera*. In: Yearbook of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv, 2021, ISSN 1331-6526 (Print), ISSN 2738-7712 (Online), pp. 185-193.

Yang Chang. *Breathing in Bel Canto*. In: Science, Education and Art Innovations, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv, 2023, ISSN 2738-8956 (Print), ISSN 2738-8964 (Online), pp. 154-159.

Yang Chang. *Vocal Music during the Renaissance*. In: Spring Scientific Readings, AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv, 2024, ISSN 1314-7005 (Print), ISSN 2738-7720 (Online).

Yang Chang is also active in her artistic work related to the topic of her dissertation. In her biography we see that in the last 5 years she has performed: *Stabat Mater* by Rossini; the role of Flora in Verdi's *La Traviata*; sings in Vivaldi's Magnificat - KV611 and Gloria - RV589; participates in the operas *Nabucco*, *Suor Angelica*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, etc. she actively uses the bel canto technique in her work as a singer.

Contributions to the Doctoral Dissertation

1. Combining history and theory, through an in-depth analysis of the use of bel canto singing in Italian, Russian and Chinese vocal works, the author traces the historical development of this vocal style and examines how it has adapted and influenced different languages and cultural environments.
2. The candidate makes a cross-cultural comparison in her research by emphasizing the influence of the language structure on singing techniques, showing how bel canto technique is adapted and modified in different linguistic contexts. This comparative approach provides valuable multicultural perspectives and methods of vocal training and performance useful for singers and educators.
3. The dissertation provides guidance for education and practice through a specific analysis of the use of bel canto in the three languages. Practical teaching methods and technical exercises are provided to help teachers and students better understand and use the bel canto singing technique.
4. The research highlights the importance of understanding and adapting different vocal techniques in the context of globalization, promoting international education and the performing arts, and promoting international cultural exchange. The dissertation provides new perspectives and in-depth analysis of the global use and development of bel canto, contributing significantly to the internationalization and multicultural development of the vocal art.

In conclusion of this Opinion I will end with the following assessment: The work of the doctoral student corresponds to the scientometric indicators for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", according to the Law on the development of the academic staff of Republic of Bulgaria. The dissertation of **Yang Chang**, doctoral student at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, titled *Historical Development of the Bel Canto Style and its Use in Vocal Performances in Different Languages*. The dissertation work, together with its scientific and practical contributions, as well as its publications, I consider sufficient to give my positive assessment and to propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree **Doctor** in professional field 8.3 Music and dance art, to **Yang Chang**, according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

23.07.2024, Sofia

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