

REVIEW

By **Prof Vessela Ivanova Geleva, PhD** – professor in Choral Conducting at the Department of Music Pedagogy and Conducting, the Faculty of Music Pedagogy of Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts “Prof Asen Diamandiev” Plovdiv.

for **Yang Zhiyu /PRC/**, candidate for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, in the field of higher education 8. Arts; professional field 8. 3. Music and Dance Art; doctoral program: Music Studies and Music Art, at the Department of Musical Pedagogy and Conducting, Faculty of Musical Pedagogy of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv.

Yang Zhiyu /b.1986/ is a Chinese pianist and conductor. He began his piano studies at the age of four. He studied with famous Chinese pianists Professor Yang Ming, former dean of the Central Conservatory of Music, Professor Zhang Peili of the Music Department of Xiamen University, and Professor Zhu Yafen, former dean of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. He also studied conducting with the famous Chinese conductor Professor Yang Zhen. He later graduated with a Bachelor's degree in piano in Krakow, and then continued his studies in a Master program at the Polish National Conservatory of Music in Gdansk and specialized at the Frederic Chopin University of Music. He worked as a piano teacher at Huacheng Academy (2017-2018) and as a teacher of choral conducting, choir, singing and piano at Xiamen Nanyang College (2018-2019). He is currently a piano and piano improvisation teacher at Xiamen Huatian College in Xiamen, South China, and holds the position of director of the Xiamen Siming Musicians Association, where he is the choir director. Yang Zhiyu has been invited to be a jury member at many competitions in China, including the Jinping Piano Competition at the 6th Youth Arts Festival, the West Lake Youth Music Festival Piano Competition, and the Youth Arts League. He won the Best Accompaniment Award at the 9th All-Star Chorus Tournament at the National Theater in Beijing. Its graduates have been accepted into famous Chinese universities such as the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, the Music Department of Xiamen University, and others.

The dissertation titled *Folk Features and Conductor Interpretations in the Chinese Choral Works* is 193 pages long and contains an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, contributions and bibliography. The cited literature includes 127 titles, of which 81 are books and 46 are scientific articles and dissertations. The scores of the analyzed works are included separately as an appendix in a volume of 200 pages. The theoretical development is structured very well, with a detailed and logical justification of all observations and conclusions made. The work and the abstract meet the legal requirements for structure, volume and content. There are also the necessary number of publications on the topic /3/, which is dissertable, relevant and contains potential for further theoretical research.

In the **introduction**, Yang Zhiyu presents the motives, object, purpose and tasks of the study. According to him, the folk features and conductor interpretations in Chinese choral works are poorly

studied and need a thorough analysis, which includes tracing the evolution of collective singing art in China from its emergence under the influence of the European choral culture to its new qualitative level in modern times. To this end, he sets the following **tasks**: to carry out a multifaceted and detailed analysis of choral works and their unique essence from the point of view of different ethnic groups, to analyze different styles and genres of emblematic Chinese choral works from the point of view of conductor interpretation, to offer specific ideas and recommendations for promoting the Chinese choral art, which has an undeniably constructive and socially significant function in China. The methods used by the author include analysis, observation, comparison, illustration through musical examples, visualization through diagrams, etc.

The **first chapter** “Folk Styles and Conductors’ Interpretations of Chinese Choral Works” contains 6 subsections, according to the geographical feature of the study: Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, South China, Inner Mongolia Province. The last subsection examines the operatic elements in the Chinese choir in the context of their originality and artistic value. The doctoral student examines one song, characteristic of each region, focusing on the plot content, formal structure, modes, melodic line and other components of the selected popular vocal samples. A special place is devoted to the conductor’s interpretation: tessitura problems, timbre dramaturgy, dynamic development, balance of the choral parts, vocal characteristics, sound color, emotional suggestion, etc. The similarities and differences in the different regions, combined with local ethnic characteristics, are analyzed in detail, which provides the performers with the opportunity for the greatest authenticity of the interpreted titles.

The subject of the **second chapter** are the different types of categories in the genre of the Chinese art songs. According to the author, they are divided into authentic folk songs, choral works with a local ethnic character, works created by borrowing Western compositional techniques and works based on ancient Chinese songs. The author again examines in detail various elements of musical works, including: interval originality, principles of ornamentation of the melody, antiphonal singing, influence of Western European harmony, presence of polyphonic technique, elements of ariosity and recitativeness as a similarity with the Western European opera tradition, features of the strokes in the context of the recreated plot and images, etc. The exposition is again supported by an abundance of musical examples that consistently and logically illustrate the author's thought.

The **third chapter** of the dissertation presents the development and national characteristics of large-scale Chinese vocal cycles. An overview of the Chinese musical style is made and its most typical components are indicated: pentatonic modes, a combination of a tritone series, hexatonic and heptatonic modes. As an illustrative example the author examines the landmark for Chinese music *Yellow River Cantata* /1939/ by Xian Xinghai, on which a multi-layered analysis has been carried out. A special contribution is made by the conductor's performance guidelines that Yang Zhiyu gives for each of the eight parts of the work. He emphasizes the original musical language, the combination of

traditional melody with Western European harmony, the presence of large-scale polyphonic developments, the presence of a balance between tradition and innovation, etc.

The last, **fourth chapter** examines the traditions and innovations in the contemporary compositional works in China. Attention is paid to the diversity of creative ideas, concepts, forms, compositional and performance techniques, etc. The doctoral student analyzes three works from different genres and summarizes that in times of globalization, including cultural, it is necessary to combine national tradition with the contemporary global trends in order to find a new creative path, the deep meaning of which and rich expressive artistic techniques will lead to the creation of new significant Chinese choral works that are popular and highly appreciated by the mass audience, including the younger generations, whose taste today follows the trends of pop music.

Among the **contributions** of the work, the following should be highlighted:

- the study of the Chinese choral art contributes to the enrichment of theoretical research on the topic. From his position as a conductor and teacher with practice and experience, Yang Zhiyu notes a certain literary deficit in the field of comparative analysis of choral works of different ethnic groups and their conductor interpretation. For this reason, he compares choral samples from different regions and historical periods in China and explores the similarities and differences in their national characteristics, as well as the possible nuances of conductor performance. In this way, he contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution and multicultural features of collective singing art in China.

- the doctoral student explores in depth the characteristics of the Chinese traditional music and analyzes in detail the national elements integrated into the Chinese choral music, including melody, harmony, theme and artistic images. This contributes to a better understanding of its uniqueness, while providing a solid theoretical foundation for building a true conducting interpretation concept.

- the proposals made by the author for the renewal of the Chinese choral tradition include the integration of modern musical elements, the further development and enrichment of creative ideas and the study of traditional Chinese aesthetics, aiming to promote the development and prosperity of the Chinese choral music.

- special attention is paid to the influence and integration of current choral trends, which will open up new horizons and opportunities for Chinese choral composition and performance.

The presented dissertation fully achieves the goals and objectives of the study set out in the introduction. It can be used by conductors, performers, musicologists, academic teachers, students, pupils, professional musicians, school teachers and lovers of symphonic art, which makes it suitable for publication in the form of a book. Considering the above, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Yang Zhiyu the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in: field of higher education 8. Arts; professional field 8. 3. Music and Dance Art; doctoral program: Music Studies and Music Art, at the Department of Musical Pedagogy and Conducting, Faculty of Musical Pedagogy of the Academy

of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv, and I wish him success in his career development as a conductor, academic teacher and scientific researcher.

25.07. 2024 г.

Prof Vesela Geleva, PhD