

OPINION

By **Prof. Dr ANDA PALIEVA**

On the competition for acquiring the academic position of Associate Professor in

Music Studies and Music Art (*History of Popular Music*)

prof. dir. 8.3 Music and Dance Art, at BAS, Institute of Art Studies, for the needs of Music Department, RG Musical Culture, and Information,

With candidate **Assist. Prof. Dr. MIHAIL LUKANOV**

Assistant Professor Dr. Mihail Lukanov has established himself in the field of Bulgarian musicology over the last decade as a thorough researcher of popular music culture in Bulgaria, with a broad view of both the historical development of this sphere and its contemporary phenomena. His publications - three monographs and six articles in scholarly journals (to these must be added his most recent article, "*New Dances*" and *Jazz in the Work of Assen Ovcharov*" in the just-published issue 4/2022 of Bulgarian Musicology) clearly show the consistency of his scholarly interest in certain personalities (Miljo Bassan, Assen Ovcharov) and genre areas. One such area is *Music at the Bulgarian Circus*, as his habilitation monograph is titled (corresponding to his 2020 article *Virtuosity and the Circus Arena*).

At the very beginning of the Introduction the author clearly motivates his choice of the topic of the circus as a "specific mediator of musical manifestations", which has remained outside the sphere of musicological interest, but has its place and importance in the development of popular music in our country due to several historical and socio-cultural circumstances. The tasks of the study then set out have determined the logical sequence and internal coherence of the seven individual chapters into a coherently considered overall construction.

Mihail Lukanov bases his observations first (Chapter One, "The Circus and Music") on defining the original notion of the circus as a performing art, with its variations in different countries and eras, to then bring out the specificity of circus music in terms of genres and instrumentation and to identify the peculiarities of the Bulgarian context. A natural continuation is the historical overview of "Some Bulgarian Circuses" (Chapter Two) and the musical performances in them, followed by the overview of the types of musical ensembles, leading personalities, and repertoire in "Orchestras and Conductors" (Chapter Three). Here the role of the circus as the only place for jazz musicians to exist and prosper in the difficult cultural and political situation in the country around the middle of the century is also revealed. Important highlights of "Touring Abroad" (Chapter Four) are the sketched portraits of the most famous Bulgarian performers and ensembles from these now distant decades.

In the following Chapter Five, "Musical Clowning", the author goes into the very substance of the phenomenon of *music in the circus*, more precisely, into the synthesis between the immanent essence of the two components. Starting from the ancient roots of the buffoonery and its journey through time to the eccentric performances, he examines Bulgarian musical clowning in the larger space of musical stage genres and presents a series of outstanding artists and ensembles in the sphere of musical clowning with their characteristic forms of expression. A logical extension is the clarification of the distinctions between musical clowns and humorous couplet singers in Chapter Six, "Couplet Singers." Here are presented founding figures in the field of the couplet-humor genre - Stoyan Milenkov, Jakob Goldstein (Jib) and Assen Bogdanov (Chicho Assos), with a brief description of their individual styles and most popular works. The final Chapter Seven, "Virtuosity in the Circus", is devoted to various manifestations of virtuosity in musical eccentricity.

Spread so widely, the development of the subject of Music in the circus provoked interest in this cultural and social phenomenon with its undeniable significance. The author comprehensively examines the various aspects both historically and in a contemporary context, emphasizing in his conclusion that "the dynamic relationship between *circus, live music, and the theatrical arts* continues to be productive. It stimulates innovation towards ideas, performance spaces and forms vital in the contemporary socio-cultural context, a circumstance that suggests that the theme of music in the circus is still relevant'. This is confirmed by several statements in the attached eight interviews, in which prominent musicians reveal from the inside the living picture in this field with interesting valuable information about personalities, ensembles, types of instruments, repertoire, performances in Bulgaria and abroad.

The book "**Music in at the Bulgarian Circus**" is a valuable contribution to our contemporary musicological literature as the first comprehensive and multifaceted study of a sphere with a significant place in the history of Bulgarian cultural and social life. To its high qualities as an academic work, I would emphasize the approach to the individual topics (from theoretical justification, through historical perspective and world practice to the concreteness of the manifestations in the Bulgarian context), the concise clear exposition with scientifically sound language, the broad reliance on Bulgarian and foreign musicological literature. My good impressions of this work are complemented by the other submitted publications with which the candidate participated in the current competition.

All this allows me to confidently support the candidature of the Assistant Professor Dr. Mihail Lukanov before the Scholarly Council of the Institute of Art Studies for his election to the academic position of Associate Professor.

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Prof. Dr. Anda Palieva