

OPINION

From Assoc. Prof. Dr Angel Angelov Zaberski (NBU)

Prof. direction 8.3, Music and Dance Art

On the competition for acquiring the academic position *Associate Professor* in Music Studies and Music Art (history of popular music), higher education field 8 Arts, professional direction 8.3 *Music and Dance Art*, one, for the needs of the *Music Department, Research Group Music Culture and Information*, published in State Gazette issue 65/12.08.2022

With candidate Senior Assistant Dr Mihail Todorov Lukanov

As is evident from the attached CV and related documents, the applicant, Mihail Todorov Lukanov, has been working as a Senior Assistant in the Music Department of the Institute of Art Studies since 2013. This is a period in which he established his interest in the field of popular music. After the successful defense of his dissertation in 2012, he is obviously continuing the work of his supervisor Prof. DSc. Claire Levy, focusing primarily on the history of Bulgarian popular music. At the same time, I cannot fail to mention that the candidate is highly qualified as an English teacher. He graduated with a second master's degree at St. Kliment Ohridski University, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology with a qualification "English teacher in secondary schools". He is an editor and translator at the academic journal of the Institute of Art Studies *Bulgarian Musicology*. All this is undoubtedly a great plus for his research. I will add one more thing that is important and relevant to his research work related to the musical material he examines: Mihail Lukanov completed his secondary musical education with double bass and his higher education at the Academy of Music with a major in composition. He is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Composers.

I will begin my commentary on the specific indicators by concluding that the candidate meets the minimum science metric requirements in each group. His participation in the competition is convincing.

1. His defended dissertation (group "A") is entitled *Convention and innovation in Bulgarian rock music: on the experience of Formation Studio Balkanton* (diploma dated 13.06.2012).
2. His habilitation thesis, a published monograph, is on *Music at the Bulgarian Circuses: Historical and Theoretical Aspects*. De Artibus Monographiae № II, Institute of Art Studies, BAS, 2020 (group "B").
3. His activity in group "Г" is very impressive. He has published a monograph that is not presented as a major habilitation work - "Miljo Bassan - Life and Art" (Institute

of Art Studies, BAS, 2017). His dissertation thesis has been published; 5 articles and reports in specialized publications in the field of arts have been presented, these are:

- Lukanov, M. Notes to the songs of Milo Bassan. – In: Bulgarian Musicology, 1/2014, p. 57-67

- Lukanov, M. The gramophone records in the archive of the Institute of Art Studies, circulated before 1960: an attempt at systematization. - In: Bulgarian Musicology, Special Issue of Art Studies Quarterly, Archives and the Internet: history and perspectives, Special Issue, 2021, pp. 87-94.

- Lukanov, M. On authorship in popular music through the eyes of Will Stroh - In: Medialog, 10/2021.

- Lukanov, M. Musical creativity through the eyes of Jason Toynebee - In: Medialog, 2/2017.

- Lukanov, M. Virtuosity and the Circus Arena. - In: Art Studies Readings (Motifs, Models, Sketches) Thematic Peer-Reviewed Yearbook of Art Studies in Two Volumes, 2020, I-II, Institute of Art Studies at BAS, 2019, pp. 409-415.

His works have been cited (10 citations are listed, including reviews of his books (*group "Д"*)).

4. In group "*E*" the candidate has included participation in two projects, and three awards of his choral works.

5. In the enclosed "Contributions" Mihail Lukanov has grouped the publications into four thematic groups: 1) Music in the Bulgarian circus (from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1980s), 2) History of popular music in Bulgaria in the first half of the 20th century, 3) FSB and progressive rock in Bulgaria, 4) Individual music-theoretical and aesthetic aspects of popular culture.

I have read the publications and I can confidently say that they are in-depth studies, beneficial for the author himself and for Bulgarian musicology, they are also very useful for specialized music education. In addition to being a performer and composer, I am a lecturer at NBU, and I highly appreciate this aspect of my colleague's works. The knowledge of our cultural and specifically musical history, the analysis of the individual works illustrate and reveal the path that popular music in our country has followed over the decades, taking in foreign influences and at the same time following its own patterns, related to the general musical and overall cultural development, to the performances of individual musicians, to the interest of the audience, etc.

His habilitation thesis - "Music at the Bulgarian Circus", is an endlessly curious and very important topic for our popular music and our musical culture in general. I would like to stress that the musical samples are treated very professionally. Very valuable are the 8 interviews with participants in events, famous musicians of our country: Gencho Vartovski, Deyan Timnev, Dimitar Stoikov, Dimitar Simeonov, Liana Antonova, Ljubomir Odzhakov, Nedko Troshanov, Stefan Slavov. The third chapter, devoted to orchestras and conductors, is particularly interesting and central

for me, as it contains a lot of historical data as well as important conclusions. A special section is devoted to jazz in the Bulgarian circus. Very important is the observation that "after the 1930s and especially the 1940s, big band formations consisting of saxophone, trumpet, trombone and rhythm section (i.e., piano, double bass and percussion) increasingly influenced circus orchestras in the West. This was reflected in performance practice in Bulgaria a little later. Similar ensembles appeared in Bulgarian circuses in the 1950s and several factors contributed to this. In the early 1950s, jazz was declared a decadent music, which placed it outside most legitimate forms of music mediation... At this point Gencho Tyulyumbakov, director of the Circus "Republika", played a pivotal role in providing an alternative "stage" for Bulgarian jazz formations" (p. 63). Mikhail Lukanov refers to existing sources and interviews and draws his conclusions. Musicians associated with jazz find in the circus a means of professional realization. And another quote, "It was a very wise decision by Sakellarov. The Bulgarian circus could go out and travel anywhere. They also travelled to the West. And then the "Optimists" became a circus orchestra" (p. 64). Of course, all the topics/chapters are very interesting. They are very accurately summarized in the Conclusion of the book in terms of the genre of circus-related practices, as well as its functions, including as an alternative stage for several Bulgarian singers (e.g., Liana Antonova, Snezhka Dobрева, Lea Ivanova, etc.) and as a forum and a kind of "niche" for the realization of Bulgarian jazz in the mid-1950s and subsequent years (pp. 125-126).

The history of popular music in Bulgaria in the first half of the twentieth century, examined through the lives and works of central figures of Bulgarian popular music, such as Milyo Bassan and Assen Ovcharov, are contributory historical studies, but they are also valuable for their theoretical analyses of schlager and the entry of jazz - "the distinction of the "young" Bulgarian jazz in the then schlager-dominated intonational environment, as well as the "thorny" moments in its development under the "socialist management of culture" from the early to mid-1950s". Along with examining Milyo Bassan, violinist, arranger and bandleader, and his contribution to the development of the schlager, Mihail Lukanov discusses the work of Joseph Tsankov, Stoyan Milenkov, Jakob Goldstein (Jib), Albert Pinkus and other pioneers in the same creative field.

The third group is related to research on the FSB formation and progressive rock in Bulgaria, seen as an alternative type of youth culture that entered the scene in the early 1950s, very active since the 1970s. Certain similarities with British rock music are sought.

The fourth group includes two texts which are devoted to music-theoretical and aesthetic aspects of popular culture. They represent Mihail Lukanov's interest in ideas and views with a theoretical and philosophical-aesthetic orientation, commenting on notions such as 'author', 'authorship', 'creativity', and 'intertextuality' in terms of the postmodern deconstruction of cultural artefacts. A personal interpretation of the concepts in question is also offered through concrete examples and analyses.

The activity of the candidate Senior Assistant Dr. Mihail Lukanov is convincing in all groups with the required scientific-metric indicators in the field of arts, research area: 8.3 *Music and Dance Art*. His texts contribute to music historical and music theoretical research in the field of popular music in Bulgaria. I confidently support the decision of the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to nominate Sen. Asst. Dr Mihail Todorov Lukanov to be proposed for voting in the Scholarly Council for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 8.3. *Music and Dance Art (History of Popular Music)*.

Sofia, 5 January 2023

Assoc. Prof. Dr Angel Zaberski