

OPINION

By Dr Miglena Tzenova, Associate Professor at the Institute of Art Studies,
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

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: **Senior Ass. Dr. MIHAIL LUKANOV**

Asst. Professor Dr. Mihail Lukanov offers for evaluation in the competition for associate professor his habilitation work - the published author's monograph "Music at the Bulgarian Circus. Historical and Theoretical Aspects" (published by the Institute of Art Studies, 2020, ISBN:978-954-8594-80-6), as well as six (6) published scientific articles (three of which - in refereed journals). During his work as an assistant professor at the Institute of Art Studies (IAS), BAS (2013 - 2022), Mihail Lukanov published two additional monographs: "Miljo Bassan – Life and Art" , a monograph that has not been presented as the main habilitation work; publication of the IAS, BAS, 2017, ISBN:978-954-8594-64-6) and "Conventions and Innovations in Bulgarian Rock Music: the Experience of FSB" (based on the defended in 2012 dissertation for acquiring a PhD, also a publication of the IAS, 2018, ISBN:978-954-8594-74-5). The attached list of ten (10) citations found so far in scientific publications (some of them in refereed journals), attest to the authority of the Asst. Prof. Dr. Lukanov in the scientific community and the value of his research work.

Here I could add that the research of Dr Lukanov is also cited in unpublished scientific works and projects (for example: Tsenova, M. Perception of Japanese traditional theatre performances in Bulgaria, 2020, pp. 92, 93, 102, 103, 112, 113, 114, 370), which could also serve as a confirmation of the already made conclusion about the value of the research of Dr Lukanov's research, as well as its points of contact or intersection with other research fields. Along with the publications and citations, Dr. Lukanov participates in national and international scientific and applied research projects, presents papers at scientific forums, and has received awards for his creative works. From the attached documents and materials, it is evident that Dr. Lukanov meets the requirements of Art. 53 and Art. 54 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS.

The habilitation thesis "Music at the Bulgarian Circus. Historical and Theoretical Aspects" is devoted to a topic that has not been developed as a monographic study in Bulgarian musicology. According to Dr. Lukanov, the aim of the study is "to highlight the general picture of musical performances of the circus "scene" in Bulgaria in terms of history, key figures, and ensembles and to seek general conclusions about their place in Bulgarian culture" (p. 12). The object of the study (again according to the author) is "the music of the Bulgarian circus arena as specifics and functions" (p. 12). Dr Lukanov examines "the period from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 1980s" (p. 12). The preferred by Ass. Prof. Dr Lukanov's approach is to trace a certain problem "theoretically and conceptually with a look at circus practices abroad, and then locate it in the Bulgarian context, as far as possible and appropriate, in chronological sequence" (p. 13). Important sources for the realization of the proposed habilitation thesis are the book *The Circus Through the Ages* by Yordan Demirev (Sofia: Otechestvo Publishing House, 1988) and the manuscript *The Beginning and Development of Popular Music (Entertainment and Dance) in Bulgaria. Creativity and Performance* by Miljo Bassan (1973, NA - BAS, vol. XIX, op. 1, a. f. 4 - 12). Along with the two sources cited and the literature used from recently published print and online sources in Bulgarian, English and German, described at the end of the text (pp. 192 - 199), particularly valuable for the research are the interviews initiated by the author with musicians who contributed to the development and promotion of Bulgarian circus art. Part of the interviews with musicians have been used to restore or clarify events and interpretations, presented in the text. Some of the interviews used in the study have been offered in separate appendices to the study (pp. 129-190). For me personally, these interviews with participants in the processes conceptualized in the study are among the most striking contributions of the proposed research.

The structure of the thesis consists of a main text - introduction, seven chapters, conclusion and "Instead of an afterword" (in a volume of 128 pp.), two appendices (pp. 129 - 190) and references (pp. 191 - 199). The text is illustrated with illustrative material, the illustrations being appended in the text itself (not separated as appendices). The introduction, entitled "Why the Circus" (pp. 11 - 14), offers an account on the subject matter, the aims, the objectives of the study and the approaches to their implementation. Chapter One, entitled "The Circus and Music" (pp. 15 - 32), is devoted to outlining the place of music in circus performances (past and present). Musical examples are analyzed (polkas, marches, gallops; excerpts from operas and operettas, jazz standards, etc.); musical examples evoking vivid associations with circus art, which have proved to be particularly suitable for performance during circus shows (such as Julius Fucik's March of the Gladiators, Isaac Dunayevsky's March of the Soviet Circus, and others) are also analyzed. Musical instruments accompanying circus performances around the world and in Bulgaria are discussed, including the calliope, lantern, etc. There is also a survey of various performers of music under the circus dome, including soloists, chamber ensembles, military brass bands, "big band-type orchestras" (p. 29), and others. In Chapter Two, entitled "Some Bulgarian Circuses" (pp. 33-58), probably because of

the desire to follow the chronology of the origin, development, and establishment of circus art in Bulgaria, as well as the reasons for its origin, the author begins his exposition with events preceding the founding of the first circus in Bulgaria, tracing the first tours of troupes from Asia and Europe to Bulgaria (pp. 34-35). In his account of the first Bulgarian circus, the Bulgarian Flag, founded in 1897, the author of the monograph emphasizes the presence of musicians in its composition - 'a brass quartet consisting of clarinet, flugelhorn, trombone and drums' (p. 36)¹. In the same chapter of the habilitation paper the dynamics of the initiation and establishment of the art of the circus in Bulgaria is studied and the research interest in the examination of these processes is directed at the music they used. At the end of the chapter, a conditional periodization is proposed, according to Yordan Demirev, according to which the development of the Bulgarian circus is divided into four periods (p. 58)². Chapter three: "Orchestras and conductors" (p. 59 - 72), is dedicated to the orchestras and conductors in the Bulgarian circus, to the repertoire, orchestrations and arrangements for the music performed in the Bulgarian circus. The activity of Bozhidar Sakelarov, Stefan Kovanov and Georgi Bakardjiev is meaningful. The contribution of Boris Karadimchev as a musicologist and author of arrangements in the first Bulgarian circus, known as the "Old Winter Circus", which existed in the period 1957 - 1963, is also outlined (pp. 58 - 60). The fourth chapter: "Tours Abroad" (p. 73 - 86), is dedicated to the tours of Bulgarian circus formations (and some foreign circus formations with the participation of Bulgarian musicians) in Romania, Poland, Hungary, and Israel, with the research interest again is to the contribution of the musicians in the successful implementation of these tours. The specific tours were selected due to the participation of many musicians in them. In Chapter Four, as well as in some of the interviews in the appendices, evidence is provided that specific musicians have elicited positive media coverage when touring abroad. The contribution of the Olympia Trio is also highlighted, as well as that of Bulgarian singers on these tours - Liana Antonova, Leia Ivanova, and others. Chapter Five, entitled "The Musical Clown" (pp. 87-102), highlights the contributions of Kosta Kertikov, Cesar Imbrosh, Todor Kozarov and Hristo Yanakiev, the "Bufosynchronists", the "Harizanovs" and others. The sixth chapter, called "The Coupletists" (pp. 103-112), reflects on the activities of Stoyan Milenkov, Jakob Goldstein (Jib), Assen Bogdanov and others. Chapter Seven, "Virtuosity and the Circus" (pp. 113 - 124), relates virtuosity to changing musical understandings of virtuosity in music across the centuries. The conclusion (pp. 125 - 126) draws out the main theses of the overall study. After the conclusion, in a structural unit entitled

¹ The text points out that the presence of musicians in the various Bulgarian circuses and circus performances is invariable, pointing out that the term "orchestra" used to refer to the musicians involved in the performance of circus shows, is found in connection with the Corona Circus, founded in the late 1930s, under which the rights and duties of musicians were specified - they were required to be 'highly qualified' and 'for each new program' a 'new overture arrangement must be made' (p. 44, quoted in Demirev, J. op. cit, c. 279).

²(At the beginning of the 60s, Boris Karadimchev made a selection of works and excerpts suitable for circus performances, for several years he orchestrated and arranged works for their performance during circus performances, and thus he contributed to the formation of a repertoire for certain circus acts, and as a result of his work, the circus artists themselves began to have individual part for the musicians of the orchestra - for each of their individual acts.)

"Instead of an Afterword" (pp. 126-128), the author draws attention to pressing issues related to circus art that inevitably affect the musical aspects of this art.

In conclusion, the habilitation thesis is contributory, readable, and engaging. The identified aims and objectives are addressed in a multifaceted way. The phenomena and processes under consideration are placed in a European and global context, while what is typical for the Bulgarian cultural context is highlighted. Again, I would like to emphasize the interviews with musicians who contributed to the establishment of circus art in Bulgaria - from the perspective of the aspiration to preserve the cultural and historical heritage.

Based on the habilitation thesis, the other materials and documents submitted for the competition for Associate Professor of Musicology and Musical Art, as well as on my impressions of the candidate's academic activity, I confidently propose to the members of the esteemed Scientific jury and the Scholarly Council of the Institute Art Studies, BAS, to elect Ass. Prof. Dr. Mihail Lukanov for the academic position of Associate Professor.

8 January 2023, Sofia

Dr Miglena Tsenova,
Associate Professor at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS