

REVIEW

From Prof. Elisaveta Borisova Valchiova-Chendova

(Institute of Art Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art

on the dissertation of

VLADIMIR VASILEV VLAEV

On the subject

**EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES IN THE FIELD OF ELECTROACOUSTIC
COMPOSITION BY COMPOSERS FROM BULGARIA (ANDRÉ
BOUCOURECHLIEV, VLADIMIR DJAMBAZOV, BOZHIDAR SPASOV,
MICHAIL GOLEMINOV, MARIA PANAYOTOVA)**

For acquiring a PhD in professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art, academic specialty
Musicology and Musical Art

Academic advisor Prof. Dr. Angelina Petrova

BRIEF PROFILE OF THE DISSERTANT

Vladimir Vasilev Vlaev (b. 1980) is a distinguished composer, guitarist, and researcher. He graduated with a degree in composition under Prof. Dimitar Tapkov in 2009. Concurrently, he earned a master's degree in "Music Editor in Media" in 2006. He completed a one-year course (2015–2016) and a master's program in the Netherlands at the Institute of Sonology at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague (2016–2018). He is a full-time doctoral student at the Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2022–2025).

Vlaev is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Composers. He has received awards as both a performer and a composer. I will mention only those from recent years (*Computer Space*—International Forum for Digital Arts 2023, the Crystal Lyre Award from the Bulgarian Music and Dance Artists Union in the "Sound Design" category for the performance of *Pervade the Space* at the *Sofia Underground – International Performance Art Festival* 2024), as well as his appearances at the International Composers' Tribune in Budapest (2018) and Ljubljana (2025), and his presentation of the multichannel spatial sound performance *Pervade the Space* at the *Seoul International Computer Music Festival* in Seoul, South Korea (2023).

As Vlaev summarizes his work, he is a composer and sound designer, as well as a lecturer—giving lectures, presentations, and workshops on the theoretical and practical aspects of electronic and *experimental music* at the National Academy of Music “Prof. Pancho Vladigerov,” the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev” in Plovdiv, New Bulgarian University, Resonator Co-Innovation Hub in Sofia.

I have personal impressions of his compositions; some of them are available online on his website¹.

Evaluation of the Dissertation

The choice of the dissertation topic is linked to the doctoral candidate’s professional interests and experience. As Vladimir Vlaev emphasizes at the outset, the topic of this dissertation is closely linked to his long-standing creative explorations, now theoretically grounded in the field of experimental approaches to composition and performance, with an emphasis on the Bulgarian contribution to electroacoustic music. This also defines the main object of the study, centered on the phenomenon of *experimental music*, while the specific subject of the dissertation is the particular compositional approaches and models associated with it and applied by the Bulgarian composers under consideration in the analyzed works. In the context of the concept of *experimental music*, which, as the author notes, encompasses a broad stylistic spectrum, the five specific objectives of the study are clearly defined (Dissertation, p. 11). The first of these—to summarize “the semantic scope of the concept of *experimental music*, its origin, variants, path of development, and contemporary significance” (p. 11)—is an exceptionally difficult task due to the term’s comprehensiveness and its vague parameters, which also include phenomena outside the realm of electronic music. I will quote the conclusion from the online version of the entry on *musique expérimentale* in the “Dictionnaire Larousse de français”: *listing the various types of experimental music would require a comprehensive review of all current research. Therefore, we must refrain from seeking an overly precise definition of this term, which reflects the current difficulty (...) of encompassing the diversity of contemporary musical movements with clear and distinctive labels*². Vlaev adopts the historical approach as a research strategy, identifying as key the parameters of the concept derived from the first three works (from the 1950s) devoted to *experimental music*, thereby narrowing and specifying the stylistic spectrum of the concept as it relates to electronic music with specific characteristics (**Chapter One,**

¹ home – Vladimir vlaev

² *musique expérimentale*,
https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/musdico/musique_exp%C3%A9rimentale/167525?fbclid=IwY2xjawUnCK5leHRuA2FlbQIxmABwZG9mBWJyaWQRMW03QXZjV3Y3NmJqbVhoemJzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEefIOVgO3BIYKwABLRfyEo96ObEHxqe8QMXd5mt9arelZ866w_BISGRFVZSxY_aem_vVuMnKGQpHRDsgAK9Zx-Vg

Section 5). This enables him to trace these characteristics in the works of the composers included in the study, analyzing their compositions to confirm whether or not the sought-after experimental composition approaches were applied. The next four tasks he set for himself reveal the complex stylistic spectrum introduced by the author in connection with the concept of *experimental music*.

The dissertation is 361 pages long and consists of an Introduction, six chapters, a Conclusion, and six appendices (brief biographies and updated catalogs of works by Andre Bukureshtliev, Vladimir Dzhambazov, Mihail Goleminov, and Maria Panayotova; an attached timeline and a link to audio files of the analyzed compositions and Maria Panayotova's score). The bibliography includes 46 titles in Cyrillic, 101 titles in Latin script, and 108 web pages. The book also features interviews with the authors Vladimir Dzhambazov, Maria Panayotova, and Angela Tosheva.

The Introduction explains Vlaev's rationale for his particular research interest in the composers Andre Boucoureshliev (1925–1997), Mikhail Goleminov (1956–2022), Bozhidar Spasov (1949), Vladimir Dzhambazov (1954), and Maria Panayotova (1976) from the perspective of the hypothesis regarding the correspondence of their works with the original sources and the development of experimental music, the possibility of original research on the creative work of these composers as part of musical developments from the 1950s to the present day.

The titles of the chapters and their subsections clearly highlight the text's main focus. The first chapter, "On the Concept of Experimental Music," is historical and theoretical (pp. 15–93). It is organized into seven sections that logically follow the stylistic framework introduced by Vlaev for the concept and the phenomena associated with it. Of central importance to the author are three texts published in the second half of the 1950s related to *experimental music*: in 1957 in Paris—"Toward Experimental Music" (Vers une musique expérimentale) by Pierre Schaeffer and *Experimental Music* by John Cage; and in 1959, *Experimental Music: Composing with an Electronic Computer* by Lejaren Hiller and Leonard Isaacson. The compositional and aesthetic characteristics of each of these musical phenomena are presented from the perspective of the concept of *experimental music*. Vlaev views them as a complex phenomenon in terms of the *creative use of technology in the compositional process and performance, the expansion and redefinition of the roles of composer, performer, and audience*, emphasizing that two of the three phenomena (those of Cage and Schaeffer) also assert their *opposition to the aesthetic principles of serialism*; other characteristics pertaining to one of the three phenomena—*such as the use of chance operations, the application of indeterminacy, and the allowance of unintended sounds in performance* (Cage) do not find a counterpart in the other phenomena, and at a later stage (in the early 1960s), other important characteristics also emerge, including the *blurring of the boundaries between music and other art forms* (Abstract, p. 8).

Central to the Bulgarian composers discussed in the following chapters is **the fifth section of Chapter One**, where the operational framework of the concept of *experimental music* is synthesized and clearly formulated, defining the identification and interpretation of compositional approaches that point to the existence of an experimental aesthetic stance in Bulgaria. The scope is defined by Cage's indeterminacy and silence (with their later incarnations—*live electronics*, *free improvisation*, *musical graphics*, and *ambient music*) and the *empirical nature of Sch  fer's studio practice* (and its later development into *acousmatic music*); within this scope lie characteristics that are more or less evident in the compositions analyzed in the following chapters: *the significance of technology; redefining the traditionally established relationships between composer, performer, and audience; allowing for unintended sounds in performance; and blurring the boundaries between music and other arts* (Dissertation, pp. 64–68). The focus then narrows to experimental manifestations within the specific context of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe during the second half of the 20th century, electroacoustic production studios as experimental venues, avant-garde music festivals, and the role of contemporary/avant-garde music festivals that emerged in the Eastern Bloc, emphasizing the importance of these forums for the introduction of new ideas behind the Iron Curtain. The final, **seventh section of Chapter One**—“Bulgaria and the Manifestations of the Experimental”—is devoted to the spread of “experimentation with new ideas” in Bulgaria, much like in other Eastern European countries, as a technological and cultural movement centered around the Electronic Music Studio at the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR)—founded in 1974 by Simo Lazarov—and the concert initiatives that began in the early 1980s and became very active after 1989. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of the Experimental Studio for Contemporary Music, as well as on the festivals for electroacoustic music and the “Musica Nova” festival. In summary, the first chapter represents a serious attempt to examine the phenomenon of *experimental music* within the framework of the research strategy introduced by Vlaev. The text is also highly informative and explores various analytical dimensions within the field of Musica Nova and its experimental nature—in terms of its creation, the technologies employed, and its process—which challenge conventional notions of the composer–performer–audience relationship.

The next five chapters of the dissertation are devoted to individual creative work, featuring analyses of specific works by the composers examined in the study, based on the methodological framework outlined in the Introduction and Chapter One; the approach moves from a general characterization to specific analyses. Each of these chapters makes a significant contribution through its analytical focus.

The most extensive is **Chapter Two**, devoted to Andr   Boucoureshliev — “*Musique exp  rimentale* and the open work in the Oeuvre of Andr   Boucoureshliev: *Texte I* (1958), *Texte II* (1959), *Archipel II* (1969)” (pp. 94–176). Drawing on serious studies of Boucoureshliev's work and contemporary music, Vlaev offers an original interpretation in his examination of the open form employed by the composer and the

unfolding of the sound material. His works are examined within the cultural context of their creation and premiere performance. The idea of a *mixture*, “*melange*,” or hybridization (Christian Rose) is also reflected in his approach to the “poetics of indeterminacy”—its dominance is balanced by the alternation of determinate and indeterminate episodes; he does not allow himself to completely lose control over the unfolding of the musical form in real time. Boucoureshliev explores the concept of music as a “system of differences” in a multifaceted way, from its micro- to its macro-level manifestations—from the characteristics of individual sound events to musical form (p. 98).

In **Chapter Three**—Michail Goleminov and the manifestations of the experimental in his *Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos* (2002), *Contemplation* (2017), and *Sound Conflict* (2021) (pp. 177–232), the approaches to indeterminacy and the interaction with the indeterminism of Cage, Feldman, and Brown, which subsequently finds expression in the organization of musical time and sound material in his compositional work, leading to the complete liberation of compositional means and sound parameters from the composer’s control and their entrustment to the performer’s choice.

In the analysis of Vladimir Dzhambazov’s electroacoustic music—*Dialogue* (1981), *No Contact III* (1989), *The Secret Life of a Beer Can* (2001) (**Chapter Five**, pp. 240–286), the author examines the shift in the selection of raw source material in the creation of electroacoustic compositions, his approach to the use of noise as sound material, the conception of musical composition as a narrative, and the association of sound with “... a character that evolves over time” (Vladimir Dzhambazov).

In **Chapter Six**—“Beauty in Simplicity”—the music of Maria Panayotova: *Transience* (2000), *Sun Water Sky Moon* (2001), *In the Forest* (2006) (pp. 287–321), it is emphasized that a number of characteristics in her work can be interpreted as manifestations of a compositional approach stemming from American experimental music, and more specifically *from that strand of it that emerged from the silence of Cage’s “4’33.”* Indeterminacy manifests itself primarily in the organization of time and the use of *static soundscapes* in sound design.

Whereas in the works of Boucoureshliev, Dzhambazov, and Panayiota, certain traits are traced as manifestations of the introduced context of *experimental music*, the analyses of Bozhidar Spasov’s music in **Chapter Four**—“In Search of an Experimental Aesthetic Position in the Work of Bozhidar Spasov: *Asylphonia* (1995), *Fiato Continuo* (1998–2004), *Antigrav* (2007),” argue *against the confirmation* of Vlaev’s hypothesis regarding the presence of an experimental aesthetic stance in his work. The reflection on “Eastern and Western European traditions” (Maria Kostakova) reveals an intention to connect with tradition, but, as Vlaev emphasizes, *experimenting with unusual combinations of traditional musical instruments in search of “new sound textures” does not fit within the scope of the stated (...) operational framework, defined by the indeterminacy of performance and the*

empiricism of studio practice. This reflection by Spasov points in the opposite direction of the experiment: the very essence of experimental music lies, first and foremost, in the rejection of traditions (p. 234).

The **Conclusion** summarizes the results of the examination of the experimental approaches among the composers under consideration, outlining the research perspectives embedded in the analyses.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

I fully agree with the stated contributions of the dissertation, which relate to the attempt to systematically present the manifestations of *experimental music* in the works of Bulgarian composers. The approach of applying analyses to works by Bulgarian composers—analyses that follow and enrich the methodological analytical frameworks—is appropriate: for the analysis of an electroacoustic composition by Marie Simoni; for the analysis of musical graphics based on texts by Nicholas Cook, Virginia Anderson, and Brian Inglis; and for the analysis of John Cage’s indeterminacy. A differentiated approach to the various manifestations of *indeterminacy* is justified, and for the purposes of the analysis, the operational concepts of *relative indeterminacy*, *complementary indeterminacy*, and *total indeterminacy* are introduced. The presentation of the composers and the analysis of their work are situated within a cultural-historical context and within the context of the authors’ overall body of work and aesthetic positions.

As Vlaev emphasizes in the Conclusion, the dissertation does not claim to provide an exhaustive treatment of the topic of experimental trends in Bulgarian music, but it can serve as a foundation for future research on the subject.

The abstract provides a substantive overview of the dissertation.

Between 2023 and 2026, Vladimir Vlaev **published six articles in specialized journals**. Three of these were published in the journal *Bulgarian Musicology* and are devoted to the manifestos of experimental music from the 1950s in Europe and the United States, as well as to Boucoureshliev and Michail Goleminov. The other three—on Vladimir Dzhambazov and the development of experimental instruments—appeared in the scientific journal “FEMA Acoustics”.

CONCLUSION

I congratulate my colleague Vladimir Vlaev. I recommend that his work be published as a monographic study. I hope that his scholarly interests will continue, extending to

other experimental phenomena in the field of Musica Nova. This would be of great value to the Institute's research strategy in the Music Department.

Given the importance and relevance of the topic, the professional approach to it, and the contributions made toward achieving the set tasks and goals, I strongly recommend **that Vladimir Vasilev Vlaev be awarded the degree of “Doctor” for his dissertation EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES IN THE FIELD OF ELECTROACOUSTIC COMPOSITION BY COMPOSERS FROM BULGARIA (ANDRÉ BOUCOURECHLIEV, VLADIMIR DJAMBAZOV, BOZHIDAR SPASOV, MICHAIL GOLEMINOV, MARIA PANAYOTOVA) be awarded the academic and scientific degree of “Doctor,” prof. direction 8.3. Music and Dance Arts.**

Sofia, September 29, 2026 *Prof. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, DSc*