

OPINON

From

Assoc. Prof. Rositsa Dimitrova Becheva PhD

New Bulgarian University

on the dissertation

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

for acquiring the educational degree of doctor

to

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Ph.D. candidate at the INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS, academic supervisor
Prof. Angelina Petrova PhD

For acquiring a PhD in professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art, academic
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Biographical Information

Education and Training: 2000–2005 – Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts, Plovdiv; Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Music Education; 2005–2006 – Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts, Plovdiv; Master of Arts (MA) in Music Editing for Media; 2005–2009 – Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts, Plovdiv; Master of Arts (MA) in Composition; 2015–2016 – Institute of Sonology, Royal Conservatory, The Hague, NL, One-Year Course; 2016–2018 – Institute of Sonology, Royal Conservatory, The Hague, NL, Master of Music (MMus); 2022–2025 – Institute for Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)—public defense pending.

Professional and Creative Activities: The professional and creative activities of Vladimir Vlavev—composer, sonologist, researcher, lecturer, music educator, sound designer, music producer, and performer—is linked to his participation in numerous musical events in Bulgaria and abroad, his appearances at a number of festivals for computer and electroacoustic music around the world, and his participation in scientific forums, including the National Scientific Conference “Acoustics—FEMA”

(2023, 2024, 2025)—as part of the International Forum-Festival “The Universe of Computer Music—Sofia,” NIME 2024 – New Interfaces for Musical Expression. Utrecht, Netherlands, September 4–6, 2024 The 2024 edition is organized by three institutions: Sounds Like Touch, Gaudeamus, and HKU (Utrecht University of the Arts). “HexApp—a Multichannel Hybrid Instrument for Experimental Performance Practice,” project organization and preparation by the Ministry of Culture.

Contents of the Dissertation

The dissertation is 361 pages long and is structured as follows: Introduction, Six Chapters, Conclusion, Bibliography and Sources (Bibliography—101 sources in Latin script, 46 in Cyrillic script, 108 online sources, interviews), Contributions of the Dissertation, and six appendices.

The research addresses a timely topic. By combining a scientific research perspective with practical knowledge of the issue, the doctoral candidate outlines the main objective and tasks of the study.

Regarding the relevance of the dissertation research, the doctoral candidate explains that, based on the presented analysis of the state of the problem and the review of the existing literature, it is clear that the subject matter of the dissertation is an under-researched area in Bulgaria: “Approaches to composition and performance that involve experimentation point to the field in which this dissertation is situated—that of the complex stylistic spectrum underlying the concept of *experimental music*.” Both the concept itself and the phenomenon have yet to be sufficiently explored in Bulgarian musicology. This circumstance, in turn, opens up a field for research and leads me to the main **objective** of this study—to expand our understanding of the creative work and aesthetic positions of the composers under consideration by analyzing their compositional approaches, interpreting them specifically in the context of manifestations of experimental music.” (cited by the author, p. 4).

The Introduction presents the essential characteristics of the concept of “experimental music,” clarifies the objectives, object, and subject of the study, the methods and literature used, and specifies the time frame.

Object of the study— “the main object of the study revolves around the phenomenon of *experimental music*.”

Subject of the study— “the specific compositional approaches and models associated with it and applied by the Bulgarian composers under consideration in the analyzed works.”

Research Objectives:

- to summarize the semantic scope of the concept of experimental music, its origins, variations, historical development, and contemporary significance;

- to interpret the experimental elements in the works of the composers included in the study;
- to analyze works representative of the application of experimental compositional approaches;
- to interpret the compositional approaches used in the analyzed works;
- to highlight the contributions of the studied composers to the complex stylistic spectrum of experimental music.

The author of the study explains: “The selection of the composers examined in this study led to the next decision—to choose for analysis works that cover a broad spectrum of techniques and thus demonstrate most convincingly the compositional techniques associated with experimental music. The number of works analyzed is determined, on the one hand, by the need for a certain degree of representativeness, and on the other, by the possibility of completing the study within the allotted time. The subjects of analysis in this dissertation are “electroacoustic works for fixed and mixed media; instrumental compositions characterized by indeterminacy (a key feature of experimental music according to Cage); and instances of the use of musical graphics or the creation of audiovisual installations.” (cited by the author, p. 5)

The theoretical framework of the study is based on a critical review of the scholarly literature on the subject. The thesis traces and compares the theoretical positions of a number of researchers regarding the phenomenon of “experimental music.” The doctoral candidate emphasizes that “The main sources in this area include the theoretical works of Curtis Rhodes and Marie Simoni, which are applicable to the analysis of electroacoustic composition; the method for analyzing indeterminacy used by Cage; and the methodological framework for analyzing musical graphics proposed by Virginia Anderson and Brian Inglis. The insights drawn from the analyses of specific works, as presented in texts by Jean Ducharm, Anda Palieva, and Erica Locke, are applied here, contributing to a detailed examination of the analyzed works.” (cited by the author, p. 5)

For the purposes of the specific context of this study, and in order to define the term *experimental music* as a working concept, the author of this dissertation draws attention to the global scholarly literature on the subject, citing significant works in the field by authors such as: John Cage (*Cage*, John. “Experimental Music: Doctrine.” – In: *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. London, 1961), Pierre Schaeffer (*Schaeffer*, Pierre. “Vers une musique expérimentale.” — In: *De la musique concrète à la musique mémo*, La revue musicale, 1977), and Lejaren Hiller (*Hiller*, Lejaren, Leonard Isaacson. *Experimental Music, Composition with an Electronic Computer*. New York, 1959), who, in their published texts, use the term *experimental music* in connection with their ideas about musical composition. The doctoral candidate explains: “Cage elaborates on his understanding of *experimental music* in a series of

articles, defining the experimental act as ‘an action whose result is unknown.’” Because it ensures the uncertainty of each new performance and thus transforms it into an experimental act, *indeterminacy* in the performance of the musical act is emphasized as a key quality of *experimental music*. “In his article ‘Toward Experimental Music’ (Vers une musique expérimentale), Schäfer uses the term *musique expérimentale* in an attempt to establish a common foundation for the practices of *musique concrète* and *elektronische Musik*—concepts formed at the level of sound material.” “In the texts listed, the authors identify their work with the concept of experimental music, and their ideas represent an original contribution to the development of music in the second half of the 20th century.” (cited in Diss., pp. 6–7)

In connection with contextualizing the scientific and theoretical framework of the dissertation research, the author of the study states: “In the works of the Bulgarian composers I examine in this dissertation, I will seek manifestations of compositional thinking that can reasonably be interpreted in the context of the musical phenomena of the 1950s listed above and their later developments. I will frame the subject of this dissertation around these phenomena.” “Most of the composers examined in this study, however, employ compositional techniques in a (representative) portion of their work that are related to the concept of experimental music.” Indefiniteness (applied in both the compositional process and the performance) is a prominent feature in the works of Boucoureshliev, Goleminov, and Panayiota, while the electroacoustic works by Boucoureshliev and Dzhambazov discussed here point toward the studio empiricism of *musique expérimentale*. A special case in this context is the work of Bozhidar Spasov, in which, in the process of clarifying the scope and characteristics of the concept of experimental music (outlined in Chapter One), it could be said that the hypothesis regarding the presence of an experimental aesthetic stance has, rather, not been confirmed.” (cited in Dissertation, pp. 7–8)

The doctoral candidate highlights iconic works by the aforementioned authors: the “Archipelagos” cycle and *Texte II* (1959) by André Boucoureshliev; Marin Goleminov’s *Subway* (2002), *Gladiator* (2008), *Parquet Deformation* (2012), and *Sonic Conflict* (2021); Vladimir Dzhambazov’s cycle of acousmatic compositions *The Secret Life of a French Horn* (1999), *... of a Violin* (2000), *... of a Beer Can* (2001), and *... of a Small Drum* (2005); *Transience* for orchestra, electroacoustic works, and audiovisual installations such as: *Titania*, *In the Forest*, *Study in Process*, *Water*, and *Continuous Cities* by Maria Panayotova; the cycle *Fiato continuo* by Bozhidar Spasov—analyzed and differentiated according to the context of the study.

In **CHAPTER ONE, “ON THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC,”** the focus, from a historical perspective, is on the semantic scope of the concept and phenomenon of *experimental music*. Manifestos of experimental music are presented: *Vers une musique expérimentale* (Pierre Schaeffer’s studio empiricism), *Experimental Music* (John Cage’s indeterminacy), and Lejaren Hiller’s algorithms in *Experimental Music: Composition with an Electronic Computer*. A comparative

analysis is conducted, and the characteristic features of experimental compositional approaches are identified. The paper examines musical practices influenced by the primary sources of experimental music in the United States and Western Europe during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s: Fluxus, Minimalism (or the scope of experimental music), British experimentalism, Musical Graphics, Free Improvisation, Live Electronics—as well as the significance of technology—Ambient and Environmental Music, Computer Music, and *Musique expérimentale – musique acousmatique*.

A key focus of this chapter is the sections that examine the operational scope of the concept of *experimental music* in the dissertation. Regarding the meaning of the concept of *experimental music*, the author of the study analyzes the works of authors such as Cecilia Sun, Frank Mauser, who discuss the semantic scope and the process of establishing the concept of *experimental music*, as well as Cage and his contribution to popularizing the concept, and the contemporary dimensions of the concepts articulated in the texts of Cage, Schaeffer, and Hiller from the late 1950s.

The comparative analysis of the essential characteristics of experimental music, as articulated in the writings of authors such as Schaeffer, Cage, and Hiller, can be traced in the sections devoted to these authors' scholarly works. "The dissertation proposes the hypothesis that, *although they are three distinct phenomena, experimental music shares certain common aesthetic positions.*"

The observations and analyses in this chapter also include experimental developments behind the Iron Curtain, the special case of Eastern Europe, existing practices, studios for electroacoustic production, and avant-garde music festivals.

A key focus of the first chapter is the texts that concentrate on the emergence and establishment of electroacoustic music in Bulgaria, the electronic music studio at Bulgarian National Radio and its activities, the "breakthrough" of electroacoustic music in the 1980s, international recognition for Bulgarian composers in the field of electroacoustic music, the activities of the experimental studio for contemporary music, and festivals for electroacoustic and computer music.

Contributive are chapters 2 through 6: CHAPTER 2 "MUSIQUE EXPÉRIMENTALE AND THE OPEN WORK IN THE CREATIVE WORK OF ANDRE BOUCOURESHLIEV. 'TEXTE I' (1958), 'TEXTE II' (1959), 'ARCHIPEL II' (1969), CHAPTER THREE "MANIFESTATIONS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL IN THE WORKS OF MIKHAIL GOLEMINOV. 'CONCERT IN C MINOR FOR TWO PIANOS' (2002), 'CONTEMPLATION' (2017), "SONIC CONFLICT" (2021), CHAPTER FOUR "IN SEARCH OF AN EXPERIMENTAL AESTHETIC POSITION IN THE WORKS OF BOZHIDAR SPASOV. ASYLPHONIA (1995), FIATO CONTINUO (1998–2004), ANTIGRAV (2007)," CHAPTER FIVE "THE ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC OF VLADIMIR DJAMBAZOV. "DIALOG" (1981), "NO CONTACT III" (1989), "THE SECRET

***LIFE OF A BEER CAN* (2001), CHAPTER SIX “BEAUTY IN SIMPLICITY”—THE MUSIC OF MARIA PANAYOTOVA. TRANSIENCE (2000), SUN WATER SKY MOON (2001), IN THE FOREST (2006),”** of the dissertation research, dedicated to the individual creative work and analyses of specific works by the composers examined in the study—based on the aforementioned methodological frameworks, which examine the experimental manifestations in their creative work and outline the aesthetic emphases and contours of their entire body of work.

The doctoral candidate explains that, for the purposes of the study, three works by each composer were selected: “In the following chapters, I will examine manifestations of compositional thinking that draw parallels with the phenomena discussed in Chapter One. These works—electroacoustic, instrumental, and mixed-media—reveal a broad spectrum of compositional approaches in which recognizable threads can be identified, linking them to the developments of the phenomena that emerged in the 1950s as experimental music. The time span of the analyzed body of work extends over more than five decades and allows for the delineation of a chronological trajectory of development: approaches to indeterminacy (from Boucoureshliev’s “Archipelagos” of the 1960s to Goleminov’s “Sonic Conflict” of 2021); and in studio practice shaped by technological development (from the analog Studio di Fonologia of the 1950s to the digital home studio of the early 21st century used by Dzhambazov and Panayiotis); in the attempt to convincingly interpret these works within the context of experimental music.” (cited from the dissertation, p. 94)

The **Conclusions and Recommendations** section summarizes the findings of the study, the recommendations, and the contributions. The doctoral candidate has made use of a sufficient number of information sources, which are cited correctly.

Assessment of the abstract’s consistency with the main provisions and contributions of the dissertation—The 30-page abstract conveys the nature of the doctoral dissertation.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation

The six publications presented are substantively related to the dissertation.

Contributions of the Dissertation

I accept the contributions to the work identified by the doctoral candidate.

This dissertation is an in-depth study with scientific-theoretical and applied contributions. By applying theoretical and practical methods of scientific research, comparative analysis, and the use of engineering tools in the analysis of electroacoustic composition, the doctoral candidate methodically investigates the results of his work. In terms of content, the systematic presentation of the dissertation text is impressive, as are the detailed analyses, which include the organization of the

tonal material, the compositional techniques and aesthetic decisions employed, the manifestations of indeterminacy, the creative use of technology, and the approach to notation—for each of the composers examined. The in-depth analysis attests to a thorough understanding of the subject matter.

In conclusion:

I give a positive evaluation of Vladimir Vlavec's dissertation: "EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES IN THE FIELD OF ELECTROACOUSTIC COMPOSITION BY COMPOSERS FROM BULGARIA (ANDRÉ BOUCOURECHLIEV, VLADIMIR DJAMBAZOV, BOZHIDAR SPASOV, MICHAIL GOLEMINOV, MARIA PANAYOTOVA)" in light of its contributions of both scientific and applied value. I consider that the doctoral candidate's dissertation fully meets the requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Arts, in accordance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, and I propose to the esteemed academic jury that it be awarded to him.

October 2, 2026, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Rositsa Becheva PhD