

# REVIEW

By Prof. DSc Rosemary Statelova

On the dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree of

*Doctor*

on the subject

**The Italian Musica Leggera and the Bulgarian Popular Song by the end of the  
1980 – Aspects of Influence**

By Dzana Videva Ivanova

I have been familiar with Dzana Ivanova's dissertation on the above-mentioned topic since the years of its initial conception and shaping - the doctoral student and her mentor Prof. Dr. Rositsa Draganova approached me as a musicologist who had worked for many years in the field of popular music. Even then the topic seemed to me interesting and important enough for Bulgarian musicology and music culture studies. As pointed out in the introduction, among the reasons for developing this problem in the first place was Ivanova's interest in Italian music and musical culture, and the fact that the topic of the influence of Italian *musica leggera* on Bulgarian pop music had not yet been studied independently and in depth. Another important argument is that the question of intercultural interactions is one of the main problems in contemporary humanities. The time of the Italian influence on Bulgarian popular music, called pop music at that time, is also particularly well chosen - the years between the 1950s and the late 1980s were the most important for popular music culture in the world and especially in Europe. We are aware of numerous studies from that time on the subject, but they are all mostly journalistic or partial in subject matter. The many years spent to develop the topic Ivanova used precisely to penetrate the essence of the problem as comprehensively as possible, almost totally, in my opinion culturally rather than in a musicological aspect.

The text of the dissertation consists of the already mentioned introduction, three chapters, a short conclusion, and a rather extensive final part of nine appendices, about which I will say more later. Finally, there follows a bibliography, consisting of a section in Cyrillic /79 titles of studied and cited works/ and in Latin /19 titles/, Internet-based sources and a list of eight author publications on the topic published in scientific journals.

The **First** chapter is generally devoted, so to speak, to the "Italian part" of the work. It begins with a meticulous treatment of the concept of *musica leggera*, i.e., light music in Italian. It examines its origins based on the tradition-rich Italian musical culture with its well-known historical influence on the world of music in general. It examines its specificity and - mainly - the Italian research understanding of this specificity, based on the purpose of *musica leggera* to entertain, to sound in everyday life, to be danceable, lyrical, or humorous, to rest on specific rhythmic, harmonic,

arranging and formal laws. We are introduced to researchers such as Roberto Caselli, Roberto Agostini, and others. The analysis focuses mainly on the links of "music legerdemain" with the music industry, as well as with the media and sound recording. Particular attention is paid to one major factor in the dissemination of Italian light music in Europe and the world: the Sanremo festival. Its repertoire policy and its impact on contemporary popular music are discussed. The focus is on the movement in leggera music that emerged in the 1950s - the phenomenon of the urlatori (whistlers). Mostly, however, the emphasis on Italian light music being a key example of wide-ranging melody dominates.

The following **second** and **third** chapters of the text constitute the actual content of Dzana Ivanova's dissertation. They deal in turn with the basic question of the influence of "musica leggera" on Bulgarian pop music in the period from the 1950s to the late 1980s. But this is not all. Before proceeding, the critical reader should first familiarize himself mainly with the contents of the **nine appendices** to the text. The point is that these nine appendices contain in fact - if I may put it this way - the essential part of the empirics on which the dissertation reflects. Appendix 1, for example, which is made up of 42 pages, contains 144 examples of Bulgarian cover versions of Italian songs from the time in question, performed by a huge number of our singers, beginning with performances by Akhinora Kumanova and ending with performances by Hristo Kidikov. This appendix is, in my opinion, particularly valuable - it provides information on both the Bulgarian singers and the Italian singers who performed the originals. The information proceeds with data about the Italian artists and the Internet addresses where the covers can be heard. That is to say, the appendices to the dissertation enable future researchers to pursue the matter further should subjective or objective research reasons make this necessary. In a similarly fulfilling way, the second appendix offers information on covers of Italian songs released by the record company Balkanton. And then, in another seven appendices, interviews are offered, most of them in-depth /that is, extensive/ with seven of the most prominent artists and performers of Bulgarian pop music of the period mentioned in the title, in which the artists, in conversation with the dissertation's author, reflect on the problem of the influence of Italian 'musica leggera' on their former work and on the work of their other colleagues. Based on all this, we can now turn to the issues treated in chapters two and three of the dissertation text.

The **Second** chapter of the study is devoted to a rather multifaceted presentation of the newly emerging post-World War II 1950s Bulgarian entertainment music called Soviet-influenced pop. The process is further traced in the 1960s. Here again we should note the strength of the dissertation not so much in analyzing the process as in saturating its presentation with information. The groups of participants in the process are presented, and the opinions of musicologists, journalists, and composers active at the time are brought into the discussion, who speak on the particularities of what was happening, presented as an ideologically controversial process. It is revealed how, as early as the 1950s, the Italian pop song found a warm reception among singers and audiences. This process of cross-cultural influences unfolds against the backdrop of the discussion of what the new Bulgarian pop music should - and should not - be. The

Italian influence, very strong at the time for the whole of Europe, was discussed and evaluated both positively and negatively, as a role model. The participation of a whole array of singers is revealed, several whom are now almost forgotten. The main virtue of Italian 'musica leggera' is pointed out - its marked melodiousness. It is noted that the Italian song influence appeared as a model for the creation of a new Bulgarian repertoire, i.e., the contact with the Italian songsters raised the level of Bulgarian popular song to a new level. The influence was primarily on the performance style of the young Bulgarian singers, led by Georgi Kordov and Lili Ivanova. The chapter concludes with an overview of the newly emerging state institutions in Bulgaria at the time, which ensured the development of the process in which imitation was gradually overcome.

The last **Third** chapter concludes the analysis of the process of influence of the Italian "musica leggera" on the young Bulgarian pop music in the time mentioned in the title. This influence is not simply imitation, but - as with any young school of music - is in fact a process of learning, of mastering the craft and of mastery. This influence/learning ceased in the 1990s and onwards when both entertainment music schools - the Italian and Bulgarian - began to learn and be influenced by a third entertainment music practice, namely the English-speaking one.

Today - and indeed for several decades now - electronics have, figuratively speaking, done away with melodic crooning. The brief, thematic motives of singing is brought in, as is the electronic arrangement. Both classical Italian and young Bulgarian musical cultures become subordinated to a third musical culture that has become internationally significant.

Contextually, the **third** chapter introduces us to the many Italian performers who participated either as competitors or as recital guests of honor at our Golden Orpheus Festival. The presence of Italian singers in Bulgaria during the period under consideration is remarkable - I claim this as a direct participant in the process under treatment. The production of the Balkanton gramophone record company, influenced by, or outright dedicated to, 'musica leggera', is examined. It also continues the discussion begun in the previous chapter of the different views of Bulgarian pop music of this time. Special paragraphs are devoted to the Bulgarian solo performers, performance formations, composers and arrangers associated with the influence of Italian entertainment music of the period treated. The chapter concludes with a factually confirmed conclusion that Italian entertainment music catalyzed the processes in Bulgarian pop music, that epigones developed into quality. As a result, it can be argued that the Bulgarian pop music of these years is not inferior in quality to the 'musica leggera'.

The **Conclusion** of the dissertation acknowledges the power of cross-cultural influences in the modern world. As the text points out /quote/: "the infiltration of melodic intonations from different cultures" enriches the music of the world. It also points out the well-known thesis that the contribution of Italian musical culture worldwide is undeniable, not only in high music but also in light music. The means of influence, apart from the personal contact between artists, for which - I remind you -

the second group of appendices with interviews of composers and singers gives us a lot of material, are also the media, the practice of recording and festivals. Overall, the influence on the repertoire of Bulgarian performers and on the audience in the period under review was productive. It contributed to the development of song in Bulgaria. The influence on Bulgarian pop authors and arrangers was also productive.

At the end of the conclusion, the main **contributions** of the thesis, which were identified in the review at the appropriate places, are outlined. First of all, it confirms the value of the work as the first in our country comprehensive scientific and applied research of the influence of the Italian "musica leggera" on the Bulgarian pop music. A second contribution is our introduction to scholarly sources on the nature of the phenomenon of Italian light music. A third contribution is that the periods and spheres of influence and impact are outlined. As a fourth contribution, the importance of the two sets of appendices is highlighted, which provide concise information about Bulgarian covers of Italian songs and reveal significant personal opinions about the process treated in the dissertation. A sixth contribution is that the dissertation under review defends the thesis on the role of cross-cultural influences in art and music , offering a historically confirmed model of these influences.

I have also consulted the **abstract** to the dissertation and must say that it presents the content of the text in a thoroughly satisfactory manner.

In conclusion of the review, I would confirm my opinion that Dzana Ivanova's dissertation **The Italian Musica Leggera and the Bulgarian Popular Song by the end of the 1980 – Aspects of Influence** fully fulfills the requirements for the scientific value of a doctoral dissertation. I therefore invite the members of the scientific jury to award Dzana Videva Ivanova the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

Sofia, 16 March 2023

Prof. DSc Rosemary Statelova