

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr Adriana Blagoeva

on the PhD thesis

of

Iva Georgieva

BONCHO BOCHEV, THE "BODRA SMYANA" CHOIR AND THE PRACTICE OF CHILDREN'S CHOIRS IN BULGARIA

(1940s – 1970s)

Professional field: 8.3 Music and Dance Art

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Iva Georgieva was born in Burgas. She graduated from the National School of Music and Performing Arts "Prof. P. Vladigerov" - Burgas with a degree in piano and the High School of Latin Languages "G. C. Rakovski" - Burgas with Italian as an independent study. Later she graduated from the National Music Academy "Prof. P. Vladigerov" - Sofia with two specialties - Bachelor of Sound Design, Sound and Media Design and Master of Choral Conducting. During the period 2017 - 2023 she was a full-time PhD student at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Since 2017, she has been an accompanist in the choir "Bodra Smyana" at the National Palace of Children. She has participated in various courses and trainings related to choral conducting and working with children; she has gained experience as a chorister, accompanist and choirmaster in various vocal formations. She also performs as a solo pianist.

Iva Georgieva's dissertation "**Boncho Bochev, the "Bodra Smyana" Choir and the Practice of Children's Choirs in Bulgaria (1940s-1970s)**" contains 235 pages divided into an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and seven appendices.

In the **INTRODUCTION** the object of the thesis research is presented: the activities of Boncho Bochev and "Bodra Smyana" "as part of the practice of children's choirs in Bulgaria during the 1940s-1970s" (p. 6). Evidence of the activity of children's choirs during this period is provided, and at the same time, 'the role of Bodra Smyana under the conductorship of Boncho Bochev has not been the subject of independent

scholarly research' (p.9). The ways of achieving the main objectives of the study - "systematization and interpretation of the persistent characteristics of the work of the "Bodra Smyana under the direction of Boncho Bochev" (p. 10) by:

"1) studying the conductor's archive and uncovering his ideas about the organization of training.....

2) researching the specifics of the sound production, repertoire selection and concert activity of the ensemble during his leadership.....

3) a discussion of the influence of Boncho Bochev and "Bodra Smyana" as a model for the practice of children's choirs in Bulgaria" (p. 10).

CHAPTER ONE. REVIEW OF USED LITERATURE

Two types of sources of information on which the author draws in her work are listed. On the one hand, these are various research texts by Ag. Balareva, D. Ruskov, P. Chesnokov, V. Krastev, K. Belivanova, E. Yanev, etc. Included here are journalistic and memoir texts, collections on anniversaries of B. Bochev and "Bodra Smyana".

On the other hand, reports and articles by B. Bochev, as well as his manuscripts, choral documentation, textbooks. In the first chapter, as well as in the whole dissertation, there are many footnotes to make the information as comprehensive as possible.

CHAPTER TWO. ORGANISATION OF TRAINING

This chapter provides initial and more general information about the organization of activities at the Bodra Smyana choir. It emphasizes the importance of organizational work in the conductor's activities, which the author refers to as "training and educational work" (p. 27). She mainly focuses on three aspects of this - 'repertoire policy, solo training and vocal work' (p. 28). Another important element of B. Bochev, which for the author is very essential, is "the emotional impact of music" (p. 28). She points out that in Bochev's work it is 'the meaning and purpose of every song or concert' (p. 28).

Iva Georgieva discusses the activities of the children's choirs of B. Bochev before "Bodra Smyana" because they are an important prerequisite for the creation of the successful educational and pedagogical model of "Bodra Smyana". Particular attention is paid to the children's choir Sofia Nightingales. Initially, it was established as a choir at the school "Antim I", but later it grew into a collective choir of Sofia primary schools, which received its name "Sofia Nightingales" in 1939. In 1940 the composer D. Hristov became the "godfather" of the choir. "The Sofia Nightingales"

have many and varied performances. Among them stand out the individual concerts with 16-17 to 20 songs. Performing such long programs was not a typical practice for children's choirs at the time" (p. 34) Therefore, we can say that Boncho Bochev renewed the function of the children's choir and made it a full participant in the cultural life of the capital"(p. 34). "'The Sofia Nightingales" was the first (and for many years the only) children's choir to collaborate with the then Sofia People's Opera"(p. 35).

Very important are the generalizations of I. Georgieva about the importance of the "Sofia Nightingales" in structuring the principles of B. Bochev. "On the one hand, he built his children's choir on the model of European children's choirs for academic singing, and on the other - he stepped on the tradition of children's songs without being their direct successor He composes the organizational and artistic principles of his rehearsal work himself, though he does not stop to consult and seek recommendations. Having found a suitable methodology for musical literacy, Bochev has now set himself a big goal - to enlarge his choir and turn it into a school for musical and vocal training" (p. 35). Based on the artistic and creative results of the "Sofia Nightingales" in 1947, the "Bodra Smyana" choir was founded.

In this chapter the central theme is the choir school as an organizational and pedagogical form. The author stresses that for B. Bochev it is "an organizational form of work in which training is conducted in a planned manner, on professional principles and with professional achievements..... The main task of the choir school is to cover children in a wide age range and to provide them with a long and complete course of education" (p.36).

Issues that will be addressed in more detail in other chapters of this dissertation are also briefly touched upon, such as: tasks and criteria of the Bodra Smyana Choir School, choir documentation, selection and age of choristers, types of ensembles in Bodra Smyana, repertoire schedule and types of rehearsals, repertoire exams, etc.

CHAPTER THREE. REPERTOIRE POLICY

The author draws attention to the fact that she will analyze the repertoire policy of the choir "mainly in relation to Boncho Bochev's principles of a smooth and systematic musical and vocal training and in interaction with his artistic views determining the appearance and development of the choir" (p. 55). The choir's repertoire is analyzed by decade.

The first period covers the first 10 years of the choir's history, 1947-1957.

"The task that B. Bochev during this period, was to shape the "Bodra Smyana" into a choral-singing school, emphasizing solfège studies" (p. 58). Works by G. Dimitrov, F. Kutev, L. Pipkov, P. Hadzhiev, D. Petkov, Sv. Obretenov, T. Popov, Al. Raichev, P. Stupel, Russian authors. The works are of a varied character - hymns, marches, revival songs, lyrical a cappella songs ("Yellow Butterfly", "Nani mi, nani, Damyancho"), etc. Some works by Western European composers are included (Mozart, B. Fliess). The opera group of "Bodra Smyana" participates in "Boris Godunov", "The Queen of Spades", "Momchil", "Tosca", "La Bohème". The author draws attention to the fact that by "1952, in only its fifth year of existence, the Bodra Smyana chorus already had a repertoire of over 100 works" (p. 66).

In the second decade of the choir's history - 1957-67 - it proved itself "also as a methodological center. Classes were attended by conductors of children's choirs, choristers and music teachers interested in the method of Boncho Bochev, by composers and poets. The solfège teacher, Ivelin Dimitrov, tailors his work entirely to the choir's changing repertoire" (p. 68). The types of performances are increasing - recordings on gramophone records, recordings and appearances on radio and television, appearances in the reviews of the Union of Bulgarian Composers, new titles for the opera group - appearances in the operas "Ivaylo", "Otello", "Turandot", "Antigone 43", concerts abroad are added. The group of Bulgarian composers, whose works are in the repertoire of the choir, increases - the names of Al. Yosifov, Al. Popov, B. Eliezer, Iv. Dimitrov, K. Iliev, Kr. Kurkchiski, N. Stoykov, S. Pironkov, etc. The list of foreign authors is also being enriched. A particularly important fact of this period is the beginning of the joint creative activity (1966) of the chorus "Bodra Smyana" and the Sofia Chamber Orchestra, today the orchestra "Sofia Soloists", with conductor Vasil Kazandjiev. "Memorable remain the interpretations of Pergolesi's "Stabat mater" and Monteverdi's six madrigals, which r

Among the main repertoire tasks of the third decade in the history of the choir under the conductorship of B. Bochev - 1967 - 1977 - the author points out "the balance between contemporary and classical examples, between newly written and old titles, between Bulgarian and foreign authors" (p. 76). The ensemble began to participate more and more with various orchestras and other choral ensembles in the performance of cantata-oratorio works by Gustav Klimt. Dimitrov, Dm. Shostakovich, Dm. Kabalevsky and especially L. Pipkov ("Oratorio for Our Time"). During this period, the work of B. Britten's Missa brevis in D, together with the Sofia Chamber Orchestra and V. Kazandjiev. The repertoire of "Vigilant Change" includes works from the Renaissance, works by Bach, Schubert, Debussy, Bartók, etc.

This chapter characterizes the choir's repertoire by genre and song imagery: happy, lyrical, humorous, heroic, etc., emphasizing the conductor's special treatment of

lyrical songs. It is stated that the repertoire complexity is in accordance with the age of the choristers. Very important for B. Bochev is the requirement for the choristers to develop through the repertoire, to overcome certain artistic difficulties to grow as singers.

CHAPTER FOUR. NOTE LITERACY AND SCHOOL SINGING

At the beginning of the chapter, the terms "music literacy" and "solfege" are clarified. The method of B. Trichkov's "Ladder" method of music singing which is the basis of music literacy in the "Bodra Smyana" choir. B. Bochev is a great supporter of this method.

The teaching of solfege in the choir is considered in detail as one of the main elements in the work of the choir school. "It provides knowledge of solfege and harmony at a high level" (p.93). During solfège training, careful attention is paid to sound production, which should not differ from that during rehearsals. The author outlines three main objectives of solfege training in the choir:

- (a) the so-called "levelling" of the choristers' level of knowledge.
- b) increasing the musical culture and productivity of choristers.
- c) the development of harmonic hearing.

The author summarizes that "the musical literacy of the more advanced ensembles is one reason for the proverbial high productivity of Bodra Smyana" (p. 97).

An important point in the analysis of solfege training in the choir is how it changed during the different three periods of the choir's development under B. Bochev. Examples are given of open solfege lessons held abroad - Russia, Slovenia, Estonia, Armenia, Hungary, Serbia, etc.

Boncho Bochev formulates the aim of solfege training as "to increase the musical culture and productivity of the choristers..... with strict systematicity and consistency" of the work. The author follows analytically the method of solfege work of Ivelin Dimitrov - the longest and most successful solfege teacher in the choir.

This chapter also includes an evaluation of Boncho Bochev's work on music education in Bulgarian schools and school singing. It is stressed that "despite his enormous engagement at the "Bodra Smyana", Bochev invested a great deal of time and energy in writing textbooks for primary and secondary school, in training teachers, and in preparing curricula" (p. 113).

The advice that B. Bochev gives to music teachers - about the work in the classroom, about linking it with the work of the school choir, about the emotional upbringing of

children as a basis for successful music education, about the qualification of music teachers, about the number of music classes, about the forms of methodological support, etc. are commented.

An important place is given to textbooks, which B. Bochev and four author teams under his leadership published for the pupils, mostly from the elementary school, in the period of the 1950s - 1960s.

At the end of this chapter I. Georgieva summarizes. The versatile work of Bochev..... turned him into a remarkable figure who marked both the development of our choral work and the processes in school education. The achievements resulting from Bochev's systematic efforts in the field of music education and music literacy are commensurate with the significance of his contributions to the field of choral music making and interpretation" (p. 131).

CHAPTER FIVE. VOCAL WORK

This is one of the most important chapters of I. Georgieva. It presents the way of vocal work of B. Bochev, described in his book "How the "Bodra Smyana" choir was created and grew up" and in a report of 14.02.1962, devoted to this very subject and given in the framework of a course for choral conductors. B. Bochev identifies two important points that affect vocal education - "a necessary minimum of vocal qualities to be looked for in the selection of choristers, and the development of the voice in the process of training in the choir" (p.132).

The standard for "beautiful sonority" B. Bochev formulates it thus: "naturally placed singing voice; singing without strain, with ease, vocal range from sol-fa of minor octave for altos and to sol-la of second octave for sopranos, smooth transition.....; beautiful and characteristic timbre for the part, dynamic range from pianissimo to forte...."(p. 143). "Boncho Bochev strives for a natural sound and easy singing that does not cause strain in the vocal apparatus" (p. 144). Nowhere does the conductor speak of a "support" of sound. He "seeks to make children understand for themselves how it is right to sing after making them feel and discover the 'beautiful' natural sonority..... Requires continuous aural control from its choristers. They approach singing with an idea of the sound sought" (p. 164).

For the conductor, it is important to organize the selection of choristers in the right way. When selecting new choristers, considerable preparatory and organizational work is done and three elements are carefully monitored: 'musical ability, vocal

qualities and emotionality of performance' (p.141). Attention is also paid to musical hearing and memory as they affect the character of the choir's sound.

The question of vocal work in the rehearsal process is an important one, starting with the completion of the choristers by roles. Individual voice development is also very carefully monitored.

B. Bochev places great emphasis on the arrangement of the singers in the choral parts, because it is "a prerequisite for the development of the two basic choral habits - structure and ensemble" (p. 146).

Another important aspect of B. Bochev is his system for building choral and vocal habits - singing posture, breathing (including chaining), sound formation, diction. These habits are developed not only when working on individual songs, but also when singing. Here, too, the conductor observes specific and tried and tested rules - e.g. intoning with the mouth closed, singing precisely chosen vocals, etc.

Exercises for singing have not changed over the years, but greater and greater precision is sought in their performance.

The emotional and expressive singing of the choristers especially contributes to the quality of the vocal work. This is an important principle in B. Bochev's work, which he strictly observes. The author especially emphasizes that "the main point in Bochev's method is the embodiment of the textual message in the musical fabric of the song..... In this way, an expressive recitation of the text is achieved, and the facial expression is activated during the performance" (p.154).

In the conclusion of this chapter, the author emphasizes that "the most important tasks of vocal training in "Bodra Smyana" are correct and uniform sound formation and breathing, achieving a noble and rounded sound of vocals, expanding the volume of the voice and equalizing registers, acquiring flexibility of voices, emotionality and expressiveness" (p.156).

CHAPTER SIX. THE MODEL OF BODRA SMYANA

This chapter comments on how the "Bodra Smyana" model of work is used by other children's groups in the country. An analytical parallel is drawn with the sound of the Children's Radio Choir with conductor Hristo Nedyalkov.

The work of other children's choirs, which follow the model of "Bodra Smyana", is examined. Kardam, Targovishchko with conductor Mladen Statev, the children's choir - Tolbukhin with conductor Zakhari Mednikarov, the children's choir "Bodra Pesen" - Shumen with conductor Veneta Vicheva, the children's choir - Burgas with conductor Milka Stoeva, the children's choir "Druzha Pesen" - Sliven with

conductor Metody Grigorov. It is commented how the model of work of "Bodra Smyana" affects the development of these choirs, refracted through the individual work of the different conductors.

CONCLUSION

Here the author stresses that her study "analyses the main characteristics of the conducting method of Boncho Bochev - one of the leading figures of our musical life in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s. The chorus "Bodra Smyana", led by him, embodies the stable principles of organization and musical and vocal training, which have been established because of many years of practice, and which proved to be decisive for the future development of children's choral amateurism in our country" (pp. 182-183). The stages through which the research work has passed are again traced and the contents of the individual chapters are briefly summarized.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography used by Iva Georgieva is very rich and includes one hundred titles in Cyrillic, four titles in Latin and two Internet sources. Boncho Bochev's authorship materials number twenty-eight.

ANNEXES

The annexes supplement the information discussed in this dissertation.

Annex I describe the types of choral documentation used in the Bodra Smyana Choir, including the different types of choral maps.

Appendix II presents the classification of ensembles in the Bodra Smyana according to B. Bochev.

Annex III describes the types of choir rehearsals and their purposes.

Appendix IV is a description of the repertoire of the "Bodra Smyana" conducted by B. Bochev for the period of the 1940s - 1970s, the works are divided into Bulgarian and foreign authors. This annex is very valuable as a document.

Annex V presents the solfege work in the Bodra Smyana based on the 'Ladder' method. Here I. Georgieva also comments on the results of the practical solfège course she conducted with the choristers of "Bodra Smyana" in the period 31.10.2018 - May 2019. In it she worked on the textbook of B. Bochev for the second grade, used before in the solfege training in the choir. The author defines the purpose of this course as a test of how today's choristers of the "Bodra Smyana" work according to the methods of B. Bochev and what results they achieve. The finding was that the children successfully mastered the required knowledge in the allotted time.

Annex VI is an interview with Acad. Vasil Kazandjiev about his work with "Bodra Smyana" and "Sofia Soloists".

Appendix VII is an interview with Denitsa Uzunova, conductor of the chorus "Bodra Pesen" - Shumen.

ABSTRACT

In the abstract, which is 41 pages long, the author presents in a concise but clear and specific way the most characteristic conclusions for the different chapters of the dissertation. The abstract is well proportioned and packed with sufficient information. At the end of it, the CONTRIBUTIONS of the thesis are listed, which I accept in full.

Also presented are the PUBLICATIONS on the subject of the dissertation - six in total - five in Bulgarian and one in English.

In the declaration of I. Georgieva's statement of fulfillment of the minimum national requirements, her participations in various scientific forums in the country - six in total, where also in the presented papers various issues related to the dissertation topic are mentioned.

The thesis of Iva Georgieva "Boncho Bochev, the "Bodra Smyana" Choir and the Practice of Children's Choirs in Bulgaria (1940s – 1970s)" is a very serious scientific study and deserves high praise. The author relates the issues under discussion to the nature, successes, problems and importance of children's choral singing in Bulgaria as an essential part of Bulgarian choral performance art and Bulgarian musical culture. The dissertation analyses the musical, pedagogical and educational work of Boncho Bochev with his choir "Bodra Smyana", as well as their influence on the overall development of children's choral singing in Bulgaria in the period of the 1940s - 1970s. B. Bochev's method is examined from different sides and in great depth. The vast archive of the ensemble and its conductor serves as a research base. The author tries to analyze it in as much detail as possible and to draw her conclusions to bring out the basic principles of work that make "Bodra Smyana" a unique choral school of musical-aesthetic education.

The dissertation's six chapters comprehensively present the issues at hand. The analysis is supported using a rich bibliography.

I regard the topic discussed in the dissertation not only as very important for Bulgarian musical culture, but also as very important. On the one hand, the research focuses on a phenomenon in Bulgarian musical culture that has been insufficiently studied so far - the conductor Boncho Bochev and his choir Bodra Smyana. On the other hand - the study and popularization of the model of "Bodra Smyana" created by

B. Bochev and continued by Lilyana Bocheva, is important for conductors who are today, in the present difficult conditions, dedicated to children's choral singing.

The incredible artistic results of "Bodra Smyana", the outstanding success on the international concert stage, the impressive musical and educational work with generations of children who have passed through the remarkable choral school of "Bodra Smyana" under the conductorship of Boncho Bochev and Lilyana Bocheva deserve the highest professional recognition and are a cause for national pride.

Based on all the above, I confidently recommend the esteemed scientific jury to award Iva Georgieva the degree of Doctor of Education and Science.

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