

# **REVIEW**

*by Prof. DSc Elisaveta Valchiova-Chendova (Institute of Art Studies-BAS)*

*Professional field: 8.3 Music and Dance Art*

*on the PhD thesis*

**of**

**Iva Margaritova Georgieva**

**on the topic**

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

**(1940s – 1970s)**

for acquiring a PhD degree,

*Professional field: 8.3 Music and Dance Art*

*Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rositsa Draganova*

## **BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE PHD STUDENT**

Iva Margaritova Georgieva (b. 1989) graduated from the National School of Music and Performing Arts “Prof. P. Vladigerov” - Burgas, with piano (full-time studies) and “G. S. Rakovski” gymnasium of Latin languages - Burgas, with Italian language (independent study). She graduated from the National Academy of Music “Prof. P. Vladigerov” with a BA in *Sound Direction, Sound and Media Design* and Master - *Choral Conducting*.

Her performing experience in the field of musical began in 2008, when she joined the “Irina Stiglich” Chamber Choir at the community center "Slavyanska Beseda 1880" with conductor Denitsa Kaburova. She is also participated in the Bel canto Vocal Ensemble with conductor Vanilia Kisova. She is a choirmaster in the Sofia Chamber Choir with conductor Maria Rouseva. Since 2017 she has been a music teacher (accompanist) in the choir "Bodra Smyana".

From 2016 to 2018 she attended various professional development courses: Creative Laboratory for Introduction to Choral Literature with Krikor Chetianyan, Plovdiv (active participant /conductor/ and scholarship holder); Practical Seminar on "Music, Movement and Creativity through Children's Songs, Games and the Application of Orff-Schulwerk Elements in Preschool Education" with lecturer Soiley Perkiyo, Sofia; Creative workshop within the International Children's Festival "Young Talents" on "Creative ideas for summer work with children" with lecturer Svetla Paslak, NPC, Sofia, etc.

From 2017 to 2023 she is a full-time PhD student at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS. She graduated on time (during these years she took maternity leave twice).

Her dissertation was discussed and unanimously referred for public defense at an extended meeting of the research group Music Culture and Information at the Institute of Art Studies.

## **DISSERTATION EVALUATION**

The choice of the dissertation topic is related to the professional experience of Iva Georgieva, acquired as a performer in choirs and choirmaster, and especially as an accompanist in the choir "Bodra Smyana". The object of the research is the activity of Boncho Bochev as the founder and chief conductor of the choir, examined in the context of the practice of children's choirs in Bulgaria in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s.

The work is 237 pp. long, including 188 pp. of main text, comprising an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography with 109 sources used in Cyrillic and Latin, and seven appendices.

The **Introduction** (pp. 6-11) provides a brief historical overview of the heyday of children's choral art in the country, thematizing the specifics of working with children, the growth of many children's formations into choral schools and the establishment of choral performance traditions, and the renewal of the repertoire for children, including works by Bulgarian composers. With good reason, the dissertation emphasizes the growth of children's choral work as one of the most significant phenomena in Bulgarian musical culture. Undoubtedly, in this picture the role of the chorus "Bodra Smyana" is very important. The focus on the object of study is a contribution as the first independent scientific study of this topic. Numerous professional texts and speeches, journalistic reviews have been dedicated to the Bodra Smyana choir and Boncho Bochev, but this is the first time that the topic has been scientifically conceptualized and brought to its full significance.

Appropriately, **Chapter One** (pp. 11-26) provides a systematization of the existing material and a review of the literature. The sources of information are research texts and journalistic and memoir materials that are devoted to the work of Boncho Bochev and the choir, as well as reports, articles, reviews, manuscripts, choir documentation and textbooks by him. I will especially emphasize scholarly correctness and thoroughness in the treatment and integration of these sources in the text.

Historically, the dissertations work on choral work in the country up to 1944 by Agapia Balareva is a logical support. Texts by Balareva, Vasil Arnaudov, Kipriana Belivanova, Venelin Krastev, Svetla Beshovishka, Emil Yanev and others address specific issues in the work of Boncho Bochev. Information about his method published in articles and collections of a popular or jubilee character, as well as in other journalistic materials, is given.

**Chapter Two** (pp. 26-54) examines the organization of training in the children's choir and specifically in the “Bodra Smyana” which is done for the first time in our musicological literature. The dissertation draws on data from extant choral documentation, which reveals in detail the work in the choir, specifically the choral ensembles and singing, the selection and age of the choristers, the rehearsal schedule and the repertoire examinations conducted. The principles of Boncho Bochev's work with the children's choir are outlined in detail, interpreted as an argument for revealing his own conducting method.

**Chapter Three** (pp. 54 - 88) analyses the repertoire, which is traced in detail over the three decades of Boncho Bochev's work with the choir in the period 1947 - 1977 (according to Agapia Balareva's periodization). A characterization is made, examining the repertoire complexity and the ratio between songs by Bulgarian and foreign authors, with special emphasis on the role of the lyrical song, which had an important place in Boncho Bochev's repertoire policy and in the construction of the concert programs of “Bodra Smyana”. Among the main titles are those by the Bulgarian composers Lyubomir Pipkov, Dimitar Petkov and others, by Todor Popov, who dedicated several songs to the choir, and by foreign authors. Quite important is the tracking of the repertoire by age - respectively one-voice, two-voice and three-voice songs. The results of these descriptions and analyses can be applied in part to contemporary choral conducting practice. As summarized by the dissertation in the conclusion of this chapter, the performance qualities of “Bodra Smyana” choir stimulate composers to create artistic examples without technological limitations. The vocal and dynamic range of the songs is very wide, the metric is specific and varied. The works have vivid concert qualities and varied subject matter (p. 88).

In **Chapter Four** (pp. 88-131) Iva Georgieva discusses the very important issue of the musical literacy of choristers. She concretizes the notions of *note literacy* and *solfege* in pedagogical practice in this country, discusses Boris Trichkov's "Staircase" method and its role in Boncho Bochev's work, emphasizing that the conductor applied it creatively and this is discussed in detail in the text. *He devised his own tasks and adapted the system to the specifics of his work* (Dissertation, p. 93). Three main aims of solfege training in "Bodra Smyana" choir are stated: *'levelling' the level of the choristers; increasing the musical culture and productivity of the choristers; and developing harmonic hearing* (pp. 95-98). The teaching of solfege in "Bodra Smyana" choir is also discussed by decade. This chronological approach is very appropriate because it outlines the stages in the music pedagogical tasks for the conductor, at the same time justifying the selection of the repertoire mentioned in the previous chapter. A special place is given to the analysis of the few surviving notebooks, inscribed by Ivelin Dimitrov, with the most appropriate solfege exercises. *He uses a great variety of notated material which broadens the musical culture of the children* (p. 109). Based on the questionnaire, *it was pointed out that, in general, solfege teaching had different aims from learning the current repertoire, but in some cases, with more difficult contemporary works, it also happened that the solfege teacher helped* (p. 111). And the conclusions drawn from the questionnaire with former alumni of the choir outline the methodology of work in this direction (Dissertation, pp. 111 - 112). In the second section of this chapter, "Boncho Bochev on Music Education and School Singing" (pp. 113 - 125), the conductor's working methodology and views are discussed at length, based on articles by him as well as other texts. Boncho Bochev's relationship with school music teachers is outlined. Some of his ideas can still be discussed today in relation to current music education in comprehensive schools. Logically, the third section of the chapter is devoted to Boncho Bochev's textbooks used in the Bulgarian educational system, which are the subject of the works devoted to music education in general education schools. They are introduced as another manifestation of his multifaceted personality with a great contribution to music education as well.

In **Chapter Five** (pp. 131-159), the dissertation discusses vocal work in the chorus "Bodra Smyana" as a *key aspect of Boncho Bochev's conducting method* (p. 131), aimed at beautiful sonority, respectively systematic work against *power singing*. The individual activities are described in detail - the mechanism in the selection of the choristers, the vocal work in the rehearsal process. Things that are present in the work of each conductor, and accordingly reveal the individual approach or the use of specific methods of work.

The relationship to modernity and the reception of Boncho Bochev's work are the subject of **Chapter Six** (pp. 159-182). The conductor's work is thus examined in continuity - forming based on already existing practices, developing an individual approach, and turning this approach into a model that is creatively applied by other conductors and ensembles.

Iva Georgieva's dissertation gives a comprehensive view of Boncho Bochev's work, revealing important specifics of choral work, specifically of children's choirs, of music education in our country and the relationship with 'musical amateurism'. With this, the author very well develops the three research tasks set at the beginning of the text (p. 10). The research approaches and different methods used are very successful: historiographical - in the study of the choir's past; descriptive - in the presentation of the formal organization of training and concert activity; theoretical and historical - in the study of repertoire, the principles of musical literacy and vocal work; comparative-analytical - in the presentation of the practice of other children's choirs, etc. The conclusions drawn are confirmed by the results of a survey conducted with former alumni of the choir, as well as in interviews and conversations with some of our leading conductors.

The **seven appendices** included are relevant and meaningfully related to the text. The first five are documentary sources commented in the work. The interview with Acad. Vasil Kazandjiev and with Denitsa Uzunova is valuable insights into the composer involved in the work of Bodra Smyana choir, and the conductor who, following Veneta Vicheva, is a contemporary re-creation of the Boncho Bochev model in the children's choir Bodra Pesen - Shumen.

**I fully accept the seven contributions of the dissertation.** They summarize what the dissertation has done:

- As I have already pointed out, this is the first scientific study of its kind on this topic, which analyses, summarizes and brings out as a model the conducting and music pedagogical activity of Boncho Bochev. The main artistic-performing, methodological and conceptual aspects of his work in the chorus "Bodra Smyana" for the period of the 1940s - 1970s are highlighted (Contribution No. 1).
- Valuable is her work with archival materials of Boncho Bochev, which were introduced and studied for the first time (Contribution No. 2).
- The history of the choir, its organization and its artistic work is traced and revealed through the review and systematization of the choir's repertoire (Contributions No. 3 and 4).

- An important focus of the work is the interpretation of the basic ideas and practices of solfege training in the "Vigilant Shift" and some music pedagogical views of Boncho Bochev applied in the general school (Contribution No. 5). The vocal work in the choir concretizes his notion of children's sonority (Contribution 6).
- Boncho Bochev's influence on selected schools of our children's and youth choirs (Contribution No. 7) is very important for research on contemporary choral culture.

**The abstract correctly and completely summarizes the thesis.**

Seven publications in the journal "Bulgarian Musicology" (two), "Papers of BAS" (one, in English) and in the proceedings of scientific conferences held at the NMA and NBU (four) are mentioned. Thus, the main texts of the work have already been published. I congratulate the PhD student for this scientific activity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Considering the importance of the topic, the approach to it and the contributions in the realization of the set tasks and goals, I confidently propose to award Iva Margaritova Georgieva for her dissertation work entitled "Boncho Bochev, the "Bodra Smyana" Choir and the Practice of Children's Choirs in Bulgaria (1940s - 1970s)" the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Prof. field 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

I congratulate Iva Georgieva; I believe that her scientific interest will continue with research topics related to choral culture in Bulgaria.

I especially congratulate her supervisor Prof. Dr. Rositsa Draganova for their joint work during the PhD studies, on which I have personal observations, and the excellent result with the dissertation text.

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