

OPINION

by Prof. Dr Goritsa Naydenova, Institute of Art Studies - BAS

on the PhD thesis

of

Iva Margaritova 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

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Rositsa Draganova

Iva Georgieva has submitted a dissertation with a total length of 235 pages, which include: 1) main text structured in Introduction, six chapters, conclusion and bibliography of 109 titles in Cyrillic and Latin, total 193 pages; 2) seven appendices (42 pages). During her PhD study, the dissertation candidate has completed 5 publications on her research topic. The abstract correctly reflects the content of the dissertation.

The study is dedicated to one of the most prominent and at the same time rarely in the focus of research attention figures in Bulgarian choral work, and in our musical culture in general - Boncho Bochev. Perhaps because his name is not associated with the National Academy of Music (the natural center of training in choral conducting and choral studies), his merits remain rather "behind the scenes" and are more visible through the work of his explicit and implicit successors. His importance remains in the shadow of the work of Prof. Georgi Dimitrov (as the founder of the choral conducting class and an active factor in the formation of the choral network, including administrative support) or of prof. Dimitar Ruskov (as a teacher who introduced pedagogical systematicity in the training of choral conductors). In fact, Boncho Bochev is, along with them, one of the pioneers of the organized choral movement in our country. This is a personality who left a bright mark both with his talent and with the creation and practical introduction of a comprehensive model of choral work in Bulgarian conditions in the second half of the twentieth century. It is in the historical tracing of the development of this model and in its research

"objectification" that the main contribution of Iva Georgieva's work lies, but at the same time this extremely conscientiously crafted dissertation - precisely because of its respectful attitude both to the research process and to its research object - achieves a number of other results, which due to the limited length of a single statement I will present in summary.

The first chapter has a rather introductory role and here the dissertation presents the available publications and sources on the topic correctly and in detail, systematizing them according to the different nature of the information contained in them. Chapters two to five trace the main aspects of Boncho Bochev's model of work, each of them becoming a knot of research problems, traced both chronologically (according to their emergence and development in Boncho Bochev's views or in the choral movement as a whole) and in their practical application by the conductor himself and in their 'spread' into the fabric of our musical culture. For example, Chapter Two outlines the origins and maturation of the notion of organizing a children's choir and outlines the realization of this notion in its most developed form (from the bit-manual level to the criteria for selecting choristers and the stages of their preparation in various stages=compositions). But this chapter also shows the general principle of administration in choirs during the socialist period and suggests to the reader the subsequent dismantling of the idea of a "choir school" not only in children's choirs but also in choirs in general (it is known that in many cities in later years similar "floor" structures of choirs with a unified leadership and with an artistic hierarchical organization were formed). The third chapter traces Boncho Bochev's repertoire strategies, looking at them again through the idea of a gradual build-up and growth (both vocal-technical and artistic) of the choristers. From my point of view, these two chapters (the second and the third) succeed in capturing and rehabilitating the enlightenment basis of choral work in Bulgaria, which was also extremely strong under socialism, and which remains largely misunderstood today. Although under-emphasized in terms of importance, this foundation is intuitively placed by the author as the red thread of the dissertation, and this is particularly evident in the following Chapter Four, which, through the question of the development of the musical literacy of choristers, reaches the topic of Boncho Bochev's views and practice regarding music education. The last section of Chapter Four (on school singing) and the whole of Chapter Five (on Boncho Bochev's approach to vocal work with choristers) take a turn and enter the technological substance of choral work under Boncho Bochev. It is in this specialized area that the stylistic and artistic essence of Bochev's model becomes apparent and here Iva Georgieva delicately but clearly shows the specificity of this model, outlining its difference from the transition that took place in the 1960s from children's to girls' choirs in some of the children's ensembles in Bulgaria. The

final Chapter Six presents children's choirs directly influenced by Boncho Bochev's work, views and achievements, and thus presents the most direct line of influence of his model on the network of Bulgarian musical culture. This is also the direction in which I see the perspectives set out in this thesis for future research.

The annexes are also a serious contribution, as they are systematic (for the documents used) and synthesizing (for Boncho Bochev's views), rather than merely illustrative. In the eventual future publication of the study as a monograph - which I stress as necessary - I would recommend that Annex 4 follow the alphabetical order of composers' names rather than works (unless it is possible to trace a chronology of the appearance of works in the repertoire).

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize: the dissertation proposed by Iva Georgieva is a serious and extremely conscientious research. Its contributions are not limited to the illumination of Boncho Bochev's views and practice, to the detailed description of his model of working with a choir, or to the collection and presentation of the history of the Bodra Smyana Choir. It is a study that achieves other much more important results. One is that, by covering the many aspects of a conductor's work with his choir (from the purely administrative through the selection of repertoire to the music-technological level of selecting choristers, organizing the rehearsal process, singing, musically and specifically vocally training the choristers, arranging the choir on stage, and so on), it essentially rehabilitates a dormant field in our musicology that used to modestly call itself "choral studies." The second important result of Iva Georgieva's work is that it calmly and without pathos opens the eyes of today's reader to the true nature and mission of choral work in Bulgaria during socialism through the work and thoughts of one of the most luminous figures in our musical culture.

I congratulate the PhD student and her supervisor, and I strongly recommend the Scientific Jury to award Iva Georgieva the scientific and educational degree of Doctor.

27.08.2024

Signature:

(Goritsa Naydenova)