

**INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS**



**IVA MARGARITOVA GEORGIEVA**

**BONCHO BOCHEV, “BODRA SMYANA” CHOIR AND THE  
PRACTICE OF CHILDREN’S CHOIRS IN BULGARIA  
(1940s – 1970s OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)**

**ABSTRACT**

OF DISSERTATION FOR AWARDING THE EDUCATIONAL AND  
SCIENTIFIC DEGREE *DOCTOR* (PHD)

**SOFIA**

**2024**

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The dissertation was discussed and directed for public defense at a meeting of the Music Department of the Institute of Art Studies, held on 29.01.2024.

The dissertation consists of 237 pages, of which 188 pages main text (introduction, six chapters and conclusion); bibliography containing 109 titles in Bulgarian, Russian and English language, as well as 7 appendices.

The public defense will be held on 07.10.2024 in Hall 1 of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, at a meeting of a scientific jury consisting of: prof. Adriana Blagoeva, PhD, National Academy of Music “Prof. Pancho Vladigerov”, reviewer; prof. Georgi Petkov, PhD, New Bulgarian University; prof. Goritsa Naydenova, PhD, Institute of Art Studies, chair of the jury; prof. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, DSc, Institute of Art Studies, reviewer; prof. Julian Kuyumdzhiev, PhD, AMDFA “Prof. Asen Diamandiev”.

The materials about the defense are available to interested parties at the Department of Administrative Services of the Institute of Art Studies at 21 Krakra Str.

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## INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation examines the work of Boncho Bochev (December 1, 1899, Polikraishte – May 22, 1975, Sofia) – founder and chief conductor of the “Bodra Smyana” choir, as part of the practice of children’s choirs in Bulgaria during the period from the 1940s to the 1970s of the 20th century. Choral art was an important phenomenon in Bulgarian music of the era; the genre reflects the ideological, social, and aesthetic changes that occurred in our country after the end of the Second World War. These changes affected the state of our musical culture in general and, in particular, determined the dynamics of children’s choir performance and the flourishing of some ensembles.

At the beginning of the considered period, however, this practice was mainly concentrated in schools. Of course, many formations also existed in parallel in the community centres. Later choirs were quickly created at the branches of the Palace of Pioneers in the larger cities of the country, and also at other institutions. However, the children’s choral activity remains inseparable from the school work; it is generically connected with it even at the time of the musician educators of the late renaissance and early post-liberation era, as well as the “Detski Kitki” (“Children’s Bouquets”) movement created by Dimo Boychev.

As is known, this tradition, so characteristic of Bulgaria, was born in 1905 in Plovdiv and it gradually spread to various parts of the country through its followers. With his singing groups, Dimo Boychev introduced and confirmed a new organizational form of children’s amateur performance that was well ahead of its time – choral, dance and theatrical, manifested mainly in children’s operettas. He actively searched for new music material on children’s themes and collaborated closely with his contemporaries – composers Emanuil Manolov, Panayot Pipkov, Angel Bukoreshtliev, Maestro Georgi Atanasov, etc., distributing and even publishing their works.

Children’s ensembles known as “detski kitki” became the primary source for children’s amateur choral art. They are something of a predecessor of it, because it is then, in the earliest childhood, that the love of music and healthy singing habits are formed. The further development of the practice, however, was distinguished by its new, constantly renewing repertoire, by advanced principles of vocal and music-pedagogical work, and also by a different aesthetic.

After the changes of 1944 and the end of the Second World War, a number of city-wide children’s choirs emerged, and they sought to establish their name and participated in regional and national competitions specifically created for this type of art. The competitions

were an incentive for the ensembles to go through an intensive period of clarifying their organizational and educational principles, of increasing their number of participants, and of accumulating new, contemporary repertoire. This was the path of “Bodra Smyana” choir, founded in 1947. Concurrently with this choir, in the same year (i.e. 1947), the children’s choir “Dunavski Valni” in the city of Ruse (founded by Maria Kiryakova and Donka Georgieva), and the “Detska Kitka” choir in the city of Plovdiv (founded by Atanas Marinkev) were established. In the following year, 1948, a children’s choir was created 1952–1953 at the District Pioneer Palace in Burgas (founded by Boris Ibrishimov). A little later, in, the children’s choir “Dobri Hristov” in Varna (founded by Veselin Ivanov) also appeared. Of course, many other singing formations were formed, so it is impossible to list them all. In the beginning, most of them were conducted by pedagogues, they often changed their conductors and they went through a difficult process of stabilization.

The largest number of children’s choirs, whose names are still known today, were founded in the 1960s. Among them are the Children’s Radio Choir (founded in 1960 by Hristo Nedyalkov), the children’s choirs in Dobrich (1961, Zahari Mednikarov), Shumen (1963, Veneta Vicheva), Sliven (1965/1966, Metodiy Grigorov), Kazanlak (1966, Petya Pavlovich) and Yambol (1967/1968, Stefka Pasternadzhieva), the boys’ ensembles in Sofia (1968, Liliana Todorova), Varna (1969, Marin Chonev) and many others. These children’s choirs significantly shortened their initial stabilization period, and they often worked in collaboration with professional choirs or orchestras. On the one hand, they were established by professional conductors who graduated from the first choral conducting class of the Music Academy (today, National Academy of Music “Prof. Pancho Vladigerov”). On the other hand, they had the opportunity to gain experience from the already widespread model of “Bodra Smyana”, combined with other favourable factors, such as the musical traditions in the respective city, the existence of mixed choirs, the support of the State, the initiative of the local cultural community, etc.

Thus, we are gradually entering the period of flourishing of children’s choral art in our country – a process that follows the development of choirs for adults, but at its own pace and mission. Many of the famous children’s ensembles grew into “choral schools” and created traditions in the field of musical performance. And at the same time, they become the reason for renewing children’s repertoire and turning choral music into one of the most significant phenomena in Bulgarian musical culture.

The activities of children’s choirs during the period under review, as well as the role of the “Bodra Smyana” choir in particular, have not been the subject of independent

scientific research until now. The field mainly contains critical texts, testimonies of participants, evaluations by conductors, journalistic reviews, which we will systematize and present in the literature review (Chapter One).

An important point is the need to research and evaluate the choir conductor's creativity and its specificity in relation to the work with children. Boncho Bochev formed his principles of solfege and vocal work as a result of his long-standing experience and its theoretical understanding. He creates his own conducting method, which will be presented in the following chapters, dedicated respectively to the formal organization of the activity (Chapter Two), the repertoire policy (Chapter Three), to solfege methodology (Chapter Four) and to vocal work (Chapter Five).

In a short period of time, conductor Boncho Bochev raised children's choral singing to the highest professional level, commensurate with world achievements in the field. The choir became one of the main models in the creation and management of many other ensembles at that time. Therefore, the issue of its influence will be touched upon in the dissertation work, illustrated through the practice of several selected collectives (Chapter Six).

Tracking the described aspects will complement knowledge in the fields of choral work, conducting, solfege, and music pedagogy, and thus will help address current problems while providing effective methods for working with children's choral formations today.

The main goal of the research – systematization and interpretation of the sustainable characteristics of working with the “Bodra Smyana” choir under Boncho Bochev's leadership – gets into details addressing following specific tasks:

- 1) Studying the conductor's archive and disclosing his ideas for the organization of training, solfege and vocal work;
- 2) Studying specifics of the vocalization, the selection of repertoire and the concert activity of the ensemble during his leadership (40s – 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century);
- 3) Discussing the influence of Boncho Bochev and “Bodra Smyana” as a model for the practice of children's choirs in Bulgaria.

Approaches from the field of music history and aesthetics, plus the theory of musical culture and education were used in the dissertation. Various methods were used to achieve the set tasks: historiographical – when studying the past of the composition; descriptive – when presenting the formal organization of training and concert activity; theoretical and historical – in the study of the repertoire, the principles of note literacy, and vocal work; comparative-analytical – when presenting the practice of other children's choirs, etc.

The conclusions drawn are confirmed by the results of a survey with ex-choristers, as



well as in interviews and conversations with some of our leading conductors.

## CHAPTER ONE. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scientific interest in the theoretical-analytical foundations of choral work intensified after the foundation of the Conducting Department at the Theoretical Faculty of the Bulgarian Academy of Music in 1951. In this period, methodical literature for the benefit of amateur choir conductors began to be published.

In parallel, the methodology of work with children's voices poses a number of questions, the interpretation of which requires competences at the intersection between pedagogy and conducting. In the USA, the term "choral pedagogy" is gradually replacing the term "choir conducting education". However, it is not accepted in our country. Moreover, due to the large volume of work, in the process of academic training of future conductors, the problems of child-adolescent vocal development and the specifics of children's repertoire remain to some extent in the background.

### I. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON BONCHO BOCHEV AND "BODRA SMYANA"

#### 1. Research texts

Agapia Balareva's book "*Choral work in Bulgaria (from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1944)*"<sup>1</sup> is a research of fundamental importance, which gives us the concept of choral work – the intersection between composition and performance.

Of particular importance are the reports read at the methodological conference on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "Bodra Smyana" in 1967<sup>2</sup>. Among them, we will highlight the texts of Agapia Balareva and Vasil Arnaudov, which are important for the development of the theses and the approaches in the present dissertation. Balareva comments on the level of training of the choristers, dwells on the variety and complexity of the performed repertoire, on the large number of concerts, notes the continuous development of the choir. Arnaudov for the first time touches on the question of interpretation, appreciating the strong suggestion that Bochev achieves, although he admits that his concepts sometimes differ.

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<sup>1</sup> **Balareva, Agapia.** *Choir work in Bulgaria (from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1944)*. Sofia: BAS, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> 20 years of "Bodra Smyana" (Materials from a methodical conference for summarizing the experience of the choir), Sofia: Palace of Pioneers "G. Dimitrov", 1967.

In turn, Venelin Krastev dedicates one of the studios in his “*Profiles*”<sup>3</sup> to “Bodra Smyana”. The author knows well the development of “Bodra Smyana”, thoroughly researches the choir’s repertoire and highlights Bochev’s contribution to the development of children’s song genre. However, Krastev also interpreted some methodical aspects of the vocal work, defining as one of the greatest achievements of this choral school the overcoming of register barriers.

The activity of Boncho Bochev is also presented in Boyan Sokolov’s review book “*Prominent Bulgarian Choirs and Their Conductors*”<sup>4</sup>, in which comprehensive information is systematized about the creative commitments of the choir from its foundation to the commemoration of the conductor’s 70th anniversary.

Kipriana Belivanova, who is not only a researcher of choir’s activities, but also his graduate, is preparing two extremely interesting articles<sup>5</sup> in which different aspects of the complex, multi-layered personality of Boncho Bochev, presented as a teacher, conductor, and publicist, are outlined.

To the published texts with a research focus, we should also add the diploma thesis of Svetla Beshovishka<sup>6</sup> – a long-time accompanist, and then a conductor of the “Bodra Smyana” choir.

## 2. Journalistic and memoir texts

Particularly valuable is the book compiled by Minka Zlateva on the the 100th anniversary of Bochev’s birth, containing his biography, reviews of “Bodra Smyana”, jubilee greetings, texts by musicologists, conductors, artists, as well as numerous memories from former choristers<sup>7</sup>.

The three jubilee collections for the 10<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the founding of “Bodra Smyana” are directly related to the present dissertation<sup>8</sup>. For its part, the documentary

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<sup>3</sup> **Krastev, Venelin.** Profiles. Book 5. Sofia: Music, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> **Sokolov, Boyan.** “Bodra Smyana” - independent children's and youth choir school at the Palace of Pioneers “Georgi Dimitrov – Sofia” - In: Prominent Bulgarian choirs and their conductors, Sofia, 1979, pp. 56-92.

<sup>5</sup> **Belivanova, Kypriana.** Dobri Hristov and Boncho Bochev. – In: Khlebarov, Ivan, comp. Kypriana Belivanova. Research. Criticism. Journalism (through the published legacy). Sofia: ARTKOOP, 2002, pp. 324-330.; Belivanova, Kypriana. Boncho Bochev - time and personality. – In: Zlateva, Minka, comp. The magician. Anniversary book on the occasion of 100 years since the birth of Boncho Bochev. Veliko Tarnovo: PIK, 2001, pp. 49-59.

<sup>6</sup> **Beshovishka, Svetla.** “Bodra Smyana” - beginning, example and incentive. Sofia, Bulgarian State Conservatory, Faculty of Theory, 1972, manuscript.

<sup>7</sup> **Zlateva, Minka.** The magician. Anniversary book on the occasion of 100 years since the birth of Boncho Bochev. Veliko Tarnovo: PIK, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Ten years choir “Bodra Smyana”. 1947 – 1957. Sofia: Palace of Pioneers Georgi Dimitrov, 1957; Choir “Bodra Smyana” twenty years old (anniversary collection). Sofia: Science and Art, 1967; Bochev, Boncho, comp. Romyana Savova-Kasabova, editor. 25 years of “Bodra Smyana”. Sofia: Science and Art, 1973.

novel *“Bodra Smyana Sings”* by the poetess Teodora Gancheva traces the history of the ensemble from its foundation to the mid-60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>.

As for the publications about “Bodra Smyana” and Bochev’s interpretive mastery in the periodical press – they are truly innumerable. Among them, some of the texts in the foreign press stand out, which Bochev translated and kept in his archive.

## **II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION WITH AUTHOR BONCHO BOCHEV**

### **1. Reports, articles, reviews**

Bochev’s book *“How the “Bodra Smyana” choir was created and grew”* is a collection of reports given by the author in Bulgaria and abroad. The first edition dates from 1975 and the second from 1979; in practice they come out posthumously.

In another group of publications, Bochev presents successful practices from his own pedagogical work. His earliest articles (late 30s – early 40s) were published in the magazine *“Muzikalno Vazpitanie”* (*“Music Education”*): *“What I do in the first hours of each school year”*, *“Children’s choir in the primary school”* and others.

In the 1950s, the conductor became involved in the discussion about the applicability of the *“Stalbitsa”* method in the Bulgarian general school. In 1955, he read a report at the Conference on Music Education that was fundamental to the rethinking of traditions in our music education.

In the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, Bochev devoted a lot of attention to the problems of choral and school artistic activity, to the musical and aesthetic education of students. Actively published in *“Balgarska Muzika”* (*“Bulgarian Music”*) magazine, *“Uchitelsko delo”* (*“Teacher’s Work”*), *“Narodna Kultura”* (*“National Culture”*), etc. The author discusses the consequences of the reduction in the number of hours of singing in the Bulgarian school program, the insufficient qualification of the teachers, the inappropriate song repertoire, the neglect of the mentioned problems by the governing bodies, etc.

### **2. Manuscripts, choral documentation, textbooks**

Another source of information about Bochev’s views and methods is a transcript (albeit incomplete) of a course for choir conductors held in 1962 at the Palace of Pioneers in Sofia. Five folders of talks are available, which largely overlap with the issues covered in the conductor’s book, but are told more figuratively and backed up with concrete methodical

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<sup>9</sup> **Gancheva, Teodora.** *“Bodra Smyana” sings.* Sofia: National Youth, 1969.

examples.

The archive, available in the “Bodra Smyana” rehearsal rooms, includes a significant volume of choral documentation. In the choir diaries, for example, you can refer to all the important events in the history of the choir, get information about the structure of a rehearsal, about the way of planning and reporting the work, find the conductor’s notes.

Among the materials in the conductor’s room, you can also find some of the singing textbooks for the basic and secondary courses of the general education school, the authors of which are headed by Bochev<sup>10</sup>. When developing them, the conductor creates a large number of solfege exercises with specific didactic tasks, following the principles of solfege and vocal work, which he also applies in “Bodra Smiana”. Therefore, although they are the result of collective work and are subordinated to the normative requirements, these tools represent an additional, specific source of information about Bochev’s views and approaches.

## **CHAPTER TWO. ORGANIZATION OF TRAINING**

### **I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND ARTISTIC WORK**

Boncho Bochev successfully calls the creation of optimal conditions for the strengthening of a team “organizational foundation of the choir”. The conductor played certain elements of the future structure and concert activity of “Bodra Smyana” already at the time when he led his smaller school ensembles; therefore, in the next section of the dissertation, their history is briefly presented.

### **II. CHILDREN’S CHOIRS CONDUCTED BY BOCHEV BEFORE “BODRA SMYANA”**

Boncho Bochev created his first children’s choir in his native village Polikraishte in 1926/1927. Before developing his own methodology, the conductor followed the example of foreign ensembles touring in our country. With the practice, Bochev clarified many questions of choral art and significantly developed his school choir, whose successes impress at various regional competitions and conferences.

In the fall of 1932, the conductor moved to Sofia with his family. Initially, he taught in the 15<sup>th</sup> primary school “Konstantin Velichkov”, and then – in the 5<sup>th</sup> Sofia junior high school

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<sup>10</sup> See e.g. **Boncho Bochev** and team. Music singing for the first grade, State Publishing House of Ministry of Public Education, Sofia, 1947. The conductor is the co-author of a methodical guide. See **Bochev, Boncho. Vasilka Doncheva, Jordan Markov, Ekaterina Penkova**. Teaching singing in I, II and III grades (methodical instructions). National Education, 1960, Sofia.

“Antim I”. Here he created a collective choir of Sofia primary schools, which in 1939 received the name “Sofiyskite Slaveycheta” (“The Sofia Nightingales”). This ensemble performed solo concerts with 16-17 to 20 songs – atypically long programs for its time. Boncho Bochev renewed the function of the children’s choir and made it an important participant in the cultural life of the capital.

In 1939, Boncho Bochev’s school choir held a “Dobri-Hristovo Utro” (Matinée with the songs of Dobri Hristov) in the hall of “Antim I”. And at the composer’s jubilee concert in 1940, Dobri Hristov became the “godfather of the choir” with a humorous testimony. Since then, Bochev gratefully calls the children from his choir “grandfather Dobri’s nightingales” and never stops interpreting his songs.

In the fall of 1941, Boncho Bochev was transferred to the “Ivan Denkoglu” school. With a renewed choir, an active work begins with increasingly diverse and responsible tasks. “Sofiyskite Slaveycheta” was the first (and for many years the only) children’s choir that collaborated with the then Sofia National Opera. Appearances on Radio Sofia and gramophone records are also becoming more frequent.

To achieve all these remarkable results, Bochev formulated clear organizational and artistic principles in his rehearsal work. After finding a suitable methodology for musical notation and supplementing it with new vocal tasks and a higher level of musical performance, the conductor sets himself the goal of growing his choir and turning it into a choir singing school. And this opportunity really arose – in the fall of 1946, the “Septemvriyche” department at the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union initiated the creation of the pioneer choir “Bodra Smyana”.

### **III. THE CHOIR AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL AND PEDAGOGICAL FORM**

According to Boncho Bochev, the choir is an organizational form of work in which the training is “planned, on professional basis and with professional achievements”. The selection criteria for the choristers, the organization of rehearsals, the tracking of results, etc., are essential. The main task of the choir is to include children in a wide age range and to provide them a long-term and comprehensive course of study.

#### **1. Tasks and criteria**

“Bodra Smyana” works systematically 9-10 months a year. According to Bochev, singing 5-6 to 7 hours a week is optimal for achieving singing endurance and strengthening the vocal apparatus. And although singing in a choir seems to be the most popular art, it turns

out to be the calling of only a selected few – those who started their musical education early enough (in the elementary course) and who have an excellent musical ear and voice.

Gradually, through his activity, Boncho Bochev imposed criteria for interpretation that influenced the practice of children's choirs in Bulgaria – marked emotionality and at the same time meticulous correctness to notes and text; light but not disembodied singing; closed but not darkened vocalization; homogeneous sonority in a wide range, etc.

## **2. Choral documentation**

*Appendix I* presents the types of choral documentation used in “Bodra Smyana”. The conductor creates a system of accountability, which becomes the basis for a thorough analytical assessment of the achieved results.

## **3. Selection and age of the choristers**

This subsection of the dissertation describes and comments on the selection and age of choristers, as well as the changes in strategies associated with them. Initially, Bochev worked with children from the elementary school. After the transition to the Palace of Pioneers, the upper age limit gradually changed and “Bodra Smyana” became a large children's and youth choir, which unites the youngest chavdarcheta, pioneers, and then Komsomol members up to the age of 16. The renewal of the ensemble is now smoother, the stay of the children in the choir is extended, and new colors are added to the sound palette. New choristers are accepted every three years after auditioning in several rounds.

## **4. Types of groups within the choir**

Bochev distinguishes three categories of choristers according to their experience: new, junior and senior, through which he forms different ensembles. Their specifics are presented in more detail in *Appendix II*.

Balancing the groups of a large choir is a complex task that requires serious planning. Thus, the beginning of the 1960s turned out to be an extremely intensive period that necessitated some changes. Gradually, the children's choir ceased to function as a separate ensemble with its own tasks, and become a reserve for the older ones. The core of the concert choir consists mainly of high school girls and the more advanced children of grades 5-7. As a result, the sound of the 1950s “Bodra Smyana” compared to that of the 60s, and even more so of the 70s and 80s, changes. The child's ease, airiness and emotionality are preserved, but gradually become colored with more density and maturity. It is this sound and vision of the

choir that is gaining popularity. This “Bodra Smyana” sings with the Sofia Chamber Orchestra; it demonstrates enviable solfege skills at open lessons abroad; composers dedicate the highest examples of choral work to this ensemble; these kids stay up late recording on the radio.

### **5. Rehearsal schedule and types of rehearsals**

There are two main types of rehearsals: partial and general. Rehearsals are held with each voice separately in two alternating shifts – morning and afternoon – according to the school availability of the choristers. Boncho Bochev classifies the types of rehearsals according to the stages of learning the repertoire (ordinary, “za progonka” (one-time singing the repertoire), for catching up, etc.) or according to the specific tasks of the artistic work (general rehearsal, technical, together with other choirs and orchestras, etc.). The information about them is selected in *Appendix III* and is commented on in this subsection of the dissertation.

### **6. Repertory exams**

Bochev introduced the exams to determine the participants for the Second World Youth Festival in 1949 in Budapest, where “Bodra Smyana” won first prize. After that, they are held regularly with each chorister 2-3 times a year on the most difficult works and help to establish a single criterion for the artistic performance.

### **7. Difficulties and organizational transformations**

In the first years of its creation, “Bodra Smyana” did not have an established rehearsal hall. Only after the achievements in Budapest, the choir was settled in a room on the corner of “Aksakov” and “Levski” streets in Sofia, and in 1968 it was planned to build “A house of “Bodra Smyana”” in the Fighters against fascism and communism building. From today’s point of view, the common space has a respectable area – the former choir rehearsal room now serves as his concert hall – and it guides us to the greatness of the choir school conceived by Bochev. Its number is huge – 320-350 children, and the productivity is amazing. During the academic year 1965/1966, with the three ensembles of “Bodra Smyana”, 49 new works were studied and 5 were restored, among them large musical forms such as “Stabat mater” by Pergolesi and “Vezpev na Rodinata” by Georgi Dimitrov.

But success comes at a price, and parents begin to worry about their children’s busy schedules. In 1968, Boncho Bochev delivered a report in the Palace of Pioneers on the topic

“Mandatory changes in the organization and training of the “Bodra Smyana” choir”. Decisions related to the number and responsibilities of the children are made and an annual recruitment of a small number of choristers is started. The balance has been found and the necessary organizational transformations have been reached, which will at the same time allow the training in “Bodra Smyana” to pursue its important goals. Liliana Bocheva already works with a smaller number of singers under the same high artistic requirements, which is also a kind of proof of the sustainability of many of the principles of organization and training in “Bodra Smyana”.

### **CHAPTER THREE. REPERTOIRE POLICY**

The choir’s repertoire policy is examined mainly in relation to Boncho Bonchev’s principles for smooth and systematic music-singing training and in interaction with his artistic views. The results of the conducted factual survey of the repertoire are compiled in a table and presented in *Appendix IV*. It includes all song titles discovered so far, performed from the 1940s to the 1970s, with authors of the music and lyrics (as far as possible). The data from it allows making the presented overview and systematization of the repertoire.

#### **I. THE REPERTOIRE OF “BODRA SMYANA” THROUGH THE DIFFERENT STAGES**

The study uses the periodization of the development of the choir by decades, introduced in 1967 by Agapia Balareva, supplementing it with the last decade for the period under consideration. This is how the three stages mentioned below are distinguished.

##### **1. The first decade of “Bodra Smyana” – 1947-1957**

Initially, the training of the little choristers was carried out on the basis of the existing children’s and school works, many of which we also find in the then singing textbooks and collections of children’s songs. Children’s songs newly written during the period by Svetoslav Obretenov, Georgi Dimitrov, Todor Popov, Parashkev Hadjiev and others were gradually added. “Haidushko Kladenche”, “Biserna Reka” and “Gaidar” were composed especially for the choir by St. Obretenov – emblematic titles. G. Dimitrov’s songs – “Konche Vodya”, “Dyado i Mechka” and “Posmali, Mango” are among the most remarkable works from the repertoire of “Bodra Smyana”.

Dobri Hristov’s songs are also characteristic. His name is invariably present on the list



of performed authors, even when other genres and styles become more relevant. The reason is not only the personal contact with the composer, but the attitude towards his work as a choral classic and an indispensable basis for children's vocal training. Dobri-Hristov's works "Zaspala li si, Neranzo", "Ranen yunak" and "Goro le, zelena" occupy a permanent place in the choir's repertoire.

Quite early, compared to the rest of our leaders of children's choirs, Boncho Bochev traveled abroad, where he got to know the criteria by which the jury makes its assessment. In addition, he distributes Bulgarian songs that impress the European audience and often win prizes. "Zhalta Peperuda" by Lyubomir Pipkov became the highlight of the choir program at the Second World Youth Festival in Budapest in 1949, and "Nani mi, Nani, Damyancho" – at the Third – in Berlin in 1951.

The choir also sings typical Soviet and Bulgarian marches and hymns, renaissance, military, patriotic songs, which bring an atmosphere of determination and enthusiasm. Bochev interprets them with finesse and attention to detail. Among the first mass songs that entered the repertoire of "Bodra Smyana" immediately after they were written were "Himn na Balgarskite Vastanitsi" by L. Pipkov, "Republiko Nasha, Zdravey" by G. Dimitrov and others. Works dedicated to the activities of the organization "Septemvriyche" – "Marsh na Septemvriychetata" by Al. Raichev, "Pessen za Pionerskata chest" by P. Stupel and others.

The anthems of Bulgaria and other countries (e.g. "The International" by Pierre Degeiter) are also present in the repertoire – as an expression of respect for the hosts, as a cultural value and as an example of phonetic education in different languages.

The works of Western European classics, e.g. "Lyulchina" by Fleiss and "Repetitsiya za Konzert" by Mozart, complete the characterization of the concert programs and performance achievements of the choir during this period. At the same time, the opera cast of "Bodra Smyana" participated in "Boris Godunov", "Momchil", "Tosca" and "Bohemi". And in 1955/56, at the very end of the first stage of the history of "Bodra Smyana", the Group of the little ones was formed, which has its own special repertoire: "Svarila Baba Chorbitsa" – St. Obretenov, "Zhabeshki Konzert" – Hr. Iliev, "Dete i Ptichka" – German folk song (arr. J. Heim) and others.

## **2. The second decade of "Bodra Smyana" – 1957-1967**

During the second decade of "Bodra Smyana", major concert assignments were carried out in Bulgaria and abroad. Along with this, the appearances on Radio and Television, in the concerts of the Union of Bulgarian Composers, in the performances of the Sofia Opera

– already in “Ivaylo”, “Dama Pika”, “Othello”, “Turandot”, “Antigone 43”.

New names are added to the established circle of Bulgarian authors from the first period: Alexander Popov, Ivelin Dimitrov, Konstantin Iliev, Krasimir Kyurkchiyski and others.

A novelty in the repertoire is the performance of a choral arrangement of an instrumental piece, as Todor Popov does on “Ave Maria” by Schubert and “Moonlight” by Debussy. These works, which were original for their time, arose as a result of the close collaboration of “Bodra Smyana” with T. Popov, who is also the author of “Mladezhka Proletna Pessen” – the peculiar hymn of the choir, which unites generations of Bodrosmenians on stage to this day.

Orlando di Lasso, Palestrina, Monteverdi, Lotti, Kodai, Tchaikovsky, Dunaevsky, Kabalevsky, Gotovac, etc. were represented by foreign composers during the second stage. The share of classics – Western and Russian – and interest in earlier, Renaissance and Baroque music is increasing. Polyphonic works appeared in choir diaries as early as 1961/1962.

Until the mid-1960s, the choir performed mainly a cappella and with piano accompaniment. The repertoire is also diversified by some works with the participation of other instruments (e.g. “Ruzho, Byala Ruzho” by Hr. Todorov – accompanied by english horn). And since 1966, the successful beginning of joint concerts with the Sofia Chamber Orchestra conducted by Vasil Kazandzhiev began (see *Appendix VI*). The interpretations of “Stabat mater” by Pergolesi and the Six Madrigals by Monteverdi, presented in various cities in Bulgaria and abroad and recorded on gramophone records, remain memorable. The performances of “Bodra Smyana” are distinguished by balanced vocal parts, with a clear and ringing tone, with skillfully crafted phrasing and clear diction.

### **3. The third decade of “Bodra Smyana” – 1967-1977**

Among Bochev’s main tasks during the period was the balance between contemporary and classical examples of choral music in the program, between newly written and old titles, between Bulgarian and foreign authors. He reduced to a minimum the songs at celebrations, holidays, government concerts, which are already distributed among several children’s choirs, among which is the Children’s Radio Choir.

However, the line of joint work with orchestras is thickening. The choir participates in the performance of major works – oratorios, cantatas and operas. Such are “Pessen za Gorite” by Shostakovich, “Pessen za Rodinata” by G. Dimitrov, “Oratoria za Nasheto Vreme” and

“Antigone 43” by L. Pipkov.

## **II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REPERTOIRE**

The repertoire of “Bodra Smyana” is truly diverse and includes both children’s songs for learning through auditory imitation and difficult examples of a cappella songs. Each work is masterful and impactful in its own way.

Different systematizations of the repertoire are possible: by character, e.g. cheerful (“Blyan” by P. Hadjiev), lyrical (“Esenni Peyzazhi” – V. Tormis), heroic (“Haydushko kladenche” – St. Obretenov), humorous (“Dremcho na Lager” – G. Dimitrov); by era: Renaissance (“Echo” – Orlando di Lasso), Baroque (from “High Mass” in B minor – Bach), Viennese Classics (“Repetitsiya za Konzert” – Mozart), Romanticism (“Ave Maria” – Schubert), Modernity (“Po Patechkata na Dagata” – K. Iliev); by genres: march (“Na Strazha” – T. Popov), hymn (“Himn na Balgarskite Vastanitsi” – G. Dimitrov); polka (“Pionerska Polka” – P. Stupel); waltz (“Festivalen Vals” - T. Popov); ballad (“Balada za Voyvodata” - T. Popov) etc. Again, on the genre principle, it is also possible to distinguish: oratorio (“Oratoria za Nasheto Vreme” - L. Pipkov); cantata (“Pessen za Rodinata” - G. Dimitrov); suite (“Pionersko Sartse” - D. Petkov; “Lageren Ogan” - Prokofiev) and others.

### **1. Repertoire complexity**

According to Bochev, the songs should be “problematic”, requiring the overcoming of certain performance challenges according to the level of the singing group. The exam songs in “Bodra Smyana” contain typical tasks: “Koza i Pelin” by G. Dimitrov – for good diction in a fast tempo; “Vyatarat i Momcheto” by K. Iliev, “Planinski Noshti” and “Shtarkelcheto” by Zoltan Kodai – for intonation difficulties, mastering the dissonant sonority, nuance; “Pueri Hebraorum” by Palestrina, “Stabat Mater” by Pergolesi, “Missa Brevis” by Britton – for skills in stylistic interpretation of polyphonic works from different eras.

The pace at which the choir progresses outpaces the development of the children’s song genre, so Bochev also works on compositions for women’s and mixed choirs. In his text from 1967, Vasil Arnaudov defends the position that the difficulty of the repertoire is justified by the results achieved. Unlike him, Agapia Balareva does not fully support this practice. Aram Khachaturyan is of the opinion that too heavy and slow songs are not suitable for children. Despite everything, Bochev did not change his views.

### **2. Proportions between Bulgarian and foreign works**

The official cultural policy requires a predominant share of Bulgarian music. In most children's choirs, it is represented by the composers who were also the first collaborators of "Bodra Smyana": Dobri Hristov, G. Dimitrov, St. Obretenov, L. Pipkov, D. Petkov, T. Popov. They are co-founders and associates, thanks to whom the choral work made a huge leap in its development and became famous all over the world.

Songs by foreign composers are included if they have certain "instructive qualities"; if they are distinguished in terms of composition or with a valuable artistic message; if they correspond to the level of perception of the choristers. They complement the overall concept of children's musical and singing development, but Bulgarian works remain the basis for their vocal and artistic education.

### **3. The role of lyrical song**

Around (or shortly after) the middle of the concert programs conducted by Bochev, we find the already mentioned iconic titles by L. Pipkov ("Zhalta Peperuda" and "Nani mi Nani, Damyancho"), D. Petkov ("Oblache" and "Vocaliza"), Z. Kodai ("Planinski Noshti"), as well as many of T. Popov's songs ("Akvarel", "Autumn Song", etc.). Lyrical songs express to the greatest extent the achieved vocal mastery, the skills to build the musical phrase, to chain breathing, to nuance the sonority, to sustain the song form – far more developed than our familiar children's miniatures. Therefore, they are an essential part of the repertoire of the advanced choristers.

### **4. The repertoire of "Bodra Smyana" by age**

In this subsection of the dissertation, the distribution of the repertoire by age is commented. Specific examples are indicated by choir groups (for the youngest, junior and senior choristers). Some compositional features related to the complexity and volume of the works, the character and accompaniment, the functions of the soprano and alto parts, the presence of solos, etc., are discussed. In conclusion, it is emphasized that the performance qualities of "Bodra Smyana" give composers wider opportunities to create without particular restrictions. The vocal and dynamic range of the songs is very wide, the metrorhythm is specific and moving, and the singing texture is enriched and complex.

## **CHAPTER FOUR. MUSIC LITERACY AND SCHOOL SINGING**

The idea of "music literacy", which builds on the singing by ear, was already

established during the construction of the Bulgarian general education school after the Liberation and is traditionally present both in the music programs and in the practice of the Bulgarian children's choirs. At first, different methods of note literacy, imported from abroad, spread in our country, but relatively quickly the creation of Boris Trichkov's "Stalbitsa" was reached, presented by its author as a "Bulgarian method for conscious note singing". The system includes three stages, which are discussed in the thesis, and its graphical models are shown in *Appendix V*.

The „Stalbitsa“ is a subject of consideration by a number of our musical figures, in whose articles and works sometimes contradictory assessments of Boris Trichkov's ideas are given, but in general, everyone considers the expediency and significance of this method. Until the end of his life, the conductor of "Bodra Smyana" remained a follower of Trichkov. It is significant that Bochev contributes to the confirmation of the high level of music literacy not only in our country, but also abroad – the leader of the children's choir "The Trobovlje Nightingales", August Shuligoi, devotes nearly a month specifically to studying the „Stalbitsa“ method with Boncho Bochev in Sofia.

## **I. SOLFEGE TRAINING IN "BODRA SMYANA"**

Bochev approaches the application of the method creatively and adapts it to the specifics of his work. The conductor came to the conclusion that the „Stalbitsa“ simultaneously develops the solfège and singing skills of the children and contributes to a better quality of choral sound.

At the beginning, Bochev led the music literacy classes himself, and then assigned them to other teachers, but through all stages it can be said that the training not only goes beyond the acquisition of music literacy, but provides training in solfège and harmony at a high level, relevant to music schools. The solfège training covers the acquisition of three voice harmony (for the most advanced – four voice harmony) and tonalities up to four signs in the key signature with alterations. The results of the choristers are filled in the Annual Solfège Chart shown in *Appendix I*.

Both vocal qualities and basic skills are assessed, which are also the main activities in the solfège lesson: intonation, metrorhythm, solfège, 2 and 3 voice solfège exercises, prima vista solfège, oral notation, written notation, transposition, memory, note reading on prima vista and tone-guessing. After their definition and commentary in the exposition of the text, a conclusion is made about the practical orientation of the solfège course in "Bodra Smyana", which distinguishes it from the program of music schools.

## **1. Objectives of solfege training**

### *1 “Leveling” the skills of the choristers*

Solfege training takes place in small groups of 10-12 children with a similar level of solfege skills. If necessary, students are regrouped at the beginning of each following school year. The “leveling” of the skills takes place first within the solfege class, and then in the choir groups. The goal is for each chorister to acquire the skills to independently read the musical text of his choral part, orienting himself horizontally and vertically in the score.

### *2. Increasing the musical culture and productivity of choristers*

Music literacy allows working with the choir quickly, methodically and above all consciously. The process of learning the repertoire is significantly shortened, and its restoration at a later stage is easier. The musical material used in the solfege training is varied and far exceeds the examples contained in the music textbooks of the time, and this enriches the auditory experience, aesthetic ideas and musical culture of the choristers.

### *3. Development of harmonic hearing*

The “stagnation” in C major has been widely discussed as a shortcoming of the “Stalbitsa”. However, the method has an advantage for the development of harmonic hearing with the early introduction of two-voices exercises – on the second year of education, soon after learning the notes. The polyphonic solfege training allows the mastery of easy 2-voice pieces even with the beginners of the choir, e.g. the emblematic children song “Prela baba” by M. Kochev (arr. T. Popov).

## **2. Solfege training in “Bodra Smyana” during the various stages**

### *1. The first decade of “Bodra Smyana” (1947-1957)*

Children begin their solfege training immediately after being admitted to “Bodra Smyana”. The beginners learn the songs aurally, while at the same time, through the solfege lessons, they prepare for polyphonic works. This transition is carried out mainly through exercises on the „Stalbitsa“ by B. Trichkov.

In 1953, Bochev organized a demonstration of music literacy in Moscow with the opera ensemble of “Bodra Smyana” in front of musicians, educators and phoniaticians. On this occasion, D. Petkov wrote in the jubilee book for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “Bodra Smyana” that in this choir children sing alone on prima vista and that they are able to notate quickly and reliably.

“Notation” takes place in an interesting game form, introduced by Boncho Bochev.

Three roles are defined: two separate children and the rest of the class, which carry out the three stages of the exercise: composing, guessing and notating a melody. These are the so-called by B. Trichkov “Bochevi zadachi” (Exercises of Bochev). Piano playing was never practised, and notation (in the sense of writing down on a sheet of music) soon dropped out to give way to the choristers’ main occupation, singing.

### *2. The second decade of the “Bodra Smyana” (1957-1967)*

During this period, a solfege teacher was Ivelin Dimitrov. He was also a follower of the “Stalbitsa”, but he made it harmonically complicated and enriched according to the new academic requirements. As a composer, Dimitrov created exercises that not only fulfill the specific didactic tasks, but are sustained in terms of musical form and content – original, logical, complete.

In the choir’s archive there are photos that captured various moments of open solfege classes abroad: in Russia, Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, etc., in which the most advanced solfege groups of “Bodra Smyana” participated. Plans for some of these demonstrations are found in choir’s diaries, and are included in the dissertation.

In 1963 in Celje, Slovenia, at a conference on music education, choristers of “Bodra Smyana” received an assignment from the audience on three voices in B-flat major. The choristers sang it on prima vista on three voices, then repeated it with a Slovenian text.

Demonstrations on note singing in the Soviet Union in 1964 had also a huge success. On one of them was present the Russian composer and choir conductor Vl. Sokolov, who indicated his own tasks and the children were doing excellently again. The Russian conductor noted that the displayed solfege skills exceeded even the capabilities of some students from the Academy of music.

### *3. The third decade of “Bodra Smyana” (1967-1977)*

In this subsection, we focus on textbooks that are new for the specified period – “Systematic Course in Solfege”, “Solfege by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven”, “Solfege through the Works of the Romantic composers”, etc. The most advanced sang the soprano exercises from Concon and “Metodo pratico” from Vacay. Demonstrations of note singing also continued in this period – in Moscow, Kiev, Yerevan (the last one even got an encore!). Solfege classes fulfilled the goal set by Bochev – to increase the musical culture and productivity of the choristers. However, not the entire repertoire was learned by reading the sheet music, but at the discretion of the conductor.

## **3. The study material compiled by Ivelin Dimitrov**

The choir archive contains a folder with solfeges used by Ivelin Dimitrov to train the choristers of “Bodra Smyana”, which contains: “Solfeges in C dur and a moll with alterations by Jules Arnaud”; “Two-voice – translation from old clefs”; “Fragments of music pieces and Lemoine”; “Exercises for intonation and rhythmic mastery” and others. The dissertation describes the method of systematization of the solfeges, the ratio between examples from European, Russian and Bulgarian authors, between monophonic and polyphonic exercises. A variety of genres are represented. Some of the most interesting moments in Ivelin Dimitrov’s pedagogical system are highlighted, for example: introduction of the minor scale through Russian (and single Slovak and Polish) folk songs; introduction of alterations and modulations through third movements of piano and violin sonatas; introduction of 2-voice harmony through polyphonic music, etc.

#### **4. Solfege training through the memories of former choristers**

Some conclusions were drawn based on the answers of former singers of “Bodra Smyana” in a survey: solfege classes are interesting and fascinating for children; singing on the „Stalbitsa“ remained the main activity for a long time; one of the most important goals is quick orientation in different tonalities; voice care is unceasing; once introduced, polyphonic singing is practiced and perfected in each lesson. As during the rehearsals, the time is used to the maximum, the mental challenges are great, the discipline is impeccable.

## **II. BONCHO BOCHEV ON MUSIC EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SINGING**

In this section of Chapter Four, some of Boncho Bochev’s views on the need for changes in educational policy, on the unresolved issues of school singing, on the qualification of pedagogical staff, etc. are discussed. The active work of the conductor in the field of music education takes place at various levels in different directions.

First of all, the exhibition examines Bochev’s work in class. At the end of the 1930s, the conductor actively published in the magazine “*Muzikalno Vazpitanie*” (“*Music Education*”) and dealt with specific pedagogical tasks: to convince teachers of children’s capabilities, to reveal successful ways of organizing educational activities, to prove that note singing is correct and accessible method of music-singing training and upbringing. From separate articles, we learn how the author distributed and arranged the class by voices, as well as some of his pedagogical approaches – e.g. to point to the most talented children as a model, but to work with everyone. Bochev found that with proper positioning (among the more advanced) and with longer auditory singing of a suitable repertoire at the age of 11-12, the so-



called “brambarcheta” (“beetles”) show musical and vocal qualities. Bochev also shares some ideas for games that diversify rehearsals and classes, for example, “*Sing Like Me!*” and “*Speak without a voice!*”.

The conductor realized that changes were needed in the overall educational policy, and in the 1950s his journalistic texts gradually touched on issues of educational management such as the qualification of primary teachers and music teachers, the horarium, etc. At the music education conference held in 1955, Bochev summarized his views on the problems of school singing: training of music teachers for all educational levels; organizing control and supporting the work of the pedagogues; increasing the horary of singing to at least 14-15 hours.

As a possible solution to the problem with the qualification of music teachers, Bochev suggested the conducting of short-term courses. The subsection comments on the organizational steps he offered; the benefits of the courses are interpreted and some specific data is indicated with an approximate number of instructors and teachers that needed to be included.

Regarding the horarium, Bochev insisted on a minimum of two hours a week in both elementary and secondary courses. Key, according to him, is musical education from 1st to 4th grade, for which the school program provided two hours a week, but after the reconstructions in 1950, only one hour remained. On the other hand, two hours a week were given for singing in the 5th grade, but soon after that it has been suggested that the hours be shortened. Bochev reacted sharply to these and other changes in the educational system and he was among the most active defenders of the subject. Efforts regarding the horary paid off and in 1959 it was increased.

At the end of this section, the successful forms of providing methodical assistance according to Bochev are explained: the so-called “*shefstvo*” (“*leadership*”) over a class or a school, as well as the preparation of specially trained choristers to assist the teacher in the singing lesson, organization of joint concerts, etc. These forms of cooperation increased the quality of the singing, which in turn allowed the performance of a more extensive repertoire.

### **III. THE TEXTBOOKS OF BONCHO BOCHEV**

Bochev’s last textbooks were written in the second half of the 1960s, after the controversy over music literacy and the quality of musical education in Bulgarian schools had subsided. In the new editions, covering all alterations, as well as the assimilation of the major and minor variations, is omitted, and the “stagnation” in C major is shortened. As a result,

more tonalities are learned: up to two signs in the key signature (instead of one, as it was until then). The easier singing program may be distancing students from “live” music because it narrows their aural representations and experience, and hence their perceptual abilities. For the purposes of school activity, however, such an abbreviated course of music literacy training is sufficient. The hours are enough to sing all the included exercises and songs, but if this system is combined with other activities or if it serves as a starting point for more in-depth music studies, it needs to be accelerated and intensified.

This conclusion was also confirmed in a practical course I conducted – a series of solfege classes in “Bodra Smyana” during the academic year 2018/2019, in which I used the latest edition of Bochev’s textbook for 2nd grade. The peculiar experiment is described in detail in *Appendix V*. Its purpose is to draw attention to the possibilities of music literacy in the children’s choir today.

## **CHAPTER FIVE. THE VOCAL WORK**

In this chapter, Boncho Bochev’s high criteria and his idea of children’s choral sonority, as well as the specific ways to achieve them in practice, are discussed.

### **I. FORMING THE APPROACH**

#### **1. Standard of “beautiful sound”**

The voices of the children of “Bodra Smyana” are often described by critics as “bells”, “clear”, “crystal”. The conductor builds his idea of “beautiful” sonority by interacting with other choirs, e.g. “The Trobovlje Nightingales” conducted by August Shuligoi, who visited our country in the 1930s. The two conductors exchanged experience and Bochev gradually achieved the lightness and coloring of the Slovenian “nightingales” with his collective, which is why his first choir was named “The Sofia Nightingales”.

Boncho Bochev found that there is a lack of the necessary literature in Bulgaria, and that strictly established concepts are not used in the Russian-language literature. The conductor did not introduce a unified terminology, but systematized and offered in-depth information on the issues of children’s choral art. He also reminded of the need to take measures for the dissemination and popularization of scientific experience in the field of children’s choral singing.

#### **2. The fight against power singing**

Although carefully selected, most of the new choristers sing loudly and openly, which causes rapid vocal fatigue, narrows the range, and causes permanent damage to the vocal apparatus. Timely correction on the part of the conductor is imperative to create habits of aural control, soft attack, and proper intonation.

Boncho Bochev compares the classical way of singing with the folk one and notes that his first choristers in his native village sang with a narrower and lower range compared to the children in the city, in which case the songs had to be transposed into a lower key.

In the struggle for a “beautiful sound”, Boncho Bochev applies a positive example of “model children” – choristers with a natural, correct way of vocalization, in which the resonating tone is combined with a correctly shaped mouth and a calm, unstressed face.

Systematic work against forced singing is Boncho Bochev’s main recommendation for adult choirs as well. In his critique of the Republican Youth Festival in 1959, he makes a fair assessment of sonority that reveals his criteria for beautiful sound.

## **II. A MECHANISM FOR SELECTING CHORISTERS**

### **1. Choir admission criteria**

In his book, Boncho Bochev summarizes the criteria for admission of choristers in three categories: musical abilities, vocal qualities and emotionality of the performance. Of great importance in the exam sheets are the points “vocalization, transitions”, “voice range” and “plasticity”, which reveal both the level of preparation and the child’s potential. “Vocalization” is the manner of singing – “light” or “with effort”, “with great effort”, “open” or “rounded”. A description of the transitions is added to the same column – mainly the head transition: satisfactory, smooth, almost imperceptible, etc. The aural and vocal qualities of the candidates are assessed in detail to ensure the sonority sought by the conductor, to make it possible to model the sound emission, to ensure singing stability, clear and stable intonation of choirs.

### **2. Vocal qualities**

Bochev searches sonorous and clear, but not too characteristic voices, for the manner of voicing mentioned above. Among the exam sheets, the following positive timbre characteristics are often found: bright, clear, pleasant, definitely soprano. And the negative ones are: discolored, raspy, strained – they exclude participation in the choir. The alto is the least common, so often the older choristers take part in the alto part. The range might be for example:  $ahc^1-c^2defgac^3$ . Dynamics and plasticity of the voice are also noted. For Boncho

Bochev, it is important that the child sings without great strain, that there are no speech defects and that improper singing habits are not observed.

### **III. VOCAL WORK IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS**

#### **1. Completing the choral parts**

Children's voices are not yet timbre-shaped as sopranos or altos. Their distribution is mainly based on range and transitions. It is important that singers perform the choral part in which they feel most comfortable in order to properly develop their voice. After admission in the choir, regular observation of the voice development is necessary due to the rapidly occurring changes in childhood and adolescence. Also of primary importance is the numerical ratio between the choral parts, in which arithmetical accuracy of the number of voices is not observed, but a balanced and equalized sound is sought.

#### **2. Arrangement of the choir**

The "correct", successful arrangement is a prerequisite for building the two main choral habits – intonation and ensemble. The author says that he arranges the three main parts in his children's choir from left to right as follows: first sopranos, altos, second sopranos. The reasons for having the altos in the middle is that they tend to sound a little rougher, thus blending more easily with the overall sound. In the cited article, Boncho Bochev also develops other "*guiding singing considerations*", which are synthesized and interpreted in this subsection, and will only be listed here: rule for visual contact; for compactness; for inexperienced choristers; for the "border choristers" between two different choral parts; for divisi; aesthetic considerations.

#### **3. Choral and vocal habits**

Rehearsals for newly admitted choristers last about an hour, but their voices rest for 15-20 minutes – time for conducting instructions, a short talk or "passive study". Bochev's approach is known, in which the younger ones learn from the older ones through imitation. In vocal work, it should be applied thoughtfully. Beginners are introduced to the standard for desired sonority without imitating the timbre, dynamics and density of more mature voices. As soon as they join the choir, children gradually form basic choral and vocal habits – correct body posture, breathing, sound formation, diction, etc., which allow them to develop their vocal technique, to acquire the ability to control their own voice.

#### **4. Choral warm-up**

The main task is the intonation with a closed mouth of exercises in the range of fifths in ascending and descending motion. At the end of the singing warm-up, the same exercises

are vocalized with the syllable “ma” or “na” (examples are given in the thesis). To cover the open sonority, scale-like passages are sung on the wide vowels “a” and “o” with the syllables “me-a”, “mi-o”, etc. When singing with an open mouth, work is mainly done on the vowel “a”, and other task is to refine the vowel “o”. Exercises are given to dense the sonority of the altos. More experienced choristers perform arpeggios within an octave to extend the range. In singing, the progress of each chorister over the years is monitored; so e.g. the same tasks should be performed incomparably better in the third year of singing training than in the first.

### **5. Emotional and expressive singing**

The two terms “emotional” and “expressive” are differentiated, the former being more general, while the latter refers to interpretation. Bochev examines the issue of emotional education in two aspects: in the selection of suitable works and in the process of studying them. Further on in the dissertation, the visual side of emotional singing is also commented on. Ways of emotionally recreating musical works for beginning choristers are indicated: with easy movements, gestures, facial expressions, a short *mise-en-scène*. And senior choristers embody emotionality through facial expression and vocal expressiveness in a relatively static singing position. Only “Repetitsiya za Konzert” by Mozart Bochev interprets as a small play – with a “conductor” - soloist and an “orchestra” of choristers.

Expressive singing acquires a concrete external expression and is demonstrated, as in vocal work, through the example of “model children”. We find their photos in the archive of the choir. They were also published in music textbooks for secondary schools in the 1960s and 1970s. For Bochev, expressive singing has is a choral habit.

### **6. The vocal work through the memories of former choristers**

In this subsection, the survey responses of former choristers regarding vocal work are analyzed. Most of the choir graduates characterized the singing style as “schooled” or “academic”. The specific vocal guidance received from the choir conductor is clustered around the basic performance techniques of rounding tone and active articulation of the text. The constant reminder of proper singing posture, correct breathing, expressive face without many facial expressions also complete our idea of the systematically conducted singing training in “Bodra Smyana”. Requirements related to confluence, ensemble also prevail. Interesting details are added for a sound without much vibrato, which gives reason to draw a parallel with the vocal principles of Hristo Nedyalkov in the Children’s Radio Choir.

## **CHAPTER SIX. THE MODEL OF “BODRA SMYANA”**

After the establishment of “Bodra Smyana” as a leading singing collective in the 1950s and 1960s, many choral conductors began to implement some of Boncho Bochev’s ideas in their work. The spread of the model is due to the frequent trips of “Bodra Smyana” in the country; through participation in the program of Radio Sofia and through sound recording activity; with presence in music textbooks; as a result of the methodical assistance provided. Along with the main concert activity, the choir also makes a number of visits to schools, educational concerts for children and adults, participations in important political and cultural events.

The sound of “Bodra Smyana” becomes a kind of benchmark. In the 1960s, new ensembles appeared, and the existing ones quickly developed in the direction of intonation, tune, ensemble, phrasing, and singing technique. Boncho Bochev emphasized the urgent need for each of the existing choirs to build their own profile by choosing a specific repertoire and by the performance style of the conductor.

## **I. TWO APPROACHES**

The sound of the Children’s Radio Choir is most clearly distinguished from the model of “Bodra Smyana”. In this subsection, some organizational moments and the representative repertoire of the choir are commented. Nedyalkov attends the rehearsals of “Bodra Smyana” and studies the methodology of Boncho Bochev. Adopts the way of keeping choral documentation, the criteria for the selection of choristers, the stages of auditioning the candidates, the regular exams. And although he appreciates the work of his colleague, the sonority that Hristo Nedyalkov seeks with his choir is significantly different. This issue is specifically discussed by Venelin Krastev in Book 4 of his “Profiles” and the analysis is placed in the main text of the dissertation.

The choristers of “Bodra Smyana” sing the vowels quite similarly to the way they would pronounce them. Children leave an impression of immediacy and emotionality, as if they are singing with a smile. And what is observed both in terms of sonority and externally – in photos from the concerts of the Children’s Radio Choir – is that Hristo Nedyalkov’s choristers vocalize with a different type of vertically-shaped mouth opening.

Both choral schools apply the universally valid truths about the need for correct posture, breathing, articulation, etc. The difference is in the approach. Nedyalkov clarifies terms such as “resonators”, “mask”, “yawn”, “high position”; he requires his youngest choristers to come to rehearsal with a mirror to observe the position of the tongue and the oval of the lips.

Regarding the benefits of his method, the conductor of the Children's Radio Choir points out that the voices of his choristers sound much more strong than falsettos. Accordingly, the choir can perform with less members, which is important when traveling abroad.

## **II. "BODRA SMYANA" – INSPIRATION AND STIMULUS**

Bochev's method of work quickly spread. In a report on the activities of "Bodra Smyana" from 1981, it is stated that, according to its example, "today there are 17 pioneering representative choirs with great international authority in Bulgaria." To them we should also add the school ensembles – in primary, secondary, and high schools, as well as the girls' and youth singing formations, created on the initiative of the grown-up former choristers. Children's choirs, inspired by Boncho Bochev's model, appear both in cities and in villages. However, the work conditions are not the same, and the reasons are explained in this subsection.

### **1. Pioneer choir – Khardam village**

In his book *"My Pioneer Choir"*, Mladen Statev gratefully shares about the joint rehearsals with "Bodra Smyana", about the written correspondence – *"100 letters – a whole methodical guide"*, about the scores with conductor's notes – all this not only helps Statev to get to know the principles of Bochev's work, but to accept his conducting method as the only possible and correct one.

The choir from the village of Kardam performs songs by P. Boyadzhiev, B. Ibrishimov, Evg. Cheshmedzhiev, B. Trichkov, P. Hadzhiev – the then available school repertoire. We also note works that are more difficult, for example: "Izprashtane" by T. Popov, "Radostna Pessen za Republikata" by L. Pipkov, "Oi Tumany Moi" by Vl. Zakharov. The repertoire also includes songs by Dobri Hristov, which Mladen Statev learned with the help of Bochev.

Folkore works occupy a large share in the villages. School choirs often perform folkore songs from the collections of F. Kutev. Due to the narrower range, these songs probably seem suitable for children to perform. However, most of them contain technical difficulties that require special preparation.

Children's choir ensembles in the cities work in a different environment. Their aspiration is for contemporary, unperformed songs. Usually, mixed choirs have been functioning there for decades, and experience has been gained in the performance of larger works, together with professional orchestras and theaters.

## **2. Representative children's choir – town of Tolbukhin (Dobrich)**

The children's choir in Dobrich was founded in 1961 with the support of Boncho Bochev. After certain organizational difficulties, the singing group stabilized in terms of numbers, building choral habits, vocal training. At the First Festival of Pioneer Choir Amateur Art, held in Gabrovo in 1966, at which Boncho Bochev was a chairman of the republican jury, the Children's Choir of Dobrich performed with great success both Bulgarian and foreign works. The repertoire includes some of the iconic works from the repertoire of "Bodra Smyan", e.g. "Zhalta Peperuda" by L. Pipkov, "Zakukala Kukuivitsa" by F. Kutev, "Planinski Noshti" by Z. Kodai, "Tiha Ukrainska Nosht" by R. Shchedrin, fragments from "Missa brevis" by Britton, "Stabat mater" by Pergolesi, performed by soloists from the Varna Opera and the Children's Music School of Dobrich.

A significant share in the repertoire is given to Western European Renaissance and Baroque music, for example "Stabat mater" by Scarlatti, Magnificat by Monteverdi, "Echo" by Orlando di Lasso, "Ahi, Che Quest' Occhi Miei" by Palestrina.

In 1970, the choir of Dobrich was a partner of "Bodra Smyana" at the ISME conference. Together they performed "Rodina Slyshit" by Shostakovich and "Vecherniy Zvon" arranged by Vl. Sokolov. This became reality because of the closeness in the sonority of the two singing formations, which is commented on in the text of the dissertation.

## **3. Children's choir of the District Pioneer Home – Burgas**

Milka Stoeva has been the conductor of the Children's Choir at the District Pioneer Home in Burgas since 1961. The very first appearance at the Republican Pioneer Assembly in Sofia in 1962 brought first place and the first gold medal. There were also great successes abroad: at a competition in Neeprelt, Belgium in 1972, the choir received the maximum 100 points and first place, and Milka Stoeva – an award for masterful conducting.

The choir collaborated with a number of composers, to whom it dedicated special original programs: Al. Yosifov, Al. Tekeliev, D. Petkov, D. Tapkov, T. Popov and others. Milka Stoeva works together with the professional music institutes in Burgas – the Opera and the Symphony orchestra. The result of this were the performances of the oratorio "Momche kato Slantse" by P. Stupel, the suite "Iskrite na Oktomvri" by D. Petkov, the cantata "Momcheto i Chaykata" by Al. Yosifov and others.

The choir performed the emblematic for "Bodra Smyana" choir works "Nani mi, Nani, Damyancho" and "Zhalta Peperuda". Interpreted by Milka Stoeva, however, the common songs sounded their own. Along with this, the repertoire was gradually enriched with music work by composers with whom the ensemble maintained artistic contacts.



#### **4. “Bodra Pessen” Children’s Choir – town of Shumen**

In 1963, Veneta Vicheva founded the “Bodra Pessen” Children’s Choir. The ensemble first won an award at a pioneer competition in Gabrovo in 1966, then participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> World Youth Festival in Sofia. In 1968, it was again among the best ensembles at the May Choir Festival in Varna, and at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republican Festival of Amateur Arts in 1969, it won a gold medal. “Bodra Pessen” grew very quickly, as Boncho Bochev himself notes in the chronicle book of the choir.

Among the emblematic works of “Bodra Pessen” are the songs “Sinigerova Svatba”, “Za Da Ima Pessen” by Petar Stupel, “Chudnoto Horo” by G. Kostov, “Malka Prikazka” by F. Pavlov, “Urok po Gadulka” by N. Stoykov and others. The need for up-to-date, contemporary repertoire prompted Vicheva to create the “Dobri Voinikov National School Choir Festival” (today “Dobri Voinikov International Children and Youth Choral Gala Days”) in 1971.

Apart from the sought-after diversity in the repertoire, the vocal work, the requirements for admission to the choir, the regular exams in tercets or quartets are similar for Vicheva and Bochev. The current conductor Denitsa Uzunova retains much of the organizational work of the past. She pays great attention to singing warm-up, which (unlike before) is performed without an instrument and includes polyphonic exercises. A light and expressive sonority, accuracy of intonation, including the dissonants laid down in modern scores, is sought.

#### **5. “Druzna Pessen” Children’s Choir – town of Sliven**

Metodiy Grigorov became the leader of the formation in 1969. The first solo concert of the choir was in 1970 with works by Al. Raichev, L. Pipkov, D. Petkov, P. Hadzhiev, P. Stupel, St. Obretenov et al. Hristo Nedyalkov provides methodical help, but Grigorov also considers Boncho Bochev and Zahari Mednikarov as his teachers. In the documentary-memoir book “Methodiy Grigorov and the Sliven Choirs 1968-2003” there is a photo from a conversation with Boncho Bochev in Sofia in 1971, and Grigorov specifies that he attended rehearsals of the most expert connoisseur of children’s choral singing.

The first important participations of the choir were: The Meeting of the Pioneer Choirs from Southern Bulgaria in 1971 in Sliven, the Children’s Book and Song Week in 1972, the 4<sup>th</sup> Republican Festival, etc. Grigorov includes in the repertoire contemporary works by K. Iliev – “Machna Gatanka”, T. Popov – “Bela sam, Bela, Yunache”, Iv. Spasov – “Viroglavko”, N. Stoykov – “Ala-bala-nitsa”, etc. Among the foreign works, interesting examples stand out, such as “Bolnoto Kotentse” – Hans Eisler, “Malkiyat Kosmonavt” – Vladim Kuzmetsov, etc. The choir also sings some works from the repertoire of “Bodra

Smyana”, for example “Ana-Marzelana” and “Posmali Mango” by G. Dimitrov and “Repetitsiya za Kontsert” by Mozart, “Liylchina Pessen” by Fleiss, etc. In general, the repertoire of “Druzha Pessen” sounds up-to-date, with a predominant share of modern compositions, with a complicated musical language and a variety of musical and expressive means. The Grigorov’s choir impresses with a childlike spontaneity and emotionality of the sound. The text of the dissertation contains some reviews that describe the light, sonorous, typically children’s sonority.

#### **6. Other types of choir ensembles**

Boncho Bochev shared his idea about a boys’ choir, but this project was not realized in “Bodra Smyana”. The first such singing formation in Bulgaria – the Sofia Boys’ Choir was created in 1968 by Liliana Todorova, the Varna Boys’ Choir – in 1969 by Marin Chonev, and the Plovdiv Boys’ Choir – in 1975.

Another important problem is the development of youth choirs in Bulgaria. In the period 1953-54, at the insistence of the former graduates of “Bodra Smyana”, “Hor na Sofiyskite Devoyki” (“Choir of Sofia Young Ladies”) was founded. Boncho Bochev’s idea of the importance of continuity in the choir school is confirmed, the basis of which is the skilfully and responsibly trained children’s ensemble, but on which other formations, differentiated by age, as well as by genre, can be built on – chamber, madrigal, cantata-oratorio, etc.

We could summarize that the choirs that borrow the overall model or individual elements from the “Bodra Smyana” choir are indeed numerous and diverse. The formation of one’s own style, expressed in the selection and interpretation of the repertoire, is a long process. Even more so when it is necessary to start from the very beginning, to form children’s taste for music, to work on solving vocal and performing problems. As well as achieving results in a time frame that would convince parents and the community of the right to exist of the new type of children’s choirs, created under the influence of the already established practice of “Bodra Smyana”. Tasks that they solved successfully to become in turn units of the development and future of our choral history.

### **CONCLUSION**

The present study analyzes the main characteristics of Boncho Bochev’s conducting and music-pedagogical activities. “Bodra Smyana” embodies the sustainable principles of organization and music-singing training, which have proven to be decisive for the future development of children’s choral activities in our country.

Achieving the main goal of the dissertation went through resolving a number of specific tasks. It was necessary to carefully study both the existing literature and the conductor's archive in order to reveal and interpret his ideas in their entirety.

Due to the unavailability of the materials transferred to the State Archives, the materials in the current rehearsal building of "Bodra Smyana" on "Tsar Boris I Street" became the main source for the present study. This legacy of the conductor Boncho Bochev covers a huge array of choral documentation, correspondence, summarizations on the choir activities, plans, reports, articles, notes... Unfortunately, as a result of a robbery on the premises, all the documents were disturbed and scattered, which necessitated preliminary work for their organization and sorting – an unforeseen and challenging task.

After that, basic data about the choir history, its concerts, repertoire, educational activities, etc. were extracted and compared with the information in already published sources about Boncho Bochev and his choir, discussed in Chapter One of the dissertation. The literature review describes and systematizes research and critical works, journalistic and memoir texts. And here another difficulty arose – a discrepancy in some facts, which had to be checked further. However, the process confirmed the correct completion of the choral documentation by the leaders of Bodra Smyana, which means that it can be used as a reliable resource not only in the current dissertation, in which it was introduced for the first time, but also in other future studies on the subject.

In Chapter Two, for the first time in our musicological literature, the organization of training in "Bodra Smyana" is examined. Data on the types of choral documentation, choral compositions and singing, the selection and age of the choristers, the rehearsal schedule and the conducted repertoire exams were also interpreted.

The results of these descriptions and analyzes can be partially applied to the modern choral-conducting practice, to the extent that even today it is important to create a structure that ensures systematic work at a high level.

In Chapter Three, the repertoire policy of the "Bodra Smyana" choir is commented on both horizontally – by discussing the changes that occurred during the studied period from the 40s to the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and vertically – by distinguishing the songs by character, genre, style, complexity, proportions between Bulgarian and foreign works, etc.

The repertoire is mastered thanks to the solfège training discussed in Chapter Four of the present work. Boncho Bochev implements the "Stalbitsa" method not only as a method for achieving music literacy, but as a way to form habits for conscious perception and performance, and as a means of increasing the overall theoretical and practical training of

children. Bochev's views on the role of music education and school singing are also explored in the same chapter. His schoolbooks have also been presented for the first time, in which some changes in the educational system can be traced – the reforms in the “Stalbitsa”, the selection of musical material, the proportions between the various types of activities included in the singing and music classes. The results of a practical course in solfege, based on the accomplished analyses, have also been briefly commented on.

In Chapter Five of the dissertation, the principles of vocal training in “Bodra Smyana” are systematically and purposefully interpreted for the first time in our musicological literature, marking a new stage in the differentiation of the components of Boncho Bochev's conducting method. Characteristic of the choir is the so-called “natural staging” – without tension, but with the necessary emotional charge. Achieving a rounding, soft and sonorous tone, sung with a smile, is the goal of choir-singing work in the choir. In addition to its vocal qualities, “Bodra smyana” also stands out with exclusive ensemble performance skills with impeccably balanced vocal parts, brilliant intonation, clear diction and meaningful facial expression, which have been repeatedly noted by critics in various stage performances of the choir.

In Chapter Six, a parallel is drawn between some working principles of our leading conductors of children's choirs. Of course, each choir has its own unique identity, but the influence of Boncho Bochev is also evident in the approaches to sound extraction, as well as in the selection of the repertoire.

Even today, many choirs retain fundamental principles of music-singing training that reflect the successful model of “Bodra Smyana”, albeit adapted to modern circumstances.

Systematic work, stages of training, partial rehearsals are the staple practice of most choirs in our country. The vocal performance is much more confident than in the past, and in some groups, it has reached a very high level, aligning with the latest global trends, such as the use of kinesthetic props and a dynamic stage presence.

However, solfege training gives way to learning the repertoire by ear, where the score serves mainly as a memory support, and not so much as a musical text being read by the choristers. On the other hand, as this was also confirmed in the attempt to learn musical notation using Bochev's schoolbooks, the children perceive such a task as interesting and entertaining, and it can once again become part of the musical training of the choristers in our country.

Therefore, I hope that the study of the individual components of Boncho Bochev's conducting method carried out in this dissertation will help solve some of the current

problems of children's choral singing and will serve as a basis for further research into the issue. As for the main contributions and merits of the work, they could be summarized to the following main points:

1. This dissertation is the first of its kind in our country, offering a comprehensive overview of the sustainable principles underlying Boncho Bochev's conducting and music-pedagogical activities. It highlights the main artistic, methodological, and conceptual aspects of his work with the "Bodra Smyana" choir during the 1940s through the 1970s.

2. In addition to the existing literature on children's choral art in general and the "Bodra Smyana" choir in particular, it introduces and examines for the first time a collection of archival materials by Boncho Bochev, which are preserved in the conductor's room of the current rehearsal building of the choir.

3. The history of the ensemble has been traced in detail and the organization of training in "Bodra Smyana" has been discussed as a necessary basis for the choir's artistic and creative work.

4. An overview and systematization of the choir repertoire has been made, both diachronically and according to the main characteristics of the performed works.

5. The main ideas and practices of solfege training in "Bodra Smyana" and some music-pedagogical views of Boncho Bochev, applied in the schools of general education, have been interpreted.

6. The principles of vocal work in "Bodra Smyana" have been discussed. The idea of children's sonority of the choir from the reviewed period has been concretized; the ways to achieve it have been presented; a comparison has been made with another approach to vocal training.

7. The influence of Boncho Bochev on selected our children's and youth choirs has been discussed.

#### **PUBLICATIONS ON THE THEME OF THE DISSERTATION**

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