

# OPINION

by Prof. Dr Julian Kuyumdzhev

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*

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Iva Georgieva has completed her secondary education in Burgas - NUMTI "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov" with a degree in piano and graduated from G. Rakovski School of Latin Languages with a degree in Italian (independent study). She received her higher education at the NMA "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov" with a degree in Sound Direction, Sound and Media Design (BA) in 2012 and Choral Conducting (MA) in 2013. From 2017 to 2023 she is a PhD student at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS. She participated in the Creative Laboratory for Introduction to Choral Literature with the supervisor Assoc. Krikor Chetianyan in Plovdiv (2016) and in the Creative Laboratory for Choral Music "Krikor Chetianyan" with the supervisor Frieder Bernius in Plovdiv (2019). Her performing experience in choral music includes her participation as a chorister in the chamber choir "Irina Shchiglich" at the People's Chitalishte "Slavyanska beseda 1880" with conductor Denitsa Kaburova (2008 - 2018) and in the vocal ensemble "Bel canto" with conductor Vanilia Kisova (2010 - 2012), as choirmaster in the chamber choir "Sofia" with conductor Maria Ruseva (2012 - 2016). ), as an accompanist and vocal teacher in the vocal studio "Rainbow" at the House of Culture "Sredets" with artistic director Snezhana Polihronova-Karnolsky (2016 - 2019) and as an accompanist in the choir "Canto nova" at the National Community Centre "Tsanko Tserkovski 1946" with conductor Evgeni Mirev (2016 - 2019). Since 2017 Iva Georgieva has been an accompanist in the choir "Bodra Smyana".

The work includes an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography (which contains 109 titles in Cyrillic and Latin) and seven annexes with a total of 237 pages, of which 188 pages are main text.

The focus of the study is the activities of the great choral conductor Boncho Bochev (1899-1975) and the chorus "Bodra Smyana", which he founded and directed for almost three decades (1946-1975), as a starting point for the analysis of children's choral singing in Bulgaria during this period. In fact, this is the first work devoted specifically to the contribution of this legendary figure to Bulgarian musical culture and to the ensemble invariably associated with his name. Hence, the main aim of the study is "to systematize and interpret the enduring characteristics of the work in the Bodra Smyana Choir under the direction of Boncho Bochev" (p. 10). In relation to this goal, the author sets herself the tasks of studying the conductor's archive and presenting his ideas about the organization of his work; to investigate the specifics of sound production, as well as the repertoire and concert activity of the choir in the mentioned period; to raise the question of the influence of Boncho Bochev and "Bodra Smyana" as a model for other children's choirs in these decades.

The first chapter systematizes a considerable amount of information about Boncho Bochev and the chorus "Bodra Smyana", derived from works on choral work in Bulgaria, as well as from articles, conference reports and journalistic materials, but also from the author's own texts and documents from his archive. This chapter thus provides the necessary basis for the following five, in which Iva Georgieva analyses various aspects of the subject.

The second chapter is devoted to Boncho Bochev's organizational work in Bodra Smyana. The author clarifies the content of the term "choir school" used by B. Bochev - it "denotes the way of functioning of the choral collective", "an organizational form of work in which training is conducted in a planned manner, on professional grounds and under professional excellence", and its main task is "to cover children in a wide age range and to provide them with a long and complete course of training" (p. 36). On the basis of the choir's extant documentation, Iva Georgieva clarifies the tasks set by Bochev and his criteria for interpretation; his requirements for the selection of choristers; the forming of different categories of choristers into several ensembles and their balancing in terms of numbers, level, and workload; the rehearsal schedule and types of singing; and the repertoire examinations introduced by Bochev, which "helped to establish a single criterion for artistic performance" (p. 49); the difficulties in the work of the chorus and the changes in organization that were necessary.

The repertoire of "Bodra Smyana" is analyzed in the third chapter from several points of view - as a chronological change within three decades (1947 - 1977), as complexity, as a ratio between Bulgarian and foreign titles, as age groups of the choristers; the importance of the interaction between the conductor and a number of composers who wrote songs specifically for the ensemble is highlighted - according to Iva Georgieva, "the performance qualities of "Bodra Smyana" give composers broader opportunities to create without particular restrictions", the songs have "vivid concert qualities and very varied subject matter" (p. 88).

The fourth chapter explores the teaching of solfège in "Bodra Smyana", its aims and specifics during the various stages (special emphasis is placed on the work of the long-time solfège pedagogue Ivelin Dimitrov), as well as Boncho Bochev's principles regarding school singing as reflected in his articles and textbooks on singing, his positions on the place and chorus of the subject in Bulgarian schools, and his views on music education.

Iva Georgieva defines the vocal training in the chorus "Bodra Smyana" as "a key aspect of Boncho Bochev's conducting method" (p. 131). In the fifth chapter, she analyses the formation of the approach to working with the choristers, the criteria for their selection, the completion of the choral parts, the problems of correct posture, breathing, sound production, diction, singing exercises, the achievement of emotional and expressive singing, and the development of stage behavior. The author emphasizes that Boncho Bochev "created a system for evaluating and screening quality voices, for tracking voice changes and completing parts, for singing and arranging on stage" (p. 158).

The final sixth chapter focuses on the influence of "Bodra Smyana" choir on children's choral ensembles of these three decades. Iva Georgieva highlights that the model of this ensemble spread in several ways: 'thanks to frequent trips and concerts in different parts of the country; through participation in the Radio Sofia program and through recording activities; through presence in music textbooks as a result of the methodological assistance provided' (pp. 159-160). The influence on several children's choirs is presented, including the Representative Children's Choir in Dobrich (then Tolbukhin) with conductor Zahari Mednikarov, the Children's Choir at the District Pioneer House in Burgas with conductor Milka Stoeva (later the Milka Stoeva Children's Choir), the Children's Choir "Bodra Song" in Shumen with conductor Prof. Veneta Vicheva, Children's Choir "Druzhna Pesen" in Sliven with conductor Metodi Grigorov. At the same time, the author particularly focuses on the case of the Bulgarian National Radio Children's Choir, whose conductor Hristo Nedyalkov at first "studied the organization of the work and the methodology of

Boncho Bochev" (p. 161), but later sought and achieved a different sound. She concludes that the two men "turned out to be diametrically opposed in terms of sound formation and notions of 'beautiful' sonority" (p. 164), and so Nedyalkov created his own, different approach.

In the introduction, the doctoral student stresses that the question of the influence of the Bodra Smyana Choir 'will be illustrated through the practice of a few selected collectives' (p. 10). An important question is on what principle these choirs were selected, because out of sight are such ensembles as the children's choir Danube Waves in Ruse, the choir Children's Kitka in Plovdiv, the Dobri Hristov Choir in Varna, the City Pioneer Choir in Kazanlak (today the Iskra Children's and Youth Choir), the Children's Choir at the District Pioneer Home in Yambol (today the Children's Choir at the Yambol Choir School "Prof. Georgi Dimitrov"), the Choir of Sofia Boys, the Choir of Varna Boys, the Choir of Plovdiv Boys. It remains unclear whether these choirs were not influenced by Bodra Smya and Boncho Bochev or whether the author's selection had other reasons.

Iva Georgieva's work for the first time thoroughly analyzes Boncho Bochev's activity as a conductor and teacher, his conducting method, the organization of his work in "Bodra Smyana" choir, his solo training and vocal work, repertoire policy and thus outlines from different sides the significant role of the famous musician in children's choral practice and music education in our country. The author also introduces a wealth of previously unknown material from the Bodra Smyana Choir archive, some of which is included as appendices. All of this constitutes an indisputable contribution of her dissertation.

The PhD student has six publications on the topic, published in the journal "Bulgarian Musicology" (2019, 2020), the collection "Doctoral Readings" of NMA "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov" (2019), the collection "Young Scientific Forum on Music and Dance" of NBU (2019, 2020) and "Papers of BAS" (2020). The 41-page abstract fully and accurately reflects the content of the work.

Based on the merits of the work and the personal contribution of the doctoral student, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award her the degree of doctor in the professional field 8.3. "Music and Dance Art".

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