

REVIEW

On the dissertation of

KALINA NIKOLAEVA TOMOVA

Institute of Art Studies, BAS

On the subject:

ENGLISH CAROL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY VOCAL REPERTOIRE: GENRE SPECIFICS, TECHNIQUES, INTERACTIONS

For receiving the educational and academic degree Doctor

Professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art

Reviewer: Prof. DSc Mariana Bouleva-Petrova

University of Veliko Tarnovo "St Cyril and Methodius"

Kalina Tomova's dissertation was submitted for defense by the Research Group Music Culture and Information at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, and all the requirements of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS were met. The stages of the procedure have been passed correctly and no violations were found. The submitted text and scientific publications meet the Minimum national requirements under Article 2b(2) and (3) of the ADASRB and Article 24(2) and (3) of the RIADASRB. The publications approbate the key ideas of the thesis and the abstract adequately and comprehensively reflect its content.

Kalina Tomova is a graduate of NMA "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov", where she obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees - BA in Classical Singing, MA in Vocal Pedagogy and MA in Musicology. Immediately after completing her master's degree in musicology, she started her doctoral studies at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS. Her professional work experience at the Bulgarian National Radio and the Sofia Music Weeks, as well as by the publications she has so far published (mostly in English), her participation in international scientific events and in an international project is quite impressive. Tomova is a young scholar who is purposefully, intensively, and gradually building on her education, while in parallel, in the most convincing way, making her milestones known and forming lasting academic interests.

The dissertation has a volume of 413 pages, including 194 pages of main text (introduction, three chapters and conclusion); a bibliography including 194 titles in English, Latin, German and Bulgarian, as well as 29 manuscripts and 10 CDs; an appendix with transcriptions of 119 songs.

I judge the focus on fifteenth-century English carols *to be a remarkable encounter with a unique research object* that, with literally every feature, generates significant scholarly facts and radiates the potential for vivid contributions to various subject areas of knowledge - history, cultural studies, music theory. The polyphonic song genre of English or Latin carols, born in England in the late Middle Ages, is indeed informative from every perspective: 1. as a genre phenomenon (both socially and musically-linguistically); 2. as an occasion for looking into cultural communications in the fifteenth century; 3. as an opportunity to penetrate into the most specific levels of the mensural type of musical notation and musical thinking; 4. as material for the study of polyphonic compositional techniques.

However, the abundant opportunities for scientific insight arising from a given subject present each researcher not only with enticing prospects but also with serious risks. I believe that overcoming these hypothetical risks is the first major achievement of the young author and her supervisor. Kalina Tomova does not focus on a particular aspect of the genre (which would seemingly center the effort but would deprive it of vital context), but instead relies on a *“thorough examination of the repertoire in its entirety,”* which *“has not yet been realized in the scholarly literature on carols”* (p. 5). This is a decision that has good grounds for at least three reasons: 1. the knowledge and scientific hypotheses accumulated in the cited representative studies in the period from 1935 to the present day need to be critically examined, collated and synthesized in order to move forward; 2. the appearance of such a work, whose original language is Bulgarian, implies providing as broad a view of the issues as possible; 3. each aspect in the study of genre needs the coordinate system of the others to protect the researcher from the aimlessness of particular theoretical conclusions.

But the author is not content with this “horizontal plane” of informativity. Kalina Tomova's careful study of the current state of scholarly achievements has given her the chance to highlight those critical or yet unlit points where she can make her bold entries in depth. Thus, the vertical lines of force of personal discovery emerge, with which the dissertation author declares her fresh presence and new voice among the international scientific community. This gives grounds to evaluate the development as **significant, topical, and promising**.

In order to achieve the tasks set out in the introduction, the exceptional correctness with which Kalina Tomova manages to delineate the boundaries of the object and the novelty of the subject is of great importance: the toponymic approach to the genre - not along the lines of language, but along geographical lines (p. 4); the precise time boundaries - the 15th century; the homogeneity of the corpus of songs (*“about 120 songs, which provide the opportunity to enter in detail into the subject of the dissertation - the genre features, compositional techniques and notational problems of the carols, as well as the interactions between the genre and the rest of the vocal music of the period”*, p. 5); the coverage of various issues of a theoretical nature, which has either not been done on the whole repertoire before, or (even it has been in sight) not done extensively and from different perspectives. Thus, one gets a sense of

the *novelty of the research* in the context of current studies and searches in the scholarly community devoted to the issues in question.

A great merit of the work (highlighted especially in the introduction) is the adherence to the terminology characteristic of the theoretical thinking of the era, as well as the special arrangement of the cases in which modern terminology is resorted to. Overall, the dissertation's introduction satisfied my expectation of receiving the necessary orientation to get an adequate understanding and to clear up any questions that might arise spontaneously.

Before I discuss the individual chapters, I want to highlight one more important point. It concerns the fact that any topic with a complex subject and object inevitably activates a complex methodology. It brings together alternating or simultaneous methods that come from different scientific disciplines: history, cultural studies, music theory. Energy is invested by the author in the combined operation of deductive and inductive strategies, hinted at in the following self-reflexive thought from the introduction: "...making new transcriptions while working on the study, in addition to being a necessary step to mastering the mensural notation, allowed me to penetrate in depth both the notational and compositional characteristics of the repertoire" (p. 9). This suggests a sophisticated theoretical-empirical approach in which the theoretical framework constructed from source texts¹ and contemporary research is tested against empirical musical material, which in turn provokes the need to enrich theoretical knowledge. I would recommend that if Kalina Tomova realizes *a book publication of her dissertation (which I highly recommend and look forward to)*, she should strengthen her self-reflection on her research process and include in the introduction not only the aims and objectives, but also the methods with which the research was carried out.

Chapter one (The carol and its place in the music of Western Europe in the

fifteenth century) impresses with its high informativeness and the wide range of thematization and problematization². Although this chapter is primarily systematizing, it reconstructs a colorful panorama of historical events and cultural interactions. Comparative observations are made on related genres of the period and polyphonic techniques (faburden and fauxbourdon and English discord) are presented, leading to the conclusion that "Fifteenth-century Carol brings together all the above features of English polyphonic music of this century" (p. 30). Of great interest to me is the information, reinforced by relevant historical material and contemporary interpretations, about the contact between musicians on the island and on the mainland. Chapter One is also the author's first success, achieved by

¹ Music theoretical treatises from the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries by authors such as Johannes Boon, Franco of Cologne, Hermann Fink, Zebald Heyden, Stephan Monettarius, Walter Addington, Stefano Vaneo, Johannes Vetulus and anonymous theorists.

² 1.1. *English musical sources in the fifteenth century - main characteristics and content*; 1.2. *Vocal genres in fifteenth-century England and the place of the carol among them*; 1.3. *The musical idiom in fifteenth-century England and the place of carol characteristics in the music of the island at that time*; 1.4. *The social functions of the English carol*; 1.5 *The carol and related genres*; 1.6. *Problems of the performing praxis of the carols*

combining historical, cultural, and musical theoretical approaches, with the comparative and systematizing method actively at work.

Chapter Two (The notation of the carol repertoire) delves into the problems of mensural notation. I will express my personal conviction that the neglect of this knowledge in music education is to the detriment not only of the music-theoretical school concerned, but also (and especially) to the detriment of musical performers (I am not referring specifically to interpreters of music from the 13th-17th centuries). The study of mensural notation can reveal the significance of the great turning point in the conception and organization of musical time brought about by mensuration, which replaced the modal principle of increasing tonal durations in arithmetic progression with the principle of divisibility of durations in geometric progression. Knowledge of the mensural rhythmic system broadens scientific 'vision' and thus opens the possibility of realizing the patterns deeply embedded in cultural memory, the mystery of which is hidden in European mensural music, and which deserve the attention of contemporary musicians. Considering the complexity of this fundamentally contextual notation and the direct resonance of its mastery on dissertation application with transcriptions, and conversely the role of practical work on them as a source of empirical material for new inductive conclusions, *it can be argued that the young author has indeed made a serious contribution to the construction of a richer and historically adequate view of mensural notation.*

In this chapter, Kalina Tomova provides a generous “scientific gift” for the Bulgarian professional music community by outlining the basic principles and rules of mensural notation. The need for this is perfectly justified by the author on p. 70. Personally, I would be very happy if this effort of hers were to have the effect of fertilizing the pedagogical tradition as a beginning. The first step in this direction is the study published in the journal *Bulgarian Musicology*³.

In the information presented, the author's attention is focused on the form of the notes, their correspondence to modern note values, and especially on the essential issue of the mensuration of the breves (perfect and imperfect tempus) and of the semibreves (perfect and imperfect pace). It would have been to the advantage to mention here (and not just further into the text) certain principles related to the mensural organization of music that play an essential role in the rest of the development. For example, the sentence "Because of the lack of bar features in the mensural notation, it is not always entirely clear where one perfection ends and the next begins", which appears in Chapter 3, should be introduced in § 2.1 in an appropriate way at an appropriate place. It is of particular importance that the question of strong time be raised in principle immediately afterwards, clarifying the specificity of the mensuration (quantitative in type as a correlation between larger note values and smaller ones) versus the qualitative (accentual) meter (visualized in a bar grid). In the elaboration, up to one point the expression *strong time* appears without quotation marks, after which it begins to function in quotation marks, i.e.

³ Tomova, Kalina. Introduction to Mensural Notation through Examples from the 15th Century English Carol Repertoire – In: *Bulgarian Musicology*, 03/2022, pp.96-119.

conditionally, in the analyses of chapter three. This metrical factor has a direct bearing on the interpretation of syncopation in mensural music (as opposed to its contemporary understanding). It is for this reason that I recommend that, in the eventual future publication of a monograph, the issue of the strong tense should also be raised and commented upon when introducing the knowledge of mensuration in §2.1.

We come to one of Kalina Tomova's central contributions, concerning syncopation in mensural music notation. The dissertator formulates all the theoretical, practical and creative aspects of this contribution as precisely as possible: *“Through a detailed examination of syncopated rhythm in its various manifestations, it is placed in the necessary theoretical context. The relationship between notational dots and syncopation in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is outlined, as is the application of these notational features in the carol repertoire. By demonstrating the unfounded use of the term punctus syncopationis in the work of Willi Apel, which subsequently influenced many other researchers in the mid-twentieth century, the previous scholarly acceptance of methods for notating syncopated rhythm is called into question. Newfound evidence is presented for Johannes Vetulus’ ideas on syncopation in the late fourteenth century, which stand in stark contrast to the definitions of other theorists of the era. Syncopated rhythm is highlighted not only as a notational problem in the carol repertoire (in the second chapter of the dissertation), but also as a compositional feature by drawing on relevant contemporaneous treatises (in the third chapter).”* Undoubtedly before us is a serious music-theoretical achievement worthy of the highest professional evaluation and admiration! It is also a benchmark in terms of the way it has been carried out - a model of in-depth analytical work on source texts, contemporary theoretical works, and manuscripts, combined with the effort of their reading and interpretation, from which new theoretical formulations have emerged. **I congratulate Kalina Tomova for this great success, which gives high value to the dissertation and is a testimony to the research potential of the young author.**

Chapter 2 also problematizes the principle of alteration in the carol repertoire (2.3.), as well as coloring methods (2.4.). A special focus is section 2.2.2. *The case of the carol Alma redemptoris mater* (T, 3; no. 4), which addresses an issue that is also the subject of one of the dissertation's English-language publications⁴ (in press). From the footnote in the dissertation text, where thanks are expressed to David Fellowes, Margaret Bent and Nicholas Bell, as well as to the editor Paul Kolb, Kalina Tomova's professional contacts with established scholars become evident, as well as her accumulated skills in dealing with difficult-to-read manuscripts, which also involve dialogue with representatives of the authoritative scholarly community. This again gives me an occasion to express my professional joy that a young scientist enters the sphere of science, adopting the values and models of behavior typical of contemporary scientific communities in the respective disciplinary field.

⁴ Tomova, Kalina. Dots, Syncopation, and Similis ante similem in the Alma redemptoris mater from the Trinity Carol Roll. – In: *European Music Notations in Theory and Practice, 1400-1600*. Paul Kolb, ed. Turnhout: Brepols, 2024

Chapter three (Compositional features of the fifteenth-century English Carol)

offers various significant and thought-provoking theoretical observations, typologies, analyses, and interpretations. Various melodic, rhythmic, contrapuntal, and harmonic specificities of the carol are the focus of attention. Several specific contributions related to a particular means of expression or compositional technique are concentrated here.

In § 3.1 *Melodic characteristics* the attention of the researcher's attention is directed towards melodic jumps – a problem that derives from the following observation: “If the leaps of a third, fourth and fifth do not cause too much surprise, those of a seventh, octave and even ninth might raise not only aesthetic questions, but also doubts as to the extent to which such a melodic line is suitable for vocal performance” (p.143). Personally, I find the presented examples an interesting phenomenon and would fit into future research on issues of musical thinking and musical attitudes in the historical period under consideration.

Also, of interest is § 3.3.1. *Dissonance treatment in two-part texture*. The author finds “divergent approaches to dissonance that are impossible to sort into the strict rules by which sixteenth-century vocal polyphony is largely accepted today” (p. 170). Of course, the dissertator cannot be expected or required at this stage to reach wider generalizations and conclusions, but she has convincingly articulated the directions of her explorations and thus laid the basis for making sense of the typology of musical thinking at the time towards which her scholarly interest is directed. Here is the place to stress that the presence of perspective in this work is also a major scholarly achievement.

The problematizations and the author's solutions to phenomena such as rhythmic irregularities or the improvisational techniques of *faburden* and *fauxbourdon* used in carols as compositional devices are also contributory in Chapter Three. The latter essential theoretical thesis is the subject of the author's second English-language article, which is in press.⁵

Special mention should be made of the appendix, which constitutes a significant contribution. The author points out that the transcriptions she has realized “differ dramatically from the official edition of the repertoire”. The immense labor that has gone into the translation of sheet music provides readers with access to this remarkable repertoire, which can be interpreted in the future in different types of studies in all areas of musicology.

In conclusion: the topic on which Kalina Tomova unfolds her dissertation research is a phenomenon and a valuable contribution to the Bulgarian-language music theoretical tradition. I would also like to point out the merit of the supervisor - Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yavor Genov, who with his studies paved the way for thematic lines that require specialized competences, and now validates them by stating his willingness and ability to support followers.

⁵ Tomova, Kalina. *Faburden and Fauxbourdon in the Fifteenth Century Carol*. – In: *Benedicamus Domino Conference Volume*. Catherine Bradley, ed. Turnhout: Brepols, 2024.

Such work guarantees the wide exposure of a young researcher in the global scientific space, and this cannot but make us happy. Kalina Tomova makes very concrete, real contributions to the study of mensural notation and to the genre of English Carol, adding to contemporary scholarship.

Based on all the above, I give my full professional support and confidently propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Kalina Nikolaeva Tomova the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in the professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art.

02.04. 2024 Reviewer:.....

(Prof. DSc Mariana Bouleva)