

## OPINION

From Prof. Dr. Rositsa Slavcheva Draganova, Institute of Art Studies-BAS

On the dissertation of Kalina Nikolaeva Tomova, PhD student at the IAS-BAS,

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr Yavor Genov on the subject:

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

For acquiring the educational and academic degree Doctor

Professional direction: 8.3. Music and Dance Art

Kalina Tomova's dissertation is dedicated to the interesting subject of the English carol from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The text focuses on a corpus of 119 songs and analyzes and generalizes quite successfully the genre specificities, compositional techniques, and some notation problems of the carols. On the other hand, the study comments on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the genre, as well as its interactions with similar genres of the polyphonic singing repertoire characteristic of the musical culture of the late Western European Middle Ages. Therefore, the tasks in the dissertation are structured on two complementary levels - let us call them conventionally the level of musical-textual analysis and the level of historical-cultural reading, and their peculiar synthesis leads to the interpretation of the repertoire in its entirety - the real aim of the research, which, as the author herself reports in her introduction, "Such in-depth examination of the repertoire in its entirety has not yet been realized in the scholarly literature on the carols." (Abstract, p. 7).

The presented aims and objectives of the dissertation also determine the logic of its structuring (introduction, three chapters and conclusion), as well as the presence of a voluminous appendix, which contains transcriptions of the studied carols, most of which are the work of the PhD student herself. The work consists of 191 pages of 'plain' text, followed by a necessary but at the same time carefully selected bibliography in English, Latin and German, as well as several well-chosen titles in Bulgarian. All sources are adequately introduced and cited in accordance with current academic ethics and practice of musicological research. Also noteworthy is the cogency of the approaches to both the analysis of the musical text and notational problems, and the reading of influences in polyphonic practice of the period, carried out in Chapter One of the dissertation.

The most striking contributions of the study are concentrated in chapter two. Having already discussed in the previous chapter the sources of the genre, the subject matter, and social functions of the selected songs, as well as some problems in their performance, the work now reveals the main notational problems of the repertoire. As Kalina Tomova points out in her introduction, "A central part of chapter two is

occupied by the problem of the notation of complicated rhythm in the carol repertoire, and in particular the presence of syncopations in the songs.” (Dissertation, p. 7). In this regard, the role of the notation point is emphasized – a problem which has not been discussed in the scholarly literature so far, although the available examples in the theoretical sources of the era demonstrate a variety of uses.” (ibid.). The author's comments draw on important treatises from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries that have not been cited in the Bulgarian-language musicological literature - a kind of complementary contribution to this section of the text that adds to its main merit, namely that here for the first time is launched “a comprehensive view of the problem is presented for the first time, as well as a possible theory of how syncopation was perceived by the singers in those centuries”. (ibid.) The syncopated rhythm is thus “placed for the first time in the necessary historical-theoretical context: the relationship between notational points and syncopation in theoretical thought in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is outlined, as is the application of these notational features to the carol repertoire” (Dissertation, p. 192). I would also like to point out the convincing way in which Kalina Tomova discusses the inaccurate use of the term *punctus syncopationis* in Willi Apel's famous work “The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600”, because I believe that the ability to problematize rather than conveniently reiterate (or combine) what has already been written on the subject is a real testament to getting to the heart of it and reveals the potential for scholarly work.

The third chapter of the dissertation is devoted to techniques characteristic of carols, including the syncopated rhythm just commented on. It “comprehensively examines the melodic, rhythmic, and contrapuntal language throughout the repertoire, presenting special cases in addition to the most common situations in the carols, in order to demonstrate the multiplicity that is present in the repertoire despite their generally homogeneous expression”. (Dissertation, p. 8). Evidence of the compositional features exhibited in the melodic and metrical features of the examples is summarized, and the texture and contrapuntal techniques used are extensively commented upon.

As I have already mentioned, an important part of the work under discussion is the appendix, which includes transcriptions of 119 fifteenth-century English carols. Most of these are the work of the doctoral student herself, and in some cases her proposed variants depart from the official edition of the repertoire, and her justification for them, based also on her reading of music-theoretical sources of the period, is woven into the conclusions and contributions of the study. Thus, it is a particular transcription that becomes the starting point for the rethinking of the *Alma redemptoris mater* carol in Chapter Two, as well as for one of the publications on the topic of the dissertation in a specialized authoritative publication (“European Music Notations in Theory and Practice, 1400-1600”).

Kalina Tomova's work contributes to a specific, complex scientific field, in which different aspects of musicological practice are intertwined. Its development needs the

overlay of diverse knowledge and skills in the field of music history, music theory and analysis, performance, socio-cultural dynamics, even language proficiency, etc., which the doctoral student possesses and combines effectively in the performance of the set educational and scientific tasks.

On the basis of all stated above, I give a positive evaluation to the dissertation work of Kalina Nikolaeva Tomova on the topic “THE ENGLISH CAROL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY VOCAL REPEROIRE: GENRE CHARACTERISTICS, TECHNIQUES, INTERACTIONS” and I vote with conviction for awarding the educational and academic degree of Doctor in the professional field: 8.3 "Music and Dance Art".

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