

## POSITION

by **Prof. Dr. Slavia Barlieva** (Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), prepared on the basis of the Director's Order of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS No. 42-RD dated January 26, 2024, and a decision of the Scientific Jury at a meeting held on February 1, 2024, for the doctoral thesis of **Kalina Nikolaeva Tomova** – a regular doctoral student in the "Music" sector of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS, proposed for obtaining a the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the scientific specialty "Musicology and Musical Arts", professional field 8.3 Musical and Dance Art, on the topic: "THE ENGLISH CAROL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY VOCAL REPERTOIRE: GENRE CHARACTERISTICS, TECHNIQUES, INTERACTIONS", academic supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yavor Genov**.

I became acquainted with my young colleague Kalina Tomova as her consultant on issues of Latin paleography, which she encountered in developing the topic of her dissertation and from her work on deciphering the Latin music manuscripts, the subject of her research. I am flattered by the thought that she learned from me some basic techniques in deciphering late Medieval Latin script, but I must admit that I myself benefited from our joint activities, learning previously unknown details about musical notation from the Western European Middle Ages and Renaissance. It is particularly satisfying for me to see this dissertation completed, which transcends the often self-imposed "nation-centric" tasks in Bulgarian humanities and explores relevant musicological issues with European significance, introducing them into Bulgarian musical culture.

The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion, totaling 214 pages, accompanied by 198 pages of transcriptions of English carols, which illustrate the exposition. Immediately noticeable is the good chronological limitation of the material and the focus on the development solely on the fifteenth century and its 120 works, which form a homogeneous corpus in terms of musical expression. Based on this corpus, the author constructs her in-depth examination of the genre features, compositional techniques, and notational problems of the carols, as well as the interactions between the genre and other vocal music of the period. Thus, she presents the repertoire in its entirety in a study that has not been realized before in the scholarly literature on carols. The three chapters of the dissertation focus on its three main objectives:

**The first chapter examines the carol against the background of Western European polyphonic music of the fifteenth century** and other vocal genres prevalent in England at that time. Sufficiently detailed but without overemphasis, the main research on the subject is presented, upon which any study on English carols must build. Competently and in accordance with good paleographic traditions, English musical sources are introduced, carriers of the preserved specimens of the carol repertoire from the studied era: the famous parchment scroll from the Wren Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, containing 13 carols – one of the extremely rare surviving examples of music scrolls; the manuscript book of carols from the Selden archive in the Bodleian Library in Oxford; the two manuscripts at the British Library – MS 3307 from the Egerton collection, as well as Joseph Ritson's choirbook Add. MS 5665 –

the most voluminous compendium of carols from the era. In addition to these primary sources, the doctoral student has also drawn upon numerous other manuscript sources. Remarkable is her skill in dealing with these extremely difficult-to-read manuscripts, her impressive competence in musical paleography, and her excellent orientation in the texts – not only Middle English but also Latin, and partly macaronic. Without hesitation, I would say that Bulgarian musicology now has a leading specialist in Western European musical paleography.

Kalina Tomova traces the presence of the carol throughout the transformative fifteenth century and its influence on the musical expression in England during that time. She proves its central position among vocal genres in England and defines it as "the embodiment of all the characteristics of English polyphonic practice that distinguish it from that of the continent in the fifteenth century" (p. 31) and simultaneously as "the main driving force behind the compositional impetus that English music provides to continental musicians" (p. 38). The author presents a convincing systematization of the performance context of carols, showing their position as an intermediate link between high and low in literature and music, between the sacred and the secular, between the literary and the oral. She outlines the genre as a unique phenomenon in Western European vocal music, preparing the exposition for **the second chapter, dedicated to notation in the carol repertoire and the problems of its deciphering**. The doctoral student presents the basic principles and rules of mensural notation, acquainting us with a theoretical topic relatively distant from the research paradigm of Bulgarian musicology. The competent exposition and appropriate examples leave no doubt that Kalina Tomova has mastered mensural notation through prolonged, persistent, and in-depth work with primary sources and through the creation of transcriptions (evidence of this is the impressive addition to the dissertation of new transcriptions of fifteenth-century English carols). She provides for the first time in the musicological literature a comprehensive study of fundamental notational problems of the repertoire. The data she discovers regarding the relationship between the use of notational dots and syncopated rhythm offers a new perspective on some long-established ideas regarding the basic notational features of the material under study in the dissertation. The doctoral student presented her conclusions on this matter at an authoritative international conference in Leuven/Brussels, and the text was accepted for publication by Brepols, one of the most prestigious publishers for publications on art and culture history.

**The third chapter sheds light on the compositional features of the fifteenth-century English carol.** , The balance between the use of stepwise movement and the presence of large leaps is highlighted as the primary reason for the expressiveness of the melodic lines in the songs, and examples of different melodic movements are presented with detailed comments and descriptions. Regarding rhythm in the songs, the prevalence of syncopated rhythm as a compositional device and the presence of metric "irregularities" are outlined. The contrapuntal texture in carols is extensively discussed, including the use of techniques such as *faburden* and *fauxbourdon* as compositional devices. In this role, they are demonstrated through examples that have hitherto escaped the attention of other researchers. No less important to the dissertation are the newly presented transcriptions of the entire repertoire of fifteenth-century English carols included in the appendix. They are based on careful readings of the music-theoretical sources of the era, resulting in new interpretations of some of the songs, which are

radically different from the official edition of the repertoire. Undoubtedly, the compiled list of sources used is necessary, but to meet the requirements of paleographic description and identification, it would be beneficial to indicate the collections to which the manuscripts belong, not just their identifiers in The Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music. Adding an index-glossary of key terms will facilitate the use of the dissertation. I want to emphasize that the author has successfully managed the difficult task of introducing terms and concepts into Bulgarian that have not been used in our scientific literature before. In this aspect, it would be helpful to include the original form of names wherever only Cyrillic is cited.

Overall, it should be emphasized that **Kalina Tomova's work is a contributory study in the field of early Western European vocal music** (the contributions are clearly and accurately reflected in the dissertation abstract), created on the basis of direct work with primary sources and an excellent understanding of previous research on the subject. The doctoral student and her academic supervisor have chosen to develop a topic, which has enjoyed renewed interest in recent decades, during which interesting and contributory studies have been conducted. Undoubtedly, the current dissertation will be one of them. Unfortunately, some of these works by young scholars have remained unpublished, which, considering the excellent publication policy of the Institute of Art Studies, I hope will not be the case with the discussed study. It is excellently structured, clearly written and will offer the Bulgarian audience information on important phenomena of the musical culture from the Western European Medieval and Renaissance periods. With this, Kalina Tomova becomes part of the musicological school at the Institute of Art Studies, founded by Prof. Elena Toncheva and which unites the most authoritative researchers of early music in Bulgaria.

The qualities of the dissertation "THE ENGLISH CAROL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY VOCAL REPERTOIRE: GENRE CHARACTERISTICS, TECHNIQUES, INTERACTIONS" present Kalina Nikolaeva Tomova as an established researcher with an original approach to the studied issues, analytical skills, and undeniable ability for independent research. Her work fully meets the requirements of Article 6, paragraph 3 of the Higher Education Act.

The above gives me reason to confidently vote for Kalina Nikolaeva Tomova to be awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Sofia, April 19, 2024

Prof. Dr. Slavia Barlieva