

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. ANDA PALIEVA

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for the dissertation of

ANNA PETROVA - FORSTER

on the topic

The Unknown European Piano Music

of the

Second Half of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries.

with scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Sc. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova

for awarding an educational and scientific Doctor's degree in the professional field

8.3. "Music and dance"

Anna Petrova-Forster's work provokes interest even with the very title, which determines the author's orientation to a new, undeveloped musical science topic and suggests a very large-scale, serious, in-depth historical study in a vast territorial and temporal space. This is confirmed by the first look at the content of the paper, which covers an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and appendices, with a total volume of 230 pages. In the separate chapters devoted to the musical cultures of Germany, Austria, France and England, the works of more than 24 composers are examined, most of whom are now little-known. It is especially important that the reference to this work comes from Anna Forster's own pianistic practice and she knows in detail 'inside' the musical fabric of the works in question. And her performing biography is really rich and respectable.

After receiving her higher education at the Conservatory in Sofia, she studied at Ecole supérieure de musique in Geneva, and received a diploma as a concert artist from the

Musikhochschule (Konzertdiplom) in Lucerne, after which she took chamber music lessons with Nathan Milstein in London, and also attended masterclasses by Stanislav Neuhaus, Ivan Moravec and Jürgen Uhde. For decades she has been giving recitals in Europe, America, Japan and Italy with various chamber ensembles, and for many years directed the 'Geheitipp am Mittag' concert series in Zurich. She has made recordings for Belgian, French, Bulgarian and Austrian radio and Radio Monte Carlo, has made television recordings in Japan and Switzerland and released six CDs. She has taught at the Ecole supérieure de musique in Geneva, the Konservatorium in Zurich and the Musikhochschule and Konservatorium/Musikschule in Biel, among others.

And her fluency in six languages (Bulgarian, Russian, English, German, French, Italian) allows her access in the original to an extremely wide range of historical and analytical music literature and documents, which is evident in the Bibliography – 121 titles in four languages. This rare combination of such active artistry and rich erudition has enabled Anna Forster to offer a serious, thorough study which is a contribution to both music historical scholarship and performance pianistic practice.

The dissertation is constructed in a slender, balanced architecture, with clear reasoning for the choice of the considered works and successfully described individual characteristics such as stylistics, piano technique and historical significance.

In the **Introduction**, the dissertation clearly formulates the aim and task of her research, rightly emphasizing that 'this is the first attempt in Bulgarian musicological literature to present in an overview unknown, rarely performed European piano works from the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries with the desire to arouse interest in this music not only for a narrow circle of specialists' (pp. 5-6). The author is driven by the historically compelling motivation that 'acquaintance with the works of the forgotten so-called minor masters, besides broadening our horizons and introducing us to new musical worlds, also gives us a very different, deeper understanding and appreciation of the work of famous composers. The giants of keyboard music did not create in a vacuum; there was (and is) always an exchange of ideas and influence between artists; the famous composers drew their ideas from their inspiration as well as from the music of their colleagues (p. 5). And this is a contemporary, up-to-date position, opening up new perspectives in musical research science and performing culture.

After outlining in **Chapter One** the overall panorama in the field of European piano music, instrumentation, performance practice, and pianistic schools of the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the following **Chapter Two** is logically devoted first to Germany, since, as the author points out, during this period most of the composers in England and France who composed piano music, as well as the first pianoforte makers, were of German origin.

It was in Germany, not Italy, that the first attempts to perfect Cristofori's gravicembalo were made and the continued improvements made in England were also the work of German/Swiss masters (p. 10). Examining the work of **Johann Müthel** and **Leopold Mozart**, the dissertation emphasizes the introduction for the first time of dynamic signs and instructions for performance, and in **Friedrich Rust's** dozens of sonatas the author finds that he is much closer to Beethoven in his thinking and interpretation of the instrument than to his contemporaries Haydn and the young Mozart. Also presented are the works of **Daniel Steibelt**, one of the first itinerant virtuoso pianists, as well as the forgotten authors **Ludwig Berger**, **August Alexander Klengel**, **Ludwig Böhner** and **Sixtus Bachmann**, whose works, according to Anna Petrova-Forster, allow us to trace the gradual creation of a new style thanks to the researches of the young generation of musicians in the early 19th century.

Chapter Three logically unfolds a colourful picture of authors of different national origins, due to the multinational character of the Austrian state and culture. Here we find analyses and a new assessment of the work of the Czech composers **Johann Wanhal**, **Leopold Kozeluch** and **Jan Voříšek**, the Austrian composers **Josef Woelfl** and **Nikolaus von Krufft** (of German origin), and the Hungarian composer **Johann Fuss**. Analyses of their works, as well as comments by contemporaries, create new insights into the context in which Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert lived and worked.

A different and very interesting picture is painted in the chapter dedicated to the piano music of this period in France, also related to the complex socio-political situation. Again, the activity of composers of German origin – **Johann Schobert**, **Johann Eckard** and **Ignaz Ladurner** – is examined, as well as **Leontzi Honauer**, **Johann Edelmann**, the French **Hyacinthe Jadin**, **Alexander Boëly** and others. The author also highlights here a specific

moment, distinctive for the French culture – the active presence of a whole constellation of women composers, among whom she pays special attention to **Hélène de Montgeroult**. Another important point is that in the early 19th century most musicians were not of French descent, 'the Parisian music world is international' (p. 177) and Anna Petrova-Forster recalls the presence of Anton Reicha and **Friedrich Kalkbrenner**, later Sigismund Thalberg, Stefan Heller and Ferdinand Hiller and Frederic Chopin and Ferenc Liszt, dwelling in more detail on the importance of Friedrich Kalkbrenner's multifaceted performances and his creative and pedagogical work.

The situation described is similar for the composers who worked in England (**Chapter Five**), who are also of German descent. Works by **Johann Samuel Schröter**, **Johann Baptist Cramer** and **George Pinto** are examined. Overall, Anna Petrova-Forster's work is of a highly professional standard with an abundance of detailed analysed musical samples and rich illustrative material. A multifaceted panorama of the epoch has been built, with a vivid narrative with biographical details and historical events, and corrections of existing factual inaccuracies. And comparisons with a wide range of later compositions accommodate authors and works in a historical continuum and beyond the specific period.

The combination of in-depth research and fascinating fiction reading would be of interest to a wide range of readers, which is why I highly recommend its publication.

The contributions of the research indicated by the dissertation fully correspond to the peer-reviewed text.

Scientific studies and articles on the topic of the dissertation have been published in the journal *Bulgarian Musicology* (2013, 2020), "Violin Key" – St. Petersburg (2014, 2019); in the Proceedings of the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Scientific Conferences of Doctoral Students with International Participation "Young Scientific Forum for Music and Dance", NBU; Proceedings of a conference dedicated to the 250th anniversary of Daniel Steibelt, Paris, 2015; Two articles in the Russian State Library, St. Petersburg, <http://nlr.ru/oniz/RA2159/publikatsii-otdela-not#sci>. These publications present some of the main ideas of the dissertation, and its content is adequately reflected in the Abstract. There are also several scientific and applied publications – booklets to CDs, published by Toccata Classics – London, Gega New – Sofia, CD Baby – USA. In conclusion, given the indisputable contributions of the dissertation on "**Unknown European piano music from the second half of the eighteenth - early nineteenth century**", I can confidently recommend to the

distinguished members of the scientific jury that they award **Anna Petrova-Forster** the degree of Doctor of Education and Science.

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