

REVIEW

by Prof. Yavor Svetozarov Konov, Ph.D., Ph.D.

place of work: Department of Music, NBU professor of polyphony
(professional field 8.3. "Music and dance")

**of the dissertation for acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor
(professional field 8.3. "Music and dance")**

by

Master ANNA PETROVA-FORSTER

on the topic

**'UNKNOWN EUROPEAN PIANO MUSIC FROM THE SECOND HALF OF
THE XVIII AND THE BEGINNING OF THE XIX CENTURIES'**

Scientific adviser: Prof. Dr. Sc. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova

The dissertation submitted to me for review has 230 pages, including numerous illustrations and musical examples. It is structured in an Introduction, 5 Chapters, Conclusion, References, Contributions and Appendices.

The first chapter is 'On the Unknown European Piano Music of the Second Half of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries.¹ Schools and influences'. Chapters Nos. 2-5 are respectively dedicated to composers from Germany (Johann Mützel, Wilhelm Friedrich Rust, Daniel Steibelt, Ludwig Berger, Alexander August Klengel, the first itinerant virtuoso pianists Jan Dussek, Joseph Woelfl, Daniel Steibelt, Maria Szymanowska, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Ignaz Moscheles), from Austria (whose empire then included Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia...: Johann Baptist Wanhal, Leopold Kozeluch, Jan Vofíšek, Joseph Woelfl, Nikolaus

¹ The era of the pianoforte instrument - already the hammered piano, which replaced the plucked harpsichord, in the process of evolution and competition between manufacturers, with the particularities of their instruments. Decades in which high-class music was no longer just for aristocrats, but was also making inroads into other urban social strata. A time when for a girl from a good (and wealthy) family playing the piano was a mandatory part of a good general upbringing. A time of transition from clavichord and harpsichord to the piano, in which, however, things were often mixed – the new instruments were called by old names (harpsichord, which is actually a pianoforte) because of their similar form – a question that the PhD student explicitly clarified in her text (in the First chapter of the dissertation). And how the harpsichord was called "grand piano" (a royal instrument) – and how this name was transferred to the piano (and remains to this day, for modern grand pianos) – something I did not know. Remarks by J.K.

von Krufft and Johann Fuss), from France (Johann Schobert, Johann Eckard, Alexandre Boëly, Hyacinthe Jadin, Hélène de Montgeroult and Friedrich Kalkbrenner) and from England (with the 'imported' Italian Muzio Clementi and the Germans Johann Baptist Cramer and Johann Schroeter, and the Englishman George Pinto).

In the Conclusion, the dissertation is very well presented briefly and most substantively: in terms of motivation and design, in terms of conducting the research and achieving the relevant results (including the PhD student's teaching practice – in educational institutions and as a private tutor), in terms of making sense of what has been done and its conclusions. Including the fact that musicians often do not want to take the risk of playing in their concerts unknown works by unknown composers, who are even considered as composers of insufficient value. Similarly, the use of instruments from the period, rather than the modern grand pianos, to whose sound both the performers and the audience are accustomed, because those old instruments have insufficient sound qualities (considerations that the PhD student refutes). The fact that these instruments show the 'flavour' and characteristics of sound – and especially for what kind of instruments (in terms of technical possibilities and acoustic qualities) the composers were then writing their music – precisely with their sound in mind, this is left aside. The issues surrounding the 'tandem' of HIP (Historically Informed Performance) vs. HAL (Historically Aware Listener). The author therefore advocates the education of the audience and the use of period instruments. And there is truth in the PhD student's statement that "at the same time, audiences perceive unfamiliar works with interest, especially if they are commented on by the performer". I know this from my own practice of concerts-lectures (with multimedia presentations) related to history, culture and music that is very alien (old, unknown) for the "Bulgarian audience" (if I may allow myself such a generalization).

The literature referred to in the dissertation comprises 121 sources, of which 17 are in Cyrillic (ten in Bulgarian, mostly translated, and seven in Russian, both translated and in Russian) and the rest are in Latin (in French, German, English and Czech) plus one in Russian, on Internet access. Following are seven contributions that I accept as a whole.

Appendices at the end of the dissertation: copies of CDs covers of her performances of piano music by Daniel Steibelt (Daniel Steibelt. Piano works. Anna Petrova-Forster. Gega New, 2012 and Daniel Steibelt. Œuvres pour piano. Anna Petrova-Forster. Forgotten Records, 2015), by child prodigy composers (Diagnosis Wunderkind. Piano works by young

composers. Anna Petrova-Forster, piano. CD Baby, 2016), piano pieces, and chamber music by August Klengel (August Alexander Klengel. Piano and Chamber Music. Trio Klengel: Anna Petrova-Forster, piano, Keiko Yamaguchi, violin, Stefania Veritá, cello. Toccata Classics, 2018), "The Birth of the Etude" – with etudes by 7 composers of the period (The Birth of the Etude. Anna Petrova-Forster, piano. Toccata Classics, 2021), description of radio broadcast and of uploaded videos on YouTube on the "channel" of the PhD student

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTJFIU165gG83Q4nVjpKJ0g> -

where there are over 40 videos with her recordings, I listened with interest and pleasure) and others (<http://www.annapetrova.com/en/>).

The abstract sufficiently reflects the dissertation, structurally and substantively.

The topic of searching in old library collections for manuscripts and published sheet music of works and authors more or less lost in oblivion is relevant (hence the dissertation of A. Petrova-Forster, and this is only one of the lines of topicality in it). Among these authors there were also outstanding professional musicians who were composers, performers and teachers. They influenced both as teachers and by their work – as role models – a number of today's most famous composers who were their pupils. And so, wonderful – or at least sufficiently professional and enjoyable – musical pieces are being rediscovered; on the one hand they are familiar in stylistics to the audience, and on the other hand they give it the opportunity to hear something familiar yet unknown, which will diversify the usual repertoire range.

In recent decades, through the increasing number of digitized music scores of works by a growing number of composers available via the Internet, such rediscoveries are also possible for those living in areas (such as Bulgaria) where no such library collections exist. Of course, there is another 'thrill' – to discover forgotten 'paper music scores' in a fascinating library, even in its almost 'magical' old departments...

The PhD student, Master Anna Petrova-Foster, states her motivation for writing her dissertation (i.e. for the written presentation of this research of hers) in the very first sentence of her dissertation. And she immediately emphasizes the main difficulties in this endeavor: scarce and hardly accessible information that is often incorrect.

The aim of the research is 'to present unknown, now forgotten piano works and their creators, as well as to highlight their high professional level. In spite of today's enormous information possibilities, in spite of the digitization of sheet music that can be found on library websites and on the Petrucci Music Library website (https://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page, J.K.), the works of many composers of this important era in the development of piano music are still waiting for their discoverers and performers' (Ibidem.) Shortly afterwards, the colleague A. Petrova-Foster emphasized the unjust oblivion of composers of high professional and artistic value, at the expense of the canonization of names familiar to us. Being 56 years old I know these processes well enough – and a number of reasons for them, as valid today as ever! – for this neglect of personalities and works. In this regard, I highly admire undertakings and actions such as those of my colleague Petrova-Foster, and in particular her dissertation, about which I am writing these lines.

'The subject of the study is the period of the second half of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, ...'; 'The task of this work with a historical approach was primarily to verify, process and clarify the information scattered in various sources and archives about these 'forgotten composers and their music' (Ibid.).

The exposition (the dissertation) is filled with a huge amount of facts – names of composers and performers, instrument manufacturers, various instruments with different sound extraction, resp. approaches and techniques for playing them – similarities and differences (clavichord, harpsichord, hammered pianoforte - the 3 in principle), pieces, music scores, treatises...

Historical and cultural processes, including those of music, cities, schools, names again, concert programs, descriptions of performing behaviors, strategies and tactics, in practical terms, to succeed ... in the life and work of the performing virtuoso, also so difficult because of the travel in those conditions, he has in addition to deal with owners or managers of concert halls, with private lessons at his place of residence and in the cities where he tours, with the knowledge of the local customs and mentality, with the solvency of the audience, with all kinds of lies and deceit, and with going to debtors' prison when the touring musician fails financially – or, if he manages to escape, his publisher goes to prison, for example ... (It is also a question of character and organizational experience, of course – this is also emphasized in the dissertation.) The publishing practices are also presented in the exposition. Russia as a place for cultural life and touring (and subsistence) and long-term residence, even

for settling down permanently, for life. History of composed works, influences from which – and outright similarities to which – are available in much later, currently known works of great composers. Practices in music criticism... Etc., etc.

A well-informed PhD student, the colleague Anna Petrova-Forster. And: musical examples, examples, examples!... Very highly impressive and authenticating verbal exposition. The musical examples are taken from a variety of musical scores, not from the (same) "sheet music book"... And there are parallels with later periods, pianists, methods... (For example between those of Hanon and Cortot.)

Very useful reading, also in general on the history of Europe and its urban societies of the period. Reading it disproves stereotypes about the musical culture of France and England of the era – if I go back to music...

The dissertation is the result of many years of interest in the subject, work, visits to libraries, research, conversations with colleagues and like-minded people, concerts, recordings...

This dissertation would be very informative and educational for the (few) Bulgarian-speaking people interested in the subject – I would be happy (and on their behalf, I dare say) if my colleague Anna Petrova-Foster could publish it – in this form or (with some modification) – as a monograph. Why not from the NBU publishing house? But the decision is hers (and the publisher's, of course).

At the same time, I can't help but admit that many of these works have dropped out of the repertoire for a reason – wonderful professionally, but lacking that "element" of genius that... – how to explain it, but just feelings.

The PhD student Mrs. Anna Petrova-Forster has precisely formulated the aims and objectives of her research. The chosen research methods (historical, cultural, analytical, multilingual approach, etc.) correspond to the set goals and objectives of the dissertation.

The doctoral student knows to an extremely high degree the state of the issues, in accordance with the literature used as a musicologist (historian, theorist, analyst), and her knowledge and experience as a musician, performer and lecturer.

The Ph.D. student has an extremely high level of knowledge of the state of the art, in accordance with both the literature used as a musicologist (historian, theorist, analyst), and her knowledge and experience as a musician, performer and teacher.

The citations of the authors are completely correct.

The material used in the study is reliable.

The dissertation and the contributions of the PhD student prove that she has a deep historical and theoretical knowledge of the specialty and a high capacity for independent scientific research.

The publications on the dissertation (four studies and articles in scientific journals in the country and in Russia, six papers in conference proceedings – three of them in print in Russia and Germany, as well as four booklets to CDs of the doctoral student) have made it sufficiently public.

The dissertation meets the scientific-metric indicators for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor, required by the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Congratulations to the scientific supervisor Prof. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova!

On the basis of the above, I am IN FAVOUR of awarding the degree of Doctor of Education and Science to my colleague ANNA PETROVA-FORSTER, based on her dissertation "THE UNKNOWN EUROPEAN PIANO MUSIC OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURY. I believe that this will also be the assessment of the other colleagues on the scientific jury.

Prof. Yavor Svetozarov Konov,
Ph.D., Dr.Sc., Professor

Sofia, March 24, 2021

Department of Music, NBU

