

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Dimitrova Becheva,

New Bulgarian University,

on the dissertation work of **Ardiana Bytyqi - Ismajli**,

professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

Phd candidate at New Bulgarian University,

Topic:

INTERPRETIVE PROBLEMS IN THE LYRICS OF JOHANNES BRAHMS – WORD AND TONE

(Interpretative problems of the Text in the lyrics Songs by Johannes Brahms – word and tone)

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "PhD"

Supervisor: *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ermila Schweizer*

Biographical data:

Ardiana Bytyqi- Ismajli was born in Pristina (Kosovo).

Education and training:

2005 - Masterclass with Roman Trekel, Baritone, Germany;

2008 - Summer Theatre Detmold - Masterclass under Christa Ludwig, Germany;

2009 - Completed Master of Music in Vocal Performance at Hochschule für Musik Detmold, Germany;

2011 - University of Pristina.

Professional experience:

2007 – Frequently performed in national and international competitions:

- participation in the Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition, 2000 - soloist in the Bach Week,

Organization of Kosovo Artists, 2000 - Soloist at the "International Festival of

2007 - Soloist in the concert "Forum Lied" Gütersloh,

Germany, 2008 - Soloist in the performance "Durch 7 Tueren...eine Reise ins Innere" - Mozart

Marathon, 2008 "Mozart Marathon" concert in Bayreuth, Germany, 2010 - Concert with

Vinorosso Orchestra in the Lieder ohne Grenze Festival Detmold, 2010 Concert in

DAM Festival, Prishtina, 2011 -Solo concert at the Catedrale "Sant

Ignazio", Rome, Italy, 2012 -Soloist in the Concert of the European Summer Music

Pristina, 2015 - Concert on the occasion of the poetry festival "Takimet e

Poeteshave Shqiptare", 2019 - Solo concert at the Academy of Science and Arts in Tirana,

Albania, 2019 - Soloist in concert "Merita and Friends" with American Orchestra from

Monclair University USA - Ferizaj and others.

Working positions: 2006-2008 - in collaboration with the Theater of "Opernwerkstadt Am Rhein",

Germany, 2010 - Soloist and Choirmaster of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Kosovo, Prishtina,

2018 - Professor of vocal performance at the University of Prishtina "Hasan

Prishtina" Faculty of Arts, Prishtina (Kosovo).

Ardiana is a PhD candidate at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia.

Contents of the dissertation

The volume of the dissertation is 105 pages, including 14 music examples. Its structure comprises: abstract, introduction, conclusion, contributions, and bibliography (total number of cited sources - 72).

The abstract states the main aim of the research: the thesis examines the interpretative problems in the songs of Johannes Brahms, as well as the significance of linguistic knowledge in the interpretation of a given song, formulating the following *tasks*:

- analysis of different interpretations of Brahms' songs performed by singers internationally acknowledged as specialists in the Lieder art;

- examining the role of linguistic knowledge in the interpretation of a given song, the process of working out elements such as the form of the songs;

rhythmic structure - changing the frequency of beats, syncopation, and elements such as language, diction, declamation, breathing, phrasing;

- deciphering interpretive problems in solo songs of Johannes Brahms, mostly related to the meaning of the original language.

The doctoral student's motivation for her choice of topic reflects her experience of an active concert performer - interpreter of chamber music and operatic works, and her aspiration to search and find new approaches for improving the interpreter's skills.

The underlying hypothesis of the work is: The way Brahms composed his songs creates difficulties for performers. Out of the vast composer's legacy, three songs have been selected and analysed. The criteria for the choice of songs were determined on the basis of several principles:

The rhythmic structure of these songs, which includes frequent changes of metrum;

The occurrence of syncopations;

The lyrics of the songs;

The elements related to language.

The doctoral student emphasizes that: "Any inattention to language - the lack of striving towards understanding the text the singer is interpreting, weakens the performance. It is therefore necessary to pay special attention to the language, in addition to the other musical elements". And

further: "Knowledge of the original language is of great importance for the interpretation of a song. Each work consists of various musical elements, which depend on the nuances of the original language". "In all songs, in addition to the challenges associated with the rhythmic structure of the song, linguistic elements that are of particular importance to the performer are being identified. The language essentially not only helps to better reflect the entire narrative of the song, but also helps the performer to naturally enter the character. On the basis of this analysis, conclusions are drawn which are the main focus of attention in the proposed dissertation."

In this regard, the study compares German-speaking and non-German-speaking performers of Brahms' songs. The author of the elaboration explains that during the analysis it was found that "German-speaking singers have no problems with articulation..., while those who are not fluent in German are observed to experience articulation difficulties with balancing the vowels, pronunciation of consonants, as well as with the way of phrasing, expressing emotions, and also with the declamation of the text."

In Chapter 2, *The Life and Work of Johannes Brahms*, the focus of the research centers on the life and work of Johannes Brahms in a historical plan: the factors that influenced his formation as a composer, his position and his influence as a composer and conductor in the musical life of Germany, the themes that he addresses in his songs, the vision of various scholars on Brahms, the origins of German songs.

Of particular importance to me are the texts examining the relationship between lyrics and music in the songs of Johannes Brahms. The thesis also presents the visions of various scholars of Brahms' work, including Peter Jost, Ludwig Fincher, Heather Platt.

In this chapter, observations are made on the differences and commonalities between Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf in the light of musical aesthetics.

I would like to highlight Chapter 2.4 *Different Interpretations of Brahms' songs* and Chapter 3 *Discussion*, which encompass a detailed analysis of different interpretations of Brahms' songs: 'Liebestreu', 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer' and "Sapphische Ode", also of the cycle "Zigeunerlieder op. 103" – regarding articulation problems, formal-structural features, possibilities for dramatic construction, the method Brahms used to compose his songs, and the difficulties of

performing his songs. The research attention of the doctoral research also focuses on the problems of declamation in Brahms' *Lieder*.

The PhD candidate explains: 'In the analysis of various interpreters, which investigated relevant to his songs aspects, it was noticed that a most important element for Brahms was the declamation of the text.'

The PhD candidate is citing opinions of scholars such as Heather Platt, Parsons, and Jenner in support of her view.

The author of the study points out that, "One of the aims of this study is to clarify the importance of the performer's language."

In the course of the exposition of this chapter, attention is drawn to other musical elements of importance in song interpretation such as: dynamics, harmonic language, the role of keyboard accompaniment.

For me, of particular weight are the texts in which the personal experience of a singer-interpreter reflects in the research, for example: *'My opinion on "Liebestreu":* As an interpreter of many songs by the composer Brahms, I can say that "Liebestreu" is one of the songs with the highest requirements for a good interpretation...the details in this are of great importance... From the beginning to the end of the song the performer must be very careful in the nuances to be able to present the characters in the best possible way...Very important elements are breathing and dynamics.", or: *My opinion on "Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer"*- The song "Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer" is one of Brahms' most beautiful songs, but also quite complex. As an interpreter of this song I encounter many interpretive problems...Articulation - good pronunciation of consonants, good balance of vowels and declamation are elements that I attach great importance to as a performer."

As a summary it is noted that "During the comparative analysis of the interpreters, in which various aspects related to his songs were examined, I noticed that for Brahms not only the musical aspect but also the content of the text is important."

The doctoral candidate offers possible solutions to overcome interpretive problems, combining a research attitude with her practical experience in Chapter 4: "*Some views on the interpretation of Brahms' 'Zigeunerlieder op.103'*".

In the **Conclusion**, points of support are drawn out, which, according to the author of the research, are of utmost importance: "The aim of this study is, by comparing the performers of Johannes Brahms' songs, to gain knowledge about interpretation, to focus on the meaning of the language as well as on the relationship or influence, that language has with various musical elements such as diction, declamation, and phrasing."

Value of the research topic in scientific and applied terms

- The author's personal experience is shared.
- A comparative analysis between different singers' - German speakers and singers whose mother tongue is not German – is clearly outlined.

Degree of knowledge with the problem and relevance of the used literature

The doctoral candidate used sufficient information sources, the reference to which is correct.

Contributions of the dissertation

I accept the contributions of the doctoral thesis, including:

- An attempt has been made to explore the difficulties in interpreting the Lieder by Brahms from the point of view of a solo singer whose native language is not German.

- Ways of overcoming these difficulties are sought and some solutions are being proposed.
- The author's personal views on the interpretation of some works by Brahms based on her own experience as a concert singer and interpreter of chamber music and operatic works are stated in the text.
- This text may help other non-German-speaking singers to overcome some difficulties in performing Brahms songs.

Evaluation of the relevance of the abstract to the main points and contributions of the thesis

The 23-page abstract conveys the character of the doctoral thesis.

Publications on the subject of the dissertation

The doctoral candidate has a sufficient number of publications on the doctoral thesis:

1. Bytyqi, Ardiana, *Sapphische Ode*. In *Young Scientific Music and Dance Forum*, Sofia, NBU, 01/2021.
2. Bytyqi, Ardiana, The Influence of Johannes Brahms on Romantic Music. In *Young Scientific Music and Dance Forum*, Sofia, NBU, 10/2022.

Opinions, recommendations and notes

I would recommend Ardiana Bytyqi- Ismajli's work to be published.

In conclusion:

I give my positive assessment of Ardiana's dissertation

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in connection with the contributions she has made with scientific and applied qualities. I consider that the doctoral dissertation fully meets the requirements for obtaining the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in the professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art" under the Law on

Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury TO AWARD HER THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR

07.06.2023, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rossitsa Becheva