

OPINION

By **Assoc. Prof. Rositsa Dimitrova Becheva, PhD**,
New Bulgarian University,
On **Birgit Karoh's** thesis,
Professional Direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art,
A doctoral candidate at the New Bulgarian University,
Entitled:

THE FORM OF VARIATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY FLUTE REPERTOIRE

For awarding a Philosophy Doctor's educational and scientific degree

Scientific supervisors: *Prof. Yavor Konov, DSc and Prof. Luisa Sello, PhD*

Background

Birgit Karoh, an Austrian flautist, educator and mental trainer for musicians.

Education and studies: After her studies in the field of elementary education she studied Flute Pedagogy with Bernhard Krabatsch as well as Applied Musicology at Mozarteum University of Salzburg, Austria. She pursued her Master's degree majoring in Flute in Italy with Prof. Luisa Sello, PhD at Tartini Conservatory of Trieste, where she graduated with the highest possible honors.

Professional and artistic career: Since 2010 to date Birgit Karoh has held positions as a teacher of flute, ensembles and elementary music education at several music schools in Austria with award-winning students. She holds masterclasses for young flautists and has published a flute pedagogy textbook in two volumes with Doblinger Publishers in Vienna. In 2024 she was offered a position as a teacher of Music Education at a federal high school in Lower Austria, which she will take up.

She gives concerts as a chamber musician, orchestra musician and soloist with a wide-ranging Baroque to contemporary music repertoire. She is the founder of the ensembles Trio Bellaria (organ, soprano and flute) and Trio MiSaBi (accordion, harp, flute) and an active member of Le Agane, an international hybrid flute ensemble founded by the Italian flautist Luisa Sello. In masterclasses with János Bálint, Wil Offermans, Karin Reda, Erwin Klambauer, Laura Lévy-Aksin, Luisa Sello, Furugh Karimi-Djafar-Zadeh, Bernhard Krabatsch, Dirko Juchem, Nina Assimakopoulos, Alberto Almarza, Bernhard Wiesinger (Jazzflute), András Adorján, Philippe Bernold, Borislav Yasenov, Tatjana Krkeljic, Derek Jones, Keith Underwood, Wendy Stern, Claudia Giottoli, Eszter Alföldy-Boruss and Fereshteh Tahbari, Birgit Karoh trained her flute skills and understanding of the flute repertoire around the world over for years. She participates in festivals such as *La Settimana della composizione – Week of Composition* under the direction of Fabio Nieder, *Udine Castello Festival* and *Udinestate* in Italy, congresses of the National Flute Association in America, *Imago Sloveniae Festival* in Slovenia or *Qingdao Music Festival* in China.

At the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, Bulgaria, she is a doctoral candidate in the class of Prof. Luisa Sello, PhD in the field of flute performance with a special emphasis on interpretation of new flute music.

Thesis content

The thesis is 174 pages long and its structure includes an abstract, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, references (43 books, 26 internet sources, 3 articles in specialized journals, 14 scores, 1 thesis, 2 interviews – total number of sources: 89 in the Latin alphabet), a list of figures, an appendix (interviews, a concert schedule, teaching and research career, an autobiography of Birgit Karoh).

The abstract introduces us into the subject area of the research and the state of the issue discussed. The main *goal of the research*, i.e. analyze *the form of variation* in the contemporary flute repertoire, the *variation* in its numerous forms, is set out and the *tasks* are formulated in the introduction.

The doctoral candidate points out: *Guided by the major changes in the flute's structure and playing technique over the centuries, which are reflected in the **varied** tonal expression, motifs and formal schemes, which can vary, are analyzed at the beginning of the text using selected works from past eras. From the perspective of musical aesthetics after 1945 and the specificity of hermeneutic metalanguages, the knowledge gained is applied to the interpretative analysis of contemporary works. The selection of the new pieces for flute focuses on different, **varied** features that can be identified even outside of the pure theory of forms. These contributions expand the analysis tools to provide orientation in the contemporary flute music, based on the **variation** of sound as a material that conveys form and content at the same time. The emphasis on musical **variation** culminates in dodecaphony.* (Abstract, p. 2)

In this regard, *those musical and aesthetic aspects that characterize the tonal and compositional canon breaking as well as atonal music, especially Arnold Schoenberg's dodecaphony, are the focus of the research. This technique and philosophical and musical concept are discussed through the prism of the 21st century, following the Viennese composer Rainer Bischof, a student of Hans Erich Apostel, who in turn studied with Alban Berg and Schoenberg himself. In the research the occurrence of variation in selected flute pieces is studied across different eras and related to interpretation. These works are discussed in detail both as a technique and as a form-creating element, initially in the increasing musical and theoretical context of the concept of tonal music to the content-oriented forms of variation... The mimetic principle is particularly important here to carry out a philosophical and interdisciplinary interpretation. The variation standard serves as a guideline to analysis in order to create new approaches to interpretation in the broad field of new music.* (Abstract, p. 4)

The research methods include an overview of scientific literature on the subject, the used historical method, interview method, comparative analysis, hermeneutic approach, on the basis of which generalizations and inferences are drawn.

For a deeper insight into the thesis subject, works from flute literature are selected, which the doctoral candidate knows well from their practical performance.

The first chapter, *Definitions of variation and aspects of music theory, sound development and philosophy*, is dedicated to the theoretical discussion of the *variation* in various fields, particularly in music, the discussion of the *variation* in various disciplines in search of similarities and differences.

The research author emphasizes that *regardless of the subject area, the **variation** always refers*

to change, modification into something similar, that modern methods of analysis are required for a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary flute music. This means extended interpretation that takes into account the flute's development, techniques and thus the changing areas of use. During the analysis the following is concluded: *The musical aesthetics and the technical aspects of the flute's structure lead to the mimesis of the ancient Greek philosophy and the reflections on beauty and the real in music based on Schoenberg's views.*

I would like to say that the following chapters have contributory nature: **the second chapter, Definitions of variation and aspects of music theory, sound development and philosophy**, and **the third chapter, New flute music related to variation from the 20th and 21st centuries under holistic analysis**, having a strong theoretical and practical focus.

In **the second chapter, Definitions of variation and aspects of music theory, sound development and philosophy**, the traditional view of the *variation* is explained using works from the eras before 1945: the Baroque period with the piece *Les Folies d'Espagne* by Marin Marais, the Classical period with *Sonate für Flöte und Klavier*, B-Dur and *Variationen über Volkslieder für Klavier und Flöte ad libitum*, op. 105, by Ludwig Van Beethoven, the Romantic period with *Variationen über das Lied 'Trockne Blumen' für Flöte und Klavier* by Franz Schubert and *Fantaisie brillante sur 'Carmen' for flute and piano* by François Borne, with reference to the form.

In **the third chapter, New flute music related to variation from the 20th and 21st centuries under holistic analysis**, the research focus is directed to contemporary flute compositions. The works selected present various references to the *variation* in a musical and theoretical context and in *mimetic relational systems*. A hermeneutic and holistic approach is also used in the analysis.

The following works are analyzed: *27 Haidenburger Vogellaute* by Fabio Nieder, *Variationen* by Friedrich Voss, *Variationssuite* by Wolfram Wagner, *Des Kaisers neue Kleider (nach einem Thema von Joseph Haydn)* by Johannes Berauer, *Élégie pour flûte* by Marc-André Dalbavie, *Sello de Luisa*, *Tema e 23 Variazioni per Flauto alto solo* by Rainer Bischof, *Metalevels – The parameter of sound as a conveyer of feelings and content in new flute music*.

The doctoral candidate points out: *The chapter with a focus on analysis of contemporary works for flute is dedicated to considerations that go beyond purely musical and theoretical approaches. Rather, all available aspects are used for interpretation according to the criterion of variation.*

The texts providing not only a musical and theoretical analysis, but also practical guidelines based on the doctoral candidate's personal experience as a flautist/interpreter are especially important to me.

The **conclusion** presents generalizations and inferences. The appendices complement the research in a meaningful way.

Significance of the issue studied in scientific and scientific and applied terms

- The thesis is relevant and practically applicable.

Degree of knowledge of the state of the issue and compliance of the literature used - The research author uses sufficient information sources, the references to which are correct.

Thesis contributions

I agree to the thesis contributions referred to by the doctoral candidate, including:

A significant contribution of the doctoral thesis is its aspect of metalevel interpretation in the field of variation together with the well-known considerations of the formal theory and the variation as a basic musical technique. This enables a comparison of earlier methods of analysis based on variation and those that incorporate insights and approaches outside of pure theory and thus function in a multiperspective manner as an equivalent to the varied contemporary musical landscape. This was guided by the question of new interpretation methods in the field of new flute music since old methods are controversial as regards new music.

Evaluation of the abstract's compliance with the main points and contributions of the thesis

The 22-page-long abstract conveys the doctoral thesis' nature.

Publications on the thesis subject

The doctoral candidate has a sufficient number of publications and concerts on the doctoral thesis.

Opinions, recommendations and notes

I would recommend that the thesis be published.

In conclusion:

I do hereby give my positive opinion on **Birgit Karoh's** thesis ***THE FORM OF VARIATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY FLUTE REPERTOIRE*** in relation to the contributions with scientific and applied qualities it has. I believe the doctoral candidate's thesis fully meets the requirements of earning a Philosophy Doctor's educational and scientific degree in Professional Direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art under the Republic of Bulgaria's Academic Staff Development Act and do hereby propose to the honorable scientific jury that it be awarded to her.

10 January 2025, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Rositsa Becheva, PhD