

OPINION

By Prof. Adrian Georgiev, PhD, St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University

In respect of a thesis entitled

THE FORM OF VARIATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY FLUTE REPERTOIRE

Birgit Karoh

Birgit Karoh is an educator and a teacher of flute, chamber 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 and teaching methodology textbook in two volumes with Doblinger Publishers in Vienna. 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 Yassenov, 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 the 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.

Birgit Karoh's thesis *The Variation Form in the Contemporary Flute Repertoire* is arranged in three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The abstract provided to me corresponds to the thesis content as well as the list of publications and concerts on the thesis subject. I could not cite in this opinion the huge and impressive number of concerts; I would simply express my high appreciation of the materials provided. Musical and aesthetic aspects that characterize the tonal and compositional canon breaking as well as atonal music, especially Arnold Schoenberg's dodecaphony, are brought up as the subject and topic 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. Bischof is probably one of the few – if not the only one – composing strictly according to the twelve-tone system and creating dodecaphonic pieces for flute in close collaboration with the Italian flautist Luisa Sello. The sound is in no way inferior to the other parameters of variation, which defines all aspects of the twelve-tone order in every respect and functions as a conveyer of feelings and content. As I already said, the main goal of the thesis is to study the variation in its numerous forms. 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 music theory and musical analysis. These contributions expand the analysis tools to provide orientation in the contemporary flute music, based on the **variation** of sound as an emphasis that conveys form and content at the same time. The emphasis on musical **variation** culminates in dodecaphony. The work for solo flute from this period by Viennese composer Rainer Bischof provides a holistic understanding of music and the modern interaction among a composer, a flautist and a listener.

According to Birgit Karoh, the variation as a technique and form has always been at the heart of the flute music. This fact and its different versions were initially the subject of discussion in the musical and theoretical theses, while in nonmusical fields the philosophical approach to the variation is replaced by analyses of the works.

For a deeper insight into the thesis subject, works from flute literature are selected, which the doctoral candidate knows well from their practical performance. Personal relationships with some of the composers of contemporary works were established in the past; encounters of various kinds resonate in the reflections on the works of Fabio Nieder, Wolfram Wagner, Johannes Berauer and Rainer Bischof. The hermeneutical approach, incorporating insights into the variation from nonmusical disciplines and philosophy, guides the analytical work.

One chapter is dedicated to the theoretical discussion of the variation in various fields, particularly in music. The musical aesthetics and the technical aspects of the flute's structure lead to the reproduction (mimesis) of the ancient Greek philosophy and the reflections on *beauty* and *the real* in music based on Schoenberg's views.

The classical traditional view of the variation is explained using works from the era before 1945. These are the following pieces: *Les Folies d'Espagne* by Marin Marais from the Baroque period, *Sonate für Flöte und Klavier, B-Dur* and *Variationen über Volkslieder für Klavier und Flöte ad libitum*, op. 105, by Ludwig Van Beethoven from the Classical period, *Variationen über das Lied 'Trockne Blumen'* by Franz Schubert as a work of the Romantic period and *Fantaisie brillante sur 'Carmen' for flute and piano* by François Borne as another Romantic work with reference to the form.

Another main chapter finally turns to contemporary flute compositions. The insights gathered from the previous chapters are integrated through a hermeneutic and holistic approach. The works selected present various references to the *variation* both in a musical and theoretical context and in *mimetic relational systems*. The subject of this part are *A work for piccolo flute*, *27 Haidenburger Vogellaute* by Fabio Nieder, the piece *Variationen* by Friedrich Voss, *Variationssuite* by Wolfram Wagner, *Des Kaisers neue Kleider (nach einem Thema von Joseph Haydn)* composed by Johannes Berauer, *Élégie pour flûte* by Marc-André Dalbavie and the dodecaphonic piece *Sello de Luisa, Tema e 23 Variazioni per Flauto alto solo* by Rainer Bischof.

In addition to literature work, selected contemporary flute works are analyzed primarily on an interpretative level and the related questions about variation and philosophy as well as the different manifestations of variation in the contemporary flute repertoire are explained. The general discussion of the definition of variation makes it clear that the term and the associated principle of change, modification and achieving different results go beyond the field of music theory and have a similar contextual meaning in mathematics, in the field of language and biology of the respective discipline that exists. Thus, the variation is also analyzed as development, principle, constant transformation, change, progress and growth, which is always

transparent. The processes of reflection on the flute's structure demonstrate variation in the flute's sound due to its progress, which has a special position in respect of the expression in the new music.

Scientific contributions of the thesis:

- The role of the variations in the new flute music is studied and analyzed for its understanding at tonal, structural and interpretative level. The text discusses the development and significance of the variation as a technique, form and creative idea in the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods as well as a possible interpretation of this content in relation to selected new flute music from the 20th and 21st centuries. The author demonstrates the transformation of the variations across the eras from an increasingly formal consideration to metalevel factors through the flute's wide contemporary sound spectrum and fields related to the processes of music making.
- An issue in the interpretation of the contemporary music is specified and analyzed: the new music diversity opens up creative spaces that require expanded approaches to interpretation. The thesis proposes the variation as a common denominator against which contemporary works can be analyzed.
- The author presents a chronological selection of pieces for flute with reference to variations from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods, where insights from the history of music and the theory of form are included.
- The position of the new music for the concert stage, the study of the repertoire of concert flautists and students and its reception by the audience are analyzed.
- 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.

Considering all stated above, I confidently give my highest opinion on Birgit Karoh's thesis and do hereby recommend to the honorable scientific jury to award a PHILOSOPHY DOCTOR's educational and scientific degree in the direction of Music and Dance Art.

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