

## REVIEW

**By Assoc. Prof. Emil Toshev Traychev, PhD, New Bulgarian University,  
Of Birgit Karoh's thesis**

**For earning a Philosophy Doctor's educational and scientific degree in  
Professional Direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art**

**Entitled**

***The Form of Variation in the Contemporary Flute Repertoire***

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

Before proceeding to the analysis of Birgit Karoh's thesis, I would like to emphasize that it is the result of her longtime career as a performer, educator and researcher. Her extensive professional experience allows her to discuss the research subject from multiple perspectives and offer innovative approaches to the contemporary music.

Birgit Karoh is an Austrian flautist, educator and mental trainer for musicians with an impressive career both in Europe and beyond. She graduated from the Mozarteum University of Salzburg majoring in Flute Pedagogy, after which she earned her Master's degree at the Tartini Conservatory of Trieste, Italy under the supervision of Prof. Luisa Sello with excellent results. In addition to her teaching career at several music schools in Austria, Birgit Karoh has published two flute pedagogy textbooks, holds masterclasses and participates in music festivals and forums such as *Imago Sloveniae Festival* and the National Flute Association USA on a regular basis.

Her active concert career spans a wide Baroque to contemporary music repertoire and she has played in ensembles such as Trio Bellaria and Le Agane. Her notable performances include her participation in Varna Summer International Music Festival in Bulgaria and *Settimana della Composizione* in Italy, where she presents innovative interpretations of contemporary works. Her participation in interdisciplinary projects related to contemporary flute techniques, which complements her contribution to music education and performing arts, deserves special attention.

**The doctoral thesis *The Form of Variation in the Contemporary Flute Repertoire*** presents an in-depth research based on the doctoral candidate's extensive professional experience. The thesis is 179 pages long with the main text arranged into an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, abstract, references and appendices. The references include over 90 sources in English, Italian, French and German. The abstract provided by Birgit Karoh is 18 pages long and has the main goals, tasks, methodology and contributions of the thesis stated in a clear and organized manner.

The appendices contain:

1. Transcribed interviews with Rainer Bischof, PhD conducted in Vienna.
2. List of Birgit Karoh's concert performances, teaching and research career.

The thesis has a clear and logical structure, which supports the research, allowing integration of interdisciplinary approaches.

In her introduction Birgit Karoh justifies the choice of the subject and its significance for the contemporary musical practice, emphasizing the importance of the variation form as a

technique and means of expression in the flute music both in historical and contemporary context. The main goal of the research is to analyze the role of the variation form as a key compositional and interpretative principle in the contemporary flute music by studying its development from historical traditions to innovative approaches in the modern repertoire.

In her research Karoh clearly formulates the main tasks: study the role of the variation in the contemporary flute music, analyze its manifestations in the new music with an emphasis on philosophical aspects, develop new interpretative approaches to the contemporary musical repertoire and thoroughly explore dodecaphony as a key stage in the evolution of the variation technique. She also studies the relationship among emotion, the performer's interpretation and communication with the listener in the context of contemporary music making.

In her thesis the doctoral candidate discusses the significance of the interaction between the flute technical improvements and compositional techniques, highlighting the contributions of composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and Rainer Bischof. The methodological approach used includes music theory, philosophy and hermeneutics, providing an interdisciplinary basis for the analysis of the works selected. As Birgit Karoh herself notes in her abstract: *The hermeneutical approach, incorporating insights into the variation from nonmusical disciplines and philosophy, guides the analytical work.* (Abstract, p. 5). This highlights the role of interdisciplinarity as a key element in her research, expanding the scope of analysis beyond musical boundaries.

**In the first chapter** entitled *Definitions of variation and aspects of music theory, sound development and philosophy* Birgit Karoh makes an in-depth analysis of the concept of *variation* through the prism of philosophy, linguistics, semiotic and semantic analysis, connecting these disciplines with the music theory. She explores how the principle of variation unites different aspects of music making and interpretation, connecting theoretical concepts with practical applications in music. A particular emphasis is put on the relationship between musical aesthetics and technical innovations in the flute's structure. These changes not only expand the instrument's sound palette, but also create new possibilities for expression that play a central role in the contemporary music. As Karoh notes: *Variation is understood here as an overarching principle that exists not only in the music theory, but also in development and change in general, which is reflected in both compositional styles and the flute's structure and playing technique.* (Thesis, p. 130)

Karoh also focuses on the mimetic principle, interpreting through the views of Plato, Aristotle, and Erich Auerbach. She discusses the mimetic process not as an imitation of nature or human feelings, but as a creative transformation that a performer adapts in a musical context. The analysis also includes the philosophical ideas of Theodor Adorno and Arnold Schoenberg, emphasizing how the variation is a fundamental principle in dodecaphony.

In the first chapter Birgit Karoh successfully demonstrates how the variation functions not only as a musical technique, but also as a cultural and human phenomenon, uniting theory and practice.

**The second chapter**, *Examples of variation pieces for flute from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods*, focuses on the historical foundations of the variation form. Birgit Karoh discusses how the variation is used as a technique and form in different historical periods, analyzing works from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods. As the doctoral candidate notes: *The variation can be found in every stage of the history of music as a technique*

and as a principle of form. When discussing works from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods as exemplary moments in the musical history, it has always been possible to relate tones to each other through the tonal system in such a way as to define major and minor elements. (Thesis, p. 132)

The analysis in the second chapter includes the following works: *Les Folies d'Espagne* by Marin Marais (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 (Classical period); *Variationen über das Lied 'Trockne Blumen'* by Franz Schubert (Romantic period); and *Fantaisie brillante sur 'Carmen' for flute and piano* by François Borne (Romantic period, a virtuoso work).

In this chapter, Karoh studies the evolution of the flute instrument and the influence of its technical potential on the development of the variation form. The works are discussed not only as musical texts, but also as historical evidence of the development of the flute technique and the transformation of musical aesthetics across different historical periods.

**In the third chapter**, *New flute music related to variation from the 20th and 21st centuries under holistic analysis*, the doctoral candidate analyzes contemporary flute pieces that demonstrate different approaches to the variation form, emphasizing the interaction between compositional techniques and the instrument's interpretative potential. As Karoh notes: *Each work presents a possible form of variation in the new music. The following analyses of the works explore musical and compositional elements as well as the influence of origin, possible philosophical content and flute aspects in order to approach the work in the most holistic way possible and create authentic interpretations of the new music.* (Thesis, p. 132). In this part of her research the doctoral candidate discusses how the flute palette is used not only to create sound and emotional worlds, but also how the variation form functions as a fundamental compositional principle.

Karoh cites works such as *27 Haidenburger Vogellaute* by Fabio Nieder, where the flute recreates natural sounds and emotions, and *Variationen* by Friedrich Voss, which demonstrates the classical structure of the variation in the context of the contemporary sound. In *Variationssuite* by Wolfram Wagner she analyzes how dance elements are transferred to a modern variation concept and with *Des Kaisers neue Kleider* by Johannes Berauer she shows how historical themes are interpreted through modern techniques.

The analysis of *Élégie pour flûte* by Marc-André Dalbavie, where Karoh discusses how modern playing techniques are woven into the variation structure to create emotional depth, is particularly interesting. In the work *Sello de Luisa, Tema e 23 Variazioni per Flauto alto solo* by Rainer Bischof she emphasizes the role of the variation as a fundamental principle that connects compositional technique with the emotional charge of music, while analyzing the alto flute's interpretative potential.

**The conclusion of the doctoral thesis** summarizes the main results of the research, emphasizing the importance of the variation as a fundamental principle in the contemporary flute music. Birgit Karoh focuses on the interaction between compositional techniques and a performer's interpretation, which enriches the repertoire and creates new opportunities for expression and creative freedom. The research clearly demonstrates how extended playing techniques combined with contemporary composers' innovative approaches not only place new demands on performers, but also offer original opportunities for interpretation and

communication with the audience.

The conclusion affirms the need for integration between theory and practice, which allows the flute music to be looked at as a means of interdisciplinary research and artistic performance.

### **Scientific contributions of the thesis**

Birgit Karoh's thesis represents a significant contribution to the understanding of the contemporary flute repertoire, integrating musical and theoretical, philosophical and interpretative approaches. The thesis studies the development of the form of variation in the flute music – from historical periods to the present day – and offers innovative methods of analysis and interpretation that combine technique and artistic expression. The author successfully demonstrates how the variation unites the music theory and the philosophy with the tonal and emotional depth of the flute repertoire. I agree to the contributions referred to, which emphasize the depth and originality of the research.

1. The thesis studies the evolution of the variation form as a key compositional and interpretative principle.
2. The research expands the traditional framework of analysis by integrating music theory, philosophy and hermeneutics.
3. New interpretive approaches are proposed, combining a performer's personal perception with a composer's concept.
4. Contemporary works are analyzed, emphasizing the role of the variation in the modern music.
5. Innovative teaching and performance methods are developed to popularize the contemporary repertoire.
6. The thesis combines complex theoretical concepts with practical experience, offering a new perspective on the contemporary musical culture.

These contributions expand both the theory and practice in the field of the contemporary flute music, emphasizing the importance of an interdisciplinary approach and personal interpretation in the contemporary musical context. The thesis demonstrates the author's ability to integrate complex theoretical concepts with a performer's practical experience, creating a unique contribution to the contemporary musical culture.

### **Conclusion**

The thesis *The Form of Variation in the Contemporary Flute Repertoire* represents a significant contribution to the contemporary flute music studies. The thesis demonstrates depth, innovation and an interdisciplinary approach, uniting a theoretical analysis, a performer's perspective and philosophical reflection. Through the carefully selected repertoire and analysis, the author presents new possibilities to understand and interpret the contemporary flute repertoire, while emphasizing the importance of the variation as a fundamental principle in music.

**All this gives me every reason to propose to the honorable scientific jury to award a Philosophy Doctor's educational and scientific degree to Birgit Karoh.**

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