

REVIEW

By Prof. Borislav Aleksandrov Yassenov, PhD
Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, Plovdiv

By Order No. 3-RK-49 of 29 October 2024 of the Chancellor of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia I have been appointed a member of a scientific jury to ensure a presentation procedure for a thesis entitled *The Form of Variation in the Contemporary Flute Repertoire* for earning a **Philosophy Doctor's** educational and scientific degree in Higher Education Area 8. Arts, Professional Direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art, Musicology and Musical Art Doctoral Program. The thesis author is Birgit Karoh, a doctoral candidate in independent mode of study at Department of Music of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, with scientific supervisors Prof. Yavor Konov, DSc and Prof. Luisa Sello, PhD.

The set of materials provided to me includes the following documents: an autobiography, a thesis, an abstract, a list of concerts.

Birgit Karoh is an Austrian flautist, educator and mental trainer for musicians. She completed studies in Elementary Education, then studied Flute Pedagogy with Bernhard Krabatsch as well as Applied Musicology at Mozarteum University of Salzburg, Austria. She earned a Master's educational and scientific degree in the major of Flute at Giuseppe Tartini Conservatory of Trieste, Italy, where she studied the instrument with Prof. Luisa Sello, PhD. She improves her competences by participating in flute masterclasses with a number of prominent performers and educators. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, Bulgaria in the class of Prof. Luisa Sello, PhD in the field of flute performance with an emphasis on interpretation of contemporary flute music.

The doctoral candidate has an extremely active artistic, teaching and, subsequently, research career.

Her artistic career is rich and diverse. Birgit Karoh gives concerts as a chamber musician, orchestra musician and soloist with a diverse repertoire spanning Baroque to contemporary musical works. 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 ensemble founded by her teacher, Prof. Luisa Sello.

She participates in festivals such as *La Settimana della Composizione* under the direction of Fabio Nieder, *Udine Castello Festival* and *Udine Summer* in Italy, congresses of the National Flute Association in America, *Imago Sloveniae Festival* and *Qingdao Music Festival* in China.

The doctoral candidate's teaching career dates back to 2010. B. Karoh teaches Flute, Ensembles and Elementary Music Pedagogy at several music schools in Austria. Students of hers are award winners. She holds masterclasses for young flautists and has published a flute pedagogy textbook in two volumes with Doblinger Publishers, Vienna. In 2024 she was offered a position as a teacher of Music Education at a federal high school in Lower Austria.

The doctoral candidate discusses the variation on a broad scale in her thesis. Based on the musical development and evolution in the flute's structure over the centuries, which is reflected in the musical expression and form, the doctoral candidate analyzes selected works chronologically from past periods to the present day. The works are studied from a musical and

aesthetic perspective in terms of sound and composition. Based on the musical and aesthetic vision and practice from the middle of the last century, knowledge is applied to the interpretative analysis of contemporary works. The selection of the flute compositions discussed is based on various characteristics helping discuss the issues beyond the musical analysis. The works are analyzed in detail as a technique, initially from a musical and theoretical perspective, from the concept of tonal music to the forms of variation. The doctoral candidate's approach to the subject discussed includes a contemporary viewpoint – philosophical, musical and aesthetic, and existential. Interpretation of sound – the building material of musical art, is presented as an important component of the interpretative essence of the variation being extremely important to both works from past eras and the contemporary flute music. A special place in the research is occupied by dodecaphony, the holistic interpretation of music and the modern interaction among a composer, a flautist and a listener.

Based on the variation as a comprehensive concept, the doctoral candidate aims to shed light on modern approaches to the interpretation of contemporary music. The analysis of flute pieces from the 20th and 21st centuries, little or not yet discussed, will help make the proper approach to the interpretation of contemporary works clear and turning to the interpretation of sound material is extremely important to a highly artistic performance of both ancient and contemporary music. All this will contribute to orientation in the stylistic and ideological characteristics of the composition.

The thesis subject is the variation discussed using a musical and theoretical analysis of the form and a philosophical analysis generated by the conceptual and aesthetic approach to the works (the variation).

Specific flute pieces performed by the doctoral candidate are in the focus of the thesis. There are two methods, theoretical and empirical, facilitating a thorough and detailed musical and aesthetic, and interpretative analysis. A contribution to the issues discussed is the doctoral candidate's personal contact with some of the composers of contemporary works enriching the knowledge and approach to the works.

B. Karoh presents the goal, topic, subject and tasks and sets out her scientific hypothesis in the introduction of this in-depth and comprehensive research.

In the first chapter, *Variations in Different Areas in a Musical Context*, the doctoral candidate looks at the variation in different areas in search of similarities and differences. The variation is presented as a comprehensive principle related to the interrelationship between compositional styles, on the one hand, and the flute's structure, on the other hand, a factor predetermining the instrument's playing style. The interpretation is also supported by philosophical theories. The change in music caused by technical progress and sociopolitical cataclysms is pointed out. The analysis goes beyond the theoretical approach to variations, especially in the new music using dodecaphony, by expanding their interpretation through philosophy.

A flautist's aesthetics, personal view and contribution to the performance are discussed. Different opinions are presented about the variation as a technique and form, dodecaphony as a creative model, the potential of Arnold Schoenberg's technique and musical view, the atonal musical suggestion differing from the previous periods, where the meaning is based on the tonal structure.

Works from the Baroque to 1945 are analyzed in detail in the second chapter, *Examples of*

variation pieces for flute from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods. The works are discussed from a contemporary flautist's perspective. A musical and aesthetic, and interpretative analysis is made arising from theoretical and philosophical treatises. Each of the compositions selected is focused on a different approach to the variation in order to present the diversity. The flute's role and interpretative potential relative to the different periods are highlighted as well as the influence on the music making for the instrument caused by the different stage of its technical development. The analysis is holistic, covering the period, the composer's style, the state of the instrument's make, the areas of application and the specific potential for interpretation of the variation, which are also discussed outside the music theory.

The works are: *Les Folies d'Espagne* by Marin Marais, an example of a Baroque work. The period-specific prerequisites and traditions typical to the style and variation principle of development are described as well as the flute's interpretative potential arising from the instrument's structure during this period and the difference when playing the modern Böhm flute; *Sonate für Flöte und Klavier*, B-Dur, whose fourth part is *Theme with Variations*, and *Variationen über Volkslieder für Klavier und Flöte*, op. 105 – folk melodies developed as variations by Ludwig van Beethoven, are works typical to the Classical period; *Variationen über das Lied 'Trockne Blumen' für Flöte und Klavier* post 160 D 802 by Franz Schubert. The composition requires exceptional ensemble interpretation expressed in balancing the voices both in the solo and in the accompanying instrument typical to the composer's style and the Romantic period; *Fantaisie Brillante* for flute and piano by François Borne, variations on themes from *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. One of the most popular works, virtuoso in every aspect, a typical example of a romantic composition built on the variation principle.

Contemporary flute pieces are studied in the third chapter, *Analysis of new flute music with an emphasis on variation from another perspective*, the interpretation of which goes beyond musical and theoretical approaches. Each of the works selected represents an independent type in terms of variations in the flute repertoire of the 20th and 21st century. Shared are thoughts from *Musikalische Analyse* by Diether De La Motte, according to which the approach to analysis is different due to the fact that a composer, a performer and a listener are subject to constant changing, and Hugo Leichtentritt's thoughts regarding the complexity of Schoenberg's music due to the processes of variation in dodecaphony encouraging a listener to find meaning in their personal perception. The conclusion that no rules from the past would completely suppress a composer's personality and style are leading in the doctoral candidate's reasoning.

The following works are discussed: *27 Haidenburger Vogellaute* for piccolo and electronics by Fabio Nieder (2011) – the bird voices are expressed through the piccolo's timbre, which according to Karoh can be looked at as a variation of the sound itself. The fact that a similar idea was implemented as early as in Baroque compositions is taken into account; *Variationen* by Friedrich Voss (1967), atonal music with a highly expressive character, where the theme composed is followed by variations demonstrating the modern Böhm flute's technical and expressive potential; *Variationssuite* by Wolfram Wagner (2010) built on the basis of dance music, which is placed in a contemporary context. Wagner uses in his suite the theme from the beginning of the Allemande of *Partita für Flöte solo* BWV 1013 by J. S. Bach further developed in variations characterized by a different dance style (calypso, waltz); *Des Kaisers neue Kleider* by Johannes Berauer (2007), a work for solo flute with a sociopolitical focus; *Élégie pour flûte* by Marc-André Dalbavie, a work in which the author relies on contemporary sounds described in a legend to the work; *Sello de Luisa, Tema e 23 Variazioni per Flauto alto solo* by Rainer Bischof, a Viennese composer and philosopher, who in collaboration with the flautist Luisa Sello creates dodecaphonic flute pieces; *Metalevels – The parameter of sound as a conveyer of*

feelings and content in new flute music.

The reflection on the flute's structure and evolution are indicative of the variation in the instrument's sound development, a leading factor in the expression of the contemporary music. The varied sound is presented in its specifics characterizing the respective composition and interpreted using a hermeneutic approach.

The doctoral candidate presents a list of diverse concerts of high artistic value taking place in the period of 2019 to 2023, motivated by the issues studied, with a modern and relevant multidirectional method toward their interpretation, backed up by competence and professional approach to sound interpretation.

The interest in the thesis subject has been triggered by Karoh's professional orientation and affinity for contemporary flute music making as well as the performance practice originating from it, and also by the scarcity of theoretical developments, musical and aesthetic, and methodological and applied analyses concerning the issues discussed.

The foregoing will lead to popularization of contemporary flute music making and will shed light on the approaches to interpretation and its significance for the music art. The performance issues are based on the personal professional experience of the thesis author and the routine and theoretical knowledge substantiating the interpretation and analyses of the works.

The relevance of the thesis subject is determined by the novelties in the development of the contemporary musical flute art and the need to spread awareness of and analyze contemporary works leading to improvement of the interpretive potential and renewal of the approaches in the teaching methodology as well as their application in the performance practice. All this will contribute to enrichment of the professional and aesthetic mindset, setup and development of a performance-creation model as well as improvement of the flautists' theoretical and practical skills. It will expand the competencies of the music instructors. The foregoing supports the contributory nature of the research.

The thesis consists of 174 pages, 127 as main text containing 46 musical examples. The references include 68 sources, of which 21 websites, 3 articles from specialized journals and a thesis by Luisa Sello (2013). Two interviews with R. Bischof, PhD, Vienna (2021, 2023) as well as photos are attached.

The doctoral candidate has participated in the International Scientific Conference *15th Young Scientific Music and Dance Forum* of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia and the report whose subject is directly related to the issues studied has been published in a Conference's collection.

The contributions of the thesis are expressed in the following:

- The role of the variations in the new flute music is studied from several perspectives: sound, structure and interpretation. The importance of the variation as a technique, form and creative idea from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods and the flute music from the 20th and 21st century are discussed. A special consideration is given to the instrument's expression, sound interpretation and an author's and a performer's approaches to a composition;
- The issues in the interpretation of contemporary music are analyzed. A universal approach to the analysis of contemporary works is proposed – technical, form-creating, tonal, philosophical and musical and historical, for full creation of an artistic image and reaching an impressive interpretation;

- Presented is a chronological selection of flute pieces with variations from the Baroque, the Classical and the Romantic periods discussed theoretically through the music history and the form analysis. The flute evolution, which has led to its popularization as a solo instrument in the contemporary music, is presented. The development is discussed by including philosophical aspects from the Greek antiquity, hermeneutics, semantic and semiotic interpretations and contemporary considerations based on interviews with Rainer Bischof, PhD;
- The place of the new music in the concert practice and its reception by the audience is discussed. The difficulty of understanding modern music caused by the musical and historical development and the related sociopolitical changes as well as the need to become aware of its intellectual essence and reflection are analyzed. This will contribute to the enrichment of the flute methodology and music education as a whole;
- The analytical approach to a metalevel interpretation in the field of variation together with an analysis of the musical form and the variation as a technique allow for a comparative analysis between earlier methods based on variations and contemporary approaches to interpretation generated by the new requirements of modern flute music making;
- The dilemma of the approach to contemporary music relying on the knowledge on authentic interpretation and the novelties generated by our time and flute music making is discussed in the research from a flautist's perspective.

The thesis has a theoretical and practical nature and applicability in both a performing and a teaching career. This justifies its contributory nature.

The research is fundamental for future research in the context of the issues studied.

The abstract provides a clear idea of the content, goal, topic, subject, tasks, research tools and reflects the main results achieved in the thesis.

I am convinced the thesis will be of interest not only to flautists, but also to any musicians interested in a stylish interpretation of contemporary music and an adequate approach to sound interpretation. Therefore, I recommend that the thesis be published in order to make it available to a wider circle of readers.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Birgit Karoh's thesis entitled *The Form of Variation in the Contemporary Flute Repertoire* impressed me with its universal approach and in-depth discussion of the subject, the analyses and the scientific and theoretical justification as well as the consistent examples that help understand the research even more clearly. From what is presented in the thesis it is clear that Birgit Karoh is a sophisticated musician with an extensive musical and theoretical background and concert practice as well as with an innovative interdisciplinary and philosophical approach to the works interpreted. I believe the theoretical thesis meets the requirements to earning a Philosophy Doctor's educational and scientific degree set forth in the Republic of Bulgaria's Academic Staff Development Act and the Regulations on its implementation. This gives me a reason to propose to the honorable scientific jury to award a Philosophy Doctor's educational and scientific degree in Higher Education Area 8. Arts, Professional Direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art, Musicology and Musical Art Doctoral Program, to Birgit Karoh.

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