

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Georgi Metev Petkov, Department of Music at NBU,

Professional Field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art"

for the doctoral dissertation

by

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on the topic

"CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES IN INDIVIDUAL WORK WITH CHANGING
VOICES"

To obtain the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor,"

Prof. Field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art"

Thesis Advisor: Prof. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, Ph.D.

The dissertation contains 264 pages, including 169 pages of the main text and four appendices. The bibliography includes 86 titles in Cyrillic (60 in Bulgarian and 26 in Russian) and 50 works in English by English and American authors. The reference sources also include 8 internet sources. The text is structured into an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, and four appendices, with Appendix IV including 53 interviews with vocal pedagogues conducted by the author.

The research is primarily focused on the voice change during adolescence, known as the voice mutation. The author possesses considerable experience in vocal pedagogy within the specific field to which she has devoted her research. Her interest in the subject is driven by her desire to gain maximum knowledge to successfully guide her students through this important and delicate period of their vocal development. In the Introduction, she shares the following: "I enriched my vocal training methodology during the mutation, which follows one of the fundamental principles in singing education - to avoid harming the vocal mechanism during mutation. I use new innovative approaches and techniques that ensure the crucial development of a blended sound across the entire range and work with timbre", expressing her desire to present her personal experience and accumulated knowledge in this direction.

The main goal of the work is to analyze scientific research on the changing voice to date and propose a new methodological approach for working during the voice change period. Among the main tasks set by the author are the analysis and systematization of scientific research to date on voice work and a comprehensive explanation of the specifics of this period, especially the voice change. Preserving the child's voice is set as a primary priority and an important goal for this research.

Of the four appendices to the dissertation, I would like to highlight as particularly contributory Appendix IV, where the experience of 53 vocal pedagogues is presented and summarized, responding to a specially prepared questionnaire. I believe this is a significant and representative sample that enriches the study and testifies to the theoretical preparation and findings from the practical experience of a substantial part of the guild actively working with the "mutation" subject. The practical-applied value of this interview relates to the choice of methodology to work most effectively and gently with the adolescent voice.

The **first chapter** provides an overview of scientific research and methodologies for working with the voice during mutation from the mid-20th century to the present day, with a focus on the dilemma of "whether and to what extent" the child's voice should be loaded during mutation. The author expands the scope of the study beyond the limits of Bulgarian vocal methodological literature and presents some of the most significant theories for working with the changing voice from American vocal pedagogues who have thoroughly investigated the issue. Bulgarian vocal pedagogy is also commented on but in the light of its lagging behind in time compared to vocal pedagogy in the United States (for example). However, it should be noted that the discussion is about the development of the voice during mutation, specifically related to pop and jazz singing. Until the beginning of the 21st century in Bulgaria, such singing was not taught in the primary and secondary stages of our educational system. I would like to emphasize that, in addition to classical singing education since the 1970s, the teaching of traditional singing with its corresponding established methodology became part of our educational system—a methodology that does not exist in the United States for understandable reasons.. This important fact about Bulgarian national musical culture is overlooked in the text.

The study is specifically directed towards the mutation of voices in the fields of pop and jazz singing only. As for classical and folk singing, there already exists a well-established methodology for working with changing voices, which has proven its effectiveness and yielded positive results in practice. The modern approaches to dealing with changing voices (as is the subject of this study) in this specific case relate solely to the training in pop and jazz singing,

not in a broader context. Another personal observation regarding the conclusion, I quote: "But the opinion of most vocal coaches is that choir singing unify the voice. Students cannot develop and showcase their individual qualities" (p. 17). Such a viewpoint does not bode well for the development of choral culture and collective, team-oriented education among young people. In my practice, serious issues have arisen with vocal coaches who share similar views, and for this reason, I am highlighting the problem here. The consequences of such a standpoint are already evident in the tangible decline in interest in choral arts and collective, "team" thinking in Bulgaria over the past few years. I apologize for this brief divergence on a topic that has been particularly relevant lately and is not directly connected to the current study. I appreciate the author for including this observation in the text!

On page 15, the author notes that with the introduction of training in pop and jazz singing into the Bulgarian educational system after 2000, "a change in the approach to singing education, specifically towards mutating voices, becomes necessary. However, a written methodology specialized for this specific moment of change in the voices of adolescents in Bulgarian vocal pedagogy is missing." I consider this statement to have high practical value for the research. It will enrich existing frameworks in vocal methodology, primarily pertaining to individual training in pop and jazz singing. Additionally, vocal coaches from other "genres" would benefit by enhancing their knowledge with innovative practices from foreign experiences, adapted to the specifics of Bulgarian phonetics and corresponding vocal technique. My remark does not in any way reduce the overall contributory value of the study.

In **Chapter Two**, particular attention is given to the question "Why should singing not be stopped during mutation?" The experience of researchers, vocal coaches, conductors, as well as the author's personal pedagogical experience and thorough observations in this direction are summarized. Details about the anatomy and development of the larynx during adolescence, as well as overall changes in the human body during puberty, are presented. The stages of the forthcoming voice changes influenced by the composition of sex hormones in girls and boys separately are analyzed.

The **third chapter**, Diagnosis and Practical Methodology, introduces the reasons that could provoke vocal problems in students. The author offers one of the innovative approaches in vocal teaching methodology to identify issues through diagnosis, specifically determining problems related to sound formation. The causes that could lead to vocal problems are systematized and classified as psychological, physical, physiological, and sound-related.

In the **fourth chapter**, several contemporary approaches for establishing vocal habits during mutation are proposed and recommended.

In the **conclusion**, the author outlines five fundamental rules that should be followed to protect the voice during this delicate period of its development. The study is based on numerous sources from foreign, primarily Anglo-American, as well as Bulgarian scientific literature on the subject. The author draws conclusions and recommendations aimed at deriving the best and innovative practices to assist vocal coaches and conductors of student choirs. This fact eloquently speaks to the practical contribution of the study and its usefulness in contemporary vocal pedagogical practice.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. The mutation and the explored innovative approaches are scientifically justified and validated in the author's worldwide practice. General parameters and criteria characteristic of the changing voice have been derived, serving as a starting point in the educational process.

2. Innovative approaches for resolving vocal issues during mutation are proposed. Diagnosis is an approach that serves as an objective analysis of the state of the changing voice.

3. A gentle approach and methodology in the singing education process are suggested.

4. Cases from the author's personal practice are examined; over several years, the development of the voices of some of her students is tracked.

5. A classification of exercises is made based on their purpose.

6. The experience of 53 interviewed vocal coaches is summarized. Their responses to a questionnaire specifically prepared for this purpose (Appendix IV) are included.

7. The present dissertation is directed towards a broad audience – vocal coaches, music teachers, students, and directors of vocal ensembles in secondary educational institutions, enriching their methodological practices through a deeper understanding of the process of change in adolescent voices.

All sources are correctly cited, and I declare that I have not identified any instances of plagiarism in the text submitted for defense before the scientific jury. There are three publications by the author on the research topic.

Despite the minor observations, considering everything mentioned above, I emphatically stand in support of the author and her dissertation, providing my positive assessment.

I propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury award Dorotea Lyutskanova the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 8.3. "Musical and Dance Arts."

Congratulations to the author and her academic supervisor, Prof. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, D.Sc., for the achieved success!

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Prepared by: /Prof. Dr. Georgi Petkov/
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