

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Borislav Alexandrov Yassenov

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts

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By **Order No. 3-RK-171 of 29.03.2024** of the Rector of New Bulgarian University, Sofia, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure the procedure for the defense of dissertation on "Contemporary composers from Kosovo, Albania and the region and new works for clarinet. Performance Problems", for the degree of Doctor of Education and Science, in the field of higher education 8. Arts, professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Arts, Doctoral Program in Musicology and Music Arts. The author of the dissertation is Fatbardh Haji Gashi - a PhD student in the independent form of study at the Department of Music of the NBU, Sofia, with a scientific supervisor Prof. Yavor Konov.

The set of materials provided to me includes the following documents:

- CV;
- dissertation;
- abstract;
- list of academic publications

Fatbardh Gashi studied at the University of Pristina, Kosovo at the Faculty of Arts, Department of Music. He graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor's degree in clarinet. In 2012 he obtained a Master's degree at the University "Saints Cyril and Methodius " in Skopje, North Macedonia. Subsequently, he enrolled as a PhD student in an independent study format at New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria.

The PhD candidate is extremely active in his artistic, teaching and later in his research activities.

Gashi's performing activities include numerous concerts, with rich and varied programs, held in the period 2008-2024, in Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Germany, Great Britain, Bulgaria, etc.

The pedagogical work of the dissertant is related to the School of Music and the University of Peć, Kosovo. From 2008 to 2012 he was a clarinet teacher at the Music School "Halit Kasapoli" in Peć, Kosovo. Since 2012 he has been working at the University "Hadzi Zeka, Peć, Kosovo, where in 2016 he took the academic position of associate professor.

He has described the concerts and performances of his students from 2012-2019.

In the period 2012-2017, he served as Interim Deputy Dean, and since 2021 he has been the Head of Department at the Faculty of Arts.

Performance is a priority for the PhD candidate, which logically leads to an artistic research of his PhD.

Gashi's interest in the dissertation topic was provoked by his professional orientation and affinity for contemporary clarinet music, with an emphasis on works created by composers from the Balkan region, as well as by his emerging performance practice, and also by the scarcity of theoretical developments, musical-aesthetic and methodological research concerning works for the instrument.

The doctoral student aims to create a basic methodological work that will provoke further research in the field of the problems under consideration.

In this study, the author uses an analytical approach to the study of contemporary works for clarinet written by Balkan composers. Performance issues are touched upon, technical difficulties are traced, and methodological guidelines for mastering them are given.

Due to the fact that the programs of classical concertos for clarinet are dominated by works mainly by pan-European composers, the dissertation focuses on those contemporary works, which

are less familiar to clarinetists, and which are created by artists from the Eastern Balkans, not very popular both nationally and internationally.

The doctoral candidate believes that these works will contribute to one's professional growth and increase one's competence in the field under consideration, with which I absolutely agree.

The unique combination of traditional Balkan with modern classical music, the inclusion of advanced techniques such as multiphonics, microtones and extended techniques such as Flatterzunge and permanent (chain) breathing will awaken the interest in contemporary Balkan works for clarinet. It is noted that despite their indisputable contribution to creating a rich and specific tone, as well as a characteristic interpretation of the sound according to style, they present a challenge to clarinetists, creating problems of intonation, control and coordination.

The text discusses the most frequently encountered performance problems in clarinet playing, such as intonation, control, coordination, and breath support, and provides methodological guidelines for overcoming them.

The dissertation analyses the presented compositions in terms of structure, compositional technique, cultural and historical aspects. Through the musical-aesthetic and interpretative analysis, the author aims at creating a comprehensive picture of the characteristics, musical expression of works created in the Balkans, to achieve a suggestive interpretation in the construction of the artistic representation.

The above described would lead to the popularization of works for clarinet from the Balkan region and shed light on its significance for the art of music.

Performance issues are based on the doctoral candidate's personal professional experience, the routines and theoretical knowledge justifying the interpretation and analyses of the works.

Gashi's approach to drawing up the content of the concert programme is provocative and spectacular. For attracting interest and seeking variety, the dissertator builds the programmes with works by iconic composers such as Mozart, Schumann and Weber, while also including works created by contemporary Balkan composers, focusing on them.

The dissertation analyses compositions performed in concert programmes, by examining typical problems arising in the interpretation. The author gives methodological guidelines that will contribute to overcoming them.

Chapter One, Introduction, formulates the aims of the study.

In **Chapter Two, "Review of the Literature,"** the doctoral candidate examines chronologically the evolution of the clarinet, the specifics characterizing the instrument, the contemporary clarinet, its place in the orchestra, style, construction - parts of the clarinet. The following are world-famous composers who created works for the instrument, as well as nine of the most popular works. A description is made of classical music and its role in concert practice in the Balkans, and particularly its development in Kosovo. A significant number of works from the clarinet repertoire created by contemporary Balkan composers are presented, including solo works, concertos and ensemble pieces (chamber music). Prominent composers of contemporary music for clarinet such as Dobrinka Tabakova, Isidora Zhebelian, Ana Sokolovic, Kaia Saariaho, Jennifer Higdon and Michael Torke are featured. The doctoral candidate characterizes their compositions as demonstrating the range, technical ability, and expressiveness of the instrument, helping to convey a variety of artistic imagery and emotional suggestions.

Special attention is given to notable composers of clarinet music from the Balkans who added the unique Balkan spirit to their folk traditions - Petar Krstic, Ivan Jevtic and Miroslav Stakic (Serbia), Georgi Arnaudov and Petar Stoyanov (Bulgaria), Ivan Brkljačić (Croatia), Josip Magdić (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Tale Ognjenovski (North Macedonia), Manos Hadjidakis (Greece), Alexander Lalo (Albania), Anatol Vieru (Romania). The genre focus is described and A brief description of the work of each of the above-mentioned artists. Tagged their contributions to the development of classical music. Their significant works for clarinet. It is concluded that each of the above composers contributed his musical aesthetic outlook and specific style to the enrichment of repertoire for the instrument.

Bulgarian composers from different periods in Bulgarian musical history with significant contributions to the cultural heritage of the country are mentioned, showing the diversity and creative achievements in Bulgarian music over the years, covering different genres.

The dissertation expresses the opinion that by incorporating elements of traditional folk music into their works, composers from the Balkans and beyond created innovative works that enriched and developed the clarinet oeuvre. And bringing in elements of jazz, classical and world music highlights the instrument's adaptability to different styles and genres.

New techniques and approaches to clarinet playing are introduced, expanding the possibilities for the instrument. This should lead to a renewed interest in the clarinet as a solo instrument, as well as the promotion of creativity for the instrument. In conclusion, the doctoral candidate states the enormous contribution of contemporary Balkan composers to the development of the art of clarinet playing.

In **Chapter Three - "Research Methodology"**, the methods of research and all the processes accompanying the analyses of the concert programmes.

In **Chapter Four, "Program Analysis"**, the dissertation presents the program of each concert, focusing on the selection of works and their impact when interpreting. An analysis is made of the programme and of the technical difficulties encountered during the concert. The analysis includes an evaluation of the programme as well as an assessment of the performance. For a complete and comprehensive understanding and enrichment of the audience experience, the interaction with cultural and social themes such as identity, performance and impact. The aim is to gain insight into the essence of the music performed, generated by the cultural and historical environment in which it exists.

The analyses justify the PhD candidate's professional approach to the selection of works and their stylistic interpretation in order to achieve a full emotional experience for the listener/audience. This reflects in audience engagement and feedback at the completion of the creative process perception, performance appreciation and repertoire. Musical aesthetic and interpretative analyses of the works in the programmes are made in the context of the issues under consideration. Brief biographical data and the clarinet affinities of the composers performed are

presented. For a clearer perception of the analyses, notational examples have been added to some works.

In **Chapter Five, "Conclusion and Recommendations,"** Gashi summarizes the research findings and provides methodological guidelines and recommendations. The conclusions support the dissertation's hypothesis.

Chapter Six - "Limitations", acknowledges the difficulty of conducting the research caused by the scarcity of sources in theoretical and practical aspects, especially in the context of Kosovo and Albania.

The analysed contemporary works for clarinet, in particular works by contemporary composers from Kosovo, Albania and the Balkan region, would enrich the repertoire for clarinet and enhance interest in the instrument. The performance issues addressed, and the methodological guidelines given should contribute to the improvement of competences and approach in teaching the instrument. In order to achieve an adequate interpretation, the doctoral student recommends gaining insight into the works of some of the prominent composers, to become aware of the style, aesthetic and musical expression of the works and to approach the technical mastery with understanding. It is recommended that musicians perform contemporary works for the clarinet, with an emphasis on composers from the Balkans, which helps to introduce and explore styles, as well as expanding the technical capabilities of the instrument. The foregoing justifies the contributory nature of the work.

The relevance of the topic of the dissertation is determined by the dynamics in the development of contemporary musical art and the need to get to know and analyze contemporary works for clarinet. This leads to the improvement of interpretive techniques and the renewal of approaches in the methodology of their teaching, as well as their application in performance practice. All of this contributes to the enrichment of the professional aesthetic outlook, to the construction and development of the model of performance and creativity, as well as to the improvement of the theoretical and practical skills of clarinet performers. It is going to broaden the competences of music educators. The above substantiates the contributory nature of the research.

The dissertation consists of 105 pages including 6 appendices and examples. The bibliography includes 78 sources, of which 75 in English, 2 in Albanian and 1 in Bulgarian.

The reference of scientific publications shows that there are three in number and are in direct to the topic of the dissertation, which logically finalizes the PhD candidate's research up to now:

- "Instrumental teacher training in Kosovo: competencies, roles and contemporary standardized curricula", 2015, Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies. Presented at the Fifth International Conference - "Relevance of standards in Southeast European countries to European Union harmonized standards", CSARA - Centre for Science, Academic Research and Arts, Rome, Italy. www.academia.edu 2015, fq.171-177.
- "The Current State of Instrumental Education in Higher Education with Emphasis on "Realities and Challenges" in Art Education in the Department of Woodwind Instruments, Faculty of Arts, Kosovo", Balkan Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 2016, ISSN 2410-759X, ISSN 2411-9725, Tirana, Albania;
- "The communicative needs of English music students and ESP curriculum development at undergraduate level", 2020, Mokslinës Leidybos Deimantas - Diamond Scientific Publishing. Presented at Eighth International Conference on Modern Approaches in the Humanities and Arts.

The contributions of the work are as follows:

- An overview of concert music for clarinet is given, evidencing the universality and importance of the instrument in Balkan music;
- contemporary works created by composers from the Balkan region;
- the performance issues of works for clarinet are explored and methodological guidelines are given;
- an analysis of the concert programme has been carried out, focusing on works by Albanian composers;
- a musical and aesthetic analysis of compositions for the instrument has been made; attention has been paid to: difficulty, structure and composition, combined genres and performance techniques.

The development has a theoretical/practical character and relevance both in performance and teaching. This grounds its contributory character.

The research is fundamental for future research in the context of the studied issues and may also provoke similar studies in other Balkan countries for the purpose of comparison. The dissertation employs a theoretical method related to the chronology of clarinet art in its historical aspect and the theory of musical elements, facilitating the analyses of the works, as well as an empirical method of research concerning the interpretation of the works.

The two are united in a complex approach, helping to conduct the research in a more comprehensive way. This may create a prerequisite for the development of new technical exercises, helping to improve the quality and innovation of clarinet training and enriching the performance possibilities of musicians.

The abstract gives a clear idea of the content, object, purpose, objectives, research tools, and reflects the main results achieved in the dissertation.

Taking into account the fact that the doctoral study is artistically creative and taking into account the doctoral candidate's professional artistic appearances, the choice of works, qualitative analyses and findings, supported by appropriate examples, helping to argue and make even clearer the perception of the subject under consideration, I note the theoretical-practical contribution and the practical-applied character of the development, which gives me grounds to propose to the esteemed scientific jury **to award Fatbardh Haji Gashi the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"**, in the field of higher education 8. Arts, professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Arts, Doctoral Program in Musicology and Musical Arts.

28.05.2024.

Peer reviewer:

Prof. Dr. **Borislav Yasenov**