

REVIEW

Of dissertation "CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS FROM KOSOVO,
ALBANIA AND THE REGION AND NEW WORKS FOR CLARINET:
PERFORMANCE ISSUES"

by Fatbardh Gashi

(Performance PhD)

Reviewer.

Prof. Dr. Sava Dimitrov

NMA "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov"

The author of the dissertation Fatbardh Gashi was born in 1985 in Kosovo. He graduated in clarinet at the University of Kosovo, obtained a Master's degree at the Faculty of Music of the University of St. Cyril and Methodius", Skopje, North Macedonia. He teaches as an Associate Professor at the University of Peja, Kosovo. He is doing a free doctorate at the Department of Music at New Bulgarian University, Sofia . He has a rich performing activity as a soloist and participates in chamber ensembles.

The proposed dissertation is directly related to the candidate's previous activities as a performer. However, the analyses included are enriched with additional information on different authors, styles and specifics of performance mastery, as evidenced by the bibliography.

First should be noted from the outset F. Gashi's thorough knowledge of the existing foreign literature on the numerous works discussed in the exposition - this is again evidenced by the bibliography appended to the dissertation. On the other hand, the candidate is also obviously well acquainted with the various recordings of the works which he has used to compare them and to

enrich the performance with new ideas. It seems to me that this is also one of the main merits of the dissertation - that it presents many facts with which the candidate has become familiar in his preparation for the performance of the works presented, and that in the dissertation itself the works are not considered chronologically, but are grouped on the basis of the performance line-up intended by the composers.

To cover the extremely broad subject he has chosen, F. Gashi has had to deal with many issues, first presenting the basic principles of the clarinet as an instrument on the basis of specific works. However, it should be noted that he does not get carried away with the description of specific problems but maintains the strictly concise character of his exposition. The problems presented in the thesis are grouped in relation to intonation, control, embouchure, consonance and sustain.

The work naturally includes a presentation of the most important composers who wrote for the clarinet, including A. Mozart, C. M. von Weber, J. Brahms, and Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, George Gershwin, Claude Debussy, Dmitri Shostakovich, Francis Poulenc.

Of course, the focus of the exposition is on contemporary composers from the Western Balkans and their contribution to the enrichment of the clarinet repertoire, emphasizing that their music demonstrates the versatility and range of the instrument, revealing its innovation and accessibility to a wide range of listeners. It is emphasized that their compositions often draw on traditional Balkan culture, incorporating elements of folk dance music. They also contribute to the clarinet repertoire by writing music influenced by jazz, classical and other styles. In the view of the nominee, the works of contemporary Balkan composers have generally helped to expand the possibilities of the clarinet, creating new and exciting music that continues to inspire and captivate audiences around the world.

Before focusing in particular on composers from Kosovo and Albania, the candidate pays special attention to the Bulgarian composer Dobrinka Tabakova, whose work he considers in the context of the works of many other Bulgarian composers. The other name that F. Gashi mentions is the Serbian composer Isidora Zhebelian. In fact, these composers are presented in the work as a

background against which the contributions of the composers Walton Bekiri, Tomáš Simaku, Drinor Zimberi and Artan Hasani are outlined.

After the introduction, the work in which the candidate has participated is presented. This is, in fact, the main part of the dissertation, which demonstrates the candidate's ability to summarize his research in combination with the performance of the works. What is special about the recitals in question is that the performer combines works from the world's classics with works by composers from Kosovo, Albania and the region, thus demonstrating how their works fit into the world's musical culture.

Attached is a special list of the candidate's performances in six recitals in Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Germany and the United Kingdom, which further explains the choice of works included in the dissertation, which at first glance seems chaotic because it includes composers of different styles and periods (with contemporary composers from the Balkans also included). In addition, the analysis of all the works is preceded by brief biographical notes on the composers represented, which also explain their relationship to the art of clarinet playing. This often leads to broader generalizations concerning either the manifestations of a particular musical formation or a characterization of the style on which they are based.

It begins with a recital of works by Camille Saint-Saëns, Robert Schumann and Michele Mangani. The choice was made based on the candidate's excellent knowledge of the works presented, as he had worked extensively on them and therefore included in her text an analysis of all the pieces performed. The second recital focuses on the works of V. A. Mozart and A. Glazunov. In the third - works by J. Brahms and Drinor Zumbéry. In the fourth - works by R. Schumann, Artan Hasani and Tomáš Simaku. In the next - Artan Hasani and Walton Bekiry.

Of great value is the summary of all the candidates' recitals, which, through the works of Balkan composers, reveals the emergence of fresh, innovative ideas in contact with classical music. Walton Bekiry is represented by his Suite for Clarinet and Piano, whose sound is very close to the classical images of clarinet literature. Thomas Simaki is identified by the candidate as a composer with haunting melodies and complex harmonies whose compositions push the boundaries of clarinet performance. In the case of Drinor Zimbetti, on the other hand, it is emphasized that he uses rhythmic and harmonic complexes and experimental techniques, adding dynamics and modern currents to his works. According to the nominee, Artan Khazani's value lies in the fact that in his

compositions he reveals the synthesis of traditional Balkan elements with contemporary styles and even jazz elements, the result of his rich life experience. It allows the performer to reveal the technical aspects of clarinet playing and the control of the movement of the fingers in the production of sound.

The presence of these composers in the programmes of the various recitals has enabled the performer to reveal the stylistic and technical refinements characteristic of contemporary clarinet works, thus highlighting the contribution of Balkan composers to the world's clarinet literature.

It should be noted that in all the works under review, all attention is specifically directed to problems of performance of the clarinet and its relationship to chamber music, such as intonation, dynamics, timbre, vibrato, tempo. (The word "challenge" is deliberately not used in the review because it introduces a journalistic element into the exposition, whereas it is constructed in a strictly scientific manner).

In the conclusion to the analyses made in the dissertation, the possibilities offered by the clarinet are reiterated, and it is emphasized that these possibilities should be exploited in accordance with the styles that differ from one epoch to another, paying particular attention to dynamics, articulation, intonation, vibrato and timbre.

As can be seen from the less successful summary, the programme of individual recitals represents the various musical forms in which F. Gashi has performed as a clarinetist, one is left with the impression that some of the works presented were first performances.

In accordance with the existing requirements, the candidate's three publications are mentioned in the abstract, some of which are related to his dissertation, while others show his commitment to music and performance.

Traditionally, when examining dissertations, great attention is paid to the contributions of the doctoral candidate. I believe that in this case one can indeed speak of contributions, because although he examines the performance of many works with which F. Gashi deals with in his exposition, in most cases he arrives at skillful generalizations and thus substantially enriches his work.

The proposed dissertation contributes by the many specific topics it deals with in depth and with care to reach significant generalizations. Therefore, based on all the facts presented, I believe that FATBARDH GASHI may be awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

Sofia, 15 May 2024.

Prof. Dr. Sava Dimitrov