

## OPINION

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**on the doctoral dissertation by  
HRISTINA ATANASOVA PIPOVA**

on topic: „**RHYTHM & BLUES“ I AND II BY RUMEN TSONEV –  
CREATIVE PROJECTION OF AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER  
AND POSTMODERN VOCABULARY**

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*for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"  
by professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art*

### **Biographical reference and performing career**

Already from the biographical data of the dissertation student Hristina Atanasova Pipova, her special attitude to the field of pop and jazz singing is evident, as already in 2013 she completed her Master's degree in the specialty of pop and jazz singing with Prof. Rumen Tsonev.

The idea of a free doctoral program at NBU, aimed at contemporary experimental musical theater, was initiated by Prof. Rumen Tsonev, but implemented after his death on 09/26/2014. The doctorate is connected with her participation in the performances of Prof. Rumen Tsonev "Rhythm and Blues".

Following her creative biography, it is striking that she worked in the team of the productions she studied of the well-known in the European cultural space, music and theater director and Prof. PhD. Rumen Tsonev. In this sense, her representative experience and for theoretical generalization is related to the practice and knowledge of the work of this extraordinarily original Bulgarian artist. She was invited by him to the very first cast of "Rhythm & Blues" 2 at MGT "Zad Kanala". In addition to Sofia, the performance was presented at "Varna Summer", "Apolonia" and many other stages in

the country, as well as at the Bulgarian Embassy in Kensington, London (on the occasion of May 24, 2012), and excerpts from "Rhythm & Blues" 1 and Rhythm & Blues 2 featured in a concert in Hyde Park, London. In 2015, a tour was held at the invitation of the Bulgarian Cultural Institute in Rome, Italy, with two performances at Teatro "Belli".

After 2015, she performed a number of roles in the Musical Theater "St. Macedonian" under the European student program at NBU and in the period 2014 - 2017 she worked there and performed the following roles: "The Merry Widow" - Valenciennes, "The Little Matchmaker" - The Noble Lady, "The Phantoms of the Operetta" - Christine, "Escape" - concert with the songs of the "Avenue" duet, "Frasquita" - Lola, "Hubavata Elena" - Aphrodite, "Countess Maritsa" - Many.

Her stage and creative experience is also related to the figure of Kamen Donev, in whose performance "Views of a teacher on universal education" in the Drama Theater - Plovdiv she participated. Her biography is supplemented by participation in 2017 in the TV format "Sing or lie" on Nova TV with the aria "Time to say goodbye". Since 2018, she has regularly participated in the musical "Mamma Mia" of the Sofia Opera in the role of Lisa and the ensemble. In 2021, at the invitation of the composer Lyubomir Denev, she performed the main role of Katya in the first Bulgarian jazz opera "Dinner in Manhattan" at the New Theater - NDK with director Boyko Iliev. In 2022, she made a recording in the "Dolly" studio in the role of the Turtle in the play with music by Lubomir Denev based on Valery Petrov's fairy tale "Softly spoken" with director and animation artist Henri Kulev. Among her most recent creative appearances from the beginning of 2024 until now are two main female roles in performances that are repertory: Julia in "1984" by George Orwell, playwright and director Boyko Iliev, music Lyubomir Denev (premiere February 8, 2024); Cynthia Barrett in the musical "Agarta", based on the idea and music of Lubomir Denev-sin with the Pioneer Philharmonic (premiering February 24 and 25, 2024).

### **Content of the dissertation**

The dissertation consists of an Introduction and an attempt to theoretically present the context surrounding the subject of the dissertation: "RHYTHM & BLUES" I AND II BY RUMEN TSONEV, entitled POSTMODERNISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER (read by Rumensonev and some theater researchers and music in the age of postmodernism). Chapter one is entitled POSTMODERNISM AND CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER (read by Rumensonev and some researchers of theater and music in the

era of postmodernism). The second and third chapters of the dissertation represent an attempt to reconstruct the script of the performance, in its two parts (Chapter Two: THE AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER AND THE RHYTHM & BLUES PERFORMANCES; Chapter Three: THE REALIZATION OF "RHYTHM & BLUES" I (reconstruction of the script) ; Chapter four: THE REALIZATION OF "RHYTHM & BLUES" (reconstruction of the script). The bibliography of the dissertation contains 98 titles in Bulgarian and English, containing a description and classification of his author's notes on the performance, as well as the primary description of his personal archive, with which the author had the opportunity to work.

This dissertation is the first text dedicated to a composer, conductor and director with a unique European biography: Rumen Tsonev gives lectures and practical courses at the National Conservatory of Dramatic Art in Paris, the Lyon Conservatory, the Conservatory of Polyphonic Music in Tours, the Royal College for music in London as well as the Royal Swedish Theatre. He leads master classes at the Paris Conservatoire, in London, in New York, Boston, Stockholm, Marseille, Lyon, as well as in Bulgaria. He is the musical director of the theater in Toulouse.

His meetings with personalities such as Brigitte Bardot, Ingmar Bergman, Ella Fitzgerald, Maurice Bejart, Peter Greenway, Bibi Anderson, Alexander Kalyagin, Meryl Streep, Carlos Santos, Slawomir Mrozek, Fernando Arabal and others. are amazing, they enrich his creative path.

In Bulgaria, he worked with names such as Krikor Azarian, Grisha Ostrovski, Alexander Morfov, Kamen Donev, Ivan Dobchev, Margarita Mladenova, Plamen Markov, Boyko Iliev and many others.

There are few Bulgarian musicians and directors who have won European awards such as the prestigious "Bergman" award, he is the only foreign artist with this distinction. In 2010, he received the "Icarus" for his overall contribution to the Bulgarian theater, and in December of the same year he was awarded the honorary citizenship of his native city of Burgas - "the most expensive award for him", as he himself has repeatedly shared.

In 1996, Rumen Tsonev became the musical director of ATEM (Atelier for Theater and Music) in Paris – the largest center for contemporary musical theater in Europe. There he has the opportunity to personally join the vast world of avant-garde research and experiment, working with prominent cosmopolitan artists. The experience gained in France is the basis of his interest in avant-garde musical theater and later on

his creative performances abroad and in our country. His performances "Rhythm & Blues" Part I and II are considered as the first manifestations of modern "avant-garde musical theater" in Bulgaria.

The value of the work is stimulated by the unique archival material on which the PhD student works, as well as by the fact that she examines from the performer's point of view the two performances as the result of the composer's creative invention, shaped by the rich French experience he had. Preserving and studying the personal archive of Prof. Rumen Tsonev, she makes us sympathize with his work and a remarkable breakthrough in Western European musical theater from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

The dissertation introduces the concept of "avant-garde musical theater", which refers to the idea of the experiment in this field and in the specified period. Here, R. Tsonev's focus is that he "demonstrates the musicality of the theater". His creative support is the musicality of the tones, recreating the theatricality in the society around us. He shares that "the voice, freed from the traditional affects of which it is the bearer, opens up to the sounds of everyday life and thus gives birth to the theater" (Abstract, p. 14).

The uniqueness of the dramaturgy of the researched performances of "Rhythm and Blues" is in: "The idea is to unite in an original way a maximum number of completely different styles of music, which are mixed to such an extent that they already sound similar. Although reminiscent of "comedia dell'arte" with the many improvisations that are the actors' favorite numbers, the show is different. In its main part are well-thought-out etudes, which are rather sung than acted by the people on the stage by means of movement" (Abstract pp. 16, 17). Rumen Tsonev's concept is related to the ideas of Luigi Nono and Luciano Berio, transferred to the sphere of musical theater. This is part of his unique and hitherto unexplored European concept of theater, which only gives us an opportunity to consider the significance of what was created by this great figure - Rumen Tsonev. In addition, the structure of the performances includes the unusual interaction with arts such as film and plastic arts. Very little is known in our country about the concept of musical theater based on avant-garde and post-avant-garde authors, and Rumen Tsonev is among the most creative and organically European represented Bulgarian artists. Therefore, the study and even this first panorama of his ideas is valuable, intriguing, valuable.

In the contributions of the dissertation work, it should be pointed out that the idea to place a creator like Rumen Tsonev as a scientific object and to pull his exceptional concept out of oblivion is in itself a valuable scientific entry, a truly pioneering study of great value. The connections of Rumen Tsonev's concept with the French experimental musical theater are also not known or researched. Not to mention that the reenactment or reconstruction of the script of "Rhythm & Blues" is invaluable, considering that these performances are an essential, important object in the field of musical theater in our country. Even the very reproduction of the ideas about the "theatrogenic" role of music is an extraordinarily important contribution. Also summarized are the testimonies of those who participated in the performances, their echoes in the public space. A separate and unimportant contribution is the primary inventory of his archive, a labor-intensive and complex object, with which the dissertation lays the foundations of his study.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the truly intriguing, close to the original and truly valuable work of Hristina Atanasova Pipova, the contributions achieved in it and the introduction of a new scientific object, such as the work of Rumen Tsonev, I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award her the scientific and educational degree "Doctor", professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

Sofia, Septembre 2024

Angelina Petrova