

OPINION

by Prof. Ermila Schweitzer, PhD,
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on the doctoral dissertation by
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independent study doctoral student,
doctoral program "Music", NBU,

on topic:

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

Scientific supervisor: Prof. D.Sc. Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, NBU

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

Hristina Pipova was born in Sofia. He graduated from the 51. Secondary School "Elisaveta Bagryana" with a profile of fine arts with the French language. She started playing the piano at the age of 11, is a soloist in the children's folk choir "Bagri" and the children's choir of Guna Ivanova, while simultaneously taking lessons in folk singing with Nelka Petkova. He graduated with a bachelor's degree at NBU with folk singing and a master's degree, again at NBU, in 2013 with pop and jazz singing under Prof. Rumen Tsonev. During her studies, she actively participated in various creative projects, in 2010, at the invitation of Prof. Rumen Tsonev, she performed the main role in the buffo-opera "The King and the Plumber" in the University Theater at NBU. In 2010, she was invited by Prof. Rumen Tsonev to the 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 London, on the occasion of May 24, 2012. In the period 2014-2017, she was an intern at the Musical Theater "St. . Macedonian" in the European student program at NBU and performs a number of solo roles. In 2017, she made her debut at the Sofia Opera in the children's musical "Lily and the Magic Pearl" in the role of Midata, and since 2018 she has participated in the musical "Mamma Mia" in the role of Lisa. 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, directed by Boyko Iliev. In 2024, she received two main female roles in the performances "1984" by George Orwell (Julia), playwright and director Boyko Iliev, music by Lubomir Denev; and Cynthia Barrett in the musical "Agarta", based on the idea and music of Lubomir Denev-son with the Pioneer Philharmonic.

The dissertation contains a total of 216 pages, which include an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography (82 titles), Internet resources (7), videos (9) and two appendices.

The paper is very well structured and distinguished by precise and clear statement. In the introduction, the doctoral student justifies the choice of the topic of the dissertation, which is related to her long-term joint work with Prof. Rumen Tsonev, who also bequeathed her his personal archive. For Hristina, the work on this topic is "*...simultaneously a creative provocation and a moral duty to his creative heritage.*"(p.7) The goals, subject, tasks and methodology of the research are indicated.

The first chapter is devoted to postmodernism and contemporary avant-garde musical theater as a phenomenon that is difficult to define due to the dynamic processes that take place in the system of performing arts and musical theater. The connections of the avant-garde musical theater with the opera and their mutual penetration and influence are examined, as well as with the dance theater, the happening, the multimedia performance, the theater of the absurd. The author seeks the answer to the question of who is the leading figure in the creation of a performance of the avant-garde musical theater - the director or the composer, citing the opinions of numerous artists and researchers, advocates of one or the other opinion. A brief historical overview of the development and the most significant creators of avant-garde musical theater is made - from Jean Tardault, Georg Ligeti and Luigi Dallapiccola, through Luciano Berio and Luigi Nono, to Igor Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Bertold Brecht. Special attention is given to French musical theater and authors such as Georges Apergis, Richard Dubelsky, Pierre Barra, Maurice Béjart, to the importance of avant-garde theater forums such as the Avignon Festival, the Opera Atelier de la Reine and ATEM - Atelier

de Theater et de Musique de Paris, in in which Prof. Rumen Tsonev was a direct participant, who later brought these ideas to Bulgaria.

In the second chapter, the dissertation examines the features of the avant-garde musical theater that carry the performances "Rhythm and Blues" I and II, of which Rumen Tsonev is the composer, director, conductor and playwright. The new genre provides unlimited opportunities for experimentation with new music-theatrical means, "...as in it everything is sung theatrically, but also played musically".(p.78) The author is "...a demanding artist who, taking you to syncretism, presents a synchronicity of speech, music, dance in motion." (p.81) The result is a musical performance without drama, without plot and narrative, which is united by a theme that keeps the composition from disintegration and illogicality. The performance is a series of well-thought-out etudes "...which are rather sung than played by the people on stage by means of movement."(p.85) According to Hristina's successful formulation: "*mutual penetration is obtained - dramatization of the music and analysis of drama through music.*" (p.91)

The third and fourth chapters represent a reconstruction of the scripts of the performances "Rhythm and Blues" I and II, and for this purpose, Hristina uses, in addition to partially preserved notes and notated fragments, conversations with participating actors and her own notes and memories, through which the puzzle of the script of the play. Since Hristina has been involved in Rhythm and Blues II from the very beginning of its creation, she describes the very process of giving birth to such a show in the first person, something that is particularly valuable. The second performance is a kind of upgrade – more and more complex musical numbers, more instrumentalist musicians, stage well-prepared singers. Rumen Tsonev's approach to working with artists is very well analyzed - to activate emotions as a factor of vocal expression, to encourage improvisation in order to increase the expression of the situation. At the center of the performance is music: "...*the creation, the deformation, the perception of sound events. It is the basis on which it is reflected and staged*". (p.141)

There are seven contributions of the dissertation that I fully support. I would especially like to emphasize that the writing of this work contributes to the preservation of the memory and knowledge of a bright person in our musical and theatrical culture, such as Prof. Rumen Tsonev.

The dissertation student has two scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation work. The abstract, with a volume of 28 pages, corresponds to the content of the dissertation work.

In conclusion: Hristina Pipova's dissertation is an in-depth scientific study, both in terms of the issues under consideration and in terms of the analyzes and conclusions made. From the work presented, it is clear that Hristina Pipova is a committed artist and musician, with excellent music-theoretical training and a successful artistic career. I congratulate the author and her scientific supervisor - Prof. DSc Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, and I confidently propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award Hristina Pipova the scientific educational degree "Doctor" in professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

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