

OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, New Bulgarian University,
on the doctoral dissertation by **HRISTINA ATANASOVA PIPOVA**
PhD student, New Bulgarian University
in professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art

on topic: **"RHYTHM & BLUES" I and II by RUMEN TSONEV -
CREATIVE PROJECTION OF AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER i
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*

Biographical

Hristina Pipova was born in Sofia. Graduated from Elisaveta Bagryana secondary school, fine arts profile with French language. She has been playing the piano since she was 11 years old. He is a soloist of pop groups formed at school. Since the 10th grade, he has been a soloist of the children's folk choir "Bagri" and the children's choir of Guna Ivanova. Since 2005, he has been a student at the New Bulgarian University, in Nelka Petkova's folk singing class. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in folk singing and a master's degree in pop and jazz singing with Prof. Rumen Tsonev, Ph.D. (2013). He actively participates in Prof. Dr. Georgi Petkov's "Folk-Jazz Formation", attends the acting courses of Assoc. Dr. Nina Naydenova, and begins tambourine lessons under the guidance of Prof. Georgi Petkov. During his studies at the NBU, he was active in: the Bulgarian Eurovision Song Contest; The master classes of Milcho Leviev and Viki Almazidou (scholarship award 2009); The performance for the presentation of the "Icarus" awards under the direction of Prof. Rumen Tsonev (2008); Radio advertisements; The international contest "The Crown of Tarnovgrad" with vocal leader Vicky Almazidou; The international folklore competition "Pautalia 2008" with tambourine and folk singing (Certificate and plaque); Successful casting for the "Three K", announced by Prof. Rumen Tsonev to the NBU (2008); Course in jazz improvisation with Prof. Angel Zaberski and participation with him in the Czech Cultural Center and BNR, etc. In 2010, at the invitation of Prof. Rumen Tsonev, he performed the main role in the buffo-opera "The King and the Plumber" in the University Theater of the NBU, the premiere was in Studio 1 of the BNR, and then the performance was included in the MMF "Varna Summer". In 2010, she was chosen as the main vocalist of the Bulgarian ethno-fusion group "IRFAN", with whom she performed concerts in Europe and Bulgaria for two years - at the festivals Gothic Fantasy Fair in the city of Lis and Castle Fest near the city of Utrecht , the Netherlands, and in 2012 at the largest Gothic festival in Europe Wave Gothic Treffen in Leipzig, Germany, in Portugal at the Entremuralhas Gothic Festival, in Poland, Germany, Belgium, Romania. In 2012 she was invited by Prof. Rumen Tsonev to the cast of "Rhythm & Blues" 2 in the Small City Theater "Behind the Canal". In addition to Sofia, the performance was presented at "Varna Summer", "Apolonia" and other stages in the country, as well as at the Bulgarian Embassy in Kensington, London (for May 24, 2012), and excerpts from "Rhythm & Blues" 1 and "Rhythm & blues' 2 are included 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 graduating from NBU, Hristina applied for an internship at the "Stefan Makedonski" Musical Theater (under the European student program) and in the period 2014-2017 worked there and performed the roles: "The Merry Widow" - Valenciennes, "The Little Matchmaker" - The Noble Lady, " The Phantoms of the Operetta" - Christine,

"Escape" - a concert with the songs of the duet "Avenue", "Frasquita" - Lola, "The Beautiful Elena" - Aphrodite, "Countess Maritza" - Manya. Participated in Kamen Donev's author's play "Views of a teacher on universal education" in Drama Theater - Plovdiv (2013), in the competition "Balkan Romance" in RCC (second prize for best vocal performance, 2015), in the TV format "You sing or lie" on Nova TV with the aria "Time to say goodbye" (2017). She made her debut at the Sofia Opera in the children's musical "Lily and the Magic Pearl" in the role of Midata, to music by Lubomir Denev, based on the fairy tale "Puk" by Valeri Petrov and directed by Yulia Krasteva (2017-2019). From 2018 until now, she has regularly participated in the musical "Mamma Mia" of the Sofia Opera in the role of Lisa and in the ensemble. Concerted with the pianist Svetoslav Milanov in the duet "SveT & HiHi" they participate in the TV format "The Voice of Bulgaria" in Ivan Lechev's team (2020). Performed the main role of Katya in the first Bulgarian jazz opera "Dinner in Manhattan" in the New Theater of the National Palace of Culture by composer Lubomir Denev and director Boyko Iliev (2021). Recorded (in "Dolly" studio) the role of the Turtle in a play with music by Lubomir Denev based on Valery Petrov's fairy tale "Softly spoken" with director and animation artist Henri Kulev. Her last creative appearances since the beginning of 2024 are two main female roles: of Julia in "1984" by George Orwell, playwright and director Boyko Iliev, music Lyubomir Denev (premiere February 8, 2024); of Cynthia Barrett in the musical "Agarta", based on the idea and music of Lubomir Denev-syn with the Pioneer Philharmonic (premiere 24 and 25 February 2024). In the last five years she has returned to painting again. From 2018 until now, she has participated in several joint exhibitions at the "The House of Sofia", and on April 1, 2022, she will have her first solo exhibition on the theme "Flight" at the "Orpheus Self-Knowledge Center" in Sofia. Opens own atelier/gallery "Artina" in the town of Bankya (July 16, 2024).

Content of the dissertation

The dissertation is intended for public defense at a meeting of the Music Department - NBU, held on 20.6.2024. The paper has a volume of 216 pages, including 193 pages of main text and two appendices. The main text is structured in an introduction, four chapters¹, conclusion and bibliography with 98 sources used: 41 in Cyrillic, 41 in Latin and 16 Internet resources (sites and video materials). Appendix I is with author's notes and sheet music manuscripts. Appendix II is an inventory of Rumen Tsonev's personal archive².

The idea of scientific research on contemporary experimental musical theater was initiated by Prof. Rumen Tsonev, Ph.D., but was carried out after his death (26.09.2014). The doctorate is artistic and creative and is connected with Hristina Pipova's participation in Rumen Tsonev's performances "Rhythm and Blues". "In 2014, a few months before his death, Prof. Rumen Tsonev donated his personal archive to me. For me, working on the subject is both a creative provocation and a moral duty to his creative legacy." (quote from the dissertation).

Precisely formulated objectives and tasks of the dissertation

The "avant-garde musical theater" (according to Rumen Tsonev's definition), which is the subject of my research, is far from engaging only a limited circle of intellectuals. He has brought not only a new language, new ideas, new points of view, but also a new philosophy for music-theatre art, which with its conventionality overturns the thinking and perception of the world of the performers, the audience and professional critics. This is the reason why the composer Rumen Tsonev is not always understood and, accordingly, meaningfully evaluated." (citation from the

¹ **Chapter one.** POSTMODERNISM AND CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER (read by Rumen Tsonev and some researchers of theater and music in the era of postmodernism).

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" II (reconstruction of the script).

² **APPENDIX I.** AUTHOR'S NOTES AND MUSIC MANUSCRIPTS: "RHYTHM & BLUES" I. Author's notes (beginning of the performance and titles of individual numbers); "RHYTHM & BLUES" II. Author's notes (beginning of the performance); "RHYTHM & BLUES" II. Author notes (titles of individual issues); "RHYTHM & BLUES" I. Music Sketch "Broken Telephone"; "RHYTHM & BLUES" I. "Krivo SadoVsko", arrangement for four-part ensemble.

APPENDIX II. PERSONAL ARCHIVE OF RUMEN TSONEV. DESCRIPTION.

dissertation) **The purpose** of this dissertation is to present the conventionality of the "avant-garde musical theater", understanding it as a manifestation of postmodern art, following the history of this phenomenon from the second half of the 20th century in a European context (primarily in France, with which Rumen Tsonev is professionally connected), and its "transfer" to the Bulgarian scene. To direct attention to the Bulgarian theater scene and the important place of Rumen Tsonev in it by analyzing the two musical-theatre performances. **The research approaches** that are used are both theoretical, based on research in the field of contemporary musical theater and specifically on "avant-garde musical theater", and artistic-interpretive, analyzing the author's stage scores of the two performances, with the doctoral student also based on his own music-theatre experience. In connection with the text, conversations were held with the actors Hristo Mutafchiev, Evgenia Lecheva, Petar Kalchev, Yordanka Ilova and Krasimir Spiridonov, with whom they managed to reconstruct in detail the original performances and everything that happened on stage. Particularly important is the task that Hristina Pipova sets herself, to organize and describe the archive of Rumen Tsonev. **The attached original inventory** that she provides is important and useful for its future preservation, but also for subsequent scientific research. An important credit for the success of Hristina's scientific work goes to her scientific supervisor Prof. Valchinova-Chendova, Ph.D. – an accomplished musicologist who has experience with archives and is the most sought-after scholar in the professional field.

Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms

The structure of the work follows the set research tasks. **The theoretical basis** is the conceptual formulations and specific observations introduced and examined by Prof. Rumen Tsonev in his dissertation work, defended at the Sorbonne in Paris, on the topic "The audio-visual form of manifestation of musical theater (French compositional experience in the 80s and 90s years)' (1999). This is the first study of the experimental musical theater of the 1980s and 1990s, assessed as a work of fundamental importance for the theoretical and practical understanding of contemporary phenomena.³ Tsonev's thesis about the "theatrogenic" nature of music is very important. In the current dissertation, an attempt is made to outline the creative perspective of the "avant-garde musical theater" in Bulgarian practice through the prism of the "theatrogenic" nature of Rumen Tsonev's music.

As a musician who also performs artistic roles, the doctoral student has the task of examining the performances and reconstructing their scenarios. The second and third chapters are devoted to this. The theoretical basis of the scientific development is the texts of Rumen Tsonev, related to the avant-garde musical theater (cited by the doctoral student). Pipova also refers to journalistic sources - materials published in periodicals and internet sites, which have documentary value and reflect the public reflection of Rumen Tsonev's creative projects.

Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and correspondence of the literature used

Until now, there is no complete study devoted to the work of Rumen Tsonev and specifically to his music-stage projects. This is the first attempt to consider his two Rhythm & Blues shows as contemporary "avant-garde musical theatre" with the prospect of them having a future stage life. I think that Hristina Pipova is the most suitable person to (having personally worked with the author) to do this scientific development firsthand, and also as the heir to his valuable archive (which will continue to be researched, described and analyzed). I would support the quality of knowledge of the doctoral student with her quote: *"Staging a **musical performance without drama in a dramatic theater** is a challenge to the audience and to critics - there is no typical plot/narrative here, the individual parts are not united by a story, but by a theme that keeps the composition from disintegration and illogicality. **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. At its core are well-thought-out etudes that are sung rather than acted by the people on stage through movement.**"*

³ In it, the objects of analysis are the works of the French musical theater of Georges Apergis and Richard Dubelsky, with whom Rumen Tsonev is connected.

"Rhythm & Blues" is not made up of elementary sketches, although the humor is really many and varied - for example, there are jokes about music lovers who are familiar with the art of opera (it is assumed that people in the audience have at least seen the opera "La Traviata") or are seriously interested in music and know iconic names of composers and titles in each style. And most importantly, the performance is not a show (although there were, are and will be similar opinions of skeptics to such new experimental forms in art). It has original arrangements and transitions between songs, reworkings, intertwining folklore and "R&B" style (Rumen Tsonev is absolutely captivated by Bulgarian folklore and Church Slavonic music, which is felt in his arrangements), and, of course, presented at a high artistic level in the performances of the actors and singers themselves"

Bearing in mind that only part of the text of the script of the first performance has been preserved in the composer's archive (details and even entire numbers from the act are missing), I consider her work on the restoration of its author's text particularly important. To be restored and supplemented by Hristina, she made conversations with artists and analyzed preserved handwritten notes in his personal archive. It becomes clear (I have commented on it with Prof. Valchinova) that there are no notated harmonic connections between individual fragments of songs, as they were created by the composer during his work directly in the recording studio. Rumen liked to play with theater making, which is part of the improvisational moment in his "avant-garde musical theater" style. And what great artist or composer thinks (during the creation of a work) that he must describe everything in his score...

Accuracy in citing a representative number of authors
Hristina Pipova is correct in her citations.

Dissertation Contributions

I would present the contributions of the dissertation as follows:

1. For the first time, the work of the composer Rumen Tsonev is the subject of independent scientific research.
2. The composer's relationship with the French avant-garde musical theater and its reflection on his creative projects are analyzed.
3. A complete reconstruction of the scripts of "Rhythm & Blues" I and II was made, being supplemented based on separate notes by Rumen Tsonev, conversations with the actors and notes by the doctoral student about the missing moments in the composer's preserved texts. This is a perspective for the future creative life of the performances. I consider this a major contribution of the dissertation.
4. An attempt was made to analyze the musical material of the two performances as a manifestation of the "theatrogenic" nature of the music.
5. The public response to the performances was monitored.
6. The text also reflects overall observations of Hristina Pipova from her joint work with Rumen Tsonev.
7. A primary inventory of the personal archive of the composer was made (Appendix II). I also consider this to be a significant contribution of Hristina Pipova's dissertation.

Assessment of the compliance of the abstract with the main points and contributions of the dissertation work

The abstract corresponds to the dissertation.

Personal qualities of the author (if the reviewer knows him)

I know Hristina Pipova personally, I also knew Prof. Rumen Tsonev personally (Bow!). I witnessed the staging of both Rhythm & Blues shows. I am happy that this text has reached its final version, for which Prof. Valchinova-Chendova also has great merit. I believe that the words yet to be written will be appreciated and commented on. I congratulate the doctoral student and supervisor. I wish both of them continued success.

Publications on the subject of the dissertation

1. **Pipova**, Hristina. *Contemporary experimental musical theatre*. In: "Young Scientific Forum for Music and Dance Conference with International Participation", Proceedings 10: summary booklet and CD with the papers. Sofia: NBU, 2016.

2. **Pipova**, Hristina. *"RHYTHM & BLUES" I* by Rumens Tsonev - author's project and realization. In: "Young Science Forum on Music and Dance Conference with International Participation". Collection 11: book with summary and SD with the reports. Sofia: NBU, 2017. Hristina Pipova has also presented enough stage and practical projects (listed in her biography) related to her work on the doctoral thesis, which I consider to be a type of publications.

In conclusion of this OPINION, I will conclude with the following assessment:

The activity of the doctoral student meets the scientometric indicators for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor", according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The dissertation work of **HRISTINA ATANASOVA PIPOVA**, doctoral student at NBU - Sofia, on the topic: **"RHYTHM & BLUES" I AND II BY RUMEN TSONEV - CREATIVE PROJECTION OF AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER AND POSTMODERN VOCABULARY**, together with his scientific and applied contributions, as well as the publications/creative performances, I consider fully sufficient to give my positive assessment and propose to the respected scientific jury **to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"** in professional direction 8.3 Music and Dance Art, to **HRISTINA PIPOVA**, according to the requirements of the Law for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

25.7.2024, Sofia

Prof. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, PhD