

REVIEW

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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 AN AVANT-GARDE MUSICAL THEATER
AND POSTMODERN VOCABULARY***

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

*for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor",
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Before commenting specifically on Hristina Pipova's dissertation work, I would like to emphasize that it is the result of a long and multidirectional activity as a performer, with a number of successful performances in the field of the genre field chosen by her as a researcher. In addition, her development and creative achievements in parallel and in the field of visual arts contribute to her broader view of the studied phenomena.

Hristina Pipova's versatile professional training began with parallel training in fine arts and music, and already in her school years she performed as a soloist in pop groups and children's folk choirs, participated in the International Folklore Competition "Balkan Folk" in Veliko Tarnovo. She graduated from the New Bulgarian University with a bachelor's degree in folk singing and a master's degree (2013) in pop and jazz

singing under Prof. Rumen Tsonev. At the same time, she attends Nina Naydenova's acting course, joins the "Folk-jazz formation" of Prof. Georgi Petkov, with whom she also studies the tambourine.

During her studies, she successfully participated in the Bulgarian Eurovision Song Contest, the master classes of Milcho Leviev and Viki Almazidou, the Icarus award show, the International Jazz Vocal Competition "Crown of Tarnovgrad", the International Folklore Competition "Pautalia 2008" - with tambourine and folk singing, in all performances of Prof. Rumen Tsonev's project "The Three K's", with the course in jazz improvisation with Prof. Angel Zaberski and a number of others, for which she received several awards and scholarships. She performed the main role in the buffo-opera "The King and the Plumber" in the University Theater at NBU, she was the main vocalist of the ethno-fusion group "IRFAN", with which she toured Europe and Bulgaria for two years, and with the performance "Rhythm & Blues" 2 is a guest on many stages in our country, in London and in Rome.

After graduating, she continued her stage performances - for four years she sang in the State Musical Theater "Stefan Makedonski", participated in Kamen Donev's author's play "Views of a teacher on universal education" in the Drama Theater - Plovdiv, won second place in the "Balkan Romance" competition award, also participated in the TV format "Sing or Lie" on Nova TV. In 2017, she made her debut at the Sofia Opera in the musical "Lily and the Magic Pearl" by Lubomir Denev, then for two years she participated in the Opera's children's program, regularly singing in the musical "Mamma Mia". In recent seasons, she performed the main roles in works with music by Lubomir Denev (the first Bulgarian jazz opera "Dinner in Manhattan", the performances "Softly Spoken" and "1984") and in the musical "Agarta" with music by Lubomir Denev-son. At the same time, she continues to paint, participates in various expositions, and holds a solo exhibition.

Hristina Pipova's dissertation intrigues even with the title itself, directing attention to the multifaceted creative figure of Prof. Rumen Tsonev, as well as to a significant topic in the contemporary cultural space, present to a certain extent peripherally in Bulgarian musicology.

The work includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography (98 bibliographic items in Bulgarian, French, German, English and Italian and Internet resources) and two appendices (I – author's notes and sheet music manuscripts; II – inventory of the personal archive of Rumen Tsonev), in a total volume of 216 pages.

The idea for Hristina Pipova's dissertation development, in her own words (Dissertation, p. 6), was inspired by her professional contacts with Prof. Rumen Tsonev and her participation in the performances of "Rhythm & Blues", which stimulated her to examine from performance point of view these performances and made sense of them in the context of the specific creative view of the composer.

She clearly formulated the tasks she set herself - to present the conventionality of the "avant-garde musical theater" and to make sense of it as a manifestation of postmodern art, tracing its history in the second half of the European twentieth century and especially in France, as well as "the transfer his" on the Bulgarian stage (p. 7); to emphasize the important place of Rumen Tsonev in the Bulgarian theater space by analyzing his two performances; also to present his personal archive in an ordered and described form (p. 8).

The structure of the work is clear, streamlined, its logic follows the set tasks - from an overview of the specific problems of the avant-garde musical theater (first chapter), through its manifestations in the space of the Bulgarian musical theater scene (second chapter), to an examination of the specific works that do not have so far been the object of in-depth analysis (third and fourth chapters) and revealing of key moments of the author's creative process in the Appendices, which not only give a full-fledged conclusion to this development, but also open up possibilities for new further research and interpretations of the rich intriguing creative world of Rumen Tsonev.

In 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)*, Hristina Pipova's deep insight into a multilingual panorama of research into the phenomenon of "avant-garde musical theater" and its functioning is impressive in a broad historical context. And although she enters through the reading and aesthetic positions of Rumen Tsonev into the theoretical and terminological problems in this area,

in her active reflection she tries to offer her own conclusions based on examples from musical history and works from the 20th and 21st centuries. Here, of course, other works could be included, such as the operas of Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg, the oratorio "Joan of Arc at the Stake" by Arthur Honegger, the ballet "Bull on the Roof" by Darius Millau, etc., no less -little indicative of the birth and multidirectional evolution of experimental musical theatre. And I think it would be more correct to indicate the titles in the original, for example Ligeti's opera *Le Grand Macabre*, instead of the controversial translation "The Great Horror"; or in parentheses if there is an established Bulgarian translation, such as Boulez's "Le Marteau sans maître" ("Hammer without a master"), Stravinsky's "Renard" ("Fable" or "Tale of the Fox, the Rooster, the Cat and the Ram"), etc.

The second chapter - *Avant-garde musical theater and the performances "Rhythm & Blues"* is particularly significant, because it is here that the dissertation systematically presents the overall creative concept of Rumen Tsonev, his main aesthetic postulates and principles of building his author's project, emphasizing the importance of contacts his with Georges Apergis in Paris. Hristina Pipova briefly points out in seven aspects the common characteristics between the two "Rhythm & Blues" shows, then examines the very process of creating the project, noting the important role of the author's collaboration with the actor Hristo Mutafchiev. Very appropriate here is the citation of interviews and various media reviews, giving an idea of the public reception and the high evaluation of the first example of avant-garde musical theater on the Bulgarian theater scene.

Focusing in her analysis above all on the genre characteristics of the "Rhythm & Blues" project and its inclusion in the postmodern space of contemporary avant-garde musical theater, the author logically traces the influences of Maurizio Kagel's instrumental theater, the concepts of Luigi Nono and Luciano Berio, as well as and some parallels with the views of Pierre Barra, Ahmed Essyad, Georges Lavelli, etc., to emphasize that "*Prof. Rumen Tsonev borrows from their experience and way of thinking, creating his new, unquestionably avant-garde for his time, original solutions for the innovative mixed artistic techniques between theater and music*" (p. 89 - 90). And here

she very succinctly and accurately defines the dual nature of musical theater as "*dramatizing music and analyzing drama through music*" (p. 91).

In the following **Third and Fourth chapters** - *Realization of "Rhythm & Blues" I (reconstruction of the script) and Realization of "Rhythm & Blues" II (reconstruction of the script)* the independent creative work of Hristina Pipova is especially fully displayed, on the one hand, as a careful researcher of the stored materials documented by the composer surrounding the creation of the two projects, and on the other hand, with the filling, as a precise restorer, of the missing elements with his own observations and stage experience as a participant in the performances, as well as with the many conversations with other participating actors. Also very important are her comments on the specific requirements and searches of Rumen Tsonev in the production process (with a marked emphasis on his work with the musical material and vocal performance), for which the only registration is precisely these personal memories and impressions. And on this basis, she analyzes (**in the Fourth Chapter**) and evaluates the innovative creative concept of the composer, placing it as a phenomenon in the global postmodern space of the avant-garde musical theater.

In the **Conclusion**, Hristina Pipova again emphasizes the importance of Rumen Tsonev's innovative ideas in their connection with the French avant-garde musical theater (especially with Georges Apergis and Richard Dubelsky), whose experience he "transferred" to the Bulgarian theater scene, as well as the importance of his theoretical research and his thesis on the theatrical nature of music.

The seven **Contributing Moments** described by the dissertation actually correspond to the contributing nature of her development as the first study of Rumen Tsonev's work in his connection with the French avant-garde musical theater. And the credible reconstruction of the scenarios of "Rhythm & Blues", with an analysis of the musical material, not only preserves the two projects as a musical historical document, but would also allow possible future implementations of these performances. The inventory of the composer's personal archive is also a very important point, as a starting point for other subsequent studies of his work.

The abstract fully adequately reflects the content of the development.

The attached rich bibliography functions organically in the dissertation text.

On the topic of the dissertation, Hristina Pipova has two publications in collections of doctoral readings with international participation, published by the NBU in 2016 and 2017.

As a first study of the ideas and creative legacy of such a unique figure in our modern culture as Rumen Tsonev, I think it would be appropriate to shape and publish this work as a book.

CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind the undeniably contributing nature of the dissertation work "*Rhythm & Blues*" I and II by Rumen Tsonev - a creative projection of avant-garde musical theater and postmodern lexicon" and my excellent impressions of the qualities of the proposed text, I confidently suggest to the respected members of the scientific jury to award of Hristina Atanasova Pipova, the educational and scientific degree "doctor", professional direction 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

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