

REVIEW

**by Assoc. Prof. Georgi Metev Petkov, PhD, Department of Music, NBU,
professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art"**

for the PhD thesis

of

Hristo Ivanov Dimitrov

on the theme

**NATIONAL FOLKLORE ENSEMBLE BULGARE. MANAGING AND
CREATIVE APPROACHES**

thesis

in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD educational and scientific degree, professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art"

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Georg Kraev, PhD

The thesis contains a total of 232 pages, including 72 pages of annexes with interviews of prominent Bulgarian choreographers and artistic directors of folklore ensembles. The work is structured in an Introduction, Three Chapters, End notes, Conclusions and Contributions of the study, as well as a Glossary of some rare, obsolete and dialect words and expressions. Numerous theoretical sources are used to support the construction of hypotheses and conclusions concerning the topic. The bibliographical reference lists 232 titles. The list of authors' publications consists of three titles that are relevant to the topic. Six concerts related to the research topic were realized.

The doctoral candidate Hristo Dimitrov was born on 7 October 1969 in the town of Varna. Since his childhood he turned to Bulgarian folk dances as a performer in amateur groups. He graduated in 1994 in major Choreography and Directing in the class of prof. Petar Lukanov from the Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev", Plovdiv.

In 2002 Hristo Dimitrov and his sister Elena Anderson founded the National Folklore Ensemble BULGARE. With the financial support of the British citizen Ian Charles Anderson, Hristo Dimitrov created and trained the largest private professional folklore ensemble in Bulgaria.

The PhD candidate has extensive experience in the fields of: production and impresario activity, organizer and co-author of national and patriotic initiatives, creator of several festivals. He is

holder of several highest state honours and honorary awards. Since 2019, he has been the Director General of the National TV BULGARE, broadcasting a 24-hour program.

The topic of the study: National Folklore Ensemble Bulgare /Managing and creative approaches/ was chosen due to the broad rehearsal, concert and managerial experience of the PhD candidate during his long leadership of the first private professional ensemble in Bulgaria. The narrative per se is a theoretical systematization and apprehension of the issues, based on the author's personal practice. The self reflexive approach to the subject is a serious proof that Hristo Dimitrov knows perfectly the object of his survey and the contributions listed constitute the result of his own work. The text aims at *"searching reasoned solutions to the crisis issues related to management, focusing on the specifics in contemporary folklore-based artistic creation, requiring the creation of a market based model for the functioning of folklore art as a system"*.

Already in the introductory part, Hristo Dimitrov claims the relevance and importance of the chosen topic with the lack of interdisciplinary contemporary studies of the creative approaches in the adaptation of performing folk-based music and dance arts to the existing contemporary market conditions for their existence and development.

The **subject** of the thesis are the management, managerial and creative approaches for private professional folklore ensembles as an artistic and creative environment and factor for the creation of contemporary performing art. The studied **object** is the National Folklore Ensemble Bulgare as a new and alternative form for improved managerial and creative approaches in the organization of private professional art with a view of recreating the traditional Bulgarian folklore into a contemporary stage art on a folklore basis.

The main goal of the present thesis is to present the current state of the management and the artistic and creative work in the National Folklore Ensemble Bulgare (NFE) as a model example for the functioning of a private professional folklore ensemble in the conditions of a market economy. The tasks set by the PhD candidate to achieve the main goal are properly selected.

The methodology responds to the stated goal and objectives of the survey by including: empirical research, survey of sources with information, observations, probing, and presentation of main organizational and artistic experience.

Chapter One presents chronologically historical data and facts related to the creation of the first folklore ensembles in Bulgaria, tracing the phases through which musical and dance folklore passed to reach its contemporary professional stage presentation. Social, economic, managerial, ideological, educational and other important factors that contributed to the establishment and achievement of artistic and creative summits in the development of professional dance art during the socialist era are analyzed.

In Chapter Two, the author defines the term "Private Professional Folk Ensemble" and presents an analytical comparison of the similarities and differences between private and state owned folk ensembles, arguing in detail the creative and managerial advantages of the private folk ensemble Bulgare as compared with the state and municipal ensembles. From my personal professional experience as a conductor and member of the artistic management of the state ensembles

Dobrudza, NFE Philip Kutev and the municipal professional ensemble Gabrovo, I confirm the reliability of the conclusions and findings drawn by the doctoral student and consider this to be his particular contribution to the research. Hristo Dimitrov proves in theory and in practice that the existence and the success of a private folklore ensemble are possible and are an undeniable fact. In this chapter, details and particulars from the "kitchen" /the best practices/ of the management and successful functioning of the private ensemble structure of Bulgare are shared, constituting a contribution in a practical and applied aspect to be used by future similar formations and ensembles. The main organisational, technical and creative approaches to the creation of a contemporary folk dance performance are presented and described in detail in the following chapter three. The PhD candidate shares his rich experience, gained in the creation of eight major author's performances for the National Folklore Ensemble Bulgare. Namely:

This is Bulgaria, Bulgaria through the Ages, Albena, Bulgaria in Europe, "The Last Night of the Apostle, The Eighth Wonder, How will the Americans Catch up with us and The Secret Bulgare.

In Annex 3 detailed interviews with prominent Bulgarian folklore choreographers are presented, highlighting the factors and problems influencing the creative and organizational activities of the folklore ensembles. The probed opinions of specialists with time-proven organizational and creative experience and the conclusions and inferences drawn from them have a distinct character of a contribution and can serve future research in this direction.

Main contributions of the thesis

-For the first time a scientific survey is focussed on private professional folk performing art, its management and creative adaptation during the present period of historical and economic development of Bulgaria. The term "contemporary folklore art" is scientifically defined as a part of the system of artistic creativity and artistic culture today.

-The survey contains an original author's methodology, which effectively combines different creative methods for interpreting and turning the traditional Bulgarian dance folklore into contemporary dance art and for task achievement.

-For the first time, an overall director's plan of a realized performance, "The Eighth Wonder", is provided – A novelty in the context of the director's plan is the accompanying semantic analysis of the spatial parameters of the performance, of the concept and the message of selected traditional folk actions, movements, characters and accessories

-Carried a whole series of detailed interviews with the most prominent and professional choreographers and ensemble managers in Bulgaria (and beyond, USA). These interviews can start forthcoming surveys of Bulgarian dance folklore and ensemble activity.

-The main functions of the director and chief artistic manager of a private folklore ensemble are identified, and the need to introduce the position of "producer"-manager of a folklore ensemble into the organizational structure is justified.

-Presented methodology for improving the management of folklore ensembles through training and additional qualification in the field of cultural management and through creative work with the empiric forms of traditional Bulgarian folklore. Put forth are some important moments in the organization of large-scale performances, which have been tested in the real

setting and have shown their efficiency, an example that could inspire further managerial decisions.

The contributions are due to the author and I fully agree with them, but I have some minor remarks about bringing them to a textual level! For example, "The survey contains an original author's methodology ". It is correct to say: "The study presents, the author's original methodology created and tested in practice, which efficiently matches etc.". The author claims to have scientifically defined the term "contemporary folk art", but I did not find a precise and concise statement of this definition in the survey. There is a constant repetitive use in the text e of long dashes, which is contrary to the writing rules in Bulgarian.

Despite the minor remarks, based on all that was said hereinabove, I strongly support the author and his thesis by giving my positive evaluation.

I recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award to Hristo Dimitrov the PhD educational and scientific degree 8.3. Professional field "Music and Dance Art".

I congratulate the author and his supervisor Prof. Dr. Georg Kraev for the achieved success!

Sofia, 09.10.2022

Assistant Professor Georgi Petkov, PhD