

# STATEMENT

From

Prof. Dr. Katya Guineva Kayryakova

Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

at

Dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", doctoral programme "Music"

Doctoral student: Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova, PhD student at the Master's Faculty of Musicology and Musical Art of

NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY

Theme: **Methods of dance therapy through modern dance for personal self-improvement**

**Scientific supervisor:** Assoc. Prof. Anna Pampulova

## **General presentation of the procedure and the materials received for review**

The opinion is based on Order No 3-PK-172 of 29 March 2024. of the Rector of the NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY concerning the confirmation of the composition of the scientific jury and the dissertation, abstract, statement of contributions in the dissertation, publications on the topic of the dissertation submitted by the PhD student, in accordance with the requirements of the Law on PhD and PhD in Science for the acquisition of the degree of Doctor of Education and PhD in Science.

The candidate Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova has submitted for review:

- ✓ Dissertation of 197 pages, of which 174 are main text, with the following structure: introduction, statement in four chapters, conclusion, reference to contributions, bibliography and annexes. The bibliography includes 30 titles in Bulgarian and English, 13 internet sources, attached photographs.
- ✓ Abstract, 24 pages, prepared in accordance with academic requirements.

## **Brief biographical data about the PhD student**

The PhD student Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova graduated from the National Vocational School of Polygraphy and Photography, Sofia, Bulgaria. Sofia, Bachelor's degree at New Bulgarian University, Theatre Department - Dance Theatre Program, Sofia, Bulgaria. Music and Dance - Choreographer of Contemporary Dance. Since 2005 she has been a choreographer in the sports club "DM", where she teaches children from 5 to 18 years old in the styles of: ballet, jazz, show dance, contemporary dance, contact improvisation, sports dance. Over the years, the children have won numerous medals, cups and scholarships at home and abroad, which is a serious indicator of the high professionalism of their leader Kristina Merdzhanova. From 2006 to 2014 she was a member of the Bulgarian Sport Dance Organization (BSTF), as a choreographer, dancer and judge, a member of IDO (International Dance Organization), where she participated with her group of dancers who were ranked in

competitions of national, republican and international rank. He heads the contemporary and jazz dance department. He has twice won the Choreographer of the Year Award with "International Contribution to the Development of Dance". For her work she has been awarded numerous honorary diplomas for the development of contemporary dance in Bulgaria from competitions. Her professional path goes through 18 participations in National and International WORKSHOPS.

The biography and professional path of the author of the proposed dissertation Kristina Merdzhanova clearly suggests the reason for the orientation to the research topic: the methods of dance therapy through contemporary dance for personal self-improvement. A topic that combines rich creative and pedagogical experience and doctoral studies appears as a natural continuation in the improvement of professional and personal qualities.

### **Relevance of the topic**

The issues developed in the proposed dissertation have their relevance in the broad spectrum of personal improvement that the dynamics of today offer. The emphasis placed on dance not as a means of creating an artistic image, but as a way of achieving harmony between body and mind, draws the thematic lines of the research and establishes dance therapy as a contemporary method of self-discovery and personal development.

### **Appropriateness of research methods to achieve research objectives**

The research methodology used combines several approaches of work in relation to the set goal and its objectives - historical, theoretical-analytical, comparative, method of study and analysis of practical experience.

### **General characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation**

In terms of formal indicators, the dissertation meets the requirements for this type of scientific work.

**The introduction** justifies the topicality of the topic with the need for a more comprehensive and in-depth study and analysis of the possibilities that body movements offer for finding a balance between spiritual, physical and mental health. The motivation for the choice of the topic is the doctoral student's personal interest in answering the question "Can dancing help people fight stress in a stressful lifestyle?"<sup>p.5/</sup> , which formulates the main objective to explore and analyze the usefulness and necessity of dance therapy. The object of the study is dance therapy and the subject is "... the various dance movements in dance therapy and their implementation through specific techniques of spirit and thought, which could be a means of self-improvement of the individual."<sup>p.4/</sup> The aim also specifies the main five tasks set.

**In the first chapter** of the dissertation, the PhD student defines the concept of authentic movement. Referring to the research of Mary Whitehouse, Janet Adler, Joan Chodorow, authentic movement is defined as a structure expressing states and emotions beyond the confines of words. Sources of movement are discussed in detail with emphasis on the importance for coding and interpreting movement by Dr. Judith Kestenbarg and the Kentenberg Movement Profile - KMP/KMP - a system for noting observed movement patterns, classifying these patterns, and analyzing an individual's movement repertoire.

**In chapter two** the focus is on Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) and the types of therapies. The essence of the American Dance Therapy Association as a form of expressive therapy designed around the direct relationship between movement and emotion is explored. Dance-movement therapy is defined as a branch of psychotherapy that uses dance movements as a method to promote the integration of the individual into society. Creative therapies are explored, edited by Paul Wilkins, the School for the Bodymind's Bonnie Bambridge Cohen. The analysis formulated the conclusion that dance therapy is useful for healthy people as well as for people with certain needs and health problems.

I would describe **chapter three** as the dissertation's most significant contribution. The theoretical research and practical experiences presented in the previous parts of the thesis have been validated in the experiment conducted to investigate the applicability of dance therapy and authentic movement by applying different tasks to children aged 12-18. The extent to which children share their personal experiences through their natural movements is investigated. The tasks are besides individual and group, the communication between the children is observed and then analyzed by the "witnesses" without evaluating the experience. The successful outcome of the practicality of dance therapy in the experiment is evident from the attached essays of the participants.

**Chapter four** is devoted to the development of dance therapy in contemporary reality. Summarizing, the doctoral student concludes that Dance Therapy evolved in psychology through the synthesis of art (movement, dance and science) and thus it continues to evolve based on a fusion of knowledge built on the therapeutic and spiritual use of dance throughout the ages, cultural anthropology, philosophy, psychodynamic theories, various sciences, the psychology of art and the creative process.

**The final part** of the dissertation summarizes the results and formulates specific conclusions validating the benefits and help that dance therapy offers.

I fully accept the six contributions of the thesis as outlined and presented analytically.

The doctoral candidate has indicated two publications and applied a considerable amount of practical work on the topic of the dissertation.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Starting from all the above I express my positive evaluation of the dissertation Methods of Dance Therapy through Contemporary Dance for Personal Self-Cultivation and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", Doctoral Program "Music".

27 May 2024.

Prepared the opinion:

Gr. Varna Prof. Dr. Katja Kairyakova