

STATEMENT

by Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova, New Bulgarian University,
on the dissertation of **KRISTINA DIMITROVA MERDZHANOVA**

PhD student New Bulgarian University

in professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art

on the topic:

METHODS OF DANCE THERAPY THROUGH CONTEMPORARY DANCE FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

with scientific supervisor: doc. dr. Anna Pampulova

Prof. Anna Pampula for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Biographical data

Kristina Merdzhanova graduated consecutively from 90 Secondary School, Sofia, National Professional High School of Polygraphy and Photography, Sofia and New Bulgarian University, Dance Theatre (BA) and Music and Dance (MA). She is an active young performer-dancer and choreographer. In the period 2001-2023 **she participated in 18 workshops** of well-known names such as Milos Isailovic, Charise Renouf, Emanuela Campiciano and Gino Labate - Barcelona Ballet Project (Spain), Jean-Philippe Durie (France), Ateneo della Danza (Italy), Juri Konjar and Matej Kajar (Slovenia), Dalija Acin, Serbia and Montenegro, etc. **Participates in professional theatre performances:** (2015) "20 Steps" - choreographer of a duet included in a performance celebrating 20 years of contemporary dance in Bulgaria (2015) "20 Steps" - choreographed by Tatiana Sokolova and Rosen Mikhailov, Theatre "Behind the Canal" , International Festival in Burgas, Theatre "Adriana Budevskan"; (2003) "Unsown Field" - choreographed by Elisaveta Yordanova, NDK Hall 2, etc. She has won awards on her own and as a teacher-choreographer with her students. 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: ballet, jazz, show dance, contemporary dance, contact improvisation, sports dance, etc. He is a member of BSTF from 2006 to 2014 in Bulgarian Sport Dance Organization as a choreographer, dancer and judge, member of IDO (International Dance Organization). She has been awarded Honorary Diplomas for the development of contemporary dance in Bulgaria from competitions such as "Path of Glory", "Morning Star", "Crossroads of Muses", "Orfeo in Italy", etc.

Contents of the dissertation

The dissertation was discussed and directed for defense at a meeting of the Department of Music. It contains an introduction, four chapters¹, conclusion, sources used (20 in number),

¹ I. **Concepts of Authentic Movement** (1.1. Mary Starks Whitehouse. 1.2. Janet Adler. 1.3 The seven sources of movement-movements coming from the primordial unconscious. 2. Importance for coding and interpreting movement. 3. Portrait of CMR. 3.1. Darwin's conclusions. 3.2. Benefits of dance in children. 4. Rudolf von Laban. 5. Analyses of KStenberg Motion Movement Profile - KMP) II. **Dance therapy - DMT and types of therapies** (1. Expressive movement method (EMP). 2. American Dance Therapy - American Dance Therapy Association. 3. Dance as therapy. 4. Recreating an authentic relationship with self. 5. 6. The school for body-

contributions Appendix. The CV attached to the thesis shows Christina's activity and her multidirectional work as a dancer, choreographer and teacher.

Accurately formulated goals and objectives of the dissertation

The aim of the dissertation is to explore and analyse the usefulness and need for dance therapy by presenting a variety of research by scholars, psychologists, therapists and putting into practice (approbating) what has been learned. **The subject of the research** is the different dance movements and their realization through specific techniques of the spirit and thought, which could be a means of personal self-improvement. The object of study is dance therapy. According to the doctoral student, applying it, we analyze and get to know ourselves, self-heal our body and soul. **The main hypothesis** is that dance therapy and movement (from embryonic state to adulthood and old age), are an important and necessary connection between body and soul, which is of great importance for the rediscovery and self-improvement of our personality. **The main tasks are:** To trace the history of dance therapy from its inception to the present day. To present a variety of information from various articles, books, publications in order to enrich the knowledge and development of dance therapy in our country, which is part of the evidence of the usefulness of scientific development. To describe and analyze different perspectives, knowledge, findings of scientists, psychologists and specialists in the field of dance therapy. To provide information about some of the centers that in offer various specialized training in dance therapy. To give specific tasks (improvisational methods in working with children) that can prove (through analysis) the overcoming of problems in: communication, expression of needs, feelings, information about object relations, development, super ego, defense mechanisms, dynamics and analysis of personality. With children at different ages set tasks to explore whether dance therapy helps and what the benefits are.

Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms

The relationship of our emotions and our body is continuous and extremely important to be healthy. Movement and dance are one of the first ways of communication. "Movement and dance develop us not only on a physical level, but to a very large extent and with equal importance spiritually" (quote from the thesis) Kristina Merdzhanova considers dance, not as a means to create an artistic image, but as a way to achieve harmony between body and mind. She traces the relationship between dance therapy and psychosomatics, the interaction between behaviour (thoughts, feelings, actions) and bodily illness and physical ailments.

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

A scientific look at dance therapy and its methods as a means of supporting various illnesses, when working with older people and children (as well as children with SEN), would help to explore the benefits and importance of movement in particular and authentic movement. The centres where these methods are applied and practiced today are producing good results outside Bulgaria. People are increasingly looking for convenience, thus immobilising themselves, which in combination with poor food, dirty air and daily stress is leading to more

mind centering. 7. Educational process. 8. The heart as the center of breathing. 9. Therapy through breathing) **III. Practical applicability of Dance Therapy in working with children** (1. Study of the practical applicability, aims, methods and benefits of the tasks set to children of different ages. 2. Results of practical applicability of intentions and goals in developing specific tasks with study participants) **IV. DMT and development and now**

and more diseases. Perhaps dance movements and dance therapy are part of the journey to overcome believes the PhD student and makes an attempt to confidently prove it. *"Authentic movement is a method of active imagination in motion."* (quote) Benefits of dance in children (according to texts in the thesis): *"dance develops the imagination and supports non-verbal communication; it teaches and enables children to move freely and organically and through this movement to recreate different stories and narratives; dance is extremely important in communication, it is a non-verbal communication between us and the audience and also between us and our partner or between us and our partners; dance is freedom of expression and the knowledge of movement that children gain by learning a particular style or different styles of dance helps them in communication and self-expression; it serves to release the body and overcome traumatic memories and situations; dance and Dance Therapy have been studied by many professionals and have been proven as therapeutic tools for many children, adults and patients with undeniable benefits described in many books, publications and materials."*

I believe that the PhD student has seriatim research, analysis and conclusions. Through the thesis, she proves her thesis convincingly and has done her task.

Correctness in citing a representative number of authors

Kristina Merdzhanova is correct in her citations.

Contributions of the thesis

I would present the contributions of the dissertation as follows:

1. The dissertation traces the history of dance therapy from its inception to the present day, which is important for the region and Bulgaria. The diverse information presented from different articles, books, publications in order to enrich the knowledge and development of dance therapy in our country will be important for further research and studies as well as for practitioners in the field. The work can serve as a basis for future books and manuals on child psychology and development for teachers, parents and amateurs.
2. The doctoral student has described and analyzed various perspectives, knowledge, and findings of scholars, psychologists, and practitioners in the field of dance therapy. The work can enrich students' knowledge of psychology, semiotics, communication, linguistics, creative arts therapies, kinesiology, dance, drama and child development.
3. The study provides information about some of the centres that in offer various specialised training. It shares literature used and links to which the interested person can refer for further information and search or find articles, books and new research in the field of dance therapy.
4. The study can be used by teachers and dance choreographers and therapists in kindergartens, schools (for integration of children with SEN and in teamwork), various courses and self-help groups, teambuilding, health centers, etc. The tasks described in the work (Chapter III) can be used to analyse problems and overcome them in: communication, expression of needs, feelings, information about object relations, development, super ego, defence mechanisms, dynamics and personality analysis.
5. Scientific research proves the importance of movement (from embryonic state to adulthood and old age), emphasizes the connection of the body with the soul, stresses the importance of

movement for the rediscovery and cultivation of our personality. The scientific findings and the frames set by the study can serve for further development in areas related to the practice of biohacking and to life extension research.

Assessment of the relevance of the abstract to the main points and contributions of the thesis.

The abstract is relevant to the thesis.

Personal qualities of the author (if known to the reviewer)

I do not know Kristina Merdzhanova personally. However, her autobiography as well as this dissertation show her activity, dedication to dance and desire to discover new fields and spiritual practices.

Publications on the dissertation topic

Kristina Merdzhanova has submitted 2 publications related to the topic of her PhD:

Merdzhanova, Kristina. Project: *practical applicability of dance therapy in working with children*. In: Young Scientific Forum on Music and Dance - Doctoral Conference with International Participation, vol. 18, NBU, 2024.

Merdzhanova, Kristina. *Dance/Movement therapy (DMT) and its development now*. In: Young Scientific Forum on Music and Dance - Doctoral Conference with International Participation, vol. 18, NBU, 2024.

She has also presented enough stage and practical projects related to her PhD work that I accept them as a type of publication.

I will conclude this OPINION with the following assessment: the PhD student's activity meets the scientific and metric indicators for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "PhD", according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The dissertation work of **Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova**, PhD student at NBU - Sofia, entitled: **METHODS OF DANCE THERAPY THROUGH MODERN DANCE FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT OF PERSONALITY**, together with the contributions of scientific and applied qualities, as well as the publications/creative performances, I consider fully sufficient to give my positive evaluation and to propose to the esteemed scientific jury **to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"** in the professional field 8. 3 Music and Dance Art, to **Kristina Merdzhanova**, according to the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria.

7.4.2024, Sofia

Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova