

## STATEMENT

by **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Dimitrova Becheva,**

New Bulgarian University,

on the dissertation of **Yi Lisha**

Professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

PhD student at New Bulgarian University,

on the topic:

*"Vocal, Dramatic, and Stylistic Features of the Interpretation of Leading Female Roles in "Madama Butterfly" and "Turandot" by Puccini. A Comparative Analysis with Leading Female Characters in Chinese Opera"*

for the award of the degree of Doctor

Research Supervisor: **Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova**

Vocal Supervisor: **Dr. Natalia Afeyan**

### **Biographical data:**

Lisha Yi (YI LISHA) is from China. She is a lecturer at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, a visiting scholar at the Rome Conservatory of Music - appointed by the Ministry of Education of China, a young teacher under the National Training Program.

She has participated in national and international competitions, member of national and international forums: member of the International Education Forum of the National Finance Commission; judge of China Children's Golden Gold Record, judge of Pattison Special Voice Competition, judge of Einstein National Singing, judge of the Most Beautiful Children's Voice

Competition. Lishae has won many awards, including: the Bellini International Vocal Music Competition, the International Vocal Music Competition - Germany, the Chinese Music Golden Bell Award Competition, an award from the Special Projects Fund for the Arts of the Overseas Study Fund Commission of the Ministry of Education, a national scholarship, etc.

She is a doctoral candidate at New Bulgarian University in Sofia.

### **Contents of the dissertation**

The dissertation is 115 pages in length, and its structure comprises: an Abstract, an Introduction, three Chapters, a Conclusion (I. Research Results, II. List of Contributions), References (I. Bibliography - total number of 42 titles in Latin, II. References cited - 24 sources cited).

The abstract introduces the research topic.

The Introduction outlines the main purpose of the study: to compare the vocal, dramaturgical and stylistic features of the interpretation of the two composers, the Western composer Puccini and the Chinese composer Xu Zhanghai, and the leading female roles in their operas; to explore the relationship and different interpretation aspects of the leading female characters in Far Eastern opera.

The PhD candidate's motivation for her choice of topic reflects her experience as an opera singer-performer, and her desire to seek approaches of engagement to improve her skills as an interpreter.

The author of the study emphasizes that, in connection with finding "the direction of interpretation" and "more appropriate points of view of performance for different elements in operas", better understanding of "relevant symbolic structures and deep-rooted meanings", on-the-spot studies of Western composers and their musical works were conducted, a comparison of the latest versions of performances with recordings from different periods and countries was made, and then the analyses made and theoretical research was applied to practical interpretation.

With regard to the specifics of the research process and methods of study, the PhD student also explains that: "the approach to the topic is mainly carried out from a vertical and horizontal

perspective: the first part begins with a vertical examination of the objective content related to each of the three operas, using the real context as a theoretical basis for the study of the subjective thoughts and psyche of the characters." The analysis focuses on "the constitutive elements related to the composers and the operas, the biographies of the authors, creative characteristics; it enters the main content of the scores imploring the objective the objective social background and the subjective concept of the operas, which affects the general idea and projects the inner movements of the work.

In the Introduction, in the course of the exposition, the following tasks are outlined:

- Exploring the manifold aspects of the characters, analyzing the complex processes of their internal changes - in order to reach conclusions from the dramatic content

- Analysis of the various musical elements in the opera: examining the integration and balance between music and drama, with "a focus on analysing how music interprets and expresses the dramatic conflicts and inner emotions of the female character", "exploring the way in which characteristic musical and creative methods are applied in areas such as orchestration, arias and monologues", examining the costumes, props and accessories included in the play in order to complement the representation of the ethnic characteristics of the characters; comparing the different versions of the works (with a focus on the arias of the main character), in order to present the different requirements of the different directors in terms of the interpretation of the libretto and the scenography, showing the unique experiences provided to the audience by the collaborative creative interpretations in the field of musical aesthetics at different times

- A detailed comparative analysis of the three operas horizontally according to their thematic frameworks: comparison and analysis of aspects such as the historical background, the characteristics of the characters, the culture and the music, as well as the differences in the actual performance; exploration of objective factors and subjective experiences, in order to reveal the different perspectives of Western and Eastern culture in the creation of operas, the impact of these differences on the development of the characters, the musical techniques used and the resulting necessary adaptations in singing

- Defining interpretive issues, generalizations and conclusions about appropriate ways to portray Eastern female characters and different ways of thinking - offering a basis for training and research for performers.

The author of the study points out that one of the aims of the dissertation text is "to promote mutual learning and integration between Western and Eastern cultures in the field of music, which will make the sphere of opera more diverse and rich" (Abstract, p. 11), will help to improve the performance interpretation.

**In Chapter 1:** "Puccini's operas *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot* from a historical perspective", the focus of research attention is on Puccini's oeuvre - his iconic works *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La Boheme* and *Turandot*, the characteristics of the composer's dramatic and musical style, the themes explored in his operatic works, and the influence of Puccini's work on future generations.

Of particular interest to me are texts examining the relationship between music, lyrics, singing, and emotional content in Puccini's operas *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*, the characteristics of the leading female roles in the drama, the artistic interpretation of female protagonists, and vocal and instrumental language.

**In Chapter 2:** "The Chinese Opera *Cang Yuan*". The research focuses on the works of Xu Zhanghai, the author of the opera *Cang Yuan*, one of the most outstanding contemporary Chinese composers, the characteristics of his musical style, arguing that the opera *Cang Yuan* "stands out as one of the most representative classical works in the history of national opera."

Of particular importance to me are the texts representing the musical language and artistic interpretation of the female leads.

I would like to single out **Chapter 3:** "Comparison of the Three Operas" as a contribution, which compares and analyzes in detail the formal structural features, dramaturgical construction, character traits of the characters in the three operas, and the differences and commonalities in terms of musical aesthetics and musical language in the operas by Puccini and Xu Zhanghai.

In the summaries and conclusions drawn, the student's personal experience as a singer-interpreter is reflected. Combining her practical experience with a research attitude to the problem,

along with the analyses and comparisons made, the author of the study also presents possible approaches to the interpretation of the female leads in the operas under consideration.

In the **Conclusion**, the most important results of the individual parts of the study, recommendations, and contributions are summarized.

### **Significance of the research topic in scientific and applied terms**

- The author's personal experience is shared.
- An innovative approach to the interpretation of the main female roles in Eastern operas is presented.

### **Degree of familiarity with the state of the problem and conformity of the literature used**

The doctoral candidate uses sufficient information sources, the reference to which is correct.

### **Contributions of the dissertation**

I accept the contributions of the thesis made by the doctoral candidate, including:

1. The study clearly identifies an appropriate method and direction of interpretation of female leads in Eastern operas. This will greatly assist performers in their dramatic interpretation and musical understanding of Eastern female characters.
2. The study has shown the historical and cultural aspects behind Eastern characters and music, and identified key points of mutual influence between Eastern and Western music. This will contribute to expanding the scope and depth of future integration between Eastern and Western music and culture.
3. This research leads to the creation of a number of platforms for learning and performance. These provide opera performers with more opportunities for training and practice. This also creates the potential for future internationalization of eastern opera.

4. This dissertation introduces the distinguished composer Xu Zhanghai, who is one of the pillars of contemporary Chinese musical culture. It includes an interview given by him exclusively for the purpose of the dissertation, which reveals valuable insights into the development of national Chinese and international music.

5. The author has engaged in in-depth discussions with Mr. Franco Moretti, director of the Puccini Opera House in Italy, on the characteristics of Eastern and Western musical operas, introduced Eastern opera into the field of European classical music, laid the foundation for future cooperation in the creation and performance of relevant Eastern operas, and deepened interaction and cooperation.

6. Thanks to the research, a means of mutual influence and exchange of Eastern opera performances has been established among the three nations of ancient music: Italy, Bulgaria and China. This provides a starting point for the promotion of their respective musical cultures.

### **Assessment of the relevance of the abstract to the main points and contributions of the thesis**

The 23-page abstract conveys the nature of the doctoral work.

### **Publications on the dissertation topic**

The doctoral candidate has a sufficient number of publications on the doctoral thesis:

1. Yi, Lisha. THE CHINESE COMPOSER XU ZHANHAI AND HIS OPERATIC MASTER PIECE "CANG YUAN": A FUSION OF THE EASTERN AND WESTERN IN MUSIC. In: Young Scientific Forum of Music and Dance, NBU Press, vol. 18, 2023.

2. Yi, Lisha. ON THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF SINGING METHODS BETWEEN EUROPE AND CHINA IN BELCANTO. In: Young Scientific Forum of Music and Dance, NBU Press, vol. 17, 2022.

### **Opinions, recommendations and notes**

I would recommend Yi Lisha's work to be published.

### **In conclusion:**

I give my positive evaluation to Lisha Y's dissertation: "Vocal, Dramatic, and Stylistic Features of the Interpretation of Leading Female Roles in "Madama Butterfly" and "Turandot" by Puccini. A Comparative Analysis with Leading Female Characters in Chinese Opera" , in connection with its contributions of scientific and applied merit. I consider that the doctoral dissertation of the PhD candidate **fully meets the requirements for obtaining the degree of Doctor** in the professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art" under the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award it to her.

19.05.2024, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Rositsa Becheva