

STATEMENT

by

Prof. Dr. Ermila Schweizer

NMA „Prof. Pancho Vladigerov“

on the dissertation of

YII LISHA

PhD candidate of full-time studies,

in the professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

Musicology and Music Art Programme/ Department of Music

New Bulgarian University, Sofia

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

Topic of the 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"

for the award of the degree of Doctor

Following a decision of the Faculty Board of the Master's Faculty of NBU of 20.02.2024 to initiate a procedure for the defense of the dissertation of Yi Lisha, I was provided with the following materials: the candidate's CV, the dissertation, the abstract, a reference to the contribution of the dissertation, a list of publications on the topic.

Brief biographical data about the candidate:

Yi Lisha was born in China. At present, she works as a lecturer at the Shenyang Conservatory. She is a visiting researcher at the Conservatory of Rome, Italy, under the program of the Chinese Ministry of Education. She is a member of various educational committees and forums, and has participated as a panel member in numerous competitions. Yi Lisha is a dramatic soprano and has won prizes in a number of singing competitions including Bellini International Vocal Music Competition, Germany Gut Immling International Vocal Music Competition, Chinese Music Golden Bell Award Competition. Her active singing career is probably the reason why she chose to pursue an artistic doctorate that would allow her to enrich her knowledge of the operatic repertoire she performs on stage as a singer.

Yi Lisha's thesis focuses on the female leads in Puccini's two operas with Eastern themes, *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*, and the female lead in Chinese composer Xu Zhanghai's opera *Cang Yuan*. The author aims to compare the vocal, dramaturgical and stylistic features of the interpretation of these central soprano roles.

The research methods include: a detailed factual study on the biographies and characteristics of the two composers and their respective influences, an examination of multiple documentary sources, a detailed study of the scores such as score, melody, speech and emotion, a comparative analysis of several interpretations from different periods and countries, and an interview with the composer Xu Zhanghai.

Yi Lisha's dissertation is an analytical-comparative study. Chapters One and Two examine the objective content of the three operas, using the real-world context as a theoretical basis for exploring the subjective thoughts and mentalities of the characters. The author explores in detail the libretti and their setting to music by Puccini and Xu Zhanghai. An analysis is made of the various musical elements in the operas, focusing on the analysis of how the music interprets and expresses the dramatic conflicts and inner emotions of the female characters. The way in which distinctive musical and creative methods are applied in areas such as orchestration, arias and monologues are explored. The interplay between drama and music is explored, and how this affects the degree of stage impact and emotional charge of each musical number. For example, the opera *Turandot* is known to have a fictional plot and characters, but the stage realism sought by Puccini is achieved with the historical verisimilitude of the period and social setting. In the opera *Cang Yuan*, the composer Xu Zhanghai incorporates elements of traditional Chinese folk songs and musical techniques using the form of Western European opera. He effectively fuses Chinese folk

music with Western compositional techniques, achieving a synthesis between Eastern and Western notions of musical drama.

Chapter Three is central to the study because here the author presents her comparative analysis of the three operas. The comparisons are structured into several sub-points: historical background, character traits of the protagonists, culture and music, and distinctive features of the operas. Puccini's two operas were written in the early twentieth century, when the gradual penetration and influence of Western culture in the East began. Xu Zhanghai's opera was composed at the end of the 20th century, a time when Western culture in China had greatly expanded its influence, to the point that a Chinese composer wrote an opera with a Chinese subject and Western compositional techniques. What is remarkable is the breakneck development and mutual influence that took place over a period of about a century, made possible by China's opening to the world and the development of communications and technology. The author's interest is logically focused on the interpretive and vocal challenges of the three main female roles, analyzed from the performer's perspective. In her view, "their characteristics are often deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts that, as a basis for character interpretation, influence both singing and performance" (p. 19).

The dissertation identifies six contributions to the work that I find valid. The study would certainly be useful to opera performers in their search for an appropriate method and direction for interpreting female leads in operas with Eastern themes. I consider it very valuable and contributory that Yi Lisha shares her personal experience as a singer with an Eastern background, which provides another point of reference for her observations and analyses.

The publications on the topic of the dissertation are sufficient and demonstrate a professional experience and research interest. The submitted abstract is relevant to the dissertation.

Yi Lisha's dissertation is an analytical and comparative study, with marked practical value, detailed analyses and well-formulated conclusions.

On the basis of all that has been said so far, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to **award Yi Lisha the degree of Doctor in the professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art.**

Sofia, 19.05.2024

Prof. Dr. Ermila Schweizer