

## OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Vessela Ivanova Geleva (Lecturer in Choral Conducting at the Department of Music Pedagogy and Conducting of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv)

on the dissertation of Mete Gökçe, PhD candidate at the Department of Music at New Bulgarian University – Sofia

on the topic "YOUTH CHOIRS IN TURKEY IN THE LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY – PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES" for awarding the scientific and educational degree "Doctor", field of higher education 8. Arts, professional field 8.3. "Music and dance art".

Mete Gokce was born in 1975 in Ankara. His music education has begun at *Gazi University* and his Master's degree is from *Çukurova University* in Choral Conducting. He has been a doctoral student at *New Bulgarian University*, Sofia, since 2014. Mete Gokce is a lecturer at *Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University* and at *Niğde University* in the Faculty of Education. His master's thesis is a research titled "The Effect of Choir Arrangement on Musical Results". He is heading a number of projects, festivals and associations, including "100 Voices" Choir School, *Çanakkale International Choir Festival*, *Çanakkale Children's Choirs Festival*, *Polyphonic Arts and Choirs Association*. He conducts the *Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Choir*, the "100 Voices" National Youth Choir, the *Çanakkale Peace Choir*, *Konrul Vocal Ensemble*, "100 Voices" *Çanakkale Children's Choir*, *Olive Seeds Children's Choir*. Mete Gökçe is a lecturer at the Department of Pedagogy of Fine Arts and the Department of Music Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy of *Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University*; he frequently organizes master classes and seminars in

choral conducting, and participates in international panels and radio broadcasts; he is also a winner of numerous awards and distinctions at various choral forums. Mete Gokce has released two CDs and authored numerous publications on the history and the specifics of Turkish vocal and ensemble music.

The presented work is written in English and consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, contributions and bibliography. The total volume is 173 pages, 167 pages of which are body text that includes images, tables and documentary photos. There are 35 titles in Turkish and English in the quoted literature.

The introduction outlines the objectives of the research: to make a historical overview of Turkish choral music, focusing on the processes in its development in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, to analyze and identify the problems and the stylistic trends and to present leading choral conductors who actively promote the art of choral music in Turkey. The introduction states as well the layout of the results of the data obtained in the project of the National Youth Choir "*100 votes*" for choral music and summarizes the relevant conclusions.

The first chapter is titled *Assessment of the history of choral research in Turkey from 1970 to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century*. The author presents in it the factors and historical preconditions for the emergence of choral art in Turkey, preceded by Turkish folk, religious and court music in their diversity and utilitarian purpose. The transition from the Ottoman to the republican period, which gave impetus to the evolution of the musical education in the country and introduced a significant part of the Western European achievements in philosophy, education, and arts, is a subject of thorough analysis. The PhD candidate points to the 1970s as being a crucial period for setting up the foundation of professional choral art in Turkey. He states that the progress was supported by the creation of specialized institutions, choirs, establishment of festivals and competitions with growing prestige.

Subject of the second chapter is the choral singing in Turkey in the 20th century. The dissertation presents the general education system and the position of music and choral studies, emphasizing on the significance of extracurricular activities in assembling children with talent and interest in the art of singing. The author lists the main types of vocal ensemble, i.e. ensembles of Turkish court music, vocal ensembles of folk music and polyphonic choral ensembles. He discusses the options for academic music education in choral conducting, as well as the variety of seminars and courses within festivals, various universities, associations and choral projects, which make up for the insufficient standard of academic training of future conductors. A list of the names of the leading contemporary Turkish choral conductors with significant contributions to Turkish choral music is presented. In my opinion, it should also include the name of Burak Onur Erdem, conductor of the *Resonance Choir*, of the *European Choir of Istanbul* and of the *Turkish State Choir*. The achievements of this young conductor are indisputable and are commensurate with international choral performance practice.

The third chapter of the dissertation contains an overview of the choral works of contemporary Turkish composers, mentioned in the book "*Catalog of Turkish composers*" (2006) by Turkish musicologist Ersin Antep.

The next chapter of the paper is titled "*Problems of Youth Choirs and an Overview of the Situation in Turkey in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> and Early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries.*" The PhD candidate points out a number of shortcomings and obstacles for achieving high choral singing culture in the Turkish education system, including insufficient number of music lessons at schools, lack of steady academic education for choir conductors in the higher institutions of arts, shortage of specialized departments of choral conducting in the academies, where manual conducting technique, means of expression, suggestion and performing skills, different styles and their corresponding repertoire etc., should be studied. Voice

studies, musical analysis, piano and score reading, which are disciplines of utmost importance for the future chorus master, are also insufficient.

The PhD candidate addresses various issues of choral performance in Turkey from a technical, interpretive and psychological point of view, based on his personal experience and many years of practice. He emphasizes the need to establish basic singing habits and culture from an early age, which would ensure the presence of young and trained choristers with solid experience and repertoire knowledge. The insufficient amount of research and theory on the problems of the art of vocal ensemble is also pointed out. This premises the appearance of a fifth chapter of the dissertation – *"Study of the project" National Youth Choir 100 Voices "in the framework of the development of youth choirs in Turkey."*

This project was launched successfully in 2014. It is an innovative initiative with its own educational programs that ensure the development of Turkish choral music in academic and public structures according to international choral standards. The program combines seminars and workshops, classes in music theory, solfeggio, vocal performance, history of music, choral conducting, score studies, music psychology, rehearsals and concerts. The structure of 3 choral formations - preparatory, general and public – creates optimal conditions for effective and purposeful work according to the capabilities of each group. The positive results of the work of the *National Youth Choral School "100 Voices"* prove that such a model is very productive and promising for overcoming the problems of Turkish choral music.

I would like to point out the following contributions of the dissertation:

- The history of Turkish music is traced from an angle of choral culture for the first time; the emergence of polyphonic choral music and the influence of the Western vocal tradition has been thoroughly studied. The

characteristics of folk, court and religious music in the Ottoman Empire, their educational structures, characteristics and purpose are clarified in detail.

- Prominent chorus masters, composers and choral works, which are essential for the building of a Turkish choral school of modern type, are being presented on the base of the author's selection and analytical commentary.
- The study focuses on the origin and evolution of youth choirs in Turkey over the last 30-40 years. The historical process that began with the formation of the first professional mixed choir at Turkish Radio and Television in 1970 is traced, as well as the work of the first Turkish choral composers, music pedagogues and choir conductors of the period. A table of all amateur and professional youth choirs in Turkey, playing an active role in the development of musical art in the country, is attached.
- The PhD candidate has researched thoroughly the state of music education in Turkey and pointed out the shortcomings in the system that hinder the upward development of choral culture.
- The dissertation presents the highest achievements and awards received so far by Turkish choirs in European choral festivals and competitions. It contains a thorough analysis of the onset and development of Turkish choral music and the contribution of Turkish conductors who graduated in choral conducting abroad as well as foreign choral conductors who worked in the country, in the light of the international achievements.
- A most important contribution of the research is the description of the project, accomplished by the author's unique organization *National Choir School "100 Voices"* (100 Vocal National Choir School), which is viewed as a model of effective problem solving and perspective for the development of youth choral music in the country.

This dissertation is a result of many years of performing, academic and intellectual practice. It is obvious that its author is dedicated to the choral work and wants to contribute to the establishment and improvement of choral music in Turkey. Therefore, and in **conclusion** of all the above, I respectfully propose to award Mete Gökçe the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 8. Arts, professional field 8.3. Music and dance art.

March 18, 2021.

Prof. Dr. Vesela Geleva

Plovdiv