

REVIEW

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on the dissertation entitled

" THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS IN BULGARIA.

HISTORY, CURRENT ISSUES AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS"

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

in the professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

PhD candidate **NAYDEN VLADISLAVOV TODOROV**

Nayden Todorov is a prominent figure in our culture with his conducting and public activity. His artistic biography is published on his official website(<https://naydentodorov.com/>), on the website of the Sofia Philharmonic (of which he has been the director since 2017) and of the Ministry of Culture (he has twice served as a provisional Minister of Culture), etc.; as a conductor with an international career, guest conductor at major music venues; his profile is included in prestigious music databases. In the context of the thesis defence procedure, I will only highlight the author's strategic positions on the management of cultural processes, his active participation in debates on fundamental topics related to the organisation, management and functioning of the performing arts. Convinced of the need to change the whole model of determining funding and of outlining practical solutions, his statements are respectable for the reasoned analyses of existing practices, for the description and critical analysis of different cultural models, for his broad knowledge and versatile interests in different fields, and for his foresight. Nayden Todorov is a propagandist of the art of music (here I will mention his broadcasts "In Concert with BNT 2"), he is the author of the book "A Breeze of Angels".

Topic Relevance, Approach and Methodology

In Nayden Todorov's busy professional and public life, the writing of this dissertation is an opportunity for an extended and challenging exposition of the ideas he has been publicly articulating for many years. Subject matter under examination is symphony orchestras with a focus on their present-day existence. I will emphasize that there is no comprehensive historical study of the path of symphonic activities in Bulgaria until the middle of the twentieth century and in the following decades (unlike opera, choral work, wind orchestras, etc.). Symphony orchestras are examined as existing models in historical and current aspects. The subject itself is vast and undoubtedly very significant, fundamental, and far beyond the tasks of such a dissertation. The approach and implementation of its analysis, the argumentation and application of the methodology used (historical analysis and synthesis, comparative method, opinion and evaluation research, social experiment, etc.) and the formulation of problematic fields for further research contribute to the respectable scientific importance of the text. As the author stresses in relation to the relevance of the topic, so far "different models have not been approbated to establish the importance of strategy as an influencing factor on the performance of symphony orchestras and to assess which form of management is most appropriate for Bulgaria" (Dissertation, p. 5) - a fact that personally stimulated him to design the present work.

Nayden Todorov set himself the task of: (firstly) a historical cross-section of the symphony orchestra's historical evolution from the Liberation to the present day as part of the performing arts; (secondly) drawing on world practices, to outline the possible paths of its development as a music and social instrument by creating a strategy for its growth; (thirdly) to specify the issues with the experience of the National Philharmonic Institution, with a special emphasis on the work of a musician of the orchestra, which, as the author underlines, has "a dual character - on one side he is a personal capital and at the same time a capital of the organisation interested in developing him" (p. 6). Eight specific tasks, each of which requires detailed study and research, are indicated and implemented, and this is the undisputed contribution of the work.

The sources of information used are various: historical research and publications in periodicals, archival and official legislative documents for different periods of the Bulgarian music culture; materials (written and digital) related to the activities of leading European and other world orchestras, as well as Bulgarian orchestras and institutions. Specifically, 20 foreign orchestras for which public information is available are examined.

Structure of the dissertation

In accordance with the aim and the objectives, the dissertation is structured as an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, bibliography, online bibliography and appendices. The total volume is 278 p. of main text and 50 p. of appendices. The four chapters follow the structure of the exposition.

Chapter One, "Theoretical Settings of the Issues of Symphony Orchestra" (pp. 9-42), discusses in detail the concept of an orchestra and its types, which are first examined as historical and present-day models. The concept is derived terminologically and, therefore, substantively on the basis of world practice, and its adoption and habitation in our country is traced historically. The second topical grouping of orchestras is according to the way of their establishment and their function. The third group is according to their operational goals. Of course, in any such codification, the same orchestras as a type are included in different categories and this somewhat schematises their examination. In terms of content, what is most important is the purpose of their creation and the operational tasks they have. Since the subject of this work is symphony orchestras, attention is focused on the orchestra types, their organisation and activities.

The conclusions of the first chapter, which focus on the present day, are very important and provide explanations of the status of symphony orchestras, with special attention to the concept of the "philharmonic orchestra" and the "philharmony," which in many cases is "an organisation for the performance and promotion of concert activity with a wide range of genre repertoire and performing ensembles" (p. 42).

While Chapter One is largely introductory to the text in terms of terminology, the expansive Chapter Two, "Analysis of Influencing Factors on the Performance of Symphony Orchestras in Bulgaria" (pp. 43-121), extensively problematises the terms "'philharmony' and 'symphony orchestra'". The historical picture of these institutions in Bulgaria is summarised, drawing on numerous sources on the subject, some of which have not been commented on in musicological publications. I especially congratulate Nayden Todorov for this first-of-its-kind critical survey of printed texts and documents.

The situation after the political changes in 1989, which we consider to be contemporary, is subjected to a thorough analysis. The existence and the process of cultural reforms in the performing arts, which determined the way of financing and management of state orchestras and municipal ensembles, the possibilities for the existence of the private sector as a new one for the country, are presented in an analytical and critical perspective; different opinions of the audience, musicians, state (municipal) institutes and private/independent structures are quoted and commented.

In turn, this chapter of the thesis presents a detailed critical overview of the picture related to the contemporary existence of symphony orchestras. I pay special attention to the section 'Alternative views and opinions' (pp. 103-120). As early as 2016, Naiden Todorov expressed his opinion on the matter with a special "Questionnaire for statesmen with the intention to reform culture" for the media "Ploshad Slaveykov" (01.04.2016) and today, the author emphasises, it is not very different because "any reform in the public sector normally follows the vision of the national strategy in the respective professional field, in this case - the National Strategy for the Development of Culture" (p. 109). Analysing the legal decrees and the work on the national strategy projects in 2011 and 2019, Nayden Todorov concludes that the two draft strategies "celebrate cultural heritage (of the arts), performance (the arts) and education (in the arts) as significant, overlooking the fact that the arts - whether historically (cultural heritage), presently (theatres, community centres, etc.) or in the future (arts education) are only part of CULTURE, as a way of self-expression and development of a nation" (p. 111). In a press conference on January 17, 2022, he identifies as his priority to see through to a successful conclusion the effort to create a National Cultural Strategy, summarising that "the construction of a workable strategy would require an extensive discussion with current cultural managers in the public and private sectors, comparing the pros and cons and making adequate decisions to overcome the problems that have existed for years and have not been solved by any reform" (p. 120).

In the detailed and structured conclusions to the second chapter, Nayden Todorov points out that the approach to the concept of "reform" should not be merely formal; it implies innovation, even when it is a reproduction of previous models. He specifically looks at the interpretation of the term "innovation", which "in the world of cultural organisations it means - properly organised costs, increased interest and attendance, increased income, but also a richer repertoire, more diverse

performers, a higher artistic level, educational and social activity and a high prestige in society. This should be the point of a reform, and this is what has been lacking in our country" (p. 120). But this can only be achieved once the terms 'cultural industry' and 'cultural policy' are clearly defined.

At the beginning of **Chapter Three**, "Testing a Model of the Importance of Strategy as an Influencing Factor on the Outcomes of the Sofia Philharmonic" (pp. 122-145), Nayden Todorov discusses the various stages of the Philharmonic's existence from 1892 to the present, drawing attention to the historical line in its development, which he corrects in an argued way with existing historical and encyclopaedic material. The model is analysed on the basis of a thorough insight into the situation and management structure with their strengths and weaknesses within the Sofia Philharmonic in the absence of a National Strategy. Opportunities for the development of the national institution are pointed out, taking into account the objective threats that may negatively affect the work. An overall strategy for the development of the Sofia Philharmonic is presented, with a multifaceted consideration of the mission and activities of the institution. The factors that would lead to the creation of a successful and workable Development Strategy for the Sofia Philharmonic are specified.

Chapter Four, "Implementing Organisational Change of a Symphony Orchestra" (pp. 146-237), specifies the main possible directions for the practical concretisation of the presented strategic model, with nine accents as main factors for the implementation of organisational change outlined in subchapters. These cover the spheres of management, the cultural industry and social activity, the audience, the repertoire, dependencies on changes in the legislative framework and funding, and human resources in the symphony orchestra. I will especially emphasise the application in the analyses of well-researched experience of leading foreign orchestras, as well as of various Bulgarian ensembles, presenting different models of the concepts of "symphony orchestra" and "philharmonic orchestra" existing in Bulgaria today.

I draw attention to the analysis of the national experience, which is the focus of the dissertation. Here is an example: Nayden Todorov cites "Strategies for the Future of Orchestras" by Stefan Rosu (2014) and the four points mentioned, which are used to present the goals of a successful symphony orchestra manager: a). High quality concerts; b). Sold-out events; c). Enthusiastic audiences; d). Happy performers/employees." He adds four more, "which are tied to the first four in a particular way": e). Financial stability/prosperity of the institution; f). Financial

stability of musicians/staff; g). High public esteem; h). International prestige (p. 171). I agree with his conclusion that "in the fulfillment of these eight points lies the whole philosophy of the leadership of an orchestra, regardless of the legal form of governance and management" (p. 171).

Nayden Todorov also formulates integral criteria for classifying (or evaluating) different groups of orchestras that can be applied in the future.

The section " Summaries and recommendations to the object of research" (pp. 238-224) synthesises what has been elaborated in the thesis and, I would say, has a programmatic character. It draws out very clearly the conclusions of the analytical observations and concrete actions towards various reforms in the sense introduced in the text.

Assessment of the contributions of the dissertation

I fully accept the 7 contributions listed in the dissertation. Each of them summarises the themes that are analytically addressed in the thesis. They are tentatively grouped as contributions of cultural-managerial and scientific-applied nature.

Contribution No. 4 is of great significance for the science of music history, as it relates to tracing the development of symphony orchestras from the Liberation to the present day as part of the performing arts.

Linked to the main tasks of the dissertation, Contribution No. 5, related to the critical analysis of the cultural reforms in performing arts in Bulgaria and the definition of a legislative framework for managing the performing arts in Bulgaria, and No. 6, related to the proposed and tested model of the strategy of the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra as an example for similar orchestras, are essential.

The formulated Contribution No. 7 - "the conclusions drawn, the array of information presented, even the examples and practices given, the data and interviews proposed in the appendices, can be the basis for further scientific and applied research in the field of orchestral work and management" (p. 246) - presents my highest evaluation for the dissertation. To this I would add that the text implies that many other issues, which are suggested in the course of the presentation, will be raised and polemicised with this subsequent scientific and applied research. For example, one such important question is about repertoire and attracting new audiences.

Abstract and publications

The abstract fully presents the content of the thesis.

There are three publications on the subject in peer-reviewed journals, which present the author's views on the policy model for managing a modern cultural institution, the specifics of the symphony orchestra and his strategy as director of the Sofia Philharmonic,

I will also add the numerous interviews, public speeches and social media posts that attest to the author's visions presented in the dissertation.

CONCLUSION

Considering the importance and relevance of the topic, the approach to it and the contributions in the accomplishment of the set tasks and goals, which are strategic for the cultural policy of today's Bulgaria and define the functioning of symphony orchestras as part of the musical and performing arts, I propose most emphatically **to award the dissertation entitled**

" THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS IN BULGARIA.

HISTORY, CURRENT ISSUES AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS"

the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *prof. field 8.3.*

Music and Dance Art.

I hope that this text will be published as a book, which will certainly have a wide response and will provoke a constructive public debate that leads to legislative decisions on the elaboration, adoption and implementation of a National Strategy for Culture.

Sofia, 06.09.2024 Prof. DSc. Elisaveta Valcinova-Chandova