

REVIEW

by

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on the dissertation work for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of
“Doctor” in the professional field 8.3 “Music and Dance Art”

of **Nikolay Hristov Cheynov**

Topic of the dissertation:

“The Troubadoures and the Contemporary Bard Culture”

Nikolay Cheynov was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1957. From the age of 8 he began to study guitar with maestro Simeon Simov. Alone and in a duo with guitarist Loreta Simova he won city competitions in classical guitar. The two of them participated in television programs. Nikolay Cheynov graduated with honours from the stage department of the Bulgarian State Conservatory in 1979. He taught guitar in the community school network in Sofia. In the late 70's Cheynov participated in the cult vocal-instrumental ensemble of Sofia University, “Collegium”. Together with flautist Bistra Karafilova, he performed concerts for flute and classical guitar. In 1986 he settled in the Kingdom of Norway and developed a highly successful career as a troubadour, subsequently inspiring and training a host of Bulgarian troubadours. Cheynov has performed in Scandinavia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and elsewhere. In addition to the standard music performed by the professional troubadour-entertainers, he specialized in the music of Irish and Scottish song folklore. Nikolay Cheynov has recorded three CDs. In 2006 he returned to Bulgaria, but continued to travel abroad and pursue a career as a troubadour. In 2014 he graduated with honors as a Master of Music in the New Bulgarian University – specialty of Musical Art and Classical Instrument – Guitar, from the class of Prof. Dr. Panayot Panayotov. Since then Nikolay Cheynov has continued his work

as a lecturer in guitar at New Bulgarian University and Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. He speaks and writes English, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Serbo-Croatian.

The topicality and motivation for examining the topic “Troubadours and the Contemporary Bard-Culture” arises from the fact that in recent years the terms “bard” and “troubadour” have been used rather arbitrarily – almost as synonyms, which sometimes sounds confusing to the general public. According to the author, the aim of this dissertation is to provide a more comprehensive historical overview of all professions and representatives related to bards and troubadours. This survey alone will illuminate the subject and bring greater clarity to the matter. The relationship and similarities between ancient, medieval, and contemporary representatives of poetic-musical creativity will be traced.

The subject of the study (not the dissertation, according to N. Cheynov) are the biographies, methods of work and contributions of the most significant representatives of the poetic-musical estates in different time periods in the respective ethnic areas, kingdoms, empires and countries.

The methodology of the research (not the dissertation) involves the presentation and analysis of information from a very large number of sources, with subsequent analysis of the contribution of the subject presented to world culture (including – to contemporary bard-culture). In addition to Bulgarian, sources in English, Russian, Spanish, Norwegian, Swedish and Serbo-Croatian, translated by the PhD student, are used.

The tasks set by N. Cheynov in connection with the development of the dissertation are:

- Arranging and presenting all the known poetic-musical styles that inhabited Europe (and later - America) from antiquity to the present and introducing their most significant figures.
- An analysis of the contribution of the styles to world culture and their (possible) contribution to contemporary bard-culture.
- Compiling a table reflecting the periods and places of existence and activity of the respective poetic-musical collectives.
- Clarifying the contemporary meaning and usage of the terms “bard” and “troubadour”.

The structure of the dissertation is consistent with the sequence of the tasks. Chapter I introduces the predecessors of the troubadours: bards and philid, scopes and skalds, who lived and worked in ancient Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England and Scandinavia respectively. Chapter II describes the actual troubadours who appeared in the late 11th - early 12th century in the lands of ancient Occitania and lasted for two and a half centuries. The main styles and genres of their work are mentioned, as well as their relation to Bulgarian history. Chapter III is devoted to the contemporaries and followers of the troubadours from northern France, the lands of the Holy Roman Empire and the Anglo-Saxon lands: the trouvères, minstrels, jongleurs, vagantes and goliards. At the end of Chapter III, a table has been created showing the historical positioning of the various orders of bards, troubadours, etc., from antiquity to the twentieth century. Chapter IV identifies the most significant “troubadours” of our time: the singing poets who performed their own songs and who left the most vivid mark on the cultural history of the twentieth and the already begun twenty-first century. Beginning with the great names of North American poetic-song culture who have inspired their European counterparts to a great extent, some of the greatest creators of South American “engaged” song follow. The study also introduces a reader to the most significant “contemporary troubadours” from the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia, and the former Soviet Union. It then goes on to present notable names of contemporary troubadours from Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and (naturally) some of the most prominent Bulgarian authors.

The study contributes to a better understanding of the difference between the terms “troubadour” and “bard” in our times. According to the author, in the last 50 years, perhaps more, the two terms have been used arbitrarily as synonyms, and this has created some confusion. Nikolay Cheynov gives clarity in the definition, although during this period in different parts of the world the profession of the solo performer – singer and musician, accompanying his songs with the guitar was called by both names, almost everywhere the old name “troubadour” has already established itself. To some extent, the exceptions to this are Russia and some countries of Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, where the definition “bard” is more popular. Today (again according to N. Cheynov's classification) we could divide modern professional troubadours into two categories:

By presenting the history and the different varieties of the troubadour profession, light is shed and a clearer explanation is given of the nature of the terms “troubadour” and “bard” in modern life.

- **Prominent professional troubadours** (such as Bob Dylan, Vladimir Vysotsky).
- **Professional troubadours-entertainers** who work in entertainment venues.

While some also use the term “bard” for the first group, the established term for the latter in modern terms is always “troubadour”. The term “bard” in the modern sense could be divided into two types:

- A **bard** who is only a poet and is called so out of respect for his valuable work.
- A **bard** who creates both lyrics and music, and performs them himself in song form.

Nikolay Cheynov also points out that in contemporary language the terms “troubadour” and “bard” are sometimes used in a slightly negative sense - for example, when referring to a poet who sings about an unpopular person, cause or organisation.

This study presents a comprehensive picture of the world and history of the troubadours, their predecessors, contemporaries and followers. To the best of our knowledge, no one has done such a study and selection in such a wide historical scope.

I agree with the stated contributions of the dissertation, and would highlight only a few of them:

- For the first time, at least in Bulgaria, a broad, in historical context study and selection is being made.
- The most significant periods in the existence of bards, troubadours and their predecessors and followers in Europe and America, from antiquity to the present, are systematized and analyzed.
- Timetables have been created for the emergence, apogee and disappearance of the various representatives of bard culture over the centuries, as well as indicative tables for the historical positioning of the different periods of the development of world culture.
- The terms “troubadour” and “bard” are formulated and defined.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION TOPIC:

1. “The troubadours - origin and contribution to Medieval culture”, In: Scientific Conference “Young Scientific Forum for Music and Dance”, issue 10, NBU, 2016

2. “Stylistic peculiarities and characteristics in the work of trouvères, minnesingers, minstrels, jongleurs, goliards”, In: Scientific Conference “Young Scientific Forum for Music and Dance”, issue 11, NBU, 2017

3. “The great troubadours of Scandinavia and their relationship to the European tradition”, In: Scientific Conference “Young Scientific Forum for Music and Dance”, issue 12, NBU, 2024

In conclusion, I would like to note some critical remarks regarding the stylistic and graphic layout of the text, in some places there are incorrectly placed periods, commas, etc., but this does not change the overall structural content of the dissertation. If the author decides, it is possible to publish the work as an independent monographic work, and in this sense Nikolay Cheynov could comply with these notes.

Taking into account everything stated so far, I give my high evaluation of the dissertation, and I recommend to the esteemed scientific jury, to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Nikolay Cheynov.

05.01.2024

Prof. Adrian Georgiev