

STATEMENT

by *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gabriela Ivanova Georgieva*

Lecturer in Opera Singing at the Vocal Faculty

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professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art

on the dissertation of

Sarah Jane Lobegeiger de Rodriguez

PhD candidate at New Bulgarian University. Program/Department of Music and Dance Art,

The Operatic Polyglot: Routes and Techniques in Western European Classical Singing

for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Research

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Milena Shushulova-Pavlova

1. Academic requirements

The dissertation of Sarah Lobegeiger de Rodríguez is written in accordance with the normative requirements for the award of the doctoral degree. The thesis was discussed and proposed for public defence at a meeting of NBU, Department of Music on 23.02.2023.

2. Brief presentation of the doctoral candidate's professional biography

From the biography of the candidate it is understood that she has taken Bachelor of Arts from a number of universities with majors in: Arts at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia in 1999-2001, Voice at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne in 2002-2004, Certificate IV TESOL 2005 from Hillside College in Western Australia, MA in Speech Pathology at La Trove University in Melbourne and Master of Music at NBU, majoring in opera in 2011 - 2014.

She has been working in speech pathology since 2011 having a private practice in Melbourne since 2013 , where she worked with adults on accent reduction and voice rehabilitation, as well as with professional performers. Over all these years she has worked in a number of clinics but always with a focus on voice restoration and rehabilitation for people working with their voice. She has taught English in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and South Korea.

3. Aims and objectives of the dissertation

This thesis hypothesizes and discusses various ways and means of building creative cognitive skills that contribute to the mastery of phonetic accuracy of professional singers with methods based on the principles of kinesthetics, neuroplasticity and functional MRI research. The author investigates approaches to developing linguistic and acoustic competence in performers of classical, operatic, religious music and art songs, when singing in different languages. The aim of this research is to assess the viability and sustainability of neurologically informed approaches to voice training for artists, particularly in relation to phonation, pitch and resonance regulation, and prosody; it also proposes new approaches to voice, language and artistic interpretation practice techniques for classical singers for their daily practice seeking to improve aural fluency.

4. Degree of knowledge of the problem

It is evident from the candidate's biography that she has been involved in the resolution of voice problems in people who actively work with their voice for many years. She herself is studying opera singing, which leads me to believe that she is very competent about the details of the whole process of mastering the voice in its full range. Judging by the literature cited and its use in the dissertation, the candidate draws meaningful conclusions in the context of the topic under study and is thoroughly familiar with the problem.

5. Structure of the research

The dissertation contains 113 pages arranged in 4 chapters, an introduction, a conclusion, contributions and a bibliography. There are 18 figures included in the dissertation. The literature cited and mainly used in the bibliography includes 80 titles mainly in the Latin alphabet. Internet resources are also listed in the references.

The first chapter deals with the topic of neuroplasticity, i.e. the ability of the brain to change its structure and function through thought and action.

Through a number of studies cited, the PhD candidate develops the idea that creating music changes the motor, sensory and multimodal functions of the brain. For the sake of precision and orderliness, she puts the information into tables and charts.

She discusses in detail Giuseppe Riva's hypothetical body matrix theory, which is based on the idea that an individual's bodily experiences form complex connections in the brain.

The second chapter introduces and defines the term "operatic polyglot" (on page 17 of the work) and discusses possible approaches for a singer to acquire the skills to handle the phonetic features of any language in which he or she has to sing, drawing on theories of motor learning, body memory and the body matrix, and principles of neuroplasticity.

The following chapters discuss the theories of vocal motor control acquisition that will create vocal-phonetic motor control in the singer, with attention to the four phases of the formation of this motor control (Fast Phase, Consolidation Phase, Automatic Phase, and Retention Phase). It discusses the three factors playing a role in motor learning (Anticipation, Attention and Adaptation). The text discusses in detail the ten principles of neuroplasticity and how they come into use for classical singers in their daily practice. It explores thoroughly the benefits of the body matrix theory and focused practice for developing creative cognition in singers.

6. Contributions of the dissertation

The author's account of the contribution of the dissertation - "The Operatic Polyglot: Pathways and Techniques in Western European Classical Singing" is absolutely objective in its six points.

1. The cognitive skills and mechanical processes of voice formation have been studied in terms of pronunciation, declamation, prosody and phonetics.
2. Drawing on Giuseppe Riva's theory of the body matrix and adapting it, the author of the work points out ways for the singer to construct a body schema and how to develop precision in the phonetic tuning of the tone.
3. The author introduces the term "operatic polyglot", which refers to the singer who has the technical mastery to sing in languages other than the native language, achieving flawless phonetic proficiency, balancing the parameters of spoken language and musical language.
4. The doctoral candidate distinguishes singing pronunciation from spoken pronunciation, showing the unique characteristics and requirements of sung syllables other than spoken syllables.
5. The author develops a new term, "phonetic pitch tuning," which differs from terms related to diction and articulation, which typically ignore the requirements of rhythmicity, acoustic properties of sound, overtones, etc., necessary for a musical form.
6. The author has developed a classification system of phonetic errors.

The dissertation poses various interpretive, staging, stylistic, and other questions and provides answers and useful solutions, especially valuable for the practical work with singers that reveal and form evaluative mechanisms combined with critical thinking. The research, practical and creative aspects of the work are undeniably contributory. The dissertation is aimed at a wide audience of vocal pedagogues, students, artists in the field of operatic art, specialists engaged in voice restoration, etc. The research is thorough and extensive, based on a serious study of a considerable amount of literature, studying and analyzing facts and publications.

7. Conclusion

In my opinion, the dissertation work of Sarah Jane Lobegeiger de Rodriguez on "The Operatic Polyglot: Routes and Techniques in Western European Classical Singing" has a contributory character, both in the theoretical and applied sense, and meets the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in Bulgaria (ASDA). The candidate fulfils the requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 8.3. Music and Dance Art.

10.09.2023
Georgieva

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gabriela