

# REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Krasimir Draganov Taskov Composer and pianist,  
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for the dissertation of  
Stefan Todorov Dragostinov

professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art, PhD student at New  
Bulgarian University,

on the subject:

**POLYTEMPOS - TIME AND SPACES**  
**for the award of the Educational and Academic Degree of Doctor**

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Simo Lazarov

The creative biography of prof. Stefan Dragostinov is extremely impressive and significant in the context of Bulgarian contemporary music culture.

He was a well-known Bulgarian composer, pianist, conductor, teacher and public figure. He is the author of a number of opuses in cantata-oratorio, symphonic, instrumental, choral, chamber and vocal music, pop, ballet, film and theatre music. He was born in Sofia. He began studying piano at the age of seven with Sonya Zheleva, and subsequently composition with prof. He studied harmony and polyphony with prof. Assen Karastoyanov; piano with Assoc. Lydia Kuteva, and later with prof. Bogomil Sturshenov and composition under prof. Alexander Raichev. In 1970-1972 he was a student at the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Conservatory "Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov", where he graduated in the composition class of prof. Boris Arapov. In 1982 he was a scholarship holder of the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) in Cologne, Germany. He has won first prizes at prestigious international composition competitions: Gaudeamus in the Netherlands for the cantata The Fair - Polytempi 1, (1978), Karlheinz Stockhausen in Italy for the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra - Polytempi 4 (1980), Grand Prix Foundation France - Arthur Honegger for the cantata Polytempi 3 (1982), Simon Bolivar - Venezuela for the Symphony-Monument (1984), Fernando Pessoa - Portugal for the Ode to the Sea (1986). From 1974 to 1994 Stefan Dragostinov worked at the State Folklore Ensemble "Philip Kutev" (now NFA "Philip Kutev") as conductor, chief artistic director and director. In 1988 in Japan the ensemble "Filip Kutev" under the conductorship of Stefan Dragostinov recorded its first 3 CDs, which the publishing house "Victor" circulated in 1 500 000 copies. He carried out a large-scale musical project - "Anthology of Bulgarian Folklore - Sound Icons of Bulgaria and the Key to the Sacrament", which he realized together with the choir formation "Dragostin Folk National", with which he has so far released 11 CD-albums.

Stefan Dragostinov is Professor of Composition, Orchestration, Harmony, Theory and Contemporary Music Techniques at New Bulgarian University, Sofia. In 2011 he was awarded the title of Honorary Professor of New Bulgarian University for his contribution as a teacher of composition and music analysis. His series of five works "Polytempi" for various performing ensembles is realized with the help of a device called "photopolymetronome". His works have been performed at festivals all over the world: the Moscow Autumn, the Summer Music Festival in

Milan-Bergamo, the Warsaw Autumn, at the Tchaikovsky and Bolshoi Theatres in Moscow, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, etc.

The thesis contains 216 pages of text with notated examples and diagrams, presented in 11 chapters contributions, publications and a creative biography of the PhD student.

In my opinion, each of the 11 main Chapters of the work, in its entirety and in detail, could be the subject of a separate specialized study, the valuable thing, however, is that the proposed text offers the most concentrated thematic issues and gives a clear picture of the phenomenon of Controlled Polytempo in the context of innovative compositional systems of the 20th and 21st centuries. I will note with a quote from the PhD student an important basic aspect of his work: *the theoretical contribution of this research consists in the construction of a comprehensive systematic concept describing the Controlled Polytempo composing method, detailing the parameters and capabilities offered by the Photopolymetronome apparatus; the development of a complex technological and creative platform containing all the main components of Controlled Polytempo-based composing techniques* Page 4 of the Abstract.

Object of the Research POLYTEMPS - TIME AND SPACES by prof. Stefan Dragostinov is the fruit of his long-standing creative path and personal need to share in theoretical aspect the stated problematics - part of current compositional practices of the 20th and 21st centuries.

His compositional style is distinguished by its originality and synthesis of national musical tradition , modern compositional techniques and technologies.

In this regard, the selected by prof. Stefan Dragostinov's direction since 1978 is related to the application in some of his compositions of the method of innovative Controlled Polytempo.

His analytical approach in his presentation of various Examples from foreign composers , as well as his own works, is dictated by creative considerations, envisioning the processes of creating "from within" musical matter by means of Controlled Polytempo and providing valuable information for the artistic re-creation of ideas and technological solutions.

I find that the significance of the proposed doctoral thesis is justified by the author and by the systematic historical tracing of characteristic polyphonic phenomena and authors from the 15th to the 20th centuries. ; by , *the multifaceted development of polyphonic forms in the music of the time, throughout an extremely rich and diverse palette of polymetric and polyphonic structures - hemiola, prolation, syncopation, augmentation and diminution, palindrome, inversion and retrograde exposition - outlines the parameters of a significant technological resource for the future development of polytemporal processes in music.* p.23 From the Abstract.

A of Polytempia, as a method of composition by significant artists of the 20th century. Dragostinov devotes a special place, especially in the detailed presentation of the constructed unique, supporting live performances apparatus Photopolymetronome.

In the specific examples with extensive analyses by Dragastinov, presented in Chapter 4, one can feel his clear compositional approach and insight into the issues of selected 20th century works, such as Charles Ives's Unanswered Question with its parallel progression of two divergent layers of sound, Samuel Conlon Nancarrow's String Quartet No. 3, Karlheinz Stockhausen's orchestral "Gruppen" "Carre", and others whose technological basis is a possible inspiration for some of Dragostinov's own opuses , commented on in detail by him verbally with added score fragments.

I am convinced that these innovative technological means have facilitated and motivated the composer Dragostinov to translate his own specific sound-shaped semantics into his original musical language.

The associative connection he makes in Chapter 2, focusing on natural phenomena , sounds of nature, and with traditional folk phenomena such as piping, over-singing or over-playing to achieve an uncontrollable polytempic effect is also a creative idea for his further explorations in the direction of constructive recasting in communal dramatic canvases.

This innovative approach becomes his indicative mark, besides being a fresh artistic quirk, also in the search for the identification of the primordial Bulgarian, through the prism of an original authorial idea , in the recreation of a sound space of an unconventional type.

The next step for the accurate realizability of the complex temporal organization of the polytempo musical score is the necessity to create and construct an apparatus for controlling and directing the performances of the set segments and parameters by the composer to assist the conductor in feeding the heterogeneous tempo markings.

The photopolymetronome was engineered and created as a patented discovery of composer and theorist Assoc. Ilija Kozuharov in 1977 , whose main role is to control the different tempos set in the score, in a measured time order during the flow of the unified musical flow in stage performances.

Stefan Dragostinov draws attention to a number of practical advantages for his time , but also to certain imperfections in the design and efficiency of the use of the Photopolymetronome, which subsequently necessitated a new Integrated Polytempo Installation - I.P.I.

As mentioned by the PhD student, this term is introduced for the first time in this research study. "The I.P.I. device should contain several main components, which are in permanent interconnection, ensuring maximum creative-technological composing possibilities, based on the Controlled Polytempo method. innovative technical applications - Polytempo Navigation Device and Polytempo Digitogram. The construction of a modern, technologically-creative construction will unconditionally reveal to the modern composer - working in the sphere of Controlled Polytempo - new, hitherto unknown creative territories and will secure maximum possibilities for the visual-graphic realization of the notated text on the score, as well as - accordingly - will secure a real prerequisite and possibility for the achievement of an adequate full-fledged sound picture of a newly created musical polytempo work. " p.44 of the Abstract.

Chapters **Six, Seven , Eight and Nine** constitute the substantive part of the research, detailing the subordinations between two polytempic periods occurring in different time parameters.

They are expressed in numerical mathematical relations and systematized , according to the rate of motion of the polytempic structures and become the basis for efficient engineering solutions in the realization of a suitable new apparatus Photopolymetronome , with improved technological design.

The text in Chapter 10 can be followed with interest, noting shared facts from the realisation of works with Controlled Polytempo through the author's recollections of problems and their overcoming in the rehearsal period and stage realisation of his works.

Here he expresses his characteristic artistic spiritedness, sharing valuable insights into how to realise and find an optimum and effective approach to the varied tempi set in the score. Obviously, this

turns out to be a serious problem of a technological nature and necessitates a search for updating and developing new parameters of the Photopolymetronome apparatus.

As a personal suggestion, if the implementation of polytempo relationships were embedded in preset parameters of heterogeneous tempos in electroacoustic and/or electronic music, the possibility of realizing the sonic material could also be successfully realized with polytempo compositional structures in a different time format.

By means of software programs and platforms, with pre-prepared recorded tempo segments, through the author's controllable different speed tempos, would give opportunities to realize the most diverse spatial sound configurations.

An idea for similar implementations, but in an acoustic environment, in stage performances can be guided by certain signals in headphones, fed by apparatus to the performers.

This method can aid convenience in the performance of tempo deviations, especially in chamber ensembles.

For me, as a composer and reviewer of this unique scholarly work, it is particularly interesting and fruitful to enter Dragoostinov's creative workshop, with the peculiarities of composing with the Controlled Polytempo method so extensively and analytically - thoroughly revealed.

In this connection I may note that my interest as an author in free-flowing polytempo organisation is also directed and realised in some of my works - symphonic and chamber works, such as in the 2005 symphonic portrait *The Mime Orator* after E. Canetti, where the general coda-episode is a combination of parallel running sound layers in a kaleidoscopic overlay , a recapitulation of sounded thematic material of a varied type of structurality or the piece *Clerks* for piano 4 hands, with a permanently sounding mechanical metronome and sporadic tempo deviations in the piano part, Polytempism in *Musical Moments* for Aeoline Quartet and 14 strings.

In these examples we can observe free polytempic relationships - the fruit and manifestation of the artistic idea, an artistic conceit with imagery and semantic orientation and as an effective dramaturgical device.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz-xppUjMBs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9RwAFUoLKY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtK9HxHCxBA>

As a summary of the peer-reviewed scientific work, I would like to highlight the clearly argued and substantially formulated **Eight Contributions** proposed by prof. Stefan Dragostinov, representing significant, interconnected and systematized components of a deeply considered methodology based on a successfully realized creativity.

I will quote his statement specifically: *“The new creative-technological concepts and terms introduced - unknown and unused in the scientific literature and musicology, such as Polytemporalism formulated a concept for the first time, characterizing polytemporal processes in music with a “new expressiveness”, as well as the parameters of modern technological principles of the Controlled Polytemporal Method and the Photopolymetronome apparatus, namely: Semaphore Graphic Symbol; Light Tempo Indicator; Polytempo Period; Main Common Vertical; Central Common Vertical; Polytempo Fan; Integral Polytempo Installation. Applying this research in academic training of young artists and introducing them to the Controlled Polytempo compositing method, is a new opportunity for innovative solutions , utilizing the technological and*

*creative resources and capacity of the Photopolymetronome apparatus.“*

**The abstract** essentially reflects the structure of the dissertation comprehensively and in a concentrated form and presents all the main and essential points in the development of its content.

With the present Review I express my positive assessment of the undoubted merits of the unique, in terms of significance and innovative character scientific work of Prof. Stefan Dragostinov and propose the scientific jury to award the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

25.09.2023

Prof. Dr Krasimir Taskov

