

## **REVIEW**

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nina Kubratova Naidenova, NBU

Of a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor'

Professional field - 3.8 Music and Dance Art

Author of the dissertation: Tsvetanka Gueorguieva Potchkanska

Form the doctoral study: self-training

Scientific organization: New Bulgarian University, Doctoral Programme 'Music'

Theme: Igor Stravinsky and the European Musical Theater between the Two World Wars (Renard  
and Oedipus Rex)

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Albena Kechlibareva, NBU

Tsvetanka Gueorguieva Potchekanska is an artist with a wide range of aesthetic pursuits and fulfillments – from instrumental art, through pedagogy and cultural studies, to musical theatre directing, on which her major interest is focused. Potchekanska has undergone a respectful educational process. She obtained a Master's Degree in Instrumental Art, Music Pedagogy, Musical Theatre Directing at the National Academy of Music "Pancho Vladigerov"; she has a degree in Cultural Studies from the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" and Theatre (class T) of the Master Programme at IUAV of Venice, Italy. She participated in many directing laboratories and specializations such as: Laboratory of J. Rock at the festival - Video Saound Art, San Columbano, Italy; Class - Commedia dell'arte, Teatro Atlante, Palermo, Italy; Noh Theater at Monique Arno, Milan, Italy; Dramaturgy with Prof. Brambila, (institute „Paolo Grasi”), Milan, Italy; as well as Dramaturgy, directing and editing of short film forms in NATFA “Krastyu Sarafov”. She has realized nine individual projects as a director and six as an assistant director. She has many years of professional experience as an artist – an orchestral musician at the National Opera and Ballet.

The theme Igor Stravinsky and the European Musical Theater between the Two World Wars (Renard and Oedipus Rex) chosen by the doctoral student is of importance to the musicians community which is interested in the processes related to the musical theatre of the 20th century. Potchekanska has skillfully limited the extremely wide information field covering the radical changes of the epoch, the new searches and views, the integration of genres and cultural processes in the dynamics of that time, within the time span of the 20s and 30s of the 20th century - the time between two world wars having a significant impact on art. The focus on these specific works of Stravinsky, Renard (1916) and Oedipus Rex (1926 - 1927), studied in their capacity as the main paradigm for the development of the opera genre in this particular period, has guaranteed completeness of the findings and conclusions. In the very introduction, the doctoral student defines the research spheres in which she is to search for arguments to defend her theses, namely, historical, aesthetic, philosophical and creative. Her analysis is set in the context of a synthesis of the trends

defining the epoch which resulted from the creative achievements of composers, poets, directors, philosophers - all of them in search for the outlines of the „new works“ of the time.

The question posed by Tsvetanka Potchekanska at the very beginning of whether the tradition will be continued or it will be considered only as a faded value, stirs a definite interest in the research and proves its possible relevance. Stravinsky's quote at the beginning of the dissertation, "Tradition is a generic concept. Not only is it passed from fathers to children, but it also goes through all stages of the life process: it is born, grows, reaches maturity, and dies out, only to be reborn." engages Potchekanska both emotionally and as a researcher to help her swim across the ocean of information and 'revive' the interest in Stravinsky's creative heritage. One work and one ambition worthy of admiration!

In the **First Part** of the dissertation "Theoretical background and analysis of the prerequisites for the emergence of Igor Stravinsky's works for musical theater in the period between the two world wars" Tsvetanka Potchekanska considers the problematics of the topic and puts it in a specific context – time frames and defining trends as part of a continuous evolutionary process subject to the causal links between the events related to the development of art. As a main approach in the analysis Potchekanska has chosen periodization – which reflects the essence of the ongoing phenomena objectively and deeply – leaving in the background the calendar tracking of the processes. Potchekanska also emphasizes the complexity of the phenomena that occurred in the process of formation of modern art. Here notes should be the in-depth research on the historical phenomena in the processes of art development both as analysis and as trends. The scope of research touches on texts by authors such as TS Elliott, Thomas Mann, Theodore Adorno, Mikhail Druskin, Carl Dahlhous, José Ortega y Gasset and others. In her attempt to delineate the border between 'traditionalism' and 'modern' musical theater, the doctoral student takes a comparative, but also a distinguishing look, to come to the realization that her work has 'a rather ambitious goal', namely to study the development of the general trends reflected in the opera genre and generally in the Western European musical theater from the beginning of the 20th century. Quite delicately, but with research intention, Potchekanska makes this impressive research slalom. Her work is a bold penetration into the complex matter of a young researcher who is committed to transformation of what she has read in a text with an applied research focus.

In **Chapter Two** "Transformations and rejection of the existing models affecting the spheres of music and theatre in the period between the two world wars" Potchekanska identifies the major components, namely, 'revolt' and 'change', the revolt of the epoch being a revolutionary impulse to break with traditional art and the 'official' culture, with its destructive approach and its short-lived nature due to the lack of models to replace the existing ones analyzed consistently by the doctoral student. The change is outlined through the many manifestos of avant-garde art in the early 20th century, as well as in the reflection of the frantic need that artists seek and justify the creation of new works. The 'pessimism', the 'entertainment of the bored', the 'market relations', the 'autonomy of art', 'the beautiful as different from the pleasant', 'useful and good' are part of the aesthetic, philosophical and life categories which Potchekanska outlines in her research in search of the new 'modern art'. 'Modern art,' a term introduced by Baudelaire, as well as his opposition to the theory of "art for art's sake" have determined a major tendency in the research of the doctoral student, namely, the search for a hitherto unknown form of art representation and a new starting point for creating it.

Potchekanska has penetrated immeasurable depths – complex, intertwined between aesthetics and philosophy, seen through the eyes of Schiller, Lessing, Mallarmé, Nietzsche and Wagner. Even a very experienced researcher can be lost here. The doctoral student imposes a special, and certainly reasonable, approach in her work based on the principle of the puzzle: each piece of thought-judgment of a great artist is arranged next to another one and up to the construction, in this way, of a complete map of the 'new modern'. While this map is arranged horizontally on the basis of quotations and shared thoughts, along the vertical Potchekanska goes inwardly, in the specific analyses of the topics divided into separate chapters, such as "Striving for autonomy" /p.30/ and "The collapse of the humanistic ideal in the art" /p.32/ to reach the "The European Musical Theater influenced by Modernity" in a separate third chapter, consisting of 20 pages of analysis. The 'depersonalized' man, his alienation and the 'rejection of the masses', introspection, individualism and emancipation, are all processes connected with the new faith of the artist. What Potchekanska traces is the formation of ideas for the dehumanization of art in order to come up with the 'idea of the game' – developed by Ortega and Gasset – and its rules freely accepted by the artists. Johann Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, and Theodor Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* are works the doctoral student refers to in order to prove and link the causal processes of creating works bearing the hallmarks of that particular time.

The entire first part of the doctoral dissertation is exceptionally comprehensive and selected as a collection of authors, quotations, comparative references – an ocean of information that Potchekanska 'swam across' to reach the island, the core of her work "The Works of Igor Stravinsky, outside the ballet genre, in the period between the two world wars." In the very title of the topic, a clear limitation, which is the focus of the study, is set, namely the theatrical and musical works of Stravinsky. This is a sphere the doctoral student 'knows as the back of her hand' as a director and easily analyzes of the issue. "Renard" is a chapter containing opinions extremely interesting to follow ranging from the interrelationships of cinematic language and theater and the poetics of montage to the features of experimental research. From the very beginning, Potchekanska poses the main questions to which she seeks answers in order to dissect the specific work concerning the opposition in the theater which is based on anti-aesthetics; the waves of negation of the romantic, naturalistic and other concepts; a new theatricality synthesizing the energy of other arts and stepping on the non- professional street art and Russian traditions in folk festivities. Here the principles of the 'avant-garde' are considered in detail and proved again by the statements of a number of researchers, including Meyerhold, Burger, Lotman. Renard is considered by Potchekanska as Stravinsky's experiment with 'epic imagery' imposing a new technique that invaded all levels of the musical theatre score. Montage, as both an artistic device and as a sign of the process of disintegration of the humanistic ideal, is also part of the commented processes. The verbal folklore traditions, the „balagan“ theater with the stylization and the artistic strategy of the Russian avant-garde are the good ground on which Stravinsky created his Renard, Potchekanska emphasizes. The composer's own definition of the genre as "a short comic street performance" is also part of Potchekanska's argumentation about the opposition between tradition and avant-garde, about art with museum value and the idea of vitality. Studies are also the means of expression used by Stravinsky to achieve the new theatrical quality. The doctoral student presents the montage representation of the characteristic imagery of the characters in a clear schematic sequence /p.90/. The principles of the structural connections in the work are also presented in tables. Each part of the musical work is examined in detail and related to the whole with logical connections. After a detailed analysis, quite logically established are four main well-formulated tendencies identified by Potchekanska: Stravinsky's experiment on the basis of the street theater; the principle of montage at all levels of the work; epic features and structure different from Brecht's socially critical view; own leading avant-garde searches of the composer in the creation of opera- oratorio, a non-specific genre

not imposed as a traditional /the latter only applies to Oedipus Rex/, in which way the transition is made to the next chapter central to the research.

**Chapter V:** "Evolution and realization of the epic form in the opera-oratorio Oedipus Rex" is the main part of Potchekanska's study focusing on Stravinsky's dominant search for a new concept of myth built on Stravinsky's emblematic work, Oedipus Rex. In Potchekanska's view, the "hostile world" and its being transformed into a phenomenon of consciousness serves as a starting point for the analysis of the specific work, for a proclamation of the impossibility of any communication of the human with the outside world, as well as of the work of art with reality. Introducing us to the particulars of the problems of the work, the doctoral student remains true to her broad informative approach: starting from the sense of the general rhythm of being; going through the fact that each person can belong with the myth distancing himself from the consciousness of being; through unlocking the universal; through the principles of ancient Greek mythology and medieval religious symbolism of archaic ritual action, to come to Brecht and his 'alienation effect'. After an extensively informative introduction to the chapter, Potchekanska goes on to focus on the specific analysis of Oedipus Rex – starting from its first performance, recapping the original sources – the tragedy of Sophocles and Cocteau's texts, noting the libretto and orchestral composition, and commenting on the archaic Latin and its specifics as musical expression and construction of auditory perceptions. Studied are the complex interrelations, the radical distinctiveness of the main dramatic elements, the theory of synthesis and the revival of the spirit of the tragedy /influence by Wagner/, the turn to the baroque forms /influenced by Handel's operas and oratorios/, the principles of diversion from the dynamics of Aristotle's theater /the presence of a central anti-dramatic principle/ and the tendency towards statics /developed in the works of Meyerhold/. The dramatic genre synthesis of opera-oratorio is a researched field that reveals Stravinsky's form-making as his artistic ambition to create a work without an analogue – a signifying sign as a mark of the epoch. For greater clarity, here again included has been a construction scheme of the opera-oratorio. When considering the "imagery" of the musical-dramatic features of the characters, many reflections are also made. It is of great value that Potchekanska has considered them first in relation to one another and, secondly, relative specifically to a given object or subject through a characteristic musical or dramatic element of the

work. The musical-dramaturgical analysis is logically and consistently construed, making a horizontal and vertical cross-section starting from the general towards the specific and fragmentary.

**Chapter VI "Igor Stravinsky and the European musical theater between the two world wars. Specifics of the manifestation of the epic type of theatricality in the works of the Russian composer"** is the part of the research with the greatest applied and contributing value. It is, in itself, sufficient to constitute the core of the doctoral dissertation. The introduction of this chapter outlines the whole study by repeating the theses advanced at the beginning of the work with the idea to confirm the conclusions already drawn and make sure that the synthesis of all that has been said thus far has clearly delineated the historical, philosophical and aesthetic framework of the epoch and its creators and thinkers. To be sure, the different focus in the reiterations clarifies the specific thesis discussed in each section of the dissertation. One of the main contributions of the work is the marker identified which can serve as a meeting point of the "general" and "specific" in the dramaturgical elements of a specific work, in a specific time period, to help make recognizable a certain type of dramaturgy with signs of the "epic". This chapter also synthesizes all dramatic techniques used by Stravinsky in his musical theatrical works, among which static technique, repetition and mirror technique, inclusion of grotesque, playing with masks, division of roles - pantomime and vocal ones, hybrid genre definition, a relief-futuristic scene, light score, depersonalization, etc.

All techniques discussed so far are naturally bound with the epic nature of the hybrid works of Igor Stravinsky discussed in Chapter VII. Here Potchekanska does not refrain from going beyond the limits of her subject by undertaking the study of another emblematic work of Stravinsky *The Soldier's Tale*, "quite schematically", as she puts it, but in fact rather vividly, analyzing each part of it. The operas *Mavra* and *Perséphone* are subjected to dissection in the same way. Quite naturally, the musical-theatrical works /without the ballets/ being thus collected, we can say that this text has become a collection through which every researcher, student, director, artist or other person can draw the necessary information and find their starting point to study a specific work Stravinsky and his art in general. The identified marker for epic type of theater makes it possible for a specific category of musical- scenic works, different from all the rest, to be distinguished, which is the main contribution of this dissertation.

Potchekanska enumerates a total of 10 main contributions of the dissertation, which are important on account of their comprehensiveness on the one hand, and on the other hand, are a precise focus on the specific problems of the epoch, its trends and especially the uniqueness of Stravinsky's work.

As an appendix, Potchekanska has attached materials from the performance of *The Soldier's Tale* at the Teatro Malibran, Venice and at the Teatro Due, Parma, in which she participated herself together with performers from the Teatro La Fenice – an indisputable experience which stirred her interest in the present work.

The cited literature comprises 104 titles in Bulgarian, English, Russian, French and Italian. The dissertation has the total of 237 pages, divided into two parts, the first having three chapters and the second having four chapters. The abstract is 26 pages, a well-structured synthesis of the important issues. The publications are five, of which four in Bulgarian and one in a foreign specialized edition. The presented set of documents is in accordance with the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor'.

I highly appreciate this work, being aware of how much effort and how many years of work have been put into collecting and analyzing the information. My recommendation to the PhD student would only be to adhere to a clearer specific focus of each sub-topic. This focus can be achieved if each sub-item is given specific sub-title, a topic to which the doctoral student should adhere with greater rigor, in order to avoid the repetitions which at times complicate the text. The text could also be illustrated with more tables and graphs which could help to better perceive the conclusions. No doubt, if the text were compressed to contain up to 170 - 200 pages, it would be a volume sufficient to present all the information. An editorial intervention to limit in the exhibited texts some double presented elements could benefit a future publication of the work of whose worth I am convinced.

I have known Tsvetanka Potchekanska since the time she was still a student. I have always been impressed by her insatiable interest in receiving new, different information on topics that are certainly forbidding even for long-established researchers. I am definitely respected by ambition and creative enthusiasm, as well as the knowledge accumulated by her.



The dissertation shows that the doctoral student Tsvetanka Potchekanska has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty, in the professional field 3.8 Music and Dance Art, demonstrating abilities and skills for independent research.

**In conclusion, I confidently give my positive assessment and suggest that the esteemed scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' in the Doctoral Programme 'Music' at NBU.**

April 12th 2021

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nina Naidenova