

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Tony Shekerdjieva-Novak,

lecturer at AMTII "prof. Assen Diamandiev,
professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

for the dissertation of Vita Guhelli,

PhD candidate at the dept. of Music in NBU - Sofia, on the topic of:

“Symbolism in solo songs of Albanian Composers

written in the second half of the twentieth century“

for the award of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 8. Arts, professional field 8.3. "Music and Dance Art

Short biographical background:

Vita Guhelli received her Master's degree from the Academy of Arts in Pristina with the qualification of Master of Music Performance. She is currently teaching singing at the Amadeus School of Music. She was awarded first prize in the 2007 Europe Day competition as part of the annual activity awards.

She received the 2012 Creativity of the Year Award for literary activity. She was also awarded a prize for her musical activities in 2013. As part of the ESMA (European Summer Music Academy) in June 2014, she performed the role of Bastiena in Mozart's Singspiel *Bastien und Bastiena*, conducted by Desar Suleimani. 2016 was the year in which Vita Guhelli performed a concert in Vienna, Austria, in which she also presented arias from operas by Albanian composers. Other interesting

appearances include the soundtrack of the series "Season of Love " and the documentary "Atlantic Battalion".

Vita Guhelli was engaged in an active concert activity within the summer academies in Tirana and Prishtina and has performed chamber music on the stages of Skopje, Tirana and Prishtina. In October 2019, she represented Kosovo at the IKV festival in Genk, a city in northeastern Belgium, where she was the soloist in the first performance of composer Jan Van Der Roost's *Amor Io fallo*.

Scientific publications related to the topic of the doctoral dissertation - 4 in total:

1. The first article to her PhD thesis was published in the journal SSRN with an impact factor from the global platform Elsevier https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3585411 "*The emergence of symbolism in music as a movement of natural stylistic development or as a reaction to the communist regime in the period 1944 - 1991*"
2. Her second publication was featured in the International Scientific Journal "Monte" <http://www.journalmonte.com/volume-1-no-1-2020-april> "*The Distinctive Features of Symbolism in the Solo Songs of Albanian and Other European and World Composers*"
3. The International Scientific Journal "Olcinium" features her third publication in Vol 1. No 1 April 2020 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/HasanRustemi/publication/342715733_olcinium_20203/links/5f032250299bf1881603b5d6/olcinium-20203.pdf "Tiparet dalluese të simbolizmit në muzikën botërore dhe shqiptare gjatë gjysmës së dytë të shekullit XX", "*Distinctive Features of Symbolism in World Music and Albanian Music in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century*" (translated by me, T.Š. H.)

4. A fourth publication is featured in the International Journal of Advanced and Innovative Studies http://iaraedu.com/about_journal/ijair-volume-7-issue-3-iii-july-september-2020.php "*Is it possible to identify symbolism as a musical idea?*"

Contents of the dissertation

The dissertation of doctoral student Vita Guhelli on "Symbolism in solo songs by Albanian composers of the second half of the 20th century" aims to analyze the symbolism and some aesthetic elements in the genre of art songs in Albanian music created during the "...censorship of the totalitarian communist ideology" (abstract). The author identifies symbolism as a very thinly covered field in Albanian music, for which no publications and studies are explaining the symbolism in musical art in general, "much less in the genre of solo songs" (ibid.). As a performer of works by Albanian composers in this genre, Guhelli set herself the task of elucidating the reason for the emergence of this strand in professional music in the second half of the 20th century, a period in which the country was influenced not only by Russian ideology but also by French history and literature - part of the school curriculum in Albania. This fact probably gave way to symbolism in Albanian art and is an issue explored in the main text of the thesis.

The dissertation consists of 221 pages and contains 8 chapters, 13 subchapters, an abstract, an introduction and a bibliography:

Introduction

1. Origins

1.1 Historical Overview of Symbolism

1.2 Symbolism in the Art Music

1.3 Symbolism in solo songs

2. Stylistic deviations

Symbolism and symbology

2.1 Symbolism vs realism

2.2 Symbolism vs expressionism

3. The text-music relationship in Symbolism

4. Comparative methodology

4.1 Symbolism in art songs in world music literature and Albanian music of the second half of the twentieth century

4.2 Distinctive features of symbolism in solo songs by Albanian and Kosovar composers

5. Analytical methodology

6. Research methodology

6.1 Which stylistic trends influenced the emergence of the symbolic spirit in 1944-1991?

6.2 What was the influence of geopolitical circumstances on the work of Albanian composers of the second half of the twentieth century?

6.3 Did symbolism enter Albanian music as a result of its natural stylistic development or as a reaction against the communist regime of 1944-1991?

6.4 Did the Russian National School influence the professional and stylistic formation of Albanian composers of the second half of the twentieth century?

6.5 Can symbolism be defined as a musical thought? 6.6 Did the development of the symbolist spirit continue after the communist era?

7. Conclusions

8. Contributions

Bibliography

In the chapter "Origin", which I have already commented on, the research focuses on Symbolism and its main characteristics. The historical description includes the representatives of Symbolism in French literature, such as Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, who formulated the Symbolists' projections through a new poetic language that reflected "*absolute reality freed from the changeability and darkness of everyday life.*" Victor Cousin, who defended the thesis of "Iarpurlartism" "Art for art's sake" (*l'art pour l'art*) advocated by the Symbolists, Parnassists and Impressionists, is quoted with his theoretical conception. His ideas are 1. "Neither art nor politics nor religion can influence art" 2. "To understand art is a goal of art itself, which derives from its laws" 3. "Art should be understood only through the idea of beauty" (Xhelal Zejneli, "Periudhat dhe drejtimet në letërsi", Çabej, Tetovë, 2006, pp. 110). Here I would like to express my personal opinion on the introduction of terms into our language, which is already too loaded with them. We are talking about "Iarpurlartism", or "Art for art's sake". Vita Guhelli outlines symbolism in art music and solo songs through quotations and examples from various musical sources and theorists. An attempt is made to show stylistic discrepancies as well as symbolism and symbology with their particularities. In this direction, the relations of symbolism versus realism, symbolism versus expressionism, the relation of text and music are also indicated.

Guhelli stresses that twentieth-century formalism is perceived as a musical direction, which is reflected through the absolute freedom of creation, and the symbiosis of "the symbolist spirit between literature and music leads us to the genre of the 'solo

song', in which these two fields of art are intertwined in one form". According to her, the correct reading is achieved "*by deciphering the work and arranging its constituent parts from the beginning to the coordinates of chronological rotation*" (abstract). In drawing her conclusions, the dissertation considers that the identification of symbolism in solo songs has been achieved, the Albanian composers included in the study "*connect the creative element of their individuality coloured by the originality of the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of their origins*", and "*the natural stylistic approach of symbolism has been achieved through other stylistic trends that preceded the symbolist spirit*" (ibid.).

I will not dwell on the ambiguous and contradictory terms used. I have often been placed in situations too difficult to resolve, given the translation of my foreign PhD students' publications. I know how much time and extra work is required in getting to the heart of an author's intent, the desire to preserve the style and at the same time be accurate and understood by the readers. I will not comment on the failures in this abstract because we have also been provided with a dissertation in English.

The thesis has been submitted for defense at New Bulgarian University. In this regard, I believe that even brief information on the emergence of symbolism as a manifestation of modernism in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century (the poets Yavorov, Debelyanov, Liliev, Yasenov and the composers T. Popov, L. Pipkov, I. Spasov, etc.) would be helpful for the overall conception of the doctorate.

The bibliography of the dissertation contains sources in English and Albanian. I believe that the PhD candidate is familiar with the state of the studied issues, the literature used in the examples and citations, and all the referenced sources. I accept the contributions of the thesis as outlined by her.

In support of what I have said so far, I give the following conclusion. The dissertation has scholarly and practical qualities. I agree with the outlined contributions and consider the publications sufficient. All this gives me grounds to propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the degree of **Doctor** in the professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art to doctoral candidate **Vita Guhelli**.

20.10.2021

Prof. Dr. Toni Shekerdjieva-Novak