

## REVIEW

by **Assoc. Prof. Rositsa Dimitrova Becheva,**

New Bulgarian University,

for the dissertation of **Wāng Bo**, F 101488,

Professional field 8.3 Music and Dance Art,

PhD student at New Bulgarian University,

On

*Vocal Interpretation of Selected Songs by Franz Schubert, Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré and Qing Zhu, Huang Zi, Li Yinghai: a Comparative Study from a Singer's Perspective*

for the award of the academic degree of Doctor

Research Supervisor. **Prof. Dr. Nilena Shushulova-Pavlova**

Vocal supervisor: **Dr. Natalia Afeyan**

### **Brief biographical details:**

Education and training: 2011 - Bachelor's degree in Music Performance (Belcanto) at Inner Mongolia University, School of Art, Department of Music; 2016 - Master's degree in Chamber Music (Vocal Chamber Music) at the National Conservatory of Music "F. Venezzè" in Rovigo,

Italy; 2019 - Advanced Studies in Opera Performance - with Prof. Hidemi Kikuchi at Musashino Academia Musicae, Japan.

Wang Bo is an active performer, participating in national and international competitions.

2011 - Gold Medal at the 6th World Choir Games. During the period of study - 2012- 2016 at the National Music Conservatory "F. Venezze" in Rovigo, Italy, she actively participated as an assistant-teacher; in 2014 she was recommended by the school as a soloist to participate in a tour (concerts with works of important German composers) organised by all music academies in the Veneto region (capital: Venice), as the only Chinese performer-vocalist. During the period 2016-2020 as soprano soloist in Beijing/Inner Mongolia, China, he participated in various concert performances and singing competitions. In 2017, she reached the semi-finals in the chamber music category in the "8th National Opera and Vocal Competition for Higher Art Institutions" and "2nd International University Student" and won an award for excellence. In 2017, she qualified as a finalist in the China Division of the Dakli International Vocal Competition in Harikore District. In 2017, she was invited by the organisers to participate in the 2nd Music Festival of Baotou Teachers College and performed a solo concert during the festival. In 2020, she won the Outstanding Performance Award at the China Selection Competition of the 2020 New York International Opera Competition.

From 2020 to present day, Wang Bo is a doctoral student at New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria.

### **Contents of the dissertation**

The dissertation is 97 pages in length, and its structure comprises: an Abstract, an Introduction, four Chapters, a Conclusion and Contributions, References (I. Bibliography - total number of 32 titles in Latin, II. References - 8 cited sources).

The **Abstract** introduces the topic of the study.

Drawing attention to the art song as a genre, the author of the study points out, "the art song, as a prestigious genre in classical vocal music, has been highly valued for centuries. Therefore, the performance of art song requires skillful technical ability and a high level of culture and musical

literacy on the part of the performer. By tracing the historical processes of Western and Chinese music, analyzing the positive and negative influences, and comparing the aesthetics of music in the East and West, this dissertation highlights the importance of art songs to the development of contemporary Chinese music."

The **Introduction** outlines the main aim of the study: to present a professional vocal interpretation of selected songs by Franz Schubert, Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré on one side, and Qin Zhu, Huang Ji, Li Yinghai on the other. It is a comparative study from the singer's perspective.

In this regard, the dissertation aims to give readers from other countries insight into the development of Chinese art songs, "to highlight their uniqueness, and to stimulate interest in the rich tapestry of Chinese artistic expression." "The ultimate goal of this study is to enhance the understanding and analysis of art songs in a cross-cultural context."

The author focuses on the aesthetics of Chinese vocal culture and Western vocal culture, the approaches of musical expression used, pointing out that, "this thesis extends from the study of art songs to the evolution of aesthetic concepts in Eastern and Western traditions. By comprehensively examining differences in musical aesthetics, it provides a deeper understanding of emotive expression in art songs. A comparative analysis of the compositional and aesthetic styles of Eastern and Western art songs not only enhances the performer's aesthetic awareness, but also serves as a bridge of communication between composers and audiences." This, in turn, will enable vocal performers to present "informed personal interpretations based on the requirements of different backgrounds and audiences".

In terms of the methodology and research approaches used, it is clarified that in this dissertation the main research method is the comparative research method; the study first examines the differences in aesthetic pursuits between Chinese and Western culture.

The following *tasks* are introduced throughout the exposition:

- A **comparative study** of three Chinese and three Western composers while focusing on the development of art songs in China. The pairwise comparisons aim to explore the differences between Chinese and Western art songs, examining the further development of Chinese art songs;

- exploring the **history of aesthetics** in both Chinese and Western cultures, examining the influences that have shaped their current musical styles, and tracing the evolution of aesthetic ideologies;

- exploring the **emotional characteristics**, "especially the reserved emotional expressions and emotionally compelling lyrical expositions prevalent in Western classical vocal music".

- exploring the **aesthetics of traditional Chinese music**, and in relation to this, conducting parallel comparisons with other traditional Chinese art forms to gain insight into the Chinese understanding of musical aesthetics within the broader context of traditional culture;

- providing a theoretical basis for the subsequent comparative study of three pairs of **Chinese and Western composers** - analysing similarities and differences using compositional styles and musical aesthetics as points of reference;

- Performing a detailed analysis of **three compositions by each Chinese composer** - in order to gain a deeper and more sensitive understanding of the development of Chinese art songs;

- Defining **interpretive issues, generalizations and conclusions**.

**Chapter 1.** A Brief Introduction to Traditional Chinese Aesthetics, is a historical look at the understanding of philosophical thinking in ancient China - in the period 6th century BCE - 2nd century BCE, the philosophical system of traditional Chinese culture. It is explained that: the "Hundred Schools of Thought" had an important influence on the development of Chinese political thought and legal system, as well as on culture, arts and education. Over time, they became a diverse social sphere of development".

The research focuses on: the Bronze Age, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese aesthetics in the context of ethical and moral ideas, the fields of architecture, literature, fine arts, traditional Chinese music, and the position of Buddhist culture in China.

Of particular importance to me are the texts dealing with the correlation *aesthetics-arts-culture*. The author of the elaboration explains that: 'the taotie, the dragon and the phoenix, as imaginary mythical creatures, became representative models for sculpture in bronze art, marking the beginning of the Chinese people's vivid aesthetic aspiration in art. "The art of Chinese

characters developed alongside bronze art, forming a uniquely Chinese art form encompassing calligraphy and aesthetics. "Chinese aesthetics in the context of ethical and moral ideas is represented through the ideas of Confucianism and Taoism. This chapter also presents approaches, artistic concepts in Chinese art that are characteristic of fine art, music, and literature.

**Chapter 2.** A brief overview of Western art historical forms

The research focuses on the origins of European music, ancient Greek aesthetics, the intersection of aesthetic thought: sensibility and rationality in music, the synthesis of aesthetics in music, and more broadly, the role of music in social terms.

**Chapter 3.** A Comparison of Chinese and Western Aesthetics, the main aspects of Western art and aesthetics, Chinese art and aesthetics, and in this connection the evolution of Chinese music, the establishment of certain philosophical and aesthetic tendencies are presented.

**Chapter 4.** A Comparison of Western Romantic Composers and Contemporary Chinese Composers; I would like to highlight it as a contribution. This chapter compares and analyses in detail the differences and commonalities in terms of musical aesthetics, musical language and stylistics, and compositional technique in the works of three pairs of composers, Franz Schubert and Qin Zhu, Richard Strauss and Huang Zi, and Li Yinghai and Gabriel Urbain Fauré.

The research attitude of the dissertation's author and her personal experience as a singer-interpreter are reflected in the analyses and comparisons made - which is of particular importance for the purposes of the study.

The **Conclusion** and the **Contributions** present the most important findings and summaries of the different parts of the study, the contributory points, the recommendations, the reference issues of particular importance:

"With this dissertation, I aim to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of art songs and to provide a better methodological approach for all those who are trained in classical singing, in order to study art songs more effectively".

### **Prominence of the research topic in scientific and applied terms**

A proprietary methodology is presented regarding the vocal interpretation of selected songs by the composers Franz Schubert, Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré and Qin Zhu, Huang Zhi, Li Yinghai.

### **Knowledge of the state and relevance of the literature used**

The doctoral candidate used sufficient information sources, the reference to which is correct.

### **Contributions of the dissertation**

I accept the contributions of the thesis as outlined by the doctoral candidate, including, "The contribution of this thesis is embodied in the systematic summary of the aesthetic characteristics found in various aspects of traditional Chinese art, such as calligraphy, painting, architecture, etc., as well as the derivation of their relationship to music based on a system of aesthetic characteristics".

Evaluation of the abstract's conformity with the main points and contributions of the dissertation

The abstract consists of 19 pages and conveys the character of the doctoral work.

### **Publications on the dissertation topic:**

The doctoral candidate has a sufficient number of publications and concerts on the doctoral thesis.

**Publications and concerts on the doctoral thesis:**

1. 7. 11. 2021. 11:00 Palace of Culture Music Lobby - Orpheus Chamber Orchestra
  
2. 15. 11. 2021,15:00 NBU gallery - Androniki Antonio and WangBo' Concert
  
3. 18. 5. 2022,Boris Hristov Museum - XVIII Boris Hristov Arts Festival Musical Marathon
  
4. 17. 6. 2022, "Prof.Raina Mihailova "Hall - Andiana Bytyci-Ismajli and WangBo's concert
  
5. 26. 09. 2022,Hall 506,Building1, NBU, STUDENT ORIENTATION WEEK Classical concert
  
6. 13. 10. 2022,Chinese Cultural Center, Chamber concert of students and postgraduates of the Music Program of New Bugarian University
  
7. 10. 12. 2022,Chinese Cultural Center, Voices from the East meeting the West
  
8. 8. 5. 2023, ul. "Knyaz Boris I" 146, 1000 Sofia Center, Sofia,Concert in Catholic Church
  
9. 12. 6. 2023,Chinese Cultural Center, concert

**Opinions, recommendations and notes:**

None.

**In conclusion:**

I give my positive evaluation for the dissertation work of Wang Bo “Vocal Interpretation of Selected Songs by Franz Schubert, Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré and Qing Zhu, Huang Zi, Li Yinghai: a Comparative Study from a Singer’s Perspective” in relation to the contributions of scholarly and applied merit it brings. **I consider that the doctoral dissertation of the PhD student fully meets the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 8.3. "Music and Dance Art" under the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award it to her.**

03. 06. 2024, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Becheva