

REFERENCE LETTER

On the teaching activities and scientific accomplishments of Asst. Professor Ventsislav Dimov Dimov, DSc, participating in a competition for the academic rank of professor in division 3.5. Social communications and information sciences. Journalism – media music, announced in State Gazette, issue 65, August 16 2019.

Reviewer: Prof. Ivan Stefanov, Doctor of philosophical sciences

Asst. Prof. Ventsislav Dimov, DSc is the only participant in the competition for the academic rank of professor of *Journalism – media music* for the needs of the Faculty of journalism and mass communication of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, where he works in the “Radio and television” department (professional division 3.5. Social communications and information sciences) and, at the time of participation in the competition, he has 9 years of successful teaching and research activity.

V. Dimov was born on 26.04.1963 in Dobrich. He graduated Bulgarian philology at the University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” (1987) and International economic relations and business at The Higher Institute of Architecture and Construction, Sofia (1993). As a graduate student with an independent preparation at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, he defended a dissertation on “Ethnopol music and creative industries” in 1999 and received the educational and scientific doctoral degree. He is a part-time lecturer at SU at the Faculty of journalism and mass communication with a Master’s course in “Media music”. In 2018, he defended a dissertation on “Media music. Recorded and media (re)produced music from Bulgaria” and received the degree “doctor of sciences”.

Asst. Prof. V. Dimov actively takes part in teaching at the Faculty of journalism and mass communication. He has courses, diverse in subject, for both Bachelors’ and Masters’ programs. This is expressed in his overloaded academic schedule – containing 435 lection hours and 90 hours of practical exercises per year. He has overseen 49 successfully defended bachelors and masters theses from 2010 to 2019. 4 young scientists have successfully defended doctoral dissertations under his supervision.

V. Dimov coauthored 6 textbooks and teacher’s manuals, published by “Prosveta”, for the needs of musical education in middle schools, presenting synthesized content, bibliographical

resources and links to video sites and digital contents with music, which he uses in his teaching work with students in the disciplines, related to music in media.

Asst. Prof. V. Dimov is an active participant in academic research projects, conducted by scientific collectives, and has made real contributions to them. I will point out his participation in three significant scientific projects: 1. “The soft power” of popular music in the media” (a project he managed, financed by NSF-MES); 2. “Media and culture: spaces, societies and communities” (a project of the “Radio and television” department, supported by SU’s SRC); 3. The scientific and applied project “Sound Portraits from Bulgaria”, carried out under the guidance of American researcher Martin Koenig, and resulting in the publishing of a book, written in English, in the USA, with V. Dimov as one of the authors.

Asst. Prof. V. Dimov is an exceptionally hardworking and highly productive researcher. He has over 200 scientific publications in total. Of those – 5 monographs, around 140 independent scientific publications (studies, articles, reviews, etc.), around 60 coauthored publications (textbooks, teacher’s manuals, etc.). He has over 400 citations of his research and publications in books by domestic and foreign authors.

I can adduce other facts about V. Dimov’s active and, in many ways, innovative scholarly and research activity, but I believe, that the previously stated is enough to outline the applicant’s daily teaching and research presence in the life of the university and, more broadly – in the cultural life. The facts clearly show that Dimov is an acclaimed, established and widely known – in a scientific and pedagogical respect – university lecturer and his claim for the high scientific degree is well founded.

Asst. Prof. V. Dimov is participating in this competition for the academic rank of professor, specifically, with 1 monograph, 15 articles and studies he authored, 7 publications he coauthored, 6 textbooks and teacher’s manuals, and 1 collection. None of these publications have been used in the applicant’s previous competitions and attestations. 26 citations of these publications have been found. I will point out some of these publications’ contributions.

In his latest monograph, “Music for the people on the media front” V. Dimov examines electronic media, recorded and transmitted music for the broad mass audience – folklore (peoples) and popular (Estrada) in the 1944-1989 period. The use of many and different sources: archival documents, related to Bulgarian radio and power in the period, radio programs and scripts, TV programs, gramophone records, recorded songs and music, song lyrics and notes, testimonials of people, who

were part of the processes, periodicals – newspapers and magazines, song collections, etc., as a significant and not widely known research base is a contribution of the scientific work. Many of the source materials the monograph is based on are published and interpreted for the first time. I would like to point out, that one of the primary strengths of V. Dimov’s overall research is that he always gets the impetus for an author’s analysis from real musical facts and events, which he uses as a basis. He never pulls anything from his own imagination. The reading of the near past, realized by the author, is very valuable and useful in that he follows his own methodology: this past needs neither apologetics, nor unambiguously negative readings, but rather getting to know and understand the facts and processes. This allows the gathering of the various pieces and constructing a mosaic picture, in order to understand the essence and dramatics of the socialist past. It turns out, that under the lid of the boiling “pot” of socialist ideologemes, under the influence of direct political power and even under the strict supervision of auto censorship; the second and third musical networks – with their own, parallel life – emerge. On the one hand, the propaganda and its music dominate and rule; on the other hand, the secondary networks form their own musical culture of the everyday, and the latter – everyday culture – purports its own, at least relative aesthetic autonomy. The aesthetization of politics and the politization of art are complex processes, mediated by a number of media and other mediators, which forms various culturally-artistic fields, simultaneously connected and antagonistically different. The soft power of music, which the author researches competently, but not deliberately excellently, turns out to be not only circumstantially politically, but also specifically anthropologically (humanely) rationalized. This is an **important contribution** of the monograph: **the innovative approaches** to the research subject. More specifically: combining factual elements with descriptive ones, interpretational with discursive methods, guarantees the objectivity of the scientific analysis; the simultaneous application of anthropological approaches in searching for music experiences and notions of a human, community and more narrowly, a group of people, but also the sociocultural and political research of the media representation of musical artefacts. Music’s media images and its uses are saturated with relations; they include ties to the power relations in society, with identity construction, with variation in the use of art and knowledge in interpretative practices.

For his participation in the competition, V Dimov also submitted 15 studies and articles he authored, which I will present through their main contributions.

1. An in-depth divulgation and development of the author’s previously stated idea about media music as a new research subject is found in the study “Towards an understanding of media music”, the articles “Balkan pubs and cafes and the birth of local recorded music”, “Slavonic traces

in the recorded on gramophone records music in Bulgaria”, “Reverse gaze: art reads the academy”, etc. By introducing and constantly developing the term *media music*, V. Dimov eased his approach toward a new **research position** in our musicology. Instead of the traditionally treated Music, with a capital “M”, understood as a unified and consistent whole, the real presence of many and different musics is stated. (We willingly subject ourselves to the influence of Serbian, Romanian, Greek, Turkish and any other pop music on a daily basis!) **From a historical standpoint, a change and development of the very aura of music as an art should be taken into consideration.** The first and extremely long-lasting age of live performers, of human voices – rich and varied in their beauty and charm, is drastically ended, creatively supplemented and transformed through the technical reproduction of the musical piece, turned into some form of recording. Thus, the agenda becomes the charm of the copy, of the constant repetition of pop music’s hits in the media. Everyone searches for and accepts the copy, primitive as a gramophone record, and today, as an exquisitely perfect digital recording. This is why we are currently in the age of the remix, which puts us – wittingly or not – in an ocean of melodies and rhythms, in a daily abundance of works, which provide us presence in different musical worlds, often appearing as though they are turned upside down. The classic musical pyramid is turned over and Dimov gives us not only factual and completely reliable facts about all of this, he further develops the primary methodological means for its understanding and practical possession.

2. Through his articles and studies, V. Dimov finds his own successful way to speak and problematize significant contemporary musical, cultural and even social processes, pathologies and practices. In the field of musical synthesis, media music is expressed through its functions of a *cultural mediator*. Previous readings of media music relate it mainly to the popular-musical and the “low”, but it can include and be transformed into art music, create its own masterpieces. I find these matters developed more thoroughly in some articles with very telling titles: “Constructing by singing: of a Balkan music festival”, “On some orientalisms in Bulgarian recorded music”, “Around the Balkan Passions of the Ethnofusion“, “For Chalga with disgust and love”, etc.

3. In the third group of articles, V Dimov analyzes the relations of cooperation and constant antagonism between music, media, power and politics in depth; he also raises the question for the “soft power” of media music. In most cases, these articles are precursors or followers of the main monograph V. Dimov presents himself so convincingly with, in this competition for the academic rank of professor. I will cite these publications: “What a memory it has become”, “Bulgarian “hip-hop” music as a phenomenon of alternative journalism”, “Power and music for the people in socialist Bulgaria”, “Our labor is the song”. The optic of the author’s observation is very accurately pointed at

historical or current works, media events and phenomena in these publications. The summaries made therein show how widely public media music gains the characteristics of different platforms for community views and active citizenship.

To complete this section on the applicant's scientific accomplishments and contributions, I would like to point out one more significant, positive moment in his scientific work.

Ventsislav Dimov is the author of the first research on ethnopop music as a cultural and media industry in Bulgaria. He reveals how, in the form of a cultural explosion, unforeseen mass musical phenomena get on the forefront of everyday life, and how ethnopop music (neo folk) is their impact force, brought about by the dynamic shift of the layers of musical culture. V. Dimov researches the historical roots, how this process occurred, documents the phenomenon, and analyzes its creative subjects and audience.

From a sociological standpoint, neo folk is not music of a specific social group. Its audience is heterogeneous. The number and significance of many and different social communities is increasing. They vigorously search for the most popular musical and visual artistic consolidation, as a response to the threat of isolation. This way ethnopop music is practically an aesthetic phenomenon, parallel to social changes, to establishing private business, to the growing individualization of civil life. Taking into account the increased role of media in this process, V. Dimov accurately observes that we cannot fail to recognize one regularity, uncovered by mass communication theory: the influence of mass media is mainly determined by quality, by the audience's socio-psychological characteristics, rather than by the content of the means of communication. A number of aspects of contemporary Bulgarian ethnopop are related to the user's specific psychological characteristics – family, village and city life, formal and informal groups, ethnic preferences, etc.

The rise of phenomena such as the emergence of new forms of folklore – which are not connected to authentic Bulgarian folklore structurally, semantically or genetically, but are functionally folklore – should be sought in sociocultural conditions as well. V. Dimov's content analysis reveals how neo folklore advertises a way of life, dominated by several primary and popular values, desired by all. Therein ethno music repeats and confirms the principle, that every mass culture must be a culture of the private, individual life.

As a conclusion of this reference letter, I will summarize that V. Dimov's significant teaching experience in the multiannual communication with students, as well as his current research and his

achieved contributions regarding new musical phenomena, give me grounds to evaluate his professor candidacy positively. For this reason, **I strongly suggest Asst. Prof. Ventsislav Dimov Dimov, DSc be awarded the academic title of *professor*** in division 3.5. Social communications and information sciences. Media music.

Sofia, 15.11.2019

Reviewer:

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