

## **REVIEW**

of Doctoral Dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, Department of Music and Multimedia Technologies

**Theme:** Theoretical and methodological aspects of church monody

**Doctoral student:** Ilia Zdravkov Mihaylov

**Professional field:** 1.3. Pedagogy of the Education, PhD programme "Methodology of Music Education"

**Scientific supervisor:** Prof. Dr. Adrian Georgiev

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### **Biographical data:**

The PhD student's CV to date presents us with an intensive creative activity on an international scale. He holds master's degrees from the University of Music in Lausanne (double bass, piano, music theory), the Juilliard School in New York (double bass, orchestral conducting, liberal arts), the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music in the UK (music director of symphony orchestra). He has appeared primarily as a conductor - of classical, traditional and Eastern Orthodox church music choirs, but also of symphonic ensembles. Along with his permanent engagement as music director of the "The Great Voices of Bulgaria" choir from 1999 to the present day, Ilia Mihaylov has worked as Artistic Director of the Ensemble for Byzantine Music "Sofia Psalters" and serve as such with The Bulgarian Musical Society. He was conductor with the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra and the National Philharmonic Choir "Svetoslav Obretenov". As a guest conductor he has made numerous appearances at musical venues in Bulgaria and abroad, and served as Music Director of choral formations in France and Switzerland. Mihaylov has collaborated with some of the world's greatest names of the conducting art. The specialization in arts management at New York University has helped Ilia Mihaylov to realize his career as a cultural project manager. His teaching and lecturing experience is related to the American College of Sofia, Harvard University (USA), University of Paris - VIII and others.

**The topic relevance:** the study of Eastern Orthodox church music, known today as "Byzantine music", and in Bulgarian Renaissance's years and after the Ottoman Liberation as "Psaltic" or "Greek singing", gradually dropped out of singing classes in Bulgarian schools. That occurred in the early twentieth century, for reasons, psychological attitude and educational conditions understandable for that period of time. Today in Bulgaria, the development of music mediaevalism and the study of Eastern Orthodox medieval/ancient Bulgarian church music, puts scientific knowledge of it as theological foundations, theory and practice on an increasingly solid professional ground. Its re-introduction into Bulgarian specialised and general music education, in order to preserve and keep alive this valuable cultural heritage for Bulgaria and the world, is a sufficiently actual mission. The degree of its relevance is also raised by its being offered in a transcription – as accurate as possible, close to the authentic sound, which can be mastered with the help of modern technical means and technologies.

**Structure:** the dissertation contains 199 pages. The thesis is structured in an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. In terms of length, structure, scientific methodology and conclusions it meets the requirements for a doctoral dissertation. The bibliography includes a total of **133** sources, of which **94** in Cyrillic and **39** in Latin. *Appendix 1* sets out general propositions about singing and voice functions in teaching for children. *Appendix 2* demonstrates three *troparions* notated in five staff notation with microchromatic signs.

**The introduction** clearly states the thesis and hypothesis, aims and objectives of the dissertation. These make clear the doctoral student's intention to prove through scientific research and practical experiment:

- a) the Eastern origin and belonging of the "eastern" church chants performed in Bulgaria,
- b) the real possibility of their finding a place again in Bulgarian primary education in the form of extracurricular activities due to their kinship with Bulgarian musical thinking, spirituality and folklore,
- c) exploring the existing forms and possibilities for these chants to be preserved and continue to function as a valuable and living cultural tradition.

The introduction proposes an innovative and easily applicable methodological model for teaching Eastern Orthodox chant in schools. It can be used "by music teachers and, where such teachers are lacking, by primary teachers or visiting teachers" (p. 5). The introduction also introduces an experiment conducted with students in a classroom setting, as an essential phase

of this high-content research-practice study. A 'design' project is set out - stages, groups of participants, aims etc.

**In Chapter One** "Theoretical and methodological aspects of church monody," the doctoral student starts from the problems of the terminological apparatus used by musicologists-medievalists and interpreters – psalters and monks from the past to the present, and comments on terminological "variation" in the field of Eastern Orthodox music. Although terminological uniformity "is not the subject of this dissertation" (see p. 14), he prudently, yet critically, selectively seeks a balanced position and summarizes knowledge from both theoretical lines. Ilia Mihaylov's pedagogical precision directs him to the genealogy of the ecclesiastical monody, established in the Bulgarian lands in the Middle Ages, transformed to the present, to the different points of view of theorists and practitioners (generally speaking). From the position of acquired personal aural and singing experience, he continues to summarize the theoretical and practical knowledge concerning the "quantitative, qualitative and spiritual specificities of the Orthodox monody", conveying them in professionally accurate, yet understandable language for any intelligent and musically educated reader.

As a music historian, I appreciate the information in 1. 2. "The East in Contacting and/or Related Cultures" on musicologists studying Eastern cultures, terms and concepts, stylistic and aesthetic categories. Considered are sound order systems (including microchromatics) and genres of modal music of Persians, Arabs, and Turks, theories on the penetration of elements of the *makams* into church modes, of Eastern secular, including art music into the chants of the Eastern Orthodox Church (p. 37). Important statements are that "voices are not mere scales but a set of melodic constructions that define their qualities" (p. 40), and that church monody has a pan-Eastern origin (p. 41). The aesthetic and technical similarities between the musical systems under consideration become obvious, to the connections of early Bulgarian music with the monophonic traditions of Near Eastern cultures. The parallels he draws between church chants and Bulgarian folklore songs within the phenomenon of "monody" naturally lead to the conclusion of analogous processes and principles. The undoubtedly valuable, but seemingly neglected by the mediaevalists in the present, conclusions of Prof. Dr. Stoyan Djudjeff on the kinship between Orthodox monody and our monody folk singing are rediscovered in his cited publications.

Concerning the monody of Eastern Christianity, the doctoral student seeks substantiation in the works of little-known and cited in Bulgaria French-speaking musicologists - François-Joseph Fétis, Amédée Gastoué, Jean-Baptiste Rebour, citing their convincing and independent, of the already established in this country, observations. As a result, it is concluded that "The Orthodox Church is Eastern in nature, and the Eastern (even the "Oriental" - as it is used in Bulgaria) is still palpably present in the practice of this monody" (p. 21). Further, I would summarize the doctoral student's argument as follows: Bulgarian music pedagogy/education should not neglect "our" Eastern at the expense of "imported" Western European musical thinking, despite the difficulties it must overcome.

**The second chapter** of the present dissertation deals with the "Methodological Aspects of Church Monody" from secular school music education point of view. It covers the cultural and historical periods from the conversion to Christianity in Bulgaria (9th century) to the present day.

Regarding the pedagogical aspects of the presence of Eastern Orthodox music in the general educational school, the doctoral student also provides a thorough historical overview, combining cultural, social, political, religious and educational grounds. In parallel, he analyses the development of methodological principles for the subject of singing/chanting/music with its achievements and weaknesses. In examining the music education process up to the middle of the twentieth century, attention is also focused on views on the melodic basis of school music education, closely related to the study of modal Eastern Orthodox music. The pedagogical principles of Georgi Baidanov, Boris Trichkov and Dobri Hristov are mentioned. The tendency to create sacred songs with the typical features of children's and school song, which has become dominant, is noted. The development of the concepts of this subject in the second half of the century to the present day makes it difficult to deduce the observation begun. But the doctoral student states an undeniable fact: "of our two distinctive musical traditions, attention is paid only to folk music." The thesis he affirms is that "as a living and millenary musical tradition, Church Slavonic chants are an important part of our cultural and historical heritage and identity, and undoubtedly their practice, understanding and preservation is impossible to ensure without the definite participation of the Bulgarian school" (p. 66). The revival of this tradition must be tailored to the contemporary situation and educational strategies in Bulgarian schools. That is why Ilia Mihaylov proposes a "new, innovative methodology" based on the latest technologies and technical means.

**The third chapter** "Didactic Model (Method) for Teaching Orthodox Church Monody in the Primary School" seeks the place for the implementation of this model in the educational

process and finds it in the envisaged extracurricular school activities - the Interest classes (IC) and the Elective classes (EC). Their VOLUNTARITY is highlighted as an essential characteristic. In accordance with their design, they have a "high educational value" (p. 130) and meet the general pedagogical grounds mentioned so far: "children's need for communication and self-expression" and "the formation of a profound interest that can develop into a vocational orientation" (p. 131). The requirement for additional knowledge is noted: that it be fun and playful, that the method of teaching it be different from the method of teaching even-tempered tonal music, and that it be flexible to the abilities of trainers and learners (p.132). The application of modern multimedia technology is the key to that process.

As a fundamental prerequisite for the introduction and testing of the innovative model, specific strategies and coordination of problems of a different nature for each stage have been thought out - selection of repertoire, reference performers (psalters - "bearers of tradition"), preparation of sound recordings, even exercises for the development of modal musical hearing and natural sound production! The development of a plan-concept for the study of Orthodox monophonic chants as Extracurricular Activities (ECA) is proposed.

**The fourth chapter** "Experimental Study and Analysis of Results" outlines the functions of the experimental and control groups, traces the results of the stages "preliminary experiment", "formative experiment" and "control experiment", analyzes and summarizes the conclusions of the questionnaire-interview with controlling experts from different fields related to the problem. The expert opinions presented conclusively demonstrate the value of the elective subject initiated by Ilia Mihaylov and the fruitfulness of its educational format.

**Notes, recommendations and questions.** Being involved in the process of creating the dissertation text, I have already addressed most of my questions and recommendations to Ilia Mihaylov. He correctly took them into consideration, so there are none in relation to the final version. The only recommendation already made to him, which remains for the future, is that with certain structural changes this work be published and that knowledge of the musical culture of the East be expanded in it. Still, one question of mine remained, for the answer to which I waited until the end of the experiment: to what extent did the participating children have prior habits in the field of tempered singing, and did the new skills mastered affect them?

**Publications on the topic:** the publications presented by the PhD student on the topic have been published in reputable Bulgarian publications. They reflect his serious growth as a theoretician and researcher with deepening theoretical thinking and improving writing skills.

**Contributions.** The contributions mentioned by the PhD student correspond to the real situation. He adopts and convincingly develops the thesis of kinship between church and folklore singing patterns, defended by prof. Stoyan Djudjeff. The information on the music theory and aesthetics of the Middle Eastern cultures - terminology, sound order systems (modal), genres in Persian, Arabic and Turkish music, etc. - is beneficial for Bulgarian musicology.

His aspiration to broaden the intonational basis of Bulgarian music education through theoretical research and conducting activity is a contribution. Innovative and reflective of the spiritual "frequencies" of our time is the thesis defended that Eastern Orthodox music is the Bulgarian spiritual and musical share in world culture with identifying significance for us, that its study and performance based on authentic tradition should be restored to Bulgarian education after decades of conscious restrictions. In order to fill a real educational "niche" that has existed for decades, both in our Music curricula and in those of specialized schools of the arts, the doctoral candidate proposes a modern methodological model - the current cultural and musical-educational imperatives of our time are met with the means of modern technique and pedagogy.

**Personal impressions.** On this point of the review requirements, I would like to share that I associate the personality and work of Ilia Mihaylov with the concepts of "accuracy", "speed", "precision", "ethics", "professional dedication", manifested on the basis of musical professionalism, which he continuously builds upon. While working on his dissertation, he also achieved an accurate, analytical and scientifically correct style in his observations and conclusions.

**CONCLUSION:** I confidently declare a positive assessment of the dissertation work of Ilia Mihaylov, which responds to topical problems - socio-historical, cultural of national significance, religious, musical-educational, spiritual-educational and methodological, theoretical and practical, connected in a complex knot, the untangling of which is imperative. The valuable proposals in this work are the grounds for proposing to the esteemed jury to award the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Science to Ilia Zdravkov Mihaylov.

13. 10. 2023

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boryana Mangova