

## REVIEW

**By Prof. Dr. Atanas Atanasov**

**On the dissertation of Petya Vasileva Dimanova**

**„Rhythmics, music and sound picture as possible substitutes for a missing dramaturgical structure in non-verbal theater and performances based on non-theatrical text”**

**For awarding of PhD educational and scientific degree**

**NATFA “Kr. Sarafov”, Stage Arts Faculty, Stage Speech Department**

Petya Dimanova has a master’s degree in Percussion Instruments from the Academy of Music and has been a longtime vocal pedagogue at NATFA “Kr. Sarafov” /since 2009/.

For every active practitioner, her creative biography is enviable. She has dozens of participations in theater and film projects. She has worked as a composer, studio musician and performer at the Stars Company Music House, Milan.

She is a winner of prestigious awards and nominations from the Union of Bulgarian Composers, ASKEER Foundation and UBA.

The dissertation is 122 pages long and comprises an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, contributions and bibliography.

The introduction to the thesis provides detailed information about the general characteristics of the topic, the methodological basis, the empirical basis of the study and the practical significance of the results for building of an integral stage character.

As evidence to support the methodological research and her practical activity over the years, Petya Dimanova applies a detailed list of performances in which rhythmics, music and sound picture have complemented or fully replaced a serious dramatic basis. The performances in which the author’s rhythmics and vocal composition conceptually replace verbal theatric action have won prestigious awards and are one of the most significant achievements of theater in Bulgaria over the last decades.

In this sense, it is no chance that Petya Dimanova is a leading vocal pedagogue at the Theater Academy where she not only cultivates the voice and vocal technique of her students but also experiments with new, innovative approaches in the vocal, rhythm and sound training.

Our long-term cooperation in the work with the teams of my classes in Drama Theater Acting is marked by very good results and successful stage achievements. Along with the traditional musical “Class Evenings” performed in front of audience, the WE! Graduation performance was also realized which gave the graduates the opportunity to express the wide range of their vocal skills in their communication in which they themselves are authors of non-verbal dramaturgy in action.

I am adamant in my assertion that one of the great merits of practical pedagogic activity which is also reflected in the scientific thesis of Petya Dimanova, is the formation of skills and abilities to build a stage character through a vocal task. Something more – rhythmic and vocal exercises eliminate a large part of those psychophysical blockades the overcoming of which is a core issue in the first years of training in the major subject – Drama Theater Acting.

In the practical-methodological foundation of her work aimed at the detailed study of the functions of musical score in stage performance, modern achievements of cognitive and personal psychology have a leading role for Petya Dimanova. The author’s interest in these fundamental aspects of human knowledge is purposefully and effectively reflected in both the analytical part of the work and her role of a pedagogue at the NATFA “Kr. Sarafov”.

Knowledge of behavioral psychology of the group and the individual is especially valuable starting point in understanding the specific teacher-student relationship. This largely determines the pedagogue’s qualities and the mutual impact in communication during the years of study. The relation made on a personal, sensory level in which the particular behavioral features of the individual and their ability to be cultivated and professionally reconsidered are recognized, respected and appreciated is the best achievement of the pedagogue in the training in creative thinking and realization.

The training of students at the Theater Academy begins with and continues to be carried out for four years primarily through the Self of the individual. From “I in the circumstances offered” in the first stage attempts to the balanced duality “Subject-Character” in the graduation performances.

In their first mute sketches and exercises, our students outline the parameters of their:

1. Level of erudition.
2. Cultural interests and distinctions.
3. Social environment.
4. Priority interests and partialities.
5. Life experience.
6. Motivational abilities.
7. Personal and on-stage communication skills, etc.

The experience and the results achieved in Petya Dimanova's pedagogic work prove that she skillfully masters mechanisms of behavioral approach for creative influence in communicating with the students' unstable professionalism.

As a main specific quality in the practical work of Petya Dimanova, I highlight the following:

1. Personal approach to the audience, consistent with the potential abilities of the students. The model of such training is effective for motivational processes of the personality and achieves positive results in the stages of improving the skills and their upgrading.
2. Interrelation of the Vocal training with the study material in DTA, Stage Speech and Performing Arts. The effects of this strategic approach in teamwork form sustainable psychophysical training, mastery of the means of expression and skills for their complex exposure in various stage genres.

My observations on the practical pedagogic activity of Petya Dimanova are confirmed by the developed theoretical part in CHAPTER FOUR of her dissertation – Training Design. Furthermore, I find that with its length, analysis and findings, her work has also scientific value for the practical training in Acting where:

1. Rhythm is not a derivative of swiftness and speed but a meaningful stage action with a precise direction and a clear objective.
2. Sound is a means of influence equivalent to the power of speech.
3. Non-verbal communication triggers the creative imagination.

The author develops in detail the significance of the topic, the major objectives, the expected results and offers a detailed plan of the training modules. According to Petya Dimanova, "... the psychological interpretation of the theatrical and musical

methodology, the techniques, the tools and the procedures in the specific activity that is realized in successive processes plays a huge role” in the suggested methodology and methodological procedures.

For the overall perception, understanding and evaluation of her dissertation, the author relies on two factors – objective and subjective. On the one hand, the interpretation of the “sound-space” symbiosis through creativity and thought process, and on the other – “the internal relationship between the parameters of musical composition in general and our consciousness”.

I admire the main aspects of training and perceptions which are professed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four of the dissertation, and which are a creative creed in the practical activity of the author. I believe it to be one of the great merits of „Rhythmics, music and sound picture as possible substitutes for a missing dramaturgical structure in non-verbal theater and performances based on non-theatrical text”.

I realize that I devote the most part of my assessment of Petya Dimanova’s dissertation to my knowledge of her pedagogic experience. I am also aware that in my review, I do not adhere to a strict chronological analysis by following the succession of developed chapters and topics. However, I think it is fair to distance moderately from the high professional knowledge of the author in a field in which I am not directly involved, and to mention those most significant achievements of Petya Dimanova that has enriched our creative cooperation at the Theater Academy and our stage events with outer teams. In our joint professional projects, the specific “creative design” of Petya Dimanova has driven unsuspected acting manifestations.

In the first chapter of the dissertation – “Functions of Rhythm and Music in Non-theater Conventionality”, along with the fascinating tracing from the primitive origin of rhythm and pre-historic music to their transformation in an independent art and a convincing substitute for verbal theatrical action, the author draws a parallel between spatial aspects of music forms and theatrical action. The convincing analysis on the physical and conditional-temporal space theoretically proves Petya Dimanova’s experience in structuring of a polyphonic stage expression. In “Space and Image in Music” part of the first chapter, the statement “In fact, music is not determine by whole numbers but by proportional relations which set overall musical depiction of the world by analogy”, is in absolute sync

with the ambition and capabilities of theatrical “character-action” to present its views on the “life of human spirit” in time and space.

I am not an upholder of K.S.Stanislavski’s statement on this occasion: “How difficult it is to do this without mise-en-scene, objects and furniture on which the actor can rely or lean or gather a group around them”. From my professional practical experience accumulated over years, and applying interdisciplinary methods in training at NATFA “Kr. Sarafov”, I can firmly state that in many cases, the mastered rhythmic score and sound in exposure of the stage character produce not a superficial and banal stage character but a spirit of a unique human essence.

The accents in Petya Dimanova’s dissertation are clearly stated in its title: Rhythmics, music and sound picture as possible substitutes for a missing dramaturgical structure in non-verbal theater and performances based on non-theatrical text. I find it appropriate to add that in fact the work goes beyond the particular task the author set to herself. The presented material gives opportunity for a new meaning and unconventional analysis of dramatic texts. The author’s practical experience and her participation in teams where the leading staging and conceptual principle is the verbal scenic communication, gives me reason to express a wish for the examples in which music is an equal partner of the verbal theatrical act, to be also present in the author’s work. I believe this will enrich the impressions of the methodological “design” of her creative work.

The starting point in the Second Chapter of the dissertation: Functions of Theatrical Music in the Performance, is the analysis of the conditional and non-conditional concepts “Theater” and “Music”, their dependence on public perception, evaluation and impact. Petya Dimanova convincingly distinguishes the essence of the two performing arts. For her:

1. „The abstract world of theater has always been evaluated in connection to the real world. Viewers use the same senses in their assessment of the unreal world which they would use in assessing the real world... The audience should believe in the logic and integrity of the presented world, otherwise it simply stops experiencing the events as theater.”
2. „It /Music/ only happens as an exception in the real world. It is not from the world, instead it interrupts the world, imposes demands on the world and creates conditions or zones of exceptions, providing listeners with the chance to (partially) leave the real world. It opens portals because it is connected to the world through analogy and metaphor.“

For Petya Dimanova, the discrepancy and paradoxical logic of relation between Theater and Music is their dramaturgical duality and spectators' assessment on the context of the active score. Its driver is the sound and its tempo-rhythmic indicators where the rhythm of the narrated story is directly dependent on the rhythm set by the narrator. The main components in mastering this complex, practically feasible structure are the melody of individual words and word groups, the breath of voice, the inherent capabilities, the range, the timbre, the volitional efforts in articulating and modulating sounds.

At the end of my review, I would like to get back to Chapter Three and Chapter Four of Petya Dimanova's dissertation. While the fourth chapter is fixed on the detailed training design, duration and specifics of educational modules, Chapter Three reveals the specifics of pedagogic methodology and the aspects focused by the main goal. According to the author, it is a revelation of the hidden essence, the psychological self of the subject. From the point of view of my professional experience, I find that the evidential theses in this part of the dissertation are magnificently developed in some of the separate parts: Practical Training of the Actor, Voice Psychology, The Habit as a Psychological Concept, Phase-Hypnotic Conditions, and The Will Factor.

With its integrity, development and possibilities for practical application, Chapter Three is an example of direct connection and interaction with acting training. The conclusions in it definitely outline successful positioning of stage character in:

- „Extending the scope of presence.“
- „Fixing and shifting the suggestion point.“
- „Carrying out a theatrical image through singing.“

The “Rhythmics, music and sound picture as possible substitutes for a missing dramaturgical structure in non-verbal theater and performances based on non-theatrical text” dissertation is a reflection of Petya Dimanova's rich practical experience in structuring a conceptual and multilayered sound-rhythmic scenic image. A factor for the qualities and the success of the theoretical defense is the bibliography used and the impressive number of multilingual sources. The quality of the work is in its relevance and broad-scale comparative analysis of methodological models “presenting the typology of the actor's personality” through the self of its subject.

I assess the scientific contributions written by the author, as comprehensive and objective.

The qualities of the proposed dissertation give me a definite reason to recommend to the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree PhD to Petya Dimanova.

I vote “YES”.

Prof. PhD Atanas Atanasov