

OPINION

from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boryana Mangova,
Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
regarding the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching (Methodology of Music Education)
on the doctoral dissertation of Evgenia Petrova Vitanova, doctoral student at the Department
of Music and Multimedia Technologies, Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment
Ohridski"
on the topic: "Specifics of Working with Children's Musicals in Preschool Groups in
Kindergarten"
Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ganka Nedelcheva

General Presentation of the Candidate:

Doctoral student Evgenia Vitanova has obtained systematic music education in various complementary fields: classical singing and piano at the National School of Music "Prof. Dobri Hristov" – Varna, a bachelor's degree in the Vocal Faculty and Conducting Faculty at the National Academy of Music "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov," and a master's degree in various pedagogical specialties at Shumen University "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski" and Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." Her pedagogical experience, as outlined in her CV, shows that she has professionally developed her qualifications with a focus on teaching – piano in Korea, solfeggio in Sofia, music in private and public kindergartens in Sofia, and currently in the innovative 54th School "St. John of Rila." She also shows interest in music education for children with special educational needs (SEN).

Relevance of the Topic:

The initiative for children's musical-theatrical performances in Bulgarian general education schools dates back to the beginning of the last century, with proven activating, educational, and educational impacts. Today, it appears sporadically, limited, and awaiting relevant solutions for the modern times. Establishing musical theater skills and habits in children as early as the preschool stage (kindergarten) is a relatively new aspect of this educational tradition, emerging from the last decade of the 20th century onwards, as noted by Evgenia Vitanova on p.12 of her work. The doctoral dissertation of Evgenia Vitanova addresses these significant questions for contemporary Bulgarian education with competent professional ideas from both pedagogical and musical perspectives.

Structure of the Dissertation:

The dissertation text comprises 165 pages and is structured into an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and three appendices. The bibliography includes 24 book sources in Cyrillic and 22 internet sources.

Introduction of the Dissertation: The introduction outlines the motivation, goals, tasks, subject, and object of the research, as well as the working hypothesis.

Chapter One distinguishes and examines the musical in its various forms:

- **As an entertaining genre for adults**, in its historical development on the theatrical stage and beyond – on the movie screen;
- **Children's musicals**, with similar characteristics but appropriate themes for their age. Special attention is given to the Bulgarian contemporary children's musical from the last three decades. Different varieties are distinguished, existing in musical creativity, recording production, and performances for children – “musical fairy tales” and “listening fairy tales” as potential bases for transformation into the new genre;
- **Musicals for kindergartens**. The author strives to formulate the parameters and specific forms of this new genre: "It carries the stylistic characteristics of a children's musical but is adapted to the organization of the school day in the kindergarten, close to the organization and worldview of 5-6-year-old children" (p. 18). The genre created by E. Vitanova is built upon the children's musical through the transformation of original works by established composers, to which various musical, textual, theatrical, and other elements are added, considering the children's age characteristics, their individual musical abilities, and the mandatory curriculum for kindergarten preparatory groups. This enhances the attractiveness of the performance and allows all children to participate. The doctoral candidate rejects the idea of staging children's musicals in private kindergartens and highlights the specific organizational challenges within them, concluding that "a multi-component rehearsal process for children's musicals under these circumstances is impossible" (p. 21). The conditions for staging children's musicals are also discussed at the level of primary education.

Chapter Two reviews the stages of working on staging a musical for kindergarten and proposes "a completed structure of the rehearsal process and guidelines for overcoming challenges within it" (p. 43). Each stage is meticulously tracked; all components are carefully thought out. Potential difficulties and problematic situations are anticipated, demonstrating the candidate's acquired insights and experience, which form the basis for the solutions found. The presentation of the staging, directing, and sound directing activities is carried out with imagination. It remains unclear whether all the stage techniques, such as "live wall" and "swinging cloak," are borrowed from established theatrical practices or are original creations by the doctoral candidate.

Chapter Three examines the functions of children's musical instruments, the possibilities for making costumes and sets for staging musicals in kindergartens. A detailed classification of children's musical instruments suitable for use in musicals is provided – Bulgarian folk musical toys, traditional, and non-traditional children's musical instruments. The author refers to "non-traditional" instruments as "those not popular in Bulgaria," dividing them into "European" and "Far Eastern." The proposed classification of non-traditional children's instruments is identified as a contribution of the dissertation. At the conference paper titled "The Kindergarten – A Musical Stage with Participation of Traditional and Non-Traditional Musical Instruments," during the Jubilee Scientific Conference "30 Years of the Music Speciality at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski," E. Vitanova demonstrated a rich collection of traditional and non-traditional children's instruments with different ethnic backgrounds – instrument toys that undoubtedly stimulate the interest, imagination, and activity of children.

Chapter Four presents the pedagogical experiment conducted by the doctoral candidate in the preparatory group of a kindergarten, applying her original methodological model and "with the necessary diagnostic tools" (p. 103). The musical "The Missing Martenitsa" was performed in both an experimental and a control group.

In three phases, systematically, consistently, and methodically, the children were introduced to the essence of the new activity. Conversations with them, a survey of the parents, and engaging diagnostic "procedures" (e.g., cards with images, picture tests, etc.) indicated the children's readiness to participate in the musical. Simultaneously, the songs from the musical were learned.

Contributions of the Dissertation:

- The state of children's musical-stage genres in Bulgaria over the last three decades is reflected, with terminological and systematic distinctions of the genre varieties.
- The stages of staging a musical in preschool education are logically and consistently outlined.
- Competence is demonstrated regarding the working conditions in municipal and private kindergartens, state educational requirements, and the specific characteristics of children at this age. The possibilities or obstacles for practical realization of children's musical theater in preschool education are recognized.
- The conducted experiment combines already accepted contemporary methods for working with children with the doctoral candidate's creative ideas and productions.
- The derived results convincingly prove the working hypothesis.
- Designed as a methodological guide for teachers and music teachers across various educational levels in general and specialized schools, as well as for leaders of musical and theatrical formations, the text includes many recommendations, predictions about periods and stages, possible changes, children's reactions, etc.
- The contribution points mentioned by the doctoral candidate correctly correspond to the results achieved in the work.

Question: Among the instruments listed in the appendix, we see samples from Africa and South America. However, the reference to the term "Far East" shows that it includes only Asian countries. Does the doctoral candidate intend to expand her classification to include instruments from other continents?

The **abstract** of the presented dissertation corresponds to its text and meets the requirements for such.

Recommendations:

- Despite the doctoral candidate's good knowledge of the state of children's musical-theatrical productions in Bulgaria, familiarity with international research would undoubtedly expand her ideas for work.

–At the time when Maestro Georgi Atanasov was creating the mentioned children's operettas, many other works emerged, notably those of Panayot Pipkov. Their staging in so-called "musical bouquets" and in schools became "fashionable," as noted by Prof. Romyana Karakostova (see "Children's Operetta in Bulgaria. Repertoire Catalog 1906 – 1954," Bulgarian Musicology Journal, 2002, No. 2). It would be advisable to fill the chronological gap up to the works of Parashkev Hadzhiev, even if briefly.

–The comparison between operetta and musical is not entirely convincing. What theoretical and reference sources were used to derive some of the claims? Such are not found in the cited literature.

–The proposed original model requires the development of other supporting materials, as some of the activities included require specialized knowledge and skills that exceed those of ordinary teachers and music teachers.

Despite the recommendations for certain corrections and additions, primarily in the historical-theoretical overview of the musical genre, Evgenia Vitanova's dissertation contains many valuable observations, conclusions, and ideas for musical-theatrical performances in kindergartens. Evidently, the doctoral candidate has filled her pedagogical experience (slightly more than a decade) with active engagement, a lively interest in child psychology, and creativity in various complementary artistic activities. The planned "Methodical Guide" and other accompanying creative products that Evgenia Vitanova could publish based on the methodological model presented in her dissertation would greatly serve the wide range of recipients she mentions (see p. 6). The high practical-applied value of the dissertation is a basis for a positive assessment, and I confidently propose that the esteemed jury award Evgenia Vitanova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor."

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