

OPINION

From Prof. Dr. Veneta Doycheva Ivanova, NATFA "Kr. Sarafov" Field of Higher Education: Arts, specialty 8.4. Theater and Film Arts Scientific Specialty: "Theater Studies and Theater Art"

For obtaining the academic degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies Doctoral program "Culturology" (Cultural Relations between Science and the Arts. Scientific Theater as an Intersection of Science, Art, and Education) With the candidate:

Gergana Yuliyanova Dimitrova And the dissertation: "Exploring the Potential of Sofia University to Create a Center for Scientific Theater"

Gergana Dimitrova's dissertation is a rare example of research on an entirely new and unexplored practice in Bulgaria. The phenomenon under analysis is scientific theater as an element in contemporary cultural and academic life. The author approaches the subject motivated by several equally significant reasons. She herself is an established creator in the field of theater, working in various aesthetics that are more alternative to the classical theatrical process. Her biography as a director and producer is extremely rich and impressive. Her work includes translations from German of numerous contemporary German plays, as well as influential theater studies. She is well acquainted with and actively participates in the contemporary European network for the exchange of ideas in the independent theater sector. All this provides a solid foundation for her theatrical competence, acquired in authoritative academic schools in Bulgaria and Germany. Due to the unconventional theatrical activities she implements (readings, performance-lectures, installations, interactive performative events, dance performances), her interest is directed towards scientific theater. This is the theatrical motivation of the research. Gergana Dimitrova's serious attitude towards the potential of theater to provoke debates and reflections, as well as to discover ways of connecting with the audience, piqued her curiosity towards this new manifestation of theater. Today, science is attractive, provocative, and intriguing to more and more people, and theater can be a bridge to expanding the audience that approaches the achievements and challenges of contemporary science.

The dissertation offers the first academic steps in understanding the phenomenon of scientific theater. The structure of the work is oriented towards presenting this form and providing arguments for its development in Bulgaria. Even the basic condition – the definition of scientific theater – turns out to be still unstable. The author offers her own definition of this type of theater and argues for it. This is undoubtedly one of the contributions of the dissertation. In this regard, the research demonstrates G. Dimitrova's theatrical culture and systematizes manifestations of the intersection between science and theatrical art in a historical-typological perspective. Here are some of the strong arguments in favor

of creating a Center for Scientific Theater at Sofia University. Knowledge, objectivity, the social impact of science, and the moral dimensions of revolutionary discoveries in various fields – these issues are highlighted as topics with high tension to which theater has historically been committed. The experience of the drama in scientific exploration is the subject of plays and stage works. Besides this more traditional form, the practices of interdisciplinary productions are also presented, reaching a point where not only the arts penetrate each other but also meet science in various projects. The last element of this chain of collaboration is the contemporary university, entrusted with the mission of working and reaching a broad social environment.

Respect for science as a value that should be shared in the most impactful way – this is the leading line in the dissertation. The author identifies forms of scientific theater such as performance-lecture, installation, classic dramatic theater production based on a text in which scientists participate in various forms, scientific show, scientific stand-up.

The ambition stated in the title of the dissertation – to determine the potential of Sofia University for creating a center for scientific theater – defines the next stages. The research studies existing practices in Europe (Germany, UK, Austria, Italy) and presents various interdisciplinary centers working in this field in a concise but sufficiently specific manner. In these pages, the balance between a look at creative activity, management, and audience impact is convincingly achieved. The search for functional models in this pioneering endeavor reveals diverse approaches that are understood with the idea of their productive adaptation to the Bulgarian context. The author highlights the sciences that most often collaborate with various arts (natural sciences, high-tech research, biology, ecology, and design, graffiti art, dance, literature, puppet theater, etc.). All these centers, initiatives, and programs are noted as being associated with some university institution that supports, initiates, and provokes interest in science and art.

A central part of the dissertation is the sections related to the Bulgarian line in the synthesis between science and arts, particularly science and theater. In these pages, impressive volumes of information are collected and organized. Here, the dissertation acquires the characteristics of a historicizing study and convinces us that a wide spectrum of artists and organizations work successfully in this field. In addition to being a historian of the latest artistic initiatives, the author is also an artist with a long biography in this direction (her most important projects are related to the organization "36 Monkeys"). For the purposes of the dissertation, she creates the project "In the Small Big World of Bats" (2019, a collaboration between Gergana Dimitrova (director, author, producer, artistic director of Organization "36 Monkeys") and Antonia Hubancheva (ecologist, bat researcher, associate at BAS, member of the Bat Research and Protection Center, doctoral student in sensory ecology at the Max

Planck Institute for Ornithology, Germany, and BAS, science communicator). They also worked together on their previous project "Eva Bechstein – The Night of the Bats" (2009). The project is presented objectively, but the focus is on understanding the successful and problematic aspects from a theatrical and scientific perspective. The author's ongoing effort to achieve an artistic fact that excites, impacts, and engages audiences is expressed, if not explicitly stated. The discussion about bats, involving scientists from various fields (natural and humanities), is an interesting addition to the project.

The last part of the research is an attempt to understand the effect of scientific theater on audiences. The interdisciplinary approach here is successfully applied, combining sociology, field observation, hypothesis testing, and conclusions.

The solid research work is the basis for creating a proposal-model for a new structure "Center for Scientific Theater." All aspects of the creation and functioning of such a structure have been considered, and the conclusion is that Sofia University is the most appropriate place for this. In this part, the research takes on the character of a presentation of a project for activities in the field of cultural policy, critically weighing all organizational, financial, managerial, creative, and receptive issues. For the purposes of the dissertation, in-depth interviews were conducted with figures from the university who would have a decisive say in the future endeavor (former and current rectors, heads of the University Theater "Alma Alter" and the Cultural Center at Sofia University). The conclusion that follows is a realistic highlighting of the existing opportunities for funding (very limited) and steps for intelligent lobbying in favor of the idea.

In conclusion, the dissertation outlines an interdisciplinary study of a new and unexplored problem (both internationally and nationally). Approaches from cultural studies, theater history, contemporary stage practices, cultural management, and cultural forecasting are skillfully combined. The author masters the art of theater as a profession (director and manager), works in-depth with the logics of cultural production, and has a sense for the new – scientific theater in Bulgaria, which she realizes.

Not only the unexplored subject matter gives reason to establish the contributory character of the dissertation. The synthesis between academic methods and the freedom of creative thinking, combined with high theatrical culture and personal artistic realization, have contributed to the result.

The author has publications on the subject and participates in various forums at home and abroad. The overall composition of the dissertation (main text of 214 pages with integrated 42 images and 24 graphics, bibliography in several languages, appendices (195 pages), and the abstract) meets all academic requirements.

The dissertation is undoubtedly an entirely original work with a contributory character.

I express the opinion that Gergana Dimitrova should be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor." I vote YES.

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