REVIEW

of a dissertation for awarding

the educational and scientific degree "Doctor",

professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art",

doctoral program "Choreography"

Author: Teodora Marincheva Staneva – Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar", Department of Arts. Independent doctoral student.
Scientific Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Ivaylo Ivanov, PhD
Reviewer: Prof. Mariya Kardzhieva, PhD - Varna free university "Chernorizets Hrabar"

The review has been prepared on the basis of Order No. 598 dated September 29, 2026, issued by the Rector of Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar" regarding the approval of the composition of the scientific jury and the materials submitted by the doctoral student: dissertation, abstract, CV, contributions, and three author publications on the topic.

The dissertation has a volume of 484 pages. It consists of an introduction (9 pp.), three chapters (248 pp.), a conclusion (12 pp.), contributions (4 pp.), references (16 pp.) – 139 titles in Bulgarian, Russian, and English, 24 internet sources, and 19 appendices (196 pp.).

The life and professional path of Teodora Staneva is fundamentally connected with dance art across its three dimensions: as a performer, creator, and pedagogue. Her dedication and striving for perfection inevitably led her to the dance halls of secondary dance education, specifically the Secondary School for Humanities and Arts "Konstantin Preslavsky" – Varna, where she has applied her accumulated practical experience and successfully experimented creatively. Testimony to her achievements are the awards received (indicated in the CV) and the successes of her

students, who are currently students at Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar" majoring in "Choreography". The work on the presented dissertation is largely conditioned by the aforementioned factors.

The author has built a sound structure for the dissertation. The object, subject, and goal have been clearly formulated in accordance with the set research problem and the derived author's thesis. Ten tasks related to deriving and developing the set goal have been outlined.

According to the text presented in the introduction regarding the topicality of the researched problem, four directions stand out: 1) regulatory and legal framework; 2) methodological aspect; 3) international experience, and 4) strategic priorities. The topicality is determined by the absence of research judgments on the studied issues in the field of "Modern Dance" education.

The selected qualitative toolkit in the research methodology is tailored to the specifics of the dissertation and described in detail. Limitations in the development of the research have also been outlined.

Chapter One, "Creation and Introduction of Dance Subjects from the Specialty 'Modern Dance': Theoretical and Practical Foundations", reasonably begins with the development of Paragraph 1.1. Historical aspects in the development of modern dance and prerequisites for its introduction into the education system. Delsarte's influence on the pioneers of modern dance. The text presented here has fundamental value for the development of the research. Succinctly, which is entirely sufficient, the prerequisites for the emergence of modern dance are outlined, as well as the names that gave impetus to its spread in America and Europe. The rest of the paragraph is dedicated to the work and personality of François Delsarte – the essence of his theory based on two main principles: the Law of Correspondence (the relationship between the inner mental world and outer bodily expression) and the Law of Trinity (mental, spiritual-emotional, and physical centers); the spread and

phases of "American Delsartism" (Steele MacKaye, Genevieve Stebbins, and Henrietta Hovey); and the schools that followed Delsarte's ideology are presented. Figure 1 (Block diagram of François Delsarte's influence on page 42) complements the text. Exceptionally useful is the text on pages 43–44 – key conclusions, not only for the paragraph, but for the entire study.

The exposition in Paragraph 1.2. Essence of the basic techniques embedded in dance education from a global perspective details and analyzes the three main foundations in the development of modern dance technique – Martha Graham, José Limón, and Lester Horton. The exposition includes biographical data, a professional presentation of the specific concept in perfecting dance technique, the created dance schools and followers, specific methodologies/pedagogical approaches, and art criticism opinions. Specifics related to this statement are as follows: 1) Martha Graham, her philosophy of building modern dance as a way of life, psychology, and physiology, as the author points out on page 60: "... one of the most significant and fundamental systems in the development of modern dance in the 20th century. Built upon the principles of 'contraction and release', breathing, working with the center of the body, and interaction with gravity, she creates a new approach to movement as a means of psychological, emotional, and spiritual expression." 2) José Limón's work is examined precisely and professionally in all aspects without omitting details. Art criticism opinions are cited that deeply highlight his contribution to the perfection of modern dance technique: page 68: "Limón's style stems from his own rediscovery of dance as a deeply personal and emotional process. He surrenders entirely to movement without submitting to pre-imposed notions of form or external aesthetics. Combining exceptional physical control with powerful emotional expressiveness, Limón expands the possibilities of male dance and creates a new understanding of its power, plasticity, and artistic range." 3) Lester Horton is

presented as the creator of a complex and consistent methodology that remains one of the main pillars in professional contemporary dance training today.

In Paragraph 1.3. Global dance education and theoretical approaches for creating methodological foundations for teaching dance subjects of the "Modern Dance" specialty in high school, Teodora Staneva presents an in-depth and theoretically grounded overview of the historical processes that led to the formation of contemporary dance art and education. She successfully traces the line from European ballet masters and the Russian school to American modern dance pioneers and postmodern experiments. It is impressive that the text has a practical-applied orientation toward high school teaching methodology and the social role of dance, which “possesses significant potential to support social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and personal development.” Four independent thematic-chronological periods of modern dance are systematized in a table, supplementing the scientific value of the work.

Chapter Two, entitled “Methodological foundations for creating optimal conditions for organizing, teaching, and improving dance subjects of the 'Modern Dance' specialty in high school”, begins with the unfolding of the exposition in Paragraph 2.1. Methodological and institutional foundations of dance education in the USA. The text details the stages in the institutionalization of dance education, the figures who exerted influence on the formation of the first curricula/teaching philosophy, and the support provided at state and associative levels. The author successfully brings out the role of NDEO standards and federal policies that transformed dance from a part of physical education into an independent artistic discipline. The exposition concludes with a valuable methodological conclusion on how this rich experience should be critically adapted to the Bulgarian educational context and state standards without mechanical copying.

Paragraph 2.2. Methodological foundations and theoretical approaches to teaching modern and contemporary dance: The Russian educational model and its applicability in the Bulgarian system of secondary vocational dance education emphasizes the historical connection and Russian influence on Bulgarian dance education. The next issue addressed concerns the terminological ambiguity in defining "contemporary dance" in Russian choreographic pedagogy. Key Russian manuals and the structure of a five-year curriculum are reviewed. It is noted that this experience is also useful for application in creating a Bulgarian model.

Paragraph 2.3. Historical aspect and prerequisites for establishing the specialty "Modern Dance" in high school in the context of the Bulgarian educational system chronologically directs attention to the Bulgarian paradigm in education in the field of modern dance. The text is rich in data and facts, citations, press excerpts, and interviews that add weight to the work and enhance its dissertation-grade quality.

The practical-applied focus of the research is developed in **Chapter Three**, “Organization, teaching, and improvement of dance subjects of the 'Modern Dance' specialty at the Secondary School for Humanities and Arts 'Konstantin Preslavsky' – Varna”.

Paragraph 3.1. Concept of the notion "Modern Dance school subject" in secondary education. The text in this part holds high scientific value. Unlike previous sections, here Teodora Staneva transitions from a purely descriptive or factual review to conceptual and terminological analysis. Clear "working definitions" and systematized conclusions are derived. The distinction made between the concepts of "modern" and "contemporary" dance is useful, overcoming "frequent merging and chaos in practice." The author proves that continuity between them plays an important role in successfully building a curriculum. The research in this paragraph demonstrates deep knowledge of the author's choreographic

pedagogical practice and makes it realistically applicable in preparing curricula in accordance with state requirements.

In Paragraph 3.2. Regulatory analysis and conceptual model for training in the profession of "Dancer", specialty "Modern Dance" at the SSHHA "Konstantin Preslavsky" – Varna, the model proposed by the doctoral student impresses with its depth, systematic nature, and exceptional precision in combining the strict regulatory framework of Bulgarian education with the specifics of contemporary dance art. The strongest side of the concept is the way it resolves the conflict between academic standardization at school and the nature of modern dance, which by its very nature is exploratory, variable, and free. Introducing a balance between a mandatory and a elective core allows for the preservation of state requirements without killing the creative individuality of the student. A very valuable aspect is the clear distinction between historical author techniques (Graham, Humphrey, Limón, etc.) and contemporary dance techniques. This clears up a long-standing terminological confusion in the educational environment in Bulgaria and provides a solid foundation for curriculum design and objective assessment. The choice to analyze and defend the model with extended foreign language study (B4) is strategically mature. Although the slow start in the 8th grade seems challenging due to the lack of vocational subjects in the mandatory general plan, the author skillfully turns it into an advantage – language training becomes a tool for access to global sources and an international environment, while compensatory mechanisms and entry diagnostics in the 10th grade guarantee catching up. Training is not presented as a mechanical collection of hours, but as a five-year vertical process in which theory, practice, repertoire, improvisation, and stage behavior interact continuously. The spiral approach guarantees that basic principles (breathing, weight, center) build logically, and the multi-component assessment system accounts for both technical results and bodily awareness and team responsibility.

Paragraph 3.3. Conceptual model for the structure, content, and interrelationships between school subjects in the profession of "Dancer, specialty "Modern Dance" at the SSHHA "Konstantin Preslavsky" – Varna. Curriculum analysis represents an exhaustive unfolding of curricula by grades and disciplines, detailing: 1) the scheme of interrelationships between all special subjects (from history and theory through exercises to ensemble and practical training); 2) distribution by grades (8th to 12th grade) and how leading techniques change over years – for instance, how basic movement culture is built in the 8th grade, Cunningham is included in the 9th grade, Limón-Humphrey and jazz dance in the 10th grade, Release technique in the 11th grade, and integration and Bulgarian dance history are studied in the 12th grade; 3) an overview of the content of the subject "Dance Theory and Methodology" (including Laban analysis, German expressive dance, American postmodernism, and contact improvisation); 4) classical exercise and jazz dance as supporting academic foundations, presented through comparative tables and specific methodological tasks.

It should be summarized that Paragraph 3.2 sets the legal and organizational foundations of the model, while Paragraph 3.3 provides the full internal content, methodology, and academic interrelationships between the curricula themselves.

Based on the analyses performed, each chapter concludes with a Conclusion, which essentially serves as a summary or conclusions to the exposition.

The study’s Conclusion (8 pp.) successfully synthesizes both the theoretical postulates and the practical results of the dissertation.

I accept the scientifically structured and formulated contributions as presented.

Three publications reflecting parts of the dissertation topic have been presented.

I believe that the abstract provides information on all parts of the dissertation.

The materials reviewed in the appendices prove the complete approbation and applicability of the proposed pedagogical system in a real school environment.

In conclusion, I believe that Teodora Marincheva Staneva's dissertation "**Development of Modern Dance in the Secondary Education System**" represents an in-depth study combining theoretical precision with a pragmatic focus in a real school environment. The developed concept is the product of the doctoral student's long-standing pedagogical practice, which has transformed into a living model for contemporary choreographic education. The created and approbated academic product possesses high scientific value and practical-applied character, which not only fills a serious gap in Bulgarian vocational dance training following the introduction of the new Law on Preschool and School Education, but also provides a ready, working tool for the development of the "Modern Dance" specialty in secondary arts schools.

The above provides grounds for me to give my positive evaluation of the researched topic and to propose that the Scientific Jury award Teodora Marincheva Staneva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", doctoral program "Choreography".

October 29, 2026

Reviewer: Prof. Mariya Kardzhieva, PhD