

up for the musical performance and the three scholarly presentations. The Director of the Center Harry J. Psomiades welcomed the audience to the symposium. Gail Holst-Warhaft read in Greek and in English a letter from Mikis Theodorakis. Grigoris Maninakis was the artistic director and vocalist for the event. He and his band, Marios Charalambous (bouzouki), Kyriakos Hadjittofis (guitar), Glafkos Kontemeniotis (piano) and Claudia Tseng (flute), performed many of Theodorakis' best-loved songs. Professors Spyros D. Orfanos, Nicos Alexiou, and Gail Holst-Warhaft presented short papers discussing the life history, politics, and music of the composer. The Theodorakis letter and the two papers by Holst-Warhaft and Orfanos that follow may give the reader a feel of the musical celebration held on the second day in May of 1999. We recall, however, Plato's words, "All this is a prelude to the song itself which must be learned."

## *From Epitafios to Antigone : Theodorakis's Musical Circle*

GAIL HOLST-WARHAFT

In the late 1950's, Greek artist and intellectuals, especially but not exclusively those on the left, felt they had a mission. The country was slowly recovering economically from the devastating effects of the war and the Civil War, but the deep political divisions between Right and Left were reinforced by the chasm that existed between intellectuals and the ordinary people of Greece. During the years in which artists had been forced by circumstances to fight shoulder to shoulder with Greek peasants and later share the privations of prison camp with them, some had understood not only that the chasm existed, but that the ordinary Greek people had resources, in particular musical and poetic resources, that they, as bourgeois Greeks, had never suspected. It was on the island of Ikaria, in 1947, that Theodorakis first listened attentively to the *rebetika* songs of the urban working class. He had been born into a middle class household where such music was not encouraged. On Ikaria he realized that not only were many of the *rebetika* songs musically interesting, but they spoke to the very Greeks that he and his fellow artists wished to reach out to. Soon he began notating the melodies of the songs, eager to use them as the raw material of a new sort of popular music, one that would cross boundaries of class and education and appeal to all Greeks.

Theodorakis and his fellow composer Manos Hadzidakis were the leaders of what was to become a most extraordinary experiment in popular music. There are many cultures in which popular

music, often the music of a despised or rejected subgroup (the gypsies of Andalusia, the slum-dwelling tough guys of Buenos Aires, the *rebetes* of Piraeus) has been appreciated and adopted by a middle class audience and eventually transformed into commercial popular music. What began in Greece in the late 1950's and continued into the 1970's was something quite different. It was a conscious attempt to provide the Greek people, exhausted and demoralized as they were by years of suffering, with a new sort of music. The elements of the music would be familiar to them, consciously related to the popular working class music of the day, but the words would be drawn from the leading poets of modern Greece. The combination of music that would expand and transcend the popular songs on which it was based, and the poetry of Greece's leading poets: Yiannis Ritsos, George Seferis, Odysseas Elytis and Nikos Gatsos among them, would elevate Greek music to a level that would inspire a generation.

It was a bold experiment. What is miraculous is that it worked. For more than two decades Greek popular music was a unique blend of the popular and the elite, of high and low culture. And it did inspire a generation of Greeks – even a few non-Greeks – to think that music and poetry, stirred in the right pot, could transform the world. For it to be successful, though, the pot had to be right. It had to be a *kapnismeno tsoukali*.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the pot itself had to be a traditional one and certain ingredients had to be in it already. First, you had to have a traditional body of music, a shared musical heritage to build on. Moreover, you had to have a culture in which music and poetry were already linked. Modern Greek poetry had begun with song, not only with the sung poetry of the oral tradition (the *dimotika*) but with poets like Solomos, Kalvos, Palamas and Sikelianos looking to that rich tradition for models as they began to write poetry for the first time in the spoken language of modern Greece. And in spite of the gulf that divided uneducated Greeks from the bourgeoisie, a deep respect for folk song was common to both. The music and poetry of the Orthodox Church was another common element that united Greeks of all classes, whether they were believers or not and reinforced the inter-connectedness of poetry and music. When Theodorakis set Elytis's *Axion Esti* to music, for example, there was a whole

reservoir of musical resources available to him, sounds and melodies that already resonated through the texts with its myriad ecclesiastical, folk and urban popular musical associations

Another factor that contributed to the success of this musical outpouring was that the political situation of Greece during the period when it took place was volatile and passionate. People wanted to believe; they needed hope. Between 1952 and 1964 there were six parliamentary elections. American intervention in Greek affairs was open and resented. Many of Greece's intellectuals and artists as well as thousands of Greeks who had fought in the resistance to the Germans and continued to be loyal to the Left were still on prison islands, in exile, or in physical danger. Grigoris Lambrakis, one of the most outstanding and moderate figures on the Left, was murdered by thugs who were found to be in the pay of the police, the army and perhaps even of the government. There was a movement on the island of Cyprus for union with Greece. It was, as Dickens said of late eighteenth century France, the best of times and the worst of times. After the destruction and famine of the war, the violence and disillusionment of the Civil War, it did, at least, give Greeks the illusion of hope. Men of vision and talent, almost all of them inspired by some form of socialist idealism, believed that art could give Greece a new direction.

There was one ingredient in this marriage of high and low art that had very little to do with the circumstances of those years in Greece. Mikis Theodorakis was a uniquely gifted composer. He was able to draw on the strengths of a group of brilliant contemporaries and inspire composers around him, drawing from them works they might never otherwise have composed. The Greece Theodorakis grew up in was one in which poetry was at a high point. The two Nobel Prize-winners, Seferis and Elytis, were representative of a remarkable literary awakening that could not fail to inspire artists in other fields. Theodorakis was not alone in sensing the possibilities of setting modern Greek poetry to music. His contemporary Manos Hadzidakis and other composers of popular song were excited by the outpouring of poetry around them. Nor was he alone in recognizing the strengths of his country's traditional musical resources, but he was and is a singular phenomenon in Greek music because of his apparently inexhaustible fund of

melodic inspiration and his ability to exploit the resources of European classical music as well as Greek.

Whatever the reception of his later works, classical or popular, Theodorakis will probably remain known, within his own country, as the composer of a large number of hauntingly beautiful songs, most of them written in the early and mid 1960's. Even these songs are not all as well known as they deserve to be. Take the songs of the *Epitafios* cycle, for example, songs that gave Theodorakis instant fame and changed the course of Greek music forever. What makes the songs so appealing is that like so much of the best innovative art, they are firmly grounded in tradition. Their originality lies in the juxtaposition of that tradition with the unexpected. The new only shocks in context. This applies as much to Ritsos's verse as it does to Theodorakis's setting and his choice of interpreters. It is interesting to compare the notes of the poet and of the composer of *Epitafios*. Ritsos took his inspiration from the sounds and songs of his childhood. "I had only to listen to the voices of my childhood to write [the poem]. My feelings, my acoustic foundations came from the people...they came from inside me. I sang them. I'd listened to them since I was a child."<sup>2</sup> Growing up in Monemvasia, the poet claimed that the biggest influences of his childhood were the music of the Orthodox Church and of folk songs. The composer, on the other hand found himself sitting in his car outside a Parisian shop in the rain, waiting for his wife to return with the groceries and was overwhelmed by what he read on the page. Immediately he took out a pencil and began scribbling notes in the margins. Like the poet, Theodorakis relied on the acoustic resources of his childhood to set Ritsos' words to music, taking his inspiration from the traditional cadences to Ritsos's verses and the symbolic associations of the subject matter and cobbling together melodic fragments from a Cretan *rizitiko*, a Byzantine hymn or a *rebetiko* song.<sup>3</sup>

Poet and composer both may have turned to traditional resources, but the subject-matter of the songs is the death of a young man during the brutal police repression of a strike by tobacco workers in Thessalonike in 1936. By using both the imagery of the folk lament and of the Virgin's lament for her dead son and calling his poem *Epitafios*, Ritsos had already used the familiar in a way that

shocked. He remained proud, all his life, of the fact that the poem was publicly burned by Metaxas and remained banned longer than any other piece of literature in modern Greek. Ritsos's decision, twenty years later, to send Theodorakis the poem he had begun as an immediate response to the photograph of a dead worker and subsequently revised, was made in a political context that was almost as dangerous for all those in Greece who were identified with the Left as the Metaxas dictatorship. Like the poet, the composer deliberately used melodic material from the liturgy for the *Epitafios*, the most solemn ritual of the Orthodox church, so linking the young man's martyrdom musically and well as poetically to the passion of Christ. The song "*Na'ha t'athanato nero*," for example, the seventh song of the cycle, is based on a melodic fragment from "*Tin Oraioteta*," and the opening phrase of the sixth song ("*Sto Parathiri Stekosoun*") is borrowed from the *Doxologia* in the Third Tone of Byzantine hymnography. The echoes of liturgical melodies may be subliminal to the listeners, but they form the "acoustic foundations" of modern Greece. Theodorakis's decision to use a bouzouki accompaniment in his recording of the *Epitafios* cycle and the *rebetika* singer Grigoris Bithikotsis to interpret them has been discussed at length elsewhere and is now part of Greek musical history.<sup>4</sup> It shocked not the general public, but the intellectuals of Athens, many of whom thought he had taken leave of his senses, but his decision was based, like his use of traditional material, on sound foundations. Once he had made the decision to try to write for the ordinary Greeks, he began to listen as carefully to the *rebetika* as he had to classical and Byzantine music. Theodorakis's keen musical ear told him what was the best of the "*laiki mousiki*" of his day and his choice of interpreters, Manolis Hiotis and Grigoris Bithikotsis, could hardly have been better for his purpose. Their recording of *Epitafios* remains one of the masterpieces of modern Greek music.

The *Epitafios* cycle was followed by a series of songs and song-cycles some of which I have analyzed elsewhere. Listening to the dozens of songs written in the decade that followed, I am continually struck by the subtlety of Theodorakis's musical responses to poems. Take his 1964 settings of the poet Kostas Varnalis, for example, that formed part of the cycle *Politeia B'*. "*Oi Moupaioi*"

("The Doomed") is a poem set in a basement *taverna*, where a group of disillusioned and self-pitying old friends gather each evening to drown their sorrows in drink. The poem has a nostalgic melancholy about it, a longing for lost beliefs and half-forgotten beauty which is brilliantly translated by the musical setting:

ΜΕΣ ΤΗΝ ΥΠΟΓΕΙΑ ΤΗ ΤΑΒΕΡΝΑ,  
 ΜΕΣ ΣΕ ΚΑΠΝΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΣΕ ΒΡΙΣΙΕΣ  
 (ΑΠΑΝΟ ΣΤΡΙΓΚΛΙΖΕ Η ΛΑΤΕΡΝΑ)  
 ΟΛ' Η ΠΑΡΕΑ ΠΙΝΑΜ' ΕΧΤΕΣ·  
 ΕΧΕΣ, ΣΑΝ ΟΛΑ ΤΑ ΒΡΑΔΑΚΙΑ,  
 ΝΑ ΠΑΝΕ ΚΑΤΩ ΤΑ ΦΑΡΜΑΚΙΑ.

In the basement tavern  
 amid smoke and curses  
 (with the barrel-organ screeching above)  
 our whole gang was drinking last night,  
 last night like all the others,  
 to wash the poison down.

...

The song is a *βαρύ χασάπικο*, in other words it is composed in the rhythm of a slow urban dance that yolks two or three men together in a coordinated pattern of steps requiring practice. It opens with an introduction that cleverly mimics the sound of the barrel organ, an urban sound that is mechanized but imperfectly so, depending, as it does, on the steadiness of the organ grinder's arm and invariably emerging as a jerky series of staccato notes. What Greeks who knew the Athens of the 1950's or 60's could fail to hear the echo of the *laterna* as they listened, or not follow the *parea* down those narrow stairs, pausing with melody as it sinks on each stair like a tired foot, rises in a nostalgic sigh and sinks again into lassitude?

Theodorakis's technique in such songs is not *Wortmalerei* (word-painting) in the renaissance or baroque sense. Rather, like Schubert, the composer echoes the mood and sentiments of the poem through a combination of musical effects that include rhythm and melodic

line itself. Something more akin to word-painting occurs in the final phrase of his other setting of Varnalis, *I Ballada tou Andrikou*, a line impossible to translate into English without destroying its breathless rhythm or convey its full range of meanings (*χτυπάς, φτωχή καρδιά, με βία!*—you beat, poor/impooverished heart, fast/hard!). Here Theodorakis's solution is to turn three iambs of the line into the musical equivalent of heartbeats. By cutting the poem "Ballad of Andrikos" down to less than half its length, Theodorakis ends it not with the poem's rather sentimental farewell to the hunch-backed boatman but where the poet might better have ended it, with the coming of winter and a mysterious cough.

It is easy to treat jaunty songs of Theodorakis like the "Ballad of Andrikos" as light and pleasant popular songs. It is only when you listen carefully to the music and poetry together that you realize the subtlety of his word-setting. Like many of Varnalis's poems, the "Ballad of Andrikos" has a Brechtian false positivism:

Είχε μια τέντα ξομπλιαστή  
 η βάρκα του καμπούρι Αντρέα.  
 Γυρμένος πλάι στην κουπαστή  
 ονειράτα έβλεπεν ωραία.

Η Κατερίνα κ'η Ζωή,  
 τ' Αντιγονάκ, η Ζηνοβία  
 (ω τι χαρούμενη ζωή  
 χτυπάς, φτωχή καρδιά, με βία )

τα μεσιμέρια τα ζεστά  
 τη βάρκα παίρνανε τ' Αντρέα  
 για να τις πάει αργά, ανοιχτά  
 όλες μαζί, τρελή παρέα.

Andreas the hunchback's boat  
 had an embroidered awning.  
 Bent beside the gunwale  
 he saw lovely visions.

Katerina, Zoe,  
 Antigone, Zinovia  
 (oh! what a happy life!  
 poor heart, you beat so fast!)

On hot days at noon  
 they'd hire Andreas' boat  
 to take them slowly out to sea  
 all together, a crazy crew.

Unlike the doomed *parea* that drinks in the taverna each night, the *trelli pareia* of the "Ballad" is young, female, and full of exuberance. Oblivious of the narrowing "needle" eye of the hunchbacked boatman, the girls head to sea take off their clothes and turn to mermaids in the water. The song is as full of youth as the girls and doesn't miss a beat with the onset of the mysterious cough that will kill the hunchback. And yet how those lines of the last stanza, fitted into the same carelessly melody and rhythm, stay in the mind after the song ends! It is as brilliant a musical solution as the slow *hasapiko* of "The Doomed," and in combination, the two settings, like the poems, form a contrasting but closely related pair (there is even a barrel-organ in each, although the *romvia* disappears from Theodorakis's setting of the "Ballad.").

I singled out these two songs of Varnalis partly because I had always judged one as lesser than the other and failed to see them as a balanced, contrasting pair. Almost any of Theodorakis's early settings of poetry turns out, on careful examination, to be acutely sensitive to the poetic line. He has been criticized for the arrangements of his songs, but this has never been the point for him. Theodorakis's concern has been, in the popular songs, to compose melodies that would express the essence of the poems that have inspired him. The melodies and rhythms are the bare bones of his music, and he gives them out freely (some critics would argue too freely) to anyone who wants to perform or arrange them. For him, they have not only been a sort of public lending library, from which he himself borrows what he needs for his own classical compositions.

Throughout his career, Theodorakis has remained true to his

acoustic foundations. We find fragments of Byzantine and folk melodic material in composition after composition. In his brief but useful explanation of his own melodic inspiration, *Mousiki Yia Tis Mazes* Theodorakis stresses the importance of the Byzantine melody (in the first plagal tone) of Palm Sunday in a number of his compositions. Analyzing the melody he concludes that it can be reduced to basic characteristics, the first a repetition of three descending notes which also happen to be the lowest three notes of the western minor scale, and the second a rise from the sub-tonic to the tonic accompanied by a *melisma* or melodic embroidery around the tonic.<sup>5</sup> Those who are familiar with the music of Theodorakis will recognize the material, usually associated with his most poignant lyrics, in song after song. We find in early songs like the Kambanellis/Theodorakis "Song of Songs", and in "I Was Lost" from Theodorakis's setting of his brother's cycle "The Deserters" and in "The Doomed." It reappears in the "Θρήνος της Μάνας του Αναστασιάδη" ("Lament of the Mother of Anastasiades" from the *Τραγούδια του Αγώνα* and in the 1987 composition *Η Βεατρίκη στην Οδό Μηδέν* (*Beatrice in Zero Street*) in the song "Zero Street". To the listener familiar with his work it becomes a self-referential motif, quite independent of its original source.

It was in his setting of Elytis's *Axion Esti* that Theodorakis made fullest use of Byzantine melodic material. Like Ritsos's *Epitafios*, Elytis's long poem already contained the elements of surprise and familiarity that gave it an arresting quality. In its structure and language it is closely modeled on the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. Yet the poem's celebration of the pagan, sensual world and its direct references to the brutal reality of recent Greek history – to the Albanian campaign, the German occupation and the Civil War – are anything but orthodox. Theodorakis echoes the unconventional conventions of the poem in his setting, mingling Byzantine melodic material with folk melodies, chromatic classical orchestration, and popular bouzouki songs in what must be one of the most curious musical experiments of the twentieth century.

The success of *Axion Esti* had its own musical ingredients. Not only were traditional musical elements that a Greek audience could respond to, but in 1962 Theodorakis had begun a campaign of trying to extend the audience for modern less familiar European mu-

sic. Together with Manos Hadzidakis he had played a pioneering role in trying to broaden musical tastes by forming a chamber orchestra and conducting performances of Bach and Handel, Britten and Stravinsky, in small auditoriums around Athens and Piraeus. In the program notes for the *Mikri Orchistra Athinon*'s first concert, on Sunday, 18th November, 1962, Theodorakis wrote of his purpose in the full flood of enthusiasm:

Κίνημα ιδεών που θέλει να σπάσει την κρυστάλινη γυάλα όπου κλείσαν τη Μουσική οι απειροελάχιστοι εστέτ της Αθήνας και να τη ρίξει στους βουερούς δρόμους, στα Πανεπιστήμια, στις συνοικίες, στις συζητήσεις.

Η Μ.Ο.Α. είναι σα να λέει στο λαό μας· Αυτομορφώσου, ύψωσε την πνευματική σου στάθμη. Μην περιμένεις να σου δώσουν οι άλλοι αυτό που σου ανήκει.

The sentiments may seem outdated or naively Marxist, but there is no doubt about the quality of the music that was performed at the concerts. Theodorakis chose, for his first concert, a Handel concerto grosso, Vivaldi's *L'estro Armonico* opus 3, Bach's second violin concerto and a concerto grosso by Geminiani. In fact the M.O.A.'s concerts for November and December of 1962, performed for "students and workers" offered a splendid selection of baroque and contemporary chamber works that few Greeks had ever had the opportunity to hear. How influential the "Little Orchestra" was is impossible to judge, but it could be that the popular success of *Axion Esti* was partly due to the efforts of Theodorakis and his colleagues to broaden the audience for classical music.

Recently Theodorakis published an anthology of his song texts.<sup>6</sup> The 450-page anthology of poems did not include the texts of his large-scale or classical works. A second volume, published in 1999, contained texts of his symphonic and "metasymphonic" works and oratorios. Together, the two volumes represent an astonishingly large and rich anthology of poetry. Not only are most of Greece's leading poets represented, from Solomos and Kalvos to Kazantzakis, Seferis, Elytis, Ritsos, Anagnostakis and Ganas but

there are settings of Federico Garcia Lorca, Pablo Neruda, Paul Elouard and Brendan Behan. Many of the poets Theodorakis set to music were on the left of the political spectrum, but what is impressive is the range and selection of poems. Some of Theodorakis's most sensitive settings are of poets who not only did not share his political views, but would not be seen on the same platform with him.<sup>7</sup> Considering the range and quality of the poetry Theodorakis has set to music, it is perhaps not surprising that most Greeks are familiar with only a fraction of it. It is also not surprising that almost all of the songs that made him famous in Greece belong to a period (1960-67) where the ingredients of that singular marriage of high and low art were in place. Once the political and economic conditions changed and the idealistic unity of opposition to a series of repressive regimes dissolved, Greeks were no longer so receptive to Theodorakis's compositions. Although he was never more popular than in the years of the dictatorship, the majority of the songs Greeks sang in secret or in exile were written before 1967. Many of the songs Theodorakis actually composed during those seven years have remained unknown. Some were recorded for the first time in the late 1990's in Germany and others are still unrecorded. At the concerts Theodorakis gave after his flight from Greece in 1970, his audiences wanted to hear the songs that had inspired them before they left their country, not the new and more musically demanding "flow-songs" he had composed while under house arrest in Zatouna, nor his setting of Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*, a score sung in Spanish, not Greek.

The failure of much of Theodorakis's music from the 1970's and 80's to attract a broad audience left him in a curious position as a composer. He had dedicated himself to the struggle of the Greek Left and abandoned a promising career as a composer of western classical music to become a writer of "Music for the Masses."<sup>8</sup> In his compositions he stretched the notion of popular music to its limits. His setting of *Axion Esti* was a great achievement of cultural synthesis, but it belonged to a historical moment and was never to be repeated.<sup>9</sup> On his return to Greece in 1974, Theodorakis had two choices. He could continue to try to attract an audience for his compositions by keeping his ear to the ground and using elements from contemporary popular music as the basis

for his own more sophisticated songs, or he could settle for a more limited audience for his music. The problem was that having been broadly popular, he was no longer considered a serious composer by the Greek bourgeoisie, who attended symphony concerts and operas by foreign composers but ignored Theodorakis's symphonies and chamber compositions. At the same time Theodorakis had lost touch with the popular musical tastes of the young Greeks, who were no longer steeped in the acoustic foundations of Greek folk, ecclesiastical or popular music but had begun to listen to American and British rock music. For the next two decades, instead of turning his back on the world of popular music, Theodorakis continued to write songs which were less successful than he would have wished, and at the same time to compose symphonic and choral works which were given very little serious critical attention in Greece.

An obvious parallel suggests itself here between Theodorakis and Leonard Bernstein, a composer who paid for the success of *West Side Story* for the rest of his career. Bernstein was frustrated that his later compositions were not taken seriously, perhaps because the Broadway musical was indeed a masterpiece that was hard to surpass, but perhaps because the public who listened to compositions of his later years were expecting something different. Aaron Copland is another American composer who suffered from the success of his "American" pieces like *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring*. Audiences continued to expect American folk and popular elements to surface in his work long after he had abandoned Americana. But Bernstein and Copland were working in a very different musical environment from Theodorakis. Having established their reputation as classical composers in the United States, they could seek commissions and find orchestras to perform their new compositions. Theodorakis had begun his career as a classical composer in Paris and London and was seeking to attract an audience for his classical compositions in a country where classical music meant, for the most part, the standard European repertoire played by an indifferent orchestra to a very small public.

Despite his feelings of alienation from the Greek musical scene, Theodorakis began an astonishing new phase of composition in the 1980's, writing a series of symphonic, chamber and choral

works, including the second, third, fourth and seventh symphonies and the cantata "Kata Saddoukaion," arranging his earlier song cycles and still producing popular songs. It was only in the late 1980's and 90's, when Theodorakis turned to opera and began composing the trilogy *Medea*, *Electra*, and *Antigone* that he seemed ready to forfeit his popular audience and concentrate exclusively on classical music. Opera was, in many ways the logical form for Theodorakis to turn to. Having alternated orchestral and choral compositions with popular song throughout his career, he was able to combine his gifts as a symphonic composer and an inspired melodist to create contemporary operas that were both sophisticated and accessible. The *Antigone* is the first of the three to have its premiere in Greece. For the others, Theodorakis was forced to look elsewhere in Europe (Spain, Poland, Russia, Luxemburg) for opera companies willing to risk the expense of producing a full-scale opera. *Electra* had its American premiere at Carnegie Hall on June 11, 2000 as a concert performance. It was the first time any of Theodorakis's major classical compositions had been heard by an American audience. The success of *Electra* has already encouraged music promoters to schedule three more performances of Theodorakis's classical works in New York City.

It was the triumph of his ballet suite, *Zorba*, performed for the first time at the *Arena di Verona* on June 8, 1988, that inspired the three operas Theodorakis composed in the 1990's. Seeing his name on a banner beside the giants of Italian opera, and having drunk, according to his own account, a lot of wine with the director of the theater,<sup>10</sup> he declared he would compose three grand operas: one for Verdi, one for Puccini and one for Bellini. Over the next ten years he went on to do precisely as he had promised.

Despite their dedications the operas have few stylistic links to the three composers nor, indeed, to Italian opera. They are generally closer in style to the works of Strauss or Berg than to the Italian composers, with the exception of *Antigone*, where the lyrical melodies are less thickly orchestrated and the soloists are allowed, periodically, to dominate rather than functioning as instruments in the orchestra. However despite their length (the original version of *Medea*, which the composer later edited lasted four hours) the operas are all entitled "lyric tragedies" and it is the lyrical and me-

lodic character of the three compositions that remind us they were written by Theodorakis. Composers can be taught many things: the principals of harmony, of orchestration, of atonal composition. What they cannot be taught is how to write a melody that stays in the mind. That is a gift. No composer of this century has been blessed with a greater gift for melody than Theodorakis, and he has used it, always, in the service of poetry.

That he should have turned, in his 70's, to the poetry of Attic tragedy is not surprising. He had composed music for ancient drama many times, both in the form of film scores and as incidental music for theater. His ballet suite *Antigone*, commissioned by Sadler's Wells, was one of his first successes and a composition he remained strongly attached to, rearranging it for two pianos in 1959, and as an orchestral suite (*Images D'Antigone*, performed at Monte Carlo in 1961). In 1971, he composed a new ballet, *Antigone II (Antigone in Prison)* for the Anne Beranger Ballet in Paris and wrote the score for Minos Volanakis's 1990 production of the play at the Epidaurus Theater. His scores for Greek productions of ancient drama include *The Phoenician Women* (1959-1960), *Ajax* (1960-61), *The Trojan Women* (1965), *Lysistrata* (1966-7), *The Suppliants* (1977), *Knights* (1979), *The Oresteia* (1986-88), *Hecuba* (1987), *Prometheus Bound* (1982) and *Oedipus Rex* (1996). He also scores for Michael Cacoyannis's films of ancient tragedy: *Electra* (1961-62), *The Trojan Women* (1970-71) and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1976). Of the three, *Electra* was, perhaps, the most successful and fragments from it resurface in his later opera.

Opera was a form that offered Theodorakis a synthesis of orchestral and vocal music. Also the dominance of the chorus in ancient drama gave him the opportunity to elaborate a form he had always enjoyed writing for. Greece is not a country with a tradition of opera. On the other hand modern Greek productions of ancient tragedy and comedy have traditionally restored music and dance to their prominent place in the dramas. It could be argued that the plays were always conceived of as some more akin to opera than to a modern play. Theodorakis's scores for ancient drama had allowed him to compose for the combination of orchestra and chorus that he had always enjoyed; opera would give him added dimension of the classically trained solo voice.

Like the production of tragedies in antiquity, the staging of an opera is an expensive business. Staging a new opera is something few major opera companies are willing to risk. The first two operas of Theodorakis's trilogy were performed where he could find an opera house willing to undertake such a risk and a company that could work with the problems of singing in Greek. It was not until his first two operas had been performed abroad that he was successful in staging a full-scale opera for the first time in Athens.<sup>11</sup> A production of a large-scale opera demands sponsorship; in the case of *Antigone*, a single, wealthy *horigos* who filled the auditorium at the premiere with invited guests. At such an occasion is difficult to say whether there is a Greek audience of music-lovers for these operas. Will these operas achieve a permanent place in the repertoire of modern Greek music or in the international world of classical opera? Time is the only reliable judge, but the critic can speculate. *Medea* and *Electra* have been impressive to non-Greek audiences and received more favorable reviews abroad than at home. The extravagant Greek production of *Antigone* and a startling performance in the title role by the soprano Jenny Drivala, may be enough to reinstate Theodorakis as a 'serious' composer for Greek audiences. Still, I think Greeks are waiting for the outside world to recognize the operas as a twentieth century masterpieces. This is despite the fact that, for an audience familiar with Theodorakis's works, all three operas are enriched by their references to his earlier compositions.

Take *Antigone's* first aria, for example. It is a lament for her brothers and her mother. To a western-trained ear it begins as a chromatic tone row, but to a trained Greek ear it is made up of a melodic material familiar from the Byzantine chromatic mode known as the Second Plagal tone, a modal type that also happens to be common in *rebetika* music. But only a few bars into the aria, the clarinet introduces a quite different melody, one that Theodorakis used for the darkest of his Lorca settings and one of the most majestic of his melodies: "Pandermi" (*Romance de la Pena Negra*):

Is it relevant to our understanding of the operatic score that Pandermi, like *Antigone*, is a woman alone and in black despair? Do we need to be familiar with Orthodox or popular Greek music to appreciate the aria? Or take *Jocasta's* last aria before her death,

207

Antigone  
 Creon

Viol. I  
 Viol. II  
 Vla.  
 Vcl.

210

Antigone  
 Creon

Viol. I  
 Viol. II  
 Vla.  
 Vcl.

“*Ἡ πῶ δὺστυχη μητέρα*” (“The Most Unfortunate Woman”) when she tries to separate her warring sons. Do we need to know that this wonderful melody combines two of the composer’s earliest songs, written in Tripoli in 1942: “For a Dead Woman” and “The Autumn of Love”?

Each of these melodies, written at a time of national trauma, during the German occupation, but also at a time of innocent adolescence for the composer, are recalled at points in the opera which stress the purity of Jokasta’s love for her sons, Antigone’s and Haemon’s for each other. They are cross-referenced to the composer’s own early work, but to songs which very few Greeks have ever heard and even fewer could link to a particular period of Theodorakis’s life. For those who pick up such associations, there

is an added richness to the score, but I doubt if we need to search for them any more than we need musical associations to appreciate *Axion Esti* or *Epitafios*. The strength of *Antigone*, like the best of Theodorakis’s work is in its melodic genius and attention to the poetic text, and whether it is achieved by combining fragments of old melodies or writing new ones, whether supported by thick, sophisticated orchestration, or left unadorned, it transcends national references or categories.

Theodorakis used Spyros Evangelatos’s quite straightforward translation of Sophocles’ *Electra* for his second opera, but for *Medea* and *Antigone* he wrote his own libretto. Theodorakis’s *Medea* was based closely on Euripides, but his *Antigone* differs significantly from Sophocles. The libretto is created from a collage of plays dealing with the Theban cycle – Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*, Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*, and Sophocles’ three Theban plays. For Theodorakis, *Antigone* has always symbolized the “closed circle of a reiterated human tragedy...the eternal Evil, the forever-repeated drama which, like a curse, accompanies the human race.”<sup>12</sup> By introducing the clash of Eteocles and Polyneices from Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*, and Jocasta as innocent intermediary, Theodorakis is able to stress the cyclical nature of human strife and the helplessness of the innocent to intervene. Eteocles and Creon become power-hungry doubles, and the fight to the death between the two brothers foreshadows the clash of values and beliefs between Antigone and Creon. Oedipus and Antigone are also paired in the opera, both achieving through different means what the composer sees as the “fundamental gift of life, which is to be united with the laws of universal harmony.” (1999, op. cit.).

Dramatically, there is sometimes a price to pay for the introduction of so much extraneous material in the plot of *Antigone*, particularly in scene one, where Oedipus’s long aria and exchange with the leader of the chorus threaten to weigh down the action before it begins. On the other hand, the clash of words and swords between Eteocles and Polyneices, brings dramatic tension back to the stage and builds a climax in which the grieving Jocasta is given one of the finest arias in the opera (*Ἡ πῶ δὺστυχη μητέρα*).

The other climactic point of the opera is not an interpolation into the text but a compression of the Sophoclean original to a

845 Adagio  $\text{♩} = 45$

*f* *cresc.*

*mf* Η ῥοδὸν στῦλον ἴη τε - - - πο. Δέν ε - - - χεῖ μέτρο ο - - - πο - - -  
 I po di - - - stō - - - ni me - - - te - - - ra. Den e - - - ti me - - - tro o - - - po - - -

Adagio  $\text{♩} = 45$

*pp*

850

voc. \_\_\_\_\_ η ο - - - βυδ - - - οοο Δέν ε - - - χεῖ τε - - - λος.  
 nos. \_\_\_\_\_ ε - - - νι - - - οοο den e - - - χεῖ τε - - - los.

single line repeated over and over again in both its ancient and modern Greek forms: ἔρωτα μάχαν ἀνίκητε, ἔρωτα στη μάχη ἀνίκητε (Love, invincible in battle). The phrase becomes hypnotic by the end of the opera, but it is perhaps at its most effective in the chorus that follows Creon's final pronouncement of Antigone's death sentence. Here again, anyone familiar with Theodorakis's music will recognize the poignant falling notes of the minor third in the opening bars:

*Antigone* is the most lyrical of Theodorakis's three operas and the one in which he makes the synthesis of his popular and classical composition most transparent. Rhythmically, melodically, and

Sopr. - Alto

*f*

Ε - - - ρο - - - τα μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - τε. Ε - - - ρο - - - τα στή - - - μα - - - λι μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - λι  
 E - - - ro - - - ta ma - - - han a - - - ni - - - la - - - te. e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li

Ten.

Ε - - - ρο - - - τα μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - τε. Ε - - - ρο - - - τα στή - - - μα - - - λι μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - λι  
 E - - - ro - - - ta ma - - - han a - - - ni - - - la - - - te. e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li

Barit.

Ε - - - ρο - - - τα μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - τε. Ε - - - ρο - - - τα στή - - - μα - - - λι μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - λι  
 E - - - ro - - - ta ma - - - han a - - - ni - - - la - - - te. e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li

Bass.

Ε - - - ρο - - - τα μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - τε. Ε - - - ρο - - - τα στή - - - μα - - - λι μὲ - - - χον ο - - - νι - - - μα - - - λι  
 E - - - ro - - - ta ma - - - han a - - - ni - - - la - - - te. e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li e - - - ro - - - ta sti - - - ma - - - li

Vcl. I

*pp* Tremolo *al f*

Vcl. II

*pp* Tremolo *al f*

Vla.

*pp* Tremolo *al f*

Vr.

*mf*

Cb.

*pp* *pizz.*

tonally *Antigone* reminds the listener that he/she is not listening to a piece from the mainstream of western classical composition. Instead, it is an opera that quite logically closes the circle begun with the ballet *Antigone* and moved through *Epitafios* and the great song-cycles of the 1960's to the choral symphony and back to the youthful composer's fascination with ancient drama, poetry and song. Opera may turn out to be the one art form which will allow Theodorakis to re-establish himself as a "classical" composer in his own country.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Καπνισμένο Τσουκάλι or "Smoked Earthen Pot" is the title of an anthology of Ritsos' poems written in 1949 and published in 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Πρεβελάκις Παντελής, *Ο Ποιητής Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Συνολική θεώρηση του Έργου Του*, Athens: Kedros, 1983, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere I have elaborated on the way themes from the hymns sung in the Good Friday Epitafios service are woven into the cycle, and on the way Ritsos moves from the imagery of lament to that of resurrection in his poem. See Holst, Gail, *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music*. Amsterdam: A. Hakkert, 1980, pp.60-70.

<sup>4</sup> See Holst, 1980, 61-70.

<sup>5</sup> *Mousiki Yia Tis Mazes* (Olkos, Athens, 1972), p. 151.

<sup>6</sup> Μίκη Θεοδωράκη: *Μελοποιημένη Ποίηση. Α' Τόμος/Τραγούδια*. Athens, Ypsilon, 1998. *Β' Τόμος Συμφωνικά/Μετασυμφωνικά Ορατόρια*, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> I am thinking particularly of Seferis here. Despite his political differences with Theodorakis, Elytis recognized the quality of his music and became an enthusiastic admirer of the settings of *Axion Esti*. However even Ritsos was at first wary of the neo-rebetic settings of his *Epitafios* poems.

<sup>8</sup> The title of his 1972 book (Athens, Olkos) in which he laid down his Marxist philosophy of music and provided the interested listener with some useful information about his method of composing.

<sup>9</sup> *Canto General* has been performed before large audiences outside Greece (Cuba, Stockholm, Germany) and inside Greece, but it has never enjoyed the same broad popularity amongst Greeks as *Axion Esti*.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the author (Meiningen, May 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Theodorakis also later categorized his Kostas Karyotakis (The Metamorphoses of Dionysus), first presented at the *Lyriki Skini*, as an opera.

<sup>12</sup> "Για την Αντιγόνη." *Βραχάτι*, 4.15.1999. (published as program notes to *Antigone*, October, 1999).

## *The Creative Boldness of Mikis Theodorakis*

SPYROS D. ORFANOS

Creative expression is, above all, an act of freedom.  
I create means I am free-I become free.  
The message of art is the message of freedom.

Mikis Theodorakis, 1972

Mikis Theodorakis is the most important Greek composer of the twentieth century. His continued creative output might make him the most important Greek composer of the twenty-first century. The sheer number of haunting melodies he has composed and the diversity of the musical forms within which he creates is breathtaking. His appeal cuts across aesthetics, class, politics and nationality.

His compositions have been recorded and performed countless of times and in almost all the continents of the world. At age 75, Theodorakis enjoys acclaim both for his notable contributions to the domain of music and for his peace efforts on behalf of humanity. In the year 2000, the government of Greece officially nominated Mikis Theodorakis for the Nobel Peace Prize. In short, he is a creator of great eminence and he has played a significant role in Greek and global relations.

The genius of Theodorakis is steeped in a creative boldness that marks his music and his politics. He is a man that takes risks. The ideas expressed in this essay are an attempt to further the understanding of the man and his work. There are three sections to this paper. First, I begin with a personal view on what makes