

Greek musical modernism (1950s-1970s) and the archetypal perception of Hellenic past

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Abstract

The emergence of musical modernism in post-1950 Greece, which propagated notions related to the idea of the avant garde, was initially constructed in opposition to the, until then, institutionally strong nationalist ideas. However, even in the first experiments with modernist musical ideas by the pioneers of the movement (Yannis Papaioannou and Yorgos Sicilianos) Greek antiquity (the Hellenic period of the Greek past) became an essential and recurring topos of expression. Moreover, the Hellenic past has also a diverse presence in the institutional expression of this movement by the Hellenic Association of Contemporary Music – starting with the very predilection for the adjective Hellenic instead of Greek for the English name of the association.

The proposed paper explores the approach of Greek modernist composers to Hellenic past applying the third category of Dimitris Tziovas' categorization of the ways in which Greek literature perceived ancient Greece during the last two centuries. In this category Greek antiquity 'functions as an archetype,...as a deep structure which is reactivated and recharged by being exploited in artistic terms' and 'the primary emphasis is on past's potential for transformation and recreation' (Tziovas 2008: 290).

Important aspects of the Greek modernist music are understood and discussed as expressions of an archetypal approach to Hellenic past. Two representative examples: a) Greek tragedy acts archetypally for the form and other aspects (such as speech delivery) of Greek modernist works and b) ancient Greek speech (*logos*) is not translated into modern Greek and also functions as the ultimate archetype in various ways: e.g. Sicilianos in *Eppiklessis* abstracts rhythmic and pitch series through the application of Erasmus pronunciation in the used fragment by Aeschylus.

The discussion of the exploration of Hellenic past by Greek modernists offers a starting point for a critical approach to their self-definition against the nationalist ideas, while offering interesting parallels with other cultural fields in Greece of this period.

CV

Kostas Chardas had his Bachelor on Musicology and his diploma on piano by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Athinaiko Conservatoire respectively. He then pursued further studies in England, supported by a scholarship from the Greek Academy. He received a MMus degree by the University of London and a PhD by the University of Surrey supervised by Chris Mark. He has presented papers in conferences and has published on the following research areas: theory and analysis, 20th century music and Greek art music of the 20th century. He is a lecturer of the Department of Music Studies of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He is working on the critical editions of Papaioannou's piano music and on a book for Papaioannou for Nakas Editions. He is also an active pianist.