

Avant-garde and experimental music through the dissolution of the melodic- rhythmic-harmonic unity of the theme and the liberation of the musical components

George Zervos

Department of Music Studies, University of Athens, Greece
mouriki@upatras.gr

Abstract

Looking back at the musical events of the 20th century, we notice that there is a sharp contrast between the previous periods of European music and the trends of post-1950 music; whereas the former, despite being historically continuous, retained, at the same time, their individual characteristics, it is impossible to understand the latter without regard to the ground-breaking changes that occurred during the first three decades of the 20th century. The aim of this paper is to discuss the two main trends of avant-garde music, that is the European and the American, not only through the innovations which resulted from these changes, but also their connection with early Modernism and especially the expressionist works of Second Viennese School composers whose main characteristic was the dissolution of the melodic-rhythmic-harmonic unity of the theme and the liberation of the fundamental musical components. If the dissolution of the melodic-rhythmic-harmonic unity of the theme has been common ground for almost all trends in avant-garde, post-1950 music, the way in which these components are reunified (when they are indeed reunified) has indicated the boundaries between European and American music. This way of reunifying the components is not connected only to the technical aspect, but also to the arising content, that is whether the reunification of the musical components creates an intra-musical content in the context of the continuation of the tradition of absolute music and the preservation of the concept of the work of art, or, on the contrary, this content is not purely the result of intra-musical compositional processes, but of open and cooperative (composer, performer, audience) processes through which the prevalent notion about art is to a certain degree challenged.

CV

George Zervos is Assistant Professor (Department of Music Studies, University of Athens) and composer. He studied Physics (University of Athens) as well as piano, theory and composition. In 1982, he received the post-graduate diploma D.E.A. from the University of Paris I-Panthéon-Sorbonne. His thesis on «The crisis of theme in the work of the Second Vienna School composers: Schoenberg, Berg, Webern» earned him a Ph.D. degree in Musicology from the University of Thessalonica in 1995. He has composed chamber and vocal music, as well as works for orchestra. His works have been performed in Greece as well as in Italy, Cyprus, France, Austria and USA. G. Zervos has published several articles and two books on 20th century music (*The crisis of music through the crisis of the theme and the forms*, Athens 2002, and *Nikos Skalkottas and the European tradition in the beginning of the 20th century*, Athens 2002).