

Crisis Concealing Light

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Abstract

In this article I discuss the blossoming of musical life in Greece that begun in 1974, simultaneously with the growth of the debt crisis. Communist musicians returned from exile and they were hailed as heroes while their music became indispensable to pre-electoral gatherings. Connected to the return to democracy, music and musicians became extremely important to politicians and loved by the people, and were offered a substantial portion of the money that poured in from the EU. Cold War cultural politics played their role in promoting avant-garde music as well. In comparison, today Greece has a great number of excellent musicians and the architectural infrastructure for the performance and study of music, but these are concealed by the daily hammering of crisis news.

Keywords

Dictatorship, democracy, communism, music education, avant-garde music

Crisis is both a modern Greek phenomenon and an ancient Greek word, still used today. In modern Greek, the word has two meanings: 1) Crisis is 'judgement', which is identical with its ancient Greek meaning, and 2) Crisis is what is understood by the recent Greek phenomenon, a time of intense difficulty or danger. The link to that transformation was made through Christian theology and 'the Judgement Day', as indeed, the Day of Crisis (in the first sense) will be a Day of Crisis (in the second sense) to many. This linguistic transformation is, however, a pessimistic view of the Day of Crisis (i.e. the Judgement Day), since a number of souls will not descend to Hades on that day, but ascend to Heaven.

Attracted by this connection between the two meanings of Crisis and the concealed optimistic half, it occurred to me that it could be applied metaphorically to the subject of this article, which is Music and Crisis in Greece today. To summarise the metaphor in advance: it was a time of Crisis in the first sense (the Judgement Day) which brought about a Crisis in the second sense, opening up at, the same time, the path to Heaven, a fact thoroughly concealed, however, in our everyday intake.

Ten days before the conference *Music and Crisis* held at the University of Nottingham, on 22 June 2015, where I read a paper "Music flourishing in a declining society", I presented a similar paper in Greek, with the poetic

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title “Orpheus in Hades”. This was at one of the events associated with the research project *Western Art Music at the Time of Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Study of Contemporary Greek Culture and European Integration*, conducted by the Music Department of the University of Athens, with the participation of Royal Holloway University of London, and directed by Professor of Anthropology of Music, Pavlos Kavouras. All the speakers at that event were Greek, and a majority of them were not involved with this project. The participants in the project, a victim of the Crisis itself (because the funding for that project was severely and unexpectedly reduced) have publicised, mainly in the social media, a lot of interesting facts about Western art music in Greece since 2008 – the year when the recent economic collapse occurred. A most comprehensive product of their research is the 26th volume of the periodical *Polyphonia* (Spring 2015), dedicated to the project, the title of which is also that of the introductory article by Pavlos Kavouras (2015). Doing a very general classification of the articles of this special issue, one observes that the authors that stick to the period 2008–2014 present their findings as a positive exception to a generally negative picture. Thus, Katerina Levidou speaks of the blossoming of Western art music festivals all over Greece (Levidou 2015), while Giorgos Manouselis singles out the quality and ethos, gained through a new operational flexibility of the Ergon Ensemble, a new ensemble for contemporary music, consisting of brilliant young soloists (Manouselis 2015). Besides the articles discussing theoretical and methodological aspects of the subject (Samson 2015; Willson 2015), the remaining articles tend to compare the dissemination of Western art music in Greece with its dissemination in Western countries and explain the differences by looking into the past (Hapsoulas 2015; Poulakis 2015; Kallergi-Panopoulou 2015; Furlanou 2015; Mallouhos 2015; Vavva 2015).

The articles in *Polyphonia*, as well as the papers read during the all-Greek conference mentioned above, solidified some of my opinions regarding the events and the causes that simultaneously lit up Apollo’s lyre and deepened the darkness of Hades in recent Greek history. At that conference, where all speakers, being Greek musicians and musicologists, were persons in close contact with contemporary Greek musical life, it turned out that almost everybody else besides me was speaking about music in Greece being in Crisis (in its second sense). It did not take long to realise that I was the exception because I was the oldest one among the speakers, and as such, the only one who had seen Orpheus’ lyre blast its light into the country. All the other participants were born in that light (some being its rays, as a matter of fact). Most of them tended to compare the present situation in Greece with some ideal situation constructed in their imagination by their view of the environment in the Western cities where they had studied. Speaking about Greece, they expressed their experience of a country where university music education had numerous deficiencies, orchestras had no decent facilities for rehearsals, and institutions for musicological research (archives, digitalised or not) were unorganised and extremely difficult to gain access to.

However, I spoke of my experience of a country where university music education, as well as decent conditions for performers and basic foundations

for musicological research (archives digitalised or not) **did not even exist**. My own experience of the situation was that it had all appeared in the past few decades. Musical life flourished very quickly; it brought together famous musicians with unknown talents dispersed throughout the country; and it turned Greek music and musical life into one of the most qualitative, admirable, productive and successful fields of modern Greek culture.

It is obvious that an important coefficient here that permits a clear view is **time**. Depending on the time, one may decide what is the standard situation (the *canon*, as is often called), and if what we live today can be seen as a qualitative ascent or descent. It is true that the musicians born in the light of Orpheus's lyre playing, have seen part of their income, and much of their optimism and certainty for their professional future, fade away during the last five or six years. Therefore I have chosen to present here the blossoming of musical life in Greece, which includes the broad dissemination of Western art music, for the first ever time in the country. This blossoming originated together with the recent economic Crisis and out of the same political developments – and their psychological repercussions.

The crucial period for the blossoming of musical life in Greece was from 1974 to the beginning of the 21st century. Summarised, the events and causes are:

- the fall of the colonels' *junta* in 1974, and the amnesty given by post dictatorial governments to all communists and leftists for the first time ever after World War II;
- the Cold War cultural policies and the exception that was Greece in the Balkans;
- Greece's 1981 entrance into the European Union (i.e. European Economic Community), and the money that came pouring in Greece from the EEC/EU, before and after the euro replaced the drachma in 2001.

Musical education in Greece had begun with a spectacular growth after the fall of the colonels' *junta* (1967–1974). Music had a prominent role in the return to democracy and the rebirth of the political parties, while the repatriation to Greece of musicians with a heroic past and leftist ideology had a strong popular impact. The colonels' *junta* was the last dictatorship in 20th century Greece; its task was the same as that of all previous dictatorships – to wipe out the communists from the country. The way communists had been treated before and after the *junta*'s fall was decisive for the growth of most evil and good after that date. Communists had been greatly victimized up until then. Marc Mazower presents impressive facts concerning the striking antithesis between the post-war fate of Greek communists and the fate of Greeks who collaborated with the Germans, and of German and Austrian war criminals in Greece. The latter enjoyed public positions, fame, prosperity and a dignified life, while the former were exorcised, imprisoned and tortured, impoverished and humiliated, until many decades after the end of the Civil War (Mazower 1994: 405406). A most impressive example is that of Kurt Waldheim, a suspected war criminal in Greece according to a UN commission, who was nonetheless elected and served as Secretary General of the United Nations between 1972 and 1981 (Ibid: 406).

The vindication of communists was exceedingly generous. It was awkwardly exploited by some of the post-dictatorial elected governments and by their voters in a continuous give and take that grew into a vicious circle, even today continuing its, albeit declining, course. Communists were offered respected professional positions (in the state academy etc.), and other means to lead a prosperous life. The results were a multiplication of ‘communists’ over the country, and a **carelessly growing debt**. It is noteworthy that some real communists, who had lived through the sufferings of deportation and imprisonment, abstained in disgust from these governmental offerings, as they realised the immoral ‘games’ in their distribution, and valued their dignity best (Michaël 2003).

Before becoming the most efficient subject for populism, communism had been the ideology of the young and the progressive; furthermore, it had been closely related to the music that had encouraged acts of resistance and revolt. A key personality was the communist composer and politician Mikis Theodorakis. His music, although forbidden by the dictators, was heard from loudspeakers during students’ revolts, multiple times in the law school and in 1973 in the polytechnic school. In the elections of 1974, music was more important than speeches, being associated, as I have said, with the return to democracy and the re-organisation of political parties. Music was the protagonist. Pre-electoral speeches were, in essence, music festivals. In order to compete with the ‘United Left’ – a coalition of leftists, of which Mikis Theodorakis was a candidate – all other political parties got or fabricated their own composer. A party composer was considered indispensable, and in fact he was. The composers of popular songs such as Manos Loizos, Yannis Markopoulos, Thanos Mikroutsikos, Dionysis Savvopoulos, and Stavros Xarchakos gained unprecedented popularity in the 1970s and 1980s thanks to their political identification, while others, such as Elias Andriopoulos, were actually established through the generous support of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK).

The connection between politicians and musicians put into operation another vicious circle, which heightened the (material) price of music, transformed music making into a lucrative profession, multiplied the number of professional famous musicians, turned composers and singers into the most popular stars of the Greek publicity firmament, publicised the study of music, and contributed to *the* carelessly growing debt. Antagonism was high between political parties, TV channels, and even (this was new) between music schools and conservatories, a great number of which had been newly founded throughout the country to satisfy the great demand. The increase of guitar classes and the creation of a very important Greek classical guitar school was characteristic of the times, because many young people wishing to learn to accompany their singing were trapped in the study of classical guitar.

But it was not only that sort of trapping that brought the dissemination of Western art music in Greece at that time. Universal developments had prepared that outcome. Iannis Xenakis was another Greek composer who returned home after the *junta*’s fall, and was welcomed as a hero. Concerts of his music attracted massive audiences, ready to be enthused both by his leftist ideology

and by the fame he had acquired in the West. His fame had benefited from Western Cold War politics, to which culture was of great importance. During the Cold War, Greece, the only Balkan country to be assigned to the Western block after World War II, produced a number of avant-garde composers acclaimed in the entire world, such as Theodore Antoniou, Anestis Logothetis, Yannis Christou, Michalis Adamis, Georges Couroupos, Georges Aperghis, Kyriakos Sfetsas, and others. No other group or generation of Greek composers has been so well integrated into Western music life. No other group of Greek composers has been performed so often outside Greece. No other generation of Greek musicians had been offered so many scholarships to study in the West. The majority of them were leaning to the left, as, indeed, one of the early victories of the West was to steal the 'progress' from communism and clothe it with capitalism.

Progressive young men were no longer those with leftist ideologies. Progressives were now those that contributed to and partook in the avant-garde of the Western world. It seems as if the lure of the leftist youth stemmed from the very first steps of serial music dissemination in Paris, as René Leibowitz propagated the revived twelve-tone method to a progressive (i.e. leftist) readership, relying on his friendship with Jean-Paul Sartre (Deliège 2003: 52). Leftist youth were effectively attracted by new artistic trends. Thus, Greek musicians who had become famous in the West were upon their repatriation received as progressives by people belonging to the entire political spectrum.

In the 1980s the foundations of music education were firmly established, and so was the economic crisis. Investing in education and modernising its structure was characteristic of the times. Beginning in 1981, during the first governing period of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) led by Andreas Papandreou, a great number of new universities and departments were created throughout the country. The topology of educational reforms was assumedly calculated with a view to political gains. The fact is, nonetheless, that thousands of inhabitants of marginal cities and small communities saw their lives change radically and prosper, and many rural families' desire to see their offspring get a university education was made easier.

Music was one of the subjects introduced into higher education during that period (Greece being the last country in the entire European continent to introduce music in its tertiary education). In 1985 the Music Department of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki was founded, followed by the Music Department of the National and Capodistrian University of Athens, the Music Department of the Ionian University in Corfu, the Department of Music Science and Art of the University of Macedonia, the Department of Audio & Visual Arts of the Ionian University in Corfu, as well as the departments of technical tertiary education schools: Music Technology and Acoustics in Rethymnon of Crete, Technology of Sound and Musical Instruments in Lixouri of Cephalonia, and Traditional Popular Music in Arta.

Even more numerous were the music conservatories founded all over the country, among which there were several municipal conservatories where lessons were free of charge. This was in contrast to all other music conservatories in the country, with the exception of the State Conservatory of Northern

Greece in Thessaloniki, founded in 1914 on the occasion of the incorporation of the city to the Greek state after the Balkan Wars. In 1988 the first 'music school' was founded in Marathon, close to Athens. Today, there are forty-four public music schools all over the country. These follow the program of secondary education schools, and give extra music lessons. Besides their obvious work with talented children, music schools employ numerous graduates of the universities' music departments, a combination with undisputable dynamics.

In the 1990s, musicians who migrated to Greece from countries to our north, made it possible to have new symphony orchestras or string ensembles in numerous Greek cities, and to give autonomy to the existing orchestras (up to that time sharing many of their musicians). For example, in Athens, the Orchestra of Colours (1989) and the Camerata (1991) were established. I should note that, unlike what happened in those countries that had profited from Soviet music education, in Greece music conservatories, which are commercial enterprises, produced more pianists and guitarists than performers of symphony orchestra instruments. This lack was especially prominent in the strings because wind instruments were traditionally studied in the Ionian islands' philharmonic societies (because the Ionian Islands were under the Ottomans for a very brief period of time and had developed a prominent musical culture, very well connected and very similar to the Italian south), hence wind players were good and abundant.

In 1991 *Megaron*, the Athens Concert Hall, was inaugurated, changing radically the musical life of the capital, which was up to that point far better prepared for summer festivals than for winter concerts. The Music Library, opened in 1997, transformed the conditions of musicological research within its splendid building. Other wealthy Greeks followed the example of the Athens Concert Hall, a private undertaking supported by the State. The Michael Cacoyannis Foundation and the Onassis Foundation Cultural Centre began to operate in 2010, and in 2016 the exquisite Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre opened to the public; it will house the National Opera and the National Library of Greece. These cultural centres expand the cultural zone of Athens in elongated radiuses, leading to inestimably positive social changes. Similar developments have occurred in several other cities, most remarkably in Thessaloniki.

This increase of excellent musicians and architectural infrastructure has developed in parallel with inflation, debts to creditors, excessive consumption, the gigantism of the State, redundant non-productive public servants, shocking tolerance of immorality, and everything else that encompasses our daily pessimistic intake, which unfortunately conceals the spectacular illumination of Greek musical life.

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Кети Роману

КРИЗА ПРЕКРИВА СВЕТЛОСТ

(Резиме)

У овом раду приказан је процват музичког живота у Грчкој у последњих неколико деценија. Он је, по први пут у овој земљи, обухватио и широку дистрибуцију западне уметничке музике. До процвата је дошло истовремено када је наступила и економска криза, а потекао је из истих политичких околности и њихових психолошких последица.

Образовање у сфери музике у Грчкој почело је интензивно да се развија након пада режима војне хунте (1967–1974). Музика је имала значајну улогу у повратку демократији и поновном рађању политичких партија, док је великог одјека у народу имао повратак у Грчку музичара који су се одликовали херојском прошлoшћу и левичарском идеологијом. Војна хунта је била последња диктатура у Грчкој у XX веку; њен циљ је био исти као и код свих претходних диктатура, да „очисти” замљу од комуниста. До пада хунте, комунисти су претрпели бројне жртве. Њихову рехабилитацију су надаље користиле неке од постдиктаторских изабраних влада и њихови гласачи, у непрестаном давању и узимању, које се претворило у зачаран круг, крећући се истим путем, иако све слабије, и до данас.

Пре него што је постао најделотворнији исказ популизма, комунизам је био идеологија младих и напредних; штавише, био је тесно повезан са музиком, која је подстицала његово испољавање отпора и револта. Кључна личност у томе био је комунистички композитор и политичар Микис Теодоракис.

На изборима 1974. године музика је била значајнија од реторике, будући повезана са повратком демократији и реорганизацијом политичких партија. Зависност политике од музике створила је још један зачарани круг између политичара и музичара: композиторе и певаче учинила је најпопуларнијим „звездама” у грчкој јавности, што је промовисано у проучавању музике и допринело нехајном расту дуга. Јанис Ксенакис био је још један грчки композитор који се вратио кући након пада хунте и био дочекан као херој. Он је, заједно са још неким грчким авангардним композиторима, био признат у читавом свету. Томе је допринела политика Хладног рата, за коју је култура била од великог значаја.

Током осамдесетих година XX века постављени су чврсти темељи музичког образовања и архитектурална инфраструктура за музичка извођења и музиколошка истраживања, али и темељи економске кризе. Повећање броја изванредних музичара одвијало се паралелно са растом инфлације и дуговања према кредиторима, са прекомерном потрошњом, гигантизмом Државе, вишком непродуктивних јавних службеника, шокантном толеранцијом према неморалу и са свиме осталим што је довело до садашњег песимистичног расположења, које засењује спектакуларну бриљантност музичког живота.

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