

Mikis Theodorakis,  
His Music and Politics  
(Durrell Studies 6)

**By the same author:**

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# Mikis Theodorakis, His Music and Politics (Durrell Studies 6)

By

Gail Holst-Warhaft

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By Gail Holst-Warhaft

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## SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

I encountered the work of Gail Holst-Warhaft when I was researching the emergence of Greek music; her *Road to Rembetika* (1975) was an eye-opening account of a cultural phenomenon and its introduction from Asia Minor to modern Greek society. We began a correspondence, in the course of which I invited her to contribute a lecture on this topic to a symposium 'East, West, Greece' in Corfu in 2022; while the symposium could not take place, due to the consequences of the ongoing Covid pandemic, the lecture took place at the Solomos Museum and was published in *Greece Between East and West: Culture and Geopolitics* (Durrell Studies 7, 2023).

In the meantime, I had become aware, and a huge admirer, of Gail's 1980 work on Mikis Theodorakis. Her personal friendship with him, her musicianship and her capacity to write engagingly and with passion about his music and his musical personality, was impressive. When Theodorakis died, in September 2021, I asked Gail to consider a new edition, since the work Theodorakis had undertaken between 1980 and 2000, in particular – including four operas and also involving the 'rediscovery' of his early piano works and chamber music – was of enormous importance and demanded a new study along the lines of Gail's original.

The result, forty years later, encompasses the new works and allows Gail Holst-Warhaft (in 1980, Gail Holst), to give a thorough reconsideration of the man whom she knew and befriended and whose work remains a vital element in contemporary Greek culture. As Gail shrewdly observes, the reputation of Theodorakis as a composer principally for the voice, the setter-to-music of the poetry which was closest to his heart, has allowed his more 'symphonic' work and his chamber music to remain not undiscovered, but appreciated to a far lesser extent than it warrants. I am confident that Gail's advocacy, in this new edition, of this less-appreciated work will ensure that due attention is paid to it by musicologists and, more importantly, by the listening public.

There is a serendipitous connection also, between Gail's study and my interest in her work: in the late 1970s and early 1980s I was involved in a Council of Europe project researching the relationship between civic and voluntary organisations in the field of cultural development. One of my



colleagues, representing Luxembourg, was Guy Wagner, a cultural administrator who, in the course of our discussions, asked my advice about a possible publisher for an English edition of a book he was writing, with the composer's assistance, about Theodorakis. The book was published in German as *Mikis Theodorakis: Ein Biografie* in 1983 and was followed by *Mikis Theodorakis: Ein Leben für Griechenland* in 1995. It seems that no English publisher was interested in a book about a man whose reputation, in Britain, rested largely on the composition of *Zorba the Greek*. My – and Gail's – friend Guy Wagner died at the age of seventy-eight in 2016, having seen his book appear in a Greek translation in 2002, but not in English. It was while Gail and I were discussing the present book that we realised that we had had this dear friend in common.

Another pleasurable point of serendipity was the production, by TG4, the Irish-language television channel, of *An Buachaill Gealgháireach* [The Laughing Boy], narrated by my old friend and colleague Theo Dorgan (August 2022), in which Gail appeared as an 'expert witness', speaking of Theodorakis' exile on the island of Ikaria and his use of Brendan Behan's 'The Laughing Boy' as a mantra of resistance in Greek politics – a feature which reappears several times in the present book.

It has been a privilege to work with Gail Holst-Warhaft, in an editorial capacity, during the past year, and to meet her, finally, in Corfu in the summer of 2022, when she lectured for the Durrell Library. Forty years after the first edition, the vigour, intensity and authority of her writing has not dimmed; the inclusion of this new edition of her work on Mikis Theodorakis enhances and honours the Durrell Studies series.

—Richard Pine  
Durrell Library of Corfu.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank Theodorakis himself. This book is a tribute to the man and his music, but to write such a book required discussing his compositions, and asking him a thousand questions. To anyone genuinely interested in his music Theodorakis was always accessible and generous with his time, his scores, his recordings. I was privileged to work with him, play his music, listen to it with him, and talk with him for hours whenever I was in Greece. For his music, his inspiration, and his friendship, I will be forever grateful. He has left a legacy of beauty and an example of strength that will inspire Greeks and Greek-lovers for generations.

I thank Rena Parmenidou, without whom I could never have maintained my contact with Theodorakis. As Theodorakis' assistant she facilitated our meetings and our correspondence, and looked after a thousand details of Theodorakis' life until the end. She is still a fierce and loving guardian of his legacy.

I'm truly grateful to Asteris Koutoulas, whose extraordinary devotion to Theodorakis led to a series of books and films that are indispensable for any student of Theodorakis. His cataloguing of Theodorakis' works, his encouragement of Theodorakis' collaboration with German musicians, his organisation of international concerts and recordings, and his imaginative film-making have all added greatly to Theodorakis' international reception.

Stephanie Merakos, Director of the Lilian Voudouri Library of the Athens Concert Hall, which houses the physical and digital archive of Theodorakis' work, is a model of efficiency and has always been ready to help with any inquiries.

I am grateful to the late Guy Wagner for his important biography of Theodorakis, for organising the website devoted to his work, and for his painstaking documentation of the composer's life and work that was so important to all students and scholars.

Last but by no means least, I thank my editor, Richard Pine, who not only persuaded me to revise and extend my 1980 book on Theodorakis, but involved himself in every detail of this edition, advising and kindly persuading me to make the book more comprehensive and more accessible to the non-specialist. It required more patience and enthusiasm than I had a right to expect.

And to my husband, Zellman Warhaft, who does not like to be thanked but is always ready to give me advice and read my manuscripts, I am grateful for his musical knowledge and his patience with my distraction.

The author is grateful to the following sources for permission to reproduce musical autographs and photographs:

To Asteris Koutoulas for the cover photograph of Mikis Theodorakis conducting *Axion Esti* in Leipzig, 1983 (copyright Privatier/Asti Music), to Stephania Merakos and Valia Vraka of the Music Library of the Athens Concert Hall (Lilian Voudouri), for photographs of autograph scores and notes from the Theodorakis archive, to Maggie Sadoway for the 1975 photograph of the author at the spinet, to Mr. Theodorakis himself, who gave permission for early family photographs from his archive to be reproduced before the archive was transferred to the Music Library.

## A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION OF GREEK WORDS AND NAMES

All translations of Greek are my own except where otherwise stated. This includes translations of poetry by well-known poets.

Transliteration of Greek words is generally phonetic, but in the case of names, I have used the spelling usually associated with a particular person, or as they have chosen to spell it themselves. For example, Manos Hadjidakis's name is spelled as he spelled it outside Greece, as are the names of Michael Cacoyannis and Jani Christou. The same applies to works of music, poems, or film titles, where I have generally bowed to convention. I am aware that there are alternative possibilities for transliteration, but provided the English spelling helps the non-Greek reader to pronounce the Greek more or less correctly, it serves its purpose.

# A GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS AND DANCES

In order to make this book accessible to non-specialists, I have tried to simplify the use of musical terms in this revised and enlarged edition of the book, but for the reader unfamiliar with musical analysis, especially of Greek music, I have provided a short glossary.

**Modes, modal scales.** In addition to major and minor scales Greek music uses modes, that is, scales and certain melodic types associated with them that are derived either from ecclesiastical music (see *oktoechos*), taking their names from ancient Greek and Byzantine music (Dorian, Phrygian, etc), or with Ottoman music. The Greeks call the Ottoman modes ‘*dromi*’, meaning roads. In Turkish music they are called *makam* (plural *makamlar*) after the Arabic *maqam*.

**Oktoechos or Octoechos** is the eight-mode system used for the composition of religious chant in Byzantine, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Latin and Slavic churches since the Middle Ages. In a modified form the octoechos is still regarded as the foundation of the tradition of monodic (monophonic) chant.

**Plagal modes** are extended versions of the same system of modes, doubling the number of modes in the system.

**Time signatures and Greek Dance Rhythms.** We are accustomed to reading music with 2, 3, 4, 6, or 8 beats in a bar. Greek rhythms are often uneven – there may five, seven, or nine beats in a bar. Greek composers often use popular dance rhythms when they compose, even when they are writing symphonic music. When we refer to duple or triple time, we mean 2 or 3 beats in a bar, and all compound time signatures can be thought of as composed of 2’s and 3’s. So a Greek dance rhythm called a *karsilamas*, which has nine eighth-notes (quavers) in a bar, is broken up into units of 2+2+2+3, and a *kalamatianos*, which has seven beats, is divided into longer beats: 3+2+2. By far the most complicated of Greek dance-rhythms is the 9/8 of the modern *zeibekiko*, which in Theodorakis’ day was mostly counted

in 3 units: short-long short/long long/short-long short/long long, in other words, unlike the 9/8 karsilamas, it begins with a syncopated beat.

**Augmented interval.** An augmented interval has one more semitone than a perfect interval. Since C to F is a perfect fourth (5 half steps), C to Fsharp would be an augmented fourth (6 half steps).

**Dominant note.** The fifth note of the scale. A dominant scale is a major scale consisting of two tetrachords divided in the middle by the dominant.

**Duple, triple time.** Music with two or three beats in a bar.

**Leading note.** The seventh note of an eight-note scale, the note that leads to the octave.

**Melisma** was originally used for vocal music when a single syllable of text is sung while moving between several different notes in succession. Music sung in this style is referred to as melismatic, as opposed to syllabic, in which each syllable of text is matched to a single note. It can also be applied to an instrumental musical ornament. Often, it is improvised.

**Minor third.** An interval consisting of two notes with a whole and a half steps distance. For example, C to Eflat will result in this musical interval. Theodorakis often uses the three notes that make up the minor third in descending order as the kernel of a melody, e.g., if he is writing in the key of C minor, he will use the notes Eflat D & C. (A major third has an extra half-step, as in the notes C, D & E).

**Serial composition, serialism.** Strictly speaking, a serial pattern in music is merely one that repeats over and over for a significant stretch of a composition, but as a compositional technique, it was pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg using all 12 notes of the western scale to avoid writing in traditional western tonality and harmony. The term chromatic is also applied to music that uses all 12 notes of the scale.

**Tetrachord.** A scale of four notes separated by three intervals and bounded by the interval of a perfect fourth (an interval the size of two and one-half steps, e.g., c-f.)

**Tonic** is the starting note of any major or minor scale.

## CHRONOLOGY

**1821:** Encouraged by Russia, France, England and Austria, the Greeks revolt against Ottoman rule.

**1824:** Byron dies at Missolonghi.

**1827:** In the naval battle of Navarino the allies sink two thirds of the largely Egyptian Ottoman navy, thus signalling the impending defeat of the Ottomans.

**1832:** Greece (the Peloponnese, the Cyclades and parts of the mainland) wins independence from Turkey under King Otto, a Bavarian prince appointed by the Great Powers.

**1840:** Crete returns from Egyptian to direct Turkish control.

**1853:** Crimean War. Greece sides with Russia against Turkey, England and France. Turkey expels many Greeks from Constantinople and Smyrna.

**1854:** England and France enforce Greek neutrality by military occupation.

**1862:** King Otto is expelled for refusing to grant a constitution.

**1863:** A Danish prince is accepted as King George I and Britain cedes the Ionian Islands to Greece (1864).

**1887:** Russo-Turkish War. Turkey defeated. As a result, Cyprus is ceded to England and Thessaly is ceded to Greece.

**1897:** Continuous violence, revolt and repression causes Greece to send troops to Crete. The Allies announce an international protectorate for the island.

**1910:** Eleftherios Venizelos becomes prime minister of Greece. Representatives from now autonomous Crete admitted to the Greek government. Greece joins Bulgaria and Serbia, and the combined armies successfully expel Turkey from Europe.

**1913:** George I is assassinated and is succeeded by his son Constantine I. The 'Bulgarian Wars', with Bulgaria at war with Serbia and Greece over spoils – chiefly the division of Macedonia. Greece wins Macedonia, Epirus and the Aegean islands, including Salonika/Thessaloniki, which becomes the second city of Greece.

**1914:** First World War begins. Greece is divided into two camps. Venizelos supports the Allies; the King, backed by General Metaxas, supports the Germans.

**1915:** Venizelos is dismissed and Dimitrios Gounaris is appointed in his stead. Greece remains neutral.

- 1916:** Venizelos sets up a rival pro-Allies government in Thessaloniki.
- 1917:** Constantine I is forced to abdicate and is succeeded by his son Alexander I. Venizelos returns to Athens. Demotic Greek is introduced in schools for the first time. Greece declares war against Germany.
- 1920:** As a reward for support to the Allied cause, Greece is given Thrace to within 80 kms. of Constantinople and parts of Anatolia including Smyrna. King Alexander dies from a monkey bite. Constantine is re-enthroned. Venizelos defeated at the polls by the royalist Gounaris.
- 1921:** Greek forces trying to claim ceded Smyrna and Anatolia are badly defeated by the army of Mustafa Kemal (Attatürk), thus precipitating the 'Asia Minor Catastrophe'.
- 1922:** Constantine I is unseated again and succeeded by his brother George II. Gounaris (and five others) tried and executed for his conduct of the Smyrna incident.
- 1923:** Treaty of Lausanne. Compulsory exchange of Muslim and Orthodox populations. King George II is expelled and a republic proclaimed under Venizelos.
- 1925:** President Pavlos Koundouriotis resigns. Replaced by dictatorship under Theodoros Pangalos. **Theodorakis is born, 29 July, on the island of Chios.**
- 1926:** The dictatorship is overthrown and Koundouriotis resumes office.
- 1928:** Venizelos returns as Prime Minister under a new constitution.
- 1932:** Venizelos loses to royalist Panagis Tsaldaris. A Pro-Venizelos coup fails. A plebiscite results in the return of George II and restores the 1911 constitution.
- 1936:** With the King's consent, General Ioannis Metaxas assumes dictatorial powers, ostensibly to forestall a communist coup. Thirty people are killed and hundreds injured in a demonstration in Thessaloniki. Inspired by the event, the young poet Yiannis Ritsos writes *Epitaphios*.
- 1940:** 'Ochi' Day (28th October) marks the occasion on which Italians force Greece into the war by invading from Albania.
- 1941:** The Italians are driven back and a quarter of Albania is occupied by Greek forces. Germans enter and overrun the country. Metaxas dies. King George II flees the country. EAM, the National Liberation Front, is set up. Later an armed force is organised as ELAS.
- 1942:** Famine in Greece. Theodorakis is arrested for striking an Italian officer in Tripolis. He joins the resistance.
- 1943:** Theodorakis joins EPON, the youth movement of EAM in Athens. He is again arrested and released. EAM-ELAS sets up a provisional government in the mountains.



**1944:** The British and Greek armies enter Athens, with a coalition government under George Papandreou. Demonstrations against the new ‘occupying force’ in Athens take place. Many unarmed demonstrators are killed and wounded. Theodorakis takes an active part.

**1945:** EAM-ELAS overrun all Greece except Thessaloniki and Athens. EAM agree to the disarmament of all resistance groups. Theodorakis is again arrested.

**1946:** A plebiscite restores George II to the throne. Full-scale guerrilla war is resumed. Theodorakis is badly beaten by soldiers in a demonstration against forthcoming elections, and is presumed dead.

**1947:** The US Government (under the terms of the ‘Truman Doctrine’) takes over the suppression of partisan forces in Greece. Ten thousand members of the resistance are arrested in Athens in one week, among them Theodorakis. They are transferred to the prison islands Psitalia and Ikaria. Under the coalition government of Themistoklis Sofoulis partial amnesty is granted. Many prisoners are released, including Theodorakis. George II dies, succeeded by his son Paul I. A partisan government is set up again in the mountains. The Dodecanese islands (formerly under the control of Italy) are transferred to Greece.

**1948:** Yugoslavia breaks with the Cominform and closes Greece’s northern border to communist help. Theodorakis is again arrested and taken back to Ikaria; he is later transferred to Makronissos.

**1949:** The resistance collapses in the mountains. Mass executions take place on Makronissos. Theodorakis is badly tortured and transferred to a military hospital.

**1950:** A coalition government is elected under Nikolaos Plastiras. Theodorakis graduates from Athens Conservatory but has to do his military service. Threatened with return to Makronissos, he attempts suicide. His father helps him to gain transfer to Crete.

**1952:** Alexandros Papagos is elected with a large majority under the new proportional representation basis. Theodorakis completes military service and becomes a music critic in Athens.

**1954:** Odysseas Elytis publishes *Axion Esti*. Theodorakis receives a scholarship to the Paris Conservatoire and begins studies there.

**1955:** Papagos dies. Konstantinos Karamanlis is appointed to succeed him.

**1958:** Theodorakis sets eight of the poems of *Epitaphios* to music. He receives commissions for three ballets. *Antigone* is very successful at Covent Garden.

**1959:** Greece and Turkey agree to Cypriot independence.

**1960:** Theodorakis returns to Greece. The *Epitaphios* controversy.

**1961:** Karamanlis wins elections but Papandreou disputes the results and attacks the King for his interference in politics.

**1963:** Grigoris Lambrakis is murdered in Thessaloniki. Karamanlis resigns. The Lambrakis Youth Movement begins and Theodorakis is elected as its president. Papandreou's Centre Union Party fails to gain an absolute majority in the election.

**1964:** Papandreou is elected and forms a government. Theodorakis is elected as a member of parliament. Paul I dies, succeeded by his son Constantine II. First performance of *Axion Esti*.

**1965:** King Constantine dismisses Papandreou. Konstantinos Stephanopoulos succeeds him.

**1966:** Theodorakis' records are banned on Greek radio. Thousands take part in a peace march from Marathon to Athens to commemorate the third anniversary of the death of Lambrakis. Twenty-eight army officers are indicted over the 'Aspida' plot, and Papandreou's son Andreas is implicated. Stephanopoulos resigns. After a series of demonstrations against the royal family, the king promises new elections for May '67.

**1967:** The king appoints Ioannis Paraskevopoulos who then resigns. Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (leader of conservative ERE party) forms new government.

April 21: a *coup d'état* is carried out by a group of army officers under George Papadopoulos. George and Andreas Papandreou, and Kanellopoulos are among the thousands arrested. Theodorakis goes into hiding. A new Constitution is drafted. Censorship is instituted. Unions are banned. Trial by jury is suspended. Constantine II flees to Italy. Greece withdraws from the Council of Europe. Theodorakis is captured and composes *The Sun and Time* and *Epiphania* in Averof prison.

**1968:** George Papandreou dies. The new constitution is approved by 'referendum'. Theodorakis is released and later re-arrested. He and his family are placed under house arrest in Zatouna. A student, Alekos Panagoulis, fails in an attempt to assassinate Papadopoulos.

**1969:** Theodorakis is transferred to Oropos prison.

**1970:** Theodorakis is transferred to prison hospital after a recurrence of tuberculosis. French MP Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber effects Theodorakis' release and they leave together for Paris.

**1971:** The US government officially suspends aid to Greece. Theodorakis tours the world raising support for the anti-junta cause.

**1973:** The siege of the Polytechnic in Athens, leading to the deaths of many students. A *coup d'état* takes place in Chile while Theodorakis is on a tour of South America.

**1974:** Turkish troops invade Cyprus. The dictatorship ends in Greece. Karamanlis returns from Paris to head a provisional government.

**1975:** Karamanlis' leadership is confirmed in elections. Theodorakis fails to gain a seat in parliament. A plebiscite rejects the return of the monarchy. Theodorakis tours Greece, giving concerts to large audiences.

**1977:** Karamanlis is returned with a reduced majority. Andreas Papandreu's opposition socialist party (PASOK) makes significant gains at the election. Archbishop Makarios dies.

**1978:** Theodorakis fails in his attempt to gain election as mayor of Athens.

**1980:** Angry about criticism of him in the media, Theodorakis leaves Greece for exile in Paris.

**1981:** January: Greece joins the European Community. Andreas Papandreu becomes Greece's first socialist Premier. Theodorakis is elected to parliament as a deputy. Melina Mercouri is appointed Minister of Culture. Greek liberal politician Pavlos Bakoyannis is assassinated by the terrorist group 'November 17'. Theodorakis completes *Canto General* and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphonies. *Canto General* is performed in Latin America.

**1982:** First performance of Theodorakis' Concerto for Piano by Cyprien Katsaris. 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony is performed at the Palace of the Republic, East Berlin. First performance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony at the Komische Oper, East Berlin. Theodorakis conducts the Piano Concerto and Second Symphony at the Festival Echternach, Luxembourg.

**1983:** First performance of the *Passion of the Sadducees*, Metropole Theatre, East Berlin, conducted by Hans-Peter Franck. Theodorakis is awarded the Lenin Prize for Peace. May: First performance of the *Liturgy No. 2* by the Dresden Kreuzchor.

**1984:** First performance of the 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony in Dresden. Theodorakis and Yiannis Ritsos in attendance.

**1985:** Christos Sartzetakis, who sentenced the murderers of Grigoris Lambrakis to jail, becomes President of the Hellenic Republic. July: to celebrate the composer's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, the *Spring Symphony* is performed at Epidaurus.

**1986:** In statements and interviews, Theodorakis distances himself from the Greek Communist Party.

**1987:** With Turkish composer Zülfü Livaneli, Theodorakis initiates the Greek-Turkish Friendship Association. He publishes the first volume of his autobiography *Ways of the Archangel*. First performance of the 4<sup>th</sup> Symphony, Lucas Karytinis conducting. First performance of the *Zorba* Ballet at Verona, with Theodorakis conducting and choreography of Lorca Massine. Yorgos Koskotas, a banker, is involved in a massive financial scandal and implicates the Papandreu government.

**1989:** Theodorakis meets Constantine Mitsotakis, leader of the conservative New Democracy Party [ND], and suggests a coalition with the Left. In parliamentary elections, ND fails to win an outright majority. Theodorakis stands as an independent candidate for ND.

**1990:** Constantine Mitsotakis becomes Prime Minister, after ND wins the elections. Theodorakis becomes Minister without Portfolio. Karamanlis becomes president of the Republic again. November: Poet Yiannis Ritsos dies. October: Premiere of opera *Medea* in Bilbao, Spain.

**1991:** The beginning of the long-running dispute between Greece and the independent (former Yugoslav) Republic of Macedonia regarding its name.

**1992:** After a 'special court' trial, Andreas Papandreou is cleared of the charges resulting from the Bank of Crete scandal. Theodorakis resigns from Mitsotakis government. The adoption of a flag incorporating the Vergina Sun by the Republic of Macedonia, increases tensions between the two countries.

**1993:** Theodorakis conducts a performance of *Canto General* in Chile. A Greek performance of Theodorakis' *Medea* is staged at the Athens Festival. Andreas Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement [PASOK] wins the general elections. Theodorakis becomes general director of the choir and orchestras of the State Radio and Television (ERT) and organises successful tours abroad.

**1994:** 6 March: Melina Mercouri dies. Theodorakis begins a new European concert tour with the theme 'Music without Borders'. June: Manos Hadjidakis dies. Theodorakis resigns as music director of the ERT orchestra and choir. He attacks the Lambrakis media empire. Composes *Politeia 3*.

**1995:** November: Greece ends the embargo that had been imposed on the Republic of Macedonia, after the latter's decision to change its flag and controversial articles of its constitution. Premiere of Theodorakis' opera *Electra* at the Luxembourg Municipal Theatre. He conducts a series of concerts celebrating his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Later that year he tours Australia.

**1996:** Andreas Papandreou, in declining health, retires from office. Costas Simitis is elected Premier. January: Greece and Turkey are brought to the brink of war over the ownership of the Imia islet. 23 June: Andreas Papandreou dies. His funeral procession produces a great outpouring of public emotion. Greek premiere of *Electra*. September: Simitis wins elections for PASOK. October: Premiere of *Electra* in Germany. December: Theodorakis' younger brother Yiannis dies.

**1997:** March: Andreas Lendakis, for whom Theodorakis wrote the *Songs for Andreas*, dies. German recording of Theodorakis' *Requiem*. Theodorakis plans to tour Europe with Livaneli but he collapses at the first concert and has to cancel the tour. He receives many honours. Volume 1 of *Poetry Set*

*to Music* is published. Maria Farandouri tours Europe performing the *Poetica* songs with German musicians.

**1998:** Death of Karamanlis. A recording of *Electra* is made in St Petersburg. May: Tatiana Papageorgiou performs the *Concerto for Piano* and other pieces for solo piano at Royal Festival Hall, London. Theodorakis' 4<sup>th</sup> Symphony is released on the *Intuition* label. Asteris Koutoulas publishes *Theodorakis the Musician*. July: A performance of the *Zorba* ballet is held at the Herod Atticus Theatre, and a concert tribute to Theodorakis is held at Epidaurus. September: A symphonic version of *Canto General* is performed in Munich. October: World premiere of *Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra*. **1999:** July: world premiere of *Kostas Karyotakis: the Metamorphosis of Dionysos* in a chamber orchestra version arranged by Henning Schmiedt. 17 August: Powerful earthquakes strike the Turkish city of Izmir. Greece is the first foreign country to pledge aid to Turkey. Theodorakis and Livaneli organise a concert for the victims. 7 September: Athens is struck by the most devastating earthquake in Greece of the past 20 years. October: Premiere at Athens Megaron of *Antigone*, the third opera of Theodorakis' classical trilogy. December: Volume 2 of *Poetry Set to Music – Symphonies, Meta-symphonic Music and Oratorios* is published. Theodorakis denounces the Kosovo war and NATO raids and plays a leading role in a concert supporting the Yugoslav people.

**2000:** The third volume of *Poetry Set to Music* is published. June: A concert performance of *Electra* at Weill Hall, New York. July: A celebratory concert in Munich and other German cities for Theodorakis' 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. October: Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony perform an all-Theodorakis programme at Alice Tully Hall, New York.

**2001:** May: A concert at Herod Atticus Theatre features new versions of *March of the Spirit* and *Axion Esti*. August: a theatre performance of *Medea* with new music by Theodorakis. Theodorakis completes his last opera, *Lysistrata*. 11 September: '9/11' destruction of the 'twin towers' of the World Trade Center, including the St Nicholas Orthodox Church (rebuilt 2022).

**2002:** Theodorakis' *Canto Olympico* is played at the Salt Lake City Olympic Games, but his name is not mentioned. Premiere of *Lysistrata*. The opera is a success but there are criticisms about the cost of production. Theodorakis receives the Erich Korngold award for film music.

**2003:** Theodorakis begins a series of broadcasts on the SKAI television channel. He attacks the US invasion of Iraq and condemns the EU. In November, after anti-Israel remarks, he is accused of antisemitism.

**2004:** 24 April: in a referendum, Greek Cypriots reject the 'Annan Plan' for the future governance of Cyprus, whereas Turkish Cypriots accept it. 1st

May: Cyprus becomes a member of the European Union. Athens hosts the 2004 Summer Olympics.

**2005:** Theodorakis' music for theatre and cinema is performed in a series of concerts. Awards from Chile and Russia. Death of Grigoris Bithikotsis. 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebrations in Chania, Crete, with concerts and lectures on the composer's work. International awards continue to accrue, including the IMC-UNESCO music prize.

**2006:** An international conference organised by the University of Crete discusses Theodorakis' 'theory of universal harmony' – a subject that has preoccupied him for decades. He attends in a wheelchair. A museum commemorating his exile in Zatonna is established in the village.

**2007:** Theodorakis is named Commander of the *Légion d'honneur* by the French government. August: Catastrophic fires break out in Greece and Theodorakis organises a concert to benefit the victims.

**2008:** March: Greece blocks Macedonia's bid to join Nato because of the unresolved dispute over the former Yugoslav republic's name. December: Students and young people take to city streets in nationwide protests and riots over the police killing of a 15-year-old boy in Athens. Major public-sector strikes coincide to increase pressure on the government over its economic policies. The Piano Concerto no. 2 is performed with Tatiana Papageorgiou and the National Radio and Television Orchestra at the Herod Atticus Theatre. June: A large exhibition dedicated to Theodorakis is mounted in Athens.

**2009:** October: Opposition PASOK socialist party wins a snap election called by PM Kostas Karamanlis. George Papandreou (son of Andreas) becomes prime minister. The Greek financial crisis (and the European sovereign debt crisis) begins. The German finance minister refuses to extend credit to 'lazy Greeks'. Public debt rises, and the EU urges a policy of austerity on Greece. Theodorakis denounces the EU's policy.

**2010:** January-March: The government announces two more rounds of tough austerity measures, and faces mass protests and strikes. 14–15 May: The Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, visits Greece; 21 memoranda of cooperation between the two countries were signed. *Rhapsody for String Orchestra and Mezzo Soprano* is performed.

**2011:** July: European Union leaders agree to a major bailout for Greece over its debt crisis by channelling 109bn euros through the European Financial Stability Facility. October: Eurozone leaders agree to a 50% debt write-off for Greece in return for further austerity measures. November: Papandreou resigns. At the Festival of the Aegean Sea, Renato Zanello presents a ballet based on Theodorakis' opera *Medea*. Asteris Koutoulas uses this as the basis

of an innovative 2013 film combining images of Theodorakis in a gas mask at a demonstration with scenes from the performance.

**2012:** February: Against a background of violent protests on the streets of Athens, the Greek parliament approves a new package of tough austerity measures agreed with the EU as the price of a 130bn euro bailout. May: the three top-ranking parties fail to form a working coalition and President Karolos Papoulias calls fresh elections for 17 June. Theodorakis and resistance hero Manolis Glezos are both tear-gassed at a demonstration in Syntagma Square. June: Antonis Samaras assembles a coalition with third-placed PASOK and smaller groups to pursue the austerity programme.

**2013:** June: The government suspends state broadcaster ERT. September: Government launches crackdown on far-right Golden Dawn party. Party leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos and five other Golden Dawn MPs are arrested on charges including assault, money laundering and belonging to a criminal organisation. Koutoulas' film *Recycling Medea* is released.

**2014:** May: Anti-austerity, radical leftist Syriza coalition wins European election with 26.6% of the vote.

**2015:** January: Alexis Tsipras of Syriza becomes prime minister after winning the parliamentary elections, and forms a coalition with the nationalist Independent Greeks party. Tsipras visits Theodorakis, who supports the anti-austerity policy. June-July: The European Central Bank ends emergency funding. Greece closes banks, and imposes capital controls. August: Greece and its creditors agree a third bailout worth 86bn euros, to avoid bankruptcy and exit from the eurozone.

**2016:** March: Macedonia closes its border with Greece to migrants, leaving thousands of people stranded at the Greek border village of Idomeni. Death of Guy Wagner, Theodorakis' biographer and webmaster of the Mikis Theodorakis website.

**2017:** A massive concert tribute to Theodorakis is organised in the Panathenaic Stadium with a 1000-member choir; 50,000 people attend. Theodorakis, who attends in a wheelchair, conducts the final songs and is overwhelmed by emotion. Koutoulas releases a documentary based on his travels with Theodorakis: *Dance, Fight, Love, Die: With Mikis on the Road*.

**2018:** June: Macedonia and Greece sign an historic agreement 'Prespes', resolving the 27-year-long dispute over the official name of the (now) Republic of North Macedonia. At a protest rally, Theodorakis gives a surprising speech reversing his previous stance on the former Yugoslavian region of Macedonia's right to call its new state Macedonia, and says that 'Macedonia will always be Greek'. He is cheered by members of Golden Dawn whom he calls patriots. Members of Syriza and other leftist groups denounce his speech.

**2019:** July: Centre-right ND wins a landslide at early elections, and leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis becomes prime minister.

**2021:** June: a large exhibition of Theodorakis' scores, photographs, and other material from his archive is opened at the Lilian Voudouri Library attached to the Athens Concert Hall. In connection with the exhibition a tribute concert is held on July 17. The Athens State Orchestra performs a series of symphonic works by the composer. 2 September: Theodorakis dies, aged 96. Three days of national mourning are declared by the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The composer is buried in Crete next to his parents, according to his wishes.



## INTRODUCTION TO THE 1980 EDITION

*I fight to embrace the entire circle of human activity to the full extent of my ability, to divine which wind is urging all these waves of mankind upward. I bend over the age in which I live, that tiny, imperceptible arc of the vast circle, and struggle to obtain a clear view of today's duty. Perhaps this is the only way a man can carry out something immortal within the ephemeral moment of his life: immortal because he collaborates with an immortal rhythm ... Happy the man who hears the cry of his times (each epoch has its own cry) and works in collaboration with it. He alone can be saved.*

—Nikos Kazantzakis: *Report to Greco*

I first met Mikis Theodorakis in Australia in 1972. By then he was already a legendary figure to most Greeks and to non-Greeks like myself who had become involved with the resistance to the 1967-74 dictatorship. It is difficult to write about myths. Books about Byron, Picasso, Che Guevara, tend to leave one with the feeling of having been cheated. Either the account is so romantically overblown as to make one incredulous or the author tries so hard to be impartial that the subject becomes a faceless bore. In a book which is trying to do justice to an artist's achievements and place them within their national and social context, there is a good case for avoiding the personality of the artist, of trying to show that his works alone are the test of his genius. But Theodorakis is not a private man. Most of his life has been spent in the full glare of Greek and, later, international publicity. He is a man at home in a crowd. I have never seen anyone who has a more powerful effect on a mass audience. His songs may be what made him a popular figure but his physical presence is a real factor in his success. It is something you feel as he enters a room.

I had travelled from Australia to Greece on a Greek ship, and after brief travels to other European countries, decided that Greece was the country I most wanted to live in. A military *coup d'état* in April, 1967 took me by surprise and made me feel uncomfortable about remaining in a country where the regime maintained control through torture and imprisonment. I first went to London, where I met political exiles who spent their evenings singing Theodorakis songs, and a pair of women who were sending money to the families of Greek prisoners. One of them, Diana Pym,

advised me to go back to Australia if I wanted to help the cause of Greek freedom, and after a rather long journey in an old ambulance from London to Madras and from there by motorcycle, I found myself back in Australia, where I joined the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Greece.

After his release from prison in 1970, Theodorakis began touring the world, giving concerts of his music and trying to raise support for the cause of resistance to the dictatorship. He was invited by the Greeks of Australia to publicise the cause of resistance to the military junta and encourage the Australian authorities to denounce the regime. For those of us who were aware of what was happening in Greece he was a hero. He had smuggled a tape recording from the remote mountain village of Zatouna, where the regime had placed him under house arrest. We had listened in awe to the voice of the composer whispering about the conditions he and his family lived in and the ill-treatment of his young son by one of the guards. The thought that I might meet this man was unbelievable. Just before I went to meet him at Sydney airport I spoke to a Czech student of mine. When I told him who I was going to meet he said: 'That man is a saint for us, perhaps the only living saint.' I wondered what this man could be like: a hero of Greek resistance to a military dictatorship, the composer who had turned the poetry of George Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, and Yiannis Ritsos into popular songs. The bare facts of his life story were shocking. He had been tortured, imprisoned, exiled, deprived of his citizenship, separated from his family. His songs were as familiar to me as the nursery rhymes of my childhood, but Greeks were forbidden to listen to them on pain of imprisonment. Could there be a personality large enough to fit the legend?

Not only did I meet him, but the Greeks had neglected to provide an interpreter and I was pushed into a chair next to the man I thought of as a myth and asked to interpret for a press conference, something I was ill-equipped to do. He saw my discomfort and immediately started making jokes to put me at my ease. In the days that followed I became a groupie, following every move the composer and his musicians made. I was studying harpsichord at the Sydney Conservatorium and when I invited the musicians to my house, Theodorakis asked me to play him something. I stumbled through the slow movement of Bach's Italian Concerto, and when I had finished he said, 'When the junta falls, you will play in my orchestra.' At the time I took it to be the sort of thing people say after a glass or two of wine.

In the spring of 1975, I did, in fact, play in Theodorakis' orchestra. I had returned to Greece after the junta fell, and attended one of his concerts. I went backstage to greet him and the first thing he said was 'Do you have a harpsichord?' Of course I didn't have one, but with some difficulty I found

a spinet and was able to play with the orchestra on a tour of the Peloponnese. It was the first tour he had made of the Greek countryside since the dictatorship had fallen the year before. For seven years his music had been banned. People had been jailed for playing one of his records. He had made the cause of resistance to the Junta internationally popular. Kings, diplomats and film-stars had competed to shake the hand of this left-wing composer whose songs had become so identified with resistance in Greece that to sing one in a public place was as much an act of defiance to the regime as to hang out a red flag. As Theodorakis toured the villages and country towns of Greece, his arrival was a confirmation that the dictatorship had really ended. Wherever he went he was greeted with near hysterical adoration.

Theodorakis, like that other over-life-size figure of modern Greek culture, Nikos Kazantzakis, was filled with a sense of the importance of his creative energy. He believed he had a debt to society because of his artistic genius and his natural qualities of leadership. He was constantly composing, writing political speeches, planning. Half his songs had been written in prison, on aeroplanes, or sitting on the stage while his musicians packed up their instruments around him. His life was usually so busy and so public that he is rarely alone. It didn't seem to worry him. He preferred his crowded prison life at Oropos to the seclusion of exile in the mountains of the Peloponnese. He often seemed to me a sort of public bard, taking his inspiration from the people around him and improvising his responses.

*May 1975.* The football stadium of Volos has been full for hours but people keep streaming into the stands. Some manage to squeeze onto a bench, others stand wherever they can. There are shouts for people to sit down, although there is nothing to be seen except an empty platform in the centre of the arena. Soft-drink sellers who can no longer push through the packed stands are hurling plastic bottles with surprising accuracy at their customers. Coins are thrown back, some of which find their mark. Children are passed along the rows to their mothers as they begin to cry. A fight seems to have broken out at the gates as police try to stop more people coming into the already over-full stadium. Some of them are waving tickets but there is no more chance of them reaching their seats than there is of the police stopping the stream of people who are climbing over the fence.

The shouting at the gates is drowned by a shout from the stands. The lights have gone up on the platform where the musicians are now tuning up. There are whistles, shouts, slow handclapping. The musicians tune, consult with technicians and get down off the platform again. More shouting from the stands. The noise at the gates is beginning to sound ugly. There is a solid block of mostly young Greeks pressing against the barriers and demanding to be allowed to sit on the ground in the middle of the stadium.

The police have been asked to stay out of the stands to avoid violence, but the volunteer organisers have lost all control. They appeal to the dressing rooms. A message comes back: 'Let them all in free!' The gates are opened and hundreds, perhaps thousands of people race towards the platform. Volunteers link arms in a protective chain around the platform but as the crowd surges forward the technicians run to catch toppling floodlights and crouch over their speakers. Appeals are made for caution, but no-one can hear a word.

It takes half an hour before the crowd settles down again. Now they cover the central area of the stadium as well as filling the stands. Apartment blocks near the stadium are jammed with neighbours and friends watching from the upper balconies. The concert should have begun at eight o'clock. It is already nine, and still the stage is empty. The crowd is excited and restless. The police are keeping well in the background but the audience is aware of their presence. There are shouts of 'Down with the dictatorship, down with fascism!' 'CIA betrayal!' The musicians get up on the platform again to a lot of cheering and whistling. Everyone's eyes are on the doors to the dressing-rooms. A hysterical cry goes up: 'There he is!' The stadium is on its feet.

The tall figure walks along the path that has been cleared for him. He waves and nods as he walks. Fifteen thousand people are shouting, cheering, calling his name. He climbs quickly onto the platform, turns to his musicians and gives them a private smile of encouragement. Then he lifts his arms.

The first notes of *Romiosini* are drowned by the nearly hysterical crowd. Then the singer's voice sounds over the stadium...

*It doesn't suit these trees to stand under less sky.  
It doesn't suit these stones to be under foreign feet.  
These faces are only fit for the sun.  
These hearts are only fit for justice...*

There is a hush followed by a roar of delight. Men and women are singing in the stands; songs they know by heart, songs that have become synonymous with the spirit of resistance. On the platform, his arms out wide, his face serene, it seems as if Theodorakis is holding all Greece in his embrace.

Theodorakis' lead singer stands up. Maria Farandouri's powerful contralto voice has become so identified with the composer's music that she herself is a near mythical figure. Again, shouts drown her first notes....

*How lovely is my love  
in her everyday dress  
with a comb in her hair.  
Nobody knew how beautiful she was...*

It is a setting of a poem by Iakovos Kambanellis, written for a girl who died in the concentration camp of Mauthausen. As they listen to Farandouri's passionate voice, men and women begin to weep. People take each other's hands. Children stop crying and stare at their weeping parents. It is a moment so charged with emotion that it makes me feel embarrassed, as if I am watching the private baring of a nation's wounds.

*November 1976.* Theodorakis is giving his second concert in the town of Volos since the dictatorship fell. Instead of the football stadium he is playing in a medium-sized picture theatre. By the afternoon of the concert there are still a lot of seats unsold. The organisers send volunteers into the streets to urge people to come to the performance. By the time the concert begins the theatre is almost full. It holds about 2,000 people. Now there is no hysteria; just a warm reception from an audience of loyal fans. Maria Farandouri is no longer singing with the orchestra. She has formed her own ensemble to perform mixed programmes of Theodorakis and other composers. Andonis Kaloyannis, the popular male soloist of the last concert, has also formed his own group and is performing in an Athens nightclub. The pianist who led the orchestra in 1975 is dead. Theodorakis has a new group of young musicians with one or two of his old players. The songs are the same and Theodorakis is conducting with his usual energy, but the atmosphere is no longer charged with emotion. At the end of the concert a small crowd waits to shake the composer's hand. The musicians escape to a nearby restaurant to eat.

It has been a disappointing year for Theodorakis. He has been defeated in his attempt to gain a seat in parliament. The Greek Communist Party has condemned him as a reactionary and a traitor to the Party. A large proportion of Greece's students and intellectuals have attacked him for a variety of reasons — they say his political position is equivocal, opportunist or dishonest, that he is a millionaire acting the part of a socialist and martyr, that his recent music is worthless. In a basement club in the Plaka district of Athens, leftist intellectuals and students flock to hear the composer Savvopoulos perform his musical updated version of Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*. In the show, a Euripides/Theodorakis figure is asked for one of those rousing old songs 'with the knife at the bone, the strap at the neck...' The audience chortles as the wry anti-hero Savvopoulos pokes a not too gentle finger of fun at the Lion of the Resistance. Theodorakis is bitter and appears confused. He talks of threats to his family which necessitate his

carrying a gun. He considers living permanently abroad. There, in western Europe, his success has never been greater. Inside Greece he has lost touch temporarily with his public and his latest records are not selling well.

What caused the change in attitude of a considerable proportion of the Greek population to Theodorakis between the spring of 1975 and the autumn of 1976? Was the success of his music largely a feature of the dictatorship years? Was he out of touch with post-dictatorship Greek society? Was his involvement with post-dictatorship left wing politics and his rejection by the Communist Party sufficient reason to alienate both his communist supporters and his non-political admirers? Was his music only popular because of its political significance? Had he stopped writing 'music for the masses' or had he run out of musical inspiration altogether? Was he simply suffering the time-honoured process of ostracism in its classical Greek sense — a rejection of the former leader, a fate he shared with Greeks of renown from Socrates to the hero of the War of Independence, General Makryiannis?

The answers to these questions are, in part, what this book is about. Theodorakis has been eulogised, his life as a politico-cultural figure has been documented and romanticised. His music has been discussed in relation to his dramatic life and his political ideas, but no-one has attempted to consider his achievements as a composer objectively or to place his music in the context of modern Greek music. It is impossible to avoid judging a composer like Theodorakis without involving his political life and ideas, but if he is, as I believe him to be, one of the most important figures of twentieth-century music, his music deserves to be examined critically in terms of his intentions as a composer and not as the product of a political hero. It is fair to say that his music has been used by himself as well as by others for demagogic, pedagogic and directly political ends, but it is music composed by a serious intellectual who believes himself to be leading modern Greek music towards a unique synthesis of traditional national elements with western classical technique. It is also, or it was until recently, the music of a composer who sincerely believed that his music could help to shape society.

There is a fine historical and national basis for Theodorakis' belief that his music could perform a socially important function. In ancient Greece music was taken seriously as a means of moulding young Athenians to become worthy citizens of one of the most sophisticated societies the world has achieved. Plato's *Republic* devotes considerable space to musical education. Plato regarded musical training not only as an essential part of the education of young children but as the key to an understanding of philosophy. He also believed that music should be strictly censored in the