

The 'National Soul' of an 'Ecumenical' Music, Through the Time...

KALLIOPI STIGA

Collegel/Lyceum of Kea-Cyclades, Greece

EVA-MARIA V. ADAM-SCHMIDMEIER

Detmold

ABSTRACT: During our epoch of globalization where any national art is threatened, where any diversifying characteristic national element is absorbed under the flux of cultural homogenization, the relation between musical work and national identity as well as the role of the contemporary composer must be reviewed.

In this article, we will examine the relation between musical work and national identity in the 19th century and 20th century, through a comparative critical analysis of musical works and literary texts, specifically chosen by representative composers of these periods, such as Richard Wagner, Robert Schumann, Manolis Kalomoiris, Mikis Theodorakis, etc. Secondly, we will define the musical elements that transformed their works – expressing the 'national soul' – to ecumenical. Finally, we will highlight how the idea of 'national identity' is expressed nowadays through the works of Greek and German contemporary composers.

KEYWORDS: *music and national identity, Schumann, Febel, Kalomoiris, Theodorakis*

IF the Wagnerian 'musical drama' reminds us of the German spirit; if the rich orchestral color of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's work reveals in a 'discrete and shy manner' the Russian soul which will be revealed thereafter in all its splendor in the works of the composers of the 'group of 5', of Modest Mussorgsky's work in particular; if the elegiac and melancholic tone of Edvard Grieg's lyrical melodies makes us dream of the Norwegian fjords; if the austere style of the short characteristic motives of Jan Sibelius' works makes us think about the 'rude' character of the Finnish forests; if the dances of Frederic Chopin and the works of Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana, among others, transmit us the energy which characterizes the Polish and Bohemian peoples; if the melodies of Kalomoiris reflect the Greek bravery, how can we still wonder about the need of the existence of the 'national musics', of these musics which make us travel from one country to the other, of these musics which resuscitate in us 'the soul' of each people?

It is from 1815 (the end of Napoleon's Empire and Congress of Vienne) and until 1914 (1st World War) – chronological demarcation of the 19th century according to the historians – that Europe becomes the centre of philosophical, scientific and artistic research. The industrialization, the democratization and the nationalism are the three predominant tendencies

of this century and their consequences are unavoidable as well in the scientific domain as in the field of art and ideas. As regards the world of music, up to the middle of the 19th century, Italy, France and Germanic countries are in the centre of any evolution; however, the strengthening of nationalism and the revolutionary ambience which prevail in Europe, create the need for the different European people to eliminate any 'foreign' element of their music and to search their own intellectual roots (cf. Neff [1910] 1985: 492). It is therefore in this particular context that the European National Musical Schools come into the world. Their birth is identified with the use of music as one of the ways to express an oppressed or a triumphant national identity. The aim of the composers belonging to the National Schools is to create a music reflecting the soul of their people and inciting to think about their country; in other terms, they want to give birth to a pure and easily recognizable musical style characteristic of their nation, of their people. To realise it they have recourse as well to myths and to legends as to songs and to folk dances of their country. But at the same time, they use the 'cosmopolitan' musical language formulated and imposed by the savant music of Italy, France but especially Germany and Austria (Frangou-Psychopedis 1990: 24).

In this paper we are interested in two geographically distant European countries: Germany and Greece which have always had strong links and intensive exchanges as well on a political as on a cultural level. More particularly, we shall concentrate on the 'national character' of the music of these two countries through the literary writings and the musical works of distinguished German and Greek composers.

In his article "Niels W. Gade", published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (1 January 1844), Robert Schumann is speaking about the national elements in music:

Indeed it seems as if the nations adjoining to Germany wanted to emancipate from the dominion of German music. [...] So represents Chopin his native country, Bennet England, in Holland J. Verhulst is making hopes for being a worthy representative of his native country, also Hungary brings national attempts to bear. And as they all consider the German nation as their first and beloved teacher in music, nobody shall wonder if they also want to speak their own language of music, but without getting unfaithful to the teaching of their master. [...] Also in the North of Europe we saw national tendencies getting manifest. Lindblad in Stockholm translated his old folk-songs, also Ole Bull, although no productive talent of first celebrity tried to naturalize the sounds of his native place. The new appearing significant poets of Scandinavia understood to give his musical talents a powerful stimulation, getting remembered from their hills and lakes, their runic letters and northern lights, that the North is allowed to speak an own language. Also our young musician [Niels Wilhelm Gade] was educated by the poets of

his native country; he knows and loves them all; the old fairy-tales and legends accompany him [...]. So in his music, and firstly in this Ossians-Overture, is shown for the first time a firmly marked northern character; but certainly Gade himself will not deny how much he is owing to the German masters (quoted after Schumann 1854).

For Schumann all these countries he mentioned (Poland, England, Holland, Scandinavian countries) shall try to speak their own 'language of music' – but in loyalty to their musical 'master' Germany! Schumann thinks the 'national language' (the 'national tendencies') can be expressed by:

- old folk-songs (*Lindblad in Stockholm*),
- musical description of typical landscapes, inspired by the national poets ("hills and lakes, [...] runic letters and northern lights" remind the musician to speak his own language),
- old fairy-tales and legends.

In the music of Robert Schumann you can find a lot of the mentioned topics, which form a typical 'national tone' – in this case a typical German tone: titles like *Märchenbilder* op. 113 (for piano and viola), or works with German fairy-tales or legends as topic (for example: his opera *Genoveva* op. 81, or *Der Rose Pilgerfahrt. Märchen nach einer Dichtung von Moritz Horn* op. 112) are not only Schumann's personal preferences, they are at least just as close to the political and social background of Germany in the first half of the 19th century.

The political idea in the background is the idea of a 'culture-nation', basically formulated by Johann Gottfried von Herder. His main argument for a culture-nation is especially a common language and a common culture (cf. Herder 1774). In contrast to the French Revolution, which considered 'nation' as a political affair, artists defined 'nation' as an exclusive cultural affair. Though the romantic era had a specific political component, it is also the era, which is connected like no other era everywhere in Europe with the idea of specific 'German'.

Inspired by the 'German musical spirit', almost a century later, the Greek composer Manolis Kalomoiris inaugurates the Greek National Musical School with the Program-Manifesto for his concert given in the Conservatory of Athens on June 11th, 1908. Influenced especially by the movement of the Russian National School, Kalomoiris is a fervent defender of the 'national character' of music. More precisely, in his Manifesto, Kalomoiris writes:

A really National Music is founded on our pure songs on the one hand, and 'decorated' on the other hand, of all these technical elements given by the uninterrupted work of the musically advanced people as the Germans, the French, the Russians and the Norwegians. [...]

And as the poet is free to search his inspiration where he finds it, sometimes in the national traditions and sometimes in the worldwide problems, in the same way the musician sometimes gets closer to the national Muse and sometimes to the foreigner (quoted after Frangou-Psychopedis 1990: 49).

Kalomoiris, who supports the movement for the institution of the Greek demotic language as official language of the country, is related to some of the most important personalities of his epoch as for example, to the poets Costis Palamas and Angelos Sikélianos and to the writer Nikos Kazantzakis. In his Program-Manifesto, he is referring to the importance of the national language which is the “living language of people” and which, only it can “nourish a powerful music” (Frangou-Psychopedis 1990: 48). Besides, this strong relation between music and poetry is proved as well through Kalomoiris’ big works (operas, symphonies) as through his cycles of songs.

As far as his musical language is concerned, it incorporates, on the one hand, several Wagnerian elements as the infinite melody and leitmotifs and on the other, several elements of the Greek demotic song (such as scales or intervals) adapted always to the tempered European system. His works can be based as well on simple but dense melodies of a remarkable beauty as on long musical phrases with an accentuating intensity in an epic style. This last characteristic is especially found in Kalomoiris’ operas and symphonies where his vision for the creation of a “Big Greek art” and the reconstruction of the “Big Greece” (according to the purposes of the Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos who was speaking about the “Big Greece of the 2 continents and of the 5 seas”: cf. Krassanakis) are clearly expressed.

As an example, we want to refer to his 5 Preludes for piano and to his Symphony of Bravery.

The 5 Preludes for piano are important because, with the other works for piano by Kalomoiris, they inaugurate the neo-hellenic musical literature for piano. Kalomoiris is the first Greek composer to consider the piano as an instrument with a characteristic language and not as a simple ‘tool’, among the others, which contribute to the formation of the symphonic orchestra. The 5 Preludes by their tripartite form remind us of the Preludes of Chopin; the 4th and the 5th Prelude however introduce a ‘Greek character’ much more accentuated: the 4th because it seems to be founded on a free improvisation on a rhythm in 7/8 and the 5th with the indication *Assai vivo e vigoroso* (=with bravour) resembles to a vivacious and dynamic version of the Greek *tsamiko* dance (cf. Romanou 2000: 124–127).

As regards the Symphony of Bravery, it is the first symphony of the composer (1918) premiered under his direction in 1920 in the ancient theatre of Herodes Atticus. Composed and created in a climate of general enthusiasm owed to the victory of the Greek soldiers in the Battle of Skra against the Bulgarians, the symphony is devoted to the heroes of Balkan

Wars and also to the poet Costis Palamas. The work consists of 4 parts: 1. *Héroïquement et Passionnément*, 2. *Lamentation*, 3. *Scherzo-Fête*, 4. *Victoires*. In the last part, founded on the Byzantine hymn *Ti Ypermaho* (to the Virgin Mary), the influence of Mussorgsky's piece *Pictures at an Exhibition* is obvious. At the same time, the Wagnerian influence is felt in the whole work (cf. Frangou-Psychopedis 1990: 143–145).

But if the Wagnerian style appears in that way in Kalomoiris' work, the founder of the Greek National School, Richard Wagner himself really did not support this tendency of creation of 'national musics', he advocated, on the contrary, the creation of an 'ecumenical music'.

More precisely, in 1849, Richard Wagner writes in his work *Die Kunst und die Revolution (Art and Revolution)*:

If the Greek work of art contained the mind of a beautiful nation, the work of art of the future must contain the mind of the free humanity outside of all national borders: the national character could be included only as an ornament, as an attraction provided by individual diversity and not as an obstacle (Wagner 1849; quoted after Wagner's Cycle / Wagner and Greece 1992–1993: 52).

When this distinguished German composer, profound admirer of the ancient Greek civilization, wrote this, he was persuaded that a real chef d'oeuvre could only be produced by the mind of a free man! As 'free' were considered by Wagner, the eminent dramatists of the Ancient Greece: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, at the time of the creation of their works that is to say before the end of the Athenian Democracy. Based on this, Wagner aspired to the creation of artistic works which would be the reflection of the whole of humanity, of a free humanity. In that case, any particular element of the artistic work which would remind a national culture would only be a 'decorating' element and not at all an element of limitation.

Did this Wagnerian vision come true or did it remain a utopia? How could we break the deadlock in which we live in our epoch? How in this era of globalization where any national art is threatened, where any diversifying characteristic national element is absorbed under the flux of homogenization, could we become free again and create some real *chefs d'oeuvres*? As we are not able in this paper to focus on the whole artistic domains, we shall limit ourselves to music and we shall try firstly to define the actual 'relation between musical composition and national identity', in the Germanic and in the Greek area through the thoughts and the music of the German composer Reinhard Febel and of one of the most important Greek personalities of the 20th century and till now, of the composer, politician and thinker, Mikis Theodorakis.

The German composer Reinhard Febel was born in 1952 in Metzingen near Stuttgart (Germany). He studied with Klaus Huber in Freiburg,

participated in courses for electronic music at the IRCAM Paris, from 1983 to 1988 Reinhard Febel operated as a freelance composer in London. Since 1989 Reinhard Febel was Professor for composition and music theory at the Hannover University of Music and Drama (*Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hannover*), since 1997 he is Professor for composition at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg. As a guest lecturer he spent a lot of time abroad: he gave lectures in South-America (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Peru), Cameroon, South-Africa, New Zealand, Latvia, Bolivia, Texas, Taiwan, Japan, Turkey, Macedonia, United Kingdom, Italy and Spain.

Travelling through Africa, New Zealand, South-America, Japan and many other countries lend to Reinhard Febel an astonishing new perspective on the European music life. His idea of 'music' got extended by becoming acquainted with ethnic music; Febel also works up this 'ethnic idea' in his compositions. For example his Four Pieces for violin and orchestra (composed in 1994) uses in the second piece a 'fiddle-solo' that means a very fast played melody in the first position, as you can find it in the North-American folk-songs. The fourth piece transforms a *Gumboot-Dance* that Febel heard from miners in South-Africa (Febel 2004: 25).

While Robert Schumann is speaking about loyalty to the musical master Germany, Febel uses the word 'Imperialism'. In his opinion the last half of the century was stamped from a European culture-imperialism:

Imperialism: The eradication of the nation continues in eradication of the folklore. Unfortunately – at least I think so – the new music didn't earn laurels referring to the occupation with the music of foreign cultures. Even I think, that the last decades or the last half of the century was stamped from a European culture-imperialism that could not be the last word. Naturally so-called 'crossover'-phenomenon are also not unproblematic, I'm aware, and the music of other cultures is no self-service-shop. Nevertheless I think that the analytical occupation [...] with ideas and concepts of music from other cultures has become a very important thing (Febel 2004: 37).

In non-European music Febel is especially interested in the rhythmical structures and their physical effects, which are not very present in the European so-called 'classical music'; the contemporary music renounces far-reaching on these rhythmical structures and physical effects too by eliminating generally metrics and pulsation. For this reason Febel tried to bring back the direct physical effects with repetitive rhythms, for example in his works *Sinfonie* (1985/1986), *Die vier Zeiten* (1993, for choir), *Piano Books I, II and III* (1986–1994) or in works for music-theatre like *Sekunden und Jahre des Caspar Hauser* (1991/1992) and *Beauty* (1995/1996).

His piece, *Sphinxes* (2004), also uses constantly repeating short and simple melodies and cadences. It is related to the work of Robert Schumann, a composer who is greatly admired by Febel. He quotes several piano works:

the Piano Concerto, *Kinderszenen*, *Humoreske* and *Kreisleriana*. The quotes are not always audible at once; they are interwoven with or hidden in the new composition. *Sphinxes* tries to describe the tragic aspect in the life of Schumann: being tortured by repeated melodies and cadences.

Febel's view on near and far cultures and his view on the past and the present are un-historical: Mozart is at the same time very far (as a representative of a past era and society) and very close, because his music is always present. Vice versa the Indian music is far away – geographically –, but it is easily accessible by CDs, and it is also easy to have the original experience by travelling. For Febel there is no more difference between near and far. His definition is consequently non-geographical and non-historical – near is, what we love, far is all the other:

Temporal and spatial distance act the same. However both are no graduator for the meaning of a thing, because: close is what we love, distant is every other thing.

Mozart and the Turkish music. Giacomo Puccini and the Japanese music. Claude Debussy and Gamelan. John Cage and the Zen-Buddhism. Richard Wagner, Arthur Schopenhauer and the Indian philosophy. György Ligeti and African music. Antonín Dvořák and the music of the new American world. Red Indian songs and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Gipsy music, Joseph Haydn and Johannes Brahms. The Argentine tango, Igor Strawinsky and Astor Piazzolla. Yehudi Menuhin and the Indian music. But also: Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven and Bach, Anton Webern and Bach, Dmitri Schostakovitsch and Bach, Luciano Berio and Gustav Mahler, Olivier Messiaen and the birds, Freddie Mercury and Antonio Vivaldi or Georg Philipp Telemann (the prelude to The Show Must Go On 1991); Alban Berg, the hymn Es ist genug and the Ländler; Arnold Schönberg and Brahms, Maurice Ravel and the Habanera, Berio's Folksongs and so on and so on. So-called 'Crossovers' have always taken place, it is certainly even more difficult to find and describe stylistic 'pure' areas, as to find again many things in many things (Febel 2004: 87)

Febel compares the overrating of the European music – or in general the European art – between the year 1000 and nowadays to an enormous 'hydrocephalus'. His consequence: "The history of Europe has worked out a turning-point" (Febel 2004: 47).

As about Mikis Theodorakis, born in 1925 in Chios in Greece, he wanted, according to the Wagnerian spirit, to create a "music for the masses", a "music without borders", an "ecumenical music" (cf. Stiga 2006: 19–20).¹ Mikis Theodorakis grew up during an epoch of an immense instability in every domain of the Greek social life. In this period, the German musical culture as well as the National Greek School prevailed in Greece. Influenced by these two tendencies as well as by the traditional Greek music – Byzantine music and demotic (folk) music – and by the popular Greek music (*rebétikas*)

¹ Ecumenical or oecumenical (from late Latin *oecumenicus*, from Greek *ΟΙ ΚΟΙΝΟΜΕΝΙ ΚΟΣ*): of worldwide scope or applicability; universal.

and inspired by the Socialist Cultural Revolution, Theodorakis, who had already studied the western classical music in Greece and in France, led the “mass culture regenerator movement” in Greece during the 1960s, creating a “music for the masses” (cf. Stiga 2006: 125). The “music for the masses” was born out of “the marriage of traditional Greek folk and popular music with the modern Greek poetry” (Theodorakis 1972: 22) and through new musical forms like the ‘cycle of songs’, the ‘popular oratorio’, the ‘modern popular musical tragedy’, the ‘flow-song’ expresses the longing of modern Greece, the hopes and dreams of all those fighting for Peace and Freedom.

More precisely, in Theodorakian music, Byzantine modes which have their roots in Ancient Greek Music, meet with the *dromoi* used in *rébétikas* songs as well as with the major and minor modes used in western music; the odd rhythms of Greek demotic dances cross with the pairs rhythms of Western dances; the sounds of the *bouzouki*, the *santouri* and the *baglamas* flirt with the sounds of the violin, the harp and the clarinet; the Greek contemporary poetry of Yannis Ritsos, Odysseus Elytis, George Seferis joins the poetry of Paul Eluard, Federico Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda. In this way, the Theodorakian music is at the same time ‘a national music’ and an ‘ecumenical music’ on the service of the humanity and important ideals: as the Worldwide Peace, the Democracy, the Peoples’ Collaboration...

The German musicologist Gerhard Folkerts in his paper “The Symphonic Work of Mikis Theodorakis”, presented during the International Congress *Mikis Theodorakis: Man, Artist, Musician, Politician; Native of Crete and Citizen of the World*, who took place in Crete in 2005, supports:

[...] thanks to his symphonic work, the composer Mikis Theodorakis created a new model of Greek and European original music. This music makes him different and transforms him into the founder of a Contemporary Greek School of composers and of a Contemporary European School of composers. The centre of this symphonic work is not the musical material but the Man. It is what differentiates Theodorakis from other composers of Western European avant-garde. In the heart of his symphonic works exists the protest and the resistance against every – so-called irremovable – thing, as well as the positive creation of the future of the human genre. Through his symphonic work, Theodorakis, incite us to think and creates in us the desire to realize our need of Love, Freedom and Peace (Folkerts 2005: 107–108).

At the same time, the famous Finnish singer Arja Saijonmaa, who transmitted the Theodorakian work in the Scandinavian countries, confirms, by speaking directly to Mikis Theodorakis, during the same International Congress, that his music is easily recognizable everywhere on the planet thanks to its ‘Greek character’:

Mikis, I see you as the one who cultivated his Greek origin, his Greek culture, his Greek roots, his identity, his history, his education through

the learning of the classical music; I see you as the one who turned round towards his roots and who consciously chose his Greek origin as a tool for his musical creation. Mikis, you are not only Greek. You use your Greekness to express yourself, to say something that belongs to all of us (Saijonmaa 2005: 220).

Who cannot, for instance, recognize the music of the film *Zorba the Greek* as well as the ballet *Zorba il Greco* and the *Suite of Zorba* where the rhythm of the *sirtaki* dance prevails? The music of these works “becomes the expression of an unlimited hope” (*Wagner’s Cycle / Wagner and Greece* 2000: 289). According to his biographer Guy Wagner, thanks to this music Mikis Theodorakis

[...] accomplished one of his more important musical deals: to join symphonic, popular and Cretan music in a so harmonic manner as their alliance appears completely natural; and that because he understood this alliance ‘not as an opposition, but as a synthesis’. Theodorakis is ‘Cretan, Greek and European’ and with this score, Greek popular music makes a bright entrance in the Western symphonic music (Wagner 2000: 288).

In other words, the ecumenical character of the Theodorakian work is based on the fact that it “is the echo of Antiquity, that it carries elements of Byzantine wealth, juices of demotic music and ‘péniés’ of the rebetik song. All that joined in a diachronic ensemble, mirror of the soul of the people” (Serézis 2002: 23).

We are wondering, however, if this ecumenical work with the national soul can become a useful weapon against the movement of globalization and cultural homogenization which prevail nowadays.

We are persuaded that it can become, because the Theodorakian music contains all these elements of Greek culture and it can help us to protect our national culture at this time where any national culture is threatened. The Greek singer Dimitris Bassis, with a humoristic air, maintains that “the music of Theodorakis is for worldwide music what is the Acropolis, the Parthenon for worldwide civilization” (Stiga 2006: 1129); in such case, does the Theodorakian music not become automatically a powerful weapon of Greek culture’s defense?

From Schumann to Febel, from Kalomoiris to Theodorakis, we can note that as well in Germany as in Greece, musics with a ‘national soul’ can become ecumenical thanks to uniting traditional elements which they contain. Consequently, we can only wish that the flux of globalization which invades us does not cause the death of the local traditions, because every diversifying national element has at the same time an indubitable ecumenical value.

References

- Febel, R. (2004). *Alles ständig in Bewegung. Texte zur Musik 1976–2003*. Hrsg. von R. Nonnenmann (*Quellentexte zur Musik des 20./21. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 11,1). Saarbrücken: Pfau.
- Folkerts, G. (2005). The symphonic work of Mikis Theodorakis. *Proceedings of the International Congress “Mikis Theodorakis: Man, Artist, Musician, Politician; Native of Crete and Citizen of the World”*. Hania: Prefecture and Ministry of Culture, pp. 109–110.
- Frangou-Psychopedis, O. (1990). Η Εθνική Σχολή Μουσικής. Προβλήματα Ιδεολογίας [The [Greek] National School of Music. Problems of Ideology]. Athens: Foundation for Mediterranean Studies.
- Herder, J. G. (1774). *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*. Riga: J. F. Hartknoch.
- Krassanakis, A. Νεότερη Κρητική ιστορία [Recent Cretan History]. <http://www.krassanakis.gr/Venizelos.htm>
- Neff, K. (1910). *Einführung in die Musikgeschichte*. Trans. by F. Anogianakis as: *Ιστορία Μουσικής*. Athens: Votsis N., 1985.
- Romanou, K. (2000). *Ιστορία Νεοελληνικής Έντεχνης Μουσικής* [History of Neo-Hellenic Art Music]. Athens: Koultoura.
- Saijonmaa, A. (2005). Salutation. In: *Proceedings of the International Congress “Mikis Theodorakis: Man, Artist, Musician, Politician; Native of Crete and Citizen of the World”*. Hania: Prefecture and Ministry of Culture, p. 220.
- Schumann, R. (1854). *Niels W. Gade*. In: R. Schumann. *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*. Leipzig. Reprint – Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1985, S. 282–287.
- Serézis, K. (2002). *Μίκης Θεοδωράκης, ο οικουμενικός* [Mikis Theodorakis: The Ecumenical]. Athens: Kastaniotis.
- Stiga, K. (2006). *Mikis Theodorakis: le chantre du rapprochement de la musique savante et de la musique populaire* (Thèse de Doctorat, Vol. 3). Lyon: Université Lumière-Lyon II.
- Theodorakis, M. (1972). *Μουσική για τις μάζες* [Music for the Masses]. Athens: Olkos.
- Wagner, G. (2000). *Mikis Theodorakis: Une vie pour la Grèce*. Luxembourg: PHI.
- Wagner, R. (1849). *Die Kunst und die Revolution*. Trans. by Tz. Mastoraki as: *Η Τέχνη και η Επανάσταση*. In: *Wagner’s Cycle / Wagner and Greece*. Athens: Athens Concert Hall and Educational Foundation of National Bank of Greece, 1992–1993, pp. 1–53.