

In conclusion, I would like to stress that there are no irreconcilable oppositions between Realism, Romanticism, and the depiction of folkways (*ethographia*), three strains present in the writings of Papadiamantis. Conventional literary terms are often deemed inadequate to define the variety of modes found in European Romanticism. Are not such "Realists" as Manzoni, Merimee, and Stendhal Romanticists as well? Many contemporary critics consider Realism as a major component of the Romantic Movement, one which came to assume a dominant role in prose writing during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ In Germany a distinguished group of prose writers of the period roughly 1830-1880, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Adalbert Stifter, Gottfried Keller, Theodor Storm, and Jeremias Gotthelf, wrote stories (*Novellen*) characterized by diffused romanticism and also that very quality we call in Greek *ethographia*. In Storm, for example, the landscape of his Northern homeland, Schleswig-Holstein, becomes the setting for his melancholy and the backdrop for the tragic dramas he relates, the unfulfilled love in "Immensee," the constant struggle with the unrelenting sea in "Der Schimmelreiter," and the devotion of the good father to his worthless son in "Carsten Curator." The Germans call this mixture of Romanticism and Realism *Poetischer Realismus*, and this is a term that we might well appropriate to describe the work of Alexandros Papadiamantis as well.

¹⁹Barzun 1961: 99: "the first phase of romanticism is one of extraordinary, unremitting, 'unspecialized' production in all fields.... Romanticism sounds all the themes of the century in its first movement. The next three movements develop one theme each. The next three movements are: Realism, Symbolism, Naturalism." Peyre, 1971: 221-28, speaks of the Romanticism in the works of Leconte de Lisle, Flaubert, and Zola, and other writers of the second half of the nineteenth century. Harold Bloom expresses the judgment that English Romanticism covers the entire nineteenth century (Kermode (ed.) n.d.: 1177).

Mikis Theodorakis: Music, Culture, and the Creative Process

SPYROS D. ORFANOS

Music helped poetry to become necessary,
necessary to man like bread and wine.

Yannis Ritsos

Understanding the evocative and expressive power of music by reading about it is not possible. The musical experience defies verbal organization even when the critic is a talented one. Music we know gives us a great deal of information - aesthetic, emotional, historical, and even philosophical. Thus, it is clear that writing about music is a difficult task. Understanding the creative power and impact of Greece's premier composer, Mikis Theodorakis, is an even more formidable task. The songs and music of this seventy-three-year-old year old composer have been both innovative and traditional at the same time. He has had an astonishing popularity in Greece, Europe, the United States, and South America. He is a complex artist and an activist with a disposition that can best be described as a unique combination of sensitivity, imagination, independence, and radicalism. While highly intellectual, Theodorakis is able to communicate passions and ideas even under physical and psychological conditions of extraordinary stress. His profound concerns for social and political justice are rooted in his personal history and his leftist ideology. While often idealized, he is not without controversy.

During the period of 1960 to 1975, when Theodorakis was at the height of his popularity, he may have been one of the most influential figures on the Greek psyche. From 1975 to the present, Theodorakis has continued to compose music of great beauty and artistic integrity and to be a participant in the cultural and political currents of Greece.

Given his visionary creativity and the ability to galvanize a world-wide audience, there are surprisingly few scholarly studies that have been published in English.¹

With a focus on Mikis Theodorakis, this paper aims at applying a psychological understanding to the relationship among the musical, cultural and creative processes that have been operative in Modern Greece.² Theodorakis is a very political composer. Creating music is a political act for him, yet at the same time it is an aesthetic act, and this makes it particularly difficult to analyze the merits of his works.

¹The four significant English language publications are: George Giannaris, *Mikis Theodorakis: Music and Social Change* (New York, 1972); Mikis Theodorakis, *Journals of Resistance*. Translated from the French by Graham Webb (New York, 1973); Gail Holst, *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music* (Amsterdam, 1979); Mikis Theodorakis, *Music and Theater*. Translated from the Greek by George Giannaris (Athens, 1983); and Nicholas Papandreou, "Mikis and Manos: A Tale of Two Composers," *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, 19:1, pp. 113-131. Gail Holst's treatise is by far the most accomplished. She offers an exquisite structural analysis of Theodorakis' music up until the year 1975, and her cultural understanding is also of great usefulness to one trying to understand the creative life and times of Theodorakis.

In Greek, recent works of interest are: Peter Petrides, *The Political Theodorakis* (Athens, 1997); and Theodorakis himself has written a five volume autobiography *The Streets of the Archangel* (Athens, 1986-1997). This autobiographical series is scheduled to include additional volumes.

²Creativity is of wide interdisciplinary interest and psychology is one source of understanding that has made contributions to the topic. Within psychology, my own perspective is a psychoanalytic one. A distinction must be made between clinical psychoanalysis and applied psychoanalysis. Clinical psychoanalysis is a discipline that seeks to understand and alleviate human suffering. I am not dealing with clinical issues. We are in the applied psychoanalytic arena, and this means that I am using the interpretive discipline of psychoanalysis to understand a particular creative phenomena. My psychoanalytic beliefs are rooted not in Freud but in contemporary psychoanalytic theory; a theory that emphasizes relationships and community as the driving motivational sources of the individual mind. Thus, I am not concerned with how much libido or aggression Theodorakis possesses but with the nature of his relationships and how he experienced them and how those relational experiences might be connected to his creative experiences. Further, I understand creativity not as a by-product psychopathology; on the contrary, it has its source in healthy aspects of the personality.

Given the vastness and complexity of the topic it must be considered exploratory. It should be noted that history and culture are not well-ordered and linear. Further, artistic activities are embedded in a complex amalgam of social-structural, economic, political, and cultural forces. It will by necessity exclude numerous composers and artist from the present effort, such as Manos Hadjidakis, Vasilis Tsitanis, and others, who were also highly influential. But, my assumption is that Theodorakis has been by far the most significant Greek composer of our time.

Greek Music

Like many peoples of the world, Greeks, since their ancient days have been greatly involved in music. Certainly the perception here in the United States, after the films *Never on Sunday* (music by Hadjidakis) in 1960 and *Zorba the Greek* (music by Theodorakis) in 1965, is that Greeks love music and dance. Of course, this love of song and dance has had a bad press with the saccharine "Souvenir from Greece" cassettes, but the seriously interested can find a rich, varied, and visionary musical tradition in Greece.

A simple sketch of the various major roots that can be said to constitute Greek music might include: *demotika*, the Byzantine *melos*, and *rebetika*. *Demotika* is folk music and dance of the rural areas and islands. The Byzantine *melos* is ecclesiastic melody with links to Ancient Greece. *Rebetika* is, roughly speaking, music, dance, and songs of the harbors, brothels, and the cities, chiefly of the lower and working classes. *Rebetika* were popular in the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1940s and 1950s, they became known as *laika*.

Other important musical elements to be included would be *Acritic* and *klephtic* ballets, old Eastern folksongs, *cantadas* and the light European song. *Acritic* ballads are epic songs of the ninth century Byzantine hero, Digenis Acritas. *Klephtic* ballads are heroic tales of 19th century resistance fighters against the Turks. Old Eastern folksongs include Arabic, Indian, Semitic, and Turkish rhythms and strains. *Cantadas* are songs from Italy. Prior to the 1960s, classical music played a minor role in Greek music listening.

Roderick Beaton has argued that unlike other European countries, Greece has never really assimilated the classical musical tradition of her western neighbors. This was due to the deep-seated hatred of the Greek Orthodox for everything Frankish, which goes back even be-

yond the Fourth Crusade. Further, it was due to the effect of Ottoman Turkish rule in almost all parts of the Greek-speaking world during the very centuries (the sixteenth to the nineteenth) when the European musical tradition was reaching its fullest development.³

Writing about the music developments in Greece, Theodorakis observed that,

In the same period when Italy was giving birth to Vivaldi and Rossini, Germany to Bach and Mozart, and France to her Couperins, our "composers" were "writing" their masterpieces: the dirges of Mani, the Cretan *rizitika*, the songs and dances of Roumeli, Epiros, and the islands. But as our "composers" were either shepherds or fishermen, it was not expected that their technique would go beyond the limits of unsophisticated inspiration. Thus the song fermented, hidden amidst the people, remaining forever unknown.⁴

As a music critic in the early 1950s, Theodorakis attempted to define what constitutes a genuine Greek style of music. He was critical of the lack of substantive musical education in Greece and believed that the Italian and German-Austrian traditions dominated Greek conservatories and concerts. He wrote that,

The followers of the so-called "National School of Music" like Manolis Kalomiris, Marios Varvoglis, Spyros Evangelatos, etc., tried to combine the Greek melodic world with the Western technique. Thus, they took the harmonics, the orchestral technique and the forms of the Europeans in order to dress them with these Greek, mostly demotic songs and dances.

But unlike Stravinsky and Bela Bartok who took the *character* of the folk melodies in trying also-and here is where the greatness of their work is to be found-to create new technical foundations and elaborations; that is, harmonies, rhythms, orchestral colors, musical forms, which would spring directly from the new melodic world, the Greek

³Robert Beaton, "The Art of the Greek Folk Song," *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 3 (1986) pp. 47-55.

⁴Quoted in Giannaris, p. 119.

composers whom I have just mentioned used unchanging primarily demotic melodies, adding to them, as I have shown, the technique of European music, unaltered and unassimilated.

It is therefore to be expected that such methodology will lead us to a Greek-like rather than a genuine Greek musical work. Furthermore, the servile imitation of the Western musical ideology, in combination with the forged character of the modern Greek symphonic work, turned the masses of our country's people from artistic endeavors.⁵

Theodorakis, a classically trained composer and a Marxist like many other Greek intellectuals of his time, was eager to speak to the broadest possible audience. What he consciously wished to champion was the Greek popular song of his day, the *laiko* song. He saw in the *laiko* song a creative force that could critique the status quo and offer identification with the oppressed. The word "*laiko*" means "of the people," and a *laiko* song uses as its chief instrument the *bouzouki* (a long-necked string instrument with a half-pear-shaped wooden back of Greco-Turkish background). The *laiko* song followed the musical tradition of the *rebetika*, but instead of simply emphasizing lyrics that were escapist, rebellious, and erotic, it expanded to themes of psychological and social despair.

During the 1940s when Greece was occupied by the German war machine, the *laiko* song "Cloudy Sunday" by Vasilis Tsitsanis became a thinly veiled lament for the desecrated homeland and the demoralized populace. The song's extraordinary popularity was organic in that it was spread by word of mouth, for it was not recorded until 1948.⁶

It was during his political imprisonments in the late 1940s that Theodorakis was introduced to *laiko* song by fellow prisoners who

⁵Theodorakis, *Music and Theater*, pp. 29-30.

⁶In an analysis of "Cloudy Sunday" Theodorakis finds that the melody Tsitsanis composed is in character related to Byzantine music. He contrast this to Kalomiris' "Symphony for the Brave Youth" which directly borrows a classical Byzantine melody "Ti Ypermachio." For Theodorakis, "Cloudy Sunday" is Greek, and "Symphony for the Brave Youth" is Greek-like. See "My Artistic Credo" in Theodorakis' *Music and Theater*, p. 21.

came from the poor urban areas and therefore were familiar with songs "of the people." He wrote down the melodies and began his analysis of their musical roots. By the late 1950s, Theodorakis realized that it was these songs that needed to be at the core of his musical revolution.

The Life and Times of Mikis Theodorakis

I believe that we can say that Theodorakis' creative journey had its roots in the era before his birth on the island of Chios on July 29, 1925. He was born into a modest family and community that was *traumatized* by the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922. During this "catastrophe" the Turks slaughtered the Greeks of Smyrna, burned the city to the ground, and created 1.5 million refugees that then had to be absorbed by mainland Greece. This was one of the first of the major crises that befell Greece. Some have argued that from that time till 1974, Greece has been in continuous political and economic crisis with only a few short periods of stability.⁷

Mikis Theodorakis' mother, Aspasia Poulakis, was a refugee from Tsesmes, a coastal city in Asia Minor. She came from an educated and established family. His father, Yorgos Theodorakis, a government civil servant, was from the village of Galata in Crete, and was the descendent of a long line of freedom fighters, chieftains, and politicians who had fought for Greek independence. Yorgos Theodorakis himself had been exiled from Crete three times for his resistance to Turkish oppression.

Theodorakis openly talks about the experience of his parents as outsiders on Chios and the effect it had on him.⁸ He recalls his mother being ostracized and finding comfort only with her own kind and other refugees from Tsesmes. He observed her shame and sadness. Interestingly enough, when the family visited Crete, the father's home, his mother was treated as an outsider there too because she was not from Crete and she had married a local *pallikari* (a worthy lad). Yorgos Theodorakis moved from post to post as governments changed. Thus, young Mikis (Michail) moved with his family to numerous provin-

⁷Nikos Alivizatos, *Political Institutions in Crisis, 1922-1974: Aspects of the Greek Experience* (in Greek) (Athens, 1983).

⁸Interviews with the author held in Athens. January 1995.

cial islands and towns like Lesbos, Ioannina, Kefalonia, Patras and Tripolis. In 1932, Mikis' brother, Yannis was born.⁹

For Mikis Theodorakis the numerous relocations created intimate familiarity with the breathtaking Greek landscape of the mountains and the islands. But at the same time, the relocations created a sense of not belonging to the local community, of being a *xenos*. However, the constancy of a loving family and the Greek Orthodox Church, where he sang in the choir, made for tremendous psychological security. Two early memories are revealing of the kind of emotional climate Mikis grew up in. The first memory is of his father singing endless love songs to his mother. The second involves an activity that he and his father would always engage in when the family relocated. They would build bookcases for the many books they owned. The books consisted of Greek and European literature and philosophy. Thus, the expression of love and the value placed on knowledge were prominent characteristics of the Theodorakis family household.

If early childhood experiences contribute to the character and personality of the adult, then the very early years of Mikis Theodorakis foretold of experiences having to do with oppression, trauma, and marginalization. He developed a great resentment for irrational and illegal authority. Physical and psychological survival was achieved by love of family, nature, the Church, music and literature. It is not a major leap to hypothesize that much of Theodorakis' music is on a personal level about being oppressed and an outsider, and that this has resonated with Greeks because much of the psychology of Greeks is that of the outsider and the oppressed. But, Greeks have always appreciated their landscape and their families and when Theodorakis composed music about the skies and seas of Greece and familial bonds and losses, this too resonated with the Greek psyche. Further, when he purposefully included and asserted the ethnic music of Greece and broke down the barriers between popular and concert music in Greece, he was in part, healing his own wounds, that of his parents, and his people.

Theodorakis' musical interests and talents developed early. In Patras at the age of twelve he had written his first compositions and in Tri-

⁹Yannis Theodorakis became an accomplished poet. Mikis Theodorakis set some of his finest music to the poetry of his brother. Yannis Theodorakis died in 1997.

polis, at the age of seventeen in 1942, he composed the liturgical hymn *Kassiani*. The next year, still in Tripolis, he became active in the resistance and was arrested by Italian authorities. In prison, he was tortured for the first time. Other prisoners encouraged him to read Lenin and Marx, and he became a member of the Communist Party. Later in the year, having just left Tripolis for Athens to continue his musical studies, ten of his friends in the resistance were hanged in the town square.

The decade of the 1940s was a profoundly difficult one for Greece with the Metaxas dictatorship, the occupation and resistance and the Civil War taking a profound political, economic, and psychological toll on the country. At the beginning of the decade, 300,000 Greeks die of hunger during the famine. By the middle of the decade, another 250,000 are killed due to warfare and the Italian, German, and Bulgarian occupation. For Theodorakis, the first half of the decade was extremely important. He became a member of the youth section of EAM, the National Liberation Front. And he met Myrto Altinoglou, an ardent militant of the youth group, who ten years later became his wife. He joined the Athens Conservatory where he studied with Philoktitis Economides, wrote music to sophisticated poetry, held numerous low-level jobs, fought Germans, and then British troops. Explaining all this activity, he humorously adds, "And we didn't even eat a great deal."

In 1946, at a demonstration connected to the elections, Theodorakis was beaten mercilessly and unconscious by Greeks opposing the Left. He was taken to the morgue and officially listed as dead. He awoke on a marble slab at the morgue, surrounded by corpses. He escaped with the help of members of the resistance. As a result of a skull fracture the vision in his right eye was permanently damaged. In 1948, still largely unaware of the *laiko* song, Theodorakis wrote *Love and Death* on the island of Ikaria, an island near the Turkish coast, where he was exiled for his communist activities. The lyrics are by the poet Lorentzos Mavilis and the composer dedicated the work to Myrto, his future wife. He also composed concert music in memory of specific executed friends on both sides of the Civil War: *Song of the Dead Brother* and *Symphony No. 1*.

It was while imprisoned in Ikaria and later Makronissos that he heard *rembetika/laika* and was startled by the enchanting melodies. In 1949, the Communist rebellion collapsed in the mountains. There

were mass executions on Makronissos. He witnessed hundreds of killings, was constantly threatened with execution himself, and was badly tortured by the notorious sadist, Loris. Yet, he resisted "re-education" and was transferred to a military hospital where he was expected to die. His father, Yorgos Theodorakis, frantically searched for him and arranged to have his son transferred to the mainland and eventually Crete. By 1950, there was a coalition government and Theodorakis graduated from the Athens Conservatory. He continued his "military service" and because of his Communist record was threatened with return to Makronissos. He attempted suicide by swallowing gunpowder because he could not bear to experience the horror again. Fortunately, his attempt failed. His father helped him again secure a transfer to Crete. A decade of active resistance, first against the Axis forces and then against repressive Greek governments, left Theodorakis in a state of despair and depression. Nevertheless, his spirit to create managed to survive.

In 1952, Theodorakis returned to Athens and became a music critic for the Left-wing daily *Avgi*. He criticized the musical establishment for their failure to produce a Greek school of music. He married Myrto Altinoglou, now a physician, in March of that year. Both apply and receive scholarships from French government; Mikis to study musical analysis and conducting at the French Conservatory with Olivier Messiaen¹⁰ and Eugene Bigot, and Myrto to specialize in radiography at the Curie Foundation.

In Paris from 1954 to 1960, Theodorakis is drawn to the music of Stravinsky and Bartok, two great classical composers who took into account the ethnic music of their respective countries, Russia and Hungary. During the next series of years, he wrote a number of concert pieces, ballet suites, and film scores, and became quite successful. In 1957, he won the Gold Medal at the Moscow Music Festival. In 1959, following his highly acclaimed ballet "Antigone" with Margot Fonteyn at Covent Garden, he was nominated for the American Copley Music Prize as Best European Composer of the Year. Despite the successes, Theodorakis felt that European classical technique was limiting. He began writing music to a cycle of poems by Yannis Ritsos,

¹⁰During World War II, Messiaen was held as a prisoner of war at Gorlitz for two years. He too composed music while in prison.

Epitaphios. His aim was to create a musical revolution centered on genuine Greek melodies and deliverance from elitist European concert music.

Following the birth of his daughter, Margarita in 1959, and his son Yorgos in 1960, Mikis Theodorakis sparked a seven year cultural revolution in Greece with his song cycle *Epitaphios*. He followed *Epitaphios* by setting to music George Seferis' *Epiphania*, Iacovos Kambanellis' *Mauthausen*, Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*, Odysseus Elytis' *Little Cyclades* and *Axion Esti*, Yannis Ritsos' *Romiossini*, and Federico Garcia Lorca's *Romancero Gitan*. He was inspired by revolutionary energy, and along with other composers, such as, Manos Hadjidakis, Christos Leondis, Manos Loizos, Yannis Markopoulos, Stavros Xarchakos, and others, gave Greek music back its dignity.

The enormous success of the "artistic popular song" in Greece was truly a creation of the first-order. Unlike Europe, with its classifications of symphonic music, light music, opera, pop music, Greece now had a more inclusive quality to its music. Theodorakis observed that in Greece, the aim was not only to embrace the senses and the heart. Greek music aspired to embrace "the mind, imagination, intellectuality, the aesthetic deliverance, and finally, the moral and spiritual elevation, the internal liberation."¹¹

In the midst of this cultural revolution (1960-1967), Theodorakis continued to place himself directly into political activity. He participated in the Peace Movement, was elected president of the newly formed Lambrakis Youth Movement after Grigoris Lambrakis, a peace leader of the Left, was assassinated. In 1964, he was elected to Parliament in Piraeus. The Lambrakis Youth Movement grew in numbers and organized political and cultural activities, planted trees, restored churches, opened libraries and held concerts. Theodorakis and his followers personified the politically engaged Greek of the 1960s. However, while Theodorakis was well on his way to completing his project, on April 21, 1967 history intervened in the form of a military dictatorship.

In order to better understand Theodorakis' achievements before, during and after the junta, I will examine three aspects of the creative process as expressed in his work.

¹¹Giannaris, p. xii.

Creative Integration

I have always declared that my greatest ambition was to serve poetry faithfully.

Mikis Theodorakis

While music and literature stand on their own they are both similar in that they involve a complex interaction of emotional and cognitive elements. This interaction is operative on both conscious and unconscious levels. We may, however, state that at the core of music is an indefinable affective/emotional reaction and at the core of literature is an indefinable cognitive/intellectual reaction. Without question, the emotional and the cognitive are not really separate in our mental life, but we generally find it difficult to discuss both at the same time. For our purposes, music intensifies the impact of words. Wedding the two often creates a whole greater than the sum of the parts. If music and words are well integrated into song and the listener cannot imagine the one without the other, then we have an extraordinary achievement.

Creativity consists of the state or process of bringing forth products that are both new and valuable. Further, I use the word "creativity" to mean a process, not a product, by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed. Something in the culture is changed. It involves a person (in our case, Theodorakis), a domain (Greek music) and a field (peers, rivals, critics, fellow citizens). Mikis Theodorakis' greatest creative contribution was to integrate sophisticated poetry with popular and epic music and to have every taxi driver, office and factory worker, and member of intelligencia in Greece singing the same songs. This integration was not only meaningful and beautiful, but like an organism, a living, breathing entity. Theodorakis' compositions were, and continue to be, organic because the music and the poetry are both separate and connected at the same time producing a holistic aesthetic experience.¹² Others had created songs out of great poetry before Theodorakis (classical composers like Schubert and Bach and in Greece, Dimitris Mitropoulos and Antonis Kounadis), they had even incorporated folk elements into their music, but their music did

¹²Albert Rothenberg, "Studies in the Creative Process: An Empirical Investigation." In J. M. Masling and R. F. Bornstein (Eds.). *Empirical Perspectives on Object Relations Theory* (Washington, D.C., 1994).

not capture the imagination of an entire nation.

Theodorakis' goal was to integrate Greek poetry and music and to bring this integrated work to the masses. "Art for the masses." His was not the decorative art of the Enlightenment. His goals were humanistic: "By helping us to discover ourselves, culture enables us to say that 'the other person' is ourselves, and that we are 'the other person.' A new joy fills our hearts, a joy which becomes a strength." Art is therefore implicated not only in class struggle, but in the psychological struggle to connect with others.

A good example of this creative integration of music and words can be found in Theodorakis' 1964 composition *Axion Esti*. The 1960 poem *Axion Esti* ("Worthy It Is") by Odysseas Elytis, which Theodorakis called "a monument to Greek art," serves as the text for this grand oratorio. Writing in the winter of 1970 at Oropos prison where he was held by the Greek junta, Theodorakis stated that,

The dimensions as well as the poetic text *per se* led, in general, towards a new musical form. The poem covers all the recent history of the Greek nation, from the Genesis of this 'small world, the Great,' to the prophetic vision of the horrors imposed on us by the present dictatorship... with *Axion Esti* the Word of the poet is the Word of the people. His memory is its memory. The people itself is the creator of the events from which the poet draws inspiration.¹³

The new musical form that Theodorakis created to serve Elytis' text was what he called "metasympmonic." That is, in order to deal with this structurally complex epic poem he integrated *demotika*, *laika*, and Byzantine forms of music with classical western symphonic techniques. He joined this music so well to the text, that the poet himself acknowledged that Theodorakis completely understood the spirit of the work. The most popular of the melodies, "A Solitary Swallow," is sung by a rebetika-style cantor and a mixed chorus. It is a *hasapiko* dance rhythm of great melodic beauty. There is hardly a Greek that does not know the lines to "A Solitary Swallow:"

¹³Theodorakis, *Music and Theater*, p.51.

A solitary swallow and a costly spring,
For the sun to turn it takes a job of work,
It takes a thousand dead sweating at the wheels,
It takes the living also giving up their blood.¹⁴

The question as to whether Theodorakis captured the spirit of the times or whether the spirit of the times captured him is an interesting one. According to Theodorakis,

Artistic creativity is a full circle. It begins... among the people and the times; it passes through the sensitivity of the creator, who gives it his own expression and form, and continues on to attain completion there where it began, that is amidst the people and the times. If this circle is interrupted, or if a segment is missing, then we cannot have a true and viable artistic work.¹⁵

My belief is that for this extraordinary creative integration between music and poetry to take place and for it to reach the popularity it did, Theodorakis tapped into something within himself and within the soul of every Greek. The songs helped bring to consciousness the energizing pessimism that is so central to the Greek psychological experience. His music intensified Elytis' message: "Worthy is the price paid."

Remembering to Mourn

Pop music helps us forget,
Greek music helps us remember.
Mikis Theodorakis

In a recent investigation into the political, social, and psychological impact of trauma and human rights violations in the warring coun-

¹⁴Translation by Holst, p.95. On the day of the original recording of "A Solitary Swallow," Theodorakis recalls the schoolchildren were visiting the studio. The musicians feared that the student "noise" would interrupt the recording. "I asked them to stay and listen. The idea of permanently recording whispers, breathing, and heartbeats of the pure and innocent children as background to my work "A Solitary Swallow" appealed to me greatly."

¹⁵Giannaris, p. xi.

tries of the former Yugoslavia, Inger Agger and Soren Buus Jense focused on mourning.¹⁶ They believe that social mourning is one of the necessary processes in the successful resolution of communities that have become uprooted, destroyed, traumatized, and divided. A basic therapeutic principle is that in order to psychologically recover from such events the story must be told.

Historian Richard Clogg has referred to the decades of the 1940s as the "darkest in Greece's independent history." Despite the heroism of the resistance to the barbaric Italian, German and Bulgarian occupation there was unprecedented famine, reprisals, and devastation, together with the destruction of Greek Jewry, and the strife that was to culminate in civil war between 1946 and 1949.¹⁷ Unlike other European nations, Greece never recovered economically or psychologically from World War II because the nation was immediately caught up into another violent conflict. Following the Civil War, the governments of Greece (some quite repressive) focused on the containment of communism and very little on the restructuring of a devastated society. While individually families mourned their losses, collectively Greece did not have the opportunity to mourn its tragic losses of the 1940s and 1950s.

Psychologically, mourning involves both "letting go" and "holding on." Loss of loved ones threatens the basis of a secure inner psychological world and a sense of security in the outer world. This threat is mastered through the process of continuity, that is, an explicit, even if unconscious, recognition that the person is gone. Creation of continuity always has a bittersweet quality and it helps the mourner move forward in life.¹⁸

In 1960, Theodorakis electrified the Greek musical landscape with the song cycle *Epitaphios*, based on the poetry of Yannis Ritsos. *Epitaphios* is the name given to the most solemn of all liturgical music in the Orthodox Church, the service for Good Friday. It is the dirge of the Virgin Mary and the other mourning women at the tomb of the crucified Christ. Before renaming his poem *Epitaphios*, Ritsos

¹⁶Inger Agger and Soren Buus Jense, *Trauma and Healing Under State Terrorism* (London, 1996).

¹⁷Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge, U.K., 1992).

¹⁸Robert Gaines, "Detachment and Continuity: The Two Tasks of Mourning," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 33 (1997) 549-572.

had titled it *Dirge*. Ritsos was inspired to write the poem based on a newspaper photograph in 1936 of a woman mourning over the body of a young dead man in the street. The young man was her son, a tobacco factory worker who had been killed by police during a march by strikers in Salonica. In Ritsos' creative mind, the photograph turned into a folk lament representing the entire working class.

Theodorakis used the *rebetica/laika* rhythms of the *hasapiko* and *zeimbekiko* (dances of the urban working class) and created eight songs based on the verses from eleven of the twenty stanzas. He also used the famed bouzouki player Manolis Hiotis and the *rebetica* singer Grigoris Bithikotsis who possessed a dry, forceful voice, a voice, according to Theodorakis, that betrayed suffering as the mother in the poem suffered. Bithikotsis sang "A day in May you left me, a day in May I lose you." and all of Greece understood his lament and mourning.

Through *Epitaphios* and the many other creative song cycles that followed, Theodorakis' compositions allowed Greek history to be reclaimed, and the story told. The popularity of his songs cannot be underestimated. In the early and mid-1960s millions of Greeks at home, in tavernas, and in concerts were singing serious poetry and dealing with the tragedies of their past.

The legacy of the Civil War, however, continued into the late 1960s and culminated with the military dictatorship of 1967-1974. Theodorakis went underground on the day of the coup, April 21, 1967 and founded the Patriotic Front. Naturally, his music was banned. He was arrested on August 21, placed in various prisons and island camps, and eventually under house arrest. When not interrogated or tortured, he would engage in an array of resistance efforts. He also composed. In fact, under the dictatorship some of the poetry Theodorakis set to music included his own *Sun and Time*, Manos Eleftheriou's *The Laika*, George Seferis' *Mythoistorema*, and Angelos Sikelianos' grand, optimistic poem, *March of the Spirit*.

In Averroff prison in Athens in early January of 1968, Theodorakis took George Seferis' *Mythoistorema* poem and composed music to four extracts. The poem was written by Seferis in 1933 and evokes ancient myths, the Asia Minor disaster, an endless tragic journey, and modest hope. The first line of the third songs tells all, "In my breast the wound reopens." In his words:

I wrote the music in a state of high tension and in spite of

the special, not to say exceptional, conditions of prison life; but my comrades in the prison did all they could to create the most favorable atmosphere for composition. The moment they saw me turn my back and lean on the window-sill to write, they fell absolutely silent.¹⁹

Following close to three years of imprisonment and house arrest, Theodorakis was released due to international pressure by figures such as Dimitri Shostakovitch, Leonard Bernstein, and Arthur Miller. Within a few months of his release he toured the world raising money and support for the restoration of democracy in Greece. In exile, he set to music the poetry of Yannis Ritsos' *18 Songs for the Bitter Motherland*, Manolis Anagnostakis' *Ballads*, and Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*. By using the original Spanish text of Neruda's 1940 epic poem *Canto General*, Theodorakis created another metasymphonic work, only this time, a musical integration of two cultures. When the junta fell in 1974, he began to give concerts throughout Greece to massive, enthusiastic audiences.

In the spring of 1975, Gail Holst played in Theodorakis' orchestra. Here is her recollection of the beginning of a May concert in a soccer stadium in the city of Volos:

The first notes of *Romiossini* are drowned by the nearly hysterical crowd. Then the singer's voice sound 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 woman singer stands up. Maria Farandouri's powerful contralto voice has become so iden-

¹⁹Theodorakis, *Journals of Resistance*, p. 165.

tified with the composer's music that she herself is near mythical figure. Again the shouts drown her first notes...

*How beautiful 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 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.²⁰

What Gail Holst witnessed on that day in May was collective mourning, and it was the spirit of Theodorakis and his ability to hold the lost years of the junta and to free the mourners to move on. With regard to World War II and the Civil War, it took over a decade before the nation could collectively mourn. Fortunately, the people of Greece now had immediate access to the vehicle necessary to carry out the mourning, namely, the music of Theodorakis. His music embraced the feelings of the entire nation.

The Courage to Create

Your tanks will rust, our songs will last.
Mikis Theodorakis

Mikis Theodorakis was traumatized, tortured, and near death countless of times during his life. Despair was a familiar emotion to Theodorakis. He witnessed the executions and beatings of many of his comrades. Further, he witnessed the humiliation of members of his family. Lastly, he witnessed betrayals of his nation's democratic spirit. Confronting such immoral and perverted events, how did he fashion art which became a guide for the ethics of the entire nation and the international community? How did he avoid withdrawal into

²⁰Holst, p. 4.

anxiety and panic? How did he seize the courage necessary to preserve his purpose and responsibility? Perhaps, Elytis, Nietzsche and Sartre were right when they proclaimed that courage is not the absence of despair; it is, rather, the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair.

Theodorakis took traumatic events, both personal and national, and with great courage and perseverance turned the events into healing ones. He never stayed a victim. Through his creativity and psychology he actively transformed evil and terror into recovery and empowerment for himself and others. His courage was not simply physical; nor was it only moral courage. Theodorakis demonstrated the most important kind of courage of all: creative courage.²¹ Whereas moral courage is concerned with the righting of wrongs, creative courage is the discovering of new forms, new symbols, new patterns on which a new society can be built.

In Averoff prison on New Year's Day 1968,²² Theodorakis had the following conversation with fellow prisoner Leonidas Kyrkos:

"You must find something new, something exceptional for your music."

"Too true. I want to break the bonds of the song, to free it."

"As you did with Ritsos's poem *Romiossini*."

"I want to go even farther, following a line of inner progression. And outside the classical framework."

"Oh, you've got something simmering..."

"I've got this collection of Seferis' poetry here. You remember that poem I set to music called 'I Have Kept Hold of Life.' Do you know how many verses I took from it? Four or five. Well, I'm going to take a whole poem and make a song, an immense song."

"You're going to start on it?"

"This evening. As soon as they've closed the gates."

Creating for Theodorakis means to break the "bonds" and to be "free." A few days after this interchange, he had composed *Averoff Epiphany* using a new musical format. In its final form it is for singer, six voices, mixed choir and orchestra and based on the poem written

²¹Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York, 1975).

²²Theodorakis, *Journals of Resistance*, p.163.

by George Seferis in 1937 and published in the collection of his work under the title, *Epiphany*, 1937. Theodorakis labeled his new musical form "song-river." The song-river compositions were quite different than any of his song cycles or metasymphonic music. In the song-river the melody follows long poetic texts in free verse. The text is given great prominence. While the song-river *Averoff Epiphany* was well received after the junta years, its importance lies in the fact that Theodorakis used this new musical form as a vehicle for future compositional inventions.

Coda

All this is a prelude to the song itself
which must be learned.

Plato

Since his heroic return to Greece after the fall of the military dictatorship, Theodorakis has been immensely creative both musically and politically. He ran for office, lost, and then ran again. He was elected several times to the Greek Parliament (1981-1986 and 1989-1993). From 1990 to 1992, he was Minister in the New Democracy government of Constatine Mitsotakis, a political affiliation that was far removed from his communist and leftist political ideology, but certainly within his restless and independent psychology. In 1987, he initiated the Greek-Turkish Friendship Association with Turkish composer and singer Zulfu Livaneli.

Simultaneously, he struggled for the withdrawal of the Turkish Armed Forces from Cyprus and for the release of human rights activists in Turkey.

In the past twenty-two years, Theodorakis' musical output for the cinema, the theater, the opera stage, the concert hall, the ballet, and the tavernas has been enormous and sublime. Among his songs cycles have been Kostas Tripolitis' *The Passenger*, Lefteris Papadopoulos' *The Bitter Saturdays*, Dimitra Manda's *A Sea*, Michail Ganas' *Eastern Bird*, and Dionisi Karatzas' *Beatrice on Zero Street*, *Faces of the Sun* and *Poetica*. Pop music collections are *The State, No. 3*, *The State, No. 4*, and *40 Songs for Children*. Some of his symphonic music and oratorios include *Symphonies No. 2, 3, 4, & 7*, *According to the Sadducees*, *Canto Olimpico*, *Liturgia 2*, *Requiem*, and *Adagio*, which he dedicates to the victims of the Bosnian war.

Theodorakis' musical innovations continue unabated. On May 24, 1996, he was awarded the gold medal of the University of Crete and he took the opportunity to explain his new venture: the lyric trilogy *Medea, Electra, Antigone* (which, with the addition of *Kostas Karyotakis*, may perhaps become a tetralogy in the future). His aim is to create operas that are Greek, with "drama, tragic figures, violent conflicts and the presentation of the ancient Chorus in a modern form which would be closer to the mental and spiritual reality of the contemporary Greek listener-spectator."

Along with the human propensity for conflict there stands the human capacity for creative integration. For decades, Mikis Theodorakis led the fight against cultural and political oppression, a theme that was as familiar to him as his first milk. His personal talents matched the needs of the Greek people. He gave them new musical forms, the modern poets, the opportunity to mourn and to go beyond their tragic past, and the courage to affirm life in the face of despair and death.

From 1960 to 1967 Theodorakis' project can, in part, be understood as a cultural revolution. He achieved this by wedding music to poetry, and inviting every Greek to the wedding festivities. From 1967 to 1975, Theodorakis' project was to unite the resistance to the military junta. He did so heroically. He knew how to operate from the margins – from within jail cells and from exile, and this behavior the Greek people recognized in themselves. From 1976 to the present, Theodorakis continues to create music with magnificent melodies even though entertainment multinationals and the saturation of the postmodern market have made for an uneven reception to his music. Yet, he still continues to create. He wants the dialogue and inspiration provided by an enthusiastic public. But, he does not need it in order to create.

Gail Holst, an astute observer of Greek culture, has recently written that there is a revival of Greek music going on in the Greece of the 1990s and that it may be linked to a national feeling of isolation and rejection in relation to Europe and combined with the insecurity about what is happening on Greece's borders.²³ Given this, then not only will Greek youth and musicians listen and play *demotica* and *rebetica*

²³Gail Holst-Warhaft, "Song, self-identity, and the Neohellenic," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 15 (1995) 232-237.

laika, but they will head Theodorakis once again. The lyricist Lefteris Papadopoulos, paraphrasing the poet Odysseus Elytis, recently proposed that, "Whenever evil confronts you, whenever your mind is confused, sing Theodorakis."

The music of Mikis Theodorakis is a profound creative achievement. But, in our appreciation of his compositions, we are also performing a creative act. When we are listening to poetry as set to music by Theodorakis, something is triggered in our listening, something unique is born that is seeking expression. According to Theodorakis, "Creative expression is, above all, an act of freedom. I create means I am free – I become free. The message of art is the message of freedom."