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ATHENS: THE 4th HELLENIC WEEK OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC.

The relaxed atmosphere of early autumn under sunny latin skies in the company of audiences not over exposed to the mixed pleasures of contemporary art is an invigorating environment in which to listen to "new music" and view mixed-media events. For Greeks, many of whose creative artists are resident abroad for economic reasons, have rarely the opportunity to come into contact with the latest developments in the arts and therefore an eager audience exists of all age groups. This was certainly seen during the "4th Hellenic Week" held in Athens during September - selected programmes of which were repeated in Thessaloniki and Volos.

With the possible exception of Skalkottas and Xenakis, relatively little is known here of the work of Greek composers outside the programmes of the English Bach Festival where the leading figures of the middle generation, Christou, Adamis and Ioannidis have been introduced. This is a pity for Greece has a number of important individual voices who write with considerable technical accomplishment in a language of new thought deserving of a correct evaluation by those with open and alert ears.

As in previous years the festival, given under a grant from the Ford Foundation, presented commissions and premieres from in fact all the leading Greek composers together with representatives from Europe and America. While the Greeks prefer aleatoric elements and graphic notation to extensive improvisation and prose texts, the degree of control preferred was relaxed in an early evening of improvisation for three VCS 3's, piano and audience in which the fun element produced a valid and relaxed experience. The composer's international concern with communication and his changing role in society was reflected in a number of works outside of social or spiritual commitment; problems arising from the use of elements from classical Greek drama to create a unified language valid within the terms of "our new musical resources" were evident in several pieces. Yannis Papaioannou's "4 Orpheus Hymns" for narrator and ensemble utilizes the dramatic style of Greek theatre where a more restrained vocal delivery would have been more appropriate in what is otherwise a work of beauty and integrated instrumental sonorities. In another festival commission, "Kratima", Michael Adamis continues a valid transformation of Byzantine source material through subtle use of chanter, instruments, and synthesized sound towards expressive regions in which experimentation becomes a filter by which we renew the past to become a mirror of the present in music that retains certain secrets to be revealed at a future hearing.

Nikos Mamangakis speaks with the voice of the European avant-garde and was represented by three works, each showing facets of his current preoccupation with articulation in the composer/performer

relationship. In "Parastasis", a solo flute builds on tightly concentrated segments set against an electronic tape of alienated speech to represent the social involvement of Prometheus in modern society culminating in a climax of staggering emotional impact. In direct contrast, "Penthima" is an attractive piece for guitar. More substantial was the cello work, "Askesis", in which a free and expansive approach allowed the player to express his inner personality within defined notational limits - control of the kind in which the music moves towards the 'gesture', the duration of variables motivated by an emotional response for player and listener.

A propelling force of a quite different order is to be found in the scores of Anestis Logothetis, whose 50th birthday together with that of Iannis Xenakis was celebrated by an exhibition of scores and documents. The graphic works of Logothetis, despite their often precise instructions, create formidable problems on occasions, in the presence of the composer who knows exactly how to realise his intentions. In the case of "Pyriflegthethon-Acheron-Kikkotos" (the three rivers of the classical Greek underworld) the result is a fascinating world of timbres, the sum total of which is a kaleidoscope of sound built from transformations of Greek folk song uttered by the University of Salonica Choir in ancient and modern Greek. In a more restrained yet equally impressive use of voice and instruments Dimitri Terzakis', "X" - symbol of the unknown - uses in imaginative terms a total microtonal language centred around cellular units of minor thirds in a logical progression from equal temperament.

The shadow of two lamented artists pervaded the festival, those of Jani Christou, who died in a car crash the preceding January, and George Seferis whose passing darkened the second day of the festival. A programme by the Nicoloudi Dance Company included a version of Christou's mixed-media "Epicycle" - a continuum of events represented by the confined movements of dancers in casual dress together with a solo actor were superimposed on a tape prepared by the composer for a projected gramophone record and complete except for the final seconds; it is a tape of remarkable originality which to a certain degree conditions the stage action by the use of ritual sound elements of voices and electronics whose clearly defined multi-track structure acts as a force towards a positive and creative unleashing of forces latent in the primordial subconscious. The performances failed through the failure of the restrained stylised choreography to realise the composer's intentions.

"Epicycle" was one of the two most subtle and impressive works of art given during the week. The other was performed in an incomplete version - without stage action - in the same programme. This was Stephanos Vassiliadis's "The Secret Songs of Silence" which explores man's inner quest for reality through dream states of awakening consciousness. A tape of multi-track sources revealed the work of an extremely sensitive mind in command of electronic media treated in an entirely new direction.

Within the context of a festival almost exclusively devoted to new work from the under-fifties, the most recent creation from John Cage emerged with an almost classical puritanism of figurative elements distributed in space. "Mesostics" for solo performer is a syllabic word-mix of Letraset type faces rendered into unintelligibility but simultaneously having a life force of their own. At least this was the result in the capable hands of the Greek baritone Spyros Sakkas whose mastery of sound and gesture transfers the viewer into regions of visual and psychic imagery of a world beyond sound theatre. The dancer Jannine Byatt reacted to each of Sakkas' mesostics on another plane of activity.

Though impressive new compositions appeared from Aperghis, Antoniou, Becker, Halffter, Heider, Ioannidis and Sfetsas, direct communication through instrumental sound gestures were most successfully achieved in "Askesis" by the American composer Joseph Castaldo. An instrumental ensemble doubling on sound-producing instruments combine to produce humour with elegance in a highly imaginative and exciting work of rhythmic drive and spontaneity where 'sonic' elements are used with care and precision to provide an enjoyable musical experience. In "Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death", with his customary craftsmanship George Crumb uses amplified instruments in a highly expressive manner for a sound world in which understatement of a textural situation leads directly to an invocation of the poetic images of Lorca.

Throughout the festival the members of the Hellenic Group for Contemporary Music provided authoritative performances of complex scores under the inspired direction of Theodore Antoniou. Under a condition of the Ford Foundation grant only Greek performing musicians participated and even with the demands attendant on 14 programmes in Athens alone this ensemble is certainly among the important groups specializing in contemporary music.

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