

Anastasia Georgaki, Apostolos Loufopoulos

SPIRITUALITY IN THE ELECTROACOUSTIC WORKS APOKALYPSIS, TETELESTAI AND KRATIMA OF THE GREEK COMPOSER MICHAEL ADAMIS

1. BIOGRAPHY AND MUSICAL TRAJECTORY OF MICHAEL ADAMIS

The studies and musical trajectory of the composer are reflected in the conception and the structure of his works. Deeply affected in his first steps by the Byzantine musical tradition¹ and its spiritual potential, as well as by the contemporary musical trends (from the electronic sound to the avant-garde techniques of composition), the composer has created an extraordinary personal style which bridges, in an ingenious way, Tradition and Novelty.

Born in Piraeus, Greece, in 1929, Michael Adamis started studying music at a very young age. He studied Byzantine Music at the Conservatory of Piraeus, and Music Theory and Composition with I. Papaioannou at the 'Hellenicon' Conservatory. He also studied Theology at the University of Athens. He was attracted to the Choir during his studies, thus he started working on Choral Music very seriously and effectively while still being a student at the University. He founded two successful groups, the 'Boys' Choir of the Royal Palace Chapel (1950) and the 'Athens Chamber Choir' (1958). Ten years later he became director of the Choir of Pierce College in Athens, continuing a rich and long concert activity.

From 1961 to 1965 he studied Composition and Byzantine Music Paleography, with A. Berger and K. Levy respectively, at Brandeis University in Boston; the Electronic Music Studio at Brandeis, a rarity at that time, gave him the

¹ Byzantine Music is a music of the Church, and is liturgically associated with religious services; it is composed for the Church and is performed in the Church. The forms which it has taken, whether short or long, are directly related to the virtual "ordo" of religious practice. Its basic constitutive element is the troparion, a typical musical miniature; on the larger scale, the entire religious Office – within which the smaller elements are organized – is musically typical. Byzantine Music is monophonic. It has not called on other parameters of musical construction, such as harmony or counterpoint, yet it has produced a wealth of extraordinarily rich melodies, as well as complex musical forms, and carried the monophonic genre to heights of refinement and wisdom. It has remained an essentially vocal music.

opportunity to become familiar with electroacoustic composition. There the composer worked on his first electroacoustic pieces – *Piece 1*, *Piece 2*, *Proschimata* – all in 1964. During his postgraduate studies in the United States Michael Adamis met pioneer composers of modern music like J. Cage, M. Feldman and A. Lucier, to name a few. Upon his resettlement in 1965, Adamis established and operated the first electronic music laboratory in Greece, and this is where he worked on most of his electroacoustic pieces.²

Michael Adamis returned and permanently resettled in Greece in 1965, at the outset of the period that marked a significant progress for modern music, with a lot of important activities like contemporary concerts and exhibitions taking place in the major Greek cities, Athens and Thessaloniki. During this creative period the composer wrote several pieces in different forms and various combinations of electronic means, musical instruments and the human voice. Besides electroacoustic music he also composed vocal, choral, instrumental – chamber and orchestral – music as well as incidental music for ancient tragedies.

In most of the electroacoustic pieces he composed between 1965–1977, like *Apocalypsis* (1967), *Genesis* (1968), *Glaros* (1977), *Kratima* (1971), *Mirolloi* (1970) and *Tetelestai* (1971), a unique combination of two different music worlds, the Byzantine and the electronic, is revealed. Using the Byzantine chant in the formation of a contemporary musical style, the composer has managed to admirably combine the vocal groups with the tape through novel compositional techniques.³

His incidental music of the period between 1960 and 1974, mostly music for tape and occasionally using live electronic in performances of ancient Greek tragedies, also marks a very important contribution to modern music. In works such as *Seven Against Thebes* (1968), *Ifigenia in Aulis* (1970), *Orestes* (1971) and *Prometheus Bound* (1974), the composer regards the ancient drama with respect to its profound philosophic implications, markedly different from the spirituality reflected in the Byzantine tradition.

² Electroacoustic music first appeared in Greece at the beginning of the 1960's, thus falling behind more than ten years in comparison with other countries all over the world. The short history of the Greek electroacoustic music can be divided into three basic parts-periods. The first period lasts from the beginnings to the first bloom of the Greek electroacoustic music, when some important events like concerts and international conventions first introduced electroacoustic music in Greece during the 1960's. The second period lasts from the early 1970's to the beginnings of the "dark period" at the end of the 1970-decade. Finally, the third part refers to the third-mature period of the electroacoustic music in Greece, which lasts from the middle 1980's to the present day.

³ Adamis is considered one of the main precursors of the Greek electroacoustic music. Most of the electronic sounds used in the three following pieces were created in the personal Studio of the composer which was in the '60s and '70s equipped with: a sound generator (sine-square waves), a ring modulator, stereo tape recorders (Wollensax-Vicing), a stereo amplifier, speakers. Apart from the aforementioned units, there was also a small, handmade mixer and a pitch-shifting device. After 1970, the lab was equipped with two larger speakers, one multichannel mixing console, two Revox stereo tape recorders and an EMS-VCS III analogue synthesizer.

Following 1978 the composer's interest shifts mainly to vocal and instrumental music, at a time when – despite the continuous development of music technology – Greek electroacoustic music enters a period of decline, possibly due to the lack of organized studios.

The composer himself considers this shift of focus as a renewed interest in writing for instruments and voice with the experience acquired from the electroacoustic treatment of sound, actually aiming at exploring with traditional musical media some ideas and techniques he had developed in his electronic works.

2. SPIRITUALITY IN *APOCALYPSIS*, *TETELESTAI* AND *KRATIMA*

Among the precious music pieces Adamis has composed, we have been particularly attracted by three works in which an overall underlying spirituality is manifest in their completion as musical compositions through:

1. the use of sacred texts – written in Greek – and of symbolic archetypal material that reflects the human being's relation with God,
2. the presence of the electroacoustic medium, and
3. the integration of Greek traditional and Byzantine singing in the use of contemporary instrumental and vocal techniques.

The following two works, *Tetelestai* and *Apokalypsis*, which are going to be analysed through the prism of sound material structure and the aesthetic approach of the composer, derive their text from the Bible.

2.1. Spirituality conveyed through the sacred texts

The manifestation of spirituality predominantly through the text in *Apokalypsis* and *Tetelestai* is made apparent in the importance of the roles of the narrator and the psaltis (chanter) in these pieces.

In *Apokalypsis*⁴ (1967) the text is taken from the 6th and 7th chapters of St. John's "Revelation", a sacred book which has often inspired great workers of the Arts through the ages. Divided in three main parts – Universe Upheaval, Exceptional Position/Catharsis of The Chosen and The Excelling Christian Church – the text provides a central axis for the structure and form, the narrator being a major factor of continuity of the musical events that develop on both the contextual level and the level of the sonic basis, which consists of electronic and concrete sounds as well as of human voices.

In *Tetelestai* (1971) the text is taken from St. John ch. 19, v. 17, 18, 26, 27, 28, 30 and from the Orthodox Church hymnology for the Holy Week. The main

⁴ *Apokalypsis* is one of the major electroacoustic pieces of the composer written for 30 solo voices divided into 5 vocal groups, narrator and tape. It was composed in 1967 and first presented during the "2nd Greek Week of Contemporary Music" in Athens 1967. At this premiere live electronics, sound generators and prepared piano were also used.

idea refers to the crucifixion of Jesus and his final victory over death. The account of events does not follow the familiar Western model for the sequence of musical movements but aims at projecting the contrasted emotions and, mainly, the contrast on the spiritual level.

2.2. Spirituality through the transcendence of the sonic medium

The sonic medium reinforces the sacred text, especially in *Apocalypsis* and *Tetelestai*, adding another dimension which introduces the listener to a meditative listening that enables him to move to an advanced level of spirituality.

In *Apocalypsis*, the main characteristic is the multitude of ways in which the composer uses the vocal abilities of the choir which is divided into five groups. For the sonic presentation of the biblical events, the voice is used as a whisper, talk, song, chant, but also as "a structure of solid sound surfaces or complexes of singing and narrative elements." [Adamis, 1967]. On the use of the tape, the composer adds: "the tape, which contains the composition of electronically generated and concrete sounds, constitutes the background from which the various events emerge." [Adamis, 1967].

More precisely, in the first part the 'upheaval' of the universe is reinforced by pre-recorded tape sounds, in most cases produced by percussion and traditional Greek musical instruments. This is followed by a dynamic multilevel apposition of the vocal groups on the title word "A-po-ca-ly-psi".

In order to reinforce the impact of the phrase "sismos megas" (great earthquake), sung by the choir, the composer concludes the first part with tape sounds of percussion and prepared piano, which represent the situation of 'chaos' after the destruction.

In the second part the composer develops a "sound motion", a constant flow of vivid alterations of rhythmic and of melodic elements of the sound material which consists of short musical patterns notated by the composer, performed on traditional Greek folk instruments which are highly electronically processed.

The reference to supernatural phenomena such as the dialogue between God and the Angels is thus enhanced while the narration refers to the 'freezing of the Earth World' and the 'Judicature to the Chosen'.

In *Tetelestai*⁵ the spiritual dimension is set from the beginning, which is made evident by the use of the hymnology in both the electronically processed and the choral parts which constantly intersect during the introduction, which establishes the character of both the piece, and the composition. Pre-recorded

⁵ *Tetelestai*, one of the "mature" works of the composer, is written for 3 vocal groups, chanter and tape. It was composed for the "English Bach Festival", where it was first presented on May 5, 1971. The performance was by the "Halsy" choir of London and Michael Adamis was the conductor. The work has also been presented in Greece, Spain and Switzerland. It was especially written for the "4th Greek Week of Contemporary Music" in 1971 and first presented in Athens in the same year.

and actually sung melodic lines blend in a complex musical flow that allows the transendence of semantics – the descriptive quality of the words – and the projection of the spiritual dimension that the events have acquired in the Orthodox conscience.

In the third part, where the chanter recites the ascending to Golgotha and the Crucifixion, we can perceive one of the most interesting sound images of the composition where the tape provides a dense texture of electronically processed concrete sounds that combine with the melodic line of the chanter's solo in an interplay of "independent" sonic developments treated in the light of the composer's polymelodic technique.

According to the composer "I have introduced the psaltis (chanter) as a soloist in a piece of contemporary music for his special and characteristic musical utterance, the intonation he achieves, the color of his voice, and the range within which it moves. In some works (like the Byzantine Passion) he sings as he would have in the church." [Adamis, 1995].

The last part focuses on the word 'tetelestai' - "it is finished" – and on an elaborate compound of excerpts from the hymnology of the Passion and the holy service of the Resurrection: some sung by the choir, other recited by the psaltis, all sounding together in a form that intends to project the unification of time in the context of the meaning.

One of the most remarkable morphological elements of the piece is the particular combination of Byzantine, western and contemporary notation, as shown in the following example:



Tetelestai, p. 48: chanter's melody

2.3. Spirituality beyond the text and the Byzantine Chant in *Kratima* (1971)

Spirituality in *Kratima*⁵ (1971), a piece for chanter, oboe, tuba and tape, is revealed through another path: that of abstraction, where the melody for the voice is independent of semantics. The Greek word 'kratima' directly refers to the

⁵ The Byzantine "kratima" is a musical form in which the chanter improvises a melody with meaningless syllables such as "te-re-re, te-re-ru, a-ne-na-ne, to-to, ti-ti-ri, ku-ku e.t.c."

Byzantine musical genre in which vocal music is released from textual limitations, in order to reach free forms of expression.

Along this path, the composer succeeds in integrating the 'unconstraint' quality of the Byzantine musical material into the contemporary trends of modern music. According to the composer, *Kratima* suggests a new musical expression which develops from the creative encounter of musical elements from the East and the West. [Adamis, 1971].

The composer's orientation in *Kratima* (1971) intends to give the chanter – "psaltis" more flexibility by releasing him from the constraint of a poetic text as well as from the limitations of the traditional chanting techniques. The potentialities of the psaltic idiom are explored in several musical settings throughout the piece; in the fifth movement, using the characteristic non-sense syllables of the Byzantine genre, as well as single phonemes like 'a-e-i-o, e-na, a-hou, e-re', the chanter repeats and also sings variations of rhythmic and melodic motifs previously rendered by the instruments, live or pre-recorded on the tape.

Another compositional objective of *Kratima* is the timbral interpolation of the various sources of sound in the piece; the chanter's voice is blended into the sound of the tape – consisting of electronically elaborated pre-recorded material – and is being completely transfigured.

3. MICHAEL ADAMIS – THE ALCHEMIST OF GREEK SONORITIES IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

According to the analysis of three selected works in which the spiritual quality of the text is perfectly integrated in the electronic and vocal media, from symbolism (*Apokalypsis*, *Tetelestai*) to abstraction (*Kratima*), we can deduce that Michael Adamis has succeeded in musically enhancing the spiritual context of the sacred texts using different techniques by means of which he bridges novelty and tradition. In this context the composer attempts to achieve such an approach to the sacred text- in ways and through means definitely different from the traditional – in which vocal music intends to serve the worship ritual through the artistic expression of the words; and although some would argue whether vocal music has a more direct function between man and God, electroacoustic music composed of pure electronic or electronically processed instrumental and vocal sounds, even on its own, has a spiritual power over the listener which approaches the "voice of creation".

From this point of view Adamis has achieved the transformation of Eastern (Byzantine) sound to a contemporary (Western) musical idiom by integrating vocal and electronic sonorities in a unique way that underlines the spiritual context of his works. Byzantine chant as performed in a contemporary context reflects a spiritual vision of existence and refers to a transcendence that gives meaning to human destiny.

In the composer's words: "As far as I'm concerned, the experience of the Byzantine musical tradition has marked my outlook as a composer and at the same time it gave way to my sense of creative adventure on a path that hasn't been trodden before. With the insight of a tradition that is a living part of my experience and with the parallel experience of Western music in its development, within the realm of contemporary music thought, though not following the line of Western art, my musical endeavours strive for the creative encounter of the two arts, aiming at a new dimension of musical experience. Rooted in the Byzantine music, fragmenting and re-organizing it, transforming and transcending it, my music aims at the development of an approach towards the absolute taking the pathways of a tradition whose ethos and the symbolism and the realization shed a different light to the treatment of sound and to our inner processes of dealing with the abstract."

Moreover, the 'natural elaboration' of the choral sound acts complementary to the 'electronic elaboration' of the tape sound, which leads to a form of a sonic environment attained by the use of both electronic and natural process techniques. In the aforementioned works for vocal groups, instruments, chanter (psaltis) and tape we remark the composition and decomposition of the voices in a continuously transforming electronic environment, as the text sung by the choir or the chanter loses its semantic characteristics and the language is structured upon quasi-vocal sounds which gradually acquire a new, pure sonic, dimension.

The main tissue of the electroacoustic "aura" of the composer is the sound net (continuum) that is being created by the virtuosity of the constant interchange between natural voices and pre-recorded processed voices.

The apparent contrast between the concrete quality of the vocal parts and the abstract quality of the complex musical structure that sonically reflects the images of the sacred texts is used metaphorically so as to project the difference between the real world and what's beyond it.

On the other hand, the composer's virtuosity to combine in such a delicate and balanced way the electronic sound with the voice and the instruments (sometimes we perceive the electronic sound as an extension of the vocal or the instrumental) is one of the major achievements of his works despite the inadequate elementary electronic equipment of the '60s and '70s.

The original combination of electroacoustic, vocal and instrumental elements in the context of a spiritual quest creates an extraordinary sound environment which ineditably imprints the composer's personal mark: beyond time and space, balancing from "symbolism to abstraction".

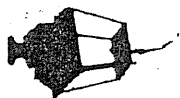
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SUMMARY

Michael Adamis is one of the most important composers of Greek contemporary music. In this article we will try to focus our interest on a special part of his works where the combination of electronic sound, Byzantine singing and contemporary compositional techniques reveals – through symbolic paths – an ingenious spiritual trajectory of the composer between Tradition and Novelty.

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Εξαιτίας πρακτικών ή σχολικών, ο "Πόρφυρος" αδυνατεί να απαντά σε όλους του φίλους που στέλνουν συνεργασία. Για τα κείμενα όμως που πρόκειται να δημοσιευτούν, οι συνεργασίες τους θα ειδοποιούνται με επιστολή μέσα σε δύο το αργότερο μήνες από τη λήψη της συνεργασίας τους.

ΠΟΙΗΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗ ΣΤΟΝ ΚΙΝΗΜΑΤΟΓΡΑΦΟ

Ποίηση, ποιητική, κινηματογράφος: ένας τίτλος με τρεις όρους για αποσαφήνιση. Η λέξη κινηματογράφος μοιάζει εννοιολογικά ευκολότερη αφού έκλεισε μόλις 113 χρόνια ζωής: κινηματογράφος είναι αυτόνομη τέχνη και τεχνική, μια πολύμορφη γλώσσα, ένα σύνολο πραγμάτων και ανισόχρονων καταστάσεων, ένα ρευστό αποτέλεσμα, μια κοσμοθεωρία -μια θυμίζει ο Μαγιακόφσκι-, ένας τρόπος να βλέπουμε τον κόσμο δηλαδή. Ο κινηματογράφος είναι επίσης ιδέα και αίσθηση. Για πολλούς, όπως ο Μαλρώ, ο κινηματογράφος είναι μια βιομηχανία, παραγωγικές διαδικασίες, εμποδομήματα των κοινωνιών, εκφάνσεις των πολιτισμών. Για πολλούς άλλους ο κινηματογράφος (που περιλαμβάνει όλες τις κινηματογραφίες) είναι ένας πλανήτης, ο άλλος κόσμος, η έτερη ύπαρξη, η διδυμη αδελφή ή αδελφός. Κινηματογράφος ακόμη είναι κάθε τι που δεν βιώνεται στην καθημερινότητα, αλλά στο επίπεδο ενός επικαιρικού ονείρου, οπτασίας, οράματος. Ο κινηματογράφος εντέλει μπορεί να γίνει απόλαυση και ενίοτε όπιο.

Σε κάθε περίπτωση, ο κινηματογράφος παίρνει διάφορες διαστάσεις: διαστέλλεται πάνω και κάτω από την πραγματικότητα και την αλήθεια χωρίς δεσμεύσεις τόπου και καιρού. Σε αυτό το παιχνίδι της δοκίμασίας να απαντήσω στο ερώτημα τι είναι κινηματογράφος, έδωσα έμφαση σε όψεις του επαναστατικού φαινομένου που ονομάστηκε "η τέχνη του 20ου αιώνα", μια και η μάζα των θεατών που επηρεάστηκε από αυτό δεν ήταν ούτε δημιουργοί ούτε τεχνικοί. Δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία ότι ο κινηματογράφος δεν είναι μόνο ένας με κ κεφαλαίο. Όπως συμβαίνει και με τις τέχνες και τους πολιτισμούς, και δεν υπάρχει αμφιβολία ότι συνδέεται με διαφορετικές κοινωνικές και εθνικές ομάδες. Κανείς εξάλλου δεν αρνείται πλέον ότι ο κινηματογραφικός προϊόν δεν αγγίζει τις οικονομίες και ότι δεν εντάσσεται στους κανόνες και τις απαιτήσεις τους. Σίγουρα, όμως, η κινηματογραφική ταινία επηρεάζει συνειδήσεις, διαμορφώνει νοοτροπίες, επιδρά στον ψυχισμό μας. Μπορεί τέλος πάντως μια ταινία να αλλάξει ακόμη και την άποψη που κάποιος έχει για τη ζωή.

Επομένως, η ποίηση και η ποιητική, οι ατέλειματες και απειρίοριστες αυτές έννοιες, τις οποίες δεν θεωρώ συνδεδεμένες μόνο με τον γραπτό λόγο, ενπνάζουν στον κόσμο του κινηματογράφου, όπως και τότε άλλα στοιχεία. Δεν θα ήθελα να σταθώ περισσότερο στις έννοιες ποίηση και ποιη-