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## **DIVERGING FROM AN ESTABLISHED GREEK MUSICAL NATIONALISM: ASPECTS OF MODERNISM IN THE WORKS OF DIMITRI MITROPOULOS, NIKOS SKALKOTTAS, DIMITRIOS LEVIDIS AND HARILAOS PERPESSAS, DURING THE 1920S AND 30S**

**Abstract:** The presence of many young talented composers outside Greece, studying in prominent European music centres during the 1920s and 30s, set them free from the ideological compulsions of Greek musical nationalism prevailing in Athenian musical life during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The creative approach and adoption of aspects of musical modernism, having been established around the same period in western music, are subsequently commented upon in the works, style and ideology of four different Greek composers: the pioneer of atonality and twelve-note technique in Greece, Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896–1960); the innovator and descendant of the Second Viennese School, Nikos Skalkottas (1904–1949); the ardent supporter of timbral innovation into new instruments and ensembles, Dimitrios Levidis (1886–1951); and, finally, the ascetical and secluded Harilaos Perpepassas (1907–1995), another pupil of Schoenberg in Berlin.

**Keywords:** Dimitri Mitropoulos, Nikos Skalkottas, Dimitrios Levidis, Harilaos Perpepassas, modernism

### **NATIONALISM, POLITICS, MUSIC (1900–1930)**

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century significant changes were taking place in several aspects of Greek art music. The so-called “Ionian tradition”, originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and much earlier than the establishment of the modern Greek state (1829–1831), had been providing models of music education and perception by mixing local people’s special social and linguistic characteristics with the strong influence of musical style and practice of Italian

origin. At the same time, the Ionian Islands had comprised a passage for the pervasion of the ideas of Enlightenment within Greece (Romanou 2006: 48). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially in Corfu, western music education was mainly provided by the Philharmonic Societies, which were founded and which operated after the model of the Italian conservatories of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In these music institutes, much emphasis was given to the study and use of wind instruments. The reason was the need to staff local military bands, a phenomenon that is also related to the establishment of national ideology in the Ionian Islands along with a social demand for the popularization of music. Byzantine chant was also taught at Ionian Academy, the first Greek university founded in Corfu (1824), and was practiced as part of a local tradition of improvised polyphony (Romanou 2006: 48–49). As far as musical life and perception of western music are concerned, opera was predominant, rather than to instrumental music, although Greek opera composers did not present their works very often. The Ionian tradition was still evident in Athens during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as regards musical education and practice. Philharmonic Societies and military bands coexisted with Italian opera companies (from 1837), and French operetta companies (from 1871), invited by the Greek authorities in order to entertain foreign diplomats, economic notables and members of the aristocracy.

The changes that were about to become more evident in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, applied to musical life, education, perception and musical composition for the most part. The reformation of the programme of studies of the Conservatory of Athens in 1891, under a more progressive central-European orientation, was an important event that marked the beginning of a new era (Romanou 2006: 131, Sakallieros 2008). Such events emerged or evolved as later consequences of an earlier urbanization (culminating around 1880–1900, especially in Athens) and were followed by a series of drastic political, social and cultural changes all over Greece (between 1910–1930), that involved extensive periods of war, the reconstruction of indigenous social groups in conjunction with abrupt instances of immigration, the reshaping of ideological trends (such as “Greekness” and “national identity”), as well as evolutions in the speaking and teaching of the modern Greek language (Augustinos 2003: 84–100; Siopsi 2003: 18–20).

It is important to understand the basic aspects of the complex concept of Greek nationalism, in order to understand how political and social changes affected musical life and musical composition in Greece after 1900. From a political point of view, Greek nationalism expressed the hope of establishing a Greek state that would encompass all ethnic Greeks from Sicily to Asia Minor and the Black Sea, and from Macedonia and Epirus to Crete and Cyprus (Veremis 1999: 14). The so-called “Μεγάλη Ιδέα” (“Great Idea”) dominated foreign policy and domestic politics of Greece from the War of Independence in the 1820s up until the 1910s. As an irredentist concept of Greek nationalism, it finally led to another Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), also known as the *Asia Minor Expedition* (Clogg 2002: 46–97; Vakalopoulos 1991: 425–431). The first two years of the war were victorious for Greece and redefined its borders with Turkey, according to the *Treaty of Sèvres* signed in August 10, 1920 [see Image 1].



Image 1.

Political and economic authorities applied complex propaganda mechanisms to promote the idea of nationalistic territorial claims and engage Greek citizens in a new war. Cultural procedures included not only the use of arts

and letters, but also light musical theatre and entertainment (Sakallieros 2008). Unfortunately, the tragic ending of the Greco-Turkish war of 1919–1922 led to the decline of those nationalistic ideas, at least in the sense and form in that they were determined and propagated during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

From a musical-historical point of view, the period 1900–1940 is nowadays defined as the rise and culmination of *Athenian musical life*. The diversity of its characteristics included the establishment of an important number of institutions, music publishing, art-music composition – mainly in terms of “national identity” – the performance of art music, light music and folk music, as well as new ways of perceiving ancient Greek, Byzantine and folk musical tradition (Romanou 2006: 109–130; Sakallieros 2008). Several of the above elements were directly linked to social issues of ethnological content and the perception of historical past while being employed into arts and letters, especially between 1880–1910.

As far as music was concerned, Greek composers of the National School, and especially Kalomiris and Lambelet, were inclined towards a clear nationalism, either theoretically (through articles, music reviews, etc.)<sup>2</sup> or musically. The majority of compositions from that period and up to 1950 are defined by the combination of a post-romantic and an early neoclassical style in terms of form and genre, including various elaborations of Greek folk material. Thematic development, colourful orchestration, harmonic innovation, elaboration of homophonic and contrapuntal texture, and the adoption of dramatic symbolism were creatively employed, especially as part of the quest to create large-scale

<sup>1</sup> The *Treaty of Lausanne* (July 24, 1923) settled the Anatolian and East Thracian parts of the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire and delimited the boundaries of Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The new treaty superseded the *Treaty of Sèvres* (1920) and led to the international recognition of the sovereignty of the new Republic of Turkey as the successor state of the defunct Ottoman Empire (which had signed the *Treaty of Sèvres*). It also provided for the independence of the Republic of Turkey, but also for the protection of the Greek Orthodox Christian minority in Turkey and the Muslim minority in Greece. However, most of the Christian population of Turkey and the Turkish population of Greece had already been deported under the earlier *Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations* signed by Greece and Turkey (January 30, 1923) (Clogg 2002: 98–141; Vakalopoulos 1991: 442–443).

<sup>2</sup> The earliest published manifestation of national identity as concerns music: Γεώργιος Λαμπελέτ (1901), “Η Εθνική Μουσική” [Georgios Lambelet, “The National Music”], *Παναθήναια* II (November 15): 82–90, (November 30): 126–131. Many articles followed, especially by Manolis Kalomiris and Petros Petridis.

forms such as symphony and opera. Manolis Kalomiris (1883–1962), the leading figure of the period, was an ardent advocate of such trends, which also defined the origins of the Greek National School of composers (Romanou 2006: 169–191; Siopsi 2003: 21–34). Moreover, means of promoting nationalistic ideology included musical education, musical journalism and criticism, and it could also be traced in several aspects of musical life, such as the rather conservative repertory appearing in Greek orchestras' symphonic concerts or staged performances of opera, representing the mainstream urban musical taste of the Athenians at least until 1924, the year of Mitropoulos' arrival in the Greek capital. As a conductor of the main Athenian orchestral ensembles in the 1920s and 30s, Mitropoulos gave the Greek premieres of a substantial number of works written in the 20th century (by Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Honegger, Prokofiev, R. Strauss, De Falla, Hindemith, and many others), while reforming the Athenian audiences' taste as regards the modern symphonic repertory (Romanou 2006: 205, 216). Let us now look more closely at Mitropoulos the composer.

#### DIMITRI MITROPOULOS (1896–1960)

When Mitropoulos was introduced to the Athenian audience as an opera composer, with the full staging of *Sœur Béatrice* (based on Maeterlinck's drama) in 1920, he was 24 years old, having just completed his studies in piano and music theory with honours from Athens Conservatory (Sakallieros 2010: 27–28). He had already conducted the Athens Conservatory Symphony Orchestra in 1914, while his first symphonic work was premiered when he was just 19 years old. Mitropoulos and the young violinist Nikos Skalkottas, who had just received his diploma, were considered as the two most promising of the talented young Greek musicians of their generation. They were both offered a scholarship and were sent abroad for further musical studies. Mitropoulos began to study organ and composition in Brussels in 1920, but the following year he moved to Berlin, where he was introduced to Ferruccio Busoni's circle at the Berlin *Akademie de Künste*. In 1922 he was appointed as *Korrepetitor* and *Assistent* in the prestigious Berlin State Opera *Unter der Linden*, under the guidance of the Artistic Director Erich Kleiber. He served there until 1924.

Mitropoulos's legendary conducting career in America and Europe during the 1940s–1960s led music historians to put aside his compositional output and its unique qualities for quite a long time. As a concert artist his career was greatly promoted by an event that took place in Berlin on February 27, 1930. Invited to conduct Prokofiev's Piano Concerto no. 3 with the Berlin Philharmonic, he had to substitute – at the last minute – for Egon Petri (a Busoni's pupil) at the piano, from where he also conducted the orchestra (Kostios 1985: 47). This was the trigger for his international career. Mitropoulos was invited to conduct major European and American orchestras, and on many occasions to be both conductor and performer. These upcoming conducting and performing engagements in the 1930s were the most significant, but not the exclusive, reasons that finally led him to abandon composition.

Mitropoulos's first appearance as a composer dates from 29 April 1915, when he conducted his symphonic work *Ταφή* (*The Burial*) at the regular concert series of the Athens Conservatory Symphony Orchestra. Between 1915 and 1920 he presented a number of works that do not reveal the evolution of an early personal musical style and language, but, rather, display diverse musical influences, mostly from of the established Greek nationalism of that period. *Ταφή* and *Sœur Béatrice* introduce the principles of thematic elaboration within a rich post-romantic harmonic texture, whereas impressionistic modal gestures, parallel harmony, and ostinato pedal parts also betray the influence of French music on the young composer (Sakallieros 2010: 23–27).

It is certain that Mitropoulos' Belgian teacher Armand Marsick introduced him to the post-Wagnerian trends of French music, as found in the works of Franck's and the Schola Cantorum composers (i.e. d'Indy, teacher of Marsick), as well as to the more contemporary trends of French impressionism (Sakallieros 2010: 22–25). Yet Mitropoulos was not stylistically independent from Greek nationalism. The ambitious *Eine Griechische Sonate* for piano, composed in Brussels (1920–21), revealed a romantic and impassioned character that seemed not to come to terms with Busoni's anti-romantic perspective on composition at the time,<sup>3</sup> when Mitropoulos performed it for him in Berlin in 1922. Mitropoulos hardly composed anything for the next

<sup>3</sup> For more information: Levitz T. (1996) *Busoni's place in Berlin's musical life – Teaching 'new classicality'*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 66–69.

three years, while establishing a prestigious musical reputation in other posts. The impact of the negative criticism the composer received for his creative output during the 1920s, in both Germany and Greece, is now being reconsidered as new evidence has recently appeared (Xanthoudakis 2010a). However, it seems that such an impact was nevertheless an important cause of him changing his compositional style, literally from one year to another, along with long periods of distance from composition.

On the other hand, Mitropoulos seemed quite daring and brave as a composer after returning to Athens from Berlin in 1924. Between 1924 and 1927 he introduced atonal expressionism to a conservative and rather hostile Athenian audience, with three works. The purely atonal and clearly anti-romantic *Passacaglia, Intermezzo and Fuga* (1924) heralded the appearance of twelve-note compositional technique, without yet adopting it. Neoclassicism in form, it was certainly influenced by Busoni, especially as concerns Mitropoulos's adoption of the baroque genres of passacaglia and fugue [see Example 1].

The image displays three staves of musical notation in bass clef with a 7/4 time signature. The first staff features a melodic line with several intervals, labeled 'motiv 1' and 'cell 1'. A bracket labeled 'cell 2' spans the final two notes of the first staff. The second staff continues the melodic line, with 'motiv 2' and 'motiv 3 [cell 1 + 2]' indicated. Arrows point from 'cell 1' and 'cell 2' in the first staff to 'motiv 3' in the second staff, showing their contribution to the third motif. The third staff shows 'motiv 3a', which is a variation of the third motif.

**Example 1.**

Strict intervallic organization, chordal blocks of fourths and sevenths, harsh chromaticism and the non-functional harmonic structure leave no doubt that this work was the introduction of modernism to the Greek audience. Despite the cold reception, Mitropoulos continued to cultivate and develop

the principles of the Second Viennese School. In 1927 he completed *Ostinata in tre parti* for violin and piano, the first work written in 12-note technique in Greek music literature [see Examples 2a and 2b].

Example 2a.

Example 2b.

Jusr before *Ostinata*, in 1925, Mitropoulos had also completed a cycle of songs for voice and piano entitled *14 Invenzioni*, after fourteen poems by Cavafy. All three works (*Passacaglia*, *Ostinata* and *Invenzioni*) were performed on 5 June 1927, provoking a major scandal in Athenian musical circles. It was not only the atonal style and the use of 12-note technique that irritated the audience and critics, but also the musical setting of Cavafy's poems. Their defining themes, such as uncertainty about the future, sensual pleasures, the moral character and psychology of individuals, homosexuality, evocations of real or literary figures of the past, and a fatalistic existential nostalgia, were not even remotely acceptable to the conservative circles of Greek arts and letters of that period.<sup>4</sup> Each invention comprises an independent baroque form, notably canon, fuga or passacaglia, in a freely organized atonal pitch structure with strict rhythmic patterns deriving from diminished or augmented quotations that follow each opening melodic line. The vocal part evokes the way the voice recites on pitches, rather than sings, in Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, a work recently considered as a major influence on Mitropoulos as regards the conception and formation of *Invenzioni* (Xanthoudakis 2010b: 25–26).

Peevish critics commented upon “*dissoluteness...*”, “*psychopathic aesthetics...*”, and “*the descending creative course of the young composer...*”, who, by the way, was already a prominent figure in Athenian musical life as a conductor and pianist.<sup>5</sup> In the following year, the orchestral *Concerto Grosso* (1928) marked an enforced stylistic change for Mitropoulos, again, combining a mixture of trends. Baroque neoclassicism of form, as well as contrapuntal and homophonic texture under a much smoother elaboration of dissonance and intervallic structure, coexist with surprising neo-folkloric – and presumably *Bartókian* – melodic evocations, particularly in the finale (Sakallieros 2011). This work, together with the two musical settings of ancient Greek plays, *Hipollytus* and *Elektra* (1936, 1937) commissioned by the Greek Royal Theatre Company, completed the compositional output of Mitropoulos.

<sup>4</sup> Selected bibliography on Cavafy, in English: R. Liddell (1974) *Cavafy: A Critical Biography*, London: Duckworth; E. Keeley (1995) *Cavafy's Alexandria*, Princeton-Chichester: Princeton University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Musical reviews were published in the Greek newspapers *Πολιτεία*, *Η Καθημερινή* and *Η Πρωία* in June 8 and June 9, 1927, as well as in the monthly journal *Νέα Εστία* in July 1, 1927.

## NIKOS SKALKOTTAS (1904–1949)

The case of Nikos Skalkottas is rather different from that of Mitropoulos, especially as regards his extended compositional output and the position he held (or perhaps did not) hold in Athenian musical life after his return from Berlin in 1933.<sup>6</sup> A direct descendant of the Second Viennese School, having completed his compositional studies in Schoenberg's prestigious class at the *Akademie de Künste* in Berlin (1927–1931), Skalkottas was forced to return to Greece for political and economic reasons. Being awarded the position of violinist on the back stands of the Orchestra of the Athens Conservatory in 1934, he generally remained isolated from public musical life and his works were not performed during his lifetime. In order to support himself and his family, he copied, arranged and harmonized other composers' music and he was a piano accompanist (Romanou 2009: 170). At the same time he cultivated atonal expressionism and dodecaphony in a great mixture of styles and compositional methods. His personal musical language, beyond 12-note composition, was quite diverse, including even post-romantic or folk elements, and resulted in a large number of works (approximately 170). Some 55 of them, especially those from his Berlin years, are still considered missing. The stylistic diversity (dodecaphony, atonality, tonality, modality, folk music)

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<sup>6</sup> Skalkottas's life, musical style and works have been the object of examination by musicologists for quite some time. New studies, collected editions and articles appear frequently, both in Greece and abroad. Some important ones published recently (after 2000 and in chronological order) are: Alsmeyer J. (2001) *Komponieren mit Tönen: Nikos Skalkottas und Schönbergs "Komposition mit zwölf Tönen"*, Saarbrücken: Pfau; Παπαϊωάννου Γ. Γ. [Papaioannou Y. Y.] (2004) *Νίκος Σκαλκώτας 1904–1949. Μια προσπάθεια διείσδυσης στον μαγικό κόσμο της δημιουργίας σου* [*Nikos Skalkottas 1904–1949. An attempt to enter the magical world of his music*], Athens: Παπαρηγορίου – Νάκας (the most ardent researcher on Skalkottas for about half a century. In a concluding *magnum opus* of his efforts, the two volume edition brings together a vast amount on information on literally every aspect of the life and works of the composer, although its author faced extended criticism by other scholars for his research methods and the validity of his assumptions); Vrontos H. (ed.) (2008) *Nikos Skalkottas, A Greek European*, Athens: Benaki Museum (a collective bilingual edition of articles on Skalkottas's life, affiliations, style and works, written by H. Vrontos, Y. Zervos, E. Mantzourani, N. Christodoulou, V. Fidetzis, A. Kostios, E. Varopoulou, L. Holtmeier, J. Thornley, A. Rikakis, L. Ramou, Y. Belonis and M. Bichsel); Mantzourani E. (2011) *The Life and Twelve-Note Music of Nikos Skalkottas*, Farnham: Ashgate. Also, as a part of a collective edition, Romanou K. (2009) "Nikos Skalkottas", in K. Romanou (ed.) *Serbian and Greek Art Music*, Bristol – Chicago: Intellect, 163–185.

the Skalkottas applied to musical composition brought the necessity to divide his works into categories (Zervos 2008: 61–67). Six of them can be clearly defined, both within and outside modernism, including:

1. Serial twelve-note works, in a constantly evolving style from 1928 to 1949, such as the three string quartets (1928–1940), the four sonatinas for violin and piano (1929–35), the Piano Concerto no. 1 (1931), the Violin Concerto (1938) and the Second Symphonic Suite (1944).

2. Atonal, but not twelve-note, works, such as the 32 Piano Pieces (1940), the second sonata for violin and piano (1940), the Double Concerto for violin, viola and wind orchestra (1939–1940) and the Double-bass concerto (1942).

3. Free twelve-note works, i.e. with limited serial or non-serial twelve-note conception, such as *The Return of Ulysses* (1942) or the fairy tale-drama *Με του Μαγικού τα Μάγια* (*Mayday Spell*, 1943–1944/1949).

4. Tonal works based exclusively on the tradition of folk music or directly inspired by it. The famous *36 Greek Dances* for orchestra (1931–1936) form a category of their own in Skalkottas's output. One of the major contradictions in Greek art-music history is that Skalkottas, the outstanding pre-war modernist, is also the composer of the most famous Greek tonal work employing folk material!

5. Tonal works that:

(i) do not include folk elements, such as the Concertino for C for piano and orchestra (1948), or most sections of the ballet *Η Λυγερή κι ο Χάρος* (*Death and the Maiden*, 1938);

(ii) include folk-like melodies, (but not in the manner of the Greek National School), such as the Symphonietta in B flat and the Classical Symphony, in which Skalkottas decided to echo the feelings and customs of the Greek people and cultural aspects of everyday life in Greece;<sup>7</sup>

(iii) reveal a more popular and light folk character with the use of modal melodies and harmony, and in a simpler overall texture, avoiding the use of authentic folk elements<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In the accompanying programme for the latter work Skalkottas described the parts as “...a popular psalm, a song of the past, a song of old times, like a popular ‘romance’, revelry with harmonic, lute and folk instruments...” (Zervos 2008: 64).

<sup>8</sup> Such works were generally written after 1945, i.e. the ballet *Η Θάλασσα* (*The Sea*, 1949).

6. Twelve-note works where folk-style elements are incorporated. The elaboration of an *im Volkston* (folk-like) melody in the Eight Variations for piano, violin and cello on a Greek folk tune (1938) into a free 12-note texture was followed by works such as the two Little Suites for violin and cello (1946, 1949) and the Duo for violin and cello (1947). In the second part of the Concerto for two violins and orchestra (1944–1945) Skalkottas adapts a very popular rebetiko song by the Greek composer Vassilis Tsitsanis to make a set of free 12-note variations.

Skalkottas's compositional style from 1928 to 1931 in Berlin evolved under the supervision and discreet influence of Schoenberg. The Austrian composer considered Skalkottas to be one of his finest students (Schoenberg 1975: 382–386).<sup>9</sup> Skalkottas knew that the musical cultivation of German expressionism and dodecaphony would not easily be accepted by conservative Athenian audiences. Moreover, as a correspondent from Berlin for the Greek periodical *Μουσική Ζωή* in 1931, he addressed music critics in Greece in a very austere manner, severely criticizing, one by one, the criteria by which they deployed their reviews in Greek newspapers and periodicals, in one of his articles entitled “Music Criticism” (Skalkottas 2008: 322–328). It is certain that Skalkottas was not very interested in cultivating a friendly environment for himself in Athenian music circles, in order to promote his work. It is, of course, also true that he did not know at the time that, two years later, he would be forced to return to Greece and face such negativity towards his work.

Skalkottas had already faced fierce criticism on his first public appearance as a composer in Greece, in 23 November 1930, conducting his *Konzert für Blasorchester*,<sup>10</sup> and received even worse reviews for the following concert of November 27, 1930, including five of his chamber music

<sup>9</sup> In a letter to Dimitri Mitropoulos sent in November 20, 1945, Schoenberg, residing in Los Angeles at the time, asks him for news about Skalkottas, 14 years after he had last seen him in Berlin. The information was acquired by the electronic online database of Schoenberg's correspondence in the United States, available on the web site of the *Arnold Schönberg Centre* (donated by the United States Library of Congress): <http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD019/4057.jpg> (retrieved in August 21, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> This work was premiered in Berlin at a concert of Schoenberg's masterclass in May 20, 1930. The composer conducted the Berlin Symphony Orchestra in his work, along with works of Winfried Zillig and Norbert von Hanneheim.

works. The only cases of Skalkottas' short-term acceptance by Greek musical cycles were the presentations of his orchestral Greek Dances (after 1936) and the earlier orchestration of Mitropoulos' *Κρητική Γιορτή* (*Cretan Feast*, 1928) (Belonis 2008: 450–456).

The cases of Mitropoulos and Skalkottas comprised the two prime pre-war examples of Greek composers who freed themselves from nationalistic compulsions, adopted trends of musical modernism and fearlessly disseminated them in Greek art music in the 1920s and 1930s respectively. However, it should not be ignored that the adaptation of such trends and their reception in Greece marked different paths for Mitropoulos and Skalkottas (Kostios 2008: 194–224). Mitropoulos pioneered atonal expressionism in Greece from 1924, but he composed a limited number of works and gradually abandoned composition on account of negative criticism, a disinclination to evolve a certain personal style and the acceptance of major conducting posts in Greece (after 1924) and abroad (after 1930).

Skalkottas kept his creative stimulus going through his difficult Athenian years (1933–1949), and did not give up his efforts, in spite of harsh criticism as a composer and isolation from public musical life in general. On the contrary, he evolved his twelve-note techniques of the early 1930s in a series of atonal, tonal, modal or even folk idioms that do not mingle except for specific reasons, thus producing diverse stylistic directions. His music does not exclusively include elements from the Second Viennese School, but also bears creative influences from the music of Bartók, Hindemith and Stravinsky. Skalkottas re-adopted genres from 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century music (suite, sonata, sonatina, concerto) and the structural models that corresponded to them (two and three-part sonata forms, variations, rondo forms), thus refashioning aspects of modernism in texture with structural elements of the neoclassicism of the 1920s, in order to achieve a high level of artistry in forms of absolute music. Tonal idioms, the elaboration of folk material, and modality in thematic/harmonic construction were mainly applied in dance-like forms, stage music or works written specifically to be choreographed (Zervos 2008: 68–70).

## DIMITRIOS LEVIDIS (1886–1951)

Although the importance of colour and timbre were already described by Schoenberg in 1911, with his definition of *Klangfarbenmelodie* as an integral part of composition,<sup>11</sup> such novelties are still considered as a privilege of French music, cultivated in a long tradition that originated from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when tone-colour quality was becoming a part of modality and harmonic progression (in Dukas, Fauré, Satie and other composers). This tradition culminated into the French movement of impressionism (Samson 1975: 33–38) and continued to evolve through diverse innovations including the invention of the first electronic musical instruments in the late 1920s and 30s and later experimentations by Varèse, Messiaen and the post-war avant-garde scene.<sup>12</sup>

The Greek composer Dimitrios Levidis (1886–1951) did not study in France, but his long stay in Paris (1910–1932) introduced him to the prevailing musical trends of the period, resulting in several applications of innovative elements in his works, even after his return to Greece in 1932. Born in Leipzig, Levidis studied in Athens, Lausanne and Munich. His teachers included Friedrich Klose, Felix Mottl and – as reported but not confirmed – Richard Strauss, who was supposed to have been his composition teacher from 1907 to 1908 (Leotsakos 1986: 9–10).<sup>13</sup> In Germany he was awarded the Franz Liszt Prize

<sup>11</sup> *Klangfarbenmelodie* (German for *tone-colour-melody*) is a musical technique that describes the segmentation of a musical line or melody, each segment taken by a different instrument or instruments. It enhances the colour and texture of a melodic line, instead of using a single timbre throughout. The term was introduced by Arnold Schoenberg in his *Harmonielehre* (1911), where he actually discusses the creation of “timbre-structures”. He and Anton Webern are particularly noted for their use of the technique, Schoenberg most notably in the third of his *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 16, entitled “Farben” (Schönberg 1922: 506–507).

<sup>12</sup> For further reading, as regards differences between French and German music in the beginning of the twentieth century, see: Taruskin R. (2005) *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 4, *The Early Twentieth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, focusing on Chapter 48 “Getting rid of glue: Satie, Debussy, Fauré, Lili Boulanger”, 59–129 (especially in pp. 59–64 and 101–106). Other interesting essays: Pople A. (2002) “Styles and languages around the turn of the century”, in J. Samson (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 601–620; Butler C. (2004), “Innovation and the avant-garde, 1900–1920”, in N. Cook, A. Pople (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 69–89.

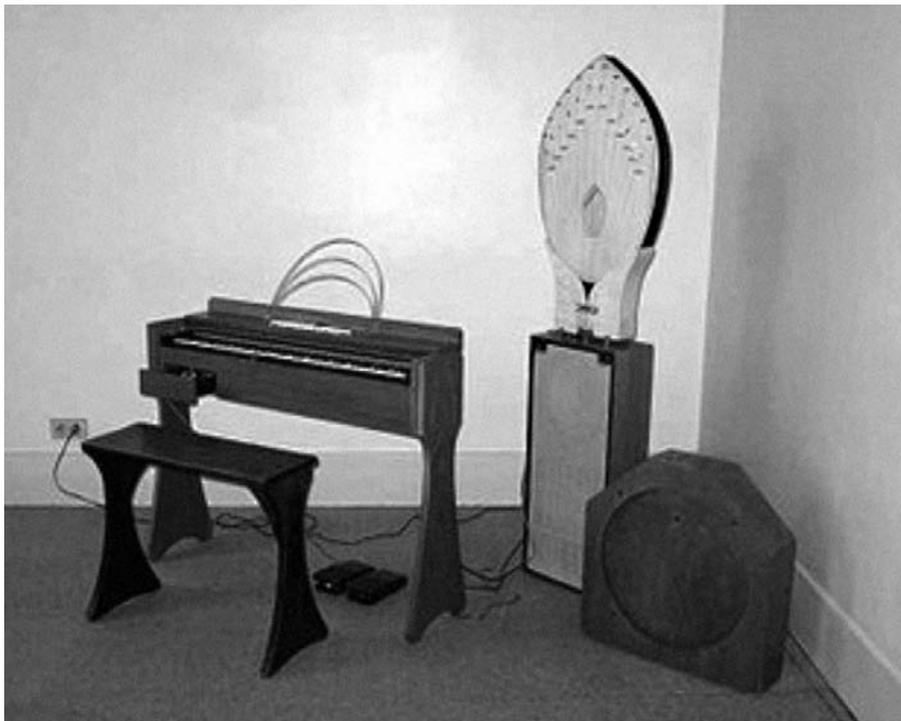
<sup>13</sup> Further references on Levidis: Μπουμπουλίδης Φ. [Bouboulidis F.] (1949) *Νεοέλληνες Μουσουργοί: Α. Δημήτριος Λεβίδης. Συμβολή εις την Ιστορίαν της Νεοελληνικής Μουσικής* [*Greek Composers: A. Dimitrios Levidis. A contribution to Greek Music History*], Athens; Leotsakos G., “Levidis, Dimitrios”, *Grove Music Online*, [www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16518](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16518) (retrieved 21 August 2009); Slonimsky N. (1965) “New Music in Greece”, *The Musical Quarterly* 51 (1): 225–235.

for his *Erste Griechische Romantische Sonate* for piano, op. 16. After settling in Paris, he served in the French Army during World War I and received French nationality in 1929. His compositional style does not imply modernism, at least in the sense that was described in the works of Mitropoulos and Skalkottas. Levidis did not abandon tonality. He applied a refined technique that combined post-romantic and chromatically rich Straussian harmony with Ravelian modality, firm outer structure and sophisticated rhythmic detailing. An advocate of exploiting ancient Greek modes, he achieved a style of greater homogeneity than that of many of his Greek contemporaries, outside any nationalistic trends.

Levidis' innovations aimed at the experimental use of instrumental timbre in novel combinations and the experimental use of new instruments. He had already developed an unconventional instrumental ensemble called the “dixtuor éolien d'orchestre”, which consisted of muted string quintet (except for the first violin), piano, celesta, two harps, and a percussionist (playing tambourine, cymbals, gong, snare and tenor drum). His work *Divertissement* for English horn and dixtuor éolien dated from 1911. His interest in new sounds led him to be the first composer to write for the Ondes Martenot, one of the new electronic instruments of the period [see Image 2].<sup>14</sup>

Levidis's *Poème symphonique* for ondes martenot and orchestra, (op. 43b) was premiered on the occasion of the first public appearance of the instrument, on April 20, 1928 at the Paris Opéra, with its inventor, Maurice Martenot, performing as soloist. Following this impressive debut, the conductor Leopold Stokowski brought Martenot to the United States to perform the Levidis work with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The popularity of the device and its

<sup>14</sup>The *Ondes Martenot* was invented by Maurice Martenot (1898–1980), and it was originally named ‘*ondes musicales*’. Martenot was very active in promoting and developing the instrument (touring worldwide in 1930–31), which soon found favour with a number of composers, many of them quite important. After Levidis, Varèse first used it as a substitute for the sirens in a performance of *Amériques* (May 30, 1929, Paris) and later replaced two theremins by ondes martenot in the revised version of *Ecuatorial*. Messiaen wrote for six ondes martenot in *Fêtes des belles eaux* (1937) and gave a prominent part to the instrument in the *Trois petites liturgies de la présence divine* (1943–1944) and the *Turangalila-symphonie* (1946–1948). In 1947 Martenot established classes for the ondes martenot at the Paris Conservatoire, and in the same year Jolivet was the first composer who wrote a concerto for it. Apart from concert works (over 700 by 1990) and film music, the instrument has also been employed in stage music, participating in live ensembles at many French theatres, including the Comédie-Française, the Théâtre National Populaire etc., as well as much popular music (Orton R. and Davies H., “Ondes martenot”, *Grove Music Online*, [www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20343](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20343), retrieved 9 September 2009).

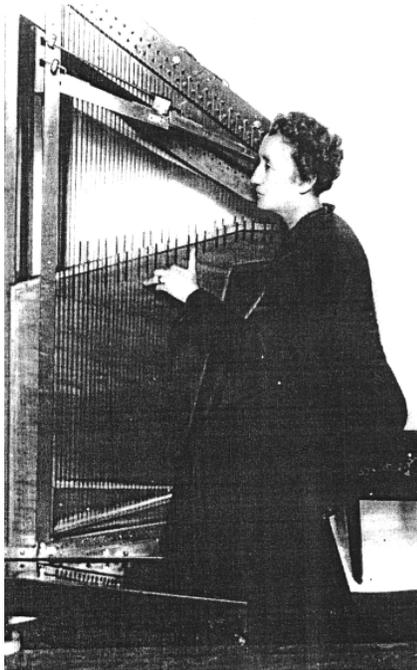


**Image 2.**

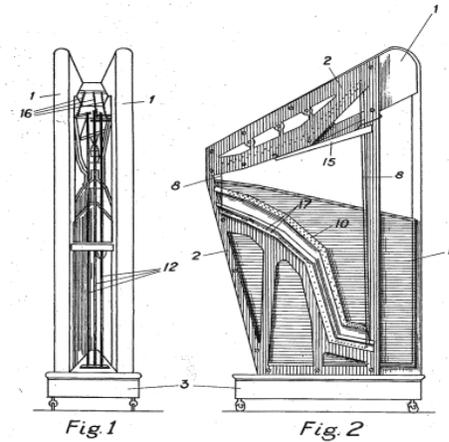
colour capabilities motivated famous composers such as Honegger, Jolivet, Messiaen, Varèse and Martinů, who included it in a large number of works.

After his return to Greece in 1932, Levidis was appointed to the Ministry of Education, the Hellenic Conservatory and the Music Lyceum. He also served as chairman of the Greek Composers Union from 1945 to 1947.<sup>15</sup> In Greece he provided music for the *πολύχορδον* (*polychord*), a new plucked string instrument in the form of a double chromatic harp with 117 strings, invented by the Greek piano tuner Evangelos Tsamourtzis (1888–1965) [see Image 3]. Levidis composed five works for the instrument (one for three polychords) that primarily explored the chromatic capabilities of the instrument, and supplied a teaching method (1941) that is still unpublished [see Example 3]. The method was compiled in French, probably in 1940–1941, and resulted from a collaboration between Levidis and the harpist and teacher of the Athens Conservatory Mathilde

<sup>15</sup> Levidis's works during the late 1930s and in the 1940s seemed to adopt nationalistic elements, probably due to his involvement with the Greek Composers' Union, still under the strong influence of Kalomiris.



May 25, 1937. E. T. TSAMOURTZI 2,081,516  
HARP LIKE POLYPHONIC MUSICAL INSTRUMENT  
Filed Nov. 21, 1935 2 Sheets-Sheet 1



INVENTOR  
E. T. TSAMOURTZI  
BY  
E. V. Howard  
ATTORNEY

Image 3.

Παράδειγμα 3

Παράδειγμα 4

Παράδειγμα 5

ETUDE CHROMATIQUE

*Moderato* *o. sfz* *glissando*

Example 3.

Wassenhoven. Its full title was *Méthode speciale destinée à l'enseignement du 'Polycorde' (technique et doigté de Mme Mathilde Wassenhoven)*.

Levidis's deep interest in the nature of sound and timbre also led him to musicological research that resulted in some interesting papers. In Paris, his music was often performed at the Colonne, Straram, Padeloup and Touche concerts. Prominent conductors Sergei Koussevitzky and Leopold Stokowski also premiered orchestral works by Levidis in the United States.

#### HARILAOS PERPESSAS (1907–1995)

The most enigmatic and unknown Greek composer reported to have turned aside from Greek musical nationalism before World War II, is Harilaos Perpassas.<sup>16</sup> Born in Leipzig, he studied music theory and composition in Berlin, where he was a pupil of Schoenberg for two years (1929–31) and was acquainted with Skalkottas.

Perpassas opposed Schoenberg's compositional methods and did not complete his studies with him. He remained within the bounds of tonality, and was mainly influenced by German late romanticism and French impressionism. He arrived in Greece for the first time in January 1934, attracting notice as a composer. Dimitri Mitropoulos conducted two of his symphonic works with the Athens Conservatory Symphony Orchestra, while Perpassas received a prize for composition from the Academy of Athens. His very private and introvert personality meant that he led a secluded life that still makes very difficult for

<sup>16</sup> References on Perpassas: Λεωτσάκος Γ. [Leotsakos G.] (1988), "Περπέσσας, Χαρίλαος" ("Perpassas, Harilaos"), Παγκόσμιο Βιογραφικό Λεξικό, Vol. viii, Athens: Εκδοτική Αθηνών; Gradenwitz P. E. (1996), "Requiem to a Forgotten Composer", The Athenian, 272: 16–18; by the same author: (1998) Arnold Schönberg und seine Meisterschüler. Berlin 1925–1933. Wien: Paul Zsolnay (especially pp. 184–198); Ηλιαδέλης Σ. Δ. [Heliadelis S. D.] (1999) "Χαρίλαος Περπέσσας, ο άγνωστος Σιατιστινός συνθέτης και φιλόσοφος" ["Harilaos Perpassas, the unknown classical composer and philosopher from Siatista"], Ελμειακά 43: 93–110; Jaklitsch N. - M. (1999) "Μανώλης Καλομοίρης, Νίκος Σκαλκώτας, Χαρίλαος Περπέσσας – Έλληνες μουσουργοί του εικοστού αιώνα μεταξύ της ελληνικής παράδοσης και του 'δυτικού' μοντερνισμού", ["Manolis Kalomiris, Nikos Skalkottas, Harilaos Perpassas – Greek composers of the 20th century, in between Greek tradition and western modernism"], in A. Arghyriou, K. A. Dimadis and A. D. Lazaridou (eds.), Πρακτικά του Α' Ευρωπαϊκού Συνεδρίου Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών 'Ο Ελληνικός Κόσμος ανάμεσα στην Ανατολή και τη Δύση 1453–1981' (Proceedings of First European Congress of Modern Greek Studies), Band II, Athens: Ελληνικά Γράμματα: 297–309.

researchers to discover the dates for his works, since he continually revised or, even worse, destroyed many of them. From his Athenian period his most important compositions were *Dionysos Dithyramben* for piano and orchestra (possibly bf. 1934), Symphony no. 1 (1934, lost) and Prelude and Fugue in C for orchestra (1935).

In 1948 Perpassas moved to New York. Mitropoulos, leading the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at the time, gave him a great deal of support. He introduced Perpassas to George Skouras, the most powerful film producer in Hollywood, so that the composer might earn a decent income by producing film scores. Perpassas declined such commissions or altered their content: for example, he received an annual scholarship in order to compose a large symphonic work, and instead produced a set of variations on thematic material taken from Beethoven's 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony! Although he led a secluded life, he was one of the very few Greek composers whose work was repeatedly performed by prominent American orchestras. His Prelude and Fugue in C introduced him to the American public when Mitropoulos performed it with the New York Philharmonic on 4, 5 and 6 November 1948 [see Image 4].

**THE PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY SOCIETY**  
1842 **OF NEW YORK** 1878  
CONSOLIDATED 1918

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1948 ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH SEASON 1949

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**CARNEGIE HALL**  
THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 4, 1948, at 8:45  
FRIDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 5, 1948, at 2:30

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463rd and 463rd Concerts

Under the Direction of  
**DIMITRI MITROPOULOS**

Assisting Artist:  
LEONARD ROSE, 'Cellist

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PROGRAM

WAGNER Prelude to "Lohengrin"

SCHUMANN Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra  
in A minor, Opus 129

I. Nicht zu schnell (Not too fast)  
II. Langsam (Slowly)  
III. Sehr lebhaft (Very lively)  
(played without pause)  
LEONARD ROSE

INTERMISSION

PERPASSA Prelude and Fugue for Orchestra  
(First Performance in this Country)

CHAUSSON Symphony in B-flat major, Op. 20

I. Lent — Allegro vivo  
II. Très lent  
III. Animé

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ARTHUR JUDSON, BRUNO ZIRATO, Managers  
THE STEINWAY is the Official Piano of The Philharmonic-Symphony Society  
COLUMBIA AND VICTOR RECORDS

**THE PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY SOCIETY**  
1842 **OF NEW YORK** 1878  
CONSOLIDATED 1918

---

1950 ONE HUNDRED NINTH SEASON 1951

---

Conductor: DIMITRI MITROPOULOS  
Guest Conductors: BRUNO WALTER, GEORGE SZELL,  
VICTOR DE SABATA, LEONARD BERNSTEIN  
Associate Conductor: FRANCIS ALFORD  
For Young People's Concerts: SIGOR BUKSTOFF

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**CARNEGIE HALL**  
463rd and 465th Concerts

THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 26, 1950, at 8:45  
FRIDAY AFTERNOON, OCTOBER 27, 1950, at 2:30

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Under the Direction of  
**DIMITRI MITROPOULOS**

Assisting Artist:  
YEHUDI MENUHIN, Violinist

BEETHOVEN Overture, *Coriolanus*  
MOZART Concerto No. 7, D major,  
for Violin and Orchestra K. 271-a

Allegro maestoso  
Andante  
Rondo: Allegro  
Yehudi Menuhin

INTERMISSION

PERPASSA *Christus Symphony*

Adagio  
Adagio  
Allegro con fuoco—Andante  
Adagio  
Presto  
(Played without pause)  
(First performances)  
\*RAVEL *La Valse*, Choreographic Poem for Orchestra

---

ARTHUR JUDSON, BRUNO ZIRATO, Managers  
THE STEINWAY is the Official Piano of The Philharmonic-Symphony Society  
\*COLUMBIA AND VICTOR RECORDS

Image 4.

He then completed his Symphony no. 2 under the title *Συμφωνία του Χριστού* (*Christus Symphony*), which was performed twice in a concert season, by the New York Philharmonic and Mitropoulos, on 26 and 27 October and 2 and 3 December 1950 [see Image 4]. The Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy also performed the work in 1956.

Perpassas's musical style abounds in a rich, chromatic polyphony driven to powerful and dramatic climaxes, with wide-leaping melodies and a refined and very detailed orchestration, at least in his few known works (Leotsakos 2010).<sup>17</sup> It is very interesting to note here that, just before moving to America, Perpassas tried to re-establish contact with Arnold Schoenberg, who was already in Los Angeles, beginning a correspondence with him that lasted for about three months, from April to June 1947. The reason for the beginning of this correspondence was probably that Perpassas was trying to enter the prestigious Juilliard School in New York, and therefore he needed a letter of recommendation from Schoenberg. In one of those letters, there is a copy of an enclosed filled-in form that Schoenberg has addressed to Juilliard, on behalf of Perpassas. Schoenberg refers to Perpassas's compositions as approaching the style of Stravinsky, which is a reliable written testimony on Perpassas's modernistic compositional attempts in 1929–1930. In his letter to Perpassas (May 11, 1947) Schoenberg writes:

*“Dear Mr. Perpassa: I enclosed the form you sent me. I have answered all the questions as well as I could, regarding the long time which has elapsed since I saw you last or heard from you. By the way: have you not been with me earlier than 1930? I would guess it was 1926 or 27? Let me hear whether you succeeded with your application. Very kindly greeting you, I am yours sincerely”.*

In the enclosed form from Juilliard School that Perpassas asked Schoenberg to fill out, one can read:

*“One year (1930–1931) ...I assume he is musical and gifted for composition. I liked him. He was natural and quite lively and intelligent. I had the impression that he is idealistic and wants to do the best. Since it is about 16 years that Mr. Harilaos Perpassa was a pupil of my Masterclasses at the Academy of Arts to Berlin, and I have probably seen in this time quite a few hundred of more or less talented students,*

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<sup>17</sup> Some relevant information is found also in the programme notes of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra's concerts on 4 and 5 November 1948 and 26 and 27 October 1950 (available online at: <http://history.nyphil.org/nypwcpub/dbweb.asp?ac=a1>).

*so you will understand that I have only a faint recollection of him. But as these have been masterclasses, he must have graduated from a German conservatory (which means something to me!) and I would not have accepted him, if I had thought that he is talented, and I was independent in this respect. I remember (also not quite clearly) that he showed me compositions about in Stravinsky's style".<sup>18</sup>*

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper is to show the differences between the established nationalistic ideology in musical composition that prevailed Greek art music in the 1920s and 30s and the fresh contemporary ideas, innovations and modernistic trends imported by a number of young composers who arrived in Greece at about the same period, from important western European music centres. Further archival research, analytical applications and stylistic comparison between those composers' works and works that retain 'national' identity, may establish the existence of a concrete movement of modernism in Greece during the 1920s and 30s that could have contributed to laying foundations for the forthcoming 'abrupt' rise of the Greek avant-garde musical scene after 1950.

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<sup>18</sup> The information was acquired by the electronic online database of Schoenberg's correspondence in the United States, available on the web site of the *Arnold Schönberg Centre*: the three scanned pages of the facsimile can easily be viewed and studied on the following web pages: [http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD022/4447\\_1.jpg](http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD022/4447_1.jpg) (for page 1), [http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD022/4447\\_2.jpg](http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD022/4447_2.jpg) (for page 2) and [http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD022/4447\\_3.jpg](http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/DVD022/4447_3.jpg) (for page 3, comprising the enclosed filled-in form required by the Juilliard School) (retrieved September 7, 2009).

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*Јорџос Сакаљерос*

ОТКЛОН ОД ГРЧКОГ МУЗИЧКОГ НАЦИОНАЛИЗМА:  
АСПЕКТИ МОДЕРНИЗМА У ДЕЛИМА  
ДИМИТРИСА МИТРОПУЛОСА, НИКОСА СКАЛКОТАСА,  
ДИМИТРИОСА ЛЕВИДИСА И ХАРИЛАОСА ПЕРПЕСАСА  
ТОКОМ 20-ИХ И 30-ИХ ГОДИНА

(Резиме)

На прагу XX века у Грчкој долази до значајних промена у музичком животу, образовању, рецепцији и стваралаштву. Успон и развој музичке уметности у Атини током 20-их и 30-их година представља сложен културни феномен проистекао из убрзане урбанизације, појаве нових уметничких струјања, као и промена друштвених, економских и образовних прилика, те политичких околности. Када је реч о ликовној уметности и књижевности, национално усмерење доживљава кулминацију током прве две деценије XX века. То је био резултат пропагандних активности грчких званичника које су имале за циљ покретање рата против Турске (1919–1922) са катастрофалним последицама. Манолис Каломирис био је водећи представник грчке националне школе у области музичког стварања, који се ватрено залагао за музички национализам. Насупрот њему, идеолошки оквири грчког музичког национализма нису у потпуности били блиски делу младих и талентованих композитора који су, студирајући у значајним западноевропским центрима током друге и треће деценије, стекли увид у перспективе и домете предратног европског модернизма. У раду је учињен осврт на дела, стил и идеологију четворице грчких композитора: Димитриса Митропулоса (1896–1960) који је, осим што је био изврстан диригент и пијаниста, био и родоначелник експресионизма, атоналности и додекафоније на грчком тлу, потом Никоса Скалкотаса (1904–1949), утемељивача предратног грчког музичког модернизма и следбеника Друге бечке школе, Димитриоса Левидиса (1886–1951), великог поклоника примене иновација у области звучних истраживања у градњи инструмената и нових врста ансамбала и, на крају, Хариоласа Перпесаса, Шенберговог ученика и једне од најзагонетнијих личности грчке уметничке музике.