

**The Amalgamation of Greek Folk Music
with Western Musical Tradition in Vangelis Karafillidis’
“Variations on a Greek Island Dance” and “Micrographies” Nos. 3 & 4**

Variations on a Greek Island Dance and Micrographies; a prologue

The art of the piano is an important aspect of European music culture, to say the least, thanks to the wide range of possibilities that this instrument can offer. The creation of a national repertoire has always been a priority for Greek composers. In fact, the musicians’ repertoire, in general, represents one of the most important aspects of their professional activity, since it can be proved to be important for both their training as well as their performances. In addition to the arrangements and compositions inspired by folk music, Karafillidis has also composed original piano music, which can be used for both educational and performing purposes. For example, Karafillidis himself reveals the reason why he composed the piano works *Variations on a Greek Island Dance and Micrographies*: “I composed these pieces in order to explore the synthesization of Greek folk music with western music compositional techniques as well as to provide an educational tool for both piano and music theory students”.

The Variations on a Greek Island Dance; an overall outlook

The piano work *Variations on a Greek Island Dance* (composed in 1992), comprises (in addition to the theme) a series of ten Variations. The Theme is a folk song from the Aegean Sea islands called “Thalassaki” (“Little Sea”). The predominant musical characteristics of this work are clarity of form, melodiousness, harmonic simplicity, use of modality and varicoloured emotional expression. The Theme (“Thalassaki”) is a very popular folk song and specifically speaking it is Vangelis Karafillidis’ favourite folk melody. Essentially, this song is a meditation addressed to the sea; a pray not to cause trouble to seamen and protect them from danger. The same song is also a “Kalamatianos” dance and therefore follows the rhythmical pattern 7/8 [(3+2+2)/8]. The name “Kalamatianos” is derived from a city of Peloponnesus, in southern Greece (Kalamata). The piece is based on an almost typical classical “Theme and Variations” form. The Theme and each one of the Variations (apart from the last one) bear structural uniformity; they each consist of two segments of five and six bars respectively.

We could also mention that the emotional context of the piece ranges from calmness to storminess (bringing to mind the sea itself in this way) and from devoutness to triumph. In overall, the style of the music is romantic with a pervasive nostalgic inclination. The (almost) classical “Theme and Variations” form along with the motivic unity of the piece ensure clarity and coherence. The romantic mood of the work provides interesting emotional alterations and the usage of modality (E Aeolian and E Dorian modes) as well as tonality (E Minor) underline the Greek temper of the piece.

Although the composer followed the (macro-structural) context of the classical “Theme and Variations” form, he consciously based the Variations on the treatment of motivic material derived from both the Theme and the 1st Variation (at the micro-structural level). The reason is that he wanted to liberate himself and diverge from any “predictability” side effects of the classical form, while at the same time concentrating on the alterations at the melodic level which constitute the predominant expressional means of Greek folk music.

The alterations of mood result in an almost programmatic environment which functions as an emotional voyage for the listener, as an interpretational challenge for the piano performer and as a source for aesthetic and expressive means’ analysis for the potential composer. Overall, this work, in addition to being an attractive choice for the piano interpreter and an enchanting piece for the listener, can aid piano as well as music theory and composition tuition.

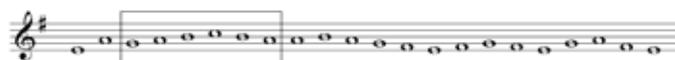
The Variations on a Greek Island Dance; the analysis

Although the first impression (after taking a look at the score) is that most of the Variations bear no connection with the Theme, nothing is further from the truth; each one of the Variations is strongly connected either to the Theme or the 1st Variation via the procedure of motivic transfiguration.

The Theme: As mentioned above, the Theme is a very popular folk song (“Thalassaki”). The song consists of three verses. The composer utilized the melodies of the first two verses for constructing the Theme. Specifically speaking, he consciously decided to expose this material in a very simplified (almost subtractive) form. Thus, the melody appears in the right hand part, while at the same time the left hand plays the original “Kalamatianos” dance rhythmical pattern formed of plain harmonic octave intervals. The composer intentionally simplified the original folk song for utilizing it as the Theme. This offers the opportunity to the listener to concentrate on the motivic construction of the Theme. Actually, it’s the motivic construction of the Theme that functions as the starting point for the unfolding of each one of the Variations. Furthermore, the classical “Theme and Variations” form most of the time preferably evolves from the relaxation of the Theme to gradually complicated and aesthetically intense Variations.

Variation I: The 1st Variation follows the “Kalamatianos” dance rhythmical articulation (7/8). The melody in the right hand part seemingly has no connection with the Theme. But actually, it has a very strong one, which is revealed at the end of the *Variations*; the “A” segment of the 1st Variation is a countermelody of the corresponding segment of the Theme. The “B” segment of the 1st Variation exposes an oppositely directed (inversed-like) melodic line when compared to the segment “A” one. Both “A” and “B” segment melodies are strongly connected with the Theme, due to the motivic coherence between them, which is derived from micro-structural transfigurations of the Theme motives.

Variation II: The rhythmical articulation of the 2nd Variation again follows the “Kalamatianos” dance rhythmical articulation (7/8). The principal motif in the right hand part is derived from the Theme. In detail, the melodic construction of the “A” segment of the Theme in its simplified form looks like this:



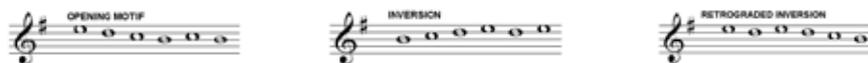
Variation IV: This (*Allegro molto*) Variation comes in contrast to the previous Variations. Aesthetically, it functions as a precursor of the following Variation, where the Theme is recapitulated. The fast sixteenth notes passages are based on the opening of the “B” part of the 1st Variation. The alteration of mood here is consciously used in order to instigate the listener’s attention and prepare him/her of the next Variation.



Variation V: The composer intentionally placed this enriched recapitulation of the Theme exactly at the middle of this series of Variations. The alteration of mood and the motivic explorations in the previous Variations make the listener diverge from the Theme. The melody here appears enriched with chords in the right hand part. The left hand performs a contrapuntal accompaniment formed of harmonic octave intervals, which clearly reminds of the 1st Variation.



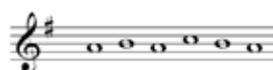
Variation VI: The mood of this Variation is closely connected with the previous one. The melody of the “A” segment is derived from the corresponding segment of the 1st Variation as shown below:



The melody in the “B” segment is derived from the same material. If we partition the principal motif of the previous segment into two groups of three notes each, we have the following triads:



The inversion of the 1st triad in combination with the 2nd triad generates the principal melodic pattern of this segment:



Variation VII: The motivic material of this Variation is clearly derived from the “B” segment of the 1st Variation.

Variation VIII: This Variation is based on contrapuntal writing. Although such techniques are virtually non-existent in Greek folk music, the composer utilized contrapuntal-like dialogues between the right and left hand parts. The thematic material is clearly derived from both the Theme and the 1st Variation. We should underline that the usage of counterpoint is tactful.

Variation IX: This Variation is based on thirds. The principal motives for both segments are derived from the Theme. Both fast passages (sixteenth notes) as well as the accented notes bear close connection with the Theme.

Variation X (finale): This Variation not only constitutes an altered recapitulation of the Theme, but furthermore is an exposition of the whole song. The right hand performs the melody, while at the same time the left hand performs relatively simple chord formations which clearly follow the “Kalamatianos” dance rhythmical pattern. It’s highly remarkable that the composer again after four Variations recapitulated the Theme (the same thing happened with the precious recapitulation of the Theme in the 5th Variation). This results in a strong sense of symmetry and integration for the piece. We should also mention that in the closing of this Variation the left hand part performs the opening of the Theme while at the same time the right hand part performs the opening of the 1st Variation. The composer intentionally chose the closing of this series of Variations in order to reveal the strong connection between the Theme and the 1st Variation. Under this perspective it is exactly at this point, the listener solves the coherence “mystery” of this piece and the music theoretician traces the justification of the motivic treatment in this series of Variations.

The Micrographies; an overall outlook

The “*Micrographies*” (composed in 1994) are four little pieces addressed to piano students. Here, modern compositional techniques are used. This work utilizes folk melodies in their original form (in *Micrographies* no.3 and 4), pentatonic scales (in *Micrography* no.1) and impressionistic as well as romantic style (in *Micrography* no.2). In fact it was Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos* that served as the prototype for the *Micrographies*. Vangelis Karafillidis by composing this work not only demonstrated his profound knowledge of modern compositional techniques, but furthermore he provided a small collection of fascinating piano miniatures.

The Micrographies Nos.3 & 4; the analysis

For the “*Micrography*” No.3 the composer used the same song (“Thalassaki”) as in his *Variations*. But here, the treatment of the same thematic material is completely different. The right hand performs the melody in its original form while at the same time the accompaniment of the left hand utilizes modern compositional techniques. In the first phrase, the melody is accompanied by a chromatic melodic scheme. In the second phrase the combination of rhythmical articulations of the melody and the accompaniment generates the sense of polyrhythm (birhythm); the right hand plays a 7/8 beat pattern while the left a 2/4 one. In the third phrase the coexistence of melody and accompaniment forms polymodality (bimodality) with the E Aeolian mode in the right hand part coexisting with the E Dorian mode in the left hand one. The rhythmical articulation in the left hand part in this piece does not follow the original “Kalamatianos” dance rhythmical pattern.

Micrography No. 3

The musical score for "Micrography No. 3" is written for piano and violin. It begins with the tempo marking "Allegretto". The piano part starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and a *legato* articulation. The violin part starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The score includes several measures with dynamic markings such as *poco a poco cresc.*, *dim.*, *p*, and *rit.*. The piece concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.

This *Micrography* was the favourite one of the Greek composer Alkis Baltas, who was very impressed with the wide spectra of modern techniques used for a single melody, in such a small area, without degrading the overall Greek originality of the song. The handling of the melody generates the sense of an articulated, organic whole, which is formed of ever-changing compositional perspectives. It is also worth pointing out the composer's interest towards the plasticity of the musical substances. In this work, Vangelis Karafillidis proves once again that using folk music material in combination with modern compositional techniques can generate not only a viable music language, but also an imaginative and attractive work.

The "Micrography" No.4 is based on the most popular folk song from Cyprus "Tillirkotissa". This "Micrography" follows the tripartite musical form ABA. The musical syntax of this piece is an accompanied melody. The right hand performs the original form of the melody while the left hand plays a chromatic and dissonant accompaniment. The rhythmical pattern in the left hand part is identical to the (original) folk dance.

Micrography No. 4

The musical score for "Micrography No. 4" is written for piano and violin. It begins with the tempo marking "Allegretto". The piano part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The violin part starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The score includes several measures with dynamic markings such as *poco a poco cresc.*, *p*, and *poco dim. e rit.*. The piece concludes with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.

Bibliography

1. Karafillidis, Vangelis – Variations on a Greek Island Dance, score, Thessaloniki, 1992
2. Karafillidis, Vangelis – Micrographies, score, Thessaloniki, 1994

Santrauka

Graikų liaudies muzikos ir vakarietiško muzikinių tradicijų susilieėjimas

V. Karafillidžio kūriniuose „Variacijos graikų salų šokio tema“ ir „Mikrografijos“ Nr. 3 ir Nr. 4

Kompozitoriaus produktyvumą lemia jo požiūris į muziką, gilus vidinis poreikis kurti, taip pat jo pastangos kiekvienam kūriniui suteikti savitumo. Šio kompozitoriaus kūryba yra gausi, atskleidžianti ryškią individualybę, savo stiliumi atliepanti graikišką dvasią. Pastarųjų metų stilistinės įvairovės, būdingos tiek Graikijos, tiek apskritai Vakarų muzikai, kontekste V. Karafillidis išsiskiria neabejotinu profesiniu sąžiningumu. Šiame pranešime nagrinėjami du kompozitoriaus fortepijoniniai kūriniai – „Variacijos graikų salų šokio tema“ ir dvi pjesės iš ciklo „Mikrografijos“ (Nr. 3 ir Nr. 4). Už šiuos kūrinius 2000 m. autorius buvo apdovanotas atitinkamai I ir II premijomis I fortepijoninių kūrinių konkurse, kurį organizavo Ksanti (Graikija) savivaldybės Švietimo ir menų rūmai.

1992 m. sukurtos „Variacijos graikų salų šokio tema“ – tai dešimt variacijų Egėjaus jūros salų liaudies dainos „Thalassaki“ (*Mažoji jūra*) tema. Pagrindiniai kūrinio bruožai yra formos aiškumas, melodingumas, harmonijos paprastumas, modalumas ir įvairiaspalvė emocinė išraiška. Temai panaudota labai populiarė ir ypač kompozitoriaus mėgstama liaudies dainos melodija. Iš tiesų ši daina – tai tarsi meditacija apie jūrą, malda už jūreivių saugumą ir pavojų atitolinimą. Šios dainos tema naudojama ir šokių „Kalamatianos“, kuriam būdingas 7/8 ([3+2+2]/8) ritminių dalių piešinys. Pavadinimas „Kalamatianos“ kilęs iš miesto Kalamata vardo (miestas yra Peloponeso pusiasalyje, pietų Graikijoje). Kūrinys parašytas klasikine temos su variacijomis forma. Tema pasirodo penktojoje ir dešimtojoje variacijose. Galima pastebėti, kad emocijų skalė auga nuo visiškos ramybės iki audringumo (jūros vaizdų priminimas), nuo pamaldumo iki triumfavimo. Muzikos stilius yra romantiškas su nostalgiskomis nuotaikomis.

1994 m. sukurtose „Mikrografijose“ – keturiuose nedidelėse pjesėse, skirtose besimokantiems skambinti fortepijonu, naudojamos šiuolaikinės komponavimo technikos. Dvi paskutinės pjesės parašytos graikų liaudies dainų temomis. „Mikrografijoje“ Nr. 3 kompozitorius panaudojo tą pačią temą („Thalassaki“) kaip ir „Variacijose graikų salų šokio tema“, Tačiau čia teminė medžiaga traktuojama visiškai skirtingai. Dešinės rankos partijoje skamba originali melodija, o kairės rankos partijoje naudojamos šiuolaikinės komponavimo technikos. Pirmojoje frazėje melodiją palydi chromatinė melodinė schema. Antrojoje frazėje ritminių melodijos ir akompanimento artikuliacijų deriniai sudaro poliritmijos (biritmijos) įspūdį. Dešinė ranka atlieka 7/8 dalių ritminį piešinį, o kairė – 2/4. Trečioje frazėje, kurioje dešinės rankos partijoje skamba eolinė E dermė, o kairė – dorinė E dermė, melodijos ir akompanimento santykis tampa poliderminis (biderminis). Kairės rankos ritminis artikuliacijavimas neatitinka tikrojo „Kalamatianos“ šokio ritminio piešinio.

„Mikrografijos“ Nr. 4 pagrindas yra populiariausios Kipro liaudies dainos „Tillirkotissa“ tema. Pjesė parašyta trijų dalių forma ABA, o jos muzikinė sintaksė – melodija su akompanimentu. Dešinė ranka skambina originalią melodiją, o kairė – chromatinį disonansinį akompanimentą. Ritminis akompanimento piešinys yra identiškas (originalaus) liaudies šokio ritminiam piešiniui.