

Nicolas Astrinidis (1921-2010): Compositional Languages in His 'Deux Pièces en Style Grec' for Violin and Piano

The composer Nicolas Astrinidis; a brief biography

Nicolas Astrinidis (1921-2010) was a multidimensional music personality. He was a composer, pianist, conductor and pedagogue. As a child he grew up in a multicultural environment in Bessarabia (Ackerman) since his father was Greek and his mother Russo-Romanian. As an adult he came in contact with many cultures; he studied music in Bucharest (Romania), he made his first but important career steps in Cairo (Egypt), he completed his music studies in Paris (France), he made an international career both as a pianist and composer and when he became forty-four years old he moved to Thessaloniki (Greece) where he spent the rest of his life being focused mostly on composition and teaching. As a composer he is one of the last representatives of the Greek National School. His oeuvre synthesizes in an imaginative way elements from romanticism, impressionism and Greek folk music (as well as Byzantine music) with modern compositional techniques. His works are characterized by inspiration, ingenuity, deep knowledge of instrumental techniques and felicitous use of expressive means.

The Greek National School; issues and potentials

When talking about synthesizing Byzantine or Greek folk music with romanticism, impressionism and modern compositional techniques, we should always have in mind that the above fields are seemingly incompatible. On the one hand, Byzantine music (Greek Orthodox Church sacred vocal music) is actually monophonic with a rudimentary form of accompaniment based on pedal tones (called "isokratis"); Greek folk music is in a similar way mainly monophonic, but with an enriched (when compared to Byzantine music) type of accompaniment which is based on simple harmonies. Both Byzantine and Greek folk music utilize the same scales, which do not resemble at all the western music ones, since they are a special form of modes constructed on non-equal temperaments. Furthermore, the structure of both Byzantine and Greek folk music bears virtually no resemblance to western music forms (such as sonata, rondo, etc.). On the other hand, romanticism, impressionism and modernism each have a clear aesthetic context and theoretical background characterized by individualities regarding the harmonic texture, structural preferences, melodic treatment, instrumental writing and vocal techniques.

The 'Deux Pièces en Style Grec'; an overall outlook

Nicolas Astrinidis -due to his background and deep as well as broad knowledge on music- assimilated the qualities of these individual music genres not as contradicted and incompatible entities, but as optimal materializations for diverse types of music expression. This is the hypostasis of his highly successful symbiotic usage of these elements under the perspective of an innovative effort for expanding the expressive potentials of the Greek National School.

His '*Deux Pièces en Style Grec*' ('*Two pieces in Greek style*') for violin and piano -although not based on original Greek folk melodies- imitate the archaic simplicity and melodic clarity of Greek folk music. Moreover, the adoption, inventive adaptation and imaginative utilization of modern compositional techniques along with romantic and impressionistic elements result in an attractive musical achievement regarding the harmonic context, thematic treatment and development, contrapuntal activity and instrumental writing. In general terms, we could note the resemblance to the Byzantine music scales at the melodic level, use of "isokratis"-like pedal tones at the harmonic level, impressionistic-like chord progressions, Greek folk dance rhythmical patterns, romantic expressional approach and mood, utilization of modality as well as an expanded form of tonality, usage of pentatonic scales, contrapuntal "dialogues" between violin and piano, thematic treatment mastery and instrumental writing artistry. The piano and violin parts have supplementary and of equal importance roles in these pieces. We should underline a paradox at this point; the Greek temper of the pieces is more than obvious and dominates, although the aesthetically contradicted Western music compositional techniques and Greek folk music elements coexist.

In the end, we should mention that here both the violinist and pianist should have a very high level of performing capabilities along with artistic maturity in order to achieve the desirable result for the above pieces.

The 1st piece from ‘Deux Pièces en Style Grec’

In the opening part (duration ca. 1’58”) of the 1st piece Nicolas Astrinidis combined an “isokratis”-like pedal tone on G#, a micrography of a chaconne-like Variations form based on impressionistic-inspired chord progressions, Greek folk music-originated scales and almost romantic mood with contrapuntal dialogues between the instruments. The “isokratis” type of accompaniment in Byzantine music results in an virtually constant harmonic basis for the melody. Here, this basis refers to the harmonic progressions, which bear close connection with impressionism. The harmonic progression not only functions as an accompaniment for the melodic and contrapuntal evolution and development, but additionally follows the chaconne-like Variations form. The scales used in this piece are similar to Byzantine music modes. Specifically, the melodic interval of augmented 2nd (which is very common in both Byzantine and Greek folk music) is widely used. Also, we should mention that the principal melody at the opening of this piece is limited to the range of one octave and is characterized by simplicity, bringing to mind the vocal hypostasis of Byzantine music in this way.

Example 1. Opening of the 1st piece

The musical score for the opening of the first piece consists of two staves. The top staff is for the violin, starting with a whole rest followed by a melodic line beginning on G#4. The bottom staff is for the piano, featuring a constant harmonic accompaniment of arpeggiated chords, marked 'pp' and 'sempre arpeg.'. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C).

The middle part gradually unfolds from calmness to intension. At the beginning, some thematic material which is derived from the opening part in combination with some new motivic ideas is utilized, while directly afterwards a *stretto*-like explosion of instrumental writing, *tempo* changes (*accelerando*), dynamics alterations (*crescendo*) and harmonic progressions based on 3rd intervals lead to the peaceful closing.

The closing part of this piece, although not being identical to the opening one, could be characterized as a form of an altered recapitulation, since it bears close connection with it; it is based on the same thematic material (harmonic progressions, motives and mood) and utilizes similar instrumental techniques.

The 2nd piece from ‘Deux Pièces en Style Grec’

In the 2nd piece Nicolas Astrinidis combined pentatonic scales, modality, a 7/8 rhythmical pattern (this is actually derived from the most popular Greek dance called “Kalamatianos”), surprising harmonic progressions and key changes, imaginative thematic treatment and varicoloured expressive means, which are formed in conjunction with the dance-inspired character of the piece. This piece is more energetic and luminous than the 1st one.

Example 2. Opening of the 2nd piece

The musical score for the opening of the second piece consists of two staves. The top staff is for the violin, starting with a whole rest followed by a melodic line beginning on G#4. The bottom staff is for the piano, featuring a constant harmonic accompaniment of arpeggiated chords, marked 'pp'. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 7/8.

In detail, at the opening, the piano part performs an accompaniment pattern which is based on the G-A-B-D-E pentatonic scale (the G is omitted). The violin part performs the melody which is based on the A Aeolian mode. The motivic material derived from the accompaniment scheme and the melodic part is utilized

either unchanged or in transfigured forms and constitutes the basis for constructing this piece. At this point, we could underline a parallelism between the two pieces; the 1st one is based on a chaconne-like type of chord progressions reminding of a harmonic *ostinato*-like accompaniment, while the 2nd one is based on a repeated motivic pattern bringing to mind a melodic *ostinato*-like accompaniment.

At the middle part of the piece the mood is ethereal; the dynamics range from *ppp* to *p* and the violin part utilizes the harmonics technique. The thematic material here is identical to the one of the opening part, but the character is completely different. Also, we could mention the contrapuntal dialogues between the two parts. At the end of the middle part a *crescendo* along with an enrichment of the instrumental writing leads to the closing of the piece. The cadence of the piece utilizes an inversed form of the principal motivic material in conjunction with fast passages on the violin. The *tempo* follows an *accelerando*, but the principal rhythmical articulation (apart from the fast passages) remains unchanged.

Santrauka

N. Astrinidžio (1921–2010) „Dviejų graikiško stiliaus pjesių“ smuikui ir fortepijonui kompozicinė kalba

N. Astrinidis (1921–2010) buvo įvairiapusis muzikas – kompozitorius, pianistas, dirigentas ir pedagogas. Jo vaikystė prabėgo daugiakultūrinėje Besarabijos (Akermano) aplinkoje. Jo tėvas buvo graikas, o motina – rusų ir rumunų kilmės. Vėliau jis taip pat susidūrė su įvairiomis kultūromis: muziką studijavo Bukarešte (Rumunija), pirmus svarbius savo karjeros žingsnius žengė Kaire (Egiptas), muzikos studijas baigė Paryžiuje (Prancūzija). Tarptautiniu mastu išgarsėjęs kaip pianistas ir kompozitorius, būdamas keturiasdešimt ketverių metų persikėlė į Tesalonikus (Graikija), kur praleido likusį gyvenimą kurdamas ir dirbdamas pedagoginį darbą. Kaip kompozitorius jis yra vienas iš paskutiniųjų graikų nacionalinės mokyklos atstovų. Savo kūryboje jis išradingai derino romantizmo, impresionizmo ir graikų liaudies bei Bizantijos muzikos elementus su moderniomis komponavimo technikomis. Jo muzikai būdingas įkvėpimas, išradingumas, gilus instrumentinės technikos pažinimas ir taiklus išraiškos priemonių panaudojimas. Šiame pranešime nagrinėjama jo „Dviejų graikiško stiliaus pjesių“ smuikui ir fortepijonui, sukurtų 1947 m., kompozicinė kalba.

Kalbant apie graikų liaudies arba Bizantijos muzikos sintezę su romantizmo, impresionizmo arba šiuolaikinėmis komponavimo technikomis, reikia turėti omenyje, kad šie dalykai yra tarsi ir nesuderinami. Viena vertus, Bizantijos muzika (graikų ortodoksinės Bažnyčios vokalinė muzika) iš tiesų yra vienbalsė su rudimentinės formos akompanimentu, pagrįstu pedaliniiais tonais, vadinamais *isokratis*. Graikų liaudies muzika taip pat iš esmės yra vienbalsė, tačiau su turtingesniu, palyginti su Bizantijos, akompanimentu, pagrįstu nesudėtinga harmonija. Ir Bizantijos, ir graikų liaudies muzikoje naudojami tie patys garsaeiliai, nė kiek neprimenantys vakarietiško, kadangi jie sudaromi remiantis netolygiai temperuotomis darnomis (oktavos dalijimu). Be to, ir Bizantijos, ir graikų liaudies muzikos formos visiškai nepanašios į vakarietiškas, tokias kaip sonata, rondo ir kt. Kita vertus, romantizmas, impresionizmas ir modernizmas turi aiškius estetinius kontekstus ir teorinius pagrindus su jiems būdingomis tam tikromis harmoninėmis faktūromis, struktūrinėmis nuostatomis, melodikos traktavimu, instrumentuotėmis ir vokalinėmis technikomis.

N. Astrinidžio aplinka ir gilus bei įvairiapusis išsilavinimas leido jam įsisavinti šių skirtingų muzikos stilių savybes ne kaip prieštaringas ir nesuderinamas, bet kaip optimalias įvairaus pobūdžio muzikinės išraiškos priemones. Ir tai yra kompozitoriaus sėkmingo simbiozinio šių elementų panaudojimo hipostazė, įvertinant jo novatoriškas pastangas, siekiant išplėsti graikų nacionalinės mokyklos išraiškos priemonių potencialą. Nors ir nepagrįstos originaliomis graikų liaudies melodijomis, „Dvi graikiško stiliaus pjesės“ smuikui ir fortepijonui atspindi archajinį graikų liaudies muzikos paprastumą ir melodinį aiškumą. Be to, išradingai pritaikydamas ir panaudodamas šiuolaikines komponavimo technikas ir romantinės bei impresionistinės muzikos elementus, kompozitorius sukūrė labai patrauklų kūrinių harmoninio konteksto, temų traktavimo ir plėtojimo, kontrapunktinio plėtojimo ir instrumentuotės prasme. Paprasčiau tariant, kūrinių temose galima pastebėti sąsają su Bizantijos garsaeiliais, harmonijose – isokrates tipo pedalinių tonų, taip pat čia rasime impresionistinių akordinių sekų, graikų šokių ritminių piešinių, romantinės ekspresijos ir nuotaikų, modalumo, išplėto to nalumo, pentatoninių garsaeilių, kontrapunktinių smuiko ir fortepijono „dialogų“, meistriško temų plėtojimo ir instrumentuotės.