

**From the *Imbabazi*
to *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*:
A Quest through Images, Words and Melodies**

Abstract. The oratorio *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* (In Search of Lost Harmony), composed in 2016 by the Greek composer Ioannis Kourtis (1973) was conceived as a call to the international community to work in order for the lost harmony to come back to Earth.

Being particularly sensitive to the sociopolitical actuality, in 2013 Kourtis composed the soundtrack for the film *Imbabazi* (The Pardon) directed by Joël Karekezi, which centers around the Rwandan Genocide. Two years later, the forced displacement of populations—the well-known problem of the “migration crisis”—also deeply affected the composer, who had experienced expatriation some years before—in his case, by choice. The piece *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* was born after the commission by the choral director Kamala Calderoni, whose wish was to produce a novel work with her choral ensemble, based on poetical texts representative of different cultures. Therefore, the composer has chosen “classical” poetic texts (by Dante, Lorenzo de Medici etc.) as well as contemporary ones (by Wislawa Szymborska, Iannis Ritsos etc.) to set in music. At the same time, he wanted, through new arrangements, to re-reveal some traditional songs—Greek, Armenian etc.—that are already imprinted in the collective memory. This piece is not a “classical” oratorio, as that conceived in the 17th century, but a “popular oratorio” closer to the new musical form inaugurated by Mikis Theodorakis during the sixties.

This paper aims to present (through a *live* dialogue with the composer) the *realization of the musical work as a whole* and to highlight the different stages of the compositional process, that is to say, the interaction of images, words and melodies born by the mental and emotional shock provoked on the composer by the actuality of his epoch. Moreover, the eventual socio-political role of the piece is to be revealed.

Keywords: Ioannis Kourtis, 21st century, Greek composer, contemporary music, film music, choral music, classical poetry, traditional poetry, contemporary poetry.

Considering that one of the axes of Kalliopi Stigka's research concerns the relationship between “music and society” and “music and politics”, she always seeks to discover unpublished or unknown works by contemporary composers whose commitment is not highlighted. Therefore, it is within the framework of this research, that she discovered the oratorio *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* by the Greek composer Ioannis Kourtis. As no recording or score had seen the light of day at that time, she contacted the composer, who kindly made available to her both the score of the work and some videos of its unique performance; this took place on 31 July 2016 at the Domaine de la Tour in Nébian in France, as part of the 9th edition of the Intercultural Festival of the Tower. The oratorio was performed by choral ensembles of children, adults and soloists, accompanied on the piano by Barbara Hammadi and conducted by Kamala Calderoni.

This article, designed and written by the two co-authors, is based, on the one hand, on the exploitation of their conversations which, in the form of interviews, were carried out between July and October 2021 and, on the other hand, on the in-depth poetic-musical analysis of the work *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*. Its purpose is to reveal the different aspects of the creative process of Kourtis, that is to say, the course followed by the composer from the conception of his initial idea until its transformation into a complete work—chamber music, oratorio, film music etc.—and its final performance/production. Is this an intuitive or rational process? In addition, the impact of the socio-political context of our time on the composer as well as the level of his commitment to current social problems will also be highlighted. Is the oratorio *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* conceived as a “committed” work or a “protest” work with the secret or unconscious intention of changing the world which will finally find Harmony?

a. *Intuitio versus ratio*

Numerous studies in the field of neurosciences, psychoacoustics, music psychology and, over the past twenty years, music genetics (Donin 2015: 105–116) concern, among others, the perception of music and its impact on the emotional world of the individual, as well as the processes followed by a composer from the moment of the conception until the final realization of a musical work. Is it mostly an intuitive/emotional process rather than a rational/cerebral one?

According to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences proposed by Howard Gardner (Gardner 1983) almost forty years ago, the “musical intelligence” particularly developed in musicians and composers explains the intimate relationship between music and emotions and shares common thought processes with “logico-mathematical intelligence”. Would the compositional process be then simultaneously intuitive/emotional and rational/cerebral? Not pretending to be able to group in this brief article the conclusions of all of this significant research, which had been carried out during the 20th century and which continues to date, and above all not being specialists in these fields, we prefer not even try to apply it in the case of Kourtis. On the contrary, the composer himself will explain if in his case, the *intuitio* dominates over the *ratio*. Is his creative process always the same or does it vary, if yes, depending on what?

Like any creator (writer, composer, painter), Kourtis has his own sources of inspiration:

“My sources of inspiration are diverse. Daily life and how I feel in everyday life is a big part of my sources. In this daily routine, we find almost everything. A few events, great or minor, from a simple glance at an important event, a journey with its imbued images, a visit to a museum, a painting... even music that marked me can be a source of inspiration for me... I am very sensitive to everything, as soon as something appeals to me, it becomes a source of inspiration.” (Stigka 2021).

It is moreover this inspiration as well as the imagination of the moment, which are the bases of any musical work by Kourtis, while the compositional process depends above all on the musical genre; the composer himself points out:

“No, the compositional process is not the same, it depends on what I compose.

We can say that I have 3 processes. All are based on inspiration and imagination but we can say that each one has its ‘basis’.

For films, this is the image.

For the compositions for voice or choir, the words.

For instrumental compositions, it’s pure imagination.

Concerning the films, I base myself on what the image gives me, on what I want to provide on my side to the spectators and also to match the expectations of the director (sometimes it is not obvious).

Concerning the compositions for voice, I based myself on my feelings towards the text/the feelings that a text or poem arouses.

And then, in all the other compositions, solo or orchestra, it’s mainly imagination. Afterward at the level of the process that also changes, for example for a composition for a solo instrument, I will pay more attention to the technique, whereas in a composition for an orchestra, the sensitive point will be the orchestration.” (Stigka 2021)

Concerning the composition of songs—as in the case of the songs of his oratorio *A la Recherche de l’Harmonie perdue*—the composer himself says:

“I set poems to music and not the other way around. I find that each poem or text deserves its original music and not an already composed music.” (Stigka 2021)

Moreover, through a very realistic description of the steps of his creative process, the composer underlines the importance of inspiration and imagination:

“You could say it’s a bit of both; the compositional process includes specific patterns that are repeated each time and it is also a spontaneous work linked to my inspiration of the moment...

In fact, I already have a fixed process, if you can say that, that is sitting at the piano and using my imagination, and then arranging to better orchestrate my ideas; but sometimes, I happen to have an idea, somewhere, maybe even in the street and take out a piece of paper, draw a staff and compose...” (Stigka 2021)

It is therefore obvious that in the case of Kourtis, composing is only a deep expression of his emotions and not a “pre-calculated” work.

b. Ioannis Kourtis: A ‘committed composer’?!

Taking into consideration the catalogue of Kourtis’ musical works—compiled for the first time and published in the Annex of this article—it is immediately noted that during the first ten years of his career, chamber music, music for solo instrument—especially for guitar and violin, instruments that the composer plays himself—symphonic music as well as music for choir dominate, while film music has become his favourite

musical genre since the year 2000. If we put aside the works like *Concerto for clarinet and strings* (1992), *Trio classico* (1995), *Trio* (1997), *Waltz* (2002), *3 Dances* (2008), *Study in A flat* (1997), *Minuet* (1999) as well as film scores, titles of all other works, e.g. *Seferis* (1993), *Peur* [Fear] (1999), *Raining thoughts for 5 instruments* (2000), *Lovely doll* (2001), *Élégie* [Elegia] (2001), *Cinderella* (2002), *Valse equitable* [Fair waltz] (2007), *Danse equitable* [Fair dance] (2020), *Valse nostalgique* [Nostalgic Waltz] (2018), *Rizkita* (2020), *Pictures of a garden* (2000), *Liberté* [Freedom] (2004) reveal the composer's state of mind at the time of the conception and composition of the work. The composer himself says:

“As the titles of my compositions often prove, I try to show, through my music, the feelings of this precise moment... One thing is certain: the title of a work is never chosen haphazardly. It can be the result of the emotional charge at the time of the conception of the work, of an incident in everyday life or of a major event; it depends on the work... For example, *Seferis* is mostly a small tribute to the Nobelist Greek poet, Georges Seferis. After spending one night reading his poems, the next morning I wanted to pay homage to him by expressing in music... everything that he had made me feel! *Élégie* was somehow a ‘tribute’ to my grandmother. For the *Equitable Waltz* and the *Equitable Dance*, the principle was the same. Justice in relation to the instruments, no soloist really, all are equal and share everything. The *Equitable Dance* was composed for my daughter and her friends. Fair solos, advantage for no one... As far as *Liberté* is concerned, it was composed for a European Union competition for which we were asked to create a hymn. I chose the poem *Liberté* by Paul Eluard.” (Stigka 2021)

Concerning the title of the oratorio *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, which can only make us think of the almost homonymous title of the Proustian novel *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time), according to the composer, “it was chosen with Kamala Calderoni; we both wanted to rediscover this notion of harmony which is disappearing; harmony both in music and in the world...”. (Stigka 2021)

Even the first stage of the creative process itself—the choice of the title of the work—proves the great sensitivity of Kourtis. The words “freedom”, “harmony”, and “equitable” can only express his permanent quest for these deeply humanist values. The composer himself states:

“Yes, indeed ‘equity’—a word used in 2007 for *Valse equitable* and which returns thirteen years later in 2020 for *Danse equitable*—is one of my principles and touches me a lot. So sometimes I adapt it to music, even if I find that for example in a *Concerto*, all the musicians are equal... (despite their different parts, the difficulty, the solos etc.).” (Stigka 2021)

Before moving on to the analytical study of the oratorio *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, we would like to refer to the film and documentary, the music for which was composed by Kourtis. These are *Imbabazi* and *Dreams of Memory*.

The drama *Imbabazi* (The Pardon) by Rwandan film director Joël Karekezi, refers to a very real and in no way imaginative contemporary tragedy “the Rwandan Genocide”. The screenplay written by the director—whose father was killed during this war—describes the atrocious consequences of this war through the lives of two friends, Manzi and Karemera. This war lasted a hundred days—between April and July 1994—and caused the mass execution of 850,000 people of the Tutsi population by their Hutu compatriots, and then the forced displacement of several thousands of Rwandans. Manzi, during the genocide, had joined the extremist nationalist movement Hutu Power, while the life of Karémara was in danger because he was Tutsi. Manzi's choice breaks the friendship between the two men. When fifteen years later, Manzi comes out of prison, he tries to explain his violent acts during the war and hopes to be forgiven by his compatriots and especially by his friend. Karémara at first rejects his friendship, but eventually, they reconcile after they come to terms. The protagonists of the film, which was shot in English in 2013 in Rwanda are the actors Wilson Egessa (Karemera), Joel Okuyo Atiku Prynca (Manzi), Rehema Nanfuka (Alice), Michael Wawuyo (Kalisa), all from Uganda. *Imbabazi*, in 2013, was nominated for the Best Political Film Award at the Hamburg Film Festival, the Audience Award at the Chicago International Film Festival as well as the Best Child Actor Award at the Africa Movie Academy Awards while in 2014, he was honored with the Grand Prix du Nile at the Luxor African Film Festival.

The music for the film was entrusted to Kourtis, already known and recognized for his film scores and had previously been honored with various awards. Through this soundtrack, Kourtis (even if he does not define himself as a “socially engaged artist”) supports the “voice” of the anti-militarist director Karekezi, while the

film's music, which can also be interpreted independently of the film, becomes a symbol of struggle and a "call for Peace".

If we chose to refer to the music of this particular film, it is only to underline the particular sensitivity of the composer *vis-à-vis* the important socio-political events and their impact on the lives of everyday people. Talking about it through cinematographic art and with the help of film music that transmits to the public today but also to future generations the timeless humanistic ideals of Freedom, Peace and Solidarity, is one of his main artistic concerns.

Moreover, this is also proved by the music he composed in 2011, for the historical documentary *Dreams of Memory*, by the Cypriot director Costas Chrysanthou, who, based on the life of his grandfather, evokes the life and dreams of the young Cypriot Loukas Orphanides, who, in 1935, immigrated to London to live a better life. But eventually, in 1937, he traveled to Spain and joined the fighters who opposed Franco in the 1936–1939 Spanish Civil War.

Is, however, creating "engaged works" one of Kourtis' main concerns? The composer himself explains:

"My two works—*Imbabazi* and *Dreams of Memory*—deal with important social phenomena. But personally, I don't really consider myself a committed artist and composer. Maybe more like an artist who accompanies committed artists. I am sensitive to the different problems of humanity and through these artists that I accompany, the director of the *Imbabazi* on one side and the various poets on the other, I probably put a little touch to their works that are already more or less engaged.

For example, the director and friend of the *Imbabazi*, Joel Karekezi, lived through the Rwandan Genocide when he was very young, and he saw his father die because of it. His film is a commitment against all that: war, violence etc. My music obviously supports him, but the artist involved is mainly him.

As I said above, I support committed artists. By putting their thoughts, paintings, poems, music or other works at the service of a cause, I find that it helps society to move forward. Because there are many people who discover or learn, through a work, history, what not to do or redo, things that they would not have learned without these works.

I will always consider the committed artists' role vital for the world to move forward." (Stigka 2021)

Immigration, wars, dictatorships, forced displacement of populations: this is what characterizes the time when Kourtis was born and grew up... Born in Greece, during the Colonels' Septennium, Kourtis certainly has no specific memories of this atrocious period but he belongs to the first generation of the "New Regime" and, like all of us who belong to this generation, he was necessarily influenced by the ideas of Liberty, Democracy, Union, which prevailed in Greece during the period of the "New Regime" that ended, according to contemporary historians, in 2009, when the "economic crisis" erupted. Having left his native country in 1999 to settle in France, he experienced what is expressed by the word "immigrant" even if in his case the displacement was not forced. It is, therefore, obvious that the "migration crisis", which shook Europe in 2015 and is still evolving, could not leave him indifferent. The press articles concerning the living conditions in the reception camps on Lesbos, Samos or Chios, as well as the photos of refugees and migrants with desperate looks, are among these painful but effective sources of inspiration that have resulted in the conception of the work *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*.

c. A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue

The oratorio *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* is, according to the composer, both the product of his anger and his rage at this inhumane situation, and of his fruitful discussions with his collaborator, Kamala Calderoni, a soprano and director of children's and non-professional adults' choir, who asked him to compose a new work for her vocal ensemble, based on poetic texts representative of different cultures.

Apparently, this coincidence between the work with an "international aspect" that Calderoni requested and the serious global socio-political problem which overwhelmed Kourtis, triggered the creative spirit of the composer who wrote this original work.

It is not, of course, a "classic" oratorio like the one conceived in the 17th century, on the contrary, it is rather close to the *popular oratorio*, this innovative musical genre conceived by Mikis Theodorakis during the sixties and inaugurated by him with setting to music of *Axion Esti*.

The work *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* consists of the following fifteen songs:

Original title of the song	Title translated into English	Poet	Music
<i>Dzieci epoki</i>	Children of our age	Wisława Szymborska	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Av όλα τα παιδιά της γης</i>	If all the children of the earth	Iannis Ritsos	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Yerushalaim shel zahav</i>	Jerusalem of Gold	Naomi Shemer	Naomi Shemer / Ioannis Kourtis: Arrangement
<i>Het waren twee koningskinderen</i>	They were two royal children	Unknown / Flanders Traditional	Ioannis Kourtis: Arrangement
<i>Gorani</i>	Gorani	Western Armenian folksong	Ioannis Kourtis: Arrangement
<i>Nino Viejo</i>	Old Boy	Reinaldo Arenas	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Shnei Shoshanim</i>	Two roses	Ya'akov Orland	Mordechai Zeira / Ioannis Kourtis: Arrangement
<i>Blood and Gold/Mobacs</i>	Blood and Gold	Andy Irvine and Jean Cassidy	Ioannis Kourtis: Transcription
<i>Canzoniere – LIX</i>	Song's Book – LIX	Lorenzo de Medici	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Chant d'Automne</i>	The Song of Fall	Charles Baudelaire	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Canto inferno XI</i>	Inferno XI	Dante	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Anthem for doomed youth</i>	Anthem for doomed youth	Wilfred Owen	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Tzivaeri</i>	Tzivaeri	Traditional Greek song	Ioannis Kourtis: Arrangement
<i>Leisure</i>	Leisure	William Henry Davies	Ioannis Kourtis
<i>Yavaran Massemé</i>	The Song of Peace	Traditional Persian song / Sufi poet: Djalâl ud Din Rûmî	Ioannis Kourtis: Arrangement

From the Medieval poetry of Dante and that of the Florentine Renaissance of Lorenzo de Medici to the romantic-symbolic French poetry by Charles Baudelaire, from the “committed poetry” of the Greek poet Yannis Ritsos and of the Polish poetess Wisława Szymborska to the British poetry of Wilfred Owen and William Henry Davies, from the Cuban poetry of Reinaldo Arenas to the Jewish poetry of Yaakov Orland and Naomi Shemer, from Sufi song to Greek, Flemish, Armenian and Romanian/Hungarian folk songs, the global character of the work is immediately perceived. Concerning the choice of the poems and the music style as well, Kourtis points out:

“The choirmaster let me free concerning the style of music and the poems/texts. But she had chosen me because she knows me. She also knew a little about my stylistic palette.

The two compositions—*Imbabazi* and *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*—were not created at the same time (3 years apart). However, the two works have special links. Peace can be a keyword that can unite these two works. Peace and Union are the causes that the film supports and on the other hand, this whole collection of poems from around the world shows a desire for union, equality and—of course—peace. Misery and poverty are also part of the two works.” (Stigka 2021)

Thus, expressing above all, his emotional charge, the composer chooses poetical texts which evoke:

• **immigration**, i.e.:

- the Greek demotic poem *Tzivaeri*¹:

*Αχ! Η ξενιτιά το χείρεται,
Τζιβαέρι μου
Το μοσχολούλουδό μου
Σιγανά, σιγανά, σιγανά και ταπεινά.
...*

Ah! The foreign lands are taking happiness from him,
my Tzivaeri
My flower with a beautiful smell
Quietly, quietly, quietly and humbly.
...

¹ Tzivaeri (Τζιβαέρι): Greek word with a Turkish root (cevahir), meaning ‘precious stone’ and figuratively ‘my treasure’.

- the traditional Israeli poem *Yerushalayim shel zahav* set to music in 1967 as a patriotic song, by Naomi Shemer:

...

*Ach bevo'i hayom lashir lach
Velach lik'shor k'tarim,
Katonti mitze'ir bana'ich
Ume'acharon hamshorerim.*

*Ki shmech tzorev et basfatayim
Keneshikat saraf,
Im eshkachech Yerushalayim
Asber kulah zahav...*

Yerushalayim shel zahav.

...

...

But as I come to sing to you today,
And to adorn crowns to you
I am the least worthy of doing so of the youngest of your children
And of the last poet among all the poets born).

For your name scorches the lips
Like the kiss of a seraph
If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
Which is all gold...

Jerusalem of gold.

...

- **love, i.e.:**

- the poem *Chant d'Automne* by the French poet Charles Beaudelaire:

*Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres ;
Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts !*

...

Soon we shall plunge into the cold darkness;
Farewell, vivid brightness of our too-short-lived summers!

...

- the Armenian folk poem *Gorani*:

...

*Gorani, Gorani, jarem Gorani
Khabrik me khosatsir darderous degbner.*

...

...

Gorani, Gorani, my love Gorani
Give me some news, to cure my suffering.

...

- the poem *Shnei Shoshanim* by the Hebrew poet Yaakov Orland:

...

*Uvaleilot, uvaleilot,
Nashvu ruchot bam kalilot.
Koh liv'levu ad ba'ab yad
Yad shekatfa shoshan echad
Ve'in yode'a ad hayom -
Et halavan o ha'adom.*

*Verak yod'im ki hanotar
Libo nishbar, libo nishbar.
Hayo hayu lifney shanim
shnei shoshanim, shnei shoshanim.
Haya ze kvar rachok hayom,
echad lavan, sheni adom.*

...

...

And in the nights, in the nights
winds blew in them slightly.
How they sprouted until a hand came
the hand that picked one rose,
and it isn't known until today -
the white or the red.

All that's known's that the remaining one
its heart is broken, its heart is broken.
A song from way back when
two roses, two roses.
It was long ago that day,
one was white, the other red.

...

- **the search for a life more serene; i.e.:**

- the poem *Leisure* by the British poet William Henry Davies:

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare, -

No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep or cows:

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance:

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began?

A poor life this is if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

- **or finally the quest for truth; i.e.:**

- *Inferno canto XI* from the epic poem *Comedia Divina* (Divine Comedy) by Italian poet Dante Alighieri:

...	...
<i>D'ogne malizia, ch'odio in cielo acquista,</i>	Of all malicious act abhorr'd in heaven,
<i>ingiuria è 'l fine, ed ogne fin cotale</i>	The end is injury; and all such end
<i>o con forza o con frode altrui contrista.</i>	Either by force or fraud works other's woe.
...	...

- the 59th song (LIX) from the *Canzoniere* [Song's Book] by the Italian poet Lorenzo de' Medici or Lorenzo il Magnifico:

...	...
<i>Ogni cosa è fugace e poco dura;</i>	Fortune doth fashion with inconstant mind,
<i>tanto Fortuna al mondo è mal costante:</i>	All things are transient here below and frail.
<i>sola sta ferma, e sempre dura Morte.</i>	Death only stranded fast for evermore.
...	...

Although, the dominant theme of the work is “the child”:

- **the innocent and joyful child; i.e.:**

- the poem *Αν όλα τα παιδιά της γης* (*An ola ta paidia tis gis*; If all the children of the earth) by the Greek communist poet Yannis Ritsos (Lenin Prize for Peace, USSR, 1977):

...	...
<i>Αν όλα τα παιδιά της γης</i>	If all the children of the earth
<i>πιάναν γερά τα χέρια</i>	joined hands firmly
<i>κορίτσια αγόρια στη σειρά</i>	boys and girls in a row
<i>και σήνανε χορό</i>	and started dancing
<i>ο κύκλος θα γινότανε</i>	the circle would become
<i>πολύ πολύ μεγάλο</i>	very very big
<i>κι ολόκληρη τη Γη μας</i>	and would embrace courageously
<i>θ' αγκάλιαζε θαρρώ.</i>	the whole of our Earth.
...	...

- **the child in search of serenity, i.e.:**

- the Flemish folk poem *Het waren twee koningskinderen*:

...	...
<i>Och moeder, mijn jongste broeder is nog een zo kleinen kind,</i>	Oh, mother, my youngest brother is such a small child,
<i>bij loopt er naar alle de vogels die hij onder wegen vindt”</i>	he walks to all the birds, he finds on his way.
<i>De moeder ging naar de kerke, de dochter ging hare gang</i>	The mother went to the church, the daughter went her way,
<i>Tot zij er bij het water een visser, haars vaders visser vand.</i>	till she found near the water a fisherman, her father's fisherman.
...	...

- **the rebellious child, i.e.:**

- the poem *Nino Viejo* by the Cuban revolutionary poet and author Reinaldo Arenas:

...	...
<i>Yo soy ese airado y solo niño de siempre</i>	I am that angry and lonely child of always
<i>que os lanza el insulto del solo niño de siempre</i>	that throws you the insult of that angry child of always and warns you:
<i>y os advierte: si hipócritamente me acaricias la cabeza</i>	if hypocritically you pat me on the head
<i>aprovecharé la ocasión para levantarles la cartera.</i>	I would take that opportunity to steal your wallet.
...	...

- **the young combatant, i.e.:**

- the poet *Anthem for doomed Youth* by one of the most significant British poets of WWI, Wilfred Owen:

...

*What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
shall shine the holy glimmers of good byes...
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.*

- the poem *Blood and Gold/Mohacs* by the Irish duo Andy Irvine and Jean Cassidy on the occasion of Yugoslavia's Civil War, set to music by Silly Sisters who based it on a Romanian/Hungarian folk song collected by Béla Bartók:

...
Behind him soldier boys sadly weeping go
O lads of mine weep no more
You are gone to kill and die.
 ...

- the poem *Dzieci epoki* by the Polish Nobel poetess Wisława Szymborska:

...
Jesteśmy dziećmi epoki,
epoka jest polityczna.

Wszystkie twoje, nasze, wasze
dzienne sprawy, nocne sprawy
to są sprawy polityczne.
 ...

...
 We are children of our age
 it's a political age.

 All day long, all through the night,
 all affairs- yours, ours, theirs-
 are political affairs.
 ...

Based on these fifteen poetic texts, the composer either composed new melodies or was inspired by pre-existing music and made new arrangements or new transcriptions. A new transcription is made for *Blood and Gold/Mohacs*; new arrangements are proposed for the songs: *Tzivaeri*, *Gorani*, *Yavaran Masseme*, *Shnei Shosanim*, *Yerushalayim shel zava*, *Het waren twee koningskinderen*; while new melodies are composed to set to music the poetic texts of Dante, Lorenzo de Medici, Charles Baudelaire, Wilfred Owen, William Henry Davies, Reinaldo Arenas, Wisława Szymborska and Ioannis Ritsos.

The influence of the music of his native country, Greece, as well as of his adopted country (France), but also all traditional European music, is evident in both the arrangements and new compositions. Kourtis states:

“Indeed, I feel somehow, when I compose, the influence of the Greek traditional music, of the music of the Balkans in general, as well as of the contemporary Greek music, Manos Hatzidakis’ music for example. At the same time, the influence of French composers of the late 19th and 20th centuries, for example, Debussy, Fauré, Satie, Ravel is not negligible. And of course, as a guitarist, I’m obviously influenced by the Spanish traditional music.” (Stigka 2021)

As an example, we cite *Yavaran Masseme*, which is a song of the mystics (Sufi) of Islam; its text is in Arabic, and it is attributed to the Persian poet Djalâl ud Dîn Rûmî but it was also translated and interpreted in Romani and Yiddish, with the aim of reconciliation of peoples:

...
A izza i ana sacranou
A izza i ana sacranou
Askaratni kaasoun kaasoun khalidah
Ana mal' anou biboubbinn raasikbinn
Lan yatroukani abada
Ana mal' anou biboubbinn raasikbinn
Lan yatroukani abada.
 ...

...
 Dear friends

 I'm drunk, drunk from an eternal cup
 Filled with strong love
 Who will never leave me.
 ...

The composer, in his arrangement for pianoforte and vocal ensemble of men, women and solo voices, while keeping the spiritual background of the initial song—which was not difficult for him given his origins—creates a song, in G-minor, more of a “western” style—the song is composed for pianoforte and voice and harmonic elements that refer us to jazz—which can reach a wider audience, obviously for the same purpose.

2
30

Solo
ye - der be _____ kher voys trinkt zikh oyss

Femmes
ke - ren Fil ye - der be _____ kher

30

Pno.

37

Femmes
Ha - tta tam - ta - li' _____ aal ar - na - hou hou - bba *mf* Ha - tta tam - ta - li' _____ aal ar - na - hou hou -

Hommes
mp Ah _____ ar - na - hou hou - bba Ah

37

Pno.

44

Femmes
bba

Hommes

44

Pno. *mf*

51

Femmes
mf Ha - tta ta - h - ri - qa ja - lou - da - na _____ naa - rou naa - rou i hou - bbi

51

Pno. *mp*

Extract 1: Kourtis. *Yavaran Masseme*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

As for setting to music poetic texts written in a language that the composer doesn't know, he states:

“Regarding the languages that I do not know, I inquire about the text, its translation, its pronunciation etc. and I ask for help from someone who speaks the language. Regarding the *Yerushalayim shel zahav*, since it was an arrangement, it was a bit easier because I had already had the vocals ready.” (Stigka, 2021)

The melodies of the oratorio *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, are tonal and very lyrical as a whole. Their lyricism is opposed to the cruelty of the major part of the poetic themes, putting them this way in evidence; for instance, the mourning content of the last two verses of *Blood and Gold/Mohacs*: “Mothers, sisters, wives, weep for us / Marked as Cain we lie alone” is underlined thanks to the lyricism of the song's last melodic theme:

6 Blood and gold-Mohacs

119

S/T place O mo - ther hear the drum - beat in the vi - llage square

A O mo - ther hear the drum beat in the vi - llage square

B O mo - ther hear the drum beat in the vi - llage square

127

S/T O mo-ther that drums for me to go for a sol - dier there

A O mo-ther that drums for me to go for a sol-dier there

B O mo-ther that drums for me to go for a sol - dier there

135

S/T Mo-thers si - sters wi

A Mo-thers si - sters wi

B Mo-thers si - sters wi

Blood and gold-Mohacs

7

142

S/T ves we - ep for us Marked as Cain we

A ves we - ep for us Marked as Cain we

B ves weep for us Marked as Cain we

149

S/T die a - lone

A die a lone

B die a lone

Extract 2: Kourtis. *Blood and Gold/Mohacs*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

The semantic content of the poetic texts is also very well highlighted by using sometimes melismatic writing as in *Tzivaeri*:

Score Tzivaeri Traditionnel grec
Arr.: I.Kourtis

The score consists of three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a Soprano line and a Piano accompaniment. The second system includes the following lyrics:

mp Ah i kse - ni - tia to khe re te
 Ah pa - na - the - ma se kse - ti -
 Ah pou pi - res - to pe da - ki mou

The third system includes the following lyrics:

Tzi va é ri mou To mo - sko lou lon do
 Tzi va é ri mou sé ké to ka lo
 Tzi va é ri mou ké to ka nes di ko

The fourth system includes the following lyrics:

mou Si - ga na si - ga na si - ga - na ké ta - pi - na
 sou Si - ga na si - ga - na ké ta - pi - na
 sou Si - ga na si - ga - na si - ga - na pa - to - sti - ghi. ghi.

2 Tzivaeri

(Rall. la dernière fois)

Extract 3: Kourtis. *Tzivaeri*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

and usually, syllabic writing as in *Canzoniere di Lorenzo de Medici – LIX*:

Musical score for 'Canzoniere di Lorenzo de Medici – LIX'. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features Soprano (S), Bass (B), and Piano (Pno.) parts. The lyrics are: *f* Qua-nto sia va-na o-gni spe-
ra-nza no-stra, qua-nto fa-lla-ce cia-sche-dun di-se-gno.

Extract 4: Kourtis. *Canzoniere – LIX*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

The same syllabic writing is also used in *Children of our age* which is a song with a clear political message, based on the poetry of Wisława Szymborska; the influence of Kurt Weill's music on the composer is evident in this song of epic style:

Musical score for 'Children of our age'. The score is in B-flat major and 4/4 time. It features Soprano (S), Tenor (T), Voice (Voix), and Piano (Pno.) parts. The lyrics are: *f*We are children of our age, it's a po-li-ti-cal
age. All day long, all through the night,
mf All a ffairs yours
ours, *f* are po-li-ti-cal a-ffairs.
mf theirs *f* are po-li-ti-cal a-ffairs.

Extract 5: Kourtis. *Children of our age*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

Furthermore, the composer, in order to underline the semantic content of the poetical texts, uses the movement of the melody which “follows” the meaning of the words to place importance on them. For example:

- in *Av όλα τα παιδιά της γης* (If all the children of the earth) to emphasize the immensity of the circle, the melody of the soprano suddenly rises:

13
 ro o ki-klos tha - gi - no - ta - ne po - li po - li - me -
 o ki-klos tha gi - no - ta - ne a ko - ma pio me
 ro o ki klos tha gi - no - ta - ne po - li me -
 ki klos tha gi - no - ta - ne pio me
 Pno. *cresc.*

17
 ga - los kie - lo - kli - ri ti gi - mas tha ga - lia - ze tha - ro *mf* kie -
 ga - los ke dio fo res ti gi - mas tha ga - lia - ze tha ro *mf* kie -
 ga - los *mp* ti gi mas tha ga - lia - ze tha - ro
 ga - los *mp* mas tha ga lia ze tha - ro
 Pno. *f* *mp* *p*

Extract 6: Kourtis. *Av όλα τα παιδιά της γης*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

- in *Anthem for doomed Youth* for tenor, he stresses the word “shrill” by putting a high G#:

17
 T Nor a - ny voice of mour - ning save the choirs *f* The shrill de - me - nited choirs of wail - ing shells;
 Pno. *f*

22
 T *mf* And bu - gles cal - ling for them from sad shires. *p* *mp* What
 Pno. *mp* *p*

Extract 7: Kourtis. *Anthem for doomed Youth*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

- in the same song, he emphasizes the last verse “drawing down of blinds” with a stress on the word “down” by putting a high A:

36
T
si - lent minds, And each slow dusk a draw - ing down of blinds *mf* Their
Pno.
36
39
T
flow - ers the tend - er - ness of si - lent minds, And each slow dusk a draw - ing down of blinds
Pno.
43
T
blinds. *mf*
Pno.
43

Extract 8: Kourtis. *Anthem for doomed Youth*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

- while in the song *Chant d'Automne* (The Song of Fall) he uses a high D on the word “deaf”:

6
50
S
to - mbe L'é - cha - faud qu'on a bâ - tit n'a pas d'é - cho plus sourd
A
to - mbe L'é - cha - faud qu'on a bâ tit n'a pas d'é - cho plus sourd
T
to - mbe L'é - cha - faud qu'on a bâ - tit n'a pas d'é - cho plus sourd Mon es -
B
to - mbe L'é - cha - faud qu'on a bâ - tit n'a pas d'é - cho plus sourd Mon es -
Pno.
50
p cresc. f mf

Extract 9: Kourtis. *Chant d'Automne*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

Another technique often used to emphasize the meaning of the words is by using rhythmic values that juxtapose the meaning of the words, as in *Chant d'Automne* where he used a half note on the word “short”:

The image shows a musical score for 'Chant d'Automne' by I. Kourtis. It features four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a Piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'Bien - tôt nous plon-ge - rons dans les froi-des té - nè - bres A - dieu vi - ve cla - rté de nos é - tés trop courts!' and 'J'en-'. A circled note in the Soprano part highlights the word 'courts!'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, and *cresc.*.

Extract 10: Kourtis. *Chant d'Automne*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

On the other hand, we could speak of *descriptive music*, and do it on several occasions as in *Chant d'Automne*. This poem from the poetic collection *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil) by Charles Baudelaire presents—in a deeply pessimistic tone—the passage from summer to fall, which implies the passage from life to death; the last line of the poem “this mysterious noise sounds like a departure” is described by the composer using the supertonic major with 7th and the 5th flattened (marked by circle), whereas the “departure” towards death is done slowly, the final notes of the melody being interpreted via *ritenuto*:

8
69

S
hâte un cer-cueil quel - que part *mp* Cé - lait hi - er fé - te voi - ci l'au - to -

A
hâte un cer-cueil quel - que part *mp* Cé - lait hi - er fé - te voi - ci l'au - to -

T
hâte un cer-cueil quel que part *f* Pour qui?

B
hâte un cer-cueil quel - que part *f* Pour qui?

Pno.
f *mf* *f*

74

S
mne *p* Ce bruit my - sté - ri - eux *mf* son - ne comme un dé

A
mne *mp* Ce bruit my - sté - ri - eux son - ne comme un dé -

T
— *mp* bruit *rit.* *mf* son - ne comme un dé -

B
— *mp* Ce bruit *mf* son - ne comme un dé -

Pno.
pp

79

S
part.

A
part.

T
part.

B
part.

Pno.
rit.

Extract 11: Kourtis. *Chant d'Automne*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

The setting to music of the poem of *Leisure* by William H. Davies is on the same wavelength as the technique mentioned above; the composer underlines the final verses: “A poor life this, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare” modifying the tempo from allegretto to adagio as if we had a lot of time:

The musical score is presented in a standard format with vocal staves and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are as follows:

time to wait till her mouth can _____ En - rich that smile her eyes be -

gan. *mf* A poor life this is if full of care _____ We have no time *mp* to stand and stare.

gan. *ppp* full of care _____ stand and stare.

gan. *ppp* full of care _____ stand and stare.

gan. *ppp* full of care _____ stand and stare.

gan. *ppp* full of care _____ stand and stare.

The piano accompaniment features triplet patterns in the left hand and chords in the right hand. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *mp*, *ppp*, and *p*. A tempo change to **Adagio** is marked at measure 64. The score concludes with a *p* dynamic marking.

Extract 12: Kourtis. *Leisure*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

The same technique is used as well for the setting to the music of *Nino Viejo* on the poetry of Reinaldo Arenas, where in order to underline the passage to the terrifying panorama, the composer modifies the key of G minor into Bb minor:

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system (measures 61-65) shows the vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The piano part has a *cresc.* marking. The second system (measures 66-71) features a key change to Bb minor, indicated by the addition of a flat to the bass clef. A large black oval encircles the piano accompaniment and the vocal lines for measures 66-71, highlighting the key change. The piano part has a *p* marking. The vocal lines have a *p* marking and the lyrics 'E - se ni - no'. The third system (measures 72-76) continues in Bb minor. The piano part has a *p* marking. The vocal lines have a *p* marking and the lyrics 'E - se ni - no'. A smaller black oval highlights a specific chord in the piano part at measure 71.

Extract 13: Kourtis, *Nino Viejo*, 2016, © I. Kourtis

Conclusion

Images and words, thoughts and feelings give birth to new compositions by Ioannis Kourtis. From *Imbabazi* to *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, Kourtis' compositional process is more emotional than cerebral and depends on the emotional-psychological charge of the composer at the time of creation. As far as the oratorio *A la Recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* is concerned, we can only confirm that lyricism and authenticity, spirituality and spontaneity coexist. Its ecumenical character is revealed through the poetic texts issued from eleven different cultures: French, Greek, Armenian, Polish, Italian etc. as well as through the setting to music in an "occidental style" even if sometimes melodic or rhythmic elements have their roots in the musical tradition of each represented culture. Additionally, inspired without a doubt unconsciously by Mikis Theodorakis' popular oratorio *Axion Esti*, the composer Ioannis Kourtis managed to transform his oratorio into a transmission medium of the supreme humanistic ideals of Peace, Unity, and Equity. In other words, *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* can be a useful pedagogical tool—especially nowadays, in an era of enormous moral and social instability—and mainly it can be a precious peaceful weapon of struggle.

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- Stigka Kalliopi (2021). *Unedited Interviews with Ioannis Kourtis, Montpellier and Athens, 2021*. Athens: K. Stigka's Private Archives.

ANNEX

Catalogue of Complete Music Works by Ioannis Kourtis

I. Chamber Music

- Concert for clarinet and strings*, 1992
- Seferis*, for small chamber orchestra, 1993
- Trio classico*, for violin, clarinet and pianoforte, 1995 [piece performed by the *Trio Corypho* at the Municipal Theatre of Corfu and recorded by the Greek Radio Television / ERT]
- Trio* for strings, clarinet and pianoforte, 1997
- Peur*, Miniature for small chamber orchestra, 1999
- Raining thoughts for 5 instruments-* clarinet, trumpet, violin, cello and pianoforte-, 2000
- Lovely doll*, for chamber orchestra, 2001 [piece performed by the Orchestra of Moselle, in Luneville, in 2001, in the frame of the First Competition for Young Film Music Composers and recorded by the competition's organizers]
- Elegia*, for string orchestra, 2001
- Waltz*, for small chamber orchestra, 2002
- Cinderella – Suite* for small chamber orchestra, 2002
- Valse équitabile*, for soprano Saxophone, viola, xylophone and pianoforte, 2007
- 3 Danses*, for cello and pianoforte, 2008
- Danse équitabile*, for pianoforte, violin, oboe and bassoon, 2020

II. For Solo Instruments

- Study in A flat major*, for violin, 1997
- Menuet*, for organ, 1999
- Valse nostalgique*, for classical guitar, 2018
- Rizkita*, for classical guitar, 2020

III. Music for Vocal Ensemble (and instrument/s)

- Kyrie Eleison*, for 4 voices Choral and organ, 1996
- Crudelis Herodes*, for 4 voices Choral, 2003
- Dicha de lo dicho*, for 4 voices Choral, 2004

IV. Symphonic Works

- Antar*, for symphonic orchestra, 1999
- Pictures of a garden*, for symphonic orchestra, 2000
- Liberté*, for 4 voices Choral and symphonic orchestra, 2004

V. Oratorio

- A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, for 4 voices Choral, pianoforte and soloists, 2016

VI. Film Music

- Les Barges* (France), 2000
- The talking bench* (USA), 2001
- Ex Inferis* (France), 2002
- Sous-sol* (France), 2003
- PO Box* (USA), 2003
- Consequences* (France), 2004
- Le cambrioleur imprudent* (France), 2004
- A la lueur d'une arme blanche* (France), 2005
- Same time tomorrow* (UK), 2006
- Cold Earth (Aka Dark secrets)* (UK), 2008
- Si jolie mort* (France), 2009
- A toutes nos différences* (France), 2010

Correspondances (France), 2011
Dreams of memory (Cyprus), 2011
Cyprus UE Presidency, 2011 [music for the video of Cyprus' presentation to the European community]
Imbabazi - "The Pardon" (Rwanda), 2012
Perfect piece (UK), 2016
Zapruder the time intruder (USA), 2017
10 Years (Hungary), 2018
Black Belgian (Rwanda), 2019

Catalogue of published and recorded music works by Ioannis Kourtis

Crudelis Herodes, for mixt Choral, Toulouse: Eurochoral Publisher, 2007, 4 p.
Dicha de lo dicho, for mixt Choral, Toulouse: Eurochoral Publisher, 2007, 8 p.
Chant d'automone, from *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, Toulouse: Eurochoral Publisher, 2017, 6 p.
Yeroushalaim Shel Jabav, from *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*, Toulouse: Eurochoral Publisher, 2017, 6 p.

Nuo *Imbabazi* iki *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue*: paieškos per vaizdinius, pasaulius ir melodijas

Santrauka

Graikų kompozitoriaus Ioannis Kourtis (g. 1973) 2015–2016 m. sukurta oratorija *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* („Prarastos harmonijos beiėškant“) yra tarsi kvietimas tarptautinei bendruomenei dirbti, kad prarasta harmonija grįžtų į Žemę. Kitaip tariant, šis kūrinys – tai kompozitoriaus sielos išraiška, užlieta sielvarto, kurį sukėlė 2015 m. migrantų krizės vaizdiniai. Šiuose vaizdiniuose – tūkstančiai pabėgėlių ir migrantų, toli nuo karo ir kančių ieškančių Pažadėtosios žemės. Kompozitorius kūrinio muziką sujungė su šiuolaikine ir tradicine poezija, idant paskatintų mus pamąstyti apie naujų kartų ateitį (kuri, atrodo, yra neišiki) ir kovoti už jos tobulėjimą.

Ioannis Kourtis – graikų kompozitorius, pastaruosius dvidešimt metų gyvenęs Prancūzijoje, yra paveiktas savo gimtosios šalies muzikos tradicijų, šalies, kurioje gyvena, muzikinių srovių, taip pat Vakarų klasikinės muzikos, kurią studijavo nuo pat ankstyvos jaunystės. Būdamas ypač jautrus socialinėms politinėms aktualijoms, 2013 m. jis sukūrė muziką Joėlio Karekezio režisuotam filmui *Imbabazi* („Atleidimas“). Filme pasakojama apie likimus dviejų iš Ruandos kilusių draugų, kurie 1994 m. per genocidą pasuko skirtingais keliais. Tikra filmo istorija apie Ruandos genocidą ir jo pasekmes kompozitoriaus negalėjo palikti abejingo – jis sukūrė labai paveiklą ir iškalbingą muziką, kuri puikiai paryškina semantinį filmo turinį.

Po poros metų (2015) vykęs priverstinis populiacijų perkraustymas – gerai žinoma Migracijos krizės problema – taip pat itin sukrėtė kompozitorių, savo laiku patyrusių (nors ir savanorišką) ekspatriaciją. *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* gimė choro dirigentės Kamalos Calderoni iniciatyva – ji norėjo, kad kompozitorius sukurtų kūrinį, paremtą skirtingų kultūrų poetiniais tekstais, jos suburtam vaikų ir neprofesionalų chorui. Taigi, kompozitorius pasirinko klasikinius (Dantės Alighieri, Lorenzo de Medici, Charles'o Baudelaire'o ir kt.) ir šiuolaikinius (Wisławos Szymborskos, Yiannio Ritsos ir kt.) poetinius tekstus. Tuo pat metu jis norėjo naujomis aranžuotėmis iš naujo atskleisti kai kurias tradicines (graikų, armėnų ir kt.) dainas, jau spėjusias palikti įspaudus kolektyvinėje atmintyje. Akivaizdu, kad šis kūrinys yra ne klasikinė oratorija, kokia buvo sumanyta XVII a., o populiariori oratorija, artimesnė šeštajame praėjusio amžiaus dešimtmetyje Mikio Theodorakio pradėtai muzikos krypciai.

Šiame straipsnyje, remiantis kompozitoriaus žodžiais ir nuodugnia *A la recherche de l'Harmonie perdue* muzikos bei poezijos analize, atskleidžiamas kūrinio, kaip visumos, ir skirtingų komponavimo proceso stadijų realizavimas, t. y. vaizdinių, žodžių ir melodijų sąveika, kurią pagimdė protinis ir emocinis sukrėtimas, išprovokuotas kompozitoriaus epochos aktualijų. Be to, išryškėja sociopolitinis kūrinio vaidmuo, padedantis jam tapti tiek puikia pedagogine medžiaga, tiek taikiu ginklu vidiniame pasipriešinime.