

Human hyperbole – non-existent civilization

From this stand, I would first like to thank the individuals as well as the body responsible for this gathering tonight. I would like to thank them for the honor of having invited me here to speak, as a troubled member of contemporary society, as a simple high school music teacher having worked in the juvenile prison high school of my country for the past two years.

On the 19th of June 2004 the Greek newspaper “Kathimerini” presented an article that appeared in the British newspaper “The Guardian”, written by theatrical critic Mich Billington, entitled “Contemporary terrorism imposes Ancient Drama”. The British critic wondered which direction the theatre automatically turns to during times of crisis. Sure not to the direction of Bernard Shaw or to that of Shakespeare. It turns to the ancient Greek Dramatists.

Contemporary terrorism is definitely not the sole and only threat to the planet.

Though Mr. Billington might refer to ancient drama in times of crisis, I, however, when being here to talk about music, refer to Plato.

In his work, “Politia”, Plato’s reference to music includes the point that music education is not only an imperative element in the development of the young, but is also regarded and is, the key to rational and philosophical thinking. He believes that in the Ideal Republic, music ought to be strictly chosen:

“Music of good quality benefits the Republic as much as music of bad quality would harm it”.

As far as education is concerned, Plato considers music to be a more primary subject compared to Gymnastics. Within Plato’s references one finds ample proof of profound awareness of the power music holds- I would say, not only in reference to Greek society, but also as far as any civilization is concerned.

However, in Ancient Greece, one would not find music separated from poetry or vice versa. Monophonic Greek music, after bowing before Poetry, enhances Poetic Versification by highlighting the melody and rhythm accentuation uttered by language itself. It is the rhythm and the volume of the verse that determines the rhythm and volume of the melody.

Mikis Theodorakis remains totally faithful to this stance. As a composer he does not, in any sense, elude this tradition, always linking his music to poetry.

It is not coincidental that he wrote music for two Nobel winning worldwide poets: Elyt Axion Esti and Pablo Neruda: Canto General .

The common ground these three personalities share is that they fought for and wrote about liberty.

Let us however, remain in the domain of this special work that contemporary music is called to show, because of its transcending worth, its uniqueness and authenticity.

It is definitely authentic, since it is fruit of the price paid in their common exile in Patagonia, thus creating this Song of the Earth.

It is definitely authentic because Neruda was inspired as much by the bloodshed in South America, his ancestors the Indians, as by the wounded Democracy of his country, by his own exile, his torture and anxieties and the fierce hunting down of the Junta in Chile.

The guerrilla poet flipped his life on a coin repeatedly as a hymn to freedom.

On the other hand, "Theodorakis" might be a synonym for the word "fighter". He was born and raised in a period of great turmoil, of a torturing and hard period that the Greek Democracy underwent. He himself makes music of his pain, the pain he experienced in the torture chambers, the exile in prison. He makes music of his hope for freedom.

The sound of his choral music is typical, but so is that of his orchestral music: it is the same sound he once heard inside of him either during moments of pain extreme to the point of passing out, or during moments when he set foot on bloodshedded but free grounds.

"Canto General" is considered by Theodorakis himself to be of the highest musical value, combining within its rich rhythms the Western techniques and the Greek idiom.

The Spanish verse has been given frame in the hands of Mikis Theodorakis. It has many performers numerous and from many parts of the world. It was first performed by Greek soloist singers accompanied by a large French choir and drummers from Strasburg. There was also a French and an Argentinean pianist in the participation of a Greek folk orchestra.

This work was performed in the 70s in most European countries and in nearly the whole of South America and to this day we come across it as an alternative work worldwide.

During the difficult times Democracy has been through, Canto General has become a "tool" and a hymn empowering both the peoples of South America and the people of Greece after the Greek Junta.

It becomes equally popular to the different peoples carrying for both the same message of skepticism and excitement.

The reason I chose to speak about this work is that I feel that nowadays humanity is facing far worse problems than the ones faced during the time when Theodorakis composed it.

Today Democracy is under worse threat.

It goes without saying that I am all for the new and the new proposals not only as far as music is concerned.

However, life and freedom nowadays can not be taken for granted but are interdependent of a common fate and pattern between the East and the West rather than comprising a free right of choice.

Similarly, one's social level is attacked by the economical system on which globalization and its products are based on.

Contemporary cinematic art, news reports based on image, the massive business called "Media" and its informative contribution, the mediator called television, and teleculture, the industrialized forms of art and show, the show business itself and the kitsch fies disorientate the individual, who is apolitical and unprepared for these developments. They form citizens who dwell in apathy, detached citizens, citizens in a near trance sea in the comfort of their home sofas, since the means mentioned above offer a contemporary form of "art and theama" (the bread and butter of contemporary showbiz) to contemporary man.

I would like to make clear that what I mean is not that what is needed is a popular, cheap art. Furthermore, neither do we need barren, stiff art. One must not exterminate the old for the sake of the new neither must one detach the new from the old.

Within the existing confusion, (since political science supports globalization while the social sciences make reference to an era of extremity or, alternatively, of a culture clash) "Canto General" creates a balance between the old and the new, includes and provides answers to all vice against humanity. That is the reason why at present, "Canto General" is more contemporary than ever.

We need a spiritual renaissance more than ever and that is the work of creators. It goes without saying that what makes their task even harder is their lack of proportion, existing arrogance and the confusion of contemporary times. Nevertheless, this gap needs to be covered by art as well, art which is to emphasize the ideological as well as the symbolic level.

In order for the new tendencies and proposals in art to obtain profundity and value, well as remaining time transcending, it first has to be comprehensible. And that is the creators' responsibility.

Pablo Neruda and Mikis Theodorakis did perform a kind of social art and that is why Euripides' Ancient Drama which talks about mankind itself is still so contemporary nowadays.

Closing, I would like to say that if Plato wrote the "ideal Republic", if Socrates accepted death and if Theodorakis underwent all that torturing, and ended up creating this kind of composition, it is precisely because these men not only believed in man but loved him. They may have even worshipped him.