



**HAL**  
open science

# The chorus reformation in modern performances of Ancient Greek tragedy after 1945: The Suppliants (1964) of Iannis Xenakis and The Persians (1965) of Jani Christou

Andriana Soulele

## ► To cite this version:

Andriana Soulele. The chorus reformation in modern performances of Ancient Greek tragedy after 1945: The Suppliants (1964) of Iannis Xenakis and The Persians (1965) of Jani Christou. NEMO-Online, Special issu, p. 1-18, 2021, In Memoriam Katy Romanou 1939-2020. hal-03868261

**HAL Id: hal-03868261**

**<https://unilim.hal.science/hal-03868261>**

Submitted on 30 Jan 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# THE CHORUS REFORMATION IN MODERN PERFORMANCES OF ANCIENT GREEK TRAGEDY AFTER 1945: *The Suppliants* (1964) of Iannis Xenakis and *The Persians* (1965) of Jani Christou

By: Andriana SOULELE<sup>1</sup>

In a century that experienced two World Wars, vast technological developments, volatile economic and socio-political conditions as well as cultural revolution, ancient Greek civilisation served as a unique source of inspiration for many artists as they reflected upon and criticised the period. Ancient Greek tragedy in particular became the focus of artistic creation. Theatrical and literary works, dramatic performances, musical composition and scientific studies illustrated its revival throughout Europe. In Greece, various studies conducted by philologists and archaeologists contributed to the renewal of ancient Greek tragedy<sup>2</sup>, as did performances by both amateur groups and professional theatres<sup>3</sup>. In spite of political instability, the second half of the twentieth century appeared to be the most prolific. Numerous performances took place in ancient theatres<sup>4</sup> during festivals organised throughout Greece. The most renowned was the Epidaurus Festival, inaugurated in 1954 by famous stage director Dimitris Rondiris<sup>5</sup>.

Staging an ancient Greek tragedy in the modern world is challenging for stage directors, actors, set and costume designers, as well as choreographers and composers. Several constraints arise from the poetic form of tragedy, the chorus's function<sup>6</sup>, the theatrical space and the translation and adaptation of an ancient Greek text. Also, we have limited knowledge of production in ancient times, especially with regard to staging and musical accompaniment. However, these challenges are regularly overcome creatively, depending on the stage directors'

---

<sup>1</sup> IReMus (Sorbonne Université), CRIHAM (Université de Poitiers), RelMus/FG (Hellenic Musicological Society). Katy Romanou was my professor during my musicological studies at the University of Athens. I admired her and was inspired by her work on the history of Greek music. This article reflects part of my research in Greek music and ancient drama that she supervised for my PhD thesis (defended in 2009, Sorbonne Université). She also helped and supported me for years throughout my research and scientific activities as a musicologist. She was my mentor and a rare friend with whom I shared beautiful moments. I will always be grateful to her for being there for me.

<sup>2</sup> Bakopoulou-Halls, Alice: 'Greece', *Living Greek Theatre. A Handbook of Classical Performance and Modern Production*, ed. J. Michael Walton, translation Katerina Arvanity, Viki Manteli, Greek Letters, (Athens, 2007), pp. 381-428.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the National Theatre of Greece, the Theatre of Art and the Theatre of Piraeus collaborated with renowned stage directors including Alexis Minotis, Karolos Koun, Takis Mouzenidis and Dimitris Rondiris.

<sup>4</sup> The ancient theatres of Dodonis and Thasos hosted a great number of ancient Greek tragedy performances.

<sup>5</sup> The inauguration of the Epidaurus Festival in 1954 included the performance of Euripides's *Hippolyte*, staged by Dimitris Rondiris. The music was written by Dimitris Mitropoulos.

<sup>6</sup> Wiles, David: *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 141-144.

general aesthetic approach. For instance, they can take all Ancient Drama conventions into account, including masks<sup>7</sup> and chorus singing, without necessarily being preoccupied with archaeological precision<sup>8</sup>. Or, they may choose to eliminate some of these conventions, leading to an open field for theatrical experimentation. Implementing ancient drama conventions in contemporary performances can also create a new form of chorus<sup>9</sup>. In any case, stage conception directly affects musical work. The final outcome of the performance is shaped by the degree of creative collaboration between the stage director and the composer.

Composers may have the most difficult task, as they attempt to respect staging aesthetics and coordinate interaction among music, text, movement, action and dramatic interpretation. They must also handle multiple functions of the chorus and the perhaps limited musical abilities of the actors, which may hinder their work. Additionally, their music depends not only on their personal style and aims, but also on diverse constraints related to production, including open or closed theatre performances, financial budget and the number of musicians. Nevertheless, Greek composers succeeded in writing remarkable music for representations of ancient Greek tragedy. They frequently used electroacoustics and characteristic elements from traditional or ancient Greek music or even from the musical cultures of Africa, Asia or South America, for example<sup>10</sup>. After analysing a number of Greek incidental music scores composed after 1945, it is noticed that the instrumental parts contain elaborate rhythms and melodies. They reflect composers' individual styles, which may be considered as atonal, dodecaphonic or serial. The choral parts are much simpler in order to facilitate the choristers' singing. The choices of instrumentation and rhythmic and melodic structure (traditional rhythms, modality, use of micro-intervals, etc.), often illustrate the strong influence of Greek traditional or extra-European music. Associating characteristic elements from these musical cultures with current avant-garde music creates unusual instrumental ensembles, rich timbres, original sounds, rhythms and melodies. It also offers distinct solutions to the chorus form and presence on stage.

When considering the chorus as well as the actors' limited musical skills, the first decision to be made is whether to compose polyphonic or monophonic choral melodies. Composers usually write monophonic choral music either because the stage director adheres to the

---

<sup>7</sup> For the use of masks in performances of Greek tragedy, see Wiles, David: *Mask and performance in Greek tragedy: from ancient festival to modern experimentation*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Vasseur-Legangneux, Patricia: *Les tragédies grecques sur la scène moderne, une utopie théâtrale*, Presse Universitaire Septentrion, (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2004), pp. 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Vasseur-Legangneux, (2004), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> The incidental music in ancient Greek tragedy performances in Greece between 1945 and 1975 constitutes one of the main subjects of the author's PhD thesis. Soulele, Andriana: *La musique de scène dans les représentations de tragédies grecques en France et en Grèce, de 1945 à 1975*, Thèse de Doctorat, Sorbonne Université, (2009).

principles of ancient tragedy or because the chorus members are not capable of complex musical interpretation. However, if this obstacle can be overcome and if production conditions are favourable and approved by the stage director, composers can choose to write music for a polyphonic chorus. They can then develop the vocal parts and modify the common group interpretation by occasionally using polyphonic melodies for a small number of soloists. For instance, Georges Couroupos<sup>11</sup> composed polyphonic modal melodies for eight independent, parallel female voices for Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (staged by Alexis Minotis<sup>12</sup> and performed by the National Theatre of Greece in 1979). Under different conditions, Theodore Antoniou<sup>13</sup> composed a canon in order to facilitate the actors' singing in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*<sup>14</sup> in 1967 (See Figure 1).

---

<sup>11</sup> Georges Couroupos (1942) studied piano at the Athens Conservatory and composition with Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire (1968-1972). His music for French theatre performances during the seventies made him famous in France. After his return to Athens and in addition to his career as a composer, he took on the artistic direction for numerous Greek institutions. He mainly composes chamber and theatre music. Symeonidou, Aleka: *Dictionary of Greek Composers*, Philippos Nakas, (Athens, 1995), pp. 203-206. [Συμεωνίδου, Αλέκα: *Λεξικό Ελλήνων Συνθετών*, Φίλιππος Νάκας, (Αθήνα, 1995), σ. 203-206]. See also Romanou, Katy: *Greek Art Music in modern times*, Culture Editions, (Athens, 2006), pp. 261-263. [Ρωμανού, Καίτη: *Έντεχνη Ελληνική μουσική στους νεότερους χρόνους*, Εκδόσεις Κουλτούρα (Αθήνα, 2006), σ. 261-263].

<sup>12</sup> Talented stage director and actor, Alexis Minotis (1900-1990) devoted a great part of his career to ancient Greek drama and its performance in modern times. He worked at the National Theatre of Greece for many years. Minotis, Alexis: *The Ancient Drama and Its Renaissance*, Astrolabe-Responsibility Editions, (Athens, 1987). [Μινωτής, Αλέξης: *Το αρχαίο δράμα και η αναβίωσή του*, Αστρολάβος-Ευθύνη, (Αθήνα 1987)].

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Antoniou (1935-2018) was one of the most prolific Greek figures to have an international career as a composer, conductor and professor of composition. His work shows his vast experience in both avant-garde and traditional techniques. The sensation of dramatic structure in his music is due to his long career in theatre music. Romanou, (Athens, 2006), p. 261.

<sup>14</sup> *Philoctetes* was represented by the National Theatre of Greece with staging by Alexis Minotis. Soulele, (2009), pp. 291-301.

# "YPNE"

## Choriko apo ti mousiki gia ton Philoktiti tou Sophokli

TH.ANTONIIOU

1 50 *p*  
A I' - pne pou svi - nis tis li - pes pou - svi - nis tous po - nous e - laa - pa - los san a - ge - ri

9 *p*  
B To fos a - po ta ma - tia ske - pa - se to fos To

17  
C fos ske pa - see si to - fos i - pne i - pne i' - - -

37 CODA  
*pnc.*

Figure 1: Theodore Antoniou, *Philoctetes*, choral chant, third *stasimon*, canon (with permission of the composer's son, William Antoniou).

In addition to monophonic and polyphonic styles, it is fundamental to determine the kind of musical language that best suits a tragic chorus. By searching among various musical traditions, Greek composers identified key sources that led them to inventive and atypical composition choices. For example, while Manos Hadjidakis<sup>15</sup> was writing the music for *Medea* in 1956<sup>16</sup>, he was clearly influenced by the rhythms and melodies of Greek popular urban music, called *rebetiko*<sup>17</sup>. We can also refer to George Sicilianos's<sup>18</sup> music for *Madness of Hercules*,

<sup>15</sup> Manos Hadjidakis (1925-1994) was an autodidactic composer with great talent and was never really interested in avant-garde music. Inspired by the Greek musical tradition, he wrote music and a great number of songs mostly for theatre and cinema. Evangelatos, Spyros: 'Manos Hadjidakis and Incidental Music', *Open Letters to Manos Hadjidakis*, Bastas-Plessas Editions, (Athens, 1996), pp. 64-65. [Ευαγγελάτος, Σπύρος: 'Μάνος Χατζιδάκις και σκηνική μουσική', *Ανοιχτές επιστολές στον Μάνο Χατζιδάκι*, Εκδόσεις Μπάστας-Πλέσσας (Αθήνα, 1996), σ. 64-65]

<sup>16</sup> *Medea* was staged by Alexis Minotis and performed by the National Theatre of Greece during the Epidaurus Festival in 1956.

<sup>17</sup> Urban Greek music, *rebetiko*, appeared in the 1920s. For more information, see Liavas, Lambros: *The Greek Song from 1821 to 1950s*, Athens Commercial Bank of Greece, (Athens, 2009). [Λιάβας, Λάμπρος: *Το ελληνικό τραγούδι από το 1821 έως τη δεκαετία του 1950*, Εμπορική τράπεζα της Ελλάδος, (Αθήνα, 2009)].

<sup>18</sup> By studying music in Europe and the USA, Georges Sicilianos (1920-2005) spent time with Tony Aubin, Boris Blacher and Ildebrando Pizzetti. His work, divided into three periods, is characterised by a tendency of experimentation in Greek traditional music and avant-garde methods. His activities in numerous Greek institutions played a significant role in the Greek music life. Romanou, (2006), pp. 248-249. See also Tselika, Valentini (ed.): *Georges Sicilianos: the composer in the avant-garde contemporary music*, Benaki Museum (Athens, 2007). [Τσελίκια, Βαλεντίνη (επιμ.), *Γιώργος Σισιλιάνος: ο συνθέτης στην πρωτοπορία της σύγχρονης μουσικής*, Μουσείο Μπενάκη (Αθήνα, 2007)].

which was staged by Takis Mouzenidis<sup>19</sup> and performed by the National Theatre of Greece during the Epidaurus Festival in 1960. The choral parts were derived from a profound philosophical and prosodic study of the text and characterised by monody, modal melodic lines and perfect fourth intervals. These elements suggest a sort of attachment to ancient Greek music. Moreover, in order to respect the audacious staging concept of Giannis Houvardas, Georges Couroupos wrote tango music for Euripides's *Alcestis*<sup>20</sup> (performed at the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 1984). He was even inspired by traditional Lebanese music<sup>21</sup> for the choral chants in *Trojan Women*. This Euripidean tragedy was directed by Andreas Voutsinas<sup>22</sup> and performed at the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 1987<sup>23</sup>.

Traditional Greek music appears to rise above any other source of inspiration for the majority of Greek incidental music. This is particularly evident when staging aesthetics are based on a traditional approach<sup>24</sup> that clearly influences instrumentation, rhythmic and melodic development, as well as how the text and music are related. Religious, bucolic or funeral choral parts favour music inspired by Byzantine chant or traditional song called *dimotiko*. One example is *Rhesus* from Euripides, performed by the National Theatre of Greece in 1968 and staged by Takis Mouzenidis<sup>25</sup>. Couroupos's score for this production includes vocal and environmental sounds. They were transformed with electroacoustics, such as reel-to-reel tape, and combined with pentatonic melodies, diatonic or chromatic tetrachords and traditional rhythms such as unequally divided 9/8 and 8/8 meters (See Figure 2). Also, for the 1960 performance of Euripides's *The Phoenician Women* at the National Theatre of Greece, directed

---

<sup>19</sup> Takis Mouzenidis (1909-1981) was a great stage director who studied law in Athens and stage setting, philosophy, history of art and culture, psychology and aesthetic in Germany. He collaborated with many theatres, Greek and Europeans as well, but essentially with the National Theatre of Greece and the Epidaurus' Festival. For his personal point of view concerning stage direction see Mouzenidis, Takis: *Theatrical space and staging: an essay*, G. Fexi (Athens, 1965). [Μουζενίδης, Τάκης: *Θεατρικός χώρος και σκηνοθεσία: δοκίμιο*, Γ. Φέξης, (Αθήνα, 1965)].

<sup>20</sup> One of the most talented stage directors who studied dramatic art at the Royal Academy of London and at the Wurtemberg State Theatre. He worked as an actor with many theatres in Greece and abroad as well. As a director, his productions reveal a rich repertoire ranging from the ancient Greek to the contemporary European and American playwrights.

<sup>21</sup> Couroupos' music respected the staging concept of the director. He had the intention of criticising the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) which was going on at the time of *Trojan Women*'s production. Soulele, Andriana: 'Music for the Ancient Greek Drama. An Interview with the composer Georges Couroupos', *Polyphonia 7* (2005), pp. 145-170. [Σουλελέ, Ανδριάννα: 'Μουσική για το αρχαίο ελληνικό δράμα. Μια συνέντευξη με τον συνθέτη Γιώργο Κουρουπό', *Πολυφωνία 7* (2005), σ. 145-170].

<sup>22</sup> Stage director of international career, Andreas Voutsinas has already staged more than 130 pieces of classical and contemporary repertoire in collaboration with many theatres in Greece, London, Canada, New York and Paris. Most of his productions reveal a revolutionary conception and a critic mind towards the world's actuality.

<sup>23</sup> Soulele, (2005), pp. 150-170.

<sup>24</sup> Most of Alexis Minotis' performances revealed a traditional or conservatory perception of the ancient Greek tragedy that demanded an analogous musical accompaniment.

<sup>25</sup> Soulele, (2009), pp. 323-327.

by Alexis Minotis, Mikis Theodorakis<sup>26</sup> wrote complex serial instrumental parts. They alternated with monophonic choral chants, based mainly on diatonic tetrachords, pedals or *isson*<sup>27</sup>, and Greek rhythms in 9/8 meter (See Figure 3). Finally, the Dimitris Dragatakis<sup>28</sup> score for *Antigone* by Sophocles, performed by the National Theatre of Greece in 1969 and staged by Lambros Costopoulos, evoked the traditional music of Epirus. Modal melodic lines, augmented intervals and chromatic tetrachords were perfectly assimilated to the composer's personal atonal language<sup>29</sup> (See Figure 4).

Figure 2: Georges Couroupos, *Rhesus*, first *stasimon*, part A (copy of the manuscript score, with permission of the composer).

<sup>26</sup> Known widely for his political activity during the Second World War and the Greek Junta (1967-1974), Mikis Theodorakis (1925) is a renowned European composer, primarily for his symphonic music characterised by atonalism and dodecaphonism. Since 1960, his work has been heavily inspired by *rebetiko* and Byzantine chant. Romanou, (2006), p. 252.

<sup>27</sup> Sustained note interpreted vocally in Greek traditional and Byzantine chant.

<sup>28</sup> Autodidactic composer Dimitris Dragatakis (1914-2001) studied violin and composition with Leonidas Zoras and Manolis Kalomiris at the Athens National Conservatory. His music was clearly influenced by the traditional music of Epirus and reveals a unique association of occidental forms, original musical ensembles and electro-acoustics. Symeonidou, (1995), pp. 106-108. See also Kalopana, Magdalini: *Dimitris Dragatakis: work catalogue*, PhD Thesis, University of Athens, (2008). [Καλοπανά, Μαγδαληνή: *Δημήτρης Δραγατάκης: κατάλογος έργων*, Διδακτορική διατριβή, Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, (2008)].

<sup>29</sup> For an analytical approach of these productions, see Soulele (2009), pp. 277-333.

CHORUS: O holy vale of leaves, crowded with wild animals.

EURIPIDES THE PHOENICIAN WOMEN  
THIRD CHORAL ODE  
SECOND STASIMON

Figure 3: Mikis Theodorakis, *The Phoenician women*, second *stasimon*, antistrophe (Theodorakis, Mikis: *The Phoenician women*. Full score [1960], Romanos Editions, (Athens, 2004). With permission of the composer).

Clarinet

Chorus

Santour

6

Cl.

Ch.

San.

και νυ- χτε -

ρεύ - εις στ'απα- λά της κό-ρης μά- γου-λα έ - ρω έ-ρω-τα ε\_ε

Figure 4: Dimitris Dragatakis, *Antigona*, extract from the *kommos*, (reproduced from the original handwritten score, with permission of the composer's daughter, Vassiliki Dragataki-Koronidi).

Iannis Xenakis and Jani Christou incorporated far more experimentation into their musical scores than any other Greek composer of the period. They were inspired by Greek traditional music and Byzantine chant, as well as music and rituals from cultures outside of Europe. The music composed for *The Suppliants* (1964) and *The Persians* (1965) included highly innovative conceptions of the tragic chorus<sup>30</sup>.

*The Suppliants* was directed by Alexis Solomos and performed on 26 July 1964 at the National Theatre of Greece during the Epidaurus Festival. Ioannis Gryparis translated the text, Giannis Pappas was in charge of set design and Agapi Evanguelidi choreographed the performance. Xenakis aimed to give music a dominant role in this theatrical production, which was completely in line with Solomos's perspective of stage direction. With the hope of revolutionising the action on stage, Solomos chose to incorporate primitive elements, such as irrepressible passionate screams, where music was also a factor<sup>31</sup>. He gave clear instructions for the character and action of each *stasimon* (i.e. ritual, melancholy, hysterical fear and joy) and identified the most appropriate kind of music for them (collective songs, declamation or monotone recitative). His intention was to represent the choral parts from Aeschylus as fanatic rituals (exorcisms, magic and summoning the forces of the sun and moon), where passion is expressed through collective hysteria, inarticulate screams and irrational vehemence<sup>32</sup>. Solomos traced mass movement in his theatrical approach, and Xenakis followed his lead, considering that with the right music, dance and disordered percussive interpretation, mass movement could provide a much-needed, contemporary breath of fresh air to tragedy<sup>33</sup>.

Xenakis produced music from three different sources: a reel-to-reel tape for the orchestral parts<sup>34</sup>, various musicians playing live music near the stage, and choristers playing percussion instruments. The composer emphasised the presence of the chorus and their function on stage. Chorus members were invited to dance, act and play music. Additionally, they had to perform songs with symmetrical rhythm and simple melodic lines, reminiscent of traditional Greek music. Their interpretation also required flat voices for pronouncing vowels and consonants in a special way, which Solomos claimed strengthened the words<sup>35</sup>. Xenakis avoided using any

---

<sup>30</sup> Soulele, (2009), pp. 303-310, 345-355.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of Alexis Solomos addressed to Iannis Xenakis, 17.2.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>32</sup> Letter of Alexis Solomos addressed to Iannis Xenakis, 6.3.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of Iannis Xenakis addressed to Alexis Solomos, 3.4.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>34</sup> The instrumental part is written for 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, 2 violins, 2 violoncellos and 2 contrabasses.

<sup>35</sup> Solomos, Alexis: *What for Dionysos. Notes for the Greek Tragedy*, Difros, (Athens, 1972), p. 73. [Σολομός, Αλέξης: *Τι προς Διόνυσον. Σημειώσεις για την ελληνική τραγωδία*, Δίφρος, (Athens, 1972)]

Western musical language because he thought it would be inappropriate for the tragic chorus. Instead, he preferred to reconsider the melodic and rhythmic structures of *demotic* song and Byzantine chant that survived from antiquity<sup>36</sup>. The instrumental parts reveal Xenakis's characteristic style through the use of micro-intervals and numerous glissandi. However, the choral parts are often accompanied by the Greek traditional instrument *souravli*<sup>37</sup> and are characterised by diatonic and chromatic tetrachords, perfect fourth intervals, pedals (*isson*), singing for one or two voices (melody and pedal) and syllabic style (see Figure 5).

The main innovation in this work was the massive introduction of a large number of percussion instruments<sup>38</sup> played by the chorus as they moved around on stage<sup>39</sup>. This musical accompaniment, or 'auto-accompaniment,' offered the chorus new sound dimensions as well as new group and dance movements. This allowed Xenakis to implement the concept of sound masses as well as the spatial perception of sound<sup>40</sup>. Dance, choral declamation, asynchronous voices and singing shifted from order to disorder, combining different texts with screaming and hysteria, which created chaotic sound clouds at particular moments of the tragedy<sup>41</sup>. These masses of sound were reminiscent of 'primitive rites' and revitalised the typical chorus performance.

---

<sup>36</sup> 'Notes sur l'Orestie', Dossier OM 13/7-1, Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>37</sup> *Souravli* is a type of flute that is much smaller, with a range of two octaves.

<sup>38</sup> Some of the percussion instruments used in this performance included drums of different sizes, castanets, small bells, horse-bells, crotales, sistra, cymbals, etc. Most of them were invented by Xenakis. Letter of Iannis Xenakis addressed to the Greek musicologist Phivos Anoyanakis, 23.4.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>39</sup> According to the composer, he gave castanets and bells to the forty women in the chorus to accompany their dance and songs; this was innovative. Bois, Mario: 'Xenakis. Musicien de l'avant-garde. L'entretien du 4 mars 1966', *Bulletin d'information Boosey and Hawkes. Société des grandes éditions musicales* 23 (septembre 1966).

<sup>40</sup> Letter of Iannis Xenakis addressed to the Greek musicologist Phivos Anoyanakis, 23.4.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>41</sup> For example, during Jupiter's invocation by the Suppliants chorus in the first *stasimon*. Xenakis described the frenetic ambiance of this *stasimon* in his sketches. Dossier OM 11/3, Archives of the Xenakis Family.

first strophe

Chorus

Va - si - le - a ton va - si - le - on ma - ka - ri - on ma - ka - ri - o - tq - te kai mes s'ol - ez pan - y - per - ta - ti e - xou - si - a kli - ne pros tin de - i - si mas ol - vie Di - a

third strophe

pou ar - ro - sti - a den ta pia - nei fel - la - me - ni apo tin ath - li a tis sum - fo - ra

Figure 5: Iannis Xenakis, *The Suppliants*, verse 524, extracts from the first and third strophe (reproduced from the original handwritten score and with permission of Mâkhi Xenakis © Archives of the Xenakis Family)

According to the composer, these sound dimensions and percussion instruments brought diverse new directions to Greek tragic art<sup>42</sup>. This is particularly true for *The Suppliants*. Xenakis creatively influenced sound production, stage direction, costumes and set design by attaching small instruments, like bells and sistra, to the choristers' costumes. He also placed larger instruments, like drums, around the set<sup>43</sup>. Alexis Solomos believed that an innovative contribution to the theatrical interpretation of tragedy was made by using a variety of instruments and creating a rich, flexible, mobile sound mosaic with musical passages going from complete order to total disorder<sup>44</sup>. Music resulted naturally from on-stage action, actors' movements and instrumental accompaniment. The composer stated that directing choristers to play music synchronized musical mobility and staging<sup>45</sup>. In *The Suppliants*, Xenakis focused on creating sound masses and on how sound was distributed through space; as a result, he introduced original, avant-garde music concepts. These were largely developed in his later

<sup>42</sup>Letter of Iannis Xenakis addressed to Alexis Solomos, 10.4.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>43</sup>Letter of Iannis Xenakis addressed to Alexis Solomos, 3.4.1964. Dossier OM 11/2, (Correspondence), Archives of the Xenakis Family.

<sup>44</sup>Solomos, (1972), p. 73.

<sup>45</sup>Bois, (1966).

works such as *Oresteia* (1965-1966)<sup>46</sup>, *Terretektorh* (1965-66) and *Nomos Gamma* (1967-68)<sup>47</sup>, and they contributed to creating new forms of musical expression<sup>48</sup>.

Jani Christou's<sup>49</sup> music for *The Persians* illustrated another very imaginative concept for Greek tragedy. This Aeschylusian tragedy was directed by Karolos Koun<sup>50</sup> and performed at London's Aldwych Theatre by the Theatre of Art in April 1965<sup>51</sup>, with set design by Giannis Tsarouchis, costumes by Giannis Moralis and choreography by Maria Kynigou. Koun and Christou influenced each other's work: Koun envisioned *The Persians* through Christou's music, and Christou mentally staged the ancient tragedy before and while composing the score<sup>52</sup>. Christou believed the text constituted 'a score where the sounds were added afterwards'<sup>53</sup>. Koun embraced Christou's concept that music should have a primary function in the performance, as well as his original ideas for the chorus.

The complex score of *The Persians* was written for reel-to-reel tape (prepared piano and 'musique concrète'), a wind ensemble, strings and percussion instruments<sup>54</sup> as well as a singing and reciting chorus. It is characterised by dissonant and chromatic melodic development, various rhythmic motifs and an important role for percussion instruments. As for the *stasima*, most were recited normally and rhythmically by soloists and the chorus. They were often accompanied by percussion, such as tam-tam and timpani. The singing parts comprised a smaller part of the score. However, their hieratic and psalmodic aspects were heavily influenced

---

<sup>46</sup> *Oresteia* was performed at Ypsilanti of Michigan with staging by Alexis Solomos.

<sup>47</sup> Da Silva Santana, Helena Maria: *L'orchestration chez Iannis Xenakis : L'espace et le rythme, fonctions du timbre*, Thèse de Doctorat, Sorbonne Université, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, (2000), p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> In both *Terretektorh* (1965-1966) and *Nomos Gamma* (1967-1968), Xenakis used many percussion instruments. To explore the spatial dimension of sound, musicians were placed among the public and the conductor was in the centre. Da Silva Santana, (2000), p. 105.

<sup>49</sup> Jani Christou's (1926-1970) avant-garde music revealed a profound reflection for music and the perception of the arts in general. He studied music, philosophy and psychology and was passionate about history and the music of ancient and modern cultures. Christou first wrote symphonic and vocal music and later applied the technical patterns. The theatrical element played an important role in his later works. Romanou, (2006), pp. 245-247. See also Zouliatis, Kostis, 'Jani Christou and the Philosophy of Meta-Music', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 74 (4), (2018), pp. 1493-1506. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26563366>.

<sup>50</sup> Karolos Koun (1908-1987) was an exceptional stage director, renowned in Europe for his vivid performances of Greek ancient tragedy and comedy. He founded the Theatre of Art in 1942, presented numerous productions of avant-garde European writers such as Brecht and Pirandello and collaborated with many Greek composers. Mayer, Michael: *Karolos Koun and the Theatre of Art*, Greek translation by Erika Kairi, Greek Literary and Historical Archive, (Athens, 2004). [Μάγιαρ Μάικλ: *Ο Κάρολος Κουν και το Θέατρο Τέχνης*, μετάφραση Έρεικα Καϊρή, Ελληνικό λογοτεχνικό και ιστορικό αρχείο, (Αθήνα, 2004)].

<sup>51</sup> After this first performance in London, *The Persians* was produced at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in Athens.

<sup>52</sup> Stathoulopoulou, Constantina: 'Chants in Epidaurus', *Epidaurus. The Ancient Theatre, The Performances*, ed. Kostas Georgousopoulos, Militos Editions (Athens, 2004), p. 220. [Σταθουλοπούλου Κωνσταντίνα: 'Επιδauria Μελίσματα', *Επίδauρος. Το αρχαίο θέατρο, οι παραστάσεις*, επιμ. Κώστας Γεωργουσόπουλος, Εκδόσεις Μίλητος (Αθήνα, 2004), σ. 220].

<sup>53</sup> Stathoulopoulou, (2004), pp. 220-221.

<sup>54</sup> The orchestra consisted of 3 horns, 2 trombones, tuba, piano, violoncello, contrabass, *santour*, xylophone, blocks, military drum, cymbals, tam-tam, buss drum, bongos, conga, toms, timpani and various bells.

by Byzantine chant<sup>55</sup>, especially the pedals (*isson*), the chromaticism of melodic lines, the use of tetrachords and their limited range (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Jani Christou, *The Persians*, second *stasimon*, invocation of Darius's spirit (reproduced from the handwritten score, with permission of Sandra Christou, Archives Jani Christou).

Christou's incidental music for *The Persians* is unique. It affected how the text was interpreted, and it innovatively shaped the chorus's form and function. Some of Christou's techniques for chorus interpretation, such as mixing various song with recited verses, asynchronous performances and various superimposed voices and texts, can be traced to other incidental music such as Xenakis's *Oresteia* (1965-1966). However, Christou applies these techniques differently. His broad, dramatic musical imagination goes beyond the borders that define how the chorus should be performed on stage. ΈKoun also participated in writing stage directions into the score. Some passages of actors' text, the full chorus text, movements and every possible nuance of expression were written down in order to determine their relationship with the music<sup>56</sup>.

Christou used the chorus, chant and diverse declamations as sound material that developed musically throughout the performance. The composer stated that he wanted to use the chorus as a way to reproduce the primitive emotions of tragedy. He focused on placing words and phrases in a way that created forms of autonomous vocal sounds with varied textures<sup>57</sup>. Christou considered the chorus as a complex multi-instrument that occupied a dominant place in *The Persians*. The human voice served as a large canvas, ranging from speaking to singing or

<sup>55</sup> The influence of Byzantine chant is clear at almost every *stasimon* and is incontestable at the second one: the Persian chorus evokes Darius's spirit with a short melody based on chromatic tetrachords.

<sup>56</sup> Papaioannou, Giannis G.: *Jani Christou and the Metaphysics of Music*, Greek Association of Contemporary Music, (Athens, 1970), p.13. [Παπαϊωάννου Γιάννης Γ.: *Ο Γιάννης Χρήστου και η μεταφυσική της μουσικής*, Ελληνικός Σύνδεσμος Σύγχρονης Μουσικής, (Αθήνα, 1970), σ. 13].

<sup>57</sup> Christou, Jani: 'Composing for the chorus', *Theatre of Art 1942-1972*, Hellenic Society of the Theatre, (Athens, 1972), p. 33. [Χρήστου, Γιάννης: 'Γράφοντας για τον χορό', *Θέατρο Τέχνης 1942-1972*, Ελληνική Εταιρεία Θεάτρου (Αθήνα, 1972), σ.33].

shouting, producing all possible vocal sounds and expressions: wailing, mourning (as in a psalmody), *glissandi*, screaming, crying and breathing sounds such as sighing, inhaling and exhaling<sup>58</sup>. He also used the rhythmic possibilities of the Greek language and every nuance from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* in order to emphasise particular text fragments (see Figures 7 and 8).

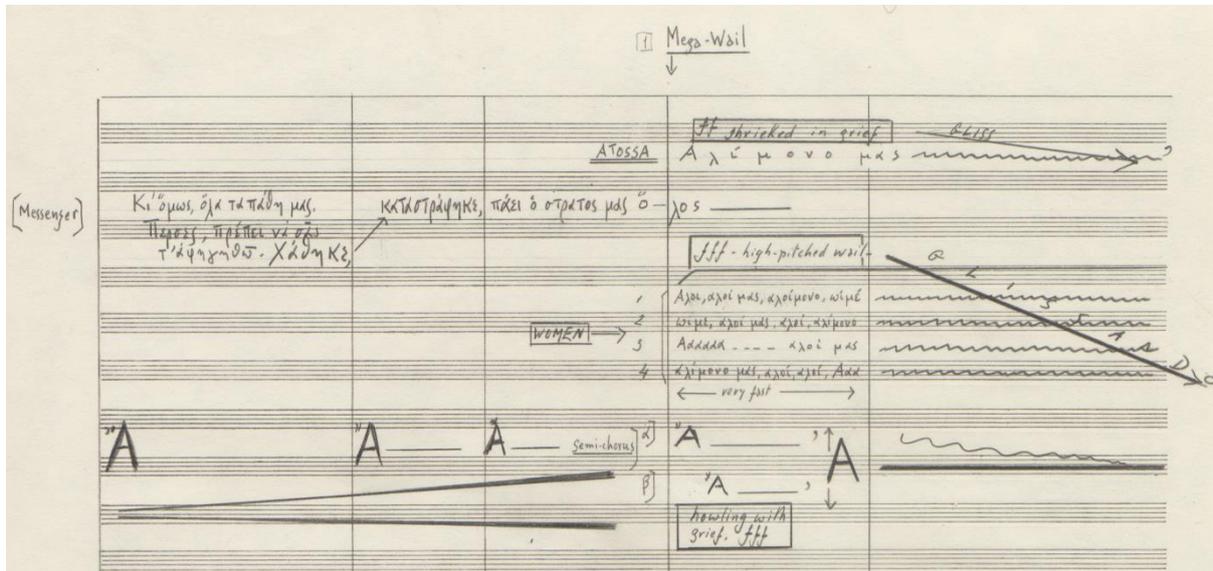


Figure 7: Jani Christou, *The Persians*, kommos, chorus, (manuscript score, with permission of Sandra Christou, Archives Jani Christou).

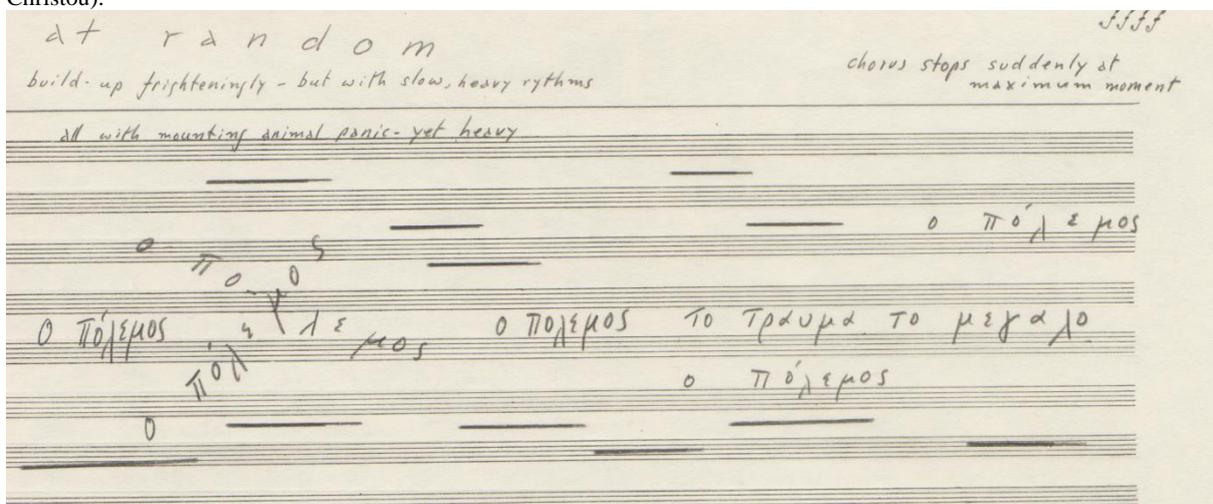


Figure 8: Jani Christou, *The Persians*, end of the third stasimon, chorus, and random declamation (manuscript score, with permission of Sandra Christou, Archives Jani Christou).

Separating the chorus allowed him to divide and redistribute the text, add repetition and use it more freely. He separated key words and phrases and created rich, rhythmic, melodic patterns (see Figure 9). One or more choral groups or soloists perform these patterns, while others recite

<sup>58</sup> Lucciano, Anna-Martine: *Jani Christou: the works and temperament of a Greek composer*, translation by Catherine Dale, Harwood Academic Publishers (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 75.

different text fragments, often simultaneously. Christou applied different tempi, rhythms, dynamics, as well as various accentuations and techniques, including the rhythmic or melodic polyphonic style, as well as a question-answer game and the canon. He thus ‘orchestrated’ the chorus in an ingenious way that diminished the use of instruments (see Figure 10). His proposed vocal interpretation offered more vigour to recitation, dialogue, complaints and the lamentation of the chorus. It also marked crucial moments of stage action and brought out profound meaning in the text. Even though music had a crucial role, the text was always at the forefront. As a result, Christou reformed the chorus performance both musically and theatrically. Staging and musical interpretation became one, dependent on each other and inseparable.

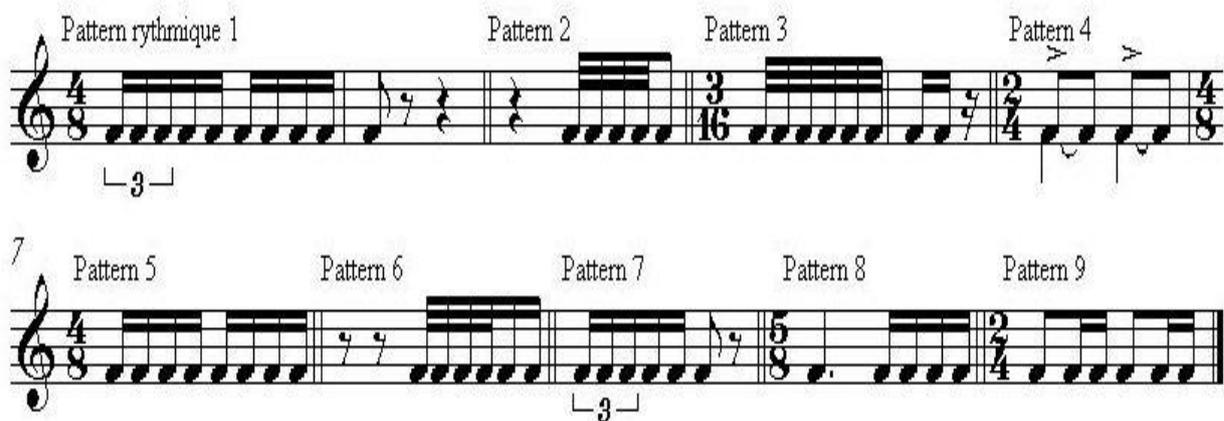


Figure 9: Jani Christou, *The Persians*, patterns (reproduced from the handwritten score, with permission of Sandra Christou, Archives Jani Christou).

Figure 10: Jani Christou, *The Persians*, second *stasimon*, Darius' spirit invocation (manuscript score, with permission of Sandra Christou, Archives Jani Christou).

*The Persians* is considered to be the most unique work of its genre by many Greek composers, including Couroupos and Antoniou<sup>59</sup> and encompasses a vocal realisation that blurs the boundaries between speech and music. These two elements are unified at a higher level that could surpass the form of the opera. According to Anne-Martine Lucciano, the dichotomy between text and music ceased to exist with this production. Instead, an integrated sound substance arose from two heterogeneous sources<sup>60</sup>. Christou made use of the immense musical possibilities of the voice at the large scale. Lucciano believes he no longer valued the profoundly human dimensions of voice and took it to the limits of sonorous possibilities, to the edge of the normal world, bordering on madness<sup>61</sup>. In this incidental music, Christou experimented, explored new methods of expression and significantly developed theatrical elements. This process contributed to ritualising musical interpretation in his future pieces. His work *Anaparastasis* (proto-performances or reenactments, written between 1966 and 1969) represents this significant change in style by ritualising musical interpretation, uniting music, gesture, movement and choreography.

By transforming obstacles of the tragic chorus into creative advantages, the works of Xenakis and Christou revolutionised performances of ancient Greek tragedy. The public and the press were incredibly receptive of the music. The music for *The Suppliants* was derived from stage action, whereas *The Persians'* music was an integrated part of the staging. Both performances illustrated a remarkable amalgam of diverse musical languages, including ancient Greek, traditional Greek and avant-garde of the sixties. Some *stasima* were also heavily influenced by religious rites from non-western cultures, including Africa and South America. Jupiter's prayer by the *Suppliants'* chorus and the invocation of Darius's spirit by the *Persian* chorus are characteristic examples of chaotic massive interpretation that is rhythmically intensified with percussion. By merging various cultures and exploring the rich traditional Greek music, Christou and Xenakis innovated both music and staging for ancient Greek drama.

As a 'total theatre', to quote Xenakis, ancient Greek tragedy not only offered Greek composers a real challenge, but also provided a unique and prolific field for musical experimentation. By creating an inventive dialogue between the musical past and present across different cultures, composers' music for ancient Greek tragedy performances led to substantial development in contemporary musical expression.

---

<sup>59</sup> Soulele, (2005), pp. 145-170.

<sup>60</sup> Lucciano, (2000), p. 81.

<sup>61</sup> Lucciano, (2000), p. 81.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Antoniou, Theodore, *Philoctetes*, manuscript score, Archives of the National Theatre of Greece (1967). <http://www.nt-archive.gr/playMaterial.aspx?playID=808#music>

Archives of the Xenakis Family: Dossiers OM 11/2, OM 11/3 – Correspondence between Alexis Solomos and Iannis Xenakis.

Bakopoulou-Halls, Alice, 'Greece', *Living Greek Theatre. A Handbook of Classical Performance and Modern Production*, ed. J. Michael Walton, translation Katerina Arvanity, Viki Manteli, Greek Letters, (Athens, 2007), pp. 381 - 428.

Bois, Mario, 'Xenakis. Musicien de l'avant-garde. L'entretien du 4 mars 1966', *Bulletin d'information Boosey and Hawkes société des grandes éditions musicales* 23 (septembre 1966).

Christou, Jani, 'Composing for the chorus', *Theatre of Art 1942-1972*, Hellenic Society of Theatre, (Athens, 1972), p. 33. [Χρήστου, Γιάννης: 'Γράφοντας για τον χορό', *Θέατρο Τέχνης 1942-1972*, Ελληνική Εταιρεία Θεάτρου (Αθήνα, 1972), σ.33].

Christou, Jani, *The Persians*, handwritten score, (1965), Archives Jani Christou.

Couroupos, Georges, *Rhesus*, manuscript score, Archives of the National Theatre of Greece (1968), <http://www.nt-archive.gr/playMaterial.aspx?playID=441#music>

Dragatakis, Dimitris, *Antigone*, manuscript score, Archives of the National Theatre of Greece (1969). <http://www.nt-archive.gr/playMaterial.aspx?playID=809#music>

Evangelatos, Spyros, 'Manos Hadjidakis and Incidental Music', *Open Letters to Manos Hadjidakis*, Bastas-Plessas Editions, (Athens, 1996), pp. 64-65. [Ευαγγελάτος, Σπύρος: 'Μάνος Χατζιδάκις και σκηνική μουσική', *Ανοιχτές επιστολές στον Μάνο Χατζιδάκι*, Εκδόσεις Μπάστας-Πλέσσας (Αθήνα, 1996), σ. 64-65]

Da Silva Santana, Helena Maria, *L'orchestration chez Iannis Xenakis: L'espace et le rythme, fonctions du timbre*, Thèse de Doctorat, Sorbonne Université, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, (2000).

Kalopana, Magdalini: *Dimitris Dragatakis: work catalogue*, PhD Thesis, University of Athens, (2008). [Καλοπανά, Μαγδαληνή: *Δημήτρης Δραγατάκης: κατάλογος έργων*, Διδακτορική διατριβή, Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, (2008)].

Lucciano, Anna-Martine, *Jani Christou: the works and temperament of a Greek composer*, translation by Catherine Dale, Harwood Academic Publishers, (Amsterdam, 2000).

Mayer, Michael, *Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre*, Greek translation by Erika Kairi, Greek Literary and Historical Archive, (Athens, 2004). [Μάγιαρ Μάικλ: *Ο Κάρολος Κουν και το Θέατρο Τέχνης*, μετάφραση Έρεικα Καϊρη, Ελληνικό λογοτεχνικό και ιστορικό αρχείο (Αθήνα, 2004)].

Minotis, Alexis, *The Ancient Drama and Its Renaissance*, Astrolabe-Responsibility Editions, (Athens, 1987). [Μινωτής, Αλέξης: *Το αρχαίο δράμα και η αναβίωσή του*, Αστρολάβος-Ευθύνη, (Αθήνα 1987)].

Mouzenidis, Takis, *Theatrical space and staging: an essay*, G. Fexi, (Athens, 1965) [Μουζενίδης, Τάκης: *Θεατρικός χώρος και σκηνοθεσία: δοκίμιο*, Γ. Φέξης, (Αθήνα, 1965)].

Papaïoannou, Giannis G., *Jani Christou and the Metaphysics of Music*, Greek Association of Contemporary Music, (Athens, 1970). [Παπαϊωάννου Γιάννης Γ.: *Ο Γιάννης Χρήστου και η μεταφυσική της μουσικής*, Ελληνικός Σύνδεσμος Σύγχρονης Μουσικής, (Αθήνα, 1970)].

Romanou, Katy, *Greek Art Music in modern times*, Culture Editions, (Athens, 2006). [Ρωμανού, Καίτη: *Έντεχνη Ελληνική μουσική στους νεώτερους χρόνους*, Εκδόσεις Κουλτούρα, (Αθήνα, 2006)].

Solomos, Alexis, *What for Dionysos. Notes for the Greek Tragedy*, Difros, (Athens, 1972). [Σολομός, Αλέξης: *Τι προς Διόνυσον. Σημειώσεις για την ελληνική τραγωδία*, Δίφρος, (Athens, 1972)].

Symeonidou, Aleka, *Dictionary of Greek Composers*, Philippos Nakas, (Athens, 1995). [Συμεωνίδου, Αλέκα: *Λεξικό Ελλήνων Συνθετών*, Φίλιππος Νάκας, (Αθήνα, 1995)].

Siopsi, Anastasia, 'Music and the scene in stage productions of ancient dramas and comedies in Greece at the last decades of the 20th century', *New Sound International Magazine 36 II*, (2010), pp. 75-90.

Soulele, Andriana, 'Music for the Ancient Greek Drama. An Interview with the composer Georges Couroupos', *Polyphonia 7*, (2005), pp. 145-170. [Σουλελέ, Ανδριάννα: 'Μουσική για το αρχαίο ελληνικό δράμα. Μια συνέντευξη με τον συνθέτη Γιώργο Κουρουπό', *Πολυφωνία 7*, (2005), σ. 145-170].

Soulele, Andriana, *La musique de scène dans les représentations de tragédies grecques en France et en Grèce, de 1945 à 1975*, Thèse de Doctorat, Sorbonne Université, (2009).

Stathouloupoulou, Constantina, 'Chants in Epidaurus', *Epidaurus. The Ancient Theatre, the performances*, ed. Kostas Georgousopoulos, Militos Editions, (Athens, 2004). [Σταθουλοπούλου Κωνσταντίνα: 'Επιδαύρια Μελίσματα', *Επίδαυρος. Το αρχαίο θέατρο, οι παραστάσεις*, επιμ. Κώστας Γεωργουσόπουλος, Εκδόσεις Μίλητος, (Αθήνα, 2004)].

Theodorakis, Mikis, *The Phoenician women. Full score* [1960], Romanos Editions, (Athens, 2004).

Tselika, Valentini (ed.): *Georges Sicilianos: the composer in the avant-garde contemporary music*, Benaki Museum, (Athens, 2007). [Τσελικά, Βαλεντίνη (επιμ.), *Γιώργος Σισιλιάνος: ο συνθέτης στην πρωτοπορία της σύγχρονης μουσικής*, Μουσείο Μπενάκη (Αθήνα, 2007)].

Turner, Charles: 'Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1966 : What Iannis Xenakis might have learned from Alexis Solomos', *Proceedings of the conference in Greek musical creation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for lyrical theater and other performance arts.*, ed. Georges Vlastos, Megaron Concert Hall, (Athens, 2009), pp. 188-191.

Vasseur-Legangneux, Patricia, *Les tragédies grecques sur la scène moderne, une utopie théâtrale*, Presse Universitaire Septentrion, (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2004).

Wiles, David, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 2000).

Iannis Xenakis, *The Suppliants*, handwritten score, (1964), © Archives of the Xenakis Family.

Zouliatis, Costis, 'Jani Christou and the Philosophy of Meta-Music', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 74 (4), (2018), pp. 1493-1506. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26563366> .