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# GRECIA OGGI INCONTRI TRA LE ARTI

a cura di Maria Caracausi



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## Poetry Set to Music: the example of Theodorakis and Hadjidakis

ACHILLEAS CHALDAEAKES

Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis were leading representatives of a brilliant artistic career, during which poetic production met musical creation, both timeless aspects of the Greek spirit. Poetry set to music, as faithfully served by Theodorakis and Hadjidakis, constitutes a cultural phenomenon of enormous influence, linking the high poetic writing of poets such as Seferis, Elytis, and Cavafis with music formed according to a strong centuries-old tradition, which moved and still moves Greek and international audiences alike.

Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis, undoubtedly the two most important representatives of this compositional output in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, succeeded through their musical creations in bringing new life into Greek poetry, making it accessible to a wider audience without moving away from its literary quality. Through his musical poetry, Theodorakis builds bridges between the high-level poetry and the popular sensibility. Hadjidakis, for his part, chooses to collaborate with specific poets and creates works in which the lyrics and the music become inseparable.

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Their compositions, such as «Κράτησα τη ζωή μου»<sup>1</sup> or «Χάρτινο το Φεγγαράκι»<sup>2</sup>, prove that transforming poetry into melody can give a new dimension and breath to classic and contemporary poems.

\* \* \*

Some further preliminary remarks are necessary here regarding the musical creation of these two great composers and the way they handled poetry as the poetic discourse of the musical articulation of their songs<sup>3</sup>:

#### *Mikis Theodorakis*

Despite starting out as a symphonic composer with significant studies at the Athens Conservatoire and in Paris as well, Mikis Theodorakis decided to abandon his successful career and devote himself to songwriting for more than 20 years. During these years, he created a new genre that he called «έντεχνο λαϊκό τραγούδι» (*artistic folk song*), seeking to describe the combination of art music with poetry and folk music ele-

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<sup>1</sup> Listen to the aforementioned composition «Κράτησα τη ζωή μου» (Lyrics G. Seferis; Music M. Theodorakis; Interpretation Gr. Bithikotsis; see the links to listen to all the songs mentioned here, in a special table at the end of this article), a song where the simple, dramatic interpretation is combined with a very atmospheric melody, which respects the poetic form and highlights the emotional intensity of the poem. *Κράτησα τη ζωή μου | ταξιδεύοντας ανάμεσα σε κίτρινα δέντρα | κάτω απ' το πλάγιασμα της βροχής. | Σε σιωπηλές πλαγιές φορτωμένες | με τα φύλλα της οξιάς | καμά φωτιά στην κορυφή τους | βραδιάζει...*

<sup>2</sup> Listen to the aforementioned composition «Χάρτινο το φεγγαράκι» (Lyrics N. Gatsos; Music M. Hadjidakis; Interpretation Nena Venetsanou), a song where poetry of Gatsos meets Hatzidakis' colorful, melodically delicate musical composition; the result is poetic and musically sensitive. *Θα φέρει η θάλασσα πουλιά | κι άστρα χρυσά τ' αγέρι | να σου χαϊδεύουν τα μαλλιά | να σου φιλούν το χέρι. | Χάρτινο το φεγγαράκι | ψεύτικη η ακρογιαλιά | αν με πίστευες λιγάκι | θα 'ταν όλα αληθινά. | Δίχως τη δική σου αγάπη | γρήγορα περνά ο καιρός | δίχως τη δική σου αγάπη | είναι ο κόσμος πιο μικρός. | Χάρτινο το φεγγαράκι | ψεύτικη η ακρογιαλιά | αν με πίστευες λιγάκι | θα 'ταν όλα αληθινά.*

<sup>3</sup> See: [https://melodisseia.gr/article/melopoiimeni-poiisi?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://melodisseia.gr/article/melopoiimeni-poiisi?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

ments. As he himself has confessed, the inspiration for this was Yannis Ritsos's «Επιτάφιος», a poem published in 1956. Theodorakis decided to set the poem to music in 1959, while he was in Paris. The songs, which were released in two different versions with different performers (Nana Mouschouri & Grigoris Bithikotsis), had a huge impact<sup>4</sup>. In fact, the poems were so well received that they inspired the composer himself, who decided to devote himself entirely to songwriting for the next 20 years.

After «Επιτάφιος», he followed up with «Άξιόν εστι», based on the poetry of Odysseas Elytis, a work that is a benchmark for his oeuvre as it incorporates his entire musical world (folk elements, Greekness, symphonic elements, etc.). With «Άξιόν εστι» (composed between 1960-63), Theodorakis brought together Odysseas Elytis' lyrics in a comprehensive post-symphonic work, combining folk and literary elements with supreme aesthetic intensity<sup>5</sup>.

Although Theodorakis returned to symphonic music after 1980, he never abandoned poetry until the end of his life. Sometimes a rebel, sometimes a folk hero, sometimes romantic, he never stopped relying on poetry and set it to his music. After all, he himself has stated that *“the history of my songs is identical to the history of my life. In order to write this music, I had to live through these events”*. Other poems he set to music include those by poets such as Seferis and Ritsos, as well as modern Greek poetry by Karyotakis, etc<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Listen to a characteristic sample of that circle of songs; «Πού πέταξε τ' αγόρι μου» (Lyrics Yannis Ritsos; Music M. Theodorakis; Interpretation Nana Mouschouri): *Γιε μου, σπλάχνο των σπλάχνων μου | καρδούλα της καρδιάς μου | πουλάκι της φτωχιάς αυλής | ανθέ της ερημιάς μου. | Πού πέταξε τ' αγόρι μου | πού πήγε, πού μ' αφήνει. | Χωρίς πουλάκι το κλουβί | χωρίς νερό η κρήνη. | Πώς κλείσαν τα ματάκια σου | και δε θωρείς που κλαίω | και δε σαλεύεις δε γρικιάς | τα που πικρά σου λέω.*

<sup>5</sup> Listen to a characteristic sample of the introduction of «Άξιόν εστι», from a live performance, given in Athens, August 1977, a concert conducted by the composer himself.

<sup>6</sup> There follows an example of interpretation that shows how speech and music can work together; the song «Αν θυμηθείς το όνειρό μου» (Lyrics N. Gat-

*Manos Hadjidakis*

Manos Hadjidakis, on the other hand, was a composer of the same generation as Mikis Theodorakis, with whom he was the same age. The two of them were the driving forces behind the art song movement in Greece, but they approached it in completely different ways. Hadjidakis, although he was a lover of poetry and had a deep knowledge of it, was very sparing in setting it to music, as he believed that poetry and music are self-sufficient and that it is not necessary for them to be combined and coexist. Thus, the setting of poems by older or newer poets to music constitutes a minority of his work. Instead, a large part of his work is based on lyrics written by poets with the intention of being set to music, as he was an advocate of the use of high poetic language. In this context, his long-standing collaboration with Nikos Gatsos is a major chapter<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, Hadjidakis' composition called «Μεγάλος Ερωτικός» (composed in 1972) is a landmark work in the history of Greek song. Its composition is based on works by Greek poets of all ages, from Euripides and Sappho to Seferis and Gatsos, and from Hortatsis and Solomos to Cavafis and Elytis<sup>8</sup>.

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sos; Music M. Theodorakis; Interpretation Giovanna). Στην αγκαλιά μου κι απόψε σαν άστρο κοιμήσου | δεν απομένει στον κόσμο ελπίδα καμιά | τώρα που η νύχτα κεντά με φιλιά το κορμί σου | μέτρα τον πόνο κι άσε με μόνο στην ερημιά. | Αν θυμηθείς τ' όνειρό μου | σε περιμένω να 'ρθεις | μ' ένα τραγούδι του δρόμου να 'ρθεις, όνειρό μου | το καλοκαίρι που λάμπει τ' αστέρι με φως να ντυθείς.

<sup>7</sup> An example of the collaboration between Hadjidakis and Gatsos; high poetic and musical aesthetics; the song «Αθανασία» (Lyrics N. Gatsos; Music M. Hadjidakis; Interpretation Dimitra Galani). Τι ζητάς αθανασία στο μπαλκόνι μου μπροστά | δε μου δίνεις σημασία κι η καρδιά μου πώς βαστά | Σ' αγαπήσανε στον κόσμο βασιλιάδες, ποιητές | κι ένα κλωναράκι δυόσμο δεν τούς χάρισες ποτές. | Είσαι σκληρή σαν του θανάτου τη γροθιά | μα ήρθαν καιροί που σε πιστέψαμε βαθιά | Κάθε γενιά δική της θέλει να γενείς | Ομορφονιά, που δε σε κέρδισε κανείς. | Τι ζητάς αθανασία στο μπαλκόνι μου μπροστά | ποια παράξενη θυσία η ζωή να σου χρωστά | Ήρθαν διψασμένοι Κροίσοι, ταπεινοί προσκυνητές | κι απ' τον κήπου σου τη βρύση δεν τους πότισες ποτές. | Είσαι σκληρή σαν του θανάτου τη γροθιά | μα ήρθαν καιροί που σε πιστέψαν βαθιά | Κάθε γενιά δική της θέλει να γενείς | Ομορφονιά, που δε σε κέρδισε κανείς.

<sup>8</sup> Let's listen to a characteristic sample of that circle of songs; «Κρατατά ως θάνατος αγάπη» (Lyrics taken from Solomon «Άσμα Ασμάτων»; Music M. Hadjidakis; Interpretation Fleri Dadonaki & Dimitrios Psarianos).

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The composer writes in «Μεγάλος Ερωτικός» album notes: *The Great Erotic is a folk God who lives in our imagination from the moment we are born until we die, beautiful, adolescent, and eternally alive [...] The sequence of these poems by Greek poets forms an unbroken circle of songs, a liturgy for the Great Erotic – something like the Vespers of Saints in churches with the participation of imaginary angels, lovers, virgins, and adolescents. It is a strange Litany, but also so natural, in our inner and secret life. I tried to create simple songs, but not easy ones [...] The Great Erotic is a series of folk songs, written first and foremost to communicate with all the Greek people I love deeply, those I have known, those I will know, and those I will never be able to know. And also, through them, to unite with the soul of my homeland in an immortal, erotic, and Greek ritual.*

\* \* \*

The latest comments eloquently link the musical creations of our two great composers, based on Greek poetry, with the earlier performing and musical tradition of Hellenism, as we know it from antiquity and also through Byzantium. I would like, due to my personal expertise, as a Professor of Byzantine Musicology and the Art of Chanting, to focus for a moment on this invisible but certainly understandable link between our two great composers and the Byzantine and Folk Music traditions, musical traditions of which they were undoubtedly both knowledgeable and proponents<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> For the relationship between the two great composers and the tradition of the so-called Byzantine Music, their influences and inspirations from it, one can listen to a series of related radio-programs given by Panagiotis Andriopoulos, broadcast by the Third Program of Greek Radio, as part of the program “*Egnatia Odos*”, edited and presented by George Dovolos; a. About Hatzidakis: [1] Μάνος Χατζιδάκις, Εκκλησιαστική Ποίηση και Μουσική [1/2] | 25.10.2025 [2] Μάνος Χατζιδάκις, Εκκλησιαστική Ποίηση και Μουσική [2/2] | 26.10.2025; b. About Theodorakis: [1] Ο «Εκκλησιαστικός» Μίκης Θεοδωράκης [1/3] | 08.11.2025

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*Manos Hadjidakis*

It is well known<sup>10</sup>, that Manos Hadjidakis gave a historic lecture on “rebetiko songs” in January 31, 1949, at the Karolos Koun Art Theater. Hadjidakis, although seemingly more distant from ecclesiastical music, often uses modal melodies, especially in his interior works such as «Πασχαλιόγορτα» or parts of «Καπετάν Μιχάλης», where the mystical atmosphere and the use of monophonic themes create similarities with psalmody. Hadjidakis said in that historic speech: *“Rebetiko songs are built on these rhythms, and by observing their melodic line, we can clearly discern the influence, or rather the extension, of Byzantine chant. Not only by examining the scales, which remain unchanged from the folk musicians’ repertoire, but also by observing the cadences, intervals, and manner of performance. All reveal the source, which is none other than the strict and uncompromising ecclesiastical hymnody”*.

Hadjidakis’ comparison of rebetiko songs with folk songs, Byzantine Music, and classical music is certainly impressive, in a way that draws in examples from other arts. Of course, no one can dispute Hadjidakis’s “musical” arguments; even though he was very young at the time, he was already considered a great talent and was actively involved in what was happening in the field. He added at the time: *“To explain the basic extension of the Byzantine element in rebetiko, one can see how similar the atmosphere created by the decline of Byzantium was to our own today [...] Thus, the expressive elements of the crumbling*

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[2] Ο «Εκκλησιαστικός» Μίκης Θεοδωράκης [2/3] | 09.11.2025 [3] Ο «Εκκλησιαστικός» Μίκης Θεοδωράκης [3/3] | 15.11.2025. Cf.. additionally, Panagiotis Andriopoulos, Τα Χατζιδάκια, Athens 2023; Idem, Τα Θεοδωρακικά, Athens 2025.

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://www.mousikogramma.gr/se\\_aspro\\_mauro/arthro/o\\_manos\\_xatzidakis\\_dinei\\_mia\\_istoriki\\_dialeksi\\_gia\\_to\\_rempetiko\\_sto\\_theatro\\_texnis\\_to\\_1949-5951/#gsc.tab=0](https://www.mousikogramma.gr/se_aspro_mauro/arthro/o_manos_xatzidakis_dinei_mia_istoriki_dialeksi_gia_to_rempetiko_sto_theatro_texnis_to_1949-5951/#gsc.tab=0). Cf. Lambros Liavas, «Η διάλεξη του Μάνου Χατζιδάκι για το Ρεμπέτικο. Από τον “λαϊκό εξπρεσιονισμό” στο “έντεχνο λαϊκό” τραγούδι», in Evangelos Karamanēs (ed.), Λόγος παράδοσης, έργο ζωής. Τιμητικός τόμος για την Αικατερίνη Πολυμέρου-Καμηλάκη. Vol. II, pp. 779-798. Athens 2025: Academy of Athens.

*Byzantium, with their immediate passivity, find a familiar atmosphere in rebetiko –i.e. the contemporary folk song– to develop and compose the current expressive form of an equally intense passivity [...] What music of ours can claim today that it is beyond Byzantine music, beyond folk song and, in the worst case, beyond the broken ancient columns of the Parthenon and the Erechtheion, and that it is found where all these were in their time? Rebetiko song is originally Greek, uniquely Greek”.*

In his speech, Hadjidakis used live performances of traditional rebetiko songs (by *Vamvakaris* and *Bellou*), which effectively confirmed his views on the connections between Byzantine and traditional musical traditions and contemporary musical creation. Hypothetically speaking, I would like to point out that one of the songs that Hadjidakis could have referred to at that time, and which the audience of his historic speech on “rebetiko songs” could have heard, could have been the well-known melody of *Misirlou*.

*“Misirlou”*

*Misirlou*<sup>11</sup>, is a song that originated in Greece as a rebetiko and became a worldwide hit, with covers in different musical styles (Jazz, Oriental, Rock, etc.). *Misirlou* means a “woman from *Misir*” (*Misir* means *Egypt* in Arabic) and refers to a Muslim woman from Egypt. *Misirlou* is a “slow zeibekiko”, which was first heard in Athens at around 1927 by the band of Dimitris Patrinos, a musician from Smyrna who came to the capital with the wave of refugees from the Asia Minor Catastrophe. The song refers to the love of a Christian for a Muslim woman, a taboo subject at that time and beyond. The melody either existed previously and was familiar throughout the Ottoman Empire, or was the result of a collective effort by Patrinos’ band. The only thing that is certain is that Patrinos

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<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.sansimera.gr/articles/306>

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wrote the lyrics. The song's international career began in 1930 in the USA, with its release by the so-called "Orthophonic" record company of Greek-American Tetos Dimitriadis<sup>12</sup>.

### Μισιρλού

πηγή: Τετος Δημητριάδης (1927)

$\text{♩} = 110-120$

Μι - σιρ λου μου η γλω κια σου μα - πα Φλο - γο με χι α - να - φει μοσ στην καρ - δια -

Αχ για - χα - μι - μι Αχ για - λε - λε - λι Αχ Τα δυο σου χι - λι στα - ζου - νε με - λι

Αχ Α

μην Μι - σιρ - λου. Τρε - λα θα μι - ρι - θει

δεν υ - πο - φε - ρω - πα Αχ θα σε κλε - ψω μοσ απ την Α - ρα - πα

The melodic development of *Misirlou*, as it was performed by Tetos Dimitriadis (1927), recorded into Staff Notation by Alexandros Kapsokavadis

In 1941, another Greek-American musician Nikos Roubanis, changed the tone and melody, giving it the oriental sound with which it is known today. He even made sure to register his name as the song's composer. Since no one challenged his right to do so, Roubanis is credited as the composer of *Misirlou* throughout the world except Greece. Immediately after Roubanis' arrangement, the song was included in the repertoire of the great orchestras of the swing era, but *Misirlou*'s great success came in the early 1960<sup>s</sup>, while in 1994 *Misirlou* came back into the spotlight when it was featured in Quentin Tarantino's cult film *Pulp Fiction*<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Listen to the original musical version of "Misirlou", performed by the aforementioned Tetos Dimitriadis in New York, 1927.

<sup>13</sup> Listen Misirlou's melody according to the version that could be heard in *Pulp Fiction* film.

Poetry Set to Music: the example of Theodorakis and Hadjidakis

What few people, even among musicologists, do not know is that the basic part of the melody of *Misirlou* has an older and well-documented history, linking it to a very ancient tradition of Byzantine Music.

In Byzantine Music Theory there is a pedagogical scheme, through which aspects of Byzantine Music Theory were practically taught; that was the so-called *Wheel of the Chromatic Modes of the Byzantine Octaechia*, which was a scheme formed as one can see below and according to which the so-called Chromatic Genus of the Byzantine Music Modes was taught<sup>14</sup>.



G. Konstantinou, *Theory and Practice of the Ecclesiastical Music*, Vatopediou Monastery on Mount Athos<sup>6</sup> 2013, p. 334

A great Byzantine Music tutor, Chrysanthos of Madytos, has explained the way that the said scheme was practically approached, in his theoretical treatise entitled *Great Theory of Music*<sup>15</sup>, where one can also find written down how the mu-

<sup>14</sup> See Achilleas G. Chaldæakes, "Plato's Influences in the Greek Religious Music Theory", in *Proceedings of the Greek-Chinese Conference "Jixia Academy and Plato's Academy – Chinese and Greek Classical Civilizations Summit Forum"* (Zibo, September 2018); forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> See Chrysanthos of Madytos, *Great Theory of Music*, trans. K. Romanou, New York 2010, pp. 123-5<sup>§§246-52</sup> [; "On the Notes of the Chromatic Genus"].



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*ne Octaechia*) is given below [transcribed into Staff Notation by Theodore Karathodoros], with a transposition in the same tone as the pre-stated melody of *Misirlou* and, in addition, under the same melodic development, formed according to a sequence of four identical pairs of musical phrases of its individual ascending and descending scale degrees:

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff is labeled 'Psaltis' and is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a series of eighth notes, with some beamed together. Below the staff, the lyrics are: 'ne a nes ne na no ne a nes ne na no ne a nes ne na no ne a nes ne na no ne che a'. The second staff is labeled 'Ps.' and starts at measure 10. It is in 4/4 time with the same key signature. The melody continues with eighth notes and a final half note. Below the staff, the lyrics are: 'nes ne na no ne che a nes ne na no ne che a nes ne na no ne che a nes ne na no ne a nes'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as stems, beams, and note heads.

It is obvious that this chromatic scale forms the main part of the aforementioned internationally famous melody, the one known under the title *Misirlou*; judging by specific parts of the latter composition [see, specifically, bars 4-8 & 27-34 of the pre-stated musical example], it is for sure that anyone can recognize the similarities between *Misirlou's* melody and the above chromatic scale [see, specifically, bars 5-9 of the last musical example], similarities that are immediately apparent not only in *Misirlou's* original Greek version but even in the version that could be heard in *Pulp Fiction* film.

Even though this melody is worldwide known, it is not respectively known that its prototype is based in the way a byzantine chanter could simply perform a full chromatic scale through the aforementioned “*wheel of the chromatic Modes*”; so, it has to be known that the hidden origin of the melody under discussion is found from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the tradition of the Byzantine Music Theory and that its melodic development is written down through the Byzantine Notation in 1832 in Chrysanthos's *Great Theory of Music*.

This ancient Byzantine musical tradition, strongly connected over the years with the corresponding folk music tra-

dition and popular music in general, inevitably influenced (either explicitly or implicitly) our two great composers. It is characteristic the following popular song by Manos Hadjidakis, which undoubtedly resembles an “unmade” folk or popular Greek song. Legend has it that the poet and lyricist Eftychia Papagiannopoulou slipped the paper with the lyrics of the song under the door of Manos Hadjidakis’ house at a time when the song was being transformed at the expense of the old folk composers. Hadjidakis created this famous song, one of the greatest “zeibekiko” songs of all time, which was loved through the voice of Grigoris Bithikotsis and the amazing bouzouki performance by Giorgos Zambetas<sup>16</sup>.

#### *Mikis Theodorakis*

On the other hand, Mikis Theodorakis, especially in «Ἄξιόν ἐστι», adopts inflections and melodic lines that refer to ecclesiastical music compositions and Byzantine Music idioms. The alternation of a “psalmodic recitativo” with composition-al parts, and the intense use of modal musical elements (taken, especially, from the so-called 4<sup>th</sup> plagal Mode) testify to influences from the eight-Modes system of Byzantine Music.

We must not overlook the fact that the poets themselves, whose works were set to music, were influenced by Byzantine Hymnography. Odysseas Elytis, especially in «Ἄξιόν ἐστι», adopts ecclesiastical rhetoric and hymnological structure. His language is sometimes laudatory, full of references to theological language and liturgical hymnology.

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<sup>16</sup> Listen to the aforementioned composition «Εἶμ’ ἀητός χωρίς φτερά», a song with a characteristic refrain that repeats the inspired lyrics bidirectional (similar to folk songs): *I am an eagle without wings | without love and joy : without love and joy | I am an eagle without wings. Σαν τον αετό είχα φτερά | και πέταγα πολύ ψηλά | Μα ένα χέρι λατρεμένο | ένα χέρι λατρευτό | Μου τα κόβει τα φτερά μου | για να μη ψηλά πετώ. | Εἶμ’ ἀητός χωρίς φτερά | χωρίς αγάπη και χαρά | Χωρίς αγάπη και χαρά | εἶμ’ ἀητός χωρίς φτερά. | Το χέρι αυτό το λατρευτό | μες στη ζωή θα τ’ αγαπώ | Ότι και να μου χ’ει κάνει | όλα του τα συγχωρώ | Με φτερούγες τσακισμένες | πάντα εγώ θα τ’ αγαπώ. | Εἶμ’ ἀητός χωρίς φτερά | χωρίς αγάπη και χαρά | Χωρίς αγάπη και χαρά | εἶμ’ ἀητός χωρίς φτερά.*

## Poetry Set to Music: the example of Theodorakis and Hadjidakis

A characteristic example is the poem «Ανοίγω το στόμα μου κι αναγαλλιάζει το πέλαγος»<sup>17</sup>, in which Odysseas Elytis closely followed the metrical form of the Kanon sung during the service of the so-called *Akathistos Hymn*, and more specifically from the 1<sup>st</sup> Ode of this Kanon, which begins with the phrase «Ανοίξω το στόμα μου και πληρωθήσεται Πνεύματος».

It should be noted that Elytis' poem consists of five stanzas, and it is certainly no coincidence that the poet followed the structure of the aforementioned Kanon of the *Akathistos Hymn*, any one of the eight in total Odes of which is also consists of five stanzas, namely the first and guiding hymn (the so-called *Heirmos*) and another four *Troparia*, which follow precisely the metrical and rhythmic structure, as well as the melody, of the *Heirmos*.

The *Heirmoi* of this Kanon are poems by John of Damascus (8<sup>th</sup> century), while the rest poems, the so-called *Troparia*, are the work of Joseph the Hymnographer (9<sup>th</sup> century).

For comparison, see below the lyrics of Elytis' «Ανοίγω το στόμα μου» alternately with the lyrics of the poems by John of Damascus (*Heirmos*) and Joseph the Hymnographer (*Troparia*). The metrical and rhythmic similarity is obvious:

John of Damascus (Heirmos)	Odysseas Elytis's «Αξιόν εστι»
Ανοίξω το στόμα μου, και πληρωθήσεται Πνεύματος και λόγον ερεύξομαι, τη βασιλιδι Μητρί και οφθήσομαι φαιδρός πανηγυρίζων και άσω γηθόμενος ταύτης τα θαύματα.	Ανοίγω το στόμα μου κι αναγαλλιάζει το πέλαγος Και παίρνει τα λόγια μου στις σκοτεινές του σπηλιές Και στις φώκιες τις μικρές τα ψιθυρίζει Τις νύχτες που κλαιν των ανθρώπων τα βάσανα.
Joseph the Hymnographer (1 <sup>st</sup> Troparion)	– ≈ –
Χριστού βιβλον έμφυχον, εσφραγισμένην σε πνεύματι ο μέγας Αρχάγγελος, Αγνή θεώμενος επεφώνει σοι χαίρε, χαράς δοχείον δι' ης της προμήτορος αρά λυθήσεται.	Χαράζω τις φλέβες μου και κοκκινίζουν τα όνειρα Και τσέρκουλα γίνονται στις γειτονιές των παιδιών Και σεντόνια στις κοπέλες που αγρυπνούνε Κρυφά για ν' ακούν των ερώτων τα θαύματα

Since it is clear that Elytis wrote «Ανοίγω το στόμα μου» based (as a model) on the lyrical and metrical structure of «Ανοίξω

<sup>17</sup> See: <https://emiliusx.blogspot.com/2011/01/o.html>

το στόμα μου» by John of Damascus, it would not be risky to observe that we could easily “chant” Elytis’ poem as has been suggested from time to time by Byzantine and post-Byzantine composers, as well as by the collective ecclesiastical musical tradition, since Elytis’ latter poem “obeys” and “resembles” Damaskenos’ original well-known melody!

If we attempted something similar, this popular poem by Elytis could be sung by anyone, just like the *Troparia* of the *Akathistos Hymn*! Such an attempt, which to our knowledge has not been attempted or proposed until now, would be poetically and musically revelatory<sup>18</sup>.

### Ἦχος κατά Βου<sup>κ</sup>

The image displays two columns of musical notation for the hymn "Ἦχος κατά Βουκ". Each column contains four staves of music. The left column is marked with a large red 'Α' and the right column with a large red 'Β'. The text is in Greek and appears to be a liturgical hymn. The notation includes neumes and a four-line staff.

<sup>18</sup> The following example is based on the melodic pattern of performative interpretation of the *Heirmos* in question («Ανοιξω το στόμα μου»), as established by a musical record made by Protopsaltis Petros Byzantios († 1808); this specific musical development is identically taken as it is written down in the following edition: *Ειρμολόγιον των καταβασιών Πέτρου του Πελοποννησίου, μετά του συντόμου Ειρμολογίου Πέτρου Πρωτοψάλτου του Βυζαντίου. Εξηγημένα κατά την νέαν της μουσικής μέθοδον μετά προσθήκης ικανών μαθημάτων, ων εσπερούντο εις το παλαιόν. Επιθεωρηθέντα ήδη, και ακριβώς διορθωθέντα παρά του Διδασκάλου Χουρμουζιου Χαρτοφύλακος [...], Κωνσταντινούπολις, εν τη Βρεταννική Τυπογραφία Κάστρου εις Γαλατάν, αωκε'* [*Heirmologion, composed by (A) Petros Peloponnesios (slow version) & (B) Petros Byzantios (fast version), Constantinople 1825*], p. [B]

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Furthermore, if we would like to apply older, slower, and more melismatic musical proposals, given for Damascenos' *Heirms* by the relevant Byzantine Music tradition formed from time to time, the performative way of singing Elytis' new poems would be different, giving rise to even more interesting poetic and musical observations. Let us listen, for example, to how this poem would sound according to the slow melody of «Ανοιξω το στόμα μου», as composed in Constantinople by a great 18<sup>th</sup>-century composer, Petros Peloponnesios († 1778).<sup>19</sup>:

Ἦχος *νέου* Βου

70. As it is clearly shown, in relation to the melodic pattern, some minor changes to the melody are necessary in order to always highlight the meaning of each poem. These changes can even be found in the *Troparia* of the Byzantine Hymnography (composed by Joseph the Hymnographer), which must necessarily be adapted to the traditional metrical and melodic model of John of Damascus. Indeed, as can be seen in the table above, these necessary changes (which are marked in red ink in the score written in Byzantine Notation recorded here) are (indicatively) more numerous in Joseph's *Troparia* than in Elytis' contemporary poem, a fact that is highly remarkable and absolutely eloquent.<sup>19</sup> The following example, based on the melodic pattern of performative interpretation of the *Heirmos* in question («Ανοιξω το στόμα μου»), as established by a musical record made by the said Petros Peloponnesios († 1778), is identically taken as it is written down in the aforementioned *Heirmologion* edition (pp. [A] 67-8). In this case, it is certainly noteworthy that the adaptation of Elytis's latest poem to the metrical and melodic model (of John Damaskenus and Petros Peloponnesios, respectively) is so fitting that no changes or alterations are necessary.

## Achilleas Chaldaeakes

It is interesting to note that the latter melody bears a few melodic similarities to the well-known composition by Mikis Theodorakis<sup>20</sup>, as can be seen in the following comparative example, based on the first phrase of both musical versions in question<sup>21</sup>:

Voice

Α νοι - γω το στο μα - μου κι α

Psaltis

Α νοι ζω - το στο - μα - μου - ου

It should be noted that Theodorakis himself described himself as a “*child of the Church*” and spoke of the greatness of Byzantine Music, which influenced his work<sup>22</sup>. When asked: “*Is there a song that you hold close to your heart, one of your songs, that is your mysticism, your essence? Is there a song that resonates with you the most?*”, Mikis’ answer is revealing:

*“I won’t talk about my own song, but I am a child of the Church. I am a child who was born with Byzantine Music. And that is precisely why I included all three hymns in my third symphony – «Αι γενεαί πάσα» and so on. But of course, the bedrock on which I stood as a person and as a musician is «Τη Υπερμάχω». That’s where everything in music begins and ends, I think”.*

Mikis Theodorakis “*represents, perhaps more than any other Greek composer, the embodiment of the division of our art music between its national roots (folk songs, Byzantine melodies, rebetiko) and the West*”. I would like to conclude this paper with a song by Mikis that particularly moves me, in

<sup>20</sup> Listen to the aforementioned composition «Ανοίγω το στόμα μου», by the historic interpretation of Gr. Bithikotsis.

<sup>21</sup> The score of Theodorakis’s composition is taken from the Digital Collection of his Archive; specifically, is found at the following site: <https://digital.mmb.org.gr/digma/handle/123456789/37760>. The slow melody of «Ανοίξω το στόμα μου», as composed by Petros Peloponnesios, is transcribed into Staff Notation by Theodore Karathodoros.

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://edromos.gr/zosa-vyzantini-paradosi-kai-mikis-theodorakis/>

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a sensitive live performance by Yannis Parios (Athens, 2001); Michalis Ganas' introverted lyrics become the canvas on which Theodorakis, with sensitivity and heart-rending emotion, created a unique melody, that touch the souls of listeners directly, as an antidote to oblivion in the memory of every physical and spiritual erotic passion we had in our lives<sup>23</sup>.

\* \* \*

Poetry set to music in Greece is not simply a cultural phenomenon, but an act of composing and transcribing words into a musical experience. Theodorakis and Hadjidakis were not simply composers but creators of a new aesthetic style, that bridged poetry with music. Both consciously or unconsciously drew on the Byzantine tradition, both in music and in poetry, confirming that modern Greek art bears deep traces of its spiritual origins. Thus, despite their different starting points, both composers show influences from Byzantine Music in various works, either directly or through the traditional music of the East, which preserves Byzantine remnants.

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<sup>23</sup> Listen to the aforementioned composition «Πώς να ξεχάσω». *Απ' τη ζωή μου δε θα βγεις ποτέ, | ζωή δική μου και ζωή μου δυο φορές. | Χαρά στη λύπη μου και λύπη στις χαρές, | πώς να ξεχάσω, πώς να ξεχάσω... | Τα μεγάλα μάτια που με χάιδεψαν... | τα ζεστά σου χέρια που με άγγιξαν... | και τα τόσα λόγια που δεν πρόλαβα... | σε βαθύ πηγάδι θα το πω, πόσο σ' αγαπώ. | Απ' το κορμί μου δε θα βγεις ποτέ, | δικό μου σώμα και κορμί μου δυο φορές. | Χαρά στον πόνο μου και τραύμα στις χαρές, | πώς να ξεχάσω, πώς να ξεχάσω...*

## LINKS

- Note 1 - «Κράτησα τη ζωή μου»:  
<https://youtu.be/x2CwtgsyB1w?si=IgLPoWeGZSzkKJZA>
- Note 2 - «Χάρτινο το φεγγαράκι»:  
<https://youtu.be/uuMiVTHURjk?si=l7C7-qliCFppSM5k>
- Note 4 - «Πού πέταξε τ' αγόρι μου»:  
[https://youtu.be/j-mWzI5fBrg?si=3\\_ocQEZGS26igVcX](https://youtu.be/j-mWzI5fBrg?si=3_ocQEZGS26igVcX)
- Note 5 - «Αξιόν εστι»:  
<https://youtu.be/TrXeUleShYk?si=4aKlvy95Cr2xRwSn>
- Note 6 - «Αν θυμηθείς το όνειρό μου»:  
<https://youtu.be/VfsSlayrtNY?si=sVvaH0YGtUufqaJs>
- Note 7 - «Αθυνασία»:  
[https://youtu.be/p\\_84TnU\\_3X8?si=zJ3kNT2g\\_uLXT1tt](https://youtu.be/p_84TnU_3X8?si=zJ3kNT2g_uLXT1tt)
- Note 8 - «Κραταιά ως θάνατος αγάπη»:  
<https://youtu.be/BTENbpLdM5U?si=fKWVMkpN4ElsZ1-2>
- Note 9 - a. About Hatzidakis: [1] <https://www.ertecho.gr/radio/trito/show/egnatia-odos/ondemand/1131140/manos-xatzidakis-ekklisiastiki-poiisi-kai-mousiki-1-2-25-10-2025/> [2] <https://www.ertecho.gr/radio/trito/show/egnatia-odos/ondemand/1131154/manos-xatzidakis-ekklisiastiki-poiisi-kai-mousiki-2-2-26-10-2025/>;  
b. About Theodorakis: [1] <https://www.ertecho.gr/radio/trito/show/egnatia-odos/ondemand/1142147/o-ekklisiastikos-mikis-theodorakis-1-3-08-11-2025/> [2] <https://www.ertecho.gr/radio/trito/show/egnatia-odos/ondemand/1142157/o-ekklisiastikos-mikis-theodorakis-2-3-09-11-2025/> [3] <https://www.ertecho.gr/radio/trito/show/egnatia-odos/ondemand/1142167/o-ekklisiastikos-mikis-theodorakis-3-3-15-11-2025/>.
- Note 12 - Misirlou:  
<https://youtu.be/LW6qGy3RtwY?si=zPvtjyhr41B5DD0x>

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Note 13 - Pulp Fiction:

[https://youtu.be/1hLIXrIpRe8?si=X3\\_zSgplcX6Q-nAB](https://youtu.be/1hLIXrIpRe8?si=X3_zSgplcX6Q-nAB)

Note 16 - «Είμ' αητός χωρίς φτερά»:

<https://youtu.be/KTJQAf754HU?si=2XV9LL8iAVa6vVxG>

Note 20 - «Ανοίγω το στόμα μου»:

<https://youtu.be/5uE6Yg64FJl?si=OCPP8epFYBSafS-j>

Note 23 - «Πώς να ξεχάσω»:

<https://youtu.be/OWHKnS3R9PA?si=3d2NOv5cAh4xNxoI>

## Note biografiche

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scientifica comprende oltre 200 studi (monografie, articoli, saggi in vari volumi collettanei e riviste scientifiche) su vari argomenti nell'ambito della Musicologia Bizantina e dell'Arte Psaltica. La attività, sia come ricercatore e docente sia come interprete e direttore di *ensemble* musicali, esplora nuovi percorsi verso un approccio globale, poliedrico e innovativo alle sue discipline.

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JANNIS PSYCHOPEDIS: Professore Emerito dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Grecia, è artista greco di fama mondiale tra i più significativi. Ha realizzato un centinaio di mostre tra personali e collettive, due delle quali nella Sala Verifiche del complesso Monumentale Steri (“L'alfabeto di Jannis Psychopedis” e “*Ars poetica*: illusione dell'umanità”), e ha al suo attivo numerosi volumi e saggi su arte, estetica e letteratura. La permanenza a Palermo ha ispirato la creazione della sua opera “Palermo: faces & ruins”.

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DIMITRIS VERNIKOS: Regista e produttore. Dopo aver compiuto gli studi alla National Film School (Londra), ha collaborato con la ERT (Radiotelevisione nazionale greca), producendo documentari, film, serie televisive, programmi culturali e musicali. Ha al suo attivo diversi film tra cui ricordiamo: *Μάνος Χατζιδάκις - Είδωλο στον καθρέφτη* (2008).

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