



NAXOS

TOPOS

20th-Century Greek Orchestral Music

CONSTANTINIDIS
KALOMIRIS
MICHAELIDES
SKALKOTTAS

Noé Inui, Violin
Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra
Zoi Tsokanou

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Five Greek Dances (1933/36, arr. 1938/1940–47)		10:43
(edition for string orchestra by Walter Goehr from the composer's arrangement for string quartet)		
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'*Topos*' (pl. '*topoi*') has multiple connotations for Greeks and non-Greeks alike. It means 'land' or 'place', and in the expression '*o topos mou*' ('my land') it affectionately signifies the land or place of origin, be it small or large: a village, a city, a country. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'topos' also as a 'traditional or conventional literary or rhetorical theme or topic'. An analogue in music is the musical 'topos': a stylised, modified original musical sign with extra-musical associations, like a horn call that refers to hunting.

The four composers on this album lived, studied and worked in various lands: Cyprus, the Ottoman Empire, England, France, Germany, Russia and Greece. But each drew inspiration from his *topos*, be it a city (Smyrna, now Izmir, for Kalomiris and Constantinidis) or a country (Cyprus for Michaelides and Greece for the other three). The musical *topoi* they shared, however, are enclosed within Greek folk music.

Topos in all its meanings, therefore, emerges as a unifying notion for these composers. Inevitably, all had to deal with the issue of incorporating folk rhythms and melodies meaningfully into art music, by devising creative ways of handling the available rhythmic or melodic material, be it folk or folk-like. Ultimately, they had to negotiate their national identity through their art, as did composers with nationalist musical tendencies everywhere.

Solon Michaelides (1905–1979):

***Dawn at the Parthenon* ('Avgi ston Parthenona')**
(1934/36)

Greek-Cypriot composer, conductor and musicologist Solon Michaelides founded the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra in 1959. Two years earlier he had been appointed director of the Thessaloniki State Conservatory. Considered the foremost representative of the Cypriot National School of Music and a member of the post-1930 Greek National School, Michaelides's style contains elements of modality, Byzantine chant and folk

music; but the earliest works from 1933 onwards are infused with the aroma of French Impressionism. *Dawn at the Parthenon* is a pure example of those influences. In its 1933 version it was titled *Morning Awakening* ('Proino xipnima'), written a few months before Michaelides would leave Paris after studies at the École Normale de Musique (with Nadia Boulanger) and the Schola Cantorum. Assuming its current title as the first of the *Two Greek Symphonic Pictures* most likely in 1936, *Dawn* portrays the tranquillity of an early morning at the Athenian Acropolis. Sensitive orchestration in the Impressionist vein and cast in a neo-modal harmonic *topos*, the piece opens with harmonics in the muted strings dyeing the sky with the bronze tint of the dawning light. After a simple melody in the harp, a muted solo trumpet reveals the clear horizon. Birdcalls in the woodwinds signal the awakening of nature (a broad theme in the oboe), followed by a chorale-like section where the brass highlight 'peaceful happiness', according to Michaelides. The last segment of the piece begins with the warm tone of the strings, as woodwinds and brass compound to create an exultant, apothecotic conclusion. The Parthenon is gloriously bathed in sunlight.

Manolis Kalomiris (1883–1962):

Island Pictures, Suite for Solo Violin and Orchestra
(*'Nissiotikes zografies'*) (1928, rev. 1939)

Manolis Kalomiris was the most imposing figure of the Greek National School of Music. As a composer, educator, textbook author, music critic, polemicist, administrator and holder of numerous official positions, he shaped the country's musical life for more than half a century until his death in 1962. During his Viennese studies (1901 to 1906) he was influenced by 19th-century Austro-Germanic ideology, and became an ardent admirer of Wagner's music dramas. While teaching in Kharkov (1906 to 1910) he became acquainted with the music of the Russian nationalists, and after settling in

Athens he was instrumental in constructing a (if not his own) Greek national music identity. Already demoralised by the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe and the burning of his native Smyrna, he took a devastating blow a year later when his teenage son died. This 'horrible tragedy', as he later described it, coupled with increasing problems with his partners at the conservatory he had founded, led to meagre artistic creation for a decade. He visited Paris, however, for lectures and concerts of his music, and in 1927 he became familiar with traditional Dodecanese melodies from Kasos Island, harmonising a few. As a result, in April 1928 his *Island Pictures (Suite on Motifs from the Dodecanese)* was premiered as a four-movement work, and after a 1939 revision the work appeared as a three-movement suite.

The first movement, *To the Dawn*, features a pensive melody apparently of Kalomiris's own invention. It unfolds repeatedly in the solo violin over a subtle rhythmic ostinato with cordial woodwind interlucations, in a quasi-modal and mostly static harmonic environment. A vivacious folk-like dance is briefly interjected for contrast, until the original theme is reinstated and engaged with juxtaposing countermelodies, as soloist and ensemble alternate roles. These gentle contrapuntal interventions lead to a condensed iteration of the violin melody against the harp's arpeggiated colouristic backdrop. As the English horn makes its final appearance with the solo, the last chord depicts the orange halo of a sunrise.

The *Kalamatianos* dance in 7/8 metre forms the rhythmic backbone of the second movement, *Lullaby*. Slow and hypnotic, it works like a silk carpet for a heterophonic treatment of the folk song melody through development and modification. The non-standard scalic passages in the harp help create the magical atmosphere of an exotic fairy tale.

The final movement, *Sousta*, originates from an ancient lively Cretan military dance. By tossing the numerous short phrases between soloist and orchestra, Kalomiris avoids monotony and focuses on creative harmonic treatment. The soloist finally displays some virtuosity, especially in a short cadenza leading to an exuberant concluding section. *Island Pictures* is a

testament to the profound impression Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* had made on Kalomiris when he first heard it in Vienna.

Yannis Constantinidis (1903–1984): Dodecanesian Suites Nos. 1 and 2 (1948/49)

Also born in cosmopolitan Smyrna, 20 years after Kalomiris, Yannis Constantinidis grew up listening to Italian *canzonettas* and Greek traditional or urban songs. His encounter with folk song came around the age of six in the rustic environs of Smyrna. These melodies and rhythms were etched into his memory for life. French, Italian and Greek operas and operettas constituted the musical entertainment of the city's upper-middle class. He became familiar with European music through piano and orchestral scores, mostly by French (Debussy, Ravel et al.) and German composers (Wagner and R. Strauss). The early 20th-century French Impressionist style elicited favourable emotional reactions, which can be traced throughout his creative output. He fled Smyrna before its destruction in 1922 and ended up in Berlin at Skalkottas's encouragement. The two became friends, studying and performing together. From 1923 until 1931 Constantinidis studied in the thriving capital of the Weimar Republic, imbibing its intense musical life. Among his teachers was Kurt Weill, who praised the young Greek's 'excellent talent in his handling of the orchestra'.

This became a trait of Constantinidis's orchestral style. Upon his return to Athens, he became one of the most successful Greek composers of vaudeville and musical theatre (under the alias Costas Yannidis). In conjunction with his musical alter ego, he continued to channel his love for Greek folk songs through numerous settings and adaptations which respect the melodic material, drawn mainly from Asia Minor and the Dodecanese Islands. His sensitivity for dance rhythms is evident, but the secret lies in his masterful orchestrations which infuse the original folk melodies with new expressive qualities. His harmonic language is also remarkably Impressionistic.

All these characteristics are perfectly combined in the two *Dodecanesian Suites*. With the music of Michaelides and Kalamiris still resonating and having read the previous commentary, one possesses enough information to appreciate the sheer beauty of Constantinidis's *Suites*. It is instantly obvious that in each of these two sets of six stylised dances his craftsmanship in melody, rhythm, harmony, form and orchestration yields a balanced amalgam. Even the internal tempo modifications resulting in character shifts (in all but the second and fourth dances of *Suite No. 1* and the second and fifth dances of *Suite No. 2*) are judiciously placed to sound welcome and natural.

Nikos Skalkottas (1904–1949):

Five Greek Dances (1933/36, arr. 1938/1940–47)
(edition for string orchestra by Walter Goehr from the composer's arrangement for string quartet)

Nikos Skalkottas is universally recognised as a leading member of the Second Viennese School and its most prominent Greek composer, who wrote atonal, twelve-tone, neo-Classical and tonal music. A brilliant violinist, Skalkottas moved to Berlin in 1921 at the age of 17 and stayed there until his repatriation in 1933, never to leave Athens again. Although playing the violin in various ensembles and settings remained the main source of income throughout his life, by 1923 he had already turned his efforts to composition. Two of the leading composers with whom he studied were Kurt Weill and Arnold Schoenberg; in fact, the latter considered Skalkottas among his 'most gifted students'.

Early in his life Skalkottas adopted a critical stance towards Greek folk tradition, objecting to the use of Greek themes as a mandatory mantle of musical Greekness. He remarked that 'one could write Greek music without using any Greek theme', and he was bent on proving his point: eleven out of the *36 Greek Dances* employ his own melodic material, often bearing no recognisable folk traits. Indeed, Greek folklore is not to be found in Skalkottas's *Dances*.

The *36 Greek Dances* (composed from 1931 to 1936 in three sets of twelve) predate Constantinidis's *Suites*, yet in their fully orchestrated original form surpass them on all levels: ingenious elaboration of the melodic material, harmonic innovation, rhythmic and formal inventiveness, orchestrated to perfection. Content and form become one, and Skalkottas opens a path connecting Greece with Europe, in a conscious effort to overcome musical parochialism and present a large-scale complete work to international audiences.

Skalkottas's arrangements of some of the dances for solo piano and various ensembles confirm his desire for wider dissemination. Most popular is the adaptation of *Five Greek Dances* for string orchestra, based on his own string quartet arrangement and edited posthumously (with added double bass part) by the German conductor Walter Goehr (1903–1960), a friend and fellow student of Skalkottas in Schoenberg's composition class. This is the most familiar version to Greek and international audiences alike.

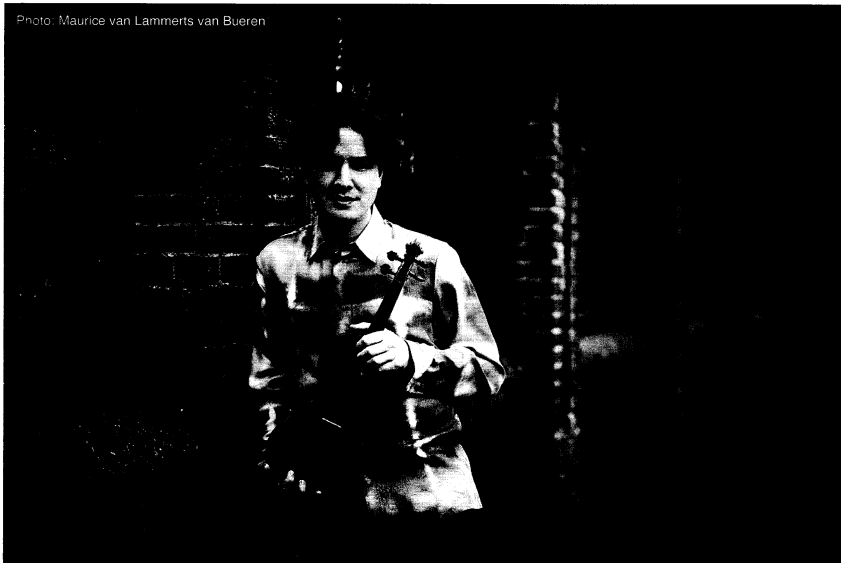
No. 1. Epirotikos is a dynamic and rhythmically vigorous dance. Skalkottas's own theme displays some generic folk-like melodic traits, but equally interesting is the interplay between major and minor scales with some modal inflections. Based on two folk tunes from Crete, *No. 2. Kretikos* sounds like a couple exchanging teasing comments, with hints of wry humour (notice the shrieking melodic exclamations in the high register and the subtle chromatic chuckles underneath the melody). Also featuring a folk melody is *No. 3. Tsamikos*, a richly orchestrated dance with chromatic and contrapuntal motion. The theme of *No. 4. Arkadikos* makes no folk pretences; however, it conveys a pastoral mood with grace, as it unfolds mostly over single or double drones. Finally, the intoxicating rhythmic drive of *No. 5. Kleftikos* provides a fitting conclusion to this set and to the entire album.

I wish to thank composer-conductor and Skalkottas expert Nikos Christodoulou for his valuable advice.

George-Julius Papadopoulos

Noé Inui

Photo: Maurice van Lammerts van Bueren



Born in Brussels in 1985 to a Greek mother and a Japanese father, violinist Noé Inui's character and career have been shaped by a wide variety of influences. He started playing the violin at the tender age of four, and studied at the conservatories of Brussels, Paris, Karlsruhe and Düsseldorf. He became familiar with various 'schools of playing', including the Franco-Belgian, German, and Russian traditions, and was inspired by legendary pedagogues such as Ivan Galamian and Pyotr Stolyarsky. Inui's talents have been recognised internationally, with awards including the Special Prize for Young Talents at the 2005 International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition and the 2007 Louis Spohr Medal. He has also been supported by the Young Concert Artists organisation in New York (2009) and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw (2020), which selected him as one of their Classical Futures Europe artists. Inui is grateful for the guidance and inspiration he has received from musicologist Helga Thoene, as well as violinists Ulf Hoelscher and Rosa Fain.

www.noeinui.com

Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra

Photo: Amanda Protidou



The Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra (TSSO) is one of the major cultural organisations in Greece, and the most historic symphonic ensemble in Northern Greece. Founded in 1959 by the Greek-Cypriot composer Solon Michaelides, it currently comprises 118 musicians. The TSSO honours its role as a public organisation by creating music at the highest level in an accessible way. Its range of activities includes collaborations with highly acclaimed Greek and international artists, the dissemination of Greek musical works, and the implementation of various educational and social projects. The TSSO is Greece's most notable symphonic ensemble on disc, regularly recording for internationally renowned labels such as EMI, BIS and Naxos, with releases garnering much recognition and laudatory reviews as well as various international prizes. Musical collaborations abroad have included successful concerts in Berlin, Munich, Beijing, Prague, Valencia and Florence, among others. The TSSO's current director is Simos Papanas, with Leo McFall serving as principal conductor.

www.tssso.gr

Zoi Tsokanou

Photo: Amanda Protidou



Through multiple opera and concert engagements across Europe, Zoi Tsokanou has made a name for herself with performances characterised by her vivid temperament and true love of making music on stage. Serving as artistic director of the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra from 2017 to 2023, she is the first woman in history to lead a major Greek Orchestra. Tsokanou has worked with distinguished artists such as Gil Shaham, Thomas Hampson, Yulianna Avdeeva, Daniel Lozakovich, Alena Baeva and Daniel Müller-Schott. Between 2014 and 2017 she served as a permanent conductor at the Theater Erfurt, conducting a wide selection of operatic and concert repertoire, and for two years held the position of associate conductor at the West Bohemian Symphony Orchestra. From 2011 to 2014 she was music director of Arosa Music Theatre at the Arosa Festival, and she also served as Bernard Haitink's assistant at the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich. She has won several prizes in international conducting competitions. Born in Thessaloniki, Tsokanou studied piano (Diploma) and musicology (Bachelor), before moving to Zurich to study piano with Konstantin Scherbakov and conducting with Johannes Schlaefli.

www.zoitsokanou.com