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JANI CHRISTOU

Awareness of and identification with the past is a nationalistic feature more present in the Greek character than in perhaps any other European race: proximity to the legends of classical antiquity - often recreated in modern terms - further identifies this close relationship. A translation of tragedy into the romantic image, in the case of individuality of mind and creative ability, brings with it the danger of over-emphasis of events and the formation of a myth divorced from essentials to become a non-reality. Early death when aligned to tragedy tends to heighten such a situation.

The death in a car accident on the 8th January 1970 of the composer Jani Christou on the eve of his forty-fourth birthday deprived Greek artistic life of a rare mind who explored in his work new areas of the imagination. The vehicle in which the tragedy occurred also claimed the lives of the wives of Christou and the composer Stephanos Vassiliades, the last named being the only survivor.

Awareness of the time available for creative work certainly played an important part in Christou's life; his rejection of academic opportunities and anything limiting his life was further accentuated by the energetic fervour with which he himself devoted to composition during his last years. At the time of his death he was engaged on a new concept of opera in The Orestia, a multi-media version in contemporary terms of the classical legend.

Christou was born in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, in 1926 of a Cypriot mother and a Greek father. After studies at the English school in Alexandria he attended King's College, Cambridge, for philosophy with Ludwig Wittgenstein, obtaining his M.A. in 1948. At the same time he studied composition with Hans Redlich and his first accepted work, Phoenix Music, is a product of this period. Serial, and post-Bergian in style, it is an important work, both in its own right and in relation to his later development. The association between philosophy and musical creation became realities early in his life, for it was from the philosophical disciplines, especially logic - the symbolic logic of Russell and the linguistic logic of Wittgenstein to which he attached particular importance - that he derived his later view: that "in order to be validly non-logical it is necessary to master the techniques of logic" - a viewpoint close to statements made more recently by Xenakis in relation to chance and random procedures.

After a short period of study in Italy with Frederico Lavagnino for orchestration and attendance at the courses of the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Sienna he moved to Zurich where for a time he studied

psychology with Carl Jung. Christou's elder brother, a psychologist (who was also to die in a car accident) was working with Jung and guided Christou's development, including, one may presume, areas important in Jung's life that are mirrored in the concepts of "protoperformance" of the composer's later years.

During the next period his musical language was to develop slowly in isolation from the international music scene. He read and studied philosophy, religion, anthropology, psychology, alchemy, magic and pre-history. These activities were an essential part of the discovery of his true self and an individual creative path which incorporated "musical ideas derived from metaphysical speculation"; for, as John G. Papaioannou has observed, "Christou believed unshakably that only from an invincible internal necessity based on a philosophical-metaphysical foundation could the creation of art have meaning for anyone".

His development is important in the attention it gives to the evolution of musical form, beginning with Phoenix Music, where a symmetrical form derived from the "phoenix principal": beginning - drama - end/beginning, follows a complete life-cycle: birth, death and re-birth, yet unlike classical ABA form correctly mirrors the beginning. Here and throughout his work we see the characteristic gesture of Christou in which at a moment of tension (drama), silence or a sudden change to a new area will occur - as at moments of awareness of a new reality. In later works a colourful orchestral palette does on occasions lead to the danger of over-orchestration. The works are purified in language and texture, as also are his evolution of serial and post-serial techniques; the latter in the sphere of rhythm lead to the concept of pattern and permutation and the road to a synthetic notation in which the score is a summation of essential complex elements more clearly defined in the parts.

Clarification of notation to essentials - orchestration and pitch material - is also combined with a complexity of rhythmic possibilities existing in multi-layers of small units. Such melodic and rhythmic units each have a function and can be subjected to processes of permutation or exist as separate entities together with other non-related material. Examples of these are found in Patterns and Permutations (1960) and the Toccatà (1962) and a clarification from complex elements in Six Songs From T.S. Eliot (1955).

The complex structures of Patterns and Permutations are audible in an orchestral work of vivid yet essential colour; it is music for the ear and mind, a dialogue of actions through degrees of complexity that abruptly end as they began. A work of dramatic intensity at the crossroads to the new language of the final years is The Tongues of Fire (1964) for baritone, chorus and orchestra, a Pentecost oratorio set in the period following the resurrection. The chorus enact the drama as seen through the eyes of the

uneducated populace whose semi-pagan religious outlook is mirrored in an emotionally charged score that makes extensive use of new speech possibilities in chanting, whispering and shouting; lamentation with relatively little in the way of sung choral roles. Christou's desire to move beyond the drama itself into the psychology of the people of the time is aided by his studies in pre-history, and realised in the unleashing of emotional forces absent in the devotional oratorio.

Following a series of works for the National Art Theatre, there emerged what in performance may appear to be Christou's outstanding contribution to our time: Mysterion (1966), a setting of the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" for narrators, three choirs, orchestra, actors and tape. This is a work written in the new "synthetic" score notation in which figurative illustrations indicate theatrical and emotional actions; ritualistic-mystical elements dominate the score in the book which is a series of magical incantations from the lore of Egyptian magic - a powerful force in its own right without the particular type of Christou musical alchemy. The enactment of the ancient past through ritual drama here is heightened through the invocation to the Gods of Upper and Lower Egypt in the liturgy for the dead and their resurrection in the after life - the underworld of the animalistic gods of pre-history. Moments of hysteria and trance that move beyond logic are characteristic of Christou's late works.

Ritual instrumental theatre is developed with systematic logic in Praxis (1965). The work exists in two versions, for eleven strings and pianist-conductor (Praxis for 12) and for forty-four strings and pianist-conductor (Praxis) - the two are identical except for minor points of orchestration. The title indicates "purposeful action" which is combined with and alternates with metapraxis: "action beyond rational control" (trance, panic, hysteria). This is further defined by the composer: "a violinist playing the violin is a praxis, a violinist screaming instead of or while playing the violin is a metapraxis... the term metapraxis is meaningful only in the context of concert convention". The musical and metamusical actions of controlled random sound aggregates, trance-like movement across the stage and sounds of hysteria are transmuted into ritual theatre that is logical in its beauty through an invocation of a stillness and meaning beyond the sounds and gestures. The notation of the final version made shortly before the composer's death incorporates visual symbols that clarify the degree and nature of the metapraxis.

The notational procedures of Mysterion and Praxis are used with flexibility in each work that followed; fixed pitches appear less, to be replaced by signs and "traffic signals" together with graphic notation and rhythmic pattern notation. With these new possibilities Christou could realise his intentions with brevity and was able to compose at speed. With such a notation as he required for a ritual re-enactment of moments in pre-history and their valid transformation to present-day situations - the

use of controlled aleatoric procedures involving actors, instruments, and electronics - Christou realised his intentions in a series of thirty-five works for various combinations written between 1966 and 1968. These works all aim at "protoperformance". Protoperformance is the name given to performances in "remote pre-history involving ritualistic re-enactments of the drama of renewal", at a period "when the terror of non-renewal of vital processes in the environment was felt as real". The title of one work, Anaparastasis, means re-enactment. In these works only the climate of protoperformance is attempted, not anything specific; the audience as well as the performers interpret the drama in the light of their own consciousness and the logic or non-logic of the dream material presented.

Anaparastasis for baritone and ensemble premiered at a Musica Viva concert in Munich in November 1968 is a setting of the nightwatchman's opening oration from "The Orestia" of Aeschylus in which he is awaiting a beacon flash signifying the Fall of Troy. The keyword is "release"; allied to this are the names of colours spoken by the conductor as "traffic signs" "keeping a city's circulation under control" and acting as instrumental cues to the players. Combined with this are texts spoken by the players taken from the safety alarm regulations governing fire and the abandonment of a ship at sea. The re-enactment operates on a number of levels incorporating degrees of hysteria. Within the work's short duration these are subdivided into four phases: vocal terror, hypnotic state of the soloist, instrumental panic and sudden solemnity. The meta-action is of terrifying intensity where Christou's flexibility with large volumes of sound is used with masterly control; his use of the crescendo as a formative/generative element is unique. (The device was for him akin to the use by Xenakis of the pizzicato towards differing metamusical ends.) When imitated by other Greek composers since his death and divorced from the rationale behind its use - allied to concepts of pattern, time and a ritual meaning - it is merely an illogical event.

Christou's last completed work was Enantiodromia for orchestra and tape, written at the suggestion of Heinrich Strobel and premiered in Oakland, California in 1969. At the root of this piece is the regulating function of opposites: the forward movement of energy and regression. (The contrawise action of dualities is one of the major psychological laws discovered by Heraclitus). Each instrumental entry is defined by a pattern. There are twenty-seven of these plus simple permutations and each player has a role further extended by a metapraxis function indicated by sign notation. These pictures are of a metapsychic variety; the "pictures are to be un-scrambled, decoded by reference to a set of specifications". The degree and type of action will alter with the country and nationality of the performers. The "synthetic notation" of component patterns creates a picture whose visual impact can be assimilated as a whole and not merely in stages. The success of the Oakland performance proved to Christou the

validity of his notational process with a large body of orchestral players working within the confines of the conventional repertoire, and therefore its adaptability for future works.

In the work of relatively few artists can such a continuous line of development be traced as in the work of Christou from Phoenix Music to Enantiiodromia. Clarity of texture stripped to essentials is achieved by the composers of the past only in old age. Christou found his clarity of vision by the age of forty.

With the loss of any creative artist speculation on the uncharted future is meaningless. The Orestia would have been a considerable contribution to the death of conventional opera; certain of his plans for the work were discussed with the writer some months before his death. His original treatment of the sound possibilities in electronics are preserved in the tape he prepared for a recording of Epicycle and in his work for stage and film. Plans for the creation of an arts centre in Greece, where artists could work for a period away from commercial pressures, and the founding of a multi-media group for authentic performances of his own work were ideas close to his heart. His contribution remains in his music, and in his remarkable qualities as a man. In this, he will be especially remembered by the young Greek composers and performers whom he guided on a path to the future.

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