
INTRODUCTION

THEODORAKIS GOES FOR GOLD

The air is filled with anticipation, agitation even. There are only a few seconds left of the second half. A final basket lifts the entire stadium to its feet, roaring, applauding, cheering its heroes. The hundreds of people who have gathered to support the Greek women's basketball team cannot contain their pride and exhilaration. 'Yes! They've won! *We've won!*' The familiar sound of the bouzouki rings out from the stadium loudspeakers. There is no need for an introduction. As one person and as if controlled by an unknown force, the crowd puts its hands together: 'Dada...dada... didi-dada...' As the tempo increases, so does the rhythm of the clapping; faster and faster, intensifying in dynamic level and escalating in energy. As the music becomes a fast dance, Greece's team knows that there is only one thing to do – they link arms, form a circle and begin the *hasaposervikos*, their dance of victory, right there, in the middle of the basketball court. This is just what the spectators want - a tangible, 'Greek', celebration of triumph.

You may already have guessed the identity of the piece of music that spurred the crowd and players on: Mikis Theodorakis' 'Zorba's Dance'. Time and time again, this music was played at the 2004 Olympic Games, intended to excite the spectators (and the athletes), invariably bringing them to their feet. This is music that has gained a life of its own; a life over which its own composer no longer has control.

When I was asked about the prevalence of Theodorakis' music at the Olympic Games in Athens 2004, there was one simple answer: It was everywhere. Theodorakis' music resonated at the opening ceremony, along with that of Manos Hadjidakis. As a volunteer and spectator at the Games, I heard it in the many stadia, as well as in the outer domains of the Olympic complexes. I invariably caught 'Zorba's Dance' while watching an Olympic event on television. Even the *Official Olympic* CD features eighteen of Theodorakis' popular songs sung by different artists. Not only was I bombarded by his music at Olympic events, but on a tour to Delphi (a 'non-Olympic' event), our tour-guide offered us the choice of music: either the latest interpretation of what 'ancient' Greek music sounded like, or the music of Greece's 'national' composer, Mikis Theodorakis.

What does this actually tell us about Theodorakis' music? Is it part and parcel of what it is to be Greek? Does it define the style of Greek music? Or encapsulate Greek spirit? The fact that all the songs on the *Official Olympic* CD were composed by Theodorakis strongly suggests that he is synonymous with both Greek identity and Greek musical expression. My quest is to find out how this has come about.

My own experience as a South African of Greek descent is that Mikis Theodorakis' music *has* without question become part of Greek identity. One cannot speak about Greek culture without speaking about music, and one cannot speak about Greek music without invoking Theodorakis. As for my own experience of Greek music, I think it is necessary to mention where I stand. My parents are both Greek-Cypriot in origin – my mother was born in Cyprus and moved to South Africa at twelve years of age, while my father, whose parents were Cypriot-born and bred, was born in Johannesburg: so I always say that I am 'one-and-a-half' generation South African. Although I grew up in Johannesburg, my parents always played Greek music in our home and my grandfather sang Greek songs at the piano. So from a very young age, the sounds of Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis were familiar to me, even if I did not know who composed the music. I also attended a Greek school in Johannesburg where I learned the Greek language and culture (Greek dancing, singing, literature, history, religion) – I always admired the Greek spirit because it was constantly present in my environment and part of me. So as a Greek of the diaspora, Greek music and culture hold an extra special place in my heart, as anyone of us who yearns to keep our cultural heritage alive and an active part of our identity. I will admit that my experience of 'Greekness' has affected the way I look and experience the material at hand, and furthermore, it affects the way I understand it. The material moves me in an indescribable way because of the important and special place it has held in my environment throughout my life. On this journey of the life and work of Mikis Theodorakis, I have tried my best to be as objective as possible, but at the same time I caution the reader that my admiration of the Greek culture and spirit may sometimes compromise this objectivity. At the same time, it is this very admiration that has compelled me to delve deeply into the life and work of Mikis Theodorakis.

My love for the Greek spirit also brought me to volunteer at the Athens Olympic Games in 2004. While I was in Athens, I talked to many people, young and old, from students to security guards, volunteers to professors. They reconstructed a gigantic figure for me, describing Theodorakis as a god, a brilliant, amazing man, about whom I would find masses of information for my research. Masses of information I did find, but strangely enough little of it is seriously academic. The truth is that Theodorakis has provided me with hundreds of popular songs and other works to analyse, songs that remain close to the heart of the Greek people. However, it was only when I began researching his work that I learnt that Theodorakis is also a Western art music composer. Some people I spoke to were as surprised as I was to hear this. Others would quickly remark: 'Theodorakis is a communist, you know!' Responses to these different aspects of Theodorakis' creative personality and experience suggest an ambivalence: he is obviously a potent symbol of Hellenic culture, a legend who has inspired people throughout the years; at the same time, there is a sense of dislike for, or rather misunderstanding of, 'the communist', the leftist, 'the one who says he is a socialist but who has made a fortune'.¹

Nevertheless, Theodorakis continues to be acknowledged as a man who fought for Greece, who rose against the military dictatorship and who struggled for justice. He is undoubtedly a national hero. But he still seems to be

misunderstood in some ways. A music student I met at the Games remarked that it is not Theodorakis that is Greece's national composer, but Manos Hadjidakis. Theodorakis was simply a political composer, she argued, part of the past. Her reasoning was obviously based on the fact that Theodorakis composed music during an important political period in Greece's history, a time when Greece was trying to find a stable political/cultural identity. (This period is marked by the Greek civil war between 1946-49, and the period of the military dictatorship, commonly known as the Junta, from 1967-74.) Theodorakis was politically active then, imprisoned and exiled for his beliefs; his music was banned. Does this explain why he is *still* revered in the Greek community, why we hear his music everywhere even without knowing who he is, and why he has become a hero for the Greek people? What about the music itself, the way it seems to move the Greek spirit and to bear some relation to Greek society? Are the above statements valid observations, and if so, why is his symphonic music so different? And why is it mostly unknown?

Drawing on contemporary identity theories, such as those of Martin Stokes and Simon Frith, my aim is to interrogate the construction of modern Greek identity in Theodorakis' music. In Chapter One, I unravel the complex webs spun by history and culture to shape the modern nation, and the ways in which Theodorakis' political and musical life have intersected with these webs in the twentieth century. In Chapter Two, I discuss the establishment of the Popular Art Song as a powerful agent of modern Greek identity. Chapter Three examines major moves in Theodorakis' advancing of popular art forms and hence his own renegotiation of modern Greek identity. Theatre, 'metasymphonic' music and 'lyric tragedy' are genres that I discuss. Chapter Four explores Theodorakis' inner world, his beliefs and perspectives. Chapter Five discusses the phenomenon of Theodorakis' *Zorba* as the all-encompassing representation of modern Greek identity.

I hope that this journey will reveal some of the many faces of Theodorakis and Greece and, in so doing, will ultimately uncover some of the secrets to our own identity.