

The unfinished avant-garde of Jani Christou

Η ημιτελής πρωτοπορία του Γιάννη Χρήστου

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Patterns and permutations

In 1960 Europe saw important changes, music gained popularity due to audio devices and Jani Christou composed a major piece that marked the turning point in his career. In this piece he presented a new system of composition which influenced the whole process of composition till his death.

The Greek translation of "*Patterns and permutations*" is "Μετατροπές Protypa ke Metashimatismi" and Antallages" ("*Μετατροπές*", "*Πρότυπα και μετασχηματισμοί*" και "*Ανταλλαγές*"). After many unsuccessful efforts, its premiere was given in the Athens State Orchestra under Andres Paridis on 11/3/1963 in Athens. This performance provoked a great conflict between avant-garders and the Athens State Orchestra experience its first turbulent night in its history since the conflict took place during the concert.

Christou composed a theoretical text to help the aspiring composers understand this new system of composition along with the notions of the piece. These are the notions presented and examined hereafter.

These notions are as follows: *Permutation, Pattern, Complex pattern, Isochrones, Simple pattern, Mega statement, Continuum*. Today we are going to examine the simple and complex pattern, the mega statement and the continuum.

According always to the composer's text, the simple pattern arises from a series of transformations addressed to a certain category of perception. In this case, the energy revealed is simple. On the contrary, the complex pattern arises when the above mentioned process takes place in more than one category of perception and the material is an independent rhythmic entity with its own inner rhythms.

This explanation leads to the following important conclusion. The differentiation between the two patterns is abstract and the composer does not use a musical example However, we

are talking about 1960, when Christou began exhibiting an interest in metaphysics. That's the reason why he uses the term after serialism in an effort to approach the patterns beyond any serial analysis. Despite the fact that the notion of the simple and complex pattern comes from the serialism, Christou didn't use the patterns in the way the other composers have done it, i.e Berg or Schönberg.

The second important term that Christou invented is the Mega Statement. Briefly, this is the answer to the formation of a pattern, which we can clearly hear and which constitutes one of the major moments of the piece. The first Mega statement that appears in meters 782-786 upsets the entire piece since it happens in the middle of the continuum no.12 while with its power manages to annihilate it. Also, it interrupts the development of the complex patterns that has started just a while before. The same thing happens in meters 818-820 when the Mega statement no.4 interrupts the development of the complex pattern that shall follow the statement of the main statement no 14.

The main characteristic of the first group of Mega Statements (1-12) is the fact that there is always a short pause that comes before. During the audition there is the impression that the foreboding of the appearance of the Mega statement is enough to immobilize all the others structural elements of the work (continuum, main statement, simple and complex pattern). The second group of Mega Statements (13-19) is very short and much less powerful than the first one. The first group interrupts the progression of the continuum while the second one doesn't manage to do the same.

The main conclusion of the above are a) the strengthening of the conflict that exist between the major powers in a macro-structural approach of the after serialism and b) the establishment of the philosophic approach of the composer towards his works and more specifically the mysterious and magical –as described by himself- nature of the Mega statement. In the continuously arising conflict of powers, the Mega statement prevails against the patterns while the continuum prevails against the Mega statement. Regarding the chronic sequence of the events the work is narrative.

The third main term used by Christou is the continuum, which is divided into three sub-categories, the "pedal continuum", the "continuum by isochrones" and the "sustained series".

The simplest form is the "pedal continuum" which is just a bourdon in its medieval version – if we could say that. The "continuum by isochrones", which we meet only twice, is more complex. Once again it is more interesting examine the interactions between the main elements used by the composer than to examine them one by one. The first of the two "continuum by isochrones" prepares the entrance of the first Mega statement that takes place

just after the beginning of the second "continuum by isochrones". Apparently, the composer chooses this way to announce the appearance of the first Mega statement, a fact that is also confirmed by the presence of the mother series no1, the unique twelve tone series on which the Mega statement is based.

The "sustained series" are composed of notes that appear one after the other with the same chronological distance between their entrance (in 4/4, in 2/4 etc). Every note lasts until the end of the entrance of the last one. The main acoustic difference between this continuum and the others is that this one is heard at the end, just before its mute, while the others are heard from the beginning. In the pre ultimate section, the continuum gets the defining role mentioned hereunder. During this section the 1/3 of the continuums of the piece is heard. It's a dialogue between the "sustained series" and the "pedal continuums" and constitutes one of the most important moments of the piece.

From serialism, Christou keeps the twelve tone series but also uses series of fewer notes. Furthermore, his approach is more free and Christou rarely uses the main elements of serialism (inversion etc). The patterns are his raw material (from which the name of the piece is derived) based on serial models but the outcome is totally different than in Schönberg's or Webern's creations. In this piece and in the pieces that followed, the composer used the possibilities that different dynamics may offer. For his entire work, he doesn't get his inspiration from non musical elements or other specific systems. On the contrary, he is inspired from the drama derived from the contrast of the blow-up and the calmness that exist in the work itself. The after serialism is based on patterns and aims to a psychological and philosophical approach of the structural issues of humanity. Since 1965, the pattern of 1960 became an archetype while the stave was gradually replaced by graphic scores. For his works *Anaparastasis* he used an after serialism approach but without the means, in other words the row.

The Anaparastasis

The second case, in which Jani Christou presented an innovative idea-conception as well as composition, is *Anaparastasis*. These make part of the broad cycle of "Protoektelesis"(around 130!!) or "Attempts of protoektelesis" the composer conceived after

1966. Unfortunately only two out of thirty five of them written between 1966 and 1968 were saved.

The first thing to be pointed out is that Anaparastasis shouldn't be considered to be clearly musical compositions. After 1965, following the *Mysterion* in 1966, Christou created a mixture of music and theatrical performance, whose final artistic state is being shaped in Anaparastasis. For this reason when it comes to these specific works one should see more than listen to them.

Concerning the lost Anaparastasis and after a constant research in the composer's archives one comes to three conclusions. Firstly that these are narrative works, something also proved by their titles (*Reconstruction of an event*, *Moving my hand in an unusual way* etc.).

A second conclusion is that there is a relation between many Anaparastasis and the *Oresteia*. This "modern opera", according to the composer, could embody certain Anaparastasis. Some of them belong to those thirty five compositions whose titles have been found but are not always referred to with the same title.

Finally the composer left notes according to which the existence of even more Anaparastasis is a possibility. One of them is entitled "Strychnine lady file-Anaparastasis". Probably the composer had this in mind as an idea for another Anaparastasis. Either way, these works have a lot in common with the two Anaparastasis that were saved (only one protagonist, same scenic instructions etc.).

The first of these two Anaparastasis is entitled "The baritone" and tells the story of the guard at the Atreids' palace who is waiting for more than a year for a sign that will mean the capture of Troy. The dominating phrase is "ἀστρον κάτοιδα νυκτέρων ομήγουριν" and the key word is "απαλλαγή". The guard-baritone can't speak normally. Vowels are missing, phrases are mincing, anxiety and exhaustion don't allow him to articulate the words the way he should. The existing recordings bring in mind the performances of the Dutch musician Jaap Blonk who is specialized in sound poetry.

The second Anaparastasis that is saved is called "The pianist" and shows a pianist's efforts to build a logical relation with the instrument, that is to play. But he doesn't make it. The pianist passes from a variety of different states of anxiety, he caresses the piano, he wallows under it, he makes cries. The essence of *protoekteleosis*, that is the fear of no rejuvenation of vital activities of the universe, is everywhere.

In order to achieve this result Christou invented the metapraxis. When praxis is "...an action that is intentionally accomplished in order to conform with the current universal reason that characterizes art", metapraxis is "...an action that is intentionally accomplished but in order to go further than the current universal reason that characterizes art". The composer goes on using the following representative example: "a conductor directing a concert is a metapraxis. But if someone asks him to walk in circles, talk, shout, scream, gesture or do any other action that is not strictly connected to his work as a conductor, this could be a metapraxis."

The aim of these two Anaparastasis is to express the disappointment that comes from the inefficiency to achieve a predefined goal. The means for the protoektelexis is the metapraxis and the mode is the gradual preparation of the explosion, one of Christou's favorite patterns. In both cases the content is based on the contradiction between calmness and explosions. The explosions don't come out of nothing, they are being thoroughly prepared according to the composer's recommendations (the following are gradually referred : "fear", "panic and fear", "fear that comes out of additional panic", "maximum fear"). There is only one structural cycle, and that is birth – development - distraction – pause (stop). The scores are graphical, with designs, symbols and pictures created by the composer in order to help the performers in the interpretation of each work.

Anaparastasis are not Kagel or Berio-styled musical theatre, or Bussotti or Schäffer-styled mixed forms. The composer intends to produce a revival of the experience or of the ambiance of an archetypical schema experience, of an "initial" schema which is present in the creation of a physical or metaphysical phenomenon that man realizes or experiences in the present or in the past. For this to be possible, man must become himself a part of this procedure by passing through three states: the confirmation of the model, the participation in its performance and the identification with it. The aim is for the model to be revived so that it will start functioning again. Through the metapraxis it is lead to a reconstruction of an established to collective subconscious situation, while through the actions gradually released the composer wishes that every musician overcomes himself and the quality he had until then.

In the first case mentioned above (metaserialism), Christou begins using one technique and evolves it to such an extent that finally it doesn't remind the initial one. In the second case he constructs his own version of the reconstruction of an event, whose means and final result are characteristic qualities of the composer. Among his innovations are the techniques of

metaserialism and metapraxis, the symbols, the designs and graphic scores. All of these elements would be fundamental features of *Oresteia*, Christou's last work which was left unfinished. His death in a car accident on his 44th birthday left the Greek composer's plans and ideas incomplete.