

Foreword

James Harley

The music of Iannis Xenakis, or some of it, is quite well known. His writings, at least by reputation, are also quite well known. His work is often listed as standard reference for algorithmic composition, computer music, extended instrumental techniques, granular synthesis, massed sonorities, multimedia spectacles, probability functions, sieves, textural/sonoristic composition, stochastic synthesis, theory of groups, and more. Certainly his name is mentioned in all modern texts discussing the developments of twentieth-century music. The compelling biography by Nouritza Matossian (1986) has been read by many,¹ and the BBC film by Marc Kidel (1991), *Something Rich and Strange*, has been shown widely in the UK and on the art-film festival circuit. Compared with other composers of similar stature, though, his music and writings have been little studied.

Fortunately, as time has gone on, a dedicated band of researchers has grown up around this fascinating figure. The aim of this publication is to present some of the work that is being done on the analysis of Xenakis' music and his ideas. An important meeting of these scholars took place in Paris in January 1998, at a symposium organized by Makis Solomos and Marianne Lyon.² The opportunity to meet together, present our work, discuss ideas, and explore further collaborations, was inspirational. Out of that meeting grew the idea for this publication.³

Each of the articles focuses on a different period or aspect of Xenakis' music and ideas. They are presented here in an order that proceeds more or less chronologically through the composer's output. Makis Solomos discusses the early Xenakis, examining the relationships between the concerns of the young, pre-*Metastaseis* composer and his later, more well-known oeuvre. Philipp Oswalt places Xenakis' multimedia work into the context of architectural aesthetics, beginning with his seminal collaborations with Le Corbusier. Benoît Gibson looks in detail at Xenakis' use of sieves and his adaptation of the theory of groups to compositional structure. Pianist Marc Couroux takes on the difficult task of discussing performance issues relating to "impossible" music, with particular reference to *Evryali*, a piece that engendered a flurry of controversy in the pages of *Tempo* some twenty years ago. Richard Barrett presents his reflections on and analysis of *La légende d'Eer*, the lynchpin of Xenakis' electroacoustic compositions. His article nicely complements Oswalt's architectural discussion of *Le Diatope*, the multimedia installation for which this piece was originally conceived. Irvine Arditti, one of the foremost interpreters of Xenakis' music, puts forward for the first time his thoughts on the performance of this particular, often problematic, repertoire for chamber strings. Given his close relationship to the composer over

many years, this contribution is all the more valuable. Ronald Squibbs has developed an analytical approach to the music of Xenakis that is oriented toward parsing the different textures that often form the basis for formal organization. In this article, he applies his tools to the piano solo, *Mists*, drawing attention to the "arborescences" that constitute one of the important elements in the piece. In the 1980s, Xenakis was drawn to a new technique adapted from computer science, "cellular automata." He discussed this topic briefly in his interview with Bálint András Varga (Varga 1996: 182–184, 199–200), but little is known about how he applied it to music. Peter Hoffmann introduces cellular automata and examines particular examples in Xenakis' scores where the composer has applied this technique to musical structures. He then compares it to the composer's stochastic synthesis algorithm, GENDYN, both being seen as exemplifying a particular conception of automated art. Miha Iliescu, concerned with wider aesthetic issues, adopts a different approach, outlining concerns which he terms "postmodern" and showing how they are manifest in one of Xenakis' late works, *Paille in the Wind*. Finally, I have included a brief discussion of the influence of nature on Xenakis' aesthetic, drawing particular attention on his relationship (and that of his wife, Françoise, who has written on the topic) to the Mediterranean Sea.

We are also fortunate to be able to include in this volume an interview Xenakis gave in 1993, in which he touches on a number of interesting issues, along with references to specific works. It is always good to hear the composer speak in his own voice.

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Just as the final touches were being put to this issue, the news came through that Xenakis had died. It seemed appropriate, then, to gather a few tributes from people who have been associated with him in different ways to open the volume. It is always difficult to give an "assessment" of someone who has been very important in your life, whether personally or professionally. Therefore, we appreciate very much these contributions, given under tight deadline constraints. In the case of pianist Roger Woodward, his tribute turned into a full-length article, so we have placed it with the research papers, at the point where its subject matter (*Keqrops*) fits chronologically. In addition, Irvine Arditti, rather than write a separate tribute, revised his contribution to include a more timely conclusion. These late additions, in their various forms, will help cast further light on aspects of Xenakis' life and work.

References

- Harley, M. A. [M. Trochimczyk] (ed.) (1998) *Muzyka "Świat Xenakisa"* 43(4).
 Kidel, Marc (1991) *Something Rich and Strange*. London: BBC.
 Matossian, N. (1986) *Xenakis*. London: Kahn & Averill.
 Varga, B. A. (1996) *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis*. London: Faber and Faber.

Notes

1. The biography was first published in French in 1981, then translated into English. Aside from Xenakis' own writings, it remains one of the main published sources, in English, of information about the composer and his evolution as a composer.

2. *Présences de Iannis Xenakis, 29–30 January 1998*, Paris. The book of proceedings has been published (March 2001) under the same title by the Centre de Documentation de la Musique Contemporaine (www.cdmc.asso.fr).
3. Another important progenitor of this issue of *Contemporary Music Review* was the publication in Poland of an issue of *Muzyka* devoted to Xenakis, edited by Maria Anna Harley (Maja Trochimczyk). Some of the same researchers who contributed to that journal also present their work here (Harley 1998).

