Contemporary Music Review, 2002, Vol. 21, Nos 2/3, 109–120

Preparations for Xenakis and *Keqrops*

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The author offers his recollections on preparations for the premiere of *Keqrops*, a work by Xenakis for piano and orchestra from 1986. He discusses his study of the score, the memorization process, the physical practicing routine, and the final rehearsals with the New York Philharmonic.

KEYWORDS: *Keqrops*, working score, formal outline, practice regime

I.

When I first read through Xenakis' new work, *Keqrops*, in the early summer of 1986, his calm, patient voice counseled:

> Don't look for traditional music or conventional things. Open your ears, your mind, and your soul without prejudice. Feel you are on another planet. If you can do this, it will be a big step forward in your own liberation. In Art, human nature can make leaps without intermediate phases.[1]

The composer's superhumanly assertive third work for piano and orchestra was scored for quadruple woodwinds, quadruple brass with tuba, harp, timpani, percussion, and sixty strings – a massive orchestra of ninety-four musicians plus piano. It was a magnum opus propelled by high-octane flights of energy in rich detail, dedicated to the regeneration of Art Music at an abnormally high level. The feeling of constant renewal recalled *Pithoprakta* (1956), *Terretektorh* (1966), *Nomos Gamma* (1968), *Jonchaies* (1977) and *Horos* (1986). The subdivisions of up to sixty strings recalled *Syrmos* (1959), *Aroura* (1971), and *Shaar* (1982): vast expanses of the sea; his own lifelong obsession and love of the wondrous events of nature – singing cicadas, menacing swarms of bees, rainstorms; and the sounds of aerial combat from World War II as manifested in his masterful electroacoustic productions, *Hibiki Hana Ma* (1970) staged at the Osaka World Exposition, *Persepolis* (1971) staged in Shiraz, and *Polytope de Cluny* (1972), amongst many others. The string writing in *Keqrops* also concealed lost songs from the savage beauty of *La Légende d'Eer* (1977) whilst winds pierced the sky with primitive shrieks, recalling ancient worlds with primordial outpourings erupting over unknown volcanic landscapes.

The new Xenakis score teemed with life! Glistening rainforests, with their foliage of a thousand greens, were scattered through the Herculean girders intertwined amongst massive trunks and clusters of wild orchids. Beyond any predictable parameters hung an almost imperceptible but enigmatic veil, a

Contemporary Music Review
ISSN 0749-4467 print/ISSN 1477-2256 online © 2002 Taylor & Francis Ltd
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals
DOI:0749446022000022675

constant growth surging upward in complex counterpoint toward the white light. It was as palpable as its appearance throughout the third of his piano pieces, *Mists*, written for me five years earlier as a "personal gift," in which the clarity of attack demanded an equally precise preparation to produce a range of percussive sonorities like the "beautiful bell-like sonorities [of *Mists*] which also characterize *Keqrops*."[2] The proverbial "clouds of sound" in *Mists* had been transformed into "galaxies" in *Keqrops* through the same sweeping parabolas and Boolean algebra of Xenakis' computed sequences.

On first reading, twenty-two working sections became evident with five distinct sound events, from which a further five pattern types suggest themselves:

(1) Four occurrences of mid-register clusters, orientated around a series of left hand B♭ octaves, principally at mm. 11–27, 29, 38, and 163–165;
(2) Five occurrences of complex parallel- and contrary-motion scale patterns, based on ancient Byzantine 31-pitch extended scale forms, principally at mm. 28–29, 30–37, 39–61, 64–65, and 160–162;
(3) Five extensions of Pattern-type 2, but in more complex linear counterpoint, or "waves," spread over two octaves, principally at mm. 73–83, 100–119, 142–146, 147–150, and 156–159;
(4) Four extensions of Pattern-type 1, where massive clusters form larger or more complex chords or clusters, principally at mm. 62–64, 119–136, 147, and 151–154; and
(5) Four zones of freely distributed pitches over the complete range of the instrument, spatially notated, principally at mm. 66–72, 84–100, 137–141, and 154–156.

Every day I spent with Xenakis' new score, my notebook was filled with such personal observations as a means to take hold of the task before me, but it was like trying to grab hold of the tiger's tail. I had no alternative but to write his score out fully so as to be able to hear its unique sound and to at least provide myself with a viable game-plan of attack until *Keqrops* became part of me. I could not learn the work by the usual means because it would take too long, so I abandoned everything and threw myself at it. A large empty space was needed with a well-lit, long, empty wall on which to hang the score. As I read through it and realized what had to be achieved in a short space of time I felt a profound need to approach the work on its own terms. Its unspoken dialogue seemed to have arrived as if from another world and time, almost unapproachable, magnificent, wild, with moments of great tenderness – clearly the most aggressive-sounding work for piano and orchestra that I had yet read from Xenakis' pen.

The purity of Xenakis' brass choirs stood proud, recalling the heraldic friezes of Gabrieli, inscrutable rationale of Varèse, the brass–percussion narrative of the composer's own *Khal Perr* (1983); awesome powers unleashed by the piano–brass maelstrom at mm. 119–133 and the coda extended the "massive shifting planes" (Toop 1989) of *Eonta* (1963), *Synaphaï* (1969) and the Olympian demands of *Evryali* (1973) and *Mists*. *Keqrops*'s grand chordal battalions at mm. 119–133 also predicted the third and final work he dedicated to me seven years later, *Paille in the Wind*. Without doubt, *Keqrops* was a landmark which not only looked back but

also predicted *à r.* (1987), inspired by some of *Keqrops*'s most brilliant piano passages, notably the parallel and contrary motion (Pattern-type 2) and their extensions (Pattern-type 3) from the ancient Byzantine scale forms; the choral brass writing in *Troorkh* (1991); turbulent soundscapes of *Ata* (1987), *Krinoïdï* (1991), and *Roáï* (1991); the mystical narrative of *Le Voyage absolu des Unari vers Andromède* (1989); and *GENDY3* (1991), among others.

As with leaves on trees, or the life and vicissitudes of sixteenth-note rhythms in the music of Bach, Xenakis' predictably notated score revealed its secrets slowly. Out of the tumultuous orchestration the rich complexity of his rhythmic counterpoint seemed to spring from nature, as did his unerring juxtaposition of chamber ensembles with the soloist. As with certain other inspired works of art, the ground seemed to move beneath my feet as I set out on this journey, just as it had with my preparations for *Eonta* (1963), *Kraanerg* (1968), *Synaphaï* (1969), *Evryali* (1973) and *Mists* (1981). The sense of freedom one feels living with a Xenakis work is a rare and liberating experience. For Xenakis himself, the most important thing of all in life and in art was the individual freedom he achieved through his music. However, if *Kraanerg* reminded me of a giant (perhaps mankind) in chains, then *Keqrops* (the pure spirit of mankind as half animal, half man) was the Colossus itself unchained.

The composer had spoken about the possible significance of the title's Greek origins, which meant "weaving." However, he had also spoken of the Mycenean legend of Keqrops I, originally from Saïs in Egypt, who married Agraulos, daughter of Aktaois, King of Athens, and who, during a reign which lasted fifty years, introduced civilization to Attica, fortified the Acropolis, and divided the people into four tribes. "In ancient legend Keqrops was accredited with a double nature, half-man/half-dragon." (Xenakis 1986b).

With these thoughts and feelings in mind I began learning the new score.

II.

Perhaps it seemed shamanistic at the time, but the first thing I decided was to cut out all social visits and worldly distractions. I rang up everybody I knew and told them that I was going on a month's holiday to the Seychelles. As arranged, trustworthy friends arrived with whom I stayed at home, and from that moment on I was "on holidays." The jolt of the telephone's disconnection had a terrible affect for many days, after which it finally felt sufficiently free to work in the knowledge that there would be no phone, no car, no disturbances of any kind. After the first ten days I felt as if I were walking on air. I cycled at night in the park, swam in the mornings at the Lido, and relaxed. In the breaks I visited nearby buildings, galleries, toured the markets, and fell in love with the neighborhood. Work took place in three shifts of four hours with shorter and longer breaks in between. The longer break was an afternoon nap to re-energize memory banks. Eating was rigorously organized with a balanced diet, the day ending with two glasses of red wine and a long, relaxing bath with fresh herbs.

I carried a little notebook about with me incessantly, complete with my own "grand plan" in which I wrote questions either to myself or to the composer about matters that had to be resolved quickly or that might have to be resolved in the longer term. I was determined not to ring him more than three times during

the entire period of the learning process and kept my word. However, to my complete bewilderment, he once replied: "I don't know!"

At the beginning, the work was daunting. However, I tried to console my worst anxieties with the fact that even Goliath fell as the result of David's simple persistence and determination. Each night I made personal notes on work completed that day and on work that had to be tackled the following day, the day after and so on, over a month, with special problem areas isolated to be worked on daily as a separate exercise. I stuck to my plan. I would rise and greet the dawn, eat a light breakfast; walk or cycle to the Lido. By the time it was legally possible to play, I had already memorized those areas that had been set aside to learn the day or evening before. One of the other tasks I had set myself each day was to read the whole score through silently without any break or interruption of any kind, simply to hear once again what it might reveal. This ritual nearly always took place in the very early hours of the morning, when everything was completely still. Many secrets were revealed in the process. After each reading, I added, in a special section of my notebook, relevant questions to be answered. Looking back over those notes, I came to four conclusions. A performer:

(1) should never underestimate the secrets that can be revealed by a work of art;
(2) can never know a score well enough;
(3) should always have a transcendental plan to solve problems, even if it seemed impossible to realize in the short term, or even the long, for that matter. Such a plan, even if idealistic, provides the artist with something to hang onto when things get tough; although an act of idealism, it is there, nevertheless, and provides something tangible to guide one's efforts;
(4) should always go to the greatest lengths possible to protect the preparation period from any possible disturbance – the resulting relationship between the artist and the work that emerges can then be protected and grow but not on any imposed or negotiated basis.

The working score which I carried about with me became the main one, although I had printed two others which were placed safely away for emergencies. The fourth copy looked down at my efforts in wry amusement from the studio wall. The sweeping vista of musical information, fully opened out for the eyes to take in as a totality, always accelerated the rapid absorption of musical information, before the normal process of memorizing parts of the whole ever took place. This wall score also proved ideal for making several rough external analyses, which allowed me to investigate the reasons why the composer placed his slabs of material together. Tracing paper placed over the whole helped me become familiar with Xenakis' notated dynamic markings, and when removed from the main score provided a convenient spreadsheet of dynamic intensities and their distributions. Such tracings broke down further information as rapidly, including textures and aspects of orchestration. The bridges that joined slabs were the most fascinating of all and provided many clues into the composer's vision for the creation of his work and how it flowed. Tracings also helped determine how the structural slabs pieced together as a unified architectural whole.

As the wall charts were gradually abandoned and I reached for my hand-score

more frequently, I felt I was already familiar with much of the information, sufficiently to make a move on memorizing it. The whole business of sitting at the instrument itself was getting closer and I was beginning to look forward to the day when I could do so. However, there was still quite a bit of musical housekeeping to attend to.

Boring though the job always is, measure numbers had to be checked and those that were incorrect or missing corrected. I found errors that the copyist had made, which would certainly have held up rehearsal had they not been corrected. I rewrote corrections to each of the parts in *Keqrops* (as suggestions) and sent them off to Xenakis for his perusal and fortunately we made it to the copyist and printer in time for the rehearsals. Accidentals and clefs remained to be checked. There were many errors. Uunlike many other composers Xenakis welcomed constructively intended input without taking the slightest offence.

The next step was to organize reliable hand positions and their comfortable distribution, mapped out as part of a dependable calisthenic topography. The calisthenic feel of a work, for a pianist, is critical in mastering the memory flow and once a pianist knows – instinctively – where the valleys, plains, rivers, and mountain peaks are formed on the soundscape, it is possible for the foot and the hand to set out on their journey, in the knowledge that they will be certain of their tread toward, and grasp of, musical images. I returned to the wall charts and mapped out ideal hand solutions to the massive clusters in the soloist's part. Widely distributed pitches and spatially notated zones of Pattern-type 5 took the longest to memorize. Body movements were planned and recorded to consummate the ideal marriage of physical movement to keyboard performance – more weight lean forward; less weight back readjusting shoulder or back weight for certain passages. Although most of Xenakis' score was beginning to "play itself," many of my own notes from the project continued to be devoted to where weight might be placed, i.e. at the end of the fingertips, from the trunk of the body moving forward (or leaning backwards), with the back and/or shoulder weight placed onto the right or left foot (front or back), whether to move bodily to one end of the instrument, etc. The question of lumbar posture was also important, plus the need to decide on final fingerings for the complexity involved with comfortably executing Pattern-types 2 and 3, etc. My efforts were rewarded one afternoon with a visit from the invisible angel who provided the vision of a rainbow at measure 137 as a reward for all my efforts. Whatever the reason, this unforgettable, magic moment remained special for me after that, and something that I always look forward to in performance.

Despite work on this aspect of the preparation, I found that I still could not play certain passages as I needed. Some chords were still swallowed by Xenakis' galaxies of sound and so the whole matter of articulation had to be examined afresh. Nothing worked so I decided to lose a stone in weight to see if it made a difference. It worked. I proceeded to memorize section numbers which I knew the conductor might call for, to save precious time in rehearsal. Now that the basic preparation was systematically completed – the notation perfectly ordered, all musical information able to be read and heard as a whole, from beginning to end – I was free to make a start on memorizing the solo part.

In the early hours of the morning, away from the piano, I memorized the introductory ten bars and then tried them out at the piano when it was possible to begin playing. I felt confident that I might already know those bars well enough

because I had assimilated the whole score in my mind's eye and musician's inner ear through analysis. Before I sat at the piano for the very first time, I felt that I knew the work sufficiently well and that it was, at least in many ways, already a part of me. I heard the opening ten bars even before I sat down to place my hands over the pitches themselves and bring to life the musical event of which they formed part. The first chord was an explosion of sound scored for every player in the orchestra plus soloist and required optimum coordination by a brilliant conductor, preferably one who had mastered a short baton as the extension of fine wrist technique. In this respect it was fortunate that Zubin Mehta directed the New York Philharmonic for the premiere performances. Surprisingly, the opening ten bars proved no problem at all, so I proceeded to the next section and the same thing happened. Next morning I memorized a more difficult slab and it too presented no problem, although it took me slightly longer to memorize than the first two. In small sections the piano part was memorized quickly enough, with prepared hand positions and fingerings modified along the way. I then began to memorize the orchestral parts. Early morning vigils with the score took on new meaning and most of the following weeks were devoted to a detailed study of the orchestration during which time I finished the memorizing of the work in its entirety.

I took a break for three days before the next job which was to integrate tempi within an overall pulse. Xenakis was very clear about what he wanted in this regard, so it took no time at all before an overall tempo began to dominate and the body of the performance began to take shape with a reliable inner pulse suggesting itself throughout. I felt a huge sense of elation when the many different tempi suddenly fell into place and formed a unified whole. A sense of natural flow suddenly seemed to exist for its own sake as the complexity of narrative unfolded, and with surprising ease! Something intangible but completely wonderful began to emerge as the gestalt of an unheard song seemed to be piecing itself together, dependent on the flow of narrative as it unfolded, and on the sixteenth-note motions, which were based on progressions of the same rhythmic units (perhaps as in Bach).

As final hand positions took on their own ideal shapes at tempo, I became more convinced than ever of the ancient Chinese belief in the immense power of the separate memory systems. It provided a mastery of muscular coordination, which, under pressure, was completely reliable. Analysis provided penetrating insight but the central nerve between thumb and index finger was equally critical. The combination of the two memory systems (one mental, the other physical) gave rise to the idea of a third, perhaps as the result of the peculiar balancing act created by the combination of the other two. This third memory system proved, by far, the strongest of all, created by a combination of factors:

(1) mastery of perceived, naturalized mental and physical memory applications;
(2) an understanding of the work's hidden but ever-emerging gestalt as a kind of cantilena-narrative; and
(3) irrational factors of inspiration, unspoken dialogue, and the arcane powers of the work's sacred orenda.

In any case, my love of Xenakis' work seemed to overwhelm everything else, and to sweep all rational processes to one side. It seemed that the mental and

physical preparation, together with the absorbing of the work's emotional psyche, was less an act of faith and more the living out of an inspirational state that was altogether irrational. By the end of the preparation, I can say that these allegedly irrational matters replaced everything else I had learned to that point as I became increasingly aware of the work's spiritual presence as a living organism. The work's spirit visited me often, and from that moment on I realized that it had always been alive inside me; that everything about a work of art remains sacred. Nothing could or should ever be taken for granted in art as in life, but revered as a miracle of beauty, a celebration of life itself in all its richness and a living wonder. Such are the immortal works of art to which we dedicate our lives and struggle to interpret as the supreme privilege of living. Perhaps they form part of a longer song of life of which all our performances are part and in which our finest moments flow like crystal waters through a perception of what it is that we may be holding up as a mirror to our own existence.

Work was nearing completion as details of pacing and timing – always complicated – seemed to fall into place without analysis, without coercion, without hours of practice. I knew, perhaps instinctively, that although Zubin Mehta and I had performed *Eonta* many times before, and that his mastery of Xenakis was an inspired, if exacting, affair, he was anxious to check the accuracy of the preparation in Xenakis' presence. I therefore revised the measure numbers of central events and repeated them to myself so that, in the event of an unforeseen disturbance, my response would be automatic and reliable. Once again, I checked the attacks, dynamics, the myriad little accents, and repeated answers concerning details of orchestration. I isolated problem areas such as the trombone entry at mm. 8–9, or tuba entry at mm. 9–10, where the thirty-second notes must be played rapidly. Breathing points had to be prepared to coincide with the brass players, since all their entries would be staggered and therefore paced differently. I had to know where they would breathe, especially in sections like mm. 119–126. To coordinate such details, I mounted a system of thirty-seven insurance cues at salient points for the conductor in case of emergency, and to my delight he accepted them.

I knew that preparations had come to an end when I began to play the work through as the result of hearing and feeling sound before playing it. The flow of events, of narrative, of unspoken dialogue, also seemed to suggest themselves as I performed *Keqrops* through as a whole, correcting only minor details here or there. I had also prepared the Bach D minor Concerto for the same concert series and it turned out that one had helped the other since Xenakis is very close to Bach in many ways.

III.

My London manager and I flew to New York in early November where it was already cold. The writer Nouritza Matossian and Iannis Xenakis arrived just after us. Critics, musicologists, composers, pianists, and friends had also flown to New York from Europe to hear the world premiere. It appeared that there was great interest in the new work.

On the day of the first rehearsal, the Philharmonic attendant conducted me to a reasonable practice piano. It was getting colder by the minute so I warmed

up with some Bach Preludes and Fugues and passages from the D minor Concerto, followed by passages from *Keqrops*, which somehow sounded like extensions of each other. Soon after, Iannis and Zubin arrived; we greeted each other, their scores came out, and we commenced work. Not long after, the musicians of the New York Philharmonic also began arriving like beasts of burden carrying their instruments in out of the snow. As they passed the composer, conductor, and soloist, I felt that they may possibly have been wondering what was going on – to my left was the composer with his immaculate score spread out over the closed piano lid, and to the right was the conductor with his score, complete with characteristic battery of personal markings, all of which he subsequently executed from memory and with breathtaking confidence. Perhaps, appropriately, he wanted to be certain that I was playing everything that was written, so he asked me, in the presence of the composer, to play through my part at a deliberate but very slow pace, without making any use of the piano pedals. I performed the work in this hyper-articulated manner as slowly as requested with as much of the orchestration as possible. I then played through the solo part again, this time with a slightly increased pulse whilst Zubin made notes on his score here and there in between beating time. I played the work through a third time, at tempo, and

Figure 1
Roger Woodward with Iannis Xenakis at rehearsal of the premiere of *Keqrops*.

became aware of a coterie of orchestral musicians who had congregated to watch the blood sports. This was before we met on stage, where, to my relief, the Steinway D was superlative and prepared to perfection.

An hour later it became obvious that we were getting absolutely nowhere but, of course, most Xenakis rehearsals, with such an orchestration, commence that way and I was prepared for it. After all, there was a lot to discuss. During the break, Zubin asked me to close my music and play from memory when we returned. It worked. With renewed application we tackled the problem of the opening chord which I believe had, somehow, prevented us from establishing our musical bearings, even though the chord itself was easy enough for all to play as written. For everyone present it was possible to hear what everybody else played *except* oneself. Hearing a Xenakis score in print and playing it are of course worlds apart. Although it is possible for one to be well informed as a result of reading about a maelstrom and, as a consequence, plan appropriate tactical strategies for dealing with it, the reality of the arrival of the maelstrom and its impact always comes as a shock. Once in the maelstrom, everything that one has prepared beforehand can (unexpectedly) be thrown out the window as one is caught up in the full force of the physical experience itself. I felt like a boy scout with a penknife about to do battle with the gorgon in *Evryali*. At least here I was not alone because we all felt overwhelmed by the demands of the score. None of us could hear ourselves in the opening chord. We could only hear the collective result. The totality of the opening sound, although a deafening volcanic blast, was in fact a carefully pitched musical event to which we had to stay not only attuned. It was also an event from which we were obliged to continue. As that first rehearsal progressed we sat through molten lava as it rained down about our ears and formed rivers of sound. We learned to hear through it and to continue playing in a soundscape, the musical equivalent of an inferno, until measure 11 where a grotesque, wild dance – one which perhaps belonged to giants – stepped out from the piano. A few musicians made jokes about the unusual nature of what was required of them.

During the second rehearsal, the chaos and confusion of the work's opening musical events had abated. Once the cauldron at mm. 52–57 died down I set out on the next section at the little clearing which begins at measure 58, where the soloist descended through the "sonorous mass" (Kundera 1981) of Xenakis' "clouds of sound" to embark on the first of (what amounts to) three cadenzas scattered throughout the work. At measure 58, the first of these cadenzas recalls the wild dance: subtly; elegantly; in light, dry, capricious attacks, before the *crescendo* to *fff*. When the orchestra came up for oxygen, at rehearsal I noticed the composer striding down the length of the hall and, to my surprise and embarrassment, request me to commence the cadenza again. I was as puzzled as I was embarrassed. He did so several times whilst the conductor and orchestra watched. I was not quite sure what it was he had in mind since I had played everything faithfully. Finally, he came right up to the foot of the stage and requested to speak with me privately. I could see from his demeanor that he was concerned so I asked him as quietly as I could what it was all about. He looked up with an expression full of anguish, as if I should surely have known: "Please, can't you play a little louder?" I could only reply: "With all respect, I am playing *mezzo forte* as you marked, since I need to be able to make a convincing *crescendo* on the next system where you have written triple *forte*!" He paused, looked at the

floor, paused again, and then replied: "But can't you play it just a little louder anyway?" I did. However, at the rehearsals for the Wien Modern performance with Claudio Abbado some years later, I reduced the dynamic back to its original level. The live recording which was issued from that performance includes the *mf*, and Xenakis left it as he had originally notated it.[3]

For the world premiere at Lincoln Center, Mehta's direction of the very opening chord ricocheted and carried all of us with it throughout the challenges, so much so that the tumultuous sound he had built up (going into measure 58) left no alternative but for me to play the *mf* as marked. By the time of that first performance, I had realized that it was, of course, not a question of dynamics but rather, of actually clearing sound beforehand at measure 57 (using *rubato*), an adjustment made on stage during the concert – a dangerous practice, and not one to be normally recommended!

During rehearsal with Abbado in Vienna, Xenakis hurried down to the stage once again and my heart stopped. This time it was after I had sounded the final octave B♭ which ends the work at the bottom of the piano, and over which there are three markings: *fff*, "*assez longue*," and "resonance." I was racking my brains as to what could possibly have happened, since things had gone so well with the orchestra, after great determination and persistence. I thought that perhaps he had hurried down to congratulate the conductor and the wonderful Mahlerjungendorchester on the fine job they had done after the seventeen rehearsals they had completed before I had arrived. However, I was quite mistaken, because it was to request that I "please play the final sound more like a low bell." Of course. His music is full of bells, not only for music but for life as well.

As Milan Kundera commented:

> [A] moment can come (in the life of one man or that of a whole civilization) in which sentimentality (previously regarded as a force which makes man more human, and mitigates the coldness of Reason) is suddenly unmasked as "the superstructure of brutality." It was at such a moment that Music seemed to me like the "deafening noise of the emotions," whereas the world of noise in Xenakis's compositions became, for me, "beauty:" beauty with the affective filth washed away, beauty stripped of sentimental barbarism. As a "prophet of insensibility" James Joyce could still remain a novelist; Xenakis, on the other hand, has had to "go beyond music." His innovation is quite different in character to those of Bach, Debussy, and Schoenberg. They never lost their ties with the preceding history of music, they could always "go back" (and often did). For Xenakis, the bridges are burnt. All the great musicians before him set themselves against the previous phase of music. Xenakis sets himself against the history of European music in its totality. His point of departure is located elsewhere: not in an artificial sound, separated from nature in order to express subjectivity, but in an "objective" noise of the world, a "sonorous mass" which does not gush from the heart but comes toward us from outside, like the tread of a rainstorm or the voice of the wind.
>
> With Xenakis, one finds oneself beyond the history of music; this history no longer seems the only possible one; it is over, and it yields its position. For the first time, one wonders what it (as a whole) sought to tell us, and where it is going. And one asks (perhaps with a certain anguish) what necessity (in the deepest sense) led Xenakis to side so radically with the "objective" sound of the world, against that of a single soul and its sentimental subjectivity. (Kundera 1981)

The final rehearsal was a mock concert for a limited number of patrons, which assisted the focus of building up and clearing sound at entries and exits, and enabled me to adjust dynamic ratios accordingly. During one particularly loud moment (m. 151), I experienced a mental flashback to the overwhelming *crescendo* which took place some years earlier, where, throughout the opening eighty-two

measures of *Synaphaï* (Xenakis' first work for piano and orchestra), I had to play handfuls of chords as a *fff* trill with pedal. I remembered the struggle to hear what I was in fact playing, as the full orchestra was so loud. It had almost reached a point of aural disorientation, and at that very point a choir of thirteen brass almost obliterated the focus of the full orchestral sound altogether with their entry. I remembered the very floorboards shaking on stage. Riding the solo part felt like riding a surfboard on a tidal wave, in the expectation of hopefully reaching dry land safely. The following year, I discussed this phenomenon with the great pianist, Sviatoslav Richter, who recommended a possible solution of how to overcome the problem by adopting the less-is-more approach to the organization of sound and its projection. He was right.

At measure 137 there is a little clearing in *Keqrops*, almost like an enchanted island, for harp and piano, who sing to each other across the orchestral chasm their strange but beautiful little song, complete with its own understated magic. Whenever the harpist and I performed that moment, it always instilled the feeling that it was not just "something rich and strange"[4] that we were singing to each other but something much more than that. It was almost as if we were part of some kind of new linguistics which had been invented by the composer. Was it a special moment he had created to help us discover something valuable which had been given to humanity (hidden in music) at the time of creation itself; which had been deeply confided to us and which the world itself should have discovered by now but couldn't, since, whatever it was, it had become locked away inside man-made procedures, unable to speak? This wonderful little song seemed to span time as few other moments do in music. Was it Dostoyevsky speaking, through Xenakis, about beauty saving the world, or was it the visit of an angel with the rainbow? Perhaps it was a new and tiny Voyager breaking through other distant dimensions of time and space, discovering new worlds far beyond our comprehension of where real parameters lie – the ones that matter. Whatever and whoever it is, that little moment, with its radiant spirit, remains one of the unexplained wonders of this work. Certainly, Xenakis always listened to it attentively when it was played. I would love to have known what it meant to him. Once, in the string passage that follows, one of the eight double basses played a wrong note at rehearsal. The passage was played several times, and I knew that something was not quite right but I was too busy to take the time to pinpoint it. Xenakis drew it to the attention of the conductor only during the rehearsal break, so as not to cause offence to the conductor or the player. Contrary to pejorative propaganda by some other composers, the protective radar of Xenakis' inner ear was altogether superhuman and could easily pinpoint the slightest indiscretion at rehearsal or concert performance. Perhaps it was his own fault that those who wanted to tear Xenakis down, or who felt they had to limit his achievements, saw him deliberately avoid office or influence or the seeking of power over others. Xenakis remained first a true musician, loyal to music all his life. Despite his early doubts, he must have known he had inherited the sacred trust of carrying the whole of music into the twenty-first century from those who had preceded him in the great line of Western composers. Like Bach before him, Xenakis galvanized those codes which straddled two ages of thought and feeling, and in this way the two giants greet each other across the centuries as true brothers whose prolific output and genius altered the destiny of music forever. His unassuming and modest way endeared him to those of us who

worked closely with Xenakis, and so we gave him our respect, our loyalty, and the best of ourselves.

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Notes

1. Xenakis (1986a), in conversation with the author.
2. Matossian (1986), in conversation with the author (a remark intended for the publication of the revised version of her biography, *Xenakis*).
3. DDG 447 115–2 (1993), Roger Woodward, piano, Claudio Abbado, conductor, Mahlerjungendorchester, recorded live at the Wienerkonzerthaus.
4. The title (taken from *The Tempest*, by Shakespeare) of a BBC documentary directed by Mark Kidel (1991).