

Rhythm and Greekness in the *Cities* of Mikis Theodorakis

Four notes and a rhythm, the *syrтаки* rhythm, were identified with Mikis Theodorakis and Greek music.



Figure 1. Zorba's dance

It is the melodic-rhythmic theme of Zorba's dance, which was immortalized in the homonym film "*Zorba the Greek*" (1964) by the prominent Cypriot filmmaker Michael Cacoyannis. This dance is rooted in traditional Greek music. Namely, the *syrтаки* dance – a modern and cheerful dance inspired by Theodorakis – emerges from the combination of two Greek folk dances, the *hasapiko* dance¹ and the *hasaposerviko* dance².

The use of traditional and popular Greek music rhythms is frequent in Theodorakis' work. The composer was initiated into Greek traditional music during his childhood while he was acquainted with Greek popular music later on, in 1947 during his exile in Ikaria Island, where he heard for the first time the most famous rebetiko song "Captain Andreas Zepos" (*Καπετάν Ανδρέα Ζέπο*) by Yannis Papaioannou written in *syrτος*³ rhythm (2/4).

Theodorakis was particularly sensitized early on to the concept of the rhythm. During his adolescence, in the early 1940s, he studied thoroughly and he is deeply influenced by the texts of an important Modern Greek poet Costis Palamas⁴ (1859–1943). He agreed with the poet's belief that "the rhythm in poetry – the rhythmic walking – symbolizes the rhythm that governs the Universe" (Theodorakis, 1986, vol. 1: 140–141) and moreover, Theodorakis adds the concept of *Harmony*. "That is, the rhythmic Harmony, which one realizes through the motion of the stars when gazing into the celestial vault." (Theodorakis, 1986, vol. 1: 141)

As Theodorakis believes that: "...the Music, diffused as light, forms the acoustical expression of Universal Harmony ... and may lead us to the Law of Objective Truth that governs our journey into the Timeless Time. ... It can unite us with the Centre of Universal Harmony thus helping us climb the highest rung of human happiness, serenity, and perfection" (Theodorakis, 1999, vol. 3: 162), he creates his own "Music Galaxy", consisting of songs, cycles of songs, flow-songs, popular oratorios, chamber music works, symphonic music, music for the theater and the cinema, oratorios and operas.

His main source of inspiration for the creation of this multifarious work is Poetry, which Mikis Theodorakis consults regularly from an early age and he unites it with the *Melos* – melody – and with the Rhythms which contain elements of traditional Greek music – Byzantine music and *demotic* Greek music – as well as of *rebetik* popular music and of classical Western music.

The study of the tetralogy of the *Cities* – *City A', B', C', D'* (*Πολιτείες Α', Β', Γ', Δ'*) will shed light on the aforementioned.

¹ *Hasapiko* dance: a slow dance from Asia Minor: ♩ | ♩ | or ♩ | ♩ |

² *Hasaposerviko* dance: a fast dance from Macedonia: ♩ | ♩ | or ♩ | ♩ |

³ *Syrτος* dance: one of the most popular traditional dances throughout Greece. Its rhythmic pattern can be in 2/2, 2/4, 4/4.

⁴ Costis Palamas (1859–1943): he has dominated Modern Greek poetry for at least three decades, from 1890. Influenced by the French literary movement of Parnassianism, he adopted the rigorous perfection of the form. Even though he never stated that he belonged to the group of symbolists, the influence of symbolism is obvious in his poetry. He was also influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy and socialism.

It is about four cycles of songs. The first two cycles of songs were composed during the 1960s while the other two during the 1990s, i.e. 30 years later. The comparative study of these four cycles of songs enables us to observe the evolution of the composer's musical language during the thirty years separating the periods of composition of the first two song cycles from the next two. However, it goes without saying that neither the poetic options nor the composer's musical language do not alter between the cycles of songs of the same period, namely between the *Cities A' / B'* and the *Cities C' / D'*. Moreover, the composer himself states that:

"*The City B', on a level of music and lyrics, is the natural extension of the City A'.*" (Flessas, 1994: 20)

More precisely:

The *City A'* was composed in 1960–1961, in Paris. It consists of nine songs:

1. «Καημός» (Kaimos) = *Sea of Bitterness*
2. «Βράχο-βράχο» (Vracho-vracho) = *Rock of Rocks*
3. «Το παράπονο» (To paraponon) = *Lonely man's plaint*
4. «Μετανάστης» (Metanastis) = *Emigrant*
5. «Μάνα μου και Παναγιά» (Mana mou kai Panagia) = *Madonna Mother*
6. «Έχω μια αγάπη» (Echo mia agapi) = *My mistress dawn*
7. «Δραπετσώνα» (Drapetsona) = *Drapetsona*
8. «Σαββατόβραδο» (Savvatovrado) = *Let every night be Saturday*
9. «Βρέχει στη φτωχογειτονιά» (Vrechei sti ftochogeitonía) = *Rainfall in my ghetto heart*

on poetry by Dimitris Christodoulou, Tasos Livaditis and Costas Virvos. The work was recorded in the same period, in Athens, by Grigoris Bithikotsis, Stelios Kazantzidis and Marinella, who were accompanied by a popular orchestra under the baton of the composer.

The *City B'* was composed in 1964, in Paris and in Athens. It consists of six songs:

1. «Στράτα τη στράτα» (Strata ti strata) = *Youth leaves lightning-swift*
2. «Είναι μακρύς ο δρόμος σου» (Einaí makrys o dromos sou) = *So far away, be patient*
3. «Βραδιάζει» (Vradiazai) = *Evening deep in your eyes*
4. «Γωνιά-γωνιά» (Gonia-gonia) = *I search each corner for you*
5. «Οι μοιραίοι» (Oí moiraiói) = *Down in the old taverna*
6. «Η μπαλάντα του Αντρίκου» (I balanta tou Antrikou) = *Andrew's Ballad*

on poetry by Dimitris Christodoulou, Costas Varnalis, Nikos Gatsos and Panos Kokkinopoulos. The work was recorded in the same year, in Athens, by Grigoris Bithikotsis, who was also accompanied by a popular orchestra under the baton of the composer.

The *City C'* was composed in 1994, in Athens. It consists of ten songs:

1. «Εκείνα που είχα να σου πω» (Ekeina pou eicha na sou po) = *All that I had to tell you*
2. «Εστω κι από λύπη μίλησέ μου» (Esto ki apo lypi milise mou) = *Talk to me even if it's out of pity*
3. «Ήσουν μπαξές» (Isoun baxes) = *You were a garden*
4. «Ποιοι είμαστε εμείς?» (Poioi eimaste emeis?) = *Who are we?*
5. «Η ελπίδα που έλεγες» (I elpida pou eleges) = *You were talking about hope*
6. «Ξένος στη στράτα κι ορφανός» (Xenos sti strata ki orfanos) = *Foreigner and orphan in the street*
7. «Δεν έχει ο δρόμος γυρισμό» (Den echei o dromos gurismo) = *There is no way back*
8. «Το πάθος που διώκεται» (To pathos pou dioketai) = *Persecuted passion*
9. «Μιλώ παλιά» (Milao palia) = *I'm talking old*
10. «Αχ! Έλα κι άναψε το φως» (Ach! Ela ki anapse to fos) = *Ah! Come and turn the light on*

on poetry by Manos Eleftheriou, Dimitris Kesiosoglou and Lina Nikolakopoulou. The work was presented for the first time and recorded in the same year, in Athens, by Manolis Mitsias.

The *City D'* was composed in 1994–1995, in Athens. It consists of ten songs:

1. «Ας τους να μας κοροϊδεύουν» (As tous na mas koroidevoun) = *Let them fool us*
2. «Αρχόντισσα μου σιωπηλή» (Archontissa mou siopili) = *You, my silent Lady*
3. «Κορίτσι του Οκτώβρη» (Koritsi tou Oktovri) = *October girl*
4. «Δεν φταις εσύ που ταξιδεύω» (Den ftais esy poy taxidevo) = *It's not your fault that I travel*
5. «Τώρα που φεύγεις» (Tora pou fevgeis) = *Now that you're leaving far away*
6. «Χρόνια Φτηνά» (Chronia Ftina) = *Cheap years*
7. «Νύχτες φωτογράφοι» (Nychtes fotografoi) = *Nights photographers*
8. «Περίμενέ με» (Perimene me) = *Wait for me*
9. «Με τις χαμένες τις ψυχές» (Me tis chamenes tis psyches) = *With the lost souls*
10. «Σε ποια πατρίδα θες να πας?» (Se poia patrida thes na pas?) = *In which homeland do you want to go?*

on poetry by Manos Eleftheriou and Spiros Toupyouannis. The work was presented for the first time and recorded in 1996, in Athens, by Petros Gaitanos.

From the **poetic analysis** of the four cycles of songs results:

a. Themes:

- The main themes of the songs of the *Cities A'* and *B'* are:
- the sorrow of exile and emigration; expressed, for example, in the songs *Rock of Rocks*:

Βράχο-βράχο τον καϊμό μου,
τον μετρώ και πονώ,
κι είναι το παράπονό μου,
πότε μάνα θα σε δώ.

* * *

*Rock of rocks my sorrow,
I count it and I suffer pain,
And my grievance is,
When will I see you again mother.*

and *Emigrant*:

Με δέρναν όλοι οι καιροί μου πάγωναν τα μάτια,
μου κάναν πέτρα το ψωμί,
μου κάναν βούρκο το νερό
και την καρδιά κομμάτια.

* * *

*I was beaten up by every storm, my eyes were frozen,
they made my bread taste like stone,
they made my water taste like bog
and they broke my heart into pieces.*

- the poverty; expressed, for example, in the song *Drapetsona*:

Ένα κρεβάτι και μια κούνια στη γωνιά
στην τρύπια σέγγη του άστρα και πουλιά.
Κάθε του πόρτα ιδρώτας κι αναστεναγμός
κάθε παράθυρό του κι ουρανός.

* * *

*A room with a bed and a child's cradle,
the stars decorated the leaky roof.
On each door was sweat and sigh,
on each window was the sky.*

- the sad life; expressed, for example, in the song *Evening deep in your eyes*.

Βοριάς χτυπά την πόρτα μου
και στην ψυχή μου αδιάζει
και στα πικρά τα μάτια μου
στιγμή στιγμή βραδιάζει.

* * *

*The north wind knocks on my door
and my soul is frozen
and in my bitter eyes
it's getting dark
moment by moment.*

These topics directly reflect the historic and social reality of Greece at the time of creating these cycles of songs and they fully express the spirit of the poets: Gatsos, Livaditis and mainly Varnalis, who had participated in the Resistance (1940–1944), in the Greek Civil War (1945–1949) and in general in all the struggles for Freedom, Democracy and Social Justice.

– Unlike the *Cities A'* and *B'*, the themes of the songs of the *Cities C'* and *D'* are characterized by an intense lyricism, entirely personal; they express the innermost concerns of the poets Eleftheriou, Toupoyannis and Nikolakopoulou, by reflecting their soul. More precisely, the songs of the *City C'*, which Theodorakis called “small wildflowers” (Tilerama Magazine, 1994, October 29: Untitled Article) and the songs of the “bittersweet” *City D'* (*Ethnos* Newspaper, 1996, October 16: Concerning the *City D'*) refer both to:

- the cruelty of our time; expressed, for example, in the song *All that I had to tell you*:

Εγώ'χα μόνο ένα κορμί
να σου χαρίσω μια στιγμή
και να γελάς.
Μα τις ανθρώπινες ψυχές
τις έβλεπες σα μετοχές
που τις πουλάς.

* * *

*I only had a body
to share with you a little moment
and make you laugh.
But you saw the human souls
as shares
to be sold on the stock market.*

- the lack of true human relationships; expressed, for example, in the song *Talk to me even if it's out of pity*:

Έστω κι από λύπη μίλησέ μου
έχω ξεπεράσει τις ντροπές
σαν ελεημοσύνη μίλησέ μου
τέλος πάντων πες μου ότι θες.

* * *

*Talk to me even if it's out of pity
I get over all my shyness.
Talk to me even if it's out of charity
in short, tell me anything you want.*

- the despair caused by loneliness; expressed, for example, in the song *You were talking about hope*:

Μοναχός περπάτησα
κι άδειασε η ψυχή μου
σαν ένα ποτήρι με νερό
σαν ποτήρι που έσπασε
δίπλα στη ζωή μου
κι ούτε στάλα πρόφτασα να πιω.

* * *

*I walked all alone
and my soul was empty
like a glass of water
like a broken glass of water
next to my life
and I didn't even have the time to drink a drop.*

- the beauty of love; expressed, for example, in the song *You, my silent Lady*:

Ξέρω δε θα'ρθεις να μου στάξεις
λίγη στα χείλη μου δροσιά
γιατί φοβάσαι μη μου τάξεις
τον ήλιο και την ξαστεριά

* * *

*I know that you won't come and drip
some dew drops on my lips
because you're afraid to promise me
the sun and the clear sky.*

- the pain of separation; expressed, for example, in the song *Now that you're leaving far away*:

Τώρα που φεύγεις μακριά
 πάρε μαζί σου τη ζωή μου
 ένα ποτάμι σιωπηλό
 κι ένα τραγούδι της ψυχής μου.

* * *

*Now that you're leaving far away
 take with you my life
 a silent river
 and a song of my soul.*

- the eternal hope of a new meeting which will eliminate loneliness; expressed, for example, in the song *Ah! Come and turn the light on*:

Αχ! έλα κι άναψε το φως
 τα χρόνια να μοιράσω
 και μείνε στο παράθυρο
 να διώχνεις τα παλιά.
 Έλα και τράβα τη σκεπή
 να φύγω να πετάξω.

* * *

*Ah! Come and turn the light on
 to dispense my years
 and stay in the window
 to chase away the old times.
 Come and pull the roof down
 to fly away.*

- the hope that arises from the faith to God to whom we 'address' in every difficulty; expressed, for example, in the song *Persecuted passion*:

Το πάθος που διώκεται
 δεν πάει να επιδιώκεται
 εσείς θα βγείτε λάθος.
 Στο βάθος το ζηλεύουμε
 αυτό που ρεζιλεύουμε
 και μάρτυράς μου ο Άθως.

* * *

*Persecuted passion
 even if it is desired afresh
 you will prove wrong.
 Deep down we envy
 what we deride
 and Athos is my witness.*

b. Poetic structure:

– The three-verse poems dominate and their rate peaks at 68.75 % in the *Cities A'* and *B'* and 55 % in the *Cities C'* and *D'*. These are four-line verses at a percentage of 53.3 % in the *Cities A'* and *B'* and 45 % in the *Cities C'* and *D'*. Moreover, in the *Cities C'* and *D'* there are six-line verses in a percentage of 30 %.

– Among the four *Cities*, only three poems *Rock of Rocks* and *Rainfall in my ghetto heart* from the *City A'* and *Let them fool us* from the *City D'* have isometric verses – i.e. 8.57 % – while the rest of the poems have heterometric verses.

c. Lyrics:

As far as the meter of the verses is concerned, the *iambic* and *trochaic* verses⁵ predominate, as in the *demotic* Greek music and the *rebetika* songs. However, the *iambic* verses and especially the *iambic fifteen-syllable* – the so-called “national Greek verse” – prevail in all four *Cities*. It appears both as “inseparable” verse – lines of 15 syllables (for example, the song *Rock of Rocks* from the *City A'*) and as “separated” verse – 8 syllables/line + 7 syllables/line (for example, the song *So far away, be patient* from the *City B'*).

From the **musical analysis** of the four cycles of songs results:

The **form** that prevails is verse with refrain, which was established during the ‘labour phase’ (1940–1953) of the *rebetiko song* with the songs by Vassilis Tsitsanis. It is based on several short melodic themes, which correspond to each line (a theme/line). The reiteration of the themes and the refrain highlight the poetic text and intensify the emotions emanating there from.

The **melodic line** is simple and is characterized by the step to step movement. The melodic line varies and extends from the interval of 6th to the interval of 12th in the *Cities A'* and *B'* and from the interval of 7th to the interval of 11th interval in the *Cities C'* and *D'*.

The **harmonic structure** is tonal with melodic modal turns and it is based on the main chords of basic tonality, thus it is “able to describe simple and direct feelings” (Scott: Greek Music Library ‘Lilian Voudouri). In the *Cities A'* and *B'* there is frequent use of the tonalities: *Sol M*, *Re M*, *Fa M*, *la m*, *mi m*, *re m*, while in the *Cities C'* and *D'* the prevailing tonalities are: *Re M*, *Si, M*, *la m*, *mi m*, *re m*. The modulations are rare, instant and appear in relative or homonymous tonalities. The shifts in the modes of the ancient Greek and Byzantine music demonstrate the composer’s influence by the Greek musical tradition. The frequent use of the *aeolian* and the *dorian* modes (West, 1999: 247–257) in the *Cities A'* and *B'* gives them a tone of pride and virility, thereby attributing the ‘epic’ vibe that characterizes these *Cities*. On the contrary, the frequent use of the *lydian* and the *mixolydian* modes (West, 1999: 247–257) combined with the minor tonalities in the *Cities C'* and *D'* reveal a passionate and plaintive lyricism.

It is of particular interest to study the **rhythms** of the songs of the four *Cities*. The impact of the demotic and the rebetik music is obvious on the composer’s work. More specifically:

- The rhythm of *ballos*⁶ dance is used in the following song: *Emigrant* (Figure 2)

Figure 2. *Emigrant*

⁵ *Iambic Verse*: as the Greek meter is basically built on the alternation of long and short syllables, the iambic verse is composed of a weak syllable followed by a strong syllable (◡ –)

Trochaic Verse: as the Greek meter is basically built on the alternation of long and short syllables, the iambic verse is composed of a strong syllable followed by a weak syllable (– ◡)

⁶ *Ballos* (μπάλλος): a Greek traditional dance of maritime Greece. It is mostly danced in the islands of the East Aegean Sea – Chios island, Ikaria island, Samos island – and in the islands of the Thracian Sea – Thasos island, Samothrace island, as well as in the Cyclades, in the Sporades and in the island of Euboea. Its rhythm is binary: (♩♩ | ♩♩ or ♩♩♩♩ or ♩♩♩). Characteristic is the ballos dance of the Ionian island of Lefkada, which has been influenced by the music of Epirus and it can start in 2/4 or 4/8 and finish in 7/8.

- The rhythm of *hasapiko* dance is used in the following songs:
Youth leaves lightning-swift, Evening deep in your eyes, Down in the old taverna, Andrew's Ballad, You were a garden, You were talking about hope, Ah! Come and turn the light on, Now that you're leaving, Wait for me, With the lost souls, In which homeland do you want to go? (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Down in the old taverna

- The rhythm of *zeibekikon*⁷ dance is used in the following songs:
Drapetsona, Let every night be Saturday, Rainfall in my ghetto heart, I search each corner for you, You were a garden, Let them fool us, It's not your fault that I travel (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Drapetsona

- The rhythm of the Thessalian dance *tai-tai*⁸ is used in the following song: *Rock of Rocks* (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Rock of Rocks

⁷ *Zeibekikon*: a Greek popular dance in 9/4 or 9/8. The origin of zeibekikon dance cannot be really defined. Nevertheless, we believe that it was a war dance performed in the 18th century, by a tribe of nomadic warriors, called the zeibekides. These warriors constituted a police force assistant to the Turkish sultans in the Ottoman Empire and before the latter exterminate the former, fearing that the zeibekides would slip from their control. The zeibekikon dance of the rebetes is danced indoors, usually in a tavern and never before sunset, unlike the original one, which was held outdoors. This dance evokes the vagaries of a hard life and the revolt which may cause. Who performs a zeibekikon dance, enjoys a great freedom of movements. These gestures combine the tension and the relaxation time, and express, in line with the rebetikon, the melancholy mood, the restrained violence, the accumulated problems and suffering... The zeibekikon dance does not have established characters. Usually danced by men solo, the zeibekikon dance has a female version in Cyprus.

⁸ *Tai-tai*: a brisk traditional dance of the area of Thessaly: ♩ ♩ ♩.

- The rhythm of the Epirotic dances “in triple tempo” in the following song: *Cheap years* (Figure 6)

The musical score for "Cheap years" is presented in two systems. The first system includes a vocal line (Soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Chords are indicated below the piano part: Gm, D, Gm, Dm/F, E7maj7, Cm, D. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with chords D7, Gm, D, Cm, D, Gm.

Figure 6. *Cheap years*

- The rhythm of the *Syrtaki* dance is used in the following song: *You, my silent Lady* (Figure 7)

The musical score for "You, my silent Lady" is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Chords are indicated below the piano part: C, G. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with chords G, C, C, F, G. The third system includes the vocal line with Greek lyrics and the piano accompaniment with chords C, C, C, G.

Figure 7. *You, my silent Lady*

As the rhythm constitutes a key element of Theodorakis' works, in his attempt to create a “Single Musical Sound Lyric Stochastic Universe” (Theodorakis, 1999, vol. 3: 167), the composer uses small rhythmic cells as a cohesive element both between songs of the same cycle and between songs of different cycles. For example:

- The rhythmic cell $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ can be found both in the songs: *Sea of Bitterness*, *Lonely man's plaint*, *Madonna Mother*, *Rainfall in my ghetto heart of the City A'* and in the song *So far away, be patient of the City B'* by amalgamating both the songs of the same cycle together and the two different song cycles together.
- Likewise, the rhythmic patterns of triplets $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ and dotted $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ appear in the songs of the *Cities C'* and *D'*, as in the songs: *Talk to me even if it's out of pity* and *You, my silent Lady* and they constitute a cohesive element of the two cycles of songs.

Finally, as far as the **orchestration** of these song cycles is concerned, it should be mentioned that the composer mainly uses the musical instruments of the Greek popular orchestra: bouzouki and occasionally baglamas, guitar and percussions to which he adds instruments of the symphonic orchestra, such as the oboe, the cello, the harp or the bass.

While Theodorakis was setting to music the songs of the *Cities A', B', C' and D'*, he was mainly inspired by the Greek traditional music with which he was raised. Ancient Greek and Byzantine modes, traditional musical instruments and traditional dance rhythms attribute an undeniable Greek character to the songs of the *Cities'* tetralogy.

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Santrauka

Mikio Theodorakio *Cities*: ritmas ir graikiškumas

Savo autobiografiniame veikalė „Archangelo keliai“ žymus graikų kompozitorius Mikis Theodorakis (g. 1925) užsimena: „C. Palamas tikėjo, kad ritmas poezijoje – ritminis ėjimas – simbolizuoja ritmą, kuris valdo Visatą. Aš pats, būdamas muzikas, dar pridėčiau ir Harmoniją. Kiekvienas, pakėlęs žvilgsnį į žvaigždėtą dangų ir pamatęs ritminę žvaigždžių judėjimą lemiančią harmoniją, iš karto su tuo sutiktų“ (Theodorakis, 1986, t. 1: 140–141).

Mikis Theodorakis regė „galaktikos žvaigždes“ kaip savo įvairiapusiškos kūrybos visumą, kuri apima dainų ciklus, kamerinės muzikos kūrinius, muziką teatrui ir kinui, simfoninę muziką, oratorijas ir operas. Jo išskirtinė muzikos kalba kilo ir iš tradicinės bei populiariosios graikų muzikos, ir iš Vakarų Europos muzikos tradicijos.

Straipsnyje atskleidžiamas ritmo, kaip pagrindinio struktūrinio elemento, vaidmuo Mikio Theodorakio muzikos kalboje. Tai atliekama analizuojant jo tetralogiją *Cities* (*City A'* / 1959–1960, *City B'* / 1964, *City C'* / 1994, *City D'* / 1996). Taip pat aptariamas ryšys tarp ritmo ir graikiškumo Theodorakio kūryboje.