

META-XENAKIS

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON IANNIS XENAKIS'S LIFE, WORK,
AND LEGACIES

EDITED BY SHARON KANACH AND PETER NELSON





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2. Iannis Xenakis through his Letters at the KSYME Archive

Stella Kourmpana

In memory of Haris Xanthoudakis¹

KSYME (*Κέντρο Σύγχρονης Μουσικής Έρευνας*, or Contemporary Music Research Center) was founded in 1979 by Iannis Xenakis, along with Stefanos Vassiliades (1933–2004) and John G. Papaioannou (1915–2000), and twenty-two other members, following the example of Xenakis's CEMAMu (Centre d'Études de Mathématique et Automatique Musicales; founded in 1972 in Paris). Its main founding goal was the research and development of computer-based electroacoustic music in Greece. Today, located at the premises of the Athens Conservatoire, the KSYME is an active Music Research Center and its archives host valuable chapters of Greek music heritage, and a great part of its collections is related to its main founder.

At the archives one can find a collection of twenty-three letters by Xenakis; twenty-two are addressed to Papaioannou, written during the period Xenakis was living in France and making his first steps as a composer and as an engineer and architect, and one is a later letter addressed to the then President of the Greek Republic, Konstantinos Karamanlis (1907–98), the person who gave back to Xenakis his Greek citizenship, that had been taken away in 1947. This chapter explores the content of these letters, to provide context for the first complete translation into English of the letter from Xenakis to Karamanlis, a statement and an offer that could have marked a turning point in Xenakis's life, and which show clearly the extent of Xenakis's personal and emotional commitment to Greece, and to the political and cultural renovation of Greek life that began with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974.

The urban planner and musicologist, Papaioannou, a valued friend of contemporary music in Greece, who offered his life to promoting the work of another prominent Greek composer and pupil of Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951), Nikos Skalkottas

¹ Haris Xanthoudakis (1950–2023) was a leading Greek composer and musicologist—a pupil of Xenakis in Paris and one of his collaborators in Greece—an important figure in Greek musicology, who dedicated his life to promoting Greek art music.

(1904–49), had realized early on the importance of the work of Xenakis and was very willing to help him in many ways. After their acquaintance in Germany during the premiere of *Metastasis* (1953–4) in 1955, Xenakis and Papaioannou became good friends. Papaioannou was one of the key people who introduced the work of Xenakis to Greece, during the years of Xenakis’s exile, mainly through the organization of the “Greek Contemporary Music Weeks”² but also through his articles and his lectures on contemporary music. Their regular correspondence, from 1956 until 1962, reveals the evolution of Xenakis’s musical thought during the period when his own creative voice was being formed: as it became known with the emblematic work *Metastasis*, his break with Le Corbusier (1887–1965) over the authorship of the Philips Pavilion,³ the rivalry with Pierre Boulez (1925–2016), his critique of serialism, but also his relationship with Greece and his identity as a Greek composer.

Xenakis in Greece

Born in Braïla (Romania) in 1921, Iannis Xenakis and his younger brothers, Jason and Kosmas, moved to Greece in 1927, a year after the death of their mother.⁴ Their father Klearchos sent them to a boarding school on the island of Spetses. It was there that the young Iannis took his first music lessons and learned to sing (Palestrina, among other things). After that boarding school experience, Xenakis moved to Athens in order to study engineering. At the same time, he studied music with the Greek composer Aristotle Kondourov (1896–1969), a student of Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov (1859–1935), with whom Xenakis studied harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. The political situation in Greece during those years—while Xenakis was studying at the Athens Polytechnic (1940–7: the German Occupation, December Days (*Dekemvriana*), and the beginning of the Civil War)—played a decisive role in his personal development and in his musical formation.⁵ This difficult period, during which he developed intense resistance activity, strengthened his conviction that creation was the only “path to salvation.” Thus, the Occupation demonstrations in which he participated (and, in particular, the behavior of the sound carried from the front to the back of the crowd) would later serve as a source of inspiration for the composition of *Metastasis*, his first iconic work.

His youthful years in the capital would mark him in many ways. In the Battle of Athens in December 1944, in which Xenakis participated as a member of the resistance, he was wounded in the face by a shell and lost an eye. Despite his serious injury, in 1947, having just received his diploma from the Polytechnic University, he was called

2 The “Greek Contemporary Music Weeks” was a very important initiative that promoted contemporary music in Greece during the years 1966–76, by organizing concerts, but also lectures and exhibitions.

3 See further Chapter 22 in this volume.

4 As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, the question lingers as to whether Xenakis was born in 1921 or in 1922. Yet, in Greece, his birth year was consistently celebrated as being 1921.

5 For further comment on the December Days, see Chapter 28 in this volume.

up to join the National Army. Being a member of the Communist Party, at a time when communists were being persecuted in Greece, he escaped from the army and managed, via Italy, to flee to Paris. In the meantime, he was sentenced to death in absentia by a court martial and shortly afterwards stripped of his Greek citizenship.

Paris, which was then for him a kind of continuity of the ancient Greek civilization that he so admired, proved to be a hospitable place, but he never ceased to feel like a stranger. His collaboration with Le Corbusier would pave the way to recognition in the field of architecture and his apprenticeship with Olivier Messiaen (1908–92) would convince him that he could do what he wanted in music, without restrictions. France would become his second home (he was granted French citizenship in 1965) and it would not be long before he established himself as a pioneer in the world of musical.

A Young Composer in Paris

Although still at the beginning of their acquaintance, in his first letter to Papaioannou, written in Paris on 27 November 1956, Xenakis felt the need to open up to his Greek supporter and to share his feelings and thoughts with him. Thanking Papaioannou for an article he had published in the Athenian newspaper *Nea* dedicated to Xenakis's music, the composer (who had been living in exile in Paris since 1947) felt extremely moved when realizing that there were people supporting him in his homeland, since, at the same time, "Foreigners are always ungenerous with encouraging words, when not addressing compatriots."⁶ As an example, he mentioned the fact that the newspaper *Figaro* wrote about five composers who won scholarships, and published a short *curriculum vitae* only for the French one, while for the other four, there was only a mention of their names. Xenakis concluded that "the French in general are chauvinists while the Germans are much more open."⁷

Concerning contemporary music, things were not easier:

Generally, avant-garde French composers are performed in Germany, but in France no orchestra, private or public, want to perform them. Only Boulez succeeded to present contemporary works but again, choosing composers who were strictly dodecaphonic (serial) and of his own mentality.⁸

Here one can trace the marks of Xenakis's disagreement with serial music and technique, that would very soon be expressed in his study "La crise de la musique sérielle,"⁹ a text that would give serious impetus to Xenakis's own compositional language.

6 Xenakis's letter to Papaioannou, 27 November 1956 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [*Καὶ οἱ ξένοι εἶναι πάντοτε φειδωλοὶ στὰ ἐνθαρρυντικὰ λόγια ὅταν δὲν πρόκειται γιὰ ὁμοεθνεῖς*].

7 Ibid. [*Γενικὰ δὲ οἱ Γάλλοι εἶναι ἐθνικιστὲς ἐνῶ οἱ Γερμανοὶ εἶναι πολὺ πρὸ ἐλευθέρου*].

8 Ibid. [*Γενικὰ οἱ προοδευτικοὶ Γάλλοι συνθέτες παίζονται στὴ Γερμανία ἐνῶ στὴ Γαλλία καμμιά ὀρχήστρα κρατικὴ ἢ ιδιωτικὴ δὲν τοὺς ἀναδέχεται. Μόνο ὁ Boulez κατάφερε νὰ ἀνεβάσει σύγχρονα ἔργα καὶ πάλι διαλέγοντας τοὺς συνθέτες νὰ εἶναι στενὰ δωδεκαφθογγιστὲς καὶ τῆς ἴδιας νοοτροπίας τῆς ἰδικῆς του*].

9 See Xenakis, 1955, p. 2–4.

In a letter dated 22 July 1958, we read again about the difficulties Xenakis had to face as a foreign composer in France:

Greeks think that life in France offers great facilities. But they forget that everyday living and competition is on another level. And for a Greek, it is a double fight: a) To understand the mentality of life here, of the social relationships and values, that are different from those there [in Greece] and b) to prepare for and surpass the best, if he has any ambition (or just pride—φιλότιμο). In Paris, either you disappear and even the stones forget about you, or you are patient, you work night and day, until your work and efforts are recognized. Triumphs for a (Greek) foreigner do not exist, especially when one seeks the avant-garde. Teaching the French with a non-stop tradition of 1.000 years, or a German?¹⁰

Contrary to popular belief, Xenakis (like all Greeks) faced many challenges in achieving success in France, a country with a rich musical tradition. The first ten years were particularly difficult for Xenakis. He had to work very hard and wait a long time for his work to be recognized and applauded. During this period, he was mostly occupied with engineering and architecture.¹¹

Xenakis and Le Corbusier—The Philips Pavilion

It is really fascinating to follow, day by day, important historical moments through Xenakis's words, right when those events were taking place. In the first letter from 1956 cited above, Xenakis mentions his involvement with the Philips Pavilion:

The Philips Company asked Le Corbusier to create a Pavilion for the International Exposition of 1958 in Brussels. He (Le Corbusier) assigned me the architectural study and I made a pavilion without any of his instructions, or rather, against his instructions, and he finally approved it, with no changes. It is quite original. Inside he will make an 'Electronic Poem', with colored projections with the play of light and shadows and sound. For the music he will collaborate with Varèse and myself. Varèse will create music lasting 8 minutes, and me, 2 minutes.¹² It is very interesting, and I believe that it will be impressive.¹³

10 Xenakis's letter to Papaioannou, 2 July 1958 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [Οἱ Ἕλληνες νομίζουν πὼς ἡ ζωὴ στὴ Γαλλία ἔχει μεγάλες εὐκολίες. Ξεχνοῦν ὅμως ὅτι ἡ βιοπάλη καὶ ὁ συναγωνισμὸς βρίσκονται σὲ ἄλλη στάθμη. Καὶ γιὰ ἓναν Ἕλληνα εἶναι διπλὸς ὁ ἀγῶνας: α) νὰ μπῇ στὸ νόημα τῆς ἐδῶ ζωῆς, τῶν κοινωνικῶν σχέσεων καὶ ἀξιών ποὺ διαφέρουν ἀπ' τὴς ἐκεῖ β) νὰ ἐφοδιασθῇ καὶ νὰ ξεπεράσῃ τοὺς καλλίτερους ἂν ἔχει φιλοδοξία (ἢ καὶ ἀπλῶς φιλότιμο). Στὸ Παρίσι ἡ χάνεσαι καὶ σὲ ξεχνοῦν καὶ οἱ πέτρες ἢ κάνεις ὑπομονὴ δουλεύοντας νύχτα μέρα ὥσπου νὰ δικαιωθοῦν ἀργὰ οἱ κόποι σου. Θρίαμβοι γιὰ ἓνα ξένο (Ἕλληνα) δὲν ὑπάρχουν, μάλιστα ὅταν ἀξιῶνεις τὴν πρωτοπορεία. Νὰ διδάξεις Γάλλους μὲ συνεχόμενη παράδοση 1000 ἐτῶν, ἢ Γερμανό;].

11 During the years 1947–59, Xenakis worked full-time in Le Corbusier's studio.

12 That would be the piece *Concret PH* (1958).

13 Xenakis's letter to Papaioannou, 27 November 1956 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [Ἡ ἐταιρεία ΦΙΛΙΠΣ πέρασε παραγγελία τοῦ Le Corbusier γιὰ νὰ φτιάξῃ ἓνα περίπτερο στὴ διεθνῇ ἐκθεση 1958 τῶν Βρυξελλῶν. Μοῦ ἀνέθεσε τὴν ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ μελέτη καὶ τοῦ ἐφτιαξά ἓνα περίπτερο χωρὶς καμμία ὁδηγία του, μᾶλλον παρὰ τὴς ὁδηγίες του, καὶ τὸ ἐνέκρινε τελικὰ χωρὶς καμμία

Note here the word “interesting,” a keyword for Xenakis.¹⁴

The next mention of the Philips Pavilion appears in a letter dated 19 April 1958, meaning two days after the inauguration of the Brussels Exposition. After discussing *Pithoprakta* (1955–6), Xenakis refers to the Pavilion:

I am also sending you an article the Philips Company commissioned me to write about the architecture of the Pavilion that I made for Le Corbusier. You will see how and why I gave it that form. Le C[orbusier] admits my role in that, although he doesn't mind accepting the congratulations in my place. It is a fight with him and with Philips. And when it is over, I will tell you about it. Finally, Le Corbusier accepted the official title: Architecture Philips = Le Corbusier + Y. Xenakis.¹⁵

And of course, that “fight” between Le Corbusier and Xenakis was to be fatal to their relationship. As Xenakis mentioned many years later, they both liked and respected each other; their fight was basically a matter of generational difference.¹⁶ Regarding the Philips Pavilion, Xenakis was very proud because, for the first time, he had the chance to create something entirely by himself, and that “something” was totally unique. And he was proud that in it he had implemented the main idea that he had also used in his first, revolutionary musical work, *Metastasis*: the goal was to try and allow movement from one point to another without disturbing the continuity. What he did with the *glissandi* in *Metastasis*, he also applied to the Pavilion, with hyperbolic paraboloids. From the very beginning, Xenakis thought like a true *homo universalis*.

Xenakis's Early Compositions

It is very interesting to see that Xenakis felt the need to discuss with Papaioannou several issues arising from his compositions; not only about the reception of his work, but also about the composition of the works themselves. It seems Xenakis had found a good conversational partner as far as contemporary music was concerned, since Papaioannou was a great analyst of music himself. When *Pithoprakta* was first performed in Southern Germany, no one seemed to have understood what Xenakis was trying to do, and they wrote that he was like “a worm made of nickel that eats the corpse.”¹⁷

μεταβολή. Είναι αρκετά πρωτότυπο. Μέσα σ' αυτό θα κάνει ο ίδιος ένα «ηλεκτρονικό ποίημα» με προβολές έγχρωμες, παιχνίδια φωτός και σκιών και ήχοβολίες. Στη μουσική θα συνεργαστή με τον Varèse και μ' έμένα. Ο Varèse θα κάνει μουσική 8 λεπτών κ' εγώ 2 λεπτών. Έχει μεγάλο ενδιαφέρον και νομίζω πως θα κάνει κρότο].

14 See Xenakis, 2008, p. 130 (“Beautiful or Ugly”).

15 Xenakis's letter to Papaioannou, 19 April 1958 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [Σου έσωκλείω ένα άρθρο που μου παράγγειλε ή έτ[αιρία] Φίλιπς πάνω στην αρχιτεκτονική του περιπτέρου που έμελέτησα για τον Le Corbusier. Θα δής πως και γιατί του έδωσα τέτοια μορφή. Ο Le C[orbusier] παραδέχεται τον ρόλο μου αλλά δεν τον ένοχλει να δέχεται τα συγχαρητήρια στην θέση μου. Είναι μία άλλη μαζί του και μαζί με την Φίλιπς και αν περάση θα στα διηγηθώ. Τελικά ο Le Corbusier δέχτηκε τον τίτλο Architecture Philips= Le Corbusier + Y. Xenakis επίσημα κλπ].

16 Cf. “Biography” chapter in Varga, 1996, p. 7–46.

17 Xenakis's letter to Papaioannou, 19 April 1958 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [με παρομοίασαν με σκουλήκι από χρωμονικέλιο που σπαράτει τα πτώματα].

This is why he felt so relieved when he read Papaioannou's analysis of the work, and he knew that he had a great interlocutor with whom he could share his thoughts. So, in a postcard dating from, most likely, 1962, he explained to Papaioannou: "I wrote an 'application' for piano: I finally discovered a 'symbolic' music, like symbolic logic."¹⁸ The work he was referring to was, of course, *Herma*, a piece for piano he composed between 1960 and 1962, in which he "finally" found a way to parallel mathematics and music (once again, this demonstrates his holistic thinking). George Boole's (1915–64) algebra and symbolic logic formed the basis of his new compositional idea. When asked why he chose the term "symbolic music" he answered: "because sounds are symbols, they have no other meaning."¹⁹ Xenakis believed that music does not provoke emotion. It is rather the psychological and sociological contexts that make us react emotionally to music. Xenakis wanted to create a new sound universe that would be different from any other.²⁰

But what is perhaps more interesting in Xenakis's letters about his music is the connection between music and his relationship with his homeland.

Xenakis and Greece: Nostalgia and Guilt

In a letter dated 25 February 1960, Xenakis wrote to Papaioannou to ask Manos Hatzidakis (1925–94) to bring him Byzantine music and some of Hatzidakis's own compositions.²¹ At the time, Xenakis was working on the music for the film *Orient-Occident* (which would be presented eventually at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1960). This project led him to listen to Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (RTF), which was playing music from Pontos.²² Listening to this music provoked in him a great nostalgia: "I got so nostalgic. I counted the years that I stayed in France, away from Greece."²³ And that thought made him ask himself:

What kind of music do I make? International or French? I hope the first, since Greek I cannot, although it doesn't really matter anymore. Greek ok, but only if that could stand as a model for the whole earth (tomorrow). Fortunately, art no longer has borders. But it is good when your homeland brings the best fruits.²⁴

18 Xenakis's postcard to Papaioannou, undated (KSyme Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [Ἐγγραφα γιὰ πιάνο μία ἐφαρμογή. Βρῆκα ἐπὶ τέλους μίαν «συμβολικὴ μουσικὴ» κατὰ τὴν συμβολικὴ λογικὴ].

19 Cf. "Theories-Compositions" chapter in Varga, 1996, p. 72–96.

20 As Haris Xanthoudakis, a former pupil of Xenakis and collaborator, told me in a private conversation, during the Meta-Xenakis Global Symposium, in Athens on 1 October 2022.

21 A very popular Greek composer of his time.

22 Pontos is an area in today's Turkey where Greek orthodox populations used to live until their genocide during the years 1914–23.

23 Xenakis's letter to Papaioannou, 25 February 1962 (KSyme Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [Πόση νοσταλγία μέπιασε. Ἀναμέτρησα ξαφνικὰ τὰ χρόνια ποὺ ἔμεινα στὴ Γαλλία ἔξω ἀπ' τὴν Ἑλλάδα].

24 Ibid. [Τί μουσικὴ κάνω; Διεθνιστικὴ ἢ Γαλλικὴ; Εὐχομαι τὴ πρώτη ἀφοῦ Ἑλληνικὴ δὲν μπορῶ, ἂν καὶ δὲν ἔχει πιά καὶ τόσο σημασία σήμερα. Ἑλληνικὴ σύμφωνοι, ἀλλὰ μόνο μὲ τὴν προϋπόθεσιν νᾶναι «δεῖγμα» σ' ὅλη τὴ γῆ (αὐριο). Ἡ τέχνη εὐτυχῶς πιά σήμερα δὲν ἔχει σύννορα. Ἀλλὰ καλὸ

In 1972, Xenakis founded the CEMAMu in Paris, a research center aimed at promoting contemporary and, above all, electronic music, as well as its research, and the renewal of music education, and in 1974 he would become a professor at the Sorbonne. However, for years Xenakis was tormented by guilt for having left the country he had fought for. He felt a debt to the friends he had left behind by escaping abroad, and he felt he had to do something to repay it. "I felt I had a mission. I had to do something important to regain my right to live."²⁵

But what could he do for his country that had driven him so far away? In the autumn of 1974, with the fall of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy, thanks to the intervention of the President of the Republic, Karamanlis, Xenakis was acquitted of the charge of high treason that condemned him to death, and he regained his citizenship. He could now return home after twenty-seven years of "difficult exile," as he wrote (see below).²⁶ It was the moment to fulfill the debt he felt he owed. In Greece, he had some friends waiting for him who had supported him during his period of exile. One of them was Papaioannou, the person who had dedicated his life to the promotion of contemporary music in Greece, and who had made sure that Xenakis's work was known to his homeland while he was in France. Despite the challenging political situation in Greece, especially during the period of the Seven Year Dictatorship (1967–74), the musical life of the country showed impressive activity, especially in the field of avant-garde music (largely thanks to Papaioannou's activity). At the same time, the echoes of Xenakis's work in France had reached his homeland, so when he returned to Greece, with the experience of so many years and the desire to do something important for his country, he was accepted almost as a hero.

In April 1975, a group of Greek students invited Xenakis to speak about philosophy. He responded enthusiastically and gave a four-hour lecture in front of an audience that had flooded the Law School building and the surrounding streets, where loudspeakers had been installed. Xenakis was back in his homeland, and speaking on his favorite subject, ancient Greek philosophy, which was for him not only a world of inspiration but also of creation. He often said that in his youth he believed he had been born twenty-five centuries too late. He read Plato (ca. 427–348 BCE) in the original, and believed that Greekness was harmony, proportion, and light. He lived with one foot in ancient Greece and the other in modern Greece. These two moments in time were to merge in September 1978 at the *Polytope de Mycènes*. Polytope means "a mixture of many places," with the term place being taken in the general, abstract sense, as the creator himself explained, and it was an event that included music, speech, and lighting.²⁷ Xenakis had already presented the *Polytope de Montréal* (1967) and the *Polytope de Cluny* (1972),

εἶναι ὁ τόπος σου νὰ τρέφει τοὺς καλλίτερους καρπούς].

25 "Interludium (Confession)" chapter in Varga, 1996, p. 56.

26 Xenakis's letter to Karamanlis, 24 June 1980 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters).

27 Cf. Pierre Carré "Polytope," in Dimitris Exarchos (ed.), "A Xenakis Dictionary" (2023), *Les Amis de Xenakis*, <https://www.iannis-xenakis.org/en/polytope/>

and more would follow, but the one in Mycenae had something unique. Mycenae was a place of particular cultural significance both for humanity and for Xenakis himself. A Polytope at the archaeological site of Mycenae aimed at a connection between the ancient era and the modern one. The composer wanted to recall how many “peaks” there are in Greek culture, as he used to say, and, on the occasion of the presentation of the *Polytope*, to give an opportunity to create a new, modern, “peak” in the same place.

In this complex extravaganza, for which a very large number of individuals and institutions (even the Greek army) collaborated, Xenakis had as constant companions both Papaioannou and the composer Stefanos Vassiliadis, who, together with Xenakis and twenty-two other founding members, would sign, shortly after the presentation of the *Polytope*, the Statutes of KSYME. If the *Polytope de Mycènes* had been a new “peak” for Greek culture, the establishment of a center for contemporary music research would have been the springboard for the continued creation of important cultural events in Greece. Xenakis’s vision was to create an institution along the lines of CEMAMu, which would promote research and music composition, with a special emphasis on technology, but also to familiarize young children and teenagers with the sounds that modern technological means can create. The basic tool of CEMAMu was a computer system for sound creation and musical composition based on the graphical representation of the sound signal, which had been first presented in Bonn in 1977 with great success and was called UPIC (Unité Polyagogique Informatique CEMAMu). Xenakis wanted to bring and disseminate a UPIC (Greek: *Polyagogia*) in Greece.²⁸

But the creation of an institution does not automatically imply its operation. It needs the support—mainly financial—of the state. Thus, Xenakis decided to write a letter to the President of the Republic, Karamanlis, who had allowed his longed-for return to Greece. This letter, written in 1980, describes the vision of the operation of this new institution and, through it, the fulfillment of the debt that Xenakis would offer his country. He wanted to shift the center of gravity of his artistic and teaching activity from France (where he was a professor at the Sorbonne) to Greece, and to make the KSYME a model center among the “most advanced in the world” for “the learning of music, the synthesis and the promotion of the latest ideas and methods based on mathematics, physics, acoustics, the history of music and the latest computer technology.”²⁹ Xenakis’s role in this would be merely coordinating, with no other consideration, as he emphasized, than the pleasure of contributing to his art and his place. In other words, Xenakis, at the peak of his artistic career, longed to offer all his

28 Cf. Agostino Di Scipio, “UPIC,” in Dimitris Exarchos (ed.), “A Xenakis Dictionary” (2023), *Les Amis de Xenakis*, <https://www.iannis-xenakis.org/en/dictionary-upic/>

29 Xenakis’s letter to Karamanlis, 24 June 1980 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis’s Letters) [Αὐτὸ τὸ κέντρο θὰ προίκιζε τὴν Ἑλλάδα μὲ ἓνα μέσο πρωτότυπο, πρότυπο καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ προχωρημένα στὸν κόσμος, γιὰ τὴν ἐκμάθηση τῆς μουσικῆς, τὴν σύνθεση καὶ τὴν προαγωγή τῶν τελευταίων ιδεῶν καὶ μεθόδων ποὺ στηρίζονται στὰ μαθηματικά, τὴ φυσικὴ, τὴν ἀκουστικὴ, τὴν ἱστορία τῆς μουσικῆς καὶ στὴν τελευταία τεχνολογία τῶν ἠλεκτρονικῶν ὑπολογιστῶν].

strength for the “new reconstruction of culture” in his own place:

Dear Mr. President,

Six years ago you issued a special decree that gave me back my Greek citizenship and deleted the condemnation of my youth. As a result, thanks to you, I could finally return to Greece for the first time after 27 years of hard exile, even if I spent them along with the friendly and beautiful nation of French, who honored me with the French citizenship in 1965. I owe you great favor for that.

My joy was great and I was ready to help with all my strength to the new rebuilding of the culture of my homeland [...] and I was thinking that I could, if not completely, at least, partly move the base of my cultural and educational activity (I am a professor at the Sorbonne) to Greece, so that the young people and my homeland can take advantage of the quality and the experience of my whole intensive cultural activity abroad. This is why I proposed the foundation of a Center of Scientific Research on Music in Greece, following the example of the Center that I created in Paris with main financial support by the ministry of Culture in France and according to the official will of the President at the time, Georges Pompidou.

This Center would offer Greece an original and a model platform, and one of the most advanced in the world, for learning music, for composing, and promoting the most recent methods, based in mathematics, physics, acoustics, the history of Music, as well as the cutting-edge technology of computers. The Center that I created in France is the fruit of the most advanced cultural-scientific concepts in music. My role would be, as in the French center, simply guiding—scientifically and artistically—without any other reward, only having the joy to help to my art and my country.³⁰

30 Xenakis's letter to Karamanlis, 24 June 1980 (KSYME Archive, Xenakis's Letters) [*Κύριε Πρόεδρε, Πριν έξη χρόνια βγάλατε ειδικό διάταγμα που μου έδινε πίσω την ελληνική ιθαγένεια και έσβυνε τις καταδίκες των νεανικών μου χρόνων. Έτσι, χάρη σέ σάς, μπόρεσα να έπιστρέψω στην Ελλάδα, πρώτη φορά ύστερα από 27 έτων δύσκολης έξορίας, έστω και αν τα πέρασα στο φιλικό και ώραίο έθνος των Γάλλων, που με τίμησαν τό 1965 με την Γαλλική ιθαγένεια. Σας χρεωστώ χάρη μεγάλη γι' αυτό.*

Η χαρά μου ήτο πολλή και ήμουν έτοιμος να συμβάλλω με τις δυνάμεις μου στην νέα ανοικοδόμηση του πολιτισμού του τόπου μου κάτω απ' την σοφή και αναίμακτη οδήγησή σας. Σκεφτόμουν, αν όχι έντελώς, τουλάχιστο μερικώς, να μετατοπίσω τό κέντρο βάρους της καλλιτεχνικής και διδακτικής μου (είμαι καθηγητής στη Σορβόννη) δραστηριότητας στην Ελλάδα, ώστε ή νεολαία και ό τόπος να έπωφεληθούν απ' την ποιότητα και την πείρα όλόκληρης της έντατικής καλλιτεχνικής επίδοσής μου στο έξωτερικό. Γι' αυτό και πρότεινα να ιδρυθή στην Αθήνα ένα κέντρο έπιστημονικής έρεύνης της μουσικής κατά τό πρότυπο του κέντρου που ίδρυσα στο Παρίσι με κύρια οικονομική άρωγή του ύπουργείου πολιτισμού της Γαλλίας και σύμφωνα με την έπίσημη θέληση του τότε προέδρου Ζωρζ Πομπιδού.

Αυτό τό κέντρο θα προίκιζε την Ελλάδα με ένα μέσο πρωτότυπο, πρότυπο και από τα πιο προχωρημένα στον κόσμο, γιά την εκμάθηση της μουσικής, την σύνθεση και την προαγωγή των τελευταίων ιδεών και μεθόδων που στηρίζονται στα μαθηματικά, τη φυσική, την άκουστική, την ιστορία της μουσικής και στην τελευταία τεχνολογία των ήλεκτρονικών ύπολογιστών. Αυτό τό κέντρο, όπως και αυτό που ίδρυσα στη Γαλλία, είναι τό άνθος της πιο προχωρημένης καλλιτεχνικοεπιστημονικής σκέψης στη μουσική.

Ο ρόλος μου θα ήτο, όπως και στο Γαλλικό κέντρο, έντελώς καθοδηγητικός, έπιστημονικά και καλλιτεχνικά, χωρίς άλλη καμμία άμοιβή, πλην της χαράς να συμβάλλω στην τέχνη μου και στον τόπο αυτό. Θεώρησα δέ, ότι υπήρξε εύτυχής συγκυρία ή παρουσία σας στη θέση εκείνου που άποφασίζει, γνωρίζοντας ότι εκτιμάτε όπως άξιζει τις άνιδιοτελείς προσφορές.

Ότε ξεχνώ βέβαια την τιμή που μου κάνατε, έρχόμενος στις Μυκήνες και μάλιστα όταν εκφράσατε δημοσία την είλικρινή και λίαν ενδιαφέρουσα κρίση σας, που άντάμειψε πλήρως

However, despite this selfless contribution of the “greatest contemporary musician in the world” and the “greatest artist of modern Greece,” as the Athenian newspapers described him at the time,³¹ the Greek state did not respond to Xenakis’s invitation and the operation of KSYME was not possible before 1986. The inauguration of the association took place with the presentation of UPIC, the technical installation and maintenance of which was carried out by a professor at the Polytechnic University, Andreas Stafylopatis, while the use of this new means of musical creation was taught by Haris Xanthoudakis and Dimitris Kamarotos, who were the first Greek composers, after Xenakis, to produce works with this system. The delayed start of the KSYME and the limited interest of the state in the vision of this Greek composer did not allow, in the end, the shift of Xenakis’s center of gravity and the dedication of all his energies to Greece. The KSYME continued its operation, albeit it without the inspirational guidance of its visionary founder. Despite this, Xenakis never abandoned it. He had fulfilled his debt to his country, yet he never ceased to feel like a stranger everywhere.

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τοὺς κόπους τῶν συνεργατῶν μου καὶ τοὺς ἰδικούς μου.

Σήμερα ἔρχομαι, ἴσως γιὰ τελευταία φορά, νὰ σᾶς παρακαλέσω νὰ δώσετε τὴν ὀριστικὴ ὠθηση πρὸς τὸ ὑπουργεῖο συντονισμοῦ (ἀρμόδιος ὁ κος Σουφλιᾶς) καὶ στὸ ὑπουργεῖο πολιτισμοῦ, ὥστε τὸ κέντρο πού σᾶς προτείνω, νὰ ἐνταχθῇ τῶρα, χωρὶς καθυστέρηση, στὸ «Πνευματικὸ Κέντρο», ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπ’ τὴν ἴδρυση τῆς Μουσικῆς Ἀκαδημίας, πού, ὅταν γίνη, εὐκόλο θά ναι νὰ ἐνσωματωθῇ. Τοῦτο, διότι τὸ κέντρο αὐτὸ μπορεῖ νὰ λειτουργεῖ ἀμέσως, χωρὶς χρονοτριβή (θὰ ἦτο ἴσως καὶ μιά εὐκαιρία ἀπαρχῆς ἐγκαταστάσεώς μου στὴν Ἑλλάδα). Ὁ κ. Κανδύλης, μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο μίλησα, εἶναι πρόθυμος νὰ σᾶς ἐνημερώσῃ σ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ζήτημα, καὶ φυσικὰ κι’ ἐγώ.

Ἐλπίζοντας ὅτι αὐτὴ μου ἡ ἐπιστολὴ θὰ εὕρῃ τὴν εὐνοϊκὴ σας ὑποστήριξη, σᾶς παρακαλῶ νὰ δεχθῆτε τὴν ἐκφραση τοῦ βαθυτάτου σεβασμοῦ μου].

31 Clippings at the KSYME Archive.