

K. Mitsakis, *Modern Greek Music and Poetry: An Anthology*, Preface by Mikis Theodorakis, Athens, Grigoris, 1979, pp. xv + 533.

This handsome leather-bound, bilingual, and impressive volume came to answer a need that recent cultural developments have created in the realm of Greek lyricism. Since the end of the Second World War Greece has experienced an unprecedented creativity of high-quality musical compositions inspired by lyric poems and other texts of famous writers.

It is up to professional musicologists to determine whether this phenomenon is comparable to the age of the great *Lieder* in Germany, or to the Elizabethan song tradition in England, the age of the troubadours in France, and to similar artistic manifestations elsewhere in the civilized world. The fact is, however, that even major poets, like Nikos Gatsos, stopped writing regular poetry to devote their talent to the writing of lyrics for musical compositions—and by that I do not mean light, run-off-the-mill songs for mass consumption. Moreover, numerous famous pieces by major poets of the present and the past were also turned to songs, symphonic compositions, dance music, secular oratoria, and other musical genres by composers of talent. Elytis's *Axion Esti*, in Theodoraki's melodies, is the best example.

As Theodorakis mentions in his "Preface" (pp. x-xv), and Professor Mitsakis elaborates upon in his comparative and erudite "Introduction" (pp. 2-47), Greek musicians have abandoned the facile, tasteless, and ephemeral lyrics that pre-1945 versifiers had been supplying them with, and opted for sophisticated and profounder texts, often of what is known as "literature of commitment". Parallely to that, great and "relevant" poems of the past—e.g. "The Free Besieged" of Solomos—were rediscovered, so to speak, and inspired competent musicians to do music for them.

The greatness of the poetry, which is attested to by Greece's two Nobel Prize winners, Seferis (1963) and Elytis (1979), is matched by the rich and prolific talent of two composers of international reputation, Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis, plus a host of newer or younger ones, whose presence guarantees the continuation of this happy development well into the next century.

Dr. Mitsakis assures us that this volume is unique for its kind in the whole world; though he hastens to qualify his claim by stating that it is not an absolutely complete discography, nor an absolutely complete bibliography of Greek poetry in English translation. There is no doubt that in minor, or short-lived, or now forgotten "little" magazines of poetry a researcher may one day find English versions of lyrics that are printed only in Greek in this anthology. Dr. Mitsakis, admitting *a priori* that this may have happened, and some existing pieces have escaped his attention, adds the observation that if these translations were good, they would not have remained unknown and hidden for long, unless they exist only as unpublished manuscripts.

After "Preface" and "Introduction" (with its documentation) the editor presents "Abbreviations of Discography" (pp. 48-65), and "Abbreviations of Bibliography" (pp. 66-75)—I. Greek Texts, II. English Translations—all bilingually, on facing pages and in alphabetical order of names. The anthology proper begins with the Cretan poet George Chortatsis (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries), on p. 80, with passages from his tragedy *Erophili* as set to music by Cretan composer Mamangakis, English version by Marshall. This part of the volume extends through p. 497, covering (in chronological order, as it should) the following twenty-nine stars and luminaries of the Greek poetic firmament that resounds with Plato's "music of the spheres": Chortatsis, Kornaros, Kalvos, Solomos, Vizyinos, Eftaliotis, Michailidis, Palamas, Cavafy, Lipertis, Chatzopoulos, Papantoniou, Kazantzakis, Sikelianos,

Varnalis, Lapathiotis, Karyotakis, Skarimbis, Seferis, Themelis, Prevelakis, Ritsos, Engonopoulos, Kavadias, Elytis, Vrettakos, Loundemis, Dimakis, and Anagnostakis.

Not all texts and musical compositions are of the same kind or category, of course. As the scholarly compiler explains (pp. 30-47) many poems were turned to songs in their entirety, others with major or minor modifications by the composers, to suit a particular purpose or mood. Other texts are passages and excerpts from longer poetic texts, like the romance *Erotokritos*, still others are based on variations of texts that differ from those of "standard" editions. Also, there are some prose texts whose lyrical intensity and mood prompted a sensitive composer to re-write as verse, for instance Kazantzakis's novel *Captain Michael (Freedom or Death)*.

The book is completed by a necessary "Index of the First Lines of All the Poems in this Anthology" (pp. 512-521), and an equally important "Index of Persons and Subjects" (pp. 522-533), both bilingual. Needless to say that Dr. Mitsakis's book this way becomes an indispensable tool to the student and the lover of Greek lyricism in both its dimensions: melody and logos. Its bilinguality makes the book accessible to the many anglophone scholars, comparatists, musicologists, sociologists of art, and other readers who would not have been able to benefit from a strictly Greek volume of this kind. After all the number of anglophone students and researchers of Modern Greek culture has been on a steady increase ever since the times of *Zorba the Greek*, novel as well as musical.

As I said earlier, despite the meticulous, scholarly, and thorough efforts of this energetic compiler, this anthology is not a check-list of discs and English versions of their Greek lyrics. Some existing items were deliberately omitted on account of their low quality. Just the same, a person who enjoys what music can do to a good text, and what a good text can make a gifted composer do, will cherish and treasure this book.

Karolos Mitsakis's *Modern Greek Music and Poetry: An Anthology* is now a fact. It may inspire others to try and do a better or more complete work. It may also bring to the forefront fine or competent translations of anthologized texts that would make the present volume perfect and definitive.

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Angelos Sikelianos, *Selected Poems*, translated and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1979, pp. xx/150.

Of the major Greek poets of this century—Cavafy, Sikelianos, Seferis, Elytis and Ritsos—Sikelianos is by far the most neglected outside of Greece, chiefly because he is so difficult to translate. He discourages translators in a way that the others do not, because his persona almost always sounds like an inspired prophet declaiming with ritualistic solemnity, something which in our ears seems rhetorical. As Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard say in their Introduction, "this hierophantic, rhapsodic voice is possibly the one least accessible to a contemporary Western sensibility, not only because that sensibility has been trained in our time to question rhetoric of almost any kind, but because the voice depends for credibility and vitality on the character of the language it offers ...—all of which is lost in translation". In the 1940s, when Sikelianos was nominated by the Society of Greek Writers for the Nobel Prize, a very few poems were translated by Lawrence Durrell. The first representative