

## **ORPHIKON I BY ATHANASIOS TRIKOUPI – A “BRIDGE” BETWEEN ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY TIMES, A MEANS OF TEACHING MODERN MUSIC TO CHILDREN**

**STELA GUȚANU<sup>1</sup>**

**SUMMARY.** One of the goals of music education is to infuse culture, to teach the ability to understand, listen to, appreciate, classify, analyse and perform music. The changes occurred in the contemporary music creation have contributed to the emergence of new complex genres that actually reach all the structural levels of compositional art, so far, as well as of arts, in general. Extremely complex in terms of form and structure, contemporary music requires a certain training and degree of knowledge in order to be adequately understood. This is why today's music teacher is faced with a series of problems in finding various ways and methods to facilitate the children's understanding and liking of contemporary music. The Greek composer and teacher Athanasios Trikoupi has managed to do just that, by composing *Orphikon I*, whose world premiere took place in Alexandroupoli, Greece, at the Scientific Session dedicated to Orpheus (1-2 October 2010). The work was performed by the Orchestra of the “Fhaëton” Conservatory in Alexandroupoli, comprised of teachers and students of that institution. By rendering modern musical garments to ancient Greek hymns, the composer has built a “bridge” between the ancient times and today. By knowing the traditions, history and culture of ancient Greece, the children found it much easier to understand the compositional concepts of modern music and they even liked it. This article presents a short analysis of this work, which highlights the approach and techniques used by the composer.

**Keywords:** music education, composer, modern music, Athanasios Trikoupi, Hymn.

Even during ancient times, music played an essential part in almost all the activities of the society. It was one of those courses included in the education curriculum that were of great importance in the formation of the future citizen. In the ancient Greek society, music was a must in every show from the period of the great development of tragedy and comedy. Musical professionalism climaxed with the famous contests that were later established. The ancient

---

<sup>1</sup> Univ. Lecturer, PhD – Faculty of Arts, Department of Arts, Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania, E-mail: [stelajupiter@yahoo.com](mailto:stelajupiter@yahoo.com)

Greeks thought that music's inner force had the power to influence and mould the human character (the theory of the *ethos*). They thought that music was an imitative art that could reproduce moral traits and transmit them to the audience. In Plato's ideal state, music guided the young towards harmony and spiritual beauty. According to Aristotle, music could cure mental disorders, if only the ill person listened to some exalting melodies, able to create a state of ecstasy and to provoke a spiritual outburst that could reinstate the mental balance. The same Aristotle noticed the function of music as pure entertainment, as a means of relaxation after a hard day's work.

Today, music education aims at cultivating the ability to appreciate the beauty in arts or our surrounding ambiance, in nature and social life. It also aims at creating beauty through age-specific forms of manifestation, which helps shape and perfect one's personality. In this regard, some of the fundamental disciplines of music education are music history and music literature. The study of music history and literature, both universal and Romanian, is considered fundamental in the learning process and for the understanding of the main musical styles, as well as to the creation and enrichment of pupils' artistic culture, both theoretical and practical. Alongside the other musical disciplines, the study of music history has an informative character (of acquiring knowledge), but, more importantly, a formative one. As regards the latter, knowing the *époques*, periods, stages and styles of universal music gives pupils the possibility to distinguish essential traits, values and non-values within the past and present musical phenomenon. The study of this discipline comprises theoretical lectures, musical auditions (with the aid of audio and video devices), the participation in concerts and the studying of a given bibliography. These fundamental disciplines contribute to the cultivation of culture, as well as to the capacity to understand music, to hear, appreciate, analyse and perform it.

The changes that have occurred in the contemporary music creation have led to the emergence of new complex genres, which basically reach all the structural levels of the compositional musical art, so far, and of art, in general. The art of the last decades is characterized by a distinctive artistic freedom that has led to excesses, which, in their turn, largely condition the interest for this kind of experimentation. In the creation of contemporary composers, these searches reach significant proportions, so that, there often appears a new genre, as an outcome of such an active artistic process. Sometimes, the composers intentionally refrain themselves from making any genre specification. Hence, in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century music, we can notice two trends. The first is characterized by the reconstruction of genres and the emergence of new ones (based on the old ones or on the basis of new elements and principles). The second trend is based on the conscious and declared delimitation from the rules of the genre, the detachment from any kind of limitations imposed by it. In this regard, the diversity of mixed genres represents an intermediary phase. More precisely, these genres clearly demonstrate the stylistic pluralism,

which, in fact, is one of the most important features of the époque. Extremely complex in terms of its form and structure, contemporary music requires some prior training or knowledge in order to be adequately understood. This is why, today's music teacher is faced with a series of challenges in finding various means and procedures that would help pupils understand contemporary music and even get them to like it.

One of the contemporary musicians, namely Athanasios Trikoupis has managed to do just that by composing the work „ORPHIKON I”, whose world premiere took place in Alexandroupoli, Greece, at the Scientific Session dedicated to Orpheus (1-2 October 2010). The work was performed by the Orchestra of the “Faëthon” Conservatory in Alexandroupoli (comprised of teachers and students of that institution). The young Greek composer Athanasios Trikoupis, Doctor of Music and assistant with the University of Music in Thessaloniki, was born in the town of Alexandroupoli, in northern Greece. He graduated from the Music Conservatory in Athens, the European Conservatory of Music in Paris and from the Music University in Graz. In 2009, he earned the degree of Doctor of Music. In 1991, he performed as a pianist, winning the first prize in a national piano competition and had a series of concerts as a solo piano player, both nationally and abroad. His compositional talent could be appreciated by the public from Greece, England, Germany and Austria, where some of his compositions were performed.

His composition, *Orphikon I*, is based on two old hymns from the period of ancient Greece that refer to deities. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., a new spiritual movement took birth in ancient Greece and it was called “Orphism”. The purpose of this religion was to seek and discover one's own personal self and reach salvation. It dealt with all the basic problems related to the mystery of human existence: life and death. Unfortunately, no documents were found that would be able to shed some light regarding the procession of those ceremonies. Only a few Orphic hymns have remained. The so-called “Orphic hymns” were being sung or recited by the Greeks during the religious ceremonies from the ancient times. The name of “Orphic hymns” came from the legendary Orpheus, son of Apollon and of the Muse Kalliope. According to the myths of ancient Greece, he was considered the perfect singer, who, through his voice and music, could put a spell not only on animals, but even trees. The 87 Orphic hymns are dedicated to the different deities. In some cases, the hymn was dedicated to only one god, but that deity was assigned different names. The hymns expressed the desires and requests addressed to the gods and priests who performed the religious ceremonies and prayed for health, wellbeing, for a good year, for travellers and, in general, for a better life.

By rendering modern musical garments to the ancient Greek hymns, the composer has built a “bridge” between the ancient times and today, between archaism and modernism. By knowing the traditions, history and culture of ancient Greece, the pupils found it much easier to understand the compositional

concepts of modern music and they even liked it. The short analysis of this work following below will highlight the approach and techniques used by the composer for an adequate understanding and learning of the modern compositional outlooks.

*Orphikon I* is written for orchestra, vocal group, children's choir and soundtrack. The orchestra comprises the following instruments:

1. strings instruments: first and second violin (with divisions), viola and cello;
2. wind instruments: flute, B-flat clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, B-flat trumpet;
3. percussion instruments: timpani, bass drum, conga, tom-tom drum and tambour.

### Ex. 1

ΟΡΦΙΚΟΝ Ι

ΑΘ. ΤΡΙΚΟΥΤΗΣ

90

Flute

Clarinet in Bb

Alto Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone

Trumpet in Bb

Timpani

Gran Cassa

Drum (snare off)

Conga

Tom-toms

Παιδικός Χορός

Soprano I

Soprano k

Soprano i

Soprano j

Tenor

Baritone

Tape

Violin I (solo)

Violin I

Violin II (solo)

Violin IIa

Violin Iib

Viola

Violoncello

pp

pp

For the vocal group, the composer has chosen the timbral colours of the tenor and baritone voices, as well as the high female voices (four sopranos).

Faced with the two archaic hymns, the composer has conferred them the most splendid acoustic garment that reflected the Orphic archetype of the hero-singer and the magical properties of the music he was playing. The broad and diverse spectrum of the acoustic characteristics - offered by the variety of instruments used, by the vocal timbral diversity of the vocal group, by the various sounds emitted by the children's choir (with their voices or with percussion instruments) and by the previously recorded soundtrack that acts as a musical background – is assigned distinct parts, throughout the development of the Orphic mystery. The polyrhythm, unison, modal harmony, strong dissonances, the rhythmic-melodic contrast, the modern techniques of execution that enrich the acoustic palette of traditional orchestral instruments, improvisation, the previously recorded soundtrack (played as a background, throughout the entire piece) - all these represent some of the compositional elements the composer used in order to acoustically render, in an adequate way, the religious ritual described by the two Orphic hymns. The symbolic musical aggressiveness of this work is determined by the multiple characters of the gods described in the archaic texts of Orpheus's hymns (states of wrath, fury, anger, etc.). The physical and spiritual ecstasy, orgy and fear – all these are faced with each other throughout the successive parts of this piece, creating a strong contrast that constitutes its main element.

*Orphikon I* comprises an introduction and four parts. **The introductive part** (bars 1-132), based on polyrhythm and archaic melodic motifs, introduces us into the atmosphere and archaic character of the literary text which is about to be presented in the following parts.

The subtle entry of the 2-a violins, based on a rhythmic *ostinato* of quintuplet in a 5/8 bar is taken over by the 2-b violins at bar no. 8, with a single change of accent on the last segment of the rhythmic structure.

## Ex. 2

The image shows a musical score for two violins, Violin IIa and Violin IIb, in 5/8 time. Violin IIa is playing a continuous quintuplet rhythm (five eighth notes) in the treble clef, marked *pp*. Violin IIb is silent until bar 8, where it enters with the same quintuplet rhythm in the treble clef, marked with a yellow highlight and an accent (>). The notation is in 5/8 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

It is here that the first contrast of accents appears. The first violins enter at bar no. 19 at a fifth interval, but maintaining the same rhythmic *ostinato* of the second violins.

## Ex. 3



While the first and second violins (with their divisions) continue with the rhythmic ostinato in „*pp*”, the first solo violin enters at bar 23 in „*mp*”, with a new rhythmic pattern consisting of a game of triplets and quintuplets.

## Ex. 4



The second solo violin enters at bar 34 with the same rhythmic pattern, but in contrast with the first solo violin, maintaining the dynamic indication of „*mp*”.

## Ex. 5



The viola and cello start playing in unison at bar no. 43 with upbeat (anacrusis), with the same rhythmic *ostinato*, but asymmetrically (compared to the beat) and with the accent on the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment of the rhythmic structure.

## Ex. 6



Bar no. 36 marks an intense increase in dynamics, so that the entire orchestra reaches „*f*” (*forte*) at bar 46 (when the clarinet in B enters with the note F#).

### Ex. 7

[illegible]

The timpani enter at bar 59 with an *ostinato* asymmetrical rhythm of triplets. At this point, the orchestra goes into „*ff*“.

### Ex. 8

The bass drum enters at bar no. 61 and the tambour and trumpet (in G) – at bar 62; this is where the pentatonic cycle becomes evident. The last to enter are the flutes, with a high whistling in *ostinato*.

**Ex. 9**

At bar 69, the polyrhythms stops, once all the instruments stop playing, except for the viola and cello, which sustain the note G in unison, over two bars. The beat also changes from 5/8 to 4/8.

After that sudden two-bar silence (except for the viola and cello), the entire orchestra enters in unison (bars 71-80) in „*sff*”, with an archaic melodic motif. After the playing of the archaic melodic theme, all the instruments stop again, leaving only a trio of percussion instruments (the timpani, tom-tom drum and conga), each with a contrasting rhythmic-melodic pattern.

**Ex. 10**

A musical score for percussion instruments. It shows a rhythmic pattern in 4/8 time. The instruments are Timpani (Timp.), Gong/Cymbal (G. C.), Drum (Dr.), and Conga. The pattern is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The notes are grouped with brackets and numbers 3 and 2, indicating a triplet and a pair of notes.

Starting with bar no. 111, the other instruments start entering, one by one, in „*ff*”, with the initial rhythmic-melodic pattern. The strings part has a small change: the initial melody is played in fifths, which enriches the general sound of the orchestra.

**Ex. 11**

A musical score for Viola (Vla.) and Violoncello (Vc.) parts. It shows a rhythmic pattern in 4/8 time. The notes are grouped with brackets and numbers 3 and 2, indicating a triplet and a pair of notes. The pattern is marked with a forte (f) dynamic.



At bar 123, one can hear again the archaic melodic motif in the wind instruments (flute, clarinet, alto and tenor saxophones and trumpet), whereas the string instruments carry on with their rhythmic-melodic *ostinato* without changes.

**Ex. 12**

Next, the children's choir enters at bar 125, crying out names of deities (Kuretes, Korybantes) and thus announcing the beginning of the religious ceremony and of the first part of the work. The instruments' entering one by one, the gradual increase in the dynamic indications, the rhythmic-melodic contrast – all these procedures used by the composer illustrate the introductive image of the people gathering, one by one, for the religious ceremony, as well as the noise and polemics arising amongst them, as they wait for the doxology to start.

**Ex. 13**

The first part of *Orfikon I* starts with bar no. 133, when the previously recorded soundtrack begins.

[illegible]

This soundtrack represents the voice of the greatest of all gods and it accompanies the performance of the musical piece, up to its ending. This procedure the composer employs is very inspired. The audience hears a voice, without seeing the singer – which gives that voice an aura of mystery, since it is amplified and has a reverberation effect applied to it, thus creating

the mysterious figure of the god in the listener's imagination. While the voice cries out the name of different deities, the string instruments, divided in pairs (violins 1a with violins 1b, violins 2a with violins 2b, and the viola with cello), play in a rhythmic contrast of minor seconds and major sevenths (as if trying to evoke a controversy). The dynamics of the interpretation span from "*f*-*ff*". Here, the composer has given the musicians freedom in rendering the rhythmic pattern, in order to create the contrast. In all the four parts, the instruments' role is to render whatever is being heard on the soundtrack. For example, at bar 135 of the first part, when the greatest of the gods shouts the words "*aria tefki*" (battle weapons), the percussion instruments enter with an exuberantly powerful and frantic rhythmic pattern.

### Ex. 15

[illegible]

At bar 137, when the word “*zoigoni*” is pronounced (meaning “life”), one can hear the minor seconds in rhythmic contrast with the major sevenths in the string instruments, which thus suggest turmoil and the beginning of life.

### Ex. 16

The musical score for Violins I and II, Viola, and Violoncello is shown. The first system (measures 1-2) features a crescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 2. The second system (measures 3-4) continues the fortissimo section. The third system (measures 5-6) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 6. The fourth system (measures 7-8) continues the fortissimo section. The fifth system (measures 9-10) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 10. The sixth system (measures 11-12) continues the fortissimo section. The seventh system (measures 13-14) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 14. The eighth system (measures 15-16) continues the fortissimo section. The ninth system (measures 17-18) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 18. The tenth system (measures 19-20) continues the fortissimo section. The eleventh system (measures 21-22) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 22. The twelfth system (measures 23-24) continues the fortissimo section. The thirteenth system (measures 25-26) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 26. The fourteenth system (measures 27-28) continues the fortissimo section. The fifteenth system (measures 29-30) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 30. The sixteenth system (measures 31-32) continues the fortissimo section. The seventeenth system (measures 33-34) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 34. The eighteenth system (measures 35-36) continues the fortissimo section. The nineteenth system (measures 37-38) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 38. The twentieth system (measures 39-40) continues the fortissimo section. The twenty-first system (measures 41-42) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 42. The twenty-second system (measures 43-44) continues the fortissimo section. The twenty-third system (measures 45-46) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 46. The twenty-fourth system (measures 47-48) continues the fortissimo section. The twenty-fifth system (measures 49-50) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 50. The twenty-sixth system (measures 51-52) continues the fortissimo section. The twenty-seventh system (measures 53-54) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 54. The twenty-eighth system (measures 55-56) continues the fortissimo section. The twenty-ninth system (measures 57-58) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 58. The thirtieth system (measures 59-60) continues the fortissimo section. The thirty-first system (measures 61-62) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 62. The thirty-second system (measures 63-64) continues the fortissimo section. The thirty-third system (measures 65-66) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 66. The thirty-fourth system (measures 67-68) continues the fortissimo section. The thirty-fifth system (measures 69-70) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 70. The thirty-sixth system (measures 71-72) continues the fortissimo section. The thirty-seventh system (measures 73-74) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 74. The thirty-eighth system (measures 75-76) continues the fortissimo section. The thirty-ninth system (measures 77-78) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 78. The fortieth system (measures 79-80) continues the fortissimo section. The forty-first system (measures 81-82) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 82. The forty-second system (measures 83-84) continues the fortissimo section. The forty-third system (measures 85-86) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 86. The forty-fourth system (measures 87-88) continues the fortissimo section. The forty-fifth system (measures 89-90) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 90. The forty-sixth system (measures 91-92) continues the fortissimo section. The forty-seventh system (measures 93-94) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 94. The forty-eighth system (measures 95-96) continues the fortissimo section. The forty-ninth system (measures 97-98) shows a decrescendo marked with a hairpin and a fortissimo section starting in measure 98. The fiftieth system (measures 99-100) continues the fortissimo section.

Then, at bar 138, at the word “*samothraki*” (the designation of a Greek island), the melody becomes majestic, with an ample development.

**Ex. 17**

The image displays a musical score for seven instruments: Violin I (solo), Violin I, Violin II (solo), Violin IIa, Violin IIb, Viola, and Violoncello. Each staff contains a series of notes, with a downward arrow and the marking 'ord. p' (ordine piano) indicating a specific musical instruction. The notes are arranged in a way that suggests a descending melodic line across the staves. The Violoncello staff at the bottom has a yellow highlight under the first few notes and a 'sf' (sforzando) marking.

This is where the vocal group appears (tenor, baritone and the four sopranos), representing the clergymen. One by one, they exclaim praises to the deities. With each exclamation, the children’s choir brings its own reply, by clapping their hands and feet or by hitting spoons and cymbals. At the end of the first part, when a soprano exclaims “*orgiofanti!*” (suggesting a state of enrapturement), the musical piece reaches climax and the children’s choir gives all the replies that, so far, had been interpreted one by one – only, this time, simultaneously (the clapping of the hands and feet, the hitting of spoons and cymbals). The first part ends with the bass drum that interrupts the children’s replies.

**The second part** is totally different from the first one, as it is a prayer.

### Ex. 18

[illegible]

The text refers to a prayer to the sky. The violins suggest the soundless air by drawing the bow against the bridge. The vocal group interprets a peaceful, modal melody based on fifths and seconds.

The second part ends at bar no. 186.

The third part is based on the rhythmic and musical material of the first part and it is actually its development. The content of the literary text describes what the gods do when they are angry. Here, the string instruments execute the rhythmic-melodic *ostinato* of the first part, on a 5/8 beat, in *forte*, whereas the wind instruments perform the archaic motif of the first part. At bar 216, the melodic motif is taken over by the string instruments and the wind and percussion instruments play a rhythmic-melodic *ostinato*.

## Ex. 19

Bars 224-230 represent the final part or its cadenza, which starts with a “*subito p*” dynamic indication and goes up to “*fff*” during its performance, as all the instruments enter, one by one. The point of “*fff*” begins when all the voices from the vocal group and the children’s choir exclaim the word “Kuretes”.



**The final part of this musical piece - the fourth** – is the continuation of the second part. Here, all the instruments play in a “*tonlos*” manner that is “without sound”: the violins play with their bows on the bridge, suggesting the blowing of air, the trumpet suggests heavy air by playing a *glissando* and the flute player emits a vibrating blow of air, by moving the lips rapidly. The words uttered by the soloists characterize the air, the breath and the soul, which are also suggested by the orchestral score. Towards the ending, the solo violins imitate the sounds of seagulls through a *glissando*, which ends the entire musical piece.

### Ex. 20

222

Fl.

Cl.

A. Sax.

T. Sax.

Tpt.

Temp.

Temp.

Dr.

Congo

Tom-t.

Vln. I (solo)

Vln. I

Vln. II (solo)

Vln. IIa

Vln. IIb

Vla.

Vc.

223

224

225

226

227

228

229

230

231

232

233

234

235

236

237

238

239

240

241

242

243

244

245

246

247

248

249

250

251

252

253

254

255

256

257

258

259

260

261

262

263

264

265

266

267

268

269

270

271

272

273

274

275

276

277

278

279

280

281

282

283

284

285

286

287

288

289

290

291

292

293

294

295

296

297

298

299

300

301

302

303

304

305

306

307

308

309

310

311

312

313

314

315

316

317

318

319

320

321

322

323

324

325

326

327

328

329

330

331

332

333

334

335

336

337

338

339

340

341

342

343

344

345

346

347

348

349

350

351

352

353

354

355

356

357

358

359

360

361

362

363

364

365

366

367

368

369

370

371

372

373

374

375

376

377

378

379

380

381

382

383

384

385

386

387

388

389

390

391

392

393

394

395

396

397

398

399

400

401

402

403

404

405

406

407

408

409

410

411

412

413

414

415

416

417

418

419

420

421

422

423

424

425

426

427

428

429

430

431

432

433

434

435

436

437

438

439

440

441

442

443

444

445

446

447

448

449

450

451

452

453

454

455

456

457

458

459

460

461

462

463

464

465

466

467

468

469

470

471

472

473

474

475

476

477

478

479

480

481

482

483

484

485

486

487

488

489

490

491

492

493

494

495

496

497

498

499

500

501

502

503

504

505

506

507

508

509

510

511

512

513

514

515

516

517

518

519

520

521

522

523

524

525

526

527

528

529

530

531

532

533

534

535

536

537

538

539

540

541

542

543

544

545

546

547

548

549

550

551

552

553

554

555

556

557

558

559

560

561

562

563

564

565

566

567

568

569

570

571

572

573

574

575

576

577

578

579

580

581

582

583

584

585

586

587

588

589

590

591

592

593

594

595

596

597

598

599

600

601

602

603

604

605

606

607

608

609

610

611

612

613

614

615

616

617

618

619

620

621

622

623

624

625

626

627

628

629

630

631

632

633

634

635

636

637

638

639

640

641

642

643

644

645

646

647

648

649

650

651

652

The merit of the composer lies in having succeeded to express such an ample and philosophic theme through simple means of interpretation, in accordance with the abilities of the pupils who performed *Orphikon I*. He did this with the express intention of raising the children's interest in such an activity of music education, from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint. *Orphikon I* is a didactic musical piece that helps the pupils learn the style and techniques of contemporary music, through a practical activity.

Translated by Raluca Stoica

## REFERENCES

Trikoupis, Athanasios, *Orfikon I* – score (manuscript), 2009.