Constantine Soteriou

Iannis Xenakis: The Analysis of Four Works for Piano Solo

The Opponent’s Report

I have known Constantine Soteriou since the very beginning of his study at the Faculty of Education as a very good musician in the area of piano playing, sight singing, aural analysis and music theory. It was for me a challenge to become the opponent of his diploma thesis because I have not had the opportunity to recognize his ability to conceive a theoretical and historical project.

Soteriou is concerned with Greek musician Iannis Xenakis, one of the leading composers of 20th century. After description of Xenakis’s life (which can’t be in my opinion appreciated as „complete“, see p. 90), come two most important chapters in which the author analyses the composer’s originality, which is given by application of several mathematical theories in music (set, sieve, game, group, computer theories). After following survey of Xenakis’s piano compositions Soteriou presents very detailed analysis of four works for piano solo. The resulting text is very, very difficult to read, often is almost incomprehensible for the reader who is not educated in maths very well.

Concerning formal aspects, the thesis contains all necessary formalities.

Several critical notices and tasks for personal discussion:

- I would like to know how much Soteriou used the analysis contained in the theoretical studies of R. Squibbs and how great was his own contribution.
- As I could understand only little from very detailed analysis, I ask the author to present short demonstration of some of the basic principles of Xenakis’s methods in aural way for the state exam. (For example, how he would present them to students of a high school.)
- Soteriou concentrates on a technical part of Xenakis’s compositions which could be analysed only in written scores. On the other hand, I miss at least short description of their resulting sound form – e.g. how it influences auditors, how it is accepted by them, and above all Soteriou’s personal experience with this music (as the interpret and also the auditor).
- I think that some unusual terms could have been explained or described, e.g. „stochastic music“ (p. 21), „sieve theory“ (p. 13) etc.
- In my opinion, the title of the thesis could only be e.g. „Iannis Xenakis: Works for Piano Solo“.
- I don’t understand the antagonism between Xenakis’s method to implicity mathematical theories into music and the sentence: „By using the logical mathematical theories, Xenakis sought to create disorder in music.“ (p. 21)

Summary:
The thesis represents a very scientifical view on a highly complicated compositional style. In my opinion, also theoretical thesis of this kind should be written in more understandable way.

Proposal mark: very well

Prague, 20th May 2011

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