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The Humanistic Pathos of Iannis Xenakis' Choral Musical Legacy**Abstract**

The article is devoted to study of the substantive vectors of Iannis Xenakis' choral music. The author elicits the crucial themes declared for the first time in the 1960s, which have preserved their relevance during the course of the composer's entire choral output. Also, the author discusses particularities of the interactions between the text and music, and the specificity of the timbral solution of the compositions, making it possible to speak of both the influence on the choral writing of the composer's contemporaries and of the individuality of the creative manner of Xenakis himself. Within the framework of textural analysis, the main varieties of texture characteristic for Xenakis' compositions of that time period are reduced: along with the newest techniques of "artificial reverberation" and elements of diagonal organization, we can encounter the types of musical exposition characteristic for compositions of romantic composers – homophonic-harmonic, chordal, homophonic-polyphonic, and strata texture, as well as the classical techniques of juxtaposition of soli – tutti. Such a combination of traditional and the newest techniques of choral writing is analogous to the coexistence of techniques of phoneme composition and a strict adherence to ancient literary sources. In total, all of this stipulates the brilliant individuality of Iannis Xenakis' choral musical legacy.

Keywords:

avant-garde, choral music, choral texture, vocal timbre studies, Iannis Xenakis, phoneme composition.

The musical oeuvres of Iannis Xenakis form a special page in the history of the music of the second half of the 20th century. Being one of the most radical innovators in the sphere of musical composition, he is known today, most of all, as the composer of orchestral works ("Metastaseis," "Stratégie," "Jonchaies") and the creator of unique synthetic audiovisual compositions ("Polytope de Montréal," "Persépolis," "Polytope de Cluny"). Xenakis' choral music, to which the composer turned during the course

of his entire creative path, is less in demand for research, despite the fact that it is particularly here that Xenakis, a person who was very reserved in his ordinary life, disclosed himself as a remarkably refined and emotionally vibrant artist who reacted sensitively to the events taking place in the world.

In the composer's choral works from as early as the 1960s it is possible to distinguish two basic thematic directions that passed through Xenakis' entire musical legacy: the first is connected with the incorporation of images from ancient Greek art, the inclusion of original texts by Aeschylles, Seneca, and Sophocles ("Polla ta dhina," "Hiketides," "Oresteia," "Medea Senecae")¹, while the second is based on the leading motive of protest against violence against personality associated with the images of war or political tyranny ("Nuits"). These two substantial vectors rely upon expressive means that are in many ways contrasting. If reconstruction of ancient Greek tragedies is characterized by a "quasi-archaic" atmosphere, achieved by means of use of narrow-ranged tunes in the melodies, a reliance on diatonicism, the prevalence of monody, diaphony, and heterophony in the textural makeup, in the piece "Nuits," in contrast to this, we encounter a complex of techniques that are ultra-modern for the 1960s: a maximal expansion of the ranges of choral parts, a chiaroscuro of registers of singing voices, application of effects of phoneme composition, and new vocal articulation techniques (tremolo, continual changes of vocalization of tones, nasal pizzicato)².

While the music of the early period is marked, on the one hand, by the creation of a "quasi-archaic" style of choral episodes in the tragedies and, on the other hand, the beginning of a search for his own vocal writing, oriented, among other things, on the innovations of the postwar avant-garde style (Luigi Nono, Mauricio Kagel), the choral compositions from the 1970s demonstrate a further expansion of the quantity of timbre-textural innovations and, at the same time, a consolidation as a basis of a conglomeration of techniques perceived in the present day as the indispensable components of Xenakis' vocal style. The first composition that presented a substantial expansion of the vocal possibilities of the chorus as part of a vocal-instrumental composition was the work "Cendrées" for chorus and orchestra. The mentioned composition may be defined as being a borderline work in the composer's output: in its content and technical solution one may observe connections with the choral compositions

¹ Xenakis explained his profound interest in Ancient Greek art not only by his wish to immerse into study of the historical past of his people (the composer's nationality was Greek), but also by the closeness of the synthetic character of Ancient Greek art to his own perception: "I have studied literature and Ancient Greek philosophy, I have read Plato in the original – at least, I tried to read him. He has synthesis, or, to express it better, a limitlessness of cultures; everything is situated at close proximity – architecture, poetry with rhythm, music with numbers and the Pythagorean tradition..." (Cit. from: Yuzef Kon, „Yannis Xenakis”, w *XX vek. Ocherki. Dokumenty. Vyp. 3* [XX century. Essays. Documents. Vol. 3] (Moscow: Muzyka, 2000), 175.

² Chester Alwes write about the choral writing in "Nuits": "Prior to Nuits, Xenakis had focused on stringed instruments; unlike voices, those instruments never had problems with pitch accuracy and were able to sustain an absolute legato even during a glissando. The opening system of Nuits demonstrates Xenakis' attempt to reproduce the same effects u-sing voices..." (Chester Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*. Vol. 2 (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 239-240).

from the 1960s and, at the same time, new stylistic features that would become typical for the choral music of the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. Thus, according to N. Matossian, in its content “Cendreés” is closely tangential with “Nuits”, presenting another response on the part of the composer to the political situation in Greece and Portugal. Performed in Lisbon in 1974, this vocal-orchestral canvas became for Xenakis another turn to the issue of oppression of people’s rights in those countries: “Berliozian in its massive deployment of resources, it [“Cendreés” – A.R.] was completed when both Greece and Portugal were under military dictatorship and, like *Nuits*, without a word of text, states an inflammatory moral and political protest unambiguous in its intent³.”

In addition, here, just as in “Nuits”, Xenakis makes use of the possibilities of phoneme composition. At the same time, the master’s attention is drawn, first of all, to operating not by means of syllables, but by separate vowels, which will become the characteristic feature of most of his subsequent choral pieces. The concentration on the use of vowel phonemes was explained by the composer in one of his interviews: “Very early on, vowels were chanted for ritual purposes, at least in the Middle East, but my music has nothing to do with that. The problem is of a more general nature: consonants are usually swallowed by singers, in conservatoires and elsewhere. The only exception is Germany, where they pronounce them with brutality, but even they are not sufficiently consistent. My conclusion has been: I don’t need consonants! Elsewhere, however, I do use them, because musically they can have great importance⁴.” In addition, turning to the resources of phoneme composition was also connected with a perception of the irrational, typical for Xenakis, a character of the art of music not subject to explanation. The composer wrote: “Music is not a language; it is not a message (...) The impact that music produces often exceeds our rational methods of investigation. Movements are created inside you, you can be conscious of them or not, you can control them or not, they are in you⁵.”

Xenakis also continues to make use of the resources of aleatory technique within the “sound clouds” typical for all of his early pieces. It is true, however, that subsequently this compositional element will become quite a rare event. The glissando effect in “Cendreés” familiar from his compositions from the 1960s becomes crucial and acquires a character of a short and, for the most part, ascending melodic progression, typical for the compositions of the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, at times connected with *tremolos*. And, finally, “Cendreés” becomes the last choral composition in which Xenakis actively applies quarter-tone notation in choral parts⁶. It is quite possible that the rejection of quarter-tone notation was the result of the composer’s understanding

³ Nouritza Matossian, *Xenakis* (Lefcosia: Moufflon Publications, 2005), 284.

⁴ Balit Andras Varga, *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996), 170-171.

⁵ Cit. from: Justina Humięcka-Jakubowska, *Inspirations in reflection and creativeness. Karlheinz Stockhausen – György Ligeti – Luigi Nono – Luciano Berio – Iannis Xenakis* (Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2015), 178.

⁶ The last time quarter-tone notation was employed in a vocal line was in “Nikuia” (m.143), and after that it was never found in Xenakis’ scores.

of its relative character in the conditions of vocal intonating. It is known, for example, that Xenakis remained unsatisfied with the character of the performance of “Cendreés.” When answering B.A. Varga’s questions regarding the composition’s premiere, he stated with a sense of disappointment: “It’s never performed the way I want. Singers have a great deal to learn. They can’t control their voices, especially those I haven’t worked with⁷.” In addition, quarter tone intonating in “Cendreés” results from the definitive role of the string section in the timbral solution in the score. Subsequently, in his new vocal-instrumental compositions Xenakis, similarly to what he did in his early musical-theatrical opuses, gave priority to timbres of wind instruments, for which, just as in vocal lines, quarter-tone intonating presents serious difficulties.

The choral pieces from 1977 “À Colone” and “À Hélène” are some of the most well-known pieces from the composer’s middle period of his compositional development. The secret of their popularity has in many ways been conditioned by the composer’s return to the poetics of his musical-theatrical compositions, and at the same time, these compositions, being concert pieces, do not require additional stage production resources, unlike, for example, “Oresteïa” or “Medea Senecae.” These pieces are close to Xenakis’ musical tragedies not only in their literary basis (the composer chose fragments in Ancient Greek from two tragedies – Sophocles’ “Oedipus in Colonus” for “À Colone” and Euripides’ “Helen” for “À Hélène”), but also by the solution of the choral texture (the prevalence of a two-voice texture with a predominantly syllabic rendering of the verbal order and limited ranges of the parts situated in the middle and lower register). The compositions are united both by the idea of reconstruction of Ancient Greek polyphony, the hypothesis of the existence of which is stated by the composer in the introductions to his scores:

- “Polyphony certainly existed, even though no written record has been left, witness the aulos (two-reeded tubes played simultaneously, cf. present-day bagpipes with double chanter)⁸”;
- “In my opinion, polyphony must have existed in Greek antiquity (cf. the legend of Er, Book 10 of Plato’s ‘Republic’ in which eight sirens sing simultaneously eight sounds composing thus a single harmony)⁹.”

In both scores the composer incorporates a homogenous ensemble, relaying to the conductor the choice between a female and a male chorus. However, on the title page of the scores Xenakis indicates at a priority of the male chorus for the piece “À Colone” and a female one for “À Hélène.” In comparison with the composer’s previous composition, these pieces demonstrate a significant restriction in the inclusion of the newest techniques of vocal timbre: the composer refrains from the use of tremolo and barely incorporates glissando (it is possible to bring out only a few episodes with glissando in “À Colone”).

The differences between the compositions are in many ways conditioned by the use of the ensemble of performers. Whereas “À Hélène” is a piece for two-part chorus a cappella, in “À Colone” along with the chorus there is also an instrumental

⁷ Varga, *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis*, 106.

⁸ Iannis Xenakis, *À Colone* (Paris: Salabert Editions, 2012), I.

⁹ Iannis Xenakis, *À Hélène* (Paris: Salabert Editions, 2015), III.

ensemble used (horns, trombones, cellos, and double-basses). During the vocal sound the instruments frequently present themselves in the role of a stable background, which is especially perceptible in the solo sections (*Example No. 1*). In addition, the instruments also participate in the creation of reverberation effects, lengthening the sounds of the notes situated in the vocal parts. Such an “echo” appearing at the moment of the singers pronouncing the noise-induced tones ([s], [ph]) creates the impression of a fricative consonant sounding at a particular pitch¹⁰. Presumably it was the idea of that kind of interaction in particular that led the composer to incorporate wind instruments resembling vocal sounds in their acoustic traits in “À Colone.”

Example No. 1. (I. Xenakis “À Colone” B. 683-689):

© 1985 Éditions SALABERT (Xenakis I. À Colone. – Paris: Éditions SALABERT, 2015. S.5).

The choral texture of “À Colone,” by the character of interaction of two choral parts, approaches the writing of “Medea Senecae,” rather than “Oresteia”: the composer obviously orientates himself on the principles of Medieval diaphony: two vocal lines develop in a linear manner, at the same time depending on each other not only rhythmically, but also in terms of intonation. For the most part, Xenakis makes use of a combination of two principles: the development of the upper voice against the background of the sustained sounds of the lower voice and parallel motion of perfect intervals (fourths and fifths). For the sake of achieving an ideal ensemble between the parts Xenakis suggests not to isolate the parts from each other (the principle of 1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-2), but rather to place the singers in pairs (1-2-1-2-1-2 etc.).

“À Hélène” may perhaps be called the most ascetic score in Xenakis’ entire choral musical legacy. The composer rejects here his favorite technique of juxtaposing *solo* (*sol*) and *tutti*. The unified rhythmic motion without highlighting the strong beats creates the impression of ancient quantitative music strengthened by the permanence of the chosen textural configuration (the composer enacts unity of the phrasal, predominantly syllabic ensemble and avoids using *divisi*) (Example No. 2).

¹⁰ Xenakis follows Nono in his bringing out of separate consonant sounds from the structure of the words. However, while the Italian composer was induced upon intonating fricative consonants on a particular pitch to distort their sounds (“Cori di Didone”), Xenakis preserved the original phonetics by using the accompanying instruments.

Example No. 2. (Iannis Xenakis “À Hélène” B. 1-2)

Σὲ τὰν ἑ - νὰ - ῥ - λο - ῖς ἤ - πο δὲν - δρο - κό - μο - ῖς

SE TAN E NA U LO IS HÛ PO DE — NDRO KO MO IS

© 1988 Éditions SALABERT (Xenakis I. À Hélène. – Paris: Éditions SALABERT, 2012. S.1).

However, herewith, Xenakis does not reject the possibilities of dynamization, which manifests itself in the second stanza; its main resources turn out to be harmony (intensification of the meaning of chromaticism), tessitura (extending the range from the primary fifth to the octave), and the character of melodic motion (a gradual intensification of the role of broad intervals – all the way up to octave leaps). Great significance is also carried by the dramaturgy of harmonic finales completing the unfolding of lines of literary works. While in the first strophe, the first antistrophe, and the second antistrophe concluding the composition the interval of the fourth predominates (see *Scheme No. 1*), the second strophe suggests the greatest number of harmonic variants: from the minor second to the major sixth.

Scheme No. 1:

1 st strophe	1-7-5-2-7-5-2-5 ₁
1 st antistrophe	1-5-2-5-0-5-5-5-2-0-5-5
2 nd strophe	0-1-5-5-7-9-7-0-7-6-1-7
2 nd antistrophe	0-2-5-0-7-6-0-5
2 nd antistrophe	2-2-7-5-5-5-7-7-5-5-5-5

The creation in 1981 of the vocal-orchestral piece “Nekuia” declared the composer’s return to the existential problem range. While the pieces “Nuits” and “Cendrées” were connected by Xenakis with the theme of political protest, in 1981 he created a composition that was a “note of warning” for all of humanity living under the constant threat of war. The composer chose as the literary basis for it two fragments taken from works by Jean-Paul Richter “Blumen- Frucht- und Dornenstücke oder Ehestand, Tod und Hochzeit des Armenadvokaten F. St. Siebenkäs” and a poem by the composer’s spouse Françoise Xenakis from her poetry book “Écoute.”

“Nekuia” turned out to be the first composition in Xenakis’ vocal output, which demonstrated itself by a combination of the principles of phoneme and more traditional musical-literary composition based on the interaction of the musical and verbal elements. Unlike many of his colleagues, the composer did not turn to use of

polytextuality: the texts in French (by Françoise Xenakis) and German (Jean-Paul Richter) are presented at a distance from each other. At the same time, Xenakis can dissect the text into separate parts, subjecting the fragments of phrases to parallel unfolding. Separate phonemes in “Nekuia” are applied by the composer, when he creates both continual and discreet sounds: in the first case, he enacts a direct transition from one vowel to another¹¹, and in the second case – their isolated sounding within the framework of articulation of *staccato* or *tremolo*.

The audibility of the literary texts into the composition, notwithstanding the lack of polytextual unfolding, is practically inaccessible for the listeners' perception, stipulated by the textural solution of the composition, which demonstrates an aspiration to the effects of the so-called “artificial reverberation.”¹² In this case, it refers to the use of principles of canonic composition with a minimal distance between the subject and the answer (*Example No. 3*). Such organization of the texture creates an apparently perceived stereo sound conditioned by a consistent transfer of the sounding tone from one vocal part to another.

Example No. 3 (Iannis Xenakis “Nekuia” B.40-41):

© 1992 Éditions SALABERT (Xenakis I. Nekuia – Paris: Éditions SALABERT, 1992. S.3).

Unlike Gyorgy Ligeti (“Requiem,” “Lux aeterna”) and Luigi Nono (“Ha venido: canciones para Silvia,” “Sarà dolce tacere”), Xenakis’ attention is centered on the reverberating effect, which in the music of the other two composers presented a “secondary product” of timbral modulation. Xenakis is not very interested in separate notes or even separate lines. This can be seen clearly in his understanding of the possibilities of diagonal texture, which is principally different from Nono’s. Whereas in the latter’s

¹¹ For the designation of this transfer the composer brings in a horizontal line situated between the vowels (for example, A→O), commenting this graphic innovation the following way: “The arrow starting from a vowel and pointing to another means a continuous closure (opening) of the mouth cavity in a way to obtain a continuous transformation of the sonority from a phoneme to the next one” (Iannis Xenakis, *Nekuia* (Paris: Salabert Editions, 1992), IV).

¹² In his introduction to the score the composer indicates: “On the technical level there is, for example, a discussion and a treatment of the non-octaviating scales in relation to my ‘sieve’ theory with, in addition, multiplicities of shifted melodic patterns, like a kind of artificial reverberation” (Xenakis, *Nekuia*, II).

music the diagonal organization becomes a means of construction of a peculiar polytimbral monody of a broad range, Xenakis perceives textural diagonal relationships as a point of departure for the creation of a dynamic textural stratum with a rapidly expanding density of sound. The composer, who, according to Elena Ferapontova, “was more concerned with issues of density, mass, and motion of sound complexes in spaces¹³,” creates a complex textural space based on constant change of density of sound of the strata comprising it in the conditions of the artificial reverberation that he himself creates. Herewith, as R. Frisius indicates, even such a simple element as a scale becomes a means of creation of compound sound complexes stipulated by the fact that “the sounds of the scale seem to become compressed vertically¹⁴,” conditioning the effect of intonational derivativeness of the vertical element from the horizontal. In certain cases, the dialogue of intonationally identical linear and vertical elements of the texture is intended, first of all, to create the impression of an acoustic reflection of the pitches of the horizontal element. Use of unison texture essentially becomes in “Nekuia” (mm. 85-91) a rudimentary occurrence, reminiscent of the “quasi-archaic” quality of his early choral works. The complexity of the choral parts expands to the maximum, creating an unprecedented phenomenon even in the context of choral music of the postwar avant-garde. Let us turn our attention, for example, to the characteristic element present in Xenakis’ late compositions, which first asserted itself in “Nekuia” – the use of semitone couplings between the vocal lines intonating ascending and descending chromatic lines (!) (Example No. 4).

Example No. 4 (Iannis Xenakis “Nekuia” B. 279):

© 1992 Éditions SALABERT (Xenakis I. Nekuia – Paris: Éditions SALABERT, 1992. S.31).

Along with such dynamic sonoric effects, use is also made of stable pulsating clusters organized by means of couplings of semitones in consonant vertical formations.

¹³ Elena Ferapontova, *Vokal'naya muzyka Yannisa Ksenakisa kak fenomen ego kompozitorskogo tvorhestva: dis. ... kand. isk.* [The Vocal Music of Iannis Xenakis as a Phenomenon of his Musical Legacy: Thesis] (Moscow, 2007), 31.

¹⁴ Rudolf Frisius, *Iannis Xenakis: Nekuia. Musik über Krieg und Tod* [Electronic resource], <http://www.frisius.de/rudolf/texte/NekuiaInternetversion.pdf>

In this case, the composer demonstrates an interest in register contrasts, typical of his composition “Nuits,” emerging as a result of the juxtaposition of female and male vocal parts. In the organization of clusters by means of a homogenously sounding chorus, the place of register contrast is assumed by contrast in dynamics and articulation. Thus, in m. 65 the composer juxtaposes two versions of a cluster identical in their pitch content: the first is a customary form of intonation in the dynamic mark of *p*, while the second is a tremolo with the dynamic mark of *fff* (Example No. 5).

Thereby, articulation, as well as dynamics, becomes a very important resource for the creation of effects of “artificial reverberation,” which may be seen not only in the example cited above, but also in those sections of the work where the composer combines the sound of one vertical formation in the versions of sustained (continuous) and pulsating (discreet) sound.

Example No. 5 (Iannis Xenakis “Nekuia” mm. 65-66):

© 1992 Éditions SALABERT (Xenakis I. Nekuia – Paris: Éditions SALABERT, 1992. S.11).

Just as in the pair of compositions from 1977 “À Colone” – “À Hélène,” the works “Nekuia” and “Serment-Orkos” from 1981 demonstrate certain particular analogies to each other in their approach to choral writing in the vocal-orchestral score and in the *a cappella* choral score. It is even possible to state that “Serment-Orkos” in a certain sense demonstrates itself as a reflection of “Nekuia” in its organization of the interaction between the verbal (phoneme) and musical components, as well as in the use of timbral and textural resources of the chorus. In both compositions Xenakis works both

with verbal (in “Nekuia” – with the texts of Françoise Xenakis and Jean-Paul Richter, and in “Serment-Orkos” – with the texts of Hippocrates’ oath in Ancient Greek¹⁵) and with phonemic material (alternation of vowel sounds). However, unlike “Nekuia,” the phonemic and verbal components in the score of “Serment-Orkos” tend to unfold not only in isolation from each other, but also simultaneously (*Example No. 6*).

Let us highlight the similar techniques in the organization of the choral texture:

- a) alternation of *sol*i and *tutti*;
- b) juxtapositions between the parts for the male and female voices based on timbre and register;
- c) incorporation of contrast between ordinary intonating and vocal tremolo.

Example No. 6. (Iannis Xenakis “Serment-Orkos” B.41-42):

© 1981 Éditions SALABERT (Xenakis I. Serment-Orkos – Paris: Éditions SALABERT, 1981. S.1).

At the same time, in “Serment-Orkos” Xenakis makes use of the technique of *glissando*, both in the version of intonational sliding in the connection of the tones of one line and in the variant of lengthy ascents and descents. Also worthy of attention are the diagonal relationships of the consistently shifted tones. Whereas in “Nekuia” they were the result of bringing in canons with minimal distance between the subjects and the answers, here Xenakis limits himself to the creation of a particular homophonic harmonic texture, in which the relief function is carried out by the upper voice, while the background – the other voices of the texture – is based on reflection of only separate tones of the relief within the textural diagonal relationships.

A testimony for further expansion of timbral resources of the chorus in Xenakis’ compositions is provided by the inclusion in “Serment-Orkos” of loud inhaling and exhaling breathing sounds made by the singers, familiar from the scores of Ligeti’s scores (“Aventures” and “Nouvelles Aventures”)¹⁶, which carry out the acoustic

¹⁵ The work “Serment-Orkos” was written upon commission from the organizing committee of the International Congress of Cardiovascular Surgery which took place in September 1981 in Athens.

¹⁶ The use of these techniques in conjunction with choral glissandi aroused an ambiguous reaction from the audience at the premiere, which N. Strimple mentions in his monograph in a manner not

function of noise percussion instruments because of the concise articulation of the ascribed rhythmic figures, creating an additional timbral event in the score. Moreover, one of Xenakis' utterances also testifies to a certain symbolic meaning of this technique: "Patients sigh like that when they're suffering – that's why I put it in, as a very concrete aspect of the healing of the sick¹⁷."

In "Serment-Orkos" for the first time we encounter the utilization of a throaty voice, contrasted here, just as in Mauricio Kagel's choral works¹⁸, to ordinary singing. Along with this, the score of "Serment-Orkos" sees the return of the technique of the expressive scream, incorporated for the first time in "Oresteïa." In "Serment" this technique is used as an expressive element of color complementing the vocal *tremolos*.

The similarity of the techniques of choral writing in the compositions representing two various categories of subject matter, conditionally designated by us as Antique ("Serment-Orkos") and existential ("Nekuia"), testifies to the universality of Xenakis' compositional methods in this period and their independence of any concrete thematic directedness of any particular composition. Thereby, the "quasi-archaic" style of the choral episodes of the musical tragedies and the experimental vocal writing, directed, among other things, on the innovations of the postwar avant-garde – the two sides of Xenakis' choral music, presenting a reflection of two crucial themes of his vocal compositions, which conditionally may be labeled as Antique or existential. However, from the perspectives of the idea-based foundation and of the technical compositional solution, the two categories of composition turn out to be inwardly very close to each other. In one of his first choral works "Polla ta dhina," Xenakis, having turned to Sophocles' text, formulated, as Elena Ferapontova writes, "the macro-subject" of his entire vocal output – the theme of the human being¹⁹. This "macro-subject" connects his works composed on the texts of the Ancient Greek tragedians with the compositions in which the composer turns to other literary sources or phonemic elements. The defenselessness of the human being in the face of fate, doom, the inevitability of death (non-existence) – all of these comprise the main leitmotifs of Xenakis' choral works, which stipulate their deeply tragic sound. In one of his interviews the composer said: "Death is something I think of all the time. The object is, of course, not only my own demise, but also about something more common: death in its nature,

devoid of humor: "*Serment* (1981) for unaccompanied mixed chorus is Xenakis's most accessible work. Written for the International Society of Cardiovascular Surgeons, its choral wails, moans, and barking may not seem intended, at first, to promote confidence in the medical profession, but repeated hearings reveal many inventive and entertaining ideas" (Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2005), 174).

¹⁷ Varga, *Conversations with Iannis Xenakis*, 172.

¹⁸ In Mauricio Kagel's scores the guttural throaty voice is labeled with the word combination *distorted voice*.

¹⁹ Ferapontova writes "The 'macro-theme' of Xenakis' vocal music turned out to be the human being. Most symbolic are Sophocles' lines present in the composer's famous choral composition 'Polla ta dhina' – 'Numberless are the world's wonders, but none more wonderful than man'" (Ferapontova, *Vokal'naya muzyka Yannisa Ksenakisa kak fenomen ego kompozitorskogo tvorchestva*, 11).

in human society, in our actions, in the past which has terminated, but which has not completely finished.” [2, p. 166] The motive of death, one of the most determinative in the first musical tragedies, remains the crucial theme in his subsequent musical compositions, asserting itself either in the literary texts (“Pour la paix,” “Pu wijnuej we fyp²⁰,” “Sea Nymphs”), or in the compositions’ titles (“Nuits,” “Knephas²¹”), or in both (“Nekuia”²²), thereby determining the conditional quality of the boundary between the ancient Greek and his own existential theme. He, being a composer who remained without a homeland, who experienced personally all the senselessness of various political theories put into action, was preoccupied all his life with the theme of the helplessness of the human being in front of the frightening face of war and terror so often unleashed in the name of the ideals of various ideologies (let us remember “Nuits” and “Nekuia”). Unlike the representatives of “protest music,” such as Arnold Schoenberg (“A Survivor from Warsaw”), Luigi Dallapiccola (“Canti di prigionia”), Bruno Maderna (“Quattro lettere”), or Luigi Nono (“Il canto sospeso” and “Intolleranza 1960”), Xenakis avoided “dogmatic” juxtapositions between the false and the true ideologies (for example, Nazism vs. Judaic [Christian] humanism or Nazism vs. communism), because it was important for him to preserve his independence, among other things, from concrete political doctrines. The composer once expressed his humanistic creed very concisely in one phrase: “The most important thing in art and life is to be free²³”.

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²⁰ In the composition “Pu wijnuej we fyp,” despite the use of a transformed verbal text, one cannot deny the connection with the literary source – Arthur Rimbaud’s poem “Le dormeur du val” [“The Sleeper in the Hollow”], at the center of which there is an image of a killed soldier – an innocent victim of war.

²¹ “Knephas” (“Darkness”) is a composition written in memory of Xenakis deceased close friend Maurice Fleuret.

²² The composition “Nekuia” (“The Slain”) is based on the texts of Jean-Paul Richter and Françoise Xenakis.

²³ Cit. from: Anna Stoyanova, *E'lektroakusticheskaya kompoziciya Yannisa Ksenakisa: dis. ... cand. arts.* [Electroacoustic composition by Iannis Xenakis: thesis] (Moscow, 2016), 32.

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