

Fantasy
5002

Vista Series
HIGH FIDELITY

NIKOS SKALKOTTAS:

TWELVE
DANCES



LITTLE SYMPHONY OF SAN FRANCISCO
GREGORY MILLAR, CONDUCTOR



ΔΟΡΕΑ

Agripio T. Zolotas

The Symphony Orchestra of San Francisco

GREGORY MILLAR, Conductor

NIKOS SKALKOTTAS: Twelve Greek Dances



SIDE 1

PELOPONNISIAKOS I
KRITIKOS I, Cretan Dance
KLEFTIKOS I
SIFINIKOS II
NISSITIKOS
EPIROTIKOS I

(Series I, Number 4)
(Series I, Number 2)
(Series I, Number 6)
(Series II, Number 2)
(Series II, Number 4)
(Series I, Number 3)

HOSTIANOS
KLEFTIKOS II
NERANTZOFLIMA
TSAMIKOS I
EPIROTIKOS II
MAZOKIOS

SIDE 2

(Series III, Number 1)
(Series III, Number 3)
(Series III, Number 9)
(Series I, Number 1)
(Series III, Number 2)
(Series III, Number 12)

On the occasion of two London performances in November, 1951, of works by Nikos Skalkottas, the Musical Times declared: "It may well be that Skalkottas . . . a composer who writes in the twelve-tone method, a private serial system of his own, or the Greek modes — Greece has produced a composer of the front rank."

In 1949, Skalkottas was dead, his music will little know abroad and—except for those who were "in the know"—was almost entirely unknown in Greece itself.

Skalkottas was born in Chalkis, Greece, in 1904. He began his studies in Athens. From 1921-1931, he studied in Germany with Karl Weill, Paul Jarzachs and Arnold Schoenberg. Returning to Athens in 1935, he spent the rest of his life there, continuing to write in comparative obscurity. In his last 20 years, Skalkottas completed over a hundred compositions including symphonies and chamber music, piano pieces, songs, and ballet scores.

I am indebted for the information that follows concerning the Greek Dances to J. G. Papaioannou of the Skalkottas Committee, Athens.

In 1935, Skalkottas was experiencing a creative crisis, and for more than a year he did not compose. His father, a brass-band conductor and fiasco, suggested that he write a few Greek dances for the orchestra.

After an initial period of reluctance, Skalkottas began to be intrigued by the challenge, and composed twelve dances for the dances in 1935. He worked on a recording project for the Folk Music Archives in Athens, and by the next year, he had completed and orchestrated all 36 dances in 3 sections. The title of this recording are numbered according to the series in which they were originally contained.

Skalkottas, incidentally, possessed an extraordinary musical memory. He orchestrated the dances, for example, entirely from memory, and the year before, he had written down by heart a complete, 12-measure neo-baroque orchestral tune he had composed in 1929 in Germany where the score had been left.

In 1948, the French Institute in Athens published four out of the dances in score at which time Skalkottas rewrote the four and reorchestrated the rest in various degrees. A measure of the lack of recognition in which Skalkottas worked in that the 1948 publication represented the only work of his—aside from two piano pieces—ever to have been published.

Later, Universal-Edition (Vienna-London) acquired the copyright for the entire composition, and began to publish the dances in consecutive volumes. Volume I of the original twelve dances, containing 5 dances, was published in 1954. Volume I of the version for strings, also containing 5 dances, was released in 1956, both in score and piano reduction.

In this country, only 5 of the 12 dances on this LP had been published before January of 1957. The remaining seven were sent to the Little Symphony in their original manuscript form and were used for the orchestra by Robert Parr.

All these dances were given their original premiere by the Little Symphony of San Francisco conducted by Gregory Miller. The additional compositions of Nikos Skalkottas—Andante Segno for Piano and Winds, Little Suite for Strings, and Ten Sketches for Strings, were also given their premiere performance by the Little Symphony, conducted by Mr. Miller.

The Skalkottas Committee of Athens is endeavoring to publish one "Skalkottas" did not aim at scientific truthfulness or

folk-song-anthology work, but at free artistic creation incorporating thematic material based on Greek folk tunes, sometimes greatly transformed." Skalkottas did not, for the most part, respect the original folk dance version and melody, harmonizing it. Only in a small percentage of the dances can familiar Greek folk tunes be found in easily recognizable profile. Even with the assistance of the best Greek folk song experts, the Committee continues, "the original folk tunes have not been identified for those that should be the dances for the folk."

Skalkottas, therefore, created a characteristically individualized work which had roots in folk sources but emerged as a new synthesis of his own composition energized by folk material.

Skalkottas' music can be contrasted to Greek folk song. In addition to his work with the Folk Song Archives, he often visited clubs and taverns and stayed at provincial towns to hear the local music, and he knew several folk musicians. In addition, he worked with many Greek musicians who had themselves collected folk material, and he helped them in their arranging and orchestration of those sources.

The major part of Skalkottas' work was written off "main street," a total technique of his own invention. The dances, however, are composed in rather simple tonal idioms. There is evidence of relatively unobtrusive harmonic modulation, but not particularly daring. Yet the result is fresh, often uniquely his own. Skalkottas' music is characterized by its ability to combine strength and lyricism, intensity and earthy release of emotion. There is no pretentiousness in his music. Many of the dances are marked by their scrupulous avoidance of either deliberate primitivism or slick sophistication. ("The Twelve Dances" will be heard in its entirety in every detail. . . . Skalkottas, with something like the insistence of genius, seems to penetrate to the heart of the matter.)

The Little Skalkottas Committee adds: "The originality of Skalkottas' treatment of the folk material . . . preserves a sort of overview to the music, and the more traditional features of Greek folk music (modal functions, notes and rhythmic structure and quality of rhythmic accretion and phrasing, melodic differentiation into separate strains and other forms of free, rhapsodic, recitative-like type, etc.)"

Skalkottas remained an individualist throughout the mature years of his life, even in such works as the Greek Dances. Initially influenced by Schoenberg and, to a lesser extent, Berg, Skalkottas was attracted to Stravinsky's music, but he never became increasingly his own. As a result, he was not indigenous to Greek composers, nor, in view of his obscurity in life, did he influence them.

These dances, in essence, illustrate again that the deeper an artist's roots in his culture, the more likely he is to contribute something of personal value to that culture in his work. "The Mediterranean area," as Henry Cowell noted in his introduction to Folkways Folk Music of the Mediterranean, "has divulged more of the secrets of ancient music than any other area of the world." The dances of the Jews and Arabs, the Persians, and, particularly into Greece and Asia Minor, where it was most brought in from Persia and Arabia, are particularly strong from Egypt and Arab, adding scientific tuning and many new ideas from many places, and many new and increased musical culture spread to Rome on one side and Byzantium on the other.

Skalkottas was a product, as are we all, of what came after, but in these dances, he resorted to folk memories with what he had learned, and the combination has become alive.

—NAT HENRIEUX

About Mr. Millar

GREGORY MILLAR (Manassis) was born in Northern Saskatchewan of Greek and French Canadian parentage and came to San Francisco at the end of World War Two to pursue his career as a conductor. Since that time he has directed orchestras in San Francisco, Vancouver, B. C., St. Louis and New York. Mr. Millar was Director of Music at St. Louis University from 1948 to 1951, prior to returning to California to organize and conduct the Little Symphony Orchestra of San Francisco. As a result of a Rockefeller Grant awarded in 1955, Mr. Millar has been able to make an extended research of little symphony repertoire.

About the Orchestra

The Little Symphony Orchestra of San Francisco was founded in 1951 to present concerts of great music as originally scored for a small symphony. The orchestra has performed in over 100 concerts in addition to radio broadcasts and the first live television series for small symphony in this country. The Little Symphony has presented 39 works in the United States and has presented 12 world premieres.

Orchestra Personnel for This Recording

VIOLINS: N. Rubin, concertmaster; C. Meacham, assistant; D. Schneider, principal second; S. Claudio, B. Stanley, E. Keen, D. Rahm, L. Wengert, E. Michalson, W. Pynchon. VIOLAS: D. Oldham, principal; M. James, E. Bell, CALLOS. VIOLA: E. Grant, principal; J. Maguire, H. Struss, R. Abramo, JAMES. C. Modeli, principal; D. Williams, FLUTE (Pic.): V. W. Solbe, R. Fabrizio, Oboes: (English Horn): R. Daise, L. Mackintosh, CLARINET (B. C.): F. Bibbins, D. Carroll. BASSONS: R. Ojeda, V. Ojeda, F. Hilschke (C. Taylor), F. French. HORN: E. Sinton, J. Callahan, R. Byler, D. Lechi. TRUMPETS: E. Haug, C. Bubb, Jr., THOMPSONS: P. Lippina, W. Spencer, J. Bischoff, TURN: A. Freeman, THOMPSON: M. Milve, PITCHBENDER: L. Davis.

Vista Series High Fidelity

VISTA SERIES High Fidelity recordings will attain the highest standard of orchestral sound and the truest reproduction of the soloist's instrument. VISTA SERIES recordings are recorded on cut on disks on the RIAA curve on Scully lathes employing the Erezek W. Durrant Variable Pitch technique. Both technically and artistically Fantasy VISTA SERIES recordings offer an unsurpassable experience to the lover of the world's finest music.