

mono

music today

Nikos Skalkottas octet

eight variations
on a Greek folk tune
for piano trio
string quartet no. 3



members of the Melos Ensemble

William Bennett, flute / Peter Graeme, oboe
Gavrus de Peyer, clarinet / William Watershouse, bassoon
Emanuel Hurwitz / Ivor McMahon, violins
Cecil Aronowitz, viola / Terence Weil, cello

Robert Masters, violin Derek Simpson, cello Marcel Gazelle, piano

Dartington string quartet

Colin Sauer, first violin
Peter Carter, second violin
Keith Lovell, viola
Michael Evans, cello

[side one]

Nikos Skalkottas

band one

octet

- 1 Allegro moderato
- 2 Andante cantabile
- 3 Presto

band two

eight variations on a Greek folk tune for piano trio

[side two]

ALP2289 mono

string quartet no.3

- 1 Allegro moderato
- 2 Andante
- 3 Allegro vivace [Rondo]

A great imaginative novel might be written about the Greek composer Nikos Skalkottas. As a young man – 'lively, ironic, and combative' – he studied the violin at Athens Conservatoire. After winning a gold medal for his performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, he proceeded to Berlin, in 1921, with every prospect of becoming a world-famous virtuoso. By the mid-1920s, however, he had decided to make his career as a composer. After a short period of study with Philipp Jarnach and Kurt Weill, he went to Schoenberg, who thought so highly of his talent that a quarter of a century later, not knowing any of the music Skalkottas had written in the intervening years, he numbered him among the few real composers he had taught.

In 1933 Skalkottas left Germany. He returned to Athens, as Mozart had returned to equally provincial Salzburg after the double failure of his grand tour and his great love in Mannheim and Paris. For Skalkottas – ten years older than Mozart had been when his crisis came – there was a black period of three years when he wrote nothing. Then he broke into flower again, composing ceaselessly and, to judge by the size of his output, effortlessly. Genius is, among other things, an infinite capacity for taking pain and transmitting it to other people's pleasure. But the combative personality was, to all outward appearances, gone: there had been a withdrawal from the world, the onset of a divine indifference which only did not stop him composing. As Hans Keller has pointed out, he was not concerned with himself even to the extent of critically destroying any of his music – as, say, the comparably fluent and fractious Brahms had been. Something had indeed happened: inductive research might reveal what, but does it matter? One either knows devastation or one does not – the occasion is subsidiary. What really matters is the result: in Skalkottas's case, a curious band of indifference which yet does not inhibit action but rather allows something to

speak through the hole where the ego used to be – like Mozart's creative response after Aloysia Weber. Skalkottas composed; he played his violin again, for money, in whatever orchestra was to hand; he lived, if you call it living, and in 1946, at the age of 42, he married. Three years later he died. He had for some time been suffering from a hernia which he had not bothered (or perhaps not been able to afford) to have treated. A sudden crisis in his condition had occurred just as his wife was about to bear their second child. Not wishing to worry her he had still not sought treatment – a fatal omission.

Rarely can there have been a greater disparity between how a composer's music looks likely to sound, and how it in fact sounds. That is to say, Skalkottas had an unbelievable ear. His inner sound-world was busy and clouded like that of Ives, totally chromatic like that of Schoenberg; and yet it rarely lost touch with the intonations of Greek folk music. Of the works on this record, the Eight Variations stay closest to Greece, the Quartet gets nearest the opposite end of the polarity, Schoenberg, and the Octet comes somewhere in the middle. Each shows a slightly different facet of the same many-sided crystal, the inexhaustible musical personality of Nikos Skalkottas. His range is great and conforms to no classic pattern of development: a solo-violin sonata from the early 1920s, one of the great works for violin alone, is almost like Hindemith but sounds better; his last suite, a suite [no. 2], again for violin, but with piano, is a kind of Greek atonal Wieniawski-brought-up-to-date: in between come works of Schoenbergian rigour and Mediterranean luxuriance. Skalkottas is free-and-easy, exuberant, expert, unclassifiable. Berg and Bartók are perhaps most like him, but either of them is easier to analyse, or pigeon-hole. When we know and understand him better, he may well prove their equal in stature – the Quiet Genius, still this century's most mysterious great composer.

Note © Leo Black, 1966

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Long Play 33¹/₃ rpm

A leaflet containing analytical notes and documentation is enclosed with this record



EMI Records

[The Gramophone Company Ltd]
Hayes, Middlesex, England

Printed in Great Britain

Nikos Skalkottas

octet

eight variations
on a Greek folk tune
for piano trio

string quartet no. 3

stereo ASD 2289/mono ALP 2289 © 1966

Sleeve and documentation :

Editor David Drew

Designer Robin Fior



music today
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EMI Records

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Printed in Great Britain by Shenval Press

Nikos Skalkottas

- 1908 *Mano Anthea* (opera) (Prague) at Munich
- 1909 *The Family Party in Athens*
- 1920 *Compositions* to gain recognition
- 1927 *Accepted by an "honorary" Schola Cantorum*
- arrived in Berlin to continue his study studies
- 1928 in second *Vienna* performing activities first experience
- in Berlin especially at the Hochschule für Musik
- in 1929 awarded to become a composer
- 1930-37 Studies composition with Philipp Arrau and later with Kurt Weill
- 1934 *Beats* for unaccompanied voice (started composing work)
- 1937 *John Schwaner's* nomination as the Berlin Academy of Arts
- 1939-40 *First Suite for Large Orchestra*
- 1939 *Lesson* the composition
- but returned to study composition with Schoenberg
- 1950 *String Quartet No 1* **String**
- String Quartet No 2**, **Flute Concerto No 1**
- 1950 After the first escape of women, returns to Athens
- 1950 **String Quartet No 3**, **String Trio**
- 1950-51 *Prague*, **Two Greek Suites for Violin and Piano**
- 1950-52 *Four Suites for solo piano* and other chamber music
- 1957 *Compositions for two pianos*
- 1958-*Cello Concerto* (commission missing)
- 1959 **Eight Variations on a Greek Folk Tune for piano solo**
- Flute Concerto No 2**, **Violin Concerto**
- 1959 *Score of the Greek Revival* are given their highly individual free performance by the Athens orchestra (the only performance of any of his works for sale for sale in Greece before his death)
- 1959 **Three Piano Concertos**
- 1960 **Trilogy for Piano Flute**
- 1962-67 *Two Symphonies for strings*, **Little Suite for Strings**, **Sixth Suite for large Orchestra**
- 1968 *The Return of Athena* (concerto for large orchestra)
- Kataklysmos* (100 part setting)
- 1968 *March for the Greek spirit* **Maria Pergali**
- 1967-8 *With the Spirit of the Nation* (solo singer and orchestra) and several other before his full activity
- 1968 *Suite for Cello and Piano*, **Trilogy** *Waltz for solo and piano*
- 11 September 1968 *Time after a tragic attack*

his whole oeuvre comprises about 150 works

Education and Career

After matriculation in Athens and the completion of his national education throughout Greece, Nikos acquired a high significance and increasingly selected various composers. The quality of their music was not, of course, determined by the quality of the field music it depended on their own inspiration, and they well-composed compositions - Chopin for example - was particularly high in Greece the admiration of music to national was not the exception in our contemporary musician. Nikos and Schwaner continued to theoretical studies of using Athens as a private study and composer, and they used major material. Studious disciplines, and he ends were simple.

Great influence on it was Chopin's national development. After the national uprising of 1821 and the foundation of modern Greece, a remarkable time elapsed before the formation of any specific national school in music. Most of the other national schools already had been established in other countries. The Greek school actually began a period of four thousand years. The music of the great nations - the Italians, the Russians, the ages of ages with their own, the German classical and the Russians - however separated altogether or also remained an integral part of national artistic expression. Such has left its mark on the composition of the music and the new character of the future. During the last decades of Greek rule - 1820-1827 - the national and particularly musical culture were almost underground, when the nationalists a great part engaged with the aspirations of the present. One can understand why Greek music cannot measure in the standards of the average musical composition in any. Students who made their own music Schwaner's 12-note method - his own, and through Greek's is, combined by individual personalities with an individual, international character. Above them the evidence of Greek Politics.



Nikos Skalkottas in a studio studying with the master Constantin Schwaner

The *Beats*, written in Berlin, was performed first in 1937, at a concert of works by following a party, conducted by Kurt Schwaner. The only score was left in Berlin in 1938 and (like many other Skalkottas scores) was lost almost lost. Quite by chance the Greek woman *Sandra* (her name has disappeared) in 1946, in the shape of a Berlin music dealer. A manuscript score in preparation, and will be published by Universal Edition (Richard A. Kalmus Ltd) London/Vienna.

The *Variations on a Greek Folk Tune* for soprano was first performed in Athens, at a National Concert given after the composer's death. The score is published by Universal Edition (Richard A. Kalmus Ltd) London/Vienna.

The *String Quartet No 3* was first performed by the (Prague) String Quartet at the Bohemian Music Festival on 5 July 1958. The manuscript score in preparation, and will be published by Universal Edition (Richard A. Kalmus Ltd) London/Vienna.

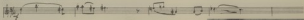
The music examples in the following pages are reproduced from the composer's autograph scores, by permission of the publisher, and by courtesy of the Institute Committee of Athens, which also supplied the photographs.

Opus

- 1. *Beats* (soprano)
- 2. *Beats* (soprano)
- 3. *Beats*

The score movements of the *Beats* has something of the distinctive character, with frequent juxtapositions of woodwind and strings. But in each there are stark contrasts. Towards the end of the first movement the student might suddenly feel as if he had written:

The slow movement, in a simple but gentle form, shows ultimately the appearance of these notes, a *sfz*, it reveals in itself an inimitable appearance (and not with less music) already begins to define the movement's strategy and single character. Two interpretations and one movement of the three notes (beginning and the base of the idea) (B & B) presented in the beginning of the future and closed by the note.



Op 1

The strategy of this is even simplified. While the vocal instrument between the movement and program. The strategy involves their own vibrant and beautiful material. Later the main instrumental are presented, for the movement there is perhaps a combination of the variety, gesture and intention, that allowed Skalkottas between 1918 and 1930. Again this is all the national goals of the future, and an important element in the Greek national culture in 1930 and although, as in further movements, the high points are suddenly and intensely interrupted, this time there is a return and the movement ends in a beautiful climax.



Nikos Skalkottas

Eight Variations on a Greek Folk Tune

Neither the origin nor the words, if any, of the folk theme have been traced. Skalkottas noted the theme, together with two others, on a scrap of manuscript paper, but did not identify it. Its character – at once tragic and heroic – suggests that it is a melody from the time of the Turkish occupation, probably originating from Central Greece. In varying it, however, Skalkottas enlarges the geographical perspective. Thus the first variation seems to evoke a graceful Cretan dance, while the second assembles, in its heaviness, a Men's Dance from the mountainous north-west of Greece.

The presentation of the theme (**Ex 2** below) has four strands: the theme itself in the violin (later taken up by the cello); the passacaglia-like progression in the bass of the piano; an elegiac motive in the treble of the piano, interwoven with chromatically-sliding minor chords; and a tambourine effect produced by the cello's unusual pizzicato sul ponticello.

Handwritten musical score for "Eight Variations on a Greek Folk Tune". The score is written in black ink on aged paper. At the top, it reads "8 Acht Variationen über ein griechisches Volksliedchen." Below this, there are two staves. The upper staff is for Violin (Vcl. a.) and the lower staff is for Cello (Cello). The music is in 2/4 time and features a mix of melodic lines and rhythmic patterns. A stamp in the upper right corner reads "R. SKALKOTTAS ΑΘΗΝΑΙ".

Ex 2

Naturally, all four strands are involved in the work's development.

The main divisions in the work are as follows:

- Theme *Moderato assai*
- Var 1 *Allegro*
- Var 2 *Allegro vivo*
- Var 3 *Allegretto*
- Var 4 *Moderato*
- Var 5 *Andante con moto*
- Var 6 *Adagio*
- Var 7 *Allegro ben ritmico*
- Var 8 *Allegro vivace* [Finale]

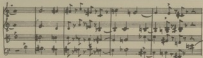
In the central section, the two slow variations – the fifth, an improvisational one for piano solo, and the sixth – are flanked by two different types of scherzando variation. The first of these (*moderato*) is a playful interlude before the piano's tragic monologue. The impressive *adagio* variation which juxtaposes the plain cello sound to the violin *con sordino* – the climax of the work's lyricism – comments on the monologue with an elevated and typically Greek compassion. The second *scherzando* variation, like the first, is again a kind of *in mezzo*. Its light rhythm recalls Skalkottas's *Sifnosikos* (a dance from the island of Sifnos). With the *largo* finale comes a sense of liberation, culminating in the dithyrambic reappearance of the theme.

String Quartet No 3

- 1 *Alllegro moderato*
- 2 *Andante*
- 3 *Alllegro vivace*

One of the most striking and typical features of the quartet is the completely spontaneous use of 12-note serial technique – so spontaneous, so naturally at the service of musical inspiration, that the listener might not be aware of the minutely detailed working.

The first movement, which is in sonata form, opens with a texture based on four distinct 12-note rows, one for each instrument. Let us call them the 'first group' rows. Their vertical relationship is controlled: the first notes of each row form a cluster of minor seconds, the second a cluster of major seconds, the third a cluster of augmented seconds. Thus:



Ex 3

The 'second group rows' are likewise distinct, and apportioned between the instruments. In this case, however, the treatment is much freer. Segments of each row are repeated before the row itself is complete, thus giving the typically lyrical 'second subject' an almost nursery-rhyme inflection. Moreover, there are only three rows. The second violin's row is a transposition of the first violin's. In the next example (Ex 4) which shows the beginning of the second subject group, there are only two rows plus the transposition.

Ex 4



The third row is not introduced until the next [*forte*] stage, when the cello sets its pizzicato semiquavers against a varied restatement of the material from Ex 4. In the development section the Ex 4 material acquires a new and immensely forceful character – the argument being equally divided between the two 'subjects'. The recapitulation opens with a return of the music of Ex 3, now remote and ethereal where before it had been direct and robust.

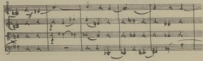
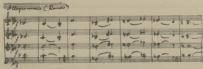


Skalotas in Berlin c.1921



The *Andante* is in song form. Here again there are two sets of rows – one set of two for the A section, and another set of two for the B section, the B rows usually appear in consecutive transpositions, and thus retain an episodic character. By contrast the A rows form a long melodic line, enabling their original and retrograde versions to unfold consecutively. This long melodic line is later intensified by canonic working. The expressive resources of the strings are fully exploited and underline the fine differences between the poignancy of the B rows and the wide cantabile of the A rows.

The finale, a rondo, seems to present the essence of the waltz in different historical and emotional guises within the Central European tradition – including allusions to *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Wozzeck*. The refrain [Ex B below] uses – yet again – four different rows. The first is the basis of the opening unison statement. It is continued, with octave transpositions, by the first violin, while each of the other instruments has its own row material.



Ex 5

A second group of four rows is reserved for the 'couplets' in the rondo form, and is divided into pairs. The pairs are presented in close proximity and in similar fashion, by viola and cello. They begin the first couplet as follows:



Ex 6

After a brief commentary by the two violins, the viola and cello return to resume the Ex 6 pattern, but now on the basis of the second pair of rows.



1929 On holiday in Austria