

In Tribute to Mikis Theodorakis

(July 29, 1925 – September 2, 2021)

by Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos, Ambassador ad honorem

It is difficult to write an obituary for someone who has not died. Mikis Theodorakis may have left his body, but his spirit and his cultural work in the area of music will continue to enlighten humanity far into the future. So, for us Greeks, he will always be with us, He did not die; he cannot die.

I will not go into the details of his life and of his works. These are known and it would be necessary to write a thesis. Allow me to share my personal recollections of Mikis.

It was November 1986; I was Consul General of Greece in Istanbul at the time, and Turkey was still under the iron rule of the Evren dictatorship, and Istanbul was still under martial law. The Turkish composer Sülfü Livaneli had invited Theodorakis to give four concerts in Istanbul. I had expected that the authorities would not give permission for the concerts to take place, but the insistence of Livaneli paid off, and the concerts took place.

I attended the concert of November 30 that took place in the Istanbul opera house. All seats had been sold out, and the atmosphere was very lively. Police had surrounded the building, and many were afraid that violence might be provoked. The concert and the other three that followed were a fantastic success because the songs promoted the need for Turkey to go faster with democratic reform that the civilian Prime Minister Turgut Özal was pushing. The joint singing of Theodorakis and Livaneli created an atmosphere of Greek-Turkish friendship that became still more apparent after the concerts, and continued even during the crisis of March 1987, which brought the two countries to the brink of war.

At a dinner I hosted for him at my residence, Mikis told me that the aim of these concerts was exactly that—to weaken the iron grip of the Turkish military regime and enhance democratic progress, and to promote and consolidate Greek-Turkish relations. To this effect he



Office of the Prime Minister/Vasileios Filis, May 2010

“Art is the only power that can create within us a microcosm in perfect parallel with the Cosmos.” —Mikis Theodorakis

established with Livaneli a Greek-Turkish Friendship Association. Prominent Turkish intellectuals and writers like Yaşar Kemal and Azis Nesin participated also. Theodorakis was enthusiastic about his visit and contacts with his Turkish friends, and he was happy to pursue his dream of bringing closer the people of the two countries.

I met him again in 1994. I was then heading the diplomatic office of the alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs, and I had to brief Theodorakis on the situation in Turkey, since he was going to visit Ankara this time, and try to smooth out relations between the two coun-

tries. It was a private initiative and the Ministry tried to help him as much as possible. Theodorakis in our conversation continued to maintain the spirit of November 1986, as I tried to explain to him the many changes that had taken place since then.

He had a fantastic personality. He was a fighter, a visionary and a creator of art in the form of high-quality music and opera.

He will never be missed because he will always be with us.

Why Greeks Love Mikis Theodorakis— and His Music

by Theodore Andromidas and Dean Andromidas

Men like Mikis Theodorakis are rare. There is no more beloved figure for the Hellenic people. And he has come to represent, and still lead, the struggles of the Greek people against what have been centuries of war, against first the Ottoman, and then the British Empire.

Born on the island of Chios in 1925, he spent his childhood in the towns and villages of the Greek countryside, becoming familiar with the music of Greece. It was in the Peloponnesian town of Tripolis, where he spent his teenage years, that he first heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and decided then to become a composer.

Yet, you cannot really understand why he is so loved by the Greek people, without understanding his life-long struggle, not just to defeat British-controlled fascism, but to create a new musical voice for Greece.

In 1972, when he was in exile during the Colonels' Junta that ruled Greece militarily at the time, he wrote this in the forward of the book *Mikis Theodorakis: Music and Social Change*, by George Giannaris:

Search as one may in the poetic texts that I have used, one will not find any political slogans. One will find neither obvious nor hidden propaganda concerning specific political viewpoints. Consequently, the politicization of my art is exclusively the result of two causes (a) its forthrightness, and (b) my personal commitment. This is the consequence and the cost that springs forth from my basic principle that art

ought to communicate at every moment with the people. In other words, it ought to involve the masses.

The masses, however, are not something abstract but are, on the contrary, totally concrete. For instance, masses for me are the Greek people who today live under certain conditions that produce specific problems, expectations, ideologies, ideals. From its historical past, this people has inherited particular traditions, principles, customs, sensitivity, learning, and a specific intellectual and cultural foundation. Hence in order to converse with this people, at this moment, and in order to give it—with the form of an artistic work—aesthetic truths that will concern it, the artist himself, as well as this work, must be immersed in this historical reality. This means that he must be sincere, as his work, too, must be sincere.

This is the essence of the issue of the politicization of my work. There is, however, something else. Creative expression is, above all, an act of freedom. 'I create' means 'I am free; I become free.' The message of art is the message of freedom. Therefore, the art that wants to express, faithfully and sincerely, a people that struggles for its freedom, aspires to win not only the love of this people, but also the hatred of its enemies. It is a great, a consummate aspiration, which I do not hide; I have pursued it with all my heart.¹

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was first published in *EIR*, June 26, 2015.

1. George Giannaris, *Mikis Theodorakis, Music and Social Change*, 1972, Praeger Publishers, Forward by Mikis Theodorakis.