

Solon Michaelides: Life, Work, and Legacy: Selected Papers from the Solon Michaelides Cultural Foundation Conference, 14 May 2016, University of Nicosia

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Introduction

Solon Michaelides (1905–79) stands as the most iconic figure of modern Cypriot art music culture. No doubt, Michaelides’s near mythical status in the Cypriot popular imagination has emerged in part from Cypriots’ collective desire to identify and celebrate individuals whom they perceive as having contributed significantly to the modernization of local culture. As John Covach has pointed out, “...there is no subject [i.e., analyst] without an object,” and this creates a dialectical relationship mediated by shared cultural and field-specific assumptions.¹ “To have such shared assumptions,” Covach argues, “is part of what constitutes participating in a culture. These shared assumptions, it seems, are necessary and unavoidable. But to the extent that they are shared, they also become transparent to us.”² Such shared assumptions have nurtured a local reception of Solon Michaelides’s career and music that somewhat uncritically conforms to the dominant Greek-Cypriot narrative of the island’s modern history. While this may be convenient for the maintenance of established beliefs, it does little to recommend Michaelides’s significance to the outside world. The six papers featured in the present volume constitute the first efforts to break away from locally-oriented adulation and instead establish an objective, scholarly assessment of Michaelides’s position in the broader field of twentieth-century art music. Indeed, this was the stated goal of the conference where these papers were first presented.³

Kenneth Owen Smith’s opening article immediately brings the correlation between music and cultural constraints into orbit. Smith asks whether Michaelides’s aesthetic stance would have been shaped by the ethos promoted by Vincent d’Indy at the Schola Cantorum, where the Cypriot composer received his formal academic training in the early 1930s. Emphasizing the Schola’s explicit intention of elevating d’Indy’s nationalistic musical aesthetics as a matter of pedagogical doctrine, Smith argues that Michaelides could hardly have avoided the efforts of his professors, most notably Guy de Lioncourt, to impose the *scholiste* agenda on all of their students. Ultimately, Smith sees Michaelides’s lifelong adherence to d’Indy’s aesthetic values as evidence that the Cypriot composer was, in fact, a dedicated *scholiste*. Given Michaelides’s role in the establishment of musical modernity in Cyprus, this conclusion bears potentially far reaching implications for the history of Cypriot art music.

¹ John Covach, “Deconstructing Cartesian Dualism in Music Analysis,” *Music Theory Online* 0 (1994), accessed 20 December 2018, <http://www.mtosmt.org>.

² Ibid.

³ “Solon Michaelides: Life, Work, and Legacy,” Solon Michaelides Cultural Foundation Conference, University of Nicosia, 14 May 2016.

In contrast to Smith's discussion of Michaelides's artistic subjectivity, Katy Romanou emphasizes his important contributions as an objective musicologist. In outlining the merits of Michaelides's musicological writings, Romanou's essay re-creates the Neo-Hellenic musical universe he operated in and the challenges it presented to aspiring musicologists. Romanou depicts Michaelides as a scholar who, despite writing about the prominent living figures of his own social and professional context, possessed an acute critical mind whose objective judgements remained unscathed by the internal politics of Greek musical society. Through his careful and professional writing style, Michaelides introduced all the major figures and events of modern Greek music to an international audience with dignity and detached impartiality—exceedingly uncommon attributes in Greek musical discourse at the time.

The contributions of Walter Kurt Kreyszig and Vasilis Kallis each provide a close reading of one of Michaelides's two most important books. Kreyszig's survey of Michaelides's *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Music* (1978) presents a far-reaching account of its position in the long history of ancient Greek music. Central to his discussion is the great efforts Michaelides made to render the finer aspects of the *systema teleion* intelligible to modern readers. Additionally, Kreyszig places Michaelides's treatment of the *systema teleion* within the historical context of its reception during the emergence of the Renaissance humanism.

Stepping into a more music-theoretic territory, Kallis examines the innovative, yet largely unknown contribution the Cypriot composer made to music theory with his *Harmony of Contemporary Music* (1945). Unfortunately, in Kallis's view, Michaelides's decision to publish his book in Greek rather than English relegated its remarkable content to obscurity. By surveying the historiography of *harmonielehre* in the early and mid twentieth century, Kallis illuminates the forward-looking attributes of Michaelides's text. His analysis suggests that Michaelides's overlooked study might have enjoyed much greater recognition had it been presented in a language more accessible to an international readership.

Our volume concludes with two articles that are descriptive of archival data. Having created the first full catalogue of the Solon Michaelides Archive in Limassol, Loizos Panayi summarizes the archive's contents and presents selections from the many documents held there. These documents provide unique evidence for the events of the composer's life and professional activities. Also drawing on the materials in the Solon Michaelides Archive, along with numerous documents acquired by her during her studies with the composer himself, Georgia Michaelides (the composer's niece) catalogues the vocal works of Solon Michaelides, including brief performance commentary for each piece.

The editors would like to extend their gratitude to Panos Vlagopoulos, editor-in-chief of *Mousikos Logos*, for his invaluable assistance as we prepared this volume for publication. We are especially appreciative of his entrusting us with the task of editing this volume of the journal, and so providing us with the opportunity to make Michaelides scholarship available to a wider audience.