

SMARO GREGORIADOU

MUSICAL RESEARCH ON THE GREEK DRAMA

“Undarken me!”

Diogenes the Cynical to Alexander the Great

Smaro Gregoriadou’s research on ancient Greek drama focused primarily on its musical comprehension and the revelation of tragedy’s inner representative content through the mystic power of sound. It was committed to commentary on contemporary culture, human nature and relationships by exploring the ritualistic essence of ancient forms of theatre and its application on today’s world; it integrated traditional theatrical techniques with contemporary forms of dramatic expression in highly physical, emotionally charged, musically structured challenging productions, mainly delivered by Choriambos Theatre Company (2006-2010).

MUSICAL RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

Considering Greek dramas as musical rather than purely literary compositions, Gregoriadou’s approach aligned musical design in choral odes with a special meaning and underlined how serious our loss of it is to our appreciation of the total theatrical experience; it also held that a purely musical approach to drama has still the power to awaken the transcendental perspective of ancient tragedy to the modern spectator, who needs it so urgently today. The following ideas have been fundamental for the composer’s research, methodology and form structuring:

1. Since ancient Greek was a musical language and every single word contained specific meter, rhythm and melody, the fabric of music, movement and meaning in drama was so tightly woven, that significant portions of the plays cannot be fully realized on stage unless the complete musical form conceived by the poet is incorporated.
2. Rhythm of Greek poetry and language changed radically since first Hellenistic era: meter and scansion patterns (sets of metrical verses used in drama, such as choriambic, dactylic, anapaestic etc) gradually disappeared from language, but were transmitted in folk song and dance and still survive there.
3. Metrical patterns in ancient drama are not a secondary detail of the plays but a central feature of their musical organization. Just as the playwright enhanced awareness of themes with a series of recurring and developing verbal images, he also designed the music and meter to guide the audience understanding of unfolding, often ambiguous events. Inner rhythm of characters’ and chorus’ thoughts and moods is coordinated with outer rhythm and meter of the odes. The chorus becomes a single persona, a character with partial knowledge, a sharer in the action. The combination of words, meters and forms provides a new perspective on each play, since meter was conceived by the tragic poet as both:
 - Distributor of inner energy of characters’ moods, and
 - Symbol of cosmic order, truth, essence of God.