

CEAIT FESTIVAL 2011

(CENTER FOR EXPERIMENTS IN ART, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGY)

IANNIS XENAKIS: NOW AND TOMORROW

JANUARY 29, 2011 | 8:30 PM

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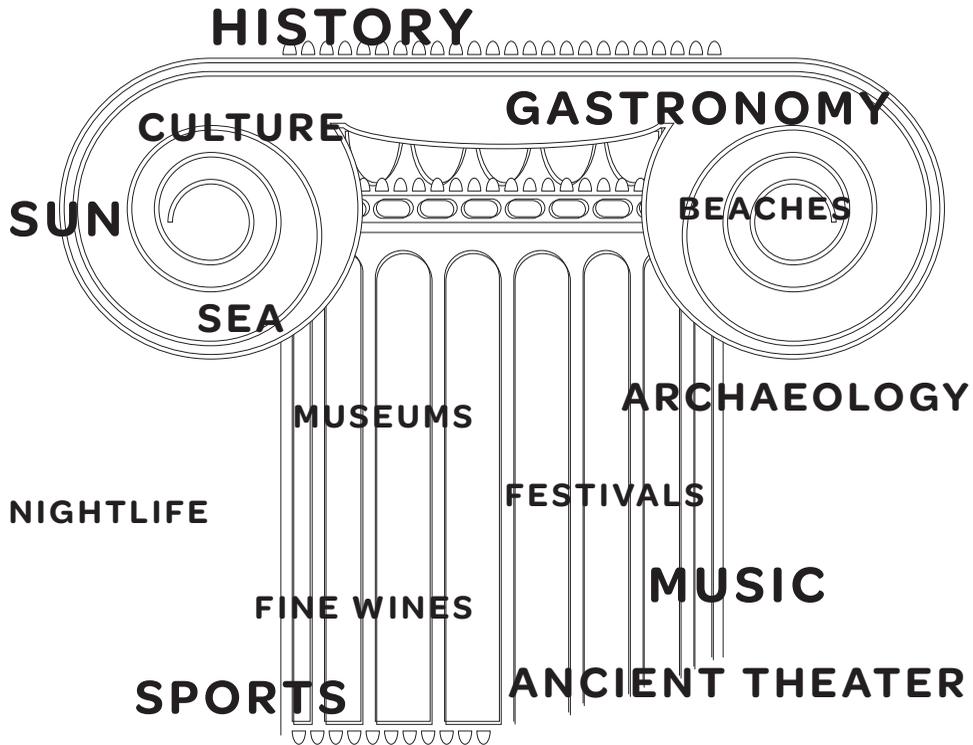
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CEAIT FESTIVAL 2011

(CENTER FOR EXPERIMENTS IN ART, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGY)

IANNIS XENAKIS: NOW AND TOMORROW

Saturday, January 29, 2011, 8:30pm

PROGRAM

All works by Iannis Xenakis.

Achorripsis (1956–7)

Christine Lanza, piccolo; Claire Chenette, oboe; Charles du Preez, Eb clarinet; Christin Hablewitz, bass clarinet; Eric Singleton, bassoon; Archie Carey, contrabassoon; Jonah Levy, Drew Jordan, trumpet; Kevin Austin, trombone; Domi LaRussa, Sean Woodman, percussion; Bianca McClure, Nic Salas, Lauren Baba, violin; Betsy Rettig, Aaron Salinas, Thea Mesirov, cello; Ivan Johnson, James Klopffleisch, Carter Wallace, bass; Mark Menzies, conductor

Nomos alpha (1965–66)

Rohan de Saram, cello

Analogique A + B (1958–59)

Mark Menzies, Mona Tian, Georgi Dimitrov, violin; Aniela Perry, Aaron Salinas, Betsy Rettig, cello; Ivan Johnson, James Klopffleisch, Carter Wallace, bass; Mark Trayle, pre-recorded sound diffuser; Andrew Tholl, conductor

Kottos (1977)

Rohan de Saram, cello

Intermission

Charisma (1971)

Rohan de Saram, cello; Lori Freedman, clarinet

Pour la Paix (1981)

Robert Cucuzza, director; Alexandra Kustin, Gabriella Rhodeen, Julian Evens, James Cowan, performers; Jacqueline Bobak, Maria Fortuna-Dean, Claire Gendler, Harmony Jiroudek, Marc Lowenstein, Glenn Fernandez, Robert Halvorson, Paul Berkolds, singers; Mark Trayle, pre-recorded sound diffuser; Andrew Lia, stage manager; Alice Tavener, costume designer; Andrew Wofford, production assistant

Funded in part with generous support by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Consulate General of Greece in Los Angeles.



ABOUT THE MUSIC

Presented here, constituting the 2011 CEAIT festival at REDCAT, are three programs focusing on music of Iannis Xenakis. These concerts tie into and conclude a series of events in Los Angeles focused on Xenakis' output as both an internationally recognized architect and composer, arranged around a large exhibit at MOCA at the Pacific Design Center: this all parallels a similar enterprise presented in New York earlier in 2010. CalArts was particularly proud to present the U.S. premiere of the complete opera *Oresteia* at the outset (last November) of the Los Angeles component of this look at Xenakis.

Our programs over these three days at the end of January look backwards and forwards: looking backwards not just in interpreting older scores, but also in connecting with some of the Xenakis performance history via our esteemed guests and soloists, who have interacted with Xenakis and/or his repertoire in variously profound ways; having access to this heritage is the way CalArts goes about informing the performance practice of recent and contemporary music for its community of aspiring professional musicians whom we reckon will become the leading advocates of evolving practice in their heyday forthcoming.

Another forward-looking aspect of our programming is the creative tendrils some of the multi-media offerings present that draw out responses to Xenakis' music and ideas. This seems particularly appropriate in this context of celebrating a creative soul that was *always* exploring the possibilities of his ideas, even in so-called finished compositions: when performing electroacoustic (tape) pieces, he routinely, and creatively, adapted the spatialization and acoustic "mappings" of the compositions in relation to the given acoustic space; a significant number of his compositions are rewrites of earlier manifestations of an idea, such as the opera *Oresteia* previously mentioned (that piece went through several rewrites, with extra sections added from the '60s through the late '80s): performers who worked with Xenakis tell me repeatedly that interpreting the (sometimes overflowing/overgrown) score was an exploration into what the score aspires to, rather than a dry review of explicit instructions. Both these instances, of course, mean that his extraordinarily visceral, bold and sometimes frighteningly overwhelming compositions and their gestures rarely sound exactly the same from one performer/performance to another—he was thereby an obvious and charismatic participant in the notion of the unique performer and performance that has been the grist for the mill of performers' careers since the epic singers of his beloved ancient Greece, and one of the reasons for his works' assured survival in active repertoire for a very long time from now.

I could be wrong—and I've done no official study of this—but my sense is that in the last few decades, a great number of performances of Xenakis' music have been of his late pieces, from the mid-'80s onwards. There have been hardly any performances (in concert halls) of his tape pieces, since that format was unpopular at concerts even in its heyday. So, I think our programming over these three evenings is quite unusual in presenting a number of earlier pieces intermingled with a substantial swath of his tape-music production.

In understanding Xenakis' compositional ambitions, particularly early in his musical career when he was working on forging a musical language that utilized what resources he had (his work and reputation as an architect and his involvement with mathematics was largely concluded by the time he decided to pursue a compositional career, around 1959), one of the red herrings is precisely his expertise as a sophisticated, avant-garde architect and mathematician. In the distant past of European religious music—think anything from late Medieval to the High Renaissance masters and even J. S. Bach—much of the music is constructed with complex numerical/symbolic systems that engender a (parallel) set of meanings into the fabric of the composition; as beautiful as this style of music often is to listen to, one would have little clue about the existence of these layers of meaning unless you studied the style and probed into the possible constructive elements.

Because Xenakis also employs, in a number of pieces, somewhat sophisticated mathematical principles—and he certainly wrote prolifically on this subject at the time (such “scientific” commentary on art was very much in vogue then!)—the impression has been that he was in the tradition of the afore-mentioned European church style. This is really not the case. What the mathematics did (simple(r) examples are found in **Analogique A+B** (1958–59) and **Achorripsis** (1956–7, both 1/29)) was give rise to acoustic, gestural and “sonically architected” (my term) phenomena that became the very fertile field for pretty much an entire career of composing; this stage of his writing had created a pinnacle in the orchestral work *Metastaseis* (1954): as an architectural design, the form—how the gestures and their metastasizing are laid out—couldn't be simpler, so as not to distract from the *extraordinary* things that are being done to the sonic fabric, its texture and the rhetorical implications of what it might be saying.

That the music was saying something is always a factor in Xenakis' output, but what that might be precisely is up to the listener to construct. Even titles that are made of relatively observational words, such as “analogy” (*Analogique*) or “metastasize” (think cancer), have the potential to carry an emotional connection: in the case of *Analogique*, the almost banal Webernesque pointillism of the string writing (not to belittle the timbral transformations that take the composition in unexpected directions) finds its analogy in an almost hysterical tape part, as if we are listening in to the frantic brain-waves of the string players as they are trying to grab all the notes correctly in their given time-stream...

Akanthos (1979, 1/30) suggests a tangle of meanings—one being ‘thorn-bush’, another a kind of Corinthian column, such as at Delphi, and so on: here, the soprano helps, without one word of text, to suggest a world of “meanings” (rhetorical statements, I suppose), intertwined with the supporting ensemble in a catalogue of human gestures, the narrative of which you, the audience, find a way to construct for yourselves.

In each evening is a duo, and in each the relationship between the instruments becomes a source for its ‘meaning’, and the trajectory of its unfolding. In **Dmaathen** (1976) for oboe and percussion (1/28) a small commonality between the instruments is created by incorporating pitched percussion, a somewhat rare usage for Xenakis; in **Charisma** (1971, 1/29) the greater sonic commonalities of the clarinet and cello are exploited to a very different expressive idea of

peace or conclusion; “a duality of two natures”; **Dikhthas** (1979, 1/30), for the historic duo of violin and piano, overflows into a sequence of virtuosic seizures that was a feature of Xenakis’ writing in the ’70s in particular: “arborescences” is the word often used to describe a crazy, often barely playable, proliferation of ideas and polyphonic possibility of the musical germ—in other words a complex tangle of branching.

Super-virtuosic writing is at the heart of the two solo cello works, **Kottos** (1977) and **Nomos alpha** (1965–66, 1/29), where the challenge is yet further exaggerated by the stress under which the cello itself undergoes via the to-ing and fro-ing in and out of the outrageous scordatura that crops up at points during the piece.

The epic struggle of **Epicycles** (1989, 1/30) brushes aside the perennial relationship trouble the solo cello has always had with an accompanying ensemble or orchestra: here, the sound of soloist must, at times, bravely attempt to project beyond the significant sonic resources given to the ensemble though, of course, the sense of gesture does register what the ear may not perfectly hear.

The game scenario that inspired **Linaia-Agon** (1972, 1/28) is not necessarily completely playful—the theory behind it addresses trajectories of economic and/or political conflict; an enthusiastic participation in the Greek political situation around the Second World War—he was severely wounded and, for a time, utterly dispirited—Xenakis later did occasionally vent intense political points of view through his music. **Pour la Paix** (1981, 1/29), a radio play, is one such piece, composed with a libretto by François Xenakis, his wife.

It has always struck me that Xenakis’ tape pieces, for example, **Orient-Occident** (1960), **Diamorphoses** (1957–8, both 1/28), and the substantial **Polytope de Cluny** (1972, 1/30), are the fulfillment of the aesthetic that Edgard Varèse offered to the notion of manipulated tape sounds—revealing “unknown worlds” perhaps ... Mentioning Varèse is not an idle connection of course, given that one of Xenakis’ architectural projects, the Philips Pavilion at Expo ’58 in Brussels, was the structure for which Varèse’s tape piece *Poème électronique* was assembled. We can only imagine how the aesthetic of this new way of working with sound must have inspired Xenakis, not least in ways that remained part of an intuitive yearning for a certain way of revealing how sound may transform itself, the perception of the space in which it resonates, and the way its extraordinarily visceral, bold and sometimes frighteningly overwhelming resources pour out meaning to a world well beyond the imagination of the concert hall and its attendant listeners.

Mark Menzies, 2011

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Robert Cucuzza is a 2011 MFA Candidate in Directing and an acting instructor at CalArts, where he recently directed Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* and his own musical extravaganza, *Hellzapoppin’*. In New York City he was an artist-in-residence at the Ontological-Hysteric Theater where he wrote and directed many plays. As an actor he has toured across the globe

in productions by Richard Foreman and Elevator Repair Service, with whom he most recently originated the role of Tom Buchanan in *Gatz*, a complete staging of the entire text of *The Great Gatsby*.

Rohan de Saram studied cello from the age of 11 with Gaspar Cassadó in Italy. At the age of 17 he was awarded the coveted Suggia award to study in the U.K. with John Barbirolli and in Puerto Rico with Pablo Casals. At the invitation of Dmitri Mitropoulos, who described him in 1957 as “a rare genius ... a born musician ...an amazing cellist,” Rohan de Saram was invited to give his Carnegie Hall debut in 1960 with the New York Philharmonic, playing Khatchaturian’s Cello Concerto under the baton of Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. Rohan de Saram has worked with Kodály, Shostakovich, Poulenc and Walton, as well as more recently with many leading contemporary composers such as Pousseur, Xenakis and Berio who have, among others, written works for him. In November 2005 Rohan de Saram bid farewell to the Arditti Quartet of which he was a member. He works now with a variety of artists, friends and composers, bringing together music from a range of musical periods and parts of the world. Since leaving the Arditti Quartet, Rohan de Saram has taught and given solo and ensemble recitals at Darmstadt Summer School, Avant-garde Tirol and Ruemlingen Festival, Switzerland, among many other venues. Website: www.rohandesaram.co.uk/

A Forum: Hearing and Seeing Xenakis

Sat., Jan. 29, 3:00–6:00pm; Sun., Jan. 30, 1:00–4:00pm.

FREE (mention this Forum at the front desk for admission)

Presentations by invited speakers will be interspersed with world-premiere showings of Xenakis himself speaking and demonstrating on video. Speakers, 1/29: James Harley, Curtis Roads, Wolfgang v. Schweinitz. Speakers, 1/30: Sharon Kanach, Carey Lovelace, Robert Wannamaker. Ahmanson Auditorium, MOCA-Grand Avenue, 250 South Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

Iannis Xenakis: Composer, Architect, Visionary (through Feb. 4) explores the fundamental role of drawing in the work of avant-garde composer Iannis Xenakis (1922–2001). One of the most important figures in twentieth-century music, Xenakis originally trained as an engineer and was also known as an architect, developing iconic designs while working with Le Corbusier in the 1950s. This exhibition of Xenakis’ visual work comprises samples of his pioneering graphic musings, architectural plans, compelling preparatory mathematical renderings, and pre-compositional sketches—in all, nearly 100 documents created between 1953 and 1984. Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)-Pacific Design Center, 8687 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood 90069-5712. www.moca.org

CURATORIAL COMMITTEE

Mark Menzies, Mark Trayle, and David Rosenboom

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February 3–5:

George Herms: *The Artist's Life*

February 7:

Mark Dresser Trio

February 9–13:

Association Noa-Cie Vincent Mantsoe: *San*

February 15:

Kasper Toeplitz and Myriam Gourfink: *Breathing Monster*

February 19–20:

Studio: Winter 2011

February 22:

In Focus: The Humorous: Recent Video Art from Israel, Japan and Mexico

February 28:

The Artist Theater Program: A group show of film and video work by visual artists

March 7:

John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble

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