

## **Thessaloniki – a City of Interactions in the Field of Classical Music**

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The research project titled *Thessaloniki – a City of Interactions in the Field of Classical Music*, sponsored by the “Stavros Niarchos” Foundation, took place between July 9 and July 24 in Thessaloniki, Greece. The topic of the research was the collaboration between Greece and Bulgaria in the field of classical music. The purpose was to interview either Bulgarian musicians who work, study, or have been invited to perform in Thessaloniki or Greek musicians who are involved in similar activities in Bulgaria.

The choice of location was not arbitrary but based on Thessaloniki’s proximity to the Greek-Bulgarian border. As a result of this proximity, an intense collaboration in the field of classical music has been established between Bulgarian and Greek musicians. In the past 20 years, Greece has demonstrated a steady increase in interest and big development in the field of classical music, and now more and more Bulgarian musicians are being invited to become a part of the city’s concert life. Moreover, many others are invited to teach at different educational institutions not only in Thessaloniki but in Greece in general, and yet others give occasional master courses in different music disciplines. On the other hand, many Greek musicians are also regularly invited to perform concerts in Bulgaria, and others go to study at the Music Academy of Sofia (the capital of Bulgaria), which is so far the biggest music academy on the Balkans. All of these trends in the collaboration between Greece and Bulgaria are particularly strong in Thessaloniki, which is one of the major centers of the development of classical music in Greece at the moment.

The geographical proximity between the two countries is a factor with increasing importance for their future relationships. In an interview for the press, the Ambassador of Greece in Bulgaria shares with the readers the intentions of the two countries to build four new border zones. He also adds that, because Bulgaria is likely to become a member of the European Union in 2008, the relationships between the two neighboring countries are likely to become even stronger. The European Union has recently granted 465000 Euro for an international program that will support small projects between Bulgaria and Greece. All of these factors will

contribute positively to the collaboration between the two countries in general and will definitely play a major role in their collaboration in the field of classical music, in particular.

The interviews taken during the project could therefore be divided into several general categories: interviews of Bulgarian professors who teach/consult students at Greek Conservatories or give master courses in Greece; interviews of Bulgarian musicians/performers who are/have been invited to perform in different locations in Greece; interviews of Greek musicians who are/have been invited to perform in different locations in Bulgaria; interviews of Greek students who study at the Academy of Music in Sofia; examples of other types of collaboration in the field of classical music (the production of recordings, participation in music competitions, etc.); and any combination of the above mentioned trends. At the time when the interviews were taken, some of the musicians in Thessaloniki were there for specific purposes (for example, concert activity), whereas some others were not available (for example, some Bulgarian pedagogues do not teach in Thessaloniki during the summer). However, a list of over 40 names was gathered and a total of 17 interviews were made.

One common theme in the interviews was the quality of the conditions for such collaboration in both Greece and Bulgaria. It was found that the working conditions in Greece were generally very good, as in Greece a much better financial support is provided for classical music than is provided in Bulgaria. However, most of this support comes from private institutions, and many of the interviewed musicians held the opinion that classical music should become also a policy of the state. Bulgaria, on the other hand, due to its former collaboration with some European countries and the Soviet Union in the field of classical music, has reached a very high level in classical music performance and education. Most interviewed musicians, however, argued that in order to keep its high level of education, Bulgaria must provide its musicians with more stimuli to remain in the country and must also try to attract more students from other countries. Hopefully, its entrance in the European Union will provide better financial support for the field of classical music.

The interviews were not only centered on the present means of collaboration between the two countries but also elaborated on the possibilities for development in the future. Some of the ideas coincided with trends in this collaboration that are already present, such as the organization of concerts and master courses (both in Greece and Bulgaria) with guest professors/students, the production of recordings of compositions of composers from one country by performers and

recording studios in the other one, more invitations for Bulgarian professors to teach in Greece, as well as for Greek students to study in Bulgaria, and many others. Most of the innovative ideas gathered from the interviews concerned education, as most musicians agreed that reforms in this field are the next step that Greece must undertake in order to fully correspond to the high criteria set up in some Western European countries, such as Germany and France. A good example for such a reform would be the desirable collaboration with Bulgarian piano accompanists for lessons in other instruments that are taken at the Greek conservatories.

For the past 20 years, Greece has shown an increasing interest and great development in the field of classical music. Many private conservatory-type institutions called “odeia” (conservatories) were established. They have already contributed a lot to the music life in the country, providing their students with music education (from Greek, Bulgarian and other pedagogues) and with diplomas that are approved at an intermediate level between a high-school diploma and a Bachelor’s Degree (i.e. in Germany, a student with such a diploma would skip 2 years of training towards receiving a Bachelor’s Degree in music). However, most interviewed musicians agreed that it is about time for Greece to create its own Music Academy – an institution that could provide Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctoral degrees to Greek musicians in their own country. Several institutions have already made most of the necessary reforms in this direction. The music departments at the “Aristotle” and Macedonian Universities in Thessaloniki already offer theoretical music courses at the corresponding level, but more instrumental sections need to be added before they receive recognition as musical academies. This opens another field for the collaboration between Bulgaria and Greece, as many Bulgarian pedagogues could be invited to teach there when such institutions are established. Prof. Atanas Atanasov, the Dean of the Instrumental Department at the Sofia Music Academy, also described the possibilities of creating filial institutions of the Sofia Music Academy in Greece, so that Greek music students could receive Bulgarian diplomas with Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees in their own country.

As a conclusion, it must be stated that the collaboration between Greece and Bulgaria, as intense as it is now, is likely to continue to develop into new forms in the future. The increasing importance of collaborations of this type for institutions in the European Union will be one more beneficial factor for the development of classical music in both countries in case Bulgaria enters

the European Union in 2008. In any case, it is almost certain that the strong ties between the two countries will not only continue to exist but also grow even stronger.