

JOURNALS OF RESISTANCE

by Mikis Theodorakis (Hart-Davis MacGibbon)

“While I am naturally sympathetic, I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a few men of letters should remain isolated; and take no part in these collective activities.”

Thus T.S. Eliot in 1937, upon being asked to make a statement one way or the other on the Spanish Civil War; and his attitude has been a very common one among artists the world over throughout this century, except for specific special cases such as Vietnam or the destalinisation struggle in Russia.

For the Greek artist, however, to take a line like this, is virtually unheard of; he is, both by temperament and circumstance, a political animal both insofar as he is Greek and insofar as he is an artist at all.

Whether on the superficial level of coffee house rhetoric or the serious one involving anything from ballot-box to bombs, Greeks have been forced ever since independence to, as Thomas Mann put it, “see their destiny in political terms”, and the artists, as the public voices of masses often lacking both articulacy and legitimate political outlets, have acquired over the years a crucial political role.

No Greek would be in the least surprised at the fact that the most powerful and effective voices of opposition to the colonels are an actress — Melina Merkouri — a novelist — Vasilis Vassilikos — and, especially, a popular composer and songwriter.

Even for a Greek artist, the author of a moving and eloquent journal, *Journals of Resistance* by Mikis Theodorakis has been exceptionally involved in politics.

Born in 1925, he was first arrested at seventeen for striking an officer of the occupying Italian Army. The same happened next year, and in 1947 the right-wing Greek Government arrested him again during the prolonged redhunt that followed the war and merged with the bloody and brutal civil war of which, in many ways, the current Greek crisis is a result.

In 1964 Theodorakis was elected to Parliament as a member of EDA — the Greek Democratic Left, formed after the Communist Party was banned following the civil war — and, meanwhile, became president of Lambrakis Youth, a left-wing organisation named after the deputy who was murdered, with Government connivance, in 1963, and on whose story Vassilikos based his novel, and Costa-Gavras his film, *Z*.

Theodorakis's story, after the coup, is a grim one. Arrested, tortured, freed, arrested again, at last exiled; his music banned — he quotes the case of a man jailed for four years for selling one of his records — and his friends imprisoned, exiled or dead, he has continued to fight the colonels as best he can; those who were lucky enough to see his Australian concerts can judge how effectively.

What the final effect of such modes of protest as Theodorakis's will be, no-one can tell yet; but certainly, despite all the accusations of romanticism and political ineptness — accusations which fail to take into account that Theodorakis the artist is not a different person to Theodorakis the politician — their impact is immense; one can only hope that apathy, self-interest and realpolitik won't ensure that they're wasted.

Many of the greatest of his songs seem to limn an eerie, melancholy world that becomes increasingly and disturbingly more real; but there is always in them some sense of inexhaustible wellsprings, a feeling that at last the wasteland will bear fruit.

This, I think, is the feeling that has guided Theodorakis's life, that has led to the bitter hostility of the grey life-haters who have tried to destroy him, and that is finally his greatest strength:

Eagle of the winter cold falcon of solitude...
take a twig of osier
a head of rosemary
and change into the cold of the moon
to rise up as midnight chimes
in the middle of the thirsty garden...

Sydney Morning Herald, 5 August 1973