



BIOGRAPHY OF NIKOS
SKALKOTTAS

*[from The Friends of
NIKOS SKALKOTTAS'S
Music Society]*



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Nikos Skalkottas was born in Chalkis in 1904 and died in Athens in 1949. Very early on he started violin lessons with his musician father and uncle.

He continued studying at the Athens Conservatory and graduated in 1920. From 1921 to 1933 he lived in Berlin, where he first took violin lessons with Willy Hess. In 1923 he decided to give up his career as a violinist and become a composer.

He studied composition with Paul Kahn, Paul Juon, Kurt Weill, Philipp Jarnach and Arnold Schönberg.

In 1933, when Hitler came to power, Skalkottas returned to Athens, where he earned a living playing in different orchestras. Skalkottas's early works, most of which he wrote in Berlin and some of those written in Athens, are lost. The earliest of his works available to us today are dating from 1922-24 and are piano compositions as well as the orchestration of "Cretan Feast" by Dimitris Mitropoulos.





Among the later works written in Berlin are the sonata for solo violin, several works for piano, chamber music and some symphonic works.

During the period 1931-1934 Skalkottas did not compose anything.

He started composing again in Athens continued until he died.

His works comprise symphonic works

(*Greek Dances,*

The symphonic overture Return of Ulysses,

The fairy drama Mayday Spell,

The second symphonic suite, the ballet The Maiden and Death,

The Classical Symphony for winds, a Sinfonietta and several concertos),

Chamber music works, as well as vocal works and music pieces for solo instrument.

Skalkottas died unexpectedly in 1949, leaving some symphonic works with incomplete orchestration.

Besides his musical work, Skalkottas compiled an important theoretical work, consisting of several "musical articles", a treatise on orchestration, musical analyses etc. Skalkottas soon shaped his personal features of musical writing so that any influence of his teachers was soon assimilated creatively in a manner of composition that is absolutely personal and recognizable.

Thus - in view of his works available to us - Skalkottas' evolution as a composer follows certain invariable axes that define his confrontation with the historical, technical and musical challenges of his epoch, throughout his life.



He founded his compositional self-sufficiency and his compositional contemplation on his own forces. He remained, to the end, an "honest" musician. Although he came to know Schönberg's dodecaphonic system, Skalkottas shaped his own dodecaphonic idioms and also wrote tonal works using specific tonal idioms, but remaining recognizable to the end and always writing original works that stand up quite high on the compositional scale.

Skalkottas's music that is known to us today, classifies him as one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century and, definitely, the greatest Greek composer of his time.

While he was still alive, his music remained relatively unknown. After his death, thanks to the efforts of a group of friends of the composer with the dominant figure of Yiannis Papaioannou, Skalkottas's musical work became more known.

Around 1954-55, when his music was first performed abroad, the composer took place among the most important composers of the mid-war dodecaphonic avantgarde.

Since then, Skalkottas's name has always been part of the contemporary scene, sometimes more so sometimes less so, depending on the initiatives taken by - mainly - the Greek side. Within Greece itself, the "Greek Dances" remained for a long time the best known of his works.

