

Interview with Michalis Tranoudakis

Michalis Tranoudakis, composer, educator

President of the Pan-Hellenic Artistic School Games for 2002-2004

Olga Alexopoulou

Conductor, Vice President of the Pan-Hellenic Association of Conductors of Choral & Instrumental Ensembles

Olga Alexopoulou: How did the games start?

Michalis Tranoudakis: Well, in the early 1990s Periklis Nearhou, counsellor for educational matters, came up with the idea of the artistic games, a competition involving the arts. Secondary schools from all over Greece and Cyprus, as well as Greek schools from abroad, could participate in these games. They included competitions in many artistic fields: music, dance, theatre and painting, and involved a great range of diverse performances.

OA What was the key message behind the games?

MT The aim was to evaluate and promote artistic creativity in schools, given that the original arts education programme was far from satisfactory. Our motto was: it is the taking part that counts! The prizes simply served as an incentive. The main objective with this competition was to encourage teamwork and partnership in particular. We strongly believe that

creating art and being creative as part of a group increases children's ability to empathise and react sensitively; therefore, we focused our interest on choirs and orchestras, as well as theatre and dance groups. My personal goal as a music educator was to make this kind of music popular among young people. This was the first initiative in Greece to familiarise society with the arts in such a broad way. Throughout my years as President, my ambition was to make the games a big event in each local area. It was astonishing to see how smaller schools from remote regions or islands were able to participate. I was amazed by a small school of 20 pupils from the island of Ios who worked throughout the whole year in order to win First Prize in the local competition and then travel to Athens for the second round.

OA How were the games judged?

MT The committee members and judges were carefully selected, not only for their knowledge and expertise, but also for their educational abilities. Renowned conductors and composers (Stefanos Vasiliades, Vyron Fidetzis, Miltos Logiades, Dimitris Myrat, Theodoros Antoniou among others) were also known to possess great pedagogic skills and have experience in working with young people.

OA What difficulties did you encounter?

MT I can not say that we encountered any financial difficulties. The organising body covered all the costs for infrastructure and logistics, such as concert halls, rent, sound system, recording equipment and publicity for the duration of the games, as well as transport and accommodation costs for the teams competing in Athens. We did have some organisational difficulties and came across problems that needed to be resolved urgently. We were in constant contact

with all the regional committees. A complex plan had to be organised in order to coordinate everybody involved and serve the needs of the 30,000 participants.

OA To what extent did choral singing evolve during the competition?

MT Each choir – mixed or otherwise – had to present a compulsory piece of moderate difficulty from the publication *For our Choirs* by Antonis Kontogeorgiou during the 23-minute programme; the rest of the repertoire was chosen by the choir. The truth is that it was difficult for public schools to compete with the music schools' choirs and some of the private schools, because of the teachers' lack of specific knowledge about choirs and inadequate contact time. In spite of this, we did not focus on the so-called stars but rather encouraged every effort. Our stance was to award only one choir per school; because of this the first polyphonic choirs started to slowly emerge in public schools during the games, where only monophonic groups had existed before. This was a great achievement.

OA What were the overall benefits?

MT They can be divided into three categories. First, there were pedagogic benefits; the competition brought together schools from different origins and allowed the children to socialise through the arts. Secondly, there were social benefits; even though Greek society was not perhaps quite ready to embrace an event as big as the artistic games. But the seed was planted and an awareness of the need for strong cultural ties between the cities of Greece was raised. Thirdly, there were educational benefits; the event highlighted the problems in Greek public and music schools and how these spread over into the arts. Therefore, even though

the final games were held in 2008-2009, we succeeded in bringing to the forefront of Greek society many educational issues that require solutions.

OA What remains your dream?

MT For the games to become Pan-European or to take place worldwide. Despite the fact that we are in a period of financial crisis, and the humanities and social sciences are under-appreciated, I am convinced that the only way to achieve spiritual elevation and calm is for societies to maintain culture and its role in society, even using low-cost methods.



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Edited by Hayley Smith, UK