



The *Sixteen Songs* (16 Τραγούδια, 1941) by Nikos Skalkottas¹

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Αφιερωμένο στις δύο αγαπημένες μου δασκάλες,
Βασιλική Μπασκουρέλου και Μαρία Καφέ, με ευγνωμοσύνη.

Although there have repeatedly been tendencies in new music to define musical works purely technically, and although public discourse and the countless self-statements by composers about their works have focused almost exclusively on technical and formal questions, it can be observed that for many significant representatives of new music, the belief that music conveys a message has continued to hold true and still does today.

Constantin Floros²

Abstract

This article presents a hermeneutic and analytical study of Nikos Skalkottas's *Sixteen Songs* (1941), focusing particularly on the first song of the cycle. After an outline of Skalkottas's biography and cultural context, the work explores the complex interplay between poetic text, musical rhetoric, and dramaturgical structure within the song cycle, emphasizing their roots in both Greek tradition and European modernism. Employing tools of topical, textual, and serial analysis, the study demonstrates how Skalkottas fuses dodecaphonic techniques with references to folk music, popular contemporary dances, and rhetorical devices, creating a unique and ironic sound world that transcends the boundaries of tonality, atonality, and genre. The article highlights the cycle's oscillation between lyrical and *agitato* moments, its dense web of literary and musical topoi, and the innovative handling of form and voice. In addition to presenting a detailed analysis

¹ Many thanks to the Association "Friends of Music" and the Lilian Voudouri Library in Athens for their financial support, which enabled me to begin work on this article, as well as their friendly assistance in providing access to the Skalkottas archive.

² Constantin Floros, "Jenseits von Schönberg und Debussy: Die 32 Klavierstücke von Nikos Skalkottas," in *Neue Obren für neue Musik: Streifzüge durch die Musik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Schott, 2006), 119.

of the first song – including its motivic, harmonic, and structural features – the article provides new English translations of the cycle’s lyrics and offers a broader dramaturgical and interpretive perspective on the work as a whole. By considering the technical, symbolist, and expressive dimensions together, the study situates Skalkottas’s songs as a singular synthesis of tradition and avant-garde, urging greater recognition of their artistic quality and significance for both Greek and international repertoire.

Keywords

Nikos Skalkottas; Hermeneutic analysis; *Sixteen Songs* (1941); Musical rhetoric; Musical dramaturgy

1 Presentation

This article offers a hermeneutic analysis of the first song from Nikos Skalkottas’ *Sixteen Songs* (1941), accompanied by a brief description and a literal English translation of its lyrics, a topical and dramaturgical overview of the entire cycle, and a concise biographical contextualisation. The appendix includes transcriptions of four songs, including the one analysed, based on the manuscript held at the Lilian Voudouri Library in Athens.

Before delving into the study of the *Sixteen Songs* and the major bibliography on Skalkottas, I was captivated by the sonorities, the interplay of tonal and atonal harmonies, the instrumentation, the expressionistic and rhetorical gestures of the melodies, his inventive and unorthodox approach to folklorism, and a distinctive, rhapsodic spontaneity – strikingly at odds with the highly calculated procedures of dodecaphony. Listening to the Concerto for double bass and orchestra from 1942, I was struck by the music’s density and darkness, and by its even greater emphasis on movement than that found in Schoenberg and his followers. In some of the Greek dances, there is an extraordinary blend of apparently “spontaneous” rhetorical freedom and the regularity of folk, or pseudo-folk dance pulse and hypermeters.

One of the main challenges of this study is to confirm or nuance the intuition, supported by oral testimonies from my composition teachers in Vienna – who studied with pupils of Schoenberg – that the use of dodecaphonic methods is ultimately a private matter within the composer’s workshop. It holds no inherent musical or phenomenological relevance whether Skalkottas, Berg, Webern, or Robert Gerhard, for that matter, employ twelve-tone rows, tonality, atonality, or a mixture of these, as in the case here. Accordingly, an analysis of this music should not be confined to counting tone rows but should instead explore what

Schoenberg reportedly termed “the music:” its capacity to function as a unique form of human communication.

The analysis of the *Sixteen Songs* forms the central core of the text. It begins with a brief overview of their connections to the lyrics before delving into a detailed examination of the first song. Rather than outlining an analytical method upfront, the song itself prompted specific steps for analysis. Only afterward, in a hermeneutic spirit, could we attempt to explain what had occurred and which frameworks had emerged. Inevitably, the hermeneutical approach was just one of the methodological biases that influenced the author’s perspective. The result includes a combination of topical analysis, counting twelve-tone rows, identifying word-painting elements, and discussing rhetorical and music-dramaturgical aspects.

Regarding topical analysis, a recent article by Lorenda Ramou was instrumental in identifying references to contemporary dance music.³ As with his *32 Piano Pieces*, most of Skalkottas’s *Sixteen Songs* can be linked to dance references, thereby reinforcing the ironic tone that, in our interpretation, pervades much of the cycle, beginning with the poetic material.

An annex to this article includes a transcription of the manuscript for four of the songs, that have remained unpublished to this day. I had access to the final, clean copy (B1, 73 pages) of the two complete manuscript versions that exist. The first, denser and less legible draft (B2, 34 pages) provides exact dates for the completion of each song.⁴

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Alexandros Charkiolakis, director of the Lilian Voudouri Library; Dr. Valia Vraka, head of the Greek Music Section; and Dr. Myrto Oikonomidou, Dr. Maria-Eirini Mountzia, and Ms. Silia Papachatzopoulou for their efficient and kind assistance during my stay in Athens. Additionally, I am also grateful for the generous oral and written contributions of dear friends and experts on Skalkottas’ music Nikos Christodoulou, Kostas Chardas, and Angeliki Kathariou. Last but not least, this article is dedicated to my two beloved Greek teachers, without whom there would be no article at all. Their infinite patience and deep love for the language remain a constant inspiration.

³ See Lorenda Ramou, “Jazz References in Skalkottas’s Solo Piano Works,” in *Skalkottas Today*, eds. Tatjana Markovic, Stephanie Merakos, Valia Vraka, Eva Mantzouranis, Petros Vouvaris, Kostas Tsougras, and Alexandros Charkiolakis (Athens: The Friends of Music Society, 2025).

⁴ Yorgos Sakallieros, “Τα 16 Τραγούδια για μεσόφωνο και πιάνο (1941) του Νίκου Σκαλκώτα: Ένας καλειδοσκοπικός φωνητικός κύκλος και τα ιδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστικά του,” in Διατμηματικό Μουσικολογικό Συνέδριο ‘Νεωτερισμός και Παράδοση’ (Αθήνα, 2019), ed. I. Φούλιας, Π. Πούβαρης, Κ. Καρδάμης, and Γ. Σακαλλιέρος (Thessaloniki: Ελληνική Μουσικολογική Εταιρεία, 2020), 335.

2 A Brief Biographical Contextualisation

The Greek composer Nikos Skalkottas (1904–1949) came from a humble family of musicians with roots in Tinos. His father, Alekos Skalkottas, was a flutist in the Chalkida Philharmonic, where the composer was born on March 8th, 1904, while his first violin lessons were with his uncle, Kostas, who retained the original family surname “Skalkotos,” a surname extremely common in Tinos.⁵ A few years after his family’s move to Athens (1909), Skalkottas was admitted to the Athens Conservatory and to the class of the distinguished pedagogue Tony Schultze in 1914.⁶ In the words of Giorgos Sakallieros,

During those turbulent years, the conservatory was directed by Georgios Nazos, and since 1911 Manolis Kalomiris was also teaching there. As he passed from childhood into adolescence, the young violinist was nurtured in an environment dominated by the ideology of the National School, as a musical response to issues of identity: the concepts of Greekness and historical continuity, the irredentist ideology of the “Great Idea,” and the conflict between supporters of the demotic and *katharevousa* forms of the Greek language. These elements of the era’s socio-political mix were accompanied by ongoing military campaigns and changes of borders – the First and Second Balkan Wars (1912–13), Greece’s participation in World War I, culminating in the catastrophic outcome of the Asia Minor Campaign in 1922.⁷

Young Nikos managed to go to Berlin at just seventeen years old to study violin, having impressively performed Beethoven’s Concerto after completing his studies in Athens. At that time, Berlin was a truly vibrant cultural hub and “the Mecca of the new music.”⁸ His teacher, Willy Hess, soon told him there was nothing more to teach him. Skalkottas replied that what he truly wanted was to compose.⁹ Subsequently, he was invited to join Arnold Schoenberg’s masterclass in Berlin, where he studied from 1927 to 1933. According to Jason Dimitriades, Skalkottas lived in Berlin with another violinist, Mathilde Temko, with whom he had

⁵ Papaioannou 1997, 50–51, quoted in Yorgos Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί* [Προπτυχιακό εγχειρίδιο] (Athens: Κάλλιπος, Ανοικτές Ακαδημαϊκές Εκδόσεις, 2023), 172.

⁶ Eva Mantzourani, *The Life and Twelve-Note Music of Nikos Skalkottas* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2011), 13, quoted in Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, 173.

⁷ Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, 173.

⁸ See Constantin Floros, “Nikos Skalkottas—Ein Schönberg-Schüler in Berlin,” in *Neue Obren für neue Musik: Streifzüge durch die Musik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Schott, 2006), 102.

⁹ Gyorgos Chadznikos, “Nikos Skalkottas, Greek Composer,” in *Παραμυθόδραμα (Fairytale)*, booklet (1989).

two children – only one daughter survived.¹⁰ In 1931, following disagreements with both Schoenberg and Mathilde, Skalkottas parted ways with his teacher and his partner.

Interestingly, Skalkottas also studied for a time under Kurt Weill, “one of the most well-known and controversial composers in Berlin.”¹¹ Additionally, Constantin Floros notes a possible connection to Ferruccio Busoni’s school and his ideal of a “young classicism,” as reflected, for instance, in the J. S. Bach references heard in Skalkottas’s *Sonata for solo violin* (1925).¹²

It must have been a very challenging time for the young man in Berlin. Andrea Harrandt recounts Skalkottas playing in a dancing band and selling raisins that he had imported from Greece. Another colleague and friend in the group would try to sleep as much as possible to avoid eating.¹³ In 1933, Skalkottas fled Berlin for personal and financial reasons rather than political ones, intending to spend some time in Athens.¹⁴ However, he never returned to Berlin, resulting in the loss of all his belongings and compositions left behind. These personal circumstances, combined with financial troubles, may have contributed to the depressive state of mind in which he returned to Athens.

The Athens of 1933 left the young composer speechless, and he did not write a single note for two years. However, starting in 1935, he began composing significant works while earning a living by playing violin in the Athens Conservatory Orchestra. He also performed with amateur groups, created arrangements for friends, and displayed exceptional kindness and generosity. Yorgos Sakallieros reports Skalkottas transcribing some traditional Greek songs from a recording:

Interest in the collection and harmonization of folk songs took on a professional character in Athens during the 1930s, when Skalkottas was invited by Melpo Merlier, head of the then Musical Folklore Archive (MFA) – today’s Centre for Asia Minor Studies – to transcribe onto staff notation the audio material from 15 gramophone records, mostly with recordings from Crete and Sifnos. The collaboration lasted from June 15th, 1934, to January 31st, 1935, enriching the MFA with 43 transcriptions, reconnecting Skalkottas with the music of his

¹⁰ Jason Dimitriades, “Nikos Skalkottas”, in booklet Παραμυθόδραμα, *Fairytales*, 1989.

¹¹ Floros, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 103. For references to *Tanzjazz* in Skalkottas’s music, see also Ramou, “Jazz References.”

¹² Floros, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 102.

¹³ Andrea Harrandt, “Die ‘Meistersinger’ Schönbergs in Berlin,” in *Nikos Skalkottas zum 100. Geburtstag (1904–1949): Akten des Wiener Internationalen Symposions vom 10. Dezember 2004*, ed. Nina-Maria Wanek (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), Band XXV, 33.

¹⁴ Nikos Christodoulou, “Nikos Skalkottas—A Centenary of His Birth,” in *Nikos Skalkottas: A Greek European*, ed. Haris Vrontos (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2008), 130.

homeland after his years in Berlin, and providing the musical material for nine of his 36 Greek Dances for orchestra.¹⁵

Despite being increasingly sidelined in the music world and the lack of premieres for his works, Skalkottas continued to work diligently. According to one of his most distinguished performers, Nikos Christodoulou, this demanding music bears the traces of an unmistakable international ambition, evident even in its calligraphy. Hans Keller highlights the tragic case of such an outstanding composer passing away before receiving the recognition he deserved.¹⁶ Constantin Floros regards Skalkottas, alongside Yannis Xenakis, as “the most original Greek composer of the 20th century.”¹⁷ Kostas Chardas, for his part, reflects on the inevitable “mythologisation of Skalkottas” as a modernist who, in opposition to the conservative nationalist “national school,” devoted considerable effort to creating and disseminating a Greek musical avant-garde grounded in Central-European models.¹⁸ From this perspective, “the uncompromising and heroic side” of Skalkottas’s character is emphasised, as well as his “experimentation with new complicated elements of music construction,” while the “tonal elements of Skalkottas’s music are underplayed, almost vanished.”¹⁹

The manuscript of the first of our *Sixteen Songs* is dated “25 Απριλίου 1941,” just two days before the German occupation of Greece during World War II. Athens underwent a dramatic and tragic transformation under Nazi control. On April 27th, German troops entered the Greek capital, marking the collapse of Greek and Allied military resistance after months of fierce fighting. The *German Occupation* devastated Athens and its people. During this period, Skalkottas spent two months in prison. The Greek government, including King George II, evacuated to Crete while a puppet government was installed in Athens. The citizens of Athens largely remained indoors, silently witnessing the city’s fall. A period of extreme hardship followed: severe famine caused by shortages and malnutrition, harsh reprisals, and terror imposed by Nazi forces and their collaborators. The occupation left a profound scar on the city and its people, resulting in immediate suffering, long-lasting trauma, and widespread devastation of resources, infrastructure, and industry.

¹⁵ Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, 173–174.

¹⁶ Keller 1954, quoted in Christodoulou, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 135.

¹⁷ Floros, “Jenseits von Schönberg und Debussy,” 107.

¹⁸ Kostas Chardas, “The Past as Future: The Paradigmatic Function of Nikos Skalkottas within the Emergent Greek Musical Modernism (1950–65),” in *Skalkottas Today*, eds. Tatjana Markovic, Stephanie Merakos, Valia Vraka, Eva Mantzouranis, Petros Vouvaris, Kostas Tsougras, and Alexandros Charkiolakis (Athens: The Friends of Music Society, 2025), 107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The *Sixteen Songs* were composed in just seven weeks, from April 25th to June 10th, 1941, as evidenced by the draft manuscript. The dedication to Chrysós Evelpidis in the final manuscript, dated May 28th, 1942, reflects Skalkottas's appreciation for the poet and their special relationship.²⁰

Positive milestones in Skalkottas's life include the 1938 premiere in Athens of the *Greek Dances*, perhaps reflecting a concession to the then-prevalent nationalist style, and his marriage to pianist Maria Pangali in 1946. They had one child, but just hours before the birth of their second, Skalkottas died of a hernia at age 45, reportedly saying nothing to his wife about his ailing, so as not to worry her. Renowned for his monumental works and later chamber miniatures, Skalkottas was said to be able to rewrite any of his compositions from memory at any moment. He favoured neglected instruments such as the double bass, bassoon, oboe, and trumpet, and transcribed many Greek folk songs in the manner of Bartók. Skalkottas demonstrated a genuine engagement with Greek musical and cultural traditions, while remaining acutely aware of the contemporary European avant-garde, particularly the dodecaphonic techniques he adapted from Schoenberg.

Constantin Floros outlines the history of Skalkottas's legacy, extending into the early years of this century:

Only after his early death did the musical world begin to recognize the significance of his versatile oeuvre. Through the efforts of some of his friends (especially Walter Goehr), around 25 of his compositions were published by Universal Edition. The musicologist Iannis Papaioannou founded the Skalkottas Archive in Athens. In the 1950s, pianist George Hadjinikos succeeded in Berlin in locating manuscripts by Skalkottas that had long been considered lost. In 1980, Gunther Schuller established the publisher Margun Music in Newton, near Boston, USA, which has since worked on publishing Skalkottas's unpublished works. Foundational dissertations on Skalkottas have been produced in Germany, Greece, the United Kingdom, and Austria.²¹

Skalkottas has been compared to Bartók Béla and Jean Sibelius, as these composers are considered musical emblems of their respective countries.²² Kalomiris compares him to Manuel de Falla to place Skalkottas above him.²³ In our opinion, setting an imaginary competition between artworks and artists is not very beneficial. However, these comparisons do help to position our composer among his contemporaries who faced similar circumstances and created musical works that illuminate one another. In the case of Spanish music, the best comparison

²⁰ Sakallieros, "Τα 16 Τραγούδια για μεσόφωνο και πιάνο," 332.

²¹ Floros, "Nikos Skalkottas," 99.

²² Christodoulou, "Nikos Skalkottas," 128.

²³ Quoted in Christodoulou, "Nikos Skalkottas," 132.

to Skalkottas would be the Catalan composer with Swiss background Robert Gerhard (1896–1970). Gerhard studied first under Felip Pedrell (one of de Falla’s teachers) and later with Schoenberg in Vienna and Berlin from 1923 to 1928. Gerhard’s music mirrors Skalkottas’ in the balance between folkloristic and avant-garde dodecapronic styles.²⁴

In his atonal work, Skalkottas continues and varies the hard line of the so-called Second Vienna School. On the other hand, his tonal oeuvre, mostly dances and ballets, makes him a central figure of the new Greek national school.²⁵ Skalkottas explores all styles available at his time: neo-classicism, dodecapronicism, tonality, folklorism, all at the same time.²⁶ The combination of folklorism and atonality, for instance, is quite remarkable. His tone rows tend to have a thematic profile, as in the songs we are presenting in this article. He combines some series in every song or piece. He also “introduces the original conception of a ‘functional’ atonal harmony.”²⁷ In this way, Skalkottas reconnects with a tradition to widen it thanks to the connection with the avant-garde dodecapphony.

The composer’s most well-known work to the general public, even today, is the *36 Greek Dances*. According to Yorgos Sakallieros, “it is the most famous Greek work in the style of the National School, composed by the main representative of pre-war Greek musical modernism – and its denier. The *Greek Dances* occupied Skalkottas for almost his entire creative life.”²⁸

Of the dances, 23 are based on authentic folk songs, 2 on songs that are not strictly folk but have become part of popular tradition, while 11 are folk-like themes of the composer’s own invention.²⁹ Each dance is essentially a monothematic form that is organized, developed, and completed autonomously:

Skalkottas uses folk themes as motivic kernels, which he modifies and transforms in various ways. The folk song does not lead the composer to an academic approach, but becomes the occasion to present a personal sound world – sometimes with the passion and heroic element of human nature, sometimes with a darker and more melancholic mood, sometimes with humour and brightness. The often abstract and reductive, almost like a canvas, version of a folk melody or its fragments is dressed in the elements of his utterly personal style: modal and/or polytonal harmony with characteristic use of dissonance, colourful and effect-rich

²⁴ See Joaquim Homs, *Robert Gerhard i la seva obra* (Barcelona: Biblioteca de Catalunya, 1991).

²⁵ Christodoulou, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 140.

²⁶ See Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, esp. § 6.4 Polystylism, Greekness, and Internationalism.

²⁷ Christodoulou, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 142.

²⁸ Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, 176.

²⁹ Christodoulou, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 147–49, 155.

orchestration, miniature musical conception, and the depiction of “sound painting” with geographical specificity.³⁰

He is also the author of the first dodecaphonic concerto, for piano and orchestra No. 1 (1931). Out of his eleven concertos, nine survived. They constitute the bulk of his symphonic output. The last one, a concertino for piano, is the only one to be tonal.

Within Skalkottas’s overall output, vocal writing occupies a relatively peripheral position.³¹ In addition to the *16 Songs*, his archive contains a handful of other vocal works: solo and choral versions from “Paramythodrama,” arrangements of some Greek folk songs for solo voice or choir, two partisan marches for voice and piano (1945), and two standalone atonal songs (“Kápotē,” “Tō Feggari”).³²

On the other hand, the crucial role that references to dance play in Skalkottas’s works is an emblematic stylistic feature that sets his music apart from the post-romantic, expressionistic, and impressionistic European and Russian schools, which tend to focus on vocal references. Moreover, it is not only folkloric dances such as *syrtos*, *kalamatianos*, or *tsamikos* that are quoted or paraphrased, but also contemporary popular music, music hall, and jazz.³³ These dance references, however, do not imply a tonal or traditional framework, as is often the case with other 19th- and 20th-century composers. Instead, they are integrated into a contemporary, high-brow style through demanding harmonic, serial, and contrapuntal techniques. Skalkottas’s work can be seen as a unique synthesis of tradition and a personal adaptation of contemporary innovations. This eclecticism is one of the hallmarks of his style, distinguishing him from Schoenberg, who adopted an uncompromising stance toward tonality and was particularly opposed to folklorism.³⁴

3 The Lyrics. Poetic and Musical Topical References.

This paragraph presents the transcription and a literal English translation of the cycle’s lyrics, as well as a brief commentary on the poetic and musical topical references. It also touches on some of the peculiar relationships between the text

³⁰ Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, 176.

³¹ See a work catalogue of Skalkottas in John Thornley, “Nikos Skalkottas,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., vol. 23 (London: Macmillan, 2001), 468.

³² Sakallieros, “Τα 16 Τραγούδια για μεσόφωνο και πιάνο,” 331.

³³ See Ramou, “Jazz References,” and Sakallieros, *Όψεις του μουσικού μοντερνισμού στον ελληνικό 20ό αιώνα: Πρόσωπα, ρεύματα, έργα, θεσμοί*, esp. § 6.2 Dance and the Dance Element.

³⁴ Floros, “Nikos Skalkottas,” 101. Reading prof. Floros’s texts, one realises how Schoenberg’s influence on Skalkottas may have been exaggerated, at the expense of other influences such as Busoni, or Weill.

and music, which often diverge from conventional patterns. Emphasis is placed on the dramaturgical elements present in both the lyrics and the music.

For the lyrics of his *Sixteen Songs*, Skalkottas recurred to the poetry of Chrysos Evelpides, the husband of a friend of his. It is worth noting that Chrysos's brother, Christos Evelpides, is a poet of greater significance, being the author of the lyrics of another unforgettable work by Skalkottas, the dramatic fairy tale *Με του Μαγιστού τα μάγια* ("With the Magic of May") or *Maienzauber* (1943). As Yorgos Sakallieros (2020) states, the sixteen poems set to music by Skalkottas originate from the youthful collection «Σκίτσα» ("Sketches," 1917) by Chrysos Evelpides, who published under the pseudonym "Chr. Ēsperas," *Χρ. Έσπερας*.

Evelpides was an agricultural economist, professor, politician, and literary figure. His wife, Nelli Askitopoulou-Evelpides, a violinist, was a close friend and significant supporter of Skalkottas, especially during the hardships of the German Occupation. The poems were later incorporated into the prose work «Όπως Όλοι – Φύλλα Ημερολογίου» ("*Like Everyone Else – Diary Pages*," 1940), where the protagonist, Stefanos Georgidis, is portrayed as a man with existential, philosophical, and moral concerns, struggling with life's expectations and disappointments. Skalkottas appears to have identified to some extent with this protagonist.

Due to the difficulty of finding a printed version of the poems, they were transcribed specifically for this occasion from a recital's hand programme featuring the *Sixteen Songs*. This was done with the invaluable assistance of Myrto Oikonomidou, Maria-Eirini Mountzia, and Silia Papachatzopoulou. For each poem, a literal English translation and a short literary description are included. The lyrics' most salient dramaturgical and topical characteristics are briefly compared with their musical counterpart.

The poems exhibit a tendency towards conventional topoi and metrical forms, such as the sonnet or rhyming couplet. Interestingly, they also incorporate often a dramaturgical aspect, with elements that disrupt or burst into the initial setting. The composer only sporadically takes advantage of this, as he appears to be more focused on constructive elements, particularly diastematic and harmonic questions, rather than dramatic musical representation. However, a topical and rhetorical analysis produced more results than expected. Refer to Table 1 for an overview of the sixteen songs.

3.1 *Ιδανικό*

Κύμα, που στην απέραντη τη θάλασσα
αρμενίζεις
αδύνατο και πρόσκαιρο και μπαίγνιο του
βοριά
πες μου, πού τρέχεις βιαστικά και
μανιασμένο αφρίζεις;
Κοίτα, συντρίμια γύρω σου και πουθενά
στεριά.

Τρέχω όπου η Μοίρα η ρήγισσα μου έχει
τυφλά γραμμένα,
με φτερουγίζει ονειρευτής στεριάς
επιθυμιά
και του βοριά το μούγκρισμα τραγούδι
είναι για μένα
και τα συντρίμια σύμβολα και πείσμα
η τρικυμιά.

Κι αν σβήσω εγώ, θα γεννηθούν κύματα
απ' τον αφρό μου
περαστικά στο πέλαγο το τρισπαντότινο
ν' ακολουθήσουνε κι αυτά το δρόμο τον
δικό μου.

Τρέχω σε κάποιο απάντεχο λιμάνι μακρινό
κι έχοντας μόνο σύντροφο το κρώξιμο του
γλάρου,
να ξεψυχήσω, χρυσωμένο από το φως του
φάρου.

Ideal

Wave, sailing upon the endless sea
Weak and fleeting, plaything of the north
wind,
Tell me, where are you rushing to,
foaming so wildly?
Look, wreckage all around you and no
land anywhere.

I run wherever Fate, the queen, has
blindly written for me,
I am fluttered by a dreamer's longing for
land,
and the roar of the north wind is but
a song to me,
and the wrecks but symbols, and the
storm a dare.

And if I fade away, waves will be born
from my foam,
passing through the thrice-eternally open
sea
to follow, too, my own path.

I rush toward some unexpected, distant
harbour
and having only the sea-gull's squall for
company,
to breathe my last, gilded by the glow of
the lighthouse.

The sonnet “*Ιδανικό*” centers around powerful literary topoi, primarily focusing on a dialogue with an individual wave. The wave that sails across the endless ocean serves as a classic symbol of impermanence, journey, and the unknown. This wave is personified, becoming the protagonist who, after being asked, speaks of its fate, desires, and destiny, embodying both vulnerability and determination. Another

crucial topos is destiny, symbolized by Fate as a queen (Μοίρα η ρήγισσα), who has “blindly written” the wave’s path. This is a nod to classical and folkloric ideas of predestination, and to the Three Fates of Greek mythology, who spin, measure, and cut the thread of life. Alongside fate, the “dreamer’s longing for land” points to the human quest for stability, home, or purpose amid chaos. The motif of transformation and continuity is evident as the wave contemplates fading away yet giving birth to new waves from its foam, suggesting the cyclical nature of life, death, and renewal.

Solitude and companionship also play significant roles. The wave’s only company is the cry of the seagull, while wrecks and storms encountered along its journey serve not only as obstacles but also as symbols of past struggles or lives and challenges, enriching the narrative layers of the wave’s odyssey. The poem is steeped in classical and mythological references, such as sea imagery, a common symbol in poetry of all times and places for life’s journey and its uncertainty in the hands of the uncontrollable forces of nature. Its literary tradition reflects personification reminiscent of Romantic and Symbolist poetry, where natural elements give voice to human emotions. Existential themes permeate the poem, especially in the wave’s existential questioning – “Where are you rushing to?” – evoking echoes of modern and early 20th-century European poetry.

The rhetorical tone is lyrical and reflective, with a contemplative and melancholic mood balanced by a sense of acceptance and continuity. Structurally, the narrative dialogue between the poetic persona and the personified wave creates intimacy and immediacy. Skalkottas seems to react to this represented closeness with the topos of “plucked strings” in bars 12 and beyond (see further the musical analysis of the song in §5, and its transcription in the Appendix).

Metrically, the sonnet displays a classical rhyme scheme, whereas the rhythm of each line is irregular. Dramaturgically, the wave’s journey mirrors the human condition – marked by striving, longing, facing obstacles, and ultimately accepting one’s path. Emotionally, the poem balances despair, captured in phrases like “no land anywhere,” with hope, as in “waves will be born from my foam,” thereby presenting a nuanced emotional landscape.

3.2 Αναλαμπή

Το τζάμι δροσοχαίδευεν αγνά το μέτωπό
μου
που κάτι χέρια πύρωσαν ανέγγιχτα, βαριά

και μου έδειχνε την ψηλή δεντροσειρά
του δρόμου
που λύγιζε την κεφαλή στο διάβα του
βοριά.

Σα Μοίρα, αυτοκρατόρισα
γοργοπερνούσε η μπόρα
ζωή και θάνατο μαζί σκορπώντας στα
κλαδιά.
Και κάποιο πεύκο ανύψωνε χέρια
λαμπαδοφόρα
στον κεραυνό που φώτισε τη σάπια του
καρδιά.

Gleam

The dew on the glass window faintly
caressed my forehead
that some hands had scorched,
untouched, heavy,
and showed me the tall row of trees
along the road
that bowed their heads as the north wind
passed.

Like Fate, the empress, the storm swept
swiftly by
scattering life and death together among
the branches.
And some pine raised torch-bearing
hands
to the lightning that illuminated its
rotten heart.

The two four-line stanzas of *Αναλαμπή* (“Gleam”) present rich natural imagery, where elements such as dew, glass, trees, storm, pine, and lightning play active roles rather than serving merely as a backdrop. Drawing again from classical and mythological traditions, the storm is portrayed as Fate itself, a Queen in the precedent poem, here an Empress sweeping past and scattering life and death, evoking a sense of the sublime and the overwhelming, uncontrollable forces of existence. Amidst this, the pine tree, described as having “torch-bearing hands,” is illuminated by lightning, revealing its “rotten heart,” symbolizing moments of transformation and illumination where hidden truths and vulnerabilities come to light.

As with the wave in *Ιδανικό*, the poem’s personification of natural elements and its focus on emotional and existential states resonate with Romantic and Symbolist poetry. The tone keeps being contemplative and almost mystical, tinged with melancholy and awe.

Dramaturgically, the poem captures an epiphany or revelation, a fleeting moment when the natural world exposes both its beauty and its hidden suffering. Just like the precedent wave, here the storm’s scattering of life and death suggests the cyclical, interconnected nature of existence.

Musically, in addition to the obvious topical reference to the operatic *Tempesta* style, continuing the *agitato* tone in the previous song, an ironic “Fox Trot” gait with a certain “martial” whiff is introduced. (See Table 1 for an overview).³⁵

3.3 *Ad aperturam libri*

Πάντα μανάχος, Στη σιωπή του κάμπου
ξαπλωμένος

τους νόμους που όλο κυβερνούν το
σύμπαν μελετώ.

Με τα βιβλία μου συντροφιά, στον γύρω
κόσμο ξένος,

τα λούλουδα περιφρονώ και τα
ποδοπατώ...

Μα το σκουλήκι λιάζεται σε στρώμα
λουλουδιών

και το πουλάκι αφρόντιστα τραγουδία
πάντα χύνει.

Και σ' ένα σύννεφο χρωμάτων, μύρων κι
αρμονιών

έρχεται η φύση σιγαλά και το βιβλίο μου
κλείνει.

At the Opening of a Book

Always alone. Lying in the silence of the
plain,

I study the laws that govern the universe.

With my books as companions,
a stranger to the surrounding world,

I scorn the flowers and trample them
underfoot...

Yet the worm basks on a bed of flowers,

And the little bird carelessly pours out
endless songs.

And in a cloud of colours, scents, and
harmonies,

Nature quietly approaches and closes my
book.

The third poem of the cycle (*At the Opening of a Book*) delves deeper into the topoi of solitude and alienation through the speaker's portrayal as a stranger to the surrounding world. There is a certain dramaturgical shift in the two quatrains as the poetic persona begins the poem as a new Faust, engrossed in studying the laws of the universe, yet remains disconnected from the living natural world. However, nature eventually asserts its power by personifying itself as quietly approaching and closing the speaker's book.

The tone is reflective, tinged with irony, suggesting that true understanding may require harmony between both realms. The closing symbolism of the worm and the bird once again evokes life's cycles and joyful existence, contrasting the speaker's solitary, cerebral study with nature's vibrant continuity.

³⁵ For the operatic *Tempesta* style, see Clive McClelland, *Tempesta. Stormy Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham, Maryland, etc.: Lexington Books 2017); Joan Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 100f.

Musically, the 12/8 beat is reminiscent of the old pastoral tradition. However, there is a significant amount of chromatic half-steps and ornamentation, which could be a reference to the Romantic topos of “Melting Chromaticism.”³⁶ The song’s playful tone appears to be a reaction to the poem’s subtle irony, which appears to be present throughout the entire collection. Viewed this way, and depending on the tempo one takes, the rhythm could be that of a fast “waltz.”

3.4 Βράδυ

Στη διάφανη την καταχνιά που χύνει αργά
το βράδυ
στον κάμπο που σιγά σιγά κοιμάται
χρυσωπός
προβάλλει μιας μονότονης φλογέρας
ο σκοπός
σα θρήνος, σα καημός, σα χάδι.

Κι ένα κατσίκι θεότρελο –τι τρέλα!–
σκαρφαλώνει
στου πύργου τα χαλάσματα που μ’ αίμα
έχουν βαφεί
φτάνει στην άφραστη, στην πιο ψηλή-
ψηλή κορφή
κι εκεί τα πόδια του στυλώνει.

Ακίνητο σαν άγαλμα, μα έτοιμο να
πηδήσει
τα μάτια του τα ολόχρυσα φλογίζουν σα
δαδί
κι ορθάνοιχτα προς τ’ άπειρο, λες πολεμά
να ιδεί
τι να είναι πέρ’ από τη δύση.

Evening

In the transparent haze that slowly pours
the evening,
Over the plain that gradually falls asleep,
golden-hued,
Emerges the tune of a monotonous flute
Like a lament, like a sorrow, like a caress.

And a mad goat – what madness! –
climbs
The ruins of the tower stained with my
blood,
Reaches the unmatched, the highest-
high peak,
And there it plants its feet.

Motionless like a statue, yet ready to leap,
Its golden eyes blaze like a torch,
Wide open toward infinity, as if it fights
to see
What lies beyond the sunset.

The three quatrains of *Βράδυ* (“Evening”), No. 4, continue the pastoral setting of the precedent poem, including a flute, a goat, and bloodstained tower ruins, in a Greek countryside at dusk. Themes of transience and time emerge

³⁶ For “Melting Chromaticism” see Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 73–77, and Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 52f.

through the “transparent haze” and “golden-hued” plain, symbolizing the fleeting beauty and reflective nature of the evening. Melancholy and longing resonate in the flute’s tune, blending sadness with tenderness. The “mad goat” climbing the bloodstained ruins embodies a wild, instinctive striving – perhaps for freedom, or understanding – with its blazing golden eyes staring “wide open toward infinity.” Skalkottas’ music responds to the grotesque aspect of this image with what can be interpreted as a frenetic reference to the “Shimmy,” a fast version of the Foxtrot characterised by “a very rapid movement of the shoulders and the torso.”³⁷

If the flute and the blood-stained ruins serve as a classic pastoral background, including sacrifice, maybe in allusion to historical struggles, the goat irrupts dramatically into the scene and displays a silent yet expressive gesture, which the poetic persona interprets as a human quest for existential meaning.

3.5 Αποκάλυψη

Σ’ είδα στο παρεκκλήσι κι ήσουν
μες στα εικονίσματα σαν Παναγιά
που λες για σένα γίνονταν η λειτουργιά
κι οι ψαλμωδίες πασχίζανε να
σ’ εξυμνήσουν.

Σκύβαν τα χερουβείμ να σε φιλήσουν
και γύρω στα χρυσά σου τα μαλλιά
καίγανε τη ζωή τους τα κεριά
με φωτοστέφανο να σε στολίσουν.

Μα εσύ, μονάχη σε μια άκρη
προσευχόσουν σκυμμένη, ταπεινή
κι άγιαζε τη ματιά σου κάποιο δάκρυ.

Τότε πρωτόνιωσα κι εγώ θρησκεία στην
ψυχή μου
κι εντός μου υψώθη μια φωνή·
–Δέξου την προσευχή μου!

Revelation

I saw you in the chapel, and you were
Amid the icons like the Virgin Mary
As if the liturgy was held for you,
And the chants strove to praise you.

The cherubim bent down to kiss you,
And around your golden hair
The candles burned their lives away
To crown you with a halo.

But you, all alone in a corner,
Prayed, bowed, humble
And some tear sanctified your eyes.

Then, for the first time, I too felt religion
in my soul,
And within me a voice rose:
Accept my prayer!

³⁷ Ramou, “Jazz References,” 219.

The second sonnet in the cycle, *Αποκάλυψη* (“Revelation”), intertwines sacred and profane elements by situating its scene in a chapel where Christian imagery creates a ritualistic backdrop for a moment of spiritual revelation. The central figure’s humble posture, praying “all alone in a corner,” contrasts with the exaltation she receives from the surrounding ceremonial light and angelic figures. Within this intimate solitude amid outward ritual, the transformative power of spiritual conversion is revealed as a plot twist. The speaker narrates a sudden awakening to religion, overlaying a sense of erotic devotion onto this poignant moment of personal faith.

The poem’s reverent and mystical tone within the church is juxtaposed with the worldly love of the poetic persona, creating an ironic incongruity. The speaker experiences a spiritual epiphany in a space that blurs the lines between sacred and erotic love. This nuanced interplay between the sacred and the erotic resonates with the ancient Greek poetic tradition. Accordingly, the piano part alternates between references to “plucked strings,” which align with a lyrical tradition focused on erotic love, and a meditative state of “ecstasy,” as if there is no discernible metrical pulse.³⁸ (Refer to the song’s score in the Appendix.)

3.6 Μοναξιά

Ας μην ταραξεί σήμερα κανείς τη μοναξιά μου.

Θέλω για λίγο να χαρώ τη νεκρική γαλήνη

που απλώθηκεν ανέλπιστα μες στη βουβή καρδιά μου

κι άλλης ζωής, απόκοσμης, άδειον παλμό της δίνει.

Σ’ ό,τι κι αν είναι γύρω μου θέλω να μείνω ξένος.

Δε θέλω λόγια συμπονιάς. Μα τώρα μοναχός μου

στον ντιβανιού το μαλακό βελούδο ξαπλωμένος

θα κλείσω το παράθυρο στη μάταιη βοή του κόσμου

Solitude

Let no one disturb my solitude today.

I want, for a while, to savour this funereal calm

That has unexpectedly spread within my silent heart

And gives it the empty pulse of another, otherworldly life.

To whatever is around me, I wish to remain a stranger.

I do not want words of sympathy. But now, alone,

Lying on the soft velvet of the divan,

I will close the window to the world’s vain clamor

³⁸ The topos of “plucked strings” is discussed in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 207f. For ecstatic music as a sign of elevation, see *ibid.*, 91, 237.

και στην ακόλαστη γιορτή που έστησε γύρω η φύση.	And to the wanton celebration nature has set all around.
Μόν' η καντήλα, το χλωμό σκοτάδι να φωτίζει.	Only the lamp, to light the pale darkness.
Και η θύμησή σου να έρχεται σιγά, να μην ξυπνήσει	And your memory, coming quietly, so as not to awaken
τον κοιμισμένον Έρωτα που η Λήθη νανουρίζει.	The sleeping Eros whom Lethe soothes to sleep.

Number 6, *Μοναξιά* (“Solitude”), seems to focus on self-imposed isolation.³⁹ The poetic persona insists on savoring a “funereal calm” and remaining a stranger to the world. The poem draws on classical mythology, referencing Lethe as forgetfulness and Eros as dormant love. It also recalls Romantic motifs of solitude and rejection of “Worldly Tumult,” as described by Adorno in Mahler’s music.⁴⁰ Imagery like “funereal calm,” “soft velvet of the divan,” and “pale darkness” emphasises the contemplative, melancholic tone that characterises the whole work.

A plot twist arrives in the last two lines, where Memory arrives quietly, careful not to wake the sleeping Eros soothed by Lethe, hinting at suppressed emotions. The irony lies in the solitary setting eventually being revealed as a reaction to feelings for a beloved person who remains dangerously present in the poetic persona’s consciousness.

The music seems to return to the wave-like motion of the first song, evoking the Baroque rhetorical figure of *Circulatio*.⁴¹ The intimate setting is reflected in a renewed reference to “plucked strings,” while a nod to the gently rocking rhythms of the “Sweet Foxtrot” appears to enhance the ironic tone of the song.

³⁹ This is the song that Hartmut Krones analyses, see Hartmut Krones, “Gestische und semantische Ebenen im Vokalschaffen von Nikos Skalkottas,” in *Nikos Skalkottas zum 100. Geburtstag (1904–1949): Akten des Wiener Internationalen Symposions vom 10. Dezember 2004*, ed. Nina-Maria Wanek (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), Band XXV, 51–70.

⁴⁰ More about the *Weltgetümmel*, a term from *Das himmlische Leben*, in Joan Grimalt, “Gustav Mahler’s Wunderhorn Orchestral Songs: A Topical Analysis and a Semiotic Square” (PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2011), chapter 4, and in Joan Grimalt, “Gustav Mahler’s Wunderhorn Orchestral Songs: A Topical Analysis and a Semiotic Square,” in *Gustav Mahler und der „Sturmflug unserer großen Zeit“ – Parallelen und Einflüsse*, ed. Alexander Odefey, *Mahler-Studien. Schriftenreihe der Gustav Mahler Vereinigung Hamburg*, Bd. 4 (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022). For us, the “Worldly Tumult” would qualify as an isotopy, emblematic of Mahler’s music.

⁴¹ The rhetorical figure of *Circulatio* is dealt with in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 78.

3.7 Άνοιξη

Οργιάζει γύρω η Άνοιξη στην αγκαλιά του Μάη

τ' αηδόνια γλυκοψάλλουνε τα νυφικά τραγούδια

στεφάνια πλέκουν οι μυρτιές και ο ήλιος το φως κερνάει.

Τον κάθε λάκκον σκέπασαν χορτάρια και λουλούδια.

Γιατί ν' ανθίζουν τα κλαδιά; Σε λίγο θα 'ν' θλιμμένα...

και μια σταγόνα ως του ματιού μου κύλισε την άκρη.

Το είδε η τρελή τριανταφυλλιά κι έσκυψε προς τα μένα

κι ένα χλωμό τριαντάφυλλο μου σφούγγισε το δάκρυ.

Spring

Spring rages around in May's embrace,

The nightingales sweetly chant bridal songs,

Myrtle wreaths are woven, and the sun offers its light.

Every ditch is covered with grasses and flowers.

But why do the branches bloom? Soon they will be sorrowful...

And a drop rolled down the edge of my eye.

The wild rosebush saw it and bent toward me,

And a pale rose wiped away my tear.

Number 7, *Άνοιξη* (“Spring”), revolves around themes of renewal and transience, depicting spring as a powerful, violent force that “rages” and brings life. Amid this vitality, the speaker reflects on the fleetingness of happiness. Nature is portrayed empathetically, with a wild rosebush noticing the speaker’s tear and bending to comfort them, offering a “pale rose.”

The dramaturgical aspect of the poem is evident in the persona’s irruptive reaction (the tear), to which personified nature reacts in turn. Musically, Skalkottas’ music seems to respond to this shift in bar 29, with a *piano pianissimo* dynamic. However, the topical field, a storm-like “Gigue” bordering on a machine-like topos, remains constant throughout the song.⁴²

⁴² For the ‘Gigue’ topos, see Grimalt 2020, Mapping, p. 275. For the ‘Machine’ topos, see Paulo De Castro, “Dionysian or Tectological? On the Cultural Meaning of the ‘Machine Music’ Topic in the Early Soviet Context,” in *Music and the Second Industrial Revolution*, ed. Massimiliano Sala, Series Music, Science and Technology, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 395–411.

3.8 Συκιά

Στο βράχο επάνω φύτρωσες, σ' έρμη
ακροθαλασσιά.

Με πόνο οι ρίζες σου γλιστρούνε
στα σπλάχνα του να βρουν
λίγη δροσιά.

Ανώφελη ζωή!

Στην ερημιά σκορπίζεις ίσκιους όλη μέρα

σαπίζουν οι καρποί σου εδώ στην ξέρα
και φλόγα δεν θα λάμψει απ' το ξερό σου
το κορμί.

Μπόρες, χαλάζια, κύματα, σιμούν
με λύσσα επάνω σου χυμούν
όμως, του κάκου, απ' το βράχο δεν
σαλεύεις.

Σαν άγρυπνος στρατιώτης στη σκοπιά
πέρα στο πέλαγος μακριά
το ανέλπιστο αγναντεύεις.

Fig Tree

Upon the rock you grew, on a desolate
shore.

With pain your roots slip
Into its depths to find
A little coolness.

Futile life!

In the wilderness you scatter shade all
day

Your fruit rots here on the barren ground
And no flame will shine from your dry
trunk.

Storms, hail, waves, simoom winds
Attack you with fury

But, in vain, you do not move from the
rock.

Like a sleepless soldier at his spot
Far at sea
You gaze at the unexpected.

The image of a fig tree growing stubbornly on a barren, rocky seashore serves as a metaphor for endurance and perhaps existential futility. The tree's roots painfully seek sustenance in inhospitable ground, symbolising a struggle for survival and meaning amid adverse conditions, alongside a sense of wasted potential and isolation. The final image likens the tree to a sleepless soldier on watch, gazing out to sea in hope or anticipation of something unexpected – a powerful symbol of resilience, vigilance, and perhaps hope against all odds. This fig tree mirrors the goat in song No. 4 in their parallel search for life's meaning and in their marginality.

The poem's existential undertones, reflecting the struggles and inner life of individuals in difficult times, can be understood as a social critique. The artist might portray himself as not being recognised as he would deserve. The music follows faithfully the sonnet's traditional formal division in two halves, as well as the text's reference to natural violence and displays a dramaturgical shift

between an initial reference to the syncopated “Ragtime” and a final *agitato*, *Tempesta* reference.⁴³

3.9 Χρυσάνθεμα

Στο έρημο πάρκο, στο δαρμένο απ’ τη
βροχή παρτέρι
πάνω στα φύλλα τα παλιά
στο έρημο πάρκο που προδώσαν τα πουλιά
σας άνοιξε της Φύσης τ’ άγιο χέρι.

Τα δέντρα, στο τρανταχτερό σάλπισμα του
βοριά
που διαλαλεί το γυρισμό του τύραννου
χειμώνα
χλωμιάσανε απ’ το φόβο τους, και μόνα
κάτω από τη μαύρη του ουρανού θωριά

χρυσάνθεμα, το φουντωτό σηκώνετε
κεφάλι,
πολύχρωμα, με νέα ζωή,
που περγελά και του χειμώνα την πνοή
και την ανεμοζάλη.

Ο, να μπορούσε στις καρδιές, που ερήμωσε
η συμφορά
κι όπου ο βοριάς φυσομανά τραγούδια,
ν’ ανθίζανε νέα λουλούδια
πάνω στα φύλλα τα ξερά.

Chrysanthemums

In the deserted park, in the rain-beaten
flowerbed
Upon the old leaves,
In the deserted park abandoned by the
birds
Nature’s holy hand opened you.

The trees, at the resounding call of the
north wind,
Which proclaims the return of tyrant
winter,
Have grown pale with fear, and alone
Under the black gaze of the sky

Chrysanthemums, you raise your bushy
heads,
Multicoloured, with new life
That mocks even the breath of winter
And the stormy gale.

Oh, if only in hearts deserted by
misfortune
And where the north wind breathes its
songs,
New flowers could bloom
Upon the withered leaves.

The image of chrysanthemums blooming in a deserted, rain-battered park insists on the metaphor for resilience, hope, and renewal in the face of adversity. The fourth and last stanza shifts from the external landscape to an inner, emotional

⁴³ For the idea of “Ragtime” that European musicians had at the time, including No. 25 of Skalkottas’s 32 *Piano Pieces, Ragtime*, see Ramou, “Jazz References,” 228f. For a description of the *Tempesta* style, see McClelland, *Tempesta*, as well as Grimalt, *Mapping*, 100f.

one. The poetic persona wishes that new flowers – symbols of hope and renewal – could also bloom upon the dry, dead leaves of the past. The longing for emotional regeneration in the aftermath of suffering, in the historical context of German occupation during WWII, resonates in an impressive way. As with other poems in the cycle, the imagery bridges the natural and psychological worlds.

Musically, No. 9 seems to reenact the wave-like movement of No. 1, as well as its topical opposition between a meditative, *pianissimo* rocking movement and *agitato*, violent gestures. The reference to movement, as in the precedent song, could be that of the “Ragtime” as understood and used by Skalkottas in the No. 25, *Ragtime*, of his *32 Piano Pieces*.⁴⁴

3.10 Πέρασμα

Στον κήπο περπατούσα αργά
το μέτωπο σκυμμένο από την έννοια
κι όλα ήταν γύρω μου άψυχα, βουβά.

Φύλλα, λουλούδια και κλαδιά μοιάζαν
χαρτένια.

Μα πέρασες. Κι ευθύς
τα πάντα ζωντανέψαν
χρώματα απλώθηκαν τριγύρω, καταγής
μελτέμια τα φυλλώματα χαϊδέψαν

λογιών λογιών αρώματα σκορπίσαν τα
λουλούδια,
πίασανε το τραγούδι τα πουλιά
και τον αγέρα στόλισαν χρυσά μαμούδια,

λες ήσουν μάγισσα, λες ήσουν η Άνοιξη,
λες ήσουν θεά
κι όλα γενήκαν σύμβολα στο άγγιγμα της
ματιάς σου
και διαλαλούν το πέρασμά σου.

Passage

I was walking slowly in the garden
My brow heavy with worry
And everything around me was lifeless,
mute.

Leaves, flowers, and branches seemed
made of paper.

But you passed by. And suddenly
Everything came alive
Colours spread all around, on the ground
The breeze caressed the foliage,

All kinds of scents were scattered by the
flowers,
Birds picked up the song
And the air was adorned with golden
insects,

As if you were a sorceress, Spring,
a goddess
And everything became a symbol at the
touch of your gaze
And proclaimed your passing.

⁴⁴ Ramou, “Jazz References,” 228f.

Poem number 10 sets a scenery of personal melancholy, with the speaker wandering through a garden where everything appears to be “made of paper,” conveying a sense of emotional numbness or detachment from the world. The turning point occurs with the passing of a significant “you” in the second quatrain. This presence dramatically transforms the environment, as if springtime had suddenly arrived. The poem celebrates the transformative power of love, presence, or inspiration. It resonates with themes of renewal, hope, and the supernatural effect that beauty or affection can have on the human spirit.

Skalkottas’ music does not seem to follow the traditional division of the sonnet into two halves or the dramaturgical thread that separates the first quatrain from the rest. Instead, it cuts between the third and last tercets and displays a lengthy interlude with what sounds like word-painting references to the “birds” and the “golden insects” in the third stanza. Typically, the main references appear to be a carnivalesque “Foxtrot,” presented in a sarcastic tone.

3.11 Το τραγούδι του αργαλειού

Σκυφτή, στον κάτασπρο αργαλειό
το νυφικό σεντόνι της υφαίνει
η ξακουσμένη σ’ όλο το χωριό
παπαδοπούλα Ελένη.

Και τραγουδά τον μορφονίο,
τον άντρα που προσμένει
κι απ’ τη λαχτάρα η όμορφη Λενιώ
πηγαινοφέρνει βιαστικά το χτένι

ενώ η σαγίτα, χέρι με το χέρι,
γοργοπετά ελαφριά, κυματιστή
με του σκοπού τ’ αγέρι

σαν του καλού της το γοργό καράβι...
Μ’ αλίμονο! Σπάνει η κλωστή
και το τραγούδι παύει.

The Song of the Loom

Bent over, at the snow-white loom
She weaves her bridal sheet,
The priest’s daughter Eleni,
Famed throughout the village.

And she sings of her handsome beloved,
The man she awaits,
And from longing, beautiful Leni
Moves the comb back and forth in haste

While the shuttle, hand in hand,
Flies swiftly, lightly, in waves
With the breeze of the tune

Like her beloved’s swift ship...
But alas! The thread snaps
And the song ceases.

The sonnet number 11 is the only one referred to as a “song.” Following the genre’s folkloric hint, it depicts a scene of traditional village life, focusing on

Eleni, the priest's daughter, weaving her wedding sheet at the loom. The act of weaving is intertwined with anticipation and longing for her beloved, whom she awaits with hope and desire. The loom is "snow-white," emphasizing purity and tradition, as well as the social importance of Eleni's task. The movement of the shuttle is compared to the ship of her beloved. The last two lines introduce a sudden interruption where, in an ironic twist, the thread breaks, bringing the song to a halt. This can symbolise the fragility of hope, life and death.

The music does not recur to the obvious reference to Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, D. 118. Instead, it continues the topical reference to the "Fox-trot" of the previous song, possibly with a martial undertone and an ironic tone, without addressing the final plot twist in the lyrics. Rather than the traditional, pastoral-related reference to the spinning wheel, the topos of a devilish, obsessive "machine," as it was described by Paulo de Castro in relation to contemporary Soviet music, may be also at play here.⁴⁵

3.12 Γεωργός

Φτωχοντυμένος, λιοκαμένος, ταπεινός
σαν τον Χριστό με ζώα ταπεινά
μεγαλωμένος

πίσω απ' τ' αλέτρι του παντοτινά σκυφτός
και στα καλά του κόσμου, ξένος.

Σπέρνει τον ιδρώτα του και στη γη
τη μαύρη κύματα σταριού χρυσώνουν
και δέντρα στην πληγή
της τσάπας του ριζώνουν.

Κι αυτός, χλωμός από την κόυραση
γεωργός
δημιουργός
μέσα στον κόσμο αγνώριστος διαβαίνει.

Χωρίς παράπονο ή βοή
σ' άλλους για να χαρίσει τη ζωή
πεθαίνει.

Farmer

Poorly dressed, sunburnt, humble
Like Christ, raised among humble beasts,

Forever bent behind his plow
And a stranger to the world's comforts.

He sows his sweat and on the black earth
Waves of golden wheat appear,
And trees take root
In the wounds of his hoe.

And he, the farmer, pale from exhaustion
– a creator –
Passes through the world unrecognised.

Without complaint or cry
To give life to others
He dies.

⁴⁵ See Paulo De Castro, "Dionysian or Tectological? On the Cultural Meaning of the 'Machine Music' Topic in the Early Soviet Context," in *Music and the Second Industrial Revolution*, ed. Massimiliano Sala, *Series Music, Science and Technology*, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 395–411.

Behind a poignant tribute to the humble Greek farmer, drawing a parallel with Christ, the artist appears to identify himself with the protagonist of number 12 through an imagery of humility and sacrifice. The metaphor of “sowing his sweat” highlights how his hard work turns the barren earth into abundance. Despite being a “creator,” the farmer goes “unrecognised” by society as he moves through life. Instead of a plot twist, the poem’s final lines show the divine artist/farmer dying “without complaint or cry,” after dedicating his life to giving life to others.

In the music, the frenetic, *agitato* reference to a “waltz,” or perhaps a “gigue,” seems to insist on a carnivalesque irony, sharply contrasting with the transcendental and deeply serious tones of the lyrics. At the start of the second half of the sonnet, a contrasting *Ein wenig langsamer* (“A little slower”) section accompanies most of the first tercet, as if underscoring its central meaning. However, before the words *αγνώριστος διαβαίνει* (“unrecognised passes”) are finished, a *Tempo primo* indication brings back the main topical reference, including a final, inhuman *stringendo, fortissimo*.

3.13 Καλαμιές

Στον κάμπο τον μυριόχρωμο κι απέραντον
ανθώνα

του βάλτου αχνίζουν τώρα τα νερά

σάπια, θολά, μονότονα και που ταραίζουν
μόνα

καμιάς βαριάς αγριόπαπιας τα μολυβιά
φτερά.

Μα κάπου κάπου οι καλαμιές τραντάζουν
πέρα ως πέρα

κι εκεί που οι ρίζες τους βουτούν στη
λάσπη τη βαθιά

σηκώνονται περήφανα, στον ουρανό
φοβέρα,

σα σκουριασμένα ιπποτικά σπαθιά.

Reeds

In the plain, the multicoloured and
endless flower field,

Now the waters of the marsh shimmer
faintly

– rotten, muddy, monotonous – and they
are disturbed only

By the heavy, leaden wings of a wild
duck.

But now and then the reeds shudder
from end to end,

And where their roots plunge into the
deep mud,

They rise proudly, a threat to the sky,

Like rusted knightly swords.

The two contrasting quatrains of number 13 are separated by the particle “but.” The first quatrain depicts the lifeless waters of a marsh, while the second introduces heroic, defiant, and personalised reeds, “like rusted knightly swords.” Between them, the fleeting image of a “wild duck” adds further depth to the

metaphor of the artist as a soldier. Both the comparison to a wild animal – “disturbing” the social decay – and the portrayal of artistic activity as a martial struggle are characteristic of Romantic imagery. The duck can be viewed as a companion to the goat and the fig tree, in songs Nos. 4 and 8.

Musically, the ironic reference to a “Bourrée” – the courtly, aristocratic dance of the past – appears to continue a thread of martial-related references, starting with number 10. This thread contrasts with the character and topical references introduced in the following song. In the final bars of the song’s postlude, a renewed nod to the anapaestic rhythms of the “Ragtime” can be discerned.

3.14 Στο περιβόλι μου...

Στο περιβόλι μου, στο μπάνκο τον παλιό,
στη μοναξιά
που ίσκιος, ενθύμησες, δροσιά κι απλότη
με χαϊδεύουν
κάθουμαι, βλέπω τα πουλιά
μέσα στα φύλλα τα χρυσά σκουλήκια να
γυρεύουν.

Εδώ, που λούλουδα μπουκέτα ραΐναν μύρα
κι εμορφιά
τα δέντρα σκύβουν, βαρεμένα απ’ τους
καρπούς που δένουν.
Και ψιθυρίσαν τα κλαριά:
όσοι γεννήθηκαν ποιητές φιλόσοφοι
πεθαίνουν.

In my orchard...

In my orchard, on the old bench, in
solitude
Where shade, memories, coolness, and
simplicity caress me
I sit, I watch the birds
Searching among the golden leaves for
worms.

Here, where bouquets of flowers once
scattered fragrance and beauty,
The trees bend, weighed down by the
fruit they bear.
And the branches whispered:
Those born poets die as philosophers.

Number 14 features unusually long verses, which could be interpreted as a nod to the classical Homeric epic style or to lofty subject matters.⁴⁶ This aligns with the poem’s meditation on solitude, memory, and the passage of time, all taking place in a peaceful personal orchard. The orchard is now marked by the weight of fruit-laden branches, symbolising maturity and abundance. The final line, where the branches whisper “those born poets die as philosophers,” hints at a transformation that occurs throughout life. It suggests that youthful creativity and idealism eventually give way to contemplation, wisdom, and possibly resignation. The

⁴⁶ The relationship between long and short verse lines is interpreted in Joan Grimalt, “Traces of Metre and Prosody in Instrumental Music,” in *Res Facta Nova*, no. 24 (33), ed. Małgorzata Pawłowska (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2023).

orchard serves as a metaphor for inner life: a place where beauty and inspiration once thrived, now tempered by experience and reflection.

The music's tone, accordingly, returns to the initial meditative and lyrical pace, perhaps in another reference to Skalkottas's version of a "Blues:" a melancholy, march-like song with many syncopations.⁴⁷ Refer to the transcription of the song's score in the Appendix.

3.15 (Απόψε)

Απόψε κάθουμαι βουβά, μονάχος σε μια
κόγχη
κι ακούω το πρωτοβρόχι
να ξεκουκίζει το μονότονό του κομπολόι
σιγά σα μοιρολόι...

(Tonight)⁴⁸

Tonight I sit in silence, alone in a corner

And listen to the first autumn rain
Unthreading its monotonous rosary
Softly, like a lament...

The shortest poem in the collection, number 15 consists of just one quatrain in rhymed couplets. It continues the topic and atmosphere of the previous song, transitioning from summer and daylight in the orchard to autumn, evening, and rain at home. Accordingly, a meditative "dysphoric march" appears to be the main topical reference here.⁴⁹ Additionally, the topos of "Plucked strings" on the piano, previously seen in number 6, "Solitude," may serve as another cross-reference to the introspective nature of both poems and songs in the collection, and prepare for the next one to close the cycle in a melancholic tone.

3.16 Χινόπωρο

Έξω χινόπωρο βαρύ τα δέντρα ξεφυλλίζει.

Το δάσος έσβησε ψιλή βροχή σαν καταχνιά
στο περιβόλι απλώθηκε σαπίλας μυρωδιά

κι η περγουλιά στο φύσημα του αγέρα
τουρτουρίζει.

Autumn

Outside, heavy autumn strips the leaves
from the trees.

The forest has faded; a fine rain, like mist,
spreads the smell of decay through the
orchard,

and the grapevine shivers in the blowing
wind.

⁴⁷ See our analysis of the first song, *Ιδανικό*, as well as the description of Skalkottas's *Blues*, No. 28 of his *32 Piano Pieces*, in Ramou, "Jazz References," 231–233.

⁴⁸ The brackets appear in the poem's title, but not in the musical autograph.

⁴⁹ "Dysphoric marches" are discussed as musical *topoi* in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 188f.

Έλα μες στο σπιτάκι μας με την απλή θωριά κι άσ' τον αγέρα στα κλειστά παντζούρια να σφυρίζει. Στην καμαρούλα, που άγρυπνο το τζάκι θα φωτίζει, θα είναι για μας ατέλειωτη, γλυκιά καλοκαιριά.	Come into our little house with its simple look and let the wind whistle at the closed shutters. In the small room, where the fireplace will glow sleeplessly, for us, it will be an endless, sweet summertime.
Στα μάτια σου ασυννέφιαστο θα ξαναδώ ουρανό, τα μάγουλά σου Τροπικού θα μοιάζουν δειλινό το στήθος σου ροδακινιάς άνθισμα θα θυμίζει,	In your eyes, I'll see again a sky without clouds, your cheeks will resemble a tropical sunset, your chest will remind me of a blossoming peach tree,
στο μίλημά σου θα ξυπνούν αηδόνια τ' Απριλιού, λιακάδες θ' αναλάμπουνε στη θέρμη ενός φιλιού...	to your words, the nightingales of April will awaken, sunshine will flash in the warmth of a kiss...
Έλα, χινόπωρο βαρύ τα δέντρα ξεφυλλίζει.	Come, heavy autumn is stripping the leaves from the trees.

As if continuing the autumnal, rainy scene from the previous poem, this final sonnet portrays the musical persona imagining a love scene inside “the small room” from outside the house. The cycle thus concludes with an erotic and meditative tone, contrasting the outer, unwelcoming environment with a private world filled with tenderness and human warmth.

The repetition of the first line at the poem’s end suggests a cyclic structure, which Skalkottas reinforces by reprising the initial *agitato* bars (*Sehr bewegt und unruhig*, “Very agitated and restless”) at the song’s conclusion. In contrast, the inner world is musically correlated with an *Andante sostenuto* section, spanning from the second quatrain to the poem’s end, excluding the final line. This central, lyrical passage features once again the intimate sounds of “plucked strings.”

The frenetic sections of the song evoke the “Shimmy” rhythm previously encountered in song No. 4, while the gentle syncopations of the central part

seem to correspond to the so-called “Sweet Fox.”⁵⁰ Please refer to the Appendix for a transcription of the score of this final song.

4 The *Sixteen Songs* as a Cycle

The collection is arguably not a cycle in the strict sense that one can attribute to Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte*, Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und -leben*, or Mahler’s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*.⁵¹ Yorgos Sakallieros characterises it as a “kaleidoscope” of vocal and pianistic colours.⁵² The general musical character of the collection is marked by a predominantly syllabic “recitative” or arioso style, with only sparse use of melismata. Throughout the cycle, however, there is a distinctive oscillation between passages of meditative lyricism and moments of stormy, *agitato* intensity – a contrast that is particularly evident in the first, eighth, ninth, and sixteenth songs, where both moods are interwoven. This alternation between lyric and *agitato* sections forms one of the central cyclic features of the work. Within the cycle, certain songs blend both approaches (Nos. 1, 8, 9, and 16), while others are characterized primarily by a turbulent energy (Nos. 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13). In contrast, songs 3, 5, 6, 14, and 15 are distinguished by their contemplative mood.

There are numerous internal references and continuities between the songs. For example, a pastoral-inflected tone appears in Nos. 3, 8, 14, and 16, while references to parodic dances and marches can be heard in Nos. 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 16. Some songs also seem to recall each other. Thus, the initial, decisive song No. 1 is not only echoed in the meditative, lyrical atmosphere of No. 9 but also reenacted through its word-painting reference to the “wave.” Additionally, the protagonists of Nos. 4 (the goat), 8 (the fig tree), 12 (the farmer), and 13 (the duck) are all depicted as quixotic figures, mirroring each other in their futile stubbornness and existential quest. Some songs form smaller units within the whole cycle, such as Nos. 5 and 6, 8 and 9, or the final three songs, which share an intimate, domestic setting. Finally, a thematic thread of adversity and resiliency pervades many of the characters and situations portrayed throughout the collection.

⁵⁰ Ramou, “Jazz References,” 230f.

⁵¹ In a recent paper, Annini Tsioutis concludes that Skalkottas’s *32 Piano Pieces* are intended as a cycle, although this does not imply an obligation to perform all the pieces at every performance. See Annini Tsioutis, “The 32 Piano Pieces by Nikos Skalkottas: A Cycle or a Collection of Pieces?” in *Skalkottas Today*, eds. Tatjana Markovic, Stephanie Merakos, Valia Vraka, Eva Mantzouranis, Petros Vouvaris, Kostas Tsougras, and Alexandros Charkiolakis (Athens: The Friends of Music Society, 2025).

⁵² Sakallieros, “Τα 16 Τραγούδια για μεσόφωνο και πιάνο.”

Perhaps the most unitary feature of the entire collection is the ironic tone, which sometimes borders on sarcasm, at least in our interpretation. Both Nikos Christodoulou and Angelikí Katharióu point out a distinctive way of orchestrating as a stylistic emblem of Skalkottas's music.⁵³ In his orchestral works, he occasionally prescribes notes that are not available on that particular instrument, or even non-existent instruments, despite being the author of a treatise on instrumentation and having worked in the orchestra for many years. The original title, *Sixteen Songs for Mezzo-soprano*, also appears to be an ironic quirk. The songs' range is mostly suited for a soprano voice, with only very occasional deep notes (too low even for a mezzo-soprano) justifying the designation to a mezzo. Similarly, the piano's range tends to extremes, favouring a tendency towards polyphonic density in the low register that contributes to a notably dark sound image. These consistent incongruences, one could say, align with the general gist of a work that often seems to prioritise constructive, idealistic matters over the practicalities of prosody, voice ranges, or even the auditory conditions of a performance.

Including topical analysis in our overview as a hermeneutic tool offers two main advantages: it reconnects the music to the cultural history of Europe in the 1930s and 40s, and it provides valuable interpretive guidance to performers. When considering topical dance references, it is important to account not only for traditional dances in common-practice repertoire (minuet, contredanse, siciliana, gigue) but also, and primarily, the genres of light dance music popular at the time. To help distinguish these among a majority of march-like, binary rhythms, Lorenda Ramou offers a very useful summary.⁵⁴ Based on Skalkottas's *32 Piano Pieces*, some of which feature titles revealing specific topical references, she identifies seven binary dance rhythms, some of which could be applied to our songs. Ordered from slow to fast: *Rebetiko slow*, *Slow (Sweet) Fox*, *Ragtime*, *Tango*, *Rebetiko fast*, *Blues*, *Hot Fox*, *Shimmy*.⁵⁵

The following table represents a summary of the main references of each of the songs, along with their tempo indications.

⁵³ Christodoulou, "Nikos Skalkottas," 136. Ms. Katharióu kindly shared her impressions in an oral conversation.

⁵⁴ See Ramou, "Jazz References."

⁵⁵ These are not the actual dances or genres, but rather their topical references, as they may have been adapted in Berlin and in Athens, where Skalkottas played piano for cinema and dance events.

Table 1 An overview of Skalkottas Sixteen Songs

Title	Tempo indication	Interpretation, main references
1. Ιδανικό ("Ideal")	<i>Langsam und rubig</i>	Meditative "Blues" / <i>agitato</i>
2. Αναλαμπή ("Gleam")	<i>Moderato ritmato</i>	"Fox Trot," <i>Tempesta, agitato</i>
3. Ad aperturam libri ("At the Opening of a Book")	—	Pastoral, Lyrical and playful, "Melting Chromaticism"
4. Βράδυ ("Evening")	<i>Molto allegro</i>	Parodic, "Toy March," "Shimmy"
5. Αποκάλυψη ("Revelation")	—	Meditative "Ecstasy," "Plucked strings"
6. Μοναξιά ("Solitude")	—	"Waves," <i>Circulatio</i> , "Plucked strings," "Sweet Fox"
7. Ανοιξη ("Spring")	<i>Sehr schnell und nicht übermäßig betont</i>	"Gigue," "Tempesta," <i>agitato</i> , "Mechanical violence"
8. Συκιά ("Fig Tree")	<i>Molto moderato</i>	Lyrical, "Ragtime" / <i>agitato</i> , <i>Tempesta</i>
9. Χρυσάνθεμα ("Chrysanthemums")	<i>Andante moderato</i>	Waves, "Ragtime" / <i>agitato</i>
10. Πέρασμα ("Passage")	<i>Allegretto moderato</i>	"Foxtrot," Carnivalesque sarcasm
11. Το τραγούδι του αργαλειού ("The Song of the Loom")	<i>Moderato – Allegretto</i>	Martial / "Foxtrot," <i>agitato</i> , <i>Tempesta</i> , Irony, "Machine" topos
12. Γεωργός ("Farmer")	<i>Sehr feurig</i>	Frenetic "waltz" or "gigue" <i>agitato</i> , <i>Tempesta</i> , Irony
13. Καλαμιάς ("Reeds")	<i>Moderato e grazioso</i>	"Bourrée," "Ragtime," Irony
14. Στο περιβόλι μου... ("In my Orchard...")	<i>Andante molto espressivo</i>	"Blues," Lyricism
15. Απόψε ("Tonight")	<i>Langsam und schweremütig</i>	"Dysphoric March," "Plucked strings"
16. Χινόπωρο ("Autumn")	<i>Sehr bewegt und unruhig / Andante sostenuto</i>	<i>Agitato</i> , <i>Tempesta</i> "Shimmy" / Lyrical "Sweet Fox," "Plucked strings"

5 An Analysis of the First Song, *Ιδανικό*

5.1 First stanza

The initial minims chords in the low register, repeated four times, seemed to suggest a solemn, possibly tragic pace in a remarkably slow pulse. The 4/4 metre, combined with the marking *Langsam und ruhig*, Ἀργά και ἡσυχά (“Slowly and calmly”), are thus called into question twice at the very start of the song and the cycle. First, because the opening bars invite to listen to them as *alla breve* instead of in crotchets. Second, the syncopated quaver rhythms starting in bar 3, announced in bar 2, create an *agitato* tone that clashes with the initially represented gait. See Example 1.

The reference to movement here could be the “Blues” as it was understood those days in Europe: as a derivation of a “march” to a “melancholy negro song.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the gait and the syncopations of *Ιδανικό* remind of No. 25, *Blues*, within Skalkottas’s *32 Piano Pieces*.

Example 1 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), beginning.

Langsam und ruhig – Ἀργά και ἡσυχά

Κύ-μα, που στην α-πέ-ραν-τη τη θά-λασ-σα αχ-με - νι - ζεις

The *agitato* tone in the piano part can also be interpreted as a word-painting device, representing the undulating, irregular movement of the wave, which plays the protagonist role in the poem. The motif of ascending seconds in the right hand at bar 2 is arguably the main motivic kernel of the song, alongside the series. Moreover, this rocking motif reappears in song No. 9, *Χρυσάνθεμα*, creating one of the subtle cyclical connections discussed in the preceding paragraph.

In the vocal part, the predominantly syllabic style that characterises the entire cycle is evident from the very first line:

– *Wave, sailing upon the endless sea*

⁵⁶ See Ramou, “Jazz References,” 232f.

In the first stanza, the poetic persona addresses a personified wave. The following three stanzas of the sonnet represent the wave's response. The initial descending augmented fourth can be heard as a variant of the rhetorical *apostrophe*, a figure traditionally used to address someone or a deity in a solemn manner. This may be an ironic variation of a classical *apostrophe*, with the tritone replacing the customary octave.⁵⁷ The melodic design of this first line, with its sinuous shape, may also be a nod, whether ironic or not, to the traditional *hypotyposis*, i.e., a musical "visual" representation.⁵⁸ In fact, the diastematic contour seems to mirror the process of a wave reaching the shore: first descending and ascending relatively high ($A\flat$ to $G\flat$); a second "wave" stretching from B to $E\flat$; and a third "spasm" bringing the motion down to a minimal major second, $B\flat$ to $A\flat$, which is replicated in bar 5 with the same rhythm but a semitone lower. This musical imagery comes at the expense of prosodic declamation, as some unaccented syllables, such as $\sigma\tau\eta\nu$ or the last syllable of $\alpha\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\nu\tau\eta$, receive unnatural stress due to their high placement in the wave's musical depiction.

From a harmonic perspective, these initial five bars are informative. They demonstrate the combination of polytonality and dodecaphonism, which appears to be one of Skalkottas' stylistic emblems. Whereas the left hand suggests a B-flat key, present in the bass of all five bars, the right hand alternates between two diminished-fifth scales, $F\# - A - C$, and $E - G - B\flat$. Interestingly, in bars 2–3 the left hand moves away from the $B\flat$ bass and presents a variant of the $F\#$ chord from the right hand, this time with a perfect fifth and a major ninth.

On the other hand, the composer's idiosyncratic use of the twelve-tone series can be seen in his overlaying of two series that share a connection that is not immediately apparent. In bars 1–3 of the piano part, what could be called **S1** is introduced:

$B\flat - F - E - F\# - A - G - B - C - D - A\flat - E\flat - C\#$.

Notice how the sequence $D - A\flat - E\flat$ recurs in both series, albeit on opposite sides. Moreover, it recurs in retrograde form in **S5**.⁵⁹ However, the last note of this series, $C\#$, does not appear until bar 4, after some notes in the series have been repeated. In the voice part, the row is as follows:

$D - A\flat - E\flat - G\flat - F - B - C - E - D\flat - B\flat - G - A$.

This series could be designated **S2**. Both **S1** and **S2** are employed and varied to supply the diastematic material for the song's first stanza, as well as for stanzas

⁵⁷ More about the rhetorical figure of *Apostrophe* in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 65f.

⁵⁸ See *Hypotyposis* as word-painting device in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 49, 83f., 354.

⁵⁹ Many thanks to Nataša Crnjanski for this observation.

3 and 4, which serve as a reprise. The only departure from strict serial procedure occurs in the repetition on the dotted rhythm in bar 4, which can be interpreted in its madrigalistic aspect. Additionally, the rhythm on the word θάλασσα (“sea”) aligns with its natural prosody, even though it disrupts the regularity of the row’s presentation.

Finally, the melisma that closes the first musical phrase we are analysing here seems to reply by inverting and rectifying the initial rhetorical apostrophe: instead of $D - Ab$, here it is $A - D$, as if starting a second instance of the voice row **S2**.

Note also the remarkably dark register, with the right hand notated in F-clef in the whole of this passage. This polyphonic and rhythmic density in the low register reminds of Schoenberg’s style, and also of Brahms’s saturated sonority.

In the second phrase, the second line, that characterises the wave as *weak and fleeting, plaything of the north wind*, shows an exchange of the initial series. The pattern that was originally in the piano part (**S1**) is now reproduced in a rather free form in the voice, and vice versa. The wave-like articulation in the right hand of bar 2 is now found in the melody of the singer in bar 6, even though the prosody does not align with this articulation, see Example 2. Harmonically, there are hints to F minor in bar 6 and E-flat 7 in bar 7.

Example 2 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 6–11.

Notice the articulatory *bowings* in the vocal part, which may indicate that it is conceived in a rather instrumental manner.

The poem’s third line completes the initial sentence with a new apostrophe and a rhetorical question: *Tell me, where are you rushing to, foaming so wildly?*

This corresponds to bars 8–11 (Example 2). Different polytonal hints can be perceived in the form of different triads in each hand. Taking advantage of the repetition of the rhetorical apostrophe, “Tell me,” after “Wave!,” Skalkottas chooses to mirror both the rhythm and the melodic contour of the first phrase, a semitone higher. The variations on the model (bars 2–5) in melody and rhythm are minimal, but they seem to show a higher degree of rhetorical immediacy – see

the syncopation in bar 8 – as if following the elan of the initial imperative tense. The ornaments in semiquavers in bars 9 and 11 might be a new ironic game with hypotyposis, describing the protagonist wave’s “rushing and foaming.”

Regarding the piano part, in addition to transporting up by half a tone, the third line also switches and varies the tone material that was in the left hand during the second verse to the right hand, and vice versa (refer to Table 2). This reintroduction of the initial combination between both rows evokes the traditional polyphonic procedure of inverted counterpoint. Typically, the wave-like, *piano*-related figure in the right hand of bars 2 and 3 is extended by one octave and placed on the square pulse in bars 8–9, omitting the syncopated rhythms of the original figure. Furthermore, the slow, *piano pianissimo* chords in the left hand of bars 1–2 turn into a quaver accompaniment in the treble register in bars 8–11 that would fit in an *accompagnato* recitative or some other high-brow, operatic style.

In contrast, the final line of the first stanza features a topical reference to plucked strings, beginning at bar 12, see Example 3. This aligns with the shift in tone of the lyrics, introducing a new imperative, while conveying a sense of intimacy with the imaginary interlocutor: *Look, wreckage all around you and no land anywhere.*

Example 3 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 11–15.

The image shows a musical score for Example 3, consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are in Greek: "φοί - ζεις; Κοί-τα, συν-τόμ-μια γύ - ρο σου και που-θε-νά στε - ριά." The piano part is written in two staves, with the right hand in the treble clef and the left hand in the bass clef. The piano part features a complex accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings, including *mf*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *p*. The score is divided into measures, with bar numbers 11 through 15 indicated.

The vocal line’s tone row **S2** reveals its motivic connection to the previously introduced **S1**. This series first appears in the piano, then on the voice on the second line of the text (bars 6–8), returns to the piano in bars 8–11, and now reappears in the singer’s part in bars 12–14. Correspondingly, fragments of **S2** seem to form the foundational tone material for the piano part in this phrase, from bar 12 to the first beat of bar 14. For an overview of the song’s sections, see Table 2.

At the same time, bar 14 marks the beginning of the first instrumental interlude, positioned logically between the first and second stanzas. A notable feature of this first interlude is the introduction of a dotted rhythm, paired with a to-and-fro movement, see Example 4. This dotted rhythm is then carried over into the first line of the second stanza, possibly mirroring the swaying motion of the poem's central figure, the wave.

In addition to the rocking rhythm, bar 14 introduces a variant of the initial vocal phrase, transposed a fourth above its original version. The row seems to be a new one, **S3**, if further use is confirmed. It does not present any clear kinship with either of the prior series, except for the first interval:

$G - D\flat - F - E - A - E\flat - G\flat - C - B - B\flat - D - A\flat$.

The accompaniment to that melody instead bears some traces of **S2**, although not exactly in the order the notes appeared the first time. Harmonically, the diminished fifths that characterised the beginning of the song reappear as the diminished seventh on *D* (bar 14), on *C* (bar 15, as if part of an *A* \flat dominant seventh chord), on *G* (bar 16), and briefly on *F* in bar 18.

Example 4 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* ("Ideal"), bars 14–18.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* ("Ideal"), bars 14–18. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score begins with a 'cra.' marking and a 'p' dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a dotted rhythm and diminished fifths. The vocal line starts with a dotted rhythm and a to-and-fro movement.

5.2 Second stanza

The next three stanzas of the sonnet represent the wave's response to the questions and apostrophes posed by the poetic persona. The first line of the second stanza reads: *– I run wherever Fate, the queen, has blindly written for me.*

One might anticipate a noticeable change in the tone of the vocal line at this juncture. However, such a shift only briefly occurs at the very start, in bar 19, as shown in Example 5. The recitative reference, centred on a single psalmodic tone *–D–*, quickly transitions into the wide intervals that defined the setting of the first stanza.

Example 5 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 19–22.

The vocal line (bars 19–24) appears to introduce a new twelve-note row that we could label as **S4**:

$D - E\flat - A - G - A\flat - C\flat - B\flat - D\flat - C - F\# - F - E$.

In the piano part (bars 19–20), the same inverted counterpoint seen in the first stanza is utilised. A **S5** row, which shares some similarities with its vocal counterpart, is presented:

$D\flat - F - B\flat - E - A - F\# - B - G - C - E\flat - A\flat - D$.

Following that (bars 25–30, to conclude the second stanza), a varied **S5** emerges in the vocal part, missing only the B note:

$F - D\flat - E - B\flat - E\flat - A\flat - D - F\# - G - A - C$.

On the other hand, **S4** is also employed in the piano part in bars 22–24, 25–26, and then freely varied. The connection between both rows corresponding to this second stanza, **S4** and **S5**, is highlighted by the imitation of the sequence $D\flat - C - F\# - F - E$, first in the vocal part, then played twice as fast in the piano in bar 24: refer to Example 6.

Example 6 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 23–26.

In Examples 5 and 6, the articulation marks in the vocal part reveal an instrumental, constructive approach, as if emphasising motivic elements. Combining a loose dodecaphonic-motivic serialism with polytonality, the right hand in bars 19–20 aligns with a D-major dominant harmony, while the left hand presents the three components of a B^b minor chord in first inversion, along with a natural E. Similarly, bar 21 appears to superimpose a D^b harmony over an F[#] chord. These constitute only the most obvious tonal references.

Typically, the reference to plucked strings heard in bars 12–13 reappears at the beginning of the second stanza in the left hand, alongside the opening words of this humanised wave. The right hand instead continues with the bowed-strings accompaniment from bars 8–11. This could be interpreted as a blend of a public and private statement. The rests in the left hand in bars 19–21 (see Example 6) might allude to the madrigalism of *suspiratio*, possibly indicating an *agitato* tone beneath the wave’s discourse.⁶⁰ Conversely, the numerous dotted rhythms and anapaests in bar 21 suggest a “martial,” authoritarian reference, aligning with the idea of “queen Fate” “blindly writing” the wave’s path. The broken chords in bar 26 may be a response to the word “song,” in a new reference to the traditional plucked strings of a lute or guitar. Finally, bars 30–31 appear to illustrate the “storm” mentioned in the last line of this second stanza in a new hypotyposis, see Example 7.⁶¹

Example 7 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 27–31.

εί-ναι για μέ - να και τα συν-τόμη - μια σύμ-βο-λα και πεί - σμα-η τη - κυ - μιά.

⁶⁰ The madrigalism of *suspiratio* is discussed in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 35f.

⁶¹ *Tempesta* was described and exemplified as a musical topos in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 100f.

Example 8 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 31–36.

The musical score for Example 8 consists of two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a *dolce* marking and a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a *Tempo* marking and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes, which then transitions to a more serene, dotted, arpeggiated minim in bar 33. The dynamics in the piano part range from *mf* to *pp*. The Greek lyrics are: Κι αν σβή-σω.ε-γώ, —θα γεν-νη-θούν κύ-μα- τα απ' τον α - φρό μου.

The *Tempesta*-like second interlude (bars 31–32, see Table 2 and Examples 7 and 8) transitions from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*, passing through *mezzoforte* and *piano*. It displays a parallel rhythmic calming effect from the frantic density of bar 31 to the serenity of the dotted, arpeggiated minim of bar 33, complete with a *ritardando*: see Example 8. Rhetorically, the *suspiraciones* from the beginning of the second stanza (bars 19–21) return in bar 32 to set up the *ritardando* that leads into the third stanza. The diastematic material in the second interlude appears to be derived from combinations of both rows used in the preceding stanza, **S4** and **S5**.

5.3 Third Stanza

The third stanza introduces a new existential, comforting thought of the human wave: *And if I fade away, waves will be born from my foam.*

Musically, the second half of the sonnet functions as a Reprise, in a correlate to the wave’s “rebirth.” The treble part on the piano (bars 33–36) echoes a slightly altered version of the vocal line’s first phrase (bars 2–5). In contrast, following the previously established inverted counterpoint pattern, the singer (bars 33–39) adopts the melodic line of the piano’s right hand from bars 2–8. **S1** and **S2** are now presented together, revealing their status as variants of each other. Initially, **S1** unites the piano and voice parts, which had previously followed separate rows. Starting from bar 34, **S1** and **S2** are reiterated consecutively. From a structural viewpoint, this Reprise can be understood as a synthesis of the earlier diastematic material that was first introduced in isolation. The final two syllables of line 9 in bar 36, *-φρό μου*, signal the beginning of a new iteration of **S1** and **S2** as a unified series, once again featuring variations and permutations of the original row order.

Topically, the Reprise expands on the reference to the Recitative that marked the beginning of the wave’s stanza in bars 19–20, extending it to a six-bar

fragment (33–38). Similar to a Baroque recitative, the long, broken chord in bar 33, mimicking a harpsichord or lute, introduces a significant number of small intervals and a reciting tone as in psalmody, temporarily deviating from the typically expressionistic wide intervals that dominate the rest of the song. A reference to the madrigalism of *pianto* catches the eye, as Skalkottas marks the descending minor-second interval in both notes of bar 36 and in the last ones of bar 35 with a *legato* bow each, despite both crotchets and minims singing different syllables: see the last bar of Example 8. The traditional musical “weeping” falls with the words *my foam*, that can be interpreted as the remains of a wave “fading away,” i.e., dying.

In bars 39–43, a new thematic-motivic combination is presented. **S1**, transported a semitone upwards, appears on the piano’s right hand, whereas the left appears to reproduce the same transposition of **S2**, one semitone upwards. The notes on the vocal part complete the notes that are missing in the series on the piano. This allows the singing line to closely follow the usual prosodic and melodic patterns, as if freed from any serial rules, see Example 9.

Example 9 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 37–43.

πε-ρα-στι - κι στο πέ-λα - γο το τρι-σπαν-τό - τι-νο υέ-κο-λου-θη-ους-νε - κι αυ-τά - το δρό-μο- των δι-κό μου.

Lines 9 and 10, completing the third stanza, appear to be fused together in one musical phrase, similar to the pairs of verses 5–6 and 7–8 in the second stanza. However, in bars 42–43, a stark contrast is seen to the immediately preceding reciting tone. Melismata on the words *δρόμο* (“path”) and *δικό* (“my own”) draw attention, as if the entire metaphor at the foundation of the poem, relating the wave to human existence, is being revealed or emphasised.

5.4 Fourth Stanza

The last stanza carries on the topic of death that was brought up in the third strophe, portrayed through beautiful imagery:

*I rush toward some unexpected, distant harbour
and having only the sea-gull's squall for company,
to breathe my last, gilded by the glow of the lighthouse.*

Bar 44 includes all twelve notes of **S1**, although not exactly in its usual sequence. Additionally, it showcases a transposition of the wave-like motif from bar 2 on the right hand here to the left hand, now a whole tone higher, see Example 10.

Example 10 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 44–48.

The image shows a musical score for Example 10, bars 44-48 of the piece 'Ideal' by Nikos Skalkottas. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef and has the lyrics: 'Τρέ - χω... σε κά-ποιο,α-πάν-τε-χο λι - μά - νι μα-κρι - νό κι-έ-χον-τας μό-νο σύν-τρο-φο το'. The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features a wave-like motif in the left hand, transposed a whole tone higher from bar 2. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Bar 45 presents a new variation of the Reprise that began in the second half of the poem, at bar 33. In this case, what was previously separated between the right and left hand is now condensed into the left hand in bar 45. The rest of the song uses a new combination of both initial series, revealing common features between **S1** and **S2**, such as the sequences $D - Ab - Eb$, $B - C$, $A - G/G - A$, or $C\# - Bb$. Line 10 is performed on two new reciting tones, Eb (bars 44–45) and A (47). This repeated reference to psalmody (*recto tono*) can be interpreted as a hint to the metaphysical and solemn, if not religious tone of these existential reflections on human life and death.

In bar 49, a very original instance of word painting appears to depict “the sea-gull’s squall” in a *martellato* figure, as shown in Example 11.

Example 11 Skalkottas, *Ιδανικό* (“Ideal”), bars 44–48.

The demisemiquaver figure in this section is reminiscent of bar 31, where the *Tempesta* topos had left a similar rhythm on the last beat (see Example 7). It contrasts with the mellow, *legato* movement of the omnipresent wave motif (bars 2, 3, 4, 24, 39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 54), as well as with the apparent emotional content of the text. The energetic gesture in bar 49 seems to offer a vitalistic resistance to the ultimate, inevitable acceptance of a dignified end. After that, the pulse returns to the initial rhythm of minims. In bars 51–52 the traditional rhetorical figure of *passus duriusculus*, against all serial order, confirms the pathetic sense of these last lines.⁶² In contrast with this chromatic passage, an ascending diatonic trajectory $G - A - Bb - C$ is displayed in the vocal part, perhaps representing the “gilded glow of the lighthouse” – first in crotchets and quavers (bar 52), then in crotchets and a dotted minim (53), as in a written-out *ritardando*. To underscore the poem’s underlying idea of an eternal return, embodied by the wave’s movement, the music ends with a quotation of the initial motifs.

Please refer to Table 2 an overview of the song’s structure.

⁶² The *passus duriusculus* – the chromatic, *Lamento*-descent – is set in relationship with the rhetorical katabasis in Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, 52.

Table 2 *Ιδανικό*, a global overview

Line	bars	12-note row	References
1	1–5	S1 (piano), S2 (voice)	tragic pace, <i>agitato</i> , hypotyposis, apostrophe
2	6–8	S2 (piano), S1 (voice)	hypotyposis
3	8–11	S1 (piano), S2 (voice)	apostrophe, <i>pianti</i> , rhetorical question, operatic setting
4	12–14	S2 (piano), S1 (voice)	plucked strings, apostrophe
Interlude 1	14–18	S3 (piano)	hypotyposis, variation of line 1
5–6	19–24	S4 (voice), S5 (piano)	recitative, plucked strings, bowed strings, <i>suspiratio</i> , martial rhythms
7–8	25–30	S4 (piano), S5 (voice)	plucked strings, <i>Tempesta</i>
Interlude 2	31–32	S4 + S5	<i>Tempesta</i> , <i>suspirationes</i> , retransition to the
9	33–36	S1 + S2	reprise, recitative
10	36–38		recitative, psalmody (<i>recto tono</i>)
11	39–43		syllabic, melismatic singing
12	44–47		recitative, psalmody (<i>recto tono</i>), wave-motif
13	47–50		<i>Martellato</i> figure
14	50–54		<i>Passus duriusculus</i> ; appeasement, return to the beginning

6 Mapping the Analysis

In a truly hermeneutic spirit, Nicholas Cook stated that every musical work demands a specific analytical approach tailored to the way it is listened to and performed.⁶³ So, what kind of analysis do Skalkottas' *Sixteen Songs* invite? I would argue that they primarily call for a technical and detailed analysis rather than a phenomenological one from the listener's or performer's perspective, which would be my usual approach. This type of analysis plays close attention to the many fragments and procedures that may not be intended to come across in performance.

This emphasis on construction over communication is characteristic of what was considered *avant-garde* in the early twentieth century. It recalls the

⁶³ Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; originally published 1987), 1–4.

polyphonic motet, not only due to shared compositional techniques such as inverted counterpoint and mirroring, but also from an aesthetic standpoint. Just as the sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation motet aimed to idiosyncratically celebrate sacred mystery musically and liturgically, Schoenberg and his school initially envisioned an ideal future listener who might one day appreciate the subtle intricacies of their complex musical creations.

In *Ιδανικό*, we observed that the tone rows serve both motivic and structural roles. The counting of notes necessary to complete a series, which in other dodecaphonic works may seem unproductive, proved to be a valuable analytical tool here. For instance, it revealed the presence of inverted counterpoint between series, occurring between the vocal and piano parts, as well as between the two hands of the piano. It also showcased the musical reprise in the second half of the sonnet, which reutilises the initial tone rows **S1** and **S2**. Skalkottas's use of tone rows is not mathematically strict; rather, he often prioritises expressive repetitions, motivic relationships or considerations of prosody.

Secondly, word-painting emerges as another archaic method of constructing musical meaning, as the music continues its attempt to depict the movement of the wave. This discovery came as a surprise, even after reading Hartmut Krones's article, where he noted the traditional use of hypotyposis.⁶⁴ In the common repertoire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, word-painting was largely absent and often disparaged.

Thirdly, against expectations, a topical analysis proves fruitful in this work and potentially in most of Skalkottas's output. A brief glance at Table 1, which lists topical references found in the *Sixteen Songs*, suffices here. Numerous opera seria references appear alongside a notable presence of dance topoi, contrasting with the typical idiom of dodecaphonists, who generally focus more on vocal genres and gravitate toward an ecstatic flow. This "degree zero" of movement is just one facet of Skalkottas's palette. Musical topoi are a significant feature within this progressive style, often signifying a strong – and frequently ironic – connection to musical tradition. In one of his insightful articles, Constantin Floros highlighted "Types from Baroque and Classicism" in Skalkottas's *32 Piano Pieces* (1940), where topical references such as *Marcia funebre*, *Gavotte*, *Nachtstück*, *Italienische Serenade*, *Tango*, *Blues*, or *Fox-Trot* stand out.⁶⁵

Fourth, the importance of rhetorical aspects proved greater than initially assumed. In addition to traditional rhetorical figures like apostrophe, *suspira-tiones*, or *passus duriusculus*, the overall **tone** of the musical discourse appears to

⁶⁴ Krones, "Gestische und semantische Ebenen."

⁶⁵ Floros, "Jenseits von Schönberg und Debussy," 108–111.

be a powerful interpretive tool, much as it does in common-practice repertoire.⁶⁶ When approached ironically, many references reveal their fullest meaning. In *Ιδανικό*, for instance, the alternating operatic and chamber music references, typical of Romanticism; the grandiose rhetorical question and apostrophe; the nods to tragic opera (*Tempesta*, recitative) and to psalmody all seem part of a playful game. The incongruous juxtaposition of these heavily connoted, high-brow references with avant-garde dodecaphonic procedures invites an ironic interpretation for both listeners and performers. Despoina Panagiotidou similarly interprets some topical references in Skalkottas's *32 Pieces for Piano* as ironic.⁶⁷ A closer examination of other musical topoi and rhetorical tones in additional songs – such as frenetic waltz, parodic march, carnivalesque sarcasm, bourrée, polka, or gigue – supports this reading.

It is remarkable how ancient techniques like inverted counterpoint and word-painting, typical of 16th-century motets and madrigals, resurface within this avant-garde experimental song cycle. This aligns with Schoenberg's claim that, despite appearances, he was a traditionalist rooted in Classical tradition. Indeed, in most countries, Schoenberg's analytical methods have been integrated with those of Heinrich Schenker to develop formal typologies that provide excellent foundations for academic analysis of common-practice repertoire.⁶⁸

7 Conclusions

The considerable difficulty of Skalkottas's *Sixteen Songs* may have contributed to their relative obscurity and infrequent performance among the composer's works. Through this article, we aim to raise awareness of them and showcase their high artistic quality, befitting the creator of the renowned *36 Greek Dances*. In his important recent article, Kostas Chardas (2025) reveals how the generation immediately following Skalkottas sought to interpret his legacy as forms of communication. This perspective belongs to Skalkottas's reception history, alongside those who associate him with a Hellenic national school. There is also

⁶⁶ More about the tone of the musical discourse in Joan Grimalt, *Analysing Musical Signification: A Hermeneutic, Rhetorical Approach to Western Art Music* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2026), § 3.3.

⁶⁷ Despoina Panagiotidou, "Topics and the Music of Nikos Skalkottas," in *Skalkottas Today*, eds. Tatjana Markovic, Stephanie Merakos, Valia Vraka, Eva Mantzouranis, Petros Vouvaris, Kostas Tsougras, and Alexandros Charkiolakis (Athens: The Friends of Music Society, 2025), 91.

⁶⁸ See William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Erwin Ratz, *Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre: Über Formprinzipien in den Inventionen und Fugen J. S. Bachs und ihre Bedeutung für die Kompositionstechnik Beethovens*, 3rd ed. (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1973; 1st ed. 1951); Anton Webern, *Über musikalische Formen*, ed. Niel Boynton (Mainz et al.: Schott, 2002). After this initial structural step, however, it is worthwhile to engage with the music as a special kind of message, that is, in an interpretive, hermeneutic manner.

the enigmatic view of Skalkottas as a composer who wrote solely for himself – or perhaps one who sincerely hoped that one day his *Sixteen Songs* would become part of the standard repertoire.

The deeper one delves into early twentieth-century aesthetics, especially within Schoenberg's school, the more astonishing the bold, radically new concepts of "communication with the audience" appear; concepts that were being actively developed and tested. I believe these demanding compositional procedures did not entirely neglect the audience, as some avant-garde music of the 1950s might suggest. Through their texts and manifestos, and most importantly, their music, it seems a new kind of listener was envisaged – one capable of perceiving intricately woven textures and meticulously crafted contrapuntal, serial and harmonic complexities. In the Prologue to his own *32 Piano Pieces* (1940), Skalkottas concluded with these striking words:

Both the length and the brevity of the piano compositions constitute a whole in themselves – a small or larger musical idea or musical sphere – and pursue the specific purpose of bringing the music vividly closer even to a more discerning audience.⁶⁹

In essence, the metaphysical idealism of the late nineteenth century underpins these ideas, which boldly envision a profoundly rich relationship between composer and listeners, often without relying on fundamental elements of musical tradition such as a dance-based pulse, a melodic line inspired by vocal genres and prosody, or tonal harmony.

While constrained by the space limitations of this article, the author would have preferred to continue the musical analysis that was touched upon in relation to the first song. Comparing it with the literary and topical analysis provided for each of the sixteen poems would have added depth to the discussion. Furthermore, transcribing and producing a critical edition of the full musical manuscript remains an important future endeavour. This article presents transcriptions of only four of the songs. On a positive note, Eva Mantzourani has begun work on a *Nikos Skalkottas Critical Edition*, in collaboration with the Vienna-based Universal Edition.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Quoted in Floros, "Jenseits von Schönberg und Debussy," 108.

⁷⁰ Eva Mantzourani, "A New Critical Edition of Skalkottas's *Konzert für Violine und Orchester*," in *Skalkottas Today*, eds. Tatjana Markovic, Stephanie Merakos, Valia Vraka, Eva Mantzouranis, Petros Vouvaris, Kostas Tsougras, and Alexandros Charkioliakis (Athens: The Friends of Music Society, 2025), 151.

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The *Sixteen Songs* (16 Τραγούδια, 1941) by Nikos Skalkottas

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Annex

Transcription of four of the *Sixteen Songs* by Nikos Skalkottas (1941):

1. Ιδανικό
2. Βράδυ
3. Στο περιβόλι μου...
4. Χινόπωρο

Ιδανικό

Ποίηση: Κρ. Έσπερα

Μουσική: Ν. Σκαλκώτας

Langsam und ruhig – Αργά και ήσυχα

Κύ - μα, — που στην α - πέ - ραν - τη τη θά - λασ - σα — αρ - με -

vi - ζεις α - δύ - να - το και πρό - σκαι - ρο και μπαί - γνιο του βο -

ράϊ Πες μου, πού τρέ - χεις βια - στι - κά και μα - νια - σμέ - νο — α -

φοί - ζεις; Κοί - τα, συν - τριμ - μα γύ - ρο σου και που - θε - νά στε -

ριά.

14 *p*

17 Τρέ - χω ό - που η Μοί - ρα, η

20 ρή - γισ - σα μου έ - χει τω - φλά γοαμ - μέ - να,

22 με φτε - ρου - γί - ζει ο - νει - ρου - τής στε - ριάς ε - πι - θυ - μιά

— και του βο-ριά το μου-γι-σμα τρα-γού - δι εί-ναι για μέ - να και τα συν-τήμ - μα

σύν - βο - λα και πεί - σμα, η τρι - κυ - μιά.

dolce
p Κι αν σβή-σω, ε-γώ, —

Tempo

ff *mf* *rit.* *p* *pp*

— θα γεν-νη-θούν κύ-μα - τα απ' τον α - φρό μου

πε - ρα - στι - κά στο πέ - λα - γο το τρι - σπαν - τό - τι - νο -

— ν'α - κο - λου - θή - σου - νε — κι αυ - τά — το δρό - μο — τον δι - κό — μου.

Τρέ - χω — σε κά - ποιο, α - πάν - τε - χο λι - μά - νι μα - κρι - νό κι έ - χον - τας

μό - νο σύν - τρο - φο το κρώ - ξι - μο του γλά - ρου, να ξε -

51

ψυ - χή - σω, χυ - σω - μέ - νο α - πό το φως του φά - ρου.

25 Απριλίου
1941

Βράδυ

Ποίηση: Κρ. Έσπαρα
Μουσική: Ν. Σκαλκίotta

Molto allegro

p *pp*

Στη διά - φα - νη την κα - τα - χνιά που χύ-νει αρ-

γά το βρά - δυ, στον κά - μπο που σι - γά σι -

γά — — — — — κοι - μά - ται χρυ - σω - πός — — — — — προ - βάλ - λει

7 12 18

mf *pp* *ppp*

The Sixteen Songs (16 Τραγούδια, 1941) by Nikos Skalkottas

2

Βράδυ

μας μο - νό - το - νης φλο - γέ - ρας ο σκο - πός - σα

23

θρή - νος, σαν κρη - μός, σα χά - δι.

30

37

Κι έ - να κα - τσί - κι θε - ό - τρε - λο (τι)

(echo)

44

pppp

Βράδου

3

p *mf*

τρέ - λα!) σκαρ-φα - λώ - νει σου πέρ - γου τα χα - λά-σμα-τα

50 *pp*

f

πού μ'αί - μα έ - χουν βα - φεί

57

φτά - νει στην ά - φτα - στη, στην πο - φι - λή

63

sc

φι - λή κορ - φή κι ε-κεί τα πό-δια του στυ -

71 *cresc.*

The Sixteen Songs (16 Τραγούδια, 1941) by Nikos Skalkottas

4

Βράδυ

λώ - νει.

78

f

85

ff

92

f A - κί - νη - το σαν

97

ά - γαλ - μα, μα έ - ται - μο - να πι - δί - σει, -

Βράδυ

5

— τα μά-τια του τα-ο-λό-χρου - σα φλο-γί-ζουν σα δα -

102

δί κι-ορ - θά-νοι - χτα προς τ'ά-πει-ρο, λες πο-λε-μά

108

να ι - δεί - τα να εί - ναι πέρ' α - πό τη δύ -

116

σι.

126 *pp*

Στο περιβόλι μου...

Ποίηση: Χρ. Ξεσπερα
Μουσική: Ν. Σκαλιόττα

Andante molto espressivo

Στο πε-ρι-βό - λι μου, στο μπάν-κο το πα-λιό, στη μο-να-ξιά που
ί - σκιος, εν-θύ-μη - σες, δρο-σιά κι α - πλό - τη με χαϊ-δευ - ουν
κά-θου-μαι, βλέ-πω τα που-λιά μέ-σα στα φύλ - λα τα χρου-σά
— σκου-λή-κια να γυ - ρεύ - ουν. *molto espr.* E -

δώ, που λού - λου-δα μπου - κέ - τα ραί - ναν μύ-ρα

17

κιε - μορ-φιά τα δέν-τρα σκύ - βουν, βα-ρε-μέν' απ' τους καρ-πούς που

21

δέ - νουν. Και ψι-θυ-ρί - σαν

25

τα κλα-ριά: Ο - σοι γεν - νή - θη-καν ποι-η - τές, φι-λό-σο -

29

Breit -----

φοι πε-θαί - νουν. —

33 *mf* *p* *dim.* *p* 7

38

Score

Χινόπωρο

Ποίηση: Χρ. Έσπαρα
Μουσική: Ν. Σκαλκώτα

Schtr bewegt und unruhig - 180

Ε - ζω χι - νό - πο - ρο - βα - ρύ - τα δέν - τρα ξε - φου - λι - ζει. Το δά - σος έ - σφι - σε ψι - λι βρο - χι - σαν κα - τυχ - νιά στο πε - ρι - βό - λι - α - πλώ - θη - κε σα - πί - λας μου - ρω - διά και η περ - γου - λιιά στο φώ - ση - μα του α - γέ - ραι του ρ - του - ρι - ζει.

The Sixteen Songs (16 Τραγούδια, 1941) by Nikos Skalkottas

2

Χινόπορο

Andante sostenuto $\text{♩} = 2$

mf E - λα μεο'

19 στο σπι-τά-κι μας με την α-πλή θω - ριά... κιασ' τον α - γέ-ρα στα κλει - στά παν-τζού-ρια να σφύ - ρι - ζει.

25 Στην κα-μα-ρού - λα, που ά-γου - τνο το ζά - κι θα φω-τί - ζει, θα εί - ναι για μας

30 α-τέ-λειω-τη, γλυ-κιά κα-λο-και-ριά. Στα μά-τια

Χινόπωρο

3

σου α - συν-νέ-φια - στο θα ξά-να-δώ ου - ρα - νό, τα μιά-γου-λά σου

37

Τρο - πι-κού θα μούα - ζουν δει - λι - νό το στή-θος σου ρο-δα - κι - νιάς αν-θι-ομα

41

— θα θυ-μί - ξει, στο μι - λη - μιά σου θα ξυ - πνούν αι-δό - νια τ'Α - ποι - λιού, —

46

— Λια-κά - δες θ'ά-να-λά-μπου-νε στη θέρ-μη.ε - νός φι - λιού...

50

Tempo primo

55

The Sixteen Songs (16 Τραγούδια, 1941) by Nikos Skalkottas

4

Χινόπορο

Schr bewegt und unruhig

Ε - λα, χι - νό - πο - ρο - βα -

ού - τα δέν - τρα ξε - φυλ - λι - ζει.

59 *f*

61 *f*

65 *sf* *p* *pp*