



The Symphony in Greek Art Music: Cultural Memory between Western and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

Greek art music has made a significant and enduring contribution to the symphonic genre within European art music, serving not only as a site of stylistic development but also as a repository of cultural memory. Since the 18th century, beginning with Michele Stratico's (1728–1783) thirty-five (35) *sinfonias*, Greek composers have engaged in a continuous dialogue with the symphonic form, each work echoing both contemporary influences and inherited legacies. This evolving tradition – passed from generation to generation – embodies not merely musical innovation but also the collective memory of a nation navigating modernity, exile, identity, and continuity.

Key figures such as Nikolaos Chalikiopoulos-Mantzaros (1795–1872), with twenty (20) *sinfonias*, and later Alkis Panagiotopoulos (1950) and Athanasios Simoglou (1954), each with ten (10) symphonies, contribute to a sonic lineage in which memory is not just thematic but structural – embedded in forms, modes, and motives. Petros Petridis (1892–1977), Dimitris Dragatakis (1914–2001), Mikis Theodorakis (1925–2021), Dinos Constantinides (1929–2021), and Dimitris Themelis (1931–2017) each composed six (6) symphonies, acts of remembrance as much as composition, often drawing on national, historical, or personal pasts. The lifespans and works of Giannis A. Papaioannou (1910–1989), Christos Samaras (1956), and Stelios Coucounaras (1936) (each with five symphonies) mark successive stages in a shared memoryscape, demonstrating the genre's increasing weight in Greek musical culture as both a formal discipline and a vessel for cultural reflection.

Keywords

symphonic genre; cultural memory; national identity; form and style; Greek art music

Ionian School

A detailed examination of Greek symphonic production¹ begins with the composers of the Ionian Islands, where significant connections to the symphony's Italian origins can be traced. Emerging around 1730, the symphony evolved from two traditions: the *concerto ripieno* (orchestral works without soloists) and the *sinfonia*, originally an operatic overture in the Neapolitan style. Early symphonists such as Giovanni Battista Sammartini (c. 1700–1775) and Antonio Brioschi (c. 1725–1750) adopted a three-part structure, contributing to the genre's growing popularity in orchestral concerts. During this period, the term *sinfonia* broadly encompassed various types of orchestral music, a usage that persisted until the 19th century.² The Italian-type *sinfonia* (overture) was shaped towards the end of the 17th century by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) in Naples. Initially (1st type of *sinfonia*), it consisted of three short and often interconnected movements: a fast, homophonic one in concerto style; a slow and brief one, written solely for strings and set in a related key (corresponding structurally to the sonata and concerto genres of the same period); and a final lively, dance-like movement in the manner of a minuet or *giga* (most commonly in 3/8, 6/8, or 12/8 metre), in binary suite form. After the first decades of the 18th century, the two outer movements increasingly adopt sonata form, while the slow middle movement expands in length (2nd type). However, from the mid-18th century onwards, the overall structure of the Italian *sinfonia* becomes progressively reduced, either through the retention of only the opening fast movement or through the transformation of the original fast–slow–fast sequence into a single movement in three-part sonata form, featuring an exposition, a slow inserted episode (in place of a development), and a recapitulation (3rd type). Simultaneously, the tripartite *sinfonia* evolved into the concert symphony genre, while as an overture it remained in use towards the end of the 18th and into

¹ An earlier version of this article has been presented under the title “The Genre of the Symphony in Greek Art Music: Tracing Memories between Western and Eastern Europe” at the International Academic Conference “Music and Memory” (April 24–25, 2025) at the Prof. Pancho Vladigerov National Academy of Music (Sofia).

² Ioannis Fulfias, “V. The Era of Musical Classicism,” in *History of Western Art Music* [Ιστορία της δυτικής έντεχνης μουσικής], eds. Irmgard Lerch-Kalavrytinou and Ioannis Fulfias (Athens: Panas Music, 2023), 287–88.

the early 19th century, typically reduced to a single, fast-paced movement, most often in sonata form without development.³

The first known Greek symphonists are the composers of the Ionian Islands. Recent research,⁴ however, has brought to light composers of Greek descent who were active outside the Greek mainland: along the maritime routes of the Venetian Republic, and especially on the Dalmatian coast, we find the first Greek composer of symphonies. Giuseppe Michele Stratico (1728–1783) composed thirty-five *sinfonias* that demonstrate how musical form can function as a vehicle of cultural memory,⁵ preserving Italianate stylistic traits within a diasporic Greek context.⁶ His *Sinfonia in C Major*, with its clear second-type *sinfonia* structure, captures a musical moment shaped by Enlightenment ideals and transmitted across time. Similarly, Nikolaos Chalikiopoulos-Mantzaros (1795–1872), a Corfiot nobleman who studied in Naples, composed twenty one-movement *sinfonias*, echoing the Neapolitan school within a uniquely Greek idiom.⁷ His *Sinfonia No. 4, Grande Sinfonia Militaire*, stands as a memory-piece par excellence, commemorating both military spectacle and formal tradition, fitting to his contemporaneous third type of *sinfonia*. Spyridon-Filiskos Samaras (1861–1917), a composer from the Ionian Islands, renowned on the Italian operatic scene, contributed a *Sinfonia* for symphonic orchestra (1879) during his studies at the Athens Conservatory (ca. 1875–1882). Raffaele Parisini (1811–1875), an Italian descent key figure in early modern Athenian music, also composed a *Sinfonia a grand' orchestra*. Their works reveal memories of European orchestral norms together with the aspiration to inscribe Greek voices into a dominant historical narrative. Alberto Andlovitz (1860–?) later added the *Sinfonia Nazionale*, also

³ Ioannis Fulas, *Elements of Music Analysis* [Στοιχεία μουσικής ανάλυσης] (Athens: Kallipos, Open Academic Editions, 2022), 125–26, <http://dx.doi.org/10.57713/kallipos-76>.

⁴ Athanasios Trikoupi, *Western Music in Hellenic Communities. Musicians and Institutions* (Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2015), 415.

⁵ Astrid Erll, “The Invention of Cultural Memory: A Short History of Memory Studies,” in *Memory in Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230321670_2; Ann Rigney, *Cultural Memory Studies: Mediation, Narrative, and the Aesthetic* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁶ Zdravko Blažeković, “Elementi za životopis Josipa Mihovila Stratica,” *Radovi Zavoda JAZU u Zadru*, no. 32 (1990): 112–113.

⁷ The Septinsular composers Domenico Padovanis (1817–1892), Nikolaos Tzannis Metaxas (1825–1907), and, later, Dionysios Lavrangas (1860–1941) composed also pieces for symphony orchestra. Moreover, “Dionysios Lavrangas came from the Ionian Islands but comprised a connecting link between the Septinsular School of the 19th century and the Greek National School of the 20th century. His *Greek Suite No. 1* for orchestra [1903] is generally regarded as the first symphonic work of the Greek National School.” Dimitris Giannou, *Greek Symphonic Music* [Ελληνική Συμφωνική Μουσική], University lecture notes (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1993), 8.

known as *25 Marzo*, written for wind ensemble, both as a patriotic act and an echo of past ceremonial music.⁸

Greek symphonic production soon shifted focus from the Italian to the German Romantic tradition, especially through composers like Dionysios Rodotheatos (1849–1892) and Dimitrios Lialios (1860/1871–1940).⁹ Here, memory took on a more subjective and programmatic shape. Rodotheatos, a student of Mantzaros who also studied in Naples, Milan, Austria, and Germany, composed now-lost sinfonias, mainly revitalizing Septinsular symphonic output by integrating Romantic influences; in this frame his had been the first to introduce the genre of symphonic poem¹⁰ in Greek Art music (*Atalia*, based on Jean-Baptiste Racine’s final tragedy *Athalie*, and *Lo Cid*, after Pierre Corneille’s tragicomedy *Le Cid*). In the same direction, Lialios’ *Mitternachts Traum (im Süden)*, completed at Munich in 1891, is arguably the first Greek example of a four-movement programmatic symphony: a dreamlike evocation of Romantic ideals, it functions as both personal reverie and historical inscription. The eventual relocation of many Ionian composers to Athens toward the end of the 19th century marks another layer in this chain of memory: a transplantation of style and pedagogy from peripheral regions into the cultural heart of modern Greece.¹¹

⁸ Irmgard Lerch-Kalavrytinou, *Rafail Parisinis [Ραφαήλ Παριζίτσης]* (Athens: Panas Music, 2015).

⁹ Giorgos Sakallieros, “The Greek Symphony (1900–1950): Oscillating between Greek Nationalism and Western Art-Music Tradition,” in *The National Element in Music: Conference Proceedings, Athens, 18–20 January 2013*, ed. Nikos Maliaras (Athens: University of Athens, Faculty of Music Studies, 2014), 34.

¹⁰ “An orchestral form in which a poem or programme provides a narrative or illustrative basis. The form flourished in the second half of the 19th century and in the early part of the 20th and was generally in one movement. Like a number of other ephemeral forms, such as the madrigal and the concerto grosso, it had a relatively short life, lasting from its origins in the late 1840s until its rapid decline in the 1920s.” Hugh Macdonald, “Symphonic Poem,” *Grove Music Online*, first published 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000027250> (accessed July 22, 2025).

¹¹ “In most other aspects, the Westernization of music in Greek cities (Aegina and Nauplion – the early capitals, in 1828 and 1829–1834 respectively – Athens, Piraeus, Patra, and Hermoupolis) had common characteristics with that of new Western conquests all over the world: music making in homes connected to the kings (the Bavarian Otto and the Danish George I), wind bands (of the palace, the army, and the amateurs’ societies) playing marches and dances in the open air, and performances of opera, operetta, and spicy music reviews, by Italians and Heptanesians, as a rule, produced on makeshift stages, and the decent theatres that replaced them.” Katy Romanou, “V. In a Modern State. 1. The 19th Century,” in *Greece*, ed. Katy Romanou, Thomas J. Mathiesen, Alexander Lingas, Nikos Maliaras, Achilleus Chaldaiakis, John Plemmenos, Pyrros Bamichas, Kostas Kardamis, Sofia Kontossi, Myrto Economides, Dafni Tragaki, Ioannis Tsagkarakis, Kostas Chardas, Manolis Seiragakis, Sotirios Chianis, and Rudolph M. Brandl, *Grove Music Online*, 2019, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-3000000167> (accessed July 22, 2025).

At this point it should be clarified that the classical four-movement symphony, established by Johann Stamitz at Mannheim,¹² did not spread in Greece during its emergence, due to the Ottoman rule's isolating effects. Greek composers active in European communities during this period remain under study.¹³ The classical symphony form gained prominence in Greece in the 20th century. Initially, the multi-movement programmatic symphony and one-movement symphonic poem dominated the early 20th century, with the four-movement symphony reached its peak in the latter half.¹⁴

National School

The rise of programmatic music in the early 20th century mirrored a shift toward collective memory as a compositional impulse. Programmatic or descriptive music, with its narrative themes, aligned also closely with the national concerns¹⁵ that artists sought to express across various mediums, including music. Between 1910 and 1940, Greek art music was largely dedicated to the pursuit of a “national” style and identity, blending post-Romantic style and early Neoclassical forms with diverse approaches to folk material.¹⁶

Manolis Kalomiris (1883–1962), founder of the Greek National School of Music and a pivotal figure in early 20th-century Greek art music, embodied this effort.¹⁷ His large-scale works, including operas and symphonies, reflect themes of loss, nostalgia for displaced homelands, and the aspiration for a grand national

¹² Jan Larue, Eugene K. Wolf, Mark Evan Bonds, Stephen Walsh, and Charles Wilson, “Symphony,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000027254> (accessed July 22, 2025).

¹³ Trikoupis, *Western Music in Hellenic Communities: Musicians and Institutions*.

¹⁴ In the mid-19th century, as programmatic music (music representing a narrative or theme) gained prominence, debates arose about music's ability to convey specific content. Programmatic works, often accompanied by descriptive titles or explanatory texts, depict interrelated events or images and allow for more structural freedom to express their non-musical narratives. This genre includes programmatic sonatas, concertos, symphonies, and symphonic poems, which emerged in the late 17th century and continued to evolve, especially with the rise of the symphonic poem in the 19th century [translated by M. Kalopana]. Fulfias, *Elements of Music Analysis*, 187–188.

¹⁵ Apart from the efforts of the Ionian composers to establish art music in Greece, the emerging Athenian bourgeois class and intellectuals raised questions about the national characteristics of Greek art music and the historical continuity. Anastasia Siopsi, “Music in the Imaginary Worlds of the Greek Nation: Greek Art Music during the Nineteenth Century's Fin de Siècle (1880s–1910s),” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 8, no. 1 (2011): 23.

¹⁶ Regarding genres and ensembles, symphonic music comprised an integral part of the compositional output of the Greek national school representatives. Sakallieros, “Greek Symphony (1900–1950),” 36.

¹⁷ Notable for Kalomiris has also been the general national concept under the term “Megali Idea” (“Great Idea”). On this term, see Thanos Veremis, ed., *National Identity and Nationalism in Modern Greece* (Athens: Educational Institute of the National Bank of Greece, 1999), 14.

art filled with symbolic elements.¹⁸ Kalomiris's symphonies, rich in programmatic content, align with the four-movement programmatic symphonic tradition; moreover, sonata form is incorporated into their structural design.¹⁹

In the first half of the 20th century, neoclassical symphonies also emerged. A key figure of this style within the Greek National School was Petros Petridis (1892–1977), who blended French impressionism, German symphonic traditions, and Greek folk music in his works, showing how memory may be reconstructed through synthesis.²⁰ During the same period, Georgios Poniridis (1887–1982) composed *Symphony No. 1*, an early example of dodecaphony by 1935, during his time in Paris, thus reframing collective memory within the idioms of modernism.²¹ Nikos Skalkottas' (1904–1949) *Classical Symphony* and *Symphonietta* (1947–1948) belong to his late tonal period, lacking innovative features. However, his 1942 orchestral overture, *The Return of Ulysses*, exemplifies a 20th-century *sinfonia*: neoclassical in structure but deeply expressionistic, employs a large-scale sonata form with thematic development, a fugal section, and a climactic coda.²² Ulysses' homecoming becomes a metaphor for compositional return: the revisiting of past forms, reimaged through 20th-century complexity.

Between 1930 and 1950, many Greek composers born after 1900 premiered their first symphonies. While the pursuit of national identity remained evident, most works adhered to tonal idioms, blending neoclassicism with folk modality and chromaticism (as in Antiochos Evangelatos [1903–1981] and Dimitry Levidis [1885–1951]) or incorporating programmatic content (as in Loris Margaritis [1895–1953]). The post-Romanticism that characterized the early Greek National School, particularly Kalomiris' early works, gradually declined after

¹⁸ Giorgos Sakallieros, "Transitionalty of 'Texture' and 'Style' in Modern Greek Musical Creation (19th–20th Century): A Historical Retrospective through Critical Evaluation and Practical Sources" [*Μεταβατικότητα «υφής» και «ύφους» της νεοελληνικής μουσικής δημιουργίας (19ος–20ός αιώνας): ιστορική αναδρομή μέσω κριτικής αποτίμησης και πρακτικών πηγών*], *Mousikologia*, no. 20 (2011): 219–220.

¹⁹ For instance, the fourth movement ("Ta Nikitiria" [The Victory Song]) of Manolis Kalomiris's *Symphony No. 1* "Leventia" ("Heroism") is cast in a sonata form with two themes while also incorporating a choir, thereby justifying the designation "choral symphony."

²⁰ Nikos Maliaras, "Alternative Greek National Music: The Case of Petros Petridis," in *Music, Language and Identity in Greece: Defining a National Art Music in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Polina Tambakaki, Panos Vlagopoulos, Katerina Levidou, and Roderick Beaton (London: Routledge, 2019), 133.

²¹ Nikos Maliaras, "Poniridis, Georgios," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0002280597> (accessed July 22, 2025).

²² Eva Mantzourani, *The Life and Twelve Note Music of Nikos Skalkottas* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 275.

WWII.²³ Regardless of stylistic influences – whether folk or Byzantine melodic elements, traditional meters, or folk performance practices – most composers employed the four-movement symphonic structure, featuring thematic elaboration, binary or ternary inner movements, and cyclic or sectional outer movements.²⁴ In this period, musical memory proves not to be static but evolving and inclusive.

Moreover, the symphonies of Alekos Xenos (1912–1995), Dimitris Dragatakis (1914–2001), and Mikis Theodorakis (1925–2021) often carry the imprint of social memory – especially the trauma and heroism of World War II.²⁵ Echoes of Russian neoclassicism of 1930s and 1940s, particularly that of Shostakovich, meet local narratives. Here, symphonic form becomes a means of preserving historical consciousness in sound; Xenos', Dragatakis', and Theodorakis' first symphonies, often reflecting themes of WWII resistance and social rebellion, received critical acclaim and awards.²⁶

Notably, two pioneering women made significant contributions to the Greek symphonic tradition. Eleni Lampiri (1889–1960) composed the first symphony by a Greek woman, marking a historical moment of both artistic expression and gendered memory within a predominantly male canon.²⁷ Maria Kalogridou (1922–2001) in turn, created *Symphony of Colours*, the first symphony written

²³ Yannis Belonis, “The Greek National School,” in *Aspects of Greek and Serian Music*, ed. Katy Romanou (Athens: Edition Orpheus, 2008), 188–189.

²⁴ Sakallieros, “Greek Symphony (1900–1950),” 45.

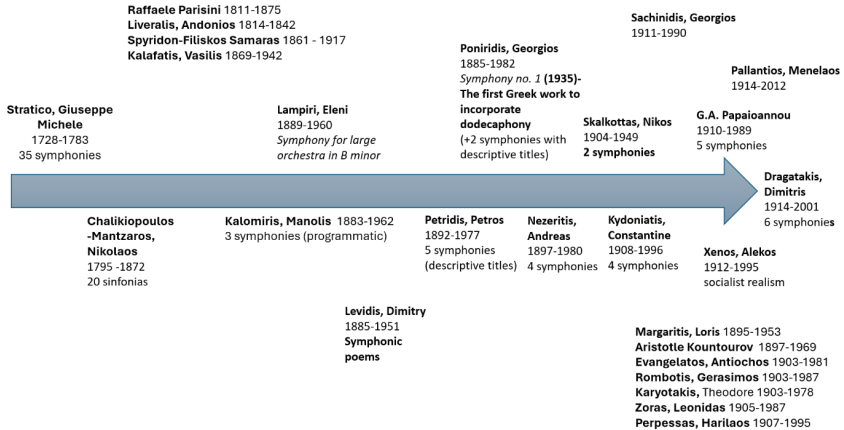
²⁵ Another relevant work constitutes *Symphony of Freedom* by Georgios Vakalopoulos. Chrysa Skarlatou, “Musical Microhistories from the Archives of the State Conservatory of Thessaloniki: The Symphony of Freedom by Georgios Vakalopoulos” [*Μουσικές μικροϊστορίες των αρχείων του Κρατικού Ωδείου Θεσσαλονίκης: Η Συμφωνία της λευτεριάς του Γεωργίου Βακαλόπουλου*], paper presented at the 16th Interdepartmental Musicology Conference under the auspices of the Hellenic Musicological Society, “Anniversary Musical Reflections, Analytical Considerations and Critical Reflections,” Thessaloniki, November 8–10, 2024.

²⁶ Theodorakis *Symphony No. 1* was completed in late January 1945, shortly after the dramatic December Events (Dekemvriana) of 1944, which are reflected in the composition. This historical context suggests that the piece embodies the tension, turmoil, and emotions of that period, capturing the intensity and impact of the events that unfolded during the December conflict in Greece. Specifically, the work consists of a chorus symphony in three parts, with programmatic content the death of two of the composer's close friends by opposing political “camps” – Makis Karlis from the composer's youth and Vasilis Zannos from the resistance group – died within days of each other. The first movement exhibits strong characteristics of sonata form, featuring rather a 3rd type *sinfonia*. Dragatakis' *Symphony No. 1* (1959), dedicated to the youths of the National Resistance, got a second prize at the Composition Competition of the National Broadcasting Corporation (1962). Xenos' *Symphony No. 1* “The Resistance” premiered at the world democratic youth festival (Bucharest, 1952).

²⁷ Lampiri's *Symphony in b minor* is in four parts and follows a late romantic style, with rich harmonic chromaticism and daring transportations. Yet the last part applies a monothematic sonata form.

for children in Greece²⁸ – an imaginative and educational work that underscores the importance of early musical memory and intergenerational transmission. An overall overview of Greek symphonists up to 1950 is presented in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. A brief overview of Greek symphonists up to 1950.



After the Second World War and up to the Present Day

During the 1950s and 1960s, many 20th-century composers abandoned the symphonic form altogether, viewing its thematic unity and tonal architecture as outdated considering emerging modernist aesthetics. However, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a revival of the genre, as composers drawn to neo-romanticism or post-tonal idioms – and often motivated by political and ideological concerns – began to return to the symphony. In doing so, they not only revitalized its structural possibilities but also reactivated its role as a medium of musical memory, capable of reflecting on the past while articulating contemporary experiences.²⁹

Post-1950 Greek symphonic production reflects the rapid assimilation of musical modernism, a process facilitated by both domestic and international

²⁸ Magdalini Kalopana, “The Life and Work of Maria Kalogridou (1922–2001) as Revealed by the Study of Her Archive: Emphasis on Her London Years (1954–1967),” *Matica Srpska Journal of Stage Arts and Music*, no. 71 (2025): 182.

²⁹ Jan Larue, Eugene K. Wolf, Mark Evan Bonds, Stephen Walsh, and Charles Wilson, “Symphony,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000027254> (accessed July 22, 2025).

cultural institutions during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁰ The first symphonies of Jani Christou (1926–1970)³¹ and Yorgos Sicilianos (1920–2005) exemplify this shift, merging neoclassical structures with atonal and serial techniques, and signalling a deliberate move away from the overt pursuit of national identity. Yet even in this break from tradition, elements of musical memory persist – embedded in structural choices, residual tonal gestures, and the composers’ engagement with inherited symphonic forms.³² Furthermore, Greek symphonists such as Giannis A. Papaioannou (1910–1989) and Dimitris Dragatakis, embraced the avant-garde directions. Notably, Papaioannou’s *Symphony No. 3*, awarded a prize at the 1953 prestigious Queen Elizabeth International Composition Competition in Belgium, stood at the intersection of celebration and controversy: lauded abroad as a model of modern Greek music, yet criticized by composers of the National School for departing from folkloric idioms. The work integrates melodic serialism within a cyclical formal design, reflecting a nuanced negotiation between innovation and tradition – between forward-looking idioms and structural memories rooted in the Western symphonic legacy.

During the same period, certain composers – such as Konstantinos Kydoniatis (1908–1996) – remained aligned with the prewar symphonic tradition, treating the genre as a stable vehicle for continuity and stylistic memory. His work reflects a conscious preservation of earlier symphonic elements, suggesting that musical memory can also be expressed through formal consistency and resistance to innovation. By contrast, Harilaos Perpassas’ (1907–1995) *Christus Symphony* stands as a striking exception.³³ This distinctive composition blends contrasting timbres, intense rhythmic profiles, and dramatic gestural language, creating a sound world where tonal and atonal elements coexist in expressive tension, defying categorization within the Greek National School, postwar avant-garde, or other contemporary trends.³⁴

The postmodern generation of Greek composers has reengaged with the symphony as a central genre, employing it as a framework through which to

³⁰ Kostas Chardas and Giorgos Sakallieros, “Musical modernism in Greece: An overview,” in *Perspectives on Greek Musical Modernism*, eds. E. Mantzourani, C. Tsougras and P. Vouvaris (Routledge, 2025), 38–70.

³¹ Christou’s *Symphony No. 1* (1950), from his early compositional period, reintroduces voice – on T. S. Eliot’s “Eyes that last I saw in tears” – blends programmatic elements with free atonality, and is based on thematic transformations of the “Phoenix” trichord (tone–semitone, e.g., C#–D#–D).

³² Sakallieros, “Greek Symphony (1900–1950),” 46.

³³ It is a programmatic work in five – later six – parts, written in a post-romantic idiom, and structured overall in a cyclic form. The first and second parts are described through excerpts from the *Revelation* of St. John (chapter 21, verses 3–4), with the first part, *Adagio – Presto – Adagio*, follows a ternary form.

³⁴ Sakallieros, “Greek Symphony (1900–1950),” 48.

trace the evolution of their individual musical languages and to reflect on inherited traditions. In this context, the symphony becomes not only a site of formal innovation but also a dynamic repository of musical memory – where stylistic histories, cultural references, and compositional identities converge.

For composers such as Dinos Constantinides (1929–2021), Dimitris Themelis (1931–2017), Alkis Panagiotopoulos (1950), Joseph Papadatos (1960), and Philippos Tsalachouris (1969),³⁵ symphonic movement structures are often inspired by texts, myths, or abstract concepts, echoing the traditions of programmatic music. These works reframe memory positioning the symphony as a vessel for reimagining cultural, historical, or philosophical legacies.

Other composers – including Theodore Antoniou (1935–2018),³⁶ Dinos Constantinides (1929–2021), Christos Samaras (1956), Charalambos Kanas (1952), Stelios Coucounaras (1936), and Athanasios Simoglou (1954) – prioritize orchestral color, form, and timbral innovation. Yet even within their formally strict approaches, traces of memory endure through the recontextualization of traditional gestures, modal inflections, or the subtle evocation of earlier symphonic idioms.

As something of a distinctive case, Dimitris Dragatakis, starting from neo-classicism – and even social realism – moves through the avant-garde by experimenting with the form and content of the symphony, and ultimately arrives at programmatic writing, also drawing on elements of tradition (e.g., *Symphony No. 6*, “To chreos” [“The duty”] 1989, which features the use of the Cretan lyra). An brief overview of Greek symphonists active after 1950 is provided in Diagram 2.

Pioneering figures such as Christos Hatzis (1953) explore hybrid and technologically mediated forms, as exemplified in *Syn-phonia: Migration Patterns* (“*Gaia*”), which integrates orchestra, electric violin, quadraphonic tape, Arab and Inuit vocal styles, 3D animation, and virtual reality. This multimedia work constructs a polyphonic soundscape, where disparate sonic and cultural elements are brought into dialogue – rendering migration, identity, and ecological consciousness as layers of collective and sonic memory.

³⁵ Tsalachouris’s, four-part, programmatic *5th Symphony* depicts the tragic journey from despair to contemplation and from nostalgia to decision and flight, with the first movement loosely follows a dithematic sonata form.

³⁶ Antoniou’s *1st Symphony*, performed by the Bulgarian Symphony Orchestra under Alkis Panagiotopoulos, follows a traditional four-movement structure. The first movement adopts a dithematic sonata form based on a pandiatonic idiom, while thematic material is recycled across movements and other works as well.

Diagram 2 A brief overview of Greek symphonists after 1950.



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Concluding remarks

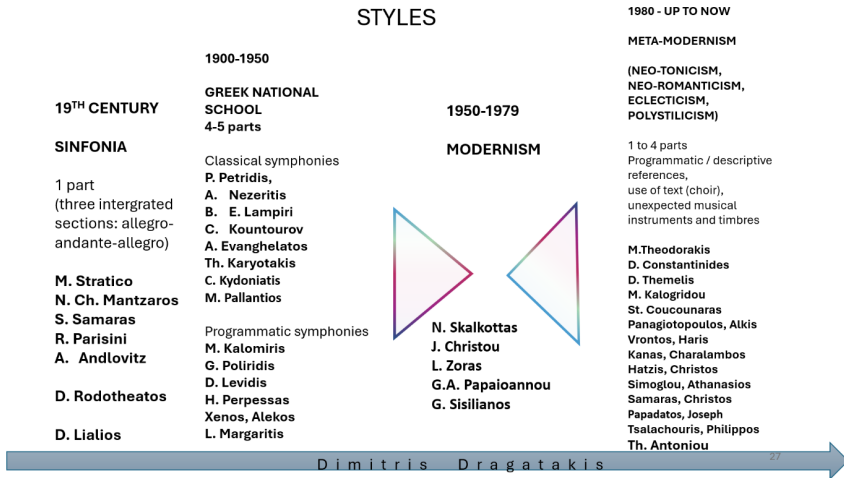
An overview of the works of the most prolific Greek symphonists reveals key trends, including a sustained engagement with the symphonic genre – even among composers who produced only a single symphony – and substantial outputs by others, ranging from five to ten works. This ongoing investment in the form underscores the symphony's enduring role as a site of musical memory, where composers return to inherited structures in order to reflect upon, reinterpret, and transform them.

Across this repertoire, diverse formats – including the *sinfonia*, the four-movement symphony, the one-movement symphonic poem, and the programmatic symphony – form a mosaic in which prevailing musical styles and individual creativity are placed in constant dialogue. In this context, musical memory is not preserved passively but actively negotiated: adapted, reshaped, and voiced within the evolving landscape of Greek musical life.

The stylistic periodization proposed in this text (Diagram 3) further highlights ongoing innovation in formal approaches and compositional techniques, illustrating how the symphonic genre in Greek art music continues to develop through a dynamic interplay between past and present. Despite the breadth of Greek symphonic production, performances of Greek symphonies by state orchestras remain rare, as their programs predominantly feature classical and

Romantic Western repertory.³⁷ This disconnection limits the genre's integration into Greek musical life, despite its consistent development. Nevertheless, musicological research underscores the genre's significance for modern Greek and European musical heritage.

Diagram 3 Proposed stylistic periodization of Greek symphonies by Kalopana.



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³⁷ Sakallieros, "Greek Symphony (1900–1950)," 47; Danai Loukidi, *The Athens State Orchestra and Greek Composers: The Presence of Greek Composers in the ASO's Repertoire, Its First 70 Years of Operation (1942–2012)* [Κρατική Ορχήστρα Αθηνών και Έλληνες Συνθέτες. Η Παρουσία των Ελλήνων Συνθετών στο ρεπερτόριο της ΚΟΑ τα πρώτα 70 χρόνια λειτουργίας της (1942–2012)] (Graduation thesis, Technological Educational Institute of Epirus, Department of Traditional Music, 2014).

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