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**Dion Arivas's Attikos's Song Cycle
Asmata: Greek Poetry and Music in
the Service of New Singers**

Georgia Katsiroumpa

PhD Student

University of Leeds

United Kingdom

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
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President
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**Dion Arivas's Attikos's Song Cycle *Asmata*:
Greek Poetry and Music in the Service of New Singers**

**Georgia Katsiroumpa
PhD Student
University of Leeds
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Abstract

The song cycle *Asmata (Songs)*, written in 1995, is the only published work by the composer and baritone Dion Arivas Attikos (1928-2000). The cycle includes 50 songs for voice and piano on Kostas Kalapanidas poetry, and as the composer annotates in the edition, 'aims at educational purposes'. *Asmata* is probably the most extensive Greek song cycle of its kind. Its uniqueness lies on Arivas's dual status as a composer and singer, as well as on the songs' dual nature both as art songs (lieder) and children's songs. The aim of the study is to examine and promote the value of this neglected work that could be of considerable use to music education.

After discussing the backgrounds of both the composer and the poet and their collaboration for the creation of *Asmata*, the paper will focus upon specific song examples, mainly exploring the cycle's pedagogical parameters. Through analysis of the songs the following issues will be discussed: 1) Children's poetry and its 'translation' into music 2) Aspects of vocal technique and performance: Phrasing, intervals, range of vocal melody, breathing 3) The Greek elements that dominate the cycle: Language, rhythm, modes. 4) The use of sophisticated harmony and accompaniment and its educational benefit. These will be examined under the spectrum of the potential use of the cycle in schools and conservatoires.

Contact Information of Corresponding author:

Introduction

Studies of the song-cycle allow us to focus upon a range of issues, including structure, narrative, characterisation, and the composer-poet relationship. However, there is a more fundamental question surrounding intent: why did the composer write it in the first place? This paper will discuss the song cycle *Asmata*, written in 1995: the only published work by the composer and baritone Dion Arivas Attikos (1928-2000). *Asmata*, an ancient Greek version of the word *tragoudia* which means ‘songs’, is probably the most extensive Greek song cycle of its kind, and represents 50 songs for voice and piano mainly based on Kostas Kalapanidas’s children’s poetry. This paper suggests that the uniqueness of the cycle lies in its dual nature: it can be seen both as a collection of art songs (lieder) and as a deliberate educational strategy in attempting to develop children’s musical awareness.

The composer

Dion Arivas Attikos (1928-2000) was a prolific composer associated with Greek ‘classical’ music. His output, which includes about 400 works in total and which is housed at the Greek Composers’ Archive of the library of Athens Music Hall (Great Music Library of Greece-LilianVoudouri), is dominated by what might be described as ‘Greek lieder’: works written mainly for piano and voice that contain a blend of traditional Greek elements and ‘classical’ western harmony and structure. Arivas’s 35 song cycles and 100 individual songs reference 50 poets (most of them Greek), ranging from the ancient poet Aischylos-525 B.C. to late twentieth-century figures such as N. Vrettakos and K. Choreanthis, identifying Arivas as a ‘literary composer’. As a baritone, Arivas also had a practical awareness of how texts could be set effectively: an important aspect of *Asmata*.

The poet

Kostas Kalapanidas’s (born 1935) literary work is dominated by poetry, with 16 poetic collections to his name. The most distinguished examples of his work are probably his three collections of children’s poetry, *Children’s Songs (Paidika Tragoudia 1968)*, *Speaking to the Stars (Kouventa me t’Asteria, 1972)* and *The Flying Horse (M’Alogaki Fteroto, 1993)*.

Kalapanidas’s children’s poetry deals with two main themes; nature and school life, both based on his childhood experiences and his twenty years’ work as a school teacher. The educational value of Kalapanidas’s poems is reflected in both their structure and content. Through plain language and an intense poetic rhythm he conveys ideas such as freedom of spirit and optimism, managing to avoid the didacticism commonly associated with children’s poetry. The educational scientist and writer Antonis Benekos has highlighted the musicality of Kalapanidas’s poetry, suggesting that these texts ‘resemble libretti, especially created for music setting’ (*The School and the Home, 1997*).

Τί κοντά, τί κοντά	Ti konta, ti konta	How close, how close
ειν’η λύπη στη χαρά!	ein’ i lypi sti chara!	sadness and joy is!
Τί κοντά που παν τα δυο,	Ti konta pou pan ta dyo,	How really close

το καλό και το κακό!	to kalo kai to kako!	does good and evil go!
Από κάτω απ'το καλό κάνει ίσκιο το κακό. Βγαζ' η λύπη νέα φτερά και δακρύζει από χαρά.	Apo kato ap' to kalo kanei ischio to kako. Vgaz' i lypi nea ftera kai dakryzei apo chara.	Just beneath good there is evil in the shadows. Sadness makes new wings and weeps with joy.
(<i>Ti κοντά!</i> , 1993)	(<i>Ti konta!</i> , 1993)	(<i>How Close!</i> , 1993)

The song cycle *Asmata*

In November 1995, three years after Arivas and Kalapanidas first met, the song cycle *Asmata* was published. It includes a combination of songs based in the poetic collections *The Flying Horse* (twenty eight songs), *Children's Songs* (nine songs), *Speaking to the Stars* (six songs) as well as six individual Kalapanidas poems and one poem by the composer.

The musical setting of the poems reflect the seven modes found in Byzantine music theory and Greek folk song, highlighted by the composer using the ancient names dorian, phrygian, lydian, mixolydian, hypodorian (locrian), hypophrygian and hypolydian. In the published edition, Arivas notes: 'I accept that Byzantine and folk music are a continuance of the ancient music, although there is no evidence for that, and that the practice of the dominant notes originate from ancient Greece'. The composer's intention of attempting a direct connection with ancient Greek music is even evident in the illustrations of the book, which are in the classical Greek style (Fig. 1).

At the same time the composer describes the nature of the songs as 'lyrical compositions, *lieder*, belonging to the genre of chamber music'. This combination of Greek traditional material (modes, rhythms, folk music elements etc.) and western, 'classical' compositional techniques is one of the cycle's most distinguished characteristics, and suggests Arivas is a follower of the tradition of the Greek National School of Music. The cycle is available in three types of voices: *Grave* (low voice), *Medio* (medium voice) and *Acuto* (high voice), so that each song is available in three keys.

There are four ways in which *Asmata* reflects its poetic source materials:

1) The songs are arranged thematically by the composer, in terms of the subject matter of the poetry. They are divided in five groups: 'Lyrical School' (themes from school life), 'Land Full of Herbs' (the human's relationship with the earth), 'Blue Joy' (the human's relationship with the sea), 'In the Sky's Fields' (escape to the world of fantasy), 'The Root of the Reed' (the man's struggle for survival). Arivas explains briefly each group's theme in the published edition.

2) As the poet confirms¹, apart from a few minor textual alterations for the sake of the vocal melody (always with the permission of the poet), Arivas remained faithful to the text and its poetic rhythm and phrasing. Examples such as the song *My Village* (*Chorio Mou*) can exhibit the fine correspondence of the music with the prosody. The rhythmic groupings of notes follow the natural syllable stress of the poem (Ex. 1)

3) *Asmata* is among the composer's less complex works. It seems that the simplicity of the poetry is mirrored in the musical setting. The vocal line in the majority of the

¹ Personal interview, April 2011

songs is simple, yet memorable, and it features a syllabic word setting and plain rhythmic values (Ex. 1). The structure is strophic, often in a binary form (verse-refrain form: ABAB).

4) Although Arivas generally keeps a consistent style throughout the cycle, there is at times a certain amount of diversity between songs, which reflects the meaning of the text. Broadly, he creates more complex music when the poem's content becomes more serious, resulting in the most striking and technically demanding examples in the cycle. The contrast between the simple, almost religious music of *My Village* (Ex. 1) and the mixed metre and relatively demanding vocal line and accompaniment of the song *Daradimaina* (Ex. 2) for instance, depict the poetic content:

Thirty houses in the crystal nature,
my village!
Up in the hill, the white chapel,
my village!

(*My Village*)

Now she has a sorrow
and children none.
The war took the one,
the other left for a foreign place.

(*Daradimaina*)

The cycle's educational value

The way the cycle is structured suggests a collection of lieder. There is no obvious sequence in the choice of modes in each song, and the songs are grouped according to their subject matter only, with no progress from simple settings to more advanced material. However, given the composer's awareness of the pedagogical character of the poems, this cycle can be seen as a work whose primary objective relates to musical education. Arivas achieves this in two ways: 1) by offering songs that deliberately develop vocal technique and 2) by challenging the performers in places to develop a sense of musical awareness (art-music basis).

Vocal technique

Despite not being a singing method, *Asmata* could be compared with Nicola Vaccai singing exercises¹, as an equivalent vocal training tool in Greek poetry. Although the cycle does not highlight a particular vocal skill in each song (as with Vaccai), the songs in their majority include elements which develop vocal technique, more specifically vocal range, phrasing, breathing and vocal flexibility.

The vocal part is carefully constructed, featuring simple, recurrent motives and short phrases, in order to serve the needs of a young or newly trained voice (Ex. 3). Most songs' vocal line consists of short phrases which are clearly indicated by breath marks or suggested by rests so that the breathing is easy. (See all examples). The songs exhibit a well-shaped vocal melody whose range does not exceed one octave (Ex. 4). The vocal line often moves in steps and intervals are not bigger than a fifth. The song *The Staircase* is a characteristic example of the composer's educational intentions. It is a vocal study on scales and third intervals (Ex. 5).

Within this simple material, Arivas introduces some technically more demanding

¹ Nicola Vaccai's *Metodo Pratico de Canto (Practical Vocal Method)* (1832) is a collection of vocal exercises in the form of short Italian songs, in Pietro Metastazio's poetry. It has been transposed for different types of voices (available in Low, Medium and High voice) and it still has an extended use as a singing training tool.

vocal elements. Examples include bigger intervals, such as the ascending sixth interval in the song *The Child and the Moon* which only appears in two bars (Ex. 6) and elements for developing vocal flexibility (Ex. 7).

Musical awareness

Apart from the practical vocal aspect, Arivas also aims to develop the general musicianship of the performer by creating a greater awareness of the entire musical text. He attempts to do this firstly by familiarizing the singer with Greek music, incorporating modes, melodies and rhythms which originate in Greek music tradition and secondly by adopting the idea of contrast as an educational tool. He achieves this by using a more challenging piano accompaniment, harmonic content and rhythm in some songs.

Greek music: The use of modes infuses the songs with a profound Greek temperament, resulting to a distinctive vocal melody. The song *Classmates* is written in Lydios mode (Ex. 8). Many of the songs incorporate melodies with a strong folk character (Ex. 9). There is also an extensive use of the augmented second interval, typical of Greek music tradition (Ex. 10). Traditional Greek dances' mixed metres such as Kalamatianos (7/8) (Ex. 11) and Zeimpekikos (9/8) (Ex. 9) are widely adopted by the composer.

While Arivas keeps the vocal line relatively simple in most songs, the use of sophisticated harmony and demanding piano accompaniment creates a unique style, differentiating the cycle from other children's songs material. The complex harmony and accompaniment has been deliberately incorporated to enhance an awareness of musical style; as Arivas's partner and associate Kseni Anastasiou confirmed, it was his conviction that the songs should be "for children, but not 'childish'", and that young people can absorb complicated material a lot easier than one might think. This creates a contrast between voice and piano part, which is used to serve the composer's educational purposes.

Harmonic content: Unusual chords often support a vocal line that would seem more straightforward standing on its own (Ex. 12). In many instances Arivas adopts different harmony for two identical vocal phrases, offering an alternative view (Ex. 13). He can also duplicate the voice part in the piano accompaniment, to help the singer (Ex. 13). The composer has also a tendency towards unexpected endings. The dominant seventh chord in *Argyris the Ant* proves particularly difficult for the singer (Ex. 14).

Piano accompaniment: The song *O Choros (The Dance)* demonstrates the contrast between voice and piano part (Ex. 15). This contrast is even more evident in the restless accompaniment and dramatic character of *Nychta ston Kissavo (Night on the Mountain Kissavos)* (Ex. 16), while the technical difficulties of *Nychterino (Night Song)* are both vocal and pianistic (Ex. 17).

Rhythm: In many instances the composer is exploring cross rhythms with changes of time signature, which contribute to the development of the sense of rhythm (Ex. 13).

Conclusion

The uniqueness of *Asmata* is its dual nature. This could be summarised like this:

Simple settings	Elaborate settings
Simple voice part	Complex piano accompaniment and harmony
Children's songs	Art songs (lieder)
Children's education	Young lyric singers' education
Use in: Schools	Conservatoires

Asmata may seem like a simple song cycle on the surface. Nevertheless, this simplicity is deceptive. A more detailed examination of the cycle's contents reveals that it includes more complicated material, combining different elements (Greek character, modes, rhythm, vocal training elements etc.). Especially the sophisticated harmony and piano accompaniment provide the songs with a distinct style.

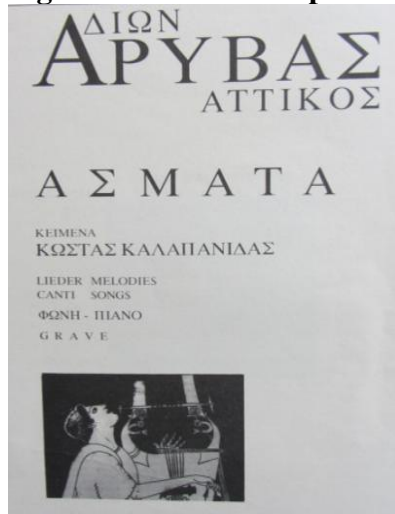
The study of the cycle identifies the composer's initial purpose which is singing education. He achieves that through a blend of contrasting characteristics (simple and complex ones), making the cycle a useful teaching tool both for children and newly trained lyric singers. This means that it can have an especially extended use, in schools, conservatoires and universities. Indeed, as a baritone and singing teacher, Arivas used *Asmata* extensively as part of the training of his new students, mainly as a substitute of Vaccai exercises.

Asmata could even be characterized as a new genre, lying between children's song and art song. The particularly wide range of songs that combine the technicality of vocal exercises and the musicality of lieder can provide classical singers a unique training material: a song collection in Greek language which can prepare them for performing more advanced Greek lieder (Kalomiris, Labelet, Evaggelatos etc.). And this is something that is missing from Greek vocal education.

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Figure 1. The *Asmata* published edition



Example 1. My Village

5

Tri - a - nta spi - ta - kia sti dia - fa - ni fy - si, cho - rio mou!
 Τρι - ά - ντα σπι - τά - κια στη διά - φα - νη φύ - ση, χω - ριό μου!

12

Psi - la stin kor - fou - la to as - pro xo - kli - si, cho - rio mou!
 Ψη - λά στην κορ - φού - λα το ά - σπρο ξω - κλή - σι, χω - ριό μου!

Example 2. Daradimaina

7
To - ra e - cheie - nan kai - mo

8
kai pai - di ka - ne - na,

9
to 'na pi - reo po - le - mos, t'al - lo

10
paei sta xe - na, to 'na pi - reo po - le -

Example 3. Questions

[Allegretto $\text{♩} = 116$]

Pou gen - ni, pou gen - ni, pou gen - ni - thi - kes gia - gia? Se mia pra, se mia pra, se mia pra - si - ni - pla - gia

Example 4. The Pomegranate Tree

[Lento tranquillo al Habanera $\text{♩} = 44$]

Se pro - si - lio pe - ri - vo - li thal - lei pra - si - ni ro - dia. Flo - ges an - thi mes ta fyl - la, flo - ges an - thi sta kla - dia

Example 5. The Staircase

[Semplice $\text{♩} = 126$]

Na 'che ska - lao ou - ra - nos, na 'tan ta ska - liaa - po fos, na 'ta -

12
nai - ve - na dyo dyo os 'ta - ste - ri t'or - fa - no

dolce

Example 6. The Child and the Moon

14 [Adagio asperessivo ♩=100] *f*

Kai sti gi e-na pai - di tra - gou-da-ei san pou - li

21 *p*

Leei tra - gou - di sto fen - ga - ri kai to leei me to - si cha - ri

Example 7. The Ship

[Largo ♩ = 46]

O-ra ka-li ka - ra - vi, sy-re me to Chri- sto. Mia ma-na-se pro- sme - nei kie-na fi-li ze - sto

Example 8. The Classmates

38 [Moderato semplice ♩ = 100]

To-ra ei-saien - nia chro-no, pas s'al-lo scho - lei - o M'e-n'a-go - ri ka-tho-mai sto

44

i-dioe-go thra - ni - o, sto i-dioe-go thra - ni - o

Example 9. Argyris the Ant

Andante mosso, brillante ♩ = 72

f Na kio myr-mig-kas oAr-gi-ris o me-ga-lo-noi-ko-ky-ris
sfz *mf* *mf*
 4
 Vgi-ke tsar-ka n'a-gnan-te-psei prin o i-lios va-si-lep-sei,

Example 10. Giannos

22
 pi-re-to po-ta-mi me pi-re-to po-ta-mi *ff*
 rit....

Example 11. The Nightingale

11 [Andante espressivo ♩ = 66]

La-li-se t'ai-do-ni to mi-kro pou-li

Example 12. A Red Fish

26
 psa-re-psei Sma-ro kok-ki-no psa-ra-ki, ka-to sto gia-lo m'ar-gy-roa-gi-stra-ki.

Example 13. Ladybird

34 [Andante cantabile ♩ = 66]

f E - laa - ne - va stin kar - dia mou kai sta kok - ki - nao - nei - ra mou,

Example 14. Argyris the Ant

11 [Andante mosso, brillante ♩ = 72]

f eim' a - fen - tis *f* tsar - ka vgi - ka *sfz* chai!

Example 15. The Dance

25

ska - ne stra - kes o - loioi fi - loi!

Example 16. Night on the Mountain Kissavos

Animato espressivo ♩ = 120

Fen - ga - ra - ki sto vou - no kie - la - to te - tra - psi - lo

Example 17. Night Song

[Andante espressivo ♩=138]

59 *f*

A, ti ny-chta ei - nai tou-ti, pai - zoun oi ski - es