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## The Role of Cultural Constraints in the Development of Music

### Theory and Analysis in Modern Cyprus

#### ABSTRACT

##### Background

As of today, the praxis of music theory and analysis in Cyprus (Greek-speaking side) exists as three parallel, yet not interrelated *modus operandi*:

- (i) Applied theory for students who attend private music schools whose music theory curriculum follows that of specific Greek conservatories and/or the British music examination boards
- (ii) Theory and analysis as offered in the state musical high-schools
- (iii) Theory and analysis as scholarly discipline practiced by scholars at tertiary institutions or independently

##### Aims and repertoire studied

The primary aim of this paper is to address these *modus operandi*, their inter-relationships (if any), and their role in the evolution of music in Cyprus.

##### Methods

More specifically, I consider the objectives and practices of the aforementioned three universes, examine the causes that gave rise to, and the conditions that sustain their existence, address their interrelationship or its lack thereof, and project them onto the historical and cultural background of modern Cyprus. Inevitably, the focus will be on scholarly music theory and analysis and its interaction with relevant music institutions and practices within and outside Cyprus. To maintain the perspective on scholarly music theory and analysis, I will offer a reflection on questions such as

- What kind of scholarly music theory and analysis is practiced in Cyprus?
- Is there a relationship between art composition and music theory/analysis?
- Has modern Cyprus had any interaction with European musical ‘schools’ in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?, and
- Does scholarly music theory and analysis have a role in the music education system of Cyprus?

##### Implications

###### *Applied Theory at Music Conservatories and Musical High Schools*

For almost a century, a child who sought a music-theoretic training in Cyprus had two options: the prescribed curriculum of either the British examination boards or the Greek conservatories. Both systems are more or less rigid, but they differentiate in their structure and content (see Table 1). The Greek pathway privileges applied (conventional) music-theoretic subjects and its proponents have been reluctant to embrace change. The British examination boards also maintain focus

on applied music theory, yet they have proven to be more flexible in the content of their syllabuses since they consider more modern (post-tonal) approaches to theory and composition.

The state Musical Lyceum opened its doors in 2006. As a term, ‘Musical Lyceum’ is rather unfortunate since, in reality, the particular institution’s operation does not differ from that of the private music conservatories. It could be described well as a state governed conservatory whose curriculum – including music theory – models, more or less, the curriculum of the equivalent private enterprises.

###### *Theory and analysis as scholarly discipline*

Scholarly music theory and analysis in Cyprus is largely an outcome of the academic practices at the tertiary institutions on the island that offer music degrees – in fact, it came into existence only when music degrees were offered in 2005. These practices can be organized into two broad categories: i) music theory and analysis as the content of various university courses, including traditional subjects such as harmony, form and *formenlehre*, and counterpoint, as well as more contemporary theoretic/analytical approaches and models including set-theory, transformational analysis, and spectral analysis and ii) the sort of scholarly activities expected to relate to a university music program, including but not limited to publications, conferences, workshops/seminars, and international collaborations (often through various EU-funded programs). It is noteworthy to mention that, since 2005, which marks the launching of university music programs in Cyprus, the musicological, and by extension, the music-theoretic activities have multiplied in scope, depth, and frequency.

Nevertheless, we need to distinguish between systematic and sporadic music-theoretic activities. As of today, Cyprus hosts no more than a handful of specialized music theorists and analysts (scholars whose primary field is music theory and/or analysis), and a considerable part of the scholarly music-theoretic activities that take place are accomplished by composers and musicologists. The lack of critical mass of music theorists/analysts on the island is consequential in some important respects. Most importantly, it has prevented the institutional organization of the field; there are no societies, associations or groups directly related to the field. Thus, music theory lacks the kind of systematic practice that would enable its coordination with the efforts of other musical disciplines. The absence of the latter is most characteristic between music theory and composition. While, since the 1990s, art music composition in Cyprus is flourishing, one notices the conspicuous lack of any kind of reciprocity between this field and music theory – most probably a result of the relatively short life of both disciplines and the unsystematic practice of music theory on the island.

Until 2005, when the first university-level music programs were introduced the instrumental and theoretical education on the island was controlled by the local music conservatories. But the particular institutions were unable to accommodate fully the continual shifts of the social background on which they projected their operations. With respect to music and musical training within the modern Cypriot society, we can identify three broadly defined phases of evolution (Kallis, 2015):

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1927–1960    | Period in which art music and music education was a privilege of the urban elite |
| 1960–1990    | Creation of a robust middle class which was seeking the cultivation of its youth |
| 1990 – today | Professional music career era.   |

Beginning in 1927, which marks the establishment of the first music conservatory on the island by the British administration, the music conservatories provided adequate training in music theory to cultivate the needs of the urban elite and the emerging middle class during the first two of the three aforementioned phases. But from the early 1990s onwards when Cypriots began systematically to seek musical training for a professional career (other than teaching locally), the instrumental and music theory curriculum of the particular institutions was unable to accommodate; this had to wait for the creation of university music programs. With respect to music theory and analysis, the music conservatories along with the musical lyceum currently are purposed to prepare students for further study in music academies and universities. The knowledge, skill, and qualifications they grant to students (i.e., O- and A-level qualifications) are potentially valuable for earning a place at Greek, British, and other European institutions. Nonetheless, owing to rigid cultural constraints related to ethnic origin and Cyprus's (British) colonial past, the private music conservatories are deep-rooted in the Greek-Cypriot society and they have developed into an establishment with considerable social and financial prerogatives, which they are reluctant to relinquish (Smith, 2015).

As a result of the fragmentation of the music theory and analysis field, these three parallel universes simply coexist. They do not interact with each other, and they remain partially independent of each other in terms of their objectives and operations. This fact is not without a consequence. It forbids the coordination of the objectives of, and the sharing of knowledge and expertise between, these three music stakeholders. It also diminishes the role scholarly music theory and analysis could play in the organization and development of the music theory and analysis field in Cyprus. As of today, Cyprus lacks a national policy in music (and generally in the arts). There is no national curriculum of music (much less music theory and analysis) which would reflect the peculiarities of, and serve the specific needs of the local society. This is largely left to external stakeholders, namely the British music examination boards and the Greek conservatories.

Despite its growing cycle of applications, scholarly music theory and analysis has been irrelevant to the local society and its establishments. It hardly exists outside academic institutions, and those who pursue scholarly research do so mainly for their own purposes. Furthermore, owing to the lack of a critical mass of music theorists and the absence of post-gradu-

ate training in music theory and analysis at local tertiary institutions, the field is heteronomous and unable at the moment to induce a self-preservation cycle. Consequently, it has been diachronically unable to constitute a collective school of thought with an active role in the development of the musical praxis in Cyprus.

With respect to research-based activities and the dissemination of their outcome, the 'theatre of operations' for Cypriot music theorists and analysts lies mostly outside the geographic parameters of the island. As a matter of fact, Cypriot music theorists have formed relationships with international institutions in order to maintain the visibility and recognition of their scholarly work.

Evidently, the demographic realities and cultural constraints that characterize modern Cyprus have not exactly contributed to the efficient organization of the music theory and analysis field. But these are not the sole factors of an impediment to the field's evolution process; there is also the island's geography, a fact that allows me to touch upon a thinly veiled secondary objective of the present paper. Cyprus is located at the Eastern periphery of the European continent, and in some respects, its distance from the European cultural centres imposes severe constraints on local endeavours, particularly in the arts. It is my belief that scholarly music theory and analysis in Cyprus can blossom fully and achieve its purposes only through its integration within a broader European network comprised of areas and countries that share common characteristics and experiences. This is a prospect that has the potential to minimize or bypass the effects of the aforementioned drawbacks and introduce a dynamic that could invigorate the field of music theory and analysis at the European 'theatre of operations' in several respects.

#### Keywords

National or regional character, musical pedagogy, music anthropology.

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