



The Life and Twelve-Note Music of Nikos Skalkottas

Eva Mantzourani

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Nikos Skalkottas is perhaps the last great 'undiscovered' composer of the twentieth century. In the 1920s he was a promising young violinist and composer in Berlin, and a student of Schoenberg, who included him among his most gifted pupils. It was only after his return to Greece in 1933 that Skalkottas became an anonymous and obscure figure, working in complete isolation until his death in 1949. Most of his works remained unpublished and unperformed during his lifetime, and although he is largely known for his folkloristic tonal pieces, Skalkottas in fact concentrated predominantly on developing an idiosyncratic dodecaphonic musical language. Eva Mantzourani provides here a comprehensive study of this fascinating yet under-researched composer. The book, lavishly illustrated with musical examples, is divided into three parts. Part I comprises a critical biography that, by drawing extensively on his letters and other writings, reappraises the image of Skalkottas with which we are often presented. The main focus of the book, however, is on Skalkottas's twelve-note compositional processes, since these characterize the majority of his output, and are neither well-known nor fully understood. Part II presents the structural and technical features of his twelve-note technique, particularly the different types of sets and their manipulation, and his approach to musical forms. Part III consists of analytical case studies of several works, presented chronologically, which thus provide a diachronic framework within which Skalkottas's dodecaphonic compositional development can be more effectively viewed. This book underlines Nikos Skalkottas's importance as a composer with a distinctive artistic personality, whose work contributed to the development of twelve-note compositional practice, and who deserves a more significant position within the Western art music canon than that to which he is often assigned.

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