

Mikis' life for Greece, and over thirty years of Guy Wagner's life for Mikis

Mia zoi yia to Miki Theodoraki

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The relation between Mikis Theodorakis and Guy Wagner, which started in 1973 has now culminated in an unparalleled exhibition called „Mikis Theodorakis: témoin de notre époque“ whose opening incidentally marked the first celebration for Mikis' 80th birthday outside Greece.

The exhibition is the result of over 30 years of friendship between two men who share mutual respect and dedication to art as well as characteristics like for example a strong sense of justice and commitment to peace, absolute belief in their ideals and the undaunted and undefeated refusal to be bent and twisted to adapt to what other people might think is right and good.

The long symbiosis between these two men could only lead to this: Guy Wagner's ultimate biography of Mikis Theodorakis „Ein Leben für Griechenland“ and the immense wealth of this exhibition of all things to do with the Greek composer, collected over so many years – an exhibition which documents a life in which politics and art, idealism and bitter disillusionment, joy and horror were for ever intertwined as in no other life imaginable.

The items are exhibited in 6 rooms and despite the huge number of exhibits, Guy Wagner is said to have been somewhat upset when the premises of the Centre de Littérature in Mersch couldn't possibly hold any more and he reluctantly had to take several boxes of them back home....

One of the oldest photos on show is of Mikis and his mother – the great composer is all of two months old. Two of the most recent items are Mikis' video message for this exhibition and his latest book, only just published in Athens. Mikis Theodorakis himself no longer travels abroad to receive awards and honours. The physical tortures he was subjected to during his life are taking their toll and his legs, broken several times by his torturers, make travelling difficult for him.

His 80 years are divided into four major phases:

1925-1960: the fighting years, maturity, suffering, international acclaim

1960-1967: the happy years, the „War of the Epitaphios“ cycles of songs, music for plays, Lambrakis Youth, cultural revolution in Greece

1967-1974: the dark years, dictatorship, resistance, arrests, concentration camps, exile, world tours and triumphant return to Greece

1974-2005: political commitment, parliament, minister, leader of the ERT orchestras, composer of symphonies,



„Every visitor can put together his own Theodorakis concert and video documents“

ballets, oratorios and operas, living legend.

A special collection illustrates Theodorakis' manifold and sometimes unsuspected relations with Luxembourg.

Finally over a hundred photographs from Mikis' life and Greek history are exhibited on the second floor.

It was there that we watched the slide-show that officially opened the exhibition, and I was very moved to see Theodorakis' parents, elderly people then, two heads shorter than their famous son who involuntarily caused them so much grief and worry. How many times did they not know where exactly he had been abducted to or if he was still alive at all? I looked at the loving, lined face of his father and thought of the time he was called to come and collect the body of his supposedly dead son. Yorgos Theodorakis walked past his son three times – Mikis had been so tortured and beaten that he was unrecognizable even to his own father.

Then the photos or film excerpts of Mikis picking up and carrying a banner sprayed with blood during a demonstra-

tion, the dead friends, the emaciated and tortured prisoners, the trials

There is also some footage of his wife and two young children with him in the harsh banishment region of Zatouna where even his children were subjected to police harassment because the father's spirit COULD NOT be broken.

And later in his life there is a happy Theodorakis, a grandfather proudly playing with one of his four grandsons....

The exhibits include compositions and poems from as early as 1936 of the teenage Theodorakis but also, among other things, a page written later by Mikis while in prison, asking permission for certain things... this request was famously refused „for not obeying orders“ and became one of Theodorakis' best-known and most bitter songs.

Incidentally, the event is not so much a „classic“ exhibition where you look at immobile things, safe behind thick glass – it is rather an interactive multi-media show. For although there are indeed photos, manuscripts, books on or by Mikis Theodorakis, CDs as well as the good old vinyl records, there are also videos, films or slide-shows that one is free to look at as one likes, next to posters and brochures in various languages etc etc. Doubtlessly one of the most spectacular facets of this event is the fact that every, and I mean EVERY, recorded note ever composed by Theodorakis can be listened to (thanks to Guy Wagner's son Serge) – every visitor can put together his own Theodorakis concert and video documents! For true Theodorakis freaks this is the closest we'll ever get to heaven!

So – do not delude yourselves that you can fully appreciate this exhibition in one single visit. On the contrary – the best thing to do would be to rent a room in Mersch and go to the Centre de Littérature for a couple of hours every day.

Thanks to Guy Wagner's unprecedented achievement and unflagging dedication, the legacy of the man who brought the greatest contemporary poems to the humblest Greek homes is safe for all those who are still to come.

The exhibition is open daily except Saturdays and Sundays until 22nd April.

Later this year it will go to Crete and then to Athens. It will find its permanent home either in a new museum on the island where Theodorakis' origins lie or in the Archives „Lilian Voudouri“ in Athens' „Megaron Mousikis“: Our loss, most definitely – but the Greek people's gain.

Frankly, I am dying to know what they will have to say about it.