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# Music and intertextuality in Aristophanic comedy

Angeliki Varakis

## *Introduction*

Like a landscape, a soundscape is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of the world; it is a site in which meaning is contested and negotiated. An important part of a performance's soundscape is its music which is usually prepared in advance and integrated into the total directorial and scenographical conception framing the production emotionally, narratively, temporally and spatially. Descriptive terms like 'evocative', 'festive' or 'celebratory' are frequently used to characterise the music of an Aristophanic production. Even when these indicate a positive response, they are often inadequate descriptions for outlining the function of music in Aristophanic theatre that in its original context served a much more complex role than to simply create an uplifting atmosphere.

I want to consider more closely the various functions of music in Aristophanic performance, taking into account the intertextual and parodic quality of the comedy, by using Karolos Koun's 1966 production of *Frogs* as my case study.<sup>1</sup> In my analysis I refer to the performance's 'musical soundscape' which I use interchangeably with 'music' and covers the songs included in the comedy, but also the music and musical sounds that are not indicated in the script but added by directorial intent.<sup>2</sup>

The 1966 production featured the modernist musical compositions of avant-Garde artist Jani Christou<sup>3</sup> and made use of a wide range of musical styles and sounds borrowed from different traditions that helped enhance the humour of the play and challenge the distinction between

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<sup>1</sup> My analysis of the production's music has relied extensively on the listening of the audio recording of the London 1967 re-staging of the production which is held at the British Library sound collections. The recording offers a very clear aural account of the production's soundscape including the vocal responses of the spectators allowing one to gain a valuable glimpse not only of the stylistic qualities of the music but also of the broader impact that specific sounds and musical choices had in the creation of contrasting moods.

<sup>2</sup> Patrice Pavis defines this simply as 'music used in a performance.' See Pavis (1998), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Christou (1926-1970) was among the most provocative and engaging composers of the twentieth century musical Avant Garde. The most comprehensive study of Christou's work is Anne Martine Lucciano's book *Jani Christou: The Works and Temperament of a Greek Composer* which introduces the reader to the composer's musical personality and distinctive periods of work and includes a chapter dedicated to his work in theatre titled 'Music for the Theatre' 56-88.

seriousness and funniness through inserting a tragic chorus into a comedy. Through looking at Christou's musical soundscape, I hope to highlight the significant role of the composer in the stage interpretation of the comedy who through their musical choices add their own layer of meaning to the Aristophanic world impacting upon the audience's appreciation of the play. As I shall argue, Christou was not solely interested to embellish the comedy with popular tunes but to also playfully capture Aristophanes' intertextual and popular style of writing as embodied in the language of the play and to stay true to what he believed were the original intentions of the comic poet.

Before delving into my analysis of Christou's music, I think it is useful to briefly consider the different ways in which Aristophanic music is thought to have functioned in antiquity in order to get a fuller picture of the many ways in which music and song can shape the meaning of the comedy.

### ***Artistophanic Music in Antiquity***

Although we have no surviving examples of musical scores from antiquity we do however know that Greek drama was essentially a musical form of theatre and that music was integral to the overall sensory experience that made up the performance in fifth century Athens. In *Poetics*, Aristotle cites music as one of the most important means of staging drama alongside speech (1447a 16-20) and that the musical elements were what set drama apart from epic poetry (1462a 15-17). According to Robson, at least 20% of the lines in fifth century comedies would have been sung. In addition to this, numerous passages were chanted with some form of musical accompaniment.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from being a large component of the comic performance, music in Aristophanic theatre was also very intertextual.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Robson (2009), 141.

<sup>5</sup> Building upon the ideas of French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the term "intertextuality" was coined by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in her writings of the late 1960s, and quickly became probably the most influential idea in literary criticism during the 1970s and early 1980s. For more on the origins and history of the term, see G. Allen, *Intertextuality*, (2022).

What does this mean? It means that the comedy would have featured a diverse range of pre-existing tunes and lyrics borrowed from other theatrical genres such as tragedy and dithyramb; and contemporary styles such as funeral songs, paeans, praise songs, wedding hymns and ceremonial music. As Bernhard Zimmermann states in his insightful analysis of Aristophanic theatre with regards to meter and music:

Just as a multitude of discourses contributes to the content and language of Aristophanic comedy and just as a multitude of texts—be they literary works, texts of daily use, or texts stemming from political discourse—are alluded to through acute references, so also does the metrical skeleton mirror this polyphony and multiformity from a musical point of view.<sup>6</sup>

This selection of a plethora of lyrical meters would have been carefully and often deliberately selected by the comic poet, bringing along with it a long list of associations for performers and audiences alike that would have contributed towards enhancing the parodic quality of the play by creating a parallel to other music with which the audience was already familiar. In a seminal 1985 article, titled “The Place of Intertextuality in Music Studies,” Robert Hatten outlines a theory of musical intertextuality. He suggests that intertextuality in music operates on two essential levels: stylistic and strategic. Stylistic intertextuality occurs when a composer adopts distinctive features of a pre-existing style without reference to any specific work while strategic intertextuality is more pointed, occurring when a composer or in case of Greek comedy, the comic poet makes a deliberate choice to reference a particular earlier or contemporary work or works for various reasons such as to parody the original.<sup>7</sup>

For example, in Aristophanic comedy and by means of certain metrical forms, especially if these were rare in comedy, the poet alerted the spectator to the parodied model. In *Frogs* the most obvious example of musical parody and strategic intertextuality comes during the poetic contest between Euripides and Aeschylus where we have Euripides’ musical and lyrical innovations presented in stark contrast to the traditional tunes of Aeschylus. According to C. W. Marshall, in the contest scene, Aristophanes’ comedic brilliance is achieved ‘by having the two poets imitating the other’s lyrics instead of them boasting for their own musical accomplishments, allowing the mockery to emerge more clearly’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Zimmermann (2014), 139.

<sup>7</sup> See Hatten (1985), 70

<sup>8</sup> See Marshall (2020), 20. In a modern rendering of the play the stylistic difference between the two must capture musically this sense of new versus old, in order for the audience to appreciate the debate in a way that would be

Another important function of music that is highlighted by Zimmermann is related to characterisation where he describes how Aristophanes makes use of certain associations inherent in a given lyrical meter in order to characterize the comic chorus. He brings forth as an example the parodos of *Frogs* where an application of ionic rhythm emerges. As he explains 'by delivering the entrance song in ionic rhythm, the chorus identify themselves as followers of Dionysus, because ionic rhythms with their emotional appeal have their proper place in the cult of Dionysus, which was introduced from the East.'<sup>9</sup>

In the comedy's episodic scenes, audiences would have also encountered lyrics that evoke predominantly traditional type of popular songs that are often connected to a specific comic character or a particular event within the play, such as a wedding. The insertion of popular songs and recognisable tunes from daily life would have served to uplift the spectators and were often used to punctuate the spoken parts of the play adding structure, texture and variety, growing organically out of the action. These songs were far from elevated but would have exercised huge popular appeal enhancing the popular spirit and festive atmosphere of the comedy.

Although the above list of examples is by no means exhaustive, it does however show how Aristophanic performance featured a variety of musical genres and traditions ranging from popular songs to ritual prayers for a number of different purposes. In this respect it opened and still opens a world of possibilities for composers to playfully experiment with different and contrasting musical styles from their own contemporary reality in order to captivate the audience's emotional involvement in different ways and capture what Zimmermann describes as 'the polyphonous nature of the comedy'.<sup>10</sup>

Bearing this in mind I will now move on to discuss the function of music in Koun's 1966 production of *Frogs* which featured a distinctive blend of styles capturing musically the intertextual quality of the comedy.

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meaningful in their own contemporary context. As Peter Meineck correctly observes 'the challenge then in a new stage adaptation of *Frogs*, a play where different musical styles of Aeschylus and Euripides are central to the plot, is how to render the lyrics of these songs in a way that captures the essential differences between the two playwrights.' See Meineck, (2021), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Zimmermann (2014) 139.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## # *intertextual music of parody*

An aspect of the performance, that must have captured the audience's attention in Koun's production of *Frogs* that premiered in the Herodes Atticus theatre in the summer of 1966 was its innovative 'musical soundscape'. The 'unearthly' melodies of the performance were highly unusual for Aristophanic comedy that in the sixties was mainly associated with uplifting popular tunes through the National Theatre productions of Alexis Solomos.<sup>11</sup> But the music was also noticeably different in style, sound and rhythm to Manos Hatzidakis' bittersweet familiar rebetica melodies of the Art Theatre's award-winning *Birds* that had premiered a few years earlier. It was described by one reviewer as 'more high-minded and complex' due to the music's lack of stylistic coherence and the inclusion of odd strands of sounds produced by an unusual combination of instruments such as bells, drums, trumpets, mandolins and a bagpipe of Cretan origins.<sup>12</sup>

But why did the composer Christou decide to use a variety of musical instruments that produced unusual sounds and to create a musical pastiche that was not representative, as he himself had admitted, of his musical style?

Anna Lucciano in her important study about the work of Christou, convincingly argues that Christou's choices were not a matter of showcasing his personal style or composing lyrics of high quality but a matter of penetrating into Aristophanes' mindset with regards to music' in order to better capture the essence of the comedy.<sup>13</sup>

But what exactly is the essence of the comedy?

According to the composer's reading of the play, Aristophanes' comedy was characterised by two key factors that were embodied in the language of the play and which inspired his musical compositions; its popular and parodic style of writing.

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<sup>11</sup> Alexis Solomos was the Artistic director of the National Theatre between 1955-1964 where he directed eight out of the eleven surviving Aristophanic comedies, using grandiose spectacle and impressive choreography.

<sup>12</sup> See Wardle (1967).

<sup>13</sup> See Lucciano (2000), 82-83. Establishing an in-depth philosophical understanding of the comedy's essence and Aristophanes' way of thinking was an important part of Christou's creative process. Once he established an understanding of the poet's intentions and the comedy's essence, the music came naturally and effortlessly. As Costis Zouliatis observes 'Christou philosophises before the making...he does not proceed with the sounds unless a solid philosophical ground has been first cultivated...'. See Zouliatis (2018), 1496.

In the performance of the comedy, the popular style was musically captured through the songs that featured in the performance on four separate occasions and were connected to either a single character (e.g. Aeaclus song) or a group of people (e.g. the contest song). These songs grew organically out of the action and complemented nicely the slapstick comedy of the episodic scenes. They also helped punctuate the spoken parts of the play adding structure, texture and variety to the comedy whilst uplifting the audience.

The parodic style on the other hand was musically captured in the use of a variety of sounds, and pop tunes (classical or contemporary) which were borrowed from other musical traditions and every-day life. As the composer explained,

The music I used in *The Frogs* is basically the music of everyday life. I mean I used jazz elements and popular music from Greece and abroad. In short, anything you might hear on switching on the radio.<sup>14</sup>

For example, just before the competition between Aeschylus and Euripides commenced, the music imitated the style of Verdi and Wagner. More specifically, the chorus's song that was addressed towards the muses was delivered in a style that alluded to opera with the accompaniment of classical music. The delivery was exaggerated, loud and funny. In the audio recording of the 1967 re-staging of the play it was clear to hear that following the end of the operatic song - that was sealed with a grand announcement that the competition was about to commence - the audience responded with applause and laughter proving that the music had a humorous effect. Most Greek critics discerned Christou's playful intentions describing the scene as 'a parody of the operatic style' and full of humour.<sup>15</sup> Another example of parody that generated laughter was the singing of a *miroloi* (Greek lament) that accompanied the 'corpse scene' at the beginning of the play as well as the individual prayers of Aeschylus and Euripides which were sung alongside the chorus and were delivered just before the start of their contest. The musical prayers were chanted in an exaggerated and humorous manner this time incorporating liturgical elements inspired by the Greek orthodox tradition inserting occasionally as an accompaniment to their words short tunes from Russian composer Mussorgsky. This created an odd audio collage of different musical styles. In the case of

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<sup>14</sup> Lucciano (2000), 82.

<sup>15</sup> Ploritis (1966)

Euripides, the repetitive sound of church bells was also added. This was a perfect example of a musical pastiche.

The 1966 production also featured a broad range of unusual 'found' sounds (e.g. the sound of bells, tweeting of birds, drums, etc.) that did not always display a direct relevance to the action or words of the characters. These sounds which are comparable to the non-diegetic<sup>16</sup> sounds of cinema, exhibited the composer's interest in exploring creatively the use and impact of everyday sounds when taken out of their original context, a visible trend of many avant-garde composers during the sixties, echoing John Cage's work and views as expressed in his essay *The Future of Music: Credo* (1937) where all sounds (found and extra-musical) have the potential to be used creatively.<sup>17</sup> As Christou mentioned with regards to his musical choices,

Music has now gone beyond the boundaries within which it was enclosed for so many centuries; within the term 'music', the composer of our time includes even the sounds and the footsteps of the man in the street.<sup>18</sup>

Arguably, in Aristophanic comedy which does not demand stylistic coherence as gradual shifts, sudden contrasts and incongruities are part of the art form<sup>19</sup>, Christou found a liberating medium of expression to test some of his own progressive ideas around the meaning and function of music through experimenting with various styles, tones and sounds that would not normally feature in a comedy and which bore no direct dramatic relevance to the plot.

These random and seemingly 'misplaced' sounds and tunes that were included at various sections of the play as a musical accompaniment to the dialogue produced an incongruous effect and were described by the composer as a 'musical joke' and 'fun' thing to do.<sup>20</sup> This was clearly the case, when just before the contest begun, Euripides announced to Dionysus that he wanted to pray to his own gods; a sudden unexpected loud blowing trumpet and repetitive church bell were sounded discrediting the seriousness of his declaration. These randomly sequenced sounds accompanied the prayer for its entire duration. Loredana Di Virgilio in her

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<sup>16</sup> Non-diegetic sound in film is represented as coming from a source outside the story space. The distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic depends on our understanding of the conventions of film viewing and listening with some sounds coming from the story world and others coming from outside the world. A play with diegetic and non-diegetic conventions can be used to create ambiguity or to surprise the audience (comedy).

<sup>17</sup> See Cage, J. (1961), 3-6.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Lucciano (2000), 82.

<sup>19</sup> 'Aristophanes (it must by now be obvious) is a writer of considerable stylistic diversity, whose mobility indeed presupposes a diverse range of stylistic levels, techniques, and effects for him to be mobile with and between.' See Silk (2000), 121.

<sup>20</sup> Lucciano, 82.

article 'Some Thoughts on Humour and Music in Aristophanic plays' provides an indicative list of examples of musical comedy strategies for making the audience laugh. One mentioned is a particular form of surprise, which she calls *aprosdoketon*, and which she defines as the 'disappointment of the spectator's expectation'.<sup>21</sup> In the 1966 production the use of the operatic style, the blending of religious chanting with classical music and use of extra-musical sounds as part of the same musical soundscape must have produced a similar surprising effect adding to the humour of the scene. One could go as far as to argue that for some spectators the surprising effect could have been seen to have captured one of the key themes of *Frogs* around old versus new with regards to all kinds of artistic expression, including music. In this respect, it is entirely plausible that some members of the audience may have identified in the figure of the avant-garde composer Christou, the modern version of the artistic innovator Euripides.

### ***Ritual as parody with a serious undertone***

Aristophanes' parodic style was also connected to the comedy's world of ritual. Researchers who specialise in the study of Aristophanes in general and in *Frogs* in particular agree that this play is the most Dionysiac of all the preserved comedies. Indeed the way this Dionysism is perceived by commentators comprises a wide range of scholarly assessments.<sup>22</sup> Although Christou was not a classicist, he did however adopt a scholarly attitude in his study of the comedy, dedicating a considerable amount of time in analysing the comedy's ritual dimension in order to fully understand its distinctive dramatic features in relation to its form, content, intentions and relationship with the broader civic and religious context.

As Christou explained,

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<sup>21</sup> According to Di Virgilio: 'Although *aprosdoketa* may regard many aspects of the text and the stagecraft, for example the appearance of an unforeseen character acting or dressing in an unexpected way, in the original text musical *aprosdoketa* are also traceable from metrics which gives us an idea of what surprising effects could happen from a musical point of view.' Di Virgilio (2019) 53.

<sup>22</sup> Emilio Suarezde la Torre in their article 'Religion, theatre, and the salvation of the city: some thoughts on Aristophanes' *Frogs*' provides a list with the most substantial scholarly studies that adopt a ritual reading of *Frogs*. See Suarezde la Torre (2016), 450.

Many of these studies were published in the sixties (for example, by Gelzer 1960, Russo 1961, Segal 1961, Fraenkel 1962, Sicking 1963, Stanford 1963) when a renewed interest in the ritual aspect of Greek theatre was prominent within academic as well as artistic circles. The experimental theatre of the 1960s (for example, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Joseph Chaikin, Julian Beck and Judith Malina's troupe the Living Theatre) often inspired by the theories of Antonin Artaud, favoured ritualistic work rooted in the body that sought to transcend the limits of verbal, cognitive-based communication.

God of Attic drama, Dionysus, with his 'passions' created the form of comedy. Thus, on one level the work is concerned with contemporary issues, whilst on a second level, it opens up the whole Dionysian mystery...Today through my music I have tried to bring these ritual elements to the surface. It is only in this way that the extent of the parody...may be explained and the fact that the chorus moves from highly comical situations to a ritual atmosphere may be justified.<sup>23</sup>

From Christou's words it is clear to see that Aristophanic parody was directly connected to the comic poet's use of ritual. In fact, the ritual origins of comedy explained, in his view, the poet's extensive use of ritual parody. But, unlike the comical prayers of Aeschylus and Euripides, in the case of the chorus, the allusion to contemporary ritual practice was not exclusively connected to laughter. Instead, it helped create 'a ritual atmosphere'. At this point it is important to mention that traditional definitions of parody usually only discuss it in the stricter sense of something intended to ridicule the text it parodies. There is also a broader, extended sense of parody that may not include ridicule, and may be based on many other uses and intentions and this is something that is most often encountered in postmodern theatre. According to L. Parker,

It is often assumed that parody is designed to ridicule its original, but that is not necessarily so. Parody (or pastiche) can be used to point up a whole range of parallelisms...In fact, writers on Aristophanes commonly use parody in a loose sense to cover all sorts of pastiche and allusion.<sup>24</sup>

Parker's understanding of parody acknowledges the close relationship between parody and intertextuality. Her analysis is based on a close reading of the comedies' lyrics and their meters and concludes that when there is no evident clash of style within the lines of a song such as would make them laughable and when the lyric meter that alludes to other traditions is of high quality it is likely that there was no humorous intent. Although Parker's analysis does not take into account the delivery of the song (which could have very well ridiculed the original), she does raise an important point regarding the often misguided assumption that musical parody must always serve to ridicule its original, especially when encountered in the context of a comic performance. In discussing the use of song parody in various cultural contexts Ian Brodie also describes parody as something that does not always display a humorous effect through listing a range of examples. As he states,

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Lucciano, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Parker (1999), 6.

Parody does not have to be humorous: the folksongs of soldiers' labour, and to commemorate disasters are frequently parodies that make a case for this historical moment being analogous to another, and, save the grim comedy of history repeating itself, the result is rarely humour. Derek Penslar notes the history of Haggadah parodies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that recast the divine liberation story to a more urgent secular context and Michel Lagrée locates the grotesque parodies of ritual that accompanied the extreme brutal violence of the French Revolution.<sup>25</sup>

In Koun's production the liturgical chanting of the chorus of initiates in the Greek Orthodox religious tradition, was an example of ritual parody that alluded to a Greek orthodox liturgy without displaying a humorous intent. The audio recording of the production indicates that it was neither exaggerated nor funny in its delivery. The orgiastic exodus of the chorus that was staged with the accompaniment of jazz music was arguably another example of a musical parody with no humorous intent, but which was incorporated into the performance in order to build up the tension towards the ritual climax of the finale which was explosive and anarchic through the loud cries of an orgiastic chorus. The music on both occasions was highly emotive and did not appear to generate laughter as was the case with the operatic in style prayer or the prayers of the tragic poets. As the composer explained this choice applied mainly to the chorus,

With the music and especially the chorus parts, I tried...to render prominent the element of ritualism...the play is interesting, quite openly reflecting the various stages of an Eleusinian Mystery...Aristophanes was of course making points relevant to his day and times, and making fun of the Mysteries too, but deep down it's not all fun, and in spite of all the irreverence and fun, the good old archetypes are at work. I tried to bring this aspect out, by using liturgical elements, even in pop style at times as an undercurrent...I had accepted to do this play, the music that is, because the director, Koun, let me use the chorus in this manner.<sup>26</sup>

Through its frequent allusion and use of material from ritual, Aristophanic comedy offered the director and composer the opportunity to challenge the dichotomy between tragedy and comedy, with regards to their respective claims to seriousness and mirthfulness through adding a more serious tone to a comic scene.

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<sup>25</sup> Brodie (2020), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Lucciano, 83. The quote indicates that the director gave the composer the freedom to experiment without any restrictions. The close collaboration between Koun and Christou is also noted in Koun's own writings 'There was always a deep spiritual connection between us, a perfect correspondence. We constantly sparked each other's imagination, Christou through sounds and me through visual images.' See Koun (1986), 83.

In the parabasis, the predominantly slapstick quality that dominated the episodic scenes through the exaggerated acting of the comic protagonists was suddenly transformed into a solemn ritual 'with no room for a knockabout Dionysus'.<sup>27</sup> An English reviewer described, the sound that ran through the theatre in the 1967 re-staging of the play in London like 'a rapidly repeated pedal point... with an effect of a gathering storm with the effect being amplified in the main chorus scenes choreographed as a pastoral of the dead.'<sup>28</sup>

But even in the less serious sections of the play, such as for example, when Dionysus is being flogged by Aeakus or the final judgment scene, the chorus intervened in the comic action through chanting in a liturgical style adding an ambivalent mood to the comedy and to the poet's attitude towards ritual and play. The music and physicality of the performance captured the emotively fluid atmosphere of the comedy through the chorus, which was described as 'grotesquely bobbing, jiggling and jumbing when being funny and profoundly moving in its solemn cadences'.<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to consider why the composer and director chose to add this sombre mood to the comedy by looking more closely at the broader context of the performance. Reviewers, such as Marios Ploritis, queried this decision: 'The climactic moment of the choreography imitated the magical invocation of the chorus of Persians...in what way does the initiates of *Frogs* relate to the barbarian chorus of the Persians?'<sup>30</sup> In a similar vein as Ploritis, reviewer Stathis Dromazos felt that the director and composer had misread the light-hearted role of the initiates in the comedy, treating them in a similar manner to that used in the dramatic representation of the tragic chorus in *Persians*. Dromazos made special reference to the fact that Koun had used the same famous composer as in his *Persians* (1966) and expressed the view that the tunes led the chorus to a Dionysiac frenzy with mystical undertones resulting in a stylistic inconsistency between the tragic representation of the choral sections and the buffoon-like acting of the main characters.<sup>31</sup> In Greece, where Greek tragedies and comedies

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<sup>27</sup> See Wardle, 1967.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *vening Standard*, (1967). Zimmermann identifies this mixture of comedy and seriousness in the parodos of *Frogs* where the chorus of initiates mix jokes and seriousness, humour and playfulness, with the goal of saying what is right. See Zimmerman (2014), 157.

<sup>30</sup> Ploritis (1966).

<sup>31</sup> See Dromazos (2003), 155-159. A discussion of Dromazos critical views are also discussed in Varakis (2007), 187.

are traditionally performed (and often repeated) as part of the same annual festival and where companies produce yearly productions of ancient Greek drama often using the same creative team, an intricate web of connections is created where allusions to previous stage interpretations are inevitable. In this intricate web, ancient Greek productions are not viewed as isolated events allowing for audiences, such as the critical reviewers Ploritis and Dromazos, to identify elements of past productions in the performance of present performances. It also makes it possible for theatre practitioners to respond to each other's work (or make reference to their own work) as would have happened in antiquity demonstrating how intertextuality can operate on many different levels and in many different ways when presenting ancient Greek drama as part of an annual festival.<sup>32</sup>

Taking into account Christou's reading of the comedy as a parody and ritual performance in which the element of initiation is fundamental, it is tempting to suggest that the composer intended to allude to his own seminal staging of the *Persians* - that had premiered a year earlier and was re-staged alongside *Frogs* in the 1967 World Theatre Season in London - within the wider intertextual world of the comedy with its frequent references to Aeschylean tragedy.

It is more likely, however, that with the use of a tragic chorus and ritual music, the composer wanted to underline the play's subject matter, which concerns a descent into *Hades* but also to capture the political message of the comedy that was originally performed at a time of a major political crisis. It was written and performed just a year before Athens surrendered to Sparta after they lost their fleet. Not only was there war, but there was also a political crisis as, in 411 BCE, there was an oligarchic coup. In *Frogs*, the chorus recommend the re-enfranchisement of those who had lost their citizenship following the failed oligarchic coup. This political crisis echoed the turbulent political situation of Greece at the time of the 1966 production.<sup>33</sup> In the parabasis, the chorus's call to the government to pardon political offenders spoke to the hearts and minds of Greek audiences. This was no laughing matter.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gonda Van Steen uses the term 'intertextuality' or 'stage dialectics' to describe these web of connections. See Van Steen, 141.

<sup>33</sup> During the 1960s, Greece was shaken by political clashes and violent social confrontations; incidents that were sealed with the military coup d'état in 1967. In July 1965, Prime Minister Papandreou and King Constantine were involved in a personal disagreement regarding the placement of the government's Ministers, resulting in Mr. Papandreou's resignation on July 15, 1965, that would change the modern political history of the country, leading to a period of political instability and division.

<sup>34</sup> The chorus of initiates in the parabasis is not just any insignificant chorus, but one which defines itself as ἱερός (675, 686), which gives it a particular authority. As Emilio Suarezde la Torre explain in his analysis of the parabasis

The parabasis and its elaborate metaphor spoke particularly for the left-wing members of the Greek audience.<sup>35</sup> A year later in 1967, the English press were equally enthused with the performance of the parabasis. Harold Hobson of *The Sunday Times* wondered how it would impact the Greek spectators 'when it is delivered in Athens under the 'new regime' of colonels who had just forced themselves in power' and D. A. N. Jones of the *New Statesman* made the point that Aristophanes' call for national unity and all round forgiveness was particularly felt by Greeks who had gathered in the audience in great numbers with some distributing anti-fascist leaflets outside the Aldwych Theatre.<sup>36</sup> The sombre mood that was created through Christou's evocative music, made the content of the politically charged parabasis all the more engaging and purposeful. The patriotic call to grant amnesty to those who were sentenced to live in exile was clearly articulated by the chorus leaders (played by Charalambous and Vouteli) who along with the rest of the group took off their half masks in order to direct their message straight at the audience. The decision to have the chorus remove their masks added an immediacy to the scene that was particularly engaging and amplified as it was addressed against a background of ritual music that was accompanied by a characteristic pattern-weaving by the dancers.<sup>37</sup>

Although the use of serious material borrowed from other contexts (e.g. tragedy) in the performance of Aristophanic comedy is most often associated with an intention to mock existing serious traditions in order to generate laughter, it is also possible, as was the case in the Art Theatre's 1966 production, for a solemn religious tune that alludes to other religious traditions or past tragic performances (e.g. *Persians*) to temporarily turn a comic scene into a sombre experience, especially if the duration of the choral section is lengthy as happens in

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in *Frogs* 'The chorus is composed of initiates in the Eleusinian mysteries and, just as in the parodos they had included a series of anapaests establishing a profile for those to be admitted among the privileged who attend the mysteries in terms of political 'righteousness', they insist now on similar arguments. The chorus of Eleusinians in the parabasis – who, in some way, has 'seen the truth' – was able to give advice to the citizens in terms of harmony for the city and reasonable behaviour in the delicate historical and political circumstances of fifth century Athens. The main message they send was perfectly in accordance with the arguments of the parodos and with those that reappeared in the final agon.' Suarezde la Torre (2016) 456-57.

<sup>35</sup> As Van Steen observes 'They understood the political plea of the transmitted *parabasis* (especially *Frogs* 687-691) as supporting progressive, leftist sympathisers, both ancient and modern, at the expense of the right wing conservatives punished after the abortive revolution of the Four Hundred...the spontaneously cheered mentions of democracy as well as a historical proposal of amnesty for those holding a political ideology contrary to their own, as they applied it to negotiations on behalf of long detained leftist prisoners of the Resistance and civil war'. Van Steen, (2000) 179.

<sup>36</sup> Jones (1967).

<sup>37</sup> Darlington, 1967.

*Frogs*. This gives the spectator the opportunity to pause their laughter and think about some of the comedy's key political themes.<sup>38</sup> In performance, music can play an important role in enhancing this perspective through its power to trigger powerful emotions.

### ***Conclusion***

Through my analysis of Christou's musical soundscape I have shown that music in Aristophanic performance can serve a much more meaningful purpose than to simply decorate the performance and uplift the audience, creating atmosphere alone. By trying to capture the parodic and intertextual quality of Aristophanes' language on a musical level rather than simply embellishing the comedy with popular tunes, Christou was able to add his own layer of meaning to the performance creating a pastiche of sounds and melodies that drew from different and often contrasting musical traditions and genres, capturing in this way the polyphonic nature of the comedy in true Aristophanic fashion. The mixture of tones, sounds and moods seemed appropriate for a modern rendering of Aristophanes' *Frogs* with its dark setting, especially when seen against the broader context of Greece's 1960's political climate of national division. It captured the ambivalent mood of the country at the time. But in a comedy where music and musical experimentation is also one of its key themes, Christou's 'high minded and complex soundscape' could also be seen to have captured the essence of the play's contest around old versus new with regards to all kinds of artistic expression, including music at a time when theatre companies and artists from around the world were starting to challenge the centrality of language in the stage interpretation of ancient Greek drama.

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<sup>38</sup> As Goldhill observes part of the essence of Old Comedy – 'how far, how serious, how comic, how literal...are questions that Aristophanes' writing constantly poses for its readers and audiences.' Goldhill (1991) 194. Michael Silk in his study *Aristophanes and the definition of comedy* explores the enigma of 'serious comedy' and approaches Aristophanic comedy not in opposition to tragedy but as a world that in its openness is able to include aspects that are associated to serious genres. See Silk (2000).

Theatre director and scholar Magdalena Zira in a chapter titled 'Melancholia and Laughter: Modern Greek Productions of Aristophanes in the Twenty-First Century' describes how many avant-garde directors in Greece and Cyprus have in recent years chosen to approach Aristophanes through a more melancholic lens marking a turning point on how audiences may learn to appreciate and experience the humour of Aristophanes, especially at moments of political and financial crisis. See Zira (2020) 193-204.

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