

This is the Green Access transcript of the academic podcast 'Ichneutai by Sophocles: The Invention of (Theatre) Music?' by Konstantinos Thomaidis, as it appeared on the research podcast series Staging Sound: Reflecting Theatre Music and Sound Design in May 2023.

Ichneutai by Sophocles: The Invention of (Theatre) Music?

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by Konstantinos Thomaidis

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

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QUESTIONS BY: DAVID ROESNER AND MILLIE TAYLOR

00:00:23 Introduction

David Roesner:

Welcome to another episode of *Staging Sound*, our podcast on all things to do with sound and music and technology and theatre, obviously, and performance, and all those kind of things.

Today, I am very happy to welcome Konstantinos Thomaidis, who has also been on the previous episode, from which you will remember him. He is going to tell us a bit more about a project he has recently done, which was a combination of research and practice really. And that will take us very 'meta': it will tell us all about theatre *about* theatre music and music and sound and all matter of things, and I am very happy for him to explain.

Just as a reminder, Konstantinos is a Senior Lecturer in Drama, Theatre & Performance at the University of Exeter in the UK. He has published widely on all matters to do with voice and performance, and performer training as well, for example, [*Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*](#), which was in 2015. Also, the wonderfully concise

[*Theatre & Voice*](#) from 2017. He is also one of the editors of the [*Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*](#), which you may want to ask your library to subscribe to.

With me today, as my co-host and another interested person to ask Konstantinos questions or to find out more about his project, is Millie Taylor. Millie Taylor has also been on the podcast before. She is the Joop van den Ende Chair of the Musical at the University of Amsterdam. Again, also being a practitioner for many, many years, she has toured Britain and Europe as a freelance musical director in musical theatre, and she has published widely on the musical. But also, she has published recently [*Theatre Music and Sound at the RSC: Macbeth to Matilda*](#), a book from 2018 that is very much at the heart of the theme of our podcasts.

Welcome both of you.

Well, Konstantinos, I know you've got plenty to tell us, give us an insight into your project, which is about a Sophocles play. Tell us more about that.

00:02:33 On Sophocles's Satyr Play *Trackers* (Plot Summary)

Konstantinos Thomaidis:

Thank you, David, for the kind introduction. Thank you, Millie.

The play is called in Greek *Ichneuctai*; in English has been translated as *Trackers* and in German as *Sniffing Hounds*.¹ It is quite an interesting play because it hasn't had a very long performance history—and that's because it is a fragment. For centuries, it has been missing, and we only had something like two or three lines from Hellenistic or Byzantine commentators talking about the play—so, all we knew was that it was a satyr play written by Sophocles.

And then, about 100–110 years ago, between 1908 and 1912, an excavation took place in a town in Egypt, Oxyrhynchus. In there, they found papyri. And there was this big archaeological discovery, which was: in one of the papyri, we had 400 lines from the play: the opening of the play, almost 2/3 of the play. In a way, this is a play that's also, for us, a document of what a satyr play looked like, because we only have another satyr play surviving, by Euripides, and that's the only one and most complete fragment we have.

This [*Ichneutai*] is a play that dramatizes for us, and stages for us, the invention of music, at least according to Greek mythology. Essentially, it is one of the first plays of the European, or Western, canon that stages for us how music was *created* and how this first music was *received* by its listeners.

If I were to summarize the plot of the play, what happens is:

We are at the top of the mountain Cyllene, which is in Peloponnese, in Greece, or the mythical Arcadia, nowadays Corinth. God Apollo comes in really upset—because it is a satyr play, the gods are sort of between comedy and tragedy, so still of course very godlike and stately but at the same time we see him a little bit dishevelled. And, he sort of says, ‘I’ve been running throughout Greece, I have this big problem’. Which is: Apollo was the god of cattle, and his cattle has been stolen and he’s running around Greece asking: ‘What happened? Did somebody use magic? Where are my cattle?’ And he proclaims that whoever helps him to find the cattle is going to win a lot from him.

And here comes Silenus, who is the old leader of the satyrs, saying: ‘OK, I heard something about the prize, who was calling?’ And Apollo says again, ‘I have this issue’ and he [Silenus] says ‘I’m gonna find it for you. And what’s the prize exactly?’ And, very interestingly, Apollo says: ‘it’s gold and liberty, freedom’—so whoever brings me my cattle back is going to win these two things. And Silenus says to us ‘OK, I have a whole troop of my kids and followers, the satyrs, and they’re going to come and help’.

Enter the satyrs, the chorus of satyrs, and they start searching. The first, I don’t know, I would say 100 or 150 lines of the play are them trying to figure out where the cattle is. They are sniffing and working on all fours, trying to find where they are, in all sorts of comedic manners because they get really confused. They follow the traces on the ground and, at a certain point, they start getting really, really puzzled, because the feet seem to have been walking backwards, and they [the satyrs] don’t know what’s happening. (As an Athenian audience, you know from the myth that the god Hermes did that to the cattle).

They arrive at the entrance of a cave at Mount Killini, Cyllene in English. And what happens there is: as they search for the cattle, they hear a sound that they’ve never had before, and they all get so frozen, they’re, like, so scared. They are in awe. They cannot move.

Silenus, who follows them, does not hear the sound. He's like, 'why have you stopped? Why are you frozen?' and 'we have a job to do. There is gold and freedom waiting for us', and all that. But the satyrs are sort of 'Father, there's this sound. I don't know what's going on. I've never heard it before'. He [Silenus]... there is a whole comedic speech that he does against them, saying 'oh you're such cowards, *I* did this and that in my youth and *you're* afraid of a sound, I'm going to follow you.' By the end of the speech, they start searching again.

And we hear the sound for a second time. Silenus goes 'OK, that's something I've never had before. I'm really scared. You go and find it. I don't care about gold and freedom. Bye'—and he disappears.

So, then the satyrs go: 'We hear the sound coming from underneath the earth. We're going to start stomping and dancing until we scare whomever makes the sound out, and they come up'. And they do that, there is a whole scene where they stomp and dance.

Who comes out is the nymph of the mountain, Mount Cyllene. The important thing is, in ancient Greek imagination, this is not a goddess that resides in the mountain, it's actually animism: it is the mountain that comes out in female / god / nymph form and talks to us. She basically says: 'Oh you really disrupted what I was doing underneath. What do you want? Why did you make all this fuss? What was all this sound?' (Already you can see that the dramaturgy is [along the lines of] 'What is this sound? Who said this? Who said that? Can you define this sound for me?')

So, she comes out, and because she knows the satyrs from before, she sort of confides in them.

What has been going on is: Zeus had an affair with another nymph - as he always did—and out of this affair Maia gave birth to a new god, Hermes. And Maia, the mother, got sick after birth. So, the nymph Cyllene has been looking after the child, she has been the nurse. And they are hiding that child in the cave because they don't want Hera, Zeus's wife to find out about this affair.

Then the satyrs ask, 'OK, what's this sound? Because we've been hearing a sound and we don't know what that is.' And again, the nymph, after a long discussion, confides in them that the child, because they're a god, within six days grew up, grew really intelligent, and invented something new, a new machine –and that machine is an instrument. (For the Greeks, that's the

invention of the lyre, an ancient string instrument.) And everybody's like, 'oh, what's this machine? What is the animal?'

There follows a whole riddle scene, because what Cyllene says is that animal did not have a voice when it was alive but now when it's dead, it has a voice. She describes the instrument built out of an animal as having a voice that the animal did not have beforehand. And as she describes how the instrument was built, she says... There is a whole game with the satyrs what 'was the animal like, was this or that?', and they end up with Cyllene saying to them that it was a tortoise and the child used it as the resonator and then used reeds and the entrails, the guts of sheep to create the first cords [strings] and he stabilized the resonator, to create the resonance, with skin from cattle.

She carries on talking about the instrument, but of course, the satyrs go 'what?' And then they realize that the little god escaped and stole his brother's cattle, and that the cattle are underneath the earth, and of course, they accuse the little god as a thief.

Cyllene goes: 'How dare you accuse the son of a god?' This is, roughly, where the fragment ends.

But we know the end of the play, from commentators and from a couple of other sources, for example, there is the *Hymn to Hermes*.² We know that in the end what happens is that Apollo returns on stage and the satyrs tell him, 'this is who stole your cattle' and that they found the cattle. Apollo gives them gold and freedom and there is a big 'party', dancing and music, etcetera.

Then the two brothers reconcile with each other. And what happens is: Apollo, who also hears the sound of the music, goes, 'Oh, what's that?', so he decides to forgive his brother and also hand the cattle in to him (in Greek mythology, Hermes is the god of cattle, the leader of cattle), on the condition that Hermes gives him the lyre—and this is how Apollo becomes the god of music.

So, this is roughly the plot, and this is the end of the play.

00:11:53 On the Research for the Production by Mikhail Marmarinos

David Roesner:

Amazing. And great to have the whole context there because obviously, as you say, it's hardly been done. It is not a familiar play. Some Greek plays we know very well, and they have been done also here in Germany a lot but this one I'm hardly aware of. Can you tell us a bit more about... So, you have mentioned already that that there is music and the invention of music and the invention of instruments, and also it sounds like the e-effects and a-effects of music are front and centre in this piece. You talk about the fear, you talk about how it's the unknown, and Chion and others call it the acousmatic nature of that sound, that sound where we can't detect the source. We can't see where it's coming from, and therefore we also don't know what it is. That seems to be an almost anthropological constant that those kinds of sounds disorient us or make us curious in a positive way, and, in this case, to begin with it's fear.

So, you have been involved in the production of that play and you have mentioned before to us that there was a long research period. Obviously, there's some textual research, I assume, some looking into, you know, 'what can we find?' 'What versions are there?' 'Where might fragments belong?'— etcetera, etcetera. But I'm sure you've also researched musicality of ancient Greek theatre and so forth. Tell us a bit about that, that background and that research.

00:13:14 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

This particular production was directed by Mikhail Marmarinos.³ Mikhail Marmarinos is one of the most prominent Greek directors since the '80s in Greece; in a way, he is the advocate of postmodernism, devised theatre, includes a lot of physicality and chorality in his plays, and over the years he has shifted also towards performance, and site-specificity, and what we would call here in Germany composed theatre.⁴ The production, it was the first full staging of the play for one of the big festivals: in Epidaurus, in Greece.

And for this, we were lucky enough to have an almost three-year period of research. What happened was: in 2019, when Mikhail Marmarinos decided to stage the play, we were co-teaching at a workshop at the ancient theatre of the Dodoni, on Greek drama and more particularly on sound and voice around Greek drama. He was teaching acting classes—and his approach is always very musical, or at least informed by music and sound—and I was doing the voice classes, but I was also his assistant in the acting classes, bringing in the element of voice

and sound. So, the first thing we did was that we explored the text really deeply with the trainees regarding the plot and the characters, but also the moments when music occurs. My job, by the end of this—because I brought in my researcher self as well—was to create what I call a ‘sound map’ of the text.⁵ Because I studied a little bit of philology before (my second degree was philology before I left for the UK), I went in[to the text] and I studied all the words for their meaning in terms of the Greek context, especially words that had to do something with language and sound and music—what they meant in context—and sort of traced the trajectory of how people perceive sound or how sound appears in the play. That became the basis of a second phase of research the following year, in 2020. The play was commissioned by the Athens and Epidaurus Festival for 2020, but then the pandemic came. And what we did with the company was that we spent about three months online, researching the play further, starting rehearsals. Then the production was staged in 2021 in Epidaurus. It had a small tour. There were two performances in Epidaurus. Then, importantly, the production a month later was performed at Mount Ziria, which is Cyllene, it was site-specific, next to the Cave of Hermes. This was the very first production of ancient theatre that happened in that place. And then it [the production] ended up in Athens, in the Odeon of Herodotus Atticus, very close to the theatre of Dionysus, under the Acropolis.

00:16:12: Some Findings

In that period of research, yes, we worked around ancient Greek music and sounds, and some of the findings are quite interesting.⁶

So, if we look at the text, the first things that became obvious out of this mapping, this sonic mapping of the play, is that the play sonically begins by the usual sort of rhetoric and *text-based sonicity* of ancient Greek drama. When Apollo comes on stage, he uses words like ‘I proclaim’ or ‘whoever listens, this is the text like that I swear by’, etcetera. Then, when Silenus and the satyrs come, we have a slight shift to *quality of voice*, not necessarily text: they say, ‘I heard your passionate voice, and I thought you were upset. Do you need my help?’ And then, as we keep progressing, as the satyrs start listening to that first sound, the language becomes a little bit confusing, because they don't have vocabulary. They keep shifting between terms. And the terms they use are a lot of the time *φωνή*, *phone*, which means voice, or *φθέγμα*, *phthegma*, which

means ‘word’ or ‘text coming either by an animal or a human or an inanimate source’. They don’t know the source, as you said, for them it’s very acousmatic. And there is this whole middle part where there is linguistic confusion that reflects their state of reception.

Then, when Cyllene appears and they talk about it [the sound], then we start having really precise terms. The satyrs start saying: ‘Oh, I hear this *vibration* coming through the earth.’ Then they say, ‘oh, this vibration which comes *from a string*’. Διαχράσσω. So: they start realizing that the source has to do something with a string, and then, ‘this is vibration-from-a-string that comes through scratching’. So they have then another word. They realize that it’s, you know, tactile and there is a human involved, sort of a hand involved behind it. And as they talk, Cyllene says to them: at the beginning this sound was made, this voice was made; and then the first sound; and then what she calls *aiolisma*, which is what we would call melismatic sound, a little bit more differentiated; and then she calls it *melos symphonon*, which means melody that goes up and down and creates, you know, *symphonic*, which means harmonic, sound. Essentially, we hear that, first, we have a physical movement that produces a certain kind of sound; then a sound that gets more varied; a sound that acquires melodic features; and in the end, a sound that acquires harmonic features.

So, Cyllene and the satyrs, when they talk about it, not only do they try to deal with this new sound, but they give us also *a map towards understanding music*. They say to us: you can hear at first the sound, and then, if you have to decipher it, you can hear to sound individually, then sound together as melody, and then sound together as harmony. For me, there are two interpretations: either, as they hear little Hermes playing ‘downstairs’, under the earth, Hermes becomes a little bit more skilled, and the music develops. Or, Hermes, because he is a god, already is very skilled, but the listeners—the satyrs and Cyllene—become more skilled listeners and, as they hear, they listen to this music a little bit better or in a more complex and sophisticated way.

00:19:50 How to Name Sounds?

Millie Taylor:

But I think there's something really interesting there about the fact that they have to name it. And so they've got to use language, but particularly they've got to use voice in order to name it. And so the whole premise of the play is actually founded on something quite bizarre. Because actually you're using voices, you're in chorus, and you're talking about sound. And they're dancing as well, the dancing is both rhythmic and musical. So, in a funny sort of way, they already had all these tools, they just hadn't named them. So, is this actually a play about *naming* these things or is it about the *discovery of an instrument*?

00:20:35 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

I think it is—and actually in the chapter I talk about this aspect of the play quite at length—I think it's two things at the same time.

One is precisely, as we say, that music [in this case] comes to our language, to our terms, to our understanding. So, there is a codification of it taking place, and voice has this very interesting role in the play in that it becomes an anchor for the music, a comment. If you go to a gallery and you see a painting, you have the explanatory note, the text beside it, which Barthes called *anchorage* or anchoring⁷—I think that's what the voice does for us, tells the audience how to listen to this sound. They [Cyllene and the satyrs] sort of frame it. Also, it becomes, interestingly for our contemporary sonic imagination, the *background* of that music. Because a lot of time in contemporary music- or sound-based theatre, music is the sounds out of which voice comes (e.g. song we break into)—song becomes the foreground sound. But in this play, we have all these voices singing and talking to each other, and *music* becomes the foreground sound.

But another aspect that's quite important, the second aspect, is that if you listen to the language, you are right, we are in a world that is full of music. But I think it's a little bit more free-flowing, and I would call it a world of *musicality*. They had music, they had dance, they had rhythm. And very interestingly, in this play, we have no humans. The satyrs are half animals. There is a nymph. There are two gods, there are cattle. So, it is a play about a world that's full of music, that is now coming to human ears, who codify it as music. It's a play that says that music has to do with what we would call anthropo-listening—sort of centering the *anthropos*, the humans, around the notion of music—and, at the same time, sort of tongue-in-cheek telling us: 'but we had it all the way before you came to it.' And that's a basic operating principle of the universe.

00:22:46 Early Listening to Theatre Music

David Roesner:

I wanted to pick up on the question of listening, because when you were talking about how sort of the listening develops and it kind of comes from a very basic understanding of ‘there are vibrations’ to an appreciation of melodic differentiation essentially, it's interesting if you look at some of the more recent theories on listening or philosophies. I am just thinking about Chion again, with his three modes of listening.⁸ It's almost the opposite.

It's almost like there is semantic listening first and foremost, because that dominates our day. We, as you, dear listener, are doing right now—you are listening to this particularly with an interest in *what* we are saying or what the meaning is. And then there's a second layer which is about sort of ‘where does this come from?’, which also features in the play. (Where is this underground? We need to stomp to find out what this is). And then and only then, sort of almost as a kind of archaeological discovery where you dig deeper, then you get to the sound itself. What is the sound itself? What are the vibrations? How could you describe it?

And the same goes for language. How do you describe it? So sometimes they talk about what the sound sounds like. Sometimes they talk about how it may be produced, so they fantasize about what could create that sound. And then at some point they probably also think about what it means, what its function is, etcetera, etcetera. And that's quite fascinating, because it's really a number of ways in which we engage with theatre music, or theatre sound as well, that sometimes it's predominantly there to guide our attention, to structure a play, also to obviously create emotions, atmospheres etcetera. So, it kind of covers that range in a very early example, although I am just curious what kind of research or what kind of sort of knowledge basis was there to talk quite sophisticatedly about the role of music and sound in theatre at this early stage already?

00:24:44 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

That's a very interesting question. The first thing to say is, for me, the play does quite the opposite of Chion's or Schaeffer's tactics.⁹ It sort of says that sound might be *meaningless*—which is close to the reduced mode of listening by Chion—but it is never *contextless*. It always

either indexes identity or has effects on people. In my understanding of Chion's project, it's [this] sort of late '80s, '90s, Northern European strategy, or even American earlier on in the '70s, of trying to work against codified appreciations of music, and trying to re-find what sound in itself was, and creating the project of sound studies. But in this play, we have a desire to keep it [sound] in context. It is always about something. About gods, about animals, about our connections, about our affect in the theatre.

When it comes to music and appreciation, again it's quite interesting, because by that point—we're talking late 5th century BCE in Greece; most of the contemporary philologists place the play around 430 or 420, that decade—by that point in classical Athens, pedagogy has been codified, solidified, that it is around music and sports. So everyone in Athens has had some sort of basic training in music, and the lyre, the instrument that the play talks about, was the first version of a string instrument that trainees used in their education. So pretty much everybody in Athens, pretty much every free citizen in Athens, would have had training in it. There is this basic level of [musical] appreciation.

00:26:42: Sophocles and (His) Instruments

Now in terms of that, I find that Sophocles is also a little bit 'meta'—because he was a trained *kitharodos*, which means player of the *kithara* (which is the advanced version of the lyre, it has more strings, it's wooden and it's not by a tortoise etcetera)—for a couple of reasons.

The first one is: in ancient Greek drama, the instrument that was accompanying the chorus next to the *themeli*, or sometimes behind the scene, was the instrument of god Dionysus, which was the *aulos*,¹⁰ the 2-reed 'flute' [oboe]. So, there are a couple of hypotheses around how the play was staged. The first one, really basic one, that I'm not sure holds too much truth but it's worth entertaining, is that as per convention, the instrument playing throughout the production was *aulos* and everybody in the play sort of said 'what's that sound? Oh, lyre!' We hear the sound of the wind instrument and, because we talk about it, we name it *as* the sound of a lyre, it goes 'oh, that's a sound that I haven't heard before.' The second option is that we hear *aulos* throughout the production, but then there are moments when we hear the lyre. So again, there is a juxtaposition against convention, [according to] what the play needs. The third option is that we hear the

kithara, the advanced version. Because I would think in, and a lot of archaeologists would think, nobody would play the lyre in a big sort of politicized and open, public space, because it's quite basic for Greeks. They would play the *kithara*, which they played for poetry competitions. So again, there is this 'meta' level, where somebody plays the guitar and people talk about it as the lyre, a different kind of string instrument. Or, it could be all of the above. So, there is already a sort of guiding of your [the audience's] sonic imagination: in hearing the sound, there's something else that it isn't.

Now the second interesting thing about context there is that around the middle of the 5th century in classical Athens, there was a big public debate around the role of music, which is, later on, reflected in the writings of Plato. What happened was that there was this competition of music and poetry, Panathinaia, and in 446, I want to say, a *kitharodos*, a guitar player from Mytilene, another city, won, in Athens.¹¹ He was also the inventor of a *kithara* version with extra strings and the inventor of not pure tones but melismas, in-between tones and melismatic melody. And there were the hardcore people, conservatives that said, 'that's not music' and 'what's happening there?' And of course the public went crazy with the new sound. The whole debate was around the new guitar sound, *νέα κιθαρωδία* (*nea kitharodia*). So, it was a very prominent discourse in Greece. I think Sophocles, who was also a trained *kitharodos*, was commenting on New Music— as if you have people that know classical harmony and suddenly, dodecaphony comes about— and the play talks about that.

00:30:09 (Musical) Comedy and Narrative in Different Productions

Millie Taylor:

There's two fascinating strands opening up. One is that what we are really talking about is comedy, and meta-narratives, and that play with the idea that there is no instrument when there is an instrument, and what we are believing in a play. So that whole sense of the way a play is constructed is being explored here in a really interesting way, and one that perhaps we haven't ever discussed in relation to Greek theatre. So I wonder, perhaps, if we could talk a bit about that. And from then move to, then, how on earth do you deal with that in the present?

00:30:33 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

Another two fascinating questions, so fascinating. The first one is yes, this play, in a way, has become one of the primary sources that we now use to sort of trigger our acoustic imagination into listening back to theatre and what it could achieve sonically and aurally and acoustically, especially in combination with other sources. For me, it's actually more engaging to talk about what we *did* with that play in the contemporary day, which is, you know, the history of the music of the production nowadays. I'll give you a few examples.

The play was first staged in Germany, in Halle, by a German philologist /archaeologist, Carl Robert, who reconstructed the play, filling the gaps from the other sources, with students, and the only sound he used was the lyre, very scarcely in the play.¹²

Millie Taylor: And voices.

Konstantinos Thomaidis: Yes, and voices, of course—yes, I'm talking about music—the voices of the students.

Then, what happens Théodore Reinach, German-French, he was researching ancient Greek music, created a new translation that was picked up by a French composer, Albert Roussel, and the second staging is actually an opera. So that opera, called *La Naissance de la Lyre*, was performed in France in 1925.¹³ And it is—because he [Roussel] was a sort of affiliate/student of Debussy—very sort of expressionistic and Debussy-like and sort of pastoral—once again, a whole other universe.

The third very interesting production happens in Italy in the early '30s by a Greekist archaeologist / philologist, Ettore Romagnoli, who performs it in an open theatre. As far as we know, the music was again the lyre, but he has this incredible idea, because it's an open space, to introduce real cattle. So we know that in the production animals come on stage, and we hear the animals.

That's pretty much what happened in the beginning of the 20th century. Then, there is a long gap in the history of productions of the play. And we must say that all these early productions come from people that are very interested in ancient Greek music as well and use the play to do their research and reimagine the acoustic past a little bit more. So, for example, Reinach writes a book on ancient Greek music a year after he stages the play, and he was also the person that 10 years earlier had decoded [transcribed to contemporary notation] the musical notation of the Apollo

Paeon in the Delphic inscriptions. Ettore Romagnoli is another very interesting case, because his listening-back and sort of vision of antiquity is also reflected—the context here is quite important as well—in the fact that he was a member of the party at the time of Mussolini. And I think that's the reason why we have a big gap in the history of productions in the middle of the 20th century.

00:33:45: Tony Harrison's Adaption in the 1980s

Skip to the 1980s when we have a renewed interest in the play. There are a couple of 'half productions or choreo-drama productions in Greece. The most influential one comes from the UK. It's by Tony Harrison. Tony Harrison writes an adaptation of the play, which is called the *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.¹⁴ The middle section is basically a translation of the play, but what he does is, in the opening scene, the two British archaeologists that found the fragments, the papyri, in Egypt, Grenfell and Hunt, they have discussion about the role of archaeology: 'And why we do [this]? What are we trying to find?', etcetera, etcetera—and then they turn into the characters of the play. Then in the third section, which was first performed in the Ancient site [stadium] of Delphi in 1988, the satyrs they party, they have a big sort of 'yes, we're now free, etcetera'. And when he [Apollo] gives them the gold, he gives them big blocks of gold. And then as they unwrap them, the gold falls out, they become boomboxes. And there's this sound of '80s, very contemporary, and that all has to do with the '80s and the Thatcher years in the UK and class. Then, at the closing of the play, they say to Apollo, 'oh, we like the lyre. Can we play it?' And Apollo says: 'no, you are not worthy of this sound.' So, there is the battle between the 'upper' music, aristocratic music, and the boomboxes. And what do they do? They [the satyrs] turn into 1980s hooligans that destroy the set, which is paper and fragments of the papyri, and they turn it into balls, and they play football, and they destroy the set. And [it's as if] they say, 'hey, our culture is boomboxes and football. And we didn't care about this lofty high culture'.

When he restages, Tony Harrison, the play for the National Theatre in 1990 (across to 1992), in that final section, we still have the boomboxes and music comment but also the set becomes cardboard, because it was performed at the National Theatre, the 'cardboard city' back in the day, there were a lot of homeless people, so it becomes a comment about the people that are excluded from theatre and what is perceived as high culture. And what also Tony Harrison does

very well in the play is the satyrs speak in a Northern accent, and also use boomboxes—and the dance that he uses, which was actually nominated for an Olivier Award for choreography, is clog dancing. All this ‘I’m gonna take everybody out of the cave’, they do [it in clog] dancing from the North. So it becomes a comment about the role of music in contemporary society, and I think now that has stayed with the play, and in some sort of way –I’m not quite sure whether Tony Harrison was aware of it, because it’s much later the research that we now know about *nea kitharodia*—is what Sophocles did back in the day as well.

00:36:51 Millie Taylor:

You mean he used regional accents and regional dance styles, or...?

00:36:54 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

He was commenting on music and the role of music and the difference between who’s included or excluded in the listening of music.

00:37:01 Politics in the Play – Through Music?

Millie Taylor:

Alright. OK. So, because I think there are two kinds of politics going on—aren’t there?—there’s one, one is that whole sort of class-based thing about what we think of as ‘music’, and then the other is just this idea of description and naming when you’re doing it already. And I think one is comic and the other is deeply political. And I think what’s interesting about what you’re talking about is, is this idea that you have both comedy and politics intertwined at this very, very early stage in Greek theatre.

00:37:47 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

And the satyr play, as far as... from what we know, it occupies this middle, in-between territory between tragedy and comedy. It doesn’t become a sort of..., it doesn’t have direct political commentary. In comedy, you have *parabasis* where everything stops and we address the audience or we use the names of contemporary politicians, but the satyr play uses some of the movement or, you know, linguistic conventions (not all of them) [of comedy] and, at the same

time, the characters are gods and nymphs, and most of the linguistic landscape retains the sound of tragedy. It's that in-between territory that says: 'Or we are shifting into light relief while at the same time occupying this higher place in our imagination'.

00:38:23 Millie Taylor:

Well, not just in our imagination, but presumably in the theatre space.

Because it becomes almost as though voice and movement, and the sounds they produce, are not music, and only instrumental music is music, and I think that is a really interesting conversation, because of course that completely negates voice from the discussion of music. And, of course, then we have hundreds of years of symphonic music, or thousands in fact. So, you know, I think it's really interesting, which is why I think you should talk about what you have done with it in the contemporary period.

00:38:58 Mikhail Marmarinos's Production in 2021

Konstantinos Thomaidis:

In this particular production, what Mikhail Marmarinos did, and the team around him—actually more intuitively and instinctively and artistically, because that production was an artistic production; of course I was a member of the team that also had the research agenda, but, you know, the primary drive was artistic—it sort of returned us to voice.¹⁵

So, what happened was, after the first period of research, the final aesthetic is this: you are in Epidaurus in the orchestra, you have the big theatre of Epidaurus, and what we did was: in terms of the sound that was on stage, first of all, all the satyrs wore these cattle-identifying bells. Each one of them a different one, so you could hear them as different humanimals. And, also, we had a platform on one part of the stage, where you could stomp. There was wood, so you can make all the sounds of stomping and etcetera, but underneath it we had sensors and that sound got amplified. We could play with lots of sort of rhythmic ways that became really sort of vibrant and the audience could feel them. That was the sonic environment of the stage.

Now, for the first time—we had to go through a long process with the archaeological team of Epidaurus—we were allowed to also use the auditorium. We placed four musicians in different

parts of the auditorium, and the music by Billy Bultheel, who composed the music/soundscape for the production sound design, was two tubas and two euphoniums, and they were spread across. And although it was music, this sort of signified the cattle, because we have two kinds of sounds: the cattle and then new music. In the sonic imagination of the piece, in the Sonic environment of the piece, it [the brass music] sort of became these two things.

And then, at the very top [of the auditorium]—this is a very large theatre—instead of being under the earth, was god Hermes, behind the audience. They don't see him as they enter the space. Steve Katona, who was the German countertenor that performed Hermes, whenever the satyrs hear a sound, was performing really high-pitched, complex, almost extra-normal, operatic sounds. So that voice became the signifier of the 'new music'.¹⁶

00:41:32 MUSIC TRACK 1: 'HERMES' BY BILLY BULTHEEL (VOICE: STEVE KATONA)¹⁷

And when, at the very last part, Hermes appears on stage, he had to cross the audience singing, and then the musicians followed him because both the cattle and Hermes arrive on stage.

Then, when he talks to Apollo, another interesting sonic element was that he spoke quite in his singing register, it was a speech-song, so he retained that sort of almost recitativo-plus-singing voice. And he also spoke in an accent, which in Greek theatre, especially in Epidaurus, is a little bit, you know, not done very often. So, the new sound was a countertenor presenting himself as the new instrument, and German-inflected modern Greek in speech-song being the new sound of the god.

The final lovely 'touch' by Mikhail in this production was the person that performed Silenus—the older leader and a very comic one—was Stamatis Kraounakis.¹⁸ Stamatis Kraounakis is perhaps the most famous Greek composer. He has written a lot of... not pop music, he has written a lot of *popular* music but really quite advanced, he has discographed a lot—so everybody knows him. But he performs a spoken part, he never sings once in the play, so you have all these expectations of the audience expecting Stamatis Kraounakis to sing or have his own-sort-of-style music. And only in the end, when everybody leaves and he goes off, his final words are almost sung, like this *promise* of the composer we all know and love.

00:44:23 Music and Ethics?

David Roesner:

And that's really fascinating point because it reminds us how much intertextuality, or, dare I say, intermusicality,¹⁹ is almost always at play. Because you're saying it's... you don't just listen to the music or the sound, but you also listen to what it references, the kind of context this comes from, the kind of connotations; you have talked about class, about high and low, what music do we associate with what.

I was wondering to what degree—and this may be an irrelevant question—but from my scarce understanding of ancient Greek music there is not only an aesthetic debate that you've talked about earlier, but also an ethical debate. So, it used to be that certain modes would sort of be used in education to fortify your courage or make you a forthright person, etcetera etcetera—which is something slightly less perhaps common in I don't know, in in Germanic or Anglophone music education. It's all about aesthetics, and the notion of 'playing in a certain key will make you a better person' is a bit foreign to us. But does that play into this world and this place, that's still something that people deal with consciously, or is that just in the past?

00:45:44 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

I could only make suppositions about it. And music in Ancient Greece is quite a complex subject and we all, and we know a lot about other sources. So the kind of debate that you are describing comes primarily from Plato, who is very suspicious of the arts in general -

00:46:01 David Roesner

- particularly of theatre,²⁰ actually -

00:46:02 Konstantinos Thomaidis

Yes, particularly of theatre, because of the effects it has on people, and how it's not about purity of ideas and influencing their [the audience's] right-ful ethics. And of course, music plays a big part in it and how it's staged and how it is perceived. Yes, there were certain modes that were assigned to good education and morale, and what I can say about that is it also has to do not [just] with a perceived ethics, but also function. In Ancient Greece, you had choric songs whose primary purpose was, you know, to sort of build community and create, you know, sort of mini

versions of citizenship and unity. But you also had songs for war, songs for dancing, songs for symposiums, songs for theatre, music that was performed at festivals. So yes, you have different functions allocated to music because Plato tells us that he would like music to do this or that and affect people in certain ways. I'm not quite sure that this is what music *did*, or what some philosophers or music educators *wanted it to do* that, there's a fine distinction there. I think there is an element of truth in that some people believed, you know, in its moral-building or morality-building as well in terms of ethics or functions, but at the same time, music performed itself in various, various ways.

00:47:23 Apollonian and Dionysian?

David Roesner:

I wondered—I am still thinking about the notion that Apollo becomes the god of music through this story—and then I am thinking, because you also described the almost feral ways of stomping and screaming and the cattle and so forth, and so there is that Apollo / Dionysus dichotomy there. Is that described in the play, is that something? Because it seems that this personification, allocating music to both to Dionysus and to Apollo in various ways, really speaks to those two tensions in the music, generally speaking: that it could have a sort of an educating and morally, sort of, nourishing and kind of orderly aspect to it, which would draw us to the Apollonian, and the sort of imbricating, control-losing nature, etcetera etcetera. I am saying this, of course, because German literature and particularly I am thinking of Thomas Mann and others obsessed with Apollo and Dionysus, and Nietzsche is of course as well. So, I don't know to what degree that actually all goes back to Sophocles, and even this play, or is that just part of that universe of thinking.

00:48:37 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

Again, I can only make suppositions because I am sort of researching this play as a voice researcher, and my philology, even though I have trained in it, is at best a sort of informed amateur philology, but I have talked to a lot of people, and I have read quite a bit on the play. My sense is that this kind of clear dichotomy is sort of the way Europeans at a certain point in their

own nation-building, and therefore culture-building, project projected on ancient Greece. And, I think, Greece of antiquity was not very fond of dichotomies.

To give the example here: you have Sophocles, who everybody knows as the rightful citizen, the very sort of serious and complex tragedist, here showing us that that such dichotomies do not necessarily exist—because he tells us that music was invented as an act of a very mischievous child that became a thief. And that, Apollo, who is the god of right-ful, ethical music, was second-hand god of music and he had to bargain to get to that role. And first we see him really, as I said, upset and dishevelled and the god of cattle. So his becoming the advocate, or sort of emblem, of a specific kind of music, is a *project* and it is a *process* that we sort of trace and follow throughout the play. And I think that is the comment that is been made here: that music is a wide spectrum, and even the gods that come to exemplify specific ends of the continua within which music operates came there as a process—therefore they're sort of made, acculturated as these symbols.

00:50:29 Millie Taylor:

So, in terms of the sort of contemporary production of this, how is that continuum explored and what are the... Basically, I want you to describe a bit more what it what it sounds like this, this continuum. You've talked about the instruments and the sort of kinds of sounds they are making and the intermusical or intertextual associations, inter-creature associations, I guess, between humans and cattle or whatever. But what's that sound world that we are listening to and how is that feeding into a potential atmospheric, intellectual understanding of this work?

00:51:14 Marmarinos's Musicality

Konstantinos Thomaidis:

The first thing to say about this production—and that is very typical of Mikhail Marmarinos's aesthetic—is that he works for months on end on the musicality of the text. I am not quite sure whether Mikhail would want me to say that... but I think he would: I overheard him in one rehearsal, leaning over to Stamatis Kraounakis, the composer, while the chorus was rehearsing, and saying to him: 'I am convinced, even though I'm a theatre-maker, that everything is music'.

So, his approach is very musical. If you listen to the text, it's almost like a score in [terms of] its rhythm—but not the old-school way ('There is a meter and we take it very seriously'). It's actually an intervention in pedestrian, everyday speech. One would speak the text in a specific way to make meaning out of it, and Mikhail breaks it down, changes the inflections, or changes where the tone goes, to create a multiplicity of meanings, or designate that this is theatre/musical speech rather than everyday speech.

So, there is now a tradition, after Mikhail and a couple of other directors, in Greece, in modern Greek theatre, that if you were to say, I don't know, 'What is this? This is a book.'—which is how it would make sense—it would be[come instead] 'What? Is this? This iiiis... a book!' So, there were different sort of breaks in the phrase, or marks and punctuations, that already musicalize the way the speech is delivered.

Perhaps for and non-Greek-speaking audience, the closest we can get to that is ... there is a Greek [film] director, Yorgos Lanthimos, who created *Dogtooth* or *The Favorite*, and the way his actors speak—because he comes from this tradition of Greek directors—if you hear the actors, they speak in this speech-song or musical tradition, which comes from Greek theatre, because he also worked in Greek theatre and he was very familiar with these directors. And for me, this a sort of transnational travel of musicality, of speech, that's going on here in somebody like Rachel Weisz or Olivia Colman speaking almost in a Greek-theatre tradition kind of speech.

So, the entirety of the production [of *Ichneutai*], first and foremost is choric. You constantly listen to the satyrs, either when they speak or, also, they keep making background sounds. They are the entire sonic and vocal landscape of the piece. The music, the euphonium and tubas, are only heard at the beginning and the interventions of the cattle. Then, in the end, they create, they start... they end up playing almost like contemporary harmony—because by that point they would make dissonant sounds or almost soundscape / 'punctums'²¹ in the sonic landscape—they almost create an 'exit-band' feeling.

00:54:02: MUSIC TRACK 2: 'SLOW PARADE' BY BILLY BULTHEEL²²

I think that has to do with something we never talked about in rehearsals but, I think, in the end, Mikhail created quite cleverly: when the satyrs are given their freedom and they have this party, the whole final section is them saying 'yes, we are free'—and in ancient Greece they used to

dance, *Euoi Euan*, there are cheers to Dionysus, and they celebrate. [In this production] We have this melancholy music, almost like an exit march playing, and the lights come down, and all the musicians and the cattle disappear, and they [the satyrs] are left on stage and their speech is like ‘[In melancholy/bland tone] Yay, let's celebrate. Hey, we are free.’

So, I think, suddenly—we have seen them, you know, being so physical and loud etcetera—they are left out of words. They are left out of music. They are left out of voice. And they do not know what to do with their freedom. And I think that's also what the production is showing: *Freedom for what? Freedom towards what? And what do we do with it?*

00:56:42 Can we Compare this to Other Forms?

Millie Taylor:

That's a really interesting sonic dramaturgy, isn't it? Something occurred to me as you were speaking: if... you're talking about this this way of speaking and performing Greek text. To what extent might we make a comparison with other forms? So, I am thinking the diversity from Berio to *London Road*, you know. How would, how does this sit within those, and how is it notated for the performers? Because, of course, *London Road* famously was partially orally communicated.

00:57:06 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

The first thing to say is that, at least in Mikhail Marmarinos's productions, it's never notated. It is embodied and experimented with. Mikhail Marmarinos has a whole sort of system of working with instructions within which the performers improvise, and then he keeps the elements of aurality that stick with his sort of wider, broader vision. So, there is no [exact] notation that's, that's for sure. But all of the actors know by the end—because it's been three years of research, etcetera—where, you know, there is an upper inflection, when there is a comma, when there is a pause, but it is an embodied understanding of this. It is rhythmical rather than notated.

Now within that spectrum, from Berio to *London Road*, which is an interesting spectrum that doesn't quite apply to the Greek context, is that... yes, there is a tradition of avant-garde music as well in Greece (and in the Italian context of Berio, there is also Demetrio Stratos,²³ who was one of the improvisers-vocalizers that participated into this creation of avant-garde vocality). There

are just *affinities* with that, in the sense that Mikhail wants to explore sound for all the possibilities of its meaning. But what anchors differently his approach is that he always uses classical text that, in the end, somehow makes meaning, even though he breaks it, whereas other people would just use sounds or random words and all that. In terms of *London Road*, in Greece, we do not quite have a sonic landscape that reflects on class and regionality in the way that *London Road* does. We do have some dialects in specific regions, but it does not quite apply to intersectional sonicity of both class and regionality.

However, the way that Mikhail's actors, and therefore the characters in his productions, speak has something to do with breaking established conventions of speaking. So, if we consider *London Road* an intervention into the voicemap of musical theatre and what this well-made, sort of structured, way of speaking and voicing and singing in musical theatre is, the only affinity is that he breaks what is [a] 'proper' speaking of the text in the context of both Greek drama and contemporary drama. And at the same time, it's very well-researched and very 'well done.' It is not just experimental. You end up tuning into this new sort of way of speaking the text. And by the end of it, I'm not quite sure that everybody's alienated by it, because it ends up being its own language. It is as if you are tuning into another way of speaking.

00:59:55 Millie Taylor:

But it does raise an issue. First of all, the piece is made on the performers and, therefore, they have some agency within it. But if this piece were performed again, are the performers therefore becoming effectively robots and even down to the phrasing and the intonation of their speech? Because that's a charge that is sometimes levelled, not just at musical theatre, but also against some kinds of verbatim theatre.

01:00:22 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

I wouldn't think that anybody would sort of reproduce or revive that production. We do not have a [systematic] tradition of revivals in Greece. It's always a new production. So, I do not think—again, in the Greek context—that it would become a concern. Of course, there is the ownership of the actors. As I said, Mikhail in the '80s was the advocate of devised theatre; it's always 'in collaboration with—'

And even in terms of the team around him: there was Mikhail, of course, that has a very musical way of creating and has his own system of training as well (that has been written extensively about). But there was Billy Bultheel, who wrote the music, and he also improvised a bit with Steve, the countertenor. So, the music in itself has Steve's improvisations within it, and some of the musicians', even though the tuba and euphonium parts have been written in the end. There's the sound designer that amplifies the sound. Actually, the whole scene where they [the actors/satyrs] stomp on the platform and gets different rhythms was created by the actors and all of us chipping in—Mikhail wanted a specific sort of dramaturgy of the sound, and then Silenus, the composer Stamatis Kraounakis sort of saying 'Oh yeah, perhaps we can try that sound,' and I had played with a lot of the actors in terms of rhythmic training the first year of [training]. So, there is always this element of co-composition and embodied ownership by everybody.

01:01:47 Millie Taylor:

And yet, there is somebody called a 'composer' and somebody called a 'director'.

01:01:52 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

Yes, of course. And I think that has to do with the fact that we are very much operating within a tradition of the auteur director. All of us contributed. All of us worked in different capacities. Even I started as a vocal archaeologist / assistant, and then sort of became, for example, the trainer of Steve Katona, of the countertenor, in Greek. So, we kept changing and shifting, sort of, trajectories within the production, but it was always in accordance with what Mikhail had in mind. Which was not 'We're aiming for this result.' It was more: 'Here is an area that's of interest to me. Let's all delve in and see what's gonna come out [of it].'

01:02:33 Millie Taylor:

So, a joint exploration of the materials.

01:02:36 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

Yes, yes. So, it is very much, in a way, both collaborative and 'authored'.

01:02:44 David Roesner:

Wonderful. I think, looking at the time, we should probably wrap this up, but I think that has been an absolutely fascinating insight into not only the play and its history and its performance history, but also contemporary staging practices in the context, really, of such a layered and complex history and so forth. So, thank you so much, Konstantinos for sharing that with us, and hope we will speak about some more productions in future episodes to come.

01:03:11 Konstantinos Thomaidis:

Thank you very much, David. Thank you very much, Millie.

01:03:13 David Roesner:

Thank you. Bye.

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¹ A freely accessible translation of the play can be found here: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0221>

² For further information on the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, refer to Johnston (2002), Fletcher (2008) and Bungard (2011).

³ For the production by Mikhail Marmarinos, please check the listing by the Athens and Epidaurus Festival (incl. photos and video trailer): https://aefestival.gr/festival_events/trackers/?lang=en

⁴ For the notion of 'composed theatre', please consult Rebstock and Roesner (2012).

⁵ For the methodology of vocal archaeology (part of which is tracing the sonic aspects of performance in the textual fragments), see Thomaidis (2021, 2022), and previous podcast on this series: <https://stagingssound.podigee.io/11-new-episode>

⁶ To start reading on music in Greek antiquity, including perspectives on theatre music, please refer to West (1992), Hourhoubi, Gourniezaki and Antonopoulou (1999), Hall (2002), D'Angour (2017) and Klavan (2021).

⁷ See Barthes (1977), p.38 onwards.

⁸ For the tripartite division of modes of listening (causal, semantic, reduced) by Chion, check his book *Audio-Vision* (1994 / 2019).

⁹ On Pierre Schaeffer's approach to acousmatic sounds, read the opening chapter in Kane (2014).

¹⁰ See Ercoles (2020).

¹¹ On the cultural debate around new music in 5th-century-BCE Athens, see chapter by Timothy Power (2012): <https://brill.com/display/book/edcoll/9789004217621/B9789004217621-s016.xml>

¹² For the first modern staging in Bad-Lauchstädt by Carl Robert, please read Hillgruber (2011).

¹³ For the 1925 French opera *La Naissance de la Lyre*, check the score on as it is available in the public domain: <http://fr.opera-scores.com/O/Albert+Roussel/La+Naissance+de+la+lyre.html>. Read also the chapter by Corbier (2008).

¹⁴ For Tony Harrison's *The Trackers of Oxyrynchus* and its productions: <https://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/greekplays/poetry/tony-harrison/plays-classical-referents/trackers-oxyrynchus>. See also the chapter by Parkyn (2022).

¹⁵ Regarding the members of the creative team and cast that collaborated on the sonic aspects of the production, you can source more information on the links below:

- Music by Billy Bultheel - his website: <https://billybultheel.pro/> and snippets from *Ichneutai*: <https://billybultheel.pro/html/trackers.html>
- For the countertenor Steve Katona (who played the role of Hermes): <https://www.steve-katona.com/>
- The director Mikhail Marmarinos's website: <https://www.michailmarmarinos.com/>

¹⁶ For a discussion of how voice can be used to stage impossible sound, see forthcoming chapter 'Staging (Theatre) Music Reception: Voicing Unacoustics in Sophocles' *Trackers*' (Thomaidis 2024).

¹⁷ Source: <https://billybultheel.pro/html/trackers.html> Many thanks to Billy Bultheel for permissions to reproduce his music.

¹⁸ For further information, please visit: <https://kraounakis.gr>

¹⁹ See Monson (1997).

²⁰ For a discussion of Plato's anti-theatrical views, see opening chapter in Ridout (2009).

²¹ For the notion of punctum, in visual terms, see Barthes (1981).

²² The first version of this 'exit-band' music by the players/cattle/Silenus leaving can be heard on Billy Bultheel's webpage, under the track 'Sweet Sound': <https://billybultheel.pro/html/trackers.html>. The music developed quite significantly between this original composition and the performance, and one can get more accurate glimpses of how it sounded in the track used here, derived from the composer's Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CrgEbpyIQBt/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link This version was developed by Billy Bultheel for a concert version (Mount Analogue) in Paris (April 2023), under the new title 'Slow Parade'—and this is what is heard in this podcast. This version is closer to the Epidaurus version but developed even further. Many thanks, again, to the composer for permissions.

²³ See: <http://www.progarchives.com/artist.asp?id=3046>