

**Iro Menegou**

## **WOMEN COMPOSING IN THE BALKANS**

*Women composing in the Balkans* wish to encourage young female composers to introduce their work abroad, rehearse with new musicians and develop a network of younger generation interpreters and composers in the Balkan area. The project was first addressed through a call for scores to composers from Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, aiming to include more Balkan countries in the future. The selected compositions were performed by the Methexis Ensemble, consisting of violin, clarinet, accordion and piano, giving prominence to the important role of these instruments in the traditional as well as the contemporary music of the area.

### **The Idea**

The folk music tradition in the Balkans has a very strong identity and has inspired many collaborations among musicians from different countries of the area. In contrast, in the field of classical and contemporary music, the interplay between composers and interpreters who live and are active in the area has only crossed the very first steps in the recent years. The project underlines this need, aiming to create new paths in music tradition for younger musicians through contemporary music creation, simultaneously referencing the traditional music elements. Hence, the instruments proposed for the first edition were accordion, clarinet, violin and piano, giving prominence to their importance in the traditional music of the area as well as in the contemporary repertoire. Furthermore, due to the limited involvement of female composers in concert programmes and contemporary music festivals in the area, the project aimed to provide an opportunity for female composers to present their work abroad, have their pieces recorded and get involved in a bigger music community. The idea was first developed by Iro Menegou and Popi Kalaitzi in the Cultural Management Academy, Sofia, Bucharest, Thessaloniki in 2017, organised by the Goethe-Institut. This academy supports active artists and cultural managers, reinforces the pursuance of new ideas and provides new means of partnership in the next generation of the area.

### **The Implementation**

The implementation of the first edition of the project was accomplished in four steps. First, a call for scores for women composers up to 30 years of age

from Bulgaria, Greece and Romania was announced in February 2018. The instrumentation was open for any combination, except solo pieces. The selection of the pieces was completed in May 2018, by a four-member jury of composers and interpreters in collaboration with the Laboratory of Research on Contemporary Music (La.Re.Co.M) from the Department of Music Science and Art (DMSA) of the University of Macedonia based in Thessaloniki, Greece and the non-profit organisation beArtive, which operates in the classical and contemporary music field in Greece. The selected pieces *Inner Ambience* by Utami Easty, *Quantum Vacuum* by Anastasia Giamouzi, *Memorandum* by Maria Gouvali, *Reviriment* by Lidia Ciubuc and *Four Seasons* by Rafaela Trolou were announced in June 2018. In addition, the organisation delegated Diana Rotaru, as a guest composer, to transcribe her composition *Red Hot* for the project. In the third step, from June until August 2018, the Methexis Ensemble, Dora Alexiadou – violin, Iro Menegou – piano, Alexis Pogrevnois – clarinet, and Artemis Vavatsika – accordion began rehearsing the works, frequently maintaining contact with the composers. The project was completed with a three-day festival, from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of September, which took place in the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki, Greece. Apart from the open rehearsals, the organisation included the lecture *Accordion for Composers* held by professor Konstantinos Raptis, aiming to provide useful information on the techniques of the instrument and its role in contemporary music. On the last day of the festival, before the concert, a round table coordinated by the composer Vasilis Kitsos was scheduled. Through this event, the composers shared the challenges they are facing, their motivations and even their inspiration stimulus, while the audience had the opportunity to ask questions and become more familiar with the process of a new composition.



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*Poster at MOMus Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Graphic Design by Elpida Kokovidou*

### **Project's Evaluation and Feedback**

From the very first steps of its implementation, the project received positive feedback and with its completion, it appears that its goals have been achieved

successfully. The presented works in which traditional elements and contemporary techniques coexist harmonically received great reviews. The benefits of the network that came into being can be identified in new collaborations beyond the participants, while many women composers from other countries expressed interest in participation – a fact that encourages its future continuation. Furthermore, the idea raised the interest of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, which ultimately included the festival in the Parallel Events of the 53<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Dimitria Cultural Festival. In January 2019, the project was nominated for the 2019 Classical:NEXT Innovation Award. From 37 nominations from 26 countries, it has been shortlisted to the top 10 finalists.