

SOLON MICHAELIDES ON ANCIENT GREEK MUSIC

To me, not belonging to the musical world, Solon Michaelides was unknown until, early in 1976, he got into touch with me. I visited him at his London hotel, to be captivated instantly by his charm. He explained his project, showed me a mound of typescript, but all he asked was whether I thought such a "dictionary" (for so he called it at that stage) of ancient Greek music would serve a useful purpose; and I said yes without hesitation. A year passed, and we were in touch again. The mound of typescript was now in proof, privately printed in Cyprus. He asked me to read his Preface, and we talked about publishers: Faber were interested, he said. One thing led to another, and in a remarkably short time, after some revisions and additions, the book was presented to the public under the title of The Music of Ancient Greece: an Encyclopaedia. That was in 1978.

This is not the occasion for a detailed review of the book. Michaelides was not a professed classicist and, as a musicologist, his published work was on such subjects as modern harmony and neo-Hellenic folk music, but even in the highly specialized field of ancient Greek music he could only count as an "amateur" in the sense that he was producing a "labour of love". During a long career crowded with activities, creative, interpretative and administrative, he had never lost his interest in the earliest stages of Hellenic music but went on collecting and organizing material for the book which has now appeared. The subject has fascinated many, and many are the ingenious interpretations of the scanty evidence. You will look in vain to Michaelides for a novel theory of those famous "modes". He is interested in facts rather than theories, though there is enough bibliography in his work to enable the student to pursue his own enquiries. And, scanty as the strictly musical evidence may be, there are facts to fill a book of 365 pages. Facts about what the ancient theorists said; technical terms of all kinds to be defined; prosopography, the obscure names along with the great; the names of musical instruments, some of which are of historical fame (lyres and pipes), others barely identifiable; names of festivals; and - a striking feature - the vocabulary of poets where it touches upon music. Greek terms are transliterated; citation of passages is liberal, and they are translated into English. He cast his net widely and missed little: there will be few indeed who cannot learn from his book.

For me, it was a stroke of good fortune to make the acquaintance, though late and sadly brief, of a man of such distinction and charm; a privilege, if I was able to facilitate, in however small a way, the final stages of publication; a pleasure, which I share with all his friends, that the book appeared in time for him to see it and know that it had been well received.

R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM