When the Acropolis of Athens was completed, it was considered a masterpiece of architecture and art. Twenty-five centuries later another monument has been erected in that city. True to this day and age, this new edifice is a masterpiece of architecture and technology.

It is known as the Athens Concert Hall, although to the Greeks it is referred to as the "Mansion of Music."

This superb structure is the product of an idea that stemmed fifty years ago from the passion that a great singer had for music. She was Alexandra Trianti. She presented the fact that her beloved city had no theater up to the standards of the renowned artists that were regularly invited to perform.

During the summer, Athens very proudly hosted these artists in the world's most famous antique theater, the Herodion, built in the first century of our era by the Athenian-born Roman Counsil Herodus Atticus. The performers always loved to display their talent in such overwhelming surroundings, and only last summer Luciano Pavarotti expressed his enthusiasm for the theater. But came winter, the great performances had to be put to a stop. The theater halls in Athens were inadequate both in space and in acoustics.

Half a century ago, Alexandra Trianti had visualized a concert hall equipped with the latest that technology had to offer. She started by organizing a society which she named "The Friends of Music" and which became the center of music lovers. Naturally she was the first President of this Society (which is still very active to this day) and even put together a group of musicologists to improve the development of this art in Greece. Unfortunately, war and occupation put a stop to that constructive work.

With the liberation of Greece from the Nazis and the country returning to a seeming normality, Alexandra's wings spread open again. In between her concert tours (she sang all over Europe and repeatedly in the United States) she was diffusing her idea of a concert hall. In 1956 she succeeded in having the location donated by the State. And some location it was, as, shortly after the
American Embassy was built a block away.

The enterprising singer got in contact with prominent architects and sound experts from abroad, mostly Germany and England. Everything was ready for her dream to come true. Everything except the money needed for the realization of that dream...

Alexandra Trianti spoke to her old friend, Lambros Eftaxias. He was a member of the parliament and an ex-under-secretary. Also he came from a very wealthy family which made him the chairman of the “Decozi-Vouros Foundation” established by his family. He gave his full support and construction started. Unfortunately, Alexandra Trianti passed away, but not before granting to the hall of music building the largest part of her substantial fortune.

A few years later Lambros Eftaxias became incapacitated, and although still alive to this day, he is incapable of admiring the work to which he so generously contributed.

With the disappearance of both Alexandra and Eftaxias, the project seemed for a while to be at a standstill. That is, until Christos Lambrakis, who has been on the board of the “Friends of Music,” came actively into the picture.

But before getting to this incredible man, it would be interesting to have a look at the work he was instrumental in producing. From “The Athens Concert Hall Organization” bulletin, we quote, “It would be difficult to catalogue exhaustively all the superb technical solutions which were applied for the first time to such a project, or the rare materials used in the Hall’s construction and outfitting. Even so we should mention the white doric facades of Dionysos marble which was fixed so that it does not touch the structure but is instead suspended to it as also the special wood panelling of the interior of the Concert Hall which was transported piece by piece from Germany and was suspended along the sides of the hall.”

Further on we read that “The Main Hall,” also called “The Friends of Music Hall” has a total capacity of about 2,000 seats, from which 1,100 are stalls, of which 8 are seats for the disabled and 851 balcony seats.

There is also a second Hall seating 500 people which was named in memory of the famous Dimitri Mitropoulos. Six more smaller rooms can be used for chamber music, individual recitals or conferences. Because of the advanced technology employed by the expert designers, such as the movability of the roof of the stage and of the boxes, these halls are suitable for hosting and providing the highest technical standards for many different functions: symphonic music, chamber music, opera, theater, ballet, even ancient drama. Besides, both the Halls can also function as a conference center. They are provided with 9 language simultaneous translation system and 9 interpreter booths, all with stage sightlines microphones in 221 seats for the use of 442 delegates. Last but not least, a huge screen, 30X18 ft, electrically driven for projection use, is to everybody’s surprise, embedded in the stage floor. This stage also is flexible, as a proscenium can be formed by retracting the front...
two balconies in the stall and raising 2 proscenium towers from the stage floor. This miracle of modern technology is achieved by use of the telescopic mechanism. No doubt the mechanics are the only ones who know what that means... According to the German engineers responsible for this achievement, such work was never done previously. Finally, Greece came up with a "first"...

Also unique is the backstage area. Besides an amount of storage room it has a suite for the artists to entertain during intermission. The conductor has his private room with bath and all the facilities. The soloists get six rooms, the orchestra and the choir 12 cloakrooms with a capacity for 200 people. To be found also are rehearsal rooms and waiting area for the choir, cafeteria for the convenience of the artists, laundry and ironing room for the wardrobe, and a hairdresser salon. Above all there is a foyer for the VIPs with bar and every modern equipment. And not to be disregarded, the utmost decorative touch: the floor, all the length of the enormous foyer, paved with Pendelic Marble has its slabs joined together by medallions of bronze. These medallions, each representing a different scene of an ancient Greek musical theme, were made in the workshop of the one and only goldsmith and academician, Ilias Lalaounis.

To sum it up, this unique concert hall must be seen to be believed. Of course, at this point, a natural question can be raised — Who is running such an establishment? And naturally, we come to Christo Lambrakis.

Although the board consists of 9 members, each one prominent in his field (plus two representatives of the government as the institution is partially subsidised by the State) Lambrakis is the soul and power behind it all. He was since the day he took over, unofficially at first but gradually taking the matter in his own hands. And being of the dynamic personality that he is, he delivered to the city of Athens a twentieth century Acropolis.

Christo is the son of Dimitri Lambrakis, a Cretan, journalist of great reknown, and a fanatic follower of Eleftherios Venizelos. In his days, he owned two prominent daily newspapers, the Eleftheron Vima and the Athenaika
Nea. At his death, his only son, Christo, inherited both his business and his aggressiveness. He developed the business into the Lambraki Media Organization (actually he is referred to as the Hearst of Greece). He turned the Eleftheron Vima into a weekly politico-cultural review under the simple name of Vima. The Nea also dropped its first name but continues to be one of the very top daily newspapers. The “Tahidromos” magazine became weekly and the “Economikos Tahidromos,” the equivalent of the Wall Street Journal, continues to be the top business review. A few more magazines plus active interests in travel, tourism and hotels are part of the tremendous organization.

When Christo Lambraki got the concert hall on his lap, he made it his pet project. His unrefrainable personality went all out. He first turned to his lifelong friend, Melina Mercouri, at that time Under-Secretary of Culture. Melina, very “in” with the government, arranged for a substantial support for the cause of music. Private donations also started coming in. It is said that the first highly generous contribution came out of Christo’s own pocket. Also, again it is said that his mother, the most glamorous great grandmother Elsa, matched it with pleasure. His two sisters also were dragged in as well as were all his friends. So, from 1981 on, the work that for so many years had been suspended for financial reasons started getting ahead. Finally, last spring the inauguration took place and Athens saw the long expected happy day.

Yet, a few more things are in the making. A huge underground garage will be started (hopefully) this winter. Also a Museum of Music, a Music Library and last but not least, a Center of Musical Research.

Could anyone name any concert hall of that caliber anywhere in the world? Or for that matter does anyone know the amount of zeros that went into the construction? Plentiful, to be sure, but it was worth it, every bit of it...

Eytyxismena Xristougenna

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America

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