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Thoughts on Mediterranean music today, starting from the heritage of the European avant-garde.

In this lecture, we will be seeking to demonstrate the historical continuity that runs through the quests and significations of the modernist movements as they have manifested themselves, initially in the late 19th and early 20th century, then—especially—in the latter half of the 20th century, and, finally, in the contemporary modernity of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (we might describe this latter modernity as a ‘new modernity’ or even a ‘post-modern modernity’). A core feature of 20th-century music—and this applies to the post-modern in part, as well as to the modern—from Debussy, Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Bartók through to Varèse, Webern and Messiaen, and from Xenakis, Boulez and Ligeti through to Cage, Feldman and Reich, is the creation of new sound world: new musical spaces and new temporalities, most of them entirely different from each other in terms of their aesthetic directions and the compositional techniques they employ. The contributions of composers from the fringes of Europe and from the Mediterranean have imbued these new spaces and temporalities with a ‘Mediterranean’ sensuality and sensitivity which take the edges off the spaces and times of classical modernism.

In the case of the Mediterranean, its traditions have often been absorbed directly or indirectly into the European tradition as they have explored the aesthetic potentials and compositional techniques of this new modernity. The successful assimilation (where this has been attempted) of aspects of these local traditions, along with the critical reception of the achievements of modernism and postmodernism, remain key prerequisites for the re-signification and communization of the adventures of 20th and 21st-century contemporary music.