

## Defending Cyprus through art *Cypriot Rhapsody* (1944) by Nicolas Astrinidis

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Small and powerless nations often resort to culture to survive conquerors and avert extinction. The way politically withering Hellenism permeated the Roman Empire through language and the arts is a classic example of the pen conquering the sword.

Modern Hellenism, too, managed to resist the Ottoman occupation through waves of emigration to the West, whose effect ranges from the Renaissance to the revival of the Olympic games.

It is crucial, then, to defend Cyprus, a serially attacked bastion of Hellenism, by investing in culture, especially the arts. Nicolas Astrinidis' *Cypriot Rhapsody* is a case in point.

A Diaspora Greek born in Romania in 1921, [Astrinidis](#) saw his family dismembered by the Soviet invasion of Bessarabia, in June 1940. Leaving two brothers in communist-controlled Bucharest, he and his parents escaped to the Middle East, where he enlisted in the Greek Royal Air Force and spent two years at the Libyan front. A wound in the leg landed him in Cyprus, then a British colony, for recuperation. The island's enchanting atmosphere and music gave rise to his first mature composition, a music rhapsody based on local folk and popular tunes.

Transferred to Cairo and with lighter duties, sergeant Astrinidis spent much of the summer of 1944 writing the *Cypriot Rhapsody*. His performance of the work at the Eisteddfod festival, held in the city in September, earned him a First Prize both as a composer and a pianist. This award launched his music career in Egypt, then in Paris, and later internationally. (One of his performances, in Tananarive, Madagascar, in 1956, was made possible thanks to the intervention of then exiled Archbishop Makarios.)

Over the next years, Astrinidis transcribed the work for two pianos, woodwind ensemble, and full symphonic orchestra. His last solo presentation was in Fall 2004, during a Hellenic Festival at the New York Public Library. A playlist of all recorded performances of the *Cypriot Rhapsody* is freely available here:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL\\_Ia56HUYMZY7Guz\\_2qMnwTw9eGjH45N1](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_Ia56HUYMZY7Guz_2qMnwTw9eGjH45N1)

Eighty years after its composition and half-a-century from Turkey's invasion, *Cypriot Rhapsody* is a powerful reminder of the island's rich musical legacy. Its casting in a well-established form and style of the Romantic period renders it ideal for concert hall presentation and guarantees its international transmission.

**Sources:**

\* Ηλίας Χρυσοχοΐδης, "[Το συνθετικό έργο του Νίκου Αστρινίδη: Μια πρώτη προσέγγιση](#)," (Τμήμα Μουσικών Σπουδών, Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, 1992).

\* Ilias Chrissochoidis, [Nicolas Astrinidis: Life – Works Catalog](#) (Stanford, 2012) [in Greek].

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