

Bottom-up Modernism: Researching and Writing *Xenakis in America*
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Abstract

Are the circumstances under which Post-war composers created relevant to our understanding of their work? Some facets, such as the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, achieved an almost instant mythic status. Increasingly, electro-acoustic studios are being studied for their contribution to the fine art music of the twentieth century. Still largely unanalyzed is the university system—particularly in the United States—and its purported effects on the character of composition.

From the beginning, I had thought that *Xenakis in America* would involve a confluence of themes. Xenakis claimed his time in the U.S. was a disappointment. His contact with cultural institutions was extensive and varied. He attempted to realize complex and difficult projects. What he couldn't accomplish in America, he was able to achieve later in France.

Research for *Xenakis in America* was a transatlantic search, piecing together bits of primary information into a coherent picture of the activities Xenakis engaged in. Identifying and dating sources, resolving conflicts of memory and documentation, mapping information and attempting synthesis was an ongoing process, not really complete until the text was finalized. Judgement about what to leave out, and realization of an overarching theme of departure and return to France, were decisions confronted and taken after my writing had well begun.

In my talk, I'll discuss the specifics of my project, and present dilemmas large and small that (for better or worse) form my narrative. With this context in hand, I'd hope we can together assess the value of *Xenakis in America* as a contribution to the historiography of Post-war cultural and musical form.