Maria Callas’ Greek Adventure
The story of a strained relationship and the man who stood by her

Marianna Kaloyeropoulou in Athens 1937-1945
It was 6 March 1937, when the young New Yorker Maria Callas, who was not yet fourteen, arrived for the first time in Athens after her Greek parents’ separation in the States and her mother Litsa’s (Evangelia) decision to return to Greece with her two daughters. Litsa Callas also decided to return to her husband’s original name, Kaloyeropoulous, or to its feminine Greek form, Kaloyeropoulou, which her husband had Americanized to ‘Callas’, a not unusual habit among immigrants.

In the fall of that same year, Maria Kaloyeropoulou registered at the National Odeum (conservatory), attending lessons in Maria Trivella’s class, where she studied for two years. In the fall of 1939, she was accepted by the prestigious Athens Odeum (conservatory), in the class of the Spanish coloratura soprano Elvira de Hidalgo, who had sung the role of Rosina in Rossini’s opera buffa The Barber of Seville over sixty times opposite the legendary Enrico Caruso. It was the year that the Royal Opera was founded, as part of the Royal Theatre of Greece, by its Director-General Costis Bastias, who was also Director-General of the Department of Letters and Fine Arts at the Ministry of National Education, something like a Minister of Culture.

The theatre opened with a performance of Johann Strauss’s Die Fledermaus, on 5 March 1940, six months after World War II was declared, follow-

John C. Bastias

Maria Callas first professional contract with the Greek National Opera was signed on 20 June 1940.
On the left, the signature of Costis Bastias, General Manager of the Opera and on the right, the signature of Marianna Kaloyeropoulou, the future Maria Callas

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sixteen-year-old Maria, or Marianna as she introduced herself, Kaloyeropoulou. De Hidalgo had requested a private audition at Bastias’ home, to avoid any gossip. She had even warned him that she was somewhat overweight, but had assured him that he would hear a voice the likes of which did not exist in the whole country.

De Hidalgo sat at the piano to accompany Maria, while Bastias listened with interest, smoking his pipe. Within a week, Marianna Kaloyeropoulou had signed her first contract with Bastias as a member of the chorus, but under strict orders that she was not to participate in the rehearsals for fear that such participation might be harmful to her voice, and would continue her lessons with de Hidalgo. Years later, she gave him a photo on which she had written in Greek: “To Bastias, the first who recognized me – with friendship, Maria, 1959”.

It was in January 1941 during the war against Italy, when Greece was heavily and victoriously involved on the Albanian front, that Bastias decided to try Maria out. He placed her as an understudy in the Royal Opera’s third production, Franz von Suppé’s comic opera Boccaccio, where she appeared in the small role of Beatrice, replacing soprano Nafsika B. Galanou. However, though we have her name on the programme, it is not certain which performances she participated in. What we do know is that her first appearance was a 3 p.m. matinée performance in mid-February, since the evening performances were then at 6 p.m., because of the curfew due to the danger of German bombardments.

At the beginning of the German occupation in April of 1941, Bastias was imprisoned because of his pro-British allegiance and Maria lost her most powerful supporter. However, she continued her career with the National Opera, as it was then renamed, and had her first triumph in a lead role playing Floria Tosca in Puccini’s opera on 27 August 1942. At the première, all the front row seats were filled with German and Italian officers in uniform.

Maria continued her career at the National Opera during the rest of the occupation despite hostility towards her from many of the other sopranos, who sensed that their careers were threatened. After the Liberation in October of 1944, and the re-establishment of international travel, Maria returned to New York in 1945, when her father still lived, not without some bitterness about the country of her ancestors and the treatment she had received there. Two years later she was to begin her international career, not in New York, but in the Arena of Verona, interpreting the principal role of La Gioconda in Ponchielli’s grand opera, under Maestro Tullio Serafin, who helped develop Maria Callas’ talents in the years to come.

The disappointing 1957 return
After an invitation in 1957 by the Constantine Karamanlis government to appear in the 3rd Athens Festival with two recitals at the ancient open-air theatre, the Odeum Herodes Atticus, on the 1st and 5th of August, Maria Callas arrived at Athens’s International airport on the 29th of July, accompanied by her husband, Giovanni Battista Meneghini. The famous Italian operatic conductor Antonino Votto, from Milano's Teatro alla Scala, had been invited to conduct the orchestra.

Callas felt exuberant to be back after eleven years. She had left as an unknown young soprano and was returning an in
Due to the political crisis caused by the Maria Callas recital at the 1957 Athens Festival, artist Phokion Demetriades drew the above caricature of Callas sitting in the Odeum Herodes Atticus, at the foot of the Acropolis, refusing to sing, while minister Tsatsos is trying to explain, pointing to Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis and the leaders of the opposition, George Papandreou and Sophocles Venizelos (front page: Athens daily To Vema, 4 August 1957)

31 July 1957. During the rehearsals for the concert at the Odeum Herodes Atticus. With Elvira de Hidalgo
9 August 1960. Callas has just arrived at Athens’s International Hellinikon Airport and is welcomed by Costis Bastias.

First meeting with the press. On the left, journalist Yorgos Pelihos of the daily Ta Nea.
ternational star. Little did she know the local political scene and how it would affect her recitals. After a bloody civil war in the late 40s between the communists and the nationalists, Greece managed not to fall behind the Iron Curtain, and now had a rather stable Conservative government. Still, old animosities die hard and the opposition, led by George Papandreou and Sophocles Venizelos, the son of Greece’s greatest political leader, Eleftherios Venizelos, lost no opportunity to strike at the government. The daily newspapers Ta Nea and To Vema, owned by publisher Dimitris Lambrakis, decided to attack the government concerning Callas’s fee of US $9000 for the two recitals.

No one could have suspected how well orchestrated the attack on the Karamanlis government would be, or predicted the attack on the Minister responsible for signing the Callas contract, – University of Athens Professor Constantinos Tsatsos, brother-in-law of the Nobel Laureate poet George Seferis. But the Athens Summer Festival, which had only recently been founded, badly needed tourism and, of course, relied heavenly on Maria Callas herself. From April 1957, the plan started unfolding as the daily Ta Nea revealed the terms of the contract and the two recitals became a major political issue. The leaders of the opposition, Papandreou and Venizelos, refused to be present at the première as a sign of their disapproval of the ‘scandalous’ fee, and the principal columnist of To Vema, Pavlos Palaiologos, incited his readers to boycott the performances.

Bastias had narrated the arrival at the hotel of Minister Tsatsos, when he was informed that Callas refused to appear in such a hostile environment claiming that she was ill: “He visited her a little before the opening to convince her to change her mind. ‘Do you know that if you don’t sing tonight, the government is in danger of falling?’ he told her. ‘Do you know’, she replied, ‘that if I sing tonight, Callas is in danger of falling?’”.

At 19:30, on the evening of 1 August, just a little before the start of the recital, while information arrived about demonstrators and more threatening letters and phone calls reached the hotel, the Committee of the Athens Festival announced that because of a sudden illness, Mme. Callas would not appear and the performance would be postponed.

Finally, a new première was set for 5

Maria Callas, escorted by Costis Bastias, leaves Hellinikon Airport on the way to the Grande Bretagne Hotel in Athens, where they were to give a press conference the following day.
August. Pavlos Palaiologos struck again from his column claiming that Callas was “unworthy” of her nation and her family, and used all the information he had managed to collect about Callas’s relations with her mother based on vulgar gossip. "My God!", the columnist exclaimed, “My national pride has been insulted.” And continuing his tirade, he added, “One road remains for Calas (sic) to follow and it leads to the airport.” And on the day of the new opening, Dimitris Psathas, the front page columnist of Ta Nea went further: “This column must honestly confess that it feels shamed because it has been repeatedly preoccupied with this repulsive prominent lady, who came to grab the dollars of our poverty.”

Despite the unsavory attacks of part of the press, Athens’s music lovers witnessed another Callas triumph on the evening of 5 August 1957 at the ancient Odeum of Herodes Atticus at the foot of the Acropolis. But the distressing situation she was subjected to, when she found herself in the midst of a political storm, left a bitter taste she would not forget easily. She decided never to appear again on stage in Greece.

**Callas returns to Greece**

In 1959, Prime Minister Karamanlis asked Bastias, the founder and former head of the National Opera of Greece, to take over again as Director-General in an attempt to extricate the house from the quagmire into which it had sunk, because of political patronage and rampant corruption. One of Bastias’ first plans was to convince Callas to appear for the first time ever in an opera performance at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus. It was Bastias who had staged, for the first time in the modern era, ancient tragedy at Epidaurus, in 1938 – Sophocles’s Electra. Now, an opera with Callas was sure to attract international attention. But would she accept, in view of the 1957 events?

Bastias had more tricks up his sleeve. He proposed that her fee of $15,000 for three performances in August 1960 be donated to a scholarship fund to finance the education and training of Greek singers abroad. To this fund, the National Opera would add an additional sum. Concerning the Greek press and those journalists that had written against her three years before, Bastias told her that they would hold a press conference as soon as she arrived and face the press, not the way it was mishandled in 1957, when she was in her room in the hotel and all the officials were in hiding. “Don’t worry Maria,” he told her, “leave the press to me. I will be standing next to you. Everything will go smoothly!” Callas felt assured. She knew how well Bastias was respected among journalists, being himself a top novelist, columnist, editor and publisher. She also
knew that the publisher of *To Vema* and *Ta Nea*, the newspapers that had spearheaded the attack on her, had died a few weeks after the 1957 events and the whole Lambrakis publishing empire had been taken over by his son Christos Lambrakis, a music lover and fervent friend and admirer of Callas. She immediately accepted Bastias’ proposal and suggested that they stage Bellini’s *Norma*, rather than Cherubini’s *Medea*, which Bastias had preferred in order to link the ancient Greek theater with the world of opera in our time. “It’s more bel canto,” she told him.

Upon arriving at the then Athens Hellinikon Airport on 9 August 1960, Maria Callas would find Costis Bastias waiting to welcome her and lead her to the scheduled press conference in town the following day. There, she would tell the press:

“I want you all to understand one thing. I am grateful to Mr. Bastias because, when I was fourteen or fifteen years old, I believe, [...] the National Opera of Greece was being founded and I had an audition with Mr. Bastias, when I was just a child then, who agreed with Mme. de Hidalgo to pay me to continue my studies at the disposal of the Opera. [...] This I could never forget. Consequently, first of all because it was evident that Mr. Bastias has brains, ears, and, as they say in Italian, *naso*, nose, in other words he can smell something of value, and he placed his confidence in me, and in gratitude, to reciprocate I said, when he wrote to me about Epidaurus to stage an opera, [...] in gratitude to his gesture to me, I said we will perform an opera. They wanted *Medea*, and I preferred *Norma*, because it is more bel canto. As far as my fee from the National Opera is concerned, we decided to entrust it... do you want to say it better, Costis? To explain it better than I?”

And Bastias continued the press briefing saying:

“Mme. Callas informed me a few months ago from Milan and also by phone that in reciprocity to what [...] we had done for her, she will return to the National Opera the amount of $15,000, which are her fee of $5,000 per performance. [...] And this
amount, according to her own words, she is returning it so that I can do for others what I had done for her then. [This purse] will be augmented by the National Opera, so that the income may be sufficient for a young artist to travel every year abroad to attend special courses. However, this committee, wherein Mme. Callas will participate, will reach its unbiased selections without any outside influence. [...] Thus, it is done and established, a type of Maria Callas scholarship.”

**Callas triumphs with Norma at Epidaurus**

Three years had passed since the unfortunate 1957 incidents and everything had changed. Her fee could no longer be an excuse for attacks on her person, since it had been offered for the establishment of the ‘Maria Callas scholarships’, following Bastias’ advice. Bastias, a person highly respected for his contribution to Hellenic culture, was again in charge of the National Opera and Maria Callas’ host. Dimitris Lambrakis, the publisher and founder of the newspapers To Vema and Ta Nea had passed away at his summer residence on the isle of Poros on 12 August 1957, less than two weeks after the vicious attacks against Callas, and it is even doubtful if he had ever been informed by his editors of their initiative.

The new publisher and successor to the media conglomerate was his son, Christos Lambrakis, a friend and admirer of Callas, with a solid musical background. And even Callas was more cooperative director, the National Opera of Greece became front-page news worldwide, for the first time in its history. Even *The Times* (London) wrote with enthusiasm: “August, 1960, will surely go down as a landmark in the annals of Greek artistic history. In the first place the performance of *Norma* given in the open-air theatre at Epidaurus brought Mme. Maria Callas home for the first time, as a great international diva, to sing with the Greek National Opera in which she began her career as a member of the chorus until spotted by the discerning Director-General of the company, Mr. Costis Bastias.”

And Marios Ploritis, one of Greece’s most prominent theatre reviewers, authors and translators wrote in his column:

“Rarely does the entrance of an actor on stage rivet the audience to their seats, as happened just with the appearance alone of Callas. Her royal bearing, her sovereign stride, her monumental demeanor, her eagle-like glance, her crystal-clear countenance, subjected everything around her, and the thousands of spectators became – as one would say – solely two eyes, one breath, hanging from her slightest movement.”

The unprecedented success of the National Opera of Greece with Callas as Norma led Bastias, the Board and the Greek...
government to decide on a new appearance of Callas at Epidaurus the following August (1961), this time with Medea, Luigi Cherubini’s opéra comique. Since the 1958 performance of Medea at the Dallas Opera with Callas, and Nicola Resigno as conductor, Alexis Minotis as stage director, Jon Vickers as Jason, painter Yannis Tsarouchis for sets and costumes, the same team had appeared at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in 1959 and would now follow Callas to Epidaurus. There, on the evening of 6 August 1961, at the ancient theatre of Polykleitos the Younger, another triumph for the National Opera took place in front of 15,000 spectators with Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis and his wife Amalia in the front row and the rest of the theatre overflowing.

Though Bastias planned a third Epidaurus appearance by Callas in 1962, thus establishing the presence of the National Opera of Greece in the Epidaurus Festival, in spite of all the objections about the desecration of the ‘sacred’ ancient Greek theatre by Italian melodrama, it was not meant to be. The first problems with Callas’ voice had already appeared, as well as the frequent attacks of sinusitis. The following year, 1963, Bastias was overwhelmed by the creation of Greek television, a new undertaking in Greece, while the fall of the Karamanlis government and the subsequent electoral victory of the center-left George Papandreou party foreshadowed his replacement at the Opera.

Greece honours Maria Callas with decorations, commemorative medals and coins

However, the last step in Maria Callas’ Greek vindication, as Costis Bastias believed, was the award of a royal decoration by the Palace. It is not clear if Callas was aware of this plan, but a week after her departure for Milan, following the Norma performances in August 1960, Bastias followed her. In his luggage he carried, in a rather irregular manner, two decorations from the Kingdom of Greece to be delivered to the Greek General Consul in Milan, who was duly empowered to award them. The first, the Commander of the Order of Merit for Maria Callas

At the General Consulate of Greece in Milan, on the evening of 12 September 1960, after the previous August performances of Norma, the Consul Th. Meletiou decorated Maria Callas with the Order of Merit and Maestro Tullio Serafin with the Order of the Phoenix. Costis Bastias spoke and Callas followed thanking King Paul of Greece and Prime Minister C. Karamanlis.

Below: Callas and Serafin wearing their decorations after the ceremony
and the second, the Commander of the Order of the Phoenix for maestro Tullio Serafin. In addition, Bastias offered Callas a commemorative, bas-relief gold-plated profile plaque of her on a wooden panel (40 x 36 cm.) by the sculptor Nicos Perandinos (1910-1991). Present at the low-key ceremony was the superintendent of the Teatro alla Scala, Antonio Ghiringhelli, who invited everyone present to dinner to celebrate Maria Callas’ official recognition by the country of her ancestors. However, Italy had preceded Greece when President Giovanni Gronchi had decorated Callas as a Commendatore OMRI (Order of Merit) in 1956, one year before the 1957 incidents when Greek politicians, journalists and others boycotted her Athens recital. Bastias also received the decoration of Commendatore OMRI in 1962 from the Italian President Antonio Segni for his role in initiating the collaboration between the Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) and the Greek equivalent, which was just starting the installation of television.

After Bastias’ return to Athens, a bronze commemorative medal was commissioned from Perandinos using the mold of the bas-relief. It was six cms. in diameter with Callas’ profile on the obverse and the words “MAPIA” on the left and “KAΛΑΑΔΣ” on the right, just like the bas-relief. It was officially issued with “Greek National Opera” inscribed on the top perimeter and “Epidauros” on the bottom perimeter of the reverse in Greek. In the center it read in Greek “NORMA / MARIA CALLAS /21.24.28 August/1960”. After Callas’ death in 1977, many unauthorized versions of the original medal and of the bas-relief (see footnote 11) were issued. The Greek entrepreneurial spirit was again at its best, or worst. As alla Scala, where for years Callas appeared, issued a Maria Callas commemorative medal on the 25th anniversary of her death. The Greek State Mint issued a €10 silver commemorative coin in 2007, on the 30th anniversary of her death, as it has done for various great Greek artists. It is such institutions that reserve the right to issue commemorative medals.

Also, when Callas returned the following year, to appear in Medea, and between the two performances on 6 and 13 August at Epidauros, she returned to Athens on 11 August to receive the gold medal of honour from the Municipality of Athens from the mayor at the Grande Bretagne Hotel. Maria Callas’ father George Kaloyeropoulos and Costis Bastias were present at the ceremony.

The Maria Callas scholarship fund
Still pending was the creation of the Maria Callas scholarship fund for voice studies abroad, as had been announced by Callas herself and Bastias at the August 1960 press conference. Callas wanted to go ahead as rapidly as possible, while Bastias was preoccupied with the establishment of TV broadcasting in Greece, running the national radio stations, a state monopoly then with no private radio existing, at a time of extreme political strife with the center party of George Papandreou, and writing every evening the front page political commentaries for one of the conservative dailies.
supporting Constantine Karamanlis. At the time, Karamanlis was in self-exile in Paris, but would return for the November 1963 elections, when he would be defeated, and Bastias had little time to devote to the scholarships.

Thus, Callas decided to recruit her friend, publisher Christos Lambrakis, because of his musical background and his youth (29 years old), to become President of the first Maria Callas Scholarship Committee. On 20 September 1963, she wrote to Bastias in English from Milan:

“Knowing you are very busy and cannot therefore have all the time and the patience necessary, I would like Xristos [Christos] Lambakis to take over, of course with your collaboration, this scholarship. He is an excellent musician, I trust him and I am sure he will do things objectively. This scholarship must start immediately so, therefore, your collaboration is most necessary.”

The first Maria Callas Scholarship Committee consisted of Christos Lambrakis (1934-2009), president, Costis Bastias (1901-1972), Alexandra Trianti, the famous Lieder singer, composer Menelaos Palladinos (1914-2012), who succeeded Bastias in September 1964 as Director-General of the National Opera of Greece, and Maritsa Ralli, for many years on the Board of Directors of the National Opera of Greece. Its first public action was on 20 November 1963 when the Committee issued a press release that included the deadline for applying and a number of rules: all applicants had to have completed three years of sôl-fêgê (voice exercises in music schools where runs and scales are sung using the syllables sol-fa), have adequate command of a foreign language and have with them the scores of three arias which they had prepared for the contest.

The Committee had received US $20,000 from the Callas fees for the Epidaurus performances and another $10,000 from the Greek State, as promised by Bastias during the August 1961 opening of the National Opera of Greece, and the candidates would deliver their applications to participate. The preliminary auditions took place on 19 and 20 December 1963 at the auditorium of the Athens Odeum and the final selection for the two singers who would go abroad, on Saturday morning 21 December.

The Maria Callas Scholarships completed their first 50 years this year. During this time they have been awarded at irregular intervals, usually of two to three years, but occasionally even five years. They are no longer under the patronage of Greece’s National Opera, but under the Athens Concert Hall Megaron, completed and operated by publisher Christos Lambrakis’ unceasing efforts. Following his death in 2009, the last two scholarship awards, in 2010 and 2012, were named “The Christos Lambrakis Scholarship”, though the Association Maria Callas Scholarships has not announced if this practice will continue in the future. On their website, which is only in Greek, the masthead still bears the title “Maria Callas Scholarships”.

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Postscript

This article was first delivered as a lecture at the Foundation of the Greek Parliament on 27 September 2007, during the anniversary exhibition, Maria Callas, 30 years after. That evening Nicholas Petsalidis-Diomidis, author of The Unknown Callas: The Greek Years (2001), recounted an imaginary Athenian promenade, stopping at every place where Callas was known to have been, while mezzo-soprano Kiki Morphonioi spoke about her appearances with Callas in both Epidaurus performances. I have now expanded the text and translated it in English for the Maria Callas Magazine of The Maria Callas International Club.
Taking a bow, after the opening performance of Cherubini’s Medea at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus on 6 August 1961.

From left to right: painter Yannis Tsarouhis, responsible for sets and costumes, Director-General Costis Bastias, Maria Callas and Stage Director Alexis Minotis

At the small Xenia Hotel at Epidaurus, following the opening of Medea, on 6 August 1961, Bastias is hosting a dinner party for Maria Callas. Sitting from left to right: Costis Bastias, Maria Callas, society columnist Elsa Maxwell and John Bastias (author of the present article) speaking to prominent tragedienne Katina Paxinou.

Across the table, but not appearing in the photograph, are Maestro Nicola Rescigno and Stage Director Alexis Minotis, husband of Paxinou
Footnotes
1. P. Palaiologos, “Para pasan prospathian”, daily newspaper To Vema, 5 April 1957. Like all the other quotations in this article from the Greek press, this has been translated into English by the author.
2. Freddy Germanos, “One of ours has left...”, daily newspaper Apogeimatin, 30 December 1972 (Costis Bastias obituary).
3. [Costis Bastias], Maria Callas, Alpha Magazine, 21 January 1965.
7. This press conference given by Maria Callas and Costis Bastias was recorded and broadcast by the National Radio Broadcasting Station of Athens (E.I.R). CD copies exist in the Costis Bastias Archives and in those kept by many Callas scholars.
8. “Mme. Callas Sings Norma in the Theatre at Epidaurus” (by a special correspondent), The Times (London), 29 August 1960. Still, The Times’ special correspondent seems not to know that Bastias’ discerning ‘naso’, as Callas recounts above, didn’t discover her in the chorus, where he himself had placed her, but in the preceding private audition at his home with de Hidalgo.
10. Most opéras comiques, like the Medea, are not comic operas but tragedies.
11. It was sold at the 2 and 3 December 2000 auction Maria Callas Souvenirs d’une légende by Calmels Chambre Cohen in Paris, at an estimated US $7140-8570. It seems, however, that after the death of Bastias (1972) and Callas (1977), many unauthorized copies were produced and sold to private individuals and even opera museums in Europe and the U.S.
12. Callas’s original letter is kept at the Costis Bastias Archives in Athens.
14. The information for this caption was graciously offered by the Maria Callas collector, Dimitris Pyromallis, Greece’s most important collector of records, CDs, programmes, books, posters, photographs etc, all pertaining to the Divina.

Following Maria Callas’ wishes, Costis Bastias and publisher Christos Lambrakis worked closely, from the end of 1963, for the creation of the Maria Callas scholarships.

Below, Callas and Lambrakis enter the Odeum Herodes Atticus to see the August 1966 performance of Sergei Prokofiev’s ballet Romeo and Juliet, with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, as the whole amphitheater cheers.
Costis Bastias: Mme. Callas. I would like to hear about your impressions and your feelings, being back in Greece after so many years to appear in a whole production.

Maria Callas: Now, let’s just say one thing. We are Greeks! I feel for Greece even more, because, let’s not forget that, during the War, we were together, we suffered together, we went hungry together, we worked together, and thus, I cannot say we went up in flames because us Greeks, glory be to the Almighty, do not go up in flames. As a result, we came back here three or four years ago [1957]. Again the usual troubles, again the usual situations. But, we did quite well and left each other dear friends, as always, since actually we were never enemies. These are things created by the press.

Now, when Mr. Bastias wrote to me – I had seen Mr. Bastias last year when we passed with the Christina and I always remember for sure both the good and the bad things in life. I want you all to understand one thing. I am grateful to Mr. Bastias because, when I was fourteen or fifteen years old, I believe, I had an audition with Mr. Bastias, when I was just a child then, and the National Opera of Greece was being founded, who agreed with Mme. de Hidalgo to pay me to continue my studies at the disposal of the Opera. In other words, he showed great trust in me and helped me at a time when I most needed such help. This I could never forget. Consequently, first of all because it was evident that Mr. Bastias has brains, ears, and, as they say in Italian, naso, nose, in other words he can smell something of value, and he placed his confidence in me, and in gratitude, to reciprocate I said, when he wrote to me about Epidaurus to stage an opera, in gratitude to his gesture to me, I said we will perform an opera. They wanted the Medea, and I preferred Norma, because it is more bel canto. As far as my fee from the National Opera is concerned, we decided to entrust it... do you want to say it better, Costis?

C.B.: Mme. Callas informed me a few months ago from Milano and also by phone that in reciprocity to what we had done for her, she will return to the National Opera the amount of U.S.$15,000, which are her fee of $5,000 per performance. And this amount, according to her own words, she is returning it so that I can do for others what I had done then for her.

M.C.: Because a young girl... [clapping].

C.B.: [This purse] will be augmented by the National Opera, so that the income may be sufficient for a young artist to travel every year abroad to attend special
courses. However, this committee, wherein Mme. Callas will participate, will reach its unbiased selections without any outside influence.

M.C.: I will be personally present.
C.B.: And we will decide for the suitable persons either a singer, a dancer...
M.C.: I prefer a singer.
C.B.: Only singing. Then, it is done and established, a type of Maria Callas scholarship.
M.C.: Thus, as I had then need for help, and they helped me, in the same way, a young person who now has need of assistance in his or her first steps, I would like to do the same.

(Translated from the original Greek by John Bastias)