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Large Record Collectors: The Unrecognized Authorities

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Record Collectors and the Historical Record

Where are musical traditions preserved? Not necessarily in public institutions. The holdings of private record collectors are often the only sources for popular and traditional music. Even the most casual survey of any archive's collections reveals that the holdings are composed not merely of academic field recordings, but also the often extensive donations of amateur collectors. We tend to forget that private curio cabinets were the seeds from which some of the largest archives and museums in the world first grew.

Researchers seeking information on world music sometimes discover that historical events have led to a situation where commercial records are nearly the only evidence remaining for musical traditions destroyed by war, outlawed by political edict, or displaced by rapid social change. From our perspective, these past events elevate commercial records from cheap mass-produced popular consumer items to invaluable cultural documents. Although circumstances might suggest that the researcher explore holdings of commercial records unavailable in public institutions, academic researchers do not often seek out private record collectors. Ironically, academics appear to reject record collectors for the same reason they approach them in the first place: their willingness to talk at length about their areas of musical interest. Interactions between academics and collectors are reported, by both groups, as almost inevitably ending in open argument.

For the academic focusing on particular musical, historical or cultural problems evident in music, the record collector's attention to collectible detail is simply too removed from the academic's own set tasks to be taken seriously. Collectors are usually labeled "too difficult to work with," and academics are reported to be totally ignorant of whole areas in the history of



Dino Pappas.

commercial music. Collectors contend that academics simply don't listen very well. The academics are also said not to adequately credit the collector's contributions in the scholar's final printed works.

Certainly many researchers do work out successful relationships with collectors. Still, by all accounts, long-term interactions with collectors are the exception, not the rule. This is unfortunate since the music and information these amateur collectors hold is too valuable to be summarily dismissed. Academics intent on a specific research problem tend to overlook the fact that collectors very often know far more than just the records. In many cases collectors were witnesses to the social and cultural transformations revealed on the recordings, and are fully aware of social, historical and musical contexts.

The role of large record collectors in investigating Greek, Balkan, and Anatolian musical traditions is especially crucial. Particular historical circumstances exist where the United States—not Greece or Anatolian Turkey—was the location for the first appearance of literally hundreds of traditional Greek songs on commercial records. Ten, and sometimes twenty years

before such songs were recorded in Greece or Turkey, they were being recorded and released in New York City and Chicago. Beginning in the 1890s, some forms of traditional music were totally forbidden for political reasons and were never released in Greece. Archives in public institutions contain only a fragment of these musical traditions.

This essay will use the experiences of one key informant on Balkan music, Dino X. Pappas, as a case study in the roles of record collectors and their potential contributions to the historical record.

The Pappas Record Collection

Dino X. Pappas of St. Clair Shores, Michigan, holds one of the largest collections of Greek, Balkan, and Anatolian recorded music. The Pappas collection has a core group of 7,000 Greek 78 rpm records and 3,000 Turkish and Armenian 78 rpm records. Aside from these, there are 2,000 45 rpm records and more than 2,000 long-playing albums, all a mixture of Greek and Turkish music. Making up a small but important segment of the collection are the miscellaneous Ladino, Macedonian and Syrian records. The collection is not restricted solely to Balkan music: there are also several hundred American popular 78s.

Dino doesn't collect just music. Over the years he has amassed Greek sheet music, record catalogs dating from 1918, music store advertisements, articles on Greek and Balkan music gleaned from journals, magazines and newspapers, taped interviews with traditional musicians, seven Victrolas, and even a player piano.

What kind of music is found in the Pappas collection? Traditional Greek folk song genres abound: *kleftika* (mountain freedom songs), *demotika* (popular songs), *kandathes* (choral songs), the urban style of music called first *smyrnaika* then *rebetika* and/or (after the location where they were performed) *cafe-aman* songs. The collection includes traditional dance instrumentals for the *kalamatiano*, *syrtos*, *tsamikos*, *hasapiko*, *ballos*, *cifte telli*, *Cretiko sousta*, *zeybekiko*, *tik* and the *pentozales*—in other words, music for literally every dance performed by Greeks.

The range of dance and music genres that document Western influences is also amazingly diverse. We find Greek waltzes, light fox trots, rumbas, mambos, and tangos alongside the less obvious forms of "Greek" recorded music: the operettas, traditional calendar custom songs, Italianate sentimental songs, Greek military band music, and popular American songs of the 1920s and 1930s sung in Greek.

The holdings of the Pappas collection reveal that Greek oral performances on record also include the traditional ethnic comedy form known as *karaghiozis* performed in Greek, Turkish and Ladino, or mixtures of those languages, sometimes even with English. The highly popular comic review, a mixture of dialogue and song, is one further comedy genre found on record. Modern Greek drama in America also appears with many variations of popular songs from stage plays, especially the tragic melodramas. Pappas has also collected Byzantine chant and church music dating from the early 1900s to the present.

Dino X. Pappas: The Golden Greek of Detroit

Dino Pappas is far from a reclusive collector. "The Golden Greek of Detroit" is what the Detroit Free Press calls Dino whenever it runs a story on him and his collection. Dino has lectured for community groups, private clubs, and academic audiences in California, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Utah. As a guest speaker Dino has appeared on numerous radio programs all around the country, lecturing with extensive musical examples. At the request of local scholars, Dino prepared a taped lecture with music to accompany the National Endowment for the Humanities exhibition, "The Greek American Family: Continuity Through Change," when it toured to Wayne State University in 1983. Dino has compiled a discography entitled *Greek and Turkish Commercial Recordings in America: 1900 to 1956*, the result of five years' worth of investigation and cross-referencing. Negotiations are underway to have this discography published.

Scholars have long respected Dino's expertise. Recordings of interviews with Dino, lectures, and rerecordings of 78 rpm records from his collection are deposited at five locations: The Wayne State Ethnic Archives, the Grand Rapids Public Library, the Greek Collection of the Archives of the West at the Marriott Library in Salt Lake City, and the Indiana University Uralic- Altaic Archives and the Archives of Traditional Music.

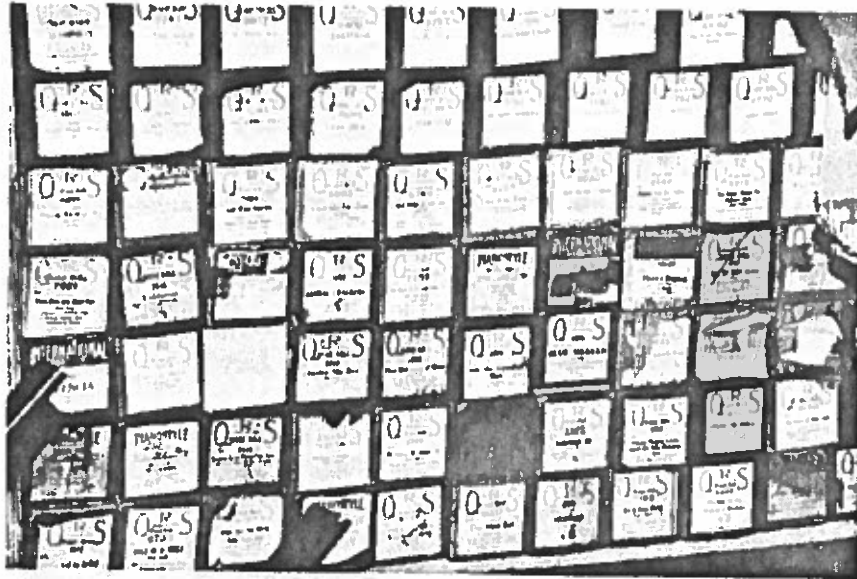
But who is Dino Pappas? The following is from his autobiography.

My name is Constantinos X. Papakonstantinou, or better known as Dino Pappas. I was born in Detroit, Michigan, August 1, 1931, of Greek immigrant parents. My father came to the United States in approximately 1905 from the Roumelia region of Greece. My mother came to the United States from Constantinople, Turkey, but of Greek parents, in 1921.

My interest in Greek and Turkish music came at an early age. I used to love playing the records and looking back and seeing the enjoyment on people's faces as they either sang along or danced to the music. I made myself a vow, at an early age, that I would always try to collect something new and different constantly. My collection is quite extensive. It is considered by many collectors and scholars as the largest Greek and Turkish record collection in the country.

Because of my little bits of knowledge and through listening to the songs, I have been able to follow Greek-American history through the recordings. I had the honor also of taking part in the making of the Hollywood movie, "The Postman Always Rings Twice," with Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange. The Greek records played in the movie are out of my collection.

Dino's "little bits of knowledge and listening to the songs" has him constantly sought out by Balkan music lovers and scholars all over the world. Musicians, scholars, Greek community groups, movie producers, and folklore and dance clubs regularly contact him to learn about modern Greek and Balkan music. Dino's



Piano rolls from the Pappas collection of over three hundred rolls containing Greek, Turkish, and American popular music.

accessibility and his generous nature have led to a seemingly endless stream of visitors. It is these contacts, over the past ten years, that have established Dino's reputation in Greece and the United States as a leading authority on modern Greek and Turkish recorded music.

The array of scholars who maintain contact with Dino Pappas reads like a who's who of modern Greek and Turkish studies. Elias Petropoulos, author of *Rebetika Tragoudhia* (Rebetic Song) a recognized classic on modern Greek and Asia Minor music, has repeatedly written to seek out Dino's advice, knowledge and music.

Various people have contacted Dino for information and music to use in producing re-released albums on Greek and Turkish music. Dino contributed to *Greek-Oriental: Smyrnic-Rebetic Songs and Dances, The Golden Years, 1927-1937* (Folklyric Records 9033) through numerous lengthy consultations with its producer, Martin Schwartz.

While preparing *To Elliniko Laiko Tragoudi Stin Ameriki 1917-1938* (Greek Folk Songs in America 1917-1938), the album's producer, James Palis, spent days in Dino's basement listening, often for the first time, to the earliest commercial records of Greek music available in America.

Steve Demarkopoulos, the noted Greek lexicographer, has a running conversation with Dino. The *Dictionary of Uncommon Modern Greek*, Demarkopoulos' latest project, is a compilation of popular words, slang, and colloquialisms not found in standard Greek dictionaries. Given the history of the Greek nation state over the last one hundred years, compiling such a dictionary amounts to a political statement. Greece's incorporation into the Ottoman Empire from roughly 1453 until 1821 resulted in a host of political, social, and cultural transformations once independence was achieved. One aspect of the cultural changes was that the Greek language became a political issue. No foreign

words from Turkish or any Balkan language were admissible in public or in print, but commercial records contain many of these forbidden words.

In his academic writings as well as his immensely popular syndicated newspaper column, "Do You Speak Greek," Dr. Demarkopoulos has documented, with considerable help from Dino, the appearance of "Gringlish" on early 78rpm records. Gringlish or Greenglish (indicating a green horn, a term applied to many immigrant Greeks in the early 1900s) is a merger of Greek and English words that follows Greek grammatical forms. "Gringlish, like all patois, thrives because either there is no exact counterpart in the standard language or the counterpart is too complicated for the Greek-American to remember or too cumbersome to bother to reproduce." (Demarkopoulos 1979) The use of Gringlish is not only quite widespread among Greek-American communities, but some witnesses believe that its use is increasing.

Many musicians and several academics have asked Dino for specific rerecordings on technical aspects of Greek and Turkish music. One example is Michael G. Kaloyanides, an ethnomusicologist who requested a whole series of cassettes with musical examples of Turkish modes called *makams*. Richard K. Spottswood, author of *Ethnic Music on Record. A Discography of Commercial Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States 1893 to 1942*, spent many days with Dino discussing Greek records released in America.

While a host of other names could be included, perhaps the most important recent visitor to Dino's home has been Fotios K. Litsas, the Byzantine and modern Greek scholar. As part of a twelve-hour series on Greeks in America, Dr. Litsas made a special trip to Michigan with his video crew to interview Dino on the history of Greek and Turkish music recorded in America for a National Greek Television and Eurovision documentary.

Traditions Learned in the Home

Informal gatherings in the living room or kitchen were the scenes where Dino's mother and aunts would sing songs they learned growing up in Constantinople. Dino would often come home to find his father and his friends sitting around the kitchen table laughing and singing the *kleftika*, the mountain freedom songs of the Roumelia region of Greece.

Even the presence of mechanical music was not something new to his family. Dino recalls, "Mom said that they had a Victrola *me houni* (with a horn)," so he asked, "Was it a disc with a horn?" "No," she said, "*makerades* (spools)." She also said they would put a piece of foil over the cylinder and record their own songs. In Constantinople, before 1921, Dino's mother and her sisters would gather around the cylinder machine. One aunt would play the mandolin, another took a spoon and a plate to keep time as they all sang into the horn. These homemade cylinders would last two or three replays.

Sometimes Dino refers to his family as *glenjedes*, or party people, for their obvious love of music, dance, and camaraderie. Dino recalls that in his youth some homes were like museums with dust on the Victrolas. Victrolas in these homes were status symbols, nothing else. This was certainly not the case in Dino's home. Dino still has his parents' 1925 Brunswick Victrola with the family's original record collection inside.

When is the Informant an Authority?

A Dino Pappas Primer in Modern Greek Music

While the sheer bulk of the Pappas collection makes it a priceless cultural treasure, it is still Dino's knowledge that is the most valuable. He can hear and compare instantly what it takes many people weeks of listening just to begin to recognize.

Dino's contributions in demonstrating Greek and Balkan music traditions are clear. He has helped many scholars fill in the missing pieces to the historical puzzle concerning Greek and Turkish music. This is especially the case with many of the *smyrniaka* or *rebetika* songs whose lyrics contain references to free love, drugs, and the hypocrisy of Greek political and social systems. These genres, along with songs with lyrics alternating one language with another, such as Greek and Turkish, were actively suppressed in Greece after World War I, and did not surface on Greek-issued commercial records until the 1950s. Nevertheless, they were recorded in Greece, especially by Tetos Demetriades, an agent of RCA Victor, and released in the United States. These Greek-American records, which were outside the control of the Greek government, serve as invaluable documentation, and in some cases, the only documentation of publicly banned musical traditions.

The Pappas collection has been a useful source of information for a number of discographers due to the scarcity of record company logs or files. In the case of the two largest producers of Greek records, RCA Victor has only a fraction of its business files documenting the production of Greek records, and all the Columbia documents have been destroyed (Spottswood 1990; personal communication). In the absence of written information, the only way to know what was issued is to actually see the records.

A *meraklis* is the Greek word for a consummate music lover, and no better term could be applied to Dino X. Pappas. Scholars and music aficionados are contacting Dino in ever-increasing numbers. More and more people are writing about Dino and his collection.

Dino was just awarded a Helen Zeese Papanikolas Charitable Trust Award to catalog some of his music. Much of the future research on modern Greek music will certainly be influenced by Dino and his collection.

Still, I'm absolutely sure, Dino just doesn't give a hoot. I can see Dino now. He's down in his basement. Dinner is cooking upstairs. And Dino? He has his latest discovery on the turntable. With his earphones on, he's singing, stomping, and shouting to the music.

Notes

A 1984 interview of Dino Pappas by the author may be found under Archives accession number 86-102-F/C. The interview contains music examples and Pappas' discussion of the history or relationships of various songs, artists and musical traditions.

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