

Marimba Bands, Hawai Early Greek Love Songs

By Steve Frangos

Special to The National Herald

Weddings are a celebration of life and love. People come together and dance to celebrate and honor the bride and groom, and to wish them a long and happy life together. Dancing is a key celebratory aspect of Greek weddings. But you can't have dancing without music and song. That being the obvious case, it's worthwhile to explore the history of early Greek love songs on commercial records.

The complexity of love songs found on the very first Greek commercial records produced in North America is a marvelous unexplored musical legacy. Instruments, topical themes, musical genres and languages no longer associated with popular Greek music are all documented on these commercial records. While romance and experimentation are both features of love, no academic will openly discuss these commercial recordings. These are far from recent stylistic innovations. From 1896 onwards, with the very first documented Greek songs recorded in North America, we hear a consistent mix of languages, genres and musical traditions which few will even acknowledge exist.

Marimba bands, Hawaiian guitar orchestras, xylophones, 100-mandolin bands, mambos, tangos, foxtrots and many other musical instruments and genres can be found on Greek commercial records here in North America. In time, with Greek American records, we can easily hear a tsifteteli mambo or a Greek/Oriental foxtrot.

These Greek love songs were not novelty items recorded once or twice, and then totally forgotten. Capitalism does have its historical uses. Vinyl records were produced in direct proportion to how many sold.

From our perspective in history, records which sold in large numbers can be safely assumed to have been highly popular with



ΡΑΜΟΝΑ

Πέρα εκεί μέσ' στην έρημιά
μέσα στα βουνά
είδα μιὰ βραδυά
Και μέσ' στης νύχτας τή σιωπή
μακρὰ εκεί, κάποιος τραγουδεί

«Ραμόνα», που είσαι τώρα μακρὰ
Ραμόνα, θυμίσου, πάλι τὰ παλιὰ
που είχες γεμίσει πικρὸ φαρμάκι
μέσ' στη καρδιά
μὲ ὄρκους και λόγια και μὲ τὰ
φεύτικα σου φιλιά

Ραμόνα, ἄχ! ὅλα τώρα τὰ ξεχνῶ
Ραμόνα, ἀγάπα με ὅπως κι' ἐγώ
μεσ' [στη] ψυχή μου σ' ἔχω
δὲν σὲ λημονῶ
Ραμόμα, σὲ θέλω, πονῶ (δίσ)

their Greek audience and consumers. All these new love songs found their way onto one Greek record after another, from 1896 until well into the 1960's.

But like so much else in Greek American culture and history, the very artifacts themselves - commercially released records, in this case - are disappearing at a phenomenal rate. We will probably never have a complete soundscape of Greek-recorded music in North America.

Like a lost, but never to be forgotten, first love, all we can do here is remember.

The Oriental Fox Trot

What do we hear first? By May 4, 1896 Michael Arachtingi had recorded eight Berliner seven-inch records. Even at this early date,

songs such as Smyrana Serenade (BER 1002), Great Constantinopolitan Song (BER 1005) and Cozagiaki Song (BER 1004), cited as being sung in Turkish, all suggest an Asia Minor origin, or at least musical exposure to Arachtingis' musical repertoire. With Arachtingis' last recording, "To Ta L'Ami Zo Singlino (The Cat and the Dog)," we clearly see - and hear - Westernized musical influences. This Greek cabaret style is as traditionally as any other form.

How many traditional demotic songs should I cite which mention the beautiful Vlach girl, the Turkish girl in the veil, or even the captivating Karagouna? Why are the mention of such persons, inclusion of words from their languages, or even incorporation of their dances (e.g., the chasapiko or zeim-

iii Guitars and You on Commercial Records

ekiko) or music traditions (kanades) acceptable when Greeks are in Europe, but not when they sing and dance in North America?

Tetos Demetriades, a very popular Greek American musician, recorded a wide range of musical traditions spanning the full range of traditional Greek folk songs to popular-selling Greek versions of hit American songs from the 1920's and 1930's. Demetriades was so astute in his selection of best-selling Greek, Turkish and foreign-language music, he eventually became vice president of RCA Victor's foreign language division. Given what we hear on these records, Demetriades was unquestionably a vocalist well versed in Greek music hall and vaudeville performative styles.

With more than 200 known songs to his credit, Demetriades was one of the most popular Greek singers in modern times. Certainly Demetriades released Greek versions of "Titina (1925)," "Yes, Sir That's My Baby (1926)," "S' Ena Horioudaki (In a Little Spanish Town, 1927)," Palia Mou Hronia (My Blue Heaven, 1928)," "Filo to xeri tis madame (I Kiss Your Hand Madame, 1929)," and a host of others. Much of the musical accompaniment for these songs which Demetriades recorded came from the fabled orchestra leader, Nathaniel Shilkret, and the Victor Orchestra (known after 1929 as the RCA Victor Orchestra). Aside from their work at the RCA Victor studios in Camden, New Jersey, Shilkret and his orchestra are probably best known for their work in nearly all the Laurel & Hardy movies. Other studio sessions featured an eclectic mix of traditional Greek instrumentals, American studio musicians and Greek vocalists.

Was this all just smaltzi second-rate music? Simply bad knockoffs of popular American originals? Forget about it. These were top-selling records, and many Greek immigrant performers made their careers out of, and based on, this kind of music.

The kind of music these Greek immigrants and studio musicians forged has not disappeared. To cite just one example would be the 18-piece "New Leviathan Oriental Fox Trot Orchestra... a revival orchestra that performs authentic orchestrations of vintage American popular music from the 1890's through the early 1930's... In addition to the well-known compositions of jazz and ragtime composers like Jelly Roll Morton, Fletcher Henderson and Eubie Blake, the orchestra's repertory includes the work of less well-re-

membered Tin Pan Alley composers... In 1972, their first performance was at Tulane University, presenting a rather tongue-in-cheek concert of best-loved Oriental Foxtrots (a then largely forgotten early 20th Century dance music genre), partially satirizing the then current revival of scholarly interest in classic ragtime. The orchestra has appeared in Europe and throughout the United States, (with their recordings) featured in the soundtracks of Woody Allen's

Continued on page 20



Ἰ'Απ' τὴν Βαβελωνία

ΤΟ ΦΛΙΤ

Τώρα πια με την επιδημία
οὐλοὶ ἄντρες, γυναῖκες, παιδιὰ
μὲν τὰ τρέματα ἀπόκοντα σέρνουν
κι' οὐλο δός του με φόρα τρεμάνουν
κι' ἡ γυναῖκα μου ποῦνε σουλοῦπα
σὲν μοῦ γίνεται πλέον κουνούπι
με μὴ τρέματα κι' αὐτὴν στήν ἀρχίζω
κι' ἀπ' τὸ ὄργη τὸ πολὺ τὴ ζαλίζω!
Κι' ἂν ἰδῶ πὼς εἶν' αὐτὸν πο μπίτι
καὶ δὲν παρνεὶ πολὺ ἀπὸ φλίτ
τὴν ἀρχίζω καὶ σὲ... παντούφλιτ.

Ρεπραὶν

Φλίτ, Φλίτ, Φλίτ!
Φλίτ γέρο κι' παντούφλιτ
Ρε Φλίτ θέλει κι' ὁ ἔρωσ διὰ νὰ ἔξο-
φλειτ!

Φλίτ, Φλίτ, Φλίτ
Κι' ὅσο κείνη τσαουφλιτ
Τσομπόριζε ἀβέρτα
καὶ μὴ σὲ νο εἶπει μπίτι!...

Ποιητὲς μὰ σ' ἀγαπῶ μαῦ κραινεῖ
κι' ἐνῶ ἄλι! τῆς φωνάζω οὐρή!
ἄκείνη δός του τὴ φούστα τῆς βγαίνει
κι' εἰ τὸν μῦτον μου μπαίνει σὺθωρει
Τὸτ' ἀρχίζω τὸ Φλίτ πια με βία
μὰ ἄντις νὰ ζαλίσω αὐτὴν
ἐζαλίσθημα γὰ τὴν πρῶτα
καὶ κατάνησα σκίνα σωστή
Κι' ἐνῶ εἶχα λυγὸλι πια φλίτ
ἄκείνη νοδμπαινα ἀκόμα στή μπίτι
καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγε ἀναίσθητη μπίτι!

Ρεπραὶν

Δός μου τὸ ὕστερο τὸ φλίτ!
δός μου καὶ ἄλλο ἀκόμα
κι' ἐγὼ ἀναίσθητος πια μπίτι
τραγουδάγα σὲ σερῶμα
Τὸ πρῶτο τὸ φλίτ
δὲν σὲ ζαλίζει μπίτι
τὸ δεύτερο τὸ φλίτ!
εἰν' εἶνο μπίτι γιὰ μπίτι!
Σὲ τρεῖς τὸ φλίτ!
Ὁ κῶνωψ ἔξαντλειτ!
καὶ σὲ πέμπτο πια τὸ φλι
κῶνωψ καὶ φλίτ ζοφλειτ!

Early Greek Love Songs o

Continued from page 5

1994 film, 'Bullets over Broadway and Storyville' (1992) (wikipedia.com)."

The Greek Interpreter

A number of Greek American musician's names could be added to the list of Oriental foxtrot composers and performers. Here are three of Demetriades' early love songs:

"I Agapi (The Love)," recorded on March 28, 1924 in New York City, features Demetriades at tenor with G. Maraveas at baritone (Victor 77477A). I should point out that, given the date this song was recorded, the two singers would have had to sing into a megaphone, as studio microphones did not come into professional use until 1928.

This song reports on the importance of love in everyone's life. Whoever has not loved, is better not to have lived!

Ta mavra sou matia
Prepi na to xeris
Fos mou,
Ekanan komatia
Oles tis karthies,
Tou kosmou.
Y'afto kai'go se latrevo
Ki' agapi sou girevo
Kai'an de se kerdiso
Pistepse me
Den tha ziso.
S' agapo pouli mou.
Na pou sou to leo tora.
Eis' ap'ti zoi mou
Os tin isterni mou ora.
Ki' etsi papse na fovase
Mono prepei na lipase

Your dark eyes
You should know,
O light of my life
Have broken (into pieces),
All the hearts
In the world.
That's why I adore you,
And seek your love,
And if I don't win you,
Believe me,
I shall not live.
I love you, my sweet bird,
Here, I'm telling you now.
You are part of my life,
Until my final hour.
So stop being afraid.
Just have some pity...

(REFRAIN)

He is fortunate indeed who desires to find love
With one kiss, the one he loves is happy in this world.

Ola giro ethos tin fisi, ola echoun agapisei.
Ola edo trigiro, agapi mou glikia, alazoune filia.

Everything in creation, everything, has loved.
Everything roundabout, my sweet love, exchanges
kisses.

Opios den agapisei, einai kala mi zisei
Fevgei ap'ton kosmo, toutone paidia, choris na dei
chara.

He who has never loved is better off not living
He leaves this world, my friends, without having experienced
joy.

Love songs like these were once heard in every Greek community across North America. Today few of these commercial records can be found, even in the largest archives. We have lost more than art and musings about the nature of love. We have lost a darkly beautiful aspect of our cultural history which, alas, can never be retrieved in its entirety.

But for those lovers who wish to be wed Greek-style, who are still searching for their special song and haven't been able to pick one yet, maybe they can find one by Demetriades.

ii Guitars and You

on Commercial Records

In 1925, "Yes Sir, That's My Baby" was written by acclaimed Tin Pan Alley composers, Gus Kahn (1886-1941) and Walter Donaldson (1893-1947). On March 17, 1926 Demetriades wasted no time re-recording this song (with his own lyrics) making it an extremely popular Greek-American hit song (Victor 78629).

Pia nomizeis ein'afiti
 Me ti fousa tin konti
 Pou tis pira tora to fili?
 Mi thareis pos tha sto po
 Mathe omos, einai mistiko

Who do you think that is
 In the short skirt,
 The one I stole a kiss from?
 Don't think I'm going to tell you
 But understand, it's a secret.

Yes sir, me fonazei
 Yes sir, m'angaliazei
 Yes sir, otan me kitaei
 Yes sir, me filaei,
 Yes sir, me methaei,
 Yes sir, apo ta filia
 Tote ego de vasto
 Yes, sir, tha tin paro
 Yes sir, na tin pao
 Yes sir, na tin pantrefto

Yes sir, she calls me
 Yes sir, she embraces me
 Yes sir, when she looks at me
 Yes sir, she kisses me
 Yes sir, she intoxicates me
 Yes sir, with kisses
 Then I can't bear it any more
 Yes sir, I will take her
 Yes sir, to take her
 Yes sir, to be wed.

ΤΡΑΠΑΡΕΤΟΝ Ο ΜΥΕΜΟΥΞΕ

Σὲ Σὲρ δὲν μὰὶ μὲμῆκη
 Σὲρ δὲν μὰὶ μὲμῆκη
 Σὲρ δὲν μὰὶ μὲμῆκη
 Σὲ μὲμῆκη γιὰτὶ σ' ἀγαπῶ
 Σὲ μὲμῆκη πῶς δὲν σ' ἀγαπῶ
 Σὲ μὲμῆκη θὰ σὲ πάρω μὲμῆκη
 γιὰτὶ σ' ἀγαπῶ (δὶς).

Ὁ μὲ πᾶρης ἰμὶ τὴν Μάρτια
 δὲν ἔχω πρῶτα μὲμῆκη
 μὲμῆκη δὲλτον μὲμῆκη νὰ γινῶμαι ταίρι
 ἀγαπῶ πολλὸ θὰ σὲ πάρω ταίρι
 ἔλλω θάλαϊ ἔδδ ;



"To Tango tis Agapis (The Tango of Love)" was recorded sometime in New York City during the month of July 1927, with Demetriades singing vocals, accompanied by Hawaiian guitars (Columbia 56071-F).

Se karterousa nostalgika
 Kapia vradia
 Na'rtheis, sima mou
 San kapia lampsi mageftiki
 Me mia lachtara erotiki.

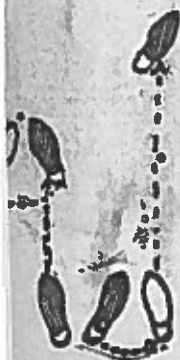
I longed for you, nostalgically
 One night
 To come near me
 Like some enchanting glow,
 With erotic yearning.

Eirthes san aniksi ol'anthis-
 meni
 Yia na mou peis trela erotev-
 meni
 Kapio tragoudi oniremeno
 Pou to kratouses stin kardia
 sou
 Filakto.

You came blooming like
 springtime
 To tell me, madly in love,
 About some dreamy love song
 Which you kept hidden inside
 your heart
 Like a talisman (of our love)

Kai tora pia pou se krato
 glykia mou,
 Kai spartaras mesa stin an-
 galia mou,
 Tha zoume panta eftichis-
 meni
 Mes' sto methisi tis agapis to
 trelo

And now that I am holding
 you, my sweetness,
 And you are trembling in my
 arms,
 We will live forever happy
 and content
 In love's mad intoxication.



Πρωτοφανής έκδοσις τῆς
 πολλῶν δημοτικῶν εἰδήσεων
 τοῦ Δ. ΜΟΥΣΗ εἰς πολλὰς
 ἐκδόσεις εἰς δια τὰ

Ζητήσατε τὰ «Νέα Ἐ
 δια τῶν 8 δραχμῶν

ΕΚΔΟΣΙΣ Δ. Σ.
 Ὀδὸς Παιωνίου ἀριθ.