

# Rediscovering the History of Greek

By Steve Frangos

Virtually no one is systematically studying Greek music produced in North America. Not surprisingly, then, Greek commercial records, sheet music, record catalogs, instruments, and all the other material items necessary to make, purchase, or hear music are also ignored. Musicians, music store owners, entertainment promoters, instrument builders, club owners, and independent Greek record company manufacturers should all have been interviewed long ago. As the public record can now report, all of that basic research most likely never happened and is still not happening now.

This fundamental lack of interest is all the more surprising given that archival collections related to Greek music in the

billboards from around the country, I was startled by a black and white photograph of the Paradise Oriental Restaurant. Immediately above that Greek restaurant, in the second story windows, "Apollo Music Co. Music Publishers" was written in block lettering.

While no caption is included with the picture, the street number "301" appears several times. As the Apollo Music Company of New York City printed its address on its sheet music as 301 West 41st Street, New York City, it could be concluded that this was a photograph of that location. Along with the company's name, there is more block lettering: "Yours With Our Best Songs Musophone." Was Musophone a subsidiary of Apollo?

With no background information all that are left are the phys-

and find a variety of Apollo musical items buried among their private collections of sheet music. Given the overall popularity that company apparently enjoyed, it seems best to begin with at least a preliminary survey of information can be found printed, stamped, or written directly on the sheet music itself.

Apollo cover art varied over the years. Yet the majority of examples of that company's sheet music feature a standardized cover: a border along all four sides of a rose covered trellis with a vase on the viewer's right side. The individual song's title is at the top of the front cover, with the number of the specific song in the upper left-hand corner. The back page has the title in block letters, Apollo Editions at the top of the page, and then a listing of songs.

The only street address I have ever seen printed on Apollo Music Company sheet music is the one mentioned above. As some pieces of sheet music include the words Athens, Greece," as well. Perhaps there was an Apollo office in Athens? Maybe some of the sheet music issued under the Apollo name was originally printed in Greece? The phrase, "Made and Printed in U.S.A." can be found on other pieces of Apollo sheet music, "Two New Apollo Records by CRIONAS" on others yet. Although any conclusions are speculative, it appears that given that the vast majority



The copies of Apollo sheet music were visible on pianos in the parlors of many Greek-American homes for decades. Its offices were at 301 West 41st Street, New York City, at the heart of New York City's long-gone Greektown near Times Square.

United States have only grown over the last 20 to 30 years. Just in terms of Greek sheet music, both printed in North America and imported from abroad, institutions such as The National Hellenic Museum in Chicago, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Greek Museum, the Center for Greek-American Heritage, and the Tsakopoulos Hellenic Collection are just a few of the public institutions that now hold sizable collections.

While absent-mindedly flipping through a book on popular American architecture, looking at street scenes, gas stations and

ical objects found in the archives and private collections on which to begin a review of Apollo.

#### PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

While there appears to be no detailed documentation on Apollo, I have seen the sheet music issued by this one publisher my entire life. Aside from my family's own small collection, I have seen numerous copies of Apollo sheet music on pianos in any number of Greek-American family homes. While not as openly present as in times past I am still surprised by how many Greek-Americans are able to reach into their piano bench

of the Apollo sheet music available, the bulk of the material originally issued hailed from the United States.

The cost of these individual pieces of sheet music ranged between 20 and 25 cents. Aside from family collections I have looked at over the years I once donated one hundred individual pieces of sheet music to the National Hellenic Museum in Chicago. Even after closely re-examining all those individual pieces it is still difficult to determine how Apollo numbered the sheet music. Especially since some of the copyright dates (given in Roman numerals) note the 1920s and then follow in numerical order pieces of sheet music with much later copyright dates.

Some of these randomly-ap-

STORY

# Sheet Music in the United States

## Η ΚΟΝΤΕΣΣΙΝΑ

(ΣΤΟΥ ΧΟΡΟΥ ΤΗΝ ΑΓΚΑΛΙΑ)

ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΥΠΕΡΟΧΗΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΝ ΤΑΙΝΙΑΝ

### “ΣΤΕΛΛΑ ΒΙΟΛΑΝΤΗ”

ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΥ ΞΕΝΟΠΟΥΔΟΥ

### “ΕΡΩΣ ΕΣΤΑΥΡΩΜΕΝΟΣ”



Το Ηρώδιο Καίριο Φιλί

ΕΠΙΔΕΙΚΝΥΕΤΑΙ ΠΑΡΑ ΤΗΣ

## LONDOS FILM CO.

PUBLISHED BY

## APOLLO MUSIC CO.

NEW YORK

“Londos Film Co.” appears on this above sheet music. Did im Londos, the fabled Greek-American wrestler, once finance a Greek film company in the US? The title of the Greek novel that inspired the music is intriguing, too: “Crucified Love.”

pearing phrases are important. Occasionally one finds the proud volumes. So, ascertaining when something was first copyrighted,

sic Company’s business policy, as evidenced by songs such as “Venizelos” (No. 660), “Hymnos tis Kritis” with its photograph of Haralambos Bougioukalos (1865-1908) (No. 564), “Hymnos tis Neas Geneas,” subtitled the Greek-American Hymn, (No. 679), and certainly the “Hymnos tis GAPA,” (No. 766) and “Hymnos tis AHEPAS,” (No. 765) are meant for a very specific audience. Other individual pieces of Apollo sheet music have, just under the title, a phrase such as “Songs of Greece,” “Famous Radio Songs,” “Greek American Songs,” and “Panhellenic Songs,” just to name a few.

Given the changes in the social composition of Greek America of the last 50 years, it is important to note that the initials G.A.P.A. stood for the “Greek American Progressive Association,” which formed as a direct counterpoint to AHEPA. GAPA wished to retain the Greek heritage of its members in an American setting. Surprisingly even with that proud proclamation, no Greek-born academic has bothered to study this once national organization.

Some of the Apollo sheet music can lead to as yet unimagined avenues of Greek-American historical studies. A prime example of that is “E Kontessina,” (No 606). Right on the front of this Apollo Music Company sheet music one sees printed “Londos Film Co.” Did Jim Londos, the

statement, "Music Publishers Since 1920." So we can assume that the Apollo Music Company, if not the owners/publishers began in 1920. Complimenting this lone fact is that Billboard Magazine lists the Apollo Music Company, at the 41st Street address in both its 1943 and 1944 Music Yearbooks. So, we may assume that this company had, at the very least, a 23 to 24 year history, even though various Greektown stores around the country held on their shelves sheet music and commercial records decades after they were first issued. In fact, Greektown stores sometimes would staple together individual pieces of sheet music together to form a larger book. The Kentrikon Store in Chicago even printed their own covers to place on the front of these compiled

issued, and sold is not always conclusive simply by looking at the printed material itself.

#### KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

By the sheer number of Apollo sheet music pieces found in both archival collections and private Greek-American collections it can be concluded that whomever was running the production knew what the audience wanted. Undoubtedly part of the reason that Apollo sheet music can still be found is the complex array of themes and genres of music that company issued. Traditional Greek folk songs, regional, and popular music abound. Clearly, the majority of these songs were meant for nothing more than personal as well as family entertainment. Niche marketing also seems to have been a feature of the Apollo Mu-

tabled Greek-American wrestler, once finance a Greek film company in the United States?

Other songs are loose mergers of Greek and American traditions such as "Santa Claus," (No. 581) which is supposed to be a fusion of this American Christmas figure and the traditional kalanda song Aghios Vasilios. Then, again, one even finds popular American songs with Greek and English lyrics such as Stephen Foster's, "Old Folks At Home," as "O Ksenitemenos," (No. 609) and "Spiti Mou Glika/Home Sweet Home"(No. 608).

Was the Apollo Music Company the premier sheet music publisher for Greeks in the United States? It is a tragedy of the very first order that more about the history of that company is not known.