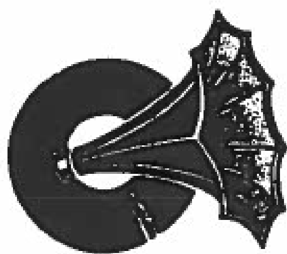

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Greek-American Family Record Collections: Family Record Collections as Research Sources

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The role of commercial record companies in the early documentation of non-Western music has long been argued to be the complimentary, but often missing, half of academic studies of music traditions around the world (Gronow 1981). The strategy of the recording industry was to send its field agents on regular and lengthy collecting trips around the world. Next, through determined and pioneering efforts at target marketing, the record companies sold and shipped those recordings anywhere and everywhere the buying public demanded. The unintended consequence of this strictly commercial venture was that by the late 1890s, music traditions from remote areas of the world became available on the international market.

Family record collections document for the contemporary researcher the "public's" response to those first concerted attempts at mass marketing music from around the world. Family record collections, from our vantage point in history, demonstrate the interrelationships between those categories once designated by academic researchers and commercial agents as the separate genres of ethnic, popular American and world music.

The contents of such collections do raise one immediate issue not considered in the discussions of the comparative nature of commercial records and academic field recordings. Portable recording machines became available to the general public at the same time the technology was first used by academic researchers and commercial company agents. The home recordings made on these portable machines by the very "native" or "ethnic" people the academics and company agents were documenting must also be considered in any evaluation of the influences of recorded sound on music traditions.

Sheet music cover featuring *O Yero Demos* (second line).

Taking this into account, we can then see the owners of these record collections not as passive consumers, but as active agents in using, enjoying, and altering their musical traditions.

Twelve Greek-American family record collections recently deposited at the Archives of Traditional Music include representative recordings from, virtually, the whole spectrum of Greek commercial music in America. The collection includes five hundred Greek, Turkish, and popular American 78 rpm records, and a mixed collection of sixty 45 rpm discs, long-playing records, and eight-track tapes. In addition, the rerecordings of sixteen Greek

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and Balkan piano rolls is a particularly significant aspect of the overall collection, given the rarity of the medium. The only commercial medium missing from this collection is the wax cylinder.

Other documentation, such as photocopies of sheet music, record catalogs, and assorted Greek language advertisements, provides another dimension of information relevant to these recordings. Recorded interviews with owners of the various collections offer some further contextual background. Finally, a number of studio recordings are also in the collection, which is cataloged under accession number 89-050-F/C.

This brief essay will survey some of the issues involved when addressing the question of how family record collections serve as objects of study.

Commercially Recorded Field Collections

In the 1890s, acoustically recorded discs and wax cylinders represented the state of the art in sound recording technology. In 1890, Jesse Walter Fewkes carted an Edison cylinder recorder to a settlement of Passamaquoddy Indians in Calais, Maine, and proceeded to make the very first ethographic field recordings. From that time onward, the use of sound recordings was closely associated with the documentation of non-Western musical traditions.

The chronology of events related to Greek and Ottoman music begins in 1903 when both the first academic researchers and phonograph company agents arrived in Constantinople and Smyrna. By 1907, four phonograph companies were recording in the Ottoman Empire: Zonophone, Odeon, Favorite Records, and Gramophone. At the end of the 1920s, it is safe to say that the entire range of musical genres in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans was on disc.

Target marketing, a concept not immediately associated with the year 1918, is clearly evident in this passage taken from an article on the subject from a distributor's journal of that year, *The Voice of Victor*:

> Tony Andrianopolis shyly enters your store, hat in hand, and asks if you have some Greek records. Of course you have none, and in the past simply told him so and turned away from him. He slinked out of your store. You soon forgot the incident. Now had you invited Tony into your office, inquired from him about how many Greeks, for instance, lived in your city, and put it to him squarely if he thought it would be profitable for you to carry Greek records, you might sit up surprised that you had wasted some wonderful opportunities. (Spottswood 1979:228)

Direct marketing was not limited to the Greeks, but was aimed at all potential consumers of foreign language records. Beginning in 1905, foreign language records were to be found in the catalogs of all the major record companies. The next logical move, producing catalogs and supplements in the language of the targeted audience, were being regularly produced by the early 1910s (Spottswood 1979:225).

For the scholar of Greek musical traditions in America, there is a further complicating factor to this sequence of events, in the person of Tetos Demetriades, a Greek

Greek dancers from Gary, Indiana, around the mid-1930s. The group is dancing a *sousta*. From left to right the dancers are Peter Kazanas (lead dancer), Bessie Stephan, Bill Christ, Mrs. Bill Christ, Chrisoula Polikroni, Jim Matris, Gust Kefales, and unknown man.

opening line to this alleged *klephtic* or mountain fighter song. Popular as this song may be, it is not a traditional *klephti* ballad. *O Yero Demos* is an operetta whose composer was Peter Karreris with lyrics written by A. Valaoritis. Constantine Petropoulos is the tenor on the Columbia Graphophone record in the collection (E 7947). Theatrical reviews, Greek school graduations, and I am told, gatherings around the piano, were all locations for singing about Old Demos.

The degree to which Greek-Americans identified with the songs mentioned above is attested to in the 1937 to 1939 WPA recordings made among the Greeks of Florida. Alton C. Morris and other fieldworkers recorded various singers in Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Tarpon Springs, singing the three "traditional" Greek folk songs, "Misirlou," "E Golfo" and "O Yero Demos." Among the very first Greek recordings in the collections of the Archives, these three songs document transformations rather than traditions. (See especially, Jennis Castrounis, Jacksonville, Florida, 4 October 1939 and George Anastassiou, Tarpon Springs, Florida, 27 August 1939).

When I first started to gather Greek record collections, I only took "Greek" records. It was some time before I realized that to get the entire range of interrelationships involved in these music traditions, all the records in the collection had to be included. Consequently, the collection now deposited at the Archives of Traditional Music includes not just Greek records, but everything from early Bluebird label jazz, popular American records, and a 1926 Gennett recording of the Hopi snake dance.

We would expect to see records that in some sense signal assimilation. This string of hits by Tetos Demetriades, for Victor from 1925 to 1929 seems at first to provide such a body of songs: "Titina," (1925); "Yes Sir That's My Baby" (1926); "S' Ena Horiudaki" ("In a Little Spanish Town," 1927); "Palia Mou Hronia" ("My Blue Heaven," 1928); "Filo To Heri Tis Madame" ("I Kiss Your Hand Madam," 1929). All the musical accompaniment for each of these records came from the famed orchestra leader Nathaniel Shilkret and the RCA Victor Orchestra.

On the surface, the music is the same. But, and this is undoubtedly the factor that has remained hidden for so long—the lyrics are all changed. In and of themselves, the "new" lyrics aren't very much different in broad terms. Demetriades sings about lost love, the passage of youth, the desire to marry one's true love, and so on. Demetriades' intentions cannot now be second guessed, yet the records themselves reveal the music to be American popular while the themes, language and tone are identical to those released by the majority of Greek record companies in the 1920s. This one tendency in Greek music in America provides the strongest argument for collecting all the records in a family collection and not just the Greek music. Only through comparisons of the American popular records and the Greek renditions of those songs did this recurring tendency reveal itself.

Demetriades' ability to pick the kind of music his Greek audience would respond to, regardless of the genre, speaks volumes for his awareness of the variation and range endemic to Greek music. While scholars have ignored mixed language songs or the occurrence of non-Greek music at Greek events, Demetriades did not. Demetriades' 1930-31 field collections witness the borrowing of traditions among various ethnic groups as well as the occurrence of mixed language songs. For example, Antonios Delgas' "Tis Kseni Teias Ponos" ("The Pain of the Strange Land," Orthophonic S-629-B) is also sung and recorded in Turkish, with different lyrics, as "Her Yer Karanlik" (Pappas, 1986: personal communication). "Skanthi Evroiaopoula" ("The Blond Jewess") sung in Greek, Arabic and Ladino by Riota Abajis, and "To Neo Hanoumaki" ("The Young Hanoum") sung by Rosa Eskenazi in alternating Greek and Turkish lyrics (Orthophonic 317 A/B, with S. Pantelidis cited as composer on both) are two songs representative of the mixed language genre on the same records.

Circles Within Circles: Greek Dance in America

While the collection presents all manner of songs, it is in the realm of dance where the general public has seen most of Greek musical traditions in America. Greek traditional dancing occurs in a variety of social contexts, formal and informal. Whether a public celebration or a small family gathering, dance and song are common among Greek-Americans. When recorded music is being used, the phonograph is the work station of the young children. The whirl of the disc in a youngsters' hands as the adults call out which record to play next is a frequent sight. Whistles, sudden shouts, and praises loudly voiced for the lead dancer's steps are all a part of the event as the dancers turn in circles on the floor.

Who leads the dance, the dancers or the musicians, is perhaps the most pronounced difference between dancing to live or recorded music. Greek musicians traditionally follow the steps of the lead dancer. The momentary hesitation experienced by someone taking the lead when recorded music is being played occurs because the new dancer must follow the music rather than having the musicians improvise a moment or two until being able to follow the new dancer's steps and movements.

In these dances, it is the leader's prerogative to improvise on the basic steps with flips, leaps, whirls on the heel, and slaps to the shoe. Ideally, the dancer becomes so absorbed in the music and dance that *kefi*, a state of high emotion, inspires the dancer without premeditation.

Commercial records document dances, such as tangos and rhumbas, that one might not expect to find in a strictly Greek collection. "Can you play American?" is often the key question in hiring a Greek band for a wedding or other public celebration. Anyone who has attended a Hellenic festival held by a Greek church can bear witness to having heard the Greek bands play, often on electronic instruments, American popular dance music.

78 Rpm Record Collections as Historical Documents

Speculations and pronouncements about the assimilation of Greeks into the wider American culture have existed since their arrival. Music, as a part of the Greek's wider social and cultural experience, can be used to document and refute that process.

Given what we can see and hear in family record collections, this music brings the very definition of what constitutes Greek music into question. Different historical and everyday experiences have resulted in some very fundamental changes among Greeks in America and

those from mainland Greece that cannot be argued away. Still, we are left with a whole series of questions. What about all the transformations in music evident on records imported from Greece? Just as Greeks in Chicago own records imported from Greece, Greeks in Athens own records imported from "Ameriki."

During 1890 to 1950, the era said to be when Greeks in America gradually lost their distinct heritage, is also the period when the rural villages of Greece experienced extensive modernization. Does this mean that the songs we hear on Greek records in America are the result of assimilation alone, or was there a double influence of subtle changes with each body of music affecting the other?

The interpenetration of musical cultures is far from a recent series of events. We must be careful to note that these world-wide influences were not just unidirectional from Euro-American high culture to everyone else. Record collections and sheet music note other influences. South American bands toured Europe and the Balkans just before World War I, causing perhaps the first international "dance craze" by introducing the tango, rhumba, samba and other dances in elaborate musical reviews (Slobin 1982). In Athens during the early 1950s it was the era not only for the rebirth of Greek urban music, but for enthusiastic acceptance of the Hawaiian guitar (Panourgia 1989: personal communication). With these examples in mind, the New Internationalism or EuroPop with, say, the use of the bouzouki in new wave Irish rock bands, only repeats an older pattern.

Greek music remains, like all music traditions, always mutable. The active denial of this fact in Greece from the 1900s to the 1950s was the consequence of political, not cultural factors. The outlawing of certain song themes and even musical instruments in Greece was the direct result of a post World War I government, hypersensitive to any traditions that might bring its official public identity into question. This politicization of folklore in Greece initiated not only the active repression of these musical traditions in public places, but naturally the release of commercial recordings as well. Greek-American music and collections of commercial records which were outside the direct control of civil or social regulations of the modern Greek state serve as the documentation for these publicly banned musical traditions.

The continued study of commercial records and homemade recordings offers a necessary counterpoint to existing studies on traditional Greek music since so much exists that challenges notions of "survival." It is not that "traditional" music did not survive in America; rather, the contextual use testifies as to which songs were popular, if not traditional. The contents of these record collections will also provide examples of records that are claimed by Greeks in America to be traditional and most certainly are not.

Every one of these family record collections needs to be recognized as a mixture of voices: the original musicians, the academic researchers, the commercial record companies and the listening audience. Only when all these categorities of persons are taken together and each is studied in its own context, can we begin to study the history of modern Greek music from 1890 to the present.

Notes

[1] The Greek record collections at the Archives under accession number 89-050-F/C were deposited by the author through the courtesy of the following individuals and families: Peter G. and Sophia Bouras, Fran Demos, the Eustathion-Kekatos families, the Kakleas-Limperes families, Catherine and Denny Frangos, the Harris-Frangos families, George S. Harris, Bess G. Maheris, Bill Pappas, Dino X. Pappas, Andy Dellas, Nicolletta and Alexander Rapanos, and the Stavropoulos-Kachikas families.

[2] In chronological order, other collections on Greeks in America at the Archives of Traditional Music are: the WPA recordings of Greeks in Florida (Alton Morris, 54-066-F); folksongs sung by Georgia Tarsoulis (George Herzog, 54-295-F); Greek folksongs collected in Gary, Indiana (Harriet Munn, 61-068-F); Greek folksongs and folktales collected in Indiana and elsewhere (Robert A. George, 061-014-F); Greek bands and Byzantine Choir music, Indianapolis (Peter Gold 84-1431, 1432-F); the Northwest Indiana Urban Folklore Project recordings dealing with Greeks in Indiana (Richard M. Dorson, et al., 76-135-F, ff.); the Sylvia and Jack Cohen family record collection (79-110-C); oral history and music from the Calumet Region (Tina Bucuvalas, 86-003-F); the Pappas/Sloane record collection (86-102-F/C); interviews and recordings of Greek and Macedonian musicians in Indiana (Paul Tyler, 80-106-F); the Liberty Record collection (Steve Frangos, 89-182-C); interviews with Greek musicians George Katsaros and John Gianaros (Steve Frangos, 89-049-C/F).

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