Greek Music in America

John K. Gianaros: Musician and Composer

By Steve Frangos

(The following is the first installment of a 13-part series by Steve Frangos tracing the beginnings and influences of the Greek music tradition in America.)

Not only young foreign laborers arrived in the massive waves of migration to America in the late 1890s and early 1900s, but new varieties of music as well. The contributions of ethnic traditions on urban music in America at the turn of the century is a little-known area of study. When urban music is addressed at all, popular writings tend to focus upon Afro-American musical traditions such as ragtime, the blues, or the then-developing genre of jazz.

Even the diversity of Anglo-American music forms remains blurred in our historical understanding of this era. In the popular imagination, the time-honored traditions of American city music stand somewhere between dance hall girls and vaudeville soft-shoe artists in tails holding a cane. The quintessential Anglo-American public performance form, the Chautauquas, were not just religious or "educational" gatherings at fairgrounds, but also explicitly musical entertainments conducted in large fraternal halls and in public school auditoriums around the country.

It was not simply music. At the turn of the century, public entertainment in urban America was a haphazard blend of music and performance. Humor, theatre skits, dance, and recitations were all publically performed with music. Resort hotels and church or fraternal organization socials and picnics were also common arenas where live music and humor saw enactment. Compounding all this neglect of popular urban music from the late 1890s into the 1900s are all the public presentations of the ethnic music that still remain largely ignored.

With all this being said it is not surprising then that the cross-fertilization of musics and performance traditions in the great melting pot of urban America is still not well understood. For the study of Greek music in America, we have two lines of research that potentially help in the understanding of that musical tradition's heritage in America. First, the growing body of research on the history of the Greek and Balkan commercial record industry in America, and second, the research in Greece on the variety of influences on modern Greek music.

The neglected heritage of ethnic music in America has seen a few pioneer studies. In terms of Greek or Balkan music we have only a few written accounts. We still have no real historical chronology of even the major musical events of the most revered perfomers. Lost to the history of the Greek experience in America is any sense of the

musical diversity even a preliminary survey of the publically available records, interviews and published documents reveal.

Oddly enough, in Greece the situation concerning Greek music in America is somewhat better understood. To begin with, the lives and working conditions of many Greek musicians are documented in oral history interviews. Several books largely based on interviews with senior generation Greek musicians such as Markos Vamvakaris' *Autobiography* (Keil 1973), Rosa Eskenazi's *Auta Pou Thimame* (Hatzidoulis 1982) and Basilis Tsitsanis: *E Zoe Tou, To Ergo Tou* (Hatzidoulis 1981) provide us with a basis for understanding the development of modern Greek urban music from the early 1900s. These musicians provide the Greek-American scholar with a sense of the influences these performers experienced from their American counterparts and the Greek-American listening audience.

Complementing these biographical accounts are a host of Greek re-release albums. These albums focus exclusively on Greek music originally released in the first two or three decades of this century. A surprising number of the re-release albums contain records by Greek-American artists. One of the finest re-release albums is *Greek-Oriental: Smyrnaic-Rebetic Songs and Dances.* The Golden Years: 1927-1937 (Folklyric Records 9033). In this album, Martin Schwartz selects from an array of artists such as Marika Papagika, Yorgos Papasidheris, Demetrios Semsis, Rita Abatzi, Yangos Psamarvanos, Rosa Eskenazi, Andonis Dalgas, Y. Oghdhondakis, and Haralambos Panayis. The unintended consequence of Dr. Schwartz's efforts is an album that, by virtue of its contents, explores the cross-cutting influences between the performers in Greece and America. A quick gloss for Greek *rebetiko* music is to describe it as that genre of music that developed in the urban centers of Greece, Asia Minor, and America in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

The inclusion of America in this development of modern Greek music is essential. As Stathis Gauntlett has noted, "[T]he earliest known application of the term *rebetiko* to song occurs on the labels of gramaphone records pressed in America and England during the second and third decades of this century (1982-1983: 83)." In the essay *Rebetiko Tragoudi as a Generic Term*, Gauntlett cites for the first appearance of the term *rebetiko* on a record label the American release by Marika Papagikas in June 1928 *Doura, Doura* and *Milo Mou Ke Mantarini* (Columbia 56113-F A/B). These two songs were recorded at Columbia Record's New York studios. Research since Gauntlett's essay suggest that in fact the first appearance of the term rebetiko appeared one month earlier. The artist is again Marika Papagika this time singing *Sti Filaki Me Valane* and *E Mavromata* (Columbia 56117 A/B) (c.f. Spottswood n.d. 62). The historical significance of the term *rebetiko* appearing on a record label is that Greek officials were imprisoning individuals in mainland Greece for recording *rebetiko* songs. Research among Greek audiences outside of Greece is mandatory since they were the target market group for many of the song genres that because of censorship laws could not be performed in public, let alone recorded in Greece.

The linernotes to these albums provide us some slim understanding of the events surrounding their original release. But here again even these Greek re-release albums and their linernotes have not gone without criticism. Ole L. Smith has severely critiqued the linernotes on the majority of these re-released albums (Smith 1989).[6]

To fully understand the neglected heritage of Greek music in America we must turn our attention away from Greece and Greek musicians. Only by exploring the individual lives of Greek-American performers and the social settings in which they performed their music can we gain insight into the Greek contribution to the history and diversity of urban music in America. This essay is meant to extend that historical record. The recollections of one senior generation performer from New York City, John K. Gianaros, is offered here as one life history in this wider field of study.

Steve Frangos c. 1991
Indiana University (Bloomington)

Next week: Tarpon Springs

Greek Music in America

The *Cafe Aman* Scene in New York City

By Steve Frangos

(The following is the second installment of a 13-part series that traces the beginnings and influences of Greek music in America through Greek musician John K. Gianaros.)

Among the most fascinating of Gianaros' recollections are of the 8th Avenue area club life in New York City. These Greek clubs or *cafe amans* were the Balkan and Anatolian "speakeasies" of their day. Certainly the Greeks had their coffee houses, and to be sure, many of them were grand establishments, but these *cafe amans* were something else altogether—neither completely a coffee house nor exactly an American night club. In this world the female vocalist reigned supreme. In the 1920s **Marika Papagika, Madame Coula**, and **Virginia Mangidou** were the three top female singers in these New York clubs. Contrary to popular wisdom, Gianaros contends that Virginia Mangidou was the finest vocalist of the three.

According to Gianaros the standard *cafe aman* orchestra consisted of five instruments the clarinet, violin, *oud, santouri*, and a drum. The drums were sometimes the *doumbeleki*, an hour-glass shaped drum, and other times a standard American drum set. The musicians used to be paid 55 to 60 dollars a week plus tips. At this same time the average New York City union musician only made about 35 dollars a week. These groups would regularly perform with two to four Arabian belly dancers along with two or three singers. The instrumentalists would team up with whatever singers the club requested. The performers worked from 8 pm till at least 2 am, and some nights much later.

While Gianaros can provide a seemingly endless stream of names for vocalists and instrumentals who played in New York's *cafe amans*, he can not name a single belly dancer, though he says there were some famous ones. Always the musician, Gianaros then went on a long discussion of how the tempo for the dancers used to be much slower. Gianaros asserts, as have other musicians I have interviewed, that the Chicago and New York club owners first brought Turkish belly dancers and musicians to America in the mid-1950s. So what nationality were the dancers before 1950? Gianaros and I just were not able to move beyond the issue of music and belly-dancers so that I could learn more about these dancers.

In the 1927 Atlantis *kazamia* we can find the stunning "pin up" photographs of two dancers obviously well-known during this era: **Liz Melsas** and **Nina Constantinova**. The brief captions accompanying these photographs only stress "the beautiful eyes...and dancing" of Melsas while Constantinova is noted as a "Russian dancer" with a "graphic dancing" style. Even George Katsaros, who definitely had a gleam in his eye when he told me the *best* dancers were from the Sudan, could not recall a single name. From what I can sense from my interviews is that this overall lack of recollection on these female dancers is not a matter of embarassment or an attempt to cover up the fact that women danced in these cafes and night clubs. Dancers were simply not important to the musicians I've met and interviewed so far.

These female belly dancers play a unique role in the popular consciousness of urban performance in America. Unless further research demonstrates otherwise, it is Chicago and not New York that is first cited as a location for "belly dancing." Among the stunning array of world music presented at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition was the live music of the Cairo Street exhibition. While the Turkish Theatre, as it was called, provided an incredibly popular musical show it was the dancer known as "Little Egypt" who caused a national sensation with her swaying dance that was quickly coined "belly" dancing. It is not often recalled today that this one woman's dancing so struck the officials at the Columbia Exposition that when performances at the 1893 Chicago Fair were being selected to be preserved on the new medium of movie film, Little Egypt's dancing on stage was among the very first performances documented. In fact, a version of her dance called the Hoochi Koo became a national craze.

The nationality of Little Egypt and the Turkish musicians is still a matter of debate. It was Benjamin Ives Gilman on behalf of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University who collected nine wax cylinders of Turkish music recorded in the the Turkish Theatre on the Midway Plaisance on September 25, 1893, at 8:45 am. Gilman cites the performers as Khlil-Zacharia on Oriental lute, Meliki-Sourou on Oriental harp, a small drum is played by Latifi-Haskie and a woman Maria-Lisme plays tambourine. Gilman further notes that the players all hail from Beirut. Greek Americans from Chicago have long contended that a number of these performers were Greek.

After their two daily shows at the Turkish Theatre, the musicians are said to have gone to nearby Greek cafes to play at night. It is further contended that several of the musicians stayed in Chicago after the Fair closed. Dr. Andrew T. Kopan, the foremost scholar on the history of Greeks in Chicago, confirms this popular Chicago Greek story not only by his own research, but from his peronal recollections of visiting with his family as a very young boy, Andrew Spyropoulos' International Cafe in Chicago's Halsted street area in Greektown (Kopan 1990: personnal communication). Spyropoulos married the woman known at the 1893 Exposition as Little Egypt.

Thalia Cheronis Selz in her memoir *The Switchboard* recalls her own family's Sunday afternoon visits to one of the restaurants with outdoor tables referred to among Greeks in Chicago as the "Greek Garden." "'Andrew (Spyropoulos) was once *quite* a gay blade,' observes my mother...Solemnly my mother points to a window high above. A legendary face glares down upon us, and for a moment I almost believe in the Evil Eye. 'He was a good catch,' my mother says, 'until he married Little Egypt.' And I learn that the famous bellydancer at the Columbian Exposition has become a jealous shrew who watches her husband from upstairs windows, though she never comes down into the garden (Selz 1976: 130)."

Dr. Kopan reports that Spyropoulos was one of the vendors at the 1893 Chicago Exposition and met his future wife while working at the Fair. Dr. Kopan's own research has led to his locating a full-page photograph of Little Egypt that was published during the early 1890s. When I asked Dr. Kopan if he had seen any belly dancers as a child on these Halsted Street visits I was struck by the fact that he quickly looked left then right before saying, "No, never, it was forbidden!"

The notes Gilman left behind on these nine cylinders are fragmentary at best. On cylinder number 80 aside from Maria-Lisme, the woman drum player, Gilman notes another female drum player citing her only as a "girl." This girl is noted as "The dancer well known at the fair as the star of Constantinople or some other locality." Was this "girl" the dancer the American public dubbed Little Egypt? Is she the "Maria [?] cited in the notes for cylinder number 79? Gilman's notes seem to indicate a confusion over which Maria is playing the Oriental lute on this cylinder.

Was it only Little Egypt who danced at the Turkish Theatre? The Chicago Historical Society has a number of photographs and photograph books issued on the Columbian World's Fair. In one such book a boy is shown dancing. Identified only as a "Syrian," this male dancer is said to have been "the best dancer" at the 1983 Fair. Can we assume that the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition was the first large scale exposure American society had to the *zembekiko* and the *chefti telli*?

A further mystery involves Gilman's movements on September 25, 1893. The first cylinder is noted as being recorded at 8:45 am but by the fifth cylinder the time is given as 12 midnight. Where were they recording? The Fair had long closed for the night. Did Benjamin Ives Gilman, the distinguished researcher from Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, spend his evening recording cylinders at a Greek *cafe aman* in the Halsted Street area of Chicago?

In 1925, the first cafe aman to open in New York City was "Marika's" named after its owner Marika Papagika at 34th Street between 7th and 8th Avenue, one floor up. This was the only such club Marika Papagika ever owned. Greeks were regular patrons, as well as Bulgarians and Armenians. Gianaros contends that the majority of the crowd were Armenians (ATL #89-049-C/F tape 2 side A). After Marika's cafe aman opened, others soon appeared in the Greek and Jewish section under the Manhattan Bridge around Delancy and Cherry streets. Within less than fifteen years, there were six to eight of these cafe amans in the 8th Avenue area. All these cafes were within four or five blocks of Marika's. Some of the other *cafe amans* in New York were the infamous Port Said, the Arabian Nights, and Omar Khayyam's on 39th and 8th Avenue.

Marika Papagika's husband wrote the song *Armenaki* (The Little Armenian) as a syrto. Gianaros recalls the opening lines as:

> *"Armenaki eime Kyra mou, pare me,*
> *Ke stin angalia sou mesa, vale me"*
>
> *"I am a little Armenian, my Lady, take me*
> *Into your embrace, take me."*

Armenaki was one of four songs Marika Papagika recorded in New York City on November 17, 1926. The record is a vocal set to a *sousta* dance step (Victor 68790). The song, according to Gianaros, was first sung publically in Armenian. The lyrics on this Victor record are sung in Greek, but the melody is said to be traditionally Armenian. As far as I am aware, Marika Papagika never recorded this song in Armenian, an issue, given its popularity, I find odd.

"I was there when she introduced the song...because the cabaret she had Armenians used to go up there. This time those things (eg ethnic speakeasys) they used to call cafe amans. You know why? Was Prohibition (at that time) ...and those cafe amans...you sit at a table and you told the waiters, 'Cafe ...aman!, Cafe...aman!' They didn't mean the place...They'd put ouzo in the coffee cups and would bring it to them (the customers). That's why they called it cafe aman (c.f. ATL #89-049-C/F tape 2 side A)." The slang usage here is playing on the fact that aman is the Turkish word for mercy as when you call out and ask to have your life spared. The implication suggested here is that the patrons are petitioning the waiters to be served and so saved from "dying" of thirst.

When I asked why Greeks would want what seemed to me non-Greek music, Gianaros replied "because in those cafenions used to go all kinds of nations (eg nationalities)...Turkish, Arabians, Bulgarians, Yugoslavians." When I then asked who owned those places Gianaros said "only Greeks" (cf ATL #89-049-C/F tape 1 side B).

Next week: The Prohibition Era

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Indiana University (Bloomington)

Greek Music in America

Prohibition Comes to the Cafe Amans

By Steve Frangos

(The following is the fourth installment of a 13-part series that traces the beginnings and influences of Greek music in America through Greek musician John K. Gianaros.)

Police protection, so fundamental a part of American speakeasies during the Prohibition years of 1920 to 1933, was also a key element in the cafe amans. In the case of the Greek cafes in the 8th Street area this protection is personified in Gianaros' mind by one man. "There was one Irish...the head man (eg the "Captain" for 8th Avenue)...they used to call him Mavros Gatos (the Black Cat) because he was dark, and when they opened the door he had the voice of a Cat. Ugly and dark. But he loved the Greeks. He told them (the speakeasy owners) 'If you tell me the truth I won't do anything to you.' I knew him (by sight) many did. He didn't bother the *pareus* (the groups of customers). He went directly to the kitchen drank one or two, asked the boss if there was any trouble and left. He told the boss, 'I'm outside if you need anything' (c.f. ATL #89-049-C/F tape 2 side A)."

In 1924-1925 Greek "gangsters" were also a part of this nether world. In the sense of "moonshine" makers or bootleggers, it was Nick Acropolis, John Poulos, and a man only known as "Makris" who were the three principle Greek gang leaders in New York. These were the men who had O Mavros Gatos on their payroll. Eventually these men had three or four clubs each. Acropolis and Makris were also involved in the drug trade.

As in Greece, a few of the cafe aman crowd would do drugs. "Hashish from Alexandria, from Constantinopouli...needles...existed then, dope!" Five or six would sit at a table and pass a hand-rolled cigarette with hashish, cocaine, or whatever mixed in with the tobacco. Even at that time, and in the most notorious of cafes, discretion was required. The smokers passed their "cigarette" under the table to each other. I was so surprised at hearing of drug use in New York among the customers of the cafes that I asked Gianaros if he heard all this or if he saw it. Gianaros said he saw it all and more. Then, Gianaros used a term for the addicts I never heard before, *trofilakades*. *O trofimos* translates literally as a pensioner, boarder, or inmate. The meaning is clear (c.f. ATL #89-049-C/F tape 4 side A and tape 6 side A).

Helen Zeese Papanikolas and Dino Pappas, in their 1988 essay "A Few Notes On The Bouzoukia," cite the song *To Miore tis Tavernas* as an example of the commercial records found in Greek-American family record collections that deal with drugs and the argot of the users. To an outsider the references to a brunette and a blonde would seem to indicate women. In fact they refer to hashish and cocaine.

Mes tin taverna, ta vlamakia, 're pedhia
Pou kath[illegible] enan ponon ehi stin kardhia
O enas l[illegible] kai poni ghia mia melahrini
K'alos traghoudhi ghia mia xanthi

In the tavern, my buddies, O, you lads
Where each person has a pain in his heart
One pines and hurts for a dark one
And another sings for a blonde.

While *To Miore tis Tavernas* is a record imported from Greece, the *Fast Life of the Roaring Twenties* is Greek music clearly recorded in America. In fact such songs do not end with the 1920s, but run a pace through the 1930s well into the 1940s. Whatever prudish second-generation Greeks may deny about their musical past, their parents originally made best-sellers. Virtually all the deadly sins can be found on Greek commercial records made in America: card-playing, dice, horse-racing, playing the numbers, moonshine, going to speakeasies, and even the Greek male immigrant's dismay at the changing social roles of women in America.

Card playing can be found in the lyrics of a number of records. Tetos Demetriades recorded under several pseudonyms. As Nontas Sgouros Demetriades he recorded *Hartopektis*, The Gambler, on January 8, 1929 for Victor Records in New York (Victor V-58014). As Takis Nicolaou, Demetriades recorded a song by Antonios Sakelariou *Pseftopokadoros*, The Lying Poker Player, for the Victor Talking Machine Company, which mentions not only cards, but dice-playing as well (Orthophonic 68852-B (1 G 68852B). *Pezo Poka, Pezo Pinokli*, I Play Poker, I Play Pinochle, written and sung by George Katsaros seems to have been released on both a Victor label record and a Orthophonic label record (Orthophonic S-652).

For dice, playing there are two songs composed and sung by George Katsaros—*Ol' Imera Pezi Zargia*, All Day He Plays Dice, recorded for Victor Records on January 13, 1928 in New York (Victor 68960) and *Taverna kai to Zari*, The Taverna and the Dice, recorded again for Victor, but in Chicago on November 5, 1929. We even hear of the Greek dice game *barbouti* in *To West*, a zembekiko with Harilaos Cretekos on lyra and Epamenondas Asimakopoulos on laouto and vocals, recorded in Chicago on May 29, 1935 (Columbia 56356-F).

On July 16, 1928 *Aloghata*, The Horses, a zembekiko, was recorded at Victor Records New York studio with Angeliki Karayiannis on vocals (Victor CVE 46314-2). H. Spiropoulos on September 16, 1937 sings about wild women, horses, and the numbers racket in *Ta Alogha kai ta Numera*.

Songs about drinking abound. *Krasi* and especially *retsina* as the theme and title appear on numerous records. One of the earliest records with retsina as its theme is *Retsina Mou, Retsinia Mou* performed by the Greek Mandolinata of the Steamship Alexander. This song was recorded in New York on January 19, 1923 (Victor 73754). The Victor Record Company files only list the group's members by their last names. The four vocalists are Zournarkis and Nicolopoulos as the tenors, Zamanos as the baritone, and Almanci as the bass singer. On mandolins are Chrystodoulides and Grafidis. De Vapoli is credited with playing the piano. Perhaps the most famous song ever written about ouzo is Sakellarides' *Barba Ouzo*, Uncle Ouzo. Demetriades, again singing as Takis Nicolaou, recorded a very popular version of *Barba Ouzo* (Victor 58054).

...To Miore tis Tavernas *as an example of the commercial records found in Greek-American family record collections that deal with drugs and the argot of the users...*

The changing social roles of women in America can be heard on George Katsaros' *Pajames* (Columbia 56345-F). On this record Katsaros sings of how women run around in pajamas (jump suits), bob their hair, drink beer, and yes, even smoke cigarettes. The quintessential feminine response to this position is undoubtedly the song *To Cigaretto*. In this song the female vocalist declares she will do as she pleases, go where she wishes, drink, smoke, whatever. She may even get a pipe! While perhaps Lisa Kourouklі's 1928 release of *To Cigaretto* on Columbia is the best known (Columbia 56096-F) version of this song there were many earlier recordings of it. The first version I am aware of is Maria Smyrnea's 1921 rendition for Victor followed by Olga D. Mellas's for Columbia in 1926 and then Tassia Demetriades' again for Victor in 1927.

The career of vocalist and comedian Giannakis Ioannidis documents the "gay life" of America in the 1920s. Recorded in New York sometime in 1928 *Pio Ein' To Giatriko*, What is the Medicine, with Ioannides and Vrysoula Photopoulos (Columbia 56095-F) speaks of American Prohibition with not only the Greek lyrics but the injection of English words such as "speakeasies" and "moonshine." *O Pinoklis* a zembekiko, was a tremendously popular song Ioannides did with Lisa Kouroukli (Columbia 56096). It was written by D. Zattas and recorded in New York sometime in 1928. The lyrics tell of a Greek immigrant by the name of Noklis who after coming to America is renamed Pinoklis by his friends since the man is such an avid pinochle player. Even the admission of having given up the wild life in America can be heard in Ioannidis' *Imouna Mortis Mia Fora* I Was A Rogue Once (Columbia 56144-F), recorded in New York during February of 1929. Ioannidis is said to have died on stage of a heart attack sometime in the 1930s (for all record citations c.f. Spottswood n.d.; on Ioannides see Papanikolas and Pappas 1988b).

Given that the Greeks always have a "word" for any topic, the term glentzedes can be defined as "party people." If one song can be said to personify the *cafe aman* crowd it is perhaps the often recorded song *E Glentzedes*. One version made in the early 1920s on Panhellenion 312, is a duet with a female soprano cited only as Bibilis and Tetos Demetriades recorded in New York City. Another is an instrumental, as a kalamatiano. This record documents the C. Papagikas Greek Orchestra who on August 15, 1927 went to the New York studios of Okeh records to record a set of six songs of which *E Glentzedes* was one song. Yet another version is the resounding *E Glendtzedes* with an array of vocalists featuring Giannakis Ioannidis, Lisa Kouroukli, Maki Karneri, and Gerasimos Kourouklis, recorded in New York sometime in May of 1929 (Columbia 56154-F).

Still, for all of this fast life Gianaros contends "at that time wasn't violent like today...It was very nice and quiet...Because they (the regular cafe crowd) knew...Down at 8th Avenue if you do anything down there that time, brother, you have to pay...drinking, having a good time, okay...but no violence no anything. Because they knew if they do anything, oh boy! Mavro Gatos used to take care of them. And the bosses (Acropolis, Poulos, and Makris) knew it right away, they'd call their bouncers, *right away!* (ATL #89-049-C/F tape 1 side A)."

As a young man who was well liked by the other musicians, Gianaros was asked many times to play at one cafe or another. Gianaros didn't want to work steady in the *cafe amans*. "I went there sometimes play one-nighters...If I played in there (regularly) I'd be dead...In those coffee houses in New York...the winter...when the snow was coming out, and the cold, they closed the doors and windows all of them! They didn't have ventilation the way we have today. (Besides) [O]ut of a hundred customers eighty were sick!...They cough all night...The cigarettes that everyone smoked all the smoke stayed inside—it couldn't escape...Remember (it was) six seven hours when you worked there...All night long you inhale that smoke and all the disease...that's why no one is left from the *cafe aman*. All the female singers...all the instrument players...dead!" (ATL #89-049-C/F tape 1 side B and tape 7 side A)

Next week—Radio WWRL

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Indiana University (Bloomington)

Greek Music in America

"Charlie" Gadinis: The Greek Benny Goodman

By Steve Frangos

(The following is the sixth installment of a 13-part series that traces the beginnings and influences of Greek music in America through Greek musician John K. Gianaros.)

Kostandenos Gadinis is considered one of the premiere clarinet players of his generation. Born in the town of Siastia in Northern Greece Kostas Gadinis started playing in his home village when he was 14 years old. Gadinis, like many of the other Balkan and Anatolian musicians of this era, performed and recorded under a number of different names and with a number of different bands. Known as "Charlie" Gadinis and "Charlie Macedonos" Gadinas' career is one of the most prolific of the first generation of Greek musicians in America.

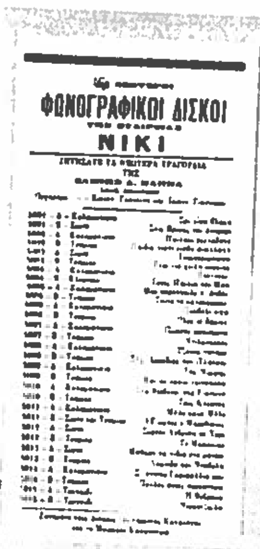
"Me and Charlie we played the Macedonia music" is how Gianaros prefaced his recollection of the 17 years the two men played and recorded together. "He was a genius" Gianaros said at one point about Gadinis' skill as a clarinetist, "but he couldn't read a line of music." Consequently Gianaros after listenfing to Gadinis play would write out all of the famed clarinetist's music. The two men would also play Gianaros' own compositions. *Xemerose E Anatoli*, a hasapiko, and *Syrto Canari* being only two of Gianaros' original compositions the men recorded together.

Kostandenos Gadinis died in 1968 in New York City. A detailed study of Kostandenos Gadinis is long overdue, but here I will only discuss Gadinis' career as it interwines with Gianaros'.

Untangling Kostandenos Gadinis' career, even with Gianaros' recollections, is not easy. This has much to do with the social conditions under which musicians from the Balkans had to work. Playing for a number of audiences, Gadinis regularly switched his name, band, and playing style to accomodate the sensibilities of the group to which he played. Published discographies and even the physical 78rpm records contradict themselves as much as they complement each other. Consequently, the following outline can only be assumed to be just that, a thumbnail sketch, awaiting detailed study.

The first commercial records cited as the Costas Gadinis Trio were recorded on March 23, 1927 in the Victor Record Company's New York City studios. Record company files suggest that before 1927 Kostas Gadinis recorded as a member of the Tom Vrounas Trio which first began recording on September 30, 1926.

A quick review of Richard Keith Spottswood's "Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recording Produced in the United States, 1893-1947" gives us some notion of the various names employed by Gadinis on commercial record labels: Costa Gadenis Trio, Kosta Gadinis Trio, Costa Gadinis


ΦΩΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟΙ ΔΙΣΚΟΙ

ΝΙΚΙ

Trio, Kostas Gadinis, C. Gadini's Popular Dance Orchestra, and the Gus Gadinis Orchestra.

The "Macedonian" music Gianaros recalls is that mix of genres and songs that were played by various ethnic groups that once all lived in what is today northern Greece, southern Bulgaria and southeastern Yugoslavia. Working musicians would change their names, the language in which they sang, and the music itself to "fit" the sensibilities of the audience. This alternating ethnicity has been missed by many researchers looking for the survival of real traditions in ethnic music played in America.

In terms of commercial records, this situational adjustment took some peculiar forms. Various instrumentals were released with a variety of labels each printed in the language of the ethnic group to which it was being target marketed (c.f. Frangos 1991). With this in mind it is not surprising that many of Gadinis' recordings were released as Jewish music. Many immigrants from the large population of Eskenazi and Sephardic Jews in the Ottoman Empire especially from the city of Salonika, the large provincial town of Katoria in Macedonia, and other towns and hamlets in the region of Epiros ended up in New York City.

Victor's files are not specific but some instrumentals first released as C. Gadinis Popular Dance Orchestra were later reissued as "Jewish Orchestra" under the numbers V-9050, V-9084, 25-5017, and 25-5046 (c.f. Spottswood n.d.: 28). Spottswood notes the mystery is even more complex since "a fourth title, (BS 060728-1R) *Lechayim* (Good Luck) (Gadinis), released on Vi V-9084 and Vi 25-5046, is dubbed from another untraced Gadinis recording (Spottswood n.d.: 28)." Again, at least two of Gadinis' instrumentals *Agir Aldin Zeybek* (Victor V-26031A) and *Karsi Yaka Souk Suyu* (Victor V-26031B), recorded on December 27, 1939, were also released under the title Popular Turkish Orchestra (Spottswood n.d.: 28-29)! Gadinis must have been popular with the Turkish record-buying public. On June 13, 1940 Kostas Gadinis and his group recorded eight songs, not under his own name, but as Popular Turkish Orchestra, all for Orthophonic.

To the best of Gianaros' recollection, he and Gadinis recorded more than thirty songs just for Columbia. Spottswood only cites a total of sixty-five songs for Gadinis and these songs were recorded at a number of companies—Victor, Orthophonic, Columbia etc. (c.f. n.d.: 27-29). Gianaros arrived at this estimate of records for Columbia based on the royalty checks he used to receive. "Every few months I used to get a check besides what I got to record it." Each musician was paid $45 for each set of four songs recorded. A four-song set was the minimum. Whoever wrote the music got a penny to five cents for each record sold. Whoever wrote the lyrics got two cents for every record sold. Since Gadinis didn't know how to write music, he would split the money with Gianaros who wrote out whatever Gadinis composed.

Around this same period in 1937 Gianaros says he recorded with Gadinis the instrumental *Dona Vlachiko* a "Bulgarian" hasapiko dance song. This song is not listed in any bibliography or company catalog available to me. I found that many of the songs that Gianaros recalled were simply not cited anywhere. Often in our conversations, Gianaros would hold up the 78rpm record with the song he was talking about. The pattern that emerges, and Gadinis is a case in point for this situation, is that when a musician or a song seemed to span two or more ethnic music traditions those songs are simply not cited.

This is not limited to intra-Balkan and Anatolian music traditions. Gianaros freely referred to a "*tsefterelli* mombo," a "Turkish rumba," "Arabian balero," "*flaouto* lullaby" and even a "Macedonian balero" for piano which is based on a Kastoria sousto, all of which you just can't find listed in any source. Again this may be due to the Greek American social use of music that researchers have long ignored mixed dancing. Virtually every form of Greek social event where dancing has taken place from 1886 till today includes "American music" along with traditional Greek music.

Gadinis had recorded between 1927 to 1942 on Columbia and Victor's Orthophonic label. For reasons that remain unknown, Gadinis took a five-year hiatus in recording for these two companies between 1932 to 1937. Being as popular a clarinetist as he was, it is unlikely that Gadinis simply was not recorded because of the Great Depression. In point of fact, Greek records sold relatively well, even through the darkest hours of the Great Depression (Gronow 1982). This is supported by the fact that Gadinis had been recording at Capital Records and many smaller record companies all along and continued to do so even after 1942.

A random sampling of Gadinis' brand of clarinet playing for this 1927-1942 period in New York City would include *Gaida Gurakouna* (Victor 68821) recorded as the Costa Gadinis Trio with probably Soterios Stasinopoulos on *oud* and Tom Vrouras on *santouri* on March 23, 1927. *Kastoriano* (Victor 59036) on April 17, 1928. *Hasapiko Sirba* (Orthophonic SO 6461) on February 26, 1929. *Karsilamas* (Columbia 56316-F) in 1932. *Tsiganiko Hasapiko* (Orthophonic S-757) recorded on June 18, 1937. *Asker-Zeibekiko* (Orthophonic S-476) on March 13, 1930. *T Sanakale* (Columbia 7210-F) on October 22, 1940 which features John K. Gianaros on accordion. And finally *Ena Dio Tria* (Orthophonic S-585) with John K. Gianaros on accordion and Aidin Asllan on oud on May 1, 1942 (c.f. Spottswood n.d.: 27-29).

Gianaros contends that he and Gadinis frequently recorded at Capital Records. Their contract with Capital Records came from their working relationship with a man named Porgis. Porgis was himself a Jewish immigrant who was only 34 or 35 when he started working for Columbia Records in their foreign language division. When Porgis went on to Capital Records, Gianaros and Gadinis got the chance to record for that company. In 1936 Porgis called Gadinis and Gianaros in to Capital Records' New York studio to record two records, four songs.

Gianaros and Gadinis were told to report to studio number 11. Unbeknownst to the two men, Benny Goodman was in studio number 13 or 14. "The studio manager comes in and says, 'Charlie, you got a card? Charlie says yes and hands him a card. On the card it says 'The Greek Benny Goodman' Now Benny Goodman he knew him (Charlie Gadinis) but had never met him... the manager takes the card and goes to the studio (where Benny Goodman was recording and hands him the card) and says 'When you finish, I want to introduce you to Benny Goodman!' 'Oh, Charlie the Greek is here, tell him not to go away'... The door opens, Benny comes in and says (as if he were an awe-struck fan) 'Are *you* Charlie?' They both laughed. Charlie says 'you're a great musician,' Goodman says 'No, no, you play better than me, because I've got your records and I hear it.' Gadinis says 'you want us to play.. something for you?' 'Play me a *tsamiko*,' Goodman says (When Benny Goodman got up to leave, he said) 'I see you have my name (on the business card). Charlie use my name and don't be afraid (c.f. ATL #89-049-C F tape 3 side B).

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Indiana University (Bloomington)

Next week: Cafe Aman and Musician

Greek Music in America
The Catskill Mountains

By Steve Frangos

(The following is the tenth installment of a 13-part series that traces the beginning and influences of Greek music in America through Greek musician John K. Gianaros.)

The Catskill Mountains are a group of low segmented mountains of the Allegheny Plateau that form a part of the Appalachian system. West of the Hudson River in southeastern New York these mountains lie mainly in Greene county but also occupy adjoining sections of Albany, Delaware, Schoharies, Sullivan, and Ulster counties. The Catskills are characterized by innumerable waterfalls which run between bulky masses and summits that have few valleys but exceptional deep gorges called 'cloves.' While the highest of the thickly forested peaks rise only slightly over 4,000 feet the sloping summits, eminently visible from the shores of the Hudson river, present striking scenery. The Catskills appear to be much higher than they are because the bases of the mountains are only a ew hundred feet about sea level. The sheer number of deep cloves adds to this sense of height.

The name is derived from the Dutch name Kaaterskill, (Wildcat Creek), the name of one of the better-known cloves, or rocky glens, in the area. The region was made famous by Washington Irving's short story of the legendary character Rip Van Winkle, who supposedly took his long nap under a tree near the town of Catskill on the Hudson River.

The Catskill Mounatins with their unusually steep-sided valleys and massive rounded uplands comprise a natural wilderness within easy reach of New York City. It is as a resort region with many hotels, cabins, and a large state forest that this section of New York is most known. The Catskill Mountain resorts gains another level of renown as the training ground for hundreds of comedians, singers, musicians and dancers.

Still the summers performing on the "Borscht Belt Circuit" was not exclusively the domain of "Americans." Many ethnic performers, undoubtedly in the popular mind most notably Jewish performers, also entertained the New York vacationers. Armenians, Greeks, and many other ethnics performers from New York 'played the season' in the Catskill Mountain Resorts. Given the extensive involvement of the Greeks in the Catskill Mountain Resorts it is quite surprising that their presence is not mentioned in the standard Greek-American histories.

In the Spring of 1954 John Belasco's installment of his long running New York column in the *Athena* Magazine describes the experiences of Greeks in America and the Catskill Mountain resorts.

Tatiana Vasilakou

"Dear Readers:

...For the past three decades we find thousands of Greek origin to patronize the Catskills. Many of them own homes with gardens and even tiny farms. Among those who accept boarders for travelers and even tiny farms. Among those who accept boarders for travelers and vacationists are, the Acropolis Farm, one of the oldest; the Parthenon; Parnassus; Crystal Brook; Sparta Manor; Pindos; Olympia; New Olympia; Grand Hotel; Kallithea; Summit House, and the Sunset Springs Hotel, most distinguished of them all (1954: 28)."

At this point Belasco moves from a general description of Greeks in the Catskills to what is clearly a shameless promotion for a good friend. This regard for a single resort and even a specific room (or cabin) waiter or waitress and again even a band or instrumentalist seems typical of the Catskill Mountain experience for many individuals not simply the Greeks. This description also goes a long way to help those who have never been to a Catskill Mountain hotel to visualize what constitutes such a resort complex.

"The Sunset Springs Hotel, which I patronize every year and where I feel at home, is owned and operated by John D. Stames, who acquired it some fourteen years ago. This is not just another hotel, but an institution patronized by discriminating Greek-Americans. It is situated at Haines Falls, NY, nestling privately within its own estate of 119 acres at the Twilight Park, a a towering peak with a grand view close to the skies. Often when clouds settle low, we find ourselves abaove the clouds.

This hotel of ours which is valued at one million, was purchased for 25,000 dollars. It is built of stone and rocks, has a 90 foot long terrace which has become a real broad walk for the guests. The hotel service is excellent and can accomodate 360 guests. This vacationing center is provided with all modern conveniences and the guests take advantage of its facilities."

Just so that no one will think the Sunset Hotel is an octogenarian hangout, Belasco is quick to note what entertainments are awaiting 'the younger generation.' This 1954 description also provides us a new location for the second generation Greek-Americans to 'socialize' other than strictly community based events.

"The younger set enjoy the gymnasium, tennis court, basketball, swimming pool, dancing, the cocktail lounge, and the beautiful garden for sun bathing and social chat. Music and talent direcot, Martin Ryner, provides excellent shows and entertainers at the casino nightly. This gives the younger generation a chance to know each other, and many marriages have resulted thereof. The youth enjoy its dancing and midnight swimming in the hotel pool and all the sports."

Ultimately Belasco's description of the Greek community and seasonal vacationers in teh Catskills is touched by his romantic appreciation for the region's natural beauty. "The moonlight nights are magic and for honeymooners it is heaven itself. In the morning hours people usually take long walks, others go horseback riding, still others visit other Hellenic centers hereabouts, or they marvel at the beauty and photograph the Haines Falls... there is also blackberry picking and hiking in the forests."

From 1947 to 1957 Gianaros played every summer season in the resort hotels of the Catskill Mountains. Gianaros' son Chris recalls "[In] 1947 I was born and every year thereafter... I grew up in the Catskill Mountains, literally grew up. I remember... two weeks before school would end... okay we're going up to the Catskill Mountains and we'd go up to the Summer House. The Grand Hotel, all of that. We'd spend the whole summer up in the Catskill Mountains where Dad was playing (ATL #89-049-C/F tape 3 side A)."

For Gianaros the 'season' began anywhere between the end of May to June 15th and lasted nine to ten weeks until around Labor Day weekend. Since Gianaros has never

Continued on page 18

Greek Music in America

The Balkan Record Company of New York City

By Steve Frangos

(l to r): Michael Thomakakis (violin), John Degaitos (guitar), and John K. Gianaros (accordion).

(The following is the eleventh installment of a 13-part series that traces the beginning and influences of Greek music in America through Greek musician John K. Gianaros.)

Ajdin Asllan was an accomplished instrumentalist who played *oud*, clarinet and *laouto* with ease and grace. It was Ajdin who was the original owner of the Balkan Record Company when Gianaros bought a partnership in the company. Asllan was an Arvanitis, eg a member of the Greek minority group that speaks an Albanian dialect. This being the case Ajdin also went by the name Andonidis Aslanidis. Gianaros contends Ajdin "knew seven languages, Albanian, Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Roumanian, Turkish, and English... he was a Balkan."

It was sometime in the very early 1920s, as best as John can remember, when Ajdin started Balkan Records. The office was located at 42 Rivington Street. The Rivington and Delaney Street area was the old Greek and Jewish section. One could hear Ladino, Greek, and English anywhere and everywhere on the streets and in the small family owned shops in the area. The district was also one were small coffee shops and *cafe amans* were also to be found. To get a visual sense of the Greek character still evident in the neighborhood in the 1940s one needs only look at a photograph called "Greek Cafe" in Andreas Feininger's book *New York in the Forties*. This photograph shows several Greek patrons in front of the *E Smantisis Kafeneion*.

Gianaros knew Ajdin as a musician first and played with him on many occasions. At least three times a year Gianaros played with Ajdin when they went to the Albanian Orthodox church in Niagara Falls. Four commercially recorded instrumentals exist of Gianaros and Asllan playing with Gardinis as the "Gus Gardinis Trio." These songs, all recorded on May 1, 1942, are *Istanbul Zeybek* (Orthophonic S-584A), *Pireotikos Ballos* (Orthophonic S-584B), *Mes T' Agiantou Ton Platano* (Orthophonic S-585A), and *Ena Dyo Tria* (Orthophonic S-585B). All four songs ascribe Gadinis as the clarinet player and composer, Gianaros as the accordion player, and Ajdin as the *oud* player.

The "stealing" of songs between groups and musicians fill Gianaros' memories. While in traditional folk settings no one person owns a song or writes songs. True folk songs are composed, re-composed and performed by the community at large. This all changed with the advent of commercial records and the royalty check. Many parallels exist between Gianaros' recollections and those heard among the oral histories collected among many of the early Blues singers who all claimed to have written the same song. In a folk tradition that moves into a publishing domain of copyrights the issue of who "really" wrote a particular song is a constant comparative theme among all ethnic or folk musics in America.

Ajdin was prompted to start Balkan Records after a song he wrote was stolen. In the 1920s Ajdin played regularly at New York City's Port Said club. One of Ajdin's improvised instrumentals became a signature piece for him at the club. Gianaros reports that the Armenian vocalist in the group Ajdin was playing with took this instrumental made a record and to add insult to injury called the song *Port Said*. Ajdin was stunned he didn't even know about copyrighting songs then (ATL #89-049-C/F tape 3 side B).

It was while Gianaros was playing with Ajdin and recording at Balkan Record Company that he learned that the company was going out of business. It was in 1935-1936 that Gianaros bought into the company as a full partner. Gianaros stayed three years then finding out about the company's desperate financial situation left around 1938-1939.

Gianaros showed me pristine new copies of Balkan Record Company records he had been responsible for producing. In the time that Gianaros spent at Balkan Records Markos Melkon, an Armenian, an *oud* and clarinet player was the most sought after recording artist. Gianaros approached Markos and had him record several songs for Balkan. Melkon, is perhaps, best known to the American public for his work on the theme song of the movie *The Third Man*.

Across from the Balkan Record Company office on the other side of Rivington Street was the *Acropolis Night Club*. The musicians who played at the Acropolis would stop off at the Balkan Record Company offices before going to work. These "visits" would end up in long bull sessions (and impromptu 'jams' among the various performers) that lasted for hours. "As I told you all the musicians used to come...to my place (the Balkan Record Company office) before going to work...they meet there...talk how much they made last night who was (playing) last night. (At) 7:30 pm. I tell them "Hey fellows I'm going home"... they (all) start (work at) 8 o'clock." Gianaros ruefully laughed about this daily gathering "I know everything (about the events in the Greek musician's world) because they used to talk about them there (ATL #89-049 C/F tape 1 side B)."

At Balkan Record Company the policy was no less than 500 records at a pressing. As with other small companies you sent out one copy to every store you had contact with. Since the record stores usually had no way of knowing what the smaller companies had available as new releases this was a standard practice. If the record was popular locally then orders would be made. Gianaros had some bad business experiences with the small record stores.

"You have to be careful. Because you know how many times they double-crossed me? They used to send me letters from Chicago at the Balkan (Record Company office). "Send me a box." A box is 24-25 (records). "And in thirty days you will have your money." Alright. First time, you send (the records to, for example, the) Music Center in Detroit. We send the records. In fifteen days (the music store owner would write and say) "Please send me another box because its very popular here."... Thirty days come up. No check come in. We used to send them letters after thirty days.... they'd come back, no such address.

Now whata you going to do? You go over there, to Detroit for instance, you need how much money to go with the train and come back. You have to stay a couple of days. You go to the ... Court whata going to do to him? That was only 50 cents a record (for production which was then sold at a $1.00 each)... 25 records...its $25.00 the whole thing. Your going to have to spend $1,000! You can't do nothing to him? So, I said to hell with it, with the money. But, the next time, you know we got wise (cf ATL #89-049-C/F tape #2 side A)."

But the Balkan Record Company soon faced serious legal troubles. "Because this, jerk, (eg Ajdin Asslan) he had so much money and he went to Greece and Constantinopolis. And they spent all his money, by you know, going (to the) cabarets having good time. And when he came here (back to the USA) he owned in taxes $4,500. He owed to the company that was printing the records $18,000 (ATL #89-049 C/F tape 2 side A)."

Once, James Phillos, a New York lawyer, reviewed the financial ledgers of the Balkan Record Company he immediately told Gianaros to get out of the partnership. Asllan had squandered over $35,000. Gianaros had a house that the Balkan Record Company creditors could take away to pay off all the debts. In reviewing all the company's finances Phillos learned that Ajdin Asllan's house was not in his own name but that of a man Asslan called his "Uncle."

Even after Gianaros' formal legal departure from the Balkan Record Company he stilled maintained contact with Ajdin recording for him and even helping on many of the company's releases. Here again we have an example of Gianaros' skill at mediating. Gianaros interacted with the other ethnic musicians very often as a middle-man using his skill as a writer of western music notation or his understanding of the American companies recording procedures to work with other ethnic musicians.

Next week: The 1950s

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