The Search For Greek Music's Past In N. America

By Steve Frangos

TNH Staff Writer

CHICAGO- Between 1896 and 1942, at least 2,000 individual commercial recordings of Greek music were produced in the United States. That is what we know. What we don't know is how many commercial records of Greek music were imported during that same period. Given economic and psychological factors Greeks in the United States proved avid consumers of Greek music during this period. A further dimension to this broader puzzle is that the accepted figure of 2,000 individual records does not include every small independent company, then, in operation in the United States up to 1945. Since, in point of fact, no one can honestly say how many of those small companies actually existed. That we even know that these as yet to be fully accounted for small companies existed is itself only the result of the odd bit of surviving ephemera and/or the chance remark during an oral history interview.

In like measure sheet music, instrument makers, the lives of professional musicians, the role(s) of amateur musicians in their home communities, the enduring role of Greek cafes and restaurants in American life, the continuing role of music among Greeks in the United States and other related issues are equally subjects little or never studied. All this in the face of the ever growing popularity of Greek music produced and/or targeted

Continued on page 7

ALL HIS

Searching for the Sound: the Quest for A

Continued from page 1

to a Greek audience in the United States. While like so much else in this general topic no one really knows how many re-releases of Greek music available from 1896 to 1945 has seen production. A fair guess is that as many non-Greeks have been actively involved in this resurgence as Greeks. By virtual of the appearance of these rerelease collections we are able to gauge that this music has gained in popularity not simply among Greek-Americans and an American audience but also a world audience as well.

Again, in keeping with the totally chaotic situation as it now exists no private collector nor public institution has come forward to claim that they possess all 2,000 known recordings. Nor can these same sources shed light onto any of the broader questions of the total number of imported or target marketed recordings, small company inventory, and other related questions. From the existence of record company catalogues issued at the same time as the actual music we have a broader picture—dating from at least 1910---of far, far more than simply 2,000 individual record-

Leaving aside the question of private holdings let us turn to public institutions. To the best of my knowledge no annotated guide exists that lists the public locations of Greek music holdings in North America, Such listings, which are often annotated accounts amounting to vignettes on each individual library, museum, archive or historical society collection, provide the researcher an overview of the available holdings and the terms by which one can view or hear those documents. Having said that we do have Richard K. Spottswood's phenomenal masterwork, Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Eth-





The treasury of Greek music that circulated in America is not a Among the firms were Apollo Music Co. (heart) and the Colonial

nic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893-1942 (University of Illinois Press, 1990) which is a nine-volume listing of sound recordings produced by/or for minority groups issued in the United States until 1942. Volume 3 of these series features Greek music such that this is the published source for the documented existence of the 2,000 individual recordings known to have been produced in North America from 1896 to 1942.

Without going into any details sections from Spottswood's entries on Albanian, Sephardic-Jewish and Turkish discographic entries are also related to his Greek section. Spottswood's watershed publication was drawn from literally years of research based on record company documents, private collector's holdings and visits to public institutions around the country. For

ethnic music in the United States no other study matches it in detail or scope. Now that we know something of which records were produced and released the question becomes where are they?

Being perfect is a fine ideal. But most of the time one must make do with what has on hand. I propose to offer accounts of varying detail on those Greek music collections I have visited, know of or can locate here in the United States. Rather than wait until I know every single detail of each collection I will offer what I have learned so that others can build on what I have found.

We know that the Library of Congress, Indiana University's Archives of Traditional Music (Bloomington), the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, San Francisco State Univer-

%

TORY

Archives of Greek Music in N. America



as accessible at it should be. Music Publishing Co.

sity, Center for Modern Greek Studies: Northern California Greek American Archive, the Helen Zeese Papanikolas Papers at the University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott Library, the State of Florida and the City of Tarpon Springs and the National Hellenic Museum all hold materials related to Greek music produced in North America. It is fair to assume that other archives, museums and historical societies around the country also hold such musical documents.

Given my personal interests I have visited each one of these public institutions but only two recently. The musical holdings held by these diverse organizations range from commercial records produced in the United States, sheet music, oral history interviews with traditional Greek musicians, instrument collections, hymnals, record cat-

alogs, piano rolls, papers related to the Greek music business in this country, photographs, ephemera such as handbills, posters and so on.

At this moment in time, none of these locations (as far as I have been able to discover) has a listing or description of their Greek musical holdings online or otherwise available. This is not a failing or oversight of any of these organizations. Archiving requires personnel; money and will to accomplish its long-term goals—just like any other public institution. Also be aware that each location has its own rules and regulations related to

I first visited the Balch Institute July 1976 when I attended the Clergy-Laity Conference in Philadelphia. As part of a city wide series of Greek events, lectures, films and exhibitions, The Hellenic Perspective art exhibition was curated by the Balch under the auspices of the Greek-American Committee of the Philadelphia Bicentennial. Fiftyfive works of art by 16 international recognized Greek-American artist was on display. I had never before seen such a Greek-American exposition. Stunning does not really describe the overall effect this exhibition had on visiting Greek-Americans. It was literally something the vast majority of us had ever seen before in our lives. I made what contacts I could with the Balch Institute staff before I left the city.

In due course I learned that the Balch Institute had in its general collections some 325 individual pieces of Greek sheet music. In 1992, Richard Chicko was a staff member of the Balch and through him I was able to receive Xerox copies of nineteen pieces of this institution's Greek sheet music with the proviso of my translating of the titles as well as some background information. Which I provided. Twelve of the piece dated from

1956 to 1961 from the Attikon Music Co of Astoria, NY; two pieces form the Colonial Music Co of NY; one piece from the Cosmopolitan Music Publishers dated 1945; one piece from L. Cavadias Publishing dated 1933; one piece dated 1943 Argyriou Bros Newark NJ; and two pieces dated 1912 from the Atlantis Company of New York. By the time Mr. Chicko left the Balch Institute my interests had moved to other topics.

For whatever reasons while I have my extended files on the Balch Institute, notes and other materials from my subsequent visits and all my correspondence with Mr. Chicko and several other archivists and librarians I can't locate the copies of their sheet music in my pile of storage

boxes

Given the enduring popularity of Greek music produced in the United States and/or target marketed to a Greek-American audience since 1896 I cannot believe I am the only one ever to seek out these archival collections.

Let me note, once again, for general consideration that at a time in history when we have more Greek-Americans and native born Greeks teaching at every level of educational facility and/or archive, library or museum we have no one on a full time basis examining, writing and lecturing about the history and culture of Greeks in this nation. While it is always unwise to predict the future I ask the simple question do you think we will ever have as many Greek professionals in such key institutions ever again.

The unquestionable beauty of Greek music informs the creativity of musicians across the planet. Is it so much to ask that we know where we can go to listen to and learn more about this music as it has existed in North American since 1896?

hellenenow1@yahoo.com