

Nikos Ordoulidis: Cosmopolitan Music by Cosmopolitan Musicians: The Case of Spyros Peristeris, Leading Figure of the Rebetiko. Conference Paper, 'Creating music across cultures in the 21st century, The Centre for Advanced Studies in Music (25-27/5). Istanbul Technical University, 2017.

The rebetiko enthusiasts

Initially, an effort will be made to describe, in short, some of the fundamental ideological beliefs which come from specific groups of rebetiko enthusiasts in Greece. Before these ideological beliefs are approached, it must be noted that when the rebetiko is mentioned, it signifies one of the most popular urban popular music genres in Greece, which – eventually – acquired a firm relationship with discography and the music industry in general.

Before returning to its aesthetic approach; what, in the final analysis, the rebetiko is (whether anyone can answer this question is a moot point), because as a term it is rather vague, the rebetiko forum shall be broached, which constitutes a community of devotees of the genre, who come from a wide spectrum of fields: some are professional musicians, others amateur, while others amateur researchers etc., have been exchanging views for years. Through the case of the rebetiko conclusions about other genres could be drawn as well, which their devotees discuss, having very often the issue of authenticity as a focal point; oftentimes, through these discussions, the prerequisites for authenticity and originality of a song, a composer, a performer, a singer, a songwriter etc. transpire.

To document certain representative examples, phrases of the forum members, in order to encapsulate the essence of the mentality with which they manage issues of authenticity was the initial idea. Essentially, in these discussions, the generated sound of the performers is either approved or not, based on the rules and boundaries previously set. In the epicentre, we find not only who performs but also what and how it is performed. These discussions obviously concern mostly younger artists, examining incidences even of the present, as the rebetiko is considered popular amongst the ranks of popular musicians.¹ In essence, nowadays, another revival, albeit, rather singular, is observed. The rebetiko could not be excluded from the global inclination for adaptation observed in the last few years (see also Tragaki, 2015). In other words, the rebetiko enthusiasts often propose a contemporary performance as a topic for discussion, debating whether its protagonists deviate from the authenticity prerequisites previously set by them themselves. Their discussions, however, also concern artists of the supposed rebetiko period itself, since the boundaries of the rebetiko are not specific. Often an artist, for example from the 1940s, is placed at the epicentre of a discussion, and they try to ascertain the degree of his authenticity in comparison to another artist that they have a priori appointed as authentically rebetiko.

¹ In terms of the term 'popular' see additional information below.

Having thoroughly studied the discussions on the forum, an odd route has been chosen: to document the phrase of a member who responds to other members on the issues of authenticity posed in the specific thread, which bears the title ‘Authenticity, evolution and the rebetiko...’.² Since a plethora of proposals and thoughts has been expressed on whether someone/many from different periods of time perform rebetiko songs authentically, who the authentic rebetes are etc., the specific member writes:

Unfortunately, I have come to the conclusion that the answer lies in a museum-like worship which has developed for the rebetiko (which is not wrong, of course, so long as it is not fanatical) in which it is forbidden to touch or adapt. You can only reproduce faithfully and many times mimic something that you are not.

Rebetiko revivals

Before the knot of Spyros Peristeris [Σπύρος Περιστερης], who is a key persona in the configuration of the aesthetical trends of urban popular genres, begins to untangle it must be stressed that in the revivals of the rebetiko that have taken place in Greece, the as much as possible most faithful performance based on the first recording of a piece always constituted an ultimate requirement. This is the core of the rationale of the rebetiko enthusiasts, even today. At this point we encounter what is presented by Christine Yano, outlining the custom and the policies of the *enka* songs (which are a form of Japanese popular ballad), as *ki o terasazui ni*: that is, ‘without showing off anything new’ (Yano 2005: 195). Many times, this faithful reproduction of the rebetiko acquired folklore characteristics accompanied by emotionally charged attitudes (for example, nostalgia for the past), from a sense of authenticity and exclusive rights on the genre, but also agonized efforts to integrate the idiom into national music heritage, something which evidently has multi-level political extensions.

The sense of exclusive rights for the delivery of speech regarding musical issues is a highly contentious topic, often causing disputes in the discourse on the rebetiko. As characteristically described by Simon Frith, ‘culture as an academic object, in short, is different from culture as a popular activity, a process’ (1998: 12). Failure to understand this principle often leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes, the articulation of subjective speech which frequently manifests traits of despotism, hegemony and ownership, leading ultimately to the preponderance of emotional experience rather than a rationalistic argumentation. These inclinations of the proponents of the rebetiko seem to be governed by the same hegemony with which opponents spoke against the rebetiko in the past (see Gauntlett, 2001; Βλησίδης, 2006; and Ορδουλίδης, 2017), posing issues of authenticity and Greekness, and excluding the rebetiko from the acceptable music genres, as much for its uncertified Greekness,

² See www.rembetiko.gr/forums/showthread.php?t=28870.

as for its non-serious contribution. The articulation of personal opinions by the rebetiko enthusiasts, which in essence have preference at their core, which indeed constitutes an important parameter of the value system of popular music, lack musical language (not musicological), that is the fundamental tool for a concrete and distinct view, even if it is characterized by subjectivity.

The act of representation which refers to the process of the rebetiko revival entails the policy of unadulterated and precise consumption and incorporation of the past into the present. This, undoubtedly, comes into stark contrast with the characteristics of the popular conditions in which popular trends are developed; a condition characterized by musical syncretism, polystylism, fluidity in implementation, and the absence of standardization in repetition.³ This monomania led to particularly interesting practices on the part of the rebetiko enthusiasts. Any live performance in the present, which would involve alterations in one of the comprehensible on their part musical characteristics (harmony, melody, rhythm) would constitute an act of 'desecration'; let alone an adaptation of a canonized musical piece, which through its new performance would confer with other idioms, often inciting the rage of the authenticity proponents versus the negatively charged current cosmopolitanism; often identified with another also negatively charged term, globalization.

As it shall be ascertained further down, the story of Peristeris and the rebetiko is neither the story of one person, nor the story of one musical genre; it is a compilation of stories. Some of the most vital points of this story will be elaborated on, in an effort to illustrate on the one hand the convergence of heterogeneity which takes place constantly under cosmopolitan conditions, and on the other the fact that the artists themselves are the ones who define values, habits, trends and in the final analysis the whole aesthetic casing of the repertoire.

The heterotopias of the estudiantinas

Initially, a clarification concerning the term 'rebetiko' is needed, it refers to both major phases-categories in which it is usually divided: that is, namely the Smyrna style and the Piraeus style, the so-called *Smirneiko* and *Pireotiko* rebetiko. This constitutes a highly controversial issue. Firstly, this segregation is the product of a molding between colloquial and invalidated study of the rebetiko. At this point it must be noted that due to the long-term refusal of science to engage in 'other' music, nowadays, discovery of sources and documentation of the material is rendered especially difficult; oftentimes impossible. Hence, the basic text of popular music in its urban forms is often scarce, corrupt or unaccompanied by the necessary documentation information. With regard to periodization of the rebetiko, examination of the recording corpus with aesthetic rules is still in limbo, in order for us to accomplish periodization in musicological terms. Scientific literature has already adequately commented on current basic periodization of the rebetiko (Smith, 1991; Pennanen, 1999; Gauntlett,

³ For the revivals of the rebetiko, see Pennanen (1999), Tragaki (2007) and Καρσινάκης (2011).

2001; Κοκκώνης, 2005). The term ‘Smirneiko’ is quite problematic, as a large part of the repertoire does not come from Smyrna. Even the repertoire that was recorded or flourished there is more a product of cosmopolitanism of the area and cultural convergences, rather than from Smyrna itself, at least in geographical terms. In addition, the Smyrna style is usually identified with the so-called *santuroviolins* (from the words santur and violin), something which is also problematic. The santuroviolins constituted only one part of this repertoire. Furthermore, during the prime of the Piraeus style rebetiko, which now had the bouzouki as its base, the other styles do not instantaneously cease to exist. Were we to take into account other places of recording, such as America, we would see that genre categorization is much more complex than it seems.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, certain musical ensembles came into effect, mainly from Constantinople and Smyrna, which with the combination of the rapid growth of an emerging discography, were to play a determining role in the configuration of artistic trends; known as the *estudiantinas*. At the same time various types of orchestral ensembles, such as the *mandolinatas*, were also active. It must also be noted that during the same period, such orchestral figures were being created not only in Constantinople, Smyrna and Athens, but also across the Atlantic, a product of immigration. Today, thanks to the internet, we are able to discover what exactly happened during that period. An effort will be made in order to unwind the skein of the *estudiantinas*’s history:⁴

On 7 March 1878, during the celebration of the Paris carnival, an *estudiantina* orchestra, comprised of 32 Spanish students (according to others more),⁵ astounded the crowds with its performance.⁶ This orchestra had been formed earlier in Madrid, in order to participate, in traditional attire, in local customs, playing *bandurria* in the streets. An international tour commences, which takes them as far as the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean, where this particular musical trend becomes the vogue in 1880. *The New York Times* on 26th August 1879 announces an *estudiantina* concert in New York on 13th October 1879, this time with 22 members.

Eight years after Paris, it is still in vogue, and in the Greek capital the newspaper *Acropolis*, on 21st July 1887, announces that the *estudiantina* orchestra had been in Athens and was preparing to go to Patras, with only six members in its orchestra.⁷ The typical composition of Spanish *estudiantinas* consisted of various plucked string

⁴ The following short passage comes from its Greek version which can be found in Ορδουλίδης (2017: 102)

⁵ The information about the number of orchestra members in Paris comes from the newspaper *Acropolis*, 21st July 1887. Despite this, the photograph in The International Museum of the Student www.museodelestudiante.com depicts more members, without clarifying, however, whether all are instrument players of the orchestra.

⁶ A photograph of the Spanish *estudiantina* can be found here: <http://www.museodelestudiante.com/Fotografias/EstudiantinaEspanolaAA.htm>.

⁷ The *estudiantina* performed a concert at the Athens Conservatory on 26th and 29th April 1886 (Μπαρμπάκη: 376).

instruments, with the most popular being the guitar and the mandolin.⁸ However, in engravings of that period⁹ violins, wind and percussion instruments are also depicted. In essence, they were well-organized amateur music societies by Spanish university students. Their stem source seems to be the *tuna*, the street serenade (Orlandi, 2010).

As it tours all over the world the *estudiantina* orchestra plants the seed of its aesthetic in the large urban centres (Sparks, 2005). An article in the Spanish newspaper *Diario de Córdoba*, on 28th February 1886, mentions that an *estudiantina* was in Constantinople to present their programme to the court of the Sultan Abdulhamid (Conejero, 2008: 102). It seems that the orchestra stayed for quite some time in Constantinople and Smyrna, where it was a catalytic influence on the musicians there.

The first well-known Greek speaking *estudiantina* was created by Aristidis Peristeris, father of Spyros Peristeris, and Vasilios Sideris.¹⁰ They named their orchestra ‘*Ta politakia*’ [the guys from Poli, that is, Constantinople] and settled in Smyrna from approximately 1898 to 1906. It is not clear whether they stay in Constantinople or Smyrna or when they move.¹¹

At this point we should add a parenthesis in order to understand the identity of the protagonists of the now legendary orchestra. Aristidis Peristeris was born in Corfu¹² and marries Despina Bekou, a Greek with Italian citizenship, born in Corsica. Vasilis Sideris was born in Vourla, Smyrna, whom we find still active in Athens from 1924 to 1930 (Κουβάδης, 2003b: 276). Additionally, it must be noted that Spyros’s brother, Stelios, was himself a musician, a teacher of classical violin at the Athens Conservatory. Furthermore, according to information procured from Stelios’s grandchild, George, who is himself a classical violinist at present, their cousin was the other Spyros Peristeris, son of Dimitrios Peristeris, physician and folklorist from Rododafni, Aigio. Spyros Dimitrios Peristeris was a teacher at the School of Byzantine music at the historical Athens Conservatory, the successor of the founder, Konstantinos Psahos, of the school in question from 1937 onwards, and First Cantor at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens.

The ‘*politakia*’ is a type of small mandolinata¹³ with intense Spanish influence, in which only men participated, mainly with mandolins and guitars, while the singing is often lyrical, and occasionally polyphonic. The sound salvaged by their discography is,

⁸ For the Spanish *estudiantina*, see: Christoforidis (2009 and 2017).

⁹ See www.museodelestudiante.com [visited on 20/08/2016].

¹⁰ According to Kaliviotis, the *estudiantina* was created in 1898 (Καλυβιώτης, 2002: 72).

¹¹ Kaliviotis claims that they appeared for the first time in 1898, and according to Karakasis they settled in Smyrna in 1906.

¹² The information comes from the research undertaken by Tony Klein, Nikos Politis and David Murray, who interviewed Spyros Peristeris’s son Dimitris, in 2008.

¹³ The Greek mandolinatas constitute another important case of syncretism, and indeed on a multitude of levels, their trips to America acting as mediators. Repertoires and performance practices are structured in various locales, proposing interesting schools and styles (see, for example, mandolinata activity by Ierotheos Shizas and Mihalīs Sifneōs).

to a great extent, the ‘sound of Smyrna’, whose environment could be considered the definition of cosmopolitanism of the period (see also Scott, 2015a and 2015b).¹⁴

What is particularly interesting is that apart from the live performances, the *estudiantina* is synonymous with erudition, the study which its etymology poses; in other words, we have a musical education framework, which utilizes musical notation and reading. The whole management of the musical act is consequently distinguished by a scholarly process, which does not subtract from its popular, by nature, repertoire and its great popularity.

The photographic material proves the direct influence of the Spanish *estudiantinas*: a postcard of that period depicts the first ‘*politakia*’ in folklore attire (namely, in traditional Cretan costumes), mandolins and guitars, an image equivalent to traditional costume, which characterises the theatrical aesthetic (which refers to auto-exoticism, a huge issue which this article will, however, not examine¹⁵) of the respective Spanish orchestra; however, their practices are not practices of mimicry.¹⁶ As other musicians of Smyrna, having their ears open to the sounds surrounding them, they set a course of their own, shaping prototype aesthetics, style and repertoire.

The diverse musical languages which are involved in this composition freely share instrumentation, techniques, rhythmology, all types of *modeness* which characterise the various local ethno-cultural idioms, but also external influences, which disembark at its busy port; the Smyrna musical ‘*ecumene*’ functions in a spirit of *perichoresis* [co-inherence].¹⁷

The record labels which the *estudiantinas* recorded both in Smyrna and Constantinople provide a mine of information concerning repertoire scope.

¹⁴ For the ‘*politakia*’ and generally *estudiantinas* and the music life in Smyrna see: Σολομωνίδης (1957); Παπάζογλου (1994); Καλυβιώτης (2002: 71); Κουνάδης (2003a: 294 and 2003b: 265); Κοκκώνης (2005); Ünlü (2016: 166-174)

¹⁵ See also Scott (2015b).

¹⁶ This postcard can be found in Σολομωνίδης (1957: 63); Καλυβιώτης (2002: 111), Κουνάδης (2003a: 295) and Ünlü (2016: 1710). See also <http://www.akpool.co.uk/postcards/25532240-postcard-estudiantina-dorient-dirige-par-m-basile-sideris-musikgruppe-in-trachten-lauten>.

¹⁷ The record label photographs taken in Smyrna and Constantinople and their ranking (variety of languages, rhythm, genre, *dromos*, *makam*, hymns, European, theatre, shadow theatre et al. See also Καλυβιώτης, 2002) constitute perhaps the most vivid example of this syncretism (for *perichoresis* see footnote 30).

SONG TITLE	COMPANY	MATRIX	CATALOGUE	YEAR	ESTUDIANTINA	LABEL
Μη λησμονείς (O sole mio)	Odeon	CX 696	31961	1906	Σιδερή [Of Sideris]	
Σύρμπα [Sirba]	Odeon		46095	1907	Σμυρναϊκή [Smyrnaiki]	
Χανουμάκι [Young belly dancer]	Odeon	CX 1885	NO 58584	1908	Σμυρναϊκή [Smyrnaiki]	
Σμυρνέικο μανέ τζιβαέρι [Smyrna style manes tzivaeri]	Victor (re-issue)	12828B	VI-63524	1909	Ελληνική [Greek]	Δνίς Μαρία (soprano) [Miss Maria]
Μινόρε μανές [Minor manes]	Odeon	XSC 62	NO 54728	1910	Σμυρναϊκή [Smyrnaiki]	
Σμυρνέικο συρτό [Smyrneiko syrto]	Gramophone	1580Y	11-12152	1910	Ελληνική [Greek]	
Φα Μαδζόρε μανές [Fa major manes]	Odeon	XSC-70	54736	1910	Σμυρναϊκή [Smyrnaiki]	
Βαλς εσπανιόλ [Spanish waltz]	Victor (re-issue)		VI-63539	1910	Ελληνική [Greek]	
Το χάσιση (L' opium)	Odeon	GO 24	GA 1045	1925	Πανελλήνιος [Panhellenic]	dance turque

Table 1: Some examples of record labels of *estudiantinas*' recordings¹⁸

It is important to understand certain basic characteristics of *estudiantina* activity, thus facilitating understanding also of the activities of Spyros Peristeris and the rest of the protagonists of the *rebetiko* during their subsequent stage; in Piraeus, since the condition of *estudiantina* was catalytic for the molding of the artistic physiognomy. We should not forget that apart from Peristeris, other protagonists of the Piraeus period originate from the world of the *estudiantinas* too, such as for example, Panagiotis Tountas and Vangelis Papazoglou (Παπάζογλου, 1994: 105-106). What is more, in understanding the physiognomy of the *estudiantinas* we will manage to decipher the term *λαϊκό* [*laikó*¹⁹ –popular] more, which evidently does not coincide conceptually in all languages, since its significance differs depending on the cultural condition under which its entity is acquired. The term is granted diverse meaning, almost with every *estudiantina* recording.

In essence, the *estudiantina* sound is what has prevailed today as *fusion*. The sound products are dominated by certain characteristic traits:

- 1) The utilized instrumentation does not follow a particular 'traditional' prototype. Consequently, it is multi-selection and miscellaneous. Participation of instruments not only connected to popular traditions but also others with important tradition in scholarly music.
- 2) Some of the protagonists are musically literate, able to read and write, while others function in the framework of orality.

¹⁸ All recording dates were documented by Μανιάτης (2006), except from the *estudiantinas* recordings about which Καλυβιώτης (2002) was also consulted. The rest of information on the recordings was obtained from the photographs of the labels themselves. A list of the available discographical sources on Greek urban popular music can be found in Ορδουλίδης (2017b).

¹⁹ Λαός [laós –the people].

- 3) Recordings take place with different guests every time (musicians and singers). Many of whom come from the opera house, while others from the 'stage' of a rural setting.
- 4) A motley amalgam of elements related to performance practices is observed, such as a congruous and incongruous coalescence of sound and/or instruments, voices et al. This fusion is confirmed by the record labels containing terms such as 'folk' [δημοτικό –dimotiko], 'folk-like' [δημώδες –dimodes], 'popular' [λαϊκό –laiko], 'traditional' [παραδοσιακό –paradosiako], 'manes' [μανές –type of *ala greca* style gazel] etc.
- 5) Composition form does not follow a certain prototype that could identify with some certain tradition of scholarly/erudite music. It is, however, inextricably linked with the recording technology of the time.
- 6) Freedom in performance practices is observed, which in essence is equal to non-existent musical notation, even though certain *estudiantinas* function as singular music schools.
- 7) Second recordings, often more than second, have been found of the same musical pieces which differentiate themselves on diverse levels.

Based on the up to now documentation and existing archives, it is calculated that the number of *estudiantina* recordings, mainly in the Constantinople-Smyrna-Athens triangle, exceeds 500.

Spyros Peristeris

It is in this atmosphere that Spyros Peristeris is born and raised. In the passenger list of the transatlantic *Byron*, with which he travelled to America as a hired musician in the lounge of the ship, he claims that he is 39 years old. The voyage in question took place in 1935, thus Peristeris's date of birth can be calculated to be 1896.²⁰

Between 1906 and 1915, his family moves from Smyrna to Constantinople. Indeed, it appears that he attends the Italian School from approximately 1916 to 1920. After 1918, Spyros Peristeris undertakes the 'Politakia', who, however, wane due to the turbulent period.

He moves to Athens in approximately 1924 and is active as a musician, reintroducing the 'Politakia'.²¹ He undertakes the post of artistic director for Odeon-Parlaphone, which is the segment of Gramophone Co, under the management of Minos Matsas, with whom he cooperates discographically in the roles of composer and lyricist respectively.

²⁰ Despite this, we should show caution when calculating dates of birth, because great difficulty has been found in the ascertainment of the exact age of the refugee population. Spyros Peristeris died in Athens in 1966.

²¹ For a few photographs of the reintroduced 'Politakia', see Καλυβιώτης (2002: 127), Κουνάδης (2003b: 274 and 275) and Ünlü (2016: 1969).

His stint at the company lasts approximately from 1930-1934 to 1965-1966, playing a key role in the essential configuration of the urban *laiko* song: Participating as a musician, supervising, recommending, adapting, orchestrating, not only his own compositions but also those of other important musicians of the period. He acquires a crucial role both in the studio and on the music stage. In order for one to confirm how defining his role was, one need only to cast a glance at the available record labels. The information almost always included on the record label is the name of the person under whose direction the orchestra recorded. In Odeon-Parlophone where Peristeris worked, his name appears on countless labels, as conductor of the orchestra, not only for his own compositions but also for other *laiko* protagonists of *laiko* discography. What is impressive is that he conducts pieces that do not only belong to the urban *laiko* genre, for example in repertoires from rural areas.

Sources agree that he himself introduced the bouzouki trend by convincing Minos Matsas of Odeon-Parlophone to record Markos Vamvakaris with his bouzouki-based songs, rendering it *mainstream* in the *laiko* sound, from the 1930s onwards,²² even though he himself did not always perform with the bouzouki in recording, but some other instrument, mainly the guitar and the piano. In spite of this, he also presents a new aspect of the newly-introduced bouzouki trend in question, that of the so-called *laiki* guitar,²³ which he uses many times as a substitute for the bouzouki.²⁴

In the specific instruments that he played, that is, the piano, the bouzouki, the guitar and the mandolin, in studio recordings, he bequeaths a sophisticated legacy in performance and innovative orchestrations. From Markos Vamvakaris's autobiography we learn that 'He could play ten instruments [...] He has also written many songs tsamika [traditional rural dance] and zeibekika and kleftika [traditional rural forms] [...] He was from Constantinople but he grew up in Smyrna' (Βέλλου-Κάυλ, 1978: 190). Further down, Vamvakaris adds vlahika [vlach traditional songs], hasapika [kasap²⁵], kalamatiana [traditional rural dance] and syrta [rural/urban dance/form, also found in Ottoman and Turkish repertoires]. From Angela Papazoglou's memoirs, wife of Vangelis Papazoglou, who was yet another of the rebetiko protagonists, not only in Smyrna, from which he comes, but also in Athens, we ascertain that Peristeris was a literate musician and that initially he was the first mandolin in the Politakia of Smyrna (Παπάζογλου, 1994: 105-106). Makis Matsas, son of Minos Matsas who owned the Greek segment of Gramophone comprised of Odeon-Parlophone, also agrees that Peristeris 'was an educated musician'. We are informed that his father (Minos Matsas)

²² See indicatively, Χατζηδουλής (1979: 22-24 and 100-102); Μανιάτης (2001: 167); Κουνάδης (2003a: 54 and 2007: 53-57).

²³ *Laiki* is the feminine type.

²⁴ *Ταταυλιανό χασάπικο* [tatavliano hasapiko], Odeon, GO 2053 - GA 1853, 1934 (<https://youtu.be/fCFDxWN9iIA>); *Μες στον τεκέ της Μαριγώς* [mes ton teke tis Marigos], Orthophonic BS 92407-1 - S 344, 1935 (https://youtu.be/Oip__IyBnAw).

²⁵ For hasapiko, kasap, hora and sirba, see Κοκκώνης (2017: 133-161).

appreciated his musical skills and the assistance he offered to the other composers in the studio while working, but also beforehand in order to create the songs in the correct metre. Many times they were without metre, their melodies were without structure and he would mold them, shape them, he would enhance them and bring about the correct musical foundation. His contribution was important (Κουβάδης, 2007: 135).

His phrase ‘he was able to compose anything, from operetta to rebetiko’ (Κουβάδης, 2007: 119) is what will dominate the rest of this article, of which the epicentre is the aesthetic of polystylism.

Polystylism in *laiko*

Polystylism seems to dominate every urban popular musical form which develops within a condition which is characterised by two very important characteristics: the cosmopolitan aesthetic of everyday life and the direct connection of the musical act to discography, from the beginning of the twentieth century and onwards. Regarding the network constituted of the three urban centres which preoccupy us, that is, Constantinople, Smyrna and Athens, their cosmopolitanism is their characteristic trait. Should we also include in this network other large urban centres which communicate with the cities in question and, occasionally, participate indirectly in this common network, such as Bucharest, Cairo, Alexandria, Thessaloniki and Napoli, then we shall ascertain that the cultural dialogues are multidimensional and extremely fecund.²⁶ In the communication amongst the points of this network we must understand the catalytic role that discography plays, as music now travels faster and relays vaster amounts of information. In fact, it reaches the point of giving birth to not only new genres and idioms but also new specializations and occupations. Under these conditions, the *estudiantinas* constitute the ‘radio’ of the time, which, if nothing else reproduces the hits –it deals in them, that is, its people subsist on this relationship but they also remodel them with every new performance, since *laiki* music is characterised by plasticity in performance. Thus, we have reached the point today to have access to a variety of performances of, supposedly, the same song, its performers, though, leaving evident signs of appropriation. We observe alterations in instrumentation, even in primary musical characteristics such as rhythmic accompaniment, melodic formulae et al.

The case of Peristeris and his position in this environment is special because:

- 1) We are dealing with a professional literate musician, who before moving to Greece had already acquired a reputation. This reputation begins within the ranks of musicians themselves, an important factor in his subsequent course and the large scale acceptance by the rest, in the position of artistic director at Odeon-

²⁶ See also Fabbri (2016).

Parlophone.²⁷ Despite being literate, he functions within the *laiko* framework with ease.

- 2) He was chosen as artistic director by one of the two main recording companies in Greece for many years (Odeon-Parlophone).
- 3) The recording work in which he is involved as composer, musician and orchestrator is huge (evidence of more than 700 recordings).
- 4) While he is actively involved as a key figure in the music industry as well, he does not alienate himself from the literal framework of the *laiko*, which is the music stage. On the one hand, this means that his communication with the other musicians takes place in a familiar, for all, environment, and on the other, he remains an insider of the whole *laiko* condition, processing it within the framework of discography knowledgeably. In other words, he is aware of the way *laiki* music functions pragmatically.

The results of these four axes led to a singular polystylism, which we see in his corpus. What does this polystylism and the multiplicities of its actualisation consist of, and what does it propose? Initially, it must be noted that his ceaseless and regular production, his popularity amongst the ranks of musicians as well as his commercial impact and the future reproduction of many of his pieces proves a rather successful 'recipe'. Peristeris's formula depicts, if nothing else, his success at converging the diversities he was called upon to manage. Under these circumstances, musicians act as chameleons, in a fashion, and the constant change and adaptation for them is a familiar and intimate environment in contrast to the environment of the specific, the stagnant, the closed and the 'orthodox'. Borrowing a phrase by Simon Emmerson, which is however used in a different context, we can say that for many musicians of that period 'the world has always been a mix of musics' (Emmerson, 2007: 2).

The discographical work of Peristeris includes many flavours which pertain to multifarious musical traditions, the sonic atmosphere in which he himself grew up, but also functioned as a musician. On the other hand, his work is a precursor for the subsequent models of urban *laiko* idioms. The diversity detected in the recording corpus of Peristeris often gives the impression that more than one composer was involved. There is not only a plethora of deviations but they are also substantial, he shows neither preference nor does he settle on only one composition form.

He records pieces which denote his relation to a more eastern repertoire as well as more scholarly sounds and practices, structured around the consistency which the makam presents.²⁸ In contrast, he illustrates his familiarity with more European

²⁷ The fact that Peristeris was a leading musician, well-respected by colleagues, oftentimes referred to as 'maestro', can be verified in many of their autobiographies and interviews. See, for example: Βέλλου-Κάλι (1978: 190); Κλειάσιου (2004: 243, 290); Κουνάδης (2007: 56-57, 80); Γεωργιάδης & Ραχματούλινα (2009: 265).

²⁸ Example: *Εχάσαμε τον Βενιζέλο* [ehasame ton Venizelo], Odeon, GO 2446 - GA 1931, 1936 (<https://youtu.be/ex42LKbCH9g>).

sounds.²⁹ In essence, we have an endless journey and a continual mutation of sound products. This journey is geographical but also cultural; in either case, difficult to define in national or political terms. Besides, in the case of the *estudiantinas* as well, it is not easy to identify its mindset absolutely and only with Spain, as the history of plucked instruments is also directly connected to Italian practices. Peristeris operates on a dual axis: the appropriation of musical entities and innovation. In his work we ascertain a *dialogical reciprocity*³⁰ between the musical entities utilized and the environment of *co-existence* which this dialogue structures. Peristeris uses forms of the waltz and habanera,³¹ manes,³² orchestral pieces based on the *ala greca* atmosphere of Smyrna, in which the *Minore* [minor] seems to function as a singular entity,³³ the exotic bolero,³⁴ scotic songs³⁵ but also songs from rural areas.³⁶ He often alludes to the worlds of the *café aman*, the *café chantant* and the world of the *μάγκας* [mangas – rebel, tough] of Piraeus. Sometimes he develops harmonization techniques and at others he constructs and evolves melodic formulae. Sometimes he uses lyrical singers and at other singers with an eastern timbre. Sometimes he uses the *laiko*-modal violin and at others the symphonic, guitars, mandolins and mandolas, percussion instruments, the piano, the bouzouki, brass and wooden wind instruments, even bells.³⁷

The questions that arise from this data are numerous and complex. They concern both the artistic substance of Peristeris, and urban *laiki* music in general. They also concern company policy, but also the redefinition of mainstream sound, both within and beyond the borders of Greece; what the protagonists seek in supplementation to what they can do. This perhaps is the core of urban *laiki* music: the interaction between creator and audience; a relationship just as dynamic both in the recording studio and on the music stage. Was perhaps finding himself with a different instrument in his hands and in a different role each time, and conducting a different orchestra in a different form each time, for him the most familiar environment?

²⁹ Example: *Η Μαριγιώ* [I Marigio], Odeon, GO 4002 - GA 7463, 1948 (<https://youtu.be/5hqjS9QjuiE>).

³⁰ The term ‘dialogical reciprocity’ comes from the terminology of Orthodox Theology, mainly as it was used by Father Nikolaos Loudovikos (Loudovikos, 2013). See also the way in which the term is used in conjunction with the term ‘alliloperichorisis’ [αλληλοπεριχώρηση –co-existence, reciprocal interpenetration], in Ορδουλίδης (2017: 68, 69, 101, 171,174).

³¹ Example: *Πάμε μια βόλτα* [pame mia volta], Parlophone, GO 4238 - B 74181, 1950 (https://youtu.be/PkNU_PmZwxc).

³² Example: *Μινόρε μανές (Σκληρό το πεπρωμένο)* [Minore manes (skliro to pepromeno)], Odeon, GO 2067 - GA 1766, 1934 (https://youtu.be/gxNt_tWP8kA)

³³ Example: *Το σερβικάκι* [To servikaki], Odeon, GO 2678 - GA 7020, 1937 (<https://youtu.be/AlInBBE06w8>).

³⁴ Example: *Σεχραζάτ* [Sehrazat], Odeon, GO 3851 - GA 7404, 1947 (https://youtu.be/1c_94QX6880).

³⁵ Example: *Αστέρω* [Astero], Odeon, GO 4562 - GA 7638, 1951 (<https://youtu.be/5-fBbWboLyg>).

³⁶ Example: *Το άρρωστο κορίτσι* [To arosto koritsi], Parlophone, GO 4590 - B 74243, 1951 (<https://youtu.be/3A59ZgY4mTw>).

³⁷ Example: *Το γλυκοχάραγμα* [To glykoharagma], Odeon, GO 3844 - GA 7404, 1947 (<https://youtu.be/oB8wHkk59r8>).

Taking all the above into consideration, which clearly should be examined in conjunction with the audio dimension, since this is what contains the primary information, once again the title of the thread from the rebetiko forum is brought to the forefront, which constituted the inspiration for this article: ‘Authenticity, evolution and rebetiko...’ With Peristeris’s activity as an axis we are able to contemplate a diversity of issues which elicit such discussions, but notably the term which is always troubling when used in discussions regarding urban *laiki* music; it is none other than the term ‘authenticity’.

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