

The GREEK FOLK - MUSIC

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The Greek people are a musical people. From ancient times, which bequeathed to the world a rich musical tradition, down to our time Music has been one of the most important artistic manifestations of the Greek people.

The Song especially - of a monodic character - has always been their inseparable companion throughout their long history.

During their periods of prosperity and flourish as well as during hardships and slavery the people sought refuge in poetry and song; Greeks have moreover a unique gift of improvising with ease in poetry.

The Neohellenic folk - music, in a general manner as also Byzantine Music (that is our Church music) contain on the one hand, fundamental elements of ancient Greek Art and, on the other, well pronounced features of the chromatic oriental music. In continental Greece the diatonic modes are more predominant, while in the Aegean Islands, near Asia Minor, and in Cyprus the oriental element is rather stronger. Moreover, in the Ionian Islands, near Italy, there is an influence of the modern major and minor modes, and of the European Music in general. There is also some relationship with the folk - music of the other Balkan peoples, which has been influenced by Greek Art

principally since the days of the Byzantine Empire. These elements are rather freely intermixed and, therefore, are to be found everywhere. But generally speaking the diatonic element prevails over the chromatic.

Of all the diatonic modes, known as "Greek" or "Gregorian" modes, the Hypodorian ^(modern Aeolian) predominates. This is similar to the modern minor, but without a leading-note.

ex. 1.

The following — a folk-song, called the "Three Sisters" is in this mode; it is in 7/8 time which is not found in the folk-music of Western Europe.

Ex. 2 "The Three Sisters"

In classical Greece the Dorian mode (or modern "Phrygian") was considered as the national mode "par excellence". It is used in the Neobellenic folk-music, but not so often as the Hypodorian. The following melody is in this mode; it is a love-song.

Ex. 3

The Lydian, Hypolydian and Mixolydian ~~at~~ are also to be found. The major and minor modes, as I have already mentioned, are also used; but very often the melodic and rhythmical structures tend to create a type of song different from the European.

In the following graceful melody, which is a choral-dance for girls, there is a judicious mixture of the chromatic element with modal feeling in the cadence. The name of the melody is "butterfly" Ex. 4

The chromatic element, which is not very strong in this melody, may be more profound and pronounced in others. Chromaticism is here used in the old meaning of the term, i.e. that of a tetrachord containing the augmented 2nd:

ex. 5a ; and there are scales with two such tetrachords:

ex. 5b.

Although ^{the} chromatic is a fundamental element with almost an exclusively expressive value in pure oriental music (Turkish, Arab-Persian), yet taking into consideration that the "Chromatic genus" was used by ancient Greeks and that Greece, owing to her geographical position, has been a crossroad between East and West, we cannot declare this element as quite unnatural in Greek art. Here are two characteristic examples with a pronounced chromaticism; the first is a part of a Cretan dance; the second, with a modulatory middle part, is a love-song with dance from Asia Minor:

Ex. 6a) "Cretan Syrtos"

" 6b) "Bournovalia"

At the end of the second melody there is a point which deserves special attention. In the Greek folk-song ^{music}, as also in Byzantine music, some intervals smaller than the semitones are used, third-tones or quarter-tones as some Theorists support. It is true that the popular singer (or instrumentalist) at certain moments makes an expressive glissando and takes a small

interval, but it is difficult to define whether it is a third-tone, or a quarter-tone, or even a smaller interval. In the last phrase of the previous song we have such a case. I am repeating this phrase and I shall stop on the particular note affected; then I shall give again the whole phrase: Ex-7a+b

The Neohellenic folk-music may be classed into three groups; a) the folk-songs, b) the folk-dances and c) a third group in which both are combined, the dance-songs or choral-dances. This last group reminds us of the ancient combination of the three Arts: poetry, dance and music.

a) All the manifestations of the private and social life have offered subjects for the creation of folk-songs. So, there are religious songs, patriotic, heroic, love, farewell and nuptial songs, songs of humour, lullabies, lamentations, pastorals, and so on. Among the enormous number of these songs a prominent place is held by the songs for "Freedom". Under this general title I should include most of the songs created during the Turkish occupation; ^{end of 19th cent down to 1918/21} they express in an infinite scale of feelings the sacred and ardent love of the Greeks for freedom. A great part of these songs are known as "Kleptie", or, to use a contemporary expression, "Guerrilla" songs, and they are unlike anything else in literature. Most of them reveal an unusual power of expression, a real passion for the Fatherland and

for Freedom, and constitute a valuable legacy for Modern Greece. Although they have originated in Roumeli and Epirus (i.e. in Central and North-Western Greece) they are sung, with slight variations, throughout Greece (both ^{continental and insular}); this is so because they are connected with a most painful and dark period of the whole Greek world. When in Western Europe the Renaissance began in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Country, which had been the inspirer of it, was sunk in the darkest slavery under the Ottoman domination. From 1453 when Constantinople fell and a few years later when the whole of Greece followed its fate, a dark and heavy veil covered Greece for over three centuries. Nothing, at least in appearance, remained in the Country where Letters and Arts were once flourishing. The calm voice of Socrates was no longer heard, the Majestic teaching of Plato, the power of Aeschylus ... all seemed to die away. Parthenon, on the high Acropolis, was tacitly raising to the Attic blue sky the everlasting light of the Ancient glory. As sole consolation for the enslaved people remained the Song; in dark small houses, in remote caves, in humble small churches the persecuted people were singing their sorrows, their dreams and above all the exploits of their Heroes, the famous "Klepts". During the Turkish occupation many were abandoning their families and homes, and went to live in the snowclad mountains, from where they carried on, for centuries, a continuous warfare against the conqueror.

So, there had been created a new class of men, the "Klepts," as they have been called, who spent all their life on the mountains under the most difficult conditions. They left a very rich heritage, both with their patriotism and their ballads and songs. Some of these songs have a heroic tone, others have a delicate feeling of tenderness, of love and often of a nostalgia yearning for peaceful life. Here is now a well-known Kleptic song, called the "40 Klepts", related with an episode of the fighting in Peloponnese. Its restrained melody and serene tone have a sort of an elegiac grandeur; it is in the Hypodorian, ~~and if given on the piano, it loses almost half of its power.~~

Ex. 8 "The 40 Klepts". Song.

Other songs of the same period are historical monuments reminiscent of some aspects of the fight for Freedom. Such is the famous dance-song of Zalongo, connected with a tragic episode, similar to which it is almost impossible to find in the whole history of the world. In 1804 Suli, a mountainous village of Epirus, was in danger to fall in the hands of the Turks. Then the women made a circle and began dancing and singing a sad farewell song above the precipice; when the leader of the ring reached the precipice separated herself from the rest and fell to death; then followed, after each verse, the second, the third, until all had perished, thus preferring death to slavery and humiliation.

Here is a translation of a part of the poem: "Farewell!
lovely world of sorrow; farewell! sweet life; and to you, my
sad Country, farewell! Farewell! cool little fountains, hills,
mountains and forests. Suliot women, know not only to
live; they know also how to die rather than live in slavery."

Ex. 9. "The dance of Zalongo"

Almost all the melodies given are rather simple with
clear and well defined texture; the rhythmical and
architectural structure is also clear. But there are
many other folk-songs very free, full of vocalisms and
melismatic ornamentation; their irregular change of accents
together with the use of other intervals than the tempered
make their notation very difficult.

b) A few words may be said about the dances.
The folk-dances are usually named after the district
where according to the popular tradition had been first
created (e.g. Cretan, Thessalic). Others have a general
name or title expressive of a special kind of dance, or of
rhythm and movements of the dance ("Sytós"). Others
again are connected with a certain profession.

Some of the popular dances have, it seems, a very
old tradition; such is a war-dance of Crete, called
"Pyrrhichios", which in its movements has a striking
resemblance to an ancient dance of the same name
described by Homer. Usually the Greek folk-dances are

danced by a group of men or women with a leader, who leads the dance and often sings in dialogue with the group (couplets and refrain). Very often the place of the leader is taken by all the dancers successively. The men's dances are very lively in rhythm and movement, while those of women are more delicate and rather restrained. Some dances have also a sort of mimic action; for instance in a fishermen's dance (called "Triata") the dancers are imitating the movements of fishermen while pulling the net; again in another popular dance ("Ballos") the couple imitates a small love story.

The most popular dance is the so-called "Syrtos" in $\frac{7}{8}$ time; this was used also in ancient Greece, but we don't know the movements. Of a particular interest for the Western European, however, are certainly those dances in $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{7}{8}$ and $\frac{9}{8}$ time. This last one is formed with an original alternate change of two different triple-times, $\frac{3}{8} + \frac{3}{4}$. Here is an example from a dance of the Island of Cyprus.

Ex. 10. "Karsilamas".

but the $\frac{7}{8}$ time is the Greek national "par-excellence". The greatest part of folk-songs and dances are found in this time; some of the melodies I have given are also in this time.

c) The dances, and sometimes the songs too, are accompanied by various popular instruments, among

which there are also some universal instruments such as the violin and the clarinet. A rather interesting popular instrument is the so-called "Lyra", a small instrument which is rather long and narrow in some districts, while in others it is rather round in shape; it has three strings and is played resting on the knees with a bow.

- Folk-music, as well as Byzantine Hymnody, constitute valuable sources for the Modern Greek Composers. Folk-songs, Byzantine hymns, also rhythms and modes of folk-music are widely used. So, a Greek National School has been created on these lines, and is now flourishing. A considerable number of Composers have given important works for every kind of art, from Symphony to Opera and Chamber Music. Some of them, as Calomiris, Petridis, Varvoglis, Poniridis, Levidis and others, are well known in Continental Europe and their works were performed before the last war in France, Germany and other countries.

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