

INTERNATIONAL FOLK MUSIC COUNCIL

CONGRESS AT BASLE - SWITZERLAND

13-18 SEPTEMBER, 1948.

GREEK FOLK- MUSIC -PRESERVATION OF THE TRADITIONAL PRACTICE
OF FOLK-MUSIC IN GREECE.

By Solon Michaelides, D.C. Mus.

Folk Music still holds a rather important place in the life of the Greek people, especially of the rural and insular population. The preservation of the traditional practice of Folk Music in Greece is due to many reasons which may fall, in a general way, under three main categories: physical, racial and historical.

a) The composition of the soil which is deeply divided into a multitude of small islands, of high mountains and deep ravines, makes the touch with the town rather difficult. Thus, the cities, from which usually emanate the enemies of the Folk Art, remained in a certain degree, away from the pure life of the village, and many national customs continue to have their place in the simple life of the peasant or the sailor.

b) The Greek people, moreover, have an exceptional power of preserving their habits and customs, and generally all such characteristics as are part and parcel of their national personality. It is not difficult to recognise in many customs, folk-dances and songs the survival of many traits of the old Hellenic life. The physical conditions, which inspired the ancients, have most probably remained unchanged. The same clear blue sky, which bathed the Athenians of old, the same fragrant mountains with the shady forests, with pine trees and fir-trees, the deep ravines, the rapid torrents and the little cool fountains, all full of the shadows of ancient Gods. The same beaches, the same deep blue waters and the beautiful isles of the Aegean sea, as Ulysses knew and Byron sang... And indeed as in the ancient mythology, so in the modern Greek tradition, nymphs, fairies and other graceful creations of the popular imagination continue to live in the forests, the rivers, the beaches and the distant seas. In certain districts very old customs are still preserved; mention^(*) in Epirus represent in the fields the death and the revival of nature, just as in the ancient "adonia" (Ἀδώνια) for God Adonis. One of the girls lies on earth while the other maids adorn her with flowers and sing dirges over her. ① As regards the folk-dances, the study of the position, the movements, the chorographic combinations as they are represented on vase-paintings, bas-reliefs, frescoes etc, or are described by ancient writers, and their comparison to many modern dances reveal also common signs. Some modern dances are almost identical to ancient ones. Such is a famous war-(or Sword) dance of the island of Crete (Πυρρίχιος) which has a striking resemblance to an ancient Cretan dance of the same name described by Homer in the Iliad (S, v. 590-605). Others are similar to dances described by Plato, Lucian and others.

The physical features are indeed the same. But though the natural scenery remains almost unaltered, how considerably the conditions of life have changed since then. Hence, it would be rather bold to assert that the world of sense and feeling of the Greek people has remained invariable. But many features have survived, which show clearly that the evolution has followed a consistent line. Particularly in the case of Folk-Music-song and dance- a careful study of such elements as the modes, the tonal systems, the rythms etc. proves that the aesthetics of the Greek people still preserve

(*) might be made of one of them according to which maidens

Addendum

- 1) A second scene follows with joyful songs and dances in honour of the coming spring.
- 2) Out of 1108 folk songs and dances from every part of Greece, as they appear in the principal collections, I have found 691 i.e. 62% exclusively modal. The modal element is the governing power in the Hellenic folk music. It is not rare to find examples of the ~~ancient~~ Tonal System of Ancient Greeks. I may add that in the Greek ^{modal} folk songs we don't find any traits of pentatonic remainders. The main reason to this is that the Greeks reached the stage from the pentatonic (and exatonic) to the heptatonic modes long, long ago, about the 7th cent. B.C. Here are 1-2 modal examples. (40 παρρησια, ας εδωκε, Χερσιν λαογγο, Αττος).

But I am not going to enter into technical problems in this ~~rather~~ short statement, or in a special study etc.

- ③ In Cyprus in Whit Sunday and Whit Monday thousands of villagers descend by the sea ~~to~~, to the Holy Coast (beach), if I may translate the full of paganistic spirit popular expression and fair. One of the main characteristics of this fair is the competition in verse improvisation ^{on a known melody} and dancing to which I have referred. Judges over folk-songs by 4 men.

(4) In Secondary Schools ^{also} a rather important place is given to folk songs and national dances. *ovix.*

(5) I referred above to ~~the study~~ some characteristics of the Greek Folk Music. But this music, as is the case of every ~~national~~ country, is not an isolated phenomenon which existed and continues to exist alone without undergoing exterior influences and extending its influence beyond its national boundaries. Hence, ~~the~~^{its} study would be more fruitful if it was combined ~~with~~ comparatively with the study of certain other Countries.

This leads me to ~~submit~~ end this statement by submitting a suggestion to the General Conference. *ovix.* One of the objects

certain fundamental principles. ²

(In a special study on the Neohellenic Folk Music, just published in English, I examine in detail all these technical points; I have with me some copies and shall be glad to offer to those interested.)

c) A third reason for the preservation of the traditional practice of F.M. is based on the important place occupied by a class of historical songs. They are still living in the soul of the Greek Nation and they keep the glow of the historical tradition vividly bright. Under this general title we would include most of the songs created during the Ottoman rule and during or after the War of Independence of 1821. They express on an infinite scale of feelings the sacred and ardent love of the Greek people for freedom. A great number of these songs are known as "Klephtic" and in their text they are unlike anything else in literature. Perhaps some explanation about the history of this important class of songs would be interesting. During the Turkish occupation (from the second half of the 15th century down to 1821) many people used to abandon their families and homes, and go to live on the snowclad mountains, from where they carried on, for centuries, a continuous warfare against the conqueror. So, a new class of men was created, -the "Klephts" (bandits, robbers) as they were called by the Turks, who spent all their life on the mountains under the most difficult conditions. A great part of their leisure time was given to various athletic exercises, useful to their perilous job, such as running, jumping, shooting, etc. Poetry and music (song and dance) were also their true and faithful companions. It is well known that the leaders of the Klephts had their own minstrels, just as the Homeric Kings and Heroes had theirs. Moreover, many of them were known to have the ability of composing, even improvising, verses and songs, and they often made use of it to encourage and inspire their "Pallikars" (brave warriors). Many of these Klephtic songs have a heroic tone, others have a delicate feeling of tenderness and love, and often of a nostalgic yearning for peaceful life.

Everybody may easily imagine why all these songs are preserved alive in the life of the Greek nation. This reason, which is of both historical and national importance, led the State in its first steps after the liberation (about 1830) to make use of a Klephtic song as the national anthem. In more modern years and especially in the 20th century the traditional practice of F.M. has been more systematised. During almost every national feast and in popular fairs the folk songs and dances constitute the principal embellishments, especially in the villages of course but sometimes in the towns too.

Popular singers and poets take part in competitions in verse improvisations (in the form of a dialogue) on a certain given subject, while popular dancers compete in dancing. Folk singers, as the ancient minstrels (the Rhapsodists), go round the country (especially in Crete and Cyprus) and sing their ballads (on the events of the day).

In all these there is ~~is~~ always the same danger: the contact with the town, which inevitably increases, and a tendency of the peasant to adopt his life to that of the citizen, who is a man of a more refined type as he sees him, fatally lead him to a slow and subconscious revision of his conceptions in regard with the Folk Art and the preservation of his pure customs. (As regards ~~the~~ music ~~preservation~~ especially, undoubtedly considerable harm is done by the light music with the songs en vogue scattered to all directions through the radio and the grammophone.)

In Greece the evolution of the practice of F.M. has followed about this course: first it slowly withdraws from the cities to the rural and insular districts; these again little by little many songs and customs begin to be neglected by men and are confined to women and children. Many songs and customs which, it seems, had of yore a place in the life of aged people are now almost exclusively performed by children. For this reason in Greece the

in the schools will be an effective method

systematic teaching of authentic folk-songs of preserving the practice of F.M. Already class-singing in the Elementary Schools is based for the most part on folk songs. In many national festivals the School children are providing by their singing and dancing the main national characteristics of the feast. But with the children and Schools only the first step is taken. The F.M. can only live with the perpetuation of living tradition among the people themselves as an indispensable means of expression of their world of sense and feeling. An important contribution to that aim will be the enlightenment of the rather educated classes that the practice of F.A., does not constitute an underrated activity. It is true that owing to the great development of the 20th century the gap, which always existed between the great mass of the people and the more educated classes, has enormously widened, and tends to grow continually from a pure folklorist view point. The enlightenment will have immediate and positive results:

a) It will make them conscious ~~of~~ that the F.M constitutes a high function and a natural expression of the ensemble of the people.

b) It will teach them the birth and the evolution of the various spiritual and artistic manifestations of their own people; it will teach them to know themselves and their race. Through this internal projection their own and the world round will be enlightened; and they will be, at last, able to appreciate the degree of civilisation of their own people.

But the gap between the few and the mass of the people, will be bridged over principally by the living performance of F.M. This enters into the scope of the Council and international festivals of authentic F.M.

which has to encourage the organization of national

5

}

Undoubtedly

Before ending this statement I wish to submit a suggestion to the Congress. One of the objects of the Council is to further the comparative study of F.M. Unfortunately a comparative study of the elements of F.M. (modes, rhythms, forms, melodic and ~~xxx~~ rhythmical features, intervals, etc) of all Countries and especially of those which have racial affinities or have lived in constant contact with one another, could lead to safe conclusions regarding the definition of common or kindred features in their F.M. and the discovery, where possible, of the channels through which certain folk songs and ^{certain} prominent features have originated.

I would, therefore, propose the formation of regional committees of Experts to study comparatively and report on the F.M. of each region or group of countries. The adoption of this plan might well determine the various stages of the musical evolution of several peoples, especially of those, about whose F.M. little is

known. The determination and recognition of kindred features in their F.A. and of their inter-influence would promote understanding and friendship among nations, which is one of the main objects of the Council.

Solon Trichadides