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Salon Music in Nineteenth-Century Greece*

Keywords: Greek folk dances, Westernization, Italian opera

This paper aims to give an overview of musical salons in Greece over the course of the 19th century. Musical salons formed part of the general Westernizing and Europeanizing trend of Greek culture after the foundation of the Greek state – a trend that reflected the Greeks' wish to distantiate their identity from their Ottoman past. Most Greek salons of the 19th century followed the fashion of the European salons of the period: they were held by cosmopolitan elites; Italian opera excerpts and light dance music were the key repertoire; the piano functioned as a bourgeois status symbol; women enjoyed a certain prominence in them. However here we will focus on the particularities of the Greek 19th century as well as on the aspects of musical hybridization that reflect the cultural amalgamation between Greece and Europe that was taking place in salons.

Before embarking on a description of 19th century salon music in Greece, a very short historical overview is necessary only to remind some basic facts. The modern Hellenic state was founded in 1830 after a ten years war for liberation from Ottoman rule which had lasted for about 400 years. This means that most Greek speaking lands were cut off for several centuries from European socio-cultural evolutions such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, forming part of an oriental sultanate.

* Parts of this article have been published in Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2017.

From the first days of the establishment of the modern Hellenic state, catching up with lost time and getting into alignment with European ways was viewed as an imperative need. As a consequence, all eyes were turned towards the West and a new, bourgeois lifestyle was embraced, but with one telling difference: the middle class did not yet exist. The inhabitants of the new Greek capital, Athens, lacking a bourgeois tradition and consciousness, imitated European customs through externally adopted attitudes and uncritical consumption of imported western cultural products. An inevitable result of this one-sided cultural exchange between Greece and the western world is the slow assimilation process of foreign models and the time delay in the appearance and spread of cultural phenomena.

In any map of 19th century southeast Europe one may see our vast area of interest, which is not co-extensive with the borders of the Greek State of the time. This wide area encompasses, in the long 19th century the Ionian islands, the two major urban city-ports of Hermoupolis and Patras, the capital of the Greek State, Athens, and the centres of the Greek diaspora in the Balkans, the Black Sea and the cosmopolitan Ottoman centres of Constantinople and Smyrna (Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2017: 5-19).

Causes and constituents: some considerations

The presence of salon music in Greece is closely associated with the specific historical conditions of each Greek-speaking geographical area, but also with the general drive of the country towards urbanization and westernization. Simultaneously, the spread of this musical genre is connected to the developments in the music market.

Factors such as the growth of the music industry (instrument manufacture and publications), the growth of music education, the institutionalization, that is the establishment and function of a certain cultural infrastructure, and the continuously increasing professionalism crucially affected musical praxis in all its aspects.

In addition, salon music, following the European model, is strongly associated with the female sex in the Greek-speaking centres. The gifted female members of the bourgeois families were considered, with their sensitivity and talent, the highest ornaments of Greek salon culture. In accordance with the period's viewpoint, learning music and dance constituted "a diploma of bourgeoisie" (Berstein and Milza 1997, B: 205) and an essential social virtue for a lady (Varika 2007: 57-61).

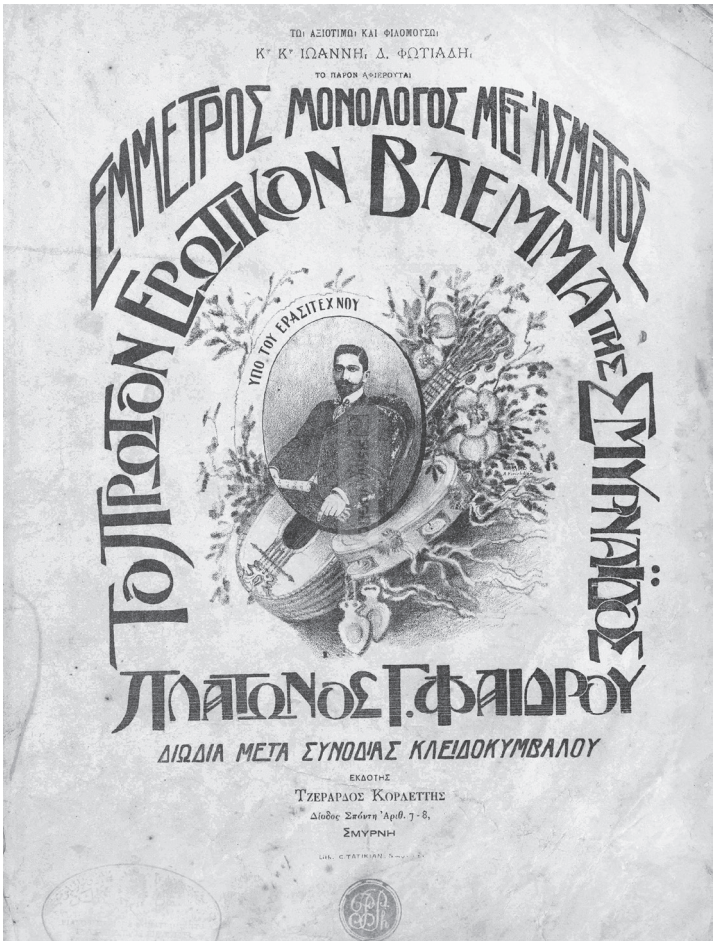

Fig. 1. *The cover page of the score* The first love gaze of a Smyrniot lady, *song for voice and piano by Platon G. Phaidros, Smyrna, early 20th century (kept at the Sakkoulidis Collection, Sismanoglion Megaron, Istanbul).*

> [Charikleia was taught] music, dancing and the guitar, and became an excellent student. It was impossible to hear her singing and not to be charmed by the flexibility and the harmony of her voice; it was impossible to see her dance and not to admire the lightness of her body and the gracefulness of her movements and steps. These qualities are an object of admiration in any woman. (Palaiologos 1842 [1989]: 120)

The ability to play a musical instrument made a girl a worthy future mistress of the house. Towards the end of the century, the first feminist objections against the model of the lifeless doll woman were expressed through Callirrhoe Parren, who resented the fact that woman's destiny was only to wear fashionable outfits, exchange visits, play the piano, and wait to get married (Parren 1887; Papakostas 1988: 72-74).

Fig. 2. *Young Callirrhoe Parren was a pioneer of female emancipation in Greece (Skokos'* Almanac, *1889: 191).*

Locations and occasions of events

What were the places that hosted this type of musical activity, and what exactly were these famous Greek salons? Clearly, the term includes the reception rooms of wealthy upper-class residences. However, salons could also be found at the various clubs, societies and associations, where the members met and participated in social events. Similarly, the royal halls, where public balls, chamber concerts, and amateur performances were held, could also be included, together with the semi-public salons of hotels, restaurant lobbies, town halls, embassies, higher education institutions, and cafés.

The attributes of a social salon can be recognized in other meeting places such as art galleries, theatre foyers, even gardens, which often functioned as open-air salons during the summer months. The widespread popularity of the piano during the second half of the 19th century rendered this musical instrument a necessary piece of furniture, with both practical and decorative

function, in such salons. On the contrary, violins, guitars, and wind instruments acquired supremacy when the salon moved to the sea, in nocturnes, barcarolles, and seaside serenades.

Salons were thronged with people on all occasions, while French savoir vivre almost always held the place of honour, as the famed French salons constituted the unsurpassable model (Tunley 2002). The French traveller Alexis de Valon reports that Greek salons left nothing to be desired in comparison to the French ones: "In social events in the private sphere, in receptions and soirées, the French language is spoken so much and so fluently that one can hardly believe that one is not attending a Parisian salon of the Rue Saint-Lazare" (Matton 1963: 219).

Sometimes, a special event took place, for instance, the celebration of an engagement, wedding or christening, the name day of a family member, or the arrival or departure of a beloved person. These evenings varied from simple family gatherings with musical accompaniment, to large crowded parties and noisy balls, not rarely with the collaboration of grand orchestras and professional musicians and dancers. At other times, the *soirées* may have followed set frequency patterns, especially when the aim was sophisticated evening entertainment in the style of the European *jour fixe*.

Fig. 3. *The interior of an Athenian house, 1859* (History of the Greek Nation *2000: 187).*

The upper-class salons meticulously applied French etiquette: "Apart from soirées, matinées, après-midis, five-o'clocks, also translated into Greek as mornings, afternoons, evenings, or in some other way, are particularly popular" (Mitsakis 1887 [1995]: 73). The humbler middle-class salons had to be content with the

> modest *veggherie*, i.e. the family and friendly gatherings during which innocent parlour games were played, to the accompaniment of music. But because in those days everything was in short supply, and, most of all, pianists of both sexes, this service was usually performed by the guitar, which accompanied the song of the most talented member of the party. (Anninos 1925 [1971]: 317-318)

Performers and participants

More specifically, the protagonists of salon music belonged to a broad spectrum of artists and performers. Some were accomplished pianists, prominent virtuosos, and professional musicians. Yet others were *dilettanti* of a musical instrument or amateur singers, at an intermediate or elementary level, who were eager to demonstrate their skills within a familiar circle. The two types would occasionally collaborate in small instrumental ensembles and light chamber music orchestras. Frequently, the performers were also composers, and thus inevitably included their own works in their repertoire.

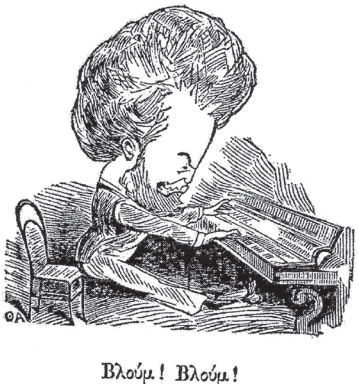

Fig. 4. *The Ionian Composer Pavlos (Paolo) Carrer or Karrer[is] playing the piano (sketch by Themos Anninos, Asmodaios, June 8th,1875).*

We must stress here that the contribution of European music teachers to the promotion of domestic musical praxis was of manifold significance. In the Ionian Islands, Italian musicians gave private music lessons – mainly to young

girls, who could not leave home easily – and staffed the first music schools – intended, in this case, for young boys (Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2017: 11).

In Athens, on the other hand, despite the fact that musical education was presented as an urgent necessity, the founding of conservatoires and music schools as well as the introduction of music as a subject in primary and secondary education occurred relatively late (Drossinis 1938: 69-73). In order to compensate for this lack, the city's elite turned to private music teachers, who were no longer only of Italian origin, but also Ionian and German. German musicians and teachers enjoyed the favour of the court, especially in the period of Bavarian rule, and were usually competitive towards music teachers of other nationalities (Xepapadakou 2013: 145-149).

At any rate, from the 1840s and until the end of the century, numerous European music teachers were gathered in Athens, aiming at a wide clientele, principally among the upper-class Athenian families, through newspaper advertisements (Synadinos 1919: 65). Raffaele Parisini from Bologna is a case in point. After studying in Corfu under Mantzaros, he moved to Athens in 1844, and turned his house into a conservatoire, where he taught music theory, piano, cello, and vocals (Motsenigos 1985: 307-308; Romanou 2003: 22-26).

As time went on, and especially after the kingship passed to George I (1863), musical education stopped being a matter of private teaching, and, gradually, the responsibility fell to the official institutions, such as private schools, cultural societies and, during the last decades of the 19th century, the Athens Conservatoire. It seems that, from the mid-19th century onwards, singing and piano were taught in private girls' schools, as knowledge of music was considered a must for the education of young women (Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2017: 24-25).

Fig. 5. *Singing course at the Athens Conservatoire, early 20th century (Kairophyllas 1978: 113).*

The repertoire

The main 19th-century salon repertoire was drawn from three sources: The largest and richest was Italian opera, which remained inexhaustible until the beginning of the 20th century. A second and equally important source was the fashionable European ballroom dances. The Modern Greek musical production, which included works of local colour and style, was smaller, but not negligible. At the end of the century, the light songs of the French *opérette* acquired a prominent position in the musical salon.

It has been repeatedly underlined that the development of salon music in the Greek-speaking areas is directly connected with the supremacy of Italian opera. Throughout the 19th century, the larger Italian music publishing houses employed various musical genres in order to promote the operas then in vogue. First of all, opera *spartiti* for voices and piano were widely available, and achieved high sales rates. Additionally, the most popular opera melodies, the highlights, were rearranged for domestic instruments and were even used as piano exercises. Innumerable such opera transcriptions in the form of arias, instrumental music, or potpourris were created and designed especially for "home consumption". Through this widespread practice, the operatic genre was disrupted and converted into a series of unconnected compilations of songs and melodies, the "albums". As a consequence, the opera was popularized, since it was now accessible to all social classes. The simplified piano and other instrumental adaptations allowed the average performer of a musical instrument to recreate the experience of an opera performance (Romanou 2006: 55-56).

The Ionian composers, just like their Italian colleagues, were adept at such adaptations and arrangements. We are dealing with a gigantic musical enterprise in the service of opera, through which any musician aspiring to shine in the European market was tested (Xepapadakou 2013: 380). However, these "light" compositions, though today they may seem unworthy of the main work of certain musicians, constitute an integral part of the musical landscape of the era as a whole. It was de rigueur for every composer to produce, together with his primary musical compositions, some material for the salon repertoire, such as variations, fantasies, or paraphrases for piano and a second musical instrument (usually violin or flute). The vast majority of distinguished Ionian musicians produced transcriptions of this kind, a substantial number of which are preserved at the Library of the Corfu Philharmonic Society (Romanou, et al 2004).

It is self-evident that the greatest popularity was enjoyed by the operas which constituted the main repertoire of 19th-century Greek opera houses,

like the San Giacomo Theatre of Corfu, the Apollon and Foscolos Municipal Theatres of Zante, the Cephalos Theatre of Cephalonia, the Municipal Theatres of Patras and Hermoupolis, both named "Apollon", and the Athenian Winter Theatre, known as "Boukoura" (Xepapadakou 2019b, 324). The most beloved composers of the period were Verdi, the Italian belcanto composers (Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti), and the French creators of the *grandopéra* and the *opéra-comique*. The presence of Greek composers of Ionian origin, such as Pavlos Carrer, Spyridon Xyndas, Dionysios Lavrangas, and the internationally acclaimed Spyros Samaras and Napoleon Lambelet should not be ignored.

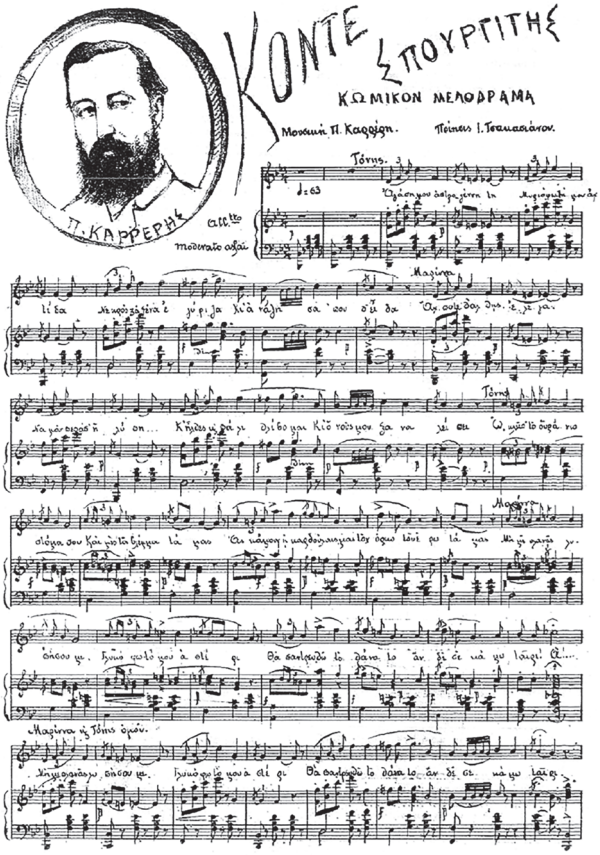

Fig. 6. *Duet from the operetta* Count Sparrow *by Pavlos (Paolo) Carrer or Karrer[is] (To Asty, December 18th, 1888).*

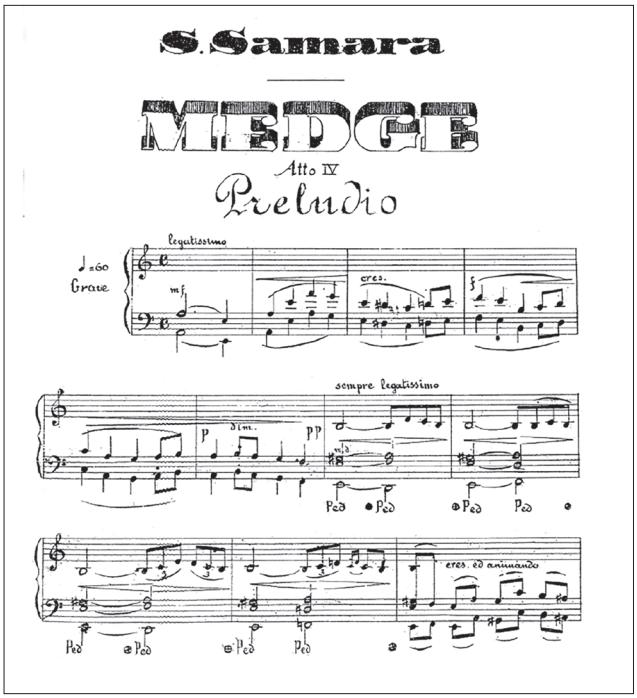

Fig. 7. *Spyros (Spiro) Samaras, Excerpt from the opera Medgè (first page) (To Asty, October 23rd, 1888).*

Dance tunes and rhythms abounded in 19th-century salons, representing the social role of salon music. These were mainly waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, polka-mazurkas, redowas, tyroliennes, ballades, barcarolles, pastorales, oriental dances in an idiosyncratic mixture especially popular in Phanariot salons (Preda-Schimek 2009: 29-41; Plemmenos 2013: 423-448), and also adaptations of Greek folk dances, composed in the western harmonies for western musical instruments. This was a peculiar process of osmosis between national tradition and a European urban custom: in this way, folk dances invaded the salons and became urbanized (Xepapadakou 2013: 81-82).

At the same time, Greek composers of the 19th century produced numerous original works, in obedience to the current stylistic commands of European Romanticism. These works were, as a rule, intended for private performance. This repertoire contained, besides transcriptions and dances, songs of various styles for voices and musical instruments, setting to music lyrics and poems by Greek and European poets, with topics related to romantic

issues of the time. Such compositions became widely available and even popular in Athens and the other urban centres (Xepapadakou 2018: 1030-1032).

Musical production of a national character holds a special place in the salon repertoire. Two thematic and stylistic categories may be distinguished: national songs and dedicatory works. The Ionian "national songs" and "Greek canzonettas" were mentioned in a previous section. To the same category should be added a number of national marches and hymns, as well as pieces for solo piano or small instrumental ensemble, all of which attempted to maintain an "ethnic" feel (Synadinos 1922: 144-145). The effort of composers consisted in the westernization, urbanization, and "salonization" of local folk and national music genres. Their intentions were of course romantic, influenced by the European and especially the Italian philhellenic movement, but mainly patriotic. It should not be forgotten that historical and political reasons dictated this creative musical current, which reflected the struggle of the Ionian people for the annexation of the Ionian Islands to the Greek state.

Fig. 8. *The cover page of* Averof Marche *by Joseph Kaissaris. The piece was composed on the occasion of the First Modern Olympic Games in Athens, 1896.*

With the passage of time, and as Athens grew into an urban capital, the local composers turned to a type of dedicatory panegyric, praising distinguished personalities of the political or social sphere (royalty, politicians, and benefactors). At other times, these compositions glorified major historical or social events and anniversaries (royal weddings, the annexation of Epirus and Thessaly, the Olympic Games, etc.).

It must also be emphasized that in Greek salons of the 19th century, the ultimate salon music repertoire of central Europe, the *Lied* and instrumental chamber music, were relatively uncommon. Instead, during the last decades, it was music for the light musical theatre, i.e. the juicy hits of the French operettas, and, even later, the hits of Greek operetta and revue, as far as decency permitted, that captured salon taste (Xepapadakou 2019a, 167-186).

During the first half of the 19th century, the above repertoire was introduced in printed form directly from abroad. Usually, those interested ordered the music for their private use, but it is also known that in Corfu musical works were sold in local bookstores (Kardamis 2006: 335-336). Along with the printed versions, handwritten copies were also available, which were apparently in great demand in 1850s Athens. At any rate, in the mid-century, the trade of music books received a considerable boost in Athens. Towards the end of the 1870s, Zacharias Veloudios started the first Athenian music publishing business, printing compilations and albums of European and Greek piano music (Xepapadakou 2013: 202-203). At the same time, certain illustrated magazines included music scores in their pages (Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2015: 163-164), while special piano pieces intended for singing and piano courses began to circulate (Romanou 2006: 115).

The role of periodicals

An especially important facet of music in the periodical press of the 19th century is the publication of the musical works themselves. Apart from their main subject matter, 19th-century Greek magazines also included, in the form of musical scores, the entire range of salon music. The compilation of this special material, which involves mostly original compositions of the period, has not been documented up to now, nor has it been included in the opus catalogues of Greek composers. It is a valuable repository of Greek musical and theatrical production, which remains mostly unknown, not only to music and theatre studies, but to literary studies as well, since several works are of considerable poetic interest.

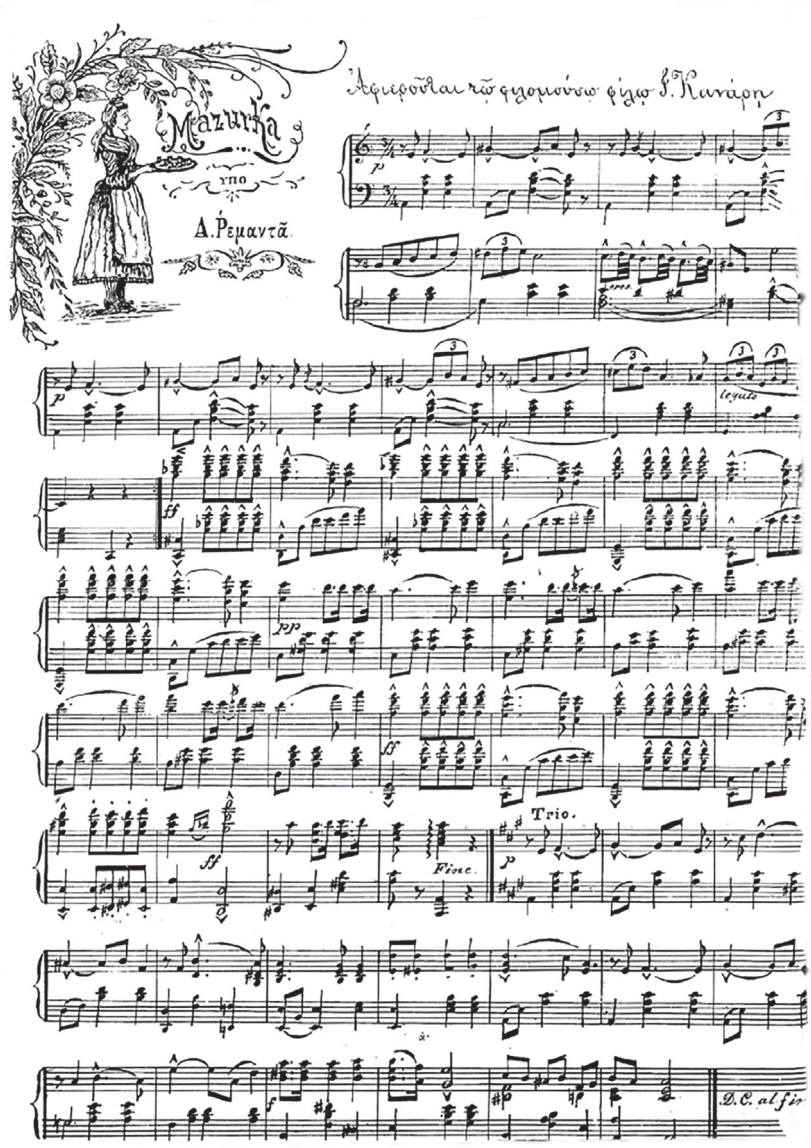

Fig. 9. Mazurka *by Adamantios Ramantas (To Asty, July 26th, 1887: 7).*

The general and the literary magazines of the period chose to added music score supplements to their pages for a variety of reasons. First of all, they offered their readers a gift to which they would not otherwise have easy access. Until the foundation of the first music publishing house in Athens, the only way to acquire a musical score in the capital was to order it from abroad, in an expensive foreign edition. Furthermore, a publication in the periodical press was a form of edition and dissemination of the composers' work, since they themselves could hardly afford to have their compositions printed.

One could further assume that a magazine invested in quality by including art in its reading matter, hoping in this way to increase its status and readership. Music, then as now, constituted a means of promotion of the publication. In particular, the musical supplement was intended for two sections of the reading public with gradually increasing consumer power: women and the younger generations. With the offer of music, the journals flattered the sense of prestige of the bourgeoisie, while covering a range of its social and psychological needs: entertainment, socializing, flirting, artistic expression, emotional release. Moreover, this practice indirectly created new consumer needs, such as the acquisition of a piano, which would allow the family to enjoy the new music it now possessed.

If we attempt to sketch the target audience, the main receivers of the musical pages of these periodicals must have been the music-loving female subscribers. These included the educated, cultured bourgeois ladies, the daughters of old aristocratic families, or even European women settled in Greece (Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2015: 167).

Salon musical instruments

The position of prominence in the 19th-century bourgeois home was occupied by the musical instrument par excellence of the romantic era, the piano. The use of the piano by the families of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie soon became connected with the salon music repertoire (vocal music, opera paraphrases, and popular solo works). Knowledge of the pianoforte, even at an elementary level, became a hallmark of 19th-century European middle class (Anninos 1891: 113-115).

While tracing keyboard instruments in the Greek-speaking territory, one cannot but notice the surprising variety of terminology since the 18th century: clavecin, clavichord, multichord, clavier, fortepiano, piano (Xanthoudakis 2007: 6-9). The variety of terms indicates that in certain cases they refer to cembalos (harpsichords) and in others to pianos. Nevertheless, in the first

decades of the 19th century, the terms "kleidokymvalon" and "piano" became established, following the growth of piano production and trading, as well as the over-production of printed piano works (Kardamis 2006: 339). By the middle of the century, the piano had become prevalent in the urban salons: "The piano is never absent from the living room . . . even if the other rooms remain bare, resembling those of a disreputable hotel" (Mitsakis 1887 [1995]: 75; Bickford-Smith 1993: 251). Besides the piano, certain other instruments were widespread in the Greek 19th century upper-class residences, such as the harmonium, the violin, the harp, the mandolin, and especially the flute.

Recapitulation

In attempting to examine the reception of salon music by Greek audiences, two main conclusions are possible. First, that, in this case, the performer and the listener were very often identical. Secondly, that audiences were different in each geographical area, just as cultural and social life differed in each urban centre. As far as the first point is concerned, it was not always easy to distinguish, in a musical evening, those who were entertaining others from those who were being entertained. These two roles often alternated, especially in the case of a gathering of amateurs, in which everybody desired to show their musical, vocal, and dancing skills.

A first estimation of the overall presence of salon music in the Greek-speaking areas must focus on the high degree of dispersion of the phenomenon, and on the time differential in its reception by the capital and by the other urban centres. The bourgeois section of the Greek population was formed outside the borders of the Kingdom of Greece, and therefore most of the instances of salon music, a bourgeois expression par excellence, were scattered throughout this large area. For this reason, the greatest part of this musical activity developed in Athens during the second half of the 19th century, since it was connected with the accession of the bourgeois class, the gradual urbanization of the Greek state, and its orientation towards Western Europe.

Nevertheless, just as it happened in metropolitan Europe, in the Hellenic centres within or outside the state borders, two elements of musical culture, which had become distinctive features of the middle and upper social classes, constituted the *raisons d'être* of salon music: the opera, the bourgeoisie's most characteristic public social event, which served as an unlimited source of repertoire, and the piano, the musical instrument that lay at the heart of the bourgeois salon, in the service of the social life and cultural education of an

entire class. A good grasp of music was regarded as a way of gaining access to high society. The custom of musical evenings in the bourgeois salons satisfied the social needs of the wealthy families, promoting a chic and sophisticated modus vivendi.

Moreover, the strong presence in the repertoire *à la mode* of a large number of Greek salon music works, in which traditional musical elements mingled with Western harmony, leads to the conclusion that salon music should be considered a part of the general assimilation process of European models and their incorporation in local tradition. This phenomenon of cultural dependency on the West, and the simultaneous search for the determining elements of national cultural identity through indigenous creation is common in the whole Balkan area and Eastern Europe of the 19th century (Puchner 1988: 335).

Fig. 10. *Quadrilles Helleniques by Kimon Bellas, Constantinople, early 20th century (kept at the Sakkoulidis Collection, Sismanoglion Megaron, Istanbul).*

Finally, it must be stressed that, although in Western Europe the term "salon music" or "salon composer" sometimes evoked negative associations, and might occasionally have been considered disparaging, in the Greek 19th century, the distinction between the entertainment function of music and its higher expression, simply did not exist. In the consciousness of Greek composers, musicians and audiences of the age, these two dimensions of music were not opposite but complementary. Salon music was for a long time an important manifestation of European music, and contributed immensely to the familiarization of Greek audiences with the codes of Western harmony, and to the spread of European music in Greece. The fact that all the eminent Greek musicians, composers, and artists, among them several virtuosos, were active at the 19th-century music salons should not be neglected. Very often, hidden amongst the fashionable repertoire, some of the most important musical compositions of Greek and European music were performed.

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