



ORIGIN, by Aphrodite Patoulidou

finding the roots of

Maurice Ravel's Cinq Mélodies Populaires Grecques for Voice, Piano

- *How did the greek songs reach France?*

Hubert Pernot (1870–1946) was the first to make a collection "au phonographe", when in 1898–99 he visited Chios, still under Turkish rule, on a mission entrusted to him by the French ministry of education. However, Pernot, a linguist and professor of Modern Greek at the Sorbonne, did not know any music, and the valuable wax cylinders, on which he had recorded the music, were kept in the Sorbonne and were not found until after the Second World War. On the other hand, Paul le Flem (1881–1984), who transcribed the music from the cylinders for the first edition, in 1900–1902, was an accomplished musician but had not the least experience of Eastern folk music and did not know any Modern Greek. Since the disappearance of the cylinders, his transcriptions are the only documentary evidence of Pernot's fieldwork, but they are not very reliable. - Katy Romanou

- *How did the greek songs reach Ravel?*

The earliest of Ravel's *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques* were written in 1904 at the urgent request of musicologist Pierre Aubry, who needed to illustrate a lecture he was giving on Greek folksong. A mutual friend of his and Ravel's, Michel D. Calvocoressi (1877–1944, himself of Greek descent), found five choice examples and Ravel supplied a piano accompaniment for them in a mere thirty-six hours. Calvocoressi, impressed by this 'extraordinary feat', then produced three more and commissioned Ravel to set those as well. The new collection, selected from the total eight, was first performed (in Greek) in Paris and published in French translation in 1906. Ravel began the task of orchestrating them but soon lost interest (Rosenthal completed the task in 1935).

- ***First performance:*** The genesis of this cycle may be traced to a lecture that the French musicologist P. Aubry planned to give on the songs of oppressed peoples (Greeks and Armenians). He asked the critic Calvocoressi to select some Greek songs for illustrative purposes, and after making his choice, Calvocoressi taught them phonetically to the singer Louise Thomasset, who agreed to perform them on short notice but wished to have piano accompaniments for the melodies. The critic thereupon turned to Ravel, who wrote accompaniments to five melodies. First performance of complete cycle by Marguerite Babiakian at a lecture-recital presented by M.D. Calvocoressi in Paris during the 1905-6 season.

- **Interpretation:** These are authentic Greek folk-songs, wonderfully harmonized by Ravel, and this is enough to underline that their style of interpretation can, and must, be freer than that of genuine mélodies. - P.Bernac
- **Greek text:** In the process of translating, it was inevitable that Calvocoressi would have to change the prosody as to fit the french lyrics into the melody. So when sung in greek, the phrasing is also different than that of the french text.

ORIGIN

I. Chanson de la Mariée / Ξύπνησε Πετροπέρδικα (Wake Up Partridge)

Incipit: Réveille-toi, perdrix mignonne

As mentioned in P.Bernac's book "The Interpretation of French Song": "the correct French title for this song is "Le Réveil de la Mariée", as it is not sung by the bride, but by the broom who has come to awake his bride. This wedding song roots in the villages of "Avgonima" (Αυγώνυμα) and "Anavatos" (Ανάβατος) near the area of New Monastery of Chios (UNESCO). Original rhythm 4/4.

II. Là-bas, vers l'église / Κάτω στον Άγιο Σίδερο

This song in Frygian mode, refers to the bravest of the soldiers which are gathered and layed in the little cemetery behind the church of Saint - Constanntinos and Saint - Isidoros (Sidero) in Chios. Other sources say is the lament of a mother the day that the young men go to war. This song originally was "Smichtos" dance (Σμιχτός=from the verb "σμίγω"= unite) from the village "Marmaro" (Μάρμαρο) -the only dance that was danced without a handkerchief and so allowed men and women to hold hands and was danced during the days of the Celebration of the Carnival.

As it may seem inappropriate to dance happily with these sad lines, it is very common for the oral memory of a community to dance unto such laments. These lines exist with different music in other Greek areas as well. Referance to the war: From 1566 Chios was under the Turkish reign until 1912. In the meantime, the rebellion of 1822 was drown in blood. The Turkish army burned everything on their way for 40 days.



E.Delacroix - The Massacre at Chios, 1824

III. Quel galant! / Ποιος ασίκης

Originally a Kalamatianos dance, 1932. Very important in this text is the use a turkish origin-word "ασίκης" (pronounced "asikis"[Turkish: aşık =lover < Arabic. asiq]) which in the slang dialect means the man who is gifted physicaly as well as intellectually, or even the troubadour. It is very common to use turkish rooted words in greek songs since the two civilization were always interacting.

IV. Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques / Άγγελος είσαι μάτια μου

Icipit: O joie de mon âme

This tune written in Lydian mode, originates in the village Pirgi, Πυργί, to be sang when gathering mastic. Lentisques=Lentisk, Pistacia lentiscus (also mastic; Greek: μαστίχα, mastíkha) is a dioecious evergreen shrub or small tree of the pistaciogenus growing up to 4 m (13 ft) tall which is cultivated for its aromatic resin, only on the Greek island of Chios.

In the tradition of Chios, the Lentisks (or Skinos) began to shed tears when Saint Isidore martyred by the Romans around 250 AD. The Romans chased Saint Isidore because he was fond of the Christian religion. The Saint in order to escape, fled near the village Mesta. At that moment, there appeared a white horse with whom he arrived at the Southern villages of Chios (where is the largest production of mastic), and because he could not go on after being seriously injured he sat under a lentisk. The Lentisk felt his torture and shed tears of fragrant. From then on, the tears of St. Isidore are said to be the mastic.

V. Tout gai! / Γιαρούμπι

Erotic song coming from the peninsula of Eritrea Asia Minor. To be danced as "Sirtos" or "Ballos". Original rhythm 8/8 (3-3-2).

Bibliography

- Special thanks to Dr Athena Katsanevaki
Ethnomusicology-traditional singing performance
University of Macedonia-Teaching Staff
who was my guide into the traditional singing of Greece and enlightened me with information about the origins of each song.
- Keith Anderson's text "**About this Recording**
8.554176-77 - RAVEL, M.: Chansons (Songs) (Millot, Mula, Brua, Naouri, Theruel)"
- P.Bernac's book "The Interpretation of French Song"
- Folk Melodies from Chios. New Simplified and corrected notation by Marcos Ph. Dragoumis. The friends of the musical ethnological archive of Melpo Merlier. Athens, 2006.
- Katy Romanou, Reviews/Musicology p.345/346
- Maurice Ravel Songs 1896-1914 edited by Arbie Orenstein

Brussels, Royal Conservatory, January 2015