

RECORDING REVIEWS

Music by nineteenth-century Greek composers: A note regarding discography

The simplistic – and until relatively recently the prevailing – conviction that music by nineteenth-century Greek composers was confined to vocal works (mostly in popular genres), together with certain pedigreed interpretations of Greek cultural life prior to 1910 and the virtual absence of archival research, all contributed to the exiguous discography of a repertory that was for a long time arcane to most. However, since the late 1980s both the re-evaluation of the Greek nineteenth century and the subsequent beginning of source research in Greek and other European archives, have resulted in a series of new recordings that reflect new scholarship in this field. This discographic activity owes much to the strenuous efforts of a handful of committed people, notably the conductor Byron Fidetzis and the musicologist Giorgos Leotsakos, and a good deal also to burgeoning research activities within Greek academia. It owes conspicuously less to any governmental support or coordination. Leaving aside the discographic production prior to the late 1980s (since it is hard to find these days and is in no sense representative of the diversity of Greek music in the nineteenth century), this short presentation will attempt to give an overview of commercial discography within the last two decades.

An appropriate starting point for this discographic survey is the first complete recording (1991) of Nikolaos Halikiopoulos Mantzaros' (1795–1872) earliest (1830) setting of the *Hymn to Liberty* (Lyra CD0064). This work is instantly recognizable, since the initial bars of its first part became in 1865 the Greek National Anthem, though the remaining 23 parts were left in oblivion.

Opera and opera-related works by Greek composers occupy a considerable part of the discography, since the melodramatic activities of nineteenth-century Greek composers were more familiar to audiences than their orchestral or chamber music. Nonetheless, finding and editing the existing scores proved on most occasions a demanding task, and a significant number of melodramatic works remain to be recorded. Operas by Pavlos Karrer (also Carrer) (1829–1896) and Spyridon Samaras (1861–1917) form the core of this recorded repertory. Byron Fidetzis and the Pasardjik Symphony Orchestra (Bulgaria) with the Greek soloists Martha Arapi, Giorgos Papas, Vangelis Hadjissimos, Tassis Christogiannopoulos, Eleni Liona and Haris Andrianos have recorded Karrer's *Frossini* in 1999 (Lyra ML0669/70) and *Despo* in 2002 (Lyra CD0792). The latter CD also includes instrumental music from *Isabella d'Aspeno* and *Maria Antonietta*, the folklore-inspired *Yero-Dimos*, three songs with orchestral accompaniment and an orchestral polka, all by Karrer.

The Pasardjik Symphony Orchestra and Fidetzis also joined forces for the recordings of Samaras' *La martire* in 1994, a century after its premiere (Lyra CD0156), and *La biondinetta* in 1998 (Lyra ML0654). A relatively recent addition to Samaras' recorded operas is the 2004 reissue of a 1984 live recording of *Rhea*, performed by Fidetzis and the Sofia Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir (Lyra CD1053). Most of the aforementioned singers participate also in the Samaras recordings, and Andreas Kouloumbis, Frangiskos Voutsinos,

Lydia Angelopoulou, Maria Thoma, Marina Krilovici, Stamatis Beris, Nikos Kapetas, Dimitris Stefanou, Ioulia Troussa and Maria Koromantzou joined the cause as well. These recordings further affirmed Samaras' major contribution to the late nineteenth-century Italian operatic style, but there is still work to be done (the long-awaited double CD of *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle* has yet to be officially released).

During the late 1990s recordings of Mantzaros' early works revealed a new side to the composer's creative activities. In 2005 the orchestra of the Ionian University's Music Department under Milto Logiadis recorded some of the concert arias that Mantzaros composed in Corfu between 1815 and 1827 (*Nikolaos Halikiopoulos Mantzaros: Early Works*, IU005), featuring a new generation of Greek singers: Rosa Poulimenou, Aris Arghyris, Yannis Christopoulos and Marina Fideli. The bilingual booklets in Greek and English of all the above recordings present important information regarding the composers and their works.

The latest addition to opera-related compositions is the earliest existing work by a Greek composer; Mantzaros' one-act 'azione comica', *Don Crepuscolo*, which was premiered in 1815 in Corfu, revived in 1995 by Fidetzis and finally recorded in 2010 by George Petrou and Armonia Atenea/Athens Camerata. Mantzaros' work, with Christophoros Stamboglis in the title (and only singing) role, is performed on period instruments and is included as a bonus with the first world-recording of Handel's *Alessandro Severo* by Musikproduktion Dabringhaus und Grimm (MDG 609 1674-2, released in January 2011).

Non-vocal music by nineteenth-century Greek composers was, until recently, neglected. However, the research of Giorgos Leotsakos resulted in 1999 in the production of a CD presenting for the first time several piano works by Greek composers (such as Iossif Liberalis (1820–1899), Samaras, Ludovikos Spinellis (1871–1904), Lavrentios Kamilieris (1874–1956)). Its title is *Light Under a Bushel: Piano Works by Greek Composers (1847–1908)* (Crete University Press 11) and of equal importance is its bilingual booklet, which offers an unconventional look into nineteenth-century Greek music and a wealth of information on the composers. Nonetheless, Greek discography was already familiar with certain piano works by Mantzaros, Samaras and Georgios Lambelet (1875–1945) since 1994 (*Piano Works by Corfu Composers*, performed by Pavlos Ventouras. Municipality of Corfu, 010694) and by the Greco-French celebrity Camille Stamaty (1811–1870) since 1992 (*Greek Composers of the Diaspora*, performed by Diana Vranoussi. Lyra CD0086). Piano works were also the original sources of the arrangements for woodwinds performed by the Nikolaos Mantzaros Ensemble in a recording reissued in 1996 (originally released as two LPs in 1981 and 1985) featuring *sinfonias* by Mantzaros and salon music by Napoleon Lambelet (1864–1932) and Karrer (*Music of the Ionian School*, Motivo NM1049).

Nineteenth-century orchestral music made an impressive debut in Greek discography in 2001 with the first recording of Dimitrios Lialios' (1869–1940) symphonic work, *A Midnight Dream (in the South)* (Lyra, CD0721; it is performed once again by Fidetzis and the Pasardjik Symphony Orchestra). Lialios, who was born in Patras and composed this work in 1891 during his studies in Munich, offers us a tantalizing glimpse into the *terra incognita* of a Greek composer's liaisons with the Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian musical idiom. Moreover, Lialios' String Quartet no. 4 was recorded by the New Hellenic

Quartet in 2009 (*Composers from Patras* (Legend Classics, 2201659612)) opening windows onto an unfamiliar terrain of Greek chamber music.

However, the most ambitious (and, regrettably, least promoted) project so far regarding nineteenth-century Greek art music was the production in 2004 of a 12-disc box set entitled *Works by Greek Composers: 19th-20th Century*, accompanied by a 240-page volume written in English by Greek academics and researchers. The project was supervised and coordinated by the Greek Composers Union, and was funded by the 2004 Cultural Olympiad, bringing together an impressive number of performers, ensembles, conductors and scholars. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the nineteenth-century material in this box set is full of 'Greek rarities' that represent a near-comprehensive cross-section of the diverse musical production of this period.

Instrumental music by Greek nineteenth-century composers is illustrated by a good selection of works, ranging from one of Domenikos Padovanis' (1817–1892) 1830s *sinfonias* and Karrer's 'descriptive prelude' entitled 'Dawn' from the opera *Marathon–Salamis* to the refined cosmopolitanism of Dionyssios Rodotheatos' (1849–1892) 'poema sinfonico', *Lo Cid*, the folklorism of G. Lambelet's *The Feast* and Georgios Axiotis' (1875–1924) *Prelude and Fugue*. Lialios is also represented by his *Serenade* for string orchestra. The *partimenti* by Mantzaros shed new light on the roots of Greek chamber music, whereas G. Lambelet's *Menuett* for strings and his *Melody* for piano offer an equally engaging insight into the repertoire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Vocal works are also an important and revealing component of this box set. Choral music extends from compositions by the pioneering Spyridon Xyndas (1810–1896) to those by Wagner's assistant Dimitrios Lalas (1844–1911). Works by Mantzaros, Xyndas, Karrer, Samaras, Lavrangas, the Lambelet brothers and Kamilieris offer a representative overview of the Greek nineteenth-century song. Dionyssios Lavrangas (1860–1941), however, is not represented with any of his melodramatic compositions or his instrumental works, which are considered as milestones in the quest for 'national music', at least as it was expressed in the *fin-de-siècle* Greece; and these are not the only nineteenth-century *desiderata* that Greek commercial discography has to satisfy in the future.

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