

## **Demotic Music of Cyprus - Preservation, Dissemination, Re-institution**

*(Kypraia Foni- St' agnarka ton tzeron...)*

In relation to the correct ways of preserving and disseminating our traditional music, various and sometimes diverse opinions have been formulated at different times. Through my contact with our demotic music for a number of years now, I have developed my own ideas on the subject. In order for this to take place however, it was first necessary to undertake an extremely useful analysis as regards the creation of our demotic music, its evolution and its passage through time.

Demotic music was formed and evolved in earlier years, when rural life, the lack of entertainment, and living conditions in general constituted artistic creation an indispensable human need. In this way, music which was created by simple folk, because of a lack of contact and transportation, had as its only foundation tunes heard from their parents and grandparents, which were none other than those of ancient Greek and Byzantine music, given their heritage. These creations then, which owed their existence to the efforts undertaken by various talented persons during moments of particular inspiration, were presented at various small gatherings, the participants of which shared similar experiences and customs.

If these songs corresponded to the already-familiar auditory experiences and customs but had something special, they would pique the interest of other talented people in the group, who would then attempt to learn how to sing them. However, the opportunities presented to them to hear the same song again from the same person were limited. For this reason, as well as because of each individual's different aptitude in song, variations on the original theme were unavoidable. These variations however, in order to become accepted and widespread, should once again conform to traditional forms and custom. It is these very variations which lend particular beauty to our demotic songs.

At this point, one naturally interposes the question: "So what happened with the many foreign conquerors who passed at various times through Cyprus, as well as with neighbouring peoples who enjoyed some sort of contact with our folk?" It would be pointless and, in my opinion, not at all useful for anyone to claim that our demotic music

remained entirely unaffected by foreign conquerors and neighbouring peoples. However, the contact between the people of the island and its conquerors was confined to an overlord-serf relationship, resulting in the people's opposition and resistance to foreign culture. Because then of this resistance and cultural differences, popular filtering mechanisms allowed the passage into our demotic music of only those foreign elements which did not differ so intensely from our own. This, however, took place very slowly. In this way, and through the passage of time, these elements were adapted and assimilated with the corpus of our own demotic music.

The same took place with the demotic music of neighbouring peoples, with the difference being that the people of the island were more accepting of them, given the absence of an overlord-serf relationship, but more importantly because their music enjoyed certain common roots with ours (more with some than with others). Therefore, in this case, the twin process of adaptation and assimilation was easier. This very ability of our demotic music to select, adapt and assimilate foreign elements which enrich and enhance it is, in my opinion, yet another of its many beauties.

All this was happening since times of old and all the way to the middle of the last century, at which time a great technological revolution took place, and means of artificially reproducing sound, as well as electronic media, made their appearance. The improvement of communications and telecommunications began to free man of his loneliness, which was also one of the reasons leading him to artistic creation. The traditional venues and conditions giving rise to artistic creation - small and quiet villages, rural activity, endless winter evenings around the fireplace, the weaving loom - were replaced by busy cities, noisy tractors, organised livestock units, factories, building sites etc. Today, electronic media instantly offer thousands of songs for each and every occasion: joy, sorrow and love, in order to help us express, even if passively now, our feelings and sentiments.

Therefore, the need to create has almost disappeared from simple folk, and is now confined to those few specially-trained individuals.

The wise filtering mechanism possessed by the creators and the people has now stopped functioning, since our memories are assailed daily by thousands of foreign and of dubious quality aural stimuli.

In order therefore to preserve our demotic music and re-instate it as part of the entertainment of the Cypriots of today, we have to look at it as a living organism and not a museum piece, nor as a something lending itself to uncontrollable experimentation. Would-be interpreters, if lacking in reserves of earlier renditions, should sit and listen extensively to demotic music and come into contact with the plain folk who are, through their affinity with the people, the genuine channels of expression of tradition. It is only then that the former will be in a position to give their own, correct interpretation.

Recordings of such interpretations should be facilitated and encouraged, with the resulting output promoted at entertainment venues, the media, and schools (initially through listening, and then by learning through auditory methods). When the dissemination of our demotic music has reached a high enough level and the music becomes part and parcel of our people's experiences, then new creators, having by then an abundance of reserves in their memories, will be in a position to create their own, uncontrived songs and their own music, based inevitably on the very roots of tradition and will constitute a modern-day and natural continuation of our centuries-old popular lore.

Michalis Terlikkas - 2002