Savina Yannatou Primavera en Salonico

Songs of Thessaloniki

ECM

Savina Yannatou
Primavera en Salonico

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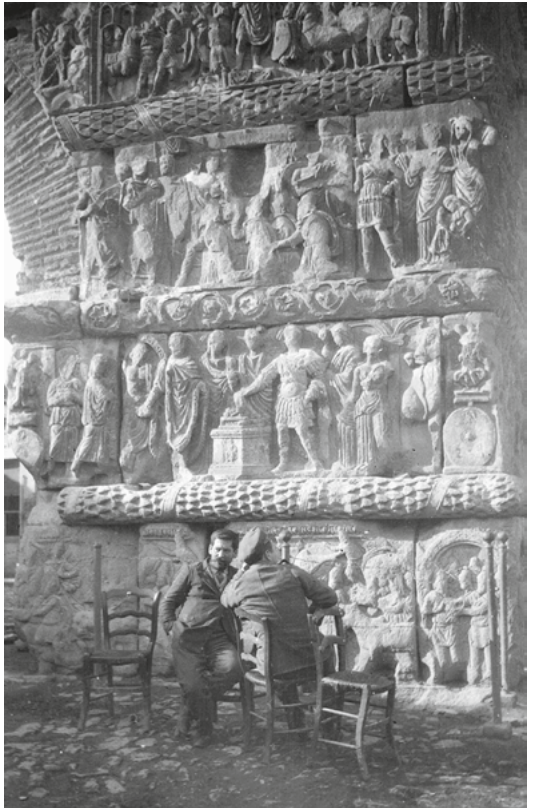
Savina Yannatou	voice
Kostas Vomvolos	qanun, accordion
Yannis Alexandris	oud, guitar
Kyriakos Gouventas	violin
Harris Lambrakis	nay
Michalis Siganidis	double bass
Kostas Theodorou	percussion



1	**Apolitikion Agiou Dimitriou** Greek hymn of St. Demetrius	2:24
2	**A la scola del Allianza** Sephardic traditional	2:14
3	**Tin Patrida Mou Ehasa** Pontiac-Greek traditional Lyrics: Christos Antoniadis	5:45
4	**Dimo is Solun hodeshe** Bulgarian traditional	5:18
5	**La cantiga del fuego** Sephardic traditional	4:12
6	**Una muchacha en Selanica** Sephardic traditional	4:19
7	**Iptidadan yol sorarsan** Turkish Bektashi hymn Lyrics: Şah İsmail Hatayi	5:36
8	**Qele-qele** Armenian traditional collected by Komitas	3:17
9	**Çalin Davullari** Turkish traditional	5:23

10 **To yelekaki** 3:58

Greek song
Music: Spyros Ollandezos
Lyrics: Giannis Theodoridis

11 **Salonika** 2:57

Irish folk song collected by Jimmy Crowley

12 **Inchu Bingyole mdar?** 1:59

Armenian traditional collected by Komitas

13 **Jelena Solun Devojko** 4:19

Kosovo Serbian traditional

14 **Yedi Kule** 4:44

Greek song
Music: Sosos Ioannidis
Lyrics: Emilios Savidis

15 **Poulakin eiha se klouvi** 4:14

Greek traditional collected by Giorgos Melikis

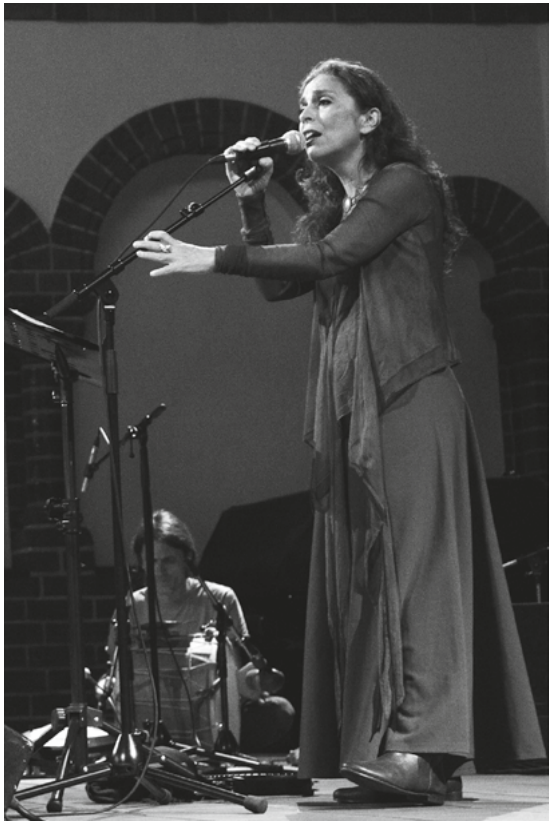
16 **Pismo dojde od Soluna grada** 4:31

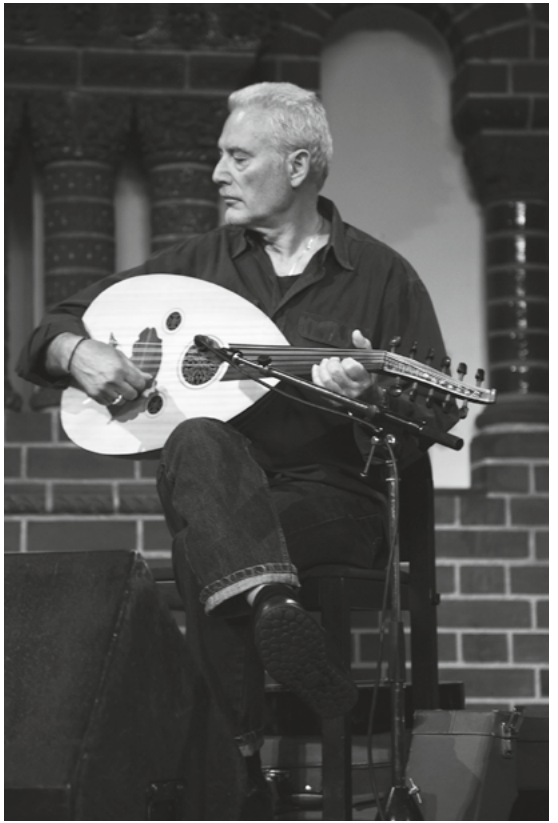
Slav-Macedonian traditional

17 **Apolitikion Agiou Dimitriou** 2:22

Greek hymn of St. Demetrius

All songs arranged and orchestrated by Kostas Vomvolos





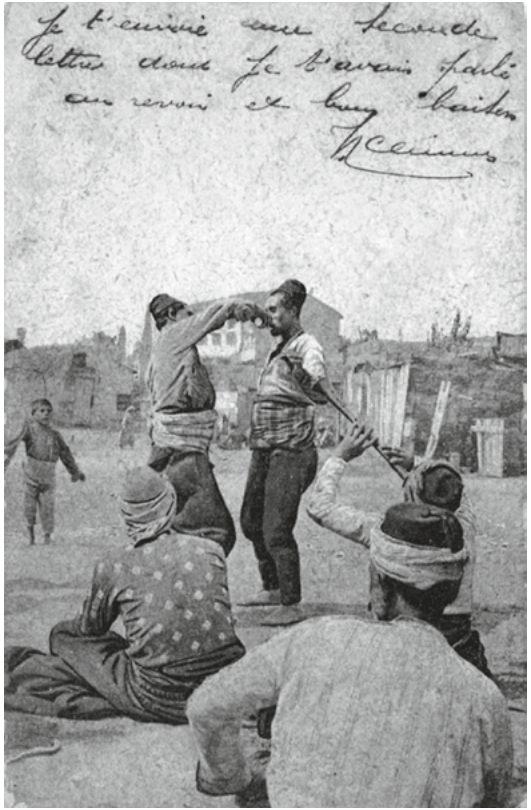
THE SONGS

The collection of songs in this album is an approach to the multicultural past of Thessaloniki through the contemporary eyes of the Primavera en Salonico group and Savina Yannatou: "Old songs, as if postcards of sound with the label *Souvenir de Salonique,* were our original materials", they say. "They became canvases for our imagination to create contemporary narratives on old myths. Sometimes the original 'pictures' are merely coated with colour, sometimes only the outlines are saved, and sometimes the addition of the new material transforms them completely. There is however an element which remains – by choice – almost unaltered throughout this process: the timbre of the instruments. This is what mostly forms the 'texture' of the material and convey the final sense of the whole endeavour."

And her voice remembers, imitates, or arbitrarily recreates things heard of, not known, barely suspected. Here are tales of people who once co-existed, not always immediately recognizable in their new sound costumes. The patron Saint Dimitrios who protects the city; the daring schoolgirl of the Alliance school of Jewish pro-European education; the prisoner in Yedi Kule with his rosebush as black as his heart; the Sephardic fire victim who tries to repent for his sins in his makeshift tent; Dimo who wants to go back to Bulgaria to marry; the Slav-Macedonian who wants to go to the wedding not as best man but as a groom; the Pontiac refugee who longs for his home; the Jewish girl who wants to be Turkish, no longer hearing her mother berate her for burning the food; the enamoured Armenian; and the Turkish maiden who died three days before her wedding.

"They are all there", Savina Yannatou says, "as if in a composition of glimpses into windows of homes, of individual desires, frustrations and compromises; images on transparent slides covering each other, leaving in sight traces of all, in a contemporary sound world."

We would like to thank Vasilis Tomanas, Irena Alexieva, Fide Koksal, Diroui Galileas, Samis Taboh, Father Stephanos Pashayan, Rita Ventoura, Rena Molho, Nicola Madzirov, Shoshana Weich-Shahak, Chrisa Mantsi, for their help with translations of lyrics and for background information.



THESSALONIKI

Thessaloniki, late 19th and early 20th century: a bustling city full of multilingual sounds, varied costumes, colours of East and West, a crowded 'bazaar-city' as described by travellers of the time, a crossroads of cultures, religions and different ethnic communities who coexisted under Ottoman rule. Greeks, Jews, Turks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Armenians and Pontiac Greeks, as well as a host of Western Europeans, shared the diversity of the city's life in civil equality and religious freedom. Minarets and mosques, Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, sprang out in the different neighbourhoods as living cells of the three major faiths in this multicultural fabric; the old Byzantine city with its Christian population had opened up to Muslim settlers from the East since the 15th century after its capture by the Ottomans and had later given refuge to Sephardic Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, followed by waves of immigrating Jews from the North, gradually developing into an overpopulated "Jerusalem of the Balkans". The city, owing much to its Jewish community, which outnumbered the Greek and Turkish population and had a high educational level, flourished economically and intellectually, to become a thriving cosmopolitan centre by the end of the 19th century. Trade and manufacturing prospered, new immigrants arrived from surrounding areas seeking better prospects in the urban abundance, the fortification walls were torn down opening up to the sea, a railway connection to central Europe was established, and educational, intellectual and social activities were affected by new ideas and western values.

At the same time, Thessaloniki became a most important pole of political movements that were to mark its history in early 20th century; among them, the "Federation Socialiste Ouvrière" founded by the Sephardic Jew A. Benaroya became the strongest socialist party in the Ottoman Empire and envisaged a state free from any ethnic divisions (to evolve later into the first Greek socialist party in 1918), while other groups with different aspirations gave rise to a turbulent period of unrest and violence (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, 1894–1903, The Boatmen of Thessaloniki 1903, Young Turks Revolution with Kemal Ataturk, 1908). A culmination of ethnic and national conflicts for the domination in Macedonia came with the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 where the Ottoman Empire was defeated by Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek forces.

The Greek army entered Thessaloniki and the Turkish garrison surrendered the city, to be incorporated thereafter in Greece. The population swelled as Pontiac Greeks and Armenians expelled from Turkey arrived, seeking refuge, and bringing with them new dreams, along with their own traditions, customs, dialects and tongues, soon assimilated in the diversity of local society. After all, the city had been a haven for refugees through centuries and knew how to embrace newcomers in its crowded neighbourhoods. Peace, however, was not to return soon. When the First World War broke out, the Allied Forces flooded the port and stationed their troops in Thessaloniki as a military base. Those days are eloquently described by journalist R. H. Davis in his memoirs: "*The scenes in the streets presented the most curious contrasts. It was the East clashing with the West, and the uniforms of four armies and navies contrasted with the dress of civilians of every nation (…); there were Jews in gabardines, robed old men with the noble faces of Sargent's apostles; there were the Jewish married women in sleeveless cloaks of green silk trimmed with rich fur; Greek priests with matted hair reaching to the waist, and Turkish women, their faces hidden in yashmaks (…) These people of all races, with conflicting purposes, speaking, or shrieking, in a dozen different tongues…*" Night scenes were captured as if in photos: "*… the blazing doors of a cinema would show in the dark street, the vast crowd pushing, struggling for a foothold on the muddy stones. In the circle of light cast by the automobiles, out of the mass a single face would flash (…) Above it might be the gold visor and scarlet band of a Brass Hat, staff-officer, the fur kepi of a Serbian refugee, the steel helmet of a French soldier, the white cap of a navy officer, the tassel of an Evzone, a red fez, a turban of rags.*" The ability of the locals to speak many languages was impressive if unhelpful for the English speaking visitor: "*… the Jews' language has been called the Esperanto of the Salonikans. For the small shopkeeper, the cabman, the waiter, it is the common tongue (…) But, in Salonika, the language most generally spoken is French; all those who are educated, even most sketchily, speak French. It makes life in Salonika difficult. When a man attacks you in Turkish, Yiddish, or Greek, and you cannot understand him, there is some excuse, but when he instantly renews the attack in both French and Spanish, it is disheartening…*"

The troops were still in the city in 1917 when the Great Fire broke out, sweeping through the central neighbourhoods, turning a vast area of houses, shops, banks, and public buildings into ashes and leaving thousands of people homeless. Except for the Upper Town, the old Ottoman city with its narrow cobblestone streets and traditional architecture was lost forever. The fire itself was preserved in memory through popular narrations.

The Jewish song *'La cantiga del fuego'* carries the story through to our times: "*The houses are burning, the fire reaches the heavens, we've lost our roots and are without shelter… "* A few years later, the whole Muslim community of 30,000 people was uprooted, forced to leave for Turkey in a population exchange after the Greco-Turkish war and the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922). Massive crowds of ethnic Greeks arrived respectively from Turkey, with their own grim stories of forced marches, starvation and massacre. This time the number of refugees (over 150,000) changed the city's demographics. As more than a third of the population, the Greek element now prevailed, yet the variety of customs and dialect idioms they brought with them from different Turkish territories added one more multicultural mixture to the local society. Greeks from the Black Sea and Greeks from the cosmopolitan Smyrna would have little in common apart from their Greco-Christian faith, their religious traditions and the shared nostalgia of the refugee."*… I long for my home, in my soul I carry churches deserted and monasteries with no candles, doors and windows that were left wide-open …"*

says a Pontiac Greek song in an idiomatic dialect incomprehensible to other Greeks. Difference of languages, however, had never been an obstacle in the townsfolk's communication, nor differences of customs or even faith, while songs and music united them in common entertainment. Family gatherings and religious feasts provided always opportunities for singing and dancing, and at the taverns and the c*afé-amans* several musical styles were performed by musicians of all ethnic groups; Judeo-Spanish songs, oriental melodies, Greek and Turkish lyrics, Balkan tunes, coexisted and often lent elements to each other in improvisations that enriched and broadened the repertory. A Christian cantor might meet there with a synagogue chanter, singing secular songs for their own enjoyment, amateur singers would interact with professional musicians, versions of lyrics in three languages might interchange in the same songs. The most famous was the *Café-Mazlum* where musicians from Istanbul came for performances in the Ottoman period, while after 1922 and the inflow of Greeks from Asia Minor many highly skilled musicians arrived bringing with them Anatolian and European musical instruments, different styles and new songs. The Smyrna songs or s*myrneika* soon became popular and were embraced by all audiences in the context of the cultural cosmopolitanism in Thessaloniki, although some of these songs (distinguished later as *rebetica* and comprising a separate style) had lyrics of an underworld character, originating from Ottoman cafés, hashish dens with hookahs and even the prison. (These were later censored in the mid-1930s to be revived only after the 60s.)

Music could be heard anytime – in the streets there would be wandering Romani with tabors, Balkan clarinettists playing mountain tunes, young men with mandolins serenading girls at night. A nostalgic love song might be on the lips of an Armenian refugee strolling with friends on the waterfront, a Serbian song would entertain a friendly gathering in a leisure park, a Sephardic song might be whistled by any worker, and religious chants would echo in all congregations at religious festivities. In times of exile, political instability and uncertainty for the future, music was an antidote to adversities, a way to remember one's roots or simply to connect with fellow humans, to celebrate the joy of life.

The old Salonica was to irrevocably change in the Second World War. Its entire Jewish community was wiped out and perished in the Nazi concentration camps; of its 50,000 members only about two thousands survived. Their rich lively culture remained alive in their songs where corners of the city, events, persons, names, have been immortalized to remind us of a place that is long gone. The mosaic of that city's society is fading today in a mist of history, memory and myth, along with old maps of Selanik, Salonico or Solun, interweaving paths of imagination with the real experiences of the people who walked upon its streets.

Sofia Giannatou

Sources: M. Mazower *Salonica, City of Ghosts*,
R. H. Davis *With the Allies in France and Salonica*

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