

# Dance in Greece

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By DR. Alkis Raftis

## 1. Roman And Byzantine Period

Greek classical antiquity came to an end with the Roman conquest in the 2nd century B.C. The Romans adopted many of the achievements of Greek civilization and made great use of its artists and scholars throughout the Roman Empire. Greek dancers found themselves addressing a wider audience, spread over a large area, constituting various peoples, in most part not understanding their language. Not bound anymore to the moral and aesthetic precepts of the small Greek city, they turned to easy tricks to please their patrons: dances became burlesque, lascivious, comic or frightening. The unity that characterized the Greek notion of *musike*, comprising song, dance and instrumental music in one whole, was fragmented into separate parts of the performance. Song remained in Greek language for some time, sung by a passive chorus as an interlude. Music became independent by the addition of several instruments to the lyre and flute, so as to form a little orchestra.

Dance, loose from word and melody, became pantomime. Although mimic dances abounded in the Greek antiquity, pantomime is the hallmark of the Greco-Roman period. Performers became famous for thier ability to relate entire stories with their gestures and postures. They wore masks, lavish clothes and jewelry, they were frequently effeminate and they resorted to vulgar jokes and obscenities. Thus dancers became professionals of low status rather than public servants and dance lost its religious and educational character to become a spectacle of mere entertainment.

It was inevitable that the Christian church would attack this form of dancing, especially in the Byzantine Empire, virtually a theocratic state. Most of what is

known about dance during the Byzantine era (5th to 15 centuries) comes from the prohibitions and exhortations of the orthodox church. Texts by the church fathers and the synods refer to dancing as demonic, blasphemous and abominable. The very fact that this polemic persisted proves that dance remained popular.

It is important to note, though, that the Eastern Christian church made no distinction between dancing by professional dancers (jugglers, circus and theater actors, prostitutes, slaves) and rural dancing by villagers. Stage dancing must have been somehow obscene in Constantinople and the other urban centers, though our sources are exclusively ecclesiastical. Mimes and dancers lived a disorderly life and made it a point to ridicule Christian rites. On the other hand dancing in villages conserved its nature as a public ritual, albeit with pagan and naturalistic elements.

In spite of the constant pressure by the church, emperors hesitated to prohibit dancing for fear of arousing the public sentiment. Popular dancing continued in village celebrations on saints' days and there were instances where dancing is reported inside the churches on Christmas. Dances were very common after Easter, during marriage feasts, on birthdays. Soldiers danced during pauses of their training, chariotteers danced their victories, the court danced on the emperor's birthday, large public dances erupted as a relief after the passing of difficult moments.

Written sources do not supply any actual description of dancing. From a multitude of dispersed phrases and some paintings in churches it can be deduced that as a rule the pattern was the round, chain dance. Men and women danced separately, but there is mention of mixed dances. Sometimes the leading dancer would take the line into a sinuous form. It was frequent for the dancers to hold kerchiefs or veils and wave them, to stamp their feet on the ground and clap their hands. Women dancers, especially professionals, held wooden or metal cymbals. The dancers or the musicians sang known songs or improvised. A distinguishing feature of stage dancers was their shirt-sleeves, very tight up to the elbow and then very large and long so that they could be waved and enhance the movements of the hands. The most common instruments used for dancing was the flute, also the guitar, little drums and tambourines.

There is no evidence of dances of the court or of the upper classes of this period. Unlike Western Europe of the Middle Ages where a variety of local rulers looked to Rome for their religious authority, the Eastern Empire was a centralized state where

political and religious authority ran in parallel, confirms its continuity and establishes the conclusion that time has worked on it entirely in a reductive way. That is, the variety and richness of dance situation contracted gradually and slowly, with very little adoption of additional elements. This is explained by the following traits of the evolution of Greek culture since the antiquity:

The Greek countryside has villages that have always lived in economic and cultural autonomy. The frequent passage of conquering armies on the mainland and pirates along the coasts, the difficulty of communications even between neighboring areas or islands, the poor yield of the soil that caused a chronic expiration of the most dynamic element of the population, the absence of a local ruling class that would enhance integration, these were the main reasons for the extent of self-sufficiency of Greek villages as compared with villages in other countries, who could have a constant contact with a neighboring urban center.

Thus, customs evolved in a slow rate in every village and small region, and with them dancing as well. Local festivities on religious occasions conserved their ritual character as an affirmation of in-group identity. Social control through the observance of customs remained strict as a defense against the rulers and a way to preserve ties with emigrating relatives. A common dance in the village square or churchyard was the only occasion for a general meeting and review of the condition of families, for the open encounter between boys and girls and for celebration after a harsh daily life. Marriages were such occasions on a smaller scale. Preparations and celebrations lasted several days or several weeks, following an elaborate pattern of prescribed customs including dancing at various moments.

## **2. Rural Popular Dance**

Traditional dance is defined here as dance transmitted from one generation to the next by the continuous immersion in one cultural group, that is not through formal

teaching. Folk dance, on the other hand, consists of traditional dance forms practiced within a non-traditional society for educational, performing or other purposes. In this sense, traditional dancing is still widely practiced in the Greek countryside, although a steady decline is evident since the Second World War, as a result of modernization. Young people have left the villages to find jobs in the towns or abroad, roads have been opened to previously inaccessible areas, television sets have proliferated, tourists flood the coasts every summer and discotheques sprout in the smallest towns. Customary ways of entertainment have changed, while government policy towards dance has been one of marked neglect.

The Civil War in the Forties forced a large part of the rural population to find refuge in towns and to look back to life in the village as one associated with backwardness. The after-war generation does not consider popular dance as its own. Traditional dances tend to become gradually a matter for folk dance groups, with the subsequent loss of feeling and emphasis on the spectacular.

There are 500 folk dance groups around the country, and as many in the Greek communities abroad. The State gives them a token financial support and they raise the necessary funds to have costumes made by donations from wealthier citizens. These groups have a repertoire of dances from their own region, as they cannot afford more sets of costumes. There are two State-supported permanent theaters giving daily performances of dances from various regions. One is kept by the Dora Stratou group in Athens and the other by the Nelly Dimoglou group in Rhodes. The Lyceum of Greek Women, the first organization to start giving performances of folk dances back in the Thirties, has branches in all towns, each one having its own dance group.

Costumes, music and dance styles differ greatly among regions and among Greek sub-cultures, sometimes even among nearby villages. Generally speaking, one could distinguish at least twenty regions and sub-cultures, each one of them having at least ten dances of its own, and this division could go even further. This stems from the fact that, apart from geographical entities, there are ethnic groups of Greeks that have resettled in other areas. Pontic Greeks, for example, have lived for centuries along the North coast of Asia Minor until they established themselves in entire villages dispersed in Macedonia, the most notable regions when it comes

to dance are: Thrace, Macedonia, Epirus, the Southern Mainland, the Ionian Islands, the Aegean Sea Islands, the Dodecanese Islands, Crete, Cyprus. Other ethnic groups, irrespective of the region of settlement are the Arvanites, the Vlachs, the Pomacs, the Sarakatsani and resettled Greeks from the Asia Minor coast, the Black Sea coast and Northern Thrace. Some dances are common between neighboring regions, although the style of dancing is unmistakably different. Songs and music are quite distinct, too. Thus, a performing group will not present dances from another region unless it has the costumes of this region. There is no one truly all Greek dance, although some dances have come to be widely practiced.

By far the most common dance form is the *Syrtos* dance. The name indicates a "drawing" action and this explains the basic notion of a dance being "drawn" by the first dancer, as if the leader pulls a line of dancers behind him. The term *Syrtos* was found on an ancient inscription but there is no indication of how it was danced. In modern Greece it became a generic name for a dance in open circle with a walk-like step. The basic *Syrtos* is in 2/4 measure, with one long and two short steps to the right. The leader has freedom to improvise and to coil and uncoil the line of dancers into various patterns. One particular *Syrtos*, called *Kalamatianos*, is in 7/8 measure and originates from the Southern mainland. It was gradually adopted by the other regions and came to be considered as a national dance as it evoked the part of Greece that was first liberated from Turkish rule. Several other dances are called *Pidiktos* (i.e. hopping) to distinguish from *Syrtos* that has necessarily a shuffling step.

In the most common handhold each dancer simply holds the hands of the two dancers next to him, arms down or bent at the elbows. Another way is to hold hands cross-wise, that is between alternative dancers in the line (as in the *Trata* of Megara or the *Sousta* of Rhodes), mostly used in women's dances. Men's dances sometimes involve holding each other's shoulder (like in the *Pentozali* of Crete and the *Gaida* of Macedonia) and a tendency to stay in a straight line rather than a circle. Other holds are by the elbow (as in *Tsakonikos* of Peloponese and *Pogonissios* of Epirus) or by the belts (as in *Zonaradikos* of Thrace).

Dancing face-to-face (*Karsilamas* or *Antikrystos*) or solo (*Beratis* dance) is rare and seems an influence from the Greeks of Asia Minor. Couple dances (like *Ballos*) are an exception, presumably of Western origin. The rule for public dancing was the solemn circular dance, while improvising figures and dancing of small groups was decent only in family celebrations at home. In general, dancers move the upper parts of their bodies very slightly, by contrast with Middle Eastern dancers. Similarly, Greek women do not dance alone in front of men.

The first dancer in the line holds a position of honor, the dance is considered his. In some areas, after the Easter Sunday mass the priest leads the first dance in the churchyard or around the church as a token of benediction of the celebration. In a marriage feast the bride leads the first dance, the bridegroom and the inlaws. Usually all the participants take turns at leading the dance, each one also asking the musicians to play the tune of his preference and paying them for it. A woman will not lead a dance unless her father, brother, or husband asks and gives an order to the musicians. As a rule, the head of the family passes an order to the musicians when he wants to dance with his family or friends. It was considered a deliberate offense to enter into someone else's dance, many fights and stabbings started this way. It was also improper to ask a girl to the dance unless engaged to marry.

The order in which dancers align themselves in the circular dance was of great importance, especially in the opening dance of a celebration. The most common pattern is for men first, according to age, followed by the women also according to age, then the children. Thus, the only way to advance up the line was when an older person could not dance any more. In some villages a girl may advance in the line if she marries before an older girl. Since holding the hand of a woman in public was considered improper, a problem arose as to who would be the connecting link between the men and the women. This was solved by placing there a child or an aged couple. When the entire family dances as a group, the internal hierarchy is followed in the order of succession, this causing sometimes disputes between cousins.

In earlier times, when village people were too poor to pay a musician, it was common for the Sunday afternoon dances to be held with the girls singing. But big public dances on prescribed dates and marriage celebrations were always held with

instrumental music. The most widespread instruments are the bagpipe, called *gaida* on the mainland (or *tsambouna* on the islands, where it has no drone), the three-stringed lyra (gradually replaced by the violin), the shawn (*zourna*, usually played by gypsies) and the clarinette (*klarino*), that replaced the flute. Percussion is provided by a big drum (up to 1 meter in diameter, called *daouli*), a small pottery drum (*toumbeleki*), or tambourine which was mainly a woman's instrument. Most of the instrumentplayers on the mainland are still gypsies, but their own musical idiom did not influence local music, as in other countries. Instruments were made by the musicians themselves, types and methods of construction varying widely among regions.

Of special interest are the fire-dancing rites in three Macedonian villages on St. Constantine's Day, where participants dance on glowing coals until they reduce them to ashes. Also, the carnival celebrations in Naoussa, Skyros, Zakyntos and other areas, where villagers wearing masks, bells, sheepskins and various disguises perform ritualised mimic and comic dances.

### **3. Urban Popular Dance**

By the middle of the 19th century, an idiomatic form of music and dancing appeared among the lower social strata in ports of the Aegean Sea. In the poorer neighborhoods of cities like Istanbul, Smyrna, Salonica and Syra had gathered thousands of outcasts leading a life of misery and lawlessness. They developed their own means of expression breaking away -though taking elements from - the rural tradition, the Turkish culture and the European culture of the upper classes. This genre - eventually called *rebetika* - gained increasing momentum and social acceptance to become one century later the hallmark of Greek music internationally.

Originating in the tavernas and coffee-houses frequented by sailors, peddlers, jobless and petty criminals, lyrics lament frustrated loves, reject bourgeois lifestyle, idealised bravado actions and project the counter-values of a marginal social group. Music is played by string instruments: mainly the mandolin-like *bouzouki* and the smaller *baglama*, also violin, *santouri* (dulcimer) and guitar. The

musicians who played on a stage along one wall of the neighborhood cafe, with a small space in front of it where patrons could dance. The orchestra appeared there every evening, unlike folk musicians who played only on festive days in the open air, and it included women singers who occasionally danced too.

The most common dance is the *Zeibekiko*, in 9/4 meter, a solo improvisation dance with balanced precision movements expressing intense concentration and self-absorption. In its original rural form it is a dance performed in carnival by disguised characters, its name deriving from a fierce tribe in Asia Minor. Next most popular is the *Khasapiko* (meaning butcher's dance) in slow 2/4 meter, danced by two or three men held by the shoulders and moving back and forth, usually close friends who have developed their own variations on the basic step. A similar dance in fast tempo and moving to the right is *Serviko*. Both dances were used as a base to create a new dance called *Zorba dance* or *Syrtaki*. This dance became very popular around the world in the Sixties and is still the highlight of Greek fraternity balls abroad and every tourist cabaret in Greece. Other *rebetiko* dances are *Karsilama* (i.e. face-to-face) with a 9/8 time signature, danced by couples, and the *Tsifteteli* (i.e. double-chord-strum), a solo dance in 4/4 resembling a subdued or mock belly dance.

The *rebetika* dancing style bears the mark of its urban origin. Suitable for dancing in the small space cleared by tables in tavernas, it is danced solo or by very few persons. Movements seem precise and calculated, the body crouches forward, arms outstretched to keep the balance. Originally practiced almost exclusively by men, it reflects the individualism of the town-person, as opposed to the large circular dances stressing village communality, while village dancing is based on the repetition of the same steps over a very long time a dance might last half an hour or more - *rebetika* dances rely on the incessant variation of steps for the few minutes during which their songs last.

Until the Fifties middle-class Greeks and the media were contemptuous of *rebetika* music and dance. Then, composers Manos Hadjidakis ("Never on Sunday") and Mikis Theodorakis("Zorba the Greek") started to compose music for films and popular songs adapting *rebetika* style to modern taste. They had immediate success in Greece and abroad, establishing a revival of the style although the original social



conditions of its existence had disappeared. Now *rebetika* is widely adopted socially and is played in the radio and T.V. Most tavernas feature a modernized version of songs and dancing of this style. Young men and women dance it invariably, while patrons are encouraged to show their appreciation by breaking dishes on the dance floor.

#### **4. Social Dance**

After the War of Independence (1821-1827) the liberated Greek provinces founded an independent State; other provinces were attached to it one after another, until Greece reached its present boundaries a hundred years later. The first king came from Bavaria and his court introduced European couple dances to the new capital. Major Greek communities in the diaspora were already familiar with these dances and the Athenian middle class gradually adopted them. European fashion dances became the rule for home gatherings and celebrations in the towns, with an occasional Greek dance at the end. There are no ballrooms or competition dancing. Discotheques are very popular, there are more than one hundred in the greater Athens area, where more than a third of the population of the country lives.

In Athens, besides the taverns featuring *rebetiko* dance music, there are two dozen tavernas with folk musicians from particular regions (Crete, Epirus, Islands, Pontic, Thrace). There, patrons of country origin usually go with their families to meet fellow villagers who reside in Athens and to dance their own dances. Major towns in Macedonia have such tavernas with Pontic dance music, Cretan towns have tavernas with local music. In general, Greeks distinguish between bouzouki tavernas (with *rebetiko* music), clarinet tavernas (with traditional music from the mainland) and violin tavernas (with music from the islands and the coasts).

#### **5. Theatrical Dance**

Stage dancing was unknown in Greece during the Turkish occupation. By the middle of the 19th century touring foreign groups started giving performances in the capital of the new State. At the turn of the century several *cafe-chantants* in Athens offered cabaret shows that included dancing numbers, always by foreign

artists. The "review" genre, featuring sketches of political satire and dancing is still very popular, with half a dozen theaters in Athens.

The first notable performance of Greek drama was given in the ancient theater of Delphi in 1927. It was organized by poet Angelos Sikelianos and his wife, American archaeologist Eva Palmer. Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound" was presented, the event was combined with a folk festival, exhibitions and lectures. The "Delphic Feasts" were repeated in 1930 with Aeschylus' "Suppliants", also choreographed by Eva Palmer, who was a friend and follower of Isadora Duncan. Duncan had given two performances in Athens in 1912 and had tried to establish a dance academy there.

In 1932, the National Theater - founded the same year in Athens - presented "Ajax", establishing a tradition of commissioning dancers and choreographers to teach movement to the chorus of Greek plays. The chorus was composed of actors, rarely dancers, but some dance training has been part of the actors' schools curriculum. Having practically no information on the movements of the chorus in ancient drama, choreographers' approach to the modern presentations vary from rhythmic recitation combined with a sequence of postures, to elaborate creations. Their main source of inspiration, though, remains the traditional dancing of modern Greece. Already in the 1927 performance of "Prometheus" the chorus entered the scene singing and dancing a syrtos. After World War II interpretations by the National Theater, the Pireaus Theater of Dimitri Rondiris and the Art Theater of Karolos Koun have followed this line. The tendency was to move away from group recitation and archaic gestures, into singing and dancing as derived from the living popular tradition.

The "Lyrike Skene", a State theater presenting opera and operetta, was founded in 1940 and included a small corps-de-ballet of trained dancers. Since 1960 it has been giving ballet evenings about twice a year. Another troupe was the "Greek Chorodrama" under the first dancer and choreographer Ms. Ralou Manou. Founded in 1952, it has employed the most well-known Greek composers, painters and choreographers in an effort to bring ballet closer to a home-grown inspiration. Other private initiatives are the "Experimental Ballet" under Mr. Yannis Metsis (since 1956), the "Sismani Ballet", an offspring of the school of Ms. Iro Sismani

(between 1955 and 1962), and more recently, the "Classical Ballet Center" under Ms. Rene Kammaer and Mr. Leonidas de Pian.

## **6. Dance Education**

The first ballet school was founded in Athens by Mr. Morianoff in 1929. It was followed in 1930 by Ms. Koula Pratsika, whose school became the "State School of Dance Art" in 1972. Several other schools were also founded before the War. There are now 200 private dance schools in Greece, three fourths of them in Athens. The total number of their students is 11,000, most of them are in their teens and taking one and a half hour's training three times a week. The predominant course is rythmical movement, introduced in Greece by Marguerite Jordan as early as 1913 in the Conservatory of Music.

Ten schools, totalling 200 students, follow the 3-year, 20-hours a week curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Culture, so they can present their graduates for the State examination. 20 to 25 students pass this examination every year, giving them the right to teach dance in private schools.

Dance is not taught in high schools or Universities. Some folk dances are taught in the Academy of Physical Education so that gymnastics teachers can teach them in high school, often with poor results. Private dance schools usually teach a few folk dances to their students.

# DANCE IN GREECE

SPECIAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL GREEK FOLKLORE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

By DR. ALKIS RAFTIS

## 1. ROMAN AND BYZANTINE PERIOD

Greek classical antiquity came to an end with the Roman conquest in the 2nd century B.C. The Romans adopted many of the achievements of Greek civilization and made great use of its artists and scholars throughout the Roman Empire. Greek dancers found themselves addressing a wider audience, spread over a large area, constituting various peoples, in most part not understanding their language. Not bound anymore to the moral and aesthetic precepts of the small Greek city, they turned to easy tricks to please their patrons: dances became burlesque, lascivious, comic or frightening. The unity that characterized the Greek notion of *musike*, comprising song, dance and instrumental music in one whole, was fragmented into separate parts of the performance. Song remained in Greek language for some time, sung by a passive chorus as an interlude. Music became independent by the addition of several instruments to the lyre and flute, so as to form a little orchestra.

Dance, loose from word and melody, became pantomime. Although mimic dances abounded in the Greek antiquity, pantomime is the hallmark of the Greco-Roman period. Performers became famous for their ability to relate entire stories with their gestures and postures. They wore masks, lavish clothes and jewelry, they were frequently effeminate and they resorted to vulgar jokes and obscenities. Thus dancers became professionals of low status rather than public servants and dance lost its religious and educational character to become a spectacle of mere entertainment.

It was inevitable that the Christian church would attack this form of dancing, especially in the Byzantine Empire, virtually a theocratic state. Most of what is known about dance during the Byzantine era (5th to 15 centuries) comes from the prohibitions and exhortations of the orthodox church. Texts by the church fathers and the synods refer to dancing as demonic, blasphemous and abominable. The very fact that this polemic persisted proves that dance remained popular.

It is important to note, though, that the Eastern Christian church made no distinction between dancing by professional dancers (jugglers, circus and theater actors, prostitutes, slaves) and rural dancing by villagers. Stage dancing must have been somehow obscene in Constantinople and the other urban centers, though our sources are exclusively ecclesiastical. Mimes and dancers lived a disorderly life and made it a point to ridicule Christian rites. On the other hand dancing in villages conserved its nature as a public ritual, albeit with pagan and naturalistic elements.

In spite of the constant pressure by the church, emperors hesitated to prohibit dancing for fear of arousing the public sentiment. Popular dancing continued in village celebrations on saints' days and there were instances where dancing is reported inside the churches on Christmas. Dances were very common after Easter, during marriage feasts, on birthdays. Soldiers

danced during pauses of their training, chariotteers danced their victories, the court danced on the emperor's birthday, large public dances erupted as a relief after the passing of difficult moments.

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There is no evidence of dances of the court or of the upper classes of this period. Unlike Western Europe of the Middle Ages where a variety of local rulers looked to Rome for their religious authority, the Eastern Empire was a centralized state where

political and religious authority ran in parallel, confirms its continuity and establishes the conclusion that time has worked on it entirely in a reductive way. That is, the variety and richness of dance situation contracted gradually and slowly, with very little adoption of additional elements. This is explained by the following traits of the evolution of Greek culture since the antiquity:

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## 2. RURAL POPULAR DANCE

Traditional dance is defined here as dance transmitted from one generation to the next by the continuous immersion in one cultural group, that is not through formal teaching. Folk dance, on the other hand, consists of traditional dance forms practiced within a non-traditional society for educational, performing or other purposes. In this sense, traditional dancing is still widely practiced in the Greek countryside, although a steady decline is evident since the Second World War, as a result of modernization. Young people have left the villages to find jobs in the towns or abroad, roads have been opened to previously inaccessible areas, television sets have proliferated, tourists flood the coasts every summer and discotheques sprout in the smallest towns. Customary ways of entertainment have changed, while government policy towards dance has been one of marked neglect.

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Dancing face-to-face (*Karsilamas* or *Antikrystos*) or solo (*Beratis* dance) is rare and seems an influence from the Greeks of Asia Minor. Couple dances (like *Ballos*) are an exception, presumably of Western origin. The rule for public dancing was the solemn circular dance, while improvising figures and dancing of small groups was decent only in family celebrations at home. In general, dancers move the upper parts of their bodies very slightly, by contrast with Middle Eastern dancers. Similarly, Greek women do not dance alone in front of men.

The first dancer in the line holds a position of honour, the dance is considered his. In some areas, after the Easter Sunday mass the priest leads the first dance in the churchyard or around the church as a token of benediction of the celebration. In a marriage feast the bride leads the first dance, the bridegroom and the in-laws. Usually all the participants take turns at leading the dance, each one also asking the musicians to play the tune of his preference and paying them for it. A woman will not lead a dance unless her father, brother, or husband asks and gives an order to the musicians. As a rule, the head of the family passes an order to the musicians when he wants to dance with his family or friends. It was considered a deliberate offense to enter into someone else's dance, many fights and stabbings started this way. It was also improper to ask a girl to the dance unless engaged to marry.

The order in which dancers align themselves in the circular dance was of great importance, especially in the opening dance of a celebration. The most common pattern is for men first, according to age, followed by the women also according to age, then the children. Thus, the only way to advance up the line was when an older person could not dance any more. In some villages a girl may advance in the line if she marries before an older girl. Since holding the hand of a woman in public was considered improper, a problem arose as to who would be the connecting link between the men and the women. This was solved by placing there a child or an aged couple. When the entire family dances as a group, the internal hierarchy is followed in the order of succession, this causing sometimes disputes between cousins.

In earlier times, when village people were too poor to pay a musician, it was common for the Sunday afternoon dances to be held with the girls singing. But big public dances on prescribed dates and marriage celebrations were always held with instrumental music. The most widespread instruments are the bagpipe, called *gaida* on the mainland (or *tsambouna* on the islands, where it has no drone), the three-stringed *lyra* (gradually replaced by the violin), the shawn (*zourna*, usually played by gypsies) and the clarinette (*klarino*), that replaced the flute. Percussion is provided by a big drum (up to 1 meter in diameter, called *daouli*), a small pottery drum (*toumbeleki*), or tambourine which was mainly a woman's instrument. Most of the instrument

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players on the mainland are still gypsies, but their own musical idiom did not influence local music, as in other countries. Instruments were made by the musicians themselves, types and methods of construction varying widely among regions.

Of special interest are the fire-dancing rites in three Macedonian villages on St. Constantine's Day, where participants dance on glowing coals until they reduce them to ashes. Also, the carnival celebrations in Naoussa, Skyros, Zakynthos and other areas, where villagers wearing masks, bells, sheepskins and various disguises perform ritualised mimic and comic dances.

### 3. URBAN POPULAR DANCE

By the middle of the 19th century, an idiomatic form of music and dancing appeared among the lower social strata in ports of the Aegean Sea. In the poorer neighborhoods of cities like Istanbul, Smyrna, Salonica and Syra had gathered thousands of outcasts leading a life of misery and lawlessness. They developed their own means of expression breaking away – though taking elements from – the rural tradition, the Turkish culture and the European culture of the upper classes. This genre – eventually called *rebetika* – gained increasing momentum and social acceptance to become one century later the hallmark of Greek music internationally.

Originating in the tavernas and coffee-houses frequented by sailors, peddlers, jobless and petty criminals, lyrics lament frustrated loves, reject bourgeois lifestyle, idealised bravado actions and project the counter-values of a marginal social group. Music is played by string instruments: mainly the mandolin-like *bouzouki* and the smaller *baglama*, also violin, *santouri* (dulcimer) and guitar. The musicians who played on a stage along one wall of the neighborhood cafe, with a small space in front of it where patrons could dance. The orchestra appeared there every evening, unlike folk musicians who played only on festive days in the open air, and it included women singers who occasionally danced too.

The most common dance is the *Zeibekiko*, in 9/4 meter, a solo improvisation dance with balanced precision movements expressing intense concentration and self-absorption. In its original rural form it is a dance performed in carnival by disguised characters, its name deriving from a fierce tribe in Asia Minor. Next most popular is the *Khasapiko* (meaning butcher's dance) in slow 2/4 meter, danced by two or three men held by the shoulders and moving back and forth, usually close friends who have developed their own variations on the basic step. A similar dance in fast tempo and moving to the right is *Serviko*. Both dances were used as a base to create a new dance called *Zorba dance* or *Syrtaki*. This dance became very popular around the world in the Sixties and is still the highlight of Greek fraternity balls abroad and every tourist cabaret in Greece. Other *rebetiko* dances are *Karsilama* (i.e. face-to-face) with a 9/8 time signature, danced by couples, and the *Tsifteteli* (i.e. double-chord-strum), a solo dance in 4/4 resembling a subdued or mock belly dance.

The *rebetika* dancing style bears the mark of its urban origin. Suitable for dancing in the small space cleared by tables in tavernas, it is danced solo or by very few persons. Movements seem precise and calculated, the body crouches forward, arms outstretched to keep the balance. Originally practiced almost exclusively by men, it reflects the individualism of the towns-person, as opposed to the large circular dances stressing village communality, while village dancing is based on the repetition of the same steps over a very long time a dance might last half an hour or more – *rebetika* dances rely on the incessant variation of steps for the few minutes during which their songs last.

Until the Fifties middle-class Greeks and the media were contemptuous of *rebetika* music and dance. Then, composers Manos Hadjidakis ("Never on Sunday") and Mikis Theodorakis

("Zorba the Greek") started to compose music for films and popular songs adapting *rebetika* style to modern taste. They had immediate success in Greece and abroad, establishing a revival of the style although the original social conditions of its existence had disappeared. Now *rebetika* is widely adopted socially and is played in the radio and T.V. Most tavernas feature a modernized version of songs and dancing of this style. Young men and women dance it invariably, while patrons are encouraged to show their appreciation by breaking dishes on the dance floor.

### 4. SOCIAL DANCE

After the War of Independence (1821-1827) the liberated Greek provinces founded an independent State; other provinces were attached to it one after another, until Greece reached its present boundaries a hundred years later. The first king came from Bavaria and his court introduced European couple dances to the new capital. Major Greek communities in the diaspora were already familiar with these dances and the Athenian middle class gradually adopted them. European fashion dances became the rule for home gatherings and celebrations in the towns, with an occasional Greek dance at the end. There are no ballrooms or competition dancing. Discotheques are very popular, there are more than one hundred in the greater Athens area, where more than a third of the population of the country lives.

In Athens, besides the taverns featuring *rebetiko* dance music, there are two dozen tavernas with folk musicians from particular regions (Crete, Epirus, Islands, Pontic, Thrace). There, patrons of country origin usually go with their families to meet fellow villagers who reside in Athens and to dance their own dances. Major towns in Macedonia have such tavernas with Pontic dance music, Cretan towns have tavernas with local music. In general, Greeks distinguish between *bouzouki* tavernas (with *rebetiko* music), clarinet tavernas (with traditional music from the mainland) and violin tavernas (with music from the islands and the coasts).

### 5. THEATRICAL DANCE

Stage dancing was unknown in Greece during the Turkish occupation. By the middle of the 19th century touring foreign groups started giving performances in the capital of the new State. At the turn of the century several *cafe-chantants* in Athens offered cabaret shows that included dancing numbers, always by foreign artists. The "review" genre, featuring sketches of political satire and dancing is still very popular, with half a dozen theaters in Athens.

The first notable performance of Greek drama was given in the ancient theater of Delphi in 1927. It was organized by poet Angelos Sikelianos and his wife, American archaeologist Eva Palmer. Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound" was presented, the event was combined with a folk festival, exhibitions and lectures. The "Delphic Feasts" were repeated in 1930 with Aeschylus' "Suppliants", also choreographed by Eva Palmer, who was a friend and follower of Isadora Duncan. Duncan had given two performances in Athens in 1912 and had tried to establish a dance academy there.

In 1932, the National Theater – founded the same year in Athens – presented "Ajax", establishing a tradition of commissioning dancers and choreographers to teach movement to the chorus of Greek plays. The chorus was composed of actors, rarely dancers, but some dance training has been part of the actors' schools curriculum. Having practically no information on the movements of the chorus in ancient drama, choreographers' approach to the modern presentations vary from rhythmic recitation combined with a sequence of postures, to elaborate creations. Their main source of inspiration, though, remains the

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## Dance In Greece

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traditional dancing of modern Greece. Already in the 1927 performance of "Prometheus" the chorus entered the scene singing and dancing a *syrtos*. After World War II interpretations by the National Theater, the Pireaus Theater of Dimitri Rondiris and the Art Theater of Karolos Koon have followed this line. The tendency was to move away from group recitation and archaic gestures, into singing and dancing as derived from the living popular tradition.

The "Lyrike Skene", a State theater presenting opera and operetta, was founded in 1940 and included a small corps-de-ballet of trained dancers. Since 1960 it has been giving ballet evenings about twice a year. Another troupe was the "Greek Chorodrama" under the first dancer and choreographer Ms. Ralou Manou. Founded in 1952, it has employed the most well-known Greek composers, painters and choreographers in an effort to bring ballet closer to a home-grown inspiration. Other private initiatives are the "Experimental Ballet" under Mr. Yannis Metsis (since 1956), the "Sismani Ballet", an offspring of the school of Ms. Iro Sismani (between 1955 and 1962), and more recently, the "Classical Ballet Center" under Ms. Rene Kammaer and Mr. Leonidas de Pian.

6.

### DANCE EDUCATION

The first ballet school was founded in Athens by Mr. Morianoff in 1929. It was followed in 1930 by Ms. Koula Pratsika, whose school became the "State School of Dance Art" in 1972. Several other schools were also founded before the War. There are now 200 private dance schools in Greece, three fourths of them in Athens. The total number of their students is 11,000, most of them are in their teens and taking one and a half hour's training three times a week. The predominant course is rythmical movement, introduced in Greece by Marguerite Jordan as early as 1913 in the Conservatory of Music.

Ten schools, totalling 200 students, follow the 3-year, 20-hours a week curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Culture, so they can present their graduates for the State examination. 20 to 25 students pass this examination every year, giving them the right to teach dance in private schools.

Dance is not taught in high schools or Universities. Some folk dances are taught in the Academy of Physical Education so that gymnastics teachers can teach them in high school, often with poor results. Private dance schools usually teach a few folk dances to their students. ▲