

# Eastward Heterotopias of the Piano

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This article concerns the postdoctoral research carried out at the University of Ioannina and the Department of Music Studies, with a scholarship from the European Union and the Greek State Scholarship Foundation, formally from January 2020 to December 2021. The main goal of the research program is to highlight a distinct and unexplored aspect of the piano: its role outside its usual context, that is, what is usually called “classical music”. The research program focuses on the discography found in a variety of musical realities, within a broad geographical span: Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East. The geographic areas covered by the survey are increasing, consequently the span is widening.<sup>2</sup>

The choice of the piano as a vector for an investigation “of the east” seems at first sight paradoxical: this instrument is, supposedly, geographically and culturally fixed. The eastward heterotopias of the piano is precisely for this reason a particularly challenging research project. It is connected to the condition of limitality in its role as an instrument, within idioms that we are used to understanding as dependent on a conservative tradition, with strict anti-Western orientations. A careful look at the discography, from the beginning of the 20th century, reveals a multitude of recordings, which surprise with the variety and ingenuity of the ways of integrating the piano into the examined musical genres.

The musical realizations we study constitute heterotopias, in the sense given to the term by Foucault’s celebrated lecture (1967). It is difficult to talk about these musics with national symbols or to lock them within the political geographical demarcations where they were recorded, as they pertain more to spiritual and cultural places. The main characteristic of these places is syncretism, dynamic and fluidity. The move to and embracing of the diverse and the reciprocal inter-penetrative and co-existent behaviour amongst the alterities, with products that testify to a framework of reconciliation during combination. These places are

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<sup>1</sup> This article was published in Greek in 2022, as part of the proceedings of the 12th conference organized by the Hellenic Musicological Society (Ordoulidis, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> For example, historical recordings have come to light from Myanmar and Thailand, where the piano also took on a different role and is performed in a different way. Although these latest discoveries are not going to concern the specific text, as they have not yet been fully documented, they give the possibility to reflect on an even “more eastern East”, with its own characteristics, in terms of its musical context (theory and practice). The reason for this eastern opening is the artistic and research activity of Alex Peh, Associate Professor at the Music Department of New Paltz, State University of New York. Dr Peh received Fulbright funding to visit the Department of Music Studies at the University of Ioannina, showed interest in the research being conducted there on the eastward heterotopias of the piano. This project has continued as a SUNY Collaborative Online International Learning unit (COIL) between our piano courses, resulting in a signing of a memorandum between our two universities (see <https://sites.google.com/view/theeastwardpianoproject>). Moreover, an ethnographic documentary film, titled “Intermittent Attunement” and directed by Lauren Meeker, was another product of this collaboration (<https://hawksites.newpaltz.edu/intermittentattunement/>).

places of the non-normal, yet real. The word “eastward” is deliberately used, as it is considered less imaginary than the term “East”, at least for the period we are concerned with, which is that of the emergence of the revolutionary phenomenon of discography, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, “eastward” also testifies to the distancing from a certain dipole perspective, which places the East within defined geographical and cultural boundaries, based on a certain imaginary “rivalry” towards an equally imaginary West.

In the specific repertoires, the piano can be found both in the official commercial discography, mainly the product of large European companies that sent mobile recording crews to various parts of the world, as well as on the music stages, in venues with live music. Regarding this second category, the photographic material, as well as the biographies of the music protagonists, constitute the basic evidence. As far as the historical discography is concerned, the piano has been a popular choice since early on. After all, the repertoire it had at its disposal was endless and constantly growing, coming from great and historical musical traditions from specific places in Europe. Despite this, it also appeared in the discography within another aesthetic, different from the usual one. It participated in different contexts, it performed other repertoires, in other ways and it constituted, finally, another independent/autonomous entity. These pianistic alternations, which are most active even at present, were not studied as much as those of classical Europe.

Possibly, and this may be very crucial, Western musicology has ignored this presence of the piano, thinking either that it will fall upon something already known, at best, or that the specific practices are somehow an adulteration/corruption of the nature of the instrument. On the other hand, the musicology of the East was trapped in the restraints of the interval worlds, altered traditions, etc. That is, it considered that the piano cannot serve the Eastern musical identities, so it, in turn, left it out of the equation. It is worth mentioning a very interesting related incident that took place at the celebrated international musicological conference of the Arab world, which was held in Cairo, Egypt in 1932. During the works, among others, the following, extremely burning for the time and region, question was raised: whether or not to allow the continuation of the use of the piano in Eastern music traditions. The use of which in 1932 was already a dynamic reality, in hundreds of recordings, schools and students in places in the East.<sup>3</sup> A distinct element of this pre-existing dynamic concerns the companies and the choice of repertoires and instrumentation. We should not forget that in these first decades of the recording phenomenon, the risk of investment on the part of the producers still dominates. Both the production of records and the movement of crews to record musicians are expensive, which makes producers and agents more cautious. However, it is not only Europeans who decide to record the piano in such roles, but also the Arabs themselves. For example, the Baidaphon Company, founded in the 1910s and headquartered in Beirut, establishes branches in various parts of the Arab world. Under the Baidaphon label, many pianists released their work, performing the instrument in different ways, compared to the usual ones of classical Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> On the Cairo conference see Katz (2015). The interview given by one of the leading musicians, Maurice El Médioni (1928–) to Max Reinhardt is of great interest. Born in Oran in 1928, Médioni talks about the teachers and piano schools of the time (Reinhardt, 2017: 51–7).

So far, the literature on these different roles of the piano is scant. A doctoral thesis at the Université de Montréal deals with piano schools in Iran: Maryam Farshadfar, “The Practice of Persian Piano in Iran from 1879 to 1979” (2017). An also recent PhD comes from Université Lyon, which, understandably, deals with North Africa and the French colonies: Rym Mansour Harbaoui, “L'utilisation du piano dans la musique arabe du XXème siècle: organologie et analyse” (2018). Another PhD from 2021 concerns the use of the piano in Lebanon and Egypt: Patricio Fadel Molina, “Arabic Music and the Piano: The Use of the Piano in Lebanon and Egypt During the Golden Age of Arabic Music”. In addition, there are some biographies of some iconic artists, which do not come from academia and also concern the French colonies. Examples: Max Reinhardt (ed.), Maurice El Médioni - A Memoir (1938–1992): From Oran to Marseilles (1938–1992) (2017).

## Historical commercial discography

One of the main axes of the research project is the discography, the examination and analysis of which allows the compilation of an electronic database, which includes all historical recordings found. The database already contains 600 historical recordings. Each recording is a separate entry in the base, offering information related to its discographical validation, as well as other metadata. Specifically, the fields are as follows: i) Title, ii) Ethnocultural group, if it is, for example, a Sephardic Jewish musician and/or repertoire, iii) Location of recording, iv) Part of, Empire or colonies or any other governing entity, depending on the recording date, v) Recording date, vi) Label, vii) Matrix code, viii) Disc/record code, ix) Other/flip side of record, x) Composer, xi) Lyricist, xii) Singer A, xiii) Singer B, xiv) Orchestra, xv) Comments.

As for validation, which is one of the most problematic issues of such research internationally,<sup>4</sup> information is drawn from a multitude of options available today, which are on the one hand constantly increasing, but on the other, this happens at such an extremely slow pace, always with reservations regarding the accuracy of some. Just how accurately we can document a historical recording depends largely on the following parameters:

A) The geographical area where the recording took place and the current ruling entity to which this area belongs. What policy is followed with regard to archival material and historical discography, what the status of the specific research field in the universities and research institutions of the region is, the number of collectors there and whether all of the above participate in the global discography network today (for example, if they speak internationally spoken languages and/or if they also have their catalogues in an international language). Thus, it is easier to document and validate the historical discography that took place in the USA, for example, than the one that took place in Iran.

B) The historical period in which the recording took place, in combination with the other parameters. Understandably, the older the recording, the more difficult it is to document

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<sup>4</sup> See relative texts: Pennanen (2005), Trezise (2009), Gronow (2014).

and/or find the audio and/or record label. In an ideal situation, full documentation should include access to the audio material, the record label and fundamental recording information such as the date. Of course, depending on the geographic region and the company, the above rule “the older the recording, the more difficult the documentation” does not always apply (see for example in the case of the USA).

C) The record company/label and whether there are records available today. This particular parameter is equally complex, since we are not always talking about the headquarters of a company with international recording activity, such as for example the English Gramophone (later EMI), which owns and releases records under the labels His Master’s Voice, Columbia and other small or large labels, which used to be autonomous companies until they were bought by Gramophone. Many times, local offices were created, and historical documents were catalogued only there, without being sent to headquarters. For example, France’s Disque Gramophone made countless recordings in North Africa. Or, Gramophone’s local office/branch in Turkey printed His Master’s Voice labels as “Sahibinin Sesi” (meaning “His Master’s Voice” in Turkish).<sup>5</sup>

Based on the above, both official archives and databases, as well as unofficial catalogues drawn up by local collectors and researchers are used to document the finds. Below is a sample of the available tools/sources of documentation and validation:

- British Library Sounds <https://sounds.bl.uk>
- Centre des Musiques Arabes et Méditerranéennes <http://phonotheque.cmam.tn>
- Cemal Ünlü Fonograf Gramofon <http://tasplak.pankitap.com>
- Discography of American Historical Recordings <https://adp.library.ucsb.edu>
- Hachlef, Ahmed, and Mohamed Elhabib Hachlef. *Anthologie de la Musique Arabe, 1906-1960*. Paris: Publisud, 1993
- Henry König <http://www.musiktitel.de>
- Joel Bresler Sephardic Music [www.sephardicmusic.org](http://www.sephardicmusic.org)
- Kelly On-line Database [www.kellydatabase.org](http://www.kellydatabase.org)
- Kounadis Archive Virtual Museum <https://vmrebetiko.gr/en/d-home-en>
- National Library of Serbia [www.nb.rs](http://www.nb.rs)
- Neumann-Haus, Gramofon Online, ungarischen Populärkultur <https://gramofononline.hu>
- Rainer E. Lotz [www.lotz-verlag.de](http://www.lotz-verlag.de)
- Recording Pioneers [www.recordingpioneers.com](http://www.recordingpioneers.com)
- Stare Melodie Polish archive <https://staremelodie.pl>
- The AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) [www.charm.kcl.ac.uk](http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk)
- The Arhoolie Foundation [www.arhoolie.org](http://www.arhoolie.org)
- The Great 78 Project <http://great78.archive.org>

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<sup>5</sup> For historical discography, see for example: Gronow (1983 and 2014); Cook et al (2009); Martland (2013); Roy and Rodriguez (2022).

- The International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA) [www.iasa-web.org](http://www.iasa-web.org)
- The Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences [www.oeaw.ac.at/en/phonogrammarchiv](http://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/phonogrammarchiv)
- Vernon, Paul. *Ethnic and Vernacular Music, 1898-1960*. Greenwood Press, 1995
- Yuri Bernikov Russian Records [www.russian-records.com](http://www.russian-records.com)

It should be emphasized that the search, finding and listing of recordings in the database has been conducted mainly with qualitative rather than quantitative characteristics. The main aim is to represent as many musical genres and places as possible. The primary purpose is not the complete indexing of the discography, which in any case seems impossible, but the mapping of the recorded material, analyzing and comparing each case. The discography evidence allows a clear illustration of the historical trajectory of the instrument.

In the early 20th century, recordings were made by mobile crews that roamed countless places to record local musicians. These crews are sent by major European and North American companies. Discography research reveals that a highly interesting discography network is quickly created. For example, we find “wandering” musical melodies in various places in the Mediterranean, the Balkans, Eastern Europe and America et al, where local musicians adopt and reconstruct them, as well as counter-loans in terms of performance practices. The scope of the repertoire is endless, which is de-territorialized and mixed with other repertoires, which now have translocal characteristics: the cosmopolitan nature of large urban centers, combined with the new technological means, highlight the polystylisms and polymorphisms of musical realities.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to comprehend the context of mobile discography, as there are not yet specially designed spaces, good sound media, specific policies on the part of companies, not

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<sup>6</sup> The Kounadis Archive Virtual Museum’s collection under the title of “Cosmopolitanism in Greek historical discography” constitutes a singular tool for examining and shedding light on cosmopolitanism in music over a wide geographical area, offering access not only to audio but also to visual data. This area includes the following broad regions: Europe (including Russia), North Africa, the Middle East, and the United States of America. Crucial findings have resulted from this research, regarding the relationships between various “ethnic” repertoires. More specifically, dozens of music tunes have been detected and documented, which were recorded in Greek historical discography. The same tunes were recorded also in other repertoires (in some cases earlier and in others later than the Greek recordings). In essence, these are amongst the first recordings ever made, as the phenomenon of discography took its first steps in late 19th and early 20th centuries (see <https://vmrebetiko.gr/en/cosmopolitanism-en/>). At the epicentre of this new virtual room lies the intertextuality which is observed in folk repertoires of the 20th century. Moreover, issues such as the ever-changing fluidity during performance, and the adoptions enacted by musicians are critical in this research project. These repertoires, and the musicians who carry them, can be regarded as conduits in the uniquely diverse cultural heritage of this musical world. The mutual influences are evident in performance practices, instrumentation, rhythm, harmonisation, vocal placement and, in general, the habits that each musician carries in him/her. Musicians constituted key interlocutors within the borders of three major multicultural Empires (Austrian / Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Ottoman) and other smaller or larger political entities, not to mention their travels outside these borders, and they composed a rich musical mosaic consisting of heterogeneous but co-existing palimpsests. This mosaic can be regarded as a pool to which everyone added and from which everyone received something.

even specific local musical identities, as musicians are often on the move, serving diverse repertoires, coming from heterogeneous ethno-cultural groups, etc. In other words, the piano is found in this early discography only if it pre-exists in the places chosen as recording venues (for example, a large hotel room). The presence of the piano in discography is more frequent when local factories are built, evidently because in them it is a permanent presence, in the recording room. The fact that in America it is found from the beginning in historical recordings is not accidental, as factories are the only condition there. Despite the objective difficulties of finding venues with a piano, research has brought to light recordings conducted at the beginning of the 20th century (for example, of Greek interest in Constantinople from 1906).

## The geography of recordings

Recorded piano repertoire has already been detected and catalogued in the following countries, presented here in their current form and political borders: Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Iran and India.<sup>7</sup> However, it is relatively safe to assume that their neighbors also have similar material.

The parallel reality of America should definitely be mentioned. Most of the examined repertoires flourished in parallel in large urban centers of the United States, due to the immigrants that lived there. An extremely critical observation, however, concerns the differentiation of performance practices and often of the work itself, if one compares the recording made in the place or, many times, in the places of its “origin”, with the recording carried out by the immigrants.<sup>8</sup> At this point, an essential issue is raised: The broader set of recorded works can be considered as an extensive network, bringing geographically and culturally distant places together. The way in which musical interactions circulate within this scheme is not always the direct path of immediate proximity, but the tangled path of travel and migration, and, later, all the new media, radio, cinema and of course discography. For example, we find a rich discography of Greek-speaking urban folk song in America, or Sephardic Jewish discography in North Africa, as for example in Algeria and Tunisia, at a time when many of these areas are French colonies. This meandering movement brings about a revolution, as it transcends geographical borders and de-territorializes repertoires, granting the piano new roles in new places.

This kind of discussion takes on different dimensions when the colonialism of Europe is involved. In this way, some idioms evolved into a form which added, for example, elements of the Arab world of North Africa (what is often referred to as the Maghrib or Barbaria) and musical idioms which traveled from central Europe, mainly with the French.<sup>9</sup> The discographical products catalogued for this research are characterized by a cultural

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<sup>7</sup> Heartfelt thanks to the following collectors, for kindly donating material from their archives: Martin Schwartz, Panagiotis and Leonardos Kounadis, Nikos Dionysopoulos, Chris Silver, Cemal Ünlü, Panagiota Anagnostou, Tony Klein.

<sup>8</sup> For two relative examples see Ordoulidis (2021a and 2021b).

<sup>9</sup> For example: *Haramtou bik Nouassi*, Baidaphon B 095129 – 130, Algeria, circa 1934: [https://youtu.be/Tq8VdE\\_Me38](https://youtu.be/Tq8VdE_Me38).

syncretism of special interest and value, as they bear multi-layered information of the life of the different places that make it up. The “East” shows that it is not single and solid but a *heterotopia* with complex and varied aesthetic values. The piano penetrates this space, and sometimes it adapts to the practices while at others the practices adapt to it; it does not constitute a disposable tool or a trial stage.

Within the above framework of mobile repertoires, Gypsy and Jewish music plays a catalytic role in enriching local repertoires and is a vehicle for the dissemination of techniques, practices, styles and aesthetics. Transatlantic migration gives this dissemination truly universal dimensions, as is the case for example with the European klezmer, in Ashkenazi folk music, which meets American jazz. Colonialism, revolutions, conflicts, refugee waves, but also circulations in all kinds of commercial channels, in a world that evolves dynamically and anisotropically, form a complex mesh of “centres” and “peripheries” in alternating roles, which set the musical idioms in motion, literally and figuratively. Record production is shaped through this movement, and in turn reshapes routes and rearranges artistic priorities. In the “geography of recording” it is difficult to define “East” and “West”, based on its conventional orientation and multiple historical contexts. This becomes particularly evident if we focus on the role of the piano in the musical history of the Balkans, the Eastern Europe and the Middle East: the audio evidence does not allow it to be characterized as a “tool of westernization”, nor as a “lightning rod” against oriental aesthetics. On the contrary, it highlights trends and artistic fermentation that, despite their marginality, or rather thanks to their marginality, allow a detached perspective, leading to a broader and deeper understanding of the musical cultures that meet in the East.

## **Modeness**

The term ‘modeness’ is used purposefully in order to include definitions usually consigned to the words ‘popular’, ‘East’ and ‘modality’. The problems regarding the first two are patently clear: the in-between ‘places’ between the poles of the high-status and the popular and that of the East and the West are innumerable, and hardly distinguishable. The third word, modality, presents two problematic points: on the one hand, it has been wrongfully connected to Eastern musics, even though it does not constitute their exclusivity; on the other hand, it describes a simple systematic analysis, of melodic movement and (rarely) its harmonization. The alternative term ‘modeness’ renders, in its totality, the behaviour of a musical entity with its specific characteristics, rhythm, melody, harmony and so on as the epicentre, not, however, as a theoretical substance with self-contained rules, but as an implemented case. In other words, how it functions in the artistic act is examined: its creation context and utilization, the implementation of its protagonists (musicians, intermediaries, audience), performance practice and technique, technological issues and so forth. This approach incorporates those elements described by the terms ‘East’ and ‘modality’, simultaneously expanding their scope. At the same time, though, it highlights a fundamental characteristic of popular music expression, which is none other than the orality and ensuing fluidity during realization (Ordoulidis, 2021c: x-xi).

Modeness starts from the musical concept of the performers, placing the artist as a person and their musical experiences at the centre, placing the mechanized theoretical stereotypes in the background. In other words, modeness does not oppose the Western and the scholarly, nor does it replace the Oriental and the popular. At the same time, it shows how it exists as a tool in the performance practices of both popular musicians and scholars. This emerging modeness transforms these two major groups from their typical product-based categorizations into more human entities based on the creator of the product, allowing and facilitating the examination of material created by musicians who served both categorizations (Ordoulidis, 2018: 17).

The above “interlude” about “modeness” was deemed necessary so that it is understood from the outset that the presence of the piano in the repertoires we will examine below essentially outlines in between spaces, between very powerful dipole theoretical formations. In other words, on the one hand we are interested in seeing whether these implementations redraft the prevailing theoretical norms (makam, laikoi dromoi, classical European harmonization, et al); whether the implementations give rise to the need to reconsider the theories, which observed musical phenomena from a variety of repertoires, high-status or folk. On the other hand, we are interested in including other parameters in our examination, equally serious and interesting, and which in the end seem to have often played a catalytic role in the final audio product. That is, on what kind of piano, with what sound equipment, in what historical-social context and with what cultural background a pianist played a piece, and, at the end, to what extent these elements influenced the way in which they harmonized, phrased, embellished the melodies and harmonies, and organized the rhythmic accompaniment they performed. Finally, through the tool of modeness, we are interested in examining whether Europeanization was solely responsible for the introduction and use of the piano in musical traditions that were far away from the centers of classical Europe, or whether innovation was also a dynamic factor that pushed folk musicians to adopt unusual and/or unfamiliar, for the traditional musical models of the areas where they lived and created, tools.

By cataloguing and analyzing the repertoire, two dynamic dipoles emerged: East/West and folk/high-status or scholarly. By filtering the recorded repertoire through these relationships, interesting conclusions are drawn, which help one understand the historical processes that took place in the areas under examination, but also the way in which music and musicians functioned: modeness. Thus, two main axes emerge, which function as magnifying glasses: eastern-ness and folk-ness. We should look at these axes as intermediate places of the dipoles, aiming at a pragmatic aesthetic analysis of the repertoire. Following this methodology, the characteristics of these intermediate places are transformed into their connecting links.

Despite the great dispersion, the space in which we attempt to map the position of the piano presents common characteristics. The modeness of musicians and repertoires is governed by common codes. The ways in which an attempt is made to integrate the instrument into the local realities bring to the surface something extremely interesting: the exotic gaze with which the musical protagonist looks at their own tradition, a clear self-exoticism (see also Scott, 2015). Here, of course, a crucial role is played by the balance that



the protagonist tries to strike, between what they experientially wish to implement and what is imposed on them by “the theoretical orthodox”, that is, the context in which they have come to know music: “correct” intervals, variations, melodic progressions, harmonization, cadences, dynamics, coloring. If anything, it is more appropriate to serve your (eastern) cultural identity with an oud in hand than a piano. Let us not forget that the period we are studying is defined by ethnicities and nationalisms, and symbols play a catalytic role in how everyone sees themselves as part of a whole. Obviously, an examination of this type is open to multiple readings on multiple levels, from the choice of repertoire to be recorded, to the muscle memory that will play its own role during implementation.

On the one hand, the implementations and/or the repertoire present a certain sense of eastern-ness, although the term is obviously general and vague. The following explanations, however, attempt to look at these codes in an attempt to understand the limits of a pragmatic eastern-ness. Three broad subcategories emerge from the examination of the material: recordings which quite clearly exhibit an Eastern modernness.<sup>10</sup> In this category, chordal harmony is almost completely absent. Even when a rhythmic pattern is followed, it is performed in octaves in the left hand. A repertoire and references to terms are chosen, which identify with the local theoretical tradition itself, adding a certain authenticity (for example, modes names). North Africa, Iran and India are some of the regions that commonly feature this type of discographical repertoire.

The second category contains recordings whose modernness is more eastern-like, rather than Eastern.<sup>11</sup> In other words, a sense of imagination of the East often dominates, in the musicians’ attempt to assimilate traditions originating from the East. In addition, various parameters make the implementations we have identified eastern-like anyway, such as for example the instrumentation used or the placement of the voice. Areas belonging to this category show stronger relations with Europe, either because they are geographically closer, or because there is a tradition of communication, or because the repertoire itself shows a diaspora, as for example the Jewish repertoire, which the “journey” of many musical tunes is credited to. Turkey, Armenia and Greece are included in this category.

Finally, the third category includes recordings in which a balance of elements is observed (Eastern and/or eastern-like with Western and/or western-like).<sup>12</sup> Again, geography and regional relations play a catalytic role, with places that have traditionally been hubs where the poles met and co-functioned, such as Romania, Russia, Greece and Turkey.

Of particular importance is the fact that these rather abstract/virtual categories are not entirely tied to one geographical area. In several cases a mix is observed in the discographical repertoire within the same geographical area (for example, in Turkey). When the piano penetrates these traditions, whether participating in orchestral ensembles or as a soloist, it forces us not only to re-evaluate the boundaries between “Western” and “Eastern” music, but also their supposed opposition, within a particularly charged dipole. It also allows

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<sup>10</sup> For example: *Bashraf nawa'ather Yusuf Bey*, Gramophone FX 135 (OK 159 – 30-7832), Cairo, 9 April 1931: [https://youtu.be/LUrb\\_xwRONo](https://youtu.be/LUrb_xwRONo).

<sup>11</sup> For example: *Hattikva*, Disc Gramophone BG 1266 – 25-212346 – K 4362, Tunis, 4 December 1930: [https://youtu.be/mw3Sb\\_Htv1Y](https://youtu.be/mw3Sb_Htv1Y).

<sup>12</sup> For example: *Cocoșel Cu Două Crește*, Columbia WHR 450-1 – DR 33, 1935: <https://youtu.be/Bwy8ylySqhY>.

us to deconstruct all kinds of exoticism, revealing evidence of a creative coexistence that transcends conventional borders and cultural stereotypes.

Obviously, practices and repertoires differ from place to place. If we were to talk about two entities that emerge from listening to the material of this vast geographical span, we would say that chordal harmony is what varies from place to place: in some locations it has a very strong presence, as in Russia, Serbia, Romania and Greece,<sup>13</sup> while in others not, such as in Algeria, Tunisia and Iran.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, there are geographical areas, such as Turkey, where implementations are observed in both categories.<sup>15</sup>

The second tool of observation is folk-ness. Another link in regard to the liminality often seen in performance practices, which oscillate between what is called in the musician's world "playing by ear" and a more formulaic, yet evidently fluid mode of performance. A sense, that is, of folk-ness. Here, of course, arises the extremely large issue of the relations between orality and literacy, for which the literature is rich and substantial. In other words, an attempt is made to understand the relative osmosis and the intermediate "places", where folk-ness and scholarly-ness enter into a creative dialogue in diverse ways, depending on the historical conditions. On the one hand we have music protagonists who also handle musical transcription and on the other, those who enlist only experience for any actualization.

Even in traditions where the piano is relatively inaccessible, artists do not hesitate to borrow seemingly unfamiliar practices and "dialects" in order to express themselves creatively. In fact, in many cases, the same persons record repertoire from both categories (such as in the case of Yorgo Bacanos discussed below).

## Samples of the material

The first case to be examined is that of Yorgo Bacanos (1900–1977). A Christian by faith, a resident of Constantinople during the change of treaty from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, a Gypsy and a Greek-speaking native of the region of Silivri, a coastal region 76 kilometers west of Constantinople.<sup>16</sup> Based on the relevant bibliography, the cosmopolitan and syncretic model of the time is evident, which Bacanos also follows, knowing on the one hand the literate and scholarly musical world and, on the other, that of the "street" of folk musicians, in which he began to participate since childhood. He also gets to know other cultures by travelling to Berlin and Paris (Tsiamoulis and Ereunidis, 1998: 40). He managed to reform the oud, which was his instrument of specialization, and established himself as one of the greatest virtuosos of his time.<sup>17</sup> A major reformer, both in terms of technique and aesthetics.

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<sup>13</sup> For example: *Minore manes (skliro to pepromeno mou)*, Odeon GO 2067 – GA 1766, Athens, 1934: [https://youtu.be/gxNt\\_tWP8kA](https://youtu.be/gxNt_tWP8kA).

<sup>14</sup> For example: *Fad El Wahsh*, Baidaphon B 095131, Algeria, circa 1934: <https://youtu.be/FetQHF-KhtU>.

<sup>15</sup> For example: *Atesin Gozleri Ruha*, Pathé 76357, circa 1927: <https://youtu.be/il5VeL8wD18>; *Cifte Tellî Oyun Havasi*, Pathé X 76293 – 11677, circa 1927: <https://youtu.be/kIGd3mDRXJc>.

<sup>16</sup>The region of Silivri: <https://goo.gl/maps/Apgh2RVdVvKWbVBJ8>.

<sup>17</sup> For Bacanos see: Bacanos (1997); Tsiamoulis and Ereunidis (1998); Andreou (2014).

Initially, the relevant discographical research yielded the discovery of a great and quite popular recording of Bacanos, in a *taximi*<sup>18</sup> for solo piano.<sup>19</sup> A more thorough search of the historical discography of Constantinople yielded additional recordings as a pianist, finally reaching eight documented recordings (it should be noted here that Turkey is one of the most problematic areas, in terms of documenting the historical discography). Four additional recordings have been found, in which his participation is suspected. The singular and characteristic performance technique of Bacanos supports the above argument, as in the remaining undocumented recordings the sound-color and the role of the piano are very similar to the documented ones.

In the recording of the *taxim Piyano İle Taksim*, the attempt to apply the technique of the *kanun* is evident. He uses the same approach and technique in *Gördüm Gözünü*<sup>20</sup> and *Gülle Hem Bezmi Visaliz*<sup>21</sup> which constitute original gazels (Ottoman vocal improvisation), performed by Kemal Bey and Sadettin Kaynak respectively. The technology and the construction architecture of the piano show how they help Bacanos, not only to apply the *á la kanun* technique but also to evolve it on the spot, which can be regarded as one of the most characteristic trends of folk musicians. Here, there is talk of “inspiration of the moment” and improvisation, but also the value code of musicians, who try to impress with their skills and imagination, firstly (and perhaps mostly) their colleagues.

In another noteworthy recording, he again records with the piano together with his brother Aleko, who plays the *kemençe*.<sup>22</sup> Yorgo accompanies in a special way. The form of the piece and the transition from one part to another is interesting, given the time limit in recording during this particular era. Obviously, the two perform on stage together and feel an artistic intimacy. On the other hand, Yorgo shows that he knows the instrument and in combination with the fact that he knows the repertoire well, how it works, he lays the rhythmic-harmonic background for Aleko, together creating a feeling of perfect harmony, what today we would call “groove”. Bacanos, with these specific recordings, marked the discography by proposing a different technique. It seems that he has a special understanding of the keyboard, the colors of the instrument and also the application of modality on the piano.

Through the recordings of Bacanos, the value code of the aesthetic essence of the folk musician becomes apparent, the one who is not concerned about the “traditional” position of an instrument in specific repertoires and about dogmatic theoretical arguments. An analytical look at the historical discography of approximately 130 years reveals that instruments, which ostensibly come from specific and “closed” repertoires, are frequently used by folk musicians in different contexts. In addition, the musicians do not seem to be concerned with theoretical imperatives, such as the interval world of modal Eastern musics

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<sup>18</sup> “The *taxími* (plural *taxímia*) is a non-rhythmic improvisation based on the *dhrómos* [mode] of the particular song or on a combination of *dhrómi*. It is played at the beginning of the song. The other instruments may play the *íso* (*íso*), which is a single sustained note. The role of the *taxími* is either to show a musician’s talent, imagination and skills, to emphasize the tonality and the *dhrómos* of the song or both. A *taxími* could also be played inside a song with the orchestra continuing to play the rhythm and the soloist improvising either based on the rhythm or not” (Ordoulidis, 2012: 31).

<sup>19</sup> *Piyano İle Taksim*, Odeon CO 320 – RA 202521, Constantinople, 1928: <https://youtu.be/tIEJ8GXBWKA>.

<sup>20</sup> *Gördüm Gözünü*, Columbia 12560, Constantinople, 1931 (before May): [https://youtu.be/QFVMOcw1\\_sA](https://youtu.be/QFVMOcw1_sA).

<sup>21</sup> *Gülle Hem Bezmi Visaliz*, Odeon Lxx 126503-A, circa 1930: [https://youtu.be/O9S\\_bm5YWbY](https://youtu.be/O9S_bm5YWbY).

<sup>22</sup> *Arap Çiftetellisi*, Odeon RX 131543, Constantinople, circa 1927–1928: <https://youtu.be/klGd3mDRXJc>.

and the equal-tempered piano tuning. The folk substance, aesthetics and style, stands in between, appearing to be indifferent –often “provocatively” so– to the theoretical literature which, in any case, is subsequent to folk creation. In a more technical language, it is remarkable how Bacanos managed the micro-interval language of the lyre in *Arap Çiftetellisi* and accompanied it with an instrument, which while theoretically cannot reproduce the same intervals can “communicate”, showing that Bacanos is proficient in this language and its usage. This could also be considered as the reconciliation contained in the syncretic cultural context during the encounter of alterities, rather than as conflict and friction between the heterogeneous elements. A union which is the result of the need for artistic expression, a key factor in the value code of musicians. Essentially, escaping from theoretical requirements, Bacanos transforms the interval diversity of the piano into an advantage, proposing through his recordings a different way of performing the instrument; another language with which the instrument can be expressed.

Some of the techniques that Bacanos uses, such as the one in his taxims, are familiar, as we have detected them in other areas. For example, the Sephardic Jew Messaoud Habib in Tunisia also performs a taxim, using similar practices on the instrument. Habib enters the discography as a pianist from the early 1920s. He also plays the pump harmonium. Earlier, however, around the end of the First World War, he started writing piano rolls for the music label Bembaron. Jacques and Aurelio Bembaron were Sephardic Jews, who around 1903 started their commercial activity in Tunisia, importing instruments and mainly pianos. Later, they had the role of representatives of major European record companies.

Habib participated in various aesthetic repertoires and recordings: solo piano, piano-voice, in orchestral ensembles as a pianist, but also in Jewish religious hymns as a pianist. He collaborated with the most popular stars (musicians and singers) of the time and the region. For some, he is considered to be solely responsible for the popularity they acquired, given the strong position he held in the branches of the large companies in the region. In particular, he was responsible for repertoire for Gramophone and Pathé. In the interwar period he was the director of the military orchestra of the Tunisian monarch.

It should be noted that Tunisia is one of the North African countries, where we find many historical recordings with the piano in such roles. Apart from the Arab world, large populations of Sephardic Jews live in the African north, at the same time that these areas are French colonies.<sup>23</sup>

The recording of the taxim titled *Istikhbar Ochak* was made by Habib around 1928.<sup>24</sup> The basic rationale of the technique he uses is simple: both hands perform the same melodic line in parallel. The right hand, however, is the one that embellishes the phrases in a variety of ways: variations intended to charge and dramatize the interpretation and create a certain aesthetic landscape. In certain parts of the narrative, the opening of the hands, the distance created between them on the keyboard is two and three octaves, with the right hand performing in the highest region of the instrument. In addition, some phrase endings have the last note of the phrase being played by the left hand an octave lower than it is at that point. Something which gives the impression that he wants to highlight those singular semi-colons of the melodic text. Habib also seems to take advantage of the possibilities that the

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<sup>23</sup> For Habib but also for the African North see Silver (2017).

<sup>24</sup> *Istikhbar Ochak*, Columbia, Tunis, May 1928: <https://bit.ly/3x3K1p8>.

instrument gives him in terms of colorings, expressions and dynamics. He follows the course of the phrases, sometimes increasing the intensity or emphasizing specific notes and sometimes vice versa, thus building a well-structured atmosphere. Halfway through the piece he places the hands closer together and changes technique, showing that his inspiration comes from the kanun. Although the recording is categorized in the repertoires that do not make use of chordal harmony, based on what was mentioned above in the text, nevertheless Habib shows that he is also familiar with this specific environment, as a chord is heard at the beginning and, above all, he ends some of his phrases with chordal arpeggios.

The different tuning and construction efforts that were made from time to time so that the piano can reproduce the “correct”, according to various Eastern theories, intervals is an extremely wide field of study with a long history. Even though it will not concern the present text, reference will nevertheless be made to two areas which have showed and continue to produce piano-recorded repertoire tuned differently.

One of these areas is Iran. The trend of different tuning there soon took on school dimensions, which is active to this day.<sup>25</sup> The piano seems to arrive in Iran at the beginning of the 19th century and was initially installed and performed exclusively in the palace. Dynamic personalities, however, and restless musical spirits governed by modernist moods, not only managed to use the instrument more expansively, but also left a recording and pedagogical legacy. Pianists such as Moshir Habibollah Homayoun Shahrदार (1886–1969), who, according to the sources, appears to have been the first to record with the piano for the major European companies sweeping the region to record local material; and even seems to have also travelled to London in 1909, where he made recordings. Javad Maroufi (1912–1993), with stronger influences from classical European traditions and with a disposition towards syncretism with Persian classical music traditions. And Morteza Mahjubi (1900–1965), who in the relevant literature is considered the most leading figure, the great *Ostad* (teacher, master). Mahjubi played the piano for Golha Radio, the national Iranian radio station. He was illiterate but used his own writing system for the works he performed (see Farshadfar, 2017: 40).

Shahrदार made a recording for British Columbia in 1933.<sup>26</sup> It is a pianistic improvisation, based on a particular modal musical entity of the Iranian system, the so-called “*dastgāh*”. Because of its duration, it occupies both sides of the 78-rpm disc. The instrument is prepared: on the one hand, it has been tuned in a different way, and on the other hand, it seems that Shahrदार has interfered with the hammers and/or the strings, in order to reduce the natural echo that occurs after the impact of the hammers on the strings. Improvisation is supposed to be based on specific classical compositions. Shahrदार’s mastery is evident: he possesses a remarkable micro-technique, with clear variations, rapid changes of the right-hand positions on the keyboard, coloring that gives a touch of expressionism to the narrative, but he also does not hesitate to show his other influences, one of these is arpeggios, which he often uses. Some parts of the improvisation are rhythmic, which

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Ghazal Nazerfasihi: <https://youtu.be/97cC8r4jsp0>. Indeed, the look at the Steinway & Sons logo, listening at the same time to the different tuning, can offer room for extensive analysis.

<sup>26</sup> *Rāst-Panjgāh*, Columbia PPX 1 – OX 9-1 / OX 10-1 / WOX 9, Teheran, June 1933: <https://youtu.be/kIboD3npMoc>.

Shahrdar seems to particularly enjoy. He moves the melodic lines from one hand to the other, creates a form of *iso* (drone) in the high range but also a bass rhythmic *iso*, building a peculiar “groove”. In other parts of the improvisation, he introduces responses to small patterns performed in other areas of the keyboard, and often uses trills and appoggiaturas more in a sense to create sound effects, than to embellish the melodies.

We also found a different tuning in Lebanon. The first attempts to construct a piano with different tuning were made by Wadih Sabra (1876–1952) in 1922, while living in France. In fact, Sabra presented the instrument he constructed at the conference in Cairo in 1932. These attempts were taken over by Abdallah Chahine, (1894–1975), with studies in music as well as in construction and maintenance of pianos. Chahine designed a not equal-tempered instrument, which was eventually built in Vienna by the Hoffman factory in collaboration with the Renner factory in Stuttgart. He used two additional foot pedals with which he was able to quickly change the tuning on the instrument. Chahine made some recordings on the original instrument he had kept in Lebanon. The recordings were made around 1960, which were released on LP in 1965, under the title “Al-nagham al-khaled: Angham min alsharq”.<sup>27</sup> These are improvisations on theoretical modal music entities. After the improvisations, specific works are performed, accompanied by a percussion instrument. Here too we find the technique that tries to imitate the kanun. All these attempts at imitation give the impression of frantically searching for a way to modernize the old, but without losing the references to it. Chahine’s rendition of the improvisational parts is simple, showing that his interest revolves around keeping the proper development of the taxim. In the parts of the more specific works/compositions, paradoxically, which follow the improvisations, he seems to free himself more, using a variety of embellishment techniques, with which he enriches the main melody performed by the right hand, with the left sometimes following by performing the same melodies and sometimes adhering to a more rhythmic role.

The last case to be examined is that of Colea Serban, a Romanian gypsy (1924–1974). Serban comes from a musical family, which during World War II changed their name to Serbanescu in order to sound more Romanian than gypsy. His brother, Gregor (1907–1997), was one of the most famous violinists of the period, while their father, Andrei, who introduced them to music, was a cimbalom player. Colea joined Gregor’s orchestra and they soon settled permanently in the Netherlands, where they studied music and became active professionally. Colea was a keen player, who was aware of his virtuosity, evidently granted to him by his classical studies to a degree, but also by the tools he acquired through the condition of orality. The familiarity he had with the folk environment is clear from the recordings and videos he left behind.

Around 1960 recordings were made for the Fontana label. It seems that the same material was also used for the production of visual material. Serban participates as a soloist along with a cimbalom and they are accompanied by a symphony-style orchestral ensemble, all dressed in folkloric Romanian attire.

Among others, they record the famous “hora morii”, or “hora de la moara” or “la moara la harta-scarta”. The specific context of the performance of the famous hora, known also in Greek repertoire as the *karotseris*,<sup>28</sup> is an adaptation of the first rhapsody of George Enescu,

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<sup>27</sup> “Oriental Bouquet”, Parlophone, XCV0X 83 / 334 – LPVDX 134, 1965: <https://bit.ly/3h4OGS4>.

<sup>28</sup> For more details see Kokkonis (2017: 148).

who included the melody in his work, noting that he heard it in this way from the lăutari, that is, the gypsies who were mostly Romanian folk professional musicians. The new element added in relation to Enescu's work? The taxim in the middle, where Serban shows, perhaps, that in this way the work is now complete. At the same time, the great cimbalom master keeps the rhythm for the taxim performed by the piano.<sup>29</sup>

## Epilogue

In this article we have attempted a general overview of the available categories and types of documentation, regarding the research concerning the presence and the role of the piano in eastward historical discography. The overview was accompanied by samples of these types of documentation. In the future, the indexing and validation of these sources will greatly contribute to the crystallization of the image of the instrument in this research. In addition, we wanted to cite a sample of the recording corpus that has been collected so far, in order to demonstrate the repertoire range and the diversity observed in performance practices. The piano, like other instruments in folk orchestras, has built its own identities in terms of ways of performing. Folk musicians "pulled" it towards the aesthetics of the repertoires they served each time, they adopted it and built new languages of expression. Clearly, the whole issue is directly related to several key chapters, such as social and technological developments, within a long in duration and big in geographical dispersion historical context, which starts from the industrial revolution and reaches up to the birth of the nation-states and the phenomena observed in their own histories. Regarding the historical discography, although as mentioned the research has advanced a lot, there are many and, in many cases, perhaps unsolvable problems, such as finding the names of the protagonists who took part in the recordings, but also of course the indexing and validation of as large a volume of recordings as possible. The piano, like the repertoires in general, displays "parallel lives", depending on the location where the recordings take place. This is an extremely serious issue, as repertoires are performed in different aesthetic terms in each region, which opens the door to even more research issues. Finally, the whole issue of the presence of the piano in these repertoires is not a museum-matter, with a beginning and an end. On the contrary, its presence and its diversity of expression is enriched over the years, and continues to play an active role in the more modern genres too. To this day, performance practices continue to shape and evolve in parallel with artistic trends, finding new avenues of expression.

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<sup>29</sup> Colea Serban, Enescu Rhapsody: [https://youtu.be/r\\_rLIBdv9vA](https://youtu.be/r_rLIBdv9vA).

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