

### The story of the “İstanbul laternası” project

Kalan.com

For nearly 3 years we have been engaged in a team effort to transfer Turkish folk and classical music to CDs under the Kalan label. The motivation behind these efforts has been the desire to protect the sound of the past from merciless time before it disappears completely.

At Kalan Music, we produce gramophone recordings. We had also undertaken a project concerning phonograph cylinders. The laterna album was to be the final portion of the trio. We plan to document and to archive our musical history from 1860 to 1965 by means of examples that perhaps do not exist anywhere else in the world. This laterna album is intended to achieve this goal and also to serve as the beginning of a Turkish film music project. In January 1999 we decided to begin with Yesilçam Music Archives' film of Haldun Dormen, *Güzel bir gün için* (“For a Beautiful Day”).

Necip Sarici, the founder of Yeni Lale film studio and an expert on sound recording of Turkish films for 40 years, informed us about film music that he had in his archives during a conversation. Of the film music that we listened to in our first meeting, one of the most unforgettable was the background music for *Güzel bir gün için* (“For a Beautiful Day”). According to Necip Sarici, this was an adventure film undertaken by Haldun Dormen in 1965. While using various places for the film, a laterna player was brought from a meyhane in Beyoglu's Balik Pazar area. Because nothing was known about the laterna player, no information was available as to the names of the pieces.

In the summer of 1998, we happened to travel to Athens. Stelyos Berberis and his friend Midillili Panos took us to the Greek Folk Music Museum in the Ethnomusicology Center, which was built at the foot of the Acropolis in Plaka. The instruments on display were those that had been collected, organized, and then donated to the Ministry of Culture, forming the basis for this excellent museum. At the top of the stairs which lead down to the lower floor of the museum there was a well-preserved and beautiful laterna. It was also fortuitous that the life story of a laterna player from Thessaloniki was portrayed in a documentary shown on the screen of a television which was set up in the middle of the museum. We sat on the floor with elementary-aged children and visitors to the museum and watched this very moving documentary.

During the following evening while walking about the streets of Plaka with Bülent Aksoy, we happened upon a badly-tuned and extremely “touristic” travelling laterna. Our greatest discovery for our insistent search for our laterna CD was made on the last day. Due to this album we met the great laterna master, Nikos Armaos of Istanbul.

#### For a Beautiful Day

Not being able to learn the identity of the usta who played laterna in the movie spoiled our mood. We found Haldun Dormen, the director and producer of the movie. In the space of two hours, Mr Dormen procured the photographs and documents that we are presenting here, but he was unable to assist us in the subject of the laterna. The negatives of the film were lost and there was no copy.

For us, the greatest struggles in the studio were changes in the order and the extension of the pieces to one and a half and two and a half minutes. What saved us in the end was finding the names of the pieces. The ones that we found and were able to make fit were those names which were derived from known dance tunes. The only melody which we

were able to recognize and that had a known name was “Bu ne sevgi ah, bu ne istirap”. This melody, which was beloved and made famous by Abdullah Yuce, constitutes a good example of a contemporary popular song adapted by the laterna. Inspired by Turconi, we named the first piece in Neapolitan style *Alla Turconi*.

### **What is a laterna?**

The invention of the Edison phonograph in 1878 was the culmination of the never-ending search to find a way to record the human voice. In 1887 Emil Berliner made a more developed model of the phonograph which can be considered to be the gramophone – as well as the first gramophone record. This new discovery made it possible for people to hear music at any place and at any hour of the day. You no longer had to find a musician and depend on his whims in order to create a musical environment. The best singers and the largest ensembles sang and played for you. You could listen to the same song repeatedly, or instead of listening to them again, you could put your records away in a corner.

The idea of a “musician-less” mechanical musical instrument was one of mankind’s *idéés fixes*. In the 10th century a church instrument called “organistrum” was developed. Used in poor neighborhoods that had no musicians, and in village churches, over time this instrument was developed into the forerunner of the organ and pianoforte. The hurdy-gurdy is another such mechanized instrument. Since the end of the 19th century, Europe was the center of these types of mechanical instrument. Names such as barrel piano, *calliope*, *pianoforte a cilindro*, handle organ and *laterna* were given to these types of instruments.

### **A new kind of laterna music**

Turconi progressed to the production of lanternas and the cylinders which wrote Istanbul laterna melodies. Ustas (masters) called “stambadori” were able to program all kinds of songs, dances, and instrumental melodies by mounting pins onto a cylinder which was made out of linden (flamouri) wood. Nine distinct melodies of 60-70 second duration were rolled up into a cylinder, and these were played over again by returning to the beginning and repeating the melody.

The laterna, a mechanical instrument which repeated programmed melodies, first appeared in Istanbul at the end of the 19th century. This type consisted of the laterna and a “çivili laterna” (laterna with pins). The çivili laterna was a model developed by the Swiss Aristide Janivier in 1776. A Levantine by the name of Guiseppe Turconi began to sell lanternas which he imported from Italy in his shop on Bankalar Caddesi (Banker’s Street) in Istanbul’s district. Naturally these lanternas were programmed to play Italian melodies and waltzes. There was much interest in this instrument, especially in cities such as Izmir, Siros, Island, Piraeus and Thessaloniki where there were large populations of Italian Levantines. Soon this instrument became indispensable to Greek communities which also lived in these cities and were partial to entertainment and dancing.

At some point Greeks adopted the laterna. The most significant impact of this fusion was the replacement of imported melodies from Italy with dance pieces such as hasapiko, serviko, zeybekiko and syrto. Masters working along with Turconi learned the essence of his work and overcame difficulties in adapting the laterna to some traditional pieces. It was not easy to set an Eastern musical scale system on an instrument tuned according to the Western scale system. Melodies produced for Western urban music lovers did not hold much appeal for Eastern people. It was inevitable that the melodies had to be changed. As a result of the realization of this change, the laterna acquired an unbelievable degree of popularity in the days before the spread of the gramophone. In *meyhanes* (taverns), in the countryside and in Greek religious festivals called *panegyris* which were celebrated one after the other, the laterna constituted the mainstay of musical entertainment, replacing performances by live musical ensembles.

### **The laterna provided portable music**

The compartment in which the cylinder turned was called the *hazne* (chamber) or *sandık* (trunk). The tips of the pins which were set into motion began to rotate with the turning of the arm located in the front of the *sandık*, lifting the felt-covered hammers – just like those used in the piano – thus creating a melody by striking the strings.

When the arm (*manivela*) located on the left side of the chamber was pulled back, the contact points or position of the pins changed and another melody began to be audible. By making an adjustment in the partition alongside the cylinder, it was possible to skip from the third piece to the eighth, thus changing the programmed order. The side facing of the cylinder was subdivided into nine sections. By pulling back the arm, it was brought to the level of the desired song. Turning the location of the interchangeable cylinder caused different melodies to be played. It was possible to ruin the melody when rolling a cylinder which was not positioned well. In order to adjust the rotation speed while turning the cylinder, it was necessary to keep in rhythm. There was also a “*zil*” (small cymbal) located in the *hazne* (chamber) which added depth and color to the melody. The *usta* who turned the laterna struck the cymbal in the rhythm of the piece, and this sound mixed in with the melody.

The name of the perpendicular section in which the piano wires were stretched was called *balkon* (balcony). This was made of maple wood, the same material used for instruments such as the violin, cello and viola. The middle section of the *balkon* was usually decorated with an Orientalist-style portrait of a woman. Decorated as it was with items such as beads, artificial flowers and flags according to the taste of the owner, this instrument had a festive appearance, sometimes resembling an altar. In fact, this decorated section served as a resonance chamber, creating a resonance similar to instruments such as the guitar, ‘ud, and tambur.

### **Playing the laterna**

The *rombia* was a larger version of the laterna. This instrument was manufactured by an Italian firm. With the boast that it had “18,000 pins” in its cylinder and able to play “seventeen different melodies,” it could not be carried on the back but had to be transported in a cart due to its weight.

The laterna had a hanging strap attached to the back of the *balkon* by which the laterna was carried on the laterna player’s back. The laterna was opened and closed, and there was a tradition of playing the instrument by setting it on a thin-legged tripod whose legs were turned on a lathe.

### **The laterna ensemble**

These same leg shapes were found in Piraeus, Izmir and Istanbul. The laterna ensemble usually consisted of two people. While the *usta* turned the laterna, his assistant struck a *def* (frame drum) decorated with cloth ribbons with the back of his hand. The assistant also swayed with steps to accompany the increased volume of the melody from the laterna, invited the listeners to dance, and participated in the dance which was done. In some situations, a prepared spare cylinder was inserted. Thus with the enlarged repertoire, it was possible to dance for hours. The laterna cylinder was programmed with dances such as waltz, fox-trot, tango, syrto, serviko, hasapiko, kalamatiano, fast waltzes and popular songs of the day.

### **The master and his assistant**

Although the American researcher Petrides wrote, “the laterna was played in the palace of Sultan Abdülhamit II and the Padişah rewarded laterna players with gold”, it is more likely that the laterna was perceived as a “street entertainment instrument” rather than being welcomed into select circles. Many *stambaci* and laterna players who lived during Turconi’s time continued the heyday of the laterna in other countries such as Albania,

Serbia, Romania and Egypt. While not finding acceptance in select circles, the laterna was beloved and acquired a close following of the common people. One of Turconi's apprentices, Fotios Fotun, established a laterna workshop in the area close to the train station in Thessaloniki, which he developed for mass production with his partner Evimos Polikarpos. Other important laterna players of Thessaloniki include Tomas Cimuris from Asagi Tumbali, Dimitro Kapiris from Izmir (b. 1908), Manolis Karacis from Pontus (b. 1907), Yorgos Kasteropulos from Istanbul (b. 1902). In fact, most of these masters were primarily Istanbulites who migrated to Greece after the population exchange of 1923.

### **Grand master Nikos Armaos**

In Piraeus, Istanbul-born Nikos Armaos dedicated his life to this instrument and was probably the greatest master of all time. Thus the Istanbul laterna came to life again in Athens. Armaos organized, collected and made new arrangements of many zeybek and kasap melodies. He added some "2,000 works, of which the majority were his own compositions that were not drawn from songs" by attaching pins. Nikos Armaos was recorded on two LP records in Greece; he died in Athens in May 1979 at the age of 90.

The spread of the gramophone after 1940 caused the laterna to be forgotten. Hacidakis, the famous composer who felt a great interest in 1955 for traditional music and played a significant role in the rediscovery of rebetiko music, contemporized the laterna. Armaos wrote music for the film "*Laterna, Poverty and Honour*" (*Laterna Ftochia ke Filiotimo*). The laterna was modernized at that time but this development did not deter its inevitable demise.

+++++

### **INTERVIEW WITH NIKOS TEMIZIS**

Recorded Sunday 14 March 1999 :: The Balikli Rum Hospital Home for the Elderly

Mr. Niko, can we know some things about you such as where you are from and where were you born?

In Arnavutköy. I'm Niko Temizis from Arnavutköy.

Do you remember which year it was?

1320 (1902). The new calendar system came later.

Okay Kir Niko. How many siblings did you have?

My father was a fisherman. We were 6 children. All have died over time, of course. Only I have remained. I'm the last child. All are buried. We lived in the market district. There was a school. We lived behind the school. At No. 10 Kirechane street...

Where did you play the laterna?

Everywhere. In Arnavutkoy, Kucuksu, Cengelkoy. They picked me up and brought me to Ankara by plane. I was everywhere. I played at a panayir for one month... I slept and woke up there.

Okay, where was the last place that you played?

The last place was at the saray Club in Kurucesme. In the middle of the sea. I last played there. Then I quit.

Can you remember what the date was?

It was a long time ago.

Okay, who attached the pins? Who inscribed the songs onto the cylinder?

There were other masters who did the pins. There was Polikarpos. There was Stamati.

Where were their work places?

Some lived in Ortakoy. Some lived in Beyoglu. Some in Saray. Then there was Yorgos in Yedikule. He had a laterna. There was Dikran. Then there was an Armenian by the name of Cakir from Ankara. Keram Cakir. He lived in Kasimpasa.

Did Armenians make laternas?

Yes, they did. At that time there were a lot of masters. Also by the police station as you go down to Dolapdere (Kalyoncu Kulluk Sokagi). There was a laterna maker by the name of Pandelis near the Aya Kostantin and Helene church. He did the pins. Another one was Dimitro of Dolapdere... I knew many of them. They invited me to play everywhere.

There was master in Yenikoy.

Yes. Father and son were carpenters. But I can't remember their names.

Okay. What about Yorgos Rondis?

He was my friend. I worked together with Yorgos Rondis. He died here.

When was this?

It was a long time ago. Rondis was a very good man. He distributed food to the poor in Kurtulus.

What tunes did your laterna play?

It had both Turkish and Greek songs. It had *Konyali*, *Adanali*, *Uskudar'da bir yagmur vardi*. [*Uskudara gider iken...Katibim*] When the tunes got old we put in new ones. We had money. When a new song came out we'd go and listen to it before anyone else and before anyone else bought it we'd buy it. We called the laterna "organo", that is, *calgi* (instrument).

Did you pay a lot of money for new songs?

Eh! but at that time we earned a lot of money. As soon as Turconi made a new song we went right away and got it. Just like for the gramophone; we'd change the cylinder just like putting on a new record.

Was there someone who played def?

I played and danced at the same time. When I got tired I'd switch arms. I'd turn (the laterna) and my friend played *def*.

Okay, did you go and play in movies? Did they ever film you?

Of course we did a lot of movies. They filmed me.

Where?

When we were working in the Kurtulus gazino (Kurtulus Club.)

So, when you were playing did they film you or did they only do a sound recording?

They filmed us while we were playing. We played in a lot of movies.

Did you only give them music, or did you go to the studio and play for them?

I can't remember. We played in movies.

Okay, let's talk about Turconi. Did you know Turconi?

Of course. He was actually Italian. They call the real laternas Turconi. Turconi is the one who taught us this profession.

Where was Turconi's shop?

There was a Greek consulate right beside him. He had a large apartment for himself. This means that he moved there afterwards.

Okay, did Turconi have a shop in the Persembе Pazar area? It was in Karakoy. Do you know about this?

No, I don't remember this. I remember the large apartment by the Greek consulate.

Okay, were laternas made in Istanbul? Or did they only attach the pins?

Of course, of course. Turconi did this. Of course, of course.

You mean, only the pins were attached?

That was a different *usta* (master). Turconi brought in wood from Romania for reinforcement. He needed this. He brought wood by boat. I say this now as we heard this from other *ustas*. His actual business was the laterna. Turconi made them. He was a teacher. He played the songs with his mandolin and then transferred the song to the cylinder.

Okay, did Turconi sell pianos?

Of course, he sold pianos.

Did you ever play laterna at the panayirs in Tatavla?

Of course.

When?

A long time ago.

How many laternas were at the Tatavla panayirs?

Many. At that time it was cheap.

Are there any photographs left over from the panayir?

At that time we didn't think this stuff was very important. No.

Okay, how did you dance? Other than the *def* that you were holding what else did you hold? For instance, [did you hold] *tesbih* (prayer beads)?

I had a *tesbih*. An amber *tesbih*. We carried the laterna, played it and danced about.

Who played the laterna the best?

Who ever was interested in it could play. The tempo had to move along well. That's what it took.

How did the laterna affect people when it was played?

The laterna was a very sweet instrument but the time for us has passed. It became out-moded. One group of laternas went to Athens and very few were left here. Now the laternas aren't worth much...Now there are cassette recordings. There are cassette players. The laterna isn't worth much anymore.

A laterna cassette is about to come out. Is this a good thing?

Could be. If it was up to me, of course it's a good thing. To someone else, it would be a different matter...

Is it possible to say that the laterna was hard to play?

Yeahhh, very hard.

Is it easy to change songs? How many songs were there?

There were nine. The pins attached to the cylinder were essential. There were high pitched pins. The low pitched pins were separate.

Okay, what kind of feelings did the laterna create in people?

Now the laterna, there was *kanun* then the instrument played...it [the laterna] worked okay alongside [the *kanun*]. If it was another kind of music, it didn't work alongside the laterna. Whatever the customer wanted we put it on [played]. [When they said,] "Put on a kasap tune..." we put on a kasap tune.

That wasn't what I wanted to ask. I meant, what did you think about when you played the laterna. What did you feel?

Yes, [in Greek...] My Turkish isn't very good. You translate for me.

Music is food for the soul. Did you ever play *kanun*?

Nooo, I didn't play it.

Okay, did you earn money from this profession?

Eeee, of course we earned money from it. This work didn't go for free.

Were you able to support yourself on this work?

We got by, we got by. Of course...

Did you know other Greek musicians?

Yorgos Bacanos... We worked together on Buyukada Island. There was also Andreas who played accordion in Kurtulus.

Is it possible that you are the person playing laterna on the cassette that we played for you?

It's possible. I can't remember. We appeared in a lot of movies, in magazines... But he plays well. This must have been a cylinder made by Turconi [in the laterna playing in the film].

Do your days pass well here?

If we don't keep active here we would die. I make my own bed. I go downstairs. My feet move very slowly but sometimes I go to Arnavutkoy. My niece lives in Arnavutkoy also...

Thanks, Barba Niko...

Interviewers: Cemal Unlu, Stelyo Berberis

+++++

## **A Carnival Evening in Beyoglu**

by Ahmet Rasim

The first good news came from a laterna set up in front of a house. Men, women and a group of buffoons emerged from the house. A guy with a bear head attacked and drove away the neighborhood children. His hands were covered with gloves that had claws. He stuck a huge ring in his nose; a woman had a def in her hand, she hauled it along by pulling it by its chain.

The lanterns of the Sishane district police station illuminated the square which had been surrounded by a murky darkness. Again the laterna began to play. The dance began with the laterna. The barber danced the polka.

One part of this group continued to turn, with the hand of one on the waist of the other. With the naiveté of that time I understood the security guaranteed by a mask: if there had been no mask one did not dance in public, even in the night-time. The one in the bear costume also danced. All of the sudden, a loud muttering was heard. This man who appeared to be chained but who was in fact the leader of the group apparently gave a command.

The laterna immediately stopped playing and led the way. The gang began to dance while walking behind him. During this, our barber mixed in with the crowd but he was not brave enough. (...) We saw something leave which was decorated with candles alongside the road when we approached the front of the city hall. This was another procession which imitated a ship... There was a smokestack, smoke, cauldron, the captain's seat and paddle-wheels which moved along above wheels. There was a man in a ceremonial Captain of the Greek Guards costume [a type of fostenella] with thick, tasselled padded shoulders and hanging loosely on his long waist; his fes rakishly tilted as much as possible; the moustache two finger lengths in width and bushy as a brush; in the waist area of the coat hangs an old horse pistol. He yelled out a command and passengers boarded and disembarked from the boat as it stops. Why would our barber stay behind? ...

He also got on board. He got on but then quickly disembarked. Those who didn't wear masks were not allowed on this ship.

Another procession could be seen from behind...Six porters carrying three poles were in front; on each side there were two lantern bearers... They carried only a single egg... The load was very heavy; so heavy that even in this cold weather the porters seemed to gleam as if they were drenched in sweat; every other step they would stop and rest. Upon the command of the captain at one point, the laterna passed to the front. This string of fifty or sixty people danced along while walking.

...Just then the buffoons riding horseback comprised of eight or ten riders suddenly appeared. These were even more marvelous, even more decorated. In front of these were a lavta (lute), an accordion and a Cigirtma (folk flute). The entire procession sang, "Of aman aman Eleni". Another group appeared from the same side with their real laternas held in front, they came twistingly along. The street was filled to capacity. [...]

These extreme types amassed together, one after another: the porters carrying the egg; the guy with the Easter costume with the bell hung between his two horns; the Gypsy women with baskets on their arms; among them other zurnas, laternas; one with a painted face mounted backwards on a donkey; a long pointed mosaic hat. 20 or 30 drinks and one or two trays of food emerged from each one of the meyhanes in the vicinity. We were surrounded by songs that were sung whether or not they suited the melodies played by the various instruments, the loud cries, the "Hallos" and "Heys" that were yelled out and the clamoring and shouting.

[English translation by Sonia Tamar Seeman]

### **The Tatavla Carnival**

The Greek population of Istanbul was most well-known for the Tatavla district's traditional carnival celebration held every year just before the "Great Fast". Even though it may be erased from the memories of elderly Istanbulites today, and although Turks did not experience this festival much, many things were heard about these celebrations. (...) According to prevailing opinion, the roots of carnival celebrations reach back to the festivals of Dionysus and Poseidon of Ancient Greece. This tradition was in great demand in Italy, particularly in Venice during the Middle Ages, and spread to the Greek Islands of the Ionian Sea which had close relations with Venice. The carnival ritual spread as far as Anatolia via these islands which maintained connections to large port cities of the Eastern Mediterranean such as Istanbul, Izmir, Alexandria and other areas which had large Greek communities.

"Along with finding carnival entertainment much beloved by Istanbul Greeks in the Galata and Pera districts, the first place that comes to mind when mentioning carnival in Istanbul is Tatavla. The carnival celebrations which the Istanbul Greeks called "Apokria" lasted for days. It was held at the end of February or the beginning of March according to the changing calendar, and without exception extended until the "Kathera Deftera" day on Monday, ending on this day. After the day which the Istanbulites called "Baklahorani", everyone stayed inside their houses, and awaited the coming of Great Easter, passing time by fasting and in religious observance."

On the day of Kathera Deftera [Clean Monday], Greeks would flood in from other districts of Istanbul and celebrate with all their hearts as did as the people of Tatavla in taverns and gazinos such as Ararat, Panorama, Akropolis, Paris and Lemonia. Ladies of easy virtue from streets of ill repute traversed the road to Tatavla from Dolapdere to Akarça street accompanied by lanterns wearing their carnival costumes, some on horseback, some walking, laughing and being merry in groups. These women had to wear a special costume in order to distinguish them from other women. Usually they wore velvet tailor-made suits and short velvet pants; sailor hats made out of the same material



embroidered with silver braid, with black stockings completing their outfits. They always covered their faces with a mask made out of velvet and silk.

In the book entitled *Loksandra*, Maria Yordanidu describes Tatavla carnival as follows: "As for the young men of Tatavla, they performed dances particular to Istanbul Greeks. At the beginning of the festive rejoicing, the merry melodies and that year's popular songs of Barba Todori's laterna could be heard.

Eleni Halkusi also mentioned the Tatavla carnival: "The celebrations which began in Galata and Pera would have parades that ended in Tatavla. Young men dressed in Greek costume called fostenella would dance Greek dances such as sirto and kasapiko, accompanied by the much-beloved instrument of the time, the laterna."

Content generated and edited by Cemal Ünlü and Stelyo Berberis

---

The following laterna recordings can be found on the YouTube channel of kalan.com at <https://www.youtube.com/c/kalanmusicofficial>

- 1 . Alla Turconi
- 2 . Kasap havasi
- 3 . Bu ne sevgi ah
- 4 . Ciftetelli
- 5 . Zeybek havasi (slow)
- 6 . Zeybek havasi
- 7 . Serviko (fast kasap havasi)
- 8 . Alla Turconi

**NOTE:** The illustrations from the CD have not been included here.