

CHAPTER 4

Considerations in the compilation of a rebetika CD

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So far as the compiler is aware, *The Rough Guide to Rebetika* was the first attempt to give a notionally complete, representative overview of the trajectory and development of *rebetika* on a single, commercial CD. Existing compilations have tended to focus either on a single artist or a single sub-genre within *rebetika* (e.g. *hasiklídhika*).

The task was constrained at the outset by various ground rules imposed by the UK-based record label undertaking the project, World Music Network (WMN), concerning play time, track-source labels and licensing territories. The album was to be no less than 65 minutes but no more than 74 minutes in duration – although the company admitted they could be flexible, as they previously had produced compilations of up to 77 minutes (as the 80-minute limit of commercial blank CDs is approached, the risk of write failure increases notably – a disaster if you’ve 5,000 defective pressings).

WMN was unable to license tracks from any of the “major” labels, which include EMI, Universal, Sony, BMG Ariola and their various (and numerous) subsidiaries. This is because when you license tracks from the “majors” they must be licensed for every worldwide territory individually – a financially and logistically unfeasible task. A label like WMN which engages principally in compilations typically has one employee who does little other than correspond with overseas record labels, negotiating licensing fees and exchanging contracts.

Unfortunately, EMI/Minos/Regal in Greece are classified as “major” labels, which meant that almost the entire 1950s discography of post-war figures like Ioanna Yiorgakopoulou and Sotiria Bellou – as well as Vassilis Tsitsanis and Marika Ninou – performing at their prime, would be “off limits”. Some later material for Bellou and Tsitsanis was available on “minor” labels, but I decided that it would be better to pass on this than mar the compilation with markedly inferior tracks. The dominance of Minos/EMI also extended back into the pre-World War II period, which made availability of many Markos Vamvakaris songs problematic. Also, the entire backlist of Adherfi Falirea/Falirea Brothers, though now owned by Lyra/General Publishing, proved unavailable owing to the nature of the deal which the surviving Falirea brother had done with Lyra when he dissolved his own company – I only learned this after preparing the demo.

Besides having to work within the above (severe!) limitations, my own general criteria at the outset were:

- a minimum of 22 tracks, and CD to be filled as much as practicable to its physical limit – thus a bias towards short tracks (under 3:40), so as to profile more performers in perhaps 23 tracks
- as even a balance as possible between male and female vocalists
- no composer or performer should feature more than twice, so that as many influential figures as possible could appear
- no sub-genre (e.g. *amanédhes* or *hasiklídhika*) to be disproportionately represented (this proved the hardest rule to adhere to, owing to my own predilections and vagaries of the licensing process)
- as much as possible, sourcing from CDs which were themselves worthwhile as a whole, not just the chosen track, as source CDs would be promoted pictorially on the WMN CD sleeve

- insomuch as possible, a number of “classics”, and not just obscure songs for the sake of it
- a fair variation in rhythms and modes, ie not just *zeibékika*
- instruments other than *bouzouki* and *baglamás*, eg accordion, *sandoúri* and guitar, should all get a look-in
- reasonable sound quality (since no re-mastering would be available, tracks had to be used “as is”)
- and last but not least, the entire period from the late 1950s until the mid-1970s revival could be omitted, because listeners would merely learn far more about the bad taste of the *bouzouki* clubs of that era than about *rebetika*.

First redaction:

With these criteria in mind, a few hundred songs from all eras (excluding those two decades) were listened to exhaustively by myself to form a short list. After several weeks, the finalists, duly committed to a demo CD in this order, were:

- 1) Marika & Gus Papaghika, “Galata Manes” (1926) from *Marika Papaghika: Greek Music in New York, 1918–1929* (Alma Criolla Records).
- 2) Andonis “Dalgas” Dhiamandidhis: “Manes Tseryiah” (1929), from *Dalgas 1928–1933* (Heritage Records).
- 3) Grigoris Asikis, “Nini” (1930), from *Unknown recordings of songs from Smyrna 1922–1940* (FM Records).
- 4) Rosa Eskenazi, comp. Emmanouil Khrysafakis, “Iy Tsapina sti Rafina” (1932?), from *USA Authentic Rebetika* on Falirea Bros/Lyra-MBI.
- 5) Dalgas (Andonis Dhiamandidhis), “Enas Mangas Hasiklis” (1931) from *Dalgas, 1928-1933* (Heritage).
- 6) Rita Abatzi, “O Xemangas” (comp. Vangelis Papazoglou; 1935), from *Rita Abatzi 1933–38* (Heritage).
- 7) Evangelos Papazoglou comp., Kostas Roukounas vocal, “Marika Hasiklou” (1932), from *Rebetiko Songs 1933-1940* (FM Records).
- 8) Rita Abatzi (comp. “Salonikios” Semsis), “Ta Hanumakia” (late 1930s), from *Greek Oriental Rebetika* (Arhoolie/Polylyric).
- 9) Stratos Payioumtzis, “Rast Neva” (1937), (from Heritage’s *Rebetika in Pireaus Volume 1*.
- 10) Rosa Eskenazi, “Enas Mangas sto Teke mou (1934), from Heritage’s *Lost Homelands*.
- 11) Markos Vamvakaris, “Mavra Matia Mavra Fidhia”, with Kostas Roukounas (1936) from *Markos Vamvakaris, Bouzouki Pioneer* (Rounder Records).
- 12) Yiorgos Kavouras (1938), “Mia Varkoula tha Navlaso”, from *My Only Consolation* (Rounder Records).
- 13) Stratos Payioumtzis (Batis composition) : “Zeibékano Spaniólo (Zoula, Vre, se mia Barka Bika) ”, (1936), from Heritage’s *Rebetika in Piraesus Part I*.
- 14) Stellakis Perpiniadhes, “Yelasmenos” (date unknown), from *Authentic USA Rebetika* (Falirea Bros, now Lyra/MBI).
- 15) Panayiotis Toundas, Kostas Roukounas singing, “Kouvenda me ton Haro” (1936), from Trikont’s double CD compilation.
- 16) Ioannis Papaïoannou & Dhimitris Perdhikopoulos, “Kapetan Andhreas Zeppo”, (1945), from *Songs of the Sea* (FM Records).

- 17) Yiorgos Katsaros, “Mas Pigane Exoria” (1947), from *Moumourika* (Rounder Records).
- 18) Ioannis Papioannou comp., K. Manesis: “Pende Ellines ston Adhi” (1947), from the Trikont double set.
- 19) Apostolos Kaldharas comp., Markos Vamvakaris singing: “Mangas Vyike yia Seryiani” (1946), from *Vassilis Tsitsanis* (Rounder Records).
- 20) Apostolos Kaldharas comp., Stella Haskil voice: “Nykhtose Horis Fengari” (1947), from the Trikont double CD.
- 21) Marika Ninou with Tsitsanis (comp.), “Gülbahar” (1955), from *Stou Tzimi tou Hondrou*, (Venus-Tzina Records).
- 22) Spyros Peristeris, comp., Rebetiki Kompania performing, “Bouzouki mou Dhiplokordho” (1979), from *Pos tha Perasi iy Vradhyia* (Zodiac, now owned by Lyra).
- 23) Vassilis Tsitsanis comp., Opisthodomiki Kompania performing, Eleftheria Arvanitaki vocals, “Iy Sarah” (1982), from *Stis Xanthis, sto Eyinitio, sto Armatogogo ‘Kos’* (Lyra Records).

Total time 74:32

WMN’s initial reaction was broadly favourable, but they had one major objection: the “play list” was too “archival” and gave little sense that *rebetika* was still in any way a living tradition. They said they had faced this same issue with their blues collections, and gave me the option of making the compilation completely archival, i.e. pre-1960s, or revamping the track balance to be at least one-third performers active since the 1970s. After consideration, I agreed to a rethink along the latter lines, especially since there was in fact a serious imbalance between male and female vocalists, and arguably too many *hasiklidhika* and *amanédhes*.

Second redaction:

After some more weeks of buying and borrowing more potential source CDs, listening and reshuffling, what we hoped was the final track list looked like this:

- 1) Marika & Gus Papaghika, “Galata Manes” (1926) from *Marika Papaghika: Greek Music in New York, 1918–1929* (Alma Criolla Records).
- 2) Andonis “Dalgas” Dhiamandidhis: “Manes Tseryiah” (1929), from *Dalgas 1928–1933* (Heritage Records).
- 3) Grigoris Asikis, “Nini” (1930), from *Unknown recordings of songs from Smyrna 1922–1940* (FM Records).
- 4) Rosa Eskenazi singing, composed by Kostas Tzovenos, “Nea Meraklou” (1933), from *Rosa Eskenazi 1933–1938* (Heritage).
- 5) Rita Abatzi (comp. “Salonikios” Semsis), “Ta Hanumakia” (late 1930s), from *Greek Oriental Rebetika*, (Arhoolie/Polylyric).
- 6) Stratos Payioumtzis, “Rast Neva” (1937), from *Rebetika in Piraeus Vol. 1* (Heritage).
- 7) Rosa Eskenazi, “Enas Mangas sto Teke mou” (1934), from Heritage’s *Lost Homelands*.
- 8) Markos Vamvakaris, “Mavra Matia Mavra Fidhia”, with Kostas Roukounas (1936) from *Markos Vamvakaris, Bouzouki Pioneer* (Rounder Records).
- 9) Stratos Payioumtzis (Batis comp.), “Zeïbekano Spaniolo (Zoula se mia Barka Bika)” (1936), from Heritage’s *Rebetika in Piraeus Part I* disc.

- 10) Panayiotis Toundas comp., Kostas Roukounas singing, “Kouvenda me ton Haro” (1936), from Trikont double-CD anthology.
- 11) Ioannis Papaïoannou & Dhimitris Perdhikopoulos, “Kapetan Andreas Zeppo” (1945), from FM Records’ *Songs of the Sea*.
- 12) Yiorgos Katsaros: “Mas Pigane Exoria” (1947), from *Moumourika* on Rounder Records.
- 13) Apostolos Kaldharas comp., Stella Haskil voice: “Nykhtose horis Fengari” (1947), from the Trikont double set.
- 14) Ioannis Papaïoannou, K. Manesis: “Pende Ellines ston Adhi” (1947), again from the Trikont set.
- 15) Apostolos Kaldharas comp., Markos Vamvakaris singing: “Mangas Vyike yia Seryiani” (1946), from *Vassilis Tsitsanis* on Rounder Records.
- 16) Marika Ninou, Takis Binis, Vassilis Tsitsanis “Ta Kavourakia” (1953), from *Greek Music Tradition to be Discovered: Vassilis Tsitsanis, Sotiria Bellou, Marika Ninou* on Musurgia Graeca/Lyra.
- 17) Marika Ninou with Tsitsanis (comp.), “Gülbahar” (1955), from *Stou Tzimi tou Hondrou* (Venus-Tzina Records).
- 18) Spyros Peristeris, comp., Rebetiki Kompania performing, “Bouzouki mou Dhiplokordho” (1979), from *Pos tha Perasi iy Vradhyia* (Zodiac, now owned by Lyra).
- 19) Vassilis Tsitsanis comp, Opisthodomiki Kompania performing, Eleftheria Arvanitaki vocals, “Iy Sarah” (1982), from *Stis Xanthis, sto Eyinitio, sto Armatogogo ‘Kos’* (Lyra)
- 20) Glykeria, “Stin Kalyva ti Dhiki Mou” (composer Yiorgos Mitsakis) from *Me tin Glykeria Sti Omorfi Nykhta* (Lyra; recording date 1983–84)
- 21) Assorted house band from Stoa Athanaton, Niki Trampa or Theodosia Stinga vocals, “Iy Pendamorfi”, Apostolos Hatzihristos comp., from *Mia Vradhya sti Stoa Athanaton* (on MBI records, 1993 release date).
- 22) Agathonas Iakovidhis, “Mes ton teke tis Marigos (variously attributed to Nikos Yeoryiadhis, or Spyros Peristeris), from *Tou Tekke ke tis Tavernas* (1996), on Eros Records.
- 23) Maryo, Kostas Vomvolos ensemble backing, “Pireotissa” (by Ioannis Papaïoannou), from *Laledakia* (Musurgia Graeca/Lyra, released 2000).

Total time: 73:06

The two-month-plus process of licensing undertaken by WMN itself uncovered various surprises, both pleasant and unpleasant – not all is as it seems with the existing recordings. Trouble was anticipated with the Heritage source discs, because most of them have recently gone out of print, but no difficulties in fact arose with Interstate Music, the parent company. Rounder Records, with whom WMN had worked on numerous occasions, was assumed to be plain sailing for the three requested songs, but in the event we got a curt refusal, with no explanation other than that they didn’t really own the rights to the tracks. I found, and find, this intriguing since the same person (Charlie Howard) prepared the source discs for both Heritage and Rounder. I’m not prepared to say anything further other than that any subsequent contretemps is now Interstate’s legal responsibility, not WMN’s.

Following Rounder’s declining to license Yiorgos Katsaros’ “Mas Pigane Exoria”, I decided it would be excellent to have a TB song (“Mana mou Eimai Fthisikos”), as I had overlooked this sub-genre. Eros Records was initially cooperative, even enthusiastically emailing me a lengthy biography of Katsaros, but then subsequently contacted WMN saying there was a problem with certain overseas territories, and couldn’t license the

song. So on very short notice we had to source the Trikont disc again for a third-choice Yiorgos Katsaros track, which meant yet another *hasiklídhika* which wasn't really desirable. Similarly, I was left with a very limited choice for anything featuring Markos Vamvakaris, and finally decided on one from an FM disc, as much for the clarity of the recording and the general worthiness of the disc as for the song itself.

Since Eleftheria Arvanitaki had become a big star, and changed record labels two or three times, Lyra no longer had the right to license the 1982 track from her relatively humble beginnings as a *rebetika* revivalist, leaving us short of 1950s/Tsistanis material. Then Venus-Tzina insisted we license a minimum of three tracks from *Marika Ninou stou Tzimi tou Hondrou* for a whopping sum, which wasn't tenable. Not only were we now seriously bereft of love songs/orientalia/exotica, we had lost access to one of the very few live recordings of 1950s *rebetika*. At this point I was beginning to understand why there are so many collections of 1920s and 1930s material – not just because foreign audiences like them, but also because they are relatively easy to license. I remained keen to avoid the CD becoming a “compilation of the compilations”, with repeated recourse to Trikont etc, because one of the implicit purposes of WMN products is to showcase worthy single-artist or single-genre discs. In the end the only track performed during the 1950s would be an acceptable, acoustic version of “Ta Kavourakia” which just happened to be controlled by Lyra/General Publishing.

The copyright position for sound recordings early in the 20th century varies significantly from that applying to printed matter (which extends to 70 years after the death of the author). According to the legal officer at the NUJ, the term of protection in a sound recording expires 50 years after the end of the calendar year in which the recording was made or, if it is released within that period, 50 years from the end of the year of authorised release. Clearly many compilers, if they possess an original 78 of a certain age, can remaster and reissue it freely without referring to the original recording company or its successors if 50 years have passed. This accounts in part for the large number of rereleased recordings from before World War II. Often a particular version of a song is reissued by more than one company simultaneously, with considerable variation in sound quality – and ease of obtaining permission to relicense. I have been told – though WMN did not do this – that one common dodge is to obtain permission from an amenable company controlling an inferior recording, and then go ahead and duplicate a superior version that was not, strictly speaking, legally available.

Once the signed licensing contracts began to be returned, and confirmed tracks accumulated, I was given the go-ahead to begin writing the sleeve notes. The total word count was proposed to be 2500–2700 words in total, which worked out at an average of about 120 words per personality/song – barely enough for a potted biography of the artist and/or composer, and perhaps a few words about the song, never mind any lyrics. There also had to be an introductory paragraph or two about *rebetika*, designed to “hook in” people who were assumed to know nothing about the music. In the end I managed to cram in well over 3,000 words, including some translated stanzas, at the cost of a rather microscopic type font.

References for compiling the liner notes included Tassos Schorelis' four-volume set *Rebetiki Anthologia*, Petros Dragoumanos' massive catalogue of Greek discography *Odhigos Ellenikis Dhiskografias 1950–1997*, Gail Holst's *Road to Rebetika*, and Ilias Petropoulos' *Rebetika Tragoudhia* as sources, as well as the liner notes of the source (and other) discs themselves – and performer CVs/biogs sent by several record companies. Not surprisingly, these were frequently in conflict with each other as to “facts”. As examples, birth/death dates given often had discrepancies of up to a decade; on one disc (Mario's *Laledakia*), the composer for “Pireotissa” was given differently in the English and Greek notes, and Schorelis omits the particular song from his collection, so no help there; printed lyrics often did not match what was ostensibly the recorded version they were referring to. Frequently I had to don headphones and listen carefully yet again,

and/or make a judgment based on the balance of probabilities, i.e. three sources agreed and one (often Schorelis) dissented.

As the project progressed, the spelling of performer names emerged as a surprisingly contentious issue. Greek licensors in particular, as a condition of signing a contract with WMN, insisted on markedly eccentric renderings (eg Payioumidzis rather than Payioumtzis, Glikeria rather than Glykeria), which even conflicted with the transliterations used on their very own CD jackets (we rebelled, however, at the Germanic ‘Jannis Papaioannou’ used by Trikont, and settled on Yiannis as a compromise between that and Ioannis). Or they would insist on crediting particular soloists rather than groups (e.g. Dimitrianakis and Kontogiannis rather than Rebetiki Kompania).

The citation of song titles also proved to be problematic: FM Records was prepared to license “Psaropoula”, which was how they had entitled what everyone else calls “Kapetan Andreas Zeppo”, and in order to avoid confusion with the well-known Hydriot tune “Xekinaei mia Psaropoula” by Dimitris Gongos, WMN was prevailed upon to cite “Kapetan Andreas Zeppo” first, with “Psaropoula” following in brackets. The song entitled “Pira ti Strata ke Erhomai” on the Nena Venetsanou source disc is discussed as “Strose mou na Kimitho” in Gail Holst’s book, so since I wasn’t around when the song was new, and couldn’t authoritatively say how people of the time called it, and Schorelis was again of no assistance, I felt it best to again list both titles, one in brackets following.

The CD as finally produced varied significantly from the demo disc first presented to WMN, and not just in that nearly two-fifths of the tracks were second- or third-alternate choices for a particular artist, or completely new selections. Most obviously, it is no longer a strictly chronological survey of *rebetika* from the 1920s to the present day. WMN decided to present the initial five tracks of a total 22 “out of order” because they hope to entice radio DJs across Europe to give air time to these ostensibly “catchiest” songs, and thus boost sales. I reserved judgment on this point, and in fact was pleasantly surprised with the result. However at least one listener has already remarked that this makes the final track by Nena Venetsanou “not fit” with the preceding ones, something that wasn’t so evident when the Mario track was contiguous.

Third redaction:

The Final Play-List, artists and song titles as spelled on sleeve notes:

- 1: Roza Eskenazi, “Enas Mangas sto Teke Mou”
- 2: Manolis Dimitrianakis & Dimitris Kontogiannis (ie Rebetiki Kompania), “Bouzouki mou Diplohordo”
- 3: Mario, “Pireotissa”
- 4: Yiorgos Katsaros, “Mes’ tou Mantho to Teke”
- 5: Glikeria, “Stin Kaliva tin Diki mou”
- 6: Marika Papaghika, “Galata Manes”
- 7: Dalgas, “Manes Tsergiach”
- 8: Grigoris Asikis, “Nini”
- 9: Roza Eskenazi, “Nea Meraklou”
- 10: Rita Abatzi, “Ta Hanumakia”
- 11: Efstratios Payioumidzis, “Manes Rast Neva”
- 12: Kostas Roukounas, “Kouvenda me ton Haro”
- 13: Rita Abatzi, “O Xemangas”
- 14: Efstratios Payioumidzis, “Zeimbekano Spaniolo”

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- 15: Markos Vamvakaris, “Antonis Varkaris Seretis”, from *Anthology of Rebetiko Songs*, 1933–1940 (FM Records).
- 16: Yiannis Papaïoannou, “Kapetan Andreas Zeppo (Psaropoula)”
- 17: Stella Haskil, “Nykhtose Horis Fengari”
- 18: Yiannis Papaïoannou, “Pende Ellines ston Adi”
- 19: Marika Ninou, “Ta Kavourakia”
- 20: Theodosia Stinga, “I Pendamorfi”
- 21: Agathonas Iakovidis, “Mes’ ton Teke Tis Marigos”
- 22: Nena Venetsanou: “Pira ti Strata ki Erhome (Strose mou Na Kimitho)”, from *Zeibekika – Profane Prayers* (2000), on MBI Lyra Records.

Total time: 72:53

NOTE: Full discographic details for the CD, including artist biographies, can be found at:

<https://www.discogs.com/release/6527380-Variou-The-Rough-Guide-To-Reb%C3%A9tika>

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