

### **The SOAS Rebetiko Band – a (very) Brief History**

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In 2000 I started the Hydra Rebetiko Gatherings on the Greek island of Hydra. Each year we brought musicians to the island to perform an evening concert at the Douskos restaurant (Xeri Elia) in the centre of the port. Memorable music-making, but a place from which we have now been banned by Stavros Douskos, its new owner. The Gatherings also included conferencing activities, and some of the papers are represented in this present volume.

At this same time I also began translating the rebetological writings of Ilias Petropoulos, and at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London [SOAS] I began to run seminars on rebetiko music. This was done as the Institute of Rebetology, of which the vice-presidents were Costas Ferris and Martin Schwartz. I have continued to translate Petropoulos from that day to this. I am currently working on his *History of the Condom*.

It soon became apparent that in order to take the research work further we needed to create a rebetiko band. I was able to persuade the landlord of the Horseshoe pub in Farringdon to use his upstairs room for a regular rebetiko session, which for several years became a popular focus for Greek musicians in London.

Further down the line, students at the General Meeting of the Student Union at SOAS voted that “Monday Night is Rebetiko Night @ SOAS”. Moneys were allocated for the payment of musicians, and the SOAS bar became the location of joyous nights of music, singing and dancing. At that time there were many Greeks in London, escaping the economic crisis of the homeland.

I also organised international tours for the Band. These took us to Rovigo, Venice, Paris, and most notably Istanbul, where we played for the Greek community of that city. We also travelled to Calais, where we played for the refugee community camped in the port.

An important aspect of the Band is that it has always had a mixed composition, and among its members it has included Greeks, Cypriots and Turks – a fact that reflected the hybrid nature of rebetiko song over the decades.

At the time of the publication of this book, changes in the management structure at SOAS mean that we have been expelled from our Monday Nights @ SOAS (they have replaced us with a Quiz Night). The year 2023-24 is seen by students as “the death of live music at SOAS”. However, after some vigorous campaigning, it is possible that this will change.

Such is the energy of the SOAS band that we have now established bands in other cities. In the course of 2022-23 I helped to set up rebetiko bands in Oxford, Cambridge and Paris, which are flourishing and performing regularly, and another band is now forming in Cyprus with a view to staging a rebetiko festival on the island.

Many singers and musicians have passed through the SOAS Rebetiko Band over the years. Some have gone on to become famous. Others just enjoy the quiet pleasures of playing together in the company of others. Wherever you go you will meet Greeks who have passed through London and who have enjoyed our musics. We are proud of that, and we are proud to say that the music goes on...

**Όλοι οι ρεμπέτες του ντουρνιά...**

## Some Photos

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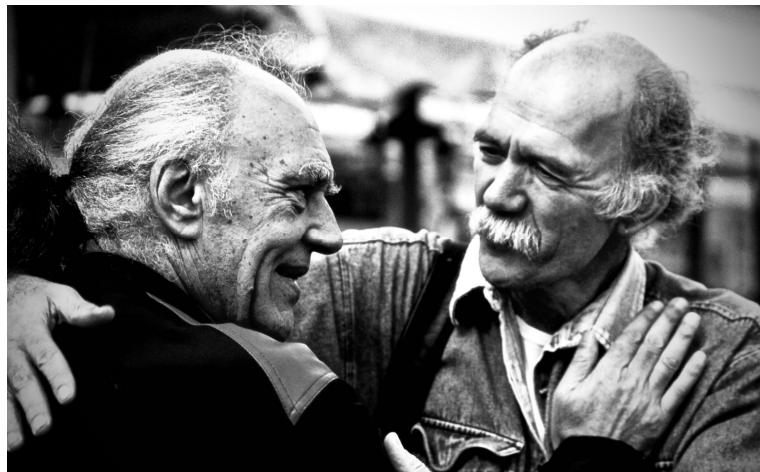
**Fig. 1:** A dignified *zeibekiko* in the SOAS Bar, with Spyros Bolovinis and Vicki Anastasiou.



**Fig. 2:** We bring 20+ musicians to Ertho Theatre to play for the Greeks of Istanbul.



**Fig 3.** Our friend Mr Doulis, the blind accordionist of Hydra.



**Fig. 4:** Stelios Vamvakaris joins us in Hydra.



**Fig. 5:** Our favourite *koutouki* in Hydra market. Later it was closed because they said it was being used as a brothel.



**Fig. 6:** At Talimhane, with Istanbul rebetiko devotees Ivi Dermanci and Muammer Ketencoglou.