

The New York Times : "Staying True to Greece While Drawing on Some Wider Influences"



Eleftheria Arvanitaki's Adoring Fans Flock to Carnegie Hall By [JON PARELES](#) FEB. 2, 2014

The Greek singer [Eleftheria Arvanitaki](#), who performed for an adoring crowd on Saturday night at [Carnegie Hall](#), is part of an international sorority of musicians who have merged national traditions with pop. She has collaborated with some of them, including Cesária Évora from Cape Verde, Buika from Spain and Dulce Pontes from Portugal, and in Greece Ms. Arvanitaki is so celebrated that she was chosen to sing her hit "[Dynata](#)" ("It's Possible"; the word also means "strong") at the [closing ceremony](#) of the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Like her international peers, Ms. Arvanitaki trades some of the rawness of traditional styles for the refinement and variety of pop. She's a soprano who merges sweetness with fervor, clarity and delicacy with a sense of sorrow and melancholy resolve. To an American listener, she could sound at times like Judy Collins infused with the modes and meters of Greek music. She has the many regional and urban styles of Greece and its neighbors to draw on, particularly the insistent syncopation and gathering crescendos of the urban folk hybrid rebetika, which can be both mournful and fierce.

Although Ms. Arvanitaki has recorded with all sorts of arrangements in a career that dates back to the 1980s, her Carnegie Hall group was largely acoustic, with Greek instruments — bouzouki, oud, hand drums, kaval (wood flute) — alongside trap drums, soprano saxophone and a rarely used electric keyboard.

Ms. Arvanitaki is not a songwriter, but she chooses songs that use the melodic directness of folk tunes to carry lyrics with poetic ambitions: love songs that can turn philosophical, thoughts of journeys and longings, laments and tales of exile. In "[I Ask Love](#)," a hand-drum



Eleftheria Arvanitaki, the Greek singer, performing on Saturday night at Carnegie Hall, where she was joined by the composer Aris Christidis, a longtime collaborator.

and tales of exile. In "I Ask Love," a hand-drum beat and a bouzouki line shadowed a serene melody that gave more emphasis with every verse, as the audience started clapping along. "I Here and Mark Sherry" was sung in Greek, accented according to regional pronunciation with her band members. The concert's peak was a group of songs with music by Aris Christidis, who wrote "Dynata" and went on to collaborate with Ms. Arvanitaki on the 1994 album "The Madras and the Kavalos," the paired her group onstage for the latter part of the concert, playing oud and cembus, a baglam-like instrument from Turkey. "The Bodies and the Kavalos," with lyrics about love and painful memory, grew into a drum-driven incantation, both wounded and admanant, the ballad "Carnegie's Earle" moved from heartache to determination. The audience members wouldn't let Ms. Arvanitaki go until she had sung "Dynata" twice, as they wholeheartedly joined in.

Is That a Modigliani? Who Says So?

beat and a bouzouki line shadowed a terse melody that grew more impassioned with every verse, as the audience started clapping along. “I Burn and Melt Slowly” was sung in stately, ancient-sounding a cappella harmonies with her band members. The concert’s peak was a group of songs with music by Ara Dinkjian, who wrote “Dynata” and went on to collaborate with Ms. Arvanitaki on the 1994 album “The Bodies and the Knives.” He joined her group onstage for the latter part of the concert, playing oud and cumbus, a banjolike instrument from Turkey. “The Bodies and the Knives,” with lyrics about love and painful memory, grew into a drum-driven incantation, both wounded and adamant; the ballad “Complaint-Exile” moved from heartache to determination. The audience members wouldn’t let Ms. Arvanitaki go until she had sung “Dynata” twice, as they wholeheartedly joined in.

Reviewing Eleftheria Arvanitaki's tribute concert to Vassilis Tsitsanis at Herodion Theatre...

By Eleni Lambraki, www.musiccorner.gr, 3/10/2014



“What if today, tomorrow or now” is a song that all Greeks are familiar with – and have whispered from times to times. This is because the songs of Vassilis Tsitsanis are part of our DNA, the songs that our parents used to listen to when we were kids, the songs we doubted as teenagers and the songs to where we return as we grow older and come to admire deeply.

Eleftheria Arvanitaki has always been fond of rembetika and this is part of the reason why her tribute to Tsitsanis concert was unique. She described the original performances of

these songs by female singers such as Ninou or Bellou as legendary, but I'm sure – after experiencing Arvanitaki's Herodion appearance – that these songs have met their ideal performer also in our days and this is Eleftheria Arvanitaki...

... Eleftheria Arvanitaki was exceptional once more. She is a performer who, apart from her extraordinary vocal abilities, can entertain the audience and bring it close to her, even at a theatre like Herodion that is quite imposing. When she spoke about Tsitsanis she called him the "Parthenon of Greek music" and she was more than right. Vassilis Tsitsanis changed the character of "laika" and "rembetika" songs, he removed their outcast character and righteously positioned them to a major part of the Greek musical tradition. These songs are still talking to our inner selves and this is why the audience didn't stop singing and applauding last night...

... What I'm keeping from last night's concert is a sense of endless warmth and love we all felt, coming from the musicians, Eleftheria and the rest of the performers, and reached even the highest of the seating zones, before spreading out to the Athenian sky...

The Age Newspaper (Australia) - Goddess of music adored around the world

13 May, 2009

Eleftheria Arvanitaki has revitalised a traditional style, writes Kelsey Munro.

IN GREECE, she is a megastar, a modern goddess. Eleftheria Arvanitaki is a singer celebrated for the clarity and expressiveness of her voice, and — by those who speak Greek — the poetry of her music.

Her songs have become contemporary Greek classics. Every solo album she has released in the country since the mid '80s has gone platinum. She has sung at the invitation of the Pope in Rome.

She was the only Greek singer to perform a work by Philip Glass, commissioned for the 2004 Athens Olympics closing ceremony. (That production, Orion, also visited Melbourne.) Yet while she is signed to the famous American jazz label Verve, she is little known outside the Greek diaspora and dedicated world music circles.

With lustrous black hair, looking like an elegant Greek P.J. Harvey, Arvanitaki has had an enduring love affair with the Greek public. Judging by her sales, she's never released an album they didn't like. ...

Arvanitaki's music since has embraced genres as diverse as Spanish rhythms and jazz; and combined innovation and tradition in collaborations with renowned world music acts including Dulce Pontes (Portugal), Amara (Spain) and Ismael Lo (Senegal)...

The Rough Guide to World Music (GB)

WORLD MUSIC ROUGH GUIDE

AFRICA, EUROPE & THE MIDDLE EAST, VOL.1, 1999

There is no doubt about it, the hot name internationally on the Greek music scene is Eleftheria Arvanitaki. Her voice has a clarity and emotional depth that registers whether or not you understand the words, and the music she sings has a lyricism and instrumental sophistication that sets it apart. Her performances at WOMAD festivals in 1998 marked a transition from performing to Greek communities round the world to a new audience of World Music fans. They weren't disappointed.

Of course Eleftheria had long been a familiar figure in Greece. She was 'discovered' in 1979 by a couple of rembetika revivalists when she was singing for friends in a taverna, and joined the group Opisthodomiki Kompania. Since then, she's followed a career embracing rembetika, many of the leading names in Greek music, and notably the New York/Armenian musician Ara Dinkjian who, with Mihalis Ganas, composed the songs for her most beautiful and successful album *The Bodies and the Knives* (*Ta Kormia keh ta Maheria*). It's a recording that thrillingly exemplifies one of her musical ambitions to create a real Mediterranean sound and Greece's cultural location between the two worlds. "Greece is one of the few countries in Europe that has kept its own traditional music", she says. "Perhaps because we have very deep roots in music and in history, of course. Because we are between the West and East we know very well the music of Europe and America, but we know the music of Asia as well. We are well-positioned to take the best from both worlds, but we keep doing our music in our own way". That meeting of two worlds also lies behind rembetika, whose 1980 revival gave Eleftheria her break. "After the fall of the Colonels, this music came out through the students and people started to take notice of it. Rembetika is an important part of our history. It describes how the people lived when they came from Asia Minor and what they had to face.

It was a very important time in my life when I rediscovered our music. Like many Greeks, I was a big fan of Dylan and the Rolling Stones, but suddenly we found our own music". Eleftheria is always keen to renew her contacts with her musical roots and her latest recording (*Ektos Programmatos*) returns to rembetika repertoire: "I play with my band some traditional songs and classic rembetika - not the big hits of rembetika, but great songs, by Vamvakaris, Tsitsanis and others, with something deeper behind them. Songs from the 1920s up to the '60s, plus traditional songs from the mountains. Through this music we can understand the history of our country".

(by Simon Broughton, Editor of World Music Rough Guide - Africa, Europe and the Middle East, Vol.1, 1999)

Tahidromos magazine (6/4/2002) "One Woman Show"

06 April, 2002

By Haris Pontida

For about three hours, i.e. from the beginning till the end of the show, you don't get the least chance to look at your watch. On the contrary, you keep asking for more at the end of the show ...

Shall we call it "internal energy"? Or, shall we say it is due to a "maturity in performance" and a deep feeling that overflows the hall? No, this is not obvious when discussing a live show. Moreover, you usually get the sense that too much time has been spent and that there has been too much thinking on designing the lights and decoration, and that this is where the whole "innovative air" of the show. Eleftheria, who appears at "Gyalino Mousiko Theatro" (i.e. Glass Music Theatre) in Athens, was the only ...luminous element on stage- Eleftheria and her band, to be perfectly honest:

Yannis Anninos (bass), Manos Achalinotopoulos (clarinet, flute), Kiriakos Gouventas (violin), Spiros Goumas (bouzouki, tzouras), Yiorgos Zahariou (piano, keyboards), Michalis Kapilidis (drums), Vangelis Karipis (percussions) and Dimitris Barbagalas (electric and acoustic guitar).

This is exactly where there is a difference between her past and her present stage appearance. At "Gyalino" we watched Eleftheria being part of a group of musicians who, by playing, gave the impression that they were together in this. They were a team that played for themselves first, and, at the same time, for the lady who, being seated for the most part of the program, managed to keep our minds and thoughts focused on her voice's travels. This different approach on the relationship of the band and the performer, as well as this game with the improvisations of the musicians on the songs - that were all "altered" by the arrangement of Yiorgos Zachariou - refreshed Eleftheria's old time classic songs - which now sound brand new - and led Eleftheria reach an optimal level of performance.

Difono Magazine - THE TIME PASSED QUICKLY...

01 November, 2006

ΝΙΚΟΣ ΞΥΔΑΚΗΣ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΑ Η ΩΡΑ ΠΕΡΑΣΕ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ ΑΡΒΑΝΙΤΑΚΗ



ΣΑΠΦΩ/ΟΔΥΣΣΕΑΣ ΕΛΥΤΗΣ Κ.Χ. ΜΥΡΗΣ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΗΣ ΚΑΨΑΛΗΣ ΚΩΣΤΑΣ ΚΑΡΥΩΤΑΚΗΣ

... but the time of magic, the time of poetry should pass slowly... Eleftheria Arvanitaki truly is a revelation! What a precious sense! ...The composer is entitled to be pleased because one of his favorite partners (i.e. Eleftheria Arvanitaki) is at her best moment... (Dionissia Baka, Difono Magazine, November 2006)

More than just Zorba the Greek

Peter Aspden meets Eleftheria Arvanitaki as she prepares to introduce London to a more contemporary style of Greek music

Anyone who has ever sat down at a Greek taverna and experienced the nagging tinkle of a bouzouki coming out of a tinny speaker tied to the precarious branch of an olive tree might reflect that the present enthusiasm for ethnic music, in this corner of the Mediterranean at least, is a little misplaced. Yet there has long been more to Greek music than the soundtrack of Zorba the Greek.

One of its leading practitioners arrives in London next week as part of the Barbican Centre's Mediterranean Festival, and she is in the mood to correct some misconceptions. Eleftheria Arvanitaki first made waves in her native country some 20 years ago when she helped lead a revival of Greece's rembetika tradition.

These were the songs of the refugees who lost their homes in Asia Minor at the beginning of the last century, and told, in swirling Anatolian melodies, of the pain and sense of loss as they struggled to adapt to their new lives on the Greek mainland. "After the war, rembetika were seen as proletarian, underground songs and they stopped being heard on the state run radio," says Arvanitaki. "So a whole part of the history of Greece was being

buried. In the 1970s some of the leading cultural figures in the country began to talk about them, and the students began to seek them out. "A friend of mine left me some tapes when he went to do his national service and I listened to the songs and they simply didn't sound like they belonged to the past, both the lyrics and the melodies were completely contemporary, particularly in the way they dealt with eroticism. A group of us got together and formed a band [Opisthodromiki Kompania] to have a few laughs, but also out of a great passion and love for this music."

Arvanitaki and her comrades struck a chord with a younger generation of Greeks who had emerged from the culturally insular years of the military dictatorship and, having thrown themselves into the exotic rebelliousness of AngloAmerican rock music, began to feel the need to look into their own cultural history. "After the fall of the junta there was an understandable wish to engage with the outside world, like Spain after Franco, but also a great need to discover our roots."

But so far Arvanitaki was just part of a popular movement. It wasn't until her second solo album, Kontrabando, that she applied her high, light soprano to a new sound, one which combined Greek themes with contemporary, non-Greek arrangements. It was artistically risky, but became a huge commercial breakthrough (all of her solo albums have since gone platinum). "I had wanted to do it because foreign musical trends the ballad, Latin rhythms had always played a big part in Greek music." Eventually this thirst for eclecticism led her to fruitful collaborations with prominent world music figures such as the Armenian composer and oud player Ara Dinkjian. Arvanitaki's finest album, Tragoudia yia tous mines (Songs for the Months), bore the added distinction of setting to music the work of some of Greece's most renowned poets, including Nobel prize winner Odysseas Elytis.

"It is something that has been tried many times, and the results can be indifferent or occasionally great. It was a huge undertaking the record took two-and-a-half years to make, but the poems chosen were those behind which you could hear the music. Elytis said that his poetry was written with music in mind, which helps of course." Arvanitaki's international reputation began to grow after a cover feature in Folk Roots magazine, after which she was invited to her first Womad festival in Britain, and then to the Montreux Jazz festival. Again, she was in the right place at the right time, in an ideal position to exploit the booming interest in world music. "I don't know what world music or ethnic music is," she says a little wearily, "but it is a good thing that jazz festivals everywhere are opening up to non-Anglo-American music, to cultural traditions that are not so well known."

She agrees that rock music is in something of a stagnant state, "although there are some very good things coming out. There is just no coherent movement, and we all feel that because Anglo-American music is part of our daily lives too." I ask her if the terms of the Barbican festival encompassing all things Mediterranean made any musical sense. "There is certainly something familiar to Greeks in the music of Spain, southern Italy, Morocco. The rhythms and melodies of flamenco, for instance, are heard to us as if they are our own. It is a common way of thinking, of looking at things, and then there is often this sense of depth and melancholy." But weren't her concerts also well known for being seriously good parties? "But this is the characteristic and paradox of Greek music, that it is all about joy and glendi on the one hand, but also about terribly sad things.

"There are songs from Smyrni that start with slow, intense amanedes [vocal improvisations all about loss and suffering but they always build up and end with a very dynamic and strong rhythm. It is the very battle to turn that sad feeling into one of joy. That is the essence of Greek music, and of the Greek soul."

Eleftheria Arvanitaki plays at the Barbican, London EC2, 01 June 10.

Tel + 44 20 7638 8891 . www.barbican.org.uk

Financial Times 07/06/2002

EL PAIS 13/10/1999

Eleftheria Arvanitaki is refreshing the popular music of the Mediterranean...

TIME OUT (UK) (12/1998) Queen Elizabeth Hall

Eleftheria Arvanitaki - Queen Elizabeth Hall

Internationally acclaimed Greek diva makes her first ever London appearances. Bringing together tradition and novelty, she is possessed of a wonderful voice and truly haunting and affecting musical style.

THE TIMES (UK) OCTOBER 2000

Two years ago, making her London debut, Greece's Eleftheria Arvanitaki played to a full house at the Festival Hall. Promoters have been itching to bring her back...

A key figure in the rediscovery of Greek traditional styles such as rembetica, the country's distinctively lyrical, blues-like music, her last concert proved that she has a voice of extraordinary clarity and emotional depth. Add her powerful stage presence and a band unlike anything you have heard at the local taverna, and this should be a night to remember.

By Nigel Williamson

“World of Glass” ...

and then finally it's the turn of a local heroine, the glamorous vocalist Eleftheria Arvanitaki, whose albums routinely go platinum in Greece. She is swathed in a skin-tight orange gown that glows in the stage lights, and her richly expressive voice stirs many older members of the audience to tears, and to ragged attempts to sing along.

Her song, unless the people I ask about it are having me on, is a traditional folk melody, “Tzivaeri”, and it turns on the repeated phrase: sigana ke tapina, which they translate for me as “slowly, not proudly”. If the United Nations ever decides that the Earth needs a planetary anthem, the Glass arrangement of “Tzivaeri” would serve well.

As she brings the song home to its final chorus, one by one, the featured soloists return to stage, each one adding a new color to the musical spectrum. A final swell of voice and ensemble, and Marc Atkins bookends “Orion” by letting fly with a didgeridoo blast every bit as spine-shuddering as the first. We 're done.

(By Kevin Jackson, The Independent on Sunday, 13/6/2004)

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY ON ELEFThERIA'S PART IN "ORION"

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CRYSTAL ELEFThERIA

From a string quartet to a brass section, Eleftheria Arvanitaki performs a surprising show at Vox.

I was thinking, why is it that, since her ascension started, I've never seen one bad show from Eleftheria Arvanitaki. The answer lies in the enthusiasm she deals with her live shows. She always gives her all on stage. She keeps nothing for herself, no energy, no "reserve power". This is so important in a day and age full of fake live shows, of singers who treat their residencies as a necessary evil.

Beyond this, she is so sincere. More and more shows slide towards entertainment with no idea where it will lead them, but Eleftheria's shows continue the tradition of an artistic live event, a show that's based on the singer's aura, and includes, really, everything : from introverted, interpretative moments to entertainment peaks, and in the case of this year's show, she can jump from one end to the other with great flexibility. Eleftheria is the only major singer who still presents a «one woman show» on stage, the kind of show that not only provides entertainment, but also makes a star of its protagonist. That's why Arvanitaki remains a "goddess" to her audience, in an age that sees legends fading fast.

This kind of show has some standard features. Eleftheria, however, tries to modify some pieces of the puzzle, so that the show is innovative .

Between her two solo sets, there's a "laiko" part, she separates the show into distinct parts, once using a string quartet, once a three-part brass section. As far as arrangements go, there's an innovative intention there, too.

... As far as her singing is concerned, one thing is certain : she has hit a peak during the last three years. It's not maturity she's going through, it's a golden youth. Just listen to her, how crystal clear is her singing on "Meno Ektos", after three and a half hours of live show.

Nikos Moraitis

(TIME OUT, 04-03-2004)

To Vima, Tuesday 29.07.03

Emotional Finale...

Odysseus Elytis, Maria Polydouri, Michalis Ganas, Lina Nikolakopoulou, as well as lyrics of our tradition were the 'bridge' of the routes of poetry and the voice that can pulse along with the hearts of those that turn emotion into applause. Like the applause that was spread all over the place at the Small Theatre of Ancient Epidavros last Friday and Saturday. Two nights with a luminous Eleftheria Arvanitaki performing songs of two of her most important discographic depositions of the last decade under a sky full of stars.

The "Songs for the months" (music by D. Papadimitriou) and "The bodies and the knives" (music by Ara Dinkjian) albums formed the repertoire of those two concerts that had a finale full of emotions. The evocative character of the theatre matched completely with the romantic mood and the natural set of the series of events of the "Music July of the Hellenic Festival". Eleftheria Arvanitaki, dressed in white, appeared in front of a full theatre (her concerts were sold out from the very first day of the tickets' sale!). The audience were dedicated, well-prepared and enthusiastic with Eleftheria Arvanitaki's absolute and mature performance of the songs that have been so much associated with her and her voice in the last years.

And it was when Eleftheria Arvanitaki performed a capella the "Complaint" (traditional Armenian - Greek lyrics Lina Nikolakopoulou) that the audience was overflowed with enthusiasm and gave Eleftheria a huge applause!...

TO VIMA, Tuesday 29.07.03

"Ethnos tis kyriakis" Newspaper

7/4/2002

Vassilis Bouziotis prefaces Eleftheria's interview ...

It's after midnight when Eleftheria sings "To Parapono" (i.e. "The Complaint"). This is poetry by Odisseas Elitis set to music by Dimitris Papadimitriou. That is a powerful and complete performance that goes straight to your heart. The audience has become a large company and sings with her - not only the chorus, but also the whole of the difficult piece. When the song ends the audience glorifies her. Her eyes are shining. She looks really swept away. "You make me grow", she says. She really looks as if she's grown, as if she has ...flown away from the stage.

In the days of ... "Big Brother" it is quite important to resist by watching shows emanating from the bottom of the soul. In these days when values are on discount...it is important to utter the poetry of Odisseas Elitis, to "travel" through this poetry, and to "escape" in that way from the unbearable burdens of everyday life.

...(Eleftheria's show at "Gyalino") is a show with Eleftheria solo on stage for the first time in her career, for about three hours without even a short break; with her magnificent voice as well as her good musicians at her disposal, without ...smoke, without special effects, without stage scenery...; with a black dress only and without the slightest paint...

Tahidromos magazine 6/4/2002 "One Woman Show"

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By Nigel Williamson

El Pais (Spain), 13/10/99

Eleftheria Arvanitaki is refreshing the popular music of the Mediterranean...

Cronicas De Terra (Portugal) - 10/99

Eleftheria Arvanitaki is at the moment a synonym to great popularity in Greece. All her concerts are crowded. Most of her audience are young people who have memorized the lyrics that talk about love, friendship and dreams that Eleftheria is singing.

It is worth noting that someone revived a 1973-banner saying "Bread-Education-Freedom" (Eleftheria means Freedom, in Greek), and then corrected it saying that Freedom=Eleftheria Arvanitaki...

During her career, Eleftheria Arvanitaki has always been trying to give an updated version on her roots, and to discover new sounds.

World Music Institute, OCT 99

Eleftheria Arvanitaki is Greek-roots music's shining star. With a voice that transcends musical boundaries, Arvanitaki has developed a musical style uniquely her own, rooted in the 20th century Greek tradition of popular urban song. Combining tradition and innovation, she is blessed with a voice that has received rave reviews throughout Europe. She is accompanied by a 12-piece orchestra featuring some of Greece's finest musicians on violin, bouzouki, laouta, clarinet, keyboard, percussion and ud.

The Rough Guide to World Music (GB), 1999



WORLD MUSIC ROUGH GUIDE
AFRICA, EUROPE & THE MIDDLE EAST, VOL.1, 1999

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"Greece is one of the few countries in Europe that has kept its own traditional music", she says. "Perhaps because we have very deep roots in music and in history, of course. Because we are between the West and East we know very well the music of Europe and America, but we know the music of Asia as well. We are well-positioned to take the best from both worlds, but we keep doing our music in our own way". That meeting of two worlds also lies behind rembetika, whose 1980 revival gave Eleftheria her break. "After the fall of the Colonels, this music came out through the students and people started to take notice of it. Rembetika is an important part of our history. It describes how the people lived when they came from Asia Minor and what they had to face.

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(by Simon Broughton, Editor of World Music Rough Guide - Africa, Europe and the Middle East, Vol.1, 1999)

TIME OUT (UK), December 98

Eleftheria Arvanitaki - Queen Elizabeth Hall

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Financial Times 07/06/2002

More than just Zorba the Greek

Peter Aspden meets Eleftheria Arvanitaki as she prepares to introduce London to a more contemporary style of Greek music

Anyone who has ever sat down at a Greek taverna and experienced the nagging tinkle of a bouzouki coming out of a tinny speaker tied to the precarious branch of an olive tree might reflect that the present enthusiasm for ethnic music, in this corner of the Mediterranean at least, is a little misplaced. Yet there has long been more to Greek music than the soundtrack of Zorba the Greek. One of its leading practitioners arrives in London next week as part of the Barbican Centre's Mediterranean Festival, and she is in the mood to correct some misconceptions. Eleftheria Arvanitaki first made waves in her native country some 20 years ago when she helped lead a revival of Greece's rembetika tradition. These were the songs of the refugees who lost their homes in Asia Minor at the beginning of the last century, and told, in swirling Anatolian melodies, of the pain and sense of loss as they struggled to adapt to their new lives on the Greek mainland. "After the war, rembetika were seen as proletarian, underground songs and they stopped being heard on the state-run radio," says Arvanitaki. "So a whole part of the history of Greece was being buried. In the 1970s some of the leading cultural figures in the country began to talk about them, and the students began to seek them out. "A friend of mine left me some tapes when he went to do his national service and I listened to the songs - and they simply didn't sound like they belonged to the past, both the lyrics and the melodies were completely contemporary, particularly in the way they dealt with eroticism. A group of us got together and formed a band [Opisthodomiki Kompania] to have a few laughs, but also out of a great passion and love for this music." Arvanitaki and her comrades struck a chord with a younger generation of Greeks who had emerged from the culturally insular years of the military dictatorship and, having thrown themselves into the exotic rebelliousness of Anglo-American rock music, began to feel the need to look into their own cultural history. "After the fall of the junta there was an understandable wish to engage with the outside world, like Spain after Franco, but also a great need to discover our roots." But so far Arvanitaki was just part of a popular movement. It wasn't until her second solo album, *Kontrabando*, that she applied her high, light soprano to a new sound, one which combined Greek themes with contemporary, non-Greek arrangements. It was artistically risky, but became a huge commercial breakthrough (all of her solo albums have since gone platinum). "I had wanted to do it because foreign musical trends - the ballad, Latin rhythms had always played a big part in Greek music." Eventually this thirst for eclecticism led her to fruitful collaborations with prominent world music figures such as the Armenian composer and oud player Ara Dinkjian. Arvanitaki's finest album, *Tragoudia yia tous mines* (Songs for the Months), bore the added distinction of setting to music the work of some of Greece's most renowned poets, including Nobel prize-winner Odysseas Elytis. "It is something that has been tried many times, and the results can be indifferent or occasionally great. It was a huge undertaking - the record took two-and-a-half years to make, but the poems chosen were those behind which you could hear the music. Elytis said that his poetry was written with music in mind, which helps of course." Arvanitaki's international reputation began to grow after a cover feature in *Folk Roots* magazine, after which she was invited to her first *Womad* festival in Britain, and then to the Montreux Jazz festival. Again, she was in

the right place at the right time, in an ideal position to exploit the booming interest in world music. "I don't know what world music or ethnic music is," she says a little wearily, "but it is a good thing that jazz festivals everywhere are opening up to non-Anglo-American music, to cultural traditions that are not so well known." She agrees that rock music is in some-thing of a stagnant state, "although there are some very good things coming out. There is just no coherent movement, and we all feel that because Anglo-American music is part of our daily lives too." I ask her if the terms of the Barbican festival encompassing all things Mediterranean - made any musical sense. "There is certainly something familiar to Greeks in the music of Spain, southern Italy, Morocco. The rhythms and melodies of flamenco, for instance, are heard to us as if they are our own. It is a common way of thinking, of looking at things, and then there is often this sense of depth and melancholy." But weren't her concerts also well known for being seriously good parties? "But this is the characteristic and paradox of Greek music, that it is all about joy and glendi on the one hand, but also about terribly sad things. "There are songs from Smyrni that start with slow, intense amanedes [vocal improvisations all about loss and suffering but they always build up and end with a very dynamic and strong rhythm. It is the very battle to turn that sad feeling into one of joy. That is the essence of Greek music, and of the Greek soul." Eleftheria Arvanitaki plays at the Barbican, London EC2, 01 June 10. Tel + 44 20 7638 8891. www.barbican.org.uk

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Greece has always existed between two worlds, but very wisely never chose between them. For the last fifteen years the musician, or with her earlier group Opisthodomiki Kompania in the '80s, her work is the amalgamation of the best of the two worlds. Eleftheria was always very musical. In her teens she never dreamed of becoming a singer. Her life would change forever in the summer of 1981 when she met [the name of the group] Kompania. These were amateur, wandering musicians who played in Athens taverns for whatever money patrons would

them in a couple of songs that finally lasted the whole night. The trio continued their travels around the Greek islands. On the island of Plaka, they performed in a club that also included the folk revivalist/ archivist Domna Sarniou and trapeze artists. They, thought that Eleftheria was so fascinated by Eleftheria that he declared that he had found one of the greatest Greek female singers around Athens taverns, always appreciating the public who made them popular. Now much in demand, they were asked to perform (bouzouki), Stratos Stratigopoulos (guitar), Lambros Karelas (accordeon), Eleni Kalatzopoulou (klarino) and Thanassis Panagiotou into their music and stood as inspiration for Eleftheria, blending Greek roots music and Western styles. If we want to understand and re- evaluate rembetika from the '20s and '30s, often known to Westerners as the 'Greek blues'. They started to hang out with composers and archivists like Kostas Hadjidoulis, Spiros Papaioannou and Panos Dragoumis opened up their archives and compiled the songs of Eleni, Maria, Farantouri and the pseudo-Brechtian songs of Thanos Mikroutsikos. These composers represented an anti- roots movement but K.K.E. was the only Communist party in the world that attacked peoples' music. K.K.E., the Greek Communist Party, turned towards music politics and went against the tide. They were mostly politically independent or neo- hippies belonging to the non- party scene. They changed their guitars for bouzouki and baglama. They preferred the early rembetika of Markos Vamvakaris and George Satsis to the modern one that attracted them to rembetika written forty years before their time? Eleftheria remembers: "It was the forthrightness, urgency of the songs concerned a particular subculture, a part of Greek society that remained purposely unknown to us. You see, the Communist Party was re-evaluating not only rembetika but also smyrneika (from the Greek Orient) and started to see it from a new perspective in the '30s. But because these are classic songs and a part of our tradition and upbringing, these songs matter even today. Through music, I learned things that I would otherwise have learned very differently." Opisthodomiki Kompania was founded according to Sfankianakis, Opisthodomiki was modeled after Italian roots bands such as Nuovo Compagnia Di Canto Popolare (folk and laiki) of Makis Christodoulou. In 1981, they got tremendous exposure when Savopoulos asked Hadjidoulis - one of the best appearing just before final results were announced, they stole the show from all the boring singer- songwriters. The event was recorded on the album [At Xanthe's, Aeginitio Mental Hospital And Supply Ship Kos] (CD 3347) was produced by Dionysis Savopoulos. The album is an essential souvenir of the era, bringing a refreshing sound to the Greek scene of the early '80s, and is the album that Opisthodomiki spent the night between October and May for three years became legendary, turning the group into an important part of Athens nightlife. The album of laiki and rembetika standards. It also indicated that Opisthodomiki Kompania was a superb live group that was better captured on the album (Sms Station) based on the poems of the great Salonica poet Yiorghos Ioannou. She also sang in Dionysis Savopoulos' Trapeze album in her career. For a long time the group opened the concerts of 'Nionios', and Savopoulos gave them equal billing. But while all this was going on, an ideology, and those who worked like public officials." Nobody was certain about the future of the group. Many people suggested that she should sing Angelos Sfakianakis (CD3375). Once again she sang rembetika and laiki classics backed by members of Opisthodomiki Kompania. The album soundtrack of Mother India. which was covered in Greece by Voula Palla. (In 1960 after the huge success of Mother India, the recording of the song restored the reputation of the genre to a new audience.) In 1985 the group released a final album, Stin Mesa Tera (In The Middle) by Theodoris Papadopoulos, a huge hit for the the group and still a favourite among Eleftheria's fans. But at the end of her career. Angelos Sfakianakis was much in demand as a producer for Lyra. Three years later he, Theodoris Papadopoulos and Yiannis Ritsos, one of the best songwriters in Greece. These albums, recorded between 1985 and 1989, include with Stavros Logarides on the album (also on Lyra), and Stavros Kouyiomtzis and George Dalaras' Trelli Ke Angelv (Madmen And Angela) on Minotaur (also on Lyra), where the DJ spins laiki classics as well as today's glitzy hits for a dancing crowd. η 1986 Eleftheria released one of the most important albums. Theodorakis coined the word 'entechno' - translated as 'artful' - when he set Yiannis Ritsos's Epitaphios (Funeral) to music with wings with the synthesizer. The album was a fine blend of the West and the Orient with a Western pop approach and from this album emerged the laiki music of its time. Spanoudakis loves laiki music. His music also follows the European tradition. Eleftheria remembers: "I always wanted to follow a similar path." In 1987 Eleftheria participated in one of the milestones of modern Greek music. It was an album of folk music from Asia Minor from the pre-1922 period, including Ross Daly among the musicians. Eleftheria comments: "Of a kind that has not been heard for a decade." Indeed, The Rough Guide To World Music calls it "one of the best Greek discs of the last 20 years". Two years later she appeared on the album Contrabando. She also appeared on Savopoulos's controversial album To Kourema (The Haircut) and appeared in his album Echos (I Live Outside The City) (Polygram CD 849303}, an album with songs written by Christos Nikolopoulos, George Dinkjian. How did this collaboration really start? "It was radio DJ Xenophontas Rarakos who handed me Night Ark's CD and I was who I was, and I also sent him the CD so he could listen to my versions of the songs. I invited him to Greece and I discovered we were influenced by music in the same way. That's how I started a close friendship with Ara Dinkjian which still exists today." In the album with Ara Dinkjian. For this album, she specially invited Dinkjian (oud, cumbus and saz) and the percussionist Arto Tunçboyacı, the album we planned to include three or four songs in the album. But Ara brought more material than I expected, and we decided to make an album with Dimitris Papadimitriou, who is a great classically- trained entechno composer, but who at the same time has a great knowledge of the Greek music. I could ever have written those songs. Maybe he would, but not in the same way you hear on the album. The album kicks off with the song "Who dreams of us / and cares about us? / and when he awakes will he recognise us? / Or will he turn to the other side?" The

asked him how much Greek music existed in the original compositions and how much he had modified them to give a Greek European, so there were also European (tonal) elements in the arrangements. Since the compositions were written by a musician and I had already written the arrangements but I had to rearrange them. In these I made the minimum modifications excluding the Greek folk music. I worked as a Greek musician, knowing that the album was aimed at a Greek audience. I wanted to show that my solo career. Not only was it a great album but it very soon went platinum. In the summer of 1995 Eleftheria toured Greece which included a three-part instrumental piece (Imprevision With Oud, Tamzara, Greek Thracian Dance) and their versions of Pict (5778712) is as essential as The Bodies And The Knives and best represents the Greek-Armenian collaboration between Eleftheria and (Polygram 537052}, written by Dimitris Papadimitriou. It is a collection of entechno songs based on poems written by Odysseus Elytis (Disticha were songs comprised of only two lines in which the whole meaning is enveloped). How did Eleftheria decide to play me one song from the album. It was Elytis's The Complaint. Dimitris and I decided to make an album based on lyrics accompanied by a guitar. Of course we used more than just a guitar!" Dimitris Papadimitriou adds: "We sent Elytis's songs to him and he approved them and he expressed his wish for more poems to be set to music. / Told You About The Clouds is rooted "n the folk tradition with twelve gods." "I used the same approach also to the poem of Karyotakis. He was a romantic poet. Romanticism has a lot to do with Greek Romanticism on a musical level. The outlaws, hashish-smoking rembetes, were the Greek proletariat underclass that was 'grounded in the organ grinder'. So I wrote a song that would express the memory of such kind of music." Finally, I asked Eleftheria to do a dimensional and multi- faceted thing. Our music and culture belongs to Greece and eastward." Recommended Recordings: 1980s: Eleftheria (Maria Hanomai) and Stamatis Spanoudakis (from Contrabando) are on her 'Greatest Hits' double CD Stin Archin Tou Tragoudi (Particularly recommended by the Folk Roots editorial staff. All of Eleftheria's back catalogue on CD, including the many collaborations with Stavros Logarides and Nikos Xidakis collaborations.) Stop Press: There were

"MENO EKTOS" by Eleftheria Arvanitaki among the 100 best world music albums ever by the *Rough Guide to World Music Magazine* (Editor Simon Broughton).



... Eleftheria Arvanitaki has a light, focused voice with a silky freshness that is captivating to listen to - whether or not you understand a word of Greek. This (i.e. Meno Ektos) isn't a disc for dancing on tables and breaking plates: there's a preponderance of slow music, and that's what Arvanitaki does best, singing with understated delicacy and poise...With its predominantly slow pace and elegiac character this is an album for the romantic at heart. Its strengths are the otherworldly quality of Arvanitaki's voice, the control with which she handles it and the lyrical writing throughout.

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Goddess of music adored around the world

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Eleftheria Arvanitaki has revitalised a traditional style, writes Kelsey Munro.

IN GREECE, she is a megastar, a modern goddess. Eleftheria Arvanitaki is a singer celebrated for the clarity and expressiveness of her voice, and — by those who speak Greek — the poetry of her music.

Her songs have become contemporary Greek classics. Every solo album she has released in the country since the mid '80s has gone platinum. She has sung at the invitation of the Pope in Rome.

She was the only Greek singer to perform a work by Philip Glass, commissioned for the 2004 Athens Olympics closing ceremony. (That production, *Orion*, also visited Melbourne.) Yet while she is signed to the famous American jazz label Verve, she is little known outside the Greek diaspora and dedicated world music circles.

With lustrous black hair, looking like an elegant Greek P.J. Harvey, Arvanitaki has had an enduring love affair with the Greek public. Judging by her sales, she's never released an album they didn't like. ...

Arvanitaki's music since has embraced genres as diverse as Spanish rhythms and jazz; and combined innovation and tradition in collaborations with renowned world music acts including Dulce Pontes (Portugal), Amaral (Spain) and Ismael Lo (Senegal).