

# TRADITIONAL GREEK DANCE AND THEATRE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In modern Greece staged folk dance performances focus on the representation of a scenario. The outcome of aesthetic experience depends on the narrative forwarded by the organizers of the event. By comparing the master narratives of three dance groups – more specifically, a “national” example, an experienced “traditional” example from one site, and a third example of “historic” evolution – the paper proposes a framework for understanding staged folk dance in Greece. It juxtaposes issues such as: dance movements, dancer’s body, costumes, staging approaches, and the audience. The paper concludes with suggestions of starting a critical dialogue with dance teachers/choreographers in the hope of creating alternative approaches to staged performances of Greek folk dances.

## Keywords

Greece; narrative analysis; staging; performances; folk dances

It is an established fact that over the past twenty years a significant growth is observed in the scholarship on traditional dance in Greece. Meanwhile, most publications are preoccupied with the potential benefits of traditional dance in education. And to a great extent this may be justified. From 1980 onward, when Greek dances are established as a discipline<sup>2</sup> and their instruction is integrated into the school curriculum, a similar interest is observed among other educational institutions (e.g. cultural organizations, dance groups, and various dance schools that integrated teaching into their educational programs); traditional Greek dances are now regarded as a cherished form of educational material, and there is an intention to teach all interested pupils to dance, while also acquiring knowledge with regard to the origin, history and function of these dances. Moreover, as has been greatly emphasized in various publications, their instruction through active participation in the act of dance itself aims at the acquisition of particular skills, while also contributing to the familiarization of those interested in popular Greek tradition, and fostering the notion of diversity and geographic variety; that is, individuals thus learn the differences between dances and are able

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1 Translated into English by Andreas Bloom.

2 Indicative of this are the curricula in the country’s higher education system.

to interpret them using their body. In this manner, their meaning, as well as the worth of the valued Greek dance, are highlighted.

A paradox lies, however, in the fact that, as the staging of the dances on the theatre stage<sup>3</sup> is recognized as part of the educational process,<sup>4</sup> this theatrical phenomenon in and of itself does not seem to satisfy but a handful of researchers so far. That is perhaps because the transition of Greek dances from their natural space to the theatre stage and their “re-dubbing” into an artwork is bizarre to many, as it seems to clash on issues of principle, causing intense confrontation and ambiguity, since such an effort is coupled with a tendency toward balletization. As a result, some recognize only negative aspects in the theatrical performances of dances, and speak in terms of alienation, loss of ethos and authenticity of dance. Moreover, in classifying these performances in the web of folklore<sup>5</sup> or, in the best-case scenario, in the web of the second existence of dance, they do not account for the importance and the value of spectacle<sup>6</sup> as an independent theatrical event. At the same time, others, who are more daring, face this transformation as a provocation, and focus on the challenges to these speculations, and the new relationships that this transformation may bring about, and thus resort to choreographic (re)creations, without, however, being severed from the vehicle of tradition.

In this article, I will not deal with the narration of the process of transition of dance from the public square to the theatre stage – this is, in fact, an issue that several researchers have described in various ways, but have also analyzed and interpreted. Neither do we find in the epicenter the differences and modulations that are located in the form and content of dances (as, for instance, in

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3 In discussing the notion of a Greek repertoire and the ways in which this may be constituted and used by persons and organizations whose chief task is the collection, instruction, and on-stage presence of traditional dances, but also at an academic level, Papakostas (2007) introduces Benjamin’s term “mechanical reproduction” as a basic practice of the educational process of dance. The use of the term seems to stem from the necessity of composing a body of dances that initially offer themselves as “raw material” for the educational process and their instruction, and then for theatrical and on-stage presence.

4 Let us remember events like national holidays, gymnastic demonstrations, events that come with the completion of classes, special performances, cultural associations, and more.

5 According to Meraklis (1989, p. 112), the aggressive definition of “folklore” suggests the artificial revival of traditional forms of folk art and folk culture that do not functionally respond to the terms of modern life, but exert a certain charm, among the bourgeoisie in particular, and vis-à-vis the urbanized modern man in general. This view is both broadened in its meaning and strengthened by the comparison through juxtaposition between the live tradition and tradition as folklore, where the “live” is experienced tradition and eternally changing, as it constantly adapts to the specific needs and life circumstances of its conveyers, that is, of the people and social groups or communities that experience and reproduce it, whereas “tradition” as folklore, collects certain elements selectively from tradition and presents them as performance, cut off from their social function (for the definitions of folklore, folklorism, and tradition, see the collective volume *Folklore and Tradition* [2010], edited by P. Kavouras).

6 See the letter of support by Alkis Raftis, President of the “Dora Stratou” Association of Greek Dances, titled “The door opened on the Cretan dance”, which refers to the attempt of a cultural association to go beyond the established and offer a spectacle based on Cretan dance. <http://www.dancetheatre.gr/xrisima-xoros/arthra-xoros/1972-arthro-alkis-raftis-kritikos-xoros-dora-stratou.html>

the transition from the rural to the urban) in the various stages of the transition and its final adaptations to the new, *by definition* urban environment (cf. Papakostas, 2001).

My own approach focuses on traditional dances, which I see as a raw material for the organization of a “complete” theatrical performance, in order to create an autonomous theatrical event. For this reason, I chose three examples as a case study, through which I intend to approach the subject. The first example, particularly innovative for its time, is titled “Dances and Songs from the Ritual of Wedding”. It was first staged by the Lyceum Club of Greek Women at the Odeon (Theatre) of Herodes Atticus, Athens, on July 1991. The second bears the title “Cheers to the Oncoming Wedding” and deals with the initiative of the “Evros” Cultural Association for Traditional Dances, which staged a local version of the wedding ceremony in Thrace, in the Garden Theatre of Alexandroupoli in July 2005. The third case concerns the performance titled “From Andros to Athens...”, which was staged at the Theatre of the Michael Cacoyannis Foundation on 23 January 2011, and was composed and directed by Giorgos Kotsos and Nancy Harmanta.

### **Traditional dances are staged**

The staging of a classical work in the theatre is a complex process, for the implementation of which the collaboration of various disciplines specific to different art forms is required, in order to highlight the content and meaning of the story; and this is because a classical work reflects the history of the culture that shaped it, while conveying its ideals and values in a present-day context. We could perceive this work as a live representation of history, since, with the realization of the performance (staging, scene, costumes, dance, song, music), the audience is taken to different times, places, and situations. While focusing on this problematization in dance, I would claim that, though many of the stories that have been choreographed are used ritually, they also use other elements, portraying events that date several decades back.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, these elements, as well as the body techniques that the trained eye may discern in them, reflect notions and beliefs that transcend time, since, even today, they not only reflect enjoyment and recreation, but also offer happiness, and a deep spiritual and symbolic significance, both for the creators/artists and for the audience that attends these performances. I do not aspire to compare a performance of classical ballet to a corresponding performance of Greek dances, despite the fact that both are shaped on the basis of a theme, a narrative. The content is different, and so are the goals. However, as with every type of performance, a performance (presentation/demonstration) of Greek dances, with its diverse types of theatrical interventions, presents a structure that seems as complex as that of classical ballet, and one that is clearly included in the theatre’s space. Moreover, as a spectacle, it may lend itself to various

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7 For instance, *Giselle* (1841), *Le Corsaire* (1856), *Swan Lake* (1895), *The Nutcracker* (1892), *Romeo and Juliet* (1935), which are considered to be amongst the most structured forms of romantic ballet.

readings and approaches.<sup>8</sup> It may be studied from a folklore perspective, given that the spectacle may reflect moments from the customary life of a community, as, for example, with the recreation of a wedding ceremony, a Christmas or carnival custom. It may attract the interest of a musicologist, since, as is widely recognized, the dance material presented is accompanied by particular types of music and/or song; it may even be analyzed from the perspective of kinesiology and body techniques by a scholar of dance or an anthropologist (e.g. body positions, means of movement of the dancers from one point to the next, use of body weight, stylistic issues, questions of proximity between the dancers, arrangement of dances in space, use of space).

Since we are talking about the performance of a “representation” of customary practices, a study on the principles of the anthropology of theatre may prove particularly useful, if it focuses on the human behaviors that aim to evoke public admiration through the transformation of bodies. Meanwhile, ideologies expressed through the verses of songs may be studied through a philosophical, social, or religious perspective. Such a performance may also reveal information with respect to the history and use of dances (forgotten dances, new dances, modern dances, imported dances), transmitting values both with respect to the period during which they were performed (dances of the interwar period, and of the turn of the 20th century), as well as the communities that were being represented/representing others (dances of the diaspora, dances of the refugees).

In summarizing these thoughts on dance among rural communities – whose representation on the theatre stage we would also like to examine in the context of this text –, it can be said that the performance whose protagonist is traditional dance as a raw material borrows and uses the materials of social and ritual activity such as the following: dance, music, songs, rituals, costumes, tools, paraphernalia, useful items, customary reason. It composes the above in small or large units, in order to present the image of a narration; an image in which the selected events are *utilized theatrically*, with the intention of demonstrating the function of dance in space and time. Even where the directorial interventions surpass certain boundaries, these performances neither stop presenting, in their own way, nor do they stop short of leading the viewers to the comprehension of the intentions and thoughts of the creator, since the goal of such an effort – as this is underlined in all the printed programs that accompany performances – remains the display of wealth and diversity of the cultural heritage of Greece.

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8 Tsatsoulis (1997, pp. 13–14) believes that a theatrical event is “determined by an organized whole of parts, which, through its own structure and organization, follows defined rules of syntax, while adhering to a particular code that each time also determines the way in which all the parts are combined in a whole in order to produce meaning”. In this sense, it can be said that the corresponding affinities seem to be valid in the theatrical dance event, too.

### **Cultural performances (or performances with a scenario)**

In theatre, several factors create various tendencies. Can we speak of coincidence? Fashion? Necessity? The maturing of long-term processes? Perhaps a combination of all these factors? In any case, the “presentation of Greek dances” in the “domestic market”, without shaking off the notion of tradition, moves toward their theatricalization, a tendency that seems dominant in the past few years. The question is: Why? What happened so that the dance teachers of the amateur/semi-professional, urban/rural, small/large, or even newly-founded cultural centers, suddenly resort to staging a performance with a scenario? Is a new trend being attempted, to ensure that dances remain relevant? Are the reasons clearly artistic? Or is it that in seeking a dramaturgy, more “comprehensible to the public”, as with dance within a framework, the dance teachers resort to recreations of scenes of the past and “tested” recipes, in order to offer a new performance and a problematization related to the practice of staging dance performance? Or, rather, do things tend to become more personal, and thus begin to take on a personal signature?

It should be made clear from the outset that we are talking about a Greek dance performance as an artistically and aesthetically complemented happening on stage, for its organization requires a series of processes that go beyond the hackneyed approach that says, “I teach students certain dances that I will then transfer to the stage,” with the intention of presenting or demonstrating them before an audience. At the core of a “complete”<sup>9</sup> performance is the text/scenario, which contains and guides the assignment of roles, the action of the performances, and the development of the history of the persons and their actions; it subjugates the rhythm, the atmosphere, the images and the interpretation of the events. The role of the coordinator of such a multi-faceted, but also costly production, is assumed by the dance instructor, who is now personally responsible for all its stages of creation (from the conception of the idea, to the bibliographic validation, the rehearsals, and the mounting of the production in the more general sense). Thus, we see a partial abandonment of the model that relied on the reproduction of a geographical map (e.g. *Dances and songs of Macedonia*, *Dances and songs from Greece*) as would repeatedly occur in the past (Loutzaki, 2004, p. 126); now the dance instructor is called upon to serve an idea that functions as an outline for action, already known and agreed upon by the performers of the show. Thus, using a title as a guide, the dance instructor mingles dances, music, and ethnic practices into wholes, together with the human capital, namely the dancers and the instrument players. The dancers, predominantly young boys and girls, who choose dance above other activities – besides, that is why they participate in lessons on offer by every organization

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9 The aggressive description “complete” is introduced by the Lyceum Club in order to distinguish the professional interdisciplinary collaboration of many specializations through a highly aesthetic and artistic result from a “demonstration” of traditional dances, whose goal is orchestrated presence, with the intention of surprising and eliciting praise (Loutzaki, 2010, p. 307).

– are called upon to assume not just the role of the dancer, but also symbolic, social, and ritual parts, and to participate in scenes that reflect events they have almost never experienced.

On the other hand, the dance instructor, in using the semiotics of a popular expression, attempts, through various syntheses and re-syntheses and artistic creations, to activate the subconscious in order to provoke an impression on outsiders, but also for internal consumption. In this manner, s/he takes on a magical aspect, and if s/he is successful in his/her task, s/he also becomes comprehensible to his/her viewers who, in various ways (applause, mass attendance, positive reviews<sup>10</sup>) approve of his/her creation. However, it is still the goal of this effort to move, to charm, to teach. Thus, instructors and dancers are located in a realistic manner, in order to serve stable values such as the vision for national elevation and pride, admiration and love for the ethnic-folk element or the exaltation of cultural heritage.

In focusing on the content, we may turn to Theatre Studies scholar Dimitris Tsatsoulis (1997, p. 14), who says that every theatrical performance “borrows and utilizes aspects of the culture that it composes in order to present their image, and may be understood as a miniature version of the society being investigated”. In our case, however, the question arises as to the extent to which performances that deal with Greek dance aim to secure the conditions that will provide the viewer with the freedom to become an agent of art and culture. Moreover, if we speak of a theatrical event – a performance based on Greek dance –, it brings to the fore not only the content and the means of engaging with the material, but another factor of theatre: the audience. What is it that they yearn for, after all? Is it a “faithful” presentation/reproduction/imitation of real life? Do they perceive the image in front of them as a source of ideas and valued good, rather than as a structure of social identity? Or rather, do they confront the *rural past* as more of a subject of curiosity, an exotic thing?

A first conclusion that could be drawn is that performances with a plot, along with their diverse content, are more of a “national”<sup>11</sup> narrative, which, despite the fact that partial actions are frequently perceived as a field for the pursuit of factual elements, is supported entirely on the re-synthesis of information on rural dance, mainly of the past, seen, nevertheless, through a spectrum of evaluation on the basis of a timeless era: “When that used to happen, when that used to work!” The result is that the past is highlighted and used theatrically, since this usage is combined with a present-day perspective. In this respect, the performances also call for an anthropological reading, which explores expressive arts in which music and dance are central, though the most central element is the theatrical “rendition and interpretation”.

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10 “The last performance by the Dance Group of the Lyceum Club at the Athens Festival was a congregation of feelings and sensations. [...] The new work by the brilliant Lefteris Drandakis surprised us pleasantly and moved us deeply. Because in these ‘Songs and Dances in the Circle of Life’ we must – all of us must have discovered something from our youth, our puberty or even maturity!” (Andreas Rikakis, *Kathimerini* newspaper, 25 July 1997).

11 National in the sense that it is “inspired by the nation or local culture”.

This presentation is related to three performances that I attended, three interesting cultural events, which, using quick transitions and interesting creations (moving picture, word, song, music, dance, scenographic creations and transformation, dress), aim at creating a spectacle for the benefit of the audience. Thus, this text aims, through the description of the basic elements of every performance and the highlighting of the selection criteria and the appropriate codes that guided the production and organization of every theatrical activity, to emphasize the possibilities in using traditional dance as a raw material for the production of an artistic spectacle.

**1. "Dances and Songs from the Ritual of Wedding". Direction-choreography: Lefteris Drandakis. Assistant directors: Nancy Harmanta – Giorgios Kotsos. Production: Lyceum Club of Greek Women. Athens Festival. Odeon of Herodes Atticus, 7 July 1991. Duration: 3 hours.<sup>12</sup>**

*The scenario:* The wedding ceremony is composed of a sequence of rituals which convey feelings and behaviors with a symbolic character performed according to a particular type. These actions contain the limits of transition from one social state to the next<sup>13</sup> and are celebrated in the various communities of Greece. This passage does not constitute an instant natural phenomenon, but is rather a lasting process, tailored to the circumstances, and may be extended in time. The performance of the wedding ceremony, the *crowning*, is the pretext through which the family and the community are called upon to congregate in order to honor the newly-wed couple. It is in the face of this couple that the creation of a new social unit is welcomed. Entertainment – food, drink, song, dance – and the ritual are played out in parallel. As every ritual follows a structure, so does the ritual of wedding follow a structure in *space* and *time*. Moreover, the organization of this ritual reflects basic features of social life.

*Places of reference:* Euboea, Florina, Orini (Serres), Pogoni, Kefalovriso, Argolis, Drama, Roumlouki, Crete, Lefkada, the Dodecanese, and other places but also different social groups, such as the refugees of Eastern Rumelia and the Sarakatsani. The costume sets emphasize the character of the social group of origin.

*The formulation of the structure.*<sup>14</sup> An analysis of the performance by quantity:

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12 The wedding was a performance in the repertoire of the Lyceum Club, later revised and presented in several theatres, such as the Athens Concert Hall (1992), a theatre in Odessa (1994), and at the "Mediterranea" Biennale in Lyon (1998).

13 The ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep (1960) recognizes that the wedding ceremony, like every rite of passage, has a three-fold structure. It is made up of rites of separation, passage, and integration.

14 The information that follows was drawn from a printed program of the performance (Lyceum Club of Greek Women, 1991). The cinematized version of the performance, directed by television conductor Stamatis K. Chondroyannis, may be found in digitized format in the ERT archive. See <http://www.ert-archives.gr/V3/public/main/page-assetview.aspx?tid=7855&tsiz=0 &act=mMain View>].

a) *Prologue*: A distinct section of the performance, which introduced the spectator to the story of the performance, while using marital symbols,<sup>15</sup> wishes and dances.<sup>16</sup>

b) *Act I*: “From the preparation of the wedding” (washing of hair,<sup>17</sup> the sticks of happiness, the matchmaking,<sup>18</sup> the decoration of the emblem,<sup>19</sup> the arrangement of the bed,<sup>20</sup> the dowry,<sup>21</sup> the eve of the wedding in the bride’s home).<sup>22</sup> In the pre-wedding period, the ritual takes place inside the house, on the bride and groom’s threshold, and reaches a climax with the departure of the bride from the home, to go to church. The separation of the space reflects the difference in the role of women, which appears to be protective and is expressed through song and dance, whereas men, where they are allowed to participate, take on an auxiliary role.

c) *Act II*: “The wedding” (the shaving and bedecking of the groom,<sup>23</sup> the dressing of the bride, the departure of the bride,<sup>24</sup> the procession, the crowning, the *tranos choros*<sup>25</sup> on the day after the wedding).<sup>26</sup> In this transitional stage, we observe a separation of space (in the interior of the bride’s home, in the interior of the groom’s home, in the street). The sacred ritual (the crowning) and the entertainment call for the gathering of the family and the community, which are represented symbolically in the first instance through the creation of two dance circles (by gender), and in the second instance through a circle, where men and women of all ages take part at once.

15 Flags, ensigns, emblems, apple trees, bread loaves.

16 *Kleistos* (Kimi, Evia), *Syrtos* (marital song), *Spiri Piperi* and *Ston Kombo, stin riza kovoun tin elia* (Kimi, Evia). Costumes: from Kimi, Evia.

17 *Patinada* (couplets in this case), *Ballos, Milia*, Yannis of Marathos. Costumes from Lefkada.

18 Funeral song, Dance for two, *The preparation of the leaven* (song), *Come on boys and join the dance, Fesodrevenagas-Tassa, Syrtos* of Pilaia, Thessaloniki. Costumes from Ayii Pantes, Thesprotia.

19 *Leventikos* or *Poustsena, To Flambouro* (song), *Bayratse* or *Gerontikos, Sta tessera-Akritikos*. Costumes: Antartiko, Florina.

20 *Kato choros, Pidichtos, To Sperveri* (song), *Sousta, El pou 'se*. Costumes by Embona, Rhodes.

21 *Ta prikia* (song), *Patinada tou gamou, Oraia pou'ne i nifi mas* (song), *Baidouska, Leventikos*. Costumes by Volakas and Xiropotamos, Drama.

22 *Syngathistos, Syrtos, Troiro* (Thrace). Women’s costumes from the Karoti village of Evros, men’s costumes from Kavakli, Eastern Rumelia. *Road song, Syrtos-Pentozalis, Tragoudi tis tavlas*. Women’s costumes from Anogia and Chania. Men’s costumes: breeches. *Mitrena, Proskinitos* or *Klainiatska, Bela Olympio*. Costumes from Goumenissa, Kilkis. *Kastrinos* or *Maleviziotis*, song. *Rizitika* songs: Karanos Association, “I Riza”.

23 Praising of the groom, *Masenta, Soumbeti-Syngathistos, Lissavo-Geiko, Soumbeti-Patinada*. Women’s costumes: Liti, Thessaloniki, Men’s costumes: Promachi, Almopias.

24 Praising of the bride, The slender lady’s dress, Little Eleni or Eleni the Daughter, *Gaida, Ti stekisi chryso m’ denti, Patinada-Syrtos*, Praising and blessing of the bride, There goes our bride. Costumes: Drimos and Liti, Thessaloniki.

25 *Patinada*, Pilgrimage, *Ekklesia mou koukloti, Byzantine Ecclesiastical Chant, Tranos, Syrtos, Tis Patronas-Traios, Pousnitsa*. Women’s costumes from the Roumlouk region of Macedonia. Men’s costumes: Gidas and Episkopi of Imathia.

26 *Paraxipnimata, Perioli, Ballos*. Women’s costumes: the “megala alajia” of Nissiros. Men’s costumes: breeches from the Dodecanese.



d) *Epilogue*: A distinct section with wishes, marital symbols, song, and dance in which all performers of the act take part.<sup>27</sup>

*Roles*: The groom, the bride, the best man, the best woman, the parents of the groom, the family of the groom and bride, the friends, the guests.

*Participants*: The dance group of the Lyceum Club, Members of the "I Riza" Association (Kidonia, Crete), the traditional choir of the Lyceum Club, as well as musicians from Goumenis, Gida, Florina, Volaka (Drama) and Crete.

**2. "Cheers to the Oncoming Wedding". Scenario-instruction: Giorgos Ziogas – Research team of the association. Production: "Evros" Cultural Association for Traditional Dances. Garden Theatre, Alexandroupoli. July 2005.**

*The scenario*: The wedding ceremony is a link to the Mareika villages (Evros, Thrace), and is accompanied by live music, dance, and food. The core of the ritual is the ecclesiastical procession, though before and after it many rituals will take place, each with a goal in mind (protective, advisory, initiatory, symbolic). The rituals function as a testimony, and as a ratification of an important event, such as a wedding, which creates a new family through the synthesis of two persons.

*Place of reference*: Mareika villages (Evros, Thrace). Costumes: men's *potouri* garments. Women's costumes from the Mareika villages (bridal, festive, and daily), Pirgos and the villages of Eastern Rumelia.

*The formulation of the structure*.<sup>28</sup> In the performance, we observe the reproduction of a Mareiko wedding. And in this case the rituals were united according to the relations in *time* (before the ritual, during the ritual, after the ritual), and *dance* (interior of the home, church, street, courtyard). An analysis of the performance by quantity:

- a) *Prologue*: A distinct section that begins with the reading of a brief text by a narrator. Teeming with personal experiences and memories, the narration introduces the spectators to the spectacle for the importance of this element, the wedding, which is chiefly social, to be understood.
- b) *Chief part*: The preparation of the leaven,<sup>29</sup> the painting of eyebrows and hands by the

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27 Wishes, closed-circle dance, "*Neva kateva Panayia me to Monogeni sou*".

28 The analysis and description were chiefly based on the cinematized version of the performance, by the television channel DELTA, in 2005, but also on a brief elucidatory discussion with its performers. In summary, a version of the performance that lasted 26 minutes, which I had the opportunity to attend at the 37th International Festival of Zakopane (Poland) in July 2006, where the Association was taking part, and earned the third award in the "authentic dances" category.

maid of honour,<sup>30</sup> the shaving and bedecking of the groom,<sup>31</sup> the handing over of the emblem,<sup>32</sup> the gathering in wait for the groom in the bride's home,<sup>33</sup> the departure of the bride and the exit from the home, the breaking of the *protopsomo* bread, the throwing of apples by the bride,<sup>34</sup> the journey to the church,<sup>35</sup> the crowning,<sup>36</sup> the reception of the bride by the mother in law, the washing of hands by the bride,<sup>37</sup> the dance of the best man with the jug.<sup>38</sup> c) *Exit*: the common dance, with the participation of all performers in the performances but also that of the audience.<sup>39</sup>

*Roles*: The groom, the bride, the best man, the maid of honour, the *bratimia*, the parents of the best man and the bride, the family of the groom and bride, friends, guests.

*Participants*: Members of the association, pupils of all ages from the classes, as well as an ensemble of traditional instruments composed of a *gaida*, an accordion, drums, a violin, a *laouto*, a clarinet.

**3. "From Andros to Athens..." Text by Nancy Harmanta. Composition and editing by Giorgos Kotsou and Nancy Harmanta. Production: Andros Nautical Club. Theatre of the Michael Cacoyannis Foundation, 23 January 2011.**

*The scenario*: In May 1821 the modern history of Andros (one of the Cyclades) begins, during which the island found itself at the peak of the island group's economic prosperity, thanks to its strong shipping industry. From that time to the present, the demographic and social web of the island saw many changes, which were "reflected" in society, shaping, as time went by, different "profiles" and social behaviors, some of which are visible even today. A similar development was seen in the spiritual and artistic activity of the island, the course of which was neither continuous nor whole, as it frequently saw periods of downturn that succeeded periods of creative upsurge.

When the Andriots speak of dance, which they regard as an inalienable part of their entertainment, they do not mean the steps, but the context in which the dance moves are played out: weddings, evening parties, name day celebrations, festivals, dances.

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29 "Protopsomo" (song), humble dance, "Piristirouda mas" (song), *Syrtos-Syngathistos*.

30 *Syngathistos* and *Choros gia ti gikna*.

31 "Afenti mou sintassontan" (song), humble dance, *sichtir havasi*, *Syngathistos*.

32 "Simera ine Kiriaki" (song), *Zonaradikos*, *Syngathistos*.

33 "Afto t'askeri" (Zonari dance), *Syngathistos*, *Sou'pa mana'm*.

34 "Chereta nij chereta" (song).

35 "Pigame ke piram", handkerchief dance.

36 "Potirion Sotiriou lipsome" (ecclesiastical).

37 "Evga evga mor' mana m" (song), *Syngathistos*.

38 *Koulouriastos*, *Drista*, *Dentritsi-mantilatos*.

39 *Syrtos*, *Syngathistos*.

*Time and place of reference:* Villages of Andros and the town of Andros (Chora) (end of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century), Athens (postwar). Costumes: rural and urban attires from every era.

*The formulation of the structure.* Analysis of the sections of the performance by quantity:

a) *Prologue:* Introduction, where the main hero of the story, the narrator in the part of the grandfather, nostalgically describes real events and occurrences, feelings, and ideas, integrated in a historical and social context through the flashback method. The narration that follows the natural course of events emerges through a local type for every period, and is illustrated through moving and static images drawn from local and private archives. As a figure, the narrator is present throughout the duration of the performance, as his speech functions in an explanatory manner with respect to what will happen; simultaneously, it also functions as a bridge between the episodes in which the protagonists are the dancers, singers, musicians.

b) *Episode A:*

1. Andros toward the end of the 19th century. *During the Celebrations* ("Mars", *Syrtos*, and *Balos* with couplets, *Katsivelikos*, *Sousta*, quadrilles).

2. Andros, interwar period: *In Kotsakis's theatre* ("Let me lean", "Like a magical dream", "In the mouth, in the mouth", "My heart aches for you," "Plou plou"); *At Frangoulis's restaurant* ("*Rezenta*", "*Cumparsita*" (tango), "If you had a heart" (*fox anglais*), "If you don't want me, we will elope" (charleston), "My jealous one" (*Hasapiko*), "Hold me tight" (waltz), "Old tavern").

c) *Episode B:* Athens, after the war:

1. In a family centre ("Many times", "I never want you to come back" (bolero), "People and Kolonaki" (swing), "The last tram" (cha cha), "Put out the fire" (mambo), "You also look like the sea".

2. *At a people's hangout* (sunset – *Zeibekiko*), "You are the reason I suffer" (*Hasaposerviko*).

*Roles:* Men and women of the Andros community.

*Participants:* The Dance Ensemble of the Lyceum Club of Greek Women of Salamis (director: Glafkos Harmantas), framed by an ensemble of artists, such as the narrator-actor Christos Aslanidis in the role of the grandfather, the soprano Giouli Karagouni from the National Opera, vocalists Zacharias Kaerounis and Christina Lazarou. Also taking part were the musicians: Yannis Pavlopoulos (violin and vocals), Nikos Katsikis (bouzouki), Andreas Tsekouras (piano, accordion, guitar, banjo, *havaia* and mandolin) and many others, dancers, as well as a multi-member orchestra.

### **Analysis of the points of the three performances and a suggestion on how to read them**

The preceding descriptions, despite their summary form, offer, I believe, those few ethnographic data that depict in some way the methods that were used in accordance with the melody and content of every performance.

I will subsequently attempt to identify certain interesting passages while describing the same performances in a somewhat more systematic manner. Thus, in initiating this analysis, I would say that the three examples signal three different cases of utilization, of shaping and developing the dances of small agricultural communities, where, once products of collective creativity, they turned in the hands of the “director/dance instructor” into products of individual artistic conscience. Regardless of whether they were expressed or not, or even whether they were broadly understood or not, a methodology, whose theoretical context functioned as a guide that directed both the composition of the material (the choice and order of appearance in the act) as well as the realization of the performance, was adopted for the design of every performance. Thus, based on the content, these three performances constitute three distinct means of managing and highlighting of Greek dance through a narration:

a) *A ritual* (in this instance, a wedding ceremony) *whose composition was based on the patching together of contemporary dance and customary practices from various regions, together with the documentation that relates to the place of origin and their modus operandi* (etic approach).

Using a three-part model – before, during and after the crowning –, the Lyceum Club, as a basic criterion, appears to command the *functional integration* of the activities in the scenario. For the creator, what mattered was that the spectators realized that, in creating a performance, a whole is created, which may be made up of “heterogeneous” (from one point of view) marital activities – their selection was made by different communities; however, they assume importance and meaning and function as a whole from the moment that they are used as elements of an image, in this particular instance of an image that reproduces the idea of a Greek wedding (see the formulation of the structure and the places of origin of the activities). Thus, I would say that the directorial instinct of the creator is established in the fact that they managed, through the “framing” of *specific* customary actions connected to marital rituals, to unfold the story of a “traditional” wedding ceremony. These customary practices, however, obtained cohesion and existed as wedding ceremonies only on the theatre stage. Thus, in the performance, the activities went beyond everything that is presented functionally in the place from which they were drawn, since the goal in selecting them was the creation of a period – when things worked – with “artistic” *pictures from tradition* that reproduced an idea about rural Greece from the start of the 20th century, for instance. At first sight, the geographic indication seems not to account for the choice of different activities. The reference to their place of origin was, however, present (see the printed program), as some elements – for instance, the costume and the means of performance of certain ritual practices as signaling a social group – set the tone for specific places in which every feature may be found.

Another element is the use of dances. Traditionally, dances that are tied to wedding ceremonies are simple, ritual, and marked by variety, since special songs (songs of praise, advisory and symbolic songs) are highlighted. As a rule, these are interpreted by women, close relatives of the bride or the groom. The marital dance, which is unique, is that which the couple will perform after the crowning.

In the particular performance, the dances – particularly scant in number when compared to other performances by the same company – that accompanied every separate action had a more ornamental, rather than functional character, a tactic that leads to the thought that the measure, composition, and melody, together with the form of the dance, all function as criteria that determined the choices of the creators, regardless of whether or not these choices were entirely harmonized with the notion of wedding.

Thus, I would say that the second criterion in choosing the activities, just as important as their functionality, is their aesthetic substance. Because, as acts, these activities also have an aesthetic substance.<sup>40</sup> Besides, dance, music, song and ritual have all been drawn from the broad pool of folk wedding rites and traditional practices in Greece (I would add the term “from the outside in”), with the single goal – as mentioned in the printed program – of presenting them in a “theatrical manner” in order for them to “serve the broader notion of a ‘Greek wedding’” (see Lyceum of Greek Women, 1991, p. 2).

b) *A ritual* (in this particular instance of a wedding ceremony) *the construction of which is composed of dances and ritual practices from a local dance tradition, or of a number of germane dance traditions through a homogenous area, with particular reference to dance as a dimension of the behavior of man in society* (emic approach).

The second example concerns the initiative of a private rural association in Alexandroupolis, which, in June 2005, *dared* to stage its own wedding, in the garden theatre of Alexandroupoli. The performance, produced by the Association itself, was integrated in the context of the event that was organized by the Association with the closing of the school’s classes approximately every two years, and was primarily directed at the students (who also happen to be the protagonists in the performance) and their relatives, but also constituted an artistic event for the city. As the president of the Association admits, the motive for this performance was the performance of the Lyceum Club.<sup>41</sup> But, he adds, their effort was based on the experiences of the members of

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40 “As an intangible concept, dance belongs to common cultural phenomena – like music and poetry – which have no utilitarian functionality; when used only in an aesthetic manner, they are destabilized with regard to the meanings that they convey; their meanings then lose their autonomy, they are dis-jointed from their determined functionality and obtain others, based on aesthetic” (Loutzaki, 2004, p. 115).

41 This particular performance found many imitators, since as a subject it was a basic motive for every form of cultural association to present to their own audience their own wedding. Thus, Antzaka-Vei (2010, p. 334) very eloquently mentions that this performance led to the creation of a school, in one manner of speaking.

the group, and the results of the field recordings that the Association initiated years ago,<sup>42</sup> in the Marides communities (in the Northern section of the Evros prefecture).

The Association, wishing to stay close to reality, attempted to render in the most faithful manner possible the individual activities on stage (I could, for the sake of analogy, compare this effort to Geertz's "thick descriptions"). Upgrading the process of wedding to the level of a theatrical episode – in this instance, we mean the Mareika wedding – the Association attributed importance to the factual material and the means of gathering it, following an "insider's" narration of the ritual, while using local definitions and taxonomic categories (see the formulation of the structure).

Thus, from a mere theatrical narration, the performance is converted into an organic means that expanded its search on three levels: the micro-scale of the steps and sounds (like the use of a single dance, the *syngathistos* dance, as the one that is by definition related to wedding), the medium scale of human relations and behaviors (like the usage of persons of different ages), and the macro-scale of tradition, of civilization and society (like the dramatized historicization of wedding events as they are performed in a particular area). As a result, the view of the creator of the performance approaches significantly the perception of the informants: rituals, dances, music neither as tunes and steps nor as culture or tradition, but as interaction and communication through certain expressive forms, in which practices, steps and tunes, culture and tradition function as constituting elements (Ronström, 1999, pp. 135, 140); and this is because in wedding the roles cease to be clearly dance-related but also become social, symbolic, ritual.

In conclusion, I would say that, in the second example, a basic criterion for the choice of different scenes was that the way the wedding activity was carried out culturally at a local level should be understood. Besides, the audience that it was directed towards, in contrast to the Lyceum Club's tradition, was entirely Thracian. Thus, on stage, the "wedding" of the Association was presented, on the one hand, "from the inside", from the perspective of the organizers who were responsible for its implementation and, on the other, from the perspective of its performers who, as locals, had experienced and could not only render, with particular feeling, the roles they had taken on, but could also interpret the consequences of the event (emic approach). The priority of the performance was based on highlighting the speech and the acts of those same organizations that put together the social event, while functioning in an auxiliary manner toward other perspectives (theatrical adaptation), that analyzed the structure and action of the wedding ceremony "from the outside".

c) *The intense study of the dance tradition as a system of cognitive and social process that in its turn constitutes a part of it, or is associated with the social and political system of an island culture.*

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42 Whatever is taught to the members of the Association is the result of a years-long recording carried out by the research team of the Association during meetings with musicians, singers and residents of various areas of Thrace and Evros Prefecture in particular. See a historical overview on the Association's website: <http://www.oevros.gr/>

While being greatly innovative and wishing to pleasantly surprise its members, the Nautical Club of Andros (NOA), with the pretext of the cutting of the *vasilopita*, an annual holiday that is directed exclusively towards its members, *ordered* the performance for it to be the core event of the celebration. The performance was a “spectacle full of dance, music, songs, based on the memories of old Andriots with references to the celebrations on the island, but also Athens”.<sup>43</sup>

The third example stands out from the other two, as dance, the main subject of the performance, was integrated into the – ever-shifting – aesthetic and ideological, personal and sociopolitical, but, above all, social context. And while in the first and second examples the marital activities are seen in their timeless dimension, in the third example (the Andriot dance activities), these same activities are understood in their development, where what is presented is an element in its succession (Andros, 19th century / Athens, 20th century; Andros: rural/urban; there: the island / here: Athens). Thus, in masterfully utilizing historical testimonies and evidence from the local and family archive, the “directors” of the performance presented the dance culture of the island of Andros, while highlighting various aspects of its urban life.

From the point of view of the theme, the performance was organized into three parts; it constituted a small narrative, where the first part referred to an agricultural space, related to the town of Andros (Chora), its customs and culture, and the second concerned urban space, based on the urban environment of Athens, man in the city and his entertainment. Initiating from the realization that *space* constitutes one of the frameworks of the formulation of memory, there was an attempt in the performance to project the relationship between urban space and historic memory (e.g. in celebrations, in Kotsakis’s theatre, at Frangoulis’s restaurant). Their elements were the daily lives of people, the way they dressed, their food, their habits, and their preoccupations in daily life, the *Syrmos* dances, as well as their entertainment; a form that offered a new understanding through which space might be used (the decoration of space is used) for the “live” frames to materialize. In essence, we are talking about selected moments in history that supported one another, and were there to historicize (visualize) the narrator’s text.

An interesting observation that also set the tone for the performance was that an attempt was made so that the volunteers in the performance, members of the dance ensemble of the Lyceum Club of Greek Women of Salamis, directed their feelings internally, felt it inside, experienced the moment and shared the stylistic and kinesiological tricks of the past. This means that with persistence and several rehearsals, they learned how to walk on stage, how one sex behaves towards the other, or how the individual behaves toward the group, the use of space. It is something that may ultimately be learned.

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43 “We journeyed together through the old Andros festivals, to the interwar taverns at the Port and to the dances that were organized in the Athenian halls and the night clubs. We were carried away by beautiful melodies that we silently hummed, we were moved by them, and danced meaningfully dances like the *ballos*, the *syrtos*, quadrille, tango, waltz, cha-cha, mambo...” (<http://www.noa.com.gr>; see events from 2011).

## Epilogue

The three performances revealed a volume of spiritual work, the greatest part of which went beyond the level of a mere restructuring of the dances. Every creator managed, in their own way, the dances and customs that they chose as means of expression, yet all invested in the search for ideas through “direction”. Thus, they revealed that they shared some concerns, they surpassed the limits of tradition and touched upon the art of dance. An important element in the analysis was the printed program that accompanied every performance – particularly well looked after and informative, with extensive texts and photographs in the case of the Lyceum Club of Greek Women, a brief outline in the other two cases. The digital presentation of the performances – that is, the DVD that every organization brought forward – was also particularly useful as a mnemonic tool, since the analysis was carried out several years after the performances themselves.

In conclusion, I would say that it is a dangerous thing when reality is transformed into something other than what it truly is. What is interesting is to discover theatre within folk activities themselves, as the latter have their own theatricality. Every reading is a revelation. We also proposed a “reading”. However, I would say that there is always the element of subjectivity in the manner of interpreting a spectacle, while, of course, respecting its “objective” features.

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