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Dances, Waltzes, and Serenades: Salon Piano Music by Ionian Composers

‘The very most that can be expected of music for girls is that it isn’t totally bad’.¹ This statement by an anonymous reviewer of Bidenbenz’s *Leichte Klavierstücke* in 1799 could summarize the music world’s assessment for the vast majority of music compositions aimed to be performed by women throughout Europe, from the end of eighteenth until the first decades of the twentieth century. The term “Salon music” that is frequently used to describe music performed in the nineteenth century upper class salons is neither musicologically accurate nor exclusively associated with music for women. However, its usual pejorative implication often refers to music that is gentle, intimate, and sentimental – qualities customarily associated with the fair sex; albeit the occasional superficial brilliance required the contribution of a skilled performer.

The consideration of salon music as an independent music genre, solely on the premise that its performance took place in salons, would put together a remarkable diversity of repertoire and composers with very little in common other than the conditions under which this music was performed. Frederic Chopin’s *Nocturnes* and Henry Herz’s *Trois Nocturnes caractéristiques* have in common nothing but their title, as well as their composer’s intention to be performed in intimate settings: Chopin’s masterpieces integrate technical challenges such as trills, octaves, extended passagework, open wide-leap arpeggios, and uneven rhythmic divisions among hands with a compositional masterfulness demonstrated with Chopin’s signature colorful, and at times chromatic, harmony, the multi-layered voicing, the improvisation-inspired ornamentation figures and so forth. On the other hand Herz’s *Nocturnes* are compositions for amateurs, with restricted technical abilities that limit the left hand accompaniments to a monotonous, simplistic broken chord pattern that serves as the

¹ Head, Matthew. “‘If the Pretty Little Hand Won’t Stretch’: Music for the Fair Sex in the Eighteenth-Century Germany”. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52/2 (Summer, 1999), 244

background to an unknown – yet vaguely familiar- single voiced melody produced by the right hand.

These disparities in the “salon music” genre are succinctly described by Charles Rosen:

The style of the genre may have been determined by its original function, but the style of the individual examples is not only more personal but even transcends any personal intent²

Regardless of its problematic categorization and classification, salon music has been widely associated with pieces for small chamber ensembles, songs with piano accompaniments and above all with solo and four-hand piano works performed in intimate upper class-bourgeois salons by amateur and occasionally professional guest musicians. The political turmoil and the continuous wars that dominated Greece’s mainland for the majority of nineteenth century prevented it from being a peaceful setting for salon music. Even though there are records of *soirées* taking place in upper class residences in Athens as early as 1834,³ the local press often criticized such events as being unsuccessful mimics of imported western habits.⁴ However, parts of Greece, such as the Ionian Islands, never occupied by the Ottoman Empire, sustained long and influential relationships with the western European musical traditions, which, combined with the local urban social settings, resulted in the flourish of salon music production from the early nineteenth until the early twentieth century.

The so called “Ionian School” is represented by an impressive number of composers, in comparison to the population of the islands, indicative of the significance of music life in Ionian society during the nineteenth century. Beginning with the highly influential musical personality of Nikolaos Mantzaros (1795-1872), the region produced composers such as Iosif Liveralis (1820-1899), Pavlos Karrer (1829-1896) Spyridon Xindas (1812 or 1814 – 1896), Dionisios Rodotheatos (1849-1892), and Spyridon Samaras (1861-1917), just to name a few. The focus of Ionian composers seemed to be opera, with Corfu being the operatic center of Greece since 1733 when San Giacomo Theater welcomed its first opera production and turned into

² Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 385

³ Kostas Baroutas, *Musical life in Athens during 19th Century*. (Athens: Filippou Nakas, 1992), 13

⁴ Anninos, Haralambos. ‘The Conservatory’ [To Odeion]. *Estia* 31/8 (Sixteenth Year - 1891), 114

an opera house until the beginning of twentieth century.⁵ However, piano's increasing popularity in the nineteenth century made it an ideal vehicle for compositions aimed to cover a variety of purposes.

Commercial records indicate that various early fortepianos were present in the island even before 1815. This particular year marked the official beginning of British rule in the island; a fact that along with the unparalleled popularity of keyboard instruments in Britain at the time led to an unprecedented development of the piano in the Ionian region.⁶ The independence of keyboard music from representational (operatic in this case) and subordinate (such as dances) social functions according to the rise of nineteenth century's western aesthetic theory occurred only gradually in the small Ionian society.⁷

This is particularly evident from some of the earliest existing Greek piano compositions, the early *Sinfonias* by Nikolaos Halikiopoulos Mantzaros (1795-1872), from the 1820s, which according to Domenico Padovan were in 'Greek manner', full of beautiful original lyrical melodies,⁸ thus marking the linkage to the lyric theater tradition. Additionally, the use of *sinfonia* as an instrumental form underlines the close connection of the newly-emerged -in this region- keyboard repertoire with forms affiliated with opera introductions, essentially sonata forms with minimum or non existing development parts.⁹ Apart from formal considerations, the score itself is indicative of the ambiguousness concerning its purpose: it appears to resemble an orchestral piano reduction rather than being an idiosyncratic keyboard composition, as it opens with string *tremoli* on the right hand and lower instruments - probably brass, stating the fanfare-like introduction on the left hand:

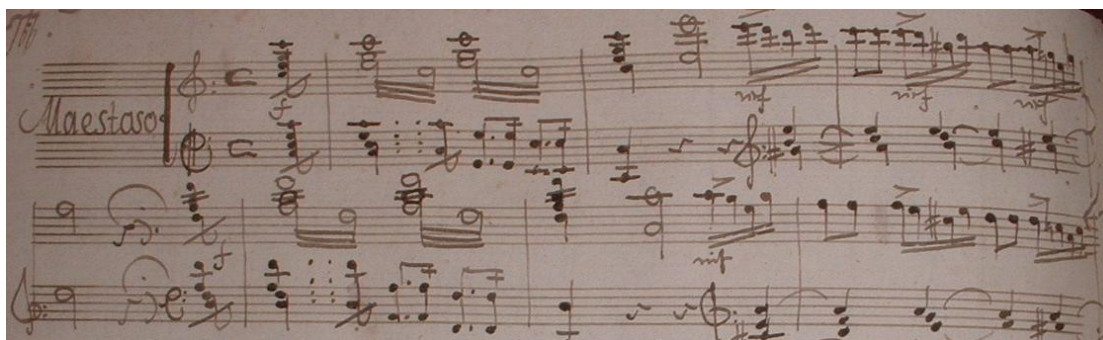
⁵ Xanthoudakis, Haris. 'The chronicle of Neohellenic Art Music' in *Antis gia oneiro*, edited by Alexandros Mouzas. Athens: Cultural Olympiad, 2004. 21

⁶ Kardamis, Konstantinos. 'Presolomian Nikolaos Halikiopoulos Matzaros and his Work'. Ph.D. diss., Ionian University, 2006. 331

⁷ Bowie, Andrew. 'Music and the Rise of Aesthetics' in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 31

⁸ Haris Xanthoudakis and Kostas Kardamis (eds). *Nikolaos Halikiopoulos Mantzaros: Research Contribution on the occasion of 130 years since the composer's death*. (Corfu, Ionian University – Department of Music Studies, 2003), 159-160

⁹ Kardamis, 'Presolomian...', 345



Ex. 1. Mantzaros, Sinfonia in C, Maestoso¹⁰

Mantzaros has assured his claim to fame as the composer of the Greek national anthem, the first opera by a Greek composer (*Don Crepuscolo*, 1815), and the earliest Greek piece for voice and orchestra (*Aria Greca*, 1827). His influence on Corfu's musical life was not confined in a series of compositional premieres on Greek soil, as he was perhaps of the most influential music teacher in Corfu for a large part of nineteenth century.

While keyboard production in the Ionian Islands did not remain as closely attached to vocal forms as Mantzaros' early works, it maintained a functional character for the rest of the century. This is evident by a mere review of the titles of keyboard works that survived in local libraries and archives: waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, marches, nocturnes, operatic paraphrases, and serenades are found in abundance, while the large-scale independent keyboard forms like sonatas, concert etudes, romantic variations, works consisting of large number of individual pieces functioning as a cycle, are absent.

Apparently, Ionian composers used the piano as a "utility" instrument aiming to fulfill the need for popularization, a trait quite common in nineteenth century musical culture throughout Europe. Leon Platina, in his article "The Piano and the 19th Century" provides ample examples of composers, from Beethoven up to Debussy and Stravinsky that made piano reductions of large scores as a result of playing their compositions over at the piano.¹¹ Music paraphrases and transcriptions both served as vehicles to establish accessibility to orchestral, chamber or vocal music, while providing composers already popular schemes for guaranteed communication with

¹⁰ Composer's ms., in Corfu Philharmonic Society archive.

¹¹ Todd, Larry R. (ed.). *Nineteenth Century Piano Music*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 10

their audiences.¹² Liszt's overnight selling success of the first attempts of Schubert song's transcription in 1838, led to a new similar commission by Diabelli.¹³

In the same vein, Iosif Liveralis (1820-1899) found interest for publication from Milan's publisher Francesco Lucca for his *Fantasia di Concerto per pianoforte sopra alcuni motive nell'opera I Lombardi*. Iosif Liveralis (or Giuseppe Liberalis as we can see in this Fantasia's edition found in the Corfu Philharmonic Society Archives) is mostly known so far as the composer of lost lyrical works inspired from the Greek Independence War, which along with the fairly recently found set of variations *Le Réveil du Kléphant* are considered the oldest "National School" works in Modern Greek Music.¹⁴

His published paraphrase on *I Lombardi* bears no publication date. However, Lucca's plate number (5130) suggests publication in 1845,¹⁵ only two years after Verdi's premiere in 1843. The work, following the paraphrase's ultimate goal of variation, concentrates on themes from Verdi's work mixing and mingling the material *en route*.¹⁶ For instance, after a short thick textured introduction, seemingly aimed to set the orchestral dramatic mood, Liveralis introduces his initial thematic material (ex. 2) which in fact is not part of the opera's introduction; it rather comes from the first scene of the third act where the crusaders joined by Christian pilgrims, sing of the beauty of Jerusalem and the Holy Land (ex. 3). Apart from being a memorable melody, Liveralis obviously considered this theme morally appropriate as being of a religious and not sentimental character, since he dedicated this work to a married lady, "Signora Elena Marchetti, nata Marcoran", stating this dedication above the title of the printed cover. On the other hand, it was more common for paraphrases to use material from choral opera parts that were customarily more memorable and easier to be sung by amateurs.

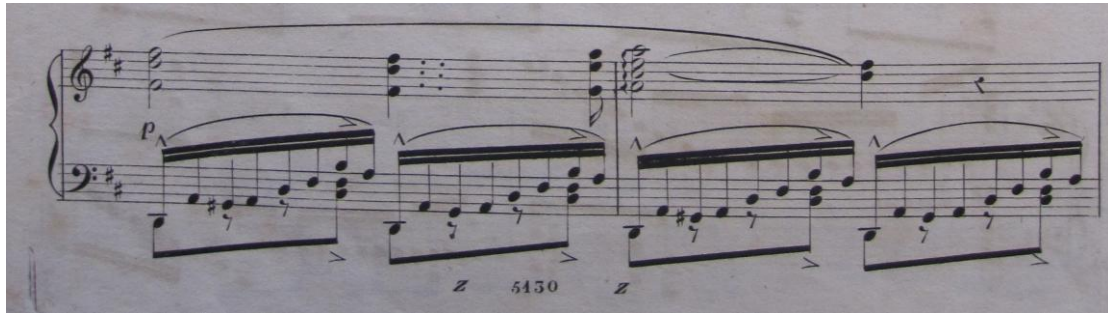
¹² Morelli, Giovanni. 'Round Table VI: Forms of Popularization of Music in the 19th Century and up to World War I'. *Acta Musicologica* 59/1 (Jan. – Apr., 1987), 19 - 25

¹³ Walker, Alan. 'Liszt and the Schubert Song Transcriptions'. *The Musical Quarterly* 67/1 (Jan. 1981), 51

¹⁴ Leotsakos, Giorgos. 'Light under the Bushel'. CD liner notes. Rethimno: Crete University Publications, 1999. 35

¹⁵ Camera, Marcoemilio. 'Lucca' in *Dizionario degli editori musicali Italiani: 1750-1930*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini. Pisa: ETS, 2000. 213

¹⁶ Walker, 'Liszt and the Schubert...', 52



Ex. 2. Iosif Liberalis *Fantasia di Concerto*

Handwritten musical score for Verdi's *I Lombardi*, Act 3, Scene 1. The score is written on two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a complex, multi-layered texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the bass and treble. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is visible at the beginning. The measures are numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The lyrics are: "Deh! per i luo - - ghi che veder n'è da - - to, e di pian - to ba - gnar, 1".

Ex.3. Verdi's *I Lombardi*, Act 3, Scene 1

The dedication to a lady does not qualify this as “girl’s music”, due to the score’s thick multi-layered texture and advanced technical demands. It requires further archive research to determine whether Signora Marhetti was an accomplished pianist able to enjoy her dedicated *Lombardi* excerpts at her own piano. In this multi-

sectional *Fantasia Liberalis* takes a Lisztian approach using an abundance of *glissandi*, fast passage works, arpeggios in the whole keyboard range and so forth. However, the same composer dramatically reduces the technical requirements when transcribing opera material for pedagogical purposes.

Piano reductions of popular opera and orchestral works were apparently one standard educational tool for piano, theory and composition courses in Corfu during nineteenth century, as evident by the large number of such scores available in the Corfu Philharmonic Archives. While it is unknown for which course Livalis made a piano transcription of Donizetti's opera *Maria di Rohan*, it is evident that he attempted to be objective and faithful to the score. The simplicity of the score (ex. 4) however, prevents this transcription from being an accurate one, since it does not allow the composer to unfold the original work to the smallest detail.¹⁷ Regardless on whether this score was aimed to be performed by a female piano student or not, it is probable that a high level of technical proficiency did not characterize the entirety of the female population, as suggested by a large number of character / salon compositions from the mid-nineteenth century on.



Ex. 4. Liberalis: *Cavatina Nell' Opera Maria di Rohan*, Allegro

An immediate follower of Livalis's nationalistic tendencies was the Zakynthian composer Pavlos Carrer (1829-1896), who after achieving a remarkable success in Milan with his Italian operas, he returned to Greece working on melodramas inspired by Greece's independence-war triumphs. He directly refers to Greek heroes from the 1821 Greek Revolution against the Ottomans giving their

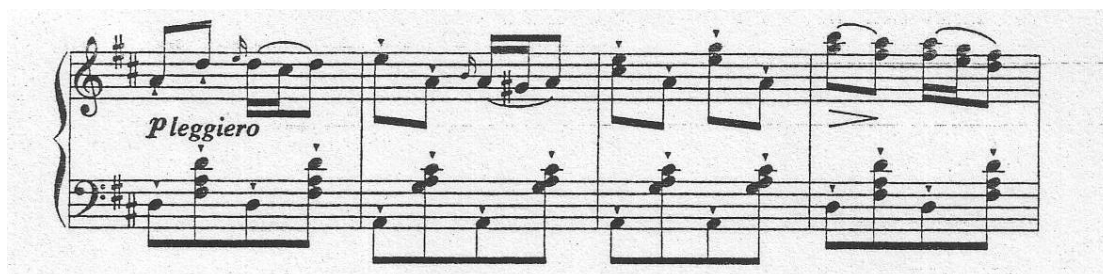
¹⁷ Walker, 'Liszt and the Schubert...', 52

names to some of his operas (*Marcos Botsaris*, *Kyra Frosyni*, and *Despo*), while in other case he establishes connections to ancient glories, as in *Marathon-Salamis*.

Pavlos Carrer mastered the art of operatic paraphrases for piano during his years in Milan between 1850 and 1857: just for the record, he has composed at least eight solo piano pieces based on themes from Verdi's *Il trovatore*. His fondness for piano paraphrases continued for his own Greek operas after returning to Greece in 1857. However, his piano compositions with original melodic material are clearly salon-music pieces. More often than not, the titles of his works include a type of dance – with a special emphasis on polkas, even though waltzes, mazurkas and occasional special event salon pieces are also quite common.

One of the latter is Carrer's "Polka – Salon pour le Piano" entitled *Les Belles Armènes* from 1851, published by Canti editions in Milan. According to Leotsakos' catalogues, the same work was published in two more forms: for solo flute and duo violin and piano.¹⁸ The composition consists of three polkas named after Armenian women: Validè, Melitza and Zerleina. The third one is not included in the existing copy from the Corfu Philharmonic Society Archives; however, a careful study of the two existing ones reveals that the only thing Armenian about them is their title.

Each of the polkas is divided in three parts: the main polka, the trio and the finale. The overall form of each set is ABÁ with extremely repetitive melodic material and triumphantly exclamatory endings. This traditional eastern European dance was as popular as the waltz during nineteenth century. With his *Les Polka [sic] des Salons*, Moscheles is honoring his Bohemian heritage by using a polka for a piano piece clearly aimed for salon use; however the work's melodic vapidness (Ex. 5) is typical of polkas aimed to be danced,¹⁹ indicating that similar salon polkas were possibly designed for less formal dancing *soirées*.



Ex. 5. Moscheles, *Les Polka des Salons*

¹⁸ Giorgos Leotsakos. *Pavlos Karrer: Memoirs and Works*. (Athens: Benaki Museum and Department of Music Studies - Ionian University, 2003), 236

¹⁹ Derek Carew. *The Mechanical Muse: the Piano, Pianism and Piano Music, c. 1760-1850*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 420

Carrer's "Polka-Salon" makes an equally strong statement about the piece's target group. A quick glance at the score would be sufficient to convince one that one's ability to play octaves and left hand broken chords would suffice for a satisfactory performance. Aside from the moderate technical demands, the performer of the piece would not necessarily need to be an imaginative and knowledgeable musician. The chord progression moves around tonic, subdominant and dominant, the few transpositions occur with no harmonic preparation and the repetitious character of the forms used reduces the material to be practiced to a minimum (ex. 6)



Ex. 6. Pavlos Carrer, *Validè*, Op.9/1 (1851)

During nineteenth century salon music was certainly more associated with the feminine sphere than the masculine.²⁰ The piano was considered the most suitable instrument for an upper class young woman who wished to be educated properly as a lady. In addition, women amateur performances in various salons provided ample opportunity to demonstrate a potential bride's talents, elegance and social status. In a time where composers being independent from various patronages strived to see their works published and sold, while trying to promote their more serious endeavors, such as operas in the case of Ionian composers, it is perfectly understandable for them to take on far less serious - yet largely popular tasks.

²⁰ Koza, Julia Eklund. 'Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in Godey's Lady's Book, 1830-1877'. *The Musical Quarterly* 75/2 (Summer 1991), 103

As Rosen suggested though, it is not the genre, but rather the composers' individual qualities and devotion to their compositions that determines the outcome. In Carrer's example the genre resulted in a composition that in today's terms would be easily characterized as "elevator music" – albeit electric elevators were invented in the 1880s and it probably took several decades before music in them served as the passengers' background.

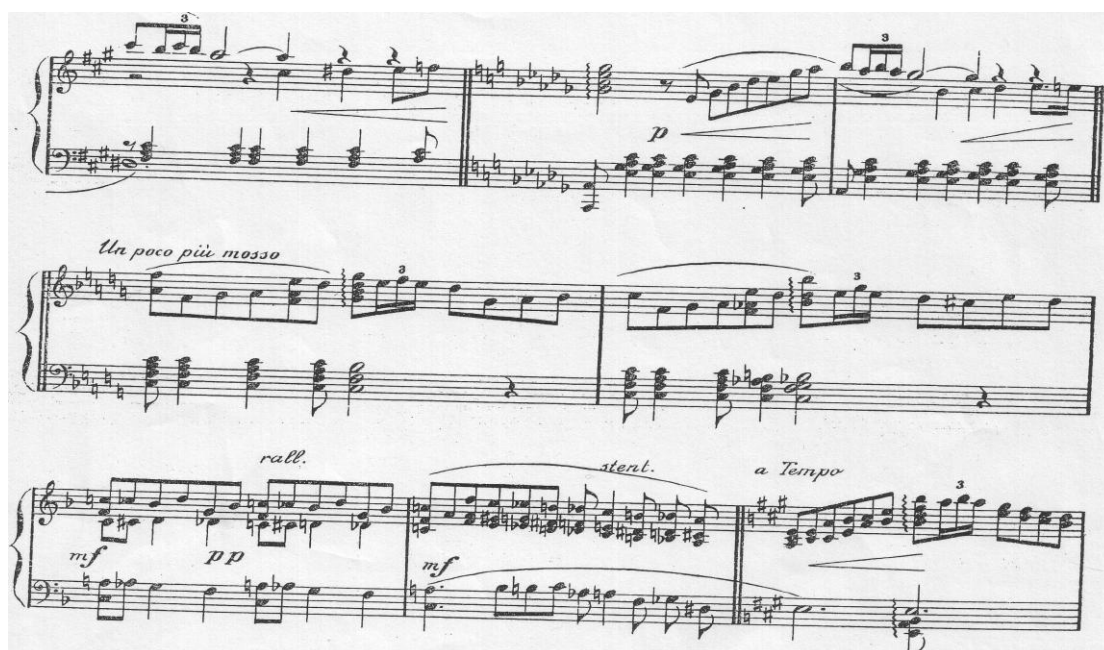
The same genre in the hands of Spyros Samaras (1861-1917), and in his *Sérénade Française*, produced an entirely different outcome. Samaras is the well known composer of *Olympic Hymn*, as well as of major influential operas with great success in Italy, such as *Flora mirabilis* and *Il Martire*, among others. This particular piece is the first of *Six Sérénades*, a work initially published in Leipzig in 1903. Unfortunately, the remaining five are lost along with a number of other Samaras' works. The work reflected the composer's music training which, unlike the vast majority of Ionian composers, it took place in Paris, where Samaras studied composition with Léo Delibes and Théodore Dubois.

The first of the *Six Sérénades* was published in the Alexandrian monthly music magazine "Orpheus", which published "everything interesting and beautiful" about music, including biographies, and compositions by established and amateur composers. Naturally, such a magazine would be very appealing to the upper-class female population, providing new scores for their salon concerts. The work is a typical sample of French piano *salon musique*: it's highly emotional, with an expressive melodic line "floating" over repeated syncopated chords. (ex. 7)



Ex. 7. Spyros Samaras: *Sérénade Française*, opening measures

Despite the brevity of the piece (35 bars), Samaras uses an imaginative harmonic language that rises above the piece's inherent need for straightforwardness and manages to oscillate between A major, A flat major and F minor. Even though the composer does not increase his technical demands, Samaras provides a solid composition whose simplicity of form does not diminish its artistic value, with imaginative harmonies, long beautiful melodic patterns and syncopated rhythms that counterbalance the piece's rhythmic steadiness. (ex. 8)



Ex. 8. Spyros Samaras: *Sérénade Française*, mm. 13—20

'Serenade' as a romantic composition title makes an implicit female reference. Occasionally though, composers felt that the female target-group should be even more explicitly addressed by the use of a woman's name in the composition title: such an example is *Roxana - Valse Lente* by Napoleon Lambelet from 1918. Lambelet's long sustained success in London where he moved in 1895 after a notable career in Athens and Alexandria was secured by his unmistakable melodic gift. The Swiss /Greek composer found fertile soil for his romantic compositions in the popular *belle-époque* genres of music theatre and cabaret productions, as well as in an abundance of salon music pieces. Several of his solo piano compositions were named after women: In the Corfu Philharmonic Archives one can find the scores of an *Elektra Valse*, a *Vivienne Waltz*, and one *Doris*, among others. Lambelet uses names that either make direct references to well known female theatre-roles (a practice that can

be traced from Mantzaro's most well known piano piece, a *Redowa Mazurka* named *Ophelia*, or refers to real women (for instance, *Vivienne* was composed for Vivienne, the composer's daughter).

Roxana was published in London by Feldman & Co, and the cover is designed to ensure selling success, certainly much needed in the financially difficult years following the First World War. The piece is dedicated to Miss Doris Keane, an American actress who had a great success in London. Miss Keane performed the role of "Roxana" in Avery Hopwood's "Nobody's Widow" for nine months in London's Lyric Theatre²¹ that year, and apparently Lambelet's *Valse* was included in the play's background music. Aside from the picture of the actress, a note on the cover ensures that the piece included in the score is found "as performed with Great Success at the Lyric Theater" (ex. 9).



Ex. 9. Napoleon Labelet's *Roxana*: cover

The piece echoes a Belle-époque, interwar-period atmosphere, with simple yet memorable melodic patterns and romantic harmonic progressions with use of ample secondary dominant chords, creating thus a chromatically ornamented effect. Despite the predictability of the waltz rhythm, Lambelet enhances rhythmic flexibility

²¹ *The New York Times* (New York), 26, October 1919.

by use of a seven-note pattern in a three beat bar unit as the principal melodic theme, as well as by and the ever-changing use of tempo indications (Ex. 10). In the first 16 bars the composer changes the time signature (once), the tempo markings (three times) and has added tempo suggestions such as four more *ritenuti* indications, among others.



Ex. 10. Napoleon Labelet: *Roxana*, opening measures

The piece's theatrical origin obviously requires a narrative and flexible performance, portraying an array of emotions and moods. A repetitious melodic material is rather anticipated in a stage-music situation to help the score to become popular. The piece requires from the performer to rely almost exclusively on the rhythmic subtleties in order to sustain interest as the melody is not only frequently repeated unchanged but it is also often doubled by both hands.

Even though composers of salon music frequently minimized their technical requirements when addressing amateur and usually female performers, they incorporated a much wider variety of expressive technical means in pieces composed under special circumstances and aimed to be performed by themselves, or other professional musicians. A case in point would be funeral pieces that retain their status

as salon music solely on the premise that they were often performed in small gatherings and special occasions.

Alexander Greck (1876 – 1959), is perhaps the last in the row of 19th century Corfiot composers and teachers. He achieved a fair success in Alexandria (Egypt) with his operettas, symphonic poems and chamber music. Greck penned numerous piano compositions that either fall under the salon genre, or are pieces - particularly marches- aimed for the classroom, since he taught piano and theory in Corfu from 1945 until the end of his life.²²

Unlike the expected simplicity and at times unbearable predictability that can be observed in his compositions for ladies, such as his *Valse Uranie* and his *Italian Valse*, in the *Marche Funèbre* Greck is more efficient in exploring a pianists' technical palette. The piece is devoted to his deceased wife, Maria Agiovlassiti, and was published in Alexandria by "Litho L'Ancre" in 1936. The composer's distress for his loved one is presented through an raid of octaves in the lower piano register, thick textures, agonizing *tremolo*, whilst melodic passages that interrupt the ferocity are reminiscent of older, happier times. (ex. 11)



Ex. 11. Alex Greck: *Marche Funèbre* measures 9-15

A higher level of technical means is not a guarantee for higher artistry, just like technical simplicity is not synonymous with naivety. Greck's funeral march manages to stage a dramatic mood but, due to its repetitious thematic material and chordal stereotypes, and particularly, due to the fragmented melodic interludes, it fails

²² Takis Kalogeropoulos. *The Dictionary of Greek Music: From Orpheus until Today*. (Athens: Gialellis Editions, 1998). 513

to provide enough emotional contrast in order to sustain a narrative quality, without failing to exhibit the rhapsodic character commonly associated with funeral marches.

Salon music's lack of concrete definition is no coincidence: its only permanent parameter is the performance environment, i.e. the salon. However, its potential performers hardly form one group. There are certainly the amateur female pianists who may have reduced technical abilities, or banal musical taste, yet they need to demonstrate their music skills in social gatherings. There are also the ladies who do have the musical talent and technical efficiency to play and appreciate a higher level of art music, and they need challenging music to do so. There are also those who are interested in playing stage-music hits, opera highlights, song arrangements and dances to entertain their guests— those that would play something dedicated to them by their music teacher or bought for them by their loved ones. There are also salon gatherings where a professional pianist is required (the “petit clan” of the Verdurins, in Marcel Proust’s “Un amour de Swann” comes in mind!). Paraphrases with virtuosic displays, nights devoted in the honor of a lost one, and small recitals that honor a special guest are also occasions where a skilled musician is indispensable.

Ionian composers in nineteenth century had to meet all those needs through their compositions for solo piano. The result is an impressive *corpus* of works, some lost, some published, some in manuscripts, almost all of them in various archives waiting to be discovered, catalogued, studied and evaluated. For decades, this music has been ignored by musicologists and performers. Recently, the pioneer work of a new generation of Greek musicologists gives rise to the hope that further research, performances and recordings will follow, as this repertoire forms an integral part of Greek music history.

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