

The Clarinet in Greece

Colours in Double by Kiriakos Sfetsas

The ability of the clarinet to adapt to the demands of many musical styles has always managed to fascinate players and composers. Used worldwide in interpreting a variety of musical styles, it gradually became popular and often replaced other instruments in orchestras, ensembles and bands. In western music, composers felt its significance and began increasingly using it in orchestras as a solo instrument. As a result, the role of the clarinet gained a considerable level of importance, leading it to be used in ensemble and solo pieces. Its technical capabilities, which in many respects exceed those of other woodwind instruments, led to the expansion of the repertoire for the clarinet.

This presentation's topic is part of the thesis titled *The Clarinet in Greece: A historical outline with examination of performing issues in a selection of pieces by Greek composers*.

It will be useful to initially outline how the clarinet as an instrument came and spread across Greece, before presenting an example of an orchestral piece, in which the clarinet is singled out for its significance in playing the main melody. The main part of this presentation will be the piece by the Greek composer Kiriakos Sfetsas *Colours in Double*; a piece for solo traditional clarinet and orchestra, in which the role of the orchestral and solo clarinet can be studied in greater detail. Moreover, by examining transcriptions of improvisations played by the soloist, we will be able to understand the successful combination of two different styles of performance and how the use of Byzantine music influences the traditional style of playing the clarinet in Greece.

Greece is divided in several regions and during the last 180 years, each one played an important part in making the clarinet the dominant woodwind instrument that was exploited by many performers and composers. As an instrument, it first arrived in 1834 according to Despoina Mazaraki in her book *The Traditional Clarinet in Greece* (Athens, 1959). At the time, southern Greece was only recently liberated by a revolution against the Ottoman Empire, with regions of northern Greece (Thessalia,

Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace) still being under occupation. Mazaraki claims that it was from Thrace and Epirus (**Fig. 1**) that the clarinet begun its spreading with the help of *Tourkogiftoi* (Turkish-Gypsies) and *Tourkalvanoï* (Turkish-Albanian Gypsies) musicians like Souleimanis and Metos, who introduced it to the local musicians, before descending all the way down to Peloponnesse.



Fig. 1 Map of Greece. The first route of the klarino, which covered the regions of Epirus, Sterea Ellada and Peloponnesse is represented by Souleimánis. The second klarino's route represented by Méto¹s started in Macedonia, was established in Thessalia and gradually expanded towards Sterea Ellada and Athens.

The clarinet in traditional Greek music serves as the instrument that performs the entire song, alongside the sung tune. More specifically, it performs the introduction of the piece, then plays quietly on the background while the melody of the piece is sung and finally repeats the melody in-between each verse. Before the end of most songs, the clarinettist is allowed to improvise following some of the melodic patterns previously heard, which are based on specific modes of the Byzantine music.

The clarinet, used even nowadays in traditional music, is an Albert system clarinet. People refer to it as *klarino* which has no connection to the upper register of the clarinet as we know it. It is simply a language distinction which maintains the root of the word (clarin-) and uses the ending -o. This term will be used during this presentation to distinguish the two styles of playing the clarinet in Greece; the traditional and western style of performance as well as the Albert system clarinet from the Boehm system which is currently used by western style performers. The traditional performers, unlike western style clarinettists, are not usually interested in shaping their tone colour by obtaining a mouthpiece corresponding to tuning or to the reed strength. They use reeds which strength is either 1 or 1 ½ purely because they are flexible enough to allow them to play accordingly to the traditional style with the use of various ornaments and techniques that will be mentioned later on.

The *klarino* replaced gradually many of the woodwind instruments used for centuries throughout Greece such as the *floyera* (recorder with no mouthpiece), the *zourna* (an oboe-like instrument with a double reed) and the *gaida* or *tsampouna* which are different forms of bagpipes. Whether it was its bigger range, greater dynamic capacity, better tone colour or its flexibility, the *klarino* could easily surpass all the previously mentioned instruments. The *klarino* immediately had a key place among the *kompania*; a name used to describe a group of players who formed a band. On stage, the *klarino* was placed in the centre, surrounded by the violin, the singer and the lute (**Fig. 2**). In a few occasions, a percussion instrument was also included to reinforce the sense of rhythm, which was played by the lute. The role of the violin was to shadow the *klarino* during a performance and only in a few occasions take over in order to give a chance to the *klarino* player to rest. Among a number of exceptional performers nowadays, people are still able to experience the thrilling

performances of Petroloukas Chalkias, whose improvisations on pentatonic scales have been renowned in Greece and in USA.



Fig. 2 The kompanía of Nikos Tzáras²

At the same time the *klarino* spread and flourished in mainland Greece, at the islands of the Ionian Sea, the clarinet grew in importance through its use in orchestras and marching bands. In Athens, the newly appointed Bavarian King Otto introduced the western style of clarinet performance by inviting German bands, orchestras and tutors who taught the German system of playing at the Athens Conservatory. It was only during the 1950s that the Boehm system was introduced and established as the only system taught through the significant presence of Charalampos Farantatos, who graduated Paris Conservatory in 1952.

Among a growing number of clarinet works by Greek composers, here is an example of a piece by Nikos Skalkottas called *Tsamikos*. This is part of a suite of dances titled *36 Greek Dances*, which were composed between 1931 and 1936. Like most of the other dances in this work, the tune is based on a Greek traditional folk song. During

the *Tsamikos*, Skalkottas wrote a solo for the principal orchestral clarinet (**Ex. 1**), which is a simplified version of the traditional tune originally performed by the *klarino*. A number of similarly influenced pieces by Manolis Kalomiris and other Greek composers paved the way for Kiriakos Sfetsas's piece *Diploxromia* (*Colours in Double*); a contemporary example of how the traditional and western style of clarinet performance can be combined, as it is not based on any traditional melody but still manages to blend the Byzantine modal scales and the well tempered western music.

Example 1: Skalkóttas – 36 Greek Dances (*Tsámikos*, bb. 47 – 65)

Clarinet in B \flat a^2 f

Cl. mf p pp I. Solo

Cl.

Tune from *Tsámikos* dance (Enas Aitós) played by the clarinet³

Colours in Double

Kiriákos Sfétas (*b* Amphilocheia, 29 Sept 1945) studied composition under M. Voúrtsis and the piano under Krinió Kalomíri at the National Conservatory in Athens (1959–66). In 1964, when he was 18 years old, Sfétas was asked to accompany on the piano Maria Kallas in her last concert appearance before a Greek audience in Lefkas island, where she sung the aria of Santuzza from the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni.



Kiriákos Sfétas



Kiriákos Sfétas (piano) and Maria Callas

In 1967 he moved to Paris and received a French government grant, which enabled him to pursue his studies in composition, conducting and analysis with Max Deutsch (1969–72), benefiting at the same time from advice provided by Xenakis and Nono.⁴

As Aléka Simeonídou comments:

the composer was first influenced by the contemporary environment and therefore decided to follow the serialistic style of writing pieces. However, he did follow (Sfétas's own comment) an 'anarchist' way of composing pieces.⁵

A significant characteristic of his compositional style is the use of short individual ideas that can be easily identified by the audience. Throughout his youth and prior to being influenced by western compositional styles, the composer claims that he had experienced the way Greek traditional music was performed.⁶ After returning to Greece, Sfetsas abandoned serialism and became interested in ideas based on this kind of music. His interest resulted in the composition of *Colours in Double* (Athens, May – July 1988); a two-movement piece, which is scored for traditional clarinet and chamber orchestra. The title suggests the combination of both traditional and western art music colours. The need for such composition appeared, as Theodore Antoniou explains, because

‘... of the amazing skill and musicality of these (traditional) performers who, unfortunately, are becoming very hard to find. Moreover,... most contemporary Greek composers had become obsessed with the “manifestos” of modern avant-garde and had turned their backs on their own roots...’⁷

This piece was commissioned by Theodore Antoniou and the Heraklion Festival in Crete, where it was first performed at the ‘N. Kazantzakis’ open theatre on 27 August 1988 during the summer festival. Vassílis Soukas was the solo traditional clarinet performer and the composer conducted the Boston University ALEA III orchestra.

In *Colours in Double* the difference in performing style and sound colour among the orchestral and solo traditional clarinet becomes clear through the piece’s structure. We shall examine the role of the *klarino* in more detail, but first let us pay attention to the highlights of the orchestral clarinet. As you can see at the score, the clarinet is more significant than the other woodwind instruments in the orchestra. It either plays different phrases that refer to the free sections to follow, or performs short solo phrases to pave the way for the *klarino* solo. Finally, it precedes all the other woodwind with semiquaver additive patterns and interacts with the soloist in different parts of the piece.

The most significant feature in Sfetsas's piece is the traditional solo clarinet part. Vassilis Soukas, a self-taught player that is considered among the virtuoso performers in Greek traditional music, was the first to perform this piece on his Albert system clarinet. During the piece's three Improvisational sections, Soukas unfolds his skill and understanding of the traditional Greek music in a way that blends with the orchestra. The structure of each Improvisation and the role of each instrumental family in the orchestra, reflects the role of each instrument in a Greek traditional music group.

The main mode used in the Improvisations is the *Ousak* (Ex. 2). Greek traditional players still refer to most modes with their Turkish names, because when Greece was still under Ottoman occupation, reading and writing was forbidden and the musical tradition after being blended with common elements by the two cultures was passed down from generation to generation by using the Turkish terminology.

Example 2



Ousak scale used in the Improvisation sections⁸

However, if we pay a closer look to the *Ousak* mode, it is identical to the *Plagios tou Protou*, as Soukas reveals in his Byzantine music notated score of his Improvisation. This mode consists of quartertone intervals (10-8-12), which form the scale, with an additional interval in the middle that links the two halves (*tetrachords*). Each tone in western music notation corresponds to 12 *moria* (parts) in Byzantine music, with the semitone being 6 *moria*. All the following four Byzantine modes⁹ are used in the Improvisation sections of the piece (Fig. 3).

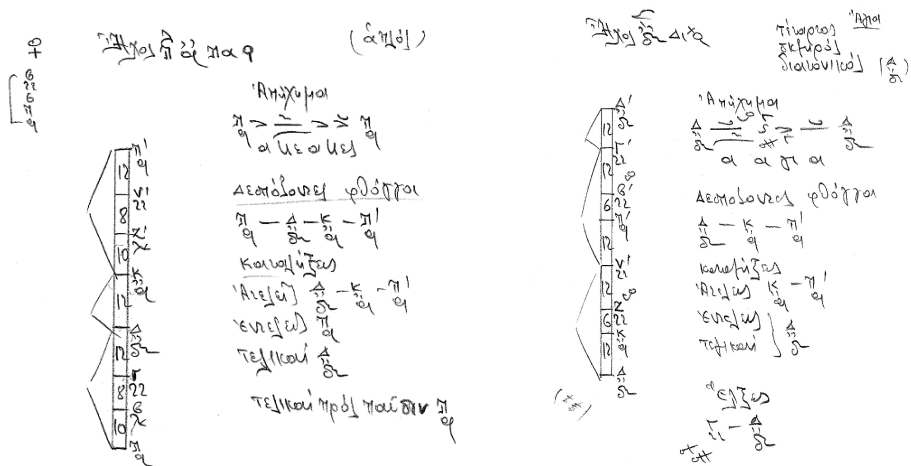


Fig. 3a: Byzantine scale of *Plágios tou Prótou* with its tetrachord intervals 10-8-12 (left) and *Tétartos Sklirós Diatonikós* or *Ágia* (right)

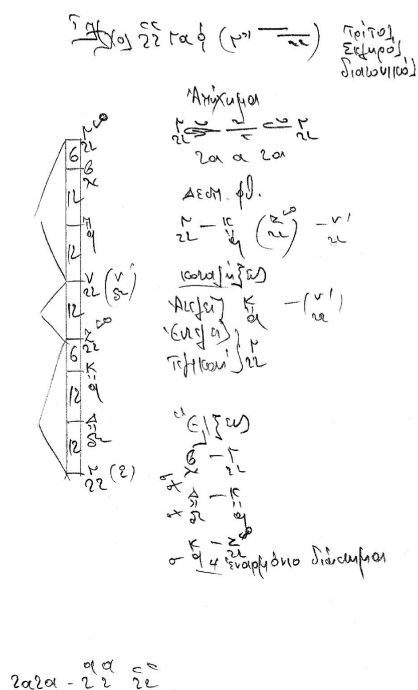


Fig. 3b: *Trítos Sklirós Diatonikós*

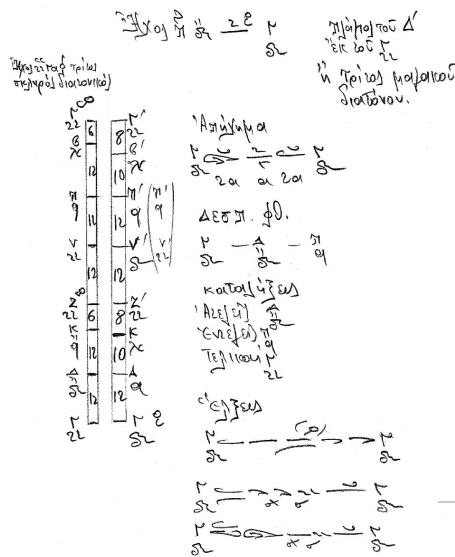


Fig. 3c: *Tritos Malakou Diatonou* (scale on the right with the tetrachord of 12-10-8) in comparison with the scale of *Tritos Sklirós Diatonikós* (on the left with the tetrachord of 12-12-6)

This is the Byzantine music notation that Soukas used in *Colours in Double* (**Fig. 4**). The notation not only indicates the stepwise motion of the melody, but it also dictates through various symbols its twists and turns.

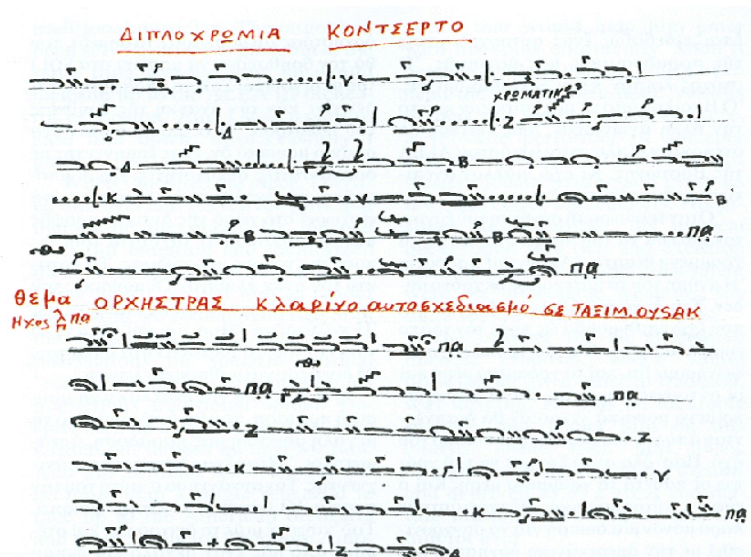


Fig. 4: Byzantine notation of the traditional clarinet improvisation (first movement) by Vassilis Soukas. In the middle right the word 'Ousak' reveals the Arabic scale of the solo. On the left the 'Ηχος πα' is the Byzantine notation of naming the same scale.¹⁰

The symbols used are called *Neumes* and they are split in three different categories according to what they dictate: interval, duration or expression (**Fig. 5**).

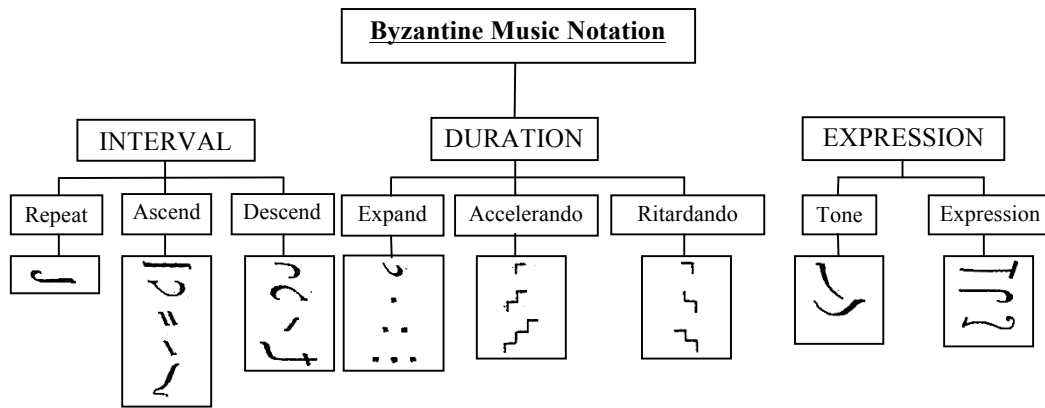


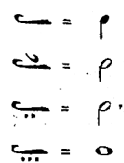
Fig. 5a: Basic categories of Byzantine *Neumes* ¹¹

(a) 'Bodies' (Sōmata)		
apostrophos	⤿	desc. 2nd
oligon	—	asc. 2nd
oxeia	/	asc. 2nd (+ stress)
petastē	⤿	asc. 2nd (+ stress)
dyo kentēmata	⋈	asc. 2nd, short
kouphisma	⤿*	asc. 2nd (+ shake)
pelaston	⤿	asc. 2nd (+ stress)
(b) 'Spirits' (Pneumata)		
kentēma	⤿	asc. 3rd
elaphron	⤿	desc. 3rd
hysēlē	⤿	asc. 5th
chamēlē	⤿	desc. 5th
(c) Composite signs		
oligon-kentēma	—⤿	asc. 3rd
oxeia-kentēma	/⤿	asc. 3rd
elaphron-apostrophos	⤿⤿	desc. 4th
kentēma-oxeia	⤿/	asc. 4th
dyo apostrophoi	⤿⤿	desc. 2nd
ison-petastē	⤿⤿	repetition with stress
oligon-petastē	—⤿	asc. 3rd
(d) Other signs		
ison	⤿	repeated pitch
diplē	⋈	accentual sign
kratēma	⤿	accentual sign
tzakisma	⤿	prolongation*
apoderma	⤿	?fermata
gorgon	⤿	accelerando
argon	⤿	ritardando

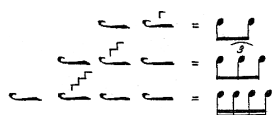
(*usually transcribed by a dot)

Fig. 5b: Explanatory Table of *Neumes* ¹²

a) Expand the Duration



b) Accelerando



c) Ritardando

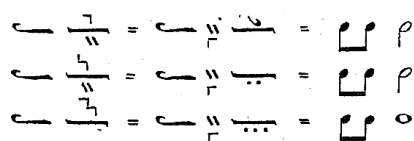


Fig. 5c: Byzantine Duration *Neumes* ¹³

↘ → Varía

↪ → Psifistón

→ → Omalón

→ → Antikénoma

↪ → Éteron or Síndesmos

Fig. 5d: Byzantine Expression *Neumes* ¹⁴

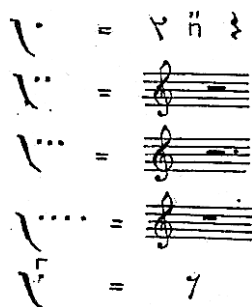


Fig. 5e: Byzantine Rest *Neumes* ¹⁵

One can observe how a small section of Soúkas's score is interpreted in Western notation (**Fig. 6**). The third line is what the performer played in the recording of the piece, which indicates that the score only served as a guideline to the actual Improvisation.

a)



b)

Clarinet in B \flat



c)

Clarinet in B \flat



Fig. 6: a) Byzantine Notation
b) Translation into Western Notation
c) Transcription from the live recording

The transcription of the Improvisations in Western notation provides a better inside to the Greek traditional music (**Ex. 3**). This score combined with the recording and an Albert system clarinet should give performers the opportunity to approach the Greek traditional performing style, before liberating themselves to improvise accordingly. The acciaccaturas, mordents, trills and turns are simplified in order to make it easier for the clarinetist to follow the score. Breaths, bar lines, legato lines and numbers are only there to indicate the different phrasing.

Example 3

CD Extract: 4:30 - 8:17

Colours in Double

Traditional Clarinet Solo - Movement 1

K. Sfetsas

Transcribed by S. Marinis

The musical score is written for Clarinet in Bb and multiple Clarinet (Cl.) parts. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 80. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *ral* (rallentando). Specific performance instructions include "1 8 beats", "3 8 beats", "5", "6", "7 (a)", "7 (b)", "7 beats", and "8". Trills are indicated with "tr" and "tr~". The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing multiple notes and rests. The overall structure is a traditional clarinet solo movement.

Transcription of 1st Improvisation in *Colours in Double* ¹⁶

The question that concerns performers nowadays is how this musical style can be interpreted by an individual that has never previously heard Greek traditional or Byzantine music, does not own an Albert system clarinet, or uses today's clarinet with a western style setup. This has been a great area of discussion not just for traditional Greek music, but for all kinds of folk music traditions that use modal scales. Provided that the improvisational skill of this person is in a level that allows him/her to approach this style in an appropriate manner, the transcription of Soúkas's Improvisations, the *Colours in Double* recording and a number of CDs on Byzantine music chanting should serve as a very useful guideline for a well-given performance. A suggestion would be that each performer uses his/her clarinet with a softer reed, in order to achieve a better tone colour and interpretation of the piece, similar to the original intention of the composer.

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¹ Map of Greece created by the author.

² **Mazaráki, Déspoina:** *The Traditional Clarinet in Greece* (Collection of the French Institute, Athens, 1959), pp. 32-33

This picture is part of the Musical Folklore Institute's archive. In the middle is Níkos Tzáras (clarinet). At the left is Kóstas Mpenátsis (violin) and at the right is Basilis Ntálas (lute). At the back is the singer Gákis Sántis from Choulíarádes. This picture was taken in 1930. (p. 149)

³ **Skalkóttas, Nikos:** *36 Greek Dances – Tsámikos*, Orchestral Score, pp.6 – 8

⁴ **Leotsákos, George:** 'Sfétas, Kyriakos', *Pangosmio viografiko lexico* (Universal Biographical Dictionary, Athens, 1988), p. 42

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⁶ Phone interview with Kiriákos Sfétas (02/11/2007)

⁷ **Sfétas, K.:** *Colours in Double*, CD Booklet, CUP 6 (1993), p.5

⁸ **Mavroidis, Marios D.:** *The Musical Modes of the East Mediterranean Sea* (Fagotto, Athens, 1999), p. 232

⁹ Byzantine scales written by **Kostópoulos Panagiótis** – Byzantine music specialist in the Argos Conservatory, Greece (Argos, 09/2005)

¹⁰ **Sfétas, Kiriákos:** *Colours in Double*, CD Booklet, CUP 6 (1993), p. 27

¹¹ **Maraziotis, Ioannis:** *Byzantine Church Music Theory* (Charilaos Stasinou, Athens, 1958), p. 32.
*Translated by the present author

¹² **Levy, Kenneth & Troelsgård, Christian:** 'Byzantine Chant', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 2, p. 737

¹³ **Maraziotis, Ioannis:** *Byzantine Church Music Theory* (Charilaos Stasinou, Athens, 1958), p. 21

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 23

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 22

¹⁶ Transcribed by the author