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Fingerstyle Rebetiko: the revival of a lost technique

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RESUM

El rebètic és una forma de música grega popular que va sorgir a finals del segle dènou entre grups marginals que vivien prop del port o que havien estat en la presó. Des de la mitat del segle vint ha desaparegut progressivament, cosa que va produir que el rebètic s'incloguera en la lista de Patrimoni Cultural Immaterial de la Humanitat de l'UNESCO. El rebètic sempre ha estat associat al *bouzouki* i a la tècnica de punteig de trèmolo considerada el "blues de Grècia". De la mateixa forma que els músics de *blues* utilitzen la guitarra acústica, els cantautors de rebètic componen i toquen la seua música en *bouzouki*. A 2017 el virtuós guitarrista popular Dimitris Mystakidis va trauer el seu àlbum *Amerika* que inclou cançons escrites per immigrants grecs als EE.UU. a principis del segle vint. La transcripció i l'anàlisi de dues de les seues cançons mostren els punts en comú entre el *fingerstyle* del *blues* i el *fingerstyle* del rebètic i les seues diferències amb la tècnica *bouzouki* habitual. Aquestes anàlisis, acompanyats d'entrevistes a Mystakidis, intenten, després d'un segle, ficar l'atenció en els sons migrants dels músics de l'est del Mediterrani, creats i gravats de forma predominant en un altre continent.

Paraules Clau: Rebètic amb dits; *blues* amb dits; *rebetiko blues*; *fingerpicking*; Dimitris Mystakidis.

RESUMEN

El rebético es una forma de música griega popular que surgió a finales del siglo diecinueve entre grupos marginales que vivían cerca de los puertos o que habían estado en la cárcel. Desde la mitad del siglo veinte ha ido desapareciendo, lo que produjo a que el rebético se incluyera en la lista de Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de la Humanidad de la UNESCO. El rebético siempre ha ido asociado al *bouzouki* y a la técnica de punteo de trémolo que se ha considerado el "blues de Grecia". De la misma forma que los músicos de *blues* utilizan la guitarra acústica, los cantautores de rebético han compuesto y tocado su música en *bouzouki*. En 2017 el virtuoso guitarrista popular Dimitris Mystakidis sacó su álbum *Amerika* que incluye canciones escritas por inmigrantes griegos en EE.UU. a principios del siglo veinte. En él recupera el olvidado estilo guitarrístico *tsibiti* [pellizcado] y asegura que esta técnica se vio influida por el *fingerpicking* de los *bluesmen*. La transcripción y el análisis de dos de sus canciones demuestran los puntos en común entre el *fingerstyle* del *blues* y el *fingerstyle* del rebético y sus diferencias con la técnica *bouzouki* habitual. Estos análisis, acompañados de entrevistas a Mystakidis, intentan, después de un siglo, poner el foco de atención en los sonidos migrantes de los músicos del este del Mediterráneo, creados y grabado de forma predominante en otro continente.

Palabras Clave: Rebético con dedos; *blues* con dedos; *rebetiko blues*; *fingerpicking*; Dimitris Mystakidis.

ABSTRACT

Rebetiko is a form of Greek folk music that originated at the end of the nineteenth century by marginal people who lived near ports or spent time in prison. It has been slowly disappearing since the mid-twentieth century, which resulted in rebetiko being inscribed on UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017. Rebetiko has always been associated with bouzoukis and tremolo picking technique yet has been characterised as 'the blues of Greece'. Just as blues musicians used acoustic guitars, rebetiko songwriters have composed and performed their music on bouzouki. In 2017, the folk guitar virtuoso Dimitris Mystakidis, released the album *Amerika* that includes songs written by Greek immigrants in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century. He revives their forgotten *tsibiti* [pinched] guitar style and claims that this technique is influenced by bluesmen fingerpicking. Transcription and analysis of two of his songs demonstrates commonalities between fingerstyle blues and fingerstyle rebetiko and their differentiation from typical bouzouki technique. These analyses, accompanied by an interview with Mystakidis, aims to spotlight, after a century, the migrant sounds of Eastern Mediterranean musicians that were predominantly created and recorded in another continent.

Keywords: Fingerstyle rebetiko; fingerstyle blues; rebetiko blues; fingerpicking; Dimitris Mystakidis.

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1. Origins and popularity of rebetiko

Rebetiko is a style of music that originated at the end of the nineteenth century by marginal people in prisons (Tambouris, 2008: 7) and ports of Greece. The people who played this kind of music, usually shared similar beliefs and outfits, and were members of a similar subculture. These people are called rebetes. Some sources consider them as members of the underworld (Lexico.com), whereas others (Petropoulos, 1990: 9-10) claim that rebetes and the underworld simply overlap.

In 1962, Dick Dale made an American surf rock version of the 1927 rebetiko song *Misirlou* and gained worldwide popularity. This was used by Quentin Tarantino as the theme of his 1994 film *Pulp Fiction* (Grow, 2014). It regained popularity in 2006, when sampled by the band Black Eyed Peas in the song *Pump It* (Erlewine, 2019). At the same time, Dick Dale's version was included in the video game *Guitar Hero 2* (Exposure Online Magazine: 2008). Finally, rebetiko was inscribed on UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017 (UNESCO, 2017).

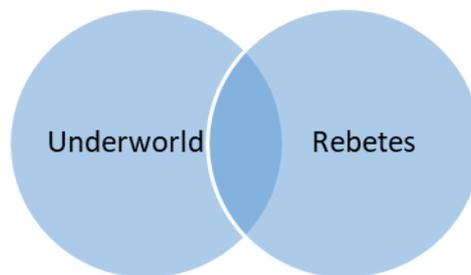


Image 1: Rebetes and the underworld only overlap.

2. 'The Greek blues' characterisation

Rebetiko tends to be described as 'the blues of Greece'. Sometimes it is used for commercial purposes. For example, the 2015 album *Rebetiko Au Bouzouki* by Paraskevas Grekis is subtitled 'The Greek Blues'; the 2004 album *Athens Exclusive Series: Rebetiko* is subtitled 'Blues, The Greek Way...' and the 2000 album *Café Rembetika* is subtitled 'The Birth of the Greek Blues'. It can also be observed in posters that are addressed to Greek audiences or to mixed Hellenophone and Anglophone audiences. These are not conceived in order to deceive, but instead to make the concerts more appealing to those who have not heard of rebetiko. Examples of these include titles such as «Rebetika: Birth of Greek Blues», «The Greek Blues – Sounds of the Underground», and «A Night of Greek Blues».



Image 2: The blues singer, songwriter and guitarist Robert Johnson

The singer-songwriter and rebetiko records collector and enthusiast, Panos Savvopoulos, has undertaken research on rebetiko, disseminating his observations in different media, such as books, magazines, blogs, websites, talks and television programmes. He mentions the similarities between rebetiko, flamenco, fado and tango, but mainly emphasises those between rebetiko and the blues. It is noticeable from pictures of famous musicians throughout the twentieth century that the majority of *rebetes* have been holding bouzoukis, whereas the bluesmen have been originally holding acoustic guitars and since the early 1940s both acoustic and electric guitars. Also, the rebetiko scales, called *dromoi*¹ [roads], are completely different from the blues scales and the pentatonic scales, as they are primarily modal. *Dromoi* have their origins in Turkish *makam*², Arabic *maqam*³ and Byzantine *echos*⁴. Although, these systems are not of equal temperament and their music is performed either on fretless instruments or on instruments that allow an adequate degree of microtonal control and tunability, whilst *dromoi* are performed mostly on fretted instruments. The term «blues scale» is actually misnomer (Jaffe, 1996: 39). The generally accepted pitch sequence generates a hexatonic scale that is not used in rebetiko. The major and minor pentatonic scales that are used in the blues are rarely used in rebetiko music, to which they were brought by traditional Greek music, like the music of Epirus⁵. Contrariwise, a commonality is the extensive use of arpeggios in both genres.

¹ Plural of *dromos*.

² A system of melody types used in Turkish music.

³ The system of melodic modes in traditional Arabic music.

⁴ The name for a Byzantine mode within its eight-mode system.

⁵ A region in northwestern Greece, which is part of the wider historical region of Epirus.



Image 3: The Famous Quartet of Piraeus: Markos Vamvakaris, Stratos Pagioumtzis, Anestis Delias and Yiorgos Batis.

In 2007, Dafni Tragaki published *Rebetiko Worlds* (Tragaki, 2007: 116), confirming that «one of the most commonly applied descriptions of rebetiko song was that which described the music as ‘the Greek blues’». In 2016, Daniel Koglin stated in his book *Greek Rebetiko from a Psychocultural Perspective* (Koglin, 2016: 101) that «it is mainly Piraeus-style rebetiko that has been mixed with globalized musical idioms» adding:

It is interesting, though hardly surprising, that rebetiko is often mixed with various older and contemporary ‘subcultural’ or ‘underground’ styles such as the blues (cf. the albums by Pavlos Sidiropoulos [1992], George Pilali [1994], and Stelios Vamvakaris [1995]), [...] Metaphorical statements like the common ‘rebetiko is the Greek blues’ or ‘rebetiko is protest music’ have their musical equivalent in these stylistic fusions.⁶

Three additional albums can be identified as representing this mix of rebetiko with blues: an EP by Pavlos Sidiropoulos [2003] and the albums by Louisiana Red with Stelios Vamvakaris [1994], and Dimitris Mystakidis [2017], a folk guitar virtuoso and multi-instrumentalist, with a career spanning thirty years and thousands of performances as a session guitarist for many Greek artists. *Amerika* is one of his latest contributions to rebetiko, as it includes covers of songs that were originally performed by Greek immigrants in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1920 the migration fever cost Greece eight per cent of its population (Tambouris, 2008: 11). Mystakidis tries to revive the lost fingerstyle technique that was developed by the *rebetes* who migrated to America. In his album’s liner notes he refers to «the special fingerstyle (‘pinched’) technique and the singular guitar playing of [Giorgos] Katsaros⁷, [Kostas] Doussas⁸ and [A.] Kostis⁹». He believes that the technique is «clearly influenced by the fingerpicking technique of Afro-American musicians who played the blues». He then adds that «The songs of this era and their playing technique, which is described by the term ‘*tsibiti*’ (‘rebetiko fingerpicking’), were released and performed only in America». Another important statement in his booklet includes the fact that «the songs that [were] recorded here in Greece were released only in the USA. », some of which were brought to Greece by visiting immigrants (Tambouris, 2008: 49). Finally, he recognises that «*Tsibiti* is mostly an uncharted field, presenting great latitude for further research and development».

⁶ Koglin, 2016: 101.

⁷ Giorgos Theologitis (1888-1997) earned the nickname ‘Katsaros’ [‘Curly’] for his curly hair.

⁸ Doussas usually appears as Dousas. In the former, double esses are used to secure correct pronunciation. Less frequently is mentioned as Dousias or Gousias.

⁹ Kostas Bezos (1905 – 1943) was a singer-songwriter, guitarist, caricaturist and journalist who recorded songs under the pseudonym A. Kostis or just Kostis.



Image 4: The gospel blues singer and guitarist Blind Willie Johnson.

The album received critical acclaim by the *fRoots* magazine's editor, Ian Anderson (Anderson, 2017: 57), who stated that *rebetes* adapted the open tunings of African-American bluesmen and that this record justifies the 'Greek blues' tag. He also recognised (Anderson, 2017: 57) that «the early American recordings evolved rebetiko on fingerpicked guitars rather than various Greek lute-family instruments (*baglama*¹⁰, bouzouki, etc.)». In an interview with Elisavet Sotiriadou for *fRoots* magazine (Sotiriadou, 2018: 39-41), Mystakidis explained that musicians used the guitar as an alternative during eras of strict censorship. He named Kostas Dousas and Giorgos Katsaros as the *rebetes* who were influenced by the blues music in the USA and he made references to the open G and open D minor tunings (Sotiriadou, 2018: 39-41). Interestingly, the British label Death Is Not The End released two compilation albums (Katsaros, 2018; Dousas, 2018) of these two musicians in 2018. Both were distributed as limited edition audio cassettes and are already sold out in 2019. Their title is *Greek Blues in America*, while the names of the artists appear in Greek. Katsaros is regarded as one of the biggest rebetiko composers in the USA and his mastery of the guitar made him famous. President Roosevelt invited him to the White House in 1942 (Tambouris, 2008: 59).



Image 5: Audio cassette compilation of Giorgos Katsaros's recordings.

Mystakidis presented his album at Theseum Theatre, in the centre of Athens on the 12th of October 2017. The show was sold out and the stage was designed just for him, his guitars, and a laptop for audio-visual material. This formal set-up is unorthodox for rebetiko music, which has historically been performed in taverns and bars

¹⁰ *Baglamas* is a significantly smaller version of bouzouki, pitched an octave higher. A similar instrument is the Turkish *baglama*.

where people sit at tables, drink, smoke, chat and dance. In 2019 he performed in several festivals in Europe, some of which advertised his act as ‘Rebetiko Blues’, highlighting once more the ‘Greek blues’ badge, probably for promotional purposes. Apart from the solo performances of his album *Amerika*, Mystakidis mostly performs with his band that consists of two acoustic guitarists and a female singer, or collaborates with other musicians. In 2016, he did a noteworthy number of performances with his band. In the second part of these series of concerts, after the break, he would return to the stage alone in order to play some solo fingerstyle songs. The majority of these songs were later included in *Amerika*. At the end of some concerts Mystakidis performed his fusion of Vassilis Tsitsanis’s song *To Skalopati Sou* [Your Doorstep] with Eric Clapton’s *Tears in Heaven*. One of these fusions was released on his 2019 album *Here & There*. On the 23rd of September 2019, The Listen Project Facebook page (Facebook, 2019) announced a new episode titled «The Other Side of the Ocean», in which the ‘Greek blues’ tag is revived, as the post describes that «Dimitris Mystakidis plays Rebetiko – the Greek Blues – in the style of the Greeks that lived in America and were influenced by Afro American music».



Image 6: Dimitris Mystakidis playing fingerstyle rebetiko.

3. The Interview

Mystakidis agreed to be interviewed in March 2018, extracts of which are presented here. When questioned about rebetiko musicians’ persistence on performing songs of the past instead of composing new tunes and releasing albums with this fresh material, his response was that:

Writing new songs that resemble Markos’s [Vamvakaris] and [Kostas] Skarvelis’s *hasapika*¹¹ would not make any sense to me. Writing new songs by borrowing stuff from them [Markos and Skarvelis], making changes and creating a distinct composition, this is what makes sense to me. [...] Rebetiko is over, it’s not possible to write new rebetiko. It is only possible to write music that is similar to rebetiko.

Another question was about his viewpoints on the new covers that mix rebetiko songs with other forms of music like gypsy jazz or reggae and he replied:

I do like some of these mixtures and I dislike some others. Personally, as a musician and as a lover of this style of music, I am irritated when I notice that this mixture happens only for convenience, only for commercial reasons. [...] if you take an old hit song and you do a cover of it and you try to convert it to easy listening with the sole purpose to sell and to win the audience more easily, it does bother me. When a fusion is made with respect... it doesn’t annoy me at all. On the contrary, when you take some old material and reprocess it and make it available to the world, on the one hand you remind your audience of this old material, so they might listen to it again, and on the other hand you also enliven it. It’s like when you visit grandma and she

¹¹ *Hasapiko* is a Greek folk dance in 4/4 meter. *Hasapikos* and *Zeibebikos* are the two most common rhythms of rebetiko music. The literal translation of the word is «butcher’s [dance]». *Hasapika* is the plural of *hasapikos*.

enjoys it and becomes cheerful. It's like revitalising the whole thing.

In some of his concerts he stated that he disagreed with the characterisation of rebetiko being the 'blues of Greece', so further questioning was able to explore this. He replied that:

Musically there is no connection between the two styles. There is no relationship between their scales, as rebetiko is mainly based in modality. While you might say the blues are modal, as you use pentatonic scales, it is very limited in comparison to the scales and the richness of rebetiko. There are no blue notes in rebetiko. Correct me if I'm wrong, these blue notes are the 'outside' from the scale notes that are characteristic.

The response to that was «Yes, this is the common way to face them today. Although, before blue notes were written onto the music stave as we see them today, the bluesmen used to play a note that was between the frets». And his reaction was «Ah, so there is a connection! [...] So the logic is the same with the folk *dromos* [...] if there is a similarity between rebetiko and blues, this is the social content of them [...] Another similarity is the way the musicians use the couplets». He was then asked to suggest fused works and his said:

You should listen to my upcoming album. [...] the verb in music is 'play' – essentially we, as musicians, do these things with great joy, it's a game for us – I've mixed big international hits with rebetiko songs. [...] For instance, I've mixed *Billie Jean* with [the Greek traditional song] *Sala Sala*. I've mixed Red Hot Chilli Peppers with Vassilis Tsitsanis. Also Eric Clapton with Tsitsanis.



Image 7: Dimitris Mystakidis using his fingerstyle rebetiko technique.

During the interview, one of the requests was to describe all the influences that he spotted during his research and creation of the album *Amerika*. His reply was that:

All these are conclusions that I arrived at, as the scenery is way too blurry in the beginning. But I try to stand in a musician's shoes who was leaving this place. Let's say that I'm leaving now and I'm going to America. I see everywhere around me this music [the blues]. Won't it influence me? Won't I sit down and start learning what this guy is doing, so I can try to play in this way? They might have found a practical use, as the open tunings provide an autonomy to the musician, and they started playing this way. But there we draw a line. The similarities with blues music stop at this point and you can add what we mentioned before about lyrics, etc.

At the end of the interview, he was asked whether he agrees or not with some observations on similarities between

the two styles of music. The first question was about whether the tendency to play triplet crotchet and quaver sets in a 4/4 *hasapiko* is a similarity to shuffle or swing rhythm. He agreed:

Yes, it is a common characteristic between the two styles. And I have actually proposed – as many people write *hasapiko* in triplets – to write them ‘phrased’ instead. What I mean is to abolish the necessity of writing triplets, but to define that the writing is ‘phrased’ above the staff and this way you can write only quavers. [...] exactly as in jazz music.

The next question was about whether the tendency to play chromatic approaches in both genres is a similarity. His response was an explanation of chromaticism: «This happens because you are trying to simulate the ‘unequal’ intervals that do not exist in equal temperament. This is why you do chromatic movements, both in endings and ascending movements». This was followed by a question about whether the tendency to play many arpeggios in both styles is a similarity and he simply replied: «Ninety percent of folk guitar phrasing is based on arpeggios». Towards the end of the discussion, it was stated that they [the bluesmen] used to play a note that was between the flat third and the natural third, so when the seventh degree was mentioned, Mystakidis interrupted in order to say: «Exactly like *Rast*¹² *makam*. [...] This is the natural interval. This is what people were hearing. [...] both of them are an evolution of traditional music».

4. Songs Analyses

The last part of this article consists of the analyses of the songs *Toutoi oi Batsoi pou 'rthan Tora* [*These Cops Who Came Now*] and *O Doktor*¹³ [*The Doctor*]. Both songs appear in the 2017 album *Amerika*, and despite the fact that the whole album is performed with the use of this distinguishable fingerstyle technique, they do have some distinctive characteristics. The majority of the songs are labeled as traditional, and they all share similar aesthetics, so the selection could have been random. However, the criteria for choosing the first one was its popularity, in combination with the existence of several diverse covers of this song, in which musicians tend to interchange verses, avoid repetition of lines, change instrumentation or arrange it for a completely different genre. The second one was selected for the time signature changes and thumb technique alteration, which implies a second fingerstyle influence, as well as for the fact that Mystakidis’s source was a very popular Katsaros’s 1928 recording. Moreover, Katsaros’s recording reappears in the recent compilation album (Katsaros, 2018) by the label *Death Is Not The End*, and in another compilation album that was assembled by Panos Savvopoulos and enclosed in his 2006 book (Savvopoulos, 2006) about the meaning and the origins of the word «rebetiko».

First Song: These Cops Who Came Now

Mystakidis’s 2017 version differs from Giannakis Ioannidis’s 1928 version that was accompanied by a bouzouki, played by Manolis Karapiperis. It is easily noticeable that they are in different keys and that there are some slight changes to the melody and repetition of phrases. The song is a *Kamilierikos Zeibekikos*¹⁴ dance, meaning *Zeibekikos* of the riders of camels, which explains the time signature choice of 9/4. The song consists of sixty bars, but it can be narrowed down to four, as seen in Figure 8. In that case, the first two bars are grouped as an A and the two remaining bars as a B. Therefore, the introduction is AAB without vocals and every instrumental is just an

¹² *Rast*’s ascending form differs from its descending form. The descending *Rast* has a lowered seventh degree.

¹³ This is the result of Greenglish: Greeks used English words that they heard in the USA, such as «doctor», but they used to pronounce them in Greek accent and write them with the letters of the Greek alphabet.

¹⁴ *Zeibekikos* is a Greek folk dance in 9/4, with two very popular rhythmic patterns. *Zeibekikos* is the most common rhythm, along with *hasapikos*, of rebetiko music. *Kamilierikos* is a variation of typical *Zeibekikos*.

AB without vocals. Each verse is an ABB', where B features only the lower octave of vocals, whereas B' features both vocal lines. The tuning is the relatively uncommon Cross-note G, that is D-G-D-G-Bb-D, also known as Open G Minor Tuning, because of its similarity to the very popular Open-G Tuning or Spanish Tuning (Grossman, 1992: 99-100), which is D-G-D-G-B-D. Open-G Tuning is the most common tuning for blues and country blues guitar, together with the Open-D or Vestapol Tuning. Hence, it is plausible that the rebetiko musicians adapted the country blues Open-G tuning and adjusted it to their needs.

Image 8: A reduction of the song's structure.

Throughout the song there is an alternating bass line. Mystakidis is alternating between the tonic and the dominant chord tones of a G minor triad, which is common practice in country blues. He does that with his thumb and the only thing that distinguishes this from the blues alternating bass is the longer fourth note, which in this case is a dotted semibreve. The pattern is identical in bars 1 and 2 and is repeated with small changes in rhythm in bars 3 and 4. This alternating bass line implies a static harmony, characteristic of some blues songs, such as *I'm a Man* by Bo Diddley (1955) and *Mannish Boy* by Muddy Waters (1955). Both the guitar and the voice produce flattened seventh and natural sixth notes on the downbeats. There is a natural seventh played by the guitar as a chromatic mordent, only as decoration. The use of these intervals resemble the blues boogie, where a dominant chord is usually implied. However, a B flat appears before the end of the bar 1, making the chord a G minor seventh. The second bar is identical to the first.

Mystakidis plays all the notes with his index and middle fingers, just like bluesmen. His singing mostly consists of crotchets. However, he does add some melismas, which are not always identical. The B flat in guitar and voice in the first beat of bars 3 and 4 shows that Part B does not differ harmonically. The mordent here is diatonic rather than chromatic. The notes define G Dorian mode. The rebetiko equivalent would be G *Kiourdi dromos* (Payatis, 1992: 57, Krionas, 2003: 62) or G *Houseini dromos* (Floudas, 2009: 17). Having started as an oral tradition, there are major problems in onomatology of rebetiko *dromoi*. In the middle of bars 3 and 4, the introduction of an A flat could be interpreted as G Dorian b2 – also known as a Phrygian #6 or Phrygian b6 – which is the second mode of the melodic minor scale. Surprisingly, there is no equivalent *dromos* in rebetiko music. The folk guitarist Michalis Atsialis suggested that this behaviour can be observed in descending *Houseini* lines. This information does not

appear in the relevant bibliography (Balena, 2014; Floudas, 2009; Hewitt, 2013; Krionas, 2003; Mystakidis, 2012; Mystakidis, 2013; Payatis, 1992; Payatis, 2010), although it is noticed in *Houseini makam*. *Makams* (or *maqams*) will not be analysed for two reasons: on the one hand there were different interpretations of one *makam* by separate rebetiko musicians, when they tried to play it on their fretted instruments, hence the problems in onomastics of the resulted *dromoi*. On the other hand, this process would conclude with a comparison between a mode that is primarily used in jazz and a Turkish *makam* or Arabic *maqam*. Therefore, the comparison will be drawn between the building material of modes and *dromoi*.



Image 9: Dimitris Mystakidis using his thumb to alternate between the tonic and the dominant chord tones.

Eastern harmony is based on pentachords¹⁵, tetrachords¹⁶ and trichords¹⁷. In Western harmony, the Dorian b_2 mode is the result of combining a Phrygian tetrachord with a Dorian tetrachord that are connected with a whole tone (Miller, 1996: 32). On the contrary, the *dromos* can be constructed by three distinct combinations, by using the eastern pentachords and tetrachords. More specifically, the *Ousak* tetrachord can be combined with a minor tetrachord that starts a whole tone above; the *Ousak* pentachord can be combined with a minor tetrachord; and the *Ousak* tetrachord can be combined with a *Rast* pentachord. In the final analysis, finding the precise combination is not so important, as older versions of the song did not include a flattened second degree, but a natural second instead, and apparently it was Mystakidis's decision to play and sing it like that. Taking this fact into consideration, Mystakidis's scalar choice can be perceived as a contemporary approach.

¹⁵ A five-note scale fragment.

¹⁶ A four-note scale fragment.

¹⁷ A three-note scale fragment.

The image shows the musical score for the introduction of 'The Doctor'. It consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (AC. GUITAR) in treble clef, with a tempo marking of ♩ = 60 and a 9/4 time signature. The second staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (AC. GUITAR) in bass clef, showing a 12-fret fingerboard with fret numbers (0-7) and bar lines. The third staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (A. GTR.) in treble clef, with a 3-measure rest at the beginning. The bottom staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (A. GTR.) in bass clef, also showing a 12-fret fingerboard with fret numbers and bar lines. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Image 10: The introduction of 'The Doctor'.

Second Song: The Doctor

Despite the fact that Mystakidis's 2017 version is based on Katsaros's 1928 recording, there are substantial differences between them. The tonal centre of Mystakidis's version is G, whereas the tonal centre of Katsaros's recording is G# or Ab, which is very unusual, especially for open tunings. Actually, his guitar is tuned a semitone higher than Mystakidis's. This choice cannot be justified, due to the fact during the 1990s he was invited to Greece and he performed alternative, shorter versions of this song, sometimes with his guitar tuned in one way (Γιώργος Κατσαρός, 1995; Γιώργης Χριστοφιλάκης - Θεολογίτης Κατσαρός : Πειραιά, 2011) and sometimes in the other (Ο Γιώργος Κατσαρός στο Συνέδριο Αποδήμου Ελληνισμού στην Θεσσαλονίκη - 3/12/1995, 1995). At the time, Katsaros was over 100 years old and, even though the song is labelled as «traditional», he claimed that he was in fact the writer, and that he conceived it in 1919.

The image shows the musical score for the first part of the verse of 'The Doctor'. It consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Voice in treble clef, with a 4/4 time signature and a 5-measure rest at the beginning. The second staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (A. GTR.) in treble clef. The third staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (A. GTR.) in bass clef, showing a 12-fret fingerboard with fret numbers and bar lines. The bottom staff is for the Acoustic Guitar (A. GTR.) in bass clef, also showing a 12-fret fingerboard with fret numbers and bar lines. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Image 11: The first part of the verse of 'The Doctor' where the singer forms a question.

The tune begins as a *Zibekikos* in 9/4, as can be seen in Figure 10, nonetheless the time signature changes to 4/4 during the verses. The instrumentals and the outro are also in 9/4. Katsaros's version also follows a similar structure, but he played more freely, adding a few extra beats in some bars, as well as varying the tempo by having slower verses and faster instrumental parts. The tuning is D-G-D-F-Bb-D, such an uncommon tuning that it is

unnamed. Therefore, this must be either a contemporary adaptation of the D-G-D-G-Bb-D tuning that suited Mystakidis's needs, or a Katsaros's invention that was only used by him to perform this kind of songs. The former assumption can be supported by the fact that Mystakidis has used both the Cross-note G and the D-G-D-F-Bb-D tunings while performing this song on television programmes and online videos (Στην υγειά μας ρε παιδιά, 2017; Dimitris Mystakidis, 2018). Additionally, in some of the few rescued videos of Katsaros's performances in Greece, it can be spotted that he also played in lowered standard tuning, either in Eb tuning or in D tuning, also known as One Step Lower or D Standard, depending on the occasion.

The image shows a musical score for the second part of the verse of 'The Doctor'. It consists of two systems of music, starting at measure 11 and 15 respectively. Each system includes three staves: VOICE (top), A. GTR. (middle), and A. GTR. (bottom). The VOICE staff shows a melodic line with lyrics. The A. GTR. staff shows a complex fingerstyle guitar melody. The bottom A. GTR. staff shows a bass line with fret numbers (0-6) and rhythmic notation. The key signature is one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 4/4. The score ends with a 'PLAY 3 TIMES' instruction and a repeat sign.

Image 12: The second part of the verse of 'The Doctor' where the singer forms the reply.

During the introduction, Mystakidis plays an alternating bass line. He is alternating between the tonic and the dominant chord tones of a G minor triad, just like in the previously presented song. The introduction lasts for four bars and is repeated as an instrumental section between the verses. During the verses, he only plays the tonic with his thumb in such a way that resembles the Texas blues monotonic bass (Grossman, 1992: 198-199). There is a distinction between his and Katsaros's version, as the latter plays the tonic with his thumb repeatedly on each bar, like a pedal point, so Mystakidis's fingerstyle tends to have a stronger connection with the blues techniques. The melody is always fingerpicked with his index and middle finger. Mystakidis played the four bars of Figure 10 repeatedly between the verses, but this section was played only once and served as the instrumental theme in the middle of Katsaros's version, as he improvised a different introduction. The structure of the verse resembles the idea of the AAB pattern of a twelve-bar blues, but it consists of fourteen bars instead, in the form of an ABB, where «A» is still the question and «B» is the response. Figure 12 shows that the response is almost identical when repeated. The tonality is established very quickly, as all the notes, but the octave, are presented during the first bar of the song. According to music books by Balena (2014), Mystakidis (2012, 2013), Payatis (1992, 2010), Floudas (2009), Hewitt (2013), Krionas (2003) and Stylianou (2019), the notes consist G *Sabah dromos*. The guitar melody develops to its complete upper octave only for the duration of a quaver in the introduction and just for a semiquaver in the verse, whereas the vocal line reaches this point. Still this is not a perfect octave, as he plays a diminished eighth degree instead of a perfect one. Three out of the former seven authors list in their books an alternative *Sabah dromos*, which is differentiated from the original just for its diminished eighth degree.

In Eastern harmony, *Sabah dromos* is the result of combining a *Sabah* tetrachord with an *Ousak* tetrachord (Payatis, 1992: 50) or a *Sabah* pentachord with an *Ousak* tetrachord (Mystakidis, 2013: 362; Payatis, 1992: 50). There is no

equivalent mode in Western harmony, but a theoretical formula for this would be the combination of a Dorian b4 tetrachord with a Phrygian tetrachord (Miller, 1996: 130) that are connected with a trisemitone¹⁸. This hypothetical mode could be named Aeolian b4, and accounted as the sixth mode of the major b2 family (Stylianou, 2019: 85-86). Regarding the alternative form of *Sabah dromos*, the existing explanations of its diminished eighth degree are non-identical, none of which involves a replacement of the *Ousak* tetrachord. Nevertheless, theoretically the hypothetical Western formula could be transformed to a combination of a Dorian b4 tetrachord with a Spanish Phrygian tetrachord.

Conclusions

Similarities between blues fingerstyle (Country blues and Texas blues) and rebetiko fingerstyle do exist, in terms of technique and open tunings. Obviously, the open tunings have been adjusted in order to be suitable for rebetiko scales and the horizontal playing on the fretboard. Katsaros's thumb technique that consistently repeats the tonic on a bass string like a pedal point distinguishes his playing from the country blues thumb technique, where there is an alteration between tonic and dominant notes on the downbeats. Yet it is relatively similar to the Texas blues monotonic bass. Mystakidis's thumb technique serves as a bridge between Katsaros's technique and typical fingerstyle blues technique. In terms of rhythm, it is not so common to have similar time signatures, because blues is mostly in 4/4, 12/8 or 6/8 time and fingerstyle rebetiko is mainly in 9/4 and occasionally in 4/4 time, whilst 9/8 subdivided into 2+2+2+3 is another typical rebetiko metre. Similarities in harmony include the persistent appearance of the flat seventh. Rebetiko and blues do not share the same scales, and as a consequence the first analysis ended with a comparison of a jazz mode and a non-existent rebetiko *dromos*, whereas the second analysis ended with a comparison of a rebetiko *dromos* and a hypothetical jazz mode. Furthermore, the problematic nature of both blues and rebetiko scales must be taken into account. Even though the hexatonic scale that consists of a minor pentatonic with an added flat fifth degree¹⁹ is generally accepted as the typical blues scale, others (Beato, 1990: 24-26; Hewitt, 2013: 137-139) describe this as the minor blues scale and distinguish it from the major blues scale that consists of a major pentatonic with an added flatten third degree²⁰. Other variations include: the former hexatonic with an occasionally added natural third degree (Jaffe, 1996: 39), thus added in parenthesis²¹; a heptatonic scale (Balena, 2014: 51; Smallwood, 1980) with a lowered third, fifth and seventh degrees²²; an enneatonic scale that consists of the major blues and a minor blues scales combined²³; or even Steve Vai's composite blues scale (Vai, 2019: 20-21), which has different notes in each octave, starting as a typical blues scale and ending as a Dorian mode²⁴. Regarding the rebetiko *dromoi*, except for the onomatology issues, the bibliography introduces contradicting harmonising instructions by different authors. In addition, some authors suggest that all *dromoi* start on the same tonic, while others argue or simply imply that they start on different tonics, indicating a modes-within-*dromoi* concept. Interestingly, similar to Beato's major blues scale and Jaffe's blues scale, *Sabah dromos* also features both a flattened and practically a natural third, as the flattened fourth is the enharmonic equivalent. Mordents are relatively unusual in blues music. Finally, there is resemblance between the two fingerstyle techniques, the blues and the rebetiko, which separates them from the traditional bouzouki playing technique. The bouzouki is always

¹⁸ An interval composed of three consecutive semitones.

¹⁹ 1 b3 4 b5 ♯5 b7

²⁰ 1 2 b3 ♯3 5 6

²¹ 1 b3 (♯3) 4 b5 ♯5 b7

²² 1 2 b3 4 b5 6 b7

²³ 1 2 b3 ♯3 4 b5 ♯5 6 b7

²⁴ 1 b3 4 b5 ♯5 b7 8 b10 11 12 13 b14 15 16 b17

played with a plectrum and one of the predominant characteristics of its sound is the tremolo picking. As Mystakidis has stated «It is evident that there is a lot to explore [...] in order to incorporate this technique to contemporary demands». In point of fact, this is not just a revival of a lost technique, as Mystakidis did not transcribe the songs in order to play them exactly as they were recorded one hundred years ago. This is an adaptation that fits Mystakidis's needs and aesthetics and must have been influenced by contemporary acoustic guitarists and the music that evolved globally in the meantime.

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Cita recomanada

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