

Maria Hnaraki



CRETAN *music*

*Unraveling
Ariadne's Thread*



KERKYRA
publications

CRETAN MUSIC

*Unraveling
Ariadne's Thread*

Editing: Maria Adamantidis
Proof reading: Kalliope Gourntis
Preliminary editing: Anna Bakola
Production: Atelier KERKYRA PUBLICATIONS
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Illustrations by Eirini Koutridou
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Kerkyra Publications, 6-8 Vlahava Street, GR-105 51 Athens
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CRETAN
music

Unraveling Ariadne's Thread

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SUPPORTED BY

Autohellas **Hertz**





SCORE

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CHORUS

It is a distinct honor to introduce a most welcomed addition to the numerous volumes devoted to Cretan music. The author skillfully combines the disciplines of mythology, history, anthropology, ethnomusicology and folklore together with her own extensive fieldwork to give the reader a comprehensive overview of an extremely complex cultural phenomenon. Interrelationships that exist in a typical Cretan ensemble of instruments and voice, the repertoire, weddings and dances, and the all-important extemporaneously composed vocal distichs known as *mandinades*, are thoroughly discussed in an interesting and scholarly manner.

Professor Hnaraki's volume is destined to serve as a model for all future scholarly works on the music of Crete and Greece in general.

Dr. Sotirios Chianis, PhD
Professor of Ethnomusicology, Emeritus
Binghamton University
State University of New York

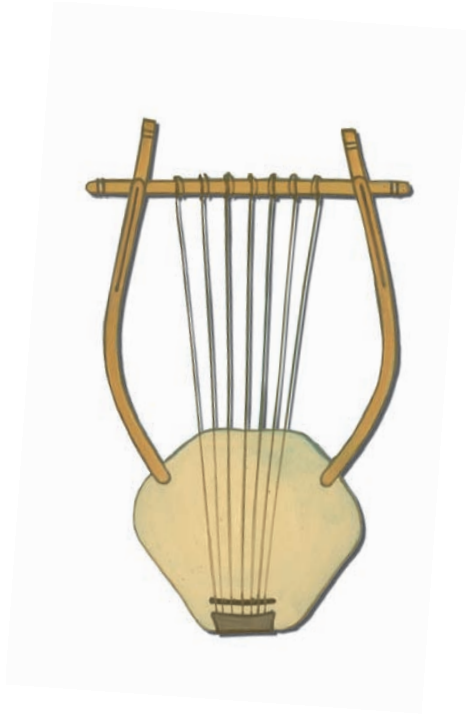


*D*r. Maria Hnaraki's suggestion that music can bring people together is well supported by her philosophical approach towards Crete, her island. She created a writing to be read by all those who love life. Crete is her palette which she skillfully uses to depict what is really worthwhile in life. Her nostalgia for the Greek island blends in with a brilliant selection of people and works, all related to Crete in ways that have led to major breakthroughs and changes, not only for the Cretans, not only for the Greeks but for the whole world.

Dr. Hnaraki's *Cretan Music: Unraveling Ariadne's Thread* is a rich writing which I salute with great pride, as it manages to appeal to different groups of people. It is in itself the proof of what she suggests, namely that we are all alike! It will give information to the historian, vital links to the researcher, pleasure to the poetry reader, clues to the philosopher, knowledge and perhaps a new awareness to all!

I congratulate all those who supported Dr. Hnaraki's "quest" and realized the importance of her project. Most of all, though, I congratulate her for the mental map she provided us with, in order to help, move and support us in our own unraveling of Ariadne's thread!

Emmanuel E. Velivasakis, P.E., F.ASCE
President
Pancretan Association of America



*M*aria Hnaraki is an artist and a scholar. Not only does she combine these two, seemingly contradictory, attributes but she excels in both.

And what is more, as an artist she creates in many forms. She is a poet, a singer, a musical performer and a teacher.

Which means she can look at any cultural phenomenon both ways: as a spectator and critic – and as a creator and performer.

And on top of all that, she is a Cretan – a quality which eludes any kind of definition. (Actually this book is an attempt to define the essence of Cretanness).

So here is a work of feeling and thought. Dealing in beauty and tragedy – two things that are indistinguishable in Greek (and Cretan) tradition. You may read it as a treatise or you may enjoy it as a performance. It is both.

Nikos Dimou
Author

IMPROVISATION

Heartfelt thanks to:

Saint Nicolas, the traveler.
The Cretans and the Anoyanoi, the dancers.
Nikos Dimou, the on- and off-line spiritual father.
Henry Glassie, the insightful.
Ross Daly, the guru.
Vasilis Stavrakakis and his family, the hospitable.
Laodikis, the storyteller.
My grandparents, the angels.
My father, the telepathetic.
My brother, the different.
My sister, the teacher.
My mother, my soul.
Theodore, the source of inspiration.

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The Aerakis music family.
The painter, Mrs. Eirini Koutridou.
The photographer, Mr. Yiannis Bromirakis.
The Pancretan Association and its current president, Mr. Emmanuel Velivasakis.

Last but not least, wholehearted thanks to:

Mrs. Alexandra Vovolini-Laskaridis and her hard-working team, Mrs. Maria Adamantidis in particular.
M.H.

INTERLUDE

The book you hold concerns Cretan music. It starts with a confession, and the description of a musical event. Then, five main chapters follow, each one with different numbers of subunits. Each chapter is preceded by the description of a music scene, to guide you through. An epilogue marks the end. The notes, list of sources and a glossary are for readers who wish to study certain topics further. To flavor the sound, a CD is included. Lastly, photographs serve as images, and drawings allure.

Greek words and place names have been transliterated according to the Journal of Modern Greek Studies, and a system which approximates Modern Greek spelling. Stress accents are provided for words of more than one syllable to ensure the closest possible correct pronunciation. Proper names have retained their established anglicized form or the spelling preferred by the person cited.

Purposefully and through respect to the reader, I have chosen a non-academic (by definition) but yet scholarly style to re-present a serious topic. It was not my goal to write a history of Cretan music, but rather to open pathways and supply lenses through which one may meditate on it.

Without further ado: once upon a time...



Chania

Rethymnon

WHITE
MOUNTAINS
(Madares)

▼ Sfakia

Mt.
PSILORITIS
(Ida)

⌘ Phaistos

LIBYAN SEA

CRETAN SEA

Heraklion

▼ Anoya

⌘ Knossos

▼ Mirtia

⌘ Diktaion
Andron

⌘ Gortyna

LASITHI
MOUNTAIN
RANGE

● Aghios
Nikolaos

● Sitia

MESSARA PLAIN

Ierapetra

Map of Crete

● Major cities

▼ Villages



Archaeological sites

REHEARSAL

| Innocent warning confession: The theater of life.¹

| God, may You give me enlightenment, and a heart big as a boiler,
| To be able to sit and think, like Daskaloyiannis.

The Daskaloyiannis Song (traditional Cretan)

“... There may be no future at all! ... I saw the airplanes passing over my head and sensed how much everything is hanging by a single thread. I have a notion that I shall soon be taking leave of this earth and I am waiting calmly, absolutely ready. And so, dismiss things ‘future.’ Without becoming nerve-racked, we must strive to live the present terrifying moments the world is undergoing, for we too are bound to experience them. Much patience and love are needed to endure with dignity this critical era it has been our lot to live in. I am certain that I have both these needed qualities. I beg you to have them too. Now, at moments such as these, the mettle of a human being is revealed... I begin work before daybreak; at nightfall I stop. I plunge into the sea, eat plenty of figs and grapes and in the evening glue my ears to the radio. Agony, but I am trying to tame it by working...”

Nikos Kazantzakis in *Nikos Kazantzakis: A Biography Based on his Letters*

These are Nikos Kazantzakis’s words in a letter to Helen Samiou (the future Mrs. Kazantzakis), on May 15, 1941, five days before the invasion of Crete by Nazi forces. These are the words that I also apply to myself and dedicate to you, sixty five years later. My hope is for a better world. With this book, I want to show that we are all alike; that we should not engage in conflict. And I ask you: Can music and dance help us in this direction? Can they possibly unite us?

Cretan music plays on my stereo while I write. I choose music from my country, from my island, to be always present in order to remind me that I need to go on and write for the people I love, for my homeland, for the people of the world. In the end, it is to all of them that I owe my existence. Without the music, without the vivid presence of Crete, a documentation of its life is not possible. Come and discover Crete with me. I want to communicate my enthusiasm and my passion with clarity so you can smell the Greek and Cretan air, see the Greek and Cretan people, listen to their music, and envision their dance.

I talk about music and dance because they help me escape. They soothe my *k a i m ó s* (sorrow) and empower my identity. I believe that tradition is not something that necessarily belongs in the past and eventually dies. In this sense, I am a traditionalist: I am inspired by the past in order to walk steadily toward the future, building on a solid present.

My passion and nostalgia for my country can often reach extremes. In the end, this book is about identity, and my own undoubtedly “sounds” Cretan²: Writing about the music of my island feels like telling the story of my own life. In a sense, it’s self-revealing.

The same tiger that follows Kazantzakis in his journey (“tiger the co-traveler” in *Taxidévondas* [*Journeying*]) accompanies me as well. I can even see it on the face of that green-eyed big cat that often visits me in the early morning, scratching my window, meowing for my attention. With these thoughts, I invite you to view this book as an ethnographic life experience that will not exclude any actors or acts.

PRELUDE

June 16, 2001: We are on a boat heading from Athens to Heraklion, onto Knossos and the palace of King Minos. Sailing from the Aegean to the open Cretan Sea, the wind blows against us, but the salty air is refreshing and invigorating.

As we enter Heraklion port we see the massive Koule, a sturdy tower with a winged Venetian marble lion atop it. In one of its dungeons we are to attend the inaugural performance of the *Elefthería - Thisía - Zoí* Concert Series (*Freedom - Sacrifice - Life* Concert Series). Soprano Anna Trocchia-Taiganides, the American wife of a Greek-American, will perform in solo voice a program of music that embraces many cultures and traditions.

The dungeon is cold, humid and dark. There is no electricity. Tea candles bring us some light and a small hole on one of the four stonewalls gives us a glimpse of the sky.

The audience for tonight's concert consists mostly of family — from my mother's side — and other Cretan, Greek, Greek-American and American friends. My father ready to record the performance. My task is to distribute the programs before the concert starts, as well as to serve the nuts and the Cretan *rakí* (the Cretan version of grappa) during the break.

"Thank you for coming. It has always been my dream to sing here. I hope you will enjoy the performance," says Anna. The first part of her recital begins with a "*Kírie*" which she has composed, a majestic and dignified musical piece strongly influenced by Byzantine church chanting. Songs and vocal music by the well-known composers Samuel Barber, Henry Purcell, Giacomo Puccini and G. F. Handel follow.

After the break, we get to listen to some folk songs, one by the Shona people of Zimbabwe, the Irish song "Danny Boy" and the Greek song '*Arnisí*' ("Denial"), by composer Mikis Theodorakis based on a poem of George Seferis. The finale comes to rivet our attention: "Amazing Grace."

A bus is waiting to take us away to a Cretan feast in the mountain village of Avdou, which took its name from an old Turkish pasha, Abdul, or from prophet Havdeu,³ and where Anna and her husband's family have bought some houses to spend their summers. In front of the village's central church, long tables are arranged for the guests. Traditional Cretan food and delicacies have been ordered and are being prepared in a restaurant just around the corner.

The musicians are already here. They drove from Heraklion and the village of Krousonas. They are about to sit on a small wooden stage by the side of the churchyard, in front of the tables. They are setting up their microphones and testing the sound. They are all men, one *laóúto* (large lute) player, one guitar player, one *líra* (the main folk instrument on the island of Crete) player and the singer of tonight's Cretan feast.

First come the appetizers with the bread, then the cheese and the salads. The main course — roasted meat with potatoes — follows. It is time for the musicians to start performing, so that we can all stand up and dance with a full

stomach. Some of the music performed is vocal, some not. Those who are not familiar with the Cretan *líra* are amazed: The sounds coming out of such a little string instrument are so unique.

The *líra* player is seated between the two other men, the one playing the *la oút o* and the other the guitar. These instruments do not seem to surprise the audience as much as the Cretan *líra* does. The *la oút o* looks to them like most of the large lutes found in the eastern Mediterranean. The guitar, on the other hand, is definitely familiar to all, replacing in tonight's performance the second *la oút o*, which is traditionally present.

Dimitris Vererakis performs dance melodies on the *líra*. The *la oút o* and the guitar players keep the rhythm. A solo melodic invitation by the *líra* player invites all to start dancing: My cousin with his family stands up first. Next, he invites me and I join the dance with more family members.

The dances we perform are dragging or leaping, slow or fast, moving in a counterclockwise rotation or danced by couples. They are Cretan and Greek, with an exception of a special order made by my cousin's father, who comes from the region around the Black Sea — what we call Pontos. In all dances we smile because we are happy to be together: Our Greek and American relatives, our friends, all our guests unite in dance.

My cousin is the first to start and lead each dance. After all, it is “his” feast. He arranged and organized the event in honor of his wife's recital and of all those who were able to attend. At the head of the circle, he performs numerous leaps, turns and acrobatic movements. He is the one who has paid the musicians, who constantly throws extra money to the stage and who orders the songs he wishes to be performed.

When my cousin invites me to be the lead dancer, I break away and begin to execute complicated steps consisting of whirls, turns and lively jumps. Then I go back to join the circle and invite somebody else to come up to the front position and be the leader.

On this particular night, we have the chance to dance with Americans and teach them how to dance. They do pretty well. However, my relatives, especially the ones who came from villages and not from the town or the city, carefully observe them dancing and comment on how I, in particular, dance well because I have “natural” movements: Cretan dancing is in my veins, they say.

The singing of Dimitris Vererakis, the *líra* player, is definitely of an oriental nature, with a specific and deliberate use of a certain nasal quality. *A m á n - a m á n* (for mercy's sake! woe is me!) is an exclamatory expression he often uses to begin improvising.

As he is a Cretan, it is natural for him to know how to perform proverbial couplets, *m a n d i n á d e s*. Due to my extensive research, my passion and love of Cretan music, and the fact that I am a Cretan in opposition to my cousin and his family who are Greek-American, I already know by heart and I can sing many of the *m a n d i n á d e s* performed by the musicians: In a sense, I am able to communicate with them, but also to judge them.

During the whole event, I get the chance to do some fieldwork. I introduce myself to the musicians and talk to them about my research. I write down their phone numbers as they show willingness to assist me. They inform me they have

some other scheduled performances over the summer, which I plan to attend. My cousin invites them to the United States to perform at his annual party.

The dancing continues until the early morning hours: Tonight's central, most astonishing as well as observed dancer is my grandmother, born on February 13, 1913. Since she was a child, she had problems with her vision. She had to quit school and stay at home. Several years ago, she became blind in both eyes. Now all she can see is shadows. Despite this, my almost ninety-year-old grandmother Christina, my mother's mom, still dances at wedding feasts and other occasions. Her presence is full of energy and power and is an inspiration to us all.⁴

She knows by heart and indeed possesses the dancing steps so well, that she is able to lead a dance by herself and create lines of amazing labyrinth formations: In this book, dancing is a central element. The labyrinth is an essential symbol since the Minoan era in Crete: It has shaped the way Cretans think of themselves as well as the way others think of them.

As you read this, imagine making your way through a labyrinth where nothing is linear. My goal is not to perplex you, but to amuse you. Inspired by Clifford Geertz and Henry Glassie,⁵ my goal is to reach you.

Time is a central concept and has a different feeling or sense in the Greek and Cretan culture. Greek and Cretan time is — as the labyrinth is — “ancient” in both character and nature, another symbol that accompanies us in the labyrinth and plays a very significant role in the formation of the Greek and the Cretan identity: Historical and contemporary time shape who the Greek and Cretan people are and how they behave.

In other words, this book moves in both space and time. The space is the labyrinth. It is also the geography, the world in which we find Greece and then Crete. On the island of Crete we trace the specific places I talk about and examine, such as the village of Anoya. Since my goal is not to examine all music performed in Crete but, instead, draw upon specific phenomena and musicians, I call my study phenomenological.

I investigate the complexity of Cretan musical identity by looking into its genres and aesthetics. Moreover, I intend to answer the following question: What is Cretan musical identity and how does it work? Following initial participant observation on my part, I rely on the musicians themselves who perform in Crete nowadays to provide candid answers to my questions. I then look into how they simultaneously separate themselves from and perceive themselves as a part of a specific musical tradition. In order to do so I observe and participate in music and dance performances.

This book consists of five chapters, which I call steps: They recall the very popular Cretan dance *pen do z á li s* (*p é n d e* means five, *z á l a* means steps; thus, a five-step dance). *Pen do z á li s* usually follows a slow dance (*si ga n ó s*), which then accelerates. These well-known, traditional Cretan lyrics accompany *pen do z á li s*: “With the perfumes of May, the red cherries, look how the Cretan young girls dance!” This is not a coincidence: I was born in a May and I choose to, as much as possible, dance in a crazy *pen do z á li s* mood.

Today, what we find in Greece generally and in Crete specifically is an amalgam of mythology shaped by places, but more so by people, in both time and space. Mythology is the world of myth and musicology the world of music. It is

this interplay of time and music that I wish to present in the beginning of each step, which opens with a mythology and a musicology, viewed always through ethnic lenses, so that my observations are at once ethnomythological and ethnomusicological.⁶

In the center of a circle, the labyrinth, lies the island of Crete and its music: It blossoms and dies, according to Heraclitus's idea of acme and decline. Also, in the center of this circle, lies the main idea: We are what we think we are. The stereotypical Cretan *líra* player and his music are in the center of this study as well, like Zorba the Greek — Zorba the Cretan.

Vasilis Stavrakakis, with his singing of *Erotókrítos* and his mandolin, an instrument of Venetian origin, moves us from the center of the circle westward, whereas Laodikis, the Syrian percussionist, takes us south. It is in this part of our circle that we trace the North African and Middle-Eastern influences on Cretan music. Ross Daly then carries us to the east, having us complete a semi-circle, as he particularly studies and occasionally even performs and collaborates with eastern and Asian musicians.

Ross Daly crosses borders. Through his musical experiments and distinct talent he brings Cretan music to the rest of the world. Through him, as we move north, and then west again, we are able to complete one circle. However, we continue moving, as Cretan musical time in my view is not linear, but akin to a labyrinth: It is a continuous mixture of past and present.

Time is responsible for bringing together on the island of Crete the three musicians I examine. Time, placed around the Cretan musical circle, moves counterclockwise like Greek and Cretan dancing. Time runs and everything repeats itself. Time, in the end, is what created what you are about to read.





step

1

Entering the labyrinth

STEP 1: ENTERING THE LABYRINTH

You are about to enter the palace of Knossos. The thread to guide and help you orient yourselves is the story of Kronos, who does not manage, in the end, to eat his child. Thus, Zeus, with the help of the nutritious milk of Amalthea, grows up strong. This Odyssey is to always be remembered and repeated.

“Demon”

The time’s wheel turns like a demon:
I am just a lit candle in the winds’ eddy.

The only way to encounter Death:
When He comes, be worthless.⁷

Stavrakakis, *Sti dīni ton anémo*

Time to bring together Ross Daly and Vasilis Stavrakakis, our two main protagonists. In the summer of 2001, while I was conducting field research, the compact disc *Sti dīni ton anémo (In the Winds’ Whirlpool)* was released, with lyrics and music by Mitsos Stavrakakis, Vasilis’s first cousin. Vasilis is the main singer on the compact disc. Ross Daly orchestrates the pieces and he plays the líra, the oúti, and the saz (long-necked type of lute).

“Light Blue and Green”

A light blue and green seashore in your eyes roars:
Whoever enters and does not drown will have stories to tell.

Over the sunset the sun touched your lips:
Now the sky is on fire and the evening burns.⁸

Stavrakakis, *Sti dīni ton anémo*

As Mitsos comments in the compact disc liner notes, the melodies and the lyrics of this work, dressed in everyday attire, have already been performed several times, for small and big audiences, on formal and informal occasions. Now, in “Sunday clothes,” they decide to go for a walk, invited or not, in private or public. They are nervous and embarrassed, hesitant as teenagers, fearful of the society.

Kondiliés (Cretan musical phrases)

Sometimes fate makes people blind:
They sing in other tunes than the ones the líra plays.⁹

Stavrakakis, *Sti dīni ton anémo*

Time perplexes these melodies: Birth comes first. Melodies become adults, capable of further stepping into the musical passages, with elegance and decisiveness. They eventually meet with impatient Skironas and Procrustes. Some melodies Skironas overlooks and Procrustes neglects. Most of them Procrustes does not even think of laying on his bench. Others, however, he handles with sensitivity and understanding, with respect to their form and inner context.

‘Manousáki’ (Narcissus)

Before tear, some joy inhabits:

Before laughter, a strangely sad silence.¹⁰

Stavrakakis, *Sti díni ton anémo*

Ross Daly, an Irishman, collaborates with the Stavrakakis family of Armanoya. He plays the líra, but also the Middle Eastern saz and the oúti. To the melodies he orchestrates, Daly chooses to add the sounds of the flogéira (fife), the laoúto (large lute) and the bendír (frame drum). The lyrics are well known, Cretan distich mandínades that deal with traditional themes such as life, death, time, fate, love, pain, relationships, solitude, bravery and survival. The recording is made at a local studio in the city of Heraklion, Crete.

Because Cretan music is basically a social phenomenon, in this book I investigate its identity and question its aesthetics: What is Cretan music? Let us now consider the pendozális, the Cretan five-step dance.

Thread

My passion for music and dance springs from the need to express myself. It is a passion rooted in my blood when, as a child, I performed dances at social gatherings and various music and dance events in Crete. This passion certainly grew larger when I left Crete and moved as a student to Athens. It certainly reached its most extreme, when I decided to continue my studies and professional life in the United States. Listening to music from Crete and dancing to it stimulates my identity. Writing these accounts feels like dancing a tango with Marta Savigliano. As she chooses to explore her Argentinean identity, I also invite you to watch me wander into music and dance realities.

Like Zorba in Kazantzakis’s novel, whom I identify with, I choose to dance rather than cry. In other words, I choose to show you who I am, who the Greek and Cretan people are through “our” participation in music and dance. In the process of trying to discover who I am and how I came to be what I think I am, I realized that I am a special case (as we all are). Though of course I carry a Greek passport, I almost never identify myself as a Greek, but as a Cretan. At the same time, even though I feel more Cretan than Greek, I can also trace in myself several Middle Eastern characteristics. Maybe this is because my maternal grandfather came to Crete from Ephesus, Asia Minor, after the Greek uprooting of 1922. Whatever the case may be with my past, the point I am trying to make here is that one’s social and cultural identity is shaped locally.

"Crete is an island where many people from different countries, cultures and religions have lived and have left their traces. So isn't music in Crete today a product of all these mixtures and cultural elements?"

Dr. Maria Hnaraki's self-posed question is answered in the affirmative as the author takes the reader on a journey of discovery through the five steps – or five chapters – of this book, constructed in the spirit of the traditional pendozalis five-step dance. Writing in an intensely personal style, bringing into her narrative gods and heroes from Greek mythology and literature as well as present-day musicians and performers, Hnaraki succeeds in evoking both the rich history and the vibrant present of Cretan music.

The author skilfully combines the disciplines of mythology, history, anthropology, ethnomusicology and folklore together with her own extensive fieldwork to give the reader a comprehensive overview of an extremely complex cultural phenomenon.

Dr. Sotirios Chianis, PhD
*Professor of Ethnomusicology Emeritus
Binghamton University, State University of New York*

Maria Hnaraki is an artist and a scholar. Not only does she combine these two, seemingly contradictory, attributes but she excels in both.... She can look at any cultural phenomenon as a spectator and critic – and as a creator and performer.... So here is a work of feeling and thought.... You may read it as a treatise or you may enjoy it as a performance. It is both.

Nikos Dimou
Author

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