

The Piano in Greek Popular Orchestras of the Early 20th Century An Overview of the Material

Prelude on ‘modeness’¹

The term ‘modeness’ is used purposefully in order to include definitions usually consigned to the words ‘popular’, ‘East’ and ‘modality’. The problems regarding the first two are patently clear: the in-between ‘places’ between the poles of the high-status and the popular and that of the East and the West are innumerable, and hardly distinguishable. The third word, modality, presents two problematic points: on the one hand, it has been wrongfully connected to Eastern musics, even though it does not constitute their exclusivity; on the other hand, it describes a simple systematic analysis, of melodic movement and (rarely) its harmonization. The alternative term ‘modeness’ renders, in its totality, the behaviour of a musical entity with its specific characteristics, rhythm, melody, harmony and so on as the epicentre, not, however, as a theoretical substance with self-contained rules, but as an implemented case. In other words, how it functions in the artistic act is examined: its creation context and utilization, the implementation of its protagonists (musicians, intermediaries, audience), performance practice and technique, technological issues and so forth. This approach incorporates those elements described by the terms ‘East’ and ‘modality’, simultaneously expanding their scope. At the same time, though, it highlights a fundamental characteristic of popular music expression, which is none other than the orality and ensuing fluidity during realization (Ordoulidis 2021, x–xi).

Modeness is borne out of the musical concept of the performers, placing the person-artist and their musical experiences at the epicentre, relegating the mechanized theoretical stereotypes to the background. In other words, modeness is not opposed to the West and the scholarly, but it also does not replace the Eastern and the popular. Parallely, it seems to exist as a tool in performance practices of not only popular musicians but also scholarly ones. This emerged modeness transforms these two large groups from typical categorizations which depend on their product, to more humanistic entities which depend on the creator of the product, permitting and facilitating the examination of the material which was created by the musicians who serve both categorizations.

Introduction: an uncommon aesthetical cloak

The present study constitutes part of a broader project which, in the form of postdoctoral research, is funded by the State Scholarships Foundation of Greece (IKY) and is titled ‘Eastwards heterotopias of the piano’ (2020–2022). The basic aim of the research project is the highlighting of a special and unexplored aspect of the piano: its role outside of its usual context, which is that of classical music.² The research programme focuses on discography found in various musical realities within a broad geographical span (Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa). The modeness found in these repertoires constitutes a common feature, which through historical discography often outlines in-between places of the familiar stereotypical dipole forms (popular–scholarly, West–East, foreign–ours). The piano is present in the live performance but also in

¹ Many thanks for the valuable advice and generosity regarding historical material to Stelyo Berber, Cemal Ünlü, Panagiotis Kounadis, Nikos Dionysopoulos, Charles Howard, Pekka Gronow, Tony Klein, Eleni Liaskou and Kostas Vlisidis.

² In essence, the term refers to the scholarly music of central Europe and partially Russia too, with the fundamental centres of production in present day Italy, Germany, Austria and France, having as a time axis a long period, approximately from the 18th to the 20th century.

the discography of the repertoire in question. In the latter, we find it even in the time period of the mobile recording workshops, that is, right from the start of commercial discography (1900). In discography, the piano appears in its familiar 'classic' identity, but it also appears in alternative aesthetical attire: it performs a different repertoire in a different manner, constructing an autonomous entity. These alternative aesthetics, active even in the present, remained excluded from research.

This type of pianistic repertoire in discography is detected with certainty in the following countries: Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, India and Iran. Obviously, the performances and repertoires differ from place to place. Should we talk about two entities which ensue from the listening to the material of this extensive geographical span, we may say that it is the harmony which differs from place to place: in certain instances its presence is intense, for example in Russia, Romania and Greece, while in others it is not, for example in Algeria and Tunisia. On the other hand, there are geographical areas, such as Turkey, where implementation of both categories is observed.

A common feature of this geographical area, despite the large diaspora, is the presence of a particular syncretism, which, by rule, hosts both stereotypical entities: the West and the East. Three large categories result from the examination of the material: recordings which present quite clearly an Eastern modernness, recordings whose modernness is probably more Easternesque, and recordings in which a balance of elements (Eastern or/and Easternesque with Western or/and Westernesque) is observed. What is especially important is the fact that these possibly summarized/virtual categories are not wholly connected to one geographical area. In many cases, a blend in the discographical repertoire within the same geographical region is observed. Another characteristic observed in some of these areas is the marginality of performance practices, which waver between what is often called in the worlds of the musicians but also in ethnomusicology as 'playing with the ear' and that of a more standard, even though clearly fluid, manner of performance (see also Lilliestam 1996).

When the piano infiltrates these traditions, not only does it oblige us to re-evaluate the boundaries between 'western' and 'eastern' music, but also their supposed opposition within an especially charged polarizability. It also allows us to deconstruct all kinds of exoticisms, revealing evidence of a creative coexistence, which transcends conventional borders and political stereotypes.

In this text we shall study certain special cases from the Greek-speaking repertoire. The cases in point we shall focus on were recorded in Constantinople, Athens and New York. The recordings in question span the period from the beginning of the 20th century up to and including the 1950s. Invariably, these cases constitute a rather weak sample of the overall corpus, which is of great interest regarding both its diversity and its time scope. Initially, some historical sources will be mentioned, aiding the structure of a historical background, in order for the subsequent examination of the discographical presence of the piano in Greek urban popular music to take place.

Historiographical remarks on the piano in Greek popular music

In the early 20th century, the recordings are conducted by mobile workshops, which travel to countless regions to record local musicians. These workshops are deployed by large companies, such as the English Gramophone, the German Odeon, and the French Pathé.³ Discographical research reveals that musical networks are created rapidly, in which music and musicians dwell: for example, we see wandering musical melodies in various places in the Mediterranean, the Balkans, Eastern Europe and America, where local musicians become familiar with them and reconstruct them, but also borrowings in performance practices.⁴ The capacity of the repertoire is endless, which is de-territorialized and blended with other repertoires, forming, now, glocalized characteristics: the

³ Indicative bibliography regarding the early history of the recording industry: Gronow (1981 and 2014), Ewbank and Papageorgiou (1997), Tschmuck (2006), Martland (2012).

⁴ A look at the catalogues contained in the absolutely monumental work of Richard Spottswood *Ethnic Music on Records* (1991) is enough to confirm the musical networks of the time.

cosmopolitan traits of the large urban centres, in combination with the new technological means, promote polystylisms and polymorphisms of the musical realities.

After 1910, the construction and operation of production factories begin, now locally. In Athens, the Columbia factory is constructed in 1930–1931. It is important to understand the context of discography by mobile workshops, as there are still no suitably designed sites, adequate audio media, specific corporate policies, not even specific local musical identities, as the musicians themselves are often on the go, employing a variety of repertoires, and coming from diverse ethno-cultural groups etc. In other words, we see the piano in this early discography only if it already exists in one of the sites chosen by the recording workshop. Based on the samples of the early discography, it seems that the places which fulfil the (rudimentary for the time) requirements, have upright pianos, which are also used by the high-status musical forms protagonists to record their own repertoire.



Figure 1: Example of the historical discography of Athens. *Sta Salona*,⁵ for piano and voice (Kounadis archive).

⁵ Στα Σάλωνα, Odeon GX 14 – No 65080, Athens, 1907-1908: www.vmrebetiko.gr/item/?id=5173.



Figure 2: Example of the historical discography of Athens. *Apocheretismos naftou*,⁶ for piano and voice (Kounadis archive).

However, in the photography archives and biographies of the protagonists, its presence on stage is firmly established from the outset. The appearance of the piano in discography is more recurrent in the era of the local factories, obviously because in the factory it is a permanent fixture in the recording studio. The fact that in America, in the recordings of the Greek-speaking world, we see it firmly established much earlier, is no coincidence, as the factories of the large corporations there, constitute the sole condition.



Figure 3: Advertisement in the newspaper *Hellas* (23/12/1907)

⁶ Αποχαιρετισμός ναύτου, HMV BS 95 – 7-13465 - AO 13, Athens, 1922: www.vmrebetiko.gr/item/?id=10035.

FEXI PIANOS

You can easily give your wife or daughter a PIANO, paying the FEXI store 50 drachmas per month.



Figure 4: Newspaper *Hellas* (3/2/1908)

THE OUTDOOR PIANIST OF ATHENS

One day it snowed, the next, a travelling musician, the Italian Karolos Vasilitis, with his instrument, played in the middle of the square under the sun.

(Photograph Mr Georgios Alexiou)

The discographical repertoire which has been collected up to now is diverse: song recordings which could be placed under the ‘umbrella’ of the Café Aman style; recordings belonging to the so-called light and burlesque song, which is often dressed in popular attire, mainly regarding forms, performance practice, the chordal sequences etc; recordings of Pirean rebetiko based on the bouzouki; recordings of contemporary popular and popular-like. The examination of the management of the piano by the popular artists highlights an appropriation trend, of anything coming from ‘outside’ (instrument, form, aesthetic and so on). As far as instruments are concerned, the history of such appropriations is rich: the clarinet, brass instruments, the violin, the violoncello and so on.

The sources, apart from the formal discography, are many, with which a historiography of the presence of the piano can be established. The photographic material of Ilias Petropoulos must be mentioned, some of which is published in his book *Rebetika songs* (1968), in which many pianists, protagonists of the music stage, are depicted. Through the observation of the photographic material, not only from the Petropoulos archive but also from other sources, certain extremely interesting findings result. For example, in an overwhelming majority we observe that the lid and the panels of the pianos in the venues are either open or removed, clearly to obtain intensity and clarity of sound. The number of panels which are open or removed seems to be connected to the size of the orchestra, the size of the venue but also the presence (and the type) of audio coverage of the music stage. In other words, if the piano participates in fairly large orchestras, the pianist is forced to open and

remove both of the two large covers (the cover at the bottom in front of the legs and the cover in front of him, which covers the hammers).



Figure 5: Photograph showing the knee panel removed (Petropoulos archive).

From the photographic material, we also conclude that often the pianists are also the accordionists, playing sometimes the one and sometimes the other instrument. Furthermore, it seems that they are possibly the only musicians using sheet music, as either on the music rack or on the closed lid of the instrument, we often see open or closed sheet music and their covers. The answer to the sheet music may lie in the biohistories of some of the protagonists of the 20th century. In many sources we read about the polystylistic repertoire which is usually performed in the venues (see all of chapter 13 in Ordoulidis 2021). Many times, it is the pianists who begin the musical programme with works from the light Greek repertoire, or even foreign hits. The sheet music constitutes certainly a quick and easy solution for the learning of many and various genres, as the pianists, in most cases, are musicians who know how to read and write.

An extremely interesting piece of evidence came into our possession from the daughter of one of the protagonists, about whom we shall speak analytically further down. It is a handwritten document by the pianist Mitsos Mertikas, which functions as a guide to the repertoire or even the sequence of the programme in the live performances of the orchestras in which he participated, in the music halls he worked. The repertoire range is obvious in this guide. Additionally, the fact that we found in the same archive, in the form of commercial sheet music, a variety of these titles, compounds the aforementioned concept of the role of the pianists in the orchestras and in the musical programmes of the venues.

1	TO KAPABANY	13	RAMONA	23		34	
2	H ALLELUIAH!	13	LI UNA LAGRIMA 22	24	TANGO DES ROSES	35	ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ...ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ
3	ΕΙΚΗ-ΒΟΒΟ	14	KONSTANTINOPLE	25		36	ΜΗ ΡΟΤΑΙ ΓΙΑΤΙ...
4	ΕΕ ΤΟ ΣΑΙΣ...	15	UN SOIR A SINGAPOUR	26	UNDER THE MOON	37	ΑΧ! ΣΟΥΤΑΝΑ ΜΟΥ
5	ΤΙ ΤΥΠΟΣ ΙΙ	16	MIO PADRE	27		38	Μ' ΑΓΑΠΟΥΣΕΣ
6	TANGO SELECTO	17	ALI BABA	28		39	NOTE ROMANS
7	ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΟΣ ΣΤΗ ΓΑΛΛΙΑ	18	Η ΠΡΟΤΗ ΑΓΑΠΗ	29	GOLIBRI	40	DONES GORAZZON
8	ΑΡΑΒΙΑ ΑΝΘΟΣ	19	LOTOS	30		41	O, DONA GLARA
9		20	DESEOS DE AMOR	31		42	TANTO ΤΟΥ ΕΡΙΝΟΥ
10	DANS UN SOUVIRE	21	HIMALAYA	32	BROADWAY MELODY	43	
11	= OH! MAROSE MARIE	22		33		44	ΣΙΕΜΠΡΕ

Figure 6: Pages from a singular programme guide from the Mitsos Mertikas archive.

45		56	ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΟ	67		79	ΓΑΛΙΚΟ ΜΟΥ ΑΤΟΡΙ
46		57		68	ΜΑΝΑ ΤΑ ΛΟΥΛΟΥΔΙΑ ΜΟΥ	80	ΤΟ ΠΡΕΤΟ ΕΡΕΤΙΚΟ ΦΥΛΙ
47	ΕΛΑ ΠΡΙΝ ΣΒΥΣΗ	58		69	ΚΑΝΤΙΟΔΕΤΑ	81	ΧΟΡΑ ΡΟΥΜΑΝΙΚΙ
48		59		70	ΑΤΣΙΤΤΑΝΙΚΟ	82	ΧΑΣΑΠΙΚΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟ
49		60		71		83	ΣΥΡΤΟ ΣΑΜΙΕΤΙΚΟ
50		61	ΧΑΣΑΠΙΚΟ	72	ΧΑΣΑΠΙΚΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟ	84	ΧΑΣΑΠΙΚΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟ
51	ΦΕΝΙΑΙ ΕΑΓΙΝΟ	62	ΡΟΥΜΑΝΙΚΟ	73		85	ΜΟΝΟΝ ΕΜΕΝΑ
52	ΜΑΜΟΖΑ ΦΟΥ	63	ΡΟΥΜΑΝΙΚΗ ΧΟΡΑ	74		86	ΧΑΣΑΠΙΚΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟ
53		64		75	TANTO ΤΗΣ ΑΓΑΠΗΣ	87	ΤΡΙΝΚΙ-ΤΡΙΝΚΙ ΤΑ ΤΑΤΗΡΙΑ
54	Η ΓΥΝΕΚΑ ΤΟΥ ΣΙΣΤΟΝΗ	65		76		88	ΧΟΡΟΙ ΡΟΥΜΑΝΙΚΟΙ
55		66	ΧΑΣΑΠΙΚΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟ	77		89	ΖΥΜΠΟΥΑΕΝΙΑ ΜΑΤΙΑ
				78		90	

Figure 6b: Continuation of the previous.

91	ΟΡΟ ΜΟΥΕΡΤΟ	102	ΑΤΤΕΝ ΑΤΤΕΝ ΤΑΤΟΝΑ	113	ΧΕΡΑ ΒΛΑΧΙΚΗ	124	ΜΑΥΡΗ ΑΤΑΝ Η ΕΡΑΤΟΝ ΣΕ ΤΑΝ ΠΕ
92	ΤΑΝΑ	103	Η ΠΕΙΣΜΑΤΑΡΑ	114	ΟΤΥΧΕΡΟΣ ΑΛΗΤΗΣ	125	
93	ΠΑΡΑΤΟΝΙΑΔΑ	104		115	ΤΡΑΒΙΑ ΤΑ	126	ΣΤΑΤΟ ΣΥΛΒΡΙΑΝΟ
94	ΧΗΡΑ ΜΟΥ	105		116	ΡΙΓΟΛΛΕΤΟ	127	ΔΕΝ ΕΕ ΒΕΛΟ ΠΙΑ
95		106	ΣΤΟ ΠΑΛΑΤΙ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΑΠΗΣ	117	ΚΑΡΜΕΛΑ	128	ΙΤΑΝΙΟΛΙΚΕΙ ΟΡΙΝΟΣ
96		107	ΤΟ ΤΑΝΤΟ ΤΟΥ ΟΡΙΝΟΥ	118	ΧΑΣΑΤΙΚΟ ΒΑΡΙ	129	ΣΕΡΕ ΤΑΙΜΕ
97		108		119	ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ	130	
98		109		120	Σ, ΕΝΑ ΜΙΚΡΟ ΖΑΧΑΡΟΠΑΤΟΝ	131	ΑΧΙ ΣΟΥ ΑΤΑΝ ΜΟΥ
99	ΔΕΣΤΟΙΝΙΣ ΔΕΣΤΟΙΝΙΣ	110	Η ΓΥΝΑΙΚΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΡΟΜΟΥ	121	ΜΑΡΙΤΣΑ ΜΟΥ ΚΟΚΚΥΛΙΤΣΑ ΜΟΥ	132	
100		111	ΤΟ ΤΑΝΤΟ ΤΟΥ ΧΕΡΙΣ ΜΟΥ	122	ΒΑΛΣ	133	ΜΑΤΙΑ ΜΑΧΜΟΥΡΙΚΑ
101	Η ΧΑΛΙΜΑ	112	ΜΑΡΙΣ ΡΕΣΙΚΟ	123	ΡΕΣΙΚΟ	134	ΣΙΕΜΟΡΕ

Figure 6c: Continuation of the previous.

In Aggeliki Vellou Kail's biography of Markos Vamvakaris,⁷ he states:

There were many smoking dens, but the prince of dens was Gravaras in Athens, there on Anargiron Street [...] There was an orchestra inside, you smoked anything you liked, but in the beginning there was only a piano, Manolis the Turk, the epitome of tough. They loved him because he used to play a lot of heart-breaking Turkish pieces. All the tough guys loved him [...] Some heavy Turkish zebekika, some chasapika. Only on the piano (Vellou-Kail 1978, 114).

This is Manolis Mamounas, Thanasis Kataras also mentions him in his article 'Popular music stages in Menidi' (2014). Kataras refers to the so-called 'Paranga', the community kiosk of Acharnon, built in 1925.⁸

In the summer of 1927 the first piano is purchased, with Dimitriadis as the pianist, who plays mainly European music (waltzes, mazourkas, fox trots etc.), but also various taksims [that is, eastern style improvisations] and other fantasies on popular musical themes. In 1927–1928 the kiosk changes hands and is taken over in partnership by Panagos Gikas and Mitsos Visarakis. On occasion, important pianists worked at the kiosk, such as Mitsos Mertikas, Manolis Mamounas aka The Turk, Vangelis Isychopoulos (who transformed the piano into a

⁷ Indicative samples of Vamvakaris's discography, where the piano takes part: *Adeiase mou ti gonía* (άδειασέ μου τη γωνιά), Parlophone GO 3697 – B 74078, Athens, 1946: <https://youtu.be/1SPI26RMhLI>; *Kapoio vradý me fengari* (κάποιο βράδυ με φεγγάρι), Parlophone GO 4249 – B 74186, Athens, 1950: <https://youtu.be/b-5F5VL30Ws>; *San me deis kai sou sfyrizo* (σαν με δεις και σου σφυρίζω), Parlophone GO 4250 – B 74186, Athens, 1950: <https://youtu.be/mNNVAYsFpaQ>.

⁸ 'Manolis the Turk seems to have been active on the music stages for more than two decades. In 1936-1937 he worked with Stauros Tzouanakis in the music hall 'O Theios', the orchestra included a violin, guitar, piano, voice (Kataras, 2014: 261). Additionally, Christos Dimopoulos, a musician who played a three-string bouzouki and was active in the 1950s, mentions in a narrative that he had worked with Stellakis Perpiniadis, Karatapakis and Manolis the Turk (Altis, 2008: 74)' (Liaskou, 2019: 16).

kanoon, striking the chords with hammers) and the blind pianist Eudokimos (Kataras 2014, 63–4).

[...] In the earlier hours of the dawn, stoned, he played amazing excerpts of operettas, arias, waltzes and so on. He too read sheet music, like me. He made the piano a cimbalom putting something on the chords. (Kleiasiou 2004, 104).

Mitsos Mertikas, mentioned by Kataras in his article, comes with his nephews Giannis and Grigoris, also pianists, but also with his father-in-law Agapios Masilis, also a pianist, from Smyrna. All three are protagonists in the music stages of Athens. Mitsos Mertikas was born in Smyrna, about 1900 and died in Athens in 1990. In 2018, his musical archive was given to the Department of Popular and Traditional Music of the Technological Educational Institute of Epirus, now the Department of Music Studies of the University of Ioannina by his daughter Zoe, with the aim of digitizing and cataloguing it, by the Workshop for Piano in Popular Musics (for Mertikas see also Skandali 1991 and 2008).



Figure 7: Giannis Mertikas (piano), according to Petropoulos perhaps 1952 (Petropoulos archive).

Agapios Masilis was born in Smyrna (Bornova) in 1907 and lived there until 1922, when he came to Greece with his family (mother and two siblings) after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. He settled and lived in Athens until 1990. He married Zoe Skomopoulou, a refugee from Constantinople (Istanbul), and had three children (two girls and a boy). According to the testimonies of his family, he was an autodidact musician. He withdrew from the music stage early on due to health reasons, even though he was not old. At home, he had an upright piano and mainly played music without sheet music. In the early 1980s, he was confined to a wheelchair because of a disease and he never played the piano again. He worked in the nightclubs and cabarets of the period. Stefanos Vartanis, popular violinist and composer, was his friend and regular visitor.



Figure 8: Agapios Masilis (Mertikas family archive).



Figure 9: Agapios Masilis with Petsas and Bebis, according to Petropoulos probably 1954 (Petropoulos archive).

The case of Evangelia Margaroni constitutes a special chapter in the examination of the popular piano protagonists, and this because the issue of the presence of the female sex in the world of the popular arises, both on the music stage as well as in discography. Undoubtedly, the musicians's guild always constituted a particular circle, with their own code, as opposed to that of the singers. Margaroni constitutes a special case, as she is one of the few cases of a female presence in the world of the popular, with many years of experience, who not only plays an instrument in the orchestra, but also arranges, harmonizes and inspires cooperation and trust in Tsitsanis, who keeps her at his side for 34 years (Ordoulidis 2012, 36).⁹ The case of Margaroni constitutes an indicative example of the junctions

⁹ Indicative samples of Tsitsanis's discography, where Margaroni plays the piano: *Ta dialehta paidia* (τα διαλεχτά παιδιά), Columbia CG 2828 – DG 6913, Athens, 9 June 1951: <https://youtu.be/3fTsQk5sDZk>; *To karavi* (το καράβι), HMV 7XGA 229 – 7PG 2565, Athens, 24 March 1959: https://youtu.be/zcPmc_yZ_Gk.

in the network of the popular. On the one hand, she is the daughter of the santur player Manolis Margaronis, something which means she has practical experience of the popular; she knows how it functions, its distinctive roles and the value system by which it is governed. On the other hand, her studies in classical piano render her part of a more scholarly and obviously literate world and tradition, but also of course a rationale regarding the instrument performance.¹⁰



Figure 10: Margaroni at the piano, according to Petropoulos 1952 at the Faliriko venue (Petropoulos archive).

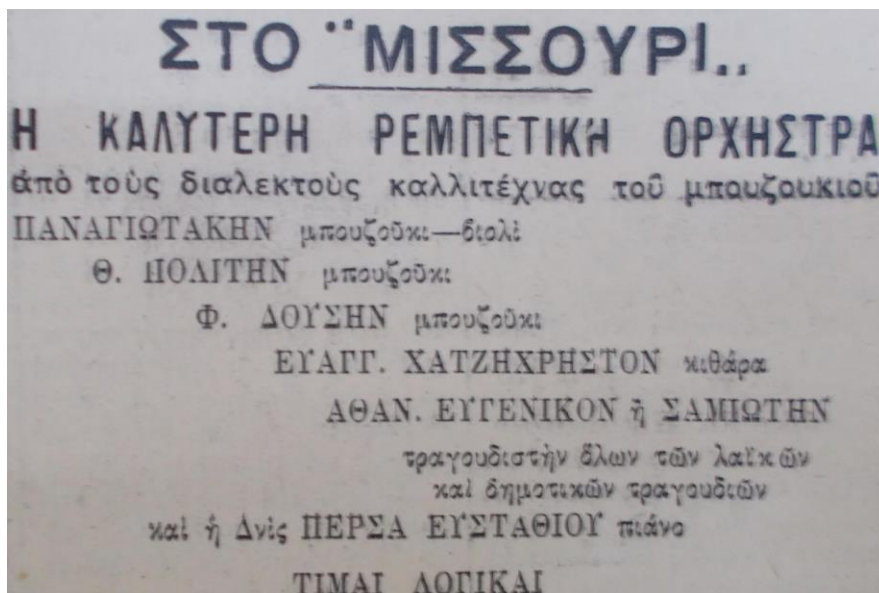


Figure 11: The newspaper *Peiraiki Zoi* (2/2/1949): a publication with the name of another woman pianist.¹¹

¹⁰ 'Additionally, Lili Nikolesko is another woman we see working with important artists on the popular music stages, not only in this period but also the subsequent one. Through the photographic material (Alexiou, 2003: 439) we see her work with Vasilis Tsitsanis in 1949' (Liaskou, 2019: 19). (See also photographic material Petropoulos, 1996.)

¹¹ Many thanks to Kostas Vlisidis for the discovery of this historical documentation.

AT 'MISSOURI'
THE BEST REBETIKO ORCHESTRA
with the finest bouzouki artists
PANAGIOTAKIN bouzouki-violin
TH. POLITIN bouzouki
F. DOUSIN bouzouki
EVANG. HATZICHRISTON guitar
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singing all the popular
and folk song
and Miss Persa Euefstathiou piano
REASONABLE PRICES

Another protagonist, mainly of the music stages, Giorgos Rovertakis, in his autobiography, talking about the beginning of the 1930s, mentions:

At the time, playing the bouzouki was a bit of a clandestine affair, Markos (that is, Vamvakaris) had not yet appeared on the scene [Vamvakaris records for the first time approximately in 1933]. And the ones that did exist were not being employed. The rebetiko was played by other instruments; the piano, the violin, the guitar (Schorelis and Oikonomidis 1973, 12).



Figure 12: Giorgos Rovertakis, according to Petropoulos in Ioannina probably 1948 (Petropoulos archive).

Rovertakis was born in 1911 and left Smyrna in 1922 to settle in Piraeus with his family. His father died when he was young, so his mother put him in an orphanage with one of his eight siblings, he received some initial musical training there. In Greece, the Smyranean Dimitris Voulgaridis hired him at his cinema 'Ilisia'. The silent movies of the time were accompanied by live music. At the 'Ilisia' there were two instruments: a violin (Giorgos Dragatsis, nephew of Ogdontakis) and a piano. His enthusiasm with the piano led him to study it for hours, sometimes at the cinema and sometimes at the cabaret next door. Very soon, he followed the profession of musician.¹²

¹² A composition by Rovertakis. Possibly, he is the one who plays the piano: *Mangika den mou xigiesai* (μάγικα δεν μου ξηγιέσαι), Parlophone GO 3857 – B 74111, Athens, 1947: <https://youtu.be/f94mhd-SkTo>.

The Smyrna junction

Regarding Smyrna, not only will Aristomenis Kalyviotis and his works be mentioned (2002), but the many newspapers in circulation there too. Kalyviotis refers to an article by John Veinoglou, who claims that at the turn of the 20th century there are 2500 pianos in existence in Smyrna (2002, 42).¹³ The material published by Kalyviotis in his own book, as he presents the names of venues with musical instruments, piano importers, tuners, piano teachers etc, reinforces this claim. The fact that some of the earliest recordings of the Sideris Estudiantina, such as the song *Tounte – tounte*,¹⁴ recorded in 1906–1907, is conducted with the inclusion of a piano in its orchestra, reinforces, in turn, the dynamic role of the instrument in urban popular music implementations. The song is known as *Tsopanakos imouna* (τσοπανάκος ήμουνα), and while the piano does not present any special interest, regarding performance practices, it highlights the dynamic role and constant presence of the piano in Smyrna.¹⁵



Figure 13: Example of the historical discography related to Smyrna and Constantinople. *Tounte tounte* by Estudiantina Sideri (Kounadis archive).

Regarding the estudiantinas and their protagonists in Constantinople and Smyrna, it is worth mentioning the trip some of them made to New York, setting off on 8 December 1922 from Constantinople and reaching New York on 8 January 1923. Among others, musicians like Zounarakis and Christodoulidis worked on the ship; all together recorded in New York, on 19 January 1923. In the orchestra, the Italian De Vapoli also participates as a pianist (see Kalyviotis 2009). Two well known, from the historical discography, estudiantinas in Constantinople are the Estudiantinas Zounarakis and Christodoulidis.

¹³ Here we must mention the extremely interesting brief history of the presence of the piano in Greece by Alexi Politis, who claims that according to the available sources, the first piano seems to have come to Athens in 1802, brought by Thomas Bruce Elgin's wife (Politis 2009, 127).

¹⁴ *Τούντε – τούντε*, Odeon CX 691 – 31330, Constantinople, 1906–1907: <https://youtu.be/kMBKiHsk58I>.

¹⁵ Another early discographical reference to the piano in the world of the estudiantinas is a recording of the song *S' ekein* (σ' εκείνην), by the Estudiantina Christodoulidis, in 1906 in Constantinople: Odeon CX 707 – No 31315: www.vmrebetiko.gr/item/?id=5106. For the Greek estudiantinas see Ordoulidis (2021, 88–100).

In the bands of Smyrna and with the 'toys' [instruments] we would express our sorrow in Minor, with violoncellos, pianos, harps, santurs, mandolins, guitars and violins. (Papazoglou 1994, 9)

The memoirs of Angela Papazoglou, wife of Vangelis Papazoglou (1994) constitute another vivid source. The latter is a protagonist, not only in Smyrna but also later on in Athens. The memoirs refer to many aspects of the piano, but also to the names of the protagonists on the music stages, such as Roupenis, Tsalapatanis and Michalakakis, names of teachers, venues etc. Not only the pianos, which are connected to Smyrnan Europeanization, but also the music in general, characterize the reality of Smyrna, at least regarding its Greek-speaking part. Angela, in one of the many times she mentions the music, talking about the historical happenings; the Greek army about to disembark, the hopes of the residents to unite with the Greek state etc., says:

Doum-Doum the big drums
In the big band of joy
On the big stage of the world.
Doum-Doum the big drums
I finally got a job in freedom
And my voice buried, centuries of silence
writhing at my feet.
Thousands of santurs... Doum-Doum the big drums
Thousands of pianos... thousands of guitars...
Thousands of harps... Doum-Doum the drums (Papazoglou 1994, 28–9)

Samples from historical discography

In very few cases do we know any biographical data, much of which is uncertain, of the names of the pianists who take part in the recordings. In many cases, we do not even know the names of the contributors. Discographical documentation, especially concerning the urban popular, is one of the thorniest issues in Greek musicology, something which has been touched upon numerous times in the past (see Smith 1989 and 1991; Aulin and Vejleskov 1991, 12–23; Pennanen 1995, 2004, 18 and 2005; Kokkonis 2005; Ordoulidis 2012, chapter 3).

The performance technique in many of the pianistic cases that we will examine is extremely interesting, since it, on the one hand, deviates from the customary – for the general public – classical pianistic sound, something which automatically poses issues of aesthetic, and, on the other hand, introduces itself as a field of important musicological value, regarding orchestration manner, pragmatic modality on the piano, popular rhythms, cultural syncretism, polystylism and a multitude of others, whose examination and analysis can provide answers to issues concerning both musicians and musicologists.

The first recording of the historical discography that we will examine was conducted in 1935 in New York. The new Politakia, the legendary *estudiantina* of Smyrna, work in the lounge of the ocean liner *Byron*. In two voyages to New York, led by Spyros Peristeris, 'orchestrator' of the Pirean *rebetiko* and son of Aristeidis Peristeris, founder of the Smyrna *estudiantina* and a Corfiot by birth, 16 songs are recorded. One of them titled *Beykos*,¹⁶ for piano and mandolin.

From the way the piano accompanies, we surmise that the pianist is an *insider* of the popular. He is familiar with the harmonic landscape of the piece and even though he exhibits no special skill, one can tell that he knows how to set the tempo and groove of the piece, in order to prepare the rhythmic-harmonic foundation for the mandolin. The aggressive staccato of the performance manner of the *chasapiko* and the I–V degree alternations on the bass played by the left hand, show that he knows

¹⁶ Orthophonic, CS 89815-1 – S 674 and VI 38-3057, New York, 7 May 1935: https://youtu.be/pnwbR7zJ_Co.

the 'job'. In the orchestra of the ship Sosos Ioannidis, who is a pianist, also participates. Comparing the sound of the piano in *Beykos* with other recordings in Athens, on which we know Ioannidis plays, it is safe to surmise that the pianist here too is one and the same.

Sheet No. **5**

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIENS EMPLOYED ON THE VESSEL AS MEMBERS OF CREW

Required under Act of Congress of February 5, 1917, to be delivered to the United States Immigration Officer by the representatives of any vessel having such aliens on board upon arrival at a port of the United States

Vessel "BYRON" arriving at NEW YORK MAY 5 1935, from the port of PINARUS UN-KUS ON APR. 19, 35

(1) No. on list	(2) State whether member of crew last preceding voyage of vessel to U. S.	(3) NAME IN FULL Family name Given name	(4) Length of service at sea	(5) Position in ship's company	(6) SHIPPED OR ENGAGED When Where	(7) Whether to be paid at or discharged at port of arrival	(8) Whether able to read	(9) Age	(10) Sex	(11) Race*	(12) Nationality	(13) Height	(14) Weight	(15) Physical marks, peculiarities, or disease	(16) REMARKS Including passport status and other relevant facts
1		TSEKOS PANAGIOTIS	10 YEARS	LINEE KEEPER	APR. 19, 35 PINARUS	NO	YES	48	M	GREEK	GREEK	5.9	--	NONE	
2		PERYESSIS ANTONIOS	5 DO	HAUSEK	DO DO	NO	YES	47	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	
3		CAVALAS ZAHNIS	5 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	37	M	DO	DO	5.9	--	DO	
4		FOUNTOS VASSILIUS	10 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	60	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	
5		VELISSARIOS ANTONIOS	7 DO	BUTCHER	DO DO	NO	YES		M	DO	DO	5.9	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
6		BOUGIOURIS MARGOS	11 DO	BAKER	DO DO	NO	YES	53	M	DO	DO	5.8	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
7		KAKANADIOS GEORGIOS	4 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES		M	DO	DO	5.8	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
8		OLYBOS YERIKLIS	1 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	60	M	DO	DO	5.9	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
9	FIRST	SAVARIS GEORGIOS		MUSICIAN	DO DO	NO	YES	57	M	DO	DO	5.9	--	DO	
10	FIRST	IOANNIDIS SOTIRIOS		DO	DO DO	NO	YES	40	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	
11	FIRST	VIDALIS GEORGIOS		DO	DO DO	NO	YES	54	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	
12	FIRST	MILLIARIS IOANNIS		DO	DO DO	NO	YES	41	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	
13	FIRST	MAKRIS STEFANOS		DO	DO DO	NO	YES	64	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	
14	FIRST	PERISTERIS SPIROS		DO	DO DO	NO	YES	39	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	
15	FIRST	ZERVUS ALEXANDROS		MOOTIE OPERATOR	DO DO	NO	YES	58	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	
16	FIRST	AKARLIS KRISTOS		DO DO	DO DO	NO	YES	39	M	DO	DO	5.8	--	DO	
17		MITSOZAKIS MIHAEL	8 DO	CHIEF COOK	DO DO	NO	YES	46	M	DO	DO	5.9	--	DO	
18		VALMAS TANNIS	8 DO	COOK	DO DO	NO	YES	47	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
19		TAKKAS KONSTANTINOS	3 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	56	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
20		OLYBOS AGAMEMNOS	4 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	37	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
21		ARVANITAKIS HRISTOS	5 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES		M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	See m. 8/16
22		KAMATZIS ALEXANDROS	8 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES		M	DO	DO	5.5	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
23		PAPAGEORGIOU DEMETRIOS	16 DO	PERLIN	DO DO	NO	YES	56	M	DO	DO	5.8	--	DO	See m. 9/16
24		GIANNARPOULOS HRISTOPHOS	1 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	27	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
25		TSILIS SPILIANOS	8 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	40	M	DO	DO	5.6	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
26		TSISSIKATOS EMANUEL	2 DO	DO	DO DO	NO	YES	24	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
27		TAKLIMOS ANTONIOS	4 DO	COOK	DO DO	NO	YES	59	M	DO	DO	5.0	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
28		TAKKAS MIHAEL	10 DO	PERLIN	DO DO	NO	YES	55	M	DO	DO	5.7	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
29		VELISSARIOS IOANNIS	12 DO	COOK	DO DO	NO	YES	57	M	DO	DO	5.8	--	DO	Did not sail PL.
30		ANTIPASS ANGELIOS	3 DO	PERLIN	DO DO	NO	YES	36	M	DO	DO	5.7	6	DO	Did not sail PL.

Line _____
 Owners _____
 Local Agents _____

Immigrant Inspector.

*See list of races on back hereof.
 Note.—Failure to furnish full or correct information in columns (1), (6), (7), and (8) is punishable by a fine of ten dollars for each alien. See other acts.

Figure 14: The passenger list of the Byron, in which we see the musicians: Savaris, Ioannidis, Vidalis, Milliaris, Makris, Peristeris (www.heritage.statueofliberty.org).

The sound of the piano in the following recordings is very close to the sound of *Beykos*. It does not accompany in the 'classic' pianistic manner but chooses an 'ala popular' manner of performing, which is characterized by the aggressive staccato in the style, with the rationale of the 'bass-paino' – the left hand plays octaves in the lower part of the keyboard usually performing the I–V of every chord, and/or creating basslines from one chord to another, while the right hand in the middle or higher part of the keyboard plays chords in variant ways.

Title	Label	Matrix	Catalogue	Rec. date	Link
Tatauliano chasapiko	Columbia (USA)	W 205348-2	CO 56031F	May 1926 ca	https://youtu.be/WnNnw14Y5fl
Karotseris	Victor (USA)	BVE 40605-4	VI 80322 & S 327 & V 19021	7 November 1927	https://bit.ly/3j9yw8n
Gia des me pos	Victor (USA)	CVE 57912	VI 58045	13 December 1929	https://youtu.be/UTR8BKHNn0
San roufao to krasi	Victor (USA)	CVE 57914	VI 58045	13 December 1929	https://youtu.be/xxKVxT0fmyo
Vre manges fylachtheite	Odeon (Greece)	GO 2056	GA 1722	1934	https://youtu.be/aXYOdM5lblI
I babesa	Orthophonic (USA)	89814	ORS 672	1935	https://youtu.be/Le7tEN5TvCc
Ithela na 'cha dyo kardies	HMV (Greece)	OGA 652	AO 2441	1937	https://youtu.be/MPcuz1ppPsl
Ennoia sou Anastasia	HMV (Greece)	OGA 840	AO 2518	1938	https://youtu.be/QjKbpGNaNcc

Table 1: Chasapikos in the Greek-speaking discography with the technique of ‘bass-piano’.

It is worth mentioning certain details regarding the second song of the above table, resulting from the discographical lists of the electronic archive *Discography of American Historical Recordings* (DAHR, www.adp.library.ucsb.edu) as well as the electronic archive of Erik Butterworth (www.goldov.com/butterw/emdb). The violin is played by Lazaros Constantine or Constantin who is registered as of Romanian descent. The piano is played by Michael Corm. After communicating with Tony Klein and Tony Russell (researchers of historical recordings) the following information resulted:¹⁷ The New York inventory of 1925 contains similar Greek names and surnames: Lazar, Lazarus, Lazaros, Constantine, Constantino, Constantinos. However, the only name which is accompanied by the characterization ‘musician’ is that of Lazar Constantino, who, as his wife Pasha, comes from Russia. Michael Corm, in the 1940 inventory, declares himself as a ‘concert pianist’. According to the DAHR list, the accounting ledgers of Victor have the piece in question registered as Greek.

It must be noted that in the Greek-speaking discography of America, on the one hand discography validation is easier because of the effectual organization of a large part of the material and, on the other hand, a lot of the characteristics of the repertoire appear different from that of the major metropolises (Athens, Constantinople).¹⁸ One of these has to do with instrumentation and the more frequent appearance of the piano in a leading role.

Another interesting piece of evidence deals with the fact that there are many recordings in which the only accompanying instrument is the piano, something which indicates that a different trend prevails from the eminent typical orchestra of the Pirean rebetiko (bouzouki-guitar). The fact that most of these types of recordings were conducted in America presents special research interest. Even more so when we deal with songs that have already been recorded in Greece, using the typical of the time orchestra of the Pirean rebetiko, while the same songs, in the recordings of America, change this classical orchestra and in the new type the piano takes on a role.

The next audio example is a recording from 1936, Athens, composed by Kostas Skarvelis and titled *Agapa ti manoula mou*. The piano has a more dominant role, as it performs not only the introduction but also the other parts, at the same time playing on the vocal parts.¹⁹ In the next piece, by Kostas Karipis, also recorded in 1936, the piano has a similar role, sharing the introduction with the violin. In both recordings, the embellishments of the right hand are of special interest, as well as the sense of a ‘saloon’ which the instrument grants the recording, which is titled *Ti to les kai den to kaneis*.²⁰

The next recording constitutes a special case. First of all, it is the popular *Minore manes* of Smyrna,²¹ recorded for the first time around 1908, a musical matrix which we see at least 50 more times in Greek

¹⁷ Communication through electronic correspondence on 5th August 2016.

¹⁸ See also Ordoulidis 2017.

¹⁹ *Αγάπα τη μανούλα μου*, Columbia CG 1485 – DG 6259, Athens, 1936: <https://youtu.be/9F5FrmpDnwY>.

²⁰ *Τι το λες και δεν το κάνεις*, HMV OGA 442 – AO 2362, Athens, 1936: https://youtu.be/8YjCUB_8oQc.

²¹ It concerns the gazel form, popular in Ottoman music, which we see in Greek-speaking discography as manes or amanes. The minore manes is a Greek-style voice improvisation with rhythmical accompaniment and it constitutes a very dynamic entity, which developed into a production musical matrix, a pattern for new musical melodies, but it also experienced multiple unadulterated repetitions. Regarding gazel and manes see indicatively: Feldman (1993); O’Connell (2003); Pennanen (2004, 9-12, 21); Kounas (2010 and 2019); Kokkonis (2017, 97).

discography until the 1950s (see Ordoulidis, 2018). The example in question was recorded in Greece and it is credited to Spyros Peristeris, who possibly also plays the piano. Due to the fact that Peristeris is familiar with the condition of Smyrna, the whole manes seems to depend on him, that is, the piano.²² Spyros Peristeris is a key persona in the urban popular, a protagonist early on, from the music stages of Smyrna, and later artistic director of Odeon-Parlophone in Athens. In discography but also in photographs on music stages we see him also as a pianist. From his early references in Athens, we see him in the club 'Mourouzis', in 1924 participating in the orchestra as a pianist. About ten years later, we see him again as a pianist on the music stage with Vasilis Tsitsanis.



Figure 15: Spyros Peristeris on the music stage as a pianist (Tsitsanis archive).

As far as the 'exchange' between scholarly and popular musicians is concerned, and their borrowings in artistic languages, a rather illustrative example is the case of Yorgos Bacanos. By religion, a Christian, a resident of Constantinople during the switch from the condition of the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Democracy, of gypsy stock and, Greek-speaking. He was born in 1900 and died in 1977. Bacanos is known for the redefinition and popularity which the oud acquired.²³ Despite this, perhaps influenced by the Europeanization of the Ottoman Empire, he records with a piano as well. In his historical taksim, recorded circa 1928,²⁴ he uses the same technique as the one used in the gazel sung by Kemal Bey, some years later. In these recording, the effort to implement the kanoon technique is evident. Technology and the sound architecture of the piano seem to help Bacanos not only to implement but also to evolve it on the spot. All this in a taksim in which, theoretically, he must adhere to a specific composition form, many times with the rationale of the 'theoretically orthodox'. In his attempt to achieve this goal the piano does not seem to hinder Bacanos who complies with a traditional perspective regarding melodic development (seyir) of the makam Hicazkâr. If nothing else, Bacanos reveals that he has fully comprehended the mechanics of the instrument, how it 'functions', something which helps him to transcend the mimicked kanoon. Bacanos dismisses the theoretical 'orthodox' and grants us historical recordings, with the piano outlining the in-between, of West and East, a pragmatic place of a period which is characterized by the *dialogical reciprocity* among the culturally diversities.

Bacanos, however, is a protagonist in popular repertoires too. That is, he performs at night in music halls. This type of repertoire, again with the piano, is recorded with his brother Alekos, who plays the kemence. *Arap Çiftetellisi*, (also known as *Rast Oyun Havası*).²⁵ Yorgos accompanies his brother in a

²² Μινόρε μανές (σκληρό το πεπρωμένο μου), Odeon GO 2067 – GA 1766, Athens, 1934: https://youtu.be/gxNt_tWP8kA.

²³ Regarding Bacanos, see Bacanos (1997) and Andreou (2014).

²⁴ Piyano ile Taksim, Odeon CO 320 – RA 202521, Istanbul, 1928: <https://youtu.be/tIEJ8GXBWKA>.

²⁵ Odeon, RX 131543, Istanbul, circa 1940: <https://youtu.be/klGd3mDRXJc>.

singular manner. What is interesting is the structure, which passes through one section of the piece to go to the other. Evidently, they perform together and feel artistic familiarity with each other. On the other hand, Yorgos seems to know the instrument, and in combination with knowing the repertoire well, he lays the rhythmic-harmonic foundation for Alekos, transcending the theoretical issues of the equal-tempered/untempered dipole. The way in which he creates sound on the piano is something worthy of analytical examination. He seems to possess a singular perception of the keyboard, the sound colours of the instrument but also the implementation of modality on the piano. A catalyst of this is his ethnocultural roots, which urge him constantly onto new audio discoveries and experimentation. So far, twelve recordings where he appears to play the piano have been partially validated.

These recordings of Bacanos are one of those special moments when the popular reveals its aesthetic substance. This substance lies between the two charged dipoles, East–West and scholarly–popular, ‘taking a stand’ and not caring about the theoretical literature which, in any case, came after its creation. With a more technical language, it is amazing how Bacanos managed the micro-interval language of the lyre in *Rast oyun havasi* and he accompanied it with an instrument, which theoretically cannot recreate the same intervals, it can, however, ‘communicate’, showing that Bacanos knows this ‘language’. In essence, breaking away from these theoretical dictates, Bacanos transforms the interval diversity of the piano into an advantage, proposing, through his recordings, a different way of performing with the instrument; another ‘language’ with which the instrument can articulate ‘speech’ and be a protagonist.²⁶

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²⁶ A photograph of Bacanos on the piano can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3mY0VRp>.

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