

Songs of Life and Love

Greek, Balkan, Armenian, Turkish & Kurdish songs

Kostantis Kourmadias & Laura Shannon
Saz, percussion and vocals

Concert program from Saturday 29 December
Findhorn, Scotland

Usak - 2/4 - Kurdistan (instrumental)

A folk melody in *usak* mode. Kostantis learned it from Fetih, his first teacher of the saz, who arrived in Athens as a penniless refugee from Kurdistan.

Palios Karsilamas - 9/8 - Lesvos, Greece / Asia Minor

Karsilamas is an improvised dance in 9/8 rhythm, typical of Greek dances from Asia Minor. This melody is well-known on the island of Lesvos, where many Greek refugees settled after 1922 and where Kostantis learned it first.

Na Ta Taxidepso Thelo - 4/4 - Chios & Lesvos, Greece

A *syrtos* dance song which longs to return to the lost homeland, the waters of Antalya. *'I told you I want to go, so come with me / And let our village fall into ruins, and let our island sink beneath the sea.'*

Vraila - 9/8 - Asia Minor (Greek)

Many Greeks once lived in Vraila, Romania. *'Oh boat and carriage, take me back to Vraila / We'll give you a thousand dinars / Oh captain, we'll pay whatever you want / Take us back to Vraila, so we can find the dervishes...'*

Skopos ton Aloghon - 5/4 - Lesvos, Greece (instrumental)

'Melody of the Horses'. A ritual tune in an unusual rhythm, to which men actually dance with their horses, riding right into the church for a blessing.

Matia Mou Matia - 4/4 - Constantinople / Asia Minor

A Greek love song full of word play: *'Eyes, my eyes, you are precious as my eyes / And my eyes have never seen anything as precious as your eyes.'*

Me Pirava Daje - 4/4 - Macedonia

A Muslim Gypsy tune from the days of the Ottoman Empire. *'I went down narrow paths, mother / When I was young I learned to cry. Poor one, hardworking one, orphaned one...'*

Katsiforas - 4/4 - Naxos, Greece

A *syrtos* song of nostalgia and lost love. The theme of separation from a loved one, together with images of winter, indicate that this folk song may be a remnant of an ancient hymn to Demeter and Persephone.

Alatsata - 2/4 - Eritrea, near Smyrna, Asia Minor

This slow Greek dance-song gives voice to both love and sorrow. It speaks of Karadagh, the Black Mountain, *'where the women of Alatsata go to cry and sing their grief... / Star of the dawn, why are you so late to appear?'*

Arap Semai - 10/8 - Syria (instrumental)

A secular melody in the particular rhythm favoured by dervishes for their rituals. Kostantis learned it from Ross Daly.

Agir Halay / Oy Memo - 10/8 - Kurdistan (Eastern Turkey)

Two Kurdish dance songs of intense yearning and undying hope. *'You said three days, you said five days, it's been months and you're still not here / I want to take you in my arms and sleep with you from winter to summer...'* And: *'Oh Memo, I want you to come riding a black and white horse, wearing a black and white scarf, come Memo, you will always be in my heart.'*

Djal i Ri Chocek - 8/8 - Macedonia (instrumental)

A Muslim Gypsy dance tune in a typically syncopated rhythm, 3+3+2.

Gioula - 9/8 - Smyrna, Asia Minor

A favourite Greek love song in *karsilamas* rhythm.

Lavra - 4/4 - words & music Kostantis Kourmadias

Manolaros / Mes tou Aigaiou - 4/4 - Kalymnos & Aegean Islands, Greece

Two *syrtos* dance songs about ships and the sea as metaphors for the journeys of life. Manolaros risks everything for his love: *'My bird, become the sea, and I will become the beach, so that your waves beat into my embrace...'* He is almost lost in the storm, but in the end has fine weather to sail into the harbour.

And: *'In the Aegean waters, angels are flying / And in their flight they scatter rose petals. / Oh my Aegean, calm your blue waters...'*

Karavi tou Bournova - 9/8 - Constantinople (instrumental)

A Greek *zeimbekiko*, an expressive solo dance usually improvised by men.

Mentilen - 9/8 - Asia Minor

Kostantis' grandfather from Smyrna used to play this old Greek melody from Asia Minor. The lyrics are new, from the Cretan group The Haïmonides. *'Madeleine, they tell me you're getting married / Don't let strange eyes see you / Those who rejoice don't cry / Tell me, who decides how the wheel of life shall spin? / Madeleine, Madeleine, those who love are not to blame.'*

Meryem Ana - 5/4 - Turkey

A Muslim song in honour of a river named after Mother Mary, *'flowing so beautifully and full of grace, looking in my eyes with passionate love.'*

Mairam Govand - 6/8 - Armenia

Laura learned this courtship song and wedding song in Armenia in 2001. Images of fertile fields lead to a song about a young woman who is getting married: *'They came and took Mairam by night; they took Mairam by candlelight...'* At the same time, the song is an invocation of *the Mairam*, Mother Mary, to bless and protect the bride on her journey of initiation.

Ti Ypermaho - a capella - Greek Orthodox

This ancient hymn to the Virgin Mary uses the microtonal scales of Byzantine music. The Holy Mother is thanked as the 'champion general' who has saved the city from siege, who has unassailable powers and who rescues us from all perils. *'Unto you I cry aloud: Rejoice, o unwedded Bride.'*

Tzaghkatz Baleni (Flowering Cherry Tree) - 3/4 - Armenia (instrumental)

An improvised dance form related to Central Asian shamanic rituals invoking the benevolent energies of nature. The cherry tree symbolises womanhood, combining the beauty and fragility of the blossom with deep-rooted strength. The Tree of Life is also a symbol for the pre-Christian Mother Goddess.

Nirakula Devi Ma - 7/8 & 8/8 - India

Laura's teacher Zuleikha created this melody to accompany prayers from the Upanishads in honour of the Divine Feminine.

Kostantis Kourmadias - Saz, vocals

Kostantis Kourmadias is a master of the violin and the saz. He specialises in the oldest forms of traditional Greek music, particularly island music and the Greek music of Asia Minor, where his grandparents were born. Kostantis also plays old *rembetika*, as well as music from the Balkans and the Middle East. In 1986 he co-founded the Ravanastro, the first 'boite' for acoustic traditional music in Athens. He has played with Ross Daly, Yiannis Sevgolis, Christos Tsiamoulis, Marisa Koch, and others. Kostantis performs throughout Greece and Europe, and frequently accompanies Laura in her dance workshops. He also teaches Byzantine music in the Ilion Music High School in Athens.

Laura Shannon - Bendir, doumberleki, dajre, spoons, vocals

Laura's passion for dance led her to Balkan and Middle Eastern music in the early 1980s. Born in the United States, she has lived in Europe since 1984 and has travelled worldwide to research and teach traditional folk dance and music. As a percussionist and singer Laura has performed with Xenos, Rosadusha, Alessandra Belloni, Beth Bahia Cohen and numerous artists in Greece. She lives in Greece and Findhorn.