

Pontic Singing in Contemporary Greece: Vocal Techniques and Pedagogical Implications of an Aural/Oral Tradition

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Abstract

This article examines the vocal techniques employed by performers of contemporary Greek Pontic traditional music. Combining fieldwork analysis with personal experience, the author offers an evidence-based explanation of the underlying cognitive and physiological processes that inform these techniques. While anatomical considerations constitute a central focus of this analysis, an appraisal of pedagogical implications suggests points for consideration that apply to aural/oral folk traditions, such as Pontic. The objectives of this research were: (a) to identify the current vocal techniques of singing in a Pontic style; (b) to bridge the gap between theory and practice in studies of voice and vocal production; (c) to illustrate how personal experience is relevant to ethnographic research in vocal music; and d) to suggest pedagogical approaches for those who wish to be engaged with a Pontic way of vocalization.

Keywords: Pontic singing; auto-ethnography; Greek traditional music

Introduction and context

The aspiration of adventurous musicologists to explore unknown or unfamiliar ways of social interaction within a given group of people engendered so-called 'classical' ethnography. In recent years, perceptions of a globalized international community have changed the scope and aims of such studies. Scholars are now required to possess high expertise, technological knowledge, different research approaches, and more sophisticated analytical skills. Being, incontrovertibly, a 'native researcher' (Gourlay, 1978; Koning, 1980; Jackson, 1987; Okely, 1983; Seeger, 1987; Chaney, 2001; Chiener, 2002) has significantly influenced the ways in which the author has approached this article and its postulates. The inevitable challenges expected from this insider/outsider duality might further be augmented when the native researcher is also a performer of the musical genre under examination. The present article constitutes such a case since the authorⁱ could be found as the subject or object of investigation.

Pontic music, whose components embrace a local dialect, vocal and instrumental music, dance and poetry, is a time-honoured heritage of the Greeks of *Pontos*ⁱⁱ (**Fig. 1**) who after 1922 (the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey), settled mainly in Greek Macedonia (around the city of Thessalonica) and elsewhere in Greece. Pontic repertoryⁱⁱⁱ can be divided into two main categories: (a) music that accompanies poetry, is not danced to and has no specific rhythm; being freely interpreted by the singer and the player; and (b) dance music in certain rhythmic patterns (2/4, 4/4, 6/8, 5/8, 7/8 and 9/8) which may or may not be accompanied by words. Pontic singing is considered to be purely monophonic, encouraging solo singing. The subjects of the lyrics are wide-ranging, including popular topics concerning history, love and the pain associated with loss.

Although various scholars have shown interest in the history of Pontos (Fotiadis: 1996, 2002, 2004; Bryer: 1976; Petropoulos: 2003, 2005; Yannakolopoulos: 2004; Evangelides: 1994; Ioannidis: 1988; Charalambidis: 1992; Laurentidis: 1975; Avramati: 1972), the music of Pontos has been neglected by scholars, as is testified by the very few documents available on the subject. Killpatric's (1980) book on 'Function and Style in Pontic Dance Music', Efstathiadis (1992) research about the 'Songs of the Pontic people' as well as Baud-Bovy's (2005) 'Research on Greek Folk Song' remain valuable documents in the field which offer significant information.

Apart from these ethnographic researches, the rest of the available documentation on Pontic music has the form of handbooks, leaflets, Audio CDs and published practical methods on learning to play Pontic music by amateur musicians. It is only in very recent years that modern ethnographies have appeared in the bibliography of this subject as academic documents (Gaitanidis PhD Thesis 2003; Tsahouridis [M] PhD Thesis 2007; Tsahouridis [K] PhD Thesis 2008).

Fieldwork and Methodology

Aside from the accrued experience and knowledge the author has gained from a life-time familiarity with traditional Greek vocal repertoires, the present article is based on an extensive fieldwork which was undertaken in the Macedonia region of northern Greece between the years 2004-2007. The necessary research was mainly conducted (i) 'in the field', (ii) by reflecting on personal experience, and (iii) through ethno musicological/vocal analyses. Methodology and criteria subjected to analysis of this ethnography mirror the artistic conventions of the informants and also resonate with academic approaches in terms of performance practice.

At the outset one needs to decide how to store her/his data, which contain musical performances, interviews, and narration. For a study concerned with vocal styles and its techniques, it seemed appropriate to employ audio-visual recording equipment (with appropriate ethical consent from participants). In this way, it would be able to observe different movements of the singers in the course of a performance (such as the use of the upper chest, the raising of the shoulders, jaw dropping and so on). A SONY HI8 digital camcorder and a Panasonic Mini DV camcorder (with tripod) were chosen. For those reluctant to perform before a camera, a Mini Disk recorder with built-in microphone was employed. A digital photo camera was also useful for capturing moments visually. Notwithstanding these items of sophisticated technology, it soon became clear that pen and notebook continued to hold a position of value. Much valuable discourse was spontaneously conducted in taverns, restaurants, domestic celebrations, and even in a car: moments when machinery would disrupt the intimacy that initiated the conversation. Unlike the camera, pen and paper record through the exercise of memory, while sustaining the immediacy of the exchange.

It is also worthy to note that although accurate recordings can provide meticulous paradigmatic examples of certain vocal techniques with clarity and distinction, of equal importance, is human communication and vocal sound perception. In terms of fieldwork, this meant that one should draw on her/his craft knowledge as a professional performer in order to detect untold actions that are vital for a fuller picture to emerge. In that, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the author, as researcher and native performer, struggled to operate at these two independent/dependent, and occasionally, contradictory levels; an exemplar situation of the native ethnomusicologist's 'schizophrenia' (Koning, 1980). Thus, subjective memories and experiences of 'being there', in the field, were vital in terms of gathering data and also constructing the ethnographic text. In order to temper subjectivity and establish the findings, the author arranged to collaborate with the vocal tutors Jeffrey Talbot and Diana Stuart. Their experience and knowledge in recognizing vocal production contributed significantly to the understanding of this kind of analysis. As such, this would also add a professional outsider's opinion to counterbalance the positions which, in turn, would inform the conclusions that this paper provides.

Although 'classical' ethnography treats the concept of the investigator-ethnomusicologist as 'neutral', or even as a presumed 'missing' (Gourlay, 1978) element from the actual research, it ignores the plethora of social constraints that the researcher experiences in his own learning process; this subsequently affects the final outcome of a research study. In that researchers are participants investigating cultural phenomena, conventionally external to themselves, they nevertheless frequently raise the vital question of 'subject-object relationship' (Gourlay, 1978, p.3). Inevitably, subjectivity and objectivity are cardinal concerns for the 'native' researcher who must weigh her/his findings between those two challenging variables. Values of traditional anthropological distinctions such as the 'emic' (insider's perspective) and the 'etic' (outsider's perspective)^{iv} may seem to collapse when confronted by the situation of a 'native' researcher. The latter status perhaps renders the above distinctions not only invalid, but also absolute at a certain level of analysis. Tangential to these overall challenges, the aim of having the researcher as empathic 'native' is of a particular relevance in the present context. The native researcher enjoys certain advantages such as language familiarity, common physical gestures, knowledge of customs, verbal and facial expressions, conventions, easy access to informants, an innately developed awareness of how the music functions, establishing viable parameters of artistic evaluation, and so on. The disadvantages, though fewer, are nonetheless significant. Owing to their innate nature, they are more difficult to assess and eliminate.

Familiarity, for example, can breed existential prejudice and a clouding of objectivity. The evaluator has inherent expectations, based on his/her own experience of the genre, of how pieces 'should' be rendered. Furthermore, natives have to 'participate', making observation an incidental privilege; therefore, one has to become an observant participant in order to bring balance between these two different states. In consequence, there are two significant challenges for a native ethnomusicologist. First, to cultivate the ability to isolate personal views and assumptions; and secondly, the tendency *not* to ask certain questions either because of one's dogmatic orientation or because the common culture precludes a cognitive approach to the very formulation of such questions.

In this changing 'terrain' of the present research, where relationships between the 'self' and the 'other' become subject of critical scrutiny, 'auto-ethnography' (Reed, 1997; Wong, 1992; Swadener, 1999; Toussaint, 2002) appears to be an elucidated resolution since the present text embraces reflective autobiographical work by the author, combined with 'native' ethnography, as well as indigenous autobiography by the informants. The term auto-ethnography is perceived in this article as a text written by an individual native (to the culture under examination) who (a) deconstructs information from their own performance practice and (b) interprets data for a non-local audience. Hence, personal development as a child, narrating past events and demonstrating local views by other natives are perceived as significant sources of information. As a result, one could summarize the frame of the present research under the following three main headings: (i) Ethnomusicology, (ii) Auto-ethnography, and (iii) Autobiography.

Points of departure

In establishing the foundation of this analysis, we will briefly refer to the *Cantometrics* project (Lomax, 1962) and its categorization of Greek folk vocal monophony that includes the vocal music of the Pontic people. *Cantometrics* is perhaps one of the most fundamental and ambitious projects of folk song study. Alan Lomax and his colleagues undertook a large intercultural study in an attempt to describe the general features of accompanied and unaccompanied song performance. They did this by gathering ten samples from almost four hundred contexts. Out of Lomax's ten categories of worldwide song styles, he viewed Greek folk monophony as belonging to category VIII, 'EURASIAN'. What follows comprises Lomax's account of the most important elements in the vocal style of this category and a starting point for the ensuing analysis. Thus, 'Eurasian' is characterized by:

Singing in solo, by unblended unison, by instruments used for accompanying songs or for dance tunes. The tone of these instruments very often corresponds to the voice quality, which is ordinarily high-pitched, often harsh and strident, delivered from a tight throat with great vocal tension, frequently with an effect of being pitched or strangulated. The expression of the singer's face is rigidly controlled or sad, often agonized. The singing tone – so frequently soprano or falsetto in character, even for male singers – is suitable for the representation of long and highly decorated melodic line, where variation is achieved by the addition of rapid quavers, glottal stops and the like. The prevailing mood of the music is tragic, melancholy, nostalgic or sweet sad, or else, in dance tunes, characterized by frenetic gaiety and a rather aggressive release of energy. Control and individualism are the key descriptive terms here (Lomax, 1959, p. 936).

Research projects of the *Cantometrics* kind usually invite controversy: the validity of its approach and the significance of the evidence for future research were raised as points of disagreement by many scholars, such as Driver and Downey (1970), Henry (1976) and Feld (1984). One of the main concerns in the current paper is to bridge the gap between descriptive methods used to explore vocal performances and learning processes on the one hand, and the inner musical experiences that we have during the action of singing on the other. For this reason, the findings of this practice-based research were based on specific case studies (folk singers) who had demonstrated eminent interest with the Pontic vocal style in terms of current performance practice and discography. The crucial choice of case studies comprises a penetrating yet questionable part of my analysis, for it appears that the author attempts to distil an entire vocal style from the evidence of a few informants. It can be, however, arguable that, in the current circumstances of no previous studies into this form of vocal music, the range of musical experience possessed by such individual performers (as cases) is of immense interest within the parameters of this present study.

Before continuing further, it is wise to mention that, although, twenty-one professional Pontic singers were interviewed during the fieldwork, the present article includes quotations by a few of them, selected because they represent a range of perspectives: (a) Hrysanthos Theodorides,

^v perhaps, the most legendary Pontic singer in contemporary Greece; (b) Stathis Nikolaidis, probably the most celebrated singer in current practice; (c) Alexis Parharidis, a famous young generation singer; and (d) Elias Petropoulos, a young singer, academic and chanter of Byzantine music. Working *in situ* with folk singers has resulted in certain vocal terms which occur below in this article. Although not all belong to standard musical nomenclature, these terms and their definitions are useful in creating appropriate images which help to visualize the vocal mechanism in a variety of sung vocal actions:^{vi}

- *Melisma*, (plural, *melismata*) is the technique of embellishing a single syllable of text with a group of notes. Music sung in this style is referred to as *melismatic*, as opposed to *syllabic*, where each syllable of the text is matched to a single note.
- *Breakings* (of the voice), is a direct translation from the Greek word (*spasimata*) and, by using such a term, singers indicate the way *melismata* are ornamented and delivered. It again refers to a single syllable and should not be confused with the Western art notion of the ‘break’ of the voice or the so-called *passaggio*.
- Singing *backwards* or *frontwards* implies that the focal point of the sound is located in the mouth cavity at either in the soft palate (back) or in the hard palate (front).
- *Vocal flexibility* refers to the relative velocity of the movements of larynx and uvula.
- *Subglottic* (or *Subglottal*) *pressure* is the air impounded at the position of the larynx below the vocal folds as it emerges from the lungs as part of the normal process of phonation.
- *Pitch* refers to the perceived tonal height of the human voice related to the underlying frequency of vibration of the vocal folds.

Findings

Vocal performance

This section includes findings that refer to (a) the way that this vocal genre is performed and the general nature of this singing style, (b) the way in which the vocal techniques were learned by the informants/singers, and (c) the way that I experienced the vocal techniques referred to below as a singer. Thus, examining closer the actual underlying process of physical vocal production of Pontic singing, the aforementioned *Cantometrics*’ information appears as being too general and perhaps anachronistic, although it embraces some important aspects of the genre. Being more specific, breathing technique in Pontic singing is close to the Italian school and its *appoggiato* technique.^{vii} The diaphragmatic (epigastric) breathing (**Fig. 2**) and facial forward projection are considered to be one action in the so-called ‘voice placement’ and this was often observed during my fieldwork in Greece. Hrysanthos, however, explained:

‘I sing from my stomach. When I feel that I run out of air, through pressure in my thorax, I create space in order to finish my phrases without sounding that I run out of breath. I borrowed this technique from the zourna players.’

According to Miller’s (1997) theory, an expert in Western classical singing, Hrysanthos’ breath management could fall into the two categories of: ‘1) those that consist of downward and outward lower abdominal distension [use of stomach] and 2) those that consist of inward and upward [thoracic space] abdominal and epigastric movement’ (Miller, 1997, p. xxi).^{viii}

It is also noteworthy that ‘thoracic space’ creation was taken from the zourna players who, apparently, make use of the well-known (among wind players) circular breathing technique. By imitating the thoracic movement of the zourna players and throughout the many years of performance practice, Hrysanthos reported that he adopted this movement, realizing that it offered him greater capacity in terms of breath management during the final seconds of a melodic line. Similarly, Stathis is well known for being able to sing long phrases and this was reportedly due to the fact that he made extensive use of his diaphragm without raising his shoulders (**Fig. 3**): ‘This came naturally through years of practising. In this way I can sing in a more relaxed position and also for many hours’. In a similar vein, Alexis noted that: ‘even after seven hours of singing, it is the use of diaphragm that saves your voice’.

Elias, however, asserted that the use of throat area is greater than the stomach. Technically, this would seem to arise from this performer's individual perception, as an avoidance of employing the diaphragm as a core part of the breathing mechanism is unlikely to be possible as it is normally involuntary in its movement. Elias reported a sense of greater use of the upper chest area and more tension in the throat. Taking into account the noticeable difference in the breathing mechanisms between Elias and the rest of the informants, he stated:

'This is how I learned it from the old people in the village. I cannot give an explanation for it. I was just trying to imitate their sounds and their way of singing. I did not want to change it so I kept it as I found it. Although some more modern singers tend to employ other techniques, what counts is the final sound'.

My own introspective analysis of my own performance practice suggests that the use of the diaphragm appears to provide more sustained air supply, as well as more control during exhalation. It is, however, perhaps important to note that use of an expanded thorax in breathing technique may encourage consequent employment of a 'movable' larynx (discussed below) and, therefore, the model espoused by Elias might indicate that the resulting tense throat allows for characteristic vocal ornamentations in this style. Hrysanthos^{ix} was the only singer to report that he made simultaneous use of both the thorax and the diaphragm (as evidenced by audio-visual material from fieldwork), while the rest of the informants cultivated the use of only one of them (usually the diaphragm). In these terms, Hrysanthos reported that he promoted an 'ideal' Pontic performance which enabled him: (a) to control his breathing [through the diaphragm] and (b) to allow vocal 'breakings' [see definition above] via the coordination of the thorax as indicated below.

Performed pitch in Pontic singing is usually set above the speaking range of the singers; that is to say, in the so-called 'head' voice. There are many factors which might impose high register singing; some of the most important are: (a) the tuning of the accompanying instruments which is often overlapping with the voice in performance, (b) the physical environment in which the music is performed, (c) the absence of artificial sound amplification, and (d) the nature of the lyrics (such as love, humour, pain of loss). The exclusive use of head voice requires singers to adjust certain positions of their vocal instrument in order to achieve the desired performing style. High registered vocalisation and, subsequently, the high tonality of a piece are qualities found in all Pontic performances. As such, settings in high *tessitura* are the most popular and well-known in this style. Consequently, this sustained high-register singing creates significant vocal demands in terms of breathing and articulation.

From an anatomical perspective, when the voice sings in a high range the vocal folds are stretched thinly towards their fullest length, changing their vibration 'amplitude' and pitch because of the folds' elasticity and flexibility. In observing the participants' vocal performances, it was noticeable that they raised and lowered the larynx with considerable speed in order to produce vocal 'breakings'. Moreover, the use of this type of 'moveable' larynx can create remarkable vocal effects (such as vocal tensions and a tightened throat) in terms of ornamentation and melismatic singing and thus becomes a quintessential component of the performance aesthetic. This manipulation of the larynx not only evokes expressive emotion, but also makes demands from the singers in terms of pitch precision. Conventional Western classical sung performance is characterised by a relative moment-to-moment stability of the larynx, even though it may change its relative height across sung registers (Welch, Sergeant & MacCurtain, 1988-89).

The voice's imitation of the ornamentations of the most prominent musical instrument of Pontos, the Pontic *lyra*^x (**Fig. 4**) can be seen as a prevailing reason for employing a 'moveable' larynx. Given that vocal flexibility can be potentially quicker than the dexterity of the hands, singers not only imitate the performed ornamentations of the *lyra*, but also find a new 'terrain' for extensive embellishment. Thus, for some singers, to imitate the ornaments of the *lyra* is an important factor in the formation of vocal breakings. Elias testified that: 'Although I first sing and then play the tune, after a few weeks I realize that I tend to imitate the *lyra*'s ornamentations in some parts of the piece'. Ornamentation of this kind demands considerable vocal effort in terms of pitch accuracy and velocity. Furthermore, these so-called 'breakings' influence the vocal articulation, since they encourage the use of the uvula and consequently the soft palate. Although most of the Pontic singers assert that they are able to make their uvula 'smaller', by working with vocal tutors and reflecting on my own performance, it is likely that a more correct terminology of this action is not to 'make it smaller', but to 'lift it up' because this accords more closely with its characteristic movement pattern (Welch *et al*, op cit).

Doing so creates more space for the air coming from the larynx, and by moving the soft palate swiftly the singer can actually manipulate the air in the way one wishes to shape it (**Fig. 5**).

Consequently, the final vocal sound is formed by shifting the uvula and moving the soft palate; both are placed in the back area of the mouth cavity which is also very influential on a follow-on vocal effect. Alexis noted that: 'when moving back and down to the soft palate, the "breakings" [of the voice] become much easier.' By lifting the uvula and the consequential creation of 'more space', this practice results in an 'open throat' (*gola a perta*) technique which concerns sensations of openness in the region of the nasopharynx.

During the breakings the vocal sound alters between the modal and the falsetto vocal registers. This is probably one of the most difficult techniques to acquire; to control such fast changes of this kind demand many years of practice as well as considerable vocal effort. In Pontic music, as currently rendered and observed in the fieldwork and in public performance, the technique is used by many singers. It is believed that Hrysanthos was probably the first to introduce this effect during the 1970s. Inspecting this alteration between the modal and falsetto voices suggests that this technique creates a highly ornamented vocal line with speedy changes between modal and falsetto voice (**Fig. 6**); that is to say, the note to be ornamented is followed by an abrupt, short note sung in a falsetto voice register (similar to an *acciaccatura* in Western Classical art singing). This alteration has to be accomplished within less than half a second, making it extremely difficult to perform. This sort of 'breaking' the voice, however, is not the sole characteristic ornamentation of the Pontic vocal style, nor does it bestow its only identity. But without doubt, it is commonly accepted and is widely used.

Although the vocal technique of 'alteration' between modal and falsetto registers uses a movable larynx and the soft palate, a further observation can be made with regard to articulation. This has to do with the perceived 'focal point' of the voice, that is, the time and space where the vocal sound is felt to be focused in the vocal instrument before being projected. This focal point in Pontic singing is more likely to be found at the rear or centre part of the mouth cavity, as it results from extensive use of the soft palate. The vocal projection emerges from a 'backwards' position, and, as ornamented vowels are always sustained, this is usually achieved also by taking 'backwards' the back part of the tongue. Consequently, the vowel sound is stabilized on the soft palate as well as being brought into the nasal cavity. In addition, the front part of the mouth cavity can also act as an important focal point. This is achieved when breakings do *not* proceed from the soft palate, but rather straight from a movable larynx. In this case the voice is brought forward, creating a less 'dark' timbre (more high frequency energy). Positions of this kind are used in ornamentations that include breakings, but exclude microtones (quarter tones).

The narrative so far has explored the vocal production in terms of the singer's actions and adjustments that have to be exercised during Pontic singing. Moving the focal point of the voice backwards is believed to encourage a more accurate performance of microtones. Moreover, the final sound is relatively dark in tone. Thus, from the perspective of articulation, it was a common comment by all the informants that taking the sound 'backwards' added to the individuality of the performer. An important step toward a more precise approach in understanding the singer's perspective and the wider culture which shapes the expectations of the performance centres on the physical behaviour of the singer and the observations that they give rise to.

Music and bodily movement^{xi} are closely related, especially in the world of voice where all singers are, perhaps subconsciously, aware of such actions. A specific physical expression related to the production of Pontic vocal sounds occurs during the performance; it is not considered as a dance movement, but an ergonomic action employed by the singer to enhance vocal performance. This movement consists of an abrupt 'twitch' of the thorax sending it backwards. During this 'twitch', the singers tend to move their whole upper body backwards since they believe that this can create an alternative form of vibration in the melodic line. Such movement has nothing to do with specific parts of the vocal instrument, but is rather an attempt to exert the whole vocal tract in order to achieve a strong emphasis in terms of melody and the particular strong accentuation of words or syllables.

This sound-modifying gesture is commonly seen in almost all performers of Pontic music. In his interview, Hrysanthos argued that: 'Through this [twitch of the thorax] I can produce a different accent to the lyrics'. Similarly, Stathis stated that: 'By this movement (the twitch of the upper chest area) the old singers used to emphasize the words and give better rhythm to the tune'. The validity of this claim (and also experienced in my own performance practice) is manifest in the audio-visual material gathered during my fieldwork since the twitch of the thorax occurs on the strong beat of the rhythm and thus gives a sense of vocal, percussive accentuation.

Impact of culture on Pontic music

Singing in the Pontic music tradition is not just a musical action but a communicative tool amongst Pontians which can transmit a sense of belonging and identity, feelings and knowledge.

Being a performer-researcher offered a series of points for consideration such as the role, status and identity of a musician, the process of learning and acquiring performance skills, the study of musicality and musical cognition as well as the untold communication between musicians and audience. Learning to perform as a research tool proved to be a unique means in data collection and analysis of vocal techniques since the human voice confers internal bodily changes hard to be reported and analyzed by just observing and listening.

Hrysanthos stated clearly that: 'singing reveals who we are' while Stathis confessed that: 'I learned our history through songs'. Similarly, Baily, an expert performer-researcher in Afghan music, reports that the action of performance 'can provide one with an understandable role and status in the community, and it can be very useful in early orientation. It explains why you are there and what are you doing.' (Baily, 2001, p. 95). In general, Pontic Greeks consider their music (embracing both music and dance) and dialect^{xii} as the strongest symbols of their culture and these are reported to have become as essential to the identity of their 'Greekness' as the blues were to the Blacks in America. Music, as a human action, plays an important role in the life of the Greeks of Pontos. It is intensively used at weddings, christenings, all-year calendar celebrations, funerals (in a lament form) and in *tavernas*.

Traditionally, the older members informed younger generations through their music and lyrics about their homeland of Pontos, history, values, tradition, courage and everyday life. Legendary stories of the origin of Pontic music and musical instruments inform us that Pontians consider their *lyra* as a successor of the Apollo's lyre and, though traditions change, they pay much attention to the sense of keeping an unbroken oral/aural transmission. One of the most important means to achieve this is through music; since Pontians find that *logos* can be more memorable when accompanied by music. Thus, for them, music means lots of other things than just melody; it carries history, habits, values and traditions that are difficult to be understood by an outsider from just listening to it.

Discussion of pedagogical implications

Pontic singing, as practised by past and present generations of Greek singers, has lately achieved remarkable popularity. Professor Fotiadis, an expert on the history of Pontic people, reported that 'we experience a dramatic increase in the number of people who get involved in learning Pontic music and dance' (Personal communication). An attempt to make approachable this vocal style to the 'outsider performers' of this tradition creates two crucial questions: (a) how to report such vocal actions to a non-local audience; (b) what is it that a singer, who has never visited this vocal genre, could learn? The crucial issue of aural/oral transmission, as exemplified in traditional learning of Pontic singing style, raises important issues about the learning of indigenous vocal music, in contrast to much conservatoire based Western classical music pedagogy.

For example, aural/oral traditional music may not be easily transcribed in a Western classical sense, since conventional notation may be inadequate in informing about highly ornamented melodic lines, the expected timbre of the performance voice and microtones (pitch). In a similar vein oral/aural traditions may not even be easy-accessed in order to transmit knowledge; recalling from the fieldwork, a singer –during the interview – refused to sing an old melody because he argued that: 'I will not sing this to you; you see, when I sung this melody to another musician, he put it down to paper in order to teach it to other musicians and finally record it; when I listened to it my hair fall down, nothing was similar to the tune I sung to him' (Interview with Nestoras Katsigiannopoulos, 29/7/2004).

Being, however, a teacher of Pontic music to non-local learners I am able to testify that the way I learned this tradition is not the only way of transmission. By this, it is meant that is not compulsory for one to be born, live in and experience as an insider a given traditional music in order to learn it to perform. Additionally, performing elements can be taught since the teacher is one of the so-called insiders; this does not specify that teachers who are outsiders of the tradition are excluded. However, at this initial stage for Pontic music it seems unorthodox since there is no given musical pedagogy for this sort of music which can offer a 'teacher's guide book'.

Using the present article as a starting point of reporting vocal techniques and their ways of performance it can be concluded that auto-ethnography is a useful 'means' in investigating vocal genres in aural/oral traditions since voice is part of the human body and therefore personal opinion of a researcher/vocalist is a basic source of information. Based on my own personal experience an integrated approach with a three-stage overview of pedagogical implications in the aural/oral tradition of Pontic singing can be suggested (Fig. 7).

Although the recommended three stages are different in content they all have a significant part in the pedagogical context of Pontic singing.^{xiii}

Stage A

At this initial stage, formulation of a panel (consisted of performers: vocalists and instrumentalists) is essential in order to supervise the collection, decision and categorization of the musical material. Being more specific on the last three actions:

The term 'collection' refers to the gathering of the material from private or public archives; the term 'decision' refers to the selection of the material which should be representative of the musical genre; and, the term 'categorization' refers to the creation of different levels of the material according to the degree of difficulty in performance practice. Any attempt similar to the above should be guided by pertinent bibliography, existing documentation of the subject and private collections.

Stage B

A teaching philosophy that should prevail has to account for:

- (a) The idioms that accompany the given vocal genre as they are elicited from the above analysis and based on the fieldwork research;
- (b) The 'accepted sound' and musical values of the tradition as they are found in recordings and current bibliography;
- (c) The traditional ways of learning through imitation and perceived acoustical processes;
- (d) The development of the tradition so that it stays alive as an aural/oral tradition and not as a 'museum' tradition.

Stage C

The method of instruction should contain lessons of vocal coaching which exemplify learning and practising of the special vocal techniques, in this case of the Pontic vocal genre. It is important to note that, although the Western five-line notation can be relatively inadequate to transcribe the subtleties in performance of musical genres such as Pontic, students should be advised to transcribe Pontic melodies in conventional Western staff notation for two reasons: (a) in order for the vocal tutor to realise how the student receives such complicated vocal lines that are usually overloaded with ornamentations and vocal breakings, and (b) since teacher and student agree upon the melody as shown in the staff, they can start using this as a skeleton for building up all the melismata until reaching the desired vocal result.

Thus, it is possible to identify three important steps in the learning process of a Pontic melody: (i) a 'Western Classical' version which will indicate the skeleton of the melody;(ii) a 'simple ornamentation' version which will initiate the student to the characteristic vocal idioms; and (iii) a 'Pontic' version of the melody as is usually performed (see below). Arguably, teachers should be able to provide all performing differences between these three versions in order for the students to acquire the desired performing result. The figures 8, 9 and 10 provide a characteristic example of the above three-step process based on a renowned Pontic lament^{xiv} dedicated to the fall of Constantinople. All three versions^{xv} of this lament are sung by the author in an attempt to present these three approaches during the actual vocal performance.

These three figures present visually the vocal differences one is likely to meet in such a sequence in order to reach stage three which is the desired performing result^{xvi}. The left scale of the figure indicates the actual notes sung during the recordings while at the same time there is a five-line notation horizontally. The pitch trace, as presented here, seeks to capture how the pitch of the voice is moving and also produced from one to another note as this stepwise process reaches the final Pontic version of the lament. In addition, one can notice the 'thickness' of the coloured notes which correspond to the different use of the larynx and, therefore, the different 'size' of the voiced sound; the lower the larynx position, the 'thicker' the virtual presentation of the note, and the opposite. Thus, in the first figure, voice is produced with a relatively low larynx position usually characteristic of Western classical singing; however, as we move to the other two figures, this sort of 'thickness' tends to be lost indicating the raising of the larynx. (b) As vocal performance moves towards the desired Pontic version, the use of a moveable larynx especially when moving between the notes is evident in an attempt to create the characteristic Pontic vocal ornamentations.

Conclusion

The paper seeks to demonstrate the requirement in Pontic singing of vocal flexibility and an unusual manipulation of the vocal organ. The high demand of the style in complex vocal ornamentation, which comes in conjunction with the desired high speed of the vocal movements, can offer a skilful vocal qualification to any singer. Studying the Pontic singing technique can be also useful to singers in exercising the manipulation of the uvula which plays such an important role in the formation of the final projected sound. It has been argued elsewhere that 'learning to perform as a research tool' (Baily; 2001, 1995) remains one of the most important means in the discipline of exploring unknown musical genres and playing techniques.

Based on the extensive fieldwork research and analysis of this paper, the picture of the Pontic vocal style that emerges here may be summarized under two main headings: (a) ornamentation and (b) monophony and heterogeneity. Pontic singing is highly ornamented, since the 'voice breakings' are prevailing features in the melodic lines. This is accomplished by employing a 'movable' larynx which encourages variations in the configuration of the soft palate and uvula. Ornamentations also occur through particular use of the falsetto voice which alters from modal voice in great velocity and precision. Moreover, the 'twitch' of thorax and the creation of thoracic 'space' in breathing are also essential devices that support the creation of vocal ornamentations. The music is also monophonic since it comprises only solo singing (with/without accompaniment), and heterogeneous in that: (1) the vocal line incorporates improvised breakings of the voice, thereby making each performance unique and unrepeatable; (2) the orally transmitted nature of the species allows other musical elements to influence the actual vocal performance.

Apart from the above findings which seek to depict the essence of a Pontic singing style, the article could be an example to similar researches where a native researcher is also a performer and a writer. By engaging with the text one should be able to distinct more vividly the difference between 'object' and 'subject' of analysis and the text presentation of 'I', 'we' and 'they' as presently exercised. This article required fieldwork research with Pontic singers in current practice and whose information was analysed through ethnomusicological and vocal means. The data was informed by employing pertinent bibliography as well as personal experience in the tradition. The anatomical approach to the description of the vocal techniques in Pontic singing follows the terminology and anatomical approach often used in Western classical music, although, local idiomatic words for describing vocal actions were also used.

Pontic singing would appear to exhibit a relatively unique vocal flexibility, including use of the soft uvula and nasal cavity, a consciously movable larynx and use of falsetto voice, elements which extend the borders of the already documented Western classical vocal techniques. The present article can be also seen as an attempt to: (i) 'bridge' the gap between theory and practice in voice studies, focusing more on the actual moment of vocal action and its analysis than the usual descriptive theory, and (ii) suggest some pedagogical implications in order to demonstrate a first approach towards an attempt to institutionalize an aural/oral music culture, like the Pontic; three crucial approaches are proposed in terms of gathering, organizing and teaching Pontic music material which, subsequently, may result the beginning of creating a specific teaching curriculum for this unique singing style.

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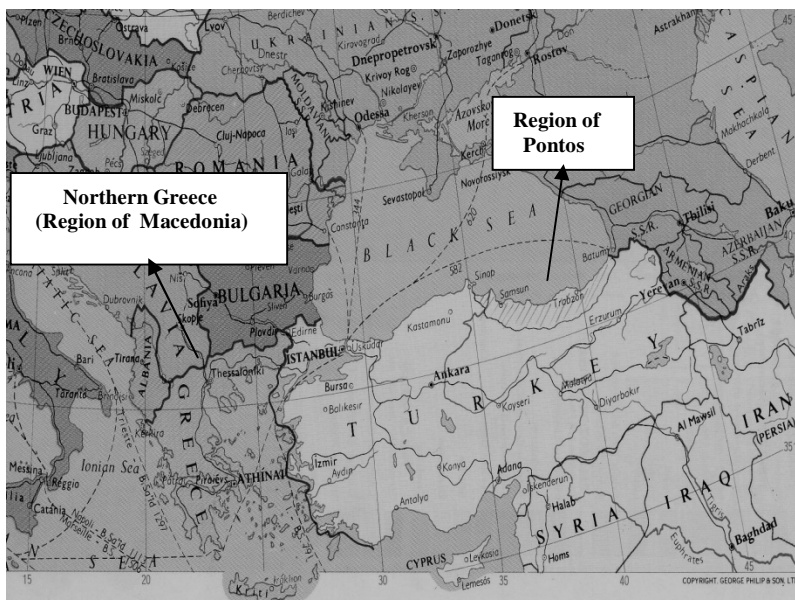
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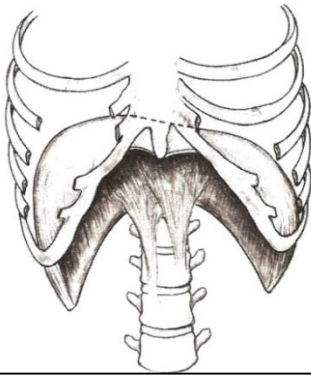
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Figures

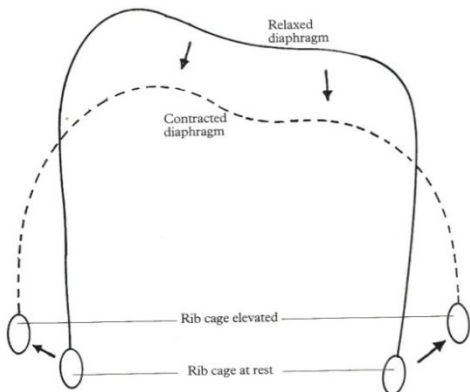
1. Geographical map of the region of Pontos and northern Greece (region of Macedonia)



2. Diaphragmatic breathing; the movement of the diaphragm (Rubin, 1998:55).



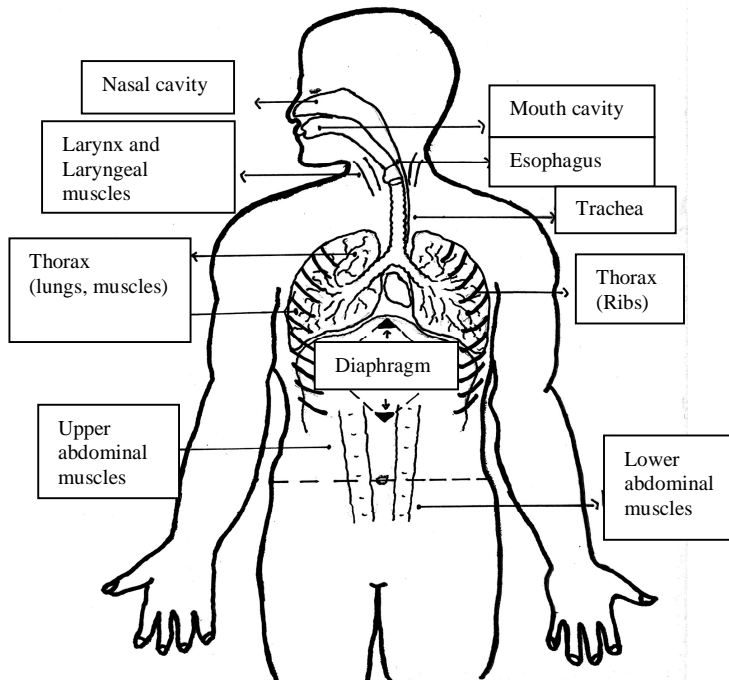
Anterior view of the diaphragm with the lower-costal cartilages partially removed



Antero-posterior view of diaphragmatic activity

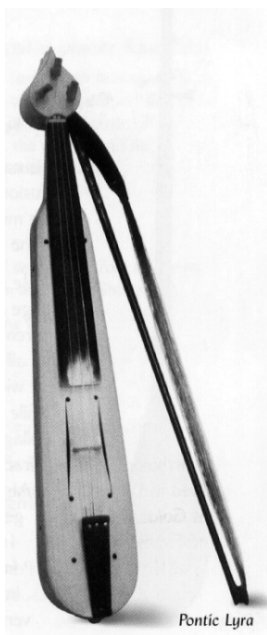
Antero-Posterior view of diaphragmatic activity

3. Image of the vocal body

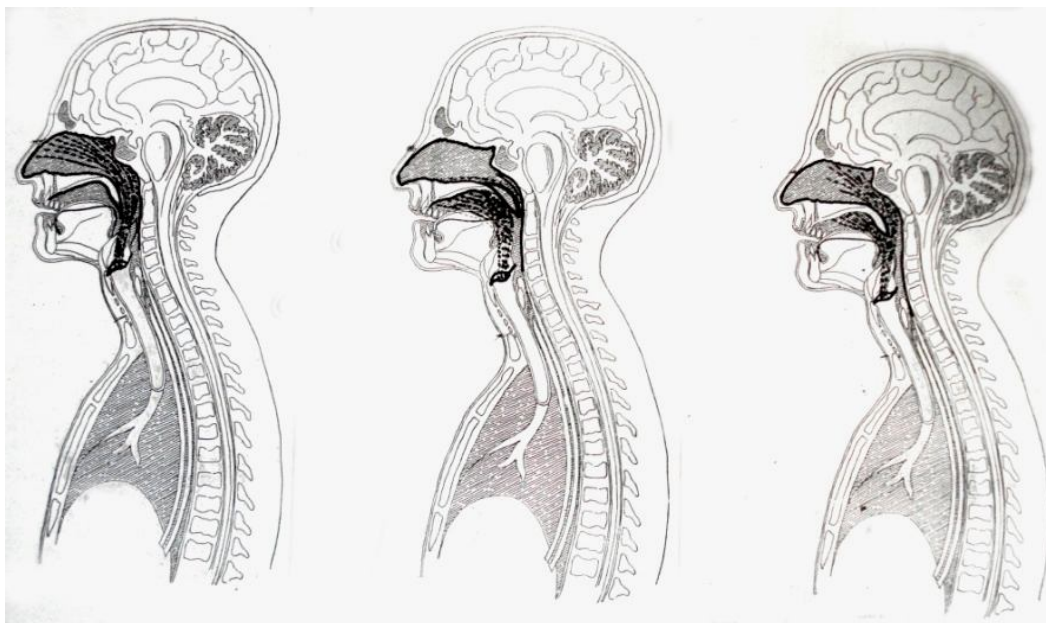


Created by KonstantinosTsaouridis

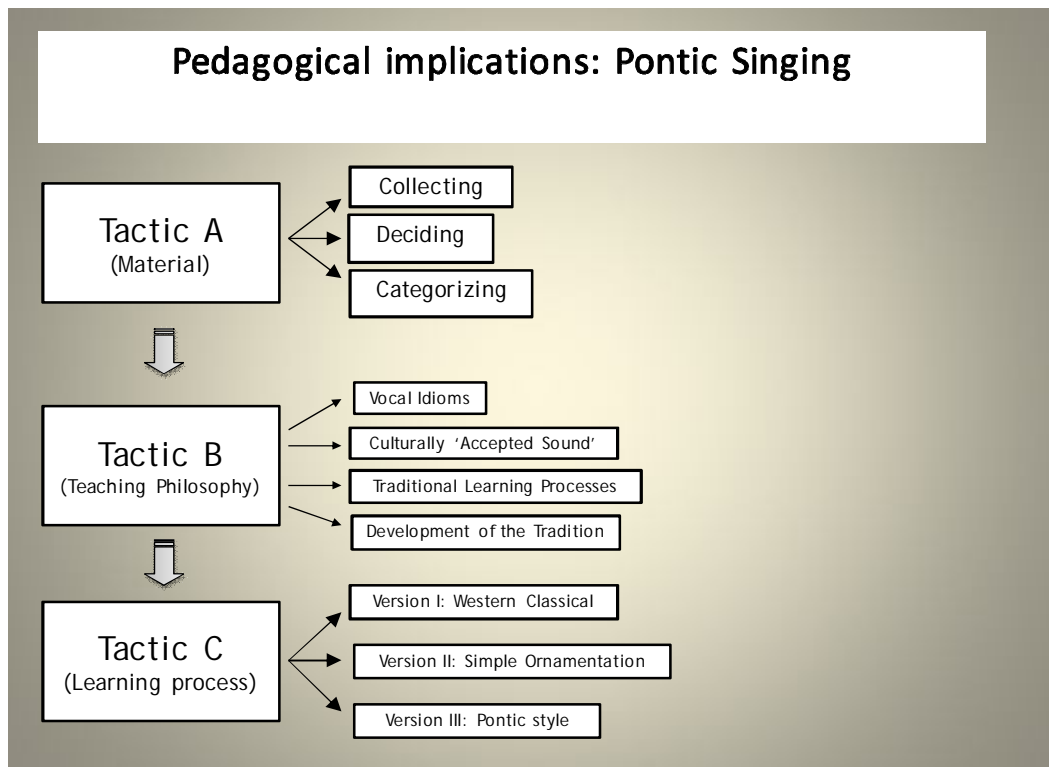
4. The Pontic lyra (Tsahouridis [M] PhD Thesis, 2007, p. 159)



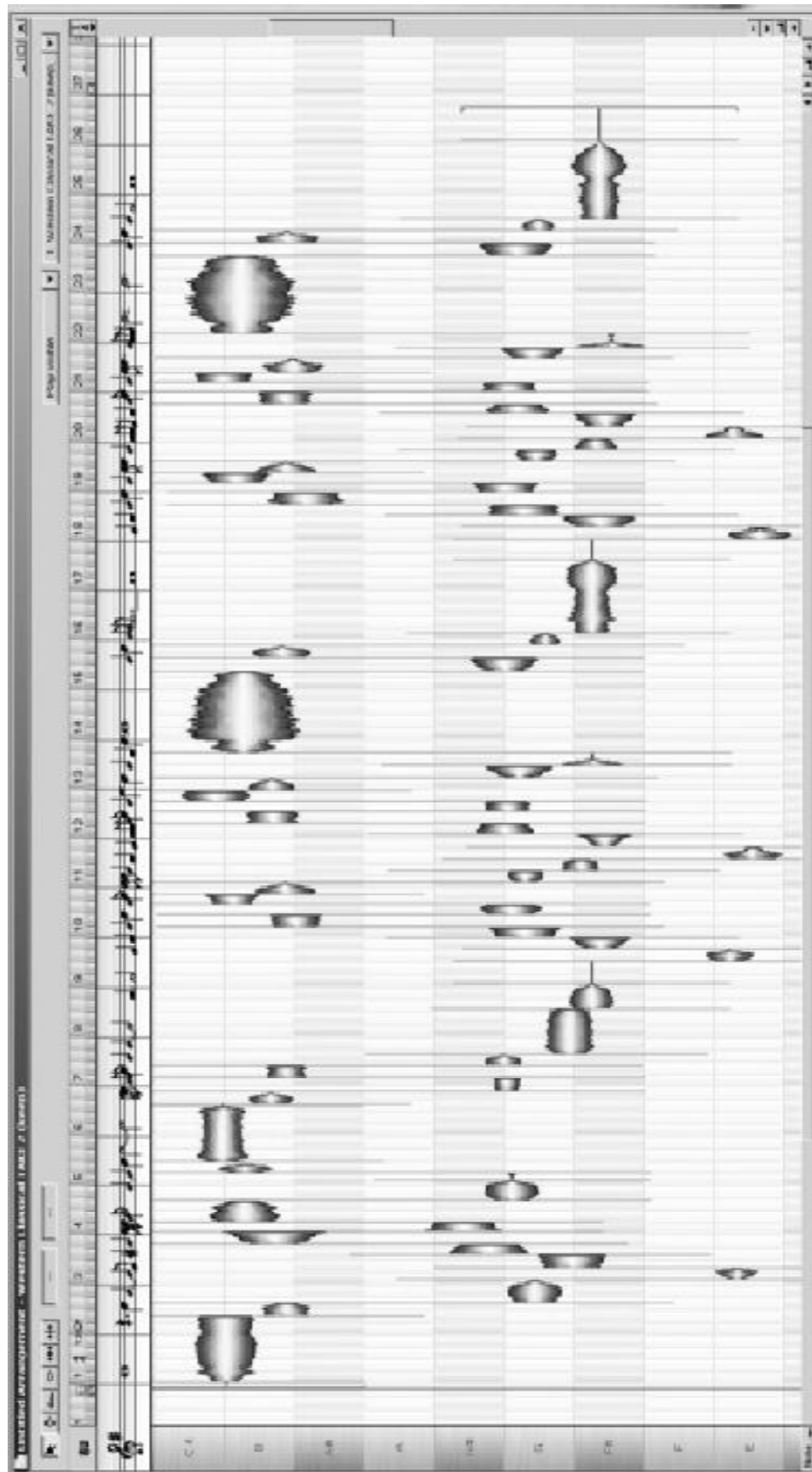
5. Different use of the soft palate: directing the air to the nasal or mouth cavity; or to both of them. (Tsahouridis [K] PhD Thesis 2008:181).



7. Suggested three-stage overview of pedagogical implications in the aural/oral tradition of Pontic singing



8. Western Classical Version



9. Simple ornamentation

The image shows a screenshot of a music notation software interface, likely MuseScore. The window title is "Simple Ornamentation TAB 3 (score)". The score is displayed on a grand staff with two systems of staves. The left system contains the piano part, and the right system contains the guitar tablature. The piano part features several instances of simple ornaments, which are indicated by a small 'o' symbol above a note. The guitar tablature shows the corresponding fretting for these notes. The interface includes a toolbar at the top with various editing tools, a playback button, and a status bar at the bottom showing the current measure and time.

10. Pontic version

The image displays a screenshot of a music notation software interface. The main window shows a score for a piece titled "Pontic 5/4 (Piano)". The score is presented on a grand staff, consisting of two staves per system. The left staff contains a melodic line with various notes and rests, while the right staff contains a piano accompaniment with chords and rhythmic patterns. The software interface includes a piano roll view at the bottom and a score editor at the top. The piano roll view shows the timing and duration of notes and rests for each instrument. The score editor shows the notation for each instrument, including notes, rests, and other musical symbols. The interface also includes a menu bar at the top and a toolbar on the left side.

Notes

ⁱExploring the vocal style of Pontos in modern Greece and drawing, for the most part of this article, on my own personal experience as a vocalist *vis-à-vis* learning processes and vocal production, I feel it necessary to interpose particulars in my life that relate to my own engagement with Greek folk music. This for two salient reasons: a) to identify myself as one further source of information in this research, and b) to allow others to evaluate the contexts of my assertions. Born in Veria, a small town in the Macedonia of northern Greece, I began singing Greek traditional music from early childhood. Coming from a musical family, I soon appreciated the vital influences of my father and his father (both Pontic *lyra*¹ players and singers) on my own formation as a musician. More than anything else, it was my family's enthusiasm for music-making that instilled in me the urge and enthusiasm to become involved with the vocal and instrumental repertoires of the Pontians. My father continues to complain somewhat sepulchrally, 'Our house, now without music since you went to London, is like a cemetery'. At age nine, I enrolled at the local conservatory where I received lessons in piano and theory. These included *solfège* (sight singing), *dictée* (musical dictation) and, later, harmony. At the same time, I undertook lessons in Byzantine chant, a species of monophony whose execution requires a markedly different approach to that of Western vocal art music. At secondary school, I was responsible for the music at all school celebrations since we had no music teacher. These occasions provided me with the opportunity to perform before an audience from a very early age, familiarizing myself with what folk musicians colloquially name the *πατάρι* (patari, 'stage'). Apart from these events I was constantly involved in local feasts called *πανηγύρια* (panigirya) which normally occur on a saint's name day. At such events I gained substantial experience in terms of repertory and performance of Greek traditional music. My efforts to absorb Greek folk music were rewarded in 1996 when I won first prize in a Pan-Hellenic competition in traditional singing. Shortly thereafter I was awarded a scholarship from the Holy Diocese of Veria to continue music studies in London. There, I kept myself preoccupied throughout my university years participating in various events that included Greek, Byzantine, classical and folk, master classes, musicals and recording sessions. At the same time operatic singing became my passion, resulting in a subconscious comparison with my Greek folk singing in terms of learning processes and performance practice.

ⁱⁱⁱ Musical samples of traditional Pontic music can be found in the following links:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BR7iazxdS8s&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nNX0uegtZg&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27pqXFpJKwM>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRwnby0DWoE&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cBCUW11KOU&feature=related>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRiCZ2EvHCY&feature=PlayList&p=82BC05DBF19B9780&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=4
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTfEWuSRO4U>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFBgklODs58&feature=related>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_y10X7QEfg&feature=related

^{iv} On the Emic/Etic distinction, cf. Harris (1976) and Feleppa (1986).

^v Each performer either gave written or oral (recorded digitally) permission for their identity to be used in any subsequent academic analysis of their responses. Hrysanthos Theodorides was, perhaps, the most important Pontic singer in modern Greece. This claim is based on (a) his legendary reputation among his colleagues, (b) the extraordinary flexibility of the larynx and vocal range (pure tenor voice with a comfortable 'high C' C5 and a G5 as a top note) and (c) the large discography and numerous live recordings that are part of his legacy to younger generations.

^{vi} For more information on the vocal anatomy please refer to Thurman- Welch (2000), Harris- Rubin- Howard (1998), Sundberg (1987), Reid (1965).

^{vii} This is a technique which creates an excessive glottal resistance to airflow during singing.

^{viii} Miller (1997) makes use of these two general categories in order, for him, to distinguish the northern (English and German) from the southern (French and Italian) national schools of singing.

^{ix} For a live musical example refer to:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFBgkIODs58&feature=player_embedded#

^x The Pontic Lyra is a bottle-shaped 3-stringed type of fiddle, and the most prominent musical instruments of the Pontic Greeks. For more information, cf. M. Tsahourides (2007, PhD thesis: *The Pontic Lyra in contemporary Greece*, Senate House Library).

^{xi} The following papers on musical structure and body movement offer examples: J. Baily 1995, 1978-77-76, Bell Yung, 1984:505-517, and Susan McClary – Robert Walser, 1994:75-84.

^{xii} Pontic dialect is the closest Modern Greek dialect to the language of the ancient Greeks. This claim is based on the vocabulary and grammar. For more information on the subject refer to: a) Economides, Dimosthenis, 1958: *Η Γραμματική της Ελληνικής Διαλέκτου του Πόντου* ('Grammar of the Greek Dialect of Pontos') (Academy of Athens: Athens), b) Melanofrides, Pantelis, 1910: *Η εν Πόντω Ελληνική Γλώσσα* ('The Greek Language of Pontos'), Batum (Private archive of K. Fotiades), c) Papadopoulos, Anthimos, 1958: *Ιστορικών Λεξικόν της Ποντικής Διαλέκτου*, ('Historical Lexikon of the Pontic Dialect') (Committee for Pontic Studies: Athens), d) Topharas, K. 1932: *Η γραμματική τι Ρωμαϊκού Ποντιακού Γλώσσας* ('The Grammar of the Greek Pontic Dialect') (Communist Rostov: Russia).

^{xiii} This can be also seen as a 'skeleton' in the process of acquiring information about an aural-oral musical tradition.

^{xiv} To listen to the three versions of the lament please refer to:

- <http://www.imerc.org/tsahouridis/1.mp3> (western classical version)
- <http://www.imerc.org/tsahouridis/2.mp3> (simple ornamentation)
- <http://www.imerc.org/tsahouridis/3.mp3> (Pontic version)

^{xv} Notes for the recordings (by Evangelos Himonides): The three recorded song snippets (Pontic, Western Classical and Simple Ornamentation) were digitally captured using a Groove tubes GT-67 professional studio vacuum tube microphone, feeding a TFPro P10 professional microphone preamplifier. No dynamics processing and equalization were applied, both at source and post hoc. The amplified microphone signal was fed into a Mytec stereo 24/96 analog to digital converter (ADC) and captured as digital information (CD quality 44.100 Hz sampling frequency, 16 bit word length, mono) using the Cockos' Reaper (version 3.05, version 7399) digital audio workstation for Intel-based personal computers (running the Microsoft Windows XP operating system). Each of the three recorded song snippets was processed using the Reaper native VST (Virtual Studio Technology) plugin ReaTune (version 0.3) in order to convert the audio information into MIDI (Music Instrument Digital Interface) information and notation. Furthermore, the recorded snippets were processed using the Celemony Melodyne software (version 3.1.2.0) in order to generate the graphical plots of the recorded melodic lines. The provided graphics are screendumps (digitally captured screenshots) of the Melodyne displays.

^{xvi} Refer to <http://www.imerc.org/tsahouridis/4.mp3> for a complete live performance of the 'Lament of Constantinople' sung by the author. Also, for a public televised performance of the genre, refer to:

http://www.tsahouridis.com/k/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=6&Itemid=9