

U.S. Folk and Popular Culture

Narrative, Bibliography and Archival Resources

by

Nikos Pouloupoulos

- Greeks and the Movies (Greeks and movie theaters)

Early in the 20th century, Greeks actively engaged into the American entertainment industry and some of them became actually pioneers in the field (Jannopoulo and the introduction of Edison's vitascope in his multi-plex entertainment establishment;

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/carlylehold/sets/72157625108421271/>

Alexander Pantazis/Pantages early movie theater empire in the West). They slowly became big movie theater owners making the entertainment industry one of the first great success stories for the Greeks in the States

- Skouras Brothers

The most successful movie theater owners and eventually leaders in the movie industry in Hollywood, between the 1930's and the 1960's, were the Skouras Brothers who produced a score of movies , some of them with (Classical) Greek flavor.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skouras_Brothers_Enterprises

They became for a number of years the spokespeople of the Greek community in the States and they partook in the multi-ethnic artistic environment of the movie industry.

- Early "Greek" movies (gangsters, social movies)

There are a number of "Greek" themed movies that were produced until the 1940's, most of them depicting Greek characters in the American crime scene (gangster movies) or participating in the social struggles of the early immigrants in America:

- *A love Sublime* (1917)
- *Smart Money* (1931)
- *Down to the Sea* (1936)
- *Juke Girl* (1942)
- *Good Luck, Mr. Yates* (1943)
- *Mr. Lucky* (1943)
- *16 Fathoms Deep* (1948)

- Greek cinematographers

In the meantime, several directors, script writers and producers of Greek (or relevant) ethnic background made considerable contributions to the movie industry and some of them even gave a Greek (immigrant) flavor to their movies (Kazan, Markopoulos, Bezzerides, Cassavetes etc.)

- Contemporary Greek movies

Over the last two decades, several Greek American themed movies have been screened, with the blockbuster hit “My big fat Greek wedding” being at the top of the box office and one that has shaped perceptions and stereotypical views about the Greek Americans. “The brides” (2003) directed by Pantelis Voulgaris has also been a well-received movie relating the trials and tribulations of Greek “bride” women while traveling to the States.

- Early Olympics in America (1904)

Sports played a huge role in the slow transformation of the Greek-American identity (and a proof of whiteness for several ethnic groups) and shaped American perceptions towards the Greeks. The Early American Olympic Games in St. Louis (1904) were the first such exhibition were several Greeks thrived.

<http://www.olympiandatabase.com/index.php?id=24842&L=1>

- Greeks and the Marathon race

The marathon race was since the time of the first modern Olympic Games (with Spyros Louis) one of the events that both the Greeks and the Americans placed increased significance (due to the historical symbolism of the race). Several such marathon races organized in big American cities

(NYC marathon, Boston marathon etc.) became huge events. In 1946, right after the end of WW2, Stylianos Kyriakides won the Boston marathon race and became a symbol of heroism and perseverance for the struggling Greek state and also an image of honor and success for the Greek Americans of the time

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m9jjCKAJa0>
<http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/article/20160415/NEWS/160416605>

- Greeks qua Hercules (wrestling – powerlifting – catch etc.)

Another area of Greek American engagement with sports was in wrestling and other sport activities that required strength (display of masculinity).

By the 1920s, catch had become a sport/spectacle that used to attract huge crowds (second only in popularity to the All-american game of baseball) and Greeks produced their own “Herculean” size athletes/stars; the greatest among them was the legendary Jim Londos, known as the “Golden Greek”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIGXM8N-aTI>
<http://www.wrestlingmuseum.com/pages/wrestlers/jimlondos2.html>

Londos was trained by another legendary Greek wrestler in St. Louis, George Tragos.

<http://nwhof.org/blog/dg-inductees/george-tragos/>

Wrestling brought closer Greeks with other Eastern European and Middle Eastern athletes in the States and became a sport of ethnic pride for various ethnic communities. The large multi-ethnic and American crowds that these wrestling competitions/spectacles attracted in the early 20th century, made athletes like Tragos and especially Jim Londos big stars among the American public.

- Greeks and American Sports (Basketball, baseball, football, hockey, Olympics)

Greeks excelled in a number of other sports, like baseball with the legendary Harry Agganis also known as the “Golden Greek” (compare it to the “Greek

Freak” today), basketball with Kert Rubis and Nick Gallis (XANΘ has played a major role in the early development of the sport of basketball in Greece), football, hockey and several Olympic Games; There has been also an increased number of Greek Americans that excelled in collegiate sports.

- Greeks and early “Greek” music (rembetika, dimotika)

The music genre that dealt with the Greek immigration was *Rembetiko*, although Greek folk music (dimotika) also made great strides in the States

(Nikos Kellias from Corinthia, for example, composed some of the most well-known clarino folk songs in the States in the early 20th century).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdwzaBIlr10>

Rembetiko was the urban music that reflected the harsh realities of life, including the immigration experience. The urban subculture of rembetiko included the poverty, illness, crime, labour, alienation, drinks and drugs. One of the most famous songs ever to those who don’t know rembetiko is the song “Misirlu”, recorded in New York in 1927 and in the vocals was Tetos Dimitriades.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT3CSg7HmMY>

The composer said to be Michalis Patrinos (1927) (or the Ottoman Jew, Abraham Levi). Tetos Dimitriades belonged to the American recording company, RCA Victor (Orthophonic). Other important Greek singers in USA were Achilles Poulos, Koula Antonopoulou (Vlahou), Marika Papagika, Amalia Vaka, Sotiris Stasinopoulos, Leonidas Smyrnios, Georgos Katsaros, etc. Moreover, some important musical instrument players made a name for themselves in the States, like Loukianos Kavadias (piano), Hierotheos Shizas, Harilaos Piperakis (Cretan Lyre), etc. Many Greek composers of rembetiko travelled transatlantic to play music for the immigrants. Some characteristic song titles about the Greek immigration in America are: “America” (1933), “Damned America” (1940), “Be always good the uncle from America” (1947), “The Kiriakos’ departure to America”, “You Burned me America”, “Mother, don’t send me to America” (1934), “Karagoz in America” (1930), “Bezos in America” (1937), “Damned immigration” (1959), “From little child in foreign land” (1936), “For your

love I went to foreign lands” (1934), “I finally returned back from the foreign land” (1956), etc.

The first American Greek recording enterprises made their appearance in 1919. From the mid 1920's there are many recordings that could be classified as rembetiko. The American recording companies helped the preservation of the genre. Especially in 1930's, when in Greece there was a dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, who outlawed rembetiko and again in 1960's with the dictatorship of George Papadopoulos. A notable example of American recording studios preserving the more bold expressions of some rembetiko songs is the record album: "Otan Kapnizi O Loulas", translated as "when the hookah smokes." Together with the particular kind of music, Greek establishments (cafe aman) sprung in cities with considerable Greek immigrant population (NY, San Francisco, Chicago etc.)

- American music and Greek music (rock, blues, etc.)

Greek music and musicians in America influenced the development of specific music genres like rock (Chiotos-Hendrix), blues/Rock & Roll (the legendary Johnny Otis or John Veliotes)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOrQTh_Cq7U
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Otis

- Greeks and the 1960's (Hatzidakis, Theodorakis)

In the 1960s two of the most important Greek composers, Hatzidakis (who spent time in NY) and Theodorakis through their music inspired or became inspired by other American music genres.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYNRxev8flc>

- Americans and the 1960s (Jules Dassin)/British Zorba the Greek (Cacoyiannis)

Again, the 1960s was the time that American artists (re)invented Greece and incorporated it into their art, like Jules Dassin cinematography.

- Greeks and Classical music (Mitropoulos, Callas, Antoniou)

Although part of high culture, classical music and opera also produced some top notch Greek American artists/musicians in the States.

- Greeks and popular Greek music in the States in the 1970s (Astoria, Chicago, New Orleans bouzoukia style)

Especially in the 1970s and until the 1990s, Greektowns around the States offered daily music entertainment with Greek bouzoukia and boite style music. The Greek cultural center in New Orleans has a large collection of posters from that era advertising upcoming Greek night events with this kind of music –something that clearly displays the popularity of such venues and events in a major port like New Orleans.

- Greek-American (avant-garde) Artists

This is huge chapter for which there is ample relevant bibliography

- Greek-American Writers

Another huge chapter that is beyond the scope of this thematic unit. Anagnostou and Kalogeras have produced ample bibliography on this topic.

- Greek-American and the American movies

“My Big Fat Greek Wedding”! See Anagnostou

- Greek American actors

Like recently with John Stamos, there is a plethora of past or present and active Greek American actors that quite often “play” with their ethnic background.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Fa9gyMmIFE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-vwAtMvu74>

- Greeks and American Sports (Giannis)

A new kind of “hybrid” ethnicity with the rise of the phenomenon known as “The Greek Freak”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V13ilM4hpII>

Museum Artifacts

Books and music scores; Music LPs from the early period; posters and prints for movies, sport competitions (catch), music events; photos of all kinds for all reasons and events; sports trophies; movie projectors and other technical devices; Sports outfits and dance costumes; music instruments; smoking paraphernalia.

Archival Resources (see also <http://www.mgsa.org/Resources/gkam.html>)

New Orleans Greek community Center; International Olympic Committee; Museum of the Moving Image; St. Louis Historical Society; Queens Museum; Music Library of Greece – Lilian Voudouri; Museum of Greek Folk Musical Instruments; XANΘ Museum of Basketball.

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(see also <http://www.mgsa.org/Resources/port.html>)

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For more see *Ergon: Greek/American Arts and Letters* under Bibliography]