



Apollo

CHAMBER PLAYERS

EUROPEAN FOLKSCAPES





Matthew Detrick, Artistic Director

EUROPEAN FOLKSCAPES

Folk music is the lifeblood of cultures, the affecting bond which provides meaning, tells stories, and illuminates shared history. It also inspires the creative passions of composers both past and present, enriching their compositions with musical depth and the profoundness of human experience.

The collection of folk melody creations on this album - transcribed and arranged by Apollo - reflects our journey the past four concert seasons. Here you will find music never-before-arranged for string quartet, including spirited Basque and Spanish folk music, beloved Italian dance and popular songs, rare *rebetika* music from Greece, and the visceral folk sounds of the Slavic region. To varying degrees, each arrangement serves as an interpretive bridge to Western classical composers' works; they also stand dynamically on their own.

A highlight of this album is a newly commissioned work by composer Karim Al-Zand, Professor of Music at the Shepherd School of Music (Rice University). Inventively incorporating the exotic harmonies and irregular dance rhythms of Bulgaria, *Fantasy on Bulgarian Rhythms* traverses the unique soundscapes of the Balkan region. Its idiosyncratic meters are infectious and the gypsy-like recitative sung by the viola sublime. We are proud to feature Al-Zand's work on our debut recording, a piece which embodies Apollo's folk music-inspired mission.

We hope you enjoy this musical journey through the wonderfully dynamic folkscapes of Europe.

APOLLO CHAMBER PLAYERS is a non-profit chamber music organization that explores the intersection of classical and folk/ethnic music and provides exciting, innovative, and culturally enriching programs to a wide audience. While illuminating the unique folk sounds and styles imbued in Western classical composers' works, Apollo discovers and recreates lost, rarely heard, and culturally significant folk music through well-crafted arrangements and commissions for chamber ensembles.

www.apollochamberplayers.org

1 WALLACHIAN LAMENT (CZECH REPUBLIC) 2013

This traditional Bohemian folk song hails from the Moravian Wallachia region of the Czech Republic, a mountainous area located near the Slovak border. In the 15th century, Moravian Vlaks came from the East and established a shepherd culture in the Beskydy mountain region - the traditional music of Moravian Wallachia evolved from this harsh but fertile environment, influenced by myriad folk cultures. This particular tune is a combination of whirling dance songs and 'hollering songs' used for communication by children and women while herding cattle and horses.

Composer Leoš Janáček was deeply influenced by the folkloric music of Moravian Wallachia; his collections of folk songs from this region were first rendered by an Edison phonograph in the early 20th century. Interestingly, Janáček's first mature composition, *Lachian Dances*, was originally titled *Wallachian Dances* until the region's name changed. His deep interest in the folk music of Moravia led him to collect over 150 folk songs from this region and to compose piano accompaniments that remained respectful to the original function and context of their sources. The composer's affection for the ethnic music of his homeland deeply influenced his lifelong compositional pursuits, and it instilled in his musical voice a depth of emotion unique among classically-trained composers. The forceful, angular dotted-rhythmic figures and the interpretive rhythmic 'lilt' of the melodies imbue *Wallachian Lament* with an unmistakable Czech character.

Apollo's arrangement of this folk song, curated from a YouTube field recording, depicts the sorrowful wailings of a peasant. The opening lament-laden tune soon subsides, however, evolving into a gradually propelling Slavic dance. After a quick change in mode (and mood), *Wallachian Lament* ends raucously in an upbeat fiddle-tune romp. Mimicking the sounds of traditional Czech instruments (cimbalom, bagpipes, pipes/flutes/recorders, and a 'squeaking fiddle' violin cousin) was an enjoyable challenge; indeed, the colors and virtuosic capabilities of a string quartet evoke the originals compellingly and add a novel perspective to this folk song gem.



2 SEREMOJ ÉS ROMÁNCA (HUNGARY) 2013

Seremoj és Románca from the Carpathian region (Hungary/Transylvania/Moldova) where Leoš Janáček and Béla Bartók famously collected folk songs in the early 20th century. We discovered this simple, soulful tune on YouTube, performed by a traditional Moravian folk band; the beautifully raw melodies transport the listener to pre-modern Moravia, and one can feel palpably the inspirational context that had such a profound effect on these first ethnomusicologists.

Through its spirited music, Apollo's arrangement of *Seremoj és Románca* evokes the eternal story of love: the excitement of courtship, the fickleness of lust, and the anguish of heartbreak. A lone violin begins with the melancholic primary melody, the mood interrupted by an upbeat and contrasting secondary tune. As both melodies progress, evolve, and take different forms - much like love - the combinations and layering of the string quartet voices add fresh aural dimensions. (Listen in particular for the atmospheric augmentation of the second melody.) Then, the doleful first theme is revisited by the solo cello, like the sudden and powerful reminiscence of lost love. Again this proves ephemeral, as the animated second melody returns with a bang, stronger than ever and filled with happy ignorance. Or is it? After the violins briefly trade a new theme (a folk-gyrating tune with an unmistakable hint of Bartókian flare), *Seremoj és Románca* concludes reflecting the ambiguity of love, as a variation of the forlorn first melody repeats and fades hurriedly into the distance.



3 I XENITIA (GREECE) 2009

Music/Lyrics by: Apostolos Hatzichristos and Vassilis Tsitsanis, Athens, ca.

(See track 4 note below)

4 NYCTOSE XORIS FEGGARI (GREECE) 2009

Music/Lyrics by: Apostolos Kaldaras (1938)

I Xenitia (“Foreign Lands”) and *Nyctose Xoris Feggari* (“Night Without Moon”) belong to a genre of Greek folk music called ‘Rebetika’, songs which express the strife and heartache endured by a people expelled from their homeland. Originating from Greek refugees living in Asia Minor - under Turkish domination - during the early 20th century, Rebetika music began to flourish in the urban ghettos of larger Greek cities (Athens, Piraeus) following the Greek diaspora in 1922. Over 1.5 million refugees brought with them Eastern Mediterranean-influenced music which, combined with the joy, sorrow, and difficulties of their new life in the urban underworld of Greece, evolved into the songs of Rebetika. This music is a hybrid of European classical styles (favored by the Greek upper and middle classes) and of Greek and Byzantine folk traditions at the opposite end of the social spectrum, ‘the urban proletariat’. The exchange and syncretization of musical ideas between these two strata created the distinctive musical style and emotional depth of Rebetika.

I Xenitia and *Nyctose Xoris Feggari* share a similar hybrid usage of standard and irregular meters, a 4/4, 5/4 combination in succession. This distinct metric pattern imbues the music with a novel rhythmic lilt, an ‘extra step’ in a dance of longing and nostalgia. Imitating the traditional instruments of a Rebetika band - a guitar-like bouzouki, a politiki lyra (bowed instrument of Persian origin), clarinet, cymbalom, oud (European lute relative), and finger-cymbals, among others - our arrangements utilize a variety of stringed instrument ‘extended techniques’. Among these are various timbral applications of pizzicato (plucking of strings) and glissandi (sliding on strings), as well as harmonics (sounding a note an octave above its fundamental pitch, producing a silvery, eerie tone) and ponticello (drawing the bow near the bridge for a nasal, gritty tone color).

In an intriguing crossover to classical music, Rebetika songs feature the practice of taximia (singular: taximi). Similar to cadenzas found in Western classical-style concerti, taximia are improvisational solos featuring an

instrumentalist's skill and virtuosity, sometimes lasting up to twenty minutes in length! Listen for the violin taximia in *I Xenitia* and *Nychtose Xoris Feggari*, quasi-improvisational cadenzas which reprise and expound upon primary motivic material. (The taximi in *Nychtose* snakes along a melodic line of exotic intervals until cascading in scalar upward/downward leaps; the following section of arpeggiated chords - which bring the taximi to a dramatic, powerful close - draws influence from classical composers as disparate as Bach and Arvo Pärt.)

This Rebetika folk melody pair represents the inspirational origin for Apollo's folk/ethnic music-themed mission; they were transcribed/arranged for and premiered in Apollo's *Folk Influences in Eastern Europe* concert on September 19th, 2009. The songs were first brought to the group's attention by Costa Papanicolaou, who's father, Dr. Andrew Papanicolaou, emigrated from Greece to Galveston, TX in 1970. Speaking about the reach of Rebetika music generally and *I Xenitia* in particular, he reckons that "an enormous percentage of the Greek population emigrates were affected by past relocations and evictions", and that a good portion of the folk songs "bemoan the loss of their loved ones to Xenitia." Apollo graciously credits the Papanicolaou family for providing rare field recordings of this fascinating, historic music.

The following lyrics for *I Xenitia* and *Nychtose Xoris Feggari* were instrumental in the process of transcribing and arranging the music for string quartet; they provide a colorful, affective context for the music of Rebetika.

I XENITIA (FOREIGN LANDS)

Alone I wander in a strange land
Meeting bitter troubles

How often, mother, I thought of you
As I endured those troubles abroad

To forget, mother, I take a drink
And then I take a second and a third

It is a sorrow, mother, it is a great pain
To wander alone in a strange land

NYCHTOSE XORIS FEGGARI (NIGHT WITHOUT MOON)

Dark moonless darkness is deep
And yet a lad cannot sleep

I wonder what awaits from evening until morning
To close the window illuminated by candle

Door opens door closes with a heavy sigh
We can guess his heart the yearning.

5 FANTASY ON BULGARIAN RHYTHMS 2013

Karim Al-Zand

Fantasy on Bulgarian Rhythms was composed for the Apollo Chamber Players, an ensemble whose mission is to explore the intersection of Western classical and folk music. The folk music of the Balkan region is quite unlike other European musical traditions, and Bulgarian music is especially idiosyncratic. Its music is distinguished by the frequent use of irregular meters (that is, rhythmic groupings which mix two and three-beat patterns) and by a harmonic vocabulary in which the common intervals of third and fifth are often replaced by seconds and sevenths. The opportunity to write a new work for the Apollo Chamber Players provided the perfect occasion for a composition inspired by this fascinating music.

I first became acquainted with Bulgarian music through two relatively modern recordings. One was an album entitled *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* (“The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices”), a recording that enjoyed widespread popularity in the US in the mid-80s. The recording showcased the striking sound of the Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir, singing arrangements of traditional repertoire. The choir employs a distinctive close-harmony style, using “clusters” of notes in dissonant chords. That sort of harmonic approach can be heard in the opening section of my piece, in passages that alternate with an expressive solo for the viola.

Another encounter with this music came through the recordings of Yuri Yurakov, a Turkish/Bulgarian/Roma virtuoso whose wildly exuberant “wedding music” uses the traditional dances of Bulgaria, with their asymmetrical rhythmic divisions. *Fantasy on Bulgarian Rhythms* incorporates two of these characteristic meters: the opening section uses a 7/16 meter (found in the *rachenitsa*, a couples dance) sub-divided 2+2+3; the brisk music which follows uses a 15/16 meter (*buchimish*, a line dance) usually sub-divided 2+2+2+2+3+2+2. The music of the two dances is combined at the end of the work.

Fantasy on Bulgarian Rhythms was commissioned with the assistance of a City Initiatives Grant from the Houston Arts Alliance.

Note by Karim Al-Zand



6 KOROBUSHKA (RUSSIA) 2012

Firmly planted in the pantheon of popular Russian folk dances, *Korobushka's* origins are modest. The song arose from a romantic 19th century poem by Nikolay Nekrasov, and the title loosely translates as a 'peddler's pack'. Nekrasov was a passionate lover of peasant Russia, and his poem tells a sorrowful story about the love between a peasant girl, Katya, and a young peddler boy: The two meet in a rye field at night where the boy promises Katya an opportune deal on his goods, before official sale at market. They fall in love, and the boy promises to marry Katya upon his return from a forthcoming commerce trip. Tragically, on his journey he is murdered by a band of thieves, and a heartbroken Katya mourns the loss of her true love.

It is believed the melody to *Korobushka* may have been composed, although like much folk/peasant music, true authorship is unknown. The song became quite popular in late 19th century Russian cities and countryside, and a dance to the music soon developed; the early 20th century saw Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine importing *Korobushka* to the USA, and its evolution continued through a quickened tempo and the addition of Hungarian-esque closing steps. Apollo's arrangement mimics the pulsating energy of the original dance, by varying the tempi and slightly compressing the 16th-note melodic groupings (a performance practice akin to the tacit contraction of Strauss waltz rhythms). Indeed, this spritely, somber tune was 'born ready' for string quartet arrangement: its melodies exude feelings of affectionate longing and heartbreak, emotions perfectly expressed by the colors, virtuosity and interplay of a string quartet.



7 MALAGUEÑA (SPAIN) 2011

Malagueña exemplifies one of the most significant styles of traditional Andalusian music: the flamenco. Its closest folk music relative is the fandango, from which it evolved in 19th century Malaga. Characterized by rich melodies and exotic, Arabic-inspired intervals (augmented seconds, tritones), folkloric fandangos were originally sung in a quick 6/8 meter to accompany dance; however, towards the second half of the 19th century performers slowed the fandango rhythm, supplemented the melody with flourishes and ornaments, and reduced accompanying instruments to a lone guitar. *Malagueña's* 'cante libre' (free style) quickly developed, and professional guitarists experimented with improvisational solos and ornamental flourishes.

Apollo's arrangement of *Malagueña* - to our knowledge a first for string quartet instrumentation - was transcribed from and inspired by the sixth movement of Ernesto Lecuona's *Suite Andulacia*. Honoring this famous tune's history of transformation and creative interpretation, our arrangement imparts the song with new and exciting soundscapes, imbuing it with a sprinkle of classical flare and sophistication. The cadenza and coda, in 'cante libre' style, serve as an homage to flamenco virtuosi guitarists the world over.



8 ZORTZIKO AND AURRESKU, FOR VIOLIN SOLO (BASQUE) 2012

Matthew Detrick, violin

Auresku is a popular Basque dance, solemn and elegant, that is performed to honor prominent local figures. When performed in traditional fashion the *auresku* comprises four different dance parts, one of which is the *zortziko*, an irregular-metered dance usually in 5/8 time. The instrumentation typically used to execute the *zortziko* song and rhythm is the txistu, a cousin of the flute, and the tamboril, a percussion instrument akin to a snare drum. Today, *auresku* is performed as part of formal events in Basque Country: weddings, store openings, congresses, functions, etc. It remains one of the most celebrated expressions of traditional Basque culture.

Apollo's arrangement of this Basque dance tune was inspired by (and transcribed from) a guitarist's stirring performance; in this particular instance, the *zortziko* dance is paired with and precedes its larger dance brethren, the *auresku*. (Our arrangement of *Zortziko* sways contrastingly in 6/8 time.) The soulful melody of this particular *Zortziko and Auresku* fuses itself instinctively with a violin's expressive color palette.

Zortziko and Auresku was first premiered in Apollo's *Folk Colorings of the Impressionist Masters* concert (2011/12 season), a program also featuring Maurice Ravel's *Piano Trio in A Minor*. Ravel, who retained a strong affection for and identity to Basque culture (his mother was of this descent, and he was born in the Basque town of Ciboure, France), exquisitely integrated the distinct irregular *zortziko* rhythm into the trio's first movement. Additionally, the 5/8 meter of the fourth movement of Ravel's *String Quartet in F Major* echoes the haunting *zortziko* rhythm, but with a driving, frenetic energy.



9 FANDANGO, FOR VIOLIN DUO (BASQUE) 2013

Matthew Detrick and Anabel Ramirez, violin

While Basque culture can claim over 400 unique and varied dance styles, the *fandango* (Spanish: *fandango*) stands as the region's most beloved, the national dance of the Basques. It is a dance of pilgrimage: ubiquitous at fairs and folkloric events, *fandango* draws its participants spontaneously, as friends and strangers alike engage in this centuries-old dance of courtship.

Fandango is traditionally accompanied by guitars, castanets and hand-clapping; its meter is similar to that of the *bolero* and *seguidilla*, and it was first notated in 6/8 time (later to become 3/8, the meter of our arrangement). Although the Spanish claim the *fandango* as their own, the primitive *fandango* dance can be traced to Phoenician/Roman belly dancers. This courtship dance is similar to *tarantella*, *bolero* and *jota* dances - and, more far-reaching, a companion to the *chica* dance of Africa and the *plugge-dansen* of Holland.

Our arrangement of *Fandango*, for violin duo, engages in acts of musical courtship, as the violins politely exchange melodic motifs and attempt to 'one-up' each other in moments of virtuosic splendor. Transcribed from a performance by a trikitixa (Basque accordion) musician, *Fandango* displays the imitative capabilities of violins at their best: we mimic the 'swooshing' air-flow effect of the accordion by rapid acceleration of the bow, while deftly emulating the Paganini-esque speed and note-range of this florid Basque instrument.





10 JOTA/ARIN-ARIN (BASQUE) 2011

Journeying to the Basque realms of Spain, one finds a rich palette of rhythms and colors in the region's folk music. The *jota* - also in the family of pilgrimage dances - originates from Aragon but thrives in a plethora of Spanish regions (including a characteristic form in Valencia, Aragon, Castile, and Navarra, among others). The dance rhythm retains a standard ternary meter, and the music utilizes instruments aplenty, from guitars and lutes to drums and castanets.

The traditional and popular *arin-arin* dance also hails from the Basque region. In contrast to the waltzing *jota*, the *arin-arin* moves like a quasi-foxtrot in double meter, its eight-bar phrases displaying high steps, jumps, and violent movements. Intriguingly, in this song by the folk band *Mielotxin*, the *Arin-Arin* is paired with the *Jota*; it is more commonly coupled with the *fandango* dance, as previously discussed, but the ternary-metered *Jota* provides a fitting and germane companion.

One challenge in arranging a work like this involves translating the heavy 'beat' and rhythmic drive of the original music to an instrument medium incapable of producing such perpetual accentuation; however, after experimenting with clapping, stomping, and the gentle slapping of our delicate wooden instruments, we hope to have found the right mix. (Listen in particular for the cacophonous bridge to the *Arin-Arin*.) Aside from the novel percussive additions, a strong melodic bass beat in the cello provides much of the needed rhythmic grounding for these two combined dances. One of our favorites, the *Arin-Arin* melody invokes a visceral, sensual journey along beautiful Basque soundscapes.

11 'O SOLE MIO (ITALY) 2012

'O Sole Mio translates literally as "my sunshine", and its beautiful tune paints a sublime portrait of love and its affectations. The story of how this humble Neapolitan song became globally famous begins during the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp, Belgium. As the conductor of the band takes to the podium, he realizes he has misplaced the music to the *Royal March* - the national anthem of Italy - and instead strikes up 'O Sole Mio. After an initial moment of confusion, the crowd responds enthusiastically and the song became for Italy an iconic staple.

Inspired by the rich qualities and voice-range of the famous Three Tenors, this arrangement features the lyrical colors of the lower string quartet voices - the viola and cello. Their sonorous timbre provides a warm contrast to the violins' lofty upper registers.

(English translation)

What a beautiful thing is a sunny day!
The air is serene after a storm,
The air is so fresh that it already feels like a celebration.
What a beautiful thing is a sunny day!
But another sun that's brighter still,
It's my own sun that's upon your face!
The sun, my own sun, it's upon your face!
It's upon your face!

When night comes and the sun has gone down,
I almost start feeling melancholy;
I'd stay below your window
When night comes and the sun has gone down.
But another sun that's brighter still,
It's my own sun that's upon your face!
The sun, my own sun, it's upon your face!
It's upon your face



12 SALENTO PIZZICA (ITALY) 2012

ORIGINAL SONG: *PALPITU DE CORE* (2012)

COMPOSER: ROSSANO RUGGERI

PUBLISHERS: MAFFUCCI MUSIC/MUSIC MARKET

What does classical music have in common with rock music? From our experience it can share plenty, particularly when interpreted through a folk music-hued lens. The heavy, driving beat of *Salento Pizzica* creates a primal rhythmic energy, a sonic effect of potent and progressing power. Given the Salento (Italy) region's varied mix of cultures - sprinkled with African, Greek, and Arabic influences - one can surmise at the song's history and evolution.

The *pizzica* dance is a perfect companion to the folk music of Salento: a popular cousin in the family of *tarantella* dances, the *pizzica* is a dance of lust and seduction. According to Italian folklore, the *pizzica* was danced by toiling peasants during grape-harvesting season. Absorbed into the culture's lifeblood, it grew into a 'wooing' dance, where a frolicking female waves a shawl or neckerchief (a symbol of love) inviting a lucky gentleman to join. The male accepts the courting gesture and cavorts accordingly, demonstrating virility to his potential suitor.

The recording from which our arrangement originates, performed by the Italian band *Zimbaria*, includes multiple percussion instruments (tambourines, drums, woodblocks) creating the aforementioned heavy beat, à la rock 'n roll. In this spirit, *Salento Pizzica*'s incessant rhythmic drive and dynamic melodies find a catalyst in the virtuosic capabilities of our classical stringed instruments.



13 HOFBRAUHAUS POLKA (GERMANY) 2011 BONUS TRACK

As imparted through Bohemian folklore, the *polka* was birthed by a young woman named Anna Slezakova, who improvised a dance to accompany a local folk song. Immediately popular, the *polka* dance spread like wildfire from dance halls in Prague to the ballrooms of Vienna, France and Germany. This simple dance has proved timeless, inspiring the musical creativity of generations of composers.

When researching German folk melodies, we happened upon a catchy tune played by a five-piece band in Munich's famed Hofbrauhaus (beer hall). Reminiscent of personal experiences at this German cultural mecca, we thought it fitting to highlight a genre of song - in this case the *polka* - so indelibly meshed in the cultural personality and mythology of Germany. This particular *polka*, to which we were unable to find a specific title or name, engenders folk music at its best: catchy, unique, and expressing a natural rhythmic pulse. Taking a few harmonic liberties, this arrangement features an energetically brooding, classical-style minor section, paying homage to our classical composer inspirations.

Notes by Apollo Chamber Players





All tracks recorded August 2013 at The Clarion Theater,
Brazosport College in Lake Jackson TX

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SESSION ENGINEERS Ryan Edwards and Shannon Smith

All works arranged by Apollo Chamber Players
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Matthew Detrick violin I Anabel Ramirez violin II
Whitney Bullock viola Matthew Dudzik cello

*Track 5 Anabel Ramirez violin I Matthew Detrick violin II

All works except track 5 transcribed/arranged by Apollo Chamber Players

Special thanks to Houston Arts Alliance, Vorin Dornan and Brazosport College for use of Clarion Music Performance Center, and to Classical 91.7/Houston Public Media for their generous support.

Fantasy on Bulgarian Rhythms made possible in part through the City's Initiative Grant Program of the Houston Arts Alliance.