

“A story exists somewhere between fiction and truth”

John Berger

Text by Dimitris Kountouras on the booklet of Ostium CD Album, Carpe Diem Records

Ostium

in contemporary times, there is a preference for short stories and songs over longer narratives. The grand narrative forms of music and poetry from the Middle Ages, along with their audiences, have long faded into history.

Ostium* presents a mosaic of numerous short pieces, weaving together a narrative of diverse musical styles that, at first glance, appear worlds apart from each other. The resonance between sacred hymns, secular songs, and dances from various traditions is explored through juxtaposition, expressed in layers of depth.

The modal approach is a unifying element in both early Western and Eastern music. My focus on modal music highlights a shared aesthetic, characterized by a linear monophonic style and a clear melodic trajectory. strophic-circular forms, such as medieval virelais and sufi hymns, have persisted across musical traditions since ancient times. This repetitive melodic structure evokes a timeless quality, fostering a meditative atmosphere for the listener.

Oral tradition, prevalent in both art and popular music, served as the primary means of transmitting music and knowledge during the Middle Ages. While contemporary culture often associates orality with popular expression, it was equally significant in the realm of art music during that era. lastly, the musical performance showcased in this album draws from shared ornamental and improvisational elements in both Western and Eastern traditions. With frequent employment of drone accompaniment, a blend of early flutes, oriental canun, medieval fiddle, and percussion instruments creates a rich tapestry of sound.

*Ostium = a small door (lat.)

The music

Ja nuns hom pris is a melody attributed to King Richard I of England, famously known as Richard the lionheart, who was also a renowned trouvère.

Zonaradikos is a traditional dance originating from Thrace, Northeastern Greece, where men interlock belts while dancing. Typically accompanied by bagpipes indigenous to the region, this lively music embodies the spirit of its cultural roots.

Hicaz Ilahi is a sufi hymn in the Hicaz mode, with its origins dating back to the 13th century and the sultanate of Rûm. This mystical music was utilized by sufi practitioners during their whirling ecstatic rituals, symbolizing a deep spiritual connection.

Petruslied, a medieval hymn dedicated to saint Peter, stands as one of the earliest recorded German hymns. its historical significance reflects the religious fervor of its time.

Mera Merose, a folk song hailing from the island of Kalymnos in the Aegean sea, marks the conclusion of all-night festivities, welcoming the first light of dawn with its melodic strains.

El Azybie is a syrian song passed down to me by the esteemed oud player Ziad Rajab, while Baiduskino, a lively 7/8 meter dance, is a staple in various regions of Northern Greece, capturing the rhythmic energy of its cultural milieu.

Sansarlat, a tarantella dance native to southern italy, is reimagined here with the a small recorder and tamburino, evoking the vibrant spirit of italian folk tradition.

Dame, Je Veux Endurer, a virelai, follows the ABBA'A strophic form and is among Guillaume de Machaut's most captivating compositions. Alongside other pieces by Machaut, such as Tels rit au Main and Comment Qu'a Moy, it pays homage to the greatest composer of the Ars Nova era.

A collection of Armenian hymns and songs are part of the duduk repertoire, the beloved wind instrument of Armenia. Es Ko Kimeti, a love song by 18th-century poet sayat Nova, celebrates the rich musical tapestry of Armenia.

For the captivating medieval sequentia of Victimae Paschali Laudes and the lively italian saltarello of the 14th century, a medieval transverse flute lends its enchanting tones to these timeless compositions.

Double flutes, a common sight in medieval Europe and still prevalent in the Balkan region, take center stage with the inclusion of the dvoynka, a traditional Bulgarian wooden double flute known for its distinctive drone and melody tube made from one piece. it is being used here for both medieval and Greek folk music, echoing the resonant tones of the bagpipe.

lastly, the ethereal bass gemshorn, the softest of all flutes, graces the plainchant „Kyrie Cunctipotens Genitor Deus,“ adding a touch of serenity to this diverse musical journey.

Epilogue

The sound of the flute has long been universally linked with pastoral scenes, symbolizing purity and tranquility. However, across diverse cultures, flute music transcends mere pastoral imagery, often serving as a conduit for expressing the deepest depths of the human soul.

While none of the compositions featured in this album were specifically written for flutes, their instrumental interpretations of predominantly vocal pieces offer a captivatingly abstract perspective on these enchanting melodies. Freed from the constraints of text and its literal meaning, the music takes on a more expansive and evocative quality.

Could “Ostium” be considered a journey of the flute through space and time? This question lingers on the border between fiction and truth, inviting listeners to explore the mystical intersection of imagination and reality within the realm of music.

Dimitris Kountouras
Ostium - Early Flute Monodies

Carpe Diem Records

