



# ROUTES through ATHENS

Christos Nikolopoulos • Fondas Ladis

Kostas Makedonas • Bambis Tsertos • Pavlos Kontoyiannidis

## OMONIA SQUARE

Omonia, you are guarded by plaster statues  
your many faces return to this place.  
Dilapidated mansions and deluxe hotels of old.  
Calling voices, lottery tickets, echoes, fast food and shops.

Soldiers defeated without ever fighting a battle.  
Shadows of caresses, moist glances and dead footsteps.  
Omonia, a watch on the wrist of a stranger,  
a reactor of the soul, a nuclear plant.

A square that I moulded in the way I saw you,  
on the dawn of a Sunday, the dusk of a Tuesday.  
A journey without meaning and an image without sound.  
A square, so full of noise, yet forever empty.

GAZI

An ocean liner of stone it seems  
Gazi! What a titan vessel!

Roofs and rails, vats and cogs,  
a hull of the sky ever without a port.

On the streets nearby the motorcycles nod off.  
Slices of the dream shared in the open.

I slip into the shadows and all is empty.  
At this time once the night shift changed.

The old factories – whatever you may say –  
have a soul somewhere you can never reach.

## IERA ODOS

My dulcimer of old,  
take a tune to play;  
all of Aegaleo to behold  
and frighten Xerxes away.

Turn the world upside down  
up to the Golden Age.  
To the Olive Grove come now,  
tell old Plato, the sage.

In my mind I have a canker  
to come and tell you of.  
On the banks of the Iridanos river  
to stand and sing thereof.

The birds and waters warble,  
counterpoint to my song  
and telling are the marbles  
I'm not singing in the wrong.

## RENOVATION

An intimate conference the other day at the ministry.  
They'll save, they say, Psyrri and Metaxourgeio.  
They'll renovate all the houses down to Omonia  
and the fissures that appeared over the years will vanish.

All this upset me and set me thinking.  
Remember all the conferences like this we had?  
Yet despite our mistakes, we didn't take measures  
and our love crumbled though it was made of stone.

An intimate conference, just like every month,  
They'll save, they say, Psyrri and all of Athens.  
But let someone come tell me, who will save us  
and what committee can renovate us.

## KONSTANTINOUPOLEOS STREET

On Konstantinoupoleos at night  
I wander and seek the traces  
of a city that grew  
of a city that climbed  
leaving here its remains.  
What it had it lost,  
its children it forgot.  
These vestiges the sole reminder.

Konstantinoupoleos at night  
sluggish, endless and vacant.  
The train has just gone by  
all alone passing us  
and I see in this blight  
the trips I've written off  
the pages I'll never fill  
in the notebook of my life so white.

## THE OLYMPICS

Now a new dream dazzles Greece.  
It is the Golden Olympics.

Better than the new metro, even better than the Parthenon,  
it'll be the most beautiful thing of this century!

The yuppies want them, so do the cynics,  
since it will magically solve all problems and needs.

I lived through the millennium, let me live this too  
and may I see nothing else in this life of mine!

O poor Greece,  
how else can I tell you?  
These Olympics  
will be a right wonder!

## THE NEW STAMPING GROUNDS

If you like ancient ruins and dig old things  
with a face-lift they come alive and keep you company.

Let's go down to Metaxourgeio  
to the operating table of the soul.  
Let's go to Asomaton too,  
to the square of the spirits!

From Kolonaki down to Kerameikos  
the arty-farty artillery goes.

Let's go to the centre of Psyrri  
to see how much you'll like it.  
And then straight over to Gazi  
that uplifts my spirit!



## KERAMEIKOS

A bit before the end of Ermou there's a door  
into Paradise you go when you pass through.  
Small knolls, scattered marble and grass  
and the mellifluous nightingale of silence.

And if the forgotten narrow streets nearby you take,  
pale houses and deserted yards you'll see.  
No hidden treasures are there to be found  
only faces in the shadows of time.

Pericles on Plataeon speaks at the Grave;  
from his voice to yours only one pace.

## PETRALONA

One day in Petralona  
two junk dealers were arguing,  
'Hey, which of the two Petralonas?'  
On a chest of drawers they climbed,  
but the drawers stuck,  
'I'll tell you the secret.'

And the woman selling it  
yanked and jiggled them.  
'Which one of the two I wonder?'  
Till they finally rattled  
and suddenly slid open,  
'I'll tell you the secret.'

Either the Upper or the Lower.  
Let's go a ways further down!  
anded at my feet?

## AGHION ASOMATON

The Bodiless Saints  
went for a walk tonight.  
Two blind men saw them  
at the church door.

And two other deaf men  
further on heard them  
telling the Caryatids  
to come on down.

The lights go out in Psyri.  
The roads are emptied again.  
Take heart, Saint Gabriel  
and help us, Saint Michael.

And there, in the morning light  
Athens half awakes  
and calls to you from Ermou  
all the way to Saint Marina.

## MONASTERAKI

Follow the streets of the sky and come to Monasteraki.  
Say 'so long!' to the ocean and enter the small river.

The sails down and no chart to check  
And Laziness himself is at the mast!

A scrap of the East in the warp of the mind,  
leaving room for the life there you say is ending.

Six days with the head down, enough!  
And yet another one in the elusive gold!

Vanias plays the accordion and the gods all in a row  
And in his little hands Samson hoists Hellas.

If you don't this life want to melt away,  
take it out for a stroll to grow old.

## ATHENAS STREET

Now that the hum subsides  
on this street something changes  
It slips into you and screams.

Now that the market hushes  
the light washes down the tarmac  
a cool blade that scissors in and out.

Now my empty footsteps I tread.  
My mask I cast away  
and what I had always desired I demand.

The night's begun.  
    You stagger.  
A single soul  
    on Athenas street.

## PEIRAEOS STREET

Come before the dawn  
to the street of miracles.  
And look upon the neglect  
the apparitions of your mind.

Walk along Peiraeos  
and hold dear what you live.  
At the dead factories  
there are secret passages.

Street, you've defeated Death.  
Beyond the earth you led me.  
From which fate did you fall  
when you IRENOVATION

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## THE RUINS

The past came alive,  
both young and old it deluded.  
Change everything you believe in,  
come and make your life on Peiraios Street.

We have a new violin,  
we flock to the ruins.  
All roll up their sleeves  
and everything is revamped.

Native Athenians of Koumoundourou Square!  
Help! The barbarians are coming!  
Street-wise of Kolonos!  
Outsiders lurk on every corner.

## LAHANAGORA

The carts from Aspropyrgos move along in line  
filled with crates of vegetables.  
The hill is hell, but the stables are in sight!  
And the bustle struggles with the mist of dawn.

Rays of sawdust on Gazi now fall  
and Koumoundourou shines in the dew.  
The soul climbs quickly to the sky  
on daylight's spider web one step behind.

"Scales!" one calls, "Peanuts!", "Drinks!"  
Trivelas' post is all abuzz.  
And the children dawdle on the high wall  
of the Hatzikostas prison.

At Tria Kappa copper jugs glint  
and at Meleti's, father is buying rounds.  
The wheels screech and Lake Scaramangas  
the day's toil quenches.



## AELOU STREET

Take the jumbo jet of memory  
down to *Loumides* and *Mambo*.

And when you arrive at last over Hafteia  
you'll feel strangely queasy.

Don't fret one bit about today.  
Go deep into the black hole of Aeolou Street.

And when you emerge a child mid century,  
you'll be wearing new clothes from *Dragonas*.

Don't leave behind the quarry of your soul.  
Dig a tunnel up to the old Post Office.

And a message, with you as the recipient,  
write and drop in the crypt of time and space.

ATHENAS STREET (Instrumental)



### **About the composer**

Christos Nikolopoulos is the best known active composer of Greek popular music and the most widely acclaimed virtuoso bouzouki player. He was born in Alexandria, near Thessaloniki, and from an early age he started playing in various local groups, Greek popular music clubs and at local festivals. In the beginning of his career, when he came to Athens, he participated as lead bouzouki player in the majority of productions by the renowned Greek composers of the time.

In the space of 30 years he has written over 1500 songs, some of them among the most widely recognised Greek popular songs. All the famous Greek singers have sung his songs and he has collaborated with the best-known Greek lyricists. There are also five instrumental works included in his discography.

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Continually rising in the Greek music scene, *Kostas Makedonas* is one of the most popular Greek singers of the new generation.



*Bambis Tsertos*, with his substantial and melodic voice, has specialised in traditional Greek music of the countryside (*demotic*), urban and rembetika music.



*Pavlos Kontoyiannidis* is a leading actor in Greek theatre, a playwright and also a singer.



Contemporary popular Greek music draws on various earlier types of music from Greece, such as *demotic* (folk) songs from various regions in Greece, both the mainland and the islands, from ecclesiastical *Byzantine* music, from occasional '*imported*' musical styles from the East and West and from songs from earlier *operettas* and more contemporary *theatre reviews*. An even greater influence on modern Greek music was the *rembetiko* song. This music, originally born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in urban centres of Turkey (Smyrna and Istanbul), later also describes the lifestyle of many social strata, especially of the refugees who were subjected to a kind of social degradation. The musical instrument that features widely in this music is the originally three-string and later four-string *bouzouki*.

Over the last 50 years Greek music became internationally recognised through the works of composers with a classical background in music, namely *Mikis Theodorakis* and *Manos Hadjidaki* and others, who composed various types of music and set poems by celebrated Greek poets to music.