

Giuliano d'Angiolini

NOTES ON THE FILM:

Un giorno nella gioia l'indomani nel pianto

Music, ritual, humanity

In 2007, I published a book¹ analyzing the various musical aspects of an orality culture: that of the village of Olympos, on the Greek island of Karpathos, which is also the plot of this film. This island is home to exceptionally rich and vibrant traditions and customs. The persistence of ancient ritual forms (such as the dirge), the social organization, the domestic space, the architecture, the artifacts and dresses, the lineage system (unique in Europe), and matrilocality, make this village a place of interest not only for musicologists, but also for ethnologists.

Karpathos is a musical island. One of those places where music, the music of one's own village, resonates everywhere and continuously. No one can say they don't love it, that they don't care about it. When they don't make music, they listen to it through amateur recordings, home videos, locally produced CDs, and now even online. It is a frequent subject of conversation not only among recognized musicians, but among everyone: men and women, young and old.

The heart of the musical and ritual matter is the practice of improvised singing of rhymed distichs (*mandinadhes*). Men gather around a table and, through singing, responding to one another, establish a dialogue.

The other main aspect of musical life in Karpathos is the 'high dance' (*pano choros*). Although all musical forms, even those sung and performed at a slow tempo, can be danced, and although other dances, both local and imported from other Greek islands, are found in Karpathos, the *pano choros* is the most important due to the richness of its musical articulation, as well as the importance it plays in the ceremonies. In Olympos, the *pano choros* plays a key social role: the dance is still largely used today for the implementation of a marriage market.

The music of Karpathos includes three instruments: the *lyra*, the *tsamboùna*, and the *laòuto*, joined in the south by the violin (*violi*). The *lyra* is a three-stringed bowed lute, very similar to the *vielle* that was common in Western Europe in the 13th century. The melody is constantly accompanied by a drone. The *laòuto* is a long-necked lute whose double strings are plucked with a plectrum. This instrument primarily serves a rhythmic-harmonic role, but the lutenist can sometimes play melodies in conjunction with the *lyra*. The *lyra-laòuto* pair, which can be played alone, can be complemented by the *tsamboùna*: a single-reed bagpipe made of two pipes. The *tsamboùna* occupies a central place in the music of Olympos and is essential to that of the *pàno choròs*. A long tradition has placed it as a ceremonial instrument, belonging to the sphere of commemoration. In various cultures, including Greece, the bagpipe has also been used as a military or parade instrument.

¹ G. d'Angiolini, *Un giorno nella gioia, l'indomani nel pianto. La musica dell'isola di Karpathos*, Nota, Geos CD Book 607, Trieste, 2007; with two CDs enclosed.

The inhabitants of Karpathos live to the rhythm, the philosophy, of the *mandinadhes*. Everyone can sing them, and they do. And those few who don't in a given circumstance listen attentively and feel the intensity of their poetic content. The *mandinadhes* offer a specific way of experiencing and managing emotions and suffering; both intimately and collectively.

Mandinadhes are performed both during ritual events that require the participation of the entire community, such as religious festivals, pilgrimages, weddings, and during those occasions that involve a small group of participants, such as a baptism or a gathering specifically dedicated to them. However, even the seemingly more informal occasions almost always involve a connection with the most important ritual moments.

The soloist's sung enunciation of the poetic verse is systematically repeated in responsorial form by the assembly of those present, with an intensity proportional to the content and the success of the poetic formulation. Another participant will respond with a new couplet. It is a true dialogic exchange, orderly and formalized, which, in most cases, expresses and brings to the community's attention a suffering, a personal concern, or even a reflection on a painful or conflictual situation affecting the group of participants.

Music evokes and make you relive what is painful within us, delicately staging anguish, grief and sorrow, encouraging the expression of these feelings and, in doing so, offering itself as a tool for revealing and liberating them. This musical and ceremonial arrangement, in Karpathos, allows for confession and tears, while simultaneously generating a certain satisfaction, and should therefore be understood as a source of pleasure and gratification. The emotional states aroused by singing are treasured. Through music, our humanity can finally express itself most profoundly and expose its most sensitive, reflective, lucid, and subtle side.

These gatherings are a place of psychic communion in which intimate confession finds collective resonance in the group's responsorial refrain. Consider how singularly comforting it must be to hear one's own thoughts and words, sometimes the expression of one's most hidden sorrow, in the lips of others, appropriated and forcefully echoed by the entire assembly in the most sublime form given them by music.

I want to emphasize the possibilities that the *mandinadhes* offer for the expression of grief because this is the most unusual and significant reality, and also the most prevalent and recurrent in Karpathos. However, the *mandinadhes* can accommodate diverse contents. They are often occasions for praise or formal celebration. While mostly an expression of intimate thought, they can nevertheless focus on commentary on the context, on the quality of the gathering or feast, or even embrace provocative themes, criticism, mockery as a public adjustment and sublimated regulation, of conflicts within the community or between individuals.

They are often occasions for praise or formal celebration, sometimes for smiles (but never for laughter). Sung dialogue provides a ritualized opportunity to resolve both intimate conflicts and tensions within community life and is therefore held in the highest regard, not only for the aesthetic pleasure and emotion it provides, but also for its value as a privileged moment of social aggregation and an important factor of cohesion for the entire community. It is therefore a vehicle for complete dialogue and a manifestation of all the relevant existential and social dynamics.

If the world is a constant creation of disorder, then the *ghlèndi* aspire to recreate a new order each time, and each time it strives to rebuild the necessary harmony between the various factors that make up the daily practice of living: personal distress, tensions within the group, the social order, bonds of alliance, kinship, the spiritual dimension, and religious horizons. Ultimately, it is a matter of balancing issues that concern the individual with those that concern the community, and thus strengthening the bond that ties one to the other. The individual's suffering must be able to be channeled into a collective dimension that welcomes them and which, in turn, in a continuous feedback loop, nourishes the community itself.

The singing of the *mandinàdhes* in their ritual context, on public occasions, or before celebrations, during those associated with rites of passage, which are key moments in life, such as baptism and marriage, takes place at night, all night long, and sometimes continues well into the morning, for a duration that can last over twelve hours straight! 'Uninterrupted' means that spoken conversation tends to be excluded, and only singing and verbal expression through sung lyrical forms are permitted. Even when attention seems to slacken, or brief exchanges occur between some participants, or practical matters requiring immediate action are being addressed, the musical stream never breaks.

When conducting a festive gathering, it is essential to maintain the absolute continuity of the flow of sound and maintain the resulting alien dimension. Music acts as a flow that accompanies and, even more, shapes not only the time of the ceremony, but also time itself; that of emotions, thoughts, speeches, and actions. It establishes a formal horizon and, at the same time, ensures a complete lyrical form for the expression of thoughts and feelings.

Music presumably takes control of the functioning of mental processes, guiding them, shaping them, imposing a rhythm to which they must submit. Those who sing also access a particular mode of thinking that is determined by the manner in which the linguistic wording is elaborated. The formulation of thoughts in measured and rhymed verse compels the mind into a forced and artificial conduct.

During a singing meeting, a succession of melodic types is performed, each lasting a variable length of time (ranging from a minimum of about one or two minutes to twenty minutes or more). Due to their structural characteristics, the

different melodies employed in the *mandinadhes* convey different emotions. Each mode and each melodic type expresses specific feelings. However, these arias are not assigned a rigidly defined role. The dialogic exchange itself happens with a certain variety of content. Different levels of expression unfold, not mutually exclusive: from the commemorative to the eulogistic, to the evocative, from remembrance to confession, from lament to encouragement. While a correspondence in meaning between words and music is possible and occurs with some frequency, it must be admitted that, considering the *ghlèndi* as a whole, as a system, emotions can be evoked independently by the melody or the content of the verse. A neutral purpose can rest on a pathetic aria: with the singer's facial features, he will betray the emotional tension inherent in the music, contrasting with the serenity of the words. Here, it is the melody that dictates the mood of the feelings. Moreover, the melancholy, languor, and bitterness predominate over the *ghlèndi* and extend beyond the single contents.

The movie films a sung dialogue, following an important religious celebration (see below). References to the Saint to whom the feast is dedicated are frequent, and his presence among the people, openly invoked, is palpable. This excerpt shows how dialogic exchange requires a transition from one topic to another, at the right time. The *ghlèndi* is a ritual in Karpathos and as such requires obligatory steps and ceremonial obligations. A wise distribution of time given to each topic, and the meticulousness with which they are developed and explored, are essential to its proper functioning.

The first part of the sung dialogue (which began before the exchange reported here) addresses the serious illness that has struck Maria, the wife of one of the participants (singer C). The *ghlèndi* here experiences one of its most powerful moments, in which emotional involvement is at its peak; the interventions follow one another rapidly and almost one upon the other, and the community itself speaks in unison, as one. While it is true that the relationship established between what is evoked by the music and what is said in the poetic verses is complex and varied, and not necessarily analogous, here we can find some choices aimed at establishing some parallelism between the two expressive media. When singer C tearfully recalls his wife's illness and declares his hope for her recovery, he employs a somewhat hesitant yet sweet and consoling melody. Singer H does the same later, addressing him with a word of good wishes and comfort ("Ah! Don't be sad, everything will pass"). Singer E, who ideally addresses the sick woman, now far from the party, to encourage her, urging her to rely on the strength inherent in her character, introduces a decisive, vigorous, and serene aria, like all those polarized on the fourth degree of the musical scale.

It's then time to pay ritual homage to a visitor from another village, Mesochori. Knowing how to engage in the dialogue means not only being able to improvise verses according to the rules of versification and inserting them correctly into the musical phrase, but also knowing how to follow the elaboration

of a theme, its rhythm, and how to develop each aspect. The link between the two topics discussed here is found by one of the singers in the figure of the Saint himself. The atmosphere then shifts, becoming almost cheerful, but the music soon returns to impose a different mood, different emotions. The final couplet, which when read appears to be merely obsequious and devoid of any particular emotional content, is instead sung in a subdued, sorrowful voice on a sad and sombre air, in the minor key.

In a *ghlèndi*, the subtle mechanisms that provoke emotion are difficult to grasp: it can be motivated equally by music or words, and even better by their conjunction. But only words seem capable of inducing tears; not, however, when the verse is recited, but only when it is sung. The institution of the *ghlèndi* is the necessary condition and support for establishing the psychological state that allows participants to experience, in unusual ways and with great pathos, the content of what the singer enunciates and intends to reveal.

At the height of the *ghlèndi* is crying. The ease with which it arises during the singing of the *mandinàdhes*, and the participants' willingness to empathize, are truly astonishing. For those of us accustomed to conceiving crying as an extreme manifestation of acute pain, it's not easy to understand how it could arise here at the slightest evocation of an emotional content that, while sad, would certainly be insufficient to provoke tears under normal conditions – for us as for them. Ultimately, music and verse are the tools that allow feelings to be expressed in non-ordinary ways. It's a forced mechanism, which gives rise to a singular behavioral and psychological pattern, distinct from that of everyday life.

Crying isn't necessarily related to personal grief. A sad melody immediately plunges participants into a state of grief, which is evident in facial expressions, body language, the content of the sung verses, and finally in tears. Each anguish is traced back to a image that summarizes them all, to grief par excellence. In this sense, the appearance of crying isn't necessarily related, in common terms, to a specific and contextual motivation, but is the result of the establishment of a system that induces, first and foremost, the expression of grief in an absolute and unrelated sense, of 'background grief'.

In Karpathos, crying is truly an additional dimension of life (although confined to the boundaries of ritual); a mode of existence felt as natural and necessary. While everyday relationships with life's events are not too dissimilar from our own, it is in this form, during a *ghlèndi*, that things in Karpathos are really felt and grasped in a truth finally revealed.

The dance

On important festive occasions, the singing of improvised distichs is gradually joined by dancers who perform a low dance (*kàto choròs*). Then, at the end of the singing, the music changes and accelerates: several songs, which act as a bridge, lead to the *pàno choròs* dance. The dancers, previously engaged in the very slow dance that accompanied the singing of the *mandinàdhes*, will slide into the high dance (*pàno choròs*) that will last for many hours, until dawn.

High dance brings with it a certain mental relaxation, a physical excitement, a repose of thoughts and emotions. It involves the silence of profound and solemn speech, implies the momentary prevalence of the body over the spirit, and therefore finds itself at the lowest rung of the ladder that descends from the sacred (the religious service, the paraliturgical chants), passing through epic and narrative singing and then that of the *mandinhàdes*, to the profane. But from the perspective of bodily energy, the path is the opposite: not a descent, but an ascent. Dance is a moment of liberation, of physical joy, a reparation for the deeply introspective and painful state caused by the *mandinhàdes*. Its movements are elevated, pointing upward with a solid and powerful movement of all the bodies, inspiring a state of exaltation and exhilaration. Playing or dancing the *pàno choròs* is more about gaining energy than losing it.

While it's true that the high dance is a moment of liberation of physical energy, and while one may enjoy dancing the *pàno choròs*, the utmost severity shines through in the participants' attitudes and expressions. This rigor tells us that this isn't truly a mere entertainment, but rather a ceremony requiring seriousness. And such conduct stems not only from the solemnity of the occasion, but also from the fact that the dance was (and to some extent still is) the strategic moment during which families negotiate the marriage of young women. Given these conditions, it can become a veritable chore for them (who are obligated to perform, and for its entire duration!).



Listening to the *mandinàdhes*. Sadness. Photo © G. d'Angiolini, 1996.

The film

The film was shot on the evening and night of August 26, 2011; the second of three days of celebration dedicated to Saint John the Baptist.

The first day happen a pilgrimage to the cave-sanctuary of Vroukounda, accessible only by foot or by sea. Following a late-afternoon Mass and a public dinner, sacred and epic songs are sung a cappella, followed by narrative songs accompanied by instruments, and then the dialogue begins, sung in improvised distichs, which lasts well into the night. After the long hours dedicated to singing (to which, from a certain point on, the low dance is added), the high dance begins, featuring the bagpipe as the musical protagonist. The dance ends at dawn. A new morning service follows, and then the return journey begins.

Gradually, over the years, the custom has developed for many to rest during the night of the second day, after the exhausting pilgrimage. On the second day (which is when the film scenes were shot), the *ghlèndi* begins late, involves a smaller number of people, and the dance ends with a select few participants. On the final day, on the contrary, everything begins in the afternoon, and by nightfall the dancers are so numerous that they completely fill the large open space.

I'm not a filmmaker. I'm an amateur in this field, but if I wanted to make this documentary and if I feel like offering it to the public, it's because I think it has its own specific interest. Over many years of patient observation of that society, its rites, its humanity, I've developed a precise idea of what a documentary should show, narrowing down what I believe to be the heart of the human question. For this reason, I deliberately left out the many other facets of a complex anthropological reality, the many details of the ritual, and even the documentation of elements important from an ethnomusicological perspective. During the final dance scene, for example, I didn't want to make any cuts that would interrupt it to show the musicians and their instruments. I focused solely on the core from which the thought and worldview of that human consortium radiates, and from which the myriad actions of the ritual unfold.

There is also a fundamental question I have posed to myself and to all documentary filmmakers. The director is concerned with composing his film so that it has its own informative significance, its own rhythm, its own aesthetic. In doing so, he translates the 'language' of a culture different and distant from our own into terms that seem comprehensible, acceptable, and enjoyable to us. That the ethnologist is a translator is a given; and one might even say that the ultimate purpose of his role, the object of ethnology and anthropology—by subtraction and contrast—is ourselves. 'Translator-traitor', but an inevitable and necessary traitor.

A great distance separates an ethnographically serious and intense film, such as Jean Rouch's, from a standard television documentary, which only yields approximations and often lies. However, I believe one issue is usually overlooked, even in documentaries made with scientific seriousness and insight approach: the compression of temporality. A ritual has its own temporal dimension, usually very long, spanning many hours, even days: compressing it into an hour and a half of film is a stretching. The film may indeed provide the necessary information, the right reflections, and be beautiful and touching in a short time, but it doesn't immerse the viewer in that particular experience of time. It's a dimension of time that alters our state of consciousness, sometimes to the point of enchantment, a kind of hypnosis. This temporality encompasses very long periods of time, times of varying articulation and importance, and even boredom. An ethnographic document (not just film) can provide us with a rich and sufficiently precise vision of a cultural phenomenon, but it risks leaving the viewer detached, outside of that experience. Now, frequenting another culture, penetrating it as deeply as possible, allows us to understand and live a dimension different from our own. It allows us to escape from our own way of being in the world and conceiving it. It is a profound philosophical, perceptive, and emotional experience.

Of course, the movie camera, the photographic camera, the microphone, in any case isolate and cut out fragments of a broader context of events, and therefore not just of time. But how can we attempt to convey the time of a ritual

that lasts at least ten hours within the much more limited time of a film? Must the spectator of an ethnographic film remain anchored to the temporality of his own world, of his ordinary life, within the mental and psychological limits of his own culture, or must he be able to escape it, alienating himself in a world different from his own, to the point of experiencing its entire temporality, as he would have the opportunity to do if he were physically there?

My solution consisted in creating an initial sequence shot that was as long as possible; a portion of time much shorter than the duration of the ceremony, but, in my intentions, suitable for expressing its temporal dimension and, I hope, adequate for making the spectator feel another time, which is not our daily one, of ordinary actions.².

Filming conditions in those locations are extremely challenging. The wind blows constantly and is often very strong, so much so that it breaks the barrier of the windscreen placed over the microphones in these cases. Even though the number of people present that night was small, given the tendency of the inhabitants of Olympos to crowd together until they completely saturate the space, the space available for filming was, as always, extremely limited if I wanted to film the musicians in front: a few centimeters separated me from the singers around the table and from others arranged next to and behind. A narrow passage between the table and a wall behind it could not be used: it was a gap where people circulated and were sure to be jostled or forced out of the way. And it was where the dancers would later pass.

A second video camera on a tripod was placed behind one side of the table, directly opposite that passage, and would later be used to film the singers with the dancers filing past behind them. In such cases, one might consider negotiating filming conditions with the villagers in advance. While their long-standing acquaintance with me might have allowed them to accept them, I doubt that these men, so proud and jealous of their traditions, hostile to anything that might disturb them, and too caught up in the intensity of the events, would have truly respected them. And besides, I had spontaneously ruled out this possibility: from the very beginning, when I approached the singers and musicians to make audio recordings, I maintained the utmost discretion with them. I could not have done otherwise. Their disposition of spirit, pride and great rigor, is very different from what one can find elsewhere: the willingness of the singers of Ceriana and Farini, or even that of the Cuncordu or the Sardinian Tenore, whom I was able to frequent, is unimaginable at Olympos.

The final scene, the high dance, was filmed with a tripod. Usually, the space is crowded with dancers, and it's difficult to find a suitable location to film them; however, on that second night, I took advantage of the small number of dancers

² An identical choice motivated the length, without interruptions, of the musical flow of the first track of one of the two albums that accompany the aforementioned book (G. d'Angiolini, 2007) and which lasts more than 49 minutes.

and the large, open area where I could easily position myself. It's noteworthy that the small number of dancers and very few other people allowed for a certain relaxation in the rigor of behavior that usually characterizes this dance.

Ideally, I would have liked a film artist to have filmed for me. But I'm not sure I would have truly appreciated the result. Because he wouldn't have watched with the same eyes. Others filmed with me, but, due to insufficient knowledge of the gestures, the minute articulations of the ritual, the people, the musical dynamics of the *ghlèndi*, the details as well as the profound thought, they didn't see what I saw.

I hope, first and foremost, that this film has documentary value. Despite its technical shortcomings, I also hope that it manages to convey, even in its condensed length, the philosophical, aesthetic, poetic, and human core of that rite, that tradition, that people. And above all, to make it live: I wanted to portray what seemed essential to me, that core I mentioned, trying to immerse the viewer as much as possible.

One of the verses of the 'night tunes' (*skopì tis nìchtas*) goes: "one day in laughter and joy, the next in tears". This is where the film's title comes from (*Un giorno nel riso e nella gioia, l'indomani nel pianto*); which is also the title of the aforementioned book.



Lyra e tsamboùna.

Photo © G. d'Angiolini, Vroukounda, 1994.

Transcription of dialogues (translation of subtitles)

Still shot of the landscape. Introduction (01:14):

On the Greek island of Karpathos, during festive gatherings, men sing improvised rhyming distichs.

Each verse sung by an individual singer is taken up in chorus by the entire assembly.

By responding to one another, the singers establish a real dialogue among themselves. These gatherings continue for many hours, even all night, and the musical thread is never interrupted.

Through this exchange of poetry and music, in a dimension alien to that of everyday time, the participants access a sort of psychic communion.

The music, the feelings it evokes, and the topics touched upon, arouse great emotion in them.

The atmosphere is often very sad and leads to tears.

The *ghlendi*, the sung dialogue (*mandinàdhes*):

Singer A (to singer C):

02:24

I want to sing to you because my heart aches

03:12

Because I see the tears flowing from your eyes

Singer B (to singer C):

03:53

I hope that the grace of Saint John will come to your aid

04:26

And that your wife will soon recover from her illness

Singer C (crying):

05:22

The doctors made a mistake, and now I have to endure it

06:08

Ah! I see her health improving, and little by little I'm gaining courage

Singer D (to singer C):

07:45

You are always affectionate and deserve every praise

08:14

Because you are always by her side, never giving up

Singer A (to singer C):

08:47

The doctors made a mistake, and you have realized it

09:32

Saint John will grant you the grace to come to your aid

Singer E (to singer C):

10:17

Be patient, I beg you

11:32

And better days will soon come for you

12:06

Don't think about the money you spend for her

12:42

Ah! May God give you what you desire

Singer D (to singer C):

13:08

When all this is over, everything will be forgotten

13:37

And then may your children feel happy

Singer F (to singer C):

14:15

Don't think about money, sad money

15:00

When illness comes, it's right to spend it

Singer G (to singer C):

15:41

Great is the Saint who drives away sorrows

16:23

I want your home to be filled with joy

Singer H (to singer C):

17:03

Ah! Don't be sad, everything will pass

17:46

And your bitter mouth will laugh again

Singer I (to singer C):

19:00

Great is the Saint and he will help you

19:30

Next year your wife will come here too

Singer B (to singer C):

21:08

Great is his grace and he will help you

22:03

To quickly heal the bitterness you feel in your heart

Singer L:

22:56

Saint John takes us all in his arms

23:35

And fills every home with joy

Singer E (to the absent wife of singer C):

24:08

My little Mary, how strong you are! I want you to resist

25:03

And that you may marry your good children well

25:57

I hope that all your ills will cease

26:32

And that your children will be successful in life

Singer L (to visitors from the nearby village of Mesochori):

28:41

Saint John loves all the inhabitants of Olympos

29:25

May he also grant the gift of good health to those of Mesochori

29:53

Since they honored us by coming here to Saint John's holiday,

30:33

We will do the same for their celebration on September 8th.

Singer M :

31:06

They came and honored us, as they were not used to doing.

31:41

And now our friends are more numerous to celebrate with us.

Singer F:

32:19

Oh, Saint John! Come with us too.

33:14

I will ask you for your help, my dear friend.

Singer B (to visitors from the nearby village of Mesochori):

33:52

Welcome to the people from the nearby village: they came to our celebration.

34:25

And they brought great joy tonight to our hearts.

Singer G:

35:34

The asphalt road now makes things easier.

36:12

And each of their visits always makes us proud.

Fixed shot of the *ghlèndi* around the table; dancers in the background:

39:00

The years pass, they flow, and they don't come back

Those beautiful moments... We can't forget them

End of previous scene (43:40):

After the singing phase, the 'high dance' follows, which also lasts for many hours. It is a time of silence of the words, of thoughts and feelings. It is a time of body and physical joy.

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Technical data sheet

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