

The idea to incorporate sympathetic strings onto the Cretan Lyra was primarily influenced by my experience of Indian and Afghani instruments, most of which employ sympathetic strings. In the 1980s I was studying both the Cretan Lyra as well as the Turkish klasik kemençe, two very similar “sisters” which, although they have many similarities, also have significant differences. The main differences to string length. The Cretan Lyra has three playing strings of a length of 28 or 29 cms (depending on the Lyra), whereas the Turkish kemençe has one string of 29cms (the middle string) and two of either 25.5 or 26 cms (the first and third strings). This means that the intervals as they occur on the strings are very different on these two instruments. As a result, after playing for an hour or two on the one, if I then switched to the other, the intervals would all be wrong and it would take me a bit of time to re-calibrate my intervals to the new instrument. Going back and forth between these two lyras was not in my view practical or viable. I would end up being a bad player on both. I therefore felt obliged to choose the one and stick to it and to abandon the other. Because I was very deeply involved in Cretan music and had already invested nearly a decade to its study (and was therefore more advanced in its practice), I decided to stay with the Cretan Lyra and to abandon my efforts to play the kemençe. This decision however did actually coincide with a growing interest in older forms of the Cretan Lyra which, interestingly enough, were much closer in construction and design to the Turkish kemençe than to the contemporary Cretan Lyra, which is heavily influenced by the construction and design of the Violin. Also, despite my perceived necessity to choose one of the two types of Lyra (Cretan or Turkish), I did not wish to sacrifice and abandon all of the extremely interesting and valuable techniques which I had learned on the Kemençe. I wanted somehow to incorporate them into my playing technique of the Cretan Lyra. What I immediately noticed was that the manner in which the contemporary Cretan Lyra is held and supported (on the outer side of the left thigh) differs radically from the way in which the kemençe is held (resting on both thighs which are held together). This difference in positioning dictated a number of significant differences in the way in which both the left hand approached fingering as well as in the way in which the right hand undertook the bowing. It was precisely these differences which, in large measure, accounted for the very different playing styles as

well as for the ability for the kemençe to move out of first position fingering and into the higher regions, something which then contemporary Cretan Lyra is unable to do. The contemporary Cretan Lyra however does have a significant advantage of its own. One can turn the instrument, much in the manner of a spike fiddle, so as to meet the string desired, a technique which greatly assists faster playing techniques (especially with the old under-handed holding of the bow). What I did notice was that as we go back in time both the Cretan Lyra as well as the Turkish kemençe were originally held in the same manner, resting, like a spike-fiddle, on top of the left thigh. This gave the instrument much greater stability than that afforded by the contemporary holding position of the Cretan Lyra, and, even though a bit less stability than the contemporary holding position of the Kemençe, it was still enough to ensure sufficient stability as well as to enable the Cretan technique of rotating the instrument. I Erenler set about redesigning the Cretan Lyra in such a way as to re-introduce many elements of its older construction together with a few small modifications of my own which would then allow me to utilize the techniques of both the Cretan Lyra as well as the Turkish kemençe on a single instrument. Thus far, I had not yet entertained the idea of sympathetic strings on this new instrument. Immediately after I came up with the idea for this new type of Lyra, it did occur to me to incorporate sympathetic strings into its construction. I never did any of this with an intention to somehow “improve” the Cretan Lyra. I think that the Cretans were quite satisfied with the instrument which they had gradually developed over many centuries and they certainly weren’t waiting for someone like me to come along and “improve” their instrument. I was actually looking to create an instrument which would be able to support my own personal musical explorations which went quite beyond the realm of Cretan music and into other areas of interest where I needed certain other capabilities and sound qualities which were in no way greater than those of Cretan music, they were simply somewhat different. The sympathetic strings derived, as I said, primarily from my experience with Indian and Afghani instruments and their related music. My initial design incorporated 18 sympathetic strings onto the Lyra. This number corresponded to the number of alternating intervals which I would need for Middle Eastern musical idioms without having to stop frequently for retuning, as is done in

Indian music. I should also point out that the Bulgarian Lyra, or Gadulka as it is called, which uses 12 sympathetic strings was also influential in this process. This initial design proved to be very satisfactory for my needs on many levels, and this immediately became my primary Lyra. It was made in a joint effort by myself and the Cretan/Karpathian luthier resident in Athens, Nikolaos Bras. Not only did I include sympathetic strings, but I also included what in India are referred to as *jawari* bridges. These are a special type of broad flat bridge which, when properly adjusted, considerably lengthen the perceived vibration time of the string which passes over such a bridge. These bridges also lend a particular sonority “color” which is very characteristic of Indian music. I never expected that this newly made hybrid of mine would attract the attention of other Lyra players. It was simply something which I came up with in the context of my own desires and explorations. It therefore came as rather a surprise to me that other musicians began to take an interest in this instrument and even went so far as to order such instruments from Nikolaos Bras (and others). In the ensuing years, one of my students, Stelios Petrakis, took an avid interest in the making of musical instruments. Amongst the very first instruments which he attempted was a Lyra similar to mine with sympathetic strings. His very first attempts had a few problems, but one of his early attempts was quite successful and it was his main instrument for a number of years (this instrument is currently in Athens in the possession of our mutual friend and musical instrument case-maker extraordinaire Yannis Seremetis). As the years went by, Stelios continued developing his skills as an instrument maker and he rapidly became one of Greece’s foremost luthiers and quite definitely THE maker of lyras with sympathetic strings. He made a number of improvements to my original design on both a functional as well as on an aesthetic level which greatly enhanced the performance of the instrument. Sometime around 2005 or 2006, I came up with a second design which enhanced somewhat the bass response of the instrument and which incorporated an extra 4 sympathetic strings, bringing the number up to 22. This is the Lyra which I currently play primarily. Out of curiosity, I once asked Stelios how many such lyras had he made over the years? He replied that he had stopped counting in 2010 at which time he had made 300!!! Of these 300, a great many find themselves in other lands (not only in

**Crete) where there is an increasing number of quite serious students, some of whom have developed into excellent players. In 1990, when I started on my journey of experimenting with Lyra construction, I could never have imagined such a development. In recent years, a number of other luthiers have begun to construct such lyras, some according to my original designs, and some employing designs of their own. Some of these lyras are of exceptional quality. Who knows where all of this will lead?**

Kevin Dawe (in a 1999 article) indicates that Kostas Moundakis went to Rajasthan with a team of Greek musicologists to study sarangi. Do you confirm this information? Was he interested in adding sympathetic strings to the lyra? Did he tell you about this?

**Kostas Mountakis went to India at the invitation of the late Pia Chatzinikou (sister of the orchestral conductor Giorgos Chatzinikos). In the late seventies she was working with the ministry of Culture arranging some cultural exchanges between Greece and India. In this context, Kostas Mountakis, together with a number of other major figures in Greek folk music (Yannis Vassilopoulos, Theodoros Kekes, Mathios Balabanis) were sent to India for a series of concerts and presentations, and a number of Indian musicians were brought to Greece for similar activities. During this visit Kostas Mountakis was introduced, amongst other things, to music and musicians from Rajasthan, the northwestern Indian province which is home to nearly all of India's family of bowed instruments. In this region there are a number of instruments which are quite clearly distant relatives of the Lyra (some actually appear to be not so distant relatives). These instruments include the Sarangi, the Sindhi Sarangi, the Kamaycha, the Ravanahatta, the Sarinda or Baluchi Soruz and others. Apparently a Ravanahatta was presented to Mountakis as a gift and he brought it back with him to Crete. Oddly enough, of all of the Rajasthani bowed instruments, this is the one which least resembles the Lyra, as opposed to the Kamaycha of the Manganiyar clan which is remarkably similar. Mountakis was very deeply influenced and affected by his trip to India and he often spoke about it expressing great reverence for India's musicians as well as for the respect shown to music and musicians in India by**

**not only the public, but also by the state itself. However he did not express either to me, or to anyone else that I know, any interest in modifying the Cretan Lyra as a result of these experiences. Such a thing would have been quite out of character for someone like Mountakis who was, on the one hand, very open and interested in the culture of other peoples, but on the other hand, very clear, comfortable and sure about his own identity.**