

2.1 **The commonalities between the DIY cultures of rebetiko and blues**

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× **Abstract**

Rebetiko is a style of folk music that originated at the end of the nineteenth century by marginal people in prisons and ports of Greece. It has always been associated with instruments of the bouzouki family yet has been characterised as ‘the blues of Greece’. For economic reasons, early musicians of these traditions collected cans, tins, cigar boxes or turtle shells from the trash, the fields, and prison yards to build their own instruments. Inspired by these musicians, the singer-songwriter Georges Pilali attempted to connect the two worlds by mixing their sounds. He covered *rebetiko* songs by fingerpicking and playing slide on resonator guitar, whereas he performed blues standards on *bouzoukobaqlamadhes*. The similarities of these handmade instruments, accompanied by analysis of two original songs by the author that combine their individual styles, demonstrate the common ground between these two distinct cultures that grew far apart for over a century.

Keywords: *rebetiko* and blues, Georges Pilali, DIY instruments, *rebetoblues*.

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1. **Background**

The term *rebetiko*² has been used to describe a style of urban folk music that originated at the end of the nineteenth century by marginal people in prisons (Tambouris, 2008, p. 7) and ports of Greece. Yet, it is still quite unclear what the word *rebetiko* in fact means and is still a subject of some debate. The songwriter, *rebetiko* records collector and enthusiast, Panos Savvopoulos, has collected various definitions of the term from dictionaries and books on *rebetiko*, as well as multiple references about what *rebetiko* is, and compiled his 2006 book that concentrates on that subject (Savvopoulos, 2006). Others support that *rebetiko* is a ‘state of mind’, rather than a genre of music, as the journalist Maria Kostala claims on the Culture Trip website (Kostala, 2017). By contrast, several authors have contributed to the creation of a myth around *rebetiko*, such as the author of the first book on the subject by the folklorist and urban historian Elias Petropoulos. This has led to a debate that Daniel Koglin analyses in *Greek Rebetiko from a Psychocultural Perspective* (2016). Despite such discrepancies, Petropoulos’s book is well cited as he was the first to collect songs of different themes, such as prison songs, hashish songs, *mourmoúrika* (murmur) songs, and others, homogenizing them under the same label of *rebetika* songs, which was also the title of his 1968 anthology (*Rebetika Traghoúdhia*). Moreover, he divided *rebetiko* into three distinct eras: *Smyrneiko*³ *rebetiko*; the ‘classic’ period, when Piraeus-style *rebetiko* was the predominant sound; and the period of wide consumption, when *rebetiko* evolved into

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2. Also transcribed as ‘rembetiko’, or with the latinized spelling ‘rebetiko’. Its plural is ‘rebetika’, referring to its songs.

3. *Rebetiko* of Smyrna, which is currently the city of Izmir in Turkey.

*laikó*⁴ and *archontorebétiko* (posh *rebetiko*). Finally, the second edition of his anthology was a sizeable tome that included a substantial archive of photographs. In 1968, the Regime of Colonels, a far-right authoritarian military junta (1967-1973) banned his book, and he was sentenced to five months in prison (Tragaki, 2007) for “pornography” (Taylor, 1981, p. 9). In fact, *rebetiko* has previously been banned for long periods of time, in different eras of Greek history and since the beginning of the twentieth century. Even holding an instrument that has been associated with *rebetiko*, such as a bouzouki or *baglamas*, could result in a prison sentence, and lyrics and stories exist about policemen who would break the bouzouki of a *rebétis*⁵ in the middle of the street. Within the last few decades, several books have been published, including comic books and digital anthologies with fresh illustrations. Some of these can be seen as a repetition of the key points of previous publications, such as Dimitropoulos’s recent anthology of illustrations (2020), while others, such as Koglin (2016), try to shed light on the *rebetiko* debate. On several occasions, the term *rebetiko* has been implying the classic period of Piraeus-style *rebetiko*.

In 1962, Dick Dale gained worldwide popularity from his American surf rock version of the 1927 *rebetiko* song ‘Misirlou’ (Egyptian girl). Dale used the tremolo picking technique, which is quite common in surf music, but it is also a typical *bouzouki* technique. The song regained popularity in 1994, when the director Quentin Tarantino used it in the opening credits of his film *Pulp Fiction* (Grow, 2014). Once more, it renewed popularity in 2006, when sampled by the band *Black Eyed Peas* in their song ‘Pump It’, while concurrently Dale’s version was included in the video game *Guitar Hero 2* (Erlewine, 2019). Finally, it was heard in venues and at the closing ceremony of the 2004 Summer Olympics. In 2017, *rebetiko* was inscribed on the UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity⁶.

2. The Greek blues

Rebetiko had been described as ‘the Greek blues’, or ‘the blues of Greece’. Although the precise origin of this definition has not been established, these descriptions have been repeatedly used in articles, interviews, album covers and promotional materials, including posters. In some cases, it has been used as the title for an article, regardless of whether the author presents this idea, or not. For example, Maria Kostala (2017) has used the title *Rembetika: The Blues of Greece*, but there is only one superficial mention of the blues. This idea remains a subject of debate in for a of *rebetiko* enthusiasts. Examples of commercial use can be observed in the 2015 album *Rebetiko Au Bouzouki* by Paraskevas Grekis, which is subtitled ‘The Greek Blues’, or the 2018 poster *Rebetika: Birth of the Greek Blues*, of the Greek *Rebetiko* Trio. Savvopoulos has contributed to the debate by disseminating his observations in different media, identifying similarities between *rebetiko*, the Portuguese *fado*, the Spanish flamenco, the Argentine tango, and especially the African American blues.

Dafni Tragaki seems to confirm that “one of the most commonly applied descriptions of *rebetiko* song was that which described the music as ‘the Greek blues’” (Tragaki, 2007, p. 116). Most recently, Daniel Koglin states that “it is mainly Piraeus-style *rebetiko* that has been mixed with globalized musical idioms. Blues has been tried by several artists” (Koglin, 2016, p. 101). In the same page, he adds a footnote stating:

³It is interesting, though hardly surprising, that *rebetiko* is often mixed with various older and contemporary ‘subcultural’ or ‘underground’ styles such as the blues (cf. the albums by Pavlos Sidiropoulos, 1992; George Pilali, 1994 and Stelios Vamvakaris, 1995), [...], post-punk (Kyriakides and Moor, 2010) and Gypsy swing (*The Burger Project*, 2013; *Gadjo Dilo*, 2013). Metaphorical statements like the common ‘*rebetiko* is the Greek blues’ or ‘*rebetiko* is protest music’ have their musical equivalent in these stylistic fusions (Koglin, 2016, p. 101).

Stathis Gauntlett of the University of Melbourne also reports Pilali’s record, as well as Vamvakaris’s collaboration with the bluesman Louisiana Red that led to the 2009 album *Blues Meets Rebetiko* (2001, p. 135). Additionally, *rebetiko* has been mixed with the blues in Sidiropoulos’s posthumous EP (2003), and in the 2017 album of *rebetiko* and folk guitarist Dimitris Mystakidis (Polyzoidis, 2019, p. 4). Recently, Gauntlett (2019) published the article ‘Rebetika, the Blues of Greece – and Australia’ in the edited volume *Greek Music in America*.

4. ‘Song of the people’, often described as ‘urban folk song’⁴ or ‘the Greek working-class song’.

5. A *rebetiko* musician, or a person that embraces the *rebetiko* ideology and lives a certain ‘marginal’ kind of life.

6. Available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/rebetiko-01291>

2.1. George Pilali and his album *Theocomodia*

The 1994 album that Koglin describes as a mix of *rebetiko* with the blues is by the musician, singer-songwriter and satirical poet, George⁷ Pilali: *Theocomodia* (Divine Comedy). This album contains more covers than originals, but Koglin based his observation on the fact that Pilali performed *rebetiko* songs with instruments that are associated with blues music, such as resonator slide guitar, and conversely, blues standards with instruments that are associated with *rebetiko* and Turkish music. More specifically, he presents himself, his guest artists, and his hired musicians in the liner notes of his album, declaring that Georges Pilali sings, and plays National Steel slide guitar, 12-string slide guitar, *banjoline* (mandolin-banjo), [Greek] *baglamas* and *sazi* (Turkish *bağlama*, or *saz*); The American blues singer Big Time Sarah sings; The American blues guitarist, harmonica player, and singer Louisiana Red sings and plays electric guitar and National Steel guitar. He refers to the musicians as ‘the people’, which is a slang, similar to the blues or jazz term ‘the cats’. They play percussion, *santoúri* (the Greek cimbalom), washboard, bass guitar, saxophone, bouzouki, acoustic guitar, *kanonáki* (the Greek kanun), accordion, *tsaboúna* (the Greek bagpipes), [Turkish] *yaylı tambur*, [Turkish] *ney*, *oúti* (the Greek oud), tambourine, clarinet and *laoutokítharo* (a lute guitar). The result is an unusual mixture of a Greek out-of-the-ordinary artist, with two African American blues artists, and musicians playing electric instruments, Greek folk instruments, and Turkish instruments. The last two categories had previously been used in *rebetiko* music, the former mostly in Piraeus-style *rebetiko*, while the latter in Smyrna-style *rebetiko*. Pilali is a distinctive figure believes that, since the art of theatre is hidden in every Greek’s subconscious, every concert is a theatrical play. He has always been introducing his songs to the audience by reciting a fantastic story that happened to his character, influenced by the *rebétis* George Baté.⁸ Pilali’s character has been wandering around America, where he accidentally finds Muddy Waters and other bluesmen. Two of his best-known covers are: the song ‘Teketzis’ (‘The Teké⁹ Runner’), that is Yiorgos Batis’s ‘O Boufetzis’ (‘The Buffet Runner’) performed with a resonator guitar and the use of the fingerpicking and slide techniques (Polyzoidis, 2020), and Robert Johnson’s ‘Sweet Home Chicago’, performed with bouzoukis, *baglamádhēs*,¹⁰ *banjolin* and accordion.

94 3. Typical instruments

Nowadays, *rebetiko* is strongly associated with bouzouki but that is not the only instrument that has been used to play *rebetiko* music. There are a number of variations. For example, *Smyrneiko* would not involve bouzoukis, but, according to Tragaki (2007, p. 7), *kanonáki*, *laouto* (lute), *santoúri* (zither), and *klaríno* (clarinet) were the main instruments. According to Nikos Papakostas, the instruments were violin, *santoúri*, guitar, *Polítiki lyra*¹¹ (Constantinopolitan lyre) and *kanonáki*. In the Piraeus-style *rebetiko* the chief instruments were *tríchordo*¹² *bouzouki(s)* and *baglamas* (Papakostas, 2015, p. 56), and sometimes folk guitars were also involved. The extensive use of *bouzouki* during the ‘classic’ period made it a symbol of the genre of *rebetiko* in general. *Bouzoukobaglamádhēs* is a compound word from *bouzouki* and *baglamádhēs*, highlighting the *tríchorda*, and removing the guitar from the picture. Another relatively common *tríchordo* is the *tzourás*, but Petropoulos also mentions, among others, the *bouzoukomána*,¹³ the *gónato*,¹⁴ and the *baglamadháki* (Petropoulos, 1991, p. 17). The guitar has mostly been used for accompaniment purposes, except the guitar playing of the *rebétes* who migrated to the US at the beginning of the twentieth century: they copied the local musicians,

7. Pronounced in a French accent, and thus it should have been transcribed as ‘Georges’. Also transcribed as ‘Zorz’, for that reason in other sources.

8. Pronounced in French accent. The nickname of the *rebétis* known as Yiorgos Batis or Abatis, whose real name was in fact Yiorgos Tsoros.

9. A pothouse/dive where *rebétes* used to gather to smoke hashish.

10. Plural of *baglamas*.

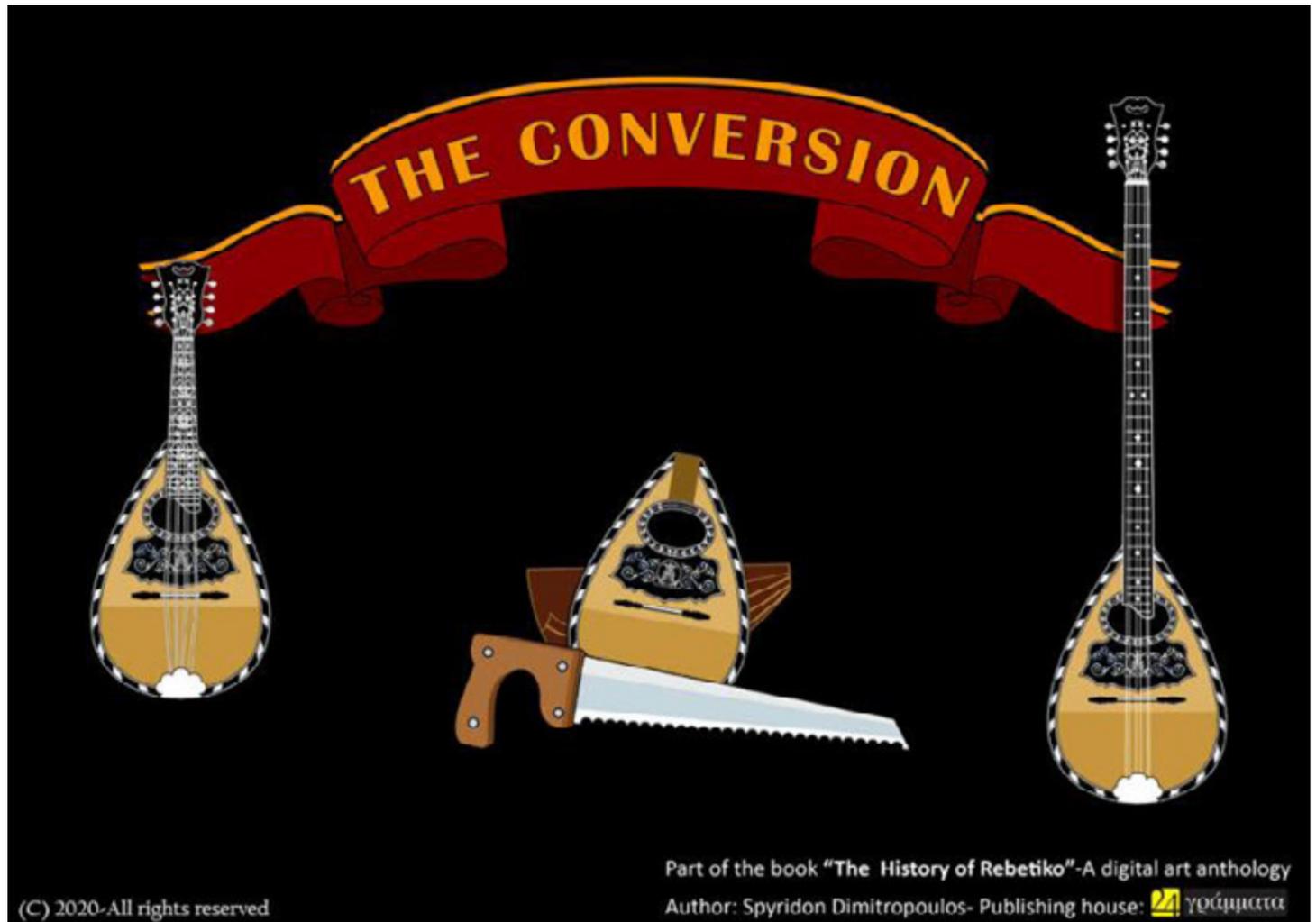
11. The equivalent of the Turkish classical *kemenche*, or *klasik kemençe*.

12. Literally translates as ‘three-stringed’, but in fact it involved three pairs of strings, so it could be transcribed as ‘three-course’. The plural is *tríchorda* and can be used to describe the whole family of bouzouki that has the standard tuning of D-A-D, except for the contemporary version of bouzouki, which involves four pairs of strings, hence it is a *tetráchordo* (four-course).

13. A compound word from bouzouki and *mána*, which literally translates as ‘bouzouki-mum’.

14. Literally translates as knee, because of the shape of his body.

adapting it to their own style, so they could make a living. Many rescued pictures of the ‘classic’ *rebetiko* era reveal that the majority of *rebétes*, either known or unknown, hold *trichorda* of various shapes and sizes. Similarly, pictures of the country (or folk, or downhome) bluesmen hold acoustic guitars, and the fingerstyle was the predominant technique. Until today, regardless of the transition from the acoustic to the electric blues, the guitar remains the main instrument to play blues music. Nevertheless, musicians of both traditions experimented with other instruments, and some of them built their own DIY instruments out of necessity. For instance, in his recent digital art anthology, Spyros Dimitropoulos illustrates how *rebétes* would convert mandolins into bouzoukis, or more specifically, to what they would call a *mandolo-bouzouko* (mandola-bouzouki) or a *miso-bouzouko* (half-bouzouki) (2020). Since the mandolin was not banned, because it was associated with serenades and other Western European styles, it would be easier to find than a bouzouki. So, the mandolin’s neck would be replaced with a longer one, and the converted instrument would imitate the bouzouki, as seen in Figure 2.1.1.



► Figure 2.1.1. - Conversion of a mandolin into a *mandolo-bouzouko* or *miso-bouzouko*
 ► Source: 24grammata publications

3.1. Similarities between the (DIY) instruments of rebetiko and blues

While both cultures use instruments with similar characteristics, each has a distinct musical approach: due to the use of fretted instruments, *rebétes* have adapted the Turkish *makam* and the Byzantine *echos* to the equally tempered *dromoi* (lit. roads), although the singers maintain the microtonal *melismata*. By contrast, bluesmen incorporated string bendings and used the bottleneck to reach the “in-between” notes that were later described as ‘blue notes’.

Apart from the fretted *trichorda*, and the acoustic and electric guitars, both *rebétes* and bluesmen have used the banjo. A rare picture of the famous *rebetiko* and *laikó* songwriter and *bouzoukist*, Vassilis Tsitsanis (1915-1984), portrays him performing with a banjo (Petropoulos, 1983, p. 535).



► Figure 2.1.2. - Another rare picture of Tsitsanis playing the banjo
 ► Source: Petropoulos (1983: 535)

The blues musician Gus Cannon (1883-1979), also known as Banjo Joe, was using a knife blade as a slide on his banjo. The predecessor of the twentieth-century banjo was a fretless instrument. Comparably, some of *rebetiko* musicians who used to live in Anatolia were familiar with an analogous Turkish instrument, the *çümbüş*, which has a spun-aluminum resonator bowl and skin soundboard. This is typically a fretless instrument, but other versions are crafted, such as the *mando-çümbüş* (Figure 2.1.3.) and the *çümbüş saz*. The *rebetiko*¹⁵ oud player Agapios Tomboulis¹⁶ (1891-1965) appears in photographs holding different versions of *çümbüş* (Petropoulos, 1983, pp. 353, 361, 367, 374-375).

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Petropoulos states that in prison, *rebétes* would build instruments that resembled the baglamas or even the bouzouki, out of tinny boxes, cans, pumpkins, and logs (Petropoulos, 1991, pp. 35-36). Likewise, bluesmen would build diddley bows, cigar box guitars, tin can guitars, frying pan banjos, unitars (one stringed guitars), and various other instruments made of cans, some of which have come to be called 'canjos'. This has inspired a new wave of enthusiasts, both in Greece and the US, who still experiment with crafting such instruments, by using cans of beer, instant coffee, spam, soft drinks, and tobacco, as well as cookies tins. An example of a tobacco can monochord can be seen in Figure 2.1.4. This idea has led to more professional outcomes, such as the Bohemian Guitars that build oil can guitars, which, according to their website are "inspired by South African street musicians"¹⁷. Oil cans have been used by some Greek luthiers and enthusiasts, too, to build oil can *tríchorda*. An obvious aesthetic difference is the use of motor oil cans from the US luthiers, and

the use of consumable olive oil cans from the Greeks. Other Greek craftsmen have been experimenting with cigar box guitars, and in the recent years there have been efforts to build cigar box *tríchorda*, and especially *tzourádhēs*.¹⁸ Finally, some Greek enthusiasts have crafted *tríchorda* out of coconuts and turtle shells. These modern approaches, though, are based on stories, and pictures of instruments of the 'classic' *rebetiko* era.



► Figure 2.1.3. - A Turkish *mando-çümbüş*, purchased from Istanbul in 2006
 ► Source: the author

15. Besides *rebetiko*, he played Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Jewish folk music.

16. Also known by his Turkish name Hagop Stambulyan.

17. Available at: <https://www.bohemianguitars.com>

18. Plural of *tzourás*.



► Figure 2.1.4. - Single-stringed tobacco canjo, purchased online in 2020
 ► Source: the author

Lastly, *rebétes*, or even people from the audience of a taverna, would play what Petropoulos called ‘non-instruments’ or ‘instruments-like’, including the *kombolói* (worry beads), the spoons, the gas tank, and the broom (Petropoulos, 1991, p. 32). Savvopoulos has devoted a whole chapter in his latest book to the *kombolói* and a similar object that involves fewer beads, the *begléri* (Savvopoulos, 2019, pp. 88-104). Both Petropoulos and Savvopoulos describe the ‘potirokombolói’¹⁹ that is essentially the rubbing of the lip of a drinking glass against a *kombolói* that is suspended from a button of the performer’s shirt or jacket. Similar ideas can be noticed in jug bands that used to play with the jug, the washboard, the spoons, the stovepipe, and the washtub bass. Early jug bands, like Gus Cannon’s band, consisted of African Americans who played blues and jazz (Charters, 1963; Oliver, 2013).

3.2. Common characteristics of the American cigar box guitars and the Greek *tríchorda*

A cigar box *tzourás*, with a slide attached, which was received as a birthday present (Figure 2.1.5), made apparent other analogies between the American cigar box guitars and the Greek *tzourás*. *Tzourádhēs* are typically tuned D3D4-A3A3-D4D4, however the maker of this instrument decided to build it with three single strings. In addition, even though the neck is fretted, and has the scale length (58 cm) of a slightly smaller *tzourás*,²⁰ it is set up with an A2-E3-A3 tuning, which is one octave below the typical ‘Open A’ American cigar box guitar tuning.²¹

Taking these developments into consideration, three commonalities can already be observed between the Greek *tzourádes*, or preferably the *tríchorda*, and the cigar box guitars: their standard tunings are identical, in the sense that they maintain the same intervallic relationship between the strings. Alternative tunings have been used in both (families of) instruments. More specifically, cigar box guitars can be tuned D3-A3-D4 (‘Open D’), which is identical to the standard *tríchorda* tuning, without having double strings; E3-B3-E4 (‘Open E’) and G3-D4-G4 (‘Open G’) follow the same principle; F#3-B3-D#4 (‘Open B’), G3-B3-E4 (‘Guitar tuning’), E3-B3-F#4 (‘Fifths’), A3-E4-G4 (‘Jazz tuning’), A3-D4-G4 (‘Classical tuning’), and A3-E4-F4 (‘A6’), have been used in different ways²².

The alternative tunings of *tríchorda* are called *douzénia*.²³ Stavros Kourousis has documented six *douzénia*: the Open, which is either a D-D-D, or a D-G-G; the *Karadouzení* (black tuning), which is D-G-A; the *Syrianó* (of

19. A compound word from *potíri* (drinking glass) and *kombolói*.

20. *Tzourádhēs* come in various sizes, so there is no standard scale length. 60 cm can be considered as an average scale length, although I own a *tzourás* with a scale length of 62.5 cm.

21. Others include the standard E3-B3-E4, and the G3-D4-G3 (‘Open G’).

22. Available at: <https://www.cigarboxguitar.com/knowledge-base/category/tunings-and-strings/>; <https://www.roadiemusic.com/blog/five-alternate-tunings-for-the-3-string-cigar-box-guitar/>; <https://beginnercbg.com/9-different-tunings-for-a-cigar-box-guitar/>.

23. Plural of *douzéni*. From the Turkish word *düzen*. The word has also been used for the desire to have fun, and the elation while experiencing a peak of enjoyment and excitement.

Syros island), which is D-G-A#; the *Arabién*, which is D-G-B; one of unknown name, which is D-G-C; and the *Ísio* (straight), which is D-G-D (Kourousis, 2006). It is noticeable that *rebétes* have always had D as the starting point, as it is the lowest string. However, the *Arabién* is an open G major triad, so theoretically it can be used in the way bluesmen have been using the 'Open B' tuning. The third similarity is that both *tríchorda* and cigar box guitars come in various sizes. Besides Petropoulos's references to unusual names of *tríchorda*, luthiers and enthusiasts still use or create compound words for new sizes, such as *tzourobaglamás*, which is smaller than a *tzourás*, but larger than a baglamas.



► Figure 2.1.5. - A cigar box tzourás, crafted in Athens by a hobbyist luthier
► Source: the author

The last corresponding phenomenon between the two cultures is the addition of extra strings: a pair of strings was added to the *tríchordo* bouzouki, which has been abandoned by contemporary players, and the 'modern' *tetráchorde* bouzouki is typically tuned C-F-A-D, just like the four high strings of a guitar but tuned a whole step below, which benefits virtuosity. The four-course bouzouki has earned its position in Greek pop and *laikó*-pop, whereas the *tríchorda* are mostly used by revivalists, purists, tribute bands, and singer-songwriters who experiment with different genres. The three-stringed and four-stringed cigar box guitars were a solution for African Americans living in poverty (Pretty, 2016), since the middle of the nineteenth century (Mawajdeh, 2016). When these blues musicians could afford a 'real' guitar, they abandoned the cigar box guitars for the acoustic guitars, which were then replaced by electric guitars.

4. Original compositions

The intention was not only to bridge the *rebetiko* to the blues, but also the 'old' to the 'new'. Therefore, both acoustic and electric instruments were placed together in the same mix. Analysis of the decisions taken during the creative process of writing and recording: the song 'Uncannily Alike' (2018) was co-written by Ioannis Sakketos, and released by *Sakké ConQuésó*; and the song 'Dear John' (2017), the idea of which was captured later than 'Uncannily Alike' but released earlier under the pseudonym *Nassos Conqueso*.

4.1. 'Uncannily Alike'

'Uncannily Alike' might be described as a DIY song considering it was self-produced by the two creators, including the songwriting process, recorded performances, recording engineering, sound mixing, comical artwork, and the independent release. The instrumentation comprises a drum kit, electric bass, and electric guitars, a modified bouzouki, a slightly unorthodox *tzourás*, and a Cretan olive oil can baglamas (Figure 2.1.6).



► Figure 2.1.6. - Cretan olive oil can baglamas, purchased from a Greek luthier in 2015
► Source: the author

Owing to the predominance of stringed instruments within the ensemble, they are used sparingly in some parts of the song, similarly in 'Dear John'. The improvised jam sessions that occur after each chorus allow the unusual timbral characteristics to come to the fore²⁴. The tools that generated the two blended calls-and-responses are the combination of a twelve-bar blues progression with dominant seventh and altered chords, on a $9/4$ *zeibékikos*²⁵ rhythm, with the use of *rebetiko dromoi* and the blues scale on *tríchorda* and electric guitars. In the first call-and-response, the *tríchordo* bouzouki makes the calls, and an electric Telecaster responds, while in the second, the *tríchordo* *tzourás* calls and an electric Stratocaster responds. The scales were mixed throughout the improvisation and some characteristic techniques of one instrument were applied to the other, such as playing vertically the blues scale on the *tzourás*, sliding to the 'blue' note, and resolving it to the previous note of the scale. The electric guitar overused tremolo picking, a technique that is not completely unknown to guitarists, however it is essential for *tríchorda* players.

24. See <https://sakkeconqueso.bandcamp.com/track/uncannily-alike>

25. A very popular *rebetiko* dance in $9/4$, divided into $4/4+5/4$. Sometimes appears in the bibliography in $9/8$, but essentially represents the same thing. *Rebêtes* communicate in dances rather than plain rhythms.

4.2. 'Dear John'

Similar instrumentation and analogous experimentation have been undertaken in this song. While 'Dear John' explores similar instrumentation and experimentation, the song was recorded in a professional high-end studio, with hired session musicians who had been provided with a fully arranged home recording of the piece so they could learn their parts in advance. The song combines a twelve-bar blues progression with dominant seventh and altered chords, on a 6/8 rhythm that modulates to 3/4 in every chorus, and then goes back to 6/8 in each verse, with the use of the blues scale and the *Hijazkar*²⁶ *dromos*, played on electric guitars and *tríchorda*, and sung by a former blues female singer²⁷. The track includes two improvised solos, one performed by a musician with a background in Western music, the other with a background in *rebetiko* music. A question that has always perplexed me is 'Why do bouzouki players never use a slide?'. So, the introduction to the song provided the ideal opportunity to use a glass slide on the olive oil can *baglamas* (Figure 2.1.6.), to play a chromatic line that resembles a blues turnaround. Coincidentally, during a personal discussion with Pilali, he mentioned that, while jamming with friends, he had tried using a metal slide on a *baglamas*, 'just for laughs'. Combining distinctive elements of the two genres in this way, produces a unique but simultaneously older, lower-quality sound that has the effect of a non-phonographic imperfection (Harper, 2014). The *tzourás* was used to accompany the singer during the bluesish verses, whereas an archtop guitar and a '52 Telecaster were comping during the *rebetiko-ish chori*. The improvisers had been guided to incorporate both scales within their solos. The guitarist had been asked to use tremolo picking, a typical technique on *tríchorda*, and the *bouzoukist* had been instructed to incorporate some string bendings, practically an unthinkable technique on *tríchorda*, on his custom *tríchordo* bouzouki. The singer – a prolific singer-songwriter of dark pop – asked for permission to change bits of the blues melody in the verses if it felt better, which was granted. Nonetheless, she sang the chorus exactly as it was in the demo.

5. Conclusion

To review, the research demonstrated the role of Georges Pilali, the similar properties of the instruments across continents, and their use to create experimental cross-cultural songs. Together, these commonalities only account for a small proportion of the aspects that constitute the common ground between *rebetiko* and the blues. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that some commonalities between the DIY instruments of the two cultures can be spotted in other parts of the world. Yet, the cultural blending of *rebetiko* and blues has been established by the thematic marriages of the two styles by Georges Pilali, given that he has borrowed codes that cross geographical and cultural boundaries. His approach, in combination with elements of Pavlos Sidiropoulos's, and Stelios Vamvakaris's with Louisiana Red's recordings, alongside some personal ideas and observations, have become the basic ingredients for the creation of the transcultural songs 'Dear John' and 'Uncannily Alike'. Other features that contributed to this blending, such as the choice of song structures, the selected lyric themes, and the use of technology and production decisions, may be of great significance but lie outside the scope of this paper. Further experimentation would not necessarily involve different instrumentations, as this has been demonstrated by Pilali, although different combinations can be achieved by mixing, for example, Turkish instruments with electric guitars and drums. Since there is a large list of *rebetiko dromoi*, my focus has been put on, but not limited to blending different *dromoi* that usually belong to the same family, with the blues scale(s) to explore their emotional effects. Similarly, emphasis has also been placed on creating the feeling of instability, a 'drunk' feel, as it has been described by young performers, by creating additional mixed metres, such as a 4/4 quintuplet swing with 5/4 Greek folk dance rhythm, or even 9/8 *Karsilamás* with 7/8 *Kalamatianós* to create the illusion of two bars of 4/4 with a misplaced quaver note. Notwithstanding, the release of such pieces of music still becomes the subject of debate between *rebetiko* purists, and it usually brings back into the limelight the albums by Pilali, Sidiropoulos, Vamvakaris and Red, and others.

Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank Amanda Bayley, Ioannis Sakketos, Spyridon Dimitropoulos, 24grammata publications, and Dimitra Mitropoulou.

Funding: This work was supported by the Bath Spa University.

26. Also transcribed as *Hitazkar*. The D *Hijazkar dromos* consists of the notes D E♭ F# G A B♭ C# D.

27. See <https://hassosconqueso.bandcamp.com/track/dear-john>

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