

Anna Vissi: The Greek ‘Madonna’?

Ioannis Polychronakis

Faculty of Music, University of Oxford, U.K.

ioannis.polychronakis@music.ox.ac.uk

In recent years Anna Vissi, the Greek pop-music star whose career has spanned over three decades, has been loudly promoted as the ‘Greek Madonna’, in an attempt to export her image and music to the international market as well as to redefine and increase her audience and appeal in Greece. While the purpose of this characterisation, which Vissi herself has embraced, is of course mainly commercial, it resonates with several crucial aspects of present-day Greek popular music. By observing the most significant characteristics of Vissi’s career, performing styles, personas and reception, this article examines some of the possible meanings of Vissi’s new image as ‘the Greek Madonna’. In particular, it focuses on the ways, in which she has arguably reaffirmed and/or reinterpreted traditional Greek popular music styles and the authenticity debate surrounding them. It ultimately argues that ‘the Greek Madonna’ remains typically Greek.

The Discourse Surrounding Anna Vissi and Biographical Background

‘Anna Vissi, the singing sensation and Greek beauty’; this glorification of one of the most popular Greek pop stars appears on the internet branch of Billboard magazine, which is an established popular-music publication in the United States.¹ ‘Anna, you’re a Goddess’; ‘Anna, we live in order to hear you sing’; Vissi’s fans cry out at her live shows in Greece. Concurrently, to some critics, Anna Vissi is a characteristic representative of the lowest forms of popular culture for promoting ‘unsophisticated’ taste and ‘lowering’ cultural standards. She has been referred to, for example, as a ‘glitzy but vacuous super-singer’.² Positive and negative characterisations derive from the two ends of a critical continuum that has been attributed to Anna Vissi over the years. However, i) the longevity of her career, which has spanned over three decades, ii) the size of her repertoire, which includes almost all different subgenres of Greek popular music, and iii) her ubiquity in the mass-mediated public space reveal one thing: Anna Vissi has been one of the most hotly debated and publicised female pop singers in Greece. This alone makes her a phenomenon worthy of analysis.

Anna Vissi was born in Cyprus on 20 December 1957.³ In 1973, one year prior to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the turbulent atmosphere on the island made Anna’s family decide to move to Athens. By that time Vissi had already started her career, collaborating with famous Greek composers, such as Míkēs Theodōrākēs and Stávros Kouyoumtzēs, and singing principally art-popular Greek music.⁴ In 1983 she married Níkos Karvélas, who has become the most influential song-writer of her entire career despite their divorce almost a decade later.⁵ He has been responsible for expanding her repertoire and directing it to more commercialised subgenres than the art-popular one, ranging from mainstream Greek pop music to musicals and from rock operas to ‘ethnic’ songs. Together, Vissi and Karvélas have created many number-one hits, and Anna has become one of the best-selling female pop-singers in Greece.

From the outset I wish to emphasise that, although Anna Vissi has attracted media attention to such an extent that very few popular artists have achieved in Greece, no scholarly project about the socio-cultural significations of the ‘Anna Vissi phenomenon’ has been undertaken so far. This article endeavours to fill the above-mentioned gap, providing an introduction to the discourse surrounding Anna Vissi, and delving into crucial aspects of contemporary Greek popular music, with which Anna Vissi’s career resonates. I shall examine how the ‘Anna Vissi phenomenon’ became possible in the first place and, subsequently, how it articulates a set of socio-cultural meanings in contemporary Greece.⁶

1 Charlotte Dillon, ‘All Music Guide, Artists’, *The Online Billboard Magazine* <http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/bio/index.jsp?pid=266351> (16 Aug. 2007).

2 Jane K. Cowan, ‘Politics, Identity and Popular Music in Contemporary Greece’, *Kampos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek*, Vol.1, No.1 (Cambridge: Modern Greek Section, Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, 1993), p. 21.

3 Dillon, *ibid* <http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/bio/index.jsp?pid=266351> (16 Aug. 2007) and Anna Vissi’s official international fan-webpage: <http://www.anna-vissi.info/english/biography/01.html> (16 Aug. 2007).

4 Art-popular music is considered by some and audiences a fairly elaborate genre of ‘good quality’ Greek popular music.

5 Pétros Dragoumános, *Katálogos Hellēnikēs Discographías 1950-2000* [Catalogue of the Greek Discography 1950-2000], 5th ed. (Athēna: Dragoumános, 2000), p. 131.

6 Any reader, who is not familiar with Anna Vissi and her music, may wish to watch a medley of some of her recent music videos on youtube.com <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Duymqg5-WFs> (16 Aug. 2007).

The Rise of ‘the Anna Vissi Phenomenon’

In the 1990s, conforming to the European Union’s socio-economic and living standards had become an urgent political objective for Greece.⁷ The country’s modernisation entailed deep changes in Greek society, such as the progressive elimination of nationalistic practices and adaptation to Western European social and political practices.⁸ Notwithstanding the controversy fuelled by such a political direction,⁹ Greece’s modernisation was eventually sustained, with television playing a quite important role in this process. Supporting the increase in foreign economic and cultural investments, newly-launched Greek private television networks imported Western entertainment programmes *en masse*, thus introducing Western commodities to the national audiences and fostering the Greek people’s familiarisation with Western popular culture.¹⁰ MAD TV, the Greek equivalent of MTV, began broadcasting in 1996,¹¹ disseminating ‘the MTV aesthetic culture’ through music videos, and giving the national music-video industry a considerable boost.

It was exactly then that Anna Vissi became one of the most dominant figures in the national music industry. Her album *Klíma Tropicó* [*Tropical Climate*] was released in 1996 and acquired platinum status within only a couple of months.¹² Vissi became a trend-setting popular artist soon afterwards. However, ‘the Anna Vissi phenomenon’, and especially its association with Madonna, could not have been only the result of the social and political circumstances described above. An important ideological framework was also in play.

The ‘East’-versus-‘West’ dichotomy has been a significant ideological issue from the foundation of the Greek state in the nineteenth century (1832) until to the present. The Ottoman occupation of the Greek world (1453-1821) led Greek leaders towards ‘the West’ in quest of support for their liberation movement, the formation of a modern state and its political and economic survival. Since then, ‘the West’ has been loudly promoted by Greek politicians and the elite as the nexus of a prosperous and pioneering culture, ‘the high Other’ that should be emulated by Greek people. On the contrary, ‘the Orient’ has been considered ‘the low Other’ that should be avoided for being inextricably intertwined with Turkey, its Ottoman past, and the centuries-long Ottoman occupation.¹³

Despite the bitter collective memory of the Ottoman occupation, Greek lower social strata did not have the chance to form close links with ‘the West’ and kept being influenced by their geographical and cultural proximity to Turkey and the Middle East. ‘The contrast between the

7 Kōstas Sēmítēs, *Politikē gia mia Dēmiourgikē Helláda* [*Politics for a Creative Greece*] (Athēna: Ekdóseis Pólis, 2005), pp. 38-51. Although Sēmítēs’s book is imbued with his political views as president of the Socialist Party (PASOK) and Prime Minister of Greece during 1996-2004, the social and political atmosphere of Greece’s heightened modernisation period emerges eloquently.

8 Ibid., pp. 525-52.

9 Ibid., pp. 33-7.

10 The first Greek private television network (Mega Channel) was on air by the end of 1989 and in the course of the 1990s private television flourished. However, lack of sufficient infrastructure initially led private television stations to import British and American programmes, thus reflecting the predominance of the Anglo-American world in the globalisation era. See, Leōnídas Stergiou, ‘Hē Historía tēs Hellēnikēs Tēleórasēs’ [‘The History of Greek Television’] in the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*, published on 04 Apr. 2006 (in Greek)

http://portal.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_kathfiles_100030_04/04/2006_149723 (16 Aug. 2007).

11 From the official MAD TV website: <http://www.mad.tv/mad4mad/?go=about&abid=16135> (16 Aug. 2007).

12 Dragoumános, *Katálogos*, p. 132.

13 Fouli T. Papageorgiou, ‘Popular Music and the Music Industry in Greece’, in Alison Ewbank and Fouli T. Papageorgiou, eds, *Whose Master’s Voice? The Development of Popular Music in Thirteen Countries* (Westport-Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp.67-8. Fouli T. Papageorgiou is Director of the Centre for Development Studies Planning and Research in Athens, Greece.

Western taste of the elite and the traditional culture of the masses, with its evident oriental elements', Fouli T. Papageorgiou points out, 'gives the essential background to understanding the structure of the main strands of [Greek] popular music'.¹⁴ Indeed, the 'East'-versus-'West' contrast has been articulated in Greek music throughout the entire twentieth century. For instance, the ban of the Turkish-influenced 'rebétika' songs in the thirties and fifties¹⁵ stirred a huge controversy and so did the 'orientalisation' of Greek popular music during the early sixties.¹⁶

However, the nineties version of the 'East'-'West' antithesis took a different direction, when the effects of globalisation started dominating the Greek culture. Despite previous deep-seated biases against 'the Orient', the country started accepting its close link to East-Mediterranean culture, yet only in the form of cultural products with a modernised 'ethnic' appearance. Lifestyle television shows started featuring distinguished members of the upper class visiting Athenian night clubs, where fusion popular musics inspired by oriental sounds formed the core of the repertoire. The opening nights of such clubs were also promoted as 'news' on prime-time television.¹⁷ In this way, signifiers of the 'modernised oriental culture' diffused the negative associations with its Ottoman past. It was only during the nineties, therefore that 'the Orient', in the wrappings of the globalised 'ethnic' Other, did eventually make its way to the spotlight of Greek popular culture.

In this light, it should not be considered a mere coincidence that, although Anna Vissi's recording career began in 1974, the first 'pop-ethnic' track, 'Pséftika' ['Fake'], ever to be found in her records was released as late as 1989.¹⁸ Anna Vissi and her music partner Níkos Karvélas were among the first artists to release 'ethnic-pop' tracks. In the course of the nineties, then, Greek popular artists were increasingly inspired by 'ethnic' sounds, thus making the release of 'ethnic-pop' songs a growing trend.

The Comparison Between Anna Vissi and Madonna

In this context, Anna Vissi's artistic and commercial success both in Greece and abroad has been on the increase from the nineties onwards. Her 'ethnic-pop' tracks have incorporated sounds from the East-Mediterranean region, but also 'programmed house and dance-style percussion', 'Cher-style synth-vocal treatments' and 'Madonna-style vocal lines', as the ethnomusicologist Kevin Dawe put it.¹⁹

This comparison between Vissi and Madonna also appears in the popular press very frequently and Anna has been asked several times to comment on it. One such instance occurred during an interview for Greek Boston Television (GBTV) in 2005. Vissi said then:

14 Ibid., p. 68.

15 Ibid., pp. 67-8.

16 The Finnish ethnomusicologist Risto Pekka Pennanen has described 'orientalisation' as 'a process of musical change [whereby] Greek musicians copied and imitated the performance practices of Middle-Eastern and Indian music and even created new musical features based on them'. See Risto P. Pennanen, *Westernisation and Modernisation in Greek Popular Music* (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1999), p. 34.

17 The promotion of show-business became soon a growing trend on Greek media. For example, during the last few years a Greek television station, Star Channel, has focused most of its prime-time news on reports relating to Greek show business.

18 The track 'Pseftika' ['Fake'] was included in Vissi's album *Fotia* [Fire] of the year 1989. Dragoumános, *Katálogos*, p. 131.

19 Kevin Dawe, 'Between East and West: Contemporary Grooves in Greek Popular Music (1990-2000)' in Goffredo Plastino, ed., *Mediterranean Mosaic: Popular Music and Global sound* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 225.

It's an honour...She's great, she shook the world! [...] we have some similarities in the way our careers have turned out to be...you know, every year I change, I try different things; I mean, I try acting and then, again, I do different types of songs. I think that's the reason why people make this comparison between us.²⁰

By accepting it as an 'honour', Vissi has adroitly converted a potential accusation of mimicry into an asset. She has openly used it to stand out in the music industry and promote herself more effectively. Indeed, 'the Greek Madonna' identity gives her the opportunity to be perceived both as the Greek, 'exotic Other', when promoted in 'the West', and as the 'modern', 'progressive' and 'trend-setting' artist that is inspired by 'the West', when promoted in Greece. 'The Greek Madonna' has been fully conversant with the globally accessible musical idioms of contemporary pop and rock, while simultaneously drawing on vocal and instrumental resources from the modern Greek-Mediterranean soundscape. Hence, she enthusiastically adopted the title, which has enabled her to export her image and music abroad, as well as to redefine and increase her appeal in Greece.

More specifically, her CD single *Call Me*, which was distributed in the United States in 2005, put emphasis on the modern-Greek otherness of Anna Vissi, featuring certain music signifiers and 'authenticating' references to her 'Greekness'. The 'oriental-sounding' whirling strings and backing vocals were by and large based on a succession of semitones and augmented seconds, thus acting as ingredients of the 'exotic' and 'ethnic' modern Greek sound.²¹ It seems, then, that Vissi, a musician 'from the margins of the global economy', has responded to the demands of authenticity that the pop musicologist Timothy Taylor has attributed to Western audiences.²² The Greek-rock remix of the same song, which in Greek is entitled 'Eísai' ['You Are'], was performed live by Anna Vissi during the MAD-Music-Video-Awards show in Athens in June 2004.²³ Electric guitars, synthesizers, drums, sequencers and samplers prevailed in a musical idiom largely dependent on the stylistic features of Western rock music. In other words, Vissi here promoted the 'Madonna' part of her 'Greek-Madonna' persona. The 'oriental' musical elements were minimised and used as mere reminders of the initial 'ethnic-pop' version of the song 'Eísai'. In this case, Vissi, a prestigious star from the centre of the national music industry, seems to take the opportunity to experiment flexibly with diverse musical styles. She is allegedly freed from the need of cultural 'authenticity', because she is arguably expected to renovate and spice up once conservative and inward-looking Greek popular-music styles.

The Authenticity Debate Revisited ...the Greek Way

The discourse surrounding Anna Vissi revolves substantially around the notion of authenticity, as it is considered a fairly significant issue by both Anna Vissi and her Greek audiences. Greek urban popular music subgenres have been regarded as 'the low Other' in post World-War-II Greek culture and have been criticised as foreign-influenced, corrupt and commercial.²⁴ Anna Vissi, having contributed much to the latest developments of these

20 Anna Vissi on GBTV in 2005 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGkRWHDdes7E> (16 Aug. 2007).

21 The official video clip of the song 'Call Me': <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=algXWhecv3Ls> (16 Aug. 2007).

22 Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 201.

23 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7HcdQIkFiM> (16 Aug. 2007).

24 Pennanen, *Westernisation*, pp. 11-2.

subgenres, has been negatively situated by her critics at the epicentre of the above-mentioned authenticity debate.²⁵

However, in the process of constructing her public persona, Vissi has dexterously given this authenticity debate a moral twist by shifting the focus of attention from the ‘authentic Greek’ sound to the ‘authentic’ personal character of a musician. In the previously-referred-to interview for GBTV in 2005 Anna said:

Everything is great as long as you are not fake; you are who you are, you go out there and you powerfully support and declare what you do and who you are. That’s all! ...as long as you have talent ...you are given something by God...you know, voice!²⁶

Anna Vissi has painstakingly insisted on publicly supporting the idea of not being a counterfeit person or artist ultimately for her own benefit. While stressing her originality as a character and entertainer, she intentionally does not focus on issues of ‘authentic Greekness’ music-wise, because her fusion music would not provide sufficient basis for such claims.

In another interview for Greek Antenna TV in 2004 Vissi said: ‘There are times when I really wonder whether I am worthy of all the love I receive from the people’. Although this is a self-critical statement, which may be taken to obscure the lustre of Vissi’s public persona, it has been a recurrent manoeuvre. Perhaps, it is a strategy, whereby she questions her stardom only to foster her image as an ‘authentic’ person and artist. In other words, it may be an effort to claim that she is not a diva, but a modest artist, striving to meet the high expectations that audiences have of her. Vissi here seems to be activating a specific rhetoric that has generally been identified by the film theorist Richard Dyer as marked by ‘lack of contr’, lack of premeditation, and privacy’.²⁷ These ‘markers of authenticity’ function effectively as such, Dyer says, ‘so long as they are not perceived as rhetoric’.²⁸ And this is exactly what Vissi does. By way of public ‘confessions’ she allegedly uncovers or brings to the surface aspects of her image, music and personality, only to attempt to control the effects of such a rhetorical manoeuvre on people; only to guide the imagination of her fans in constructing the ‘real’ Anna Vissi.

I do not wish to question Vissi’s sincerity as a character here. This is neither my task, nor my interest. All I want to do is suggest that Anna Vissi is profoundly conscious of her career strategies and discuss the consequences of such consciousness. By virtue of authenticity then, in the context of ‘the Anna Vissi phenomenon’, the fields of aesthetics and ethics not only do interlock, but it also follows that ethics enhances the impact of aesthetics. Witnessing not a boasting, self-regarding diva, but a modest artist, can make audiences think that, apart from her talent for music, Anna Vissi possesses some highly appreciated moral values as well. Thus, she is perceived by her fans, at the very least, as a ‘not unapproachable, packaged pop diva’.²⁹ Her ‘good character’ ostensibly enhances her musical talent and helps it shine through. She is constructed and conceived of as the ultimate pop star, whose various public personas are tantamount to the ‘singular’ and ‘authentic’ Anna Vissi, who is truly

25 Cowan, ‘Politics, Identity and Popular Music’, pp. 20-1.

26 Anna Vissi on GBTV in 2005 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGkRWHDs7E> (16 Aug. 2007).

27 Richard Dyer, ‘A Star Is Born and the Construction of Authenticity’, in Christine Gledhill, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 138-9.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

29 Charlotte Dillon, All Music Guide <http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/bio/index.jsp?pid=266351> (16 Aug. 2007).

‘charismatic’ from all perspectives, as the distinguished Greek lyricist Évē Drouṭsa claimed on Antenna TV in February 2006.³⁰

‘The Greek Madonna’ Remains Typically Greek

I would like to suggest, then, that this supposedly ‘authentic’ Anna Vissi remains typically Greek. This stance can be traced, for instance, in the process of critically adopting and localising the ‘Madonna personas’, where ‘the Greek Madonna’ has kept any of their ‘unfitting’ aspects out of the Greek music industry’s game. As Vissi has stated:

Although I like Madonna very much, I’ve figured out that we don’t resemble in terms of onstage sexual provocation. We belong to different cultures. I have different ways of expressing myself. I surely want to be sexy, feminine and appealing to men, but I don’t like reaching filthy limits.³¹

Therefore, Anna Vissi consciously chooses not to embrace those aspects of Madonna’s persona to which she cannot relate and which her audiences may reject. Greek society, which is still fairly homogenous, remains highly influenced by the conservatism of Orthodox Church that denounces sexual liberation and the commercialisation of sexuality. Thus, Anna Vissi distances herself from certain aspects of Madonna-the-singer, while aligning with the moral values that Madonna-the-Virgin-Mary represents as a Christian symbol. Hence, Vissi’s strategy makes the localisation of the ‘Madonna personas’ even more effective, as the Greek pop star appears to be embracing both the ‘modern’ values and the traditional Greek ones.

Thus, the common denominator of all the aspects of Anna Vissi’s public and artistic persona may actually be more Greek than it is promoted and purported to be. In further support of this claim, one should take a closer look at the official DVD featuring extracts from Vissi’s live shows at the Athenian night-club Diogenes Palace in 2004. Its careful observation leads to the conclusion that Greek elements outweigh the western ones in Vissi’s live performances. Situated centre stage, Anna Vissi performs a one-woman show like the ‘super-star’ who beams in all directions from the epicentre of an alternative ‘universe’; the Greek-entertainment ‘universe’. This entertainment culture is built upon the notion of interaction between the singer and the audience, which is a very common characteristic in all live music shows at night clubs in Greece.

In Vissi’s live shows, in particular, the sense of togetherness shared by Anna and her fans of her shows, which is arguably the most important element of her shows. She banters, plays, and speaks with as many individuals from the audience as possible. She punctuates her singing by speaking to specific people among the viewers, while at other times she invites the audience to sing along or even instead of her. In a reciprocal manner the fans send signs of adoration back to the diva. They are there, because they want to see her sweating in a singing delirium. They are there, because they want to touch her and feel her loving them back. They are there, because they want to experience the Dionysian rapture of ‘trancing’ through her music and performance. The effect of this communion conspicuously blurs the boundaries between the performer and the audience, the diva and her fans.

The ‘Greekness’ of this ‘trancing’ experience is marked music-wise by the sound of the bouzouki instrument and Vissi’s ‘quasi-oriental’ singing style, combined with the suffocating atmosphere of excessive smoking, drinking and carnation throwing. This sort of entertainment

30 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7tbIUJghVs&mode=related&search> (16 Aug. 2007).

31 Anna Vissi on MAD TV in 2001 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTELLzIbbCs&NR> 02:17”- 03:15”. The translation is mine. (16 Aug. 2007).

culture, which is often labelled by the Greeks as ‘the Athenian *pista*’ (‘the Athenian nightclub stage’), is supposed to be the quintessence of Greek entertainment. It is also a key element of the Greek show business, as it is the principal way in which Anna Vissi and all those who want to pursue a successful career as popular singers can affirm their stardom. Successful singers, divas, and stars are all constructed or burnt out in Athens by night.

Anna Vissi on the Eurovision Stage in 2006

Accordingly, the semiotics of ‘the Athenian *pista*’ prevailed in Vissi’s stage act when she flew the flag for Greece on home soil at the Athens Eurovision Song Contest in 2006. Despite the fact that her Eurovision ballad ‘Everything’ had nothing reminiscent of typically ‘Greek’ music, she incorporated in her performance the emotional intensity and histrionics of ‘the Athenian *pista*’. She even kneeled down to perform in throbbing and quivering mannerisms the last chorus of her ballad ‘Everything’.³²

Anna was considered a serious contender for the Grand Prix prior to the Contest, mainly due to the aura of her star status. However, as soon as this particular song was selected to represent Greece in the 2006 Song Contest, Eurovision-related websites and blogs displayed remarks by fans from across Europe, such as the following:

I am very happy that ‘Everything’ was selected. Now, I only worry for Anna's performance. If she is too too much dramatic on the stage that night is not good. People of Northern Europe will be put off if they get too much Mediterranean Greek tragedy sorta drama. [...] My feeling is that she must perform her great song in an ‘unassuming’ simplicity.³³

All things being equal, Anna Vissi’s onstage histrionics may not have been identified as particularly ‘Greek’ by all Eurovision fans and television viewers. Besides, many rock and pop artists in ‘the West’ are also renowned for their passionate ballad performances. Freddie Mercury performing ‘Who Wants To Live Forever’,³⁴ Axl Rose singing ‘Knocking On Heaven’s Door’³⁵ and, most recently, Christina Aguilera in ‘Hurt’³⁶ are just a few examples.

Thus, the aspect which potentially dissatisfied the European viewers, may have been the overall aesthetic discrepancy between Vissi’s over-the-top stage presentation and her rather old-fashioned ballad that could not account for such a dramatic performance. Being quite reminiscent of other songs of the same genre back in the eighties and, therefore, being rather out of date, the ballad in question could not move the European viewers as much as it stirred Anna Vissi on stage. However, knowledgeable fans, like the one quoted above, and myself, here acting as a local informant who provides his firsthand experience of Greek music culture, would attest that there was no discrepancy between the style of Vissi’s Eurovision performance and the song itself. Her onstage mannerisms drew on performance practices of the overemotional Greek-music entertainment, in the context of which Vissi’s Greek

32 Anna Vissi’s Eurovision performance is featured on the official DVD of the 2006 Eurovision Song Contest. See also: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRJJpAqzGM> (16 Aug. 2007).

33 Posted on [esctoday.com](http://www.esctoday.com) by the member called [Good Vibes \[29723\]](#) on 15 Mar. 2006 at 00:56:27, <http://www.esctoday.com/news/read/5784?id=5784&offset=702#reactions> (16 Aug. 2007).

34 Freddie Mercury, live at Wembley in 1986: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BApaVMqAVtc> (16 Aug. 2007).

35 Guns ’n’ Roses, live at the Ritz, New York, on 02 Feb. 1988: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5wRW7I4Dqc> (16 Aug. 2007).

36 Christina Aguilera, live at the MTV Music Video Awards in 2006: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxJhOZLjlyI> (16 Aug. 2007).

audiences perceived her stage act as a typical example of her live performances in Athenian night-clubs and praised her for her passionate interpretation. Contrary to this, on the night of the Eurovision Final the European viewers were rather unimpressed by Anna's idiosyncratically 'Greek' stage act and gave her only the ninth place.

However, Anna Vissi's previous attempts to expand her appeal abroad had been more successful. Her CD single *Call Me*, after being released in the United States in 2005, peaked at number one on Billboard's Hot Dance-Music/Club-Play Charts and at number two on Billboard's Dance Radio-Airplay Charts. As Fred Bronson, a distinguished music journalist who works for the Billboard magazine explained to me in a private correspondence on 28 May 2007:

[These] two dance charts [...] are certainly genre charts. So people who follow dance music might be aware of Anna Vissi, and people who pay attention to what is happening in the rest of the world might know Anna Vissi, but in the general population it would be difficult to find a lot of people who would be familiar with her.

Bronson's interpretation of Vissi's success in the United States corresponds with the Greek-American anthropologist Anastasia Panagakos's findings about the success of Greek popular artists in Canada. Panagakos claims, amongst others, that their success is principally limited to the Greek diaspora.³⁷

Conclusion

Although the 'Greek-Madonna' title has been regarded as a useful commercial hook, it ends up only highlighting the potential contradictions between Vissi's marketing and the different ways in which she is perceived by Greek and international audiences. Greeks seem to be happy with Vissi's merely flirting with 'Westernness'. This sort of attitude is enough to make her even more interesting to them, while it does not harm their perception of Anna Vissi as their 'own' Greek diva. Thus, she remains typically Greek and is perceived as such by international audiences as well, because she does not distance herself sufficiently from her Greek persona and identity. Despite the marketing, perhaps she really does wish to remain profoundly Greek. To the extent, then, that the 'Anna Vissi phenomenon' is a central case study of Greek popular music, which has absorbed and articulated recent socio-cultural and ideological changes, it seems very likely that the Greek audiences of Anna Vissi respond to modernisation rather slowly and reluctantly.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the musicologist, Katerina Levidou (University of Oxford, Christ Church), for her well-aimed and helpful comments on this article and Ann Liebeck (University of Oxford, Somerville College) for proof-reading it.

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