European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2026)
1898-Research 2. Research

The Cypriot Fiddler

opOVBLKE

Entry details

General information

Main country of application: Cyprus

Author(s) of the research project

> Dr Nicoletta Demetriou

Type: Academic research

Brief description of the project

> The Cypriot Fiddler uses ethnomusicology, oral and cultural history, and visual anthropology, in order to collect and present the life stories of some of the last surviving traditional musicians of Cyprus, both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. It is made up of a documentary, a book, and a website.

Start date of the project: 2012-10-01

Completion date of the project: 2022-11-30

Website(s) of the project/nominee: https://thecypriotfiddler.com/

Facebook page of the project, if any: https://www.facebook.com/TheCypriotFiddler/

Instagram page of the project, if any: https://www.instagram.com/the_cypriot_fiddler

Does the site or heritage in question have national/regional/local cultural heritage designation or protection status in its country?: No

Is the research project focused on a tangible or intangible heritage included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, either as an individual site or as part of a larger World Heritage site? If so, please specify which one.

No

Is the research focused on a designated European Heritage Label site? If so, please specify which one.

No

Contact details

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Entrant's position	Principal investigator/project lead
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Name of the owner	Dr Nicoletta Demetriou
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Concise summary

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> The Cypriot Fiddler uses ethnomusicology, oral and cultural history, and visual anthropology, in order to collect and present the life stories of some of the last surviving traditional musicians of Cyprus, both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. It is made up of a documentary, a book, and a website.
>
> The Cypriot Fiddler began its life as a research project based at the Oxford Centre for Life Writing, Wolfson College, between 2012 and 2019, led by Dr Nicoletta Demetriou, an ethnomusicologist and life writing scholar. Its aims were, from the start, to present the oral history of a dying professional class 'from the bottom up'; i.e., to let the musicians talk about themselves, rather than simply trying to interpret what they do. Since this is a project that focuses on traditional music-making in the first half of the twentieth century, it is also, inevitably, the story of Cyprus and Cypriot society before the intercommunal clashes, coup, invasion, displacement and de facto partition that emerged on the island in the 1960s and 1970s.
>
> Since its inception, The Cypriot Fiddler has had a great impact on both sides of the Cypriot divide. Testament to this is the fact that the project has featured extensively in both the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot press, and was supported and promoted by private individuals from both communities.
>
> In a European context, The Cypriot Fiddler serves as an example of an ethnographic project that actively puts the people it studies centre stage, by letting them tell their own story, in their own words – literally, since the people involved in this study use their own version of the Cypriot dialect of Greek to share their story. In doing so, the project also preserves a dying way of oral storytelling, localised and personal idiolects (some of which are also endangered), as well as a particular vocabulary of talking about music and music-making. Its impact was recognised by the British Academy in 2016, when it was chosen as a case study and featured on the Academy's blog.
>
> Funding for this project (from a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Research Grant [2013] , and from the Deputy Ministry of Culture in Cyprus [2020]) was very limited; the total was no more than €10.600. The rest came from an online crowdsourcing campaign on Kickstarter (2015), as well as from people's volunteer work.

Objectives, methodology and context

Aims and objectives of the research project.

> - To record the oral history of Cypriot fiddlers, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, people who worked as musicians in traditional weddings, religious festivals and other celebrations in the first half of the twentieth century.
> - To let the musicians tell their own story in their own words, therefore also recording a dying way of oral storytelling, as well as their individual music vocabulary and idiolects.
> - To present the results of the research in a book, a documentary, and a website. The documentary and website are open access; all three use non-specialised language, and are therefore accessible to both the specialist and the lay reader/viewer.

Surrounding context in which the project was undertaken, both locally and nationally, and in terms of the state of the field at the time of conducting the research.

The idea for *The Cypriot Fiddler* was born around 2005–2006. Back then, Nicoletta Demetriou, the ethnomusicologist/life writer behind the project, had gone to Cyprus from London for a year of fieldwork as part of her PhD in ethnomusicology.

Every time Nicoletta met a musician – particularly an elderly musician – for an interview, she would also ask them to tell her a few words about the life they had led as instrumentalists or singers in mid-twentieth-century Cyprus. Their stories were fascinating, as they revealed not only the stories of individual musicians, but also the story of a distinct professional class that had, by then, all but ceased to exist – along with the landscape and the people that existed around it.

From the very start, the whole project was imbued with a sense of urgency: the musicians involved were of advanced age and were becoming fewer and fewer with every passing month.

No other similar project – one that combines ethnomusicology, oral history, and visual anthropology – has existed in Cyprus before or since *The Cypriot Fiddler*. And no other project has put traditional folk musicians centre stage, allowing them to tell their own story in their own words.

Approach and methodology used for the project as well as reproducibility of the approach.

The project combines methodology from ethnomusicology, oral history, and visual anthropology. It also takes life writing and oral storytelling into account, in terms of how the oral testimonies are presented in the printed book.

Data was collected through sustained periods of fieldwork and ethnographic interviews, which lasted more than fifteen years. Participant observation was also used, since Nicoletta Demetriou had been actively involved in traditional folk singing in Cyprus for the duration of this research.

The approach can be reproduced by scholars working in similar fields. Ethnographic material relating to the project is freely available online, through The Cypriot Fiddler website (see especially the Q&A section). *The Cypriot Fiddler* book has a section dedicated to methodology, which explains the approach it took in great detail, thus making it easily reproducible by other scholars and/or students in related fields.

Stages of implementation of the project

- 2005-6: first sustained period of fieldwork (1 year)
- 2006-13: shorter periods of fieldwork (ca. 3 months a year)
- 2013-15: second sustained period of fieldwork (2 years)
- 2015: online crowdsourcing campaign
- 2015: presentation of early documentary draft
- 2015-19: shorter periods of fieldwork (ca. 3 months a year); data analysis; early drafts of book chapters
- 2019-21: writing, editing, getting book ready for publication; finalising documentary; getting website ready
- 2022: book publication, website launch

Problems encountered and justification for the decisions taken to overcome these problems, both before and during the project.

The main problem encountered during this research was time, vis-à-vis the musicians' advanced age. Many of the musicians first interviewed in 2005-6 had become visibly frailer by 2013-15. By the last few years of the research, many were gone forever.

This problem was paired with a chronic lack of funding. Funds for the project were extremely limited, so Nicoletta Demetriou very often had to stop her research and get back to teaching and admin in order to collect more funds (her research position at the University of Oxford was non-stipendiary). The problem was partly overcome through people's funding: a crowdsourcing campaign in 2015, for example, allowed the project to continue for a few more months. Having to frequently postpone the research in order to find the necessary funds, along with the musicians' advanced age and frailty, meant that time often won; several musicians died before the project could be completed.

Cyprus's political situation (its de facto partition) meant that it sometimes took time to gain the trust of people from the other community and convince them to tell their story on record. This, in turn, required patience and even more time, which also worked against the ticking clock.

European significance

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

This project:

1. Records the oral history of a professional class that has long ceased to exist; similar professional classes exist in other European countries, particularly in Mediterranean European islands.
2. Records a dying way of oral storytelling, which is part of a greater tradition of oral storytelling in Europe and beyond.
3. Records local dialects and idiolects, as well as a specialised vocabulary relating to music and music-making; this vocabulary is related to other similar vocabularies found elsewhere in Europe, in places where *oral* (rather than written) transmission of music and music-making was the norm.
4. Records a period of history where people in Cyprus (Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots) lived together, before war pulled them apart, thus recording a part of the greater European, and postcolonial, history.

Results and impact

Summary of the main results achieved and knowledge that has been gained. List the ways that the project/initiative contributes to the preservation and/or enhancement of the historical, cultural, environmental, educational and/or social values of the heritage in question. Mention the project's impact on conservation policy and practice, if any.

The Cypriot Fiddler managed:

- to record the oral history of a dying professional class;
- to record the vocabulary used by this professional class, their idioms, dialects and idiolects, and their particular ways of telling a story;
- to record the story of a group of people that peacefully co-existed in Cyprus before the country was ravaged by war and displacement;
- to bring a diminishing group of musicians together on page, on camera, on a website, and at several live music events.

In doing so, the project managed the preserve and present in perpetuity the story of this professional class, as well as the social and cultural history of Cyprus in the first half of the twentieth century.

The project serves as an example of an ethnographic study that adopts a bottom-up approach, as well as preserving a part of European, and Mediterranean, island music-making.

The Cypriot Fiddler also actively contributes to educating new ethnographers, ethnomusicologists, visual anthropologists, folklorists, etc., by making its ethnographic material, and the knowledge gained through research, freely available online.

The fact that *The Cypriot Fiddler* book is written in a non-specialised language further ensures that the knowledge gained is shared with a wider audience, including non-specialists.

Aspects of the project that can be considered innovative within its area or field.

The Cypriot Fiddler book can be read by specialists and non-specialists alike. It has two narrative strands that can be read together or separately. The first one, written in standard Greek, includes the author's introduction and essays about aspects of the fiddlers' lives and education. The other strand comprises the fiddlers' life stories, told in Cypriot Greek.

Both the book and the documentary are innovative in that:

1. They allow the musicians to tell their own story in their own words, rather than simply interpreting that story. In the book, explanations and possible interpretations and/or context are given in separate chapters, so as not to disrupt the musicians' narrative. The documentary is similarly not interrupted by interpretive/ explanatory comments, save for a short introduction that appears in the form of rolling text.
2. They seamlessly adopt two linguistic idioms, one of which (Cypriot Greek) rarely, if ever, appears in scholarly books.

Steps taken to reach people who have not previously interacted with the site/project. This might include youth, local communities, non-traditional audiences, people with disabilities, etc.

The project is open-access, therefore open to all communities and all audiences. It also maintains two social media accounts (one on Facebook, and one on Instagram).

A series of events for the general public were organised between 2015 and 2017 in Nicosia's buffer zone. These events, which merged lectures and live music, brought together elderly musicians and members of the community from both sides of the Cypriot divide, in order to share food, music, and knowledge about music (excerpts can be seen here, at ca. 5 min.)

Presentations of *The Cypriot Fiddler* in local music festivals or in small village communities across Cyprus (see Events for examples) have so far brought youth, elderly people, and lay audiences together. In doing so, knowledge gained in an academic setting was given back to the community, in ways that were accessible and in a language that was fully understandable by anyone present.

Environmental, social, and economic sustainability of the project (e.g. contribution to climate action and environmental protection; measures to ensure long-term financial sustainability or future viability; benefits for people and communities, where relevant).

N/A

Dissemination of the project's results and knowledge gained and any outreach or educational activities.

The project has been widely publicised in events in Cyprus, the UK, the US, Malta, Italy, and Greece, in a series of lectures and workshops from 2015 to today.

Its results and knowledge have been widely reported in the press (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, podcasts) in Greek, Turkish, and English, from 2015 to today.

Transferability of the initiative to other contexts and its scalability potential.

The methodology adopted by *The Cypriot Fiddler* could be adopted by other ethnographic projects looking to record oral testimonies of groups of people that share a particular experience – be it professional or other. In particular, the project's bottom-up approach, and the invitation for people to tell their own story in their own words, could stand as a model of how anthropological/ethnographic research could function as a *facilitator* between academia and the wider community: people can share their own story in a way, and in a language, that they themselves both understand and can relate with. Consequently, this empowers interviewees and audiences alike.

The book stands as a testament to how academic knowledge can be presented in easy, accessible language, while the whole project, done with extremely limited resources, is testament to how, with the involvement of the wider community, a research project can be accomplished even with minimal resources.

Costs of the project/initiative

Costs of the project (in euro), financial and management arrangements, funding partners and/or the type of funding.

Funding for the project came from the following sources:

- British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Reserach Grant: €6600 (£5500)
- Crowdsourcing campaign: €1800 (£1500)
- Deputy Ministry of Culture, Republic of Cyprus: €2200

Total: €10.600

There were no other financial or management arrangements in place; the project was conducted voluntarily.

Funding provided by the European Union or the EEA/Norway Grants (including programme, year and amount of the Grant), if any.

N/A

Short CV of research author(s)

Short CVs of the author(s)

Nicoletta Demetriou studied music in Thessaloniki (BA in Music Studies, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2002), Vienna (Postgraduate Seminars in Ethnomusicology, 2003), and London (PhD in Ethnomusicology, SOAS, University of London, 2008). She also studied Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, specialising in life writing (MA in Life Writing, 2012).

She worked as a teaching fellow in the Department of Music at SOAS (2008-11), as the Alistair Horne Visiting Fellow at St Antony's College Oxford (2011-12), and as a research fellow in ethnomusicology and life writing at Wolfson College Oxford (2012-19). She taught Narrative Non-Fiction on the MSt in Creative Writing at the University of Oxford (2012-19), and in 2018 was the programme's acting director. In 2017 she was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the Interdisciplinary Center for Hellenic Studies at Stockton University NJ, and in 2019 a Visiting Fellow in Hellenic Studies at the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies at Princeton University. Between 2019 and 2022 she worked at the University of Cyprus as a Principal Investigator on DUEL, a Widening Fellowhip/Horizon 2020 programme sponsored by the European Commission. Since 2022 she has been directing Cyprus Music Archive (CMA), a non-profit organisation founded by her.

She is co-editor of *Music in Cyprus* (Routledge, 2015), and author of *The Cypriot Fiddler: The Oral History of a Professional Class in the Twentieth Century* (in Greek; Psifides, Thessaloniki, 2022). Together with Larnaka Archives Phivos Stavrides, and with funding from the Deputy Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Cyprus, she has published a three-volume corpus on the improvised oral duels (*tsiattista*) performed at the festival of Kataklysmos in Larnaka between 1980 and 2019. A fourth volume that brings together the historical and theoretical part of the research will be published in 2025, also by Larnaka Archives Phivos Stavrides, and with funding from Cyprus's Deputy Ministry of Culture. She is also the producer of two ethnographic documentaries: *The Cypriot Fiddler* (2022), and *Poetic Duelling: New Tsiattista Poets in Cyprus* (2025). She is currently filming a third documentary, funded by the Press and Information Office of the Republic of Cyprus.

She has been a singer of Cypriot folksong since childhood, and has been performing with Michalis Terlikkas and his group Mousa for several years. She has also performed in the UK and the US, and has recorded Cypriot songs for the BBC (2010) and SOAS (2007). In 2021-22 she had the role of 'female bard' in Magdalena Zira's play *Dido/Elissa*, singing verses she composed herself on traditional poetic forms, and set to pre-existing melodies. She retook the same role in late 2024, for a new staging of the play in the theatre.

Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

It would bring much needed visibility to:

- The life and work of the musicians featured in *The Cypriot Fiddler*, i.e. the life and work of a professional class that no longer exists.
- The work of Cyprus Music Archive, which aims to collect, digitise and preserve audiovisual archives pertaining to Cypriot traditional music and make them freely available online.
- The work of similar groups working voluntarily to record the oral history of their communities.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

> For supporting the work of Cyprus Music Archive, i.e. the collection, digitisation, and promotion of audiovisual archives pertaining to Cypriot traditional music through an online, open-access digital repository.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

> Cyprus Music Archive, which has been tasked with preserving the material collected by *The Cypriot Fiddler*, as well as many other audiovisual archives pertaining to Cypriot traditional music.

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Word of mouth
Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	No
If it is a resubmission, write the registration number and title of the previous submission here:	Entry name: The Cypriot Fiddler Category: 2. Research Entry ID: 935 Identifier: XEAylVkW
On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form?	✓ 9
By submitting your data, photographs and other material to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards you agree to the processing and sharing of your data in accordance with Europa Nostra's Privacy Policy. Please check the box to indicate you agree with the Privacy Policy.	✓

Log in to european-heritage.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



1_Tzirtzipis & Pi... 684 KiB



2_Neophytos K.... 5.6 MiB



3_Nikos Charala... 6.5 MiB



4_Andreas Mod... 4.6 MiB



5_Elias G. Violar... 7.3 MiB



6_Savvas Lambr... 5.9 MiB



7_Yiannis Zavro... 641 KiB



8_Vyronis Geor... 631 KiB



9_Polonos.JPG 604 KiB



10_Kotsinoskou... 590 KiB



11_Nicolas A. Vi... 5.4 MiB



12_Andreas S. V... 6.8 MiB



13_Neophytos ... 6.8 MiB



14_Michalakis E... 7.4 MiB



15_Stelios Papa... 690 KiB



16_Polonos & K... 626 KiB



17_Tziallis & Va... 6.4 MiB



18_Polydoros V... 5.5 MiB



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20_Ismail & Kad... 8.2 MiB



21_Pitrakkis.JPG 7.3 MiB



22_Andreas Pitt... 6.3 MiB



23_Polonos, Ka... 614 KiB



24_Terlikkas, Po... 630 KiB



25_N. Charalam... 7.9 MiB



26_Vasilis & Tha... 4.9 MiB



27_Kapsis & Pol... 613 KiB



28_Andreas S. V... 5.3 MiB



29_Aziz & Kema... 1.2 MiB



30_Polonos & K... 630 KiB

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