

A Universal Troup *Athens Dramatic Company*: Tours and Performance (1887-1935)

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Abstract—The “Athens Dramatic Company” was one of the longest-running and most widely traveled troupes in the history of modern Greek theatre. The theatre company had been established since 1887 and the following: Euthychios Vonaseras, Eleni Kotopoulis, etc., like the founder of the troupe Theodoros Pofantis, referred to the distribution of the works presented in Patras: *The Price of a Crime, The Niece of her Uncle, Agathopoulos, Amphitryon, The Two Sergeants, Lawyer and Actors, The Crusaders, The Daughter of Pantopolos, He Will Kill Himself, Macbeth, The Two Orphans, The Auction, Pistis Hope and Mercy, Love Attempt, The Crusaders, The lady is in Loutra, Markos Votsaris*. In 1921 after peregrinations in Cyprus, Constantinople, Romania, Crete, Thessaloniki, Volos, Smyrna, the “Athens Dramatic Company” toured in Africa, where the Greek communities flourished. In 1923, the collaborations of troupe’s members and the repertoire varied several times, such as in Johannesburg, from where they traveled via Cape Town to Australia, where they presented the works: *Dikaioma o Eros, Enochos, Psychokori, Kolokotronis. Atimoi, Voskopoula, Golfo*, etc., while they impressed with the tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which was watched by Australians. Alongside the “Athens Dramatic Company” was also touring with “Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe” and most of the members of the two troupes went to America, uniting their formation. In 1927 the old leader of “Athens Dramatic Company” (Theodoros Pofantis) decided to re-establish his troupe, but after unpleasant adventures, he passed away. In the year 1934, the Greek Dramatic Troupe of Athens revived with works including: *The Man of the Day, A Dying Heart, A Dream Was and Gone, An Inspection, The Two Sergeants, The Mother, the Father-in-Law and the Non-existent Son-in-law*, before finally expiring in 1935, after nearly 40 years of historical passage. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how, through adverse global conditions, two early professional theater troupes managed to not only survive wandering around the world, but also evolve and shape their theatrical art by adapting to the demands of their audience. At the same time, through the presentation of their repertoire and their movements, the interest of Greek expatriates in Africa, Australia and America for the Greek theater is also indicated.

Keywords—Athens, dramatic plays, Theatre company, universal tour, troupe.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE “Athens Dramatic Company” was one of the longest-running and most widely traveled troupes, which contributed to the global spread of Greek theatre. He toured the provincial cities of Greece, Constantinople, the Black Sea, Egypt and Africa, to reach Australia and end up in America. The aim of this study is to analyze the extensive tours and performances of the “Athens Dramatic Company” and investigate how they played a role in spreading modern Greek

theater to Greek communities worldwide.

The events of the Greco-Turkish war of 1897 erased an important historical moment for Hellenism, as it was ideologically, politically and social affected by the conditions that prevailed. Throughout the 19th century, the tours of the troupes in the centers of Hellenism in the communities abroad were not only a common practice, but also the only solution for the economic survival of Greek troupes and artists. So, stage professionals were forced to travel out of the country - a period when travel was difficult - in order to live [1]. This crisis of the Greek theater is marked not only in the forced one’s tours of stage professionals, but also the only solution for the economic survival of Greek troupes and artists. The end of the 19th century means for the Greek theater and the end of an era. It is about a primarily ideological crisis, which would put it in a new phase of reorientation national identity of young Greeks, in relation to international situations and events. however, the Greek communities got to know the culture and repertoire of the Athenian troupes in this way, while the touring troupes respectively shaped the themes of their plays according to the public's preferences. The touring Greek troupes in Greece toured mainly in the neighboring centers of the great Hellenism such as the Tavoularis - Kotopoulos troupe, Evangelia Paraskevopoulos, Aikaterini Veroni, Tsouka - Isaiah, Christoforides - Kokkou, Stefanos - Spyropoulos - Helmi, Veroni - Gennadis, Philippou Strike. The troupes from Athens usually presented patriotic works, such as *Athanasios Diakos, Markos Botsaris, Souliotes, Leonidas in Thermopylae*, as well as other works that had become successes in Athens [2].

Despite the important and accomplished actors who surrounded the other Greek troupes, the “Athens Dramatic Company” was the only theater troupe in Greek history, which was active from 1887 to 1935, on such a wide scale. The troupe's extensive tours and performances reached various Greek communities around the world and it became widely known to the local public, despite the challenges posed by global international conditions. Ultimately, this troupe succeeded in spreading the Greek theater in various regions.

II. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected from primary sources namely press articles and reviews from the time period about the “Athens Dramatic Company”. Descriptions of the troupe's tours and performances consist largely of primary sources, which will be analyzed to extract relevant information about the

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tours, performances, repertoire and audience reactions. The analysis will include identifying patterns, trends and significant events that shaped the trajectory of the “Athens Dramatic Company”, according to each country's audience preferences and aesthetic perceptions. The comparative study of the regular presentation of plays by other troupes, as well as the individual members of the troupe, will lead to clear and safe conclusions regarding the mechanisms of artistic creation and the functioning of the theater during the period 1887-1935.

III. REPERTOIRE OF THE TROUPE AND CENTERS OF HELLENISM

In the first years of its tours, the troupe followed the routes of the provincial cities of Greece, the cities of the great Greece, starting from Constantinople, Smyrna, continuing to Philippopolis, Odessa and the Danubian dominions. The great competition and the multitude of troupes did not allow them to present for many consecutive days a play of theirs in the same theater, but the performances lasted at most two or three consecutive evenings and the audience demanded to have a changing repertoire [3]. The love for patriotic plays turned into preferences for plays by foreign troupes that came to Greece from French and Italian mainly light theater troupes. The social stratification of the Athenian public in the late 19th century was such that they tended to adopt with great precision any new work that had to do with European culture. The reception of the French boulevard, the admission of Ibsen and Strindberg, in general the influence of naturalism and the realist movement, as well as the intersection of these movements, were the dominant components of the formation of the theater movement in the Greek area and the works presented in the scenes were where the Greek element flourished. At a time when the artistic fashions of the individual “-isms” had begun to take on the character of a European pandemic, Greek society simultaneously welcomed achievements that had been formed mainly in different historical times of the European theater [4]. Since the pre-revolutionary period, many works of world drama had been translated into Greek, with the aspiration to educate and awaken the conscience of the Greeks. This tactic continued later, when almost all the works that were successful on international stages were presented in translation to the Greek audience, such as in 1894 Ibsen's *Vampires* by the Eftychios Vonaseras troupe, translated by Michael Giannoukakis. On the other hand, the shift towards works of ethnographic content on the part of the Greeks did not arise as a need for social observation of domestic morals but also as a need to confirm and preserve our collective national identity, in the face of European morals. Under these conditions, plays by Ibsen, Shakespeare, opera, operetta, ancient tragedy, dramatic romance by Peresiadis and Koromilas, patriotic plays by Spyros Melas, Niccodemi's play, but also by other unknown authors that had become hits were presented successively on the same stages. The urban audience mainly preferred works of European drama, while in the small towns, domestic works of ethnographic Greek authors were presented [5].

A. Foundation and First Tours

The founder of the “Athens Dramatic Company”, Theodoros Pofantis, can be found as early as 1887, in performances during the summer season at the “Paradisos” theater in Patras, where he collaborates with actors of the theater's old guard, such as Eutybios Vonaseras, Georgios Chrysafis, Pipina Vonasera, Eleni Kotopouli, Dimitrios Kotopoulis, Maria Kotopouli. Later, Th. Pofantis collaborates with D. Kazouris and they set up their own troupe, in one sense it is identified with the “Athens Dramatic Company”.

In 1892-1893, D. Kazouris and T. Pofantis, as leading members of their troupe, were on tour in Cyprus. The performances began on October 29, 1892. Members of the troupe were also Ourania Pofanti, Maria Gad, Anastasia Halikiopoulou, Maria Moirou, Margaro Berdeli, Louis Gad, Andreas Moirou, George Nikolopoulos, Michael Tsoukatos, Nikolaos Anastasiadis, Nikolaos Halkiopoulos, Elpis Halkiopou, Ioannis Rallis, Dimitrios Laskaris, Ariadni Nikolopoulou. The troupe toured Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca. In Larnaca, the troupe presented various theatrical works such as *The Fortune of Maroula*, while in Limassol the following works were performed: *Linard the Barbarian*, *The Millers in Love*, *The Archontohoriatis*, *The Carriageman of the Alps*, *The Fortune of Maroula*, *Honor among the Criminals*, *Old Man Marten*, *The Exit of Messolonghi*, *the Patriarch Gregory the V*, *Servant Wanted*, *the Carabides*, *the Dramatist*, *the noble Seven*, *the Lyra of Gero – Nikolas*, *Thanasis and Argyros*, *the Zealous*, *the Bekris*, *the incarnate statue*, *the Paedokletria*, *Maria – Joanna*, *Galatea*, *Fasting and without pendera*, *the Lady with the Camellias*. In Nicosia in 1893, the troupe presented the works: *Millers in Love*, *the Old Man's Lyre - Nikolas*, *the incarnate statue*, *the correspondence of John*, *the babra Linardos*, *Galatea*, *Margaro the Menidatissa*, *the charioteer of the Alps*, *the Archontochoriatis*, *the lady with the camellias*, *the fate of Maroula*, *the Dramatist*, *the Bee* [6].

In 1892-1894, the troupe of Theodoros Pofantis and Dimitrios Kazouris wandered in Crete, Thessaloniki, Volos, Konstantinoupolis and Smyrna. In the fall of 1894, the Greek Dramatic Troupe of Athens was in Constantinoupolis for a few performances at the “Mnimatakion Theater”. The plays were uploaded: *The Servants* (Oct 29), *The Consequences of the First Marriage*, *Barba Linardos* (Oct 30) and *Gero – Xouris* (Nov 3). The troupe then toured the Pontus region. In the spring and summer of 1895, as a Pofanti-Kazouri troupe, it gave performances in theaters in Alexandria and in the autumn of the same year in Malta and Tunis [7]. In October 1895, the “Greek Drama Troupe of Athens” gave 12 performances in Istanbul, en route to Romania. Evangelia Paraskevopoulou also participated in the troupe. The plays were presented: *The lady with the camellias*, *Love attempt*, *Dalida*, *Yantes - yantes*, *Galatea*, *Andriani Lrcouvrrer*, *the famous Golfo*, *Fausta*, *Odette*, *Bride and mare*, *Medea*, *Tosca*, *Phaedra*, *Marcella*, *Camel driver*, *Othello*, *Fantasiokopos*. At the beginning of March 1896, Dimitrios Kazouris and Theodoros Pofantis, presented in Constantinople at the “Mnimatakion theater”, the plays: *The Servants* (Mar 5), *Voskopoula's lover* (Mar 7), *Lemonakis' wedding*, a three-act comedy of Theodoros Pofantis (Mar 9),

Geros - Xouris, Kotselopoulos (Mar10) and the *Fate of Maroula* (Mar 14) [8]. Then the troupe left for Philippouli, where it gave performances in April and May. The collaboration of Th. Pofantis with the Kazouris couple ends after the performances in Bulgaria [9]. In 1897, the Greek Drama Troupe of Athens was in Cyprus and performed around 30 shows in Larnaca, Nicosia and Limassol. In addition to Theodoros Pofantis, it consists of: Ourania Pofantis, Vasilea Stefanou, Evdokia Stamatopoulou, C. Klimaniotis, Maria Konstantinidis, Emilia Marikou, Athanasios Marikos, Dimitrios Angelakis, Panagiotis Stamatopoulos, Michael Tsoukatos, Pantelis Klimaniotis, A. Vola, Michael Konstantinidis, A. Konstantinidis, Dionysios Kandiliotis, Chr. Kandiliotis, Stefanos Konstantinidis. The troupe presents moral works in Cyprus, which respond to the educational purpose of the theater, such as the performance of Ibsen's *Vampires* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The difference of this troupe compared to the previous ones was in matters of repertoire. The works presented in Cyprus by the troupe during this period were *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Grace of the King*, *Galatea*, *The Lover of the Shepherdess*, *Tosca*, *Lucretia Borgia*, *The Lady with the Camellias*, *The Executioner of the Council of Ten*, *The Mill of strife*, *Hamlet*, *Dionysia*, *Toad*, *Mosquito*, *In the willow below*, *Bride and mare*, *Glory and tears*, *Muscovy of Paris*, *Gabriela the painter*, *Dying genius*, *Athenais*, *Esme the Turkopoula*, *Golfo*, *Frou - frou*, *Hernanis*.

In the next year, 1989, the performances continued in Cyprus, but the shape of the troupe changed. Its composition includes T. Pofantis, Dimitrios Angelakis, Athanasios Marikos, A. Marikou, Artemisia Zambou, George Nikolopoulos and George Petridis. The works presented are *Rocambole*, *Esme*, *Glory and Tears*, *Muscovite of Paris*, *Merope*, *Gabriela the Painter*, *Slave*, *Lady with the Camellias*, *Dalida*, *Medea*, *Frou-Frou*, *Toad*, *Cupid and Parsis*, *Tosca*, *Paradise*, *the Great Galeotos*, *the Wife of Louloudakis* [10]. From the year 1921, the "Athenian Company" toured Egypt, Sudan and Africa, in the cities where the Greek communities of the Greeks flourished. In total, the troupe had toured Egypt twice. The collaborations and the members of the troupe are likely to be diversified, as a sufficient number of actors have taken refuge in the Greek villages, during the difficult years of Hellenism [11].

B. The Great Voyage to America

In January 1923, the "Athens Dramatic Company" had arrived in South Africa and gave performances in the Greek Communities of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. The "Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe", alongside the "Athens Drama Troupe", started a world tour at the beginning of 1922. The starting point was Egypt, with intermediate stops in Sudan, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), East and South Africa, Australia and the final destination was America. Apparently the two troupes ("Athenian" and "Vrysoula's") traveled almost together. But they made independent productions and had a different repertoire.

The "Athenian Company" presented plays for the Greek parokies. The schedule of performances in Johannesburg was as follows: *Golfo*, a comedy, with Anthi Miliadou (Jan 20), *My*

Baby Crazy, comedy, with T. Nezer (Jan 22), *Kinima Cabaret*, review by P. Dimitrakopoulos (Jan 23), *Eneken Neurokavalikeuma*, comedy, (Jan 24), *The Teacher*, drama by Niccodemi, with Anthi Miliadou and X. Tsertinin (Jan 25). In the minutes of the Hellenic Community of Pretoria there is an entry that "on January 31, Wednesday, the traveling theater troupe gave, in Pretoria, a play called *Golfo* [12]. Almost all the Greeks in the area attended the play". Also, on 18 February 1923, the troupe gave a successful charity evening at "Selborne Hall", for the establishment of the Johannesburg Community Greek School. Theodoros Pofantis, Themistocles Nezer, Ioannis Ioannidis, Anna Nezer, Doula Priamou, Maria Pofanti, Lisa Kouroukli, Gerasimos Kourouklis and Anastasios Parlas were mentioned in a local newspaper of the community as members of the "Athens Dramatic Company" [13]. However, Anthi Miliadou and X. Tsertinis were also mentioned in the distribution of the performances. Apparently, they had an extraordinary presence in the troupe as these actors were active in performances of the African diaspora. In the following year 1924, the two actors (Miliadou – Tsertinis) were again on tour in Cairo and Alexandria, where they also collaborated. However, the regular members of the "Athens Dramatic Company" would travel to the continent of Oceania a little later. They landed in Sydney Harbor in July 1923.

The members of the troupe arrived in the Antipodes in July 1923 via Cape Town, leaving a strong mark of their presence. They landed in Sydney Harbor. The Greek community of Australia welcomed the "troupe from Athens" with the well-known artists who filled the atmosphere of the Athenian theaters, while earlier they had transmitted "the sparkling Attic spirit, throughout Africa". The impressions of the presence of the "Athens Dramatic Company", or "Athenian Company" simply the "Troupe of Athens", on their annual tour of Australia, were excellent [14]. The troupe retained the previous format in South Africa, but without Doula Priamou who was married in Johannesburg. Danae Pofanti (six-year-old daughter of the Pofanti couple) was also traveling with them. The veteran actors to perform as equals in Australia became known as the Pofanti - Nezer - Kourouklis troupe. They played in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane. They presented the works: *Eros Dexi*, *Enochos*, *Psychokoris*, *Kolokotronis*, *Atimi*, *Voskopoula*, *Golfo*, *Cinema Cambare*, as well as *Inspection Numbers*. The expatriate community was excited by the presence of the actors of the Greek scene, describing them as "loving the profession of the artist". The actors of the troupe were welcomed as people with "national activity and titles of Greeks and Greek national ambassadors" [15]. The troupe also wowed Australians with the ancient tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus*. From the actors and "lovers of aesthetics, the glory and majesty of ancient Greece was presented with visionary penetration, in the most important work of Greek drama". The work was presented with a live orchestra, to music by Mendelssohn. According to the distribution of the show, Greek expatriates also participated; G. Paizis, Panagiotis Soukas and Roza Zalokosta (child) in minor roles. In Sydney *Oedipus* was performed at the "Kings Hall" and "Conservatorium", (17 Jul and 6 Aug 1923). In Melbourne at "Temperature Hall", Russel Str. (Sept 24). In Brisbane the

same play was performed at the “Elite Theatre”, George str., (Dec 13 and 24). Specifically in Brisbane, the troupe stayed for a month giving two shows a week [16]. In Melbourne, after the success of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, two more benefit performances were given, for the Ithacan Association and the Hellenic Community, at the theater stage of the Ithacan Association [17]. In addition, on June 8, a farewell theatrical evening was given for the Nezer couple “who are leaving for Greece”, in the Orpheus Hall. The oxyphonist K. Ioannidis took part after his wife Ms. Ioannidis, who appeared for the first time on the Melbourne’s stage [18]. When “Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe” arrived in the Antipodes, it consisted of Vrysoula Pantopoulou, Leonidas Dervis, Ioannis Michaelidis, Maki Karneris, the musician Demosthenes Zatta, and the tour organizer - conducting the troupe, Christoforos Tabularidis or Taboularis, husband of Vrysoula Pantopoulou (his real last name was Kostopoulos). The troupe form pre-existed in Athens, however Leonidas Dervis and Ioannis Michailidis, who were members of local amateur forms, joined in Egypt. Vrysoula Pantopoulou as the daughter of actor Evangelos Pantopoulos was widely known.

C. *Journey's End and the American Dream*

On February 28, 1924, the members of the “Athenian Company” together with the “Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe” leave Sydney harbor on the ship “RMS Tahiti”, bound for San Francisco to pursue their dream in America [19]. Upon their arrival in the country, they decided to join their forces. They collaborated with “Vrysoula Pantopoulou troupe” directed by Tambularidis. They were joined by Theodoros Pofantis, who later joined the troupe of the “Athenian Operetta”. The actors, in order to travel to America, had declared as a friendly person related to their trip, Mr. Theodoridis of the “National Theater” of Athens, who resided in Chicago. In October 1924 the Pantopoulou operetta troupe, after successful performances in Michigan and California, finally settled in Chicago. In order to survive, the actors of the Athenian troupe were absorbed into the “Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe”: T. Pofantis, I. Ioannidis, A. Parlas, as well as the Kourouklis couple, participated in the expanded operatic format. The conductor of the orchestra was Dimosthenis Zattas and the protagonist was his wife, Maki Karneris [20]. The Nezer couple was absent from the actors of the Athenian troupe in America, as they returned to Greece. But the actors who belonged to the troupe of Vrysoula Pantopoulou, Leonidas Dervis and I. Michaelidis did not continue in America. We do not know the fate of the first, however the second was an important figure in Perth's artistic activities in the 1930s [21].

In 1924, the “Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe” presented the plays Agni Susana, Panhellenia, Agapitokis tis Voskopoulas, Erovemoulioni Mylonades, Pi and Phi, The Condemnation of Kolokotronis and Plapoutas and The Princess of Tzardas. Although the actors received good reviews, the lack of repertoire variety and Pantopoulou's arbitrary performances displeased the audience. For this reason, the troupe included in its repertoire German operettas and a few romantic dramas. In fact, he hired a twelve-member American ballet. In Chicago

they continued their appearances until the following spring, after which they toured Boston and the neighboring large cities. From May to June 1925 they gave around 20 performances, reaching as far as Montreal, Canada. In the period between September and November 1925 they made their first appearances in New York. The troupe in June 1925 consisted of Theodoros Pofantis, Petros Kyriakos, Lina Dorou, Panagiotis Svoronos, Vassilis Samourakis, Ari Malliaro, Lolota Ioannidou, Babis Christou, Lisa Kourouklis, etc. [22]. On their return to Chicago, a shift towards the dramatic repertoire was attempted, with works such as *The Element of the Tower*, *Genovefa*. In Chicago they performed until the end of March 1926 and continued with tours in Detroit (Michigan), San Francisco and Los Angeles (California). However, Chicago was their base. They performed at the Eight Street Theater presenting plays such as *The Archduke*, *Mary Magdalene*, *Babylonia*, *The Hanging of Gregory V*. [23]. But the bet of the troupe was New York.

In 1927, however, the troupe's longtime leader (Theodoros Pofantis) decided to found his own troupe. Looking for new actors, he returned to Athens. When they return to America, an unpleasant adventure awaited them at Ellis Island. Together with nine other actors (among them Svoronos) they are detained for three months by the authorities. A little later, the rival founders of the two troupes, Pofantis and Tambularidis, who made the same trip around the world, passed away [24].

Nevertheless, on January 9, 1927, at the “Palm Garden at the Gala” of the Kalavrytins Association, the troupe staged the operetta *Baftistikos*. From February 6, performances began at the John Golden Theater on Broadway with the operetta *Oi apachides of Athens* and continued with the plays: *The new Panathinaia*, *Agnes Susanna*, *The Element of the Tower*, *The Merry Widow*, *The Cassiani*, *Ah*, *Columbus!!!*, *Tziotiko Ravaisi*, *Glykia Nana*, *The neighborhood girl*. In between, the troupe performed in the neighboring cities of Philadelphia, Newark, New Jersey and Scranton. In New York, the drama, *The Stranger - Madam X*, was presented on May 29. The farewell performance was *Two Orphans*, on June 5. The troupe then toured Greek communities in New Jersey, Philadelphia and Washington. In the winter season, “Pantopoulou Operetta” begins with performances in Connecticut and takes up residence at the Eltinge Theater on Broadway. On October 16 and 23, 1927, he presented the operettas, *How the married people fare*, *The sleepwalker*. At the ball of Thessaly, the work *Les Misérables* is presented, while the performances on Broadway ended in May 1928, with the ethnography *The Bride of Koulouri*. The winter season of 1928-1929 for the troupe begins at Wallack's Theater on Sunday, October 14 with the play, *The Alaniara of Athens*, and with a renewed troupe with artists such as: Iro Tiberiou, Myrta Delfi, Kostas Kazis. The “triumphant success” of Vrysoula Pantopoulou's troupe continued throughout the season, even though the competing troupe “Athenian Operetta” was also active in New York at the same time, starring Lina Dorou. (Instead of: The “triumphant success” of the troupe continues for the entire season, even though the “Athenian Operetta” with Lina Dorou as the main protagonist was also active in New York during the same

period.) At the end of the season, the troupe gives a series of honorary performances, such as Ioannidis with the play *Captain Giakoumis*, or *Skiadas* with the “Athenian Operetta”, *The End of the World* [25].

A period of silence follows with the death of the founder Chr. Tabularides, in the year 1930. The troupe members make other collaborations. At the beginning of 1933, Pantopoulou's operetta was reorganized. The actors that make up the troupe are: Vrysoula Pantopoulou, Katina Thymiou, Paria Pofanti, Eleni Magou, Yiannis Thymios, Ioannis Vokos, Antonios Mavroyiannis, Lambros Fiorantes, Phaeton Aristos. In the year 1934 the troupe will reopen, when the comedian Ar. Chrysochou having as members the actresses Lisa Christoforidou (formerly Kouroukli), Mech. Cyrus, Ger. Kouroukli, Vr. Pantopoulou, Fofou Louka, Yiannis Thymios, Dim. Argyriou, Maki Karneri, Costa Kazi, Evag. Kambouroglou, M. Makrigianni. Demosthenes Zattas assumed the role of conductor of the Athenian troupe. In 1934 the plays were staged: *The Man of the Day*, *A Dying Heart*, *A Dream Was and Gone*, *A Review*, *The Two Sergeants*, *Mama the Father-in-Law and the Nonexistent Son-in-Law*, *The New Yorker*, *Hills and A Night in the Harem*, *The Trojan war*, *Panathinaia 1934*, *Captain...Lili*, *Panhellenic*. In 1935 they presented the plays of the opera, *The Halloween Fairy*, *The Sleepwalker*, *The Delirious*, *Pipitsa*, *Anatolitissa*. They also staged the comedy *Peran's Beauty*, the musical *Mother's Heart*, *Criterion* and the review *Something Happens to Gypsies*. After these performances the troupe eventually disbanded [26].

The Vrysoula Pantopoulou's troupe, with the name of “Great Greek Operetta” that it hired in America, or whatever other names it acquired during a continuous 10-year presence, significantly influenced the artistic developments in America. In the decade 1925-1935, a center of culture around the “Pantopoulou Operetta” troupe was operated in America by the Greek immigrants. Among the artists who collaborated with the troupe besides Demosthenes Zatta were Loukianos Kavadias and Ierotheos Schizas. The works that were uploaded were by Nikos Chatziapostolou, Theofrastos Sakellaridis, Grigoris Konstantinidis, Thanos Zachos, George Kambyssi, Petros Kyriakou and others. However, in addition to the classic members of the Pantopoulou troupe, well-known rebetiko singers in America participated, such as Manolis Karapiperis (friend and compatriot of Giannakis Ioannidis), Marina Papagika, George Katsaros, Kyria Koula (Vlachou-Antonopoulou) [27].

Regardless, in the year 1934-1935, the members of “Vrysoula Pantopoulou Troupe” revived the Athens Dramatic Company” as it had happened a decade before in 1924, in reverse. An old debt was paid off before the two troupes, with their unique tours around the universe, finally breathed their last [28].

IV. CONCLUSION

The “Athens Dramatic Company” played a decisive role in spreading the modern Greek theater to the Greek communities around the world. Despite the challenges posed by global international conditions, the company toured extensively and

presented a diverse repertoire of plays. Through their performances they connected with audiences in various regions, leaving a lasting impact on the promotion and development of Greek theatre. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the global reach of Greek theater and highlight the role of theater troupes in the preservation and dissemination of culture [29].

At the end of the 19th century after years of efforts by actors and troupes for the reconstruction and development of the Greek scene where Vendetism also dominates, the permanent stay of the troupes in Athens was a difficult if not impossible task. Usually, the troupes premiered in Athens and immediately left for tours right after. The troupes were forced to work under difficult conditions, subject to the strict criticism of the literary world. As a result, troupe actors did everything to survive, changing their partnerships and even joining competing troupes. The only possible solution was tours, although many times they had difficulty even covering their travel expenses. Several times the phenomenon was observed of the actors being couples who tour as a family, as in the case of the Athenian troupe, where it consisted of the couples Pofantis, Kourouklis and Nezer. In fact, the Pofantis couple had their six-year-old daughter Danae with them.

The Greek paroikies (communities) of Smyrna and Constantinople were a very popular destination for the troupes, as Hellenism flourished there, but the demands of the public were also less, wanting to watch the plays that had previously been presented in Athens. However, the action of the “Athenian Dramatic Company” was not only artistic. As reported in the expatriate press of Australia, the troupe was founded at the behest of the Greek Government and had a national liberation character. The male actors had participated in all the wars and in fact the founder of the troupe, Theodoros Pofantis, had been arrested several times and imprisoned twice in the Monastir (Bitola) of Bulgaria (North Macedonia) [29].

As it turns out, the historical events played a catalytic role in the routes of the “Athenian Company”, as in the year 1897, when the battles of the Greek-Turkish war were raging on Greek soil, the troupe had taken refuge in Crete, where it remained for a period of three years giving performances [30].

During the period of the Macedonian struggle, 1904-1908, the troupe does not appear to give performances. The actors of the troupe participated in the national liberation wars of their homeland and during this time did not participate in the theatrical group. Specifically, for eight consecutive years Gerasimos Kourouklis fought with the Greek army, while Thodoris Pofantis was imprisoned for his actions. At the same time, with the Greek-Turkish wars, the Pan-Hellenic Society was also founded, with branches in all the parishes where Hellenism existed, as far as Australia and America. The branches of these companies presented artistic activity and neo-Greek patriotic plays, calling all Greeks everywhere in the world to enlist. The great idea and the expectation of the liberation of all the great cities of the other Hellenism that were under Ottoman rule prevailed. The “Athenian Company” therefore thrived under the shadow of these events. [31]

Consequently, in Australia the Greek expatriates welcomed

them as “honest workers of the art” and “national apostles”. We would perhaps say that the best reception reserved for them was in Australia, where, as such a remote destination, it was not lucky enough to host other troupes from Athens until 1966. In fact, Gerasimos Kourouklis was considered in Australia as a pillar of the modern Greek theater for his magnificent interpretation as *Creon* in the tragedy *Oedipus Tyrannus*. But also, the Australians who watched this play were excited by the electrifying atmosphere of the play which was breathed by the excellent performance of the actors [32].

At the time of the destruction of Smyrna, the troupe was touring the Greek paroikies (communities) of Egypt, Sudan and the rest of Africa. Therefore, the road to America must have been a one-way road as it was also the only way for the troupe to survive. In America, artistic events flourished, especially in the Greek diaspora of New York and Chicago. The route followed by the Athenian troupe was the same as that of the theatrical troupes, tour groups and caravans of the time. However, the isolated Greeks of Australia in 1923 lived with their eyes turned towards Mother Greece. Seeking serious artistic entertainment and stimulation of the Greek spirit, they invited the “Athenian Company” to Australia. The tours of the Athenian troupe were therefore the result of historical events, routes of ships and caravans, but also the theatrical concerns of the Greeks of the parishes. Beyond the artistic value of the performances, the most important thing was that the Greek expatriates lived, if only for a while, the environment of their homeland through the performances.

However, there were also personal rivalries, enmities and jealousies between the members of the troupe, especially between their two veteran founders, Theodoros Pofantis and Taboularidis, which led them to adventures in America and the final disappearance of the troupe. Also, the alliances between the members of the troupe were related to the artistic tastes of the time and the preferences of the public [33].

The universal and global research of the theatrical phenomenon, beyond the enumeration of the theatrical performances and tours of the Athenian drama troupe, adds new data to the understanding of the evolution of the modern Greek theater and the spread of the Greek spirit worldwide. The association of the actors of the Athenian troupe with the actors and the public of the Greek community influenced and was influenced by this. Theatrical genres developed especially in America where Greek operetta and Greek rebetiko flourished with Demosthenes Zattas. This is still an uncharted part of the theater of the emigrants of America, and future studies will perhaps bring us pleasant surprises and new conclusions.

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