

# SMALL BLUES TRAP

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**Paul Karapiperis** interview

by **Dave King**

**How did a group of guys from an peninsula in the Mediterranean almost a world apart from the United States become involved with American Blues? What was your first introduction to the Blues?**

First of all, I wish to thanks you for doing me the honor to ask me for an interview.

Well, in the land where I was born, there is a genre of traditional music that has many great similarities with the blues. It is called “Rembetica” or “Rebetica” and by many music scholars it is often referred to as the “Greek blues”. The music may be different but the emotions that are derived from rebetica as well as the social issues that are described and contemplated are exactly the same with the blues. Besides being one of the most ancient countries in the world, Greece is a Mediterranean country. All Mediterranean countries have their version of the “blues”. Spain has its “flamenco”, Portugal has its “fado” etc. The Greek Robert Johnson is a Rebetica pioneer musician called Markos Vamvakaris. Similar lives, similar social backgrounds and similar lyrics.

Nevertheless, like everybody else, I was exposed to Rock music as a youngster like everybody else that eventually led me to discover the roots of Rock music which is undoubtedly, the blues. One thing that makes the blues music so unique is its ability to absorb and incorporate elements from other kinds of music. The blues is the final stop of our musical journey since it represents the purest expression of human soul. We use the blues music as the base for our musical journeys that go beyond the realms of pure blues. That may sound as an act of sacrilege to someone who wants the blues to remain traditional but we wish to assure all the blues lovers that we deeply respect the blues tradition and the blues musicians who want to keep it pure and unchanged.

**How much of an anomaly is a Blues band in Greece? Are there other Blues bands in Greece? How well received is the Blues by your audiences in Greece?**

I know that it may sound strange to you but there is a significant number of descent blues bands here in Greece. There is also a substantial number of devoted blues fans here as well. This is partially attributed to the existence of “Rembetica” as I mentioned before. The first Greek band that made a pure blues album was the Blues Gang (now Blues Wire) in the beginning of the ‘80s. It is also very important to note that a great number of American Blues musicians who came and keep coming to Greece for concerts always find great audiences to welcome them and buy their music. Buddy Guy, Albert King, Albert Collins, Otis Rush, Louisiana Red, John Hammond, Carey and Lurrie Bell, John Mayall, Nick Gravenites, U.P. Wilson, Guitar Shorty, Katie Webster, Big Time Sarah, Hubert Sumlin, Johnny Winter are just some of them.

**Often, here in the United States, unless a person comes from a Greek background, we associate Greece with Telly Savalas, Anthony Quinn, the Olympic Games, Western Philosophy, and seminal culture which provided the foundation of Western civilization. We often associate Greek music with what we may recall of the movie Fiddler on the Roof. Do you inject elements of traditional Greek music into the Blues music you play?**

There are many misconceptions concerning the blues scene outside the borders of the US. Few in the United States know for example that Nick Gravenites, Johnny Otis and Alexis Korner are Greeks in origin. Nick Gravenites who also speaks Greek quite well, keeps coming to Greece quite often and jams with a number of local bands here. The music scene here in Greece is very rich and goes far beyond the well known musical “Zorba the Greek”. There are many internationally known Greek composers such as Mikis Theodorakis and the late Manos Hadjidakis.

However, we as SBT do not use elements of traditional Greek music into what we compose and play. What we attempt to do is to make music that has its very own character and identity using the blues music as the main ingredient. So far, we have managed to have our own little studio, our “shelter” as we call it. That’s where we get together and write our own music. Our studio is not professional and that has many pros and cons.

**You have recently released a new CD. On this CD, to which tracks would you like to direct our attention; which tracks are you most proud? Tell us about this new CD.**

Well, this particular CD is my first personal album and it is called « Fifteen Raindrops In An Ocean Of Blues Tales ». I attempted to write a “blues opera” with songs that poetically narrate a story. The story of a man’s life with all of its ups and downs. In reality, it reflects the time circle of a man’s existence and it attempts to depict the emotional richness, the variety of stimuli that form the uniqueness of each human personality. So, instead of 15 different songs, there could have been one divided into 15 parts. I chose CDBABY.com to be the sole distributor of this CD because I consider it a very unique company in terms of allowing every artist to fully express himself without any interventions in his work.

**As a harmonica player, who are your favorite harmonica players—either American or European? Why do you favor these artists?**

I am a self-taught musician and everything I know is the result of listening to many vinyl albums that literally melted on my turntable from being played so much. By no means do I consider myself a virtuoso musician. I keep practising everyday trying to learn as much as I can from the blues legends. I also believe that the more you try to improve your playing, the more you discover different musical paths that lead you to your very own world of creating music since they embody your own experiences and your personality.

My favorite blues harp musicians are Little Walter Jacobs , Sonny Boy Williamson 2( Rice Miller ), Walter Horton , Sonny Boy Williamson 1( John Lee ), James Cotton , Sonny Terry , Junior Wells, Paul Butterfield , William Clarke , Charlie Musselwhite and more.

Each and everyone of them has its own style. However, my favorite one is Mr. Rice Miller who-while playing the harp since he was 5 years old-had the chance to cooperate with many blues titans such as R . Johnson , R . Lockwood , E . James ... etc. He also toured Europe in the 60's and the way he played and sang influence a great number of musicians including myself.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to talk about myself, my band and my music.