

Leigh Cline Bio

"I envy your mastery of those rhythms"

Leonard Cohen

"The person who began the tradition of playing Black Sea music with guitar isn't in fact from the Black Sea region, but a Canadian"

Özhan Öztürk - Karalahana.com

Leigh Cline is a guitarist, producer and sound engineer. The music he plays focuses on Black Sea, Greek and Turkish music with echoes of the Caucasus and Celtic music.

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, Leigh – who plays guitar, tambura, saz and synthesizers – started playing guitar at the age of 15. He has performed and recorded with many musicians and has three solo CDs: Orient Express, Al Asha Bi Daha and Galatia.

Leigh was part of the Toronto/Yorkville folk and blues music scene of the 1960s, starting at Tam Kearney and Jim Strickland's Fiddlers' Green Club and travelling throughout North America as a folk music performer. For the Mariposa Folk Festival, in the '60s and '70s, Leigh was Stage Manager, Technical Director, served on the Board of Directors and did World Music Research. He was also Editor of the Toronto Folk Music Guild's HOOT Folk Music magazine. During this time, Leigh was able to learn musical styles and guitar firsthand from the likes of Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, Bukka White, Rev. Gary Davis, Maybelle Carter, Lonnie Johnson, Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Bill Munroe, Merle Travis and Doc Boggs.

Leigh was sound engineer for many performers including Bruce Cockburn, Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, The Chieftains, Syrinx, Sha Na Na, Fleetwood Mac, Procol Harum, Rod Stewart, Poco and festivals all over Canada and the USA. He toured with Ian & Sylvia & The Great Speckled Bird. He was Sound Designer for The National Ballet of Canada's production of Yannis Xenakis' Kraan Erg. He was also Sound Designer for several exhibitions at The Ontario Science Centre including "In Praise of Hands" Crafts Exhibition and the "Sports" Exhibition. As well, he was World Music Researcher for CBC Television Documentary Specials, Programme Director at the Orillia Winter Folk Festival and worked on the stage crew at the Woodstock Festival. Leigh became the first Production Manager at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre.

In the late 1960s jazz musician/artist Nobuo Kubota played a Folkways record of The Music of Afghanistan for Leigh which changed the direction of his music. From that point on Leigh began to explore and play with various members of Toronto's multicultural community performing the music of India, Iran, Central Asia and Turkey. He was also exposed to many forms of Jazz through working at a music store in the 1960s with John Norris - editor of Coda Jazz Magazine as well as by Coda photographer/saxophonist Bill Smith, who with Nobuo Kubota, were part of the Artists' Jazz Band.

A chance meeting in Toronto in 1971 with two Greek Gypsy musicians, Stratos (Steve) Sapounas and Jimmy Flevetomos, focused Leigh's interest in Greek and Turkish music. They formed the Middle East/Balkan band "Al Tayr", with Leigh on guitar, Steve on bouzouki, Jimmy playing oud, George Sawa on kanun and Mark Smith on darabukka. Leigh later formed the Kismet Orchestra, playing guitar & tambura, with Tim Rice (gaida, kaval, clarinet), Ahmet Candan (baglama saz & vocals), Geoff Clarfield (oud) and Rifat Uzunovic (vocals & guitar).

In 1974, Leigh travelled to Europe, playing with gaida/kaval master Pece Atanasovski in Skopje and doing club work in Istanbul. His close friend Yannakos Xilouris, a member of the Xilouris/Skoulas Cretan family that has produced many musicians, introduced Leigh to his cousin, singer/musician Nikos Xilouris. That year, Leigh played with Nikos on several TV shows in Athens and mixed his sound for the season at the Boite Rizes in Plaka, Athens.

Since that time, he has played in many Greek clubs (bouzoukia and folk dimotika style) in Greece, the USA and Canada with top Laika and Dimotika musicians such as Tassos Halkias, Vangelis Soukas, Stathis Kavouras, Petros Goulekas, Stelios Perpiniadis, Stratos Dionysiou, Stelios Bellos, Yannis Floriniotis, Nikos Kaltsas as well as many other traditional and Laika performers. For many years he played clubs with keyboard player Yannis Antos who was the mainstay of the band with Vassilis Tsitsanis' - one of the last of the great rebetika performers. In concert or festivals he has played with or mixed sound for (sometimes both) Ilias Klonaridis, Eleni Vitali, Domna Samiou, Pantazis, Annoula Vasiliou, Rena Koumioti, Yiota Lydia, Psarantonis Xilouris, Antipas, Yannis Katevas, Elpida, Yannis Pouloupoulos.

In 1976 he moved to the Kallithea area of Athens just down the street from The Kortsopon - one of the last old style Pontic clubs. There he met the late Kostikas Tsakalidis the master Pontic musician/singer. They played together at the Kortsopon and in Northern Greece, becoming good friends and "like family" with Kostikas' family, a relationship that continues to this day. It was at the Kortsopon that Leigh first started playing with major Pontic musicians including Chrysanthos, Stathis Nikolaidis, Thanasis Tsoleridis, Gogos Petridis, Lambis Anastasiadis. Since that time he has continually played and recorded Pontika working with most of the Pontic performers in Greece including Mihalis Kaliontzidis, Yorgos Amarantidis, Yorgos Dimitriadis, Thodoros Pavlidis, Nikos Tsimahidis, Panagiotis Aslanidis, Sophia Nikolaidou and many other well known Pontic performers.

He is the webmaster of The Pontic Music Home Page and has held workshops on a variety of guitar and long necked lute styles and lectured on the music of the Balkans, West and Central Asia. Several of these lectures were in conjunction with, and at the invitation of, ethnomusicologists Mieczyslaw Kolinski, Tim Rice and Jon Higgins.

On his solo CD, Orient Express, Leigh composed the music and plays guitars, tambura, saz and synthesizers. The album combines Pontic, Greek, Turkish and Western musicians in an East/West synthesis. Introduced to Raks Muzik of Istanbul by his friend, Coskun Sabah, the Turkish singer/oud player, Raks licensed Orient Express for Turkey, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia. The CD was also licensed in India, South Asia and the Middle East.

Leigh composed, recorded, played on and produced the CD single Galatia that combines Celtic and Pontic music. The album also features top kemenche player Mihalis Kaliontzidis, renowned Cape Breton fiddler Sandy MacIntyre and North American Bagpipe Champion Bob Worrall on Scottish border pipes as well as Mark Kelso on drums and percussion and David Woodhead on bass.

Leigh's most recent CD, Al Asha Bi Daha, features traditional Black Sea music. On this album, which Leigh produced, he plays guitar with Nikolas Mihailidis on lyra and vocals. The CD is licensed internationally and in Greece the album title is Mian Ki' Allo.

He is the author, with fiddler Sandy MacIntyre, of the Mel Bay publication "Cape Breton Traditional Style Fiddle Sets with Guitar Tablature".

Leigh continues to record and perform at concerts, clubs and festivals as well as giving workshops on guitar styles, rhythms, scales and the music of Greece, Turkey, The Caucasus and Central Asia.