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OHFS Participates in First Dance and Choral Contest

By Amalia Deligiannis

The Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society donned their dancing shoes, suited up in traditional Greek costumes and brought forth their best singing voices for a different reason this past February: their first competition. Orpheus competed against some of the best troupes on the West Coast at the 30th annual Greek Orthodox Folk Dance Festival (FDF) in San Diego.

During the event, judges from the United States, Canada and Greece assessed the authenticity and quality of the dance performances, costumes worn and songs

sung. Though FDF is presented in a competitive format, that is not its main purpose. It was created in 1976 to preserve Hellenic culture through dance, songs and music. Orpheus saw this competition as an opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with others that hold the same interests.

“Our participation at FDF allowed us to watch other groups, and meet and interact with dance directors, judges and other individuals who share the same level of enthusiasm about Greek folk dance and
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Orpheus members and choral instructor Eftyhia Papageorgiou (center) gather for a picture before the presentation of their Thassos dance suite.

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culture,” said Yannis Economou, president and principal instructor of Orpheus. “In addition, this type of exchange allowed us to talk about issues associated with a Greek folk dance organization, especially here in the United States.”

Traditionally, dance troupes and choirs from all over the West Coast, particularly the Metropolis of San Francisco, participate annually in this event. 2006 marks the first time a group from the Midwest competed. Orpheus was placed in the Advanced Senior Division of the competition. The groups are divided into separate categories based on age and ability. Overall more than 100 groups, constituting about 1600 dancers, participated in this year's event. “It was a nice to see that there are over 2,000 other people besides the members of Orpheus that share the same obsessive passion and dedication for Greek dance, music and culture,” said Jim and Angie Thanopoulos.

During the competition, Orpheus performed a suite of dances from Western Thrace and a suite of dances from the island of Thassos. The Thracian presentation included material from the villages in the prefecture of Evros, with a concentration on material from the village of Asvestades in Western Thrace. The Thassos material was researched in Greece on the island of Thassos with help from local residents and artists, as well as sources in the United States. During the performance of the Thracian suite, the male dancers wore costumes from the village of Petrota and the female dancers wore costumes from the village of Metaxades. During the Thassos suite, men wore the traditional vraka, worn in most Aegean islands, and the women wore the traditional female costume from the island.

For the Division One dance competition, Orpheus received the Founders Special Achievement Award for the originality of their suite of



Yannis Economou, Orpheus choral instructor Eftihia Papageorgiou, Marianna Gudmundsson and Kostas Economou at the award ceremony.

dances from the island of Thassos. The Olympians of Assumption Church, Long Beach, CA won the top sweepstakes award. “Although we are not a competitive group, it was nice to do something different and see some dance groups from around the country,” said Sophia Moraris.

Orpheus also participated in the choral competition. During that event, the group sang a hymn titled “*Agni Parthene;*” two folk songs, “*Yanni Mou to Mantili Sou,*” from Epiros and “*Tzivaeri*” from the Dodecanese Islands; and a popular song titled, “*Tora Pou Pas Stin Xenitia.*” Orpheus’ choral instructor, Eftihia Papageorgiou, arranged all songs specifically for this competition. Orpheus won first place in the Division One choral competition and Eftihia Papageorgiou received the Choral Director’s Award. The choral group from St. Demetrios Church in Tucson, AZ won the top sweepstakes award. For some members winning first prize was the highlight of the trip.

“Without a doubt the best part of FDF was winning first place for the vocal competition and having Eftihia win the director’s award,” said Christine Minakakis. “That was amazing because we all put

a ton of hard work into the vocal performance and it showed.”

For others it was the experience itself. “We practiced, performed, bonded and had an overall GREAT time (at FDF),” said Georgia Makris. “The whole experience was memorable—everything from the three-hour delay at O’Hare, to missing the opening ceremonies appearance by 30 seconds because of it, to dancing until 3:30 A.M. and going straight to the airport to catch our plane back to Chicago.”

“Overall, Orpheus’s participation at FDF added another dimension of experience for the group, and exposed members to other troupes who are dedicated to representing our Greek heritage,” said Marianna Gudmundsson, artistic director of Orpheus. “Dedication and a love and appreciation for dance, music and our heritage are keys to wonderful memories and success,” she said. “Each of us derives our own experiences in this type of endeavor, but it is up to the individual to learn and apply these experiences in the future. We are fortunate to be able to be together and experience new things.”

For more pictures from FDF visit www.ohfs.org. 

At Home in Your Father's Village

by Adam Papadolias

When I returned to Greece 27 years after my first visit, what amazed me most was not how small the village square was but how large I had always remembered it. I had also imagined the trip from Athens to Kollines as much farther than it was. My 35-year-old perspective managed to lower the heavens in the murals of the village church ceiling, where my childhood gaze had once interpreted the priest's chants echoing off the painted stories of dragons and saints. I had always remembered the ceiling as high as a night sky full of mythologies; there could be no other result than to come home seeing my world a little smaller.

Because I didn't understand Greek, Athens was the perfect warm-up for my trip. But once I left the comfort of the city where everyone spoke English, I started off on the same journey that my father and so many Greeks in Orpheus had already begun, where you're in a new place and have to start learning the language.

Reading street signs and maps in Athens is easier than in Tripoli and the village, where you lose the dual-language signs—if there even are any. Then there's the fun of asking for directions. I'd spend twenty minutes figuring out how to ask a yes or no question, but people would answer with their own questions. Socrates would be pleased to know his ancestors still ask more questions than they give answers.

During my odyssey, I grew to appreciate a particular aspect of Greek culture that surpasses even our olive oil and wine: simple kindness. Greek hospitality, with the exception of a few cab and bus drivers, gently and powerfully solved fairly simple problems. I realized that my obstacles in life had suddenly become quite specific. Where is the bus station and how far? I was getting a lot of "over there" and "you can't miss it" answers,

which drive me crazy enough in English, let alone in Greek.

The sheer simplicity of my ignorance helped me not take the basics of life for granted: getting home meant learning the name of a street and recalling metric conversions for distance I'd learned in grade school. It was a good thing I'd snagged that map of Tripoli out of a 1982 phone book! This was my day: getting lost and finding my way back, buying fresh bread, hunting for the ever-elusive American coffee. Oh, for a Starbucks! In Chicago I could fall into a black hole of complexities over relationship politics, Firewire vs. USB, image self-consciousness, and invisible maladies my horoscope had warned me about, but on my way to the village the layers of complexity fell off with each meter of increasing altitude.



Adam's Yiayia, Vassiliki Papadolias, leads a Kalamatiano at a party of family and friends in Kollines in 1954.

As I headed toward Kollines, rays of the late afternoon sun reached out like Apollo's welcoming hand through the pines and the peaks of mountains. That hot August evening I was just about to see my father's village again, but through an adult perspective. At about 900 meters above sea level, the nitrous levels in my brain kicked off a fit of giggles, and I didn't want the moment ever to stop coming where I was just about to see Kollines again. The son of Nikos Papadolias was coming back! Okay, really everyone had come home for the Panigyri, not for me, and no one but my father's



Adam's Theia Georgia, Yiayia, and father, Nikos Papadolias, wear their traditional clothing for this 1948 photo.

uncle was expecting me, but the eve of that August 15 was, for me, perfect cause to dance all night.

In the village, maps and street signs were suddenly made easy: Kollines has one road, which I affectionately dubbed Kollines Boulevard. Then I saw that somebody had removed the huge town square I remembered and replaced it with a little square. The world was shrinking. Places so far away had suddenly come closer than such distant relatives. And there was Theios Panayiotis sitting at the café, waiting for me. He, too, had someone coming.

In retrospect, if no one had known I was coming, I would have been a stranger in a strange land—*Xenitia!* The stuff of good folk songs! But you're never a stranger in your father's village. That's a new Greek proverb I made up.

The night of the celebration granted me my first glimpse of Greek fasting. I think they need to put the "e" back in "fasting" because I lost count of the courses. Finally, at midnight the priest got up to start the first Kalamatianos, and I dove into the dance, testing almost a year of Orpheus. Throughout the church yard little whirlpools of dance circles eddied and dissolved into other swirls. As a cautious traveler, I saw Charybdis* down a few ships with the help of that good Greek wine. Then the man dancing next to me said something in Greek. I smiled and nodded, and he said something

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else. I can smile in many languages, but I admitted, “*Den katalaveno.*” But when I said, “*O Pateras mou einai o Nikos Papadolias,*” he stopped in the middle of the dance and exclaimed, “*Ego eimai Papadolias!*”

From that moment, my last name became the most important Greek word I knew. It was my passport to the discovery of who somebody was. For the next two weeks, as I journeyed down Kollines Boulevard, I stumbled upon neighborhood parties and reunions where my father’s old friends took me in. I was never allowed to cook for myself, for everyone invited me over, asking, “*Apopse?*” Overbooked, I learned to say, “*Avrio.*” At dinner my cousins and aunts would spoon thirds and fourths onto my plate even though I tried to explain that I’d be single for the rest of my life if they kept feeding me like this.

During my explorations, I discovered there was a spell over the neighborhood of Pelaxorio, a part of the village down in the valley. It seems to have been enchanted by Eros long ago, for you can’t live there without falling in love with your neighbor. My father’s parents had been neighbors there and married. So, too, had my

grandparents’ parents, along with Dimitri and Dina, two of my dad’s best friends. I met them in Pelaxorio when I visited the old house, burned down by the German army, and found the stony heap of debris now consumed by the world’s largest mulberry bush. I introduced myself to the neighbors, who spoke to me in Greek, and soon an old woman grabbed me by the hand. Someone explained, “She wants to introduce you to someone.” This woman, Dina, cried when she met me and embraced me. She, my aunt, and my dad had shared a plate when the town was rebuilding. You don’t cry because an army burned down everything you had. You cry because you survived. You cry because for the rest of your life, all the times you feel lonely, you go back in your heart to the intimacy of three little kids sharing what food they had.

I thought about how my father had made friends for life. I couldn’t help but feel that to Theia Dina I was almost my dad of old, traveling through time. I’d ask the house to show me who he had been while I scrubbed the floors and added my own touches to the quaint ambience and welcoming spirit. Old pictures of family that had spooked me as a kid now made more sense. We belonged to each other

even if our marriages were not always perfect and neither were our sons. Time and distance between people were a perspective. For example, on a picture of me at thirteen was my very first Greek writing which I’d long forgotten about: “To Yiayia,” with love, from me in Greek. I’d had my dad write it down so I could copy it. She had kept it and looked at it everyday. How could someone keep out a picture of me for so long? And my father and cousins had left it out even when none of us ever imagined I’d someday ask, “Dad, can I stay at your house?” *Spiti sou* became *spiti mou*. How could a woman I’d never met embrace me as she had my father back when they were tiny and cold? In America, how do you get three little kids to share anything, let alone their food? I may have remembered the village as farther away than it was, and the church murals higher, but it took going home again to see the enormity of love. Friendship and family had not been forgotten, no matter how long ago, no matter how far. ☐

For the full-length version of this story, please go to ohfs.org

** Charybdis was once a nymph-daughter of Poseidon and Gaia who flooded lands for her father’s underwater kingdom until Zeus turned her into a monster and had her suck water in and out three times an day.*

spotlight

on Orpheus
dancer...



Christine Minakakis

As a full-time high school student, Christine Minakakis is currently involved in soccer, piano and voice but she still finds a way to make her mom drive her to practice every Thursday. Even though Mrs. Minakakis (i.e. MOM) had been scoping out the Orpheus dance troupe even before the youth group started, don’t think Christine doesn’t enjoy it. A few years after the youth group was formed, Christine joined and has been an involved member ever since.

Hometown: Northern Chicago Suburbs

Parents From: Mom is from Kerasia, Tripoli, Greece and my dad is from Kalivia Soxas, Sparti, Greece

Occupation: Student

Time dancing with Orpheus: Seven years

Orpheus Presents Ethnic Folk Dance at Concordia University

College students from Professor Jean Harrison's class on world music and cultures had the opportunity to learn a little something about Greek folk dancing and traditions last April. During the event, Orpheus presented folk dances, music, songs, costumes and some history to the students of Concordia University, a liberal arts college located in River Forest, IL.

This is the tenth year Orpheus has participated in the class, which strives to teach students about different world music and cultures. The course, which is offered through the university's music department, brings in various groups and individuals to present a specific ethnic culture. As a result, it's become one of the troupe's favorite annual venues.

According to Yannis Economou, the opportunity to do a presentation in a college setting is intriguing because it requires a different approach com-

pared to some of the other group performances. For this event, the educational and entertainment portions are more balanced since more time is devoted to explaining the cultural and historical contexts of the Greek folk traditions. But it is also challenging to present the material in a way that will hold the students' interest, since it's an evening event. As a result, the performance portion is interactive which enables the students to maintain their focus in a relaxed environment.

Even though most of the students in the class have had limited exposure to Greek traditions, they still possessed an appreciation and exhibited an interest in the music and dances. The students appeared to

enjoy not only the dancing but also the live music by members of the Orpheus Music Group, who demonstrated a variety of folk instruments. The evening ended with the entire class participating in an impromptu dance class. Students and members of Orpheus were dancing the Hasaposerviko in the "aisles" and kicking it up with a "sta tria" step variation.

After observing multiple ethnic groups, the students are required to write a paper on one of the cultures at the end of the course. This paper is supposed to stem from one of the presentations and further research conducted independently by the students. ☐



Orpheus members with Professor Jean Harrison (top row, second from left) at the conclusion of the "World Music and Cultures" class presentation.

Thoughts on dancing: I think it is a really great way to make friends, have fun, and stay in touch with my culture.

Favorite dance: Ikariotiko

Most vivid OHFS memory: Singing and dancing "Tsak Tsak" in the hotel pool at the Boca Raton Winter Dance conference, and making friends from across the country—thanks to the conferences

Favorite Greek dish: My yiayia's spanakopita with the filo she makes herself

Favorite place in Greece: Santorini

Hobbies/Sports/Interests: Music, soccer, piano, voice, sewing, hanging out with friends, shopping

Nobody knows: I speak French better than I speak Greek

Someone I'd like to meet: Johnny Depp

I'm currently looking forward to: Summer vacation

I stay home to watch: Grey's Anatomy

Prized possession: My iPod music is my life. I don't know what I'd do without it.

Where I heard about the Orpheus Dance Troupe: My mom saw them perform a really long time ago and asked about joining, but the group wasn't for anyone under the age of 16. A few years later the youth group formed and we heard about it by word of mouth. ☐

photo gallery



Practicing the dances for FDF at the hotel grounds in San Diego, CA.



Girls performing and singing "Mazou ta Peristeria" from the island of Thassos during FDF in San Diego, CA.



Orpheus members with Honorary Consul General of Greece Aliko Hadji during the Consul's Greek Independence Day reception at the Chicago Cultural Center.



Atop the SAE float during the Greek-American Parade that took place at Chicago's Greek Town.



Group picture in front of the Parthenon Restaurant float before the start of the Greek-American parade.

photo gallery



The Orpheus dance troupe pictured with Alexa Ganakos, author of the book "Greek Town Chicago: Its History and its Recipes," at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore at Old Orchard Mall.



Members of the Orpheus Youth group during an "International Night" event at Hoffman Elementary School in Glenview.



Jim Stoyloff with Mitsos and Christina Dallas playing Greek folk music during the Balkan Spring Festival at the University of Chicago.



Students from Glenbrook South High School and members of the Orpheus dance group at the conclusion of their dance presentation at the school's Variety Show.



Orpheus members pose in front of the Flag of Nations display at the Skokie Festival of Cultures. Orpheus has been participating in the festival for the last 15 years. This outdoor festival is among the first of the summer season and has been attracting a wide variety of ethnic artists. The Orpheus dancers were accompanied by the Orpheus Music Group, which included dances and songs from Greece's northern regions, Macedonia and Thrace.

performance schedule

Greek Dancing Workshop
Chicago Folk & Roots Music Festival
Welles Park
4200 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago, IL
Saturday, July 8 4:00 p.m.

St. John Greek Church Family Picnic
2350 E. Dempster Ave., Des Plaines, IL
Sunday, July 9 4:00 p.m.

North America Bridge Championships
Hyatt Hotel
151 East Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL
Tuesday, July 18 6:45 p.m.

Saints Peter and Paul Greek Festival
1401 Wagner Rd., Glenview, IL
Friday, July 21 8:00 p.m.

Greek Town Festival
Halsted St., Chicago, IL
Saturday-Sunday, August 26-27
Performance: Sunday, August 27
8:00 p.m.
Come visit our booth

Evolution of a Dance: Zeibekiko
In collaboration with the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center and Asimina Chremos
Harold Washington Library Auditorium
400 South State St., Chicago, IL
Sunday, September 24 2:00 p.m.

Greek Night
St. John Lutheran Church
3020 Milwaukee Ave., Northbrook, IL
Sunday, October 15, 4:00 p.m.

Christmas Around the Word
Museum of Science and Industry
5700 South Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL
Saturday, December 9 2:45 p.m.

Performance schedule and times are subject to change. For the latest information visit <http://www.ohfs.org>.

practice schedule

Orpheus Adult Group

Beginner/Intermediate:
6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Intermediate/Advanced:
7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Every Thursday at:
St. John Lutheran Church
3020 Milwaukee Ave.
Northbrook, IL
(one mile north from the intersection of Lake/Euclid and Milwaukee Ave.)

Orpheus Youth Group:

Every Thursday at:
5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
St. John Lutheran Church
3020 Milwaukee Ave.
Northbrook, IL

Every Saturday at:
1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
New Church
Multipurpose Room
74 Park Dr., Glenview, IL
(one block west of Shermer/Glenview Rds)

Youth Group: Members ages 10-14 (Northbrook and Glenview locations).

Beginners: Members with little or no previous dance experience.

Intermediate: Dancers who have shown progress in the beginners' class attend the last hour of practice. At the discretion of the instructors, the intermediate level dancers will be practicing in a separate line.

All dancers, especially beginners, are encouraged to obtain a personal CD of the music used for performances, in order to practice on one's own and become accustomed to the music. Please provide Yannis or Kostas Economou with a blank CD.

Submissions for the Fall issue of *Lyra* will be accepted until August 15, 2006. We are always interested in educational essays/articles dealing with the subjects of Greek folk dance, folk music, and folk traditions. We continue to accept personal announcements and all other submissions pertinent to the dance troupe and its membership. If an individual wishes to contribute material on a continuous basis, please inform the Editor.