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The Newsletter for friends and members of OHFS
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Orpheus Celebrates the New Year with Annual Vasilopita Event

Saturday, January 30, was a night of serious partying! Just ask any of the guests that came to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Des Plaines, for this year's OHFS Vasilopita celebration. The event, which gains popularity every year, offers a chance for OHFS members and their families and friends to gather together for a night of great food, great music and lots of non-stop dancing and fun. In fact, in keeping with the motto of "the more, the merrier", this year's record-breaking guest list actually surpassed the 350 mark! After the blessing of

the Vasilopitas, by Father Rallis and Father Malamis, guests enjoyed the abundant buffet, courtesy of Jimmy's Restaurant.

After dinner, the eagerly awaited video segment began. This year's theme took the audience on a trip down memory lane, focusing on the events of 2009, since it was a particularly special year for Orpheus. Video highlights included segments from the 20th anniversary celebration, as well as a recap of all the performances, competitions, parades, conferences, visits from

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The eagerly awaited Vasilopita event took place for one more year in January of 2010 celebrating the beginning of a new year and reflecting on the past year. It was another memorable event, full of music, singing, dancing.

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guest musicians and instructors and many other events from the past year.

The entertainment portion of the evening was kicked off by the Orpheus choral group, led by Eftihia Papageorgiou. The choral group presented a variety of New Years carols (*kalanda*) from different regions of Greece. During the song, “*Saranta Meres, Saranta Nihtes*”, a carol from the region of Thrace, members of the OHFS youth group joined in with a Kalamatiano dance.

The Orpheus music group, along with guest musicians Petar Alekseev, playing the gaida, and Jim Stoyanoff on the clarinet, kept everyone on their feet all night. Musical selections included a variety of songs from mainland Greece and the islands, as young and old filled the dance floor, hopping, stepping and leaping to the sounds of the santouri, violin, daouli and various other instruments.

This year, OHFS had the pleasure of welcoming members from the Apollo dance troupe, from Aurora, Illinois and members from the Kyklos dance troupe, from Detroit, Michigan. A New Year’s wishes e-mail exchange with John Peppes, Director of the Kyklos dancers, evolved into a “Wouldn’t it be nice to meet again after the 20th anniversary celebration?” and the Vasilopita event presented the perfect opportunity! Taking it a step further, an impromptu dance workshop was organized for the morning of the Vasilopita, allowing for the exchange of ideas, techniques and resources among the three dance groups. John Peppes presented dances from the Dodecanese islands, while Orpheus instructor, Kostas Economou, presented dances from Almopia, Macedonia. Although the mini-workshop lasted a few hours, it was an excellent opportunity to, not only showcase Greek folk dances, but, more importantly, it was a chance for all involved to get better acquainted and facilitated an exchange of ideas, advice and experiences.



After a great dinner, guests at the OHFS Vasilopita event hit the dance floor, dancing to island and mainland rhythms well into the night, with live music courtesy of the OHFS music ensemble.



The morning of the Vasilopita event a mini workshop was conducted by members of the Orpheus dance group and the Kyklos dance group from Detroit. Elena Vranas from the Apollo dance group from Aurora also joined the workshop.

It is always wonderful to see Orpheus members, friends and family coming together and enjoying themselves at events such as this. What was even more remarkable was the way everyone cooperated in order to make that night a success! Elena Vranas, Director of the Apollo dance

troupe, commented, “To have our own daughters repeatedly saying what a terrific time they had...is a testimony to the welcoming you and your fellow members gave us and is a huge compliment in its own right! They can’t wait to dance at your next glendi!” ☐

Spotlight on Drama, Macedonia: History, Traditions and Culture (Part 1)

Greece might be one of the smallest countries on the map, but its history, traditions and culture definitely rival those of any other country triple its size. Its people have held on to centuries old customs and traditions, in the face of such threats as wars, invasions and revolutions. One such area, where the inhabitants have struggled to maintain their rich customs, history and way of life is the prefecture of Drama, Macedonia.

Recently, Orpheus members had the pleasure of meeting Katerina Asteriou Kavazi at the "Horepse '09" Greek folk dance conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. Katerina, who is from Drama, Macedonia, was a guest instructor at the conference and an authority on the folk traditions of Drama. She lives and works in Prosotsani as the owner of the Epilinos organization, which organizes various cultural events, conferences, theatrical presentations, concerts and many other events. Katerina demonstrated many dances from Drama and gave conference participants many details on the history, culture and traditions from that particular area.

Drama is located on the northeastern edge of Greece, bordering Bulgaria. The massive mountain, Falakro, is known as "mountain symbol" of Drama. Drama falls within the Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Region and is divided into eight municipalities (Drama, Kato Nevrokopi, Prosotsani, Nikiforos, Paranesti, Doxato, Kalambaki and Sitagri) and one community, Sidironero. Recent archaeological excavations continue to reveal much about the lives of its past inhabitants, including many cultural and social details.

Historically, song and dance has played a significant role in everyday life, throughout Greece. It was a way for people to express themselves and

their emotions and went hand in hand with weddings, feast day celebrations and other social gatherings. Furthermore, songs served as an oral history of sorts and provided a way to relay news and significant events to other villages. Drama certainly is no exception to this. With a rich musical history and tradition, songs and dances are abundant in its communities and still rule every social gathering.

In many parts of Greece, certain dances have a particular significance or importance during a glendi,



An example of the traditional dress in the village of Volakas. The headpiece is worn in such a way as to draw attention to how the women parted their hair (more about this in the upcoming part 2 of the article). In this case, the part was straight down the middle (*o issios o dromos*).

holiday celebration or panegyri. In Drama, the dance "Syrtos" usually begins the glendi slowly, and eventually, the mood and tempo is raised by a variety of livelier, more animated dances. The popular dance, "Tsourapia" can be found everywhere in Macedonia. Villages engage in friendly competition against one another, adding their own variations to the dance, in order to prove that their dancers are the best. The dance "Evzonikos" which takes its name from the Evzones (Greek presidential

guards) is danced in the village of Monastiraki. This dance starts off the diving of the cross ceremony during the Epiphany celebration on January 6, 7 and 8. "Levendikos" or "Harapska" was originally danced freestyle in the streets, kicking off the celebration. It has since evolved into a 12-step line dance, similar to Syrtos, but with the characteristic style of Petrousa.

"*Na Deis Yiayia*" is a somber dance from the village of Kali Vrissi and has the flavor of a "*moiroloi*" or lamentation. It is tied to a historical event that occurred in the early part of the 20th century in Drama. It tells the story of Armen Kouptsios from Volaka, a local hero and "*Makedonomahos*" (Macedonian fighter) who was subsequently hung by the Bulgarians

during their occupation of the area. In those days, there were no newspapers or radio or other media to relay news, so important occurrences were relayed orally, many times in the form of a song that was passed on from village to village. Because of the solemn subject matter, the dancers are not supposed to smile while executing the dance. Men lead the line, with the lead male dancer playing a significant role. He removes his "*trayaska*" (hat) and shoes and dances the entire dance barefoot,

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bending deeply at the waist during various parts of the dance, as a tribute to the slain Kouptsios.

The music which accompanies the traditional songs and dances is performed by native villagers, who are self-taught musicians. The main instruments are the Macedonian (pear shaped) lyra; the gaida; the dahares or daires or defi. The Macedonian lyra differs in many ways from the other lyra instruments found throughout Greece. Differentiators exist in the way it is tuned, as well as how it is played, exuding a singular and distinct sound. Crafted by the actual musicians playing the instruments, the bulk of the instrument is carved out of a single piece of wood, specifically wood from the mulberry tree, since this type of wood does not easily crack or curve. The wood of the walnut tree is also utilized. Since ancient times, the dahare has been the basic rhythmic instrument. It was also crafted by the musicians from goat skins and the wood of the walnut tree or chestnut tree. Small metal cymbals were inserted in the wooden ring. The size and width of the dahare vary from musician to musician and from village to village.



Petrousa musicians, Georgios Tsaniós, Vassilis Tsiokas and Athanasios Giannikis playing the dahare instrument, made out of goat skin. Accompanying them is Katerina Asteriou Kavazi's daughter, Maria.

Music, song and dance are intertwined and oftentimes do not serve merely as a form of entertainment or pastime. The musical melodies of the instruments are a vessel of sorts to convey non-verbal emotion. The upbeat sound of the defi can instantly put one in a good mood and get them on their feet ready to dance, while the sorrowful sounds

of the Macedonian lyra can likewise change one's dance style, making it somber and soulful. The songs that have been passed from generation to generation, carry a tremendous load in their simple, yet effective lyrics. They serve as memories to those who have lived the events related in the songs, and reminders to present and future generations. ☐

spotlight

on Orpheus
dancer...

Mary
Gerontakis



Hometown: Arlington Heights, IL

Parents/Family From: My father is originally from the island of Naxos, and my mother was born here, in North Chicago but her parents were from small villages just north of Kalamata.

Time Dancing with Orpheus Group:
Going on 5 years now.

Thoughts on Dancing: I love it all types. It's strange that even babies know how to dance just goes to show it's in the blood.

Favorite Dance: Ikariotiko.

Most Vivid OHFS Memory: Dancing with OHFS in Greece of course. It was very touching to perform these dances in their homeland, where our ancestors used to dance them as part of daily life.

New Lyra Format Coming Your Way

In 1995, the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society proudly introduced its official newsletter, the *Lyra*. Named after the musical instrument played by the mythical character, Orpheus, the *Lyra* has been keeping its readers informed and updated for over a decade. Each edition of the *Lyra* updates its readers on the activities of OHFS, with articles regarding performances, events, celebrations, trips abroad, conferences, workshops, educational articles and much more. The "Spotlight" section features a mini-interview with a different OHFS member in each edition. The photo gallery gives a quick peek at recent performances and events in which Orpheus members took part, while the performance schedule lets readers know where they can catch the next OHFS performance.

Recently, we were very excited to have introduced an electronic version of the newsletter, along with our regular hard copy mailing. The colorful, semi-interactive newsletter has generated lots of feedback and has been well-received by readers. But we're not stopping there! We will be working on enhancing and updating the electronic newsletter, aiming to make

it as interesting and informative as possible for our audience.

Another electronic method of keeping up with the latest Orpheus news and activities is the wildly popular Facebook application. Once you become a Facebook fan, you will instantly receive the latest Orpheus related updates, you can check out photos and links from performances and events, and you can RSVP to upcoming OHFS events, which Facebook then puts on your calendar and sends you reminders as the event approaches. Furthermore, fans can interact with the Facebook page and post comments and reactions to the information listed on the page.

Please be aware that we will be phasing out the hard copy of the newsletter and distributing it strictly via e-mail in the latter part of this year. If you are not already receiving the electronic version of the newsletter, please contact us with your e-mail address. You can also visit our website and click on the "Join our Mailing List" button which enables you to add your email address to our mailing list to receive the *Lyra*



Snapshot of the 'Lyra' eNewsletter

newsletter, e-mail updates and more (Orpheus respects e-mail privacy and does not share e-mail addresses with other parties). For those of you who prefer to receive a hard copy of the newsletter, please contact us at orpheus@ohfs.org or call 847-729-3406. Besides the cost effective and environmentally friendly benefits, distributing our newsletter electronically offers the ability to streamline the process, reach a larger audience and get our newsletter to you quicker and easier! ☒

Favorite Greek Dish: It's a toss up: macaronada or my mom's spanakopita.

Favorite Place in Greece: So far it's Agia Anna Beach in Naxos. But there are still many more places I have to visit!

Hobbies/Sports/Other Interests: I used to play soccer and I still love watching it. I also love eating out, going to the movies, and travelling.

Nobody knows I: I studied karate for 2.5 years in high school.

Best childhood memory: Holidays as a kid. I was the youngest cousin so I used to get lots of presents. I was super spoiled!

The perfect weekend: Sunny, on a beach swimming with friends and family. No worries, just loving life and of course, fresh good Greek food!

Someone I'd like to meet: My two grandmothers. They passed away before I had a chance to meet them.

I'm currently looking forward to: The next Orpheus trip to Greece in 2011!*

I stay home to watch: The Bachelor, Two and a Half Men, and Everybody Loves Raymond. It's old, but it still makes me laugh.

Prized possession: My super cute golden retriever, Maximus.

Where I heard about Orpheus Dance Troupe: Through my good friends Penny, George, Sofia, and Effie.

*BREAKING NEWS!!!

The island of Chios has been selected as the Greece 2011 destination. More news to follow! ☒

Dancing and Singing on the Road to Kiato

By Bessie Grosso

Summer in Greece is always an adventure and produces an excitement that one cannot experience without having been there. In the summer of 2009, I travelled to the town of Kiato to celebrate the opening of a new Lyceum Club of Greek Women (LCGW) chapter. Kiato is located in the northern part of the Peloponnese on the coastline of the Corinthian Gulf. It's the capital of the municipality of Sikyonas. In the past it was called "Sikyonia" and still holds on to the name. It's the second biggest center in Corinth. The ancient theatre of Sikyonos is one of the biggest ancient theatres, built approximately around 251 to 168 BC. It is 122m in length and carved in the rock. In ancient years it was called "Sikyon" during the rule of Klesthenis. It hosted appearances by many ancient philosophers, artists and orators such as Polykletos, Kleon and Lyssipos. The remarkable statue of Dionysos (god of wine and theater), which is kept at the Archeological Museum in Athens, was found in Kiato.

The Kalamata Chapter of the LCGW, invited me and my daughter Christina to take a road trip with what else—Greek dancing and singing! Anna Mavrou, our dear friend, was kind enough to invite us on a day trip with the group from Kalamata. We left at 7:00 a.m. and helped the group get their costumes in the bus and headed off for a 5 hour bus ride north. The day was spent singing songs and practicing for the performance that evening.

The Lyceum Club of Greek Women was opening a new site in Kiato and all the neighboring dance groups were invited to showcase dances from their area and welcome the new group with good luck and cheer. The performance took place on the breathtaking mountain, just outside of Corinth. The ancient theater lay quietly next to us while thousands of onlookers and performers started to pour in.

The Lykeion ton Hellinidon (Lyceum Club of Greek Women) was founded in 1911 by Callirrhoe Siganou-Parren, a pioneer of the feminist movement

in Greece and the country's first woman journalist. It is a volunteer organization, which, in the 99 years of its existence, has played an active and important role in the preservation and presentation of Greek cultural traditions and folk customs.

Today the LCGW maintains its dynamic presence in Greek society thanks to the voluntary service of its many dedicated members in Athens, in its 51 branches all over Greece and in its 16 Bureaus abroad. The latter are particularly appreciated by the Greeks of the diaspora, who see in the Lyceum a living link with the land of their origin and a "treasurer" of their ethnic traditions and cultural heritage.

We had a chance to help dress the girls with beautiful costumes from Mani and a costume from Kalamata with its fancy and elegant embroideries. How I wished I could also wear one of these costumes! But just being with all the girls and helping them prepare for their performance was an honor. Singing live for the group was famous folk singer, Panagotis Lalezas, who we met at one of his performances in Chicago last winter.

One of the best clarinet players in Greece, Nikos Fillipidis, was also at the practices and he helped make things extremely interesting and special. It was great to visit with many of the dancers and we also got a chance to meet our friends from the Orpheus 2007 trip: Pavlo, Nicko, Vasilki, Aggy, and Tasos. I hope you all follow your dreams because around every corner you will find something wonderful in Greece. For me it's always another Greek dance connection that goes on forever... ☐



Bessie Grosso and her daughter Christina pictured with Kalamata Lykeion instructor Anna Mavrou.



Members of the Orpheus Youth group participated in the annual International Fair at Hoffman Elementary school. In the designated Greek class, students got to experience the making of a 'komboloi' or worry beads and had the chance to practice a few Greek dance steps by members of Orpheus.



The Orpheus music group took part in this year's 'Passport to the World' festivities at the Chicago Children's Museum which is a series of celebrations that focuses on the arts and traditions of Chicago's culturally diverse neighborhoods.



Members of the Orpheus dance group commemorated Greek Independence Day at the annual Kalavrita dinner dance.



The Orpheus Youth group presented dances from different regions of Greece accompanied by members of the Orpheus music group at the Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Center.



The weather during the Greek American parade might have been rainy and windy, but it did not affect the energy level or the enthusiasm of the Orpheus delegation, whose spirit and pride did not go unnoticed – not only from the spectators, but from a few of the local media outlets as well.

performance schedule

Chicago Hellenic Choir - Spring Concert

Saturday, May 15
Central United Methodist Church
8237 Kenton Avenue
Skokie, IL
7:30 p.m.

Orpheus Youth End of the Year Event

Saturday, May 16
St. John The Baptist
Greek Orthodox Church
2350 Dempster St.
Des Plaines, IL
3:00 p.m.

Chicago SummerDance

Thursday, July 1
Spirit of Music Garden
601 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL
6:00-9:30 p.m.

Klironomia Dance Conference

Friday-Monday, May 21-24
University of Toronto
Scarborough Campus
Toronto, Canada

Chicago Folk & Roots Festival

Sunday, July 11
Welles Park
2333 W. Sunnyside Ave.
Chicago, IL
5:00-6:15 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: (September through May)

Every Thursday at:

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

Every Saturday at:

2:00 p.m. - 3:00 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 October 15, 2010. 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.

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