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## Winter Dance Conference 2004, New York

By Panayi Panagiotopoulos

New York Winter Dance Conference 2004 - How did it all start? Was it supposed to be a fun trip, a business trip, or just a sightseeing trip? Well, it turned out to be all three! Like all other conferences, this year's was expected to be one more source of our cultural education. We were all excited about going to this amazing city, but we were also eager to experience all the different seminars that the organizers had scheduled.

Speaking for myself, I was enthusiastic about going to a Greek dance conference held on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. You know, in Greece we kind of take our dance heritage for granted and we believe that this is the case with other cultures. I can assure you that at no other Greek conference held

in Greece, do people dance as crazily as we did in New York. For me, it was the ultimate experience. I was filled with pride when I saw how all of the dance troupes work to preserve our culture here. I know it may seem commonplace for all of you...but for me it was not just about dancing. I dance in Greece, we have practice in Greece, we go to conferences in Greece; but we are there, it's easy for us!

But let's take the days one by one. Or not, let's take the mornings and the nights separately. On Friday and Saturday there were workshops from morning until early in the evening. One took place in the basement and one on the first floor. As much as I would love to do so, I really cannot talk about these morning workshops. I honestly tried very

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The Orpheus dance group with visiting dance instructors after Saturday night's performance.

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hard to wake up early in the morning and follow the group but it was beyond my powers! By noon, when I would usually show up, the participants were already warmed up. Customs from Naoussa and Epirus were the most powerful. The instructors were brought right from the heart of Greece and they showed us and explained so many amazing details about each dance. It was interesting that the background of each dance was accompanied by a story, almost like a fairy tale. But I guess that's how it is! They brought not only the steps of a dance from Greece, but the complete tradition of their villages. And this was the best part.

To me, as a junior participant to these conferences, this was what I enjoyed the most. It's not only dancing but a whole story behind it! It is about how the dance was created, why, when, and for what purpose. We heard so many different stories. These stories will actually help us demonstrate the appropriate atmosphere for a performance. These stories will determine our style and our mood. Consider how different the Epirus dances are from the Naoussa dances. We heard why and we heard what peoples' goals were in each case. Flirt, tease etc., etc.

Let's talk about the nights. The endless nights! Thursday, we arrived at the hotel. Our music band, the Orpheus music band, was giving its first performance in the registration room...just to warm up. By the way, we thought only Chicago had a heavy winter, but we were wrong! Friday night we all went to a Greek taverna for dinner. It was so nice. Our happiness was so apparent to every stranger. Take a look at the picture posted on the web site from the NYC underground. Aren't we lovely?

Next, we'll take a look at Friday night's glendi. So many people in such a small place! But we didn't care. We danced and danced and danced. All the musicians were so great. They played music from almost every part of Greece. After the glendi was over, some of us paid a visit to New York's night life while others went back to the hotel where the glendi kept going until early in



Members of the Orpheus music ensemble are joined by dance instructors Takis Baitsis and Christos Tsitsis in a "Rebetika" sing along.



Dance instructor Takis Baitsis joined by Orpheus members at the Friday night event.

the morning. Don't worry; you will see pictures and somebody will make fun of us at the next Vasilopita glendi!!

Saturday night was our night! We gave an excellent performance! It was a time when all of our efforts were rewarded. We had our space and our musicians playing for us. One of the dance instructors, Giorgos Kotsos, remarked, "It is not your steps or your style that makes the difference. It is your team spirit that makes the difference." We are a big *parea* and it showed while we were dancing. We are friends with each other. This is important! Don't ever lose it! It is something that we don't have in the Lykeon back in Athens—at least not all of us. We are a huge group and we get lost in it! With you, it was like dancing at a

*panigiri* with some friends! The rest of the night went on dancing at the glendi. The yellow line passengers of the NYC underground had the unique fortune to see us playing the *klarino* and dancing on the train!! We wouldn't stop! It was the natural outcome after the official glendi was over. But there is more... much more. The lobby of our hotel was empty and cold as never before. We seized the opportunity. We continued our glendi in the lobby until the early morning hours! *Bouzouki*, *klarino*, *baglamas* were the hot instruments that night. These events are what will remain in our memories after such a conference. We'll let Yianni and Kosta show us the steps and make sure we stick together as a group! ☐

# Carnival Traditions from the City of Arta

The city of Arta is the capital of the state of Arta whose residents are mainly occupied with the agriculture of citrus crops. Its history goes very far back and it was a significant Byzantine center associated with Constantinople, as indicated by numerous churches including the imperial Parigoritissa. Despite the fact that it is an urban center, rural traditions are found especially during the *Apokria*.

The roots of the carnival of Arta can be traced back to 1405, when the despot in Arta was Karolos, the First the Tokos. Karolos, longing for his country's traditions, wished to see the popular Venetian carnival celebrated in his state. His guests from Arta who attended the celebration at the despot's palace requested permission to get dressed up and wear masks during the *Apokria*.

Following the conquest of Arta by the Turks, the sultan's representative gave the people of Arta the privilege to dress up and entertain themselves during the *Apokria* and use musical instruments. However, the conquerors kept an eye on the Greeks because they were afraid of trouble or uprisings. That was how the teasing couplet was created. The spirit of the subversive atmosphere of the time was expressed in words through satiric and obscene songs.

The Turks left Arta in 1881. The free people of Arta continued to celebrate during the *Apokria*. As soon as the *Triodio* (the 3-week period preceding the first Sunday of Lent) began, all of Arta became excited when they heard the musical instruments being played in the neighborhoods. The tabors were heard. The young men, dressed in black capes and masks with bells around their waists, ran through the streets and in the market. They visited the houses where the landlords treated them to local dark wine, ouzo or *tsipouro*. They sang various songs and couplets in the streets related to *Apokria*. One of the characteristic traditions of the town, as well as of other communities in the area, was the maypole (*gaitanaki*).

## *The maypole (Gaitanaki)*

In Arta, the maypole was placed in the market on the second Saturday of *Apokria* where it would be joined by other maypoles, accompanied by musical groups, from neighboring villages. Only men participated

in the maypole. Half of them, the *yiannitsaroi*, were dressed in Greek kilts. They wore masks and their heads were covered with a colorful scarf. The other half, the *nyfes* (brides), wore feminine dresses such as colorful chintzy skirts, a mask, a headscarf, and a white or black cape. Masquerades of this type constituted an additional expression of the subversive atmosphere of the day, this time as an image. The individuals cannot be defined with respect to gender, age or type of animal. Men become women, the young become old, and people become animals. In this environment disorder prevails over order, sensuality prevails over self-restraint.

The maypole was a tall piece of wood usually three meters long. It had colorful ribbons tied at the top, which symbolized the colors of spring. These ribbons were held by a *yiannitsaro* alternating with a *nyfi*, who intertwined them on the rod while dancing to various songs in the rhythm of *tsamiko* or *syrto*. The maypole was held by a man who was escorted by an *arapis* (dark-skinned man). He wore a wild black mask, was dressed in a sheepskin, held a *vourdouli* (hitting stick), and was greatly feared by children. The *arapis* symbolized the Turkish conqueror. Other groups followed the maypole and sang couplets of the *Apokria* that satirized various situations. The camel and characters such as the man on stilts, the old man and the old woman, followed the maypole.

The main celebration took place in the central square where, following the maypole-related events, the spectators danced dances such as: "*Pos To Trivoun To Piperi*" ("*How do they grind the pepper?*"), "*Charalambis*", "*Tis Nyfis*" ("*The bride's*").

In this framework of subversive expressions, the idea of death and human vanity is expressed in different ways through songs and traditions of *Apokria*.

## *"How do they grind the pepper?"*

Only men dance this dance. Often times it is danced at the end of a celebration or feast. It has a 2-beat section, which is danced in the style of *Sta Tria*, and a 7-beat section, which is danced like a *syrto*. In the first section the dancers mimic what the song says with movements while a single dancer holds a leather belt in his hand, checks if everyone is obedient and punishes those who do not obey. The dancers in the circle hold hands with bent elbows.

## *Tis Nyfis* ("The bride's")

This is danced only by men with one of them masquerading a pregnant bride. The dance is composed of two sections. The first section is accompanied by a free-style melody, during which the "bride" pretends to be in labor. When the rhythm of the melody changes, the "bride" jumps up and everyone dances the *syrto Sta Dyo*. This is repeated two to three times followed by songs. ☐



A dance known throughout Greece as the "piperi" (pepper) where dancers (always men) imitate the movements of the leader who, enacting the words of the song, orders them to "grind the pepper" with their backs, chests and bottoms.

# "Christmas Around the World"

By Youth Member Athena Davros

The Orpheus youth group performed with the adult group at the Museum of Science and Industry. We performed many of the Greek dances and songs that are performed around Christmastime. The performance was great; the youth group sang *Kalanta* (carols) from different islands, and the dances were awesome. After working so hard and practicing so much we were able to put on a great show. I thought we did a very good job representing our Greek heritage.

Every year, the Museum of Science and Industry hosts Christmas Around the World. There are Christmas trees that are decorated with decorations representing different heritages from around the world. We, along with many other cultures, show how we celebrate Christmas. We wore different costumes from different islands and performed dances from various regions in Greece.

The adult group also performed at the Museum of Science and Industry. For one of the dances, they danced and sang at the same time. There was also a live band that provided music for several dances. The band is mostly self taught with a little training. Instruments from the clarinet to the *gaida* were used.

All in all the performance was great. All of our hard work really did pay off. We had a really great time dancing and seeing all the differently decorated trees. Right now we are working to make the end of the year program as great and as much fun as the Museum of Science and Industry performance was for all of us. I know it will be great. ☐



The Orpheus Youth group after their presentation at the Museum of Science and Industry's "Christmas Around the World".

## spotlight on Orpheus Youth Group dancer...

Theofanis  
Sarantopoulos



**Parents/Family From:**

Dad is from the village of Therisi close to the city of Tripoli and my mom is from Chicago

**Occupation:**

Freshman at Prospect High School and unfortunately I don't have a job until the summer.

**Time Dancing with the Orpheus Youth Group:**

Since the summer of 2001

**Thoughts on Dancing:**

It makes me feel proud of my heritage and brings out my masculine side. It also makes me happy. I enjoy dancing and I hope to continue with the troupe because there is nothing better than dancing. Anybody can express themselves no matter whom they are and that's why I like it.

**Favorite Dance:**

All of them because they're all unique in so many different ways but my most favorite is *tsamiko* because it's a masculine dance.

**Most Vivid OHFS Memory:**

My most vivid memory is my first performance at the Museum of Science and Industry. I remember it as if it was yesterday and I enjoyed it because I knew that I was doing something that I love.

# Folk Dance Festival 2004

By Yanni Economou

It was an honor and a humble experience to serve as a dance judge for the second consecutive year, at the Folk Dance Festival (FDF) competition that was held in Ontario, California. The FDF is a ministry of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco, led by his Eminence Metropolitan Anthony. The festival took place at the Ontario Convention Center, an impressive facility that was able to accommodate a record number of participants, over 1,800, without counting parents, escorts and other friends. The competition categories included dance and choral groups of different ages that originated from Greek Orthodox parishes located, primarily, on the west coast.

The greatest personal challenge as a dance judge is trying to separate ones emotional side from ones rational side. The emotional side is telling me that all groups deserve a perfect score for their tireless efforts, perseverance and personal sacrifice involved with their participation in this festival. Maintaining a quality



Orpheus instructor Yannis Economou (bottom) pictured along with the panel of judges for the 2004 Folk Dance Festival.

dance program is a formidable task as it balances so many factors in today's hectic lifestyle. It requires countless activities and obligations for parents and children alike. Inspiring today's Greek American youth to participate in a cultural activity in addition to other extracurricular demands, adds another layer to this challenge.

Despite all that, it is certainly impressive to watch almost 100 groups and thousands of participants along with their families. They were all gathered to celebrate and express not only Greek folk dances and songs, but their cultural identity and presence in this country. They have indeed enhanced their own lifestyles and, in a way, improved their quality of life. Keep up all the good work! ☐

## **Favorite Greek Dish:**

My favorite Greek dish would have to be my mom's *pastichio*. I love it because of what she puts in it. It's so mouth watering and the spices she uses are to die for. I can almost taste it now!

## **Favorite Place in Greece:**

My favorite place in Greece is Crete because of the beautiful flowers and the sight seeing is amazing and breath taking.

## **Hobbies/Sports/Other Interest:**

My hobbies are attending church, being apart of St. John's Goya, playing x-box, and hanging with friends. The sports that I enjoy are: baseball, football, basketball, tennis, golf, and, my favorite, soccer.

## **Nobody knows I:**

used to play the violin. I wasn't that good but I know a thing or two about it and I would love to pick it up again.

## **Best childhood memory:**

My best childhood memory was when I learned to ride a bike and got my training wheels off.

## **Dream vacation/the perfect weekend:**

My dream vacation is going to Greece and visiting and living with my dad's family and making sure that everything is okay.

## **Someone I'd like to meet:**

The one person I would love to meet would be Regis Philbin. Man, that guy is hilarious!

## **Favorite building/spot in Chicago:**

My favorite building is Dappers East (my dad's restaurant) and hey, if you're in the neighborhood please do stop by.

## **I'm currently looking for/forward to:**

I'm looking forward to being in the adult group even though I love the youth group. I can't wait until I graduate high school.

## **I stay home to watch:**

I stay home to watch tennis, bowling, golf, and other very weird sports that not many people watch.

## **Prized Possession:**

My prized possession is my family because without them I wouldn't be here today.

## **Where I heard about Orpheus Dance Troupe:**

I heard about the dance troupe from Alex Kapotas who is one of my favorite instructors. Not that I don't like all you guys! Thank you for teaching me the many dances that I know. ☐



Members of the Orpheus Adult group performing dances from the village of Asvestades, Thrace at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.



Members of the Orpheus Youth group watching their peers perform at the Museum of Science and Industry.



Mrs. Kathy Philis helps youth member Efterpie prepare for the Museum of Science and Industry performance.



Members of the Orpheus dance group and students from Glenbrook South High school presented island dances at the school's Variety Show.



Orpheus members with Professor George Brown (top left) and members of the audience at "Globefest 2004" at Bradley University.

# photo gallery



Dance instructors Christos Tsitsis, Nikos Liondos, George Kotsos and Ioannis Koutsoumbas dance Hasapiko accompanied by the Orpheus Music Ensemble at the Winter Dance Conference in New York.



Orpheus members waiting to board the train to Astoria for Saturday night's event at the Winter Dance Conference in New York.



Orpheus members with visiting dance instructors Nancy Harmanda and George Kotsos (Athens, Greece) after a practice session.



Father John Rallis, Pastor of St. John Church, with Yanni Economou after the blessing of the Vasilopitas.



Orpheus Youth members with dance instructors Nancy Harmanda and George Kotsos after practice at the Glenview branch.



The Orpheus music ensemble delight the audience with folk songs at the Vasilopita celebration.



Having fun at Orpheus' annual Vasilopita celebration.

# performance schedule

**Greek General Consul Reception  
Greek Independence Day**  
Chicago Cultural Center  
78 East Washington, Chicago, IL  
Thursday, March 25  
5:30 p.m.

**Greek-American Parade**  
Greek Town  
Halsted Street, Chicago, IL  
Sunday, March 28  
2:30 p.m.

**Washington University Alumni-St.Louis**  
Parthenon Restaurant  
314 S. Halsted St., Chicago, IL  
Sunday, March 28  
2:30 p.m.

**Greek Star Newspaper 100 Year Anniversary**  
Drury Lane Oakbrook Terrace  
100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace  
Sunday, May 16  
8:00 p.m.

**Skokie Festival of Cultures**  
Oakton Park  
4701 Oakton Street, Skokie, IL  
Saturday, May 22  
5:00 p.m.

**End of Year Orpheus Youth**  
St. John The Baptist Church  
Des Plaines, IL  
Sunday, May 23  
2:00 p.m.

**Assumption Church Festival**  
St. Louis, MO  
Saturday- Sunday, May 29-30  
4:00, 8:00 p.m.

**St. Demetrios Church Festival**  
Saginaw, MI  
Friday-Saturday, June 18-19  
4:00 & 8:00 p.m.

**SS. Peter and Paul Church Festival**  
1401 Wagner Road, Glenview, IL  
Friday, July 23  
7:00 & 8:00 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 tape 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 cassette tape.

Submissions for the Spring issue of *Lyra* will be accepted until June 3, 2004. 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.