

inside

this issue...

Zeibekiko:
Evolution of a Dance 1-2,6

Dina Sianis
Merit Awards 3-4

Yvonne Hunt In Chicago 4

Spotlight 4-5

"Yasoo" Conference
in Seattle 5

Photo Gallery 6-7

Future Performances 8



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The Newsletter for friends and members of OHFS

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The Culture of Dance

Orpheus Participates in Zeibekiko Presentation

By Effie Tsaltas

What comes to mind when you think of Zeibekiko? Is it someone's father or uncle dancing carefree and confident at a recent social gathering? Or is it a lone individual swaying and stepping to the music, seemingly oblivious to the clapping, whistling and cheering of the crowd around him? Sometimes referred to as "the drunk man's dance," Zeibekiko typically conjures up images of men and women, old and young, in one of the most intense displays of self-expression. Dancers are visibly emotionally engaged as the provocative, lamentful songs dictate their smooth, fluid, alluring gestures, undeniably capturing the attention of their audience.

On September 24, at the Cindy Pritzker Auditorium in the Harold Washington Library in Chicago, the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center hosted a unique production that put a new spin on an old favorite. The museum sponsored an entertaining presentation titled, Zeibekiko: The Evolution of a Dance. Directed by Kairol Rosenthal, contemporary dancer Asimina Chremos and members of the Orpheus Dance Troupe combined their talents to juxtapose a graceful and imaginative modern interpretation with a decidedly traditional look at one of the most-loved Greek dances.

Continued on page 2



The music was provided by Andreas Georgas (guitar), Kostas Dovas (toumbeleki), Harry Georgakopoulos (bouzouki) and the renowned singer Voula Karahalios.

Continued from page 1

Yannis and Kostas Economou, wearing Cypriot costumes danced first, presenting some very early versions of Zeibekiko. They performed two versions of Aptalikos—one from the island of Lesbos and one from Asia Minor, as well as a Salfos-Zeibekiko from Cyprus. They were followed by two very powerful and moving performances: Voula Karahalios-Pandelias sang a doleful song about Smyrna, Asia Minor, while Asimina Chremos performed an original, expressive dance, effectively enhancing the lamentful tone of the song. The audience then silently watched a somber, moving video montage of the 1922 destruction of Smyrna. Asimina and Voula's performances, coupled with the video footage, provided some historical insight into the emergence of the modern day Zeibekiko and the birth of the Rebetika songs that often accompany it.

Asimina noted, "In this project I hoped to honor the complex history of the Zeibekiko dance, and show continuity between the Zeibekiko... and contemporary dance improvisation."

The presentation took a lighter tone once The Orpheus Music Ensemble re-enacted a typical Greek "taverna" setting. Accompanied by Andreas Georgas and Voula Karahalios-Pantelias, they performed classic Rebetika favorites such as "*Giftopoula Sto Hamam*," "*Sinefiasmeni Kiriaki*" and "*Ela Opos Eisai*," creating plenty of "kefti" for the dancers and audience alike.



Yannis and Kostas Economou presented folk samples of Zeibekiko/Karsilama dances from Lesbos, Cyprus and Asia Minor.



Pinelopi Georgakopoulos and Dimitri Dallas danced a Karsilama to the song "*Gyftopoula sto Hamam*".

"The audience's reaction was very positive," said Kosta Dovas. "It was obvious they could relate to the music and dance... [And] they commented that they loved the melding of the old and the new styles of dance."

Orpheus dancers Dimitri Dallas, Pinelopi Georgakopoulos and Nikos Christakos each gave their own distinct interpretations of Zeibekiko as the audience clapped and sang along. Dimitri, who performed another version of Aptalikos, and a Karsilamas duet with Popi, noted: "An audience member came up to me after the show and told me that I looked like her father when I was dressed in the 'Rebetiko' outfit. For me, it was a great compliment because I was really shooting for authenticity."

After the lively "taverna" scene, Asimina, an independent choreographer and teacher by profession, performed again. Her extensive ballet background was evident as she executed dynamic and masterful moves in silence. Then saxophonist Dave Rempis performed with Asimina, adding undeniable flair and a new dimension to her dance.

When asked about her inspiration for this project, Asimina replied, "I wished to draw a thread between dancers who stay close to the sources and traditions of Greek cultural expression, and myself, a dancer whose father is from those sources, but still a part of the Greek diaspora."

The presentation ended with a question and answer segment, moderated by Ann Cooper Albright, professor of dance and theater at Oberlin College. Kostas Economou believes the Q&A got the audience more involved with the presentation. This component of the show was also a first for the troupe. Audience members interacted with the performers, asked questions and voiced their opinions. The feedback was resoundingly positive, with people sharing memories and reflections of Zeibekiko.

"The reaction from the audience was moving," said Yannis Economou. "It is good to see the audience demonstrate such an appreciation for the work presented. Some said their concept of what Zeibekiko was has changed. Others were very proud to see people living outside of Greece putting together such quality presentations."

Continued on page 6

First Dina Sianis Merit Awards Presented

By Yannis Economou

Within the last few months the Orpheus Youth Group bid farewell to the previous year and launched the beginning of a new and exciting year!

The end of the year event for 2005-06 took place last May at St. John the Baptist Church in Des Plaines. More than 80 children performed Greek folk songs and dances in front of the largest audience we have ever seen so far for this event. The Orpheus Music Group accompanied the various groups during most of their dances. One of the highlights of the afternoon were the speeches that several Youth members made as they transitioned to the adult group. They all spoke about their experiences with the Youth group and how they look forward to continuing as members of the adult group.

What made this year's event more poignant was the presentation of the first "Dina Sianis Merit Awards" to one male and one female youth member. These awards celebrate the memory of one of the warmest supporters not only of the Orpheus Dance Troupe,



The Orpheus dance group established the 'Dina Sianis Merit Awards' to be given to two exemplary youth members in memory of our beloved Mrs. Dina Sianis. This year's recipients were Christos Michelis and Christina Grosso, pictured here with Dr. George Sianis and Yannis Economou.

but of the Hellenic community in general. Dr. George Sianis presented the awards to this year's recipients, Christina Grosso and Christos Michelis. These awards will be given annually at this event, with the hope that they become an inspiration for the younger generation to continue Mrs. Sianis's great work and share her love for Hellenic culture.

At the conclusion of the event, all youth members and their families headed to Giordano's on Dempster Avenue, in Morton Grove, Ill, where they were treated to pizza as guests

of the Mavrakis family. It was a great fellowship time for all and a fitting end to a very successful year.

The summer went by quickly and more than 90 members started off the new youth year with a lot of enthusiasm and energy. Children, parents and instructors are collaborating very closely so that this program continues to succeed. Come and watch the Orpheus Youth Group as they perform at the Museum of Science and Industry on Saturday, December 9, at 2:45 p.m., as part of the "Christmas Around the World" festival. ☐



The 2006-2007 Orpheus Youth year started the first week of September. Members of the Northbrook branch pose for a picture.

Yvonne Hunt Brings Expertise to OHFS

By Amalia Deligiannis

More than 30 years ago, Yvonne Hunt went to Greece to study and master the country's repertoire of traditional folk dances. But she soon realized this would be impossible. The reason: Every region had its own unique style of dancing and traditions.

While Yvonne was researching dances, one particular region caught her attention: Serres, Macedonia. "I was researching in many parts of Greece concurrently with the Serres region," she said. "But the research in Serres became more in-depth because I kept uncovering more and more information that no one outside the villages of the region knew. And I'm still uncovering it."

Today Yvonne Hunt is considered one of the preeminent experts of Greek folk dance. She brought this expertise to Chicago last June and taught a series of workshops that were hosted by the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society.

Members of Orpheus, along with the Apollo dance troupe of Aurora, Ill., and



At the conclusion of the Saturday workshops, members of Orpheus, the Apollo dance troupe and the St. Spyridon dance troupe posed with instructor Yvonne Hunt.

the St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church dance group from Palos Heights, Ill., participated. Group seminars were held at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Des Plaines, Ill. A private seminar for Orpheus took place at its home base in Northbrook, Ill.

"We are very fortunate there are individuals like Yvonne Hunt, who have sacrificed themselves to research and teach the rich traditions of Greece with barely anything in return other than the satisfaction of being immersed in this rich culture," said Yannis Economou, president and principal instructor of Orpheus.

Yvonne, who's from Seattle, Washington, teaches dances from all over Greece, including Serres, Kythnos, Karpathos and Crete. Though not Greek, she speaks the language fluently and is considered one of the foremost authorities of folk material from that area. As a result, she's been asked to judge Greek folk competitions. She also hosts a 10-day seminar on the folk dances of Serres every year. She's even written a book, *Traditional Dance in Greek Culture*, and produced a CD with Neal Sandler and Christos Govetas that features musicians from Flambouro, Serres, called *Zourna Masters of Flambouro*. ☐

spotlight on Orpheus dancer...



Zaharias (Zach)
Demertzis

Hometown: Northern Chicago Suburbs.

Parents/Family From: Both of my parents are from Neos Skopos, Serres, Greece

Time Dancing with Orpheus Group: Four years

Thoughts on Dancing: Dancing is a great way to learn more about my heritage and have fun in the process. Dancing lifts my spirits and it's a great way to meet new friends.

Favorite Dance: Tsestos

Most Vivid OHFS Memory: My first performance with the adult Orpheus group at the Hellenic American Academy.

"Yasoo" 2006 Dance Conference

By Kostas Economou

When I first came across the announcement that the "Yasoo" 2006 dance conference would take place during the 4th of July weekend, I was presented with an excellent opportunity. I could spend a weekend full of Greek folk dancing as well as a couple of days visiting the beautiful city of Seattle and its surrounding attractions. This would be the third time that Orpheus members would have the pleasure of attending the Yasoo conference hosted by the Saint Demetrios dance group.

The first night of the conference offered a special treat. The Artemis dance group from the island of Leros, Greece gave a performance at the Museum of History and Industry. A suite of dances from the island of Leros were presented along with a suite of dances from various islands of Greece. It was a pleasure to watch the confidence of these young kids as they expressed themselves not only through their dancing but through their singing. Later that night we had the chance to join members of the Artemis dance group and guests of the conference for dinner.

The second day of the conference included an array of dance workshops. Dances from the island of Leros were taught by the directors of the Artemis dance group, Antonis and Roula Dallarís. Seattle's very own Yvonne Hunt presented a suite of dances from the island of Karpathos, and Dimitrios Kontogiannis from Vancouver, Canada presented a suite of dances from Epiros. The night's program also included a dinner dance co-hosted by AHEPA. Music for the night was provided by the Pangeo band and violinist Nikos Koutouzós from the island of Leros.

On Sunday, after the Divine Liturgy, we had a chance to review the material presented the previous day and then it was time to relax by enjoying a picnic hosted by Nick and Cindy Theodorou of Seattle. This has been the trademark of each Yasoo conference. A picnic or barbecue is organized for the last day where instructors, members of the organizing committee, guest and friends of the conference have a chance to mingle and get to know each other.

The last couple of days of our visit, my wife and I had a chance to visit the city of Seattle and its many attractions, take a ferry to Bainbridge Island, visit the towns of Port Townsend and Port Angeles and enjoy the breathtaking views of Hurricane Ridge at Olympic National Park.

Many thanks to the Yasoo organizing committee for putting together a most enjoyable and successful dance conference. Hope to see everybody soon again.

For more pictures, visit the Picture Gallery at www.ohfs.org. 



Orpheus members Alex Pavlos (left) and Kostas Economou (right) with dance instructors Yvonne Hunt (middle), Antonis and Roula Dallarís.

Favorite Greek Dish: My Yiayia Elli's homemade tiropita and my Mom's spaghetti with ground beef.

Favorite Place in Greece: Haniotis, Chalkidiki

Hobbies/Sports/Other Interests: Soccer, Tennis, Swimming, Skiing, and of course Greek Dancing.

Nobody knows I: I collect baseballs from every city I visit.

Best childhood memory: Spending my summers at my grandparents beach house in Chalkidiki where my pappou Thanasi taught me how to ride a bike.

Dream vacation/the perfect weekend: Spending a summer back-packing through Europe with my closest friends.

Someone I'd like to meet: Cristiano Ronaldo.

Favorite building/spot in Chicago: Greektown. Artopolis for loukoumades.

I'm currently looking for/forward to: The Rolling Stones concert.

I stay home to watch: LOST & The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

Prized possession: The baseball I caught at a White Sox game when I was 10 years old.

Where I heard about Orpheus Dance Troupe: Some of my Greek school friends were already involved with Orpheus and my mom, an ex-folklore dancer herself, decided to sign me up. It has become a passion ever since. 

photo gallery

Continued from page 2

Many audience members were familiar with Orpheus' traditional choral presentations and performances, but were pleasantly surprised to see the Troupe presenting material from a different genre.

"This performance was different than other Orpheus performances because it dealt with the Rebetiko and Laiko elements in terms of music," said Kosta Dovas. "These are more modern styles of music than what we typically see at the dance troupe, but have quite a bit of cultural significance. So it was definitely nice to have an opportunity to showcase some of the music that I love so much."

Perhaps one reason why the audience enjoyed the show was because the performers clearly enjoyed what they were doing. This made the entire production seem natural and effortless. But make no mistake—Zeibekiko: The Evolution of a Dance was definitely a challenging undertaking. For Orpheus, the greatest challenge was deciding what to include in the presentation. It was difficult finding a suitable context wherein the different elements of the folk and

modern interpretations of Rebetiko could be combined.

Add to this the fact that the director, Kairol Rosenthal, was non-Greek and unfamiliar with the Zeibekiko dance, but she still had to put all the pieces together for the presentation. Probably the most difficult aspect for Kairol and Asimina was alternating between the traditional and modern while keeping the two tied together.

"Both Asimina and Kairol had to deal with a subject that they were not very familiar with, but in a very short period of time they knew exactly what to project onto the stage and how to go about it," said Yannis Economou. "It looks easy but it takes hours of preparation to make it a reality."

In retrospect, Asimina makes an excellent observation: "In this age of Internet access and jet travel, it is easy to forget that ethnic dances are not just about a certain move, a kind of music or a distinctive costume. Dances are rich receptacles of culture, in which people embody their values and beliefs." ☐



Orpheus instructors Yannis and Kostas Economou showcased Greek folk dances during the ninth annual Chicago Folk & Roots Festival, which was organized by the Old Town School of Folk Music. The crowds filled up Welles Park for a weekend of music, dance and culture from around the world.



Orpheus performed at the Sts. Peter and Paul Church Greek Festival in July.



Orpheus member Bessie Grosso next to the Orpheus Urn at Chicago's Greektown. During the summer of 2006, visitors of Greektown had a chance to experience A Celebration of the Grecian Urn: A Street Art and Floral Exhibit. Huge urns were placed throughout Greektown. Each is hand painted by a local artist and filled with flowers from a local florist. Orpheus's urn was created by Chicago native and award winning ceramic artist Penelope Andreou.



Members of the cast: Nikos, Pinelopi, Kostas, Dimitri, Yannis, Dave and Asimina

photo gallery



Members of Orpheus are pictured with Dean Bellos, director of the Kyklos dance group of the Assumption church. Orpheus visits St. Louis annually to celebrate the Assumption Church Greek Festival.



The Chicago Children's Museum, along with the Hellenic Museum, presented an exhibit: Passport to the World: Greece. The exhibit celebrated Greek music, dance and crafts. Orpheus also performed.



The Orpheus Dance Troupe performed for the family picnic celebration at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Des Plaines, Ill. The St. John community and Orpheus have developed many strong relationships over the years, as many members are also part of the St. John parish.



Members get pumped up before the start of the performance during the annual Greek Town festival in Chicago at the end of August.



The Economou and Grosso family members had a chance to meet with dance instructors George Kotsos and Nancy Harmanda in Athens, Greece this summer.



Orpheus members had a chance to showcase a suite of Greek folk dances during the 2006 North America Bridge Championships, which took place at the Chicago Hyatt Hotel.

performance schedule

Ethnic Fest: The Many Faces of Lincolnwood

Lincolnwood Public Library
4000 W. Pratt Avenue
Lincolnwood, IL
Sunday, November 5
3 p.m.

"Introduction to Greece"

Lecture on Greek Folk Dance Traditions

University of Illinois at Chicago
Chicago, IL
Tuesday, November 21
1:30 p.m.

Christmas Around the World

Museum of Science and Industry
5700 South Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL
Saturday, December 9
2:45 p.m.

New Year Orpheus Benefit

Jimmy's Restaurant
1440 Rand Road
Des Plaines, IL
Sunday, December 31
8 p.m.

Orpheus Vasilopita Celebration

St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2350 E. Dempster Ave
Des Plaines, IL
Saturday, January 27
6 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 Winter issue of *Lyra* will be accepted until February 15, 2007. 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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