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The Newsletter for friends and members of OHFS
Vol. 15, Issue No. 1, Spring 2009

April 25, 2009 Orpheus Celebrates Milestone 20th Anniversary

Excitement is in the air. The countdown has started, and the anticipation continues to grow as the target date is fast approaching. For months now, heavy organization and preparation have been underway. Vocal chords have been relentlessly running musical scales. The sounds of a multitude of feet executing dance steps in time with island and mainland rhythms can be heard echoing Thursday nights in Northbrook and Saturday afternoons in Glenview. What's all the fuss about? The Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society is preparing to celebrate its 20th birthday. And, do we have a show planned for all!

It all began in the spring of 1989, when a group of approximately 15 young adults came together, on Chicago's North side, who shared a common interest in Greek folk dancing. Eventually, this group evolved into a performing dance troupe, complete with authentic costumes, instruc-

tors and an official name: The Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society (OHFS). As the word spread about OHFS, its membership began to expand, as did its repertoire and
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HELLENIC FOLKLORE SOCIETY

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Tax-exempt
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Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society

Celebrating 20 Years of Music, Song & Dance

Saturday, April 25, 2009
7 PM

North Shore Center for the Performing Arts
9501 Skokie Boulevard, Skokie, IL
Tickets \$35-50

1989-2009
ZORPHEUS

For more info or tickets call:
847-729-3406 773-501-2618 or visit www.ohfs.org

The poster for the 20th anniversary event

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reputation in the Chicagoland area. By 1995, the *Lyra* newsletter was in circulation, and the OHFS website made its debut, shortly thereafter, in 1997. In 1999, ten years after its inception, OHFS opened its doors to the Greek youth of Chicago, and established the OHFS Youth Group with a handful of members.

Flash forward to 2009. The Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society has enjoyed great success as a folk arts organization. Adult enrollment boasts over 60 members, while the Youth program fills to capacity each year with more than 100 new and returning members. The troupe has become a staple at annual events and celebrations such as Chicago's Greek American Parade, the Greek Consulate Independence Day Reception, Taste of Greece, the Museum of Science and Industry's 'Christmas Around the World' celebration, the McDonald's Thanksgiving Parade, and the Skokie Festival of Cultures program. Anyone passing by either of the two practice venues will probably hear the sounds of various unique instruments coming together to create distinctive Greek melodies, as Orpheus members "leap, two, three" and "step-hop, step-hop" along with the beat.

Since its inception, OHFS has travelled to Greece three times: Thessaloniki, Athens (Odeon of Herodotus Atticus Theater at the foot of the Acropolis) and, most recently, Kalamata, Messinia in the summer of 2007. The land that "started it all" continues to motivate and inspire Orpheus' directors and members alike. The fortunate members who participated in these trips will attest to the "magical" experience of performing in the motherland, and gaining a unique, priceless understanding of their heritage and culture.

Recently, OHFS debuted its revamped music ensemble, featuring professional instructors, and a variety of traditional folk and brass band instruments. The music group supports the troupe during various presentations,

but also performs on its own. The music group has performed at the annual Orpheus Vasilopita events, the Greek American Rehabilitation Center and at the Orpheus Youth Group's End of the Year Event. Some of the featured instruments include the clarinet, violin, toubeleki, daouli, santouri, accordion, trumpet, saxophone, bouzouki and baglama.



Orpheus member Christina Kakavas designed this logo especially for the anniversary. The design motifs were inspired by embroidery details from a costume.

In the interest of keeping the material fresh and members on their toes, the troupe participates in folk dance conferences, seminars, workshops and lectures, across the country and abroad. Over the years, Orpheus has collaborated with other well-known, and very talented folk dance instructors and enthusiasts such as the late Paul Ginis, Yvonne Hunt, Joe Graziosi and John Lulias in the US, Nancy Harmanta, George Kotsos, Lefteris Drandakis, Hara Deligianni, Niki Niora, Lazaros Hadjipanagiotou, Giorgos Zervas, George Mavropoulos, Kyriakos Moisidis, Tasos Mihos and Anna Mavrou from Greece.

OHFS' collaboration with the Chicago Hellenic Choir (CHC), directed by Eftihia Papageorgiou has been especially successful. For over three years, Orpheus has been collaborating with the CHC, practicing and presenting a variety of traditional and modern Greek songs, thereby adding another dimension to the dance troupe. Orpheus and the CHC have joined forces on numerous occasions to perform at various events and venues including, the Hellenic Museum, CHC

Spring Concerts, the FDF competition OHFS Vasilopita celebrations and Kalamata, Greece.

Through the years, OHFS has made over 700 appearances, both near and far. The troupe has traveled throughout the Chicagoland area and surrounding states, and as far as Canada and Greece. Media credits include appearances on such networks as ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, and FOX, as well as the troupe's 2002 appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show. In addition, Orpheus has made several appearances in media outlets in Greece and has been featured in magazines and newspaper articles. Furthermore, OHFS has the distinction of representing Greece by performing in the 1994 World Cup opening ceremonies, at Soldier Field in Chicago, in front of 65,000 fans, including U.S. President Clinton and an estimated worldwide television audience of over 1 billion!

Dates that at one point seem 'so far away' have a tendency to sneak up on you. Such is the case with Saturday, April 25, which, for Orpheus members, will arrive sooner than we think! That night, Orpheus will celebrate its 20 years of existence with a special program to be presented at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie. The program will feature the OHFS adult and youth group members, performing folk songs and dances in a variety of colorful, authentic, one-of-a-kind costumes. The dancers will be accompanied by members of the Orpheus music ensemble, the Chicago Hellenic Choir and special guest performers from Greece and the US. An audio visual presentation will feature highlights from the past 20 years and patrons will also enjoy various OHFS exhibits as well as several other surprises. Join the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society as we take a look back and celebrate two decades full of song, dance and memories, and, at the same time, look forward to another 20 years full of culture, heritage and even more memories! ☐

Reflections about Orpheus

It is my great pleasure to congratulate the Orpheus Dance Troupe of Chicago on celebrating its 20th anniversary. Almost since the beginning of Orpheus, I have had a relationship with the group and the directors, the Economou brothers. Remembering the beginning and seeing now what the group has become is an incredible story and journey.

So many times the dancers have come to Tarpon Springs to participate in the many dance conferences we have had. They have supported the folk dance scene and through their participation they have helped many other groups. The Economou brothers have given so much of themselves and I hope that is realized by the many that have benefitted from their hard work.

Congratulations again and good luck on continuing another 20 years!!! Keep up the great job you are doing.

John Lulias,
Director, Levendia Dance Troupe,
Tarpon Springs, FL

We, as Greeks, carry with us our history and our identity through our traditions, dances, songs, and ethnic dress. This is why we are able to retain our characteristics and our self-knowledge during difficult times, and in far away lands. I verified this while visiting many U.S. cities, teaching Greek dances to hundreds of Greek-American youngsters.

Even though I never had the chance to visit Chicago, I did have several opportunities to meet and teach young members of the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society, and naturally, its instructors, Yanni and Kosta Economou. Orpheus has done an excellent job in dutifully imparting traditions and knowledge to our younger generations, having devoted

20 years to passionately perpetuating the Greek culture abroad.

It is my pleasure to have taught these kids, and I sincerely wish them continued success for many more decades to come, as they continue their efforts with even more zeal and passion, with the support of Chicago's Greek community.

Kyriakos Moisodes,
Dance instructor and researcher
of Greek dance traditions,
Thessaloniki, Greece

Dancer, youth instructor, board member and editor of the *Lyra* newsletter: I've contributed to OHFS in many different ways and it's truly been a wonderful part of my life! I'm proud to say I was a member for over 10 years (my brother Andy also a member) and I can spend many hours relating fun, crazy and yes, sometimes even maddening experiences which come from being a member of OHFS. Let's go down memory lane... Some of the girls will remember that most of the female costume hats didn't fit me and I usually needed help to secure them (why—my head is too small!). Late nights spent writing and editing the newsletter with Kostas, Yannis and Christina K.—always on deadline, but determined to make it perfect! Or the time we descended on a Denny's restaurant in the wee hours of the morning accompanied by instructors Nancy and George from the Lyceum in Athens, who related stories of traveling to remote villages to learn obscure dances—legendary. Outside a hotel on an Athens street, joining a Bulgarian troupe dance their version of Baeduska, and smiling at the surprise on their faces! Or wandering through Athens at night with Alex and trying to sneak onto the Acropolis during our trip abroad to perform in the Athens Summer Festival... So many wonderful memories...

innumerable dances we've learned, friendships forged, countless performances, but the integrity and collective mission of the group remains. The 20th anniversary is an important milestone—here's to many more!

Christina Pagones,
former OHFS member

It's hard to believe that it was 20 years ago that my sister, Tina, and I started Greek dancing! We started with just a few of us with our instructor, Nikos. We were always trying to recruit new members—I even persuaded an Irish girlfriend of mine to join! But when I think about Orpheus, most of my memories are at River Park. Yanni and Kosta forever stopping and rewinding the tape player (pre-iPod days!), and of course, I can't think of those days without thinking of all the times spent trying not to laugh too hysterically with Christina Kakavas while learning new dances!

But it wasn't all about practice—some of the best memories are the times we spent at performances, getting dressed, talking and, of course, laughing. One performance I will never forget was one at Daley Plaza. We were dancing on a 3-4 foot high platform and during Zonaradikos one of the girls stepped just a little too far back and fell off the back of the stage! What was hilarious was that the dancers she was next to just joined hands and kept dancing! It was definitely a moment we all would never forget!

When I think back to those early days, it's really impressive to see how the dance group has evolved. Though I'm no longer dancing with Orpheus, I have wonderful memories and friendships that have remained. Congratulations on all of your success, Orpheus!

Linda Damianides,
former OHFS member

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Dear friends,

I am very happy to be able to participate, through this message, in this very important celebration. Naturally, I would have preferred to be there in person, like old times.

For me, my participation with the dance troupe was more than just an activity to occupy my free time or an opportunity to meet new people or simply to grant my parents' wish for me to learn Greek dance. I believe that the powerful and touching memories I have of my years in Chicago and with the dance troupe, that have followed me in life even until today, are priceless and I feel lucky to have had this privilege.

Orpheus was, for me, a true school of sorts, fostering the self-growth, development and evolution of my Greek identity, which had a significant impact not only on the development of my personality and character, but also on my conscience. This is something that I would like to believe also holds true for other young adults in our society. After so many years of service and dedication, it would not be an exaggeration to state that

Orpheus is the most priceless depiction of Greek cultural tradition in Chicago, and in the US in general.

This journey certainly would not have been possible without sacrifices, and was made possible because of your love, enthusiasm, patience, determination and tireless efforts. I hope that this astonishing, priceless, immense undertaking, with the immeasurable contributions from all the participants, will continue with endless perseverance for many more years to come. The legacy or "dowry" that Orpheus carries on its shoulders is a direct result of contributions from all its members, particularly the younger ones, and becomes richer and grander, day by day.

Congratulations to all of you for your great efforts, and solid commitment that you have demonstrated throughout the years, because I know how demanding and labor-intensive it can be. Continue to perpetuate the worthy traditions, ideals and all those elements of the genuine Greek traditions



Vaggelis (left) had a chance to re-join the Orpheus dance group during their trip to Thessaloniki, Greece, Summer of 1997.

and culture that make us stand out in the history of the world. Traditions that only the Greeks of the diaspora know how to honor in the proper way.

And remember that...
It's not the destination that's important, but the journey.

Vaggelis Zartaloudis,
former OHFS member,
Thessaloniki, Greece

spotlight on Orpheus...



Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

Parents/Family From: My parents are from Thessaloniki but most of the family members come from the Peloponnese

Time Dancing with Orpheus Group: 20 years

Thoughts on Dancing: It is a lot of fun and I owe my existence to it

Favorite Dance: All of them

Most Vivid OHFS Memory: Too many to list but some memorable moments were the formation of the group 20 years ago, the establishment of the youth and music groups, the trips to Greece, the concerts with visiting musicians, the World Cup festivities in 1994, the launch of the website and the *Lyra* newsletter, meeting and getting to know other dance enthusiasts around the US and world

Orpheus Banners Debut in Greek Town

If you've passed through Greek Town lately, you might have noticed something new "hanging around" in the neighborhood. Light posts along Halsted street are draped with colorful banners inviting everyone to join the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society in celebrating its 20 year anniversary. The banners were designed by Orpheus' own Christina Kakavas, and sponsored by the SSA #16 with the help of Bessie Grosso. The displaying of the banners is significant for many reasons. For several years, OHFS has been a staple in Greek Town, participating in many events, including the Greek-American parade, the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center and the Taste of Greece Festival, as well as performing at different restaurants in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the banners proudly mark a huge milestone for Orpheus, serving as yet another reminder that the Hellenic culture and traditions are definitely



Members of the Orpheus youth group gathered around one of the 20th anniversary banners.

alive in Chicago. On April 25, Orpheus will celebrate 20 remarkable years of traditions, culture, Hellenism, song and dance. We invite each of you to

join us at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie as we celebrate the past and look forward to an even more remarkable future. ☐

Favorite Greek Dish: Having melomakarona and dips during practices

Favorite Place in Greece: Athens, Thessaloniki, Kalamata

Hobbies/Sports/Other Interests: Traveling, music, theatre and multicultural performances

Nobody knows I: I like Mario Frangoulis concerts

Best childhood memory: The first time a member of the group was able to distinguish Yanni and Kosta

The perfect weekend: Performing in Greece and then going to the beach

Someone I'd like to meet: All the papous and yiayias that kept the traditions alive all these years

Favorite spot in Chicago: Chicago Cultural Center, Millennium Park, Navy Pier, Soldier Field, Halsted St.

I'm currently looking forward to: The 20th Anniversary event on April 25th. Needless to say it will be super!!

I stay home to watch: Workshop DVDs and past performances

Prized possession: My Hellenic heritage and traditions

Where I heard about Orpheus Dance Troupe: From Niko, Yanni and Kosta ☐



One of the first practice sessions at Welles Park in Chicago, 1989. Pictured in the front row are younger versions of Yannis and Kostas Economou. In the back row, center, is dance instructor Nikos Kourtis, who moved back to Greece in 1991 after finishing his studies in Chicago.



Members of the Orpheus dance group at the Illinois State Fair festivities in Springfield, Illinois – summer, 1992.



In September of 1997, Orpheus dancers Alexander Kapotas and Christina Pagonis represented the U.S. in the 1st Annual Celebration of Greek Artists Abroad in Athens, Greece. The show was part of the Festival of Athens, which takes place every summer at the Odeon of Herodus Atticus theater at the foot of the Acropolis.



In April 2001, the first Festival of Greek Music and Dance took place at the Chicago Historical Society in cooperation with the World Music Institute. The lineup included Niko and Kostas Filippidis, the Gevgelis Zourna ensemble, the brass band 'Chrisodahtili' and the renowned Thracian singer, Chronis Aidonidis.



The star and writer of the successful movie 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding' Nia Vardalos with members of the Orpheus dance group during a taping of the 'Oprah Winfrey Show' in 2002.



In 2007, approximately two hundred Orpheus members and their families visited Greece. Highlights included three successful dance and choral performances, workshops and meetings with local officials and dance groups, as well as several excursions around Kalamata.



Orpheus family and friends gathered together to celebrate the beginning of another exciting year at the 2009 Vasilopita celebration, at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox church in Des Plaines. There was plenty of non-stop dance action and all three branches of the Orpheus music group kept the crowd on their feet.



Members of the city of Ancient Korinthos dance group visited Orpheus' Northbrook practice facility where a variety of dances from the area of Korinthos and Central Greece were shown. The musicians that accompanied the dance group had a chance to join members of the Orpheus music group for an impromptu music workshop. A cultural event was organized in Chicago which featured folk singer Panayioti Laleza and the dance group from Ancient Korinthos.



Members of the Orpheus Youth group participated in the International Night festivities at Hoffman Elementary school in Glenview.



Father Sotiris Malamis blessed the Vasilopitas that were prepared for the evening.



Guests gathered at the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center for a viewing of the documentary, "A Dance to Remember, the Orpheus Folklore Dancers in Greece". The film tells the story of Vasiliki Grosso, who traveled with Orpheus for a performance in the hometown of her mother near Kalamata, Greece. Vasiliki presented Orpheus director Yanni Economou and Chicago Hellenic Choir director Eftihia Papageorgiou a memento at the conclusion of the presentation. The DVD is for sale at \$25. For more information, contact Vasiliki Grosso at 773-286-5132 or email at: grossob@aol.com.



Members of the Orpheus dance and music groups participated in the Passport to the World festivities organized by the Navy Pier Children's Museum and the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center, exploring Chicago's Greek community through music, dance, art, and the universal language of play.

performance schedule

Orpheus 20th Year Anniversary

Saturday, April 25, 2009
North Shore Center for the Performing Arts
Skokie, IL
7:00 p.m.

Skokie Festival of Cultures

Saturday, May 16
Oakton Park
4701 West Oakton St.
Skokie, IL
4:30 p.m.

Chicago Hellenic Choir Annual Spring Recital

Saturday, May 16
8237 Kenton Avenue
Skokie, IL 60076
7:30 p.m.

Midwest Young Artists Family Fun and Music Fest

Orpheus Youth and Music Groups
Sunday, May 16
MYA Center at Fort Sheridan
878 Lyster Road
Highwood, IL
4:00 p.m.

End of the Year Celebration Pizza and Music/Dance Gathering

Orpheus Youth Group
Giordano's Pizza
5990 W. Dempster ave.
Morton Grove, IL
2:00 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: (September through May)

Every Thursday at:

Session I: 5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Session II: 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 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 Winter issue of *Lyra* will be accepted until June 15, 2009. 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.

606 Greendale Rd.
Glenview, IL 60025

