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HELLENIC FOLKLORE
SOCIETY

606 Greendale Rd.
Glenview, IL 60025
847.657.0958

e-mail: orpheus@ohfs.org

www.facebook.com/orpheusdance

www.ohfs.org

Tax-exempt
Not-for-profit
Organization

Yannis Economou
847.657.0958
Director/President

Kostas Economou
847.729.3406
Instructor

Marianna Gudmundsson
847.967.5103
Artistic Director/Vice President

Bessie Kouchoukos-Grosso
773.286.5132
Youth Group Coordinator

The Newsletter for friends and members of OHFS

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Orpheus' Athens-Chios Tour a Great Success

You've probably heard the expression, "Go big or go home!" This summer, the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society proved, once again, that we don't do anything on a small scale! Almost one hundred and fifty Orpheus members and their families joined OHFS on its fourth trip to Greece since its inception in 1989. This year, the destinations were Athens and the island of Chios. Highlights included five successful dance and choral performances, meetings and workshops with local officials and dance groups, as well as excursions in Athens and around Chios.

The prelude to the Greece 2011 trip began with a visit to the magnificent national landmark, the Acropolis, and the impressive Acropolis Museum. After touring the ancient ruins and viewing the extraordinary artifacts on display at the museum, Orpheus members ended the evening with a casual dinner at Thanasis Taverna in Monastiraki.

The next day, the troupe kicked off the first of several performances in Greece, at the prestigious American College of Greece, Deree in Athens. The performance featured
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Orpheus members pose with Father Kaloudis (second row, center) and Presvytera Kaloudis from Chicago's Holy Trinity church in front of Agia Markella's church in Chios.

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the Orpheus youth and adult groups performing a variety of dances from mainland Greece and the islands. Orpheus member, Nicole Mitroussias, accompanied by Nikos Papathanasiou on the piano, performed song selections from celebrated Greek composer, Manos Xatzidakis. Nicole's pieces were arranged by Eftihia Papageorgiou, Director of the Odeion School of Music and Orpheus choral instructor. In addition, several Orpheus members addressed the audience, reflecting on what Greece means to them and what it feels like to have the rare opportunity to perform in the motherland.

Once in Chios, the performances continued. After a short rest, it was on to the village of Parparia to prepare for the first official performance in Chios, in the village square during the panegyri of Agia Paraskevi. Next was the dance festival in the amazingly well-preserved medieval village of Mesta, where Orpheus performed with several local Greek folk dance groups.

Another performance was given at the town square in Chios Town, where Orpheus joined 13 other dance groups from Chios. Each group formed their own circle and they all danced, simultaneously, a variety of dances from the islands of Chios, Samos, Limnos and Ikaria. At the Chios Town event, Dr. Mantikas, head of cultural



Orpheus youth members after completing a hands on tour of the production of mastiha at the village of Mesta.

affairs in Chios, welcomed Orpheus and commended the troupe on its continued efforts to preserve the Greek traditions and culture abroad.

The last performance in Chios took place at the Golden Sand hotel in the town of Karfas, during the annual Chios omogenia dinner. At the dinner, Ms. Isabella Bournias, President of the Enosis Omogenon Chios Society, presented all the performers with parting gifts consisting of mementos from Chios. She congratulated the members on perpetuating the rich traditions, history and culture of

Greece and thanked Orpheus for choosing Chios as the latest Greece trip destination.

While in Chios, Orpheus members had the chance to learn several local dances, courtesy of dance instructors, Yannis Gribabis and Symos Karaoulanis. The dances learned in the workshops were immediately put to the test at the performance in Chios Town a couple of days later. Mr. Gribabis and Mr. Karaoulanis commented on Orpheus' strong and extensive dance skills and how organized and disciplined the group was, especially with so many younger members.

In addition to swimming in the warm waters of the stunning beaches of Mavra Volia, Komi and Nagos, Orpheus members had the opportunity to visit various archeological, historical and religious sites around the island. The first excursion on the island took the troupe near the town of Volissos to the shrine of Agia Markella, the patron saint of Chios. We made the short trek along the seashore that ultimately leads to the spot where Agia Markella was executed and the small shrine commemorating her martyrdom. Orpheus was accompanied by Father and Presvytera Kaloudis, from Holy

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The Orpheus youth group performing at the Irene Bailey Theatre at the American College of Greece, Deree in Athens

Spotlight on Mesta, Chios: History, Traditions and Culture

Chios is the fifth largest of the Greek islands, situated in the Aegean Sea, five miles from the Asia Minor coast. The island is separated from Turkey by the Chios Strait and is noted for its strong merchant shipping community, its unique mastic gum and its medieval villages. The southern region of the island is famous for the Mastichochochia (Mastic villages) which include the following villages: Mesta, Pyrgi, Olympi, Kalamoti, Vessa and Elata. One of the most unique, significant and interesting of these villages is Mesta.

Mesta is a perfectly preserved medieval village of the Byzantine period (14th and 15th centuries). Mesta is one of those rare villages which has retained its personality, traditions and integrity over the centuries. It has survived earthquakes and other natural and man-made disturbances. To this day, it has been continuously inhabited and thriving since its original establishment.

The houses in Mesta are tied tightly together in a closed and compact "tunnel-like" form. This fortress style architecture served mainly as protection against the frequent attacks by invaders, enabling the inhabitants to move about the village without being seen. The narrow, cobbled and dark streets of Mesta are also an integral part of the defense system. Its labyrinth-style design was meant to deceive invaders and protect the inhabitants. Actual roads give the illusion of a dead end and dead ends give the illusion of an actual passage. The very narrow width of the main roads was calculated in such a way so that they were wide enough to ensure the passage of a fully loaded horse and its rider.

Furthermore, the houses themselves form small fortresses in their structure as well as in their room arrangement. Each is a unit, a building block of the fortress settlement, connected in a manner that makes the fortress solid.

The ground floor has one entrance and no windows, and was made from an earthen mixture with fireproof and waterproof elements called "*astrakia*". The main characteristic of the house is the "*pounti*", a sort of patio on the first floor accessible by a staircase which led to the sleeping areas, usually two bedrooms. The *pounti* had a ladder that went to the roof. In the event of an invasion, the ladder could be pulled up and the villagers could walk to the central tower for protection.

The production of mastic goes back to the 14th century, during the Genoese occupation. Mastic is the hardened resin of the mastic tree and is only harvested on Chios, being a major part of the local economy. The location of the mastic villages was carefully chosen: distant enough from the sea not visible to pirates and situated in small valleys having the protection of the surrounding hills.

The people of Chios, particularly Mesta, are extremely proud of their legacy and have worked very hard over the years to preserve their local history, culture and traditions. The Cultural Association of Mesta works diligently in this endeavor and sponsors various workshops, folk and cultural events year round.

Visitors to Mesta should make it a point to be present during feast days and celebrations, in order to really feel the pulse of the village and absorb the fantastic history and culture of the island. Furthermore, a trip to Mesta would not be complete without sampling the local cheeses, *souma*, (a locally made alcoholic drink derived from the distillation of figs), *kourmades* (ripe olives that can be consumed as soon as they are collected from the trees), Mesta red wine, made from red, sun dried grapes and a baked almond and honey delicacy.

For more information and photos of the village of Mesta please visit <http://www.chiosnet.gr/mesta> 



Orpheus members on their way to join the other local dance groups for a performance at the school in Mesta, Chios.

Reflections on the Trip to Chios

Christina H. (youth member)

On my trip to Greece, I spent so much time with my Orpheus friends that I have developed an incredible attachment to them. The trip was so flabbergastingly amazing from the performances to the workshops to the walking and to all the sites and monuments that I saw. I thought that learning about my heritage and culture was one of the many reasons that I had the best time in Greece. I honestly wish that it would be as easy to go again, considering how well it went this time.

Andrianna Mourgelas (parent)

I wanted to thank you for taking the time out of your lives to plan such a wonderful trip! I didn't know what to expect but really didn't think I would enjoy myself as much as I did. And of course the rest of my family did as well. Pappou can't stop talking about it! Just planning for my family to go



Orpheus members pose in front of Homer's Rock in the town of Vrontadon, Chios.

is stressful enough so I realize what an undertaking this was for you to plan. But congratulations to a very wonderful outcome!

Zack "Eleftherios" V. (youth member)

This trip to Greece was definitely one to remember. I'm looking forward to telling people back at school that I danced in Greece. Most of the kids that went might not get this kind

of experience again: to perform in Athens, and in Chios. Overall I think the trip went very well, and everybody got along. Also pretty much everybody, including me, made some new friends that we would otherwise never see since they only go to practice on Thursdays. Nobody would have ever thought that all this could have happened. I am so glad I was part of it and happy to have had the wonderful experience.

spotlight on Orpheus dancer...



Adam Andreas
Papadolias

Hometown: Chicago

Parents/Family From: Father is from Kollines, Arcadia. Mom is Irish-German and from Elgin, Illinois.

Time Dancing with Orpheus Group: Since October 2004.

Thoughts on Dancing: It makes the baggage fall off.

Favorite Dance: Cretan Syrtos when I can remember it.

Most Vivid OHFS Memory: Taking a date to the dance workshop where I met Yiannis and Kostas, then playing Xanthippi Karathanassi's "Aspra Mou Peristeria" in the car, amazed at how many different Greek dances I'd learned (and how quickly they slipped from my memory) and that not all Greeks are impatient.

Apostolos Georgiafentis (parent)

It isn't every day that one visits The Homeland. With this economy it is a lot to ask of people. Chios is my birthplace. Last I visited was five years ago.

I found myself admiring these students performing in song and dance. I admired these young adolescents all in a row as they performed. Dances that their ancestors performed, yet withstood the winds of change and endured. I heard melodic voices singing in song. They sang songs that were sung for generations. They sang beautiful lyrics that tell you of a story of love, of sadness, and of hope.

I commend the teachers for their enduring patience. To teach all these students of our history is quite a feat. I admired the students speak of their ancestry and give us a glimpse of their lives and their history. One of those students was my son Stefano. I am very proud of him.

I thank the parents, many whom I did not know much about till this journey. I was given the opportunity



The Haralampopoulos family pictured in front of the ancient ruins at Ephesus, Turkey

to bond with them and experience the shared joy. I thank the parents for sacrificing their time and monies for the overall good of extending our bicultural boundaries. Reuniting ourselves with our families, our culture, and our homeland.

Enclosing with great pride I very much enjoyed this experience. The opportunity to share this with my family far exceeds all my expectations. I would do it again in a heartbeat.

For more Greece 2011 trip reflections visit ww.ohfs.org 

Favorite Greek Dish: My dad's chicken kokkinisto.

Favorite Place in Greece: The Plaka. Yes, I'm a tourist, and all the memorabilia still thrills me, especially all the baglamades. I want to buy them all and get them trending in my hood. What this city needs is more baglamades and more cats.

Hobbies/Sports/Other Interests: Sitar, writing sonnets, swimming, yoga, kayaking, grassdancing at Native American pow wows.

Nobody knows I: bellydance. Oops, secret's out.

The perfect weekend would be: You had to ask. A good two-hour sitar lesson where Guruji finally starts me on Raag Shree, followed by a dinner of Indian food. Then we (insert tabla-playing date) take a wrong turn down an alley and wind up in 1930s Pireaus, where we wander into a taverna and hear Rita or Roza crooning Rebetika. Lo and behold someone drops a baglama into my hands. We'd

never leave, but who can resist the stray kittens mewing outside? They (the *gatakia*) lead us to the harbor, where we get into a canoe under the proverbial stars, float and speak in sonnets, land on sand (the beach behind my apartment), and play Raag Lalit (sitar and tabla) as dawn breaks. To understand what happens next, you kind of have to know the song.

Someone I'd like to meet: Rita Abhatzi or Roza Eskenazy. My papous.

Favorite spot in Chicago: My corner of Hollywood Beach where I play baglama.

I am currently looking forward to: Learning past tense in Greek.

Where I heard about the Orpheus Dance Troupe: Dance as a Second Language workshop at Old Town School of Folk Music. 

Orpheus Members Volunteer at Special Olympics World Games in Greece

Bessie Grosso, Orpheus Youth Group Coordinator, and her daughter Catherine, recently volunteered at the 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Greece. Before leaving for Greece, Bessie joined fellow Orpheus members at the send-off ceremony and dinner for the Illinois delegation to World Games this past June in Chicago's Greek town.

The application process was set in motion three years ago. It was a long process, but Bessie was really excited to finally get the opportunity to go to the World Games. She knew this was a great opportunity since the World Games were occurring in her ancestral homeland of Greece. Bessie said, "What made me want to volunteer is I looked at this as an important opportunity. I enjoy sports. I have the summers off, being a teacher myself, so I thought [this] was a wonderful opportunity for me to be able to meet some of these great athletes and be able to help in something that I love so much."

Upon her arrival in Greece, Bessie picked up her uniform and headed straight for the Olympic village where



Bessie Grosso and her daughter, Catherine, both volunteered at the 2011 Special Olympics World Games in Athens Greece.

she received her assignment and an orientation about World Games and Special Olympics.

While at the World Games, Bessie volunteered at the Gymnastic Center, while her daughter, Catherine, volunteered at the Judo venue. Bessie was especially excited to volunteer in gymnastics, since this was her specialty sport that she studied in college while getting her degree in physical education. In Athens, she helped to bring the athletes onto the competition floor and helped them as they rotated to each of the gymnastics events. She also assisted

with putting up the scores as the athletes completed each event.

Bessie enjoyed seeing many of the Illinois athletes and coaches when she was at World Games. She also enjoyed seeing everyone march in at the Opening Ceremony, as well as hearing the inspiring words of all the speakers in the stadium where the first modern Olympic Games were held. Bessie commented after the Games that she was "very proud to have helped here in Athens and so proud of the opportunity to be here and learn so much about Special Olympics." ☐

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Trinity church in Chicago. Father and Presvytera are both Chios natives and their presence in Chios was a wonderful surprise to Orpheus! The itinerary also included excursions to the remarkable monastery at Nea Moni, the ancient and unique villages of Pyrgi and Anavatos and Omiroupolis, where OHFS members got a chance to see Homer's Rock where, as legend has it, the famous Greek poet derived much of his inspiration. A trip to Chios would not be complete without a tour of the

masticha groves, and a lesson in the art of masticha production, one of the top exports of the island. The adults received their interactive masticha education, while the kids went on a separate, much more "hands on" tour and had a lot of fun getting messy! The troupe also went on a day long excursion to see the famous Greek and Roman ruins at Ephesus, Turkey.

The last day in Chios was particularly challenging. After a long day packed with sightseeing, swimming and performing, Orpheus members had

no time to waste since they had a boat to catch at just a little after midnight! Rushing to get ready after their last performance for the Omogenia of Chios dinner, Orpheus members grabbed their costumes, suitcases and fantastic memories of their week-long adventure in Chios and headed for the port on their way back to Athens and individual destinations.

For pictures and video of the trip, please visit www.ohfs.org or find us on Facebook. ☐



The 2011 -2012 year is off to a great start for the OHFS youth group, as the kids pose for a group shot on the first day of practice at the Glenview practice facility.



Kids from the youth group's Thursday session gather together for a "photo op" at the Northbrook practice location.



World famous Arthur Murray dance studios held their annual North Star Dance-O-Rama event in downtown Chicago. This year's theme was, "It's Greek to Me" and Orpheus was invited to perform at Friday night's theme party. After the performance, audience members, dressed up in Greek-themed costumes, joined Orpheus on the dance floor for an impromptu Greek dance lesson.



The Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) filmed a segment during this year's "Taste of Greece" event in Chicago's Greektown, featuring the Orpheus dance group. The dancers were interviewed by Zach Anner, an Austin, Texas based stand-up comedian with cerebral palsy. Orpheus members, accompanied by the Hellenic Five Orchestra, demonstrated some familiar Greek folk dances such as, Kalamatianos, Tsamikos, Zonaradikos and Hasaposervikos, during which Zach joined in the fun.



Special Olympics athletes from Illinois were crowned with olive leaves by Orpheus members in the ancient tradition at a ceremony in Chicago's Greektown, in June of this year, as they prepared to depart for Greece and the Special Olympics World Games ATHENS 2011. Orpheus Youth coordinator, Bessie Grosso, was in Athens volunteering.



For the 20th consecutive year, Orpheus participated in the "Taste of Greece" event in Chicago's Greektown. The troupe performed island dances in front of a packed audience. Orpheus members danced in front of the Orpheus booth, giving the crowd a sneak preview right before the performance.

performance schedule

Chicago McDonald's Thanksgiving Parade

Thursday, November 24
State Street
Chicago, IL
8:00 a.m.

Christmas Around the World

Sunday, December 11
Museum of Science & Industry
5700 S. Lake shore Drive
Chicago, IL
4:30 p.m.

Orpheus Vasilopita Celebration

Saturday, January 28, 2012
Saint John the Baptist Greek Church
2350 Dempster Street
Des Plaines, IL
6:00 p.m.

Neighborhoods of the World

Sunday, March 4, 2012
Navy Pier
Chicago, IL
12 - 5:00 p.m.

Greek American Rehabilitation & Care Centre

Sunday, March 11, 2012
Orpheus Youth Group
220 North 1st Street
Wheeling, IL
3:00 p.m.

Orpheus Youth - End of Year Celebration

Sunday, May 20, 2012
Saint John the Baptist Greek Church
2350 Dempster Street
Des Plaines, IL
3:00 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:

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 Winter issue of *Lyra* will be accepted until January 15, 2012. 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

