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The Newsletter for friends and members of OHFS
Vol. 14, Issue No. 2, Spring 2008

Orpheus Debuts Revamped Music Ensemble

The Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society is proud to announce the debut of its newly revamped music ensemble. The group was formed in September of 2007 and is comprised of youth and adult members, featuring a wide array of instruments and a large repertoire of musical selections.

Originally, the Orpheus music ensemble was established a few years ago in an informal way, when a few adult members that played certain instruments got together and started jamming. This year, the program became more organized and structured with the hiring of two professional instructors. Since several kids already played certain instruments with their schools' bands like clarinet, violin and percussion, the idea of offering them a venue, and the means to be part of a formal effort where they would enhance

their own skills by learning Greek folk music pieces, came pretty easily. Music group violinist, Danielle, comments, "I've been part of several orchestras and chamber groups, but this is the first time I've been in a music group that's focused on Greek music. I enjoy learning about Greek Folk music - I've never gotten the chance to learn or play it before. I love being able to connect to my heritage in this way".

This first year, auditions were held so that the program would start with a certain number of members, ensuring better monitoring of progress and goals. Featured instruments are the clarinet, violin, toubeleki, daouli, santouri, accordion, bouzouki and baglama. Eventually, the plan is to incorporate more rustic instruments, such as the gaeda (bagpipe), flute
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Sophia and Stefanie kept the crowd on their feet, singing a variety of tunes such as, "Yanni Mou to Mantili Sou", "Dahtili" and "Kato Stin Roedo". Also pictured are Jim Stoyhoff on clarinet and Izaki and Danielle on violin.

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and tsabouna (island bagpipe). The music group has already covered a wide spectrum of material from both mainland and island regions. There are significant differences between these two styles of music, making it difficult for the musicians to label one style as their favorite. "I like playing both island and mainland music. Mostly fast songs where my hands feel like they are flying", comments Paul. "I like all of them, but I like the ones that I can move a lot with my toubeleki." The multitude of instruments affords the group the opportunity to cover a lot of different material from many regions, and gives the musicians the chance to expand their talent as they take up new instruments. Paul notes, "It's fun to play the different songs. It makes me feel special to know I have control of how fast or slow we play. I am learning how to play the daouli now. I like to make a lot of noise and this drum really takes charge!" Izaki, one of the group's younger members, plays both violin and bouzouki. When asked about his preferences between island and mainland music, he replied, "I really enjoy playing island music more than mainland music. Greek island music is very fast paced and extremely challenging, but fun to play." It is safe to state that the sky is the limit for the music group members, as there are thousands of Greek folk recordings that they can learn from. This, of course, will be accomplished with the help of our two instructors, George Lawler and Eve Monzingo, who have already made great progress with the group. George Lawler is an accomplished percussionist and drum maker. Eve Monzingo is a talented, multi-instrumentalist who specializes in folk music of the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Jim Stoyhoff, a long-time friend and collaborator of Orpheus, also lends his expertise and talent to the music ensemble. For more extensive biographies on George, Eve and Jim, please visit our website, www.ohfs.org.

The original Orpheus music ensemble has performed at many venues in the



Playing the santouri, Eve Monzingo is one of the instructors of the newly revamped OHFS music group which provided the entertainment for the annual Vasilopita event at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Des Plaines, IL.

past, such as the University of Chicago Balkan Festival, The Greek Star newspaper 100th Year Anniversary and several other events, including the annual Orpheus Vasilopita celebration. In its current, more improved state, the music group has been received with great success, and the response has been overwhelming...in a good sense. There was great participation at the auditions—more than was ever expected. In addition, many other parents are already inquiring about next year's program and the requirements for joining the music group.

The music group serves exactly the same mission as the Orpheus Dance Troupe, in that it complements and enhances the way Orpheus' mission can be executed. Greek folk culture is best expressed when all three major elements are presented live: dancing, singing and music. There is no better way to present the folk songs and dances than with the accompaniment of live music. The music group will support the troupe during various presentations, but can also perform on its own. Most recently, the group has performed at the 2008 Orpheus Vasilopita event, the Greek American Rehabilitation Center and is scheduled to entertain the crowd at the Orpheus Youth Group, End of the Year

Event this coming May. Looking to the future, the music group would accompany the dance groups on a more regular basis, especially at more suitable venues such as libraries, educational institutions, auditoriums etc.

It is very exciting and encouraging to see how the younger members have responded so positively to this group, as they gain a sense of accomplishment and self-assurance. "I love being a part of the music group because it gives me a chance to express my musicality and my heritage at the same time", notes Danielle. Izaki adds, "I like being part of a group that enjoys Greek music. Also, everybody is so kind." By joining the music ensemble, kids and teens can benefit in many ways: developing and honing aural skills and a heightened sense of rhythm; an appreciation for, and an interest in, the musical traditions of the many varying regions of Greece; and lastly, confidence in their stage presence and performing abilities which will further serve them in other aspects of life.

Auditions for next year's junior music group will be held on June 12 and 19 at 5:30 p.m. at the Northbrook facility. All interested candidates should contact OHFS for additional information. ☐

Orpheus Participates in 2008 Winter Dance Conference

By Niko Bokas

The 2008 Winter Dance Conference was held in Tarpon Springs, Florida, on January 3-5. I attended this spectacular event, together with my wife, Patricia, my daughter, Christina, and my mother, Sophia. We had heard that Tarpon Springs was Greektown U.S.A., and it did not disappoint. The community is vibrant, hospitable, and generous. With 75% of the townspeople of Greek descent—the highest percentage of Greek descendants of any city in America—and with Greek flags lining the main streets and Greek shops and eateries to be found at every turn, we felt welcome and at home from the very moment of our arrival. It is a very fitting location for a Greek dance seminar.

The conference concentrated on dances and songs from the region of Macedonia. The instructors at the workshop were Joe Graziosi (Boston), who taught dances from Orma; Kyriakos Moisides (Thessaloniki), who taught dances from the Pella area (Episcopi, Hariessa, Karydia and

Kerasia) and Yiannis Papadopoulos (Kozani), who taught dances while singing songs from his village, Krokos, as well as from other areas of the prefecture of Kozani (Velvendos and Siatista). In attracting experienced and talented Greek folk dance instructors such as these, the annual Winter Dance Conference contributes to the richness and diversity of the ever-growing OHFS repertoire.

Participants at the three day workshop came from as far away as Edmonton and Toronto, Canada, New York City, Indiana, Chicago and Wisconsin. The songs and dances from Kozani had particular significance to my mother because she grew up in Avgherino, a village in Kozani. She recalled some of the songs and dances from her childhood as they were being taught to the rest of us.

The all-day workshops were held at the Spanos Community Center, a large modern facility located right next to St. Nicholas church. The wooden dance floor was smooth and



Niko Bokas filming his family learning several new dance steps during one of the workshops in Florida.

easy on the feet. We enjoyed lunching together at noon each day, and got to meet Greek dance enthusiasts who came from a variety of places, near and far.

The workshops were followed each evening with dance parties with music by Ziyia, a fabulous band with a rich sound coming from an assortment of instruments, including the violin, bouzouki, santouri (dulcimer), gaida, zourna, clarion and various drums. There were many talented and energetic dancers that made the evening glenti a showpiece of Greek dance. Included among the attendees at the glenti were a dozen or so performance dancers from the small island of Halki, which is close to Rhodes and part of the Dodecanese. They demonstrated some of their island dances, including Sousta, Vlachia and Zervodexo. The dance conference ran from Thursday through Saturday.

After the Epiphany liturgy on Sunday, a parade from the church ended at Spring Bayou, where about 60 boys dove for the cross, a traditional part of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral's Epiphany celebration. After the Epiphany celebrations, many dance groups performed a wide variety of dances before a large audience in a nearby park on a beautiful, warm day. The Winter Dance Conference packs a lot of music, dancing, and fun that makes it well worth attending for a winter getaway. We're already looking forward to going next year, and I would recommend it to everyone at Orpheus. ☐



OHFS members and family attending this year's Winter Dance Conference in Tarpon Springs, Florida. Also pictured are instructors of the conference, Joe Graziosi (Boston), Kiriakos Moisidis (Thessaloniki, Greece) and Yannis Papadopoulos (Kozani, Greece).

Choral Singing and Folk Dancing: The Connection

By Eftihia Papageorgiou

Over the last few years that I have been working with the Orpheus choral group, I have been exploring the answers to a question; one that has also been raised by several Orpheus members: Why is it important and beneficial to incorporate choral music into dance practices and performances?

Behind each dance step there is melody and rhythm. Behind that melody and rhythm, there are lyrics that define the context surrounding the dance. A series of dance steps alone do not create the dance; what creates the dance is the incorporation of the Greek spirit. But what is it that creates the Greek spirit? It is the cultural dimension that is involved in every dance. Our history and traditions shine through our Greek dances. Similarly, the poetry of Greek folk songs reflects on every aspect of our culture: history, tradition, religion, language, geography,

everyday life, love, pain, hardships, and more. When we study the songs, learn the lyrics, combine the lyrics and the music, and then combine it all with the dance steps, we own the performance. Dancing alone is a type of performance and means of expression. Dancing and singing at the same time creates a dimension that leads us to another way of owning the repertoire, and as a result, owning our culture.

I view it as a chain of learning steps. The members of the group study the dance steps along with the music, they put the steps together, they feel the rhythms, and they coordinate their dance steps to the music. When they study the songs and the lyrics and they begin to sing them while dancing, the process changes to a different kind of creative process because they are actually creating the music themselves while dancing to it. The result is a deep connection with the performance. It is a truly amazing process.

During practices, I often find myself inside the dance circle surrounded by the dancers while I coordinate their singing. At first glance, it looks like a very simple set-up: a conductor and a choir. From my perspective, the set-up is not at all simple. In fact, it is very complex and powerful. What I am experiencing while I am standing in the center of that circle is an intense and pure taste of Greece. I am surrounded by music, dancing, singing, poetry, technique, expression, interpretation, emotion, and spirit. I find myself in the center of the circle of Greek culture.

Singing enhances the meaning behind the dancing. Dancing adds a more physical dimension to the singing. Singing and dancing become one through the music. The participants become uniquely involved and focused. The performance resonates with the audience. The Greek spirit becomes alive. 📺

Eftihia Papageorgiou is the founder and director of the Chicago Hellenic Choir and the Odeion School of Music.

spotlight

on Orpheus
dancer...



Alexander
Benziger

Hometown:
Chicago

Parents/Family From:
My Yiayia is from Lachanada, Messinia and my Papou is from Tsaratsa, Messinia.

Time Dancing with Orpheus Group:
I have been with the group for 5 years.

Thoughts on Dancing:
I think that dancing is great. It is an awesome outlet for energy, and a great way to show my pride in my heritage.

Favorite Dance:
My favorite dance is probably Pentozalis.

Preserving Greek Heritage and Culture in Our Children Through Dancing and Singing

By Bessie Kouchoukos-Grosso

Performing is what we do for others; dancing is what we do for ourselves.

—Yvonne Hunt

This is so true. People will stop and ask me, “Bessie where did you learn to dance?” Well, of course, in my living room with my mom. She would play the records we bought at the long gone Polk Brothers on Belmont Avenue in Chicago. Now I do the same with my own children.

Unknowingly, my mother began the important process of preserving her culture. Seemingly trivial experiences such as this are the beginnings of cultural transmission. I began to reflect on the process of preserving my Greek heritage and culture with my own children. They want to learn Greek dance and make this a priority over other activities. On Thursday nights, you will most likely find us at the practice facility of the Orpheus

Hellenic Folklore Society. My kids and I join several other Orpheus members in an intense, yet fun, night of Greek song and dance.

While reflecting on the process of preserving our culture through dance, I was prompted to pose a few questions to some Greek dance instructors and aficionados. “Why should we be teaching Greek dance?”, I asked Hara Deliyanni, Assistant Artistic Director of the Lykeion ton Hellinidon, in Athens, Greece. Her response was, “Dance is regarded as one of the highest forms of art and has always been an expression of human feelings. On the other hand, due to the fact that traditional dance passes from generation to generation, it’s a way to keep our national identity.” I remember watching the spectacular 2004 Olympics in Athens and there was Hara with her dancers showing the world who we are through our dances.

Greek dancing is an excellent way of making Greek history, culture and traditions come alive for children. Dr. Ellena Vranas, Director of the Apollo Dance Troupe in Aurora, Illinois, explains, “Our men really enjoy performing the Mehanicos dance from Kalymnos. Without this dance, our troupe wouldn’t be aware of the fact that sponge diving was a big part of the economy and culture of this beautiful island.” Mehanicos is a dance that represents the perils of sponge diving, specifically it showcases a man with the bends, a common condition afflicting deep sea divers. In Tarpon Springs, Florida, where they still have sponge docks, the first Greek immigrants were from Kalymnos. Each winter John Loulias hosts the Winter Dance Conference during the Epiphany celebration. More than 40,000 spectators gather to watch as dance groups march down the streets dressed in their ethnic costumes singing and danc-

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Most Vivid OHFS Memory:

My most vivid Orpheus memory is the trip to Greece over the summer. I will never forget the pleasures of dancing in Greece and playing on the beaches with the Orpheus community.

Favorite Greek Dish:

Youvetsi is my favorite Greek dish. It is just delicious.

Favorite Place in Greece:

My favorite place in Greece would have to be Finikounda. Not only is it just down the vouno from our horio, but it has one of the most beautiful beaches and it is just a great place to hang out.

Hobbies/Sports/Other Interests:

I play trumpet in my school (Lincoln Park)’s concert band. I also play baseball (pitcher and center fielder), water polo, and I swim.

Best childhood memory:

My best childhood memory is probably when I was in Greece as a little kid, and I caught an octopus on the beach.

Favorite spot in Chicago:

I love to go to the beach. It is awesome during the summer for swimming, hanging out with people, and getting a tan.

I’m currently looking forward to:

I’m currently looking forward to going college touring over the summer.

Where I heard about Orpheus Dance Troupe:

My Thea Bessie got me involved in the dance troupe when I was old enough to start dancing, and I have been involved in it ever since then. ☐

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ing towards the grandstand for the Blessing of the Waters. It is at events like this that history is brought to life through the teaching of dances, like the Mehanicos, as well as direct participation in cultural traditions.

Why is Greek dancing an important method in preserving our culture? Yannis Economou, Director of the Orpheus Hellenic Folklore Society (OHFS), reflects, "Greek dancing provides a multidimensional medium to enhance the Hellenic culture. It is expressed in many social functions such as weddings, festivals or just small gatherings. These gatherings are also opportunities for people who share the same culture and interests to meet. These dances were meant for the entire community to participate so they are very communal in nature." Furthermore, Yanni explains that, "Greek dance involves other cultural aspects such as singing and playing an instrument. Many Greek-Americans who were not fluent in Greek gained a new interest in the language when they started to learn some of the respective songs."

Eftihia Papageorgiou, Director of the Chicago Hellenic Choir, knows this well. She notes that, "Greek singing is not just about music. Children who are exposed to Greek singing have the opportunity to learn a great deal about Greek culture, religion, tradition, geography, history, and language. When children study the rich Greek repertoire of our famous contemporary Greek composers, they are also exposed to beautiful poetry written by outstanding Greek poets."

Connecting the songs to the regions they came from is another example of how learning dancing and singing can be a valuable geography and history lesson. Greek singing is another way of keeping our children in touch with our religion. Our church music can easily become a part of singing sessions, and can teach children how to stay connected to our faith even outside of the



Yvonne Hunt, during her 2006 visit, pictured with OHFS members along with representatives from the Apollo Dance Troupe in Aurora, IL.

church environment. The greatest value of Greek singing is that children make all of the above connections through music, which is a very pleasant way of learning. They keep coming back for more music, and what they are really coming back for is more culture.

Okay, so we are Greek. We know and want to learn about our culture. Yvonne Hunt, a non-Greek, is a well-known Greek ethnographer and dance instructor from Seattle, Washington. She reflected with me on her experiences with dance.

"For those of Greek descent living outside of Greece, it has been one item that binds those descendents to the land of their ancestors. There is a great emphasis in some communities of the diaspora to teach the children to dance, and not just to dance the dances of their parents, but also to learn dances from many regions of Greece especially for performance purposes.

There is no better place for a child to learn his cultural heritage, whether it is dance or some other aspect, than from his parents. That, of course, is the starting point. However, the

broader-based community is much wider geographically now than the local village in Greece. There is a greater variety of cultural customs to which a child is exposed. Preserving or passing on customs of Greece may need to be done in a more organized fashion such as dance classes."

Through my experiences, I have been fortunate enough to have met experts in Greek dancing and singing who are trying in their own way to preserve our Greek identity and heritage. Young and old can enjoy a dance. The idea is for everyone to get together and take pleasure in that synergistic moment. It is up to us, as adults, to inspire and motivate the younger generations to perpetuate our rich and beautiful culture. We have come a long way from our living rooms...how lucky for me to have great parents that shared their love for Greek dance and music. Hopefully my grandchildren will too. ☐

References:

Please check the OHFS website (www.ohfs.org) for links to all the above referenced individuals and organizations as well as other upcoming dance seminars and workshops.



Father Kounavis blessed the vasilopites during the OHFS annual Vasilopita event at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.



In this year's Greek-American parade along Halsted Street, members of the music group had a chance to showcase their talents along with members of the youth group on top the Parthenon Restaurant float.



The OHFS gave a lively performance during this year's Chicago Greek Consul Greek Independence Day Reception at the Chicago Cultural Center. Yannis, Kostas and Peter pictured with Honorable General Consul of Greece, Mr. Petrovas and his wife.



OHFS youth members, Paul, Louiza and Vasiliki, enjoying a Pyrgousikos moment. The youth group also performed Zonaradikos, Palamakia and Hasaposervikos during the International Night program at Hoffman Elementary School.



OHFS youth members danced an energetic Tsamiko while residents of the Greek American Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Wheeling, IL looked on.



OHFS music group members, Yannis on the bouzouki, Dimitri on baglama and Paul on toumbeleki, performed for residents of the Greek American Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

performance schedule

Skokie Festival of Cultures

Saturday, May 17
Oakton Park
4701 West Oakton St.
Skokie, IL
4:30 p.m.

End of the Year Youth Event

Sunday, May 18
St. John The Baptist Church
2350 E. Dempster St.
Des Plaines, IL
3:00 p.m.

Cultural Events Series

Tuesday, October 15
Wright College
4300 N. Narragansett
Chicago, IL
7:30 p.m.

Chicago Hellenic Choir Concert

Saturday, May 17
Northside College Prep High School
5501 N. Kedzie Ave.
Chicago, IL
7:30 p.m.

Assumption Church Greek Fest 2008

Saturday-Sunday, May 24-25
St. Louis, MO

2008 McDonald's Thanksgiving Parade

Thursday, November 27
State Street
Chicago, IL
8:30 – 11:00 a.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 Summer issue of *Lyra* will be accepted until August 15, 2008. 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.