

It's All Greek To Me ...!

Peter Casey, the musical director of "Las Vegas", the new musical written and produced by Greek Australian master illusionist James Karp (ne Karpouzis), talks about his own Greek heritage.

Firstly, may I say what an honour it is to be invited to speak about myself and my family in the Greek newspaper, although I sadly confess to having very little knowledge of the Greek side of my heritage. However, if having an insatiable fondness for moussaka, and spit-roasted lamb with lemon-thyme potatoes, has any real significance, then I unreservedly claim ownership of my glorious Hellenic past.

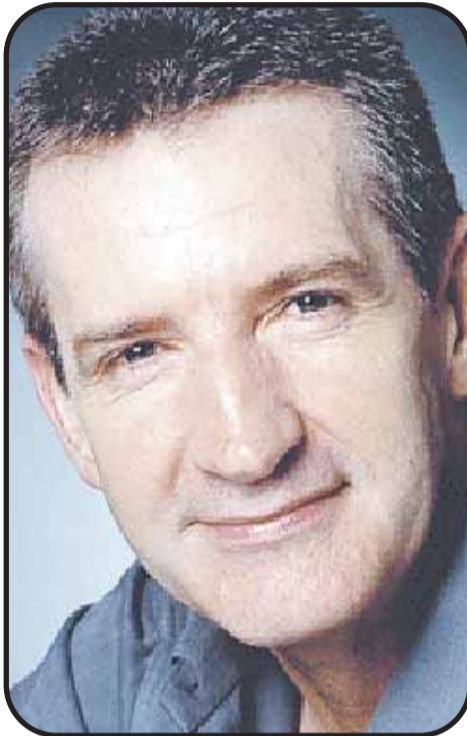
Other than my mediterranean taste-buds, a grand passion for Yanni's music, and entertaining on-board several Chandris Line Cruises in the seventies - which sadly sailed nowhere near Greece at the time - I do remember reluctantly being photographed during Chandris' Greek Night wearing a white skirt, white tights, and enormous pom-poms on my head and feet! I must admit that apart from feeling slightly embarrassed at the time, I did feel a strange sense of belonging, in those conspicuous white tights and pom-poms!

And one of my fondest memories is sharing Metaxa brandy with the Greek crews after the shows. The fact that I could not speak Greek, and they, very little English, did not matter, as I found that eating, drinking, being merry, and dancing the Sirtaki, was the only language needed. I used to marvel at their inherent and joyous love of life, and that's when I discovered that precious one-quarter of Greek blood pulsing through my veins, and embraced it whole-heartedly.

My paternal grandmother

Thinking back, perhaps the gods of circumstance had kept me in the dark about my Hellenic origins from the start? The answer may lie in my early years. I was born in Warren, country NSW, where Greek restaurants had not been invented at the time, however I was blessed to have been brought up in a musical community, which was inspired by my parent's love of music. My parents, Reg Casey and Mona Teys, had three sons, Howard, myself and younger brother, Ralph, and because my father was a master builder, we moved several times during my childhood, eventually settling in Moorabbin, Victoria, in my teens.

My father's mother, Eva Nomikos, was born on Santorini, and apart from my father's passion



Peter Casey, the esteemed musical director of Las Vegas has Greek roots

for biblical movies, his favourite being 'Demetrius and the Gladiators', starring Victor Mature, he always used to say his family was in oil - olive oil! As children, we used to hope we were related to a Greek shipping-magnet, our only reference at the time being photos of Aristotle Onassis on his gleaming yacht. But apart from that, my father spoke very little of his family or heritage in those early years, although shortly before he passed away, he had the wonderful experience of travelling to Santorini with my step-mother, Del, and meeting his uncle, who after seeing a photograph of my father with his three sons, embraced him into his family. They had a photograph together, which my father proudly showed to all of us when they returned. He bought a Greek cap whilst on Santorini, which he fondly treasured, along with meeting his uncle.

My wife, Catherine, discovered the wonders of Greece many years ago, and has been wanting to share those wonders with me ever since. We hope to do so soon, and at last I too will experience the unique magic that only Greece and the Aegean can offer.

My musical journey

Thanks to my parents, my life in music has been a joyous and rewarding journey, from the moment I was given my first toy piano as a child, which was the beginning of my passion for music theatre, performing and orchestrating. I have



since been fortunate enough to have been Musical Director for many wonderful musicals -.... including The Wizard of Oz, The Sound of Music, Les Miserables, The King and I, Chicago, Cabaret, Fiddler on the Roof, Company, Monty Python's Spamalot, Evita, Song and Dance, Jesus Christ Superstar, Cats, Grease - The Arena Spectacular, Sunset Boulevard, The Pajama Game, 42nd Street, The Producers - - and I am currently Musical Supervisor for 'Las Vegas The Musical', which my colleague, Master Illusionist James Karpouzis, has created and produced. Apart from introducing me to the joys of Greek coffee and baklava, and sat-

isfying my cravings for caffeine and sugar, I also hope to learn many-things Greek from James during our association, and who knows, we might even dance the Sirtaki together one day.

Also, I was recently given my first set of 'worry-beads', which is a puzzling concept to me, because I didn't think Greek people had anything to worry about. At least, they weren't given to me by James - then I might have reason to worry! Ya-soo, James!

"Las Vegas" opens on November the 4th at the State Theatre. For more information visit www.lasvegasthemusical.com.au