

Greek Australian Theatre Productions & Hellenism in Australia

Autumn has hit Sydney and it's when our local theatrical talents seem to come out from their summer vacation ready to warm our inner need for cultural events. We have been very fortunate on our 2MM radio show "Evdomada Einai Kai Kylaei" to have hosted promoters, writers and actors of the upcoming shows and find out more about their upcoming stage productions.

We had Alex Lykos returning with his Bulldog Theatre's home-grown story, a sequel to his popular Alex & Eve titled "Alex & Eve: The Wedding". The Christian Greek boy and the Muslim Lebanese girl take their first love encounter to the next step and we are all eager to see how the two families will handle the usual cultural and religious struggles that we are all so well aware of in our multicultural society.

We also had the pleasure to have the Take Away Theatre visit our studio to discuss their tribute show for their 20 year anniversary. They are gearing up for their theatrical presentation "The Show must go on" that will relive some of the stories that have been told during this period. Take Away Theatre boasts 20 years of home-grown talent from its writers and actors. In fact for this 20 year tribute they have managed to lure both Ada Nicodemou and Barbara Gouskos to a part of the production. They are two Greek Australian actors that have had extensive experience in Australian television as well as theatre, and what an opportunity we have to see them up close in our local theatres.

As much as there is passion and enthusiasm from both the Bulldog Theatre and the Take Away Theatre, during our radio interview discussions it was very easy to quickly sense the need for the com-

munity to reciprocate the same emotions to the writers, actors and promoters of local theatre productions. The response by the public although heart warming and ever present, it seems that it can be better. A whole lot better. And I mean the number of us that make an effort to turn up and watch Greek Australian theatre productions.

We were all wondering during our interview with the Take Away Theatre team and Fotis Zervas from Muse Events, why our second and third generation Greek Australian youth seem to be able to justify a \$200 or so outing for a Greek singer but don't seem to share the same fervour for our own local Greek cultural events. I won't be a hypocrite and say that I don't enjoy the opportunity of seeing a Greek singing artist down under but I am also a supporter of our local events. A Greek Australian theatrical event is a much less expensive event for us and it's also in most cases a very rewarding experience.

Let's be clear here that the issue at hand isn't about promoting the point that theatre is a cheaper form of entertainment but about our involvement as a Greek Australian community in supporting home-grown talent and at the same time maintaining our cultural Hellenistic values.

How many times have we heard that we are "losing" our Hellenism? We hear from our parents, relatives and friends how we are all losing our identity as Greeks and our children's children will recall that somewhere in their family tree they have some "Greek" in them.

We are already seeing our "disappearance" being written as we speak. The University of New South

Wales is potentially closing down its Modern Greek department. Students that were previously able to select Modern Greek as a subject will lose that opportunity unless they elect to take on this subject through Sydney University. There were also students at UNSW that were completing Greek as an Honours degree that now lose this opportunity at one of Sydney's elite universities. Could this be due to our apathy for our Hellenic cultural background?

The ties for me between participation and involvement in our Hellenic cultural events in the Diaspora and the survival of any element of Hellenism are intertwined. We cannot expect others to carry the baton for us as bystanders hoping that others will turn up to Greek theatre so that it can continue on.

So next time you are wondering about whether "we" are doing our best to preserve Hellenism in Australia, think about your personal involvement in the local Greek Australian events.

Take Away Theatre's "The Show Must Go On" commences on May 13th through to the 17th with 6 performances at the Sidetrack Theatre. Visit their website www.takeawaytheatre.com.au for more information on times and prices.

Alex & Eve: The Wedding commences on May 21st and runs until May 31st with performances on Thursday to Sunday for the 2 weeks at The Factory. Visit www.bulldogtheatre.com for more information on their times and prices.

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GREEK FESTIVAL: ITALIAN MIGRANT FILM Dall'Italia all'Australia (From Italy to Australia) - 1924

Among the many guests at the Sydney Greek Festival are the Italian folk roots ensemble I Viaggiatori (The Voyagers). Hailing from Melbourne and Wollongong, I Viaggiatori play lively, soulful

Italian folk and some Greek migration music that accompanies the enchanting 1924 silent film, "Dall'Italia All'Australia".

The film was re-discovered in the vaults of the Italian Cinematic Archives in Milan by Italo-Australian historian and journalist Tony De Bolfo as he was researching the migration journey of his grandfather and uncle from Italy to Australia for his book "In Search Of Kings."

Dall'Italia all'Australia (From Italy to Australia) is the cinematographic record of the voyage of the SS Regina d'Italia (Queen of Italy). In September 1924, this vessel brought 504 migrants from southern Europe to the South Seas. The passengers included some 130 Hellenes, mostly from Kythera, Castellorizo and Cyprus.

Said to be the earliest known footage of such a journey in the world, this rare documentary film was shot by Angelo Drovetti at the bequest of the Italian government. After the three months journey of filming the voyage to Australia, he took the film back to Italy.

It was never to be seen in Australia until recently re-discovered by De Bolfo. He has been instrumental in helping the film to come back to life in Australia eight decades later by inviting Kavisha Mazzella and fellow musicians to play live music to accompany the film.

As well as being an ARIA award winning singer-songwriter of her own material, Mazzella has been collecting Italian Folk songs remembered by Italian immigrants since the late 80's and has formed a choir in Melbourne "La Voce Della Luna" (the voice of the Moon) to keep

the old songs alive. She first came to national attention in Franco Di Chiera's 1992 ABC documentary about the Fremantle Italian womens choir "The Joys of The Women". She had been working in Melbourne with musician and composer Irine Vela who on bazouki, mandolin and guitar is known for leading the ARIA award winning greek band The haBiBis. The haBiBis can be heard and seen in Anna Kokinos's film "Head On". Kavisha and Irini started playing together through their mutual passion for folkroots music in 2004.

The other two musicians come from Wollongong. The first being accordionist Dave De Santi who also loves Italian folk music and tune collecting. He is known for his work in the Italian community

band Zumpa, Aussie bushband Wongawilli and and is festival director of the Illawarra Folk Festival and finally there is clarinetist and saxophonist Mark Holder-

Keeping who plays with many bands including Zumpa, buses with his saxophone in Wollongong Mall as well as being a music teacher.

Together they make up 'I Viaggiatori', a formidable group of musicians who have a deep love and respect for folk roots tradition as well as creating their own strands

of new music. Their interpretation of Italian and Greek folk music from the 1400's to the present day is played on accordion, clarinet, bouzouki, mandolin, tambourines, guitar, cahan and voice which combine to create a charming old world feel.

"We have our parents and grandparents to thank for instilling in us the love of this amazing music. Although we weren't born in Greece and Italy, through them, though not consciously, we somehow became saturated with the melodies and rhythms of the Mediterranean which has even crept into our original music. The link between Italy and Greece is a close one. During the film we play but a small selection of the myriad of styles that come from such a fertile musical culture. And thanks to Tony, the film has given us a good excuse to bask in the exquisite flavours of this traditional and atmospheric sound! It's like an excellent meal... very satisfying for the body, soul AND ears!" said Kavisha.

For one night only "Dall'Italia All'Australia" by Angelo Drovetti will be playing at the Factory Theatre in Marrickville on Tuesday, 26th May at 7.30pm for an 8pm start. The film will be introduced by historian journalist Tony De Bolfo and will be accompanied by live music of 'I Viaggiatori'. Dr Panyiotis Diamadis will present the historic context of the migrant voyage recorded in the film. This screening will be the first time Dall'Italia all'Australia will be shown to an Australian Hellenic audience. Rare archival material and historic books from the Hellenic diaspora from the early twentieth century will be on display showcasing early migrant settlement in Australia.

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL- Date: Tuesday 26 May - Time: 7.30pm for 8pm - Venue: The Factory Theatre - 105 Victoria Rd, Marrickville - Cost: \$15 + Booking Fee (Refreshments and canapes included)

Contact: 9550 3666 - www.factorytheatre.com.au

