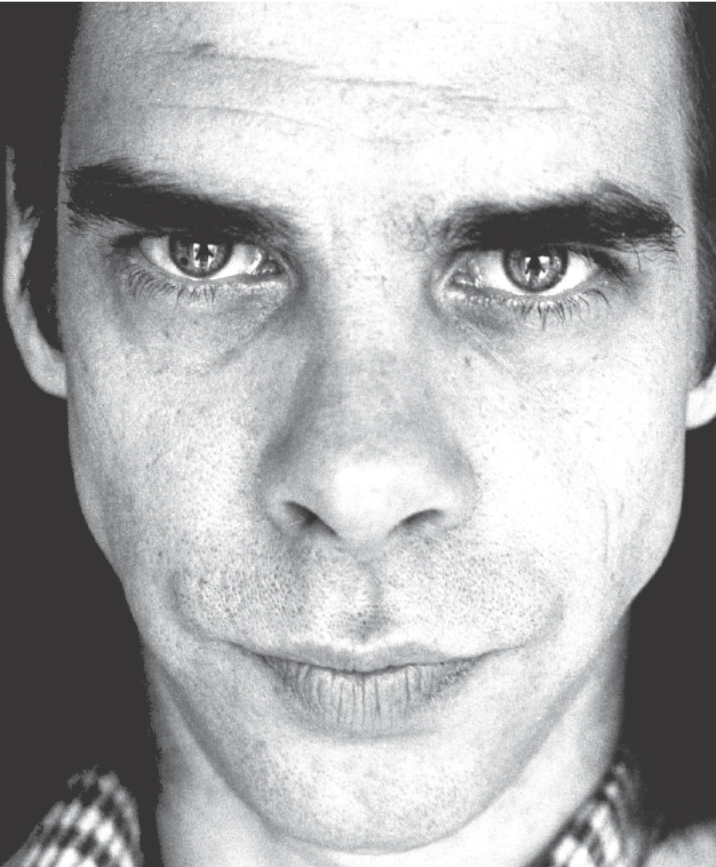


NICK «THE GREEK» CAVE

In his latest album "Push the sky away", the "king of doom and gloom" pays tribute to the plight of the Greek people and their fight against the all-consuming economic crisis, calling in the service of the mighty Zeus to offer assistance. SAVVAS LIMNATTIS writes



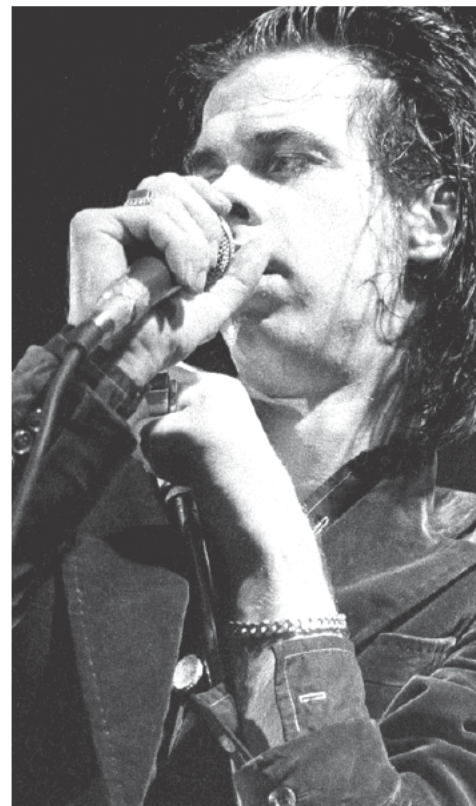
It might have to do with Greek people's affinity with sad, down-trodden, less blessed and tortured souls (some might even argue, a good portion of the Hellenic population draws excitement and inspiration from the seemingly mundane existence of those steeped in morbidity and despondency), a familiarity that can be traced back to the ancient times, when people like Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus set the foundations for drama with their tragic tales of loss and heartfelt pain. It's most definitely associated with Greeks' well understanding of pain, the country's illustrious history being packed to the brim with sorrow and suffering. Whatever the reason, modern Greece has never hidden its favoritism of, diverse in their delivery but united in their disposition, artists from Edgar Allan Poe to Leonard Cohen, and from Tindersticks to Oscar Wilde, with "cursed poets" Constantinos Cavafy, Napoleon Laphiotis and Kostas Karyotakis leading the front of home-brewed talent.

But none has stricken a chord with modern Greece quite as well as Nick Cave has. The idiosyncratic Brisbane born singer, songwriter and all-around doom merchant has managed to win the affection not only of Greece's switched on indie kids, but also of the general music loving public. From his humble beginnings as leader of Brisbane outfit The Birthday Party, to his long trail through muddy waters with the Bad Seeds, and his occasional nods to his post-punk former self (cue in the great Grinderman), Cave is considered to be something of a superstar in Greece: his concerts are always eagerly anticipated and sold out well before show time, forcing mainstream press to sit up and pay attention. But perhaps the biggest compliment Greece ever paid the chain-smoking Cave came in 1990, when his "The Good Son" album hit the top of the country's charts, given the Australian his first ever Number 1 on a worldwide basis.

Had the love affair been one sided, it wouldn't have merited even the slightest of attention. But the fact is that Nick Cave's love and admiration for all things Greek, is both well known and documented. Take for example his long association with Jim Scavunos, who has been Cave's sideman and partner-in-crime (in both The Bad Seeds and Grinderman), the man quite possibly responsible for the Australian's new found love for rebetika. Incidentally, Scavunos' own Vanity Set might have gone

largely unnoticed but the way this band of mainly Greek-American musicians managed to fuse the sounds of rebetiko with psychobilly heavy guitar riffing certainly deserved more attention and success.

Then of course there is the case of Psarantonis, the brother of the late, great Nikos Xylouris and undoubtedly one of the finest ever exponents



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of traditional Cretan song. Captivated by the sounds Psarantonis managed to exude from his lyra, and his no-nonsense, straight-to-the-point, nasal vocal delivery, Cave as curator of 2009's "All Tomorrow's Parties" festival had the Cretan as his guest of honor, with the latter captivating the mainly Anglo-Saxon audience during performances in Brisbane, Sydney and

Mount Buller (in Victoria), introducing most of them to sounds they could never imagine possible. Furthermore, Nick Cave has gone out of his way to break the enigmatic Cretan to a worldwide audience, endorsing both his albums and his concerts.

And when Cave is not visiting Greece as leader of The Bad Seeds, he takes the time to explore even the most obscure places, gaining a wide experience and knowledge of the land and its people, the rather large number of local friends he has managed to acquire over the years, serving both as guides and companions.

In 2004, Nick Cave leaned heavily on ancient Greek history for inspiration, eventually settling on the tale of a legendary musician, poet, and prophet as the title of his successful two CD set "Abattoir Blues/The Lyre of Orpheus". But if then the admiration for all things Greek could be disguised as an ode to one of the most significant ancient Greek figures in the reception of classical mythology in Western culture, with "Lightning Bolt" he comes full circle.

As part of "Push the sky away", the album Cave released a mere few days ago, the lyrics of "Lightning Bolt" are unmistakably derived by recent developments in the constantly suffering land that gave the world the lights of civilization. And if in the past, that suffering could be attributed to invasions of a myriad enemies, this time around things are more severe and harder to deal with: simply put, the economic crisis has not only brought Greece to its knees, but it's also gearing up to give it a good kick in its "private" parts.

More precisely, the lyrics of "Lightning Bolt" (see side panel) are dedicated to the Athens crisis and social unrest, with Cave referencing marches and events in the Greek capital, calling in the mighty Zeus to interfere: Two lightning bolts were delivered to my room/ They were gifts from Zeus...

But with Zeus unable to offer assistance, the people of Athens are almost left to their own devices. "In Athens all the youths are crying from the gas / I am by the hotel room working on a tan" Cave sings, pointing the figure to the powers that be and the men behind them, accusing them of sitting idly, while those around them wail in desperation: "And people/ They are never coming back/ At night I watch them sleep/ And cry years of tears/ And it's not the gas/ People ask me how we are/ We are I say mostly lost".

"LIGHTNING BOLT"

Two lightning bolts were delivered to my room
They were gifts from Zeus
I rock the bolts in a basinet of pine
People ask me how I am
I say I am all right
I'm fine!
I push the lightning bolt in a pram
Till the sun goes down & it gets dark
The girls from Jubilee Street hang out their windows
And they wave & ask me how I am tonight
I say I am good
I'm all right!
In Athens all the youths are crying from the gas
I am by the hotel room working on a tan
People come up and ask me who I am
I say if you don't know
Don't ask
Zeus laughs but it's the gas
He asks me how I am
I say Zeus don't ask
My lightning bolts are jolts of joy
They are joy boys from Zeus
I fed them porridge in their booster seats of knowledge
And in the cradle of democracy the pigeons are wearing gas masks
My lightning bolts play in the elevators
They slide down the hotel banister
And Zeus throws a gas canister
And it spins around the pool
As pigeons wearing respirators
Steal the lightning bolts
Zeus wants them back
O my bolts of joy
O my darling little boys
They are lost to us
And people
They are never coming back
At night I watch them sleep
And cry years of tears
And it's not the gas
People ask me how we are
We are I say mostly lost

