

31ST GREEK FESTIVAL OF SYDNEY

MELBOURNE BASED BAND REBETIKI PAY TRIBUTE TO THE GENIUS OF VASILIS TSITSANIS

FOR THE LOVE OF REBETIKO

Vasilis Tsitsanis was not only a legend of rebetiko music, but also the man who almost single handedly pulled the genre out of its underground surroundings of hashish dens and violent, late night encounters, pushed it to the limelight and into the hearts of the nation. Tonight at Marrickville's Factory Theatre connoisseurs of rebetika, will have the opportunity to go on a magical journey dedicated to the man and his music, courtesy of Melbourne based Rebetiki band. As band member Argyris Argyropoulos explains, apart from the impact rebetika had not only on the music, but also on the culture of Greece, they are also "fun to play".

WORDS BY SAWVAS LIMNATITIS

"So much for modern technology!" Talking from his Melbourne base, Argyris Argyropoulos of Rebetiki is trying his best to make light of the situation. We are on the phone talking about his band's performance at Marickville's The Factory Theatre, but the bad connection line is threatening to wreck havoc and turn the interview into incomprehensible rumblings. Yet despite the constant hissing and crackling, courtesy of Australian communications, his passion for and dedication to the musical genre him and his band mates serve comes down the phone line loud and clear.

Which of course can be expected, at least to a certain extent, given the fact he wasn't pushed towards this particular genre, but consciously walked down the path that led to it. What pleasantly surprises me though, is his deep knowledge of all things rebetika. A few minutes into the conversation, the prevailing sense I get on the other end of the line, is a man who hasn't simply picked up a musical instrument, learned a few chords and how to pick a tune, bought a hat and a vest, sat cross legged on a chair, a cigarette dangling from his mouth and a kompoloi from his right little finger and branded himself an exponent of rebetiko music. Oh no, dear reader, most definitely not! Over the course of our almost hourly conversation, Argyropoulos treats me to a guided tour through the history of the genre made popular by the genius that was Vasilis Tsitsanis (the subject of tonight's concert) after it was brought to mainland Greece by our compatriots fleeing Turkish brutality and the Asia Minor catastrophe of 1922. So without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce to you, the one and only Argyris Argyropoulos and his Rebetika fellow travelers!

When did the journey begin?

The journey began quite a while ago, around the early 90s, even earlier. We all used to

play in different bands over the years. It was an interest we all shared about Greek music, and most especially this type of urban folk music, or Greek blues or rebetika, call it whatever you like. Over the years we have all been in a few bands, but this line of Rebetiki – Ahileas, Antonis, Takis and Argyris - has been together for more than 10 years. But we have had quite a lot of friends and other quest musicians that have played with us over the years.

Collaboration seems to be a common thing in Melbourne, more so than in Sydney, where things are a bit more insular.

It has a lot to do with the type of music we play. If you are an exponent of this type of music, you can literally play with anyone. Like any other type of folk music, if you play an instrument you can join in. We have tried to be as inclusive as possible when circumstances permit it. We do like playing with other people as well. Here in Melbourne, I have literally played with every musician that covers this genre. It's an enjoyable thing: you learn a lot from other musicians, you become, you share information, you share musical knowledge. So it becomes a big circle of people that like to play this type of music. And that's half of the fun of it. You don't have to be a virtuoso to participate in it. You can pick up a kompoloi and a couple of potirakia and there you go, you are a rebetiko musician.

In other words, rebetika has more to do with feeling rather than technique.

The technique is obviously important, like in any other type of music. But to me you need to feel this music, you don't have to have the experience the original writers had. Rebetika is about love, about injustice and poverty, it's about things that are still important today. So in a way, yes, feeling is more important. But I can't separate the two: you need to feel and you need to be able to express it correctly.

INFO

A TRIBUTE TO VASILIS TSITSANIS PERFORMED BY REBETIKI

The music of Legendary Greek singer/songwriter and composer Vasilis Tsitsanis will be on display on Thursday 11th of April 2013 at the Factory Theatre in Marrickville performed by one of Australia's best Greek music bands, Rebetiki.

Tsitsanis left an indelible mark on the Greek generations to come following his death in 1984. He mastered Greek folk and blues music which shone through his singing, songwriting and composing talents. He became one of Greek music's leading composers, in particular Rebetika.

Tsitsanis composed over two thousand songs and was renowned for playing the Bouzouki. On Thursday 11th April Melbourne band Rebetiki will bring back to life the heart and soul of Greek blues. A four piece band that will combine a variety of instruments including the traditional six string bouzouki, baglama, oud, lute, guitar and percussion.

Rebetiki have played a range of venues across Australia including WOMADelaide, the National Folk Festival Canberra and the Carnivale Multicultural Festival at the Sydney Opera House. They also played at the Greek Prime Minister's Australian visit in Melbourne in 2007.

People who enjoy international music is encouraged to come and see one of Australia's best Greek music tribute band- a tribute to Vasilis Tsitsanis at the Factory Theatre 105 Victoria Road Marrickville.

Tickets for Rebetiki are available online at www.factorytheatre.com.au or call 02 9550-3666. Cost is \$30 adults, \$27 concession plus booking fee. Show starts at 7.30pm.

www.greekfestivalofsydney.com.au

So what triggered the initial interest with rebetika, and more precisely the early types of rebetika music when the genre was still an underground scene?

Personally I don't make any distinction between different types of music. You can go and listen to Antypa and Pantazi for example if you are in the right environment and right frame of mind. You can get up and dance and have a good time. That's fine by

