

GREECE 1994 • RETURN TO OUR ROOTS I

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MARIN’S MINOAN DANCERS PERFORM IN GREECE

By Cathie Banks

The Greek word “synharitiria” or congratulations still rings in the ears of nine members of the Minoan Dancers of Marin County who performed professionally in Greece this summer.

The group, headed by Effie and Vasilis Fourakis of Corte Madera, dance director/choreographers, left separately and met up in Athens. For the next week Minoans Sophia Avlonitis, Nicole Bertolina, Katerina, Maria and Vasilis Capetanos, Ted Simos, John Tamaresis, and four year old Achilleas Fourakis traveled together and wowed standing room only audiences in Athens and Crete.

Their dance odyssey began on July 22 for a sold out performance at Plateia Gerakas, located in an Athens suburb. This site was chosen by Vasilis and Effie because it is near the homes of many of their relatives in Greece.

“My relatives,” Effie explained, “have known for years that I dance and teach Greek folk dances through letters and pictures we’ve sent. Even so, they were astounded by the authenticity of our dances and costumes and our professionalism. My Uncle Yiorgos had tears in his eyes when he expressed thanks to us for keeping alive our Greek culture and folk dances.

Wearing costumes from Thrace, the Minoans presented twelve dances from the regions of Epiros, Thessaly, and Thrace. Between dance suites, the lights were dimmed and slides taken during past performances were shown to give the dancers a reprieve from the 110 degree heat. During a brief intermission and costume change, children of the local elementary school performed dances from Pontos.

Ελληνικό Φολκλωρικό Φεστιβάλ Χορών
από το
Ελληνο-Αμερικάνικο Συγκρότημα
MINOAN DANCERS



Παρασκευή 22 Ιουλίου 1994
στην Πλατεία του Δήμου ΓΕΡΑΚΑ
ΩΡΑ 20.30 (Γυμναστήριο ΜΠΑΣΚΕΤ)
ΕΙΣΟΔΟΣ ΔΩΡΕΑΝ
Φιλική συμμετοχή: ΧΟΡΕΥΤΙΚΟ ΔΗΜΟΥ ΓΕΡΑΚΑ



Rehearsing in Gerakas



Horos tou Zallogou in Gerakas

The second half of the Athens performance started with the Horos tou Zallongou. This dance depicts the women of the village of Zallogos who, rather than be captured during the War for Independence, threw themselves and their children to their death over a cliff. The Minoan women captured the feeling of this historic event as they danced past the hushed crowd to their “death.” “Four-year-old Achilleas Fourakis danced the part of the doomed child, who in his mother’s arms, is the last to “die.”

With compliments of relatives and strangers alike ringing in their ears, a few days later the group sailed to historic and picturesque Hania, Crete and then drove to the Minerva Hotel in Agia Marina near Hania, which had a beautiful beach to enjoy. That evening they attended a performance of Greek folk dances at the Firkas Theater in Hania presented by The Cretan Dancers, whose dance director Yiannis Agiasmenakis had arranged a joint performance with the Minoans on Thursday evening, July 28 in the same theater. Effie and Vasilis needed to see the repertoire of The Cretan Dancers in order to decide how both groups’ repertoires would fit together. The program was agreed upon and an ad taken out in the newspaper of Hania.



John led Issios



John, Achilleas, Ted, Effie & Nicole at a taverna in Crete



Achilleas, Effie, Vasilis, Nicole & Ted sailing to Crete

For the joint performance the Firkas Theater was filled beyond capacity. The performance began with a presentation of Cretan dances by Yiannis's group. The first dance by the Minoans was the Horos tou Zallongou. The lighting at the theater made the dance very dramatic and again Achilleas, the "doomed" child, stole the show. Effie recalled, "After the dance we lowered Achilleas from the stage, where he started taking pictures with our automatic camera of our Thessaly suite. As a mother with no baby sitter along, this was comforting to me for he had to take the photos near the stage where I could watch him and he could not wander off. He shot an entire roll of film during the first dance and again stole the show because many in the audience, rather than watching the stage, were watching Achilleas in his little Cretan costume take pictures of the dancers!"

During intermission the Cretan dancers offered the audience a sampling of Cretan raki or "tsikoudia" and then presented Cretan dances with such style and precision that the audience, and the Minoans, applauded wildly. The Minoans then took the stage to present five dances from Thrace and, again, the audience went wild. Both groups took to the stage during the final presentations of Hassapikos and Hassaposervikos and then everybody, including the audience, danced the Cretan Syganos dance to end the evening. Mr. Agiasmenakis expressed his appreciation by taking the entire group to dinner at a seafood taverna on the beach.



Maria, Katerina & Nicole



Vasilis, Effie & Achilleas



Zonaradikos at the Firkas Theater

The following evening the Minoans and the group from Hania boarded a KTEL bus and were taken to perform at the annual Rethymnon Wine Festival. The Minoans presented dances from Thrace and Cretan dances were performed by The Cretan Dancers from Hania and by a group from Rethymnon.

Effie said, "After the performances we were served a souvlaki dinner complete with Cretan cheese and wine. The filoxenia extended to us by the coordinators of the festival was overflowing as was the wine. As we were leaving, they presented us with souvenir posters, wine flasks, and bottles of Cretan wine."

The trip took germ in Effie and Vasilis' minds in 1992 during a visit to Crete. When they presented the idea to the Minoans, everyone was enthusiastic about it and over the next two years, many letters and phone calls crossed the Atlantic to arrange the tour. Vasilis Glimidakis, of Agia Marina and San Francisco, was especially helpful and made all the arrangements in Crete. Effie said, "For me, as difficult as arranging the performances was, it was well worth it. We were able to fulfill our dream of presenting our efforts in the country of their origin. And we were appreciated."

The travelers returned in August just in time to stage their annual fundraiser picnic at the Shadows for financing their annual appearance at the Greek Orthodox Folk Dance Festival, which this year will be in Ontario, California. At the Shadows they showed a video of the Greek Tour, which everyone enjoyed.

In September the Minoans again began their rehearsals, held in the Fellowship Center of the Nativity of Christ Greek Orthodox Church in Ignacio, Marin. This year 45 young people are in the three groups, Little Minoans, for dancers 6 to 12; Minoans I, for junior high and high schoolers, and Minoans II, for college students and above. So far this fall they have performed at the Santa Cruz Greek Festival, the Tenth Anniversary luncheon for Father Constantine Efstathiou at Nativity of Christ Greek Orthodox Church, and St. Rita's Catholic Church in Fairfax for their Greek Night.

Coming up are January auditions for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival in June for which the Minoans have been selected to dance for the past three years, the Greek Orthodox Folk Dance Festival during President's Day Weekend in February and the four-day Ethnic Dance Festival for children at Fort Mason in March. In between these larger performances, the Minoans entertain senior citizens, church and other groups, keeping Greek culture and folk dancing alive while at the same time helping the young Minoans acquire poise, grace, and self-confidence. Truly, this is a group for which "synharitiria" fits the bill.



The group posing at the Firkas



Effie & Ted