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GREEKAMERICA



Glykeria
*Sowing Seeds
of Peace*

25 Years on the World Stage: A Tribute to Glykeria

Cover Story



Πάντα Με Το Τραγουδι...
(Always with Song...)

Story by Elizabeth M. Economou
Photos by Kobi Israel

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photograph by © Kobi Israel

If one phrase could encapsulate Glykeria's life it would be "*panta me to tragoudi*," (always with the song). With more than 25 Gold and Platinum records and over six million unit sales, Glykeria reigns as the "Golden Voice of Greece."

In fact, an early album entitled "*Me Tin Glykeria Stin Omorfi Nychta*" (1982) still ranks as the top selling record in Greek history.

For a quarter century, Glykeria has been eclipsing record after record, and navigating a fine line between commercial viability and artistic veracity. Yet she insists on defining herself as someone whose music is merely a medium for human connection. Her songs, she says, are a means to communicate with the world, "*na epikeenono me ton kosmo*."

While enrapturing audiences with irresistible melodies and soulful lyrics in the small, often seedy, night clubs of Plaka (Athens) in the 1970's, Glykeria was recognized by the legendary music powerhouse George Dalaras. His invitation to share the spotlight with him catapulted her music career to the stars.

By the 1980's, her rise to stardom lent legitimacy to the Smyrneika (songs from Smyrna). And in 1982, with the release of *Apo tin Smyrna ston Pirea*, (From Smyrna to Pireaus) Glykeria was able to breathe new life to the Rebetika.

The Rebetika movement began with the burning of Smyrna, a large port city in Western Anatolia. In 1923, Turkey's leader, Mustafa Kemal (a.k.a. Ataturk) commanded the Turkish army to burn the city and to rout out the Greek Orthodox Christian population.

Possibly as many as 200,000 Greeks perished in the massacre. Those that survived ended up in shanty-towns around Athens. Formerly middle class and well-off, these new Anatolian Greek refugees were now the poorest people in Greece. A type of "blues" music evolved from their urban ghettos that often included mention of drugs, excessive drinking, suicide and themes of losing one's *patrida* (homeland).

Meanwhile, with songs like "*Kaigomai*," (I am burning), Glykeria has been able to poignantly express the plight and the pain of some 2 million Greek refugees expelled during the Asia Minor Catastrophe amid-- as Glykeria put it-- the "First Holocaust."

Today, Glykeria is considered the eminent interpreter of Rebetika.

And while many Greek singers have steered clear from bringing traditional Greek music, like *Dimotika* and *Nisiotika*, from the islands and villages into the mainstream, Glykeria has purposely embraced these genres, deeming them musical treasures for future generations.

"It's important," she says, "*tora ke sto melon prepi na ribnoume mia matia piso s'afra pou ehoun sinevi*," (now and in the future we must look back at things that have happened).

Despite reflecting on the past, Glykeria is always forging ahead as well.

In 1993, she crossed the borders of her native Greece to perform in Israel for the first time. By 1994 she had broken all sales records there. Since then Glykeria has deeply touched the heart and soul of that country. And today the people of Israel consider her one of their own.

But Glykeria's popularity extends far beyond the general public.

On a subsequent trip to Jerusalem, the city's mayor presented Glykeria with the golden key of the city, a token of appreciation, for her

devotion to philanthropic activities, including visits to children's hospitals and orphanages, and countless hours with families-- particularly mothers-- who have suffered the loss of children in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

And in 1995, a few months prior to his assassination, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin honored Glykeria with the highest humanitarian award of the Israeli government. Just three years later in 1998, Glykeria was invited by Mrs. Leah Rabin to perform at a memorial concert for her late husband. More than 300,000 adoring fans attended the open-air show, the largest musical event ever in Israeli history.

Aside from gracing the international stage with much acclaim, Glykeria has worked with some of the world's preeminent artists. In



addition to her own releases, Glykeria has also contributed to more than 100 compilation albums and special editions with other entertainers, including a collector's edition CD that was released commemorating the 3000th anniversary of the founding of the ancient city of Jerusalem.

In Israel, Glykeria has collaborated with opera tenor Yevgeni Shopavalov and superstars Ofra Haza and Hava Alberstin. And her album "Maska" ('98) included a duet with Arab megastar Natacha Atlas. Their song, "Agapi-Hioni" (Love-Snow) soared to the top of the charts in Greece and throughout the Middle East.

It's obvious Glykeria's talents are not limited to the stage nor the studio.

Between concerts and tours, it seems Glykeria finds time for diplomacy and

peacemaking. In 1999, she released a song called "Mothers Prayer," bringing together a Palestinian singer and an Israeli singer to lend support to mothers who had lost children in the Arab-Israeli conflict. "Mothers Prayer," produced by composer Stelios Fotiadis, Glykeria's husband, first appeared on Glykeria's Israeli album, "Sweet Sorrow."

According to Glykeria, "*olos o kosmos ine hamenos thioti eboun basi pethia*," (everyone is lost when they have lost children). The final verse of the song reads: "*And out of the showering of tears, an eternal rainbow will touch the earth, and the prayers of all mothers will resound.*"

At the time of its release, one Israeli newspaper noted that "Glykeria has accomplished with one song what fifty years of

political negotiations have not been able to accomplish-- to bring the two peoples together."

Meanwhile, her efforts to promote and advance peace and understanding in the Middle East have caught the attention of the United States Ambassador to Greece, the Honorable Nicholas Burns, who attended one of her performances at the Athens Show Center and met with her backstage to thank her for her efforts.

But for Glykeria, the crowning glory of her career came in May of 1999 when she performed with the world-famous Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, known throughout the world for its impeccable interpretations of classical music.

She opened her concerts with a moving rendition of the Lamentations, powerful hymns that mourn the Passion of Christ and sung on Good Friday of Holy Week. Glykeria told reporters as a Greek Orthodox Christian she hopes to enhance understanding between the people of Greece and Israel.

"Many singers have come to Israel from Greece," said Michael Haran, the principal Cello of the Philharmonic Orchestra, but none like Glykeria. We have never had so much enthusiasm in this [Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv] auditorium and I don't think we've ever experienced a show with seven encores!"

It seems that big record executives are also waking up to Glykeria's stunning appeal as an international singer. For the first time in Greek recording history (save for Nana Mouskouri) the prestigious Sony Classical label will release a CD from the concerts in Tel Aviv as a domestic (U.S) product not as an import, this spring. The move reflects a huge vote of confidence toward Glykeria's international repertoire and her ability to move cross-cultural audiences.

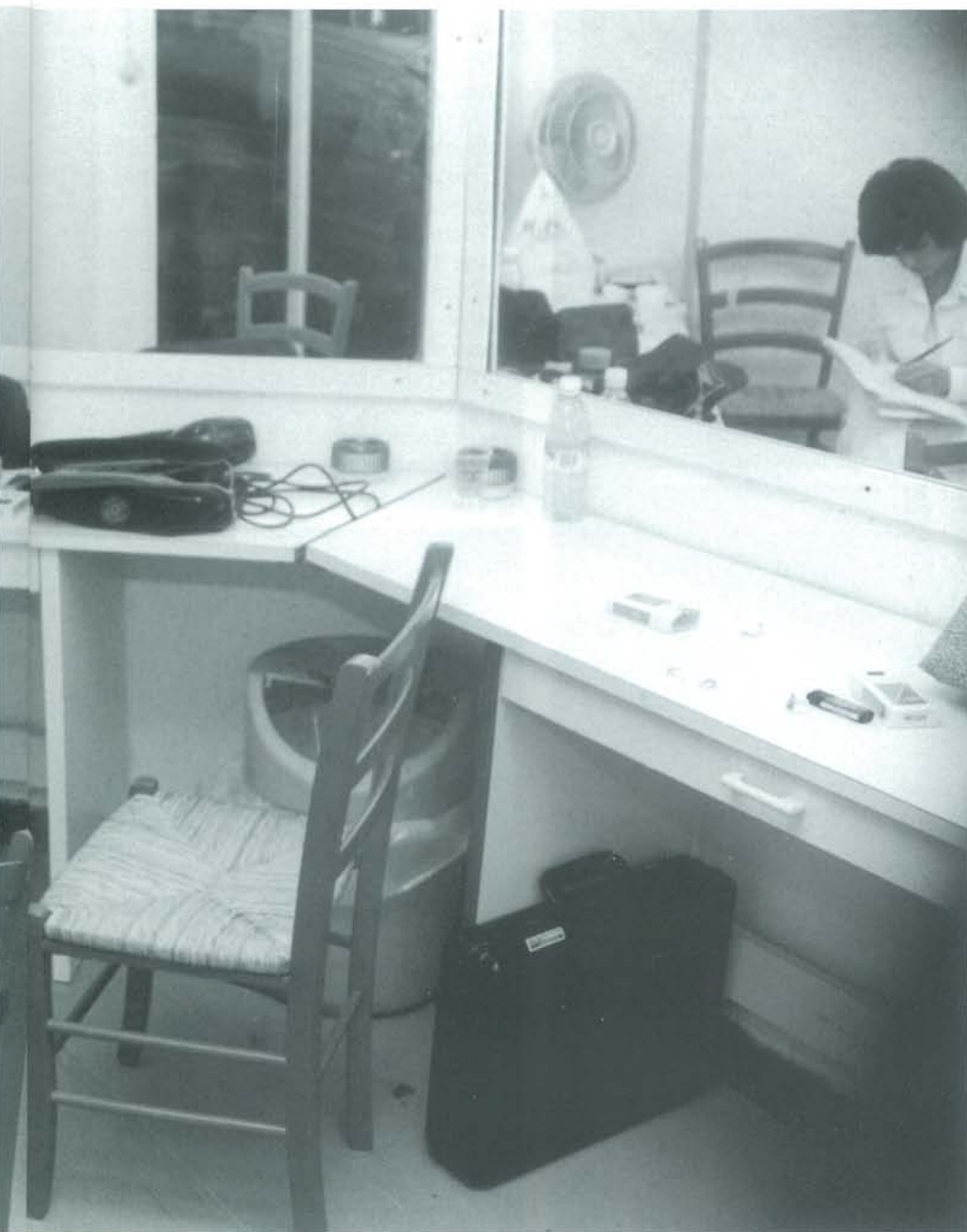
A perpetual work in progress, Glykeria welcomes new challenges.

She was the first Greek artist to engage in a live concert over the internet. The real time performance, produced by ERA-1 Greek National Radio Station, reached tens of thousands of Greek web users throughout the globe-- many of whom sent emails and telephoned the studios.

Recently, she was invited to sing the title track of the Greek techno group "Omega Vibes." The song called "Diaspora," paid tribute to the millions of Greeks who left the *patrida* (homeland) for a better life.

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**Backstage in Cesaria, Israel,
rehearsing Hebrew lyrics before a show
photograph by © Kobi Israel**





Perhaps the crowning point of her career-- two sold out concerts with the world-renown Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Tel Aviv. A prelude to things to come in America?

The renown Putumayo label, specializing in world music, also selected Glykeria as the representative Greek female voice for the release entitled "From Athens to Andalusia," containing songs from throughout the Mediterranean region.

Most recently, she participated in Putumayo's "World Playground" CD that featured children's songs from around the world.

Today, it's no secret Glykeria maintains the most modest presence in Greece's local music scene-- "her greatest asset," according to a recent article in *The Athens News*. And she never distances herself from her past. Glykeria was born in the mountainous village of Agio Pnevma (Holy Spirit) near Serres, in Macedonia, northern Greece.

According to Glykeria, singing was a very intense part of her life from early on. Her family and friends were constantly engaged in music. She recalls, "*eimaste panta me to tragoudi*," (we were always with the song). And life in the village, with its many panegyria (festivals), presented the ideal backdrop for budding artists and musicians. She says, "*to tragoudi, apla, me travixe apo para poli mikri*," (song,

simply, pulled me from a very young age).

True to her roots, last Pascha (Orthodox Easter) Glykeria released "O Glyki Mou Ear," (My Sweet Springtime) featuring selections of Lamentations from Holy Friday Services of the Greek Orthodox Church. The CD which was hailed by Byzantine experts as an important release for preserving the ancient tradition of ecclesiastical music, was dedicated to her father, a *psalti* (cantor) in her village church.

Despite a life of unimaginable success, family is still most important in Glykeria's life. She and her husband, composer Stelios Fotiades, have been married for more than 25 years. Their mutual love has produced a son, Konstantinos.

When asked what she considers to be her most defining accomplishment to date, Glykeria unequivocally answers, "*I genesis tou yiou mou*," (the birth of my son). And while family is her first love, interpreting music for the world is most definitely her second.

Over the years, Glykeria has been profoundly touched and influenced by the works of Greek music giants like Mikis Theodorakis, Manos Hadjidakis, Stavros Xarhakos and Nikos Gatsos.

In fact, Glykeria has dubbed "Megalos Erotikos" (music by Manos Hadjidakis) as the most beautiful work of the 20th century.

As for the 21st century, Glykeria has no plans of settling down. In May of 2000 she is slated to perform two concerts in United States to benefit "Seeds of Peace," an international organization that empowers young people from conflict areas with non-violent tools for resolving differences.

She has agreed to donate her voice for the cause-- one she says she believes in immensely and sees it as her "responsibility" to support.

What's more, Glykeria will continue to sing songs that not only entertain, but teach, enlighten and bring people together.

And if the past is any indication of the future, then the world has a lot to look forward to.

Elizabeth M. Economou, a New York based writer, is a second time contributor to Greek America Magazine. Formerly a writer with CNBC, Liz now works as the English Press Officer for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.