

# Greek-Cypriot Community Theatre in Britain

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## RÉSUMÉ

La longue tradition théâtrale de Chypre et de la Grèce ne pouvait qu'influencer de façon significative le théâtre des Chypriotes grecs en Angleterre, créé au début du vingtième siècle. Cet article présente un portrait global des troupes de théâtre locales d'amateurs et de semi-professionnels, et précise que les politiques coloniales ont aussi eu un impact sur leur répertoire. Les pièces écrites par une variété d'auteurs Chypriotes-Grecs ont été présentées à Londres et ailleurs en langue grecque, en dialecte chypriote, aussi bien qu'en version anglaise.

## ABSTRACT

It is only natural that the long theatrical tradition of Cyprus and Greece has critically influenced the theatre of Greek-Cypriots in England, since its inception in the early twentieth century. This article presents the panorama of the local amateur and semi-professional theatre groups, noting that colonial politics also had an impact on their repertory. The plays written by a variety of Greek-Cypriot playwrights have been staged in London and elsewhere in Greek, Greek-Cypriot, as well as in English translation.

## Introduction

The presence of a new type of theatre is automatically connected with the development of a new kind of audience or with an intention to change the attitude of theatre-goers.<sup>1</sup> The changes, which we know were caused by the development of Cypriot theatre in the British cultural scene, raise questions such as: What are the aims and objectives of a theatre from two countries (Greece and Cyprus) with a long tradition in drama? Should it follow a distancing and potentially ghettoising policy, or should it merge with the

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magnificent cosmopolitan world of Euripides and Shakespeare? We are very lucky to have a wide variety of communities settled in Canada, Australia, Britain, U.S.A., Russia, Germany, etc. Every community has its own cultural institutions: Asian drama, Indian classical music, Latin American dance and music, Armenian theatre and so on. Cypriot theatre, however, has its own unique development because in both Cyprus and Britain we can observe the rise of the Cypriot theatre side by side with metropolitan Greek and British traditions.<sup>2</sup>

### The Theatre in Cyprus

The archaeological monuments of theatres in Limassol, Paphos, and Salamis prove that Cyprus has a long theatrical tradition going back at least to the third century BC.<sup>3</sup> Even earlier in Greece, stage performances were put on by amateur actors, known as *εθελονταί*, and by the Dionysiac artists: the professional guild of actors known as *οι περί τον Διόνυσον τεχνίται*,<sup>4</sup> and also by the mime performers of the fringe.

As far as the modern Cypriot theatre is concerned, theatrical performances were very rare during the Ottoman Empire, but more frequent after Cyprus became a British Colony. All theatrical performances started with the aim of arousing the revolutionary and patriotic feelings of Cypriots against the Turks and English.<sup>5</sup>

The Agape tou Laou Theatre group (founded in 1898) produced the first political plays in Cyprus and introduced progressive drama much earlier than the radical theatre companies in Britain.<sup>6</sup> It faced rivalry from amateur Cypriot companies and visiting Greek professional ones, which presented plays written by middle-of-the-road Greek authors: Spyros Peresiades, Dimitris Koromilas and Nikolaos Laskaris (a personal friend of King George I). The political rivalry played out on the stage continued until 1948, especially with the Panergatikos Theatre Group (founded in 1922) and the Prometheus Pancypriot Theatre Company (founded in 1944).

The first Cypriot playwrights appeared after 1910. They included Kostas Markides, Evelthon Pitsilides, Thrasylvoulos Makrygiannis, Dimitris Papadimitris, Kostas Montis, Kyriakos Akanthiotis, Pavlos Liassides, Rina Katselli, Filissa Hadjihanna, Kyriakos Efthymiou and others.

*Lyriko* (1942) and *Prometheus* (1944) were the first professional Cypriot theatre companies which tried to compete with the Greek professional ones.

Cyprus had three or four of these companies during the Second World War. Cyprus also saw plenty of performances from visiting companies between 1878 and 1960. Those visits caused the closure of many local theatre companies. Well-known actors left Cyprus: Sotirakis Markides and Philis Karaviotis went to South Africa; Evis Gavrielides, Phaedros Stassinis, George Pastellides, George Evgeniou and others emigrated to London in 1950.

Actresses were like “gold-dust”.<sup>7</sup> Until the 1940s only a few women used to perform in amateur comedy productions. Actresses often dropped their careers in order to get married. The Cypriot managers searched desperately for young actresses, who were paid like Hollywood stars

### First Performances in Britain

The first performances by Greeks and Cypriots living in Britain took place approximately after 1915 in the form of school sketches and stage performances by the Greek-Orthodox schools. Those performances are very interesting if we realise that in Cyprus Ancient Greek tragedy was a continuous monopoly of the secondary schools (*σχολαρχεία, γυμνάσια-λύκεια*) between 1909-1960.<sup>8</sup> The Archdiocese of Cyprus had also shown an interest in Greek theatre. The late Archbishop Makarios gave a subsidy in 1962 for the Organisation of Theatrical Activities in Cyprus (ΟΘΑΚ: Οργανισμός Θεατρικής Ανοίξεως Κύπρου) founded by George Philis, and in 1971 for the National Theatre of Cyprus (ΘΟΚ: Θεατρικός Οργανισμός Κύπρου).

A good example of an amateur group in Britain was the Koromilas Theatre Company, founded in Liverpool in 1918 by George Birbas, a teenage immigrant, who went to Liverpool by boat from the Peloponnese in order to work. He collaborated with the Greek-Cypriots to form a Greek-Orthodox church and to organise the Greek-speaking community. His amateur group was named after the late playwright Dimitris Koromilas. It performed plays with patriotic themes such as *Papaflessas*. The group lasted until 1921 when Birbas returned to Greece in order to take part as a soldier in the war against the Turks in Asia Minor.<sup>9</sup>

The Saint Sophia School in West London (Bayswater) also made its own theatrical appearance. This school was founded in 1922 by the late Archimandrite Ilarion Vasdekas and included children from poor Greek and Cypriot families in London. The number of pupils increased because of the arrival of Greek refugees from Smyrni (Izmir) after the Turkish invasion in

August-September 1922. The school performances included plays with themes from the Greek Revolution (1821). Cypriot students played a prominent role in those drama activities with Koula Loukis, a very talented actress in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

### **Background of the Community Theatre**

The Cypriot theatre companies in Britain were without any doubt influenced by the long and wide theatrical tradition flourishing in Cyprus between 1900 and 1962. About a dozen Cypriot companies played a vital part in British theatre culture. The large number of companies and their rivalries may be seen as reflecting the political stage competitions in Cyprus (1900-1948), as well as the political theatre in Britain, which started in the 1950s. Of course we should mention the appearance of ad hoc companies (*θεατρικά μπουλούκια*) which were dismantled either after one performance or even before the opening night of their first play.<sup>11</sup>

Camden Theatro Technis is the longest-established Cypriot theatre in Britain. Its co-founder and director George Evgeniou was born in Limassol (1931), the biggest cultural and commercial centre in Cyprus during the 1930-1950 period. Eighty percent of the Cypriot actors were amateurs who had full-time daily jobs and spent their evenings at rehearsals and performances. Some of them joined visiting Greek companies, which needed actors for small parts.<sup>12</sup> For this reason some Cypriot theatre performances were cancelled because one or two actors walked out. Additionally, Evgeniou's views on community theatre and his admiration for Joan Littlewood continually came into conflict with the Cypriot performers' attitudes.

### **London Cypriots Arts Group (Καλλιτεχνικός Οργανισμός Κυπρίων Λονδίνου)**

Tefkros Anthias (pseudonym of Andreas Pavlou) was an active member of the Prometheus Pancyriot Theatre who came to London in 1948. In 1952 he founded the first Cypriot community school in Camden, because many Cypriots did not like to send their children to the Greek-Orthodox community schools. Anthias also encouraged the founding of a theatre group called *Καλλιτεχνικός Οργανισμός Κυπρίων Λονδίνου*. Steady members were Takis and Yannoula Frangofinos, Dinos Sideras and Kypros

Kouzapas. They produced Anthias' plays *The War, Stop the Decline* (Ο Πόλεμος, Σταματήστε τον κατήφορο) and others.

Lakis Pytharas joined the group in 1957 and with Kypros Kouzapas produced Kyriakos Akanthiotis' folk play *Marikou's Love* (Η Αγάπη της Μαρικούς) in 1958, which was performed at venues in London and Birmingham. They also produced Akanthiotis' *Karagiozis* and Bogris' *The Engagement* (Τα αρραβωνιάσματα). This company lasted until 1960.

### Cypriot Artists' Union (Ένωσις Κυπρίων Καλλιτεχνών)

Phaedros (Paul) Stassinou, Theodoulos Moreas, Evis Gavrielides, Harry Tardios and Lakis Pytharas founded the theatre group *Ένωσις Κυπρίων Καλλιτεχνών*, which operated under the auspices of the London Cypriot Brotherhood. George Evgeniou, who had just finished his involvement with the Dundee Repertory Theatre (Scotland), agreed to join. Other performers were Litsa Stavropoulou, Athanassia Vassiliou, Denise Baltavia,<sup>13</sup> Christos Adamou, Nicos Shiafkalis, Takis Frangofinos, Mikis Xenophontos, Stella Kranai, Antonis Olympites, Alice Roussou, Angeliqe Vayia, John Boyatzis, Theodore Hadjigeorgiou and Tassia Koulermou.

Their productions included two Greek comedies: *Illegal Traffic* (Παράνομος κυκλοφορία) by Christos Giannakopoulos and Alecos Sakellarios (1 April 1956) at the Palace Theatre, West End and *Straight and Crooked Lines* (Ευθεία και τεθλασμένη) by Dimitris Psathas and Georgios Roussos (1 June 1957) at the Scala Theatre. They also produced *Whose Baby?* (Ποιανού μωρό;), a Greek translation of an English farce with Xenia Kalogeropoulou as Mary Hamilton (3 June 1956) at the Cambridge Theatre. According to an interview given by Evgeniou on London Greek Radio (27 December 1984), various personality and financial conflicts among the actors caused the end of the company.

### Cypriot Youth Theatre Club

The Cypriot Youth Club was an amateur group founded in 1958 by Lambros Nicolaou, a barber by profession. Nicos Shiafkalis was the Artistic Director and Kypros Kouzapas, Harry Tardios and Foula Christophorou were the main actors,<sup>14</sup> with George Theodorou involved as a musician. They presented Psathas' comedy *Matchmaking* (Τα προξένεια) and Kolonas' Cypriot play *The Roots Are Very Deep* (Οι ρίζες είναι πολύ βαθιές).<sup>15</sup>

## Camden Theatro Technis (Camden Θέατρο Τέχνης)

### *Early Years*

The Camden Theatro Technis celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2007. It was founded in June 1957 after the idea of several Cypriot actors to meet one evening in Camden Town to discuss the possibility of creating a theatre for the Cypriot community. The founding members (in alphabetical order) were: Dimitris Andrea, George Andrea, Denise Baltavia, Mikis Christodoulou, Iroula Christou, Andriani Epsilandi, George Evgeniou, Byron Joannides, George Kafkaris, Toula Kouma, John Koussios, Stelios Kyriakou, Aristos Louvieris, Andreas Lyssandrou, Andreas Markos, Markos Markou, Nicos Shiafkalis, Harry Tardios, Andreas Tofarides and George Zenios.

In the first months the group had meetings once a week at the Hovenden Club in Leicester Square. The meetings became more frequent as the actors used their homes and several pubs for this purpose. Andreas Markos offered his home for rehearsals and it was the first postal address: Theatro Technis (Ελληνικόν Θέατρον Τέχνης), 12 Frederica Street, London N7.

The members were working on various methods to develop the theatre and some of them joined Littlewood's workshop from time to time. In her production *And the Wind Blew* by Edgar da Rocha Miranda (December 1957) at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, Evgeniou played the part of Tónico, Andreas Markos was Sargento and Harry Tardios was Bastos. The rehearsals for the first play stopped because Denise Baltavia returned to Greece (she had a better offer), while Nicos Shiafkalis left Theatro Technis to join the Cypriot Youth Theatre.<sup>16</sup>

The opening night of the first production took place on 3 January 1959 at the King George Hall, Y.M.C.A., Great Russell Street, WC1. It consisted of four one-act plays adapted as follows:

A Cypriot lady is shelling beans in the kitchen in the presence of her son and daughters. While she works, the grandfather narrates various stories which are taken from the following plays: Angelos Vlachos' *The Grocer's Daughter* (Η κόρη του παντοπώλου) directed by Harry Tardios, P. Rossides' Cypriot sketch *Giorkis and Tooulis* directed by Evgeniou, and Dimitris Psathas' comedies *The Nervous Gentleman* (Νευρικός κύριος) and *The Madmen of Our Days* (Τρελοί της εποχής) directed by Andreas Markos.

Other productions of the early period (1959-1962) included: Doros Alastos' (pseudonym of Evdoros Joannides) *Lighting Light* (Άστραψε Φως), Nicos

Laskaris' *Complications* (Μπερδέματα), Iakovos Kambanelli's *Courtyard of Miracles* (Αυλή των θαυμάτων) and the the English-language Cypriot play *Cypriots Go Home* (Κύπριοι, γυρίστε στην πατρίδα σας) devised by the cast and directed by Evgeniou. He was also a success in the title role of Jaroslav Hasek's play *Good Soldier Svejk* (Ο καλός στρατιώτης Σβέικ) directed by Andreas Markos.<sup>17</sup> The Theatro Technis also presented Psathas' *The Thief is Calling Out* (Φωνάζει ο κλέφτης), F. G. Lorca's plays *Blood Wedding* (Ματωμένος γάμος) and *The Shoemaker's Admirable Wife* (Η θαυμαστή μπαλωματού) as well as Rossides' *The Tree of Idleness* (Το δέντρο της τεμπελιάς).

The actors worked hard and contributed financially with two shillings and sixpence per week. In time they tended to get involved with other activities. Andreas Markos joined in the production of the play *The Prodigal Son* (Ο Άσωτος Υιός) by Paraskevas Hadjimichael at King George's Hall, (26 September 1960) performed by the Cypriot Youth Christian Association (OXEN: Ομάδα Χριστιανικής Ενώσεως Νέων). The cast included Sotiris Fotiou, Ellada Loizidou, Irenoula Savva, Costas Papadopoulos, Christos Constantinides, Neophytos Markos, Dimitris Kyriakou, Petros Hadjidimitriou, Dimitris Glynos, Christina Markou, Euterpe Pagourou, Panayiota Georgiou and Mary Hadjidimitriou. Markos also performed with Peter Finch in the film *In the Cool of the Day* directed by Robert Stephens (1960). His third involvement was with Arnold Wesker's play *The Kitchen* directed by John Dexter at the Royal Court (opening night, 27 June 1961).<sup>18</sup> Other Cypriot actors in the same production were Andreas Olympites, Panikos Iakovou, Andreas Malendrinou and Markos Markou.

The involvement of the actors in other productions, combined with differences of opinion about the policy of the Theatro Technis (Evgeniou, for example, was not in favour of Greek commercial plays) were the main reasons for the appearance of three new Cypriot companies within five years (1962-1967). These were disbanded after one or two years of activities because of disagreements and conflicts, and the actors joined other companies which had the same fate. Finally George Zenios and Andreas Markos returned to the Theatro Technis, whereas George Kafkaris immigrated to Perth (Australia) and others changed their jobs.

### **Cypriot Actors' Organisation (Οργανισμός Κυπρίων Ηθοποιών)**

The theatre group *Cypriot Actors' Organisation* was founded on 28 October 1962 and lasted until 2 January 1965. Founding members were Andreas

Markos, Andreas Lyssandrou, George Kafkaris, Dimitris Andrea and George Zenios.<sup>19</sup> Other actors were John Andrews, Takis Dimitriou, Panikos Constantinou, Stavroula Koni, Andreas Michael, Angeliki Vraka, Marianna Ignatiou, Leto Krokatsi, Stavros Lyssandrou, Maria Georgiou, P. Andronikou, Fofu Andronikou, Amalia Andronikou, Z. Ritli and M. Kitsiou. Michael Pappas<sup>20</sup> was their fund raiser. All their performances took place at King George's Hall.

Their first public performance included Evgeniou, and Dimitris Psathas' comedies *The Nervous Gentleman* (Ο νευρικός κύριος) and *The Madmen of Our Days* (Οι τρελοί της εποχής μας) directed by Andreas Markos. (υπηρέτης) (2 January 1963). A few months later they presented George Zenios' play *The Flame of Love* (Η φλόγα της αγάπης) with Windsor Davies as guest star and directed by Andreas Lyssandrou. The profits were used for the building of Saint Andrew's Greek Orthodox School. Other productions were: Psathas' "*Eros*" *Country Tavern* (Εξοχικόν Κέντρον ο Έρως) (8 February 1964) and Dimitris Photiades' *Mania Vitrova* (2 January 1965). The group came to an end when a new professional company appeared.

### Dionysos Theatre (1965-1966)

Phaedros (Paul) Stassinou, an actor of the National Theatre of Cyprus who had graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and was better known from film and TV plays, founded Dionysos under the registration name: Dionysos Theatrical and Film Enterprises Ltd. It was the first Cypriot company which employed actors for a fixed rate per show. Their address was 381 Kentish Town Road, London NW1, although they used the premises of Olympic Casino-Bayswater for their rehearsals. Stassinou was the Artistic Director and Louis Vrakas, the managing secretary. Other actors were Dinos Mouskoundis, Gregory Gregoriades, Serafeim Nicolaou, George Kafkaris, Costas Dimitriou, Yannoula Frangofinou, Foula Christophorou-Theodorou, Andreas Mavromatis, Nicos Soteriou, Androula Christophorou, Andreas Markos, Soteroula Christophorou and Andreas Stassinou.

The company presented plays of well-known authors translated into Greek, such as Albert Houseaun's *The Three Angels*, Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* translated by Gregory Gregoriades, Gabriel Arout's *Gog and Magog* and Jean Anhouil's *Orpheus and Eurydice* translated by Marios Plorites. Venues of performances were The Scala, King George's Hall and the London Co-operative Centre. The actors were disappointed because Louis



Vrakas always played the title roles, so they decided to cease their cooperation.

### **Greek-Cypriot Stage (Ελληνοκυπριακή Σκηνή)**

Andreas Lyssandrou and Tom Kazakos tried to present a purely Cypriot repertoire with the group Greek-Cypriot Stage (1966-1967). They presented Tefkros Anthias' plays *The War*, *Stop the Decline* and one or two other plays. Their efforts did not last for long as the Theatro Technis managed to attract more support from the British funding bodies.

### **Camden Theatro Technis (Camden Θέατρο Τέχνης)**

#### *Later Years (1962-2007)*

Theatro Technis had policy changes because of political and social events. The armed resistance against British rule in Cyprus had begun in 1955 and led to the establishment of the independent Republic under President Makarios in 1960.

The Cypriot theatre company used as its first base a garage at 89 Camden Mews, NW1, until 1972 and hosted theatre performances, poetry evenings, painting and photography exhibitions. The “Garage” saved Theatro Technis after it was left by a number of founder members. New persons joined including Christos Araklides, Achilleas Georgiou, Maria Evgeniou, Rena Georgiou, Dimitris Nicolaou, Criton Tomazos, Sophocles Sophocleous, George Hadjiphanis, Stavros Varvarides, Andreas Markou (social worker), and Xenia Andreou.

An Islington social worker asked Evgeniou's help for Cypriot immigrants with problems. Therefore Evgeniou decided to expand the group's activities to social work and at the same time to give semi-professional theatre performances with a combination of professionals and amateurs. In other words Evgeniou achieved to get financial support from Camden Borough, so he could keep a core of members on salary as social workers, who he could use as actors if necessary.

Stavros Varvarides, a dress-factory proprietor, had a dream to become an actor. Evgeniou accepted him because he made the offers of steady financial help for Theatro Technis and jobs for actors and actresses in his dress-factory if Evgeniou was unable to pay them.

In 1962 two plays by Stavros Lillitos *The Old Suitcase* (Η παλιά βαλίτσα) and *Under the Carob Trees* (Κάτω απ' τις χαρουπιές) had their world premiere. They were taken to Cyprus for a tour in 1962 and 1979 and were televised on Cypriot TV (Ραδιοφωνικό Ίδρυμα Κύπρου - ΡΙΚ). During the period 1963-1982 Theatro Technis produced mainly plays written in either Cypriot dialect or in English, and some Greek and English translations of classical plays. Productions included Rina Katselli's *The Incapable* (Ο ανίκανος) (1963), Aristophanes' *Peace* (Ειρήνη) (1964), Tefkros Anthias' *Cyprus Tragedy* (Κυπριακή τραγωδία), D. Patatzis' *Don Camillo* (with Christos Araklides in the title role), and P. Nicolaou's *The Sun Is not a Candle* (Ο ήλιος δεν είναι κερί) (1968).

In 1969 they played Evgeniou's *The Conversion of Lord Do-gooder* (Η μεταστροφή του Λόρδου Παράκαλου), Aristophanes' *Women in the Assembly* (Εκκλησιάζουσαι), Panos Joannides' *Gregory* and M. Pitsilides' *My In-law, Thanassis* (Ο Συμπέθερός μου ο Αθανάσης). Their repertoire also included Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1965) and *All My Sons* (1971), Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1971) and Nikolai Gogol's *The Diary of a Madman* (1972).

During the period of military government in Greece (1967-1974) Theatro Technis became a platform for political artistic events. It was also influenced by the regular visits from Greece of Karolos Koun's Arts Theatre. In 1969 Sophocles' *Antigone* was performed by Theatro Technis (Hampstead Theatre), followed by Evgeniou and Keith Murphy's *Oh! Democracy* (Ω! Δημοκρατία), a free adaptation of Aristophanes' *The Knights* (Οι ιππείς). Another production was *Prometheus Bound Today* (Προμηθέας δεσμώτης σήμερα) an adaptation by G. Evgeniou from Aeschylus' tragedy and Pericles Korovessis' book *The Method* (Η μέθοδος). This stage adaptation included messages against the Junta and was produced seven times between 1970 and 1978.

Theatro Technis performances between 1959 and 1978 took place in various venues: Unity Theatre, Hampstead Theatre, King George's Hall, Theatre Royal Stratford East, the "Garage", the London Cooperative Centre and "The Canopy". The Canopy was a disused railway shed, which became the first regular venue for Theatro Technis. It was converted into an Arts Centre thanks to Mr. Kassabow, a Bulgarian lecturer in Architecture at University College, London (9 Yorkway, London N7). Finally, Camden Borough offered the Old Saint Pancras Church Vicarage (26 Crowndale Road, NW1), which is now the permanent base of Theatro Technis and has hosted all its productions since 1978.

At this venue the performances started in Autumn 1978 with *Prometheus Bound Today*, in English, directed by Evgeniou. The cast included Koraltan Ahmed (a Turkish-Cypriot actor, who played the title role), George Savvides (Hermes), Effie Arestides (chorus leader), Maria Evgeniou, Stavros Varvarides, George Evgeniou (Oceanus), Angeliqe Rockas, and Anna Savva.

The year 1979 was dedicated to Stavros Lillitos' memory. His plays *The Old Suitcase*, *Under the Carob Trees* and *The Ambassadors of Hampstead* (Οι πρεσβευτές του Χάμστεντ) had their premieres in English. The parts of Anna in the first play and the Gipsy in the second were played by Effie Arestides, an Australian actress of Cypriot background, who has made a successful career in the British theatre.

In 1980-1982 Theatro Technis presented *Aphrodite Unbound* (Αφροδίτη λυώμενη) by Nick Axarlis, *The National Engagement* devised by the cast, Euripides' *Medea* (Μήδεια) and *A Revolutionary Nicknamed "Roosevelt"* (Ένας επαναστάτης με το παρατσούκλι «Ρούσβελτ») also devised by the cast, with George Savvides in the title role. All those plays were directed by Evgeniou and were subsidised by the Arts Council of Britain.

### **An Australian from ... a Big "Greek City"**

The semi-professional productions of Theatro Technis took place because of Evgeniou's feeling of insecurity, especially due to the appearance of other Cypriot companies founded by former members of Theatro Technis during the 1960's. Evgeniou claimed that he was inspired by Joan Littlewood. She, however, used mixed casts so that the professionals could influence the amateurs. In Theatro Technis the remarkable contributions of professional artists were spoiled by the tensions, which arose between them and the amateur actors. The rehearsals (professional program) took place in the daytime, which naturally created problems for the amateurs. Another technical problem was that George Evgeniou, Andreas Markou and Maria Evgeniou were regular actors and full-time social workers, so they had the duty to operate as citizen's advisers for immigrants' problems, an arrangement that caused many controversies. Therefore they were forced to walk out of rehearsals either to answer the phone or to deal with urgent citizens' problems.

The Arts Council of Great Britain which had sponsored the productions since 1978 refused to subsidise a production of Euripides' *Bacchae* because

of the negative reviews for Theatro Technis' production of *Medea*.<sup>21</sup> The Arts Council agreed to subsidise the production of *A Revolutionary Nicknamed "Roosevelt"*, however. In September 1982 the Drama Officer of the Arts Council warned Evgeniou that the subsidy would stop if he did not employ a guest director with a fully professional team of artists.<sup>22</sup> Help came from Australia. Theatro Technis began to raise its standard as soon as Ted Craig was involved as director of the productions. Born in Melbourne, he had worked as director of productions for the Drama Theatre at the Sydney Opera House and at various theatres in Britain.

With Theatro Technis he directed Euripides' *Alcestis* (Αλκηστις) (2-19 December 1982) and the highly successful production of Aristophanes' *The Frogs* (Οι βάρβαροι) translated into English by George Savvides. The music was by John Gould, the lyrics by David Dearlove and the set and costumes by Michael Pavelka. The cast included Guy Siner (Dionysus), David Shaugnessy (Xanthias), Alkis Kritikos, Panikos Efthymiou, George Savvides, Keith Varnier, Andy Hampton. Performances took place in London (3 November-11 December 1983) and also on a regional tour, which took place in Coventry, Oxford, Manchester and Sheffield (March-April 1984). In addition he organised the Youth Club of Theatro Technis and directed their play *Saint Pancras Circus* (February 1984). Evgeniou also raised the standard of his productions *The Appellants* (Οι εφεσιβάλλοντες) (March 1983) and *The Best of Tofias* (Το πιο καλό του Τοφία) (March 1984).

## Other Activities

Theatro Technis expanded the activities of the Youth Theatre. Panikos Efthymiou directed the youth productions *Zeus Rules O. K.* (Ο Δίας κυβερνάει Ο. Κ.) (1984), *Break, Silken Thread* (Σπάσε, μεταξένια κλωστή) and *Gringland* (1985), *The Contract* (Το συμβόλιο) (1986) and *Hands Tied, Tied Hands* (Χέρια δεμένα, δεμένα χέρια) (1987). All these plays were devised by the cast.

Corinna Seed (Greek-Egyptian) organised the Women's Theatre of Theatro Technis. They produced *Old Pandora's Box* (Το κουτί της γριά-Πανδώρας) devised by the cast and directed by *Maureen O'Farrell*. The cast included Maria Evgeniou (*Andromache*), Anna Savva, Corinna Seed, Georgia Clark, Dora Markos. Other productions included *Donna and Kebab* (Ντόνα και κεμπάπ) by Eve Adam and Martha Dimitriou, *Matchmaking* (Προξένεια) with Maria Evgeniou and Xenia Andreou. The policy of

Theatro Technis for the last twenty years is to produce one or two plays per year and to hire out the venues for visiting theatre companies.

### The Prometheus Touring Theatre

“Prometheus” celebrated its silver jubilee on 21 October 2007. An invitation to Criton Tomazos, a Cypriot poet, playwright and designer from the Theatre Writers Union to present two of his plays at the Grove Theatre (Hammersmith) opened a new chapter for the Greek and Cypriot community theatre. Tomazos asked Effie Arestides to organise the operation of a new theatre company. The performances would take place on 22 November 1982. On 21 October 1982 a meeting was held with Effie Arestides, Criton Tomazos, Akis Gabriel, John Eastham and the author of this article present.

For the new theatre company Arestides proposed the name “Ubar Theatre”<sup>23</sup> and this author the name “Prometheus Theatre Company” which was voted for.

The company’s first sponsors were the National Bank of Greece, the Commercial Bank of the Near East, the Bank of Cyprus, Cyprus Airways and Olympic Airways. Their financial assistance covered the basic expenses of the productions, the hire of rehearsal space, venues for performance, set and costume constructions. The company was unable to pay the actors, however. All performers were professional equity-members, who had monthly income from the DHSS.

The productions of the company were C. Tomazos' *The Shark* (Ο καρχαρίας), a one-act play with Effie Arestides and Peter Stanley, and *Maxim & Minnie* directed by Effie Arestides. The cast included Chris Wallace (Maxim), Jennifer Bamford (Minnie), Philip Ormrod, Rosamund Bott, Rachel Wright, Mark Johnson, and Toni Conrad. These performances took place at the Grove Theatre, 22 November 1982, whereas C. Tomazos' *A Girl in a Dark Red Dress* (Ένα κορίτσι με σκούρο κόκκινο φόρεμα) and *Maxim and Minnie* (29 January - 20 February 1983) were staged at the Charles Peguy Centre. The devised play *A Stroke of Genius* (Λάμπη εφύψας) was directed by Effie Arestides (Oval House, March 1983) as well as C. Tomazos' *Rehearsal* (Η πρόβα) (British Theatre Association, June 1983).

Prometheus' aim and objective was to offer equal opportunities to all artists, especially performers, playwrights, designers, however, Tomazos' involvement ceased on 12 December 1984 due to conflict of interests. The

company would continue to operate as a small-scale touring professional group under the name Prometheus Touring Theatre Company. It worked as main stage (α' σκηηνή) and experimental stage (β' σκηηνή). Arestides led theatre workshops and the participants used to take part in the studio workshop performances.<sup>24</sup> The touring productions of the main stage included professional actors. Productions included the devised studio play *Nightclub* (Drill Hall, March 1984), directed by Arestides; the devised studio play *Theatre-New Beginning* (Θέατρο – Νέα αρχή) directed by Effie Arestides (June 1984) at the Drill Hall, Bloomsbury London; Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Τρωάδες) translated into English by Richmond Lattimore and directed by Joan-Ann Maynard, with Effie Arestides as Hecuba and Lorraine Wright as Helen of Troy (28 September-19 October 1984) at the Commonwealth Institute, Whittington Community Centre, Saint Matthew's Meeting Place (South London) and Sir Richard Steele Theatre-Hampstead); the devised studio play *Love, Dreams and Other Madness* (Αγάπη, όνειρα και άλλη τρέλλα) directed by Effie Arestides (May 1985) at the Gray's Inn Resource Centre; Nicos Zakopoulos' *The Stranger* (Ο ξένος) translated into English by Philip Rump (September 1985) at the Offstage Theatre with a cast that included Arestides' workshop participants; James Martin's *Even* (Offstage Theatre) with Arestides' workshop participants; Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (Λυσιστράτη) with Effie Arestides in the title role directed by Sue Charman (November-December 1985) at the Place, Harmood Community Centre, Harringey Cypriot Centre, North London Polytechnic and The Bridgelane; the devised studio play *A Different Drummer* (Ένας διαφορετικός τυμπανιστής) directed by Effie Arestides (June 1986) at the Gray's Inn Resource Centre.

Prometheus continued for a long time with new plays and workshop productions of devised shows in Oxford, Yorkshire and other regional places. The author's involvement with Prometheus ceased, however, in June 1988 as he had to return to Greece for military service.

### Visiting Theatre Companies

Karolos Koun's Arts Theatre visited London several times during the period of the Greek military government and he directed Aristophanes' *Birds* (Aldwych Theatre), Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (Αχαρνείς) with George Lazanis as Dikaiopolis (Sadlers Wells Theatre) and Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (Επτά επί Θήβαις) (Sadlers Wells Theatre). Koun's talent was greatly

appreciated and recognised by the British theatre-goers,<sup>25</sup> and Sir Peter Hall invited him to Stratford-upon-Avon to direct Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the Royal Shakespeare Company.<sup>26</sup>

The Organisation of Theatrical Activities in Cyprus presented three Cypriot folk-plays in London in the early 1960s. Amphitheatro presented Petros Katsaitis' *Iphigenia in Lixourion* (Η Ιφιγένεια στο Λιξούρι) directed by Spyros Evangelatos with Leda Tassopoulou in the title role (August-September 1981) at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the London Roundhouse.

The National Theatre of Cyprus presented Kostas Montis' Cypriot adaptation of Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata* directed by the late Vladimir Kafkarides (31 March -3 April) at the Bloomsbury Theatre. The cast included Lenia Sorokou (Lysistrata), Florendia Dimitriou (Kleoniki), Elli Kyriakidou, Alcestis Pavlides (Myrrine), Medea Hanna, Annita Santorinaiou, Stelios Kafkarides (Magistrate), Spyros Stavrinides (Kinessias), Neophytos Neophytou, Andreas Moussouliotis, Leandros Panagiotides, Andreas Moustras (chorus leader), Stavros Louras, Costas Dimitriou, Phaedros Stassinou, Varnavas Kyriazis, Eftychos Poulaidis, Vladimir Kafkarides and Peter Costa.

Salonica Arts Experimental Stage (Πειραματική Σκηνή της Τέχνης) presented Aristophanes' *Women in the Assembly* directed by Professor Hourmouziades and Elias Kapetanakis' *Vengera* (Βεγγέρα) directed by Nicos Armaos (August-September 1985) at the Omnibus Theatre, West London.

Yannis Mentonis, a Cypriot comedian, also known as Firfiris, gave performances with his group at the Avenida Hall, North London (7, 14, 15 April 1984), the Dome Hall, South London (8 April 1984) at the Haringey Centre, North London (16-17, 23 March 1984) and the Kypriaki Estia in Birmingham (23 April 1984).<sup>27</sup>

### **The Cypriot Folk Writers' Association (Λαϊκή Ένωση Λογοτεχνών Αγγλίας)**

The Cypriot Folk Writers' Association (L.E.L.A.) founded an amateur group early in 1983 with folk plays in their repertoire. Their first public performance was with Yannis Grivas' *The Backgammon Addiction* (Συνήθεια για τάβλι) (4 September 1983) at the Earlham Grove Cypriot Community Centre.<sup>28</sup> They also presented Dimitris Papadimitris' *The Baby* (Το μωρό) at the Hornsey Town Hall (24 April 1986), Kyriakos Akanthiotis' *Marikou's Love* at Saint George's Theatre (6 December 1986), Nicos Hadjiapostolou's

*The Girl of the Neighbourhood* (Το κορίτσι της γειτονιάς) at the Tottenham Town Hall (May 1987), and also one-act folk sketches: George Athanassiades' *It's Better to Have Hope* (Καλύτερα να έχεις ελπίδα) and *O Kapnissis tzi o Tzirkantzis* at the Earlham Cypriot Centre (October 1985), Yannis Grivas' play *Your Customs and Your Language, Treasure at Your Door* (Τα έθιμα τζι' η γλώσσα σου εν θησαυρός στην πόρτα σου) at Tottenham (May 1987) and *The Clinic* (Η κλινική), a comedy based on the ideas and experiences of Hambis Conteatias, a folk poet, performed at St George's Theatre (February 1986) and Earlham Cypriot Centre (November 1986).

Kyros Kouzapas was their Artistic Director, Antonis Karantonis and Kleopas Demosthenous were the designers. Performers included Hambis Polycarpou, Yannis Grivas, Christina Mousicou, Gregory Andreou, Lenia Polycarpou, Andreas Haralambous, Tassos Andreou, Evangelia Card, Georgia Card, Andreas Sofos and others.

### Back to the Sixties

Yannis Mentonis' visit to London aimed to expand his activities in Britain with a London-based Cypriot company, which would present folk-plays also suitable to be sold on video cassettes. In his Firfiris Group he used actors from Cyprus and Anglo-Cypriots, who had been performers one or two decades before, but were forced to emigrate to Britain. Since they faced the racist attitudes (especially because of their continental accent) they did other jobs (dress manufacturers, grocers, restaurant owners, barbers). These persons perhaps thought that by working with the Firfiris Group they would immediately win recognition for their talents. After Firfiris' last performance (1985) his performers from London decided to found a theatre for the Cypriot community, so they could establish their own reputation.

The founding members of *Ελληνικό Θέατρο Αγγλίας* (May 1985) were Thanos Kanistras (Chair), Evangelia Card, Vassilis Panayi, Odysseas Antoniou, Tom Kazakos and Ellada Miliotou.<sup>29</sup> Thanos Kanistras tried to have complete financial control and rejected productions of Cypriot folk plays. Their first planned performance of Alekos Sakellarios' *My Pal Lefterakis* (Ο φίλος μου ο Λεφτεράκης) (7 August 1985) at the Haringay Centre was cancelled. Since the Cypriot actors could not fire Kanistras, they decided to change the name of the company. So the above mentioned actors had a meeting with Glafkos Violaris, Yannis Grivas and George Athanassiades in the premises of Anglo-Akanthou Aid Society (a Cypriot Advisory Centre in



Islington) on 24 November 1985. They voted Glafkos Violaris as chair and the new name of the company was *Κυπριακό Λαϊκό Θέατρο Αγγλίας*.<sup>30</sup> This company lasted for only three months as the members decided to incorporate it under the L.E.L.A. theatre group in February 1986. They planned to make L.E.L.A. a professional theatre company and to present a double bill on 24 April 1986. However, George Athanassiades, Vassilis Panayi, Ellada Miliotou, Odysseas Antoniou and Evangelia Card left L.E.L.A. ten days before the opening night. They founded another group, TH.O.C.A. (Θεατρικός Οργανισμός Κυπρίων Αγγλίας) and succeeded in presenting the review *The Community Has Everything* (Απ' όλα έχει η παρούσια) on 5 May 1986 in Birmingham Κυπριακή Εστία<sup>31</sup> and North London Polytechnic (22-23 December 1986). The review included Athanassiades' comic sketches, *The Radio Stations* (Οι ραδιοφωνικοί σταθμοί), *Very Good Advice* (Πολύ καλή συμβουλή), *Year 2000* (Έτος 2000), *The Deaf* (Ο Κουφός) and *Piponias and Pagonou in London* (Ο Πιπόνιας και η Παγωνού στο Λονδίνο), as well as Vassili Panayi's sketches *Kiki's Little House* (Το μικρό σπίτι της Κικής), *Gossips* (Κουτσομπολιά) and *Who Will Do the Cooking?* (Ποιος θα κάνει το μαγείρεμα;). The company lasted about eight months. Its amateur actors joined L.E.L.A. and the professional ones went to Theatro Technis, which remained the main community theatres in London.

### Community Theatre Today

The appearance of the Prometheus Theatre Company had the following achievements: it presented the Greeks and Cypriots as a vital part of multicultural British society and not as an isolated minority, and with its serious professional activity it provided an excellent example that two or three Cypriot and Greek companies could create stimulating competition and enhance entertainment. Although Prometheus is now a regional company, its founders are happy that Theatro Technis, the L. E. L. A. theatre company and the Lykeio Ellinidon theatre group are continuing and are making a significant contribution.

### A Theatrical Ghetto?

Naseem Khan's effort to belittle Cypriot theatre in England by arguing that the Cypriots have little tradition of theatre, especially the rural immigrants<sup>32</sup> is inaccurate. There are many Cypriot actors who prefer to be known only through the British stage as they intend to avoid "ghettoisation".

After all, any Greek or Cypriot theatre should be able to stand on an equal basis with the English ones. If the "ghetto" and the "ethnic stamp" are abolished I am sure that more Cypriot artists will have the courage to emerge.

## NOTES

1. Anderson, 1965.
2. Katsouris, 1972, pp. 12-21.
3. Karageorghis, 1982, pp. 172-173 and *passim*.
4. Diodorus of Sicily, Book VII, ch. 5, §4.
5. Katsouris, 1972, pp. 13-14.
6. Itzin, 1980.
7. Katsouris, 1972, pp. 14-16. Cf. Khan, 1980, p. 74 (on Indian actresses).
8. Katsouris, 1972, pp. 15.
9. Interview with Birbas' in Chalandri, Athens, November 1989.
10. Oral testimony of the late Timotheos Bishop of Militoupolis, St Sophia (1986).
11. Charalambidis, 1983, pp. 113-120.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Baltsavia was known from Greek TV serials.
14. *Ellinikos Typos* (London), 15 April 1987, p. 3.
15. *Paroikiaki* (London), 10 August 1986, p. 23.
16. Shiafkalis became resident director of productions with the Cypriot National Theatre.
17. *Pharos* (London), 11 November 1962, p. 3.
18. Findlater, ed., 1981, Appendix 1.
19. *Pharos* (London), 20 August 1960, p. 6.
20. Michael Pappas was also film director and producer of *The Private Right, Tomorrow's Warrior* and other films.
21. *City Limits* (London), 29 January 1982, p. 55.
22. *Camden New Journal* (London), 14 October 1982, p. 2.
23. The ubar is a musical instrument of the Aborigines in Australia.

24. Zakopoulos, 1985.
25. Daubeny, 1971, pp. 216, 234-241, 244-248.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.
27. *Ellinikos Typos* (London), 21 March 1984, p. 3; *Ta Nea* (London), 5 April 1984.
28. *Paroikiaki* (London), 19 February 1987, p. 17.
29. *Ellinikos Typos* (London), 27 June 1985, p. 4.
30. *Ta Nea* (London), 5 December 1989, p. 9.
31. *Ellinikos Typos* (London), 16 May 1986, pp. 2, 4.
32. Khan, 1980, pp. 73-75.

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