

The Greek Theatre in the United States from the End of the 19th Century to the 21st Century

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article couvre l'activité théâtrale des immigrants Grecs aux Etats-Unis à partir de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle jusqu'à nos jours. Il souligne l'histoire de beaucoup de troupes de théâtre qui avaient fait leur apparition dans les communautés grecques d'Amérique à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et ont connu le succès jusqu'à un déclin marquant dans la seconde décennie du vingtième siècle, déclin précipité par l'enrôlement de beaucoup de jeunes immigrants Grecs dans les Guerres Balkaniques. Le développement théâtral impressionnant, qui s'en est suivi de 1920 à 1940, et après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, est examiné en mettant l'accent sur une variété d'aspects tels que les nombreuses troupes, d'amateurs et de professionnels et leurs répertoires, thèmes, tendances, problèmes, influences politiques, enjeux sociaux, etc., nécessaires pour comprendre le rôle et l'impact que le théâtre grec a eu jusqu'à nos jours. L'auteur note que l'on observe deux tendances particulières depuis la Seconde Guerre Mondiale: les auteurs dramatiques Américains Grecs composent leurs œuvres principalement en anglais et beaucoup d'Américains d'origine grecque de la seconde génération participent à des troupes de théâtre grecques, tandis qu'un nombre d'acteurs de la première génération ayant longtemps servi dans le théâtre sont devenus des professionnels.

ABSTRACT

This article covers the theatre activity of the Greek immigrants in the USA from the end of the nineteenth century until today. It outlines the history of the many theatre groups which had appeared in the American Greek communities by the end of the nineteenth century and thrived until the marked decline in the second decade of the twentieth century precipitated by the enlistment of many young Greek immigrants for the Balkan Wars. The impressive development which followed from 1920 to 1940, and then after the Second World War, is examined with focus on a variety of aspects, such as the many companies (amateur and professional) and their repertoires, themes, trends, problems, political influences, social issues, etc., necessary for an understanding of the role

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and impact which the Greek theatre has had to the present time. Two particular trends noted since World War II are that the Greek American playwrights compose their works mainly in English and that many second generation Greek Americans participate in Greek theatre groups, while a number of first generation actors with long service in the theatre have become professionals.

From 1895 until 1940

The aim of this article is to examine the theatrical life of the Greek immigrants in the United States of America, focussing on New York and Chicago, from 1895 until 2008.

On March 25th, 1895, a milestone date, the first performance of Greek immigrants was staged in the USA. The Lykourgos Society of Chicago took the initiative in staging the comedy *Babylonia*, written by Dimitrios Byzantios, with amateur actors who lived in the city. The receipts of the performance would cover the expenses of the celebration of the National Holiday. The performance, which took place at Turner Hall, was successful and the audience was so enthusiastic that in the afternoon of the same day the performance was repeated. The main contributors of the performance were Yiannis Palamaras, the president of the Lykourgos Society, and Nikos Bekropoulos.

In 1899 the actor N. Konstantinidis arrived in New York and formed the first theatre company of amateur actors. The company's first performance of the play *Athanassios Diakos* was staged on the afternoon of April 7th, 1899, at the Manhattan Lyceum in New York, in order to celebrate the Greek War of Independence. The performance managed to attract a large number of immigrants and was considered successful. Soon, it was decided to stage another performance of the company after Easter 1899. The second play of the company's repertory was a patriotic drama *Armatoloi and Klephts* by Christopher Samargides. On December 26th, 1899, at the Arlington Hall theatre of New York, Konstantinidis' company, following the audience's demand, repeated the three-act-play *Athanassios Diakos*, which had been staged on April of the same year. In addition, the programme included the one-act comedy *The Minister's Office*. On that same evening, Konstantinidis recited an act from the drama *The Parliamentary Candidate*. The performance was attended by more than five hundred Greeks, as well as some Americans. Then, the theatre company went on tour to Boston,

Massachusetts and Chicago after being invited by the Greek communities there. On January 1900 the company appeared at the Music Hall in Lowell, Massachusetts, with the drama *Athanassios Diakos*. Two thirds of the Greek community attended the performance.

The American newspapers of Chicago at the beginning of December 1899 published recommendatory articles about the city's Hellenism. The reason was the performance of the play *Odysseus' Return to Ithaca*, which was staged at the Theatre Hall for three consecutive evenings in front of a crowded audience. The play was composed of excerpts from the *Odyssey*. The central dramatic figure was Penelope, who narrates her life during the 20-year absence of Odysseus. The inspiration and head of the performance was the young Mabel May Barrows,¹ an American philhellene who had undertaken to find the right people and work patiently with them. The rest of the amateur actors – twenty in all – were Greek immigrants. However, the chorus was formed by American women, who had also designed the scenery and the costumes. The play's language was Ancient Greek and Barrows' interpretation of Penelope's role, despite the fact she was American, did not surprise the Greek audience. There was speculation concerning her origins and her education, but, in spite of all that, for the American society of the end of the 19th century her initiative was highly avant-garde.

In the play, Dimitrios Manousopoulos had the leading role and Georgios Matalas was his co-star.² The two young men were from Laconia, from villages of Parnonas. According to sources, they had public education, both had studied at the middle school of the community capital Vamvakou and at the secondary school of Sparti, in contrast to the large number of Greek immigrants who came from the mountainous areas of Greece and did not have any kind of elementary education. Manousopoulos and Matalas were among the first amateur actors of the Greek stage in Chicago and exhortators in the spread and establishment of theatre groups throughout America.

The theatrical activity of Mabel May Barrows did not end in 1899. At the beginning of October 1903, Barrows and about thirty "trained" Greeks met at the Hull House Theatre in Chicago to rehearse the forthcoming performance of the tragedy *Aias*. We know that the preparations for the performance of *Aias* were almost completed at the end of November 1903. The various people who participated in the performance had learned their parts under the instructions of the young woman Hellenist. Georgios Matalas played the character of Aias and Michael Loris, that of Tekmissas. The chorus was formed of thirty people with Paraskevas Iliopoulos as the

chorus leader. The performances were staged at Hull House, from the 6th until the 11th December of 1903. The character of Odysseus was played by Panagiotis Lambrou, Menelaos by Iason Korologos, Athena by Liverios Manousopoulos and Tefkros by Dimitrios Manousopoulos. The language of the performance was Ancient Greek. The American newspapers praised the performance and many professors of Ancient Greek attended, as well as journalists. Georgios Matalas and Dimitrios Manousopoulos received the most praise for their performances.

The composition of Mabel May Barrows' company did not change in the following year.³ After the great success in Chicago at Hull House, the head of the company decided to stage Sophocles' *Aias* in New York.⁴ The performances had been programmed for the 23rd, 24th and 25th of March. As it was perfectly natural that the whole company could not travel to New York, vacant places resulted in the chorus, which the director tried to cover with an advertisement in the newspaper *Atlantis* (Ατλαντίς). The members of the committee which had undertaken to promote the performance belonged to the upper class of New York society. The theatre where the performances were staged, Clinton Hall, was a small auditorium packed mostly with Americans who belonged to the literary world, and the critiques were triumphal. Although some believed that the audience of the theatre would not be able to keep up with the tragedy in the ancient text, the use of Ancient Greek was avant-garde. In reality, the American audience would not have found any interest in a tragedy staged in Modern Greek. Certainly, the performances of Mabel May Barrows impressed the Greeks of Chicago and New York and boosted Greek pride. On February 19th, 1905, Barrows reappeared with an original and interesting performance. She had dramatized pastoral poems of Theocritus, which she presented in the auditorium of the Association Hall at Brooklyn. During this performance, which was funded by the Brooklyn Institute, the chorus of young girls sang the Delphic hymn to Apollo, while all the participants were dressed in ancient Greek costumes.

In the first decade of the 20th century, in all Greek communities from the eastern to the western coasts of the United States, thirty amateur Greek theatre companies were formed which staged hundreds of plays. The activity of the following amateur companies was remarkable: "Orpheus" in New York with Jenny Prensic, "Orpheus" in Lynn, Massachusetts under Il. Krommidas and D. Stratigos, the amateur company of the Panhellenic Society, "Parthenon", in New York with Polyxeni Vorvis as the leading actress, "Phoenix" and "Moussa" in Chicago, "Aeschylus" and "Muses" at Lowell, Massachusetts, "Philippos",

“Apollo” and “Sophocles” under George Vorvis in New York, the Company of Athens in Philadelphia. The spread of the Greek companies was tremendous even in the cities that had few Greeks: the theatre company “Homer” at Nashua, New Hampshire and “Parnassus” in Washington with Eleni Konstantinidou as the leading actress; an amateur company was also formed at Beloit in the state of Wisconsin, as well as in many other places.

During this period, a tradition was created regarding the staging of theatrical performances of patriotic plays during the celebration for the Greek War of Independence, resulting in the earnings of the performances being used for the benefit of the nation.

At the same time, well-known Greek actors such as Dimitrios Kazouris, Dionyssios Tavoularis, Nikolaos Lekatsas, Aggelos Sarigiannis and Eftychios Vonaseras crossed the Atlantic. Despite their efforts and the time they spent in the United States, they did not manage to help create a permanent Greek theatrical stage in America. Nevertheless, with their presence they honoured the Greek immigrant and gave the necessary boost to encourage amateur artists to form theatre companies and write plays.

During the decade of the 1920s, Greek theatre activity in America diminished both in terms of the local companies, as well as the ones on tour from Greece. Thousands of young people, during the period from 1912 until 1922, returned to the homeland and joined the Greek army. Thus, this voluntary military service resulted in the withdrawal of creative and intellectual manpower from the Greek communities.

During the period from 1920 until 1940 the theatre companies, both amateur and professional, multiplied and spread. All Greek communities, even the smallest ones, came into contact with the theatre or developed theatre activity. The theatre would become for the Greek immigrants a mode of expression, an opportunity for social association, a political podium, a link of national unity, a means of protest but also of entertainment.

The longest-lived and most important companies of this period were: the family theatre company of Aristides Parisis, the “Apollo” company of N. Patsi and K. Zapnoukagia, the operetta company of Vr. Pantopoulou, the Greek Art Theatre of Nikos Patsis, the Athenian Operetta with Lina Dorou as leading actress, the New Athenian Operetta of Yiannis and Katina Thymiou, the Lolota Ioannidou Company that performed in America from 1925 until 1929, the Greek Theatre and Greek Actors of Gerasimos Kourouklis, the Athenian Company of Ar. Chrysochoou, the New Theatre

of Yiannis Vokos and P. Adamidis, the company of Aliki Theodoridou, who settled down in America in 1939, and others.

This period also witnessed the appearance of the socialist theatre. In 1918, the communist newspaper *The Voice of the Worker* had been founded aiming to unite the Greek labour world. Through the newspaper the first local professional theatre company was born in New York, the Theatrical Labor Group of Nikos Patsis. His example was followed by other professional and amateur companies: The Socialist Amateur Group under the guidance of the well-known “veteran” of the Greek stage in America, Artemis Zampou, the Communist Amateur Group in New York, the Drama Group of the Greek Labor Educational Association in Chicago, the amateur drama groups “Spartakos” in Chicago and New York, the “Pioneer” and “Prometheus” in Chicago, and others.

We know that the means of the companies were limited, the actors in most cases were amateurs, the repertory was repeated and dated, and the result, from the aesthetic point of view, was many times mediocre. Despite all these negative factors, the companies offered plenty of feelings of admiration, joy, rapture, sadness, disappointment, but above all pride for the Greek nation and its capabilities. We must not overlook the fact that the most important role of the immigrant theatre was to entertain. It was a form of true and constructive entertainment, especially in an environment where the exhaustive rhythm of life was making even more imperative the need for theatre being a way out of the oppressive and monotonous routine.

Since the beginning of the Modern Greek theatre in the U.S.A., the companies used to rent American theatres. In addition, in the decades of 1930s and 1940s, the frequency of the performances imposed the need for permanent cooperation of the companies with theatres of Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Moreover, the theatrical groups were making appearances in the halls where events of the Greek associations and communities took place. The school performances were staged in the basements of the Greek churches, specifically where Greek language lessons were usually taking place.

Apart from its beneficial impact on the social education of the Greek immigrants, the theatre was also a way of collecting money for public benefit causes. That is why it was embraced by the various associations of Greek immigrants (associations that either were related to their place of origin in Greece or to their professional activity) which integrated theatre within the scope of various balls organized on any occasion.

Undoubtedly, the contribution of the Greek theatre companies to the cultural and social life of the Greek communities in America during the first half of the 20th century is remarkable. With the artistic activities they developed they taught sociability and brotherhood and relieved the immigrant, as spectator, actor or dramatist, from his everyday problems, the obligations regarding the place, the time and the needs of life, providing him a place of freedom. The theatre, by promoting intellectual communication and mental contact, offered the immigrants common ideals and objectives. But it mostly cultivated the notion of belonging to a broader group of people, it boosted the national conscience and it played a unifying role.

By reading the Greek-American press of the time, it can be concluded that on the whole the critiques were favorable and aimed at encouraging the audience, the companies and the dramatists. Only the criticism of the socialist newspaper *Onwards* constructively targeted the need to improve the repertory and the companies. From this severe criticism even the socialist groups were not exempted.

Until the Second World War, apart from the rapid development of the Greek-American theatre, the large production of dramatic plays by Greek immigrants was also remarkable. The self-taught immigrant playwrights, during the first immigration period until 1910, saw the prime need of writing to be to maintain the nostalgic mood of America's Greeks for the far-away homeland. Their sources of inspiration were the dramatic idylls, folk poetry and multiverse dramatic songs, i.e. "paralogues". The plays written until the decade of 1930 are easily classified into categories: immigration dramas, moral plays, historical dramas, as well as comedies, usually of one act. The main representatives of the Greek nostalgic dramaturgy in America are the following: Mimis Dimitriou (*The Fate of the Immigrant, The Deserter, The Fate Abroad, Brouklys in Athens*), Nikos Lambropoulos (*The Erudites, The Gamble, The 'Bad' Road, Clergymen and Priests, Community Meetings*), Angelos Sarigiannis (*Our Mess in America*), Ilias Papaïliou (*Greek Soil, Birds of a Feather Flock Together*), Leonidas Arniotis (*The Immigrants*), Spyros Spyropoulos (*The Chicken That Gets Lost and Disturbs the World, The Immortal Soldier, The Spy*), Nikolaos Vavoudis (*Who Are Going to Parnassus, Alamana Hero, Greek-American Seamen in Faliro, The Fighters of Faith, Crucified Mothers, etc.*), Georgios Kartsonis (*Glorious Greece*), Chr. Papachristos (*The Torment of the Engaged Woman, The Wreckage of the Asia Minor Destruction, etc.*), Stefanos Charalambidis (*Kassiani, The Unknown Woman, Theodora, The Two Orphan Girls, etc.*), Athinagoras (*Nostalgia, Priest Being Klepht, etc.* and who afterwards

became Patriarch of Constantinople), Dimitris Theodoridis (*The Legacy of the Unknown Woman*) and other many writers.

After the Russian Revolution, a nucleus of playwrights was created who came from the socialist societies and created plays that were revolutionary and naturalistic with, however, many moral elements. They focussed on social injustice, the exploitation of workers, inequality, racism, and in general the whole pathogenesis of America.

The auctorial motivation of the Greek immigrants was not literary recognition, but their desire to express and to free their intellectual world, to create a means of communication, to cultivate the Greek character and to reveal class conscience. Despite their moderate literary value, they form a singular dramaturgy. Both the plays that were spotlighted by the footlights, as well as those that were written only to be read, cultivated the theatrical *logos* having as central themes the love for the homeland, the much desired repatriation, the struggle and toil to survive. Of course, there were also immigration plays on social mores, which attempted to illustrate proper domestic and social behaviour. About fifty immigrant playwrights and more than one hundred theatrical plays have been located.

The companies' repertory was not limited to the dramaturgy of the immigrants, but also borrowed plays from the Greek and the international repertory. From the last decade of the 19th century until the first two of the 20th, the theatrical stages of the Greek immigrants presented mostly historical dramas. The companies gave priority to patriotic dramas having as their purpose to rouse emotion for the fight for independence of the enslaved Greeks. The second kind of drama which was very popular was the dramatic idyll, such as those of Spyridon Peresiadis and Dimitrios Koromilas. The place of action of these plays, the mountainous Greek landscape, awakened memories and appealed to the Greek immigrants.

During the decade of 1920, the need to change the themes was noted. The social issues of inequality, new role models, woman's position, etc., confronted the socialist and the workers' theatre groups, whether professional or amateur, which incorporated plays of the socialists Dimitris Tangopoulos, Sotiris Skipis and Georgios Simiriotis into their repertories. In addition, the naturalistic dramas of the first creative period of Spyros Melas, Theodoros Synadinos and Rigas Golfis were revived. The theatre of "ideas" found support not only within the socialist and workers' associations, but also in a limited audience, loyal to the Greek-American theatre. Then, the

socialist groups, without changing their ideological aim, worked round and adopted more light-hearted shows, the musical theatre in particular, with the intention to attract and acquire a broader audience. One-act comedies were very common, followed by dramatic plays, in order to soften the heavy atmosphere of the “serious” play. This strategy can be observed throughout the entire period under examination.

The Athenian companies on tour, at the end of the second decade of the 20th century, carried in their luggage theatrical reviews and operettas. The fashion of the light theatre lasted until the end of 1930 and its popularity matched the educational level of the Greek immigrants, but also the main objective of the theatre, the entertainment of the Greek family.

From the international dramaturgy very few plays were performed on the Greek-American stages. Shakespeare’s plays were never staged in complete form. The great playwright was barely introduced to the audience of the Greek immigrants by Dionyssios Tavoularis and Nikolaos Lekatsas, who used to interpret extracts from his plays. In contrast, the French historical dramas, as well as dramatized novels found response from the Greek-American audience. The plays that were chosen were characterized by strong dramatic elements, educational character, but at the same time by elements of the drama of social mores. It is evident that the local companies did not follow the repertory of the American companies, but of the Athenian ones, which proves the dependence of the Greek-American theatre on the Greek one. It is also worth noting that only two American plays were staged by local companies.⁵

From 1940 Until 2008

The 1940s’ epopee shocked the Greeks of America, who were anxiously following the dramatic developments through the Greek-American press, the narratives of the immigrant volunteers and the proclamations that leaked out in the Greek-American communities. The Greek-American dramaturgy during the Second World War managed to surpass its ideological contradictions and follow a common dramaturgic line. Romance and the notions of self-sacrifice and freedom prevailed. The themes of the plays were about the Greek-Albanian war and the years of the Occupation, usually in a non-artistic way, enriched with pompous rhetoric and extreme sentimentality. There were the plays for ephemeral consumption, scripted by alleged writers, such as the play *The Glory That is Greece: Patriotic Drama in*

Three Acts by the Arcadian magistrate Andreas I. Vlahos, who lived in Chicago, or plays by amateur dramatists, such as *Enslaved Hellas: Drama in One Act* by Konstantinos Papafotiou, who came from Western Macedonia. The drama in one act by Theano Margaris *For a Free Hellas – Under Slavery* was a success and was published in 1943. The plays at the beginning of the decade of 1940 are full of emotional elements and patriotism.⁶

During the decade of the 1940s amateur companies prevailed which opted for the patriotic repertory and the famous Athenian war operettas. Greek actors, who before the war participated actively in the local Greek-American companies, became successful in key positions within the Greek communities. Manolis Diamandis, in America since the mid-1930s, was an actor in Gerasimos Kourouklis' companies, Greek Actors and New Theatre. In the years after the war he had a radio programme on WEYD, which was long-lived and enjoyed great ratings in New York. The same applied to the radio broadcasts of the great Greek-American actor Yiannis Thimios, which were transmitted from the same frequency. The broadcasts of the veteran actors were a diverse theatrical podium. Theatrical radio plays were interpreted, such as *The Seven Days of Creation* by the pianist Maria Horapha, which was broadcasted in October, 1956, while on the same day the newcomer to New York, Adamantios Lemos, through the radio broadcast of Manolis Diamandis, announced his intention to develop a permanent theatrical activity in America.⁷

In Chicago, the newspaper *Greek Press* of the theatre-goer Lefteris Konstantopoulos supported and promoted the theatre, as was the case with the magazine *Athenian* of the playwright Dimitris Michalaros. Radio hours with theatrical orientation were introduced and operated in Chicago thanks to the playwright Michalis Chatsos, but mainly due to the business acumen of his wife Anna.

In the decades to follow, the Greek-American playwrights, though they continued to be inspired by Greek-American theatrical life, set aside the Greek language and continued to write mostly in "social", communicative English. The first immigrants, on the one hand, completely ignored English and, on the other, strictly addressed the audience of the economic Greek immigrants. The second generation Greeks, but also those that crossed the Atlantic after the war, were possessed by the need to free themselves from the narrow boundaries of the Greek communities and develop more complex communication means within a broader environment, maintaining, however, emotional elements in relation to the Greek character, as is the case of the writer Athina Dalla-Dami.

As mentioned before, Adamantios Lemos and his wife Mary arrived in America in 1956. Lemos with the priceless moral and economic support of the businessman Nikos Papadakos, who was the husband of Rika Dialyna, staged on March 10th, 1957 at the Assembly Hall of New York's Hunter College, the *Bridal Song* of Notis Pergialis, without great success however. Within the same period, Nikos Papadakos and Adamantios Lemos decided to establish "the first regular Greek theatre in the US". In the middle of 1957 Papadakos also rented a small theatre on 42 Street. The "Greek Art Theatre" was inaugurated on November 11th, 1957 with the play by Sakellarios-Giannakopoulos *No Names, No Pack Drill!* On February 1958, the comedy *In Need of a Dad* by M. Mrantel and A. Heart was staged. On February 1958, the newly established theatre company also presented the play *Love Needs... Beating*. Unfortunately, the theatre was soon gone due to the exorbitant expenses. In the summer of 1958, Lemos presented some summer performances in the Catskill Mountains of New York. During the new theatrical season he staged on January 30th, 1959 at New York's Carnegie Hall the drama *A Mother's Tragedy* by Dario Nicodemmi that was followed by the comedy *An Unfortunate Lady* by Sakellarios and Giannakopoulos. From February until March 1959 and also during the winter theatrical period of 1960-1961, tours were organized to nearby cities in the mid-west states and Canada. From 1961 until 1963 Lemos' activity was occasional.

On June 27th, 1963, at the Hotel Piccadilly in New York during the entire community's assembly, the establishment of the independent Hellenic Theatre Foundation of America, Inc. was announced. From 1963 until 1966 Lemos staged performances on Fridays and Saturdays, but also organised tours to focal points of Hellenism in America. In 1965 the Hellenic Theatre Foundation of America, Inc. acquired a permanent theatrical house, the Maidman Playhouse, in the centre of Manhattan. The Junta, however, terminated Adamantios Lemos' activities, as he was cut off artistically.

In the period that followed, he prepared his interpretation of Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, which was staged in the spring of 1970 at Finch College in Manhattan. In June 1973, Lemos, insisting on a quality repertory, presented the *Chairs* by Ionesco and Pirandello's *Man with a Flower in His Mouth*. In August 1973, the Lemos couple returned to Greece, however, later, he would return twice to America on tour.⁸

George Arkas, playwright and director, left Greece after the military coup and settled in New York. In 1973 he staged *Medea* and this performance gave

him the opportunity to find wealthy supporters. As a result, in 1974 the Greek Art Theatre was born. Arkas announced: “My friends saw from the reactions of the critics and the audiences that what can be in Greece, can also be here”. In October 1974, on Sheridan Square the Greek Art Theatre was inaugurated with the substantial collaboration and contribution of Greek businessmen. Arkas had leased the Café Society, a night club, for which he had to pay \$50, 000 in order to change it into a “miniature classical Greek amphitheatre”.⁹

The director sought to form a fifteen-member theatre company aiming at presenting Ancient Greek dramaturgy in English. His ambitious plan took effect on November 11, 1974 with the beginning of the performances of the Delphic Festival. The first play was Sophocles’ *Electra* adapted by Arkas. In the homonymic role the leading lady was Yula Gavala and the role of Clytemnestra was played by Sylvia Miles. A few days before the opening night, the director praised the diachronic virtues of the Ancient Greek tragedy. However, he felt that the enthusiasm did not suffice and that it was necessary for the audience to relive the feeling as well. This is why he rejected the standard director’s choices and introduced an innovation promoting the interaction between the audience and the actors.¹⁰ Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides’ *Trojan Women* followed. Every performance lasted about ten weeks covering the period 1974-5.

George Arkas intended to present not only Ancient Greek drama but also Modern Greek repertory, but only in English, instantly limiting his audience. Furthermore, the annual leasing of the stage at Sheridan Square was reaching \$72, 000. The enormous cost for the Non-Profitable Cultural Organization was covered by the earnings, the donations of the sponsors, and also by movie projections of the Classical European and American Cinema. Despite all these efforts, the company did not manage to last more than three seasons and disbanded.¹¹

Yannis Simonides, who had also been member of the Greek Art Theatre, hastened to cover the gap that the revocation of the Arkas company left behind. Simonides was born in Constantinople and grew up in Athens. He arrived in America in 1965 with the intention to study nuclear physics. Soon, however, his love for the theatre prevailed and he enrolled at the Yale School of Drama, where he studied acting and stage direction. After completing his studies, he made stage experimentations in Connecticut, lectured at Yale, and for a period he was Artistic Director at the New Britain Repertory. From 1976 until 1981 he served as chairman of the Drama Department at New York University.

In 1979, while he was still professor and president of the Drama Department of New York University, he established the Greek Theatre of New York. The activity of the company was limited until 1981. The appearance of this newly established company at La Mama E.T.C., 74A East Fourth Street, was remarkable. There “Theatrika”, a festival of music, dance, poetry and drama was presented in English and also in Greek, in contrast to the previous company. For two weeks (21/10-2/11/1980), plays such as *He Who Must Die* by Michael Antonakes, based on the novel *The Greek Passion* by Nikos Kazantzakis, were incorporated into the artistic program of “Theatrika”. In the same event, Olympia Dukakis interpreted in Greek the role of Clytemnestra, in an adaptation of the *Oresteia*. She also had the leading part in the play *Growing up a Greek-American*, which she had written in English.¹²

Simonides had discerned the need to acquire a permanent theatre stage and after a two-year search, in 1981 the theatre at 120 West 28th Street in a New York area where many Greeks lived and worked was acquired. The place had two stages, a central one with ninety-nine seats and a smaller one that was utilized for theatrical experimentations, but operated also as a children’s stage. After the presentation of the plays in English on 28th Street, the company moved temporarily to Bryant High, in Astoria, Queens, where it made appearances with the same repertory in Greek, catering for the numerous Greek community.

In the same year, 1981, in order for his venture to be viable, Simonides established The Choregoi of the Greek Theatre of New York, inviting the theatre-going Greek-American and American audiences to contribute and support the theatre activity of the professional theatre company in exchange for granting privileges.¹³

The repertory of the company during the first theatrical period 1981-1982 consisted of the plays: *Tale Without Title* by Iacovos Kambanellis, *Island of Aphrodite* by Alexis Parnis, *Birds* by Aristophanes, the adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens and *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus. But, during the next period, 1982-1983, the company insisted on the well-known dramaturgy.¹⁴ It’s worth noting that during the Greek-American Playwrights’ Festival, which took place at La Mama, plays by contemporary and famous Greek-American playwrights, such as John Kallas, Louis Phillips and Peter Perhonis, were staged.

The Greek Theatre of New York incorporated into its activities workshop performances of plays by the Greek, American and global dramaturgy,

children's theatre, cabaret, lectures, dramatic readings, music, dance and cinema. In October 1983, Yannis Simonides also established The Greek Theatre Workshop, with courses for tragedy, comedy, acting, phonetics, kinesiology and choreography.¹⁵

In 1984 the Greek Theatre of New York had moved to Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank Street, near the Hudson River and once again organized a festival of Modern Greek plays. Eleven actors interpreted abstracts from thirteen plays by seven contemporary Greek playwrights translated into English. Among the directors were Sam Blackwell, Peter Byrne, Richard Morse, Ellen Nickles and Alkis Papoutsis.¹⁶ The themes of the repertory were related to the Modern Greek change in life and the Americanization of Greek society.¹⁷

Simonides' professional company was active systematically until 1994 with great performances and co-productions of plays by Euripides, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, Ibsen, Korres, Matesis and Skourtis, which marked the Greek-American, as well as the Modern Greek theatre.¹⁸ Simonides was awarded an Emmy, established the Mythic Media International, a workshop of dramatic arts, and in 2006 he revived the Greek Theatre of New York by establishing the Elliniko Theatro, a non-profitable theatrical organization which faithfully followed the bilingual theatrical tradition that he created. The dramatized version of the platonic apology of Socrates, *The Apology Project*, with Simonides as leading actor under the direction of Loukas Skipitaris and costumes by the Oscar and Tony-awarded Theoni Vavlioti-Aldredge, was presented for the first time in 2003 in New York. During the period 2006-2007, it also went on tour in Greece with enormous success, giving performances both in Greek and English. Until today, *The Apology Project* has been presented to institutes, libraries, theatres and universities in many states of the USA, as well as in Greece. The recent significant productions of Elliniko Theatro, apart from *The Apology Project*, include *The Refugee*, directed by Simonides, *The Memoirs of General Makriyiannis*, and *Cavafy: Passions and Ancient Days*.

Loukas Skipitaris studied acting in New York and stage direction at Hunter University. He first appeared on Broadway in *Ilya Darling* with Melina Mercouri. He has participated in numerous performances of companies off Broadway and has directed plays of the ancient classic writers, Chekhov, Williams and Shaw, while he was also the director of the world premiere of the oratorio *Erotokritos* at Alice Tully Hall of the Lincoln Center. He is the founder and artistic manager of a professional acting workshop, The Acting Place, and of the Greek-American non-profitable centre of

theatre arts in New York, Theatron Inc. The performances of Theatron Inc. since 2002 include: *Yiannis & Johnny*, *The Prince Is Back*, *Growing up Greek-American*, *The Apology of Socrates* (co-production with Yannis Simonides' Mythic Media International), *Mama's Boy*, *A Groom for Vassoula*, *The Miser*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Iliad* (a staged reading), *Better to Be Crazy*, *Doctor against One's... Will!*, *Crooks and Co.*

In parallel with the activity of George Arkas and Yannis Simonides, in 1974 the Greek Cultural Center was established, in order to promote music, theatre, folk dances and shadow puppet theatre. Systematic theatre activity began in 1978. The Theatre Company, which is the name of the company of the Greek Cultural Center, has staged over seventy-five plays in the last thirty years. During that time, the company has incorporated great new Greek professionals and manages to stage up to four productions annually, receiving warm critiques and firmly supporting Modern Greek theatre.

The team also organizes annual theatre workshops for children and adults. The company's repertory derives mostly from the ancient drama (tragedies and comedies), but also from the Modern Greek comedies of situations and characters. An indicative reference includes *The Trojan Women* by Euripides (October, 2006), *Ten Little Indians* by Agatha Christie (February, 2007), *Daddies with Rum* by M. Reppas & Th. Papathanassiou (April, 2007), *Frogs* by Aristophanes (October, 2007), *With Strength from Kifissia* by Dimitris Kehaidis and Eleni Haviara (February, 2008), *Madame Sousou Conquers Manhattan*, an adaptation of D. Psathas' play *Madame Sousou* (May 2008). Also remarkable is the company's steady choice of the Greek language, incorporating at the same time a system of hyper-titles in English. The main contributors to the theatre for young people include the following: Christos Alexandridis, Martha Tompoulidou, Kostas Ilias, Christos Alexandrou, Vassia Lakoumenta, Yiannis Amouris, Antonis Armeftis, Ioanna Chasta, Fotis Michelioudakis, Louisa Papazaharia, Alkis Sarantinos and Marina Smargiannakis.

Theatre Companies on Tour from Greece

Apart from the local companies, theatre life in America was boosted by the companies on tour that arrived from Greece. In the first half of the 20th century, the theatre companies that arrived in America (the family companies of Aristides Parissis, Lolota Ioannidou, Vr. Pantopoulou, M. Iakovidis, etc.) soon dispersed, their members settling permanently in

America and joining local companies. Therefore, the theatre companies from Greece contributed significantly to the Greek theatre of America, reinforcing the local companies with professional actors and new plays. Almost all the theatre companies on tour performed within the Greek communities without having any aspirations to conquer the American audience.

In 1930 Marika Kotopouli arrived in New York, this great actress having been fare-welled in Athens by Eleftherios Venizelos himself. Marika Kotopouli's company would return to Athens in the spring of 1931, while Marika would return on 24 January 1932,¹⁹ the Greek audience anxiously awaiting her.

The critiques of the Greek-American press fervent supported not only the famous Marika Kotopouli, but also Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minotis. This great success was the reason that motivated the couple to visit America for a second time after a decade. In February 1941 Paxinou left London with New York's port her destination. Four days after the ship had sailed, it was torpedoed by a German war ship. A British war ship collected the castaways and transported them back to London. In May of the same year, Paxinou set off again for her transatlantic journey and finally arrived in America on 13 May 1941. On May 21, 1942 Alexis Minotis, following his own adventures and wanderings due to the war, arrived in New York, too.²⁰

During the entire 20th century, as well as in the beginning of the 21st, remarkable tours of America have included, among others, the following: in 1952, the National Theatre; in 1957, D. Psathas' *A Fool and a Half* by Vassilis Logothetidis Company; in 1994, Euripides' *Suppliants* by the Cyprus Theatre Organisation; in 1997, Sophocles' *Electra* by the National Theatre; in 1998, Euripides' *Medea* by the National Theatre; in 2006, Aeschylus' *Persians* by the National Theatre; and in 2007, Sophocles' *Electra* by the National Theatre.

NOTES

1. Mabel May Barrows was the daughter of the well-known philhellene Samuel J. Barrows, former Congressman from Massachusetts and writer of the book *Isles and Shrines of Greece*. [See "Έλληνες εν Αμερικῇ" ("Greeks in America"), *Atlantis* (Ατλαντίς), No. 664, 9/10/1903, pp. 2, 3].
2. Georgios Matalas was one of the founding members of the "Sparti" Society in Chicago. Dimitrios Manousopoulos was a contributor of the Chicago newspaper

Atlantis (Ατλαντίς). [See “Έλληνες εν Αμερική” (“Greeks in America”). *Atlantis* (Ατλαντίς), No. 154, 5 February 1897, p. 6].

3. February of 1904.
4. According to Rozakos, whose information is not documented, *Aias* was staged based on a Modern Greek translation that had been published anonymously in Constantinople in 1868. [See Nikos Rozakos, *Το νεοελληνικό λαϊκό θέατρο στην Αμερική: 1903-1950* (Modern Greek Folk Theatre in America: 1903-1950), San Francisco, California: Falcon Associates, Inc., 1985, pp. 4, 5]. For more information on this translation of *Aias*, as well as on other of its translations, see Chrysothemis Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou, *Το θέατρο στην καθ’ ημάς Ανατολή: Κωνσταντινούπολη και Σμύρνη* (The Theatre in the [Greek] Near East: Constantinople and Smyrna), Athens: Polytropon, 2006, pp. 80-81.
5. For more specific information on the theatre of Hellenism in America and mainly in New York, see Aikaterini Diakoumopoulou, *Το θέατρο των Ελλήνων στη Νέα Υόρκη από τα τέλη του 19ου αι. έως το 1940* (The Theatre of the Greeks in New York Since the End of the 19th Century Until 1940), (Ph. D. thesis), Athens: Panteion University, 2007.
6. Rozakos, 1985, pp 88-89.
7. Adamantios Lemos, *Η ουτοπία του Θέσπη: θεατρικό οδοιπορικό* (Thespis Unreality: Theatrical Itinerary in Athens), Athens: Filippotis, 1989, p. 384.
8. Lemos, 1989, pp. 384-549. See also Adamantios Lemos, «Στην Αμερική του 20ου αι.» (“In America of the 20th Century”), *Seven Days, Kathimerini*, (Επτά Ημέρες, Καθημερινή), 7 September 2003, pp. 24-27.
9. Louis Calta, “Delphic Festival for Café Society”, *New York Times*, 18 September 1974, p. 34.
10. Margaret Kry, “Greek Theater Opens on Sheridan Square”, *Villager*, 31 October 1973, p. 8.
11. Bruce Chadwick, “Greek Theater Has Home”, *Daily News New York*, 23 October 1981, p. 23.
12. “Greek Theater”, *New York Times*, 21 October 1980, p. C8.
13. P. L. N. Y. Press release of the Greek Theatre of New York.
14. 1) *Alexandriad, Part I* by Alex Bellas and Yiannis Simonides, an English language adaptation of texts by Homer, Arrian, Aristotle and Euripides; 2) *Ευτυχισμένη δύση ΑΕ*. (Happy Sunset Inc.) by Manolis Korres; 3) *Οιδίπους Τύραννος* (Oedipus Rex) by Sophocles; 4) *Καραγκιόζης στη χώρα των Βεζύρηδων* (Karaghiozis in the Land of Viziers) by George Skourtis.
15. P. L. N.Y. Performance programme of the Greek Theatre of New York, 1982-1983.

16. "Modern Greek Plays", *New York Times*, 17 February 1984, p. C28.
17. "Hellenic", *New York Times*, 7 February 1984, p. C15.
18. *Ερωτόκριτος* (Erotokritos) of Kornaros, *Λυσιστράτη* (Lysistrata) of Aristophanes, *Ιφιγένεια εν Ταύροις* (Iphigenia in Taurus) under the direction of Yiannis Houvardas and costumes by Dionysis Fotopoulos in May 1992 at La Mama E.T.C.
19. Frixos Iliadis, *Μαρίκα Κοτοπούλη* (Marika Kotopouli), Athens: Dorikos, 1996, pp. 240-245.
20. Platon Mavromoustakos, comp., *Παξινοῦ-Μινωτῆς, μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας και τελείας* (Paxinou-Minotis, Mimesis of a Great and Perfect Action), Athens: MIET, 1997, pp. 30-31, 75. See also "Tribute to Katina Paxinou", *Nea Estia* (Νέα Εστία), Vol. 93, No. 1097, p. 368.