

MADE BY
HAND—
PLAYED BY
HEART

*A Guide
to Traditional Arts
in Queens*



Edited by Kathleen Condon

Queens Council
on the Arts





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Published by
Queens Council on the Arts
161-04 Jamaica Avenue
Jamaica, New York 11432
(718) 291-1100.

Production editors:
Amanda Dargan and Kathleen Condon
Designer: Jennifer Farley,
The Cooper Union Center for
Design & Typography
Printer and binder: Techni-Graphics, Inc.

First Edition

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P R E F A C E

It is often said that you have to come to Queens to get a good view of Manhattan; the New York skyline is seen best from a distance. Queens, on the other hand, has to be seen close-up. Looking out over Queens from the windows of the Empire State Building or from an airplane flying into LaGuardia Airport, it appears as an endless array of row houses. But closer inspection reveals that people from every corner of the globe have made their home here, transforming the culture of the Borough to one of unparalleled richness and diversity.

For ten years the Folk Arts Program at Queens Council on the Arts has demonstrated a strong commitment to exploring the diverse cultures of the Borough of Queens through public programs, research, publications, and services to Queens artists and organizations. *Made by Hand, Played by Heart* features many of the artists with whom the Council has worked over the past decade as well as the organizations, scholars and photographers with whom we have collaborated on many of our projects. It offers both residents and non-residents of Queens a glimpse of the incredible artistry that flourishes in this Borough of more than two and a half million people.

We live in a mobile society. It is characteristic of urban areas such as Queens that neighborhoods include residents whose families have lived and may continue to live here for generations and as well as newer immigrants who have only arrived recently. Some may stay for a few years and move on to other Boroughs or states. Ethnic and religious communities often cut across neighborhood boundaries. Many musical groups, for instance, have members living in Queens, Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx; they travel across town for rehearsals, and perform all over the city. For this book, we selected artists who have left their mark on the Borough. A few artists, Romauldo Martello, Leon Schwartz, and Theodosius Konstantinou have

died since the articles about them were written. We decided to keep these essays as a testament to their artistry and their contributions to the cultural life of the Borough.

The production of *Made by Hand, Played by Heart* has been made possible through the cooperation and enthusiasm of many individuals and organizations. Three executive directors of Queens Council on the Arts—Jean Weiss, Constance Evans, and Mark Schuyler—gave their strong support to the project over the many years it took to bring it to completion. We are indebted to the writers and photographers who contributed their expertise to the project and to the organizations and individuals who shared their time and knowledge of the traditions described in the book. We are especially grateful to the AUM Cultural Center, City Lore, the Ethnic Folk Arts Center, Woodside on the Move, and the World Music Institute for their generous assistance, and to The Cooper Union Center for Design & Typography for the generous contribution of their design and production services. Thanks, also, to Cheryl McKeith and Kathleen Concannon for typing the manuscript.

This book was made possible with funds from the Folk Arts Program at the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and Philip Morris, Inc. Special thanks go to Queensborough President Claire Shulman and the Queens Delegation of the New York State Legislature and the New York City Council.

We would also like to thank Robert Baron of the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts, Michael Irish of Philip Morris, Inc., and Aida Gonzales of the Queens Borough President's Office.

Since this project began several years ago, we have discovered many other groups and individuals whom we have been tempted to include as well. But at some point we had to bring the project to an end. We hope that this book will inspire traditional artists and their neighbors to contact us, as well as encourage New York City residents to seek out these artists, and we look forward to producing new publications and programs of traditional arts and artists in the decades ahead.

Amanda Dargan
Folk Arts Program Director

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Folk arts in Queens? In this Borough known more for quiet residential neighborhoods, for industry, technology and commerce, the term “folk arts” seems incongruous. Yet, as many residents of Flushing, Astoria, Jackson Heights and a dozen other neighborhoods will attest, Queens is New York City’s most ethnically diverse Borough, home to an incredible number of immigrant and ethnic communities. Within these communities, traditional cultural expressions—food, language, crafts, music, dance, religious practices, celebrations and other customs—hold a valued place in everyday life.

Traditional arts often find their outlets in local community settings—in church halls, homes and street festivals—rather than in concert halls and art galleries. While these arts, and the artists who practice them, seldom receive the accolades they deserve from the society at large, they are no less extraordinary for their anonymity. They are among of Queens’ most priceless cultural resources.

This book was conceived to celebrate the folk arts of Queens and introduce these folk arts to the general public. Our aim is to provide a guidebook that would make Queens folk arts accessible to those interested in experiencing them for themselves while presenting these arts as they exist, embedded in local and community networks. What has emerged from this project is a fascinating portrait of a side of Queens seldom seen or acknowledged—a Queens of master crafts people working in garage workshops and of virtuoso musicians performing in neighborhood bars.

While few of us take time from our hectic schedules to venture out of our own world and witness the artistry and care our neighbors exercise in preserving their folk traditions, we should. When viewed in isolation, these folk arts are extraordinary from an aesthetic standpoint, but in context, they take

on a power and depth which come straight from the heartfelt commitment these artists have toward the arts they practice and the communities they serve. When viewed together, the amazingly varied folk arts of Queens attest to the richest form of cosmopolitanism—that of diverse cultures flourishing side by side. At a time when ethnic strife tears at the fabric of our society, these arts remind us that each of the groups which make up this sprawling Borough have brought with them traditions that possess the capacity to move us, to help us take pride in something larger than ourselves. That these arts continue to flourish here, against great odds, is nothing short of a miracle.

Although we have tried to represent as many of the Borough’s traditions as possible within the framework of this book, our aim has been illustrative rather than all-inclusive. We hope that this book will not only lead you to the artists and traditions described here, but will inspire you to search out other Queens traditions which may be right around your corner, to take advantage of all of the stunning cultural diversity that is Queens today.

Kathleen Condon



TRADITIONAL MATERIAL ARTS AND CRAFTS



Karolos Tsakirian sands mother-of-pearl inlay on a Greek bouzouki top. photo: Martha Cooper

In Queens, traditional artisans such as blacksmiths, tombstone carvers, and neon sign makers find their quality wares still much in demand in a society glutted with mass-produced objects. Ethnic craftsmen and women find interested and appreciative customers in their own communities, as many of the arts they practice, such as *mehendi* hand-painting and Italian bread sculpting, are essential components of vibrant ethnic rituals and celebrations. In Queens' multi-ethnic environment, craft traditions such as Ukrainian embroidery take on new meanings. What these arts often lose in practical function, they gain in heightened symbolic function, as they come to embody the complex sentiments an ethnic community feels for a homeland left far behind. Artists such as Louis Bernstein stand apart from these artists working within the forms and aesthetics of a traditional community, but they share with them the human impulse to reach out to others through artistic creativity. These artists often flower late in life, weaving continuity and meaning from the threads of their life experience.

While Haitian folk painters such as Toussaint Auguste have attracted the interest of art collectors, the work of most Queens folk artists seldom graces museum walls. This situation may be a loss for museum-goers, but it is a boon to those who appreciate these arts in context, as a meaningful part of their community's traditions, and to those who can open their eyes to these arts in everyday life. Many of the traditional material artists featured in this section are not as easily sought out as the traditional artists who perform at annual ethnic festivals or in corner bars, but their works enrich Queens' landscape through church doors and apartment windows, from storefronts and cemeteries. Queens' unsung traditional material artists, who often commit their lives to traditional art forms that are utilitarian as well as beautiful, add depth and meaning to our daily existence through their creations.

Kathleen Condon

KONSTANTINOS PYLARINOS

BYZANTINE-STYLE WOODCARVER

"I like people to see my work.

I enjoy contributing to the Greek community, so that they can see what they have left behind.

You don't find this here. Even in Greece, this is something special.

There are only a few who practice this art."



Konstantinos Pylarinos shows carving techniques to an apprentice. photo: Martha Cooper

It took a fire to get master woodcarver Konstantinos Pylarinos of Astoria to begin plying his trade again. After emigrating to Astoria from his native Greece in 1974, Pylarinos was unable to find work in his field for almost two years, and had begun working in a coffee shop to support himself. When a fire swept through Astoria's St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Cathedral, the priest searched the metropolitan area for a craftsman capable of reconstructing the partially damaged altar. His request quickly spread through Astoria's Greek

community, and Pylarinos was found for the job. Since then, this master carver has moved from an initial garage work space to his present-day workshop, the Byzantium Woodworking Company on Astoria Boulevard, where he carves architectural pieces and religious furniture for Greek churches throughout the United States and Canada.

Pylarinos was born in 1940 in Ahlakastro, a town in the Greek province of Nafpaktos. His parents died when he was thirteen, and he was placed in the

Zannion Orphanage in Athens. At the orphanage Pylarinos became an apprentice woodcarver, studying with such masters as George Kaloudis and Nick Pitsakis. There Pylarinos learned to make furniture in many styles for a variety of wealthy patrons, and even had a hand in carving a throne for Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia. For his work, Pylarinos earned twenty drachmas a week—just under one dollar.

Pylarinos learned carving techniques quickly, demonstrated a steady hand,

and rapidly grew to love this ancient craft. At the age of sixteen, he won first place in the orphanage woodcarving competition, which was judged by Lina Tsaldazis, then Greece's Minister of Culture. The winning piece was an intricate table leg which Pylarinos had carved in the form of a lion's paw. Two years later, he left Zannion to set up his own workshop, and though young (he compensated by growing a moustache), he was able to attract a clientele. Yet, as this Queens artisan explained, Greece, a poor country where few could afford to order well-crafted, hand-made furniture, was not a lucrative location for a fine artisan. He left his Greek workshop after sixteen years, emigrating to the United States in search of better business opportunities.

While Pylarinos carved in various styles in Greece, here he works exclusively in the Byzantine style. This style dates back to 323 A.D., when Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium, a Greek city which was subsequently renamed Constantinople. The artistic style of this period, associated with the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church which developed in Constantinople, has survived the Byzantine Empire's decline and the subsequent Arabic and Turkish invasions down to the present day.

The Byzantine style of sculpture and architecture is best exemplified by the Hagia Sophia (The Church of Holy Wisdom), built in Istanbul in 532-37 under the rule of Emperor Justinian. Pylarinos remains faithful to the traditional styles and forms inspired by the ancient canon of Byzantine woodcarving while bringing his own touch to his works. Byzantine carving is characterized by intricate, low-relief designs. Pylarinos covers the wood's surface with filigree and arabesques, ornamental designs of grape vines and floral patterns, and figures of peacocks, double-headed eagles, and, occasionally, winged angels.

The walls of his Astoria workshop are lined with Pylarinos' cardboard patterns. Speaking through an interpreter, Pylarinos remarked, "If I lost them all, I could redo all of them. They're all in my head." One of the workers employed at Byzantium Woodworking traces these designs on pieces of bass or oak wood. Then Pylarinos begins to chip a way at the stencilled wood with an array of chisels laid out on his table. As the artist explains, wood-



carving involves more than a mechanical execution of these patterns:

Whoever does this has to be able to find the design in the wood from your mind. And then, you have to learn how to control the tools. You have to have a steady hand.

When the carvings are complete, Pylarinos and his helpers assemble the pieces in the workshop, or, if the object is too large to be transported in one piece, on the site. Pylarinos seldom paints the wood, only occasionally varnishing pieces.

The objects Pylarinos carves and assembles cater to the needs of Orthodox ritual. He carves stands which are similar in form to standard lecterns to hold icons or painted portraits of saints. He carves pews in sets of three, standing as high as six feet, to seat the chanters of the Greek liturgy. His other carved pieces, such as a bishop's throne, a church pulpit, or a massive candle stand, are considerably more elaborate. The *Fpitaphios*, topped with a cupola and a cross, represents Christ's funeral bier and is paraded through the streets of Greek-American communities each year in Good Friday processions. The most majestic of Pylarinos' works is the twelve-foot-long, thirty-two-foot-wide *iconostasi* or icon screen. The *iconostasi*, an intricately

carved, wooden wall separating the congregation from the altar, holds up to thirty-two painted icons. Pylarinos custom-makes such *iconostasi*, which may take as long as six months to complete.

Pylarinos' work may be seen in many churches in the New York City area—St. Constantine and Helen in Jackson Heights, St. Eleftherios in Manhattan, Holy Trinity in Hicksville, Long Island, and St. Nicholas in Atlantic City, New Jersey. This master artisan has also installed his work in churches in Detroit, New Orleans, Savannah and San Bernardino, as well as in Ontario, Quebec, Toronto and Montreal. Pylarinos has been awarded a grant from the Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program of the New York State Council on the Arts to train young students in this art form. He has donated *iconostasi* to two churches. Pylarinos explains:

I like people to see my work. I enjoy contributing to the Greek community, so that they can see what they have left behind. You don't find this here. Even in Greece, this is something special. There are only a few who practice this art.

In North America, there are an estimated five hundred Greek Orthodox Churches. The way Konstantinos Pylarinos, this country's only Byzantine-style woodcarver, sees it, he has about 470 left to go.

Joseph Sciorra

BYZANTIUM WOODWORKING COMPANY
37-20 ASTORIA BOULEVARD
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KAROLOS TSAKIRIAN

GREEK INSTRUMENT MAKER



Karolos Tsakirian at work in his shop. photo: Martha Cooper

*"After my father died,
I came back to finish some instruments. I had to finish them.
For one thing, I needed the money.
So I finished them and all of a sudden I was in love.
I guess the thing I was missing was the responsibility of doing it all myself.
I wish I had known this all along."*

The N subway train, which runs along the elevated tracks above 31st Street in Queens, will bring you to Greek Astoria, where a proliferation of Greek-language signs—TAVERNA, KAFFENION ("coffee shop"), and ZAKAROPLASTEION ("pastry shop"), advertise neighborhood eateries. Local residents enjoy such delicacies as *avgolemona* (egg-lemon soup), a variety of roasted lamb dishes, the crescent-shaped *kourabiedes* cookies, and thick black coffee. If you get off the train at the 30th Avenue station and walk a few short blocks east towards Steinway, you will arrive at the workshop of instrument maker Karolos Tsakirian.

The small workshop is filled with Greek instruments in various stages of construction. *Bouzoukis*, *ouds*, and two smaller instruments in the oud family, *tzouras* and *Anglamas*, hang from the walls along with templates designed by Karolos's father. Nick for the decorative inlays used on the face of the instruments. Photographs of famous Greek musicians holding Nick Tsakirian's instruments line the walls.

Karolos is the third generation of instrument makers in his family. His grandfather, Agop, moved to Greece from Turkey when he was fourteen and eventually opened an instrument shop in Piraeus, near Athens. He taught his son Nick who joined him in the business, and who eventually opened his own shop in Athens. At the age of fourteen, Karolos began working full time in his father's shop while attending high school at night. Nick immigrated to the United States in 1974, and Karolos followed in 1977, helping in the workshop his father had opened in Astoria and studying accounting at night. He had mixed feelings about the often lonely occupation of instrument making. He got impatient "waiting for the glue to dry" and dreamed of opening a musical accessories store.

Nick Tsakirian died in 1984. Not long afterwards, Karolos returned to the shop to complete a few outstanding orders and to begin the process of closing down the shop. "After my father died," he said, "I came back to finish some instruments. I had to finish them. For one thing, I needed the money. So I finished them and all of a sudden I was in love. I guess the thing I was missing was the responsibility of doing it all myself. I wish I had known this all along."

The shop did not close. Karolos perfected his skills, and began selling his own instruments not only to Greek and Middle Eastern musicians, his biggest clients, but also to Irish musicians who have begun to incorporate *bouzoukis* into their music. He still owns his father's shop in Athens, which his mother manages, and continues to fill orders there as well. Asked how he viewed the future of the business, Karolos replied: "If you are good at something, you can always make a living. I'll never make millions doing this, but that was never my goal. It's a very fulfilling kind of work. I can't think of myself doing anything else."

Amanda Dargan

30-08 34TH STREET
ASTORIA, QUEENS
(718) 204-6438

THEODOSIOS KONSTANTINOY

GREEK BYZANTINE ICONOGRAPHER



Greek iconographer Theodosios Konstantinou, photo: Eugenia Marketos

"I do not see what I do as a job because I believe very deeply in my religion. It's a service, not a job. Iconographers think that the icon brings about a communication between the believers and God. The iconographer should live a more spiritual life in order to transform his religion into his work."

Every morning, in his apartment in Astoria, Theodosios Konstantinou prays before his private home altar, or *eikonostasio*, as do many Greek-Americans residing in Queens and throughout the metropolis. He begins his morning ritual by making crosses with essence and burning incense above the altar. Konstantinou's *eikonostasio* is an assemblage of objects brought together in a corner of his living room and spread across two tables: a jar of holy water, palm fronds from a Palm Sunday service, an Easter egg wrapped in mesh cloth, a tree branch brought back from a trip to Jerusalem, and a *candali*, or flame burning in oil. Icons of the Virgin Mary and the Greek saints Spyridon and Paraskevi, given to Konstantinou as gifts many years ago, now form part of this household shrine. But other icons, painted in the Byzantine style, in various stages of completion, fill the apartment walls; for this Astoria apartment doubles as Konstantinou's iconographic art studio.

Theodosios Konstantinou was born in 1944 in Volos, in the region of Thessalia. At seventeen, he began to study at the monastery on Athos, the Holy Mountain, where he worked as an iconographer's assistant. At twenty-five, he moved to Athens, where he studied painting in a private school for four years with the well-known iconographer George Karpondinis. He then returned a second time to Volos, where he painted icons for two churches before immigrating to the United States in 1978.

Byzantine iconography remains within the artistic tradition of the Byzantine Empire when the Greek Orthodox Church originated. Roman Catholic iconography comes out of the Renaissance artistic tradition, where the figures are three dimensional. Renaissance iconography idealizes the human figure, putting a great deal of emphasis on appearance—beautiful figures and beautiful clothing. As Konstantinou

stated, "Catholic iconography portrays the Virgin Mary almost like Venus." The Queens iconographer pointed out another difference between Orthodox and Roman Catholic religious painting. "All these icons (Byzantine) represent the idea of the belief rather than represent what actually happened. Our religion is full of symbols. They do not illustrate exactly what happened. They symbolize."

When painting an icon, Konstantinou begins first with the gold leaf, followed by the darker colors. He paints the face last, believing that the facial expression will emerge naturally if the background is already in place. He works primarily in acrylic paint, rather than the more traditional egg yolk and tempera, which is extremely difficult to work with. Konstantinou feels that his own spiritual state has a strong effect on his execution of the faces of his icons. "I do not see what I do as a job," he said, "because I believe very deeply in my religion. It's a service, not a job. Iconographers think that the icon brings about a communication between the believers and God. The iconographer should live a more spiritual life in order to transform his religion into his work."

Konstantinou's iconography is in churches in Pittsburg, Newcastle, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, and in Greece. In Astoria, his work can be seen at St. Raphael's, St. Kosmos, and the chapel at the Greek Cultural Center. Most of his iconography, however, can be found on the private family altars in Greek homes throughout the metropolitan area. Konstantinou died in 1990, leaving an important legacy of religious art to his community.

Amanda Dargan

ASTORIA

TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND DANCE

In a lively Irish pub in Sunnyside, the quick, graceful movements of a step dancer echo and punctuate the musical phrases turned by a fiddler's bow, distilling centuries of a culture's artistic genius in a single contemporary performance. A Forest Hills synagogue provides the setting for a performance of traditional Bukharan-Jewish music and dance, linking its congregants with an ancestral past in a far-away homeland. While solidly rooted in the enthusiasm of the moment, traditional artistic performance brings the past to bear on the present.

Music and dance traditions are inextricably tied to the cultures which nourish them, for these forms speak through a vocabulary born of and influenced by, the collective history of a people. All of us can be moved by the haunting timbre of a Korean *kayagum*, the emotion-laden note-bending of African-American gospel song, or the lyric motions of a solo Greek traditional dance. But those who have grown up within these cultural traditions see and hear much more than sheer artistic excellence. To recognize songs heard since childhood, to anticipate the inevitable turns and syncopations in traditional musical phrases and dance rhythms, and to understand the spirit or expressive style of a tradition as surely as a native language, is to feel a deep sense of familiarity and pride. This emotional tie to an art form and what it expresses transcends entertainment, and cuts to the core of personal and group identity. In an era of commercial-length attention spans, it is these powerful sentiments which keep traditional performing arts alive.

In Queens today, centuries-old performing arts traditions are being improvised throughout the borough's many neighborhoods. While the music or dance may sometimes remain unchanged, the new context more often dictates necessary adjustments. Traditional ensembles are often adapted here, for the specific combination of instrumentalists required is not



Lazaros Hristiades (Epirot. Greek) plays *laouto* (pear-shaped lute) at an Ethnic Folk Arts Center concert.
photo: Panos Papanicolaou, Courtesy Ethnic Folk Arts Center

always provided by the chance circumstances of individual immigration. Regional differences are blurred as musicians often find themselves performing with others who, while sharing an overreaching national cultural tradition, may have come from villages hundreds of miles away. In a new pluralistic environment, the role of traditional performing artists also changes. They are increasingly called upon to provide performances which foster pride and identity in emerging ethnic communities, and they often take on a new role as cultural ambassadors, providing outsiders with insight into their cultures through their performances. Often these adaptations give birth to new art forms such as rap music, which, though rooted in past traditions, reflect the influence of a radically different environment and the availability of new technological resources.

Many extraordinarily talented traditional performing artists call Queens home; in this section we have been able to describe but a few. While many of these artists are not well-known outside specific cultural groups, each is widely recognized within their own community as a master practitioner of their art form, and several have received international recognition. In private settings such as weddings and parties, and in public forums such as pubs, festivals and parades, these artists keep their cultures traditions alive. Many are now passing these traditions on to a new generation, both through performances and more formal lessons. Throughout Queens, community-based cultural, religious, political and social institutions and organizations sponsor classes in traditional forms, ensuring the future of these arts in the borough.

While in the past these traditional artists rarely performed outside community settings, the past twenty years have witnessed a growing respect for traditional arts across many levels of our society. Today community, borough-wide, city-wide, and even national arts presenting organizations and producers seek these artists out for performances, recordings, and films aimed at broad audiences. Traditional arts have blossomed in new directions as artists find new audiences who bring different expectations and interests to performances. In parts of the country where community support for traditional arts has

waned, outside interest in these arts can profoundly affect the meaning and function of a tradition, at worst, reducing traditional art forms to quaint, exotic tourist attractions. In Queens, where traditional arts still flourish at their roots, this outside interest has required traditional artists to perform a new, often rewarding and yet difficult, balancing act—to continue to serve their own communities while responding to the growing interest



of the general public. In doing so, these artists are enriching our understanding of the many cultures which give life to Queens traditional arts. They are also expanding the arenas in which their own communities can take pride in themselves and in the vibrant traditions they share, and will keep alive for generations to come.

Kathleen Condon

TRADITIONAL GREEK MUSIC AND DANCE IN ASTORIA

Astoria is home to a least 200,000 Greeks—up to half a million according to some estimates. While in recent years Greeks have settled in other sections of Queens and in other boroughs, Astoria remains the focal point of New York City's Greek culture. This culture is as complex as it is diverse, for while most Greeks have an overarching Greek-American identity, many feel an even stronger allegiance to their region of origin. Greeks from Epiros, Pontos, Crete, Rhodes, Chios, Cyprus, Karpathos and Thessaly—to name but a few—generally belong to regional societies that bring together those from particular areas of Greece. Many of these regional societies and clubs have active programs of traditional dance instruction for children. These programs often train the members of the societies' dance groups which perform, to live or recorded music, at annual community festivities and, occasionally, at events for the general public. The clubs, where compatriots gather to

play cards and exchange family news, serve to preserve communal cohesiveness and pride in a common heritage.

Outside this fraternal society structure, several New York City area non-profit organizations are dedicated to the preservation of Greek folk heritage. The Greek Cultural Center (718 726-7329), established in 1974, presents art exhibits, dance and music events, films, and other programs. The Greek American Folklore Society (718 728-8048), was established recently in response to renewed interest in folk heritage on the part of young people, most of whom are one or two generations removed from the original emigrants to this country. CYRECO (The Cypriot Emigrants Cultural Organization of America) presents programs on Greek and especially Greek Cypriot folklore (see entry on National Heritage folklore).

Two types of celebration predominate in the Greek community in Astoria. Pan-Greek celebrations, which attract Greeks

from many regions and the general public, tend to offer a cross-section of Greek music—folk (*dimotika*) as well as popular (*laika*). Annual regional celebrations (in Greek, *glenti*, or festivity) are sponsored by immigrants from each Greek region or island represented in Queens. Bohemian Hall and Park, Crystal Palace, and Oyster Bay often host these events, at which musicians brought from Greece may play along with local musicians. It is at these regional celebrations and at family events such as baptisms, weddings, engagement parties and name day celebrations that traditional folk music is most likely to be played. At nearly all such events, of course, copious amounts of homemade food are consumed with relish.

Among the many types of regional Greek music one can hear in Astoria, Epirot music is most noted for its expressive style of clarinet playing and its rich texture. Astoria's Pericles Halkias, born in 1908 in Epirus (the northwestern prov-

ince of Greece just south of Albania), is recognized as one of the finest exponents of this style of clarinet playing. In 1985, he received a National Heritage Fellowship Award for his artistry. Musicians who join Halkias from time to time and play in other combinations include Lazaros Harisidades and Grigoris Kallivas, who play *laouto*, a long-necked, plucked lute; Vagelis Bradhopoulos, Yiorgos Zervas and Ilias Platanius, who play fiddle; American-

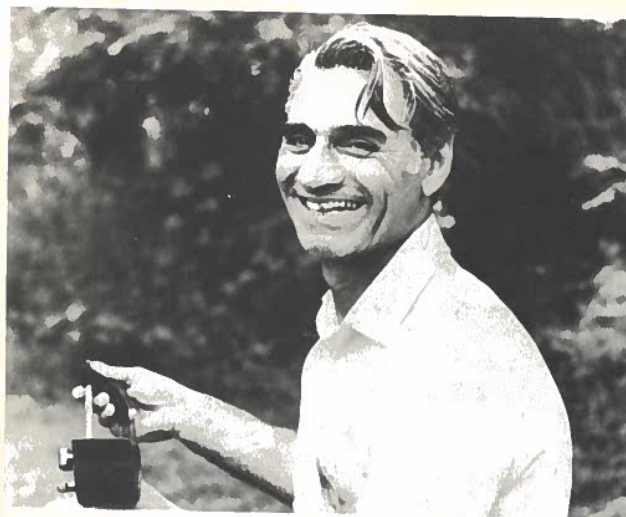
together from time to time in the New York City area. Kokonas, from the Rethymnon region of Crete, came to New York in 1968, and taught himself to play the *laouto* the next year. He now lives in Astoria. Maris, born in Athens of Cretan parents, also arrived in New York in 1968; he started to play the *lyra* in 1972, learning primarily from his father. Although Maris now lives in Florida, he occasionally returns to New York to perform with Kokonas. Another

exchange of populations between the two countries. Perhaps this uprooting has made Pontics cling more fiercely to their culture, for Pontic music and dance are among the most vital folk traditions in Greece today, as popular with the younger generation as with the older. At Komninoi, the Pontic-Greek club in Astoria, as well as at many community events, one can hear Ilias Kementzides, one of the foremost performers of the Pontic *lyra*, an instrument similar to the Cretan *lyra* but played in a very different style. Originally from Kuban, U.S.S.R., Kementzides began playing the *lyra* at the age of eight. At fourteen he emigrated to Greece, and then to the United States in 1974. The *lyra* is traditionally accompanied only by a singer, although today it is sometimes joined by Western instruments in a small orchestra. Kementzides is often accompanied by Panayiotis Vassiliades, a singer from Drama in Northern Greece who emigrated to Astoria eight years ago.

Many other musicians perform regional, pan-Hellenic and popular styles within Queens' diverse Greek communities, making New York a veritable microcosm of Greek musical culture. Of particular note is Microcosmos, a group which plays a wider range of Greek music for a more general audience. Headed by singer Gregoris Maninakis, the ensemble performs a variety of *laika* and *dimotika* (regional folk music of Greece) as well as *smyrnaika* and *rebetika*, urban styles of music that originated in the Greek communities of Istanbul (Constantinople) and Izmir (Smyrna) in the early part of this century and took root in the port cities of Greece in the 1920s. Microcosmos can be heard regularly at Microcosmos Cafe Boite.

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Ilias Kementzides, Pontic-Greek lyra player photo: Martin Koenig, courtesy Ethnic Folk Arts Center

born John Roussos, who plays *santouri*, a hammered dulcimer, and George Rambos, who plays *defi*, a tamborine. When in the United States, Halkias' two sons, Petros, a clarinetist, and Achilleas, a violinist, both well-known television, radio and recording artists in Greece, and Pericles' grandson, Bobbis, also a clarinetist, play with him as well.

The traditional musical ensemble of Crete, the largest Greek island in the Aegean, consists of two instrumentalists, one playing the *lyra*, a three-stringed, bowed instrument, and one playing the *laouto*. Two well-known Cretan musicians, Antonios Kokonas and Kostas Maris, play

young Cretan *lyra* player, living in Queens, is Nick Douround-oudakis. All three perform for local Cretan community celebrations sponsored by the Astoria-based Mimos Cretan Society and Omonia Cretan Association, as well as at national gatherings sponsored by pan-Hellenic and regional Greek organizations.

Pontic-Greek music developed in regions outside the boundaries of present day Greece. For many hundreds of years, the Pontos, a Turkish region bordering the southern shore of the Black Sea, was home to a large Greek population. The Pontic Greeks were forcibly resettled in Greece in 1922 and 1923 as part of a mas-



Antonios Kokonas plays Cretan laouto at an Ethnic Folk Arts Center concert. photo: Martin Koenig, courtesy Ethnic Folk Arts Center