

49 Films Showcased At Event In Chicago

FilmHellenes Sponsor 2011 Chicago Greek Festival of New Greek Films

By Antonia Callas

CHICAGO, IL. — On September 29, the new Chicago Greek Film Festival kicked off its inaugural year, screening a whopping 49 films over a course of four consecutive days. As a long-time adventurer in film, I was plenty excited by the depth of the offerings, though I was less sure of my ability to persevere through four days. What follows are my overall impressions.

THE BACKSTORY
The Chicago Greek Film Festival had a prior incarnation. During the years 2002–2007, it was produced by Harry Karahalios and held in collaboration with the Gene Siskel Film Center.

Fast forward to 2011. The fest was reinvigorated through the efforts of Nikos Franghias, a Greek-born filmmaker who lives in Wisconsin. For the last three years, Franghias has tenaciously and intelligently laid the groundwork for a contemporary Greek Film Festival with a broader scope.

Last year, Franghias connected with Kostas Daskalopoulos, Vice Consul, Consulate General of Greece in Chicago, and Dr. Alex Papadopoulos, Associate Professor of Geography at DePaul University, and the trio formed an organization called "FilmHellenes." Shortly thereafter, they assembled a board of media people, filmmakers, educators, and others.

A small festival for 2011 was originally planned and a call for submissions announced. The response was overwhelming. Over 102 films were submitted, not just from Greece, but also from around the world. Clearly, there was no surfeit of talent.

Hearts filled, ambitions rose, plans changed. In a dramatic gesture, FilmHellenes decided to roll out 49 films in a variety of categories including narrative features, short subjects, feature documentaries, short documentaries, and animation. The group also felt there had been a spate of internationally-recognized new Greek films that needed to be shown.

I was curious to see what the films had to offer. Given Greece's current economic situation, it is extremely difficult to acquire financing, but here's a saying that often the most difficult times produce the most

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At 73, Joan Tsakanikas Passes Away

By Demetris Tsakas

NEW YORK — Joan Tsakanikas died on Saturday, Oct. 8 at age 73, surrounded by her beloved husband, children, grandchildren, and brothers. Tsakanikas' viewing took place at the Whiting Funeral Home in Glen Head, NY on Thursday afternoon and evening, and her Funeral Service is scheduled for Friday morning 10AM at St. Paul the Apostle Church, 2534 Cedar Swamp Road, in Brookville, NY.

Tsakanikas leaves behind her husband, Niko; her children, Nicole, Tsakanikas and Glenn Skolnick; and her grandchildren, Tsakanikas and Matthew Andrejovics; her grandchildren, Dylan, Andrew, Ava and Grace; and many relatives here and in Greece.

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Mountains of Garbage Crown Economic Woes

A woman armed with a stiff upper lip faces troubles that now include mountains of garbage in Thessaloniki that are only growing larger; municipal workers are on strike.

AP PHOTO/NIKOLAOS GIAKOUMIDIS

Ancient Greek Technology Featured

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK — The Onassis Cultural Center in New York continues to illuminate Hellenic culture and history with its popular and highly-regarded events. Last week's informative panel discussion and film presentation "Ancient Greek Technology" at the Olympic Tower in Manhattan was an auspicious beginning for the Center's fall schedule.

Ambassador Lucas Tsilas, the Center's executive director, welcomed the audience and introduced the topic. He noted that modern listeners have difficulty associating the words "ancient" and "technology." The first speaker, Prof. Theodoros P. Tassios, also addressed the prejudice that technology was born with the British industrial revolution. By the end of the

evening, however, he and his colleagues demonstrated that despite the lack of things like steam engines and rockets — though some Greek inventors came close to such breakthroughs — the Greeks, in addition to their artistic, political, and intellectual achievements, were also a "technology-minded culture."

Prof. Tassios explained that technological advances were ways a part of human history. Simply put, they involve the use of tools and techniques, and the substitution of nonhuman energy for human energy.

The program began with the screening of "Diolkos, 1500 Years," a fascinating animated film that Prof. Tassios worked on, which showed what was essentially the world's first railroad and which enabled the Greeks to drag their ships across

the Isthmus of Corinth from the Sixth Century B.C. The film also painted a fascinating portrait of what life and work might have been like for ancient sailors, including the taverns where they recovered from the workday with wine and music, and the magnificent temple complexes where they worshipped the all-important god Poseidon. The guests learned that the ships were laid on an "olkos," a wheeled cart that was drawn by oxen across the "diolkos," a pair of grooves cut into blocks of stone laid across six kilometers from the Gulf of Corinth to the Saronic Gulf.

Prof. Tassios said that Greeks exhibited a fascination with technology, actual or fanciful, as early as Homer's time — the Gods benefited from devices the

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Greeks Fear That New Tax Collection Process May Leave them Destitute

By Kerin Hope in Athens

Irini, who declines to give her second name, is among tens of thousands of middle-class Greeks braced for an unprecedented plunge in their living standards as the finance ministry scrambles to meet budget targets by imposing new taxes and slashing public sector wages and pensions.

"They have caught up with people like me through the new property tax," Irini says, referring to the widespread practice among Greece's self-employed of declaring less than half their annual income.

The new tax is being added to owners' electricity bills; households who fail to pay will be cut off. The levy ought to prove effective, as many self-employed Greeks laundered their undeclared earnings during the boom years by building themselves suburban villas and second homes on the islands.

Now boom has turned to bust, with the country facing a fifth successive year of recession and a possible sovereign default. For-

eign trips, weekend excursions and increasingly Sunday lunch at a seaside taverna have fallen victim to the slump.

Greece's middle class is barely a generation old, having emerged in the 1970s with the restoration of democracy after a seven-year military dictatorship. Standards of living soared after the country joined the single currency as business loans and mortgages became widely available. But fears run high that these families could slip back into genuine poverty, bringing a wave of emigration by skilled workers if the recession continues.

Hotel stays by Greeks on the Aegean islands fell by about 30 per cent in July and August, according to travel agents' associations. Sales of foreign cars have dropped by 30-40 per cent since Greece was bailed out last year by its eurozone partners and the International Monetary Fund. "I have cut back supermarket purchases by almost half and I don't expect to go to the theatre this

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Drexel Names Building for Papadakis

The Family of Constantine "Taki" Papadakis, the late president of Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA at the dedication of Drexel's Integrated Sciences Building. See story on Page 2.

Eugenides: 9 Years after Winning Pulitzer Prize

By Alexandra Alter
Wall Street Journal

"I don't usually look like this," said Jeffrey Eugenides, who was dressed more like a congressman than a novelist, in a navy blue suit and tie. "This is my going-before-the-judge suit."

Mr. Eugenides had just testified against a man who punched him on a New Jersey train last July.

He was heading home to Princeton when he confronted a man who was drunk and swearing loudly on his cellphone. The man hit him, leaving a gash near his eye that required three stitches. He later pleaded guilty to creating a disturbance.

Sitting in a Princeton bistro in his court clothes, Mr. Eugenides says he figured the case was going his way when the prosecutor asked him excitedly if he wrote "Middlesex."

Mr. Eugenides, 51, belongs to a rare species of writer: the literary novelist with a far-reaching fan base. Teenage girls still swoon over his 1993 novel, "The Virgin Suicides." His 2002 novel "Middlesex" won two of the most coveted accolades in publishing: the Pulitzer Prize and Oprah's endorsement. It sold more than three million copies, and fans have been breathlessly awaiting more from Mr. Eugenides for nearly a decade.

"The Marriage Plot," out October 11, marks a departure from his previous two novels, which both have mythic elements, ambitious plots and unusual narrators. "Middlesex," an intergenerational epic that centers on a Greek American hermaphrodite. "The Virgin Suicides," a macabre story about a suburban family with five suicidal teenage daughters, is narrated in the first person plural. "The Marriage Plot" is a college love story that tightly focused on three characters: a beautiful, bookish brunette named Madeleine Hanna and her two suitors—brilliant, manic-depressive Leonard Bankhead and the spiritually inclined, erudite and

slightly snooty Mitchell Grammaticus.

It's Mr. Eugenides's most hyper-realistic, and autobiographical, book to date. Like Mitchell, he's a Greek American from Detroit who attended Brown in the late 1970s and early '80s, where he studied literature, religion and semiotics. Mr. Eugenides also drew on his own spiritual experimentation—he's tried everything from Zen Buddhism to Catholicism—and his travels to Europe and India, where he volunteered with Mother Teresa. He revised the chapter about Mitchell's experiences in Calcutta about 20 times, cutting

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U.S. Greeks Taxed on Greek Homes

By John Sofianos

ATHENS — The Greek law provides that the Greek-Americans who own homes and real estate properties in Greece are obligated to pay the same tax as the Greek citizens who live there. Also many Greek-Americans were called to pay the special tax contribution for their cars, pools, private jets, helicopters, or boats.

A team of experts comprised by Efstratos Sakalieros, Michael Antonopoulos, and Andreas Geompalidis explained to TNH that Greek-Americans will have to pay their taxes through a bill from the electric company, DEH. The payment can be made in installments, but "there has not been any clarification on the issue," the experts said.

According to the law, the tax is imposed on all private dwellings and businesses that receive electricity from DEH. Persons who discontinued DEH by September 17, are exempted from paying the tax until and unless they resume service. In case the real estate belongs to two or more individuals, the tax liability is calculated according to the percentage of each owner's share. Either the main owner or the primary beneficiary is responsible for payment. An example of the tax rate is that for a 16 year-old, 90 square-foot apartment valued at 1,080 euro, the tax will be 495 euro (or its U.S. dollar equivalent).

Exempt from the special tax are real estate properties that have been officially declared historic places and are not used for living space or rental properties. Also, historic and archaeological sites, as well as real es-

Petrelis and So Tiri Thrill at LI Show

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK — Thanos Petrelis wouldn't stop singing and the young Greek-Americans who turned out for the concert at the C.W. Post Tilles Center couldn't stop dancing. There was supposed to be an intermission, but that turned out to be a one-song instrumental as Petrelis, the multi-platinum Greek recording artist, changed what must have been his perspiration-soaked clothes in a performance fueled as much by the kefti of the kids in attendance as by the singer's rich, resonant Greek tenor voice and the seven-piece orchestra that accompanied him.

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Thanos Petrelis' fans surged onto the stage at C.W. Post's Tilles Center, joining him in song and dance and posing with him for photos, to which he graciously consented.

TNH/KOSTAS BE

Onassis Cultural Center Launches Fall Season with Ancient Greek Technology

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Greeks could only imagine but might seem familiar to us. Zeus enjoyed inventions ranging from thunderbolts, which helped him govern and robots which brought him snacks.

Prof. John Oleson spoke of "Hydraulic and Harbor Engineering in Greece." He pointed out that while the former was necessary in a Greece that was lacking in water and arable land, the latter wasn't necessary until Greeks after Alexander moved into areas that were not blessed with the abundance of natural harbors found in the Greek islands and mainland.

After describing the Mycenaean achievement of draining 100 sq. kilometers of swampland around 1300 B.C. he stressed that Greeks made technological progress in numerous areas, including the design of commercial and military ships, and the Sixth Century B.C. water tunnel on Samos that was cut from opposite sides of a mountain. The workers met in the middle under the summit despite the fact that the mountain's interior forced a number of changes in direction - thanks to sophisticated calculations.

Deforestation throughout the Aegean after the Minoan period forced later Greeks to develop farming methods such as terracing hillsides that served both to increase arable land and impound water that would have wastefully run down to the sea.

Greek technology took off during the Hellenistic period, driven both by the military needs of rival kingdoms and their possession of larger treasures than those of the old city states. Mechanical geniuses like Ctesibius, Hiero, and Philo of Byzantium, created devices that would be familiar and fascinating to modern minds, such as double piston pumps and pipe organs.

Prof. Tracey Elizabeth Rihll focused on "Ancient Greek Military Technology." She presented videos of efforts to build full-scale models of the Greeks' war machines, including catapults, which she said are often mistakenly attributed to the Romans. She noted that Greeks were responsible for the design and manufacture of such weapons long after the Roman conquests, the evidence supplied by treaties in Greek with detailed instructions for building them. The catapults, which evolved out of



Prof. Theodosios P. Tassios at the podium spoke first on "Ancient Greek Technology." He was followed by Prof. John Oleson and Prof. Tracey Elizabeth Rihll (both seated at table).

early mechanized bows, developed into crossbows and repeating catapults - Greek machine guns - by the Second Century A.D.

As early as in Thucydides' writings, Greeks used flame throwers, but by the Seventh Century A.D. the famed and feared Greek fire was invented, whose successful use by the

Byzantines is well-documented, though its formula and ingredients remain a mystery.

The most spectacular example of ancient Greek technology, the Antikythera mechanism, came up during the brief Q & A that followed. Prof. Tassios noted that this was the world's first known analog computer. It had the ability to predict the planets' move-

ments and the frequency and time - though not the locations - of eclipses. Although it was built after Aristarchos of Samos proposed that the earth revolved around the sun, Prof. Tassios told TNH that the Antikythera mechanism was based on the Greeks' traditional geocentric astronomy.

The Center is excited about a number of upcoming presentations including a unique Conversation Series examining the question "What is the Truth?" Visit their Web site at onassis-usa.org/conversationseries.php for more information. The season's highlight will be a remarkable exhibition, "Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd - 7th Century A.D." in collaboration with Athens' Byzantine and Christian Museum and with scholarly support from the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University. Organized by the Center's Director of Cultural Affairs, Analia Cosmetatou, it will include 170 exceptional objects on loan from museums around the world which will reflect "a period of extraordinary creativity in the art of the Greek world." The exhibition will illustrate a time of transition from pagan to Christian society when "a new society, religion and material culture were gradually replacing the old" whose initial phase came to an end with the catastrophic Arab invasions. Lasting from December 7, 2011 to May 14, 2012, it will overlap and illuminate another significant exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art titled "Byzantine and Islam" that will open on March 14.

FilmHellenes Organization Showcases 2011 Greek Film Festival in Chicago

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sublime art. I was hoping this would be the case.

OPENING NIGHT
Excitement was in the air for the opening night film, "Gold Dust" at the Pickwick Theatre, which is a huge Art Deco movie palace built in the 1920s. The theatre is owned by Dino and Sophia Vlahakis, who kindly donated it for the Festival.

A healthy crowd turned out for the award-winning film from first-time director Margarita Manda, who traveled from Greece to attend the Festival and was plainly thrilled to be here. The compelling, character-driven film dealt with themes of family and urban change, and was an impressive debut, no less so because of the minuscule budget (100,000 euro). Manda graciously answered many questions from an audience eager to learn about filmmaking in Greece. Afterward, a VIP reception was held at the home of Aris and Angela Gallos.

COMPELLING DOCUMENTARIES
In all, 24 documentaries were screened during the festival. Film producer and FilmHellenes board member Valerie Gobos explained their allure. "I produce documentaries and love the whole concept of making them. I think because bud-



Festival board: (Top L-R): Nikos Franghlias, Dimitris Kostopoulos, Kyriakos Mellos. (Bottom L-R): Terry Jacobs, Zoe Itopoulos Borys, Dr. Peter Kanelos, Valerie Gobos, Art Andros.

gets are so limited for Greek filmmakers, a documentary is a wonderful venue where filmmakers can still make a compelling film and share their Greek heritage with the public."

"My Sweet Canary" is a feature documentary that explores the life of rembetika singer Rosa Eskanazi, and was directed and produced by Roy Sher. While well-crafted, I would have

wished for more of Eskanazi's music and singing. The doc was screened at the National Hellenic Museum, which also generously donated their new space for documentaries and short subjects screenings.

The Museum hosted a lovely reception prior to the screening of the documentary. At the reception, Bessie Grosso, a director of the Orpheus Folk Dance

Troupe, remarked that she was struck by the way the film festival connected so many circles of people and friends.

The documentary "Women of Cyprus" is a moving and well-made film on the 2004 U.N. Referendum shown through the eyes of the women who tried to reunite the people of Cyprus. An interesting final note points out that it was the Greeks who

voted it down, although the filmmakers did not explore why. "A Song for Argyris," made in 2006, tells the deeply disturbing story of the massacre at Distomo at the end of World War II. While not as large as the massacre at Kalavrita, in which 1,200 people were murdered, Distomo is notable for its My Lai type atrocities, and the film does not shy from graphic depictions. A Q & A was held by Distomo massacre expert Georgia Mitchell.

CREATIVE REVOLUTION
The closing night film was the humorous and emotionally evocative, "The Guardian's Son," a first feature effort from talented Greek director Dimitris Koutsiasbasakos, who was present.

Screenings of some of the 27 internationally acclaimed films included "Attenberg" (2010 Venice Film Festival), "Plato's Academy" "Eduart," "No Subtitles Necessary: Laszlo & Vilmos," and the Academy Award-nominated "Dogtooth."

While the Festival was not judged this year, it did recognize self-taught short film creator Konstantinos Chaliasas, a high school student from Thessaloniki.

There is indeed a creative revolution underway in Greece, with new people and projects with fresh points of view. Despite the terrible financial situ-

ation and the lack of higher academic film schools, these wonderful films have managed to get made by sheer tenacity and a collaborative spirit.

The films immersed audiences in the world of characters and stories. In some ways, they remind me of American films in the 70s, before filmmaking became about fast cuts and fast-paced action. Despite the lack of polish, the films stayed with me longer than the contemporary films I see here.

(The one throwback I could have missed, however, was incessant cigarette smoking on-screen.)
Mostly I was touched and relieved to see that artists are chronicling Greece's vast social upheavals. Gifted filmmakers are proving clear-eyed and concerned about the rapid urbanization, shifting demographics, and the social and emotional change occurring at every level of the country.

Franghlias said on closing night, "Our heritage has survived on the wings of powerful storytelling. This is what we celebrate with the festival and what we want to promote through the most influential art form in our times - which is cinema."

**Antonia Callas is a Chicago-based reporter and film professional

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