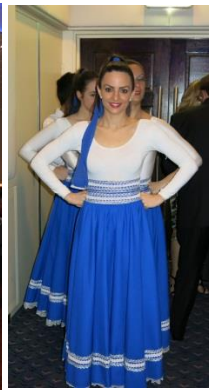




EPTANESIAN DELIGHT



On 27 September 2014 over 200 people attended the Eptanesian Federation of NSW's gala dance to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Union of the Ionian Islands with Greece.

Held at the Venus Reception Centre in Kogarah, the function was organised by the committee of the Federation made up of representatives from the Corfu Brotherhood, the Lefkadian Brotherhood, the Ithakan Association, the Zakynthian Association and the Kytherian Association in Sydney. In a true spirit of co-operation and recalling their common cultural and historical ties, the five committees sought to revive the traditions of the *eptanisa* and to commemorate the historic events of 1864 when, after centuries of Venetian and later British occupation, the Ionian Islands comprising Kerkyra, Paxos, Ithaki, Kefalonia, Lefkada, Zante and Cerigo were formally ceded to Greece by Great Britain.

The significance of the occasion and the historical ties between the Ionian Islands and the subsequent Greek-Australia migration experience are important, as emphasised by the issue of a special, full colour, commemorative program for the occasion featuring profiles of each island and the various associations in Sydney, as well as other articles documenting the history and personalities of the Ionian Islands, together with sumptuous photographs.

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Union of the Ionian Islands with Greece

The Ionian Islands largely resisted Ottoman occupation and remained distinctive because of their Venetian influences in their outlook and architecture, the rugged Ionian individuality with the rise of radicalism in the early 19th century and the push for enosis with Greece during the British occupation. Not many realise that in the first half of the 19th century the British had colonial outposts in the Ionian Islands and in a far-flung territory known as New South Wales.

Today, the Seven Islands are popular tourist destinations renowned for their verdant lushness, mountainous terrain, beautiful beaches and historic monuments, ranging from Byzantine churches, Venetian fortresses to British-built viaducts and schools, that dot the Ionian landscape. Immigrants from Kythera and Ithaki were in the first wave of Greek migration to Australia and have established substantial community associations in Sydney and Melbourne respectively, to be followed by the other islands.

His Excellency, the Ambassador of Greece, Mr Haralambos Dafaranos and his charming wife, Eva Dafaranos, were the guests of honour on the night. Mr Dafaranos in his speech paid tribute to the character of the Ionian Islands and the *eptanesian* personality with its multiple influences spanning four different colonial periods over five centuries. Mr Dafaranos praised the Ionian attitude to business enterprise and commercial initiative, noting the rise of the bourgeois classes in the islands and their increasingly internationalism and progressive spirit. He concluded that we should all be proud of our Ionian Island heritage.



John Koutsis, Secretary of the Zakynthian Association, reminded the audience of an upcoming and exciting Zakynthian Cultural and Heritage Photographic Exhibition (commencing on 13 October 2014 at Zakynthian House). The Cultural Officer of the Kytherian Association and MC for the night, George Vardas, quoted from Cavafy's famous poem, Ithaca, which allegorically reminds the reader to always keep your island home in mind; for to arrive there is your ultimate goal but do enjoy the journey along the way.

The dance was a great success. The singer, Makis Voutsinas, entertained the room with some beautiful *eptanesian* and other folkloric Greek songs, ably backed by the Iones band. Makis, himself a Kefalonian by birth, warmed to the occasion and proved to be a fantastic (albeit lone) representative for Kefalonia as guests danced throughout the night to the melodic music. Tasos Pavlides, a popular singer visiting Australia, also performed a stirring rendition of Stelios Kazantzidis' *Υπάρχω!* (I exist) and other songs to help round off the *kefi* for the night. The Joanna Tsakiridis-trained dancing troupe from the Kytherian Association also entertained with some traditional Greek folk-dancing. And finally, the Venus Reception Centre, operated by the Christodoulou family, put on

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a fabulous feast in terms of food , wine and drink and helped make the occasion a special one to remember.

Lawrence Durrell famously wrote that the blue really begins when you reach Corfu and the other Ionian Islands. On a balmy Saturday night in Kogarah that metaphorical blue had spread to Sydney as the spirit of the combined Ionian Islands came to life.

George Vardas

Honorary Secretary, Eptanesian Federation