

Joanna Mastroianni, Born on Tiny Nisyros, Now A Top Designer

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK – Even if beauty cannot save the world – hardly anyone quite understands what Dostoyevsky really meant anyway – it certainly makes it a more interesting place. Top-ranked New York fashion designer Joanna Mastroianni is one who has aspired to the creation of beauty her whole life. Her total devotion explains how she has come to reign in a world where few Greek-Americans tread.

When visiting her bright studio with its great views of Midtown Manhattan, it seems like a fun place to work. Contemporary music plays in the background. Assistants come in and out to consult with Mastroianni, who pauses occasionally to point out images from some of her favorite books or the famous fashion photos on the walls. She does a lot of celebrity dressing. That must be fun.

But the truth of the fashion business is not what it seems. “It appears to be glamorous but that aspect is five percent of it. It’s endless work.”

Only after examining her intricate garments does it become clear what she means. To wear her couture clothes a woman must be confident and feel the empowerment of well-made, flattering garments, but the body is a delightful and maddeningly complex shape for a designer to work with.

There is sensuality to her garments. She likes women to feel feminine, sensual, and glamorous when wearing her apparel. “Women need to celebrate their bodies,” she said. She adds that creating clothing is almost like engineering, “For some of these garments it’s like creating a building. You create the structure and foundation in-

side the garment that allows it to float beautifully on the body. Some of them are incredibly complex, although they give the appearance of simplicity.”

And some of them take almost two months to make.

Mastroianni is not unique among Greeks however, because it’s the same formula that has driven other Greeks to the tops of all other professions. Like them, she learned from her father, “never be afraid of work, the work should be afraid of you.”

Mastroianni said she is one of those who “have been blessed to have a disciplined upbringing,” which has been instrumental in creating the foundation for to her career. “You need the passion and the unconditional commitment, and to constantly move forward in the face challenges in order to have the ability to see things through, but . You can look at those things as creative and challenging also, so you don’t see it as negative.”

She has two brothers, one in Greece, who owns a restaurant and enjoys the beach and the good life, and the other is a florist – different kinds of creative businesses. Interspersed with the primary creative dimension of her work, there are moments of business needs and problem solving “but that’s part of life. It comes with the territory.”

Each year she produces five collections – two main collections (Spring and Fall) and three in between. “The main collections are 150-200 pieces.” That is a lot of work. “There are moments when you are exhausted, but just keep on going. There are times of the year you are working 20 hours a day after months of working seven days a week. You look like hell when

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Zakynthos Dubbed “Island Of the Blind” for Fraudulent Blindness Disability Claims

By James Angelos
The Wall Street Journal

The island of Zakynthos, long known for its Venetian ruins and turquoise waters, lately has new fame in Greece—as “the island of the blind.”

The Greek health ministry is

investigating on Zakynthos after local officials flagged records showing what they said is an implausibly high number of disability claims for blindness.

About 1.8% of the island’s population of 39,000 claimed the benefit last year, according to the health ministry. That is around nine times the prevalence of blindness estimated for many European countries in a 2004 study published in a World Health Organization journal.

Among those who put in for the blindness benefit on Zakynthos, a local official said, were a taxi driver and a bird hunter.

Zakynthos has become a symbol for the widespread corruption that has played a part in the nation’s financial downfall. “It appears the ‘blind’ of Zakynthos saw only the color of money,” said an article in the Greek newspaper Ethnos.

But the island is hardly alone, according to health ministry officials, who say fraudulent disability claims are a problem across the nation, costing the government hundreds of millions of euros a year.

Greece, under pressure from international creditors, is stepping up efforts to fight corruption and cut costs. Yet the crack-down on disabilities fraud, muddled by allegations of political gamesmanship and inaccuracy, demonstrates the difficulties in such attempts at overhauls.

Some disability recipients coming under scrutiny complain they have few options as austerity hits home in a country where pensions and wages are increasingly meager.

Zakynthos Mayor Stelios Bozikis on a Greek television talk show said residents angry about the benefits crackdown and other financial overhauls pelted him with yogurt at a recent event. He said he considered this “an honor.”

In an attempt to root out fraud, the Greek health ministry recently required disability claimants nationwide to register in a centralized database, ap-

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Indebted Greek Pensioner’s Syntagma Suicide



EUROKINISSI

Greek PM Lucas Papademos (head of table) meets leaders of AHEPA during their 84th annual overseas excursion. Supreme President Dr. John Grossomanides, Jr. is at his right.

AHEPA Arrives to Help Greeks in Need

By Vasilios Koutsilas and
Gianni Sofianos

TNH Staff Writers

ATHENS – The check for \$7,500 that the Supreme President of AHEPA, Dr. John Grossomanides, Jr. presented to the Church of Greece for its philanthropic work was a symbolic gesture, an indication of the various kinds of help the Greek-American organization ultimately intends to offer the people of Greece during their time of troubles, but it sent a powerful message during the first days of the Order’s visit to Greece.

The leaders of the AHEPA family arrived in Athens on April 1 for their 84th annual overseas excursion, which will include stops in Cyprus, Constantinople, and the Holy Land. The endeavor strengthens the bonds between the Greek-American community and the lands of their roots, but this year’s trip has an additional philanthropic dimension as they will explore how they can best and most quickly assist Greece.

The meeting with Archbishop Ieronymos on April 3 complemented the delegation’s visit with President of the Republic Karolos Papoulias and

with Greek Prime Minister Lucas Papademos on April 2. AHEPA also met with Daniel B. Smith, the U.S. Ambassador to Greece.

Papoulias expressed the motherland’s pride and gratitude to the Greeks abroad, noting that they have two homelands, and thanked them for all they have done for Greece, in good moments and bad. He said, “Today you have come to help us, during your trip you will discuss other ways in which you can help.”

He continued by saying he was not afraid for the future.

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St. George’s New Home is Ocean Township, NJ

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK – It was a glorious and historic day for the parish of St. George, a day on which it completed its journey from Asbury Park, NJ to a new home . On April 1, the community celebrated the Thyranixia – the opening of the doors of its new sanctuary in Ocean Township, NJ and the inauguration of its new community and educational centers.

The Thyranixia service began at 9:30AM before the locked central doors of the Church. Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey was resplendent in his blue episcopal robes and his well-known fine chanter’s voice resounded along with the parish choir and chanters from the public address system across the new church’s atrium. The space was filled with more than 500 parishioners and special guests, including local politicians and other friends of the parish. Talk is already generating about how



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Metropolitan Evangelos completes the Thyranixia service for the new Church of St. George in Ocean, NJ by blessing the doors with Holy Water. The parish moved from Asbury Park.

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Penelope Tsilas Chosen as Woman of the Year

By Demetrios Tsakas
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK - The Association of Greek American Professional Women (AGAPW) celebrated Women’s history Month on March 28 by honoring Penelope Tsilas as its Greek American Woman of the Year at Cyprus House in Manhattan.

“Penelope Tsilas is a dynamic and multi-dimensional woman. She participates in our events and those of the Philoptochos of Holy Trinity Cathedral and it is a great honor for us that she accepted the award, as is clear from the fact that so many came to honor her,” said Olga Alexakos, the president of AGAPW.

Tsilas’ husband, Ambassador Lucas Tsilas, Executive Director of the Onassis Foundation (USA), was present along with their children, Nick and Vicky.

The evening included a pleasant surprise when Alexakos announced an anonymous



Penelope Tsilas was honored by the women of AGAPW in New York.

\$2000 gift that tripled the size of AGAPW’s Scholarship for Excellence that was presented to Queens College student Alexandra Kavouras.

Greetings were offered by the Consuls General of Greece and Cyprus, George Eliopoulos and Koula Sophianou, respectively, and a citation was presented by NY State assemblywomen Nicole Malliotakis and Aravella Simotas.

Iranian/Greek-American artist and writer Aphrodite Navab made a presentation on “The Significance of Women’s History Month” and the guests enjoyed a program of entertainment. The one-act play, “Χελιδονοφωλιάς- Swallow’s Nest,” by Vasiliki Tsanaktsidou was performed by Tsanaktsidou and Martha Tompoulidou. Vocalist Flora Kirou performed “Χρυσό-πράσινο Φύλλο - Leaf of Gold and Green” by Mikis Theodorakis and Marios Toka and “I Dreamed a Dream” by Claude-

Michel Schonberg. The poem “Αιομαζώχτρα - The Olive Picker” by Nikiforos Vrettakos, was recited by Tompoulidou and “Τυνγαίκα” – Woman,” written by an anonymous supporter of AGAPW, was recited by Tsanaktsidou.

Navab introduced the honoree and spoke of her achievements as a lawyer, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and a philanthropist.

When she received the award Tsilas said, “I accept this distinction with gratitude not for myself, but mainly as a representative of all of you, because I believe that my life is typical of the life story of all women who strive today, sometimes under adverse conditions to meet complicated, often conflicting demands and expectations.

“Nowadays women, at least in the country we are lucky to live in, have become equal part-

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“Byzantium and Islam: A Festival for All Ages” at Met Art Museum in NY

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

MANHATTAN – The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) presented “Byzantium and Islam: A Festival for all Ages a series of musical performances, lectures and arts and craft activities that celebrated and complemented its exhibition “Byzantium and Islam - Age of Transition.” Focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean from the 7th through the 10th Centuries, the exhibition opened on March 14 and runs through July 8.

The Axion Estin Foundation and the Archdiocesan Byzantine Choir each presented musical performances. The Museum itself also presented “Stories Byzantine and Muslim Children Love to Hear.” Although the Byzantium and Islam exhibit cover the period before the Turkish peoples left Central Asia, some of the day’s Moslem cultural component consisted of Ottoman music and literature, which were strongly influenced by Arabic – and to some degree, Byzantine culture.

The Axion Estin presentation consisted in a chant and playing of the oud (string instrument) by the famous Greek Orthodox chanter and musician Christos Chalkias of Thessaloniki. He



The MMA’s Velez Blanco Patio is the courtyard of a 16th Century Spanish near the Southeastern coast of Spain. Its 2,000 marble blocks were reassembled at the Museum in 1964.

gave three performances in the MMA’s beautiful Velez Blanco Patio that afternoon.

His deep, rich baritone voice filled the patio, which is actually

the courtyard of a 16th Century Spanish Renaissance castle above the town of Vélez Blanco, near the Southeastern coast of Spain. The patio, which forms a colonnaded courtyard with an arcade and a 2nd story gallery, was reconstructed out of approximately 2,000 marble blocks that were brought to MMA in 1964.

Chalkias, who is becoming well-known to the community through his concert performances and church chanting in the New York Metropolitan Area, was introduced by Professor Angelos Lampousis, the director and founder of the Axion Estin Foundation, whose mission is to “promote the appreciation, education, and employment of Byzantine music in North America.”

The patio is now a sculpture garden filled with mainly 16th Century creations from Florence, Italy. One of them is of Orpheus, the Ancient Greek poet, musician, and prophet. He

is seen playing a bowed stringed instrument and he doubtlessly enjoyed the concert.

Chalkias’ first offering did not make use of the two beautiful ouds at his side, instruments that are plucked, not bowed. He let them rest a few minutes longer and began his program by chanting Orthodox Church music a cappella.

The concert’s guests, including the statues of Alpheus and Arethusa, a young Venetian warrior and King Phillip II of Spain – the latter two of whom knew the Ottomans well in peace and war, were then entertained by Turkish Music. This time Chalkias thrilled the audience with his oud as well as his voice.

The performance and the setting made some guests ponder on the cultural life of the Mediterranean world, where despite the constant warfare on land and sea, ruling classes were able to share high culture and science. Greek, Jewish, and Moslem physicians read the

same medical texts, often derived from the Ancient Greek sources, and artists were sent by one royal court to another to create gifts for allied or enemy sovereigns – and those in between.

One imagines that some of the 11th Century mosaicists sent to Cordoba in Moslem Spain by the Emperor in Constantinople were also musicians, or were accompanied by them. Perhaps they serenaded the Spanish Moslems in Greek, and the favor was reciprocated in the Great Palace of Constantinople.

These are the kinds of questions that might interest many.

great Orthodox Church musicians from the 17th to the 20th Centuries, included, Mi Apostrepseis (Do not Hide your Face from Me) Axion Estin, Psalm 148, Ton Stavron Sou (Your Cross), Megali Doxologia (Great Doxology) .

The Choir’s founder, Archdeacon Panteleimon Papadopoulos, told TNH they tried to select pieces, like the psalms and doxology, that were more accessible to Western audiences. “This was a great opportunity to share with general public the beauty of our musical heritage, which is alive and real today in the 20th Century in Manhattan,



Angelos Lampousis (R) is the director and founder of the Axion Estin Foundation, which promotes Byzantine music.

Lampousis was very pleased that this was one of the first times when Byzantine music, which is usually appreciated apart from the rest of Byzantine art, has been integrated into a larger Byzantine Exhibition.

Chalkias concluded with some beautiful Greek folk songs, accompanying himself first with one, then with the other oud.

The Archdiocesan Byzantine Choir chanted in MMA’s great domed entrance hall at noon, and in the Medieval Sculpture Hall at 3 PM. Six hundred people heard the performances led by the choir’s director, Demetrios Kehagias.

The pieces, set to music by

the capital of the world.”

Later in the day The Axion Estin Foundation and the Liederkrantz Club hosted a reception featuring a lecture by Fr. Dr. Stefanos Alexopoulos from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, tracing the origins and evolution of Lenten Liturgical Practices. He was introduced by Peter Jeffrey, retired Distinguished Professor of Music History at Notre Dame. Alexopoulos focused on the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts and his presentation was interspersed with chant from the liturgy by Chalkias. The sold-out event was the Foundation’s annual fundraiser.



Chanter and musician Christos Chalkias of Thessaloniki plays one of his two ouds at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



When Penelope Tsilas was honored by AGAPW as Woman of the Year she declared “I accept this distinction with gratitude not for myself, but... as a representative of all of you.”



(L-R) Nick Tsilas, Ambassador Lucas Tsilas, Vassiliki Tsilas, the honoree Penelope Tsilas, Aphrodite Navab, Olga Alexakos, Cypriot CG Koula Sophianou, Greek CG George Iliopoulos.

Honoring Women’s History Month, AGAPW Names Tsilas Woman of the Year

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ners and citizens. However, nobody can deny that this historic achievement has come only through sustained efforts, solidarity and lot of sacrifices.

“We have come a long way, but there is still much to be accomplished so that women’s vital role is further enhanced and facilitated.

“It is for this reason that the endeavors of AGAPW are so

meaningful. This is why we should all be actively engaged towards our goal, which is ‘expand career opportunities and promote community and leadership building among Greek-American professional women by forging col-

laborations among ourselves and other American and Greek-American organizations.”

Tsilas concluded by telling the guests “I am proud that I am a member of our organization and I am inspired by all and

each and every one of you.”

Upcoming AGAPW events include a Mother’s Day celebration featuring Thea Halo, the author of “Not Even My Name.” The evening will also be a fundraiser to help organizations

in Greece that offer assistance to struggling mothers and children. At the end of June there will be an exposition for Greek-American businesswomen who promote Greek products in the U.S. market.



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