

Tarpon Springs Mired In Controversy about “Unreal” Reality Show

By Constantinos E. Scaros

TARPON SPRINGS, FL – A reality show called Growing Up Greek premiered on MTV on December 3, much to the outrage of thousands in the Greek-American community, who blast the show as a besmirching of their proud Hellenic heritage.

Reality television – where cameras follow around cast members, recording purportedly unscripted situations – took American popular culture by storm about a decade ago, with shows such as The Osbournes – which featured the life of outrageous rocker Ozzy, his wife, Sharon, and their children around the house, leading their everyday lives. Other shows depicting the home lives of celebrities followed, including Chasing

– are the sons of the owners of the very real Mama’s Restaurant at the Sponge Docks. Also seen is the very real Zorba’s nightclub. What is unmistakably unreal is the “Tarpon Springs Airport” shown at the beginning (Tarpon Springs doesn’t have an airport – what they show is Tampa International Airport). There is also a false impression created that Tarpon Springs is a party town – sort of a Greek-American version of New Orleans. It’s not. It is idyllic and picturesque, and filled with many tourists by day (most non-Greek, and many retirees), but usually after 10PM you can hear a pin drop.

The show’s stars are Tarpon Greek-Americans in their early 20s, whose lives are shown to revolve around drinking, smok-

ND vs. SYRIZA Presidential Election Showdown



Samaras Gambles On Dimas to Thwart Tsipras’ Momentum

ATHENS – Prime Minister Antonis Samaras is trying to rally lawmakers outside his coalition government to support his New Democracy party’s Vice-President Stavros Dimas for the country’s symbolic president to prevent the major opposition Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) leader Alexis Tsipras from forcing early national elections.

The battle begins Dec. 17 when the 300-member Parliament will vote on Dimas as the choice of New Democracy and its coalition partner the PASOK Socialists to replace the outgoing Karolos Papoulias, from PASOK, whose term runs out in March, 2015.

But New Democracy has only 128 votes and PASOK 27 for a total of 155 and 200 is needed

Guitarist/Composer Spiros Exaras: Journey of an International Musician

By **Constantine S. Sirigos**
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK – Whether or not great talent automatically attracts mentors and muses, fans of international guitarist and composer Spiros Exaras should be as thankful as he is for the people who have guided him into and through his musical career.

Born in Thessaloniki and raised in Athens, Exaras has delighted jazz aficionados and Greek and classical music fans in New York with his guitar and voice for two decades, and his musical journey continues with his new CD with Cuban Jazz pianist Elio Villafranca titled *Old Waters New River*.

Friends and fans recently filled the Drom nightclub on Manhattan's Lower East Side to hear the "two master musicians play original pieces and traditional Greek and Cuban songs in their own arrangements," according to a press release.

Drom was filled with a unique mélange of music. Simple passages when both played around middle C were delightful, and there were moments when the layers were so rich it was hard to believe there were only two instruments.

Their masterful blends of harmony, melody and rhythm from the Mediterranean to the

Caribbean thrilled the guests.

It was no accident. He heard a variety of quality Greek songs growing up, but his second teacher opened wide his musical horizons.

"He was the nicest guy," he said of Dimitris Zabetakis, the teacher of Giorgos Apostolides, the first instructor of both brothers.

Exaras started playing guitar at 13, and inspired by his brother, he said, "I was a rocker." But he felt conflicted about his passion for classic rock and classical music, so he asked his teacher "should I give up one?"

Zabetakis said "whatever you do is fine. It's good to be exposed to all kinds of music... Just don't ever quit classical guitar... that is the foundation," and he was very relieved. His private teachers and instructors at the Athens Conservatory of music emphasized classical music "and I loved it," he said, equally excited by Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Bach.

The joy of his early musical days yielded to pain, however – although one wonders whether any artist can be untouched by tragedy. Both teachers were killed in separate auto accidents. He was shaken up, moved forward, but when he approached Zabetakis' colleague



JANIS WILKINS

Cuban pianist Elio Villafranca and Spiros Exaras performed the music from their new DC with the evocative title "Old Waters New River" at Drom on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Olga Kalogriadou for lessons, she first paused and said, "I hope I won't have the same fate as the others." "She was also fantastic; a great teacher and mentor – we are still friends." One also never knows where inspiration will come from.

Exaras discovered jazz when he was 16 years old. "One day I was shopping for some jeans in Monastiraki and the music

sounded like it was from heaven. It was so different from anything else I had heard and I was so fascinated."

The co-owners told him it was George Benson's music. "Who is that," he asked about one of the giants of jazz. When he read the album cover, he thought "oh my God" and ran to buy the record.

He gained his first profes-

sional experience at 17 and a year later he was playing with singer Alkestis Protopsaltis. As he met more musicians who recognized his talent, gigs accumulated, playing classical guitar in theaters and halls and a variety of music in piano bars. "We were playing a little bit of everything: jazz, French and Italian music, Greek too – the good stuff like Hatzidakis."

He was playing professionally in two radically different scenes when he was 18 and loved them both – but New York was calling. He had earlier gone to Detroit as a high school exchange student. Eventually he and a friend who brought a girlfriend agreed "to stay in New York for at least one year to see what happens. We were so fascinated by the city and what was happening –right in the heart of Manhattan," living in then-gritty Times Square, he said. "But I was in heaven."

Exaras didn't bring that much money, so he had to figure out what to do. He scoured the papers to see where there was live music and he began joining jam sessions. Sometimes he struck out, but he also hit home runs.

He was so nervous.

"I was playing with giants... like trying out for the NBA," he said, but he persevered and soon musicians would say "hey,

what's your number? I have a gig and you can play."

He broke onto the Greek scene, too. He made his first of his three recordings in Greece just before coming to America.

He gave the CDs of him playing the music of Kostas Hatzis to managers of Greek night clubs and got his first break at Symposium. Then met Vangelis Fampas, the founder of the renowned Thiassos and was soon playing there.

About four years ago, Exaras' former manager urged him and Villafranca to meet, believing there would be good musical chemistry. A few days after meeting, they spoke on the phone and said "let get together and see how we sound... what we can create together."

The chemistry was great and the ideas started flying immediately. "He was teaching me Cuban and I was teaching him Greek rhythms," he said, and the collaboration continues.

Exaras and his ex-wife, singer and attorney Yanna Key, work together but they have even more to offer the musical world. Daughter, Ileana, was a more-than-triple threat at the High School of Performing Arts as songwriter, actress, dancer and poet. "She writes extraordinary lyrics," said her proud father.