

ANNUNCIATION CATHEDRAL

HERALD



SPECIAL EDITION • FDF 2024

Congratulations to all of our Dance Groups

"Let them praise His name with dancing . . ." -Psalm 149:3

This year's FDF theme, Dance to Life, captures the essence of this ministry, which has been lifelong commitment for many generations of families. The perpetuation of our customs and traditions through both dance and music have become etched in the hearts, minds, and lives of our faithful through their participation in FDF. It is more than just dance practice. It is more than just performing at Greek Festival. It is more than just a weekend at FDF. Dancing has become second nature, like walking.



Every dance tells a story - of life, family, way, challenges, celebrations, traditions, and more. Those stories are not just words on a paper, they are intricate steps, beautiful melodies, and elaborate costumes, that come together to keep our ancestral legacy alive and relevant for generations to come.

-His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco

The rhythm of dance – much like the rhythm of life – is a powerful testament to our community's enduring spirit of perseverance, creativity and resilience. Just as our proud ancestors marched to the tireless beat and heroic cadence of their own drums, your harmonious movements and melodious songs continue to perpetuate our storied heritage and enliven our cherished traditions by keeping alive the rich legacy that has been passed down to us through the ages.



...In the Old Testament, we read that King David danced before the Lord with all his might, embodying the same spirit of joy, thanksgiving and devotion that we, too, are called to embrace our daily lives as Christians. Therefore, it is my fervent prayer that your every step will also be a joyful celebration of this uplifting affirmation of our collective journey and unity in Christ.

-His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America



The 47th annual Folk Dance Festival (FDF) was held February 15-19th in Anaheim. Four of the Cathedral's dance groups, Rizes, To Mellon, Revmata, and Spithes represented our community proudly. The theme of this year's FDF, "Dance to Life" brought out the joy, passion and love for dance from communities from all over our Metropolis including several others from across the U.S.

Our community's very talented Aristeia Taptelis sang the American National Anthem for Opening Ceremonies to kick off our weekend.

Let take a look at our talented groups.



Orama

Our youngest dance group, Orama (TK – 1st), enjoyed its inaugural year being introduced to the world of Greek traditional dance. True to their group's name—*Orama* means *vision* in Greek—its directors have great ambitions: They want to both inspire the children to love dance and educate them on the rich traditions behind the fun. Indeed, every Orama dancer now knows and often spontaneously recites the story told in the group's favorite dance, *Gerakina*, of the young lady who was rescued from the bottom of a well by her future husband. They learned about the hat so common in earlier times from a dance bearing its name, *Fesaki*. And they proudly donned the *Vasilissa Amalia* dress, understanding that it was worn

by the first queen of modern Greece. Their directors further the dancers' interest with occasional hands-on activities, in English and (for those who speak it) Greek, such as coloring in a map showcasing the origin of each group's costume. They hope to soon hold a "show-and-tell" on instruments, which should bring to life the melodies Orama has so far heard only through speakers. It is the directors' goal to provide an English translation of every Greek song the dancers will eventually learn so that they can appreciate the meaning behind the words.

On the technical side, the group is learning the basics of movement, rhythm, and coordination. Their hand

coordination is comparatively more developed than that of the rest of their bodies, and they now proudly rattle off and demonstrate the various ways to link arms (for the uninitiated, they are "shoulder holds," "V holds," "W holds," and the intricate "basket holds"—although sometimes the dancers mistake the latter for "basketball holds"). Not unlike those who first danced in the villages, they often identify dances by their characteristics, such as the "stomping dance" (*Podaraki*), "the snake dance"—for the winding shape of their line—(*Gaida*), and the very popular and very literal "chasing dance" (*Kiniyitos*). Although the steps of *Syrtos* are still too advanced for this age, the group has nevertheless learned how to form a bridge, which each leader loves doing in turn.

In their short time as a group, Orama has had three local performances. Its directors hope to make it to the FDF stage one day to represent the Annunciation Cathedral along with the rest of the dance groups.

Orama is directed by Evgenia Fkiaras (evgeniafkiaras@yahoo.com), Alexis Rakos (rakos.alexis@gmail.com), Anastasia Rakos (anastasiaolgarakos@gmail.com), and Taia Konstantinidis (taia.konstan@gmail.com).

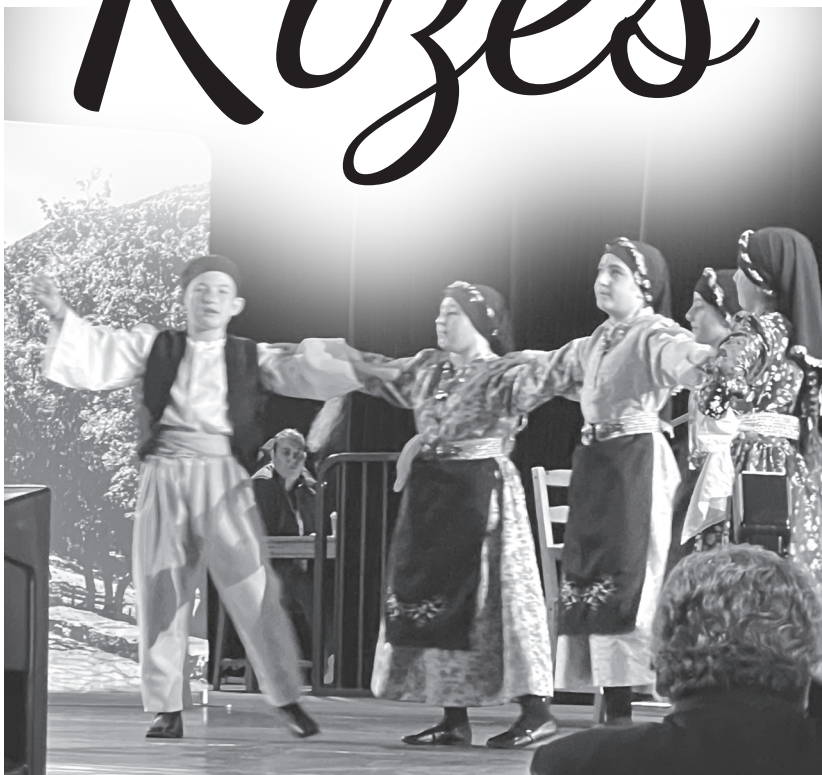


This year Rizes competed for their second time at the annual Folk Dance Festival in Anaheim, California. They were in the Primary category and competed against 10 other groups. Our small, but mighty group, danced wonderfully and we were all so impressed by their poise, confidence and beautiful performances they presented Friday and Saturday.

We performed suites from two different regions of Greece. On Friday for their semi-final suite Rizes performed dances from the island of Chios, Greece. We had costumes handmade for the girls by a villager in Chios. On Saturday for their Final round we performed a suite from the region of Kalamata in Messinia. This suite required our dancers to sing multiple songs accompanied by live music and because of their wonderful singing they were awarded the Choral Award in the Primary Category.

Rizes consists of dancers in 3-4 grades, but we are always accepting dancers if your child is interested in joining! Rizes is directed by Penny Vardakastanis (ppries21@sbcglobal.net) and Kallie Lyberopoulos (koukla808@yahoo.com).

Rizes



To Mellon, which translates to “The Future” is the Cathedral’s middle school dance group, ranging in age from 10-13 years old. They are directed by Irene Kyriacou and Katerina Sarikakis and have been dancing together since they were 3 and 4 years old building special friendships over the years.

This year, at the Metropolis’ annual Folk Dance Festival (FDF), which was held in Anaheim, To Mellon performed dances from the region of Macedonia. The dances selected were from the villages of Drymos and Goumenissa, which are neighboring villages to Thessaloniki. The directors research areas by using online resource tools, consultations and workshops with experts in the region as well as FDF and HDF judges from the U.S., Canada, and Greece. The directors research the customs, traditions, music, songs, instruments, costumes, etc. as they are always looking for new dances and regions to explore.

For their semi final round, To Mellon presented dances from the village of Drymos. Drymos is a village rich with beautiful music, songs, customs and traditions. The songs are mostly sung by women without musical accompaniment. The directors taught the girls four different songs, in addition to a song with the boys that they sang a capella. The group’s singing was rewarded this year with the choral award in their Junior category. The group was



To Mellon

also accompanied by local musicians playing Greek instruments distinctive to this region - the zourna (a wind instrument with a loud, tinny sound) and the daouli (a big heavy drum).

Semi-final round:

To Mellon - Semi-Final Round - FDF 2024

For the final round of competition, dances were selected from the village of Goumenissa, which takes its name from the monastery, Panagia tis Goumenissa. The girls learned another beautiful song that they performed a capella. The styling of the dances from this village are very difficult, as dancers

need to master not only the steps, but the different arm movements, as well as distinctive pauses, bounces, and body movements. The group also presented a custom for the area that was celebrated on the feast day of St. Tryphon. The beauty of dance is that the directors can teach and incorporate the religious, ethnic, and cultural background to the dancers.

We are so proud of the dancers and their hard work this year! They placed 4th in the Junior category, and also received both the choral award and costume award in their category. The costume, purchased from Greece, is from the village of Neohorouda in Macedonia and has been proudly worn by 2 of our older groups.

Final round:

To Mellon - Final Round - FDF 2024

Aside from our annual folk dance festival, our groups also have the opportunity to perform at other community events, such as the Greek Independence Day celebration, our Cathedral Greek food festival, as well as other local food festivals and fundraising events. We look forward to the future with this wonderful group of kids and thank the families for their dedication in bringing them and helping keep our culture alive and well for this future generation!



Our middle school/high school group, Revmata, performed two suites at FDF 2024 this year. For their semi-final round, they danced and sang songs from Pogoni, Epirus, a region Revmata has explored before. For their final round, they danced and sang songs from a new region, Aspropirgos, West Attica. For the latter round, most of the songs were sung in Arvanitika, which is a language spoken by the Arvanites of Greece and a dialect of Albanian. The group sang both acapela and with live music accompaniment that was provided by several local and out of state musicians. A lot of research was done to plan and perform these suites at FDF, where directors contacted cultural ministries in Greece, expert judges as well as several language specialists to ensure an accurate depiction of the dialect and representation of the music, which was passed along to our selected musicians. Revmata ended up being awarded 4th place medals in their category, Intermediate. We are proud of the dancers' passion and hard work and the recognition received for their efforts.

The directors and parents of female dancers also worked to make the female Aspropirgos costumes, and the colorful and gold embroidery depicted in the photos was hand embroidered by the moms and grandmothers of the dancers, as were the accessories (i.e. head pieces, jewelry, bow, etc.). The boys' foustanelles were made in Greece by an expert in traditional Greek costumes based in Athens. As a result of this hard work, Revmata was awarded the first place costume award for both the male and female Aspropirgos costumes in the Intermediate category.

The male Aspropirgos foustanela costume was worn during formal occasions and celebrations. It consists of the traditional 400 pleat foustanela, which represents the liberation of Greece from the years of Ottoman rule. On top of the white dress shirt, there is a black wool vest and sash around the waist. Black wool boot covers are placed over the stretchy white



underskirt pants and the traditional red fesi (hat) with black tassel (which is said to represent Jesus Christ's blood and tears and a symbol of our religion amongst the Turkish occupation) complete the costume.

The female costume is the bridal and formal costume of the Aspropirgos, West Attica, region and is a beautiful portrayal of both traditional Arvanitika and Hellenic elements. The white colorful head scarf is worn in various parts of both the Attika and Peloponnesian regions. Underneath the headscarf is the bridal crown, which was embellished with various gems and beadwork, and finished off with flouria (gold coins) which was part of the bride's "prika" or dowry. On her dress, the additional elements of the prika are also proudly displayed with elaborate gold coin necklaces embellished with more gems, which lay top of the very unique and characteristic gold bow "bib" of the Aspropirgos bridal dress which is made of strips of gold silk material with many more flouria sewn on and an additional ornamental gold brooch with a variety of colorful gems. On top of the white undershirt and skirt, there are the dark red velvet apron and jacket, both of which used to be heavily embroidered by skilled embroiderers in the village or even the family members, though some jackets and aprons had less embroidery, depending on the financial situation and/or skill of the

family. The jacket consists of gold embroidery down the sleeves with various geometric as well as floral and scroll patterns. The apron can be also embroidered with gold embroidery floss to match the jacket or include the more colorful floral embroidery patterns to match the colorful headscarf and gems throughout. The apron is finished off with the initials of each bride which are also embroidered in gold. The final piece is the white wool sigouna (or long vest), which consists of black and gold embroidered trim around the border to match the gold embroidery throughout. The moms and friends of the female dancers in our groups creatively designed the patterns and embroidered the apron and jackets, referencing traditional photos but adding their own individual style, just like in the village.

Rvmata consists of dancers in grade levels 8-11, and many of these dancers have been dancing together for several years and have formed strong friendships and connections, which we believe is the biggest reward of all. Revmata is directed by Eleni Taptelis, Katerina Sarikakis, Christos Karahalios, Stelios Kyriacou and Kosta Lyberopoulos. If you or your child (grandchild, etc.) are interested in joining Revmata, please contact Eleni Taptelis (helentaptelis@gmail.com) or Katerina Sarikakis (katerina.sarikakis@gmail.com).

Spithes is the Cathedral's oldest dance group and is directed by Irene Kyriacou, Lea Lyberopoulos and Lea Papavasiliou. Spithes translates to "sparks", which was a loving nickname for several of the dancers by their grandfather, Irene and Lea's dad, Vlas Fousekis. The group was formed nearly 17 years ago, with several of the original members still dancing today. The current ages of the dancers are 16-22 years old. At this year's annual Metropolis Folk Dance Festival (FDF), Spithes was awarded 3rd place medal in the Senior category.

Because of their longevity, Spithes has learned and performed songs and dances from all over Greece - Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus, Thessaly, Crete, Kalymnos, and Naxos. Each area has its own distinct style of music, songs, and dances, in addition to customs and traditions. One of the unique challenges for directors is finding the right material to teach their dancers. Directors are always looking for new and unique dances that haven't been presented to the folk dance festival community at FDF. Through online research, documentaries, video and music compilations of villagers performing songs and dances, working with experts from all over the world to gain additional knowledge and understanding, as well as obtaining additional supporting materials, the research process is intensive.

At this year's FDF, Spithes performed their semi-final round of dances from the Sarakatsan of Epirus, which they performed last year as well, the first time these dances have been presented at FDF. The directors spent over a year immersing themselves in the culture, traditions, costumes, music, songs, dialect, and so much more, learning all about these nomadic people. The costumes, which have never been presented, were made for the group in Greece. The women's costume, 10 pieces of heavy, embroidered, pleated, and knit pieces, were showcased. The Sarakatsan people lived in the mountains, where temperatures are colder, and therefore, thick, woolen, heavy layers of clothing were needed to stay warm. These beautiful costumes, adorned with heavy silver jewelry, won the costume award last year. Their entire performance was sung acapella. The group was fortunate enough to have worked with a famous Sarakatsan singer, who assisted the group and directors with the traditional singing style and dialect of the Sarakatsan people. Spithes poured their hearts out on the stage and impressed the audience with their powerful singing and dancing. After the group's performances last year, which were awarded the Sweepstake award, FDF's highest honor, which means they had the highest cumulative score out of the 40+ groups in their division, Spithes was invited to perform at the annual Sarakatsani celebration in Giftokambo.

Semi-final round:

Spithes - Semi-Final Round - FDF 2024

Spithes' final round performance was a family gathering, including grandparents and was made even more special by having our very own Father Stephen offering his blessing as part of the start of the suite. The dances presented were



Spithes

from the upper Pogoni region, the Riza villages of Epirus. Pogoni is the heart and soul of Epirotian music and dance. Spithes reenacted the custom of the Dolia, where villagers would gather to air their grievances and then celebrate with a panigiri where everyone would sing, dance and feast. The original form of dancing was done acapella, before evolving with musical accompaniment. Therefore the group sang most of their songs acapella, before transitioning to the singing with musical accompaniment. The directors and dancers, were fortunate to work with several experts and judges, including a well known dancer and researcher from Greece, who is in the process of compiling a book for this area, which he has been studying his whole life.

Both the women's and men's Pogoni costumes were made in Greece for our group this year. Due to the cold in the mountainous terrain these people lived in, the costumes were made with heavy wool. The women's costumes also had heavy brocade pieces, which were embroidered. In addition, jewelry adorned the vest and jackets and apron. The women's costume has a very distinctive headpiece, which must be wrapped in a certain manner with a red stripe showing in the front and back of the head, which represents the woman's marital status. Scarves hanging on the side of the women's belt also were a sign of marital status.

Final round:

Spithes - Final Round - FDF 2024

We are so proud of the hard work of all our dancers. They have grown and matured before our eyes, embracing their culture and faith. We thank them and their families for their commitment and dedication to our group and program and look forward to what the future holds!

HIGHLIGHTS • FDF 2024



GENERAL ANNUNCIATION DANCE PROGRAM INFORMATION

Annunciation Cathedral's Dance Program is the largest youth ministry in the parish, with dancers from ages 5 and up learning dances and songs from all regions of Greece. We currently have 5 dance groups and are always happy to have more youth join. The dance groups plan to resume weekly practices after Easter until June, when the program will break for the summer, and will continue practices in late August. Be on the lookout for a future article with more details on practice dates, days and times! Interested in joining? Please contact the directors of each dance group to learn more or come join one of our practices after church to try the program out!

If you would like to support the Annunciation Dance Program, please click on the below link to make a monetary donation or reach out to any of the directors to inquire about how you can help. Monetary donations help fund musicians, costumes, workshops, props, supplies, and other related expenses.

SUPPORT THE ANNUNCIATION DANCE PROGRAM:

<https://annunciation-cathedral-dance-groups.square.site/#RvDxrS>

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*Contratulations - We are so proud of you
and looking forward to next year!*

