

In the Spotlight: Gypsy George - Musician

Gypsy George Mihalopoulos plays a number of instruments and is a songwriter and producer, but an interview will begin with his name. Does he share genes with that colorful ethnic group known for musical brilliance, especially with a violin, or did Ellis Island do a number on his ancestor?

TNH: Why Gypsy?

GGM: It began a few years ago with my insatiable desire to randomly hop in the car – without a map – and road trip. Leaving for days on end, I'd travel the depths of America. After some time, I received the nickname 'Gypsy George.' Somehow, it stuck (plus, it's a lot less of a mouthful than Mihalopoulos). This occurred during a period in my life where I was trying to figure out if I was 'Greek' or 'American.' I am fluent in the Greek language and culture, yet I grew up in America. For the longest time, I would view myself as a Greek who happened to live in America. It wasn't until these random road trips that I began to discover the true culture of America. Having been greatly influenced by the Blues, I would travel up and down every nook and cranny of the Mississippi River visiting the same places as Leadbelly and Muddy Waters had before me. I began to see a connection between this version of America and myself. It was through these trips that I discovered that I am truly a Greek-American, fifty-fifty, a combination of BOTH cultures. These experiences culminated musically in the formation of Gypsy George & the Open Road Love Affair. The band consists of myself on multiple instruments combined with a revolving door of band members, who live all over the country. My motto is, 'if ya played with me once, you are a lifetime member!'

TNH: What first drew you to music?

GGM: Coming from a HUGE Greek family, there are two things one has to be great at doing: cooking & music. Music has been around me since child-



Gypsy George is as Greek and American as you are. He just moves around alot, and the band he leads are not gypsies.

hood. Growing up, my parents would throw these get-togethers with all their Greek friends. It would begin with a homemade dinner – enough to feed the Cyclades – followed by an improvised jam session. My father, who is a fantastic singer and musician in his own right, would usually lead the group. It was here that I first began playing music in earnest. I would sit in with my cheap, beginner's guitar playing the three chords I knew – D, G & C. Before everyone thinks that we were playing the new hits from Dalaras & Ploutarchos – think again. The music was a mixture of Greek artists such as Savopoulos, Theodorakis, Pouloupoulos and American artists such as Bob Dylan, CCR & R.E.M.

TNH: How is the response to

your new album so far? (Is it your first?)

GGM: So far, so good. Technically, this is my third album ('Door County Nights' & 'Joe's Beginning' are the other ones). The new record, entitled 'Loneliest Man In New York,' is probably my proudest recorded work to date. I've been describing it as the Beach Boys 'Pet Sounds' meets Bob Dylan's 'Blood On The Tracks' meets Dionysis Savopoulos' 'To Perivoli Tou Trelou' sprinkled with some bluegrass. I spent a lot of time crafting the sounds and arrangements for this record to really develop an emotional, sonic arch of gain and loss within the context of feeling like the only person in a city of millions. Although I have been getting a lot of positive response, I feel it has been trying to really get signifi-

cant exposure to the work. In this day of DIY Music (do it yourself), it is progressively getting more and more difficult to get heard. With that, you can obtain a copy at gypsygeorge.bandcamp.com (pay what ya like) or the perennial iTunes (\$9.99)!

TNH: How do you find the Brooklyn music scene? Has it been fruitful for you?

GGM: I LOVE the Brooklyn music scene, particularly where I live in South Slope. Everyone always clamors about Williamsburg. However, the REAL music scene is in the South Slope based simply on the gravity of musicians and artists who live in close proximity. I find being immersed in all this talent has really inspired my own work in a way that I really haven't experienced in all my travels. I am especially humbled and appreciative that I can spend everyday surrounded by such wonderful people.

TNH: As a California Greek, have you noticed any differences in the East Coast Greek American culture?

GGM: Actually, my background as a 'Californian Greek' is somewhat of a misnomer. True, I was born in Hollywood, CA. However, I've always considered myself a Chicagoan over a Californian. My father came over from Greece on the boat (yes folks!) when he was 10 or 11 years old. His family wound up in the Northside of Chicago (where a lot of my extended family resides present-day). When mom was pregnant with me, my parents decided to move to Los Angeles. After I was born, we moved back to Chicago for a few years, then back to Los Angeles. While living in Los Angeles, I was raised purely Chicago: Bulls, Bears, Cubs, 'Hawks'. I moved back to Chicago to attend Northwestern University. After I graduated, I moved back to L.A. for a stint, moved to Greece for a little bit, went back to LA-LA land, then eventually wound up in Brooklyn (starting to see the 'Gypsy' motif?)

TNH: What are some areas/projects you'd like to work on in the future?

GGM: I am spending time promoting the new record, it is available for download, but I will be releasing a limited edition box set exclusively sold at Roots Café. These will be individually numbered, signed and will feature art pieces by some of South Slope's finest artists. After that, I will be releasing a vinyl version of the record. I will continue to play shows throughout the New York area (upcoming @ Southpaw, Saturday July 9th) with my band Gypsy George & the Open Road Love Affair. There are also plans to do some 'mini tours' throughout the Northeast and Midwest. Furthermore, I am currently producing and recording a few artists as well as mastering albums. There is, finally, a plan for a follow-up record, which will be coming out early next year. In early 2012, I will have my first, full-length art show @ Roots Café featuring my original drawings, paintings and photographs. Lastly, my novella, 'Burning of the Fragile Fire,' is currently published online, and I am currently working on a new novel as well as a collection of poetry.

TNH: Share with us some words of wisdom.

GGM: There is no resistance to your existence, just the shadows that you create. Oh, and don't forget an extra pair of underwear. See ya' on the open road! – gypsy george.

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