



The Hellenic Society Prometheas

Newsletter 32

May 2004

Mark your calendar

“Tribute to Greece and to the Athens 2004 Olympics”

Prometheas, with the support of the Greek Ministry of Culture, is organizing a concert of classical and contemporary music with the theme “**Tribute to Greece and to the Athens 2004 Olympics**”. The event will take place on Sunday, May 23, 2004 at 7:30 pm at the prestigious Lisner Auditorium of the George Washington University. It will be a world premiere of a concert to be conducted by the renowned composer **Dinos Constantinides**, Boyd Professor of composition at the Louisiana State University and Music Director of the Louisiana Symphonietta. A 14-member ensemble from Baton Rouge, Louisiana and the Greek mezzosoprano **Angelica Kathariou** will perform (see the [attached flyer](#)). A brief video presentation about the Olympics will precede the musical part.

THE GREEK ARCHITECTURE OF WASHINGTON - SMITHSONIAN

Washington's Glorious Architecture: The classical Greek and Roman architecture of the monuments of Washington, the U.S. Capitol, Union Station, National Gallery of Art, Ronald Reagan Building . . .

Walking Field Trip on the Mall

SMITHSONIAN RESIDENT ASSOCIATES PROGRAM

<http://residentassociates.org/com/washington.asp>

April 20 - May 25, 12 noon

Request tickets online or call (202) 357- 3030, weekdays 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Classical is Washington's predominant style. Columns, arches, and domes were major features of the city's earliest buildings and monuments, and they are prominent architectural elements in the latest additions to the city, such as the new Ronald Reagan Building. This course traces the surprisingly resilient history of the classical tradition in Washington, from its selection for the earliest Federal architecture through its cyclical rise and fall from favor, each time transformed in new ways to suit the tastes, politics, and symbolic needs of changing times.

Metropolitan Museum of Art holds Byzantium exhibition (March 23 - July 4)

Displays feature rare icons and manuscripts spanning three centuries

By Richard Pyle - The Associated Press

New York - The Metropolitan Museum of Art has mounted its third exhibition on Byzantium in 27 years, presenting icons, manuscripts and other works from the final three centuries of a religious empire whose art and culture influenced the world for more than a millennium.

“Byzantium, Faith and Power, 1261-1557,” features some 350 Orthodox Christian masterpieces gathered from 30 countries, many of them never before shown outside the churches and monasteries that own them.

Philippe de Montebello, director of the Met, said the exhibition covers the “great artistic flowering” of Byzantium after Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos’ 1261 reconquest of Constantinople from crusaders who had sacked it in 1204, and “the subsequent appropriation of this culture by rival claimants to power.”

The capital of the eastern Roman Empire was seized by the Ottomans in 1453, but its Greek-based culture and art endured for another century, not only spreading the Orthodox gospel but influencing Islam and other cultures.

As the successor to previous Met exhibits in 1977 and 1997, the latest presentation of Byzantine art “will enhance public appreciation of the exceptional artistic accomplishments of an era too often considered primarily in terms of political decline,” de Montebello said at a preview Monday.

“When (Edward) Gibbon described the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, he set an image of the last centuries... as one of failure and sadness, and I hope this exhibition will make people understand the optimism with which the empire regained its capital in 1261 and the cultural exuberance that went with that optimism,” said Helen Evans, curator of the exhibit.

The items include more than 40 icons, manuscripts and liturgical treasures including from a sixth-century monastic outpost of Christianity on the purported Biblical site where Moses witnessed the Burning Bush.

Stunning both in beauty and preservation, the collection includes many handwritten and illustrated manuscripts dating from the 13th and 14th centuries, textiles, painted icons that survived or postdate the iconoclasm (726-843) that saw the destruction of images as objects of veneration, and other relics.

A centerpiece is the “Virgin Pafsolype with Feast Scenes and Crucifixion with Prophets,” a large, painted wood icon from the late 14th century, described as a “powerful evocation of Christ as the savior of mankind,” on loan from the Ecumenical Patriarchate located in Istanbul.

Other noteworthy items include a 13th-14th century copper chandelier made of 1,100 pieces, loaned by a Munich museum, and a 20-centimeter (8-inch)-diameter mosaic of St George slaying the dragon, from the Louvre.

The exhibition, sponsored by Greece's Alpha Bank and three foundations, will run from March 23 through July 4. Along with a 3-kilogram (7-pound) catalog, the museum published a 96-page photographic essay book on St. Catherine's Monastery.

Misc Articles of Interest

In Athens, Work Before Play

Post-Olympics Travelers Will Be Games' Biggest Winners

By Cindy Loose

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sunday, April 18, 2004; Page P01

Most of the news of Greece's preparations for the Summer Olympics is by now drearily familiar: Cranes still tower over unfinished projects; transportation will likely be inadequate for the expected 5 million spectators and 10,000 competitors; security concerns have contributed to depressed ticket sales, at least in the United States.

But one glance out my hotel window this month portends another way of looking at the situation: Athens will provide a stellar backdrop for the Games, scheduled Aug. 13-29. From the Hilton and nearly every street I walk, there is a view of the Acropolis and the Parthenon, both of which are more imposing and beautiful than millions of pictures have ever portrayed. Low-rise buildings, many glimmering white in the Mediterranean sunshine, climb the mountainsides. Tall, graceful columns and other ancient ruins dot the city, which spreads to a deep blue sea where sailboats, yachts and cruise ships bob in view of seaside restaurants.

I can't guarantee a stress-free experience for those who travel to Greece for the Games. But those watching from the comfort of their homes will be entranced, if not by the Games then at least by the scenes surrounding them.

Should the media coverage entice you to plan a trip to Athens after the Olympics, you'll arrive to find a city transformed, where several years and billions of dollars have been spent improving infrastructure and tourist attractions.

The government alone has spent as much as \$20 billion on public works programs and on sprucing up Athens and other areas of Greece, including four Olympic venues outside Athens. Private enterprise has joined the investment craze, with major hotels spending an estimated \$700 million. Fully 90 percent of hotels in Athens have been recently renovated and upgraded, says Dimitris Gemelos, a New York-based spokesman for the Greek Embassy. "All over Greece, the government and private companies have been remaking the nation," he says. The evidence during a week-long trip was everywhere.

The Greeks have been widely criticized for getting a slow start on preparing for the Olympics, and doubts about what will be finished in time abound. But in Washington, embassy spokesman Achilles Paparsenos predicts an outstanding show.

"We know a lot is at stake. This represents a link between the ancient and modern world, and we're going to show our best face."

That best face is on display the minute an overseas traveler arrives at the airport, with its new glass-and-marble terminal. The Athens International Airport can handle 600 flights a day, 16 million passengers a year.

The new tram wasn't completed, and I was confused by the bus system, so I have to shell out about \$60 for a cab ride. On the other hand, the notorious congestion on the road to Athens is gone -- we breeze along a new highway and don't hit gridlock until we turn onto downtown streets a mile or so from our hotel.

In a jet-lagged fog, I pull open the curtain of my hotel and am jolted by an unexpected view of the Acropolis and Parthenon -- scaffolding that has been up for years is already starting to come down.

Inspired by the sight, I head to the subway, whose one old line has been fortified with several new lines and sparkling-new subway stations that are a little like mini-convention centers. In the Syntagma station, a cheese company has set up a convention-style temporary exhibit, and a giant flat-screen television broadcasts a show about Greek islands. Before going down the escalator to the train platforms, I spend half an hour looking in glass cases at the bronze, marble and clay antiquities unearthed at this spot during construction.

Nearly anywhere you dig in Athens, you find ancient treasures, Paparsenos has told me. Rather than move the finds to one of the country's dozens of museums, officials decided to display what they found when digging subway stations at the stations themselves. The best displays are at the Syntagma, Akropoli, Monastiraki and Panepistimio stations.

Upon exiting the subway at the Acropolis stop, I come upon perhaps the best improvement in Athens -- the so-called Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens. The project has linked major sites with pedestrian walkways that meander past the Parthenon, Hadrian's Arch, Panathenaic Stadium, Temple of Zeus, Kerameikos cemetery and other major cultural sites.

To beautify the area, the government has ordered the dismantlement of nearly 10,000 billboards. Along the route, you can stop at dozens of restaurants, many with outdoor cafes. At the base of the Acropolis, the new Acropolis Museum is slated to open in time for the Olympics, and if Britain ever gets a conscience and returns to Greece the Elgin Marbles, they will eventually be displayed there.

Entire neighborhoods in Athens have been rehabilitated: An area called Gazi, where the old gasworks plants stood, has been turned into a mecca of restaurants and nightclubs. A rundown working-class neighborhood called Psirri is now sparkling with shops and galleries.

Outside Athens, every museum I visit around the Peloponnese and Delphi areas is closed for renovation, but due to open for the Olympics.

The ancient sites Panathinaiko and Marathon will be used during the modern games. New venues have been built with an eye toward permanent use. For instance, the new Olympic Rowing and Canoeing-Kayaking Centre in Attica will be used after the Games as a training center for teams from around the world. The Olympic Weightlifting Hall was given great acoustics and an amphitheater shape so it can be used post-Olympics for cultural events. Ditto for the new center for gymnastics and table tennis.

The new Faliro Olympic Complex, one of the largest urban redevelopment projects in Europe, sits along the Athens coast. The venue includes a new seafront esplanade that will be open long after the Olympics are gone. And outside Athens, the Olympic Sailing Centre will, after the Games, welcome tourists and residents for a variety of water sports. Both the Olympic Equestrian Centre and the Olympic Shooting Centre are also permanent additions. The old airport outside Athens is being turned into a 21-square-mile park. Nearly everything you see during the Olympics will remain, enriching the cultural and sports landscape for generations to come.

An estimated 12,000 Americans will attend the Summer Games this year, compared with the 18,000 who went to Sydney four years ago. On the one hand, this means that plenty of tickets remain available.

The usual routine is that you order what you want and find out about 15 days later if you succeeded, says Bonnie Keilbach, an Olympic specialist for Cartan Tours, the official Olympic sales outlet in the United States. As of press time, the only events known to be sold out were the swimming finals and the cheapest category of tickets for the opening and closing ceremonies.

On the other hand, availability remains so good for two reasons: the weakness of the dollar and, even more critical, concerns about security, says Don Williams, vice president of California-based Cartan Tours.

Repeatedly as I traveled around Greece, ordinary Greek citizens would ask, concern on their faces, "Do you think there will be terrorism during the Games?" Of course I had no better guess than they did. All that is clear is that herculean attempts are being made to prevent it.

Greece, a country of nearly 11 million, is spending about a billion dollars on security for the Games -- triple what Sydney spent. Even that will be supplemented: Last month, Greek officials asked NATO to provide aerial and sea surveillance. A seven-nation advisory group, including the United States, Great Britain, Israel, Australia, France, Germany and Spain, has been working with Greek experts. An operation called "Hercules Shield" has brought together U.S. and Greek military members for training exercises.

More than 50,000 soldiers and police will be on duty, along with 1,400 security cameras. Olympic venues and many other sites will be no-fly zones during the Games. Surveillance aircraft, a blimp and helicopters are expected to be searching the skies. "It's a challenge to find the balance between safety and enjoyment," says Paparsenos. "We want visitors to feel confidence, but not feel like they are in a police state."

Cindy Loose will be online to discuss this story Monday at 2 p.m. during the Travel section's regular weekly chat on www.washingtonpost.com.

Details: Athens

GETTING THERE: During the Olympics, the lowest ticket from Washington to Athens I found on online booking sites was about \$1,200 round trip. For my trip this month, I found a sale price of \$460 on KLM. For June, prices are in the \$1,000 range, dropping to about \$800 in the fall.

OLYMPICS: There are two official ticket outlets for the Summer Games. California-based Cartan Tours (800-360-2004, www.cartan.com) sells individual event tickets and packages; New Jersey's CoSport (877-457-4647, www.cosport.com) offers packages only.

Packages that include airfare, accommodations, some meals, ground transportation and tickets are still available. Cartan's least expensive package is a six-night deal, including room, airfare from New York to Athens, airport transfers and two meals a day, from \$6,789 per person double. CoSport's cheapest package of \$5,464 per person double includes five nights' hotel, breakfast, event tickets and airport transfers. CoSport's packages can be purchased through travel agents. Some packages are selling out quickly.

Most hotels in Athens are already booked or are being held by tour operators. Two agencies in Greece are arranging house rentals during the Games: Alpha Hospitality (011-30-210-327-7400) and Greek Hospitality (011-30-210-327-7403).

U.S. and Greek travel agents and tour operators can help arrange accommodations. Remember that Olympic events are being staged in four areas outside Athens, where accommodations could be easier to find. You can find Greek-based travel agencies through email links at www.hatta.gr and U.S. tour agents at www.astanet.com. The Greek National Tourism Organization (see below) also has a list of tour companies.

INFORMATION: Greek National Tourism Organization, 212-421-5777, www.gnto.gr or www.greektourism.com. The organization also operates a separate site for accommodations: www.greekhotel.com. **Athens 2004** has a comprehensive site at www.athens2004.com. For the **U.S. Olympic Committee/Training Center**: 719-866-4500, www.olympic-usa.org.

-- Cindy Loose

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Beholding Byzantium

NY Times, April 3, 2004

The galleries of a major exhibition like "Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are nearly always filled with formulaic poses. One viewer clasps his hands behind his back, which allows him to lean in closer to the objects

without alarming the guards. One viewer lets her head settle back between her shoulder blades as though looking up in a stand of redwoods, while another peers intently from the side of a painted panel, as if hoping to see between its layers. Then there are the hordes of the disembodied, wearing headphones, staggering limply from one numbered object to the next, as if the voices they were hearing were more than curatorial.

How viewers move through the galleries seems especially striking at "Byzantium" because the exhibition itself abounds in symbolic poses. The 300 years represented in "Byzantium" capture a spiritual and artistic impulse radiating outward from Constantinople, which, after 1261, was again the center of the Orthodox Church. That impulse echoes in image after image from across the Byzantine world. Throughout the galleries, iconic Virgins gesture toward the infants they hold in their arms. The gestures vary, but each specific pose expresses a different state of being, a different projection of authority and grace. It's as though one could become a different person by choosing to point with the left hand rather than the right.

And there, in front of a 14th-century icon, stands a young woman — a visitor — trying out the open-handed gesture that Mary uses to point to her son. As the young woman adopts that posture her head tilts slightly to mirror the tilt of the Virgin's head. We are so used to the word "iconic" that we forget how forceful the stylization of actual icons can be. But it isn't merely the formality of the poses that makes these images iconic. It's their emotional radiance, the astonishing difference that a hand held this way — or that — can make.

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