

CYPRECO REVIVED THE CENTURIES-OLD LACE MAKING TRADITION OF THE CYPRIOT VILLAGE OF LEFKARA

The centuries-old lace making tradition of the village of Lefkara was revived during a successful folk arts program presented by CYPRECO Of America, Inc., on March 7th at the Stathakion Cultural Center in Astoria, New York. The well attended event which was offered with free admission as a public service included guests from the Greek and Greek Cypriot American community, as well as members from the general audience of all ages and it featured the screening of an original documentary which examined and highlighted the historical development of this craft, the unique designs and techniques.

Lefkara lace, perhaps the best known Cypriot traditional embroidery, enjoys worldwide reputation and the documentary showcased step by step how this was achieved. Furthermore, the film highlighted how this unique craft is made featuring the last remaining women embroiders, how the craft evolved through the ages having gone through changes brought about by the history of the island and how it was passed on from one generation to the next. In older times, embroidering these unique laces was a vital part of the everyday life of all women in the village of Lefkara. Starting at a very young age, girls would gather with their mothers and grandmothers in the small narrow streets and in their courtyards spending endless hours embroidering the Lefkara lace. It is a craft that expresses their cultural heritage which evolved over time in response to their environment and this is evident from the plethora of designs and motifs found in this needlework which also have very distinct local names such as “potamos” (river), “klonoto” (branch-like), “arachnoti” (spider-like), among many others. The Lefkara embroidery is characterized by a geometric pattern with its structure based on the way it is embroidered on the fabric. Basically, it is comprised by the upper-filled and the cut-work designs which always follow one another. The upper-filled designs (usually triangles) are embroidered on the fabric, while the cut-work designs create the hole-points of the embroidery.

In the film there is also documented reference and information relating to the first traders of the Lefkara lace, the first being a woman in 1903 and how much these traders contributed in making these laces famous worldwide.

Apart from the documentary there was also an exhibition of embroideries from private collections brought in by members of the Greek Cypriot organization, Enosis Lefkariton of America, Inc., showcasing a variety of exquisite pieces and designs, in their majority old family heirlooms. There was also a live demonstration of the craft by Mrs. Maroulla Ioannidou who comes from Lefkara and who learned this needlework from her mother.

The event was addressed by the President of CYPRECO, Elena Maroulleti, the President of the Enosis Lefkariton of America, John Papas and the President of the Federation of Hellenic Societies of New York, Elias Tsekerides.

In her brief remarks Ms. Maroulleti thanked everyone in attendance, the Enosis Lefkariton of America for their participation and support, all guests from Lefkara who brought their embroideries, the sponsors of the event and the Federation of Hellenic Societies for placing the event under their auspices, acknowledging that the event was also part of the Federation’s “March Cultural Month” which was established to coincide with the festivities of the anniversary of March 25, 1821, Greek Independence Day. This new production, she stressed “is part of our ongoing commitment of bringing to our audience unique programs which highlight and promote different aspects of our unique heritage, history, folklore and culture”. In stressing the importance of this event, Ms. Maroulleti also noted that, “these exquisite embroideries which demand exceptional talent and devotion to make highlight techniques which were on passed from one generation to the next. They enjoy worldwide fame and recognition and are part of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Element Collection”.

The President of Enosis Lefkariton, John Papas conveyed his most sincere thanks and congratulated CYPRECO and Ms. Maroulleti for their initiative to promote the village of Lefkara and their unique embroideries to their wide audience and also shared the good news that this dying craft is now being revived in Lefkara after the recent initiative of the local authorities of the village to include the teaching of the craft in their grammar school curriculum. Referring to the documentary he said that it truly captured the “true” essence of the Lefkara needlework and at the same time it was very moving because it brought back very unique memories from his village. Mr. Papas also noted that apart from the embroideries, the people of Lefkara are also famed for producing exquisite silverware with unique designs, for their traditional food dish “Lefkaritikos Tavvas” which is one of the most famous dishes all over Cyprus and for the “Lefkara delights”. In concluding Mr. Papas also presented Elena Maroulleti with an honorary plaque on behalf of his organization and members in recognition of “her dedication and service to promoting Lefkara and Cypriot culture”.

Elias Tsekerides, President of the Greek Federation also congratulated CYPRECO and Ms. Maroulleti for this “new successful folk arts production” and stressed that all of CYRECO’s productions are of exceptional importance and “they help us further discover so many different aspects of the rich heritage and culture of Cyprus”. The Federation he further stressed is very proud to host such important programs at the cultural center of the Stathakion and will continue to support CYPRECO because all of its programs “are simply amazing, very informative and they truly serve their cultural purpose”

This family oriented program which also brought together many people who come from the village of Lefkara, was indeed very educational and informative but also very moving as attested by all in attendance. The highlight of the event was the live demonstration of the Lefkara needlework by Ms. Maroulla Ioannidou and the exhibition of the embroideries. People were thrilled to see Ms. Ioannidou embroider and further explain the unique techniques of this craft and furthermore for having the opportunity to speak directly with the guests from Lefkara who brought embroideries and who explained to them with much pride how long each piece took to be made, the meaning of the designs and the motifs. Of exceptional interest was the large table cloth brought in by Mr. John Papas which featured a large variety of the designs and motifs used in the Lefkara lace embroideries and a beautiful two piece dress brought in by another member of the Enosis Lefkariton.

CYPRECO Of America, Inc., is an established non-profit Queens-based 501 (c) 3 cultural organization with an ongoing vibrant presence in New York’s cultural scene since 1979. For 35 years CYPRECO promotes with great devotion and commitment the rich heritage, history, folklore and culture of Cyprus and Greece. CYPRECO is also a co-sponsor of the highly rated bilingual radio show AKTINA FM on WNYE 91.5FM in New York. For more information visit, www.cyprecoofamerica.com.