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Hi John-

Here are the CD reviews for the January 2011 issue. I'll be by your office later today to give you the CD covers for scanning. Sending file as back up. Talk soon,
Perri

Kiosk Wars: The Big Guns Battle for Minimarket Shelf Space

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The music industry has gone through such dramatic changes in the past twenty years, that it's hard to keep track of what's happening with the record companies at any given moment. Vinyl records, although widely accepted by audiophiles as the most satisfying way to hear recorded music, is for collectors and DJs only. CDs are still the storage medium being most widely manufactured and distributed, however, they are becoming more technologically passé on a daily basis. Downloading digital music off of the Internet in MP3 and other forms is the current youth rage, but kids seem to download scads of stuff on a whim, often times an artist's entire oeuvre in one fell swoop, and then forget to listen to it. The MySpace phenomenon on the web has made any band's music, I mean *any* band's music, from Micronesian punk rock goofball stuff to selected arias from monumental Italian opera stars, available to download into your computer's hard disk in seconds.

As the age of global stadium stars has dwindled down to a mere handful of selected acts: Rolling Stones, Madonna, U2, AC/DC, Metallica etc, so too has the Greek music scene splintered into a few revered giants and hordes of mewling newbies. Popular bouzoukia singers, who only ten years ago, needed only to release a CD and have guaranteed gold and platinum sales with their work are now economically stifled because so few people actually set foot in a record store anymore. Therefore, marketing has become the magic word in the music business, and the key, talismanic word to the marketing departments these days is periptero (kiosk).

Greece, and especially Athens, practically lives off of the corner kiosks, which are omnipresent in the city. I was shocked some months ago to see the brand, spanking new Elena Paparizou CD being sold as an insert with a popular Sunday newspaper. Shortly afterwards, with the success of Paparizou's marketing strategy, all the big pop/bouzoukia names followed suit with their new releases. Now it is common to see the new Despina Vandi, Tamta, or, I swear it's true, Iron Maiden CD vying for space on the tiny kiosk shelves next to boxes of fruit flavored chewing gum, Bar-B-Que style potato chips, packs of Marlboro cigarettes and various and sundry gentlemen's magazines. This article contains reviews of two of the new kiosk giants, Peggy Zina and Yiannis Ploutarhos, along with the new releases from popular club singer Nikos Makropoulos and hip-hop/rap stars, Goin' Through.

Nikos Makropoulos

Diskoli Nikta (Difficult Night)

2010 Legend Records

Nikos Makropoulos gives the listener a textbook example of the current Greek bouzoukia style and musical identity scene with this outstanding, beautifully recorded CD. Textural electric guitars and digital keyboards are mixed with the standard bouzoukia-band instruments and traditional arrangements in most of the album's tracks. The obligatory quasi-western pop-sound has been tastefully placed into the music for the benefit of the tourist nightclubbers and twenty-something party crowd who comprise the majority of the nightclub throng.

Per usual, in the Greek song repertoire, the themes of personal loss, regret and anxiety over romantic relationships are contrasted against very danceable Mediterranean and Balkan rhythmic patterns as are evidenced in the songs "S'agisa/Hathika" (I Loved You/I Lost You) and "Oute Yia Asteio" (Not Even as a Joke).

The more psychologically heavy, lyrical laments such as "Enthymia," (Souvenir) and "Kyrios, se Gnorisa" (Sir, I've Met You) incorporate slower, more leaden time signatures in the pieces to create semi-noire atmospheric ballads. More lively tracks like the title song "Diskoli Nikta" (Difficult Night) and "Apopse Horizo" (Tonight I'm Leaving) nicely balance out the album from its mostly mid-tempo song selection.

As stated before, this is archetypal bouzoukia music- its almost Charles Baudelaire-style libretto is serious as a heart-attack but is beautifully woven around pointillistic bouzouki playing, confident band musicianship, and strong backbeat rhythm.

John Ploutarhos

Prosopika Dedomena (Personal Information)

2010 EMI-Minos Records

John Ploutarhos is one of the truly colossal names in the Greek bouzoukia circuit. He's something on the order of the Greek Michael Bolton for frustrated, middle-aged women. While guys like Sakis Rouvas and Kostas Martakis pull in the teeny-boppers to the clubs by the busload, Ploutarhos has his fan base set dead-center in the 35-45 year old house wife demographic. They are his army, and they love him like no other.

To be sure, he is a first rate love song crooner, with seasoned good looks and a vocal confidence which is genuinely impressive to hear. Every year, he appears in the top bouzoukia

clubs in Athens and Thessaloniki. He is so respected and revered by the people that when he and his wife announced this year that they'd had their fifth child together, it was the top story on the TV celebrity news programs for days.

Prosopika Dedomena is a CD written and recorded in the classic Plutarhos style: soaring vocals, confessional libretto- string sections and orchestral backing are present on many tracks. There are no great departures from his standard mode of singing, song-theme selection or musical arrangements on the album. Among the club and discotheque crowd, Plutarhos is known as something of a "crier" because his songs often have a theme of self-accusation for troubled romances or lost loves.

He is at his best with full orchestral arrangements, as evidenced in the song, "To Hastouki tis Agapis," (The Slap of Love), but is also confident in more progressive, power-pop style arrangements such as "Eisai Omorfi," (You are Beautiful) and "Iparho yia Sena," (I Live for You).

Goin' Through

Joker

2010 Family the Label Records

Goin' Through is a hip hop institution in Greece, and have dominated the video and airplay charts for several years in the rap/r&b genre. Their hardcore fan club lies in the western suburbs of the city, where they are regarded as something on the level of cultural icons.

They can play badass with the best of the international star rappers, however, they easily mix playful humor and irony with their social messages a la Snoop Dogg and Eminem from his Slim Shady creative period. What separates them from the pack of vanilla wannabes is maturity and a wide range of sounds, tempos and rhythmic structures from which they create their pieces.

While it seems that a good number of rap bands tend to be slaves to 2:4 time signature beats with an obligatory clap track on the 4, Goin' Through use any number of rhythmic structures with fade-ins, fade-outs, stops, starts and unexpected, syncopated bridges which always keep the ear moving and never leave the listener wanting for variety. The song "Aspro Prama" (White Office Girl) pokes fun at popular night club singer Yiorgos Mazonakis, inferring that he comes from another planet. They also include vocal only skits on the CD which takes painfully accurate shots at Greek everyday household life.

Their two massive hits off of the CD, "Polla Problemata" (Many Problems) and "Boro ki Ego" (I Can do it, too) made this CD a must-play item at every discotheque and house party in the country for the last several months. This is a de rigueur CD for those with an interest in the Greek rap music scene.

Peggy Zina

Ev Aisthith.. H' Logiki (In Feeling or Logic?)

2010 EMI Records

Peggy Zina is true bouzoukia royalty, as has been for the last decade or so. She is regarded as one of the few current pop/bouzoukia stars who has legitimately taken her roots from the folk/rembetika style of Greek music and transferred the same feeling and pathos from the old style, into her current pop recordings.

This pathos and rembetika-inspired style is beautifully displayed in her current single, "Rotisa," (I Asked) and the torch song heartbreaker, "Den mou Axizeis pia." (You Don't Deserve Me Anymore). As with the new Yiannis Plutarhos CD, this album is not a great departure from her standard singing style, musical arrangements or thematic song content. She keeps her standard five-piece band with strong accent on chiming, melodic bouzouki riffs, which takes the place of the classic rhythm guitar duties in most western song constructions.

Zina is at her best when wailing full-throttle, confessional libretto as evidenced in "Logia Agapis" (Words of Love) and in her duet with folk-legend singer, Dimitris Mitropanos, "Den Glitono," (I'm not being Saved). Album highlights include "Erotas Thanatos," (Death of Love) "Stis Zois tou Party," (Life of the Party), and the opening track "Rotisa." (I Asked).