

Nikos Verdis

*Ola Einai Edo*

Universal Records 2009

Nikos Verdis is a young, popular nightclub singer and FM radio presence in Greece who has been on the bouzoukia circuit for some years. He is a combination of Sakis Rouvas come-hither good looks mixed with a mid-period Smokey Robinson-esque vocal style and delivery. Each track of *Ola Einai Edo* (Everything is here) contains lots of mildly saccharine sincere lyrics and stirring string arrangements that make this a CD a great boudoir soundtrack for the thirty-something, Kolonaki-bred, Brie and Chardonnay crowd as well as romantically inclined prep-school hipsters.

The songs on the album are not your standard, frenetic, bouzoukia-club emotional schmaltz and speed-picking nonsense. They are well-crafted FM nuggets with the mature musical style of such R&B veterans as Luther Vandross and Freddy Jackson with contemporary Greek language lyrics. Highlights of the disc include "Oneiro Alithino" (Real Dream) and "Den Teliosame" (We Haven't Finished). If there is a complaint to be made about the record, it is that the entire disc is comprised completely of mid-tempo love songs. No dance numbers, no up-tempo stuff. Although quite young still, with proper management, producers and songwriters, Verdis has the talent and potential to become an AOR staple on the Greek airwaves for some time to come.

Despina Vandi & Foivos

*C'est La Vie*

Spicy Effect Records 2010

It seems all name chanteuses must, at one point in their career, go through a Marlene Dietrich phase. Madonna, Siouxsie Sioux, Carly Simon et al have gone through their noire, torch song period. What I like about Despina Vandi is that she just pretends to go through her Dietrich phase on this record. *C'est La Vie* is a quite enjoyable mish-mash of different styles which range from Angus Young

style, rock-guitar riffing on “Koristi Prama” (Office Girl), to bouzoukia-pop on “Erota Theli h Zoi” (Love Wants Life) to the one, I repeat one, cabaret torch song, “C’est La Vie.”

Foivos, her songwriter for more than ten years, has done a fine job putting catchy melodies and memorable libretto into the pieces. My one complaint, content wise, is that the words can occasionally get a bit sophomoric; “Love wants life, not war” is as much a politically-dilettantish, flat-out goofy line of verse as anything from the pens of U2, Neil Diamond or Sting.

Beware of the deceptive cover art, which features the stunningly beautiful Vandi perched in a smoky background, wearing a gentleman’s top hat and dark-toned, evening make-up. Like I said, she’s just pretending to be in her Blue Angel period, which is fine by me.

Tamta

*Tharros h Alitheia*

Minos-EMI Records 2010

The Georgian-born, fashion icon of Greek pop returns to the charts with her third CD. The completed record sat in the can for more than a year and a half, with management releasing three singles before the entire work was released for general sale. *Tharros h Alitheia* (Truth or Dare) is a mixed bag of musical styles that runs the gamut from quasi power-ballads, to sizzling pop chart electro-dance nuggets to indie-sounding college radio stuff.

She is at her best when she performs her pop-dance material. The title song, *Tharros h Alitheia*, which she performs with Sakis Rouvas, is a dance floor phenomenon which won them the MAD TV 2010 video award for best duet. Other standout dance tracks include “Fige” (Leave) and “Den Boro Na Koimitho” (I Can’t Sleep).

Tamta, unique among Greek female singers, is simultaneously haute couture *and* teen-centric chic in her appearance without sacrificing anything from one style to augment the other. *Tharros h Alitheia* is a well-made, smart CD without being heavy handed and cool without a whit of annoying self-appreciation.

Giorgos Mazonakis

*Ta Isia Anapoda*

Heaven Music 2010

The famously unshaved, middle-distance gazing, bouzoukia badass strays from his normal musical course on this CD. Mazonakis, a nightclub circuit legend for years, is famous for his gritty, street sound. His songs are, for the most part, rooted in traditional Greek music and Greek pop spanning the last several decades. *Ta Isia Anapoda*, while still staying with his signature song styling and format, takes an unusual instrumental and marketing departure from his established image.

While bouzouki and electric guitars are still present in all pieces, heavy use of synthesizers, sequenced clap and click tracks, digital delays and flanged, harmonic notch effects are used throughout the disc. All songs remain strong, remarkably well-constructed and listenable without ever becoming boring; some are quite memorable. "Andres Den Kleine," is catchy, hip and remarkably radio-friendly. "Den Eimai Agios" (I'm not a Saint) sounds almost like an Ennio Morricone movie soundtrack piece played by futuristic keyboardists like Gary Numan or Brian Eno.

Visually, he appears to have joined the cyberpunk style council. The cover art features a headshot of Mazonakis with what appears to be a metallic blue, glitter eczema spreading across half of his face. Is he changing with the times or just trying to pull in new, youth market listeners? You decide.