

Sasa Basta: Bouzoukia Diva in Full-bloom

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Paralia nightclub, Alimos

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Let's get something straight from the start of this article: I'm a dyed-in-the-wool, 100% certified Sasa Basta fan.

She's 20 years old. She's beautiful; cool; dates regular guys and skrillionaires; looks wonderful in the photographic spreads of gentlemen's magazines that she poses for; gives the people something to talk about; and packs a wallop into the material she sings in the greek nightclubs.

She is currently performing at the Paralia summer club on Posidonas Avenue in Alimos. The club, and Sasa, are a fine marriage for each other. The club is mid-sized, well-run and remarkably clean. The band is tight and disciplined, which is also somewhat unusual for bouzoukia (Greek traditional-song/pop nightclub) culture. Nightclub musicians are usually hired-guns who drift from job to job. The current band sounds well-rehearsed and comfortable with each other during their performance.

Also, club sound quality is always a bit dicey. It ranges from crystal diamond-electron clarity to total woof-woof, dead-end nightmare depending on the sound-reinforcement equipment and engineers.

Fortunately, the Paralia has fine equipment and all instruments and voices are heard clearly and distinctly. The decor is a hybrid of traditional pista meets neo-retro-futuristic 70s style. The walls are complete with multi-colored chaser lights and kick-drum activated spotlights. Lazy searchlights sweep the crowd through layers of dry-ice and fog-machine fog.

When Sasa takes the stage there are no disbelievers of her beauty and skill in the audience. The crowd reactions to her appearance range from hushed reverence to flat-out fertility goddess worship. But make no mistake, every eye in the place is riveted on the diva as she starts her show. One of the elements that makes her so fascinating to watch is her combination of eastern and western culture in her music and costume. She's a flash of harem Fatima and western pop-songstress in one red-hot package of peroxide, estrogen and fun: Tampta meets Britney Spears or Courtney Love cross-fertilized with Kalomira. Her costmes range from fringed designer mini-skirts and Piccadilly hooker-boots to Babylonian harem pants and beaded soutiens. She prowls the stage like a later period Steve Tyler and her stylized temple dancer movements are a joy to behold.

Her voice is not what you'd expect from such a young chanteuse. Unlike most alto-range pop-bubblegum girl singers, her voice is mid-range baritone an already sounds a bit road-tested and smoky. She follows in the path of Amy Winehouse, LeAnn Rimes and Mercury years Rod Stewart in that she's a kid who already sounds like an experienced, seasoned performer.

Between song sets I had a chance to chat with Sasa and up-and-coming nightclub singer Anna Dima. On the subject of the changing bouzoukia musical style from greek-pop-traditional to a more rock-oriented format, Sasa had a surprising response to the current trend.

"I'm staying with my current way of singing. I don't plan to change anything. I'm fine the way I am," she told me.

Indeed, Sasa is bucking a trend. The mega-uber bouzoukia divas appear to be lining up to join the new rock style. Elena Papparizou now sounds like she's fronting the 70s metal band Boston. Peggy Zina's band is now borrowing guitar riffs and licks from 80s Los Angeles hair-metal groups like Ratt, Poison and Motley Crue.

Lastly, Sasa has issued her first maxi-single, entitled "Proth Fora" (First Time) on the Groove Music Productions label. The five-song disc (all Greek lyrics) is a mirror image of her live show. All track are lively, danceable, and give a great audio snapshot of her current repertoire.

You owe it to yourself to see her live one night this summer. This is great bouzoukia culture. This is the real thing.