

## JUDGES BIOS

### **Anna Yortzidis**

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**MDF Judge Coordinator – Lead Judge**



Anna Yortzidis's journey into Greek folk dance began in 1985 with the Hellenic Youth Dancers at Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Newport News, Virginia. Her passion and dedication are seen by her representing her community at prominent events such as the Metropolis of New Jersey Folk Dance Festival, Metropolis of San Francisco Folk Dance Festival, and the Metropolis of Atlanta Hellenic Dance Festival.

After 16 years of dancing with the Hellenic Youth Dancers, Anna stepped into the role of program head, where she directed five dance groups. During this period, she conducted extensive research on the traditional dances of various Greek regions, including Thrace, Pontos, Macedonia, Crete, and the islands. Her enthusiasm for costumes led her to significantly enrich the group's costume library, while she continued performing with the adult group, Enosis.

Anna's commitment extends beyond directing. She has also provided her expertise as a judge at prestigious dance competitions including the Metropolis of Atlanta Hellenic Dance Festival, the Direct Archdiocese District Folk Dance Festival (Parathosi) in New York, and the Metropolis of San Francisco Folk Dance Festival.

In 2012, alongside her husband Aris Yortzidis, she co-founded the Byzantio Cultural Arts and Dance Program, which has since flourished in the Greater Washington DC area. Based in the Greater Metropolitan Washington, DC area, Byzantio is dedicated to celebrating and preserving Greek heritage through traditional dance, music, song, costume, and mentorship.

**Bobby Garofalis**  
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**MDF Co-Lead Judge**



Bobby Garofalis is currently the director of the Hellenic Youth Dancers of Hampton Roads. Founded in 1990 with 12 dancers based out of Saints Constantine and Helen in Newport News, the program has grown to 90 dancers from all across the Coastal Virginia area and beyond. Bobby has been involved with Greek dance for over 35 years. He is well versed in the dances of many areas of Greece (Pontos, Dodecanese, Thraki) with a special emphasis on Crete.

Bobby began as a dancer for the Hellenic Youth Dancers in 1990 and then became choreographer, director, and now lead Director/Administrator. Today he oversees five dance groups including the Adult Group Enosis who perform and compete in numerous events throughout the country. Bobby has been honored with a multitude of awards and accolades at the Hellenic Dance Festival. A proud recent accomplishment was in 2023 when Bobby directed Enosis to First place rankings in the adult categories of both HDF and HDF. At the 2012 Hellenic Dance Festival in Atlanta, Bobby was honored with the Director of the Year award.

Bobby was first introduced to Cretan dancing in the summer of 1985 when he was enrolled in the Xirouhakis Dance Studio in Chania. He has since been dancing Cretan for many years, and specifically in the last 10 years, he has researched and learned many of the old or "lost" Cretan dances.

Bobby was the first presenter of the Asterousia region of Crete. This region includes unique dances such as Ethiano Pidihto and the Asterousiano Pidihto tou Lyrantzakis. For the past five years, Bobby has done much research and presentation of the dances and Rizitika of the Chania region from which his family hails from.

Recently, Bobby's attention has turned towards mentorship succession and guidance for fellow Greek Dance, instructors and dance groups. He feels that in order to continue the preservation of this unique culture and folk expression. We must focus on cultivating new directors, dancers and enthusiasts, so that we can continue to preserve our love of Greek folk dance.

Bobby believes that Greek dance is a lifelong journey, and that it is constantly evolving. It is a journey of learning and an opportunity to experience Greece's diverse culture and traditions.

**Chrysoula (Chrysa) Malogianni**  
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**MDF Judge**



Chrysoula (Chrysa) Malogianni was born and raised in Thessaloniki, Greece, a city renowned for its deep roots in Greek cultural tradition and dance. From a young age, she immersed herself in the dances of Greece, specializing in the traditions of regions such as Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus, the Islands, Pontos, and her family roots of Sarakatsanoi and Vlchoi. By the age of 17, she was already directing and teaching Greek dance to children and adults, showcasing her early passion for preserving and promoting traditional Greek culture.

She studied at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in the School of Education, where she selected coursework focusing on Greek traditions and cultural education, including advanced studies in Greek cultural practices and methodologies for teaching dance. Her academic foundation, combined with formal research training, enabled her to maintain and expand the study of Greek folk traditions. This training has fueled her lifelong dedication to researching and preserving the cultural nuances of regional Greek dances.

She has traveled extensively throughout Greece, engaging in fieldwork to study dances from regions such as Thrace, Epirus, Macedonia, and Pontos. She collaborates with fellow Greek dance researchers, continually contributing to the study and documentation of traditional Greek dances. Her annual trips to Greece involve action research, attending cultural festivals, and working alongside local experts to deepen her understanding of the sociocultural significance of Greek folk dancing and traditions.

After relocating to the United States, she continued her involvement in Greek dance as a director in Charleston, SC, and Newport News, VA. She has been an active participant in the Hellenic Dance Festival (HDF), contributing as a performer, director, and mentor, helping to sustain the vibrant tradition of Greek dance within the Greek-American community.

**Efthymia Drolapas Alexiou**  
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**MDF Judge**



Efthymia Alexiou is dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich traditions of Greek folk dance. Her journey began at the age of three in San Francisco, CA, where she competed in the Greek Folk Dance Festival for 15 years. During this time, her group earned numerous awards for their performances, representing the regions of Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace, and were recognized for their authentic and passionate interpretations of these regional styles.

Efthymia's love for Greek culture naturally led her to teaching. She spent several years instructing primary-level dance groups at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, instilling a love for dance and tradition in the next generation. From 2003 to 2006, she expanded her teaching to the University of California, Berkeley, where she offered a Greek Folk Dance course that explored the dance, music, and cultural history of Greece.

A long-standing member of the Byzantio Cultural Arts and Dance program since its inception in 2012, Efthymia has been instrumental in the preservation and promotion of Greek folk traditions. She currently teaches the elementary school-level dance group at St. Katherine's Greek Orthodox Church in Falls Church, VA, continuing to inspire young dancers with her deep knowledge of Greek culture.

In addition to her teaching, Efthymia has an extensive background in traditional Greek folk costumes. She is well-versed in all aspects of costume-making, including material selection, embroidery, weaving, and costume presentation—ensuring that every performance is authentic and culturally accurate.

Efthymia is also a novice Daouli (Greek drum) player, further deepening her connection to Greek music and dance. She believes that Greek folk dance programs play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, connecting communities to their roots, and ensuring that these traditions live on for future generations.

**ELENI APOSTOLAKOS HOPES**  
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**MDF JUDGE**



Eleni is originally from Chicago where she attended Roosevelt University's Chicago Musical College and studied Classical Ballet and Spanish Dance, and is considered a Dance Master.

Eleni traveled throughout Greece studying and collecting information and knowledge to share with her students and the Greek community. She studied with the Dora Stratou Dancers in Athens, The Nelly Demoglou Folklore Theater in Rhodes and many seminars and workshops conducted by the Likion ton Ellinidon, in Greece and the US. She conducted extensive research at the Benaki Museum in Athens, the Peloponesian Folklore Foundation in Nafplion, the Museum of Folk Art in Athens, and the Folklore Museums in Kozani and Ioannina, and recently the Victoria Karelia Costume Collection in Kalamata.

1990, Eleni became the first Greek-American to be selected by the Greek Government to participate in an educational, fact-finding expedition, conducting personal interviews with people in many villages ranging from Macedonia to the Island of Castelorizzo to record village costumes, customs, and dances.

Eleni has conducted numerous dance clinics and seminars. In 1984, she founded the first Greek Dance Conference in the Southeast which was held in Atlanta, Georgia. In this conference, she stressed the learning and sharing of knowledge gained through research and study. Eleni has traveled throughout the southeast teaching Greek culture and dance.

To date, she has taught classes in numerous parishes of the Atlanta Metropolis.

and conducted many presentations for the Fulton, Dekalb, Cobb, and Gwinnett Public School system, the Carter Library, the King Center, the Atlanta History Center, The Carlos Museum at Emory University, The High Museum, and the Georgia Historic Preservation Association.

In the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta, Eleni was a consultant to the choreographer of the Opening Ceremonies and was a key player in the orchestration of the "Tradition of the Games" section of this spectacular ceremony. In 1998, she was recognized by the San Francisco Metropolis Folk Dance Festival Board of Trustees for her commitment to the preservation Greek heritage through dance and music.

In the fall of 1998, she accompanied her husband to Brussels, Belgium, where they were attached to the American Embassy, in support of United States Government diplomatic mission. Upon receiving a Letter of Introduction from the Likion Ellinidon in Athens, Greece, the Likion Ellinidon in Brussels appointed her to the Board of Directors as the Director of Dance.

Eleni has served as a member of the board of directors of various foundations and societies dedicated to the preservation and education of the Greek culture. These organizations include: Troupe Hellas Greek Folkloric Society, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia; Hiphastia, Traditional Greek Folkloric Society, Larissa, Greece; Hellas Greek Folkloric Society, Clearwater, Florida; Laographia Greek American cultural Society, Astoria, New York; Alpha National Association for the Preservation of Hellenic Language and Culture; Parthenon Dancers, Athens, Greece; The Atlanta Folks International Cultural Association, Atlanta, Georgia, the Likion Ton Ellinidon, Brussels, Belgium, and the first President of the Likion Ellinidon in Atlanta, Georgia. She has also served as the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors to the Hellenic Dance Festival, Atlanta Metropolis and served as Co- Chairman of the Dance Odyssey scholarship program.

Eleni served as a dance and costume judge in Greek Folk Dance Festivals (FDF) on both coasts, Chicago, and the Metropolis of Atlanta's Hellenic Dance Festival and was honored as Director of the Year at the 2014 Hellenic Dance Festival held in Orlando.

Upon returning to the United States, to Charleston, South Carolina, Eleni established the Dance ministry for Holy Trinity GOC. The Holy Trinity Dance ministry earned many medals for dance, and costumes throughout her tenure.

Eleni and her husband recently moved to Newport News, VA, and look forward to active participation in the Sts. Constantine and Helen community and their dance ministry.

**Evan Euripidou**

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**MDF JUDGE**



Evan is currently a lead dancer with the Byzantio Cultural Arts and Dance Program where he has enjoyed deepening his knowledge of dance and sharing his passion with so many others. His dance journey started at the age of 4, when his natural love for dance came to light. He grew up in the dance program at St. George in Schenectady, NY, later assuming the director role of the dance program at 16 years old, leading the instruction of the 3 groups.

Realizing the immense opportunities of Greek Dance and Music to bring us all together and to unite us, Evan along with three other friends founded the Fotia Hellenic Society in 2005. They set off on a mission to make dance accessible and available to everyone and to raise the bar. The program quickly grew, attracting dancers from all over and building relations with other programs and churches all over the Country. Evan travelled the country honing his skills and knowledge with the best in the dance world, building up knowledge of over 500 dances from all over Greece and Cyprus. He has spent the majority of his dance career learning and perfecting his knowledge of the unique stylistic details of each region and dance to carry on the traditions with authenticity. Evan has shared this through instructing at various dance conferences and consulting with dance programs to prepare them to earn top medals at dance competitions.

During the pandemic, Evan and his longtime friend Maria founded the Syrtos Podcast, celebrating the journeys of Greek Dancers around the world, sharing their stories and using this as a resource for dancers around the world to find their path. Through this platform, he offered virtual dance practices to keep us all dancing together even as Covid kept us separated.

**Tina Marie Vlitas**  
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**MDF JUDGE**



- Experience: 14 years as a Greek Dancer, Holy Trinity Hellenic Dancers of Staten Island.
- Director, Holy Trinity Hellenic Dancers of Staten Island - 3 years
- Greek Dancing Judge, Sights and Sounds, Westfield, NJ- 10 years

**MARIA SOPASIS**  
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**MDF JUDGE**



Maria has been dancing since she was five years old and has been teaching Greek folk dance for the past 35 years, specializing in the dance and musical traditions of Crete. She is highly knowledgeable about the various styles practiced across the island.

Maria has performed dances from many regions of Greece. Maria has been a regular member of Astoria-based syllogos 'Minos' and 'Idomeneas,' serving as a dancer, instructor, and choreographer. In 1989, Maria founded the youth dance group Idomeneas, which performed throughout the United States for the PanCretan Association. Maria was a principal dancer with the group 'Terpsichore' in the late 1990s and is now a member of 'Hellenic Roots,' performing on and off Broadway to showcase various Greek traditions.

She taught dance at St. Demetrios Greek School in Merrick, NY, for over 20 years. Maria attends classes and occasionally performs with the Greek American Folklore Society based in Astoria, NY.