

1. LUNCH WITH GOLD

Μέσο: GOLD

Ημ. Έκδοσης: . . . 23/01/2016 Ημ. Αποδελτίωσης: . . . 23/01/2016

Σελίδα: 76



YVONNE GEORGIADOU

Lunch with Gold

THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE PHAROS ARTS FOUNDATION TALKS ABOUT HER PASSION FOR MUSIC, HOW SHE CAME TO GIVE UP A CAREER IN OPERA AND WHY, EVEN AFTER WINNING AN AWARD, SHE STILL AGREES WITH BARTOK ON THE SUBJECT OF COMPETITIONS.

By John Vickers

PLUS SEA Amathus Avenue Limassol	
GREEK SALAD	€9.00
SOUP OF THE DAY	€7.00
2 GRILLED WHOLE SQUID	€35.00
LOW-FAT LIME CHEESECAKE	€7.50
WATER 1LTR	€3.50
TOTAL	€62.00

Living in Cyprus means that most of us have, at some time, enjoyed a pleasant lunch at a seaside restaurant. Indeed, for many of the fortunate residents of Limassol, Larnaca and Paphos, it is a frequent occurrence during the island's long hot summers. Having a chance to savour top-quality food in warm, comfortable surroundings only metres from the stormy sea on a cold, rainy day is a much rarer experience and, I can assure you, even more special. In keeping with the unwritten rule that my dining companions choose the venue for their Lunch with Gold, Yvonne (Artistic Director of the Pharos Arts Foundation) has pro-

posed one of her favourites: Plus Sea on the outskirts of Limassol. Invisible from the coastal road, it is located right on the beach and, unlike many local seaside restaurants and cafés, it doesn't close in the winter. It also stands out for the superb quality of its cuisine.

She recommends the grilled whole squid as our main course, a suggestion with which I'm happy to agree, and orders a Greek salad as a starter – in the end she spends so much time enthusiastically answering all my questions that it is somewhat neglected – while I choose the delicious,

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piping hot vegetable soup.

Yvonne Georgiadou was born in Limassol and still lives there, in an old part of town, which has been renovated and restored in recent years. "It has definitely changed for the better," she says, "and I think Limassol is miles ahead of the other towns nowadays." She does not agree with those who think that the improvements are all to do with Russian money, believing instead that the established and long-term residents of the town – what she calls Limassol's "human fabric" – are responsible. And she describes the decision to set up the Cyprus University of Technology in the old part of Limassol, rather than outside, as ingenious.

"It has brought life back to the centre of the town; the old, historical buildings have been properly renovated and I love it there."

Living in Limassol, of course, means a certain amount of commuting but, thanks to the ease of modern technology and the enlightened policies of Pharos Founder Garo Keheyan, she also does a lot of her work from home and even, occasionally, from where we are sitting.

Georgiadou has always been passionate about music. Indeed, she recalls how, by the tender age of seven, she had already decided that her future lay in music and, although she was a bright pupil at school and could probably have chosen any area of higher education, she was never tempted to study anything else. "I was lucky to have

parents whose attitude was to encourage me to do what I wanted, as long as I was good at it," she says. "They had no connection with the world of music and were thus in no position to judge. I enjoyed it and once I had started piano lessons and vocal training, that was it: music, music, music!"

She not only studied music at Royal Holloway, University of London, but she later obtained her MA and Professional Diploma in Opera Studies and went on to work for several years as a professional opera singer, singing in Paris, in London and other UK cities, in Italy and elsewhere. She had tuition from the great Montserrat Caballe... Ironically, it was when she became a professional singer that her parents started to worry about her.

"It requires a lot of sacrifices," she explains, "and a lot of money. Unlike most professions, where you study, get your degree and find a job, active musicians are invariably learning all the time. I remember my father asking me if I would

ever be able to earn back all the money I had put into the profession. Of course, as most musicians will also tell you, it was never about the money for me. I could not imagine myself doing anything else. When something is your passion, you are willing to make those sacrifices and, of course, it's quite common to be working and earning one season and to be struggling the next. What looks very glamorous to the public – travelling around the world

and giving concerts – can actually be very tiring, lonely and insecure."

This is something that would eventually lead Yvonne to take a momentous decision about her own future. Today, she reflects that she probably started her career too early and let it develop too fast, having received great praise for her voice, which was very mature for her age. "My voice was mature but that didn't mean the rest of me was or that I would use it wisely" she says, "and there came a point in my life when I no longer enjoyed what I was doing in the way I had at the beginning. I started to hate the auditioning process. I no longer felt the same excitement that I had before, even though people around me were telling me that I had a great future."

Her growing dissatisfaction with the life of a professional opera singer culminated in her decision to give it all up. And it happened very fast: "I went to a concert by a singer in her fifties, who had obvi-



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ously had a superb voice when she was younger, and she was still trying to have a career," she recounts. "It was obvious to me, and it would have been to many people, that she had no chance of rekindling what she may have had before and I thought to myself, 'I don't want to reach that stage'. I was only 27 at the time but I realized at that moment that I didn't want to grow old in London, possibly still chasing my dream. I had loved music all my life but I hadn't known what it meant to be part of the music industry. That's something different altogether. Suddenly I felt that I didn't love it anymore."

Although she didn't act on her feelings immediately, she later decided ("literally in the space of one night") to give it all up and go home to Cyprus. "I needed some time to think," she tells me, "and not long after that, I received a call from what was then the Pharos Trust and started my first-ever administrative job. I'm still doing it!"

I can't help wondering if, when she finds herself in the company of the musicians and singers that she now deals with professionally as Artistic Director of the Pharos Arts Foundation, she doesn't feel a twinge of jealousy or a pang of regret that she could have continued as a performer. She answers in a flash: "Never! To be honest with you, I thought I would but no. And the truth is that I feel that I can offer more through what I'm doing now than I could have done as a singer. I am very fulfilled and I haven't felt a moment's bitterness that I am not doing what they are. I made my choice and it turned out to be the right one for me."

Ironically, Yvonne confides that if she had the chance to do it all again, she would. "I wouldn't want to be spending my days in hotel rooms," she admits, "but the feeling a singer gets when performing in front of an audience is unique. However, it's just an instant

and then it's gone. And when you are your own strictest critic, as I was, it gets harder and harder to enjoy those instants. I discovered that I needed something more stable in my life if I was to be balanced and happy."

I venture to say that Yvonne Georgiadou and the Pharos Arts Foundation was a match made in heaven. "I believe in karma," she says mysteriously, adding with a cheeky smile, "and luck too!"

The food is truly excellent and while my dining companion resists the temptation of a dessert, I don't and I am soon enjoying the low-fat lime cheesecake.

Yvonne has never considered herself to be a businesswoman, and so she was understandably surprised to find herself nominated in 2014 for a local award in the category Businesswoman of the Year. The surprise was compounded by the fact that she knew nothing about it until being informed of her nomina-

tion and also because, she says, she has never sought or enjoyed being in the spotlight. I suggest that this is rather strange for someone who has enjoyed performing to audiences around Europe but she says that such attention is an integral part of the profession whereas being chosen for an award isn't.

the second best' and so on. I think competitions on the running track or the sports field are fine, because there is a clear way of judging who is the fastest, who jumps the highest, etc. But even in football, we can't be 100% sure that it's been a fair game."

When she was shortlisted for that particular award, she made all kinds of excuses for not attending the ceremony but in the end Garo Keheyian encouraged her to go. "When my name was announced as the winner, I was shocked," she says, though for all her anti-competition sentiment, she grudgingly agrees that it was good that a woman was being recognized for her contribution to the Arts. "And now you can say that you had lunch with a former Woman of the Year!" she says with a great laugh.

However, as befits a musician, she prefers to quote the composer Bela Bartok who was of the opinion that 'Competitions are for horses, not artists'.

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"I don't like competitions of any kind," she says. "I never believed in competitions, not even in music, because I don't think we can judge someone and say, 'you're the best' or 'you're

As the rough sea continues to pound on the pebble shore a few metres away from our window and the rain shows no sign of abating, we say our goodbyes and Yvonne Georgiadou heads for home where several hours' work await her. Another 'performance' is over but these days she is enjoying life promoting other musicians and artists. The appreciation of audiences at the Pharos Arts Foundation's events are obviously all she needs to feel that she did the right thing when she took the decision to come home to her beloved Limassol almost a decade ago. **G**