

The Prima Ballerina Still Going Strong After 75 Years

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Jason Douglas and Junko Fukutome

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TOKYO—Yoko Morishita was 3 years old when she first put on a pair of ballet shoes.

Seventy-five years later, she's still en pointe.

Morishita, who will turn 78 in December, is the prima ballerina in Japan's storied Matsuyama Ballet Company. One of Japan's most-celebrated dancers, she performed with Rudolf Nureyev 200 times and toured with Margot Fonteyn.

Today, she is the world's oldest ballerina still taking on demanding lead roles.

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Singles Are So Burned Out They're Letting Spreadsheets Evaluate Their Dates

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Molly Reinmann

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Carolyn Travis was smitten by a man she met in an entrepreneurship course. It took a spreadsheet to realize the relationship was doomed.

After a few dates, the 27-year-old debriefed her two best friends over lunch. When she went to the bathroom, they got to work. They plugged Travis's core values into an app one of the friends built to assess compatibility. Then they entered everything they knew about her date, an engineer more than a decade her senior.

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Cave diver Vassilis Pantelios prepares for a solo dive during the exploration of the cave.

TO BHMA International edition

Deep Inside a Cretan Cave, Scientists Found a Hidden World

By Ioanna Soufleri

Two freezers, one at the Department of Biology of the University of Crete and the other at the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH), hold secrets

that, until recently, had remained buried deep beneath the earth.

For the first time anywhere in the world, those secrets are coming to light.

Needless to say, these are no ordinary freezers. Maintained at -80°C, they preserve an extraordinary

collection: hundreds of species of microorganisms that evolved over millions of years under extreme conditions in Gourgouthakas Cave, the deepest cave in Greece and one of the deepest in the world, located in Crete's White Mountains (Lefka Ori).

Why are these organ-

isms so valuable? Because evolution equipped them with bioactive molecules whose properties may prove antiviral, antibacterial, or anticancer. In other words, the contents of these two freezers constitute a biological repository unlike any other in the world.

An untapped scientific treasure

The properties of these bioactive molecules are being investigated by the research group of Panagiotis Sarris, professor at the University of Crete and researcher at FORTH.

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Sotiris Sorogas in his atelier.

TO BHMA International edition

Sotiris Sorogas: 'Act in a way that won't cause embarrassment later'

By Panos Kougias

It's hard to know what to focus on first, when you cross the threshold into Sotiris Sorogas' studio. Books towering in every corner of the space, works on standby, waiting for their next brushstroke, photographs of his beloved daughter Erifyli, letters from Kiki Dimoula, Manos Eleftheriou

and George Seferis, which he preserves in his archive with exemplary reverence, photographs of his students from the Architecture Faculty at Athens Polytechnic, who remain devoted to him and continue to visit even after their own retirement, exhibitions catalogs and portraits of all "those who tormented us; and who weigh heaviest on our hearts", as the poet says.

And just like that, in a matter of minutes, the space where Sotiris Sorogas works is transformed into much more than just an artist's studio. It becomes a space where the intellectual life of Greece's last six decades continues to breathe silently and to converse as much with aesthetics as with the source of his inspiration.

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One with the future

The Prima Ballerina Still Going Strong After 75 Years

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Yoko Morishita, star of Tokyo's Matsuyama Ballet Company, says daily practice and the occasional steak help her stay on her toes

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In January, she starred as Odette and the black swan Odile in “Swan Lake” and in May she performed “Coppelia.” She is currently rehearsing for her role as Clara in “The Nutcracker” in November, a part she has played for 45 years.

Being the principal dancer of a renowned ballet company would be taxing for a dancer half her age. Few ballet stars make it past 40 before hanging up their pumps and switching to teaching, overcome by the immense physical, mental and artistic demands of the art form.

In an interview at Matsuyama’s Tokyo studio, her legs swathed in pink woolen socks to keep them warm, Morishita said her secret is simple: She lives for ballet and rarely thinks beyond the next day’s rehearsal or performance.

“Once today is over, I think about tomorrow’s lesson,” she said. “Before I knew it, 75 years had passed.”

Postwar providence

Morishita was born in Hiroshima in 1948, three years after the city was obliterated by an atomic bomb. Its inhabitants were rebuilding but the scars remained: Her grandmother survived the blast but with terrible injuries.

Morishita said the resilience of her family, friends and neighbors in the aftermath of the bombing was an inspiration that still drives her today.

“Everyone was full of en-

Morishita credits her longevity to her rigorous daily training routine.



ergy and courage, and they were living their lives with an incredible sense of gratitude for being alive,” she said.

Morishita was a frail child. A doctor told her parents she needed more physical exercise. A kindergarten across the street from the family home held ballet classes after the regular school day finished.

“If it had been a gymnastics class instead, my life would have been completely different,” Morishita said. “The God of Ballet was telling me: ‘You’re meant to do ballet.’”

Her first teacher, Kiyoshi Hamuro, saw the potential in his tiny charge. He enrolled Morishita with a strict and formidable ballet mistress called Michiko Suwa.

Suwa would sometimes strike her pupils’ feet with the handle of a hataki, a Japanese feather duster, whenever

they buckled from the pain of standing en pointe too long. Today such a teacher would face a lawsuit. Back then, “parents would just keep quiet and apply ointment to our wounds,” Morishita said.

Suwa nevertheless instilled in the fledgling ballerina a discipline and rigor that would carry Morishita through her career. She gave her first ballet performance at 6 on the tiny stage in front of the screen in a Hiroshima movie theater. At 12, she persuaded her parents to send her to ballet school in Tokyo.

She joined the Matsuyama Ballet Company in 1971 after stints studying ballet overseas, including in the U.S. Morishita recalls having been electrified by a performance she had seen by Mikiko Matsuyama, who founded the company in 1948.

“At that moment, I thought, ‘This is the one, this

is the teacher,’” she said.

Morishita’s career would take her all over the world, dazzling audiences in New York, Shanghai, Paris and London. She performed with Nureyev for Queen Elizabeth II. A personal highlight was dancing alongside her idol, Margot Fonteyn, who she had first seen perform as a wide-eyed 20-year-old in New York.

“Just seeing her come out on stage—it was as if everything suddenly lit up. I still remember it to this day,” she said.

Yukihiko Yoshida, a longtime dance critic in Japan, said Morishita developed a delicate way of dancing that is uniquely Japanese. Her longevity, he said, is reminiscent of performers of traditional Japanese arts, such as Noh and Kabuki, who spend decades mastering their craft.

“Ms. Morishita is a legend of the Japanese ballet

world for sure. Everyone is wondering when her retirement performance will be,” Yoshida said.

Practice makes perfect

Ballet at the elite level is physically demanding. Rick Seah, a doctor who treats athletes and dancers at the U.K.’s Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, said ballet dancers need strength and endurance in their muscles and ligaments to reach and maintain many complex positions. Lower limb injuries including sprains, bone damage and wear and tear of the tendons are common, he said.

Seah said it is rare to see ballet dancers performing at 77. “It is a testament to how she looks after herself to achieve some longevity in her career,” he said.

Morishita practices for at least six hours, six days a week, and still makes time

for stretching on her day off. She said her commitment to practicing springs from childhood clumsiness—it always took her longer to grasp new movements and techniques than some of her peers.

She credits that daily routine with keeping her dancing. She watches her step, especially in the rain, to guard against injury. Aside from following the Hiroshima Toyo Carp baseball team, she has few hobbies outside ballet. She said there are few foods she dislikes but she is especially fond of steak. Her parents, who weren’t artistic but were hugely encouraging of her ballet aspirations, ran a steakhouse in Hiroshima. “I have to eat meat,” she said.

Another factor in her long career is the love and support she gets from her Matsuyama colleagues, she said. Her husband, Tetsutaro Shimizu, is the ballet company’s executive director and choreographer. Dancing together in 1974, she won the Gold Prize at the Varna International Ballet Competition, the first time a Japanese dancer had won one of ballet’s most prestigious awards.

Energetic and playful, Shimizu likes to tease Morishita about her height. Dancers from New York, London or Paris have “such long legs,” Shimizu said, in contrast to the 4-foot-9-inch Morishita. Still, he said, “when she dances, she looks so big. That’s her strength. Something just bursts out of her, doesn’t it? I think that’s why everyone is drawn to her.”

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The spreadsheet crunched the numbers. The result? A portrait of incompatibility.

Her perspective shifted. She saw him a few more times before breaking things off. Now she uses the app, called Spread, to track all of her dating data.

“Talking with friends is one thing, but having that visual representation of what I want versus what I’m allowing is another,” said Travis, a child-welfare advocate.

Travis is among a cohort of spreadsheet singles, or “love hackers,” who believe data could hold the cure to their dating woes. They say dating apps that spit out an unlimited menu of potential partners make it too easy to

miss obvious red flags.

“You become a little more willing to make compromises on things that you might not usually compromise on, just because you’re so tired of searching,” said Alyssa Tracy, one of Travis’ confidants. The other, Sampson Ezieme, is the creator of Spread.

Converts say spread-

sheets turn their desires into packaged datasets that they can analyze for patterns—anything from “I typically catch feelings after the fourth date” to “my best dates tend to work in engineering.”

The approach, once just the realm of professional matchmakers, is an offshoot of a broader cultural obsession with tracking just about

everything, says Skyler Wang, an assistant sociology professor at McGill University.

Data “help people find order and systemize an incredibly chaotic process,” said Wang, who authored a study on self-datafication and dating spreadsheets. They also fill dating apps’ biggest blind spot—information gleaned from an actual date.

But romance is different from other trackable behaviors like sleep or flatulence. Some love gurus say there is an element of humanity that can get lost in the spreadsheet cells.

Former matchmaker Lily Womble says she has seen daters over-emphasize the data, causing them to minimize or numb the feelings

Singles Are So Burned Out They’re Letting Spreadsheets Evaluate Their Dates

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Forget intuition. Young adults are rushing home to crunch the numbers before they decide if the date actually went well.

they get in the presence of a potential partner.

“Rigidity can actually be a shield against vulnerability,” said Womble, who now runs her own dating coaching company.

For Peyton Knight, a 27-year-old brand strategist in Austin, the rigidity shield is the whole point. She thinks dating has to feel corporate to be effective.

“Spontaneity and fun is cool, but if you don’t align with someone on basic core values that relationship is inevitably going to come to a halt,” she said.

Knight created a spreadsheet that lets her friends weigh in via a “friends feedback” tab. It came in handy when she combed through it to see if any of the men she

Greek Music: An Untapped Cultural Asset Ready for Export

TO BHMA International Edition speaks with Angeliki Spyridaki, founder of the country’s first music export office, about her mission to put Greek music on the world stage

By Maria Paravantes

Most of the world knows Greece for its magical islands, ancient monuments and celebrated cuisine. But very few know the country for one of its richest cultural treasures: its music.

From its mesmerizing folk traditions and the urban sounds of rebetiko to contemporary jazz and electronic music, Greece possesses one of the world’s most diverse musical landscapes.

This musical heritage extends far beyond the traditional folk songs (*demotika*) which, unique to each region and island, echo the sounds of ancient Greek music, to genres that tell the story of the country’s often turbulent modern history. Music that bears the marks of wars and dictatorship, exile and immigration; songs that tell of the return to democracy, the years of wealth and economic hardship.

Yet despite this extraordinary wealth, Greek music has long lacked the institutional support needed to transcend its national borders and establish a consistent international presence.

It was only fairly recently, in 1988, that Greece opened its first musical high school, in Pallini. Today, there are 52 across the country, nurturing thousands of talented young musicians and preserving both classical and traditional music education. Before then, conservatories largely focused on Western classical music, leaving a significant part of Greece’s own musical heritage outside the official educational system.

The absence of a national strategy extended beyond education. While countries such as France, Sweden, Finland and Portugal have spent decades promoting their music internationally through dedicated export offices, Greece remained one of the few European nations without a formal music export organization.

Though late in coming, this is finally beginning to change in Greece. TO BHMA International Edition sat down Angeliki Spyridaki, the founder and CEO of Music from Greece, the country’s first music export office, which is working hard to



The Music from Greece team in action: working to create bridges between Greek artists and the international music industry.

give Greek music the international visibility it deserves.

Building the missing link

“Music from Greece was created to help contemporary Greek music gain the position it deserves in international markets, while creating more opportunities for Greek artists and music industry professionals,” Spyridaki says.

She insists Greece does not need to prove its musical worth.

“Our musicians, composers and songwriters have

been proving that for decades. What was missing was an organized national body that could represent Greece internationally and create the conditions for Greek music to be heard on equal terms.”

Spyridaki explains that in most European countries, Music Export Offices have long been an integral part of national cultural policy. They help artists connect with festivals, promoters, labels, and industry professionals around the world, while also serving as a key tool for cultural extroversion

and fostering the growth of the creative economy.

Until now, Greece was one of the few countries without such a structure. Music from Greece has now arrived to fill this gap. And its ongoing work and efforts had an immediate impact.

“Music from Greece was admitted to the European Music Exporters Exchange (EMEE) by unanimous vote. Representing more than 30 countries, the EMEE is the leading European network of music export organizations, and the acceptance of Music from Greece as an

official member is a milestone. It marks our organization’s formal institutional launch, and confirms that Greece now has an organized and credible presence in the international music ecosystem.”

Music: A powerful ambassador

Spyridaki believes music can be one of a country’s most powerful ambassadors.

“Music doesn’t simply communicate sounds. It communicates stories, values and contemporary cultural identity.”

For decades, Greek artists who achieved international success largely did so alone. Figures like Mikis Theodorakis, Manos Hadjidakis, Nana Mouskouri, Demis Roussos, Vangelis and Vicky Leandros built remarkable global careers through talent, determination and personal networks rather than institutional support.

“There have always been outstanding individual success stories,” Spyridaki says. “But there was no mechanism or strategy to ensure continuity, support, and long-term planning.”

For Spyridaki, the timing is perfect. The international music market and audiences are more open than ever to new languages, different cultural identities, and authentic stories.

At the same time, the digital era has reduced traditional barriers in music distribution. “This means that countries like Greece can gain greater international appeal,” she says, “but only if they invest in the right structures.”

More than promotion

With an MA in Cultural Policy & Development and a seat on the Board of the Cultural Heritage Management Consulting Company, Spyridaki firmly believes that actions speak louder than words.

A music export office does much more than just organize events or participate in exhibitions. It creates the conditions for Greek artists to gain access to international music industry networks.

“This means identifying and participating in the most important international market events, developing partnerships with corresponding organizations abroad, networking with festivals, promoters, agents, record companies and cultural organizations, supporting Greek professionals and keeping them informed about the opportunities that exist internationally,” she explains.

In this respect, WOMEX, the world’s leading music industry networking conference, is a key event; here, artists, festival organizers and industry professionals establish partnerships that often lead to tours and long-term collaborations.

Equally important is enabling professionals from any country to discover the



Music from Greece, the country’s first music export office, is working hard to give Greek music and artists the international visibility they deserve.

wealth and diversity of Greek music creation and come into contact with the people who shape it.

“For us, every international collaboration, every appearance at a major festival, every new tour, and every professional agreement represents more than an individual artist’s success. Each achievement contributes to the gradual strengthening of Greek music’s international presence and, by extension, enhances the global cultural profile of the country itself,” she notes.

Learning from others

Unlike Greece, countries like Sweden, Finland, France, Portugal, Poland, Estonia, Germany and Canada have Music Export Offices that have been serving as a bridge between music creation and international markets for years.

“In fact,” says Spyridaki, “they are an integral part of those countries’ cultural policy.”

Spyridaki goes on to stress that, although each of these countries has very different objectives depending on its market size and cultural priorities, they all have one thing in common: they have recognized that music is a strategic asset.

Spyridaki cites some examples. Sweden, which has invested in education, innovation and a strong ecosystem of creators and producers. France, which has developed solid cultural policies that protect its language while promoting French artists internationally. Portugal, which has capitalized on the uniqueness of its musical identity, transforming Fado into a globally recognized cultural brand without compromising its authenticity. And South Korea, which has shown how coordinated long-term efforts can transform popular music into a major cultural export.

Despite their different strategies, Spyridaki says these countries share one essential principle. “They believed in the value of their own culture, and have invested consistently in it over many years.”

Rather than copying others, she believes Greece now has the opportunity to build a model suited to its own unique musical identity, while benefiting from decades of international experience. EMEE membership provides access to knowledge, partnerships and best practices that can accelerate the process and contribute substantially to the international development of Greek music in the years ahead.

Breaking through

Talent has never been Greece’s problem; access has. According to Spyridaki, the greatest challenge facing Greek artists is entering the international networks



A dream come true for many Greek artists: performing abroad either at showcase events like this one at international fair jazzahed in Bremen, or in clubs and concerts.

where careers are built.

“Achieving an international presence,” she says “is not a single event; it is a long-term process that is built up step by step”.

The global music industry operates on relationships, trust and long-term collaboration. And building an international career requires strategy, consistency and patience. It also requires financial resources—something many independent artists struggle to secure.

“A great song is important, but it isn’t enough. In Greece, creators often have to become their own managers, promoters and business teams,” she says.

To address this gap, Music from Greece plans to develop specialized educational programs that will help artists understand international markets and provide the tools and skills they require

to navigate the global music industry more effectively and build sustainable careers.

“In Greece, this kind of specialized knowledge and training has not been easily accessible to many artists and professionals in the field till now.”

It’s all Greek to me

For many years, local music industry stakeholders felt the Greek language was a barrier to its reaching larger and more international audiences. Spyridaki believes that assumption no longer reflects reality.

“We’ve seen artists singing in Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and Scandinavian languages achieve enormous international success,” she says. “Audiences today are primarily interested in authenticity, not language.”

Language may influence how listeners experience a

song, but it is rarely the deciding factor. “What matters most is artistic identity, quality, and finding the right audience.”

For Spyridaki, a musician and artist herself, the Greek language is not an obstacle; “On the contrary, it’s part of our cultural identity... one of the elements that makes our music special.”

After all, she says, music has the unique ability to communicate beyond words. “Emotion, rhythm, and sincerity are often far more powerful than language itself.”

Collective efforts go far

National music export offices operate in line with different models across Europe. Some are state-run entities, such as France’s Centre National de la Musique, which operates under the Culture Ministry,

while others follow hybrid public-private models, as seen in countries like Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands. These organizations typically function as independent non-profits, while receiving direct state support.

Music from Greece is supported by the Greek Culture Ministry, says Spyridaki, but she stresses that no single institution can transform the country’s international musical presence on its own.

“The ministry’s institutional support is essential,” she explains, “because it provides continuity, credibility, and the capacity to plan and implement actions with a long-term perspective.”

Successful music export strategies, however, require collaboration between government, the private sector, and the broader creative ecosystem. In countries that have developed effective export

frameworks, this effort often involves cooperation among multiple government bodies, including the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Development, Trade, and Tourism, she tells *TO BHMA International Edition*.

“Music is culture, but it is also a tool that contributes to diplomacy, economic development, and the strengthening of a country’s brand.”

Spyridaki also emphasizes the importance of collaboration with festivals, record labels, managers, booking agencies, educational institutions and cultural organizations.

“No organization can achieve this alone. International outreach requires a shared national vision, coordination, and consistency.”

Changing perceptions

Another challenge is changing how the world perceives Greek music. International audiences often associate Greece almost exclusively with traditional folk music.

While this genre is undeniably precious and an integral part of our cultural identity, it does not express the entirety of modern Greek musical creation.

Modern Greece is home to thriving jazz, classical, indie, hip-hop, electronica, metal, and experimental music scenes.

“One of our key objectives at Music from Greece is to introduce the world to this diversity. We don’t want to replace the existing image of Greek music, we want to expand it.”

Looking ahead

Spyridaki’s Cretan background makes her driven and determined. Looking ahead, she envisions a future in which Greek artists appearing at major international festivals and events are no longer viewed as exceptions.

Instead, she hopes Greece will become recognized as a country that consistently produces internationally competitive music across multiple genres.

“It shouldn’t be news when a Greek artist tours internationally or collaborates with global partners,” she says. “It should be business as usual.”

If she could change one thing overnight, it would be stronger bridges between Greek musicians and the international music industry.

“The talent already exists,” she says. “What artists need is access—to the right people, the right networks and the right opportunities.”

For a country whose musical heritage stretches back thousands of years and continues to evolve through new generations of talented artists, that ambition feels long overdue. It’s finally time for the next great Greek export: its music, its artists, and their stories.



Earlier this year, Music from Greece was admitted to the European Music Exporters Exchange, the leading European network of music export organizations, by unanimous vote.

Sotiris Sorogas: ‘Act in a way that won’t cause embarrassment later’

After a career that already spans more than six decades, the artist opens up his studio and talks about life, painting, Yiannis Moralis and the Greek intellectual tradition

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He himself navigates all this without the slightest hint of showing off. As if these are not his personal heirlooms, but rather objects that continue to have a place in his everyday life.

It is one of those rare encounters in which you quickly exchange the role of journalist for that of listener. Sotiris Sorogas narrates his life with a generosity one rarely encounters in this day and age. He talks about his teachers, as well as the people who made him who he is today as tenderly as he talks about painting, without ever separating the work from the life. And when the conversation reaches its end, he stands up quietly, picks out some of his books, opens them to the front page and writes a personal dedication in his familiar style, from the heart.

A while later, as I’m leafing through his book, I can’t get a phrase of his, one that made a great impression on me years ago as a teenager, out of my head: “One of the reasons it saddens me that I’m going to die is that I won’t be able to read again.” Returning to that space, it’s clear the books are so much more than an artist’s library; they are the most eloquent brushstrokes in the portrait of Sotiris Sorogas the artist and the man.

Mr. Sorogas, you are part of the seminal postwar generation that emerged on the art scene in the 1960s. How did you experience that period of intense political and intellectual searching in Athens, and what were the milestones along the way for you personally?

Looking back on the years of that truly intense, restless yet also curiously optimistic era, I remember how insuperable the barriers seemed to actually making a living from an art that never promises you anything.

Still, they were fruitful, happy years, marked by high points of ideological and artistic inquiry, with a lot of reading and dream-filled artistic horizons. When I was demobbed, in ’63, my activities began to



Sotiris Sorogas in his atelier, with two of his boat paintings.

intensify in a singular way. I was like someone discovering a miracle concealed in every aspect of life. That sense of surprise remains with me to this day, which is why the awareness that I’ve now lived my life sharpens the sorrow of departure.

You studied at the Athens School of Fine Arts under teachers like Yiannis Moralis. What has stayed with you from Moralis’ teaching, and how did you manage to

distance yourself from his immense artistic vision to find your own absolutely recognisable and captivating voice?

Moralis was exceptional, an amazing teacher with an incredible knowledge of a difficult art—because painting is hard.

He knew a great deal about how a composition is constructed out of colored shapes and light, whose revelation could open doors of creativity,

if expressing yourself was what you desired. Meaning that he knew the laws and rules that govern compositions. He spoke of simplifying surfaces, secret correspondences between different parts of a composition, color harmonies, and specific uses of light. Moralis’ teaching was expansive and non-prescriptive, which is why no one copied his painting style. And I don’t think more than a handful of his students imitated him.

I tried to continue his

teaching during the 40 years I taught in the School of Architecture. Before it was published, I gave Moralis a summary of my own teachings to read, to see if he agreed. I am moved whenever I recall our last meeting, at the Benaki Museum a few months before he passed away. Vasso Kyriaki and Antonis Kyriakoulis were there, too.

For decades, you taught Drawing and Color at the National Technical University of

Athens. How did the continuous interaction with young people affect you?

My contact with the students in the School of Architecture was one of the most joyous experiences in my life. I was always deeply committed to them, and this love and interest was reciprocated. Interestingly, when I invited Dimitris Mytaras to give them a few lessons as a visiting professor, he—being a fellow student of Moralis—referred them back to exactly the same teaching without any prior coordination on our part.

In 1972, you received the annual Ford Foundation grant, which allowed you to travel and study contemporary art in New York and Europe. How did this international experience impact you at a time when Greece was still under military rule?

We had made sure to learn about European art back in our student years, and several of us had already been to Paris and Italy. I don’t think the Colonels stopped us wanting to express ourselves. In fact, I’d say the dictatorship added impetus to our activities, as we tested the limits of risk-free—or as safe as possible—forms of resistance. Others went abroad. Curiously, the Ford Foundation grant was almost always awarded to individuals or institutions with a “dissident” profile.

The late Kaiti Myrivili was largely responsible for making these selections in Greece. She liked my work, which I had presented in my first exhibition. The grant allowed me to visit the most important museums in Europe and the U.S. and meet fellow artists. I believe the experience bore fruit in my later work. I didn’t know Myrivili beforehand, but we became good friends after that, and I was lucky enough to meet Maronitis, Tachtsis, Zongolopoulos, Karas, Kechaidis, Lefteris Poulios, and a good many others at the wonderful soirées she hosted at her home.

Your works, whether they be old rusted metals, driftwood, stones, or wells, are a study in decay and the passage of time. What made you choose to give a “voice” to objects that society considers useless or abandoned?

It’s hard to talk about things that stem, I believe, from our individual psyches and our interpretation of life. I don’t mind telling you that my love of life may verge on the immoderate, since my gaze almost always finds companionship in the dying, in things on the verge of loss. You need only recall what you remember of my subjects. Even the portraits are like funerary monuments.

The color white, or rather the “negative” of the canvas, is a co-protagonist in your work. What does it symbolize for you?

It is the eternal interplay between light and darkness. It is ambiguity and duality. It is the angelic and the black light in the poetry of Seferis, of Kalvos, of Byzantine icons and ancient tragedy. It is the canvas on which I think all art converses. I try to infuse my subjects with a sense of how the world exists for me, as a form of confession.

Your painting has a deeply poetic and philosophical dimension, which many connect with the “Greekness” of Seferis or Elytis. Do you feel like a “poet who paints”?

I would be happy indeed for my work to have “a deeply poetic and philosophical dimension” connected, as you say, with the specifically Greek quality of our two great poets. I believe that everyone who paints is actually laying bare their soul in the way they know best. This is reflected in their work, which is simultaneously influenced by various other elements and events. Quite often, these modify their efforts holistically, as well as their ability to narrate their world.

You represented Greece at the São Paulo Biennial in 1981 and your work has been shown in international exhibitions. How do international audiences perceive the deeply internal, almost “ascetic” Greekness of your paintings?

I think your question re-



Petres, one of the most recognizable painting series by Sotiris Sorogas.

quires a nuanced perspective on whether and how other criteria might be at play for a non-Greek audience, shaping how they engage with the painting. I believe that such an audience is either non-existent or exceptionally rare, due to virtually every museum of modern art having long since succumbed to an addiction to a commercialized, mass, kitsch culture in

what they choose to showcase. You will have noticed for yourself that painting is marked by its absence. I think few artists today have remained faithful to this wonderful art of nuance, of allusion, of tender feelings and contemplative meanings.

The monumental “carts” at the Larissis Metro station are a

daily meeting point for thousands of citizens. How does an artist feel when their work emerges from the silence of the studio and the gallery and becomes part of the public sphere and people’s daily lives?

I remember being delighted when the Athens Metro proposed exhibiting works

of mine there. It was a fine opportunity to start up a conversation between my work and the general public—everyone who ever finds themselves in front of an art-work without meaning to—and not only with art lovers. I considered the subject exceptionally well-suited to the works. The old modes of transport—a train, a tram, a cart—would serve as a reminder of the fate that awaits all things. In fact, this reminder may actually be at the very core of the things I spent so many years of my life painting. As for the recognition you kindly refer to, that question has always left me at a loss.

You have frequently expressed unease about the direction modern culture is moving in. In an era of absolute digitization, speed and ephemeral images, what can painting offer?

I believe that painting is a highly spiritual art with infinite expressive possibilities. After all, it is inextricably linked with mankind’s history, given that painting found the way to narrate and give physical form to every need, every religion and ideology, every culture. Nowadays, “the dominance of the ephemeral image,” as you put it, has made painting, with its inherent density of meaning and emotion, into an impenetrable form of communication. Our contemporary, kitsch-culture-addicted museums of modern art have given themselves over to a mass of rubbish that seeks—in vain, as is now clear—to substitute itself for art.

Do you believe that we have lost the “thread” and the essence of artistic creation?

I believe that the commercialization of everything at the hands of a predatory capitalism, as Chomsky would say, has led to the desecration of every aspect of our lives.

The negation of the intrinsic value of the spirit, too, and its incorporation into the transactional dealings of a mercenary mindset, has eroded, if not entirely eradicated, the meanings of life, our codes of communication and moral values. And art, inevitably integrated as it is into our contemporary, multifaceted social framework, has I believe become a mouthpiece for, and ally of, the impasses we now find ourselves in. I hasten to add that the broad formulations and generalizations of issues such as these, which I am touching upon so superficially here, cannot be simplified with impunity.

Looking at Greek society today, with all its contradictions and crises, its intellectual and spiritual quests, are you optimistic about the future?

I feel that attempting to answer your questions would force me to forfeit any claims I may have to being a serious person, given that the fate of the country hangs in the balance and hinges on these questions and our response to them. All I can tell you is what I would like to change. Not, of course, by holding back technological achievements, but primarily through the preservation of our Greek intellectual tradition. I believe—like many Greeks, though not all—that this tradition is unique in the breadth and depth of its meanings, compared to any other intellectual tradition in the world. And this tradition cannot survive, unless—first off—we protect the three-thousand-year-old language in which it is expressed. And one other thing: I can’t understand why we suffer from such a sense of national inferiority.

Can art function as a cure or a compass in an era of generalized disorientation?

Egonopoulos used to say that art helps us to die.

If you ran into the young Sotiris Sorogas as he was just starting his studies in art, what would you say to him?

I’d tell him to act in a way that won’t cause embarrassment later.



Tools, books, and miscellaneous items—all playing a unique part in the artist’s process.

Deep Inside a Cretan Cave, Scientists Found a Hidden World

A pioneering expedition into Greece’s deepest cave has uncovered hundreds of previously unexplored microorganisms that could hold promise for future antiviral, antibacterial, and anticancer discoveries

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Their findings, published in the scientific journal *Frontiers in Microbiology*, suggest significant scientific potential.

The cave microbiome—the community of microorganisms that has adapted to life inside caves—remains largely unexplored. Yet studying it has become a major priority for researchers worldwide.

Speaking to *TO VIMA Science*, Sarris explained why:

“Deep caves are not merely geological formations. They are isolated ‘worlds within the world,’ where microbial life has evolved over millions of years in complete darkness, with almost no nutrients, low temperatures, and virtually no outside influences. This extreme isolation makes cave microbiomes exceptionally valuable for science. Unlike surface ecosystems, life here does not depend on photosynthesis but on alternative metabolic strategies based on chemical reactions involving inorganic elements. These adaptations often lead to the production of unique biochemical compounds—substances nature has ‘designed’ to survive in environments with extremely limited energy. Such molecules may prove invaluable in addressing challenges such as antibiotic resistance and much more.”

A scientific adventure

Before examining the team’s discoveries, it is worth telling the remarkable story behind them—a story of scientific exploration, interdisciplinary collaboration, volunteerism, passion for research, and... zero funding.

Everything described below was accomplished solely through the researchers’ commitment to science, without any government funding.

The project began in 2022, when an entirely Greek team of volunteer geologists and cave explorers, led by Markos Vaxevanopoulos and Giorgos Sotiriadis, set out to create a modern survey of Gourgouthakas Cave. Among the expedition members descending into the White Mountains was Savvas Paragakman, the study’s lead author.

Gourgouthakas is not an easy place to explore. Stretching 2,384 meters in length and reaching a depth of 1,100 meters, with 100% humidity and temperatures ranging between 6°C and 7°C, the cave



Cavers approach the entrance to the cave, with the northeastern slopes of the White Mountains, whose peaks rise above 2,000 meters, in the background.

demands absolute respect.

“People usually ask whether there is enough oxygen inside caves,” Paragakman told *TO VIMA Science*. “In reality, the greatest danger is water. If there’s even a possibility of rain, the expedition is postponed because certain passages can flood rapidly and trigger landslides.”

He emphasized that the expedition’s meticulous planning was key to its success. A support team, including volunteer cooks, remained at the

cave entrance, while a supply station was established 600 meters underground. Communication systems and specialized caving equipment were also essential, following months of preparation.

The same level of care was devoted to collecting samples.

“We took great care to prevent contamination by surface microorganisms that we ourselves might have carried into the cave,” Paragakman explained.

He spent 22 hours inside Gourgouthakas collecting both dry and liquid samples from different depths, eventually reaching the cave’s deepest accessible point. Three of those hours were spent resting, while the climb back to the surface alone took another seven hours.

A relay race against time

The rapid and safe transport of the samples proved equally critical to the project’s success.

Dry ice maintained the samples at -78.5°C until they reached the laboratory, but getting them there was no simple task.

After emerging from the cave, Paragakman still had to hike for two hours to reach the expedition’s vehicles, which could not travel any farther. He then drove to Chania, where the samples were handed over to Christos Christakis for transport to Heraklion, allowing laboratory work to begin immediately

to ensure the microorganisms remained viable.

The first challenge was cultivating organisms that had never before been studied. But under what conditions do you grow microorganisms that no one has ever cultivated?

“Each sample was cultured using four different growth media and at two different temperatures—the cave’s natural temperature and 25°C,” Christakis said.

“As for the culture media, one was nutrient-rich, another contained half the nutrients, while the other two were much poorer. The fourth medium contained no nitrogen because we wanted to investigate whether nitrogen-fixing microorganisms were present.”

Discoveries of exceptional value

After months of systematic work, the research team successfully cultured 865 species of microorganisms, including bacteria and fungi, creating a biological repository unlike any other in the world.

Using advanced molecular techniques, the researchers then identified the microorganisms and began investigating their biological properties.

“In addition to accurately mapping microbial diversity and revealing the functional capabilities of these communities, we discovered a wide range of bioactive molecules produced by these microorganisms,” Sarris said.

“In other words, deep-cave microbiomes are not simply poorer versions of surface microbial communities. They are distinct ecosystems with specialized functions and remarkably interesting new metabolic pathways.”

The team’s initial tests have already produced encouraging results.

Two microorganisms, identified by the codes SRL871 and SRL810, proved significantly more effective than commercially available products at combating pathogens that damage vegetable crops.

Research into the antimicrobial and anticancer properties of these biomolecules is still ongoing. But one thing already seems certain: in the years ahead, the scientific community is likely to hear much more about the remarkable discoveries hidden for millions of years inside Gourgouthakas Cave.



A researcher collects samples at a depth of 1,100 meters.