

Where I Last Got Paid to Sing : Maria Damore's Portfolio Career

SEPTEMBER 1, 2019 MICHELLE LATOUR



Soprano Maria Damore enjoys a versatile career as a singer and teacher. Last year, she competed as a quarterfinalist in the 2018 American Traditions Vocal Competition, known for its celebration of American composers of various musical genres. In July, she released a single cover tune, Sarah McLachlan's "Angel." And several years ago Damore released a full CD, *Moonglow*, with her group Maria Damore and the Jazzy Gents. This month, she shares her experience performing at a Greek wedding.

Where did you last sing and get paid?

I was delighted to provide Greek folk music at a Greek American wedding reception in Philadelphia. I have been working with my brother, Stavros Flamporis, for nearly 25 years in our group, Stavros & Maria, entertaining audiences with the music of our heritage. Stavros plays the bouzouki, a traditional Greek stringed instrument, and we both sing.

How much were you paid?

As with most bands or other musical groups, the pay depends on the type of gig, location, and travel costs. We set the price based on these factors.

How long did it last?

We were booked for three hours and shared the stage with a DJ. We provided both Greek and American dinner music, with Stavros strolling on his bouzouki for Greek instrumentals and then switching to bass or guitar for the American music.

Once dinner was over, we kicked it up with Greek dance music in a variety of dance styles, such as Kalamatiano, Zeibekiko, Tsamiko, and Hasapiko. The Greek bridal song, "Oraia Pou Einai I Nifi Mas," which translates to "Beautiful Is Our Bride," was first. In this traditional Greek wedding circle dance, the bridal party starts and then the guests are invited to join the circle until the dance floor is completely full.

How did you get the job?

We generally get bookings through word of mouth or through free listings on GigSalad, the Knot, and WeddingWire. In this case, we've known the family for many years through our church community.

What was your overall experience like?

The experience was very positive. Being able to perform music of our ethnic heritage and watching our audience link arms and participate in the circle dances is a wonderful privilege.

Would you do this or a similar gig again?

Absolutely! We love playing at weddings, Greek festivals (ah, the food), and presenting programs of Greek music to retirement communities when they host ethnic heritage events.

In addition, I am developing another Greek offering: a concert/cabaret of Greek music, including folk songs and art songs particularly from the first half of the 20th century. Included in this will be Ravel's *Five Greek Folk Songs*, which I sing in Greek. Lydíá Zervanos' 2015 book, *Singing in Greek: A Guide to Greek Lyric Diction and Vocal Repertoire*, has been a tremendous aid in researching this repertoire.

Anything else you would like to add?

I am grateful every day to be able to piece together a livelihood in the arts with a portfolio career. Vocal versatility is the key to being able to manage a schedule where a few weeks might include a Greek gig on a Saturday, jazz on Sunday, Olivet youth choir direction and private voice teaching during the week, a porch concert with my pop/rock trio in Cape May, New Jersey, on a warm summer night, and any number of gigs for senior populations at retirement communities, nursing homes, and memory care units, all while preparing for a role—in this case, Mother/Witch for an abridged version of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* playing in late September 2019 at our Yocum Institute for Arts Education.

The plus side to this life, which includes a non-musical adjunct teaching position in the business division at our local community college, is that there's never a boring week. The challenges lie in keeping the voice healthy and balanced, staying on top of all the preparation required for the various types of gigs, and finding ways to market my various musical offerings.

You can find out more about Damore at www.mariadamore.com.