

GEORGE DALARAS BIOGRAPHY

Born on September 29, 1949 in the port city of Piraeus, George Dalaras comes from a tradition of folk and blues music. His mother was a Greek refugee from Asia Minor, while his father was a traditional musician and bouzouki player. Dalaras's first musical memories are of the main forms of Greek music: the laika (popular), the rebetika (a kind of blues) and the paradosiaka (traditional).

Dalaras gave his first public appearance, as a singer and guitarist, at the age of 16. Two years later he cut his first album – a critically acclaimed and popular collection of Greek urban music based on the stringed bouzouki and enriched by the young musician's contemporary approach. Since then, Dalaras has sold more than 12 million albums of his own work and collaborations. In all, he has released more than 65 solo albums and appeared as a guest or producer on more than 50 other discs.

In his early twenties, he began working with the great names in Greek music. Most notable over the years has been his collaboration with Mikis Theodorakis. Dalaras has toured Greece and Europe several times with Theodorakis, interpreting the composer's greatest songs. He has also recorded many works by Theodorakis, including a live album from Athen's Herodus Atticus Theatre of the masterpiece, Axion Esti.

Dalaras has also worked with such top Greek composers as Stavros Kouyioumtzis, Manos Loizos, Apostolos Kaldaras, Christos Nikolopoulos, Yannis Markopoulos, Stavros Xarchakos, Thanos Mikroutsikos, Eleni Karaindrou and lyricists such as Lefteris Papadopoulos, Manos Eleftheriou, Nikos Gatsos and Kostas Tripolitis.

Since 1981, he has helped promote Greek culture overseas by performing more than 500 concerts in major world cities. He has appeared at numerous cultural and humanitarian festivals at home and abroad, including the 1983 Peace Festival in Vienna, the Youth Festival in Moscow in 1985 and the Aid to Africa Concert in Athens in 1986. Two years later, he took part in a star-studded Amnesty International Concert in Athens, lining up alongside Peter Gabriel, Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Tracy Chapman and Youssou N'Dour.

In 2001, the year he first became involved with UNHCR during the agency's 50th anniversary, Dalaras appeared with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Philadelphia at the Saratoga Festival in the United States.

Dalaras has long been involved in humanitarian causes, learning from his refugee mother to care about the struggles of others. In 1994, during a concert in New Jersey, Senator Edward Kennedy presented him with the Kennedy Award in recognition of his humanitarian work.

That same year in Athens, he starred in a musical spectacular tracing the history of Greek music from antiquity to the present. The show was directed by noted film director, Costas Gavras.

The singer has not cut down on his workload in recent years. In June 2003, Dalaras performed at the Herod Atticus Theatre with Glykeria, on a "Tribute to Asia Minor." In August 2004, Dalaras and a host of special guests performed two concerts entitled "30th–40th Parallel: Musical Journey to the Mediterranean" at the same venue.

In May last year, Dalaras and Dulce Pontes performed two concerts at the Herod Atticus Theatre to raise money for children suffering from cancer. And last October, he performed a tribute to the rebetiko, or Greek Blues, in Vienna with Melina Aslanidou and Sofia Papazoglou.

Thanks to his exceptional voice and instrumental skills, Dalaras has always been at the forefront of innovation in contemporary Greek music. In a country with so many flourishing traditions, Dalaras has become a musical phenomenon. Yet this modest man shuns the celebrity lifestyle and the banalities of commercial Greek bouzouki music. He has preferred to bring his audiences to the discovery of new music.

His collaborations with other international artists – including Sting, Paco de Lucia, Al di Meola, Goran Bregovic, Ian Anderson, Joan Faulkner, Jocelyn B. Smith, Emma Shaplin, Eddy Napoli and Dulce Pontes – and orchestras have demonstrated his ability to cross over into different styles.

Aside from his music, Dalaras has won plaudits for his support of worthy causes and his concern with social issues. His fight for justice and his support for the politically or socially oppressed have made him a focus for humanitarian activists. He is particularly supportive of causes associated with labour movements, discrimination against women and children, sufferers of emotional or physical abuse – and, of course, refugees.

His art and his popularity transcend the borders of Greece precisely because his compositions – poignant expressions of protest, social indignation and hope – set him apart from most musicians.

On October 5, 2006, Dalaras was named a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador during a ceremony at the Old Parliament Building in Athens. The singer is married with one daughter.