

## **Are You a FilmHellene?**

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CHICAGO – Are you a FilmHellene? What's a FilmHellene, you ask? A FilmHellene is someone who supports Greek cinema, and FilmHellenes is an alliance of individuals striving to bring current Greek films and promote the works of Greek filmmakers from all around the world, right here in Chicago.

It's been several years since we've had a Greek film festival here in Chicago. About 2-1/2 years ago, filmmaker Niko Franghias was at an event at the National Hellenic Museum when he was approached by Vickie Kamberos. "Vickie, an avid cinephile herself, found out I was a filmmaker, and approached me to help revive the festival," shared Franghias. "I have ties to my fellow filmmakers in Greece, so I said OK, let's explore it."

Fast forward to 2011, and Franghias began meeting with Kostas Daskalopoulos, Vice Consul of Greece in Chicago. "In Europe, the film landscape had begun to change. Greek films were getting recognition abroad at international festivals. Films like "Dogtooth" were being recognized at Cannes, Venice, Sundance. We didn't want to lose that momentum," Franghias explained. "People must know that contemporary Greek films are very different. The old school of 'artistic' films that communicate to a very limited audience, is over. Now it's a dynamic period for Greek films, thanks to rising Greek talent and films like "Strella" (Berlin International Film Festival), "Plato's Academy" (Locarno Festival), "Attenberg" (Venice, Sundance among others), "Wasted Youth" (opened Rotterdam), "Homeland" (Venice), or "Dogtooth" (Cannes), which was also nominated for a foreign language Academy Award.

The two joined forces with Alex Papadopoulos, Associate Professor of Geography at DePaul University. "We proposed creating an independent alliance to bring people together – media, filmmakers, educators and others of different backgrounds who are Greek film lovers; to identify and support new Greek talent, from wherever it comes -South America, Canada, Africa, etc. We decided to revive the film fest and more."

Now what would they call this endeavor? "Our name came up as a connection to the Philhellenes of the past, notable people from all over the world - lovers of Greek culture. Philhellenism, their movement, through powerful representations of visual art and travel literature, formed an intellectual 'fashion' prominent at the turn of the 19th century, which contributed to the establishment of the Greek nation-state," said Franghias.

A committee was formed, comprised of Franghias, Daskalopoulos and Papadopoulos; plus Kyriakos Mellos of Daily Frappe; Dino Vlahakis, owner of the Pickwick Theatre in Park Ridge, Ill.; Franghias' associate Terry Jacobs of EmberFrames; producer Valerie Gobos; Dr. Zizi Papacharissi, Professor and Head of the Communications Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago; Toulia Georgakopoulos of the National Hellenic Museum; and the newest member, Dimitri Kostopoulos of the US Bank and a Greek language teacher at the Hellenic American Academy. "Terry Poulos of The Greek Media Club has been very helpful to us in getting our 'message' out, as well as the Greek Film Center, Greece's official state film organization, in providing promo materials for our events."

The FilmHellenes committee set forth, with a multi-tiered mission. In the first year, the non-profit organization (pending) will concentrate on the “Greek Film Fest Chicago!” working toward a fall festival. With this, they strive to showcase Greek films in the Chicago and surrounding communities by embracing Greek filmmakers worldwide. The festival will include selections of recent narrative features, documentaries, shorts and animation, along with thematic discussions; promote the Greek language and the ecumenical humane values of Hellenic heritage within the Greek community and beyond; inspire the newer generation of Greek-Americans and reunite the older with Greek speech heard as it is spoken today, through the cinema; synergize with, and support other Greek organizations in the Chicago area; and support the universal values of freedom of expression and thought that are fundamental to good cinema.

Next year, they hope to continue to bring current Greek films to the Chicago area on a regular basis. “In addition to the festival, we hope to create a series of film events throughout the year. For example, we could team up with the Michael Cacoyiannis Foundation and host a retrospective of his films. We could do thematical events, such as showing archaeological films, thus partnering with Agon, the archaeological film festival in Athens. There’s so much we can do.”

The FilmHellenes will present a special event on May 1 at 7:00 pm, to kick-off their endeavors. They’ll screen the classic film “Zorba the Greek” (1964) by Michael Cacoyiannis - one of the greatest movies of all time. Admission is free, thanks to the Pickwick Theater.

The FilmHellenes are actively courting funding and volunteers, to help move their plans forward. “The Greek film landscape is rapidly redefining itself, in spite of the country’s challenges. A new wave of films (both art-house and mainstream) is emerging. I’m optimistic about our efforts. There’s a lot of excitement brewing. I met many people at the Greek Journey in the Windy City event at Navy Pier, who are very enthusiastic. There’s a lot of excitement and passion out there. In the film business, we say that ‘the challenges are often too many if you just have love. Love is not enough. Passion **is**.’ Because passion is action. If you have the passion, you can make it happen,” Franghias added.

To learn more about FilmHellenes or to get involved, visit [www.greekfilmfestchicago.org](http://www.greekfilmfestchicago.org) or follow Greek Film Fest Chicago on Facebook.