

OUZO POWER SHOWCASE BIO

ROCKING GREEK BLUES - PUSHING A TRADITIONAL GENRE IN NEW DIRECTIONS

OUZO POWER, THE BAND

An electrifying, genre-leaping, bouzouki-driven rock/blues acoustic band, Ouzo Power kicks new life into traditional urban Greek Rebetika blues – a music rooted in alienation and rebellion.

Led by their bohemian front man – the fiery George Sapounidis – and backed by three world-class musicians, Ouzo Power transforms a subversive Greek underworld music of hash dens, poverty, prison, death and lost love, blazing a trail through a hard-edged fusion of blues, folk, rock, reggae and heavy metal

Last year the band was nominated *for Best World Group of the Year* at the Canadian Folk Music Awards. And they recently launched a new album, *Ouzo Power's Greatest Hits Vol.1*

FRONT MAN AND LEAD SINGER, GEORGE SAPOUNIDIS

Sapounidis, Ouzo Power's lead singer is a rocking bouzouki master. His instrument is a custom made, electrified, eight-string bouzouki fuelled by his intense passion – a passion with legitimate roots, for he is a descendant of Ottoman Greeks forced into exile and poverty by war.

The bouzouki is an eloquent expression one could say, of his anarchic soul, a soul that bears the genetic imprint of a people steeped in non-conformity.

THE MUSIC

Rebetika is the Greek form of the blues. The blues, in any language, is a bitter sweet musical genre, born of pain and sorrow and of strong emotion. It's cathartic and visceral. And it's powerful.

The Greek blues, unlike the American rural based blues rooted in African vocal spirituals, chants and field hollers, were an urban music with roots reaching back to Ottoman cafe music, a synthesis of European music, Orthodox ecclesiastical chant and traditional Anatolian dance rhythms.

Rebetika came into its own as the music of despised, displaced people – the "Rebetis" – the hundreds of thousands of Greek refugees living in Turkey, forced by war to flee the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Comfortable ordinary lives turned to misery as the ousted Turkish-born Greeks sought refuge in the slums and refugee settlements of the foreign cities of Greece.

Like the African American blues, Rebetika was forged of alienation and loss, the voice of a people trapped in a hostile land. But Rebetika was less a soulful blues than a subversive, non conformist, rebellious blues.

The songs told stories of crime, poverty, booze, death and exile – as well as love. But more than anything they celebrated the life of the underworld: the hash dens and prisons.

Over the years, the music moved into the Turkish style underground cafes and eventually to taverns and night clubs.

Rebetika all but died out in the 1950's – until a new generation of young people protesting Greece's repressive military dictatorship in the 1960's, discovered a voice in its defiant anti-establishment themes.

OUZO POWER FORGES A NEW SOUND

Now in the new millennium, along comes Ouzo Power, helmed by modern day Rebetis, George Sapounidis, and three formidable musicians to forge a new sound.

Sapounidis emanates an irresistible, offbeat charisma and unbridled enthusiasm that magically make inhibitions disappear in even the most world weary of audiences.

Tall and lanky, with greying shoulder-length curls, he defines the word "unconventional". He's an intercultural musical pied piper who draws a crowd wherever he goes, a musical ambassador to the world who can perform in a dozen languages. He is also a two-time Olympic torch bearer and subject of an award winning CTV documentary.

His three impressive backup musicians are self-described musical road warriors, masters of multiple musical forms.

STUART WATKINS - ELECTRIC GUITAR AND BACKUP VOCALS

Stuart Watkins' talents span the global musical spectrum. He has worked with Hip Hop artists in Los Angeles and studied Mblalax music in Senegal (a popular dance music that is a fusion of jazz, soul, Latin and rock, merged with sabar traditional drumming) that emerged in the 1970's. He played reggae for a decade, not to mention Bhangra (Indian pop), tango, Latin, Jazz as well as folk and rock.

Watkins teaches performance at Carleton University to bass guitar students. And he tours the world with the best: artists like David Foster, Paul Anka, Peter Gabriel, New York's East Village Opera Company and The Canadian Tenors.

When invited by Sapounidis to join Ouzo Power, he, not surprisingly, jumped at the chance to stretch his musical horizons even further and learn the challenging signatures and rhythms of a music with Byzantine roots.

“George is the most eclectic artist I have ever worked with,” Watkins says. “He charms audiences wherever he goes. He knows how to tap into what resonates with them.”

ROSS MURRAY, PRODUCER, RECORDING ENGINEER

Ross Murray has recorded and toured with Bo Diddley, Madagascar Slim, Great Big C, Etta James, and the East Village Opera Company.

“Greek Rebetika music is going viral,” Murray says. “People in Greece are crazy for this music. We’re exploring every variation possible – Greek reggae, Greek country ‘n’ western, Greek folk and blues, Greek rock and Greek heavy metal.”

That makes Ouzo Power an experimental band – a description that Murray agrees with.

“We’re all strong musicians and we take the music seriously but at the same time we have fun with it. We try different things. George knows the songs in their traditional forms but we’ve been travelling all over the place and picked up other influences.

“To take a sad, heavy, hard-drinking Greek blues song with bawdy lyrics and turn it into fast rock or reggae, that’s fun. We play with the style. We push the envelope.”

FRED GUIGNON, ELECTRIC GUITARS, LAP STEEL

Fred Guigon’s work is everywhere: on countless albums as well as theatre, film and TV sound tracks. He is as comfortable with a folksy ballad as searing heavy metal. He has toured the U.S., Europe, the U.K. and Canada.

Ouzo Power is definitely a band to watch as they take a subversive urban underground music and transform it into an exciting new ground-breaking genre.