

## About 'Chairman' George



"There are some people," wrote Montreal's La Presse newspaper, in trying to describe musical chameleon George Sapounidis, "that you would believe spring from the imagination." But some might say that this charismatic performer is a person beyond what anyone could imagine.

This bouzouki-playing civil servant, aka Dr. George Sampson, (he holds a Ph.D in mathematical statistics), with the greying mop of shoulder length curls is a singing sensation in China - as well as in Ottawa where he entertains cultural communities from across the Globe. His repertoire embraces everything from rock-infused Greek folk songs to traditional ballads in a dozen languages.

He is a two-time Olympic torch bearer, TV personality, cultural ambassador and subject of award-winning CTV, BBC and Chinese Tianjin TV documentaries.

His gentle almost child-like charisma seduces audiences of all ages and nationalities wherever he performs. He has China in the palm of his hand. Here, the Greek exhuberance of his music flirts with the Chinese tranquility of age-old Mandarin ballads. Rarely do audiences in this rule-bound nation demonstrate such unfettered enthusiasm -- for before them stands a tall, engaging western Pied Piper who speaks and composes songs in their language. He is like no one they have seen.

CBC national radio icon Shelagh Rogers called him a "troubadour savant".

Yet for all his unaffected charm, George Sapounidis' music is rooted in a tradition of rebellion and non conformity. He is a descendent of Greeks who lived in Asia Minor since antiquity but were forced into exile after the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922, relegated to shanty towns, living lives of broken dreams.

Like the blues culture of Harlem their despair gave rise to a music of pain and protest. It was called Rebetika, the musicians "Rebetes" or nonconformists.

George Sapounidis is a modern day Rebetis -- defying conventional norms in his professional, personal and musical life, enriching the lives of those he touches along the way.

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