

VICKY ANASTASIOU

An instrumental voice

London-based vocalist draws on her Mediterranean roots and folk music for inspiration

“Music came to me so naturally,” says Vicky Anastasiou. “I grew up listening to my Dad with his bouzouki, playing in the tavern every night.” With talent springing from her family’s musical background, the young vocalist is forging her own distinctive path with a sound that incorporates influences from the Mediterranean and beyond. The tunes of Greek folk songs she heard as a child resonated in her and she has found herself drawn to her musical heritage, despite a strong grounding in classical and contemporary music.

Having been immersed in music for as long as she can remember, it seemed almost inevitable that Anastasiou would make it her life’s work. “The first time I sang at a family gathering, no-one seemed very impressed,” smiled Anastasiou. “But I loved it, and kept going. I’ve worked with my father for years now, singing by his side night after night in our family’s tavern Mousiki Kivotos, and I know how proud he is of me.” With her family’s staunch support, she followed her dream to London, where she completed her Masters in Music Performance at London College of Music last year.

“I think I wanted to be a vet when I was little,” she recalled with a laugh. “But I took classical piano lessons from the age of five, and of the four children in our family I’m the only one who continued as a teenager. My brothers and sister stopped eventually, but I loved it and kept playing until Grade 8.” Growing up in Limassol, Anastasiou absorbed her father’s folk influences and was first introduced to jazz through local musicians.

Currently living and working in London, she admits that it was a challenge to find her way at first. “I love London so much, it’s so rich, so diverse, but it was very hard at the beginning, quite daunting in fact, to get into the musical network in the UK. I knew no-one, and had no musician friends. That was strange for me, because I’d done a lot of gigs in Cyprus before go-

ing away to study. But once I got to my Masters, I met a lot of people from all over the world, and started playing a lot more. Now, I even play in a Persian band, singing in Farsi and Kurdish!”

Keeping strong ties with her roots, Anastasiou also collaborates with an organisation called Kite Music, which sets up workshops to introduce young people from the London Cypriot community to Greek folk music. “People there are more nostalgic about the traditional songs, and they love it when we sing to them,” she explains. “I mean, I studied contemporary singing, styles like rock, soul and blues, but it seems that all that traditional music I heard as I was growing up has finally found an outlet, and I find myself turning back to it now that I’ve finished my studies.”

When I asked her about her ‘jazz’ influences, Anastasiou smiled. “Jazz is a huge umbrella, it covers a lot of styles,” she said. “I’m currently singing with a swing band, known as The Red Jazz Asymphony Orchestra, but I wouldn’t dare to call myself a jazz musician. It’s a very complicated style, and I would need to study it for years, I think.” She explained that she takes some of the elements of jazz, like freedom and fluidity, and uses those in her own music.

Anastasiou doesn’t feel bound by one ‘nationality’ of music. “I listen to a lot of music and a lot of styles. Lately I’m listening to a lot of singing from Bulgaria, Mongolia, Brazil and Crete. I meet so many musicians in London, from all over the world, and it’s really interesting. The point is to listen to all these styles, and absorb them before creating something new of your own.”

Her latest project is called Amalgamation, which is an exciting mix of sounds and styles, fearlessly and effortlessly blended with Anastasiou’s unique voice providing the perfect glue to bring it all together. With four concerts over the summer, the project has already been a



[All pictures by Nathan Servi]

huge success. “The first two events were sold out,” she revealed. “People loved it, even though we were singing in some languages they weren’t familiar with.”

It’s her first personal project, and she has been involved in every stage of it, including selecting the musicians, choosing the repertoire and organising the promotion. “I’m planning to record the Amalgamation project soon, featuring my own compositions,” she said. “And we’ve also got new management for the band, so we’re going to record some original pieces together. It’s going to be a busy time, but I’m also hoping to start a PhD

next year.”

Anastasiou is fascinated by the subject of ‘ethnomusicology’ – the study of music from a social and cultural perspective – and would love to pursue it further as an area of research. “I get my inspirations from all kinds of music, so even though my background is in Greek folk music, I can’t describe myself as a specific type of musician. I love music as a whole.”

Details about upcoming performances around the island, and attendance at various festivals and events around the world can be found on www.vicky Anastasiou.com.

