

An Olympic theme: Olympia – Eternal Flame



To celebrate the return of the Olympic Games to Greece, BBC TV has selected a specially commissioned new piece of music to accompany the programme, which reflects the history, spirit and all that the Olympic Games stand for.

The song, *Olympia – Eternal Flame*, is performed and recorded by the celebrated “world’s first opera band”, Amici forever (pictured above). The song was written by Greek musician/writer/producer John Themis, Rick Blaskey, who has previously been involved in the official music for many of the world’s major international sports events, and Greek poet Avraam Demetriou.

The melody is based on a traditional old Greek dance called the Karagouna. The dance originated in Thessaly, just south of Mount Olympus, abode of the Ancient Greek gods. It was danced by people wearing black (Kara) capes (Gouna) made of bear skins (bears are native to this area), hence the name Karagouna. This social dance is still popular and is danced by Greeks everywhere.

The lyrics of the piece encompass what the Games are all about. The opening sentiment is translated as, “O come young people, all join hands, with one heart, resolve your differences”, reflecting that this was, indeed, how the Olympic Games came about. This is followed by the sentiment, in Greek, which expresses that this is a “song of peace, to the people of the world, for a bright future, Greek spirit of immortality, prosperity and completeness of body and mind”. Ancient Greeks were especially focused on the development of these attributes.

The third section reflects the five colours of the Olympic rings (red, green, black, blue and yellow), as well as five symbolising the unity of the five continents. It also translates as “Arch of Heaven”, a rainbow, signifying the unity of all colours, races and creeds; and as “Time you returned home: welcome back to your birthplace, O Olympiad”.

The Olympia chant that runs throughout the song is a reference to Olympia, the birthplace of the original Olympic Games. The additional recurring refrain of *Eternal Flame* reflects the enduring spirit of the Games that is symbolised by the Olympic Flame and the symbolic Olympic Torch that carries the Flame and the spirit through time.

The song also features the ancient Greek instrument that pre-dates the Olympics. The Pontic Lyra is as old as the Trojan war – when the Trojans won the war, they devised a victory dance performed to the sounds of the Lyra, which sounds like a cross between a hurdy gurdy and a fiddle. The Zither was also used in the piece and, while not as old as the Lyra, the

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Greeks use this in a lot of their traditional music and call it a Santouri.

The band has been nominated for a Classical Brit Award for their album *The Opera Band*, which entered the classical charts at No. 2. The inspirational *Olympia – Eternal Flame* will be added as a bonus track to the album from 23 August.

Amici forever will perform *Olympia – Eternal Flame*, live at the BBC's Olympics Media Launch on 6 July.

Backgrounds

Classically trained John Themis has an impressive list of credits as a musician, producer, arranger and writer. As a musician, he has played with Dido, Stevie Wonder, George Michael, Madonna, Craig David, The Spice Girls, Michael Kamen, Elton John, Cher, Will Young, Rod Stewart and many more; as a songwriter, he has written for Blue, Kylie, Sugababes, Atomic Kitten, Blazin' Squad, Charlotte Church and Dolly Parton, among others; and as an arranger, he has worked with a multitude of artists as well as on movies and TV commercials.

Rick Blaskey has served as executive producer of official music for many of the biggest international sports events in the world over the last few years. These include football World Cups (Ricky Martin) European Championships (*Three Lions*) and rugby World Cups (*Swing Low/World In Union*). He has also been involved as a co-writer for some of these major event anthems.

Rick is executive producer for Amici forever, a role he has also played for Russell Watson, Opera Babes and other artists. He has previously worked closely with such international artists as Whitney Houston, Barry Manilow, Cliff Richard and Tina Turner; and he runs The Music and

Media Partnership, a company that puts together music-marketing communications for major brands – his latest is the current international Coca-Cola commercial.

Poet Avraam Demetriou also works full time as a dentist.

Amici forever are Jo Appleby, soprano, from Lancashire; Tsakane Valentine, soprano, from South Africa; Geoff Sewell, tenor, from New Zealand; David Habbin, tenor, from Bournemouth; and Nick Garrett, bass-baritone, from North London.