

**VASILIS KOSTAS Merges Contemporary Jazz with Greek Folk Traditions on *LÉNA*, out April 17**

**Grammy Nominee's Solo Debut Crafts a Modern Vision for the *Greek Laouto***

**Kostas is joined on the CD by a Superlative Ensemble of Musicians from Greece and the U.S.**

**New York City CD Release Concert: Saturday, April 18 at ROULETTE**

A groundbreaking composer and musician, Vasilis Kostas has spent the past decade bringing the laouto — a traditional string instrument of the lute family, similar to the oud, whose lineage traces back to ancient Greece — to the international stage. Moreover, Kostas has done so while absorbing the influences of jazz and world music into his playing.

He says he allows his creative ideas to manifest themselves, spontaneous and unrushed.

“I never sit down to consciously compose a track, or try to come up with a melody that would impress the listener,” the Grammy-nominated musician says from his home in Boston. “I always wait and wait until the conditions in my life are in tune and synchronized. All of my compositions are born out of inspirational moments, straight from the heart.”

This deep commitment to emotional truth permeates the tracks of *Léna*, an album seeped in the aching nostalgia and sinuous melodic turns that define the music of Greece. The album is set for release on April 17<sup>th</sup>.

Titled in honor of his mother, the record is a syncretic tour de force that blends the many strands of Kostas' vision while delivering a spiritual journey about healing and remembrance. Recorded in Greece and the U.S., it finds him joined by a superlative ensemble including piano, lyra, a string quartet and the ethereal voice of singer Aimilia Chalkia.

“*Léna* is a tribute to my late mother,” explains Kostas, “a simple but heartfelt ‘thank you’ — and to the spirit of generosity and love that defined her life and profoundly shaped my own. Music has always been a powerful way to honor the people who shape who we are, and this project carries that idea at its core.”

Kostas' journey to global recognition began when he moved from his childhood home in Epirus, in northwestern Greece, to attend the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he met musicians from all over the world. At the Berklee Global Jazz Institute, Kostas was mentored by Panamanian pianist Danilo Pérez, who invited him to join his Global Messengers ensemble. Their 2022 CD, *Crisalida*, was nominated for a Grammy.

After recording two exquisite albums in collaboration with legendary Greek clarinetist Petroloukas Halkias, Kostas realized that it was time to release his first session as composer and soloist.

From the quiet tenderness of opening track “Beyond Synthesis” to the deep melodic beauty of “For Léna” and the jazz shadows of “The Sides of the Soul” — a track that he wrote on the guitar when he only 16 — the music of *Léna* is sweeping and cinematic, informed by the spirit of Keith Jarrett and Pat Metheny, the two biggest influences during his teen years.

“When my mother passed away, I decided to record an album in her memory,” he recalls. “As I was still maturing and collaborating with more experienced artists, I felt that it wasn’t the right time yet. In the end, I gathered 18 years of material and chose the right people to play on the record.”

The experience of touring with Pérez was revelatory, especially after the master pianist and composer decided that the Global Messengers would begin their concerts with fully improvised openings.

“Instead of beginning a concert with the pieces that we had discussed, Danilo decided that we should start from zero,” he chuckles. “This philosophy of creating as we went along, fully conscious of the present moment, changed my life.”

The results – his own philosophical approach, letting the songs breathe – are evident in his compositions.

Mirroring the spirit of his mother, *Léna* moves from the personal to the universal on tracks such as “Kálesma,” with its propulsive laouto lines colliding with accents of percussion and acoustic bass.

“It describes the journey of refugees from the Middle East to Europe,” he explains, “and the emotional challenges and obstacles they encounter on their way to finding a new home. It’s the kind of piece where the music is there to serve the story.”

“For *Léna*,” on the other hand, begins with an atmospheric effect that Kostas describes as “a breeze from another planet.” “We tried with the lyra player, Sokratis Sinopoulos, to get the specific sound that I could hear in my mind when I wrote the track,” he says. “It is uncanny how the final mix resembles my original vision.”

Besides creating and developing his path as a player and composer, Kostas is also committed to supporting the future generations of Greek musicians. He is the founder and artistic director of the Epilekto Epirus Ensemble, an educational program he created to help young musicians explore the cultural traditions of mainland Greece. He is also the artistic director of Boston’s New England Greek Orchestra, and teaches a course focusing on the music of Epirus at Hellenic College Holy Cross.

“Music is such a personal force of nature,” says Kostas. “I think there are many different reasons why people devote their lives to it. In my case, this album is both a personal dedication and a universal reflection on how melodies allow us to remember and honor the people who shape our lives - even after they’re gone.”