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## MUSIC STORY

### The goddess of easy listening

26 August 2005

**At 70, Nana Mouskouri is about to hang up her poncho for good but, as Jane Bowron reports, she has time for one last world tour to please her legion of fans.**

The last time Nana Mouskouri was near our neck of the woods was five years ago. She toured Australia and was disappointed, "terribly disappointed", not to have made it over the ditch to New Zealand.

Nana fans will be pleased to know that Our Lady of the Kaftans will be putting that geographical oversight to rights next week when she arrives in New Zealand to do three concerts as part of her world farewell tour.

Among the memorabilia of her staggering 45-year career, which has reaped 350 diamond, platinum and gold recordings from all over the world, is a telegram from a Kiwi crew down in the Scott Base sent in 1974.

A gig she did in Christchurch was given a live transmission to the guys down on the ice who banged off a cable to say how thrilled they were not to have missed out.

"I was moved by that telegram and kept it in my papers and it always leaps out at me whenever I go through them."

Also among her mementoes is a rare artefact – a golden cassette from New Zealand, the only one she has ever been presented with and more cherished than her nine Kiwi gold records.

I ask her if she's contemplating setting up a museum – a Nanaland version of Graceland – and she admits that at the age of 70, she probably has enough souvenirs to get one going.

Immediately a vision of galleries peopled by hundreds of Nana impersonaters in ponchos and black spectacles sends shivers down my spine.

Mouskouri has toured and conquered just about every



Nana Mouskouri

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country in the world, singing more than 1350 songs in German, English, French, Spanish, Greek, Japanese, Dutch, Portuguese, Hebrew, Welsh even Maori, pronouncing Pokarekare Ana as Pokie pokie ara ana, and threatens to master another one especially for the New Zealand leg of the tour.

You get the feeling that this goddess of easy listening likes nothing better than invading countries and returning from tours of duty with truckloads of platinum, gold and diamond treasure.

This sortie, Mouskouri is bringing her six-piece band to perform her megapopular ditties: The White Rose of Athens; Over and Over; Four and Twenty Hours and Danny Come Home and a selection from her latest album I'll Remember You which has been carefully constructed to trace her life history.

Which goes, briefly, like this:  
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**Your brother's getting married in the UK in 3 months. You've got no spare cash. What will you do?**

<b>A</b>  <b>Put it on my credit card.</b>	<b>B</b>  <b>Re-mortgage the house and go.</b>	<b>C</b>  <b>Skip the wedding.</b>
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Conservatory of Athens even though she has only one vocal chord.

Her family has the smart money on sister Jenny for a musical career, so Nana slips out in the evenings to sing jazz and folk in cafes, which leads her to get kicked out of the conservatory. The new voice of Athens is born sometime in the 1950s.

Mouskouri has her first breakthrough with recordings of American standards on her album The Girl from Greece Sings directed by Quincy Jones, and marries band-member and composer George Petsilas.

They have two children Helena and Nicholas (Helena is a musician who sometimes tours with her mum and Nicholas is in the film business) but she eventually divorces Petsilas and remarries in 2003 long-time companion and sound engineer Andre Chappelle.

MOUSKOURI has been and still is an Ambassador for Unicef, served for five years as an elected Deputy to the European Parliament representing Greece, and in 1997 was made Chevalier of the Legion of Honour by French president Jacques Chirac.

She herself was a war child living through a civil war in Greece. She grew up in Crete which was occupied by the Germans before her father, active in the Resistance, moved

## Otago

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the family to Athens.

But it is her TV show, *Introducing Nana*, which screened for 10 years from the seventies that made her a household name in New Zealand. Accompanied by her band *The Athenians*, Nana would deliver a small spiel about the song she had plucked from the treasure-trove of international folk music, then perform it with all the animation of a dalek.

Audiences went wild for Nana and British comedian Benny Hill took to lampooning her format on his show. Donning a kaftan and a black wig parted severely down the middle, he would announce from behind a huge pair of black glasses in a tiny, monotoned imitation of her voice "Now I am going sing a song from a leetle village in . . ."

She got her own show after a producer of the Eurovision song contest saw her compete and thought she had a talent for TV though all Mouskouri remembers is being as "scared as a bird".

Even Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan dug Nana Mouskouri, with the latter writing the song *Every Grain of Sand* for her and she, in turn, adored their message. "What they sang about made sense morally and they wanted a freedom that came without standing on anyone's feet".

Mouskouri nearly abandoned her budding career after seeing the great chanteuse Edith Piaf sing in France.

"I was just starting out in the record business and then I saw her and just wanted to quit because she was such a wonderful artist. I was so captivated by her and the emotions she created in me, I was crying while I was watching her.

"Her performance left me ashamed to say I was a singer and I've kept this feeling all my life."

Mouskouri is quite dismissive of her success as the No 1 female recording artist in the world and says that, like her TV career, she just got in at the right time.

"The EP records were just blooming and I was in on them at a good moment," she says. "I was a Greek girl who could sing in several different languages, and that's the reason I sold a lot of records."

\* Nana Mouskouri performs at the Michael Fowler Center on September 1.

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