

# CHAIRMAN GEORGE

★ AN EYE-STEEL FILM



“heart-warming...  
you will be rooting for George long before it's over!”

★ - *The Times* (London, UK)

EyeSteelFilm Presents In association with CTV and BCE-CTV Benefits  
CHAIRMAN GEORGE

Produced, Directed, Filmed By Daniel Cross, Mila Aung-Thwin

Music By George Sapounidis Arhu Compositions Jeremy Moyer Edited by Max Chalifoux, Mila Aung-Thwin, Brett Gaylor  
Assistant Editor Erin Cumming Post-Production Supervisor Brett Gaylor Production Coordinator Anuj Khosla  
Production Managers Amy Lam, John Christou Supervising Sound Editor Cory Rizos Sound Editor Kyle Stanfield

★ ★ [www.chairmangeorge.com](http://www.chairmangeorge.com) ★

# CHAIRMAN GEORGE

## ★ DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*1 billion fans can't be wrong:  
In China, George is Elvis.  
In Canada, George is Greek.  
In Greece, George has a dream...*

I first met George in Guangzhou, China. I was sitting in a restaurant (I couldn't order food, as I could barely speak a word of Chinese) and in walked an odd-looking, guitar-carrying Greek-Canadian. He sat down to chat with me, and then he surprised me by turning around and ordering us a full meal in fluent Mandarin. The waitresses were all stunned—one by one, they all crowded around our table, blushing and giggling, listening to this hairy foreigner speak Chinese.

Then to everyone's surprise, George whipped out his guitar, and started to sing folk songs...again, in fluent Mandarin. Suddenly, I was sitting with Elvis! (You know the TV concert where all the girls sit on the stairs around Elvis, as he sings and plays the acoustic guitar? That Elvis) To me it was like watching Neil Diamond, or Don Ho, but to the waitresses this was ELVIS, clapping, singing and swooning dreamily along. His impromptu concert shut down the restaurant for 45 minutes and opened up an entirely new China to me. I decided there and then I wanted to make a film about this guy.

So imagine how I felt when I when met up with George in Canada...and learned that "Elvis" still lived with his mother. He was no longer the troubadour ladies man I had met in China, but instead a government statistician! I was a bit confused, since this George was so different from the one I'd seen charm the ladies in China.

Then he told me about his Olympic dream: to perform at the closing ceremonies of the Athens Olympics, as Athens passed the torch to China. As the "only Greek in the world who can sing in Chinese", it was his duty to sing at the Olympics. And it was my duty to follow George on his quixotic journey through Greece, China and Canada, chasing his dream, during an exhausting, extraordinary 2-year period.

Chairman George is about a man finding his place in our chaotic, globalized planet. Where a Greek-Canadian statistician can learn Mandarin, print up some trilingual business cards and re-invent his life in China. Where he can aspire to bring the ancient cultures of Greece and China together for a brief moment at the Olympic games. Let George be your guide through this strange new world...



# CHAIRMAN GEORGE

## ★ SYNOPSIS

A few years back, George Sapounidis, a shy, lanky Greek-Canadian statistician, learned a Mandarin folk song in order to impress a young Chinese lady. He did not realize at the time the profound effect this song would have on his life: soon, the local Chinese community embraced him with enthusiastic support, and he continued learning songs in Mandarin. With the help of the local Chinese ambassador to Canada, George traveled to Shanghai where he was met by adoring crowds, utterly enchanted at his interpretations of their beloved tunes.

Chairman George is a documentary film about finding your place in a chaotic, globalized world. Today, George finds himself living two distinct lives: In Canada, he is a mild-mannered bureaucrat who lives with his mother. In China, he is Elvis. So how does George reconcile his two identities? By starting a quest to perform at the closing ceremonies of 2004 Olympic Games, as the mayor of Athens passes the Olympic flame to the mayor of Beijing. This film follows "the only Greek in the world who sings in Chinese" (his words) through the most intense year of his life: globe-trotting through China, Greece, and Canada, chasing no less than the "unity of mankind", the Olympic flame, and maybe even a Chinese girlfriend or two.

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**Year of Production:** 2005

**Production Format:** DV and 16mm

**Projection Formats available:** Digibeta / BetaSP/ DVD

**Languages:** English, Mandarin Chinese, Greek

**Subtitles:** English

**Duration:** 45 minutes or 68 minutes

**Official website:** [www.ChairmanGeorge.com](http://www.ChairmanGeorge.com)

**Production company:** EyeSteelFilm +01(514) 937-4893

**Distribution (Broadcast):** TV2 Danmark

**Distribution (festivals):** EyeSteelFilm

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## Credits

**Directed, Produced, Filmed and Written by:**

Daniel Cross and Mila Aung-Thwin

**Music:** George Sapounidis

**Editors:** Max Chalifoux, Mila Aung-Thwin, Brett Gaylor

**Production Company:** EyeSteelFilm



# CHAIRMAN GEORGE

## ★ ABOUT GEORGE

### George Sapounidis – *International performer*

Ever since the Chinese embassy invited George Sapounidis, a tall lanky Canadian civil servant of Greek descent, to perform at an international folk festival in Shanghai in the fall of 2000, this populous nation has not been able to get enough of him. They have invited him back time and time again since then – the Nanning International Arts Festival of Folksongs the same year, a Beijing tour in May 2002 and again, four months later in September.

Another music tour followed in the fall of 2003, a concert in December and the ten-day Shanghai Baoshan International Folk Arts Festival again in the fall of 2004. Although he has been performing regularly at all manner of folk festivals, awards ceremonies, multicultural events, variety shows and special events as well as on Canadian radio and television for over 20 years, it's George Sapounidis' concert tours of China that have catapulted him to stardom in that country – famous more for its traditional Chinese opera and astounding acrobats than bouzouki-playing westerners singing Chinese folk songs.

From his first performance in Shanghai, this multilingual civil servant was a hit. Even poker-faced Chinese soldiers broke into smiles. At the Nanning Festival, thousands of excited fans crowded the stage, even followed him in the street. TV stations and newspapers competed for interviews.

Why the special affinity for Chinese culture? You could say it caught him by surprise. George had already been performing in several languages when he founded his multicultural band Ouzo Power in 1988, giving a new spin to Greek music, bringing in jazz elements and translating the songs of Bob Dylan and Led Zeppelin into Greek for audiences at folk and multicultural music festivals as well as CBC TV and radio -- even producing two albums. One night, while entertaining friends of different nationalities at his home, he was asked to sing in Mandarin.

Intrigued, and with help from his Chinese girlfriend (herself an acclaimed poet), he learned a traditional Mandarin folk song over the next few weeks, working his way through it phonetically. He was hooked. His repertoire of Chinese folk songs began to grow – as did his Mandarin language skills. Soon he was performing for

the Chinese embassy in Ottawa which in turn invited him to perform in China. Audiences loved him, disarmed and enchanted that a westerner would come into their midst and perform their songs with such depth and emotion.

Upon returning to Ottawa, George formed a new band, the George Sapounidis Trio, with percussionist Ken Easton who plays an impressive variety of exotic instruments from the didgeridoo to the African thumb piano, and Jeremy Moyer, another Sinophile who plays a variety of Chinese stringed instruments. They perform songs, new and old, from around the world.

Yet, by day, this Montreal born folksinger is a Ph.D. bearing statistician who works for Statistics Canada in Ottawa (where he goes by the surname Sampson) employing statistical software and mathematical formulae to design business surveys.

The songs he composes in Chinese, by contrast, are sweet and simple reflecting yearning, friendship, loneliness and love.

In 2000, George introduced a CD of international folk songs and in 2002 he produced a CD called Songs about China and Greece. His latest CD, George from Athens to Beijing, released in the summer of 2005, comprises a variety of traditional Greek and Chinese folks songs along with some personal compositions reflecting the latest twists in his personal and musical quest. Some of the songs were recorded in China with Chinese backup musicians and singers – one was even recorded live on the Great Wall – and others recorded in Canada with Canadian and Greek guest artists using a wide variety of international instruments.

When Beijing won the Olympic bid on July 13, 2001, George felt that the cosmos had come into play – the two musical worlds he straddled were about to converge when the Olympic flag would be passed from Athens to Beijing. It reflected his own artistic life, as he puts it, “building bridges between cultures.” And what's more, the announcement was made on his birthday.

“It crystallized what I had been doing for the past three years,” George says, “juxtaposing and fusing the music of both cultures. Now it was larger than him. He felt it was destiny.”

## ★ FILMMAKERS

***Daniel Cross***

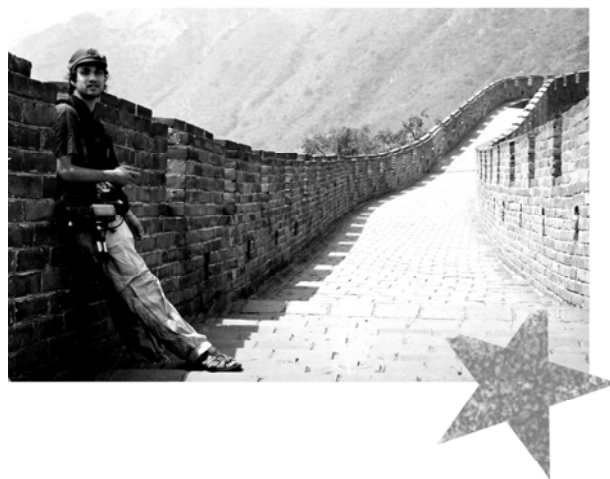
Daniel Cross founded EyeSteelFilm in 2001 with the philosophy that film is a medium for affecting social and philosophical change. He first made his mark with the award-winning, feature length documentaries, **The Street: A Film With The Homeless** (Hot Docs! Audience choice award) and **S.P.I.T: Squeegee Punks In Traffic**. Daniel also directed and co-produced the Gemini nominated **Too Colorful For The League** and co-directed the NFB's **Inuuvinga: I am Inuk, I am Alive**.

Daniel's most recent project is the **Homeless Nation**, a new media community building initiative and online documentary of homelessness in Canada. He teaches film production at Concordia University, and is an active member of the CFTP, DOC and Observatoire du Documentaire.



***Mila Aung-Thwin***

Mila Aung-Thwin is co-founder of EyeSteelFilm in Montreal. After a multi-disciplinary education in arts, journalism, and photography, he was fortunate enough to meet documentary maverick Daniel Cross in 1998. Over the course of the next 3 years, he was taught documentary cinema on the streets and gutters of Montreal and Toronto. He served as cinematographer / producer on **SPIT: Squeegee Punks in Traffic**, a theatrically-released film about a squeegee punk named Roach. He has recently produced **ROACHTRIP** as a follow-up to SPIT, directed **MUSIC FOR A BLUE TRAIN** for the NFB, and co-directed **Too Colourful For the League** and **Inuuwunga: I am Inuk, I am Alive** with Daniel Cross.



# WITNESS



# CHAIRMAN GEORGE

★ PRESS

## **The Times (London, UK)**

*Sat 28 May 2005*

George, a Greek Canadian from Ottawa, works as a statistician but has the soul of a troubadour. He sings folk songs in Mandarin as well as Greek and English, and set his heart on performing at the closing ceremony of the Athens Olympics, when the Olympic flag was passed to Beijing for the 2008 games. Why not? As he reasoned, there can be few singers able to perform in both nations' tongues. Was he a genius or a madman? And did he get the Athens gig? This heart-warming film follows him around China as he wins people over with his boundless enthusiasm and can-do charm; you will be rooting for him long before it is over.

## **The Record (Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo)**

*Sat 28 May 2005*

In the pantheon of global eccentrics with a delusional axe to grind, George Sapounidis must surely rank near the top.

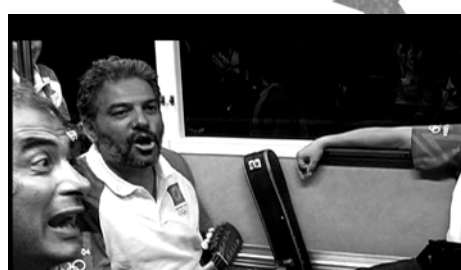
A Greek-Canadian civil servant who fancies himself an "international performer" of Chinese folk songs, the middle-aged mama's boy -- a cross between Neil Diamond, Gene Simmons and the donkey from Shrek -- is the endearingly offbeat subject of Chairman George and the Quest for the Torch, a W-FIVE Presents documentary about his unyielding quest to perform at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

George is so effortlessly loopy in his affectations that everything he does is amusing, whether he's descending to the ocean floor in a too-tight Speedo full of rocks to simulate a moonwalk, comparing music to crack cocaine or philosophizing about life with a face full of shaving cream. Well, unless he considers his revered song catalogue fodder for a slew of delusional stage hams, this will kill him.

## **The Montreal Gazette**

*Sat 28 May 2005*

Fish-out-of-water tales can be a lot of fun. Chairman George and the Quest for the Torch, a W-Five documentary by Montrealeur Daniel Cross about a goofy guy with a not-so-goofy dream, is one such film. It's a delightful road movie about Ottawa's George Sapounidis, a statistician and part-time musician. Fluent in Chinese, he came up with the idea of singing at the closing ceremony at the Olympic Games in Athens, during the hand-off of the Olympic flag to Beijing, which will host the games in 2008. The filmmaker trails George as the never-say-die troubadour knocks on doors and butts heads against Chinese officials. Chairman George has more than a few feel-good moments, and it's well worth an hour of your time.



# CHAIRMAN GEORGE

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