

Anthoula Katsimatides with director Panos Karkanevatos on the set of *Athanassia*.

## Taking Hollywood

"Top five experiences in my life." That's where acting in Oscar-winning director **Ang Lee**'s upcoming film *Taking Woodstock* falls on actress **Anthoula Katsimatides**'s list. She appears with her hair in a Sixties updo in the film, playing the older sister of the protagonist Elliot Tiber (**Demetri Martin**). She portrays, Katsimatides says, "a hip 1960s chick, but not a hippie. It's a small part, but all actors know that there are no small parts."

In an era when being a homosexual was tough, her character Esther advises her gay younger brother Elliot to move to California instead of their parents' Catskills motel. The film is based on Tiber's autobiographical account of the legendary 1969 music event. The casting director saw a likeness between Katsimatides and Greek American Jersey comic Martin. "We could pass, yeah, as siblings," Katsimatides agrees.

On the set, Katsimatides was impressed with Lee's "completely unassuming, unbelievably kind" personality.

Though she only caught the acting bug recently, Katsimatides feels like she's always been on stage. All of them overachievers, she and her brothers always had the biggest parts in school plays and the longest poems at Greek events. Her past work always had elements of performance, from advertising and high school teaching to politics.

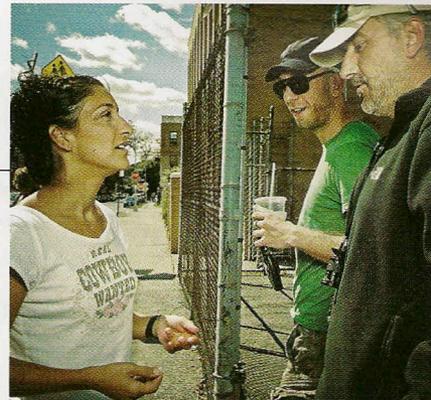
Katsimatides was working in public relations for New York Governor **George Pataki** when September

11, 2001 dealt her family a tragic blow. Her thirty-one-year-old brother John was among those who perished at the World Trade Center. The governor asked Katsimatides to serve as the state's liaison with the families of victims. It was tough, she explains: "You had your own grief to deal with and then I took on so many others. It was really heart-wrenching to deal with everyone's losses." For instance, Katsimatides says that though she had to oversee The Family Room, a shrine created by families that overlooks the World Trade Center site, while "just walking into that room was really hard".

But she adds: "I would do it again because I think that I helped so many people." After her job with Pataki ended in 2006, Katsimatides was ready for "something else to feed me emotionally, and not just financially".

Comedy came to the rescue. A visit to Astoria's Hellenic Cultural Center theater led to a part in a Greek version of Moliere's play *The Doctor In Spite of Himself*. Acting classes, readings, improvisation, a part opposite **Glenn Close** (in **Constantine Makris**'s *Damages*) and a short film by actor **Danny Glover**'s company *Louverture* Films all followed. Katsimatides was hooked. "The more actors I met, and the more classes I took, and the more studying I did, and the more books I read, the more I fell in love with the craft."

Along the way, she convinced Greek director **Panos Karkanevatos** to shoot part of his film *Well Kept Secrets: Athanassia* in New York and helped make it



Alexandros Lambrovassilis

happen. The actress says she's come a long way since appearing in the film as a schoolteacher, but appreciates how Karkanevatos taught her "to keep it small" for the camera. Katsimatides says she loves how *Well Kept Secrets* portrays her island of Nisyros and easily relates to its message: "The film is so much about how much women can endure. How much women can take, how much they can persevere and survive."

Katsimatides's non-acting roles are many, from New York Independence Day Parade commentator and radio show host (Cosmos FM) to folk dancer (Akrites Greek dance group and the World Dance Theater). She is on the board of directors of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, which has raised \$350 million to date, and presides over non-profit JAM: The Johnny and Mikey Katsimatides Foundation for Life. JAM raises money for causes in the name of John and their younger brother, Michael, who committed suicide in 1999.

"If you are just stricken with tragedy and you don't do anything, then you are just stricken with tragedy. How sad and unfortunate. I try to turn that into something positive for someone else, and then it turns into something positive for me too."

Angelike Contis