



## Orchestrating Victory: Christos Vrionides and the J.A. Jones Shipyard Orchestra

Among the artifacts displayed at the World War II Home Front Museum on St. Simons Island is the booklet of music programs shown here. The programs were organized by Christos Vrionides, conductor of the orchestra of the J. A. Jones Shipyard in Brunswick, where Liberty Ships were built. The booklet is signed by Vrionides and dated June 14, 1944. Wartime brought the conductor, an authority on Byzantine music, to live and work in the relatively small community of Brunswick in the 1940s.

Born on the Greek island of Crete in 1894, Vrionides immigrated to the United States in 1923 after graduating from the prestigious Athens Conservatory of Music. Residing in New York City, he studied at the Juilliard and Mannes

Schools of Music, before joining the faculty of the Union Theological Seminary as a professor of Byzantine music. Active in the Greek Orthodox Church, he organized an acclaimed Byzantine vocal quintet that performed in New York for a number of years.

According to his obituary in *The New York Times*, during the Depression, Vrionides became involved in Works Progress Administration programs that benefited the music industry. Through Federal funding, he organized and conducted several chamber and symphony orchestras in the New York City area.

When World War II brought Vrionides to the J.A. Jones Shipyard, he recruited unemployed professional musicians, who also took other

jobs at the shipyard, to form an orchestra as part of a government "Music in Industry" program to boost morale. He returned to New York after the war and took part in a music therapy project organized by a Veterans Administration Hospital on Long Island. Vrionides had a strong belief in the power of music, and art in general, to lift the spirits and unify humanity. In addition to serving as conductor of community orchestras on Long Island, he continued to teach music and compose until his death in 1961.

Also shown is a picture of the shipyard orchestra in action with Vrionides conducting, taken by shipyard photographer Harold J. Terhune. Note that one of the musicians is wearing welding goggles!