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## *A Phenom of the '90s*

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To Yanni's gifted ears, the music is the entire message.

Yanni Chrysomallis seems an unlikely musical deity. This black-maned, male model of a Greek import was a psychology major in college (the University of Minnesota). He neither reads nor writes music. He looks like he stepped off the cover of a romance novel, and his music sounds to some like, well, he stepped off the cover of a romance novel.

A female colleague explains his popularity this way: "He's a babe."

Yanni, as he's known to millions of fans, is the musical phenomenon of the mid-'90s. He became huge once his video "Live at the Acropolis" aired repeatedly over public television stations nationwide during PBS pledge drives.

Yanni's popularity, previously labeled New Age (a term he resists firmly), has now been given the stamp of semi-classical approval. It also put his popularity over the top in a dramatic, fiscally measurable way. Yanni is selling out arena shows.

"We chose correctly to go with PBS," Yanni, 40, says from Los Angeles. "I am personally pleased we didn't go with the networks, where they might play your show once on a Sunday at 4:30 p.m. against a football game. On PBS, we were treated correctly."

Yanni also talked about a variety of subjects:

Why he does what he does: "When I was growing up in Greece, I loved Bach and Mozart and Beethoven and Chopin. These people had the ability to communicate without one word. That just appealed to me. I'm doing this for the same reason - for music, not words. Words operate in a different area of the brain. The entire message is in the sounds and rhythm and melody."

On his inability to read and write music: "The concept of representing visually that which lies in the auditory domain is not exactly the best way to do music. The only way to know music is through your ears, not your eyes. Someone whose ear is as developed as mine doesn't need to read music."

On whether his music suffers because of his inability to write it: "No," he says. When he needs to remember some musical thought or other he has doodled on the keyboard, he jots it down in a private code, a "mishmash of numbers, symbols and Greek" that he developed as a boy. If the music has to be written in common musical notation for the cellists or oboists who do not have perfect pitch, someone does that for him.