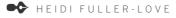
Waxing INA-CA FORGET THE ZORBA CLICHE, CRETE'S FOLK MUSICIANS HAVE BROUGHT

THEIR ISLAND'S MUSIC INTO THE 21ST CENTURY – THEY'RE CALLING IT CRETAN RAP



FEATURES | CRETE

ZORBA THE GREEK might have put Crete on the map, but the film's tinkly music score is light years away from the wild, unbridled folk sound that's pouring out over the sweating writhing crowds in Anogia's village square on a warm summer evening. As lyra maestro Giorgos Zervakis reaches the climax of his yearning ballad, *To Mavro Poukamiso* (black shirt), a group of boot-shod, black-shirt-clad shepherds raise guns and fire several shots over the unfazed heads of the trendy 20-something crowd who've come from the city to shimmy.

Welcome to a lyra gig in the 21st century. Held upright on the knee and bowed horizontally, the origins of the Cretan lyra - generally accompanied by the four- or six-stringed lute - are unclear, but it's thought that this three-stringed, pear-shaped instrument was introduced to the island during the Venetian occupation in the Middle Ages. And little has changed about the instrument's appearance, or indeed how it's made, since those early days. But the same can't be said about the type of music they're now creating. These days, the instrument is used to underlay fast-paced rhyming verses, filled with feisty humour and fighting spirit known as mantinades or kondylies. More reminiscent of freestyling hip hop, it's led fans to give the music the moniker "Cretan rap".

Often improvised, these 15-syllable couplets talk about love or politics, farming or the fight for freedom. They also discuss the bloody vendettas between local families over land rights, rape or sheep theft that forced many people, including 20thcentury violin player Kostas Papadakis, to flee the country for fear of their lives.

It's all part of a modern revival of the lyra that began in the 1950s. The instrument had gradually been falling from favour for much of the early 20th century and, by the time the Nazis invaded Crete in 1941, it was, for the most part all-but forgotten. However, in the years after the war, the lyra took on a new symbolism, as a new generation of musicians, including notables such as Thanasis Skordalos and Kostas Mountakis, came to regard the instrument as a symbol of Crete and the tiny island's struggle for freedom from the Nazis. "Cretan music is more than just a sound; it is our identity," says new-generation lyra player Giannis Katsavavakis.

A far cry from the more disciplined bouzouki music of the Greek mainland,



Cretan music has a rough, rustic quality, which gets you in the guts, and a rhythmic, trance-like quality that inspires dancing. One of the island's best-kept secrets for centuries, the music was discovered by the outside world in the 1960s when *Life* magazine did a photo spread on the hippies who'd elected residence in a labyrinth of caves lining the beach of Matala. Seduced by images of an alfresco hippie lifestyle, celebrities, including Bob Dylan, Cat Stevens and Joni Mitchell, flocked to this bijou seaside resort south-west of Heraklion. Lighting fires on the beach at sunset, they scuffed up the silky sand as they jived to Cretan music sounds on the beach until dawn. "The night is a starry dome, and they're playin' that scratchy rock and roll beneath the Matala moon," crooned Mitchell on *Carey*, the song she wrote about this heady time.

These days, with Greek DJ Omeyocan's brilliant Cretan music remixes packing dancefloors in clubs across Greece, and live







groups experimenting, Cretan musicians are putting a new spin on the island's age-old tradition. Gigs range from intimate café affairs with a couple of dozen tables to sprawling, 60s-style festivals, where thousands come to dance. "The Cretan music scene has changed so much since Joni Mitchell was here; we are blending the sounds of instruments and melodies from the Western music scene with our own music, and creating a unique sound that appeals to a much younger audience," says popular local artist Giorgos Xairetis.

Fuelled by litres of home-brewed firewater raki, Cretan music concerts are

always an event. In July, when nights are balmy, there are concerts every weekend – just look out for the posters plastered on bus stops and lampposts. In the west of the island, venues like Café Kriti (22 Kalergon) and Café Harhali (26 Grigoriou) in Chania are atmospheric tavernas where you can catch gigs and improvised sessions.

ΠΑΠΑΔΑΙ

SFAKIA, CLOSE TO CHANIA, is another stronghold associated with Cretan music. Birthplace of many great artists, including the late, great lyra maestro Kostas Mountakis, this seaside resort overlooking the Libyan Sea is the homeland of Michalis

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Tzouganakis (michalistzouganakis.com) whose troubadour style and haunting modern sounds have seduced audiences worldwide. Other must-not-miss musicians from this end of the island include velvet-voiced lyra player Nikos Zoidakis and pop singer lyra band leader Giorgos Xairetis.

Further along the coast, Rethymnon boasts dozens of live music venues. New-generation lyra players hailing from this laid-back resort include Georgia Dagakis (facebook.com/dagaki) who grew up in the narrow cobbled streets behind the town's beautifully conserved Venetian harbour. A lone female voice in the all-too-often macho world of Cretan music, Dagakis played with Animals vocalist Eric Burdon on his recent album Athens Traffic and has actually made the lyra sexy with her husky, expressive renditions of standards and modern tunes

But if you're seeking a truly authentic Cretan music experience, however, there's only one place to go: Ierapetra's stylish Minore music club in the wild and peaceful eastern end of the island. Here you can hear hip young musicians such as Giannis Katsavavkis (www.katsavavakis.gr) and Nikos Vezyrakis who regularly play to packed houses in some of the country's coolest nightclubs, lending an edgy take to the instrument.

On the village square the concert is going full swing now. Buoyed up by the nimble playing of long-time partner lute player Kostas Markakis, Zervakis segues effortlessly into another wild lilting tune as a full moon rises above the open-air stage.

A born showman, notorious for downing a bottle of whisky each time he plays, Zervakis' performance becomes increasingly extravagant as the level of the bottle descends. His subsequent unpredictable, brilliant and edgy renditions of familiar songs have huge appeal to a younger crowd and as I stand here watching the 20-somethings shimmying to Entatiki, an upbeat tune from one of his

easyJet flies to.

