

*Waxing*  
**LYRA-CAL**

FORGET THE ZORBA CLICHE, CRETE'S  
FOLK MUSICIANS HAVE BROUGHT  
THEIR ISLAND'S MUSIC  
INTO THE 21ST CENTURY –  
THEY'RE CALLING IT CRETAN RAP





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Tzouganakis ([michalitzouganakis.com](http://michalitzouganakis.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](https://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 Katsavavakis ([www.katsavavakis.gr](http://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



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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.

**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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