

Cretan Music & Folklore

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Crete, where music and dance were born, is famous for the *glendi*, the event where dancing, singing, drinking, eating, and merrymaking become panegyric. Through revolutions and subjugations, the Cretans refined the Greek notion of the *palikari*, a hero who defies death to defend liberty and who, at times of festive celebrations, displays his gallantry by showing off his dancing skills. It is the concept of the *levantis* and *meraklis*, who brings *kefi* to a party, turning simple events into festive celebrations of life. It all started at the beginning of time with the *Kourites*, who, as mentioned in another article, invented dancing and singing to protect baby Zeus, who himself became the *palikari* of Mount Olympus.



Kourites composed poetry called *madinades*, distiches that are associated with Crete, couplets of fifteen syllable lines. Live *madinades*, contests during which lyra-players-singers compete by improvising songs



on the spot, are still common on the island. These contests are oftentimes called *kontaromahies*, which translates to "fights with poles". Well-known are also the *rizitika* songs, performed mostly in the foothills of the White Mountains (*Lefka Ori*, in the West) where most people used to be shepherds of sheep and goats.

The trademark for Cretan music is the *Lyra*, which is "pear" shaped while the Pontian lyra is "bottle" shaped!. Most of the Cretan groups that come

and perform here in the USA consist of 3 instruments, the *lyra* and 2 *laouto* or *lagouto*. In well orchestrated groups, many more local instruments make up the unique Cretan sound.

It is at weddings that one can enjoy Cretan dancing. The *glenti* starts with slow dragging dances and it gets faster and louder as the *kefi* increases and reaches its pinnacle with the girls dancing with swirls and turns that are fascinating to watch, and goes to the leaping (*pidichtos*) dances and crescendos into the *pendozali* that men [*palikaria*] dance showing off their mastery by standing on bottles or the edge of a chair and still move gracefully!

Cretans Mikis Theodorakis, who wrote the music for film "*Zorba the Greek*", and Manos Hadzidakis, who composed the Oscar-winning music for "*Never on Sunday*" in the 1960s, popularized Greek music and dancing all over the world.

Anyone who has been to Crete will surely attest to the fact that Cretans are chauvinists, constantly bragging about their island. A lyra-player, *Psaradonis*, from Anogia where everyone is known by their nickname not their family name, brother of the famous singer Nikos *Xylouris*, said: "**Chauvinist is one who thinks his country is better than... CRETE!**"

