

Music

Easy communication with Italy, the expansion of trade, and the opera companies that frequently visited the island were the main factors in the development of Corfu's intimate relationship with western music. In the 19th century, one of the most important periods for European music in the transition from Classicism to Romanticism, the cornerstone of the local Ionian Music School was laid. Its founder was Nikolaos Halikiopoulos Mantzaros who created the music for the National Anthem of the Hellenic Republic. Other important composers in the same vein were Corfiot students of Mantzaros, such as Spyros Samaras (composer of the Olympic Anthem) and Spyridon Xyndas (author of the first opera based on a Greek-language libretto).

Essential to the advancement of music here have been the philharmonic societies, the so-called philharmonics. There are, nowadays, eighteen of these on the island, continuing a two-century old tradition. Membership has always been free, from their creation the philharmonics accepted everyone as student, young or old, rich or poor, never charging tuition fees. Parade bands form the backbone of the philharmonics, and their time-honoured participation is fundamental in various cultural and religious activities. Corfu Town, alone, plays host to three: the Corfu Philharmonic Society (or the Old), the Mantzaros Philharmonic Society (or the Blue), and the Kapodistrias Philharmonic Union.

There are also many choral ensembles, small conservatories, mandolin ensembles, a symphonic orchestra, a secondary-education school specializing in music studies, the Department of Music at the Ionian university, as well as circles of religious chanters for the island's countless churches.

It comes then as no surprise that Corfiots love and enjoy music. Even when there are no organized events, music envelops the Old Town, issuing from the buildings of rehearsing philharmonics, above everything else, Corfu is the musical island.