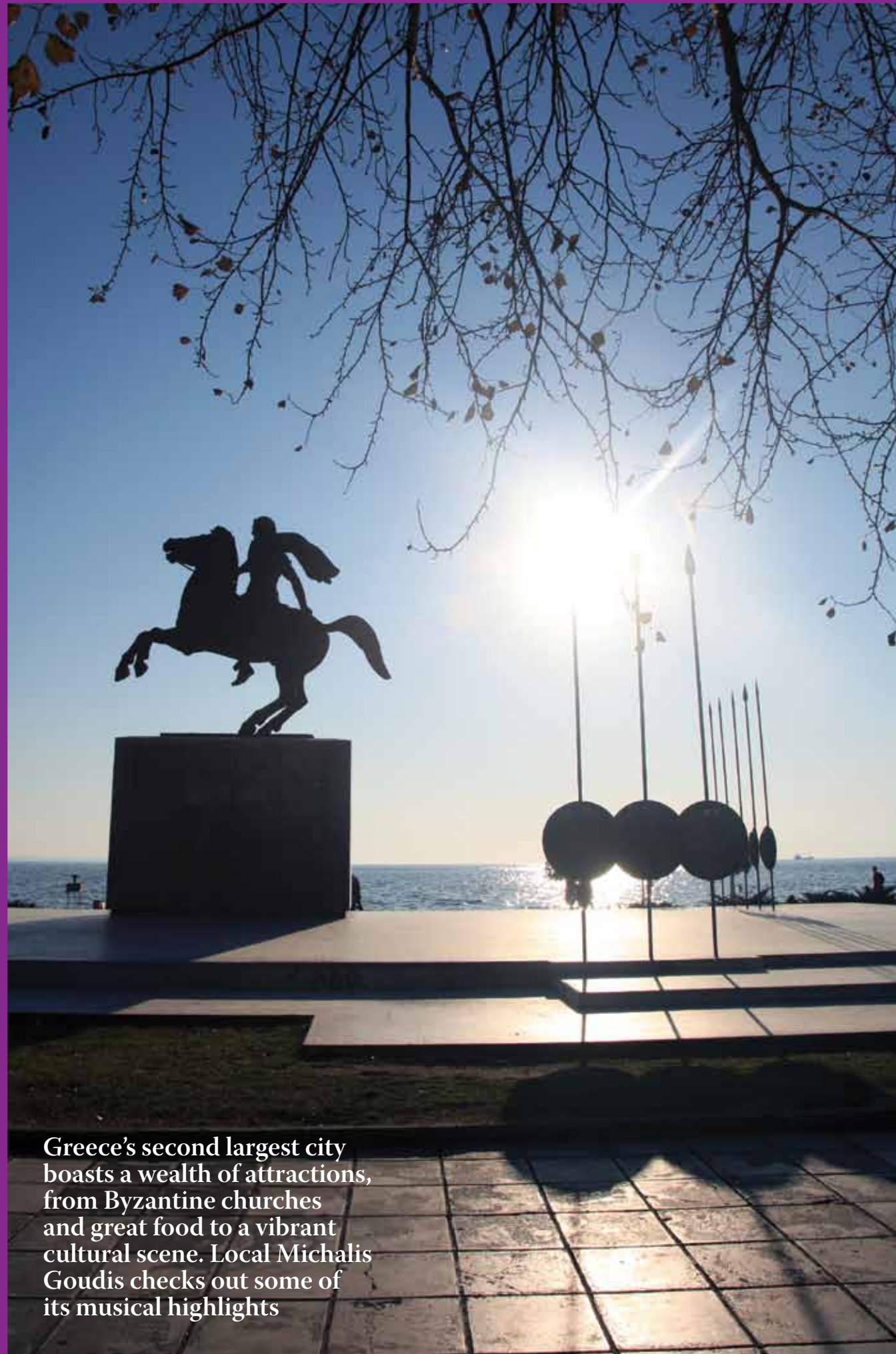


THESSALONIKI

→ SOUNDING OUT



Greece's second largest city boasts a wealth of attractions, from Byzantine churches and great food to a vibrant cultural scene. Local Michalis Goudis checks out some of its musical highlights

If it were a song, it would be an up-tempo piece, probably a *syrtaki* that would make you want to dance. One of the most vivacious cities in south-eastern Europe, Thessaloniki knows how to fight the seemingly never-ending crisis.

And while the busy capital of Athens has continued to blame the second city of Greece for its relaxed daytime rhythms, at night Thessaloniki, with its 100,000 students, is a very different story...

The historic heritage of the city is quite unique. The past can be felt everywhere, especially around the city centre: old churches, Byzantine walls and a great variety of museums. Music has also marked the modern history of Thessaloniki.

The city had already been a source of inspiration for Sephardic songs towards the end of the 19th century, later made widely popular by the 'Sweet Canary' singer Roza Eskenazi, who was born in Istanbul to a Sephardic Jewish family. The multicultural population of Thessaloniki (Greek, Turkish, Macedonian, Sephardic Jewish) started mixing different musical genres. After 1922, the Greek refugees from Asia Minor brought their own influences, notably *rebetika* songs played on *bouzouki*. Vassilis Tsitsanis and his historical tavern Ouzeri Tsitsanis are considered to be a benchmark in the Greek musical tradition. These days, *rebetika* can be heard in live gigs at almost every tavern across the city, especially in Athonos Square.

Over the decades that followed, Thessaloniki

continued to play a leading role in the emerging Greek music industry. Some of the most successful modern singers started their careers in Thessaloniki. The studios of the city were considered to be small melody factories with Agrotikon, belonging to the late Nikos Papazoglou, the flagship. Today, Yorgos Kazantzis and Giorgos Pentzikis keep fighting against all odds and their studios (Polytropon and Magnanimous respectively) continue to produce small diamonds like the recent album *The Children of the Opposite Shore*.

Thessaloniki has gained its place on the map of international festivals over the last couple of decades. Reworks is the main reason for that and offers proof that the locals love electro music.

Thessaloniki is equally proud of its two music halls – both of which are architectural jewels. The Thessaloniki Concert Hall was built in 2000 and programmes all kinds of music. The concert and conference hall, designed by Arata Isozaki, is a more alternative option right next to its more sophisticated neighbour. Lately several concerts of world and Greek folk music have started taking place in the open-air space between the two buildings by the sea, offering a not-to-be missed experience.

Thessaloniki has just started jubilee celebrations, marking 100 years since the end of the Ottoman rule in 1912. This year the city also plays host to WOMEX, the world music expo and extensive redevelopment of the waterfront is underway.

Aristotelous Square in the centre of the city and the statue of Alexander the Great (left)



RECORD SHOPS

Stereodisc

Much more than a record store. Not only will you find what you are looking for, but you may also discover something new. Mema and Kosmas have been influencing the music tastes of the city for years now.

4 Aristotelous Str, +30 2310 262912, www.facebook.com/stereodisc

FESTIVALS

Reworks Festival 2012

For the first time since its launch eight years ago, Reworks – a gathering of innovative electro artists – will take place in more than one venue. This year's message, 'We Define Our Future', makes an optimistic case against the current misery that Greece experiences.

September 21-23, www.reworks.gr

VENUES

Gaia Live

A rather small stage that's always packed, Gaia Live offers up the chance for unplugged sessions from some of the most popular Greek stars of the young generation.

5 Doxis & Salaminos Str, www.gaialive.gr

Principal Club Theater

Located in the former industrial area, this venue follows the great tradition of Mylos, a benchmark among venues of the city. Here you can listen to great Greek voices like Nikos Portokaloglou or international stars like ZAZ.

56 Andrea Georgiou Str, www.principalclub.com

Venteta

Live folk music in an underground space right in the heart of the city centre. An unmissable experience.

3 Ethnikis Aminis Str, www.venteta.com.gr

Chatzi Mpahtse

The combination of delicious food with live music is a tradition in Thessaloniki and Chatzi Mpahtse has been on the scene since 1999, despite its rather run-down location.

9 Georgiou Tsontou Str, www.chatzi-bahtse.gr

Kafodio Ellinikon

Since 1938 Kafodio Ellinikon has offered visitors probably the best Greek coffee as well as showing rare pictures of Thessaloniki on its walls and introducing emerging music stars with its famous live gigs.

3 Loustinianou Str, www.kafodeio.gr

Opta Pyri

Take a seat right in the heart of Athonos Square, see the fountain and enjoy the Greek cuisine along with *rebetiko* songs in this typical Greek *taverna*.

5 Mitropolitou Gennadiou Str

Block 33

This former industrial space has become a vibrant meeting point for all kinds of art, including live music.

33 October 26th Str, www.block33.gr

