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Voices Across the Centuries

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There is something compelling about a festival that presents an ancient musical inheritance not as a relic, but as a living practice. The Greek National Opera's Byzantine Music Days, curated by performer and theologian Zaharias Karounis, offers precisely this perspective. Across four evenings, from 21 to 24 October 2026 brings together established choirs, distinguished cantors, ensembles and voices.

The programme's title, "Genres and generations of contemporary psaltic art," expresses its central ambition: continuity made audible through difference. For an early-music listener, the festival's fascination lies in its relationship with transmission. The participating ensembles describe practices sustained through both written sources and oral teaching, through scholarship and repeated participation in worship. This is not simply the reconstruction of a vanished sound-world. It is an encounter with musicians whose understanding of historical repertoire develops within an ongoing communal practice.

The distinction matters: preservation here involves interpretation, memory and responsibility, rather than an attempt to place music beyond change. The challenge, and potential reward, is to hear beyond a general impression of solemnity. Hymn texts, melodic elaboration and the distribution of musical attention offer different paths into the same celebration. An attentive listener can ask how a phrase communicates meaning, how ornament shapes emphasis, and how collective singing accommodates individual expression. Such questions make historical listening active: the music becomes an unfolding argument rather than an atmospheric background.

The concluding concert turns towards the all-night vigil and the devotional traditions of Mount Athos. The Greek Byzantine Choir "Lykourgos Angelopoulos," directed by Georgios Konstantinou, is joined by Archimandrite Cherubim Tsinoglou, Fotios Ketsetzis and Vassilios Prassas. The programme foregrounds melismatic choral writing, solo chanting and the sustained movement of psalmody. Its stated emphasis on prayer, silence and nocturnal worship proposes a different experience of musical time: less a succession of self-contained attractions than a gradual deepening of attention.

That proposition gives the festival its most persuasive artistic identity. Its keyword is continuity, but continuity should not be mistaken for uniformity. Different generations and ensembles illuminate how a tradition remains recognisable while accommodating distinct voices. Without attending, one cannot judge vocal blend, ornamentation or the acoustical balance of particular performances. Yet the programme itself

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offers a thoughtful invitation: to listen beyond chronological distance and recognise historical music as a present-tense relationship between people, language and belief. In that meeting, the centuries need not disappear; they can become newly audible, lending depth to an encounter that remains immediate and human.

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