

The City of Melbourne acknowledges Antipodes Festival as a Tier 1 Event



Once again, the 36th Antipodes Festival, organised by the Greek Community of Melbourne (GCM), resonated with the vibrant pulse of the Greek community. Held in the heart of Melbourne's historic Greek precinct on Lonsdale Street, adorned in blue and white, the Festival marked a significant milestone.

The Festival stands as the largest Hellenic festival in the global diaspora and this year, for the first time, has been recognised by the City of Melbourne as a Tier 1 event alongside the Formula 1 grand Prix and the Australian Tennis Open. The Antipodes Festival has evolved into a hallmark event, uniting people of all backgrounds and ages to revel in Greek culture and celebrate the tapestry of cultural diversity.

The President of the GCM, Bill Papastergiadis, OAM, officially launched the Festival joined by esteemed guests including: His Grace Bishop Kyriakos of Sozopolis, representing His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, His Grace Bishop

Evmenios of Kerasounta, Ms Ingrid Stitt, Minister for Multicultural Affairs in Victoria, John Pesutto MP, leader of Victoria opposition, The Hon Andrew Giles, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services & Multicultural Affairs, The Consul General of Greece of Melbourne, Mr. Emmanuel Kakavelakis, Deputy Lord Mayor Cr Nicholas Reece, City of Melbourne, Ms Viv Nguyen AM, Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission and Mr. Theo Zografos, liberal candidate for Chisholm.

Amidst the spirited ambiance, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made a surprise appearance, commending the vibrant contributions of the Greek community to Australia. He expressed gratitude for the cultural richness shared by Greek Australians, acknowledging their pivotal role in the nation's fabric. He said "It is fantastic to be here with you. The largest Greek population outside Greece right here in Melbourne. Thank you for sharing with us your culture, your food, your language, your dance and your music. There is no community stronger in Australia than the Melbourne Greek community."

Mr Papastergiadis and the Prime Minister mentioned Bob Hawke, the first Australian Prime Minister to attend the Antipodes Festival.

The streets were teeming with people early on Saturday as the festival commenced in earnest with the traditional "Zorba Til You Drop" dance and endurance competition on the main stage at noon. Nikos Vokolos emerged as the victor, clinching a round-trip ticket to Greece, courtesy of Scoot. Naomi Allen, Scoot's sales manager, presented the prize to Nikos, who expressed immense joy and indicated he could have danced for hours. He noted that he had secured the second position in the competition last year but had set his sights on claiming the top spot this year, which he successfully achieved.

This year witnessed a record-breaking number of stalls, surpassing 90, offering a plethora of traditional food, desserts, delicacies, and displays from Greek organisations, and schools. Notably among them were the stalls of the Festival's sponsors, including the globally recognized cosmetics company, MECCA x KORRES. For the first time among the major sponsors, MECCA x KORRES provided attendees with the opportunity to sample some of its innovative products, all made from Greek herbs.



Once again, the Festival showcased exemplary samples of Greek art, culture, entertainment, and cuisine, solidifying its reputation as a cornerstone event in Melbourne's cultural calendar.

Enthusiasts of Greek cuisine were treated to a diverse array of delectable traditional dishes, including the renowned Greek souvlaki, gyros, seftalies, Thessaloniki's beloved koulouria, and loukoumades, all exuding the enticing aromas and flavours of Greece. Additionally, a series of cooking demonstrations immersed visitors in the heart of Greek gastronomy.

The program also featured entertaining competitions for both participants and spectators alike, such as the St Gerry's "Loukoudomania" competition, offering prizes of invitations to theater performances to the winners and other lucky attendees.

Over the course of two days, more than 500 performers graced the festival's three stages, with beloved music and dance groups from the community setting the tone for the festivities. The city was transformed as figures dressed as ancient Greek deities added to the vibrant atmosphere. Visitors of all ages had the opportunity to elevate their excitement levels with thrilling rides on roller coasters, the Ferris wheel, and other enjoyable activities.

The audience enthusiastically applauded the music and dance groups that

participated, including the Alphington Grammar School whose students delivered stirring renditions of the Australian and Greek National Anthems during the opening ceremony. Additionally, the GCM schools paid a touching tribute to the memory of Chronis Aidonidis, the esteemed Thracian teacher of traditional music, through captivating Thracian dances and a reflection on the milestones of his illustrious career. Over 50 dance groups from Victoria and other Australian states graced the stage, adorned in vibrant traditional costumes, as they performed a series of mesmerizing traditional dances.

Standing out in the music scene were “Xylourides”, Nikos, Antonis, and Apollonia Xylouris. With profound influences from their grandfather, Psarantonis, and father, Psarogiorgis, coupled with their unique talent and passion for Cretan music, they captivated the audience and ignited spirited dancing in the city streets.

The audience erupted in applause for the “Momogeroi,” presented by “Pontiaki Estia” and accompanied by music from the “Mavrothalassites.” Notably, in 2017, this customary event was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Since their debut at the “Antipodes” Festival in 2018, the “Momogeroi” have garnered affection and admiration from Greek Australians, and this year, their impact on younger generations was particularly noteworthy with the “bride” stealing the show.

A highlight of the Festival was the presentation of the trophy to the victorious team, Oakleigh Cannons FC, winners of the 2024 Greek Community Cup. The Greek Community Cup serves as a celebration of our heritage and a showcase of the young talent within our community.

Renowned Greek singer Melina Aslanidou took the main stage in the Festival’s musical lineup. Delighting attendees with beloved songs and chart-topping hits, accompanied by local talented musicians, Aslanidou electrified the audience on Saturday night. Tens of thousands of people flocked to enjoy her performance, revelling in an evening filled with music, dancing, and pure entertainment, as her enchanting voice and unique timbre cast a spell over the crowd.

Official Opening of the 36 Antipodes Festival

The event saw a gathering of community leaders, members of parliament, and media representatives, fostering an atmosphere conducive to cultural and diplomatic exchange. Ms. Anthea Sidiropoulos, Vice President of the GCM, and Leonidas Vlachakis, Chair of the GCM Cultural Committee, introduced the speakers.

Bill Papastergiadis, OAM, President of the GCM officially launched the Antipodes

Festival,

reflecting on its significance, saying “This festival to me symbolizes the simple pleasures that are brought to life, celebration with friends, coming together, the smiles associated with reuniting with sounds, smells and taste of lands afar. Greek words kefi and glendi spring to mind when we experience this Festival. So, when you leave tonight, we hope that the warmth and joy of this festival remains with you and hold on to these 2 Greek words kefi and glendi.”

All speakers lauded Greece and the influence of Hellenism in Australia.



Ms Ingrid Stitt, Minister for Multicultural Affairs in Victoria, highlighted the Festival’s broader importance beyond cultural sharing, recognizing the enduring contributions of Greek Australians stating, “It Is so much more than sharing your culture and generosity, it’s about your hard work and sharing your values. I’m very proud we have provided \$800,000 to the Festival so it can keep going strong for the years ahead. We know in investing in multicultural communities brings Victoria together.”

John Pesutto MP, leader of Victoria opposition, emphasized the Festival’s role in celebrating not only Greek traditions but also the enduring spirit of Hellenism and its global impact. He said “ We don’t just meet at this iconic festival to celebrate the beautiful dances and the historic customs and traditions. We come to celebrate what we have been given by the spirit, the promise and the force from Hellenism

itself and what it has given to humankind. Not just here but across the world. Not just now, but across all time. know you came in this country with nothing. Look what you have created! “

The Hon Andrew Giles, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services & Multicultural Affairs, and His Grace Bishop Kyriakos of Sozopolis highlighted the profound contribution of Hellenism and the uniqueness of the Greek identity to Australia’s development and the rich multicultural fabric of Melbourne.

The Consul General of Greece of Melbourne, Mr. Emmanuel Kakavelakis, praised the inspiration and passion of the Greek Community for continually enhancing the Festival, urging attendees to embrace Hellenism as a vibrant part of daily life. He stated, “The Antipodes Festival is a tremendous opportunity for our community to come together and reminds us that our culture keeps at its core the love for our fellow man. Keep sharing our Hellenic heritage and culture.”



Deputy Lord Mayor Cr Nicholas Reece, City of Melbourne, celebrated the Festival’s significance by repeating the two Greek words that Mr Papastergiadis emphasised, “kefi” and “glenti” and introducing himself to the crowd in Greek. He said “ This isn’t just the biggest Greek Festival in Australia. It’s the biggest Greek Festival in the world. Classifying this Festival as Tier-1 event in Melbourne is truly inspiring.”

Ms Viv Nguyen AM, Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, began

her speech by greeting the attendees by saying “Geia sas filoi mou Ellines” and continued “ Melbourne’s multiculturalism would not have the form it has today without the contribution of the Greek community. Thank you very much for all your decades of hard work and for inspiring the other communities of the city. We need a strong, cohesive and collective society in Australia.”

The speeches concluded with Theo Zografos, liberal candidate for Chisholm, underscoring the pivotal role of the Greek community and its culture in Australia.

The Antipodes Festival is presented by the Greek Community of Melbourne

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