

ISSUE 06/FREE



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The official magazine of Radio Bulgaria

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the world's biggest  
lavender producer**

**Gold Dust folk festival  
in Chelopech**

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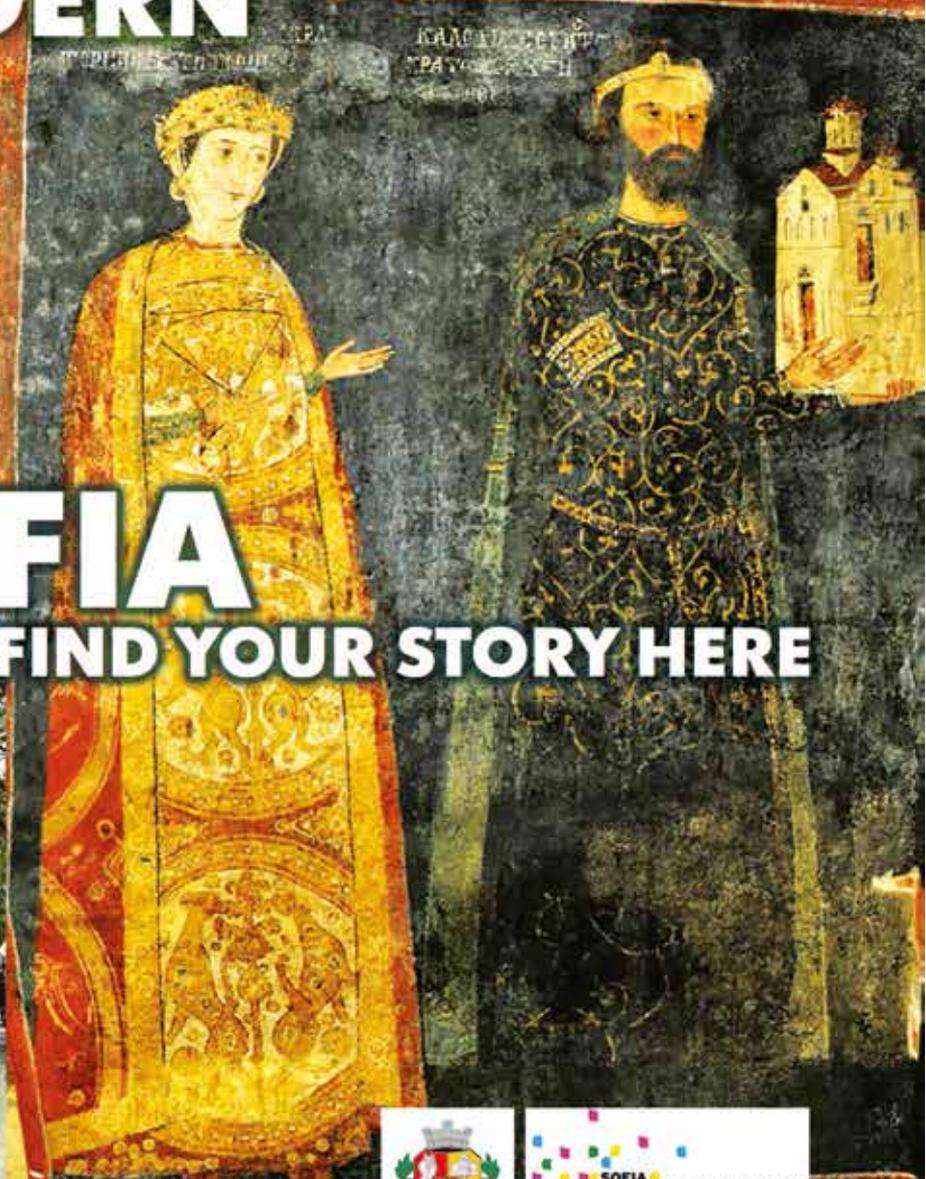




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## Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov: The Iraq crisis is a threat to national security

by Iliana Raicheva



The crisis in Iraq has gone beyond the humanitarian dimension and has directly threatened the European Union outer borders, Bulgaria included, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov said while attending a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. The EU chief diplomats convened for an extraordinary meeting in Brussels to discuss the worsening humanitarian situation in Iraq, the escalating violence in Libya and the negative consequences from the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East with special attention paid to the developments in Gaza. The caretaker foreign minister made public his position at the Council while presenting the members of his political office:

„For the first time we are witnessing crises at level 3 of the United Nations scale, especially where Iraq is concerned”, Minister Mitov explained. “We are going to have a problem with the refugee flow. In the meantime, it would be wrong to ignore the self-proclaimed Islamic State. All member-countries should join efforts to stop this plague. Readiness was voiced for supporting the Kurdish security forces

in Iraq and there was a call to member-countries to provide humanitarian aid.” On the occasion of an article dated 15 August and carried by Bild, the Bundeswehr has got a secret plan to arm Iraqi Kurds with Kalashnikov rifles from Bulgaria and Romania. More from Minister Mitov:

„It is clear that the European Union and its member-states have serious concerns over the developments in Iraq”, he went on to say. “France has already sent military aid. Germany plans to do so soon. The Czech Republic is mulling a similar move. Britain has joined the campaign, as well. No decision on this issue has been made in Bulgaria so far and in the case of an official request the issue will be discussed and options will be studied.”

Minister Mitov added that “Russia bears grave responsibility for the destabilization of Ukraine, but it is also important to make sure that when Kiev is discussing anti-Russia sanctions, it involves its European partners in the discussion too”.

„Russia should realize that its actions are counter-productive. We strongly count

on the resumption of the EU-Ukraine-Russia dialogue and on the belief that a solution will be found at the summit level”, Bulgaria’s chief diplomat said. “We hope that no new sanctions will be imposed but this does not mean that an escalation of the conflict will not prompt such sanctions.”

The extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council has worked out a position for solidarity within EU for surmounting the consequences from the Russian ban on farming goods imports. Very soon, an EU council of agriculture ministers will be held to discuss and evaluate compensations to farmers from the Russian embargo.

Another priority of the team of caretaker Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov is the support of Kristalina Georgieva’s nomination. She is running for a second mandate in the European Commission and for High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

„We are working on this objective in coordination with our EU partners. Mrs Georgieva has a very high reputation in Europe. She is one of the European bureaucrats who have never been the target of negative remarks. She is very respected by her colleagues and represents an indisputable human capital for Bulgaria.”

In case the post is distributed to the European Socialists Bulgaria will demand a priority European Commission office for Kristalina Georgieva, Daniel Mitov said.

The organization of the election process abroad and Bulgaria’s preparation for the rotating EU presidency in 2018 are other chief priorities in the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the term of the caretaker government, Minister Daniel Mitov said.

# Bulgaria and the Euro - a marriage of convenience, yet on a later stage

by Vladimir Sabev and Deyana Borissova



Bulgaria has just gone through a banking crisis which was totally fabricated and occurred without any good reasons. However, just like each crisis, it raised a series of questions. One of them was whether Bulgaria would have overcome similar crisis easier through the assistance of the European Central Bank and the other members of the Eurozone if it was part of the currency union and had adopted the Euro as an official currency. This question was quite reasonable against the background of the assistance provided by the Eurozone countries to Greece over the recent years.

In fact, Bulgaria's attitude towards the Euro dates back to 2002 when the single European currency was launched. Earlier, the Bulgarian national currency was fixed to the Deutsche Mark through the system of the Currency Board. When the official currency of Germany- the Deutsche Mark changed for Euro, the Bulgarian Lev remained fixed to the new European currency and its successes and failures. However, the country remained

outside the new currency union. The analyses and comments regarding the country's benefits and perspectives from a future accession to the Eurozone have started from day one.

"Bulgaria does not aim at joining the Eurozone on a given date. Each year this country fulfills certain criteria and requirements on its road to the Eurozone", explains economic expert Lachezar Bogdanov from the Open Society Institute. Some requirements linked with the legislation regarding the central banks remain unchanged over the years. Of course, there are some small details that can be changed, provided Bulgaria receives an official invitation to join the Eurozone."

The Bulgarian love towards the European single currency, however, seems unrequited and weaker than before. The European Central Bank does not intend to receive new members and the Eurozone members do not insist on its immediate enlargement. Moreover, the political parties and business circles

in Bulgaria do not regard the accession of this country to the Eurozone as a top priority. The accession agreement signed between Bulgaria and the EU prior to the country's membership reads that it has the obligation to adopt the European currency. However, the contract does not say when it should happen. Bulgaria has been claiming for a long time that its financial system is among the most stable ones in the EU and most Eurozone members can only dream of having such a high level of budget restrictions. The latter, in addition to data about the country's foreign debt, inflation, budget deficit, etc, allow the official authorities in Bulgaria to claim that this country has practically fulfilled the formal EU requirements regarding the Eurozone accession. Therefore, we can conclude that neither is Bulgaria in a hurry to adopt the Euro, nor is the Eurozone urgently in need of new members. Apparently, the partners in the future inevitable marriage are still not ready to exchange "wedding rings".

# BULGARIA – STILL BIGGEST LAVENDER PRODUCER WORLDWIDE

by Maria Dimitrova-Pichot

This rainy summer has delayed by nearly a month the harvest of lavender in Bulgaria, which still keeps its leading position among producers worldwide. Over the past years this country has managed to take the place of France, though the latter sees its endless purple fields of Provence as a part of its national identity.

Will bad weather affect the lavender vintage this year?

We ask this question to Mr. Dimitar Stefanov, one of the major producers and exporters of rose and lavender oil. “Cool and wet weather might be good for picking up roses, but it is no good for lavender. We need at least 4 to 5 sunny days in a row, in order to start harvesting,” the expert explains, adding: “The last 40 days of constant raining have affected negatively the lavender crops. However, tufts are some 20 – 30% bigger this summer. There are new plants as well, which will blossom for the first time. To sum up, the harvest will be a bit bigger on last year. This wet weather influences the most the

effective return of lavender oil, which will be at least 20% lower. However, both things reach a balance and we still expect the quantity of distilled lavender oil to reach last year’s levels, or some 120 tonnes.”

Thus Bulgaria preserves its leading position, regarding this aromatic plant with long-standing traditions here. After certain withdraw at the end of last century, a true boom of new plantations can be recently observed.

“Right now we are taking back our previous positions, even bettering the result,” Mr. Stefanov underlines. “We have always been second after France and at the moment we are already outrunning it in terms of production volumes. Yet we can’t boast with better quality, though, as French lavender oil remains the standard. It’s all about our climate – the best one for roses, but not as good as the French one for lavender. Luckily, rose oil is the more elite and expensive product...”

## How did we manage to outrun France, regarding the first position?

“France has had its problems with lavender plantations over the past decades, as there are diseases and the plants need to be re-planted over certain periods of time, which requires greater investments. Fields have shrunk there and production has gone down. China, the other large lavender producer has also stepped out of the market, due to other agricultural priorities, I guess. These two factors have resulted in a serious demand/supply discrepancy, shooting prices up. Hence the increased interest to lavender in Bulgaria. Combined with the new opportunities due to the EU funding, we have had 3 – 4 times bigger acreages over the past years.”

It has been a true leap, Dimitar Stefanov comments. In 2013, we had 120 tonnes of lavender oil produced, or twice more than just two years earlier. The reason: the record prices of Bulgarian lavender, reached in 2011-2012 – over 100 euro per kg. However, that peak won’t be repeated,



says Mr. Stefanov, who expects a price of some EUR 65 this year. Which means increased supply, i.e. France starts to get back to its previous production volumes. Low prices will cool down passions in Bulgaria, regarding new plantations, which will slow down the market, according to the expert. He thinks that the size of lavender fields in this country has now reached its maximum.

Traditionally grown in Bulgaria's southern parts, the record prices of lavender at the beginning of this decade attracted northern farmers, too. Those opted for the new varieties which provide higher yield, but the oil's aroma quality is lower. Branch experts warn against an excessive expansion of the areas, which will result in a sudden drop of prices. "We already went through that at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the excessive expansion of plantations resulted in prices too low and large-scale withdraw of producers. Thus we lost positions we had struggled for a long time before," analyzers comment.



# BRITISH COUPLE RESUSCITATES BULGARIAN RUSTIC TRANQUILLITY

by *Rossitsa Petcova*



Few of us can still recall the aroma of freshly baked bread with homemade jam and the bells of the flocks of sheep and goats returning from pasture. Isn't it enticing to have the opportunity for a summer vacation where, amidst the slow pace of traditional rural life, we can gain new knowledge of archaeology and contemporary practice of relaxation and also some tips on how to make the typical Bulgarian chutney for example? How does a British couple turn their dream of a rustic idyll into reality and how come they chose for this a small village in north-eastern Bulgaria?

Back in the UK, Claire Coulter and Chris Fenton-Thomson had an ordered, normal life, working as archaeologists Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, but it was somehow not enough. What brought them to the other end of the Old Continent we learn from the interview which the creators of the Wild Thyme eco-retreat gave especially for Radio Bulgaria:

"We wanted a different life", explains Chris. "We were living in the UK,

and we knew we wanted to have a small farm. Initially, we volunteered in organic farming in France and we kept meeting people who've been to Bulgaria or were from Bulgaria, and they were all telling us how some of the traditional skills of small scale farming were preserved. So we decided to go and see for ourselves. We took a camper van trip and organized several volunteer placements. The first place we went was this village and we didn't leave".

The village is called Palamartsa and is located 7 km from the town of Popovo. It is only one of numerous Bulgarian villages whose population in recent decades has drastically declined as the school and the kindergarten were closed. However, the local community centre founded in the remote 1893 is still actively functioning with several musical

groups and in recent years the place is experiencing a renaissance - largely thanks to its new inhabitants from the Island in recent years. Initially, Chris and Claire stayed with another British couple, but quickly purchased a property that they turned into an eco-farm. And for the second year now there is also a guesthouse, an Art Deco renovated building from the 1920s, with the pastoral name "The Wild Thyme". If you have the passion in something and if you believe in something, then it is possible, says Claire and adds:

"When we initially came to Bulgaria, we intended to travel around the country and work on projects in different areas but we came here and we loved the lifestyle, we loved that it's so traditional, and that the people, the old women especially, still have the skills to do everything themselves, that they are so self-sufficient. They just took us under their wing, treated us like their own children, and taught us everything that we know.





We have Maria who cooks for the guests and we have Stefan who takes people to the forest. We work with local people closely and we feel very much part of the community.”

This year alone, Chris and Clair have already had guests from Romania, France, Wales, England, Germany, Japan, Chile, and the summer season is not yet over. Some people come for a week, others just for a weekend, all seeking a retreat from the big city into the serenity of life in the slow lane, as Chris and Claire describe it. The place is still not so popular with Bulgarian guests, yet those who come say it brings back memories of their cloudless childhood days spent in the countryside with their grannies.

But what makes the Wild Thyme different from similar eco-retreats in Bulgaria? Here you can join a one-day or even a week-long archaeological tour to nearby sites and these are not few at all.

“My interest in Bulgarian archaeology started here”, says Chris. “When I was working in England, my work was all based in British archaeology. But obviously since coming here we have both discovered the incredible archaeology that’s here, particularly I think in this part of the country. Even though most of the tourist books we read focus on more famous sites like Kazanlak and Rhodopes, we did a lot of research as to what sites were close to us, within an hour’s drive, and the most popular one is the Sveshtari Thracian tomb, a UNESCO world heritage site, but there’s also a whole load of other Thracian remains there, and we go there quite often with people. Another one is the Madara Horseman. People coming from Britain also love to see the Roman archaeology because in Britain although it was part of the Roman Empire, the remains are nowhere near as well preserved as they are here. So

we go to Nicopolis ad Istrum which is a well-preserved Roman town near Veliko Tarnovo, and also to Razgrad where there are good remains of the town of Abritus. People coming from the UK also love to see relics of the Communist monuments. The one in Shumen is the most incredible monument I have ever seen, it is so huge and I like the fact that it is so near sites like Pliska and Veliki Preslav (the medieval capitals of Bulgaria), so we sometimes make a tour that combines both and talk about the relationship between the two.”

After several years in Palamartsa, Chris and Claire are already fluent in Bulgarian and are part of the local community, as Chris even plays the violin in the local band:

“I’ve been playing with the village orchestra for a couple of years now, particularly with accordion player Dimitar Todorov who lives in Popovo. And he just taught me by ear various songs as I didn’t know any Bulgarian music. Yet there’s a growing interest in Balkan music in the west and we thought it might be great for people probably from the USA, UK or Western Europe to come here with an instrument and spend a week here. They can learn a couple of new tunes and at the end of the week play together as a group in public.”

This is just one of the activities which guests at the Wild Thyme this summer can join. The workshop in Bulgarian folk music led by accordionist Dimitar Trifonov who has been teaching Bulgarian folk music for over thirty years took place in late July. Also you can join the regular reiki sessions with Claire who is a certified instructor, take lessons in traditional agriculture, cooking, enjoy horseback riding, trekking around the area, mushroom foraging and picking herbs and berries. And of course, it all starts in the morning with heart-warming home-made breakfast. The season lasts until late October. All you need is the desire to dive into life in the slow lane in a burgeoning Bulgarian village!



# Diamond rush ahead?

by Vladimir Sabev

**B**ulgaria isn't generally known for its rich mineral deposits – there's some coal, but not much, copper and zinc, manganese, iron ore, as well as a couple of lead and uranium mines, but they were closed

down a while ago. Oh, and some deposits of gold, that precious metal frequently found alongside copper and processed under a handful of concession agreements granted to foreign companies. But none of that makes our country a producer of precious metals on any kind of industrial scale. Yet now the news has broken that diamonds have been discovered in Bulgaria.

Of course they're not the type said to be a girl's best friend, but a couple of miniature specks and flakes which, as if adding insult

to injury, don't even sparkle, but are black. They were found a year ago in the Rhodope Mountains by Professor Rangel Gurov from the New Bulgarian University, but he's only telling people about them now. Diamonds are normally contained in kimberlite, an igneous rock that isn't found in Bulgaria. But the scientist found precious diamond flecks in eclogite rocks in the Rhodope Mountains.

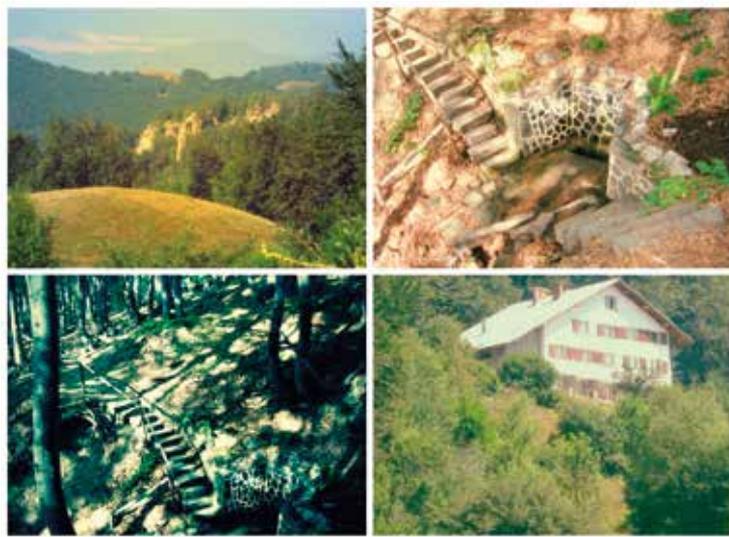
The question, however, is whether the same rock formations also contain real diamonds, the type that can be weighed in carats? So far, no one has been able to say that for sure, despite all the stories and people talking about larger gemstones having been discovered in the past. Here, though, it's important to listen carefully to precisely what the university professor has to say, as he very clearly stresses the fact that the real value in diamonds doesn't come from individual large stones, but from the diamond particles which make up ninety five per cent of all mined diamonds around the world. These particles are mainly used in the industry. As well as featuring in cutting tools in the metal-working sector and for drilling, diamond particles are used in a number of space and military technologies, the scientist explains. And the rock – eclogite – which the diamonds were discovered in, is itself exceptionally hard and can be used in different grinding processes, Rangel Gurov adds.

It's still far too early to judge whether there's an economic case for investing in the exploration and exploitation of diamond reserves in Bulgaria. For the time being, it appears more realistic and promising to examine what opportunities there are for people to find gold. But if the researchers continue their work and confirm the presence of significant diamond deposits in Bulgaria, businesses certainly won't let the opportunity pass by without making the sort of investments needed to trigger a genuine diamond rush.



# Chelopech - a sun-bathed gem

The church to Saint Nicholas the Miracle Worker was built in 1835 by master Dimon from Mirkovo. It is located in the northeastern part of Chelopech among the lush greenery of the churchyard. It has been declared an architectural and artistic monument of culture by the National Institute for Monuments of Culture since 1978.



At the spacious mountain meadows in the southwestern foothills of Murgana Peak in the Topolov kladenets locality, one can reach Murgana hut. It is named after Murgana peak towering the Stara Planina ridge northwest of the hut. The hut is called "The Pearl of the Balkan Mountains." It offers a beautiful panoramic view and with a cloudless sky one can see the higher parts of the Rila, Pirin and Rhodope Mountains. Murgana Hut boasts excellent conditions for recreation and attracts many tourists



Korminesh Park was built under the project "Development of integrated rural tourism in Chelopech municipality" and is financed by Chelopech Municipality and Agriculture State Fund. A variety of events are held in this area - the feast of the municipality, which this year drew about 3,000 people, an annual motorcycle fair, children's parties, theatre and operetta shows, outdoor discos, etc. a host of activities for all generations. Thanks to the designated seating area that can accommodate 1,000 people and is positioned so that you can eat, drink and simultaneously watch the performance, Korminesh is very popular among locals. The playgrounds are a place where parents can safely leave their kids to carefree play.



## Chelopech hosts Gold Dust folk festival

by Albena Bezovska



Located not far from Sofia, amid the beautiful scenery of the Sredna Gora Mountain, the village of Chelopech is famous for the largest copper-gold-pyrite deposit in Europe and the beautiful park Korminesh where an annual folk fair is held. Nearby are the towns of Zlatitsa and Pirdop and twenty kilometers from there is the museum town of Koprivshitsa. Several groups in the vicinity have been preserving the rich song and dance tradition of this region. They are hosts also of the First International Folklore Festival “Gold Dust”, which drew groups from Mexico, India, Georgia and Bulgaria. The forum was opened on July 30 and continued until August 2.

“One hundred lives I will turn into one and will fall like a grain in your land” - this is an excerpt from a poem by Haralampi Haralampiev dedicated to Chelopech. The Bulgarian poet is among the most famous people born in the village, which today has about 2,500 inhabitants. Mayor Alexi Kesyakov, a descendant of an ancient

Koprivshitsa family, is convinced that along with material possessions, his team must provide a rich cultural life for the local people. And traditional songs and dances are among the favourite arts here.

“Folklore is the real carrier of our national identity”, says Mr. Kesyakov. “Every patriotic Bulgarian should contribute to its preservation. It is known that millions of foreigners around the world admire our national songs and dances. Therefore in the program of Gold Dust festival we have included professional and amateur groups from this country. The performances of foreign artists are a gift to the audience and a good way to learn about different cultures. With the festival we want to contribute to the development of tourism in our area, as we would like this to become a major source of revenue in the future.”

The preparation for the international event included the construction of a magnificent stage. A little unusual for Bulgaria, the seats for the audience are placed in tiers where



there are boxes with wooden tables and benches. The idea is to combine the events with a time of recreation for the whole family.

Artistic Director of the festival is Mrs. Margarita Bogdanova – municipal councillor and a true enthusiast. “Last year we were invited by Mr. Emil Pavlov - President of the National

Section of CIOFF (International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals) to attend the largest international folk festival in Veliko Tarnovo. This beauty, these colours have given birth to a dream - to bring them to our native village. Now happily we emphasize that there is no such international forum of this magnitude in the area. We are grateful

to Mr. Pavlov for the inclusion of our festival in the CIOFF calendar and for the help that we received. Groups from Mexico and India were invited to Bulgaria for traditional events under the auspices of the international organization. Only the group of Georgia arrived especially for its participation in the forum. Someone might say that such an event is beyond the power of such a small community. But the assessment of the participants and experts proves otherwise. I am confident that we are on the right track and will cope in the future.”

What’s the story of Jessica Navarro, founder and leader of the group ViDanza from Mexico, one of the participants in the festival:

“I created this group with the help of my colleagues - young dancers and musicians to present the folklore of our country. We are from Veracruz - Kórdoba but we have included in our repertoire attractive specimens of the folklore of other areas in Mexico. We have had concerts only in our country. This is our first tour abroad. We met wonderful people at the festival in Veliko Tarnovo and our concerts in other cities. Chelopech is a wonderful place and we enjoy the new friendships.”

Here are the words of the man who in festival days in Veliko Tarnovo and Chelopech everyone called a “guru”: “My name is Ningthoujam Nabachandra Singh, head of the Thoibi Manipuri Dance and Cultural Research Institute in India. Our staff brings together about 200 people, but in Bulgaria only ten arrived. For the first time, we are in your country, we participated in several festivals of CIOFF, gave a concert in Razgrad and Koprivshitsa. To me, such events are very important because they show how close the traditions of different peoples really are. However different in appearance we might be, we all share the same sun and sky, let’s not forget that.”

# NESSEBAR AND ITS CHURCHES

*by Veneta Nikolova*





Not long ago, Bulgaria again came into the spotlight as a tourist destination, this time with the ancient Nessebar on the Black Sea, a breathtakingly beautiful spot with an eventful history going back millennia. The peninsular town, which is on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites, is now one of the top 10 greatest tourist destinations in the Balkans, according to a Macedonian tourist website. The best locations include also the emblematic Meteora complex of Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Greece, lake Ohrid in Macedonia, Bran castle in Romania, commonly known as Count Dracula's castle, etc. What makes Nessebar so remarkable are its numerous archaeological sites and most of all the multitude of churches in this tiny town.

Fifteen – that is the number of churches that have been discovered and conserved in Nessebar, each with its own history and architecture. And they are all located on a peninsula that is 840 meters long and no more than 350 meters wide. The narrow isthmus that is its connection with the mainland takes visitors to one of the oldest early Christian metropolises in Europe. The first signs of humans date back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, when there was a Thracian settlement here. Later, it was replaced by a fortified city-state with an amphitheatre and even a system of plumbing that was way ahead of its time. But most of Nessebar's churches are from the time of the Middle Ages when the city was flourishing. "It is these medieval churches that are the



reason why it is on the UNESCO World Heritage list,” says Martin Zhelev from the Museum of Archaeology in Nessebar. According to historical sources, there have been over 40 churches here through the ages, but some have crumbled with the passage of time. The first basilicas date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century when the town had close relations with Constantinople by sea. It was at that period that Nessebar experienced its first religious and cultural rise.

“In Roman times, this portion of the Black Sea coast was on the fringes of the empire, far from the capital, but when it split into two in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the proximity of the new capital Constantinople gave a tangible boost to culture in the town,” explains Martin Zhelev. “Churches were being built on a massive scale and this

continued throughout the Middle Ages and even into the times of Ottoman domination. Under Bulgarian Tsar Ivan-Alexander in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Nessebar was a boomtown with more and more churches and monasteries being built. It is interesting to note that the Nessebar iconography school continued through the Ottoman period, and was especially active in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century. It was under the influence of the Byzantine icon-painters from Mount Athos, Crete etc.”

A textbook of church architecture – that is what experts say about Nessebar. But one doesn’t need to be an expert or to have sound knowledge of history or of iconography to appreciate this beauty and elegance that has come down to us through the ages. Nessebar municipality is currently working on a project that will connect



all 15 churches in one tourist itinerary. The undisputed masterpiece among these pearls of church architecture is St. Stefan. “This is the most frequented of all sites and the only church with 16<sup>th</sup> century frescoes that have been preserved almost in their entirety”, Martin Zhelev says. “It was built in the 10<sup>th</sup> century but very few fresco fragments from that period have come down to us. Another unique house of prayer is the Church of Christ Pantokrator in the square with the town’s post office. It is the church that is best preserved here. Only its belfry is a bit damaged, otherwise it is absolutely authentic and even today looks as it originally stood. Many of the churches in the town are from the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century. The most emblematic one is the St. Sophia or the Old Metropolitan Church

as it is called, the biggest church to have ever been built in Nessebar – the building is from the 5<sup>th</sup> century! It is a rare thing for Bulgaria, or for Europe for that matter, to see remains of churches from so long ago.”

Church building never stopped in the course of a millennium and more. And it is because the town is perched on a small peninsula, almost completely isolated from the mainland and from enemy armies that so many of the churches are so well preserved. Small wonder then that the ancient Nessebar has been proclaimed an architectural and archaeological reserve; it is the only Bulgarian town to have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in its entirety.



# GOING TO A SKI RESORT AT THE END OF SUMMER

*by Veneta Nikolova*



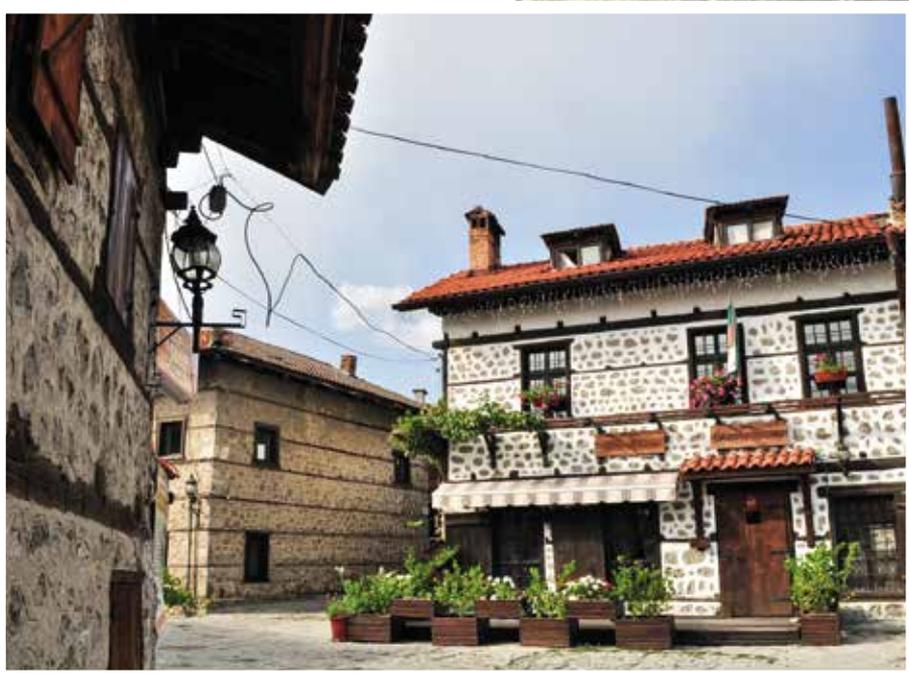
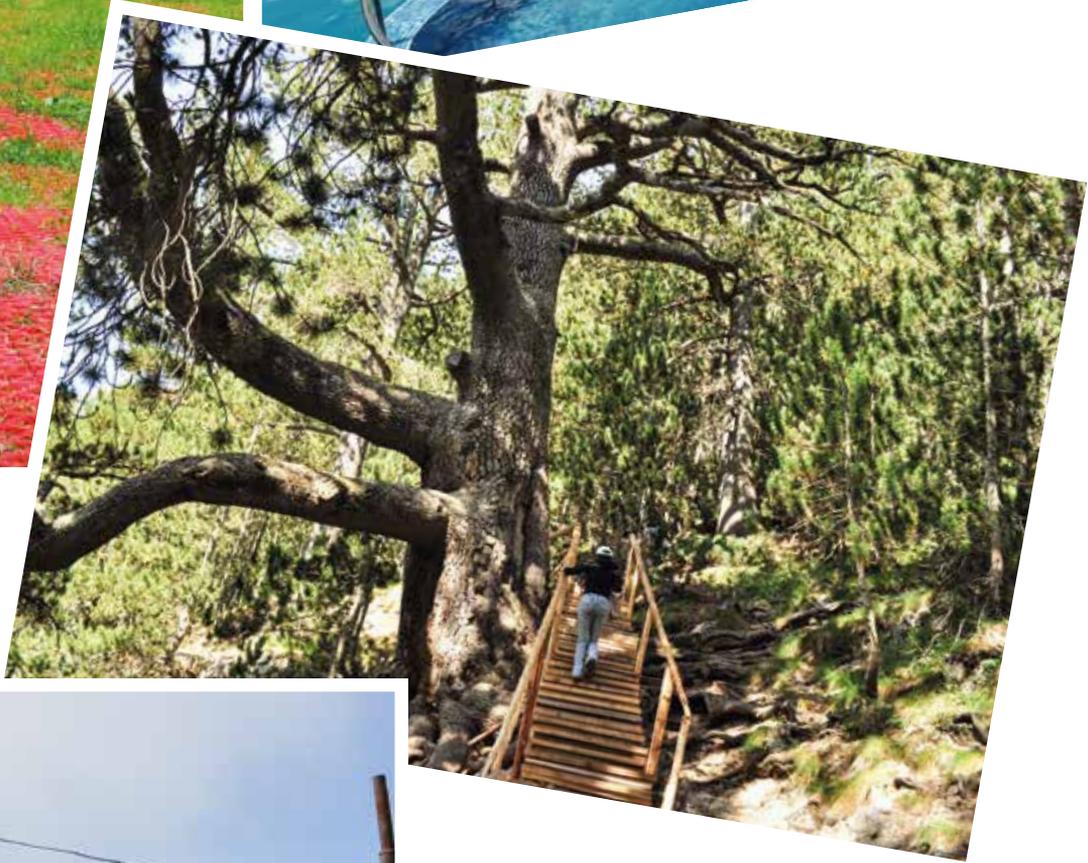
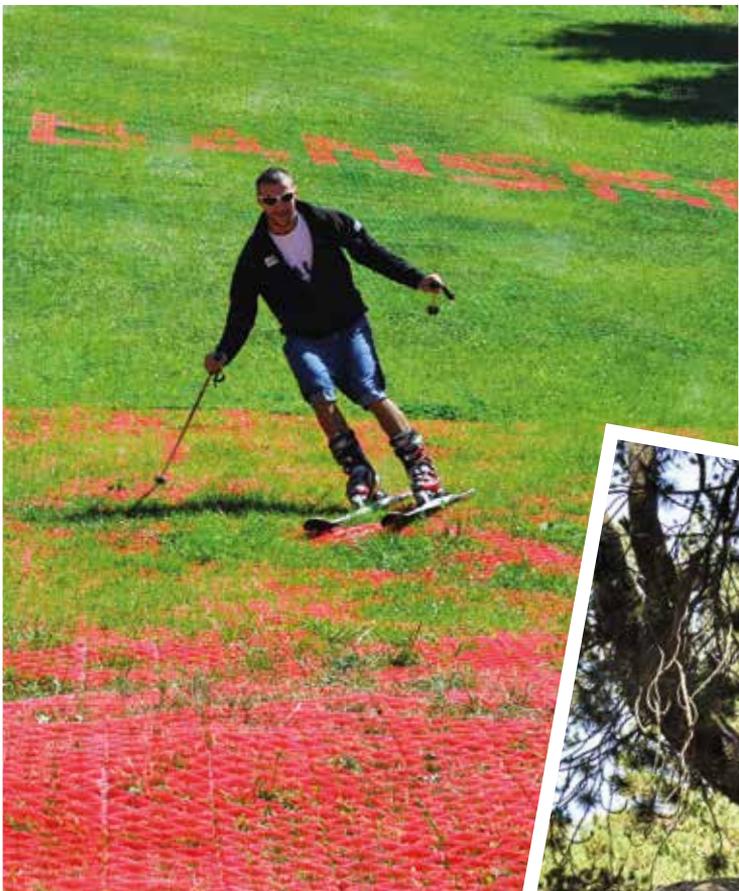
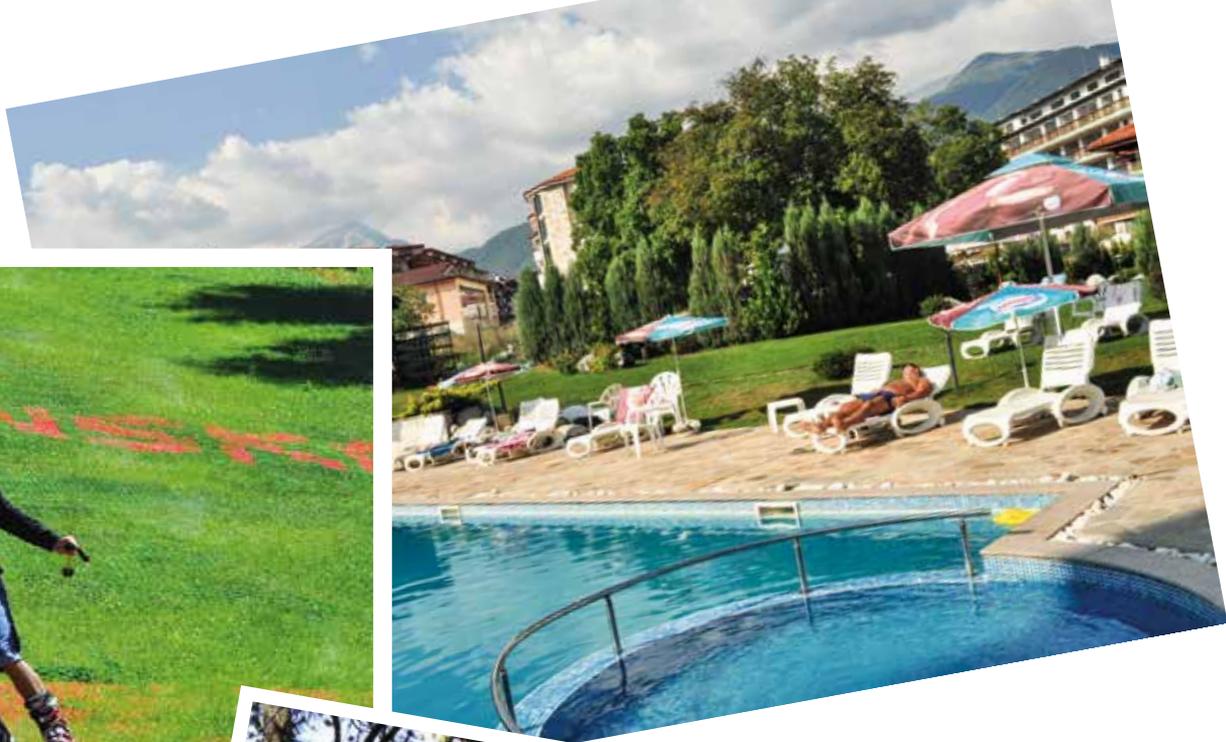
Some say the best rest is taken during a mountain holiday. So at the end of the summer, having enough of the sun and sea waves, the crowded noisy beaches and exotic rhythms pulsing from bars and discos, many people yearn for spending some time amidst the stately heights of the mountains. To fill up their hotels outside the ski season, most mountain resorts compete in offering all

kinds of promotional vacation packages. So it is in Bansko.

The lift takes tourists from Bansko to the higher parts of the mountain

One of the most rapidly developing ski resorts in Europe, the traditional host of prestigious international ski competitions and a favorite destination of world ski legends like Mark Ghirardelli and Hermann Maier, is virtually

unrecognizable in the summer. Off-season, part of Bansko's hotels remain closed, ski schools and ski lockers for equipment too as well as some restaurants and supermarkets. Gone is the usual crowd of people patiently queuing in front of the gondola, leading to the ski area high in Pirin. The streets of the resort town are quiet with the half-empty restaurants and shops. Tranquility reigns in the old part



of Bansko with its huddled stone houses, many of which have been converted into taverns or family-run hotels. Here and there you will find an open restaurant with a person in front, inviting you with a seductive smile to taste the local specialties. As you wander through the narrow streets of the old town you will see small groups of grannies gossiping as nothing escapes their curious glance. Some of them give rooms for rent, but now they are using the temporary lull in the business to rest or to prepare winter supplies. Fresh air, greenery and breathtaking views of the peaks of Pirin – this is what this small mountain town offers generously to its guests. The hotels that stay open in the



summer cannot complain about lack of customers. They welcome guests not only from Bulgaria, but also from the UK, the Scandinavian countries, Israel and Russia. A large part of the bigger resorts offer furnished studios with everything you need and even apartments for rent at very reasonable prices. Guests enjoy free open-air swimming pools usually surrounded by well-manicured lawns with sun loungers and umbrellas, often also with an adjacent tennis court and playground. However, many foreigners prefer to buy their own apartment in Bansko and use it as a holiday home or rent it. This is proven by the many real estate agencies in the town working in the heat of summer.

Bansko's main attraction is the unspoilt nature of the Pirin Mountain. To know its mysteries, however, one will need to obtain a map and it is also a good idea to hire a mountain guide. In the town center, tourists will find several offices of travel agencies that offer this service. Only then will you be sure that you will not get lost along the trails in Pirin as the tourist markings are not good at places or are sometimes missing.

The simplest and most preferred route in the region is to make a hike to Vihren hut. The gondola that departs from Bansko reaches the locality called Banderishki meadows in less than half an hour. Hence a scenic narrow path winding in the shade of century-old pine trees leads you right to Vihren hut situated at an altitude of 1,950 m. On the way there is a brief detour to one of the oldest trees in the Balkans – the Baikusheva Mura (fir tree), which is more than 1,300 years old. Other, much more difficult routes leading to spots untouched by human hand ignite the imagination of the more experienced hikers. Some of these routes are only available in the summer, so now is the time to put your backpack on your shoulders and head up across the crags to the coveted top. Summer is the most appropriate season for extended hiking. And not only!

Vihren Hut is surrounded by the difficult to climb slopes and ridges of the Pirin Mountain. Who says one can ski in winter only? In the area of Banderishki Polyani (the latter meaning meadows) people are skiing also in the summer months... on the lawns. Actually,

this is the latest craze in the resort. The track is made up of special units and is one hundred meters long. You can also race down with a snowboard and the track also has a special chute for rubber toboggans. Nearby there are opportunities for training in skiing biathlon. What other forms of entertainment does Bansko offer in the summer?

“On the one hand, we offer horse riding and also we have the opportunity for fishing at lakes and ponds. Another facility is the Bansko golf course that attracts prestigious guests. The region also boasts thermal springs and spas, allowing the implementation of rehabilitation programs. In the summer we offer outdoor picnics that are amazingly magnetic for guests! They can taste various meat dishes prepared on fire or stone, thus getting acquainted with Bansko's rich culinary traditions. Not to mention that local taverns have achieved an undeniable excellence in cooking and the presentation of the regional cuisine”, says Malin Bistrin, chairman of the Association of the Tourist Companies in Bansko.



*"Our Beautiful Bulgaria" is a non-governmental organization engaged in various activities to the benefit of society and the state. It is a large-scale project for restoring and preserving the tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as developing diverse forms of tourism.*



## **We must showcase Bulgaria's little-known treasures – Daniela Dimitrova and the other face of tourism**

*by Alvena Bezovska*

"The best road to Bulgaria's economic development is tourism. But everything related to boosting this business should be done with knowledge, consistency, and long-term planning. And last but not least - with love", believes Daniela Dimitrova, founder and manager of Our Beautiful Bulgaria Association.

It was set up in 2008 with the aim of bringing together experts in various fields. "Our Bulgaria is beautiful, but we constantly have to work in two main directions - to preserve the treasures which this country possesses and to show them with joy and pride to our guests from around the world", Mrs. Dimitrova says.



### **Hotel Hermes is located in Bansko at the foot of Pirin Mountain**

The hotel is luxuriously furnished type 4 stars, has a gym, sauna, spa  
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2770 Bansko, Bulgaria

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”If we all unite - ministries, local authorities, each individual owner and employee, we can achieve a lot. Bulgaria is beautiful but we should try to reveal its riches. People may spend only two days, or even two hours here, but we can turn this into an unforgettable experience that will make tourists fall in love with our country and dream of coming back. It really does not depend on anyone else but us. During the years in which I have been running the project, we were able to attract some of

the best specialists - architects, engineers and artists. We are working very closely with mayors and officials of local authorities. This year I have focused my efforts in the beautiful mountain resort of Bansko - recently I became the owner of a hotel and a restaurant that recreates the atmosphere of an old Bulgarian tavern. My idea is to offer an all-round tourist product to our guests, combining a visit to the beautiful mountain landscape, cultural and historical attractions, local cuisine and pleasant

surprises. The hotel and the tavern are only a hundred meters away. We have organized a means of ”transport” - a colorful horse-driven cart decorated with home-woven rugs and pillows... And the tavern awaits them with delicious food and live music.”

The first artists invited to start the project in Bansko were the musicians from the famous band Underground. Now one can hear there the original local folklore in the rendition of the “Banskite starcheta” (Bansko old men band), the Bansko Grannies female group and others. “We supply the food from local farms, everything is produced locally - goat cheese, meat, vegetables. We want to encourage small and medium businesses. This is another of our tasks”, continues Ms. Dimitrova. She is the initiator and organizer of several significant events that so far are only indirectly associated with tourism – a folklore festival in the eco-reserve, a comic theatre forum and more. Also, a series of musical events are planned that will enrich Bansko’s cultural calendar.

”We have very good contacts with Russia, with our industrial centre in Russia, the Bulgarian embassy and with many people who share our ideas. With their assistance in October we have invited a Russian group which is very popular in Russia now - ”Mystic Rose”. The musicians have many fans travelling with them. We will try to show them the interesting sites in Bansko’s vicinity. One of the major activities that we have undertaken is the restoration of Bulgarian sanctuaries. The easiest thing to do is to take tourists to only the most visited places like the Rila Monastery and other famous holy places. But we have set ourselves the task to discover and restore unknown Bulgarian cultural monuments and to show that Our Beautiful Bulgaria project really meets its goal. We have an annual program in which, together with the church trustees, mayors and others we locate ancient churches and monasteries and allocate draft budgets. We work very well with Bulgarian institutions. Our project is supported by the Ministry of Economy and Tourism. And this is extremely important as it helps our ideas turn into reality.”



## BULGARIAN SUCCESS AT WHO'S NEXT FASHION SHOW IN PARIS

by Maria Dimitrova-Pichot



The Who's Next international fashion salon in Paris was established some 30 years ago and it has proven itself as a leading forum for discovering new trends in clothing and accessories outside haute couture. Thanks to the Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Agency Bulgarian designers had the pleasure to present themselves there at the beginning of July. They were spotted and assessed and many returned with new clients and orders.

Here are two of them: avant-garde jeweller Petar Arbov and young fashion designer Valentina Antonov. Petar Arbov has been in the field for 25 years, as he has gone through different art periods. Right now he tends to add to his production parts of old watches, digital phones cameras etc. It all makes it look like the vintage style.

"I used to work with gold, diamonds and



other precious materials before. However, I gave up, as gold attracts a bit different people that I personally don't feel drawn to," the jeweller says. "For instance, silver provides greater artistic freedom. My latest works are created with imagination only. The materials are accessible, the investment is much smaller and it is all left to the flight of the imagination. I disassemble old watches, cell phones, cameras, typewriters etc., which are usually forgotten and thrown away somewhere. I combine their elements in different designs of silver, brass, copper and some quite interesting stuff occurs." How did people perceive Petar Arbov's works at the exhibition?

"I have been imposing this style for 5 years. At the same time it is turning into a global trend. I expect it to reach the top within a year or two. When industry takes it and chews it, we will have to look for something new. I am really

happy with this exhibition, since I found new clients. One really gets energy at such places, with new ideas coming from what he sees around."

Arbov has also participated in the Milano exhibition of a similar kind, but in his opinion Paris is the most significant forum in the sphere.

Paris is the city where young Bulgarian Valentina Antonov used to study and live. She is not a designer, but a fashion journalist. The contact with the best designers has revealed to her the secrets of the industry and she gradually got brave enough to start working on her own. Valentina now works in Bulgaria along with other two colleagues of hers. "I have always carried design inside my heart, but I hadn't unlocked the door for my imagination and will to work," she told us. A French fashion journalist determines

the style of her Mera brand as "a successful interweaving of evening clothes into everyday ones".

"It is for every woman, who loves herself and doesn't have fears to express herself via emotions. This style should make her feel beautiful and strong across the whole day and not only in her full dress. We live our everyday life without many explanations and words. A woman, who wants to express herself in front of the people she communicates with during the day, can now rely on clothes, which will reveal her energy, aura, temperament and spirit. Our style is simple, minimalist and expressive at the same time."

Valentina Antonov is charmed by the nice and open communication with her colleagues at the Who's Next forum in Paris where many useful and fruitful acquaintances start.



## Soprano Svetla Vassileva records an album with the Radio Orchestra

by *Elena Tsvetkova*

The Metropolitan, La Scala, Covent Garden – the leading opera theatres of the world have been fascinated by the talented and artistic Bulgarian Svetla Vassileva. The soprano stars on stage not only in Europe and America, but also in Japan and Australia. Her schedule is tight for years to come, however, she is little known at home. One reason is that she left for Italy straight after she graduated the National Academy of Music in Sofia. Her husband is Italian and her daughter has a lovely Japanese name, Yume. The girl travels with her mom and they came to Bulgaria together, on the occasion of an album that Svetla Vassileva has recorded at the invitation of the Bulgarian National Radio.

The CD includes twelve melodious and popular canzonettas. *Torna a Surriento*, *Santa Lucia*, *Non ti scordar di me* and others are quite popular and known in the interpretations of Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo. Andrea Bocelli with whom the Bulgarian soprano has appeared on stage several times, has also performed them. The Bulgarian National Radio is the album's producer. It will be released this autumn.

Svetla Vassileva spent five days in the company of the musicians from the BNR Symphony Orchestra at Studio 1. Recordings proceeded under the baton of Marcello Rota, cousin of famous film music composer Nino Rota. „I appreciate it very much that the orchestra is fully staffed because Italian canzonettas require dense orchestration”, Marcello Rota said and praised the work of the orchestra. On the last day of recordings violinist Vasko Vassilev was also at the studio. The world-

acclaimed musician has for years been a fan of Svetla Vassileva. He arrived to Bulgaria especially for the recording of the soprano's first Bulgarian CD. Being the leader of the Royal Opera orchestra in London, Vasko admitted he had never heard a more proficient Violetta in *La traviata*, meaning Svetla's rendition. The two stars looked childishly happy on stage working together and absolutely spellbound by the music they had come to perform.



# Rising star: pop singer Zhana Bergendorf

by Sibilla Lilova



Many young and talented singers have emerged in Bulgaria in recent years thanks to different TV reality shows. One of them is Zhana Bergendorf – winner of X Factor 2013, but the road leading to this success has been a long one. In her childhood she sang with the children's group Vrabchetata (Sparrows), then with the Bulgarian National Radio's Children's Radio Choir. When she graduated secondary school, Zhana left for Asia where, for six years, she sang with a rock band every night. More from the singer herself: "When I was 18 I went to South Korea to sing. I was sent there by my music teacher from Vrabchetata, Adriana Venkova. I had the all-out support of my family; the work load was enormous but it is important for an artist to accumulate experience. And after all that time I returned to Bulgaria. I

became a singer and realized my place was here."

Her private life took to Denmark for some time. There, she took part in the local X Factor for the first time, but was not successful. Two years later she came back to Sofia where she settled with her family. Last year Zhana Bergendorf auditioned for the Bulgarian version of X Factor. And at the X factor finals she won first place. "I had to learn how to be natural on camera," the singer says. "To begin with it was a great shock to me; with so many people watching the strain was enormous. But I overcame my fear. And all the time, my incentive was my four-year old son Leon. When I came on stage I always thought of him."

Zhana Bergendorf recently returned from London where she recorded her debut

single: "Everything that my life is today is thanks to my Virginia Records producer, Sanya Armoutlieva. We went to London twice, and I was lucky enough to work with one of the leading European independent studios Metropolis. There I met some of the foremost names in the music industry, like Ray Hedges and Nigel Butler who are highly successful composers and producers in the UK. When they heard my single Samurai they suggested I record an English-language version called Remember Me. When I heard the music, I literally fell in love with the song. The lyrics to Samurai are by Rushi Videnliev and I want to thank him for tailoring the words especially for me." A video to Samurai, was made a month ago, using the cutting-edge hi-end technology, used also in the making of Kylie Minogue's surreal videos.



# BOYAN PETROV: THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SUMMER OF BULGARIAN MOUNTAINEERING

by Miglena Ivanova

The highest point in the world is of course Mount Everest. But its commercialization in recent years is making it less and less attractive for trained climbers. K2, the second highest peak on the globe which lies in Pakistan near the northern border with China, is more challenging for the master mountaineers. The harsh rocky pyramid glorified for its capricious climate turns into the place of death of 29 of every 100 climbers who dare to go there. On July 31, 2014 a Bulgarian set foot on K2 for the first time. So, after in

May he reached the highest points of Kanchenjunga - 8586 m (the first ascent of a Bulgarian), and on July 23- on Broad Peak - 8047 m (the first documented ascent of a Bulgarian) without oxygen and without the help of Sherpas, Boyan Petrov, who is diabetic, became the first Bulgarian to climb 3 eight-thousanders within 100 days. His dual ascent, of Broad Peak and K2 within 8 days, is a world record. For these impressive successes the Bulgarian climber was greeted with a video message by mountaineering legend Reinhold





Messner and Italian sports journalist of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Sandro Fillipini. Did Boyan Petrov believe he would achieve this by taking ascent of K2 immediately after Broad Peak without having enough time to recover?

"I had some doubts that I might not have the power to climb all peaks. But when I saw a man in front of me, I mobilized myself three times stronger. On this expedition there was no one to overtake me because of climbing faster. I rose from bed two to three hours after the others and was then overtaking them one by one. This was due to the good shape I was in after Kanchenjunga, the acclimatization I had gotten there. On Kanchendzyonga I had hallucinations and problems with concentration over 8.500 meters. And at K2 I had the feeling that I was actually climbing a peak of 7 thousand meters. The sense I had on Kanchendzyonga that I'm in space was almost overcome," Boyan said. Success came to the Bulgarian climber after a failed ascent of K2 in 2005, but it helped him because this time unknown to him were only the last 400 meters. How does the climber describe the route

to the top?

"I knew best the route along the Abruzzi the rib. It is classic, but not easy. Many of the camps have avalanche danger. I was supposed to climb K2 with a group of Poles, but actually I moved 2-3 hours ahead. I was alone on the route - I and my 16-kg backpack. The whole time I was carrying a tent, food, bag, clothes - from base camp to the summit."

The history of climbing K2 shows that reaching the top does not mean a successful mission since death often lurks on the way back.

"Coming out on the top comb I was pushed back by a gust of wind with a speed of 60-70 km per hour and snow particles", says Boyan. "I was on the top but I could not enjoy it. After 30-40 minutes I started the descent. I was going down using a GPS clock. I fell into a state of "White Out" where looking down the slope, you cannot tell where the clouds end, where the land begins and what the incline is. You are making steps that are actually jumps. Several times I rolled until I got an idea of the terrain under me."

On the way down after a night in camp 3

the climber woke up in a tent buried in snow. He was hardly able to pull out of the icy grip.

"The descent is key to the success of the whole project", Boyan stresses. "If your attention gets distracted, death is one step away. The storms that were raging during the descent made me go through more anxious moments than during the climb. On the way down you feel mentally relieved because you have reached the top. But that would mean the disappearance of focus. From other similar descents I know that the focus must be kept until the end. And I kept it until base camp."

During his expeditions Boyan Petrov, who is a biologist and part of the team of the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia, is making discoveries, collects valuable information about the flora and fauna. Now he intends to write a scientific paper on "The upper limit of life in Pakistan." And somewhere along the Baltoro glacier in the Karakoram range walks the spider named after him, *Aulonia petrovi*, the largest black spider in the area and the only one encountered in the higher altitude camps, says the climber.

## WHAT'S ON IN SEPTEMBER?



**Sept 1 – Oct 31, Plovdiv**

Autumn Art Salon

**Sept 1-30, Plovdiv Old Town**

National Autumn Exhibitions

**Sept 4-7, Gurkovo**

Bio rally with donkey carts

**Sept 5-9, Etara**

Ethnographic complex, Gabrovo Municipality

International Fair of Traditional Crafts

**Sept 6-8, Primorsko**

Strandja sings and dances Folk festival for authentic folklore

**Sept 12-13, Plovdiv**

10th anniversary edition of Night of Museums

**Sept 14-16, Gotse Delchev**

Nevrokop plays, sings and dances Festival

**Sept 16-22, Veliko Tarnovo**

International festival of military brass bands

**Sept 19-21, Troyan**

Bulgarian Plum Festival

**Sept 19-20, Plovdiv,**

Sounds of the Ages Festival, Ancient Amphitheatre

**Sept 20-30, Albena**

Albena National holidays of culture

**Sept 20-21, Sofia**

ON! Fest Festival for urban culture, Inter Expo Centre

**Sept 21, Zlatograd**

Delyu's holidays

"A market day in the old town of Zlatograd"

**Sept 24-28, Sofia**

Good Luck Hunting, fishing, sports at Inter Expo Centre

**Sept 26, Kyustendil**

Fertility festival

**Sept 29-Oct 4, Plovdiv**

Motor Show

**Sept 26-29, Plovdiv**

Music Days in Balabanov's House International Festival

# The Sound Recording Studio of BNR First Studio



Area of 420 square meters  
Volume of 4500 cubic meters  
Reverberation time 1,35 s  
Sound engineers' control room  
Area of 31 square meters  
Volume of 90 cubic meters  
Sound recording equipment

#### **Audio mixing consoles:**

- SSL DUALITY 48 channels
- DAW:  
24 channels AD/DA Alfa Link MADI SX  
24 channels AD/DA Alfa Link MADI AX
- SOUNDSCAPE 55 32
- SOUNDSCAPE Mix/Editor SW
- PC&HP XW 4600
- 2 monitors HP LP 2065

#### **Audio monitors:**

- GENELEC 1035
- GENELEC 1031

#### **Other equipment:**

- Analogue: STUDER A812
- Recorder SONY PCM 800-24
- DAT SONY 2800

#### **Guitar amplifiers:**

- DYNACORD TURBO
- DYNACORD B412
- FENDER SHOWMAN REVERB

#### **Audio processing equipment:**

- LEXICON 480 with LARC
  - LEXICON PCM 80
- #### **Microphones:**
- NEUMANN USM69
  - BRUEL & KJAER
  - U87; U89; U49Fet
  - KMS84, KM84, TLM170,
  - GFM132 AKG D224E, D12
  - D140, C1000S, C747

#### **Additional equipment:**

- sound system

#### **Musical instruments:**

- 3 STEINWAY
- YAMAHA
- FENDER-RODES 73
- HAMMOND ORGAN
- YAMAHA ELECTRON – E3
- Vibraphone PREMIER, marimba
- Xylophone and bells MUSSER
- Timpani and big drum
- Drum set LUDWIG
- Glockenspiel, celesta
- Harpsichord and harps



RADIO BULGARIA®

## The world Internet service of the Bulgarian National Radio

The birth date of Radio Bulgaria, also known in the past as the Foreign Service of BNR, is May 16, 1936. Since that day, despite the ups and downs of political life in this country, this programme has presented to the world Bulgaria's cultural and national identity. Over the decades, Radio Bulgaria has become a basic and reliable source of information on this country for people all over the globe. Proof to that end are the dozens of thousands of contacts with people on all continents. These contacts have constantly been expanding, entering a new technological stage: as of February 1, 2012 our programmes are available on the Internet.

You can find them in 11 languages, offering information in text, sound and image. Radio Bulgaria's creative potential and technical level allows us to launch a multimedia product building the up-to-date image of this country. Through this product the team of the media would gladly respond, as it has always done, to each sign of interest in Bulgaria, to your desire to learn more about this country's history, culture, traditions and folklore; the Bulgarians' everyday life and their contribution to world processes. Our programme upholds, through the articles we offer, the public mission and prestige of the Bulgarian National Radio among its ever-growing listening and reading audience the world over.



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