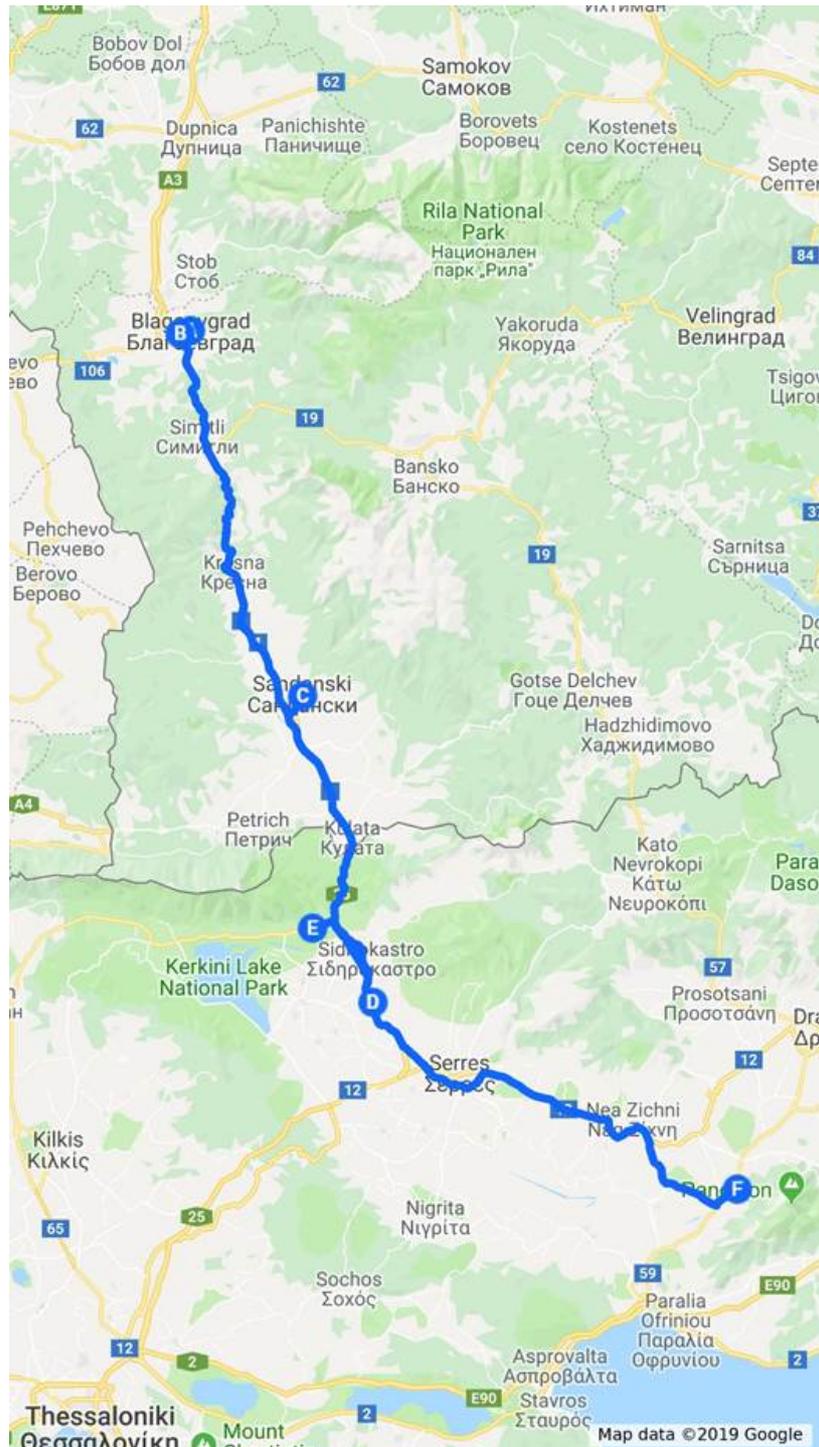




## **„THE MUSICAL AND DANCE HERITAGE OF THE VILLAGES ACROSS THE STRUMA RIVER”**

Musical heritage conveys a system of sacral meanings encoded in the image of music as a means of thinking and behaviour. The folklore heritage of different nationalities across Southeast Europe consists of similar melodic specifics, regardless of the historical transformations that are imposed on every nation. Is it possible that these musical elements are so common due to the conservatism of music and its origins? What is the global contribution of the population living in the border region of the country to the songs, to the instrumentarium, to the pulsation and the tonalities? The answers to these questions lead to the realization of numerous expeditions and scientific developments that would demonstrate the musical achievements of the local population.

For each and every person who would like to be touched by the magic of this everlasting art from the region we have made a selection of performers. All of them hold and preserve the authentic musical and dance traditions in the cross-border region of Bulgaria and Greece, situated along the Struma and Mesta rivers, from the region of Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria to the region of Serres, Greece.



### ***Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dancing "Pirin" Blagoevgrad***

The Pirin Folk Ensemble is emblematic for the Bulgarian folklore art. It unites musicians, singers, dancers who successfully recreate the folklore heritage and promote the beauty of the Pirin song, the variety of the costumes, the diversity of dance movements and rhythms not only from the region but also from all over Bulgaria. Each of their performances is an aesthetic "explosion" of folk art presented at concert venues around the world.



Picture: Pirin Ensemble Archives

Ensemble Pirin's fairy scenes of music, songs, dancing and colour have been conquering prestigious halls around the world, such as Carnegie Hall (New York), Kennedy Center (Washington), halls in Chicago, Denver, San Francisco (USA), the Queen Elizabeth Theater (Toronto), Tchaikovsky Hall (Russia), Teatro Presidente Alvear (Buenos Aires, Argentina), and over 60 other countries around the world with over 6 million viewers and admirers of their art.



Picture: Pirin Ensemble Archives

The ensemble has won dozens of international awards, including the Golden Plate (Nashville, USA) in 1982 and a Grammy in 1990 together with Marcel Sellier's "Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices".



Picture: Pirin Ensemble Archives

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### **Southwest University "Neofit Rilski" - Student Folklore Ensemble**

The Student folklore ensemble is a great combination of youth, professionalism and rich performance potential. For the past 25 years /established in 1994/ the ensemble "NeofitRilski" has had more than 350 concerts both in Bulgaria and overseas. Furthermore, the ensemble has participated in a number of international festivals such as: World Student Folklore Festival "Golden Horn" (Istanbul, Turkey); International folklore kukeri festival, (Naoussa, Greece); International Student Arts Festival (Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria) as well as in festivals in France, Spain, Russia, Italy, Germany, etc.



Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov

The vibrant picture of the Bulgarian folklore heritage of musical intonations, peculiar movements, colourful costumes and stunning emotion are skilfully recreated by the young performers. Ensemble "NeofitRilski" translates the heritage of traditional folklore into an influential contemporary art and is an ambassador of Bulgarian folklore art both in Bulgaria and around the world.



*Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov*

The young performers have made a number of recordings for the Bulgarian National Television and are frequent guests in folklore shows and musical programs.



*Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov*

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***Ensemble for folk songs and dancing "Nikola Vaptsarov", Sandanski***

The town of Sandanski maintains rich historical heritage and cultural traditions. The town is situated 60 km south from Blagoevgrad and offers its guests a pleasant climate, mineral springs, and opportunities for a satisfying and effective rest. The settlement dates back to the 2nd millennium BC and has archaeological sites from various historical periods - early Christian basilicas, an episcopal complex, decorative mosaic carpets and others. A leading institution for the preservation of the song and dance heritage is the Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dancing 'Nikola Vaptsarov', founded in 1948.



Picture: Sandanski Ensemble Archives

The ensemble's performers are amateurs who share the love for folklore songs; all of them possess delightful, beautiful voices. The intonation diversity, characteristic for this region, gives the singers great opportunities to express themselves. It also allows for a rich and meaningful repertoire which in itself provides the audience with an emotional and aesthetic experience.



Picture: Sandanski Ensemble Archives

The ensemble participates in numerous international festivals and tours all around Europe: Macedonia, Greece, France (2009), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010), Turkey (2012), Czech Republic (2013), Italy. (2017), etc. If one encounters the inspiring performances of the amateurs from Sandanski, one would come back for sure, listen to them again, and each time the performances will fill one's soul with excitement and beauty.



Picture: Sandanski Ensemble Archives

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### **Choir VAMVAKOFYTO**

The choir of Vamvakofyto in the village of Vamvakofyto, Serres was founded by Georgios Kaligas in 1999 within the framework of the Association of Cultural Activities. As a purpose of people's activity within the choir can be identified the collection, recording, preservation and promotion of the traditional village songs with which many generations of the village have grown up. On the tunes of these songs the local people have danced in the neighbourhoods and on the squares of the village for many decades. These activities ceased in 2001 when the choir temporarily discontinued their events until 2013 when the choir re-established its function. However, this time the purpose of the choir is the entertainment of the audiences through singing and dancing, as well as the spread of comprehension of the musical culture of various regions of Greece and also of the neighbouring countries. The choir collaborates successfully with the local authorities of the village and participates in its cultural calendar every year. The members of the choir currently count at 25 people.



*Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov*

The Association for the Cultural Heritage in Vamvakofyto was established in 1982 and its main direction has always been related to the dances, traditions and cultural characteristics of the area. In addition to the choir, there is an adult dance ensemble currently part of the association, which performs in different cities around Greece as well as abroad.

A very interesting project is the organization of the local Carnival "Babugeri" which occurs yearly on the Sunday of Sirni Zagovezni.

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***The association Startsovites & friends "St. Minas"***

The Startsovites association aims at spreading the traditions of the intangible cultural heritage of the region – local songs and dances, rituals and their practices. The association also engages in the cultural education of young people in order for them to study and preserve the cultural heritage of the region. Folklore allows us to understand the folk psychology of different societies and to enter into the world which would otherwise remain hidden and mysterious without the knowledge of people's everyday life. The songs, legends, customs, feasts and costumes are the source of knowledge about the being of people, about their faith and their stories. This knowledge possesses the capability of showing us a different angle and a whole unknown world of local people's life.



*Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov*

In 1988 the association was also the home of a Byzantium choir. At present, the association holds dance classes for children and teenagers of all age groups as well as for adults with different levels of experience (from beginners to advanced). A cast of actors was also part of the association from 2011 to 2015.

The association's dancing groups mainly perform on two-toned accompaniment. The accompaniment is performed by zurna musicians - from 2 to 4 people and 1 or 2 drum performers. Besides the authentic melodies, characteristic of their repertoire are also urban melodies, which are adapted to the instrumentation of the accompanying musicians.

The main activities of the association are the organization of the St. Mina's Fair, which is celebrated on 11th November, as well as the so called summer bridal market "Niphopazaro", which takes place at the Barbatanassi Square.

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***ProtiProodos' Friends of Music Association***

ProtiProodos' Friends of Music Association was founded on 1st January 1925 during a historically difficult period for the Hellenic Republic, when the state was trying to recover after a number of national catastrophes.

Despite all the difficulties the Proti village, which administratively sits within the Serres municipal region, was a vital and numerous central settlement in the region. Its inhabitants were interested not only in securing their livelihood through tobacco cultivation but also in the spiritual and cultural development of the area.

Thus, a group of people highly devoted to the idea of cultural development in the area set up the ProtiProodos association for the purpose of musical education of the local community.



*Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov*

Ever since the ProtiProodos' Friends of Music Association has been active without any cease of function. The association is the home of a brass band and offers free music education to the young people from Proti (with classes in music theory and practice of various musical instruments). The Association also includes three dance ensembles and one choir. Its activities have been extremely important, influential and long-lasting due to its performances in the region, wider Greece and abroad.



*Photographer Dr. Krum Ivanov*

After numerous years of active performances, the ProtiProodos' Friends of Music Association is widely related to the village of Proti and has become a symbol of its local history.

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