

## Sunday *Horos* in Bulgaria Today

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The paper focuses on the phenomenon of open-air folk dance gatherings occurring every Sunday afternoon in Bulgarian towns. Modern Sunday *horos* (a cumulative term used to signify the event of chain folk dances performed on Sunday afternoons in open public spaces), as a bottom-up social dance phenomenon, is hailed as part of the “back-to-the-roots” movement and has become, together with recreational dance clubs, an important part of the overall Bulgarian post-Communist folk dance and music context since 2015.

▪ **Keywords:** tradition, recreational dances, folk fitness, back-to-the-roots movements, folklore

Članek se osredinja na pojav srečanj ob ljudskem plesu na prostem, ki v bolgarskih mestih potekajo vsako nedeljo popoldne. Podobno nedeljsko *horo* (skupen izraz označuje dogodek, ob katerem se ob nedeljah popoldne na odprtih javnih površinah izvajajo skupinski plesi v koloni-kolu) kot pojav družabnega plesa od spodaj navzgor je razglašen za del gibanja »nazaj h koreninam« in je skupaj z rekreativnimi plesnimi klubi od leta 2015 postal pomemben del celotnega bolgarskega postkomunističnega konteksta ljudskega plesa in glasbe.

▪ **Ključne besede:** tradicija, rekreativni plesi, ljudski fitnes, gibanje »nazaj h koreninam«, folklor

### Intro

Dance in folk culture responds to changes in its environment with qualitative shifts. Bulgarian folk dance of today relies heavily on the ghosts of its glorious past. During Communism, stage folklore was one of the most popular instruments utilized in forging Bulgaria’s national identity and image. The “good” folk art-culture system (Clifford, 1988) was sponsored and censored by the government, shaped according to the needs of the Communist party and its political goals. After the regime’s grip was loosened and with its thorough fall, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed many new developments in the folk dance scene, such as private ensembles and dance clubs, the *horoteque*<sup>1</sup> etc. Consequently, within the larger context of the recreational folk dance movement in Bulgaria, there is a rebirth of people’s interest towards Bulgarian folk dances, traditional or not, which takes different shapes and forms.

In her 2008 book *Between the Village and the Universe: Old Folk Music from Bulgaria in Modern Times*, Lozanka Peycheva states that concentrating on classical

<sup>1</sup> A *horoteque* is a dance party at a club and/or the club itself where people gather to dance *horo* following the example of a discotheque. See Kurdova, 2021.

folk forms is a widespread idea among researchers in the sphere of Bulgarian folk studies. She further poses the question whether in the quest to record what is subject to extinction, one fails to document current forms of contemporary folklore. In addition, Peycheva criticizes the insufficient attention paid to the scientific interpretation of these forms (Peycheva, 2008). Sunday *horos* on the main squares of big cities in Bulgaria have emerged in modern times to provide entertainment without financial gain. These gatherings are not a *horoteque*, but just like a *horoteque* they have become a major source for dance material in Bulgaria and abroad via viral videos on social networks. The information I have acquired through informal conversations with participants in Sunday *horos* held in the towns of Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, and Smolyan over the course of 7 years (2015–2023) is the foundation underpinning my research. Coupling it with my own observations as a Bulgarian folk dance teacher and a participant in such Sunday gatherings on many occasions, I will try to answer how, and why, the modern Sunday *horos* originated. What is their context? The research will also observe if and in what way they relate to similar dance phenomena.

### Verse

To delve into the topic of the Sunday *horos* today, we must venture on a small journey in history, explaining the context in which those open-air gatherings originated, how they were born, and their connection to the *megdanski hora*<sup>2</sup> in the traditional folklore context. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the first Bulgarian dance groups were formed, there was a change in the socio-economic and cultural context which inspired a kind of movement for the preservation and transmission of traditional dances through the generations, due to the fear of their disappearance. As early as 1882, a dance school opened where *horos* dances were taught alongside ballroom and character dances. On the other hand, after the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878, major urban centres were already beginning to resemble European cities and migration towards them increased. Large groups of rural population began to amass in the cities, longing culturally for traditional *megdanski hora* that would bring back the comfort of home. As a result, in many professional associations, workers themselves initiated the creation of dance groups, thus continuing their local dance traditions in the urban settings (Grancharova, 2012).

The inner need to dance one's own dances along with striving to preserve traditional folklore laid the grounds for forming non-professional dance groups in an urban setting. Their leaders observed folk dances with the intention of processing them artistically

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<sup>2</sup> *Megdan* is the central square where the whole village would gather for festivities. *Megdanski hora* are chain dances that have lost their ritual context and were performed mainly during village festivities, such as every Sunday after attending church for example.

and presenting them to an “enlightened public” (Dzhudzhev, 1945: 77). A parallel can easily be drawn between those developments and the phenomena we witness today in the form of recreational dance clubs, *horoteques*, and Sunday *horos*. Anna Shtarbanova, a prominent Bulgarian ethnochoreologist, notes:

from a cultural point of view, this repeats the phenomenon from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when intellectuals replaced the village *horos* with dances created and taught in schools, emphasizing their gymnastic functions for the sake of physical education. (Shtarbanova, 2013: 94)

In Bulgaria, the post-war period of the 1940s was marked by the rapid development of stage dances based on traditional folklore following the example of the USSR. Such a process was taking place in other Communist territories as well – for example in Croatia where folk dance ensembles were established to pave the way to publicly presenting traditions (Čaleta, Zebec, 2017). In Bulgaria, the State Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dances “Filip Kutev” was created in 1951. Afterwards the number of professional ensembles began to grow, reaching as many as twenty by 1989. Just like in Croatia or in Slovenia, the Bulgarian folk dance scene was divided between city ensembles performing stylized choreographies and rural groups performing their native traditions (Čaleta, Zebec, 2017: 142; Kunej, 2020: 18). Professional training of young Bulgarian folk dance performers started during the same period – the State Ballet School opened its doors in 1951, whereas the Bulgarian folk dance education of students started in the same school in 1956. 1967 is the year when the National School of Folk Arts was founded in the town of Kotel, while in 1972 the National School of Folk Arts in the town of Shiroka Laka accepted its first pupils. In 1964 a branch of the Bulgarian State Conservatory was founded in Plovdiv and later (1972) transformed into the independent Higher Music and Pedagogical Institute. There, in 1974 Kiril Dzhenev laid the foundations of the Department of Choreography and the Bulgarian Folk Choreography major.<sup>3</sup>

The opinion that prevails up until today among researchers and the general public is that well-educated dance high school and/or university graduates, as well as the skilfully choreographed stage dances based on folklore samples, were and are a valuable advantage that helped the “Bulgarian choreographic model” develop. Describing this professionalized dance model is important because today, most of the recreational dance club leaders in Bulgaria have choreography degrees and teach their dancers by borrowing practices from professional ensembles: for example, the structure and content of the dance class; the methodology and metalanguage of teaching; uniformity in dance

<sup>3</sup> According to Daniela Dzheneva (2015: 22) “with the launch of this training, folk dances evolved to be worthy of the big stage art, placed on a solid foundation of the research and preservation of authentic folk material.”

clothing; a dance style with big movements so that even the last rows of the audience can see it. In addition, dance clubs often participate in festivals and concerts, sometimes even receiving some small remuneration for their performance. Modern Sunday *horos* are, to a large extent, influenced by such recreational folk dance clubs. Hence, the folk aesthetics picked up in the dance hall plays a crucial role in the development of this new dance phenomenon.

In his paper ‘Folklore and Modernity’, Todor Iv. Zhivkov mentions that by 1981 in Bulgaria, nearly half a million Bulgarians were engaged in the so-called *hudozhestvena samodeinost* (Zhivkov, 1981). To quote Donna Buchanan who explains the same term in the context of music:<sup>4</sup>

*Hudozhestvena* means ‘artistic’ or ‘something accomplished with artistry’. *Samodeinost* means that the musical creativity is spontaneous and amateur. There isn’t supposed to be any kind of director imposing an opinion on the music. So, putting the two words together as *hudozhestvena samodeinost* embodies an enormous contradiction, because the performers are supposedly amateurs but in fact they are led by a conductor, rehearse regularly, and may well be advised by a folklorist. (Buchanan, 2006: 133)

However, *hudozhestvena samodeinost* (*HS*) was an academic and political construct of the Bulgarian Communist government and did not originate as a cultural phenomenon, or a continuation of such related to tradition. The participation of as many people as possible in *HS* was imperative to the state policy during Communism – through *HS* the free time of the people was filled with useful activities regulated by the state, offering prestige and a type of freedom. This massive cultural phenomenon was a needed psychological “valve” to let off steam and appease the masses – folk tradition in Bulgaria had always been fused into an inseparable amalgam with Orthodox beliefs. Cultural engagement in the form of the *HS* was the quickest way to alleviate the outcry after everything church-related was forbidden. Even the poet Paun Genov recommended that citizens “participate as much as they can [...] because this increases their spiritual horizons, contributes to their cultural development and entertainment” (Genov, 1966: 63–64). All in all, *HS* in its initial stages, as a part of the general artistic folk model described above, was created to serve as an educational tool, and was used for pro-Communist campaigning. However, it also aimed at aiding the shaping of the new Bulgarian cultural identity in the period of socialism – as Goldschmidt (1964: 27) puts it, “a proper, creative approach to the abundance of forms in our dance folklore provides a broad basis for creating dances that reflect the new man.”

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<sup>4</sup> This explanation may be successfully applied to dance as well.

## Pre-chorus

Based on my research, modern Sunday *horos* have a birth date and a birthplace – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2015, in the town of Varna on the Black Sea coast. March is the month when in many Balkan countries people celebrate the upcoming spring by gifting/receiving and wearing a *martenitsa*<sup>5</sup> on their hands or clothes. During the break of a folk dance workshop I taught on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023, in an informal conversation with Magdalena Petrova (leader of the recreational folk dance club “Ludetini” (Crazies) in Varna), she shared that back in 2015, together with several enthusiasts from her club, she went out for a Sunday walk to celebrate 1<sup>st</sup> March with the intention to dance in the open in celebration of this national holiday. Passers-by joined them for a *horo* and thus the Sunday *horos* in Varna were born. A week after that, a similar initiative was held in the capital of Bulgaria – Sofia. Afterwards the idea of regularly dancing Bulgarian folk dances in the open spread exponentially. Today, almost all big towns have a Sunday *horo* gathering every week.

Sunday *horos* have a similar scenario – people organize themselves via social networks on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, etc. Either someone brings a personal loudspeaker, or the Sunday *horo* dancers gather money to buy one. With the help of a laptop, at a certain hour (usually around 16:00 h), dancing will start. Often initiated by dance group leaders, there are also plenty of cases when the entire organization of such events is done by people who are simply folklore connoisseurs. Either way, an official permission to hold such an open space gathering in public locations must be obtained beforehand.

Many Sunday *horo* participants from Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv and Smolyan whom I spoke to in informal conversations stated that they took their first *horo* steps during those Sunday dance gatherings in the open. The age of dancers varies between 5 and 90, most of the women and men are Bulgarians, though due to the central locations of the events many times foreigners also take part. A lot of the Sunday *horo* participants later on join recreational dance clubs but continue to attend the Sunday gatherings.

The repertoire of Sunday *horos* heavily depends on dancers and/or the preferences of the one in charge of the music, who often is the un/official leader overseeing the venue. The most usual dance material visible during the event consists of choreographed *horos* easily accessible as video material from Facebook and YouTube. Most popular are the dances taught by prominent dance choreographers in *horoteques*, on dance vacations and festivals, or in dance halls, etc. There are no official dance instructors showing the steps of the dances. Once the music starts, people join hands and form

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<sup>5</sup> *Martenitsa* is the name given to creations made of intertwined red and white threads – woolen, silk, or cotton. The most typical *Martenitsa* represents two small dolls, known as Pizho and Penda. *Martenitsa* is worn from the 1<sup>st</sup> March until the bearer sees a tree that has bloomed, a stork, or a martin. Afterwards it is hung on a tree.

an open circle where the more experienced dancers keep to the front while the less experienced either follow or stay outside the dance circle and watch until they feel secure enough to join the dance chain.<sup>6</sup>

Many people believe that these gatherings are a continuation of the old Bulgarian tradition of *megdanski hora* which took place on the village square after church before Communism established itself in Bulgaria. The notion of preserving and transmitting those traditional values and dances is a widespread belief among the participants in the modern Sunday *horos*, deeply rooted yet far from truth. Ethnochoreologist Goritsa Naidenova writes that artistic activity, and its cultural product, began to be accepted as identical with traditional folk dances around the beginning of the *hudozhestvena samodeinost* (Naidenova, 2017). This statement is important and is confirmed also by the answers of many of the Sunday *horos* dancers when I posed the question as to why they attend Sunday *horos*: “I dance because I am Bulgarian”, “We preserve the authentic Bulgarian *horo*”, “Our folklore is ancient and we must continue it”, etc. despite the fact that the dance repertoire during the Sunday *horos* has nothing to do with root and/or traditional dances.

Professor Anna Ilieva, one of the pioneers of Bulgarian ethnochoreology and a member of the International Folk Music Council,<sup>7</sup> distinguishes between two types of *HS*, which she named “folk” and “artistic” *HS* (Ilieva, 1971: 113). The former is upheld by village ensembles, whose participants are “direct descendants of the local dance traditions, who present on the stage the *hora* and the games of their ancestors in the most authentic form... having acquired their dancing skills from the *megdanski hora*” (Ilieva, 1971: 113). Furthermore, Ilieva defines the artistic *HS* as the various urban and rural ensembles which perform artistically processed, stage and stylized folk dances and have been trained by a leader. If we assume that the second concept refers to the *HS* dance ensembles, the first one directs us to the folklore groups operating in the community centres, the so-called *izvorni* groups (root ensembles). In the years after its creation, the *HS* unfolded and evolved in parallel with the pedagogical development of the professional dance cadres. Numerous written guidelines were disseminated via books and magazines in order to include both types of *hudozhestvena samodeinost* in this process. With much effort, love and enthusiasm, the “Bulgarian model” was born. In the dawn of its creation, the aim was to present Bulgaria and its cultural wealth to the world in the best possible way, whereas in its golden era, masterpieces of our folklore-based dance art were created and displayed on stage by professional and amateur ensembles (Ivanova-Nyberg, 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> A video published by user Черно kote (Tscherno kote) on 4.6.2023 at 22:04 h in the public Facebook group “Sunday Horo Sofia” <https://www.facebook.com/100002391386851/videos/606477491246336/>.

<sup>7</sup> Today: International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance.

The massive effort to transform dance folklore into a high-level stage art influenced the perception and aesthetics of people involved in both types of *HS* mentioned above. This gradually shifted the idea of traditional *horos* towards overlapping with choreographed creations resembling *horos* mainly due to the outer shape of the dance (performed mostly in a circle). Recreational dance clubs in Bulgaria came to existence in the late 1990s after the political changes in 1989 and the fall of Communism. Their repertoire in the first years consisted mainly of *horo*-resembling dances, albeit choreographed by professionals. Logically, Sunday *horos* rarely if ever display a repertoire comprising traditional village dances.<sup>8</sup> Just like the dancers in many recreational clubs, participants in the Sunday events have a strong preference to modernized synth folk-lore-based music and elaborate quick tempo choreographies they have seen in clubs, *horoteques*, or videos online.

### Chorus

Parallel to the development of the recreational dance club in Bulgaria, other phenomena equally important for the Sunday *horos* came to existence. They have influenced and shaped the very essence and repertoire of clubs and their impact is visible in the repertoire of the Sunday *horos*. One of the first recreational clubs in Bulgaria – “Tchanove” (Cow Bells) – is important for the overall club activity in Bulgaria due to several bold economic decisions. In 2007 they created the first tutorial with Bulgarian dances in the form of a series of DVDs, dedicated to different regions of Bulgaria. This was the first of similar products on the market in our country, and its launch coincided with the birthday of the first festival (also a dance competition) for amateur clubs in Bulgaria – “Horo se vie, izviva” (The Dance Line is Winding) – in Sofia. Twenty groups from all over Bulgaria met for the first time in front of an audience to show their level by dancing two *horos* and competing for the prize of the jury panel consisting of famous choreographers. A year later, at the second edition of the festival, there were almost twice as many clubs, while at the same time over the course of the year, more and more clubs opened their doors in bigger cities. Many of them operated in several locations in Sofia, and some such as “Tchanove” and “Gaitani” (Woolen Cord Decorations) opened branches in other cities outside the capital – a successful business model to this day. Club “Folklorika” created an online database with free access to videos from all editions of “Horo se vie, izviva”, as well as from other festivals subsequently.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The term “traditional dance” throughout the paper would mean a *horo* which still exists and is performed in a particular village, whereas the concept of tradition signifies transmission of knowledge and experience from one generation to the next within traditional contexts. See Nahachewsky, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> A link to the database of *horos* from various festivals; filmed, collected, and arranged alphabetically by the “Folklorika” dance club is available here: <https://www.folklorika.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=11>.

The “Tchanove” began the first hybrid festival on the Black Sea coast in the resort Albena under the name “Festival of the Horo” (in 2008). I call it hybrid, because the format of the festival combined the useful with the pleasant – clubs from all over Bulgaria gathered to show off their dancing skills. Thus, in the evenings they danced and celebrated together, while during the day there were organized dance lessons, with each of the clubs’ leaders present showing a new *horo* for everyone to learn.

The year 2008 marks the start of the festival “Tapan Bie, Horo se Vie” (The Drum is Beating, the Dance Line is Winding), a national folklore dance competition in the city of Kazanlak, organized by the cultural center “Zhar 2002” that took place with live music on the central square of the town. 2008 is also the year when the first *horothèque* was born in Plovdiv. Andrey Ivanov – a connoisseur of Latin dances and a frequent visitor to Latin dance parties – started the first *horo*-only party in May 2008. *Horoteque* quickly gained popularity among clubs from Plovdiv, Assenovgrad, Smolyan and other nearby cities.

Up to this point, it can be summarized that the start of the folklore dance club form in Bulgaria was incited by professional dancers/dance teachers in search of profit and new market opportunities in post-socialist times. The phenomenon quickly gained momentum, and in 2007 numerous festivals with a competitive nature appeared, reminiscent of the prominent Communist festivals-competitions for professional and amateur ensembles. At this point there was little focus on collecting and preserving traditional dances.

I suggest that there are three types of recreational dance clubs. The boundaries between these types are often not clear-cut since they flow from one type to the next at different stages of their existence, depending on the circumstances and the leaders in charge:

1. Clubs in the first category are those where the joy of dancing is the main purpose. Focus on physical activity and learning basic dance material is the general modus operandi; dancers attend the classes to find friends, get in shape and – as a rule of thumb – simply have fun. I refer to those clubs as “folk fitness” clubs. The preference there leans towards quick rhythm and quantity of learned material. Many of the Sunday *horo* participants tend to choose such clubs for further dance activity.
2. Semi-professionalization is the trait of the second type of clubs. These have already accumulated plenty of dances in the group repertoire, and members want to go to competitions and meet with other fellow recreational clubs to exchange ideas and dance together. This type of club might later venture into more “professionalization” by repurposing itself as an ensemble for stage choreographies. Such ensembles often start a choir and musical band to form the trinity considered standard by professional ensembles. Many times, those clubs close the development loop by laying the foundations of a children’s ensemble. Many Sunday *horo* participants belong to such clubs. A possible scenario for



this second club type is to split into two or three fractions which in turn become separate clubs, thus beginning the “growth” cycle anew and entering in the above-mentioned 1<sup>st</sup> category of clubs.

3. The last variation of the club is the tradition-seeking one. Such dance groups choose to go beyond the physical dimension of dance, preferring to delve into its cultural side by searching for the roots. They gather and practice traditional dance material to live music, or at least to music which was recorded especially for the purpose. Often the club leaders of such groups organize field trips to villages for all the club members. They also attend village festivities alone or with the group, forming bonds with the locals and accepting the dance aesthetic of the village folk for their dance and music tradition, as well as the costumes used. My observation is that members of such clubs do not attend dance competitions and *horoteques* and might only take part in an occasional Sunday *horo*. There are a few non-competitive festivals which were especially created by and for such clubs,<sup>10</sup> the most prominent being “Na Armane s Tapane” (On the Threshing Floor with Drums) held annually in the town of Razlog and hailed as a festival of traditional dances.<sup>11</sup>

All in all, modern Sunday *horos* as an event resemble recreational dance clubs, however in comparison, participation in them is charge-free, they take place in the open and there is no leader in the sense of one central teacher, since everyone can show the dances they know and teach them to the others. Just like in many dance clubs, there is rarely, if ever, live music. The preference towards quick and elaborate dance steps is visible in all the editions of the Sunday *horos* I have attended.

## Bridge

Undoubtedly, the *megdanski hora* are a dance phenomenon. A dance phenomenon occurs in a logical sequence without prior preparation, just as *megdanski hora* appeared every Sunday, that is, at a certain fixed time. They are awaited by the public (both in the role of dancers and/or spectators); repetitive in nature though each time constituting separate dance phenomena, if only because of their participants who may be the same on every occasion but in a different state of mind and/or body. In tradition, this dance phenomenon takes place over a period of time (a few hours, an afternoon, a whole day) and consists of music, narrative and movement which interact with each other, but also

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<sup>10</sup> A post-festival enjoyment to live music in one of the main streets of Pomorie can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/100023839605712/videos/491753876468241/> (accessed 18.6.2023). The festival in question is called “Horo krai Pomoriiskiyya bryag” (Horo along the Coast of Pomorie town), has a non-competitive character and its 14<sup>th</sup> edition was held 17.–18.6.2023.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the subject see Grancharova, 2018.

with the environment in which they occur, as mentioned above. Additional variables depend on the dancers – whether they are male or female; whether performing alone or with others; whether at the beginning, end or middle of the dance chain; their age, whether they can hear the music well etc. (Shtarbanova, 1995a). On the other hand, the “group body” (Shtarbanova, 1995b: 69–70) which consists of all the people who dance in a chain has a greater stability on a structural level (Ilieva, 2007) precisely because everyone moves together, and improvisations are sporadic along the chain of the *horo*, as well as within its motives. Last but not least, the traditional “group body” dancing in a circle has no beginning or end, no visible leader. What about modern Sunday *horos*?

According to Kealiinohomoku, old traditional dance cultures have a large context compared to the small context of newer dance traditions (Kealiinohomoku, 2001). Changing dynamics often introduces activities and behaviours that differ significantly from older traditions of the larger context. In addition to this, Malinowski’s concept of “contact diffusion” as a transition between higher and lower levels, thus reflecting the decline of (in our case) folklore culture (Malinowski, 2004; Ivanova-Nyberg, 2016), could be applied to the phenomenon of Sunday *horos*. They could be considered as being of low context as compared to recreational dance clubs, though actually are much closer to tradition in terms of transmission of knowledge and place of happening. Before 2007, recreational clubs as a new environment for dance folklore were not discussed by the scientific community. In her work from 2011, Ivanova-Nyberg defines a recreational dance club in the Bulgarian context as an urban phenomenon that combines the tradition of “the former groups from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the folk dance ensemble” (Ivanova-Nyberg, 2011: 334), based on the model of the Bulgarian choreographic school. Using this analogy, Sunday *horos* are a combination of the recreational dance club and a partial aim at the *megdanski hora* context and form. The major difference here is that modern Sunday *horos* have not much in common with the *megdanski*/church Sunday *horos*, which were part of traditional community’s life almost a century ago. The modern phenomenon stems from a different, rather urban “folklore”. Traditional Sunday *horos* vs. modern Sunday *horos* show the contrast of the village vs. the urban; the traditional vs. the choreographed. Often the dance macroform in the open-air gatherings of today resembles the one a chain dance would acquire between the walls of a dance hall: the chain moves mainly to the right or to the left, no shifting in and out (that is – moving in and/or out of line); no elaborate competition between dancers within the chain so typical for traditional dances. This is because microform and foot placement are often the only thing taught in clubs due to the limitations of the closed space, and due to the huge shift from transmission of traditional knowledge towards folk fitness and moving for fun.

Recreational clubs and modern Sunday *horos* in the open intertwine their existence. As the bond between dance and ritual had weakened before, but especially during Communism, the entire contextual power and energy concentrated into the spirit of

the dance and the elaborate steps. There no longer was a ritual situation, ritual role, ritual behaviour, or ritual costume. All that remained was the music rhythm, dance ethos, style and the pleasure and exhilaration of dancing. The original *raison d'être* of the dance has survived only in its name and style, structure, movement behaviour and meaning (Shtarbanova, 1996).

### Outro

“*I saw this in a video*” is the preferred way to obtain new dance material in amateur clubs, whether in Bulgaria or abroad. From March 2020 to the spring of 2022, the world entered an unprecedented time of uncertainty and emergency. Social channels such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram; video content platforms such as Vimeo and YouTube; sites for philanthropy and fundraising against a digital cultural product (e.g. Indiegogo and Patreon) as well as online communication programs (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.) have shifted meetings and lessons/teaching from physical to cyberspace. Enclosed between four walls, many connoisseurs of Bulgarian dance, music and song folklore published their personal video and audio archives from the Koprivishtitsa open-air festival, the “Pirin Pee” (Pirin Mountain is Singing) festival and other internationally known forums where traditional Bulgarian folklore can still be seen by the larger public, albeit somewhat altered in order to be suitable for stage presentation. Never have users had such a wide variety and choice of what and where to learn, be it by themselves at home, online as a lesson from their club, or from a paid seminar of a Bulgarian or foreign teacher of Bulgarian dances held on one of the online platforms. Reasonably, access to various information should imply access to older recordings and possibly forgotten samples to be brought back into the dance hall. But can a *horo* from one or more sources be trusted to be what we think it is if not crosschecked with other sources?

Sunday *horos* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are an entirely bottom-up dance event which divides the Bulgarian community today into those who support it and those who heavily oppose it. The former cherish Sunday *horos* as the continuation of the namesake practice from the times when traditional folklore culture was the common denominator and not merely cultural pockets with some well-preserved local traditions here and there on the map of Bulgaria. Those opposing the Sunday *horo* consider it unsuitable for cities, going as far as to claim it is a quasi-nationalist notion that could easily be weaponized for political use. One thing is certain – the Sunday *horos* and their repertoire are very visible and vocal on the internet while rapidly growing in numbers. Their development and evolution resemble the birth and expansion of recreational folk dance clubs in Bulgaria and within the diaspora communities abroad. As a relatively young phenomenon, it is yet to be observed how it will mature and spread but also how it will influence Bulgarian folk dances, whether traditional or created.

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## Nedeljsko *hora* v Bolgariji danes

Članek obravnava pojav ljudskih plesov na prostem, ki se redno odvijajo vsako nedeljo popoldne v bolgarskih mestih in vaseh. Ta srečanja, ki so v celoti družabni plesni dogodek od spodaj navzgor, so vključujoče, participativne narave in jih organizirajo ljudje za ljudi. Nedeljska *hora* (plesi v kolu-koloni), ki so bila razglašena za del gibanja »nazaj h koreninam«, so postala pomemben del splošnega postkomunističnega konteksta ljudskega plesa in glasbe in so pogosto povezana s plesnim dogodkom, ki je pred letom 1950 navadno potekal po nedeljskem bogoslužju pred cerkvijo.

Današnja bolgarska plesna folklorna dejavnost se močno opira na duhove svoje slavne preteklosti. V času komunizma je bila folklorna dejavnost eden od najbolj priljubljenih instrumentov za oblikovanje nacionalne identitete in podobe Bolgarije. Sistem »dobre« ljudske umetnosti in kulture (Clifford, 1988) je sponzorirala in cenzurirala vlada ter ga oblikovala skladno s potrebami komunistične partije in njenimi političnimi cilji. Po sprostitvi režima in njegovem dokončnem padcu je bilo konec 20. stoletja in na začetku 21. stoletja na plesno folklornem prizorišču veliko novosti, kot so zasebni ansambli in plesni klubi, *horoteke* (Kurdova, 2021) itn. Posledično je v širšem kontekstu rekreativnega ljudskega plesnega gibanja v Bolgariji prišlo do prerojenega zanimanja ljudi za bolgarske ljudske plese, tradicionalne ali ne, ki se pojavlja v različnih oblikah in izvedbah.

Nedeljsko *hora* na glavnih trgih velikih mest se je v sodobnem času pojavilo, da bi prineslo zabavo brez finančnega izkupička. Ta urbani pojav je oddaljen odmev časov, ko je bilo ljudsko izročilo del vsakdanjega življenja, ples po nedeljski sveti maši pa je bil prej pravilo kot izjema. Sodobno nedeljsko *hora* ni *horoteka*, tukaj ni didžeja, ki bi določal in uravnaval tempo z izbiro naslednje skladbe. Vendar so ta srečanja, tako kot *horoteke*, postala glavni vir plesnega učnega gradiva prek viralnih videoposnetkov na družbenih omrežjih, uporabljajo in posledično se ga učijo folklorne rekreativne skupine v Bolgariji in tujini. Raziskava, predstavljena v tem članku, temelji na terenskem delu in razkriva izvir sodobne različice tradicije nedeljskega *hora*. Nadalje pojasnjuje kontekst, v katerem se pojav razvija, in njegovo povezavo s širjenjem rekreativnih plesnih skupin za bolgarske folklorizirane plese. V sklepnem delu članek obravnava še načine, kako se nedeljska *hora* 21. stoletja povezujejo s podobnimi plesnimi fenomeni, pa tudi o tem, kako preoblikujejo predstavo o bolgarskih plesih.