



LIETUVOS BANKAS
EUROSISTEMA



LITHUANIAN
COMMEMORATIVE
EURO COINS




€2 coin
dedicated
to the Song
and Dance
Celebration



SONGS BRING EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US CLOSER TO OUR HOMELAND

Even though the song celebration movement didn't begin in the Baltics, song and dance festivals have become highly celebrated and extremely popular in the region to the point that the tradition of song and dance celebrations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania has been deservedly inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In Lithuania, these festivals, combining different kinds of art, are officially called Song Celebrations.

The origins of Song Celebrations trace back to our unique cultural traditions, including folk singing and dancing, folk art, social customs and the national cultural revival movement that emerged at the turn of the 20th century. The movement was inspired by the trends affecting all of Europe at the time of fighting for the liberation of nations and the creation of national states. In many countries, cultural





societies, choirs and orchestras were on the rise, which not only advanced society and contributed to its artistic taste and soul, but also became a nation-unifying and liberating force. The first song celebrations took place in 1843 in Zurich, Switzerland, and in 1846 in Wurzburg, Germany. Just a few decades later the first Baltic celebrations took place in the Estonian town of Tartu in 1869 and in the Latvian capital, Riga, in 1873.

In Lithuania, the first large-scale Song Celebration didn't take place until 1924, later than in its neighbouring countries, a result of the more severe oppression of Tsarist Russia, the Lithuanian press ban, and the pro-Polish attitude of the Church and aristocracy. Meanwhile, in Estonia and Latvia, the German community and Protestantism acted more favourably towards the development of national culture, education, music and the creation of choirs. In all likelihood it was the impulse needed for the birth of national celebrations.



Most of the factors influencing Lithuanian culture and the processes that gave rise to the Song Celebration were first observed in Lithuania Minor. These were related to the ideas of peaceful inner resistance to German culture and the preservation of national singularities put forward and spread by Vydūnas through the setting up of cultural organisations (including the Tilžė Society of Chanters, which was founded in 1895) and by teaching singing and choir singing. From 1895 he began organising celebrations on Rambynas Hill, events now considered to be the precursor to the Lithuanian song celebrations.

In Lithuania Major, too, the forces of professional poetry and music art were coming into prominence, with their creative works inspiring feelings of love for the homeland and giving impetus for the awakening of the nation. Just like elsewhere in Europe, the leaders of the national revival and intellectuals, such as Simonas Stanevičius, Antanas and Jonas Juška, Jonas Basanavičius, Antanas Baranauskas and Vincas Kudirka focused their attention on folk art, especially songs. They were written down, printed, and considered to be a true expression of the spirit of the nation. In order to keep up with the times, these cultural figures at the turn of the 20th century followed the model of other European countries and adapted folk songs to the choirs founded at the time. Composers such as Juozas Naujalis, Česlovas Sasnauskas, Stasys Šimkus, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis and others made great attempts to establish the traditions of choir culture. In 1899, the first secular choir *Daina* (Song) was created in secret by J. Naujalis and the first concert (*gegužinė*) took place in 1900 in Veršvai Forest near Kaunas. While the press ban was in effect, there were 36 choirs, a number that rose to above 100 and continued to grow after the ban was lifted in 1904. People created dance and other amateur art groups and organised Lithuanian cultural evenings and, in 1905, the beginnings of a unique Lithuanian stage dance and theatre culture were starting to form.

Even in 1906 and later on there were several attempts to organise song festivals. According to Antanas Smetona, the then editor of *Vilniaus Žinios* (Vilnius News), the most important purpose of the celebration was to show everyone that the nation had been resurrected and developed to the point of being ready to “choose the path of civilisation”. This goal was brought about in 1924

when the first Song Day was organised in Kaunas, an event that attracted 86 choirs and some 3,000 singers who together performed 22 folk songs and 14 original songs by Lithuanian composers. During the interwar period two more festivals took place: the first in 1928 and the second in 1930, held to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of Vytautas the Great.

During the Soviet era, nine song celebrations for adults and four for schoolchildren (the first one taking place in 1964) were held. The occupying government failed to turn them into a tool for creating the so-called Soviet man. The ideological nature of the repertoire failed to overshadow the true purpose of the celebration, which was to unite the nation and to awaken its true soul. And the nation did wake, bringing forth the most beautiful songs. Among them *Lietuva Brangi* (Dear Lithuania), one of the most mature and beloved songs, sung in public for the first time, which today is considered to be the second anthem of the nation. Awake at last and ready for the great meetings of the Revival, the nation was determined to peacefully regain the country through the power of song.

With the restoration of an independent Lithuania, the tradition of song celebrations has gained new shifts and meanings. To this day signifying unity of the nation and standing as an expression of its uniqueness (in 1990 it was titled the National Celebration), which is very important in a globalising world, these festivities support and strengthen the foundations of the state. The state established the Song Celebrations into law in 2007 and chose them as a way of celebrating the most important anniversaries of the statehood. In 2003, whilst



celebrating the 750th anniversary of the coronation of King Mindaugas of Lithuania, a Song Celebration called *Mes* (We) took place. In 2009, the Song Celebration *Amžiy Sutartinė* (Songs of the Centuries) was held to commemorate the 1,000th anniversary of the first written record of the name of Lithuania. In 2018, the celebration *Vardan Tos...* (In the Name of...) is being planned as part of the centenary celebrations of the restoration of the Lithuanian statehood.

Contemporary celebrations emphasise the ideas that are the most important to society, express its expectations and unite it through conceptual themes that run through the entire event. An emphasis on community with *Mes* (We) and a connection with the homeland with *Čia – mūsų namai* (Here is My Home) and *Vardan Tos...* (In the Name of...) are stated, and at the same time direct contact is made with every individual. Their self-awareness, memory, senses and whole existence are appealed to in the hope of reaching the very depths of their soul. Today, people are interested in these song celebrations not because of some externally-imposed ideology, but because of the equality of personal and shared experiences.

Everyone comes to these festivals, from a child of just a few months to a centenarian, from a student to a professor, from a farmer to a businessman, from a villager to a resident of the capital. Between 36,000 and 40,000 people from all over Lithuania and the Lithuanian World Community participates in these Song Celebrations. These are the vital cells of society that take part in artistic activities, including communities and collectives aiming to experience the joy of creation, enrich free time or having other goals. They comprise choirs, dance groups, song and dance ensembles, folk and wind instrument orchestras, theatres, folk ensembles, etc. Today they do this on a voluntary basis, driven by an internal need. All it takes is to properly prepare the repertoire and programmes that would correspond to the ideas of the creators.

In Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, the festival lasts for almost a week, but it begins in Kaunas as homage to the origins of the Song Celebration. The Celebration consists of four major parts. The Folklore Day has been held since 1990. Folk ensembles, artists, and experts of crafts and other areas of culture from



various ethnographic regions, towns, and villages participate in it, presenting ancient Baltic and Lithuanian folk traditions. The Ensembles' Evening has been included in the festival programme since 1960. Its artistic content consists of joint theatrical performances of song and dance ensembles, folk instrument orchestras and rural folk orchestras. Also, vocal, instrumental, choreographic pieces, harmonised, arranged folk songs and stylised folk dances are performed alongside the playing of different games. The Dance Day, taking place since 1950, is where folk dance groups and ensembles of different age groups participate, original choreographic and stylised folk dances are performed by way of compositions involving a large number of people and original as well as arranged instrumental music is played. The culmination of the festival is the Song Day, the artistic programme of which consists of joint performances by choirs of different age groups and orchestras that play wind and other kinds of instruments and where original vocal and instrumental works as well as harmonised, arranged or otherwise developed and adapted folk songs are per-



formed. Singing without an instrumental accompaniment – *a cappella* – is an exceptional part of the Song Day. In addition to these events, since 1960 one more important part of the Song Celebration takes place – a Folk Art Exhibition in which the best recent works of folk artists are exhibited. The structure of the Celebration is complemented by other, already becoming traditional or commemorative one-time programmes, including joint concerts of the stringed instrument known as *kanklės* and wind instrument orchestras, presentations of folk or tribal costume collections, new large-scale works by professional artists and performers, events organised by Lithuanian emigrants and Lithuanian national communities and, of course, colourful processions.



All of the festival programmes are based on the most significant phenomena of national culture, such as the traditional folk art of different genres that stretches back centuries, creations of Lithuanians or residents of Lithuania of different periods that have withstood the test of times, as well as works by contemporary artists. The celebrations gather the best composers, poets, directors, painters, designers, performers and specialists of modern technology from all over the country. In this way, the Song Celebration strikes a balance between the respect for tradition and the need for renewal and creation of new traditions.

However, the Song Celebration isn't just an event. It's a continuously shifting process, a tradition that's been going on for over a century. It spreads over the entire country with the continuous creative work and performances of amateur and professional art groups and their leaders, the many events related to different types of art, education and training and cyclical organisation of the celebrations themselves. This includes development of ideas, creation of repertoire, programmes and their publication, organisation of regional song celebrations, song celebrations for schoolchildren and finally the Lithuanian Song Celebration, evaluation of the results, etc. The tradition thrives wherever there are Lithuanians.





Since 1956, song or dance festivals have been held in the USA, Canada, Australia and other countries. Similar events were organised even in Siberian exile. More and more Lithuanian collectives who live abroad are returning to Lithuania to celebrate together with everyone else.

The Song Celebration is truly a celebration, the holiness of which shines through the songs, dances and music, the inherited and constantly updated rituals that have been absorbing the spirit of the nation for many years and the incredible power coming from large gatherings of people, their feelings, thoughts and experienced joy. Here, a sanctuary is created by everyone who has ideas, who creates words, sounds and images, who organises and undertakes preparations, i.e. who chooses themes, learns the repertoire and rehearses; and also by the ones that participate, i.e. sing, dance, play, speak, act, march, help others when needed, come to the events or watch them using modern technology, share their impressions and sing *Tautiška Giesmė* (the National Anthem)... In these moments there are tens, hundreds of thousands, millions of us. We are people, communities, and a nation entwined with its homeland and celebrating it. And every four years, the songs we sing acting as a sort of vow, we renew this connection.

Vida Šatkauskienė



**COMMEMORATIVE COIN
DEDICATED TO THE SONG
AND DANCE CELEBRATION**

*(inscribed on the UNESCO
Representative List of the Intangible
Cultural Heritage of Humanity)*

Denomination: €2

*On the edge of the coin:
LAISVĖ*VIENYBĖ*GEROVĖ
(FREEDOM*UNITY*WELL-BEING)*

*Coin designed by Luc Luycx
(common side)
and Eglė Ratkutė (national side)*

Alloy of ring: CuNi

*Alloy of core: CuZnNi/Ni/
CuZnNi*

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Weight (g): 8.50

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of which 5,000 coins are BU quality*

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