

Monthly Newsletter

RODINA

The Bulgarian Cultural and
Social Association



New Year – New Horizons for Our Community

Happy New Year, dear friends!

The smiles from the past year still shine in our hearts, like the warmth of freshly baked New Year's banitsa. 2024 brought us unforgettable moments – the joy of successes at the Bulgarian Language School "Dr. Petar Beron," the lively steps of "Bulgarian Rhythms" celebrating their 12th birthday, and the magic of events that united us as one big family.

This year begins with a strong pulse – the dance workshop with Prof. Gergana Panova, "Steps of Heritage," promises to bring the magic of Bulgarian dances back into our hearts. The screening of the film Gundi – Legend of Love will remind us of the power of stories that inspire. These moments connect us with our roots and give us reasons to feel proud.

January in Sydney also dazzles with colors – from the celebrations of Australia Day to stories that inspire us, like that of Kotooshu, the Bulgarian who conquered Japanese sumo wrestling. These narratives remind us that with courage and perseverance, we can achieve the extraordinary, even in the most unexpected directions.

Let this year be our stage, where each of us plays the leading role. With love, support, and collective effort, we can make 2025 a year to remember.

Rodina Team x

In this newsletter
you can expect:

Prof. Gergana
Panova: "Steps
of Heritage"

Once upon a
time...
The story of
Kotooshu

Things to Do
in Sydney

Festivals in
Bulgaria in
January



This month, an extraordinary event awaits the Bulgarian community and dance enthusiasts in Sydney! On January 21, the world-renowned Prof. Gergana Panova will be hosting a three-hour workshop, "Steps of Heritage: Exploring Bulgarian Folklore and Beyond." This workshop is a rare opportunity to immerse yourself in the beauty and depth of Bulgarian folklore under the guidance of one of the most respected experts in the field.

Prof. Panova boasts a remarkable career as a choreographer, researcher, and educator. As a former soloist and choreographer of the National Ensemble "Filip Kutev," a current member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and a professor at the prestigious Folkwang University of Arts in Germany, she has dedicated her life to preserving

and promoting the richness of Bulgarian culture. With over 400 workshops conducted worldwide, Prof. Panova brings unparalleled expertise and passion to this event, offering a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn from a globally recognized authority.

Whether you're an experienced dancer or simply wish to connect with your Bulgarian roots and culture, this workshop is for everyone. Experience the joy of traditional Bulgarian dances, understand their cultural significance, and celebrate our shared heritage in a supportive and inspiring environment.

For full details and tickets, visit rodinasydney.org.au/our-events and reserve your spot today!



This month in Sydney

- **Sydney Festival** - over 130 shows & events
When: 04 -26 Jan
Where: at 43 locations
- **Westpac Open Air Cinema**
When: 09 - 18 Jan
Where: Mrs Macquaries Point
- **Nikon-Walkley Photography exhibition**
When: until 24 Jan
Where: State Library
- **Flickerfest**
When: 17 - 26 Jan
Where: Bondi Beach
- **Australia Day**
When: 26 Jan
Where: CBD, Rocks, Circular Quay
- **James Cameron - Challenging the Deep**
When: until 02 Feb
Where: Maritime Museum



Festivals in Bulgaria in January

- **Festival of Batak Sausage and Fine Appetizers**
When: 11 Jan
Where: Batak



Upcoming Events

- **Gundi - Legends of Love**
When: 03 Feb
Where: Dendy Cinemas, Newtown
Cost: \$35 early bird (rodinasydney.org.au)

"Once upon a time..." - legends in the making

Kotooshu – The Bulgarian Giant Who Conquered Sumo



Once upon a time, in the small village of Djulyunitsa, Veliko Tarnovo Province, there was a restless boy who could never sit still.

Kaloyan Mahlyanov was born on February 19, 1983, and from an early age, he was drawn to sports. Recognizing his strength and energy, his father encouraged him to take up Greco-Roman wrestling. By the age of nine, Kaloyan began training, and by seventeen, he had already become a national champion and a European silver medalist.

Two years later, he was admitted to the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski," specializing in Greco-Roman wrestling. However, his towering height of 204 cm and weight of 130 kg proved to be obstacles for his inclusion in Bulgaria's Olympic team. But fate had other plans for Kaloyan. At the academy, he trained in the same hall as sumo wrestlers. A chance encounter with their coach, Petar Stoyanov, led to a sparring match against the coach's top wrestler. Kaloyan defeated him in just three seconds, demonstrating his exceptional strength and earning him an invitation to the world of Japanese sumo.

His first success came with a gold medal at the European Championship. After an impressive performance at a tournament in the Netherlands, Kaloyan caught the attention of Japanese sumo experts who introduced him to Yokozuna Kotozakura, head of the Sadogatake

stable. That same year, Kaloyan traveled to Japan to train at the stable, which had never before accepted a foreigner. There, he was given the name Kotooshu, meaning "European harp," symbolizing his extraordinary qualities.

Life in the Japanese sumo stable was far from easy. Kaloyan started at the very bottom of the strict hierarchy. He had to show respect to senior wrestlers by cooking and massaging for them, although he was not allowed to eat at the same table. The main dish was "chanko nabe," a soup of fish and vegetables cooked in massive pots. But with time and perseverance, Kaloyan proved himself, passing rigorous exams to join the ranks of the elite sumo wrestlers.

From there, his star began to rise. After a series of victories, Kotooshu became a beloved figure throughout Japan. By 2003, he had climbed through all the ranks of sumo. In 2004, he debuted in the top division, Makuuchi, which comprises the 42 best sumo wrestlers. In 2005, Kaloyan made history by defeating the great champion Yokozuna Asashoryu. The rank of Yokozuna, the highest in sumo, is revered in Shinto as that of a "living god." In 3,000 years of sumo history, only 67 men have achieved this title, and Kotooshu's success made him a legend and a hero in Japan, with popularity rivaling even the emperor. In 2008, Kaloyan became the first European to win the Emperor's Cup, and he was awarded Bulgaria's highest honor, the "Stara Planina" order.

But Kotooshu is more than just an athlete. He found love in Asako, a Japanese woman from a wealthy family. After years of a secret relationship due to sumo's strict traditions, the two married and built a family together.

Today, Kaloyan Mahlyanov, now known as Naruto—his new name as a coach—runs his own sumo stable. He continues to pass on his passion and discipline to a new generation of wrestlers. But as he himself says: "I was born in Bulgaria, and I will always remain Bulgarian."

The story of Kotooshu is a testament to how a dream, no matter how extraordinary, can come true with determination, courage, and hard work.

Source: Ivan Panayotov, Tarnovtsi Who Made Bulgaria Proud



The Beginning of New Steps and Stories...

The chime of New Year's glasses still echoes in our hearts, and January has already gifted us its first exciting moments. The air smells of new opportunities, as if each step is an invitation to create and experience.

With the breath of a new beginning, 2025 feels like a fresh sheet of paper — promising and inspiring. Before us lies the chance to fill this page with events brimming with laughter, music, and traditions. The air already carries the scent of new projects and dreams that will strengthen our community even further.

Every hand, every gesture matters. If you want to contribute to the growth of our organization with your ideas, time, or skills, don't hesitate

to fill out the volunteer form on our website: rodinasydney.org.au/volunteer. Together, we can create more moments to light up as beacons in our story.

Let's learn to be present — dancing, inspiring, celebrating. Every moment is a chance for a new beginning, to make not just the year but our lives more vibrant and fulfilling. With smiles, gratitude, and dreams, let's keep moving forward.

Until we meet again, filled with joy and creativity!

Warm regards,
The Rodina Sydney Team

Thank you for being with us!

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