

### ABOUT THE FEST:

The Surva International Festival of the Masquerade Games held in Pernik is the most respected stage for the authentic folklore carnival tradition not only in Bulgaria but on the Balkan Peninsula as a whole. It showcases a still vital bachelor tradition, which can be traced for centuries going back to ancient pagan times. Because of its competitive nature, the festival is both a contest and a gathering of the people who keep the tradition alive or as most of us know them, kukeri and survakari.

Surva has been officially organized by Pernik Municipality ever since 1966. Back in 1985 it became an international event and in 1995 the city of Pernik joined the International Federation of Carnival Cities as a full member.

The International Festival of the Masquerade Games is held in Pernik in the month of January of every even year.

It is a two-day parade of masquerade groups from Bulgaria and abroad.

On average, more than 5 000 people from as many as 90 folklore groups take part in the carnival each year. They come here for the thrill of the competition and the pride of presenting the traditions of their ancestors.

They also come here to have fun!

### ABOUT THE MASK:

The winter and pre-spring masquerade games celebrate the approaching awakening of nature as the old year gives way to the new. They are designed to chase away evil spirits and bring rich crops, health, and fertility to farm animals and humans and prepare mankind for a new beginning.

The origins of the tradition go back to ancient pagan times when Thracians and Slavs ruled the land.

Today, it is still as healthy and popular as ever throughout the whole of Bulgaria.

The performance of the masked men, commonly known as Survakari or Kukeri, is a mystical union of rhythm, sound, and color. Wearing unique costumes and magnificent masks, they move around in their characteristic stride filling the air with the sounds of hundreds of bells, with songs, prayers and wishes.

In Bulgarian folklore, the mask is believed to protect its wearer against powers of impure nature. This is the most probable explanation why the masks look like fearful creatures with huge jaws and awesome teeth, with horns and tails, with snapping beaks and grisly bodies. The sound of the bells hanging from the belts of the participants enhances their effect. Sometimes the mask is not that complicated. Participants from some regions use charcoal to paint their faces black and sheep's wool to make moustaches and beards.

The group consists of various different characters.

Traditionally all parts are played by men dressed in carnival costumes.

Bulgarian ceremonial masks are a valuable source of information for the various folklore regions in the country.



It is typical for the masks worn in the region of Pernik that they are made of sheep and goat furs, wings and feathers, horns, corn leaves and hemp.  
 All masks are made by the persons who wear them or with the help of craftsmen known throughout the village for their skill.  
 Shrouded in mystery, it is almost a ritual in its own right.  
 Visitors to the carnival say they feel invigorated after committing their senses to the ancient tradition!

**ABOUT THE GAMES:**

The masquerade tradition is a bachelor tradition which has its roots in ancient pagan times but is still a vital part of Bulgarian folklore. Bulgarian bachelor masquerade games are mainly related to Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

In different regions of the country masked men dance around New Year's Day, between Christmas and St. Jordan's Day, the last week preceding and the first week of Easter Fast. In the western parts of Bulgaria, men dancing shortly before or after New Year's holidays are known as survakari. In other regions, participants in pre-spring masquerade games are called Kukeri.

Various religious and local variations to these also exist. They feature different characters and are related to different folklore holidays. However, all variants share a common feature, the large group of masked men with bells tied to their belts walking in their specific rhythmic step.

All variants include roaming around the settlement and visiting each and every house in it as well as a group dance in the square. Performing a mock wedding is characteristic to the survakari whereas Kukeri perform a ritual plowing of the land.

Masquerade games always take place in the eve of the respective holiday.

In the region of Pernik, they dance in the evening of January 13 and during the day on the 14th. This holiday is known as Surva or St. Basil's day. Almost every village from the region boasts its own carnival group which often consists of more than 50 people. Generally the participants in this tradition are called survakari but there are also a few local variations. Costumes are usually two types.

The first type is made exclusively out of furs and the masks represent animals.

The other type is made of rags. The masks are tall and elaborate.

They are supported by wooden structures and adorned with feathers.

Today's masquerade traditions have two distinct faces.

On one hand, they are still celebrated as in the past - every year on the same date and place, but on the other, performed at national and international festivals before an audience of ever growing number, they have somewhat become more of a show and a competition.

WELCOME to the 17th issue of the International Festival of Masquerade Games "Surva"  
 2008 January 25, 26 and 27.

**We are expecting you!**

