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Erasmus+ Programme
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In-Cult



Knowledge Section

Romanian cultural treasures

Liga Scriitorilor Filiala

Timisoara Banat, Romania

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RO_1 | Traditional dance "brâu"

The "brâu" from the Mountainous Banat, a very fast men's dance full of vitality performed by lads sitting in a semicircle with their hands on their shoulders and forming a chain, belongs to the pastoral repertoire. Their costumes are based on a contrast between black and white. The distinctive element of this dance is the quick movements of legs. The beaten steps of "brâu" are full of energy, with a rich and nuanced rhythm, as well as a pleasant variety of tempos. The dancers perform a variety of artistic figures, "stirring" the playing field with harmonious movements, completed with figures of lifting, twisting and leg-rocking. The perfect external rhythm of legs seems to melt into an inner rhythm, so deep is the passion of this dance.

The locals know about the "brâu" from their ancestors. Over time, it lost its pastoral function and became integrated into shows. It is performed with great pride during the holidays by village lads even now. The "brâu" expresses the great vitality of dancers as representatives of the mountain area, their vigour, their passionate nature and their special pride. Likewise, it transmits authentic elements of Romanian spirituality, the way in which our ancestors manifested their feelings.

RO_2 | Christmas-time ritual "Colindatul"

"Carolling — "colindatul" — is one of the most widespread and best-known Romanian customs. The joy of the Nativity of the Saviour reflected in gestures, sung ceremonial texts and dances can be found in Carolling. The Carollers' eyes full of hope, faith and love announce the good news at people's homes, the news about the birth of the Son of God, wishing everyone health, happiness and prosperity in the coming year. They are rewarded by their hosts with traditional food and dishes—cakes, rolls, apples, nuts, sausages...— and invited to join them at the Christmas Eve dinner. From evening to dawn, the streets of villages resound with the voices of carollers, dressed in traditional costumes. They walk from gate to gate, reminding people of the moment when the Three Wise Men (Magi) from the East followed the guiding star towards the place of the Saviour's Birth.

The carols, sung from Christmas Eve and until the Epiphany—and in churches too— are transmitted from generation to generation, being considered a precious legacy which comprises thoughts, words, feelings, ancestral faith, love, communion and history. Some families leave a carol chosen from the Romanian vast repertoire as the carol of that household, inherited from father to son.

RO_3 | The art of the traditional blouse "ia"

"Ia" is one of the oldest clothing items specific to Romanian folk costumes. "Ia", the traditional Romanian blouse, was and is close to the soul of Romanian people. The rich, unique, hand-sewn and very meticulous embroideries fascinate everyone with their beauty and originality. The symbols embroidered on the front, the back or the sleeves speak not only about the life and family of the women who sewed these shirts and about the geographical area in which they were made—they differ from one region to another— but also about the craft concerns of each village.

From ancient times, Romanian popular motifs have said many things about people's spirituality. In addition to playing an aesthetic role, they also provided a way for the individuals who wore them to express themselves. The model shows the area of origin, social background, marital status, age or occupation of a person. Colours acquire special importance in Romania's folk costumes, since they are specific to the geographical area where each costume was made, but also adapt to the age of the woman who wears it, as well as to her social status. Colours convey other details too: blue and silver were used to symbolise water and rivers (a motif often found in Romanian popular culture), gold and green served to represent the plain, and red and brown described mountainous regions.

RO_4 | Making the traditional food "sarmale"

"Sarmale" is one of the most appreciated dishes in Romania. Though considered a traditional Romanian dish, it has its roots in the Ottoman Empire. "Sarmale" is cooked from the Middle East to the Balkans and Central Europe, but the recipes vary from one country to another. In Romania, this dish enjoys appreciation throughout the country and can be regarded as a dish with a special symbolism. The clay pot for "sarmale" is present in almost every Romanian home and is said to be key to obtain an authentic taste.

The most common "sarmale" are made with (sweet or pickled) cabbage leaves but also using vine leaves. The frequency and popularity of their preparation is growing, both at family and religious celebrations and at cultural events. "Sarmale", a mixture of minced pork and beef, rice, onion, egg, dill, salt and pepper carefully rolled in sauerkraut leaves, have different sizes across Romania's regions. "Sarmale" are placed in rows in the clay pot. Then, you cover them with water and put 2-3 bay leaves —and it is also possible to put smoked ribs on top. They are cooked on a low heat and after a while, the specific smell becomes enticing and unmistakable. After 3-4 hours, when the dish is ready, it can be served with polenta and cream. It is an extremely tasty and appreciated dish.

RO_5 | Pilgrimage at Nicula Monastery

Nicula Monastery—a monastery of monks dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and located in the Cluj County—is one of the oldest monastic settlements in Romania. The first testimony about the existence of a wooden church dates back to 1552. The monastery's church has housed the famous Miracle Icon, the Icon of the Mother of God with the Infant, painted on a fir board in 1681 by the priest Luke of Iclod. According to a report drawn up by Austrian soldiers, the icon wept for almost a month, between February 15th and March 12th, 1699, thus foretelling the troubles that were to come. Following this event, Nicula Monastery became one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Northern Transylvania.

The pilgrimage takes place in August. Tens of thousands of believers head for Nicula, some even walking from more than 100 km away, respecting ancient traditions. On the night between August 14th and 15th, the service of the Holy Vigil of the Mother of God is held, after which the icon is taken out of the church and a council of priests surrounds the religious building with the Icon of the Mother of God in front. On August 15th, the great service of the Holy Mass takes place, followed by a meal offered to all pilgrims.

RO_6 | Cultural practice related to the 1st of March "Mărțișorul"

The "Mărțișor" is an object of adornment tied to a braided cord of white and red thread which appears in the tradition of Romanians and Bulgarians (Martenita) and also in the Balkans, among the Aromanians and Megleno-Romanians. The "mărțișoare" are worn on the left hand or the chest, starting on March 1st (for 10 days, two weeks or a month), and it is said that, if you make a wish while hanging the "mărțișor" on a tree after wearing it, your wish will come true. Although boys usually give "mărțișoare" to girls, in Banat, Bucovina, Bistrița - Năsăud, Maramureș and part of Moldova, girls offer "mărțișoare" to boys, who in turn give gifts to girls on March 8th.

Through the tradition of giving and receiving this symbol of spring, people show their happiness about the arrival of spring and communicate their feeling of affection for the person to whom the "mărțișor" is given. Three myths are known in popular tradition: "The mighty one who set the sun free", "The struggle of spring with winter" and "The brother and sister of the prince". At the beginning of April, trees are decorated with "mărțișoare" in most Romanian and Moldovan villages. This beautiful spring tradition has formed part of UNESCO's World Heritage list since December 2017.

RO_7 | Proverbs and sayings

'Proverb' derives from the Latin word 'proverbium', which means: "popular moral teaching born of experience, expressed by a simple, suggestive formula, usually metaphorical, and often rhyming (musicality makes it easier to remember)". Proverbs and sayings —also called words of the spirit or of the elders— are anonymous. They come from the thousand-year-old wisdom of Romanian people who have lived through a multitude of events over the centuries which generated all kinds of states, observed in some qualities, in other people's vices from which Romanians learned a lesson. Examples are: "You do well, you find well done", "What you don't like, don't do it to anyone else!", "He who wakes up in the morning goes far", "Tell me who you are with, so that I can tell you who you are", " In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" and "The country is burning and the grandmother is combing her hair".

These expressions are used in certain contexts, the interlocutor instantly understanding the message. Hundreds of years ago, proverbs and sayings were considered rules of conduct that people followed. Being full of wisdom, Romanian proverbs can be read whenever a piece of advice is needed. Such advice has survived the passing of time.