

# Happy holiday hailing from ancient times

In bygone times, it was forbidden to sleep or borrow something on Kupalle, celebrated on the night of July 6th to July 7th. Back in pre-Christian times, people looked forward to the 'peak' of summer, when they jumped over the flames of bonfires, floated wreaths of flowers and searched for fern flowers

By Lyudmila Minokova

On the day of the summer solstice, our ancestors used to celebrate one of their favourite folk holidays: Kupalle. They gave thanks to the Sun, Earth and Water for its bountiful harvest. As soon as Christianity arrived, the pagan festival became combined with another holiday: the anniversary of the birth of Saint John the Baptist (popularly called Ivan Kupala, having baptised Christ). Kupalle is associated with many legends, songs and customs, with some still popular today. Others now exist only on paper or in the memory of our grandparents.

Although Kupalle was celebrated in the evening, people began to prepare for it in advance, going to the banya in the morning, to cleanse their bodies: literally and symbolically. Those who were ill placed nettles on the coals to create a herbal steam-

bath. The legacy of this is still seen today, with people still making their birch twig beaters on this day, for use for the forthcoming year. Those who failed to go to the banya might visit a spring or well with the same purpose, washing their face and throwing a coin into the water to ward off illness.

Folklorist Yanka Kruk notes that our ancestors treated Kupalle with great caution. It was strictly forbidden to give something, sell or borrow on this day: a maxim passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. It was considered a great sin to give or take fire or bread from a house, since it might bring poverty in future. They also believed that evil spirits awoke on Kupalle, with witches turning into frogs and mice on this night, in order to creep into barns to steal milk from cows, damage rye and generally harm people. To protect themselves, people would place nettles on the

doorstep and young aspen on the barn door. A candle was fixed at the gate as a talisman and bouquets of medicinal herbs and birch branches were placed on cows' horns to ward off evil. Blessed salt and Gromnitsy candles were also common.

## Float, float, the wreath...

Staying up all night at Kupalle was also thought to confer protection, so rural residents gathered together until morning. The holiday began with making a bonfire, for which young boys spent the day collecting rotten barrels and sticks, as well as worn out clothes and footwear. A wooden stick with a rye sheaf tied to it was placed in the middle of the bonfire and the fire was brought 'alive' by the spark of a flint or by friction. Songs were sung around the Kupalle bonfire the whole night, with villagers dancing



Many folk legends exist around ancient Kupalle holiday

karagods (reels) and playing games. Young boys and girls jumped over the bonfire and bathed in water to purify themselves and protect from evil spirits. They ate Kupalle dishes, wove wreaths and told fortunes. In some places, wreaths were made only from flowers while in others, oak, birch, pine and fir twigs were woven. Wreaths also varied in their size, with smaller ones designed for the head or waist and bigger for dancing karagods. Wreaths were also thrown over the bonfire and floated along the river, with the fate of the wreath's owner forecast by the wreath's 'behaviour'. If the wreath immedi-

ately sank to the bottom, the young girl wouldn't marry that year; if it floated further and smoothly, she would have a happy marriage.

## Flower of happiness

Some old beliefs and fortune telling rituals are less well-known nowadays. In days gone by, on Kupalle evening, if a family member were unwell, flowers would be placed inside the house wall, between the logs. If they had died by the next morning, it was thought that the ill person would also soon die. Wreaths made from Kupalle flowers were also thrown onto the roofs of houses where unmarried young peo-

ple lived, so that a young boy or girl would court during the year.

One of the most famous Kupalle beliefs concerns the fern flower, which was said to only bloom on this night, for a few moments. As it opened, a heavy thunderstorm would begin, with lightning. Finding the flower was thought to bring a host of treasures, good health and wealth, while conferring the lucky hunter with the ability to understand animals and plants. Those bold enough to seek out the flower would have to face various evil spirits which would try to seduce them along the way in their quest to guard the fern flower's location.

# Enthusiasm brings car legends back to life turning them into works of art

Minsk hosts Oldtimer Rally for third time

By Yevgeny Muromov

Capricious weather attempted to spoil the holiday with rain. Spectators suffered little, although the 'honourable guests' of the recent rally may not have enjoyed the weather. The youngest was 35 years old.

This year, a site near Minsk's City Hall gathered American 'dudes' more common on Las Vegas and Havana streets: a Buick Riviera, a Pontiac Bonneville and a Cadillac Eldorado. They neighbored legendary Soviet 'labourers': a Moskvich-401, a GAZ-M-12 ZiM and a GAZ-M-20 Pobeda — well known to our older generations. Pre-war German cars, amusing Ukrainian Zaporozhets cars and other interesting models were also on show.

"Our Oldtimer Rally is a fascinating competition, gathering rare cars and interesting people," notes one of the event's organisers, Vladimir Shumsky. "It's necessary to be both a racer and an intellectual to take part. The ability to communicate — both



Rare cars on show in all their former beauty

with people and cars — is more important than speed."

Of course, many are attracted not by racing but by the chance to see legendary, cult cars, learning more about them. Some models are connected with wonderful stories. For example, a ZIL-41047 Limousine was the last ZIL model produced in Soviet times. Top ranking officials

usually used them. Even the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, loved the design.

A Bentley S2 — the faithful carrier of British aristocracy — was on show nearby. "This elegant car is over 50 years old. Of course, it was designed for rich people and arrived in Belarus from America. We worried

that it might be late for the rally," says Yevgenia Kholetskaya, the elegant owner of the Bentley. Interestingly, owners of new Bentley cars note that new versions have a different smell to older models. With this in mind, manufacturers like to diffuse an aroma found in first generation cars inside new models, to mask the smell of modern materials.

The most modest exhibit was situated in a corner: a Ford-T, which helped Henry Ford to 'place all Americans on wheels'. He launched the era of cars a hundred years ago. His 'Tin Lizzy' (as this car was nicknamed a century ago) was the first to enjoy mass production — becoming the first accessible car as a result. It can travel at an average speed of 50km/h, which was insanely fast in the early 20th century.

On touching a true rarity, you gain an understanding that, over time, a car doesn't have to be consigned to the scrap heap. It can become a work of art, showing the mastery of human hands and artistic engineering.



Kolozhskaya Church in Grodno

## Kolozha forever

Grodno's St. Boris and Hleb (Kolozhskaya) Church undergoes restoration

Specialists from the Grodnograzhdanproekt Institute are overseeing the restoration project of the unique Orthodox church, which hopes to join the UNESCO World Heritage List. A family chapel and baptismal room are planned at the first stage for the ancient Belarusian church, with more major reconstruction and restoration continuing later.

The Chairman of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee, Semen Shapiro, notes that restoration of the priceless historical monument must be conducted carefully and sensibly, to allow it to keep its unique nature.