

Q&A

# Choir's uncommon singers drawn from Bulgarian villages

By Gary Budzak  
 THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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One of the most distinctive vocal groups in the world is returning to Columbus for a Thursday holiday concert.

Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares ("The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices") is known in its homeland as the Bulgarian State Radio and Television Choir.

Philip Koutev founded the female choral group in 1952 to preserve Bulgarian folk songs.

Known for strong voices and unusual timbres, the singers received international notice after the release of their debut album in 1975.

In 1990 they won a Grammy Award, and in '94 they gave their first concert in Columbus.

Today, Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares consists of 23 women and a male soloist.

Recently, between flight delays and phone difficulties, conductor Dora Hristova was interviewed by e-mail.

**Q: How are the singers selected?**

**A:** Usually the young singers come from the villages, where the traditional manner of singing and producing the sound is mostly preserved. Nowadays, we have special music schools for such gifted singers who pass the academic education.

**Q: Is it true they have no classical training?**



Dora Hristova directs Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares.

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**A:** We prefer original, innocent singers who are not touched by the modern civilized life.

**Q: Do they perform only traditional music?**

**A:** Yes. These voices correspond only to the folk songs, and the traditional songs sound perfect only performed by these voices. Song and voice are strongly linked and can't be separated. Of course, the choir performs every kind of music.

**Q: Is there much turnover in the group?**

**A:** No. In 1990, almost half of the choir was replaced by young, talented singers, and, since then, nobody has left it.

**Q: Is the Bulgarian language hard to sing?**

**A:** Bulgarian language is difficult, with many dialects. In our traditional vocal music, melody, rhythm and . . . (lyrics) are inseparable, and what is more, the dialects enrich the meaning

and the emotion of the song.

**Q: Do recordings adequately reflect the choir's sound?**

**A:** Not always. The microphone and . . . (recording equipment) change . . . the quality of the sound. The church acoustics and the big symphony venues are better for the performance. These singers should never perform with microphones.

**Q: Onstage, do you explain to**

**audience members what they are hearing?**

**A:** I never talk to the audience.

Our performance is a classical-type concert with programs printed in advance. Our music (speaks for itself).

**Q: Will Americans recognize any songs on this holiday tour?**

**A:** Our fans will immediately recognize the new pieces. The audience will feel the cheerful religious folk songs.

► Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares will perform at 8 p.m. Thursday in the Pontifical College Josephinum, 7625 N. High St. Tickets cost \$15 and \$20. Call 614-228-6224 or visit [www.citymusiccolumbus.org](http://www.citymusiccolumbus.org).

**Q: How is Christmas celebrated in Bulgaria?**

**A:** Christmas is called *Koleda*. . . *Koleda* is a ritual, which is celebrated in every house (and village . . . with many songs; special dishes; inviting guests, who bless the hosts, the meal, the animals, the crops, etc. . . . (They) wish happiness, luck, health, richness, abundance to the whole family. *Koleda* differs from the official church Christmas celebration, but the meaning is the same.

**Q: What would you like central Ohioans to know about Bulgaria?**

**A:** Our homeland is a very beautiful country, situated in the center of the Balkan peninsula, rich in mountains, valleys, rivers (and) the Black Sea. We are the crossroad of many civilizations and cultures.

**Q: How do you like being one of Bulgaria's best-known representatives?**

**A:** We are very proud to be the peaceful ambassadors of our country. Our songs tell people that the biggest fortune in the world is the purity of the singing soul.

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