

Folk rites, games, songs, music and dances: the launch of Kolberg Year celebrations

Two hundred years ago Oskar Kolberg was born in the village of Przysucha to become one of the most accomplished contributors to Polish culture and one of the most forgotten, as well. Thanks to this exquisite folklorist and ethnographer we know our forefathers' folk melodies, dances, rituals, customs and beliefs.

To mark the bicentenary of the great researcher this year, Polish parliament's lower house, the Sejm, has made 2014 the Kolberg Year. In the months to come we will be commemorating him in various ways: February starts the Kolberg Year celebrations in Poland.

A day before the folklorist's birthday, on 21 February, his hometown will host a gala concert, featuring Kolberg's works performed by Iwona Kowalkowska (soprano), Wojciech Maciejowski (tenor) and Andrzej Tatarski (piano). The audience will also be treated to a performance of the Mogilanie regional ensemble and a selection of folk music of the area of Przysucha and the region of Kraków.

On 22 February, the day when Kolberg was born – the Fryderyk Chopin Museum in Warsaw will launch its programme titled "Give Kolberg thanks for the laborious work of his. Oskar Kolberg: ethnographer, musicographer, chopinologist". Apart from a comprehensive temporary exhibition devoted to Kolberg, the narration of the museum's permanent collection will be changed to include Kolberg themes.

22 February will also see the launch of a special GPS application for smartphones enabling users to track and discover places connected with the ethnographer's life and work. The application, downloadable for free, will be available in Polish and English, for Android and in a few months' time – for IOS (iPhone), too.

The official launch of the Kolberg Year will take place on 24 February at the Warsaw Philharmonic, with the participation of Bronisław Komorowski, president of Poland, and Bogdan Zdrojewski, Poland's Minister of Culture and National Heritage. The gala will feature performances by Wielka Orkiestra Gaców, Trebunie Tutki, Kapela ze Wsi Warszawa, Zbigniew Namysłowski Quintet, and Magdalena Lisak accompanied by the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra under Jacek Kasprzyk. On the same day, selected folk artists and ethnographers will be awarded state distinctions and Gloria Artis Medals for their contribution to culture.

Oskar Kolberg has left behind opulent archives documenting the folklore of Polish territories of the 19th century, recorded in 33 volumes of his opus titled "Lud. Jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusła, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce" [The people, their customs, way of life, speech, legends, proverbs, rites, pagan ceremonies, games, songs, music and dances], which was published in his lifetime, and the same amount of materials in the form of the so-called "Kolberg files". Underlying his lifetime of hard work was passion, commitment and a calling that he continued to follow in spite of numerous obstacles he faced. Today his output is instrumental to many researchers – ethnographers and musicologists, and inspirational for many different people.

The Kolberg Year will offer an array of events for different target groups, not only researchers and artists dealing with traditional music. Many projects have been devised specifically for young people, reaching out to them through the Internet and social networks.

For more information on the celebrations, event schedule and news, go to www.kolberg2014.org.pl.

The Kolberg Year Celebrations Office is run by the Institute of Music and Dance in Warsaw. The celebrations are held in association with the Oskar Kolberg Institute, the Forum of Traditional Music, Polish Ethnological Society, Open-Air Museum of Rural Architecture in Radom, Polish Radio, Folk Artists Association, Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Polish Composers' Union, the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw, and the National Audiovisual Institute in Warsaw.