



**The Drum Orchestra in Florianopolis**



Hundreds of people take part in the seventh edition of the Drum Orchestra in Florianopolis, south Brazil. Drummers braved the pouring rain to play songs by the Beatles, Deep Purple and Kiss among others, in an attempt to break the world record set in Manchester, England when 798 drummers played together. — AFP photos

**PILGRIMS GATHER FOR COSMIC-LIKE RITUAL IN BULGARIA'S MOUNTAINS**



Members of an international religious movement called the White Brotherhood perform ritual dance on the top of the Rila Mountain.

Thousands of pilgrims gathered Monday in Bulgaria's Rila mountains to welcome their "spiritual" new year with a cosmic-like dance performed in concentric circles, creating a striking image on the verdant mountain plain. The white-clad dancers hiked up to Bulgaria's Seven Rila Lakes at an altitude of 2,100 meters (6,900 feet) and performed a special meditative dance known as "paneurhythmy" for more than an hour under the sound of singing and violins. They are followers of the Universal White Brotherhood—an esoteric society that combines Christianity and Indian mysticism and was founded by Bulgarian theologian Peter Deunov back in 1897 but banned during communism and still considered a sect by the country's Christian Orthodox Church.

It emphasizes brotherly love, healthy habits, positive thinking and living in harmony with nature. The movement does not keep track of its numbers but is believed to have tens of thousands of followers worldwide, possibly more—the majority of them in France, Belgium and Switzerland but also as far as the US, Canada, Mexico, Iceland and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its followers believe that positive cosmic energy is at its strongest in the region of the Seven Rila Lakes around August 19 and that paneurhythmy will help them channel it and spread it around the world. "Paneurhythmy combines music and movement (...) With these exercises we get in touch with the physical, the spiritual and the divine worlds," said Ventsislav Kuninsky, a 59-year-old machine engineer and follower of the Universal White Brotherhood for 30 years.

Others found purely individual pleasure and health benefits in the exercises that seem graceful and easy but are in reality quite strenuous to perform. "For me this is a recharging, a reconnection to nature, the road to good



health and the road back to my heart because nowadays we have become very reasoning, we think a lot. "Here, as banal as it may sound, everything is love," said 40-year-old Ralitsa Kovacheva, who discovered Deunov's teachings five years ago. Medical research published in 2013 suggested that regular practice of paneurhythmy improves balance and physical endurance while lowering aggression, boosting optimism and combating depression. — AFP

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