



# KLEIDONAS



25<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2012  
NERATZE SQUARE  
RETHYMNO

JUST MAKE A DESIRE  
JUMP OVER THE FIRE

IT'S UP TO YOU  
TO MAKE IT COME TRUE!

# HERE IN RETHYMNO WISHES COME TRUE!

Something magic is taking place in Neratze Square. The smell of burned herbs and dried flowers like lavender, cinnamon, rose as well as many others pervades the air setting a suggestive atmosphere. People are gathered around a bonfire and in the middle maidens in traditional outfit softly sing Kleidonas song.



The square looks like a silent picture.

The moon, "a comma, a sliver of white" secretly comes out from the darkness to add its magic to the old rituals of Kleidonas.

Come and get involved in the suggestive and unique atmosphere of Kleidonas!

You can see a small table full of flowers and leaves. A pottery pitcher on the top is the queen of the night, in its womb the magic will take place and the wishes will come true.



Kleidonas represents a very old traditional Greek custom. Every year it is organized by the Lykeion Ellinidon, that is to say, the Lyceum Club of Greek Women of Rethymno. The word 'Kleidonas' means 'Omen' and it is the name of a very ancient Greek Custom related to fertility, the Summer Solstice and the foretelling of the future.



Thousands of years ago, in Ancient Greece, these days were dedicated to Zeus, the King of Gods, Dimitra, the Goddess of Agriculture, Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom and Crafts and Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love during which a lot of related rituals were performed.



Later on, during Byzantine period, the same custom took a Christian form, as the 24<sup>th</sup> of June is dedicated to St John the Baptist, but, it didn't change. Finally reached us carrying with it a veil of mystery, some plausible prophecies, some feasible dreams and some hopes.

It is celebrated all over Greece. As indicated by the meaning of the word Kleidonas itself, Omen, the reading of the Omens has always been the most significant part of the whole Feast. Especially as far as the prospects of marriage for young women are concerned.



The celebrations themselves include the following rhytes. Firstly the lighttning of large bonfires for people to jump over while making a wish. The flower wreaths people make to celebrate the 1<sup>st</sup> of May are burnt in these fires.

Then young women act on the stage celebrating the old rhytes of *the speechless water*. All the women gather in a house and a young unmarried girl, named Maria, is asked to undertake the task of bringing a pottery pitcher full of water from the village well to the house. While carrying it she is supposed not to say a word nor respond to the teasing words addressed to her by the young men in the village. That's why the water is called *the water of silence* or *the speechless water*.

Obviously the young men do their best to make the girl talk!



During the performance the first Maria doesn't resist the temptation and answers back. This means that the water has become useless and a second Maria takes over and finally manages to accomplish the task.





Then all the young women who are in the house put an item in the pitcher, which is called rizikari. This item can be anything, a pear, an apple, a ring, a walnut. But there should not be two similar items in the pitcher so that each girl can identify her own rizikary when the pitcher opens the next day. After the items have been placed in the pitcher the girls cover it with a piece of cloth and lock it while singing. They finally place it on the terrace of the house for the night so that it can acquire its foretelling properties.





The next day the pitcher is opened and special foretellings in the form of short poems, Cretan *mantinades* are sung by the Lyra Player, *Lyraris*, while the items, *rizikaria*, are drawn out of the pitcher. The *mantinada* sing while the item is drawn out concerns the girl who had placed that item in the pitcher and tells her about her future. That's why there shouldn't be two similar items.

After watching the story of Kleidonas you will be able to enjoy dancing groups in their exceptional performances of traditional Greek and Cretan dances under the guidance of their excellent teachers.