

## CZECH/SLOVAK PAGEANT (folk wear) GUIDELINES

*These guidelines were prepared in 2002 by Carmen Langel, Curator of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library and Mark Vasko-Bigaouette, Czech and Slovak Heritage Tours Inc. and Founder of the CzechoSlovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI)*

The following should be reviewed to help guide pageant contests and contestants in the selection or creation of kroj for their competitions, or as a outline for the judges. Pageant officials recognize that not all contestants have access to an original authentic kroj from the Czech Republic or Slovakia. (Even if you have an opportunity to travel there and seek one for purchase, they are becoming increasingly scarce and those you do find may or may not be complete.)



Drawing by Jaroslav  
Koželuja

### **General kroj information:**

Czech and Slovak kroje\* (traditional folk costumes) represent some of the world's finest folk art and most exquisite dress. They reflect centuries of evolution and refinement. Kroje are also very diverse; each region and village has a distinct kroj. Each varies in fabrics, colors, embellishments, and overall form. All are traditionally handmade.

Women's kroje are usually more elaborate than men's kroje. The head covering may be a cap, scarf, headband, ribbons, or even a floral wreath. A married woman usually covers her hair with a cap or scarf. Blouses are often embellished with embroidery, beadwork, sequins, and/or lace. In parts of Moravia, the sleeves are very full and may be tightly pleated. A vest is worn over the blouse. Skirts may appear full, lie close to the body, and/or be tightly pleated. An apron, sometimes elaborately embellished, completes the kroj. There are also appropriate stockings and footwear for each region.

The manner in which a kroj is prepared and worn is as important as the individual elements. In Moravia, for example, the women of each village tie their headscarves in a unique style. Blouse sleeves may hang naturally, are starched, or may be pleated for fullness. Often, lace collars and aprons are starched for a stiff and crisp effect. Heavily pleated sleeves or skirts must not appear crushed or distorted; skirt fullness is achieved with petticoat layers. Overall, the kroj must appear clean, fresh, and unwrinkled.

Occasion is a final consideration. Traditionally, there was a specific kroj for church events and one for dancing and festivals. Kroje for wedding and mourning ceremonies were especially complicated. For example, in the Chod region of western Bohemia, the relationship of the mourners to the deceased could be determined according to the composition of the kroj. At a wedding, the bride

would dress differently than her bridesmaids; a godmother attending a baby's christening ceremony would not dress the same as the baby's mother.

Kroj is pronounced kroy. Plural is kroje, pronounced kroy-eh.

(Please note that because of the variation between kroje in each village and region, there are exceptions to nearly everything!)

### **What should I wear?**

First, recognize that there are two schools of thought on what makes an acceptable kroj.

1. The first abides by very strict rules that the only real/authentic kroj is a completely original kroj from the old country. These are the kroje you might find on exhibit in museums or worn by individuals participating in festivals in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
2. In the United States, there is growing acceptance of Czech American kroje and Slovak American kroje. These are designed and worn as a reflection of an individual's pride in his/her Czech or Slovak heritage. This includes altered authentic kroje or those made completely from scratch.

### **Selection of your kroj:**

1. If you are lucky enough to have a kroj that fits definition #1 above, then you may wear it for the pageant. Be prepared to explain your kroj to the judges. You should know as much as possible about the history of the kroj and what village/region it represents. The type of information you should seek includes: Who made and/or wore it? How was it acquired? Who brought it to the U.S.? Does it represent the area that your ancestors came from? (It is ideal, but not mandatory that your kroj represents your ancestral village or area) Are there any other interesting facts about the kroj or those who wore it before you? If you are asked to explain your kroj, consider which of following answers would be more impressive to the judges:

- a. The kroj I am wearing today was brought to the U.S. by my great-grandmother. It has been handed down to the women in her family until I inherited it this summer.
- b. The kroj I am wearing today was brought to the U.S. in about 1908 by my grandmother, Anna Novaková. I have been doing research on our family genealogy and I think she was from Western Bohemia. The kroj substantiates this as it represents a typical kroj of Domažlice. Anna gave the kroj to my aunt (Maria Novak) who wore it to several festivals and picnics. Aunt Maria gave it to me. There have been a few size alterations to the original kroj and several repairs, but overall it is an original kroj that has been a part of my family's history for nearly a century.

Clearly, the judges will appreciate answer #b. as it illustrates the contestant did her research! Even if you can't find all the answers you seek, do your best and

explain how you tried to find information and what you were able to find. At the very least, you must know what village or region your kroj represents!

**2.** Most contestants will likely have to make their own kroj or make significant repairs, alterations, or replacement pieces for an authentic kroj. If you are starting with elements from an authentic kroj, research how the original kroj would have appeared and do your best to duplicate the missing pieces. You want your kroj to appear as close to the original as possible. Be prepared to explain to the judges what you had to make/repair and what steps you took to make sure it was as accurate as possible. As above, be prepared to answer questions about the history of your kroj.

If you are starting from scratch, consider the following: Do you want to make a kroj that resembles your family's ancestral village/region? Can you find photos and/or patterns of a kroj from that area or any other areas? Will you be able to find the correct fabric, lace, and ribbons? These may all be tough questions, so do your best. Consider the list of sources at the bottom of this document and at least find images of authentic kroje. You may also be able to find books at your local library or through interlibrary loan.

Once you find your photo or pattern, do your best. From the image you should at least be able to determine fabric color or any patterns on the fabric and the overall form of the finished kroj (full skirt? short or long skirt? full or loose sleeves? etc.).

As you go through your resource material, note that kroje are divided into three areas: Bohemia (western Czech Republic), Moravia (eastern Czech Republic), or Slovakia. Generally speaking, you will notice the following about each of the three regions:

**Bohemia (Western half of Czech Republic):** ( generally richer fabrics, more muted colors )

**Blouse:** White with roomy sleeves (but not pleated or full like in Moravia). No embroidery on the blouse sleeves. Usually no fabric below the elbow.

**Vest:** Relatively simple (except those from Chod region where woman's vests are beaded). May be laced in front as opposed to buttons or frog clasps. Some East Bohemian vests are laced in the back and front.

**Skirt:** Relatively simple, not full of rick-rack, just a few lines on the bottom of the skirt. Often softer colors and richer fabrics.

**Apron:** Often most of the handwork was done to the apron, which could be embroidery (colored or white on white) or even beadwork as in kroje from the Blata region of South Bohemia.

**Head Covering:** Head coverings vary greatly in Bohemia. If you don't have the correct cap, you may wear a floral wreath. Keep in mind that the head covering usually indicates marital status.

**Footwear:** Often red stockings/tights and black shoes. ( sometimes white stockings.)

\* In the United States, there is a tradition of representing a Bohemian kroj with a red skirt, white blouse, and black vest. You may consider this as a last resort, but keep in mind that it doesn't represent a specific village or town. Think of this as the blue jeans of its day, something to do the field work it, or slop the pigs!

**Moravia** (Eastern half of Czech Republic): ( generally nice or rich fabrics, more colorful than Bohemia )

**Blouse:** White with full sleeves, some even heavily pleated and starched. May have handwork at the shoulder, collar, and cuffs.

**Vest:** Often elaborate with red or multicolored handwork.

**Skirt:** Wide range of colors and patterns, some floral. Range of skirt lengths.

**Apron:** Again, a wide variety of aprons from simple to the colorful and elaborately embroidered Kyjov aprons.

**Head covering:** Head coverings may be a dark red or brownish headscarf, beaded cap, or a floral wreath.

**Scarf:** If you opt for the scarf, remember that each village has a different method for tying them! Also, scarves usually indicate that the woman is married.

**Footwear:** Often dark stockings/tights and black shoes or mid-calf boots.( just below the knee )

**Slovakia:** ( generally nice to common fabrics, a riot of color )

The variations between kroje in Slovakia are too variable to generalize. Do keep in mind that Slovakia is generally poorer than the Czech Republic, so you are less likely to find kroje made from silk and other expensive fabrics. Slovaks had much more time than money, so much more embroidery.

Slovaks kept the tradition of wearing kroje until 40 or so years ago, and still do in some places for weddings, etc.

### **Final Recommendations/Suggestions**

Try and find out what area/village your family is from. Although best to wear a kroj representing your ancestral village, it is not mandatory, but at least something from the general region. Regardless of the area your kroj represents, judges will expect you to know where your family roots are, or to demonstrate that you attempted the research.

A couple places to start include:

1. CzechoSlovak Genealogical Society International ( CGSI ) PO Box 16225 St. Paul MN 55116 web site : [www.cgsi.org](http://www.cgsi.org)

2. Web site of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library. The NCSML librarian maintains a good list of relevant genealogy links on their web site: [www.ncsml.org](http://www.ncsml.org)

Don't blend current fashion trends with your traditional kroj. For example,

1. Short skirts may seem cute, but don't wear a short skirt unless the region you are representing has short skirts.
2. Lacy/fancy tights or pantyhose are not traditional leg wear and sandals are not traditional footwear.

### **Where to Seek Guidance**

Contact the Directors of the National Czech/Slovak Pageant, for pictures of former contestants and what they wore. Or some of the state pageants may have photos.

The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML)

30 - 16th Ave. SW

Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404

Phone # ( 319 ) 362 - 8500 Fax ( 319 ) 363 2209

Web site: <http://www.ncsml.org>

(The NCSML always has a dozen or more full kroje on exhibit. Their library also has a number of reference books and a set of full sized patterns for Czech kroje.)

CzechoSlovak Heritage Museum

122 W. 22 St.

Oakbrook, IL 60521

(They also have a large number of kroje on display plus reference books.)

CzechoSlovak Genealogical Society International

PO Box 16225 St. Paul, MN 55116

web site : <http://www.cgsi.org/>

(They have some reference books and a large number of full sized patterns, mostly of Czech / Bohemian, and some Moravian. )

Dvoracek Memorial Library

3rd St. Wilber, NE 68465

(They have some reference books and some full sized Czech patterns.)

The web site : <http://www.czechheritage.net/>

Has information on Kroje, some guidelines, and some photos.

You may also be able to find individuals who can help you make a kroj. If you can't find someone, ask representatives from the above institutions for suggestions.