

# Adrian Warchola

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a musician and vocalist. Currently, I play the piano and sing, but have also studied the alto saxophone. I co-founded the Ukrainian-Canadian dance band Euphoria together with my friend Steven Gowda, and have been leading the band into what is now our 10th anniversary year. I am the band's lead singer, keyboard player, and manager. We are currently embarking on our 10 YEARS - 10 POKIB Project - to record our debut all-Ukrainian album to be released in 2018.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

The Euphoria Band performs at many weddings around Western Canada, and my favourite moment at every wedding is the look on the bride and groom's faces when they walk into their reception venue for the first time as a married couple - especially when it's to the tune of the Ukrainian Wedding March being performed by us! Their overwhelmed look of joy is unforgettable!

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

With the rise of digital music, DJ's, and the influence of Top 40 music among youth at live events, it's a challenge to stay relevant and engaged with an audience's ever-changing music preferences. We work hard to bring in new styles of performing traditional Ukrainian songs. We focus on taking a song from what is expected, and adding the unexpected - something you only hear when a live band performs it. We also continuously add Top 40 songs to our repertoire - whether that's a Ukrainian song or English.

What inspires you?

Canada's first Ukrainian immigrants. The hardships and challenges they faced moving to a new land are insurmountable and difficult to imagine nowadays. Looking through old photographs of old trunks being unpacked with violins and instruments inside, you see how music brought a little comfort and a sense of familiarity to families in their new land of Canada.

How does your art impact the greater community?

As Stevie Wonder once wrote, "Music is the only language we all understand". I find that so true, particularly now as we can travel around the world, but it's the music that transcends all country borders. Our music allows for a sense of familiarity from one generation, and the same for another generation - wanting to have that traditional element of Ukrainian music, but brought into the 21st century. The impact it has is an appreciation for what was, and an inspiration to new generations to uphold cultural traditions and music in their own way.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I am an active member of Edmonton's Ukrainian community, and am proud to give back to the same community that supported me to get to where I am today. I have volunteered for a number of organizations including the Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Alberta Provincial Council, the University of Alberta Ukrainian Students' Society, and most recently with UFest Edmonton Ukrainian Festival. I have also participated in a variety of Ukrainian events in the community, by assembling duos or trios and background or feature entertainment.

I would be remiss not to mention how integral my upbringing in PLAST Ukrainian Scouts was in planting the "iskra" for my love of music. I often think back to the nights singing traditional Ukrainian songs around the campfire with my friends. Those memories are so fond and really inspired the founding of Euphoria.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My parents. Growing up, it would be an understatement to say I didn't enjoy going to piano lessons - but my parents continued to encourage me to learn and move through the Royal Conservatory of Music program. Funny enough, it was only after I finished my RCM studies that I found my love for music and piano, and later voice. I thank my parents for raising me in a music environment and teaching me the importance of pursuing music alongside my other career pursuits.

I also come from a very musical family, from my grandfather Roman Soltykewych, who founded the Dnipro choir, to my father who was a member of Dumka - arguably one of Canada's most famous Ukrainian-Canadian bands. I am proud to participate in and continue their musical contributions to our community.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Get involved. Our community needs you. If you can't find a place to contribute, take a risk and build a path on your own. Volunteer, engage in community events or meetings, and let your voice be heard. Live in the moment and let your talents do the work.

# Adriana Lebedovich

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a proud member of the second violin section of the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, a position I have held since September, 2007. I still hold the record for being the youngest person to have won a job in the orchestra, by three days! The opportunity to make music for a living is a dream come true.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

One opportunity was in April 2006 when I won the University of Calgary Concerto Competition and I played the first movement of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. The other unforgettable moment happened very recently. The CPO played a concert with world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma. His musicality and personality are truly one of a kind, and it was such an incredible experience to be able to make music with him.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

I think the biggest challenge many artists face is lack of funding. Without the arts, there would be no escape from the “real world,” and that is an important part of daily life.

What inspires you

One of my greatest inspirations comes from playing Education concerts for school children with the CPO, especially when we play O Canada at the beginning. It is such a joy to hear their voices in the concert hall, singing proudly for their country.

How does your art impact the greater community?

We play Education concerts for children, as well as have open rehearsals which are attended by many members of the seniors' community. We also have our annual Heartstrings month in February, and the CPO donates over 600 tickets to local charities so everyone is able to experience the gift of live music. I have also put together smaller ensembles to play in seniors' homes, as well as at the ranch where I board my horse, Taima, for their Music in the Barn series.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I attend as many Zabavas and Ukrainian events as I can, as well as prepare all of the traditional dishes for both Christmas and Easter. I also write Pysanky during the Easter season, and my favourite time to do so is after a concert, coming home and writing to clear my mind. I was a member of the Korinnya Ukrainian Folk Ensemble, in both the choir and orchestra, and I sang in the church choir at St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Church for many years. On one occasion, my mom, who was the choir director, was sick, and didn't come to church on Sunday. I decided that there would be a choir anyway, and at the age of 15 or so, I conducted the church choir for the first time! I was also a member of Zhyto, a Calgary-based Ukrainian dance band, for a few years and was able to combine music with my Ukrainian heritage, and a jam session over the holidays usually erupts with the family.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My parents have been very influential in my music career, always supporting me and helping me achieve my goals. I have also looked up to my cousin, Carissa Klopoushak, member of the National Arts Centre Orchestra.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

I would remind the younger generation to follow your dreams, and do what your heart tells you. Life will have its challenges but it will be much easier if you love what you do.

# Alicia Slusarchuk

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

Currently, I play the tsymbaly (dulcimer) and dance with Vohon Ukrainian Dance Ensemble. Previously, I also sang with numerous Ukrainian choirs. To be able to share traditions and heritage of the Ukrainian culture with the larger society, means the world to me. Thirty years from now my children may get the opportunity to hear someone playing the tsymbaly because I did my part in trying to keep this tradition alive.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

I was playing the tsymbaly with my brother at the Vegreville Pysanka Music Competition in 2012. Together, we won platinum, the Highest Achievement in Instrumental Music, and the Showmanship Award, which gave us the opportunity to perform at the evening Grandstand Show. Performing on that stage was an incredible experience. The moment I remember most vividly was when we played our fast-paced Dualing Dulcimers song, we hit the last note in unison and the crowd went from being dead-silent to a blaring roar-of-applause. Being that it was only my fourth year playing tsymbaly at the time, that moment was incredible! That moment made my heart swell with pride and accomplishment.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

The biggest challenge I face with my art is finding a way to preserve it. I, myself, can name only a handful of talented artists who currently play the tsymbaly – as it is a rare art-form. With many of fellow tsymbaly players aging and not passing the art form down, it becomes lost with fewer people able to help preserve it.

One of my biggest goals is to teach and perform the tsymbaly to as many people as I can, in the hopes of maintaining and preserving the integrity of the art and the Ukrainian culture that comes with it. This also applies to Ukrainian dance. The more people that can become involved and trained with the art-form, the longer it shall live on.

What inspires you?

People inspire me. Everyone has a different story and a different path in life. Everyone also has a different concept of success. Hearing and witnessing the paths and experiences that people have gone through to achieve success is what drives me.

How does your art impact the greater community?

My art helps carry on the tradition and soul of my culture. Without words, it allows me to express why it is so important, precious not only to myself, but to everyone I share it with. It also gives me the opportunity to remind those I am sharing it with, of memories; this occurs the most when performing for seniors – one will come up and talk to me about a tsymbaly they had at their wedding or how their uncle used to play it. Playing the tsymbaly and dancing allows me to bring joy and happiness to those I am sharing it with.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I connect with my Ukrainian heritage by immersing myself in the Ukrainian community and by volunteering with various Ukrainian organizations. I have also studied the Ukrainian language in school and have had the opportunity to study the language, culture and history in Ukraine. Another way I connect with my heritage is by praying and attending the church my ancestors built, Pruth Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Ascension Church. My ancestors have passed down many rituals and traditions that I follow.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My mom has influenced me the most with my artistic pursuits. She is the reason I started dancing and playing the tsymbaly. She can always be seen in the audience cheering me on.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Try a little bit of everything so you know what your strengths and weaknesses are, then work on your weaknesses and work even harder at accomplishing your goals using your strengths.

Another piece of advice is to not procrastinate. Develop good habits right off the start and just do it. Do what scares you and do the things you don't want to do.

My last piece of advice is to worry less about the future and live in the moment. Everything has a way of working itself out in the end.

# Ana Toumine

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am an opera singer, which means I am a story teller. I express emotions with my voice, using my own body to amplify and resonate through a hall to reach as many people as possible. Opera combines every form of art in a grand spectacle on stage, telling a story through music, often concerning the human condition.

I have only just begun my journey, but any chance I get to perform is just such a gift. I think people in North America look at this path as if it's such a rare and glamorous thing. In reality, at its bare bones, it's just like any other career starting from the ground up - networking, marketing, gaining experience, and being heard. It means a lot to pursue my passion and share it with others, and I couldn't imagine expending my energy in any other way.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/ creating.

I remember the first time I really captivated the audience; I could feel their energy from the stage. After the performance I remember so many people coming up to me and telling me how they were moved to tears, that I had changed their lives, or helped them overcome some fears. It felt like an incredibly important moment and something that I always strive for - to help people feel something they perhaps don't have the opportunity to feel in their daily lives.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

There is a huge vulnerability associated with singing. For the singer, the combination of expressing emotion, interpreting the music and the character, all the while maintaining a technical level helps access these elements and calls for a high demand of mental focus and presence. When all these elements are achieved, it is such a liberating feeling, but can also be extremely difficult to access in certain scenarios.

What inspires you?

Other art, nature, and overall happiness. When my life outside of singing feels full, my artistic range feels full of colour, creativity, and possibility.

I also love reading and writing poetry, illustrating, and creating with my hands. It's a different form of expression that often helps me learn more about myself, which in turn is reflected in my singing.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I think that the majority of people don't take enough time to reflect and listen. Opera provides a heightened scenario that highlights a lot of places people are afraid to go, either due to painful memories, feelings of vulnerability, and even feelings of great joy, for example.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I am often told by teachers and coaches I have a very Slavic sounding tone. The Ukrainian people historically are very hard working people and I carry this in my voice. I love that it is so easily identified in my sound!

There is also a lot of Czech and Russian opera that speaks to me very strongly. I was raised speaking Ukrainian and with many Ukrainian Catholic traditions. It's also made it helpful to learn and understand other Slavic opera librettos and music. I feel I can connect and understand the characters. Because of the Slavic language root, I find it so easy to connect to the text, as well as the melancholic, often nationalistic, flavour to the musical language.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

There are a few levels of influence that have really impacted my pursuit. The first being Canadian coloratura-soprano Tracy Dahl. I was so fortunate to have studied with her for two consecutive years in my training, and continue to visit her when I can. She has been such a great inspiration and mentor over the years. I continue to be influenced by my teachers and mentors, Dominique Labelle, Stephen Hargreaves, and Michael McMahon.

My family has also been a huge influence on my artistic pursuits. Both of my parents were professional ballet dancers, and from the beginning I was so inspired by their photos on the stage that I knew that was where I also belonged. My brother is also an extremely talented visual artist, and seeing his focus and creativity equally inspires me. Along with everyone in my extended family, they have been the most supportive members of my "team", and I cherish this support so much.

A singer from the Ukrainian community who has really inspired me is Canadian soprano Andriana Chuchman. It makes me feel so encouraged seeing another PLASTun (Scout organization) who is such a success story.

And of course, famous singers such as Renée Fleming and Maria Callas are huge idols of mine for many reasons besides their incredible artistry and talent.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Try not to worry so much about where you want to be, and really try as much as you can not to compare yourself to others. Never stop asking questions; curiosity keeps your eyes open to every possibility for growth and creativity. It is a daily effort you make to be an artist, and it's important to remember that you're not alone and the learning never stops. I have only just begun my journey, but even the low points have led me to exactly what I eventually needed. Ambition, passion, curiosity, and work ethic are key - the rest will come if you keep creating.

# Benjamin Christiani

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am the fiddle player for The Diamonds Band in Edmonton. We play for club dances, folk festivals, and private events in and around Edmonton. Although we play multiple genres of music from Eastern Canadian, Irish, Bluegrass, and Old Time Fiddle, our audiences always get going the most whenever we play Ukrainian music. Growing up as a sixth generation Ukrainian-Canadian, I listened to many of the classic dance orchestras from my Dido's record collection and have been influenced by many of those relics. The music community that I am pleased to be a part of has always been welcoming of young individuals and has fostered and developed new growth in this fading art.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

This past fall I was invited to the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Championship held in Quebec this year, where the top 30 or so fiddlers from across the country are invited to compete. I was one of only three fiddlers from Alberta. In the competition each fiddler had to play a waltz, jig, reel, and a tune of choice. For my tune of choice, I played "Wedding Evening Kolomeyka". I really picked up the tempo and when I finished; the crowd went crazy. After I left the stage, I was informed that I was the first fiddler in the 27 year history of the competition to play a Kolomeyka or any traditional Ukrainian tune. This really blew me away because there is a fairly rich Ukrainian culture here in western Canada.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

The Diamonds Band plays for club dances. The crowds are mostly made up of seniors. I really enjoy playing for dances as it provides a unique opportunity to share my music. Dances used to be a very popular social event but there are fewer people who are continuing this important culture, tradition, and lifestyle.

What inspires you?

I have done some musical therapy at St Michael's Care facility in Edmonton. Most of the residents there are Ukrainian so they really get excited when they hear a tune from years gone by. However, once I started playing there on a regular basis, people from the dementia ward were brought into the activity room in wheelchairs by the assistants and although they may not be able to communicate verbally, they start tapping their toes, nodding their heads, or looking around if they hear something they recognize. I have enjoyed accompanying St. Basils Sadochuk three and four year old programs for concerts and caroling. They are a bright young light in our Ukrainian community.

How does your art impact the greater community?

Music preserves history, culture, traditions, and is a way of teaching future generations and people of other decents about joys of our past. I have taught at the Mundare Ukrainian music workshop and shared some Ukrainian tunes with other members of the fiddle community. Some of the Ukrainian tunes are now being played at regular fiddle jams.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I happen to be half Ukrainian and celebrate the yearly holidays, attend Ukrainian Catholic Church, participate and volunteer at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, and still work the land on my great grandfather's farms east of Lamont.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Charlie, Debbie, and Peter Gargus, Bruce and Berni Yakoweshen, Joe and Micheal Hycrck, Jimmy and John Wacko, Metro Radomsky, Johnny Kinsawich, Ron Lakusta, Brian Cherwick, Rod Olstad, Ihor Nedoshytko, Wild Rose Fiddlers and Alberta Society of Fiddlers. Fellow band members Craig Repchuk, Rick Chomyn, Chester Chodzicki, and Nestor Worobets. Old Time bands still around, and of course, Baba and Dido.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

It is important to remember all aspects of your heritage. A lot of times, I am exposed to other parts of my culture such as Ukrainian dress, pysanka making, Ukrainian food, dancing, old farming ways, and the camaraderie of getting together without realizing it.

# Borys Tarasenko

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I'm a multidisciplinary artist based out of Edmonton. My main thing is painting, but I also like drawing, graphic design, video, and I've been involved in a number of public art projects around Edmonton.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/ creating.

I was invited by Nextfest to create a mural on the side of the historic Roxy Theatre with fellow painter and illustrator Alex Labarda in 2014. We had a week to finish it, and by the end created something with which we were both happy. It was the first piece of public art installed that had some of my creative input, so I was pretty thrilled.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

I would say the hardest thing is to convince yourself that it's worthwhile. In this age people are receiving a tidal wave of content and information on a daily basis and it's difficult to see your work as important and not just more noise.

What inspires you?

Things come from all directions. A lot of ideas enter your head when you're just out for a walk or sitting in church. There's a lot of great work to see on Instagram and other parts of the internet, but seeing it in real life, whether it's a play or gallery artwork or concert whatever, frequently makes me want to keep creating.

How does your art impact the greater community?

That is tricky to answer and difficult to actually know. I'm grateful for all the feedback I receive, whether it's good or bad, and I think that Edmonton is a genuinely fun place to make art because there's so much here that needs to be done.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I grew up in the Ukrainian Catholic Church, speaking Ukrainian with my family and community, going to Ridna Shkola (Saturday School) and Kursy (Ivan Franko School of Ukrainian Studies), Ukrainian dancing in Barvinok (Calgary) and Verkhovyna (Edmonton), singing with St. George's Church Choir, and volunteering with CYM (the Ukrainian Youth Association). I'm still connected to a lot of these organizations and I cantor for my Church regularly. This past summer I was commissioned by the Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies to produce a Ukrainian-Canadian themed colouring book they could give out during Edmonton's Heritage Festival. I titled it *Cossack Platter* and received a lot of nice feedback and interest surrounding it.

At times it is difficult to engage with certain aspects of my heritage. However, I do feel now that Ukrainian nationalism is not like other forms of nationalism. The people and culture have been in danger for most of history and I feel like Ukrainian pride is about trying to hold on to something that is always trying to be destroyed. I see myself continuing to work in the Ukrainian community, and continuing to work with Ukrainian subject matter.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

I'm a bandit who steals from everyone. I read a lot of comics growing up and I've been surrounded by Byzantine iconography my whole life, which seeps in to my work. My friends who are creating are always influencing me. Specific artists I always come back to include Brad Neely, Jeff Lemire, Richard Diebenkorn, KOOL A.D., Saul Steinberg, Tomi Ungerer, Quentin Blake, Stacey Rozich, Marcel Dzama, and Laurie Anderson.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Just do what you feel like and take care of yourself. Learn how to say no to the things you don't want to do. If you want to do something "crazy" or impractical, do it. Failing won't make you a failure and it's better than living with regret. You won't know what you really want to do unless you try it. If you're feeling stuck, make the sacrifice necessary to become unstuck. Relax. Have fun. Don't take yourself or anyone else too seriously.

# Brett Kissel

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a JUNO and Multiple CCMA Award Winner. The Canadian Press named me the “New King of Country Music,” with back to back wins for Male Artist of the Year. I am one of only a select group of Canadians to ever perform on the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and am the only Canadian to ever tour with country mega-star, Garth Brooks. I grew up on a family cattle farm in north eastern Alberta, but now reside in Nashville, Tennessee with my wife, Cecilia, and our two daughters Mila and Aria.

It is extremely special that I get to make a living, travel the world, and reach people through music. Some of our most defined traits as Canadians come through music and arts, and I'm very proud that I get to pursue my goals and dreams with my voice and a guitar in my hand.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

The first time performing on stage with my all-time hero - Garth Brooks - will be a memory I'll never forget. After years of idolizing him, I finally got the opportunity to collaborate and tour with him. Standing beside your hero, singing “his” song, with “him,” in front of 20,000 screaming fans is something I'll always remember.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Staying current is always difficult in an ever changing market place. Trying to be a trend setter is a challenge while also staying true to your roots. The balance of authenticity and thinking outside the box artistically is a constant teeter-totter for me.

What inspires you?

As a songwriter, I can get inspired by pretty much anything and turn into some kind of lyric or melody. Spending time with my daughters, or date nights with my wife can certainly inspire me. As an entertainer, I am often inspired by the crowds that come to see me play.

How does your art impact the greater community?

Like with all music, we have the ability to make an impact through our words and melodies. Whether we are taking a stance on an important world issue, or we are simply singing and writing a summertime anthem, music can change your mood, change your perspective, and inspire you.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I am very close to my grandparents who have always celebrated our roots and our heritage. Often at family dinners my grandmother, Irene, would prepare traditional Ukrainian dishes, all the while my grandfather, Ron, told stories of the olden days, giving us perspective on how far we've come from our family's humble beginnings. As a child and teenager I Ukrainian danced for over a decade.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

I have so many influences from family members to musical heroes, but my first three, and most important, would have to be my Grandfathers: Lloyd Kissel, Ron Wengzynowski, and my "adopted" Grandfather, Russ Kowtun. All three of these men made me who I am today. Whether they were teaching me lessons, driving me to concerts, taking me on the tractor, or simply just being in the audience to support me, I am who I am because of these gentlemen.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Work hard and be patient. This may seem like an oxymoron, but nothing is more important than hard work and patience, in my opinion.

# Cassian Soltykevych

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

Photography, videography, and graphic design are my creative work. My creative bent has always mixed with the business side of me wherever I go. This means I'm able to show people what I believe is an effective and inspiring way to convey a message - be it a video of a dance group, a corporate headshot, or a poster for a community event. I love that I can visually show something professional (business side) with my interpretation on how it would best look (creative side).

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

Filming various parts of a liturgy being sung by the Ukrainian Male Chorus of Edmonton at St. George's Cathedral in Lviv with my dad conducting. Singing in such a historic place in Ukraine while the parishioners frequently looked to the choir loft to see who was singing was a touching moment.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

When you have more than one contact person for a commission and you have nine suggestions from six people coming your way.

What inspires you?

Those moments in a day where you have a minute to think "wow, this is cool."

How does your art impact the greater community?

More people can see more of the community in a professional light.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

Every day - clients usually have some sort of a Ukrainian connection, I read Ukrainian news, I laugh at Ukrainian jokes and emails to/from people in the organizations I'm involved with. Cranking the TV volume whenever someone on CBC or Global or CTV mentions the word "Ukraine."

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My family and a few close friends in my life. They're the ones who tell me to try something different, that it's ok to fail, and to provide constructive feedback (things look a lot better because of them).

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

"It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something." Couldn't have said it better myself, Roosevelt. Just keep throwing things at the wall and see what sticks. And don't worry, most adults don't have their future paths figured out either.

# Dominika Koziak

Describe your creative work What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

My art focuses on a relationship between contemporary and ancestral culture. My paintings revolve around the classical Byzantine method and style of art.

Ancestral techniques are a key role in my work in order to produce a pure and academic method outside of its artistic canon. For me, returning to historical methods and motifs from thousands of years ago is a thrilling pursuit and addition to my art practice.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

The experience of time escaping you. Being so engrossed while working, a very real time loss happens! You feel as though you just sat down, and when you finally look at your watch you realize “lunch” was five hours ago!

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

As for most artists, the main struggles are time, space and money. It's very easy to create if you have a large budget, which allows you to purchase higher quality materials, and have room to experiment with new methods, or be able to make large scale works. With space, you have an area dedicated to creativeness. If you have both money and space, time allows you to fully focus on your work. My biggest challenge so far has been acquiring and balancing these three struggles.

What inspires you?

Art is always some version of a self portrait of the artist. My art is a reflection of my surroundings, my past, my interests and more. A major influence in my work that is clearly addressed, is the Byzantine influence through stylization, method, and of course, gold. Growing up I attended church twice a week (not including Holy Days!), and this left a large impact on me.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I am not sure if my art impacts the greater community, but it impacted me to be a part of the greater community. Without art I would not work at an art gallery, I would not teach art lessons, and I would not seek out to learn more by attending classes on other art forms. Art for me has developed a curiosity within myself, and a need to participate.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

Within my art, although Byzantine stylization does not specifically represent Ukrainian heritage, it is influenced by my religion, being a Ukrainian Catholic.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Both of my grandmothers were artists, and as a child I loved to copy their paintings and drawings. As any child, when I was finished I would proudly show my mother what I had drawn. I started my first art lesson with a local female artist, who mentored me from seven years old all the way to my first degree in Fine Arts. All these women encouraged me, supported me, and influenced me to become an artist.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

I would encourage you to understand that there are many jobs in the world, and in the art world you don't just have to be an “artist.” You could be an art teacher, a graphic designer, run a gallery, host residencies, paint theatre props, and so much more. I know the “dream” is to be in the studio all day and live off your artwork, but this is “the dream.” I encourage the younger generation to also focus on developing skills to help them use their art and creativity in the everyday world.

# Emily Belke

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a dancer, a dance teacher, drama teacher and theatre producer. It means the world to me to be able to pursue and teach my passion to the next generation. The arts allow people to express themselves in a manner that others can not only appreciate but also connect emotionally with.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

During my first trip to Ukraine, I was privileged enough to learn from Halyna Vantukh, who I have watched and admired for years. She is the doll in Virsky's Doll dance. Every time I was discouraged or in a negative frame of mind I would search up Doll dance and watch her. The first day we were in the studio she grabbed my hand and let me dance with her, I cherish this moment and allow her to inspire me still to this day.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Time and Travelling. The smaller communities have a desire to learn and enjoy the fun of Ukrainian Culture but it is difficult to bring the cultural leaders to them.

What inspires you?

My students, Virsky, Epic Music, and a good story inspires me and my art.

How does your art impact the greater community?

Ukrainian dance is fun! It keeps kids active and interacting with each other face to face. Through dance, I have created many cherished friendships.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Doug Rachinski has been a huge influence in my dancing, he not only got me hooked on Ukrainian Dance but he helped facilitate my love of teaching. I am also heavily influenced by Mykola Kanevets, he has been an amazing mentor to me as I grow as an instructor.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Anything is possible with proper time management. Don't give up on your passions sometimes it seems hard, there's always a way to make it work.

# Ileanna Cheladyn

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I'm a dance artist with interests informed by my studies and research in sociology and anthropology. Working with my body, and with the embodiment of others, my work and my practice explore functionality, expressiveness, presence, and physicality, all within a context of ethical standards and non-neoliberal relationships.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

I remember the time I performed a duet I co-created. We had worked on this duet for over two years; we went to Montreal to work on it, we invited several mentors to work with us, and we were given four different creative residencies to work on it. We had put in so much of our being into that duet that when we finally performed it on a stage, it was sheer bliss. The final 10 minutes of the duet directs focus towards me in the center area of the stage and, essentially, I get to jam out in a structure improvisation that plays with repetition, timing, breaking the fourth wall, and having a dance-party-for-one.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Futility. How am I supposed to believe that my art and my work and my effort has done any good for anyone (other than my parents)? I don't struggle with supporting the work of others but... my work? Sometimes I can't help but to cut myself short or cut myself out because the sensations of total, crippling insecurity are hard to metabolize. Feelings of futility slow me down and shut me down. I struggle with my social location (a white, cisgendered, educated, able, relatively financially secure woman) in my rationalizations of why I make work and what ideas I use to make work. Finally, I struggle with time and the way it slips out between my fingers or moves like the thickest and coldest of molasses.

What inspires you?

Indexing, repetition, natural beauty, artificial beauty, the mud of spring thaws, a glimpse of a naked body through a crack in the door, biopower/biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben, reading, good quality ball-point gel pens in blue or black with 0.4mm tips, high quality journals with blank paper, the process of emptying my bag at the end of every night, the mood I wake up in as a variable for my day and interactions, Frantz Fanon, anatomy books, Susan Sontag, mapping methods, recipe books, grocery shopping, the way my mom's eyes sparkle when she's proud of me, my father's fascination with animal behaviour and his extraordinary encyclopedic knowledge.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I impact the greater community by attending shows of my peers and shows in the institutions that support me. I also have worked for a non-profit organization that built connections between dance-artists and presenters within the province and across the country. I worked as the assistant producer for *Dancing on the Edge*. I provide childcare, I volunteer, and I produce shows out of an alternative performance space co-founded with two other dance-artists.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I connect with my Ukrainian heritage through cooking. And there's no doubt that the physical rigor I put into my work resembles Ukrainian dance principles and foundations of performing, presenting, and moving.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

The people who have influenced my creative practice and pursuits include most of my teachers from childhood to the present. From elementary dance classes that encouraged us to move as we wished, to my Ukrainian dance teachers and choreographers. Then there are all my professors at the University who have convinced me of the validity in merging academics and performance. More than anything, those I surround myself with are my greatest influences.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Tips? Trust the work you're putting in, trust that your rigour and your excitement are enough. Follow your curiosity. Ask for help. It takes time (taking time, and even taking time off is okay). Stay present with an eye towards the future and a memory of the past (the past is what got you here and the future is where your present will take you). You are not doing this alone.

# Joyanne Rudiak

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I work in a multitude of creative areas, including theatre, music, and writing. Within theatre, I focus mostly on musical theatre as an actor, teacher, and voice coach, though my degree actually had more to do with pure theatre. I have performed with the Edmonton Opera, my former Ukrainian trio, Zavtra, and on the streets of Dublin, Ottawa, and Edmonton. Currently, I sing with my long-time friend and colleague, Christina Csernyanski, and you can find us performing at various functions around Edmonton, including at the Byzantine Winter Festival on Alberta Avenue. We also cantor for the Ukrainian Catholic Church. With writing, I have been blogging on and off since 2011, covering such topics as philosophy, travel, and theology. I also work as a youth minister for St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Parish, managing our youth ministry website and monthly newsletter.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

I have to go way back to high school for this one. It was grade 12 and our Drama 30 class put on a production of Anne of Green Gables. I amazingly was cast as Anne, along with another girl in our class. I was very emotional on my final night as Anne. She was a character I really connected with. During the curtain call when it was my turn to enter the stage for my bow, I poked my head around the set piece hiding me. Before me stood our entire company, as well as everyone in the audience, clapping and whooping. That moment of this absolute appreciation for my work was the best feeling in the world, and I knew then and there that I would never get tired of that feeling.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Being creative is my favourite thing in the world, but my inner critic speaks loudly and I constantly have to remind myself to be brave and put my work out there. It's a vulnerable thing, being an artist.

What inspires you?

So many things inspire me! An amazing musical performance, a really good book, trees, Pinterest, little moments between people on the bus... Really, if I find beauty in something, whether that's a BuzzFeed video, our big, Alberta sky, or a quote, then I'll be inspired and want to respond.

How does your art impact the greater community?

There are so many things art can elicit - deep thought, extreme emotion, action - but I hope that my art brings joy to others and offers them a glimpse of hope.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

My connection with my Ukrainian heritage has really morphed as I've grown. When I was younger, I really connected with my heritage through dance and music. I attended every zabava I could find, listened to Ukrainian music, and surrounded myself with friends who shared that passion for our ancestral culture. Now, I find I've moved away from that scene and instead connect with my heritage through my Ukrainian Catholic faith. Through studying theology and spending more of my time exploring our liturgical tradition, I find that whatever connection I have with my Ukrainian heritage is through that lens.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Anything creative that I've wanted to do has been because of people within my family who are creative: I wanted to study Ukrainian dance because of my uncle; I wanted to learn piano because of my Tato; I wanted to be part of a choir because of my Mama; I wanted to be a storyteller because of my Baba.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Just because you decide to do something today, doesn't mean you're stuck doing that one thing forever. Just because you have one dream today doesn't mean that dream won't change; in fact, it probably will, and that's okay. Be open to the opportunities that present themselves to you; you never know if one will change your life and take you on an amazing adventure you never could have imagined.

# Kasia Brytan

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a Stage Manager for theatre in Edmonton, and have worked on shows like Sweeney Todd, William Shakespeare's Henry V, various dance productions across the province, and SVIATO 25: A Celebration of the Anniversary of Ukraine's Declaration of Independence, which took place in Churchill Square in 2016. Knowing that I can make a difference and use my skills to make these shows and important events run smoothly is why I love it.

I'm also an actor in local film, and have been a Casting Director in the past. I am currently in editing for a short film I wrote and produced which is very close to my heart. My beautiful mother moved to heaven after a battle with Breast Cancer two years ago, and the freedom to make this film has really helped me work through all my thoughts and feelings with my new life adjustment. This film is called, *Condolences*.

I am also a company member of the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company, and I can't imagine my life without it!

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

SVIATO 25 required an extraordinary amount of planning. My job as Stage Manager required me to create a system for performers to follow so they were on time, had a place to change/keep their belongings, and made it to the stage in time for their performance. The moment I will never forget is standing backstage watching Ruslana sing *Sheche ne vmerla Ukraina* to a crowd of thousands, and hearing everyone in the square singing along and waving Ukrainian flags; it was overwhelming. Being Ukrainian means so much to me and that moment of everything coming together is one I will never, ever, forget.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

To be perfectly honest, time and money. I find I am able to do less and less acting and stage managing due to less and less funding for projects that are accessible to me. I would love to write and produce more films about topics close to my heart, like grief, bullying, and promoting different cultures, but as a young adult I can only do so much volunteer work without funding.

What inspires you?

First and foremost, my mother. She was my hero and is the reason I continue to chase my passions. I am also inspired by the hardships we are facing, as Ukrainians as well as Canadians. Generally, I like where we are headed as an arts community by challenging stereotypes and discussing more topics that in the past have been ignored. At the end of every show and project, there is this magical moment where everyone feels pride in what they have accomplished, the growth they've seen in themselves, and that moment is always inspiration for me to keep going and start the next project.

How does your art impact the greater community?

On a small scale, I impact all fellow company members on any given production I am working on. I keep everyone on track, feeling safe, and feeling supported so everyone can do their best work for our audiences. I also like to work on shows that send a message for audiences to take away.

With my short film, *Condolences*, I hope it inspires others who have lost someone dear to them to keep going and grasp that it is okay to not understand their own feelings, and that everyone feels something different. I also hope it educates those who have not yet lost someone close to them that grief hits us all in different ways, and the best way to help someone grieving is to just be there for them.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

Besides performing and touring with the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company, I tend to bring as much Ukrainian heritage into my projects as I can.

Last summer I earned the title of Miss Petite Northwest Alberta 2016 and competed in the national beauty competition, Miss Canada Globe Petite, in Toronto. The competition lasted a week and I fully embraced my Ukrainian heritage the entire time. For the talent competition, I performed a Ukrainian dancing solo (thanks to the help of Mykola Kanevets!); for my National Costume, I chose to wear a traditional Hopak costume and spoke about why it is culturally significant to Ukrainians, and also why Ukrainians are significant to Canadian identity; and the rest of the time I spoke of and promoted the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, educating all 100 people at the pageant about Ukraine's past and present, what we, in Canada, are doing to help the current situation, as well as how it affects us. While I did not win the competition, I reached out to many new people across all of Canada from various cultural backgrounds and taught them things about Ukraine they never knew before.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My family is my main influence. I have grown up around arts and Ukrainian culture my entire life. They were the ones who supported my decision to pursue drama in high school and university. And thanks to them, I graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama, specializing in Technical Theatre - Stage Management from the University of Alberta.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

You don't have to decide your future path. If you pursue the things that make you happy and stay open, opportunities will present themselves. If you have a passion, follow it. You may have the same goal as another person, but you will both get there differently. Jealousy will get you nowhere, just focus on yourself and your own achievements! You are amazing, and don't let anyone tell you differently.

# Larissa Pohoreski

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I work as a visual artist, theatre artist (playwright, producer, music director, actor, dancer/performer, designer), musician, vocalist, the list goes on! I am interested in creating works that merge Ukrainian folk influences with contemporary aesthetics.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/ creating.

This past summer, I premiered a new site-specific work in the Mill Creek Ravine in Edmonton. The show, *Before the River*, divided the audience in half and sent them on a 60-minute outdoor adventure, following characters through the trees. The show was experiential, bilingual, and nothing that I had ever worked on or created before. It was extremely well-received and played to full audiences, but one performance stands out in particular. A couple, newly arrived from Ukraine, had attended the show. I was ecstatic because they were my target audience! They told me the show really moved them, was unique and unexpected, and asked me if it would be an annual event (the show was based on Kupalo traditions and folk stories). That one interaction made the entire process worth it. Who knows? Perhaps, *Before the River* will find a way to be remounted this summer?

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

My biggest challenge, is that I have too many interests! I joke that the reason I work in so many different aspects of the arts is because I get bored and cannot stand to focus on just one! I have been questioned about my practices when taking a traditional idea and stretching it into the contemporary. It can be difficult to find the freedom when it comes to sharing aspects of our culture.

What inspires you?

I am inspired by memories and emotions, personal stories. I believe that the personal is universal, and that by sharing an intimate reflection or part of myself I am able to connect with others. I love colour, folk art such as petrykivka, urban street art, movement and music. I love to see what, "makes people tick" and to capture that in any medium I can. I'm also intrigued by folk stories/mythology, language, and the similarities we have to other cultures.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I'm interested in creating art that bridges the gap between Ukrainians and the greater indie-arts community. I'm also interested in forming relationships with other cultures and encouraging people to celebrate and take ownership of their own heritage. I have had a fantastic couple of experiences sharing culture and art with an Indigenous arts group - trading dances, music, stories, and finding commonality between us.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I connect with my Ukrainian heritage daily - through family activities, language, performing with the Viter Ukrainian Dancers and Folk Choir, and through traditions such as writing pysanky. In fact, the majority of my art is influenced by my Ukrainian heritage. Most of my visual art draws motifs from pysanka designs or rozpys and embroidery patterns. My artwork was chosen for the 2016 Hamaliya-inspired Shevchenko bookmark campaign, was featured in the ACUA, *Five Waves of Inspiration* gallery exhibit, and graces CD album covers for the Viter Ukrainian Folk Choir and Ukrainian rock-polka band Zhyto. I recently had a new work featured at Latitude53 in Edmonton as part of the nation-wide Wish150 project, and that piece was also inspired by the Ukrainian-Albertan community experience. I am part of the creative team behind Pyretic Production's upcoming show *Blood of Our Soil*, comparing Russia's involvement in Ukraine today to the Bolshevik's presence in the 1940's, and also created an original painting inspired by this work. Last year I also started up my own theatre company, Mavka, and began production on a one-woman Ukrainian-English bilingual show entitled "Moonshine".

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Growing up, I remember drawing every single day. My mom enrolled me in a painting workshop with Larisa Sembaliuk-Cheladyn. From that first class, she has been a major presence in my life, and continues to be a mentor to me today. I'm also drawn towards groups like the Lemon Bucket Orchestra who aren't afraid to push boundaries and talk about past/present social issues.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Create! Explore! Play! Hold on to your culture, your language and traditions, any aspect of your Ukrainian heritage that you can and use this as a building block towards your own creative practice. Be excited and take risks! You will get push-back from older generations but I encourage you to play and to find your own way to bring our folk heritage into today's world. Culture is incredibly important to individual and group identity, and I am reminded every single day of the beautiful community that I am a part of thanks to my Ukrainian roots. Hold on to that and have fun sharing it with the rest of the world.

# Lianna Makuch

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I'm an Ukrainian Canadian theatre artist, and graduate of the University of Alberta's Bachelor of Fine Arts Acting Program. Since graduating, I have enjoyed a diverse career, as an actor, director, instructor, and artistic producer. I have managed audience outreach and communications for several Edmonton arts festivals. I have the privilege of building the independent theatre company, Pyretic Productions, as an Artistic Associate & Producer from the ground up with two other artistic partners. Throughout the past four years, we have presented a new original play every season, many of which have received nominations and awards from Edmonton's premiere theatre awards ceremony, the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes awards.

Most recently, I have flexed my artistic muscles as a playwright/creator, developing a new Ukrainian Canadian, multi-disciplinary play called *Blood of Our Soil*. This piece depicts the struggles of the Ukrainian people against the atrocities of Stalin to the horrors of Hitler, while drawing disturbing parallels to the current Putin regime.

I am grateful for the institutions that offer me the tools to build my own rewarding career as a self-initiating Ukrainian Canadian artist. Further still, it is an honor to be supported by my community, foundations, and government art bodies for *Blood of Our Soil*, and my other artistic endeavors.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

I can safely say that the creation and research process for *Blood of Our Soil* has been profoundly rewarding.

In October 2017, I travelled to Ukraine to research the production.

To choose one experience from this trip is difficult. One which stands out was the experience of digging through the overgrown graveyard of my paternal grandfather's village of Piddubtsi, and finding the gravestones of my direct relations, including my great-grandparents and others who share my last name.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

My greatest challenge to support my artistic goals is obtaining funding required for creating and presenting meaningful work. Gambling financially annually, and relying on project/foundation funding every season is my biggest obstacle to my career as an independent artist.

What inspires you?

The magic of theatre is what is most inspiring to me in my creative pursuits. I believe the theatre can touch and affect people by creating an empathetic experience only possible by the immediate experience of a live performance. That, to me, is true magic.

The opportunity to create work that I believe is important is inspiring to me. It is important to have a voice in my community, and to be creating work that I believe inspires change. And the belief that the performing arts can be a powerful medium—not only to enlighten and influence—but to advocate on behalf of community goals and bolster others in that same pursuit, is incredibly inspiring to me as I continue to create.

How does your art impact the greater community?

In my artistic pursuits, it is not enough for theatre to be “entertainment.”

My work with Pyretic Productions contributes to community development and sustainability by presenting real-life portrayals which have impact and far-reach and thus lend increased relevance and validity within society-at-large. For example, following her viewing of the play-in-progress, Minister of Parliament Linda Duncan lauded the efforts of Pyretic Productions in the House of Commons in March, 2017. She praised the company for bringing to public attention the suffering of the Ukrainian people through the Stalinist atrocities of the Holodomor in the 1930s; the horrors of Hitler's Nazism during the second World War; and the continuing Russian aggressions driven by Putin in Eastern Ukraine.

My other major artistic project, Spark! Youth Camp, is a two-week day camp for youth ages 7-14 in the Alberta Avenue community. In the neighbourhood, Spark! is the only program of its kind. It brings together students diverse in age, culture, and economic backgrounds to build community through theatre and the arts. I have observed how theatre can guide potentially destructive habits into positive, creative expression.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

As a Ukrainian Canadian and a theatre artist, I believe it is my duty to use my chosen medium and my personal voice to bring the realities of my ancestral land to the forefront. For so many Ukrainian Canadians from several waves of immigration, including my own family, Ukraine is not the “old country;” it is still “home.” With *Blood of Our Soil*, I hope to provide an opportunity for audiences of all backgrounds to convene, learn, empathize and heal.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My family has been instrumental in supporting my artistic pursuits, both indirectly and directly.

*Blood of Our Soil* is inspired by the true accounts of my grandmothers, both of whom were born in Ukraine in the 1920s and immigrated to Canada after the second World War. They, together with my parents, raised me with a strong consciousness of my heritage.

Also influential in my development as a creator, during my acting training I had the unique opportunity to work as the performer apprentice with renowned Canadian clown-duo, Mump & Smoot and their original creation, *Mump & Smoot CRACKED*. Their artistic form turns every convention about clowns upside down in a series of darkly humorous shows that range from the zany to the macabre. The opportunity to witness their creative process first-hand was profoundly influential in my development as a theatre artist.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Whatever path you choose in life, recognize the value and the power of your individual voice.

Your individual creativity is an expression of who you are at their deepest self. Your creative identity is the key to personal empowerment, enlightenment and happiness. Don't be afraid to pursue a passion.

# Michael V. Sulyma

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

Being able to pursue Ukrainian dance and theatre in general, means everything to me; it is a main part of my identity and I am so proud of it. During my time in high school, where I expanded my technical training for the performing arts in musical theatre, contemporary dance, modern dance and many other styles, I was always identified as “the Ukrainian dancer.” I believe that Ukrainian dance is a foundation for who I am as a person. My development in other areas of performing arts has enhanced that foundation of Ukrainian dance. The performing arts have been a part of my whole life and I want to continue to share Ukrainian dance and theatre for many years to come.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

There are so many moments that I cherish. One that stands out in particular is performing at the Bloor West Village Toronto Ukrainian Festival. Shumka performed its Classic Hopak in front of at least 1500, if not 2000 people, filling the outdoor venue on Bloor Street. The applause from the crowd after Hopak was deafening and something that I have never experienced before. That moment filled me up with so much pride and love for being a Ukrainian dancer; it defined that Ukrainian dancing “душа” for me.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

I believe that performing arts should never be static in terms of its development. I think the biggest challenge for me as a performing artist is how to create work that is relevant, makes a connection, and how I can affect an audience, even if it is one person. Dance is a process and you never reach a “finish line” or “end product,” you want to keep creating so that you can make that connection with the audience. That is the thing I love about theatre. Every moment on stage is unique.

What inspires you?

The people around me: my dad, sister, fellow dancers and collaborators. They all share the same love of Ukrainian dance and theatre as I do. They motivate me to do better and to continue to pursue being a part of the magic that is the performing arts.

How does your art impact the greater community?

What I love about Ukrainian dance and the performing arts is that it is not one person who makes an impact on the greater community; it is a community of artists that impact the greater community. I think being a Ukrainian dancer shows the greater community how vibrant and dynamic Ukrainian culture is. Being able to share this rich culture through dance and story-theatre, is a unique and accessible way for people to interact.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I connect with it through dance. That is one of the reasons why Ukrainian dance is so dear to me it connects me with my family and with a community that is so amazing to interact and collaborate with. As a fourth generation Ukrainian Canadian, dance was always a part of our family, even though our use of the language was sparse, but Ukrainian dance and the ability to connect both in Ukraine and around the world with this art form keeps me steeped in the ability to communicate my story.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

There are so many people that have influenced my artistic pursuits. My dad. He got me involved with Ukrainian dancing and the performing arts at a young age and has supported me through every aspect of my artistic career giving me guidance, opportunities, and most importantly, love. Another would be Linette Smith; she is the department head of the performing arts at Strathcona High School and has been my teacher/director through my high school performing arts experience. Without her, I would not be the same artist I am today. And then there is Jordan Mah, a former Shumka dancer and Strathcona alumnist. He is my role model not only as an artist, but as a person, too.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Dream big and love what you do. Allow yourself the flexibility to let each moment of your life help shape your path towards those big dreams. Your path is unique but if you love what you do and love the people who are on this journey with you, your path will lead you to where you want to be.

# Michael Wowk

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I have been Ukrainian dancing almost my entire life, starting in the youngest group at the Verkhovyna Dance School. Once I turned 16 years old I became a member of the semi-professional adult group Dunai under the Verkhovyna Ensemble.

In the last two years I have joined the Verkhovyna Choir. I was never a particularly good singer, but the love of Ukrainian folk music drove me towards joining. Since then I have improved my singing skills immensely and am very glad I joined when I did.

As a first generation Ukrainian Canadian engaging in Ukrainian dancing and singing has been a great way to keep in contact with my roots. Participating in the arts allows me to momentarily step away from my day to day work and indulge in my creative/artistic side.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

We had just finished a show in Argentina as part of Verkhovyna's Tour in 2014. The local dance group had setup a party for us at one of the local Ukrainian community halls. We arrived and there were over a hundred people greeting us with food and drink. At the beginning of the night we were all strangers but by the end of the night we had all become close friends. I will never forget how many similarities and how much in common we had as Canadian Ukrainians with the Ukrainian Argentinians. Initially, we thought it would be very difficult to communicate, but then we realized we all spoke a common language... Ukrainian.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

As an engineer, I primarily use the left side of my brain and my job can be focused on solving science and mathematical issues. It can be a challenge to alter my thinking in order to think more creatively.

What inspires you?

Bringing Ukrainians together through dance, song, and sport. Seeing the Ukrainian community in Edmonton thrive and continue to get stronger; also seeing that the Ukrainian language, religion, songs, dance steps live on for many generations to come.

How does your art impact the greater community?

As part of the performing group the biggest impact is sharing the song and dance not only with other Ukrainians but individuals who have never seen or heard Ukrainian song and dance. The Verkhovyna ensemble not only performs at various events but also organizes events throughout the years that brings together Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I connect to Ukrainian heritage through song and dance, I attend a Ukrainian church, belong to the Ukrainian Youth Association, and am a member of the League of Ukrainian Canadians. In the last three years, I have also spearheaded and established the Ukraine Athletic Sport Club in Edmonton.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Past dance instructors, my parents, and grandparents have had the biggest impact on my artistic pursuits. Seeing the effort they have put into raising me and immersing me in the Ukrainian culture has influenced me. From them, I have learned the importance and the value of fostering Ukrainian culture.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Strongly pursue the things that challenge you. Don't be afraid of trying different things and that when you try something new, know that you will most likely struggle with it at first and may not be good at them, but with enough effort and time you can only improve and get better.

# Murray Steele

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I currently dance for the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers. I also am an instructor at the Ardrossan Yatran Ukrainian Dance School. With these opportunities I am able to pass on my passion and knowledge for Ukrainian dance to my students, audience members, and other dancers within Shumka. This gives me great pride and satisfaction knowing that I have the potential to positively influence others through something I love.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

One of my students at Ardrossan Yatran began to cry when her mom was trying to convince her to play in her ringette playoff game rather than come to dance class on the same night! It made me realize that I am achieving my goal of spreading my strong passion for Ukrainian dance to the next generation.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

The biggest challenge I face is finding original or uncommon Ukrainian dance music to choreograph. Even with many different resources, it is not uncommon to hear the same rendition of a musical piece during a Ukrainian dance festival. My desire is to provide my students with music that is fun to dance and acquire music nobody else has. I have turned to collecting a vast array of vintage records and converting them to digital copies!

What inspires you?

I am inspired by the kids I have in dance class and they look forward to class all week. They are excited and then I get excited and we all try really hard. The kids make my role as their instructor very easy and their passion for Ukrainian dance is contagious. As time goes on, my inspiration has changed. My drive now revolves around passing on what I know about dance. I still love to dance but the new dancers' hunger for knowledge and my desire to contribute to Shumka's goals is what brings me back to rehearsals.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I believe that I am a front line advocate of Ukrainian dance. As a Shumka dancer I am grateful to be an active part of demonstrating the vision Shumka has as a dance company. As a dance instructor I feel that I am providing an outlet for youth to keep in touch with their Ukrainian culture, stay active, develop friendships, and have fun.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

My dad's parents moved from Scotland after WWII and my mom's parents moved from Ukraine at the beginning of the 1920's. Because of my upbringing, I happen to be more in tune with my Ukrainian Heritage than my Scottish heritage. As a Canadian-Ukrainian I enjoy keeping updated with current events in Ukraine, teaching and participating in Ukrainian dance, and attending Ukrainian social events. I am also working on reading and speaking Ukrainian better, but that is more of a long-term goal.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

There are so many individuals who have influenced me as a dancer and dance instructor. I will mention my first dance instructor, Doug Rachinski. He has been my mentor in the dance world for the past 24 years. He trained me as a dancer as well as a dance instructor and taught me to never settle for anything less than perfection in the dance studio. His passion for Ukrainian dance has made me just as passionate. I would not be where I am today without Doug Rachinski.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Be passionate about something! It is easy to feel lost or discouraged when searching for our role in this world. Your passions, your interests, and your occupations will change as life goes on but as long as you are passionate about something, it will serve you as a constant in your life.

# Myroslava Oksentiuk

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I have been involved with Ukrainian Folk Arts and culture for a long time. Currently, I teach workshops in traditional Motanky Dolls, Vytananky Paper Cutting, Petrekivskyi Painting and other authentic crafts.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

It means a lot to me because it provides me the opportunity to better understand my culture and connect me with my ancestors and perhaps understand who I am - a Ukrainian!

That's why I started to teach and share my craft and knowledge with others so that we could continue the tradition and return what was lost during the Soviet Period.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

While I was studying design I came to understand one thing: there are so many modern technologies and ideas but people started to forget the culture and traditions that were centuries old. That's when I decided not to create anything new - but rather understand what already exists. Because every culture, especially Ukrainian, already has a depth of understanding of the unity of colours, harmony and ornaments. This is already the best and ideal traditional design.

What inspires you?

The biggest challenge of my art is simply that many people don't know what is authentic Ukrainian Folk Art. It's actually more diverse than people realize. Therefore, it has become my mission to study it and bring it back to the community and share information about our traditions while we can still find our roots!

How does your art impact the greater community?

My biggest inspiration are people that work with traditional types of art in Ukraine including Hutsuls and other craftsmen from different regions of Ukraine because it is very old art and it keeps the "code" of our people. All the answers of how people make connections with spirituality and nature are found in traditional art and it is a legacy that we need to keep and study!

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I hope that my interests and research will help many people, especially in the diaspora to understand more deeply how things were in the past, how to create and what it means in order to stay connected to our roots.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

I came from Ukraine several years ago and was always curious about traditional Ukrainian arts, music and culture. I always took part in different folklore events in Kyiv and sang with the folk group Rozhanytsia where we researched music, rituals and traditions along with dances. I worked at the Honchar Museum and conducted workshops and excursions in the Kozak Village of Mamayeva Sloboda.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Pay attention to who you are and where you came from because every culture and every tradition is unique just like each of you.

# Namisha Hlus

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I dabble in a few different art forms but singing is the most important to me and the one I enjoy the most. It means the world to me that I have been given a gift from God that I am able to share with others. Even though I do not pursue it full time, I use my gift whenever I get the chance.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

One morning a few years ago, I was singing at a funeral and a woman came up to me and told me how she enjoyed me singing the service and how it brought her comfort. She proceeded to tell me that this wasn't the first time she has heard me sing. As we kept talking she mentioned to me that she had added me as a cantor in her funeral arrangements. I was totally humbled, I didn't know what to say to her...I will always remember that.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

You really need to look after yourself and your health. Your voice is your instrument and if you get sick and have a performance "the show must go on." You have to do anything and everything you can to get better.

What inspires you?

Every time I see someone pursuing their dream full-time there is a drive within me that knows I could do it too and it pushes me to find every opportunity to take the next step in my journey.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I do it through the art of Ukrainian song and culture and try to keep it alive. An example being cantoring in the church, not many people do this anymore and it is important to me to be able to share the beauty of our Ukrainian services.

I prefer to sing in Ukrainian, which in of itself has the greatest impact on the greater community. It leaves people with a fuller appreciation of this Ukrainian art form.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I'm very active in the Ukrainian community and in many different ways. I sing a lot within my church community: Weddings, funerals, baptisms, Sunday services in the choir of my home parish and out at some of the country parishes. I have been invited to guest conduct several choirs in the community and I sing in many of them. I have started to make some solo performances.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

There are so many people who have influenced my singing. This starts with my teachers Pani Danchuk and Pani Fialka for not only letting me join the St. Matthew's Elementary School Choir early but also allowing me to sing descants and higher parts before I was in Grade four. Elizabeth Anderson set me up with my first voice lesson when I was in Grade seven with two classical singers from Switzerland. Melanie Turgeon introduced me to the King's University. This is where I started getting formal training in a Bachelor of Music in voice performance, singing with the Chamber Choir and choral conducting. It was here that I really realized the gift I was given. Training with Melanie, Merla Aikman and Jihwan Cho gave me the technique and knowledge to apply all that I learned to what I am doing today. There were and are so many others who support and encourage me to never give up my passion, the most important being my family.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Follow your dreams. I know it's cliché but if you follow your passion and you love what you do, you will be successful.

# Olesia Markevych

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I have been in Ukrainian dance since age 10. I have been a member of the Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble since 2004. Dance is something that has allowed me to share my love for Ukrainian culture. Being able to dance gives me a physical and emotional release, and allows me to forget about the stresses of the day. It is something that helped me survive the stresses of medical school, and allowed me to stay centred when things could otherwise have been overwhelming. Having the opportunity to be part of Alberta's especially vibrant Ukrainian dance community is something very unique and special. I feel so lucky to be a part of it, as even this depth and diversity of the Ukrainian dance community does not exist anywhere else in the world.

I have been a member of the Plast Ukrainian Youth Association for as long as I can remember. Through them I have learned literally hundreds of Ukrainian folk songs as well as many other aspects of Ukrainian history and culture.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

I remember my very first international trip with Volya. We were in Italy in 2005. We performed on Den' Nezalezhnosti at this beautiful Italian palace. It was a wonderful night that did not end after we finished dancing, as we were greeted by so many Ukrainians who came just to see us dance. We were the first connection back to Ukraine that they had had since leaving home to work in another country. It meant so much to them to have seen us dance, and the emotion from them really touched me.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Ukrainian dance is a part-time pursuit. It is done for enjoyment. There is no career in Ukrainian dance unless you want to teach. It is sometimes hard to find the time to commit, both to attend rehearsals regularly, as well as to put in the work outside of that, going to shows, workshops, promoting, etc.

What inspires you?

I love connecting with people. Having that opportunity through something I love to do is so special and hard to explain. Bringing out emotion in others through dance or seeing the joy in the learning of a new song makes it all worth it.

How does your art impact the greater community?

Our Ukrainian culture is passed on not just from our families, but from the wider community. It is a wonderful opportunity to teach others about who we are. Ukrainian dance has become almost mainstream in Alberta. Most people recognize what it is, and it is a form of cultural entertainment that anyone can enjoy. That has only come about because of the huge tradition of Ukrainian dance in Alberta, and that has made it part of not just the Ukrainian community, but the whole Alberta community.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

My parents immersed me in the community at a young age. The cultural traditions from holidays and celebrations are just as much a part of my life as anything else. I speak the language. I know about my family's history and how they came to Canada. I belong or have belonged to many different Ukrainian groups and organizations. These things are an important part of my identity.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Mostly other people who love what they do. A former nanny and Joyce Sirski-Howell who taught me to embroider. My parents who love to sing. Zhenia Bahri, Volya's artistic director.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

You don't always have to know exactly what you want to do or where you want to be. It is important that you enjoy what you are doing. If you do what you love, you will find a way to incorporate it into your future, even if you don't know exactly how to do it yet.

# Rebecca Kassian

## *Posthumous Award*

Describe Becky's creative work. What did it mean to her to be able to pursue her creative arts?

Becky was a Ukrainian Dancer, starting at the age of four with the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club until the age of 18, for a total of 14 years, and she volunteered teaching the younger groups with this club for five years. Becky also danced an Alumni duet in 2013 for the club's 40th anniversary and taught the adult group in Thorhild, where her mother was a participant. Becky danced briefly with the Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble in 2010-2011 before finding her home with the Vohon Ukrainian Dance Ensemble where she danced from 2011 until her passing.

Ukrainian Dance was an integral part of Becky's life. She showed more heart for the love of dance than anyone else we knew. She strived to be the best by working as hard as she could. After becoming involved with Vohon, Becky embraced this ensemble with her whole heart getting immediately involved with the Society Board as a director at large and most recently treasurer for four years and living her dream of dancing and travelling around the world to share that love of dance in Thailand & Malaysia in the summer of 2012, Brazil, Argentina, & Paraguay in the summer of 2015, western Canada stops in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Dauphin's National Ukrainian Dance Festival in 2016, Toronto's Bloor Festival in 2016 and locally at Edmonton School of Ukrainian Dance year end and Christmas shows, weddings, anniversaries, Edmonton Eskimos games, local cultural festivals and shows including the Vegreville Pysanka Festival.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment she experienced while performing/creating.

The first Vohon show at the Jubilee Auditorium in February 2013 was undoubtedly one of Becky's most cherished moments performing. She sat and talked to her sister Sarah for hours about what it felt like to see the seats, perform tech and know that in a few days/hours she would be able to perform to a 'packed house' and spin your heart out during an unforgettable Hopak! She was so incredibly excited. It was an incredible feeling to hit absolutely every turn, take the Vohon energy and leave absolutely everything out on that stage - an unforgettable moment to every dancer.

Equal to that moment was being able to play the feature role of Baba Yaga in Vohon's 2015 production of Kolektsiya. She embraced that role and looked to all of her Vohon family to grow into the role and continued to improve with every practice.

What is the biggest challenge she faced with her art?

The mind and spirit may be willing but the body begins to face challenges when dancing. Becky had physical challenges that many Ukrainian Dancers eventually face and that is to endure some type of injury. That did not stop her, she would faithfully attend rehearsals when unable to dance and took steps to rectify her injuries through surgery. Her dream was to continue to travel and dance and nothing was going to stop that dream. Even when injury struck, she was on the sidelines at every practice.

What inspired her?

Becky's inspiration to dance stemmed from a very strong Ukrainian background through her grandparents and parents, family traditions and watching her mom and sister dance.

She also looked to her dance instructors right from the beginning who pushed her to be the best dancer she could and that showed right to the end. She strived to be better at everything, a spin with the perfect spot, a combination to get the timing perfect, or just a simple transition into a different spot on stage.

How did her art impact the greater community?

As our communities become more global, it is important to share of ourselves to honour, preserve and celebrate our heritage. Becky embraced that philosophy in two ways: by sharing her love for our Ukrainian heritage and traditions by teaching with the Edmonton School of Ukrainian Dance for three years as well as other short term teaching opportunities in her home town of Thorhild. She also shared her passion for Ukrainian Dance by continuing to learn and perform and tour with the Vohon Ukrainian Dance Ensemble.

How did she connect with your Ukrainian heritage?

Family

Ukrainian traditions are very important to our family—celebrating all the holidays together such as Christmas, Easter, and all the Ukrainian traditions that come with those, wedding celebrations, and other feast days and religious traditions. Becky was the pyrohy

princess in the family, learning to make pyrohy at a very young age and then perfecting her own pyrohy dough recipe from her Baba Kassian. She was passionate about making them right. Becky would make and sell pyrohy to fundraise for her touring with Vohon - gathering both of her Baba's to help for several pyrohy pinching bees where many dozen were prepared in a day.

#### Faith

Becky was also very spiritual and sang with her mom in the home church parish choir whenever she was home at the farm for the weekend.

Although Becky did not take formal Ukrainian language lessons, she learned to sing the Divine Liturgy in Ukrainian and learned many Christmas carols in Ukrainian.

#### Dance

Becky truly expressed her love for her heritage through Ukrainian dance—her favourite form of artistic expression. She learned about all the regions of Ukraine and much Ukrainian history and heritage through her years of Ukrainian dance as a youth when attending various summer Ukrainian Dance camps.

#### Who influenced her artistic pursuits?

Besides her family that inspired her, Becky was influenced strongly by the many artistic directors that encouraged her love of Ukrainian dance over the years. Of all the artistic influences in her life, Becky was most influenced by Trish Kushniruk who was her dance teacher in the Thorhild Ukrainian Dance Club for several years and called on Becky in early 2011 to come to Vohon, after she moved to Edmonton to pursue post-secondary education in the fall of 2010.

# Stephan Bociurkiw

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I have been involved in Ukrainian dance for most of my life, I am currently in my 14th season in the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company. I am proud to have the ability to be a cultural ambassador by preserving and showcasing my culture through art.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/ creating.

My most unforgettable moment was touring Ukraine in 2010 and visiting the Virsky studio in Kyiv. Virsky surprised us with an entire half of a performance with a live orchestra. Seeing the dances that I have watched a hundred times on YouTube and some that I have danced myself, being performed to the highest level possible right in front my eyes, was one of the most incredible moments of my life.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

The biggest challenge is to manage the time commitment that is required to practice the art of dance. Eight hours of rehearsals per week, plus performances can be a challenge to balance with my career and personal life.

What inspires you?

In both dance and my professional career, I'm inspired by the challenge and the opportunity in making a difference and impact in the organizations I am involved in. Dance inspires me to be creative, which significantly influences and benefits my marketing career.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I have been able to make the greatest impact in the community by being involved as a volunteer on the Ukrainian Cheremosh Society board and helping it achieve its vision of being unique, vibrant, and a recognizable Edmonton-based dance organization that continues to play an integral part in preserving Ukrainian culture. Through serving on the board, I have been able to make an impact in the organization by significantly improving its marketing and communications and growing the school of dance by over 400%.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

Ukrainian dance connects directly with my heritage by preserving traditional Ukrainian dances and adapting them for stage. I also connect with my heritage outside of dance by speaking Ukrainian and being involved in other organization such as Plast (Scout organization).

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My mother, a professional portrait and graphic artist, encouraged me to pursue art from an early age. Cheremosh Artistic Director, Mykola Kanevets' passion for Ukrainian Dance has also influenced me to continue pursuing this art form.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

I strongly encourage you to not only pursue the arts, but to use your artistic talent to give back to the community. This will not only benefit the community but will benefit you in your professional and personal lives.

# Stephania Romaniuk

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a singer, music educator, and writer. I sing in the classical, Bel Canto tradition, with frequent ventures into Ukrainian popular styles. I teach voice and musicianship, am a Resident Artist with the Calgary Board of Education, and have taught music for Ukrainian organizations and at summer camps. I was artistic director for large-scale musical-theatrical concerts in the Ukrainian community. I also work as a freelance copywriter for arts organizations including the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

In 2015, I was invited to participate in *Незбуття Квітка* one of several concerts dedicated to Kvitka Cisyk. This one was taking place in the Odesa Opera House. I was the only diaspora singer involved, and was going to be singing *Журавли* a cappella.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Apathy, complacency and moral relativism, which I believe are surely doing as much damage to art and culture as they are to basic human interaction.

If you make music, you abide, whether consciously or unconsciously, by certain values. I believe so much can be gained from studying and knowing the values and sounds that the great singers of Bel Canto gave us.

What inspires you?

In terms of Ukrainian folk and popular music, my first and still greatest inspiration is Alexis Kochan and Paris to Kyiv. Before that, it was the older girls singing at tabir by the lake for Ivano Kupalo. More recently, I've come to love Renata Bogdanska, the finest interpreter of Bohdan Wesolowsky's music.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I am always practicing, always striving to improve. I still take lessons regularly. I hope that for audiences, that means that my work and preparation will allow them to love the music they hear. That it will bring them comfort, or stir their imagination, or simply that they will enjoy an evening walking with the great composers and poets.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

My Ukrainian heritage is very important to me. I can't imagine life without it.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

Many people have made a significant impact on my life, but one of my greatest influences has been my current voice teacher. With her poetic yet disciplined approach, she opened for me the world of Bel Canto, the great singers of the past, and the nobility and depth of the classical music tradition. She taught me to rely on the bedrock of this "old school" technique, to hone one's kinesthetic-aural awareness ("hear-feeling"), the notion of ethics in music, and that making music is an act of generosity and love, in tribute to the composer and humanity.

My рідна школа teacher in Calgary, Hanyá Jakymiw, is also a great inspiration. I think of her particularly when I work with children in performance.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

There must be a sweet spot where your interests, natural gifts and abilities, training, and what your body can handle, all meet together. There is also that consideration of finances - which lifestyle you envision for yourself and your family.

Begin with what naturally sparks your imagination. Then, see where your natural abilities lie: are there certain things that seem to come naturally to you? That, even from the beginning, you have an intuitive sense for? This is the second clue. From there - and, I believe this is the most important step - you need to find the right training. You need to surround yourself with the very best teachers, mentors, and peer group.

# Stephanie Bahniuk

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a set, lighting and costume designer for theatre. I have worked on a variety of productions from independent theatre to musicals to commercial theatre. I often design all three elements for one show or just one of the elements. I am currently working towards my MFA in Theatre Design (Costume Design Major) at Yale School of Drama.

Everyday, I am being challenged in new and different ways. With every project, I get to work with new collaborators who all bring creative energy and ideas and I get to research new time periods or historical backgrounds or pop culture. It also means that I get to share my own ideas with the public and contribute to a collective collaboration.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

During my time at Williamstown, I had the opportunity to design the costumes for a production of *Mad Forest* in the Small Black Box theatre. Broadway costume designer Michael Krass was in town designing one of the main stage shows and he took the time to see my production. After the show, he sat down with me and gave me his thoughts and advice. It meant so much to me that he would take the time to contribute to my development and education.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Working as a freelance artist makes for an incredibly hectic life. I am constantly balancing multiple projects that are at various stages of the process and it is just part of making a living in this field. With experience, I have become better at managing this but this career is really my life. It isn't a job I ever get to step away from.

What inspires you?

The team I am working with on each project is usually my main source of inspiration. One of the things I love about theatre is how collaborative it is. Being in a room with a group of talented artists who all have their own perspective on a text really inspires me and pushes me to be more creative.

How does your art impact the greater community?

Theatre reaches an extremely large range of audience. Depending on the production, it could attract many different groups in the community at the same time. It is live, honest and real storytelling that is so much more dynamic than TV or movies. I welcome the challenge of developing a unique world that will draw an audience in and make them believe with every production I design.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

My Ukrainian heritage has influenced my artistic career since I was three years old. My parents registered me for a Ukrainian dance class and I knew I wanted to be in theatre ever since. I spent seven years as a dancer with the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers and toured internationally and across Canada. Many of my years with Shumka were while I was pursuing my undergraduate education and I think these things influenced each other and helped me to become a better and more well-rounded artist. After I retired from Shumka, I continued to work with the company as a design consultant and designer the set for their new production of *Kobzar*. I feel the most connected to my own work when I can use theatre to tell the stories of our heritage. I am currently working on developing a piece with Pyretic Productions called *Blood of Our Soil*. The multidisciplinary performance combines folk dance, music and video projection to tell the story of this woman and address the current conflict in Ukraine. I did the production design for the workshop production and I will be expanding the set and costume design for the full-length piece which will premiere in March. I feel so passionate about creating the world that this play exists within and help this extremely important and powerful story.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

I don't think I would be in my current path without my high school drama teacher, Dustin Maloney. He saw something in me that I didn't know existed when he assigned me the role of costume designer for a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in Grade 11. I fell in love with the craft and have never looked back.

I was incredibly lucky to spend three summers in the costume shop at Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts. I had the opportunity to work with some amazing designers including Jane Greenwood, Jessica Pabst, Lydia Fine and Gregory Gale. Each of these artists gave me a new and exciting perspective on costume design and inspired me to continue to pursue bigger and better things in the field. I also have to give credit to the Costume Shop Manager, Benjamin Zawacki, who took a chance on me as a young student with almost no experience and continued to give me unbelievable opportunities when I began working at Williamstown.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Focus on what makes you happy and then explore the options that will allow you to make that a career. I always loved visual art and performing and I was able to combine those two things into my dream job.

# Tamara Soltykevych

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

My creative work is writing. I write mostly fiction but recently have been trying out some more creative non-fiction pieces. Because I work in a technical role all day - I am a civil engineer by day - I feel it's very important to exercise the other part of my brain. To be able to have a creative outlet is rewarding and helps me feel balanced.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

Last year, I took a creative writing course with the City of Edmonton over a three month period. I will never forget how others shared their struggles with writing and the moment I realized that others are facing very similar challenges as I am. It was inspiring to meet other writers, support one another in our work, and talk about our dreams.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

I find it hard to stay motivated after submitting my work to so many different publishing outlets and receiving multiple rejection letters for work I poured a lot of heart into over and over again.

What inspires you?

Often reading the work of authors I admire inspires me to keep trying - I'd like to get my work to sound as good as theirs one day. My family supports me in my writing and this also helps me keep motivated.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I hope that readers of my work are taken on a journey that they enjoy and that they're left wanting more when it ends. With my creative non-fiction, I try to create pieces that are interesting to read but at the same time lend support to readers so they know they're not alone in facing certain experiences.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I've been involved with the Ukrainian community most of my life. Ukrainian was my first language, and my parents didn't let us speak English at home. They also ensured that my brothers and I were exposed to many Ukrainian traditions. I am thankful that they cultivated such a rich Ukrainian environment for us - not everyone is so lucky. I attended Plast (Ukrainian Scouts) as a child and participated on the Ukrainian Students' Society Executive during my university years. I took Ukrainian dance as soon as I could walk and continued dancing until my retirement from the Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble last year. Now I am a member of the Verkhovyna Choir which keeps me connected to the community.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

My Grade six teacher who told me she believed I would write a book one day. My high school English teacher who was simply incredibly supportive of me with my writing. My dance instructor from whom I learned that I had to work, work, work to get better - nothing would just get handed to me - and helped me build a thicker skin as a result. My dad who works harder than any person I know because he loves what he does. My mom because of how much pride she takes in being Ukrainian. My favourite authors: Ken Follett, J.K. Rowling, Stuart McLean - to name a few!

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Take some time to travel while you're young, because it opens your mind as nothing else can, and helps you learn about yourself. It's ok to change your mind, to make mistakes, to fail. Just keep trying, because then you'll keep growing.

# Tanya Chumak

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

My creative work is a professional ballet dancer with Alberta Ballet. I rehearse and perform in various productions throughout the year. It is incredibly meaningful for me to be able to pursue my art as a career, but it can also be very challenging to achieve success and to dance at a professional level. I am grateful for the success that I've had and for my years of hard work paying off. It has always been my dream to dance with Alberta Ballet since I was very young. Achieving that goal and continuing to overcome challenges and milestones have made me the artist I am today. To be able to pursue my passion and be successful as a ballerina has been a dream come true.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

Every performance I have onstage is unforgettable in its own way. No performance is ever the same and the adrenaline and feeling of dancing in front of an audience is truly unique. The performances that stand out the most to me are ones with a strong storyline. If you can find a way to resonate with a character or story you are portraying, the performance becomes more meaningful and those are the moments you won't forget.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

The biggest challenge I face with my art is constant improvement. There is always room for perfection and growth. It is also important to maintain a clear concentration and focus and to push yourself beyond your limits in every rehearsal and performance.

What inspires you?

There are two things that inspire me. My peers and fellow dancers inspire me on a regular basis. It is wonderful to see such talented dancers everyday and to be able to learn from them. The other thing that inspires me are young children hoping to have a career in dance one day. They remind me every day of how fortunate I am to be able to pursue my career as a ballerina.

How does your art impact the greater community?

Ballet brings culture, entertainment, emotion and tradition to the greater community. Anyone can go see the ballet and experience a variety of emotional responses. Being such a classical art form, it also brings culture and education because many of the ballets are timeless classics. I also teach many students in the dance community. As an instructor and dancer I feel that it is important to pass on my experience and knowledge and impact future dancers in a positive way.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I have always had a strong connection and involvement with my Ukrainian community. I've attended Ukrainian preschool (Sadochok) as well as Ukrainian School. I am a member of Plast, a Ukrainian youth organization. I have also been a counsellor at Plast summer camps as well as throughout the year. I enjoyed Ukrainian dancing at the Tryzub School of Ukrainian Dance as well as Junior Tryzub. I have also danced at events in the Ukrainian community. I am very grateful for my Ukrainian heritage and my connection to the Ukrainian community.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

When I was training at the School of Alberta Ballet, my teachers helped me build a strong base of technique and supported me in following a career in ballet. Now that I am in a professional company my directors and artistic staff have pushed me to continuously strive for excellence. They are constantly pushing me to grow as a dancer and give me the confidence to succeed.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

You should always do what makes you happy. If there is something you are truly passionate about then you should absolutely pursue it. Life is too short to wonder about what could have been so never put a limit on yourself.

# Tanya Pacholok

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I feel very fortunate to be able to pursue creative works as a young, Ukrainian woman involved in a range of theatre, drama, dance and music. It is incredibly meaningful for me as an artistic outlet, as a means to engage in conversation, spark social change and express my identity. I have been involved in a variety of socially relevant theatre projects from an Anti-Bullying tour around Calgary/Edmonton, the workshop production of "Blood of Our Soil" about the political turmoil in Ukraine, Canada the Musical in Banff, Alberta, and the Indra Congress in Northern Ireland.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

An unforgettable moment while performing on stage was in the end scene of *Blood of Our Soil*. Set in contemporary Donetsk, my character Nastia had just come out of hiding from an officer and unintentionally smothered her baby while trying to keep her from crying. The tragic realization of having just lost my child coupled with the other heavy political themes throughout the production, this moment would forever be one of the most difficult, yet most unforgettable moments that I've experienced while performing.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Some of the biggest challenges I face are my own self-doubts, insecurities and fear of showing vulnerability. The most powerful and rewarding art can come from personal struggles, however, these can also be the most difficult emotions to access. As a young woman who is beginning to create and write more of my own work, I find it often easier to perform other people's work than my own. This is a continuous challenge to find a balance of using my own stories, and helping tell other people's stories.

What inspires you?

I am inspired to create art that shares a story and allows people to connect on a deeper emotional level. I am inspired by the courage, convictions and will of people around me, especially the strength and endurance of generations before me, including my grandparents who immigrated from Ukraine.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I hope that my art connects people, moves audiences and makes people think differently. I recently received a Young Edmonton Grant to spearhead a "Queer Cabaret" which examines what it's like to be queer in a world of heteronormative ideals. I hope that this event helps our audiences challenge assumptions and break stereotypes that they may have initially held in the world where straight relationships are often romanticized.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

Having graduated from the Ukrainian International Bilingual Program, studied Ukrainian in university and in Ukraine, danced with Shumka for six years, and been involved with my church youth group for many years, I feel very connected with my Ukrainian heritage. I speak Ukrainian and continue to maintain my connections to my Ukrainian community by being involved in artistic projects such as "Blood Of Our Soil" - a play about the political turmoil in Ukraine (2017). While dancing with the renowned Ukrainian Shumka Dancers, I toured and performed on various stages across Canada, from the prestigious Sony Stage in Toronto performing Shumka at 50, to dancing on stage with Eurovision star Ruslana at the Jubilee Auditorium.

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

I have been influenced by many mentors over the years, including university professors, colleagues, and my family. Growing up in a musical family has supported my artistic pursuits.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

I recently read a quote by Howard Thurman that said, "Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive. And people who are alive are open and responsive to what it is that the world needs." This really struck me as powerful since it encourages us to be fully active, engaged and committed citizens in our communities by applying our visions and passions. In a world where it is easy to become complacent and take the most convenient path, I believe it is important to determine where your core ethics and values lie, and allow those to guide you forwards.

# Tatiana Cheladyn

Describe your creative work. What does it mean to you to be able to pursue your creative arts?

I am a choreographer and dance educator. I spend most of my time working with young dancers - teaching dance technique and creating choreography. It means a great deal to me to be able to inspire and motivate young performers in Edmonton. I have witnessed dozens of my students step into their potential and learn how to express themselves through movement. It is so exciting to be a part of that experience with them.

Tell us about an unforgettable moment you experienced while performing/creating.

Right after I graduated with my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, I choreographed and produced my first dance show. This was something that took a lot of work. Looking back, I didn't really know what I was getting myself into! But, it was so rewarding - I worked with six emerging dancers to create the show and we had one show on a cold December night. I think only about 30 people came to the show, but the dancers gave an amazing performance. I was inspired by their dedication to creating something new and exciting with me and hope to create something like that again in the future.

What is the biggest challenge you face with your art?

Like many artists, I find that I go through phases in my creation process. Sometimes I'm super creative and productive. And then I go through periods of time where I don't create anything at all. During these down times, it can be really discouraging. It's difficult to keep creating when the inspiration won't come. I've learned to wait for it, and keep myself ready by continuing to practice my craft (both dancing and choreographing) even if I don't like what I make. Being open to making something bad and chalking it up to practice has opened many doors for me. If I don't put the pressure on myself to create something wonderful, but just to create something (anything!), then sometimes the creativity will flow in an unexpected way.

What inspires you?

I'm inspired by how I can turn everyday, pedestrian movement and ideas into art. I like to reflect on how we, as humans, live our lives and how I can explore things that we experience everyday through dance. I'm also really interested in what audiences see when they watch dance - I love finding out how my work has been interpreted afterwards.

How does your art impact the greater community?

I contribute to the lives and practices of young artists daily, and I think that this is a really unique opportunity. By working with the next generation of dancers, I am a part of the art they are creating in our community - just as they consistently contribute to the dances I create.

How do you connect with your Ukrainian heritage? Or do you?

I started my dance training in Ukrainian dance. While I don't practice or choreograph Ukrainian anymore, I still draw on my knowledge and skill set that I gained from those years of training and performing. I always take that piece of my culture with me in everything that I do!

Who has influenced your artistic pursuits?

So many people! All of my teachers in one way or another. Also, my parents and sister - I grew up in a very artistic household and we talk about art all the time. My mom is a well-known visual artist and my sister also dances. If it wasn't for my family, I probably would not have pursued a career in the arts.

What advice would you give to a younger generation who is being asked to decide their future path?

Talk to other people who are already doing what you want to do. Get a taste of what a day in the life is like. Maybe being a choreographer seems glamorous, but in reality I spend a lot of time thinking and creating alone in my living room and working odd hours. Every job has its less-desirable qualities, just make sure that you don't mind the ones in your chosen path (or that it's worth it for your art!)