

ACUAVITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

Winter 2014-15 | Volume 19, Number 2

Honouring our Heritage

Preserving the memory of prairie churches

New home for Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum of Alberta

Warwick restores community hall artwork

Songstress Stephanie Romaniuk

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALBERTA COUNCIL
FOR THE UKRAINIAN ARTS



VOLYA UKRAINIAN DANCE ENSEMBLE PRESENTS

25 YEARS OF Volya!



THE FREEDOM LIVES ON
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: ZHENIA BAHRI

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Ensemble from
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25 YEARS OF
Volya!

ACUAVITAE

Winter 2014-15



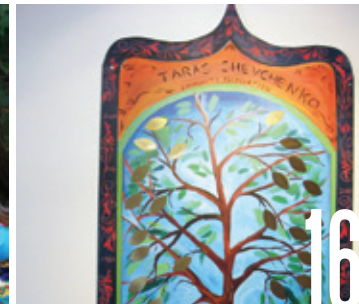
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on the cover

*Abandoned Ukrainian
Orthodox church in
Maryville, SK
(story on page 12)*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SANCTUARY PROJECT



Celebrating our legacy

Since attending my first ACUA meeting in the fall of 2008, I have been truly inspired by the vast array of talent we proudly call 'our own.' We are pleased to bring you stories about the community's remarkable artists, musicians, writers and artisans – past and present. We have many in our community dedicated to preserving our past — passionately and tirelessly recording the struggles and accomplishments of our pioneers for future generations.

In this issue, our cover story, written by the city's Historian Laureate Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail (P. 6), explores how the new UCAMA building is preserving Ukrainian culture and heritage for future generations. Maryann and Larry Pshyk review the book *Mandolin Mosaic* (P.9 and 10), which looks at the pioneer heritage of their favourite instrument, and freelancer Dawn Schrieber covers the CD launch of songstress Stephania Romaniuk.

The World celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Taras Shevchenko this year, inspiring the restoration of a mural at the Taras Shevchenko Hall in Warwick, Alta. (P.16) and a lovely poem about the "Ukrainian Bard" by Marion Mutala (P.17).

Across the province, commemorative events are celebrating milestones indicative of the history, culture and art forms we all play a role in preserving. Our Ukrainian community in Alberta is incredibly active as you'll see in the many notable Anniversaries shared in our Arts and Culture News section (P.5) and

our first Dance Around Alberta column by freelancer Fawnda Mithrush (P.11).

Through all the milestones and commemorations, we think back to another time. Our history, as Ukrainian Albertans, shapes who we are today and helps us keep our arts and culture strong. Our ancestors and families are to thank for their determination to maintain our culture in a new land. We at ACUA share this vision and hope our members find this issue reflective and inspiring. If you're not yet a member, I hope you too enjoy this issue and consider becoming a member of ACUA. Through your support we will continue to do our part in preserving the Ukrainian arts and culture in Alberta. Enjoy!

Pamela Shapka
Chair, ACUA Vitae Editorial Committee



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Verkhovyna heads to South America


Oksana Iwaszko

The Verkhovyna Ukrainian Song and Dance Ensemble is the cultural arm of the Edmonton Branch of the Ukrainian Youth Association of Canada and has been proudly delighting audiences for decades. The Ensemble has had successful anniversary performance tours in Eastern Europe (2009), Costa Rica (2004), and the state of Parana, Brazil (1999). The year 2014 marked the 55th anniversary of the Verkhovyna Choir and the 40th Anniversary of the Dunai Ukrainian Dancers! During this banner year, the ensemble embarked on yet another anniversary tour, this

time visiting Argentina and Brazil. After a year and a half of planning, 45 Ensemble members made the 12,000-km trek to South America as ambassadors from Edmonton, eager to showcase their talents on this 19-day tour.

Artistic Directors Camille Ostapowich-Allen, Shawn Ostafie, and choir conductor Orest Soltykevych collaborated to create the ensemble's full show. The show begins with "The Dream," a story depicted through song and dance of a young man who decides to leave everything behind on the farm and move to the city. The

second half of the show surprises the audience by reverting back to the ensemble's roots and showcases numerous traditional choir songs and regional dances. Throughout the 19 days, the Ensemble visited ten cities and towns, performed six sold-out shows and were overwhelmingly received by nearly 5,000 people in the audience.

The tour will culminate with a home performance in Edmonton on Nov. 1 at the DOW Centennial Centre in Fort Saskatchewan. Please visit www.verkhovyna.ca for tickets and show information! 

Ukrainian Male Chorus tours Eastern Europe


Bill Lebedovich

The Ukrainian Male Chorus of Edmonton (UMCE), under the direction of Orest Soltykevych, recently returned from a successful tour of Latvia, Poland and Vienna. Starting in Riga, Latvia, the choir competed at the World Choir Games – the largest choral event in the world. More than 27,000 choristers from 500 choirs representing more than 60 countries participated.

The choir had a very busy eight days in Riga, with qualifications, rehearsals, competitions, an open-air concert and rehearsals for the closing ceremonies. The choir competed in the three categories (Male Chamber Choir, Sacred Music a Capella and Folklore) and was pleased to receive silver in all three categories. "Our competition highlight was singing Ukrainian sacred music in an old stone church that had a reverberation of almost four seconds – truly a moving experience!" says Bill Lebedovich, chair of the tour committee.

The choir was also fortunate to have been selected as one of 30 choirs to perform in the massed choir of 900 choristers for the closing ceremonies. The concert featured pop music and was broadcast on national television. "It was a super experience and a huge rush of adrenalin!" says Lebedovich. The closing ceremonies can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TJHjhNb2wE>.

The choir's original plan had been to tour western Ukraine after Riga, but given the conflict in Ukraine, the choir instead chose to tour communities in Poland that had large Ukrainian populations. After this, the choir made its way to Vienna, where it sung the liturgy at St. Barbara's Church – the oldest Ukrainian Greek Catholic Parish this side of the former Iron Curtain.


The Ukrainian Male Chorus always welcomes new singers. Anyone interested in singing in the choir can contact the conductor, Orest Soltykevych, at 780-434-6671 or osoltykevych@yahoo.ca. 



Dnipro celebrates anniversary with North American Tour

Caitlin Crawshaw

One of Alberta's oldest Ukrainian choirs, Dnipro has performed across Alberta and the globe for six decades now. This summer, the group celebrated their 60th anniversary by touring around Eastern Canada and the United States. Dnipro kicked off the tour with their Musical Kaleidoscope concert in Edmonton this June, performing the works of Canadian composers of Ukrainian descent, including: Serhiy Eremenko, Yuri Fiala, and Roman Hurko. In early July, the group brought their show on the road, visiting Ottawa, Montreal, and New York.

For more information about Dnipro and upcoming performance dates, visit www.dniprochoir.com. 

A new home for Ukrainian heritage in Edmonton

UCAMA to open brand-new museum on Jasper Avenue

Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail
CONSTRUCTION PHOTOS: HUGH LEE

Next year, as Ukrainian-Canadians celebrate 125 years of history in this country, the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum of Alberta (UCAMA) will have extra reason to cheer. In early 2015, after over a decade of effort and \$12.5 million, UCAMA will complete Phase One of its new home on Jasper Avenue.

UCAMA currently has a building on 110 Avenue in the Norwood neighbourhood, but as Board President Paul Teterenko notes, it outgrew the site ten years ago. “We have a vast collection,” he says, “a huge selection of documents, periodicals, photos, musical instruments, and over 1,000 embroidered shirts and tablecloths. We are so tight for space, though, and it’s not archival, quality-controlled space.”

UCAMA’s Vice President (and Past President) Khrystyna Kohut agrees. When her parents, Hryhory and Stefania Yopyk, founded the museum in the early 1970s, the building they purchased on 110 Avenue was never meant to house a museum collection. “It used to be a bakery,” Kohut says. “Virtually all the work done on the building was done *gratis* by various people in the community proficient in trades. It got the building into better shape than when it was purchased, but nowhere near a museum quality environment.”

Kohut’s parents and the eleven other community members they recruited, were not trained professionals; they simply had a vision for documenting, preserving, and sharing Ukrainian heritage they had begun to amass in a public place. “My parents started collecting in the 1960s and they stored everything at home – printed material, newspapers and almanacs and calendars – it was all piled up in the rumpus room,” she says. “Priests in rural parishes started to notice that third and fourth generation people of Ukrainian descent did not necessarily carry on with the tradition of the language, so if they found books and printed materials they were not aware of the value of these items and they would burn them. One book on display at the museum

my father rescued out of the fire!”

To save these materials, the Yopyks put ads in Ukrainian newspapers and asked local priests to tell parishioners not to destroy them. Then every weekend from spring through fall they would drive out to collect them. “These kinds of records and items and memories should not be destroyed,” Kohut remembers learning from her parents. “They all tell a story.”

“It’s probably one of the best collections in the world,” says Teterenko. “It will be one of the largest Ukrainian museums in Canada and will be an education facility with school groups and researchers coming.”

Kohut believed so much in her parents’ vision that she left her job at the University of Alberta to work at UCAMA full-time from 2007 to 2009 as the only paid employee. By this time, they had purchased the buildings on Jasper Avenue, completed an independent feasibility study, and were in the midst of fundraising, dealing with government agencies, and working with the architects. “We couldn’t find someone to work there,” she says, “and it was too important to let go.” Together with the board and community they forged ahead.

That hard work and determination

is paying off. The new site, which will be housed in a renovated historic building across the street from the Shaw Conference Centre, will eventually total 20,000 square feet. “It will be the largest museum-quality space in Western Canada other than the new Royal Alberta Museum,” says Teterenko. For now, Phase One has focused on the building’s “envelope” as well as the main floor and basement, he explains, to house the ever-growing collection. During Phase Two, which will cost an additional \$6 million, UCAMA will create two more floors of gallery space, a library, and a rooftop terrace – with beautiful unobstructed views of the River Valley.

In the meantime, board members are excited at everything they’ve accomplished with the support of the Ukrainian community. Through mostly volunteer hours, they have successfully solicited funds from all three levels of government, fundraised \$2 million privately, and launched a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign over the summer to raise \$50,000 toward Phase Two.

The building design, completed by David Murray and Group 2 Architecture, has also already won two awards for how it incorporates the 100-year-old Lodge Hotel building into the new UCAMA site, and the revenue-generating Brighton Block next door being converted to commercial space. But the design and construction process has not been without challenges. “Working on a historic building – you don’t really know how difficult it’s going to be until you get to it. It’s slower because we’re trying to preserve certain aspects of it,” says Teterenko.

UCAMA takes possession of the building late this fall and will spend several months moving its collection and getting it organized. This will include a new donation of roughly 300 Ukrainian historical maps and 400 to 500 icons from an Ontario donor. “It’s probably one of the best collections in the world,” says Teterenko. “It will be one of the largest Ukrainian museums in Canada and will be an education facility with school groups and researchers coming.” He hopes these people will start coming in January 2015, when UCAMA



will open its doors to the public.

For his part, Teterenko looks forward to children and scholars alike coming to learn about the struggles and successes of Ukrainians in Alberta: everything from Ukrainian internment camps in the First World War, to the efforts of people to sustain the Ukrainian culture and language, to the thousands of stories from Ukrainian artists, professionals, and the “thousands of stories from everyday labourers and farmers and workers.”

Then in March 2015, UCAMA will put on its inaugural exhibit, showcasing the work of Peter Shostak, an award-winning artist of Ukrainian heritage who was born and raised in Alberta and draws on prairie subjects and history for inspiration. The Edmonton Heritage Council has provided operational funding for UCAMA as well as specific project funding for the Shostak exhibit. “We’re eagerly anticipating the opening and continuing work of UCAMA,” says executive director David Ridley. “This is a great example of a facility really making a difference. In bringing a number of museum and

archive organizations together, it will focus cultural memory and experience (and collections) for not only the diverse Ukrainian community, but also for the larger community. Given the significance and size of the community in this part of the world, it’s long overdue.”

Members of the board and Ukrainian community could not agree more. Kohut is gratified by the work and commitment she has experienced, and knows that her parents – were they still alive – would be amazed at UCAMA’s accomplishments. For Teterenko, more than anything, this project is a gift to future generations: “This is a place where my grandchildren can come and say ‘These are the things that Ukrainians used. We as a community did this.’”

Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail is a freelance writer, speaker, and author of two books, including Polar Winds: A Century of Flying the North (dundurn, September 2014). She lives in Edmonton and is currently serving as the city’s third Historian Laureate. www.daniellemc.com



Mandolin Mosaic

Mandolin Mosaic: Roots... Stories ... Songs...

By St. Nicholas Mandolin Ensemble and J. Marilyn Scott

Lawrence and Mary Anne Pszyk

Earlier this year, St. Nicholas Mandolin Ensemble of Edmonton launched a hardcover book, *Mandolin Mosaic: Roots... Stories... Songs...*, to commemorate the history of the group. The St. Nicholas Mandolin Society was formed to begin this project and raise funds for the book, so as to preserve Ukrainian music and culture to pass down its rich traditions to future generations.

Work on the project

began when a project committee was formed by the society. This was chaired by Lawrence Pszyk, music director and conductor of the ensemble. Marilyn Scott was hired to do research and writing of the history. With the help of many people, the book was published and distributed this year. It has been distributed to schools, museums, libraries, societies, people in the field of music, seniors homes, choirs, among many. It has surpassed our expectations by far.

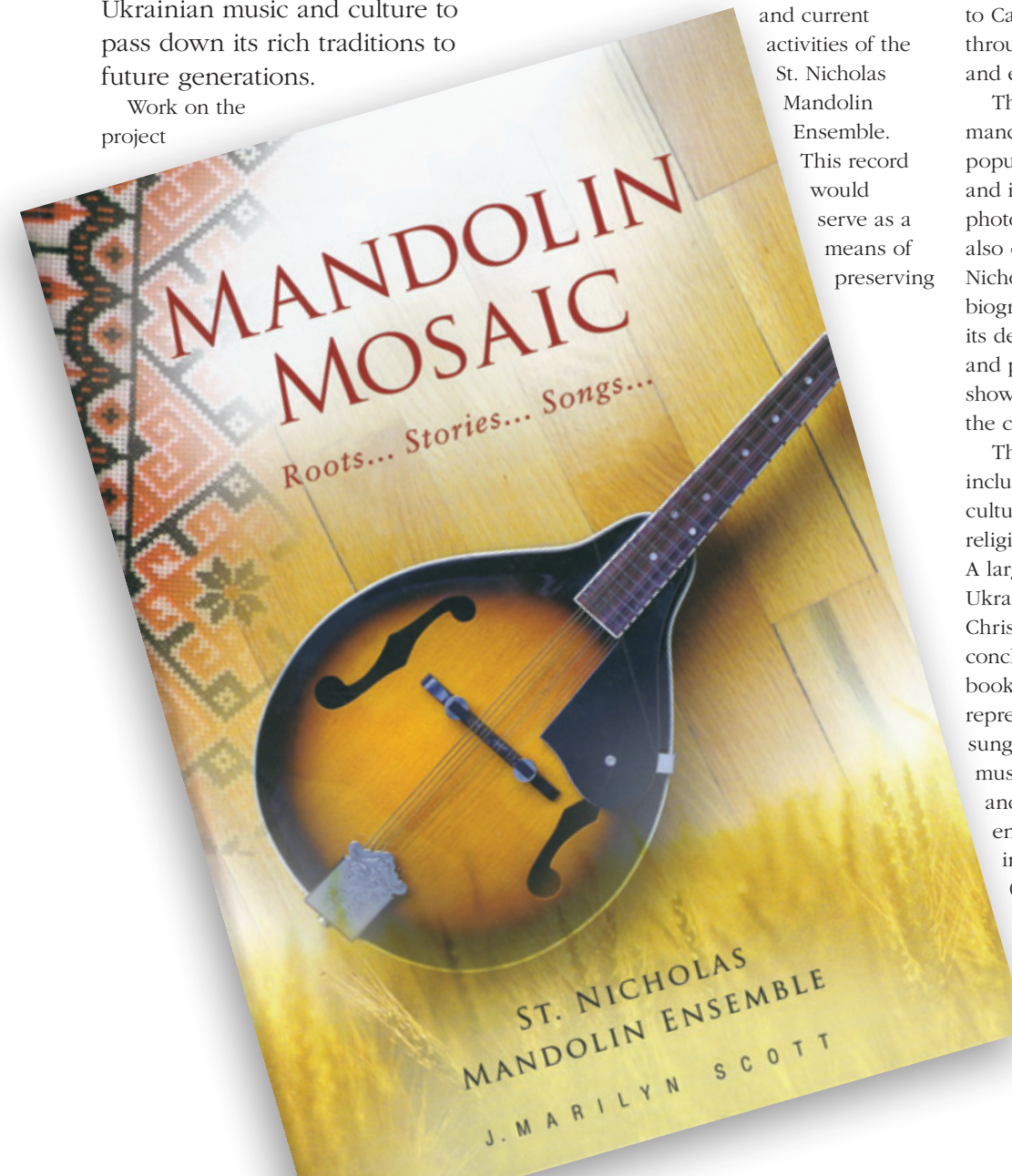
The original intent of the book was to record the history and current activities of the St. Nicholas Mandolin Ensemble. This record would serve as a means of preserving

a historical record and stories of the members of the ensemble. Part of the stories of each of the members reached back to their early family history. It soon became apparent that a background to the stories of the early Ukrainian pioneers would provide rationale for the many mandolin ensembles and community orchestras in Alberta, as well as a beginning of our ensemble. Thus, the inclusion of an abridged version of the arrival and lifestyles of Ukrainian settlers in Alberta with interesting historical photos. The pioneers brought to Canada a vibrant culture expressed through their crafts, arts, literature, and especially music and dance.

The book examines where the mandolin came from, why it was popular, and its cultural significance, and is illustrated with plenty of photos of mandolins. The book also deals with the origin of the St. Nicholas Mandolin Ensemble and the biographies of the members. Through its description of the group’s activities, and photos of performances, the book shows how the ensemble has served the community over many years.

The repertoire of the ensemble includes folksongs representing many cultural ethnicities, together with religious, classical, and original music. A large part of the repertoire includes Ukrainian folk music, church music and Christmas Carols. Ukrainian folk music concludes the major contents of the book. The music of the book is closely representative of the music played and sung by the pioneers. The authors include music and notation in both Ukrainian and English so anyone can learn and enjoy the Ukrainian folksongs. To help in learning the folksongs, four CDs (two instrumental and two vocal), are included with the book.

The book is a great culmination to a project that became more than the originators might have imagined.



Anniversaries abound

This fall, three Alberta dance groups celebrate their histories

Fawnda Mithrush

Alberta boasts one of the largest Ukrainian dance communities in the world and this season marks a special year for some of the province's most storied performing troupes. Cheremosh, Volya, and Lethbridge's Troyanda dancers all celebrate major anniversaries in the coming months—each with plans for commemorating their respective milestones. From their humble beginnings in church or community halls with handfuls of dedicated dancers, to the now hundreds of artists and friends that have grown through the ranks of each company—many of them touring Alberta's dancers around the world to mount full-scale productions—these companies deserve a raised glass for bringing the art of Ukrainian dance to the next level. And they're just getting started. *Поздоровляємо!* Congratulations!

VOLYA

Founded in 1989 by Richard Wacko, Taras Symka, and John Serinka, Edmonton's Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble began performing at festivals across Canada, eventually graduating to visit international stages in France, Portugal, Turkey, Italy, Brazil, and Germany.

As they mark their 25th anniversary, Wacko looks back fondly on the starting days of the company.

"Back in 1989, the founders could never have imagined how their dream of a new professional-calibre Ukrainian dance ensemble would take root

and flourish into the huge success that Volya has become," he says.

The troupe now boasts a cast of 40 dancers under the artistic leadership of Zhenia Bahri, who has directed the group since 2000. Born and raised in Ukraine, Bahri's unique repertoire is solidly based in folk tradition with high emphasis on technical skills.

The *25 Years of Volya: The Freedom Lives On* tour will be showcased at the

...these companies deserve a raised glass for bringing the art of Ukrainian dance to the next level.



Volya
PHOTO CREDIT: JENNIFER PIKE & KATHY VAN DELLEN

Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium on Oct. 10, 2014, featuring original choreography, and well as the DNIPRO Academic Ukrainian Folk Music Ensemble from Kyiv. The show will also tour to Saskatoon on Oct. 4, 2014 and North Battleford on Oct. 5, 2014. For more information visit www.volya.org.

CHEREMOSH

On its founding in 1969 by Chester and Luba Kuc, the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company began with just 19 dancers, and since has grown to include four performing groups, a school of dance, and over 150 dancers at various levels. Named after the Cheremosh River that separates the regions of Bukovyna and Halychyna in Ukraine, the company has since its inception strived to match the river's boisterousness and vivacity in its work.

Now at 45 seasons strong, Cheremosh's performing groups train under Artistic Director and Ballet Master Mykola



Cheremosh
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEREMOSH

Kanevets, whose distinctive choreography has given the Cheremosh a strong reputation. The group earned the Grand Prix "Golden Orpheus" Award at the European Championship of Folklore in Bulgaria in 2011, where they were also named Absolute Champion of Folklore.

To celebrate their landmark year, Cheremosh will be hosting a 45th Anniversary Benefit and Ball Gala on Oct. 24, 2014 at the Chateau Louis Conference Centre. This season, audiences can catch them at several festivals, including Veselka Festival in Foam Lake, SK, in April 2015, and Canada's National Ukrainian Festival in Dauphin, MB, in August 2015. Additionally, they will tour a new full-length show to the Shell Theatre in Ft. Saskatchewan on Nov. 7, and the Performing Arts Centre in Camrose on Nov. 8.

TROYANDA

This November, the Troyanda Ukrainian Dancers celebrate 20 years of performing and volunteering in Lethbridge, AB. The club has become a cultural fixture for the city over the years, and has seen hundreds of young dancers graduate through the levels of their


classes, from as young as 3-years-old and staying with the club all the way to the adult performance group.

Under the artistic direction of Dean Mackendenski, the performing ensemble has elevated itself from the community-driven start-up that it was in 1994 to recently collaborating with the Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra and Vox Musica on a Master Series production. Annually, the group also performs at popular Vesna and Malanka showcases, and hosts a curriculum show at the University of Lethbridge, at which young students from across southern Alberta attend to see educational dance presentations, and learn basic steps of different regional dances.

Troyanda can also be seen at cultural events throughout southern Alberta during the year, from Lethbridge's Whoop-Up Days to Taber's Cornfest to Fort Macleod's Santa Claus Parade and Calgary's Ukrainian Festival. Club members are also proudly involved with volunteering in the community, teaching *pysanky* decorating and door-to-door caroling at Ukrainian Christmas.

One of the unique aspects of Troyanda's repertoire is its impressive costume collection, which over the years has grown to \$85,000 worth of costumes

representing the different regions of Ukraine—some imported from the source, but most lovingly handmade by club members and parents.

For its anniversary, Troyanda is looking to connect with its alumni members and collect memories of their involvement with the troupe. More information at www.troyandalethbridge.com. 

A perennial asker-of-questions and teller-of-tales, Fawnda Mithrush is the current Executive Director of LitFest: Canada's only nonfiction festival. She played the role of General Manager for two of Edmonton's most storied theatre companies (Theatre Network and the outdoor Freewill Shakespeare Festival), and has penned stories and profiles for Avenue Magazine, Vue Weekly, and Edmonton Journal, among others. A former editor for the now defunct SEE Magazine, she still moonlights as a publicist for a variety of arts and non-profit organizations around town. Born and raised in Edmonton, she enjoys being a booster of the city's writers, dancers, and other artsy folk. She also has a fondness for cheese, travel, and the BBC.

The Sanctuary Project

Researchers preserve memory of ailing prairie churches

The Sanctuary Project hopes to document more than 1,000 Ukrainian and Russian churches throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SANCTUARY PROJECT

A former Ukrainian Catholic church sinking into the farmland in Ormside, SK

Lida Somchynsky

When I moved from Toronto to Edmonton three decades ago, I marvelled at the proximity of this city to the endless prairie landscape. Almost within my grasp, a visual feast of never-ending horizons. The silhouettes of pioneer homesteads and solitary onion-domed churches still haunt me.

And so how fortunate I felt to learn about The Sanctuary Project. It is the ongoing documentation of Ukrainian and Russian sacred culture in the prairie provinces. More than 1,000 churches will be researched and, to date, about 360 have been completed. That means that the exterior has been photographed, along with every image, furnishing, vestment, and tombstone. The variations within these places of worship are fascinating. They are due to eparchial boundaries, geographical settlement, the size of the population and the particular preferences of the priest himself. Along with the Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox churches, Baptist, and Evangelical places of worship are being profiled.

However, time is of the essence. Many rural congregations are disappearing; some only have four registered members. Churches have been robbed and vandalized: thieves have taken candle stands, crucifixes, and gospel books, some bequeathed by the pioneers themselves.

The investigating team consists of U of A professors John-Paul Himka, Natalie

Kononenko and Francis Swyripa, as well as ethnomusicologist Marcia Ostaszewski, of Cape Breton University. Each brings his or her own particular brand of expertise. A research assistant, Eva Himka, a history major from the University of Toronto, makes the initial community contacts and does the organizational logistics. It is the team's bonhomie enthusiasm to share tales about their cultural finds and a willingness to show me over 5,000 photos that drew me in. They talk of the unstinting hospitality that they have met in their work where farmers arrive in their pick-up trucks and graciously open up the country churches.

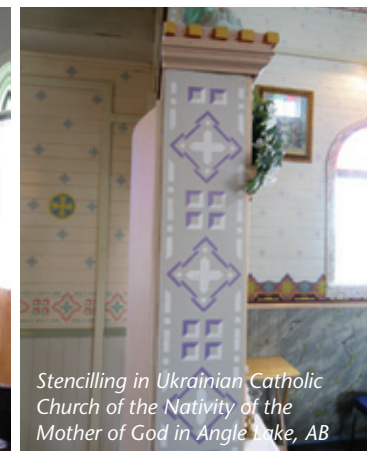
Swyripa, a prairie and ethnic historian had the Sanctuary Project percolating in her mind since the mid-1990s. After discussing it with Himka, a religious and East European historian, and Director of the Research Program on Religion and Culture at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, the project took off in 2009. For Francis, The Sanctuary Project speaks to her in a personal way as she relates many heart-rending tales of parishioners' loyalties to their places of worship. "An older man told me 'We built it in the 1930s, we maintained it, we worshipped in it, it is part of our landscape. and we want it here.' Then there is Blueberry Creek (outside of Edmonton) where a woman who is not Ukrainian volunteers to look after the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox church and the Baptist one down the way." Unfortunately, when churches are no longer in use or the attendance has dwindled to the point where insurance costs are no longer affordable, the

hierarchy of a church insists that the building should be deconsecrated. But there are also stories of hope. A local shop teacher has twice been involved in the building of the iconostasis and so the community is developing skills to reproduce it. The visits can be emotional as one is drawn into the personal spiritual realm of these caretakers. "Whoever is showing it to you has a different degree of comfort in their own church. Some will take out the sacred objects with great care while in another church the parishioners have a yearly massive spring cleaning and so they are comfortable touching things." Francis also discovered that visiting bishops were being greeted by farmers dressed up as Cossacks – a custom held till the 1930s. Was that just a prairie phenomenon? It remains to be seen.

Kononenko, who holds the Kule Chair in Ukrainian Ethnography and is one of only three Ukrainian folklorists in North America, marvels at their finds. "It is not the Ukrainian culture of Ukraine; it is a vibrant and meaningful culture in its own right that grew from Ukrainian seed and, in the fertile soil of the Canadian prairies, produced something unique and beautiful." This refreshingly open-minded appreciation is undoubtedly influenced by Kononenko growing up in the multicultural vibrancy of the New York area. "I thought the coolest thing was the Christ and Mother of God in embroidered shirts in one of the rural parishes and finding incredible crochet imitations of kilims." At one church, the grapes on the royal doors turned out to be spray painted marbles. Investigative possibilities



Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity, Mamaesti, AB



Stenciling in Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God in Angle Lake, AB




Icon of Sts. Cyril and Methodius painted by Ignatius Syca in the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Holy Ascension in Swan Plain, SK

continue. French settlement patterns in northern Alberta seem to have found their way into this sacral architecture. A fleur de lis in an iconostasis at Fahler needs to be substantiated. Natalie brings an added dimension to the project, documenting and interpreting events at the various religious observances. “A Christmas Eve service may be celebrated two days after the event and held in the morning, as that priest will be shared by nine parishes.” Through the photographic and computer skills of her husband, Peter Holloway, Professor Kononenko has expanded the scope of interviewing parishioners through Facebook. And so, a rich vein of past and current practices such as *Zeleni Sviata* (Whitsuntide) and *Kbham* (or Praznyk, a celebration on the feast day of the saint or Christian entity for whom a church was named) are collected.

Over the last few years, John-Paul found a treasure trove of unusual religious artefacts. Of special interest were iconographic works found in a few tiny parishes in northern Alberta which came from Mount Athos, in Greece – a spiritual

Greek Orthodox monastic centre, which dates back to the 6th Century. With such discoveries, art historians from Ukraine have been accompanying the team. They have remarked on the unique embroidery designs of altar cloths that are indigenous to a particular region of Ukraine but have now disappeared in the old country. One year after the fact, John-Paul still speaks with heart-felt emotion: “Some of the best embroidery across the prairies is in a church which has not had services for about ten years and this church is being taken care of by an 84-year-old man. And they have had problems with vandalism in that area.” The specificity of the sacral variations across the regions fascinate him. “When I went into a church and saw our Lady of Victory on the walls and viewed the stations of the cross, I would know for sure that you were in Saskatchewan in a Ukrainian Catholic Church. A priest will often introduce a certain uniformity to the parishes he serves. “ And this can all be seen within a wider historical context: “What I see in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba

is the largest colonization outside the traditional Orthodox lands – a post-Byzantine culture which is very unique ... and in the form of a religious aesthetic ... and this is the most Ukrainian-marked territory in North America. It is about to disappear.” John-Paul has been instrumental in developing a database to store this sacral information, creating the possibility of studying this culture for generations to come. Its accessibility makes it easily exportable to other ethno-cultural groups across Canada.

My trips into the countryside now have a different dimension as I marvel at the individual culture inherent in each church. And I wonder about this caravan of investigators making their way across scarcely travelled roads. The latest I heard is that they are looking for interpretations of the Biblical story that have been cast in the prairie experience. They think, that just maybe, it remains to be unveiled. We can only be in awe at what they have already found. 

Lida Somchynsky is an Edmonton freelance writer and an adult ESL teacher.



Stephania Romaniuk performs at Calgary's Mount Royal Conservatory
PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT ROYAL CONSERVATORY

Stephania Romaniuk: Fresh Voice of Bohdan Wesolowsky Western Canada's Ukrainian jazz-singing star launches her first CD

Dawn Schrieber

Stephania Romaniuk is a third-generation Ukrainian-Canadian, yet she feels a connection to her Ukrainian country and heritage that transcends the distance. In fact, she feels it most powerfully in the music and lyrics of Bohdan Wesolowsky, a Ukrainian composer known for his foxtrots, tangos, and waltzes, who lived from 1915 – 1971. When Romaniuk was 15 years old, a dear friend shared with her some decades-old sheet music and she was hooked. “His songs are a window to a past era and an invitation to empathize with those who came before us,” she says.

Young musicians are often pressured to put out an album, but Romaniuk – who has been singing and playing classical piano since she was a child – wanted to wait until she found something she was passionate about. The works of Wesolowsky fit the bill. “It’s where I feel I have the most to offer the community, because not everyone sings them, not everyone has the sensibilities or are naturally drawn to them,” she


says. Beyond the musical aesthetic, Romaniuk is drawn to the historical value of these works: “We owe these songs to generations of Ukrainians who have scarified so much for us to be able to continue that heritage.”

Romaniuk’s first album, *By Gone Days*, is a compilation of Wesolowsky’s most beautiful songs, re-mastered and sung by the Calgary songstress. At the spring launch at St. John’s Institute, Romaniuk’s exquisite operatic voice was accompanied by a live Jazz band. “She’s such a generous musician, someone who somehow is able to focus everyone together, and draw out everyone’s unique characteristics,” says Mary Sullivan, a flutist who performed that night.

Those who know the composer’s work may be surprised by one song on the album: “Dreamer’s Serenade.” Olena Dilai, a descendent of Wesolowsky, gave a copy to Romaniuk after it came loose amidst a stack of photocopies of the composer’s handwritten music. The serenade — written all in English, which is rare for Wesolowsky—is the only piece that didn’t match the composer’s published works. Romaniuk believes she may be the first to discover and record this song.

At 26 years of age, Romaniuk is a classically trained soprano. She was born

in Toronto and began learning piano at the age of 5, continuing her lessons into university. She is self-taught on guitar, and has been taking voice lessons since she was eleven. There is a Ukrainian holiday called *Ivana Kupala* (eve of July 7 OS feast day of St. John), which Romaniuk saw performed at Ukrainian camp once when she was little. She remembers seeing all the older girls lined up on the dock, singing a beautiful piece and putting wreathes into the lake. “It always stuck out in my memory as something so very Ukrainian.” Music is one of Ukraine’s greatest cultural well-springs, she says, Ukrainians are *spiruchyi narod*, “A people filled with song and always singing.”

Romaniuk is excited to share her music internationally, and is especially interested in such intimate cabaret events as the launch at St. John’s. She approaches each performance as a learning opportunity, and always contemplates how she can best serve the audience, the composer, and the poet. “It could be for one person, for a hundred, for thousands. To me, the most important part is about staying true to the meaning behind the music.” 

Dawn Schrieber is a freelance journalist in Edmonton.

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Warwick community restores artwork at Taras Shevchenko Community Hall

Canvas stage curtains and backdrop receive some TLC after 80 years of use

Olga Jamison


Through the tall shimmering aspen trees, painted on the wings of the stage, our eyes are led to a 100-year-old Ukrainian village. Depicted are traditional country houses, built of thatched roofs and bright white mud-sided cottages, nestled in a bucolic country meadow. The tranquil village scene, so beautifully hand painted on antique Irish linen, forms the stage backdrop of the Taras Shevchenko Community Hall, located in Warwick, Alta.

Eighty years have passed by since N.P. Boychuk painted the community backdrop. Since then, hundreds of community members have gathered, danced, played and enjoyed the folklore that has graced centre stage. In that time, the artwork has suffered from some wear and tear, prompting the town's Community Association and Warwick Ladies Club to commission its restoration. This important work was left in the capable hands of Jerzy Chlopicki, an art conservationist. Over a five-month period in 2013, he cleaned the Irish linen canvas backdrops, patched the tears and holes, and retouched our double-sided backdrop (measuring 15-ft wide and 10-ft. tall), the six panel wings, and front roll-down curtain.

The project was made possible by local support in the unique form of

the "The Warwick Tree," in which patrons purchased leaves, seed pods and bronze plaques that completed a life-sized tree painted by local artist Debra Cherniawsky-Durrer. "It was an easy sell," says Pat Dobush who, as treasurer, collected the names and marketed the project. She explains that family and friends of the Taras Shevchenko Community Association generously bought plaques in the form of seeds for the Pioneers who built the hall (located at the roots of the tree), current residents (whose leaves are placed high on the branches), and friends and supporters' plaques (who fill the decorative border). The "Restoration Project" exceeded all expectations.

"We have a dedicated and involved community who love and support the arts," says Derek Fox, who managed the project's publicity. "They continue to use the community-owned hall as a social gathering point. Our goal in restoring our stage backdrop is to ensure that future generations continue to appreciate the efforts of our forefathers, to understand and perpetuate the importance of community to our pioneers and to the living families in the Warwick area."

The restoration work was completed in November 2013 as a tribute to Taras Shevchenko's 200th Birthday. However, later this year, the project it will be followed up with a video documentary of the eldest members of the community sharing stories about the Taras Shevchenko Community Association of Warwick Alberta, established in 1936. 

Olga Jamison is the chairperson of the Restoration Project and can be reached at 780-632-2945.

In 2013, the town of Warwick, Alberta restored the hand-painted stage mural at the Taras Shevchenko Community Hall.

PHOTO CREDITS: DEBRA DURRER



The Bard of Ukraine

(March 9, 1814-March 10, 1861)

By Marion Mutala

*Taras Shevchenko, we remember you
Peasant's son, orphaned at 11
Unschool'd layman
Cultured serf*

*We remember your freedom
Life's small victory*

*We remember you suffered
And spoke as a wandering
minstrel in Kobzar
Gave testament in Zapovit*

*A literary genius,
Great humanitarian, poet, artist
speaking through one thousand works*

*Free or serf, slave or not
Your voice resonates from the
grave, a continual shout for
fairness, justice, equality*

*"End oppression"
"Eliminate poverty, share the wealth"
"Take care of woman, children,
especially- the orphans"*

*We remember your compassion and
prayers for Ukrainian people
All people
All of Humanity*

*Greed rampant
Leaders silent
Governments deaf
No one listened to your cries then or now
But still...we remember*

*We remember
And shout your words
"Stop selfishness"
"Stop war"*

*We remember
And pay tribute
Especially on this 200th
anniversary since your birth
We are reminded of great effort for change
Ideas, beliefs and vision
"Create peace"
"Hope"
"A new and better world"
Today, tomorrow and always...
We will remember you, Taras Shevchenko
The Bard of Ukraine*



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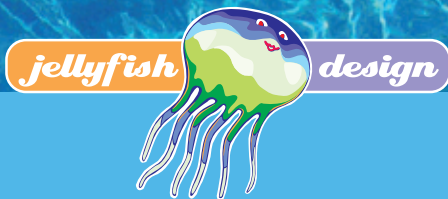
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