Celebrating **25 years** of Ukrainian Arts and Culture in Alberta

ACUA VITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

Winter 2011/2012 | Volume 18, Number 2

25 YEARS 25 ARTISTS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALBERTA COUNCIL FOR THE UKRAINIAN ARTS

ALBERTA COUNCIL FOR THE ukrainian arts АЛЬБЕРТСЬКА РАДА УКРАЇНСЬКОГО МИСТЕЦТВА

Вітаємо!

from the Ukrainian Cheremosh Society

Congratulations to ACUA on 25 Years

and to all top 25 artists, special congratulations to:
Cheremosh Artistic Director **Mykola Kanevets**
Cheremosh Founder **Chester Kuc**
Artist **Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn**
("Embroidered Memories", "Once a Kozak", "Ensemble of Colour")
Artist **Peter Shostak** ("Baba, Watch me Dance")

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ACUAVITAE

Winter 2011/12

25 YEARS 25 ARTISTS

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS BY PROFILING 25 ARTISTS WHO HAVE HELPED SHAPE UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE IN ALBERTA

ON THE COVER

Orest Soltykevych
(Profile on page 14)

Photo by Nick Howe

ALBERTA COUNCIL FOR THE ukrainian arts
АЛЬБЕРТСЬКА РАДА УКРАЇНСЬКОГО МИСТЕЦТВА

25 YEARS FROM THE EDITOR

5 years ago I was asked to write an article profiling the 20th Anniversary of the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts. As a freelance writer with a passion for the arts, this was a good opportunity. What made it even better was that it brought me back into the Ukrainian community in which I was raised. But I had no idea just how much ACUA would inspire me. There were so many things about our Ukrainian arts that I really didn't know about. Eager to learn, I jumped onto the board and through ACUA Vitae, began to explore the people and the arts that make up our Ukrainian community.

Today we celebrate a special anniversary of the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts. To mark the occasion, we decided to profile 25 artists or arts ambassadors who have promoted, preserved and developed Ukrainian folk and contemporary art over the past 25 years. From painters to poets, musicians to dancers, pysanky writers to photographers...you sent in your nominations of the people you believe have created milestones, innovations, and achievements that make us who we are today – as Albertans, as Ukrainian Canadians.

Narrowing the list down to just 25 was not an easy task. Each entry listed a vibrant personality and incredible talent…It was amazing to see just how active people are in the Ukrainian arts community. Some you certainly will know, and hopefully others will be a new discovery. We only had room for 25. And that's why I hope to continue to hear from you our readers. Is there someone, something, someplace in Alberta that deserves to be profiled for the way they have affected the Ukrainian Canadian arts community in Alberta? Send me a note and we'll keep the conversation going…

As we head into 2012, all of us at ACUA wish you and your families another wonderful year. Thank you for supporting us for the past 25 years. I look forward to reaching more milestones with ACUA and continuing to share more stories about the people, the art, and the culture that shapes who we are as Ukrainian Canadians in Alberta.

With this milestone, I would also like to introduce our new editorial committee: Pamela Shapka, Larysa Luciw, and Terri Andrews – all ACUA board members, and a very creative group of women. A special thank you to Andrée-Ann Thivierge of jellyfish design who makes each issue of ACUA Vitae look beautiful. And a very heartfelt thanks to Darka Tarnawsky, who's talent and great patience pulls the issues together, making each one better than the last. Together, along with our guest editors and fabulous writers I look forward to more issues of ACUA Vitae. I hope you do too.

Enjoy!

Andrea Kopylech,
Editor -in-Chief

ACUA Vitae committee members, clockwise: Andrea Kopylech, Pamela Shapka, Larysa Luciw, Terri Andrews

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A New Day

The problems of life's daily routine
Exist not at all for me,
I march forward on cloudless muses
Along floral fields of daily chores.

I tredge forward and hear not the slander
Which surrounds at times that count,
This is only of significance
To those who have no choice.

I live in the morning rays,
In my thoughts and in the cloudy dusk
Paying no attention to all these formalities;
They change not the essence of human.

A new day is a portrait of the unknown,
The strength of an enigmatic enchantress,
Who timelessly envelopes the abyss
Limitless in the rules of reality

Новий день

Не існує для мене реальності
У проблемах життя
повсякденного,
Я крокую у мріях безхмарності
По квітучих полях щоденности.

Я іду і не чую наклепів,
Що кружляють у часі виміру
Адже все це прості означення,
Тих людей, що не мають виходу.

Я живу у ранкових променях,
У думках, і в похмурих сутінках.
Незважаю, на усі ці формальності,
Що не змінять людської сутности.

Новий день, це портрет
невідомого,
Загадкової сили чарівності,
Що кружляє без часу у просторі
Без обмежень і правил будности.

Poem by Liliya Pantelyuk, translated by Rena Hanchuk

PHOTO CREDIT: YELLOW TREE BY LARYSA LUCIW

BRIAN CHERWICK

THROWING MEAT AND GIANT PYROHY: UKRAINIAN MUSIC FOR A NEW GENERATION

by Fawnda Mithrush

PHOTO SUPPLIED

"What did I first start to play? Hmm," Brian Cherwick muses. The good-natured folk musician, most widely known as front-man of heralded band The Kubasonics, has a hard time recalling which musical tool he picked up first — but that's probably because he's never tried just one thing at a time.

"I kind of learned by osmosis. I learned how to play lots of things by hanging around old musicians at dances and weddings and asking

"SOME PEOPLE GO TO A WEDDING AND THEY SEE A BAND THAT PLAYS POLKAS AND WALTZES AND THEY THINK THAT'S ALL THAT UKRAINIAN MUSIC IS."

them questions," he chuckles. "I'm [a] kind of multiple personality character. I was doing all these different things and I wanted to find a way to do all of them at the same time."

Born and raised in Winnipeg and surrounded by a family of musicians, young Brian picked up as many instruments as he could, playing in various bands and singing in Ukrainian choirs. He studied at the Kyiv Conservatory for Music for a time, and graduated with a Music degree from Brandon University, later receiving a PhD from the University of Alberta's Centre for Ukrainian-Canadian Studies.

Cherwick has since facilitated dozens of workshops and classes, demonstrating and sharing his knowledge at camps, festivals, and schools all over North America.

"For many of these groups it was their first opportunity to see or hear styles of Ukrainian music and instruments that they might … never be aware of," he says.

For nearly two decades, Cherwick also coordinated the Friends' Ukrainian Music Festival at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, which brings together musicians from across the province each year.

"[The festival] gave young musicians an opportunity to hear and play with older generations of great musicians [who] provided a link to our musical past," Cherwick explains, noting that popular bands like Milennia, UB, and Euphoria all had some of their earliest performances there.

Boasting a collection of some fifty folk instruments — all of which are in his playing repertoire, from *tsymbaly* to fiddle to bubon drum, flute, and bandura — Cherwick, who currently calls St. John's, Newfoundland home, fondly recalls the early Edmonton days of The Kubasonics.

"FOR MANY OF THESE GROUPS IT WAS THEIR FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO SEE OR HEAR STYLES OF UKRAINIAN MUSIC AND INSTRUMENTS THAT THEY MIGHT… NEVER BE AWARE OF"

On a request from organizers of the Hopak in the Park dance festival in 1996, Cherwick had assembled a handful of friends and family to play what he thought might be a fun, temporary gig. "Our very first show was a real shock for all of us. The first song we played, the crowd went nuts. It confirmed for us that we're doing something right."

Cherwick thought the key to success would be to bridge traditional Ukrainian folk music and themes with contemporary, sometimes silly references. "We wanted the name to be recognizable to both Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians, and I tried to think about the symbols that every Canadian would recognize as Ukrainian. They know *pysanka* and perogies… and kubasa is in every store in Western Canada." The band even purposely misspelled the name, departing from the purist pronunciation of *kovbasa*, to further increase its accessibility.

"Some people go to a wedding and they see a band that plays polkas and waltzes and they think that's all that Ukrainian music is. I felt we had a funny situation where, depending on what songs people would first hear of ours, they wouldn't be sure what kind of band it actually was. Some people have heard me playing some really fancy, melodic thing on a strange instrument and then think it's going to be all like that — until they buy the CD and there's songs about throwing meat."

With The Kubasonics' mainstream success of songs like "Giants of the Prairies," which famously detailed the small-town trend of erecting immense statues of cultural objects —many of those invoking Ukrainian icons, from the pysanka in Vergreville to the perogy in Glendon, even to the monstrous mushroom in Vilna — Cherwick notes that now, since The Kubasonics have celebrated their 15th anniversary, the gap has been bridged to a new generation of musicians.

"I think maybe because bands like ours and a few others took a bit of a chance and didn't play the same stuff all the time, now we have lots of young bands that are doing that. You know, the way Ukrainians live in Western Canada, it's kind of like a little isolated world of its own, so I feel like we were ambassadors of that culture for other parts of the world. People don't know anything about us, so somebody's got to get out there and tell them." AV

VALERIY SEMENKO

HOME IS WHERE YOU MAKE IT

by Aspen Zettel

When Valeriy Semenko speaks, it's as though he's speaking from the heart of Ukraine. The gentle lilt of his accent colours his speech with all the history and tradition of his family and his heritage.

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

When asked about the driving force of his work, Semenko has no hesitation in his response. "My inspiration...is all about Ukrainian culture," he says. "My vision is from my city, my home, and of course my biggest inspiration is my family, especially my [mother]."

Semenko spent four years studying Fine Art in the 1970s, which he followed with service in the Navy. He then proceeded to study Graphic Design and Calligraphy at Ivan Fedorov Publishing Academy, Faculty of Graphic Arts, in 1984.

It's clear that Semenko's education has formed the sound base of technical ability and competency readily seen in his work. His brushstrokes are bold, and the colors are vibrant. Everything he paints is alive with movement. The illustrative, design quality is evident in the lines of his structures and the way he carves out space with light and shadow.

When asked what subject matter is most pleasurable to paint, Semenko's voice lifts with joy: "Maybe nature. People dancing. I like old Ukrainian churches. 18th Century, 17th Century. It's unbelievable."

Immigrating to Canada in 2001, Semenko laughs a bit when he recalls the Alberta greeting he received. "To be honest, I arrived in Edmonton in January 2001. It was really cold." Although inspired by Ukraine, he finds a new beauty in the diverse landscape of Alberta. "The Jasper area and Banff is probably the most beautiful (to me)."

No longer a stranger to Canadian ways and customs, finding a balance between a new life and a great history can be a fine line, although he seems to have found the solution. Semenko keeps his culture close. To make Edmonton feel like home, Semenko has discovered the key element is involvement in the Ukrainian community. "We participate in all Ukrainian events. As a graphic designer, I design [a great many] Ukrainian events," he says. "All my posters, all my designs, people know me already. So I get commissions and proposals. I am fortunate in this case and I like it. People like my work."

Participating in events isn't his only pastime – having a productive studio practice is at the heart of Semenko's centre of focus. Partnered with artist Iryna Karpenko, Semenko instructs children and adults in the ways of art at their self-established Barvy School of Art in Edmonton. "Iryna graduated from Kyiv. She represents the Eastern part of Ukraine and I represent the Western part of Ukraine, so in Edmonton we collaborated and [now] teach," he says. "It's really interesting."

Although firmly entrenched in cultural Edmonton, Semenko cannot overstress the value of home and family. He plans to return to his native Ukraine next summer for a long overdue visit. The tenor of his voice shifts again when he speaks of his family. "My grandmother is 101 years old. She lived in a village so we are really proud," he says. "She is the honour of our family, so we are very happy."

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THE ROOTS NEVER GROW FAR FROM THE TREE

by Aspen Zettel

Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn can pinpoint the moment she developed her own artistic style. At the age of three, watching her grandmother paint *psysanky*, Cheladyn began a love affair with detail that has stayed with her throughout the entirety of her artistic career. “I tend to tell people that the Easter egg was my first canvas,” she muses.

LARISA SEMBALIUK CHELADYN

Delving into the history of the Easter egg, it's apparent that Sembaliuk Cheladyn has an extensive knowledge of the delicate objet d'art. She recounts the pagan ritual of burying decorated eggs in the crop fields to ensure a good harvest, and a gradual, ever-mellowing evolution to today's practice of simple well-wishing: "They were little messages that were passed on in the spring."

Raised in a creative household, Larisa can readily recall her artistic influences – her father and her grandmother. "My father is a graphic artist and his mom was very creative. She did all the Ukrainian folk art – pysanky (Easter eggs) and embroidery. Art has always been in my home, my parents are art collectors."

Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn comes by her talent honestly. Her father, Paul M. Sembaliuk, is the designer of the Vegreville Pysanka monument, an emblem of the presence of Ukrainian culture on the Canadian Prairies. To the observation that Cheladyn's pieces seem most vibrant and articulate when revolving around Ukrainian cultural, she responds with a laugh. "I think it's because it's intuitive, the Ukrainian culture was just part of my lifestyle. It was around me, so I learnt through osmosis."

There is an overarching subtle religious influence in many of her painted Ukrainian studies. On the specific subject of imagery, Larisa is contemplative: "For my generation in Canada, the culture and the religion were pretty much intertwined. I don't separate it at all."

The religious imagery in Ukrainian churches made Cheladyn curious about the stories being depicted. "For me it was very visual. I learned from looking at the mosaics on the walls and the stained glass windows."

With a background in Industrial Design and Printmaking, Larisa made the natural transition into illustration, and was picked up by two publishers immediately after university. Spending many years in illustration has influenced her work past the point of just illustrating children's books. "The illustrating of stories has helped me to become a story teller," she muses. "There's a story behind almost every image."

A new avenue of expression has presented itself with the popularization of digital video and editing. "I like to film my work as I paint it and edit [that footage] to music. I've always been intrigued by the fact that choreographers and composers can change their piece. You usually paint a painting and that's it. And nobody sees the layers that develop. They only see the final product," she says.

"It relates to people during this period in time. Everybody's getting digital and techno-savvy. For me it's just a new area to explore. But at the same time I still love watercolours and what they do to the paper. I love to integrate the two. For every five minutes of painting, there's five hours of editing."

Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn broke away from her standard artistic practice two decades ago to explore her Leonard Cohen series, where she visually expressed sections of lyrics from various poignant songs that personally moved her. "I loved the Cohen series because I could return to [a] looser style of painting," she says.

Her recent work, however, has seen a return to her roots. "This has been my year of being Ukrainian. I've never had a Ukrainian themed show, but right now I'm working on a Christmas card for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. I've always got little ongoing projects in my head that I'm working on." AV

"THE ILLUSTRATING OF STORIES HAS HELPED ME TO BECOME A STORY TELLER," SHE MUSES. "THERE'S A STORY BEHIND ALMOST EVERY IMAGE."

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

MYKOLA KANEVETS

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

PRIDE AND RESPECT FROM THE BOOTS UP

by Andrea Slobodian

It's a blazing hot day in Nessebar, Bulgaria – 37 degrees Celcius. Edmonton's Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company is sweating on an outdoor stage, spinning and leaping in full costume and make-up.

Their discomfort pays off: as awards are handed out at the 2011 European Championship of Folklore, the only North American entry in the competition tops all European groups. Some 8,500 kilometers from home, the semi-professional troupe is named Absolute European Champion 2011 and awarded the grand prize medal.

But Cheremosh Artistic Director Mykola Kanevets says he's most proud of the praise from local judges, fans and dancers. Some were surprised to see a high calibre of Ukrainian folk dance preserved in Canada. "Mostly what I was happy to see was when people came backstage and said they appreciate Cheremosh and how they dance," says Kanevets. "That's the best award for me."

Kanevets has been the artistic force behind Cheremosh since 1991. "I have been Ukrainian dancing all my life," he says. "It's my life."

He graduated as a Ballet Master and Choreographer from Kyiv's National University of Culture and Performing Arts. He toured with the acclaimed Virsky Ukrainian National Dance Company. As an instructor in Ukraine, he forged relationships with Canadian dance groups who were seeking authentic costume pieces and boots.

After the Soviet Union collapsed and travel restrictions eased, he visited a friend in Edmonton. He began teaching workshops and was quickly recruited by Cheremosh: "When I came to Canada twenty years ago, I saw passionate Ukrainian dancers who wanted to learn more, and I said I had to help as much as I can."

> "WHEN I CAME TO CANADA TWENTY YEARS AGO, I SAW PASSIONATE UKRAINIAN DANCERS WHO WANTED TO LEARN MORE, AND I SAID I HAD TO HELP AS MUCH AS I CAN."

Fast-forward twenty years. Kanevets has led his performers through numerous productions, including a 2007 China tour with Aboriginal troupe Blackfoot Medicine Speaks, and 2009's "Razom: A Fusion of Ukrainian Dance," featuring a cast of nearly 100 dancers from Cheremosh, Calgary's Tryzub and Winnipeg's Rusalka Ukrainian dance ensembles.

Kanevets dedicates himself full-time to the Cheremosh Ensemble and School of Dance. He instructs four different age groups.

"This is a serious job. If you want to see Ukrainian culture on a high level, you need a professional," he says. He admits, not everyone sees dance instruction as a credible career, and he laughs about the time he fibbed about being a firefighter to appease a critic. "It's lots and lots and lots of work," he admits.

Daily, he's at his desk by 9 a.m., working on choreography, music, costuming and exercises. He finds ideas in numerous sources, including one of his favourite pastimes, watching movies. "Music is very inspiring," he says. "Some characters, some books, some movies, some melodies."

Six days a week, he's at the studio around 5 p.m. for rehearsals. Cheremosh typically performs Saturday nights, though his Saturday afternoons are dedicated to watching his 11-year-old daughter's ballet class.

Mykola strives to set Cheremosh apart from other ensembles: "I feel proud and responsible when we come on stage with Ukrainian culture in Canada. We have to be at the highest level possible. We have a very strong training process," he explains, combining basic ballet, character and technique.

He orders special costumes and music from Ukraine. Cheremosh's music is specially arranged and recorded with an orchestra. Costumes are one-of-a-kind designs. "You can't find the same costume in the world," he says. Once a set is produced, the material is destroyed to prevent copies.

His dancers notice these details. "Mykola Kanevets is truly dedicated to the maintenance of traditional Ukrainian dance in Alberta," says Brooke Miller. She notes his "attention to regional authenticity in the context of a theatrical ensemble." Miller also values his team building skills. "He interacts with his dancers in a way that promotes an atmosphere of family."

Kanevets says, "I enjoy working with people. Sometimes it's hard, every person has a different character and attitude. It takes emotional energy to get a big group of people onto one target of what we have to do together."

He credits a group effort for Cheremosh's success. "I am very lucky. Many volunteers create everything possible," he says.

That support will play a huge role in next year's proposed Ukrainian tour, which will cover six regions and include workshops with Hutzul and Bukovynian state ensembles.

He hopes the tour inspires his dancers and enhances their performance back home. "If you ask other nationalities in Canada what they know about Ukrainians, they say food and dance," says Kanevets. "The better quality on stage, the more people of other nationalities will respect Ukrainian dancing."

OREST SOLTYKEVYCH

THE SON ALSO RISES

by Kathleen Bell

Like any teenager, Orest Soltykevych's younger self didn't bother to ask much about his father's past, or how he felt about his nation's history of displacement and persecution. "He lived in a Ukrainian community, but it wasn't necessarily Ukraine proper," he explains. "But then, you know, you get displaced and you end up in a displaced persons camp and he eventually ended up in Canada."

An accomplished and highly respected choir conductor, Soltykevych's father brought the tradition of Ukrainian choral music with him when he immigrated to Edmonton and shared it with his son. Soltykevych insists his dad never pushed him to participate in choir, instead preferring to call it 'exposure' – his father exposed him to his cultural roots, as any good parent would.

"When you come from a background where you are persecuted for your nationality and your beliefs, like he was," Soltykevych says, "you develop a feeling of, I don't know about anger, but you develop a feeling of unfairness. So I think a large part of what he was motivated by is a feeling that it was important for him to have people recognize Ukraine. But it's hard for me to imagine that," he continues. "I was born in Edmonton. I've never had to experience that type of persecution, so I'm just guessing." And when Soltykevych's dad passed away when he was just 18, he missed any chance to confirm his hypothesis.

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

NOT SIMPLY SATISFIED CRANKING OUT OLD STANDARDS, THE CHORUS REGULARLY COMMISSIONS ENTIRELY NEW PIECES TO ADD TO ITS REPERTOIRE

Yet, even in the absence of parental nudges and encouragement, Soltykevych ended up following in his father's footsteps, becoming a conductor (as he explains it) through osmosis. He has been at the helm of the Ukrainian Male Chorus of Edmonton for over twenty years now, taking the group to play concert halls in Europe, Australia and across Canada, including Edmonton's prestigious Winspear Centre.

The longevity of the Company may have a lot to do with its adaptability. Soltykevych talks readily of the choir's need to grow and change over the years, especially now that fewer and fewer locals speak the mother tongue. Not simply satisfied cranking out old standards, The Chorus regularly commissions entirely new pieces to add to its repertoire.

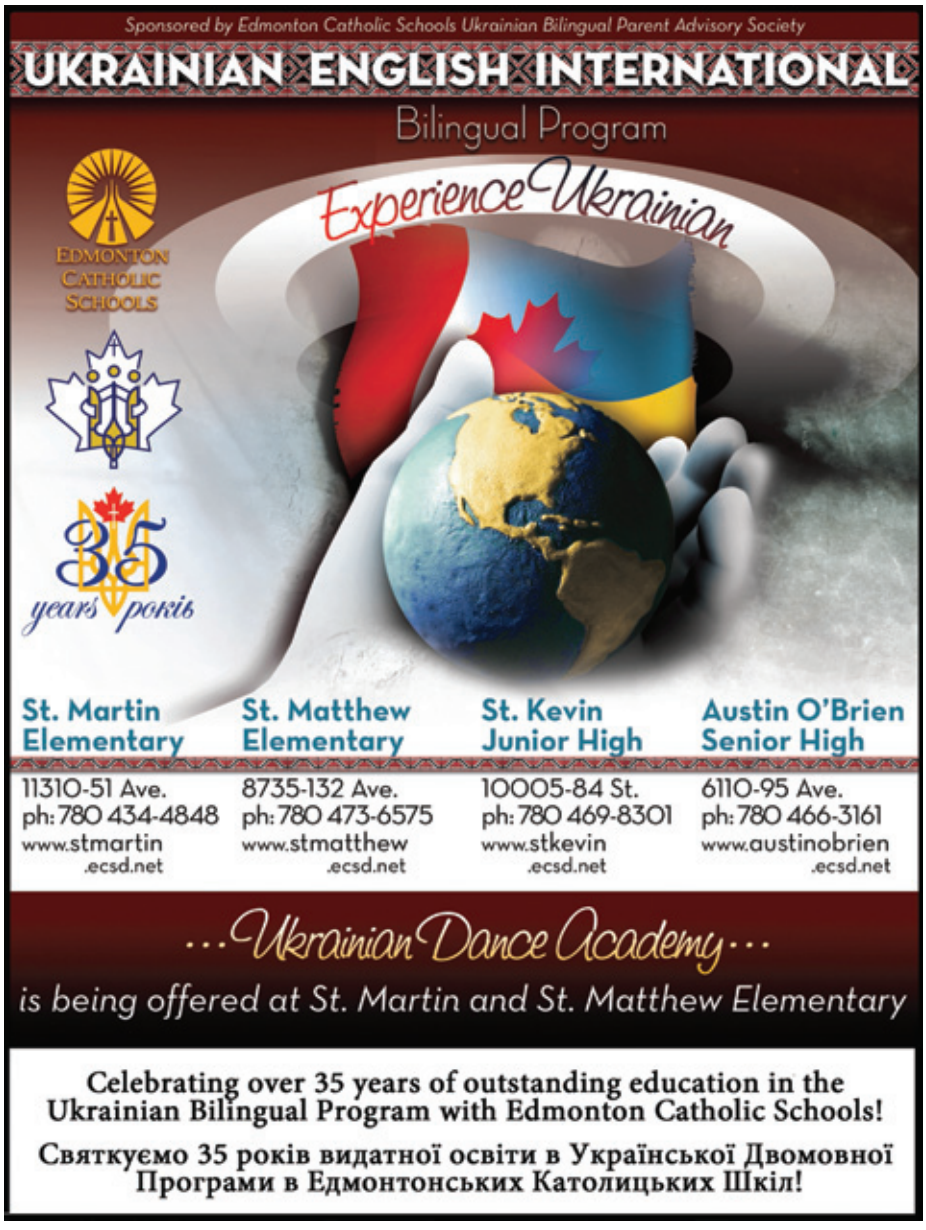
"We strive to come up with works that speak more to people of a Ukrainian-Canadian background," he says, "because a lot of the works that were written for men's choir that we sing were written in the 19th Century. And then in the 20th Century, a lot of Ukrainians weren't able to compose – not only Ukrainians, but even Russian composers under the Soviet Union, many of them were persecuted, too. So there is a real lack of that 20th Century choral music.

"A lot of it talks about 19th Century values and thoughts," he continues, "a lot about nature and love and so on, which are universal things except the sound is 19th Century—it doesn't sound as modern. So we wanted to address that."

The commissioned piece "That Old Sheepskin Coat" revives the history of immigration, surmising the stories that a well-travelled coat from Ukraine could reveal, if only it could talk. And Soltykevych is quick to point out that the amusing recipe-in-song number "A Fine Summer Borshch" is also a big hit for them.

According to Soltykevych he's interested in exposing not only the Ukrainian Canadian community, but also the entire community of Edmonton to Ukrainian culture. And that desire, which echoes his father's so perfectly, is not simply confined to choral music. Currently the host of CKUA Radio's Saturday morning show *Saturday Breakfast,* Soltykevych started his broadcast career on campus radio station CJSR. Launching the program *Sounds Ukrainian* in 1999, he brought contemporary Ukrainian hits, from rap to heavy metal, to the Edmonton radio waves.

"If you don't show people, they won't know," he concludes simply. And if Soltykevych's hypothesis is right, and his father's passion for choral music comes from wanting to be seen, to be heard, to be recognized, then it's safe to say that – through his son's humble efforts – those unadorned requests have been more than satisfied.



IHOR BOHDAN

THE DREAMS OF MILLIONS UNITED IN A SOLO VOICE

by Kathleen Bell

The crowd at the Calgary Ukrainian Festival is engaged - smiling, clapping, singing. On stage, charismatic Ihor Bohdan has captured their attention. There is constant interaction; Bohdan says he truly enjoys performing and wants his audience to enjoy the music as much as he does.

"Ukrainian pop star Ihor Bohdan is a passionate performer of Ukrainian music with a presence that attracts attention and some very loyal fans," says Lysia Smandych, Vice-Chair of the Calgary Ukrainian Festival. "Audience members have a chance to dance with him during a show as he mingles and performs on stage and off, sharing his positive energy and genuine love for his art."

Bohdan was eager to sign up as a performer at Calgary's first Ukrainian Festival in 2010. He has lived in the city since 1991 and has performed most of his life.

Bohdan was born in Ukraine's Lviv region. He says losing his parents at a young age perhaps forced him to work harder at achieving his dream. He served as an entertainer in the army and trained as an actor at the Kyiv Drama School. While working as an actor, he had an opportunity to try singing. He fell in love with it.

In those days, the Soviet government sent performers to various cities to work in the *Filharmoniya*, which performed a range of music, from classical to contemporary. Bohdan chose the latter.

While performing in Lviv, Bohdan was invited by Ihor Bilozir of the popular Vatra ensemble to be their soloist. His recording of Bilozir's "Ne syp myla skla" catapulted him to stardom.

At that time, tensions were rising in the USSR. Ihor was recruited by Olekh Kulchitsky's group - one of the first in Ukraine to perform songs forbidden in the late 1980s. Anything religious or patriotic was banned, including the Ukrainian National Anthem. Bohdan still remembers the audience looking confused and bewildered when he started singing Christmas carol"Boh Predvichny" at a concert. By the third verse, the crowd stood up and sang with him, which ended with rousing applause.

In 1991, the year of Ukraine's Independence, Bohdan toured Canada with Mykhailo Musienko and Halychany. The group came to Calgary to record with female ensemble, Rusalky. Ihor ended up marrying one of the singers, Katrusia, and staying in Calgary. Today, they and their family - children Roksolana, Marco and Victoria - are actively involved in the city's Ukrainian schools, churches and organizations.

Halya Wilson, the former ACUA representative in Southern Alberta, says, "working with both Ihor and Musienko lifted our community to a more professional level and re-energized a slowly fading community at the time of their arrival. It gave us a much needed boost and gave us closer ties to our fatherland."

Bohdan was proud to see Ukrainian culture being preserved in Canada. He vividly remembers the very first time he, Musienko and Vasyl Sawchuk appeared at Vegreville's Pysanka Festival. He says he was so impressed to see people celebrating their culture, wearing Ukrainian shirts, speaking their language and eating their ethnic foods. He was also floored by the level of professionalism and community involvement he encountered while performing at the Toronto Ukrainian Festival in Bloor West Village.

Today, Bohdan maintains close ties with his homeland. He considers himself very fortunate to be able to spend at least one month a year performing in Ukraine, where former President Leonid Kuchma honoured him as a Merited Artist for outstanding achievement in the performing arts.

Among his most unbelievable experiences was the chance to perform in Kyiv's Independence Square during the 2004 Orange Revolution.

But equally moving was the opportunity to sing Ukrainian Christmas carols with his daughter at a recent Calgary performance – the same songs the Soviets forbade him from singing years ago.

Ihor supports efforts in Ukraine by helping organize humanitarian fundraisers for a variety of causes – everything from specialized equipment for children's hospitals in Lviv and support for the Ukrainian Junior Luge Team, to the historic Orange Revolution.

Bohdan is currently planning Mother's Day concerts in Edmonton and Ukraine. He says his goal is to unite religious groups to celebrate all Ukrainian mothers, Mother Ukraine and the Blessed Virgin Mary. In a phrase he uses often, his goal is "to unite us all as one strong and majestic nation." And he's doing exactly that with his music.

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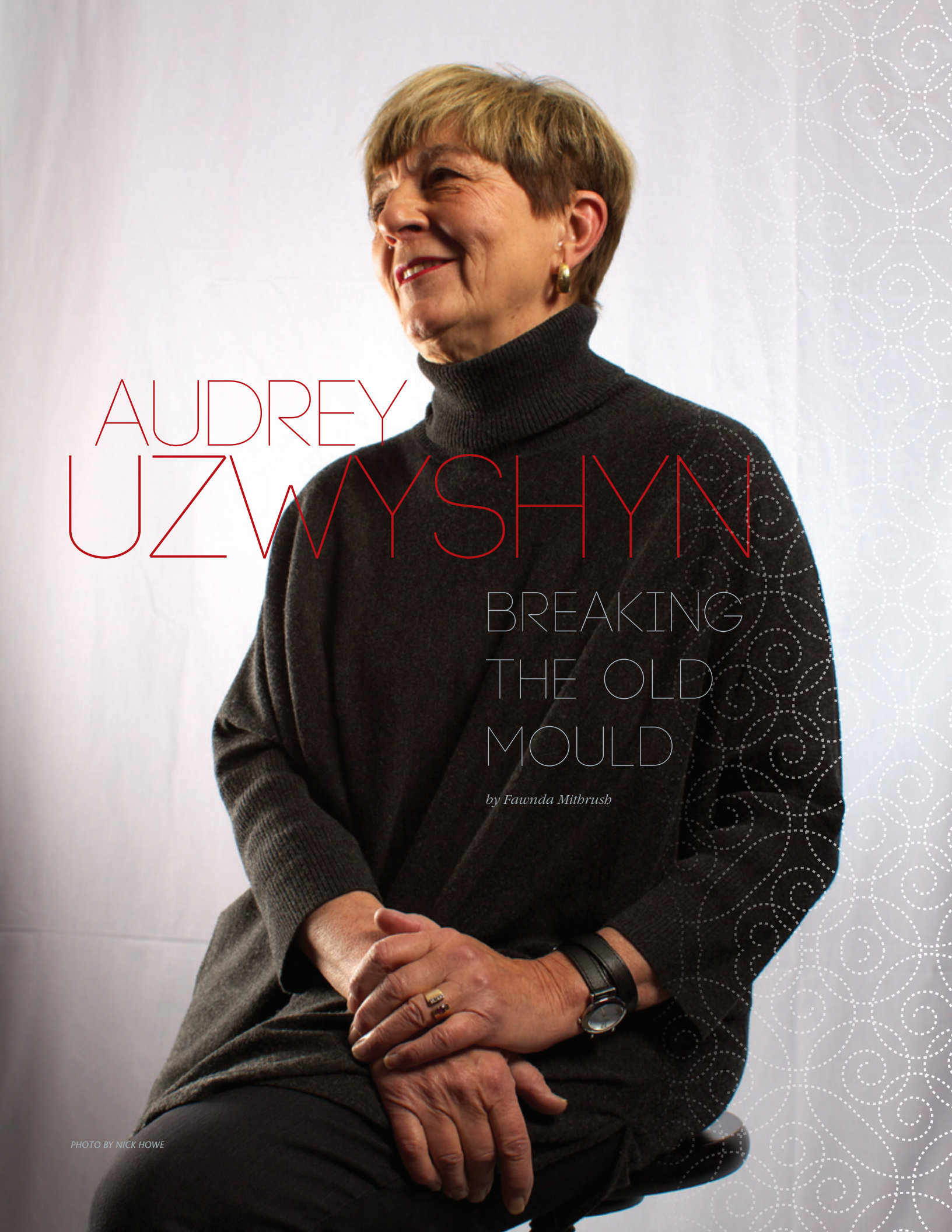

AUDREY UZWYSHYN

BREAKING THE OLD MOULD

by Fawnda Mithrush

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

Audrey Uzwyshyn's pottery career started out as a bit of an accident — and it could be her roundabout introduction to the form that has made her work so aesthetically distinct in Edmonton's art community.

Big Valley born-and-raised and educated in Interior Design, Uzwyshyn found herself in Edmonton after her late husband, Taras, had taken up a teaching job at Ross Shepherd High School. At a meeting with the school principal, who served him coffee in locally made mugs, it occurred to Taras that this was a craft tailor-made for his wife. Audrey soon received a call asking her to join the Edmonton Potter's Guild, and an unexpected path eventually led her to the role of President.

"We bought a potter's wheel, then two wheels and a little kiln — and it just escalated from there," Uzwyshyn explains. "It got to the point where the Potter's Guild just wasn't enough: you got two fifty-pound boxes of clay a year. And, I mean, I can now go through a hundred pounds a day if I'm on a roll."

Her pieces are delicate, well-matched and vibrantly coloured — all rare attributes of traditional pottery.

"A lot of pottery is really heavy and clunky. I don't like it, it's not my style. I try to make things thinner and lighter. It's just my thing, different strokes for different folks."

While Uzwyshyn attributes the distinctiveness of her pieces to her painstakingly developed glazing techniques, one gets the sense that a worldly drive and interest in many cultures informs the appearance of her work. As a game, when her daughters were young, she'd ask them to pick a country from the atlas each weekend and the family would spend a day searching for recipes and new ingredients from cultures of any corner of the world—the end goal being to prepare a meal of traditional food from that culture.

Like many interior designers, she also notes the distinct influence of Canada's neighbour across the Pacific. "I love the Japanese style of design. Their bowls are phenomenal. There's a beautiful balance of design and function with Japanese pottery that I think I've been influenced in, in some ways."

"I wouldn't call myself a potter of Ukrainian art, I consider myself a Ukrainian potter, which is a big difference," she adds, noting that she does sometimes write pysanky. "Who's to say that later in life I might not try some Trypillian things?"

The most traditional pieces are her ram figurines (*barany*), which are adorned with thousands of small, curled clay bits depicting the animals' horns and coiling fur.

"Every square inch of fur is squeezed and put on by hand, very labour intensive," she explains. "Those are sort of my signature piece. For Ukrainians they signify a number of things: prosperity, virility and strength."

In the coming year, she intends to fire a numbered series of one hundred different rams, an endeavour she's never undertaken before. She's also looking forward to taking a glass-blowing class this winter, and hopes to find a way to incorporate glass into her pottery—a combination which, to her knowledge, has never been attempted (or succeeded in) before.

Though she doesn't consider herself a maker of Ukrainian art per se, she's an obvious collector of it. Many of the large canvas paintings on her walls come straight from contemporary visual artists currently practicing in Ukraine – a collection made possible through numerous trips there to visit her daughter, Connie, who ran the ArtEast gallery in Kyiv for almost ten years.

Though her production levels have slowed down over the past few years, Audrey says that she'll carry on making pottery until she's simply physically unable to do so.

"I love the fact that you can take a piece of dirt and then—" she pauses, shaping her hands in a grand swirl, "—you make something. It's quite a process to think that this was once a piece of dirt, then you make a piece that you can either look at or use everyday. Every piece is a challenge."

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ICONS OF FAITH AND PILLARS OF STRENGTH

by Mari Sasano

MARIANNA SAVARYN

PHOTO SUPPLIED

While most parents wish for their children to have the conventional, comfortable lives of doctors, lawyers and accountants, Marianna Savaryn's mother saw something different in her artistic child's future.

It's a corny story," says Savaryn from her home in Hamilton. Recalling her upbringing in Toronto, the child of two first-generation Canadians, her fate was sealed in one afternoon. "My earliest memory was at four years old. I remember one Friday afternoon – I was in the kitchen kneeling on a chair and working on an assignment and I asked my mother what I was going to be when I grew up. And she said, 'You're going to be an artist, of course!'"

She was lucky enough to have parents who valued art: Savaryn's mother was a textile artist, and her father had a talent with drawing. But in spite of her mother's clairvoyance, Savaryn never pursued her favourite subject seriously. "In university, I thought you had to study science, so I did one year and hated it," she explains. "I decided to do something I knew, and I realized that you can take fine arts [as a discipline] and I switched. I studied at the U of T, and I specialized in drawing and lithography."

Marianna followed that with an Education degree, then eventually moved to Alberta with her husband. She took to the task of raising three children, while pursuing her artistic interests on the side, but at the age of 28, she finally found her true calling: iconography.

"It's something I started because my brother was getting married, and it was a gift. I decided I wanted something connected to our faith, and I did it without any formal training." After painting the first one, she decided that she would like to train further and ended up at the Sacred Arts Academy in Pennsylvania for a 10-day workshop. Most of her fellow students made one icon during that time; Savaryn ended up writing three. When she returned home, she began researching icons and found a book about Fr. J. Mokrytsky, who is considered the most eminent iconographer of the 20th century. She ended up studying with him for twelve years.

"He was 78 or 79 when I called him. I said I was conducting research and came across his work and wanted to study with him. And, of course, he must've heard that all the time!" She held little hope that Mokrytsky would take her on as a student, but through a coincidence – Savaryn's godfather had stayed at the same monastery as her mentor – doors opened, and they were introduced.

> "IT'S STILL A MYSTERY. I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY, BUT I UNDERSTAND THAT I SHOULD BE DOING THIS, SO I CONTINUE"

"I brought him some of my paintings and he said, in Ukrainian, 'It's possible.'" She went to train with Mokrytsky in the fall of 1990, then returned home to continue her studies with him by correspondence.

"In between, I was commissioned to do a church in Red Deer, which ended up being a five-year project," says Savaryn. "I would make drawings and send them to him, and he would make corrections, all by snail mail. Somehow, slowly, it got done. He was just happy that someone was doing it. It's very difficult, and the remuneration is not very much. It's a vocation, a ministry. I have no choice. It's an obligation."

As she gained more experience, she felt compelled to share her knowledge. Her first students were children at the Ukrainian scouting organization Plast.

"If you can hold a pencil and write your name, you can go through the process and follow the lines," she instructed them. "I taught forty-five kids over fifteen hours and each child completed an icon."

However, time has its own agenda. A few years later, her beloved mentor and teacher passed away. Then Savaryn's mother died the following year. The double tragedy was such a blow that Savaryn didn't paint for an entire year. Ultimately, a tremendous project brought her back: in 1999, Edmonton Catholic Schools initiated a project to teach icons in their school system.

Savaryn taught her art to entire schools of eager artists, seeing it as a way to help young people to connect to their faith: "The reason I wanted to do the project was because through art, you reach a different part of a person. It's heart-work. The intellectual, physical and spiritual needs to be in balance, and this is one way to reach that spiritual side."

Savaryn has since returned to Ontario, where she is working to set up similar icon workshops in the schools there. She also continues to be devoted to her own work.

"It's still a mystery. I can't tell you why, but I understand that I should be doing this, so I continue," she muses aloud.

"It's one little fraction of our culture where faith crosses with art. It's like a good marriage. In the Ukrainian community, it's an important aspect of life. In the villages, the church was the centre of life. Things are changing, but iconography is a tool to connect to faith, inner strength, hope." AV

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MARIA DYTYNIAK

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A HARMONY OF PASSION

by Fawnda Mithrush

Though Maria Dytyniak left the Dnipro Choir earlier this year after conducting the acclaimed ensemble for almost three decades, the well-respected teacher insists that she's not done with music entirely. She still tutors ten piano students regularly, noting that she's really only "semi-retired."

Taking up musical training from a young age in her hometown of Chortkiv, Ukraine, Dytyniak moved to Edmonton in 1948, and began teaching music here after completing her studies through the Royal Conservatory of Music. In 1967 she went on to found Merezhi, an all-female vocal ensemble, which toured across Canada and recorded four records before disbanding in 1982.

Edmontonians may recognize her voice from the discussions of Ukrainian classical music on her long-running CKUA Radio program, others may have read her *Bibliography of Ukrainian Composers*, published by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in 1986. Others still may recognize her from the choir conductor's position in front of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra from any of the numerous occasions that the Dnipro Choir collaborated with the ESO.

Though her appointment to the conductor's position came about unexpectedly in 1976, when Dnipro's 'heart-n-soul' founding conductor, Roman Soltykewych, passed away suddenly, Dytyniak met the new job with determination: "I always like a challenge, I don't like to sing those songs

that everybody knows," she explains. "You start analyzing the song, what the composer wanted to say, what the poet wanted to say, whether it's a folk song or sacred music. Then the performance… the performance is [a] wonderful thing. I'm not nervous when I go onstage in front of the choir."

She passionately describes the joys of conducting a large, mixed choral group: "It's like a big orchestra that uses all the instruments," she says. "There are more opportunities for what you can do."

She recalls highlights of Dnipro's successes, in particular, the challenges of producing the choir's first opera, *Kupalo*, in 1981: "I remember when I came to the executive meeting for Dnipro and said 'why don't we do an opera? It will require a symphony orchestra and costumes and acting.' Then some of them said 'what is opera?' They didn't even know," she laughs. "Every Ukrainian group in Edmonton was helping us to put on *Kupalo*."

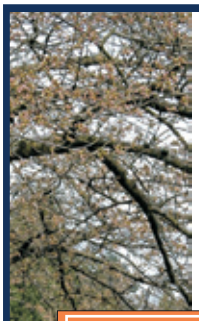
Proof positive: the production's souvenir program lists over two dozen cast and production staff, a full orchestra, multiple choirs in addition to Dnipro, dance ensembles, plus costumes and set staff — not to mention the specially commissioned artwork, a print of which hangs in Dytyniak's living room to this day. "That was a highlight, I must say," she grins.

SHE DESCRIBES UKRAINIAN VOICES AS STRONG, RICH, AND MUSCULAR — NOTING THAT THE DEEP, BASS VOICES OF SLAVIC CHOIRS ARE NOT EQUALLY MATCHED ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.

When not at the piano or at the helm of a choir, she's a consummate reader of anything Ukrainian or English, and has tomes in both languages neatly stacked on her dining room table. With an inclination for mysteries ("I've read almost all of Agatha Christie," she proclaims) and John Grisham thrillers, she looks forward to quiet time as she nears her 80th birthday on Julian Christmas this coming January. "It's time to relax, and listen to other people," she says.

Though she holds great appreciation for a range of classical composers like Bach, Beethoven, Debussy, and Shostakovich (she'll even admit a fondness for jazz), her true love is Ukrainian choral music. She describes Ukrainian voices as strong, rich, and muscular — noting that the deep, bass voices of Slavic choirs are not equally matched anywhere else in the world.

"Our [singers] have this meat around them," she says. "Ukrainian music is very melodious. I think the music says that we are very cultural people. We have beautiful songs — it's a culture that could be on any stage of the world." AV



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NATASHA LAZAROVIC

GOING WAY BACK TO PAY IT FORWARD

by Mari Sasano

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

Growing up, Natasha Lazarovic was a wild child: very vocal, stubborn, and very determined. She would always find her own way of doing things, but it turns out she came by her hard-headedness honestly.

"My family comes from the Carpathian Mountains, which is more gypsy oriented," she says. "There are very strong-willed outspoken women. My Baba would tell me, 'Natasha, you always know who you are.'"

A strong sense of identity and a love of her heritage have followed her into her career. For ten years, Lazarovic has been the creative mind behind Temna Fialka, a fashion line that takes its cues from the beauty of her gypsy Ukrainian culture. Her clothing is as

"...IT'S AMAZING HOW UKRAINIAN PEOPLE STARTED TO APPRECIATE THEIR ROOTS: THE PRE-CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS, GOING BACK TO THE EARTH."

spirited as she is, combining textures, rich colours and bold shapes.

Born to a Canadian mother and a Ukrainian father, Lazarovic's earliest memories are of art. This emphasis on culture was instilled in her by her Baba, who insisted on passing Ukrainian tradition onto her own children and then her grandchildren, including Natasha and her siblings. Music, theatre, visual art, folklore – the young Natasha was steeped in it. And of course, there was dance: "As a girl, nothing was more fascinating! The long ribbons and velvet… it's entrancing."

Perhaps this was the beginning of her love of costume and fashion, but textiles were just one inspiration for the budding artist. "I was always interested in making things, not just clothing. My mother used to sew for us; she would make these elaborate Hallowe'en costumes and I just watched her. I wasn't taught – I wrecked many sewing machines, took things apart and figured it out."

As an adult, she followed her interest in fashion, working as a buyer and later for a European agency that now represents Temna Fialka. At night, she would take classes to supplement her self-taught skills. Working with leather, satin and silk, she creates unique hand-made pieces that find their homes in wardrobes and even galleries around the world: she has sold pieces as far away as Mexico and Sweden.

"My ideal client is creative, not afraid to express what they feel… people who can appreciate custom work, and support Canadian artists. They have some level of respect for art. I don't care how old they are."

It's no surprise that she sees Temna Fialka not just as a fashion house, but a way to express her many artistic influences. Still hungry for inspiration anywhere she can find it, Lazarovic finds ideas in some surprising places: "It's an open floodgate! There are so many things. For Spring, I'm working on pieces inspired by Frida Kahlo. I watched movies, read wardrobe books, I found high-fashion images. Music. Politics."

Politics? She refers to her "Stalin Dress", a hand-painted ball gown that is "gluttonous" in scale and decorated with vintage military medallions. It's a statement about the tragic chapter in Ukrainian history, the famine of 1932. She feels grateful to have grown up in Canada, in a Ukrainian community outside of Soviet influences. And she is inspired that her ancestral country has an ever-growing interest in its own, previously repressed, heritage: "When you start to look, since the Orange Revolution there have been more artists emerging in the Western world. It's amazing how Ukrainian people started to appreciate their roots: the pre-Christian traditions, going back to the earth."

It is her hope to bring that energy to the next generation of creative Ukrainian-Canadians; to make a difference in preserving and nurturing that vibrant culture, and to provide a role model for young artists who are inspired to see her work. "My greatest achievement has been being able to take something and evolve it into a business and art form. I can take fashion, politics, and art – and people support and appreciate it."

JOHN PICHLYK

SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST HAPPY FEET

by Fawnda Mithrush

In 1976, when John Pichlyk first moved to Edmonton and joined the Ukrainian Shumka Ukrainian Dancers, he quickly gained notoriety as a bit of a rebel.

"The first dance I did for Shumka obviously was a *Zaporozhetz*," the former Artistic Director chuckles, referring to the classic, hyper-masculine kozak's dance, which became a favourite of Pichlyk's after his experiences with a group of dancers playfully described as "Cossacks on steroids." He danced with them in his University years at St. Vladimir's College in Roblin, Manitoba.

"Everyone was going 'are you crazy? You can't do that many *prysiadky* (high kicks).' I'd go 'come on, in Winnipeg I did it!' I got this reputation, but Orest [Semchuk] saw something in that I guess."

After growing up in Dauphin, Manitoba — a notable hotbed of Ukrainian-Canadian culture — Pichlyk worked to develop his dance technique through New York workshops with renowned teachers like Vadym Sulyma and Roma Pryma-Bohachevsky. Before taking on Shumka's Artistic Director gig in 1982, he spent a year at the Virsky school in Kyiv, getting schooled (so to speak) in the ways of Ukraine's official national dance ensemble.

When Pichlyk took the director's reigns from Semchuk, Shumka had been steadily picking up steam for three decades with increasingly innovative, narrative-based dances. At the time, this was a volunteer position, done in one's spare time. Pichlyk used lunch hours and weekends to develop dances, while trying to balance a growing career with Steelcraft Doors.

Though it was always tough to find a working balance between the two worlds, Pichlyk was determined to develop dances that would push the boundaries of Shumka's repertoire. He fondly remembers his first full-length show staged in 1984, *The Calling*: "The whole idea of it was a boy misplaced in society, who can't find his way in life. He doesn't know where to be, which was really what I was all about then. I mean, I got a Forestry degree that I didn't even work with. I didn't have a clue what I was doing. One minute I'm selling doors, next I'm in Ukraine — I didn't have a calling. It was quite appropriate."

The emotive aspects of Ukrainian dance became central to Pichlyk's choreographic philosophy. Ukrainian dance, he notes, has evolved far beyond the "toothpaste smiles and Brylcreem" image of its early years: "If you only teach your feet how to move, you're getting ripped off," he says. "It's about how you hold yourself, how you show pride in what you're doing, how you reflect those other feelings that aren't just in your face, that are internal. In the Shumka school we need to incorporate dramatic storytelling, theatre, acting, contemporary movement... You have to train the whole package. You can't just go out and have happy feet."

Remaining Shumka's AD until 1996, Pichlyk knew that the group would have to keep evolving, just as anything culturally relevant should. That evolution would see lots of change for Shumka's dancers, and not a lot of it traditional in nature. The group would adopt more ballet and classical styles, more contemporary movement — even contemporary

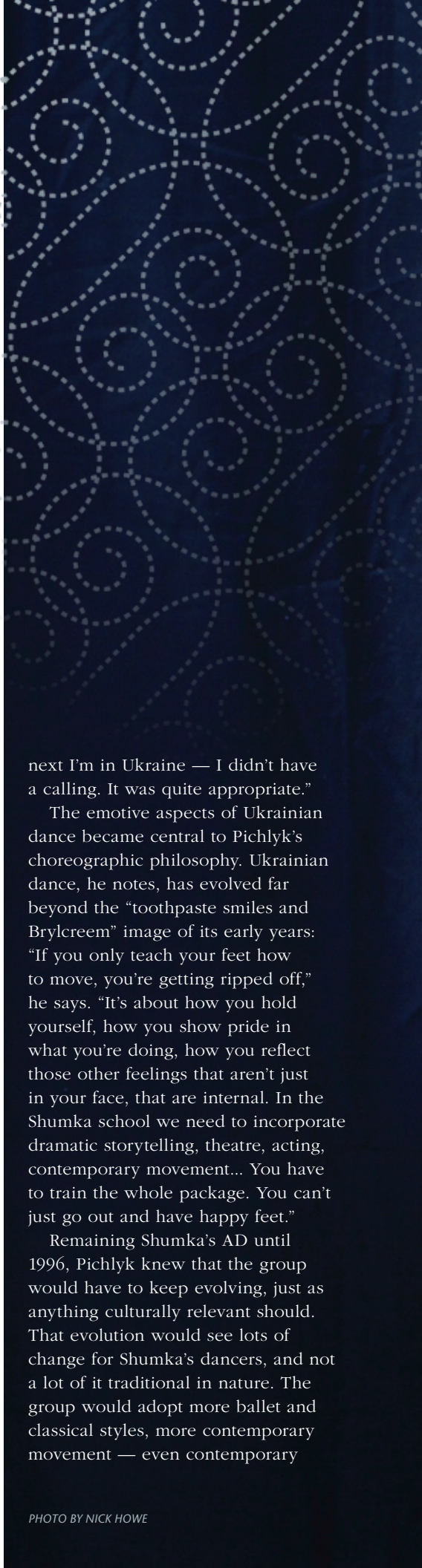


PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

costumes. Though some old-fashioned detractors may discourage any change that sways in a modern direction, Pichlyk says that's the most important fight to be fought when it comes to preserving Ukrainian heritage.

"We have the courage, it's in our makeup. We do push those buttons. We're sensitive to the fact that this has to speak to a broader base. That's the challenge for Ukrainian dance going forward, because as much as it becomes solidified, how does it keep its compass? When the rules start changing, how does dance retain its integrity, its purity, and be flexible enough to express things in new ways? I don't think we talk about that enough."

Now 56 years old and focusing on raising a family, Pichlyk still contributes to the Shumka cause, overseeing choreography for *Cinderella,* and the 50th Anniversary show and touring production more recently.

"It's been awesome," he says. "Just look at what we've accomplished so far. That's the beauty of this thing. We're just scratching the surface of what we could, on the world stage, become." AV

"IF YOU ONLY TEACH YOUR FEET HOW TO MOVE, YOU'RE GETTING RIPPED OFF," HE SAYS. "IT'S ABOUT HOW YOU HOLD YOURSELF, HOW YOU SHOW PRIDE IN WHAT YOU'RE DOING, HOW YOU REFLECT THOSE OTHER FEELINGS THAT AREN'T JUST IN YOUR FACE, THAT ARE INTERNAL...."

IRYNA KARPENKO

HAVE MUSE, WILL TRAVEL

by Mari Sasano

Iryna Karpenko's artwork – paintings, etchings, and illustrations – evokes a dreamlike, timeless atmosphere with a strong flavour of Ukrainian folklore. And no wonder.

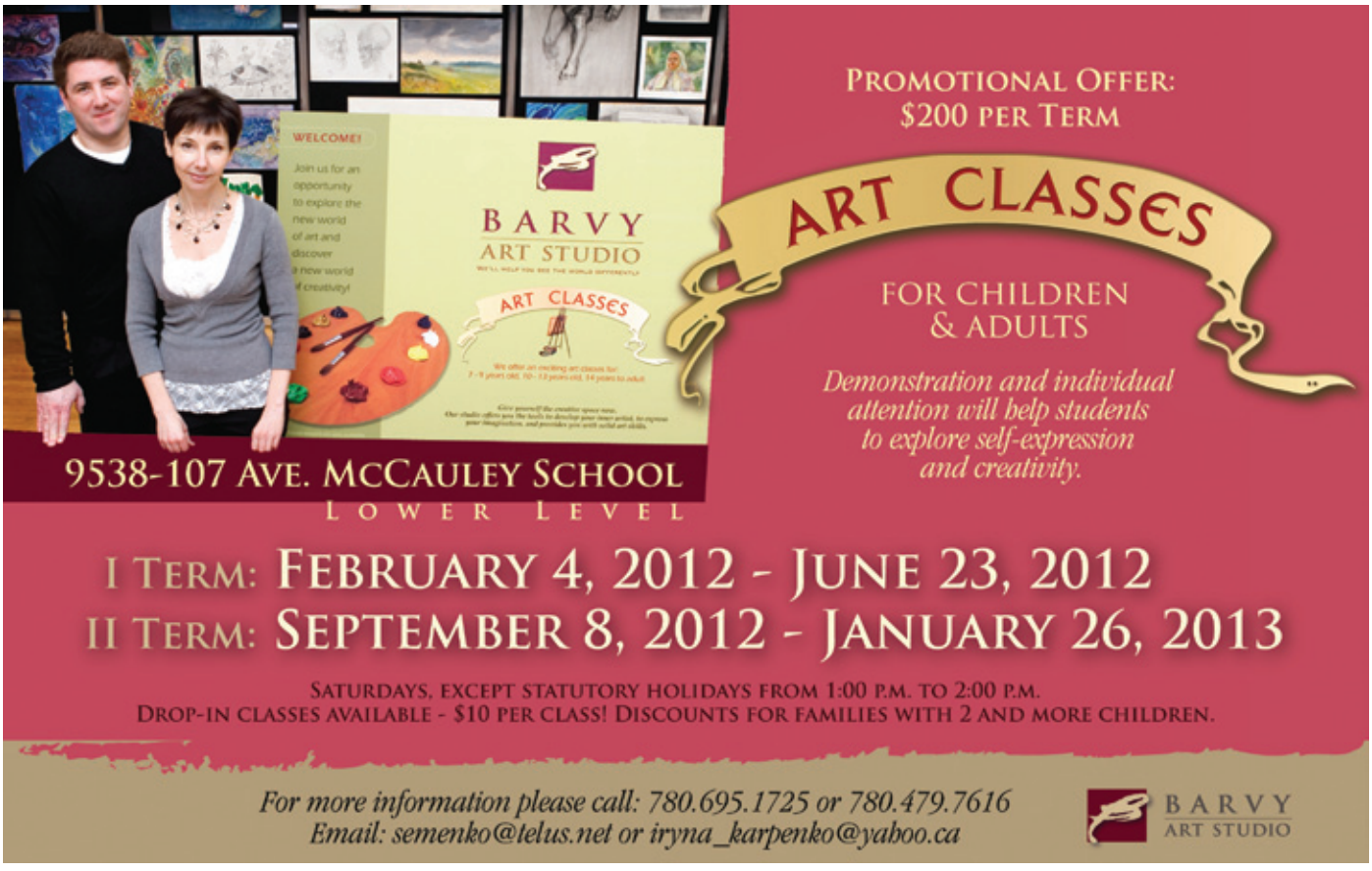
"Of course! I'm from Ukraine!" she says. "But my art is more than that. It's based on old traditions, all [springing from] culture: our lives, our grandparents' lives, how to prepare food, celebrating events. We learned Ukrainian traditions, but I try to make it modern."

Karpenko has been drawing since she was a little girl in Kyiv, pursuing her interest at the Children's Fine Art School. She later entered the Ukrainian Academy of Fine Art and Architecture and the Kyiv College of Industrial Arts, graduating with a degree in Interior Design. She spent a number of years as an illustrator in Kyiv, developing her unique style: "I'm a graphic artist, so line is more important than colour. I always start from drawing. Some artists start with colour or shade, but for me it's lines, and then light, and then colour."

Her work has been exhibited in solo shows and acquired for private collections in Ukraine, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, Czech Republic, USA and Canada.

In a career-defining moment, in 2004, Karpenko and her family moved to Edmonton: "Why does anybody come to Canada? Everybody is looking for a better life, to try something new. It's hard in Ukraine. People are just surviving," she says.

Karpenko's inspiration comes from her own life. Starting a new life



in Edmonton—as well as starting a family—gave her art a new focus, she says. "When I had my daughter, I drew art based on lullabies and songs. In all periods of life, new topics come."

Life in Edmonton has also offered her opportunities to explore new media, such as paint on glass. "I try to learn as much as possible. Every new medium is interesting and unpredictable at first. Watercolour is probably easiest for me, but I like to work with paint on glass and etching. I love the more complicated media. I enjoy the process. It's exciting to do it; you don't know what will come, and I love the mystery of it. It's impossible to compare with any other pleasure in life!"

More recently, Karpenko has been experimenting with the encaustic form, deeply textured and using melted, pigmented wax on a wood or canvas surface. "I didn't know about this in Ukraine," she exclaims. "Here, you can go to the library and learn it. There is so much more information here."

Edmonton's thriving visual arts scene has welcomed Karpenko's contributions with shows during Art Walk, at private galleries (TU, Moda Boho, the Front Gallery), public art (Art and Design in Public Spaces program), and commissions for other cultural groups (Verkhovyna Choir, Vegreville Pysanka Festival, ACUA). Karpenko has also been an art instructor since 2007 at the Barvy Art Studio, which she co-founded. In 2010, she was recognized with the City of Edmonton Cultural Diversity in the Arts Award.

Karpenko has found life in Edmonton to be very warm and welcoming, and appreciates the Ukrainian community here: "We are different branches of the tree," she says of her Canadian-born friends. "You see stuff you wouldn't see in Ukraine."

However, it is the appreciation for culture that she appreciates the most. "Ukrainian culture is so rich. I'm so happy here," says Iryna. "There are so many Ukrainian people, it's not hard. People are very open, compared to Ukraine [where they] forgot a lot, and they are not interested. If people like my work here, then I'm happy. I'm just enjoying what I'm doing."

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

MYKHAILO MUSIENKO

PHOTO SUPPLIED

A MAN FOR ALL THE SOUNDS OF LIFE

by Andrea Slobodian

Mykhailo Musienko is a familiar face on North America's Ukrainian festival and party circuit. He's a vocalist and keyboardist for two Alberta bands, Absolute and Barvinok. Musienko smiles, "I must have played two-thousand Malankas already." But he enjoys it. "People are having fun, enjoying your music. It's nice to see their faces."

He is most at home on stage, a professional musician with a diverse repertoire. In his native Ukraine, Musienko is best known as a soloist, arranger and music producer.

Originally from Chernihiv, he learned trumpet and bayan at the Conservatory of Music. At the Musical University in Kyiv, he studied composition, music theory and orchestra conducting.

He worked with the Lviv and Volyn Philharmonics, touring Europe and Asia. "Lots and lots of concerts, huge arenas, thousands of people," he reminisces. He also worked with popular bands Svitiaz' and Halychany, and renowned crooners Vasyl Zinkevych and Ihor Bohdan.

Then, his life underwent a major change. In 1991, Musienko, Bohdan and Halychany organized a cross-Canada tour of Shevchenko songs and contemporary Ukrainian music. Soon after, the USSR fell apart and they moved to Canada, and ultimately Calgary, where they recorded a project with female ensemble, Rusalky. Not long after, Musienko got married and started a new life.

"I got involved in concerts, the Ukrainian community," he explains. He and Bohdan joined bandmates from Ukraine and performed at Canada's National Ukrainian Festival in Dauphin, Soyuzivka Resort in New York and Ukrainian Independence Day Galas in Detroit and Chicago.

For Bohdan, having Musienko as his musical director and soloist "was extraordinary and made performing truly magical, for nothing is more important for a soloist than to have such talent supporting you vocally and musically."

Ever versatile, Musienko also hit the road with a four-piece country band in the 1990s and worked with a Broadway singer in the Calgary area.

Then, he received an invitation from Calgary musician Darren Moroz to fill a vacancy in his band, Absolute.

"He was simply the best thing that ever happened to Absolute," says Moroz. "He adds an amazing dynamic to the group with his vocals and exceptional craftsmanship on the keyboard. Mike's experience in sound engineering in Ukraine has taken us to a whole new level as we performed in venues across Western Canada. His wide-ranging knowledge of Ukrainian music added a completely new dimension to our band. Mike is a consummate professional who was very much involved in the Ukrainian music scene in Alberta."

Moroz quips that Musienko is equally at ease performing the beautiful Ukrainian ballad, "Marichka", and the dance floor favourite, "Macarena."

Musienko credits his classical training for a better trained ear. "The classical stuff is a base for any sort of music. You can recognize everything," he says. "It was tough to study but after that you have the best experience in the world."

He appreciates all styles, including pop and Ukrainian folk melodies, but his favourite is jazz. "I grew up in jazz," he says, listing the Weather Report and Chick Corea as inspirations. A highlight was his 50th birthday present - tickets and backstage passes to see Earth, Wind and Fire in Las Vegas. "It was the dream of my life to see that band."

It's fair to say music is Musienko's life. "Always music, always bands," he smiles.

He does have a home life – a day job operating Meest, a parcel delivery company to Eastern Europe, and his family, wife Christine and sons Maxim and Danylo – who play piano but dad says, "I don't think they will be musicians."

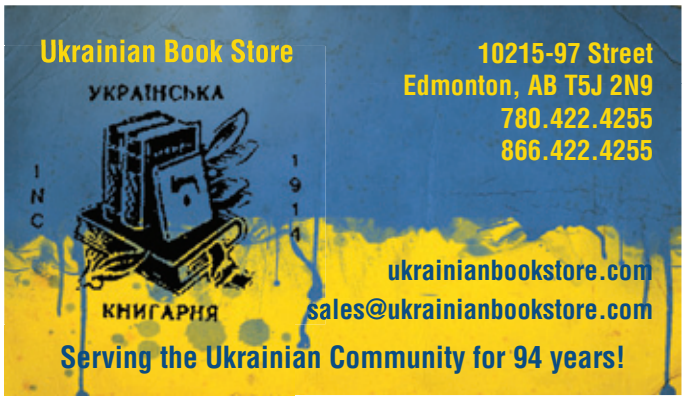
He has a recording studio at home and would love to produce albums for more local Ukrainian artists. He has arranged music for Ihor Bohdan; the two are currently planning a concert tour to Ukrainian communities in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Brazil.

Halya Wilson, UCC Calgary Past-President, calls Musienko and Bohdan "ambassadors from Alberta throughout the world as they continue to spread the beauty of the most melodic of music, our Ukrainian music."

Musienko has also arranged and recorded music for Ukrainian dance schools. Calgary's Ukrainian community often calls upon him to set up and operate sound systems for presentations and concerts. He agreed to edit and produce "Echoes of Ukraine," a television program that airs twice a week on Shaw Calgary's multicultural channel.

"Mykhailo was and continues to be approachable and supportive of our dance groups, youth and organizations by offering his services," says Halya Wilson.

Musienko is always willing to share the expertise of his vast career: "If I can help someone, I just love it."



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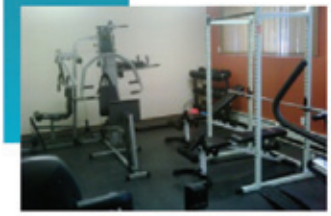

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EVA TOMIUK

FOR THE LOVE OF EASTER

by Fawnda Mithrush

Chances are, anyone who has bought a *pysanka* in Edmonton over the past 40 years might find a small "E" painted in a discreet corner of the egg's design — that being the mark of pysanka artist Eva Tomiuk.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that, at some point, most Edmontonians have at least seen Tomiuk's work. Her table at Heritage Days has been an annual treat for almost three decades. And if you visit Capilano Mall near Easter, an exhibit featuring her eggs and embroidery will likely be on display.

Other Canadians, and Americans too, have received instruction on how to write pysanky from this proud Baba. She ran workshops and demonstrated pysanka techniques to thousands in Vancouver at the 1986 International Expo, and she's appeared on TV screens all over North America as the woman who taught the world's most famous homemaker a thing or two about Ukrainian arts on *Martha Stewart Living*.

In fact, after filming a special Easter episode with Stewart in 1999, Tomiuk's segment has been reshown numerous

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

times, always on Good Friday. "I always miss it because I'm in church!" Tomiuk says, throwing up her hands with a smile.

Living in Lviv, Eva was all of eleven when her mother fell ill. Tomiuk's Baba was the one who encouraged Eva to pick up the traditional *kistka* (stylus), and get cracking on Ukraine's most iconic folk art: "I said 'Baba, I don't like to do it. At school I have to do it and I still don't like it!' But we did it anyway," she recalls, laughing.

She moved to Canada at age 18, and has since been honing her craft, sharing it with as many students as want to learn.

Her eggs have found their way to some pretty famous houses, too. She has presented a pysanka as a gift to Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Diana, Pope John Paul II, Mayors Hawrelak and Mandel, and even to *Days of Our Lives* stars Kristian Alfonso and Peter Breckell (better known, perhaps, as Hope and Bo Brady).

A trip to Tomiuk's house may well be one of the best ways to gain an understanding of just how diverse pysanky can be — not only in their regional design variations, but also in their optional, less traditional sizes: "Oh, there's goose eggs, ostrich eggs. I have a budgie egg, bantam eggs. I have pigeon eggs, but you know pigeon eggs are very oily, and nothing sticks to them. Dye won't take."

For Tomiuk, writing pysanky is just one of the Ukrainian artistic talents in her repertoire. In addition to literally thousands of decorated eggs in her home — she estimates she's made well over 4,000 — she boasts rooms full of regional embroidery displays, *rushnyk* cloths, wheat-sheath crafts, and a case stocked with wedding breads *(korovayi)*, dried and preserved for a past church exhibit. She keeps her eggs stored in cartons, various display frames, showcases and brandy glasses. A board of ribbons and awards from the Vegreville and Dauphin Ukrainian Festivals overflows with its collected accolades on the wall, not far from a framed posting of Tomiuk shown receiving a Woman of the Year certificate, a distinction offered to her in 1975 by the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada.

Always eager to instruct, she offers a postcard outlining the meaning and symbolism behind the intricate egg designs, explaining the differences in style between regions of Ukraine in their pysanky.

When asked about the holiday that's most associated with her favourite craft, she readily describes the spiritual aspect of her dedication: "I love Easter, it represents new life, resurrection, Christianity. I always make lots of eggs for it. My relatives and family always [each] get an egg. And of course all the food and decoration – everything else about Easter."

Back in 1999, she even gave Martha Stewart a lesson on traditional Ukrainian Easter dishes like horseradish and beets (that recipe made it into Stewart's cookbook, too). Now *that's* cause for celebration.

PETER SHOSTAK

PHOTO SUPPLIED

ALL ROADS LEAD SOMEWHERE

by Aspen Zettel

Peter Shostak is home for a short while to visit his mother, deliver some paintings, and refresh his mental images of the Alberta landscape, at the same time taking in inspiration for new material. Born in Bonnyville, Alberta, Shostak is the product of a quintessential Ukrainian household.

As a first generation Canadian, Shostak is rooted in the strength of his family's history. "(My father) immigrated to Canada just as the Depression started. My mother came when she was 16 years old, in 1939. They were very hardworking."

A graduate of the University of Alberta in 1969, Shostak took a teaching position at the University of Victoria, where he taught for ten years. After building his tenure, Peter surprised everyone when he left his teaching position to pursue painting full-time. "There I was, 36 years old, saying goodbye."

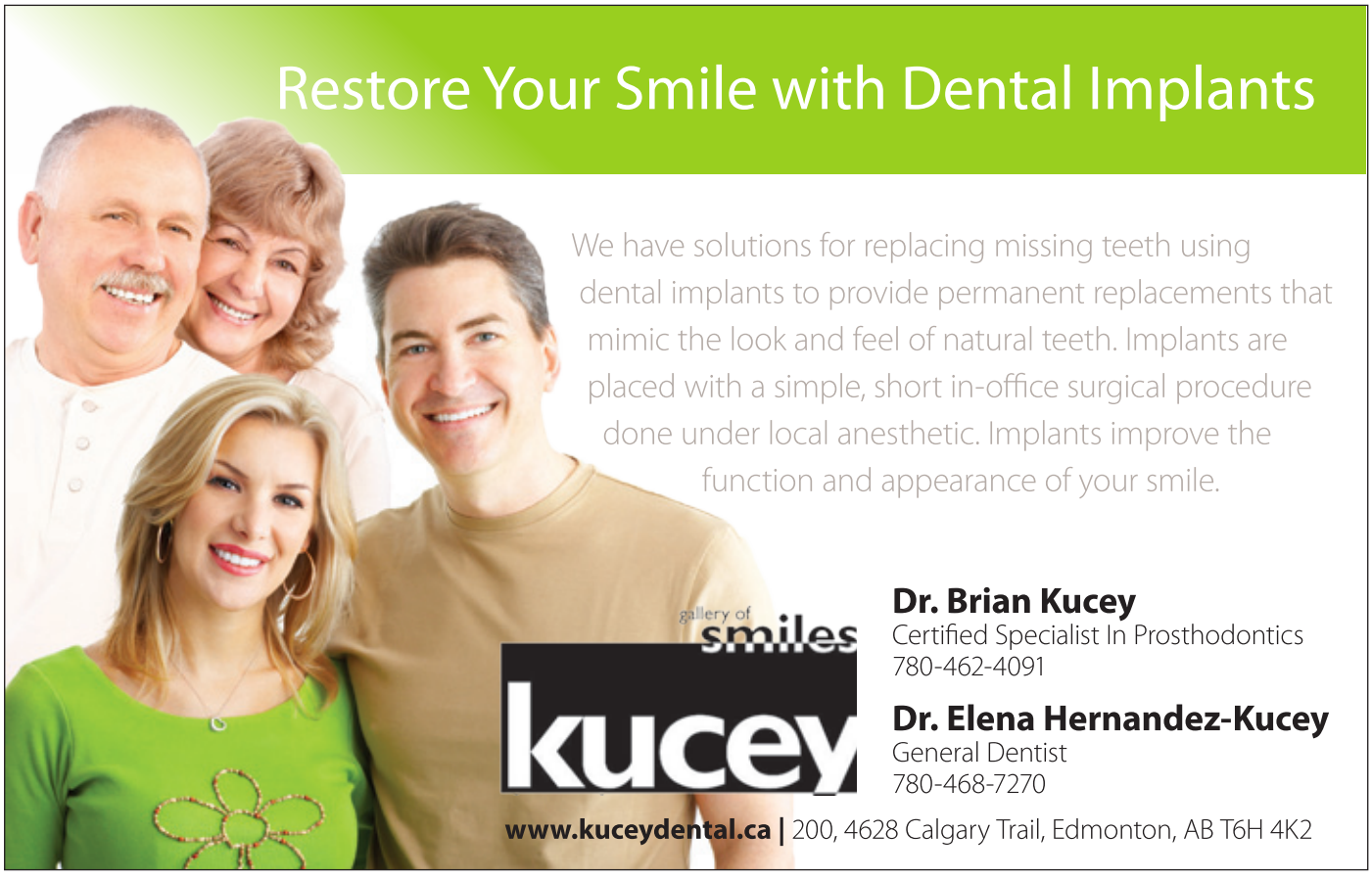
Although Shostak felt pressure from his colleagues as a result of his decision to leave, his confidence and talent established a career from which he hasn't looked back. Eager to explore new frontiers, Shostak began a portrait series that eventually became a collection of fifty paintings which, in turn, became a published book heavy with history and steeped in narrative.

When asked about the project, Shostak takes a deep breath before recounting, "That was a big project, it was five years of painting. When I got halfway into it, I thought, 'what am I doing?' It was major in terms of text. We did a lot of research."

Delving a little deeper into Shostak's painting practice, he reveals a bit about how he builds the story and substance in his paintings. "When I do a painting, especially if it's an activity painting where things are happening, you need a setting, a place for something to happen. You start deciding what you're going to do in terms of the actors in your image."

The strongest element that stands out in Shostak's work is his understanding and comprehensive rendering of light and shadow. It pulls at the memory of those raised on the Prairies, as though we are the actors depicted in his paintings – the brightness of the snow as you pull a toboggan, or the buttery light that falls on the fields in Autumn. When musing about the quiet loveliness of the Prairies, Shostak is serene. "There's a different beauty about it. You're concentrating on the sky, it's flat, plain."

Heading South for the winter, Shostak is looking forward to new landscapes to inspire him, but he isn't leaving just yet. He's on a mission to collect some new inspiration from the rural Alberta vistas and to impress in his mind the impacting visions of home. After discussing various paths-less-taken that offer refreshing vistas, Peter is eager to capture some photos and take in the fall atmosphere. Although not headed anywhere in particular, he has a good idea where inspiration might find him: "I'm going to take some side roads and see what I can find."



CHESTER KUC

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

SOMETHING DIFFERENT: A TRADITIONALIST'S MISSION

by Fawnda Mithrush

Entering the door of Chester Kuc's residence may give one the sense that they've been transported back in time. Not only is every wall space and shelf covered with hundreds of traditional Ukrainian folk art items — much of it created by Kuc and his wife, Luba, themselves — there's a not a photograph or modern artifact in sight, save for one thing: a prominently framed *Edmonton Journal* article hanging on the living room wall. The yellowed paper boasts the headline "The Father of Ukrainian Dance." Kuc appears on the page with a group of dancers, smiling widely.

Celebrated as the founding Artistic Director of The Ukrainian Shumka Dancers, and later establishing another of Edmonton's premiere Ukrainian dance groups, the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company, Kuc will correctly advise that Vasyl Avramenko was the true father of the folk dance, in Canada at least. After all, it was from Avramenko, the oft-travelling teacher, that Kuc learned his very first Poltava and Hutzul steps in the 1930s and '40s.

In fact, whenever Avramenko came through Edmonton, Kuc's father would make sure young Chester attended the dance classes: "[Avramenko] had a set repertoire, so every time he came you were doing the same dances. You knew them forwards and backwards," Kuc explains, noting that it wasn't until he saw The Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble in Winnipeg at age 14 that he became interested in exploring Ukraine's lesser-known regional dances.

"Back then you noticed that young people would dance until they were 16 or 17, and then they would drop out. [Shumka] came about because I had a vision that we had to do something different. We had to get out of that sort of rut we were in."

In 1959, when a number of talented dancers were pooled from a number of local community and church groups under the Shumka banner, Chester's father (again pushing him along) suggested that the new troupe try to book the just-built Jubilee Auditorium stage. He even lent Chester the $400 fee.

"None of our Ukrainian groups had ventured into a facility that large before. I guess it made an impression. It got us out of that Mickey Mouse-type of performing."

When the renowned Virksy National Dance Ensemble of Ukraine visited Edmonton, it changed the way Kuc would view the potential for Ukrainian dance in Canada.

"With Virsky you could see there was ballet training in there, there was a variety of regional dances which we just had no knowledge of. I think after seeing a professional dance ensemble, it gave me incentive. Whoever thought of taking ballet? We never even did warm ups or anything in those days," he laughs.

After a decade with Shumka, which clearly raised the bar for every subsequent dance group in Alberta, Kuc left the group to again "try something different." Though it's rumoured that he started Cheremosh to rival Shumka's successes, the now 80-year-old notes that his next endeavour was motivated by a hunger to return to the roots of the regional dances.

"I guess I'm one of these traditionalists," he says. "It's like when I write *pysanky*: I wrote all sorts of them, but I wanted to get back to the roots of the pysanka. There's more meaning to me because of the symbolism in it."

Though Kuc's days with both dance groups are three decades behind him, he still attends performances regularly. Since his departure from Cheremosh in 1979, he's gone on to organize one of the largest one-man shows ever held at the Royal Alberta Museum. *Pysanky: The Art and Passion of Chester Kuc* (2006) exhibited over 2,500 of Kuc's decorated eggs.

"Just like with the dancing, I had to do something that was different, unique — and what I did there was also educational. I think it opened up a lot of people's eyes: many people didn't even know that Ukrainians had different regional designs. In the colours from East to West, and how intricate the designs were for Bukovyna and Hutzulshchyna, the [various] pysanky were like night and day."

As for that rivalry and ever-rising bar? "It's good to have competition," Kuc says. "It keeps you on your toes, it keeps the standard of things much higher. When you have other groups you always have something to compare with. In fact I never dreamt that Shumka would evolve to what it is today, but thank God there were young people that were determined and wanted to continue."

IRENA TARNAWSKY

A HIGHER CALLING TO A FUNDAMENTAL NEED

by Mari Sasano

Irena Tarnawsky's life has always been surrounded by music and faith: both her grandfathers were priests, at St. George's Parish in Edmonton on her paternal side, and in Vilna, Alberta on the maternal side. The eldest of three children, her childhood was filled with Ukrainian language and culture.

"We attended Ukrainian school and Plast, the Ukrainian scouting organization, so we didn't sleep in on Saturdays. More was expected of us, by our family. At the time it seemed like a burden. Now I appreciate it."

"There used to be a button worn at festivals in the '70s which read, "It's fun to be Ukrainian." I wore it proudly then, and yes, I guess it is fun to be Ukrainian!"

Music has provided the pivotal point to that fun. Irena's parents are choristers in two choirs, her brothers are singers, and the piano felt like home from her earliest days. "I started formal piano lessons at five years old," she says from her Edmonton home. "There are pictures of me in a high chair at the piano! It was something my parents supported from a very young age."

Working diligently, Tarnawsky excelled at her chosen instrument. Soon, she was a regular performer in the Ukrainian community as well as a competitor at the Kiwanis Music Festival with other soon-to-be professional musicians-- two of whom are now international names in classical music, Angela Cheng and Linda Perillo.

"There came a point prior to my grade ten piano exams, when my parents sat me down and said they wouldn't push me anymore, and that it was now my decision if I wanted to continue. I was about sixteen. So I made the choice to continue and finish two music degrees with their support and encouragement." Irena put herself through university by giving piano lessons.

Her career as a professional musician started early: at fifteen, she was performing in the orchestra of the Dnipro Ukrainian Ensemble, and by eighteen she was the choir's main accompanist. Still in her twenties, Irena made time to provide piano accompaniment for the Merezhi Female Ensemble and the Edmonton Swiss Men's Choir.

She had her rock star moment, as well: Irena, her brothers, and two friends formed a band in the '80s called Estrada, playing a mostly Ukrainian repertoire (with a smattering of Latin and Top 40 rock) for weddings and banquets. The band's popularity peaked at Festival '88 in the Northlands Coliseum (now Rexall Place), performing to a screaming full house. Unfortunately, that was to be the band's last gig as three members moved away for work. "But we still reminisce about it. There were so many long nights and it was so much fun," she says warmly.

In Irena's very core resides a burning need to share her Ukrainian language and culture, so it's no surprise that when she is not performing, she is teaching. As a teacher in the Sherwood Park Ukrainian Bilingual Program, she has been guiding the Molodtsi young bandurists' ensemble along with Andrij Hornjatkevyc. During noon-hour lessons, they prepare the young musicians to take part in school concerts and assemblies, and at the annual Young Performer's Showcase of Ukrainian Music sponsored by the Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta: "The music for this concert is by a Ukrainian composer or on Ukrainian themes. I encourage the Molodtsi to have an awareness of their Ukrainian heritage. It's such a wonderful, rich culture."

Tarnawsky has also conducted the

choir at St. George's Ukrainian Catholic Parish for the past 15 years. The choir leads the faithful during the Divine Liturgy, but its music echoes far beyond the church building: they have released a recording of the Divine Liturgy and a variety of Christmas and Easter hymns. They produced a two-CD set that has been distributed for free to extended care centres and seniors' residences throughout the province, to enrich the lives of Ukrainian seniors who may not be able to attend services.

Irena becomes emotional when she talks about what music means to her. "I could be exhausted, or have a rough week at school, but music feeds me," she exclaims. "There's a saying – music brushes away the dust of everyday life. I love my piano students and share my passion for music with them. They are young artists in the making. My students leave [our sessions] knowing that someone feels they're important and that their heart and soul is evolving."

Music is so obviously her life's calling: "Music is my vocation, and it's sacred. I am a good and faithful servant using the talent that God has given me for His greater glory. This is my way of thanking the Creator."

PHOTO SUPPLIED

by Andrea Slobodian

THEODORA HARASYMIW

"I've always loved colour," says Theodora Harasymiw, dressed in greens and purples that are just as bright as the hues with which she paints. "I go into the supermarket and if you're there at the right time of year they've got the three different coloured peppers—I get tingles!"

Harasymiw considers herself, first and foremost, a colourist. Her colour choices are vivid, playful and striking, to the point where she rarely uses a black or a white – and 'toned down' isn't in her repertoire. "I've always used colour. Bright, bold colour – in university I used to get in trouble for it sometimes: 'We're doing a much more muted palate, Theo!'"

Despite her more rebellious tendencies, she graduated from the University of Alberta in 1996 with a degree in Fine Arts. When asked, Harasymiw is quick to claim that she didn't choose art, art chose her. While calm, crisp and orderly paintings were her focus until about five years ago, recently, mosaic art has rejuvenated her creative passions.

"I started this style of painting that resembled mosaic," she explains, "which is what full-bore became my style. So even when I was a painter, I really wanted to be a mosaic artist. It's very graphic, it's very linear, and I love that. There is only one existing image of Empress Theodora who I'm named after, and she's in a mosaic, in Ravenna, Italy, which is the mosaic capital of the world. So my name kind of guided me that way."

"I GO INTO THE SUPERMARKET AND IF YOU'RE THERE AT THE RIGHT TIME OF YEAR THEY'VE GOT THE THREE DIFFERENT COLOURED PEPPERS —I GET TINGLES!"

Born in Calgary, she recalls trips to Europe with family that first introduced a young Theodora to mosaic art – a form, she points out, that is rare in North America. But she is working to change that, at least in Edmonton. Currently in the process of completing a large commission covering the exterior residence of the recently renovated St. John's Institute on Whyte Avenue, Harasymiw is using mosaic art to leave her mark on our cityscape.

But Harasymiw has made an even bigger impact on the community. Duck your head inside a local elementary school and chances are you'll find a mural painted by Harasymiw, but designed by the students. As part of her work as an artist in residence, she's crafted (with the help of her 'li'l designers') over 60 murals in local schools and she has taught art to over 5,000 Edmonton children.

"What's really sad," she says, "is I go into a school, I spend about a month in a school and I'm all the art some kids ever see in the entire six years they're there."

Still, she shows complete faith in every child's ability to create. "The neat thing is, all children are artistic," she says, "it's just a matter of either re-introducing them to art or showing them how good they are, because I constantly hear kids say, 'oh my gosh, I didn't know I could do that!' Basically it all comes down to instruction, giving them a very basic format; giving them a format that doesn't contain them, but actually gives them something to work with and then go out boundlessly and fearlessly."

As a final project in each school, she splashes the walls with her love of colour, bringing to brilliant life the sketches each class has developed over the course of her stay, leaving every student with a sense of pride and ownership. "For me to heighten or blend or colour something that a child has already done, they think all the more of their design, because they're like, 'I did that!' And I'm like, 'yup! You did!'"

For Harasymiw, her work, writ large in public places for all to enjoy, is the most satisfying kind of art. "I've never wanted to just be a gallery artist," she proclaims, "I never wanted to just sell my work individually to clients. I've always wanted to be community-focused, whether it be in the schools, whether it be monuments, whether it be commissioned by ACUA, mosaics… I would love art parks where it's all community. Because I think art is something everyone should enjoy. I would be thrilled if I just spent the rest of my life producing for the community."

A PALETTE FOR THE EAGER PALATE

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

MYRNA KOSTASH

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

by Andrea Slobodian

Myrna Kostash recently closed a significant chapter of her ever-evolving literary life. She has completed a two month tour around the Balkans - Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey.

Most of the countries share her Orthodox faith, making it easy to pop in for Divine Liturgy or Vespers at a plethora of churches, from what she describes as the "stupendously big monument" of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria to a "tiny, perfect sailors' chapel" dedicated to St. Nicholas on the Greek Island, Aegina.

But on this cultural pilgrimage the Edmonton-based writer also took time to visit predominantly Muslim Istanbul. East meets West in the city formerly known as Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire; its capture and fall were a massive blow to Christianity.

"Istanbul is a bittersweet destination for an Orthodox," explains Kostash. "It's both one of the world's most interesting and hospitable cities, with extraordinary cultural and spiritual monuments, and the city that has risen

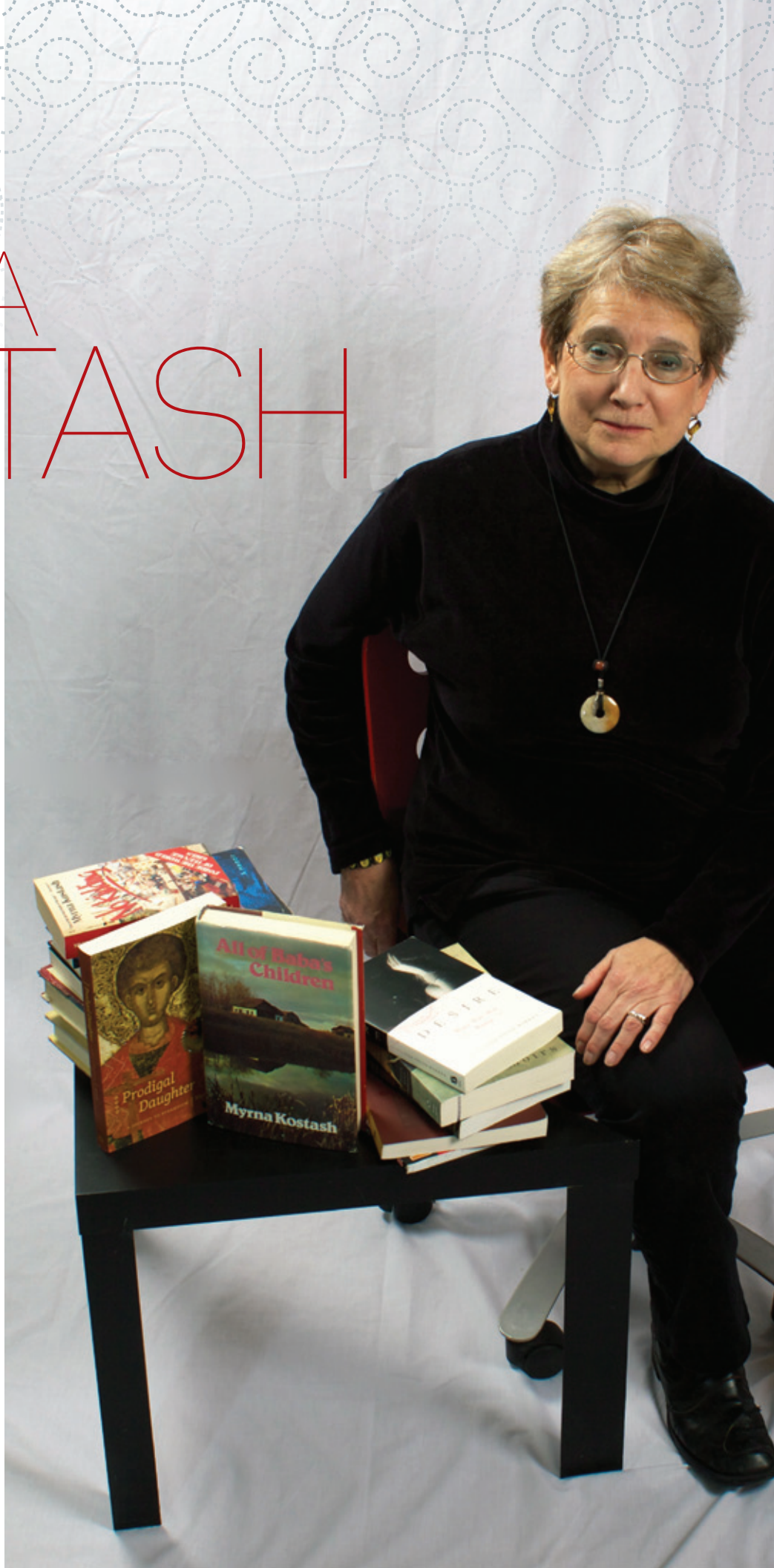


PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

in triumph over Constantinople, our Tsarigrad, and our Byzantine Church."

Her quest for Byzantium first led her here in 2000 and 2001. Her original trip resulted in her seventh creative nonfiction book, *Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium*. It takes us on her spiritual odyssey to rediscover her religious roots as a Ukrainian Orthodox Canadian. "I was trying to situate my Slavic origins in Slavic histories in Europe, especially in those places as in Ukraine that were Orthodox and used the Cyrillic alphabet," she blogs on her website, www.myrnakostash.com.

A decade later, she's back to follow up with those who helped with her research. They've received copies of her book, published by The University of Alberta Press in 2010. Some have become lifelong friends.

A quest for knowledge has shaped Kostash's literary career. In 1975, she was a self-described Toronto-centric freelance magazine journalist. She travelled back to her home province, Alberta, to research her first book, *All of Baba's Children*. It chronicles small-town residents born on homesteads to Galician immigrants, as were her parents.

Kostash, a third-generation Ukrainian-Canadian, ex-hippie and feminist, had no plans to stay in Alberta. But her time in Two Hills reconnected her to her roots, something she never felt in Eastern Canada. "My Prairie patriotism was inextricable from my Ukrainian-Canadian identity," she explains. She never returned to Toronto.

She found influence and kindred spirits in Edmonton with Hromada, a group of young artists and intellectuals affected by 1960s student peace movements, the New Left, Ukrainian dissidents and women's liberation. They formed a housing co-op that exists to this day.

"It was through my friendship and work with these men and women that I found a home again among Ukrainian-Canadians, having abandoned the community when I went to university and on to greener pastures," says Kostash.

She arrived at an exciting time for Alberta's arts scene. "Official multiculturalism was in full swing and we Ukrainian-Canadian artists saw an important role for ourselves in communicating its meaning to the public," she says. Kostash felt a renewed sense of Ukrainian pride; however, she needed more time to find a home in the Ukrainian Orthodox church.

"OFFICIAL MULTICULTURALISM WAS IN FULL SWING AND WE UKRAINIAN-CANADIAN ARTISTS SAW AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR OURSELVES IN COMMUNICATING ITS MEANING TO THE PUBLIC"

During a trip to Eastern Europe in the 1980s, she realized a cultural dividing line. "I became hyper-aware of the fact I 'came' from Byzantium in the sense that the Ukrainian people were Christianized through Byzantium (Constantinople)," she explains. "Having devoted a lot of my writing to exploring my ethnic, political and cultural identity, I finally became concerned with understanding my spiritual identity as well."

She has since been baptized Ukrainian Orthodox and told her story in *Prodigal Daughter*. A final piece on locating Byzantium in modern Istanbul is due out this November, a contribution to an anthology, *Slice Me Some Truth*.

Kostash is now focusing on projects closer to home. She wants to stage her play, *The Gallows Is Also a Tree*, based on the 1885 Frog Lake Massacre. Her goal is to bring Aboriginal history into the Ukrainian-Canadian memory. She's also assembling texts on Manitoba's 1816 Battle of Seven Oaks and a project comparing the very different inheritances through her mother's and father's families.

As Kostash continues to dig into her Ukrainian culture and Canadian social issues, we wait to discover where her literary journey will lead her next.

ZHENIA BAHRI

A REASON FOR EACH REGION

by Mari Sasano

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

Dance is so much a part of Ukrainian culture, and no wonder: the colourful costumes and energetic steps are breathtaking and instantly recognizable to international audiences. There is something irresistible about a spirited Hopak, no matter what your background might be.

Zhenia Bahri, an Edmonton-based dancer and choreographer, fell under its spell at an early age: "I was four years old when my mom put me in dancing. I'm not sure why, but she put me in ballet. But I liked it, and I continue to this day. I had a fantastic teacher. He was my hero."

Ballet wasn't offered beyond the kindergarten level, so after that first year, he enrolled in a Ukrainian dance program as part of his regular schooling. Bahri found that only dance provided the thrill of continual growth and improvement: he played handball and other sports, but he found they weren't competitive enough. "It's challenging. Every rehearsal is different. Every time, you improve yourself. In the early years, I just enjoyed the dance. As I got older, I became interested in the traditions: studying each village's folk dances they do at weddings, Easter, Christmas. Each totally different."

Bahri graduated with honours in the Professional Dance and Dance Education program from the Chernivtsi College of Cultural Arts, going on to dance for a dozen years as principal dancer with the Bukovyna State Song and Dance Ensemble.

Then, he met the woman who would eventually become his wife. She was Canadian, and a year after they married, Bahri immigrated. The couple landed in Saskatoon in 1993, then moved to Edmonton. "When I came to Canada, I was inspired by the many groups and how popular Ukrainian dance was here. In Ukraine, it is not as popular. In Canada, I was shocked to see the love and passion for Ukrainian culture. So I started teaching and tried to make a production."

Bahri found that Ukrainian dance in Canada was thriving, and he appreciated the diversity he found between provinces,

"WHEN I CAME TO CANADA, I WAS INSPIRED BY THE MANY GROUPS AND HOW POPULAR UKRAINIAN DANCE WAS HERE. IN UKRAINE, IT IS NOT AS POPULAR. IN CANADA, I WAS SHOCKED TO SEE THE LOVE AND PASSION FOR UKRAINIAN CULTURE."

as well as from company to company: "It's very different in each province. They each have a different style, based on people's knowledge and how much they promote. I think Alberta is kind of a leader in Canada for that."

Searching around for a company that resonated with his respect for tradition, he found Volya and started dancing with them. In 2000, he became the company's Artistic Director. While he remained inspired by the beauty of the traditional dances, he found that his adopted Canadian home had an impact on his choreography: "I live in this society and I absorb it. I created a Winter dance here. I made a Spring dance, with the inspiration of Canadian spring. In Canada, it goes very fast, so I came up with the idea of the spring melt. Everything is building knowledge; you open a different view on art," he says.

But most of all, his greatest inspiration is all around him: "People. The people I work with. My people. I like history, so I want to put it on stage. I start based on traditional dances. We have so many different angles, so I try to look at the different levels and start to create while preserving the characters and the technical development of the dancers. All the characters on stage are from the students, the artists. Dancing is with me, that's the most important thing to me. I'm blessed. Some of our dancers drive all the way from Saskatchewan for rehearsals."

He has been in Canada for nearly twenty years, watching his children grow while guiding Volya into the next decade. Bahri is very proud of his culture, and his part in fostering a love for his Ukrainian heritage in the next generation. Like himself, he would like young Ukrainian-Canadians to discover the joy in dancing, but also to tap into the deeper meaning underlying the movement: "With the variety of Ukrainian culture, sometimes we do only dance, but it's empty without any idea behind it. Then it is just exercise. But it's an art form, expressing who we are, our society. Respect what art is: imagination." AV

OKSANA ZHELISKO

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

THE BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS

by Kathleen Bell

"It wasn't easy," says Oksana Zhelisko, thinking back to her move from her home in L'viv, Ukraine to her current home in Edmonton. "But at that time I wasn't even thinking that it was a huge step. I was just in love. I was just following him. I didn't care if we were going to live on the moon."

The 'him' she was following was her husband. She had met her Canadian boy in 2000 as she was finishing art school and he was partying his way through a Ukrainian language summer course he was taking in L'viv. "I was celebrating my birthday in a bar and there he was," she says. "His Ukrainian was pretty good at the time, not perfect, but pretty good and he said, 'Hi, I'm from Canada and I like you.'"

A simple line but it worked. A year later and she had relocated to Canada. According to Zhelisko, the first month was like being on vacation, but it didn't take long for reality to set in. She was thousands of miles away from her friends and family and Edmonton was lonely.

"I can honestly say that I became an artist here," she says, explaining that in school she felt as if she had just acquired the raw skills but had yet to really feel like a true artist. "When I came here, I couldn't work for six months at all, so all I was doing was painting…searching…kind of trying to find my niche in this world. And I stopped at portraits and women. Women's faces—there's so much in them, their eyes—there's a story in them."

With a striking body of work that continually grows, Zhelisko captures women in gloriously rich colours, faces sparkling within radiant abstract tableaux, replete with natural elements and delicate patterns. She floods her portraits with emotions, exploring themes like the Greek goddesses, urban architecture and the cycles of the seasons, all within the confines of a woman's face.

Taking what some might see as a failing – a woman's emotional, sometimes irrational nature –Zhelisko openly accepts these traits. "Even weaknesses can be turned into strengths," she asserts. "Embracing it is a good thing. You are becoming at peace with yourself. You are finding that perfect spot and I guess it shows in the portraits."

"I mean, myself, like every woman, you look in the mirror and I don't like something about the way I look, the way I feel," she continues, "but you still have to accept who you are, so that's what goes in my paintings."

Though she does not attempt to overtly integrate any traditional Ukrainian components into her depiction of modern women, Oksana's European training still shines through. She also credits the local artistic community for helping to push her forward and inspiring new ideas, and she's quick to point out she has many more years of growth in her. Rarely satisfied with the final product, Zhelisko is resigned to facing that constant artistic struggle.

"If you stop judging yourself and become completely happy with what you're doing, you don't grow; to me, you just float," she says. "So you have to be in that fight all the time to get some results. It's really painful. It's really hard to describe. It's a fight but I wouldn't do it any other way."

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LESIA POHORESKI

FROM YOUTH CHOIR TO YOUTHFUL EXUBERANCE

by Kathleen Bell

To Lesia Pohoreski it was never a question of choosing music, it was simply allowing for a natural course of events to unfold. "Everyone joined the choir," says Pohoreski with a laugh,"you just did." And while joining may not have been a conscious decision, it was something she chose never to leave behind.

With over twenty years of conducting experience, when Pohoreski speaks about choral music you can still hear the smile in her voice. Her love for the art form is infectious and full of joy. Currently in charge of leading the fervent voices of the Viter Ukrainian Dancers and Folk Choir, she has forty singers to inspire along with some additional instrumentalists, including a fiddler and a bandurist.

This army of voices shares the stage with thirty Ukrainian dancers when the Viter performs – a rather large force to fit on a single stage. But it is a collective enchantment with folk music – the kind of music that has no writer, no name associated with its composition, just the folkloric strength charm passed down through the ages – that brings members to the choir and keeps them singing.

"If I said, 'to have fun,' would that be too cheesy?" Pohoreski wonders aloud over the phone as her daughter, who dances for Viter, feeds answers in the background to Mom, who struggles to articulate what motivates her choir. "But it is fun! That's why we're there."

Herself born and raised in Edmonton, Lesia's parents moved from Ukraine after World War II. After years of singing in the Edmonton CYMK (Ukrainian Orthodox Youth) Choir, she was eventually asked to conduct and Pohoreski jumped at the opportunity.

Over the years she has grown adept at leading her choirs by example. Having started a Ukrainian children's choir at Father Kenneth Kearns School, she attests that you need to draw on the same quality to teach children, as you would to conduct adults: passion. With close to fifty kids ready join the choir at lunchtime – some running through the halls to make it in time – she has proven herself to be wildly successful at sharing that passion.

"It's about finding a means to channel, to direct that enthusiasm and energy," she explains, "and we channel it through folk music."

With song interpretations that are bursting with life, Pohoreski has led the Viter choir, alongside the dance ensemble, through two tours of Ukraine and a romp through South America, including performances in Buenos Aries and Rio de Janeiro. For her group's interpretations, Pohoreski is painstakingly careful to research and, ultimately, comprehend the full meaning of each song. After all, these songs are cultural gems, and deserving of no less than cultural integrity. There is a boisterous, honest exuberance that

"WE WORK TOGETHER, WE SING, WE LAUGH, WE PROVIDE SOME GOOD ENTERTAINMENT. I AM OFTEN HUMBLED BY THE FACT THAT I HAVE A FORTY-VOICE CHOIR. WE STARTED WITH FOURTEEN SINGERS, AND HAVE GROWN TO A LARGE AND RATHER ENTHUSIASTIC GROUP."

sets Viter apart from all comers.

"We are a team, and I look to everyone for their input," Pohoreski says, explaining that she has learned over the years to be open with her choir. "People who have joined the Viter Ukrainian folk choir know what we are all about. They know what is expected of them as singers and performers. We work together, we sing, we laugh, we provide some good entertainment. I am often humbled by the fact that I have a forty-voice choir. We started with fourteen singers, and have grown to a large and rather enthusiastic group."

And as for difficulties and conflict, Pohoreski is at a loss—she can't recall any. According to Pohoreski, people are just happy to participate and share their voices. With that kind of confidence and vivacity leading the Viter Choir, and not an ounce of fatigue in Pohoreski's tone, it sounds like they will have a place to channel that enthusiasm for years to come.

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

HALYNA KOSZARYCZ

FRAGMENTS OF A LIFE MOSAIC WELL LIVED

by Andrea Slobodian

Stepping into Halyna Koszarycz's Northwest Calgary home is like entering an art gallery…and Koszarycz is more than eager to be your guide. A tour of her house is a tour of her life – showcasing her own art and the artists who influenced her.

"This is my treasure," she says. She picks up a heavy, leather-bound book on Vasyl Krychevsky, an artist, inspiration, and friend of her late husband, Bohdan. She points at her walls: modern images of women in *vinky* by Halyna Mazepa, alongside her own paintings – a style she calls "modern-figurative-fragmentative."

Koszarycz's career spans several decades and three continents. Born in Ukraine, she moved to Austria, then Venezuela with her family. She came to Canada with her husband and two children, settling in Montreal, Edmonton and, finally, Calgary.

Ukrainian artist Leonid Perfetsky taught young Halyna to draw. In Venezuela, the lush tropical scenery inspired her to pick up a paintbrush. "The nature in South America is so beautiful," she says.

She shows me oil-on-canvas paintings of mountains and beaches. She points out that her style is impressionistic, not realistic - you can see it's not a photograph.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

I notice a sketch in the hallway - a young woman with long hair and a pendant necklace, staring into the distance. The date reads 1949. The artist is her husband, an art major and later art teacher in Montreal.

The Koszaryczes left Venezuela in 1965 for a more stable political climate in Canada. It was only a matter of time before Halyna's artistic approach would start getting noticed. In Montreal, she became involved with art clubs and exhibitions. Her career continued growing after the family moved to Alberta, following her son's career in the oil industry.

Halyna excelled in a free art class and her instructor urged her to enroll in Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts. She graduated with a Major in Studio Arts, overcoming the challenges of learning English and being a mature student – her son was a student at the same time.

"When I went to university, it opened my mind," she says. She had an eye for modern art and enjoyed Cubism, the avant-garde movement pioneered by Pablo Picasso.

She created her own unique style, drawing from a number of sources, including her Ukrainian background. "I loved churches that had stained glass," she says. Her art has a fragmented stained glass or mosaic feel, though you can detect actual figures, hence her "modern-figurative-fragmentative" style.

She shows me several examples, printed on postcards. Villagers at Easter, heading to a church encased by three superimposed egg shapes; swirls of ice surrounding figure skaters; Hutzul men dancing in the middle of a fire pattern. "I love the art of dancing. It belongs to art. It's something beautiful," she says.

Beams of light shatter certain scenes, casting different colours on subjects - the aprons of dancing girls and flowers. "It is modern because you don't have blue sunflowers, but it's different," she explains. "For me, I am a strong colourist."

She shows me a complex rendition of Kyiv, where she cut up a map and re-assembled the city's streets and rivers, bringing together the National Opera of Ukraine, St. Andrew's Church and Bohdan Khmelnytsky monument.

Koszarycz has participated in more than forty group exhibitions across North America and 16 solo shows. Her work has been displayed at prestigious venues, including Edmonton's Gallery on Whyte and Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull and the Ukrainian Museum of Canada in Saskatoon.

Her sought-after talent has been recruited for other projects, including translating and illustrating a children's storybook, "Stefan and the Colossal Beanstalk," for the Alberta Parents for Ukrainian Education Society.

She was asked to be an art show critic, but found it tough to be judgmental. "I'm always positive," she smiles.

Recently, she contributed to an art collection commemorating the 120th anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. Her bright depiction of the evolution of Prairie life - a vivid patchwork of a new tractor, grain elevator and small onion-domed church - stands out among bleaker images of homesteaders and sod homes.

Koszarycz currently paints at her home studio. Arthritis sees to it that she can only sit for an hour at a time. It has become too much work to stage a solo exhibition, but she still lends out pieces. And she will gladly take you on a tour of her home, showing the treasures that shaped her life as an artist.

THE KOSZARYCZES LEFT VENEZUELA IN 1965 FOR A MORE STABLE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN CANADA. IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE HALYNA'S ARTISTIC APPROACH WOULD START GETTING NOTICED.

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NADIA CYNCAR

BY EACH FINE THREAD AND TINY BIRD

by Kathleen Bell

Nadia Cyncar is a walking, talking cultural institution. Given her profound passion for and knowledge of all aspects of Ukrainian folk art, you'd be hard pressed to find an art form she has not tried.

She is both an expert at the intricate stitches of traditional embroidery and a baker of wondrously towering *korovayi*. A designer, archivist, librarian and active member of her community, Cyncar is often sought out by such organizations as the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada (UCWLC) for her understanding of the history and significance of Ukrainian folk art.

Cyncar is equally willing to organize classes in order to teach the young and old how to execute these traditional techniques. She has taught students the secrets to constructing their own traditional jacket (*serdak*), the intricacy required to fold the tiny birds (*ptashky*) plied from dough that decorate wedding breads, and the patience necessary to write *pysanky*. She has served on the advisory board of the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village and was a juror for folk arts at the Vegreville Pysanka Festival for many years. The breadth of her involvement includes being a seasonal lecturer of Ukrainian Language at the University of Alberta, as well as compiler of Ukrainian serials and *Ukrainica* on microform for the University of Alberta library, prepared reviews on Ukrainian cultural events for Ukrainian newspapers and magazines, and consulted on Ukrainian costumes for several books. Nadia Cyncar is, in effect, an eternal spring of information and enthusiasm.

"Because they are beautiful," says Cyncar, when asked to explain her dedication to these crafts. "They tell you who you are. It's your roots and those traditions are over a thousand years old."

Nadia was born in western Ukraine. Her family was uprooted during World War II when she was ten years old. Travelling from one place to another after the armistice was signed, they finally crossed the Atlantic by plane in 1948.

Edmonton was the final stop of the journey. It was here that Cyncar co-founded the Edmonton branch of PLAST, a Ukrainian scouting organization. Her role was comprised of serving as a youth councillor, a socio-cultural and educational mentor. Presently, she dedicates her time within PLAST to archival and librarian work.

This was just her first membership in a long line of organizations that treasure and promote Ukraine's lush culture. From singing in St. Josaphat's Cathedral choir, to her annual work at the Ukrainian Arts Pavilion for Heritage Days, to her continual curation for the UCWLC museum, her enthusiasm for Ukrainian traditions has been unwavering.

As time marches forward, she has complete confidence that the traditions will live on, noting that the popularity of each art's ebbs and flows.

Cyncar's forte is embroidery and she is the sought after expert presenter of a plethora of embroidery workshops, from ritual cloths (*rushnyky*) to Ukrainian regional costumes. Her workshops on Ukrainian wedding customs, traditional breads and decorations, and

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

creating intricately beaded necklaces (*gerdany*) are equally popular.

Among her many other achievements, she designed costumes for the Ukrainian opera, *Kupalo*, and historical costumes for a commemorative float for the Millennium of Ukrainian Christianity. For her outstanding contribution and dedicated service to the Ukrainian community of Alberta, she was honored with the "Hetman Award" in 2003. In 2010, the Edmonton Eparchial UCWLC recognized her great work in the development of their museum and their National Congress bestowed upon her an Honorary Life Membership.

The many art forms – embroidery, productions, choirs, dancing, pysanka writing - continually reassert their importance over and over again in Ukraine's rich cultural history.

But it is Cyncar's personal dedication – her exquisite embroidery and designs, her golden korovayi, and her collection of pysanky – that is, in and of itself, a vital contribution to the lifeblood of folk art and the Ukrainian experience in Edmonton.

THE MANY ART FORMS – EMBROIDERY, PRODUCTIONS, CHOIRS, DANCING, PYSANKA WRITING - CONTINUALLY REASSERT THEIR IMPORTANCE OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN UKRAINE'S RICH CULTURAL HISTORY

PHOTO BY NICK HOWE

TH NATY

"THE SKEIN SPEAKS TO ME"

by Fawnda Mithrush

"THEY SAY YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE SOMETHING PLANNED WHEN YOU RETIRE. I THOUGHT, PAINTING? NO, I COULDN'T PAINT. DRAWING? I COULDN'T DRAW. POTTERY? WELL, I'D START WITH A VASE AND END UP WITH AN ASHTRAY"

Elizabeth Holinaty is one of those gentle, didactic characters who obviously felt comfortable at the head of the classroom. The experienced weaver, who was an Elementary schoolteacher until her retirement in 1991, easily offers up a mini-tutorial on the intricacies of different patterns from Ukraine's varying ethnographic regions, whether it's how she once lightened the weight of traditional woolen Bukovynian skirts for one performing dance group, or how she analyzed and replicated a specific Hutzul pattern for another.

Holinaty now spends most of her time volunteering and weaving — a hobby she first took up with the approach of her golden years.

"They say you're supposed to have something planned when you retire. I thought, painting? No, I couldn't paint. Drawing? I couldn't draw. Pottery? Well, I'd start with a vase and end up with an ashtray," she laughs. "I loved textiles, I sewed all of my clothing, hats and bags; I just loved fabrics. So I thought maybe I should do something with textiles."

Holinaty grew up in Wakaw, Saskatchewan, and after earning her Education degree at the University of Saskatoon, she studied remedial reading as a post-grad. She later moved to Edmonton to teach, and still teaches now, helping children in the City's Ukrainian bilingual programs learn the importance of appreciating this cherished, traditional art.

"That's important for me, because that's my contribution to my heritage."

Her life-long interest in textiles — fueled largely by her mother's keen sewing, embroidering and quilting skills — ended up an incredibly rewarding pastime for Holinaty – one that, she admits, started quite late in her life.

"I had a friend who I saw weaving," Holinaty says, recalling her first impressions of the craft. "I remember she was doing a plaid fabric, and she said 'I have 862 threads on this loom.' I thought to myself, you can do that? I could never keep track of all those!"

As it turns out, Holinaty was a lot more mathematically inclined than even she expected. Her first hands-on experience with weaving came about unexpectedly in 1976.

"I was at Banff taking a basketry class, and next door was the first year that they were giving Ukrainian weaving classes." She took the weaving class, and her interest was piqued.

"I was going back one step, learning the structure of the fabric. I love working with fabrics; I like the colour, the texture, putting things together." The first item she wove was a shawl, which to this day she still wears regularly. After that, it was hard to stop her from progressing. She became a member of numerous weavers' guilds, built up a collection of looms, and now travels Canada and North America to attend annual weaving conferences and workshops.

Weaving is very time-intensive, she says, but the majority of that is in the preparation stage. She compares the process to making a meal: "It takes a long time to plan it, to get your vegetables ready, to prepare them for cooking — that's me preparing my loom. To execute it is still the easy part, that's like sitting down to your meal." Then comes the finishing, and a final press — which could even be compared to washing the dishes after sating everyone with a well-made dinner.

Her home workshop's walls are draped with traditional and contemporary fabrics, silk and felt scarves, *poiasy* (belts) and numerous *rushnyky*. Those are some of her favourite things to weave, she notes, because of the strong ritual and emotional significance the ceremonial cloths hold for each commission, particularly the young couples that visit her to request one for upcoming nuptials.

"I love making rushnyky, I get excited thinking about what they're going to be used for. I treat the rushnyky for a wedding or for a funeral like I'm an iconographer who has a special prayer. When I'm doing it at that time I don't want any disturbances. Everything quiet, and I think of the people that I'm doing it for. It's just so special to me."

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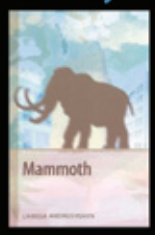
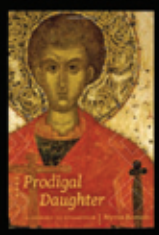


Larissa Andrusyshyn

Mammoth

DC Books;
Montreal, Quebec, 2010

Non-Fiction



Myrna Kostash

Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium

University of Alberta Press;
Edmonton, Alberta, 2010

Non-Fiction

Myroslav Shkandrij

Jews in Ukrainian Literature: Representation and Identity

Yale University Press;
London, 2009

Fiction

Rhea Tregebov

The Knife Sharpener's Bell

Coteau Books;
Regina, Saskatchewan, 2009

Fiction

Shandi Mitchell

Under This Unbroken Sky

Penguin Group Canada;
Toronto, Ontario, 2009

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