

ACUAVITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

Spring 2014 | Volume 19, Number 1

Ceramic artist Debra Cherniawsky Durrer

Folk dance scholar Andriy Nahachewsky

Metal sculptor Shane Repka

*Spring
Review*

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALBERTA COUNCIL
FOR THE UKRAINIAN ARTS



ACUA
Alberta Council for
the Ukrainian Arts



A revolution, in pictures

St. John's Institute hosts exhibition of political posters

This winter, the world watched as demonstrations in Kyiv's Independence Square evolved into the Euromaidan movement. But Ukrainians didn't just express their frustrations vocally – they used evocative images to bolster the cause. This inspired Dr. Bohdan Kordan of the

Prairie Centre for the Study for Ukraine Heritage to curate an exhibit of these powerful images. *The Euromaidan Project: Art of the Revolution* features 50 political posters from the early days of the political crisis. This multi-venue exhibit stopped in Edmonton's St. John's Institute in February and March.

ACUAVITAE

Spring 2014



5



6



12



14

features

8 Deep Roots

Vegreville artist Debra Cherniawsky Durrer creates ceramics inspired by her Ukrainian heritage.

10 Molding Metal

Award-winning sculptor Shane Repka reveals how his passion for the artform began with a bonsai tree.

16 From Dancer to Academic

How Andriy Nahachewsky's fascination with Ukrainian folk-dancing led him first to the stage and then to academia.

departments

- 4 From the Editor
- 5 Arts & Culture News
- 7 Profile: A Tale of Two Collectors
- 12 Interview: Motanky Magic
- 14 Profile: Chester Kuc
- 22 Archives: An enduring musical legacy

on the cover

Debra Cherniawsky Durrer
(story on page 8)

Photo supplied by the artist



ACUA
Alberta Council for
the Ukrainian Arts



Welcome back to another issue of *ACUA Vitae*. In the time since our last issue, the Alberta

Council for the Ukrainian Arts has undergone many changes and tackled a number of great events.

Since celebrating our 25th anniversary in 2011/2012, ACUA has been busy creating opportunities to celebrate Ukrainian artists and art forms. Since our last issue, the organization has been busy showcasing Alberta's talent. As you'll see in the news section on page 6, it's been a very full two years.

Unfortunately, not all of our news is happy news. ACUA is mourning the recent loss of our dear friend and board member Terri Andrews a few months ago. Terri was an instrumental member of the board for 15 years and served as president for one term. Her joyful nature and willingness to always lend a hand was key in helping us to achieve our goals. Terri will be missed and forever remembered for her kindness, generosity, and passion. You can read more about her legacy on page 6.

This issue offers an eclectic mix of articles, beginning with our cover story about Vegreville, Alta., ceramic artist Debra Cherniawsky Durrer. As always,

these pages highlight the diversity of art happening within the community. On page 10, meet metal worker Shane Repka, who finds inspiration from both his Ukrainian heritage and global cultures. On page 13, learn about Svetlana Sergeeva, who is sharing her knowledge of motanky doll making with the Edmonton community. This issue also highlights the work of the late composer Sergei Eremenko, as well as Chester Kuc, considered the 'father of Ukrainian dance' in Alberta. This is just a sampling of this issue's content – there's much more to uncover in our Spring 2014 edition.

This issue marks the end of my time with *ACUA Vitae*. It has been my pleasure to work with this dedicated group of board volunteers for seven years. Their passion and commitment to Ukrainian arts is inspiring. I have learned a lot during my time with them and will miss them, now that I've moved on to new opportunities in Saskatoon. I would also like to thank the talented Darka Tarnawsky, with whom I worked on many issues of the magazine, for her wonderful work.

This issue is a collaboration between the editorial committee and a new member to our team, Caitlin Crawshaw, who has taken the helm as the magazine's new managing editor. Caitlin is an award-winning freelance journalist and editor, and passionate about the arts and brings a new perspective to our publication.

Thank you all for your loyal support. We hope you enjoy this issue.

*On behalf of the editorial committee,
Andrea Kopylech*

ACUAVITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN
ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

Spring 2014 | Volume 19 Number 1

Publisher: ACUA, The Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts

Managing Editor: Caitlin Crawshaw

Editorial Committee: Pamela Shapka, Rena Hanchuk, Larysa Luciiv

Contributors: Mari Sasano, Caitlin Crawshaw, Andrea Kopylech, Nadija Szram, Natalie Kononenko, Lindsay Shapka, Liz Lepper, Fawnda Mithrush, Lida Somchynsky.

Thanks to Mary Oakwell and Andrea Kopylech for their help with this issue.

Art Direction: jellyfish design

Advertising: info@acuarts.ca

ACUA Vitae is published biannually. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of ACUA. Copyright individual writers. Permission required to re-produce contents. Send inquiries, subscription requests, address changes to: info@acuarts.ca

Printed in Canada by McCallum printers.

Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts acknowledges support from the Edmonton Arts Council, the City of Edmonton and the Government of Alberta's Community Spirit Program.





Myroslava Uniat



Viter Ukrainian Dancers and Folk Choir

Recognizing community talent

Highlighting two of ACUA's most recent scholarship winners

By Caitlin Crawshaw

Each year, Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) partners with two organizations—Friends of the Ukrainian Folklore Centre (FUFC) and Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre—to award scholarships to artists within Alberta's Ukrainian community. The \$500 scholarships are intended to help artists promoting public awareness of Ukrainian arts through a specific project or activity.

Recent scholarship winners Myroslava Uniat and the Viter folkdance and music troupe are a testament to the innovation and passion of Alberta's Ukrainian arts community.

Where poetry and film meet

Myroslava Uniat was only six years old when her mother passed away. That year, she began writing to process the trauma. "Poetry was a way of helping myself – of psychological relief," she says.

By the time she'd finished her undergraduate education degree in Ukraine, she'd published two books of poetry.

Now Uniat is living in Edmonton after

completing a master's degree in folklore at the University of Alberta (U of A) in 2013. She continues to write poems, mainly in Ukrainian, which she now pairs with artistic videos.

"The idea came about when I published my second book," she says. To keep her audience engaged during public readings, she began creating videos with music and imagery to complement the poems. These days, the videos have a second purpose: to help English speakers understand her poems, which are written in Ukrainian.


Uniat's work seems to be resonating with Edmonton's Ukrainian community; in the short time she's lived in the city, she's done more performances than she did in Ukraine. A \$500 scholarship from ACUA helped make this possible she says; the funds went towards a video camera, something she didn't have access to after moving to Canada. "I'm really thankful to ACUA that they helped me," she says.

Ukraine trip brings history to life for Viter members

Every two years, Viter Ukrainian Dancers and Folk Choir take their show on the road. In 2012, members of the 19-year-old performing troupe travelled to Ukraine to perform and learn.

"We see pictures and we know about our culture," says Terry Mucha, Viter's travel director. "But it was so key for the performers to actually be there with the people and living the culture."

The 17-day visit to Ukraine opened many performers' eyes about aspects of the country's history, like the famine, which features prominently in some of the folk songs Viter performs. "[After this] they were able to better relate to what they were performing on stage," says Mucha.

A \$500 scholarship from ACUA helped support the educational component of the trip. In several Ukrainian cities, dancers and choir members participated in workshops to help them hone their art forms and collaborate together. This has had a lasting impact on the way Viter performs: "I think the collaboration between the choir and dancers has been strengthened," says Mucha. 

Interested in applying for the next round of ACUA-FUFC scholarships? Applications are due by June 30 and Nov. 30 each year. Please visit www.acuarts.ca for more information.



BARRISTERS SOLICITORS

**Reynolds
Mirth
Richards
& Farmer LLP**

RMRF LLP is an Edmonton-based law firm that provides high caliber legal representation to local, national and international clients. Our lawyers have been achieving excellence since 1915.

*We focus on what we know,
and in those areas we are leaders.*



Cherisse N. Killick-Dzenick, Partner

3200 Manulife Place
10180 - 101 St.
Edmonton, AB

780.497.3372
ckillick@rmrf.com
www.rmrf.com

ACUA says goodbye to former president and board member

Terri Andrews was a passionate champion of the arts

By Nadija Szram

In January, The Alberta Council for Ukrainian Arts (ACUA) lost a long-time friend and supporter. Therese Evelyn Andrews, known to all as Terri, passed away on January 19, 2014, after a battle with cancer.

A former ballet dancer with the Alberta Ballet Company, Terri was passionate about all of the arts – from Ukrainian dance (particularly the dance troupe, Shumka) to the visual arts.


Terri was a long-time director of ACUA, sitting on the Board more than 15 years. During that time, she served one term each as vice-president and president. In the larger community, Terri was a force to be reckoned with, working tirelessly to promote Ukrainian arts in any way she could.

Those who worked with Terri knew that if help was needed, her name would be at the top of the list and the job would be done – usually with friends or relatives that she rallied to help. The contributions

Terri made are too numerous to list, but include a wide range of projects, festivals and art shows. Most recently, Terri lent her talents to the Servus Heritage Festival. Through her efforts as the director of the Ukrainian Cultural Tent, it won third prize for the best cultural exhibit for two consecutive years (2012 and 2013).

Terri faced her last year with courage and refused to let her illness prevent her from enjoying her last months. Upon hearing the final diagnosis, she immediately set a busy schedule of visits, events and family gatherings. In her eulogy, her twin brothers – Dave and Don Andrews – wrote of Terri's determination to live her life to the fullest. "Terri lived a full life if not one long enough. But as the consummate teacher, I think she taught us all something. [We saw] . . . how Terri lived so courageously from the very start of her diagnosis . . . Terri cried, she grieved, but went quickly forward with such strong positive disposition."

In the short time span that she had left, Terri made a famous friend, songstress K.D. Lang, visited with many friends and "lived her life like Costco shoppers: Get it now as it may not be here when you come back," wrote her brothers.

Terri's memory will live long with everyone who had the good fortune to know her: family, friends, and artists all. 

Nadija Szram is a past president of ACUA.

Former ACUA President Nadija Szram (left) with Terri Andrews. PHOTO SUPPLIED

25th Anniversary year in review

Events included art shows, media appearances and much more

In 2012, ACUA celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special edition featuring 25 profiles of Alberta artists and artisans. Here's what we've been up to since then:


East Meets West – In September 2012, ACUA took its exhibition of work by Alberta artists to Toronto Ukrainian Festival on Bloor Street, hosted by KUMF Gallery.

Appearance on Global TV – Also in September 2012, Lorraine Mansbridge of Global TV featured ACUA on her morning show.

Zacharovana Nich: An Enchanted Evening Fundraiser – Held at St. John's Cultural Centre, ACUA's annual fundraiser featured live entertainment, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, and an art show.

Prairie Dreamscapes: Reimagining our Roots – This exhibition celebrated the imaginative works of Ukrainian Canadian and Ukrainian artists in Alberta. After premiering in Toronto in the fall, the show was held at Edmonton's St. John's Institute for the better part of December 2012 and January 2013.

Collaborative art show with Ukrainian Association of Visual Artists of Canada (USOM) - ACUA partnered with its national counterpart, USOM, on an art exhibition celebrating 120 years of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. Held at King's College in Edmonton, the exhibit was also shown in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa.

For more information on ACUA's activities, sign up for our newsletter at www.acuarts.ca. 



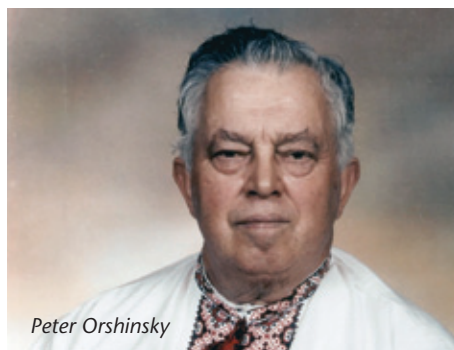
A tale of two collectors

Through their extensive collections, Peter Orshinsky and Leonard Krawchuk have bolstered the preservation and study of Ukrainian folk art in Canada

By Natalie Kononenko

Collectors of folk art perform a great service. Most folk art items are not made for public display and enjoyment; they are made for personal use. Collectors take those items and, by the act of collecting and display, re-categorize them as art, allowing all of us to enjoy the aesthetic pleasure that they provide. Embroidered *sorochky* (blouses) are made to be worn, as are *keptari* (vests) and *zapasky* (aprons). Ceramics are made to hold food and drink. *Pasky* and *babky* (Easter breads) are meant to be eaten and the preservation of the wedding *korovai* (bread) and its use as a decorative object is a recent phenomenon. Folk art objects are not put on display like paintings or sculptures; instead, collectors take folk art and move it from the intimate sphere of the family into the public sphere. They preserve the best folk creations and donate them to museums so that the general public can enjoy their beauty.

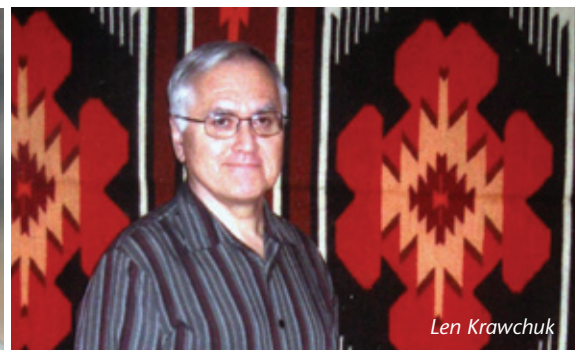
Collectors Leonard Krawchuk and the late Peter Orshinsky have made important contributions to the preservation of Ukrainian folk art in Alberta. Both men are heritage collectors, gathering artefacts to preserve culture, rather than turn a profit (unlike many collectors who approach the act as a business venture). When asked



Peter Orshinsky

to sell their collected artefacts both refused. Orshinsky was offered a substantial sum for his entire collection, but he insisted that, upon his death, his collection be donated to a major institution so that it could be properly maintained (it is currently housed at the Royal Alberta Museum). Krawchuk is currently looking for a home for his collection. Part of it was on display in Saskatoon, but he hopes to donate to a museum in Edmonton because of the scholarly work on Ukrainian folk art being conducted in this city.

Orshinsky and Krawchuk have much in common. Both men became collectors out of a desire to connect to the past and to make sense of their Ukrainian heritage. Both men were born in Canada but felt a need to reach back to the land of their ancestors. Orshinsky was born in St. Catharines, Ont., into a family with close connections to both Ukraine and rural Alberta. The connection to Ukraine was through his grandmother, Domca, who instilled in him a deep love for the land of his ancestors. His Alberta connection was through his mother, who came from the small community of Shandro, Alta., and maintained close ties with her relatives. Orshinsky started accompanying his mother on her trips out West in 1955 and discovered a way to realize his love for things Ukrainian through the beautiful objects, wonderful stories, and traditional rituals and foods he found in Alberta. He collected everything and became an excellent cook. He also published a booklet with ritual information and was the consultant on the film *Luchak's Easter*, produced by National Film Board in 1975. Orshinsky's collection of traditional costumes and religious artefacts enriched the Royal



Len Krawchuk

Alberta Museum with several thousand new pieces. Unfortunately, the stories that he collected have not been preserved.

Krawchuk was born in Flin Flon, Man., and also had a grandmother who inspired him with a love for Ukrainian folklore. His interest in the arts was supported by his aunt, Angela Kitlarchuk, who took him to the Dauphin Ukrainian Festival. A local businessman, William Perepeluk, helped pay for Krawchuk to study in Winnipeg. There he attended classes and visited Ukrainian museums and churches.

These days, Krawchuk collects according to the geography of Ukraine, trying to find costumes characteristic of all of the ethnic regions. He also has an outstanding collection of Hutsul pottery – one of the best in Canada, in fact. In addition, he collects *rushnyky* (embroidered towels), *kylymy* (tapestry rugs), porcelain figurines, and paintings of Ukrainian rural life. He has turned his apartment into a Ukrainian haven, saturated with the richness of folk art.

Both men practiced folk arts themselves. Krawchuk took weaving courses and Orshinsky learned to embroider, filling his own home and those of his relatives with his work. Both men were dancers and teachers of Ukrainian dance. In fact, Krawchuk moved to Winnipeg in response to a request to teach Ukrainian dance courses. As performers, both men understood the importance of showcasing the arts and they staged fashion shows using the folk costumes they had collected. They have amassed a rich store of objects, which beg for a show that would let the public in Edmonton and beyond enjoy their work. 🇺🇸

Dr. Natalie Kononenko is a professor of folklore at the University of Alberta.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Deep roots

Ceramic Artist Debra Cherniawsky Durrer Creates Art Inspired By Her Ukrainian Heritage

By Mari Sasano

Debra Cherniawsky Durrer's love of art began early in life. Like many Ukrainian children, she was exposed to art through traditional crafts, like *pysanky*. She could also be seen at her brothers' hockey practices sitting in the stands, drawing pictures to pass the time.

"My family didn't have time for my extracurricular activities, so I started painting and drawing," she says. "I was

also influenced by my grandmother, who was a quilter. She would say, 'You're an artist just like me.' "

In 1984, Durrer left home to pursue her art education at Red Deer College. Afterward, she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Manitoba and a Master's of Fine Arts degree from Ohio State University. In the 1990s, she taught art for a few years before settling down to her own art practice.

These days, Durrer is a professional artist who works under the name

Artables, creating ceramics that are inspired by the flora and fauna of her prairie home: poppies, sunflowers, grassy landscapes, wildlife, and fields of wheat. Artables' bowls, platters and pitchers have gained a nationwide following at gift shows across Canada. Her corporate clients include Shell, Enbridge, Coca Cola and, high-profile businessmen, Darryl Katz and Bill Gates.

Durrer's Ukrainian roots run deep: her great-grandfather came to Canada to homestead in the Vegreville area, where she continues to live and work many

generations later. “That’s all I’ve known, the work ethic and the energy involved in growing up in this lifestyle,” she says.

Not surprisingly, her upbringing greatly influences the way she operates as an artist. “As a child, I was picking rocks from our grain farm. We cleared the land by hand,” she says. As an artist, she has the patience to work with clay, which she describes as a demanding medium.

Durrer’s heritage is also a source of artistic inspiration. Traditional symbols from Ukraine can be seen in much of her creations. However, she notes that some of the symbolism is shared

across cultures. In her Now and Zen series – a series of black-and-white still lifes – some of the symbols she uses also appear in Iranian, South American, and Japanese art. “[It’s] universal, collective unconscious mark-making. It really is a small world,” she says.

While this collection is inspired by Song Dynasty pottery, there’s still a Ukrainian sensibility in the way she works the lines and repeated patterns of dots, going back to the pysanky of her childhood.

Durrer feels grateful to be able to create such meaningful works on her great-grandfather’s land.

She is the fourth generation in her family to live on the property.

“Out here, I’m surrounded by old families and established family homesteads. In other countries, it’s very common. I do trips to China where it is common for a family to stay in one place for 100 years with several generations under one roof,” she says. In Canada, it’s rare. “I hope to be able to pass it down, as I’m the fourth generation. It’s sad when families have to let go.”

Mari Sasano is a freelance writer from Edmonton.



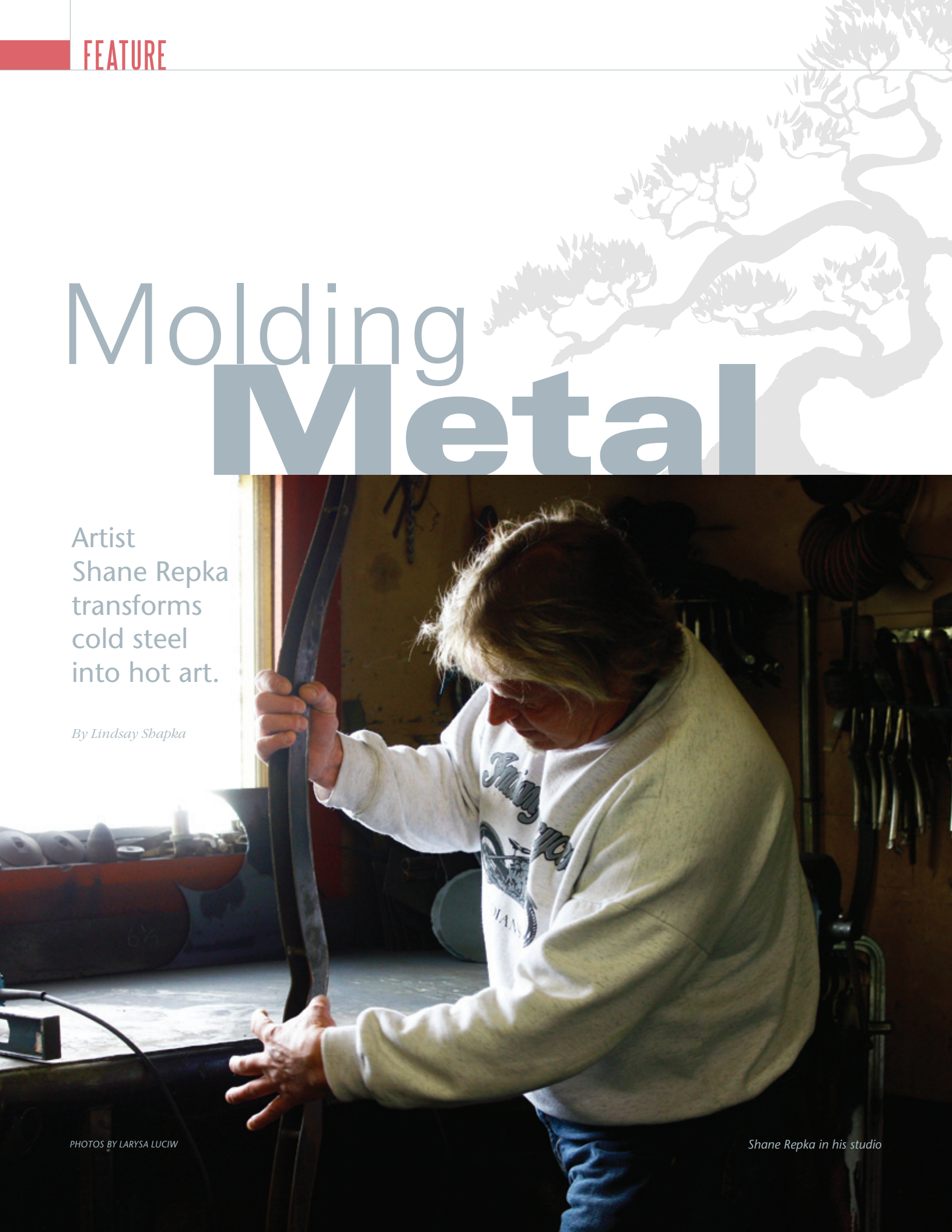
Molding Metal

Artist
Shane Repka
transforms
cold steel
into hot art.

By Lindsay Shapka

PHOTOS BY LARYSA LUCIW

Shane Repka in his studio



Although Shane Repka has never travelled to Japan, he has always been fascinated with bonsai trees. “I love the ornate pots, the curve of the trunks and the tufts of green,” he says.

“When I was a kid I would buy them, but they are really finicky and kept dying on me.”

This fascination is what led this award-winning sculptor to create his first metal art piece — a full-scale replica of a bonsai tree, with fine wires and steel wool for branches and leaves, and a trunk welded to resemble the texture of wood. “I guess I found a way to own a bonsai tree that would never die!” says Repka.

The bonsai tree continued to be a theme in Repka's life when, in one of his first major commissions in 1995, he was asked by an Edmonton company to sculpt some bonsai pieces that could be used as corporate gifts. By 1997, word of his talent had reached Calgary's City Hall and Repka was contracted to design and develop the city's Award of Merit — a contract he still holds today. As his reputation continued to grow, he acquired some high-profile commissions, including: the Alberta Summer Games Monument, a life-size sculpture of Stony Plain's first sheriff, Israel Umbach, and the fireplace tools that sit on the hearths of all Canada's Sawridge Hotels.


Over the years, Repka has customized everything from a spiral staircase to the front end of a hot rod. But his favourite piece — and one that he refuses to part with — is a 1909 Indian Motorcycle replica he built from scratch that sits proudly in the middle of his studio space.

Surrounding the bike, the walls of this creative space are plastered with yellowing family photos, while every available surface is covered in tools, collections, artifacts and history — some personal and some universal — that may be the source of inspiration. Although, he admits he's not sure where his artistic impulse comes from: “It just comes to me. Once I start, it flows and I can't stop until it's done.”

Though his public work doesn't often reflect his Ukrainian roots, they are a major part of his more personal pieces, which he holds close to his

heart. “Ukrainian pieces are personal and for my family or close friends only. In a gallery, the right person might understand them, but the meaning of the piece will be lost on most.”

Repka is not a fan of galleries — or the Internet — and so most of his commissions and sales tend to come mainly from word-of-mouth. Though a surprising approach in the social media age, this talented artist doesn't seem to need online exposure — or advertising of any kind. When I

asked if he was planning to set up a website soon, he shrugged. “Word of mouth works for me . . . one project always leads to the next one.” 

Lindsay Shapka is a magazine editor, writer and adventure seeker whose travels have taken her from the dusty soccer fields of central Honduras to the ancient baths of Budapest, and from the Terracotta Armies of China to the historic stone streets of Montreal. Connect with her at TheAnthrotrorian.com.



Motanky Magic

An interview with Edmonton artisan Svetlana Sergeeva

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

By Liz Lepper

On my third birthday, my mother gave me my first doll: a miniature, textile version of me, with loops of woolen brown hair, eyes stitched with brown thread and a pale pink cotton body dressed in tiny facsimiles of my own clothes. Immediately, my hand-made doll became my playmate, protector and keeper of secrets.

Like my mother, Edmonton artist Svetlana Seergeva lovingly and painstakingly crafts dolls for local doll enthusiasts. Seergeva is a talented maker of motanky dolls: Ukrainian folk dolls assembled by knotting, weaving or reeling cloth and thread together, rather than by sewing them using a needle and scissors.

Traditionally, *Motanky* were made of birch bark or bits of wood wrapped in scraps of cloth and often dressed in folk costumes, crafted from hand-spun and embroidered fabric. The colourful cross typical of most dolls is symbolic of the sun, with vertical lines representing masculinity and horizontal ones femininity. Dating back to the Slavic and Trypillian eras, the dolls served a variety of functions. Some dolls were simply toys for children, others were talismans used to capture positive energy, ward off illness or protect from the evil eye, and some were even symbols representing fertility.

When Seergeva hosted a *motanky*-spinning workshop at the St. John's Institute in Edmonton in 2012, I had the opportunity to ask her a few questions about her art beforehand. (Special thanks to her daughter, Anya Seergeva, for her Ukrainian-English translation.)

When was your first introduction to *motanky*? How did you learn to make them?

As long as I can remember, an interest in traditional art and ancient things was always present in me. Since childhood, I have been engaged in many different types of art – sewing, embroidery and knitting. The first



primitive dolls . . . I made as a child. Like many girls, I made dolls out of paper, herbs, flowers and even feathers.

The dolls actively became a part of my life around four years ago, when I had the chance to take educational courses in traditional folk dolls. Now, four years later, I am intensively learning everything that is related to the traditional dolls and, whenever I can, I share this information with other people.

What materials do you use to create your *motanky*?

I try to use only new and natural materials, although sometimes I use old hand-made lace or embroidery. The little dolls I make only out of fabric and for the bigger dolls I use corn as a backbone.

Another reason that I love traditional dolls is, besides easy availability, all materials meet the requirements of safety and great quality.

Each of your *motanky* is unique. Where do you find the inspiration for your designs?

Hand-made dolls are very unique, they don't look alike, they are just like humans, they are born in the process of creative inspiration and always have some distinction, convey a mood of the author, his/her experiences. This is the reason

why amongst the creators it is believed that the doll must be made when you are in a good mood, preferably before beginning the process, create a full image of the future doll, think through all the little details and begin with a prayer.

Inspiration most of the time comes from the new knowledge in the areas of history and culture, but sometimes it's the nature that gives you a hint for a new image.

Do *motanky* designs vary from region to region in Ukraine?

Yes, definitely the design depends on the region of Ukraine. There is no such general understanding of 'Ukrainian costume.' Ukraine is a big country that is made up of [historically distinct] regions, each of which has their own unique features of the costume."

What aspects of Ukrainian culture do *motanky* best represent? Why are they important to Ukrainian culture?

Folk toys, in our case – dolls – are unique expressions of the culture tightly connected to the different expressions in life, versatile in its composition. They charm you with their folk style, absolute simplicity of form

and shape, constructive resourcefulness . . . and peculiar emotional attitude.


Traditional dolls are made by rural grandmothers and mothers, and are [closely connected] with traditional rural surroundings. A doll made out of fabric, herbs, straw, or flowers, by a grandmother, mother, or older sister, carries in itself a hidden [story about] love, protection and benevolence. In these dolls there is something more than just the makings of a child's game: there are historical, household and ritualistic memories.

Do you consider your *motanky* to be in a traditional style? What elements of your dolls are typical of all *motanky*? Which elements are unique to your designs?

I have different dolls. There are some that meet all the requirements of the traditional folk doll and some that are exclusively mine. In these exclusive dolls, I try to add as much of what I learn about the culture of the costume and tradition as I possibly can. The only typical thing that is common to all dolls is the base, the backbone.

I never thought about adding something unique, but a very special place for me is the cross on the doll's face. I like to create different variations and images of it. I am charmed by this process.

How have your dolls evolved since you began making *motanky*?

My new dolls are becoming more folk. With the study of the materials about the dolls I am opened with the new aspects of the creation of the traditional dolls. 

Liz Lepper is a freelance writer embracing life in Edmonton as an honorary Ukrainian, along with her husband, toddler and dog. Liz works at Bottom Line Productions, an Alberta-based arts marketing firm. She wishes she was as skilled at making pyrohy as she is at eating them.



A tribute to Alberta's 'father of Ukrainian dance'

Chester Myroslav Kuc was a dancer, musician and practitioner of many Ukrainian art forms

By Natalie Kononenko

After Chester Myroslav Kuc passed away in February 2013, the *Edmonton Journal* ran a photo gallery capturing some of the highlights of his life. Each one portrays Chester engaged in some aspect of Ukrainian culture: directing a Ukrainian dancer mid-leap, carefully writing an intricate pattern on a pysanky with his brow knitted in concentration, and posing with his wife, Luba, and their extensive collection of Ukrainian art.

Chester was passionate about the Ukrainian arts, but also a talented practitioner of many art forms himself. A dancer, a violin player, a pianist, a *pysanka* artist, an embroiderer, he was a man of tremendous energy who, in his own words, just could not sit still. Chester was also a man determined to share his love of the arts. He taught dance all over Edmonton and started two premiere dance companies, first Shumka (1959) and later Cheremosh (1969). He volunteered at Ukrainian events such as Heritage Days in Edmonton and the Pysanka Festival in Vegreville. Chester arranged exhibits of folk art, not just in Edmonton, but also in Vancouver and Saskatoon. He collected textiles and costumes and other art objects. The Royal Alberta Museum honoured him in 2006 with a show



Chester Kuc later in life
PHOTO CREDIT: NICK HOWE

of the *pysanky* that he had produced. Self-deprecating and funny, Chester made this interviewer laugh many times.

Chester was born in Edmonton on April 15, 1931, to a Ukrainian-activist father and a Polish mother. He quite literally grew up at Ukrainian National Federation (UNF), an organization that promotes Ukrainian culture among both people of Ukrainian heritage and non-Ukrainians. While Chester was still a boy, UNF acquired its first space: a building that had apartments upstairs. Chester's father John, a dedicated UNF member, rented one of these apartments for himself and his family. This meant that Chester's exposure to Ukrainian

oriented-life was constant and powerful. As a result, Chester acquired an excellent command of the Ukrainian language through the language classes held twice a week. He was also exposed to the dance master Vasyl Avramenko every time he came to town. Chester became an excellent dancer and first performed on stage at age eight. In fact, this event left a particular impression on him. The year was 1939 and the event was a Shevchenko "concert." Chester's part was to appear in a dance duet and Luba, whom he knew from childhood and who would later become his wife, recited a Shevchenko poem. This experience led to his participation in dance competitions throughout his childhood.

Right after the Second World War, Chester had the opportunity to go to a UNF-sponsored performance program in Winnipeg, which attracted hundreds of students from across Canada and the United States. At this summer event, young people participated in singing and dancing, and watched movies of Soviet performing groups. Chester returned to the program for three more summers and, after being exposed to different approaches to dance, he believed that Edmonton needed a change. He took ballet lessons himself and worked with others to bring new life and new choreography to the local dance scene. Working primarily out of UNF, he helped introduce dance styles that were more complex and demanded greater athleticism.

A major event in the development of Ukrainian dance in Edmonton came when Shumka broke out of the primarily Ukrainian performance venue and staged a show for the general public at the Jubilee Auditorium in 1959. Prior to this event, the pattern was to have children perform at their various religious establishments or at non-denominational, but still Ukrainian, venues like UNF. With the help of his father, Chester arranged the performance at the Jubilee and helped make Ukrainian dance an entertainment form with mass appeal. The show at the Jubilee attracted a large audience and Shumka has held a fundraiser in that auditorium ever since. Nowadays, Shumka isn't just a chance

for parents and grandparents to see their little ones on stage – it is a company of international stature which performs in Edmonton, across Canada, and around the globe, with tours to Ukraine and China among its accomplishments.

Always looking for new challenges and eager to explore the dance forms characteristic of the various regions of Ukraine, Chester eventually parted company with Shumka. But he did not stay away from dance for long. The Ukrainian National Youth Federation (UYNF/MUNO), the youth branch of the UNF, asked Chester to start another dance company for the many youth who wanted the challenge of serious performance and needed a venue through which they could achieve their goals. Thus, Cheremosh was born, another dance company that has achieved national and international status.

Dance was not Chester's only means of artistic expression. Encouraged by his parents, especially his father, he studied violin as a youth. He also studied piano, an instrument that was his own choice and allowed him to later serve as accompanist for his dance pupils. His wife, Luba, also studied violin. In fact, she was so talented that she won a scholarship to study in Vancouver, but decided against it. She returned to Edmonton, marrying Chester in 1960. Not long after, the Kucs became the proud parents of two daughters, Larysa and Daria.

Chester had a keen eye, a love of craft, and a desire to explore. He wanted to learn how to write *pysanky* and saw a man make the wonderfully decorated eggs with a pen tipped with a metal nib. He acquired the technique and became a master at executing *pysanka* designs with exquisitely fine lines. As he learned about the use of a stylus, or *kystka*, in *pysanka* writing, he mastered that technique as well and became equally expert in the *kystka* decorating method. He shared his work through shows like the one at the Royal Alberta Museum already mentioned. As with dance, he was more than willing to teach this technique to others. He ran demonstrations during the show at the Royal Alberta and conducted workshops

at schools, churches, and, of course, UNF.

Both Chester and Luba loved embroidery and both were very good at it. Chester produced wall hangings, embroidered pictures, and a special accomplishment of his: tiny replicas of *rushnyk* (or ritual towel), designs done in petit point (miniatures of designs that would normally be done on a cloth several meters in length). As with *pysanky*, Chester saw a person working in petit point, became fascinated, and decided to learn the technique. He was able to do his tiny designs, using a single one of the six strands found in standard embroidery floss. He worked on his miniature embroideries until a few months before his death.

Chester's keen eye, combined with his curiosity, also led to an outstanding collecting career. Chester was curious about all things Ukrainian and, with dance, with *pysanky*, with costume, and he wanted to have a complete set of styles and forms. With dance, this was expressed through an interest in regional dance variations. With *pysanky*, this took the form of Chester trying to reproduce designs from every region of Ukraine. Starting in the 1980s, Chester and Luba travelled to Ukraine numerous times and Chester looked and learned. Helped by Luba who photographed museum collections, Chester tried to produce entire sets of designs for every region of Ukraine. Twenty-five hundred of these were on display at the Royal Alberta Museum. Many were bought by smaller museums and some were donated to the Kule Centre for Ukrainian

and Canadian Folklore. Chester and Luba had an outstanding collection of woven wall hangings called *kylymy* and arranged a show of these for the public. They tried to collect costumes from all Ukrainian regions. Luba, as costume mistress for the dance companies that Chester founded, used the collected pieces to help design the outfits worn by the young performers. She also taught the dancers and their families how to make the costumes that they needed. The originals of the costumes that the Kucs collected became the basis of exhibits. Major shows, based largely on Chester and Luba's collecting work, were held in venues such as St. John's Cathedral. When I visited Chester approximately one month before his hospitalization, he proudly showed an embroidered dress that he had just acquired for St. John's. It was a dress with a different sort of embroidery design and Chester saw it as a way to help fill out the regional specifics of the collection he had built. Chester's generosity, coupled with his curiosity, characterized his life – even in ill health.

My visit in January was my last. I had interviewed Chester several times in the summer of 2012. We had talked about his life and about dance. We had talked *pysanky* and embroidery. I planned to have our next interview cover Chester's work as a collector. Unfortunately, that interview never took place. Shortly after our visit Chester was hospitalized. He passed away on Feb. 16, 2013. 🍷

Dr. Natalie Kononenko is a professor of folklore at the University of Alberta.



Chester Kuc (centre, beige suit) with Cheremosh and junior Cheremosh Ukrainian dancers in Vegreville, AB in the mid-1970s

PHOTO CREDIT: CHEREMOSH ARCHIVES



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDRIY NAHACHEWSKY

Andriy Nahachewsky
began dancing as a child

By Fawnda Mitbrush

Growing up in a small Ukrainian community in Saskatoon, Andriy Nahachewsky fell in love with folk dancing early in life.

“It was so many things,” he says. “The performance experience, the creation process, the buzz of a show was really powerful to me. The social relationships in rehearsals and traveling around as a child, going to competitions—that whole social life was important. I made a bit of money teaching as a little guy, too.”

Nahachewsky was both passionate and committed to his art form. At the tender age of 16, he became the artistic director of the Yevshan dance group in Saskatchewan. He also danced with Cheremosh and Shumka.

As an adult, he has carved out a living from his childhood passion. After earning his BFA in dance at the University of Toronto, he went on to Kyiv to further his education. Now, he studies the complex history of Ukrainian dance as a professor at the University of Alberta (U of A). Nahachewsky is both the director of the U of A's Kule Centre for Ukrainian and Canadian Folklore and holds the Huculak Chair of Ukrainian Culture and Ethnography.

“I was going to go into anthropology or something like that, but Ukraine was really powerful for me,” he says. “When I was choreographing a dance for, say, New Year's or something like that, I felt that I needed to learn the Ukrainian traditions in order to make a choreography that connected well, but there was a lack of that kind of information. I knew other people who were hungry for that, too.”

Over the years, he's traveled the globe to explore and compare how Ukrainian dance fits into the rest of the folk dance world. In 2011, his book *Ukrainian Dance: A Cross-Cultural Approach* was released, bringing together nearly two decades of research on the subject.

Nahachewsky has gained an understanding that Alberta – particularly Edmonton – has a unique perspective on Ukrainian dance. What's more, this isn't simply because of the large number of people here who have Ukrainian heritage.

From dancer to academic

Andriy Nahachewsky's background as a Ukrainian dancer and choreographer led him to study the history of Ukrainian dance



Teaching students at the University of Alberta

"In Edmonton [there's] something in the water," he says. "There are 280 [dance] groups across the country, but Edmonton is just a major hub. I think there's that extra dimension of heritage here; it's about connecting with our grandmother even though, in reality, our grandmother never experienced anything like what we're doing. But she'll play along too and say 'Oh that's really good, that is your heritage.' "

One of the more fascinating aspects he discovered when contrasting dance here with elsewhere is the existence of *kolomyiky*. In its most popular form, the improvised group dance takes shape in a circle, where dancers take turns in the centre to demonstrate their skills – it's usually the best part of a Ukrainian wedding reception.

"It's particularly interesting because they don't know it in Ukraine. *Kolomyiky* is never danced in Ukraine unless Canadians go there. It was really formed in the 1950s and '60s in Canada." He describes how he was introduced to the ritual as a young dancer, not knowing that it was essentially being created in the moment.

"I'm old enough that I remember the late '60s in Saskatoon, when it used to be that everybody would go to weddings,


children included, and there would always be a *kolomyika*," he says. "I was an insider as a technical stage dancer, but my uncles would come in and goof off in the centre of the circle and I thought that was normal—but now I know that this was a new thing for them too. For them it was a new tradition, they were joining in on a young person's kind of dance."

"I think it's an amazing cultural phenomenon," he continues, "It shows how something new and innovative and adaptive to its cultural environment can still carry the symbolic baggage of being old. It doesn't matter if it's old, it symbolizes oldness. *Kolomyiky* is so juicy for that reason: it is deeply, deeply symbolic of old."

He admits that there are old kinds of *kolomyiky* from 19th Century western Ukraine, but the steps that one would see in a modern version are all from stage dance. What's special about how the tradition formed, he says, is that *kolomyiky* became a perfect example of bridging Ukrainian village traditions with the way we practice dance now.

"I think *kolomyiky* is valuable because it's a hybrid: it has spectacular and national and recreational aspects—it's really strongly in all three, so it's very potent."

Nahachewksy also notes that the foundation built on the enthusiasm for Ukrainian dance here is an excellent way to revive interest in folk tradition in the future.

"[Dance] is a hyperactive way of being Ukrainian, so I think it is extremely important, more important here than it is in Ukraine," he says. "Older people go to church, older people sing in choirs—but young people, if they want to be Ukrainian, they dance. If we want to build this community into the next generation, we should really support Ukrainian dance because that's the way to pull young people in. I would say it's the most successful, the most powerful way to do that." 

Fawnda Mithrbrush has worked in the media, arts, and non-profit sectors in Edmonton since 2006. Currently the General Manager at Theatre Network, she provides dance news coverage for Vue Weekly and Avenue Magazine, and works as an independent publicist for a handful of local theatre groups. A former Zorianka dancer, she was thrilled to chat with Andriy Nabachewksy about Ukrainian dance and its historical milieu here in Edmonton.

An enduring musical legacy

Well-known Ukrainian-Canadian composer Sergei Eremenko was a fixture in Edmonton's music community

By Lida Somchynsky

In Ukrainian culture – as well as other Eastern European and Slavic cultures – folk music has enjoyed an artistic forum outside of ‘the village.’ This has been largely thanks to renowned composers, like Brahms and Liszt, who were both part of this heritage and also stood outside of it. This creative phenomenon can also be found in the Ukrainian Canadian classical repertoire, in which musicians have traditionally worked within the realm of multiple cultures. A prime example is Sergei Eremenko, one of the greatest Ukrainian Canadian composers and a leader in Edmonton's music community. Among his many accomplishments, Eremenko was co-founder of the Ukrainian Musical Society of Edmonton, conductor of St. Illia's church choir for over 40 years, founder and conductor for 20 years of the choir, Verkhovyna, and founder of the women's ensemble, Merezhi.

Born in 1912 in the southern region of Ukraine, he completed his musical education in violin, musical theory and composition at the prestigious National Conservatory of Chernivtsi. During World War II, he sought refuge in Holland

where he played in the symphony orchestra, along with teaching and conducting a string orchestra. Having learnt the Dutch language, Eremenko forged a vital transatlantic connection with Holland's music community.

Upon arriving in Canada in 1952, he was immediately able to make his livelihood as a musician – a testament to his talent. Embraced by the Edmonton Ukrainian community, he made this city his home, as a teacher, composer, and conductor of both Ukrainian and Dutch choirs. “Eremenko was passionate about music,” says Jim Cupido, a Dutch friend

who played with Eremenko for over 40 years. “One winter evening we went out to perform and he had a bang-up with the car, as the roads were so slippery and he said, ‘I don't care about the car, I am sad that the playing had to be cancelled.’” Eremenko played with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra for a number of years and was able to perform all 24 capriccios by Paganini”, known as the ‘Olympic gymnast of the violin.’ Cupido and Eremenko continued to perform until Eremenko's death in 1997 at the age of 85.

A repeated refrain from former music colleagues and students concerns Eremenko's gentleness and sensitivity. “How nervous I would be on the day of my violin exams and ‘the professor’ would sit with me, until it was my turn to perform . . . and he would have such a calming effect on me,” says Luba Boyko-Bell, then a violin student and now president of the Ukrainian Musical Society of Alberta (UMSA). Natalia Talanchuk, long-time member of Verkhovyna, recalls his endless delight and energy in showcasing the choir across Alberta, ensuring that small towns were part of the tour. Ksenia Fedyna, current treasurer of UMSA, who played piano and flute accompaniment with the composer, speaks of “his continual calm demeanour.”

Maria Dytyniak, former conductor of Dnipro, speaks and writes with reverence about Eremenko's accomplishments as a composer. He created more than 50 vocal works for choir, violin, and bandura, including many folk songs. His musical compositions are pedagogically brilliant, as well as enticing



Sergei Eremenko and his wife in 1983

PHOTO BY J. FEDORIW

(COURTESY OF THE PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA, J.312/2)

for beginning musicians. His children's piece Sonechko has been used by nursery and elementary schools, and various Ukrainian youth organizations.


Other artists have been inspired by Eremenko's work, like Edmonton poets Tatiana Fedoriw and Yars Slavutych, who provided lyrics for his musical exploration. Internationally-esteemed conductor Wolodymyr Kolesnyk was so taken by Eremenko's cantata, *Conquerors of the Prairies* (with lyrics by Slavutych), that he directed the Edmonton premiere in 1982 with the Dnipro choir and a symphony orchestra comprised of Edmonton musicians. Musicologist Pavlo Matchenko has written extensively about Eremenko's "harmonic polyphonic form, which uses a particular Ukrainian style. Hidden within this is a decorative aesthetic, which is both delicate yet having deep psychological resonance. His harmonies have contemporary modern meanings and give way to various unexpected emotional portrayals."

The continued relevance of Eremenko's

compositions within the Canadian cultural landscape was evident at a recent ceremony of historical significance, titled "Renewing Friendship: Zemlya/Nanoskomum (Give Thanks for the Land)." This was a ceremonial exchange of gifts held in Edmonton to commemorate the Aboriginal/Ukrainian-Canadian relationship based on a shared bond with the land that was never officially acknowledged. One of the gifts exchanged was a vocal performance of an Eremenko song, *Saskatchevanka* (lyrics by Slavutych) by a women's trio. This song tells the story of a Ukrainian boy who sees an Aboriginal woman picking raspberries and celebrates their shared prairie experience. Written from the boy's point of view, the lyrics express regret that he and the young beauty have no language in common.

Eremenko's instrumental repertoire included more than 25 compositions. Not only were there string quartets, often compared to the same lyrical intensity of Antonin Dvorak, but he

also composed quintets of a unique nature which included flutes, oboes and clarinets. His symphonic poem premiered in Edmonton in 1974 and a reviewer was captivated by the various moods that it evoked. "Quiet Bessarabian evenings near the Black Sea . . . were contrasted with the stormy tumultuous evocations of nature." He was able to write piano music for a wide range of musical abilities and as a member of the Alberta Registered Music Teachers' Association in Edmonton, his works, with their distinctly Ukrainian harmonies, were performed at various recitals.

In October 2011, Eremenko's wide-ranging and enriching musical legacy was celebrated at a joint celebration of the 40th anniversary of UMSA and 100th anniversary of the composer's birth. The program featured performances from the Dnipro Choir, Verkhovyna, the Savaryn trio, and former members of Merezhi. 

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

Sponsored by Edmonton Catholic Schools Ukrainian Bilingual Parent Advisory Society

UKRAINIAN ENGLISH INTERNATIONAL BILINGUAL

Program

Experience Ukrainian... through language, arts and culture

Celebrating 40 Years of Ukrainian Catholic Education



St. Martin Elementary

11310-51 Avenue
T: 780 434-4848
www.stmartin.ecsd.net

St. Matthew Elementary

8735-132 Avenue
T: 780 473-6575
www.stmatthew.ecsd.net

St. Kevin Junior High

10005-84 Street
T: 780 469-8301
www.stkevin.ecsd.net



Edmonton Catholic Schools

Austin O'Brien Senior High

6110-95 Avenue
T: 780 466-3161
www.austinobrien.ecsd.net

41st Ukrainian Pysanka Festival
July 4, 5, 6, 2014
 Vegreville AB

grandstand shows, marketplace, workshops, pioneer demos, evening dances, folk arts, more!

FREE Main Gate

a spectacular 3-day showcase of Ukrainian Culture

Government of Alberta
 Canada
 Shevchenko Foundation

www.pysankafestival.com
 780.632.2777 or info@pysankafestival.com




communication
 solutions
 for **print**
 and **web**

jellyfish design

780.452.1767 | **403.770.9684**
 10713-125 street, edmonton | 836 24 avenue SE, calgary

www.jellyfishdesign.com



ACUA
 Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

As a member you will receive:

- ACUA Vitae Ukrainian arts and culture magazine
- ACUA News - our quarterly newsletter informing members of the people, places, and events that help shape our Ukrainian arts community
- Invitations to openings and events
- 10% discount on art education courses
- Access to artist workshops
- Discounts at supporting community businesses
- Voting privileges at our Annual General Meeting

Support Ukrainian arts – join ACUA

☐ I would like to become a member

☐ I would like to volunteer

☐ I would like to be on your email list for upcoming arts and cultural events.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Organizational Membership \$50/year

Individual Membership \$25/year

☐ Membership fee enclosed

☐ I would like to make a donation to ACUA
 Amount: \$ _____

☐ I give ACUA permission to publish my name on the donor gratitude list

Please make cheques payable to ACUA.
 Visa and MC payments can be called into the office
 780.488.8558

2nd Floor 4638-91 Ave. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6B 2L1
 T: 780.488.8558 | F: 780.488.8688 | info@acuarts.ca
www.acuarts.ca

