

ACQUAVITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

Winter 2015-16 | Volume 21, Number 2

People *and* Passion

*A Ram in a China Shop?
Audrey Uzwyshyn's Final Glaze*

*Behind the Scenes:
Curation and Restoration at the
Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village*

*Preserving our Culture:
Profiles in film, music and history*

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Winter 2015-16



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PHOTO SUPPLIED BY AUDREY UZWYSHYN



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At this time of year I find time in the berry bush or the garden a reflective time. We all have memories and moments that stick with us, sometimes leaving us unsure as to why one event stands out but another did not.

What activities keep us up until the wee hours of the morning, with time passing quickly, unnoticed? Those things you get totally absorbed in, whether research, art, gardening, writing, building... whatever it is, that is your passion. In this issue we have highlighted the passions of people in our community who have made a difference, an impact, and influenced others. We look for what matters to them and pushes them, and listen as they tell us why they just can't let go.

Lyrissa Sheptak talks to Orysia Tracz about her drive to find out why Ukrainians do what they do. Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail spends at day at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village east of Edmonton meeting the people behind the scenes who strive to capture our history as authentically as possible. And Charlie Gargus is recognized for his fierce desire to keep our traditional music alive.

Film is a recurring passion. Lida Somchynsky meets with Harvey Spak

of Mundare to see where his path has led him since his days in the film industry, and Lindsay Shapka talks to Maria Boychuk, an aspiring videographer and photographer quickly gaining momentum and recognition in her field. Lida also shares with us a review of the KINO Film Festival that took place in Edmonton in July.

As the weather cools, and we pull canning tools from the back shelf, we try to catch as much daytime as we can outside. And as our hands work in the earth, Audrey Uzwhsyhn takes a break from her clay and shares with Fawnda Mithrush what led to her Final Glaze.

I hope you enjoy this issue and find inspiration through a few of many who share the desire to keep our traditions and culture vibrant. As well, find interesting those who embrace a new style cultivated by our history and rooted in the hard work and perseverance passed through generations in their quest to bring their vision to fruition.

We welcome your feedback and story ideas, and would love to hear about events or people in your community. Please submit comments to acuavita@acuarts.ca. We greatly appreciate the support of our membership, advertisers and supporters because they are essential to the continuation of this publication.

Please share this issue with your friends. If you are not a member of ACUA, we trust you too will find our magazine inspiring. As we move toward our 30th Anniversary in 2016, please check our website or join our membership for regular email updates on our activities and workshops.

Enjoy!

Pamela

CORRECTION:
Spring 2015, Urbanovitch – pg 14
Please note the clothing rack
photographed was inadvertently
that of another designer
sharing Malorie's studio.

Contributors



Fawnda Mithrush

is the Executive Director of LitFest: Canada's only nonfiction festival. She has played the role of general manager for two of Edmonton's most loved theatre companies (Theatre Network, and the outdoor Freewill Shakespeare Festival) and has penned stories and profiles for the likes of *Avenue Magazine*, *Vue Weekly* and the *Edmonton Journal*. She moonlights as co-producer and host of *I Don't Get It*, an award-winning podcast about contemporary dance. Born and raised in Edmonton, she enjoys being a booster for the city's writers and artsy folk. She also enjoys cheese, travel, and the BBC.



Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail

is the author of *For the Love of Flying*, *Polar Winds*, and editor of the forthcoming *In This Together: Fifteen True Stories of Real Reconciliation* (Brindle & Glass, 2016). She is currently serving as Edmonton's Historian Laureate. www.daniellemc.com



Lida Somchynsky

is a freelance writer living in Edmonton. She enjoys kayaking, bicycling and travelling. Lida has an ever-growing library and one day she hopes to read every single book in the collection.

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As part of our 30th Anniversary celebrations, ACUA is very pleased to announce that on September 11, 2015 the official grand opening of the ACUA Gallery and Artisan Boutique was held. The gallery and boutique are overflowing with contemporary and folk art from Artists and Artisans of Ukrainian heritage from Alberta, Canada and Ukraine.

In addition to what you have read about in our AcuaVitae magazines, 2014 & 2015 have been very busy and have seen the development of new programs such as our Artists in Residence, On-line Directory of Ukrainian Artists, Signature Artists Series, Peter & Geraldine Shostak Scholarship, Christmas and Easter Markets and workshops to name a few.

We are proud to have regional representatives in Lethbridge, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Jasper, Vegreville, and Andrew, and welcome Carvel Ukrainian Cultural Society to ACUA.

ACUA has a proud 30 year history and we all look forward to more exciting years ahead! Follow us on TWITTER, 'LIKE' us on FACEBOOK, check out our Website and join our Membership E-BLAST to stay up to date on all of the ACUA events! And don't forget to visit our Gallery and Artisan Boutique (information is on the back cover of this issue). You will not be disappointed!

Deborah Stasiuk
President, ACUA



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Orysia Tracz: Pride of Heritage, Love of Culture

By Lyrissa Sheptak

Orysia Tracz has been heralded as a “Cultural Crusader”¹, and this spring ACUA had the pleasure of hosting this talented lecturer, translator and writer. Not only is she fiercely loyal to her culture, but she is also zealous about sharing it with others. She is a woman with charisma, charm and wit who loves what she does—and her enthusiasm is contagious.

When Orysia speaks, she carries authority, perspective and wisdom. In 1941, Orysia’s parents, along with thousands of others, were taken from their villages in western Ukraine to forced-labour camps in Germany. In 1945, Orysia was born in a Displaced Persons camp where she and her family remained until 1949.

Although she retains vivid memories of life in that camp (like cultivating strong friendships and taking part in school plays), her formative years were

spent in New Jersey, U. S. A, where her family eventually relocated. There, she intermingled with neighbourhood families of different cultures, excelled in school, studied German and Latin, and attained many other academic achievements. At the same time, she also attended Ukrainian schools and immersed herself in her Ukrainian community.

She married in 1965, eventually settling in Winnipeg. Needless to say, Orysia has experienced things that many of us only read about, and she is able to integrate this background into her work.

Orysia’s career as a writer began simply. She wrote about Ukrainian Christmas traditions for her church bulletin. After she caught the interest of a local magazine, she continued writing on similar topics concerning Ukrainian traditions and culture. Now, her work takes her all over the world. Orysia may well be one of the most artistic people that any of us will meet. Like any art form, her chosen media of written word and charismatic lecturing ignite emotion and atmosphere, and spark responses and dialogue amongst those fortunate enough to encounter her words.

How did Ms. Tracz become so passionate about her culture? She claims “It comes from within.” She’s always wondered “why” about things; and when it comes to who you are, she believes there’s an inherent force pulling us all toward that truth. According to Orysia, the more people learn about who they are, the less time they will spend searching for themselves.

When it comes to our own Ukrainian traditions, Orysia says we’re fortunate because, “[o]urs leaves us satisfied and secure”. Orysia loves the study of ethnography because it has taken her on many adventures in her mission to discover more about Ukrainian folklore, customs and their ancient beginnings. Her knowledge of things Ukrainian is because of decades of study and accomplished research.

Her research has taken her to the ancient steppes of Ukraine and back again to our own era. She has discovered an array of information when it comes to Ukrainian customs, traditions and folklore that explain much of who we are as Ukrainians and why we do the

things we do (and that is the title of one of her lectures). She now educates by explaining these things because many of us are either unaware of certain aspects of our culture, or don’t necessarily understand it. For many others, though, who are more immersed in Ukrainian culture, reading her works or listening to her lectures is not only educational, but also a pleasure because of the sentimental element contained in them. Either way, Orysia’s art has the ability to strike an emotional chord.

As she mentioned in her lecture, *Why We Do What We Do: Origins and Symbolism of Ukrainian Traditions*, “[there] have been so many changes over the centuries, especially with Communism, which tried to destroy the heart and lifeline of the Ukrainian people. Yet, somehow, some things found a way to remain.”


To add to the testament of our strength and tenacity as a people, she said that there has been “a continuity of the traditions from people in the ancient territories to modern Ukraine today, and this has spread with the diaspora... And when traditions are done, and songs are sung, we know that Ukraine is with us.” That is something, Orysia says, we can all be proud of, because without our culture, “life would be bland,” and we’d waste time searching for who we were by trying to create customs and traditions of our own instead of enjoying the ones bestowed upon us.

It is certainly no secret that Ukrainians are known for their passion and creativity. According to Orysia, elements in our cultural makeup (like customs, traditions, folklore, art, beliefs, and songs) are so alive that it is easy to be lured into “its strange power and become its captive”.

One instance of Orysia’s own vivacity in connecting with her audiences was the evening she gave her lecture, *Songs Your Mother Should Never Have Taught You: Erotic Symbolism in Ukrainian Folk Songs*. An animated Orysia took the podium to explain the hidden symbolism and history behind the folk songs that many of us grew up listening to and singing. Orysia broke into song, encouraging audience members to join in, creating a night of education, harmony, and laughter. It was

Her knowledge of things Ukrainian is because of decades of study and accomplished research

a wonderful example of people coming together in camaraderie to experience Ukrainian flair, food and song.

Orysia Tracz is a gem in a world that has its fair bit of tarnish. Our Ukrainian culture with all its special features and practices has withstood the pains of time and history. Through our culture, we are encouraged to not only preserve our heritage for future generations, but to assume a responsibility to share it with others as well. We certainly are privileged to live in a day and age where we are allowed to call ourselves Ukrainian, and live our culture and practice our traditions; however, we must also be thankful to live in a country that not only celebrates multiculturalism, but freely allows us to be who we are. 

Lyrissa Sheptak is a writer, historian and cultural educator residing in Beaumont.

¹ Jeffrey Picknicki Moroski, “Winnipeg’s Own Cultural Crusader: Orysia Paszczak Tracz”. *The Ukrainian Weekly*, May 4, 1997, No. 18. Vol LXV.

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Kinofest highlights the best of 2013-14 Ukrainian Cinema

By Lida Somchynsky



The Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts

(ACUA) is delighted with the success of its first film festival.

Organizers Rena Hanchuk, Deborah

Stasiuk and Yaroslav Kitynskyy radiate enthusiasm as they reflect on the weekend of June

12 to 14. "Along with

a wide cross-section of the Ukrainian community, we had children eager to see Saturday afternoon

cartoons, members of the Polish community, as well as aspiring directors, film buffs, and university students," said

Hanchuk. Deborah Stasiuk added, "They were so appreciative, and just so happy that it happened."

Thanks to the vision of the three community organizers, Edmonton audiences had an opportunity to experience award-winning cinematic

wonders of 2013-14 from Ukraine, shown at the Cosmopolitan Music Society in Old Strathcona. Each film was introduced by Rena Hanchuk and Yaroslav Kitynskyy—thereby framing the viewing experience with a historical and cinematic context.

The festival opened with *The Guide*, directed by Oles Sanin. Partially based on a true story, it takes place during the 1930s Stalin purges and Holodomor. Hundreds of Kobzar ministers and bards, who sang from village to village declaiming the history of Ukraine, were summoned to a 'conference'. They were put on cattlecars and vanished without a trace.

Interwoven within this tragic narrative is the story of an American agricultural specialist, called upon for his expertise regarding the 'current food crisis.' Stylistically, the director uses expressionistic and film noir elements to depict a story of hope amidst great tragedy as seen through the eyes of two young boys. Ingenuous referencing of both the American blues and slavery makes this film a must-see for cineastes. It deservedly won six awards at various international film festivals. *The Guide* has added historical resonance because it was to be released in 2013; but the Maidan revolution caused production

to be stalled for an additional year.

Ivan Syla, a biopic, recounts the gripping life story of Ivan Firtsak, born in a Ukrainian village in the Zakarpattia Oblast. In 1917, at the age of eighteen, he joined a Czechoslovakian circus and travelled to sixty-four countries. Astounding the world with his bodybuilding and weight-lifting prowess, he was named the strongest man of the twentieth century. Directors Viktor Andrienko and Igor Pismenny employ slapstick humour and use of animation to make this film appealing to audiences of all ages. "Not ever having been to Ukraine, there were magical parts to it. I enjoyed the cinematography and seeing the Carpathian Mountains," exclaimed one audience member.

Braty: Ostanniyaspovid (Brothers: The Final Confession) has a fascinating backstory because the film is based on a Norwegian story whose author later won the Nobel Prize. With sibling rivalry taken to the extreme, this is a Cain and Abel story transplanted to a remote dwelling in the Carpathians.

A writer comes to a small provincial town, gives a lecture about saints, and inadvertently becomes involved in two brothers' lives. The director, Victoria Trofimenko, took five years to finish the film that won two awards at the Moscow International Film Festival. Religious and folkloric symbolism highlights the psychological drama and family tragedy, while a lyrical music score acts as a haunting counterpoint.


Unravelling *Braty's* many visual symbols offers a treasure trove for folklorists.

The concluding film in the Kino Film Fest Series was *The Tribe*. Directed by Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy, it was the most controversial film in the series because of its R-rating. An ingenious blend of documentary and drama entirely in sign language, this film received over twenty-one prizes, along with the Grand Prix Award at the Cannes Film Festival.

In a boarding school for deaf children, a new student faces the scrutiny of his schoolmates as they deal in robbery and prostitution. Accepted by his peers, he becomes a

pimp; but complications arise when he falls in love with one of his 'girls.'

Dr. Roman Petryshyn, recently retired as Director of the Ukrainian Resource Development Centre at Grant MacEwan Community College, gave an impassioned speech about working with the deaf community in Ukraine, highlighting the significant inroads that have been made. However, more aid is required to alleviate a still-desperate situation.

ACUA organizers are thrilled to be part of the KINO Film Fest and for Edmonton to be part of KINO's international circuit. Under the auspices of this organization, these films have played at major cities around the world. Judging by both the enthusiasm and numbers of attendees, Edmonton will see this festival back next year. Deborah Stasiuk welcomes input from the community. "If people know of movies they would like to suggest, we welcome feedback. In addition, what an honour being part of Kino Fest—how proud we are to be part of something bigger." 

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Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village

by Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail

PHOTO CREDITS (UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE): DANIELLE METCALFE-CHENAIL

Detective Work and DIY Recreates Ukrainian Past for New Generations

This year the Ukrainian Village opened five new buildings to the public as part of its long-awaited Enrichment Program. The Morecambe School, South River Teacher's Shack, Luzan Post Office, Grekul Barn, and Grekul Granary. Like each of the more than thirty-five buildings in this open-air museum, they have gone through incredible transformation by a dedicated team who find, acquire, restore and furnish these historic buildings that represent the region's Ukrainian presence between 1892 and 1930.

The Morecambe Schoolhouse, for example, is one of the largest buildings on site and opened this spring after four years of effort and roughly \$600,000. It is one of the last examples of a two-room schoolhouse that is still standing in our province. A researcher found it and the Ukrainian Village team brought it to the open-air museum site, where it sat by the side of the road until they had funding to tackle it.

Jim Nakonechny, the Village's Restoration Officer for the past ten years, says the 1929-era school had been used as a house and then a church hall over time; so when his team acquired it, they had to work hard to determine what it would have looked like originally. "The walls were taken out and a kitchen was put in. There were a lot of holes in the floor," says Nakonechny. "A lot was

missing in this building, but we could see ghost patterns where chalkboards were, and window trims so we could see how the mouldings were done." He notes the track for the centre wall was there as well, and rot on the floor from water damage showed where the original water fountain had been.

"Sometimes it's more like peeling the onion back," says Nakonechny, who removes panelling, drywall or other new surfaces to reveal original colours and materials. The team documents what they find as they uncover the layers

and perform colour-analysis on paint chips to restore walls and trim to original hues. Nakonechny and his restoration team encounter a lot of challenges along the way, trying to be as historically accurate as possible within the bounds of what can be done. Materials that were plentiful in the 1920s, for example, such as the clear fir used to panel the interior of Morecambe School, can be very hard to find in Alberta now; so they

Cont'd on page 12

had to source the fir from Oregon.

Some building techniques have also faded from fashion, and so Nakonechny carefully trains contractors during the restoration process. He often has volunteers help as well, such as in the recent case of a clay plastering workshop held during Edmonton Historic Festival & Doors Open. Not only do these opportunities allow historic, culturally-accurate restoration skills to continue, but Nakonechny himself has learned a thing or two. “We had one of the daughters of the original man who built it [and] she said, ‘I remember, this is the way dad taught us to do it,’” Nakonechny says. She also told them that the interior had not been whitewashed as they’d assumed, but rather the finish was white clay diluted in water applied using hand-made grass brushes.

Once a building such as Morecambe Schoolhouse has been restored, Becky Dahl and her curatorial team take over furnishing it. In every case they start with a ‘Materials History Specification



Clay Plastering
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Clay Plastering with the Hlus Family
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without any luck before she placed classified ads in newspapers and on kijiji. In that manner, she found donors one at a time until they acquired about half the number of desks they needed. Skilled carpenters reproduced the rest based on historical desks from museum collections.

Even if they can find original items, the curators must use their judgement about having those valuable pieces in public spaces, because accidents do happen when enthusiastic groups gather in the buildings. If they decide to store items, then they will be placed in the temperature- and humidity-controlled collection area, along with a large numbers of other original artifacts and reproductions organized by type.

“This is a little unusual for museums,” Watt says. “Often museums have their collections organized by geographic area or by who donated it. But here, because we use a lot of the objects, we like to have them easily accessible by type. We’re usually looking for something specific like a hay fork or a typewriter.”

Next spring the Ukrainian Village plans to open more restored and curated buildings to the public. You can be sure Jim Nakonechny, Becky Dahl, Robin Watt, and the many others who work behind the scenes here to make them come to life will draw on the same spirit of pioneer ingenuity and resourcefulness as the first Ukrainians who lived and worked in the region.

As Jim Nakonechny says, “It’s a really nice feeling when you get people who actually went to the school come in and say, ‘This is exactly how I remembered it!’”



Report’, which is compiled by historians. Through research in archives and by talking with people who went to the school, they note the kinds of objects they remember being there and search to see if someone might have an original piece. If Dahl finds originals, she follows up to see if the family might donate it either for use in the building or to be preserved in storage. “If it’s not in the report, we do a bit of leg work to see if we can track it down,” she says. “In some instances we have been able to find it. A lot of the time, it just doesn’t exist or we just don’t know where it is.”

When they cannot find originals, Dahl and her team use people’s descriptions

or historic photos to hunt down similar objects in other personal collections, museums, catalogues of historical items, Ebay, or online and ‘brick-and-mortar’ retailers. It becomes a combination of detective work and gut instinct based on deep experience with the time period.

In order to outfit the school with the sixty or so desks, for example, Dahl’s assistant curator, Robin Watt, went on a historical quest. First she called all the school boards in the region to see if some desks might be in storage. “A lot of people said, ‘Oh yeah, I remember those—they piled them up in the 1950s and burned them!’” she says, shaking her head. Then she called retired teachers



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THE MUSIC AND PASSION OF CHARLIE GARGUS

By Pamela Shapka

WITH CONTENT AND QUOTES FROM CHARLIE'S SISTERS: MARILYN GARGUS SCHAFFER AND BERENICE GARGUS FREEDOME.

Our family met Charlie Gargus at the first Ukrainian Music Workshop, which was held in Mundare in April, 2005. Since then we have attended the workshop each of the past ten years it has run. Over the years my family has had the pleasure of learning Ukrainian tunes on violin, guitar, dulcimer and keyboard. We have also met instructors whom we subsequently employed, and we have jammed with classmates, shared the art of pysanka writing, and visited local museums.

PHOTO: PAMELA SHAPKA



When I profiled Charlie I turned to his family for the history that encouraged Charlie's inherent passion for continuing the traditions of Ukrainian music.

Charlie grew up in Lamont, the eldest of six children. His father, Peter, was an avid musician, fiddler and composer. Peter, a firm believer in setting rhythm as a groundwork for musical training, set a six-year-old Charlie at the drums with the Swingsters band. Although sometimes Charlie was found sleeping among the instrument cases, by eight years old he was hooked and kept the beat all night.

Over the years, four of Charlie's siblings joined the band, and eventually Charlie's son Jarod joined too, bringing three generations to the stage. The band recorded several CDs and LP records over its long run of fifty-seven years, retiring in 1998. Over the forty years Charlie performed in the group, he moved from drums to banjo, guitar, bass and second trumpet. His loss of half of two fingers on his right hand didn't deter him a bit; and at fifty, when

he inherited his dad's coveted violin, a new passion for fiddling was ignited!

Charlie dedicated himself to learning and practicing as much as he could. He began violin training under Heather Soldan, and played with his dad Peter at every opportunity. In 2001 he discovered the Alberta Society of Fiddlers Camps (www.asof.ca). It was the fall of 2004, after attending ASOF camp and the Athabasca Jamboree, his wife, Debby, recalls Charlie saying "All this music I'm learning at fiddle camp—the Ottawa Valley, Celtic ... it's great, but nobody's doing Ukrainian Music." He continued, "We're going to have a music workshop in Mundare!" The idea of hosting a one-day workshop specific to Ukrainian Music was something vitally important to Charlie. Passionate to keep Ukrainian tunes alive, with the passing of his father Charlie's desire and purpose was given new urgency.

Determined, Charlie and Debby set to the task of hosting the first-ever Ukrainian Music Workshop in Mundare in April 2005. Ten years later, people aged six to eighty still travel to Mundare each year on the second Saturday in March from Alberta, Saskatchewan and even Ontario to learn distinctly traditional Ukrainian tunes. Instruction to roughly seventy-five students is offered primarily in violin, and keyboard, but also in accordion, dulcimer, guitar and ballads. Demand and available instructors determine which classes are offered. "They're not all of Ukrainian heritage," Debby says, "but they all want to learn Ukrainian music."

Each year the workshop wraps up with a sold-out Ukrainian feast prepared by the ladies group in Mundare and assisted by donations from the local Stawnychy's Meat Processors. There is a concert showcasing the tunes learned that day. The evening ends in a traditional circle jam for

musicians and guests alike to enjoy.

In addition to bringing the Ukrainian Music Workshop to life, Charlie eagerly participates in events supporting and promoting Ukrainian music. He volunteered his time to the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts fundraiser Zacharovana Nich in 2011, and for the annual Deep Freeze Festival in Edmonton in 2014.

Charlie has participated in the Athabasca Harvest Gold competition, and won second place for his Ukrainian tunes in the Open Category. In the Grand North American Fiddle Championship (2012-14) hosted by the Alberta Wildrose Fiddlers in Radway he brought home winnings in the Twin Category (with his cousin Tom) and won First in the Seniors Category.

On August 2, 2015, for his contributions to Ukrainian Music, Charlie was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ukrainian Musicians Association. The award was presented at the fiftieth anniversary of the Ukrainian Festival in Dauphin, Manitoba.

Although this year's camp has come to an end, you can still catch Charlie performing with his Silver and Gold Trio at seniors' lodges, the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, and the Baba's and Borshch Festival in Andrew among other venues. Charlie's passion has him practicing, playing, helping organize events, or teaching traditional Ukrainian music on violin, mandolin and guitar to students of all ages. If anyone is yearning for of some toe-tappin' traditional Ukrainian tunes, just look up Charlie Gargus, the Mayor of Mundare! I'm sure he'll be happy to oblige!

"Charlie's absolutely loves Ukrainian music," Debby says. "He gets lost in it. It's truly his passion and he loves to share it." 🎻



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: GARGUS FAMILY

A Ram in a China Shop?

Potter Audrey Uzwyshyn Bids Farewell to Public Shows with a Set of 100 Unique Barany

By Fawnda Mitbrush

PHOTOS BY AUDREY UZWYSHYN

Late last year, Audrey Uzwyshyn decided she'd had enough. After two knee replacements, one new hip, and over two decades of creating thousands of ceramic pieces, it was time to pack it in after her last public show—her “final glaze”—in fall of 2014.

“It wasn't the pottery, it was the shows. It was just too hard to pack up the house, put up the shelving, on and on,” she explains. “And it's nice to leave when you're at the top, not at the bottom.” Where so much pottery is drab and clunky, she takes pride in the characteristic vibrant colour and delicacy of her work.

Uzwyshyn regularly threw 2000 pieces for her annual shows—about two dozen pieces per day over a year. If that doesn't sound like a lot, think of it another way. As she says, “You start by hauling in fifty pounds of clay. Then, every piece that you throw has to be wedged, which means you have to knead it to get all the air bubbles out. A lot of the things I do are in sets, so you have to weigh each piece out. Then you throw it. After you throw it, you put it on boards to let it dry out a bit, and after that you have to trim it.” Following that is the first bisque, then cleaning, glazing, and final fire in the kiln.

“I figured out at one point that I handled each and every individual piece twenty-five times. I worked twelve months of the year, and I'd be up at 5:00 a.m. and go to bed at midnight. Physically it's a lot of work.”

It takes about three months to make a full dinner set start to finish, and she did complete one for her children years ago with her husband, Taras, who passed in 2003. She smiles broadly when thinking of the sets she'll make for her six grandchildren in her coming retirement years.

For her final show, she also completed one hundred unique ram figurines (*baran*), a signature piece that she has become known for in the local Ukrainian crafts community.

“For Ukrainians, a ram is very important. It's prosperity, wealth, children; it's everything that's good

luck. Every Ukrainian home should have a ram,” she says. Though her parents did not have any while she was growing up, she liked the idea and did research to create her own take on the traditional item.

Uzwyshyn's typical rams are somewhere between ornate and oddball; they have a tiny, plain face surrounded by hundreds of ringlets of individually shaped hairs, topped with sleek and near-perfect spiral horns.


“I spend weeks on rams,” she says, describing the painstaking process of pushing porcelain through a sieve to create the florets of hairs that get affixed to the clay bodies. While she admits she's never counted the pieces of hair on each ram, it's a process that she enjoys. For her rams at the last show, she tried out a different style with smooth bodies and long, gently arcing horns.

“I'd always wanted to do a series of one hundred rams. Always, always, always. I'd gotten to over fifty in this series; they were so different from my regular rams it took a while for people to warm up to them. They're very different, very stylized. People either really like them or really don't. Some people said ‘they don't look like a ram, they look like a goat,’” she laughs. “I made about thirty different prototypes before I decided on what I was going to do. I liked the sleek lines of these, but wouldn't do them again.”

Apparently, the horns were stubborn about staying in place while drying, and the texture on the bodies had to be created by adding slip then “squiggling” the surface by hand before a fine layer of porcelain was applied to each body. Though these *baran* look simple in comparison to the curly-haired variety, Uzwyshyn notes that her ambition in shaping the new pieces was a bit much. These rams will be kept to the “extremely limited edition” set of one hundred—and not one more, she says.

She takes out a ledger as we chat at her kitchen table, going through a lengthy list of customers who have become avid collectors of her work over the years.

“One thing that I really emphasized with my last pottery show was that I was so pleased that so many people

had a little bit of me in their homes,” she says, a brief tear coming to her eye. With almost 50,000 pieces sold over twenty-five years, Uzwyshyn's legacy is a quiet, everyday presence in kitchens throughout the province. 

Raku figurines made of porcelain



The Renaissance Man from Mundare

By Lida Somchynsky

There is something enthralling about walking into an artist's home. How much will it reflect that individual's mysterious process of creativity—the scope and breadth of emotion that is displayed in their work? The home of artist Harvey Spak is on a quiet street in Mundare where he lives with his wife, Michelle, and their two dogs. When I enter their home, I am awestruck by Spak's many icons hanging on the walls of the entranceway and living room. His use of gold leaf in these vibrant images causes them to overflow with light and energy. This energy mirrors Spak's own exuberance and lively intelligence that have led him to explore various imaginative realms—filmmaking, iconography and more recently, poetry. Interwoven throughout is a tapestry of his Ukrainian prairie roots.

Born in Vegreville, Alberta, and raised as an Eastern Catholic Christian, Spak studied with the Oblates and considered becoming a missionary. Although he took a different path from that, Spak's faith has always been a strong influence. "I have the French Roman Catholic and the Byzantine Christian traditions which are the foundations of my faith," he says.

Spak was also a film buff and in 1968 set off for Montreal to enter a film program at Loyola College (now part of Concordia University). The program was run by Father Jack O'Brian, a Jesuit priest with a Ph.D. in communications, who hired people with hands-on experience in the film business.

With a degree in Communication Arts, Spak returned to Edmonton and became involved with Filmwest, a group that included filmmakers such as Tom Radford and Anne Wheeler. He completed a series of documentaries adding to that fine tradition developed through the National Film Board (Spak's movies such as

Woodmountain Poems, *Movie Showmen* and *Pamiat – Memory of Ancestors* can all be viewed on the current NFB website.) *Pamiat – Memory of Ancestors* is a lyrical memoir depicting the time Spak spent in seminary studying with the Oblates.

Spak's favourite is *Woodmountain Poems*, depicting the haunting work of the Saskatchewan poet Andrew Suknaski. In the poems, we visit the poet at his near disappearing village of Wood Mountain in south central Saskatchewan. The vast loneliness of the plains acts as an unwavering witness to the interwoven stories of Aboriginal people and Ukrainian settlers.

Spak also made a series of TV dramas, working with Atlantis Films—a prestigious production company that helped to bring recognition to many Canadian short stories via the screen. Among these is Spak's rendition of 'A Sick Call' by our well-known short story writer Morley Callaghan.

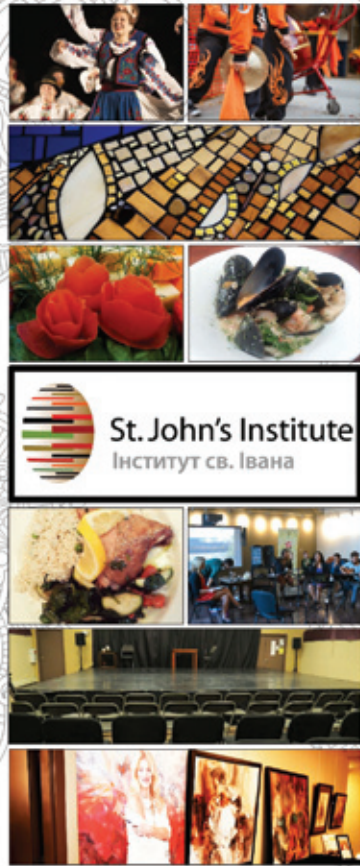
Late Night Calls

*A young woman
stands on the shore
of a great lake.
A voice says:
"Strike out for the deep."
The woman hesitates
I see her face.
It's my mother
at the age of 20.
a phone rings
and wakes me.
It's the doctor on call.
She tells me
my 93 year old mother's bleeding.
She's had a transfusion.
She's sleeping.
but she'll never survive surgery.
I drift off
and see
my young mother
with bold strokes
making for
the deep of the lake.*

H.Spak

After forty years of filmmaking, Spak began exploring other artistic pursuits; yet his cinematic fascination continues. "Recently I bought a drone that runs a Go-pro camera, and I want to do a series of aerial images of churches in the area... I see it as a visual poem. I have also shot photographs of ancient churches in the Pyrenees, west of Toulouse in France—a country I especially adore."

Spak's interest in poetry goes as far back as his filmmaking endeavours but it is only in the last year that his poetry has become available to the public. "Basically I write for myself," he says. "I started during the making of the Suknaski film. Recently, a retired South African doctor, now living in Moose Jaw, solicited my work for an on-line South African publication. And he is also a lover of Suknaski's poetry."



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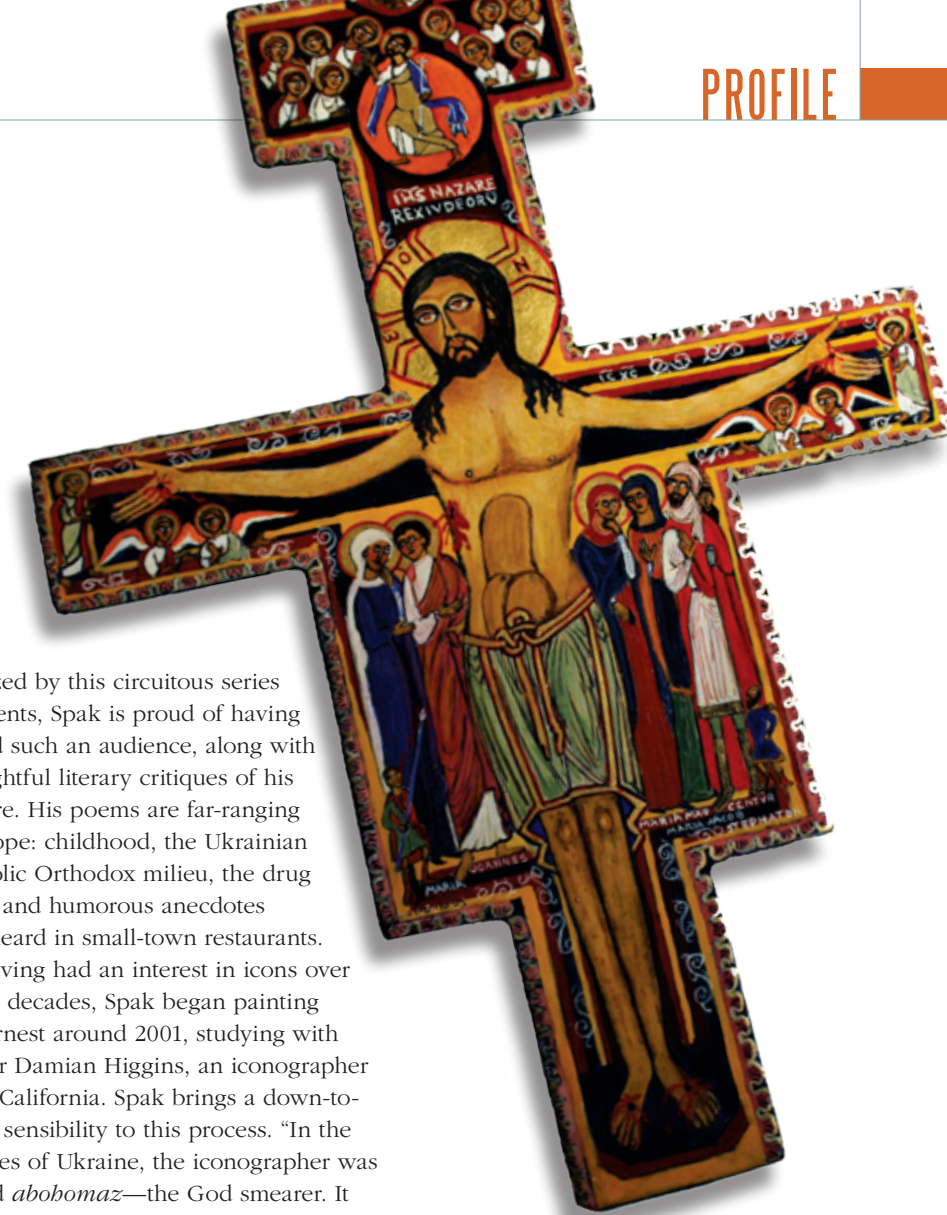
Amazed by this circuitous series of events, Spak is proud of having found such an audience, along with thoughtful literary critiques of his oeuvre. His poems are far-ranging in scope: childhood, the Ukrainian Catholic Orthodox milieu, the drug trade and humorous anecdotes overheard in small-town restaurants.

Having had an interest in icons over many decades, Spak began painting in earnest around 2001, studying with Father Damian Higgins, an iconographer from California. Spak brings a down-to-earth sensibility to this process. "In the villages of Ukraine, the iconographer was called *abobomaz*—the God smearer. It is a skill accessible to all—like being a blacksmith; and what that implies is that anybody can become an iconographer. In fact, Father Damian prefers people who have no artistic background to take his workshops. Iconography is a different way of looking at things."

Spak goes on in his inimitable down-to-earth manner, "I once visited a workshop taught by Frank Turner, an iconographer from Vancouver who said, 'Okay, now take out your vodka. And if you haven't got vodka, you can use rye, scotch or gin. It enables you to dissolve the pigment and it works like a damn.'" Later, in a pensive moment, Spak reflects on his on-going artistic practice. "And so you are using everything from God's creation—animal, vegetable, mineral. The gold leaf symbolizes the light from the beginning of creation, the light of Christ. Gold is the symbol of the eternal. It never degrades."

Spak's icons are owned by members of the Ukrainian community, along with other lovers of sacred art, and continue to be purchased by many. Recently, Spak generously donated his icon 'St. Michael Archangel of the Apocalypse', a magnificent piece 12" by 16" in hues of burgundy and gold, as part of a fundraiser for the restoration of St. Paraskavia Ukrainian Catholic Church, located in the Cossack township in east central Alberta.

Spak's Christian belief has given him a bedrock of faith and the joy of exploration. It is his parting words that resonate with me, "An iconographer must constantly return to Holy Scripture and the Gospels to rediscover the beauty, the drama and the constant surprises of the divinity of Christ, of God Who became man and showed us the beauty of His Face." 



Harvey holding an icon he created of Father Lacombe
PHOTO: PAMELA SHAPKA

CAUGHT on FILM

ALBERTA-MADE CINEMATIC MASTERPIECES

By Lindsay Shapka

Though Maria Boychuk calls herself a photographer and videographer, what she does is much more than just taking photos and recording film. A true artist, with her lens she captures fleeting emotions, subtle details and heart-warming moments that the average wedding guest, graduate or client would never notice.

Digital media has been around for awhile, and because of the increase in high-quality, inexpensive equipment, smartphone apps that give novice photographers

Photoshop-quality filters at their fingertips, and a rising demand for beautiful photos to share on social media, the pool of photographers—talented ones—has grown exponentially in the last few years.

This renewed interest in photography means more competition for the professionals, but Maria doesn't see it as a problem, because her favourite activity is videography. "It is more romantic and cinematic. Videography has a 'wow-factor' that comes along with it. There are a lot of people who are really good hobby photographers: it's a huge industry, but there are not a lot of professionals shooting video in my style. The pool of

people to draw from is more limited."

Maria also really enjoys the reach that her films have versus her photographs, especially when she posts what she calls a 'same day edit', or compilation of the morning preparations for a wedding and then the wedding ceremony. "That's my absolute favourite part, because people have a chance to see your work and what you put together on that day. When I do photography, the couple or clients will see everything, but no one else gets a chance to share those moments."

Maria grew up on a farm in Smoky Lake, and after graduating from high school, she determined to find something that she was passionate about. So,

PHOTOS: MARIA BOYCHUK

she went to NAIT and took television broadcasting. After a stint as a news reporter in Medicine Hat, she moved back north to Edmonton to be closer to her family and worked as a radio DJ at CISN Country until an opportunity arose to work for a production company. She worked with the production company for three years, soaking in every ounce of knowledge she could and developing a passion for capturing moments on film. Currently, she applies her skills in a more commercial way at UFA Cooperative in Calgary, still doing both videography and photography in the summer months.

It sounds like a lot of work having both a day job and running your own business on the side, but Maria is clearly incredibly driven and knows what she wants. "My dream job would be to work in the wedding industry and in agriculture, shooting people in action, in a director and producer role," she says. "I think I am a romantic person at heart, so I really like weddings—country weddings in particular—but if I decide to do [my own thing] full time, I will look for corporate, agricultural work as well."

Growing up in a tight-knit, Ukrainian community has created a lot of opportunity for this talented woman.

"A lot of weddings that I shoot tend to be Ukrainian and I am very familiar with them. I have filmed people getting together to make pyrogies, Ukrainian dancing and other cultural elements that make the [event] unique." But as her reputation grows, she is finding that she is getting work all over Alberta, and is hoping to grow even further over the next year thanks to an online marketing campaign.


Her dream spot to shoot? Iceland! "The towns are so quaint and colourful, so I think that would be really beautiful."

Surrounded by unique cultural elements and beautiful imagery all the time, you would think that the inspiration for her work would be visual; but according to Maria, it all starts with the music. "Most of my work includes music so it's really important to get the song choices before the client tells me the theme." The speed or lyrics of a song can dictate whether a film is lighthearted or emotional, and whether a photograph comes off as cheerful or dramatic in a slideshow.

While photography will always be a part of what she does, when asked if she thinks that the demand for videography will grow, Maria doesn't even pause,



"Absolutely. Video can show so much more than a photo can—audio, emotion, the opportunities are endless."

Check out some of Maria's incredible work on her website mariaboychuk.com 

Lindsay Shapka is the Editor of WHERE Edmonton Magazine and various other travel publications. She is also a freelance writer, frequent traveller and blogger. You can find more of her work on her website, TheAnthrotrorian.com.



40 years – what an accomplishment!

By Maria Ochitwa

This last year, 2014-15, marks the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Ensemble. The group began in September of 1974, when seven dedicated individuals put together a framework for the Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Ensemble—and Calgary's first, prominent Ukrainian dance group was created. The ensemble was named after the Tryzub, the national symbol of a free Ukraine. Since that time, it has been an integral part of the Calgary folk arts community, performing high-flying kicks and head-turning spins, awing audiences throughout Calgary, across Canada and around the world. We are proud to continue sharing our Ukrainian culture, heritage and love of dance.

Forty years has provided the opportunity for many special performances: 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies, Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Grandstand Show and Coca Cola

Stage, Alberta Centennial Celebration for her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, several collaborations with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and participation in numerous dance festivals throughout Canada and the world.

We created our own productions that include *Spirit of Ukraine*, *Visions of Ukraine*, *Glorious and Free* and *Small Steps, Big Footprints*. Tryzub also undertook two major touring productions: *Reflections of the Soul*, featured across Canada and into the USA, and *Awakenings*, that extensively toured western Canada and Australia. As well, we have had the unique opportunity and experience of collaborating with other prominent western Canadian dance organizations in productions of *Razom* and *Razom 2*, featured in western Canada.

In true Ukrainian style, our fortieth anniversary has been celebrated over one whole year beginning with a fortieth anniversary Zabava in November of 2014. We were pleased to be joined by several alumni from across Canada to celebrate our milestone, gathering friends from past and present to celebrate the growth of something special that unifies us.

The year's highlight, in April 2015, featured the stage production, *Tryzub 40*, which, under the artistic direction of Mr. Vasyl Kanevets and Mrs. Anna Kanevets, showcased the growth of our

organization since its inception. Over fifty alumni dancers, some travelling from other parts of Alberta, eastern Canada and the USA returned to join in this celebration that also featured Tryzub School of Ukrainian Dance, Junior Tryzub and the current Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Ensemble. One hundred forty performers danced two consecutive evenings to sold out audiences at Vertigo Theatre. The generations of dance displayed onstage made the show highly enjoyable; the precise execution, only reached through careful rehearsal, showed the strength of Tryzub that has endured through all these generations. It was a special time for the dancers and their family members in the audience, bringing memories by taking some back in time. Oh the fun of the rehearsal, and how special it was to spend time with cherished friends and artistic directors from the past.

Tryzub 40 celebrations concluded with the ensemble travelling to Cali, Colombia, where they participated in the Ballet Raices Folcloricas de Colombia in August, 2015.

Thank you to anyone and everyone who has been involved in the Tryzub family over the past forty years—without all of your efforts, passion and dedication, none of this could have been possible. You are the past, present, and future of Tryzub, and the reason why forty years is only the beginning for us! 🇺🇦



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