

LANA NICOLE
NILAND

It's the second season of Our Year in Ukraine with three new recruits. Another ten months, a bunch of new cities and ensembles, and a whole new script of antics: you'll want to make sure you tune in

The three young men endeavouring to engage and enhance their choreographic wit and physical aptitude on the Our Year in Ukraine 2018/19 tour all hail from North America. Starting out in the Ukrainian capital and working with the Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, they will travel onward to work with various groups in Chernivtsi, Lutsk, Lviv, Poltava, and Vinnytsia. The tour doesn't deviate much from that which the six girls embarked on in 2017/18, though with three guys taking on Ukraine, the stories are sure to be a little different. Moving on to a new city every two months, the recruits will enjoy language lessons, culture outings, and a plethora of new experiences in addition to a gruelling schedule of dance and choreography near daily in the studio. Is it too much? Maybe for some. It's unlikely, however, you'll hear these three kozaky complain.



A YEAR TO REMEMBER



Jonathan Hejnal
32-years old
*Kashtan Ukrainian
Dance School and Ensemble*

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

I wanted to participate so I am prepared for the future. I have been an assistant director with Kashtan in Cleveland for the past six years, and plan to one day become their next artistic director and I want to keep updating and progressing. With this new found knowledge from Our Year in Ukraine, I will be more prepared for this endeavour.

I want to be a better dancer and teacher for my students and I want them to see that as I learn they will learn.

Some peculiarities of life in Ukraine include the flowers – they are everywhere! I mean readily available at your beck and call: on the way to the metro, people selling them on the street... And not just flowers: local fresh produce is located on every corner as you pass. Why stop at a store when you can run to the baba on the corner for some bananas?

The most difficult thing to adjust to has been the lack of dryers – why do they not exist in this country? I miss that.

Best moment so far: Learning at the Kyiv University for Choreography and Dance here in Kyiv. They have the most amazing program I have ever come across and I relish studying with teachers and staff who have knowledge not found in the States.

In one word, what is this year going to be like: Amazing.



Timothy Jaddock
25-years old
*Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance
Company*

**Dauphin, MB Canada (hometown)
Edmonton, AB, Canada (currently)**

I am director of the Ukrainian Dance Program at KaRAR Performing Arts in Stony Plain, AB, and as such, continually seek professional development opportunities. Spending a year in Ukraine was the perfect opportunity to continue to advance my knowledge. I am excited to continue to develop my skills in both ballet and Ukrainian technique and bring these skills back to the stage in Canada. As a dance director, I am excited to advance my knowledge and understanding of the many regional variations of Ukrainian folk dance as well as learn more about Ukrainian costumes, culture, and tradition.

One thing I am not used to is how people take phone calls, no matter the time, the place, or the situation. We took a ballet class where the instructor took a call and had an entire conversation while we did battement tendu. This has not been an isolated experience, and we often have to stifle laughter when it happens.

The most difficult thing to adjust to so far has been taking the metro. Basically, we are herded like cattle with hundreds of other passengers into small hot train cars, where we stand shoulder to shoulder, trying not to fall on top of other passengers during frequent and abrupt stops.

Best moment so far: We hosted Canadian Thanksgiving for our friends from the University. It was their first time having pumpkin pie and stuffing, and they loved canned whipped cream. The evening morphed into a Ukrainian dance party, and we tynok'd, obertass'd, and polka'd our hearts out.

In one word, what is this year going to be like: Thrilling.



Mackenzie Hammer
18-years old
*Lloydminster Malanka Dancers,
Verkhovyna Dunai Ensemble*

Paradise Hill, SK, Canada

The tour offers many great opportunities to study under renowned instructors and directors as well as complete immersion into the Ukrainian culture. I chose to do the program with the intention of not only developing my own abilities as a dancer but also gaining a deeper understanding of Ukrainian dance to bring back to Canada as an instructor.

My expectations for the year are to gain a better understanding as to the roots of our culture and dancing in Canada, as well as reasoning behind the things we do (ie. the origin behind dance steps, the influences on regional culture, and the history behind cultural normalities).

The hardest part so far has been adjusting to regularities in Ukraine that are different in Canada. Drying my clothes on a drying rack on the balcony is very strange, as is watering the hardwood floor between exercises in class. Not knowing the language is probably my biggest hurdle to overcome thus far. The language lessons help immensely, however knowing how to ask someone how they are does not come in handy when trying to order a coffee.

Best moment so far: Recently we hosted our classmates over to our apartment to celebrate Canadian Thanksgiving and show them some North American culture. This event was a huge success with spur of the moment polkas as well as delicious food prepared by my roommates!

In one word, what is this year going to be like: Unpredictable.



REFLECTING ON 10 MONTHS IN UKRAINE STUDYING DANCE, LEARNING CULTURE, AND COLLECTING STORIES

My life is now split into three parts: pre-Ukraine, Ukraine, and dreaming about when I can go back to Ukraine.

In June, four other Canadians and I completed the inaugural Our Year in Ukraine program organised by Cobblestone Freeway Tours and Ukrainian Dance World. We lived in Kyiv, Lviv, Chernivtsi, Lutsk, and Poltava for two months at a time, training with ensembles in each city. The dynamics in each studio varied but there was one common thread: a sense of community. I dance with Troyanda Ukrainian Dance Ensemble in Selkirk, MB, where the sense of family is evident at rehearsal each week. Seeing this among professional ensembles however reminded me of its importance. A family may disagree at times, but because of mutual respect, you ultimately bring out the best in each other, on stage and in the studio.

There were some adjustments to life in the studio in Ukraine, like how strict some instructors were – one ballet instructor would grab the buns of female dancers and aggressively tilt their head to the correct angle or pull them into the back row when they made a mistake. And then there was the idea that, as women, it's okay to mark in class if it's that time of the month. Coming from a society where period talk is kind of taboo, it initially took us by surprise when our male instructor asked at the start of every class about our health and if we had any reason to sit out. Though I was excited to start dancing and instructing in Canada again, I was nervous about people's expectations, because believe me, I'm no expert. But I didn't go to Ukraine to become an expert – I went to learn more about the culture, to develop as a dancer, and to grow as a person. And I can say with confidence I did all those things.

Three male dancers started Our Year in Ukraine in September 2018. Guys, you're living the dream of so many people. Absorb what you can, and accept that information about dance, costumes, and culture is never really ending. There's no way you're going to learn everything thrown at you. And that's okay. Also, if you're bored, you're doing it wrong. Of course, give yourself downtime and make sure you take care of yourself. But if you find at some point that there's nothing to do – change. Watch dances, read about the culture, record your memories, go for a walk, or just sit and reflect on your time so far and the months ahead.

While in Ukraine, the other Our Year dancers and I made a positivity pact. We have all overheard negative comments about other dance groups, wherever they may be. Before you contribute to this, think about what it might accomplish. If you are genuinely curious about costume or dance step choice, then start a respectful conversation. But if you're making a comment about another group solely because it's not the group you dance with, hold back. In the end, we're here for the same reason – to celebrate and preserve Ukrainian culture through dance. So let's get out there with our red boots on, our vyshyvanky buttoned, and our arms linked to support each other, furthering our love, pride, and admiration of Ukraine.

Kaitlin Vitt

