

EXTENDING CULTURAL ROOTS

Calgary dance ensemble collaborates with Winnipeg performers

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF TRYZUB UKRAINIAN DANCE SOCIETY

For many Canadians, their connection to their Ukrainian heritage didn't necessarily start in Ukraine, but rather it started on stage, performing in solidarity with the country of their ancestors.

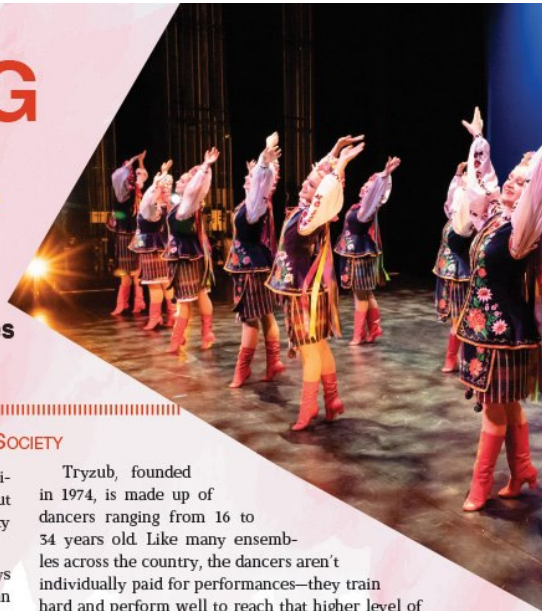
"It is incredible for me to connect with my heritage," says Christina Chumak, a dancer with Calgary's Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Ensemble. "I feel so fulfilled knowing that I am carrying on the traditions that my grandparents, and those who came before them, worked so hard to pass on."

Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Ensemble will perform its show *Героям слава* (Heroyam Slava—Glory to the Heroes) in Winnipeg on September 28, 2019 at 7 p.m. at the Burton Cummings Theatre. The ensemble, which is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year, debuted *Heroyam Slava* in April in Calgary and performed it in Kropyvnytskyi and Ivano-Frankivsk in August. Winnipeg is just one of the stops on the ensemble's western Canadian tour.

Winnipeg's O. Koshetz Ukrainian Choir will join Tryzub on stage, along with eight local dancers ages eight to ten from various dance schools in Manitoba. The production will be a mixture of song and dance, highlighting Ukrainian folklore and traditions, including the summer celebration *Ivana-Kupala*, as well as current events, like the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine.

Chumak, who has danced with Tryzub for 11 years, says this show isn't only about celebrating Ukrainian traditions—it's also about letting Ukrainians know that their struggle and fight for freedom is recognized in Canada.

"Every time I am on stage I think about how lucky I am to be able to do what I love free from any judgement, violence, and oppression," Chumak says. "Ukrainians have been silenced for so many generations now, and dancing is my way to freely share a culture that is so incredibly important to me."



Tryzub, founded in 1974, is made up of dancers ranging from 16 to 34 years old. Like many ensembles across the country, the dancers aren't individually paid for performances—they train hard and perform well to reach that higher level of perfection, as well as to keep the Ukrainian culture alive. Tryzub Ukrainian Dance Society is made up of the ensemble and its affiliated dance school.

Shane Gibson, artistic director of Tryzub since 2017, says he has dedicated his adult life to immersing himself in Ukrainian culture, learning about it in Canada and in Ukraine, which he has visited more than 25 times. Gibson has seen Ukraine through various phases, from Soviet times to present day. The culture—traditional and modern—served as inspiration to create *Heroyam Slava*.

Gibson has met several soldiers who have served in the war in Ukraine's east and has friends who have volunteered for this cause.

"We understand that this beautiful culture and its amazing people have had their lives interrupted once again at the hands of political ambition and aggression," Gibson says. "I am bothered that the world has forgotten this conflict and feel as an involved member of the Ukrainian diaspora who lives in Canada, and as a choreographer, [*Heroyam Slava*] is a medium by which Tryzub and I are able to show our support for our families in Ukraine and begin discussions to bring focus to this forgotten war."

Heroyam Slava is meant to inspire people to take action, both Gibson and Chumak said. Perhaps people will become motivated to keep up with news in Ukraine, donate to soldiers on the frontlines, or join an ensemble to carry on the traditions.

Scott Armstrong, president of O. Koshetz, agrees, saying he hopes people feel inspired to join an ensemble, one day making their debut on stage.

"Music is an incredible force that carries our collective spirit," Armstrong says. "Our Ukrainian people have long known that, and from our very beginnings we have used music through song and dance to carry the history of our people."

Armstrong says collaborating with a dance group for a full-length show isn't something the choir often does, but mastering the songs and being able to quickly adapt during the performance is a welcomed challenge.

The first act of this production is "Pryvitannya" to welcome the audience to the show, the second will feature the *Heroyam Slava* storyline, and the third will be repertoire style, with a mix of song and dance.

Gibson notes how special it is for these ensembles to come out of the studio and onto the stage. After thousands of hours at rehearsal, the behind-the-scenes work by the dancers and singers becomes seen—and they feel like they are making a difference.

Within the past few years, Manitoban ensembles and schools, including Troyanda Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, Verba Ukrainian Dance Company, Selo Ukrainian Dancers, Sopilka Ukrainian Dance School, and Zoloto Ukrainian Dance Ensemble and Company, have travelled to Ukraine.

Chumak notes how touring with ensembles, whether locally or internationally, can spark conversation both at home and abroad.

"Dance is such a unique art form that gives us the ability to touch on very difficult topics and share them with others in a powerful way," Chumak says. "It gives us the opportunity to keep our culture alive and share it with others who may not be familiar with Ukrainian traditions."



O. KOSHETZ UKRAINIAN CHOIR. PHOTO BY NORBERT K. WAN



Visit tryzub.ca to see the schedule of Tryzub's western Canadian tour. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster.