

Gordon Gordey, Director and Dancemaker
Ukrainian Canadian Dance Works Created for The Shumka Dancers,
Canada's Professional Ukrainian Dance Company

Shumka's Cinderella

Conceived, Adapted and Directed by Gordon Gordey

Original Musical Composition, Arrangement and Orchestration by Yuri Shevchenko

Sets and Costumes Designed by Maria Levitska

Resident Choreographer: Dave Ganert

Guest Choreographers: Viktor Lytvynov, John Pichlyk

"Hopak" and "Cobbler's Tambourine Dance" Music Arrangement
and Orchestration by Gene Zwozdesky

Ukrainian Regional Costuming by Fanel, Lviv

Artistic Acknowledgements: George Chrunik, Anna Ferenc-Sereda, Tasha Orysiuk, Kathy Rachmistruk,
Larissa Groch, Eldyka Popil, Vincent Rees, Leslie Sereda



The first major work I developed for Shumka, along with my creative team, was *Shumka's Cinderella*. I conceived and started writing the dance libretto for Cinderella in 1996. In prior years, as a dancer and choreographer, I experienced Shumka achieve success through our technical expertise in creating new choreographic adaptations based upon village regional dance themes. These choreographic adaptations were mostly based upon Vasile Avramenko's written accounts of Ukrainian folk dance. I had also experienced Shumka creating successful original dance works with a narrative through-line in folk ballet style on subjects from Ukrainian folklore under the guidance of Artistic Director, Orest Semchuk and later Artistic Director, John Pichlyk. These Ukrainian "folk ballets", a genre description used by Avramenko, became a signature for Shumka's style of Ukrainian dance presentations. We had achieved an ethnic distinctiveness within our own Ukrainian Canadian cultural milieu with folk ballet dance works such as *The Calling* (1984) that explored a young man's dilemma of following the "calling" of his village traditions and the "calling" from the spirits of the forest. *The Travelling Chumaky* (1987) was a broad comedic narrative of travelling salt traders (Chumaky) with their apprentice through the various ethnographic regions of Ukraine. *Enchanted Love* (1990) received its Ukraine premiere in The Taras Shevchenko National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Its folk ballet narrative was based upon Lesia Ukrainka's *Song of the Forest*.

All of these folk ballet dance works were rooted in depicting a nostalgic and idealistic world of Ukrainian village life and superstitions. I wanted to write and create a folk ballet dancework that was built on a widely recognized world story to engage a greater public. I became consumed with the vision of taking an internationally loved folktale and giving it an inventive interpretation through an enriched lexicon of Ukrainian folk dance. In 1996 I began writing the dance libretto for *Cinderella*. I believed that Shumka's distinct form of Ukrainian Canadian folk dance had reached the point where there was sufficient vocabulary of steps or lexicon, and a theatrical aesthetic to tell the *Cinderella* story.

I researched countless versions of the *Cinderella* folktale from cultures of Asia to Europe where there are over 500 variations of the folktale. At the conclusion of my research it was the most popular version of Cinderella, written by Charles Perrault in 1697, that resonated with me. However I was determined that my dance libretto was not going to be a straight copy of the classic Perrault *Cinderella* story set in a Ukrainian context. My libretto had to be recognizable as the classic *Cinderella* story with the touchstones of: a widower father, a stepmother and stepsisters, a prince, a grand ball, a fairy Godmother character, a sumptuous white jewelled boot, and of course, Cinderella. With these touchstones in place, it then had to evolve to be the story I had to tell. It had to be a story steeped in my imagination. Foremost it had to be a moving piece of innovative theatre with the wonderment of telling a story through dance in an engaging style to enter the 21st Century. It would be a work that dismantled stereotypical Ukrainian dance and reassembled it in an emotionally engaging new form. This narrative inspiration for *Cinderella* was to be securely rooted in Ukrainian regional dance style, the poetry of folk melodies, the spirit of the rise of Ukrainian nobility, the vibrant paintbrush of village arts, and the expressive energy of the European Baroque period.

I wanted to build Ukrainian dance in Canada to the next level as an art form with multiple cultural associations. The key to achieving this goal emerged from the word “folktale”. The idea of ‘putting folk dance back into the folktale’ became my mission. This was not the folktale in ballet form. This was the folktale in folk dance form. In the latter half of the 19th century Russian ballet extensively incorporated folk tales as the libretto for their popular ballets. In 1890, composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and choreographer Marius Petipa used Perrault’s fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* for their new ballet for Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg. In 1893 Petipa choreographed a *Cinderella* ballet but none of the choreography from this production survived. Through Ukrainian folk dance lexicon I believed *Cinderella* could be closer in spirit to the original folk tale because it would not be encumbered by the strict regimen of classical ballet’s variations, adagios, and pas de deux. Sergei Prokofiev in composing the score for his *Cinderella* in 1944 said that he wanted Cinderella to be more than a fairy-tale character. He wanted her to be viewed as a real person with feelings and someone we could believe moved among us.

This resonated with me because in my experience I viewed Diana, Princess of Wales, as someone who was embraced by the world as a real-life Cinderella-like princess that “moved among us”. Everyone Cinderella meets is changed and left richer in character for having met her. I also wanted to go beyond Cinderella being the only real-life character in the story. I wanted to create three-dimensional stage characters throughout my libretto. *Cinderella’s* Prince was not merely a plot device and a privileged nobleman who simply hung around the Manor House. This Prince was to be a “people’s Prince” who could handle a sword, yet be compassionate enough to annually invite everyone, rich and poor, from his manor lands to share in the bounty of the harvest at a Grand Ball.



Village girls plead with Cinderella’s Father’s apprentices to make them new red boots for the Grand Ball in *Shumka’s Cinderella* 2004. Costumes by Joyce Sirski-Howell.
(Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

His father, the “Hetman” had to see in his son someone who could change with the times and someday successfully manage the manor estate as a kind and benevolent landowner. In my libretto Cinderella’s father is not a one-dimensional sympathetic widower who marries the Stepmother for money but someone who is a successful cobbler with a trio of fun-loving apprentices.



Jayleen Gordey as Cinderella thrilled with her new white boots for the Grand Ball in *Shumka's Cinderella* 2004. Costumes by Maria Levitska. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Stephen Romanow as Cinderella's Father looks on as one of his apprentices Jeff Mortensen shows off dancing in two pairs of boots at the same time in *Shumka's Cinderella*. Costumes by Maria Levitska.
(Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Cinderella's father marries because he actually likes the Stepmother. The Stepmother is not the problem - her two daughters are.



Stephen Romanow (centre) as Cinderella's Father can't believe one of Cinderella's Stepsisters, Tara Wood (centre), broke his favorite wagon in *Shumka's Cinderella*.
(Video freeze frame. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

The sooner the two Stepsisters to Cinderella can be married then the sooner Cinderella's Father and Stepmother can enjoy a life of their own. It was also important to me to create a three-dimensional character for the magical element of the "Fairy Godmother". In my own life experience this magical element was contained in the village character of the "Voroshka" or fortune-teller who poured wax onto water to foretell the future or exorcise bad omens. I transposed this "Voroshka" character to that of a female leader of a band of gypsies who recognizes Cinderella's goodness and uses gypsy rituals to transform Cinderella into a Princess to attend the Grand Harvest Ball.



Stephen Romanow as Cinderella's Father, Stacia Gordey (center) as the Stepmother, Katrina Sochatsky (left) as a Stepsister, Zoriana Eshenko (right) as a Stepsister, John Eshenko as the Hetman, Prince's Father, Dave Ganert as the Fencing Master to the Prince, Andrea Yaremchuk as the Voroshka
(Photos by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

After three years of research and completing the first draft of the *Cinderella* the creative team at Shumka was assembled and the in-the-studio rehearsals began in 1999. Like Thomas Edison and his work on the commercialization of the light bulb, this creative team for *Cinderella* had to have specialized knowledge and the 'theatrical laboratories' to make Cinderella a reality capable of advancing Ukrainian dance in Canada. This was a major theatrical dance undertaking that was to involve 55 dancers playing a total of 50 character roles with more than 384 costume changes during a single performance. Over 2,000 meters of fabric were used to make the costumes and 133 square meters of leather was used to make the dance footwear. It had to, over time, recover the substantial financial investment the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers were putting into the physical realization of *Cinderella* by funding the original music, scenography, costumes, and choreographers. The initial choreographic team was composed of choreographers and dancers from Shumka and artists from Ukraine with whom Shumka had worked on previous dance works.

Our Kyiv, Ukraine based creative team brought the specialized knowledge of Ukrainian court dance, court music, and dress of the nobility required for the Prince's Ball scene. They could do this because they were experts in the world of Ukrainian ballet and opera. For example, set and costume designer, Maria Levitska, graduated from the Academy of Arts in Kyiv and is the Director of Scenography at the The National Opera of Ukraine. I had the privilege of meeting with Maria Levitska several times in Kyiv in 1999 for design discussions during which she probed deeply into understanding my vision for staging *Cinderella*. We visited museum clothing collections, walked through historical village flower gardens, and researched portraiture to create a research based foundation for the world we were creating for Cinderella. My eyes were opened to the Ukrainian Baroque of the Hetman era with its symbolism, heraldic signs, and opulent ornamentation.



Maria Levitska's costumes for the Prince's Grand Ball scene. Dancers Stephen Sendziak and Elizabeth Ferenc.
(Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Maria Levitska's costumes in performance for the Grand Ball scene. Centre Dancer Couple: Kristel Busby and Ryan Blush. (Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Re-imagined folk dance from the Volyn region of Ukraine at the Grand Ball in *Shumka's Cinderella*. Choreography by Dave Ganert. Set Design by Maria Levitska. Costumes by Fanel, Lviv. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Re-imagined folk dance from the Polissia region of Ukraine at the Grand Ball in *Shumka's Cinderella*.

Dave Ganert as the Fencing Master is comically drawn into the festivities.

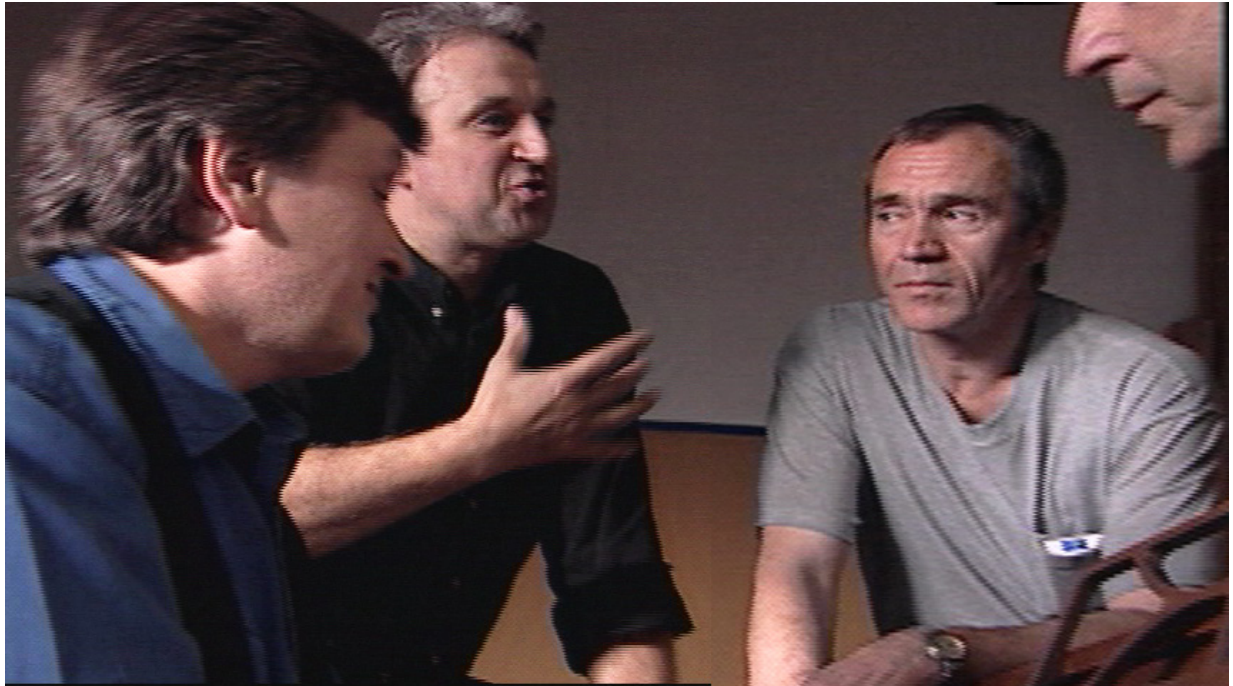
(Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Maria Levitska was a key artist in elevating *Cinderella* into the making of an artwork. Her quest for originality and spiritual connectivity to her inspiration for truth in art drove me to think deeper than I ever did before to find every nuance for making *Cinderella* a benchmark undertaking in the world of Ukrainian dance.



Maria Levitska's costumes and theatrical drops in performance for *Cinderella's* entrance into the Grand Ball scene with her Gypsy entourage. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

This same level of creative expertise and dedication to research applied to the composition of original music. Yuri Shevchenko, the composer and arranger for *Cinderella*, completed his studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music in the Faculty of Music Composition. In 1998 he awarded the distinction of Honoured Artist of Ukraine. He received and continues to receive numerous awards for Best Musical Composition for Theatre. It is his deep understanding of composing music to advance the narrative of theatre and dance that makes him an outstanding visual composer.



Yuri Shevchenko (Composer), John Pichlyk (Choreographer), and Viktor Lytvynov (Choreographer) deliberate dramatic music structure for the opening wedding scene for *Cinderella's* Father and the Stepmother.
(Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow, Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

In the show program for the premiere of *Cinderella*, Yuri Shevchenko wrote:

I understood from the outset that we would need to resolve many of the musical questions from the standpoint of folkloric intonations, that is, to tell the tale through the language of the Ukrainian melody. Once I understood this, I felt that I had found the path to completing this undertaking.

The score for *Cinderella* was recorded at the Dovzhenko Film Studio in Kyiv with the 57-piece Kyiv City Symphony and conducted by Serhiy Malovaney. The recording engineer was Slau Halatyn of BeSharp Studios in New York City.

One of the many challenges in staging *Cinderella* was finding the historical musical inspiration for the Harvest Ball Polka which was dramatically central to establishing the believability of palace life of Ukrainian nobility. Yuri Shevchenko found his historical inspiration in 16th century *kants* or *kanty* in liturgical music. By the 18th century these *kants* had developed into grand rhythms of the polonaise, the minuet, and the polka that became the favorite form of music for the nobility. Our music and dramatic challenge for the Harvest Ball Polka was solved.



The role for principal choreographer, Viktor Lytvynov, was to now take this music with a polka rhythm and combine it with the Baroque influenced formal costuming for the palace ball designed by Maria Levitska. Viktor Lytvynov would use his knowledge of the history of the development of ballet to create a palace Harvest Ball dance with a narrative that advanced the story of the Prince discovering Cinderella at the ball. Viktor Lytvynov brought a wealth of experience as the principal choreographer for *Cinderella*. As a soloist with the Kyiv Ballet of the National Opera of Ukraine in the 1960s, Viktor Lytvynov was known for his interpretation of heroic and dramatic roles. This experience was invaluable to his choreography and character development coaching for the principal roles of Cinderella and the Prince.

In 1987 Viktor Lytvynov was appointed Artistic Director of the Kyiv Ballet of the National Opera of Ukraine where he spearheaded the redevelopment of its repertoire for international touring. He continues his choreographic innovations as Resident Choreographer at the National Opera and the Municipal Opera and Ballet Theatre of Kyiv. Viktor Lytvynov and I worked together on much of the choreography for Cinderella in a creative relationship that is not typical to the making Ukrainian dance. What is typical is that whoever is the choreographer is also inherently the stage director of the dance work being created. In our case, I was the writer of the libretto for *Cinderella* and also the “stage director”. Viktor Lytvynov was the choreographer. This relationship is typical of creation in American and British musical theatre. There the “stage director”, who is in some instances also the writer of the “libretto” is the head of the creative team of choreographers, composers, and set and costume designers. As someone who trained as a theatre stage director, this was the working form and expertise that I brought to the creative team.

Jayleen Gordey as Cinderella, Lukian Opyr as the Prince
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Viktor Lytvynov and I worked closely with Yuri Shevchenko's music to evolve the dramatic concepts I conceived in the libretto. One such concept was my idea that the Cinderella character has not always achieved happiness in meeting the Prince of her dreams because in her goodness she wants happiness for all. I wanted to have a point in the narrative line of *Cinderella* where the audience encounters 'the lost Cinderellas of the world' who are all longing for love. After the night of the Harvest Ball, Cinderella's Stepmother gives her the impossible task of going to the autumn meadow to pick fresh spring wildflowers. There Cinderella pursues the impossible and encounters six other Cinderella's, all of whom are in limbo not having been successful in re-uniting with the Prince of their dreams. This multiplied dilemma and dance created a deeper dramatic tension of hopelessness for Cinderella. When the Prince enters this fantasy world with the one lost jewelled white boot, he encounters more Cinderellas than he imagined, but the jewelled white boot fits only the one that is his love.

All is not lost, because in the Prince's finding his Cinderella all the remaining Cinderellas are freed from limbo and their "Princes" appear. The finding of Cinderella by the Prince in my stage version of *Cinderella* gives hope to all maidens who are seeking their Prince and all Princes who seek their Cinderella. For the audience this translates as a metaphor for hope for love and happiness in their own lives. This dance was one that distinguished the originality of my *Cinderella* and it was achieved because of the innovative creative relationship of stage director, choreographer, composer, and set and costume designer based upon the American and British theatre model. In my view the creative achievement in this dance could not have been realized in the typical folk dance model of creation where the choreographer is the sole authority on what is seen on the stage and what dance movement is assigned to carrying out the relationship between characters, the result of which is often merely one-dimensional stereotype.

Our Edmonton, Alberta, Canada creative team primarily worked in the same director-choreographer relationship. This was most successful with John Pichlyk who choreographed a number of dances including the first scene of *Cinderella* which depicts the wedding of Cinderella's Father to her Stepmother. Again, as the writer of the libretto and as the stage director I wanted this opening scene to serve two purposes. The first was to depict Cinderella's Father as being happy to leave his status as a widower and marry an outgoing personality who was to become Cinderella's Stepmother. It was also a way to introduce the two Stepsisters into the wedding festivities as unruly spoiled brats who took an immediate dislike to the caring girl who was to become their stepsister. The second purpose of the Father's wedding scene was to create a dramatic book-end for the conclusion of *Cinderella* which was the joyous wedding of his daughter Cinderella to the Prince. Having previously worked together with John Pichlyk on a number of his dance creations made this collaboration on *Cinderella* an extension of a relationship which was committed to innovation in marrying village dance forms with narrative theatrical stage dance.

Four years from the start of the writing of the libretto *Cinderella* premiered on March 3, 2000 at the 2,700 seat Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. *Cinderella* continued on a tour of Western Canada, produced by Sulyma Productions Inc. and Bottom Line Productions Inc., and received its hometown Edmonton premiere on March 23, 2000 at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. Edmonton dance reviewer, Pamela Anthony wrote:

Shumka is a genuine phenomenon. And Cinderella, Shumka-style, is an invigorating flourish of pure dance and colour. A folk-tale with true folk sensibility and design[...]artfully shaped by the rich talents of an artistic team that knows how to put on a top-notch production[...] Cinderella is, in effect, a folk ballet. The choreography ranges from specific folk dance vocabulary, to a lyrical, sweeping style of dance theatre that successfully integrates a ballet aesthetic. (Edmonton Journal, March 24, 2000)

Cinderella then went on to tour Eastern Canada to an audience of over 16,000 people including a performance at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Canada's capital city, and two performances at Toronto's Hummingbird Centre (now the Sony Centre). Deirdre Kelly, Toronto dance reviewer wrote:

With their outstanding production of Cinderella...they [Shumka] have pushed past the narrow, parochial boundaries of ethnic dance...fusing ballet, folk, and character dance into a colourful spectacle. [Shumka's] \$2 million remake of the fairy-tale classic is a mega dance spectacle that promises to do for Ukrainian folk dance what Riverdance did for Irish stepping: Catapult it into the big time. (Globe and Mail, October 16, 2000)

The Canadian tour of *Cinderella* was a great success in the press and with enthusiastic audiences. However, not everyone was supportive of this production. There were self-appointed critics and boundary-experts in the Ukrainian Canadian cultural community who called *Cinderella* "non-Ukrainian" dance and saw it as an affront to the "authenticity" of traditional style Ukrainian dance concerts. As creative artists we all want our work to be appreciated and to be understood by everyone. Inherent in every undertaking of new works is a inability to convince these self-appointed critics that perhaps their assumptions of what is Ukrainian dance should be expanded beyond the boundaries of what they know as the familiar. Criticism, no matter how unfounded, comes with the territory of reaching out to create new cultural moments. You need to be thick-skinned because all criticism is hurtful. You lose friends who chose old country preservationist ideology over creative self-expression in the "here-and-now". You get past it. As artists we all reveal what's inside of ourselves because we are compelled to the magic of creation and to public engagement. I undertook a path that was going to gain more criticism and likely cause me to lose more friends.

As we toured more I realized that changes were required to make *Cinderella* a better production by removing some of the Ukrainian village dance numbers I had originally put in to pacify the anticipated criticism that *Cinderella* wouldn't be "Ukrainian" enough. These village regional dance numbers were affecting the narrative arc and the emotional story of the Cinderella character. Audiences were engaged with her and did not want to be distracted by the Prince encountering a Hutsul village regional dance while he was desperately searching for the girl who fit the white jewelled boot. The revisions also led to a name change that specifically conveyed to audiences that this was an original work. The piece now became known as *Shumka's Cinderella*. The creative team and I are very proud of our performances in Ukraine.

On July 6 and 7th 2007 *Shumka's Cinderella* premiered in Ukraine at the Kyiv National Opera and Ballet Theatre with the support of the National Opera's Director General Mr. Petro Chupryna. On July 9, 2007 *Shumka's Cinderella* was introduced to the audience at the State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre in Donetsk by the Theatre's Artistic Director, Vadim Pisarev and Canada's Ambassador to Ukraine, Abina Dann. The Donetsk audience was wowed by *Shumka's Cinderella* and gave the dancers and the creative team five standing ovations.

The China touring experiences of *Shumka's Cinderella* were captured in a documentary video for television: *White Boots to China: Shumka's Cinderella Story*. The documentary was well received and broadcast nationally in Canada for two years on the Canadian arts channel: BRAVO.

The belief I had that the Shumka Dancers in Canada to enrich Ukrainian dance lexicon to tell a full-length international folk tale, *Shumka's Cinderella* was realized. *Shumka's Cinderella* has had over 50 major performances across Canada, two tours to China, and major performances in Ukraine. In the history of Canadian Ukrainian dance productions *Shumka's Cinderella* holds the distinction of having the most performances of any full-length dance work directed by a Canadian born director of Ukrainian heritage.