

**Gordon Gordey, Director and Dancemaker:
Creating Original Ukrainian Dance in Canada – An Autobiographical Reflection of a
40-Year Creative Journey with The Ukrainian Shumka Dancers of Canada**

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The wonderment of telling stories through dance in an engaging 21st century style is how I choose to celebrate our Canada. I believe Canada's plurality of cultures and communities creates a fascination of our present linked to our past, and an intrigue to influence our future through a diversity of cultural expression. For 40 years, I chose to share my goals with the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers of Canada and commit to making art expressed through the gift of Ukrainian dance. I am honored to share my personal experiences of the ecology of my heritage through the process of creating original Ukrainian dance in Canada today. (Gordon Gordey, September 2013)

My 40-Year Journey of Creating Original Ukrainian Dance in Canada

We all come from somewhere and we humbly accept our life's journey. My journey is driven by being able to express my truth. As a Canadian dancemaker of Ukrainian heritage, I thought about this deeply in the fall of 2011 when the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers set foot in China to begin our *Shumka at 50* tour - 22 performances in 14 cities in 44 days. This was my fourth tour to China, but this one was a major first-tier tour to some of the most remarkable new theatres in the world.

China is committed to advancing its present cultural growth on a world scale. China has over 500 cities with populations of over 1 million with a growing new wealth of independent businessmen, private-sector lawyers, artists and employees of joint-venture companies. The leading cities in this population group have theatres with 1,800 plus seats and the highest standards of Chinese -European influenced architecture, backstage logistics, and audience comfort with restaurants, bars, and art-filled lobbies.

Can you imagine the shivers I and the rest of the Shumka dance company felt when we heard the cinematic soundscape for *Eve of Kupalo*, with its voice over in Mandarin, bring audiences to life in each of the 14 cities of this China tour? Canadian created Ukrainian dance was showcasing itself as an engaging art form that connected with an audience more half way around the world from its origins. Shumka had brought together a 'world community of man' into the ritual communion that is live theatre. I felt the same satisfaction when these audiences responded to *Pathways to Hopak*. To have these two dance works as part of the *Shumka at 50* tour in China was a personal highlight in celebrating the mystery of the imagination through rich humanizing experiences – a mission of my artistic work.

As this written account of 'a 40-year creative expedition' is autobiographical, the words "I" and "my" are used throughout; however dance is a collaborative art form and we never make it alone or experience it alone. Foremost in the contribution to the canvass upon which I conceived my artistic work is Canada's Ukrainian Shumka Dancers. Their financial resources, their choreographers, their community supporters, and the talented contributions of hundreds of dancers over 40 years were the foundation upon which I was able to build my creative inspirations and collaborative discoveries.

Within the foundation of this 40-year journey, I must recognize influential individual mentors and creative partners. I didn't start studying dance until I was 15 years old, when I left my small rural village of Innisfree to attend the summer cultural program, *Osvita*, at St. John's Institute in Edmonton, Alberta. At *Osvita* I was introduced to Ukrainian dance by Shumka dancer, Gerald Metrunc. Pride, discipline, and perfection of Ukrainian dance technique were instilled in me. Although dance was a new experience, its athletic demands flowed naturally out of my leadership experiences as a high school athlete. My music experiences from folk singing with the elders in my small village were refined for dance with operatic singing lessons from Domety Bereznetz and ensemble chorus singing under conductor, Roman Soltykevich - both classically trained in Ukraine. Chester Kuc, Shumka's Artistic Director in 1966, introduced me to the 40 year North American Ukrainian dance legacy and repertoire of Vasile Avramenko. Ruth Carse, founder of the Alberta Ballet, was my first ballet teacher instilling the fundamentals of classical dance technique. University of Alberta Department of Drama professors: Jim Defelice, Frank Buekert, Margaret Faulkes, and Tom Peacocke, shaped my pedagogy of dramatic sensibility and the art of directing for the stage. Alice Major, poet and writer of the Shumka, *Tradition in Motion* book, focused me on understanding the evolution of Shumka and its place in the evolution of Canadian culture. John Pichlyk, Orest Semchuk, and Gene Zwozdesky were the first Shumka co-creators of my first small dance works. From the 1990's forward my mentors and colleagues, who became the right combination for artistic success, were: John Pichlyk and Dave Ganert (Shumka Artistic Directors and Choreographers), Michael Sulyma (Arts Producer and Film-maker), Darka Tarnawsky (Publicist and Executive Board Member), Tommy Banks, Gene Zwozdesky, Brian Cherwick, Yuri Shevchenko and Andriy Shoost (Composers/Arrangers), and Colin MacLean (Arts Critic), Viktor Lytvynov and Brian Webb (Choreographers), Slavko Halatyn (Music Producer and Sound Engineer), Stephen Romanow and Andrew Scholotiuk (Videographers), Robert Shannon, Randall Fraser, and Oksana Paruta (Costume and Props Designers) and Maria Levitska (Director of Scenography with the National Opera of Ukraine). Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* writes that in order to become good at something, an expert, you need to have invested at least 10,000 hours in solid training and relevant experience. He also writes: *No one –not rock stars, not even professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses – ever make it alone.* I owe a gratitude to this combination of teachers, mentors, and artists whose contributions brought truth to the phrase that no one "ever make it alone".

When I joined the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers in 1966 I entered an organizational culture that had evolved over the seven years from its inception. Shumka presented their first concert on November 29, 1959 at the Ukrainian National Federation Hall in Edmonton. In Shumka's fifth anniversary program in 1964 Myron Tarnawsky, a dancer, wrote: *"We can now say with pride and humility that we are known throughout all the provincial capitals of Canada"*, and dancer Lois Sulyma wrote: *"the Shumka Dancers are making a marked contribution to the enrichment of the Canadian cultural mosaic ... as we know it, value it, and expect it to be perpetuated by the generations to come."* In this fifth anniversary program audiences enjoyed folk dances from Ukraine originally researched and choreographed by Vasile Avramenko and staged by Chester Kuc, original dances influenced by Avramenko and choreographed by Shumka dancers, and two Ukrainian folk ballets *Ukrainian Suite* and *Under the Cherry Tree* choreographed by Shumka's, Natalka Dobrolige. By 1966 the majority of dances presented were original works choreographed by Shumka including the development of a new music arrangement for *Arkan* by Shumka dancer, Gene Zwozdesky. Within the ecology of Ukrainian dance of the day in Canada, Shumka primarily performed for our own Edmonton community much like our counterparts – "Yevshan Ukrainian Folk Ballet" in Saskatoon, "Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble" in Winnipeg, and the "Chaika Performing Arts Ensemble" in Hamilton.

I lived the first 30 years of my Shumka era as a dancer, a choreographer, and a stage director who helped shape the dramatic structure of our stage works. During this period Shumka was committed, under Artistic Director, Orest Semchuk, to the goal of broadening the reach of our Ukrainian Canadian dance form to the widest possible audiences. In 1977, '78, and '79 Shumka was the only Ukrainian dance group invited to perform in July 1 Canada Day Celebrations on Parliament Hill in Canada's capital city, Ottawa. With over 50,000 Canadians in attendance and 100's of thousands watching television broadcasts Shumka believed we were reaching our goal of being regarded as a legitimate Canadian dance form. We were dancers engaged in showcasing the culture of Canada and not simply regarded as 'that nice ethnic Ukrainian oddity of men in baggy pants and women with brightly swirling ribbons'. Cross-Canada tours in 1979 and 1982, guest artist appearances with the Edmonton Symphony, and Gala performances for Queen Elizabeth II's visits to Canada combined to put Shumka into the company of Canada's successful mainstream performing arts groups. Shumka's artistic growth continued under Artistic Director, John Pichlyk and Music Director, Gene Zwozdesky, with the refinement of creation of works with a Ukrainian folk ballet narrative – a storyline through dance that engaged audience emotions in caring for characters triumphing over difficult situations. Audiences were now engaged beyond appreciation of physical dance virtuosity, lively music, and colorful costuming. This was Shumka's Canadian success but what if Shumka could test the evolution of Ukrainian dance in Canada by showcasing our work in Ukraine? Could this reconstruction of the traditional into a modern day Canadian Ukrainian folk dance experience resonate with an audience in Ukraine? In 1990 Shumka answered this question and through the determination of Producer Michael Sulyma, we toured our work to Kyiv, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Moscow. Ukrainian and Russian audiences and dance companies were astounded by our innovation and moved by our commitment to the preservation and advancement of Ukrainian dance in Canada. We were repeatedly told we were an inspiration for the development of Ukrainian dance in Ukraine which had stagnated creatively under the strict officially sanctioned codification of Socialist Realism.

In 1999, I was asked by Ukrainian Shumka Dancer organization to undertake the role of Artistic Director. In my 30 years of involvement in the performing arts I brought the experience of "10,000 hours", written about by Malcom Gladwell, to my new role in Shumka. The organization determined they wanted an Artistic Director who would continue Shumka's vision to grow as a Canadian dance company and someone who could shape the artistic path in the 'here and now' of the coming century. The Shumka organization understood that in me it was getting an Artistic Director who did not fit into the typical model or paradigm expected by those in the Ukrainian dance field.

In most dance companies, and in particular, Ukrainian dance companies, there is a model of how dance is made. In this typical model, a Ukrainian dance company has an Artistic Director who functions as the sole choreographer and authority of expert correctness in the work the company produces. The Artistic Director's authority or knowledge accreditation comes from completion of folklore and choreographic training in an academic arts school setting in Ukraine, from experience as a dancer with one of Ukraine's national folk dance companies, or from experience as a dancer in one of Canada's folk dance companies. This artistic director personally trains and rehearses the company's dancers in the studio. This Artistic Director then stages performances that are a combination of "authentic" original folk-dances and re-staged dance-works from 1970's and 1980's-era dances choreographed in Ukraine based on the same paradigm. The artistic director functions as the expert demonstrator of a fixed historical lexicon of steps and figures, a choreographer of movement patterns attributed to traditional folk dance style, and an authority on appropriate music and costuming for the dances. Dr. Andriy Nahachewsky, historian of Ukrainian dance, in his book, *Ukrainian Dance, A Cross-Cultural Approach*, writes about a principle of staging where choreographers: "allow themselves substantial licence [but] continue to try support the illusion of authenticity. [...] Whenever convenient the melodies, the instrumental flavour, the costume, the dance motifs, the dance program all make reference to the original (the authentic)". At its best Nahachewsky refers to this approach to staging as an attractive strategy that offers a balance between the goal of pursuit of the authentic and the creation of interesting theatrical presentations.

Clearly I did not wholly fit the typical artistic director model described. I did bring my own broad artistic background to add to my 30 plus years of being a dancer and choreographer with Shumka. But in addition I brought the academic experience of a Masters of Arts degree in Theatre History and Criticism, and a Masters of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Directing. I studied Ukrainian art, both pre-revolution and post-revolution. I studied pre-revolution advances in Ukrainian theatre and translated exiled playwright Mykola Kulish's avant-garde expressionist drama *The People's Malakhi* into English. Combined with this, I had directed numerous theatre productions in Canada from Edmonton to Halifax. I taught acting and directing for the stage at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Dalhousie University in Halifax, and Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton. I also worked full time for 25 years as the Drama Consultant, a Sound Recording Industry Consultant, and Film Consultant for the Department of Culture in the Province of Alberta. I came from the theatre tradition of working with creative teams who collectively pool their talent to produce engaging art. I also looked at my role as Shumka's Artistic Director as someone who mentored choreographers to work with dancers to teach them how to express their discoveries through movement as opposed to working with dancers to teach them how to mimic someone else's 'authentic' choreography.

My creative work in Shumka is credited with: "Conceived and Directed by Gordon Gordey." What does this mean? It means that the idea and creative form of the work – the story that needs to be told through dance was first thought of, researched, written out, and directed by me. It means I believe I have something to share through dance. In all of the arts we call this "finding your voice". It means not accepting boundaries that others want to impose on you. Often in heritage-based dance this imposition becomes a form of 'nostalgic bullying'. My work always springs from original creative inspiration. It is not just a cut-and-paste of Ukrainian dance vocabulary from Ukrainian dance videos, other Ukrainian dances I have seen, or the re-staging of the master works of Ukrainian choreographers. The works of Virsky National Dance Company of Ukraine are the remarkable creations and choreography of Pavlo Virsky and Myrosalv Vantukh. I respect their achievement, I am inspired by their life-long contributions, and I deeply believe their work should be fully credited to them and not copied by others. Their work is already the best version of what they wish to express so why would I want to present another variation of it? My artistic voice is driven by "created in Canada" and not "copied in Canada".

I challenged myself to create original work that is an outward expression of life through dance by engaging a creative team's physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual selves. I wanted to contribute original work to the canon of Ukrainian dance - original work that is spiritually connected to generations of continuous cultural practice. I wanted dance stories that I conceived to embed themselves in viewer's minds and become cultural touchstones worth sharing. Robert Klymasz, Ukrainian folklorist, in the *Journal of the Folklore Institute* calls this: "*the phenomenon of innovational folklore where there is a reconstruction of the traditional to produce a modern-day version of the folklore legacy[...]an amazingly rich, limitless source of entertainment, instruction, wonder, and pride.*"

Despite this artistic vision dedicated to the advancement of an art form I faced a critical fork in the road in starting my role as the Artistic Director of Shumka. One fork was to continue our mandate of creation as an amateur organization with the inherent expectations of producing dance works with limited budgets and small government Arts grants supplemented by the contributions of deeply committed volunteers. Success in this model would continue to be defined as Shumka being the best of amateur and recreational Ukrainian folk dance in Canada.

The second fork involved taking the leap to meet the benchmark of being recognized as a professional dance company by audiences, and being welcome as peers into the Canadian professional dance world. It involved adhering to new high standards of artistic achievement, management, and governance required to access Arts grants for professional organizations from all levels of government. I proposed to the Executive Board of the Shumka Dancers that if we were to survive as Canada's leading Ukrainian dance company and be recognized as an integral expression of Canadian arts, it was imperative we undertake the organizational governance change to become a professional dance company. In Canada's conditions for Arts funding from government Arts bodies in the early 2000's this also meant that dancers would now be paid for performances where there was sufficient revenue to do so.

This reconfiguration to professional status was not an easy philosophical transition for many of the company dancers. A large number of Shumka alumni were also not willing to accept change to the core belief of amateur status no matter what the financial and artistic future held for Shumka. They felt that as the Artistic Director I was giving up on a sacred pillar of our organization's history. After numerous meetings with the Shumka dance company of the day and with Shumka's Alumni Association, the Shumka Dancers society voted to become a professional dance company. *The Shumka Dancers, Canada's Professional Ukrainian Dance Company* received its first grant as a professional Arts organization in 2004. This grant from the Canada Council was the first ever grant award to a dance company outside of mainstream genres. Shumka's continued contribution to expressing our Canadian Ukrainian cultural heritage under my Artistic Directorship was built upon: advancing a vision of Canadian Ukrainian dance built upon commitment to making art, fiscal prudence, integrity to the foundation of our Ukrainian heritage, and the predictable increased support from government Arts agencies that came from committing to the principles of being a professional Arts organization.

In five years my track record as Shumka's Artistic Director and my respect from the theatre community in Alberta led to my appointment to manage performing arts celebrations for Alberta's Centennial in 2004. It was an incredibly proud moment being introduced to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II of England, as Gordon Gordey, Artistic Director of Canada's Ukrainian Shumka Dancers.



Gordon Gordey, Artistic Director, Ukrainian Shumka Dancers, introduced to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England during Alberta's Centennial 2005 (Courtesy Government of Alberta, Centennial Archives)

Our forefathers would never in their wildest dreams imagined that 100 years after being one of the founding peoples of Canada, our Ukrainian dance heritage and the Shumka Dancers would be recognized as a living component of Canada's cultural life.

Creative Renewal for Original Ukrainian Dance in Canada for the Next 40 Years

It is from these experiences of my 40 year expedition of creating original Ukrainian dance in Canada that I pose the questions that every generation of Ukrainian dance artists must ask: "What is the future of our art form of Canadian Ukrainian dance?", or as I prefer to ask them, "How do we actively shape the future of our art form in a 21st Century mentality to meaningfully engage audiences?" "How do we increase the bandwidth of Ukrainian dance in Canada?" "What can I do so the next generation of dance leaders in Canada will be wildly more successful than I ever was?"

I believe the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers can continue to lead in being the beacon of creative renewal for our art form. Shumka's distinct style of Canadian Ukrainian dance is a recognized part of the world ecology of dance. I champion the words given in a speech by Alan Davey, Chief Executive of the Arts Council of England. He says: *I want our dance companies, practitioners and choreographers to be the best they can be. I want to enable them to make amazing, difficult, baffling or joyous art. I want people to be able to do dance, to understand it, to encourage and revere our dancers and dance companies as they should, and to will them to do more. I want what we do in dance to reflect the diversity of the country we are – and to use all the talents we have. More than anything, dance should reflect who we are and who we want to be. And we should say it on a world stage as well as a domestic one.*

What an incredible renewed creative Canadian Ukrainian dance community we would be if we were to embrace Alan Davey's vision for dance. I believe we are at a point where creative renewal and adaptive capacity are vital to the long-term health of our Ukrainian dance community. If we think the public will continue to come to see anything we do because it's important to us, and because we're brilliant at marketing, we are doomed. If we believe we can continue to ask audiences to participate in an act of boredom in the theatre for reasons of romantic cultural nostalgia we are doomed. The commercial culture sector with its transnational touring shows and deep pocket advertising dollars has already marginalized us. The status quo of Ukrainian dance cannot compete with Cirque du Soleil and Paul McCartney, whether it's in Canada or in Ukraine.

As part of our creative renewal we must invest in artistic leaders who ignite the collective creativity of our community with originality, curiosity, and fresh ways of presenting our art. It's happening in Alberta in art forms other than Ukrainian dance. Visual artist, Larissa Cheladyn, achieved local and international recognition for her work inspired by her Ukrainian heritage. Her art touches a chord with all of us because it allows us to see the here and now around us as it is inspired by our Ukrainian Canadian roots. Cheladyn doesn't paint Ukrainian themed red poppies over and over and over. She paints the "Flowers of the Bible". Red poppies as part of our Ukrainian art heritage are inherent symbols of hope and I too have a painting of them – just not in every room. Cheladyn paints scenes from our churches that explore the simple wonderment of a candle-flame. Artists Iryna Karpenko, Valery Semenko and Oksana Zhelisko, as new Ukrainian Canadians living in Edmonton, Alberta, give us an amazing fresh lens as visual artists to see the world around us. The Ukrainian Male Chorus of Edmonton and the Dnipro Ensemble do not sing the same 20 folk songs over and over. They commission new work from Alberta composers like Andriy Talpash and Willie Zwozdesky.

It sometimes seems that Ukrainian dance is the only art form mired in the same old village themes where melodramatic characters are either very good or very bad and the kozaks ride to the rescue so justice can prevail in the end. This is not our Canadian Ukrainian experience nor do these themes resonate with a 21st Century audience. Why do we keep doing this? Why do we put such effort into creating a romantic nostalgia of Ukrainian life that only exists for a vocal limited and shrinking audience of self-proclaimed cultural custodians outside of Ukraine? I challenge Artistic Directors and choreographers not to keep re-enforcing this stereotype. I challenge all Canadian audience members not to keep asking to see these stereotypical themes.

I admire the courage in our Ukrainian dance community to pursue fresh themes and do what Shumka choreographer, Dave Ganert and Quebec choreographer, Jean-Marc Genereaux did together in *Through a Dreamer's Eyes*. They used contemporary dance with elements of Ukrainian dance lexicon to explore the reality of MS (Multiple Sclerosis) and the dream of those affected to be able to again freely walk and dance in the world around them. *It is a piece speaks to the human heart - human emotion, human struggle and human hope* choreographer Dave Ganert said in conversation with me in 2012. Dealing with themes of great emotional depth is difficult. Yes it is going to be a challenge to create a dance work that finds the humanity and personal triumph out of a horrific genocide in Ukraine like the Holodomor. But I challenge choreographers take it on with a vision beyond showing starving people on a stage, arms reaching to the sky. Go for a high-stakes vision that engages audiences to connect the Holodomor with today's oppression by various governments in the world at large. Find the inspirational flower of humanity that grows in the wasteland of the Holodomor. Embrace Canadian choreographer Brian Webb's vision of "*dance that takes the space and moves the audience to an ecstatic state where everyone shares ownership*".

As a Canadian dancemaker of Ukrainian heritage I listen with fascination to the world around me. I have stories that I'm dreaming about and working on that I believe need to be told. My inspirations change from year to year because I change from year to year. I believe in Canadian author, Rudy Weibe, who said: *Storytelling is a human gift that allows us to put visions in each other's heads*. I believe I am entrusted by an ancestral calling to spare no effort to make the dance that only I can do. I thank audiences in Canada, Ukraine, and in China for the respect, for coming to see my work, and thank Canada's Ukrainian Shumka Dancers for being the leading edge for my vision.

Gordon Gordey

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)



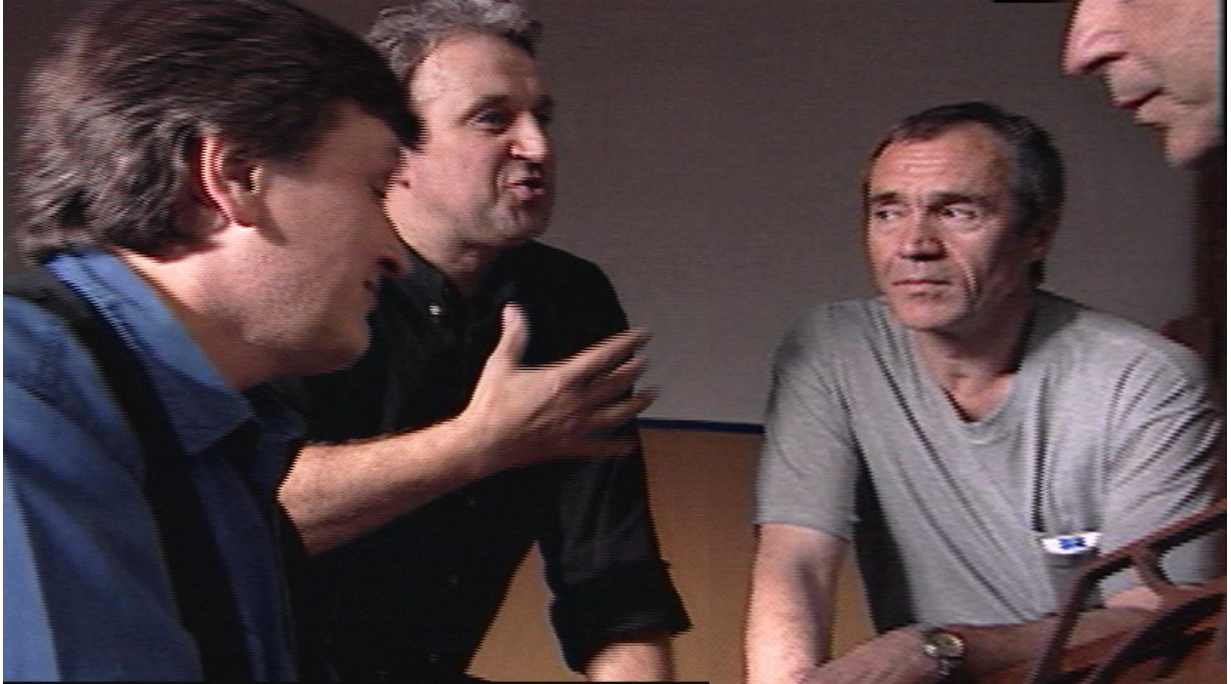
Re-imagined folk dance from the Polissia region of Ukraine at the Grand Ball in *Shumka's Cinderella*.
Dave Ganert as the Fencing Master is comically drawn into the festivities.
(Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

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.

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

Pathways to Hopak (Stezhky do Hopaka)

Conceived and Directed by Gordon Gordey
Libretto and Choreography: Viktor Lytvynov
Additional choreography by: Dave Ganert
Music composed and arranged by Yuri Shevchenko
Sets and Costumes designed by Maria Levitska



In 2002 I developed the concept for the dancework *Pathways to Hopak*. The motivation to develop this work arose from conversations with my long-time friend and Canadian contemporary dance director, Brian Webb. He and I studied ballet together in our youth with the celebrated Alberta ballet teacher, Ruth Carse, who founded the Alberta Ballet Company in 1966. Brian Webb and I maintained our close friendship studying theatre together at the University of Alberta. He went on to study modern dance with Eric Hawkins in New York City and in 1979 he founded the Brian Webb Dance Company with a mandate in contemporary dance.

His life-long belief is:

Dance celebrates our aliveness in the moment. Dance is always about the dancing; the dancing that is taking place right before the audience. The dancing body feels its senses totally engaged and communicates this aliveness to the viewing public. The dance is not complete until it is received by the audience. This exchange between the dancer and the viewer is what makes contemporary dance alive in the here and now. (Brian Webb, 2012)

As colleagues in dance we would meet over coffee and discuss our creative thoughts and philosophies. Through 30 years, Brian Webb often collaborated and choreographed for the Shumka Dancers bringing his dramatic sensibilities and style to contemporary dance works Shumka created. It was during one of our coffee discussions that Brian Webb asked me a question that had been puzzling him for some time. He asked me: “Why is it that no matter where the Shumka Dancers perform, the audience leaps to its feet at the end of the dancework “Hopak” as if Shumka’s Hopak was a dance that they felt was a part of them?” Brian and I discussed: that maybe it was because Shumka’s Hopak is a great piece of music that it lifts everyone’s emotions; maybe Shumka’s *Hopak* dancers with their swirling colours and patterns seem to mesmerize the viewer; and that maybe Shumka’s *Hopak* dance movement seems to be a perfect combination of grace and virtuosity that leaves an audience taking on the same space as the dancers. Audience reactions to Shumka’s *Hopak* in Canada were different from reactions to Pavlo Virsky’s Ukraine *Hopak*, choreographed in 1960, which embraced what Andriy Nahachewsky in his book *Ukrainian Dance, A Cross-Cultural Approach* calls the “spirit of a nation”. Audiences in Ukraine experienced a level of nationalism reacting to Virsky’s Ukraine *Hopak* which could not be duplicated elsewhere.

Brian Webb and I did not resolve the question but both of us continued to think long after about this phenomenon of the “Hopak” and how over decades it continued to engage all cultures who experienced it live on stage. At this time Brian Webb was also the Artistic Director of the Canada Dance Festival, a prestigious national organization that presents live dance performances that reflect the diverse cultural and regional landscape of Canada in partnership with the National Arts Centre in Canada’s capital city, Ottawa. Little did I know that this question on the “magic of Shumka Hopak” was not going to be left in limbo. I was contacted by the Canada Dance Festival conveying they were extending a \$10,000 dance commission to the Shumka Dancers to answer the “Shumka Hopak” phenomenon with a new dancework.

The challenge for me was to puzzle out a concept and metaphor that would lead an audience to a greater understanding and engagement with the “Shumka Hopak”. If the “Shumka Hopak” culminates a celebration of a life worth living, I then conceived that the dancework that expressed this would reflect the cycle of life from birth to death and then renew the cycle in celebration.

For the next 16 months I began the task of developing a concept that followed the cycle of life theme and undertook the task of raising the funds required to create this original dancework. In addition to the \$10,000 commission in hand from the Canada Dance Festival, I used my track-record as Shumka’s Artistic Director to secure additional grants of \$18,000 from the Canada Council Dance Production Project Program, and \$57,000 from the Government of Alberta’s funds for cultural programming. Significant among these grants was the grant from the Canada Council for the Arts because this was the first acknowledgement by our premiere national funding body that the quality of Shumka’s submission for *Pathways to Hopak* was recognized as a professional dance project. This acknowledgement was also significant for Ukrainian dance in Canada because the Shumka Dancers became the first and only Ukrainian dance company in Canada to be nationally accredited as a professional company. Now in 2016, the Shumka Dancers are still the only recognized professional Ukrainian dance company in Canada. With this \$85,000 in hand I could now proceed to work with Shumka to engage the required creative team to develop *Pathways to Hopak* into performance.

In January 2004, in studio development began on *Pathways to Hopak* with an incredibly talented creative team: choreographers Viktor Lytvynov (Kyiv) and Dave Ganert (Edmonton), composer Yuri Shevchenko (Kyiv), designers Maria Levitska (Kyiv) and Robert Shannon (Edmonton) and producer Michael Sulyma (Edmonton). We set out to create that “pathway” of the universal life cycle that brought us to the finale celebration in Shumka’s *Hopak* choreographed by John Pichlyk and with music composed and arranged by Gene Zwozdesky. Additional dramaturgical input was sought from producer Michael Sulyma (Edmonton) and stage director, Ray Roderick (New York). My task, as stage director for *Pathways to Hopak* was to bring this project to performance in six months for its June premiere at the prestigious National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Canada as part of the Canada Dance Festival on June 12, 2004.



Shumka Dancers Corp performs “Requiem” scene from *Pathways to Hopak*. 2004.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Viktor Lytvynov and I worked very closely in shaping *Pathways to Hopak* to follow our determined life cycle. We were guided in our studio creative work by the artistic vision statement of my concept.

*The resonance of the world we wake up to everyday is a great human adventure. We laugh, we cry, we love and we dream. We celebrate. A child is born into a field of dreams, takes its first awkward steps and swiftly transforms into the carefree abandon of youth. A world awash with color and music, that seems propelled by boundless energy, brings a sheer joy to being alive. But what is 'joy' if you don't share it with someone special in a suspended moment of love of another being. Love is balanced by humankind's unexplainable recurring descent into the darkness of conflict. The conflict is faceless and its end through century after century is profound loss. As humankind we acknowledge this loss and mourn for it with deepest expressions of the requiems of generation after generation. Left in a state of vulnerability and with a human instinct for survival we wait for the rivers world to wash our battlefields clean. Children will continue to be born and will continue to take their first steps. There is a life worth living. Celebrate this cycle of life through the gift of *Pathways to Hopak*." (Gordon Gordey, 2004)*

This artistic vision statement realized itself over 35 minutes in the six scenes of Viktor Lytvynov's libretto for the cycle of life that made up *Pathways to Hopak*. The scenes are: Lullaby (Koloskova), Fields of Plenty (Rodooche Pole), Dance of Youthful Abandonment Kolmeika), Love Adagio (Kohannia), The Battlefield (Borot'ba), Requiem (Chorne Pole), Life-giving Rivers (Povernenia), and Hopak.



Jarrett Syddall and Stephanie Bahniuk celebrate Kolomeika in *Pathways to Hopak* 2011. Costumes and Set Design by Maria Levitska. (Photo by Gordon Gordey. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Following its national premiere at the Canada Dance Festival the Shumka Dancers have performed *Pathways to Hopak* in Canada's major theatres and in 14 major theatres in China. *Pathways to Hopak* is in the permanent repertoire of the Shumka Dancers and is often referred to as Canada's Ukrainian contemporary folk dance benchmark. With *Pathways to Hopak* original Ukrainian Canadian dance achieved national recognition as a bona fide modern day expression of cultural life in Canada.



Dancers Jayleen Gordey, Lukian Opyr, Andrea Yaremchuk and Dave Ganert celebrate in the Hopak finale of *Pathways to Hopak*. 2009. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Recognition of our heritage dance form had what folklorist Robert Klymasz, writing in the *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, calls: “transgressed the limits and patterns sanctioned by the surrounding dominant mainstream culture.” The hierarchy of taste that disregarded heritage based art was crumbling. The belief in an expressive Canadian life where a plurality of cultures and free expression operate simultaneously realized itself in an artistic vision I would continue to pursue.

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

Girl in the Red Dress TANGO

Conceived and Directed by: Gordon Gordey

Choreography by Dave Ganert, Leo Sato

Original Music Composed and Arranged by Andriy Shoost



Since my teenage years in the 1960's, I was fascinated with the well-known Ukrainian tango piece *Hutsulka Ksenia* by Yaroslav Barnych. It always struck me that this piece of music inspired people at wedding celebrations to move onto the dance floor and enjoy its emotional tango rhythm even though many who did dance to it did not know how to do the tango. In January 2006 I began research to develop a dance libretto for *Hutsulka Ksenia*. Through my research, I found that jazz and urban tango were popular in the cafés in Lviv, in Western Ukraine, during the 1930's to 1940's. I also discovered that Eastern Canada enjoyed the tango music of musician Bohdan Veselovsky who after WWII immigrated to Canada from Ukraine for political reasons. This research broadened my scope of tango in Ukrainian popular music and inspired me to think beyond the melody of *Hutsulka Ksenia*.

I wanted to create a dance where despite Soviet political repression of so-called decadent music from the Western world, there was a courageous girl who would go to her secret place in the Carpathian mountains and dare to dance the forbidden tango. For me this girl represents the courage for free expression exhibited by strong women throughout the world.

One year later, in January 2007, with this concept in hand I travelled to Kyiv and met with composer, Andriy Shoost. He and I worked together in Kyiv for one week mapping out my libretto and the structure of the music sections for an original music composition for *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO*. Andriy Shoost composed an original score using a diverse synthesized soundscape of symphonic orchestration with live Japanese Taiko drums, ARS NOVA percussion array created by composer, Yuri Chernenko, 18th century folk instruments, Argentine acoustic guitar styles, violin, clarinet and accordion.

Although it had a narrative character framework, *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* was not a dance with a traditional 'girl-meets-boy' instructional guide storyline. In the mapping of the dance, the girl in the red dress in 'daring to dance the tango' metaphorically frees every other female to dance the tango. This progression of a spreading freedom of expression with the other females she encounters became the mapped dance shape of *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO*. It was March 2007 and I now had a libretto and a musical composition underway. I also knew that to get the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers support for this tango project I needed to receive validation from an outside dance authority. This validation came from the national funding body, The Canada Council for the Arts, who through a juried process by dance professionals awarded a production project grant of \$17,000 for developing *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO*. This now became only the second Ukrainian dance work to receive recognition and funding as a professional dance undertaking.

The final element I didn't have on our creative team was a principal choreographer versed in the lexicon of the tango. Dave Ganert, Shumka's Resident Choreographer, at the time was able to support the choreography with Ukrainian dance lexicon but not with tango lexicon. Three different tango choreographers, two from Edmonton and one from New York City, came into the Shumka Dancer studios to work on *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO*. While each knew the tango lexicon and taught it to the dancers, none could create choreography that advanced the narrative of the 'girl who dared to dance the tango'. It was then by chance that I learned about Leo Sato, a tango dancer and choreographer living in Calgary, Alberta. He had studied tango in Buenos Aires with such greats as former ballet dancer and tango choreographer, Angel Coria and renowned tango teacher and dancer, Angela Tonanez. Leo Sato came to our dance studio and after the first rehearsal it was clear that Dave Ganert and I had found the creative choreographer for *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO*. The learning curve of tango lexicon was difficult for the Shumka Dancers cast within the time frame of our premiere scheduled for November 2007. However the excitement of undertaking a new genre of dance linked to our Ukrainian urban heritage brought a great commitment from the dancers in rehearsals.



Shumka Corps performs *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* in Edmonton, Canada 2008.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

It became clear that Leo Sato himself needed to also dance in *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* playing the character in the narrative that the "girl in the red dress" dreams about when she goes to her secret place in the Carpathians to dance the tango. The lead female dancer in *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* was Jayleen Gordey, who perfected her tango technique by training and dancing with Leo Sato in Calgary in addition to rehearsing with him in the Shumka Dancers Edmonton studios. Leo Sato partnered with Jayleen Gordey at tango clubs in Calgary to reach the professional standard required for the mystique of the tango.



Jayleen Gordey and Leo Sato dance the forbidden tango in *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* 2009.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Girl in the Red Dress TANGO premiered at Edmonton's 2,700 seat Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium on November 10, 2007. *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* achieved its goal that it would absolutely not be about 'Ukrainian dancers doing a tango' but it would be a dance that stood as a work with strong passionate characters, original choreography, and one inspired by a rich European Ukrainian urban café culture. The editor of *The Ukrainian News* Marko Levitsky, Edmonton's bi-weekly ethnic press, wrote "The premieres were the highlight of the evening [...] The *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* is a virtual whirlwind of swirling motion and color." (November, 2007) As the audience applauded for *Red Dress TANGO* I imagined satisfied smiles on the faces of political exiles Yaroslav Barnych and Bohdan Veselovsky, and all the women in their red dresses who dared to dance the tango in the cafés of Lviv in the 1930's.



Shumka Corps performs *Girl in the Red Dress TANGO* in Edmonton, Canada 2008.
(Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

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

Vechornytsi (Life is a Cabaret)

Conceived and Directed by Gordon Gordey
Principal Choreographer: Dave Ganert



During the period that I was creating major dance works in 2007, I became intrigued with the new freshness of music in Ukraine, both popular and classical. I was intrigued that Ukrainian folk pop artists like Mandry, Oleh Skrypka, Pikkardijska Tertsia, and Vasya Club were finding their own voice in new arrangements of folk songs and original works. I couldn't wait to hear the next new CD release from these artists. Canadian Ukrainian folk and pop artists like Edmonton's Brian Cherwick, Toronto's Vasyl Popodiuk, and Winnipeg's Alexis Kochan were also finding their own voices and connecting with the North American folk roots music world with innovative and personal expressions of their musical heritage. The works of living Ukrainian classical composers like Miroslav Skorik were released in new interpretations by young Ukraine based virtuosos.

I became engaged by this contemporary direction in Ukrainian music and knew Shumka had to become a part of this cultural folk music renaissance by creating original dances in the same vibrant spirit. I listened to over 1,000 of these new songs from hundreds of artists and ensembles to get inside of the artistic voice of those creating them. I searched to find what I call a "resonance" I felt would connect with our choreographers and dancers. What would also "resonate" with our audience and with newly arrived Ukrainians in Alberta? Which songs and music would have something to say through inventive 21st century multi-media staging with video projections, live music, and live dance? We couldn't have dance as mere accompaniment to these new ventures in expression. What style of dance would emerge that was organic with the music and would give our dancers a new dance skills benchmark to which to aspire? How could we create dance that would make us hear the music better? Out of those 1,000 songs, 15 emerged over four years to transition into original dance works, the majority of which were choreographed by Canada's most prolific Ukrainian Canadian dance new works choreographer, Dave Ganert.

The first series of new dance librettos I wrote, starting in January 2007, was based upon Ukrainian folk songs that I felt were given inventive new interpretations for a new century. The dances were two to four minutes in length and conveyed the pure joy of the folk song. I worked with Dave Ganert and other Shumka choreographers to find the spiritual core of each song and give it an original staging. I wanted the public to engage in these dances because the dances are pure fun, the movement is innovative, and the spiritual core leaves one feeling a joy of living. One thing we did not want to do in our staging and choreography was to simply act out the lyrics of the song through dance. The result of this kind of choreography is usually an emotionally empty mimicry of the lyrics. Musically we re-scored many of these folk songs and in dance performances they were played and sung live – often by Shumka alumni who after their dance careers moved on to join choirs and form singing groups. Later these folk songs were recorded by Ukrainian Canadian performers under the direction of Brian Cherwick.

From 2007 to 2012, I had successfully developed the concepts and librettos for a total of 15 new works under the title of *Vechornytsi (Life is a Cabaret)*. The new dance works were: *Tezhe Mene*, *Chaban*, *Halia*, and *Kin Stojit* inspired by Oleh Skrypka; *Kapelyoux* and *Sumna Ya Bula* inspired by Pikkardijska Tertsia; and *Kalyna* inspired by Mandry. Inspiration came from Vasya Club for new dance works to *Chorne More* and *Hey Joe*.



Andrea Yaremchuk and Marco Eugenio in the role of the jealous husband in *Hey Joe* 2008. Original song written by Billy Roberts, popularized by the Jimi Hendrix Experience, and sung in Ukrainian by Vasyia Club. Sung in performance by John Eshenko. Costumes by Trinity Chopyk. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Maria Konowalec and Marco Gauk perform *Chorne More* 2008. Sung in performance by John Zinchuk. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Nicolya Lirette in *Kin Stojit*, Music Inspired by Oleh Skrypka 2009. (Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

In *Hey Joe* I extended the dance libretto to include projected video with exterior scenes shot in the countryside depicting the lead character, Joe's, inner torment of jealousy and the sorrow of taking his murdered wife to the graveyard draped across the back of a horse. *Hey Joe* was choreographed by dancer and choreographer, Sasha Kondrateyva, from Kyiv. She also choreographed a pas de deux from my libretto to Mykola Skoryk's *Melodia*. This work was danced live to a classical quintet with accompanying projected video of the dancers filmed in romantic settings in Kyiv, such as the fountain area around the Kyiv State Puppet Theatre.



Jayleen Gordey and Lukian Opyr in *Melodia*,
Music Composition: Mykola Skoryk 2009.
(Photo by Ed Ellis. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Jayleen Gordey and Lukian Opyr in *Melodia*,
Music Composition: Mykola Skoryk 2009.
(Performance video projection freeze frames from Kyiv,
Ukraine, by Stephen Romanow.
Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



In 2009 I wrote the libretto for *Summertime Dreams: Lullaby for a Lifetime* to the music of Canadian singer Alexis Kochan interpreting the Ukrainian folk lullaby *Oi Khodyt' son kolo vikon* and American composer George Gershwin's *Summertime*. The dancework was choreographed by Viktor Lytvynov and sung live in performance by Junetta Jamerson of the Alberta Black Pioneer Heritage Singers. The haunting similarities between the music and lyrics of this very old Ukrainian lullaby, and those of George Gershwin's *Summertime*, speak to the universal responsibility to protect the children of the world from the moment that the first lullaby is sung to them. The closing moments of the dance, during which we hear the actual recorded battle sounds of an ambush in Afghanistan, reflect upon the fact that every day the loss of someone's child is a reality in areas of conflict around the globe.



Larissa Sulyma and Jarrett Syddall comfort their child with a lullaby, while Jayleen Gordey as the metaphor for all mothers reacts to the battleground sounds of Afghanistan 2009. (Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers).

Summertime Dreams reminds us that our children are not ours alone; they are children of the world - a world in which a lullaby is our communal prayer for their safe return. Two other *Vechornytsi (Life is a Cabaret)* dance works, *Spring's Dawning* and *Hutsulka Ksenia* were created to the music of violinist Vasyl Popadiuk. *The Devil Went Down to Vegreville*, based upon the American pop song *The Devil Went Down to Georgia* by the Charlie Daniels Band, was re-worked by Canadian composer Brian Cherwick. To promote emerging Alberta artists of non-Ukrainian Canadian heritage, *Vechornytsi (Life is a Cabaret)* expanded its vision to include *Take My Hand* by Alberta singer-songwriter Ann Vriend and choreographed by JoJo Lucila, former dancer with Ballet Phillipines. For me as a creator of innovative dance concepts and librettos, *Vechornytsi (Life is a Cabaret)*, allowed me to express that you live a life in the “here and now” and you have a responsibility as an artist to bring this immediate world to the stage with a plurality of international choreographers through the gift that is our Ukrainian Canadian cultural heritage.

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

Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque

Conceived and Directed by Gordon Gordey

Choreographed by Dave Ganert

Additional Choreography by John Pichlyk and Tasha Orysiuk

Original Music Composed and Arranged by Andriy Shoost

Sets and Costumes designed by Maria Levitska

Additional Costumes designed by Oksana Paruta and Robert Shannon

Masks created by Randall Fraser



In January 2007, I created a concept and began writing the dance libretto for *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* as a contemporary Ukrainian folk dance dramatic narrative ballet with video projection. Over the decades I had seen numerous Ukrainian dance companies stage performances based upon the rituals of Kupalo and the midsummer solstice. In 30 years with the Shumka Dancers I too performed, from time to time, in dances based upon Kupalo, the first such performance taking place in the early 1970's. The performances I saw and those I performed in seemed to become locked in a very standard formula. I could predict what the choreography was going to be in Kupalo before I even entered the theatre. The dance would typically start with female dancers weaving across the stage in a version of a chain style folk dance (Vesnianka or Chorovod) and move on to a dance where female dancers would begin to weave wreathes, which usually with the assistance of a stage lighting change depicting the passage of time, resulted in the wreathes magically becoming completed. These wreathes would be symbolically placed into a stream which was nothing more than placing the wreathes upon the stage floor. The remainder of the dance moved on to young male and female dancers jumping over a theatrical stage fire of ribbons and red lights. It would then all end in a joyous dance (Kolmeika). Audiences reinforced this repetition of choreography with applause indicating that this stereotypical presentation of Kupalo was somehow an acknowledgement of authentic Ukrainian folk ritual. What it was in fact, was the recreating of a copy- of a copy - of a copy of choreography that only looked different when a particular dance company executed their version of the copy with superior dance technique.

For me, the Kupalo ritual was a completely different experience. It started with my emotional reaction to Kupalo songs which tonally and lyrically convey a profound sense of mystery and wonder. I knew there had to be an aesthetic and theatrical way to capture the mysticism projected in those Kupalo songs and to capture the spirit of those who gave themselves over to the rituals on Kupalo eve in an effort to try and comprehend the midsummer solstice. There also had to be a way to bring Kupalo ritual dance into the stage conventions of the 21st century to re-engage audiences with a fresh insight to the Ukrainian celebration of Kupalo and the Europe-wide observance of the midsummer solstice.



Photo: Burial Mask Caption: Silver Burial Figure
(Poltava VII cent.) (Ukrainian Chronicle of Clothing, Vol 1.)

It is against this fascinating backdrop of Ukrainian and world folklore that I began to create my libretto for the dancework *Eve of Kupalo – a Midsummer’s Night Mystery Masque*. I set out to create a dancework that recognized the elements that mark the midsummer solstice ritual throughout time. I wanted to explore pagan and sacred elements of folkloric ritual of Ivana Kupalo that created a fascination for: writers such as Nykolai Gogol (*The Eve of Ivan Kupala*), opera composers such as Anatol Vaknyany (*Kupalo*), filmmakers Yuri Ilienکو (*The Eve of Ivan Kupalo*) and Emir Kusturica (*Time of the Gypsies*), and New York director, Virlana Tkacz, of the Yara Arts Group a resident company of the famed La Mama Experimental Theatre (*Kupalo Freakout - Midsummer Night Rituals, Songs and Anarchy.*) To me these artists had each in their own medium captured more of the emotional performer-audience communion in Kupalo ritual than I had ever witnessed in staged Ukrainian dance presentations. To add a fresh research perspective I met with Ukrainian cultural folk history expert, Lubow Wolynetz. She is the Curator of Folk Art at the Ukrainian Museum of New York. I discussed Kupalo rituals with Wolynetz via phone and then was fortunate enough to meet with Wolynetz in Edmonton. Wolynetz became a key information source of Kupalo rites in different regions in Ukraine. I also delved into research of Ukrainian rituals and ritual dress of from the 7th Century forward.

My own 20-year theatre studies of ritual show that ritual behavior in societies is passed on through the centuries in an oral tradition of observed practices. The keeper of these practices is typically a village elder, an all-knowing *exegesis*, who is believed to possess mystical powers which lead participants through a transformative experience. This exegesis is the ritual authority on: time of ritual engagement, symbols, secluded place for the ritual, rites of passage for the participants in the ritual, the unification of man, nature, and the unknown, and interpretation of the practices of the ritual- *communication of the sacra*. This exegesis also releases the participants from the moral and religious code of their community. The ritual itself becomes the vehicle through which the participants transcend to an elevated mystical state. I imagined a dance libretto in which the knowledge of all the Kupalo *exegesis* over the centuries is combined into one grand celebration of Kupalo ritual rite across Ukraine. My belief in this accumulation of ritual rite practices became my own well-spring (*dzherlyo*) for the expression of an original Kupalo dancework for the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers.

I met with the dancers of Shumka and shared my concept and images for Kupalo.



*Rife with the symbolism and pageantry of summer solstice folklore, *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* is a bouquet for the senses, filled with beguiling movement, mesmerizing stagecraft, and bewitching film art, delving into the mystery of summer solstice rituals that have endured for centuries in Ukraine and across European cultures.*

The rhythmic unison of the magical, echo-like invocations of the songs and incantations of the summer solstice blanket the night....a burning fireball blazes down a hillside in the darkness to plunge into a lake...wreaths of herbs, grasses and flowers float upon that lake, determining lovers' destinies... the ritual bathing cleanses, renews and beautifies... young men tempted by the tsvit paparot (magic fern flower that only blooms for one night) with the promise of untold wealth and prosperity await their fate... and young lovers leap over bonfires, hands clasped to foretell their futures...

It is a flirtation with the magic and mysticism of those creatures and spirits that can tempt and influence fate, only on the enchanted mid-summer's night of Ivan Kupalo, determining who will be lovers, who will be prosperous, and whose futures will be beset by misfortune. This is a mystical Kupalo for the ages for it occurs in the rarity of a full moon –the extraordinary magic of the honey moon. The Veed'ma (Witch) and her entourage of the spring goddess (Lada), the toad, the raven, and the snake look on to guide the mystery of the Eve of Kupalo... (Gordon Gordey)

Alyssa Eugenio and Laryssa Sulyma in the wreath scene in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* in Edmonton, Canada 2009.

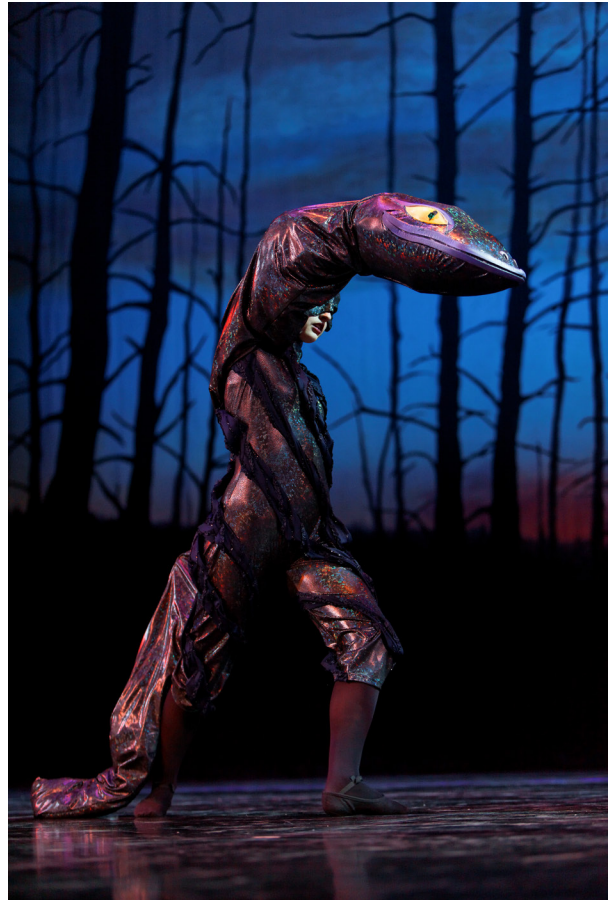
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

With the resources of the Shumka Dancers, I began to assemble the creative team to take *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* from concept libretto, to the rehearsal creation process, and ultimately to the theatre for audiences to experience. As in my past creative undertakings I worked with theatrical producer, Michael Sulyma, to bring together the creative artistic team for this project. We would once again, as with *Shumka's Cinderella* and *Pathways to Hopak* work with recognized artists from Ukraine and recognized artists from Canada. Maria Levytska, Director of Scenography at The National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv, designed the scenic drop (*zavisa*) and the costumes for the Kupalo night rituals. Oksana Paruta, from Lviv, designed the costumes for the *kolomeika* finale celebrating the arrival of the day after Kupalo Eve.

Robert Shannon, costume designer and professor of design at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada created the fantastical forest creatures: *Veed'ma* (witch), the Raven, the Toad, and the Snake.



Robert Shannon's design for the Snake character in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* 2011.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Robert Shannon's Snake character built by mask-maker Randall Fraser in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* 2011.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Robert Shannon's design for the Toad character. Mask designed and built by Randall Fraser. *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* 2011.
(Photo by Gordon Gordey. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Robert Shannon's design for the Raven character. Mask designed and built by Randall Fraser.
Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque 2011.
(Photo by Gordon Gordey. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Stephanie Lilley as the *Veed'ma* (Witch) with her creature entourage in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* 2011. Costumes designed by Robert Shannon.
(Photo by Gordon Gordey. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

A major scenographic element in my concept for *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* was the use of masks throughout the dance.



Female dancer in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* is drawn into the ritual of the mask 2011.
(Photo by Gordon Gordey. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Female dancer in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* is drawn into the ritual of the mask by Lada (Nicolya Lirette), goddess of spring 2011.
(Photo by Gordon Gordey. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

I saw the use of masks as a central image to the organic pagan ritual practices I wanted explored in dance movement and as a core metaphor of 'choosing in the unknown and the unexplainable'. I believe that in the age-old rituals of the solstice, and in Kupalo, our ancestors felt that if they could mingle in harmony with nature and the spirits they could ensure the return of the sun after its descent on the longest midsummer's day. I wanted to show in dance that in order to 'mingle in harmony with nature and the spirits' participants in Kupalo needed to lose their self in a two-fold state of being. Participants had to be what they were, that is living mortals, and at the same time that which they were not, spirits of the eve of Kupalo. Wearing masks transformed participants in the dance to enter this two-fold state. The transition to the hand-held spirit mask was carried out under the guidance of the *Veed'ma* (witch) and her forest creature entourage who danced with two large one and one-half meter spirit masks. This concept allowed for a style of movement that embraced the mysticism and wonderment of the eve of Kupalo. This concept was not based in linear time but in the here and now of nature's mysteries.



Shumka male Corps in Kupalo ritual masks awaiting the arrival of masked females 2009.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers).



Our masks for *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* were designed and built by Canadian master mask maker, Randall Fraser from Edmonton. The scenography was completed with projected film images captured by Canadian videographers Andrew Scholotiuk and Stephen Romanow. Using projected video images onto the scenic drops (*zavisy*) advanced my concept of creating a mystical "living spirit world". The eve of Kupalo element of fire was captured by projecting a video image of a rolling ball of fire onto a scenic drop of a mysterious forest. The element of water was integrated with projected video images of young maidens actually floating wreathes in a stream and images of young maidens walking into the water and submerging themselves completely to the will of chance discovery by the young men of their dreams. Water was integrated in the finale of *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* with projected a projected image of the ritual bathing of a young maiden having water poured over her head as she stands in a river. This image of baptism linked the pagan Kupalo ritual with the Christian baptismal rite attributed to John the Baptist and the naming of the *Sviato Ivana Kupala* or Feast Day of John the Baptist.

Nicolya Lirette as Lada baptizes Tanya Yacyshyn, Kupalo ritual participant in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* 2009.
(Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers).

The use of projected video was instrumental in depicting the illusive and magical fern-flower (*tsvit paparot*) of Kupalo myth. Under the guidance of the *Veed'ma* (witch) the fern-flower (*tsvit paparot*) was able to magically float from the stage and onto the scenic drops (*zavisy*), always just out of reach of the young men seeking to possess the golden treasures of the eve of Kupalo.



Director, Gordon Gordey in rehearsal with Andrew Scholotiuk (Videographer, Projectionist) for *Eve of Kupalo – a Midsummer’s Night Mystery Masque* in Edmonton, Canada.
Dave Ganert, Choreographer, (Upper left) guides dancers through the baptism scene. 2009
(Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow, Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Audiences were spellbound by this seamless integration of live stage action and projected video - the magic of Kupalo created through 21st century stage technology.



Performance scene from *Eve of Kupalo – a Midsummer’s Night Mystery Masque* 2012.
(Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

The original music score was composed, orchestrated, and arranged by Kyiv composer, Andrij Shoost. Additional music acknowledgment goes to Kyiv artists Yuri Chernenko and Daxa Brakha. Andrij Shoost's wide experience as a composer of scores to theatrical productions, documentary films, songs and musicals for children's ensembles, and dance was a fertile field for the diverse musical needs of *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque*. The score for *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* was scored for orchestral symphonic recording with added Ukrainian folk instruments using 45 players under the baton of maestro, Alexei Baklan. He is a conductor with the National Opera of Ukraine and the Chief Conductor of the Kiev Municipal Opera and Ballet Theatre for Children and Youth.

My libretto and stage direction were completed with the imaginative and fresh choreography of Shumka's Artistic Director and Resident Choreographer, Dave Ganert. His original choreography for *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* was inspired by the spiritual seed of the removal of boundaries of previous Kupalo dance works. This was our team's original creation firmly rooted in solstice rituals and age-old Ukrainian myths. The movement lexicon embraced Ukrainian folk dance, ballet, and stylized modern movement influenced by the expressiveness of ritual masks.

Additional contribution to the movement style for the female dances was created by Edmonton choreographer, Tasha Orysiuk.



Allysa Eugenio (centre) in Tasha Orysiuk's choreography for the ritual inspired "sleeves reaching to bring back the sun" in *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque*. Costume design: Oksana Paruta, Lviv 2009. (Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Additional theatrical dramaturgical contributions were provided by Edmonton choreographer, John Pichlyk. Dave Ganert's choreography for *Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque* achieved a multi-media synthesis of dance, theatricality, and video. This 25 minute dance theatre work brought a heightened theatre experience for our audiences through the ritual and myths of our ancestors in a 21st century artistic sensibility.

Eve of Kupalo - a Midsummer's Night Mystery Masque premiered at the 2,700 seat Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada on March 19, 2009. Since then it has toured across Canada and has toured to China, receiving 22 performances in major theatres in 14 cities carrying the Kupalo metaphor of the spirituality of renewal and love.

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

Voices of the Silenced

Conceived and Directed by Gordon Gordey

Choreography: Dave Ganert, Additional choreography: Stephanie Lilley

Videographer: Stephen Romanow

Music: Alexis Kochan (Paris to Kyiv), Maria Dunn, Ryan Pugh (Millenia)



In October 2003 I began developing the concept and writing the libretto for *Enemy Aliens*, a contemporary Ukrainian Canadian narrative folk dance theatre work with video exploring the unjust internment of Ukrainian Canadians in Canada during WWI. On November 11, 2006 the dance work premiered in the 2,700 seat Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada with its new name: *Shumka Remembers*. I further revised and developed the dance work under its current name: *Voices of the Silenced* which received its premiere at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium on November 17, 2012. This performance opened with the following voice-over to set the context of the dance action for the audience:

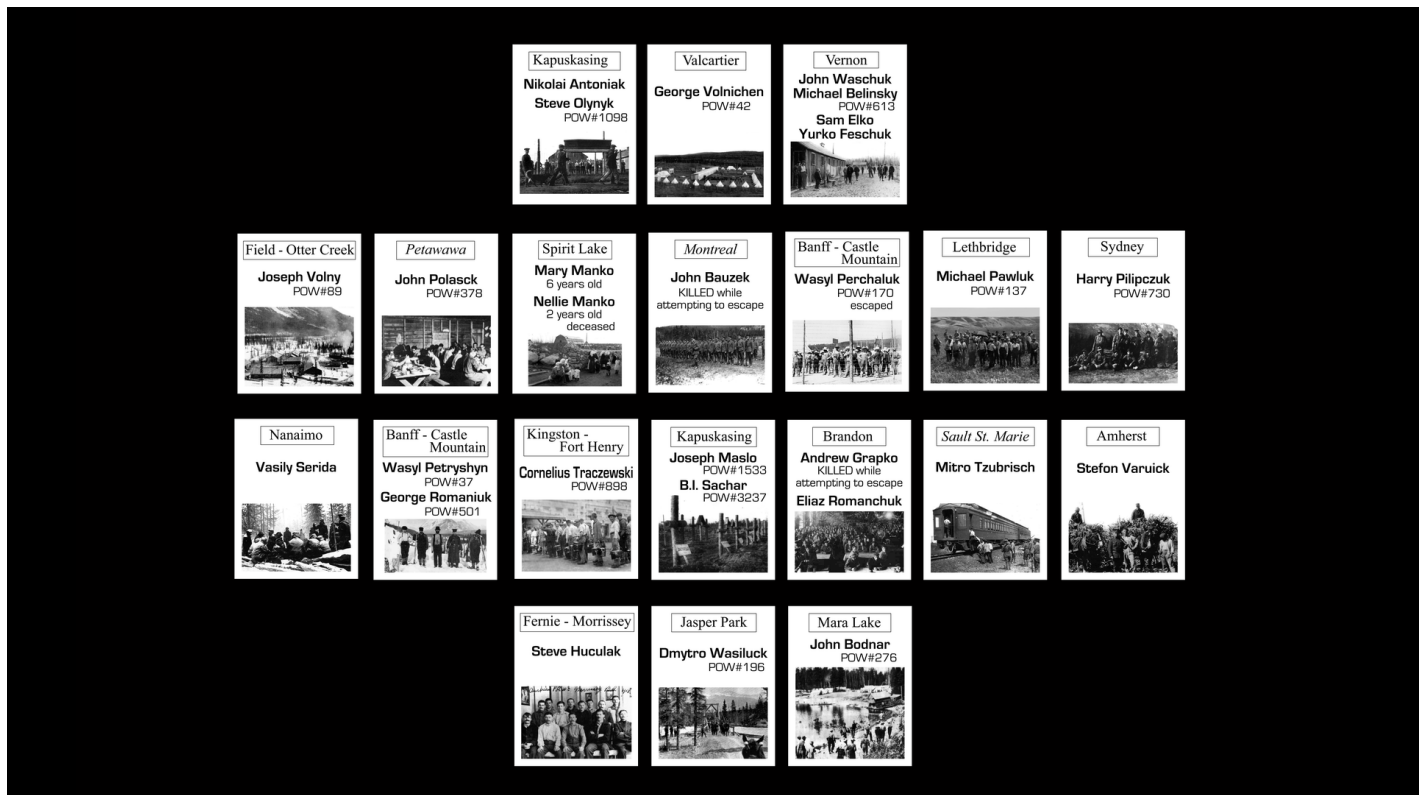
Free Lands. Canada. Free Lands. 160 Acres for each Ukrainian settler for only a \$10 registration fee. "Land, Wealth, Health, Manliness, Honour, Respect, Security, Safety." Free Lands. (Voices of the Silenced libretto, Gordon Gordey, August 2012)

This was the message widely distributed in Ukraine in 1896 when Clifford Sifton, Canadian Government Minister, sought to accelerate settlement in Western Canada with immigrants who were experienced in farming. By 1914, an estimated 170,000 Ukrainians responded to the promise of "Free Lands" and settled in Canada. These immigrants came to Canada from the Hapsburg Austrian crown lands of Western Ukraine and their citizenship was officially listed as "Austrian," although they were ethnic Ukrainians. On June 28, 1914 the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and the subsequent declaration of war by Britain on Germany on August 4, 1914 instigated a mistrust of all persons of German or Austrian-Hungarian nationality. In the interest of national security the British Secretary of State in cooperation with the Canadian government declared for the first time in our history, the War Measures Act of 1914 on August 22. The only opposition in Parliament came from Wilfred Laurier, leader of the Liberal opposition at the time, who characterized the Act as a betrayal of immigrants who were building Canada's nationhood. By 1915 in response to the War Measures Act over 80,000 German and Ukrainian "enemy aliens", as they were called, were registered with the Canada's Royal North West Mounted Police.



Dave Ganert and Stephanie Lilley portray Ukrainian Canadians whose citizenship dreams are shattered by Canada's War Measures Act of 1914 in *Voices of the Silenced* 2013.
 (Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow, Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers).

These “enemy aliens” were subjected to having to carry registration identity papers, often pay monthly registration fees, and were under constant surveillance. Of the 80,000 who were registered under the authority of the Act, 8,579 were deemed: “enemy aliens”. The majority of “enemy aliens” were Ukrainians and were arrested and interned in 26 makeshift encampments located mostly in Canada's frontier hinterlands. They were forced into hard labour clearing land for roads, building bridges, and building the railway.



One of the projected stage rolling images of “enemy alien internees” in *Voices of the Silenced* 2013.
 (Projection video image by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Among these “enemy alien internees”, as they were called, were a number of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Turks. German internees were mostly imprisoned elsewhere and under the provision of being Prisoners of War they were not required to do hard labour. Registration and internment of Ukrainian “enemy aliens” was far from being orderly. Ukrainian immigrant young men living on farms were generally left alone because their labour was seen as supporting the war effort, while Ukrainian young men living in cities, and part of a large group of unemployed labourers, were arrested and interned. This was not a proud period for Canada. Ukrainian immigrants, who came from mainly Eastern Ukraine, and under the governance of Tsarist Russia, did not fall under the War Measures Act. These Ukrainian immigrants from Eastern Ukraine, and other Ukrainian immigrants, estimated at 10,000, ‘fell between the cracks’ by concealing their Austrian citizenship and enlisted to serve with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in WWI. Filip Konowal, born in Kutkivski, Ukraine, for example, served in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces and was one of only 93 Canadians to ever receive the highest honour for bravery, the Victoria Cross.

During Canada’s first national internment operations of 1914-1920 thousands of Ukrainians and other Europeans were branded as “enemy aliens”, forced to work for the profit of their jailers, disenfranchised, and subjected to other state-sanctioned censures, not because of anything they had done, but only because of who they were, where they had come from. (The Banff Craig & Canyon. Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, June 19, 2013)

Ninety-one years later, on November 25, 2005 the Government of Canada passed Bill C-331, Internment of Persons of Ukrainian Origin Recognition Act to officially “acknowledge that persons of Ukrainian origin were interned in Canada during the First World War” and “to express its deep sorrow for those events”.

Following several months of negotiations between the Federal Government of Canada and the Ukrainian Canadian community, as represented by the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association (UCCLA), the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko (UCFTS), and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), a \$10 million endowment known as the “Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund” (CFWWIRF) was established on May 9, 2008 to commemorate and educate Canadians about Canada’s first national internment operations of 1914 to 1920. (Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund. 2013)

It is against this emerging background that I developed my concepts for telling the story of the internment of Ukrainian Canadians through dance. I felt a deep personal responsibility to my Ukrainian Canadian heritage to bring this story in dance to all Canadians. I knew I didn’t want to do the classic documentary narrative based upon letters and recorded interviews done with survivors because films like *Freedom Had a Price* (1994) by Canadian director, Yuriy Luhovy had already done such a great job of telling the story in his style. I wanted to capture moments of emotional hopelessness and shame the Internment narrative sparked in my imagination.

When I looked at Internment camp photos and read diary accounts I didn’t just think about what happened historically. I imagined what these men might have dreamed about when they went to bed at night. These dreams that could not be imprisoned behind a barbed wire fence became the key to unlocking the Internment the way I saw it happening in dance. I wanted to explore the juxtaposition of colliding emotions of those who served as Ukrainians in WWI and those who couldn’t serve as Ukrainians and were interned. I imagined what it was like to be “shamed” by the country that invited you to shape its nationhood as a founding people with your toil and sweat on its “*Free Lands*”.



Stephanie Lilley performs the “emotional hopelessness” of the women left to fend on their own in *Voices of the Silenced* 2013. (Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow, Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Shumka Remembers, this multi-media dancework as a tribute to those who served and those who wished to serve, was realized under my stage direction with Canadian modern dance choreographer Brian Webb and Shumka’s Resident Choreographer, Dave Ganert, and was danced by the Shumka company. The stage performance included guest appearances by Nicholas Faryna, an active service Afghanistan veteran and Bill Rawluk, a WWII veteran. The presence in the performance of these soldiers linked soldiers from WWI to those of more recent times and the present. The music for this dancework came from the repertoire of Winnipeg singer, Alexis Kochan and her musicians: Paris to Kyiv. Her haunting voice for *There is a Gravemound in the Field* (*Oj U Poli Mohyla*) was a cornerstone for the dramatic emotion in *Shumka Remembers*. The video of *Shumka Remembers* was shown in Kyiv on Remembrance Day 2008 under the patronage of Canada’s former ambassador to Ukraine, Abina Dann. With the encouragement of artist and Officer of the Order of Canada, Veronica Tenant, I applied under Shumka’s banner for Canada Council funding. Veronica Tenant’s support letter stated:

With a powerful, unique voice, composed of dance, song, music and video Gordey has devised a theatrical memory of soul and human anguish set in the backdrop of the internment of Canadians of Ukrainian origin who were designated enemy aliens [...] This disturbing theme transcends our diverse national cultures and has resonances as we know for other ethnicities in our Canadian collective history.



Trinity Chopyk traces a name in a gravestone for a forgotten Ukrainian Canadian ‘enemy alien’ internee in *Shumka Remembers* 2006. (Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow, Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

The request for grant funding was successful and gave Shumka the resources to revise *Shumka Remembers* and lengthen this dancework to focus more completely on the Internment. I also began to search for a new title that would drive the imagination of the creative team and engage a greater public interest in the Internment. Where *Shumka Remembers* addressed the notion of ‘tribute’, a new title, *Voices of the Silenced*, now focused the dance work to ‘active engagement’ in the Internment story. It gave a “voice” to the “silenced” and subsequently to their story of being shunned in the telling of Canadian history.

For example, this emotional path was fulfilled in the process of giving a “voice” to the “Wasył Perchaliuk suicide” scene in the dance.



Requiem for enemy alien internee Wasył Perchaliuk in *Voices of the Silenced* 2013. (Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)



Enemy alien internee Wasył Perchaliuk is “freed” in *Voices of the Silenced 2013*
 (Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

Perchaliuk was a Canadian who was interned because of his Austrian-Hungarian passport. While interned at the Castle Mountain Internment Camp, he impressed his captors through hard work and loyalty. He was released and of his own free will enlisted in the Canadian army to continue to prove his patriotism to his new country. Unbelievably he was imprisoned again, while wearing his military uniform, on the night before his battalion shipped out overseas because his identity documents showed he was an “enemy alien”. His being denied to serve resulted in his committing suicide which was officially recorded in the police records as “*a rash act during a fit of despondency*”.

Shumka choreographer, Stefanie Lilley, created the dance movement for the burial scene based upon the metaphor of the Ukrainian funeral rite censor which was realized visually in this piece as a swinging pocket watch. The pocket watch was the most difficult personal possession for internees with which to part.

The movement of swinging the censors was used in this section to ascend Wasył Perchaliuk’s soul to heaven but also the souls of the other interns whose deaths were not as literal. Being robbed of everything that makes you an individual is also a form of death. Using the pocket watches to bind the hands of the dancers, I endeavoured to show that they were “prisoners of time and situation”. The dance style is organic and fuelled by emotion while also being reminiscent of actions associated with biblical scale grieving. I had the dancers in three small groups dancing in canon to show that even if individuals were in different camps, they all shared the same heartbreak and desperation. (Stefanie Lilley, Choreographer/Dancer, 2012)



Trinity Chopyk contemplates an internee’s pocket watch in *Voices of the Silenced 2013*
 (Video freeze frame by Stephen Romanow. Courtesy Ukrainian Shumka Dancers)

For the ending of *Voices of the Silenced* I added Canadian singer- songwriter Maria Dunn to draw on the folk tradition of storytelling through song. Her commissioned Internment song *In the Shadows of the Rockies* became a key foundation for the creative movement of the metaphor of the ‘human railway of souls’ for the finale.



Maria Dunn sings *In the Shadow of the Rockies* as dancers construct a railway built on the bodies of the enemy aliens in *Voices of the Silenced* 2013.

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

Maria Dunn's lyrics "The most glorious place in the world is ugly when seen through a barbwire fence" resonated deeply within me. I found a power so haunting in those lyrics that I wanted to generate an understanding of the irony in the building of Banff National Park. Here you have one of Canada's tourist treasures being built on the backs and deaths of Ukrainian internees forced into labour internment camps at Castle Mountain. I worked with the dancers in attaining this metaphor by building a "human railway" of dancers. I then had Maria Dunn sing and walk through these ghostly images of the "human railway". (Dave Ganert, Choreographer/Dancer, 2012)

In my mind *Voices of the Silenced* is not yet complete. There still remains a larger story to tell.

*I continue my goal of public engagement for connectivity with this work. It is my creative path for *Voices of the Silenced* to speak with originality, gripping naturalness, and a contemporary sensibility of 21st century dance theatre. *Voices of the Silenced* has an inherent sense of greater purpose. When it is experienced it will leave our publics different from when they arrived at the theatre. It's a Canadian story, it's a story of our Ukrainian heritage, and it's a story of every person who was ever shamed in not being able to serve their country.*

(Gordon Gordey, Writer/Director, 2013)

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Gordon Gordey

(Master of Fine Arts, Master of Arts, Bachelor of Education)

Gordon Gordey was a key builder in the evolution of the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers of Canada. In his forty years with Shumka, Gordey transitioned from a dancer, to a librettist/writer, and to a stage director, conceiving twenty-five original dance works for Shumka from 1992 to 2012. His works set a benchmark for Ukrainian dance in Canada and have toured across Canada, Ukraine, and over 20 cities in China. Gordey also served as Shumka's Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer for 12 years. Gordey is privileged to be a Honourary Lifetime Member of the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers.

In his creative career outside of Shumka, Gordey studied ballet with Ruth Carse, founder of Alberta Ballet, spent 20 years as an Arts Consultant with the Department of Culture in Alberta, and worked for 13 years as a Human Rights Officer with the Alberta Human Rights Commission. He has been teaching Drama for 37 years at Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton. For Alberta's Centennial in 2005, he conceived and produced Celebrate Alberta as part of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's official welcome to Alberta's Centennial event, which included 1500 performers. In the same year, Gordey was recognized as one of the most influential people in the development of theatre in Alberta in the publication: Theatre 100. In 2006 he received the Hetman Award for Outstanding Contributions and Dedicated Service in Promoting Ukrainian Heritage and Culture in Alberta. He continues to serve the Ukrainian Canadian community as a National Board Member of the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko.