

Shumka dancers tribute Ukrainian history

By Murray Green

Shumka's dancers will showcase Lesya Ukrainka in a presentation entitled *A Woman of Strength and Vision* on Friday, September 20, at 7:30 p.m.

Lesya was a renowned Ukrainian artist, musician, storyteller, poet and writer. She was born more than 150 years ago, but made an impact in her country. She had a troubled life by suffering with physical ailments and lived vicariously through her art. She is a legend among the Ukrainian diaspora and, as a woman, is especially inspiring in a patriarchal culture.

"I mean this without an ounce of cliché, Camrose has become our second home. People support us time after time and the theatre gives us wonderful opportunities to create wonderful shows. We are privileged to have this facility just down the road from us," said Shumka's artistic director, Les Sereida. "This show gives us a chance to display what we were doing in Camrose previously in a workshop and show it as a world premier to our Camrose audience. This is a thank you to the Camrose community."

Ukrainian dance normally explores themes or stories, but not individuals. It depicts celebrations, but rarely the trials and challenges of life. Les was inspired to develop a dance theatre work for Shumka that focuses on her life, its physical hardships, its creative triumphs and escapes.

"This is a two-act show. The first half will be about Lesya Ukrainka, who was incredibly famous in Ukraine. She was famous for poetry, but also her work in civil rights and for equal rights for women. She wrote

about and fought for a free Ukraine, which unfortunately is still an issue today," explained Les.

Along with her literary achievements, Lesya explored ethnography and collected data on folk traditions, specifically, Ukrainian folk melodies. She recorded 220 of the latter, published a work of children's games, songs and fairy tales, and formed a collection *Folk Songs for Dance*, making her one of the pioneers of the ethnic studies scholarly field in Ukraine, amongst other accomplishments.

"This is about her dreams and how she viewed the world. When we started to dive into her work, we didn't realize how it is so relevant today. Ukraine is still fighting for its freedom, fighting for equality across all of its people. She was an incredible woman and far in advance of her time," added Les. "In the second half, we finish with our Hopak dance."

Hopak is a Ukrainian folk dance originating as a male dance among the Zaporozhian Cossacks, but later danced by couples, male soloists and mixed groups of dancers.

She made an invaluable contribution to Ukrainian folklore as a collector and performer of folk music. Her repertoire included traditional, Cossack and lyrical songs, lullabies, children's songs, ballads, ritual chants and, most unique of all, fairy tales.

This is a Shumka production that was created at the Lougheed Centre during a residency in Camrose last year. The show represents the 150th anniversary of Lesya. This will be a live-streaming show as well.

Former Camrose Veselka Ukrainian Dance



Ryan Parker Photography

Shumka members perform the Hopak dance with a large troupe during its show.

Society member Malia Pattullo made the leap from Camrose to the Shumka Studia. "That is our junior ensemble of dancers. Then she auditioned for the company and made our senior dancers. She is

to the community as well. She is a wonderful, talented dancer. Malia is also going to university in the theatre arts (MacEwan), so she is looking at a future in the theatre world. We would like her to stay with

I have looked up to them since I was small. My family and I always went to see their shows, went to the *Nutcracker* show every single year it was here. They have always been a huge inspiration and role



Submitted

The tribute to Lesya Ukrainka honours her fight for equal rights and freedom. Colourful dresses and attire make the show appealing for audiences.

now a valuable member and gives us another connection to Camrose and the community. She allows us to have emotional ties

Shumka, even beyond her dancing days as a career," said Les.

Malia is excited about dancing in front of family and friends again.

"I started dancing when I was three years old. We moved to Camrose in about Grade 3 and started dancing with Veselka. I also took lessons in jazz, ballet and contemporary dance to expand my skills, up my training. Once I moved to Edmonton for schooling, I joined Shumka to train and learn its style of dance," shared Malia.

"I had some really great instructors at Veselka and throughout my dance career. They taught me what it means to be a great Ukrainian dancer, as well as advance my skills in dance. I had always loved dance from a young age, but they pushed me to take my skills to the next level and to look forward to continue my training past high school," said Malia.

"It means so much to me (to join Shumka).

model to me," stated Malia.

She is now enrolled in theatre production at MacEwan University. "This gives knowledge of the backstage theatre production. It really helps me tie all of the dance and production together of what we are doing. I hope to continue dancing for a long time, but get a job in theatre to be able to do both," she explained.

"The show has many different elements, but every dance is important and I am excited to be a part of this production," shared Malia. "We have a large cast and really big numbers with a lot of dancers on stage. People will love it. A lot of people will be coming to see me and it will be cool to perform where I grew up. I hope I can inspire others from Camrose to dance and I want to be a role model for them. It is possible to do that and you don't have to grow up in Edmonton to dance with Shumka. If you work hard, it is possible."



Submitted

Richard, left, Malia, Brooklyn and Tanya Pattullo share a family moment during a dance outing.