



Entertainment

Ukrainian culture is alive onstage

interview by Moreen Murray

In Ukrainian, "shumka" means literally "whirlwind". This translation could either be used to describe the energetic, physically demanding dances and dancers themselves — or, the effect on the audience — that of a brief but spectacular explosion of sound and movement. Whatever the application, the Shumka dance troupe is certainly a colourful and vital contribution to Alberta's performing arts scene.

Shumka has indeed become somewhat of an Alberta institution. The group, now in its 26th year, and still going strong, consists of 45 dancers and 30 musicians. Artistic director John Picklyk elaborated further on Shumka's history, its performers and its message. "The organization," he said, "is largely volunteer — that is, made up of people who have other jobs during the day. The demands placed on the dancers both physically and time-wise mean not so much a commitment (which is major) but a lifestyle. After hours, the dancers practice for 3½ hours 3 times per week, and there are also meetings twice a week. Also, because the audiences are becoming more educated or aware of Ukrainian dance this means the dancers must strive harder to meet the audience's expectations." Picklyk emphasized once again that "you really have to be committed to the cause. We're really lucky to have a lot of people willing to make that commitment — on average people stay with Shumka from 5-10 years, some as much as 22 years."

Mr. Picklyk stressed that the ensemble's major aim is to entertain and as a side benefit inform audiences about Ukrainian folklore and tradition. He pointed out that the group employs researchers, and indeed enlists the services of the U of A's Department of Slavic Studies, in order to offer some historical and folkloric perspectives on their work. The regions from where the dances originated and what the dances symbolize are particularly important. "Ukrainian dance," says Picklyk, "is by nature very athletic. It also involves a lot of subtle mood changes — the ability to portray these dances is enhanced by the knowledge of what they mean to the dancers and indeed to the audience."

Shumka also serves well its role as an ambassador of Canadian culture when going abroad. To foreign audiences they convey in



Shumka dancers show their knowledge of folklore in their dances.

dance, the rich and unique Ukrainian heritage and culture that is part of Canada's ethnic fabric. Mr. Picklyk said their ability to translate the dances is aided by universal themes; for example, courtship and marriage. He said that "... although some audiences may be more reserved, such as

our tour to Japan, for example. They can still be entertained without knowing the language, and they do let you know their appreciation at the performance's end." Such is the beauty of dance.

As for Shumka's long range goals — Mr. Picklyk paused here and chuckled, "Well, to

keep getting better naturally, and to meet the increasingly higher standards in dance. Audiences want to get their money's worth, and I believe we're providing that." He pauses. "We want to keep entertaining people and to share with them the unique legacy that is Ukrainian dance and culture."

The fruits of Argentina's renaissance in film

interview by Elaine Ostry

"Since 1983," claims Tim Barnard, "Argentina has experienced a Renaissance in film." Barnard has written a book about Argentinian cinema and has assembled 20 films that are being shown around Canada. Five of these films are being shown in the month of April in Edmonton, at the Roxy Theatre, in cooperation with the National Film Theatre of Canada and the National Film Institute of Argentina.

Argentina has experienced this "Renaissance" as a result of its new-found freedom after the '83 defeat of the military junta which severely censored the arts for ten years. "People are now able to make films that had been in the back of their heads for ten years," said Barnard.

Barnard stresses that not all of the films are political in nature. Argentinian cinema has been producing art films and mainstream comedies and dramas as well as political films. These films have participated in several international film festivals.

Argentinian culture is unique because of its mix of traditional Indian and European cultures. "It is a hybrid of cultures rare in South America," claimed Barnard. One film in particular, *Geronima*, shows the clash between these two traditions, as an Indian woman struggles to survive in the European culture of Buenos Aires.



Argentina's films criticize society.

Other social issues explored in Argentinian film are the role of women in society and poverty. *Perros de la Noche* (Dogs in the Night) is a film which deals with both issues. It shows the human cost of the junta: 40% of the population is illiterate and homeless. The film deals with a taboo topic, but is well-received in Argentina.

Malayunta (Bad Company) is a film that was highly recommended by Barnard. It is a comedy of the clashes between a young man and an older couple. The young man insults the couple who represent the Argentinian middle class tradition. They later kill the young man "in the name of decency." This film — obviously a political allegory — won a

Silver Carradi award in a festival at Taormina, Italy, in 1986.

The Argentine government supports cinema a great deal, but Barnard stresses that it does not use film as propaganda. As he claimed, a popular saying in Argentinian film circles is that "people who oppose the government more often than not get the money for making films." The government is encouraging the idea of film "as a way of recreating national consciousness." The criticism that many films gives to Argentina's past and present governments and societies, claimed Barnard, serves "to rehabilitate Argentina in the eyes of the world" as a democracy.

One major difference that Barnard has found between Argentinian and North American cinema is that most Argentinian films are based on literary texts. Argentinian filmmakers often bring in stage actors, which adds another aspect to the films.

Barnard assembled the films when he travelled to Argentina a year ago. He spent six weeks watching films, and was very glad when he was able to have 20 of these films, many of them being award winners, up to Canada. These Argentinian films, Barnard claimed, "compete with the best of Europe on a technical level," and are presently "destroying preconceptions of South American cinema."