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A celebration of grand tradition: The Ukranian Society shares musical heritage with BC

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Posted: 1/28/08

The Ukrainian Society of Boston College hosted Syzokryli, a Ukrainian folk dance ensemble, and Vika Vasilevich, a Ukrainian pop singer, on Saturday night at 7 p.m. in Robsham Theater.

The repertoire included Ukrainian folk dances titled "Pryvyt," "Buko," "Lemko," "Holubka," "Kozak Dance," and "Hopak." Four of the aforementioned numbers were choreographed by Roma Pryma Bohachevsky. "Holubka" is a traditional choreography, but was restaged by Orlando V. Pagan, and "Kozak Dance" is an original choreography by Pagan. Each dance was accompanied by traditional Ukrainian folk music. The acts ranged from serious to comedic, but overall the ensemble's imaginative staging, majestic choreography, and eccentric costumes made the performance great. The audience clearly appreciated the performance, clapping and cheering throughout the show.

"Pryvyt," which means "Welcome," exotically ushered in the audience with a dazzling display of white, red, and gold and graceful circular movements from the dancers. In addition, the smiling faces of the dancers evoked a friendly atmosphere, immediately negating any cultural barriers between the Ukrainian dancers and many non-Ukrainians in the audience. "Buko" was interesting because of the eccentric headpieces the female dancers wore - green and red caps around their foreheads with gold straw protruding from the center. "Kozak Dance," a comedic skit with only male dancers, depicted five boys creeping around with a barrel of most likely beer, who cross paths with another boy and adopt him into their gang. Nevertheless, the most notable act was "Hopak," which featured an awe-inspiring, eye-dazzling display of athletic and artistic ability in the ensemble's dancers. The males wore baggy blue pants, red boots, and white shirts, while the females wore flowers in their hair, black blouses, and an eccentric range of plaid and striped skirts.

From 1976 until her death in 2004, Ukrainian dancers from the United States, Canada, and all around the world wished to study and train under Syzorkyli's founder and first director, the choreographer Roma Pryma Bohachevsky. In 1978, she founded Syzokryli, which, at the time, was the premier Ukrainian dance organization in the United States. Because of Bohachevsky's elegant, visionary choreographies, Syzokryli is recognized as one of the world's best Ukrainian folk dance ensembles. Her choreographies often dealt with serious topics such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the murder of Ukrainian songwriter Vasyl Ivasiuk, and the Sept. 11 terror attacks and the multiculturalism of New York City. Influenced by Agrippina Vaganova and Martha Graham, Bohachevsky's choreographies also interwove elements of ballet and modern dance in addition to stylized folk dance.

The ensemble is based in New York City, but has performed widely throughout the United States and the world. In 1992, it made a very successful and acclaimed tour of Ukraine, making appearances in major Ukrainian cities such as Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, and Ivano-Frankivsk. Concerning instruction, Syzorkyli's dancers are from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. Several currently perform in other dance companies in the United States. The majority of the members,

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however, come from one of Bohachevsky's schools in New York, New Jersey, or Pennsylvania. Its current director is Orlando V. Pagan, who has been a member of Syzokryli for 14 years. He is also the head instructor for all of Bohachevsky's schools, and the artistic director of both the Zoloty Promin Ensemble in Hartford, Conn. and the Mriya School of Ukrainian Dance in Hempstead, N.Y.

Vika Vasilevich, a pop singer from Ukraine, performed several times between the ensemble's acts. Though she only sang one song in English - the others in Ukrainian and Russian - the audience seemed to greatly enjoy Vika's pop-arena brand of rock, clapping along exuberantly as she glided across the stage and through the center aisle. Vika, who started writing lyrics at 7 and wrote her first song at 14, has written and recorded over 20 original songs and appeared at major music festivals throughout the United States and Europe, including Toronto's Bloor West Festival and Harborfront Center. In 2005, she completed her master's degree at Kiev University of Culture and Art, and since then has been concentrating on her burgeoning music career. In 2007, her song "Don't Lie to Yourself," off her second album Guilty Dreams, was the second most requested song on the top rock station in Kiev.

Following the performance, the Ukrainian Society of Boston College hosted a "zabava," or party, at the O'Connell House. The Ukrainian Society of BC was founded in March 2007 by Deanna Rakowsky, A&S '10, with the help of professor Peter Woloschuk, in order to act as a student-run organization devoted to celebrating Ukrainian culture and sharing it with the BC community. Rakowsky, who serves as the society's president, works in coordination with vice president Laryssa Kramarchuk, A&S '09, secretary Erin Lytwyn, A&S '10, and treasurer Christopher Rusyniak, A&S '10. The Ukrainian American Cultural and Religious Center of New England will be hosting a malanka, a Ukrainian folk celebration traditionally held on Jan. 13 (New Year's Eve according to the Julian calendar, commemorating the feast day of Saint Melania), on Feb. 2 from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m., featuring music by "Na Zdorov'ya" from Yonkers, New York. Check ukrainiancenter.org for more details.

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