CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN®
A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Cultural Heritage

Vol. XIX, No. 4
Winter, 1996
Organizations founded to give encouragement and support to ethnic groups customarily engage in a number of activities geared to achieving those goals. The Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center is no exception. It has, for instance, published the quarterly *Carpatho-Rusyn American*, which for almost two decades was the only non-denominational English-language publication providing current news on Rusyns in the homeland and abroad, as well as scholarly articles, biographies of famous Rusyns, and travel and bibliographical information. The C-RRC has also encouraged and supported young Rusyn scholars in their work and has provided funds to aid our brothers and sisters in the European homeland as they struggle to maintain and develop their identity and aspirations as a people. Among yet other activities, the C-RRC has published numerous books, pamphlets, and maps, and provided these items for sale at book and information booths at both scholarly conferences and ethnic festivals.

All of these efforts have been exceptionally productive. Ethnic awareness among Americans of Rusyn background has flourished over the past two decades, ties between the Rusyn community here and in Europe have been strengthened, scholarly conferences now more than ever before include panels and papers on Rusyn-related topics, library collections around the world offer researchers and interested readers a large selection of Rusyn studies to choose from (a selection that will keep growing), and a grassroots organization, inspired and encouraged by the C-RRC and some of whose leaders are board members of the C-RRC—the Carpatho-Rusyn Society of Pittsburgh—is taking in new and enthusiastic members at a pace far beyond its wildest expectations. We are grateful for all of this and warmly extend our thanks to all who have supported the C-RRC in its work in terms of funds and voluntary help over the years.

There is yet another way in which the C-RRC is now able to encourage and support the development of Rusyn culture and this is through the awarding of the newly-established Steven Chepa Aleksander Duchnovyc Prize in Rusyn Literature. This is an award of $1000 to be given annually for an outstanding book of poetry or fiction published in the Rusyn language. The award’s intention is to promote the use of the Rusyn language in works that make a significant contribution to Rusyn literature. The official announcement indicates that volumes of fiction and poetry published between 1991 and 1996 are eligible for the 1997 prize. Three copies of each book should be submitted by the author or publisher, accompanied by a brief biographical statement about the author. The deadline for this year’s prize is March 1, 1997.

The current international judging panel is chaired by Professor Elaine Rusinko, University of Maryland, who has written several articles on Rusyn literature and translated and wrote an introduction to Duchnovyc’s 1850 play *Virtue is More Important Than Riches* (Columbia University Press, 1994; available from the C-RRC). The two other members of the panel are Professor Myron Sysak, Chairman of the Department of Russian Language and Literature at Safarik University in Prešov, Slovakia, and Dr. Maria Pavlovszky of Indiana University. Dr. Pavlovszky is a Slavic linguist trained in Hungary and the last doctoral student of the Carpatho-Rusyn scholar and poet, Emyljan Balc’kyj. The committee formulated the official announcement of the prize in several languages and distributed it in various Rusyn publications both in the United States and in all the other Rusyn-inhabited countries. The winner of the initial award will be announced at the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns to be held in Budapest, May 30-June 1, 1997.

The prize helps promote the use of Rusyn in literary works, and encourages Rusyn writers and poets to demonstrate that the Rusyn language is without question capable of expressing emotional experiences and intellectual concepts. The Slovak Studies Association Prize, the Shevchenko Prize for Ukrainian Literature, and the Mickiewicz Prize for Polish Literature are among numerous other examples of such awards. Our prize is appropriately named the Duchnovyc Prize after the Rusyn national awakener, writer, and dramatist of the nineteenth century, who stands as a powerful symbol of love for and devotion to the Rusyn people and Rusyn identity. Just as Duchnovyc drew attention to the plight of the Rusyns in the nineteenth century, so too it is hoped that this prize will bring contemporary Rusyns and the fruit of their creative impulses to international attention.

Finally, the Aleksander Duchnovyc Prize has been generously funded for the next five years by Steven Chepa of Toronto, president and chief executive officer of the Cheppa Corporation—a man with an impressive and varied background as a banker and business executive. Both Chepa’s parents were Carpatho-Rusyns—his father emigrated to Canada from Subcarpathian Rus’, his mother from the Lemko Region. Last year in their honor he funded the Polish, Slovak, and Ukrainian editions of the popular 24-page brochure on Carpatho-Rusyns produced by the C-RRC. Clearly, a special wisdom motivated Chepa’s decision to support the C-RRC’s work once again, this time a literary prize. By concretely rewarding exceptional work already accomplished, such prizes inspire the productive labor of creative talent in the future. When good wishes and promises of support are actually backed up by tangible aid, there will be positive results. The C-RRC’s thanks to Steven Chepa is echoed a thousand-fold by others now and in the years to come.

**OUR FRONT COVER**

This image of two Rusyn dancers is a restylization of a poster image by Ivan Čížmar, produced originally for the annual Svidník Folk Festival in 1971. In 1978, Jerry Jumba, then music and vocal director, as well as choreographer and co-founder of the Pittsburgh-based Slavjane Folk Ensemble, created this drawing from the festival’s poster. The graphic logo has become the representative image for the Slavjane Ensemble.
OLENA ŠINALI MANDYC (1902-1975)

For nearly half a century following its unveiling in 1933, a nearly twenty-foot monumental statue and pedestal of Aleksander Duchnovyc, the nineteenth-century "national awakener" of the Carpatho-Rusyns, stood on the main square at the southern entrance to the city of Prešov in eastern Slovakia. In 1977, the statue was removed from its prominent spot to make way for the construction of a new Slovak Theater. There was no chance that the statue of a Rusyn national leader would be returned to stand in front of a new center of Slovak culture. Consequently, three years later, in 1980, when the Duchnovyc statute was re-erected, it was placed outside the old center of the city in a square along the Torysa River. (See the front cover of the Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. IV, No. 3, 1981).

A few years later, the center of Prešov was closed permanently to traffic, and cars and trucks were redirected around the city. The main road from western Slovakia now passes right by the statue, so that at present more people see Duchnovyc than ever before. To be sure, most drivers do not know that it is a Rusyn national leader who is looking over them.

Even fewer people know that the creator of the Duchnovyc statute was a young woman and the first professionally trained Carpatho-Rusyn sculptor, Olena Šinali Mandyc. Very little is known of her biography, and this despite the fact that she lived the last three decades of her life in eastern Slovakia's largest city, Košice. It was only recently that the correct spelling of her married name was determined, and most published references still list her as Mondyc. She is also incorrectly described in most sources as a native of eastern Slovakia.

Olena Šinali was born in 1902 in Giulești (Hungarian: Gyulafalva), a Romanian-inhabited Greek Catholic village which is now in Romania, but which at the time was in southern Máramaros county of the Kingdom of Hungary. Her father, Stepan Šinali, was an elementary school teacher originally from a village near Bardéjev in eastern Slovakia. Olena was most influenced, however, by her mother Kateryna Kenedic, from whom she acquired a love of artistic creativity, and by her maternal grandfather, a worldly Greek Catholic priest who early on encouraged her budding extravert personality and eventual Bohemian lifestyle.

After completing elementary classes in her father's school in Giulești, Olena was sent to Košice and Budapest to complete her secondary (gymnasmum) education. In the interim, World War I had come to an end, southern Máramaros county became part of Romania, and the Šinali family returned to their native land which had by then become part of the new state of Czechoslovakia. In 1921, Olena went off to Czechoslovakia's capital of Prague, where for three years (1922-1925) she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts under the direction of the leading Czech sculptor of the time, Jan Sturs. After completing her formal studies, she married Ivan Mandyc, a law student from Subcarpathian Rus' who subsequently became her personal artistic promoter.

For the rest of the interwar period, the Mandycéš lived in Prague, although Olena's commissions for sculpture were linked closely to her Rusyn ancestral homeland. These included a series of busts of nineteenth-century national leaders for towns in Subcarpathian Rus' and eastern Slovakia, including Aleksander Duchnovyc in Sevľuš/Vynohradiv (1925) and in Chust (1932), Jevhenij Fencyk in Užhorod (1926), Adolf Dobrians'kyj in Michalovce (1928) and in Užhorod (1929), and Aleksander Mitrak in Mukačevo (1931).

It was in 1927, however, that Mandycé received her first major commission—a larger than life-size standing figure of the founding-president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk. The statue and pedestal measured over 23 feet high and was erected in Užhorod on October 28, 1928 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia as well as to symbolize the relationship of Subcarpathian Rus' to the rest of the country. Her second major commission was the statue of Duchnovyc that still stands in Prešov and that was erected in 1933 following a successful fund-raising campaign among mostly local Carpatho-Rusyns who paid for the monument.

Mandycé's productive career as a sculptor was not to last long, however. Toward the end of the World War II, she and her husband moved to Mukačevo, which at the time was under Hungarian rule, but after Subcarpathian Rus' was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1945, the couple settled in Košice in eastern Slovakia. The conditions at the end of the war had a devastating effect on Olena's health, and despite her best efforts at modeling, she had lost feeling in her hands. For the next three decades she lived in Košice in virtual obscurity, working as a clerk in a clothing store.

Worse still was the fate of her artistic work. In 1939, the Hungarians dismantled her statue of president Masaryk, which after the war found its way to Czechoslovakia where the Communist authorities eventually melted it down for scrap metal. As recently as 1995, vandals destroyed the bust of Dobrians'kyj in the southeastern Slovak town of Michalovce. Fortunately, the creative work of Olena Mandycé on behalf of her Carpatho-Rusyn people remains alive in the impressive statue of Duchnovyc that stands along a main thoroughfare of Prešov and that is in full view of thousands of people everyday.

Philip Michaels
In July 1996, the Carpatho-Rusyn Society of Pittsburgh and the Rusin Association of Minnesota co-sponsored a Rusyn Heritage Tour to major points of interest for Rusyn Americans in Poland, Slovakia, and Transcarpathia. Andrea Kaufmann, a high school English teacher of Rusyn background, traveled with the group and later recorded her thoughts and impressions. For information on this year's trip scheduled for early summer, contact the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, 125 Westland Drive, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217.—Editor

This past summer, I joined approximately thirty-five of our members in a thoroughly memorable tour of our ancestral homeland in the Carpathian Mountains and surrounding lowlands of Slovakia, Poland, and Ukraine. In the words of a sister traveler, "It was the trip of a lifetime!" Indeed, it was. Each day was filled with rare experiences, opportunities to meet people, and places to see that many of us did not even know existed. I can only encourage each of you to join a future tour group whenever time, money, and health permit. The airline, tour bus, hotel accommodations, and food were of the highest quality.

Our tour leaders, John Righet and Jerry Jumba, planned an enriching and full itinerary, tirelessly bringing to reality with almost alchemistic skill what had begun as an ambitious, alluring plan on paper, a dream. Their combined talents and humor served to make the tour one of joy, camaraderie, and invaluable learning. Our local guides, Eva and Tatiana, generously helped us with translations and negotiations. Csaba, our bus driver, transported us securely.

Although it is impossible to describe the richness of the whole experience on paper, as it is impossible to capture the vast beauty of the Carpathian Mountains on film, I feel moved to try and convey some of what I gained on this "1996 Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage Tour."

Of primary importance is the pride I feel in being Rusyn that has grown tremendously as a direct result of making this trip and learning more about the lives of our people. I am, admittedly, a beginning student of our culture, although I am probably not so different from many Rusyn Americans of my generation. My grandparents immigrated to the United States early this century. I grew up learning customs that surround Christmas and Easter, dancing to the music played by my uncle Bill Lechko, eating the delicious foods cooked by my mother Irene Rokoski, and attempting annually to create pysanky with stylus and beeswax. As a young child I felt that my mother's family embodied some very special qualities, which I vaguely interpreted as artistic creativity and a deep wisdom stemming from an almost intuitive knowledge of nature. I enjoyed being with these relatives, and it was my experiences with them that shaped my notions of who the Rusyns are. I am happy to report that the people we met on our trip confirmed and concretized my notions.

That Rusyns are, indeed, a creative and artistic people, was confirmed when our group met and learned about several accomplished artists. On one of our first days of sightseeing, we learned about Nykyfor, a self-taught Lemko artist, who lived from 1895 to 1968 (see the biography in the Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 3). Due to family circumstances, he remained illiterate and untrained for any work. Throughout his early life, he begged on the streets of the attractive spa town Krynica, Poland. With a mighty belief in his talent, he drew copiously and gave to those he begged from detailed illustrations of various aspects of the town, its prominent buildings and stations, its stylish visitors, and its churches, bishops, and saints, done on any discarded paper he could find. Not until 1959, with an exhibition of his work in Paris, did the world see and recognize Nykyfor's talent. His grave marker, a mausoleum, bears the name Nikifor Krynicki, "Nikifor of Krynica."

When the Polish government expelled all Rusyns from this southern region of Poland in 1948, they allowed Nykyfor to stay, but rather than acknowledge his Rusyn heritage, they gave him the name of the town, thereby absorbing him into their own culture. Now that the Communist government has dissolved, his correct Rusyn surname Drovnjak will soon be added to the tomb. Our group viewed Nykyfor's drawings as well as photographs of him at the Nikifor Museum (Museum Nikifora) in Krynica. In the nearby town of Nowy Sącz, another museum displays the largest collection of his drawings and sells prints of his work, which perhaps may become available here in the future through one of our associations.

The next Rusyn-Lemko artist we met, also in Krynica, is very much alive. He is Petro Trochanovskyj (pen name, Murjanka), a poet and also a cantor in the Orthodox church near his home. Our group enjoyed profound spiritual and musical experiences with Petro. One day, he took us through places significant and holy for Lemko Rusyns; the next evening he provided song and dance. We walked with him up the steep hill that eventually leads to his home. On the climb we first visited the cemetery with Nykyfor's grave and two churches. One is a large, new church, still under construction. The other is the small, old church that it will replace, and which presently serves up to 250 worshipers at a time, even though most are forced to stand out-of-doors. In this ancient, tiny church, Petro and Jerry chanted together a melodic prayer of haunting beauty, invoking the memory of our ancestors. Petro lives close to the top of the hill, beyond the churches, and we were invited to return there.

The next evening, after dinner, Petro and his teenage son prepared a glorious bonfire in their backyard. Kolbasi, soda, and beer appeared out of nowhere. An accordion appeared, too; Jerry played it and sang. Several friends of Petro and his son came to sing and eat with us. What a joy—to sit on a hill in the Carpathian range, one that your great-grandmother may have trod, to sit amongst a group of exuberant people, almost all of whom had Rusyn roots, to hear an evening full of songs all in Rusyn. It was incredible!
Although Petro sang heartily for us and even danced a few steps, he did not recite any of his poems, which he reportedly delivers with passion. Nonetheless, the evening was a thrill, and I’m sure my fellow travelers would agree.

Another famous Rusyn from the past whose memory we encountered next was Aleksander Duchnovyc (1803-1865). A priest and a playwright, he served as canon of the Greek Catholic cathedral in Prešov, Slovakia, and also organized the Prešov Literary Society during the 1850s. He is remembered as the “national awakener” because, although he lived the first half of his life alienated from Rusyn culture, once he reaffirmed his Rusyn identity, he worked tirelessly through both art and politics to encourage his people to realize their full potential. As an educated man and a priest, he drew from his life the experiences which allowed him to write the first drama in the Rusyn language. Duchnovyc realized that illiterate, uneducated people could understand drama, as opposed to literature, and that the theater could have great socio-political and cultural significance for the Rusyns. In his play, *Virtue is More Important than Riches* (available from the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center), he hoped to steer his flock away from the tavern by purposefully exposing alcoholism as a widespread weakness or disease that debilitated otherwise capable individuals. In addition, he dramatized the equally debilitating superstition that mislabeled competent, prosperous individuals as witches and friends of the devil, and not as they actually were—simply hard workers. Duchnovyc presented as alternatives education, disciplined work, and faith in God as the paths to security and happiness.

Learning of Nykyfor and Duchnovyc and meeting Petro affirmed my childhood impressions of the Rusyn people as talented and creative. Now I was ready for more Rusyn art, music, song, and dance. You will not be surprised, then, that it was great fun for me to visit the Warhola Family Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce, Slovakia. While Andy Warhol’s work was not to the taste of all members of our group, I felt that for the first time I understood it. Seeing the village of Miková where his parents had lived, driving through the mountains which were a part of their lives, and observing the church icons which first influenced his technique, I felt I grasped at least something about the genius of his work.

The main reason that exposure to Rusyn talents has boosted my ethnic pride is that all I had ever really known about Rusyns, besides our food and holiday customs, is that we were largely peasants, an underclass who had not made our mark in the world. Being in Europe brought that whole issue into clearer perspective for me. The Rusyns’ peasant status, as I see it, has been a result of external factors that were surely out of our people’s hands. So, I feel proud of our Rusyn talent. I myself happen to enjoy the arts and so it pleases me all the more when Rusyns have distinguished themselves through art and other creative endeavors.

I was also able to see, on the other hand, possibly why the Rusyns have remained in an inferior position for so long. First, I saw that Rusyns are a people without a country. They live throughout several countries in Europe, primarily in the three our group visited, and there they are a distinct group, identified by name and language, as well as by choice. In the countries that acknowledge them, they are a minority and often experience “minority” treatment. Even in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, where they are a majority, they remain unacknowledged and thereby disadvantaged. With no state of their own, they are dependent upon the good will of local governments to grant them recognition as well as the rights to educate themselves and publish in their own language. Geographically divided by the Carpathian Mountain ranges and politically divided by borders—and further divided by religious differences—the Rusyn people seem never to have been able to garner the collective strength necessary to gain control over their own lives.

Also, I saw that because over the centuries Rusyns have been positioned squarely in the middle of two or more major powers, they inevitably suffered the effects of the conflicts between those contending powers, none of whom found the Rusyns valuable, except as chattel. Hence, Rusyns have literally been caught in the middle, and today, still without control over their own political or economic lives, they remain the object of prejudice.

One example of prejudice against Rusyns was experienced by one of our fellow travelers. He was in a restaurant ordering food in his most polite and error-free Rusyn. In response to his order, though, the waiter laughed to his face out loud, and then returned to the service area, where he shared the joke with his fellow waiters. All laughed except one. This last waiter then came to his table and asked, “Are you Rusyn?” to which he nodded. The waiter add, “Me, too.” Somehow, when I see my own people stifled by the effects of disadvantage, I cannot help feeling even greater sympathy for other peoples in the world who are objects of prejudice because they cannot succeed socially, economically, or politically. The thousands of hard-working, educated, and prosperous descendants of Rusyns who live in the United States and Canada attest to the capabilities of our people when they are free to thrive. Even the youngest member of our tour group, a ten-year-old girl, could see the difference that opportunity makes in the life of an individual let alone a whole people.

Carpatho-Rusyn American
Since arriving home, I have reread chapter one of *The Rusyns of Minnesota* by William Duly (available from the C-RRC), in which he discusses “Rusin Historical Forces in Europe.” Now that I have actually walked on the soil of the Carpathians, the history of the migrations, politics, and religious developments affecting our ancestors makes more sense to me. I can visualize the Lemko Region, the Presov Region, and Transcarpathia. I know where the Dukl’a Pass is and why it is important. I have experienced the need to know four languages (Polish, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Rusyn) in three countries. Concrete, personal experience has added the dimension of reality to my previously abstract and incomplete perceptions. I have become much more aware that our people were subjugated for centuries and are still a subordinate culture. More importantly, it has become clearer to me that although subordination has influenced our identity, it does not describe, or prescribe, that identity. William Duly explains in his introduction that occupying the position of a subordinate culture limits the markers a people have by which to distinguish their culture from others, that is, it limits the number of channels through which people can express themselves. Therefore, because Rusyns have been a border people inhabiting lands situated between major powers, they have always occupied the position of a subordinate culture, a situation which has hampered our people’s identity as well as their general development.

This brings me to my next, and last, point. I was grateful to discover that Rusyn culture is not dead. It is not just a memory of parents or grandparents to be passed down in some vague, dreamy form, only to be lost in the mists of receding time. I now know that Rusyn culture will not die with my mother’s generation, nor even with mine. It will exist for my children to explore, to know, to enjoy, and to transmit. A few specific experiences convinced me that Rusyn culture is very much alive, that it is being lived, and that it is being expanded by young Rusyns. I learned this as our group not only visited seventeenth-century churches, mute testaments of our past, but also met twentieth-century people, actively involved with the present.

Young people sang for us at Petro’s kolbasi roast. As I mentioned earlier, friends of Petro and his son, all members of their church, joined them in an evening of singing Rusyn songs for our enjoyment. The teenagers sang in robust voices with ease and gusto. They sang their own Rusyn songs. They clearly owned them. The evening was a thrilling experience precisely because our entertainers were young people.

Then, on the evening of our arrival in Presov, Slovakia, our group was surprised to be feted with a fancy dinner and live entertainment in a beautifully decorated dining room of our hotel. Musicians from the performing group, Šarišan—four young men in traditional garb: two fiddlers, an accordionist, and a bassist—played and sang throughout the evening. They played, all with professional ease and great energy, the entire list of Rusyn music that our tour leaders requested. This music was obviously a vibrant part of their lives, not something they had dusted off for our benefit.

Both these experiences provided a frame through which I could imagine the future. The musicians, like Petro’s singers, are the same age as my children. Who knows, they may meet each other one day. The children of all these musicians certainly will learn Rusyn songs. Hopefully, my children and grandchildren will learn and know them, too.

Hanka Servicka, another talented and accomplished professional artist, sings in a plaintive and beautiful voice. The freshness of her work promises that Rusyn music has a future as well as a past. Her repertory includes old songs, and she writes new ones in traditional style. One evening, our group was graced by her company in our hotel dining room, where she sang two lovely songs. Both the folkloric ensemble Šarišan and Hanka Servicka record on cassettes and CD, so their music, which helps me to feel connected to my heritage, is available to all.

Still another group of artists demonstrates the Rusyn ability to promulgate the artistic heritage, despite obstacles. The Transcarpathian Folk Choir, based in Užhorod, Ukraine, gave a special performance for our group. Again we were inspired by the fact that its members are Rusyns. In Transcarpathia, Rusyns comprise a majority of the population, but they are not acknowledged as a distinct people by the Ukrainian government. Therefore, performing Rusyn songs and dances puts them in a risky position. Yet, they continue their performances, albeit calling their material “Transcarpathian,” and presenting two or three Ukrainian dances during each performance. These musicians and dancers are of all ages, and represent the spirit of the Rusyn people, reaching from the past, participating in the present, anticipating the future. We can only hope that the future allows for increased liberty for Rusyns to share their culture openly and proudly.

I cannot close without mentioning the experience which was probably the most profound of all for many of us, and the one which invites each of us into the Rusyn future. I am referring to the encounter with our European relatives for the very first time. That experience was unique for each of our travelers, but meaningful and emotional for all. Knowing people over there and caring about them enriches one’s experience of the place. I, and perhaps others as well, now feel strongly motivated to learn the Rusyn language so that we can correspond with my cousins and read the moving poems of Petro Murjanka-Trochanovskyj. I would also love to learn Rusyn dances and hear Rusyn stories and folk tales.

So many more things about our trip are worth sharing, but I leave it to others to describe those aspects of our journey. To those of you with whom I travelled, you were wonderful travelling companions. To the rest of you, I hope you are able to go in the future.

Andrea Kaufman
Woodmere, New York
INTERETHNIC CONFLICT, ALLIANCE, AND IDENTITY IN THE HISTORY OF THE
SLAVJANE FOLK ENSEMBLE

The following article is by Robert Carl Metyl', a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh who has just returned from more than a year’s research and fieldwork on Rusyn traditional music and contemporary culture in eastern Slovakia. Portions of this article have been published in a collection on the music of ethnic minorities in Central Europe, entitled Echo der Vielfalt [Echoes of Diversity], eds. Ursula Hemetek and Emil H. Lubej (Vienna, 1996).—Editor

Slavjane, which means “the Slavs,” is a dance, song, and instrumental youth ensemble based in western Pennsylvania and consisting of about fifty-five performers ranging in age from five to nineteen. It is an egalitarian, non-professional performing arts collective, whose current bylaws stipulate: “All performing members are required to participate in all phases of performance, including singing, dancing, and playing of a musical instrument to the best of their ability.” Performing members receive instruction from Slavjane’s adult directors in dancing, singing, and the playing of one or two musical instruments. The organization has an informal one-month trial period for new performing members, but conducts no auditions. Slavjane has been in existence under its current name since the early 1970s, but has direct predecessors in other performing arts groups which were active in the 1950s and 1960s. Among the Pittsburgh-area predecessors to Slavjane, on the basis of membership and sponsorship, were the Western Pennsylvania Byzantine Catholic Chorus (predominantly an adult performing group), Karpatho-Rus’, and the Slav Cultural Dancers.

Slavjane’s Current Status

The group’s leader is its choreographer and program director, Jack Poloka, an active figure in Pittsburgh area Slavic performing arts since the 1950s. Its headquarters is the Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, just outside Pittsburgh. Slavjane is co-sponsored by the Greek Catholic Union, or GCU, a fraternal insurance corporation, founded in Pennsylvania in 1892 as the Sojedinenije Greko-Kaftoliceskich Russkich Bratstv, or the Union of Greek Catholic Rusyn Brotherhoods. The majority of Slavjane’s adult officers and trustees are of Rusyn descent, as is nearly one-half of its artistic staff and approximately twenty-five percent of its performing members. Slavjane is governed by a board of officers democratically elected by the organization’s parents’ group. The parents’ group plays a vital role in supporting the performing members in a variety of ways, including making costumes, transporting performers to and from engagements, fundraising, and performing music for recordings used to supplement live music at Slavjane rehearsals and performances.

The Slavjane community is characterized by intergenerational continuity, which is expressed by parents in conversations and is also in programs, bylaws, and other related publications. For example, the program notes to Slavjane’s 1994 Eighteenth Annual Concert state the following: “Our heritage is a rich legacy passed on lovingly from one generation to the next. It is truly a cherished bond between the past, present, and future. Slavjane’s goal is to preserve and share this legacy with our family, friends, and neighbors.”

Slavjane’s intergenerational nature is underscored by the fact that a number of the parents of children who perform with the group were themselves performing members of the ensemble when they were children and young adults in the 1970s. For instance, Jack Poloka’s granddaughter is a performing member of Slavjane, as were all of his four children, including Dean Poloka, who is Slavjane’s current associate choreographer. Dean is an amateur folklorist who has conducted participant-observational fieldwork among Rusyn and Slovak traditional performing artists in the European homeland. Also, Slavjane’s president, Greg Fejka, related through marriage to Jack Poloka, is a Slavjane alumnus with two children now performing in the current group.

Slavjane is the official representative of culture for the predominantly Rusyn-descent Byzantine Catholic Archdiocese of Pittsburgh. The Rusyns of the greater Pittsburgh area, represented by Slavjane, are chartered members of the Pittsburgh Folk Festival, a popular annual public event that highlights the traditional cultures of many ethnic groups in western Pennsylvania. Slavjane also appears at a variety of other venues throughout Pennsylvania and several neighboring states. In the 1970s, the ensemble performed traditional American and Slavic material on the grounds of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. The group has also performed at the Epcot Center in Orlando, Florida, and at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. For many, the highlight of Slavjane’s history was its June 1992 performance at the Thirteenth Annual Festival of Culture and Sport in Medzilaborce, Slovakia.

The ethnic “heritage” and “legacy” of the Slavjane ensemble is far from homogeneous. What is called “our heritage” is not that of one discrete European ethnic group, but rather an accretion of several eastern European heritages represented by the ethnically diverse membership of the ensemble itself. This heterogeneity becomes apparent through the simple observation of physical objects owned by parents and performers present during a Slavjane rehearsal. One is confronted by a puzzling and seemingly incongruous array of messages conveyed by the diverse media, whether T-shirts, car bumper stickers, or decorative instrument case decals. One encounters potentially conflicting messages such as “Kosovo je Srpska” (Kosovo is Serbian) on one instrument case resting alongside another with a souvenir sticker of the “Jadrany Junior [Croatian] Tamburitza’s,” yet the respective owners of these instruments dance happily together nearby. As one would expect, shirts worn by some parents speak of their Rusyn ethnicity, with such messages as “Carpatho-Rusin, Someone Special,” and “Russka Dolina University.” Russka Dolina, or “Rusnak Valley,” is the popular name of one section in the working-class Pittsburgh neighborhood of Greenfield. The valley received its name thanks to its concentration of Rusyn immigrants and their descendants, and its large, highly visible Rusyn Byzantine Catholic church, St. John Chrysostom, the headquarters of Slavjane’s predecessor, the Western Pennsylvania Byzantine Catholic Church. Also visible at Slavjane rehearsals and performances are shirts of parents bearing the designations, “Czechoslovakia” and “Magyarorszag” [Hungary], accompanied by correspond-
ing ethnic and national emblems. Vanity license plates on a number of parents’ cars read SLAVJANE, and one may also see bumper stickers that communicate ethno-national proclivities, including messages of Slovak orientation.

The heterogeneous eastern European ethnic composition of Slavjane’s community, indicated by the personal property of its performers and members, is reflected in the image of the ensemble’s pan-Slavic repertory and vice versa. This heterogeneous pan-Slavic image is also projected outward to the general public, attracting patronage from a heterogeneous admixture of patrons, including Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Slovak groups. Slavjane’s directors transmit and reinforce this image by customarily announcing at performances that the group “performs the traditional music and dance of many Slavic peoples, specializing in that of the Carpatho-Russian people.”

**A Word on Rusyn Identity in Relation to Ukrainian and Slovak Identity**

Of particular interest is the oppositional relationship to Rusyns on the part of Pittsburgh-area Ukrainians and Slovaks. American Rusyns have experienced the greatest conflict with American Ukrainians, especially those originating from western Ukraine (Galicia). By contrast, the Pittsburgh-area Slovak response to Rusyns, while not always idyllic, has been characterized by a greater degree of tolerance. General attitudinal difference on the part of Slovaks and Ukrainians to the concept of Rusyn ethnicity may be attributed in part to the Slovaks’ readiness to recognize Rusyns as a separate and distinct people on the basis of their language and culture. Slovaks are a West Slavic people who speak a West Slavic language and are predominantly Roman Catholic or Lutheran. Rusyns, by contrast, are an East Slavic people who preserve an East Slavic set of Rusyn dialects and adhered primarily to Eastern Christianity, whether Byzantine/Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Since Ukrainians are also East Slavs, it is simpler to argue that Rusyns are ethnologically Ukrainian than to argue that they are Slovak.

The issue of Rusyn identity and Ukrainophily is more complex and problematic when one considers the activities of Ukrainophile Rusyns in eastern Slovakia. The only organization representing Rusyns in Slovakia before the Revolution of 1989, KSUT (Kul’turnyi sojuz ukrajins’kykh trudjascych/Cultural Union of Ukrainian Workers), has been criticized for being a vehicle for Ukrainization and a contributor to the erosion of Rusyn identity in eastern Slovakia. Careful analysis reveals, however, that while Ukrainization was part of its agenda, KSUT also sponsored, organized, and supported many traditional performing arts groups and performance events devoted to local Rusyn culture. The foremost example is the annual June folkloric festival in Svädník (first staged in Medzilaborce in 1955), which showcases hundreds of traditional Rusyn performers. Since Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution of 1989, KSUT’s successor SKRUSR (Sojuz rusyniv-ukrains’cy Slovaca/koji Respublyky/Union of Rusyns-Ukrainians of the Slovak Republic) has increased its efforts toward the propagation of local Rusyn performing arts. An outstanding example of this is the annual Makovyc’ka Struna concert (established in 1973) which is held in Bardejov each December under the artistic direction of Andrej Karško, a founding member of PULS, Makovyc’ka Struna features dozens of local Rusyn solo and duo vocalists who perform traditional, yet innovative and little-heard Rusyn folk songs from eastern Slovakia. Many Rusyn “star” singers of eastern Slovakia first achieved lasting public recognition through their performances at Makovyc’ka Struna. These include Anna Servicka and the male duo Vasilenko and Džupin, who were honored in 1996 as recipients of gold cassette awards in Slovakia for outstanding sales of their recordings of Rusyn songs. Many Rusyn songs which have become classic favorites in eastern Slovakia—including “Švit’ mišačku” (Shine, Moon), performed by the male duo Lukáčko-Karafa, received considerable exposure through the venue provided by Makovyc’ka Struna.

Slavjane’s contacts in Slovakia have been with the Rusyn Renaissance Society, an organization with no Ukrainian orientation comprised of many former members of KSUT, hence the focus of the present essay on that relationship.

**The Early Years of Performing Arts and The Puzzle of Identity**

A look back in history reveals that conflict with Pittsburgh’s Ukrainian community and cordial relations with the local Slovak community already characterized Slavjane’s proto-ensemble, the Western Pennsylvania Byzantine Catholic Chorus. The chorus debuted at the First Annual Pittsburgh Folk Festival in 1956, and performed under the ethnic designation Carpatho-Russian. It consisted of adult members of several local Byzantine Catholic parishes, including Jack Poloka. The group’s transformation from a predominantly liturgical chorus performing exclusively for “insiders” to a traditional performing arts ensemble geared to the general public resulted from the meeting of two individuals: Poloka and Dick Crum, the festival’s organizer.

Crum was then the director of the world-renowned Duquesne University Tamburitza, an ever-popular university student ensemble with a predominantly pan-Slavic repertory. At the beginning of his association with Poloka and his “Carpatho-Russian” circle, Crum expressed open bewilderment at its members’ idiosyncratic and multifarious relationship to their own ethnicity. He challenged them to justify their use of the name Russian, since their ancestral homeland was geographically far removed from Russia. Moreover,
several members of the early “Carpatho-Russian” ensemble socialized freely and even performed with the festival’s Slovak ensemble. Perhaps more puzzling was the fact that although the “Carpatho-Russians” all either spoke or understood a language resembling Ukrainian, the “Carpatho-Russians” and Ukrainians never mixed and, in fact, viewed one another with enmity.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the group experienced several name changes, including Karpatho-Rus’, and The Slav Cultural Dancers. The latter name was predictive of what would become not only the group’s future name, Slavjane, but also its eventual pan-Slavic orientation.

The 1970s Synthesis of Rusyn Identity and a Pan-Slavic Repertory

In the early 1970s, several important elements aligned to produce the requisite conditions for Slavjane’s consolidation of the Rusyn identity and its expansion of its repertory and patronage base. Among the primary factors were (1) the effect of the writings of the historian Paul R. Magocsi; (2) the sponsorship of the Greek Catholic Union; and (3) the adoption by Slavjane of an open membership policy.

Influenced in part by the work of Professor Magocsi, Slavjane began identifying itself specifically as Carpatho-Rusyn at public, interethnic events. The Rusyn fraternal insurance corporation, the GCU, became the ensemble’s co-sponsor. An intensive development and expansion of the ensemble’s Rusyn repertory was also realized during this period, largely through the inspired and multifaceted creative efforts of Jerry Jumba, who from 1971 to 1980 collaborated with Poloka as the ensemble’s co-director. Slavjane’s affirmation of Rusyn ethnicity peaked in June 1992, when it was honored by the Rusyn Renaissance Society as the first Rusyn-American ensemble invited to perform in the European homeland at the Thirtieth Annual Festival of Culture and Sport in eastern Slovakia. The location of the festival, Medzilaborce, is also the site of the Warhola Family Museum of Modern Art, a short distance from the Rusyn village of Miková, from which the Pittsburgh-born artist Andy Warhol’s Rusyn parents emigrated. The cost of Slavjane’s trip was paid principally by the Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts in New York City.

In spring and summer of 1993, Jack Poloka’s son, Dean Poloka, returned to eastern Slovakia to work with members of the Rusyn Renaissance Society in Prešov, as well as to rehearse with, and collect repertory from, the traditional performing arts companies, PULS and Sarišan. Dean returned to Pittsburgh in the summer of 1993 to instruct Slavjane in the new Rusyn and Prešov-Region material he collected. It has been modified to meet the needs of a youth group, and is now included in Slavjane’s performance repertory.

The changes reflected Jack Poloka’s professional vision for the group, which was influenced by three factors: (1) his pluralistic aesthetic and social sensibility; (2) his own dual Rusyn and Croatian origins; and (3) his admiration for the success and exposure of the Duquesne University Tamburitzans.

In 1973, Slavjane’s current president, Greg Fejka, was accepted with a full academic scholarship into the Duquesne University Tamburitzans. From 1973 to the present, the Duquesne University Tamburitzans have accepted a total of thirty-one Slavjane alumni among their ranks with academic scholarships. As a result, Slavjane became known as South Slavic folklore specialists, and by the mid-1980s was being engaged by the local Slovenian and Croatian communities to represent their respective cultures at the Pittsburgh Folk Festival. Since the successful cultivation and growth of this new South Slavic patronage base, Slavjane has been regularly hired to perform for many American Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian organizations, church festivals, and junior tamburitzan groups.

Aside from the Slavic world, Slavjane’s performance repertory includes material from other European cultures. Examples of the latter include the Austrian folk song “Edelweiss,” sung in English, an Italian instrumental medley, and several Ashkenazi Jewish folk instruments. Such variety of repertory and patronage together with its unique pan-Slavic Rusynophile orientation is what distinguishes Slavjane from other ensembles. The group’s orchestra contains South Slavic tamburitza ensemble instruments as well as western European band instruments. Tamburitza ensemble instruments are sometimes utilized even during performances of Rusyn material, resulting in a stylistically syncretic blend of music and instruments.

Slavjane’s non-professional status, coupled with the characteristic intensity and spontaneity of its performances, prompted one American reviewer, Susyn Mihalasky, familiar with “the exacting regimentation, synchronization, and controlled emotional discipline of East European folk dancers” to refer to the Slavjane’s performance in Medzilaborce as “controlled chaos” (Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. XV, No. 3, 1992, p. 11). At the same time, the Rusyn journalist and singer Anna Kuzmjakova, of the Prešov-based Rusyn newspaper, Narodný novynky, witnessed the same performance as the above reviewer, and wrote that “the group Slavjane, from the American city Pittsburgh, truly has an authentic repertory, when considering its preservation of many Slavic attributes” (Narodný novynky, 15 July 1992).

Through the combined channels outlined above, Slavjane has become the most visible purveyor of Rusyn traditional performing arts in western Pennsylvania, and is now the most significant Rusyn performing arts group anywhere in the United States. Its reputation has been enhanced by exposure at the Pittsburgh Folk Festival and other venues, where it consistently announces at all performances and to all audiences, that while it “performs the repertory of many Slavic peoples,” its “area of specialization is the traditional music and dance of the Rusyn people.” Thus, Slavjane has become the principal local symbol of Rusyn culture to the general public, to Orthodox as well as Byzantine Catholic Rusyn Americans, to other ethnic groups, and to de-ethnicized Americans, or Americans of Rusyn background with allegiances to other ethnic and religious groups.
Slavjane in an Interethnic Context: The Ukrainian and Slovak Responses

In the essay, “Karpaty: koliška alebo križovatka balad?” (The Carpathians: The Cradle or the Crossroads of Ballads), Orest Zilins’kyj describes the Carpathian Mountain region as “a crossroads of influences borne in merchants’ wagons and artisans’ bundles by pilgrims, seasonal farmworkers, wandering soldiers, and beggars.” Slavjane’s Rusyn repertory also occupies a crossroads, in that it contains a number of popular folk pieces readily recognized by a mixed American audience, including members of various Slavic ethnicities and Hungarians. One may find in its programs many examples of Rusyn folk tunes, texts, and dances that are either shared by or very similar to those of the dominant ethnic groups of the states they inhabit, i.e., Ukrainians, Slovaks, and Poles. This recognizability of repertory on an interethnic level, coupled with the Rusyns’ status in Europe as a stateless ethnic minority, has elicited divergent reactions to Slavjane’s performances from sundry ethnic groups.

For example, the ensemble’s Rusyn performances in the 1970s inspired militant reactions from Pittsburgh-area Ukrainian Americans. At one such event, the 1972 Allegheny County Fair in greater Pittsburgh’s South Park, a Rusyn group was scheduled to follow the performance of a Ukrainian group. A disturbance ensued when the Ukrainians refused to vacate the stage for an extended period, temporarily barring the Rusyn group’s entrance. Eventually, the Ukrainians acquiesced and allowed the Rusyns to perform, reportedly under the threat of police intervention. On another occasion in the 1970s, when Slavjane’s turn came to perform at the Sto-Rox Nationalities Festival in McKees Rocks, the master of ceremonies, a well-known media figure in local Ukrainian-American cultural circles, declined to introduce the Rusyn group as Rusyn. The festival’s display chairman that decreed the manner in which “others rape our heritage,” and “pray[ed] God we can be spared this persecution in Pittsburgh.” The letter ended with the terse statement, “If you want two Ukrainian groups, we [the Ukrainians] can accommodate.” Poloka and others clearly recall how in 1979 the Ukrainian contingent openly sought to prevent the Rusyns from appearing at the Pittsburgh Folk Festival, claiming “double representation” of Ukrainian ethnicity.

Poloka hastens to add that in recent years such expressions of antagonism have diminished markedly. Recent reports of cooperation between Ukrainian- and Rusyn-American cultural activists augur well for a more harmonious future. That some of the rigidity of the past has relaxed may be deduced from the 1994 participation of a Slavjane graduating senior and new Duquesne University Tamburitzan inductee, Robert Bartko, who is of Rusyn descent, in both Slavjane and the local Ukrainian group, Poltava.

Nevertheless, Slavjane has not yet been engaged to perform at a Ukrainian function, and it has modified its repertory somewhat to minimize possible antagonistic reactions from Pittsburgh-area Ukrainian Americans. An example of Slavjane’s deference to local Ukrainian-American cultural activists is its avoidance of Hucul costumes, which they had used from 1976 until approximately the early 1980s. While there is no attempt to exclude systematically all transregional Rusyn and Ukrainian material from Slavjane’s performance repertory, its inclusion is not specifically designed to attract Ukrainian patronage.
Conversely, Slavjane has maintained a relatively cordial relationship with the Pittsburgh-area Slovak community since the earliest days of the proto-ensemble in 1956. For example, Slavjane performed at the annual convention of the National Slovak Society held in Pittsburgh in 1973. More recently, they appeared at the Second and Third Annual Slovak Heritage Festivals held at the University of Pittsburgh in 1992 and 1993, which were attended by many prominent individuals in the Slovak-American community.

An examination of Slavjane’s engagement sheets and program notes from the early 1970s to the present registers many performances that intentionally included what may be termed as Rusyn and Slovak “crossover pieces,” that is, transregional folk songs shared by Rusyns and Slovaks that are popular in both diasporas. Examples include “Od Ungvara,” “Vezzi zajdu,” and “A ja taka čarna.” These pieces have customarily been included in order to please Slovak Americans who patronize Slavjane’s performances, and to address the substantial Rusyn contingent that originated in the Presov Region of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire that is now eastern Slovakia. Nowadays Slavjane’s directors are so sensitive to the large number of its patrons and fans of Rusyn and Slovak ethnicity who originated in eastern Slovakia that at Slavjane performances they commonly announce, both aloud and in their program notes, that the group “specializes in the music and dance of the Carpatho-Rusyn people of eastern Slovakia.”

The familiarity of many Slovaks with the transregional, transethnic Rusyn repertory, and their enthusiasm for it, indicates not only tolerance of Rusyns and even admiration of their traditional culture, but also the presence of Rusyn Americans in the audience who have adopted Slovak ethnicity, some of whom may not even be aware that they are of Rusyn descent. A remarkable demonstration of the prevalence of such Rusyn Americans occurred during the Second Annual Slovak Heritage Festival at the University of Pittsburgh in the fall of 1992. Slavjane’s sound equipment malfunctioned during the performance of a dance to a prerecorded instrumental arrangement of the song “Cervena ruža trojaka,” (“Red Roses Three”). Instead of halting their performance, the performers continued to dance without music. The surprised and delighted “Slovak” audience responded enthusiastically by singing the song to the end of the dance in the East Slavic language of the Rusyn minority culture, which is quite distinct from Slovak, the West Slavic language of the dominant culture.

The performing arts have been a unifier not only for many Rusyn Americans in families and communities both deethnicized and intact, but also for Rusyn-American performing artists, their friends and supporters, and their European Rusyn counterparts. John Righetti, Pittsburgh-area delegate to the Second World Congress of Rusyns, held in Krynica, Poland in 1993, described his bus trip from Slovakia to Poland with other delegates to the congress as follows:

As we travelled, the mountains got higher, the villages tinier and more scenic, and there was the singing. Although we Rusyns came from several different countries, we had as a binding tie our culture, manifested here in our folk music. “Cervena ruža”... and many others were songs shared by all of us who had gathered together for the same purpose, the perpetuation of a living Rusyn culture (Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1993, p. 2).

The transregionality of the Rusyn repertory and the openness and tolerance engendered by Slavjane’s pluralistic open membership policy and its pan-Slavic repertory have cut across ethnic and religious lines and unified Slavjane’s intercultural and multiethnic members, patrons, and fans. By adopting such a course of action, Slavjane has significantly increased the visibility of Rusyns as a distinct ethnic group to the community itself as well as to the public at large. Owing to historical circumstances, its decision constitutes a de facto act of political advocacy.

Slavjane’s tolerance of a broad range of individuals and groups, regardless of ethnicity or religion, and its perceptible lack of the kind of factionalism that at times is found in other ensembles, reflects an ethos shared by many in our field, and expressed succinctly by Jack Poloka: “It is through learning about other cultures that one learns how best to appreciate one’s own.”

(Research for this article was supported in part by a grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board [IREX] with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Department of State which administers the Title VIII Program. None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed.)