

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:

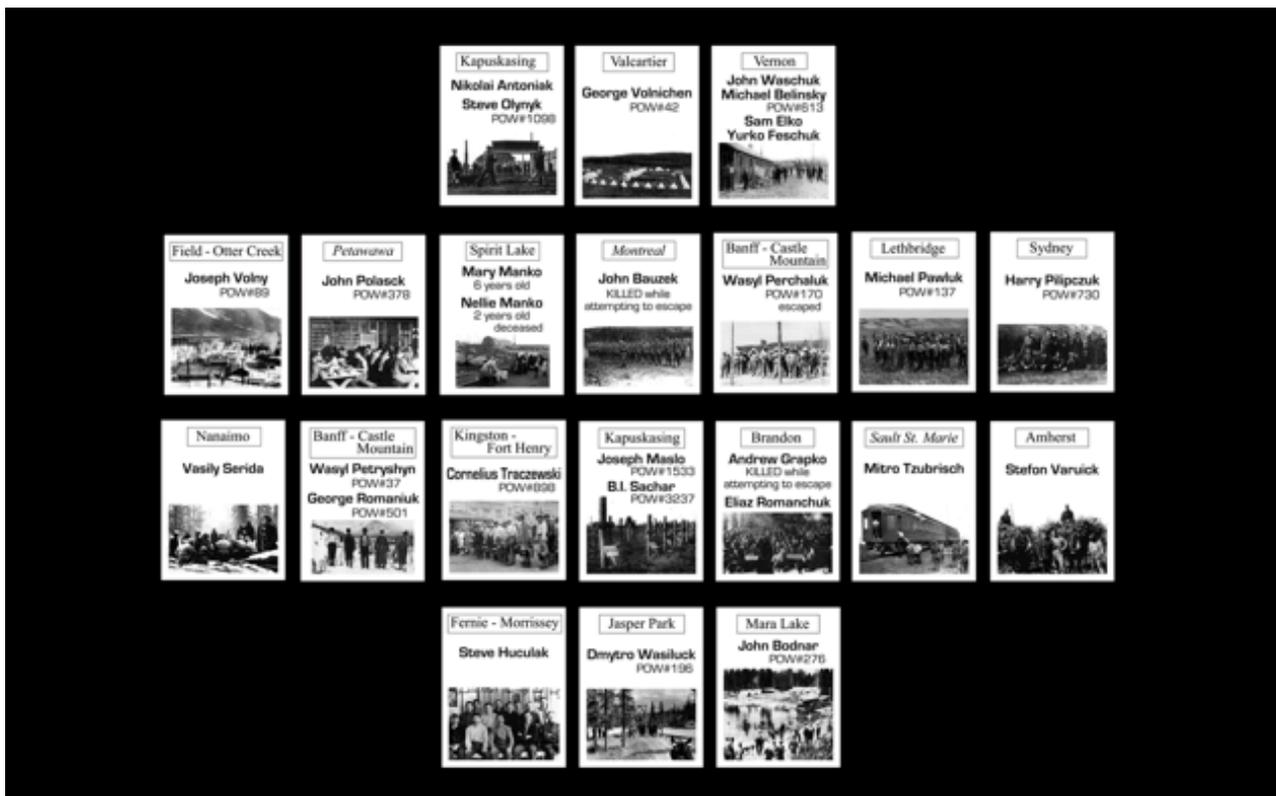
Free Lands. Canada. Free Lands. 160 Acres for each Ukrainian settler for only a \$10 registration fee. "Land, Wealth, Health, Manliness, Honour, Respect, Security, Safety." Free Lands. (Voices of the Silenced libretto, Gordon Gordey, August 2012)

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)