



## **Listening and Learning:**

### **What We are Doing & What We Plan to Do**

The Ukrainian Shumka Dancers is committed to offering a physically and emotionally safe and healthy environment for our entire community. Whether it be intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, Shumka acknowledges racism and discrimination exists within our community. We also acknowledge that racism and discrimination is a liability to the health and safety of our community. We continue to challenge ourselves to identify the issues, impacts, and injustices surrounding racism and discrimination and resolve to implement strategies to dismantle the systemic inequalities.

All we do centres on our visioning statements set by our Board, Staff and Stakeholders in regular strategic planning sessions. The Vision, Mission and Mandate of the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers is as follows:

#### **VISION**

Inspiring artists and audiences through evolving traditional boundaries, Shumka represents the pinnacle of Canadian-Ukrainian dance.

#### **MISSION**

Shumka promotes, develops and preserves professional Canadian-Ukrainian dance as community leaders.

#### **MANDATE**

Shumka creates a broad scope of original and collaborative interpretive works built upon the foundations of the Canadian and Ukrainian life experiences of its artists and the rich heritage of the Ukrainian folk culture.

Shumka achieves this mandate by:

- Respecting the origins of traditional Ukrainian culture, while integrating the Canadian experience and contemporary expectations in order to make its programs relevant to today's audiences.
- Creating a centre of excellence in dance education to prepare the next generation of citizens, dancers and creators in the art form.
- Collaborating with other artists in Edmonton, in Canada and internationally.
- Creating a hub of arts and culture activity in the community.
- Presenting art and experiences for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Engaging diverse communities through performance, education and opportunities for inclusive participation.

Inclusivity, diversity and acceptance are important bases for the organization and are considered in all we do. The overarching philosophy of the organization is to treat others as you wish to be treated.

Since moving into the Shumka Dance Centre in 2016, Shumka has had increased opportunities to open our doors to dancers, students, interested observers, collaborators and contributors. Together, we are people of all economic backgrounds, races and sexual orientation. All are not only welcomed...but invited.

The best testament of an organization's ingrained beliefs is in its actions. Below is a list of Shumka activities that demonstrate our belief in fair and equitable access to all.

## Shumka School of Dance

All children in the Shumka School are placed in classes according to age and dance ability. The common thread is an interest in dance. Many Shumka School families have no Ukrainian heritage background and reflect the racial diversity of Canada. They enjoy the warm, welcome setting and atmosphere, the leadership, instruction, additional opportunities and activities (ie: performances at the Jubilee Auditorium; opportunities to dance in Shumka productions; training in a variety of dance styles), and the art form itself. June Eeles, Programs & Outreach Administrator, is the face of the School for many. Parents confide in June about how welcome and at home they are made to feel as soon as they join the School.

Currently, as part of the Shumka 60 tour cast, Shumka has a new NextGen Program which provides professional touring and performance opportunities for young dancers in the School. They are cast in the Shumka 60 production based on dance ability and age range, and they are from a variety of backgrounds.



*Shumka 60 NextGen Cast*

Our Shumka School dancers perform once or twice annually at local care facilities for those who are hospitalized, and for their caregivers. These concerts are a highlight of the school term for the audiences and the dancers alike. Giving back to one's community is part of what is taught at the Shumka School.



*Kindness Matters*

In 2019, the Shumka School prepared and presented a very moving all-girls dance with almost 80 young performers from all age levels in the School and female dancers from the Company. Choreographed and taught by Shumka alumna Eldyka Simpson, the theme of the piece was bullying. Dancers of visibly different races and ethnicities were in the dance, which focused on inclusivity and acceptance of all. The piece was aptly titled "Kindness Matters."

Families of the Shumka School also come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The Shumka School offers numerous payment plans to fit a variety of family needs. Families with financial difficulties are not turned away. They are offered options to include their child(ren) regardless, and confidential, fair plans are provided that work with their realities.

## The Shumka Company

Many of the dancers in the professional Shumka company are not of Ukrainian descent. Dancers are chosen based on dance ability and fit with the choreography and style of Shumka's productions.

Dancers of the LGBTQ+ community are also part of our organization and are fully accepted as such.



*Shumka at 50 poster image*

**“As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Shumka has provided me a safe and supportive space to express an important part of my identity. It is a place that celebrates diversity and has accepted me for who I am. I can be proud of what makes me different, and this is due to Shumka’s ongoing commitment to love and acceptance.” – Michael Eeles, Shumka Dancer**

Shumka has pursued cross-cultural collaborations with groups including Kito No Taiko and Mattierin Irish Dancers. Pre-Covid, Shumka was in artistic discussions with Kalibante, an African Circus group based in Montreal. Those discussions will be rekindled in 2021.

In the past, some of Shumka's dance theatre themes could be seen as racist (ie: the evil Tartars, the Middle Eastern sultan/harem leader....). It has been discussed amongst Shumka Management and Artistic Teams that these themes will not be repeated in the future.

The Shumka Artistic Team is actively working on concepts to rebuild Act II of Shumka's Nutcracker to address the cultural appropriation that is part of the original Nutcracker story. This is a reality almost every ballet company in North America currently faces.

Shumka's productions strictly avoid the negative stereotypes of Ukrainian people that are often the subject of Ukrainian theatre and dance productions.

Current cultural/world relevance is an important aspect that is seriously considered when planning the next Shumka show/repertoire ideas. These ideas are discussed years in advance and an appropriate amount of time is taken to fully examine them in a current context within a Ukrainian heritage influence.

Premiered in 2018, Ancestors & Elders (A&E) was an all-encompassing project that was a truly collaborative and challenging process. The importance of genuinely understanding each culture - and one another - took more time than anticipated. The production was postponed by over 6 months to allow the proper amount of time it needed. We offered genuine artistic development and performance opportunities for Indigenous artists from 5-60 years of age, and told Indigenous and Ukrainian stories including those of relationships that weren't always positive.



*Ancestors & Elders 2018*

**“As a Canadian performing arts leader, Shumka embraces diversity and equality as illustrated so effectively through their Ancestors and Elders project; a genuinely moving Truth and Reconciliation performance.” - Shumka Board member Julian Mayne (who has held leadership positions at local arts organizations including the Winspear Centre, Fringe Theatre Adventures and ArtsHab)**



*A&E in rehearsal*

Through the A&E process we have offered our collaborators free use of the Shumka Dance Centre for their other projects. We also paid for commissioning and recording of music, choreography, lighting and assisted with staging for their own piece featured in the A&E remount in 2019. Our collaborating dance company, Running Thunder, has full rights to the piece. The A&E project continues with the documentary/show film (still touring Film Festivals including Kyiv and Austria) and screenings/panels that are being planned for the future (many in a rescheduling mode because of COVID).

Our most recent production – Mosquito’s Wedding – is based on the motto that “all we need is love,” and addresses female/male roles, stereotypes and acceptance of diversity.



*Working on puppets for MW*

Shumka Artistic and Production Teams have worked with designers and builders of various backgrounds and races and will continue to do so for future projects. We are also discussing the possibility of presenting a Dance Symposium targeted at the multicultural dance community in Northern Alberta, to discuss best practices, funding, and collaborative possibilities in developing our art forms within a Canadian context.

## Community Engagement



*Bannock & Borscht Event*

In 2016 as part of the Ancestors & Elders project, Shumka was an Official Celebration Site for Alberta Culture Days. This two-day free open-house, public event was widely advertised. Called Bannock & Borshch, it featured Indigenous and Ukrainian costume displays, performances, food, crafts and story-telling. Shumka paid numerous Indigenous and Ukrainian artists for their participation. Over 1500 people – 55% of Indigenous descent – attended throughout the weekend event.

In advance of the 2019 presentations of Ancestors & Elders, Shumka employed an Indigenous Community Liaison who worked with Shumka staff in increasing our reach into the Indigenous community for genuine and thoughtful audience-building. It was a successful project that saw us learning from each other in many ways.

In 2019, Shumka ran Bannock & Borshch Summer Camps that employed Indigenous artists and coordinators. Three Indigenous youth joined us for the camps as well. Authentic Ukrainian and Indigenous dance, crafts, food and celebrations were the theme and the young students enjoyed learning about different cultures... often realizing many cultural similarities as well.



*B&B Camp*



*Jube School*

Each time Shumka performs at our home theatre – the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium – we offer complimentary tickets to inner city schools. We also offer complimentary tickets to group homes, men and women in recovery centres, and a host of other social service agencies. Whenever possible, the dancers take time to say hello, teach workshops to young students at Jube Schools, and share their love of dance.

Since 2016, Shumka has developed a partnership with the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, offering over 400 complimentary tickets to refugees from a variety of racial backgrounds. They find the shows entertaining and inspiring and enjoy speaking with our dancers and staff in the lobby following performances. The Mennonite Centre also offers ESL classes that focus on Shumka and its productions prior to our performances to prepare their patrons for their upcoming experience. We have offered our studios on numerous occasions for Mennonite Centre client-use and have expressed an interest to collaborate with them on cross-cultural movement workshops in the future.



*Meeting our Guests*



*Student Matinee Mingling*

Shumka’s Telling Stories Through Dance school matinee programs sell out each time we present them. And our matinee ticket prices have not been increased for over a decade so they remain accessible. Students who attend our student shows come from a variety of racial backgrounds; for many it is also their first visit to the Jubilee Auditorium. Educational study guides, based on the Alberta curriculum, are also developed and made available online to provide an educational connection to each matinee experience.

Our dancers make visits to a variety of schools in Northern Alberta – for Read in Week, Ukrainian Day celebrations and other events. We also visit the Stollery Children’s Hospital to share our stories, our dancing and our characters.



We encourage donors to consider purchasing tickets for underprivileged individuals and families and are very thankful for their generosity.



*Seniors Sunday Open House*

We have a variety of seniors in our Seniors Can Shumka and Silver Swans classes. Many of our seniors do not have a Ukrainian background and love the atmosphere and friendships that are part of the experience. They have not only stayed fit but have enjoyed many special times together including performing, attending Shumka productions and gathering for Christmas celebrations.

**“It's truly a beautiful organization.”- Seniors Can Shumka dancer, Gina Anderson**

Our Whirlwind Discovery Camps give young school students an opportunity to spend a full morning or afternoon at the Shumka Dance Centre, learning ballet and Ukrainian dance, discovering costumes and Ukrainian heritage, and enjoying nutritious snacks. The cost of the field trip is less than the cost to Shumka to put it on, but accessibility is key with these community educational opportunities.

**“Always searching for field-trip opportunities that are cross curricular and address a variety of learning outcomes simultaneously, it was a pleasure stumbling upon this particular field-trip. As is the reality in many classrooms, the cognitive and gross motor skills of students are diverse. The professional staff at the studio took this into account. They eagerly encouraged all students to respond to questions and participate in dance activities. Students were actively engaged from the moment they arrived. Every student left feeling successful and excited.” – Anna Fialka, Learning Coach, St. Matthew Catholic Elementary School**

Dance for Me dance instruction for youth with developmental disabilities was a program we researched, developed and ran with three students in 2018. It was a beautiful experience for the dance students. It was not a profitable program for us financially but was fruitful in many other ways. We are continuing to find ways to successfully reach out to – and work with - this community.

In 2007, the Ukrainian Shumka Dancers Alumni Association officially opened the Shumka Stage in Louise McKinney Park in the Edmonton river valley. This legacy project was a gift from Shumka to the citizens of Edmonton. The plaque on the Stage reads in part: “May the Shumka Stage welcome all performers and provide them the opportunity to showcase their talents.” And indeed, the stage has.



*Shumka Stage*

## The Future

Shumka is proud of its focus on inclusivity and diversity. Although we are a Ukrainian dance company, we have successfully engaged with a very broad community, and this has been recognized. We have been asked to sit on panels and present about our variety of programs in diversity training sessions presented by the Edmonton Arts Council and local Rotary Clubs.

We vow to continue down this path and to work harder at identifying the issues, impacts, and injustices surrounding racism and discrimination around us. We understand the importance of implementing strategies to dismantle systemic inequalities and will ensure they are part of our agenda as we move forward with programs, productions and presentations in the future. In September 2020, we established a Diversity Committee made up of dancers from the company.

# Diversity Committee Terms of Reference

## Members

An operational committee comprised of four to five Shumka dancers appointed by the committee chair. These members should be well-suited to achieve the committee goals and represent Shumka's diversity. These Committee meetings are open to all Shumka members and they are encouraged to attend. The appointment process and selection of the chair will be reassessed prior to 2021 elections. The committee will work with Shumka management and follow the guiding principles of the organization including its Vision, Mission, Mandate, Strategic Plan and Diversity & Inclusivity Statement.

As of September, 2020 when the committee was formed, Michael Eeles (chair) appointed the following members:

1. Alyssa Eugenio
2. Elyse Dzenick
3. Nicole Schimpf
4. Nic Pacholok

## Purpose

Represent and foster the diversity within Shumka, while helping to support and promote positive social change within the company and the Ukrainian community.

## Responsibilities

- Promote social change and act as leaders within the Ukrainian community.
- Provide awareness to company members regarding social issues affecting the world.
- Promote and support the LGBTQ+ community by creating safe and inclusive spaces for all.
- Support groups and movements such as BIPOC and BLM to help combat systemic racism and discrimination.
- Help to maintain Shumka's connections with the Indigenous community.
- Assist in demonstrating Shumka's support for other cultural organizations.
- Act as resources for company members who may be struggling with their identity and need guidance from people who may know what they are going through.
- Have zero tolerance for any form of discrimination and bring attention to actions that conflict with Shumka's values.