

Vydubychi Choir Tour: Western Canada

The Vydubychi Church Choir of Kyiv, Ukraine, under the direction of its conductor Volodymyr Viniar, embarked on its second tour of Canada with a successful concert in Calgary, Alberta on 28 April 2011. The Choir, which is touring under the joint patronage of His Eminence Metropolitan Yurij of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada and of the Most Reverend Metropolitan Lawrence of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Canada, consists of 21 professional singers dedicated to the glorification of God through choral music and acting as international ambassadors for Ukrainian spiritual and folk singing.

The words of greeting which Marusia Koszarycz who acted as Master of Ceremonies for the concert in Calgary explained the mission of the Choir in Canada:

“In the joyful, celebratory words of a Christian Bright Week, the week after Easter I greet you all – Христос Воскрес! Christ is Risen! The Ukrainian community in Calgary gathered together from our respective Christian traditions, take great joy in this event!

United by ancient apostolic tradition, the language of our forefathers, and our common western cultural inheritance, we celebrate the arrival to Calgary, and warmly greet the choir of the oldest monastery in Ukraine – Vydubysky Monastery in Kyiv, the Vydubychi Church Choir! At many times in the past, Ukrainian composers and artists were forced to break the law in order to express the words, ideas and sentiments of the ancestral mind – what is now called cultural and ethnic identity.

Yet since 1990, this choir has been in the forefront of Ukraine’s return to Divine services composed and celebrated in the Ukrainian language. Singing these masterpieces, and treasures previously denied, the choir now serves the St. Michael Vydubysky Monastery in Kyiv, and has toured the world, sharing its spiritual mission, gaining accolades from International audiences in Europe, North America and Australia.

This evening’s performance is, a celebration of talent, faith, love, and enthusiasm for a culture and a world view that is closely tied to the history and development of our country – Canada. As a proud 4th generation Ukrainian-Albertan honouring this 120th anniversary of Ukrainian Immigration to Canada and like many of us with direct family ties in both religious traditions and across the Canadian provinces, I look forward to hearing the prayers and melodies of my ancestral homeland.”

After a tour of the Canadian Rockies, Vydubychi travelled to Edmonton where on April 30, it sang the Vespers Service at St Josophat's Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral. The next morning the Choir sang at a Divine Liturgy presided over by His Grace Bishop Ilarion at St. John's Cathedral and was hosted by the Parish at its annual Spilne Svyachene luncheon.

Later that same day, the Choir held a very well-attended Master Class workshop for local choral directors, choristers and anyone interested in Ukrainian spiritual music. A similar workshop, with some 80 attendees, was held during Vydubychi's stay in Winnipeg; a third session took place in Toronto on May 14. The Master Classes were free to participants and were made possible through the generous contribution of the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko.

After Edmonton, the Choir held concerts in Saskatoon, Yorkton and in Regina. As in Alberta, the Choir was warmly received by enthusiastic audiences. Since the choristers were billeted during this time with

local families, they were able to get to know Canadians up close. The choristers expressed their gratitude to those who opened up their homes to them. Along with the personal contact of singing with fellow choristers at the Master Classes, this gives an important person-to-person aspect to the Tour and is the start of future relationships between our community and this important Ukrainian choir.

In Winnipeg, the Choir - which was generously hosted by St. Andrew's College - on May 7 sang Vespers at St Mary the Protectress Cathedral with His Eminence Metropolitan Yuriy and His Grace Metropolitan Lawrence present. The next day, at the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of Sts. Vladimir and Olga, they sang at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy presided over by Metropolitan Lawrence with Metropolitan Yuriy in attendance. In Winnipeg, the choir was joined by the 'Namisnyk' of the St. Michael Vydubysky Monastery, His Grace Epifanii, Bishop of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky and Boryspil.

While in Winnipeg, Vydubychi was privileged to tour the Ukrainian Cultural & Educational Centre (Oseredok) archives, where they came face to face with items and papers belonging to Maestro Oleksander Koshetz (1975-1944), in whose memory the Tour is partially dedicated to and whose music the Choir performs and records. The Choir, in addition to paying its respects at the monument to the Holodomor in front of Winnipeg's City Hall and the Shevchenko statue on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature, made a pilgrimage to the burial place of Koshetz at the Glen Eden cemetery where they sang the responses during a panakhyda which was jointly presided over by both Metropolitans.

After a sold out concert on May 9, the Choir travelled east. A report on that section of the Vydubychi 2011 Canadian Tribute tour will be upcoming in the next issue of *Visnyk*. Everywhere the Choir went in Western Canada, they were met with great enthusiasm. Their performances were of the highest professional calibre. A review in the *Winnipeg Free Press* expressed this best:

“The Vydubychi Church Choir from Kyiv, Ukraine, which performed this past Monday to a packed Westminster United Church.

Under the dual direction of co-founder Volodymyr Viniar and assistant conductor Zenovii Palamar, the group displayed great versatility, moving quickly through a program of all-Ukrainian composers, including the revered O. Koshetz, for which a popular local Winnipeg choir is named.

Their distinctive old-world quality comes from the unique timbres of their voices. Resonant basses, rumbling out the deepest notes, reedy, but fresh, clear sopranos, insistent tenors and solidly dark altos adapted easily from prayer-like and gentle to hearty and joyful.

Steeped in tradition, they surely made many hearts stir with cultural pride.”

The organizers of the tour would like to thank everyone who assisted with the Western Canada leg of the Tour, but especially the Hierarchs of both Churches for their patronage and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada Foundation, the Shevchenko Foundation and St. Andrew's College for their financial support. Without the hard work of the local organizing committees the concerts and related activities would not have taken place. Special thanks go to Lorraine Chanasyk-Alford (Calgary), Darcia Wasarab-Rolland (Edmonton), Larry Klopoushak (Saskatoon), Fr. Melvin Slashinsky (Yorkton), Yaroslav Lozowchuk (Regina) and Scott Armstrong (Winnipeg) for leading these efforts.