

Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities 1965-2015

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In this paper, I examine the preparation and execution of spectacle, often facilitated by cultural religious traditions, as a vehicle for nurturing and evolving a collective hyphenated identity among Canadian-Serbs, by compiling an oral history archive of interviews with sponsors, administrators, and artists involved in theatrical Serbian-Canadian folk-dance organizations in Ontario. Together with the continued practice of the Christian Orthodox religion, the theatrical folk-dance continues to be a shared extracurricular activity, as well as a key component in the upbringing of second and third generations of Serbian immigrants dating back to the post-war out-migrations of Serbs from Yugoslavia. While the folk-dance form was realized in its theatrical form in 1948 and brought to Canada with the post-war migrations, I argue that the collective effort put into the creation and performance of spectacle was a key factor in the expression and nurturing of a Serbian-Canadian collective identity. Through the incorporation of personal memories via oral histories and archival materials, this paper surveys the ways in which Canadian social, economic and cultural frameworks, together with Serbian-Canadian dance organizations, have served as a vehicle for the integration of Serbian immigrants, not only into Canadian society but also into Canadian dance cultures.

Introduction

In 2015, the Serbian-Canadian community¹ had its fiftieth anniversary of folk-dance performance in Ontario.² This anniversary, however, was not marked by collective memory, rather it was celebrated by the dance ensembles in separate events that commemorated their own organizational commitment to performance. The Serbian Cultural Association (SCA) “Oplenac”³ celebrated 25 years in 2012,

¹ In this paper, I use the terms Serbian-Canadian communities, Canadian Serbs, and Serbian communities, all of which are about those communities of Canadians of Serbian or ex-Yugoslavian origins who partake in these organizations and events.

² Andriy Nahachewsky, “Folk-dance Revival Strategies,” *Ethnologies* 30:1 (2008): 47. The term “folk-dance” refers to a dance based on peasant tradition that over time reflected each dance ensemble’s mission and vision.

³ SCA Oplenac physically separated from the church of All Serbian Saints church in Mississauga in 1987.

and the Serbian Academy of Folk Dancing celebrated ten years in 2004.⁴ KOLO, a performing folk-dance ensemble situated in Hamilton, also celebrated forty years of their folk-dance performance in 2009. KOLO's founder, George Lukich, they have been working to create a special and commemorative project in celebration of their upcoming fiftieth anniversary.⁵

In Canada, the Serbian Orthodox churches preceded their corresponding performing ensembles, most of which continue to exist under the auspices of the church today. Consequently, these ensembles do not necessarily celebrate the anniversary of their own performance-involvement, but instead, they contribute in the celebration of the anniversary of the church.⁶ Most importantly, however, all of these dance groups, though they were physically separate from one another, directly contributed to the collective Serbian-Canadian identity. Historical research on the Serbian-Canadian dance culture since 1988 is severely lacking, and though a few of the existing sources offer a comprehensive overview of these dance groups, those sources were never translated from Serbian to English.

An oral history project was conducted in order to determine the degree to which Serbian communities in Ontario have used the concept of performance in order to not only integrate into Canadian society but also maintain their hyphenated identities as Serbian-Canadians. For the duration of six months, in-person and telephone interviews were conducted by the author. Key members, including sponsors, ethnographers, choreographers, musicians and dancers, were interviewed. Each interview was between thirty minutes and two hours, focusing on that individual's experience in their dance organization, the extent of their involvement, and their perception of the role that their involvement in the dance organization had in upholding and nurturing their Canadian and Serbian identities. In addition to the oral histories that were collected, the project involved existing sources on the Serbian Community, in order to analyze the role of Serbian-Canadian folk-dance practice and performance in the cultivation and nurturing of a hyphenated identity in the past forty years. A lack of archived material and

⁴ Choreographer Miroslav Marcetic created his very own Serbian Academy of Folk Dancing in 2004.

⁵ George Lukich, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*. Telephone conversation with author, 1 March 2016.

⁶ "Folklore groups," or folk-dance ensembles that continue to be functional under the church are often beneficiaries, though they are not ascribed as such; they help to collect funds for the cultural preservation of community-shared buildings, such as churches and monasteries, but also globally for Serbian communities endangered by natural disasters. One example is the Church of St. Sava in Toronto, who's folk-dance ensemble "Oplenac" established in 1965 would have reached fifty years of folklore in 2015, however, because "Oplenac" moved to the All Serbian Saints church in Mississauga, from which "SCA Oplenac" was formed in 1987 and continued as an independent community and dance organization, the 1965 date was not commemorated by any of today's ensembles.

published literature about these most recent developments was, in fact, what inspired the collection of oral histories, dance recordings, and digital footage.⁷

While the interviews offered perceptions and personal accounts, it was necessary to contextualize the data using what existing publications were available. The most comprehensive of these sources include the 1965 publication by Olga B. Markovic, which is an elaborate, grassroots account of Canadian-Serbs; and the 1988 publication *Serbs in Ontario*, edited by Sofija Skoric and the late George Vid. Tomashevich. Outside of Canada, the work done by Serbian dance groups has been documented, making it possible to analyze the progress and significance of folk-dance in the lives of Serbs with hyphenated identities and cultures. In his 1991 article, Owe Ronstrom, a professor at the Uppsala University in Sweden, gave a thorough review of the folk-dance groups in Stockholm.⁸ This particular source provides evidence that the progress of Serbian dance groups closer to the homeland was comparable to that of dance groups in Canada in 1991 in terms of structure and organization.

Besides the lack of comprehensive literature on Serbian-Canadian folk-dance, a more problematic concept was that of dance terminology. An appropriate term needed to be conjectured for this project so that the dance form could be analyzed, described and substantiated. While numerous proposed definitions of “folklore” and “folk-dance” exist, Andriy Nahachewsky and Owe Ronstrom offered the most compelling definitions for this particular project. Nahachewsky defined folk-dance as “a dance based on peasant tradition,” while Ronstrom defined it as “a specific kind of staged performance of folk music and folk-dance.”⁹ In this article, a mixture of the two definitions is used. These definitions hopefully clarify the utilization of the term “folk-dance,” which encompasses the performance-based, post-1990s Serbian-Canadian folk-dance activity in Ontario. Additionally, Nahachewsky proposed that folk-dance could be successfully practiced by ensembles in several ways, two of which were most relevant to the work being done by Serbian-Canadian folk-dance groups: the preservative and the performative methods, which will be discussed further in this paper.¹⁰

This oral history project aimed to analyze folk-dance performance in two ways: first, by understanding the contexts in which these folk-dance organizations were founded, it would be possible to juxtapose and analyze the contemporary practice of performing amateur folk-dance ensembles. According to Skoric, folk

⁷ I began a project surrounding the developments of dance in the Serbian-Canadian communities in Ontario for which I have conducted and transcribed oral histories in the community of dancers, choreographers, volunteers, sponsors and board members.

⁸ Owe Ronstrom, “Staged Folk Music and Folk-dance Performance of Yugoslavs in Stockholm,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 23 (1991): 69-77.

⁹ Ronstrom, “Staged Folk Music and Folk-dance Performance of Yugoslavs in Stockholm,” 69; Andriy Nahachewsky, “Folk-dance Revival Strategies,” *Ethnologies* 30:1 (2008): 41.

¹⁰ Andriy Nahachewsky, “Folk-dance Revival Strategies,” 47.

dancing was “one of the most popular Serbian traditions,” and that “besides the church choir” it was “the most attractive” activity for Serbian-Canadian youth. In her assertion, Skoric refers to the performance-based folk dancing and not a vernacular traditional dance.¹¹ Over the past forty years, these contemporary ensembles have had an effect on the lives of hundreds of Canadian-Serbian children and parents, respectively, and were the most efficient vehicles for upholding a collective and individual hyphenated, Serbian-Canadian identity.¹² The popularity of organized folk-dance ensembles was evident in 1965, as Canadian-born musician, John Lukich, described: “There wasn’t that much happening at the church until we had Oplenac start and Oplenac was actually quite popular, there were a lot of kids dancing in Oplenac –less so in the choir because I think it’s not as widely appealing to sing in a choir as to dance in a folklore group.”¹³

Although the notion of a hyphenated identity has the potential to be contested by members of the community, this term best describes the time-space relationship of the dance form with respect to its participants.¹⁴ Normally, as Serbs immigrated into Canada, they adjusted to the differences of their new environment. These small adjustments accumulated over time, changing their native Serbian identity and forging a distinct, Serbian-Canadian identity that was neither here nor there. This distinction was more pronounced in Canadian-born Serbs. The value of a shared identity was effectively described by the involved SCA “Oplenac” Music Director, Nemanja Pjanic, in his interview:

As Canadian- Serbs, I think we have a unique identity... when I interact with people here... they say, ‘oh, yeah, you’re Serbian – you do this because you’re Serbian...’ and when I go to the Balkans, whatever country that might be, people say ‘oh, you’re the Canadian guy.’ I think we have a unique identity, to begin with in the sense that... we don’t really belong anywhere... people that we belong to are fellow Canadian-Serbs...¹⁵

¹¹ Vernacular traditional dance is an integral part of community events. However, in this context, the church choir, and folk dancing are both activities that are organized and rehearsed.

¹² Sofija Skoric, George Vid Tomashevich, and Serbian Heritage Academy of Canada, *Serbs in Ontario: A Socio-cultural Description* (Toronto: Serbian Heritage Academy, 1988), 215.

¹³ John Lukich, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 2 February 2016.

¹⁴ Participants of the performance based folk-dance form include all those temporally, financially or emotionally invested in the preservation and growth of its existence. This includes choreographers, dancers, parents, volunteers, sponsors, musicians, and spectators.

¹⁵ Nemanja Pjanic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 22 February 2016.

Second, performance-based Serbian-Canadian folk-dance was researched in order to further establish if this dance form was a vehicle for the expression and nurturing of collective and individual hyphenated identities. Folk-dance was examined as a means for anthropological analysis of socio-cultural Serbian history in the lives of second and third generation Canadian-Serbs; one that transcends preconceived political, religious, traditional and cultural dichotomies among Serbian ethnic groups. It was because of this ability to transcend ideologies that divided the Serbian (or more correctly, Yugoslavian) nation in many ways, folk-dance organizations enabled the nurturing and expression of multi-hyphenated¹⁶ identities, which will be discussed further, below. The collected interviews from this oral history project have exposed the relationship between the collective identity of the Serbian-Canadian community and the folk-dance organizations to be a symbiotic one with a synergistic effect on the cultural growth and preservation of the community with a capacity for the whole community, which is not necessarily true for all dance forms.

The role of Church in Serbian Folk-dance

The role of the Serbian Orthodox church in the development of these folk-dance organizations is well described in textual sources, although many of the sources were not translated into English and remain inaccessible to the majority of historians. This oral history project has not only helped to illustrate the changes that have taken place since the 1980's with respect to folk-dance groups but has revealed the pervasive, enigmatic nature of the role of dance in history and vice-versa. When, in 1987, the autonomous performing ensemble was created in a building on Lakeshore Avenue in Mississauga, it was named the Serbian Cultural Association *Oplenac*. This folk-dance organization was better understood as a community center and commemorated its inception from that day, onward. Thus, the recent dance ensembles that exist do not trace their history back, or identify with, the St. Sava church on River Street in Toronto where folk-dancing truly began for these groups. It is evident from the textual sources that the grassroots collective identity was a collage of groups and individuals who situated themselves in Canada according to political, social and religious affiliations with the homeland. The focus on dance in this project in no way discredits the grassroots histories that were published before it, rather it serves as an analysis of the continuation and transformation of Serbian-Canadian social and cultural

¹⁶ This term refers to the inherently heterogeneous group of dancers experiencing different regional and ethnic socio-cultural histories, thereby adding hyphens to the already established Serbian-Canadian identity. I would like to thank York University Professor Megan Andrews for suggesting the term to me during the Senior Dance Projects Reception held on 28 March 2016, where I presented this oral history research project.

history. This section will briefly discuss the diversification of the Serbian-Canadian collective identity over time.

As mentioned, Serbian-Canadian folk-dance has been minimally documented in the context of socio-cultural Serbian-Canadian history for two possible reasons: First, the Serbian community that gathered in churches generally preferred linguistic, musical and religious culture over that of dance performance. This is consistent with Gertrude Kurath's observation that in 1974, "dancing was only recently accepted as a legitimate subject of study," and that it "was not recorded anywhere... the way it needed to be in order to be studied, notated and eventually transcribed."¹⁷ In addition to this, the value of folk-dance and the idea of "multiculturalism" has changed drastically since the 1960s through to the 1980s, during which it was predominantly classified as a charity, sport, or leisure.

The second reason for minimal documentation of Serbian folk-dance history in Canada is that the earlier, predominantly Cyrillic sources by prospective historians led to a dearth of historical documentation of Serbian-Canadian history.¹⁸ Serbian immigrants from the 1930's and 1940's predominantly favored the Serbian Kingdom (which would become Tito's Yugoslavia after 1945),¹⁹ and the Serbian Orthodox Church. A common trait of this group of immigrants was the enforcement of Cyrillic text. Most scholars could not access the remote, Cyrillic textual sources, and the information they contained, therefore, remained undisputed. In accordance with Freund's idea of "foundational family stories,"²⁰ the fundamental belief of each group of Serbian immigrants gave rise to organizations, clubs and social groups and inevitably facilitated various dance organizations. Immigrants came from various Serb-populated areas in the Balkans, however, where the Cyrillic text was no longer dominant. With time, these sources would prove increasingly inconvenient.

Churches had a role in the physical, fiscal and the conceptual realization of folk-dance organizations from as early as the late 1940's. The St. Sava church on River Street in Toronto, organized in 1948,²¹ and was the starting point of the classical form of folk-dance that was truly realized in the 1990s. As new waves of

¹⁷ Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, "Dances of Anahuak: The choreography and music of pre-Cortesian dances," *Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology* 38 (1974): 312.

¹⁸ In this text, I use the term "Cyrillic" in reference to the distinct alphabet created by Cyril and Methodius that was essential for a variety of Slavic dialects.

¹⁹ Yugoslavia began to exist under King Petar Karadjordjevic and became present as an ethnic identity in Canada in 1921. Sofija Skoric, George Vid Tomashevich, and Serbian Heritage Academy of Canada, *Serbs in Ontario: A Socio-cultural Description*, 8-20.

²⁰ Alexander Freund, "A Canadian Family Talks about Oma's Life in Nazi Germany:" Three-Generational Interviews and Communicative Memory," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 29 (2009): 11.

²¹ Sofija Skoric, George Vid Tomashevich, and Serbian Heritage Academy of Canada, *Serbs in Ontario: A Socio-cultural Description*, 76-91.

post-war immigrants arrived, their desire to uphold tradition led to the formation of choirs, orchestras, social, religious and political groups and associations and, most importantly for the purposes of this paper, dance groups. It was not until the 1960s that the performance of folk-dances would become an organized activity. Dance groups established during this time included KOLO in Hamilton in 1969, and *Oplenac* belonging to the St. Sava church in 1965.

The events that facilitated these performances since the 1950s have not only been linked to cultural-religious traditions but have, for the most part, been hosted in a physical space nominally linked to a religious organization or symbol. Folk-dance ensembles often carried the name of a remote religious location, names carried by dance ensembles also tended to carry ambiguous symbols that carry multifarious meanings. In the example of the word KOLO, the common name of a dance that moves in a circular pattern, it was allegedly derived from the word *okolo* meaning around; therefore, it carries the symbolic value of a circle as an infinite entity. In this case, the circle is the infinite entity that connects people to one another. As Milka Lukich described it, “the *kolo*, in effect, is a symbol of the cultural unity of the people.”²² The imperceptible religious connotation in the name KOLO is the fact that the tradition of the circle dances was predominantly present on religious grounds in medieval Serbian history, at weddings, baptisms, and community fairs.²³

The *Strazilovo* group formed in 1954 was not commemorated as the antecedent of the 1965 *Oplenac* in the St. Sava church in Toronto and the *Oplenac* ensemble was not retained as the antecedent of SCA *Oplenac*. In fact, as these groups began to expand, separate from the church, and branch off, they each identified with their initial names, which has confused the trajectory of their growth and involvement: the *Oplenac* group, formed in 1965, split in half by 1974 to accommodate both churches. The group that stayed in Toronto eventually reverted to its former name. Although *Oplenac* moved to the Mississauga community, its name continued to be *St. Sava Oplenac*.

Although the formation of every Serbian folk-dance ensemble functioning in 2015 was derived from groups that were formed between 1965 and 1980, scholarly and anthropological sources on the folk-dancing that took place in these organizations are scarce. For example, Skoric described the success of dance ensemble *Strazilovo*, which regrouped by 1974, although it was renamed

²² Sofija Skoric, George Vid Tomashevich, and Serbian Heritage Academy of Canada, *Serbs in Ontario: A Socio-cultural Description*, 176.

²³ This information has been preserved by ethnographic findings and ethnomusicologists who notated and transcribed song melodies and lyrics. Many dances re-enact wedding traditions or specifically mention a religious location. One example of such a song is one by the name of "Oro Se Vije Kraj Manastira" meaning "the circle dance spins around the monastery."

Oplenac.²⁴ The name *Oplenac* also resonated in the minds of participants, such as the influential musician and participant in the “St. Sava Choir” under the auspices of the All Serbian Saints church in Mississauga:

...but I can tell you that at the church at River Street is where it was formed, there was no folklore group when I was six or seven years old, however, there was a choir. St. Sava choir, they'd been formed in 1956 or so and, for whatever reason, the members of the choir at the time decided that the church needed a folklore group, since there was no other group and no other individuals that were doing that, so the actual *Oplenac* was created from the St. Sava choir and by the St. Sava choir. That's the original *Oplenac* ... as a teenager I joined *Oplenac* and I danced with them for... about three or four years...²⁵

In 1974, with the multiculturalism initiative, came the Caravan Festival,²⁶ a successful event for the Serbian community because it put the Torontonians in contact with other ethnic groups. Eventually, it was adapted for Mississauga communities as the Carassauga Festival, which hosted Serbian folk-dance groups and music ensembles well into the 2000s. Both festivals provided the dance groups with the opportunity to debut as performing ensembles, which was evident when the *Oplenac* ensemble became secularized and became the first folk-dance ensemble that no longer functioned under the auspices of the church. The transformation that was contested by the small group in the Serbian community in the 1960s had proven inevitable, and by the 1980s, the Serbian-Canadian community was becoming less of a church community and just becoming a community in general.²⁷

However, Serbian-Canadian collective identity still revolved around the idea of having a physical space in which to hold social and celebratory gatherings. While folk dancing was organized under the auspices of the church as a means of fundraising for various causes, it was primarily done, and, more importantly,

²⁴ Separations leading up to 1988 were included in the 1988 publication “Serbs in Ontario,” which preceded the separations and the significant increase in attendance as well as punctilious choreographic and ethnographic initiative that revolutionized the quality of dance technique following the 1990s. Sofija Skoric, George Vid Tomashevich, and Serbian Heritage Academy of Canada, *Serbs in Ontario: A Socio-cultural Description*, 219.

²⁵ John Lukich, Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities, telephone conversation with author, 2 February 2016.

²⁶ The Caravan Festival had been around since 1968, but led to the renaming of the *Oplenac* ensemble in Toronto so that they could participate in the pavilion, having been previously associated with the name *Strazilovo*.

²⁷ George Lukich, Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities, telephone conversation with author, 1 March 2016.

regarded as, a social event well into the 1990s. However, the Serbian-Canadian community did not have a particularly strong dance-ethic for the groups that existed and the excitement of multiculturalism had nearly worn off for the Serbian-Canadian folk-dance ensembles, leading to a participatory decline in the Caravan pavilion by Serbian-Canadian folk-dance groups.²⁸

Between the years 1945 and 1989, the Cyrillic letter was replaced with the Latin letter in many parts of Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia, which ensured that literature would be universal among the Slav nations. Due to the ethnic diversity of Serbian immigrants that arrived in Canada in the 1990s, for the most part, it was not required of European-Serbian youth or their parents to uphold and be fluent in the traditional Cyrillic format. Additionally, the demand for, and intricacy of, folk-dance practice and performance have significantly increased, yielding what has yet to be acknowledged as a fine art.

The 1990s brought in many immigrants and membership for folk-dance ensembles escalated quickly. The newcomers were ethnically heterogeneous with varying degrees of education, religiosity, and political allegiance, which further diversified these folk-dance organizations. The nostalgia for the homeland became a strong motivator for many groups to actively perform their culture. Ironically, however, the 1990s youth became involved only recreationally in folk-dance and were not familiar with the aspects of performance, choreography, and artistic finesse.²⁹ These intimate details of craftsmanship that went into researching, producing and performing a dance concert were not introduced in their entirety³⁰ until the 1994s with the arrival of choreographers from the only professional dance ensemble in the world: Belgrade's National Ensemble KOLO. This improvement in the dance organization in 1994 contrasted that of the 1991 Stockholm folk-dance ensembles Ronstrom described. According to Ronstrom, the ex-Yugoslavian Stockholm ensembles already had established a richer repertoire than existed in most Canadian-Serbian groups.³¹

Performance Preservation

The practice and performance of this contemporary folk-dance form have two predominant functions in the society. The first is to bring the community together

²⁸ John Lukich, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 2 February 2016.

²⁹ Miroslav Bata Marcetic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 20 January 2016.

³⁰ Marcetic, Lukich, and Lukich explained that the dance performances primarily consisted of a few classic dance steps for which the music was live in the 1960s and 70s, after which the performances were done to recorded music.

³¹ This is with the exception of KOLO Hamilton, where a repertoire was pieced together over the years.

physically and intellectually; therefore, serving as a network for newcomers. The second function, and that which will be the primary focus of this section of the paper, is to uphold elements of Serbian culture and heritage. In doing this, however, Serbian-Canadian folk-dance transformed from what seemed a rudimentary practice into an embellished performing art. This project made it possible not only to understand how the culture of performance not only survived, but also how it flourished in Serbian-Canadian communities in Southern-Ontario.

As folk-dance groups assumed autonomy from the religious organizations that previously housed them, dancing took on a performative nature rather than serving as a social gathering, which resulted in the transformation of folk-dance into a classical folk-dance form.³² A gradual growth in all areas of dance from the 1960s to the 1990s was primarily due to the slowly recovering economy, however, by the 1990s, the folk-dance culture began to wane compared to not only the Toronto dance culture but for the Belgrade dance culture.³³ The first performance ensemble to be fully funded by the Yugoslavian state was organized under the Stalinist model of Tito's Yugoslavia. Established in 1948 in Belgrade, the state-funded National Folk-Dance Ensemble KOLO performed professionally and practiced geographically diverse clusters of dance variations. Like the Stockholm folk-dance organizations, former dancers from this professional ensemble were the first choreographers to arrive in Canada and implement appropriate repertoire, costumes, and compositions of music that would be composed of around seven dances, each with a distinct name. The choreographies and compositions alike would be assigned the name of a geographical location.³⁴

Serbian- Canadian folk-dance organizations became concerned with what Nahachewsky described as preservative. Choreographers who arrived in 1994 were increasingly concerned with preserving certain characteristics of folklore

³² At this time, the performers described to me through an interview with the musical director of SCA Oplenac, but also by 1990s Artistic Director Miroslav Bata Marcetic, were bereft of the organizational structure and artistic aestheticism that was crucial to the survival and nurturing of a performance-based dance ensemble.

³³ By the 1950s, Canada already had an established dance culture and history, as described by Grant Strate; the founder of York University's dance program. The Belgrade dance culture picked up with the new democratic elections, and existing performing groups continued to produce and perform choreography throughout the 1990s. Additionally, although funding for dance activity was available, it was predominantly utilized by KOLO in Hamilton prior to the 1980s. After the 1980s, funding was available for dance ensembles to produce choreography, music, and costumes; however, the funding would have to be allocated to Canadian products. The founder of KOLO in Hamilton, George Lukich, explained to me in an interview that costumes were made in Canada with the funding received, although dance groups allegedly order materials and costumes from Serbia, where materials and embellishments were allegedly more authentic, corresponding to the specific epoch being danced and, among all else, they were aesthetically pleasing.

³⁴ Owe Ronstrom, "Staged Folk Music and Folk-dance Performance of Yugoslavs in Stockholm," 70-74.

traditions, such as gender constructions and social stratification.³⁵ The two prominent choreographers to establish such a performing culture in the 1990s among the existing dance ensembles were Miroslav Bata Marcetic, who arrived in 1994, followed by Dragan Maklenov in 1995. It is no coincidence that both were soloists in the National Ensemble KOLO in Belgrade throughout the 1970s and 80s. The introduction to new dance techniques and choreographic³⁶ materials quickly became an incentive for youth to join the most advanced dance ensembles in Mississauga and Hamilton. The prestige of the new repertoire inspired participants and spectators alike.³⁷ Pjanic mentions that the “Serbian community here in the 1980s was very limited; it wasn’t ‘till the 90s that the new wars that brought in even more Serbs to this country, that community organizations sort of became revitalized.”³⁸

The practice of folk-dance transformed between 1960 and 1990, and then again after 1990. Like Stockholm organizations, the effects of folk-dance performance on the Serbian-Canadian community have been both enigmatic and efficacious. First, the performing of traditional folk-dance for the community was a relatively new concept in the 1960s. Choreographically and artistically speaking, the repertoires were rudimentary and done predominantly for social enjoyment and, to a lesser degree, for physical exercise. Folk-dance was not equally popular everywhere, which was reflected in the varying attendance that was described in the oral histories collected.

Second, the community fostered the activity long enough for better-quality materials and technology to become available and, with the arrival of passionate and skilled folk-dance choreographers in the 1990s, more was invested in the structuring and reorganizing of these folk-dance ensembles. As the folk-dance organizations grew, so did the attendance of children. Folk-dance organizations doubled as a place to rehearse folk-dance repertoire, as well as a safe environment in which to raise younger generations. Folk-dancing was considered a social pastime, a source of physical exercise and most importantly, an interactive and multidisciplinary way to learn about their identity in a way that is universally applicable. The rehearsals and performances created somewhat of a musical theatre-styled rehearsal, through which children learned leadership skills, postural alignment, motor skills, linguistic skills and spatial awareness.

³⁵ Andriy Nahachewsky, “Folk-dance Revival Strategies,” 44-46.

³⁶ The task of choreographing of Serbian folk-dance includes and presumes a range of ethnographic studies of a region. A given region will be ethnographically studied for unique and prevalent dance variations, dialects and variations of songs, the organizational structure of the community, and fashion trends at a given time period.

³⁷ Nemanja Pjanic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 22 February 2016.

³⁸ Pjanic, Nemanja. *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 22 February 2016.

For instance, Bora Stankovic's famous musical drama, *Kostana* was performed in Canada in 1960, and only the parents of the second and third generation Serbian-Canadians (born in the 1990s) would remember literature and theatrical performances that were crucial to the choreographing of dances from the greater Vranje area in South Serbia. As this theatrically stylized piece revolved around Kostana, a beautiful roaming Romani girl who captivated the heart of the lead male protagonist, Mitke, with her tremendous aptitude for song and dance.³⁹ This made it an especially difficult role to cast and a challenging role to play; and, among other roles that were introduced through choreography into the folk-dance studios in the 2000s, it began the transformation of the preceding nebulous dance technique into a sophisticated one that would, once again, allow a Serbian-Canadian dance ensemble to perform in a well-known performance facility.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, there was a slow transformation in folk-dance style, organization, and structure. Small changes went unnoticed, as the Serbian-Canadian community had overcome a sequence of unfortunate events that antagonized the Serbian-Canadian population. Tito's politics interfered with the credibility of the Serbian diocese in North America causing a schism in 1962; Yugoslavia and neighboring communist regimes collapsed by 1989; and North American news stations had blatantly besmirched any reputability of Serbian people by 1999. By 2004, however, Serbian folk-dance in Serbia and North America had completely transformed and, more importantly, the community noticed.

During that time, dance scholars also worked diligently to change antediluvian notions of dance nomenclature and classification to create a less hierarchically stratified understanding of dance. The definitions by which dance forms could be classified, therefore, also changed and dance scholars re-imagined and stressed the magnitude and importance of authenticity in dance. Scholars brought various presupposed realities into question, including ballet as an ethnic

³⁹ The play, which predates the First World War, inspired pieces like *Vranjska Svita* (literally meaning "Vranje Suite" in Serbian) by Branko Markovic, in which the girl playing Kostana appears half-way through the five-part choreography composed of prestigious lower-class women, working class men (namely tinkers and tailors), Kostana's dance followed by the ardent entrance of her pariah friends; completed by the coda in which all dancers are engaged in the choreography through to the end. Kostana's dance, in particular, has an intense charisma and incites a symbolized carouse amongst the "city people" or background dancers.

⁴⁰ The SCA Oplenac ensemble performed at Hammerson Hall at the Living Arts Centre, Mississauga.

dance of a group of people.⁴¹ By extension, the argument has been made that ballet was a euro-centric representation of Roma dances.⁴²

This considerably complicated the process of defining the Serbian-Canadian performance-based folk-dance form because it no longer fit the contemporary definitions of “folk” nor of “national” dance.⁴³ Instead, it could be understood as a synthesis of stylized, almost ballet-sculpted interpretations of authentic folk-dances, researched by dance ethnographers and ethnomusicologists; notated, choreographed into a collage-dance piece and brought to Canada as a product. In a few cases, the above events happened sequentially, except the raw data that was notated and translocated to Canada, where choreographic pieces were created from that material.

By 2004, the folk-dance activity in Southern-Ontario resembled the concept of a “second existence folk-dance” described by Andriy Nahachewsky. He described it as the evolved conformation of the authentic, “first existence” folk-dance form.⁴⁴ The first existence form is described as being an exploratory, spontaneous dance form that was integral to a given community. In its “second existence” form, the practice is characterized by the changes brought about by the involvement of an ethnographer, as well as the initiatives by specialists and choreographers in the cultivation and embellishment of folk-dance performance. Nahachewsky posed the question of multiple points of historical phases from which a “change in the behavior of members of a cultural group is brought about by the presence of an ethnographer.”⁴⁵ It is possible, therefore, that the Serbian-Canadian folk-dance existence transformed a number of times.

Historical transformations of the folk-dance in the Serbian-Canadian society would have occurred up to nine times in the past half century: the very inception of *Strazilovo* in 1954, their termination and the birth of *St. Sava Oplenac* in 1964, the establishment of an autonomous *SCA Oplenac* in 1987, followed by the arrival of a series of contemporary dance specialists, Marcetic in 1994, Maklenov in 1995, the further inception of *Marcetic’s Academy of Serbian Folk Dancing* in 2004, the arrival of dance specialists Srboľjub Ninkovich in

⁴¹ Kealiinohomoku, Joann, “An anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance,” in Dils, Ann., Albright, and Ann Cooper, *Moving history / dancing cultures: a dance history reader*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 24-33

⁴² Theresa Buckland, Theresa, “All Dances Are Ethnic, but Some Are More Ethnic Than Others: Some Observations on Dance Studies and Anthropology,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 17:1 (1999): 3-21.

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/1290875>, accessed: 9 April 2017.

⁴³ “National” dance refers to the adaptation of authentic dance combinations for a proscenium stage. “Folk-dance” was defined according to Ronstrom and Nahachewsky earlier in the paper.

⁴⁴ Andriy Nahachewsky, “Once Again: On the Concepts of ‘Second Existence Folk-dance,’” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 33 (2001): 17-28.

⁴⁵ Andriy Nahachewsky, “Once Again: On the Concepts of ‘Second Existence Folk-dance,’” 19.

2005, Vladimir Spasojevic in 2008, and finally, the arrival of Radojica Kuzmanovic and Sasha Bogunovic in 2015.⁴⁶ Therefore, the folk-dance form has all but transformed in this time. Over time, smaller ensembles combined to form larger ensembles, enabling a larger repertoire and increasing the demand for skilled choreographers. In his interview, George Lukich explains that this larger model might be the key to the longevity of folk-dance practice. “I think independent groups such as *Oplenac* or *Marcetic*... that model will work in large communities... probably for the better because it relieved the pressure on the church –to worry about that kind of thing... The church can focus on the religious component... but the group can be the group, for people to come and dance and at the same time grow with the community [...]”⁴⁷

Prior to the 1990s developments, dance ensembles generally had a limited repertoire primarily due to limited accessibility of folk-dance music in Canada. Early musicians, such as John Lukich and Milan Petrovic, whose work predated the rapid advancements of music technology, have drawn attention to the tremendous amount of work surrounding the preparation of complex collages of dance numbers. The ability to combine music and arrange a recording that fit the needs and expectations of the dancers was not only a necessity but an absolute nightmare.⁴⁸ In their interviews, musicians and those involved in the acquiring, arrangement and organization of Serbian folk music performances (which were crucial to the growth and refinement of folk-dance) emphasized an inevitable decline in the availability of and access to folk-dance musicians. Therefore, with the 1990s, the initiative was put forth to engage live musicians at rehearsals and performances⁴⁹ for the first time in decades.

The concept of folk-dance transformation and Nancy Ruyter’s notion of “folk” dance referring to a genre comparable with structured dance forms, such as jazz, tap, and ballet offer a different approach from one that inherently discredits the inauthentic.⁵⁰ In fact, this project has enabled a delineation of anthropological value in the performance-based and performance-centered, “second existence”

⁴⁶ Marcetic, Spasojevic, Maklenov, Kuzmanovic, and Ninkovich were all soloists in the National Folk-dance Ensemble KOLO in Belgrade under Tito's socialist regime. They all went on to dedicate their lives to the choreographic and ethnographic cultivation processes in their own way, respectfully.

⁴⁷ George Lukich, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 1 March 2016.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Miroslav Bata Marcetic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 20 January 2016.

⁵⁰ Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, “Some Musings on Folk-dance,” *Dance Chronicle, Aspects of Dance: Essays in Honor of Selma Jeanne Cohen* 18:2 (1995): 269-279. Dance scholars have over-emphasized authenticity in performing folk-dance forms, almost to the point of discrediting them in their anthropological and ethnographic value.

folk-dance, which has captivated the majority of the Serbian-Canadian community; predominantly because of its ability to transcend political, religious and ideological boundaries.

By 2005, *SCA Oplenac* brought Serbian-Canadian folk-dance back to the proscenium stage again. The irony is that the conflict that led to the collapse of *Strazilovo* and the formation of *Oplenac* in 1964 had inadvertently revitalized the contemporary groups.⁵¹ The inclusivity of folk-dance established a symbiosis performance, which keeps it alive. In turn, performance grew the prestige of the groups and created more opportunity for the inclusion of members⁵², who were inspired to join the ensemble and perform in it, or support it as viewers.

SCA Oplenac performed at the Hammerson Hall for ten years, before which its year-end concerts were held in various high-school auditoriums. When Marcetic created his own *Academy of Serbian Folk Dancing*, his group also danced under an academic roof in the Ryerson University Theatre in downtown Toronto. His ensemble recently began performing at the Sony Centre,⁵³ marking a progression and success among Serbian-Canadian dance ensembles on the Canadian theatrical stage in the past forty years.

When *SCA Oplenac* approached the twenty-five-year mark of its autonomous existence, the dance ensemble toured throughout the United States and performed on the Harrison Theatre Stage, and held five full-length thematic concerts; the first of Serbian-Canadian folk-dance concerts to be held with a single story or plot connecting each dance.⁵⁴

I was still a dancer when we started performing at Hammerson Hall... and that was a huge change. I think it changed the way dancers perceived Oplenac and the way the community perceived *Oplenac*... because up until then the year-end concerts were held at different high school auditoriums... that was a big step up. Dancing at a hall like that, even though you're dancing with the same people... it's a big change.⁵⁵

⁵¹ In her book, the small group that denounced the "Strazilovo" dance group in 1964 did so because the group was not politically and nationalistically oriented, and focused too closely on the cultivation of the art. Although it posed a threat to the survival of the 1964 ensemble, today it is one of the main factors that enable dance ensembles to exist in such a large capacity.

⁵² Malden Racic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 20 March 2016.

⁵³ Miroslav Bata Marcetic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 20 January 2016.

⁵⁴ The theme that connected the concert as one thematic entity named "A Serbian Story," and it was centered around the life of a woman who immigrated to Canada at a young age and was reminiscing about her dog in Serbia, the dance partner she had, and her wedding at the end of the concert (after which proceeded a wedding dance from Kosovo).

⁵⁵ Nemanja Pjanic, *Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities*, telephone conversation with author, 22 February 2016.

Performance in the capacity of performances for the caravan, religious and traditional festivals, local competitions, works in progress and annual concerts, were all rituals that were continuous in the community for the last twenty years. However, it is important to note that they are vaguely linked to religious institutions that were responsible for their very inception; in the very beginning, the churches facilitated the hiring of choreographers and writing, composition, and performance of music.⁵⁶ The small, latent ensembles that existed from the 1960s to the 1980s, and the people who ensured their survival, were the pioneers of what has become the contemporary performing culture of Serbian-Canadian folk-dance.

Embodiment of Multi-Hyphenated Identities

With a diverse group of Serbian immigrants arriving in Canada, the practice of folk-dance not only helped the newcomers find their cultural center and network, but also helped both parents and children form intra-ethnic relationships amongst themselves. Having been involved in the wave of multiculturalism through performance, Serbian-Canadians had already formed inter-ethnic relations with other groups in Canada. Intra-ethnic relations upon immigration were also mediated by the performance-based nature of the groups for two reasons. First, there was a collective effort towards the creation, preparation, and performance of spectacle, which transcended all political, religious and social divisions and boundaries that existed between Serbian people since the Second World War. Second, the performance itself was a strong vehicle for cultural education, which has taken the place of the traditional, oral folk history method of educating the youth. Performance not only simultaneously involved the presence and participation of the performer as well as the spectator in the experience of intra-ethnic relationships on stage; it is comparable to a ritual through which dancers and spectators are immersed in the experience physically, visually and aurally.

Folk-dance rehearsals and performances have served as a way of experiencing Serbian identity without the barriers of the traditional method of teaching history. The performing ensemble rarely insists that their members culturally educate themselves in a culture outside of the temporal and spatial boundaries of rehearsal. At the rehearsal, during the choreographic process, the character roles, gender roles and linguistic, vocal and dance dialects are carefully described and explained by the specialist in charge and practiced.

It is questionable whether the history of Serbian-Canadians would be available to today's youth if not for performing dance ensembles that continue to

⁵⁶ John Lukich, Plural Identities in Folk-dance: Spectacle as Vehicle for Hyphenated Identities, telephone conversation with author, 2 February 2016.

attract dancers who want to be seen and respected as part of a sophisticated performing ensemble. For instance, second and third generations born in the 1990's find historical sources on Serbian-Canadians that were not translated into English inconvenient. Historical sources remain inaccessible to Serbian-Canadian youth for whom the Serbian language is far more complicated and foreign than English, and in some cases, even when the Latin alphabet is used. Learning Serbian-Canadian history through literature required an advanced or fluent understanding of Serbian grammar, vocabulary and writing styles; complete with linguistic dialects and symbolic, figurative and metaphorical words and phrases. To no surprise, this method of cultural education was not nearly as popular nor sustainable as the process of learning cultural history through embodiment and dance.⁵⁷

Additionally, performance allowed for the expression, analysis and nurturing of multi-hyphenated identities. Until recently, according to Judith Lynne Hana, dance was not looked at as an anthropological tool through which people can assess and compare their current reality with the one represented in the dance through various concepts that were well described by author Hana.⁵⁸ As a result, the advancements in scholarly understanding and researching of dance was not adapted for Serbian-Canadian folk-dance culture; and the lack of research and analysis pertaining to the value of the folk-dance form by Serbian-Canadians, in fact, inspired this project.

Moreover, the practice and performance of folk-dance have had a transformative impact on the social and cultural traditions of Serbian-Canadians, who participated more freely with the community organization than religious institutions. The introduction of dance performance in the community has not only transformed intra-ethnic relations among the older community members but has facilitated a space for the growth and cultivation of intra-ethnic relationships among younger generations.

The understanding of folk-dance has also transformed in the community. Folk-dance performance, however, is not simply a re-enactment of some historical event, but an entire process whereby the dancer becomes the character embodies their personality and engages the audience in this experience. It is an interesting way to cultivate intra-ethnic relationships as well among Serbian-Canadians of different ethnic origins. In the past, individuals and community groups tended to define themselves in ways that distinguished them from other groups. This left the community members susceptible to exclusion and disassociation from a given group based on some ambiguous and unsubstantiated reason.

⁵⁷ Andriy Nahachewsky, "Once Again: On the Concepts of 'Second Existence Folk-dance,'" 19.

⁵⁸ Judith Lynne Hanna, et al. "Movements Toward Understanding Humans Through the Anthropological Study of Dance [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology* 20:2 (1979): 315. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/2741929>, accessed: 9 April, 2017.

Choreographies are composed in a way that dancers are not asked to be from the area that the dance is from; giving them exposure to the different subcultures that exist in the context of their Serbian background.⁵⁹ Additionally, dance was not taken seriously enough to be researched as a subject to be studied. Additionally, by the 1970s, dance was often described as sport or leisure by social scientists and was not written about in a way that adequately expressed its capacity to be an anthropological tool for the performer and spectator involved in a performance.

The importance of folk-dance is not merely its presence in the lives of many second and third generation children of Serbian-Canadians, but its ability to transcend space and time for an individual, allowing the individual to perform a reality of a given character in an alternate time and space. Unlike sport, although it is physically demanding, folk-dance allows people to stay in touch with a vague collective realization of their ethnic identity at a point in time where people were together for any reason. Anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna argues that “dance performance is a product of movement configurations and sometimes includes adjunct channels such as songs and costume,” and folk-dance in Canada resembles a bottleneck effect of a style of dance performance that originated in 1948 in Belgrade.⁶⁰ Although the form was housed and facilitated by religious institutions that were not dedicated to conserving the art in terms of symbolism and tradition relating to the folk-dance, the two were conventionally linked by the greater Canadian social structure. The dance form had not evolved to the point where a group could use the performance as a means of collective identity disambiguated from the Serbian church and socio-political associations with the homeland until 1987.

Hanna argued in 1970 that there was “no program designed to meet the needs of anthropologists interested in understanding human thought and behavior through the study of dance.” This project suggests that dancing itself, whatever the type may be, can be utilized as a method for studying global communities since folk-dance has the potential to serve as a “system of symbols and meanings for a particular time-space entity.”⁶¹ The study of dance itself, however, when done over a period of a few decades can have a tremendous impact on the understanding of a people by a population thought to be removed from these realities by time and space.

Through the use of syntactic materials, or researched ethnographic materials adapted for the stage, together with songs and costumes corresponding to a region, Serbian choreographers have come to Canada and choreographed

⁵⁹ This concept sparked the very notion of multi-hyphenated identities.

⁶⁰ Judith Lynne Hanna, et al., “Movements Toward Understanding Humans Through the Anthropological Study of Dance [and Comments and Reply],” 320

⁶¹ Ibid., 315.

dances that made the dancers embody the “rules dictating how signs may be combined, systematically connecting the “realm of movement to the realm of meaning.”⁶² Therefore, folk-dance in the Canadian context allowed for otherwise culturally estranged second and third generation descendants of Serbian-Canadians as a means of anthropological analysis using multiple devices.

Throughout this project, it was assumed that folk-dance has the potential to, convey “different degrees of meaning in a variety of ways” as described by Anca Giurchescu. In the Romanian ethnochoreologist’s 2001 publication, she elaborates that “rules of behavior, functioning in everyday life, are symbolized” in performance, while spatial arrangements will “function as a metonym for social hierarchy.”⁶³ These devices, whether conventional or autographic, involve the use of sociolinguistic concepts, among others, which include: stylization, metonyms as well as actualization. Using these devices, both participants, and spectators of folk-dance performance can construct a model of reality and explain the existence of dance patterns in terms of the recurring patterns between individuals as well as groups of individuals.

Conclusion

The data collected from this project supports that the collective identity was also nurtured through performance; one that was not necessarily affiliated with chetnik, partisan, communist or any modern political entity the way it might have been in previous decades. The dancers embody historical experiences of people in a given place at a particular time. Instead of socially or religiously political events, choreographies featured social events and religious events only.⁶⁴ However, the practice of folk-dance makes the symbolism of movements, movement patterns and embodied social interactions intuitive, which has made them easy to take for granted and brushed off as an excuse for socializing by Serbian-Canadian youth.

This project analyzed the anthropological uses for Serbian-Canadian folk-dance in accordance with Nahachewsky’s idea that “a person who wants to understand the dance perhaps needs to know it at two different points.”⁶⁵ As they grow up dancing, dancers are able to make connections and relationships with each other and perform with the folk-dance ensemble within these organizations.

⁶² Ibid., 320-321.

⁶³ Anca Giurchescu, “The Power of Dance and it’s Social and Political Uses,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 33 (2001): 109-112.

⁶⁴ Judith Lynne Hanna, et al., “Movements Toward Understanding Humans Through the Anthropological Study of Dance [and Comments and Reply],” 314.

⁶⁵ Andriy Nahachewsky, “Once Again: On the Concepts of ‘Second Existence Folk-dance,’” 17.

Therefore, dancers inevitably experience, analyze and juxtapose their identity in the time-space relationship at rehearsals and concerts.

With each rehearsal, dancers gain insight into the time-space entity being realized and are better able to understand the relationship between their own gender and social status in comparison to that of the character they are dancing. This learning process is an essential part of the embodiment of Serbian-Canadian social and cultural history, which facilitates the cultivation and nurturing of a rich and distinct Serbian-Canadian collective identity.