

# The Polish Folk Ensembles of Winnipeg: Shaped by Atlantic Cultural Currents

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*Abstract: Two Polish folk ensembles of Winnipeg share ancestral roots and a similar purpose as purveyors of Polish Canadian culture, yet they are disparate in their approach; one centres on maintaining an authentic heritage, the other on relevance. By examining their entwined histories, I propose that processes of globalization involving the transfer of information, ideas and cultural perspectives across multiple generations and numerous transatlantic Polish migrations have reformulated and re-signified the expressive practices of these two groups. This study contributes to musicological research considering transatlantic cultural flows between ancestral homelands and the Americas.*

*Résumé : Deux groupes folkloriques polonais de Winnipeg partagent les mêmes racines ancestrales et ont le même objectif, être les pourvoyeurs d'une culture canado-polonaise. Et cependant, ils ont une approche radicalement différente : l'un privilégie la conservation d'un patrimoine authentique, l'autre celui de la pertinence. En examinant leurs histoires entremêlées, j'é mets l'hypothèse que le processus de mondialisation qui implique les transferts d'informations, d'idées et de perspectives culturelles à travers des générations multiples et de nombreuses migrations transatlantiques, ont reformulé et conféré un nouveau sens aux pratiques expressives de ces deux groupes. Cette étude contribue à la recherche en musicologie qui examine les flux culturels transatlantiques entre les patries ancestrales et les Amériques.*

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*This article has accompanying videos on our YouTube channel. You can find them on the playlist for MUSICultures volume 40, issue 1, available here: [bit.ly/MUSICultures-40-1](http://bit.ly/MUSICultures-40-1). With the ephemerality of web-based media in mind, we warn you that our online content may not always be accessible, and we apologize for any inconvenience.*

It was on November 14 [1981], Polish Independence Day ... and it was my first year in Canada. In Poland, at that time ... the communists were fighting to stay in power.... So when you came here [Winnipeg], you were uprooted.... [It] was very emotional to hear Sokol [Choir], here in Canada, far away, thousands of miles

from home, [and then] you saw the dancers! The Sokol movement deemed to continue the Polish community, language, roots [and] traditions here in Canada. (Frank Filip, interview, April 30, 2011)

Over the past two hundred years, thousands of ethnic Poles have crossed the Atlantic Ocean to start a new life in the Americas. Many trace their origins to—and have arrived from—countries other than Poland. Wherever they settled, whether Detroit, U.S.; Curitiba, Brazil; or Winnipeg, Canada, many of their individual and collective histories have contributed—and continue to contribute—to an image of shared identity as members of a distinct ethnic community within both their immediate locale and the broader Polish diaspora, linked to a real or imagined Polish homeland. The expressive practices of music and dance as articulators of a “hyphenated” Polish identity (e.g., Polish Canadian, Polish American) have played an important role in and are affected by local, national and transnational cultural politics, and these shared and contested histories. Existing research on this subject has focused on the Polish communities in Detroit (Savaglio 2004, 1996); the *Górale*, or Polish Highlander culture of the Greater Toronto Area in Canada (Wrazen 1991, 2007, 2013); and the connection between class identity and musical choices in Polish American culture (Keil 1985). This article contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Polish expressive arts in the North American diaspora by considering how transnational influences and transatlantic connections coloured by local and global politics have shaped the activities of two Winnipeg Polish folk ensembles. It also provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of two ethnographic theories: Tina Ramnarine’s theory of calibration (2007) and Lundberg, Malm and Rönstrom’s concept of fields of tensions (2003).

The Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble, formed in 1913, and the Polish Dance Ensemble S.P.K. Iskry (Polish Combatants Association Iskry), established in 1967, share a common purpose as organizations responsible for maintaining some aspects of Polish Canadian culture. Their activities display shared ethnic bonds. While the cultural code upon which each group was founded is similar, the way each group has interpreted this ethos in order to reshape repertoire and performance practice since the 1960s is distinctive. These distinct and, at times, disparate cultural readings are significantly influenced by tensions developing over interpretations of shared and contested histories, arising in a community that comprises multiple generations and numerous migrations.

In his overview of “diaspora,” Mark Slobin (2003) argues that little changed in ethnomusicological discourses about migrations, ethnic groups,

minorities, hybridity and acculturation between 1970 and 2000. These discourses presented diasporic communities as “non-uniform, historical and political formulations” (Ramnarine 2007: 3), shaped by displacement and the constructs of nationalism and transnationalism. The essentialist ideals of preservation and authenticity were prevalent in the academic discussions of musical repertoires and performance practices within diasporic communities.

Slobin considers some newer frames of reference that have been developed to analyze cultural shifts created by human mobility in a postcolonial and global world. Each example he cites presents different approaches from which to analyze diasporic subjects while illuminating the complexity of diaspora studies. Tina Ramnarine uses the concept of “calibration” in her analysis of carnival performances in museum spaces as a way of theorizing disjunctures between social reality, representation and translation. Calibration can provide insights into diasporic conversations about musical practices in multicultural contexts, with a continuing ethnomusicological commitment to musical ethnicities (2007: 4). Most appealing to Ramnarine is “the emphasis [placed] on things not fitting, on adjustments in the musical and social world, and on the contradiction between discourses” (6). She particularly pinpoints the disassociations between representations and realities. I find calibration very useful in analyzing the apparent contradictions presented by some in the Winnipeg Polish community, particularly between 1950 and 1989. On one hand, the rhetoric and activities of many World War II Polish veterans in the city and elsewhere in the diaspora promoted and worked toward the return of a democratic Poland free from communist rule. On the other hand, this same group of Winnipeg Poles became the enabler by which a folk repertoire, developed and disseminated by communist Poland’s cultural bureaus, came to represent “authentic” Polish folk culture in Winnipeg. At times these divergent cultural readings have created tensions within the Polish community, and between the Winnipeg Polish folk ensembles.

In studying the impact of music and media on aspects of multiculturalism in late 20th-century Sweden, Dan Lundberg, Krister Malm and Owe Rönstrom developed a conceptual model for observing contemporary musical life. They identified “contradictory tendencies” or “fields of tension” around twelve poles: homogenous–diversified, pure–mixed, global–local, great tradition–little tradition, collective–individual, and mediated–live. They describe the three tension fields most relevant to this study as follows:

- On the one hand, musical life is becoming increasingly homogenous. The same types of institution, recorded music, performance, etc. are to be found in all countries. On the other

hand the number of styles and forms is increasing and musical life is becoming more diversified.

- On the one hand the number of mixed styles of music is increasing while on the other there are strong tendencies towards the preservation of musical styles, “genuine” and “authentic” performance and ethnic ... forms ... in the area of music.
- On the one hand increasing numbers of musical styles are arising that achieve global distribution. On the other hand local musical styles seem to be becoming increasingly important to many. (2003:62; emphasis added)

Tensions arise when agents or “contrary sources of power” create difference—for example, discrepant notions of what constitutes “pure” music. While realistically all tension fields intersect at any one time to constitute a “multi-dimensional energy sphere ... in its simplest form a tension field has two poles” (63), and a musical phenomenon is drawn toward one pole or another. In this article I use the three tension fields itemized above (homogenous–diversified, pure–mixed and global–local) as conceptual tools for analyzing the changing praxis of both folk ensembles. I also draw on the construct of “festival” as a force responsible for repertoire and praxis change (Bendix 1989; Cooley 2005), the concept of sponsored performance proposed by Wrazen (1991, 2007), and I examine the influence of politics on folk repertoire and performance practice in Poland (Czekanowska (1990). My discussion of ethnicity draws on the notion of intragroup maintenance (Savaglio 2004; Cohen 1985) as an extension of boundary (Barth 1969, 1981), as well as Harms’s (2000) and Radhakrishnan’s (2003) suggestion that ethnicity is mutable and context-specific. I apply diaspora theory, as presented by Savaglio (2004) and Wrazen (1991, 2007) in their studies of Polish expressive arts in Detroit and Toronto, to Winnipeg’s Polish community.

Examining five distinct events between 1960 and 2012 through these theoretical and conceptual lenses, I seek to answer the following questions: How did the transfer of information, ideas and cultural perspectives across multiple generations and several transatlantic immigrations, shaped by social and political doctrine, world events and technological advances, reformulate and re-signify the expressive practices of Sokol and Iskry? How is cultural preservation defined within the Polish community in Winnipeg?

## Methodology

Unlike Paula Savaglio, whose entry to one of Detroit's Polish American organizations was barred by someone saying, "You cannot come in here unless you are at least one-quarter Polish" (2004: 3), I have been warmly received by those involved in the performing of Polish culture in Winnipeg. Christine Tabbornor, a first-generation Polish Canadian, has been involved in aspects of the expressive arts in the Polish community in Winnipeg for nearly her entire life in various roles: as a dancer, as a qualified Polish dance teacher and choreographer, as a chorister and soloist with Sokol Choir, and most recently as the curator of the Ogniwo Polish Museum in Winnipeg. Tabbornor introduced me to Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble and Polish Dance Ensemble S.P.K. Iskry in 2005, and she and her daughter Elizabeth, who is also a qualified Polish dance instructor and choreographer, have assisted me since then. Christine has performed the role of translator and Elizabeth has informed me on Polish folk dancing and singing. They opened the doors that enabled me to formally interview the current and two former conductors of the Sokol Choir, three generations of dance instructors, choreographers and ensemble dancers involved in one or both groups. I also interviewed choristers who ranged in age from their early twenties to mid-seventies, some of whom were new to Sokol and others who had been part of the ensemble for nearly 50 years. I have had open access to Sokol's music library, and have listened to or watched numerous recordings of Sokol's performances dating back to the 1960s, and have had access to more than 150 photographs that document 90 years of Sokol's history.

I also was given the opportunity to interview members of S.P.K. Iskry including two generations of the Lorenc family, the daughter and granddaughter of the ensemble's founder, both of whom are elementary school teachers and accredited as Polish folk dance teachers and choreographers. The Iskry interviewees helped me to understand the depth of commitment to the maintenance of Polish culture in Winnipeg, but they were also candid about the problems they face in negotiating Iskry's future. I have attended at least one live S.P.K. Iskry performance annually. Members of the ensemble have been very supportive of my research by giving me their personal photographs and videos of Iskry, which have supplemented the recordings already available on DVD and YouTube.<sup>1</sup>

For a short time, I participated as a member of Sokol, having been encouraged to sing with the group when I arrived to watch a rehearsal for the very first time. The conductor, Tadeusz Biernacki, who was aware that I was a classically trained singer but could not speak Polish, said, "Sing the

vowels; we will take care of the consonants.” At the end of that first rehearsal of “vowel singing,” a choir member presented me with a handwritten sheet on Polish pronunciation. To me, this action displayed the inclusive nature of the group, which allows singers with a range of language abilities to participate. In preparation for Sokol’s performance at the 2011 Manitoba Prayer Breakfast, the choir members took great care to ensure that I was correctly attired in Polish costume and that I understood the historical purpose and regional affiliation of the individual garments. Although I enjoyed the challenge of singing with Sokol, time restraints curbed my role as a member. However, since 2010, I have observed some of their rehearsals, attended seven live performances, watched film/video footage and listened to recordings from as early as 1975, and witnessed changes in their praxis and population.

### Polish Identities in Winnipeg

Some of the same events that initiated the mass migration of Poles have also shaped Polish identities in the diaspora. Two strong historic markers are the partitioning of ancestral lands and the sporadic suppression of the Polish language and culture in the homeland. While I cannot engage in a comprehensive survey of historical events, I have chosen to focus on those that had a direct impact on the nascence and development of the two Polish organizations responsible for some aspects of Polish culture in Winnipeg.<sup>2</sup> The historical factors that have served as the impetus for the mass migration of Poles throughout the 20th century include the lack of available agricultural land designated for Poles in Galicia in the late 19th century and Canada’s immigration policy of the same period that encouraged agricultural immigration in order to populate western Canada; the displacement of Poles during and in the aftermath of the two world wars; the social and political outlook of communist Poland; and most recently emigration from a democratic Poland influenced by a global economy.

The Polish Canadian community in Winnipeg has more similar roots to the Polish American community in Detroit than it does to the one in Toronto. Wrazen’s (1991) study focuses on the Górale community in Toronto, the majority of whom emigrated in the 1970s and 1980s from the southern area of Poland called the Podhale, in the foothills of the Tatra Mountains. Savaglio’s investigation of Poles in Detroit reveals a less homogenous group where the label “Polish-American [has] enforce[d] an outsider’s sense of commonality on a group of people who do not address issues of politics, religion, or music uniformly” (2004: 13). While they do share a common national descent, the variations that exist in the Polish community in Detroit derive from the

melding of peoples from “at least three massive movements out of Poland over the last one hundred years” (2004: 14).

The Latin word *Polonia*, meaning “Poland,” has come to signify the Polish diaspora—Poles living outside the homeland—while the adjectives “old” and “new” are designations referring to specific migrations. The term “Old Polonia” is the label Poles in Detroit accord to the groups of Poles who immigrated from 1870 until the onset of WW II. The designation “New Polonia” indicates the groups of Poles who immigrated in the immediate aftermath of WW II. Savaglio’s research in Detroit supports the existence of difference between the “Polonias” in their political orientation, educational background, use of the Polish language, and number of generations (2004: 14). The differences are mirrored in the Winnipeg locale.

Comparable to the Detroit group, Winnipeg’s Old Polonia community arrived in Manitoba in the late 19th century. They were a religious, hard-working, poorly educated, often illiterate and impoverished people who emigrated from the Austrian-controlled province of Galicia. In a study completed in the early 1950s on the 268 members of Winnipeg’s Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol, 194 or 72.7 per cent reported Galicia as either their or their parents’ place of emigration (Turek 1967: 32). Many from this wave of immigration found employment in the burgeoning railroad industry, and, within a generation, some children of homesteading families, meaning those who had received agricultural land grants, had also moved to the city (Historica-Dominion Institute 2012b). Like their American counterparts, Winnipeg’s “Old Polonia” tended to divide its political interests between local and Polish ones. After 1918, when the free Polish state was re-established, their political interests turned more toward Canadian issues.

During the interwar years, Winnipeg’s Polish population was the largest in Canada, growing from 11,228 in 1931 to 36,550 a decade later. The city had earned the name “The Polonia Capital of Canada” (Pernal 1989: 6). Poles developed a strong community, with four parishes in the city, three of which possessed regular parochial elementary day schools. Polish and Canadian news was disseminated through two newspapers, the *Gazeta Katoleka* (Catholic Gazette) and *Czas* (The Times), and a variety of religious and secular organizations, some based on American Polish models, were established. Turek lists 54 Polish organizations in Winnipeg between 1902 and 1940. The life of some associations was very short while others are still in existence today.

Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol was founded in Winnipeg in 1906 and is the oldest secular Polish organization in the city. Its roots are based in the youth sport movement of the same name, which began in Czechoslovakia in 1862. The model rapidly spread across the Slavic world,

with each nation redefining Sokol for its own purpose. Central to the Polish Sokol movement within Europe was the development of “physical alertness and mental preparedness for the struggle for national independence” (Turek 1967: 207). The movement spread to American immigrant centres with the Winnipeg association as an affiliate until 1927 when it became an autonomous organization. While the Winnipeg branch retained its European ideals, it developed as a mutual aid society, providing assistance to newcomers through loans and insurances. As well, its social programs—by elevating their members’ educational and language standard—helped Poles to forge a place in the new society. “The pride its members felt for their rich heritage” (Bibik n.d.) was exhibited through the activities of Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble.

In the decade following WW II, Winnipeg’s Polish community grew dramatically as many displaced Poles immigrated to the city. The roots of “New Polonia” were not situated in a geographic locale but were formed through their singular but collective experiences in WW II as civilian detainees or political prisoners in Soviet work camps, as combatants, and as internationally displaced persons. The political and social ideals of the newcomers, shaped through their experiences, changed the dynamics of Winnipeg’s Polish society. Neither group could understand the struggles that the other had endured from Old Polonia’s experience of pioneering in the prairies to New Polonia’s narrative of survival during WW II. This led to the establishment of a self-interest group where the wartime experiences and political ideology of its members created a strong fraternity that distinguished them as representatives of New Polonia, distinct from those of Old Polonia.

The Polish Combatants Association or S.P.K.—*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*—was founded in Italy as an “embryo or reservoir for future army formations” by Polish ex-servicemen upon demobilization at the end of WW II (Heydenkorn 1985: 112). Branches of the organization whose “aims were mutual assistance and opposition to communism in Poland” opened throughout the Polish diaspora in communities wherever significant numbers of ex-servicemen immigrated (Stone 2003: 17).

On November 15, 1946, 350 Polish veterans arrived in Winnipeg (Stone 2003: 3). Even though “Winnipeg was a friendly city and a home to many Poles who opened their hearts and homes to [the] veterans,” the wartime experiences and political views that these men held were little understood by Old Polonia. These differences made integration difficult and created some animosity between Old and New Polonia (Patalas and Izydorczyk 2003: 170). The veterans felt their needs and the needs of other new immigrants were better served within their own community, and it was not long before they opened S.P.K. Branch #13, developing social and cultural programs, as had



Polish Gymnastics Association Sokol two generations before. However, their story is not as successful, for the S.P.K. mandated that only veterans could become members. A generation later, they instituted a membership drive focused primarily on their own offspring and extended to Poles who had defected from communist Poland. This drive was met with some success, but, in 2012, the branch closed, adhering to its natural course, as the membership list grew shorter with the passing of its elderly members. Yet, during its existence, it played a very important role in the maintenance of Polish culture in Winnipeg, and its legacy, the Polish Dance Ensemble S.P.K. Iskry, continues to carry the acronym of the founder.

There are two other smaller immigration groups of Poles to Winnipeg. My interviews with and observations of these two groups form an extremely small sampling, and are based entirely upon those who are involved in the Polish cultural ensembles. These newer immigrants remain connected to friends and family in Poland, develop friendships outside of the Polish community, and maintain their ethnic identities through their affiliations with the Polish community. Many are highly educated professionals who have enhanced the Polish organizations with their skill set and have contributed greatly to the wider Winnipeg community.

I have designated the migration of the 1980s as “transitional Polonia” that reflects the period of martial law in Poland as it transitioned from a communist to a democratic state. According to Polish Canadian researchers Heydenkorn and Kogler, immigrants of “transitional Polonia” showed minimal interest in the life of Polonia, keeping in contact with organizations to receive economic or charitable aid, or “to use established organizational buildings for recreational purpose” (1988: 112). Their study was based on interviews conducted during the 1980s in the Toronto region. My interviews have revealed that immigrants to Winnipeg from this era were focused on establishing a life within the broader Winnipeg community. While some were connected with the Polish community, others were not. Immigrating in 1985 as a child of eleven, one woman, now in her thirties, related that her family had little to do with the Polish community. They moved into an area of Winnipeg where there were no other Polish children and most of her neighbours and school friends were Filipino. She had not attended a Polish cultural event or even heard of Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble until 2011 and she joined the group for reasons other than getting in touch with her heritage. Her emotional response after a month of rehearsals with Sokol Choir was of surprise and excitement. She said, “There is a part of me that has been awakened ... [I] was swimming in Polish” and “it made me feel part of a community” (Agata Plozanski, interview, April 27, 2011).

The latest and ongoing immigration period comprises those who emigrated as citizens of the current democratic Polish state. In conversation with some recent arrivals, I have learned that they consider themselves economic migrants who are very content with the opportunities that relocation to Canada has provided. This group's full impact on Polish Canadian culture in Winnipeg remains to be seen.

Old and New Polonia established the cultural institutions that I am examining in this article. The factors that initiated the founding of each group were specific to their needs and framed within distinct historical narratives. The tensions stemming from their differences eventually spilled into the expressive arts.

### The Dissemination of Polish Expressive Arts in Winnipeg

As in the Detroit study, this investigation relies upon Savaglio's extension of Fredrik Barth's (1969, 1981) explanation of boundary maintenance. Savaglio defines boundaries as "a line of separation between groups that is maintained through constant re-negotiation and interaction"; her definition refers "on another level to boundaries and distinctions *within* the one group" (2004: 6; emphasis in original). She reinforces her supposition with Anthony Cohen's observations of differing alliances found within a community:

The "commonality" which is found in community need not be uniformity. It does not clone behaviour or ideas. It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meaning) may vary considerably among its members. The triumph of community is to so contain this variety that its inherent discordance does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries. (Cohen 1985: 20)

Thus Barth's concept of ascription by others or by self as an inherent aspect of intergroup boundaries is equally essential in "the maintenance of intra-group boundaries" (Savaglio 2004: 6). Savaglio's interpretation and extension of Barth's explanation of boundaries is particularly relevant when investigating the repertoires and performance practices of the two folk ensembles Sokol and S.P.K. Iskry.

In his history *Poles in Manitoba*, Turek reports that "the most popular form of music [was] vocal music, particularly choral performances" (1967: 230). In the first decade of the 20th century, Polish parish choirs existed in Winnipeg

and some provided music for secular purposes, but the Sokol Choir, formed under the patronage of the Polish Gymnastics Association Sokol, occupied “the most prominent place” (230).

Choral singing in multiple parts is not a feature of traditional Polish folk culture. Songs from the folk repertoire were primarily monophonic. However, in the 19th century, the development of choral singing as a transnationally influenced tradition was dependent upon political and social factors in each Polish locale, particularly in the homeland, with subtle nuances occurring in the diaspora.

The development of choirs in Polish territories was subject to diverse influences, such as social prejudices and the policies of cultural control put into effect by the governing bodies of each annexed territory. In Galicia, politically part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the organization of Polish societies was illegal until 1867. Choral singing as a secular activity performed by Poles emerged relatively slowly in Galicia, compared to other Polish-held territories. Historian Jolanta Pękacz proposes that the choral movement failed to thrive in Galicia because of strong social prejudices that involved an “aversion to mixing with one’s social inferior” (2002: 146), resulting in choirs whose members came from the same professional or social group. Limited membership and ostracism doomed many choirs to failure.

Conversely, on German-controlled Polish territory, where some aspects of Polish culture were suppressed, the development of choral singing as a Polish secular social activity was the German government’s attempt to assimilate the Poles. Whether this cultural product produced the desired effect is less important than how the German Poles, who immigrated to the U.S. in the last quarter of the 19th century, used choral singing to signify Polish culture in the new locale.

Immigrants from Poznań, a city within the German-occupied Polish territory, were some of the first Poles who instituted choral singing as a Polish activity in the U.S. Regina Bendix suggests that “traditions are defined in the present, and the actors doing the defining are only concerned whether or not the manifestation will accomplish what they intend to accomplish” (1989: 132). In the U.S., the Polish Singer’s Alliance, an organization formed in 1888 to promote and preserve Polish culture through choral singing, disseminated Polish choral culture. Choral singing in the Polish American community became a form of socialization whose underlying function served as a cultural identifier, a way of expressing “Polishness” as a national identity in the new locale.<sup>3</sup>

In the early years of 20th-century Winnipeg, the majority of Poles were from Galicia, part of the Austrian-held territory, and of the proletarian class.

A Polish choir under the auspices of Polish Gymnastics Association Sokol was established in 1908 and there was a lively exchange between Polish American and Polish Canadian organizations during this period, making it likely that there was some contact between Polish Canadians in Winnipeg and the Polish Singer's Alliance (Turek 1967: 188, 232). Winnipeg was developing as a centre of excellence for choral singing, largely as a result of associations with highly regarded British musicians and musical institutions. These connections would prove to be influential in shaping the Sokol Choir's performance practices in the second half of the 20th century, as will be discussed later in this article.

The Sokol Choir's first documented public performance outside the Polish community was in December 1914. Somewhat ironically, it was as musical entertainment for an event sponsored by the People's Forum, an early assimilationist society that sought to communicate the values of Anglo-Canadian society to non-English speaking immigrants.

After WW I, immigration to Canada resumed. Many of the newly arrived Polish immigrants were better educated than the earlier group. In 1925, Helena Garczynski, a ballet dancer and recent immigrant, formed the Sokol dance group. The first documented joint performance with the choir was at the 1929 Canadian Pacific Railway Festival, an early multi-ethnic celebration, where the group adopted the name Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble.<sup>4</sup>

Documentation of Sokol's activities between 1930 and 1950 is sparse. The few sources available outline a variety of activities: they were the Polish



Figure 1. Sokol Choir and Dancers, 1949. (Orphaned Photograph, Star Photo Studio, Ogniwio Museum, Winnipeg.)

representatives at a 1929 Winnipeg folk art festival, part of a 1931 celebration to commemorate the 1863 Polish Uprising for Independence, and, in 1939, the main attraction at an aid concert for Winnipeg's social welfare branch of the Community Chest.<sup>5</sup> In 1940 the ensemble performed at the annual Springtime in Poland Ball, where they presented "expressive forms of folk dancing some of which ha[d] not yet been performed in Winnipeg" (Presentation of Folk Dances 1940) and included a dance from Upper Silesia, called the "Trojak."<sup>6</sup>

Until 1945, the Polish community in Winnipeg—Old Polonia—had been a homogenous society where new immigrants were welcomed and became assimilated into Polish Canadian culture as it evolved locally. The influx of post-war immigrants of New Polonia changed the dynamics within the community and within the Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble. Their experiences shaped their outlook on cultural retention, and one man in particular stands out in this regard.

Henryk Lorenc (1928-1997) arrived in Winnipeg in 1949 at the age of 21. His personal experiences were akin to those of many other immigrants of this era. He had been a child in a Russian work camp where speaking Polish and celebrating Polish culture were forbidden. This experience was followed by a period as a refugee in Tanzania where he had the opportunity to openly participate in his culture for the first time in his life, and then he became a member of the Polish free forces in England. These experiences shaped his outlook on the retention and transmission of Polish culture. It became imperative for him, and others of New Polonia, to ensure that their children were informed about Polish history, retained their language and celebrated their traditions. Soon after his arrival in Winnipeg, Lorenc joined Sokol as a member of the dance troupe. During his 17-year tenure, Lorenc had the opportunity to be Acting Artistic Director, taking over the role a few times when the Artistic Director, Gladys Kulas, was on maternity leave. In 1967, another opportunity arose and Lorenc left Sokol to become the first Artistic Director of S.P.K. Iskry.

Polish Dance Ensemble S.P.K. Iskry carries the acronym of its patron. Iskry was formed in 1967 to mark the celebration of Canada's confederation. With this action the associates of S.P.K., as Polish veterans and members of Winnipeg's New Polonia, paid homage to their adopted country while furthering the organization's oath "to preserve all [Polish] national independent traditions, advocating and advancing these traditions in the new lands of settlement" (Heydenkorn 1985: 112). In the ensuing decades, many members of the Polish community supported the concept of cultural preservation. Frank Filip immigrated to Winnipeg in 1981 just prior to the implementation of martial law in Poland. He remarked, "preservation [of Polish folk culture in the diaspora] was important during the communist regime [because] folk music



Figure 2. Henryk Lorenc and partner. (By permission of Lorenc family, Winnipeg, Jane Bibik, private collection, Winnipeg.)

couldn't be celebrated in Poland, [but] it could be celebrated and maintained in Canada" (interview, April 30, 2011). This was the ethos of S.P.K. Iskry, and for more than 40 years the ensemble has taken great pride in "preserving the Polish Culture through traditional song and dance" (Iskry 2013).<sup>7</sup>



According to his daughter, Bozena Langtry, Lorenc's knowledge of Polish dance was gleaned from his association with other Poles, especially during his time in England. What he lacked in formal dance training he made up by studying the available books on Polish dance and costume. During the 1960s, there was some contact between Poles in Winnipeg and friends and family in Poland, but access to recordings and folklore books from the homeland was minimal. One interviewee mentioned the difficulty in re-creating some of the elaborate costuming, as traditional patterns, hats and sewing notions like braiding were unavailable in Canada, and unattainable from Poland (Gladys Kulas, interview, May 20, 2011). Yet, with the Polish community's enthusiasm and support, a distinct expressive practice evolved.

In the late 1970s, the performance practice of both ensembles would undergo great change, with Iskry's focus turning to the concept of authenticity and preservation. The children of New Polonia began to develop a relationship with the Polish state by attending language and folklore courses designed for Polonia students at the state-run Jagiellonian University in Cracow, by participating in summer training programs for folk dancers at various locales in Poland, and by competing in dance and choral festivals intended for Polonia groups worldwide. The freshly accredited Polish Canadian dance instructors returned to Winnipeg with new repertoire and concepts of performance practice that were subsequently introduced to the dance troupes. Paradoxically, it seems that the strong political views of anti-communism espoused by New Polonia held less significance when pitted against the community's desire to maintain this aspect of Polish heritage. The instilling of Polish traditions into future generations outweighed the abhorrence for the communist regime in Poland.

Over the decades, Sokol and Iskry have evoked memories of a real or imagined homeland through their performances and have created bonds between generations of Polish Canadians and new Polish immigrants. However, there is one prominent event where the groups display their Polishness to the wider community: an annual multicultural festival hosted by the city of Winnipeg. Planned as a singular event for the 1970 centenary celebrations of the province of Manitoba, Folklorama was designed "to provide a world tour of about twenty countries without leaving the city" (World Tour – Easy Way 1970). Folklorist Pauline Greenhill remarked that Folklorama "is remarkably successful at representing geographic and national 'there' as actually 'here,' and ethnic and cultural 'other' as truly part of 'self'" (2001: 1235). The representation of multiculturalism as characterized by the early Folklorama festivals signified a change in Winnipeg's self-image from a homogeneous Anglo-Canadian society to a cosmopolitan community

promoting strength through cultural diversity. The festival's initial success was deemed a powerful tool for civic boosterism and the festival developed into an ongoing annual event.

Both Sokol and Iskry have been part of Folklorama since its inception, performing at separate locations, and presenting Polish culture in their image. The festival has been one of each group's most highly attended "sponsored performances," defined by Wrazen as "any performance that is the result of some pre-arranged agreement between the performers and others who act as sponsors be they inside or outside the community" (1991: 174). This agreement between the folk ensembles and the organizers of Folklorama fuelled the development of highly polished yet stylistically divergent repertoire presented by the Polish Canadian groups.

Questions of authenticity versus stylized performance practice, repertoire preservation versus repertoire alteration and expansion have raised tensions within the Polish expressive arts community. Discords have developed through multiple perspectives derived from divergent experiences over differing periods of immigration and numerous generations.

There have been five events spanning the second half of the 20th century that have had a significant impact on the expressive practices of the Polish community in Winnipeg. All have been linked by transatlantic connections between Poland, Canada and, in a roundabout way, Brazil, and have propelled Sokol and Iskry down apparently divergent paths.

## 1) The Performance of State Folk Group of Song and Dance "Mazowsze"

Shortly after the end of WW II, the imposed communist government of Poland instituted a cultural development program that emulated the Soviet model and focused on elevating the Polish folk tradition through the establishment of dance and choral ensembles in schools, universities and factories. "Regional identities [were] manipulated into an integrated national identity through wise manoeuvres by governmental bodies," aimed at developing a sense of national pride (Czekanowska 1990: 120). As another tool to instil nationalism and cultural pride, two national folk ensembles were formed: the State Folk Group of Song and Dance "Mazowsze" in 1948, and the Polish National Song and Dance Ensemble "Śląsk" in 1953. These groups comprised professional singers, dancers and instrumentalists who performed highly stylized folk repertoire, which Czekanowska refers to as "artificially created repertoire" (118):



It is a commonly accepted fact that the tendency to shape dance cycles is now maintained mainly by show forms that juxtapose various varieties of dance and zones of tempo (slow-fast). This use of old national and folk dances, which was recorded by Kolberg in the nineteenth century (Kolberg 1857), has survived in transformed versions and in dramatized form in the amateur movement. (1990: 118)

Of significance is the national ensembles' shaping of performance praxis in the diaspora. Through wise promotion—Mazowsze “has been acclaimed throughout the world” (Celebrity Concert Series 1963)—and the presentation of a highly polished, beautifully crafted product that induced a nostalgia for an imagined place, the performance practice of Polish folk repertoire in the diaspora was changed because of many diaspora folk ensembles' desire to emulate the performances of Śląsk and Mazowsze.



Figure 3. Illustration in Mazowsze Concert Program, 1964. (Archives of Manitoba, P3287/71 Celebrity Concerts, page 8.)

There was much excitement in Winnipeg's Polish community when an announcement revealed that Mazowsze would perform in the city on January 18, 1964, as one of the few Canadian concerts during its second tour to North and South America. Sokol's conductor at this time was Richard Seaborn, a highly respected Winnipeg musician, the concertmaster of the Winnipeg Symphony. It is probable that Seaborn was one of the 5,500 people who attended the Mazowsze concert where he would have noted the differences in performance practice between the Polish and Polish Canadian groups. The visiting ensemble comprised a choir and a dance group. This division of the praxis removed some of the performance issues, particularly breathlessness, that occurred when the performers sang and danced simultaneously, as was the common practice in a Polish village setting. Secondly, the choir performed four-voice (SATB) arrangements of monophonic folk melodies specifically created for Mazowsze's performances.

Seaborn proposed a separation of the Sokol Choir and dance ensemble, which was granted in 1966. This change allowed him to develop the vocal qualities of his choir while implementing the new performance ideas he



Figure 4. Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble promotional photograph, ca. 1965. (Napoleon Photo Studio, Napoleon Milejszo, Jane Bibik, private collection, Winnipeg.)

adopted from Mazowsze. During his eleven years as conductor, he transcribed over seventy four-part songs from the recordings of both Mazowsze and Śląsk, sometimes arranging the transcription to best suit the voices in his choir. These new arrangements re-shaped the praxis, from singing monophonic or two-part folk songs to SATB arrangements, and formed the basis of Sokol's folk repertoire until the early 1980s.

The stylized repertoire and performance practice presented by Mazowsze became recognized globally by many inside and outside the Polish tradition as representative of genuine ethnic Polish folk. In Winnipeg, this new representation was accepted readily, swaying the field of tension toward the global pole.

## 2) Summer Courses Offered by The Society of Connection to Poles Living Abroad

Technological advances of the 1970s, especially in communication and transportation, offered new opportunities for Polish Canadians to learn more about their roots. The Polish state recognized those in the diaspora's voracious interest in Polish culture and created a department called The Society of Connection to Poles Living Abroad, whose sole purpose was dedicated to connecting with the offspring of expatriates. Choral and folk dance festivals initiated by the Polish Ministry of Culture linked diasporic Poles from many nations while specifically designed courses were developed to train instructors of Polonia dance groups.

Between March 18 and November 14, 2012, I interviewed seven accredited female, Winnipeg-based Polish dance instructors who had attended the dance courses in Poland and who were or still are affiliated with either Sokol or Iskry. These women represent three generations of dance instructors and range in age from as young as 22 to nearly 80 years of age. The oldest attended the courses in Poland in the mid-1960s and the youngest finished her training in 2010. According to four of the dancers, respected Polish folklorists, professional singers and dancers taught the intensive four-week programs. The modules established a fundamental knowledge of the five national dances (Kujawiak, Krakowiak, Oberek, Mazur, Polonaise) and emphasized certain micro-cultures of the diverse regions of Poland. By attending the courses over three consecutive summers, a dancer attained a broad knowledge of Polish dance and folklore, and achieved accreditation as a choreographer of Polish folk dance. Another dancer, Christine Tabbernor, affiliated with S.P.K. Iskry recalled:

The course was pretty serious. We danced for about five hours each day followed by another hour on related material, Polish folklore, song and costuming. If you were lucky enough to find music on cassette tapes or books on folklore you bought them.... It was the communist era and things were pretty scarce.... Communist propaganda was espoused, but we didn't take heed. (Interview, April 29, 2011)

Over the years, tensions arising from disagreements about what constitutes "authentic" Polish folk dance have at times been problematic particularly for members within Iskry. For Winnipeg choreographers of Polish folk dance who were involved in either Iskry or Sokol, authenticity is determined by various criteria, including costuming, posture and footwork, learned at the Polonia courses. In his discussion of Polish interpretations of authenticity Timothy Cooley invokes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's definition of heritage. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that heritage is "the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct. Heritage is created through a process of exhibition ... [which] endows heritage ... with a second life" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 369). Cooley sees this definition as circular: "heritage is created in performance, and performance gives heritage new life" (2005: 138). The performance of heritage preservation by both dance troupes differed slightly. Sokol was interested in preservation; however, they were not motivated by the same political ideology as the organizers of Iskry. S.P.K.'s oath to preserve all "Polish national independent traditions" (Heydenkorn 1985: 112), and to advance these traditions in their locale became of prime importance. The word "independent" is significant for it implies a distinction between Masowsze's choral and dance activities, which Iskry regards as inauthentic because they were developed by the communist state and used as a propaganda, and by the traditionally styled repertoire taught by Polish state dance schools that Winnipeg Poles considered to be authentic. Yet the same communist state developed and administered the "taught" tradition. Here, a disjuncture theorized as calibration is evident, for the political ethos of S.P.K. members was less important than the preservation of what they deemed a Polish national independent tradition.

During the summers of 1972 to 1974, Bozena Langtry, the daughter of Henryk Lorenc, traversed the Atlantic to attend the Polonia dance courses and attained her certification as choreographer. In 1976, she became the Artistic Director of Iskry. Her training influenced her vision for the dance ensemble and it built on the sense of tradition that her father instituted. Each dance

would be based on “authentic” movements, meaning what she had learned in Poland, rather than what was presented by Mazowsze, the group which many Winnipeg Poles, especially those associated with Iskry, regarded as an emblem of Polish communism. Yet, Langtry recognized the need sometimes to modernize the choreography for the sake of audience interest. After all, “to watch a group go round and round in circles would not make for a very interesting performance” (interview, March 18, 2011). For more than two decades, she influenced multiple generations of Winnipeg’s Iskry dancers. As one of her students voiced it, “Langtry’s vision of Iskry is instilled into her teachers. Iskry is preserving [Polish] sentiment and tradition” (Renata Gawlik, interview, April 27, 2011).

At play in this scenario are multiple fields of tension: global–local, pure–mixed, and homogenous–diverse. The repertoire taught at the Polonia dance courses became a global product available to anyone in the Polish diaspora who chose to attend the courses. Langtry and other Winnipeg choreographers considered the Polonia repertoire and performance practice to be authentic or pure. Yet, Langtry altered Iskry’s choreography of traditional round dances for audience interest, thus shaping it to suit the local, and moving the field of tensions toward a more balanced axis. Well-rehearsed, audience-appealing ethnic heritage enactments, where success was measured by audience numbers, became increasingly important to Iskry and Sokol with the advent of Folklorama as Winnipeg’s seemingly homogenous community became more aware of its ethnic diversity.

### 3) The Festival of Polonia Choirs

In 1976, the Sokol Choir travelled to Poland to compete in the Festival of Polonia Choirs. This event drew many Polish choral groups from across the diaspora. At that time, Sokol was under the direction of Winnipeg secondary school teacher John Standing, who had encouraged the group to include some French and English Canadian folk songs as part of their competition repertoire. Standing saw the group as representing Canada, rather than Poles competing against Poles. This act re-signified the purpose of the group within the contextual framework of the competition. Sokol’s presentation was different from the other competitors in three ways: their repertoire included non-Polish folk songs (songs from their adopted country); their stage presentation incorporated the wearing of traditional Polish costumes; and their performance was enhanced through rudimentary choreography. Conversely, the Polish American choir was attired in , red, white and blue, and the stars

and stripes of the American flag, while the Polish choir from Germany sported the traditional concert dress of black tie.

What does this say about each group's ethnic and national identities? The concert dress of the choir from Germany may have indicated the long tradition in that country of community-based choral singing. Conversely, dress may have not been a signifier as important to Poles living in the European diaspora as it was to those in North America. Within the context and the era, the American dress confirms the "melting pot" theory, where ethnicity was subservient to an over-arching democratic American culture. Notably, the Polish traditional dress worn by Sokol members, combined with the performance of Canadian folk material, was an outward expression of 1970s Canadian multicultural policy that "encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding" (Government of Canada 2012). Significantly, within this context, Sokol Choir members who were self-defined as "Polish" in Canada were considered "Canadian" in Poland by the adjudicators and the other choirs. Not only their repertoire but also what being Polish Canadian meant was re-defined.

The differences in performance practice between the Polish Canadians and those from the U.S. and Germany, notably the dress of each choir and their use of choreography, sway the pure-mixed field toward the mixed pole for the American and German choirs, and toward the pure one for the Polish



Figure 5. Sokol Choir ca. 1976. John Standing, Choral Conductor is third from left in the back row. (Orphaned photograph, possibly Napoleon Photo Studio, Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol, Winnipeg.)



Canadians. However, the opposite occurs with repertoire, for Sokol Choir included the traditional Nova Scotia folk song “Farewell to Nova Scotia” in the content for this competition. Both the choir and the judges accepted this disjuncture in their repertoire: Sokol Choir won three top honours at the 1976 festival.

As part of this event, the Sokol Choir toured Poland for one month, performing at various venues. The key event, which would change the direction of Sokol, occurred in Czestochowa, where the Pochondnia Male Voice Choir hosted the Canadian choral group. Here, the Polish Canadians met the choir’s accompanist, Tadeusz Biernacki. In 1978 Biernacki came to Winnipeg under the guise of a student visa, with no intention of returning to Poland. In 1980 he took over as director of the Sokol Choir, a position he still holds. His professional affiliations are many and of high profile. In Winnipeg, he is the Musical Director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master of the Manitoba Opera. Clearly, the Sokol Choir is a labour of love, tied to ethnic affiliation and personal commitment.

The Sokol Choir under Biernacki’s guidance has become an organization where young and old singers, new Polish immigrants and Polish Canadians, some generations removed from their roots, connect to share in a variety of music. His influence has been seminal to the choir’s viability and continued successes. He arranged and orchestrated the folk melodies into medleys, often grouped together by regional affiliation. More significantly, he increased Sokol’s repertoire by approximately 500 songs of differing genres, with the majority in Polish. The group has produced two professionally recorded albums of Polish, one liturgical, and the other, folk music (both released in 1984).

From the 1990s onwards, Sokol performances have included variety shows based on operettas and musicals, as well as the staging of a complete opera by Polish composer Stanislaw Moniusko. With his worldwide connections to the Polish musical community, Biernacki has contracted the highly respected Polish and Canadian Polish opera singers, lyric soprano Mariola Płazak-Ścibich and baritone Krzysztof Biernacki to perform with the Sokol Choir. Although Sokol still performs folk music at various events during the year, the changes in repertoire and performance have reformulated its expressive practices, moving the pure–mixed pole far away from “pure,” if the term is defined only as the performance of authentic Polish folk song repertoire. The repertoire has become more diversified, yet Sokol Choir can make claims to authenticity by retaining Polish as its language of performance.

At one time, the younger generation viewed the choir as an “old people’s group,” and there was some concern that the choir might cease to exist unless



Figure 6. Tadeusz Biernacki, Sokol Artistic Director, ca. 1981. (By permission of Tadeusz Biernacki, Jane Bibik, private collection, Winnipeg.)

the next generation joined. The introduction of different musics—pop, theatre and light opera—and the presentation of full stage productions drew in the younger generation. This renewed interest in Sokol has ensured its continuation for the foreseeable future.

#### 4) S.P.K. Iskry Wins World Championship

At the same time that Biernacki was effecting change in Winnipeg, a young Brazilian of Polish ancestry was gaining a reputation in Poland as a choreographer of Polish folk dance. In 1986 Sandra Barbosa, as a member of the Junak Polish Dance Ensemble from Curitiba, Brazil, participated in the World Festival of Polish Dance and Song Competition in Rzeszow, Poland. After the competition, he remained in Poland supported by a four-year scholarship given by the Polish Ministry of Culture and Education. Barbosa studied Polish ethnography (Jagiellonian University, Krakow) and choreography (Marie Curie University, Lublin).<sup>8</sup> Upon completion of his degrees, he danced with the Polish National Song and Dance [Group] Śląsk for seven years and also choreographed for a variety of folk groups. One was the Czestachowa Song and Dance Ensemble. The connection to Czestachowa is central, as it is the hometown of Sokol's musical director, Biernacki, who has been instrumental in



developing relationships between the Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble and groups in Czestochowa. Through the encouragement of Sokol members and possibly influenced by Biernacki's professional status, Barbosa moved to Winnipeg, becoming the Artistic Director of Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble, a position he held until 2006. In 1999 he also became the Artistic Director of Iskry.

Barbosa changed the performance practice of Iskry, moving away from what some considered "authentic"—meaning the style taught at the Polonia dance courses—to the more stylized performance or "artificially created repertoire" presented by Śląsk (Czekanowska 1990: 118). According to his dancers, Barbosa demanded a very high standard of presentation "with balletic-statuesque presence" (Elizabeth Tabernor, interview, May 21, 2011). Equal to his training and experience, his choreographies were fluid and designed for the professional stage. In 2002, Iskry made its biennial trip to the Polonia dance competition, where it won first place for its performance of the national dance "Mazur" (mazurka), choreographed by Barbosa.

Barbosa propelled Iskry to new heights, but the stylized choreographies, which distanced the group from their traditional roots, proved problematic. In 2007, at the height of preparations for Iskry's 40th anniversary, Barbosa suddenly resigned from Iskry, and Christine Kovach, the granddaughter of the ensemble's founder, filled the role. Kovach aspired to maintain the group's high standards of performance, but returned to the dance traditions instilled by the teachings of her mother and grandfather, removing the stylization that was influenced by Barbosa's training and choreographies. Kovach's changes might have begun to rebalance the pure-mixed, and global-local fields of tensions; however, there were more changes to come.

## 5) Transnational Roma Performance

Kovach's connection to Polish Canadian culture is a product of a deeply rooted socialization, being immersed from an early age in the traditional activities of her family and those of the Polish community in Winnipeg. Following in her mother's footsteps, Kovach achieved accreditation as a choreographer and teacher of Polish dance. Her strong dedication to tradition is balanced with an unwavering commitment to the continued success of Iskry.

Kovach shared her concerns with me about the future of Iskry in part due to the closing of S.P.K. Branch #13, as the branch has supported the dance troupe and its affiliated dance school since their inception. Once S.P.K.'s building was sold, where would they go? Would they be able to stand on their own or would they consider combining with another group, Polish

or otherwise, to ensure their survival? Since that interview, the building has sold and Iskry has been able to remain where they are for one more year. Significantly, Kovach is married to a Hungarian Canadian, and she and her husband are members of the Hungarian Kapisztrán Folk Ensemble of Winnipeg. This affiliation has opened possibilities, but more importantly for my research, it indicates, in part, the origins of the new direction Iskry is taking to repertoire. By enhancing their repertoire with a Roma dance, i.e., a dance outside the accepted tradition, differences of opinion arose as to whether the expressive practices of Polish Roma should be considered part of Polish Canadian heritage as Roma style continues to be absent from the choreography courses offered in Poland.

The choreography for “Cyganskie” is a “fusion of styles” developed from Kovach’s knowledge of Transylvanian, Hungarian and Polish Roma (gypsy) dance traditions (Christine Kovach, interview, November 14, 2012). The dance begins in silence except for the calls of encouragement from the dancers whose positioning on stage gives the impression of a crowd scene. Then a lone man steps to the centre, the crowd stops moving and the central figure energetically snaps his fingers and then briefly flaunts complicated footwork. As



Figure 7. S.P.K. Iskry performing Roma-styled dance “Cyganskie.” (Lisa Dasiewicz, private collection, Winnipeg.)

if in a friendly competition, when one man finishes, another steps forward and displays his abilities. This show of masculine prowess is typical of the *legényes*, Hungarian for “bachelor’s dance” as described by anthropologist László Kurtü, who, since 1982 has studied dance and dance rituals in Hungarian villages in the Transylvanian part of Romania, where Hungarians, Romanians and Romas have coexisted uneasily (2004: 11-12). When the music begins, the women join in the dance, predominantly remaining in a semi-circle formation, standard for presentational performance. The women’s footwork is a fusion of Polish and Roma steps; however, the circular arm and hand movement are distinctively Hungarian Canadian, based on what I have seen of Kapisztran’s dance style, and shaped by Kovach’s concept of Roma dance influences.<sup>9</sup>

The history of the Roma people is out of the scope of this paper with the exception of recognizing that they have been marginalized and culturally persecuted for centuries in many European countries, including Poland. On one hand and at some level, certain second- and third-generation Canadian Poles feel a connection to the Roma people, perhaps as a result of their similar histories of forced dispersion and cultural suppression (Christine Kovach, interview, November 4, 2012). On the other hand, Kovach’s involvement with Kapisztran Hungarian Folk Ensemble may be the driving force behind this work. Yet, by acknowledging that expressive practices of Polish Roma are indeed part of Polish Canadian culture, Kovach is changing Iskry’s direction (Kovach, interview, November 14, 2012). The acceptance of repertoire change reinforces Radhakrishnan’s argument that “ethnicity is always in a state of flux; far from being static, unchanging, and immutable ... and is always context specific” (2003: 119). For some participating in Winnipeg’s Polish dance community, the inclusion of Roma and Hungarian dance characteristics as part of Polish repertoire created disjunctures, yet they accepted the shift in repertoire. However, the shift significantly changes the parameters of Iskry’s repertoire and resignifies what it means to be of Polish ethnicity in Winnipeg in the 21st century.

## Conclusion

Principal to this study of Polish identity articulated through expressive arts are the two concepts of ethnicity and diaspora. “Ethnicity is part of a constant process of diachronically connected but changing identities” (Harms 2000: 69) where the boundaries of ethnic identity are constantly shifting within individual contexts, and “the present [is] always in the process of becoming the future” (2000: 69). Each wave of Polish immigration to Winnipeg integrated

people with divergent identities based on personal experiences and shared and contested histories, who along with their Canadian offspring have guided the expressive practices of the two folk groups Sokol and Iskry. As meaning-endowed activities, “the arts contribute to diasporic identity formation, maintenance, and transformation” (Titon and Turino 2004: 4). Sokol and Iskry have each been shaped through cultural connections to Poland, especially through participation in festivals and courses. They have been influenced by political views at the global and local level. Interactions between the two groups, with others in the diaspora and with those from outside the tradition have in a variety of ways reformulated these expressive practices.

Ramnarine’s theory of calibration has been beneficial for understanding the contradictions between discourses—the disjunction between representations and realities, such as the superseding of New Polonia’s political views by the community’s desire to preserve Polish culture that necessitated an acceptance of certain programs, created by and disseminated through the government of communist Poland. The inclusion of the Roma dance by S.P.K. Iskry redefines Polish repertoire in the local milieu, moving the content toward the mixed rather than pure pole as theorized in fields of tensions by Lundberg, Malm and Rönstrom (2003).

The concept of preservation as presented by the repertoire and performance practice of Iskry was greatly influenced by the political ethos of the members of New Polonia whose views were shaped by their experiences in WW II, while their ideas of authenticity were influenced by the dance training subsequent generations received in Poland. During Barbosa’s tenure as the ensemble’s director, Iskry attained a performance standard that has yet to be re-achieved; however, his choreographies were highly stylized, which set them apart from those of the three generations of the Lorenc family. Yet, over the past half-decade, the preservation and growth of Iskry as an ensemble proved ultimately more important than its repertoire. Polish Dance Ensemble S.P.K. Iskry has found a new space where their traditions are blending with contemporary folk practices and drawing from new sources within and beyond the boundaries of Polish convention.

On the other hand, for nearly half a century, remaining relevant to the needs of the community rather than preservation of a heritage has been the main focus for the Sokol Choir. This ensemble has also moved with the times, albeit in different ways. Sokol’s vocal repertoire, all performed in Polish, has grown from simple folk and liturgical music to include a plethora of styles ranging from traditional Polish folk songs sung in four-part SATB medleys, liturgical music encompassing Polish hymns to Handel’s *Messiah*, selections from Polish opera, and contemporary operetta, pop and jazz tunes. Conductor

Biernacki brings out the best qualities in the choir by adapting the music to suit, and keeps their interest by providing challenging but not overly daunting music. The audiences continue to return because each performance is well prepared, exciting and encompasses music for all ages. The praxis has also changed over the decades from a choir who used rudimentary choreography to a choral group who can present fully dramatized opera and musical theatre scenes. The changes in performance practice and repertoire have kept Sokol current, responding to the needs of the community. Michal Kowalik, one of Sokol's youngest members and a new immigrant, summed up Sokol's mandate: "Sokol is more about bringing Polish people together rather than just preserving stuff" (Michal Kowalik, interview, April 30, 2011).

Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble and Polish Dance Ensemble S.P.K. Iskry have successfully negotiated tensions within and between their groups, resulting in a vibrant, responsive praxis distinct to Winnipeg. Without doubt, activities in the future will bring differences of opinion that will drive change. There is one undeniable fact: through their expressive practices, the members of Sokol and Iskry have a powerful and passionate connection to the Polish community in Winnipeg, to their kinspeople in the diaspora and to those still in Poland—a bond that unites them by roots that have been shaped by Atlantic cultural currents. 🍁

## Notes

1. Christine Tabernor and I have been friends for more than twenty years. Over the six years of this research, Christine, her daughter Elizabeth and I have shared many hours of lively conversation about matters in Winnipeg's Polish community, crossing the gamut from cultural and linguistic retention to political and historical narratives. Other members of the community who have been a great help are retired school teacher Jerzy Bibik, a long-time member of Sokol who is currently the ensemble's Coordinator of Performances and Media and its Music Librarian; Jane Bibik, former dancer and chorister with Sokol who provided me with the power point presentation and shared the stories behind the photographs; Tadeusz Biernacki, the current director of Sokol who articulated his philosophy on the retention and growth of Polish Canadian culture in Winnipeg; and Bozena Langtry and Christine Kovach, the daughter and grand-daughter of the founder of Iskry, who explained their views as accredited Polish folk dance teachers and choreographers on the shaping of Polish culture in Winnipeg.

2. For a detailed account of historical events that lead to Polish migrations in the 20th century, I recommend chapters 1 and 2 in Paula Savaglio's monograph *Negotiating Ethnic Boundaries: Polish American Music in Detroit* (2004), chapters 4 to 7 in Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki's *A Concise History of Poland* (2006), or chapters 2 to 4 in volume

2 of Norman Davies's *God's Playground: A History of Poland: 1795 to the Present* (2005). For a history of Polish immigration to Canada, see the article "The Poles" in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica-Dominion Institute 2012b), and on Polish immigration to Manitoba see chapters 1 and 2 in Victor Turek's monograph *Poles in Manitoba* (1967).

3. For further information on Polish chorale music in the United States see Kleeman and Cooley (2007-2013).

4. The Canadian Pacific Railway Festivals (1927-1931) were a series of music and folk art festivals whose purpose was to explore Canada's cultural resources. It is of great significance to musical evolution in Canada because it was an early instance of a major Canadian corporation supporting the arts, and was "an early attempt to promote serious composition by Canadians, taking into account, moreover, the folk material of the country as a source for such composition, and one of the early concerted attempts to acquaint Canada's many different musical communities and audiences with each other" (Historica-Dominion 2012a).

5. This was an international program that began in the U.S. during WW I and was designed to fund the social programs that were developed and implemented during this crisis.

6. Documentation of Sokol's activities from 1960 onward is quite extensive. The ensemble has performed throughout the western provinces, and participated at three folk and music festivals in Poland, winning three top honours in 1972 at the International Festival of Polonia Choirs in Koszalin, Poland. They were featured twice at Expo '86 in Vancouver and throughout the 1990s attended various festivals in the United States, including eight appearances at the Wisconsin Dells Polish Fest. Sokol Choir has won the coveted Tweedsmuir Trophy (1964) for best adult choir at the Winnipeg Music Festival, performed on radio, appeared in concert with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra (1965-1966), and has produced two professionally recorded albums of Polish liturgical and folk music (1984). The ensemble was featured in the CBC series that presented various ethnic communities titled *Ce Coin de Terre* (Doblin 1975) and in the CTV series *In Harmony* (1983). The dance troupe continues to focus on folk and character dances, while the choir has expanded its repertoire to include liturgical, music theatre, opera and other classical works. Although Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble is autonomous today, it remains closely affiliated to Sokol Gymnastics Association, Winnipeg. Two videos of Sokol Choir are available on YouTube. One is a 2009 performance of the Polish folk song "Oj Jaisu," a song about a young couple. The male soloist is Michal Kowalik, who immigrated to Winnipeg in 2007. The second video is a compilation of the 2011 Christmas Concert featuring Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble and friends.

7. Highlights from Iskry's past include a performance at the 1976 Olympics in Montréal, and participating at the World Festival of Polish Folk Song and Dance at Rzeszow, Poland in 1993, 1996, 1996 and in 2002, when they were crowned World Champions in the Mazur dance competition.

8. Barbosa also studied at the Igor Moissejev Ballet and the state ensemble Beriozka Teachers Program in Kronin, Poland, and Moscow, Russia.

9. A video of this dance is available on YouTube, and can be found on *MUSICultures's* YouTube playlist for volume 40, issue 1.

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