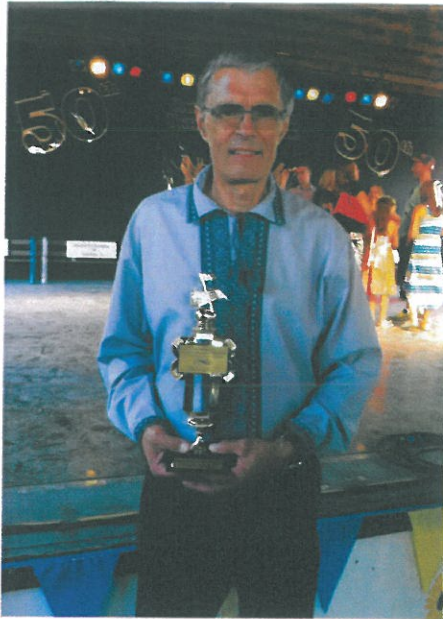


THE MUSIC AND PASSION OF CHARLIE GARGUS

By Pamela Shapka

*WITH CONTENT AND QUOTES FROM CHARLIE'S SISTERS: MARILYN
GARGUS SCHAFFER AND BERENICE GARGUS FREEDOME.*

Our family met Charlie Gargus at the first Ukrainian Music Workshop, which was held in Mundare in April, 2005. Since then we have attended the workshop each of the past ten years it has run. Over the years my family has had the pleasure of learning Ukrainian tunes on violin, guitar, dulcimer and keyboard. We have also met instructors whom we subsequently employed, and we have jammed with classmates, shared the art of pysanka writing, and visited local museums.



When I profiled Charlie I turned to his family for the history that encouraged Charlie's inherent passion for continuing the traditions of Ukrainian music.

Charlie grew up in Lamont, the eldest of six children. His father, Peter, was an avid musician, fiddler and composer. Peter, a firm believer in setting rhythm as a groundwork for musical training, set a six-year-old Charlie at the drums with the Swingsters band. Although sometimes Charlie was found sleeping among the instrument cases, by eight years old he was hooked and kept the beat all night.

Over the years, four of Charlie's siblings joined the band, and eventually Charlie's son Jarod joined too, bringing three generations to the stage. The band recorded several CDs and LP records over its long run of fifty-seven years, retiring in 1998. Over the forty years Charlie performed in the group, he moved from drums to banjo, guitar, bass and second trumpet. His loss of half of two fingers on his right hand didn't deter him a bit; and at fifty, when

he inherited his dad's coveted violin, a new passion for fiddling was ignited!

Charlie dedicated himself to learning and practicing as much as he could. He began violin training under Heather Soldan, and played with his dad Peter at every opportunity. In 2001 he discovered the Alberta Society of Fiddlers Camps (www.asof.ca). It was the fall of 2004, after attending ASOF camp and the Athabasca Jamboree, his wife, Debby, recalls Charlie saying "All this music I'm learning at fiddle camp—the Ottawa Valley, Celtic ... it's great, but nobody's doing Ukrainian Music." He continued, "We're going to have a music workshop in Mundare!" The idea of hosting a one-day workshop specific to Ukrainian Music was something vitally important to Charlie. Passionate to keep Ukrainian tunes alive, with the passing of his father Charlie's desire and purpose was given new urgency.

Determined, Charlie and Debby set to the task of hosting the first-ever Ukrainian Music Workshop in Mundare in April 2005. Ten years later, people aged six to eighty still travel to Mundare each year on the second Saturday in March from Alberta, Saskatchewan and even Ontario to learn distinctly traditional Ukrainian tunes. Instruction to roughly seventy-five students is offered primarily in violin, and keyboard, but also in accordion, dulcimer, guitar and ballads. Demand and available instructors determine which classes are offered. "They're not all of Ukrainian heritage," Debby says, "but they all want to learn Ukrainian music."

Each year the workshop wraps up with a sold-out Ukrainian feast prepared by the ladies group in Mundare and assisted by donations from the local Stawnichy's Meat Processors. There is a concert showcasing the tunes learned that day. The evening ends in a traditional circle jam for


musicians and guests alike to enjoy.

In addition to bringing the Ukrainian Music Workshop to life, Charlie eagerly participates in events supporting and promoting Ukrainian music. He volunteered his time to the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts fundraiser Zacharovana Nich in 2011, and for the annual Deep Freeze Festival in Edmonton in 2014.

Charlie has participated in the Athabasca Harvest Gold competition, and won second place for his Ukrainian tunes in the Open Category. In the Grand North American Fiddle Championship (2012-14) hosted by the Alberta Wildrose Fiddlers in Radway he brought home winnings in the Twin Category (with his cousin Tom) and won First in the Seniors Category.

On August 2, 2015, for his contributions to Ukrainian Music, Charlie was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ukrainian Musicians Association. The award was presented at the fiftieth anniversary of the Ukrainian Festival in Dauphin, Manitoba.

Although this year's camp has come to an end, you can still catch Charlie performing with his Silver and Gold Trio at seniors' lodges, the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, and the Baba's and Borshch Festival in Andrew among other venues. Charlie's passion has him practicing, playing, helping organize events, or teaching traditional Ukrainian music on violin, mandolin and guitar to students of all ages. If anyone is yearning for of some toe-tappin' traditional Ukrainian tunes, just look up Charlie Gargus, the Mayor of Mundare! I'm sure he'll be happy to oblige!

"Charlie's absolutely loves Ukrainian music," Debby says. "He gets lost in it. It's truly his passion and he loves to share it." 



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: GARGUS FAMILY