

Sharing culture through music

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River East

Maryka Chabluk is trying to explain why she is moved to help Ukrainian children living 8,000 kilometres away.

“I honestly feel that I am called to it. It’s inspiration that I get when I see a need for children to be more engaged in learning about their roots,” said the Ukrainian Canadian educator, singer, songwriter, and book editor.

Chabluk first published and printed *Maryka’s Treasures: Ukrainian and English Sing-along Activity Book* back in 2022, when thousands of Ukrainian families fled their home country following the Russian invasion and arrived in Canada. The book was included in backpacks given to newcomers who arrived with children.



Photo by Jesse Brogan

Led by Maryka Chabluk, the Maria choir rehearses for its upcoming Christmas concert.

“Originally, I created the songs and the books for Canadian children to give them an opportunity to learn Ukrainian vocabulary,” Chabluk explained. “Now they serve an important purpose in helping Ukrainian-speaking children and their families learn more English.”

Most recently, Chabluk, who has long been involved in Winnipeg’s Ukrainian Canadian community and has been musical all her life, has been sending the activity books to children in Ukraine, where they have reached schools, clubs, orphanages, and rehabilitation centres.

“I’ve created these songs so that they have a message; a moral (and) inspirational message,” Chabluk said.

Chabluk leads a youth choir called Maria at St. Anne Ukrainian Catholic Church (35 Marcie St.). At first, the Ukrainian children in the choir were not sure if they could learn all the English words.

“Because of the rhyme and the music that goes with it, I find it an excellent tool for learning a new language. It’s the kind of thing that a teacher in a classroom can teach the songs and encourage the children to do the activities,” Chabluk said.

Chabluk says it is part of her life’s mission to expose as many as many Canadians to Ukrainian culture while helping newcomers from Ukraine maintain connections to their culture.

Vladislav Abramiak, 13, has participated in more than one of Chabluk’s choirs and after learning how to sing *O Canada*, he realized he liked to sing.

“I’m also a musician. I play a Ukrainian national instrument, the bandura (a stringed instrument, like a lute). I wanted to expand my knowledge with that and continue to sing with Maryka,” Abramiak said.

Abramiak wants to continue to engage with his culture.



Photo by Jesse Brogan

Members of the Maria choir pack up copies of *Maryka's Treasure* to be sent to Ukraine.

"I'd like to have a vast knowledge of Ukrainian culture while still staying in Canada, and not being lost as a Ukrainian," Abramiak said.

Svitlana Buriak, 15, has been practicing traditional Ukrainian dance with *Rusalka* for three years. She discovered her love for singing when Chabluk invited her to try it out.

"I was like, 'No I don't sing,' (but) then I tried, saw improvements and now I'm kind of hooked," Buriak said. "I love combining the two."

The Maria choir has been rehearsing Christmas carols for its next performance, on Dec. 21 at St. Anne Ukrainian Catholic Church.

Maryka's Treasures can be purchased at the Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre. For more information, visit marykastreasures.com