

RICHARD SCHMIDT

Recognized by the Polish government for his outstanding dedication in promoting their culture abroad, Richard was awarded the "Lifetime Achievement Award" in the year 2000. Richard is an elected member currently sitting on the board of directors of the "Société du Patrimoine d'Expression du Québec", the provincial partner of "Folklore Canada International" and the "International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Art".



Having begun his dancing career in 1966 when he joined the children's group of The Polish-Canadian Folk Ensemble "Podhale", in Montreal, Canada, he soon became the principal dancer and complimented his artistic talents with music lessons enabling him to interpret the measures and rhythms with ease. In 1980, at the age of eighteen he took on the role as assistant choreographer and began learning the intricacies of teaching folk dancing. He complimented his studies at home by traveling extensively to Poland to study under many of that country's specialists. He continued to dance and participate in numerous festivals and competitions in North America and Europe. As his reputation grew, this trilingual speaking (English, French and Polish) instructor was soon being invited to teach and choreograph for numerous folk ensembles in Canada and the United States, as well as at international dance camps.

His ability to teach the basic steps in detail and his extensive knowledge of all of Poland's regional and national dances, along with his innate vision for building authentic compositions, led him to take over the reins as Artistic Director of Podhale in 1991. He immediately got to work by organizing and hosting a successful week-long festival of Polish Folk in 1992, attended by thirty amateur groups from across North America and six choreographers from Poland highlighted by a Gala performance to a full house on one of Montreal's premier stages. This set the stage for many things to come.

Over the past fifteen years, Richard has brought the ensemble to the forefront. They have been seen by millions of people through their performances in full-length concerts across Europe and North America, multiple daily presentations at Epcot Centre in Disney World Florida, numerous television appearances and their participation in the mini-series "Le Pollock" on both the French and English networks of Canadian television, where he also acted as consultant on all dance scenes.

Often adding variety to a show, Richard has included dances from the French cancan to roaming gypsies in his repertoire, but his love and passion has always remained the vibrant and beautiful dances of Poland, such as the obereks, kujawiaks, polkas and mountaineer dances, to name a few.

His energy and passion combined with thirty-nine years of experience provide his students complete satisfaction in the knowledge that they have just learnt true and authentic dance steps to add to their repertoire. Richard recently returned to Montreal to continue his work with the Podhale Folk Dance Company, after a second successful camp in Stockton, California. His ensemble also returned triumphantly from the World Festival of Polish Folklore held in Poland in July, where they received high acclaim from the resident expert choreographers for their choice of repertoire, their presentation and the beauty of their costumes. The coming season will find Richard once again in the public eye as he continues to direct full-length concerts of folk dance locally, as well as, his teachings tours in New Mexico and Poland during the summer of 2006.