



Przyjaciel Ludu Kaszubskiego

(Friend of the Kashubian People)

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A CULTURAL FIRST!!

The Regional Folk Song and Dance Group Kaszuby of Kartuzy, Poland, visits the Kashubian area of Canada

by Shirley Mask Connolly

The Kashubs and their descendants (such as myself) have lived in Canada for almost 140 years (since 1858). After so many years, we know little or nothing of our cultural heritage. Then on the Canadian Thanksgiving Day weekend, October 11th and 12th, 1997, we were given a spectacular glimpse of the rich tradition that was once ours!!

The Regional Folk Song and Dance group "Kaszuby of Kartuzy" came to Canada to perform for the Polish community in the Toronto area. They were invited by the Canadian Cultural Association of Persons from Gdansk (Kulturalne Stowarzyszenie Gdanzczan) in honour of the Millennium Celebrations of Gdansk (997-1997). However, being an amateur group with limited finances, airfare for 30 people was prohibitively expensive. LOT POLISH AIRLINES generously gave the group ½ price fares and the Toronto Polish people looked after accommodations etc. The performers knew of the Wilno Kashubian settlement and wished to meet some of "our" people and see how and where we lived. After the Toronto performances, Ted Kay of Toronto scheduled bus transportation and arrangements were made for three performances in Killaloe, Wilno and Barry's Bay, Ontario.

The Kaszuby performers wore traditional costumes dated from the late 18th and early 19th century period in Kashubian Poland. This was the time just before our ancestors emigrated to Canada and the United States. The Kashubian men were dashing in high black boots, white baggy trousers, red waistcoats, long, royal-blue coloured vests, and puffy-sleeved white shirts. They wore black hats with a red band above the brim. The beautiful flowing vests sported several slits in the lower mid back. Embroidered strips of material added further detailing.



The women wore colourful skirts in red, blue, green, and gold. Each colour has a symbolic significance - the red of the homeland, the blue of the Baltic, the green of new beginnings, and the gold of farming. These were decorated with black ribbon and topped by embroidered white aprons. They also wore crisp white blouses with Kashubian floral patterns embroidered on the sleeves. Intricately embroidered vests and bonnets completed the outfit. Long ribbons trailed down their backs.

The performers also had a more simple workaday costume with the women in floral printed skirts and aprons and plain white blouses and kerchiefs; the men wore green shirts with sashes and black hats with visors. (Continued on page 3)

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In a dramatic fishing skit, the men wore rain slickers and rain hats and carried nets. In this number, the song confirmed that there would be no Kaszub without Poland and no Poland without the Kashubs. It emphasized the significance of Kaszub giving Poland access to the sea. This song and all of the Kaszub performance was done in the Kashubian dialect. Thanks to Jacek Czapiewski for this translation.

The show consisted of a good balance of songs and dances. The set dances reminded me of the local square dances so popular with the Canadian Kashubes in the 1950's through 70's. There was the usual yelling and stomping, as well as a playfulness so typical of our Canadian Kashub people. Although I did not understand the lyrics, this element of fun was evident in the courtship rituals, the male-female scoldings and reconciliations, etc. that these dances and songs depicted.

A friend who sat beside me, translated bits and pieces of the dialogue that she understood. Rosemary Brotton nee Lorbetskie is one of the few Kashubian Canadians of the 5th generation who still speak the language. According to her translation, the lyrics told of falling in love, of nature, of Kashubian work and life. One hilarious segment was performed by a tall blonde Kashub fellow, Jacek Křiowski, using different voices... of a husband and wife. The wife made beans for supper and then they went to the theater to see a war movie. The inevitable happened and the beans "acted up" on the woman, who added a few "bangs" to the movie. I only caught a few words in this skit, but I found the impersonations of the whining woman with her sore stomach and the scolding of the embarrassed husband, excellent. Again I was reminded of the old days, the old people and the old stories. The Kashubes managed to laugh and sing about the simplest day to day happenings in their lives - despite all the hardship and pain they endured!

I was especially intrigued with the song about the Kashubian notes. When I visited the Kartuzy Kashubian Museum in Poland, an old and obviously experienced guide had sung this song for

us. A senior member of the Kaszub group performed it in Barry's Bay. Two pretty Kashubian girls held up a pictorial of the notes. Afterwards the audience sang along with a great deal of comical chiding and cajoling from the main singer. I have included my copy of the pictorial notes and the words of the "song" from the Kashubian Museum in Kartuzy.

KASZUBSKI NUT



1. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 2. Kaszubski nut
 3. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 4. Kaszubski nut

5. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 6. Kaszubski nut
 7. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 8. Kaszubski nut

9. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 10. Kaszubski nut
 11. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 12. Kaszubski nut

13. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 14. Kaszubski nut
 15. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 16. Kaszubski nut

17. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 18. Kaszubski nut
 19. Je kaszubi, nie polski
 20. Kaszubski nut

There was an entertaining and enlightening segment with Kashubian instruments: the Devil's fiddle and a barrel with a horsehair pull (called Burczybas). I had become well acquainted with the Devil's fiddle on our visit to Poland. The Devil's fiddle is a musical "contraption" with a garishly painted head, a colourfully beribboned hat, and a violin-type, stringed body. The musician uses a bow to play on strings and also to bang the cymbal-type hat and drumlike body. It is actually quite rhythmic if played properly. When we visited the Wdzydze Ethnographic Museum in Kashubian Poland, the shop sold handmade Devil's Fiddles and we purchased one as a gift for our hosts, the Visutskies (Jim and Lynne - Polish spelling Wysocki). However, since they lived in Warsaw, we had to transport it a couple of hundred miles. The Devil's fiddle is a good five feet in height and so it had to share the backseat with my father. Dad was quite glad to see the end of his "devilish" fellow passenger who clanged and clattered the entire several hour trip!

The barrel and horsehair instrument requires two players: one to hold the barrel and the other to pull the tail. The tail is wet down at regular intervals. They say that it must be a young girl who puts the water on the tail and a pretty young Kashubian gal danced between the two pairs of players, ceremoniously performing this ritual. The pulling creates a deep hollow note which can be varied by the method and timing of the pulls. At the Kaszub performance, two separate pairs played the barrels. One made a shorter, higher pitched sound while the other produced a longer and deeper note. It looked simple and fun to do, but when three volunteers from the audience gave it a try, it became obvious that a degree of skill was necessary.

And one could not help but be impressed by the excellent performance of the beautiful female violinist. She played for the entire 1 1/2 hour show!

There was a tobacco skit where one performer acted out the story of making snuff, while another performer moved through the audience with his rog (snuff box made of a cow's horn) giving the brave a chance to experience the stuff. Snorting snuff is a Kashubian pleasure of ancient and present day Poland. On our visit to the Kartuzy Museum, we had an initiation to snuff. There they have a large display of snuff containers, mostly made of cow horns. In the Maszk family, my great great grandmother, Magdalena, had a snuff box which now is in the possession of my dad, Louis Mask. The typical reaction to snuff is a big sneeze and then a laugh! Apparently the Kashubes think sneezing is healthy.

Everyone who saw the show loved it! The Kaszub of Kartuzy group may be "amateurs" but their show is undoubtedly professionally planned and performed. The group was formed in 1946 by Marla Brystori, but never before have they played in North America! They have performed in almost every city in Poland and travelled by bus to over 40 locations outside of their homeland, but never before crossed the ocean!

The members of the group come from all walks of life, including teachers, students, foresters, a bank teller, hospital workers, someone who worked in a sausage factory, etc. Des

Pepinski, a Canadian of Kashub origins with a keen interest in all things Kashubian, visited with some of the performers on the Friday evening of their arrival. They told him that there were 76 Kashubian dialects and generally they speak the Kartuzy version, whereas most of our settlement speaks the Koscierzyna/Lipusz dialect. The performers speak Kashubian only at home. At work they speak Polish. Of course, most of our Canadian Kashubes now speak English, and few speak more than a smattering of Kashub. So conversations were generally limited as the Canadian Kashubes struggled to find words to answer their questions. Hopefully we were able to make a favourable impression despite the communication difficulties.

To get another perspective on the Kartuzy group performance, I spoke to Jack Czapiewski who was born in Poland and as an adult emigrated to Canada. He has Kashubian roots in the same parishes as many of the Wilno, Ontario, Kashubes. He was pleasantly surprised that the performance was joyful and energetic, expecting something more somber. He talked of Kashub people being oppressed by the Germans and the Poles and had thought this probably resulted in repression of their culture. Even under Communist rule, the Kashubian spoken language was not allowed in school. Jack thinks that the happy enthusiasm of the Kartuzy group is indicative of a new era of Kashubian freedom - a kind of Kashubian revival. He spoke of Kashub lessons on Polish tv, documentaries on Kaszub, University courses in Kashubian studies, etc. Jack commented that the large turnout of the newer Polish residents (post World War II) of the Wadsworth Lake area (near Barry's Bay, Ontario) was indicative of the present day Polish interest in ethnicity. And the Kashubes numbering approximately 1/4 of a million people, make for one of the largest minority groups in Poland today. Jack gave the Kartuzy group a rave review, as did everyone who saw the performance!

Such a unique cultural exchange is indeed an unforgettable treat. The show was spectacular! Now that we've been given a taste, many of us hunger for more.

Those who weren't there, certainly wish they had been. I know that our American Kashub cousins would be eager to see this show!

We are especially thankful to Monsignor Pick, the pastor of St. Hedwig's Church in Barry's Bay, who assisted the group in coming to the area and arranged the performances. Monsignor Pick is of Kashubian descent and a strong promoter of the preservation of the unique Kashubian element in Renfrew County, Ontario.

This was an unforgettable happening. But, hopefully, this exposure to our Kashubian cultural heritage won't be a once in a lifetime experience! Someday, somewhere, hopefully soon, the North American Kashubes will host a repeat performance!