

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

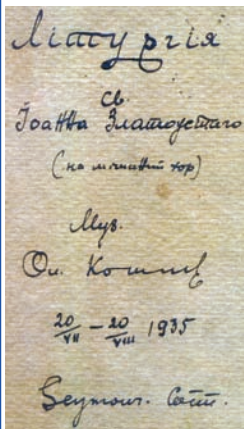
THE UKRAINIAN NATIONAL CHOIR by Curator Lubow Wolynetz

Our Museum and Library has a collection of several thousand photographs. When examining these photographs, we see how important each is in its own right, the stories they can tell, and the information they can transmit if studied and researched properly and carefully.

Among our photographs is one of the Ukrainian National Choir, under the direction of Oleksander Koshets, performing a concert in Mexico City on December 22, 1922. The photograph was a gift from Mr. and Mrs. John Orlyk.

Who was Oleksander Koshets, what was the Ukrainian National Choir, and what were they doing in Mexico City?

Oleksander Koshets (1875-1944) was born in the Kyiv area and became a prominent composer, choirmaster, and ethnographer. He was a graduate of the Kyiv Theological Academy and studied at the Lysenko Music and Drama School. He organized and conducted choirs, taught choral music at the Kyiv Conservatory, conducted the orchestra of the Sadowsky theater, and was the conductor and choirmaster of the Kyiv Opera.



In 1918 K o s h e t s founded the Ukrainian Re-



publican Kapelle, which was later reorganized and renamed the Ukrainian National Choir. It was formed to make Europe and the Americas cognizant of the newly independent Ukrainian State, to win public support for the Ukrainian National Republic, and to familiarize Europeans and Americans with Ukrainian choral music and culture. For seven years (1918-1924), the Choir toured Europe and North, Central, and South America. With the demise of the Ukrainian Republic and the communist takeover, most of the choir members remained in exile, settling in various European countries and even, eventually, in America.

The Ukrainian National Choir was a sensation in every country and city where it performed. Critics reviewing the concerts were almost unanimous in their high praise:

“stupendous, technical perfection and harmonious unity”...“resembles a miracle” ... “this choir is a human symphony orchestra; pure perfection” ... “no words can give the reader an idea about the strength with which the choir holds the audience” ... “voices of heavenly music” ... “musical tone unmatched in strength of its expressiveness” ... “we sat under the spell of the magical harmony of sweet sounds of this outstanding Ukrainian choir” ... and so on.

The referred to above photo was taken when the Choir performed at Mexico City’s amphitheater, which can accommodate an audience of 50,000. For the Koshets concert, the audience numbered 32,600. The reviews of the concert were as laudatory and acclamatory as they had been for all the Choir’s previous concerts. Koshets in his memoirs said “the audience went



absolutely crazy. They were applauding, continuously yelling bravo, waving with anything they had in their hands, jumping, screaming.” The 40-person Choir was so powerful that, after the concert, some members of the audience tore off wooden planks from the podium upon which the choir had been standing to check for hidden mechanical “tricks” that

could have enhanced the singing.

In 1926 Koshets settled in the New York area, where he directed choirs and taught choir conducting. In 1941 he moved to Canada, where he died in 1944.

As a composer, Koshets wrote five Liturgies and the arrangements for many Ukrainian folk songs.

In our Library we have a handwritten copy of Koshets’s “Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.” It was written between July 20 and August 20, 1935 in Seymour, CT.

Explore and Experience Our Past

