

**Interview for the magazine “Welcome to Ukraine” (1;43; 08) by Mariya Vlad.  
LOVE FOR THE NATIVE LAND.**

Roman Loun and his wife Danyila Loun are citizens of Ukraine who live in Philadelphia, USA. Mr. Loun is a representative of the Ukrainian Culture Fund in the USA and Canada. Mr. and Mrs. Loun founded the *Sula Dukhu* (Power of Spirit) Society in the USA to foster among the Ukrainian Diaspora in America Ukrainian national awareness, patriotic feelings toward Ukraine and respect for the history and culture of the Ukrainian people. Mr. and Mrs. Loun were interviewed by Mariya VLAD.

***-If you don't mind, let's begin with that Christmas show, Peace and Joy to Your Home, that you staged in America. The show was captured on film and the film Peace and Joy to Your Home was shown in the House of Artists in Kyiv in January 2008.***

-The idea for this show was developed in the 1990s and it was staged for the first time at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA, in December 2002. Representatives of about 200 countries of the world saw the show. It was a sort of a world Ukrainian Vertep (traditional Ukrainian theater, mostly associated with Christmas). The show begins with a scene in which a family gathers for Svyata Vecherya – Christmas Eve Dinner. The father brings in Didukh - a sheaf of cut stalks of grain, which was believed to be a symbol of protection against evil forces. Sprits of the ancestors are also invited to join the family for the supper. And all kinds of Christmas miracles begin... Then Rizdvyana Nichenka, Rizdvyana Svichechka and Rizdvyana Zironka (Christmas Night, Christmas Candle and Christmas Star) appear on the stage and open the show. Pradavnya Ukrayina (ancient Ukraine) tells the story of Ukraine in ancient times beginning from the Trypillya culture, Scythians, and then the Slavic tribe of the Antes. Then enters Maybutnya Ukrayina (Future Ukraine) that thanks God for giving Ukraine what it has. In the third act, Saint Mykolay (Nicholas) with Angels bring the Golden Chest with spiritual treasures – gifts from God for the Ukrainian children. The chest is opened and the Angels pull out a rushnyk – decorative embroidered towel – from the chest. The towel is embroidered with the words Love for the Native Land on it. St Mykolay asks the Angels to take this Gift of God to every Ukrainian household in the world. In Act Four, Shchedrivochka, Kolyadnychky (Christmas Carols), Yalynochka (Christmas Tree), and Sribny Dzvinochok (Silver Bell) call for peace and spiritual unity. In Act Five, the historical personages Grand Duchess Olga, Grand Duke Volodymyr, Grand Duke Yaroslav and Grand Duke Roman call for the preservation of spiritual legacy of the Ukrainian people and for passing this legacy to the generations to come; they also call for unity among the Ukrainians. Act Six is devoted to the unity of the Ukrainians in the world, and in Act Seven, which is the climax of the show, the Good overcomes the Evil. In 2003 we founded the Syla Dukhu (Power of Spirit) Society. It is a non-profit organization which purpose is to maintain Ukrainian traditions through the arts, literature and music. The theatrical company of this society performed the show Peace and Joy to Your Home at the national Opera of Ukraine in January 2006, and it was televised for all Ukraine to watch.

***-I saw both the broadcast and the film and was very impressed. Particularly impressive were the costumes and stage scenery.***

-I was a theater director and producer and Danyila was an art director and costume designer. We tried to make them look as authentic as possible. For many years we have been doing our best to promote Ukrainian culture among the Ukrainian Diaspora in America. Through our shows and other cultural events we have been praising God and Ukraine. In our show *Peace and Joy to Your Home* we wanted to promote humanistic ideals, to tell people about the important events in the history of Ukraine, about ancient traditions of the Ukrainian people, to call from the stage for unity among the Ukrainians of the world, to foster the feelings of love for the native land, of dignity and pride of being Ukrainian.

***-Rev. Oleh Zhovnirovych from the United States said at the presentation of the appreciation certificate from the Kyiv Patriarch Filaret, "It is the spirit that makes people beautiful, not the physical beauty... If everyone of us finds such power of spirit in their hearts the way the members of the Sylva Dukhu Society have done, we shall be people in possession of high spirit and we shall be able to maintain Ukrainian traditions and values in America." Could you elaborate a little on the Sylva Dukhu Society? I know that you and your wife have received an official letter of gratitude for your activities from Kateryna Yushchenko, the wife of President Yushchenko of Ukraine, through the Consulate General of Ukraine in New York; also, I know that your wife has been awarded the Orders of St Varvara and you – St Mykolay by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate.***

*-The Power of Spirit Society* was established as a cultural center of what is called "the fourth wave" of Ukrainian immigration to the USA. In addition to running a theater studio and doing many other things, the Society runs an art and music school. Some of the students are small children. We are happy that these talented children come to us. We are happy to see the bright colors they use in their drawings and paintings. Many of our students master elaborate technique of painting. Our students are exposed to Ukrainian culture, to Ukrainian music and age-old traditions. It helps them choose the right path in life, avoid pitfalls of consumerism and chasing petty things and of succumbing to unworthy temptations.

It's not easy to be running a theatrical studio and an art and music school. It takes a lot of effort and of constant devotion. It involves having to borrow money and looking for sponsors. A lot of projects initiated by the Society would have come to nothing if not for investing a lot of our own money and time as well as the help from such patrons of art as the Chopivsky family Foundation, the Voskobiynyk family, the Trade Mark *Domashne Svyato* in Ukraine, the Aerosvit Ukrainian Airlines, the Ukrainian Cultural Fund, the International Charity Fund *Ukrayina-3000*. Love brings charity, it helps find talents, it brings people together, it makes people feel united with their national roots.

***-Mr. Loun, what are your roots?***

-My parents passed on to me the national values and understanding that love is the basis of life. My brother and I grew up in Lviv and in the village of Turkotyn in the Land of Lvivshchyna. My father Ostap showed us the national symbols of Ukraine when we were still quite small and explained their meaning. When I was sixteen, my father told me about his membership in the Ukrainian Insurrection Army.

When I got married, my wife and I raised our twin daughters Maria and Daria and our son Nazar in the spirit that had been passed on to me by my parents. Our life was never easy here in Ukraine. We lived with our children in a small room of a dormitory. We worked, we studied, we established for ourselves creative goals. Our search for possibilities to carry out our plans took us to America.

***-Mrs. Loun, could you provide some autobiographical details too?***

-Originally, I hailed from the city of Lviv. It was my mother, my uncle Vasyl and later my father-in-law Ostap who instilled in me national values and views. My grandfather had clever hands – he built houses, made furniture, and at the same time he could play the violin. My mother did embroidery and sewing. In fact, it was she who made clothes for the family and for those who commissioned her to do something for them. She taught me and my sister to do a lot of things. And she also taught me to be strong in spirit, to be creative, to learn from others who are talented and never to be envious. “Watch and learn,” she kept saying. I have very good, warm memories of my childhood. My mother made clothes for my dolls but later I began doing it myself. I liked doing it so much that after completing my secondary education, I went to study at the Decorative Arts Institute in Lviv where I majored in fashion design. My skills came in handy when we, with my husband, began to carry out our major project – the show *Peace and Joy to Your Home*. I designed the costumes for the show doing my best to make them as authentic as possible. I am happy that the world has seen this show.

***-I read in a newspaper that last year you greeted US President George W. Bush on Christmas at the Christmas Tree on the lawn of the White House when he arrived in his helicopter. Did you have a chance to meet Viktor Youshchenko, President of Ukraine?***

-I did. I took part in his election campaigns as a representative of a public organization, Za Ukrayinu, za Yushchenka (For Ukraine, For Yushchenko!). I was deputy head and later secretary of a Ukrainian polling station in New York. I am a member of the Nasha Ukrayina Party... I've developed a project to establish a World Ukrainian Cultural Center in Kyiv. This idea was supported at the World Forum of Ukrainians which was held in Kyiv in 2006. I wrote a letter to Mr Yushchenko describing my project in detail. I hope he will support my idea as well.

***-I do hope too. This year your Christmas puppet shows were performed at the Ukrayinsky Dim Culture Center and at the Ukrainian Culture Fund. Also, you were instrumental in establishing the Ukrainian Saint Mykolay (Nicholas) Day in America.***

-We wanted to explain to the American audiences that Santa Claus had come to America from Europe, and that in Europe St Nicholas had been known under different names – Mykolay in Ukrainian. We'll do our best to have St. Mykolay's Day marked not only in Washington but also in the capitals of the countries which have Ukrainian diplomatic representations.

(Says Mrs. Loun) St Mykolay entered my heart when I was five years old. He gave me his gifts then – a book, a kaleidoscope and oranges. I felt the gentle touch of his hand on my head...When we moved to Philadelphia in the USA, we had our first show devoted to St Mykolay...Our motto is – Love what you do. We give to the people what comes

straight from our hearts. Religious feasts help us deliver our message to the people. We are convinced that good deeds come from love. •