

Proud Scottish/Canadian moments while on our tour of Czech Republic

By **CHERYL JORGENSEN**
WHITE ROCK, BC – The Tam O'Shanter Scottish Country Dancers and the Crescent Beach Pipe Band travelled to the Czech Republic on June 8 to 18 where they performed at two four-day folk festivals.

This is a country frozen in time, a fairytale land steeped in history and a rich culture unchanged through the centuries.

Bohemia was an important part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and by 965 AD Prague was an established and the richest trading city in Europe with its original roots dating back to Roman times.

In 1357 King Charles IV built the historic Gothic Charles Bridge in Prague, the most important connection between Prague Castle and the city's Old Town and adjacent areas.

During the two world wars the country was not damaged so all the cathedrals, chateaus and castles date back to the 11th and 12th Centuries, while the Baroque architecture of the 17th Century still stands in its glory.

The Russian occupation, 1947-1989, actually helped to preserve the Bohemian charm and innocence in this timeless land where the cities and countryside are so clean, one could eat off the streets.

The food, beer (pivo) and wine (pino)

are all very good and quite inexpensive and the travelling troupe made the delicious ice cream a daily staple.

Every weekend from May to September, there are numerous choices of folk festivals to attend.

The Tam O'Shanter Scottish Country Dancers and the Crescent Beach Pipe Band participated in two festivals.

The first was in Melnik, a city of 20,000, known as the Queen's city, an hour's drive north-west of Prague.

The second in Lazne Belohrad, a resort spa city of 4,000 in the mountains along the Polish border, two hours north-west of Prague.

Also participating in these festivals were groups from Korea, India, Puerto Rico, Hungary, Georgia, Russia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovakia and many local folk groups from within the Czech Republic.

The participation of children in their folk dancing is an integral part of the performance.

Every school has an extensive music program with a qualified music teacher who must be proficient at conducting choirs, orchestras and ensembles, choreographing dances, composing music and songs.

This program greatly enhances and promotes Czech culture which is so rich in music and dance.

And music is everywhere, violinists

playing on street corners, jazz groups on the Charles Bridge, concerts in cathedrals featuring music of Dvorak and many of the world's great composers, the Marionette Theatre, operas, and much more.

When the Tam O'Shanter Dancers performed *Mairi's Wedding* accompanied by the Crescent Beach Pipe Band, audiences were so appreciative.

It was a very proud Canadian moment. Our goal for performing at international folk festivals is to bring Scottish/Canadian culture to people who have never seen this before.

We felt that we had accomplished our mission in the Czech Republic as we have previously done in our performances in Hawaii, Cuba & Mexico.

On our last day in Lazne Belohrad, we were asked to sing a short song at mass in one of the cathedrals.

The Tam O'Shanter Dancers sang the first verse and chorus of *Amazing Grace* accompanied by a lone piper and then the rest of the CBPB joined in. Again, another very proud Canadian moment.



THE TAM O'SHANTER Scottish Country Dancers from White Rock, B.C. on tour of the Czech Republic on June 8 to 18.



PHOTO: Wikipedia

THE CHARLES BRIDGE from Malá Strana, Prague, Czech Rep. Its construction started in 1357 under the auspices of King Charles IV, and finished in the beginning of the 15th century.



THE CRESCENT BEACH Pipe Band flying the Canadian flag on their tour of the Czech Republic.



THE TAM O'SHANTER Dancers sang the first verse and chorus of *Amazing Grace* accompanied by a lone piper on the last day of their tour.