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Yara Arts Group in "SLAP!"

A Historical! hHysterical! Musical!

Created & performed by Bob Holman, Susan Hwang and Julian Kytasty

The outrageous life of Ukrainian painter/poet David Burliuk, the Father of Futurism!

January 23 to February 9, 2025

East Village Basement, 321 East 9th Street

Presented by Yara Arts Group

Thursdays through Saturday at 7:30 PM, Sundays at 3:00 PM

Tickets \$25.00

Buy tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/SLAP-tickets-1095365972109>

Runs :70. Critics are invited on or after January 25. Opens January 25.

Show's web page: <https://www.yaraartsgroup.net/SLAP>

Photos: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/UhjdsbCx7zpfLY7>

NEW YORK, December 23 -- To celebrate the place of Futurism in Ukrainian culture and its shared history with New York's East Village, **Yara Arts Group** will present "**SLAP!**," the outrageous story of Ukrainian painter/poet **David Burliuk**, from **January 23 to February 9** at **East Village Basement, 321 East 9th Street**. The hour-long Futurist cabaret is directed by **Virlana Tkacz** and features **Bob Holman** as Burliuk, the Father of Futurism, **Susan Hwang** as an accordion-playing Scythian Viper Princess, and bandura master **Julian Kytasty** as Mamai, an iconic character of the Steppes who sings their story.

"**SLAP!**" opens with a teenage Burliuk searching for artifacts of ancient Ukraine only to reawaken a Scythian Viper Princess. When she slaps him, he realizes that "the Future is Ancient" and starts Futurism. Burliuk's 1912 manifesto, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," declares his passion to pursue the modern, capture Futurism's dynamism and oppose the artistic conventions of the past. "**SLAP!**" is a devised work that was created in rehearsals by Bob Holman, Susan Hwang, Julian Kytasty and Virlana Tkacz and contains 17 original songs.

Painter/poet **David Burliuk** was born in 1882 near Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine and studied in Odesa, Kazan, Munich and Paris. His early paintings show Fauvist and Cubist influences, as well as a fascination with Scythian culture. He took part in many excavations of the Scythian burial mounds that dot the Kherson area of Southern Ukraine where he spent his formative years. He founded the artistic group Hylaea, the Greek name for those lands. A favorite character in his work was Mamai, an archetypal figure of the Steppe who embodied for Burliuk a vision of self-sufficiency.

Burliuk's work stands at the intersection of international modernist movements and Ukrainian cultural heritage. His paintings are characterized by vibrant colors, dynamic compositions, and integration of folklore, offering a deeply personal and uniquely regional interpretation of Futurist ideals. His compositions are often chaotic and energetic, reflecting his fascination with motion and the dynamism of modern life. A selection of his paintings is available in this production's publicity photo album (<https://photos.app.goo.gl/UhjdsbCx7zpfLY7>).

Burliuk was also a performance artist. He toured with Vladimir Mayakovsky, both dressing in colorful vests with radishes on their lapels and painted animals on their faces. (Temporary, Scythian-inspired, tattoos will be sold at "**SLAP!**" performances). Their Futurist performances drew packed houses, scandalizing many while winning converts. During the Communist Revolution, Burliuk created Futurist shows and exhibitions in Siberia and, in 1920-22, in Japan. In 1922 he settled in New York, living on East Tenth Street--a stone's throw from **The East Village Basement, 321 East 9th Street** where "**SLAP!**" is performed. The East Village basement is the

actual first home of Ellen Stewart's La MaMa E.T.C., of which Yara Arts Group, founded in 1990 by Virlana Tkacz, is a resident company.

In “**SLAP!**” Vaudevillian elements—including poems by Bob Holman and songs by Susan Hwang—weave into a Futurist canvas with Scythian imagery and *dumy* (16th century Ukrainian epic songs) performed by Julian Kytasty. As Oksana Lebedivna wrote in Svoboda newspaper (Parsippany, NJ) about a workshop performance, “Bob Holman, a famous and charismatic American poet, steps forth proudly as both Burliuk and himself, existing, not simply on stage, but truly being both. Susan Hwang, the extravagant Viper Goddess with an accordion, is both a shaman and a coquette. She gives Burliuk a generous Scythian slap, which brings up for him deeper questions of being, pushing him to see the invisible, realize his own potential and experience himself constantly at the crossroads. The voice of this Scythian goddess often sounds as a duet with Mamai, portrayed by Julian Kytasty- one of the best Ukrainian bandura players. Like Burliuk, he experiments with music.”

The ensemble describes the play as a response to the current war, in solidarity with Ukraine. They acknowledge the decolonization necessary for Ukrainians to reclaim their own culture--not only by rejecting Russian influence, but also by actively rebuilding and celebrating a vibrant, self-determined cultural identity that includes the Ukrainian East Village. In recognition of this, audience members can exchange a ticket stub for a free cup of borscht after the show at Veselka Restaurant, just across the street.

Set and lighting design are by **Watoku Ueno**. Projection and prop design are by **Darien Fiorino**. Costume design is by **Keiko Obremski**. Graphic design is by **Waldemart Klyuzko**. Stage Managers are **Anastasia Panchenko** and **Christina Deychakiwsky**. Developmental productions of “SLAP!” were mounted by Yara Arts Group at La MaMa, The Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation, the Bowery Poetry Club and at the Ukrainian Museum in New York.

Bob Holman (Burliuk) is the founder and artistic director of the Bowery Poetry Club, and the poet most often connected with the oral tradition, spoken word, hiphop and poetry slams. He studied poetry at Columbia University, and has taught there and at Princeton, NYU and Bard. He has published sixteen books of poetry, including “Sing This One Back To Me,” (Coffee House Press) that includes translations from the griot traditions of West Africa. He performed in Yara's "1917-2017: Tychyna Zhadan & the Dogs" at La MaMa. He also created two award-winning PBS series, “The United States of Poetry” and a documentary on endangered languages. (www.bobholman.com)

Susan Hwang (Scythian Viper Princess) is a singer/songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, performance artist and musician who has appeared at Joe’s Pub and Bowery Poetry Club. She tours internationally with Debutante Hour and curates the Hip Hop Book Club. She appeared in Yara Arts Group’s “Scythian Stones” (2010), “Captain John Smith Goes to Ukraine” (2014) and “Radio 477!” (2023). She plays accordions because they are pretty and lighter than pianos (barely). She plays drums because it's healthy for a girl to hit things. (www.susanhwanglalala.com and www.lusterlit.com)

Julian Kytasty (Mamai) is a third-generation bandura player who has concertized throughout the Americas and Europe and has redefined the possibilities of the instrument. He has recorded and performed with the Canadian world music group Paris to Kyiv, and with his own groundbreaking Experimental Bandura Trio. His collaborators include artists as diverse as Chinese pipa virtuoso Wu Man, Mongolian master musician Battuvshin, pioneering klezmer revivalist Michael Alpert, composer/saxophonist John Zorn and electronic composer Alla Zagaykevych.

These three, together with director Virlana Tkacz, created an experimental theater work, “Capt. John Smith Goes to Ukraine” (La MaMa, 2014), dealing with Capt. Smith's adventures in Eastern Europe circa 1603 before

he founded Jamestown. NY Theatre Wire (Kelly Aliano) called it “an extremely delightful musical-experimental work of theater [that] gives its history lessons a much-needed makeover with fun, liveliness and an accordion.”

Virlana Tkacz (Director), as founding director of Yara Arts Group, has created over 40 original theater pieces with the company, most of which had their American premieres at La MaMa in New York. Notable among these are "Capt. John Smith Goes to Ukraine," "1917-2017: Tychyna, Zhadan, and the Dogs" and "Opera GAZ." She received a NEA Poetry Translation Fellowship for her translations with Wanda Phipps of Serhiy Zhadan's poetry which were published by Yale University Press. Last year, their book "How Fire Descends: New and Selected Poems by Serhiy Zhadan," was a finalist for the American PEN Poetry Translation Award.

Yara Arts Group, founded in 1990, is a resident company of La MaMa Theatre in New York. The troupe creates original theater pieces in a signature style that uses multilingual dialogue and music supported by evocative visuals and projections. The company has created over 30 pieces based on materials from Ukraine, six theater pieces with Buryat artists from Siberia, two with artists from Kyrgyzstan and three based on Hawaiian and Japanese material, as well as numerous puppet pieces. It was awarded the 2023 Village Preservation Award "for giving voice and light to often overlooked cultures from Ukraine to the Far East and beyond." For additional information please check <https://www.yaraartsgroup.net>. (@yaraartsgroupinc, Instagram: @yara.arts)

The East Village Basement is a multipurpose theatre/arts space located in the historically artistic neighborhood of New York City. The space is designed like a cozy living room, providing an intimate and creative atmosphere for small-scale shows, readings, rehearsals, film shoots, art exhibitions, and more. @eastvillagebasement -- www.eastvillagebasement.com.

"**SLAP!**" is made possible by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, as well as the Self-Reliance Foundation and the numerous friends of Yara Arts Group.

On Saturday afternoons during the run, Yara Arts Group plans a series of talks on Burliuk, a historical walk in the East Village neighborhood, and a program on bandura by Julian Kytasty. For info on these, see the Yara website, www.yaraartsgroup.net.

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