

Bowery Poetry Club, Razom and Yara Arts Group present:

How Fire Descends

New York Poets and Artists
Respond to Ukrainian Poetry

Nov 8, 2023
Wed at 7 PM

BOWERY POETRY CLUB 308 BOWERY, NYC



Council on
the Arts



NYC Cultural
Affairs

How Fire Descends

New York Poets and Artists

Respond to Ukrainian Poetry

project conceived and directed by Virlana Tkacz

On Victoria Amelina (1986-2023)

01 “Testimonies” poem by Victoria Amelina, translated by Larissa Babij. With Teryn Kuzma

02 “The Sea” poem by Victoria Amelina translated by Larissa Babij. With Teryn Kuzma

Response poem by Olena Jennings “Waves Whisper Loss”

TRANSLATIONS into English

03-06 Four poems by Iya Kiva, translated and read by Amelia Glaser.

07 “Five Sons” poem by Iya Kiva, translated & read by Olena Jennings with music by Julian

Kytasty. Response poem by Olena Jennings “Five Daughters”

08 “My Country Now Looks Like a Ghetto” poem by Iya Kiva translated by Virlana Tkacz &

Wanda Phipps, read by Wanda Phipps. Response poem by Pichchenda Bao “The Proper Work”

09 “If I am not being killed...” poem by Iryna Shuvalova, translation by Virlana Tkacz & Wanda

Phipps read by George Drance. Response poem by Wanda Phipps

10 “Give me a brother” Kateryna Babkina, translation by Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps.

Response by Teryn Kuzma.

PART 2 -- reacting to Ukrainian poetry from the 1920s

11 “Fire – Ninth Symphony” by Oleksa Vlyzko deaf Ukrainian poet, executed 1934 at age 26.

Translated by Virlana Tkacz & Bob Holman, read by Bob Holman

12 “Forest into Fences” poem by Maik Iohansen, Ukrainian poet executed in 1937 1930, translated

by Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps. With Silvana Gonzalez, George Drance & music by Julian

Kytasty.

13 “Kharkiv, Kharkiv” text by Maik Iohansen, music by Yuli Meitus, in musical “Hello, This Is

Radio 477!” Sung by Yara Arts Group

TRANSLATIONS into Song

Songwriters reacting to Serhiy Zhadan’s new book *How Fire Descends*, translated by Virlana Tkacz

& Wanda Phipps, featuring songs by Bushwick Book Club and readings by Yara actors.

14 “They didn’t tell you” Song written and performed by Don Rauf

15 “Your attention is great” read by George Drance. Song written and performed by Susan Hwang

16 “I don’t Know Who Killed You or When” Song written & performed by Carol Lipnik

17 Zhadan’s poems in act 3 of Yara’s “RADIO 477! Scene 2 “Rhinoceros” With Silvana Gongalez & George Drance

18 “When So Much is Taken Away” read by George Drance & Silvana Gonzalez.
Song written & performed by spiritchild

19 “Of All Literature” read by Lesya Verba, Susan Hwang, George Drance, Silvana Gonzalez and Akiko Hiroshima

20 “Kharkiv Kharkiv” text by Maik Iohansen, music by Yuliy Meitus. Performed by Yara Arts Group

POETS: Victoria Amelina, Iya Kiva, Olena Jennings, Wanda Phipps, Pichchenda Bao, Bob Holman and Serhiy Zhadan

VICTORIA AMELINA (1986-2023) Ukrainian writer and poet, worked in IT before writing her first novel “The Fall Syndrome” (2014). Her second novel “Dom’s Dream Kingdom” (2017) earned several prizes and was translated into multiple languages. After the full-scale invasion, Vika turned to poetry and then started documenting war crimes. She was aware that the invading forces had lists of activists to eliminate but was undaunted. She was wounded in a Russian missile attack in Kramatorsk eastern Ukraine on June 27th and died of her injuries four days later.

IYA KIVA (poet) When war broke out in her native Donetsk Kiva moved to Kyiv, and following the full-scale invasion in 2022, she was again displaced, and has since lived in Lviv. She has garnered multiple awards for her poetry, which has been translated into over 30 languages. Her books of original poetry include *Further from Heaven* (2018), *First Page of Winter* (2019), and *The Laughter of Extinguished Fire* (2023). She is a Fall 2023 fellow at the Iowa International Writer’s Workshop. A bilingual collection of her poetry is forthcoming with Harvard’s Ukrainian Studies Series.

OLENA JENNINGS (poet & translator) Olena Jennings is the author of the poetry collection *The Age of Secrets* (Lost Horse Press, 2022) and the novel *Temporary Shelter* (Cervena Barva Press, 2021). Her translation with the author of Yuliya Musakovska’s poetry collection *The God of Freedom* is forthcoming from Arrowsmith Press. She is the founder and curator of Poets of Queens.

WANDA PHIPPS (poet &-translator) is a founding member of Yara and has been translating Ukrainian poetry with Virlana Tkacz since 1989. Together they have received the National Theatre Translation Award for their translation of *The Forest Song*, as well as numerous grants from the New York State Council on the Arts. Her books include *Mind Honey* (Autonomedia), *Field of Wanting: Poems of Desire* (BlazeVOX [books]), and *Wake-Up Calls: 66 Morning Poems* (Soft Skull Press). She curated several reading series at the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church and has written about the arts for Boog City, Time Out New York and Paper Magazine.

PICHCHENHDA BAO (poet) is a Cambodian American poet and writer. Her work has been published by the New Ohio Review, the Ilanot Review, Cultural Daily, the Cambodian American Literary Arts Association and elsewhere. She has received fellowships and support from Aspen Words, Kundiman, Bethany Arts Community, and Queens Council on the Arts. She lives, writes and raises her three children in New York City. More at www.pichchendabao.com

KATERYNA BABKINA (poet) is a Ukrainian poet and writer. She’s the author of five books of poetry, a novel, a novel in short stories, two collections of stories and four books for children. Her writings have been translated into ten languages and have appeared in Esquire Ukraine, Le Monde, Harper’s Bazaar, Kenyon Review, Poem and Washington Square Review. In 2021 Kateryna Babkina won the Angelus Central European Literature Award. Her novella for children “Cappy and the Whale” was published by Penguin Random House, UK.

BOB HOLMAN (poet & translator) is a poet most often connected with the oral tradition, spoken word, poetry slams and digital poetry. Author of 20 books, founder of the Bowery Poetry Club, he wrote the Foreword to Zhadan’s *What We Live For, What We Die For*. As an actor, he created and toured the part of Captain John Smith in Yara’s *Capt. John Smith Goes to Ukraine* and Ukrainian Futurist David Burliuk in *Slap!* He created two award-winning PBS series, *The United States of Poetry*, and the documentary on endangered languages, *Language Matters* www.bobholman.com

SERHIY ZHADAN is Ukraine’s most celebrated writer. In 2022 he received eleven international literature prizes. Yale University Press publishes his books in English: *The Orphanage*, *Mesopotamia*, *What We Live for, What We Die For: Selected Poems* and most recently *How Fire Descends: New and Selected Poems*. Serhiy was born in Luhansk, Ukraine’s easternmost region and lives in Kharkiv. He has worked with Yara Arts Group since 2005, appearing in the award-winning show *1917-2017: Tychyna, Zhadan & the Dogs* and the recent *Radio477!*

TRANSLATORS: Amelia Glaser, Olena Jennings, Larissa Babij, Virlana Tkacz, Wanda Phipps and Bob Holman

AMELIA GLASER (translator) is a writer, translator, and professor of literature at the University of California – San Diego. She is the author of *Jews and Ukrainians in Russia’s Literary Borderlands* (2012) and *Songs in Dark Times: Yiddish Poetry of Struggle from Scottsboro to Palestine*. She translates primarily from Ukrainian, Yiddish, and Russian. Her co-translated collection (with Yuliya Ilchuk) of Iya Kiva’s poems is forthcoming with Harvard’s Ukrainian series. She is writing a book about contemporary Ukrainian poetry.

LARISSA BABIJ (translator) is a Ukrainian-American writer, translator and dancer based in Kyiv, Ukraine since 2005. Before that she worked with Yara Arts Group in NYC. Her translations of Victoria Amelina’s poems were published in *The London Ukrainian Review*; other writings have appeared in *The Evergreen Review*, *The Odessa Review*, and [A Kind of Refugee](http://akindofrefugee2022.substack.com) (akindofrefugee2022.substack.com). A book featuring her dispatches from wartime Ukraine and essays on theater will be published in the Ukrainian Voices series (ibidem Press) in spring 2024.

MUSICIANS & SONGWRITERS: Teryn Kuzma, Julian Kytasty & BUSHWICK BOOK CLUB: Carol Lipnick, spiritchild, Don Rauf and Susan Hwang

TERYN KUZMA, Ukrainian-American soprano and bandurist, is a versatile performer and musician of classical, contemporary, musical theater and folk repertoire based in NYC. Ms. Kuzma is making her Spoleto Festival USA debut in 2024 singing the lead role of “H’ala” in Layale Chaker’s dynamic new opera, *Ruinous Gods*. In addition to her singing credits, Ms. Kuzma is an accomplished instrumentalist on the 55-stringed Ukrainian bandura and

is actively engaged in the performance and study of Ukrainian folk music. For more information and upcoming events, visit www.terynkuzma.com

JULIAN KYTASTY (bandura) is a third generation bandurist following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He was associated with the New York School of Bandura (NY Bandura) from 1980 and curated the Bandura Downtown series since its inception. He worked frequently with Yara creating and performing music for theatre pieces, poetry performances, and festivals. His work on Yara's *1917-2017 Tychyna, Zhadan, and the Dogs* earned him a NY Innovative Theater award for best original score.

CAROL LIPNIK is acclaimed as one of New York's most individualistic and virtuosic singers. Stephen Holden of The New York Times called her an "Ethereal vocal phenomenon." With her stunning four octave range, subtle wit and charismatic stage presence, she draws equally on 70s art-rock, theater music, Eastern mysticism, opera, and the decaying phantasmagoria of the Coney Island where she was born and raised. She has built a dedicated following through her popular performances at the East Village boîte Pangea, and Joe's Pub at the Public Theater, and has released seven albums on her Mermaid Alley Music label. Visit carollipnik.com for more information.

spiritchild is a freedom singer from the South Bronx by way of shaolin (staten island), spiritchild uses the arts to cultivate global cultural revolution. spirit fuses true school Hip Hop, funk, electronica and jazz as he channels the frequencies of J Dilla having tea with Sun Ra, paints the silhouettes of Nina Simone and remixes El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (aka Malcolm X). He integrates revolution and hip hop culture as a musician, DJ/ soul selector, producer, facilitator and mentor for youth. He created the International Movement In Motion Artist & Activist Collective and co-founded, with Fred Ho, a new black arts movement—the foundation of today's maroon party for liberation and maroon liberation school.

DON RAUF is the founding father of the long-running NY/Brooklyn chamber punk ensemble people call Life in a Blender. The NY Daily News called him a manic combination of Alice Cooper and F. Scott Fitzgerald. He has performed at many Bushwick Book Club shows, which he finds both terrifying and mindblowing. His band has a huge show at Rockwood Music Hall on Saturday, November 11th, at 7pm. lifeinablender.net

SUSAN HWANG tells stories and makes things that are collapsible, like songs and times. Her instruments take up space (accordion, Janggu—traditional Korean drum, piano) but other physical objects she can't play, wear or eat intimidate her. She founded, curates and hosts The Bushwick Book Club – a monthly live performance series and podcast presenting new work by local musicians, artists and chefs inspired by literature. Susan plays accordions because they are pretty and lighter than pianos (barely). She plays drums because it's healthy for a girl to hit things.

YARA ARTS GROUP: George Drance, Silvana Gonzalez, Bob Holman, , Akiko Hiroshima, Susan Hwang, Teryn Kuzma, Julian Kytasty, Petro Ninovskyi, Lesya Verba, Virlana Tkacz, Waldemart Klyuzko & Kateryna Diumina

GEORGE DRANCE has performed and directed in over 25 countries on five continents. He is Artistic Director of the critically acclaimed Magis Theatre Company. Theatre credits include: Metropolitan Opera, The Public, ImprovBoston, American Repertory Theatre, and La MaMa ETC - including Ping Chong + Company, *The Trojan Women Project* and as a close collaborator of Ellen Stewart. Television credits include: *The Daily Show*, and *Blacklist*. He is an Artist-in Residence at Fordham Lincoln Center.

SILVANA GONZALEZ is a Mexican actress and classical ballet dancer who graduated from NYU Tisch with a Founders Day Award and BFA in Theater. Her theater credits include Ondine in *A Thousand Suns* with Yara, Hera in *FauxBia! The Musical* at Carnegie Hall, Milenia at *The Lucille Lortel*, Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Cynthia in *WarLovers* at Theater Row, and Louise Overbee in *Love/Sick*. Silvana is a member of the NYC theater company Something From Abroad and honored to be working with Yara again.

AKIKO HIROSHIMA appeared in 10 Yara shows! Theatre: *Miss Saigon* (Kim); *Tea* (Teruko); *Fishing for Wives* (Ihara); *A Thousand Cranes* (Sadako); *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* (Peppermint Patty); *Warrior Sisters* (SiehKingKing); *Jesus Christ Superstar*; *Pippin*. Ads/VO: Intel, GE, Sprint, Amstel Beer, Audible, Ralph Lauren, MoMA, Chicago Tourism, and Japanese textbooks. Music: *Elena Moon Park and Friends* and *happyfunsmile* (ACL, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, 92nd St Y, BAM, Asia Society, Wolf Trap, BBG, DC Sakura Fest., Carnegie, and Midori & Friends).

LESYA VERBA is from Odesa, Ukraine and sings traditional music, jazz and her own compositions. She plays a traditional Ukrainian instrument called the bandura and has been involved in reviving the rituals of southern Ukraine for 30 years. Her visual art has been exhibited at international exhibitions and museums. She arrived in New York in 2021 year and has worked as an actress with the Anomalous Co., Ping Chong + Company and Yara Arts Group.

VIRLANA TKACZ (director & co-translator) heads the Yara and has directed almost forty original shows at La MaMa in New York, that also performed in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Bishkek, Ulaanbaatar, and Ulan Ude. She received an NEA Poetry Translation Fellowship for her work with Wanda Phipps on Serhiy Zhadan's poetry. Yale University published their second book of Zhadan's selected poems *How Fire Descends*, this October. Her production of *1917-2017: Tychyna Zhadan & the Dogs* won a New York Innovative Theatre Awards for best musical. She directed Yara's *Radio 477!* at La MaMa last spring.

WALDEMART KLYUZKO (graphics) is an artist from Kyiv, Ukraine, who has collaborated with Yara Arts Group since 2010, most recently creating the set for *Radio 477!*. He was nominated twice for innovative theatre design for NYIT Awards, for Yara's *Raven* based on Oleh Lysheha's poetry (2011) and *1917-2017: Tychyna, Zhadan and the Dogs* (2017). He co-curated the Kurbas in Kyiv, Kurbas in Kharkiv and the Kurbas: New Worlds exhibition at the Mystetsky Arsenal in Kyiv.

KATERYNA DIUMINA (stage manager) arrived last year from Mykolaiv, a city in southern Ukraine known for its shipbuilding. She is a student of both the Admiral Makarov National Shipbuilding University and Hunter College in New York. She started working with Yara Arts Group last fall on *Mariupol*, an exhibit of award-winning photographs and videos by Evgeniy Maloletka and Mstyslav Chernov at Howl Arts in Manhattan and stage manager on Yara's *Radio 477!* at La MaMa last spring.

YARA ARTS GROUP was established in 1990 and is a resident company at La MaMa, the acclaimed experimental theater in New York. Yara has created thirty-seven theatre pieces based on extensive research in Eastern Europe, Siberia and Asia, in Yara's signature style of multilingual dialogue and songs supported by evocative visuals. Yara Arts Group is a resident theatre company of La MaMa Experimental Theatre in New York. **Yara Arts Group 306 East 11th St #3B, New York, NY 10003 USA (212)475-6474** www.yaraartsgroup.net: @yaraartsgroupinc instagram: @yara.arts

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