

January 2025

Number 93

Yara arts group Newsletter

Yara's SLAP!

Jan 23—Feb 9, 2025

Thur-Sat 7:30, Sun 2:00

East Village Basement

321 E 9th St NYC

Tickets:

www.yaraartsgroup.net

+ updates & details

The Magic of Light

March 7—16, 2025

Thurs-Sat 8 PM + Sun 4 PM

La MaMa ETC—Downstairs

66 East 4th St NYC

Tickets: www.yaraartsgroup.net

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Yara's SLAP! returns

David Burliuk, a Ukrainian artist, is slapped by a Scythian Ice Princess. The obvious result: Futurism in Siberia, Japan and the East Village

Yara Arts Group presents *Slap!* created and performed by **Bob Holman**, **Susan Hwang** and **Julian Kytasty**, and directed by **Virlana Tkacz**. *Slap!* is an hour-long theatre musical-cabaret, interrogating the totally true but outrageous life and journey of David Burliuk, the father of Futurism.

David Burliuk was a painter, poet and the organizer of Futurism. He studied in Munich and Paris and helped excavate Scythian burial mounds in southern Ukraine where he grew up. Burliuk created the most important avant-garde exhibi-

tions in Kyiv, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Munich before WWI. He toured with Vladimir Mayakovsky, dressing in colorful vests with radishes on the lapel and painted animals on his face. During the Revolution, Burliuk created Futurist shows and exhibitions in Siberia in 1920-22 in Japan. Afterwards Burliuk settled in New York. **Along with Burliuk and his companion Scythian Viper Goddess, the audience goes on a trip through space and time from Paris to Siberia to Japan and finally to the East Village.**

In *Slap!* David Burliuk is performed by Bob Holman, founder of the Bowery Poetry Club and the poet most often connected with the oral tradition, spoken word, hip hop and poetry slams. Singer-songwriter Susan Hwang portrays the accordion-playing Scythian Ice Princess, while Julian Kytasty, traditional epic singer and bandura player, sings their story. *Slap!* was developed at La MaMa and presented despite Covid for a couple of shows at the Bowery Poetry Club

and The Ukrainian Museum in New York. After the start of Russian full scale invasion, the production of the show changed, so now you can see it in its completed form.

You've heard how Ukrainian artists were appropriated by Russian culture for years, but now their Ukrainian heritage is being reclaimed. **Yara's been de-colonializing our minds for decades. Now see de-colonialism in action and laugh a little too.** Tickets www.yaraartsgroup.net



Photo by Steven Pisano

Press on Yara's *UKR Co-Lab*

Here is a review of
Yara's UKR Co-LAB #1

"Ukrainian Weekly, January 5, 2025 by Olenka Tsyhankova

...Yara Arts Group's experimental series UKR-Co Lab was created to provide a space for those fascinated with the power of words and music who wanted to read, play and show their most recent works, whether they were already developed or simply initial ideas.

Virlana Tkacz, the founding and artistic director of Yara Arts Group, introduced the series with her usual welcome greeting. Diana Chipak, the co-host and representative of the Selfreliance Association, welcomed everyone....

Julian Kytasty, a renowned master of the bandura, described the history of the Kharkiv-style bandura. He played a few improvisational pieces before stopping to talk about his experiments and experiences with the instrument. His improvisations are attempts to expand the Kharkiv bandura's repertoire and explore the instrument's possibilities. Mr. Kytasty said traditional players of the bandura, known as kobzari, would play the instrument with unique tunings seldom used today.

Ms. Tkacz related the news about the recent publication of translations of Serhiy Zhadan's poetry in Irish Pages, a famous biannual poetry journal. The current issue, "War in Europe," opens with four poems by Mr. Zhadan translated by Wanda Phipps and Ms. Tkacz.

Ms. Phipps recited Mr. Zhadan's poem "A Glow from a Twig." "It was time

to talk about how we all change," Ms. Phipps said as her warm voice filled the room and Mr. Kytasty softly strummed his bandura strings, creating a beautiful background melody that cradled the words. Ms. Phipps also recited one of the poems...recently published in the online journal Arts Fuse. One of Mr. Zhadan's poems was also published there.

After, Ms. Tkacz introduced her book of poetry, "Three Wooden Trunks." The title is a reference to the three trunks Ms. Tkacz's mom brought with her when the family first came to New York... The book's second section addresses Ms. Tkacz's childhood in Newark, N.J., and her experience in a Ukrainian school.

"I hid my tears when Mrs. Kolenska read out loud the works of writers of the Executed Renaissance. Writing was a dangerous profession, and so was speaking Ukrainian. And weren't we lucky we could do both," Ms. Tkacz writes in reference to the generation of Ukrainian language poets, writers and artists of the 1920s and early 1930s who were killed by the Soviet regime.... Ms. Tkacz read another of Mr. Zhadan's poems printed in Irish Pages. That poem, "A Forest Surrounds Poets," commemorates members of the Executed Renaissance.

Anastasia Voytyuk from Lviv was the night's special guest. Ms. Voytyuk talked about her recent concerts in Ukraine with Mr. Kytasty. She shared the significance of lyrics in Ukrainian songs and their messages. UKR Co-Lab is meant to give artists an opportunity to test work and collaborations they are developing in an experimental setting.

Response to Yara's *SLAP!*

*If you think you live in
the wrong future, you are
right!*

"In 1917 in St. Petersburg, Ukrainian poet/painter David Burliuk packed up Futurism ahead of the White and Red Armies advancing on the city with their own ideas of the Future.

Burliuk took Futurism to Siberia where the Red Army was going to set up the Soviet future not far in the future, and when the Reds approached Siberia — he packed up Futurism again and kept moving it East all the way to Japan, where it flourished until another grim Future arrived.

So Burliuk packed up Futurism yet again and came to America where it made a good fit when unpacked on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in a basement (East Village Basement, 321 E 9th St.) where you can see Burliuk (Bob Holman) and his traveling companions — a Viper Goddess (Susan Hwang) and a trusty kobzar, poet of Ukrainian epic traditions (Julian Kytasty) in SLAP!, a new play that unfolds across lands and oceans, poetry, paintings and songs.

When you enter SLAP! and its mysteries you have arrived in the only Future you need, the Fugitive Future."

By Andrei Codrescu who wrote "The Postmodern Dada Guide" (Princeton University Press)

Tickets for *Slap!*
www.yarartsgroup.net



*UKR Co Lab #1 poster
(above)
UKR Co-Lab #2 poster
(below)
design by Waldemart
Klyuzko*



The Magic of Light

Yara's newest show *The Magic of Light* interweaves puppetry, language, music and poetry to illustrate the cultural and spiritual awakening of an artist in the 1870s in Ukraine.

The show is performed with an intimate, transforming puppet stage by bandura master **Julian Kytasty** and puppeteer **Tom Lee**. It was conceived by director **Virlana Tkacz** and created by the three in rehearsals.

Inspired by the haunting epic songs, *dumas*, of the Ukrainian blind bards, a young man embarks on a lifelong quest to record, preserve and illuminate Ukrainian traditions against the tremendous pressure of history.

Porfiry Martynovych was a student of the Imperial Art Academy, when he created the drawings for the projections shown during Ostap Veresai's first presentation of a *duma* for an international urban audience in 1875. This event changed his life.

Yara's show is based on historical facts and poetry, that includes a traditional epic, Ukrainian songs and a poem by **Serhiy Zhadan**.

The puppetry is created by Tom Lee, inspired by Ukrainian tradition. Tom has worked with Yara since 1995, as an actor, designer and puppeteer. He created the beautiful video inspired by Alla Horska for Yara's last spring's show about Mariupol.

Julian Kytasty, who performs in our show, has said that the epic songs of Veresai, opened for him the deep tradition of the bandura and the possibility of creating new music for the instrument. In *The Magic of Light*, Julian both performs the songs of Veresai and his own original music.

Our piece is bilingual (Ukrainian and English) and easily understood in both. The English translations are by Virlana Tkacz & **Wanda Phipps**.

Tom Lee's Lunar New Year show



Tom Lee's *The Great Zodiac Animal Race* is back at La MaMa Kids and just in time to celebrate the Year of the Snake! February 1-2, 2025.

Growing up in Hawai'i, Tom Lee's memories of Lunar New Year included narcissus blooms, tasty dim sum dishes

and bowing to your elders before running off to your room to open your lucky red envelope with money in it! This charming shadow puppet show retells the classic Lunar New Year zodiac tale with animals inspired by Asian languages and pictograms. Tickets at LaMaMa.



Tickets to *The Magic of Light*
<https://www.lamama.org/the-magic-of-light/>

Meet Olenka

Olenka Tsyhankova was immersed in the Yara Arts Group way before she moved to NYC last September. On her first visit to NYC in March 2023, a few months before she was supposed to return to Ukraine to graduate from Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, she went to La MaMa and watched Yara's *Radio 477!* Olenka met the artistic director Virlana Tkacz, Bob Holman, Julian Kytasty and Susan Hwang who were performing then. Little did she know (even though she really wished to but had no idea how to make that dream come true) that in a year and a half, she would move to NYC and be involved in Yara. Life has its magical ways of working out :)

The Magic of Light poster
 (above) design by
 Waldemart Klyuzko
 Olenka Tsyhankova
 (below)



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Check out
Yara's website
www.yaraartsgroup.net

Yara Celebrates 20 Years of Koliada

Virlana Tkacz first visited Kryvorivnia for a research project in 2003, and met Ivan Zelenchuk. In 2004 Yara created its first Koliada show at the Kurbas Center in Kyiv with **Serhiy Zhadan, Ivan Zelenchuk** and **Dmytro Tafiychuk**. They travelled to New York in 2005 to perform at La MaMa. Since, Yara has created over 100 events with the Koliadnyky, including 10 major winter productions at La MaMa, NY, as well as in Toronto, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Kyiv and Kharkiv. Since 2010 Koliadnyky from Kryvorivnia included Ivan and Mykola Zelenchuk, **Mykola Ilyuk, Vasyl Tymchuk** and **Ostap Kostyuk** pictured below with Serhiy Zhadan in Times Square. (poster below by Waldemart Klyuzko)



Extracurricular Activities

Julian Kytasty, Yara's bandurist and composer in residence, performed in the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa-Fe, New Mexico on January 12, 2025. His concert happened in conjunction with the exhibit about Ukrainian art in the time of war. Julian's tour continued in Tucson's leading musical communities. Now Julian is on the way to San Diego to play for La Jolla

World Music Society. Julian will be back to appear in *Slap!* next week.

Silvana Gonzalez who appeared in Yara's *Radio 477!* and *Mariupol: Tree of Life* got married to Daniel Berkson on December 13, 2024 on 22nd Street. The views were amazing!

Susan Hwang who is in *Slap!* now and has appeared in Yara's shows & events since 2010, will have a set of her own music at Pete's Candy Store in Williamsburgh on Feb 25 at 8PM. The First Bushwick Book Club show of 2025 is March 29th at 6PM celebrating the writing of Emily Rems. Venue: Howl Arts 250 Broadway NYC.

Teryn Kytasty-Kuzma, who appeared in Yara's

Photo: Silvana Gonzalez and her husband Daniel Berkson

Koliada restarted New York Bandura school with **Zoya Shepko**, another veteran of Yara's winter shows. In December Teryn and Zoya had a Christmas concert at The Ukrainian Museum, New York. Now Teryn is getting ready for the Women's Bandura Ensemble tour on March 27-30.

Tom Lee, who has worked with Yara since 1995 as an actor, designer and a puppeteer, had a special collaborative performance on January 17 in the Heritage Museum of Asian Art. Together with Yoshinojo Fujima, aka Rika Lin, they will perform the *Great Zodiac Animal Race*.

Wanda Phipps & Virlana Tkacz's translations of **Serhiy Zhadan's** four poems were published in the Irish Pages. The poems opened the special issue of the prestigious journal dedicated to the war in Europe.

