

COMMUNITY CHRONICLE

Yara Arts Group presents unique series of concerts on new and old-world music

by Ihor Slabicky

NEW YORK – Virlana Tkacz, the acclaimed director of the Yara Arts Group in New York, presented “Yara’s Winter Festival: New and Old World Music” during a series of concerts on December 17-19 at The Ukrainian Museum in New York City.

The concert on December 17 featured a performance by Julian Kytasty, the world-renowned bandura player who has redefined the capabilities of the bandura and kobza. It also featured Xiao-Fen Min, a classically trained musician who was the principal pipa soloist with the Nanjing Traditional Music Orchestra and now performs and records her traditional and improvisational music in the United States. And it also featured Afarin Nazarijou, who has studied Iranian classical music and improvisation on the qanun in Iran and



Afarin Nazarijou performed via video link during a concert that took place at The Ukrainian Museum in New York on December 17.



Xiao-Fen Min on pipa and Julian Kytasty on bandura performed during a concert at The Ukrainian Museum on December 17.



Do Yeon Kim on gayageum and Julian Kytasty with bandura performed during a concert at The Ukrainian Museum on December 18.



Julian Kytasty (left), Alina Kuzma (center) and Iryna Voloshyna perform during a concert at The Ukrainian Museum on December 19.

studied on scholarships in the United States and Canada.

The evening began with Ms. Min playing the pipa, a four-stringed multi-fretted acoustic instrument which originated in China and resembles a long-necked lute. She played “Spring, River, Flower, Moon, Night,” music from the Tang Dynasty. Staid and structured, the music portrayed the picturesque scenery and the beautiful spring sounds suggested by its title. She followed that performance with “Sunny Spring, White Snow,” another expression of the return of nature, this piece featuring harmony and rhythm.

Introduced by Julian Kytasty, Ms. Nazarijou played the qanun, a hammered dulcimer from Iran, which in look resembles the tsymbaly. Performing via video link

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from Edmonton, she played "Improvisation in mode Isafahan" and "Improvisation in mode Nava."

Although Ms. Min and Mr. Kytasty had both been in the same musical scene in New York City, both performing with the same musicians, they had never played together until this night. Their music intersected with a free improvisational piece inspired by their individual work with Derek Bailey, whose own approach when working with new musicians was to do deep improvisational work together.

Ms. Nazarijou returned to play another improvisation on the qanun. It was notable how reminiscent this was of traditional tsymbaly and bandura melodic dance tunes, and carried impressions of Indian ragas and other traditional stylings. One could be left asking, Who borrowed from whom? Who influenced whom? How much sharing is there among musical cultures?

Ms. Min closed the evening with two improvised works influenced by jazz great Thelonious Monk: "Ask Me Now," and "Sen," her sensational three note improvisation inspired by Mr. Monk's four note "Raise Four."

The December 18 performance saw Mr. Kytasty on bandura perform with Do Yeon Kim, an internationally acclaimed and award-winning virtuoso of the gayageum. Originating in Korea, the instrument is a long, multistring plucked zither.

Mr. Kytasty opened the evening playing the kobza, offering a stirring "Duma pro Fedira," an epic duma about an elder Cossack passing his legacy to the next generation.

Following an introduction by Mr. Kytasty, Ms. Kim gave a brief discourse about the gayageum, of which she had several exemplars, each with a different number of strings. She began with "Chen Neon Man Sae" (1,000 Years of Well Being), a formal composition that was reserved for the king, nobility and scholars. This was followed by a Sanjo excerpt in the style of Kim Byung Ho, a gayageum player of historical importance. This music is among the most complex in the traditional canon, changing rhythms and modes throughout.

Mr. Kytasty picked up his Kyiv style bandura and played two very lively dance tunes from the early years of the 20th century. Exemplifying music composed for the bandura, he played "Homin Stepiv" by Hryhoriy Kytasty.

Departing from the formalized traditional music, Ms. Kim explored the harmonic capabilities of her instrument with "Chimhyang-moo," a modern composition by Byungki Hwang in the Buddhist scale.

Taking up his Kharkiv style bandura, Mr. Kytasty played three improvisations from his suite of etudes "Nights in Banduristan." The first and second were in different modes; using the tunings tabs of this bandura for the 21st century, the third piece combined both modes. The resultant improvisations sounded familiar, yet they

seemingly traversed space and time.

The evening of musical explorations ended with Ms. Kim playing an extended free improvisational work that fully explored the musical instrument and what can be done to it, both musically and physically. Watching her play, one fully expected the instrument to self-destruct.

The third concert on December 19 explored Ukrainian vocal traditions with Alina Kuzma and Iryna Voloshyna, with Mr. Kytasty helping out on a few pieces.

Ms. Kuzma, a singer of traditional songs and a fourth-generation bandura player, opened with "Oy, u Kiyevi." She then performed "Koly ne Bulo," the malanka "Malanochka," and "Oy ty Dube, Dube," accompanying herself on bandura.

Ms. Voloshyna, a doctoral student in ethnomusicology and a researcher of traditional Ukrainian village songs, sang a koliadka to a young woman, "Oy, Dai Bo" and then "Chiy zhe to Pluzhok," a koliadka to a young man.

She was joined by Mr. Kytasty and Ms. Kuzma for a trio of "Zazhurylysya Hory i Dolyny." Returning to solo voice, she sang "Velykiy Horod," "Choho Pole Pochornilo?," "Oy Dvi Sestry Brata Maly," "Oy Choho Vodytsia ta i Kalamutytsya," and "Kosaryky Kosyat."

Her studies with the women singers in the villages in Ukraine gave her authentic vocal intonation that was superbly controlled, exposing the nuances of each song.

Mr. Kytasty and Ms. Kuzma joined her, with the trio singing "Oy Dai Mamo, Stakan

Romu." This song, sung in the traditional village voice, deals with modern events concerning soldiers and steel machines.

The afternoon performance ended with a duet by Ms. Voloshyna and Ms. Kuzma of "Ponad Stavom, Ponad Stavochkom" and "Oy na Hori, oy Shchuryata," their performance sending pleasant shivers of delight up and down one's spine. The video of their final song by the programs director of The Ukrainian Museum, Hanya Krill, is posted on the Museum's Facebook page at <https://bit.ly/3Kht8ho>.

Over the course of three days, Ms. Tkacz oversaw three different intriguing, enlightening and delighting sets of performances. The result? A "triple crown" win by Ms. Tkacz.

Besides hosting these musical performances, The Ukrainian Museum is exhibiting "Finding Sanctuary During Pandemic" by Christine Saj. These works on small seven- and 12-inch round vinyl media explored colors, patterns and designs that may have been influenced by the designs and textures seen in pysanky, vyshyvanky and klymy – almost the visual equivalent of the musical improvisations. The closely spaced incised lines in the media added a certain depth and glow to the pieces. The downstairs gallery featured works by Slava Gerulak, whose visionary work with clay produces figures of women and fish and other visages that are seemingly produced from dreams. This is one artist whose work and oeuvre one hopes The Ukrainian Museum will explore with an in-depth exhibit.