

Ukrainian Institute of America, Razom and Yara Arts Group present:

A Forest Surrounds Poets

Ukrainian Poetry Performed
by Yara Arts Group

Nov 11, 2023
Sat at 7 – \$35

UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA 2 EAST 79TH ST @ FIFTH AVE, NYC



A Forest Surround Poets: Ukrainian Poetry Performed by Yara Arts Group

project conceived and directed by Virlana Tkacz

On Forests - Virlana Tkacz

01-02 Victoria Amelina (1986-2023) “Testimonies” & “The Sea”

translated by Larissa Babij, performed by Teryn Kuzma

On VICTORIA AMELINA (1986-2023) and the New York Literary Festival - Olena Stiazhkina

Music by Julian Kytasty

03 A Forest Surrounds Poets

“It feels like every year/ in November/a forest surrounds poets” by Serhiy Zhadan Nov 27, 2022
Translation by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. With Wanda Phipps & Music by Julian Kytasty
Video with Serhiy Zhadan reading his poem.

1920s

04 LES KURBAS (1887-1937) theatre director executed November 3, 1937 Sandarmokh, Russia
“Premonitions” poem (fragments) January 1918. Translation by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps
With Petro Ninovskyj and music by Julian Kytasty

05-07 PAVLO TYCHYNA (1891-1967) destroyed as a poet in 1930s.

“Dawn,” “Terror” and “Test” poems from “Instead of Sonnets or Octaves” 1919 Translations by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. With Petro Ninovskyi and Susan Hwang, music by Julian Kytasty.

08-10 VOLODYMYR SVYDZINSKY (1885-1941) burned alive by Red Army October 18, 1941.

“Tired leaning on the Hills,” “Pendulum” and “Terrifying...” Translations by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. With George Drance and Silvana Gonzalez, music by Julian Kytasty.

On HNAT KHOTKEVYCH (1877-1938) theatre director, writer and ethnographer, who also created the Kharkiv bandura, was shot Oct 8, 1938 in Kharkiv. With Julian Kytasty and a musical tribute.

11 -12 MYKHAIL SEMENKO (1892-1937) executed October 23, 1937, in Kyiv.

Poezopaintngs, visuals projections, translations by Virlana Tkacz and Bob Holman. With Bob Holman.
“Mykhail Semenko,” Translation by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. With Yara Arts Group,
“Aviator” Translation by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. With Lesya Verba & Susan Hwang.

13 OLEKSA VLYZKO (1908 -1934) poet who had lost his hearing as a child. He was executed on December 14, 1934 in Kyiv. **“FIRE, FIRE!” or Ninth Symphony (fragments)** (1927) translation by Virlana Tkacz and Bob Holman. With Bob Holman.

14 MAIK IOHANSEN (1896-1937) poet and script writer, executed October 27, 1937 in Kyiv. **“Forest to Fences”** 1930. Translation by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. With George Drance and Silvana Gonzalez, music by Julian Kytasty. **“Kharkiv, Kharkiv”** text by Maik Iohansen, With Yara Arts Group, music by Yuli Meitus and Anthony Coleman.

15-20 Concert Version of YARA’S “RADIO 477! Act 3 (2023) poetry by Serhiy Zhadan, music by Anthony Coleman, translations by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps.

Scene 1 News of Kharkiv Today and in the 1930s, created by Yara Arts Group. With Susan Hwang, music by Anthony Coleman.

Scene 2 On pain and hope: composed of poetry by Serhiy Zhadan: “Rhinoceros,” “When so much is taken away” and “Maybe it’s time to start” With Silvana Gongalez, George Drance, Petro Ninovskyi and Susan Hwang, music by Anthony Coleman.

Scene 3 “Of all literature” poem by Serhiy Zhadan, With Lesya Verba, Susan Hwang, George Drance, Petro Ninovskyi and Silvana Gongalez.

Kharkiv, Kharkiv text by Maik Iohansen, music by Yuliy Meitus.

POETS

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.

SERHIY ZHADAN is one of Ukraine most celebrated writers. In 2022 he received the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought, the German Peace Prize and nine international literature prizes. His books available in English include: *The Orphanage*, *Mesopotamia* and *What We Live for, What We Die For: Selected Poems* (Yale University Press). Serhiy was born in Luhansk, Ukraine's easternmost region and lives in Kharkiv. He has worked with Yara Arts Group since 2005, including the award-winning show *1917-2017: Tychyna, Zhadan & the Dogs*. He is the front man for his band Zhadan & the Dogs.

LES KURBAS (1887-1937) was a theatre director born in western Ukraine and educated at University of Vienna. He came to Kyiv in 1916 and created the Young Theatre with local young actors. In 1922 they became an experimental company – the Berezil. Soon Kurbas was creating his most innovative work, experimenting with movement and film on stage. The Berezil became the rage with Kyiv audiences. In 1926 Berezil was named the National Theatre and transferred to Kharkiv, then the capital of Ukraine. Despite prizes at international exhibits and rave reviews, in 1933 Kurbas was removed from the company and arrested. He was shot November 3, 1937.

PAVLO TYCHYNA (1891-1967) was the most important Ukrainian poet of the 20th century. His first collection “Clarinets of the Sun” (1918) reflected the joy and radiant energy of the times and brought him instant recognition. His collections, *The Plow*, and *Instead of Sonnets or Octaves*, confirmed Tychyna’s position in Ukrainian culture.

But Tychyna suffered immediate repercussions for his third publication and never allowed any of the poems to be republished, nor did he ever even mention this collection. The Communist Party exerted increasing pressure on him, eventually breaking his spirit and destroying him as a poet.

VOLODYMYR SVIDZINSKY (1885-1941) was born in the Vinnytsia region and lived in Kharkiv. His collections include: *Lyrical Poems* (1922), *September* (1927) and *Poems* (1940). Svidzinsky also translated ancient Greek, Latin, French, German, Polish and Russian poetry into Ukrainian. He was arrested by the Soviets and, according to eyewitness accounts, was burned alive together with other prisoners during the evacuation of Kharkiv.

MYKHAIL SEMENKO (1892-1937) was the founder of Ukrainian Futurism and headed the Association of Panfuturists and later Nova Gneratsia. He published numerous collections including the 1922 series *My Mosaic: Poemopaintings* which we proejct. He was criticized in the 1930s by Party critics and executed in 1937.

OLEKSA VLYZKO (1908 -1934) lost his hearing due to Scarlet Fever. He lived in Kyiv and was part of Mykhail Semenko’s Futurist groups. By 1930 he became of one the most popular poets in Ukraine. He was only 26 years old when he was arrested and executed.

MAIK IOHANSEN (1896-1937) was a Ukrainian poet, writer, translator and linguist born in Kharkiv. He wrote the screenplay that propelled silent film director Alexander Dovzhenko to world fame. He also wrote the texts and lyrics for Ukraine’s first jazz musical, *Hello, This Is Radio 477!* that Les Kurbas’s experimental Berezil Theatre staged in Kharkiv in 1929, including the hit song “Kharkiv,Kharkiv.”

PERFORMERS

ANTHONY COLEMAN (composer and pianist) is one of the key figures of the New York music scene. His work bridges the gap between Composition and Improvisation, Uptown and Downtown. Free Improvisation, Jazz, Jewish music etc. Coleman has recorded over 20 CDs and has played on more than 150. He’s on the faculty of both the New England Conservatory and the New School.

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 agin.

BOB HOLMAN 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*.

SUSAN HWANG tells stories and makes things that are collapsible, like songs and times. Her instruments take up space (accordion, Jangu—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.

TERYN KUZMA (bandura) is 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 KYTASY (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.

PETRO NINOVSKYI is a 3rd year Juilliard acting student in the MFA program. He graduated from The Karpenko-Kary National Theatre, Cinema and Television University in Kyiv, Ukraine, where he participated in a numerous of theater productions, TV shows and movies.

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 and has worked as an actress with the Anomalous Co., Ping Chong + Company and Yara Arts Group.

ARTISTS & STAFF

VIRLANA TKACZ (director & co-translator) heads the Yara Arts Group 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 the 2018 New York Innovative Theatre Awards for best musical.

WANDA PHIPPS (co-translator) is a founding member of Yara and has been translating Ukrainian poetry with Virлана 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.

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 published in the Ukrainian Voices series (ibidem Press) in spring 2024.

WALDEMART KLYUZKO (projections and 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.

MAKSYM LOZYNSKYJ (sound design). is a singer, songwriter, producer, and actor. He has been a member of Yara Arts Group at La Mama for over 10 years and has been involved in a number of productions. He graduated from Berklee College of Music with a master's in music production and has just finished scoring the soundtrack for a new movie set to premier in America.

KATERYNA DIUMINA (stage manager) arrived this summer from Mykolaiv, a city in southern Ukraine known for its shipbuilding. She is a student of the Admiral Makarov National Shipbuilding University and is studying design. She started working with Yara Arts Group this fall and was an assistant on *Mariupol*, an exhibit of award winning photographs and videos by Evgeniy Maloletka and Mstyslav Chernov at Howl Arts in Manhattan.

ANASTASIA PANCHENKO (production assistant) is a student who worked with Yara Arts Group on reading of *Blind Sight* summer 2023.

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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