



Pavlo the Beeper puppeteered by Caitlin Nugent and bandura master Julian Kytasty. Photo by Pavlo Terekhov.

While American and European newspapers are providing daily news about the present Russian aggression and decimation of an entire nation whose legitimate independent existence is being denied, the people's spirit at home and abroad finds sustenance in its cultural traditions. The latest offering by the Yara Arts Group under the founding leadership of Virlana Tkacz connects to this spirit and fulfills a mission by unearthing and presenting the work of artists that have shaped Ukrainian consciousness and sensibility... "The Magic of Light" brings to light the achievements of artists from the 1860s and 70s whose works in painting and music were showcasing the traditional forms of Ukrainian culture found among the peasants, in myths and legends often transmitted orally by "kobzars", the wandering minstrels who traversed the Ukrainian steppes. Like the ancient Greeks, they sung/recited the epic legends accompanying themselves with a traditional Ukrainian string instrument, the bandura.

Virlana Tkacz has once again collaborated with the superb bandura master musician/performer Julian Kytasty whose singing/reciting and strumming brings to life the text with dialogue among the various characters, the poetry, and various traditional songs, most centrally among them the tragic epic, "The Three Brothers from Azov." Julian Kytasty is channeling the spirit of the blind popular "kobzar" Ostap Veresai (1803-1890) who traversed the Ukraine and performed at the 1875 Salt Palace Concert which was organized for Veresai by the well-known composer, pianist and conductor Mykola Lysenko... "The Magic of Light" production weaves together dialogue, poetry, and music in a richly entertaining performance.

A major visual and performance component is Puppetry, the special kind of puppetry art that combines hand-held puppets with a visible puppeteer/actor whose hands, facial expression and voice gives the puppet the emotional dimension of the character. Tom Lee is the puppeteer/actor who brings to life the central character/puppet, the painter Porfiry Martynovych (1856-1933), whose drawings were projected by the magic lantern during the Ostap Veresai concert at The Salt Palace.



Tom Lee and Porfiry Martynovych puppet.
Photo by Bronwen Sharp.

Tom Lee’s fine artistry—he is a master of various puppetry traditions and video projection designs—is critical to making the puppet human, as he gently moves the puppet with his hands, his visible face and clear voice carrying the wide range of emotions from humor to dejection. Black and white shadow puppets, designed by Linda Wingerter and projected against a backdrop take over at certain points the lively action in the narration of the life of Porfiry Martynovych and his encounters with influential personalities, all represented by hand puppets that have been beautifully carved and designed by Kevin White with realistic individual features and clothing... Should you make your way to a performance of “The Magic of Light”—and you should—it is a neighborhood full of Ukrainian vestiges...

from “Art, Language and the Search for Belonging ‘The Magic of Light’”
Reviewed by Beate Hein Bennett March 8, 2025, in the New York Theatre Wire
full review: <https://nytheatre-wire.com/bhb25031t.htm>

“The Magic of Light” March 7 – 16, 2025

Downstairs at LaMama, 66 East 4th Street (betw. Bowery and 2nd Ave.), New York, NY

Thurs. – Sat. at 8 pm; Sun. at 4 pm. \$30/ \$25 students/seniors

Buy tickets: www.lamama.org or call 646-430-5374. Running Time: 70 minutes