

April 2023

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# Yara arts group Newsletter

*Ping Chong's Undesirable Elements: Ukraine*  
May 5-14, 2023  
Fri-Sat at 7 & Sun at 2  
Ukrainian Museum

Yara's videos—links  
[www.yarartsgroup.net](http://www.yarartsgroup.net)

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## *Undesirable Elements: Ukraine*

Ping Chong and Company and Yara Arts Group will premiere a new *Undesirable Elements* production exploring experiences of Ukrainian-American New Yorkers and recent arrivals from Ukraine. Created in collaboration with **Virlana Tkacz** and Yara Arts Group, the production will explore the diversity of Ukrainian identity, immigration experiences, intergenerational connections, the history of Ukrainians in the United States, and the devastating impact of the current invasion by Russia.

*Undesirable Elements: Ukraine* is the most recent work in director Ping Chong's *Undesirable Elements* series. In the series, real people tell about their own lives. Since 1992, over 65 *Undesirable Elements* productions have been created in communities across the country and around the world. Ping Chong is an American contemporary theater director, choreographer, video and installation artist. He is a National Medal of Arts Recipient, which is the highest honor given to artists by the U.S. government.

Virlana had worked with Ping Chong in the 1990s when he first created the series. Last year Ping asked her if she would like to collaborate with him on a piece about Ukrainian Americans.

Virlana suggested the people who are in *Undesirable Elements: Ukraine*. **George Drance**'s grandparents arrived in New York before WWI, **Julian Kytasty**'s father arrived with his bandura playing family after WWII, while **Lesya Verba** came to New York from Odesa two years ago. **Nariman Asanov**, a Crimean Tatar, came to US in the 1990s, while **Daria Kolomic** arrived in New York last summer, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In February a work-in-progress version of *Undesirable Elements: Ukraine* was part of a symposium celebrating 30 Years of Ping Chong and Company's *Undesirable Elements* at the New School in New York.

The work-in-progress showing was followed by a conversation with the cast and



Post-performance discussion of *Undesirable Elements: Ukraine* at the New School this winter. Photo by Pavlo Terekhov.

creative team members, who were joined by Oksana Kis, Visiting Professor at Eugene Lang College for Liberal Arts Department of Anthropology at the New School.

Yara Arts Group is very proud to be partnering with Ping Chong and Company on this project. Ping Chong and Company creates theater and art that reveal beauty, invention, precision, and a commitment to social justice. It was founded in New York City in 1975 by leading theatrical innovator Ping Chong. The company's work is centered on innovation, collaboration, and community engagement. For more information: [www.pingchong.org](http://www.pingchong.org)

*Undesirable Elements: Ukraine* will premiere at the Ukrainian Museum in New York May 5 to 14, 2023. The shows are Friday and Saturdays at 7 PM and Sunday at 2 PM. The Ukrainian Museum is at 222 East 6th St (between 2nd and 3rd Ave) in Manhattan.

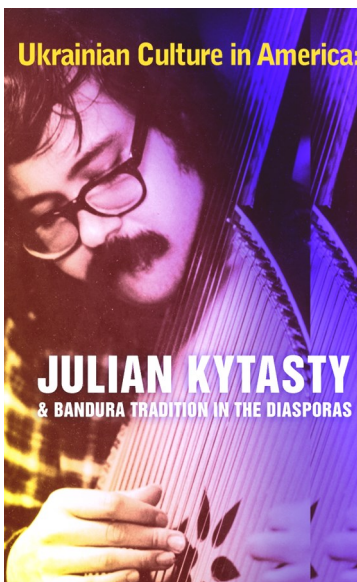
Tickets for *Undesirable Elements: Ukraine* at the Ukrainian Museum are \$30 for adults, \$25 for members, students and seniors. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/undesirable-elements-ukraine-tickets-565374248597>

## Mariupol/Exhibit

## Yara's Virtual Events about Julian Kytasty



Poster for Mariupol exhibit by Waldemart Kluyzko (above) and for virtual events about Julian Kytasty (below)



In November, How! Arts and Yara Arts Group presented *Mariupol*, an exhibition of award-winning photographs and video by **Evgeniy Maloletka** and **Mstyslav Chernov (AP)** from the first days Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

The photos are stark, but powerful. There were no funerals. No memorials. No public gatherings to mourn those killed by Russia's relentless attacks on the port city of Mariupol that became a symbol of Ukraine's ferocious resistance. The mass grave trenches told the story of a city under siege. The world would have seen none of this, would have seen next to nothing at all from Mariupol as a city under siege, if it weren't for Mstyslav Chernov and Evgeniy Maloletka, who raced into the city when the invasion began. For more than two weeks, they were the only international media in the city, and the only journalists able to transmit video and still photos to the outside world.

Moscow hated their work, insisting it was phony. But the photographs appeared on front pages all over the world and eloquently spoke to what happened in Mariupol. Evgeniy Maloletka is a Ukrainian war photographer, journalist and filmmaker, who has been covering the war in Ukraine since 2014. He has also covered the Euromaidan Revolution, the protests in Belarus, the Nagorno-Karabakh war and the COVID pandemic. He has worked with Yara since 2015. His work in Mariupol was recognized with the Knight International Journalism Award, the Visa d'or News Award and the Prix Bayeux Calvados-Normandie.

Yara Arts Group and the Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center launched the third season of "Ukrainian Culture in America" virtual events with a special four-part series on **Julian Kytasty**, master bandura player born in the U.S. Part 1 was on the Kytasty Family and was live streamed last September. It, like all the other parts, can be watched for free any time on [www.Yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.Yaraartsgroup.net)

Julian is a third-generation bandura player who followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, granduncle and father. Sharing recordings and images, **Virlana Tkacz** talks to Julian about transmission of tradition in the family. They are joined by Julian's sister **Irene Kuzma** and her daughter **Alina Kuzma** who describe how they are forging their own way in this traditional world today.

The second part is on Julian's work in the various Ukrainian diasporas in New York, Argentina, Brazil and Canada. There's even rare footage of Julian's special concert series in the Kuban diaspora in 1989.

The third part looks at how Julian started to reexamine the bandura tradition in the 1990s and how this work developed. Special guests include Dan Kahn, **Mike Andrec** and **Volodymyr Voyt**. The second and third part of Yara's special on Julian Kytasty were live streamed in October.

The final part of Yara's series looked at Julian's work in theatre, poetry, film and museum exhibitions and was streamed in November.

Julian Kytasty started working with Yara Arts Group in 1997. Virlana talks to Julian about his work in how they first started working on various poetry events and eventu-

ally on entire theatre pieces such as the Koliada shows, *Raven*, *Capt. John Smith* and *1917—2017: Tychyna Zhadan & the Dogs* for which Julian won an NYIT Award for the music with Zhadan. The poet **Bob Holman**, actor **Larysa Rusnak** from Franko Theatre in Kyiv and visual artist **Waldemart Klyuzko** from Kyiv join the conversation, sharing recordings and images, including the "Ping-Pong Bandura" short films.

The final part of Yara's special on Julian Kytasty was live streamed in November. Now all four parts can be viewed for free any time through links on Yara's website [www.Yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.Yaraartsgroup.net) Take a look!

## RADIO 477! A response

A confluence of friends are in *Radio 477*, an epic theatre work from Yara Arts conceived and directed by **Virlana Tkacz**. The show riffs on jazz in Kharkiv, Ukraine in 1929 thru the lens of cultural history & the war today. My friend **Wanda Phipps** translated the texts of poet **Serhiy Zhadan** with Virlana for the songs.

**Anthony Coleman**'s music left my jaw agape. **Frank London** was in his band & jammed with **Gogol Bordello** after. Bowery **Bob Holman** was in it and did a groovy pre-show in the lobby with bandura master **Julian Kytasty**. They're all stars, stars I tell you! A spectacular evening. Slava Ukraini!  
by **Chris Rael**—Facebook



## RADIO 477! Connects the viewers with history, poetry & Kharkiv



**Radio 477!** which was performed at La MaMa Theatre in New York City March 10-19, was developed serendipitously. Director **Virlana Tkacz** was working in the archives in Kharkiv, Ukraine when she discovered the score to a 1920s jazz musical written by Yuliy Meitus and thought to be lost during the Stalinist purges. It was this score that musician and composer **Anthony Coleman** developed into **Radio 477!**

Famed Ukrainian poet **Serhiy Zhadan**, the author of *What We Live For, What We Die For*, translated by Virlana Tkacz and **Wanda Phipps**, wrote some of the text for the performance, but not for the original 1920s musical. His text was written for his hometown, the Kharkiv of 2023.

The show began with a history lesson in the lobby. Guests were informed about the location of the city, as well as what makes it special. Poet-in-residence **Bob Holman** went over ten aspects of Kharkiv that make it famous.

Mr. Holman told the guests that the bandura that can be played with both hands, was created in the city. This fact drew the attention of the guests to **Julian Kytasty**, who played the bandura to accent the words of the poet-in-residence.

An earlier version of *Radio 477!* was performed at the Bohemian National Hall in New York at a festival dedicated to Vaclav Havel. It was also performed at PS 21 at

performance space located in Chatham, NY.

The current version demonstrates how Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine interrupted and destroyed lives. The show was presented in English with Ukrainian spoken throughout. **Lesya Verba**, a performer from Odesa, used her beautiful voice to sing songs in Ukrainian. **Petro Ninovskyi** also lent his voice to shimmering songs in Ukrainian. Performances by **George Drance, Susan Hwang, Silvana Gonzalez** and **Akiko Hiroshima** were also incredibly strong.

The set design was exceptional, part of which was only revealed behind after a curtain opened in the third act. The glowing rings of the set, recreated from Vadym Meller's 1929 set for performances of the Berezil theater in Kharkiv, were assembled by a group headed by **Waldemart Klyuzko**. They presented the illusion of stepping into another world. The world was presented to us earlier in projections compiled by Klyuzko that included vintage photographs of the old city of Kharkiv and archival photos of the original 1929 jazz show at the Berezil.

The show at La Mama, which drew the audience in with its visuals and music, revolved around the concepts of radio and theater and the way they connect to the city. It is full of beautiful lines like, "But what is as delicious as the smell of backstage?" It is a tribute to Kharkiv. Another line says, "The city as love stitched to skin." And there's the memorable line, "You don't comprehend, you feel the past in order to trust the future."

The performance reminds the audience that many people were arrested in the 1930s,

including the noted theater director Les Kurbas. From 1927 to 1933 Mr. Meitus created the music for 15 productions at the Berezil Theatre in Kharkiv, many of which were directed by Mr. Kurbas. It was believed that all of Meitus's music for the Berezil shows was destroyed after Kurbas was arrested in 1933. The discovery of the score for *Radio 477!* gives hope more of his Berezil scores will be found in the future.

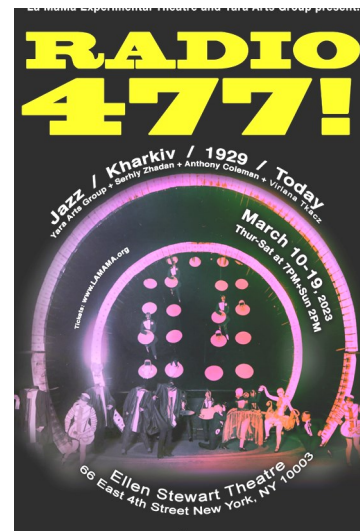
Air raid sirens sounded at the end of Act 2 and Act 3 began with news about Russia's invasion and ended with the actors transformed into characters of the original 1929 photo in costumes recreated by **Keiko Obremski**.

Time progressed and space opened, and the rings of the radio waves designed by Mr. Meller appeared. The performance of "Radio 477!" came to an end, but the show continued with a reading by Serhiy Zhadan together with Bob Holman reading the English translations.

Throughout the show the audience eagerly waited for Mr. Zhadan to appear and he did not disappoint. Zhadan looked majestic with the rings behind him. Ukraine's past was evoked in the present events. "how can you complain about the weight/of events/ that have pushed you into the cold air of history?«

**Daria Kolomiec**, a DJ new to the stage of *Radio 477!* improvised with music as Mr. Zhadan read his poems. At the end of the reading, Ms. Kolomiec brought everyone to their feet to dance. The idea of dancing for Ukraine and experiencing happiness even during a grave situation was inspiring one. The audience left with music in their bodies.

by **Olena Jennings**  
**Ukrainian Weekly 4/30/23**



Poster for Radio 477!  
 by **Waldemart Klyuzko**

Below  
 photo of **Susan Hwang**  
 in Radio 477!  
 by **Pavlo Terekhov**



## Yara Arts Group

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Check out  
Yara's website  
[www.yaraartsgroup.net](http://www.yaraartsgroup.net)

Serhiy Zhadan reading  
his poem in Radio 477!

Photo by Pavlo Terekhov



## Yara's Katya

Have you met Katya? Katya Diumina is Yara's new administrator who's been with us for over six months. She's a painter from Mykolaiv, Ukraine and arrived in New York last summer. She helped Virlana and Evgeniy Maloletka set up the *Mariupol* exhibition at Howl Arts in November. This winter she started working on Yara's *Radio 477!* and became our stage manager. She knows all the music cues in *Radio 477!* and can sing every song! You can find her in our group photo below.



## Extracurricular Activities

**George Drance**, who appeared in Yara's *Koliada* and *Radio 477!* is now performing his solo show *\*mark* at Theatre 315. [The show](#) is a telling of the Gospel of Mark and runs till the end of April. Don't miss it.

**Bob Holman**, who appeared in Yara's *Capt. John Smith*, *Tychyna Zhadan & the Dogs* and *Slap* is known for his poetry and the Bowery Poetry Club. Recently, Bob celebrated his 75th birthday and Reverend Billy declared him St. Bob. The Villager had a large write up in which **Susan Hwang** was quoted as describing Bob as "hilarious and deep at the same time — his heart is as large as his courage. He extends so much love and support to all around him." **Hear! hear! and Happy Birthday!**

**Akiko Hiroshima**, who says she appeared in more Yara's shows than anyone else, is also in the band Elena Moon Park and Friends, which just got booked for a big music festi-

val called Lollapalooza this August. They also performed just brilliantly by Steve Beck. <https://youtu.be/5doocFAheOI>

**Eugene Hutz**, who appeared in Yara's *Circle* and *Song Tree* and recently was a featured guest in *Radio 477!*, is the front man for Gogol Bordello, which will be on tour in Europe in June and just announced its summer tour of U.S. and Canada.

**Susan Hwang**, who appeared in Yara's *Scythian Stones*, *Capt John Smith*, *Slap* and *Radio 477!* is recording a new Debutante Hour album with **Maria Sonevtsky** and **Mia Pixley**. They just appeared at Barbes in Brooklyn.

**Teryn Kuzma**, who appeared in Yara's *Koliada* shows and the Kytasty Festival, will have her graduate recital, *Songs of Strength* at Bard on April 23,

**Evgeniy Maloletka** is photographer who worked

with Yara since 2015 and took the award-winning photographs of Mariupol in the first days of the war. Yara Arts Group presented an exhibit of these photographs at Howl Arts Gallery in Manhattan last November. Recently, Zhenya and Vasilisa Stepanenko received The George Polk Award from Long Island University. **CONGRATULATIONS!**

**Maria Sonevtsky**, who appeared in Yara's *Scythian Stones* and other events, has just published an academic book on one 1989 song — "Tantsi" by VV which got Kyiv punks singing in Ukrainian.

Maria also writes that the musical group "Zozulka which includes **Willa Roberts**, **Eva Salina** and me singing mostly polyphonic repertoire from Ukraine, performed at The Met Museum's Grand Tour in April."