

July 2022

Number 88

Yara arts group Newsletter

RADIO 477!

PS21 Chatham, NY

Fri-Sat Aug 19-20, 8PM

Yara's Poetry in Performance videos—links

www.yaraartsgroup.net

Radio 477! in Chatham, NY

By Viriana Tkacz

In November 2021, I was in Kharkiv working on a new Yara show “Radio 477!” with Serhiy Zhadan, my favorite Ukrainian writer who won four major international literary awards this year. Serhiy lives in Kharkiv and shares my passion for the Kharkiv avantgarde of the 1920s. Our show was inspired by a musical score I found a few years ago, which turned out to be the conductor’s copy of the legendary jazz musical staged in Kharkiv in 1929 and thought to be lost during the Stalinist purges.

In 1929, the Berezil Theatre created “Hello, This Is Radio 477!” a jazz musical revue about Kharkiv. It had catchy songs, wild dances, a spectacular set and fabulous costumes that captivated its audiences but did not endear itself to the Party bosses and was soon pulled from the repertoire. The conductor’s score I found included almost 300 pages of music and almost no text, except for the lyrics to one song. Zhadan suggested we create a new piece about a company trying to create a new theatre piece about Kharkiv, using the basic structure of the 1929 show suggested by the programs we found. We invited New Yorker Anthony Coleman, a legendary downtown pianist, to develop new music inspired by the original music composed for the show by Yuliy Meitus.

I am the artistic director of Yara Arts Group, a resident company of the world renowned La MaMa Experimental Theatre in New York. We create original theatre pieces in rehearsals from fragments of poetry, texts, song and historical material from the East, especially Ukraine. Our very first theatre piece in 1990 was about Les Kurbas, the Ukrainian theatre director who created the Berezil Theatre. Since our founding, we have created over 40 theatre pieces, 25 of which were based on material from Ukraine. I believe that culture is a

Performance Spaces for the 21st Century and Yara Arts Group present:

RADIO 477!

Text & lyrics by Serhiy Zhadan
inspired by a 1929 jazz musical from Kharkiv, Ukraine
Music by Anthony Coleman,
Project conceived and directed by Viriana Tkacz

Friday & Saturday
August 19-20
2022

PS21 "Open Air" Pavilion Theater
2980 New York 66, Chatham, NY

Info: yaraartsgroup.net



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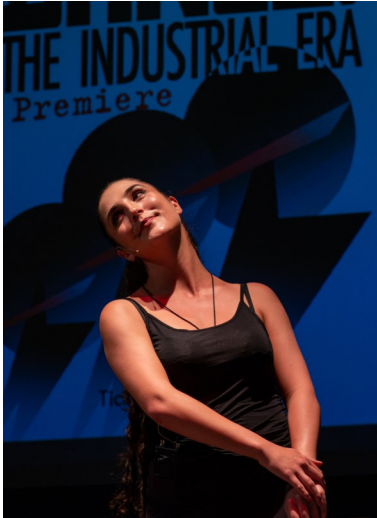
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dialogue with our contemporaries, and also with the art and artists from our past. We become a part of Ukrainian culture when we enter into an active dialogue with it. Yara makes masterpieces of Ukrainian culture available to our English-speaking audience by translating them and by setting them in a cultural context, so people unfamiliar with it can gain a deeper appreciation.

In 2018, Yara co-produced a series of museum exhibits about Les Kurbas in Ukraine, including *Kurbas in Kharkiv* at the Yermilov Center in Kharkiv. Our designers Waldemart Klyuzko and Yevhen Kopiov recreated the spectacular set Vadym Meller designed for the 1929 Berezil production of this jazz musical. This set became the center piece of our exhibit and the favorite selfie spot in town as our constant events about Kurbas and the 1920s avantgarde drew hundreds of viewers to Yermilov. A few months later, we opened *Kurbas: New Worlds*, at the Mystetskyi Arsenal, Ukraine's premiere venue in Kyiv. Over 20,000 viewers came to see our exhibition and events. Our events included a concert of music with Anthony Coleman conducting 18 young musicians from Kharkiv playing music from the Meitus score for the first time since 1929. People loved this performance which (**cont p 2**)

Yara's *Radio 477!* in Chatham NY Aug 19 & 20

cont



*Silvana Gonzalez (above)
and Susan Hwang (below)
in "Radio 477!"*

Photo by Pavlo Terekhov



(from p 1) was framed by the glorious lit arcs of light of the Meller set and we decided to pursue this project as a theatre piece.

The pandemic put our plans on hold. But last November we held our first workshop in Kharkiv with seven local actors and six musicians. Thanks to the Kharkiv Literary Museum, I had a residency in the Slovo Building where many of the artists who created the original show in 1929 lived. These included Les Kurbas, Vadym Meller and Maik Iohansen, the head writer on the show. I shared my residency apartment with composer Anthony Coleman and designer Waldemart Klyuzko. Serhiy Zhadan lived a few blocks from us. Every morning we walked to our rehearsal space in the Regional Center of Culture and Arts of Kharkiv, retracing the steps of the artists who originally created this piece. In the evening, we often stopped by the theatre museum in the Shevchenko Theatre that in the 1920s was the Berezil. Anthony Coleman had a lecture at the Kotliarevsky Conservatory which Meitus attended when he started working with Kurbas.

We were inspired by the close physical presence of the past in Kharkiv, and also by the city's great energy and hope for the future. This is reflected in the first act of "Radio 477!" which we put together in Kharkiv last November. Following the structure of the 1929 show, we have scenes in Kharkiv near a poster announcing a new show, then in a brand-new department store, park and theatre. We even have a scene with a spectacular theft, just like in the original. We called our show "Radio 477!" after the first radio station in Kharkiv. We wanted to examine our relationship to those times when everyone was busy dancing, but dark times were

just around the corner. We didn't realize how true this would become for our show and times too.

We were scheduled to do a second workshop in the city in March, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine prevented this. A few days after the invasion, Yara organized a "Stand with Ukraine" event with Eugene Hutz and numerous downtown artists at the Ukrainian Museum in New York. Many such events followed. Zhadan, who remained in Kharkiv organizing humanitarian aid in the city, urged us to continue work on our theatre project. We had always planned to include Yara's diverse group of New Yorkers in our show. This spring we conducted our second workshop with them at La MaMa. Our spring workshop culminated in a performance at a festival dedicated to Vaclav Havel at the Bohemian National Hall in Manhattan.

A few days later, Serhiy Zhadan posted this on his Facebook:

"I wrote the words, trying to imagine, what Maik Iohansen, the original writer of the libretto, could have wanted to say, and legendary jazz musician Anthony Coleman, worked with the notes of the father of Ukrainian jazz – Yuliy Meitus, giving them a contemporary sound.

The result was an ironic and moving show about Kharkiv, portrayed as the capital of jazz and constructivism, a city of theatres and business, about love, desire and politics. There was a lot of singing and radio in the show. In a word it was a satirical lyrical revue about the city which is stepping out of a past that at the same time influences its future.

We planned to continue

working on our show this spring in Kharkiv. However, that is not possible right now, so Virlana is working on it in New York with American actors. I think – it's good that today in an East Village theatre they are singing about Kharkiv, remembering Iohansen, Meitus, the Ukrainian avantgarde, and that wild and incomprehensible city on the Lohan. We must talk about ourselves, tell others about ourselves. And this can't be done without jazz."

In the 1920s, Les Kurbas created innovative productions with his Berezil Theatre hoping to create a modern urban culture in Soviet Ukraine that would transcend the difficult past and create a new vibrant Ukrainian community in the city. He did this with a diverse group of artists who looked to Europe, America and jazz for inspiration. Kurbas himself was from Western Ukraine (which was part of Poland in the 1920s) and was educated in Vienna. Vadym Meller, Berezil's brilliant designer, was born in St. Petersburg and was of Swedish ancestry. He was educated in Kyiv and Munich, where he exhibited his art with Kandinsky, Klee and the artists of the Blue Rider Group, the most innovative visual group in the pre-WWI Germany. Yuliy Meitus, the composer for 15 Berezil productions in Kharkiv, was from a Jewish family living in Central Ukraine. He studied music with Heinrich Neuhaus and at the Music Institute in Kharkiv where he headed the first jazz band. All his scores for the Berezil Theatre were thought to be destroyed, until we located the score for "Hello, This Is Radio 477!" The leading actress of the Berezil in Kharkiv was (cont p 3)

Radio 477! *cont*

(from p 2) Valentyna Chystaikova, an ethnic Russian born in St Petersburg, while the leading actors, Yosyp Hirniak and Marian Krushelnysky, like Kurbas, came from Western Ukraine. Maik Iohansen, the author of the core of text of “Hello, This Is Radio 477!” was born in Kharkiv, of Latvian heritage. Kurbas brought together this amazingly diverse group of artists to help him create modern urban Ukrainian culture in Kharkiv. Unfortunately, many of these people and their work were destroyed in the purges of the 1930s. “Radio 477!” is a new theatre piece, grounded in history, but about our relationship today to this past that is both so full of light, and always on the verge of darkness.

Currently, we are again workshoping “Radio 477!” at the La MaMa Rehearsal Studios. We are creating new scenes and rehearsing Anthony’s music. We will present our work at PS21 in Chatham, New York August 19 and 20, 2022. Come see our show in this beautiful new indoor-outdoor theatre space that The New York Times recently called, “a Hudson Valley outpost of the Avant Garde [which] presents work that challenges and invites.” Many Ukrainians have made this part of New York their favorite summer spot. It is a short drive from Hunter, New Paltz, Albany and just down the road from the Plast Camp in East Chatham. For details see yaraartsgroup.net

Come see Yara’s “radio 477!”, talk to your neighbors about Ukraine and contribute to the Serhiy Zhadan Charitable Foundation through Razom and other organizations that support Ukraine’s valiant fight for democracy and a free Ukraine today.

Oleh Lysheha’s *Dream Bridge* Event

The poetry event which Virlana Tkacz organized at the Ukrainian Museum in April, was magic, not simply enchanting, but the kind that leaves a deep impression on your soul. In these difficult times it is unusual that an artistic performance serves as a balm, a breath of fresh air which opens the space for creativity...

Virlana Tkacz began the launch of “Dream Bridge,” the bilingual book of Oleh Lysheha’s poetry she translated with Wanda Phipps, with her first impression of the poet and his work. On the screen we saw photographs of their first meeting with the poet, as well as pictures from Lysheha’s life. Virlana quickly described the scenes, relating pleasant and funny situations, drawing in the audience making it a participant in the show.

The poetry performances began with the first translated poem “Song 212” from the cycle “Winter in Tysmenytsia.” It was read by Wanda Phipps, who has worked with Virlana for many years making Lysheha’s poetry available to English readers. Virlana and Wanda also translated many other Ukrainian poets.

The actors Sean Eden, Andrew Colteaux, Kat Yew and Sofia Gutchinov read poems “Song 2,” “Bear” and performed sections of the poems that became Yara’s theatre pieces: “Swan,” “Raven” and “Dream Bridge.” They were accompanied by Julian Kytasty on bandura and Paul Brantley on cello, as they were in these shows.

We also saw a video from “Raven,” as it was performed at La MaMa in 2011 by Andrew Colteaux, Sean Eden and Kat Yew, who were present,

as well as Marin Bush. The theatre director’s modernist staging is striking, even on video.... In Virlana’s production the wall of the set is alive. It is constantly in motion, reflecting one idea after another.

I found the performance of the Ukrainian text in “Dream Bridge” by Maria Rewakowicz, a poet, translator and scholar, especially moving.

Poet Bob Holman read Lysheha’s “Oak.” His hat reminded me of the poet’s father Bohdan Lysheha... From childhood I also remember the hundreds of workers on bicycles rushing to their jobs in the early morning, as described in the poem... Bob Holman also read from his foreword to the “Dream Bridge” book... The book makes a great present for both Ukrainian and English readers of poetry.

The appearance by Korinya Band with great authentic folk singing by three young women: Alina Kuzma, Sana & Zoya Shepko was a wonderful surprise. Their natural renditions of songs from long ago were as true and pure as Oleh Lysheha’s poems, and well suited the evening.

Article by Myroslava Rozdolska

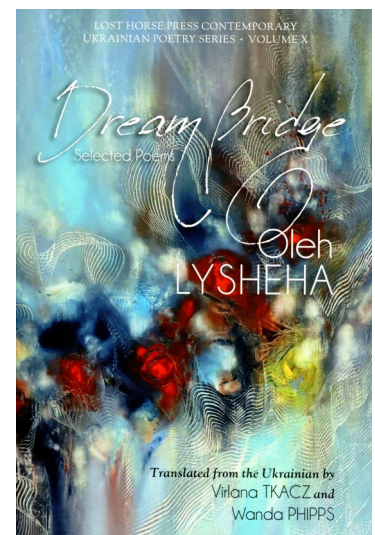
Order your copy of:

Dream Bridge: Selected Poems by Oleh Lysheha, translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. Published by Lost Horse Press, 2022, \$24

<https://losthorsepress.org/catalog/dream-bridge/>



Andrew Colteaux and Paul Brantley (cello), perform Lysheha’s “Swan” Photo by Pavlo Terekhov above Below Cover of Dream Bridge



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Check out
Yara's website
www.yaraartsgroup.net

Yara's Poetry in Performance Videos

Do you have 3 minutes to watch a video of a Yara actor reading their favorite Ukrainian poem in a translation by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. Well, apparently **40,000 people do**. Many of them probably never heard Ukrainian poetry previously. Of course, you have but still we are sure you will enjoy the readings of Shevchenko, Tykhyna & Zhadan we've posted so far. We are planning to continue this experiment with the help of the New York State Council on the Arts LitTap Grant. For easy links see www.yaraartsgroup.net

Yara Arts Group from La MaMa Experimental Theatre presents:


YARA'S POETRY IN PERFORMANCE:

Virtual Events:

- Taras Shevchenko's "It's all the same to me" (1847)
read by Sean Eden
- Taras Shevchenko's "Letter to My Countrymen" (1845)
read by Jeremy Tardy

translated by Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps

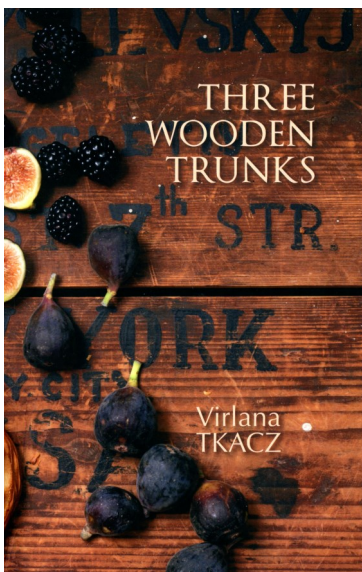
WWW.YARAARTSGROUP.NET



New York State Council on the Arts NYC Cultural Affairs

Extracurricular Activities

Cover for book of poetry by
Virlana Tkacz
Cover image
by Pavlo Terekhov



Paul Brantley, who created and performed the music for Yara's *Swan*, reprised it at our "Lysheha's Dream Bridge" event this spring. He also writes: I'm so pleased to re-release this video of YEEREMYND, my chapter sonata for solo harpsichord - performed just brilliantly by Steve Beck. <https://youtu.be/5doocFAheOI>

Amy Grappell appeared in Yara's *Light From the East*. Her film *Light From the East* about Yara's first theatre piece in Ukraine in 1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union will be screened at the Museum of Fine Art in Houston September 22, along with a 2022 update with Ukrainian actors who took part in the project.

Jessica Hecht, who appeared in Yara's *A Light From the East* workshop & *Explosions*, was recently featured as Ranevskaya in *The Orchard* based on Chekhov's *Cherry*

Orchard at the Baryshnikov Center, in New York City.

Evgeniy Maloletka has taken wonderful pictures of many Yara shows and exhibitions in Ukraine. With his partner Mstyslav Chernov, Zhenya was the AP journalists who documented Russia's siege of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol. The two journalists are the 2022 recipients of DW's Freedom of Speech Award. **Congratulations!** Zhenya's work was revealing, devastating and so important. We treasure you and your courage. <https://www.dw.com/en/dw-honors-ukrainian-journalists-maloletka-and-chernov-for-mariupol-reporting/a...>

Andrea Odezynska, who created video for Yara's *Circle* and *Swan*, has directed a new film *Return Saskyk to the Sea* about an ecological disaster in Ukraine you haven't heard about. This August it

will be shown at the Chesapeake Film Festival in Maryland and in Alaska & Poland.

Wanda Phipps, Yara's dramaturg, read a wonderful occasional poem she wrote for the opening of the Center for Art, Research and Alliances (CARA), at this great new space on West 13th St in July.

Virlana Tkacz, Yara's Artistic Director, had a book of her own poetry published this spring. *Three Wooden Trunks* can be ordered on Amazon <https://www.amazon.com/Three-Wooden-Trunks-Virlana-Tkacz/dp/1736432362>

Serhiy Zhadan, who has worked with Yara Arts Group since 2002, and appeared in the award-winning *1917-2017 Tykhyna, Zhadan & the Dogs*, is the recipient of four major international literary awards this year, including the EBRD Prize. He is also working with Yara on *Radio 477!*