

August 2024

Number 92

Yara arts group Newsletter

Yara's SLAP!

Sept 19-22, 2024

East Village Basement

321 E 9th St NYC

Tickets:

www.yaraartsgroup.net

+ updates & details

Yara's SLAP!

David Burliuk, a Ukrainian artist, is slapped by a Scythian Ice Princess. The obvious result: Futurism in Siberia, Japan and New York

Yara Arts Group presents *Slap!* created and performed by **Bob Holman**, **Susan Hwang** and **Julian Kytasty**, and directed by **Virlana Tkacz**. *Slap!* is an hour-long theatre musical-cabaret, interrogating the totally true but outrageous life and journey of David Burliuk, the father Futurism.

In *Slap!* David Burliuk is performed by Bob Holman, founder of the Bowery Poetry Club and the poet most often connected with the oral tradition, spoken word, hip hop and poetry slams. Singer-songwriter Susan Hwang portrays the accordion-

playing the Scythian Ice Princess, while Julian Kytasty, traditional epic singer and bandura player, sings their story. The three, together with director Virlana Tkacz, created *Capt. John Smith Goes to Ukraine*, which NY Theatre Wire called "an extremely delightful musical-experimental work of theater that gives its history lessons a much-needed makeover with fun, liveliness, and an accordion..."

You've heard how Ukrainian artists were appropriated by Russian culture for years, but are now being acknowledged as Ukrainian.

Yara's been de-colonializing our minds for years. *Slap!* was developed at La MaMa and presented despite Covid for a couple of shows at the Bowery Poetry Club and the Ukrainian Museum in New York.

Now see de-colonialism in action and laugh a little too. Tickets www.yaraartsgroup.net

PRESS:

"Scythian Slap" is a comedy based on the life of painter and poet David Burliuk, the founder of Futurism. It is also a very profound show... The play is composed of poems and historical facts. The unusual structure draws on various times, generations, styles and genres. Hwang and Holman play with classical vaudeville techniques we know from American comedies, successfully weaving these into a Futurist canvas. The audience sees a comedy and a futurist cabaret, an American vaudeville with Scythians, Ukrainian epic songs (dumy), original poems by Bob Holman and songs by Susan Hwang. (*continues p 2*)

Inside this issue:

Press of Yara's *Mariupol and Slap!* [2](#)

Yara's fall, Tom Lee & Nastia Panchenko [3](#)

Our Losses: Mykola Shkaraban [4](#)

Extracurricular Activities [4](#)



Yara Arts Group presents:

Slap!

David Burliuk, Ukrainian artist, is slapped by a Scythian Ice Princess. The obvious result: Futurism in Siberia, Japan and New York

Yara's new theatre piece with Bob Holman, Susan Hwang and Julian Kytasty directed by Virlana Tkacz

Sept 19-22
Th-Sat 7PM, Sun 3

2024

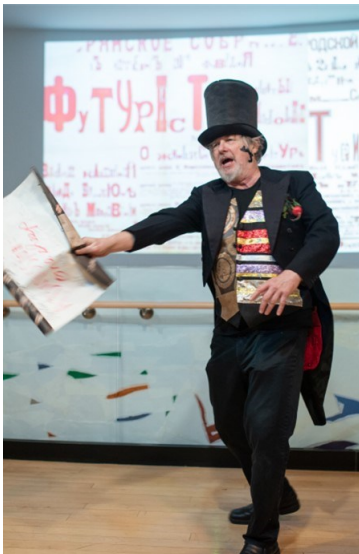
East Village Basement
321 East 9th St, New York, NY

Tickets: www.YARAARTSGROUP.net

NEW YORK Council on the Arts
NYC Cultural Affairs



Susan Hwang & cast in Mariupol show (above) and Bob Holman in Yara's Slap! (below) photo by Pavlo Terekhov



Press on Yara's *Mariupol* at festivals

Here is a review of Yara's show at festivals, that included Jersey City Theater Center in June.

“Devastation has thrown a shroud of silence over Mariupol. These are the stories that got out. They’ve been adapted for the stage by Yara director Virlana Tkacz, a specialist in Eastern European drama. Shows she’s created for New York’s long running La Mama Experimental Theater have often incorporated Ukrainian poetry into the scripts, and *Mariupol: Diaries of War and the Tree of Life* contains a gripping mid-show reading of an elegy for refugees by the celebrated Serhiy Zhadan, a literary award winner now voluntarily fighting the Russians in the National Guard. But mostly, she lets the words of the diarists do the work. These are delivered with minimal visual adornment by a quartet of actors who do their best to channel the monumental terror, grief, and confusion of people who’ve witnessed their hometown getting dismembered by an ancestral enemy. All four acquit themselves well, but particularly affecting is Susan Hwang as Yevhenia Ivanchenko, a Mariupol policewoman trying to maintain her professional composure and usefulness as the town burns around her.

Yara has also employed the services of a ringer: musician Julian Kytasty, master of the bandura, an unusual stringed instrument that resembles a cross between a zither and a tennis racket. Tkacz gifted the first ten minutes of the show to Kytasty, who sat at stage center and set the mood for the evening with a mournful, probing and emphatic

original piece. Even after the actors had taken over the stage, the composer didn’t go far. He sat in the shadows, underscoring and augmenting the scenes from Mariupol with harp-like sweeps, grunting low-string riffs, and delicate high runs like the patter of rain on a shingle. Even as *Mariupol* spoke to the universal experience of armed conflict, the presence bandura kept the storytelling firmly tethered to Ukrainian culture.

Kytasty’s playing and the moments of sturdy group vocal harmony from the nine-person cast provided necessary sweetening to a show that was unflinchingly frank about the cost of armed confrontation. The diarists described the carnage in the streets, the fear of hiding from tanks in freezing basements for weeks at a time, the impossibility of finding food and water, the casual cruelty of the invading army, and the unbearable pain of watching a beloved city — a kind of communal art project — reduced to rubble. The actors, many of whom were Eastern European, carried that dread in their postures, which, even as they sat in folding chairs, were wary, suspicious, and pinched. Ukrainian-born Petro Ninovskyi took on the role of Yaroslav Semenenko, a paralympic swimmer born without arms. Tkacz and Yara took no steps to hide the actor’s limbs. They didn’t have to: everything about Ninovskyi’s performance suggests a man stripped of agency by cruel fate.

Mariupol argues that there can be no justification for the destruction of a city and the indiscriminate killing of its inhabitants, and the terrible condition of Eastern Ukraine makes that position hard for anybody to refute.

Tris McCall, Jersey City Times, June 21, 2024

Press on Yara's

SLAP! _F

(continued from page 1)

... Bob Holman, a famous and charismatic American poet steps forth proudly as both Burluiuk and himself, existing, not simply on stage, but truly being both. Susan Hwang, the extravagant Snake Goddess with an accordion, is both a shaman and a coquette. She gives Burluiuk a generous Scythian slap, which brings up for him deeper questions of being, pushing him to see the invisible, realize his own potential and experience himself constantly at the crossroads. The voice of this Scythian goddess often sounds as a duet with Mamai, portrayed by Julian Kytasty — one of the best Ukrainian bandura players. Like Burluiuk, he experiments with music.

The show ends on an upbeat with the “Radio Manifesto” Burluiuk proclaimed in New York in 1926. What was most important in David Burluiuk’s life, was his constant desire to give a slap in face of public taste, to see the ancient past in the future and to sharpen reception in order to break through linear thinking.

The performers, director Virlana Tkacz, set designer Watoku Ueno, costume designer Keiko Obremski and projection designer Darien Fiorino arranged a banquet for the audience that celebrated the 99th anniversary of David Burluiuk’s arrival in New York.”

by Oksana Lebedivna Svoboda newspaper October 21, 2022

TICKETS for *SLAP!*
www.yaraartsgroup.net

Yara's Tom Lee performs "Akutagawa" in Tokyo

If you wondered who did the beautiful videos with Alla Horska's work in Yara's Mariupol show — it was Tom Lee.

Tom first worked with Yara as an actor in *Virtual Souls* in 1995, traveling with the show to Siberia and Ukraine. He was also in Yara's *Flight of the White Bird* and *Circle*.

Then he started creating his own puppet shows at La MaMa. The first was *Hoplite Diary* (2004) about the dreams of ancient Greek foot soldiers. This led to Tom's interest in Japanese traditional *kuruma ningyo* or cartwheel puppetry. The puppeteer sits on a wheeled cart and controls the puppet's head and left hand with his left hand and uses the fingers of his right hand for the puppet's hand.

For over 20 years, Tom has studied and collaborated with Koryu Nishikawa V, a National Treasure of Japan, to creating new pieces based in this tradition while also exploring new possibilities that new

media offered.

Eileen Blumenthal wrote a feature article on Tom in American Theatre this May — "Tom Lee's Puppet Planet." Her subtitle sums up Tom's scope: "Somewhere between earth and the stars, tradition and experimentation, La MaMa and the Met Opera, he keeps exploring his art forms."

This summer Tom presented his acclaimed production *Akutagawa* with Japanese master puppeteer Koryu Nishikawa V in Japan. This international puppetry collaboration based on the life and writing of acclaimed Japanese short form writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa was performed Aug 3-6 at Za-Koenji Theater in Tokyo.

Yuichi Konno described the work in Komei Shimbun:

"By taking a new approach to Japan's classical works, they are expanding the possibilities of contemporary expressions of tradition."



We are happy that Tom continues to create amazing puppet pieces, as well as work on Yara's shows.

Akutagawa in Tokyo.

Photo by Tomoyuki

Takasaki above

Anastasia Panchenko

below

Yara's Ukrainian Culture Festival events



Yara will kick off the Ukrainian Culture Festival on **October 15** at the legendary Bowery Poetry Club. The event will include the launch of the *Slap! Songs* album. Bob Holman, Susan Hwang and Julian Kytasty recorded the songs and musical numbers from Yara's show about

David Burliuk. Recorded in a studio, the album is digitally on Bandcamp. The evening will also feature a poetry event.

On **October 16 and 17** Yara will present **Julian Kytasty** playing bandura and presenting the ideas from a project Yara is now developing. This event will be at the **Renee and**

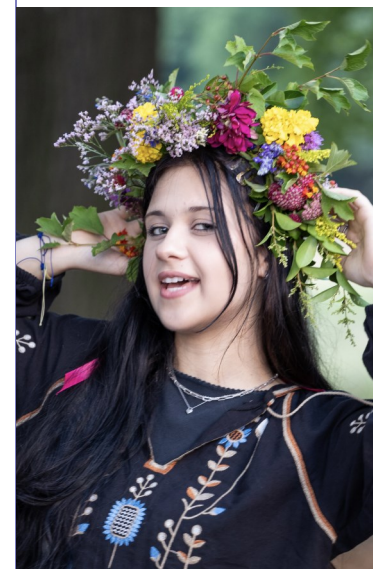
Chaim Foundation on La Guardia Place in the West Village.

Later in the fall, Yara hopes to present a new Winter Festival of World Music. Our last festival Old and New World Music had string instrument players from China, Iran, Korea and Ukraine.

Meet Nastia

Anastasia Panchenko (known to all as Nastia) is from Kyiv. She arrived in New York in the summer 2022. Nastia joined a reading of Yara's *Blind Sight* last summer and was sucked into the company.

In March, Nastia became a stage manager for Yara's *Mariupol: Diaries of War and the Tree of Life* show. "I was hesitant about the topic because I experienced the bombing of Kyiv personally. But in the show I could see hope — the Tree of Life pushes its way through the ruins towards the sky." Now Nastia is studying international relations at Baruch College and hopes to use her knowledge as a tool to advocate for Ukraine. But Ukrainian culture's important to her, so she works with Yara!



Yara Arts Group

306 East 11th Street #3B
New York, NY 10003

212-475-6474
yara.arts.group@gmail.com

Check out
Yara's website
www.yaraartsgroup.net

Our Losses: Mykola Shkaraban

1990s. It is with a very heavy heart I share with you the news that Mykola Shkaraban passed away this April in Kyiv. I met Mykola on my first visit to Ukraine, in Dec 1990. We worked together on over ten Yara shows together, many of them in several versions. He was part of the first group of Ukrainian actors that I brought to La MaMa in 1993. I saw him in January this year. Even though he told me he was very sick, he was very hopeful of recovering and we talked of working on our Shevchenko & Aldridge show again. Miss you Mykola, already.
Virlana Tkacz

More photos of Mykola www.Yaraartsgroup.net



Extracurricular Activities

Olenka Denysenko, who appeared in Yara's *Koliada 12 Dishes*, is a NYC based television director with 17+ years as a Script Supervisor on some of the most prestigious television shows. Directorial credits include NBC's *New Amsterdam* and *The Blacklist*. Recently, she directed "The Man in the Hat" episode for *Blacklist* which screened in May.

Darien Fiorino, who recently appeared in Yara's Mariupol show at the festivals, has returned to New York to work for the National Audubon Society. He originally designed the projections for *Slap!* in 2019 and is happy to be working on the show again in September.

Julian Kytasty, Yara's resident bandurist and composer, performed a special bandura concert with Teryn Kuzma for Ukraine's Independence Day at Grazhda in Hunter, New York.

Max Lozynskyj, who appeared in Yara's *Koliada on Mars* and the Mariupol show, received several awards for his score for the short film *Lines of Woman*.

Photo: Mykola Shkaraban and Olia Radchuk with La MaMa's Ellen Stewart, and Virlana Tkacz, pointing to the poster for Yara's Blind Sight 1993.

Serhiy Zhadan has worked with Yara since 2002. On his official page he writes: "When McDonald's approached me and asked me to write a poem for them for a commercial, I agreed right away. There are no burgers or fries in the poem— but there's a delicious pie. There are memories, love and tenderness. And memories are often about love and tenderness."

I'm glad that many people like this video. Because this is really about something more than advertising.

When we were coming to terms, I informed them I will hand over all my fees to charitable causes and volunteers because for me this is not a commercial project, but the opportunity to help someone. So, I am happy to hand over the sum of 1.000,000 hryvni (\$24,250) and this is the largest fee I've received in my life (so far) into good hands for good works.

