

**OR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PRESS CONTACT: Ari Roth, Founding Producing Partner**

[info@voicesfestivalproductions.com](mailto:info@voicesfestivalproductions.com)

**VOICES FESTIVAL PRODUCTIONS**

in conjunction with

**THE ARTS CLUB OF WASHINGTON**

present

**UKRAINIANS UNDER SIEGE, YEAR II**

*In-Person Presentation of Five New One Acts from the War*

*Part of the Continuing Worldwide Readings Project to Benefit the Ukrainian People*



**WASHINGTON, DC (May 3, 2023) – Voices Festival Productions** joins the **Arts Club of Washington** one year after their inaugural virtual partnership to present **UKRAINIANS UNDER SIEGE, YEAR II: Five New Ukrainian One-Acts From the War** written over the past year since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Featuring a five-actor ensemble and four directors, the in-person event will take place at the Arts Club of Washington (2017 I [Eye] Street, NW, Washington, DC) on **Wednesday, May 24 at 7 pm**. Tickets are free through the Arts Club of Washington: [www.artsclubofwashington.org](http://www.artsclubofwashington.org) – with donations encouraged to support the United Nation's [Ukraine Humanitarian Fund](#) or HIAS' [Ukraine Crisis Response](#).

The local event once again joins an **international initiative to bear witness through theater** to the horrors of Putin's war on Ukraine. The **Worldwide Readings Project** (which began in 2020 in solidarity with the beleaguered Belarus theater community) presents works which bring to light the corruption and brutality of authoritarian regimes. This year's featured Ukrainian playwrights are **Andrii Bondarenko, Iryna Harets, Olena Hapicieva, Lena Lagushonkova** and **Kateryna Penkova**.

The ensemble of Local DC actors includes **Lisa Hodsoll, Rachel Manteuffel, Fatima Quander, Theodore Sapp** and **Sam Sherman**. The plays will be directed by VFP Artistic Producing Partner, **A. Lorraine Robinson**, along with **Vanessa Gilbert**, and NY guest artists, **Zoya Kachadurian** and **Sam Sherman**. The plays are translated from the Ukrainian by **Natalia Bratus** and **John Freedman** and have been commissioned through the **Center for International Theater Development** and the advocacy of CITD Founding Director, Philip Arnoult.

## **UKRAINIANS UNDER SIEGE, YEAR II PROGRAM:**

### **“In the Bowels of the Earth”**

by Olena Hapieieva | directed by A. Lorraine Robinson

In an underground bomb shelter, Lena shares crowded quarters with her family and plenty of strangers, hoping that "the earth that takes us in" will provide protection. Families fill the space with a cacophony of needs, interrupted by children questioning the strange brutality of war.

### **“Planting an Apple Tree”**

by Iryna Harets | directed by Vanessa Gilbert

A woman recounts daily activities in her rural home as war creeps closer. Horrors are still at a distance in other, not-far-away cities, so she remains focused on tending to her trees, mixing together feelings of safety and dread in the planting.

### **“Survivor’s Syndrome”**

by Andrii Bondarenko | directed by Zoya Kachadurian

A man prepares to go on a date that never happens and confronts the guilts and regrets that grow as war disrupts everything around him. Told from The End to The Beginning, the play moves from Apocalypse to Hope in a lyrical chronology offset by a clinical precision of all that’s been lost.

### **A Topol-M Rocket Fired at a Cat Named Brooch**

by Lena Lagushonkova | directed by Vanessa Gilbert

A Russian Topol-M Rocket has been fired and may reach the narrator at any moment as she focuses her concern on the well-being of innocent cats on both sides of the border. “I do not want Russian cats to suffer. But that's the limit of my sympathy.”

### **“TDP (Temporarily Displaced Persons)”**

by Kateryna Penkova | directed by Sam Sherman

A woman helps place refugees in a local hostel, noting their quirks and peculiarities. In each profile, politeness is pronounced and the sense of tragedy understated, but when the narrator needs help for herself, is anyone left to help?

Following the reading, there will be a discussion with Ukrainian-American journalist **Irena Chalupa**, past correspondent for Radio Free Europe, Fulbright scholar, and currently English language Editor for StopFake, a fact-checking website launched by the Kyiv Mohyla Academy. She sits on the Ukrainian National Women's League of America national executive committee.

**Tickets for the reading and discussion are free, with reservations through the Arts Club of Washington website: [artsclubofwashington.org](http://artsclubofwashington.org).** Attendees are asked to support this fundraiser event by making a donation directly to the United Nation's [Ukraine Humanitarian Fund](#) or HIAS' [Ukraine Crisis Response](#). For full bios of authors, actors and directors, please visit [www.voicesfestivalproductions.com](http://www.voicesfestivalproductions.com)

## About the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings

The Worldwide Readings Project was founded in September 2020, when Belarusian playwright Andrei Kureichik asked *Moscow Times* Theater critic John Freedman if he would translate his play *Insulted - Belarus*, about the revolution in Minsk, and "perhaps arrange a few readings." Plays of resistance were indeed written and then read. Three years later, the project has supported the creation of over 250 plays, presented in over 350 different readings involving over 360 theaters in 30 countries and 22 languages, with 12,000 audience members in the US alone raising over \$250,000 in donations. Moneys have gone to Ukrainian war relief aid and to benefit Ukrainian artists, theater workers, and other Ukrainians in need. For more information, [click here](#).

## 2023 Ukrainian Playwright Bios

**Andriy Bondarenko ("Survivor's Syndrome")** is a Doctor of Philosophy, playwright, screenwriter, and culturologist. He has worked primarily as a journalist, in particular as a cultural observer. He was also a researcher at the Center for Urban History of Central and Eastern Europe (Lviv). He is currently the head of the literary and dramatic department (dramaturg) at the Lviv Puppet Theater. Plays by Bondarenko, such as *Interview with a Friend* (2019), and *Asshole* (2020) were produced in Ukraine, and have appeared in shortlists of such Ukrainian festivals as *Contemporary Play Week, Drama.UA*, and *The Festival of Drama of Love and Beaver*, where they were presented in the format of readings. His play *Clout* (2022) premiered at the Lviv Puppet Theater. Andrii is a co-founder of Kyiv's Theatre of Playwrights.

**Kateryna Penkova "TDP (Temporarily Displaced Persons)"** was born in Donetsk. She graduated as a Conversational Actor from the Kyiv State Academy of Popular and Circus Arts. Her plays have been shortlisted at DramaUa, Contemporary Play Week, and the Lyubimovka festival in Moscow. She was awarded First Prize at the Coronation of the Word competition. She was one of the winners of the drama competition of the Ukrainian Institute in the framework of Transmission.UA: Drama on the Move. Germany (2020). Productions of her works include: *I Don't Remember the Name*, Chernihiv Youth Theater; and *A Family History*, co-authored with Lena Lyagushonkova, at the Afanasyev State Academic Puppet Theater in Kharkiv.

**Iryna Harets ("Planting an Apple Tree")** is a playwright, writer, screenwriter, director, and psychologist, and the Head of the Theater of Modern Dialogue in Poltava. She has been a finalist and winner of Ukrainian and international drama and literary competitions, and she is an experienced trainer in such fields as: "Civic Competence," "Creating social theater venues," "Non-formal education for children and adults," and "Creative thinking." She is the author and curator of social projects, and is the founder of the All-Ukrainian Library of Contemporary Drama (UkrDramaHub). She was a nominee for the Women in Arts 2021 Award, in the category "Women in Theater." She is a co-founder of the Theatre of Playwrights.

**Olena Hapieieva ("In the Bowels of the Earth")** is a member of the Theatre of Playwrights. She was born in the city of Sumy, and studied directing in Kharkiv and Moscow. As a director she has staged Natalia Vorozhbyt's *Demons*, and other contemporary texts. Her own dramatic texts include: *Apartment, Sisters, Passerby, Tell Me Only Good Things*, and *Dad*. These were shortlisted and

presented as stage readings at the Contemporary Play Week festival. The war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine forced her and her two children, five years and one year, eight months, into exile beginning in Mykolaiv, continuing on to Odessa, Lviv, Poland, and from there to Rouen, France. She writes short texts based on her experience and considers her work a means to understanding reality.

**Lena Lagushonkova** was born in the village of Stanitsa Luganska in Ukraine, and she graduated from the history department of Taras Shevchenko National University in Luhansk. She debuted as a playwright in 2018 with the play *BAZA*, about women and prostitution. She is the playwright-in-residence at the Vasylo Theatre in Odessa. Her short plays have been presented at numerous festivals, including Ukrainian Contemporary Play Week, DramaUA, and Aurora.

### **Actor Bios**

**Lisa Hodsoll** is an actress (among other creative hats) who most recently appeared in Voices Festival Production of *My Calamitous Affair with the Minister of Culture & Censorship...* Other theater credits include – NEW YORK: *Laura Bush Killed A Guy* (The Klunch) - D.C. run, Helen Hayes nomination for Best Lead Actress. LOCAL: *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (Theater Alliance) Helen Hayes Nomination Best Supporting Actress, *Edgar and Annabelle* (Studio Theatre), and *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide ...* (Theater J) OTHER: *A Fool's Paradise* (Valiant Flea) at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and *Medea's Got Some Issues* in Chicago (Chicago Theater Sweatshop) and D.C. (No Rules Theatre) TV/FILM: recent appearance on *Chicago Med* and will soon be seen in Apple TV + production of *Lady in the Lake*. She is the founder of the not for profit arts organization Open Road <https://theopenroadarts.com/> and is currently working on the post production edit for the film *Flight of the Crows* as well as producing the second year of An Open Road Film Festival now in partnership with The Valley Place Arts Collaborative. For more info, visit <https://lisamhodsoll.com/>

**Fatima Quander's\*** performing and directing credits include: University of Maryland, FRESHH Inc. Theatre Company, DC Hip Hop Theatre Festival, Rep Stage, Everyman Theatre, Baltimore Center Stage Education, Theater of the First Amendment, Folger Elizabethan Theatre, Imagination Stage, Discovery Theater, Transformation Theatre, and Howard Community College; she has also performed in house and on tour with The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Fatima is on the faculty at UMD's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies and also works as a theatre educator with a number of programs throughout the DC area including Everyman Theatre, Folger Shakespeare Library's McKee Fellows and Secondary School Shakespeare Festival, FRESHH Inc.'s Griot Girls and The Vanguard, Poetry Out Loud, Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, Sitar Arts Center, Jr. Discovery at Georgetown University, and Young Playwrights' Theater. She is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association (AEA) and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA). A native Washingtonian, Fatima received her MFA from Actors Studio Drama School in NYC and her BA from Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. For Voices Festival Productions she appeared in the workshop presentation of *Apologies to Lorraine Hansberry (You Too, August Wilson)*.  
(\*Member of AEA.)

**Rachel Manteuffel** is excited to return to VFP after understudying CALAMITOUS AFFAIR in the fall. Previous roles include Nu Sass: *To Fall In Love* (Merryn); Bob Bartlett: *The Accident Bear* (Chance); 4615 Theater Company: *Enron* (Sloman/raptor); Pinky Swear: *Blight* (Cat); The Washington Rogues: *The Campsite Rule* (Susan); Prometheus Theater: *Twelfth Night* (Olivia); Doorway Arts Ensemble: *Morning, Miranda* (Roadhouse Floozy, Rubber Woman). In May and June she'll be in the premiere of Bob Bartlett's *Love And Vinyl* at KA-CHUNK! records in Annapolis. In her other life she's a Livingston Award winning writer, mostly for The Washington Post, and a 2022 DCCAH Fellow.

**Theodore Sapp\***(he/him) most recently appeared in *Ben Butler* at Washington Stage Guild. For Voices Festival Productions he appeared in the workshop presentation of *Apologies to Lorraine Hansberry (You Too, August Wilson)*. Other theatre credits include Portland Playhouse: *Bella: An American Tall Tale*; The Shakespeare Theatre: *The Amen Corner*; Virginia Repertory Theatre: *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*; The Winnepesaukee Playhouse: *The Mountaintop*; SAS Performing Arts Co.: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. You can hear him on the podcasts *Sugar Maple*, and *Not for the Masses*. He can also be seen in the short film *The Handler II* and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. Theodore would like to extend gratitude to Aryn, family, and friends for their support on this journey. (\*Member of AEA.)

**Sam Sherman** (they/he) is an actor, director, and poet, born and raised in Washington D.C. After graduating in 2020 from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Sam returned to the District where he was a Core Artist in *The Reclamation Project*, part of Page-To-Stage residency at the Kennedy Center dedicated to providing healing for artists of historically marginalized identities. In the summer of 2021, they moved to New York City in order to complete a Kenan Fellowship with Lincoln Center Education, where they worked to develop their own approach to teaching artistry and devised theatre. His recent projects include *VARIATIONS ON A BLUEPRINT*, an original devised performance created in collaboration with LCE, that addressed the nature of large, well-funded cultural institutions and the equitable redistribution of their resources. Sam also recently returned to D.C. last fall to assist director Carey Perloff in workshoping *HOME? OR A PALESTINIAN WOMAN'S PURSUIT OF LIFE, LIBRETY & HAPPINESS*, a new play by Hend Ayoub and produced by Voices Festival Productions, illustrating the life of a Palestinian woman and her journey to become an actor whilst facing discrimination. He is currently developing a one-person show about his grandfathers' experience as a Jewish American combat soldier in WWII. Sam is thrilled to be working with VFP again on the Ukrainian Playwrights Reading.

### Director Bios:

**Zoya Kachadurian** recently finished directing a video of her theatrical production of *Georgia and Me*, by and with Sarah Ford (best solo show 2011 Midtown International Festival). At NJ REP she directed the world premiere of *Apple Season*. She directed 6 new works for Manhattan Theatre Source's Estrogenius Festival, and others for EST's Octoberfest. Zoya directed *The Ride*, an original musical; *The 39 Steps*, *King O's the Moon*, *The Graduate*, *The Miracle Worker*, *Stones in his Pockets*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Stick Fly* at the Majestic Theatre in West Springfield MA; *The Cocktail Hour* (New Century Theatre) and a critically acclaimed *Stones in His Pockets* (Stoneham and Gloucester MA). She is a member of the Lincoln Center and EST Directors' Labs, and LaMama's International Directors'

Symposium, she is a proud member of AEA, DGA and SDC. Thanks to Ari and Lorraine for including me in this important night. For more info, visit [www.Zoyazk.com](http://www.Zoyazk.com)

**Vanessa Gilbert** is a theatre director, performer, and creative project doula. Projects in DC include performing as the philosopher at 48 in *Meet Hannah Arendt* (Natsu Onoda Power/Goethe Institut), as a River/Earth Fairy in *Ferry Tales* (Kennedy Center RiverRun Festival) and directing Rachel Linton's play *Fandom for Robots* in the 2019 Page to Stage Festival. From 1994-2011, Vanessa filled many roles at Perishable Theatre, RI's new works theatre- directing regional and world premieres by Mac Wellman, Erik Ehn, and Christine Evans, as well as programming the Annual Women's Playwriting Festival, an international competition of one-act plays. As a member of the Magdalena Project, Vanessa built the first ever Magdalena USA Festival, celebrating this unique network of women in contemporary theatre, hosting 37 artists from 12 countries for 10 days of theatrical exchange in Providence RI. She is grateful to join the other Voices Festival Productions artists in listening to these modern Ukrainian playwrights. [www.vanessagilbert.com](http://www.vanessagilbert.com)

**A. Lorraine Robinson** is a free-lance Director and Dramaturg who has worked with various DC area and regional theatres. Recent Projects include: Director for: *Let Me Down Easy* and *Baltimore (SMCM)*; *Apologies to Lorraine Hansberry (You Too August Wilson)* (VFP); *Three Strangers Sitting Around a Backyard Firepit at Two in the Morning Listening to Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska* (a site-specific play by Bob Bartlett); *The Piano Lesson* and *Annie* (Sitar Arts Center) and Dramaturg for *TopDog/Underdog* (Avant Bard.) Lorraine received the Central Ohio Theatre Critics Circle Award: Best Director & Best Production for *The Laramie Project* (Contemporary American Theatre Company in Columbus, Ohio.) In 2017, 2018 and 2019 she received Tony Award: Excellence in Theatre Education Honorable Mention Awards for her work at Sitar Arts Center. Previously, she was the Co-Founding/Artistic Producing Director of MuseFire Productions. Lorraine is also a Board Member and Associated Artist with Transformation Theatre Company.

### **About Voices Festival Productions**

Voices Festival Productions is an independent production company based in Washington DC, which produces plays (and the occasional musical) that stimulate debate and discourse, introspection and awareness, informed by revelation of our underlying humanity in all its color and complexity, finding resonance between those living with conflict in the Middle East and closer to home, in our nation's capital, along the seams of our nation and its very real and perceived divides. We celebrate diverse, inter-cultural voices and encounters through inter-connected performance of both provocative and introspective new works for the stage, in dialogue with our moment. For more information, [click here](#).

####