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VOICES FESTIVAL PRODUCTIONS

in conjunction with

THE ARTS CLUB OF WASHINGTON

present

UKRAINIAN PLAYWRIGHTS UNDER SIEGE:

Virtual Reading of New One Acts from the War

Part of the Worldwide Readings Project to Benefit the Ukrainian People



WASHINGTON, DC (APRIL 15, 2022) Voices Festival Productions joins the Arts Club of Washington to highlight women's voices during wartime in this virtual play reading, **May 5, 2022 @ 7:00 pm EST** featuring an all-woman cast and director, showcasing a selection of four emotionally revealing, short plays, all but one composed in a fury over the past 6 weeks, three written by women (two Ukrainian and one Russian) and one Ukrainian man. **Registration** is free through the Arts Club of Washington: www.artsclubofwashington.org – **with donations encouraged** to support Ukrainian Aid Agencies like **Ukrainian Women's Veteran Movement, Voices of Children, or the Wonder Foundation** (links below).

The reading joins an international initiative to bear witness to the horrors of Putin's war on Ukraine through theater. Originating with three dozen Ukrainian writers and playwrights, the Ukrainian component of 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.

Ukrainian Playwrights Under Siege Program:

"A Dictionary of Emotions in War Time"

by Yelena Astasyeva

(Translated from the Russian by John Freedman)

Commissioned by Philip Arnoult's Center for International Theatre Development

"Our Children"

by Natasha Blok

(Translated from the Ukrainian by John Freedman with Natalia Bratus)

Commissioned by Philip Arnoult's Center for International Theatre Development

"He Who Opens The Door"

by Neda Nezhdana

(Translated by Anatole Bilenko with John Farndon)

"Peace & Tranquility"

by Andriy Bondarenko

(Translated from Ukrainian by John Farndon)

Commissioned by Sputnik Theatre Company

Directed by A. Lorraine Robinson

Featuring Hanna Bondarewska, Aakhu Freeman* and Lisa Hodsoll

With Community Testimony & Discussion

Virtual Public Reading: May 5, 2022 @ 7:00 pm – EST

Registration Link: https://artsclubofwashington.org/events/details/?event_id=4789173

For International attendees:

Open Virtual Rehearsal: May 5, 2022 @ 12:00 pm – EST

Registration Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0td-mgqj0qGNdlyXL058y3hMwyHcUHGxln>

Worldwide Readings Project curator and theater critic **John Freedman** moved quickly at the onset of the Russian invasion to bring new Ukrainian dramatic works to global audiences. Working with **Philip Arnoult** at Baltimore's **Center for International Theater Development**, the initiative has inspired dozens of presentations across the world with playwrights waiving royalties in partnership with theaters dedicating efforts to raise funds in support of the Ukrainian war relief. **"I personally am doing this because I have to do something,"** says Freedman in an interview with Dana Rufolo of *"Play International & Europe."* Rufolo elaborates that **"Freedman is aware that staged readings of Ukrainian-authored plays around the globe will not put a stop to the infernal war in Ukraine. He does believe however that the plays act like ambassadors, telling us something important about Ukrainian culture and making us understand the humanity of the Ukrainian people."**

Writing about the war's first days in Kherson in her play ***"Our Children,"*** **Natasha Blok** describes reaching a temporary shelter for Ukrainians. "There were mothers with their children. The children

asked questions, like ‘Why is Putin bombing us? That’s not fair, Mom. His country is bigger. What does he want from us? Why are they killing us?’”

In **“A Dictionary Of Emotions In War Time,”** **Yelena Astasyeva** illustrates real-time war events to define words like *“Panic,” “Fear,” “Hunger,” “Betrayal,” “Hatred,” “Love,” and “Guilt.”*

In **“He Who Opens The Door,”** **Neda Nezhdana** uses black comedy to address a theatre of national tragedy, setting the action in a morgue during a cold season in present-day Ukraine. Vera and Viki are not sure if they’re dead or alive, but soon discover they are locked in. When the doors to the morgue finally open, they are not sure they want to leave!

In **“PEACE AND TRANQUILITY,”** **Andriy Bondarenko** elegizes the inalienable rights he had assumed he’d grown up with. Looking out to the future, he lists the books and comforting cultural tropes that provided inspiration as the walls of the war close in. *“Que Sera Sera,”* he sings. *“What will be will be.”*

Voices Festival Productions (VFP) has an ongoing interest in international issues, a lens which it will continue to include in expanded offerings. Answering the call to participate in this Worldwide Reading Project to benefit the Ukraine people was an imperative.

The presentation is directed by VFP Artistic Producing Partner and award-winning director, **A. Lorraine Robinson**, who shares: **“I believe in theatre and its power to create community, understanding and impact social justice. So, I was eager to support Ukrainian voices and especially interested in what I felt was a unique opportunity to amplify women’s voices relating their wartime experiences,** by employing a slate of works primarily by women playwrights and working with a wonderful all woman cast.”

Attendees are asked to support this fundraiser event by making a donation directly to one of these following recommended Ukrainian charitable organizations:

- Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement: https://www.uwvm.org.ua/?page_id=3437&lang=en
- Voices of Children: <https://voices.org.ua/donat>
- Wonder Foundation: <https://wonderfoundation.org.uk/donate-to-help-ukrainian-refugees-in-poland>
- Global Solidarity: Support for Ukraine – Recommended by TCG (Theatre Communications Group): <https://circle.tcg.org/blogs/teresa-eyring/2022/02/25/support-for-ukraine>

VFP Founding Producing Partner, **Ari Roth**, adds: **“This important event comes in advance of VFP’s official announcement of 2022 productions, soon to be unveiled** with Festival programming this summer at Capital Fringe Festival and for seven weeks in the fall at Woolly Mammoth Theatre’s Rehearsal Hall. But **our desire to amplify Ukrainian voices, standing in solidarity with theater artists around the world giving voice to the urgent, plaintive reportage of these besieged writers, animates us to put this reading together first, and right now.** We’ll be returning to war-torn terrain with our Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival shortly. Right now, there’s no way we can ignore these moving, theatrical elegies.” For more information on the full company of participating actors and VFP programming, go to www.voicesfestivalproductions.com

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ABOUT VOICES FESTIVAL PRODUCTIONS

Voices Festival Productions is a newly created, independent production company based in Washington DC, dedicated to humanizing headlines through theater, bringing the souls and struggles of people living alongside each other (and an echo chamber apart) to light. Joining the long-running, acclaimed "Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival" with two new semi-annual festival offerings – "Voices From a Changing Nation" and "Voices From a Changing Nation's Capital" – which seek to express multi-cultural/inter-cultural/inter-sectional voices through inter-connected performances of both provocative and introspective new works for the stage that are in dialogue with our moment.

Voices Festival Productions is an artist-driven partnership launched by playwright and producer Ari Roth in collaboration with director and producing partner, A. Lorraine Robinson, Voices Festival Productions will develop and produce plays and musicals that stimulate introspection, debate and discourse, informed by the revelation of our underlying humanity in all its color and complexity, finding resonances between those living with conflict in the Middle East, and those living with conflict closer to home -- in our nation's capital, and along the seams of our nation and its perceived divides. www.voicesfestivalproductions.com

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

YELENA ASTASYEVA

Yelena Astasyeva was born in 1973 in the city of Kherson (Ukraine), where she lives to this day. Writer, author of a number of plays that have repeatedly been shortlisted for the Ukrainian festival "Week of Current Play" and were staged in theaters in Kherson and Kiev. One of the founders of the Theater of Playwrights in Kyiv.

NATALIA BLOK

Natalia Blok is a well-known playwright and screenwriter; her plays have been staged with success both in Ukraine (state and independent theaters) and abroad. Her texts have repeatedly been shortlisted for international and national prestigious competitions: Week of Current Play, Batumi Monoplay Festival, UA Drama. Coronation of the word, pitching of State Cinema, Pitching of patriotic series of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. She has been translated into Polish, Georgian, German and Russian. She is a founder of the Theater of Playwrights, and a multiple winner of the State Cinema and Pitch of Ukraine competition as a screenwriter.

ANDRII BONDARENKO

Andrii Bondarenko is a playwright, director, culturologist-researcher, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), head of the literary and dramatic section of the Lviv Puppet Theater. Curator of the stage story circle "Drama Atelier." Author of numerous plays that have participated in major drama festivals in Ukraine. Numerous plays have been staged in Lviv, Kyiv, and Zaporizhia. Director of the short film "Night with Natalia" (2017).

NEDA NEZHDANA

Neda Nezhdana was born in 1971 in the city of Kramatorsk, Donetsk Region (Ukraine). A playwright, culturologist, art critic, director, and translator, she graduated from the Art School of Kyiv (1982-1986), the Institute of Foreign Languages of Kyiv (French philology, 1988-1993) and the Mohyla Academy of Kyiv (culturology, 1992-1995). She was studying at the School of Anatoliy Diachenko Center of Modern Experimental Dramaturgy. She has a Ph.D. in literature (“The structural and creative role of the myth in contemporary Ukrainian drama”) and is the author of a collection of 6 plays, “Promotion of the other” and also compiled and contributed her plays to more than 10 Ukrainian dramatic anthologies and 2 foreign (French and Serbian). Neda Nezhdana wrote 23 original plays and 7 adaptations. Four of her plays have been included in the catalogs of the Best Plays of Europe 2004-2008 and the catalog “European Theatre Convention” (2012). Chairman of the Confederation of playwrights of Ukraine, patron of Ukraine in the Biennale “New European Plays” in Wiesbaden (German, 2012, 2014), member of WPIC Conference in Stockholm (2012), chief of Ukrainian committee of Eurodrama of the House of Europe and the Orient in Paris (from 2013). She is the first Ukrainian author of plays published and staged in France and Turkey.

ABOUT DIRECTOR A. LORRAINE ROBINSON

A. Lorraine Robinson is an award-winning theatre director, dramaturg, producer, nonprofit arts administrator, and community-based arts educator. She is the Artistic Producing Partner for Voices Festival Productions. For seven years, she served as Artistic Producing Director of MuseFire Productions, a (501c3) not-for-profit theatre and film production company dedicated to multimedia and stylistically challenging work (especially the voices of women and individuals of color) which she co-founded with (Joint) Artistic Producing Director, Michelle T. Hall. She 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. Lorraine is also a Board Member and Associated Artist with Transformation Theatre Company.

ABOUT THE ACTORS

Hanna Bondarewska is Founder and Artistic Director of Ambassador Theater in Washington, DC. A native of Warsaw, Poland, Hanna was trained in Polish and American schools of drama, as well as at RADA in London and Alcatraz, near Gubbio in Italy with a Nobel Prize winner, Dario Fo. She holds her MFA in Classical Acting at George Washington University. Her recent acting credits include *Lady*- a one woman show based on Shakespeare's Scottish play, with which she was invited to SOLO Festival in New York and to International Shakespeare Festival in Armenia. She was also seen as Antonia in “*They Don’t Pay? We Won’t Pay!*”, Stankova in “*Protest*,” Helena Modjeska in “*Farewell to Arden*,” Ygraine in “*Death of Tintagiles*” and George Sand in “*Summer at Nohant*,” to name a few. Her one-woman show, “*Lenya Cum Weil*,” won recognition at the Kennedy Center Performing Arts Festival. Hanna has performed at Ambassador Theater, the Washington Shakespeare Theatre, Spectrum Theatre, Classika-Synetic Theatre, The New York Polish Theater, Hippodrome State Theatre, and Acrosstown Theater in Florida, where she also directed “*The Tao of Pooh*”, based on the book by B. Hoffman, and S. Mrozek’s “*Tango*.” Her Polish theater credits are extensive and include work in Warsaw, Bialystok, Olsztyn, Torun, Katowice, and Wroclaw with many luminaries of the Polish stage. She has received various honors and awards, including the ACPC Artistic Award for *LADY*, the PAAA

Artistic Grant Award 2018/2019, 2014 & 2015 DC Metro Theater Arts Best Director, the 2013 Helen Hayes Canadian Partnership Grant Award, the St. Cyril and Methodius Award of excellence in promoting the Bulgarian Culture, the Julia Heflin Performing Arts Award, and others.

Aakhu Freeman* is a graduate of Howard University and American University. She has appeared in *“Royal Family,” “All My Sons,” “The Great White Hope”* and *“Intelligence”* at Arena Stage; *“Tales of a 4th Grade Nothing,” “Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse,” “Color Me Dark”* and *“Cat On a Hot Tin Roof”* at The John F Kennedy Center; *“Fences”* and *“The Soul Collector”* at Everyman Theatre, and *“Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine”* at Mosaic Theater Company of DC. (*Appearing courtesy of Actors Equity Association).

Lisa Hodsoll was born in Brussels, Belgium and is a graduate of University of Virginia, Founder of Open Road and member of The Klunch, WednesdayHouse, and Factory 449. Acting highlights include *“Laura Bush Killed A Guy”* (Helen Hayes Nominated) D.C. Production and New York Transfer, *“Medea’s Got Some Issues”* – D.C. and Chicago Production, *“The Wonderful World of Dissocia”* (Helen Hayes Nominated) and performing at the Edinburgh Fringe with *“A Fool’s Paradise.”* Selected writing credits – *“Buffurducken”* (writer and director, winner of Royal Reel Award), co-writer on *“Kosmopolites”* (winner of Best International Feature Columbia Gorges International Film Festival) and a play adaptation of *“Company K”* by William March.

ABOUT THE ARTS CLUB OF WASHINGTON

Founded in May 1916, the Arts Club of Washington promotes the arts in Washington, D.C. and is located at the Cleveland Abbe House (2017 I Street, NW). Since 2006, the Club has awarded the Marfield Prize, also known as the National Award for Arts Writing, for nonfiction books about the arts written for a broad audience. The club supports visual, performing, and literary arts DC. It hosts a noon-time concert series and awards arts scholarships. The Drama Committee of the Arts Club of Washington seeks to nurture the dramatic arts and present original and historic works in the nation’s capital. It presents and hosts performance artists, thespians and troupes for salon events, one-act play competitions, and more. **This past Fall, Voices Festival Productions enjoyed a week-long in-person residence at the Arts Club, as it workshopped Ari Roth’s new play, “My Brief But Calamitous Affair With The Minister, or Death of the Dialogic in the American Theatre.”**

Look for VFP’s upcoming Season Announcement for a full line-up of works to be developed, presented, and produced in the second half of 2022 and into 2023.

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