
KURBASY
SONGS OF THE UKRAINIAN FOREST
ON TOUR AS PART OF CENTER STAGE
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Kurbasy

"Songs of the Ukrainian Forest"
on tour as part of Center Stage

Mariia Oneshchak and Nataliia Rybka-Parkhomenko
Artistic Directors

Created, Arranged, and Produced by Kurbasy
Projections designed by Grycja Erde & Jardim

Vocals	Mariia Oneshchak
Vocals	Nataliia Rybka-Parkhomenko
Ukrainian Instruments	Vsevolod Sadovyi
Cello	Severyn Danyleiko
Double Bass	Artem Kamenkov
Violin	Markiian Turkanyk
Sound Engineer	Viktoriia Kyrnytska
Lighting and Projections Engineer	Oleksandra Bezemska

A song cycle in 75 minutes, presented without intermission

PRODUCER
New England Foundation for the Arts

Interim Director of Program Strategy	Adrienne Petrillo
Interim Manager of Program Strategy	Kelsey Spitalny

GENERAL MANAGER
Lisa Booth Management, Inc.

Principal	Deirdre Valente
Production Manager	Robert W. Henderson
Nine Muses Travel, Tour Advance	Danielle Dybiec
On Tour Company Manager	Diego Bucio



ABOUT SONGS OF THE UKRAINIAN FOREST

Songs of the Ukrainian Forest is a conversation between two actress-singers, longtime colleagues and friends Natalia Rybka-Parkhomenko and Mariia Oneshchak. The program took shape in the spring of 2020 during the global pandemic quarantine in one of the forests of Lviv region in western Ukraine, where the two women and their families took refuge together.

Since Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Mariia and Nataliia have performed versions of the work in Ukraine and in Europe as a duo, self-accompanied with hand percussion, Tibetan cymbals and bells, and a shruti box – a small Indian harmonium. With these performances in the U.S., Kurbasy is realizing the opportunity to fully produce this work visually and musically.

The program begins with Spring Songs -- calls to awaken and renew life after the long winter -- and includes ballads and love songs from Polissia, Bukovina, Poltava, Podillia, and Central Ukraine. Traditional recruit songs are sung, which highlight the war time situation in Ukraine today.

An affirmation in a time of war and resistance Kurbasy's Songs of the Ukrainian Forest reveals contemporary connections to an archaic past.

SONG LIST

Zamovliannia vesny / Spring Invocation
A spring song «vesnyanka» from Podillia. Traditionally, spring songs were sung only by girls, very loudly, in the open air, urging Nature to awake after Winter, and to welcome longer, warmer days and new life.

Pytalasia nenka dochky / A Mother Asked Her Daughter
Spring song

Rozlylysia Vody na chotyry brody / The Waters Flow into Four Fords
Spring song

Ya ptychka-nevelychka / I Am a Little Birdy
A lyrical chant from the Kyiv region; a secular song for a three-part ensemble or choir, which was popular in Ukraine in the 16th–18th centuries. A song about love, where a small bird and a falcon allegorically depict lovers figuring out their relationship.

A vzhe tomu sim lit bude / It Has Been Seven Years
A ballad from Bukovina about a Ukrainian soldier who has been wandering lost in the forest for 7 years and now talks to his mother, who visits him in the shape of a bird and flies off, for she could no longer wait for her son to return from military service.

Oi, shcho zh to za svit nastav / Oh, What a World it is Now
A ballad with a sad story about how a son drove his mother out of the house, after which many sorrows and troubles had fallen on him and his family.

Chyia to dolyna / Whose Valley Is This
A lyrical song about a love triangle -- a girl in love with a Cossack who has a wife and three children

Kolyskovi / Lullabies
Two Ukrainian lullabies accompanied by Tibetan bells and "4 elements of Koshi" chimes

Bilia richky, bilia brodu / By the River, By the Ford
A Lemki song about a cheating girl.

Oi, vershe, miy vershe / O Highlands, My Highlands
One of the most famous Lemko songs recounts thoughts of a girl who regrets that she left her mother and fell in love with a boy with black eyebrows.

V nediliu rano / Early on Sunday
Lemko song about both sweet and bitter sides of young love and betrayal.

Iz-za hory viter viie / The Wind Blows from the Mountain
A spring song from the Poltava region in central Ukraine - with these songs, in ancient times, girls tried to invoke Spring and awaken nature. But they also have lyrical plots, as in this song, where a woman with two children waits for her husband for a long time.

Oi, lisu, lisu + Oi, perepelychko + Rano-rano / O Forest + O Little Quail + Bright and Early
A medley of three songs begins with a Spring invocation (O Forest) and moves to O Little Quail (another version of I am a Little Birdy, popular in the 18th century). Bright and Early is a relic of pre-Christian cosmology and ritual – "Seeing off the Rusalky" whose timing is now linked to the Christian calendar. The week before Pentecost or "Trinity" — the spirits of departed kin temporarily cross the veil between worlds. Locals still honor them with reverence: setting tables, offering food, singing to appease, and finally escorting them ritually into the deep forest — a symbolic return to the other world. It's a sacred act of balance: welcoming the dead, then gently sending them back, so the living may thrive undisturbed, and cosmic order restored.

Zberimosia Rode / Let's Get Together, Kindred
Feast song from Podlachia borderland region about unity and the value of going through even the most difficult moments in life together.

Chevrona Kalyna / Red Guelder Rose
This military recruit song from Podillia region describes the burden of a wife whose husband goes off to war. Not only she, but all young girls, families, and entire villages are crying for their loved ones.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL UKRAINE

Ukraine sits at the heart of Europe, bordered to the southwest by Moldova and Romania, to the west by Slovakia and Poland, to the northwest by Belarus and to the northeast and east by Russia. Ukraine's diverse geography – from the densely wooded Carpathian Mountains to the Dnipro River basin and seaside of Odessa have informed the many and different rites, practices and traditions that together form Ukrainian culture.

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Polissia — Ukraine's most archaic cultural region. Sheltered by dense forests and vast marshlands, and historically insulated from major geopolitical upheavals, Polissia has preserved archaic songs, rituals and cosmological beliefs dating back to Kyivan Rus' and even pre-Christian times. Remarkably, recent genetic studies pinpoint this borderland between Ukraine and Belarus as the cradle of the distinct Slavic genotype — where, millennia ago, Slavic DNA diverged from Baltic lineages, seeding the entire future Slavic gene pool.

Bukovina — a cultural crossroads historically divided between Romania, Ukraine, and Austria-Hungary, whose legacy still lingers in architecture, law and layered identities. Nestled in the Carpathians, its culture bursts with chromatic intensity — embroidered sleeves like woven rainbows, wooden churches piercing misty ridges and music so intricate it feels like alchemy. Bukovina was and remains a region of striking diversity. Its vibrant highland culture features some of Ukraine's most ornate folk dress and complex instrumental music. Rooted in ancient Carpathian Slavic traditions, the local sound absorbed strong Ottoman and Balkan influences — heard in asymmetric rhythms, modal scales, and instruments like the cimbalom and trembita. Despite shifting borders and empires, Bukovina's musical heritage endures as a unique fusion — archaic, layered and unmistakably its own.



Poltava — oblast (region) is situated in central Ukraine on the left bank of the Dnipro. Historically and culturally part of the Cossack Hetmanate, the region is agriculturally significant and a center of Ukraine's oil and natural gas industry. Poltava is the beating heart of Cossack spirit and the cradle of Ukrainian identity along the river Dnipro's banks. Here, where steppes meet rolling hills, the legacy of the Zaporozhian Host lives in speech, songs and stubborn pride. Refined by luminaries like Ivan Kotliarevsky and later Taras Shevchenko, who wove its rhythms into the nation's poetic canon, the Poltava dialect, with its melodic intonations and archaic lexical treasures, became the bedrock of modern Ukrainian literary language.

Podillia — the sun-drenched southern heartland of Ukraine, is a cultural borderland where Ukrainian traditions blend with strong Moldovan and Bulgarian influences — legacies of migration, trade and imperial border shifts. Known for its vibrant folk embroidery, archaic singing and earthy, rhythm-driven instrumental music, Podillia absorbed Balkan melodic turns, Romanian dance motifs, and even Bulgarian vocal harmonies — especially in villages settled by 19th-century Bulgarian migrants. Unique rituals like "vesnianky" (spring songs) and "kupalo" fire-jumping survives here with a distinct local flavor. Architecture, cuisine, and dialects also reflect this mosaic: clay houses with carved eaves, spicy stews with Balkan flair and linguistic borrowings that color everyday speech.

Central Ukraine — flanking the left and right banks of the Dnipro River and its basin, consists of several provinces (including Poltava) and its cities are among the oldest in the country. Extensive grain and sunflower fields are found throughout the area. Regarded as the nation's geographic heartland, it holds a resonant archive of polyphonic resistance. Here, the ancient tradition of "chant" singing — rich, layered polyphony echoing Renaissance Europe — survived centuries of imperial erasure, smuggled through generations in village choirs, harvest songs and whispered lullabies. Though the Russian Empire sought to silence it — today, from village porches to global stages, this multi-voiced legacy pulses on: not as museum artifact, but as living proof that authentic voice, like freedom, cannot be fully suppressed — only postponed, then powerfully reclaimed.

Lemki are a distinct Carpathian highland ethnic group of Rusyn/Ukrainian origin — inhabiting Lemkivshchyna, a cultural and historic region that geographically spans the Carpathian Mountains and foothills of western Ukraine, east and north through Slovakia, and Poland. Sharing a rich culture and language across political borders through time, Lemko culture closely holds centuries-old traditions of song, dance, dress, rituals and unique architecture which are revived and celebrated now throughout Ukraine. Tragically, Lemki became victims of forced resettlement: first by Nazi Germany, then by postwar communist Poland in "Operation Vistula" (1947), which scattered them across western Poland to erase their identity. Many fled or later emigrated — especially to the U.S. and Canada — where vibrant diaspora communities preserved their language, songs and churches. Today, their culture survives as a testament to resilience: reviving on native soil and echoing still in exile.

ABOUT KURBASY

Kurbasy is a contemporary musical project of the renowned progressive Les Kurbas Theatre in Lviv, Ukraine. Founded in 2008 as an informal vocal gathering of singer-actresses, the group has performed across Europe – from the front lines of occupied Eastern Ukraine to concert halls in Western Europe and in the U.S.

The idea of culture as a cosmic living organism is central to Kurbasy, whose folk-based multimedia performances conjure the natural world, beliefs, and rituals. The theatrical foundation of the group is central to Kurbasy's aesthetic. The music they perform is tied to, celebrates, and renews the rituals and the lived memories of Ukraine and her people.

Led by actor-vocalists Mariia Oneshchak and Nataliia Rybka-Parkhomenkho, Kurbasy's performances trace a theatrical arc to reveal the stories held in the songs of their rich repertoire, a collection of which can be heard on 'Raytse' a title that references both paradise and the mythical egg at the origins of the universe, released in 2009. Songs from the calendar cycle, Kupala [St. John's Day/ Midsummers] and wedding ritual singing form the core of their second album, 'Miracle of Creation,' released in 2018. Many of the Winter songs from Kurbasy's 'Rozkolyada' (2021), aside from describing biblical and archaic Carpathian Christmas tales, are also rich in early slavonic mythopoetic symbols and animalistic ritual images. @kurbasy_official

2025 U.S. TOUR

Kurbasy is traveling the U.S. as part of Center Stage, a cultural diplomacy program that also produced the group in 2018. The seven-week tour features residencies in 11 communities: Bethlehem, State College and Lewisburg PA, New York City NY, Chicago IL, East Lansing MI, Berkeley and Rohnert Park CA, Salt Lake City UT, Albuquerque and Santa Fe NM, and Tucson AZ.

Since 2012, Center Stage has produced national tours by 48 groups from 17 countries, hosted by colleges and universities, festivals, music clubs, and cultural centers. Center Stage ensembles reach large cities and small towns. They engage with communities onstage, offstage, and online through performances, workshops, and discussions, artist-to-artist exchanges, master classes, and community gatherings, and return home to share these experiences with peers and fans. For this last edition of the program, Center Stage has invited alumni groups to return and share their work in communities from coast to coast. These are Khumariyaan (Pakistan), Papermoon Puppet Theatre (Indonesia), Mohamed Abozekry (Egypt & France), and Kurbasy (Ukraine).

A package of virtual educational materials, tailored to students in upper elementary through high school, provides a better understanding of the contexts in which these artists thrive.
www.worldcultureincontext.org

Kurbasy is on tour as part of Center Stage, a public diplomacy initiative of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs with funding provided by the U.S. Government, administered by the New England Foundation for the Arts in cooperation with the U.S. Regional Arts Organizations. General management is provided by Lisa Booth Management, Inc.
CenterStage.org



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