Join us in commemorating the Jewish community of Vilna through poetry, music, and presentation. This year, Justin Cammy will discuss the poetic legacy of Yung-vilne and Avrom Sutzkever using an archival document as his launching point. A mini concert featuring musical settings of poetry of Avrom Sutzkever by Lazar Weiner, Henech Kon, Majer Bodanski, Judith Shatin, and Alex Weiser performed by Adrian Rosas and Ya-Jhu Yang will follow Cammy’s presentation.

Co-sponsored by Nusakh Vilne and Lithuanian Culture Institute

PROGRAM

יידישע ורטשער | Yiddish Words

אונטער דײַנע וײַס שטערן | Beneath Your White Stars

פּאָעזיע | Poetry

ויטשער און ויטשער | Vayter un Vayter

1. עס קלאַפּן די שלײַפּן | My Temples Are Throbbing

2. שפּילצײַג | Toys

3. ?װער ועט בלײַבין? | Who Will Last?
Where stars, like little goats, went out to pasture,  
where biblically, the children murmured and clamored,  
where Yiddish words emerged freshly hatched in rays of light,  
now is that light a ruin where jackals live.

Sunken ships in the sea can give up a sign,  
so that someone may swim between sharks’ fins  
straight to their treasures and draw from it their fated other,  
but the Yiddish words are absorbed without a trace.

In the time or non-time of the resurrection of the dead.  
And there I catch a glimpse of the Yiddish words in rapture:  
like children stirring under prayer shawls  
and the sunshine of those sparks grows suddenly light.

*Translation by Clair Padgett*
Оונטר דײַנע והיסע שטערן
Beneath Your White Stars
music by Avrom Brudno, arranged by Henech Kon
and
music by Lazar Weiner
Beneath your white stars
Extend your white hand to me.
   My words are tears
That want to rest in your hand.

Look, their light is dimmed,
And from the depths of my cellar
   I have no way
To give you words that shine.

Yet I want, dear God,
To entrust what I possess to you.
The fire within me demands it,
The first within me — my days.

But in the cellars and the sewer
   Murderous quiet screams.
I run — higher — over rooftops
And I search: where are you? Where?

   Madness chases me —
Stairways and courtyards full of wailing
   I hang — a ruptured string —
And that is how I sing to you.

Beneath your white stars
Extend your white hand to me.
   My words are tears
That want to rest in your hand.
A dark violet plum,
the last one on the tree,
thin-skinned and delicate as the pupil of an eye,
that in the dew at night blots out
love, visions, shivering,
and then at the morning star the dew
grows weightless:
That is poetry. Touch it so lightly
that you don't leave a fingerprint.

*Translation by Chana Bloch*
ויטסר אוּן ויטספר

1.

עס קלאַפּן די שלײַפּ

My Temples Are Throbbing

from In the Forest

From "In the Forest"

1.

עס קלאַפּן די שלײַפּ

גאַלאָפּ, גאַלאָפּ:

צװײ רײַטער, צװײ רײַטער,

בּאָדראָנט

בּאָשפּאָרנט

וּי יאָן דוק, יאָן

דער שװאַרץ אַנד קאַפּ.

אַיינ רײַטער איז ויטס אוּן דער אַנדערער

אַיינ בײַדער איז וינגען פֿון גּוּרָה באַפֿאָנטערט.

עור ויטסער איז פֿרײַדיק, עור שװאַרץער — פּאָרנט.

עור שװאַרץער — אַוהונטער, עור ויטסער — פּוּן פּאָרנט.

שװאַרץער און חימּשּווֹאַרץ אָיבען בֿיַמער אוּן חוֹאָלייט.

חימּשּווֹאַרץ און שװאַרץער אָן שװאַרץער און די פּאָרנט פּון טַליט.

עור ויטסער — עור יאָנּט מיט אַ וינקּער פֿאָגן,

עור שװאַרץער — סָפּוֹן, סָפּוֹן.

עור ויטסער — עור רײַט אַן אָ לַכּוּטיקער ריבֿטוען.

עור שװאַרץער פּאָרלע$tʃ$ בֿיַמער יונֿן פּוּן, יונֿ לעַבטוען.

כּלּיפּאנּאָפ קאָנּ קּלּיפּאנּאָפ

גאַפּנּ גוּרָה באַפֿאָנטוּ.

צװײ רײַטער, צװײ רײַטער

זױ אײַינּכיָטער שװאַרץער.

ואַן קומָן צו אָווֹאָצִיקער שװאַרּן קעַפּ בּלִי אַיינּה.

(עור ויטסער,עור ויטסער?

עור שװאַרץער,עור שװאַרץעך?

עס בלינּוּן דוּ אַרְגּוּן, עס קאָפּאָן דוּ בֿיינּעך.

Music by Judith Shatin
My temples are throbbing —
Galloping, galloping:
Two riders, two riders,
Each dashes,
Each whirs,
Through skull and through head,
With horns and spurs.

One rider is white and the other is black,
Both armored like heroes, no slip and no slack.

The white one is joyous, the black — is in wrath.
The white is up front and the black — is like death.

Blackwhite and whiteblack — over trees, over gullies;
Whiteblack and blackwhite — like the hues of a tallis.

The white — with a sunny flag of a ranger,
The black one — danger, danger, danger.

The white one rides off in direction of light,
The black will extinguish each spark, he is night.
Clipclop and clipclop,
   By destiny's will,
Two riders are riding
   To a single sill.

To the only sill only one will arrive.
   (The white one, the white?
The black one, the black?
The eyes are blinded, the bones crack.)

Rolled by the storm,
Two hoops in the rain —
   Two riders that run
Through throbbing brain —
   On and on.

And the one who arrives,
And the one who accedes —
   Will be written
With blood
Over grasses and weeds.

Translation by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav
2. שפילצײַג | Toys

דײַנע שפילצײַג, מײַן קינד, האַלט זײ טײַער.
אין זײ נאָך קײַן מאַמע, אַנײַן צו גאָט בײַ דער װאַנט.
Apache Dew and children are wakewed.
אין די שטאָט איז געװען אָן אַ קינד.

My daughter, you must care for your toys,
Poor things, they’re even smaller than you.

Every night, when the fire goes to sleep,
Cover them with the stars of the tree.

Let the golden pony graze
The cloudy sweetness of the field.
Lace up the little boy’s boots
When the sea-eagle blows cold.

Tie a straw hat on your doll
And put a bell in her hand.
For not one of them has a mother,
And so they cry out to God.

Love them, your little princesses —
I remember a cursed night
When there were dolls left in all seven streets
Of the city. And not one child.

Translation by Chana Bloch
Who will last? And what? The wind will stay,
and the blind man’s blindness when he’s gone away,
and a thread of foam — a sign of the sea —
and a bit of cloud snarled in a tree.

Who will last? And what? A word as green
as Genesis, making grasses grow.
And what the prideful rose might mean,
Seven of those grasses know.

Of all that northflung starry stuff,
the star descended in the tear will last.
In its jar, a drop of wine stands fast.
Who lasts? God abides — isn’t that enough?

Translation by Cynthia Ozick
ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Justin Cammy is professor of Jewish Studies and World Literatures at Smith College. An alum of YIVO’s Uriel Weinreich Yiddish Summer Program and a past recipient of YIVO’s Dina Abramowicz Emerging Scholar fellowship, he also serves as on-site summer director of the Naomi Prawer Kadar International Yiddish Summer Program at Tel Aviv University. Cammy is a leading expert on the interwar Yiddish literary group Young Vilna. His translation of Abraham Sutzkever’s From the Vilna Ghetto to Nuremberg (McGill-Queen’s) was a finalist for the 2021 National Jewish Book Award.

Hailed by the New York Times as “a stalwart bass-baritone with a burnished voice” and in Opera News as a “mellifluous bass-baritone [with] theatrical flair,” Adrian Rosas is an artist with “impressive experience and talent” (The Boston Globe). He has had the opportunity to perform with major North American opera houses; newly written works with Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Detroit Opera, American Lyric Theater, American Opera Projects, and the SEM Ensemble; and as a soloist at Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, The Kennedy Center, and The Library of Congress. Adrian holds a master’s degree from The Juilliard School.

Composer and pianist Ya-Jhu Yang holds a bachelor’s degree from the National Taiwan Normal University and graduate degrees from the Manhattan School of Music and the Curtis Institute of Music. Ms. Yang is currently the associate music director and conductor of the Pennsylvania Girlchoir. Ms. Yang has given recitals at churches in the New York, Philadelphia, and Delaware areas to benefit church missions and arts organizations. In 2016, Ms. Yang and her husband Sheridan Seyfried started “Celtic to Classical,” a summer concert series based in Lewes, Delaware, to produce fun, engaging, and genre-eclectic concerts.
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