

BIOGRAPHY

DakhaBrakha is music quartet from Kiev, Ukraine. Reflecting fundamental elements of sound and soul, Ukrainian “ethno chaos” band DakhaBrakha creates a world of unexpected new music.

DakhaBrakha was created in 2004 at the Kyiv Center of Contemporary Art “DAKH” by the avant-garde theatre director – Vladyslav Troitskyi – and given the name that means “give/take” in the old Ukrainian language. Theatre work has left its mark on the band performances – their shows are always staged with a strong visual element.

After experimenting with Ukrainian folk music, the band has added rhythms of the surrounding world into their music, thus creating the bright, unique and unforgettable sound of DakhaBrakha. They strive to help open up the potential of Ukrainian melodies and to bring it to the hearts and consciousness of the younger generation in Ukraine and the rest of the world as well.

Accompanied by Indian, Arabic, African, Russian and Australian traditional instrumentation, the quartet’s astonishingly powerful and uncompromising vocal range creates a trans-national sound rooted in Ukrainian culture. At the crossroads of Ukrainian folklore and theatre, their musical spectrum is at first intimate then riotous, plumbing the depths of contemporary roots and rhythms, inspiring “cultural and artistic liberation”.

In March 2010, DakhaBrakha won the prestigious Grand Prix prize named after S.Kuriokhin, in the sphere of contemporary art, and confirmed its place in the culture once again. In March 2011 DakhaBrakha was discovered by Australian Womadelaide and began their ascent in the international music scene. They have since played more than 300 concerts and performances and have taken part in major international festivals throughout Eastern and Western Europe, Russia, Asia, Australia, and North America. DakhaBrakha has also collaborated with such international musicians as: Port Mone (By), Kimmo Pohjonen Cluster (Fi), Karl Frierson (DePhazz) (Ge), Steve Cooney (IRL), Inna Zhelannaya (Ru), Kievbass (UA), Djam (UA-Iran), and David Ingibaryan (Hu).

Live Soundtrack for “Earth”:

In addition to their own performances, DakhaBrakha also performs their original live soundtrack along with screening of the classic 1930 film, “Earth”, by Aleksandr Dovzhenko, considered to be one of the most important films of the Soviet era. Dovzhenko is a master of composition, and the film—with its intense close-ups and the impressive expanses of the landscape—is a passionate tribute to the countryside, to nature, and to the people that work on it.

“Earth” was banned 9 days after its original release, and was glorified in Ukraine only after Dovzhenko’s death in 1956. Full of lyrical pantheism and utopian exaltation, it demonstrated the ambiguity of Ukrainian geopolitical choice in the 1920s. In 1958, a film critics’ forum in Brussels named “Earth” one of the 12 best films in the history of world cinema.

The group has this to say about the creation of their soundtrack for “Earth”:
“Making music for Alexander Dovzhenko’s “Earth” was a great honor for us and a difficult creative challenge. Frame by frame, this Ukrainian masterpiece of world cinema impressed us every time we worked on it. No matter how we tried to work on the film as a self-contained artistic endeavor, avoiding ideological evaluation, we could not. Of course, we voiced the film in the human terms of the 21st Century, even while being aware that after 1930, when the work was completed on “Earth”, came the years of the Communist famine of 1932-1933, the years of repression, and we know about the difficult fate of the Dovzhenko socialist empire. Together, we tried to convey the authenticity, and also the naivety, of those feelings and messages brought to us from that time and that era, to us today and our Earth.”

Marko Halanevych – vocals, darbuka, tabla, accordion

Marko is the only representative of the countryside in the band. He was born in the village of Krushenivka, in the Vinnitskiy region. into a family of village intellectuals. He graduated from the faculty of the Ukrainian philology, but came into the theatre, became an actor of the Centre of Contemporary Art “DAKH” and then accidentally found himself working with the band. Marko is fond of design – he creates the visual images of DakhaBrakha and also for the “DAKH” theatre where he continues to perform on stage as an actor.

Iryna Kovalenko – vocals, djembe, bass drums, accordion, percussion, bugay, zgaleyka, piano

Ira has played Ukrainian ethnic music since her early childhood. Moreover, she has graduated from the faculty of folklore. She is fond of yoga, yachting, and rowing. Ira is responsible for the “brass section” of the group, as she easily gets the feel of different musical instruments. She also performs at the “Dakh” theatre as an actress.

Olena Tsybulska – vocals, bass drums, percussion, garmoshka

Lena is one of the specialists at the folklore department of the National University of Ukraine. When she has some time off, she works on preparing her Candidate’s dissertation about traditional Ukrainian wedding songs. She is fond of driving, sewing and interior design.

Nina Garenetska – vocals, cello, bass drum

Nina professionally studied folklore and is a self-taught cellist. She is the most artistically open-minded member of the band and is always up for collaborating with other musicians. Nina is fond of travelling, photography, fancywork and adornment creation.

A shadowy procession to the pounding of drums, to the murmur of a cello, morphs into an anthem, an invocation, a wild and wacky breakdown. Drones and beats, crimson beads and towering black lambs-wool hats all serve as a striking backdrop for an unexpected, refreshingly novel vision of Eastern European roots music. This is the self-proclaimed “ethno-chaos” of Ukraine’s DakhaBrakha, a group that feels both intimately tied to their homeland, yet instantly compelling for international audience.

“We just want people to know our culture exists,” muses Marko Halanevych of DakhaBrakha, the remarkable Kyiv-based ensemble that has broken down the tired musical framework for Ukrainian traditional music. “We want people to know as much as possible about our corner of the world.”

The quartet does far more than introduce Ukrainian music or prove it is alive and well. They craft stunning new sonic worlds for traditional songs, reinventing their heritage with a keen ear for contemporary resonances. With one foot in the urban avant-garde theater scene and one foot in the village life that nurtured and protected Ukraine’s cultural wealth, DakhaBrakha shows the full fury and sensuality of some of Eastern Europe’s most breathtaking folklore.

Refined yet saucy, eerie yet earthy, Ukrainian music has languished in relative obscurity, though its achievements are diverse and sophisticated: complex polyphonic singing with interlocking lines so tight the ears buzz, long and philosophical epics, humorous ditties, instrumental virtuosity, and raucous dance tunes. Ritual and ribaldry, urbane composition and rural celebration, Asian influences and Western harmony all combined to give contemporary musicians a true wealth of potential sources.

DakhaBrakha knows these sources well: the three female vocalists have spent many summers traveling around Ukraine’s villages collecting songs and learning from elder women in remote areas. Like these village tradition-bearers, they have spent years singing together, a fact that resonates in the beautifully close, effortlessly blended sound of their voices. Marko grew up steeped in village life, and draws on his rural upbringing when contributing to the group.

Yet the young musicians and actors were determined to break away from purist recreations and from the stale, schmaltzy, post-Soviet remnants of an ideology-driven folk aesthetic. Urged on by Vladyslav Troitsky, an adventuresome theater director at the DAKH Center for Contemporary Art, a cornerstone of the Kyiv arts underground, the

group resolved to create something radically different. They wanted to experiment, to discover, to put Ukrainian material in a worldly context, without divorcing it from its profound connection to land and people. That's why tablas thunk and digeridoos rumble, filling out DakhaBrakha's sound, and yet never overshadow the deeply rooted voices and spare, yet unforgettable visual aesthetic.

"The beginning was pretty primitive," recalls Halanevych. "We tried to find rhythms to match the melodies. We tried to shift the emphasis of these songs. We know our own material, our native music well, yet we wanted to get to know other cultures and music well. We started with the Indian tabla, then started to try other percussion instruments. But we didn't incorporate them directly; we found our own sounds that helped us craft music."

Through this experimentation and repurposing of instruments from other cultures to serve DakhaBrakha's own sound, the band was guided by the restraint, the elemental approach that owed a debt to the emotionally charged minimalism of Phillip Glass and Steve Reich.

"At the same time as we explored ethnic music, we got interested in minimalism, though never in a way that was literal or obvious," Halanevych explains. "The methods of minimalism seemed to us to be very productive in our approach to folk. The atmospheric and dramatic pieces that started our work together were created by following that method."

This mix of contemporary, cosmopolitan savvy and intimacy with local traditions and meanings cuts to the heart of DakhaBrakha's bigger mission: To make the world aware of the new country but ancient nation that is Ukraine. "It's important to show the world Ukraine, and to show Ukrainians that we don't need to have an inferiority complex. That we're not backward hicks, but progressive artists. There are a lot of wonderful, creative people here, people who are now striving for freedom, for a more civilized way of life, and are ready to stand up for it."