Ukrainian Popular Music in Times of War: National Identity, Transnational Projections and the Musician as Grassroots Ambassador

Marco Biasioli
University of Manchester
Marco.Biasioli@manchester.ac.uk

Thomas Drew
University of Manchester
Thomas.Drew@manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

This article investigates the ways in which Ukrainian independent popular music, after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, has contributed to domestic nation-building and international nation-branding. Taking as case studies six artists who have extensively toured abroad with their musical projects, the article traces the evolution of the internal imaginings and external projections of Ukrainian identity enabled via musical activity. The article shows that the war has generated a reconfiguration of the relationship between the artist and their social responsibility, in which music now functions as a fundamental means to raise transnational awareness of the Ukrainian struggle and materially influence Ukraine's defence. This reconfiguration has prompted the performers to take on the role of the grassroots cultural ambassador and create DIY networks of solidarity, largely outside of state initiatives. While the promotion of Ukrainian identity on the international stage assumed a central role in this collective endeavour, notions of the country did not adhere to a standardized framework, but rather reflected Ukraine's unity in cultural diversity.

KEYWORDS: Ukrainian popular music, grassroots cultural ambassador, cultural diplomacy, music and conflict, Ukrainian national identity, nation-branding.

Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted a pivotal change in Ukrainian cultural production, including popular music, in which internal nation-building and external nation-branding took the primary role. The connection between music and identity affirmation in Ukraine, particularly as it pertains to distinguishing Ukraineness from Russianness, has been explored in several studies (see, for example: Wickström 2008; Shuvalova 2022; Helbig 2023). A key moment in this process was certainly the Euromaidan in 2013-2014, which contributed to a more focused, popular reforging of Ukrainian national and civic identity than was seen after the 2004 Orange Revolution. At its inception, the protest again government corruption instigated three main demonstrative movements: a formal, political opposition to President Yanukovych, headed by parliamentary figures; an 'apolitical' (1) camp in Maidan Square, which saw the highest and most diverse attendance; and a significantly smaller Anti-Maidan camp organised by Yanukovych's Party of Regions. As discussed by Hansen et al. (2019: 41-50), in all three instances music played a central role in establishing an atmosphere representative of the movement's ideals. The political camp hosted established Ukrainian pop and rock performers, along with folk music and classical ensembles. The 'apolitical' camp hosted independent, underground and non-professional musicians, emphasising improvisation and wider participation, with performances often being acoustic or semi-acoustic for lack of equipment and performance infrastructure. The Anti-Maidan demonstrators used mainly Russophone popular music, including Russian and Soviet *estrada*, Soviet patriotic songs, and Orthodox religious music.

The alignment against Russian language and Russian culture, however, was not straightforward, but open-ended and debated. At end of 2013, the political opposition camp recognised the greater popularity of Maidan's 'apolitical' group, which led to the joining of the two groups and the construction of a large stage on Maidan Square (ibid.: 43). At the same time, the two musical scenes of this conflict (Russian/Russophone and Ukrainian/Ukrainophone) were indeed antagonistic toward each other but still shared common ground and common fears. (2) Even if Ukrainian was largely the main language of the Euromaidan stage (something not obvious in a country with a significant minority of native Russophones), "the music at the Euromaidan was primarily about Ukraine's future, not about Russia as an opponent" (ibid.: 76). This situation was, however, open to variables: when the relationship between the two countries was changed radically by Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, contemporary Ukrainian culture became informed by a direct and clear opposition to Russia and Russian culture (see also below).

Protracted open warfare has altered not just the audio-textual semantics of the music, but also the material conditions of the music's production and distribution. The ubiquity of good recording hardware (e.g. modern smartphones) and the instant sharing potential of social media, which have transformed transmission of music over the last few decades, have proven crucial in times of war too: an impromptu acoustic performance in one location, such as that given by Amelia Anisovych, a young girl in a Kyiv bomb shelter (see Clark 2024: 151, 161), can be streamed live or uploaded shortly afterwards to be seen internationally and preserved as memory.

Such endeavours produce cultural icons infused with meanings of resistance. Fomenko (2022: 225) notes that "[t]he war has produced many new cultural icons", ranging from viral sensations recognised internationally to those "less known outside of Ukraine but [...] deeply meaningful for Ukrainians". These can be: "a person, a physical object, a place, or an idea identified by members of a culture as representative of that culture" and can be evoked through "a word, a phrase, or a text", with their meaning shifting in relation to context, time and place, and the audience looking at them (ibid.: 223-224). Therefore, because of the importance of music to Ukrainian identitarian demonstrations before and after the full-scale invasion, it is consistent to consider influential musical artists and performances as cultural icons in the same sense.

The emergence of these icons and their rapid commodification have contributed to "the blurring of boundaries between nation building and nation branding in Ukraine" (ibid.: 226), evidencing the "complicated relationships between internal identity struggles and international image projection" in the country (ibid.). As European and North American coverage of the war surged, increased attention to expressions of Ukrainian identity, across a spectrum from earnest support to cynical performativity, collided with a variety of Ukrainian voices who suddenly found a new audience. These voices included established Ukrainian musicians, state-endorsed artists, and independent, upcoming practitioners finding traction across the wave of interest; these musicians were creating and broadcasting either from within war-affected Ukraine, or from international diasporas following the displacement caused by the war, or while on fundraising tours abroad. This plurality of voices, in combination with a range of external observers with varying levels of prior knowledge of Ukraine and its culture, produced fertile ground for many different manifestations of Ukrainian identity, which were both expressed and received differently from one another (see also the important ethnographic work of Del Re 2023). (3)

In addition, the external perception of Ukrainian music (as well as its nation-branding potential) is closely connected to the positioning of the artist within their home political milieu. Writing about Ukraine in the Euromaidan context, Sonevytsky (2016: 292-93) argued that the apoliticism that characterised Ukrainian popular music up until 2014 became untenable when the political stakes were raised, forcing musicians to take sides and" recognize and instrumentalize the ethical potential of their aesthetic projects." This engendered a shift from "political ambivalence" to "political ambivalence as political conviction" and meant that several artists (such as Dakh Daughters) started using music to activate "complex narratives of national belonging, ultimately suggesting a third way for Ukrainian politics beyond the binary of Europe versus Russia" (ibid.). This, as Sonevytsky maintains, was the political position of the majority of the Euromaidan demonstrators. Such a stance, however, has been further complicated by the events of February 2022, in which Russia and Europe became even more starkly associated with concepts of aggressor and ally respectively. Those Ukrainian musicians who had up until that moment worked in Russia as well as at home (and often in Europe too), such as Anastasia Prikhodko, Ivan Dorn, Luna (Krystyna Bardash) and Boom Box (Andriy Khlyvnyuk), deemed the continuation of any collaboration impossible: the musical networks with Russia, a market that Ukrainian practitioners had

considerably contributed to shaping (Gorbachëv 2022), were cut off. Europe remained the only viable option for music export and touring, but for the first time European audiences became the target of a consistent endeavour: Ukrainian musicians took on the role of cultural ambassadors in order to make people aware of the war and of the Ukrainian struggle.

We are particularly interested in how the artist's self, consensuses on broader national identity, and grassroots as well as official projections of the nation for an external audience intersect within contemporary Ukrainian popular music. How have the war and the resurgence in Ukrainian nation-building affected the production of Ukrainian music? Conversely, what has been the role of music in finding a space in which to define the self and articulate the nation? What strategies do Ukrainian artists employ, in relation to their status as representatives of their country and people, to raise awareness and mobilise support among international audiences?

To answer these questions, we will draw on open-ended online interviews (five oral, one written) personally conducted with six Ukrainian musicians who have been actively touring since the start of the full-scale war. The rationale for the choice of this sample stems from the independent, non-state related status of our musicians when they started their touring endeavours, as we wanted to see how nation-branding and nation-building functioned outside of state institutions among grassroots musical producers. Therefore, all our interviewees are either unsigned or signed to a small label in no way affiliated to a major one. In addition, we strived to reflect diversity: our respondents come from different parts of the country (L'viv, Dnipro, Kyiv, Chernihiv, the Donbas); three of them are now based abroad as a consequence of the war; their genres span from folk to electronica, from pop to recitation, from jazz to psychedelic rock; their concert attendance for a solo gig abroad has ranged from 3 to 3,000 people approximately. Interestingly, one of the interviewees (Interviewee 1), on their return, was approached by the Ukrainian Institute, a state institution, founded in 2017 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which deals with the promotion of Ukrainian culture internationally; Interviewee 1 now works with the Institute in relation to Ukrainian popular music abroad, which suggests a certain degree of continuity between non-official and official activities. (4)

A few arguments emerge from our analysis. Firstly, the threats and traumas connected with the war activated a spontaneous and creative unity among Ukrainian independent music practitioners that strengthened horizontal collaboration and DIY projects, all aimed at helping their country survive. Secondly, although in this collective action the articulation of Ukrainian identity abroad became central, musicians projected this identity in different ways, which reflected the diversity of the country's composition as well as the various ways in which the musicians imagined their nation to be; ideas about the country did not conform to a template. Thirdly, a broader variety of musicians took on the role of the cultural ambassador in the overall absence of governmental directives, demonstrating that cultural diplomacy is not only a top-down practice but also a grassroots, bottom-up one. All these processes evidence how the full-scale invasion generated "collective effervescence" (Durkheim 1915) among participants, who feverishly got involved in communicating similar ideas through mutual influence, interaction, stimulation and creativity (see also Crossley 2015: 80), eventually

accelerating what was already a music industry on the rise in the European panorama (Tarkovska 2020). Lastly, although participants are usually aware of the tokenistic or essentialising processes sometimes at play in the reception of Ukrainian music abroad, they also view these processes as an intermediate or even unavoidable phase, through which their country's music must go in order to enhance and eventually consolidate its international standing.

Our article seeks to contribute to knowledge by further developing debates about music in zones of conflict, music as resistance and as a nation-building device, and music as a tool for nation-branding and grassroots cultural diplomacy. In what follows, we first summarise the effects that the full-scale war has had on the production and reception of music in Ukraine; next, we analyse the changes in perceptions of national identity, as expressed in the discourses of our participants; lastly, we examine the ambassadorial role of the Ukrainian musician and the tactics adopted by our respondents in this practice. In all the sections, we have chosen to use long excerpts from our interviews, not only because of the richness of the first-hand material, but also because we wanted to centre the article on the artists' voices.

The impact of the war

Music is used in relation to conflict in disparate ways, including as an incitement to stir, continue or re-enact struggle, advocate for peace, heal from trauma, and so on, all along the "war-peace continuum" (O'Connell 2010). In the case of the Ukrainian musicians we interviewed, the presence of the war at home partly prompted action outside the country, physically away from "the belliphonic" (Daughtry 2015), that is, from the violent soundtrack produced by armed combat, but still carrying its echoes (see also Del Re 2023). The experience of war radically changed the ways in which musicians engaged with their practice, in terms of both intensity and urgency, and for some it became embodied in aesthetic production through lyrics, speeches and performances. Interviewee 3, who is involved in an electronic project that combines music and poetry, reveals:

> The first explosions in my city raised a lot of questions about my life, its meaning, its shortness. Since it is almost impossible to determine how much time you have left to live in these conditions, because the next missile or kamikaze drone can cut your path, you cannot afford to do things that are not important to you. So when the war started, I became the most productive musician possible. I have always written music with a somewhat melancholic and dramatic mood. Now, there never was a more appropriate time for that. When I saw that my bandmate had started writing poems about current events, I suggested that we document these events in our typical style – recitations set to electronic music. We immediately decided that it was important to do this here and now – to document emotions – at least for our own reflection and therapy. In addition, we couldn't afford to put out a full-length release because we couldn't guarantee that we would be alive the next day. So we released 2-3 tracks every 2 weeks. These were sketches of emotions, reflections, and observations of wartime. It was like war and muttering. Like muttering about

the war. In fact, that's exactly what it is. Dramatic and non-entertaining content. We posted them on our Bandcamp for public listening. We did not expect that these pieces would be so well-received by the audience. People said that it was the first music they were able to listen to after they got out of shock. People started buying these tracks, and we transferred the money to the volunteers we knew. In total, we played 60 concerts, home and abroad.

For Interviewee 3, music-making became an affective response to war, a means to channel shock, mourning and sense of belonging, but also a way to document, reflect and sublimate the tragic reality around. This burst of compositional activity contrasts with the response of Interviewee 6, member of an indie-folk band:

We hardly rehearsed or created anything new throughout this time. Only at the beginning of 2024 did we have a productive week and composed several pieces. Yes, some of them reflect our thoughts on the Russian invasion and the events arising from it. But in 2022-2023, we almost didn't rehearse, setting the main goal for ourselves to perform as many concerts as possible, allowing us to convey, alongside our music, certain messages to audiences worldwide, conducting interviews and, of course, raising funds to help Ukraine.

However, not writing new songs did not mean a lack of music activity, quite the contrary; it meant that energies were channelled differently, anxiously aimed all the same at using music to help Ukrainians withstand the war. Similarly, for Interviewee 5, a bandura player who has regularly performed at the frontline, the communal potential of music, as well as its necessity, has been enhanced by the new tragic events:

Music could be for people the proof they need to see, that there is a reason to fight. Having good moments with friends, hanging out, relaxing, talking nonsense, laughing, and just being in the company of people you can trust. This is what we are doing, if we're talking about concerts on the front line. For somebody it is important to hear the song that they know. Sometimes people request songs, we play them, and we see tears in their eyes. They go 'Oh, this is what I love!' So, music brings them something important.

In a somehow complementary way, Interviewee 1, who is involved in an indie-jazz project, views the escapist function of music as vital for the Ukrainian people in order to receive some form of useful, pleasurable disengagement:

Music puts you in another world, it just switches you off, and this helps you to forget about the war for a moment. And it's OK to try and forget about it. It's one of the things that music can do. In the first months of the war it was really hard for people to take this in because music is considered to be entertainment. But it is also recreational. It has a recreational function.

As Interviewee 1 has it, this recreational function helps people to be more focused and more productive in their resistance efforts, preventing them from succumbing to stress, anxiety, and burnout. The "temporary respite" (Frith 1996: 20) is thus indispensable, interlinked with, and propaedeutic to further involvement in the country's social and political life, suggesting once more that "what's at stake is not

a simple matter of either/or [between escapism and political engagement]: 'resistance' shifts its meaning with circumstance" (ibid.).

For some musicians, their production has been altered by the war in terms of their approach to lyric-writing and the function of the word within and without the sound:

> We have existed as a band for four years now, and the first two years we were just making music for fun. The sound was the most important thing for us. Searching for interesting combinations, effects, and so on. Soundscapes are something that just musically touches us. We didn't care too much about the lyrics, they were not the main thing and perhaps not really thought through either. We were writing about global things, like feeling yourself inside the universe and so on, more kind of big-scale things, emotions, or relationships with people. And then, a couple of months before the full-scale invasion we started working on a song that was already a bit different. The lyrics talked about standing your own ground, keeping your own space, establishing boundaries when people want to break them. I started realising that maybe the whole tension that was going on around us already was being channelled into that song. The song became the most political in our whole production. It was weird because it wasn't our purpose at all. It just coincided. And after the full-scale invasion, lyrics became central to me, I wanted to convey some message now, not only sounds. Music became a tool to do that, to speak to people, while before it was just a goal in itself, to have fun and enjoy myself. Even though most of our songs are not about war, between songs we tell stories, we tell what's happening. (Interviewee 1).

While new, perhaps more explicit, political material may be in the making, five out of six practitioners have so far toured abroad with their old repertoire, which was also not directly political. This suggests, so far, that the war did not necessarily politicise lyric-writing or alter the values of music per se – the capacity to enable collective intimacy and identity-making, to activate the sharing of emotions, to favour coping mechanisms, bring about enjoyment, or engage the public into changing things. Rather, the war amplified the perceptions and uses of these values among the practitioners. For instance, Interviewee 2, an experimental electronic artist, observes:

> Music is about spirituality, about connection, togetherness, love, humanity, healing. It has a therapeutic function, and can be used to heal together and create unity. In the context of Ukraine, even if we are all different and we may disagree on certain things, now it is not the moment to focus on the differences, but on the similarities, what unites us. Values of music have not changed, but what has changed is my responsibility towards those values. Now I am much more responsible towards other people, towards raising awareness of these values, more careful about what I say and for the energy I bring into the world.

For Interviewee 2, music did not undergo any further politicisation: "because it is made by humans, music is political by default". Similarly, Interviewee 6 agreed that "Unfortunately, nothing is beyond politics. We cannot be beyond it. Just as, for example, no Ukrainian can be beyond the war (and war is a product of politics), no

matter how much they might want to be". What took place, instead, was a realisation of the responsibility that performers felt in relation to music's values and in the eyes of their fellow citizens, that is, the understanding of their art as a device to foster unity domestically and communicate Ukraine-ness internationally. In other words, what changed was the idea of the role of music in relation to national identity.

Ukrainian music and national identity

The dramatic events, which unfolded in 2014 and escalated in 2022, have massively contributed to the reawakening of Ukrainian national identity. Music, of course, has actively participated in this. As McDonald (2013: 284) identifies in relation to Palestinian music, the intervention that music makes through performance offers the opportunity to "resignify" the nation and what it means to fight for it. This also entails that this resignification is layered, imbricated in the perceptions and experiences of individuals and communities, and exposed to the fluctuations of the contingent:

> Ukrainian identity is varied. Ukraine is a huge country. Ukrainian identity of the East is not the same as Ukrainian identity in the West. What all these manifestations of Ukrainian identity had in common is that they were all undervalued before the war. Ukrainians also were not paying too much attention. But now, this has changed. We are taking pride in our culture, and it is time for unity. We need to believe in each other, believe in the Ukrainian people. Ukraine used to underestimate itself. It was a sort of idea that was passed on to us and that we accepted as true when we were kids, and because of our Russian neighbour: 'Ukrainian language is a peasant language, Russian literature is better than Ukrainian literature,' and so on. Then, since 2014 we started to question this. I, for example, made the switch to Ukrainian language back then. After February 2022 we understood that we are self-sufficient, that we should not underestimate ourselves, and that now is the right moment to build Ukrainian culture. Pain has been a great unifier for us, a sort of prompt for the evolution of our culture. Ukrainian culture has now become a hybrid space, beyond the binary Russia or Europe. That is why it is a perfect moment for Ukrainian culture. The internet and the eyes of the world are watching, and Ukrainian artists are motivated more than ever to show and disseminate Ukrainian music – which is by the way so varied, it's not just folklore. (Interviewee 2).

For Interviewee 2, the pain and trauma induced by the war have accelerated processes of what Sonevytsky (2019: 7) calls "acoustic citizenship", a form of sensory communion and national belonging generated through sound, aimed at overcoming internal barriers – in Ukraine's case, of ethnicity or East-West binarisms – towards the building of a positive, sovereign future. Acoustic citizenship underscores the intent of musicians and audiences to use music not only to harmonise the country's different forms of "nested otherness" and music traditions (ibid.), but also to push Ukraine out of its liminal position in the world. Crucially, such harmonisation does not entail a single way of doing it, but rather a multiplicity

of strategies, from the self-essentialisms of folk, through glocalisation and blending, to camouflage beneath the semblances of the Anglo-American tradition. According to Interviewee 2, such a variety of strategies and musical forms, rather than a reason for internal division, should be seen as a source of cultural richness, a reason for pride and a tool for collective identity-making, especially now that political developments have placed Ukraine at the forefront of global attention.

Similarly, Interviewee 1 speaks of the process of acquiring confidence, both at home and abroad. In this re-imagining of the authentic in connection with the national, the disaffiliation from Russia is obviously an important moment:

> We have changed the long-lasting perception that we were a smaller, lesser nation. Like we were not a nation enough. This was the message, especially in the east of Ukraine, where I'm from, so we always felt like Ukrainian language is worse than Russian, that only people from the village speak Ukrainian, but we didn't know where we were getting these thoughts from, because it felt like they were just there, around us, normal. But now in the songs and art itself, it feels that we believe in ourselves more. And music helps with that. For example, we win competitions. OK, sometimes it may feel like they choose us because we are from Ukraine, not because of the quality of our music. But I feel that less and less people have been choosing us because we're Ukrainians; they can actually see the high quality of the music we present. There are so many new artists and bands who started their careers in 2022. It's like the rise of Ukrainian music again. There was one rise in 2014 after the war started, and now there is another one. I'm sure that this takes part in building the nation in ways that you sometimes can't see directly, but when you listen to music you say 'Oh my God, that's from Ukraine!' You realise that you're not worse. And it is music in Ukrainian. Before, it felt that if you play music in English, then it's more serious and you have more chances to export it outside Ukraine. But now we feel proud, because most bands are writing in Ukrainian, and they're not afraid of it, they don't think it's a worse language or a language that isn't going to be taken seriously.

Given the historical struggles for the recognition of the Ukrainian language, which was subject to repression and scorn in the Russian Empire, and given the realities of the Anglo-dominated European music market, the internal affirmation of Ukrainian as a primary cultural language, and its appreciation on the international stage, represent a significant step not only for the construction of Ukraine's nationhood, but also for the perceived authenticity and distinctiveness of Ukrainian identity in the eyes (and ears) of world audiences. Since 2014, but more so since 2022, this collective identity-making through sound has entailed the rejection of Russophone production:

> After 2014 we didn't judge that much, and before 2014 we didn't judge at all if an artist went to Russia to perform. [After 2014] It was the state law that if you go to Russia, then you, for example, cannot apply to Eurovision anymore, because if you performed in Russia then you cannot represent Ukraine at Eurovision. So at the state level the conditions were already set. And people would decide: 'OK, I don't care about being acclaimed in Ukraine, I'm just gonna go to Russia because there is more money and the market there is more established.' A lot of people went there because they could earn more money

from the tours, big artists. It wasn't good, but in 2014 not everyone took these things seriously. People didn't have the same level of consciousness as now. But in 2022 everything changed completely. 2022 was the turning point for people to understand that there is accountability for your actions. If you go to Russia after 2022, or if you sing in Russian, then something is totally wrong with you. (Interviewee 1).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine sharpened issues concerning the colonial character of Russian culture and popular culture (Yermolenko 2022; Kuvshinova 2022; Bekbulatova 2022). This included music too: after the start of the war, for example, the Ukrainian government banned the dissemination of songs by Russian artists released after 1991, unless these artists spoke out against the war (Rzheutska 2023). Before 2022, several Ukrainian musicians were part of a shared cultural milieu that roughly coincided with the so-called post-Soviet space; in this space, they were viewed as a leading influence, including on the Russian scene (Trabun 2012; Ovchinnikov 2022; Gorbachev 2022). Just like the European music market, or the Anglophone music market, the post-Soviet music market constituted a transnational, self-standing network in which practitioners (e.g. musicians, producers, sound engineers, festival organisers, promoters, etc.) from different countries often intermingled and collaborated. The main language that facilitated network communication was Russian, and Russia remained for many Russophone performers, including Ukrainian ones, a most lucrative market in which to sell records, perform and tour, because of the geographic proximity and simply because of the number of potential audience members (around 140 million people, the largest in the post-Soviet area).

The war not only erased the existence of this common musical area (Gorbachev 2022; Ovchinnikov 2022), but also accelerated the reconceptualisation of the post-Soviet space through a decolonial lens. Together with the detachment from the Russian sphere of influence and the affirmation of sovereignty, Ukrainian musical institutions have strived to create a new, post-colonial space with other artists whose countries underwent a similar historical experience (see below). This is, however, another field of struggle: firstly, because Russia enjoys popularity among countries of the so-called global south as a bastion of resistance to western hegemony (Plokhy 2023: xiv-xv); and secondly, because the road to decolonisation is riddled with pitfalls of western tokenisation, simplification and fetishization of Ukrainian identity (Ishchenko 2022).

The expression of Ukraine-ness in music, as touched upon previously, is by no means uniform. For example, according to Interviewee 4, a member of a psychedelic indie band, singing in English rather than Ukrainian is a distinct choice, both aesthetically (the influence of the Anglo-American rock'n'roll tradition), and for reasons of communication (to amplify outreach through the help of the international language): "If I sang in Ukrainian abroad, it [the message] would be completely missed". Interviewee 4, who has always sung in English in their career, acknowledged that Ukrainian listeners may need to work harder in order to understand the content of their lyrics, but emphasised the importance of being accessible to a wider audience:

> I think that if people are interested in lyrics, they will read the lyrics. That's what I myself do from time to time. Also, that's the music I like; mostly from the US and Britain. That's why we are playing and doing this in English. As for the message in my songs, [...] well, people who want to get some information, they have to dig a bit and get it. It is possible.

In contrast to this, Interviewee 5 – the bandura player – invoked the substantial corpus of Ukrainian traditional songs as the primary proof for the very existence of the historic Ukrainian nation as distinct from its neighbours, arguing that many of these songs have been kept alive organically by generations of Ukrainians:

> When the war started, the first evidence of who we were was the culture. Some of our songs, including our singing styles, are UNESCO heritage. Our heritage is substantial and in Ukrainian. It features the different regions which altogether compose Ukraine. And this, for me, was good evidence. If somebody told me Ukraine is some part of Russia, I would tell them that we have strong evidence, we have our culture and this is a big part of our identity.

Also reaching into Ukrainian history, but with a slightly different emphasis, Interviewee 6 ascribes primacy to the nation's resilience and fortitude, which, strategically essentialised, assume an immutable and perennial character:

> The desire to be a free nation was suppressed by long periods in autocratic empires or in the Soviet totalitarian system. I believe that the 'freedom gene' is part of our identity. 'Freedom is our religion' was written on one of the buildings in Kyiv during the Maidan protests. The unwillingness to become a subjugated nation again was the main reason we endured the first months of the full-scale Russian invasion. Additionally, it's worth mentioning our sense of humour. In the darkest times, our sense of humour saves us on social media and in private conversations. Otherwise, it would be impossible to endure the horror.

Therefore, there is a considerable degree of heterogeneity in the internal perceptions and figurations of contemporary Ukrainian identity, and even more diversity of strategies as to how that identity should be demonstrated internationally (see also Ovsiannikov 2022). The two aspects, domestic perception and external projection, appear to be inextricably linked. This linkage implies a choice regarding which key messages to bring from home to the outside, which ones to leave out, and the most effective or appropriate vehicles to do it. Such a process of selection is based on the concessions that should or should not be made for foreign audiences so that the messages may be received as intended. What are the difficulties that may arise in the process of re-enacting and redefining Ukrainian national identity, choosing from the pool of local histories, folk traditions, but also transnational music styles, whilst still presenting a contemporary, living and palatable cultural identity and acoustic citizenship? All of our interviewees, like their peers, had to engage with this question in some form as they toured abroad following the full-scale invasion.

The projection of national identity abroad and the grassroots musical ambassador

Music is a multi-modal practice and, as such, re-enactment of the nation does not necessarily take place within the sound, but also in devices around it. At the same time, transnational projections of national identity through music do not automatically have to conform to stereotypes. Of course, musicians may anticipate some of the foreign audiences' expectations about Ukrainian identity, but this can also turn into an opportunity to disrupt such expectations and provide another layer to what is traditionally conceived as Ukrainian identity:

> In our case, I think people see that Ukraine has a rock'n'roll band that they can easily understand, listen to and enjoy. People are not coming to our shows just because we are from Ukraine or because of what's happening there, but because of our music – and they say this to us after the shows. I think it's good that people can understand that Ukraine is not just folk. I'm not a big fan of folk, and many Ukrainian bands are using it to express national identity, but I think in a modern world you can do this also with other stuff, it doesn't matter. We are doing it in a rock'n'roll way. So people can understand that Ukraine has different genres of music. (Interviewee 4).

Similarly, Interviewee 2 remarks:

> I want to show my audience something authentic, as a way to discover Ukrainian culture, but also as a way to make this culture half Ukrainian and half international, blending different influences. I think that, especially in the beginning of the war, Ukrainian artists abroad were overusing Ukraine as a brand. It doesn't matter whether you sing about Ukraine or not, if you're not good, you're not good. I wanted to be different from those artists. I am not just made of Ukrainian identity, but I also have an international identity. This has made me question my own position in relation to my country, of course. Sometimes it happens, when I perform for a foreign audience, that I ask myself whether I am Ukrainian enough, and I'm afraid I'm not meeting expectations. But then I also realise that I cannot change who I am, that I am doing what I like, that I have my own taste and I don't have to love everything about my culture just because it is Ukrainian. Like me, I think lots of Ukrainian artists have now become international by living abroad and learning from other cultures.

For Interviewee 2, who fled to Berlin after the start of the war, maintaining or further opening up to international influences was key to their own role as bottom-up fundraiser and ambassador; together with being questioned by the repeated encounter with foreign audiences, the musician's perception of national identity was also strengthened by their understanding of the diversity of such perceptions. At the same time, Interviewee 2's experience underscores the grassroots, DIY characteristics of Ukrainian cultural ambassadorship, partially owing to state deficiencies:

> It turns out that, because the Ukrainian state was weak, there was an absence of rules internally, and people could only believe in other people. The absence of rules generates DIY, and DIY generates meaningful connections. (Interviewee 2).

From this and the previous quote, we may locate these hybrid DIY spaces between the national and the transnational: on the one hand, Interviewee 2's ideas connect with long-lasting debates about the tensions between cosmopolitanism, locality and the cultural merging of the two; on the other, they also highlight the demands brought about by the context of displacement, the horizontality of independent communities, and the musician's agency to choose and discard identity markers outside of rigid distinctions between the local and the foreign (and the traditional and the modern).

Blurring the boundaries can also be done within the music to create defamiliarizing contrasts between soundscapes and lyrics:

> At some point we produced a contradictory song. It was a pop, upbeat song, with a really funny and clownish video, but with also a message about the war in the lyrics [in English]. I wanted it that way. I wanted to make people listen to the music and also respond to the message somehow. Thing is, we can't pressure foreign listeners with lots of sad or violent things. It can also be done in other ways, including in a sort of half-serious, half-joking way. I feel it's two different ways of approaching. So, when it is about speaking to a European audience, we should also think about not pushing too much and about making content accessible. (Interviewee 1).

The role of cultural ambassador is complex: it is not always assumed voluntarily, it may come with limitations of agency or strict codes of conduct, and performers may find themselves caught up in the hands of a government whose interests they ultimately serve (Davenport 2010; Fosler-Lussier 2012; Biasioli 2023). In conjunction with cultural diplomacy or cultural ambassadorship, one might think of the initiatives of the US during the Cold War, aiming to spread its cultural exports, particularly jazz, throughout the world and specifically within the Soviet sphere of influence (Saito 2020). Ukraine too has its own history of music as diplomacy in the formation of the Ukrainian Republic Capella in 1919, sent around Europe in an effort by the Ukrainian People's Republic to promote Ukrainian culture abroad. (5) A century later, the indie-folk quartet Dakha Brakha was touring the world with similar aims, intensified by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbas to the point that, in their words, "every concert [was] an attempt to talk about the freedom we deserve" (Levesque 2019). In the US case, however, the ambassadors were managed to a degree by the United States government, and there was a direct political hand in the organisation of their tours, with the understanding that musicians would present a positive image of the country abroad. (6) The USA was not, of course, simultaneously fighting off an invasion of heartland territories, and therefore did not have to find an equilibrium between projecting the nation's image abroad and militarily defending its own sovereignty domestically. Ukraine today has to spend resources on both military and cultural objectives simultaneously – while the latter category is crucial for maintaining international

popular and material support, the former has an existential immediacy and constitutes a priority for resource allocation. This limitation of resources significantly affects the presence and organisation of Ukrainian state institutions in matters of cultural export.

However, within the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the resultant domestic and international attitudinal changes towards Ukrainian culture, musicians seem to have taken on musical ambassadorship on their own terms, spontaneously and with little coordination – at least in the beginning – with their government. Grassroots ambassadorial musical activity has formed and centred around horizontal connections between practitioners. One example of these initiatives is Musicians Defend Ukraine, initially formed in April 2022 as a grassroots community of Ukrainian practitioners, aiming to raise money in support of fellow musicians who were fighting on the frontlines (see also below). Through Musicians Defend Ukraine, artists have been able to work collectively, share and merge their audiences, increase their fundraising potential, and streamline the process of receiving and redistributing donations. Interviewee 4, one of the main organisers of the project, explains the process behind it:

> After two months of war, we decided that we had to do something. So we decided to use our skills and our connections to help. And then our friends, musicians and promoters, got involved too. The idea behind was to help specifically musicians and people from the music industry who went to the front line and needed equipment. Most of all because at the beginning of the war there was not enough equipment for everybody. So our money has gone towards helmets, first aid kits, body armour, rescue trucks, and this kind of stuff.

In this ambassadorship, musical activity became a vehicle for conveying to people outside the country what was happening inside it. Music's capacity for collective catharsis domestically was externalised in support of communicating Ukraine's plight transnationally:

> For the first two weeks, everyone stopped playing. Many had problems in carrying on with their artistic activity as it was before. I took the instrument after the third week of war, I played an improvisation, just for myself, and I felt relief. Because when you are playing you are also self-reflecting. So this was a self-reflecting method for me, therapeutic. But then I realised that music could be my weapon. Music is my way to save Ukraine. I'm physically not strong enough to go to the front, so I thought to become a cultural diplomat. Going around with my instrument. Using soft power to convince people, talk about Ukraine and tell them the truth. I still go to the frontline and sing songs with our soldiers. But I also think that we need to tell non-Ukrainians about what we're going through, because every Ukrainian already knows that. (Interviewee 5).

Social responsibility and musical resistance, in their national and transnational dimensions, were harnessed to bolster morale domestically and to galvanise global audiences, primarily Central or Western European, into active rather than passive support. This idea of 'doing things with music' stemmed from the context of a humanitarian anxiety:

After the full-scale invasion, we stopped writing. We couldn't write. It felt like it was a secondary thing. We volunteered a lot. We fundraised. But then after a few months we realised that we had to come up with something else and decided to do tours. I started organising concerts abroad, explaining through the music what was happening. If you tell people from a distance about what's happening is one thing – they go 'OK, it's very bad what's happening', but they might also not do anything about it, or think 'thank god it's not happening with me'. But when you're with the person and this person is telling you a story about what's happening, you feel closer and understand the situation better. So we started touring, and I think we did 50 concerts in total between 2022 and 2023. It was all DIY. Sometimes there were 30 people, sometimes 50, sometimes 80. I think 80 was the biggest gig. It felt important, though, and we raised funds. We were using our art to defend our country – music became a tool for us. (Interviewee 1).

Music – primarily in the dimension of the live performance – served the sociopolitical purpose of raising awareness, as well as the pragmatic, material one of collecting resources for the country's defence. Most of the money raised during the musicians' concerts abroad has gone to Musicians Defend Ukraine, which became primary for the Ukrainian touring musical community. Interviewee 4 explains:

And after that [setting up Musicians Defend Ukraine], we got the idea to go on tour by ourselves and our booking agent [in Germany] said 'OK, guys, let's try'. And then in two weeks he booked 30 shows for us. So we applied for permission from the Ministry of Culture. It wasn't easy. We missed 5 shows because of the delay in processing the documents, but in the end we went out there and started touring and promoting our fundraising campaign. We reached *BBC UK*, for example, *Rolling Stone USA*, *Kerrang*, *Clash*. We played big showcases such as Reeperbahn Festival, Eurosonic, Iceland Airways. It's been a lot of shows, around 130 shows, and a lot of travelling. At the same time, other musicians have been travelling and also collecting money in the same way.

Musicians also raised money for the defence of Ukraine in other ways. Ukraine's largest music export, Dakha Brakha, for example, often auctions hand-crafted objects during their concerts, as does the internationally renowned neo-folk musician Anastasiya Voytyuk. For some, the pragmatics of the fundraising mission exceeded the conveyance of the message contained in their music:

What has also changed is that before we were just playing our songs and just saying hi to the audience; now we're explaining why we are here, we talk about the fundraiser, about Musicians Defend Ukraine, about what we are doing. It's more diplomatic work and also we are going on many visits to radio stations, doing interviews - you have to be informative. (Interviewee 4).

Similarly to Interviewee 4, all of our interviewees indicated a feeling of personal and artistic responsibility to present Ukrainian identity on some level, even through minor gestures:

> Whenever you perform in front of an audience, it's always an opportunity to get a message across [...] and it doesn't have to be 'give us money for the tanks', [...] it can be just something like 'don't forget about us', you know. [...] It doesn't have to be pushy. When you perform, there has to be some element, sometimes it can be just a Ukrainian flag onstage. (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 3 feels a similar sense of responsibility but, in their work and its presentation, emphasises the difficulty and the trauma of the war in accordance with their own experience of it. They do implicitly acknowledge, however, that this is not a means of delivery to which all audiences will be receptive:

> I feel responsible for how people perceive me as a Ukrainian. But I do not form a special image for this. I have been behaving, interacting and telling my story based on universal norms of respect, humanity and dignity all my adult life. I don't need to be better for a foreign audience. Moreover, I do not adapt to the expectations of the audience. I've come to tell my story - about pain, rage, support, resistance, unity, people and barbarians. Usually, in advertising the concert [on social media], I warn that it will not be an easy and entertaining event, so it is better to come if you have enough emotional resources to share with us.

Interviewee 5 spoke of the ways in which instrumental music can portray Ukrainian national identity just as vocal music can. The bandura, like the sopilka flute, is a key part of the nation's musical tradition but, because of its distinctive appearance and relative complexity in relation to more commonly encountered instruments, it serves particularly well as a visual signifier of identity, on its own or within an ensemble.

> I can say about my instrument that it was and is still considered as something old-fashioned; when I was playing bandura as a child, I was not feeling that I was playing something modern like a guitar or a synthesiser, and you're like 'oh well'. But then I realised that people actually like bandura, it's something, you know, comfortable, familiar.

Thus, for some performers, the use of folk stylings, aesthetics, and instruments features in an ambassadorial role along with them, reinforcing the nation as a distinct group, with its own history and identifiable artistic tradition.

Direct management of these musicians and artists by the Ukrainian government, in the form of any cohesive cultural ambassador programme, has been limited by the subordination of most departments to the needs of the Ministry of Defence and the wartime administration of the country. In recent months, this has been impacted by legislation, which amongst other things has reduced the minimum age of conscription to 25 and extended the requirement of military service to Ukrainians living abroad; any conscription-age Ukrainian male seeking a new passport or similar official documentation from the government is required to present military registration documents (*Reuters* 2024; Arhirova and Kullab 2024). The new laws have affected touring musicians from within Ukraine and from the existing diaspora, creating a fundamentally unstable situation that has profoundly disrupted any attempt at making long-term, logistically complex plans, such as tours or festival

participations. The legislation is a formalisation and extension of policies previously enacted in Ukraine. For instance, in late 2023 the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence began to restrict and complicate the process of international travel in response to the unsanctioned emigration of some musicians who had been touring abroad and never returned. Other touring musicians, like Interviewee 3, were affected by these new preventive rules and de facto obliged to cancel future touring plans and forced to remain inside Ukraine. Interviewee 4 recalled significant uncertainty and disorganisation in their experiences of cooperating with the Ministry of Culture:

> The system of crossing the border was completely not regulated. It's not even officially written somewhere that you have to provide this and that to go out. So, you have to know the people from the Ministry. Then you have to like, negotiate and send all the documents, and then wait. We waited until the last moment, like a few hours before, and then we went to the border and were not sure if they would allow us to go out or not. Still, it's more regulated now, as I know from the other bands. But it's also quite tricky. In general, I don't think I feel much support from the Ministry of Culture because we played 130 shows and it was all left up to us. We have to give them reports and other stuff but, from them, there has been nothing. No help at all. But maybe they're helping well-known musicians more, probably.

Interviewee 5, forced by conscription legislation to effectively create a new band after two of their ensemble members were denied permission to leave Ukraine, had little in the way of direct dealings with the Ministry of Culture, but the impression they gave was similar. They describe a lack of clear organisation and communication, and feelings of resentment among musicians at the scale and complexity of the paperwork now required of them in order to perform abroad. This is tempered by Interviewee 5's recognition of the stress faced by the Ministry with the onset of the war and its new challenges, the diversion of practically all of the cultural budget towards defence, and the work of the Ukrainian Institute.

> And I remember everybody was so angry at the Ministry of Culture. But finally we said 'hey, guys, come on, we would not have these problems had Russia not attacked us". All the anger goes towards Russia because our Ministry of Culture was not prepared to work with so many tasks. And when the war started, all the budget which was projected for cultural support was shipped to the military.

More recently, the Ukrainian Institute has begun to actively seek out grassroots ambassadors for official roles, including Interviewee 1, who started working for this organisation after returning from their DIY tours:

> I have a role in the 'mainstream music' section, but it's a weird name because it's all music except jazz and classical. I book Ukrainian artists for festivals, for showcases, for discussion panels. Now we work only in Europe, but also trying to develop the Latin America bit and the African bit. We're trying to become a member of a wider dialogue, for example through panels about post-colonial experiences or how the geography of your country can influence your resonance or international interest, and how a country might feel excluded

> because they are far [from the global centres]. So, we've tried to join forces
> with Lithuania, Latvia, Poland to talk about their post-colonial experiences.

In their decolonial struggle, Ukraine seeks affiliations among the plethora of states that were colonial subjects of Russia or other empires, in an attempt to form a movement that could empower those music scenes traditionally considered at the global fringes. Interestingly, rather than relying on already famous names, the Ukrainian Institute's cultural diplomacy relies on emerging artists:

> We're trying to work with smaller artists because big artists can already afford
> to go to festivals themselves and they have enough money to afford it. I'm more
> interested in helping artists who are emerging. as they have a lot of potential
> to develop. (Interviewee 1).

A recent example of this is Interviewee 5, who in Spring 2024 travelled to South Africa in order to give concerts and workshops. Eventually, however, the decision regarding artist selection does not rest solely with the Ukrainian Institute, but mostly with the receiving organisation:

> Mostly we do open calls because we are a state institution and we cannot just
> choose without a proper competition. But we don't really choose. We just filter
> out the artists who performed in Russia or did something that's against the law,
> for example. After that we just send this long list to the festival or to the
> showcase and they choose who they like. (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 1 is very aware of the tokenistic mechanisms that may be at play in the selection of Ukrainian performers on European platforms since the start of the full-scale war, but values this as an opportunity to capitalise on the message that can be nonetheless conveyed:

> I can sometimes feel when they just have to get someone Ukrainian quick or
> when it is genuine. When the company is really big, they have to show that
> they have someone from Ukraine, sometimes they don't care that much about
> who that is, but they have to present someone not to get criticised in the media
> or somewhere else. But on the other hand, we're using this opportunity to
> actually have an artist there who will get as much as possible from it, give
> interviews and be active. Because when this opportunity arises, usually it is for
> a huge audience. (Interviewee 1).

In addition, while the Ukrainian Institute seems to give some guidelines as to their preferred nation-branding discourse, it leaves considerable space for the performer's agency within that discourse:

> The music in itself can also be apolitical, or whatever, just nice music without
> a particular social message. But then he or she will have to do something, like
> give interviews, talk between songs and make people aware. Obviously, we
> cannot control it. We cannot tell them 'you have to do this, otherwise we don't
> take you anymore.' In the Ukrainian Institute we have a brief document with
> recommendations. For example, 'if you go there please make sure not to take
> panels with Russians.' But after that we can't control it and we just leave it to

the artist to act as they feel. Sometimes they do fundraisers, tell people that if they buy their merch, 50% of that will go towards medicine for Ukrainian soldiers. You don't even have to do huge speeches, but you need to make something out of your performance. You have to be proactive. (Interviewee 1).

Nonetheless, whereas state institutions are activating to offer grassroots musicians support, this may still feel limited for some participants:

We also have the Ukrainian Institute; I did ten or eleven projects with the support of money from the Ukrainian government through this organisation. This year there is already a budget and people receiving grants, but they try to support mostly artists from the occupied territories. For example, I'm from the west, and for me it would be really difficult to receive funding. [...] I think the Ministry of Culture is not strong enough to do everything which is needed. The Ukrainian Institute is doing things, the Ministry of Culture is doing things, but we need changes. I would say we, Ukrainians, expect much more from them than they are doing. (Interviewee 5).

This depiction supports Interviewees 2 and 4 in their emphasis on DIY and the bottom-up organisation of cultural ambassadorship by artists and collectives; although the Ukrainian Institute has been able to perform some similar functions, in the absence of established protocols and reliable support from the Ministry of Culture, Ukrainian musicians have primarily organised things themselves in conjunction with their own contacts and networks. Indeed, Ukrainian cultural ambassadorship since Russia's full-scale invasion presents an excellent example of the contrast between a motivated civil society and a disorganised state apparatus (as described by Onuch and Hale 2018; Onuch 2022). In the words of Interviewee 6:

The thing is, we don't quite understand what the official projections of Ukrainian identity are. The Ukrainian state as an institution is weak. In Ukraine, there is a strong civil society and horizontal social connections. The state, of course, tries to contribute to creating some vision and demonstrating certain messages through various projects, but it happens inconsistently. Therefore, we make efforts ourselves to transmit to the world a set of objective characteristics of today's Ukraine. Currently, our understanding is that Ukrainians aspire to live according to the laws of the civilised world, to be responsible for their future, and to have the full set of rights defining a person in today's Western civilization.

Thus, despite the various images, sounds and speeches in which Ukraine is articulated on the international stage, the common denominator shared by our respondents seems to lie in civic responsibility and collective action reaffirming Ukraine as a sovereign country that endorses western liberal values. The danger posed by the Russian full-scale invasion urged musicians to inscribe these ideas as clearly and effectively as possible in the global discourse.

Conclusions

As Interviewee 3 argues, the war provoked "us, to *remember* who we are; and people abroad to *discover* who we are" (emphasis by the authors). In both instances, music played a huge role. The urgency that drove the musicians' actions concerned a fundamental reconfiguration of the relationship between the author and the values (and uses) of music: from an end in itself, music became valued (and used) to help achieve the survival of the country and articulate, with renewed intensity, national identity and state sovereignty.

Importantly, this process was spontaneous and led by the musicians themselves. In the face of overburdened state institutions, Ukrainian artists took it upon themselves to mobilise and collaborate, first in support of their friends and colleagues, then of their country as a whole. Although some aid has been given by the government, it has come with an extensive bureaucracy that risks adding to the pressures of organising international activities or even jeopardising what has so far been an effective tool for spreading awareness of Ukraine's struggle.

Eventually, musicians have employed different tactics to tie their music to the geographical place of provenance: Ukrainian language, folk motives, political messages in the English lyrics, performance, video projections, speeches in between songs, flags, and so on. There is no such thing as a homogenous method - what is homogeneous is the urge to communicate something about the nation, to utter a word for Ukraine about Ukraine. This word, as it affirms alterity from the Russian influence, may or may not seek to disrupt Western expectations and potential exoticisation, but it is certainly committed to putting Ukraine on the world map as a self-standing cultural and political entity. What is primary is the end: Ukrainian practitioners are perfectly conscious of the mechanisms of tokenisation in which their products may become entangled but see tokenism as beyond their control and simultaneously as one of the possible (and legitimate) means to popularise their country's music, compound national identity and resistance. Moreover, tokenism, as well as exoticisation and stereotypes, are interpreted not as immobile categories, but can be transformed, through practices of performing and listening, into meaningful, global and post-colonial conversations about Ukraine.

The efficacy of the initiatives of Ukrainian touring musicians since Russia's full-scale invasion, with hundreds of gigs, tens of thousands of spectators and significant amounts of funds raised, underscores that cultural diplomacy is not exclusively a state endeavour but also encompasses grassroots actors. By empowering individuals and communities to actively shape international relations through the sharing of human, cultural and political experiences at the ground level, grassroots cultural diplomacy has, in the case of Ukraine, significantly complemented state practices of soft power, mediatic information, sensibilisation, resilience and defence.

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A note on transliteration: for both Ukrainian and Russian we used the Library of Congress system.

Endnotes

(1) In the strict sense of not having been organised or led by figures from within the political establishment.

(2) During the three months of the uprising, the 'war of songs' changed the tone of identity-affirming Ukrainian music from 'carnivalesque and jocular' to 'aggressive' and eventually 'mournful' (Hansen et al.: 33).

(3) As Clark (2024) argues in relation to Ukrainian music and resilience post-2022, these music-driven atmospheres constitute sonic micro-environments within the country's acoustic ecology, establishing a tone and a context for the objectives contained within them, and infringing upon each other's borders in attempts to disrupt one another. Beyond the polyphony and polysemy of these voices as a collective, Maria Sonevytsky (2016; 2019) has written of the 'wildness' (2019, 2) and 'semiotic hybridity' (2016, 293) which she considers characteristic of 'post-Orange Revolution, post-post-Soviet' Ukrainian cosmopolitan music (ibid., p. 292); that is, that individual and small group voices can often contain pluralities within themselves. Sonevytsky (2019, 2-5) defines wildness in this context as 'tropes of exoticism ... strategically integrated in musical performances to make political claims'; the musical form 'domesticates' wildness, making it governable, categorizable, intelligible and commodifiable as music. Again, such wildness is (un)recognized and (un)interpreted differently according to the audience listening to Ukrainian music.

(4) Interviews were conducted in English. We acknowledged that our limited knowledge of the Ukrainian language may have constrained both our available sources and our interviewees' ability to fully and naturally express themselves (though the level of English of our respondents was very fluent). We welcome Ukrainian-speaking colleagues to address any related gaps in our research. In this article, we have edited some of the responses to ensure grammatical tidiness and omit some fillers and tangents. Specific care has been taken to preserve meaning whilst ensuring ease of comprehension for the reader.

(5) After the dissolution of the UPR in 1921, the ensemble would reform as the Ukrainian National Chorus and tour North America in 1922. Among the most popular works in their repertoire were songs by Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych, including the popular carol which would later become known in English as 'Carol of the Bells'.

(6) In particular, one which could use Black American performers and Black American music to downplay the severity of its contemporary segregationist policies.

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