

# Ukrainian cultural diplomacy and musical creation 2014-2024

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Abstracts

**Arkushyna Anna**

## **“Voice as part of a body in a vocal composition (“... au ciel enflammé” for soprano and electronics)”**

This presentation of my work explores the human voice as an integral part of the body in vocal music composition. The piece ...au ciel enflammée (2023) for soprano and electronics serves as an example. This work consists of eight scenes that depict the transition from silence to sung text, exploring the voice in all its physical and emotional expressiveness. In this context, the voice is not merely an instrument for conveying text, but a central element closely linked to the physical and psychological states of a character. The presentation examines how the voice, as a physical part of the body, can convey various complex sounds and emotional nuances. The focus is on the different types of information the voice communicates and how these are employed in composition. ...au ciel enflammée serves as a case study to demonstrate how working with text, voice, and body can influence the dramaturgy and overall conception of a work. Here, electronics play a supporting role by enhancing and expanding the natural sonic and theatrical aspects of the voice without overshadowing its central importance. This research shows that the voice, as an expression of the body, plays a crucial role in vocal music and that its diverse aspects - from breathing to linguistic articulation - can have a profound emotional impact. This talk illustrates how the close connection between voice, body, and text can open up new paths in the composition of vocal music.

**Bogucki Marcin**

## **“Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra: Shifting paradigms of politics and classical music”**

In my talk I would like to focus on the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra, an ensemble created after Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine in 2022. UFO was founded by Keri-Lynn Wilson, Canadian Ukrainian conductor, with the help of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, Metropolitan Opera and the Polish National Opera in Warsaw. Members of the orchestra were recruited from refugees who were forced to leave their country and Ukrainian musicians from European orchestras, as well as leading musicians from Kiev, Lviv, Kharkiv, Odessa and other parts of the country. The first goal of my talk will show the shift of paradigms of some Western institutions towards classical music from Russia and Ukraine after 2022. I would like to draw attention to the statements of Waldemar Dąbrowski, director of the Polish National Opera in Warsaw, commenting on the response of the cultural milieu to the war and confront it with the dominant discourse before the full-scale invasion, connected especially to the cooperation with Russian institutions.

Additionally, I would like to analyze the repertoire of the UFO and will show how classical music can serve as a way of expression of political issues. The programmes of orchestra's concert tours

consisted of the works from the Western canon, pieces of Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin and Dvořák, combined with contemporary Ukrainian composers (Silvestrov, Stankovych, Poleva). In this way the orchestra was trying to amplify the voices that were rarely heard in the Western philharmonic repertoire and also contribute to the positive nation branding of the country.

Glew Anna

**“Ukrainian popular music after Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion: narrating Ukraine and its place on the map”**

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the topic of war has been extensively covered by Ukrainian popular music across a range of genres (including hip-hop, rock, pop, and electronic), featuring multiple themes.

The proposed paper will focus on the topic on Ukraine’s imagined place on the map, and it will examine Ukrainian popular songs with English subtitles. The paper will address two key questions: What narratives of Ukraine’s relations with its European neighbours and the West in general does Ukrainian popular music produce? What image of Ukraine does Ukrainian popular music construct?

While acknowledging that the main audience for such narratives is the Ukrainian listeners (as can be exemplified by the narrative ‘the West is helping us’), it is important to consider the efforts to attract foreign (predominantly Western) audiences through music: since the invasion, many Ukrainian artists have added English-language subtitles to their music videos on YouTube, giving their foreign audiences a chance to respond to those lyrics in comments, and thus engaging them in the process of constructing a particular image of Ukraine. Additionally, several Ukrainian artists created war-related songs in collaboration with artists from other European countries (including Poland, Germany, and Lithuania), and the paper will explore the potential of the lyrics of these songs to contribute to the construction of Ukraine’s image for non-Ukrainian audiences.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the issue of accessibility of narratives in song lyrics to foreign audiences. For example, some references (such as to well-known Western hip-hop artists and The Lord of the Rings characters) may seek to show that Ukraine is part of the Western cultural sphere, while other more complex references (such as to Ukraine’s history) may in fact appear rather difficult for foreign audiences to understand, and might potentially contribute to the construction of an ‘exotic’ or ‘oriental’ image of Ukraine, rather than making it better understood.

The paper will examine the lyrics and music videos of Ukrainian popular songs that were created after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and have more than a million views on Youtube.

Haidamachuk Olha

**A song as a musical key to memory**

A favorite song as a part of a personally valuable memory is at the same time an acoustic space of comfort tonality and melody, which can serve as a source of renewal of strength for a person in stressful conditions. As a 2022 fellow of the research group “Prisma Ukraina: War, Migration and Memory” at the Forum of Transregional Research in Berlin (01/09/2022 - 31/12/2022) I conducted 13 oral semi-structured interviews with Ukrainians in October - December 2022 (11 women and 2 men) in Berlin to study the shifts in tonalities of the forcibly displaced Ukrainians’ memories under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Every interview I ended with a question about the most favorite Ukrainian song of the respondent. Most of the chosen songs were not repeated. Only two from 13 interviewees presented the same song as their favorite Ukrainian song, namely the world-famous “Schedrivka” by Ukrainian composer M. Leontovych. Many respondents chose different Ukrainian folk songs (for example, “*Sila Ptakha na Topolyu*” / “A Bird Sat on a Poplar” or “*Rozpryahayte, khloptsi, koney*” / “Unharness, boys, horses...”). Some respondents chose more than one favorite song, while several respondents chose the songs, which were then currently popular, like “*Oy, u Luzi Chervona Kalyna*” / “Oh, There is a Red Viburnum in the Meadow” or “*Stefaniya*” / “Stephanie”. Based on the assumption that each person has their own basic tonality, it is interesting to find out how the tonality of a song presented as a favorite correlates with the tonalities variability used by the respondents in their interviews. What layers of memory resonate most with songs defined by respondents as their “favorites” and what memories can they unlock?

Havelková Tereza

### The Czech and Ukrainian Musical Responses to the Threat to National Sovereignty: A Decolonial Perspective

The Czech Republic has been one of the biggest supporters of Ukraine in the region. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Czech Republic has received more than 300 000 Ukrainian refugees and provided extensive military aid. The Czechs’ official and popular responses to the Russian invasion have been informed by their own historical experience, and especially the trauma of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. Both Czech and Ukrainian politicians have also evoked the Munich Agreement of 1938 to advocate for Ukraine. This paper seeks to offer a comparative perspective on the Czech and Ukrainian musical responses to the threat to national sovereignty, primarily focusing on opera. I will start by examining the Czech Republic’s entry to last year’s Eurovision Song Contest (*My Sister’s Crown*) to point out some of the common threads of these responses, before moving to the operatic case studies, namely the contemporary opera *Ukraine—Terra Incognita*, and the 1968 production of Bedřich Smetana’s Czech canonical opera *Libuše*. These diverse case studies will allow me to address the recourse to Slavic folklore and myth in these musical responses, which has generally been approached through the reductive concept of nationalism. Within the Czech context, for example, it was criticized by figures such as Václav Havel for being “yet another national revival” with limited political productivity. I propose to rethink these musical responses from a decolonial perspective developed for the study of socialist and post-socialist East-Central Europe (Pucherová and Gáfrík 2015; Kołodziejczyk and Huigen 2023).

Kobzar Alisa

### "Compositional Tools and Creative Output – A Composer’s Perspective"

In my artist talk, "*Compositional Tools and Creative Output – A Composer's Perspective*," I will explore how the digital tools we choose influence various aspects of a composer's creative output. This presentation introduces the central themes of my ongoing master's thesis, reflecting on my practice as a composer working across instrumental, computer music, mixed media, and multimedia art. Drawing from years of experience with software like Max/MSP, SuperCollider, and Pure Data, I am developing a critical perspective on how these tools shape creative processes and outcomes. I will discuss the implicit biases embedded in both commercial and open-source music-making software, examining how these impact artistic decision-making. The talk includes reflections on my older and recent works, with a detailed focus on my composition "*Projections*"—a piece for large instrumental ensemble and automatic piano player—performed in October at the Musikprotokoll / Steirischer Herbst festival in Graz.

Melnyk Lidia

### Let there be light by Bohdana Frolyak: from work to message

At 14<sup>th</sup> July 2023 the world premiere of a work by Ukrainian composer Bohdana Frolyak *Let there be light* took place at the first BBC Proms.

It was a landmark event for Ukrainian music culture from several perspectives. First, it was not often that Ukrainian composers wrote works commissioned by BBC. Second, this performance was a kind of female statement: a work by a female composer was conducted by a female conductor (Dalia Stasevska). As Janos Gereben wrote, "At the forefront of dealing with the deplorable, centuries-long gender inequality in classical music, the 2023 edition of the festival is a step on the road to a hoped-for 'year of the woman'. The opening and closing nights will be led by Dalia Stasevska and Marin Alsop, respectively, two of the 10 women conducting concerts this year. [...] Eleven of this year's 21 premieres are by female composers, including the Ukrainian Bohdana Frolyak and Master of the King's Music Judith Weir. 'We're moving in the right direction towards equitable representation,' says Proms Director David Pickard, 'but it's a slow process'."

However, the most important message of that first BBC Proms was the premiere of an Ukrainian work, which during the war became a symbol of an idea, a message of cultural diplomacy.

Before we move on to a more detailed analysis of the messages of this work, which has already become a landmark for Ukrainian musical culture of our time, let's try to understand what we mean by the concept of cultural diplomacy.

According to Waltraud Dennhardt-Herzog, director of the Austrian Cultural Forum London, "Cultural diplomacy is a tool and a medium that works through the power of human curiosity. Artists who produce or create something special will always attract attention and encourage exchange. Cultural diplomacy has a much broader and more open field of action than traditional diplomacy, because controversial discussions are possible without coming into conflict with the sovereignty of states. We only realize how important cultural diplomacy is when it is no longer practiced. Then a part of the air we need to breathe is missing, then the fourth leg at the table that stabilizes it is missing".

I have chosen this passage, because it seems to me that the main function of the work we are going to discuss today is a stabilising function. That is why this particular work has become one of the most striking manifestations of cultural diplomacy: it carries the idea of stabilisation.

Bohdana Frolyak is one of the most interesting representatives of Ukrainian musical culture today. First of all, by the very origin and history of the shaping of her talent.

I would like to especially emphasise these points here, firstly, because they are practically unknown to a wider community of musicologists, and secondly, because it seems to me that they had a special influence on the formation of the composer in general and the work in particular.

That is why I chose this work as a starting point for a case study of Ukrainian composer Bohdana Frolyak, the case study of her formation as a creative personality and especially the changes and evolution that marked her work during the last ten years of war.

Born 1968 in Carpathian village Vydyniv she became her first music teacher in her home village, it was a student of Janusz Korczak, the author of his own methods of music education Vasyl Kuflyuk. She continued her studies at the Faculty of Composition at the M.V. Lysenko Lviv State Conservatory (now Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy) in the class of Volodymyr Flys and Myroslav Skoryk. Since 1991 she had been teaching composition at her alma mater. Her compositions have been performed at many festivals in Ukraine and abroad.

After 2014 she paid more and more attention to sacred music and after the full-scale invasion of 2022, she becomes a real musical ambassador of Ukraine, writing works commissioned by the most prominent institutions.

The actual power of the diplomatic narrative in music carried by this work was confirmed by its subsequent performances, including in April 2024 in Finland (support concert for Ukraine at Helsinki Music Centre) and in November in Germany: in Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe and in Musiktheater in Revier Gelsenkirchen.

### Nesterenko Oksana

#### “Exposing Ecocide: Musical Diplomacy of Roman Grygoriv and Illia Razumeiko” (on-line)

Many popular songs were created and became viral during the Euromaidan; back in 2014-2021, however, the themes of revolution and war attracted limited attention of composers of art music. The escalation of the conflict and the unprecedented cruelty of torture, destruction, and civilian casualties have significantly changed their outlook. The need to draw international attention to the cruelty of war triggered the transformation of apolitical composers into messengers, diplomats, social commentators, and sonic writers of history.

In this presentation, I focus on *GAIA-24: Opera del Mondo* (2023-2024) by composer duo Roman Grygoriv and Illia Razumeiko. This experimental opera explores the explosion of the dam of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant by the Russian forces, which caused the flooding of wildlife habitats and the death of over fifty people and thousands of livestock. The opera is inspired by the French philosopher Bruno Latour's essay “Is Europe's soil changing beneath our feet?” (2022) and presents video footage of the changing landscapes of Kakhovka reservoir shot in the summer of 2023. In May 2024, *GAIA-24* was the highlight of the Rotterdam Festival and will be performed in major European cities, including the Venice Biennale.

While reminding the European audiences about the horrific act of ecocide committed in the course of the full-scale invasion, Grygoriv and Razumeiko continue their work of cultural diplomacy, which started in the spring 2022 with the international tour of their opera *Chornobyl'dorf* and multimedia work *Mariupol*. In 2022-2024 *Chornobyl'dorf* was performed in

seven European countries and the US and received multiple awards. In performances and presentations, the composers reminded their audiences that they were alive because of the military support of Western allies. Drawing upon major American scholarship on Cold War cultural diplomacy (Fosler-Lussier 2012, Schmelz 2015), this presentation compares the success of Ukrainian composers which originated from their individual initiatives to American state-sponsored projects. The grassroots cultural diplomacy by young Ukrainian musicians reaches wider international audiences and presents Ukraine to the world as a truly democratic state.

**Shuvalova Iryna**

**“Ukrainian popular music as a space for queer solidarity during wartime”**

In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, particularly in the aftermath of the 2022 full-scale invasion, Ukraine’s queer community, while facing significant new challenges, also found emerging opportunities to increase its visibility and advocate for its rights, including in the cultural space.

In Ukraine’s public arena, where previously non-heteronormative expressions of gender and sexuality were largely considered taboo, a fragile space of visibility began to emerge, with public figures and organizations advocating more openly for the rights of LGBTQI+ people or, in some cases, coming out as queer themselves. The draft civil union law, despite currently facing prolonged hurdles in the parliamentary committees, could give the long-awaited legal status to same-sex partnerships. Meanwhile, the active involvement of LGBTQI+ people in Ukraine’s war effort, especially in the military, has helped to increase the community’s visibility in Ukrainian society, even while provoking animosity from some of its more conservative members. In July 2024, the first community hub for LGBTQI+ veterans and servicepersons opened in Kyiv.

In the musical space, this gradual shifting of societal attitudes resulted in the emergence of new pro-LGBTQI+ voices. Some of these artists, like the singer TUCHA who identifies as bisexual, have spoken openly about their queerness and addressed discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community in their songs. Others, like the pop singer Olya Polyakova who led the Ukrainian column at the 2023 London Pride, are vocal allies, regularly speaking up in support of equal rights for queer people. Others yet, like Stasik and Alyona Alyona, while not directly addressing the issues facing the queer community, nevertheless help to advance broader acceptance of difference in Ukrainian society by challenging the heteronormative expectations around how individuals perform their femininity or masculinity. In my paper, I will examine Ukrainian popular music as a space for queer solidarity shaped by the complex range of influences from the ongoing Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.

**Stahrenberg Carolin**

**“Music – Gender – Migration: Historiographic perspectives on gendered migratory paths and musical contexts”**

How does gender as a category become effective in music-related migration contexts, and how can it be analyzed? In this paper, I address issues of gender, music, and migration from a

historiographical perspective, focusing on intersectional intertwining in different historical contexts. Looking at the past, we learn about gendered, and also specific female fields of action that fostered musical creativity; but we also notice barriers exposed, particularly to migrating women. Opportunities and obstacles to music-related migration develop in a complex field of intersectional relationships in which class, gender, and ethnicity, but also age, are important factors. Special attention will be drawn to forced migration driven by the antisemitic persecution of the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 1940s; finally, possible conclusions for contemporary challenges on migration and music will be drawn.

**Oksana Starshova / Polina Myronenko:**

“The Power of Popular Music in Wartime Ukraine”

*Since the whole-scale invasion in Ukraine started it has produced a huge response in various media and art forms. Memes, cartoons, graphic novels, street art create the war imagery and portray the effect of the war on the society and individual. Our project focuses on the popular songs created during the war, especially those accompanied with the music video. The songs perform various functions – they express emotions: of pain, sorrow, hope, they might be propagandistic calling for action, they might manifest deeply personal feelings about the lost world of peace, they help to survive, and they help to reflect on the impact of the war on everyday life of the people and the country, in other words, on the situation of existential crisis. Songs refer to the moral issues and values in human life and they articulate the pride for the national heroes and national culture. In the project, we try to collect and categorize the songs, trace the changes in their mood and modality throughout almost three years of the war. Although some of them are of different professional quality, our aim is to document the functioning of the songs created by the war as the personal and political response to the events. Our primary interest lies in decoding the messages inscribed in the music, lyrics and visuals.*

**Renata Suchowiejko**

“Music as a Soft Power Tool in Times of Crisis: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives”

The war in Ukraine has reshaped the world as we know it and introduced a new musical landscape onto the world stage. Ukraine’s musical movement is fuelled by an immense social energy that permeates all facets of musical culture: performance, creation, technology, production and management. Music has become a powerful tool Ukraine uses to assert its international position and foster cultural development, showcasing the resilience and dedication of its citizens amid wartime challenges. While music serves many roles across different cultures, it serves a universal function in managing social relationships, especially during times of social uncertainty and crises. In addition, it plays a key role in forming individual and collective identities within groups, serving as a medium of value and a tool of communication on the transnational level. Music, particularly popular music, significantly contributes to the pursuit of international soft power and is recognised as an essential factor in nation-branding practices. Therefore, analysing the new musical phenomena arising from the war in Ukraine demands a shift in approach and the adoption of novel research methodologies.

Are we ready for this change in the field of musicology and, more broadly, in the humanities? Furthermore, the rapid advancement of disruptive artificial intelligence technologies has transformed our world and will inevitably impact our research. The projection of Ukraine's image abroad largely occurs in the virtual realm, facilitated by the power of the internet: video clips, concert recordings, pop music events, streaming platforms and viral content. These forms of media create vast multi-modal datasets, which necessitates a prompt consideration of how to analyse these data effectively. Will this amazing musical and artistic movement, influenced by the ongoing war, translate into deeper understandings of Ukraine within academia? Will it stimulate methodological reflection and knowledge transfer between scholars? To what extent can existing critical tools and methodologies help us re-evaluate Ukraine's musical and create new tools for analysing these emerging phenomena? These are some of the preliminary questions to be addressed in this presentation, which focuses primarily on methodological considerations.

Suhov Ioan

### **GéoRécits: Mapping the Exile of Artists through an Online Collaborative Database**

This paper introduces GéoRécits, an innovative project dedicated to mapping the exile of artists through an online collaborative database. GéoRécits documents and analyses the transnational movements of highly skilled migrants compelled to leave their countries due to political or social pressures. Central to this project is the collaboration of researchers from diverse disciplines and backgrounds, combining expertise from fields such as sociology, digital humanities, and migration studies. By integrating individual narratives with geospatial data, the project builds an interactive database that captures the trajectories, challenges, and networks that emerge in exile. This digital archive not only preserves the stories of displaced artists but also encourages public engagement, enabling users to access, explore, and contribute to the understanding of complex migration pathways. GéoRécits aims to deepen our comprehension of cultural migration while advocating for greater visibility of the intersections between art, identity, and displacement.

Key Words: Migration, Exile, Collaborative Database, Displacement Narratives, Advocacy

Tukova Iryna

### **Resistance Through Art Music: The Ukrainian Case**

Global interest in Ukrainian culture, particularly art music, intensified after February 24, 2022—the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion. Since early spring 2022, numerous concerts in support of Ukraine have taken place, with Ukrainian artists performing on the world's major stages and presenting classical and contemporary compositions by Ukrainian authors. Ukrainian art music professionals view cultural diplomacy as a means to introduce the world to the country's history and present. In this context, special attention should be given to newly created compositions dedicated to the theme of the ongoing war. What messages do Ukrainian composers convey through their music? What is the specificity of these messages?

In this paper, I propose using the methodological framework of resistance studies to answer these questions. Resistance studies are characterized by their interdisciplinarity, allowing for the



application of their methodology across various fields. The core of resistance is non-acceptance (according to Chaudhary, Hviid, Marsico, Villadsen 2017). During the war in Ukraine, observations suggest that composers and their creativity resist both the circumstances of the war and the political narratives propagated by Russia. In general, artistic creativity resists the violence and death inherent in war, generating new meanings that reflect and capture the emotions, desires, and hopes of Ukrainians.

This paper will observe the ways of the resistance through music. Special attention will be given to the large-scale composition *To Victory* for vocal sextet and symphony orchestra by Olena Illytska (b. 1977), which premiered in 2023 during the *Ukrainian Music Days* in Warsaw, Poland.

### Tulmets Elsa

#### **“The Baltic States' support to Ukrainian musical diplomacy: building on a long resistance and resilience tradition”**

Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian people have experienced throughout their history various waves of colonial experiences - from Sweden, Russia and Germany mainly. They managed to keep their respective language and culture in particular in resisting through music and arts. One of the oldest manifestation of institutionalisation of these traditions are the singing and dance festivals organised in the three countries since the 19th century, and also throughout the world during Communist times as a means for resistance and resilience. This particularly allowed for what was called the "Singing revolution" from 1988 to 1991, at the times of crackdown of the Soviet political regime. How far are tools of musical diplomacy, some of which are part of UNESCO's immaterial heritage, nowadays mobilised in the Baltic States to support Ukrainian musical and creative diplomacy in the context of war with Russia, especially since February 2022? This contribution will give some insights into specific examples, mainly from the Estonian case.

### Zaika Alisa (Composer)

#### **First composition : "Geo's Avtoportret": caprice for violin and voice**

This is a one-performer study exploring the use of voice by a violin player in a solo piece. The voice part uses some effects and noises in addition to a text by a Ukrainian poet, screenwriter and journalist Heorhii "Geo" Shkurupii (1903-1937) who belongs to the "Executed Renaissance" - an entire generation of Ukrainian artists that was physically removed by the Russian Soviet government in the 1930's. Shkurupii was sent to the Solovki concentration camp and executed in 1937 at the age of 34.

The violin part in this piece is not an accompaniment, it rather works in synthesis with the voice to create a certain persona, "portrait" of the author - Shkurupii's poem used in the piece is called "Avtoportret" and is one of his most recognisable works, serving as a great example of the Futurist direction in Ukrainian Modernism. The poem, actually written with the Latin alphabet is

presented below in a schematic way - the original notation uses a specific visual design of the text.

geo O ge

ego

geo Wkurupij

geometr i

ja

geograf i

ja

geo log i ja ego

evrop A frik

siA

merik A vstrali A

geo O ge ego

Geo Wkurupij

AVTOPORTRET

Geo Shkurupij, 1922

### Second composition : "SHPOL" program notes

"Yulian Shpol" was the chosen pseudonym of another Ukrainian poet-futurist and representative of the Executed Renaissance, Mykhaylo Yalovyi (1895-1937). This composition for solo piano is based on an untitled poem by the author from his only published poetry book "The Tops". Shpol spent 4 years in the Solovki concentration camp and was executed at the age of 42 in 1937, among other 1,111 political prisoners, most of them being Ukrainian artists and other representatives of the "intelligentsia". This was done as a celebratory act for the Bolshevik revolution anniversary.

There is no setting of text in this piece, here the poem serves as both an epigraph to it and the main source of its essence and spirit - the music is as a "translation" of the words into a more abstract language.

Other sources of inspiration for the musical material are folk/traditional song motives as well as the Modernist era soundworlds of Ukrainian composers such as Borys Liatoshynsky and Levko Revutsky. Below is the poem's English translation done by the composer.

I won't attend the funeral  
of the old world,

I will not sing a *marche funebre* for it, -  
I'll take a blood-soaked flag and pierce my chest with it. I'll fight again,  
I'll go ahead again.  
And in the worldly Aether I'll dissolve.  
And with the atom of my soul I'll feel the myriads of depth. - No, I won't weep in vain, I won't.  
I'll weave my life out of the  
scarlet wreaths.  
Yulian Shpol, 1923

Olga Zaitseva-Herz

### Brutal Battles of Soft Power: Music on the Global Stage in the Russia's War on Ukraine

This paper examines how Russian political powers leverage cultural figures to advance their agendas abroad during the ongoing war in Ukraine, while Ukrainian musicians take on roles as diplomatic ambassadors. The analysis focuses on the role of Ukrainian and Russian music in the EU and overseas diasporas, highlighting the intersections of musical diplomacy, political resistance, and soft power. Russia has historically utilized its performers as symbols of high culture on the international stage. However, since the onset of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the involvement of Russian performers has acquired new significance in the context of unprecedented aggression. High-profile concerts, such as those by soprano Anna Netrebko in Wiesbaden, Germany, have provoked significant protests and legal battles involving Ukrainian and Russian activists, the intendant, the German Theater Orchestra, the conductor, and local government authorities. Similarly, performances by the Russian State Ballet in South Korea and the USA have faced considerable backlash. These events have exposed the strategic use of culture to obscure political intentions and perpetuate the myth of "great Russian culture," serving as a tool to project a positive image of the aggressor nation amidst its full-scale war on Ukraine. Conversely, Ukrainian artists have struggled to assert their stance and sustain a cultural front, frequently avoiding joint performances with Russian counterparts—a position that has occasionally been misunderstood by the Western concert managers. This dual dynamic is further complicated by the Russian pop scene, where artists like Philip Kirkorov, Grigory Leps, and Shaman participate in state-organized concerts, promoting aggression against Ukraine. Their propaganda efforts have successfully influenced Russian diasporas across numerous Western countries. This study explores how cultural figures function as political agents, disseminating political messages, supporting government actions, and amplifying their agendas abroad. It also investigates how music and art are used as facades to achieve political objectives during the full-scale war in Ukraine, often bypassing sanctions, local censorship, and related policies under the guise of artistic projects.

## Workshop on November 29 th

### “Vocal and Instrumental Improvisation in Live Performance of a Composition as a Method of Facilitating Spontaneity and Deep Responsiveness in Artistic Expression“

On example of the part of a contemporary opera *When The Sirens Sing* this presentation will explore the role of improvisation in various parts of compositions and examine how it influences the meaning of the performance for the audience, as well as the artist's perception of their own contribution. *When The Sirens Sing* is a contemporary opera that amplifies the voices of Ukrainian female refugees through music, drama, and sound art. Conceptualized as part of a series following Olga Zaitseva- Herz's composition *Bakhmut Rhapsody*—which premiered at the Ukrainian Contemporary Music Festival in New York City in 2024—this project delves into the devastating impact of the Russian war on Ukraine. Drawing on personal documentary stories collected through interviews, the opera weaves together traditional Ukrainian music with contemporary styles, integrating field recordings of sirens and explosions alongside folk songs recorded during ethnographic fieldwork. These musical elements are further enriched by visual art and choreography, creating a multidimensional performance. The project seeks to document and convey the human experiences of war, empower refugee artists, and raise global awareness. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of the war in Ukraine and its far-reaching consequences for humanity and the environment.