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# MUZIKA VYKSTANT KARUI: VERTĖ, ESTETIKA AR TERAPIJA? Music in Wartime: Value, Aesthetics or Therapy?

### SUMMARY

The article examines the mass musical product created after February 24, 2022 in Ukraine, and also focuses on Ukrainian music, which is an identifier of Ukrainianness in the world. The phenomenon of “music of war” is studied in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation and the role of Ukrainians in the evolution of wartime musical culture is depicted. Attention is also drawn to the recent change in the musical tastes of Ukrainians, which is interpreted as cultural resistance and a way of struggle. Some Ukrainians call music “therapy during war”, because it praises the moral and spiritual values of the Ukrainian people, and also forms aesthetic ideals in the axiological oppositions “peace / war”, “good / evil”, “own / foreign”, etc. We screened the musical moods of Ukrainians during air raids (in shelters at the “Universytet” and “Teatralna” metro stations in the center of Kyiv) and formed an outside opinion about these moods from the perspective of a foreigner (Chinese) who lived in Kyiv throughout this difficult period. The research partially answers the question: does there exist aesthetics in the music of war and does music “heal” during war.

### SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas masinis muzikinis produktas, sukurtas Ukrainoje po 2022 m. vasario 24 d., taip pat sutelkiamas dėmesys į ukrainietišką muziką, padedančią identifikuoti ukrainiečius pasaulyje. Karo muzikos fenomenas tiriamas Rusijos ir Ukrainos konfrontacijos kontekste, atskleidžiamas ukrainiečių vaidmuo, plėtojantis karo laikų muzikinei kultūrai. Taip pat atkreipiamas dėmesys į pastaruoju metu pasikeitusį ukrainiečių muzikinį skonį. Šie pokyčiai interpretuojami kaip kultūrinis pasipriešinimas ir kovos būdas. Kai kurie ukrainiečiai muziką vadina „terapija vykstant karui“, nes joje aukštinamos ukrainiečių moralinės ir dvasinės vertybės, taip pat formuojami estetiniai idealai, atsižvelgiant į aksiologines opozicijas „taika / karas“, „gėris / blogis“, „savas / svetimas“ ir t. t. Straipsnyje pasigilinta į ukrainiečių muzikines

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: karo muzika, ukrainiečių muzika, muzikos terapija, estetika, muzikologija.

KEY WORDS: war music, Ukrainian music, music therapy, aesthetics, musicology.

nuotaikas per oro antskrydžius (Kijevo centre esančiose *Universytet* ir *Teatralna* metro stotyse įrengtose slėptuvėse). Susidaryta išorinė nuomonė apie šias nuotaikas, žvelgiant iš užsieniečio (kino), visą šį sunkų laikotarpį gyvenusio Kijeve, perspektyvos. Atlikus tyrimą, iš dalies atsakoma į klausimą: ar karo muzikoje svarbi estetika ir ar muzika gydo vykstant karui?

## INTRODUCTION

From February 24, 2022, Ukrainians entered the acute phase of the war. During this period, Ukrainian mass culture began to look for ways to adapt to new realities. Art actually became a “cultural front”, because every aspect of it had to be oriented towards victory. This category has already been written about in modern art history (Denning 1996), emphasizing the theme of depression in the culture on the one hand and the new challenges of the times following tragedy and sacrifice on the other. Therefore, prospects for understanding this war in new colors are opening up for Ukraine, where both artists and connoisseurs of culture become participants and creators at the same time. It is just like in ancient China when “the civil and the military were understood as mutually complementary forces, <...> underpinned military expansion with a wide-ranging cultural campaign intended to bring military success, and the martial values associated with it, into the mainstream of cultural life” (Waley-Cohen 2006). In this aspect, we recall the German thinker O. Spengler, who more than a century ago pondered what exactly makes culture a purely human phenomenon, listing abstract concepts, language, the purpose of life that go beyond instincts (Spengler 2011). And more – Spengler described the history of the development of cultures and their crises as a way to civiliza-

tion. In this whole process, it is homo sapiens that becomes the formative component of culture. And let’s note: neither the war nor any other social changes stopped cultural progress.

And therefore, even in a crisis period, a person with his value orientations – survival, life and harmony, acutely pierced by war, can remain the catalyst for the development of culture. Music culture is no exception when it comes to war.

Emphasizing the phenomenon of “music of war”, the slogan “Music for Peace” is logically mentioned as a manifestation of cultural flourishing. Such an illustration of prosperity we can see the rise of culture (and at the same time its “struggle” for survival) in World War II:

“How can music withstand the death and destruction brought on by war? Global conflicts of the 20th century fundamentally transformed not only national boundaries, power relations, and global economies, but also the arts and culture of every nation involved. An important, unacknowledged aspect of these conflicts is that they have unique musical soundtracks. <...> how music in these environments played a crucial role in maintaining ties to an idealized “home” and constructing politicized notions of national and ethnic identity” (Potter et al. 2020).

Music, therefore, pulsates with difficult social transformations. And it is logical that music has the magic of influencing listeners. In this article, therefore,

we will try to understand (i) whether the war became an impetus for transformations for Ukrainian music, (ii) whether Ukrainians were able to find peace in

music, (iii) what music helps to distract from the war during air raids and (iv) what aesthetics do Ukrainians find in war music?

### MUSIC AS A WAY TO DISTRACT YOURSELF: A SURVEY OF KYIV RESIDENTS

When Ukrainians began to go into shelters during air raids, the idea came to me to conduct a survey, in particular, among the people of Kyiv, with whom I also went into shelters. This poll was about music. After all, it can be seen with the naked eye that the people of Kyiv take musical instruments and headphones with them to the shelter, and the city authorities even buy percussion instruments to raise the spirits of the people of Kyiv, because “music listening has the potential to evoke strong and intense experiences in listeners, and music-making is an activity that is present across all cultures” (Mencke et al. 2019). The description of the national consciousness of Ukrainians and their psychological mood during times of anxiety has already been described earlier (Howlett 2023), we will focus on music, which can also serve as a tool for psychological support. So, the survey among Kyiv residents took place at the two central metro stations “Universytet” and “Teatralna” in Kyiv in two stages with a pause of one year – March-April 2022 and 2023. The selection of two waves of the study corresponds to the “random method” in sociology, which has already been tested before (Noor et al. 2022).

During the first stage of the survey, people were concerned about psycho-

logical stress and finding ways to overcome this condition. During the second stage – the reasons for the correction of their psychological state during the year of full-scale war. In particular, respondents were asked: how do they rate their condition (on a scale from 1 to 10)? How do they cope with this condition? Does music affect them and what? Do musical preferences change during the war (in the first and second stages)? The questionnaire necessarily included a question about musical accompaniment during this emotionally difficult time: do they listen to music while staying in the shelter? What kind of music is this? Does it help to get out of complex psychological stress and does it help to “cure” bad thoughts during the war?

In general, the questionnaire was not filled with complex and long questions, because we took into account the state of the people of Kyiv and their often reluctance to engage in dialogue during the shelling of the city. However, more than 50 respondents took part in the survey at the first stage and 60 at the second stage, some of whom (15,  $n = 30\%$  at the first stage and 17,  $n = 28.3\%$  at the second stage) took musical instruments with them (guitar, ukulele, harmonica). It is clear that for such respondents music is key in their lives, because it is from these

respondents that we received 10/10 points. It is interesting that the same respondents called the undeniable role of music in the

victory, because from February 24, 2022, the number of musical products of various genres increased exponentially.

The total number of	I, $\Sigma = 50$	II, $\Sigma = 60$	I, % = 100	II, % = 100
How do you rate your psychological state (on a scale from 1 to 10)?	1-5 – 40 6-10 – 10	1-5 – 30 6-10 – 30	1-5 – 80% 6-10 – 20%	1-5 – 50% 6-10 – 50%
Do you listen to music while in the shelter?	yes – 31 no – 29	yes – 38 no – 22	yes – 62% no – 58%	yes – 63,3% no – 36,7%
Does music help you get out of complex psychological stress?	yes – 45 no – 5	yes – 51 no – 9	yes – 90% no – 10%	yes – 85% no – 15%

As we can see, the majority of respondents find peace in music and switch from thoughts about war. If we take into account that the psychological state of the majority of respondents is assessed as negative and anxious (on a scale from 1 to 5 points), we can assume that it is music that partially helps to improve this state. This can be seen from a comparison of the psychological state of people at the 1st and 2nd stages. And more than that, the bomb shelter served as a means of uniting and raising the spirit of Ukrainians:

“Music and artwork have equally been used by Ukrainians to boost morale within their refuges. Starkly contrasting the immense devastation simultaneously occurring only a few metres above, the atmospheres in the underground shelters have often reflected a sombre dynamic, such as in one of Kyiv’s metro-turned bomb shelters where Danil Kolotun, a young musician from a prominent state orchestra, played the Ukrainian national anthem on his trumpet

most evenings as the capital was attacked” (Howlett 2023).

The “therapeutic” effect of music is declared by more than half of the respondents in two stages (75 people, n = 68.2%), and the number of such people increases precisely in the second stage. We assume that this may be due to the fact that respondents are getting used to war and music is just an element of ordinary life. On the other hand, some of the respondents admitted that it was music that helped them get out of a difficult psychological state.

And another important detail: the respondents find solace both in purely pop music, which is widespread in the Ukrainian audio space, and with the help of classical works, which are also preferred by some respondents. Next, we will try to show what music emerged during the war and which was paid attention to by the respondents who were in the bomb shelter. And also – is there a concept of “aesthetics of war” (Mitton 2020), which manifests itself in music.

## “AESTHETICS OF WAR” SUNG IN MUSIC

The category of aesthetics in music is considered dominant. It can be considered universal, because it concerns genre syncretism – from classical to rock music (Dahlhaus 1978; Račić 1981; Scruton 2014). The concept of “aesthetics of war” is actively considered in psychology and psycholinguistics, cultural studies and art history (Hargreaves 1986; Kramer 2003; Mann 2006; Meis 2017). In part, this issue also affected music, which is part of the hypercultural space of the world. Does this concept exist in musicology?

The modern stage of “war music” is connected with the post-war period of the Second World War. And we are talking, in particular, about serial music, the aesthetics of which are successfully described in the compositional theory of post-war Europe:

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Post-war Europe and its aesthetics are closely related to politics, and therefore the music created at that time also had to meet the general criteria of economic and cultural reconstruction (Hesmondhalgh 2012). Instead, we can talk about the fact that since the middle of the last century, the “aesthetics of war” has been established in European musicology as a way of communication between musicians and their works related to the post-war syndrome (Hargreaves et al. 2005).

The situation with Ukraine is a little different. After all, the creation of the so-called the aesthetics of war takes place from the beginning of a large-scale invasion, and therefore strong are the emotions experienced by rocket strikes and, in parallel, the beats of beats that celebrate this war: “processes behind aesthetic framing and cognitive mastering provide the listener with concepts and abstract information that modulate attitude and expectations a priori even before the music starts” (Mencke et al. 2019). We believe that it was the war that served as an impetus for the creation of compositions in the Ukrainian language during this period and the complete rejection of songs in the Russian language.

Let’s take a closer look at the musical images and styles that became popular in Ukraine during the war.

### MUSIC AS “THERAPY”: WHICH COMPOSITIONS PROMOTED THE VALUES OF PEACE?

Of course, it is impossible to analyze all the musical material produced since the beginning of the full-scale Russian

invasion of Ukraine. Especially if you consider all the variety of musical genres and styles created from February 24,

2022 to today. But there is no need for this, because our task is different – to show what kind of music has a “therapeutic” effect on the recipients and why it has a massive effect on the listeners.

We will pay attention only to the music that was mentioned by our surveyed respondents, because it was according to their observation that such music became a consolation in difficult times. Obviously, these data are not objective, instead, they will become indicative of the mechanisms of creating a musical work of aesthetic and therapeutic nature. We note that the music of the war, which influenced the tastes of Ukrainians, can be conditionally divided into two blocks – (i) that which was created during the war (different styles, in which pop music and rap prevail) and (ii) that which created before the war, but it sounded in a new way during the war. This was facilitated by a complex of values that were embedded in the musical product: peace, goodness, self, victory, struggle, independence, etc. (realized in the axiological oppositions “peace / war”, “good / evil”, “own / foreign”, “independence / authoritarianism”, etc.

Based on the theory of 10 values (Schwartz 1992), we can emphasize that all of them remain the basis of musical works both in peacetime and wartime: “these values, according to the theory, form a circular continuum of related motivations; the more compatible any two values are, the closer they are on the circle” (Manolika & Baltzis 2022). However, their interpretation will be different. War, in our opinion, “exposes like a nerve” such values, makes them more

acute for society, and also shows clear border points in value oppositions.

So, for example, the first compositions of pop and hip-hop music in Ukraine (February-March 2022) are built around the theme of the struggle for survival and the value of Victory: “There will be spring” by MAX BARSKIH – (c) M. Bortnik; “My relatives” Alyona Alyona & Jerry Heil – (c) O. Savranenko, J. Heil, V. Klimenko; “Hear the Anthem” Skofka – (c) V. Samoliuk; “I’m going home” Okean Elsy – (c) S. Vakarchuk, etc. It should be noted that all of them are based on a slow melody, are amenable to translation and reinterpretation, were in the top chats of Spotify, YouTube Music, and Apple Music. These same compositions were named among the first in our survey, which speaks of the nature of the “music of freedom” at that time.

The main symbol of victory for Ukrainians remained the military, to whom separate pop and rock compositions were also dedicated, which also became a musical illustration of this war – “Near a poplar” Shumei – (c) P. Solodukha, “4.5.0” Aviator – (c) D. Todoryuk, A. Storozh, “Warriors of Light” Lyapis Trubetskoi – (c) S. Mikhalok, and others. Heroization of the military, in our opinion, should become key in this period, because it is the military that is an example of struggle and freedom (our survey in bomb shelters confirms this, because the list of songs about the military is in the top musical preferences of the people of Kyiv).

A separate segment of the musical life of Ukrainians is symbolism, which also

penetrated the musical space of wartime Ukraine – these are hero cities (“Bakhmut Fortress” by Antitila – (c) S. Vusyk, T. Topolya; “They can bomb Happiness” by Jerry Heil – (c) J. Heil), animal-heroes (“Patron Dog” Karta Svitu – (c) I. Marunych, I. Marunych), names-heroes – identifiers of Victory (“Stephania” Kalush Orchestra – (c) I. Klymenko, O. Psyuk, T. Muzychuk, V. Duzhik, I. Didenchuk), phrases that have become idiomatic (“Good evening, we are from Ukraine” DakhaBrah – (c) M. Galanevych; “I’ll wait for you” KOLA – (c) A. Prudius; Good Day Everybody Skylerr, 100 persons – (c) V. Kudryavets, N. Savchuk, V. Stupak) and others. The latest composition, which became a breakthrough in Europe, belongs to a mixed genre on the border of alternative hip-hop, folk and rap.

Separately, it is worth paying attention to the compositions that received a “second wind” during the war. These are songs of both pop and folk music, which became popular again during the war: “Oh in the meadow red viburnum” – (c) Narodna, S. Charnetsky, H. Truh, “Grove, green grove” – (c) Yu Rybchynskyi, O. Zlotnyk; “The land, my native land” – (c) M. Mozgovyi; “Family” – (c) V. Kryshchenko, O. Zlotnyk; “Red Ruta” – (c) V. Ivasiuk; “I had a steam engine” – (c) folk, etc. We explain this popularity with the flourishing of everything Ukrainian, which is the national identity of Ukraine. These songs were not known to the general public, or were used singly in the radio and television space, instead, the war pushed these compositions to play in a new way in the context of the war.

We cannot fail to mention those compositions that have become identifiers of Ukrainianness abroad – “Shchedryk” – (c) M. Leontovych, “Melody” – (c) M. Skoryk, “Zaporozhian March” – (c) M. Lysenko, “Ukrainian suite” – (c) V. Barvinsky, etc., most of which have become classics of the world music fund. After February 24, 2022, Ukrainians went to classical music concerts the most. There were not many of them, but their popularity was logical: in classical music, calmness, tradition, spirit of the times.

Let us emphasize that the Ukrainians were even able to hold a number of concerts in a bomb shelter (at the “Maidan Nezalezhnosti” metro station) and the selection for “Eurovision” (at the “Khreshchatyk” metro station), which was held in Liverpool on behalf of Ukraine on May 9–13, 2023:

“Although bomb shelters serve a certain function in a specific environment, and therefore remain quite understudied, they nonetheless reveal much about a precise time–space context and shed light on larger socio-political phenomena <...> Still, it is not only ordinary individuals who have engaged in musical performances within the underground shelters, as well-known Ukrainian artists have likewise played in these nontraditional settings since the beginning of the war” (Howlett 2023: 64).

So our two waves of bomb shelter surveys showed an interesting trend. The music that was born during the war had an incredible expression, a new look at values and a special aesthetic. Some of the Kyiv residents we interviewed found peace and mental balance in Ukrainian music.

## CONCLUSIONS

As we can see, Ukrainians constantly use music – both in grief and in joy. We were especially interested in crisis situations in which Ukrainians could master themselves with the help of music. In modern musicology, there is a concept of “music of war”, which we expanded in the context of our research (using the example of Ukrainians who turned to music during air raids). And we came to the conclusion that war music performs three key functions for Ukrainians – axiological (that is, it celebrates the values of freedom, democracy, independence and struggle in musical works), aesthetic (that is, it reveals the “aesthetics of

war” in musical products, in particular, it exposes war crimes and shows struggle of Ukrainians with the enemy, which is manifested in music) and therapeutic (that is, one that helps to overcome fear and inner experiences, when it was in music that Ukrainians sought psychological peace). We believe that precisely the last function is revealed not only in music that is listened to individually with headphones, but also in a mass context, that is, during the unique “safe” concerts of the Kyiv subway at the Khreshchatyk metro station. Further research may concern the musical preferences of Ukrainians after the victory.

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