

Miscellaneous

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Ukrainian Musical Diplomacy and Cultural Entrepreneurialism in Times of War: EU Contexts

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Abstract: The roundtable discussion brings together artistic activists and cultural managers, engaged in international advocacy for the Ukrainian cause, to discuss the most pressing issues and future perspectives. Operating in the narrow corridor of value-based actions and managerial efficiency, the participants consider the criteria and markers of efficiency of cultural diplomacy, their engagements with the state(s), and variegated reception of audiences in various EU member-states. They ponder the urgency and specificity of cultural production in the wake of the full-blown war, as well as uneasy relationships with other endangered communities within the ruthless economy of attention, and decreasing investments in the field of culture across Europe.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; artistic activism; intangible cultural heritage; musical programming; Ukrainian Institute

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1 Valeria Korablyova

I suggest starting with the dynamics within the triangle of civil society, institutions, and the state. We heard today from the chair of a previous panel that cultural diplomacy is an extension of foreign policy. However, one might presume that, in some cases, it is an extension of activism and civic initiative. Some parts and projects of cultural diplomacy go beyond the State, counter to it, or in parallel to it. Could you comment on how your initiatives have grown within or outside stable institutions, and how their connections and relations with the state, or multiple states, were established and transformed?

2 Oleksandra Saienko

I am currently a cultural manager and opera producer, but it all started with civic activism at the Euromaidan movement in Vienna in 2014. We realized that Ukraine was “terra incognita” even for those who supported us and took part in our demonstrations. The following year, in 2015, we initiated for the first time in history a Ukrainian cultural festival in Vienna. It turned out to be a very special tool for Austria, which enabled us to evoke some empathy for the Ukrainian cause. The feedback was so positive that we decided to continue these activities, which developed into the festival UStream. Next year, we will celebrate the tenth anniversary of our activities, and since 2017, it has become a recognized brand. The festival occurs every two years: it targets not only the international audience, but also those Ukrainian nationals who have arrived in Vienna over the past two years.

It started as a volunteer initiative, an NGO (the Centre of Ukrainian Initiatives) that occasionally received small grants from the Austrian Republic, but also donations from Ukrainian and Austrian businesses. In 2019, the festival received Ukraine’s state support for the first time, through the Ukrainian Institute, responsible for the first bilateral project of the year of Ukrainian culture in Austria.

Music is a very effective tool in Austria, as it is a music nation and Vienna is one of the world’s main music capitals. That is why a concert is always the main event in our programme. But actually, the festival is multidisciplinary: we have visual art, literature, cinema and theatre. This is a way to reach different target audiences. Over the years, we have learned which tools are the most effective. Now we know that the venue is crucial to Ukraine’s branding. Rather than cultural diplomacy, I would call this work the nation-branding of Ukraine. That is why we always choose for our music events the best concert halls of Vienna, like Konzerthaus or Musikverein. For instance, the award-winning opera-requiem “Iyov” by Illya Razumeiko and Roman Grygoriv was brought

for the first time to Vienna's Musikverein as part of our festival in 2017. This was the best venue for displaying Ukrainian art, and I am very proud of it.

To sum up my answer: although we have had some great experiences of cooperation, there is no clear strategy of support from the Ukrainian government for the coming years. Despite this, I can only applaud the work of the Ukrainian institute since its founding in 2018.

3 Anna Stavychenko

I also represent a civic initiative: the “1991 Project” is a non-profit association. It does have institutional support, but not Ukrainian: the project is based at Reid Hall, home to the Columbia Global Paris Centre and the Institute for Ideas and Imagination. We use Reid Hall, which is an amazing concert hall, for our concerts. When we started the project in 2023, most of the musicians I worked with were participants in the Paris Philharmonic Mission Project. I was the Mission Head of this project. The Mission Project aimed to provide direct support to Ukrainian musicians who found themselves in difficult situations due to the war. We were helping them to find temporary contracts with French national-level orchestras.

The initial objective was to help those musicians who were already exiled in France and wanted to play more, in particular, those who wanted to play Ukrainian music. This, unfortunately, is problematic in French orchestras. So, with the “1991 Project”, we gave Ukrainian musicians more job opportunities to secure their situation in France. Additionally, we offered them an opportunity to represent their culture abroad as Ukrainian citizens.

This is my experience of civic initiatives, collaborations and institutions. On top of that, I want to briefly mention our collaboration with the Ukrainian Institute and Sorbonne University in April 2024, when we organized a programme representing Ukrainian composers at the Sorbonne.

4 Birgit Ellinghaus

My position is different, as I have no Ukrainian background. I come from the perspective of host societies that receive displaced artists, of several waves of migrants who came to Europe over the last decades. Luckily, nowadays we have some diplomatic tools, which we did not have twenty years ago. This is mainly the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural

Expressions.¹ This is a tool to shape societies and prepare them to engage all members regardless of citizenship. The origin does not matter, because the goal is to promote cultural diversity, and the emphasis is on re-shaping host societies and recognizing diverse identities. The latter is very much related to intangible cultural heritage.

As you know, there is a list of tangible cultural heritage objects. But I am talking about intangible cultural heritage. We often fail to address cultural expressions such as theatre, music, and literature. This is covered under the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and it requires ensuring that musical knowledge is transmitted to the next generation. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is not just a nice-to-have. Each country that has ratified it has to implement it. It is not a choice but a legal obligation based on human rights. But without those who claim those rights, they fail to be fulfilled.

It is a fact that many people from Ukraine are displaced, and they can no longer work in the familiar context they have developed since independence. Now, they are spread across many European countries. Therefore, new contexts must be created to ensure the transmission of knowledge. In the end, this is about self-empowerment and the empowerment of all the actors in relation to European societies hosting Ukrainians. These are the questions we ask as members of the German UNESCO and of all the other UNESCO commissions we have in Europe.

We put these questions to our national governments, because it is a societal duty. We have to understand who the stakeholders are in European music institutions, and whether there are enough Ukrainians present at a level that gives them a powerful voice. We need to understand how the Ukrainian language and music are included in the teaching curricula in schools and at music conservatories. Whether these include instruments specific to Ukrainian culture, and knowledge about the repertory, and how it is reflected in the curricula in France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and so on.

All of these questions are part of a political debate, which requires the Ukrainian community to be more open to dialogue so that European societies can reciprocate with further dialogue. Within the context of other migrant communities present in European societies, Ukrainians compete with them. I agree that activism has been transmitted through the communities I have encountered since the Maidan, and even before this. However, it stays very often within those communities and does not inform the work of institutions, nor does it inform the cultural and political debates.

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-and-promotion-diversity-cultural-expressions>.

Consequently, we need many more people who bridge the corners of this triangle to animate the dialogue.

Valeria Korablyova: Thank you for reminding us that it is a two-way street: not only Ukrainians promote their culture, but it is equally important that the host community is interested in diversity and openness, and that some transnational frameworks could be helpful in this regard. Following up on your last remark, what is the relation between those communities of minorities? Are they collaborating or competing for attention, grants, etc?

Birgit Ellinghaus: We all know the answer: money is never enough when it comes to culture. In the Western context, certain communities are quite skilled at securing funding or advancing into certain positions. They are more active, hence they have the best conditions. Meanwhile, other communities are at the end of the ladder. I am working with Afghan musicians; they are at the very, very end of the ladder. They are coming from the only country in the world where music is banned. If you practice music there, your life is endangered. In comparison, Ukrainian displaced artists are in a kind of privileged situation, because they have free mobility in Western European countries. Many have a very good education, even if they have some language issues. Let us say the starting point for Ukrainian displaced artists is much better; they are in a much better position than many others to get grants and to raise their voices in the cultural political debate.

Lubov Morozova: The Ukrainian Institute is, to be honest, a very small institution. We have around 50 people on staff, and each art form is handled by one person. It is a kind of activism: for the next year, we have a budget of 400,000 euros for the whole institution. What is really positive is that we have two new representative offices in two countries. The first one opened two years ago in Berlin, and the second in Paris, both of which have greatly helped to advance cultural diplomacy. We plan to open a new office next year, so there will be more Ukrainian Institutes worldwide. We target not only Europe and North America, but also South America and other continents. I have been working at the Ukrainian Institute for only two years, but it has already become a big part of my life. It is very inspiring: many of things I used to write about, I can now put into practice.

For me, one of the problems in the field of Ukrainian music is the lack of scores that can be shared worldwide. To amend this problem, we have our special publication series called “Anthology”. We already have two anthologies of chamber music from the 1960s and 70s, and will be reprinting the 60s anthology because it was very successful. And this year, we are publishing an anthology of Ukrainian symphony miniatures with annotations by Liubov Kyianovska. It contains articles about all ten composers presented in the edition, ranging from the overtures and operas of Dmytro Bortniansky to the contemporary composer Hanna Havrylets. Each volume

contains annotations in three languages: Ukrainian, English, and German. I think it will enable orchestras in different countries to perform Ukrainian music.

We are also publishing an addition to the anthology of symphony miniatures, featuring two composers: Bohdana Frolyak and Ivan Petrov. Bohdana Frolyak is well known and frequently performed in the UK, including in London. Ivan Petrov is currently serving in the Ukrainian armed forces, and it is extremely important to him to know that he is still recognised as a composer.

Valeria Korablyova: Thank you. It is a very interesting twist that the State is imitating activism, expanding the geography but not the budget. For the second round, I suggest the following question: How do you measure the efficiency of cultural diplomacy? Managerial logic is not only about resonance; it also implies money and tangible outputs. How can your activities be quantified?

Birgit Ellinghaus: It depends on which point of view you look at this question. From the standpoint of creative industries, measuring cultural diplomacy means looking at numbers, such as audience attendance, different kinds of performances, media presence, musicians' earnings from their productions, how many have been hired, etc. If cultural diplomacy were effective in terms of creative industries, then we would have as a result high numbers and competitive projects.

Then there is a non-market side of culture, which cannot be measured in numbers. This is about values and identity, about respect, solidarity, community feeling, and how to sustain historical continuity. These values are part of culture, but are not relevant in terms of market dynamics; you cannot measure them. So I believe very strongly that these aspects are part of a permanent, ongoing dialogue in different societies, and how this dialogue is put to the test. And what happened here today is a very important testing point in this dialogue: making this aspect visible and putting it on the table.

Valeria Korablyova: Nicely put! Are there indirect indicators to see the impact of cultural diplomacy?

Oleksandra Saienko: I would say that numbers are also important. When we brought the opera-requiem "Iyov" to Vienna, we circulated a questionnaire among the attendees to learn more about our audience. Thus, we discovered that there were representatives of ten nations in the audience. They came to learn about Ukraine through art. Over the years, we have hosted 4 festivals, about 30 events, and 5,000 unique visitors across 30 top venues. These numbers tell something. What has changed over these years? Previously, people did not always identify Ukraine as an independent state. Now they recognize that Ukraine is an independent nation with its unique culture. We have always emphasized in our festival the shared European context that Ukraine has been rooted in.

A good example of this was the opera "Vyshyvanyi, the king of Ukraine", which was produced three years ago, during a complete lockdown, and became a big

success. The main hero is Archduke Wilhelm of Austria, an heir of the Habsburg dynasty, who adopted a Ukrainian identity. Libretto by Serhyi Zhadan, a famous Ukrainian writer, music by Alla Zahaikevych, a prominent avant-garde composer, and directed by Rostislav Derzhypilsky. We staged two performances in Kharkiv, and many international diplomats arrived from Kyiv to attend them. As it turned out, we created this opera for the new Ukrainian nation as a part of our new national identity. And it also appeared to be an efficient tool for cultural diplomacy.

Later, we organized a screening of the opera recording in Vienna, which sparked a lot of interest in the shared history of our countries, embodied by the plot. Through this opera people started asking, “Why did he choose Ukrainian identity from all the identities in the entire empire?” In a way, creating and displaying this new identity was important not only for the international community but also for ourselves. These qualitative marks (interest, attendance, public discussions) help us recognize if our activities are efficient or not. There was a big radio programme about this opera.

It is worth noting that it counters Russian propaganda in a positive way: the composer and the producer are women, and the content challenges the Russian canon. The German edition of the libretto opens with a foreword by Karl Habsburg, the heir of the Habsburg family, where he mentions that this libretto is not only a literary work of art it is “a political message for freedom, independence, the rule of law, the self-determination and identity of Ukraine, and of Ukrainian culture,” and he concludes, “it is a shining example of the fact that freedom cannot be taken for granted: it must be fought for and defended, again and again. Wilhelm von Habsburg comes from a clearly European dynasty, and Ukraine today is a beacon of freedom for the world. Slava Ukraini.”

5 Anna Stavychenko

I would define the success of Ukrainian musical diplomacy through the sustainable representation of Ukrainian music in international institutions’ programming. Today, we see Ukrainian civic initiatives fighting for and programming Ukrainian music, while the programmes of the Paris Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, and others have not changed. Programming Ukrainian music in foreign institutions is mostly a gesture of political solidarity. This is not durable.

For me personally, I can see that it is still very hard for Ukrainian music to be integrated into a seasonal programme and to be a real part of what is going on in the musical field. The real success for Ukrainian cultural diplomacy would be to see Borys Lyatoshynsky, Dmytro Bortniansky and other major composers performed during the season – but without Ukrainian flags, fundraisers and so on.

6 Birgit Ellinghaus

I am the curator for the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg and for the Old Opera House Frankfurt, and I work with world music, not classical music. Looking from within the institutions, there is not enough knowledge among the staff. They do not know how to get information about the repertoire, or how to get access to it. And if there is no knowledge, and they do not have access to the language, how could Ukrainian music be integrated into the regular programme? This work has to be done by the communities.

For instance, if I speak for myself, I have already programmed Ukrainian traditional polyphonic music and different kinds of ethnic music, such as from Crimea, because Ukrainian music is not homogeneous. However, all this knowledge I acquired through my practical work, I needed people to tell me about it. Then, I started to dig deeper, and used this knowledge in my capacity to create concert programmes. This was just an example. There are over 400 concert halls in Germany, so as you can see, there is a lot of work for you to carry out.

Valeria Korablyova: When you speak to colleagues who are running these concert halls, are they usually open to such initiatives, driven with openness and curiosity or more demonstrating inertia of thinking?

Birgit Ellinghaus: Whenever a certain piece is presented, one needs to contextualize and argue for it deeply: what this composer means for Ukraine's history, what is the artistic value and peculiarity, and then doors open up. But this kind of work cannot be done by commercial bookers: this has to be done by trained people like you, experts, musical scholars, knowledgeable people.

To position a Ukrainian piece, you have to look through the structures of programming in these concert halls, where there are differently formatted series: young rising stars, big orchestras, jazz, children concerts, and so on. For each of these series, there could be specific proposals from the Ukrainian context. A clear understanding of how these institutions work and how decisions are made is needed for a successful result.

Oleksandra Saienko: My festival is not a big institution, which is why I make decisions myself on what repertoire to bring to Vienna. For instance, in December, I organize a concert of Christmas music in a famous historic church at Hofburg, where a Ukrainian choir will sing Ukrainian and European Christmas music. In January, I will bring again a jazz concert to Vienna. I always choose good venues, but it is clear to me that these two events will attract different target audiences: the elderly stakeholders of Viennese societies in the former case, and the younger agile audience for the latter.

7 Lubov Morozova

Our strategy is updated every five years. The most recent planning took place this summer and gathered expertise from many Ukrainian stakeholders. So we have new aims for what we want to achieve over the next five years. First of all, I want to emphasise that it is really important to incorporate Ukrainian culture into broader contexts; it is important not to be encapsulated in a Ukrainian ghetto, but to collaborate and be part of a larger context.

Another goal we agreed on is to write and speak more about Ukrainian music. We have a new programme at the Ukrainian Institute called “Gracernote”, which focuses on collaboration between different media and musicological research. We collaborate with the *Glissando* magazine in Poland, which is one of the best European magazines about new music, and we also engage in planning and taking part in various academic conferences. For instance, thanks to Louisa Martin-Chevalier, we co-organized a conference at the Sorbonne University. As for our anthology of annotated scores, we always appoint the best Ukrainian musicologists. Currently, we translate them into two languages, but in the future, we also plan to translate them into French. There is a special project to publish all of Theodore Akimenko’s works with annotations.

The third aim is a capacity-building program. We understand that we do not have enough cultural managers to bring Ukrainian culture abroad. Ukrainian culture has been very closed, and we do not have specialised training in Ukraine for such managers, whether musical or otherwise. There are open calls for Ukrainian managers to get funding for participation in different B2B conferences, and there are residency visits to Ukraine for foreign experts. More and more managers and cultural journalists now visit Ukraine, attending exhibits and conferences and spreading this information abroad. There will be more of those programs in the coming years.

8 Questions from the Audience

Audience question 1:

We have been talking mostly about classical music. I wonder if there are any initiatives and programs towards the support of popular music as well? There are so many Ukrainian artists on EU tours, yet they are attended by the diaspora mostly. Are there any efforts to attract local audiences to such events?

Lubov Morozova: In the Ukrainian Institute, we have one person responsible for so-called mainstream music, which includes pop music, but not only. For

instance, we curated a very successful black metal tour – we raised a lot of money for our armed forces from it. This is one of the important parts of the Ukrainian Institute’s work. We supported the special programme of the Eurovision Song Contest. We are also collaborating with the British Council, which is very focused on pop music. So, there will be much work in this field in the future.

Audience question 2:

I think we all agree that Ukrainian culture needs sustainable funding, secured for the long term. What are your experiences in terms of long-term promises? Is funding from the Ukrainian Institute guaranteed for several years?

Lubov Morozova: Unfortunately, no. Currently, we have a one-year project.

Birgit Ellinghaus: But this is the same for projects needing financial support everywhere in Europe. You do not get long-term funding for culture with multiple crises; we will have less and less money over time.

Lubov Morozova: The Theatre Altenburg Gera has guaranteed funding until 2032. . . .

Birgit Ellinghaus: Institutions do have the long-term funding, but initiatives do not. Ukrainian independent initiatives are not institutionalized yet.

Audience Question 3:

I am trying to understand how we can shift the perception of Ukrainian culture away from that of a country at war. Many artists I met say they cannot escape being defined as artists representing war. How can we escape this frame of war – how can music help a foreign audience to reframe Ukrainian culture?

Lubov Morozova: It is paradoxical, because Ukrainian music now is much more about love than about war. One needs just to live and to share their love even in wartime. Some musicians told me, “The Russians want to take away our identity, but they cannot take away our love”.

There is a cultural renaissance in Ukraine now. For instance, it is impossible to buy a theatre ticket today. People really need culture. I can admit that I am optimistic about the cultural situation. I think we talk more about war through culture outside Ukraine. In Ukraine, culture is not only about reflections on the war. It is about how to live in this time. It is like reading a novel by Erich Maria Remarque: one cannot grasp how all such things can coexist during war. But when you live through the war, your existence cannot be reduced to hardship and resistance.

Valeria Korablyova: I think that love and cultural renaissance are the perfect way to end this discussion. Thank you very much!