

# Reflections of War Experience in Ukrainian Songs

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## INTRODUCTION

When the war starts, the issues of human dignity, honour, national identity, patriotism, and protection of the native land from invaders become the most relevant, which has a corresponding effect on literature and art. During the Russian-Ukrainian war (2022), songs, as a mass literary and musical genre, acquired particular popularity, which is connected with their ability to exert a strong influence on the inner emotional state of a person. This was also noted by scientists who studied the role and functions of songs during the First and Second World Wars. In his interview, which the famous Ukrainian writer Serhiy Zhadan gave on August 5, 2022, for the “Social Culture” (“Suspilne Kultura”) channel, he said, ‘When there is a war, it is not fought with sonnets; it is not fought with guitars. It is fought with weapons. The better the weapon, the more effective the army. (...) Culture may not be the most important thing in our lives, but it is such a component that if you take it away, it is like a thread, when you pull it out, the structure of the fabric just collapses. Culture is something that connects many things together’<sup>1</sup>.

During the war, songs motivate, inspire confidence, give strength to fight, unite people, and encourage them to overcome their confusion and despair and to persevere in the most difficult moments when nothing seems to help. Songs are perceived as a powerful weapon, as if answering the challenging question of Lesya Ukrainka:

» Why, my words, aren't you cold steel, tempered metal,  
Striking off sparks in the thick of the battle?

1 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUfgF\\_LJ9xI&t=1282s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUfgF_LJ9xI&t=1282s) (as of January 4, 2023).

Why not a sword so relentless and keen  
That all our foes' heads would be cut off clean?<sup>2</sup>

Songs created in a borderline situation, in the face of death, become the quintessence of the nation's spiritual potential. The word, combined with musical melody and rhythm, resounds with unprecedented force. Through this genre comes a profound understanding of important issues that have always preoccupied humanity, but at critical moments when people's very existence is threatened, they take on a particular poignancy. The song focuses on common human problems and timeless spiritual values that will never lose their relevance: friendship and betrayal, victory and loss, love and hate, life and death.

### CLASSIFICATION OF WARTIME SONGS

All wartime songs that became popular after February 24, 2022, can be divided into two groups according to the time of writing. Here are some examples:

- 1) Folk and original songs written before the war:
  - a. which received a 'new life' after February 24, 2022: *Oi, U Luzi Chervona Kalyna* (*Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow*); *Batko Nash Bandera* (*Our Father Bandera*); *Marsh Novoi Armii* (*March of the New Army*), based on the song *Zrodylys My Velykoi Hodyny...* (*We Were Born at a Great Hour...*) by O. Babiy; *Obiimy Mene* (*Hug Me*) and *Ne Tvoia Viina* (*Not Your War*) (lyrics and music by S. Vakarchuk); *Stefania* (performed by Kalush Orchestra); *Zaspivaimo Pisniu Za Ukrainu* (*Let's Sing a Song for Ukraine*) (lyrics and music by O. Ponomaryev); *Radisno/Strashno* (*Happy/Scary*) (music by A. Pivovarov); *Marichka* (music by S. Sabadash, lyrics by M. Tkach);
  - b. in which new or updated texts were set to existing melodies: *Ukrainska Liut* (*Ukrainian Fury*), lyrics by Kh. Solovey to the music of *Bella ciao*; *Ia Soldat* (*I Am a Soldier*), lyrics by S. Babkin; *The Soldier*, lyrics by A. Zaporozhets; *Moskal Nekrasivyi* (*Het z Ukrainy*), (*Moskal is not Beautiful* (*Get Out of Ukraine*)), music by J. Heil, a remix of the Ukrainian music song *Oi, Na Hori Zhentsi Zhnut* (*Oh, Reapers Are Reaping on the Mountain*).
- 2) Songs created after February 24, 2022: *Ukraina Peremozhe* (*Ukraine Will Win*), lyrics and music by O. Ponomarev; *Misto Marii* (*City of Mary*), lyrics and music

2 Lesya Ukrainka, *Hope: selected poetry*, translated from the Ukrainian by Gladys Evans (Kiev: 1981).

by S. Vakarchuk; *Pid Doshchem (Under the Rain)*, by A. Khayat; *Rozstriliana Vesna (Shot Spring)*, lyrics by P. Polovko, music by I. Fedyshyn; *Neperemozhna Ukraina (Invincible Ukraine)*, music by V. Budeychuk, lyrics by L. Arkhipenko; *Zori (Stars)*, music and lyrics by B. Bespalov; *Sho Vy Patsyky Na Motsykakh, Ya Tanky Hryz Yak Barbarys (What Are You Pazyks on the Mozyks, I Gnawed Tanks Like a Barberrry)* performed by Kolaba; *Bayraktar*, lyrics and music by T. Borovok; *Voiny Svitla (Warriors of Light)*, lyrics and music by S. Mikhalok; *Vrazhe (Enemy)*, lyrics by L. Horova, performed by a music band “Angy Kreyda”; *Brattia Ukraintsi (Brothers Ukrainians)*, lyrics and music by V. Eihenzeer; *Nenarodzhenym (To the Unborn)*, lyrics by O. Ganapolska, T. Shevchenko, music by O. Ganapolska, V. Lagoda.

### BRINGING BACK SONGS WRITTEN BEFORE THE WAR

Many folk songs and original songs that were written earlier became popular again after February 24, 2022. It is well known that some folk songs had authors, but over time their names were forgotten, as happened with the song *Oi, U Luzi Chervona Kalyna (Oh, in the Meadow of Red Viburnum)*, the words and music of which were written by S.M. Charnetsky more than a hundred years ago. It is notable that he took as a basis the Cossack folk song *Rozlylysia Kruti Berezhechky (The Steep Streams Spilled)*. After the song was performed by Andriy Khlyvniuk and the world-famous British group “Pink Floyd” in the first days of the war (this version of the song was titled *Hey Hey Rise Up*), it instantly spread on social networks. Later, Khlyvnyuk and other Ukrainian stars organized a video flash mob<sup>3</sup>, which was joined by bands from different parts of the country. It is performed by both professional singers and ordinary Ukrainians. On the Day of the Constitution of Ukraine, it was sung together by police officers and residents of Irpen, a city in the Kyiv region that took the first blow from Russian troops at the beginning of the war. During the *Match for Peace* charity tour, the song was performed by three charming Ukrainian singers: Khrystyna Solovey, Jerry Heil and Alyona Alyona. Later, they were joined by representatives of other countries who want to support Ukraine (Georgians, the Colombian band “Los Iankovers”, Lithuanian opera singers during the *Strength of Unity* action at Žalgiris arena, etc.<sup>4</sup>). The central symbol of the song is a viburnum, a plant that represents the native Ukrainian earth, peace, kindness, home, family, immortality, and girlish beauty. At the same time, her red clubs resemble the colour of the blood shed by those who gave their lives to protect the Motherland from

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHq2cToZTjU&t=74s> (as of January 12, 2023).

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv7DTS2V5rI> (as of January 12, 2023).

enemies. Compositionally, the song is built on the juxtaposition of ‘bloody tan’ (battle) and ‘golden lan’ (wheat field), shackles and will, sadness and fun, as well as on the psychological parallelism between nature and the country, which is usual for folklore:

» In the meadow, there’s a red viburnum  
That has bent down low.  
For some reason, our glorious Ukraine  
Has been worried so<sup>5</sup>.

The text of a folk song contains stable epithets (glorious Ukraine, white flower, red viburnum, summer wheat, raging wind, wide steppe, free race). The main motifs, which make up the plot, are the liberation of Ukrainians from slavery, the battle of Sich archers against enemies, victory, and glory. Its popularity is due to the high level of artistic skill, but to a greater extent to the relevance of the events described in the text, which correspond to the current situation in Ukraine. The leading theme of the victorious battle, the heroic pathos of the song, and the general cheerful mood are perceived during the war as a powerful emotional charge, instilling faith in an undeniable victory over the Russian invaders.

The Ukrainian songs that became popular during the current full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war generally have much in common with songs that were written during previous wars, most notably World War II. First, there are similar themes: mourning for the dead, confidence in future victory, love and womanhood, motherly love, children of war, revenge and hatred, heroism and self-sacrifice. Secondly, the composition of the songs usually consists of two parts: pity for those who suffered from the war and confidence in the future victory. However, Ukrainian history differs significantly from the official version created in the Soviet Union, and the understanding of past events in the Russian Federation that is close to it. This is due to the activities of the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and Stepan Bandera, who for many Ukrainians is a hero of the Ukrainian people’s struggle for independence, which contributed to his popularisation during the war<sup>6</sup>. The lead-

5 Translation: <https://lyricstranslate.com/ru/unknown-artist-english-red-kalyna-lyrics.html> (as of January 10, 2023).

6 This statement is based primarily on song lyrics. More than 100 songs that became particularly popular after February 24, 2022, were selected for analysis. The main criterion for selection was the number of views on the YouTube channel. The song *Our Father Bandera* has millions of views on YouTube and other social networks. There are also various versions of the song, flash mobs, memes, discussions in the press, etc. In addition, the growing popularity of Stepan Bandera is due to the specifics of the current situation. As it is known, Russian mass media discuss the need to eradicate nationalism in Ukraine, and Stepan Bandera is declared to be the main representative of nationalism.

er of the UPA, despite the controversy around him, has become a role model for many Ukrainians, especially in Western Ukraine, embodying the image of a martyr-liberator hero. Bandera and his followers resisted the communist regime, which is now being actively revived in the Russian Federation, and advocated independence for Ukraine.

A stylization of the Ukrainian rebel song *Our Father Bandera* appeared online in 2019 performed by a group of priests and quickly spread throughout western Ukraine. Accusations of Russian propagandists added to its popularity, and in 2022, the composition received special attention from listeners when performed by the “Romax” band<sup>7</sup>. The plot of the song is quite traditional: a mother mourns the death of her son in a battle with ‘moskali’ (‘Moscovites’), which becomes a reason for a nationwide uprising and resistance to enemies:

» Bandera is our father, and Ukraine is our mother.  
We will go out into battle for our Ukraine!<sup>8</sup>

Some songwriters base their lyrics on the works of famous Ukrainian poets, such as Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka and others. Based on a poem by Geo Shkurupiy, who represents the Executed Renaissance era, Artem Pivovarov wrote the song *Joyful/Scared*. It was created as part of the cultural project “Your Poems, My Notes” launched by the musician in August 2021 to preserve and promote Ukrainian culture. An author of the comment on the YouTube channel, where the song was presented on April 1, 2022, noted, ‘How differently one begins to perceive this work when one reads about the author of the text, Geo Shkurupiy. He was a progressive writer and futurist who created forms of poetry unconventional for his time. He was condemned and shot by the Soviet authorities. At the same time, the spirit of his work has been reproduced in contemporary art!’<sup>9</sup>. Printed in 1922,

This has had the opposite effect: even those Ukrainians, especially in the south and east of the country (the author of this article is from Kharkiv, by the way), where Bandera was never popular, have begun to proclaim themselves Banderaites. The songs reflect the current situation in Ukraine. The constant parallels in the Ukrainian media, in YouTube comments, in various discussions between the Russian-Ukrainian war and World War II, and between Putin and Hitler, have also played a role in Bandera being perceived by many Ukrainians as a national hero who fought for Ukraine’s independence. A selection of information sources on the Ukrainian hit can be found here: <https://goo.su/n04j> (as of July 10, 2023).

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt8xXkIU47I> (as of January 10, 2023).

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt8xXkIU47I>; translated by Steve Repa: <https://lyricstranslate.com/ru/bat%CA%B9k%D0%BE-nash-bandera-our-fathers-bandera.html> (as of January 10, 2023).

9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xefsv8zUNc&list=PLUp5P0vt6SdcvtVOAZ4dlG4u3zMANVYq8&index=5> (as of January 10, 2023) (the author of the comment is Oleksandr Rys’).

the Ukrainian futurist's poem focuses on capturing the intimate moment of a kiss and depicting the inner state of the lyrical heroine with metaphors that convey the poet's admiration for the development of science and technology, in particular, the emergence of radio communication ('electric current', 'radio laughter when kisses vibrate'<sup>10</sup>). The new interpretation of the poetic text highlights the ambivalent feelings of lovers who are both happy and frightened by the hostile world around them. The perception of the text by contemporary listeners is conditioned by the military context and the musical accompaniment of the song (a combination of new-wave pop style and Ukrainian folk motifs). In addition, the poem, written 100 years ago, is introduced into a contemporary context through visuals: the video, black and white colours with red accents. The video for the contemporary musical clip was filmed in the area of the Kyiv reservoir where the fighting took place. The colour scheme of Pivovarov's video correlates with Shkurupiy's statement about the symbolic meaning of the two colours: '...red and black. Two philosophies, two worlds are fighting for victory, and the new wins'<sup>11</sup>, which accurately describes the current situation of the war in Ukraine.

The lyrical song *Marichka*, which has had over 7.2 million hits since April 1, 2022, captivated listeners with its simple lyrics combined with an expressive melody. It was performed by Mykhailo Khoma especially for the international charity telethon #SaveUkraine. The lyrical hero confesses his love for a girl called Marichka (Maria) and promises to overcome any obstacles on the way to his beloved. The structure of the poem is based on the folk parallelism between nature and human feelings: 'river' – 'love'. Mykhailo Tkach, the author of the text, draws on the tradition of his predecessors (in particular, Ukrainian poets Sydir Vorobkevych and Yuriy Fedkovych), who also described in their poems the typical Ukrainian rural landscape of song folklore: a house on the river bank, a green field, a sycamore tree, and against this idyllic backdrop, a young man meets a beautiful maiden. Such a meeting is directly related to the traditional symbolism of wedding songs, in which a girl's presence by a river or a well means she dreams of marriage. Marichka combines the features of a real person and at the same time reminds us of magical creatures typical of Ukrainian folklore – mavka, mermaid, povitrulya<sup>12</sup> – that is, she has signs of beauty, radiating fatal magical power, and has common features with archetypal female images, one of the most famous of which is the mystical maiden Lorelei, created by Heinrich Heine. But while the meeting with Lorelei has fatal consequences for the subject of love, in Tkach's song, the symbolism of

10 G. Shkurupiy, *Vybrani tvory* (Kyiv: 2013), p. 58.

11 Ibidem, p. 191.

12 Povitrulya (Ukrainian: *Повітряля*) is a national Ukrainian mythological positive female character.

the name *Marichka*, i.e. Maria, establishes a parallel between the heroine and her sacred prototype, thereby removing any negative connotations and transferring her from the real plane to the symbolic one. These multilayered meanings, combined with a smoothly unfolding melody, create a timeless image of love as an eternal value, which is especially important in a situation of war, when a person finds himself on the verge of life and death. In times of crisis, such themes as love for a mother, for a child, for a beloved one take on a special meaning, so it is no surprise that this song has become popular again right now. Comments from numerous listeners show that the song helps them to survive difficult times, gives them strength and inspiration, unites them and awakens a sense of unity and pride in such talented Ukrainians as the authors and performers of the song *Marichka*.

In 2022, several songs appeared in the Ukrainian musical sphere which the press and ordinary listeners equated, in terms of meaning and popularity, to the National Anthem of Ukraine. One of the most famous songs, *Stefania*, was written shortly before the war and performed by the Kalush Orchestra at the Eurovision Song Contest. Congratulating the group on the victory, the first lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska noted, '*Stefania* was sung by musicians from Poland, Latvia, and France. *Stephania* was sung by "The Rasmus". Now the whole world will sing the song about the Ukrainian mother – in the Ukrainian language'<sup>13</sup>. The musicians have tried, in their words, to embody the 'Ukrainian ethnic code' in this composition, which they undoubtedly succeeded in, combining modern rap and alternative hip-hop with a folkloric basis derived from Galician chants and reminiscent, according to Valentyna Kuzyk<sup>14</sup>, of Ukrainian lullabies.

The content of songs written before the war is perceived in a new way, even though the words do not change, which confirms the importance of context in understanding and interpreting a work of art. The war has sharpened feelings and set new accents, muting what had previously seemed important and bringing to the fore what had hitherto not attracted attention. For example, the line 'I will always come to you on broken roads' from the song *Stefania*, in which the lyrical hero assures his mother that no matter how winding and difficult his path may be, eventually he will return home, has acquired more specific meaning. Now it reflects the tragedy of millions of Ukrainians who have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in foreign lands. These words have become 'associated with the fact that people, despite the destruction, still reach for their homes, for the homes

13 <https://t.me/FirstLadyOfUkraine/467> (as of January 10, 2023).

14 V. Kuzyk, *Alhorytmy sekretiv khbita «Stefaniia»?*, "Muzyka: ukrainskyi internet-zhurnal", June 2022; <http://mus.art.co.ua/alhorytmy-sekretiv-khita-stefaniia/> (as of January 10, 2023).

of their parents, even if only ashes remain there,<sup>15</sup> as the songwriter Oleg Psyuk has noted. In the interview with the journalists of TV channel “Vikna-Novyny”, the musician said that ‘after the war, many people started to see new meanings in it, that is, many people miss their mothers or just perceive it as “Ukraine is my mother”, so this song became close to many people, right in the hearts of many Ukrainians’<sup>16</sup>.

Some musicians<sup>17</sup> believe that the melody is in the foreground of the song, while the verbal component (text) is in the background<sup>18</sup>. The tradition of combining new lyrics with existing melodies has deep roots. There are many examples where poets have turned to the same musical basis for decades or even centuries, as happened with the genre of *qi* in Chinese lyric poetry or with the troubadour servants, who used the metrical schemes of the famous *canzones* (songs). Popular musical motifs were used particularly often during wars and revolutions, when it was necessary to react quickly to the urgent issues of the day and when there was no time to learn new tunes. For example, researchers have counted more than a hundred variations of verses written on the theme of *Katyusha* (music by M. Blanter)<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the well-known melody greatly contributed to the popularisation of the new text. The public accepted the song as an ‘old acquaintance,’ and it quickly spread among the wider population. In our time, the Italian folk song *Bella ciao* (*Goodbye, beautiful!*), which for several decades was considered being an anthem of resistance to Fascism in Italy during World War II, has received a new life. Whether this was actually the case or not is debatable, but what is important is that the song’s popularity has not waned over the years, and today there are at least 25 cover versions of the song and around 50 translations into different languages. Most of them retain the motif of a hero defending his homeland from enemies, even at the cost of his own life. The author of the Ukrainian text and singer Khrystyna Solovey even changed the original title *Bella ciao* to *Ukrainian Fury*, emphasizing the relevance of the content specifically for Ukrainians and defining the basic mood that helps one to persist, and to which the clear rhythm, associ-

15 O. Yakovlieva, *Kalush Orchestra — Stefania: yaki sensy nese pisnia ta v chomu yii osoblyvist*, “Viknam”, 2022; <https://vikna.tv/styl-zhyttya/shou-biz/kalush-orchestra-stefania-yaki-sensy-nese-pisnya-ta-v-chomu-yiyi-osoblyvist/> (as of January 11, 2023).

16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV5fsu86aOM&t=29s> (as of January 13, 2023).

17 For example, the famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich argued that ‘the primary importance in music is still the thematic material, the melody’ (L. Danilevich, *Dmitry Shostakovich life and creativity* (Moscow: 1980), p. 266).

18 I.V. Stepanova, *Slovo i muzyka. Dialektika semanticheskikh svyazey* (Moscow: 1999).

19 V.I. Lyakh, D.A. Sigida, *Sovetskaya massovaya pesnya kak fenomen muzykal’nogo iskusstva 20 veka*, “Kul’turnaya zhizn’ Yuga Rossii”, 2 (57), 2015, 22–25.



ated with the energetic march of soldiers lined up in columns, corresponds. The song mentions the Ukrainian realities: the ‘old Dnipro’ and the weapons (javelins and bayraktars) with the help of which the Armed Forces of Ukraine defended the country from enemy missiles and tanks. Unlike the Italian text, which refers to the death and mourning of a partisan, the Ukrainian text is more optimistic and sounds rather radical and uncompromising, ending with the following lines:

» And soon there will be no Russians at all.  
And there will be peace all around the world!<sup>20</sup>

Ukrainian journalist Pavlo Kush has written a new lyric to the motif of the famous table song *Hei, Nalyvaite Povnii Chary!* (*Hey, Fill Your Cups Full!*). Now it is called *Hei, Zariadzhaite Vpevneno Zbroiu!* (*Hey, Load Your Weapon*) and calls not for a merry celebration but for defending the homeland.

The single *Ne Tvoja Viina* (*Not Your War*), written by Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, the lead vocalist of rock band “Okean Elzy” (“Elza’s Ocean”), premiered in 2015, a year after the Russian Federation seized Crimea and invaded Donbass. Back then, it was a call to listeners to take a proactive stance, overcome inner complexes, and take responsibility for their own lives rather than waiting for help from outside, blaming others for their problems. Now, when the war has come to every home, the song is still relevant, but the emphasis has shifted to the lines:

» It will take how many more  
Of your children, not your war?<sup>21</sup>

This rhetorical question sounds especially acute today, when more and more people are dying, both at the front and among the civilian population. It is impossible not to agree with the author of the song, who stresses, ‘It is not our war, because we did not start it, but we accepted the challenge and will end it victoriously!’<sup>22</sup>.

The song *I Am a Soldier* by the Kharkiv duo *5'nizza* Sergei Babkin and Andrei Zaporozhets became a hit back in 2002. It was a response to the patriotic song *Combat*, written for the Russian band “Lyube”. In contrast to the ‘father-combat’, who performs his military duty conscientiously and takes care of soldiers like his

20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqVCQEthhOU> (as of January 10, 2023).

21 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOtEC4wCA40>; translated by Treugol'ny: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%8F-%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%B0-not-your-war.html#songtranslation> (as of January 10, 2023).

22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOtEC4wCA40&t=7s> (as of January 10, 2023).

own children, the song *I Am a Soldier* is imbued with anti-military pathos, portraying war as a terrible massacre that brings only suffering and death:

» I am a soldier,  
And I lack a head.  
It got beaten off with their boots.  
Yo-yo-yo, the commander shouts.  
The commander's mouth is torn open  
because it was a grenade...  
White bandages, red bandages  
Won't heal a soldier<sup>23</sup>.

In March 2022, the Bulgarian Nikola Simeonov recalled, 'Когато я свирехме на старите си акустични китари по пейките в парка, никога не сме си представяли какво значение тя ще придобие днес'<sup>24</sup>. In the new version of the song, the lyrical hero is not an abstract warrior but the one who defends the freedom and independence of his country, the one who, in response to the order of the Russian cruiser *Moscow* to lay down his arms and surrender, replies, 'Russian ship, \*\*\*' (an answer that instantly became a meme and is quoted in many songs written during the war):

» I'm a soldier, and trust me, I didn't want war,  
but it is filling all live broadcasts.  
I'm a soldier, a soldier of my beloved country,  
I'm a hero of a free and new world.  
I'm a soldier. To those who came to us with a holey head,  
I'll break it off with my boots<sup>25</sup>.

Compared to the first version, the assessment of this lyrical hero, although he remained a soldier as before, changed from negative to positive; he became the embodiment of the warrior-defender virtues, so even in the Russian text of the new song version, the author refers to Ukraine in Ukrainian, calling it traditionally 'Nenka':

23 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GZ60fcfBaA>; translated by Jackie Hinny: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/soldat-soldier.html-5> (as of January 10, 2023).

24 'When we played it on our old acoustic guitars on park benches, we never imagined the importance it would have today' (<https://otgrada.bg/art/ya-soldat-ne-iskax-voinata-no-tya-e-po-vsicki-efiri>).

25 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADrrGk0dZ7c&t=1s>; translated by JVjr: <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/soldat-soldier-2022.html> (as of January 10, 2023).

» This ragga is for you, Mother-Nenka.  
You will be free, dear<sup>26</sup>.

Later, Babkin completely rewrote the lyrics of the song in Ukrainian. The English version of the song was created and performed by A. Zaporozhets<sup>27</sup>. It is closer to the original, unlike Babkin's texts.

## REFLECTIONS OF WAR EXPERIENCE IN UKRAINIAN SONGS OF 2022

Among the famous singers who continued to write and perform songs during the war, supporting both the defenders of the Motherland and the civilian population of Ukraine with their creative work, it is necessary to name such famous artists as Svyatoslav Vakarchuk (the band "Okean Elzy"), Oleh Skrypka (the band "Vopli Vidopliassova"), Oleksandr Ponomariov, Mykhailo Khoma, Serhiy Zhadan, Lyapis Trubetskoy, as well as beginner musicians: Andriy Khayat, Zoryana Konovalets and many others.

In the first months of 2022, new works devoted to the war began to appear on social networks, primarily on YouTube.com. So, on April 18, 2022, the premiere of Ponomariov's song *Ukraine's Gonna Win* took place. Today, the song has more than 32 million views. It was written immediately after the Russian cruiser *Moscow*, the largest in the Black Sea Fleet, sank on April 14, allegedly due to an accidental fire. In the chorus, Ponomariov used the response of the Ukrainian soldiers from Snake Island to the offer of the Russian cruiser *Moscow* to surrender on the first day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which became an Internet meme (with the obscenity replaced by the call 'Hey, hey!'):

» Burning, burning enemy equipment,  
Our native Ukraine overcomes it!  
It's burning, burning, and all on fire!  
Russian ship, go... Hey, hey!<sup>28</sup>

The marching rhythm conveys the menacing progress of an indomitable army that relentlessly moves towards the enemy, full of heroic pathos and confidence in the future victory. The narrative is built as a list of fruitless attacks by the enemy

26 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADrrGk0dZ7c&t=1s> (as of January 10, 2023).

27 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRAk2SGABaE> (as of January 22, 2023).

28 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRuiEv3JRDQ> (as of January 10, 2023).

that are successfully repelled by the Armed Forces: enemy equipment is on fire, an enemy tank is left without a turret, Russian planes are shot down, etc. It was not without humour. As a response to the fakes about the alleged presence of biological weapons on the territory of Ukraine (birds and bats infected with viruses), which are spread by Russian propaganda<sup>29</sup>, the song mentions so-called ‘bio-warriors’:

» Still scare the enemies  
Our bio-warriors.  
From geese, chickens, and pigeons  
They run like lamplighters<sup>30</sup>.

In Ponomariov’s song, the ‘I’ of the lyrical hero is transformed into ‘we’, which is caused by the perception of the war as a common disaster that united everyone – young and old people, men and women, residents of cities and villages, east and west – and is perceived by every Ukrainian as a personal tragedy. A symbol of unity is also the joint performance of songs by artists who had never performed together before the war<sup>31</sup>.

Another important theme that is constantly addressed by the authors of songs written during the war is love. Only by supporting each other can you overcome the most difficult situations, survive the tragedy of war, and not lose your humanity, believes the lyrical hero of the song *Pid Doshchem (Under the Rain)*. Its performer, Khayat, is sure, ‘Day after day, the enemy mercilessly steals our lives and destroys our homes and dreams. We will never be the same again. But no matter where we are, no matter how difficult it is for us, our most important mission, despite the pain and devastation, is to protect each other! Because our strength is in unity!’<sup>32</sup>.

A separate group consists of songs dedicated to the tragic events in the occupied territories – Bucha, Mariupol, etc., where many civilians died at the hands of the occupiers.

29 M. Bondarenko, *Chuma, sybirka, kholera: yaki feiky pro biolobichnu zbroiu poshyriui RF*, “Fakty”, 11 bereznia 2022; <https://v.gd/KST8rf> (as of January 17, 2023).

30 The word-property translation.

31 In addition to Ponomariiev, famous Ukrainian artists took part in the performance of the song *Ukraine Will Win*: singer Mykhailo Khoma, soloist of the band “Antytila”, youth ambassador of UNICEF in Ukraine, volunteer of the Territorial Defense Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Taras Topolya, Ukrainian showman and TV presenter Yevhen Koshov, Ukrainian comedian and TV actor Yuri Tkach, Ukrainian Roma singer, composer and actor Petro Chorny.

32 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FNI3NQIEgE> (as of January 10, 2023).

» The world trembled, there was burning pain:  
Bucha was crucified on the cross<sup>33</sup>.

Iryna Fedyshyn sings in the song *Rozstriliana Vesna (Shot Spring)*. One of the commentators rightly called this composition ‘a requiem for all the people of Ukraine’<sup>34</sup>.

The poignant lines of the song *Misto Marii (City of Mary)*, dedicated to the defenders of the Cossack city of Mariupol, are not only forever etched in the memory of the destroyed city and the metallurgical plant “Azovstal”, where Ukrainian troops held their last defence and hid from enemy bombing of hundreds of civilians, but despite all the pain, the death of many people, destroyed cities and towns, the main pathos of the song is confidence in the victory of freedom over slavery, life over death. Iryna Fedyshyn expressed the feelings of this and other Ukrainian songs written during the war and about the events of the war in one of the comments to her songs, ‘I put all my pain and the pain of the Ukrainian people into a song. I wrote vocals – I cried. I shot a video – I cried. Because there is no other way. But if you want, cry, pain comes out through tears. And then we gather our spirits again and fight on! Let’s fight for our Motherland!’<sup>35</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, thanks to social media, Ukrainian songs have become popular during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022. They are distinguished by a wide range of topics, genre and stylistic diversity, combining classical and folk music with rock, hip-hop and other contemporary musical trends in popular culture. Songs created before 24 February, in the context of current events, reveal new facets of meaning to the listener, even if the lyrics and music remain unchanged (for example, *Marichka, Not Your War*). Sometimes the songs are implemented in the current context and linked to modern Ukrainian realities through textual changes: adding specific Ukrainian topos, names and other signs of a certain place and time, which creates a palimpsest effect, when old and new layers of meaning are combined, enhancing the emotional impact of the song on the listener. Some works have a lot in common with songs written during previous wars, primarily during World

33 Translated by Christian Scharlau: <https://lyricstranslate.com/ru/rozstriliana-vesna-bucha-shot-spring-bucha.html> (as of January 10, 2023).

34 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42m6YNW5XAQ> (as of January 17, 2023).

35 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42m6YNW5XAQ&t=40s> (as of January 20, 2023).

War II. They are similar in their themes: mourning for the dead, confidence in future victory, love and women's fidelity, maternal love, children of war, revenge and hatred, heroism and sacrifice, and their composition usually consists of two parts: grief for those who suffered from the war and confidence in future victory. The search for an ideal hero who could serve as a role model leads to the appeal to historical figures, one of whom is Stepan Bandera, as well as to the works of famous Ukrainian classical poets such as Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, Geo Shkurupiy and others, whose works are quoted or used as material for contemporary song lyrics. The songs inspired by the war also show a variety of themes and genres, but whether they are heroic like *Ukraine Will Win*, tragic like *Shot Spring*, or lyrical like *Under the Rain*, they are all full of faith in the victory to come.

Contemporary Ukrainian songs reflect the specific realities of war, which gives them certain journalistic features. Songwriters try to respond swiftly to what is happening in the country, which may be reflected in the artistic level of the works, where the number of songs tends to exceed their quality, but moral support is now much more important than poetic merit.

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## SUMMARY

The article examines the song as the most popular mass literary and musical genre during the war years. The songs are categorised according to the time of creation, pathos, and themes. The authors point out that after February 24, 2022, the song became a popular genre, which could be explained by such features of the genre as its mass character, mobility, power of influence, motivational potential, and reliance on folklore traditions. The analysis of the textual material established that the

lyrical hero of the songs is more often the defender of the Motherland, the songs express a wide range of emotions, but on the whole, the heroic pathos prevails. It has been established that journalistic qualities are the main characteristic of most of the songs, which is explained by the need to respond quickly to current events, which affects their artistic level and, in some cases, leads their authors to use obscene language. The songs that combine a high level of literary and musical text with a high-quality, mostly professional, performance get the highest number of views.

**KEY WORDS:** war song, contemporary Ukrainian song, lyrics analysis

### DOŚWIADCZENIE WOJNY W UKRAIŃSKICH PIOSENKACH

Przedmiotem analizy w artykule jest piosenka jako najpopularniejszy gatunek literacki i muzyczny w latach wojny. Piosenki są dzielone według czasu powstania, patosu i tematów. Po 24 lutego 2022 roku piosenka stała się gatunkiem popularnym, co można tłumaczyć takimi cechami gatunku, jak masowy charakter, łatwość rozprzestrzenienia, siła oddziaływania, potencjał motywacyjny i oparcie na tradycjach ludowych. Analiza materiału tekstowego wykazała, że bohaterem lirycznym pieśni jest najczęściej obrońca ojczyzny, piosenki wyrażają bardzo zróżnicowane emocje, ale przeważa w nich heroiczny patos. Główną cechą większości piosenek stanowi okolicznościowość, co tłumaczy się potrzebą szybkiego reagowania na bieżące wydarzenia i wpływa na ich poziom artystyczny, a niekiedy skłania ich autorów do używania obscenicznego języka. Piosenki, które łączą wysoki poziom literacki i muzyczny tekstu z (na ogół) profesjonalnym wykonaniem, uzyskują największą liczbę wyświetleń w internecie.

**SŁOWA KLUCZE:** piosenka wojenna, współczesna piosenka ukraińska, analiza tekstu