

Bandura Performance as A Component of Contemporary Cultural and Artistic Space of Ukraine in Wartime Conditions

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Received: June 9, 2025, Accepted: July 2, 2025, Published: July 14, 2025

Abstract

The article examines the creative and performance activities of prominent representatives of modern bandura music, specifically bandura soloist Inna Lisniak, the Ciscarpathian Bandura Quartet “Gerdan”, and the National Honored Bandura Chapel of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda, in the context of wartime conditions. It is noted that since the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine’s sovereign territory on February 24, 2022, figures in the cultural and artistic spheres, including well-known performers, have contributed their creative potential to a variety of national-patriotic, volunteer, and humanitarian projects, both within Ukraine and abroad. The experience of bandurist Inna Lisniak, who, at the onset of Russia’s military attack on Ukraine, fled the war and settled in Estonia, is highlighted. In Estonia, she continues to actively promote Ukrainian musical culture and bandura performance. The concert and performance practices of bandura ensemble performers are analyzed, focusing on the Ciscarpathian Bandura Quartet “Gerdan” and the National Honored Bandura Chapel of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda, who, despite today’s difficult circumstances, continue to work in the artistic field, preserving and promoting bandura performance while raising Ukraine’s cultural profile globally. The primary goal of these bandurists, as examined in this research, has been to support the morale of people from various social and religious backgrounds affected by the war, as well as to assist the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Their musical “weapon” consists of nationally oriented and patriotic songs, which uniquely contribute to the fight against the Russian invaders, bolstering faith and confidence in Ukraine’s victory.

Keywords: Bandura; Bandura performance; Ciscarpathian Bandura Quartet “Gerdan”; Full-Scale Invasion; Inna Lisniak; Ukraine; Wartime.

1. Introduction

The performance art of kobzars and bandurists, which dates to the 16th and 17th centuries, is closely connected with the history of Ukraine. Reflecting the moral and ethical norms of the people’s existence, it has undoubtedly become one of the most significant phenomena of Ukrainian musical culture, integrating the spiritual essence of the people with the characteristic features of their national mentality and character. Reflecting on the art of kobzars and bandurists, the renowned Ukrainian writer Ulas Samchuk rightly noted: “A vast empire of deep emotional power with a vast army of bearers of its will. The Ukrainian domain of this music is historically and organically identified with the very lifestyle of the entire people and stands as a synonym or symbol of true Ukrainianness” [21].

Reliance on the strong cultural and artistic traditions of kobzars and bandurists, combined with the innovative changes that shaped the 20th century in the development of bandura performance, today represents a unique performance tradition to the world [9]; [11]. Having evolved over several centuries, it now demonstrates a high professional level of performance, as well as significant potential in presenting high-quality Ukrainian musical culture on the global artistic stage.

The history of kobza and bandura performance is marked by periods of both rise and decline, inextricably linked with various historical stages of Ukraine’s development. For many centuries, the Ukrainian people have fought for their right to exist, to form, and to preserve their national identity and culture. As performers continually reflected on the social events unfolding in their native land, the art of kobzars and bandurists acquired the status of a socio-cultural phenomenon [4]; [5]. Today, Bandura’s performance represents selfless dedication to native culture and art.

The full-scale invasion of Russian troops into the sovereign territory of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, became a difficult and cruel challenge for the state and its citizens. United in resistance, Ukrainians have been repelling the invaders for more than two years on both the physical and cultural fronts. As Iryna Tukova, PhD, Dr. Habil, and Associate Professor of the Theory of Music Department at the National Music Academy of Ukraine (Kyiv) rightly noted, “Since then, all layers of the art scene in Ukraine, including its musical life, have been drastically affected. After a period of shock and confusion, Ukrainian musicians have radically redirected their activities, focusing on two

main objectives: to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces in every possible way, and to reinforce cultural diplomacy, including the global popularization of Ukrainian music, thus conveying the truth about the war through music” [26].

Like the entire cultural and artistic community, representatives of bandura art have also focused their efforts on implementing various national-patriotic, volunteer, and humanitarian projects. The main goal of these initiatives has been to support the morale of people from different social and religious backgrounds and to aid the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The exploration of the creative and performance activities of bandurists since the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is especially relevant in today’s context.

It is worth noting that, although the study of musical and performance creativity during periods of revolutions and military conflicts is a recurring theme across many branches of musical art, research into the performance art of bandurists during this specific period has not yet received widespread attention. Except for a few generalizing publications in Ukrainian and international periodicals, information preserved in leading mass media, and video materials on YouTube, the subject has not gained significant popularity.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to highlight the creative and performance activities of prominent bandura performers, both in solo performance (Inna Lisniak) and in ensemble performance (the Ciscarpathian Bandura Quartet “Gerda” and the National Honored Bandura Chapel of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda), in the context of wartime conditions.

2. Literature review

Music represents ethnic cultural identity via aesthetics developed and preserved in the community over generations. Folk instrument music helps to preserve each community’s identity and is linked to social movements and ethnic identities [21]. Bates, drawing from mythology as well as from fictional literature, concluded we can view musical instruments as “not only having some degree of agency, but even as protagonists of stories—as actors who facilitate, prevent or mediate social interaction among other characters” [3], p. [364]. He reports an instructive conversation with Turkic musicians: “It was agreed that simply by holding, playing, and interacting with a saz I would become more Turkish [...] the saz itself contained an exclusive potentiality to impact change” [3], p. [386]. In cultural studies, aesthetics, and art criticism, it is customary to highlight the originality and distinctiveness of folk musical culture on an ethno-national basis within the boundaries of a common cultural space. The attention of art historians to folk musical culture, especially to folklore, is manifested in the fact that they consider this subject a national treasure that provides inexhaustible material for professional activity. From the standpoint of cultural studies, folk musical culture appears in a broad context as a phenomenon of spiritual culture, which, being in the space of folk creativity, can exert a significant impact not only on professional art and artistic life of the region, but also on the vital activity of local society, its self-identification. Dinh [6] emphasizes that thanks to the mega-, macro- and micro-level of cultural reflection, it is possible to conduct a productive analysis of the genesis of folk musical culture, identify the features of its functioning, as well as create a modern model of cultural policy that ensures its preservation with the inevitable modernization of traditional forms of existence.

At the same time, folk musical culture has a powerful vitality, which is ensured by intergenerational continuity and the ability to preserve traditions and adapt them to the changing socio-cultural space. It is precisely these qualities of musical culture that have repeatedly helped to survive in difficult life situations, painful social transformations [10], which is further confirmed in our work using the example of bandura performance within the cultural and artistic space of Ukraine in wartime conditions. Ukrainian musician and researcher Kysliak [13] claims that every new generation of folk instrument players must learn more about the heritage to include more individual instrumental and folkloric elements into contemporary authors' works.

Culture, while often used in everyday discussions, is a very complicated and controversial term around which human lives revolve. As a result, it commands unrivaled attention in any society's conversation. Williams' idea of ‘culture’ includes performance art such as music [29]. Visual art studies in the geographical tradition address issues such as representations of spaces, places, and environments, art production such as artistic traditions, the role of arts industries in the economy and cities, the spaces of artistic creativity, dissemination, and well-deserved recognition of art and art practices [23].

Historically, the emergence of humanistic geography, with its well-known emphasis on subjectivity and human experience, may be regarded as producing significant academic interest among geographers in the expressive and emotional engagement of art with locations. Geographers have traditionally been concerned with visuals (for the building and interpretation of landscapes), but music as a unique performing art and cultural media has increasingly piqued their interest. The richness, complexity, hybridity, and inclusive character of the topics explored in music geography witness to great growth in this discipline, as evidenced by special issues of two journals in the first decade of the present century [2; 30]. It should be noted that traditional music has been more and more popular in recent years. In 2021, the worldwide traditional music market brought in USD 12,261.7 million, and by 2028, it is projected to reach USD 31,527.6 million. By 2028, the market is anticipated to expand at a 14.4% CAGR (2022–2028) (see Fig. 1) [8].

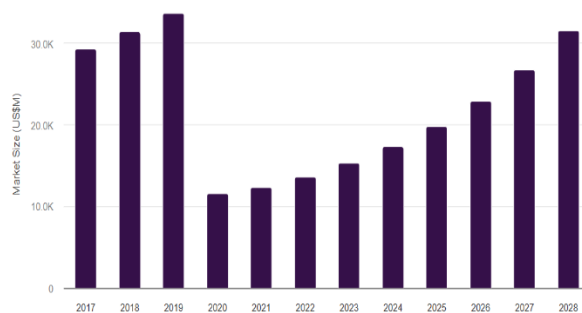


Fig. 1: Global Traditional Music Market, 2017-2028 (US\$M) [8].

In times of crisis, national music arts becomes an even stronger tool of identity preservation, even if a musician appears far from his/her motherland. Ukrainian bandura performance is a bright example of this assertion.

Tsytsyriev [27] demonstrates key points at the stage of development of such phenomenon of national music-making as the Ukrainian orchestra of folk instruments and indicates specific features of orchestral-ensemble activity for facilitating further fixation and analysis of the modern experience of groups of such type. The researcher points out that in the period from the beginning of the second half of the 20th century and up to the 1990s, there was an increasingly active and consistent attraction to the use of not only generally defined, but

also regionally characteristic musical instruments. Among the most popular instruments, there are sopilka, trembitas, drymbas, cymbals, etc. Also at this time, the development of folk instrument orchestras accelerated, and the period itself is characterized by the emergence of numerous orchestras, ensembles, bandura bands at centers and houses of folk art, production clubs, and other institutions. Later, leading professional artistic formations emerged based on these creative collectives.

In this vein, it is also expedient to mention the phenomenon of parataxis. Sarris et al. [22], by comparing the instrumental music of the Balkans with the music of the Aegean, point out a common ground regarding structure, which is called 'the technique of parataxis': the act of improvising by re-arranging a series of melodic units, hence creating form. Parataxis in folk music is manifested in the absence of obvious syntactic links between musical phrases or sentences, often creating a sense of "standing next to" elements without a clear indication of their interrelation. This can be manifested in the form of repetitions, variations, contrasts, or simply a consistent presentation of musical material. In folk music, parataxis is often associated with the oral nature of transmission and improvisation, where musicians can build a composition "on the fly" without following a strict logic of subordination. Simple, uncomplicated structures built on repetition and variations make it easy to remember and pass on melodies from generation to generation, adapting them to different performance conditions. In contemporary bandura performance by Ukrainian and diaspora artists, this phenomenon manifests rather evidently, representing a new field for both musicology studies and the development of Ukrainian folk instrumental performance.

It should also be noted that the phenomenon of national-cultural identity plays a special role in the problem of traditions, which became a subject of discussion among art historians, cultural scientists, and sociologists back in the 20th century. This phenomenon has divided scientists and practitioners into supporters of modern transformations of folk instrumental art and their opponents. The former explains the need for transformations by changing socio-cultural realities [14], the latter relies on the inviolability of traditions as a guarantee of preserving national-cultural identity [24]. The dispute between them can be resolved only with the help of interdisciplinary research, including art history, cultural, and sociological aspects.

3. Method

The study is based on qualitative methodology. While the overall paradigm of research is grounded on a system method and interpretivist approach, the toolkit of research consisted of qualitative content analysis and elements of grounded theory. At the initial stage of research, the search was conducted in ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Wiley, and EBSCO databases to outline the landscape for further research based on categorization. Then, based on the array of formulated categories, the final search of literature sources was conducted, and the sample for content analysis was formed.

The study integrated the historical-morphological, structural-typological, and musical-stylistic approaches to the study of instrumental culture at a new level. The study used methodological guidelines formed during the study of folk and folk-academic instruments and instrumental music, as well as approaches to the study of the role and place of the Institute of Musical Culture in political relations.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Rescue from bullets: bandura soloist Inna Lesniak

It should be noted that until the 20th century, the performance art of kobzars and bandurists, as an original form of folk art, had an exclusively individual character. One of the most significant achievements in the development of bandura performance in the 20th century was its professionalization, which provided a strong foundation for the further development, study, and enhancement of this art form.

Among the prominent representatives of modern bandura performance, the names of Lyudmila Posikira, Oksana Herasymenko, Roman Hryniv, Dmytro Hubyak, Svitlana Myrvoda, Heorhiy Matviyev, Valentin Lysenko, Yaroslav Dzhus, Maryna Krut, and many others stand out. They represent unique examples of traditional kobzarstvo (kobza art), solo and ensemble forms of academic music-making at the highest professional level, while also excelling in the popular performance genre.

At the onset of Russia's military attack on Ukraine, many Ukrainians, fleeing the war, were forced to leave their homeland. Among them, there were representatives of the artistic professions, including bandurists. Slowly recovering from the initial shock and adjusting to life abroad, some of them gradually returned to their creative work, establishing intercultural communication and showcasing the diverse palette of Ukrainian musical art to the world.

The well-known bandura player Inna Lisniak (born in 1978) was among those affected by the war. Today, the artist is forced to live in Estonia, where she actively promotes Ukrainian musical culture and bandura performance.

A native of Dnipropetrovsk (now the city of Dnipro), she was deeply engaged in creative, performing, and academic activities before the full-scale invasion. Having graduated from the Dnipropetrovsk Music College named after Mykhailo Glinka and the Donetsk State Music Academy named after Serhiy Prokofiev in bandura performance, Inna Lisniak became a laureate of the III International Competition of Performers on Ukrainian Folk Instruments named after Hnat Khotkevych in 2004. In 2006, she recorded her first CD, "Crystal Moment". Her concert repertoire includes Ukrainian folk and original songs, instrumental compositions, as well as works written specifically for the bandura by contemporary Ukrainian composers such as Oleksandr Rudyanskyi, Volodymyr Pavlikovskyi, and Maryna Lebed. In addition to Ukraine, the bandurist has performed in Finland, Germany, and Estonia. Notably, in March 2018, she was invited by the Congress of Ukrainians in Estonia to participate in the Shevchenko Days celebrations.

The concerts-lectures "Ukrainian Kobzarstvo and Shevchenko" were held in Tallinn and Narva, where audiences had the opportunity to enjoy Ukrainian songs performed by the bandura player and hear her lectures on the history of the formation and development of kobzarstvo.

Alongside her creative and performing activities, Lisniak has been engaged in pedagogy, teaching bandura and vocal classes in children's music schools in Donetsk and Kyiv.

Since 2008, Inna Lisniak has worked as a research fellow at the Institute of Art History, Folkloristics, and Ethnology named after Maxym Rylskyi (of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), researching bandura art and kobzarstvo. Her academic work includes several publications and a successfully defended dissertation in 2017 on the topic "Academic Bandura Art of the End of the 20th – Beginning of the 21st Century as a Reflection of the Leading Trends in the Development of Modern Ukrainian Musical Culture". She also published a monograph titled "Academic Bandura Art of Ukraine at the End of the 20th – Beginning of the 21st Century" in 2019 [15].

The full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, caught the artist in Hostomel, which quickly became an epicenter of the battles for Kyiv. "On March 10, we managed to leave Hostomel on foot... Thank you to everyone who sent thoughts and

prayers for us! 15 days in the basement, under constant fire, day and night, without light, heat, or water, without communication. The beautiful Kyiv region was destroyed by the horde,” [16], Inna wrote on her Facebook page.

Having survived the bombing and occupation, and after staying in a Polish camp for displaced persons, she and her family were able to evacuate to Estonia, where they were offered shelter.

Throughout her time abroad, the artist continued to work in her field. Over more than two years in Estonia, she managed to prepare and conduct about 30 concert performances and programs, both as a bandura soloist (her Estonian colleagues purchased a bandura for her, as her instrument remained at home) and in collaboration with Estonian musicians, including composer Andrus Kallastu, flutist Leonora Palu, kannel player Kristi Mühling (the kannel is an Estonian stringed instrument), harpsichordist Ene Nael, and others.

Thanks to Inna Lisniak, many Estonian musicians were introduced to the bandura as a uniquely Ukrainian national instrument, as well as to Ukrainian folk songs, including carols and shchedrivkas. She also familiarized her colleagues with the works of Ukrainian bandura composers such as Alla Zahaikevych, Volodymyr Zubytskyi, Viktor Vlasov, Valentina Martyniuk, and Volodymyr Pavlikovskyi.

The artist also continued to work in the scientific field. In the fall of 2022, she completed an internship at the Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. During this time, she became acquainted with Estonian colleagues who are musicologists and worked in the library of this educational institution. She participated in international conferences held in Finland (Helsinki), Hungary (Budapest), Turkey (Istanbul), and Estonia (Tartu), where she was notably involved in a research project at the Estonian Literature Museum (Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum) in Tartu. Within this framework, she presented a report titled “Methodology of Corpus Analysis of Folk Melodies and Testing: A Case Study of Estonian and Ukrainian Folk Songs”.

Among Inna Lisniak’s contemporary scientific research, there is the work “European Scientific and Artistic Dialogues: Ukraine-Estonia”, in which she discusses the role of European countries, particularly Estonia, in supporting Ukrainian researchers and artists during the full-scale war waged by Russia against Ukraine in the period from 2022 to 2023. Reflecting on her own experience, she notes, “... a great motivation for me, as well as for other Ukrainian researchers participating in international research projects during the war, is the desire to present the unique Ukrainian culture, traditions, and valuable contributions to the world scientific community. Additionally, there is a strong desire to restore the historical truth that has been misrepresented by Russian propaganda, which appropriated the history and culture of other nations” [18].

It is important to note that at the current stage, all the bandurist’s concert performances and scientific activities aim to popularize and promote Ukrainian musical culture in Estonia and integrate it into the European context. Since the beginning of the war, Inna and her family have also been assisting the Armed Forces of Ukraine, to whom they owe the preservation of their own lives.

4.2. Artistic promotion of Ukraine in bandura ensemble performance: the CIS Carpathian bandurist quartet “Gerdan”

Just as Ukrainian musical culture is unthinkable without the kobza and bandura, Ukrainian national instrument performance cannot be imagined without its ensemble form, which plays an important role in its popularization alongside solo performances. The history of the formation of collective bandura performance dates to 1902, when the founder of modern kobzar music, Hnat Khotkevych, initiated the first kobzar ensembles at the 12th Archaeological Congress held in Kharkiv. Their subsequent spread and existence were determined by the specifics of the development of bandura art, which, over the last century, underwent significant qualitative evolutionary and sometimes revolutionary transformations. These changes ranged from the improvement and unification of instrumentation to the academization and feminization of performance, along with a significant expansion of the repertoire range and even bold innovative experiments of today (such as the use of the bandura in jazz and in chamber ensembles, where the instrument is combined with various others, including violin, viola, flute, harp, accordion, etc.).

These transformations led to an active expansion of ensemble bandura music-making forms. In addition to small ensembles (duets, trios, quartets), larger ensembles emerged during the 20th century, including exclusively male (traditional) ensembles, as well as female and mixed ensembles. Despite their limited prevalence at the beginning of the last century, it is now impossible to imagine bandura performance without various collectives because “[...] the bandura chapel, as one of the forms of collective creativity, is a unique phenomenon of national culture both in Ukraine and within the broader context of world culture” [12].

Among the well-known groups of bandurists representing the chamber forms of bandura performance today, there are the duets “Bandurna Rozmova” (Lviv), “Metamorfosi” (Ivano-Frankivsk), and “Berehynia” (Drohobych), the trios “Verbena” (Cherkasy), “Malva” (Odesa), and “Oriana” (Ternopil), as well as the quartets “Kupava” (Kharkiv) and “Lvivianka” (Lviv). These ensembles tirelessly promote bandura art both in Ukraine and far beyond its borders.

A vivid example of chamber ensemble forms is the Ciscarpathian Bandura Quartet “Gerdan” (Ivano-Frankivsk), whose artistic activity focuses on developing and enhancing the best traditions of collective bandura performance in a modern interpretation. Founded in 2010, the quartet is distinguished by its exceptional technical proficiency and vocal capabilities. Today, its members include Nadiya Vivcharuk, Nataliya Fedornyak, Svitlana Matiishyn, and Professor Violetta Dutchak, who serves as the creative mentor of the bandurists.

Since its inception, “Gerdan” has repeatedly received the highest accolades at All-Ukrainian festivals and international competitions, gaining popularity among listeners and becoming a musical and artistic highlight of Ukraine. By promoting Bandura art in their homeland, the collective actively contributes to establishing the Ukrainian nation within the European cultural space. Tours abroad have become a distinctive feature of the quartet’s creative and performing activities, making them a welcome guest at various artistic events in Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and other countries.

It is highly anticipated by fans and has become a tradition for the quartet to be included in the concert program of the annual international Christmas festival “Carol in the Maizli”, which began in Ivano-Frankivsk in 2010. This festival aims to restore, preserve, and spread Christmas traditions, as well as the majestic calendar and ritual songs of the winter holiday cycle, namely Christmas carols and gifts. Since 2015, the “Gerdan” bandura ensemble has been a consistent participant in this event, which has continued even during the full-scale invasion. Thus, year after year, artists offer listeners a unique flavor of Ukrainian Christmas through beautifully performed carols accompanied by the original bandura.

A unique art project dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s Independence, titled “Ukrainian Calling: Carillon and Bandura”, featured the quartet alongside professional carillon player Iryna Ryabchun in 2021 [29]. This concert program showcased both the carillon, a unique European instrument, and the bandura, an ancient symbol of Ukrainian musical culture, presenting an original artistic product for the national music presentation in ten historical and religious centers of Ukraine by combining the sounds of bells with the playing and singing of the quartet. The implementation of this artistic idea was supported by the Ukrainian Cultural Fund and the Ivano-Frankivsk Television and Radio Company “RAI”. Thanks to their support, fans of innovations in Ukrainian musical culture had the opportunity to enjoy the finest examples of ancient Ukrainian music performed by professional artistic groups, as well as works by modern composers, which are now available in audio and video formats on the Internet.

The ensemble's performance art is marked by a strong patriotic component. In 2019, with the support of the aforementioned Ukrainian Cultural Foundation and "RAI" Television and Radio Company, along with Euromaidan and Revolution of Dignity participant Roman Hanushchak, the team took part in a documentary-musical film titled "Ukraine. Maidan. Reboot", which recounts the tumultuous events that unfolded during late 2013 and early 2014 on Kyiv's Independence Square. The film's distinctive feature is its coverage of these tragic events without journalists on screen or voiceovers, relying solely on video sequences and musical accompaniment. The fight for Ukraine, for its independence and freedom, serves as the main leitmotif of the music performed by the bandurists in this project.

Among the other compositions used in the dubbing of the film, there is the Lemko requiem song "Plyve Kacha", which is sung for those who fell on the Maidan and today serves as a farewell to the Ukrainian heroes killed in the war. Notably, the organizers of the documentary-music TV film "Ukraine. Maidan. Reboot" sent CDs with the recording to various educational institutions and libraries across Ukraine so that not only our contemporaries but also future generations could understand the high price that many compatriots paid during the winter of 2013-2014 for the independent future of our state. The events depicted in the film represent a vivid yet dramatic example of selfless love for the homeland and the desire for victory that Ukraine sought during that period. According to Violetta Dutchak: "[...] victory that is not so much political as it is mental over ourselves transforming the energy that existed in society at that time into a new progressive direction [...] the bandura itself, with its timbral sound in this film, became an identification of the Ukrainian revolution" [7].

However, neither the revolutionary events of 2013-2014 nor Russia's subsequent occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the spring of 2014 provided any indication that Ukraine would soon face a full-scale war. Like most Ukrainian artists, the bandurists of "Gerdan" responded to the full-scale invasion of Russia on February 24, 2022, with their creativity. The patriotic component of their work became significantly more pronounced with the onset of the war, vividly reflecting the nationally oriented civic position of the ensemble members. Currently, whenever possible, the bandurists successfully continue their concert activities both in Ukraine and abroad, directing all their efforts toward the artistic promotion of Ukraine and assistance to the Armed Forces.

In particular, it is worth noting the collective's participation in the cultural event "Days of Ukrainian Culture in Záhreb", which took place in the Croatian city on October 1-2, 2022, with the support of the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Society "Kobzar" (chaired by Yaroslav Burda) and the Council of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia. The bandurists presented Ukrainian culture with dignity and participated in commemorating both civilian and military victims of the war in Ukraine. Their performance program included Ukrainian folk and original works, such as the song "By the Poplar" by Petro Solodukha, dedicated to all the heroes who died for Ukraine.

The performances of the bandurist quartet, which took place during the International Specialized Machine-Building Exhibition of High-Tech Equipment for Various Branches and Industries (MSV) from October 10-12, 2023, in Brno, Czech Republic, were unforgettable. As part of the event, Ukraine was represented by the "Contact Ukraine" Program. The Ukrainian exhibition and stands were visited by the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Petr Fiala; the Chairman of the Senate of the Czech Republic, Miloš Vystrčil, the Minister of Industry and Trade, Jozef Šíkel, and other high-ranking officials, whose speeches addressed topics related to Ukraine, its support, and post-war reconstruction.

At this international event, a presentation of investment and business opportunities in the Carpathian region was held, with representatives from the region's enterprises in attendance. Thanks to the invitation from Andriy Levkovych, president of the Ivano-Frankivsk Chamber of Commerce and Industry, all attendees had the opportunity to enjoy the highly professional sound of the Ukrainian bandurist quartet "Gerdan". "The Ivano-Frankivsk Chamber of Commerce and Industry raised the bar for such presentations to a very high level with its representation of Ukraine and its culture, which will serve as a model for similar events", noted Vitaly Usatiy, the Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine in the Czech Republic.

A particularly memorable piece in the quartet's concert program was the patriotic song "Oy u luzi chervona kalyna", an anthem of Ukrainian resilience and determination. Notably, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, this song has gained exceptional popularity, especially after it was performed on Sofiyivsky Square in Kyiv by Ukrainian musician Andriy Khlyvniuk, the leader of the famous band "Boombox", who recorded a cover version of "Hey, Hey, Rise!" with the iconic British rock band "Pink Floyd".

The victory of the "Gerdan" quartet at the "Formidable" International Christmas and New Year Art Festival-Competition was indisputable. On February 2, 2024, the bandura players received the Grand Prix as a collective that tirelessly works in the artistic field, preserving and promoting Ukrainian musical culture, particularly through their performances on the bandura, which is an integral part of this culture.

In today's challenging circumstances, members of the quartet continually participate in charity concerts in support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The bandurists gladly accept invitations to participate in artistic events in the Carpathian region, particularly those honoring prominent figures from the area. Thus, during the current year of 2024, the quartet's performances were featured in artistic events dedicated to writer Stepan Pushyk, composer Ivan Fitalovych, poet Yaroslav Tkachyvs'kyi, priest Danyil Sikora, and other distinguished personalities from the Ivano-Frankivsk region [25].

It should be noted that the "Gerdan" quartet stands out for its originality and uniqueness in forming its repertoire. The group impresses with a wide range of performance possibilities in both vocal and instrumental aspects. An innovative approach to creativity, along with mobility and artistic expression, contributes not only to the effective functioning of the ensemble but also makes its professional activity, characterized by national traditionalism on one hand and compliance with European and global cultural and artistic standards on the other, both in demand and promising.

4.3. Fight for Ukraine on stage and the battlefield: the national honored chapel of bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda

In the context of this study, it is important to note that during the war, many collectives in Ukraine directed their creative and performing activities toward the glorification of Ukrainian art, charity, and assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine to bring victory closer.

A significant number of large bandura collectives emerged during the 20th century, many of which continue their creative and performing activities today. Among them, there are the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda (Kyiv), the Chapel of Bandurists "Karpaty" of the Ukrainian Society of the Blind (Lviv), the Strusiv Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine "Kobzar" (Strusiv, Ternopil Oblast), the Chapel of Bandurists named after Ostap Veresai (Chernihiv), "Charivnytsia" (Dnipro), "Gamaliya" (Lviv), "Magic Strings" (Lviv), the Taras Shevchenko Bandurist Chapel (USA), the Canadian Bandurist Chapel (Toronto, Canada), and many others. These collectives, both amateur and professional, comprising men's, women's, mixed, and children's ensembles, have made an invaluable contribution to the development and popularization of bandura art in Ukraine and beyond its borders.

One of the first large ensembles was the First Chapel of Bandurists, founded in Kyiv in 1918 by the virtuoso bandurist Vasyl Yemts (1890–1982). Forced to emigrate to Western Europe in the 1920s, Yemts was invited by the "Kobzar" Society, established in 1923 in Prague as the first socio-cultural association in the history of academic bandura within the Ukrainian diaspora of Central Europe. He was tasked with teaching bandura and organizing an ensemble of bandurists in Czechoslovakia. Notably, between 1923 and 1926, Yemts attracted over 60

bandurists of varying ages and social statuses to study the Ukrainian national instrument. In Prague and Poděbrady, he organized groups of bandura players, including the Ukrainian Chapel of Kobzars (Prague, 1925), which reflects the great popularity of bandura performance among Ukrainian emigrants during that period. Additionally, it was in the periodicals of Prague that Vasyl Yemts's works were first published, including excerpts from his authorial book "Kobza and Kobzari", published in 1923 in Germany [31], as well as articles devoted to bandura performance.

Returning to the Kyiv Chapel of Bandurists, it is important to note that in 1925, the collective was awarded the title of "First Ukrainian Artistic Chapel of Bandurists". Like the Kyiv chapel, numerous ensembles and chapels of bandurists were established in other regional centers. For example, the Poltava Chapel of Bandurists was founded in 1925 by Volodymyr Kabachko. Namely, based on these two collectives, the First Exemplary Chapel of Bandurists was established in 1935. The more than 100-year history of the collective's concert and performance activities vividly illustrates the stages of its creative rise and decline, linked to different historical periods, including the Second World War, the post-war period, the Soviet era, and the period of Ukraine's independence. The active touring practice of the chapel, both in Ukraine and abroad, "contributed not only to the preservation and popularization of national musical traditions (at the levels of instrumentation and ensemble-choral singing) but also to the identification of Ukrainian musical culture, highlighting its specific values and distinctions from others".

Today, one of the oldest artistic collectives in Ukraine is the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda. Since 2013, it has been headed by People's Artist of Ukraine Yuriy Kurach, with constant assistance from Music Director Volodymyr Marunych and Conductor Oleksiy Boyar. It is important to highlight the particularly fruitful activities of the chapel under the leadership of these artists.

Currently, the chapel comprises about 80 artists who perform a nationally oriented repertoire, notable for its diversity in genre and style. Most of the concert repertoire includes Ukrainian folk songs (historical, Cossack, military, insurgent, lyrical, humorous), calendar-ritual songs (carols, charity songs), original works, vocal pieces based on Shevchenko's writings, and modern patriotic compositions. The bandurists combine their performances into thematic programs, among which "Sings, Laughs...", "Singing Ukraine", "Bandurist, Gray Eagle", "All Eternity – From String to String", "Love Your Ukraine...", and "Oh, Ukraine! Oh, Dear Mother!" have become popular. Alongside ensemble performances, concertgoers can enjoy unique solos from the chapel's talented performers, such as Serhiy Zakharets on the old-age long bandura and others. Over the past ten years, the collective's output has been enriched with new recordings featured on ten CDs.

In the context of this exploration, it is worth mentioning the unique art project that took place in 2018 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Kyiv Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine, supported by the Ukrainian Cultural Fund. The culmination of this project was a historic concert held on October 22 at the Kyiv Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theater. "For the first time in 82 years, two ensembles, the Ukrainian Chapel of Bandurists named after Taras Shevchenko and the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists named after Heorhiy Maiboroda, performed together on the same stage. The grandeur and scale of this event, 120 bandurists on stage simultaneously, impressed the packed hall and elicited a flurry of applause," [19], noted musicologist Inna Lisniak.

Analyzing the over century-long creative history of the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda, it is striking to realize that this collective, whose former members once survived the horrors of the Second World War, found itself once again at the center of wartime events in Ukraine's recent history. The large-scale invasion of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, fundamentally changed the lives of the Ukrainian people. Many cities and villages, including Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Mariupol, Irpin, and Bucha, suffered from shelling. Buildings were destroyed, and the civilian population was exterminated.

In February 2022, the chapel members were preparing for another tour in the Chernihiv region, which was scheduled as part of the Shevchenko Days celebrations. However, the personal and creative lives of the team members were altered by the war; everyday rehearsals were replaced by military realities. A significant number of musicians, lacking military training, voluntarily joined the ranks of the territorial defense. Some had to participate in intense battles for Chernihiv from the first days of the invasion to reclaim the Kyiv region. Given that the members of the chapel hail from various parts of Ukraine, many of their families ended up in temporarily occupied territories.

"It was terrifying to think that the spectators who attended the chapel's concert in January were affected. It was unbearable to realize that the House of Culture in Derhachi, Kharkiv region so clean and beautiful, where we performed in January to a full hall had been destroyed by the Russians, and that the cities of Kupyansk, Chuhuiv, Shevchenkove, and others in the Luhansk region, where we had recently toured, were now occupied" [20], recalled members of the collective.

Since the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda has actively fought on cultural, artistic, and military fronts. Today, nine of its participants, including Honored Artists of Ukraine Volodymyr Trybel and Oleksiy Sokolovsky, as well as Dmytro Romanchuk, Ivan Tkalenko, Heorhii Nechaev, Andriy Boychenko, Oleh Slobodian, Maksym Peryan, Taras Kozmenko, and Dmytro Rudenko, are serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, bravely defending their homeland. The bandurists express their unwavering belief that "in general, one could compile a long list of venues where we performed that no longer exist. But we will undoubtedly return there to hold a concert in memory of those who gave their lives for us" [1].

It should be noted that during 2022-2023, the chapel conducted numerous charitable artistic projects across many cities in Ukraine, as well as in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Spain, and France. These initiatives were primarily aimed at supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The first charity concert tour in Europe since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, titled "With Ukraine in the Heart", began on April 7, 2022, and took place in Poland and Hungary. The primary goal of the chapel members was to introduce residents of these countries to the unique Ukrainian culture, to remind them of the tragic events occurring in Ukraine, and to collect charitable donations for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. One performance by the group in Poland highlighted the concert as "an excellent opportunity to learn more about Ukrainian folk music. The repertoire was diverse, featuring light and nostalgic songs alongside more serious ones, referencing military themes... The concert of the National Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine, part of the ensemble's tour in Lower Silesia, exemplified Polish-Ukrainian solidarity against the barbaric Russian invasion of Ukraine and the brotherhood of Poles and Ukrainians, who were also among the audience" [1]. The tour concluded on April 17, and in May and June of the same year, the bandurists returned with concerts to Polish cities and visited Germany and Austria. Throughout all twenty-six concert performances, which were exclusively charitable, the performers felt immense love and support from the audience, which included local fans as well as ethnic Ukrainians and temporarily displaced citizens from Ukraine.

The National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda continued its support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the promotion of Ukrainian culture through an international tour that commenced in September 2022. During this tour, the artists held charity performances in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Austria, where they once again showcased Ukrainian musical culture. Most importantly, they were able to share a piece of their homeland with compatriots who, fleeing the war, were forced to leave their homes and settle in Europe.

In the context of this study, it is noteworthy to mention a special concert by the bandurists' chapel that took place on November 22, 2022, in Kyiv. This performance occurred during a period marked by frequent interruptions in the operations of energy companies due to military actions by the aggressor country. "Yesterday, we became the first group to perform a concert at the National Philharmonic of Ukraine completely without electricity. There was no ticket scanning at the entrance, no microphones, and no lighting. We thank all the employees of the Philharmonic for their maximum efforts. We are grateful to the audience who bought tickets, came to the hall under such circumstances, and agreed to hear this concert. We poured all our strength, skill, and soul into this performance. Above all, we thank the Armed Forces of Ukraine for holding on and continuing to live and create!" [12] This is how the chapel members described this unprecedented concert in their creative practice.

At the end of November 2022, the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda embarked on its first tour of Ukraine since the full-scale invasion, a long-awaited event. In the winter of the same year, the artists presented a concert tour titled "Ukrainian Christmas", which was not only for compatriots but also a gesture of gratitude towards their Polish and Czech friends for their help and ongoing support in the fight against the aggressor.

The year 2023 began with a significant concert tour of Ukraine under the program "Love Your Ukraine...", featuring new works inspired by the words of Taras Shevchenko. Between air raid alarms, the bandurists performed in concert halls across the country and front of soldiers, including at the Central Military Hospital in Kyiv.

In the spring of 2023, the chapel resumed its tour of Polish cities. During these performances, in addition to the group's traditional repertoire, some songs were sung in Polish as a sign of respect and gratitude to the neighboring people for their extraordinary support and assistance to Ukrainians during a challenging time for the country. Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the band has given more than 70 concerts in Poland, consistently receiving a warm reception from audiences and generous contributions to the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

In June 2023, the bandurists visited Slovakia, and in the fall of 2023, they embarked on another tour in France, Spain, and Poland with the program "Oh, Ukraine! Oh, Dear Mother!".

On November 2, 2023, in Kyiv, the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda celebrated the 105th anniversary of the group's founding. In winter, they once again visited Europe with their Christmas program "Winter's Fairytale". Having held more than a hundred concerts outside of Ukraine to date, the bandurists tirelessly affirm their significant contribution to cultural diplomacy and continue to remind Europeans that the war in Ukraine, unfortunately, persists, and the need for assistance from the European and global community remains urgent.

5. Conclusion

In summary, we note that the performance of the bandura, an integral and essential component of the Ukrainian cultural and artistic landscape, not only embodies musical and aesthetic qualities but also conveys historical information and the inexhaustible energy of many generations of performers on this national instrument. Since February 24, 2022 the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into the sovereign territory of Ukraine the bandura, as one of the spiritual symbols of the Ukrainian people, has become not only the heart of national-patriotic education for the younger generation but also a personification of the Ukrainian people's struggle for freedom and independence.

Today, the military theme is prevalent in almost all cultural and artistic events featuring bandurists, both in Ukraine and abroad. Given Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, which includes an aggressive information campaign, modern performers not only introduce Europeans to Ukrainian musical culture but also actively participate in promoting Ukraine on the international stage, aiming to consolidate global efforts to counter the unjustified aggression of Russia. Furthermore, the desire of these performers to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine and assist Ukrainians enduring the extreme trials of war both within Ukraine and in forced emigration is particularly significant.

A vivid example of dedication to native culture and the Ukrainian people in wartime conditions is the creative and performing activity of contemporary bandurists, including solo performer Inna Lisniak, the Ciscaucasian Bandurists Quartet "Gerda", and the National Honored Chapel of Bandurists of Ukraine named after Heorhiy Maiboroda. These artists continuously direct their creative potential toward the benefit of Ukraine and its future. During the war, most of the repertoire of these artists comprised nationally oriented and patriotic compositions (arrangements of folk songs and original works with folkloric references), among which the military song "O u luzi chervona kalyna" has become especially significant. Today, such musical works, accompanied by the bandura, elevate the fighting spirit of Ukrainians, serve as a musical weapon against the Russian occupiers, and instill faith and confidence in Ukraine's victory.

Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine continues, prompting representatives of creative and performing professions, particularly bandurists, to face today's challenges while continuing their work in the new conditions and realities of modern life, both in Ukraine and in forced emigration abroad. Therefore, the study of various aspects of their creative and performing activities, as well as their public, volunteer, and educational practices, remains particularly relevant and outlines the prospects for further scientific research in this field.

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