

## International Activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir During the 2022 russian-Ukrainian War

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*The aim of the article* is to outline the main aspects of the international activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir as an element of cultural diplomacy during the 2022 russian-Ukrainian war. *Results.* The article analyses the international activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir during the period of hostilities in Ukraine. The main objectives of the choir's work are identified, and the ensemble's repertoire policy on a tour of French cities is outlined. *The scientific novelty* of the study lies in the primary analysis and consideration of the international activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir, and its influence on the formation of a positive cultural image of today's Ukraine on the world stage. In particular, a tour of French cities in November 2022 is considered. *Conclusions.* The activity of the choir during the war became a full-fledged tool for popularising and protecting national culture in the national and international sense. In its international activities, the Moravski Chamber Choir, without exaggeration, has become an ambassador of the Ukrainian choral culture on the world stage. Popularising the narratives of the protection of Ukrainian national culture from destruction by barbarian aggressors, drawing and sharpening the attention of the European community to current events on the territory of Ukraine, calling for the defence of democratic values of the world community, popularising the traditions of Ukrainian choral art, revealing the national features of the Ukrainian people are the goals of the choir's work on the international music arena. The article traces the diversity of the choir's work in today's realities, where the choir's work is not only a cultural and artistic activity but also a function of a full-fledged participant in intercultural diplomacy.

*Keywords:* Moravski Chamber Choir; O. Radko; cultural diplomacy; ambassador of culture; international cooperation; art in times of war

### For citation

Kravchuk, O., & Yatskulynets, O. (2023). International Activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir During the 2022 russian-Ukrainian War. *Bulletin of KNUKіM. Series in Arts*, 48, 65–70. <https://doi.org/10.31866/2410-1176.48.2023.282445>

### Introduction

The international activity of Ukrainian choirs during the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2022 is a full-fledged tool of cultural diplomacy necessary for creating a positive cultural image of Ukraine as a highly cultured and distinctive state on the world stage. An important component of cultural and artistic missions to carry out creative activities abroad is the identification of Ukrainian culture as a unique and tradition-rich nation. The Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Ukraine, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, S. Kys-

lytsia (The Ukrainians, 2020) notes that the issue of recognition of Ukraine by the world community is largely the association with "aggression, military operations, occupation, and human rights violations. Our task is to ensure that this recognition tends towards positive associations with Ukraine". Thus, one of the tasks of Ukrainian artists is to create and popularise a positive image of Ukraine as a highly cultured nation.

One of the first manifestations of cultural diplomacy through choral art in the history of national culture is the creation and activity of the Ukrainian Republic Capella in 1919 under the direction of O. Koshyts. Today, the international activities of

both artistic and choral groups of Ukraine are in line with the activities of the Ukrainian Republic Capella, namely: separation of Ukrainian national culture from Russian (Moscow), familiarisation of the world community with the traditions of Ukrainian choral art and their popularisation, drawing the attention of the international community to the military conflict on the territory of our country. Therefore, the Ukrainian artistic ensemble, which is the subject of our research, plays the role of an ambassador of Ukrainian culture in the world.

*Recent research and publications analysis.* The source base of the study is the scientific research on the history of the formation and activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir (Kravchuk, 2022); personal communication with the members of the chamber choir, in particular, Volodymyr Ursu and French choristers Jean-Paul Christophe and Martin. The study's important source of information is the materials published by the Ukrainian and European mass media, which outline the main achievements of the choir in realising its cultural mission on the international stage.

**The aim of the article** is to analyse the main aspects of the international activities of the Moravski Chamber Choir as an element of cultural diplomacy during the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war and to create a positive image of modern independent Ukraine.

## Results

More than a year has passed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which provides sufficient grounds to draw certain conclusions and analyse the processes taking place in Ukraine and the world. During the year of the military conflict, the topic of events in Ukraine gained primary importance in the world information space. The brutality shown by the Russian army on the territory of our state does not leave the world community indifferent, which is the main reason for the increased attention both to the tragic events experienced by our country, and to the Ukrainian nation itself, its culture, and traditions.

The world cultural and artistic community, as a sign of support and solidarity with the Ukrainian people, is interested in and promotes Ukrainian culture. Projects involving domestic artists with the representation of music by Ukrainian composers are being implemented; there are collaborations with world-famous figures and brands. In turn, Ukrainian artists are actively working to promote national culture, implementing various cultural and artistic projects abroad. In the field of choral art, various municipal and national choral groups conduct active international activities. In particular, the Kyiv

Municipal Chamber Choir (director — M. Hobdych), the National Honoured Academic Chapel of Ukraine Dumka (director — Ye. Savchuk), the H. Verovka Ukrainian National Honoured Academic Folk Choir (director — Z. Korinets), the H. Maiboroda National Honoured Bandurist Chapel of Ukraine (director — Yu. Kurach), the Honoured Academic Transcarpathian Folk Choir (director — N. Petii-Potapchuk) and others. The work of the Moravski Chamber Choir, which never ceased its creative mission, although it was forced to "pause" the rehearsal process from February to June 2022, is no exception in conducting intercultural and international activities.

In early March 2022, the Moravski Choir began preparations for the *Sing with us, Europe!* project in collaboration with the German association Art Crossing Borders (Kravchuk, 2022). The project involved more than 33 groups from 25 countries around the world to perform the Ukrainian National Anthem together, as a symbol of support and solidarity with the Ukrainian people. The result of the creative project was a video clip featuring all the participants, which was presented on the YouTube platform for the Independence Day of Ukraine, 25 August 2022 (Art Crossing Borders e.V., 2022).

The choir's next international project was a tour to France in November 2022. According to the choir's director Volodymyr Ursu (personal communication, 25 February 2023), since the start of the full-scale invasion, the choir has been receiving letters of support from colleagues from different countries around the world. One of such letters was from French choristers, who invited the choir to come to France for a temporary stay.

However, realising the exceptional importance of their own activities in protecting and preserving the national cultural space during the full-scale Russian invasion, the offer was declined.

The work of the chamber choir in the period from 24 February to June 2022 was carried out exclusively in remote mode. However, since the second half of May, choristers began to return to Kyiv, which led to the resumption of the ensemble's work. Since the choir leader Olena Radko left for temporary residence in Poland (Krakow, created the Ukrainian children's choir at the Krakow Philharmonic), choirmasters Oleksandr Kravchuk and Yuliia Kuslyva began to work on the renewal of the choir's activities. The result of their work was two charity concerts (Kravchuk, 2022) *Our Heart is Ukraine*, and *Free. United. Invincible*, which took place with the informational support of the Council of Young Scientists at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and aimed to provide psychological support to domestic scientists. In addition to the artistic and psychological

components, the projects aimed to raise funds for the needs of scientists in cooperation with the Charity Fund Human. As a result of the choir's fundraising efforts, the Charity Fund Human purchased one (out of eleven!) portable personal computer and gave it to one of the Ukrainian scientists for permanent use to continue professional scientific activities.



**Fig. 1.** Poster of the choir's concert performances in France 2022. Source: from the personal archive of the authors of the article

Since September 2022, active preparations were underway for a concert tour of French cities at the invitation of the choral association À Cœur Joie Bourgogne Franche-Comté et Rhône<sup>1</sup>. In November, cultural events of the Moravski Chamber Choir took place in the cities of (Fig. 1) Maçon (at the Église Notre-Dame de la Paix), Dijon (at the Église de la Visitation), Gray (at the Basilique Notre-Dame de Gray), Tonnerre (at the Salle Marland), Lyon (at the Temple du Change).

The concert programme of the Moravski Chamber Choir's tour presented the brightest performances,

revealing the possibilities of the choir and its artists as much as possible. The main idea was to present a wide range of national choral art, from patriotic, folk, and humorous works to works that are world-famous, like "Shchedryk" arranged by M. Leontovych.

The core of the programme was the arrangements of folk songs by M. Krechko, V. Volontyr, V. Hrytsyshyn, I. Bidak, P. Zelinskyi, O. Chmut, and traditionally — the arrangements by the choir leader Olena Radko. As noted by O. Kravchuk (2022), "the choir's uniqueness in terms of repertoire, of course, is the performance of author's works and compositions in the Olena Radko's arrangement", including arrangements of folk songs, rearrangements of works by Ukrainian and foreign composers, and spiritual music: "There Is a Pear Tree in the Garden", "Oh, the Girl Was Walking along the Shore", "Wreath", "Carol" (music by A. Komlikova, edited for the Moravski Choir by O. Radko).

Among the works of Ukrainian composers included in the programme, it is worth noting the Ukrainian song that has become a symbol of the invincibility of the Ukrainian people since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine "Oh, The Red Guelder Rose in the Meadow" in traditional musical performance and with its own interpretive changes. The changes are due to the use of a solo voice (folk viola in singing), a percussion instrument — a woodblock and the highlighting of a male choral part at the beginning of the piece.

The highlight of the tour programme was Ye. Stankovych's choral miniature "The Cherry Orchard" based on the poetry of the famous Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. The choir conductor O. Radko, in addition to the filigree choral pianissimo and the created "transparent" choral texture, introduced an artistic whistle into the work, representing the nightingale from Shevchenko's poetry. It was the concert work where the youngest chorister of the ensemble L. Holota (15 years old) performed the artistic whistle, causing great admiration among the European audience.

An important part of the choir's programme is the performance of works by the Ukrainian composer H. Havrylets, whose life unfortunately ended at the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022. The choir performed the ancient chant "Merciful Mother" and the Ukrainian carol "Hey, the Prince's Crown Asked" arranged by the musician.

In addition to choral works, the programme of the artistic event also included solo performanc-

<sup>1</sup> À Cœur Joie is a non-profit association dedicated to the development of amateur and professional choral singing in France. Since 1948, À Cœur Joie has brought together singers, choirmasters, composers, and all choral singing enthusiasts (*Qui sommes-nous?*, n.d.).

es, in particular, V. Kosenko's arrangement of the Ukrainian folk song "I Loved a Widow" performed by O. Kravchuk (concertmaster D. Mendelenko). The solo performance of the ensemble's chorister Yu. Bazeliuk deserves special attention, she, in the typical Ukrainian folk manner, performed the spring song "Mother Asked Her Daughter". A. Konkevych (woodblock, pipe, shaker, tambourine) and K. Mukha (guitar) provided instrumental accompaniment for some choral pieces.

Between the concert performances, the presenter voiced in French the story of the war of the Moravski Chamber Choir's artists. Also, each concert location displayed an exhibition of photographs of Ukrainian cities damaged during the war.

In addition, the national anthems of Ukraine and France were performed in all concert performances together with all the choirs. Also, in the city of Macon, the work "Verkhovyno" was performed by the Moravski Chamber Choir together with local choral ensembles under the direction of *Henriette Adler*.



**Fig. 2.** Conductors Yu. Kuslyva, O. Radko, O. Kravchuk after the concert at the Eglise de la Visitation (Dijon).

Source: photo by Stéphane Rak.

The following choristers were part of the team that went on a tour of the cities of France: *soprano*: V. Honhalo, I. Hryhorenko, I. Matrosova, N. Pohuda, S. Oliinyk, M. Smirnova, K. Kokarieva, A. Mykheieva; *alto*: K. Mukha, O. Karnaukhova, Yu. Bazeliuk, D. Titarova, D. Mendelenko, V. Tsepota, Yu. Kuslyva, N. Bidna, N. Taran; *tenor*: O. Kozynets, T. Yatskulynets; *bass*: V. Ursu, O. Kravchuk, Ye. Hvozdi, V. Dotsenko, L. Holota, A. Konkevych, O. Pavlenko, V. Rybarchuk; *conductor* (Fig. 2): O. Radko (Yatskulynets), *choirmasters*: Yu. Kuslyva, O. Kravchuk; *interpreter*: D. Mendelenko (*1 alto*).

After completing a ten-day tour of French cities, a number of French regional media published the reflections of the citizens on what they heard and saw (Durdilly, 2022) "Chills, tears, and compassion. The emotion was palpable at the Church of the Visitation in

Chevigny-Saint-Sauveur on Monday evening. More than six hundred people made a trip to attend a very symbolic solidarity concert of the Kyiv Moravski Choir, the ambassador of Ukrainian choral singing in France".

Among the main goals of the Moravski Chamber Choir in their international activities, the following should be highlighted:

1. Popularising Ukrainian choral culture and representing the creative work of its representatives (composers) on the international music stage;

2. Drawing the attention of the international community to the political situation in the country caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022;

3. Supporting displaced Ukrainians who are forced to live in France due to military aggression on the territory of Ukraine, through cooperation and financial assistance with the organisation Caritas Ukraine;

4. Establishing and strengthening long-term intercultural and international ties through the implementation of joint projects;

5. Introducing French citizens to real "stories of war" from choir members and with the help of a photo exhibition of recorded evidence of violent events in Ukraine;

6. Seeking financial support from the European community to restore the cultural and artistic activities and the humanitarian mission of the choir.

According to Jean-Paul Christophe, President of the Arpège choral ensemble (J.-P. Christophe, personal communication, 22 January 2022), the French audience was very impressed by the Ukrainian choir's passion and joy for life "... such that it is impossible to even imagine what they are going through. This feeling will accompany us forever: they will remain in our hearts forever". The choir's conductor, Olena Radko, repeatedly emphasized in communication with the French public that singing is a kind of act of resistance against the destruction of Ukrainian culture and nation.

In addition to their concert activities, the chamber choir also conducted educational missions. In particular, the choir met with representatives of the authorities in all the cities where they performed (L'Est Républicain, 2022). Given the great attention paid to the arrival and artistic and creative mission of the choir, the organisation and level of these meetings confirm the high degree of support for the Ukrainian people.

It is worth noting that at official meetings, choristers voiced problems regarding the situation in Ukraine and the importance of supporting the Ukrainian people, discussed the uniqueness of Ukrainian culture and, of course, expressed gratitude to the people of France for their assistance and comprehensive support. According to Martin (personal communication, 22 January 2022), an artist from the Dijon choir Suliko, choristers of the Moravski Chamber Choir impress with their

friendliness, kindness, and strength of character, which causes general admiration among the French. She also emphasised the high quality of the concerts, stating that "their music charmed the audience".

## Conclusions

Summing up the above material, it should be noted the need to preserve and record such cultural and creative activities of Ukrainian art groups. The research will be an auxiliary tool in future scientific investigations to expand and define the role of cultural and artistic actions, and their importance in building international cultural diplomacy.

In its international activities, the Moravski Chamber Choir has become an ambassador of Ukrainian choral culture on the world stage. Popularising the narratives of the protection of Ukrainian national culture from destruction by barbarian aggressors, drawing and sharpening the attention of the European community to current events on the territory of Ukraine, calling for the defence of democratic social values of the world community, popularising the traditions of Ukrainian choral art, revealing the national features of the Ukrainian people by means of musical art are the goals of the choir's work on the international music arena. Thus, the article traces the versatility of the choir's work in today's realities, where the crucial directions are not only the cultural and artistic activities but also the implementation of the important function of a full-fledged participant in intercultural diplomacy.

*The scientific novelty of the study* lies in the relevance of the analysis, systematisation, and preservation of the information component of modern artistic practices during the period of hostilities in Ukraine, and the activities of domestic choral groups on the international stage to create a positive image of the state.

*The prospects for further research* on this topic are determined by the development of activities and international cooperation of the Moravski Chamber Choir,

the representation of new cultural and artistic projects, and the expansion of comprehensive support and interaction of the world community with domestic creative ensembles.

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## Міжнародна діяльність камерного хору «Moravski» в період російсько-української війни 2022 року

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*Метою статті є аналіз основних аспектів міжнародної діяльності камерного хору «Moravski» як елемента культурної дипломатії в період російсько-української війни 2022 року. Результати дослідження. У статті проаналізовано міжнародну діяльність камерного хору «Moravski» в період*

військових дій на території України. Виокремлено основні цілі роботи колективу, окреслено репертуарну політику хору в гастрольному турне містами Франції в листопаді 2022 р. Зазначено, що після завершення десятиденного туру камерного хору «Moravski» містами Франції в низці французьких регіональних ЗМІ з'явилися схвальні відгуки містян на виступи колективу. *Наукова новизна* дослідження полягає в первинному аналізі й розгляді міжнародної діяльності камерного хору «Moravski», в дослідженні його впливу на формування позитивного культурного іміджу сучасної України на світовій арені. *Висновки.* Діяльність хорового колективу в період російської агресії стала повноцінним інструментом популяризації й захисту вітчизняної культури в національному й міжнародному значенні. У своїй інтернаціональній діяльності камерний хор «Moravski» без перебільшення став амбасадором української хорової культури України на світових майданчиках. Популяризація наративів щодо захисту української національної культури від знищення варварами-агресорами, заострення уваги європейської спільноти на сучасних подіях в Україні, заклик відстоювати демократичні цінності світового суспільства, популяризація традицій українського хорового мистецтва, розкриття національних рис українського народу є метою роботи хорового колективу на міжнародній музичній арені. Поліваріативність роботи хорового колективу в сучасних реаліях свідчить про те, що хор провадить не лише культурно-мистецьку діяльність, а й виконує функції повноцінного учасника міжнародної культурної дипломатії.

*Ключові слова:* камерний хор «Moravski»; О. Радько; культурна дипломатія; амбасадор культури; міжнародна співпраця; мистецтво у час війни

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