

Contemporary Vocal and Choral Performance: Trends and Insights

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The presented research examines the dynamic landscape of Ukrainian vocal and choral performance through the prism of artistic challenges and transformations of the 21st century. The authors focus on the multifaceted nature of the genre, where the regeneration of archaic layers of Orthodox spiritual singing organically intertwines with practices of historically informed performance and bold experiments based on modern dramatic theater. Special emphasis is placed on the conceptual change in the functions of the choir in the theatrical space: today it is not just a static background, but a full-fledged acting subject that operates with a synthesis of academic vocals, historically informed performance, folklore authenticity, and pop manners. The article proves that the modern stage dictates a request for the universalization of the performer and active diffusion with digital technologies. At the same

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time, analyzing the experience of the 2024 conductor competitions, the researchers substantiate the phenomenon of choral consolidation as a strategic response of the artistic community to the challenges of war. As a result, vocal and choral art appears as a flexible system that preserves the national code, adapting to the demands of the time.

Keywords: vocal and choral performance, sacred music, liturgical singing, conducting competitions, performing interpretation, choir in the theater, national identity, genre synthesis, actor's singing, universalization of the actor.

1. Introduction

The present moment dictates special conditions of existence for Ukrainian art, where the need for self-identification collides with total digitalization. Vocal and choral performance, being one of the most fundamental components of national culture, is currently undergoing an intensive reformation. The main difficulty is how to preserve the canonical basis (church singing or academic school) and at the same time not to remain aloof from the latest performative practices (Bridge, 2025). This requires deep reflection on how classical forms adapt to stage experiments and how the professional community finds resources for survival in times of war.

The theoretical basis of the study is based on a solid body of works that consider choral culture as a dynamic system in the context of global transformations. Conceptual significance for our work is observed, in particular, in the scientific research of Shapovalova and Nikolaevskaya (2021), whose research is devoted to the cognitive aspects of musical creativity and interpretative strategies of modern performance. Their explorations allow deeper understanding of the logic within the renewal of musical language and the specifics of communication in the modern art space.

The issues of genre transformations and classification of new vocal trends are covered in detail in the works of Bielik-Zolotareva (2024). The specifics of the folklore traditions' functioning in the space of professional theater are analyzed by Kokhan and Kokhan (2024), who are focusing on these traditions' influence on the formation of

national stage aesthetics, and the tendency of modern choral art to theatricalization is considered in dissertation research by Mostova (2003). An important contribution to understanding the evolution of conducting art is made in the works of Kachurynets (2023), while the organizational principles of the modern festival movement in Ukraine became the object of attention of Bermes (2016).

The phenomenon of competition and festival communication is explored in the works of Ivanova and Savenko (2021), who consider these events as platforms for professional reflection. The issues of sacred music and its performing interpretation are presented in the studies of Yastrub (2024). However, synthetic view of these processes – from church acoustics to online competitions – remains understudied.

With this in mind, the purpose of the article is to comprehensively identify key trends and insights into the development of modern Ukrainian vocal and choral performance through the analysis of the processes of regeneration of spiritual traditions, transformation of the role of the choir in the modern theatrical space and substantiation of the importance of professional competitions as a factor in the consolidation of the artistic community under martial law. The novelty of the work lies in the attempt to unite disparate vectors (spiritual, theatrical, educational) into a single picture of cultural resistance. For the first time, the transformation of the choir in modern Ukrainian theater is theoretically substantiated from the standpoint of its transition from an illustrative and decorative function to the status of a full-fledged

and autonomous subject of stage action; conducting competitions during the war period are considered not only as an educational process, but also as an act of professional solidarity.

2. Methodology

The study is based on a combination of art history analysis and a comparative approach. This allows comparing different vocal styles – from “pure” authenticity to the theatrical mainstream, and the socio-cultural method helps to assess the viability of the vocal and choral industry as a whole.

By defining performing as a form of artistic creativity and a form of expression for the performer, we can consider vocal and choral interpretation as a work of performing art. On the one hand, it is continuous and perceived holistically; on the other, it can be represented as a structure constructed from discrete units. Vocal performance, since it represents communication, a form of interaction between subjects in which meanings flow across social time and space, can be considered a type of social communication – artistic communication (Brown et al., 2016; Frizzell, 2020).

In frames of analyzing vocal and choral interpretations, we employ the methodology of discursive studies of literary texts, as well as traditional methods of comparative analysis of various interpretations.

3. Results and Discussion

Vocal and choral performance in Ukraine in the context of musical art global transformations

In the context of global transformations of musical art, vocal and choral performance in Ukraine retains its significant artistic and cultural position, while actively responding to the challenges of the time. The integration of traditional choral practices with modern approaches to repertoire policy, stage presentation and interpretative freedom determines the current state of the genre (Kelmendi, 2024; Kölbl, 2021). In the context of globalization and digitalization, the artistic space of choral performance is increasingly opening up to experiments, cross-genre collaborations, and the involvement of innovative technologies. Namely

these processes are becoming the basis for the analysis of current trends that shape the modern face of Ukrainian choral performance (Tsiuriak et al., 2023).

Contemporary Ukrainian choral performance is distinguished by stylistic and genre diversity, which is based on the highlighting of three main directions: academic one – with a reliance on traditional vocal manner, folk one – with a pronounced folklore color, and pop-jazz – with a synthesis of popular musical elements. According to the classification proposed by Bielik-Zolotareva (2024), it is the synthesis of these directions that acquires special artistic value and novelty, and this allows music groups to expand the performance boundaries and adapt to current public requests. Although this classification summarizes existing trends in choral art, it creates a structured basis for analyzing the current state of choral art, helping to predict further changes in the genre. Alex, J. (2026)

An equally significant aspect is the diversification of forms of choral art presentation. Bielik-Zolotareva (2024) distinguishes concert (in particular, author’s, anniversary, reporting, memorial, etc.), theatrical (such as show projects, visualizations, performances), and virtual (video clips, online concerts, video presentations) formats. This classification represents not only the expansion of genre boundaries, but also the integration of choral art into the latest cultural models. One of the indicative trends that is gaining momentum is the development of cover choral performance, which appears as an innovative form of modern musical art, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage, integration of styles and popularization of choral tradition among young people (Kachurynets, 2023).

Events, Innovative Approaches, and Continuity

Moving on to a more detailed consideration of individual cases of contemporary choral practice in Ukraine, which reveal both local features and interconnections with European performance guidelines, we should claim that one of the most prestigious events in the field of choral art is the European Grand Prix for Choral Singing (EGP) –

an annual super-final competition of the winners of six leading European choral competitions. Founded in 1989, this competition accumulates the highest standards of performing skills and artistic innovation. Only the laureates of the grand prix of such competitions as Guido d'Arezzo (Italy), Bartók (Hungary), Tolosa (Spain), Maribor (Slovenia), Varna (Bulgaria) and, from 2024, Jūrmala (Latvia) become its participants. EGP is not only a competition, but also a space where modern trends in choral art are clearly outlined: internationality, stylistic diversity, innovative repertoire approaches, and stage integration.

In 2023, the first place was won by the Chamber Choir "Sofia" (director and conductor O. Shamrytskyi) from Ukraine, demonstrating exceptional vocal culture, artistic perfection, and the ability to represent modern Ukrainian choral art at the highest international level. Among the works presented by the choir, it is worth noting the performative performance of the first part of "Ode to Kyiv" from the choral concerto by L. Dychko "My Native Land", as well as a fragment of the choral symphony-performance by E. Petrichenko "Illuminated by the Black Sun", for which the stage format is natural given the work's genre concept.

In addition to innovative approaches to the interpretation of the modern repertoire, the European choral performing tradition is increasingly turning to the depths of historical heritage. In this context, the importance of the direction of historically informed performance is growing. Appealing to the principles of authentic interpretation of music from previous eras – Baroque, Renaissance or Middle Ages – became a kind of response to the need for a deeper understanding of musical heritage, its reconstruction and actualization in the modern artistic space. Namely this approach allows choral groups not only to reproduce historical stylistics, but also to engage in a deep dialogue with tradition, discovering new layers of meanings and performance practices.

The revival and popularization of Ukrainian Baroque art acquires particular importance in the context of historically informed performance. A

vivid example of this is the activities of the independent platform Open Opera Ukraine, which initiated the project *Musica sacra Ukraina: part dimension*. The goal of this project is a comprehensive study and performance of polyphonic (part) singing of the 17th century – a unique phenomenon of Ukrainian musical heritage. As part of the project, the Partes ensemble was created, which specializes in the performance of part songs concertos by Mykola Dyletsky and anonymous authors of that period. In particular, in 2020 the ensemble presented the album "Ukrainian Baroque: *Concordacii Animos*", which includes 13 compositions from the 17th – first half of the 18th centuries, three of which are twelve-voice works by anonymous authors, performed for the first time. The activities of Open Opera Ukraine and the Partes ensemble contribute not only to the revival and popularization of Ukrainian baroque music, but also to its integration into the modern European cultural space, emphasizing the deep historical connections and commonality of musical traditions.

The logical continuation of the release of "Ukrainian Baroque: *Concordacii Animos*" was a joint project of the Academy of Early Music Leopold (Lviv) and Open Opera Ukraine (Kyiv), within the framework of which the audio album "Listen, People" Rachinsky / Berezovsky was presented. The album includes recordings of two-choirs concertos by composers Rachinsky and Berezovsky. This project represents an important step in the restoration and popularization of Ukrainian Baroque art and the introduction of historically informed performance into modern practice. The recordings of Rachinsky and Berezovsky's concerts, presented in this format, provide a deeper understanding and reconstruction of the Ukrainian Baroque tradition, opening new horizons for further research and integration of Ukrainian music into the modern European cultural context.

The development of historically informed performance in Ukraine opens up new opportunities for studying the interaction between local and pan-European musical phenomena. The study of part singing and the baroque traditions of

Ukrainian music allows understanding more deeply the processes of transformation of musical practices through the stages of historical development.

Authentic ‘Voice of the Nation’

In general, it can be stated that modern Ukrainian choral performance is distinguished not only by the preservation of classical traditions, but also by the opening of new horizons through the integration of modern technologies, cross-genre forms, and historically informed performance. This is an important step in the development of the musical culture of Ukraine, which allows choral groups not only to preserve, but also to popularize the national heritage, introducing it in the context of modern European musical trends.

However, the sacred space of the church or the chamber atmosphere of the concert hall are not the only venues where choral life pulsates today. No less interesting, and sometimes much more radical transformations of the vocal-choral factor are observed on the modern theatrical stage. Here, music ceases to be just an accompaniment, turning into an active subject of drama.

The transformation processes that have engulfed the modern Ukrainian stage are today inextricably linked with the search for an authentic “voice” of the nation. Modern theater became the platform where, through the denial of post-Soviet canons, a new aesthetics of sound is born. In this context, the choir appears not simply as a musical unit, but as an instrument of deep psychological expressiveness and a means of decolonizing theatrical language. On its thorny path, Ukrainian stage culture has overcome the painful dependence on post-Soviet canons, demonstrating the powerful potential of authorial direction, the trendiness of new cultural formats, and the uniqueness of innovative projects.

In this context, the choral component of a theatrical performance demonstrates significant potential for the formation of a new aesthetics of the stage sound space, capable not only of complementing theatrical action, but also of forming a fundamentally new dramaturgical concept. The chorus on the stage of a drama theater today is transforming from a secondary auxiliary element into an independent

powerful instrument of stage expressiveness, which allows revealing the most complex cultural, psychological, and social conflicts raging in modern society (Ramadani, 2017).

Appeal to the traditions of group singing becomes a source of inspiration, awareness of national identity, since polyphony has always been an integral part of Ukrainian culture, in particular theatrical one. Mostova (2003, pp. 16-17) claims that “the methodology of theatricalization of choral works consists of the methodology of interpretation and specific methods of working with choral music and visual and plastic arts, in particular such as analysis of the literary text, comparison of its composer’s interpretation and the performer’s own interpretation, reconciliation of differences between the composer’s and performer’s interpretation of the literary text, creation of a visual and plastic model of a musical work”, but when it comes to the existence of a choral work on the theatrical stage, an important factor in the interpretative strategy is the figure of the director and his view of the vocal and choral work’ existence.

The performance “Forest Song” based on the play by Lesya Ukrainka (directed by A. Prykhodko) staged by the Lviv Academic Youth Theater named after Les Kurbas provides an opportunity to look into the very heart of the Ukrainian writer, to “hear” the indescribable beauty of something of native, ancient, that is perceived and resonates at the genetic level. The stage space in the shape of a circle attracts the viewer to the action taking place in the center on embroidered carpets. Folk songs of Polissya and Hutsulshchyna are heard a cappella. The semantic load of the choral component goes far beyond the traditional musical accompaniment. The choir turns into an independent dramatic character, a bearer of collective memory and cultural code, which is emphasized not only in the sound, but also in the visual image. The characters of the forest kingdom are dressed in authentic Ukrainian clothing embroidered shirts, zhupans, scarves contrasting with the gray attire of people - representatives of society. The conflict between two worlds – nature and society – is intensified also by the linguistic divide. The voices of the forest sound exclusively in

Ukrainian, while society communicates in Russian. A new look at the traditional performance demonstrates a fundamentally different approach to understanding the expressive capabilities of all its components, including the choir, engaging it as a deep semantic and communicative tool capable of revealing the most complex cultural and psychological contexts of a theatrical performance.

It should be noted that the appeal to ethnic vocal tradition is becoming one of the trends of modern Ukrainian theater, which goes beyond the purely stage forms of performance. An example is the film-musical “Hutsulka Ksenya” directed by O. Demyanenko.

The function of the ancient choir – commentator of the events, is performed by the modern band – freak cabaret Dakh Daughters, whose musical style successfully combines Ukrainian folk with American jazz and burlesque. Such “upgrade nature” of the rather traditional component of the musical performance allows telling the story and events taking place in the Ukrainian village of the 1930s in modern language, which, of course, attracts today’s audience. Ukrainian intonations, which are the basis of the thematics of the musical numbers, create a unique atmosphere in the film. The heroes’ character is manifested in the songs and dances; their dreams, hopes and aspirations are reflected. The bright transformations of the musical group (foretellers, messengers, molfarkies, witches), stylish images (stylization of Ukrainian authenticity), the sound of the popular “Kolomyika” performed by “Dakha Brakha”, the clip-like nature of the musical compositions became a successful marketing move, as the most beloved songs instantly spread through social networks. And the manner of presenting the musical material is very unusual – a complete eclecticism, a combination of jazz, chanson, rap, blues, soul, etc. Such a fundamental rethinking of the vocal structure through the destruction of the established canons of group music making, experimentation with voice guidance, sound extraction allow the choral/ensemble component of the musical to function not as its static musical element, but as a dynamic spatial system that

immerses the viewer in a whirlpool of fleeting events.

This is exactly how the music of the prohibited in Soviet era Ukrainian composer Y. Barnych, author of the operetta “Hutsulka Ksenya”, which was taken as the basis for the film adaptation of the same name, sounds today. The return of the names of true patriots of the Ukrainian state from oblivion, the awareness of their contribution to the development and building of a self-sufficient European country, which was silenced, devalued and destroyed for decades, is another trend of the artistic present.

An appeal to Ukrainian classics in its modern interpretation is the staging of the musical “Natalka Poltavka” based on the play of the same name by I. Kotlyarevsky, based on the music of M. Lysenko on the stage of the Frankivsk Drama Theater.

According to directors R. Derzhypilsky and N. Paniv, every generation of Ukrainians should have its own version of a well-known classic. The performance is very dynamic, the intonations of Lysenko’s music, familiar to every connoisseur, rage in a whirlwind of modern styles – rock, metal, rap, pop, etc. (arranged by Yu. Shatsky). Leather costumes with metal elements, decorated with national ornaments, look modern and stylish. Vocals, choreography, synthesis of styles and genres create an explosive effect of energy and drive. This is facilitated by the musical accompaniment performed by a rock band with the participation of the Drama Theater orchestra.

The musical’s scenography is impressive in its scale and at the same time in detail. The play of light and shadow creates spatial illusions, emphasizing the two-dimensionality of the actors’ stage existence: on the one hand, as characters in the play, and on the other, as participants in the theatrical process. Thanks to synchronized movements, changes in position on the stage, and lighting effects, the actors (including the choir members) become part of the scenographic solution, which helps to reveal the main idea of the play – to submit to fate or to choose to fight for own dignity.

The thoughts of the Ukrainian writers today resonate in the hearts of actors and spectators. The performance is incredibly energetically powerful. All participants in the action are constantly in motion reciting, singing, dancing. Such versatility is inherent in synthetic plan actors, capable of rapid transformations in accordance with the course of events and the director's plan. Only with the presence of such a professional acting troupe are bold experiments with the content and form, style and genre of the performance possible, which ultimately allows rediscovering a classic work of Ukrainian literature.

An unusual genre for the drama theater stage is the oratorio play "Narkomaty" staged by the Kharkiv theater "Publicist" (directed by K. Vasyukov). The script is based on documentary statements and reflections of Ukrainian artists on Soviet history. In some places, they resonate with the present, reflecting acute social topics, in particular, overcoming language and mental barriers, personal boundaries, censorship, and others. It is interesting that during the performance, the characters recite not only the author's text, which, by the way, is not limited to a single genre. Poems, prose, excerpts from archival documents, and even rap are heard from the stage. The actors bring their own memories, thoughts, doubts, and beliefs to the public, and reflect on the consequences of the traumatic experience of post-Soviet Ukrainian society. Namely the personal touch gives the performance sincerity, openness, and honesty, and encourages each participant in the performance, both on stage and in the audience, to reflect on their own experiences, their own traumas, and ways to overcome them. The viewer becomes not just a witness, but a co-participant in this dialogue, immersing himself in a complex world of reflections and experiences.

The musical component of the performance is a requiem for two soloists, a choir, a string quartet and a piano, written by the composer Oleksandra Malatskovskaya (a graduate of the I.P. Kotlyarevsky State Musical College) specifically for the production of "Narkomaty". The performers are the soloists of the Kharkiv Philharmonic Tetyana

and Volodymyr Yefymenko (soprano, baritone), the "Choir of lonely hearts of Sergeant Pepper", the composer herself (piano), and the Nova Sinfonietta quartet. The academic manner of performance, the canonical texts of the "Requiem" in the frame of modern music contrast with the action taking place on the stage, giving the feeling of something eternal, inevitable, something over which the all-powerful Soviet government has no power. After all, no one is able to resist the laws of death.

The play "Narkomaty" is not just a theatrical production, but it is a kind of therapy, where actors and viewers together explore painful issues of the past and present, together looking for ways to heal from the traumas of the past.

Thus, modern Ukrainian theater demonstrates readiness and openness to new forms, experimental stylistic and genre syntheses, and unique artistic projects. The choral component of the performance successfully combines the traditions of academic performing culture with the bright stylistic palette of modern music, entering into a dialogue with folk, pop, jazz, rock, and other vocal practices. Under such conditions, traditional genre boundaries are destroyed and new, sometimes unexpected theatrical and musical forms are born. As researchers I. Drach and M. Chernyavska note, "art as an act of meeting a unique and universal being acts as a powerful source of its symbolization, gives rise to a spectrum of vivid emotions, and produces symbolic formations that, like any symbol, are ambiguous and open to interpretations" (Drach & Chernyavska, 2021, p. 287).

Directors increasingly see in group singing new expressive possibilities that allow treating the choir/ensemble not only as a background or a commentator of events, a character, or musical accompaniment that functions as a static musical element of the performance. The choral component of a theatrical performance, according to the director's plan, can become a dynamic spatial system that, thanks to electronic sound processing, multi-channel sound, and acoustic resonance effects, creates multilayered sound spaces that can fundamentally change the perception of a theatrical performance. The uniqueness of group singing lies

in the unity that has preserved the cultural gene pool of the nation for centuries. That is why singing in a group, singing in Ukrainian, creating a national artistic product of high quality, supporting and popularizing Ukrainian content will always be timely.

Ukrainian Theatre at the Present Stage

At the present stage, Ukrainian theater is undergoing profound transformational changes, characterized by a radical rethinking of traditional art forms, the search for a new stage aesthetics, and experimentation with a range of means of artistic expressiveness of theatrical performance (Romaniuk et al., 2025). This is facilitated by socio-cultural processes of decolonization of society, rethinking of national heritage, and dialogue with the world art community, which ultimately create a unique environment for the birth of fundamentally new theatrical practices. Solo vocal performance for Ukrainian drama and puppet theater has always been one of the important instruments of influence on the viewer. Investigating the significance of folklore traditions for the formation of Ukrainian professional musical and dramatic theater of the 19th century, Lyudmila and Larisa Kokhan note: "The artist saw the greatest aesthetic effect in the multifunctional use of folk music or music written in the folk style. The song not only adorned the performances, attracted with familiar motives and good singing of the actors. It revealed the characters, the emotional mood of the *mise-en-scène*. Music created multifaceted subtexts of stage situations, in operas and operettas there was the basis of drama. The introduction of a music plan of action as an equal component along with verbal and play principles was one of the main factors of innovation of Starytsky and Lysenko" (Kohkan & Kohkan, 2024, p. 98).

The further evolution of theatrical genres, changes in audience preferences and expectations, the development of video and audio technologies and their introduction into the life of an actor, shaped a unique landscape of the modern Ukrainian stage. Certain trends are consonant with global postmodernist trends, such as the fascination with post-documentary theater, physical theater,

performance, etc. Each of the above forms can be studied separately in terms of the use of certain vocal elements and the singing skills of actors. Along with innovations, stylistic flexibility, searches for experimental language and the synthesis of genres inherent in modern art, "classical" forms of theatrical performance continue to exist. Moreover, each subsequent wave of the *avant-garde* over time acquires the status of tradition and is reinterpreted by representatives of new art. All this actualizes the widely known statement of director Peter Brook that theater can be "alive" and "dead" and it does not matter what style and genre the stage performance belongs to, because if it is "alive", it will be able to find its audience. The weight and content of the vocal element in performances varies depending on the genre settings of the production, the director's ideas, the capabilities of the troupe, etc. By studying the actor's singing in the modern stage space, one can not only see which trends are gradually "dying" and which ones are "living", but also understand the needs of theater pedagogy in the near future and adjust the components of educational programs, which will allow them to remain competitive in the market of educational services.

Since Ukraine gained independence, domestic theatrical art has undergone a significant transformation, gradually losing the features of colonialism, which is reflected both in the choice of material dramaturgy for stage embodiment, and in the selection of "tools" by directors and actors to implement the idea. Regarding the use of the vocal element in theatrical performances, several interrelated trends can be identified. The first and most noticeable one is the gradual departure from the academic tuning of the singing voice of a theatrical actor towards the use of modern vocal manners. Thus, throughout the twentieth century, the leading manner of educating the voice of an actor in the post-Soviet space was precisely the academic manner, which was characterized by a spherical sound, the use of mixed lower-costal diaphragmatic breathing, the active involvement of a high singing position of sound, accented diction and quite active articulation, which contributed to

the projection of sound into the hall, required the audience to be aware of the convention of theatrical action.

Such a tradition of education was due not only to the deep connections of the Ukrainian drama theater with the musical, but also to the recognition of the standard of classical art for the then dominant ideological doctrine and the downgrading of the importance of pop genres, which were sometimes even considered “hostile”. In addition, state intervention in theatrical art was easier to organize in one city theater than to control several troupes, so often in small regional centers (for example, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Lutsk, Sumy, Luhansk, etc.) there were general musical and dramatic theaters in which both musical and dramatic performances were staged, which required academic voice settings from the actors. But, as researcher Yu. Shchukina (2019, p. 48) rightly notes, “the highest achievements in the genres of musical and rock opera on the Ukrainian stage are connected with the invitation of dramatic directors who are capable of embodying conceptually complex works”. The development of sound reinforcement technologies and the use of microphones, rather than the natural acoustics of the premises, simplified the main task of the actor – to be heard from the last row of the auditorium, which, in turn, should have significantly influenced the change in the vector of vocal education of the future actor. This trend can be traced by comparing different productions of the same work over the years.

For instance, let us cite a genre where the vocal component is an integral part – rock opera. Here, the role of Joan of Arc in the play “The White Raven” (the first Ukrainian rock opera by G. Tatarchenko and Y. Rybchynsky, 1987) is illustrative, which was played in 1991 by N. Sumska (dir. S. Danchenko, Kyiv Academic National Theater named after I. Franko), and in 2005 by Y. Voys (dir. A. Hostikoyev, Benyuk&Hostikoyev company). Both actresses use sound amplification, but N. Sumska’s manner of sound production is close to academic – a “covered” rounded sound, a light timbre, a soft attack of sound, a softened connection of the head and chest registers, while Y.

Voys sings in a pop style – using a hard attack, a “direct” sound, belting on high notes, a growl in the middle register (simply growl), which accentuates the performance. Zhanna performed by N. Sumska seems feminine and somewhat romanticized, while Y. Voys’s performance has features of masculinity. Thus, the different vocal manner of the actresses determines a completely different interpretation of the same character and contributes to understanding the director’s intention.

It is worth noting that the academic manner of the actor can still find its place in a modern production and be relevant for a separate character or performance, but since it involves a significant change between the vocal and spoken voice of the actor, which is more pronounced in women than in men, its use leads to an increase in theatrical convention, which does not always organically fit into the forms of theatrical performance. For example, in the children’s play “Ufti-Tufti” based on the fairy tale by B. Potter (dir. O. Kovshun, 2015, Kharkiv Theater for Children and Youth), there is a comic character Shpak, who generally parodies tenor singers and uses an exaggerated academic manner of sound formation for this.

“At the current stage of the theater’s development, conditions are ripe for the introduction of fundamentally new productions of performances that meet the requirements of the modern viewer/listener. There is arising need for a professionally trained acting (musical) troupe (collective), which in turn indicates the need to move to a new quality level in the system of acting education. The search for innovative ways of forms and methods of work aimed at the personal formation of the subject of education in the development of creative abilities, knowledge, skills, methods of activity, competencies seems to be very relevant” (Shapovalova et al., 2021, p. 141). Unfortunately, the vocal methods of many Ukrainian theater educational institutions still continue to use the academic manner of voice formation as the leading one for educating student actors. Despite the fact that such a task seems too difficult for modern youth, since most of them have not had active listening experience of the classical

standard of voice sound, as was the case with the generations of the second half of the 20th century. It is interesting to trace the trends of European theater educational institutions, where the academic manner of singing is not instilled in student actors at all (Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, Poland), or students study jazz vocals for half of the solo singing course (two years), while the other half of the study period academic (Mozarteum University Salzburg, Austria). In addition, both of the above-mentioned institutions have a discipline in vocal interpretation, where students are engaged only in the artistic embodiment of the work without an emphasis on its technical performance, that is, the stages of “building” the instrument – the voice and mastering expressive “playing” on it are divided into two separate subjects taught by different teachers. In recent years, the program requirements of the discipline “Solo Singing” at the theater department of the Kharkiv National University of Arts have significantly shifted towards instilling not only the academic singing style, but also others – pop, jazz, folk. This was actively facilitated by the presence of educational dialogue with stakeholders and the student community. We are gradually coming to understand that the stylistic flexibility of a modern actor expands his performing capabilities and allows him to be interesting to a wider audience.

The use of modern technologies in theatrical practice has always been a relevant trend, and our time is no exception – the integration of electronics and multimedia into performances is increasingly becoming the norm. (Glukhova, O. V., & Khachmafova, Z. R., 2026) While in the 90s of the twentieth century it was about sound amplification and the use of phonograms recorded by other actors during the performance, now complex multimedia solutions are increasingly used – autotune, electronic processing of the actor’s voice in real time to create a certain effect, sampling into a multilayered sound palette even in mono performances. In some places, the sound engineer becomes a figure no less important than the director. An example of such work is the surreal tragicomedy “Rainbow on Saltivka” – an autobiographical one-man play by

actor and director A. Vusyk (Nafta Theater, Kharkiv, 2024), in which he embodied five characters, including a singer. The musical concept of the performance is “live” music (guitar, drums, saxophone), but the musicians present on stage are not participants in the action. Interestingly, for several years before the implementation of the idea of this performance, Vusyk experimented with the image of a singer in the “non-existent” band “Danger Stranger Band”, the vocal component of which combined rock vocals, declamation, and improvisation.

Another example of the technical techniques’ application and adaptation of the performance to different conditions can be found in the puppet show based on the Ukrainian folk tale “Ivasyky-Telesyky” (dir. O. Dmitrieva, Kharkiv State Academic Puppet Theater named after V.A. Afanasyev, 2016). In the premiere version, the “singings” of Zmiivna, who was trying to “forge” her voice, were created by layering the sounds of the strowbass that the actor extracted from himself on stage, and adding high overtones to this sample – this made the atmosphere of the birth of Zmiivna’s new voice absolutely psychedelic. The performance was popular among young viewers, so during the full-scale invasion, the family duo of D. Kushnirenko and P. Savelyeva revived it on their own, poetically rethinking and demonstrating it in various locations that did not have proper equipment and were more like a version of street folk theater, so now to create Zmiivna’s voice, the actors used a combination of male throat singing, which sometimes gave two tones, and ultra-high, piercing female notes without precise fixation of the tone, which were performed on inspiration. Thanks to their own creativity, willingness to experiment, and vocal versatility, the actors appeared able to find another technique that created the necessary mood in the viewer.

The search for live sound can also be called one of the current trends, which echoes global decisions in theatrical art. Body percussion, beatboxing, the use of noises and sounds of various non-musical instruments, all this can become an accompaniment for the actor’s vocal expression on stage, and

individual vocal nuances can be more important than the technical perfection of the performance; theatrical singing has long been one of the elements of “living” the role, and not just the performance of notes. While in classical dramatic theater singing remained mostly an auxiliary element, now we increasingly see the use of live music as an organic part of the performance, where actors can perform vocal parts simultaneously with the action or be part of the “vocal noise” for another actor. Total theater integrated vocal elements into the action on an equal footing with gesture, plasticity, and language. An example of such a creative existence is the performances of the theater and music group “Schmalgauzen”, which emerged within the walls of the Karpenko-Kary Kyiv National University of Theater, Cinema and Television and is actively developing in the field of performative art.

Another trend of modern Ukrainian theater is the interest in Ukrainian folklore in its authentic sound. As noted above, folk songs and rituals have always been one of the sources of Ukrainian theatrical tradition, but in terms of vocal performance, their performance was mostly influenced by the so-called “transformed folk singing” manner, characteristic, for example, of the G. Veryovka Choir. It should be noted that this manner of performance is not similar to any of the regional traditions of Ukraine, but namely this sound has long been perceived as folk. Currently, increasingly more theater groups are using folklore traditions of solo and collective authentic sound in stage performance. The main factor here is the understanding that traditional authenticity is mainly designed for the participant in the action, not the listener, and is characterized by the spontaneous experience of emotions. Such singing is very often involved during the performance of lullabies without accompaniment to emphasize the moment of inclusion of the author and his character in the action. An example can be O. Dmitrieva’s musical performance for adults “Vertep” (Kharkiv-Lviv, 2022), where instead of actors’ lines, songs and carols are heard in traditional sound. It is the return to ritual-magical action and the involvement of modern images that allows revealing the classical myth in the best way.

The community’s interest in returning to real, rather than mystified, sources becomes the motive that should push theater pedagogy to develop this direction.

Considering the vocal component on the modern stage, one can state the presence of opposite trends, which once again emphasizes the versatility of theatrical art. In general, Ukrainian theater is moving towards the universalization of the actor’s vocal capabilities. Finding and preserving national traditions coexist with the search for a modern sound of the voice, and experiments with the use of the latest technologies do not replace the “live” sound on the theater stage. The theater world is experiencing significant changes, which, despite the difficult socio-political situation in the country, can be characterized as a wave of interest on the part of spectators and representatives of the cultural circle in the possibilities of performing arts for identifying the national idea. While in the space of modern theater, choral energy is transformed into a powerful instrument of stage action, where sacred sources and folklore authenticity acquire new, sometimes radical forms, in spiritual practice, vocals are aimed at “vertical communication”.

Church Singing as a Cornerstone of Ukraine’ Musical Culture

Church singing tradition is a cornerstone in Ukraine in the more than thousand-year history of musical culture. And now, in the 21st century, spiritual singing proves its mission in culture-making processes as the embodiment of established value orientations.

The spiritual existence of a believing person (*homo credens*) is accompanied by singing from birth to the transition to Eternity. Ukraine is a representative of an immeasurably rich singing nation with ancient spiritual roots. Namely church singing unites the drama of the entire liturgical order, the subtleties of which are determined by the sound acoustics of domed churches, and its melody is consonant with iconographic creativity and church murals. Moreover, liturgical singing is connected with church reading, the intonations of which have become the basis of hymns of syllabic structure.

It can be stated that the language of Orthodox worship has not changed over the centuries, remaining exclusively liturgical, like, for example, Church Slavonic in the territories of Slavic states.

The classification of forms of spiritual singing by the method of performance (systematized in liturgical practice), which embody the performance specificity of spiritual singing, becomes relevant in the revival and preservation by the leading choral groups of Ukraine in the 21st century. We distinguish five varieties of spiritual singing, namely: antiphonal, epiphonal (hypophonal), responsory, canonical, hymnic (Yastrub, 2024).

The antiphonal variety is the principle of alternating singing of the soloist and choir or two choirs. The epiphonal variety, in which the choir plays the function of the chorus, and the soloist psalms a constant verse. A representative of the responsory variety is the ancient tradition of choral singing of the litany (for example, the great or small litany) when the choir responds to the deacon or priest's pronouncements with the chorus "Lord, have mercy" (Yastrub, 2024). The canonical variety is characteristic of the monastic singing tradition. In particular, before the beginning of the chant, the canonarch pronounces a certain voice at a sustained pitch, and the choir responds to the specified echos, while maintaining the tempo-rhythm. The canonical variety is used for alternating chants, in particular, troparions and kondaks, sticherons. The hymnic variety is based on the praise genre of liturgical singing (for example, "O Gentle Light" ("Svete tichy"), "Glory to God in the Highest" ("Slava v vshennih Bogue") from the All-Night Vigil or "It is Truly Meet" ("Dostojno est") from the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom).

In the conditions of martial law, when the Ukrainian nation defends its independence, the emergence of festivals and concerts of sacred music, presenting samples from ancient Ukrainian church monody to the latest works, testify to the crucial importance of spiritual choral art in national cultural processes.

Since one of the many examples of the actualization of national artistic priorities today is choral artistic practice aimed at the revival of the tradition of

spiritual singing, the concert of choral music entitled "Origins" ("Vytoki"), which took place on October 14, 2024 within the walls of the oldest church in Ukraine - St. Sophia of Kyiv, can be considered one of its vivid testimonies.

The Kyiv Chamber Choir, conducted by Mykola Hobdych, presents sacred works by Ukrainian composers: from Mykola Diletsky (approx. 1650 - after 1723), Dmytro Bortnyansky (1751-1825), Mykola Lysenko (1842-1912), to Yevhen Stankovych (born 1942), Viktoriya Polyova (born 1962). The concert program was formed in such a way as to reflect the process of forming the tradition of choral singing from the Baroque, Classicism, Romanticism eras and to emphasize its continuity to the present day.

Let us dwell in more detail on the performance interpretation by the Kyiv Chamber Choir (under the direction of M. Hobdych) of the "Resurrection Canon" by M. Diletsky and the spiritual choral concert "Where Will I Go from Your Face" by M. Lysenko.

The "Resurrection Canon" by M. Diletsky, as "the most prominent Ukrainian theorist of part music," is called a fresco symphony (Suprun-Yaremko, 2014, p. 380). The monumental Easter cycle in the sound of the Kyiv Choir represents the main idea of Christ's Resurrection – the victory of life over death. The contrasting juxtaposition of the two choirs, complicated by different types of rhythmic movement, is achieved by means of a timbral and dynamic ensemble. Recitative, vocalized, and coloratura types of melody, characteristic of the choral writing of the canon, are presented at a high performing level from the point of view of vocal-choral mastery in maintaining a single tempo-rhythm as a whole, since a stable rhythmic organization is important in church-song practice.

Based on the genre-stylistic analysis of the spiritual choral concerto "Where Will I Go from Your Face" (1909) by Lysenko by the founder of the Ukrainian composer school, the regularities of the composer's interpretation of Ukrainian spiritual singing were determined: reliance on the traditions of the part concerto; comparison of the choir according to the

principle of “echo”; contrast of parts achieved through constant updating of intonation, timbre, metro-rhythmic and tempo parameters; frequent use of elements of the ascending sequence, thus preserving the tradition of contrapuntal expression of the concert style; while preserving the tradition of the Kantian three-voice, Lysenko achieves a certain independence in voice management, which is due to the frequent use of wide jumps in the choral parts (Yastrub, 2024).

Let us pay attention to the antiphonal principle involved by M. Gobdych, which is inspired by the most ancient genre of antiphon in the history of liturgical singing. The conductor revives the angelic nature of singing in the spiritual work of Lysenko and thus represents the constancy of the tradition of Ukrainian spiritual singing, its continuity and stylistic diversity in the 21st century. The performing interpretation of the choral composition, which embodies the conciliarity of the prayerful standing, is achieved through the use of chain breathing and careful pronunciation of the Church Slavonic text. The choral sound represents a harmonious dictional ensemble with a sense of through-going development, which is manifested in the achievement of quiet dynamics with a dynamic gradation of crescendo and diminuendo.

Summarizing the above provisions, we will highlight the fundamental positions. Singing as a phenomenon of musical and performing culture unites the entire act of worship. In the liturgical singing practice, its meaning is expressed Communion with God (vertical communication). Therefore, prayerfulness is the dominant criterion that embodies the ontological essence of church singing and corresponds to the timeless dimension of worship. The performing specificity of church singing lies in the unity of the word-Logos and musical intonation. That is why the archetypal quality of Orthodox singing is a cappella singing. Let us emphasize that the fact of actualization in live performing practice and drawing attention to the spiritual culture of Ukraine as a kind of performing tradition serves as the foundation for the determination of spiritual and worldview values

Insights and Potentials

Such a variety of artistic searches requires constant professional discussion and reproduction of personnel potential, which in the conditions of modern challenges is implemented through professional platforms competitions of choral conductors: “creative competitions exist as a systemic phenomenon, as an organic part of the musical and creative process as a whole, as well as the creative growth of the artist (team), the creation and perception of music” (Savenko, 2021, p. 12). Thus, in 2024 alone, several competitions of choral conductors were held in Ukraine on the basis of higher educational institutions. Based on our own observations, we will consider the role of competitions in the professional growth of young conductors during the Russian-Ukrainian war, the performance of certain functions by them, in particular, creative, educational, communicative, informational, socio-cultural.

It is well known that due to the collective basis of choral creativity, such forms as competitions of choral groups and conductors, festivals of choral art, the project “Summer Choral Academy”, initiated by the Association “Mykola Leontovych Choral Society” of the National All-Ukrainian Music Union, even the annual Attestation Exams of Graduate Conductors have always been held in a unique atmosphere, attracting a large number of listeners: “music festivals can gather the best performing forces to satisfy the requests of the listeners, as well as contribute to the development of the musical infrastructure of a city or region” (Bermes, 2016, p. 199).

Conductor competitions are now gaining special importance: they accumulate the positive energy of young people, perform an important communicative function between participants in creative competitions, listeners, organizers, jury members, and become the basis for the faith of young musicians in their own strengths and the future of Ukraine. Due to the challenges of the time (pandemic, war), the choral art of Ukraine has suffered significant losses. This is especially true of the eastern regions, where classes in educational institutions are organized, as a rule, remotely, and the performing activities of many choral groups

have ceased or are significantly limited. In this case, students, for whom the choir is the main musical “instrument” in their studies, are deprived of the opportunity to use it, receive full practice in their specialty, and prepare for participation in conducting competitions, the conditions of which provide for work with a choral group (Batovska et al., 2022).

Students, teachers, and accompanists who were in different cities of Ukraine traveled hundreds of kilometers to conduct classes, make video recordings of programs, and negotiate with the heads of other musical educational institutions about the possibility of working in safe premises. Thus, in their motivational resistance to the war, they fought for the right to full-fledged creativity. First of all (in this regard), we will name the names of the graduates of the Department of Choral and Opera and Symphonic Conducting of the Ivan Petrovich Kotlyarevsky KhNUM. Namely: Ilya Konorov (class of Professor Srgiy Prokopov), who received the Grand Prix of the III All-Ukrainian Competition of Choral Conductors named after Dmytro Zagretsky, Theodosius Morsky (class of Professor Natalia Bielik-Zolotareva) a gold diploma of the 3rd degree of this competition (participation format - distance learning), as well as a graduate of the department Fedir Voskoboynikov (class of Professor Vyacheslav Palkin), and now a graduate student of KhNUM, who won the 3rd prize of the First All-Ukrainian Competition of Choral Conductors named after Academician O. S. Tymoshenko. It should be noted that the methods of teachers' work with contestants under such circumstances, its nuances is a separate topic of research that can be implemented in other publications.

Of course, in educational institutions where the organization of the educational process is carried out in a face-to-face form, more favorable conditions have been created: there is an opportunity to work with a choir, sing in a choir. But even in relatively safe cities, organizing competitions was not easy. For this reason, for example, the date of the First All-Ukrainian Competition of Choral Conductors named after

Academician O. S. Tymoshenko was postponed several times by the P. I. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine.

Let us talk briefly about the competitions of conductors that were held in an online format. Among them, there are: Open Competition of Choral Conductors, organized by the Dnipro Academy of Music, in which only students of 1-4 years of education with a bachelor's degree participated; The 2nd International Conducting Competition named after Andriy Kushnirenk, organized by the Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, brought together about 130 participants in 15 categories from 24 cities of Ukraine, 4 foreign countries, jury members from Spain, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine. The Grand Prix was awarded to conductors from Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Nizhyn, Odessa; in April 2025, another competition for conductors (also remotely) was held the First Open All-Ukrainian Competition of Conducting and Choral Mastery named after Yuriy Kulik, organized by the Department of Choral and Opera and Symphonic Conducting of the I. P. Kotlyarevsky Kharkiv National University of Arts.

Three competitions were held in offline or mixed format. Let us consider them in more detail.

The First All-Ukrainian Open Student Competition of Choral and Symphonic Conductors (founder Lviv National Academy of Music named after M. V. Lysenko) - a two-round competition, the only one in Ukraine, held in two specializations: “choral” and “symphonic conducting”, 42 participants took part in it. The performance of the second round program was provided by the Symphony Orchestra of the Opera Studio and the Student Choir, in the choral repertoire of which in the second round the works of composers of the Lviv School were presented the arrangement of the Ukrainian folk song “Hey, the village is visible” by Mykola Kolessa, “Oh, why did you turn black” by Viktor Kaminsky. Among the jury members, there are famous conductors and teachers: Viktor Ploskina, Halyna Shpak, Igor Tsyklinsky, Ivan Yuzyuk, Bohdan Dashak. The main awards went to contestants from the Tchaikovsky National Academy of Music. As

part of this artistic event, a competition for applicants was also held, which the organizers considered an effective form of career guidance.

In November 2024, the Department of Choral Conducting of the Odessa A. V. Nezhdanova National Academy of Music held the III All-Ukrainian Competition of Choral Conductors named after Dmitry Zagretsky. A truly professional three-round creative competition was held in a mixed format. Of the 43 contestants, the absolute majority were in person. Not only are its creative results and high level of organization, worthy of the best traditions of the famous Odessa Choral School, impressive, but also its openness, involvement of a wide audience, the public (which is no less important). To this end, the Department of Choral Conducting held a number of events. Thus, as part of the competition, advanced training courses were organized, as well as online broadcasts on the YouTube channel of all its stages, a concert of the academy's student choir at the opening ceremony, and a Gala concert at the winners' award ceremony. The decision of the organizers to transfer part of the monetary contributions for participation in the competition to help the Armed Forces of Ukraine is perceived as an example of the manifestation of patriotic feelings towards the Ukrainian military and consolidation with them. The competition program was performed at a highly professional level by the Student Choir (led by Professor Halyna Shpak). The works of representatives of the Odessa Composers' School "Oh, Rye in the Field" by Serafim Orfeev, "Thought" by Oleg Polyovoy were included in the program of the 2nd round.

The winners were students of music institutions in many regions of Ukraine: Odessa, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, Rivne, Ternopil. The esteemed jury included representatives of almost all cultural centers of the country, as well as foreign musicians.

The first All-Ukrainian competition of choral conductors named after Academician O.S. Tymoshenko (founder the department of choral conducting of the P. I. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy) had its own peculiarities. Only students of higher educational institutions were allowed to participate in it; competitive auditions provided for

work with the choir in all three rounds, The competition program was the most complex, distinguished by a wide stylistic and genre range: works by composers of the Renaissance and Ukrainian Baroque (O. Lasso, C. Monteverdi, M. Dyletsky), Ukrainian music of the 20th-21st centuries (K. Stetsenko, B. Lyatoshynsky, L. Dychko, A. Zubytsky, E. Stankovych), large-scale compositions of world and Ukrainian classics (J. S. Bach, A. Bruckner, D. Verdi, W. Mozart, L. Revutsky), a total of about 40 works. Due to such a heavy load on the student choir, the organizers involved two of its ensembles, which ensured a highly professional performance of the program (artistic director Professor Yevhen Savchuk). The number of participants in the competition was small only 17, which can be explained by the difficulties of organization and the difficult conditions of the competition. The winners were students and masters of the P.I. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy V. Grigoriev, D. Korinnyk, V. Hulyak (class of Professor E. Savchuk). Among the laureates, there are representatives of the Odessa (A. Pertsev) and Kharkiv (F. Voskoboynikov) choral schools. All of them, with the support of patrons, received monetary awards.

The socio-cultural orientation of the above-mentioned competitions was also manifested in the accessibility of information. For this purpose, online broadcasts were organized, the media and television were involved. In the off-competition period, round tables accompanying the competition programs were held with the participation of jury members, competition participants, teachers, scientific and practical conferences were organized, and the presentation of sheet music publications (in particular, from the series "Repertory Treasury of the Odessa Choir School"). The strengthening of personal contacts among choirmasters was also facilitated by the fact that many contestants, teachers, and jury members participated in not one, but several such events, therefore, they had the opportunity to conduct a broad dialogue and exchange experiences. Almost all conductor competitions are named after outstanding Ukrainian artists, bright representatives of choral schools:

Kyiv – Oleg Tymoshenko, Lviv – Mykola Kolessa, Andriy Kushnirenko, Odessa – Dmytro Zagretsky, Kharkiv – Yuriy Kulyk.

Thus, the competitions of choral conductors held during the war are of great importance for ensuring the continuity of the process of professional growth of young choirmasters, enriching their performing experience, and demonstrating an example of the adaptation of the Ukrainian choral community to difficult conditions and its unprecedented consolidation.

4. Conclusion

Summing up, it is worth noting that modern vocal and choral performance in Ukraine demonstrates amazing adaptability. Based on the analysis, we formulated the following key conclusions.

Organic synthesis: Tradition today is not a frozen monument. On the contrary, we see how canonical forms of part singing or sacred music are getting a “second wind” through historically informed projects (such as “Open Opera Ukraine”),

successfully fitting national heritage into the European context.

New theatricality: The choir has finally ceased to be a decoration. In modern Ukrainian theater (from the Kurbas Theater to “Dakh”), it is the “voice” of the performance, which requires versatility from the actor: the ability to work simultaneously with academic sound, folk manner, and electronics.

Technological balance: Digitalization does not kill “living” art. It becomes its expansion, creating new acoustic spaces and allowing professional competitions to be held even in conditions of physical distance between participants.

Consolidation through challenges: Perhaps the most important insight is that the vocal and choral movement has become a form of social therapy and cultural resistance. Holding the All-Ukrainian Conductors’ Competitions (named after D. Zagretsky and O. Tymoshenko) in 2024 is not just reporting, but proof that the professional school maintains continuity despite any external threats.

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