

At the Crossroads of Traditional and Revival Ukrainian Folk Music Performance: Transmission, Preservation, and Recontextualization

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Abstract

This article examines the interaction between bearers of traditional Ukrainian folk music and revival performers from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century. Drawing on culturological and ethnomusicological analysis, published scholarship, media sources, and in-depth interviews, it explores key mechanisms of transmitting and preserving tradition, including fieldwork, oral learning, joint music-making, and combinations of traditional and revival practices. The findings demonstrate that traditional musical culture undergoes recontextualization and integration into contemporary cultural space, largely driven by growing societal interest in national heritage and traditional music. At the same time, revival performance shows a gradual shift from stage-oriented reproduction toward interactive, participatory, and community-based practices, transforming it into a form of cultural mediation that supports the sustainability and contemporary relevance of Ukrainian musical heritage.

Keywords

Ukrainian traditional music, folk music revival movement, reconstructive performance, folklore fieldwork, oral transmission, recontextualization, cultural mediation

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Introduction

In examining the context and circumstances surrounding the emergence of folk music revival movements in Ukraine and, more broadly, across the former Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s, it becomes evident that this phenomenon arose as a natural development. Its appearance was conditioned not only by objective factors—such as the intensification of folkloristic collecting practices and the elevation of ethnomusicological research to a more advanced level¹—but also by the gradual political disintegration of the communist system, which fostered heightened attention to national culture within many Soviet republics and the countries of the socialist bloc (Lukashenko 2023: 76).

During this period, engagement with folk music as a source of inspiration for professional musicians, alongside the folk music revival movement among amateurs, was characteristic of Europe as a whole. The origins of this folkloristic movement can be traced back to the post-war United States (Slobin 1996: 5–7; Vielichkina 2024: 108–110). It thus represented a new wave of fascination with folklore that spread across America and Europe, ultimately crossing the Iron Curtain into the socialist countries. In most European contexts, this took the form of a folk revival movement with diverse motivations—romantic, patriotic, political, commercial, and others (Poljak Istenič 2011: 54). A defining feature of this process was the reality that rural folk traditions in many Western European countries had largely ceased to function as living practices by that time.² By contrast, in Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, rural

1 A key reason was that technological progress made portable tape recorders more readily available, which significantly facilitated fieldwork and substantially increased both the quantity and quality of field recordings.

2 The overall dynamics of change in European oral musical traditions can be observed through field recordings. In Western Europe, the last recordings of traditional peasant music were generally made between the 1930s and 1960s, reflecting the early decline of rural musical traditions in the context of industrialization and social transformation (Livingston 1999; Ronström 2014). In contrast, in Central Europe, due to the different socio-historical conditions, such recordings continued until the 1990s, often capturing still-functioning village traditions rather than their remnants. Comparable large-scale collections (e.g., the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences [Phonographic Collection s.d.] and the Institute of Musicology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences [Urbancová 2024]) were largely created through intensive fieldwork conducted during the second half of the twentieth century. In Ukraine and other Eastern European countries, the recording of traditional music performed by rural tradition bearers, although less intensive than in the past, continues to the present day (Pavliv 2024; Polyphony Project 2025).

folk traditions in the 1970s and 1980s remained alive and actively practiced. However, they were largely under-researched and remained almost unknown not only to the general public but also to many professional musicologists. This marginalization stemmed from several factors: first, ritual traditional songs were closely intertwined with Christian worldviews,³ which conflicted with the atheistic ideology of the communist regime; second, they often exposed historical narratives that had been suppressed by the Soviet authorities; and third, certain genres embodied national liberation ideals. Collectively, these attributes virtually rendered them taboo within the Soviet ideological framework.

In order to eliminate these “undesirable” traditions, Soviet cultural policy promoted the replacement of the Christian ritual calendar with new Soviet holidays, introduced artificial rites and traditions (Helbig 2014: 515–516), and encouraged the creation of pseudo-folk songs glorifying the Soviet way of life. At the same time, traditional folklore was systematically silenced and displaced by artificial amateur performances and by a staged, decorative, and quasi-professional “folk” culture (Levin 1996: 19–21; Lukashenko 2025b: 249–250).

Thus, the folk music revival movement in Ukraine did not constitute a return to a cultural tradition that had already become purely historical, as was often the case in Europe. Rather, it represented a process of reproduction, since traditional music continued to function in its natural environment, aimed at popularization and resistance against artificial Soviet pseudo-folk culture.⁴ In Eastern Europe, the revival movement emerged primarily within the circles of collectors and researchers of folk music—folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and students of art institutions—many of whom encountered the novelty and uniqueness of rural traditions firsthand during folklore fieldwork (Lukashenko 2023: 77–79).

This specific strand of the folk revival movement, which originated among Ukrainian scholars and researchers of traditional music, constitutes

Taken together, these facts point to a fundamental temporal divergence: whereas in Western Europe revival movements largely emerged after the disappearance of living traditions, in Central Europe they developed alongside still-active, though gradually diminishing, rural musical practices. In Eastern Europe, and especially in Ukraine, the tradition, although in a decayed and largely passive state, survived until the beginning of the twenty-first century, enabling ongoing interaction between revival performers and tradition bearers.

3 The performance of traditional rituals accompanied by music—such as Christmas carols or Easter games—was prohibited, and those who continued to perform them were often persecuted and even punished by the Soviet authorities (Hanushevskaya 2024; Lukashenko 2025b: 250–251).

4 For more details, see: Lukashenko 2025b: 249–250.

the main focus of this article. It differs from other revival approaches⁵ through its scientific and methodological orientation and is commonly referred to in Ukrainian as the *reconstructive* (*rekonstruktyvnyi*) approach. The performers—primarily vocal or instrumental ensembles—are described as scientific-reconstructive or ethnographic ensembles. According to the *Ukrainian Music Encyclopedia*, the aim of such groups is to perform folk music in an authentic manner grounded in scholarly principles. Their repertoire is acquired exclusively through their own folklore expeditions, utilizing professional, precisely documented audio and video recordings. These ensembles align themselves with a specific local style, carefully analyzing and adopting dialectal, stylistic, and variational techniques, as well as performance-specific features, through both recordings and direct interaction with traditional bearers during joint music-making (Shevchuk 2006: 69). However, the most important distinguishing feature of such ensembles was that they were largely composed of experienced folklore collectors, namely ethnomusicologists, who acquired extensive aural experience not only during fieldwork but also through the subsequent processing of materials, including transcription, analysis, and systematization, given that scholarly work constituted their primary occupation.

Without discussing the history and theory of the movement in comprehensive detail, it is important to clarify the terminology at the outset. Among the range of concepts proposed in the introductory essay of the widely known volume by Bithell and Hill (2014), the terms *reproduction* and *restoration* most accurately correspond to the methodological approaches and outcomes of this particular revival direction. Moreover, over time, and with the gradual decline of living traditions, the process of restoration has become increasingly significant. The term *reconstruction* (*reconstructive performance*) is used here as a working term because it phonetically and semantically aligns with the Ukrainian-language definition.⁶

Another important issue to clarify beforehand concerns the distinction between traditional music and revival. This question has been widely debated in ethnomusicology, particularly in light of the transformation of traditional musical cultures and the simultaneous development of revival movements. In this context, a range of hybrid and transitional phenomena has emerged encompassing concepts such as collective memory, second

5 A more detailed characterization of various approaches to the performance and interpretation of traditional music can be found in Synelnikov – Synelnikova 2018: 51–52; Synelnikova – Synelnikov 2021.

6 Further discussion in English-language scholarship is required concerning the use of one of these terms as an equivalent of the Ukrainian concept *re-konstruktsiia* for this particular strand of revival practice.

existence, authenticity, and reinvention, all of which mediate between inherited practices and their contemporary reinterpretations.

The concept of traditional (or folk) music is also discussed in detail in a recent work by the prominent Ukrainian scholar Bohdan Lukaniuk (Lukaniuk 2022: 20–27). Here, however, I draw on a definition proposed by the Ukrainian composer and musicologist Vasyl Barvinskyi that Lukaniuk refers to: “By folk music we understand the entire body of vocal and instrumental melodies which, from the earliest times of a given people’s existence, have been transmitted from one generation to the next *through oral transmission*.”⁷ (Barvinskyi 1937: 691; Lukaniuk 2022: 25)

From this perspective, the defining feature of traditional music lies in its oral mode of existence and transmission, rather than in its textual or fixed form, as is the case with written (composed) music. Extending this line of thought, traditional music may be understood not merely as a repertoire, but as a form of cultural knowledge acquired through participation in a lived environment. For instance, if an individual acquires a musical repertoire not through formal learning but through growing up within a specific cultural context—alongside its language, customs, and everyday practices—this may be regarded as an instance of tradition in its active, socially mediated form.⁸ Accordingly, manifestations of folk music that fall outside this concept are defined as revival or, in Eastern European terminology, as musical folklorism (Lukaniuk 2022: 33–40; Zemtovsky 1984).

With regard to the general trajectories of the revival movement, it is also important to consider how its essence, scholarly interpretation, and the terminological designations of its various manifestations are understood within the context of Eastern European ethnomusicology (musical folkloristics), as well as their relation to concepts developed in broader European and global scholarship. This issue is discussed in greater detail by Lukashenko (2025b: 245–247).

The present study is informed by my extensive insider engagement with the Ukrainian folk music revival movement, as an ethnomusicologist with more than thirty years of fieldwork experience both in Ukraine and abroad, and a member of the folk music revival ensemble *Korali*. I also teach courses related to folk music revival practices at the Mykola Lysenko National Music Academy of Lviv. These forms of scholarly and practical involvement have provided me with sustained, direct contact with various representatives of

7 Bohdan Lukaniuk’s emphasis.

8 It is evident that, against the backdrop of the decline of musical folklore and the corresponding decrease in the number of its bearers, passive forms of its transmission may also occur and be acknowledged, albeit only within a specific tradition-bearing context.

the Ukrainian revival scene, fostering a deeper understanding of its internal processes and transformations. Accordingly, in addition to published scholarship and archival materials, this article draws upon a broad range of sources documenting the activities of Ukrainian folklore revivalists over the past three decades, including long-term field observation, insider participation in revival practices, and formal and informal interviews that reflect the perspectives and positions of the practitioners.

Sources

Although the history of the folk music revival movement in Ukraine spans nearly half a century, it remains insufficiently researched.⁹ A brief overview of the movement's historical development, including the Soviet period, was presented in an article in a leading Ukrainian ethnomusicological yearbook, *Problems of Ethnomusicology* (Lukashenko 2023). Furthermore, the emergence and early history of this phenomenon, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, has been examined in detail in two recently published articles (Lukashenko 2025a; 2025b). At present, these two publications remain virtually the only comprehensive studies devoted to the history of the folk music revival movement in Ukraine.

The history of Drevo—the pioneering ensemble of modern Ukrainian folk music revival—and its contemporary followers has been explored in a recent study by Marharyta Skazhenyk (2024). In addition, selected issues related to folk revival processes in the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine, are discussed by Olha Vielichkina (2024).

Short encyclopedic entries describing the activities of the most prominent revival ensembles can be found in the *Ukrainian Music Encyclopedia*, while the development of revival performance in specific regions of Ukraine has been addressed by several authors. Methodological publications also constitute an important source base, particularly those devoted to teaching methods and the organization of student revival ensembles (Synelnykov – Synelnykova 2018; 2020; Synelnikova – Synelnikov 2021).

9 In recent decades, Ukrainian ethnomusicology has focused primarily on the study of traditional musical culture from specific perspectives, such as structural typology, geographic ethnomusicology, ethno-organology, and related approaches. In contrast, the folk music revival movement has long been approached primarily as a practical or experiential domain rather than as a subject of systematic scholarly analysis and, as a result, has only rarely been examined within social, art, or other analytical frameworks. A similar situation was observed in world ethnomusicology several decades earlier (Livingston 1999: 68).

Brief information on the origins of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement and its founder, Yevhen Yefremov, within the broader context of contemporary Ukrainian culture is provided in the works of Maria Sonevsky (Sonevsky – Ivakhiv 2016: 140–141; Sonevsky 2019: 93–100).

At the same time, a substantial amount of information on the activities of revival performers is available online—on the official websites of ensembles, in digital publications, and in video formats—although such sources are largely journalistic in nature. Unpublished materials include in-depth personal interviews conducted with leaders of revival ensembles (Lukianets 2023; Rodovid 2021; Yefremov 2020).

Information on the contacts and forms of collaboration between Ukrainian bearers of tradition and revival performers is dispersed across a wide range of sources. This article brings these materials together, systematizing and analyzing them within a coherent analytical framework. While it does not seek to offer a complete overview—given that this is the first study devoted specifically to this issue—it nevertheless allows for the identification of recurring practices, shared strategies, and broader trends in cooperation between revival ensembles, folklorists, and tradition bearers.

Fieldwork: independent ensembles¹⁰

The first and indispensable form of interaction between reconstructive performers and bearers of tradition is folklore fieldwork. This sphere of activity became a key factor in the formation of the folk music revival movement in Ukraine. From the mid-1970s onward, field research expanded significantly, facilitated by the availability of compact portable tape recorders, the development of musical folkloristics, and the institutionalization of folk music education.

During field expeditions, researchers encountered a largely unknown musical world. Fascinated by stylistic features that differed radically from academic music, and inspired not only by musical discoveries but also by the philosophy, customs, rituals, and worldview of rural communities, some researchers decided to promote and disseminate traditional music through their own concert performances. Consequently, the first such performers were referred to as “singing folklorists” (Vielichkina 2024: 110).

¹⁰ I use this term to refer to ensembles composed of individuals with substantial experience of folk music research. They function independently of a leader (director) responsible for selecting the repertoire, determining the methods of study, and organizing expeditions, which is typically the case with youth ensembles (Pavlenko 2013; Synelnikova – Synelnikov 2021).

The profound impact of encounters with traditional bearers is vividly described by Yevhen Yefremov, founder of the first Ukrainian revival ensemble Drevo. Reflecting on his formative experiences, he recalls his early meetings with outstanding rural singers whose mastery, stylistic knowledge, and vocal technique left a lasting impression on him:

“Among my first ‘folklore teachers’, whose singing, knowledge of tradition, and technical mastery made a profound impression on me, I can name several individuals whom I encountered at different stages of my life. [...] I could name several individuals who had the most significant influence on me, and it was through their singing that I mastered the local vocal manner.” (Drevo 2020)

Thus, fieldwork not only brought a previously marginalized musical culture into scholarly and artistic focus, but also constituted a fundamental condition for the emergence and long-term activity of nearly all reconstructive ensembles. After a decade of successful experience in both fieldwork and performance, Yefremov, together with Valentyna Ponomarenko, co-founder of the ensemble Drevo, articulated their observations on the necessity, role, and methods of employing fieldwork in ensemble practice in the article “The Study of a Local Folk Song Tradition as the Foundation of a Secondary Folk Ensemble’s Activity” (Yefremov – Ponomarenko 1989).

Personal fieldwork served not merely as a source of repertoire. Equally important was direct communication with bearers of tradition, encompassing observation of their performance manner, their attitudes toward music, their everyday musical practices, and their worldview. Repeated encounters often developed into a form of apprenticeship through multiple sessions of joint music-making. As a member of the ensemble Rodovid, Oksana Ostashevskaya, recalled:

“We repeatedly travelled to the village of Zarichne to learn singing from the local women. We observed them—how they breathe, how they speak—and we sang together with them. We adopted not only their manner of sound production, but also the way they look, interact with one another, and dress...” (Interview with ensemble Rodovid 2021: 3–4)

Thus, learning involved not only vocal technique but also bodily presence, speech patterns, and forms of interpersonal communication.

Instrumental ensembles similarly relied on direct learning from traditional musicians. For instance, the performances of the ensemble Buttia were

preceded by extended fieldwork and apprenticeship. Its leader, Oksana But, adopted traditional dulcimer techniques from Yurii Samokishchuk (“Pykuriievskyi”) from the village of Kosmach in the Hutsul region. A defining feature of this style is melodic variation rather than fixed melodic repetition—an embodiment of the folk musical style (Skazhenyk 2024: 213–214).

Another prominent example of long-term fieldwork combined with direct transmission is the activity of the ensemble Bozhychi, whose members undertook annual kayak expeditions down Ukrainian rivers. Over several decades, they collected thousands of video recordings documenting traditional music along major rivers—including the Desna, Psel, Ros, Vovcha, Samara, Vorskla, and Oril—across ten regions of Ukraine.¹¹ These materials reveal that ensemble members frequently participated directly in the restoration of rituals, songs, games, and dances together with local communities.

Even under wartime conditions, revival ensembles have continued their fieldwork activities, including in frontline regions affected by military aggression. A notable example is the project “Folklore and War”, initiated in 2022 by the Kharkiv-based ensemble Muravskyi Shliakh. Visiting formerly occupied villages, the ensemble aims to provide moral support, listen to traumatic experiences, and help ensure that the desire to sing and remember does not disappear, while simultaneously documenting how war affects bearers of tradition and their musical culture (Muravskyi Shliakh 2020: 2023) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Folklore field expedition of the ensemble Muravskyi Shliakh to the de-occupied village of Cherkaska Lozova, Kharkiv region, 2023. Source: Folklorni ekspedytsii 2023.

11 A portion of this collection is publicly available online (Bozhychi Archive 2022).

Fieldwork: student and youth ensembles

Field recordings and continuous direct interaction with tradition bearers also constitute the basis for student revival ensembles affiliated with art institutions.¹² The first such ensemble, Horyna (1979), was established at the Rivne Institute of Culture (Lukashenko 2023: 83; Lukashenko 2025b: 255–258). Its initial repertoire was established and steadily augmented through new fieldwork recordings made by ensemble members in the Rivne Polissia region (Horyna 2017). Notably, the founding of this ensemble—and the corresponding need for new source material—prompted both teachers and students to begin the practice of regular folklore expeditions (Rybak 2017: 106–107).

This model remains relevant today, as traditional music—despite its ongoing decline¹³—continues to be actively practiced in rural communities. Ivan Synelnykov, founder of the student ensembles Dzherelo (1983) in Rivne and Kralytsia (1991) in Kyiv, emphasizes that the ideal mode of learning folk music is oral transmission through joint singing with bearers of tradition during folklore fieldwork. He distinguishes between expeditions focused primarily on documentation and analysis, and those oriented toward learning and living transmission, noting that in practice both approaches are usually combined (Synelnykov – Synelnykova 2020: 116–118).

Fieldwork is regarded as the most effective means of acquiring practical skills in traditional singing. Through expeditions and “singing along” with rural performers, ensembles assimilate melody, text, vocal technique, movement, and improvisation while developing musical interaction, stylistic sensitivity, and an understanding of polyphonic texture. Furthermore, field expeditions also shape the ensemble’s artistic identity, internal cohesion, professional level, and educational repertoire (*ibid.*).

Many art institutions incorporate fieldwork practice into their curricula, ensuring that students gain firsthand experience with living tradition bearers. Similarly, extracurricular educational institutions that organize

12 The main trends in the Ukrainian folk music revival movement within youth environments are examined in an article by Ivan Synelnykov and Valentyna Synelnykova (2018).

13 Modern forms of cultural communication, which began with the advent and gradual spread of radio and television in rural areas in the mid-twentieth century and have now largely shifted to the online sphere, have progressively displaced traditional forms of rural leisure involving communal singing, instrumental music, games, and dance. Rituals accompanied by music are likewise losing their significance and gradually falling out of practice. Contributing factors include the general decline of rural settlements and the spread of Protestant forms of Christianity that do not support traditional music.

children's and youth folklore groups conduct targeted field sessions to introduce young performers to traditional music in its natural context. For example, since 1995, the children's ensemble Ladovytsi at the Khmelnytskyi School of Arts has conducted regular expeditions, collecting musical and ethnographic materials while extending its research activities into neighboring regions (Kotsupei 2024) (Fig. 2).

Overall, folklore fieldwork plays a pivotal role in reconstructive performance, providing direct access to the everyday life, rituals, aesthetics, and moral values of rural communities. Listening to living speech and authentic singing shapes the performers' individual stylistic sensitivity and deepens their understanding of the modes of existence of traditional music.

Joint music-making

Extensive field experience and direct learning from tradition bearers facilitate joint music-making between traditional practitioners and revivalists not only during expeditions but also, occasionally, on stage. In some cases,



Figure 2 Field expedition of the youth ensemble Ladovytsi to the village of Zbryzh, Khmelnytskyi region, 2024. Source: Ladovytsi 2024.

as bearers of tradition pass away, reconstructive performers assume their roles to maintain ensemble continuity. One such example is the recording of the traditional repertoire of the village of Kriachivka (Poltava region) within the framework of the “Polyphony Project” by the Hungarian ethnographer Miklós Both, in which reconstructive singers replaced deceased members of the traditional ensemble Drevo (Polyphonyproject 2025).

The ensemble Mykhailove Chudo has published numerous videos in which it performs its regional repertoire together with traditional rural singers (Fig. 3), and its leader, Iryna Danyleiko, has recorded podcasts featuring bearers of tradition (EGE films). Such collaborations are significant not only for oral transmission but also for the traditional bearers themselves, who witness the intergenerational transmission of their musical heritage to younger urban singers¹⁴ (Skazhenyk 2024: 217).

An exceptional example of long-term collaboration is the twelve-year participation of traditional drummer Valentyn Davydenko in the instrumental ensemble Bozhychi. This resulted not only in stylistic assimilation,



Figure 3 Joint performance of the ensemble Mykhailove Chudo with traditional singers in the village of Dniprovske, Chernihiv region, 2021. Source: EGE films.

14 On one occasion, during a field expedition to Northern Podlasie, when I was collecting material for my dissertation, an elderly traditional singer asked me: “Why are you recording my songs?” I replied: “For research purposes—perhaps I will publish a book with these songs.” She responded with some disappointment: “A book is a book, but it would be better if someone in the future were to actually sing them.” This remark inspired my colleague and me to establish the folklore ensemble Korali in 2002.

but it also laid the groundwork for interdisciplinary research. Specifically, the ensemble leader Illia Fetysov together with the physicist Volodymyr Maksymiuk conducted pioneering measurements of the acoustic parameters distinguishing traditional from revival performance¹⁵ (Maksymiuk – Fetysov 2019).

Overall, over the past decade, as many bearers of the active tradition (born in the 1930s and 1940s) have passed away, joint music-making between tradition bearers and folklore collectors has become an increasingly prominent feature of fieldwork. A significant proportion of these collaborative performances is documented in the recently published video archive of the ensemble Bozhychi (Bozhychi archive 2022). This typically occurs when researchers return repeatedly to the same traditional singers with whom they have already established connections, as was the case during the recent expeditions of the ensemble Muravskiy Shliakh to the de-occupied territories of the Kharkiv region (Folklorni ekspedytsii 2023).

Another sphere that brings together traditional and revival performers consists of artistic projects in which the music of rural performers, revival musicians, and other strands of musical culture are presented on a shared stage. One such example is Miklós Both's project "Mysterious Ukraine", which has been presented on multiple occasions in Ukraine (Holynska 2017) and Hungary (Both 2016). Participants included singers from the Kyiv-based ensemble Bozhychi, members of the traditional ensembles Drevo (from the village of Kriachivka, Poltava region) and Pisnehray (from the village of Popivka, Poltava region), and the traditional singer Oleksii Zaiets, alongside Miklós Both's contemporary music ensemble.

Perhaps the most large-scale initiative in this sphere was the project "Ark Ukraine: Music".¹⁶ Its central idea was to bring together Ukrainian musical rural traditions and contemporary classical compositions. The title was chosen deliberately, as the project symbolized a musical ark intended to preserve Ukrainian heritage and transmit it to future generations. Nearly 200 participants from across Ukraine were involved in the realization of this project, including the ethno-ensembles DakhaBrakha and Kurbas, the men's choir Dudaryk, and the Ukrainian Youth Symphony Orchestra. A highlight of the event was the performance by the Polissian traditional singer Dominika Chekun (Ark Ukraine 2022).

15 Using a specialized device known as a vibration, strain, and audio signal analyzer, the intensity and duration of sound produced during the performance of folk music were measured individually for each ensemble member. On this basis, graphs were generated that served as the foundation for subsequent theoretical conclusions.

16 Whose online premiere took place on 24 October 2020.

Combining tradition and reconstruction

Due to the synchronous coexistence of traditional music and revival reconstruction—and, consequently, of tradition bearers and revivalists—situations arise in which these roles intersect. In these instances, bearers of tradition also become stage-based reconstructive performers of other local styles. A vivid example is the prominent Lviv-based ensemble Rodovid, which celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2025. Unlike most reconstructive ensembles, which are typically composed either of professional folklorists or students of art institutions, a distinctive feature of Rodovid is that its members (with the exception of its initiator, Yurii Kondratenko) have entirely non-artistic, everyday professions.

Another unique characteristic of the ensemble is that two of its three members—Ivanna Shevchuk and Oksana Ostashevska—were born in villages of the Sambir district in the Lviv region and were raised in a rural environment at a time when traditional music was still actively practiced. From early childhood, they participated in calendar and family rituals and sang traditional songs¹⁷ (Lukashenko 2025a: 170–171; Lukashenko 2025b: 264–266). This early-life experience continues to shape the singers' musical imagination today. Oksana Ostashevska recalls: “*When I sing now, I imagine my grandmother and her sisters singing—everyone in my family sang...*” (Hlynchak 2003; Interview with ensemble Rodovid)

A unique individual who combines the roles of an authentic bearer of tradition and a reconstructive performer is Oleksii Zaiets. Born in the village of Fasova in the Kyiv region, he is a native bearer of its local folklore tradition, while having also pursued a professional career as a folk singer and folklorist. He attended Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts and, as a student, participated in the several Kyiv-based folklore ensembles. He also auditioned for the popular television show *The Voice of Ukraine*; the controversy surrounding this participation and its underlying causes has been analyzed in detail by Maria Sonevytsky (2019: 85–88).¹⁸ Over the course of his career, he has become a laureate and prize winner of numerous

17 Because these villages were relatively remote from urban centres and the Soviet “all-seeing eye”, such practices were largely tolerated.

18 The research examines the performance of traditional-style singers, using the example of Oleksiy Zayets, within the context of the popular television competition *Holos Kraïny*, which claims to identify the “Voice of the Nation” yet consistently rewards performers of global pop styles. It aims to demonstrate how vocal timbre operates as a form of cultural politics in the post-Soviet Ukrainian media sphere, and how this distinctive sound disrupts the established rules of the competition.



Figure 4. Oleksii Zaiets and a rural ensemble from the village of Fasova, Kyiv region, 2022. Still from the film *Made in Kolys*, 2022.

festivals and competitions both in Ukraine and abroad, and he currently leads rural ensembles in the settlements of Kalynivka and Fasova in the Kyiv region (Fig. 4).

His love of traditional songs was passed down by his grandmother Mariia, a resettler from the Chernobyl exclusion zone. His grandmother's songs and the local repertoire constitute the primary source material for his singing practice. He began recording the songs in early childhood, visiting elderly women in his native village with a notebook in hand (*Made in Kolys* 2022). He adopted the vocal style and repertoire not only of the residents of Fasova but also of the inhabitants of the village of Chapaievka, who were resettled in Fasova following the Chernobyl disaster. In this way, a young man born in 1990, who possessed formal folkloristic training, innate talent, and profound devotion to traditional music, naturally integrated into ensembles of local women aged seventy to ninety. According to singers from Fasova, before Oleksii's arrival, almost no one in the village sang the old songs anymore, and it was he who organized the elderly women into an ensemble that began reviving traditional singing.¹⁹ Today, they jointly reflect on how to transmit this culture to younger generations to prevent its disappearance. Through his activities, Oleksii has thus sustained a fading tradition and breathed new life into it.

19 Numerous recordings of folk songs performed by traditional ensembles from the villages of Liudynivka, Fasova, and Kalynivka with the participation of Oleksii Zaiets are available on his YouTube channel (Zaiets 2020).

Masterclasses by bearers of tradition

As a rule, vocal masterclasses led by bearers of tradition are organized within the framework of larger cultural events, such as festivals and celebrations. However, the practice of instrumental masterclasses led by bearers of tradition is less widespread, largely due to the organizational challenges involved. One of the most notable endeavors in the history of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement is the Vasyl Mohur²⁰ School of Traditional Folk Art, which was founded in the Hutsul village of Kosmach in 2000 at the initiative of the prominent folklorist Bohdan Yaremko, a professor of folklore at Rivne State University of the Humanities. He began inviting students of ethnomusicology and folklore studies from Ukraine and Poland to Kosmach to learn traditional folk music directly from local musicians.

In 2002, the project was taken over by the All-Ukrainian Association of Young Folklore Researchers, led by folklorist and leader of the ensemble Bozhychi, Illia Fetysov. Under his leadership, the association organized the school annually each autumn. These week-long sessions in Kosmach



Figure 5 Students of Rivne State University of Humanities meeting with the traditional singer Paraska Bahriichuk as part of the Vasyl Mohur School of Traditional Folk Art, village of Kosmach, Ivano-Frankivsk region, 2003. Source: Yaremko 2025: 232.

20 Vasyl Mohur (Hrymaliuk) was a renowned Hutsul traditional virtuoso fiddler. During the Soviet period, the state record label Melodiya released an LP featuring his performances. He also played the *sopilka*, *duda*, *truba*, and other instruments, and taught his distinctive playing style to many musicians.

brought together young folklore researchers, students of folklore studies, ethnologists, ethnomusicologists, and members of youth revival ensembles from across Ukraine, who resided in local households, where they were taught traditional crafts, instrumental music, and folk singing (Fig. 5). In its peak years, up to 120 students attended the school. In 2006, the Ministry of Ukraine for Family, Youth, and Sports recognized the school as the best cultural project of the year²¹ (Muzychenko 2014).

Musical masterclasses involving bearers of tradition are occasionally still organized by cultural institutions and museums. Particularly active in this area is the Ivan Honchar Museum National Centre of Folk Culture (Iz ust v usta s.d.), as are various cultural institutions in Lviv. In November 2019, several masterclasses by the renowned Polissian traditional singer Dominika Chekun were held at the Lviv Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Center, with the participation of the ensemble Kurbasy (Kryzhanivska 2019). Similarly, in October 2025, the Klymentii Sheptytsky Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life in Lviv hosted a masterclass on Hutsul instrumental melodies and folk singing led by bearers of the living musical tradition from Kosmach. Students of the Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy participated in the instrumental masterclass, while the vocal sessions were open to the general public. On the following day, guided by visiting tradition bearers, there was a restoration of a Hutsul village wedding accompanied by traditional music (Dni 2025).

Conclusion

Through almost fifty years of close cooperation between bearers of tradition and reconstructive performers within the Ukrainian folk music revival movement, a process of recontextualizing traditional music can be observed. This process has expanded the narrow framework of the music's natural social environment and manifests itself in various forms, including:

- performing traditional music at the request of collectors during folklore fieldwork sessions;
- joint music-making for aesthetic pleasure during such encounters;
- playing together in masterclasses;
- performing for others within interactive activities such as singing, playing, dancing, and theatrical performances;

21 From 2002 to 2007, this project received funding from the Ministry of Culture, which provided financial support for both participants of the school and local tradition bearers. Over time, funding was gradually reduced and eventually discontinued. Subsequently, the school was funded by contributions from the participants and eventually closed.

- collaborative stage presentations during concerts and festivals, as well as for audio and video recordings disseminated online or distributed via media formats.

On occasions, bearers of tradition also participate in syncretic cultural projects that involve other musical domains, including professional composition, academic and popular music, ballet, and theater.

Shifting the perspective to the internal dynamics of the folk music revival movement itself, an opposite tendency is evident. Whereas the movement's initial stage of development saw reconstructive performers primarily disseminate traditional rural music among urban audiences through stage-based reproduction together with other genres of professional musical culture, over time there has been a marked increase in off-stage, interactive forms of activity. These take place in collaboration with bearers of tradition and independently of them. In such types of performance, the boundary between the performers and the audience gradually dissolves, and music becomes non-concert, participatory, and interactive—resembling forms of traditional amateur music-making that existed for centuries.²² This is manifested above all in the involvement of audiences in musical performances, the organization of masterclasses, and the reconstruction of traditional rituals, games, and festive practices. Overall, a form of intersection between traditional and revival art emerges, expanding the fields of activity for both bearers of oral tradition and revival performers.

Qualitative changes have also occurred in another dimension of the folk music revival movement. While in its early history it consisted mainly of ensembles formed by folklore scholars and professional musicians, and thus functioned as a kind of elite cultural practice, today the circle of participants has expanded significantly. This does not imply a change in methods: reconstructive performers continue to undertake folklore fieldwork, recording and learning music directly from bearers of tradition, reproducing it without altering its stylistic features. However, the primary motivation of this activity is increasingly the desire to enrich their own cultural experience, master the oral musical tradition, and become a co-bearer of this heritage. Contemporary reconstructive performers thus seek to integrate musical folklore and related ethnographic traditions into everyday life. This is reflected in the fact that many folklore activists no longer describe

²² Ukrainian oral-tradition musical culture (like that of many other ethnic groups) can be divided into two branches: an amateur branch, characterized by communal music-making and the absence of a division between performers and the audience, and a professional branch, represented primarily by the traditions of kobzars, lirnyks, and instrumental ensembles.

themselves as ensembles; instead, they operate as research-and-creative associations, folklore communities, youth folklore initiatives, folklore clubs, theatres, or dance schools, and creative laboratories. Methods of activity have also expanded: in addition to documenting and reproducing traditional music, there is active promotion through digital platforms, including video productions, documentary films, podcasts, and lectures.

Thus, over recent decades, the activities of Ukrainian folk music revival ensembles and associations have become an important component not only of musical practice but also of cultural action aimed at preserving, actualizing, and reinterpreting traditional musical heritage. These actors function as cultural mediators between the past and the present, seeking to popularize ancient musical traditions in modern society and to present them as a living, multidimensional cultural space. Their work contributes to the formation of new models of Ukrainian identity through the prism of traditional art.

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List of interviews

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Interview with Halyna Lukianets, 10 July 2023, [online], interview conducted by the author.

Interview with Yevhen Yefremov, 09 September 2020, [online], interview conducted by the author.