

european
forum
on music

MUSIC, HEALTH AND SOCIETAL RESILIENCE IN UKRAINE

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Event: European Forum on Music 2026 Timișoara, Romania



Core theme: Music meets health & resilience Exploring how music sustains communities in wartime Ukraine



Scope: From personal story to national impact Children, veterans, hospitals, culture, and international partnerships



A guiding question for the journey ahead
What can a musician do during a war?



A Personal Question

When full-scale invasion began, many Ukrainian musicians faced a difficult question:

What can a musician do during war?

Is it still meaningful to teach, perform, preserve traditional music or work with communities when people are losing their homes, their health and sometimes their lives?

Over the past four years, this question has shaped my work as a musicologist, educator, volunteer and community musician.

Today, I would like to share not simply a list of projects, but a developing Ukrainian story about music, healing and resilience.

When I look at Ukraine today, I see two major arts-based sources of resilience.

My volunteer music session at
Uzhhorod Public Library, 2022

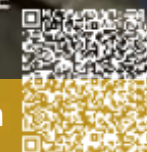


Mykhailo Oliynyk - Armed Forces of Ukraine,
Cultural Desant



ILLIA BONDARENKO
BASEMENT SHELTER, KYIV, UKRAINE

Photo from classicfm.com



more here

Two Pathways to Resilience in Ukraine:

Cultural Tradition and the Emerging Arts & Health Ecosystem

Tradition gives us roots.

The first source is an intuitive return to **our cultural roots**: folk songs, seasonal rituals, communal singing and traditional practices.

The second is the **development of a professional Arts & Health ecosystem** connecting artists, healthcare professionals, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, researchers, educators, communities and international organisations.

These two responses may initially appear very different. One grows from intergenerational cultural memory. The other develops through professional training, scientific evidence, institutional cooperation and health policy. Yet both respond to the same human need: to restore connection, meaning, dignity and a sense of continuity when life has been radically disrupted.



Beltane Ethno Festival, Uzhhorod



Music session led by N. Osborne at St Nicholas Children's Hospital, Lviv (Art Therapy Force)

Arts & Health creates pathways for care

CULTURE AS RESILIENCE

During the war, Ukrainians have intuitively begun turning more strongly towards their cultural roots. We sing folk songs, revive rituals and gather communities around traditional practices. With every year of the war, this tendency seems to become more visible.

In many ways, we found this path collectively, as a nation, before we had the language to explain why it mattered. Later, through my study of trauma and resilience, I began to understand that folklore is not only a form of cultural memory. In times of war, it can also become a resource for healing.

Traditional songs and rituals offer familiarity, rhythm and predictability. They bring us back to something we have known since childhood: a melody, a movement, a seasonal ritual, a shared way of being together. When everyday life is shaped by uncertainty, danger and constant change, this familiarity can provide an important sense of continuity and emotional grounding.



RESEARCH WHO ABOUT CULTURE HERITAGE

Recent research helps explain why these practices matter. A review of **42 studies found** consistent associations between traditional arts and mental and social well-being. Traditional culture can strengthen belonging, continuity, cultural identity and social connection.

For a society living through war, these are not abstract concepts. They are essential resources of community resilience.

This is why I see traditional culture as the first major arts-based source of resilience in Ukraine.

But alongside this intuitive return to tradition, a second process is taking place: the development of a professional, evidence-based Arts & Health ecosystem.



TRADITIONS, AS MENTAL AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

I would describe this not as a “genetic memory” in a literal biological sense, but as an embodied and intergenerational cultural memory. These songs and practices have been carried through families and communities for generations. When we return to them, we reconnect not only with the past, but also with one another.

Today, many Ukrainian communities are joining these practices intuitively. During traditional spring rituals, for example, we can see small children, teenagers, older people and wounded veterans in wheelchairs singing and moving together. This is not simply a performance of heritage. It is a living practice of belonging, social connection and collective support.

As an ethnomusicologist, I also conduct singing workshops and community events based entirely on traditional music. Through this work, I have seen how folklore can create a shared space in which people feel safer, more connected and less alone.



Video from social media

BUILDING AN ARTS HEALTH AND RESILIENCE ECOSYSTEM IN UKRAINE

During the full-scale war, Ukraine is developing the field of arts, health and resilience — from national initiatives to clinical and local practices.

National level → regional level → local level

- **National level: Art Therapy Force** — one of Ukraine's key arts and health initiatives, connecting trauma-informed creative practice with international partnerships, professional training, recovery camps, clinical work, Healing Arts Ukraine, BACH-related policy dialogue, and collaboration with WHO, Jameel Arts & Health Lab and Ukrainian institutions.

- **Clinical / regional level:**

- NICU music therapy in Ivano-Frankivsk
- X-System through Art Therapy Force,
- Music & Resilience,
- Sounds of Change

- **Local level:** Uzhhorod initiatives **NGO Sol Diez** and **NGO Rivnovaha** - connecting creativity with rehabilitation, mental health and social connection.

Art Therapy Force

Sounds of Change

Music & Resilience



Christopher Bailey's Visit to Ukraine

From June 18 to June 25, at the invitation of our project, Christopher Bailey, the Head of the "Arts and Health" department at the World Health Organization, visited Ukraine.

IMPLEMENTED **AMOUNT**
31.1.2023 - 30.4.2023 57 578 uah

Music therapy for premature babies

Premature babies require a long hospital stay after birth. Silence, like disorderly noise, inhibits the formation of a child's brain and motor development, so the project aims to fill the wards with music - a meaningful auditory stimulus.

Goal:
implementing music therapy technology at the unit of intensive care and early rehabilitation of prematurely born children of the Municipal Non-Commercial Enterprise, Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Children's Clinical Hospital

Sounds of Change in Uzhgorod - Ukraine

Ukraine - November 8, 2024

We have just returned from our first on-site training in Ukraine since the outbreak of full scale war.

At the invitation of our Sounds of Change Academy alumni Kateryna Kudasheva and her local organisation Sol Diez, we traveled with [Trauma International](#) trainers Saskia Bok and Maartje Schel. Having arrived in the city of Uzhgorod in the Ukrainian region of Zakarpattia we trained 32 caregivers, teachers and therapists.



Healing Arts Ukraine: Trauma Attuned Arts School



Music & Resilience - Latest updates -



December 11, 2025
M&R in Ukraine: December 2025

We have just returned from our sixth mission to Ukraine in support of the displaced population in Lviv, accompanying [Mediterranea Saving Humans](#) once again on what was their 22nd mission there, that took place from 29 November to 7 December.



VR rehabilitation of war victims

Since the summer of 2022, we have been assisting medical institutions in using VR as a supplementary tool for the rehabilitation of injured patients.



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ROULE OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT IN BUILDING ECO SYSTEM

WHO Partnership:

Healing Arts Network, Jameel Arts & Health Lab, BACH

International support and Health and Arts program implemented by
Partner of this organization's in Ukraine – Arts Therapy Force

Nigel Osborne — UK

Support Ukrainians since 2022 and work in projects of
NGO ART THERAPY FORCE as lector trauma-inform programs, like facilitator music
Sessions in hospitals (children, veterans), work in shelters,
recovery camps for musicians and psychologist, implement X system program in Ukraine

Music & Resilience — Italy

Italian music therapists active at different
departments of Unbroken hospital and shelters (Lviv)

Sounds of Change — Netherlands

Provides training, facilitation, and supervision in Uzhhorod.

Michael Detmer (USA)

Music therapist from USA work in Ivano-Frankivsk regional hospital
with Ukrainian doctor Anastasia Stefanyshyn and creative medical protocol and
Music playlist for therapy in neonatal intensive care.

**Jameel Arts &
Health Lab**

Sounds of Change

Music & Resilience



At the opening of the Healing Arts Ukraine 2026
Congress: Christopher Bailey, Veronika Skliarova, Henry
Redwood, Lesya Khemraieva, Amir Shahīd.
Photos by Nillia Minasova and Art Therapy Force.



Learn more

FROM GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE TO LOCAL PRACTICE

A professional Arts & Health ecosystem also grows through access to shared knowledge in local languages.

- In 2025, *Creative Care: A Resource for Artists Working in Humanitarian Contexts* became available in Ukrainian.
- The guide is designed primarily for artists working in crisis and humanitarian settings who do not have specialist art therapy or psychological training.
- It offers practical guidance on safety, the “do no harm” principle, professional boundaries, facilitation, emotional support, self-care and cooperation with local health professionals.

Professional knowledge becomes meaningful when it can be understood, shared and applied locally.



ART THERAPY FORCE: NIGEL OSBORNE

In 2022, I joined lectures organised by Art Therapy Force and led by Professor **Nigel Osborne**. These lectures changed the question for me.

Until then, I mostly understood music through performance, education and cultural memory. Nigel's work introduced another possibility:

music as a carefully structured form of support in situations of trauma.

I began to understand that the value of a music session did not depend only on the musical result. It depended on safety, trust, choice, pacing, human contact and the facilitator's ability to respond to the people in the room. This did not turn me into a music therapist.

But it changed how I understood the responsibility of a musician!

My first opportunity to test this understanding in practice came in 2023, at a recovery camp in Irshava.



[PHOTO: on training program in Lviv (2022) :
Nigel Osborne with Kumhyr-Novak Viktoriia and Kudasheva Katy]

IRSHAVA CAMP 2023

My first direct practical experience with Nigel and Art Therapy Force took place in Irshava in 2023, at a recovery camp for around 200 children from the de-occupied Kherson region. The children had experienced war, displacement and loss of safety.

Music activities included movement, rhythm, voice, improvisation and songwriting.

Children could sing, play, move, observe or remain quiet. Participation did not mean being forced to perform.

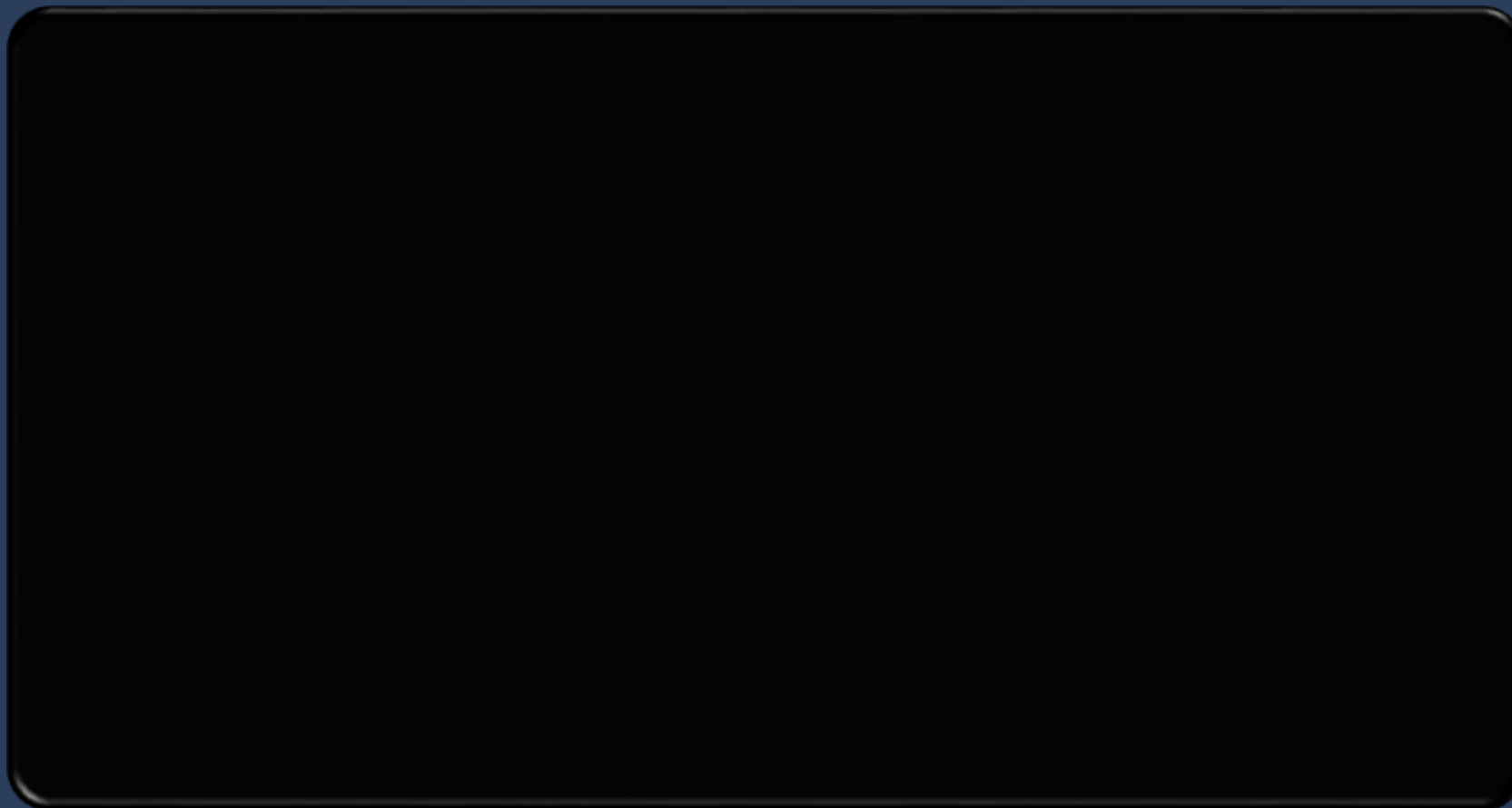
One of the songs was dedicated to fathers serving in the army.

This experience taught me that music can create value even before we speak about measurable outcomes.

It can create a temporary social world in which children have choice, authorship, play and connection.



IRSHAVA CAMP 2023 VIDEO



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Ukrainian Institute

**Irshava showed me how music could support children in a temporary recovery environment.
The next question was more difficult: what changes when this work enters a hospital?**

UNBROKEN: from observer to co-facilitator

Music in a Clinical Space

Over six months at UNBROKEN hospital in Lviv, I observed and participated in music sessions with children and wounded service members.

The hospital changed my understanding of music and health once again.

In a community setting, music can be open and playful. In a clinical environment, every interaction requires greater attention. The facilitator must consider consent, privacy, pain, fatigue, medical procedures, emotional readiness and each person's individual pace.

I gradually moved from observation to supporting sessions and participating in co-creation. The most important lesson was that music does not enter a hospital simply as an activity added to treatment. It enters as a form of relationship. A person may not always be ready to speak. But rhythm, a familiar song, shared improvisation or simply attentive musical presence can create contact, emotional safety and space for expression.

“Art can do something that medicine alone cannot always do: help restore connection, agency and a sense of wholeness.”

Christopher Bailey



Nigel's session with soldiers in Unbroken hospital



Music session in the paediatric neurosurgery department, led by Nigel and Rory Osborne, With Victoriia Kumhyr-Novak as co-facilitator.



Nigel Osborne, Olha Shevchenko (psychologist and coordinator at UNBROKEN), Victoriia Kumhyr-Novak, and Rory Osborne.



Artwork created during therapeutic arts sessions with service members who had survived captivity, torture (UNBROKEN Mental Health Centre)

From the hospital to the concert stage

In some cases, the creative process did not end inside the hospital or rehabilitation space?

One example was Sashko Sky, a Ukrainian veteran and ambient musician who took part in the **Victory Beats** music programme and **Art Therapy Force** initiative during his rehabilitation.

Through music, he transformed his personal experience into artistic expression. His original composition was later orchestrated by **Nigel Osborne** and performed with the INSO-Lviv Symphony Orchestra at the **Lviv National Philharmonic** as part of a **trauma-informed concert** programme.

For me, this performance represented much more than a concert. It showed how music can move beyond the therapeutic space to become authorship, artistic identity and public voice. Sashko was presented not only as a veteran, but as a musician and creator whose work was recognised on a professional concert stage. This experience reinforced an important

Recovery is not only about reducing distress. It can also mean reclaiming identity, agency and a place in cultural life.

Another project, however, led me to a different question:

Can music also become a personalised and clinically monitored intervention?



X-System: from Technology to Clinical Practice

• Music + Neuroscience + Medicine

X-System, developed by British professors **Paul Robertson** and **Nigel Osborne**, brings together music, neuroscience and medicine.

Its mathematical model analyses rhythm, tempo, melodic movement and other musical structures to predict their potential neurophysiological effects.

For children with drug-resistant epilepsy, EEG data is used to identify music associated with healthier patterns of individual brain activity and create a personalised listening programme.

This is not simply relaxation music or a preference-based playlist. It is a complementary, non-pharmacological approach, used under medical supervision and never as a replacement for treatment.

The Ukrainian pilot Implemented by **Art Therapy Force** and the X-System team at St Nicholas Children's Hospital in Lviv, selected through an open call. April 2024–July 2025: 20 children aged 4–17 with different forms of epilepsy and related conditions. Each child followed a personalised listening schedule while continuing prescribed treatment.

Evaluation included EEG monitoring, clinical observation, parent diaries and quality-of-life measures.



Photo from web Art Therapy Force



More here

X-System: Results — and My Personal Connection

Preliminary results:

- 22.5% reduction in interictal epileptiform activity
- 4.2 percentage-point increase in REM sleep
- 0.68-point reduction in seizure severity on the ELDQOL scale
- No adverse effects reported

Outcomes varied: some children showed significant EEG and seizure-related changes, while others experienced limited or temporary effects. However, most families and clinicians observed improvements **in sleep, concentration, behaviour and emotional well-being**. Further clinical research is still needed.

My professional and personal connection

In 2023, I joined the Art Therapy Force initiative group, supporting communication with medical institutions in Zakarpattia and Lviv. **My son Denys became the first patient** in the local pathway I helped establish. We observed positive dynamics, and his epileptologist recommended continuing the programme.

I experienced X-System not only as a musician, practitioner and organiser, but also *as a mother seeking safe, evidence-informed support for her child*.

National innovation becomes real when it reaches a particular hospital, child and family — while remaining connected to medical responsibility.

How can musicians be prepared to work responsibly across hospitals, rehabilitation centres, inclusive communities and war-affected settings?



Denis Kumhyr during music night in St.Nikolas hospital (Lviv)

How does experience become professional knowledge?

SOUNDS OF CHANGE

Sounds of Change is a Netherlands-based, trauma- and evidence-informed capacity-building organisation.

It trains musicians, teachers, psychologists, therapists and aid workers to use participatory music in educational and psychosocial support programmes, particularly in refugee, marginalised and conflict-affected communities.

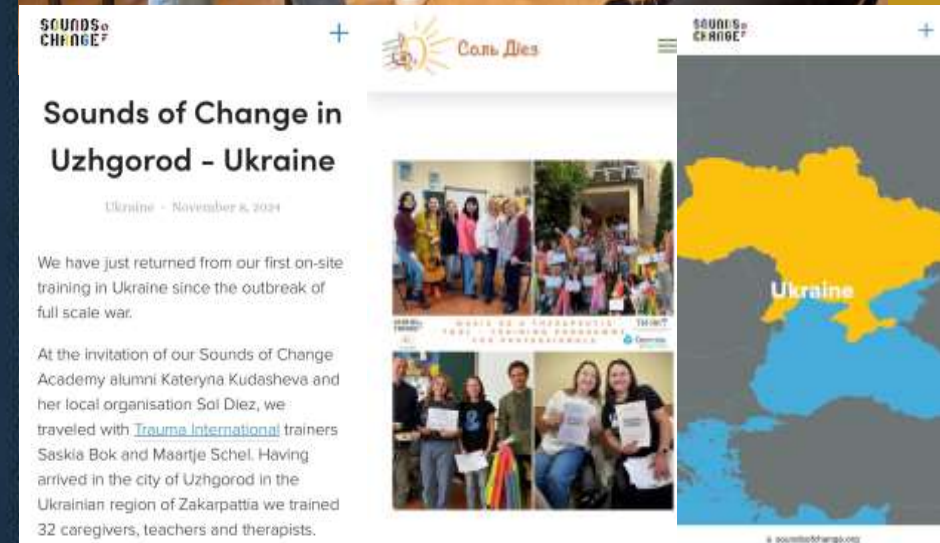
Through improvisation and collective composition, participants can connect, express emotions, regain a sense of control and strengthen resilience.

Sounds of Change does not provide therapy. It equips local professionals with safe, structured and trauma-sensitive tools they can integrate into their existing work.

From the Netherlands to Uzhhorod

The initiative to bring Sounds of Change to Zakarpattia came from my colleague **Kateryna Kudasheva**. After completing the Sounds of Change Academy in the Netherlands, Kateryna secured grant support to bring the trainers to Uzhhorod.

The first five-day programme brought together 32 caregivers, teachers and therapists from across Ukraine. Three waves of training have now taken place, and the collaboration continues.



What Is Your Musical Superpower?

Lucas Dols and Sander van Goor placed one question at the centre of the training:

What is your musical superpower?

Through training, facilitation practice and supervision, I learned to recognise my own musical strengths and use them safely and responsibly

Connection • Movement • Predictability • Choice • Participant Control • Reflection

Supervision was especially important because it transformed practice from personal intuition into a process of reflection and professional growth.

I began to apply these principles not only in **community sessions**, but also in my **pedagogical work**.

The place where these different forms of learning came together most clearly was at small local project in Uzhhorod.



How did I bring this knowledge home?

NGO «Rivnovaha» as a point of synthesis

Rivnovaha is a local recovery space for children and families in Uzhhorod.

It supports internally displaced children, children with disabilities and families who need a stable community of care. **The project combines hippotherapy, massage and physical rehabilitation, music and arts-based activities, English learning and support for parents.**

Its central idea is that recovery cannot be divided into isolated categories. The body, emotions, creativity, relationships and the family environment are interconnected.

The project presentation describes Rivnovaha as a space moving “from trauma to bodily safety, creativity and community.”

Here, different parts of my own experience came together:

- Ukrainian and world folk material;
- Sounds of Change principles;
- work with children affected by war and with children with disabilities;
- movement and improvisation;
- drawing as a pathway into sound and song;
- attention to choice and participation;
- collaboration with rehabilitation specialists.

Everything I had learned internationally became meaningful when it could be transformed into a local, accessible and relational practice! In Rivnovaha, I began to see how music could become part of a wider ecology of recovery — together with the body, movement, creativity, family support and community.



An excerpt from the presentation of “**Balthazar the Grasshopper**,” a song created by the children during the session

MAPPING ARTS & HEALTH INITIATIVES IN UKRAINE

In summer 2025, I took part in a WHO-related mapping survey conducted by Veronika Skliarova and Art Therapy Force, and included Rivnovaha among the practices mapped for the WHO context.



The mapping identified **100+** organisations and initiatives working at the intersection of arts, health and psychosocial support in Ukraine. **49** respondents completed the survey, followed by **30+** in-depth consultations. The findings show a diverse and growing field that spans NGOs, culture, education, INGOs, business and other sectors.



100+
organisations
identified



49
survey
respondents



30+
in-depth
consultations



These insights will support stronger collaboration, visibility and sustainability for arts-based approaches to health and psychosocial support in Ukraine.



SECTOR REPRESENTATION



GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE ACROSS UKRAINE



WHERE DO I FIND MY OWN RESTORATION?



More about Stantsiya Uzh

Much of this presentation is about what I try to offer other people.
But art also supports me?

Joining Stantsiya Uzh Playback Theatre — I completed a basic course at Stanciya Uzh, a playback theatre studio relocated from Kharkiv, and became its musician in the adult group.

- Music as personal response and healing — audience stories are instantly performed live; music becomes a direct embodied response.
- Co-creation with daughter Katia — very often I performs in duet with my 8-year-old daughter Katy.
- Improvisation as a path back to self — include the short reflective quote:

“Sometimes music is not only what I offer to others. It is also how I return to myself.”



What Can a Musician Do During a War?

At the beginning of this journey, I thought the answer might be simple:

continue teaching • perform • preserve culture

Today, my answer is broader. **Musician can:**

- Create a safe space — Music offers shelter from fear and uncertainty for all ages.
- Support children — Songs, movement, and play help children process trauma gently.
- Work with veterans — Music facilitates expression and healing for those who served.
- Bring people together — Communal singing and performance rebuild broken social bonds.
- Learn and share knowledge — Training others multiplies the reach of music-based healing work.
- Restore oneself through music — A musician's own recovery matters; creativity sustains the healer.

Photo from Healig Arts Lviv 2025



Healing restores wholeness.
Resilience allows us to continue.
Imagination allows us to see a future

“Music cannot stop the war.
But music can help people stay
connected, creative and human.”

THANK YOU AND CONTACTS



Thank You

Sincere gratitude to EFM 2026 audience, organizers, and all partners who supported this work.



Viktoriia Kumhyr-Novak

Musicologist | Folklorist | Teacher | Delegate of the Ukrainian Institute, Uzhhorod, Ukraine.



Email Contact

Reach out directly: vitakumgir@gmail.com — open to collaboration, dialogue, and partnerships.



Facebook — Scan to Connect

Large QR code labeled 'Facebook' — follow updates, projects, and community work.



Instagram — Scan to Follow

Large QR code labeled 'Instagram' — visual stories from music, therapy, and resilience work.



Stay Connected

Join the conversation on music, health, and resilience in Ukraine — your engagement matters.



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