

Russian Antiwar Music in American Perspective

Dr. Robert F. Baumann

In 2020, less than two years before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, author Valeria Cherepenchuk published a history of Russian rock titled *Khedlainery russkogo roka (Headliners of Russian Rock)*. In it, she presents band biographies of the twenty most significant bands and their most memorable recordings since the twilight of the Soviet Union. Several groups launched their careers under Soviet rule and endured pressure if not cancellation from government censors, since rock music was officially frowned upon until the last few years of the regime. Of the twenty bands cited in this work, almost all were still active when Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine began. A few even enjoyed his personal acclaim, which made subsequent events a little more surprising. Remarkably, a clear majority of the bands noted in Cherepenchuk's book, or at least their headlining performers, have come out unequivocally against the invasion and made themselves persona non grata in the country where they earned their fame. Antiwar music has become their principal medium of political protest against the actions of the regime.

The visible lack of support from such a large number of prominent recording artists has been more than an embarrassment for Putin's presidency. Because musicians enjoy a large audience among draft-age young Russian men, their views are highly problematic for the regime, which has responded by effectively banning some bands from performing in Russia. A domestic culture war has emerged within the "Russian world" and given the severity of Putin's response, it has him worried.

Tradition of Rock Music and Protest

In larger perspective, antiwar music has a robust tradition both in the United States and Russia. Nearly all Americans over age sixty remember antiwar music of the Vietnam War era, and most Russian citizens over fifty can remember something about protest music in the closing stages of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Particularly in the Soviet case, many of the songs focused on the plight of veterans, who like their American counterparts in Vietnam, had returned to a country did not (initially at least) widely appreciate their sacrifices. A recent resurgence in Russian antiwar music following the invasion of Ukraine invites a closer inspection of points of comparison in the two national musical traditions. Of particular interest in this article are key themes of songs associated with antiwar political positions, the extent to which antiwar music entered the cultural mainstream, and the degree of tolerance (or lack thereof) of antiwar music by those in political power.

Since Putin's lockdown of Russian society, which accelerated quickly once public dissent brought protesters into the streets, it is easy to forget that for most of the past three decades, Russia has maintained a relatively open atmosphere if one stayed out of politics. Members of Russia's cultural elite drew not only from local traditions but also traveled widely and mixed freely with artists from other countries. They became more cosmopolitan and better informed about the world than most of their compatriots. They often performed (and some resided) outside of Russia wherever there was a significant diaspora of Russian speakers—Putin's so-called



Yuri Shevchuk (center), frontman of the Russian rock band DDT, performs his song “Yedu ya na Rodinu” [I’m Going to My Homeland] at a rally 4 February 2012 at Bolotnaya Square in Moscow. Shevchuk’s comments to the audience during an 18 May 2022 concert in Ufa, Russia, prompted misdemeanor charges against him for his opposition to the war in Ukraine. The singer said, “The motherland is not the president’s ass that one must lather and kiss all the time ... People are being killed in Ukraine, our boys are also dying there. For what? What are the goals, friends? Again, the youth is being killed—Russia’s youth and Ukraine’s youth. Old people, women and children are also dying. For what? For some Napoleonic plans of the next Caesar? Is that it?” (Photo courtesy of Bogomolov.PL via Wikimedia Commons)

“Russian world.” Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, songs that opposed war in an abstract sense were tolerated and performers did not face government interference. Perhaps because it was achieved so easily, Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 generated little protest and much public support. Many Russians felt that the inclusion of Crimea in the Ukrainian Republic during the Soviet era had been arbitrary and ignored historical ties. Therefore, the return of Ukraine to Russia—even if illegally executed—seemed justifiable. Since then, however, the political context has changed sharply.

Immediately following the massive incursion of Russian forces into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, numerous Russian celebrities, especially musicians, expressed concerns about the war in Ukraine. Nearly all had often performed there and enjoyed an enthusiastic following. Meanwhile, although the criticism

of the war has often been indirect or implicit, voicing opposition to war in general without explicit reference to Ukraine has nonetheless angered the Putin administration. What has become clear is that because the war has gone so badly, Putin’s regime is extremely sensitive about any manifestations of dissent. The Russian government has resolved to censor any musical group, blogger, journalist, or political activist whose perspective does not align with officially prescribed “messaging” about the war. In fact, almost anything less than full-throated support for the “special operation” has been labeled treasonous.

In a speech on 16 March 2022, Putin openly called for ridding Russian society of dissident elements: “The Russian people will be able to distinguish true patriots from scum and traitors and simply spit them out like a midge that accidentally flew into their mouths—spit

them on the pavement. I am convinced that such a natural and necessary self-purification of society will only strengthen our country and our solidarity, cohesion, and readiness to respond to any challenges.”¹

Putin has insisted that Russia is fighting a defensive war, almost as if Ukraine had invaded Russia instead of the other way around. Thus, the Russian government has glossed over the decision to go to war in its attempt to frame support of the war as sticking up for “our

traitorous, as well as spoiled and out of touch with the feelings of true patriotic Russians. It does appear to be true that most ordinary Russians support the war at least passively, according to the rather suspect polling that has been available. Nevertheless, volunteers to *actually go* and fight in Ukraine have hardly been beating down the doors at military recruiting centers.

Recent events suggest opinion is slowly trending away from support for the war. Since Putin’s so-called

“The persistence of many members of Russia’s cultural elite in challenging the official line has exasperated Putin. Most have availed themselves of the ability to travel abroad and have reluctantly accepted the painful fact that their de facto exile may be protracted.”

boys.” Notably, as the annual Victory Day celebration approached in May 2022, one slogan among others was “we don’t abandon our own.” Of course, this side steps entirely inconvenient questions about who sent them or whether they had any choice in the matter or whether they would prefer to come home. There were many reports in the Western press (CNN, BBC, *Washington Post*, and so on) after the invasion began that Russian soldiers had been completely misinformed about the true conditions in Ukraine, the feelings of the local population, and the probable level of resistance.

In the meantime, Russian television stations, social media networks, scholarly periodicals, and semiofficial civil institutions such as the Russian Military-Historical Society have immersed the population in prowar narratives daily. They relentlessly describe the war as an existential struggle to save Russian civilization against Western aggression and maintain that Russia is saving Ukraine from the clutches of a hegemonic America.

Aggressive Russian censorship, enforced by means of the criminalization of almost any expression of dissent, has effectively stifled the dissemination of alternative perspectives in the public square. However, the persistence of many members of Russia’s cultural elite in challenging the official line has exasperated Putin. Most have availed themselves of the ability to travel abroad and have reluctantly accepted the painful fact that their de facto exile may be protracted. In turn, Putin’s government has generally depicted them as

partial mobilization in September, alarm has quickly spread in the public sphere, and the music is keeping pace. On 25 November, Putin felt it necessary to stage a meeting with mothers of Russian soldiers to express his empathy over their suffering. Of course, in a carefully controlled setting with a handpicked group of mothers, he faced no pushback. He assured the mothers that their sons had not died in vain but as heroes and patriots fighting for a noble cause.²

The exploitation of patriotic messaging has been a tool of choice for the regime. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, which coincided with the start of Putin’s first term as president, the government has steadily cultivated a sense of xenophobia that left no middle ground between total endorsement of Putin’s policies

Robert F. Baumann, PhD, is the former director of the graduate degree program and an adjunct professor of history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, while serving as an education advisor in Uzbekistan. He holds a BA in Russian from Dartmouth College, an MA in Russian and East European studies from Yale University, and a PhD in history from Yale University. He is the author of numerous books, book chapters, and scholarly articles. He is also the writer and producer of a documentary film on the U.S. and multinational peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.

and treason. This has provided the psychological lever to prevent Russians from listening to dissenting voices that question both the morality and sanity of the war. In a rational democratic culture, there is room to consider whether a war is necessary or actually harmful to the national interests, as well as whether its pursuit is consistent with ethical standards, international law, and so on. Of course, unanimity on such questions is impossible to achieve and there is still debate in the United States about how best to express patriotic dissent. There is no such dialogue in Russia. Today, Russia

were proportional to the threat of a communist takeover of the south. Accordingly, it was President Richard Nixon's decision to end the draft that lowered the political temperature in the country and bought him time to begin a withdrawal of American forces.

In Russia's case, concerns about mobilization first surfaced several months into the war as the reality dawned that it would not be the short, victorious endeavor initially promised. Particularly since his "partial mobilization" in September, Russia's disjointed attempts to invent a defensive narrative, such as invoking

“Whereas it took years for protest the Vietnam War to reach critical mass, Putin has managed to reach a crisis point within months. In each case, conscription or mobilization was a driving factor.”

is more Orwellian than rational.

To put this in historical context, it is useful to compare Russian antiwar music to that of the United States during the Vietnam War. The American debates over the righteousness of the Vietnam war bear a limited likeness to the terms of Russian dialog today. By 1967, Americans were choosing sides and a generational split emerged. The generation that fought and won World War II tended to view war as demanding total support whatever the consequences. Bumper stickers exclaiming "My Country Right or Wrong" reflected this viewpoint that circumvented the question of what best served American interests. Of course, the Vietnam and Ukraine wars differ in a host of ways but are similar in the sense that they hinged on policy decisions based on specific ideological views of the world.

In other words, these wars were not a response to a direct attack on the homeland by a hostile power (despite baseless claims by Putin's ideologists that an attack by NATO was just a matter of time). In such cases, public support depends to some extent on the credibility of the government's justification for the call to sacrifice. Whereas it took years for protest against the Vietnam War to reach critical mass, Putin has managed to reach a crisis point within months. In each case, conscription or mobilization was a driving factor. During the Vietnam War, it was the draft that amplified misgivings about America's purpose and whether the sacrifices demanded

factually ridiculous comparisons to the Nazi invasion of World War II, suggest just how fragile the rationales for "wars of choice" can be once things do not go well.

Enter Antiwar Music

Even before U.S. involvement in Vietnam, concerns about war or the risk of a Cold War turning hot found expression in American music. In the 1950s and early 1960s, generic antiwar songs found a home chiefly among folk singers who, despite growing popularity, did not command center stage in America's domestic entertainment industry. Still, with the emergence of popular performers such as The Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; Bob Dylan; Joan Baez, and songs such as "Where Have all the Flowers Gone?" (written by Pete Seeger, who also recorded it) gained an audience. At the time, they aroused little controversy, in part because they were catchy and offered poetic lyrics vague enough to be inoffensive.³

By 1967, following President Lyndon Johnson's escalation of U.S. forces in Vietnam to over half a million, antiwar lyrics slowly found their way into pop and rock music. One musical milestone that reflected America's misgivings about the war was "Requiem for the Masses" by The Association. Composed by the group's own Terry Kirkman, the song is not widely remembered today because it was neither among the first or the last, nor the most outspoken antiwar tunes. Yet,

looking back through the prism of this author's personal memories, it did anticipate a cultural tipping point. The Association was one of America's most commercially successful bands of the period from 1966 to 1969 with three hits reaching number one on the pop charts. Moreover, with their versatility on display through tight vocal harmonies and memorable melodies to go along with the drums and electric guitars, they had broad demographic appeal both generationally and regionally. In short, their music resonated with a large, diverse audience. Considered in that light, taking on a

much-anticipated Wisconsin primary election showdown that he would not seek reelection.

To be sure, Kirkman's lyrics were more allegorical than explicit, but everyone understood. Regardless of their position on the Vietnam War, people got the message: "Blue was the color of the morning sky, He saw looking up from the ground where he died, It was last thing ever seen by him."⁷ Above all, the song expressed deep empathy for courageous young soldiers even as it raised doubt about the human toll of war. It engaged but did not lecture. It was not partisan, and while it

“ In stark contrast to the Putin regime, neither a Democratic administration under Johnson nor a Republican administration under his successor Richard Nixon seriously entertained the notion of using governmental authority to silence musicians who were bearers of oppositional messages. ”

hotly controversial subject was a bold step and potentially risky. Just a year before "The Ballad of the Green Berets," a fervently patriotic and Vietnam War-friendly piece performed by Sgt. Barry Sadler, took the country by storm and sat atop the song rankings for a full month.⁴ Yet, the atmospherics in America were changing at a breathtaking pace.

On 8 October 1967, The Association performed "Requiem for the Masses" live on the nationally popular Smothers Brothers television program. Specializing in political satire and irreverently funny social commentary, it raised touchy topics from war to women's liberation to race relations in what had heretofore been the politics-free "safe space" of evening prime time in America's living rooms. The Association's performance was still months before the 1968 Tet Offensive and CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite's famous on-air remarks questioning the course of the war.⁵ It was only days before Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, a former college professor, made the stunning decision in a private meeting to take up the cause of ending the war by challenging Johnson for the Democratic nomination in the upcoming presidential campaign.⁶ By March 1968, recognizing a groundswell of opposition, Johnson shocked the country and announced on the eve of the

made some citizens uncomfortable, most did not perceive it to be unpatriotic. Still, it addressed the implicit question about the price of war and aptly reflected that conflicted moment in the American psyche.

Of course, within a couple years, mirroring the splintering of the antiwar movement in general, a new wave of more numerous and stridently confrontational songs began washing over the country, especially across its college campuses. Acts that were a good deal edgier, ranging from Jimi Hendrix ("Machine Gun") to the band Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young ("Ohio"), essentially declared a culture war against "the establishment."⁸ Angry protesters besieged the White House and heckled politicians as well as returning soldiers and marines at airports. Civility hit a low ebb when it came to the war. All in all, the late Vietnam War era was the most divisive period in modern American politics. And yet, in stark contrast to the Putin regime, neither a Democratic administration under Johnson nor a Republican administration under his successor Richard Nixon seriously entertained the notion of using governmental authority to silence musicians who were bearers of oppositional messages. (This is not to say that they never used their presidential platform to discredit opponents of the war.)

Today, antiwar music in Russia also reflects a spectrum of approaches, although the political tone of iconic bands like B-2, Time Machine, Aquarium, or Splean perhaps more resembles that of The Association than groups that followed a couple years later. B-2 (*Bee-dva* in Russian) recorded several songs that were subtly critical of militarism years before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine but did not arouse the ire of the state. Once the war began, the stakes climbed rapidly.

As numerous Russian cultural figures proclaimed their disapproval, Putin's government moved aggressively to silence and brand opposition as traitorous.

Until that point, the unapologetically confrontational female punk band Pussy Riot occupied the undisputed place of honor on the fringe of Russian protest music. The group's slightly scandalous anti-Putin protests in an Orthodox cathedral in Moscow and at the 2018 World Cup hosted by Russia caught public attention well before the current war began. Members did jail time. Now unable to perform at home, the band recently told Putin to "jump into hell" at a concert in Canterbury.⁹

In contrast to Pussy Riot, most of the recently banned Russian performers have long enjoyed broad popularity within the mainstream of Russian society. B-2 even performed at the Kremlin in 2017 and was not actively looking for a quarrel with the regime. Although the band was first formed in Belarus in 1988, lead vocalist Egor "Leva" Botnik and lead guitarist Aleksandr "Shura" Uman have spent a lot of time living abroad. Still, Russia and the "Russian world" constitute their main audience. Following the Ukraine invasion, they aroused the disapproval of Russian authorities when they declined to perform in front of a prowar banner at



Pussy Riot released a video titled "Мама, не смотри телевизор" [Mama, Don't Watch TV] in December 2022 protesting the war in Ukraine, Russian censorship, and the West "sponsoring" the regime through buying oil and gas from Russia. The video came ten months after Russia invaded Ukraine. It describes Vladimir Putin's government as a "terrorist regime" and calls him, his officials, generals, and propagandists "war criminals." In a statement accompanying the release, the group called for Putin to be tried at an international tribunal. To view the complete video, visit <https://youtu.be/zr0GN2lljaY>. (Screenshot from YouTube)

a spring concert. Then, having lost scheduled concerts in Russia, they crossed the threshold into open dissent by releasing a studio recording of the protest song "Lullaby" ("Колыбельная" in Russian). To be accurate, there is no explicit reference to Ukraine, but unmistakable clues appear throughout the song, both in the lyrics and music video.¹⁰ Notably, the world premier live concert performance of "Lullaby" took place abroad in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on 27 September 2022. The music resonated with the predominantly Russian audience, some of whom had just departed their home country in response to Putin's "partial mobilization."

Unlike The Association, who endured only mild blowback for its performance of "Requiem for the Masses," Russian groups and singers expressing reservations about the invasion of Ukraine have become exiles, vulnerable to arrest in Russia and unable to perform in major venues there. Still, due to their huge popularity among the under forty-five crowd in Russia, they are likely to have an impact among the very age demographic Putin needs to fight his war.

Then again, some of the aging rockers who have denounced the war are of Putin's own generation. Andrei Makarevich (age sixty-eight), long-time lead singer for the venerable rock group Time Machine (*Mashina*



Shura Uman (*left*) and Lyova Bortnik, members of the Russian rock band B-2, perform at the VTB Ice Palace on 15 February 2018 in Moscow. B-2 (or *Bi-2* in Russian, pronounced *bee-dva*) formed in Belarus and has been a force on the Russian rock music scene for over twenty years. Hugely popular not only in Russia itself but among Russia's cultural diaspora from Israel to Australia to Europe, the band is not currently welcome to sing in Moscow due to its refusal to endorse the war in Ukraine. At a September 2022 concert in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, they performed the live debut of their antiwar hit "Lullaby" (Photo by Reactor691 via Wikimedia Commons)

vremeni in Russian) has specifically blasted war supporters brandishing the letter "Z," which has become associated with the campaign to conquer Ukraine.¹¹ He even drew an explicit comparison between the invasion of Ukraine and the widely condemned Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Time Machine has been through this before, having been banned from performing for several years by the Soviet regime in the early 1980s. In his latest antiwar number, "Where did you go Soldier?," Makarevich examines the fate of those young soldiers sent to the war. The last phrase of the lyrics reads, "You have been deceived."¹² Meanwhile, it is worthy of note that the band has a U.S. concert tour lined up for February and March 2023.

Another big name is Boris Grebenshchikov, who established the famed group Aquarium (*Akvarium*) in 1972 and recently coproduced the antiwar song "Face to Face" with Dave Stewart and Serhii Babkin. Notably, the song includes verses in English, Russian,

and Ukrainian.¹³ Still another prominent instance is that of Yurii Shevchuk and the band DDT. Russian authorities have canceled Shevchuk's concerts and tied him up in legal proceedings for months since he criticized the war during a concert in Ufa, the capital of Bashkortostan, a republic within the Russian Federation. As Shevchuk put it, "The motherland, my friends, is not the president's ass that has to be slobbered over and kissed all the time." Remarkably, he has not sought to leave Russia.¹⁴

Meanwhile in August, Splean, one of Russia's hottest bands when the Ukraine war began, also found itself canceled in Moscow after lead singer Alexander Vasilyev expressed sympathy with fellow musicians who could no longer perform in Russia. During a concert in Voronezh on 20 August, Vasilyev praised people who "show mercy, compassion, humanity, and who do not accept cruelty, violence and murder." He then dedicated a performance of his hit "No Exit" (*Vykhoda nyet*) to his colleagues who had departed the country. Fittingly, Splean also is now signing up for concerts outside of Russia.¹⁵



"The war between Russia and Ukraine is madness, and those who unleashed it are a disgrace to Russia," said Boris Grebenshchikov, frontman of the Russian rock group Aquarium. (Photo by Ivan Marchuk via Wikimedia Commons)

the war began. Like Leva and Shura of B-2, she hails originally from Belarus, entered the rock music scene in the 1990s, and has made the “Russian world” her stage. Using only the accompaniment of a pianist, her recent antiwar song of April 2022 proclaims, “Who will answer for the tears of children, for the madness of adults? The boys are dying like snowbirds. Field of the dead, don’t look back.”²⁰

Newly emergent female artists have also had an impact. One soloist, performing under the name Liza Ooes (pronounced in Russian with two syllabus and sounding like U.S.), has broken through in Russia just during the past few years but now resides in Georgia.

Singing about the plight of young women in Russia and Ukraine alike, she has appealed to her fans to contribute to relief for Ukrainian refugees.²¹

Not surprisingly, antiwar music transcends the rock genre. Top Russian rapper Oxxxymiron migrated to Turkey where he denounced censorship in Russia and asserted that tens of millions of Russians oppose the war. He also performed at charity concerts to raise money for Ukrainian refugees.²² Fellow rapper Morgenshtern was an early qualifier for the government’s foreign agents (*inoagent*) list thanks to criticisms of the war in his work.²³

Meanwhile, another group dating all the way back to the late 1980s, Leg Pain (*Nogu svelo*), could be characterized as alternative punk. Hugely popular immediately after the fall of the USSR, this band headed by Maksim Pokrovsky continues to flourish in the twenty-first century. The group lost no time after the invasion in putting out two new antiwar songs. One, titled “Nam ne nuzhna voina” (“We Don’t Need War”), was released as a music video featuring scenes of the destruction in Ukraine.²⁴

One of the strange ironies of the war is that the music reflects the interconnectedness of Russia and



Zemfira, one of Russia’s leading rock artists, released an antiwar music video in March 2022 featuring her 2017 song “Don’t Shoot.” It included footage of Russia invasion of Ukraine as well as antiwar protests in Moscow, where an estimated fifteen thousand protestors had been detained. In her latest song, “The Meat,” she sings, “It’s spring in the calendar, and in reality—trenches and rockets.” And further, “It’s midnight in Mariupol ... I have nightmares every night. What have we come to? What are we here for? I will search for the answer for the rest of my life. Pray for me, pray.” (Photo by Marina Zakharova via Wikimedia Commons)

Ukraine. Two prominent Ukrainian female antiwar soloists, Vera Brezhneva and Svetlana Loboda, were until recently popular performers in Russia. Since they have spoken out against the war, they are now banned in Russia and their music does not even turn up on the radio unless it originates across the border. Once a singer for the “girl group” Via Gra, Brezhneva was named Russia’s “Woman of the Year” in 2010 by *Glamour* and has four times been selected as “Russia’s sexiest woman” by the Russian edition of *Maxim*.²⁵ Loboda in turn has the deeper musical background of the two. She represented Ukraine in the 2012 Eurovision competition and finished a respectable twelfth. Like Brezhneva, she is now persona non grata in Russia.²⁶ In fact, Loboda’s biggest offense from a Russian viewpoint is her prominent online display of her Ukrainian passport.²⁷

Of course, there is also a flipside in the Ukraine-Russia relationship. The immensely popular Russian female singer and fashion model, Valeria (born Alla Iure’vna Perfilova) is a big supporter of Putin. As a result, she finds that she is unwelcome in places like Ukraine and Latvia, which blacklisted her back in 2015 following the Russian annexation of Crimea. However, like her antiwar counterparts, she has found it possible



Famed Russian singer Alla Pugacheva spoke out against her country's war in Ukraine on 28 September 2022, saying it has made it a "pariah" nation and that the deaths in the conflict "weigh heavily" on Russian citizens. Pugacheva made the remarks in an Instagram post in which she also said she wanted to be placed on Russia's "foreign agent" list two days after her TV presenter/comedian husband was designated as such by Moscow. (Photo by Serge Serebro, Vitebsk Popular News via Wikimedia Commons)

to arrange relatively lucrative concert dates in Central Asia.²⁸ Other backers of the war have also had to adjust their foreign concert schedules.

Within Russia, several venerable bands, or at least their lead performers, have stood by the regime during the so-called special military operation. In contrast to most of its peers, the Russian rock band Chaif (a combination of "chai" [tea] and "Kaif," an idiom for indulgence) has consistently supported Putin's position on Ukraine beginning with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Soloist Vladimir Shakhurin even called out Andrei Makarevich in 2015 for his criticism of Russian policy. While praising Makarevich as an individual, he characterized him as "deluded."²⁹ Likewise, supporting the war via state-sponsored festivals and fundraisers is Vladimir Presniakov, lead singer of the popular heavy metal group Alisa. He, like Nikolai Noskov of Chaif, has lent active support to help integrate refugees from the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk Republics, recently "annexed" by Russia. This serves the official narrative by affirming the idea that Russian speakers in the Donbas region are victims of Ukrainian aggression. Of course, there has been a refugee flow into Russia from eastern Ukraine, although that phenomenon

has at least in part been a result of Russian propaganda calculated to induce panic. Incidentally, both men produced generic antiwar songs in past years but have supported the government line on this war.³⁰

Following the wave of "defections" by entertainers in February, the state mobilized its resources to create pro-war events. One important band that participated in officially sponsored events is Umaturman, for years a fixture at Victory Day celebrations. The state lavished 100 million rubles on a series of marathon entertainment festivals featuring various musical genres as well as poets and other artists in twenty-four cities

across the country from 14 April to 3 May. Notably, all the venues were large provincial cities in Russia's interior, where support for the war is much stronger than in Saint Petersburg or Moscow. Performers received unusually large honoraria. A band headed by the well-travelled singer-songwriter Sergei Galanin earned the most, a payout of 10.5 million rubles.³¹

Still, the general trend among Russia's most famous recording artists has not gone well for the regime. The biggest affront to Putin occurred in September 2022, when Russia's most adored pop icon of all, the now slightly vintage soft rock soloist Alla Pugacheva, spoke out from abroad in response to the government's designation of her husband Maksim Galkin (a popular comedian) as a "foreign agent." Pugacheva, who received an award from Putin himself a few years ago, invited the government to add her name to the "foreign agents list."³²

Fallout related to Galkin and Pugacheva actually began months earlier. Pop music star and entertainer Philipp Kirkorov crossed the invisible line by accusing a Putin ally of sowing division via attacks on fellow celebrities who have opted out of supporting the war. Kirkorov embroiled himself in a public spat with RT

commentator Margarita Simonyan over her attack on Maksim Galkin, suggesting that he was concealing his sexual orientation behind his marriage to Alla Pugacheva. Galkin had already become a lightning rod for speaking out against the invasion of Ukraine and departing Russia for Israel with his wife. Kirkorov, who had not explicitly criticized the war, suffered cancellations in any case and soon scheduled a performance in Tashkent.³³

In another interesting twist, at least a few departed musical artists have given private performances inside Russia despite their stand on the war. The staunchly pro-Kremlin website Tsargrad TV voiced outrage over the ability of singer Valeri Meladze to make money in Russia despite public cancellations and departing the country.³⁴ Incidentally, Meladze also performed in Tashkent in the fall.

Meanwhile, in a few instances, antiwar Russian performers initially had trouble securing concert dates in the West just because they are associated with Russia.

Judging by the frequency of concerts by the summer of 2022, however, this issue largely passed once their positions on the war became known. Moreover, Western audiences in 2023 will enjoy unprecedented access to concerts by many of Russia's top recording artists of the past several decades.

Despite the angry accusations of betrayal emanating from the Kremlin and its allies today, few antiwar songs by contemporary Russian artists say anything negative about soldiers, the army, or the regime. Instead, they tend to focus attention on the casualties of war, including civilians who find themselves in the path of destruction. In contrast to the gradual rise of antiwar music during America's Vietnam War, criticism of the war in Ukraine came to a boiling point very quickly. The Russian government's heavy-handed censorship betrays a conviction that by controlling the "messaging" they can maintain support for the war. Given the profusion of new antiwar songs, many musicians of Russia and the "Russian world" remain unconvinced. ■

Notes

1. Fred Kaplan, "Putin's Latest Speech Is a Terrifying Echo of Stalin," *Slate*, 17 March 2022, accessed 17 March 2022, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/03/putins-latest-speech-is-a-terrifying-echo-of-stalin.html>.

2. Jaroslav Lukiv, "Ukraine War: Putin Tells Russian Soldiers' Mothers He Shares Their Pain," *BBC News*, 25 November 2022, accessed 12 January 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63760278>.

3. Joe Hickerson added a couple of verses to the lyrics a couple of years after Pete Seeger wrote the song. Composed in the 1950s, the song reflected generalized Cold War concerns and only became associated with the Vietnam War as American military involvement greatly expanded from 1964 to 1968. For a sampling of academic commentary, see Fred Brandfon, "The History Boy: Innocence and History in the Life and Music of Pete Seeger," *The American Poetry Review* 43, no. 5 (2014): 43–46, accessed 15 August 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24593774>; Robert A. Rosenstone, "'The Times They Are A-Changin': The Music of Protest," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382 (1969): 131–44, accessed 15 August 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1037121>; Jens Lund and R. Serge Denisoff, "The Folk Music Revival and the Counter Culture: Contributions and Contradictions," *The Journal of American Folklore* 84, no. 334 (1971): 394–405, <https://doi.org/10.2307/539633>; Peter Dreier and Dick Flacks, "Roots of Rebellion: Music and Movements: The Tradition Continues," *New Labor Forum* 23, no. 2 (2014): 99–102, accessed 15 August 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24718517>; Michael L. Westmoreland-White, "Joan Baez: Nonviolence, Folk Music, and Spirituality, A Random Chapter in the History of Nonviolence," 23 February 2003, accessed

27 January 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20040722044934/http://www.ecapc.org/articles/WestmoW_2003.02.23.asp.

4. Neal Umphred, "Sgt Barry Sadler and the Ballad of the Green Berets (Plus a Few Dominoes)," *The Endless Sixties*, 9 September 2018, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.theendlessixties.com/green-berets/>; Eric Sof, "Barry Sadler and the Story Behind the Ballad of the Green Berets," *Special Ops Magazine*, 14 April 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://special-ops.org/barry-sadler-ballad-of-the-green-berets/>.

5. "Who, What, When, Where, Why: Report from Vietnam by Walter Cronkite," *CBS Evening News*, 27 February 1968, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120227183438/http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn4w-ud-TyE&gl=US&hl=en>; Donald North, "The Viet Cong Assault on the US Embassy at Tet and the Military Media Controversy It Launched," in *The US Army and the Media in Wartime: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Kendall Gott (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 120–21.

6. Other notable potential challengers to President Lyndon Johnson, such as Sen. Robert Kennedy, had up to that point deemed an attempt to overthrow a sitting president as tantamount to political suicide. For context, see Lawrence O'Donnell, *Playing with Fire: The 1968 Presidential Election and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 93–95.

7. For the story behind the song, see Russ Giguere and Ashley Wren Collins, *Along Comes the Association: Beyond Folk Rock and Three-Piece Suits* (Los Angeles: Rare Bird Books, 2020), 162–63, 231; see also an interview with Russ Giguere by Ben Baumann, #98 *The 1960s and the Association with Russ Giguere*, YouTube video, posted by "Roots of Reality," 14 December 2022, accessed 18 December 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/>

[watch?v=5LbqnbDCpKM](#). The Association enjoyed a meteoric rise in 1966 and was a dominant force in popular rock music on radio and in live concerts for the rest of the decade. They are also a good example of the distortional lens of historical bias. There are music commentators today who characterize the group as a 1960s "sunshine band," which is a bit lazy as well as incorrect. The range of their music was remarkable both artistically and thematically. They were not counterculture radicals of the early 1970s, but they very much reflected 1960s idealism and the drive for social progress. The song "Get Together," which became a late '60s anthem as performed by the Youngbloods, had originally been written for The Association who had performed it years earlier but did not record it until later. They are also the answer to an historical trivia question: "What was the first multi-racial band to have a number one hit?" Larry Ramos, of Philippine ancestry, joined the group as they ascended in 1967 and played a great role in their continued success.

8. See Fred Mastropolo, "50 Years Ago: Kent State Massacre Inspires CSNY's 'Ohio,'" *Ultimate Classic Rock*, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://ultimateclassicrock.com/c sny-ohio/>; for a good overview of the growth of dissent over the war, see Tom Wells, *The Battle Within: America's War in Vietnam* (self-pub., iUniverse, 2005); on Jimi Hendrix, see Frank Moriarty, "Reloading Machine Gun," *Guitar Shop*, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://archive.ph/20121220052041/http://mywebpages.comcast.net/loudfast/writeweb/mgun.htm>; see Wikipedia, s.v. "List of Anti-War Songs," last modified 30 January 2023, accessed 31 January 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_anti-war_songs. A scan of an incomplete list of over 150 songs against the Vietnam War indicates that less than 15 percent were written before "Requiem for the Masses." Of those, most were of the folk variety and long preceded the escalation of the war. They involved only a few artists and had little television exposure. The great majority appeared after the shooting of four student demonstrators at Kent State University by Ohio National Guardsmen in May 1970. For more context, Russell Duncan, "The Summer of Love and Protest: Transatlantic Counterculture in the 1960s," in *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade*, ed. Grzegorz Kosci et al. (Bielefeld, DE: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 147, accessed 12 January 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxt2b.9>.

9. Ellen Peirson-Hagger, "The Raucous Return of Pussy Riot," *The New Statesman* (website), 28 September 2022, accessed 1 October 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/music/2022/09/pussy-riot-live-canterbury-raucous-return>.

10. For video clip about B-2's song and brief comment, see "But Not Animals Pull the Trigger, but People": Bi-2 Released an Anti-war Clip" [in Russian], *Aussiedlerbote.de*, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://aussiedlerbote.de/2022/06/no-ne-zveri-nazhima-yut-kurok-a-lyudi-bi-2-vypustili-antivoennyj-klip/>; *B-2 — Lullaby / Би-2 — Колыбельная* (2022), YouTube video, posted by "Би-2" [B-2], 27 June 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2-hJ7UXw>.

11. *Kuda ty shagal, soldat?* [Where have you gone, soldier?], YouTube video, posted by "Андрей Макаревич" [Andrei Makarevich], 12 May 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MM_Ttyc4Vxs; see also Todd Prince, "Cancel Culture: Russian Musicians See Concerts Scrapped at Home Amid Crackdown on War Dissent," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL), 11 June 2022, accessed 28 November 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-war-dissent-musicians-cancel-culture/31893637.html>. For information

on some additional artists, such as Vyacheslav Butusov of Nautilus Pompilius, who are not discussed here, see Bree Halmstad, "'Net voine' [No war]: 10 of the Greatest Russian Antiwar Songs," *Metal Sucks*, 14 March 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://www.metalsucks.net/2022/03/14/%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82-%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%B5-10-of-the-greatest-russian-anti-war-songs/>. (Nautilus Pompilius, by the way, will perform in Tashkent in March 2023.)

12. Carl Schreck, "They Can F**k Off: Russian Rock Icon Sounds Off on Backers of Putin's War," *RFE/RL*, 28 May 2022, accessed 28 May 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-rock-icon-andrei-makarevich-putin-ukraine/31872977.html>.

13. See *Dave Stewart, Boris Grebenshikov & Serhii Babkin - Face to Face (feat. Stevie Nicks)*, YouTube video, posted by "Serhii Babkin," 7 October 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRFloyeU_bg.

14. "Soviet Rock Star Prosecuted for Putin's Ass Antiwar Speech," *Moscow Times* (website), 19 May 2022, accessed 17 February 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/05/19/soviet-rock-star-prosecuted-for-putins-ass-anti-war-speech-a77732>; Yanina Sorokina, "Anti-War Playlist: Russian Music against the War," *Moscow Times* (website), 21 March 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/07/08/anti-war-playlist-russian-music-against-the-war-a78157>; Aigiz Gil'manov, "Юрий Шевчук подал апелляцию по обвинению суда о дискредитации армии" [Yurii Shevchuk filed appeal over judgement by court for discrediting the army], *Prufy*, 16 November 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://prufy.ru/news/society/131626-yuriy-shevchuk-podal-apellyatsiyu-po-obvineniyu-suda-o-diskreditatsii-armii/>; see also Prince, "Cancel Culture."

15. RFE/RL's Russian Service, "Russia Cancels Rock Group's Performance after Singer Dedicates Song to Colleagues Who Fleed," *RFE/RL*, 23 August 2022, accessed 25 August 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-splean-vasilyev-canceled-ukraine-war-concert/32001385.html>; see also "V Moskve otmenili kontsert gruppy Splin" [Splein concert in Moscow cancelled for 26 August 2022], *Fontanka*, 23 August 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2022/08/23/71594846/>; "Otmena miloserdia: Splin ne vystupit v Moskve" [Mercy cancelled: Splein will not perform in Moscow], *Kommersant* (website), 23 August 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5525155>.

16. "Latest News," *Mumiytroll*, accessed 3 January 2023, <https://mumiytroll.co>; see Wikipedia, s.v. "Category: Russian Activists against the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine," last updated 15 December 2022, accessed 27 January 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Russian_activists_against_the_2022_Russian_invasion_of_Ukraine.

17. "Russian Rock Star Zemfira Releases Antiwar Video," *Moscow Times* (website), 21 March 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/21/russian-rock-star-zemfira-releases-anti-war-music-video-a76998>.

18. Yanina Sorokina, "Anti-War Playlist: Russian Music against the War," *Moscow Times* (website), 21 March 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/07/08/anti-war-playlist-russian-music-against-the-war-a78157>.

19. "Zemfira Spoke About Her Love for Russia at the Concert: 'I Will Never Play in Ukraine Again,'" *Daily News*, 4 November 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, https://www.txtreport.com/news/2022-11-04-zemfira-spoke-about-her-love-for-russia-at-the-concert-%22i-will-never-play-in-ukraine-again%22.HJ_w0Ffro.html.

20. Yanina Sorokina, "Anti-War Playlist: Russian Music Against the War," *Moscow Times* (website), 8 June 2022, accessed 27 August 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/07/08/anti-war-playlist-russian-music-against-the-war-a78157>; see also Valeria Perepenchuk, *Khedlainery russkogo roka* (Moscow: 2020), 77–78.

21. Sorokina, "Anti-War Playlist."

22. Samantha Berkhead. "Russian Rapper Oxxymiron Stages Anti-War Rallying Cry from Istanbul," *Moscow Times* (website), 19 April 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/16/russian-rapper-oxxyiron-stages-anti-war-rallying-cry-from-istanbul-a76960>; see also John Arterbury, "Russia's Biggest Rappers Are Going Hard Against Putin's War," *Rolling Stone* (website), 17 March 2022, accessed 20 December 2023, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/russia-rappers-putin-war-ukraine-1322497/>.

23. "Pesni-gromche-vzryvov-samy-e-zametnye-antivoennye-klipy-s-nachala-vtorzheniya-rossii-v-ukrainu" [Songs are louder than explosions], *Spektr*, 24 April 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://spektr.press/pesni-gromche-vzryvov-samy-e-zametnye-antivoennye-klipy-s-nachala-vtorzheniya-rossii-v-ukrainu/>.

24. *Ibid.*; for background, see Perepenchuk, *Khedlainery russkogo roka*, 72–74.

25. Vasily Shumov, "The Evolution of Russian Female Pop Singers," *Russia and India Report*, 1 October 2013, accessed 9 December 2022, https://archive.ph/20140806100140/http://in.rbth.com/arts/2013/10/01/the_evolution_of_russian_female_pop_singers_29805.html; "Russia's Sexiest Woman Announced," *Armenian News*, 19 November 2015, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://style.news.am/eng/news/1148/russias-sexiest-woman-announced.html>.

26. Nikolai Lisitsyn, "Vera Brezhneva, Loboda, Grebenshchikov, Meladze I drugie. V Rossii nachali zprshchat' vystupleniia artistov, kotorye vyskazyvalis' protiv voiny" [Vera Brezhneva, Loboda, Grebenshchikov, Meladze and others. Russia has begun to ban the performances of artists who spoke out against the war], *KP Ukraine*, 15 March 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, <https://kp.ua/culture/a645801-vera-brezhneva-loboda-hrebenshchikov-meladze-i-druhie-v-rossii-nachali-zapreshchat-vystuplenija-artistov-kotorye-vyskazyvalis-protiv-voiny>.

27. Arseniy Tomin, "Loboda oprovergl otkaz ot ukrainskogo grazhdanstva" [Loboda denied relinquishing her Ukrainian citizenship], *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 17 March 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.mk.ru/social/2022/03/17/loboda-oprovergl-otkaz-ot-ukrainskogo-grazhdanstva.html>.

28. "Foreign Minister Blacklists Russian Singers Gazmanov, Kobzon and Valeriya," *The Baltic Course*, 21 July 2014, accessed 9 December 2022, <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/legislation/?doc=94241>.

29. Tatyana Gorina, "Lider gruppy Chaif o politicheskoi pozitsii Makarevicha: 'Andreshka breedit!'" [Leader of the band Chaif on the political position of Makarevich: Andreshka is

deluded!], *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, 7 September 2015, accessed 2 January 2023, <https://www.mk.ru/social/2015/09/07/lider-gruppy-chayf-o-politicheskoy-pozitsii-makarevicha-andryushka-bredit.html>. The name of the band is a combination of the words "chai" (tea) and the idiom "kaif" for indulgence. For a full explanation, see Wikipedia, s.v. "Chaif," last updated 5 September 2022, 15:04, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaif>.

30. Alexandra Sivtsova, "Rossiiskie vlasti profinansiruyut vystavku o 'podvigakh' armii RF v Ukraine I sbornik fantastiki pro Donbass: Tak oni khotiat 'pomoch v samoidentifikatsii' zhiteliamim samoprovoglashennykh LNR i DNR" Rossiiskie [Russian authorities finance exhibition on the "achievements" of the army of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and the collection of fantasies about the Donbas. How they want 'to help in the self-identification' of residents of the self-proclaimed LNR and DNR], *Meduza*, 5 September 2022, accessed 2 January 2023, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/09/05/rossiiskie-vlasti-profinansiruyut-vystavku-o-podvigah-armii-rf-v-ukraine-i-sbornik-fantastiki-pro-donbass>.

31. Ksenia Churmanova, "Gastrol'i patriotov. Kak kremlevskie eksperty i shou biznes zarabatyvaiut na kontsertakh 'Za Rossiiu'" [Tour of the patriots: How Kremlin experts and show business make money with "For Russia" concerts], *BBC Russian Service*, 11 May 2022, accessed 2 January 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-61401033>.

32. "Pop Diva Alla Pugacheva Comes Out against the War," *Moscow Times* (website), 19 September 2022, accessed 20 September 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/18/pop-diva-alla-pugacheva-comes-out-against-the-war-a78826>; for a sample of the vitriol leveled against Alla Pugacheva in progovernment media, see "Khochesh kontserty v israele-fotografiruesia s Pugachevoi: pevits stala simvolom predatel'stva" [Want concerts in Israel and a photo with Pugacheva: The singer became a symbol of treason"], *Tsargrad TV*, accessed 7 January 2023, https://tsargrad.tv/articles/hochesh-koncerty-v-izraile-fotografirujsa-s-pugachevoj-pevica-stala-simvolom-predatelstva_674820. This article goes on to rail against the betrayal of Russia by additional artists including Zemfira, Renata Litvinova, Lulia Zivert, Little Big, Grebenshchikov, Makarevich, Noize MC, and numerous others.

33. Prince, "Cancel Culture"; see also Clementine Fujimura, "Russian Artists Grapple with the Same Dilemma as Their Soviet Forebears – To Stay or to Go?," *The Conversation*, 6 June 2022, accessed 1 January 2023, <https://theconversation.com/russian-artists-grapple-with-the-same-dilemma-as-their-soviet-forebears-to-stay-or-to-go-183194>.

34. "Zapreshcheno zapreshat'. Kak sbezhavshie zvezdy zarabatyvaiut v rossii" [It is forbidden to prohibit: How the runaway "stars" earn in Russia], *Tsargrad TV*, 13 December 2022, accessed 31 January 2023, https://tsargrad.tv/news/zapreshcheno-zapreshat-kak-sbezhavshie-zvezdy-zarabatyvajut-v-rossii_683316.