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CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

DISSERTATION
SOUNDS OF DISSENT: PROTEST MUSIC IN THE CON-
TEXT OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR
(FEBRUARY–SEPTEMBER 2022)

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to
obtain a Master's Degree in Communication and Digital
Transformation

By

Nikita Velichko

Faculty of Human Sciences

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Abstract

This work explores how Russian-language protest music changed after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It looks at how musicians responded to growing repression through different kinds of public action — from releasing new songs and making statements to boycotts and charity tours. The analysis is based on a qualitative reading of posts published on the Meduza LIVE Telegram channel between February and September 2022.

The study shows that the role of music shifted over time. At first, it was used to voice collective shock and openly dispute the official narrative. As censorship increased, musicians turned to other strategies: raising money and resources, using symbolic gestures, and forming networks that extended beyond Russia. What began as direct political speech gradually moved toward allegory and performance, creating a coded language of resistance under authoritarian conditions.

Key words: Protest music, Russian music, censorship, digital activism

Resumo

Este trabalho explora como a música de protesto em língua russa se transformou após a invasão da Ucrânia em fevereiro de 2022. Analisa de que forma os músicos responderam ao aumento da repressão através de diferentes tipos de ação pública — desde o lançamento de novas canções e declarações até boicotes e digressões de caridade. A análise baseia-se numa leitura qualitativa das publicações do canal Meduza LIVE no Telegram entre fevereiro e setembro de 2022.

O estudo demonstra que o papel da música mudou ao longo do tempo. Num primeiro momento, foi utilizada para expressar o choque coletivo e contestar abertamente a narrativa oficial. À medida que a censura se intensificava, os músicos recorreram a outras estratégias: angariação de fundos e recursos, uso de gestos simbólicos e formação de redes que ultrapassavam as fronteiras da Rússia. O que começou como um discurso político direto evoluiu gradualmente para a alegoria e a performance, criando uma linguagem codificada de resistência em condições autoritárias.

Palavras-chave: Música de protesto, música russa, censura, ativismo digital

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Introduction

Music is one of the most basic ways through which humans express themselves. It has always been used not only to make us feel good, but also as a strong way to protest against social and political problems. From songs about slavery and the American Civil War to anti-war songs in the 1960s and punk rock, music has always been a way for people to speak out against injustice and demand change. It can shape who people are, bring communities together, and create different ways for people to talk about politics, especially when other ways to express political ideas are limited or impossible.

The Russian context offers a particularly valuable case for studying this phenomenon. Since the Soviet era, when the author's song and underground rock became symbols of "quiet" resistance and the voice of an entire generation during Perestroika, the music scene has constantly reflected and shaped public sentiment. Bands like Kino and DDT created the soundtrack to the era of change, and their songs became anthems that had a life beyond their original musical meaning.

While in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods music reflected and shaped resistance largely through live performances and underground distribution, the digital age has completely transformed how people communicate during protests. The Internet and social media like YouTube, VKontakte, and Facebook gave musicians and activists new ways to share their ideas without going through traditional media or record labels. This led to more people being able to protest, which allowed those who had not been heard before to share their opinions and encourage others to join the protests, as seen in the protests of 2011-2012 (Bondarev, 2013).

But the events that began on February 24, 2022, created a completely new situation. The Russian government is censoring more and more and blocking independent media. This is making it very hard for people to speak out against the war. There's a

research gap: how does musical protest change, survive, and appear in conditions where the government controls most of the information? What new forms and strategies does he use when traditional venues — like concert halls and popular social media platforms — become inaccessible or dangerous?

This dissertation looks at the different types of musical protest in Russia during the first seven months of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The invasion began on February 24, 2022, and the dissertation looks at protest music from February 24 to September 21, 2022. The dissertation looks at how protest changed from just singing songs to a wider range of performances and discussions, and what role independent digital media, forced to work outside the mainstream, played in reporting on and influencing this change. The Telegram channel Meduza LIVE, one of the top Russian-language independent media outlets, was picked as the main data source for the analysis. This analysis has become an important place for collecting news about cultural resistance.

Research problems

The following key research questions were formulated in the work:

Research Question 1: What are the roles and functions of Russian-language protest music in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Research Question 2: How have these functions changed over time in response to escalating conflict and repression?

The first question is about identifying and classifying all types of protest activities. These activities include the release of anti-war songs and videos, public statements, cancellations of concerts, charity events, and acts of symbolic disobedience. The second question involves looking at how protests have changed over time. It involves

identifying key trends, including periods of high and low activity. These periods of activity are a response to a changing political context, increased repression, and the development of the conflict itself.

There are a few reasons why this topic is relevant. First, the work is important because it talks about how people in Russia fought against their government during a difficult time in history. It also talks about how culture was affected by the political crisis and the pressure from the government.

Secondly, for media research, this work is a case study of the use of the Telegram messenger as a key platform for anti-censorship communication and the preservation of independent journalism. It shows how the media in exile can inform people and also serve the function of collecting and understanding cultural protest.

Thirdly, the research adds to the theory of studying protest music, expanding the very concept of "musical protest." Based on the data we collected, it's clear that protest today means more than just singing a song. It also includes other actions like refusing to perform, donating, posting on social networks, or even staying silent. So, the work looks at musical protest as a complicated way of talking and performing.

The structure of the dissertation

This dissertation has five chapters.

The first chapter explains the research's theoretical background. It looks at important ideas about music as a form of protest (the ideas of Jacques Attali, Jacques Rancier, and others) and looks at the long history of protest music around the world and in Russia.

The second chapter focususn on how digital media affects modern social movements. It looks at how the internet in Russia has changed, the "sovereign Runet"

phenomenon (which is when the internet is controlled by the government), and the special role of the Telegram platform as a space for freedom of speech.

The third chapter presents the research methodology. It explains why the data source ("Meduza LIVE") was chosen, describes the content analysis procedure, and presents the coding categories developed for it.

The fourth chapter presents the results of a study that was done using real-life examples. It provides a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected data, demonstrating the main forms of protest and their dynamics by month.

Finally, the sixth chapter discusses the results. The data obtained are interpreted using the theoretical framework, and the research questions are answered. General conclusions are formulated, and ideas for future research are outlined.

PART I — Literature Review

1. Protest Music

1.1 What Is Protest Music? Interdisciplinary Debates and Theoretical Expansions

The term "protest music" is typically understood to denote songs that convey explicit political messages or unambiguous calls to action. This understanding is reflected in mainstream sources, such as the Cambridge Dictionary, which defines protest song as "a song expressing disapproval, usually on a political topic" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This interpretation reflects a dominant yet limited assumption: that political expression in music is identifiable, overt, and textual. However, this essentialist definition has been the subject of considerable critical scrutiny from scholars who have underscored the socio-historical, aesthetic, and performative dimensions of musical dissent. This section explores interdisciplinary debates that not only complicate but also expand the definition of protest music. It positions this genre not as a fixed genre or aesthetic category, but as a discursive field of cultural and political negotiations.

Eric Drott (2023) contends that the study of protest music has been characterized by fragmentation, a phenomenon he terms "inert seriality," drawing upon a term coined by Sartre. This "inert seriality" refers to the accumulation of ideas from disciplines such as musicology, political theory, and sociology without resulting in a cohesive field of study. Consequently, Drott proposes the conceptualization of "protest music studies" as an independent research program characterized by methodological reflexivity and disciplinary synthesis. Drott underscores the term's inherent instability, proposing that "protest music" is more accurately understood as a sociohistorical phenomenon, rather than being defined by its aural characteristics. Rather than inquiring into the political nature of a song based solely on its lyrics, Drott advocates for a more comprehensive examination of the cultural contexts that

give rise to the politicization of music. "The act of labeling a musical piece as 'protest' does not signify an inherent attribute of the music itself, but rather, it is a function of the manner in which it is positioned, perceived, and mobilized" (Drott, 2023, p. 3).

As Drott (2011) argues, "protest music" is not inherently defined by formal musical features or explicit lyrical content; instead, its protest character emerges from the contexts in which it is performed, received, and circulated. In this sense, protest music becomes a label applied to certain musical practices within specific conditions of struggle, rather than a stable category that can be objectively defined. Drott draws attention to the historically contingent nature of protest music, emphasizing that its meaning and function are never fully settled. Instead, they are subject to ongoing debate among various actors—musicians, audiences, critics, and institutions—each of whom may invoke or challenge the label of "protest music" to advance particular agendas (Drott, 2011). This analytical lens is particularly illuminating for understanding the Russian-language protest songs of 2022, many of which circulated online, often outside formal music industry structures, and acquired their protest status not only through lyrical denunciation of war or state violence, but also through public acts of defiance, censorship, and state repression.

Importantly, Drott's framework encourages us to pay attention to the performative and rhetorical dimensions of protest music. That is, what does it mean when a piece of music is declared protest music? Who makes this declaration, and for what purpose? In 2022, numerous Russian artists who released anti-war tracks did not initially frame their work as protest music. Rather, the protest character of these works was attributed post hoc—by listeners, cultural commentators, or even the state—thus underscoring Drott's (2011) point that the category itself is "always up for grabs."

Furthermore, Drott challenges the normative assumptions often attached to protest music, such as the idea that it must be "authentic," "grassroots," or morally righteous. By decentering these expectations, he opens the field to a more complex and pluralistic understanding of how music participates in social struggle. This has clear relevance for the Russian context in 2022, where some of the most resonant protest songs came not from underground punk scenes, but from mainstream pop and rap artists—whose work was sometimes criticized for being too ambiguous or commercially driven. Drott's approach allows us to view these contributions not as diluted or compromised, but as part of the contested terrain on which protest music operates (Drott, 2011).

Drott also critiques the tendency to treat protest music as a form of cultural residue—something that arises spontaneously in moments of crisis and then disappears. Instead, he argues for understanding protest music as part of a longer continuity of political expression and cultural memory. This insight is particularly vital when considering the genealogy of Russian protest music, from Soviet-era bard songs to 1990s counterculture to the digital-native protest songs of 2022.

In sum, Eric Drott's intervention offers a flexible and critically attuned framework for studying protest music not as a static object but as a dynamic and politically charged label. His emphasis on discourse, contestation, and historical specificity aligns well with the methodological demands of analyzing Russian-language music produced in response to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. It urges us to treat protest music not simply as a means of political communication, but as a site of ideological struggle—where meanings are made, challenged, and remade across platforms, publics, and performances

This positioning resonates with Benjamin Tausig's earlier critique of the term. In his ethnography *Bangkok Is Ringing: Sound, Protest, and Constraint* (2019), Tausig rejects the notion of protest music as a universal or genre category. Instead, he

proposes that its recurrent utilization in Western scholarship "reinforces a set of assumptions about how dissent should sound," favoring "acoustic features" rooted in the U.S. labor movement and the folk revival (Tausig, 2019, pp. 25–26). Instead, he proposes the term "sounding dissent" to encompass a more extensive array of resistance practices that may not adhere to conventional lyrical or melodic standards. Tausig's proposal for a shift in terminology is not merely a matter of semantics; it signifies a methodological transition towards contextual, affective, and nonverbal forms of resistance that challenge the conventional aesthetics of protest.

This methodological shift towards contextual and embodied expressions of dissent is echoed in the work of Mark Mattern, who proposes that music constitutes not merely an aesthetic form, but a deliberative form of collective action (Mattern, 1998, p. 10). In this view, music acts as a communicative platform through which communities can negotiate cultural survival, identity, and solidarity. "Music serves as a communicative forum through which questions of cultural survival and adaptation can be posed and alternative answers explored" (Mattern, 1998, p. 108). Importantly, Mattern situates music within the broader political economy, noting how its everyday presence is shaped by capitalist reproduction. Musical practices such as festivals, clubs, and heritage events often become commodified, transforming local traditions into marketable products and reinforcing processes of fetishization and archiving (Mattern, 1998, p. 107). Still, Mattern maintains that music retains the capacity to intervene politically, both as a mirror of dominant power structures and as a prophetic voice for transformation: "Musicians are forcing these issues into the public sphere, intentionally or not" (Mattern, 1998, p. 117). This reaffirms the role of music not only as expressive or mobilizing, but also as a medium of deliberation and cultural agency.

A more similar understanding was elaborated in Jacques Attali's seminal work *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985), in which music is reinterpreted as a prophetic medium that anticipates and shapes social transformations. Attali's

perspective on music transcends mere instrument of protest, elevating it to the status of a political act in its own right. Attali's conceptualization of music as a form of prophecy underscores its transformative potential, positioning it as a catalyst for societal change. Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society" (Attali, 1985, p. 11). In capitalist societies, music becomes a commodity and repetitive, but this very repetition paradoxically undermines the foundations. Music's dualistic nature, simultaneously masking and unveiling systemic contradictions, is a crucial element in Attali's analysis. Fredrik Jamison further elaborates on this notion in the introduction to Attali's work, underscoring the interconnection between the abstract numerical composition of music and the dual logics of emotion and economics. According to Jameson, the political significance of music is not confined to its content but is also present in its form. He conceptualizes rhythm, harmony, and structure as "ideologems," which he defines as abstract codes that convey affective and political energy beyond verbal articulation (Jameson, 1985, pp. vii–viii).

Theodor Adorno, one of the central figures of the Frankfurt School, further complicates this relation by asserting that music not only reflects ideology but may also function as a form of "false consciousness." In his aesthetic writings, Adorno contends that music, while appearing autonomous, is often deeply enmeshed in dominant cultural forms. He famously argued that listening to Beethoven without grasping the revolutionary bourgeois impulse behind his compositions — not as slogans, but as a demand for totality — misses the point entirely (Adorno, as cited in Jameson, 1985, p. ix). Yet, Adorno also warns that music is ideological precisely "insofar as it is false consciousness" (ibid). This tension reveals the duality within music's function: it is at once a medium of resistance and a possible reinforcement of dominant ideology.

This contradiction between the autonomy of aesthetic form and its entanglement with social structures lies at the heart of Frankfurt School theory. For Adorno, the modern work of art must be both formally autonomous and historically determined, a

dialectic that positions music as uniquely situated to critique society through its form. However, the very autonomy that allows for critique also risks becoming complicit with the same structures it seeks to resist. The result is a perpetual tension between music's utopian potential and its susceptibility to commodification — a contradiction that defines critical theory's approach to culture (Jameson, 1985, pp. ix–x).

Attali and Jameson have emphasized that protest can manifest in musical form, in addition to verbal expression. Music has the capacity to articulate discontent through elements such as dissonance, tension, repetition, or stylistic subversion — qualities that may not be fully captured by conventional analysis that focuses on lyrical content. This perspective aligns with Jacques Rancière's theory of the "distribution of the sensible," which conceptualizes politics as a reconfiguration of perceptual, expressive, and auditory capacities within a given society. In this theoretical framework, a protest song is defined as a musical composition that alters the established parameters of audibility. As Rancière (2004) asserts, "Politics revolves around what is visible and what can be said about it, around someone who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" (p. 13). When protest music provides a platform for the marginalized or amplifies dissent in contexts where it was previously silenced, it engages in political intervention at the level of sensory and symbolic experience.

Eyerman and Jamison (1998) offer an additional perspective based on the theory of social movements. In their seminal work *Music and Social Movements*, they contend that music is not just expressive, but also constitutive of collective identity and political cognition. According to Eyerman and Jamison (1998), social movements represent "central moments in cultural reconstruction" (p. 6), during which music emerges as a form of "cognitive practice" — a means of cognition, memorization, and imagination. It is imperative to acknowledge that the function of music in protest movements is not sporadic or incidental, but rather, it is of a historical nature. Music plays a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting the emotional and ideological

legacies of these movements. It serves as an archive, preserving the historical and cultural memory of these movements, and concurrently, it functions as a mobilizing force, uniting and energizing the movement's supporters. As posited by the following assertion, "even after a movement disappears from the political scene, its cultural residue remains embedded in the collective memory through musical forms, performances, and rituals" (p. 8). Consequently, the function of protest music is twofold: it serves as both a catalyst for action and a medium for its perpetuation.

While Eyerman and Jamison emphasize the epistemic and mnemonic functions of music, Ian Peddie (2006) shifts attention to performance, genre fluidity, and the politics of representation. In *The Resisting Muse*, Peddie critiques the prevailing critical tendency to perceive protest music as a cohesive tradition. Instead, he proposes a conceptual framework for understanding protest music as a "discursive practice" that is embedded within specific intersections of "culture, class, gender" and life experience (Peddie, 2006, p. xvi). Peddie's argument eschews binary frameworks such as the opposition between escapism and resistance or youth and the establishment. Instead, he proposes that protest music is inherently contradictory, shaped "in contradiction and through contradiction" (p. xviii). This perspective aligns with Peddie's overarching interpretation of protest as a performative and contingent act, rather than a static genre.

Peddie's analysis is characterized by a persistent focus on the concept of authenticity, which he positions as a fundamental tension within the broader context of protest music. Peddie highlights the seminal figures of John Lennon and Víctor Jara as exemplars of this phenomenon, underscoring that their status as protest singers was not solely attributed to their lyrical content, but also to their perceived role and reception as political figures. As John Street observes, cited in Peddie (2006), artists are frequently "triggered by movements that require musicians to perform a certain role" (p. xx), thereby rendering authenticity a performative reconciliation between personal convictions, industry expectations, and public perception. This challenges

the assumption that protest is solely self-contained or autonomous; instead, it is collectively constructed, mediated, and strategic.

Peddie's analysis underscores the transnational and postmodern dimensions of protest music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He emphasizes the role of diasporic soundscapes, digital platforms, and the cross-pollination of genres in disrupting conventional notions of community, identity, and place. Consequently, contemporary protest music manifests in fragmented and hybrid forms, frequently eluding conventional definitions. Peddie's conclusion asserts that protest music "resists static definition" and should be regarded as "too vague, too widespread a dissident tradition to be limited by genre, category, or time period" (2006, p. xviii).

The role of music in social movements is further highlighted through the prism of critical theory. Marcuse (1969) emphasizes that aesthetic expression, especially music, has the potential to serve as both a form of resistance and an instrument of liberation. He argues that music embodies the dialectical tension between oppression and emancipation, as historically high culture has monopolized and separated aesthetic values from everyday reality. However, with the collapse of traditional cultural hierarchies, new forms of music born out of marginalized experiences are emerging as subversive expressions of resistance. The interaction between the barricade and the dance floor, as described by Marcuse, illustrates how artistic and political rebellion are intertwined, where protest songs and revolutionary anthems go beyond mere artistic expression to become mobilizing forces in movements for social change.

Within this framework, music functions not only as a means of resistance, but also as a challenge to dominant cultural paradigms. Marcuse (1969) describes how oppressed groups, historically excluded from "higher culture," develop their own musical traditions that are imbued with defiance, joy, and an affirmation of their humanity against the definitions imposed by hegemonic power structures. This is

evident in the historical trajectory of black music, which has emerged as a powerful counter-narrative to the Eurocentric canon. From spirituals and blues to jazz and hip-hop, black music has consistently served as both a cultural response to systemic oppression and a catalyst for social change. Marcuse argues that such music fundamentally disrupts the refined, sublimated aesthetics of the dominant culture, bringing raw immediacy and emotional intensity to artistic production. This process, which he calls "desublimation," reflects a broader cultural and political shift in which once-marginalized voices are reclaiming artistic spaces as sites of resistance.

Music has long been a critical element in political movements, serving both state-affirmative and state-critical purposes. While political leaders and authoritarian regimes have historically utilized music to reinforce their power through symbolic means (Bourdieu, 1991), protest movements have employed music to mobilize participants, articulate grievances, and strengthen collective identity (Kutschke, 2016). The ability of music to evoke emotions and create associations makes it an effective tool for shaping political discourse and fostering solidarity among activists.

Unlike verbal language, which relies on structured syntax and conventions, music communicates through associations and shared cultural meanings (Kutschke, 2016). This inherent ambiguity presents a challenge for composers of political music, who must ensure that their intended message is clearly understood. To address this issue, three primary strategies are employed: (1) pairing music with lyrics or textual explanations, (2) performing the music in specific contexts that define its political orientation, and (3) utilizing musical structures and elements that listeners commonly associate with protest, such as unresolved dissonances, harsh timbres, and agitated rhythms (Kutschke, 2016). These musical techniques mirror the emotions of protesters—anger, urgency, and defiance—transforming sound into a vehicle for dissent.

In authoritarian regimes, the subversive potential of music often leads to censorship and suppression. While state officials may attempt to control musical expressions,

the inherent ambiguity of sound allows for multiple interpretations, making protest music a resilient medium for dissent (Street, 2012). The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, for instance, actively promoted nationalist compositions while simultaneously banning works deemed politically dangerous (Kutschke, 2016). Despite such efforts, underground music scenes have historically flourished, demonstrating the adaptability of musical resistance.

While protest music is often celebrated for its inspirational power, Rachel S. Vandagriff (2015/2016) cautions against uncritical use of this cultural form. Listening to protest music can create the illusion of political participation, allowing listeners to feel virtuous without engaging in actual action. Vandagriff argues that the category “protest music” is far from homogeneous: it includes militant anthems, quiet reflections, personal testimonies, and collective laments. The freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement exemplify a lively form of protest music, performed collectively during actions aimed at building solidarity and emotional resilience. However, not all protest songs lead directly to collective mobilization; narrative songs, laments, and expressions of grief play different roles in protest cultures. For example, mourning and memory are forms of resistance distinct from direct calls to action. Vandagriff notes that one of the main problems with contemporary protest music is its often ambiguous goals: it can inspire, but it often fails to provide a clear direction for tangible change. A critical approach to protest music, rather than taking it at face value, is important to understanding its true impact and the various ways it can be used in social struggle (Vandagriff, 2015/2016).

To sum it up, protest music is a discursive category (Drott) that resists genre restrictions (Peddie) and transcends the concept of a simple song (Tausig), functioning as a hybrid form that combines lyrical content, contextual performance, and sonic instruments (Kutschke & Street). It functions as a mode of communication necessary for identity formation and collective expression (Mattern), and although embedded in dominant cultural structures (Adorno), it destabilizes them from within,

exposing their contradictions (Attali), amplifying marginalized voices (Rancière), and asserting itself as an aesthetic form of resistance. At the same time, it functions as a living archive of protest and collective memory (Eyerman & Jamison).

Consequently, the field of protest music research is undergoing a shift from rigid definitions towards a more fluid, performative, and historically driven understanding of musical dissent. Drott's appeal for disciplinary coherence, Tausig's critique of genre essentialism, Mattern's conception of music as deliberative collective action, Attali's theory of music as prophecy, Rancière's aesthetics of dissent, Eyerman and Jamieson's cognitive practice, and Peddie's discourse of ambiguity are all underpinned by a shared logic: protest music is not merely the lyrics of a song, but also the actions it takes—the interference it causes with power, memory, affect, and social imagination. Consequently, any endeavor to define protest music must address its contradictions, its sonic and social roots, and its capacity to both reflect and reshape the world.

1.2 History of music in protest

Having examined the contested theoretical definitions of protest music, it is essential to contextualize these debates historically. Protest music is not a phenomenon born in the twentieth century, but rather one that has evolved alongside human civilization, shaped by both sonic innovation and political necessity. The following section traces the historical development of protest music, from ancient forms of resistance to modern mass-mediated dissent.

To understand the role of music in protest, it is essential to trace both phenomena back to their origins. Music, as a form of cultural expression, predates written language. The discovery of a 40,000-year-old bird-bone flute (Adler, 2009) provides evidence of "the earliest musical tradition," yet some theoretical perspectives argue that proto-music may have emerged as early as 400,000 years ago during the late

mid-Pleistocene (Killin, 2018). Similarly, the origins of protest reach far back into human history. The first recorded strike, occurring during the reign of Ramesses III in c.1157 BCE, marks a clear historical precedent for organized resistance (libcom.org). The history of protest music is difficult to trace comprehensively. One of the earliest examples is Psalm 137, a lamentation of a displaced people: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." (King James Bible, 1611/1987). This passage underscores music's capacity to express resilience and defiance. Over time, music has served as both a unifying force and a medium of dissent.

Just as music evolved alongside humanity, protest has also undergone significant transformations. As early as the 13th century, clerical dissenters like the Goliards adapted Latin hymns to satirize the Catholic Church (Lynskey, 2011). One of the earliest large-scale examples of ideological dissent is the Protestant Reformation of the early 16th century, a movement that challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and profoundly altered the religious and social landscape of Europe. The Reformation's emphasis on individual conscience and direct access to scripture inspired not only theological debate but also cultural shifts, including the role of music in fostering communal identity and resistance. Martin Luther, a key figure in the Reformation, recognized the powerful connection between music and theology. His chorales, such as the renowned hymn "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"), became emblematic of Protestant ideology, serving both as a spiritual expression and a tool of resistance against religious oppression. Luther's contributions to music shaped the cultural identity of Protestant communities and influenced future generations of composers, such as Johann Sebastian Bach, establishing a lasting legacy of music as a medium for both worship and dissent (Medňanský, 2019).

The tradition of protest music significantly predates the 20th century, emerging not as a studied discipline but as a fluid, oral, and performative practice, shaped by

ballads, spirituals, parodies, and hymns. As Dorian Lynskey outlines in his appendix on early protest songs, these forms circulated well before the invention of recording technologies, relying on familiar melodies and oral transmission to quickly disseminate topical messages (Lynskey, 2011).

In medieval England, protest songs such as "Song of the Husbandman" criticized the ruling class, and the couplet "*When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?*" became an emblematic slogan of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. By the 16th and 17th centuries, cheap printing presses had enabled the widespread circulation of broadsides—single-sheet publications containing lyrics set to popular tunes. These included ballads from the Thirty Years' War, English Civil War, and songs like "The World Turned Upside Down", which critiqued Puritan suppression of public festivities (Lynskey, 2011).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, protest music continued to evolve, becoming an instrument for class consciousness and revolutionary sentiment. English composer Henry Russell wrote over 80 songs addressing social issues like industrialization, alcoholism, and slavery. Meanwhile, socialist songbooks flourished with borrowed tunes, reflecting the growing recognition of music as a powerful emotional and rhetorical tool. Figures such as Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd later preserved and compiled many of these industrial and political songs (Lynskey, 2011).

This pre-1900 history demonstrates that protest music has always existed at the intersection of political urgency and cultural adaptation, drawing on familiar forms to engage, mobilize, and educate communities. Another notable example of a protest song is the "Marseillaise," written by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle in 1792, which transcends traditional musical categories, embodying elements of popular, folk, and academic music and quickly became a symbol of revolutionary spirit and the fight for freedom (Canopé, 2016). Its initial significance was established in September 1792 when the French Ministry of War officially incorporated it into the military

repertoire. In 1795, following the French Revolution, the Convention declared the "Marseillaise" the national anthem, cementing its role in shaping the new Republic. However, its status often depended on the political regime of the time: during Napoleon's rule and the Bourbon Restoration, the anthem was banned and replaced with monarchist and imperial songs such as "Veillons au salut de l'Empire" (1800) and "Vive Henri IV!" (1814). Nevertheless, during the July Revolution of 1830, the "Marseillaise" once again echoed through the streets, symbolizing the fight for freedom and rights.

In 1871, during the Paris Commune, the "Marseillaise" took on a new meaning as a workers' and revolutionaries' anthem protesting against monarchist and bourgeois traditions. However, its widespread use by various political regimes, including Napoleon III's, led some revolutionaries, like Louise Michel, to reject it, claiming it had been "profaned." The anthem regained its official status only in 1879 under pressure from Republican leaders, with its official version adopted by the Ministry of War in 1887. In the 20th century, the "Marseillaise" re-emerged as a protest song, notably during World War II, when it became a symbol of the French Resistance. Thus, throughout its history, the "Marseillaise" has remained not only a national anthem but also a rallying cry for those fighting for freedom and justice (Canopé, 2016).

A parallel example is Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, whose fourth movement, the "Ode to Joy," has undergone numerous ideological reworkings. In 1942, under the Nazi regime, it was performed by the Berlin Philharmonic to celebrate Hitler's birthday, turning Beethoven's music into an instrument of fascist propaganda. But just a few decades later, it was reimagined as a call for peace and unity. In divided post-war Germany, the symphony briefly served as the national anthem, symbolizing a desire for reconciliation. In 1986, Chilean women protesting the Pinochet dictatorship sang "Ode to Joy" as an anthem for political prisoners. In June 1989, it echoed across Tiananmen Square as Chinese students demanded democratic reform.

When the Berlin Wall fell later that year, the anthem became a sonic emblem of reunification. And since 1985, when it was officially adopted as the anthem of the European Union, it has become a symbol of transnational solidarity, freedom, and peace. These historical turns show how a single piece of music can transcend ideological boundaries, sometimes acting as an instrument of power, sometimes as an anthem of liberation DW (Deutsche Welle), Classical Music, 2020).

Moving into modernity, the 20th century was heralded by Cantor (1980) as "The Age of Protest," with global movements and mass demonstrations becoming an integral part of societal transformation. From 2009 to 2019, mass protests increased annually by 11.5%, with the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa witnessing the largest concentrations and fastest growth rates (CSIS Report, 2020). There are different distinctions between common types of music that illuminate their respective social and cultural functions.

According to Tagg (1982), a tripartite framework distinguishes between art music, folk music, and popular music, each with unique historical roles. Art music, typically associated with elite institutions and universal aesthetic ideals, relies on structured composition and notated transmission. Folk music is rooted in oral tradition and serves to reinforce the cultural identity and continuity of particular communities. Popular music, in contrast, is designed for mass dissemination via industrial means and reflects immediate, diverse, and often commercialized social realities. Despite its association with the mainstream, popular music is far from politically neutral. As Dillane, Power, Devereux, and Haynes (2020) demonstrate, popular music frequently acquires protest value through the context in which it is performed, heard, or reinterpreted—highlighting its flexibility as a vehicle for dissent and social commentary.

While *"This Land Is Your Land"* by Woody Guthrie is often celebrated as a patriotic anthem in American schools and public events, its original lyrics reveal a much

sharper social critique. Lesser-known verses, frequently omitted in mainstream performances, address issues of private property and economic inequality. In one verse, Guthrie describes: *"There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me / A sign was painted said: Private Property / But on the back side it didn't say nothing / This land was made for you and me."* Here, he highlights the contradiction between the American ideal of shared land and the reality of restricted access. Another powerful verse emphasizes poverty: *"One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple / By the relief office I saw my people / As they stood there hungry, I stood there wondering if / This land was made for you and me."* These critical elements are often excluded to present the song as a simple celebration of national unity, thereby neutralizing its protest potential. However, when these omitted verses are reintroduced in politically charged contexts, the song's original message of resistance and social justice is reactivated, demonstrating how even familiar and mainstream music can be re-signified depending on its framing and use.

Such reframing is central to understanding protest music in the popular domain. Dillane et al. (2020) provide compelling examples: disco music, often dismissed as escapist entertainment, became a form of queer resistance when performed in drag clubs during lip-syncing shows; Jimi Hendrix's rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock transformed a national anthem into a searing critique of U.S. militarism and nationalism. Similarly, hip-hop and rap, genres rooted in urban experience, have long articulated issues of racial and economic injustice. These forms, initially dismissed by critics, later emerged as central tools for expressing collective disenchantment, particularly among marginalized youth (Trapp, 2005, as cited in Dillane et al., 2020). What these examples show is that protest potential in popular music lies not in genre, but in context, performance, and interpretation.

Popular music operates on a fluid and affective level, circulating rapidly, resonates across class and national boundaries, and speaks in the vernacular of lived experience. According to Dillane et al. (2020), the protest function of popular music lies in its ambiguity and reach: songs like Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," played

widely on AM radio during the 1960s, exemplify how commercial success does not preclude political interpretation. As movements reclaim these songs and align them with dissent, they become shared emotional and ideological resources.

Finally, Dillane et al. (2020) argue that protest songs are essential tools in the construction of collective identity. They frame political grievances, identify adversaries, and articulate emotional responses that strengthen group cohesion. Crucially, they are not confined to any one genre or ideology. Popular music can be used by both dominant and subaltern groups—whether to resist oppression or to reinforce power structures. The example of the Dixie Chicks illustrates this tension: in 2003, frontwoman Natalie Maines criticized President George W. Bush and the impending Iraq War during a London concert (Hines, 2020). The backlash was swift—death threats, boycotts, radio bans—effectively exiling the band from country music for years. Yet their 2006 comeback album was defiantly political and critically acclaimed, proving their refusal to be silenced. While the industry often seeks to depoliticize music for broader marketability, artists and audiences alike continue to reinterpret and reclaim songs as tools of protest. Thus, far from being an apolitical form of entertainment, popular music emerges as a dynamic arena of ideological struggle, capable of articulating resistance precisely because of its visibility and affective reach.

Strange Fruit, performed by Billie Holiday in 1939, is widely recognized as the first true protest song to break into the realm of mass popular culture. Written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish Communist schoolteacher from the Bronx, the song stands as a radical aesthetic and political gesture against racial violence in the United States—specifically the practice of lynching African Americans. Unlike earlier protest songs associated with labor movements, which were often confined to organizing events or specific political circles, *Strange Fruit* was the first to introduce an explicitly political message into the domain of mainstream entertainment (Lynskey, 2011).

What distinguished *Strange Fruit* was not only its subject matter but also its mode of performance. Holiday sang the song under a solitary spotlight, in complete silence, with no applause and no encore. Each performance became a ritual of confrontation, leaving audiences stunned. As Lynskey notes, this was not a call to action but a form of bearing witness—a voice that refused to let the audience look away (Lynskey, 2011, p. 5). In doing so, the song created a new affective and political space for popular music, where emotion and critique merged into something viscerally unsettling.

Rather than delivering a straightforward political statement, the song operated through metaphor, evoking the horror of lynching with the haunting image of "black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze." The fusion of poetic language with brutal historical reality gave the song its power. As Lynskey argues, *Strange Fruit* transcended propaganda; it was a work of art that accused (Lynskey, 2011, p. 8). This duality—its aesthetic sophistication and moral outrage—made the song uniquely potent and revolutionary.

The song's public impact was immediate and polarizing. It was banned from many radio stations and performance venues, but its influence spread. As Lynskey emphasizes, *Strange Fruit* marked a turning point in cultural history, proving that music could be both a personal expression and a collective indictment, and that it could haunt, disrupt, and transform the public sphere (Lynskey, 2011, p. 9). It set the stage for future protest songs by demonstrating that musical beauty and political urgency need not be mutually exclusive, but could in fact amplify one another.

While there were other notable protest songs in the first half of the twentieth century, in the 1960s music became a defining element of global protest movements. Folk, rock, and soul genres emerged as vehicles for addressing political and social injustices. In the United States, the Civil Rights Movement relied heavily on music to inspire and unite activists. For example, during a 1960 meeting at the Highlander

Folk School in Tennessee, activists reimagined the traditional spiritual "We Shall Overcome," transforming it into a powerful anthem of courage and solidarity (Reed, 2005). A young participant adapted the lyrics to include the phrase "We are not afraid today," encapsulating the spirit of resistance.

The paradigm shifts that define the relationship between music and protest, as explored in *Music and Protest in 1968* (edited by Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton), highlight the profound impact of the socio-political climate on musical expression. One of the central arguments in the volume is that the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly those around 1968, were characterized by self-organization, transnationality, and a spirit of dissent. These movements rejected centralized authority and embraced grassroots participation, facilitated by the global reach of new media and communication technologies. This decentralized, collective ethos influenced not only the protest actions themselves but also the music associated with them, which often reflected a blending of genres, cultures, and traditions. The events of 1968, such as the Parisian student protests, the Prague Spring, and the Woodstock Festival, created a unique "spirit of 1968" that transcended national boundaries and permeated both popular and avant-garde musical practices.

The volume also emphasizes a methodological shift in musicology, moving away from defining musical eras solely by styles or genres and instead focusing on socio-political and cultural contexts. Music associated with 1968, including rock, folk, and jazz, has been traditionally linked to the countercultural movements of the time. However, the editors argue that the influence of 1968 extended beyond popular music, affecting avant-garde, classical, and historically informed performance practices. This broader impact reveals the interconnectedness of music and the socio-cultural climate, challenging previous narratives that isolated certain genres from the spirit of the era. The volume demonstrates that the music of 1968 was not just a product of the times but an active participant in the global wave of cultural and political transformation (Kutschke & Norton, 2013).

In this subchapter we looked at the protest music as an ancient phenomenon that has developed alongside human civilisation. Both music and protest have deep historical roots and are closely linked to basic human practices. Until the twentieth century, protest music existed mainly as an oral, fluid and accessible tradition that served as a powerful means of conveying urgent messages. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century marked a key moment when music clearly became an instrument of ideological resistance, while throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period popular musical forms were widely used to criticise government. In the eighteenth century, music increasingly became a tool for expressing class consciousness and social struggle, mobilising political sentiment through the adaptation of familiar melodies. In this historical context, iconic examples such as *La Marseillaise* and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* demonstrate how protest music is highly contextualised, with the same pieces being reinterpreted in different political regimes and struggles.

Turning to the twentieth century—the so-called "age of protest"—it becomes clear that musical functions vary according to genre (art music, folk music, popular music), but the potential for protest is present in all of them. The political significance of a song is shaped not only by its lyrics, but also by its performance, perception and recontextualisation. Because of its accessibility and emotional resonance, popular music has become a vital resource for protest movements, helping to build collective identities and mobilise groups around common grievances. Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit* became the first mass-market protest song to challenge racial violence in the mainstream, ushering in a new era of politically charged popular music. The 1960s marked the peak of music's role in mass protest, particularly within the American Civil Rights Movement, while the events of 1968 marked a paradigmatic shift from musical genre definitions to the understanding of political protest.

1.3 Anti-war music

This broader understanding of music as an active participant in cultural and political transformation provides a useful framework for examining specific forms of protest music. Among these, anti-war music stands out as a particularly potent and historically significant genre. In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, anti-war music has once again emerged as a powerful, though often persecuted, form of political expression. To better understand how music can serve as an ethical, emotional, and communicative response to state violence and war, it is crucial to examine historical precedents. This chapter offers a cultural and temporal overview of anti-war music—from antiquity to the mid-20th century—in order to identify the recurring functions and strategies through which music challenges militarism and gives voice to dissent, mourning, and memory.

Across time and geography, music has served as a conduit for resistance to war's consequences, whether through sacred liturgy, ritual lamentation, or poetic song. The phrase *Dona nobis pacem* (Grant us peace), which concludes the liturgical hymn *Agnus Dei*, received a powerful anti-war reinterpretation in Ralph Vaughan Williams's cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936), written during the turbulent interwar period. As Hugh Cobbe (2014) writes, the composer combined the sacred text of the Mass with Walt Whitman's poetry from the collection *Drum Taps*, written in the context of the American Civil War, and also included in the composition a speech by MP John Bright, delivered at the height of the Crimean War. A central place is occupied by the early composition *Dirge for Two Veterans* (1911), which, despite its stylistic disparity, emphasizes the tragic scope of the work. The cantata's final movements, based on texts from the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke, transform the final repetition of *Dona nobis pacem* into a restrained, almost silent plea for peace—a prayer, as Cobbe points out, that was not heard at the time. In this way, the liturgical text transcends its religious context and becomes an artistic and ethical act of collective memory and anticipation of catastrophe.

Although often classified as poetry, many ancient Chinese texts were originally written as anti-war pieces of music, especially those in the form of yuefu (樂府)—structured poems collected and performed by the Imperial Music Bureau since the Han Dynasty (Morcom, 2004, p. 143). These compositions included rhythm, repetition, and melodic contours that initially made them suitable for singing or chanting. One of the examples is Cao Cao's "Song of the Cemetery," which uses musical imagery to lament the mass death of civilians: "Bones lie bare in the fields, and the crow of a rooster cannot be heard within a radius of a thousand li" is a line that signals not only destruction but also silence as a sonic metaphor for grief (Liu, 2022). Such songs functioned as anti-war musical acts, preserving collective memory and expressing mourning for human losses in war. Their performative repetition, oral circulation, and embedded critique of political violence position them as early forms of protest music, centuries before the term appeared in the Western world.

As we move into the modern era, particularly the twentieth century, anti-war music became increasingly formalized within the lexicon of social movements. From the World Wars to Vietnam, musicians took to mass media platforms—radio, vinyl, protest rallies—to confront militarism, memorialize loss, and galvanize public opposition. This shift marked the transformation of anti-war music from culturally embedded ritual into a conscious political strategy, often amplified through technologies of mass communication.

One of the most emblematic American anti-war songs of World War I was *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier* (1915), with lyrics by Alfred Bryan and music by Al Piantadosi. Framed as a mother's cry, the song expresses a powerful moral opposition to war, appealing to maternal grief and international solidarity: "Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder / To shoot another mother's beloved boy?" (Davis, 2000, pp. 20-21). Published during the period of American neutrality, it became an unexpected commercial success, selling over 700,000 copies and sparking a fierce cultural

debate. While pacifists praised it as a courageous call for peace, critics from more nationalistic and militaristic circles derided it as defeatist and even dangerous, leading to a wave of parodies and patriotic counter-songs (Davis, 2000, pp. 22-23). The song's popularity revealed the deep tensions in public opinion during the early war years. Although it was later eclipsed by pro-war music after the United States entered the conflict in 1917, *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier* remains one of the earliest examples of a mass-market anti-war anthem in American history, notable for its gendered framing of moral opposition to militarism.

The current situation in Russia has disturbing historical parallels with Germany during World War II: protest is directed against both an oppressive state and the war it has unleashed. As in the case of Nazi Germany, anti-war resistance in Russia, including musical resistance, takes place under conditions of strict censorship, surveillance, persecution, and moral isolation. In both cases, music becomes a means of preserving dignity, expressing dissent, and expressing solidarity despite the threat of violence. In the first part of the documentary investigation "Fascism in Modern Russia," journalist Konstantin Goldenzweig examines the origins of the Kremlin's rhetoric about the "denazification" of Ukraine, revealing disturbing historical parallels between Nazi Germany and Putin's Russia. He shows how terms like "fascism" and "Nazism" have become insults, while the methods of the Russian regime increasingly resemble the totalitarian practices of the Third Reich: the elimination of political opponents, the rejection of democracy, the cult of the leader, revanchism, the ideology of exceptionalism, the justification of terrorism, and violence in the name of "national greatness. In both cases, the anti-war resistance, including the musical resistance, arises as a protest against militarism, repression and lies, despite the risk of imprisonment and isolation. This makes the parallel between the 1930s and today not only permissible, but necessary for understanding the current historical threat.

In Nazi Germany, established complete control over culture, creating the *Reichskulturkammer* (Imperial Chamber of Culture). Any form of "degenerate" music was banned, including jazz, atonality, works by Jewish composers, and any lyrics with pacifist or anti-fascist content. Jazz, in particular, was not perceived as protest music in a direct lyrical or mobilizing sense, its cultural function had a pronounced anti-conformist and anti-authoritarian connotation. The arrival of African-American jazz in Germany after World War I, especially thanks to figures such as Sam Wooding, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong, offered both an aesthetic and an ideological alternative to traditional European musical forms. For young people alienated from conservative cultural expectations, jazz represented spontaneity, rhythm, and cosmopolitanism, especially in comparison to military marches or salon music (Potter, 1998, pp. 4-7). The rejection of strict formalism in the genre and the desire for improvisation led some German critics, especially from progressive educational circles and the Bauhaus, to associate jazz with the democratic ideals of the Weimar Republic (Potter, 1998, pp. 16-17). At the same time, the fact that jazz is rooted in the musical traditions of black Americans and imported by performers from colonized or marginalized cultural groups makes it a symbolic form of resistance to racial and national hierarchy. Despite the fact that many Weimar jazzmen performed commercially or in cabarets, the social anxiety that jazz provoked—among conservatives, nationalists, and later Nazis—suggests that it possessed a destructive cultural power, acting as a covert challenge to militarism, racial purity, and authoritarianism. As Potter notes, it is no coincidence that by 1933 the Nazis publicly ridiculed jazz as degenerate, even though for its defenders it continued to symbolize "the interdependence of modernity and freedom" (Potter, 1998, p. 17).

In the context of total violence and dehumanization in the Nazi concentration camps from 1933 to 1945, music played a paradoxical role: while it was a means of violence for the SS, it also became a fragile form of resistance for the prisoners. While prisoners were forced to play in camp orchestras during appeals, punishments,

and even executions, they themselves secretly or openly sang songs that expressed inner freedom, collective memory, and refusal of spiritual subordination. Prisoners sang "Thoughts are free" to emphasize that even in captivity their thoughts remained free from totalitarian control. Such songs were often passed on orally, sung in low voices in the barracks or whispered during hard labor—singing became a gesture of resistance that allowed them to maintain their identity and sense of humanity in inhumane conditions (Fackler, 2007). Some of the prisoners' own compositions, such as the "Bürgermoorlied," later gained international status as anti-war anthems. These songs were written on homemade sheets of paper, cut out as souvenirs, and sung in groups—even under threat of punishment. The mechanism of such protest was complex: lyrics hostile to the authorities were rarely uttered openly, but even preserving the melody of one's own people or alluding to cultural identity was perceived as a challenge to the ideology of annihilation. Prisoners used music to create a temporary "refuge" within the system of terror, where they could regain a sense of belonging, boost their morale, and remind themselves that there was another world beyond the camp. Musical practices thus became not only cultural acts, but also a means of survival and a silent but vibrant form of protest (Fackler, 2007).

The rise of fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War forced many composers to leave their homelands, taking with them not only personal memories of oppression but also a deep ethical commitment to resisting violence through art. Figures such as Béla Bartók, Arnold Schoenberg and Kurt Weill became part of a wider wave of musical emigration that profoundly shaped the anti-war discourse in Western music. Bartók, who left Hungary for the United States in 1940 after protesting Hungary's alliance with Nazi Germany and its anti-Semitic laws, incorporated themes of cultural survival and resistance into his works, particularly in the Concerto for Orchestra (Holocaust Music Project, n.d.-a). Schoenberg, fleeing increasing anti-Semitism and the loss of his university position after the Nazis came to power in 1933, wrote *Survivor of Warsaw* (1947), a heartbreaking testimony to the trauma of the Holocaust and a musical act of remembrance and resistance (Holocaust

Music Project, n.d.-a). Meanwhile, Kurt Weill, who had found refuge in America, continued his collaboration with Bertolt Brecht's political theatre, bringing harsh criticism of war, capitalism and authoritarianism to popular music and Broadway. For these expatriate composers, exile became both a personal tragedy and a moral position: their music not only mourned the violence they had fled, but also offered new possibilities for dignity, solidarity and freedom in the face of oppression.

In mid-20th-century France, anti-war discourse in music found a sharp and vivid expression in Boris Vian's *Le Déserteur* (1954), written as an open letter to the President refusing to serve in the army. The song was presented on the day the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu fell, giving it a powerful political connotation. Despite being censored and banned until 1962, it became a powerful symbol of pacifism and the right to personal refusal to fight. Researcher Charlotte Frankel Gerrard emphasizes that Vian's "little lyrics," including *Le Déserteur*, are thoughtful acts of anti-militarist poetics that expose the hypocrisy of state power and violence (Gerrard, 1972).

In the classical tradition, one the most powerful examples of musical protest was Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (1962), written for the consecration of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral after the bombing. The composer, a convinced pacifist, combined the Latin mass with the poetry of Wilfred Owen, a poet who died in the First World War. The War Requiem was an act of atonement and a public protest against war, using musical contrasts, tritones and polyphony to convey the unbearable violence. In the finale, as Britten's partner Peter Pears notes, the composition does not end the conflict but demands further reflection—"we are not allowed to retire into peaceful slumber" (English National Opera, n.d.).

In tracing the transnational flows of protest music during the Vietnam War, it is important to consider both the domestic American context and the international echoes that shaped mutual solidarity across borders. Although physically distant from

the United States, Vietnam became a central site of cultural and political confrontation, particularly through the musical responses it provoked within the United States itself.

Sarah Hill (2023) offers a comprehensive account of the interaction of American popular music with the political divisions of 1968, arguing that that year's soundtrack conveyed not only the trauma of domestic assassinations and racial riots, but also growing frustration with American military intervention in Southeast Asia. Artists such as Pete Seeger and Joan Baez carried the legacy of traditional folk protest into this era, with songs such as "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" or Baez's "Baptism" (Hill, 2023, pp. 49-51) functioning as allegorical critiques of leadership and war. Others, such as Country Joe McDonald, changed the tone with biting irony in "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag," turning the absurdity of war into public satire. Meanwhile, rock bands such as Creedence Clearwater Revival ("Fortunate Son") and The Doors ("The Unknown Soldier") brought sonic immediacy and anger into the mainstream (Hill, 2023, pp. 50-51). In Hill's analysis, these forms of musical dissent mark the transformation of protest itself: from the didacticism of folk in the early 1960s to a more plural, affective, and stylistically diverse critique of American power. Importantly, the Vietnam War emerged as both a theme and a background-a structuring absence that haunted American musical expression in the genres of folk, soul, and rock.

This American context was not isolated. As Barley Norton (2023) shows in his chapter on Vietnam, American anti-war songs and demonstrations reverberated around the world, even reaching composers in North Vietnam. The most striking example is Phạm Tuyên's song "Play Music for Our Dear American Friends," written after seeing footage of a protest in Washington in 1969. The song was dedicated to Pete Seeger, who later performed it in Hanoi, a symbolic moment of mutual recognition across enemy lines (Norton, 2023, pp. 105-106). Similarly, American activist Norman Morrison, who committed self-immolation in protest of the war,

became a folk hero in Vietnamese songs such as "Morrison, the Human Torch" (Norton, 2023, p. 107).

These intertwined musical narratives illustrate what Norton calls the asymmetrical dynamics of protest music: how a song can function as nationalistic in one context and as radical dissent in another (Norton, 2023, p. 108). Just as *Liberate the South* was sung in Hanoi as a revolutionary anthem, American folk singers performed it as a gesture of solidarity and anti-imperialist resistance. Thus, the very circulation of protest music between the United States and Vietnam destabilized binary categories such as "enemy" and "ally," demonstrating how music mediates political meaning through context, performance, and perception.

Anti-war music, which has been present across civilizations since antiquity, is likewise shaped by context, reinterpretation, and political urgency. As shown, even canonical or religious music can acquire protest significance through recontextualization in times of conflict. In the twentieth century, anti-war music became increasingly embedded in mass culture and emerged as a conscious strategy of political mobilization, with early examples like *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier* demonstrating music's potential to influence public sentiment during World War I. The parallels between contemporary Russia and Nazi Germany further underscore the enduring importance of musical resistance under conditions of repression. In both historical moments, music—whether through the symbolic rebellion of jazz, the fragile songs of concentration camp prisoners, or the powerful contributions of exiled composers like Bartók and Schoenberg—functioned as a means of preserving dignity and opposing authoritarian violence. Furthermore, anti-war music evolved not only in elite or classical traditions but also in popular culture across national borders. The case of Vietnam-era protest music revealed how musical dissent could encapsulate profound political and emotional polarization within American society while simultaneously fostering cross-border solidarity. Thus, anti-war music, like protest music more broadly, consistently challenges binary divisions

between “us” and “them,” offering a dynamic and affective medium through which collective memory, resistance, and ethical action are articulated across time and space.

1.1.4 Protest and anti-war music after 1968

The transformations in protest music after 1968 reflect a broader shift from external confrontation toward internal critique. Initially centered on direct opposition to war and state violence, musical activism gradually expanded to encompass more complex forms of resistance, including reflection on internal societal divisions and contradictions. This evolution highlights how music not only mirrored external struggles but also engaged in deeper interrogations of collective identity, ethical responsibility, and strategies of resistance, setting the stage for new forms of political and cultural expression in genres such as hip-hop, punk, and electronic music.

Since the late 1980s, hip-hop has functioned as a powerful medium of African American protest, combining emotional expression, social critique, and political mobilization. The emergence of N.W.A. and their track *Fuck tha Police* (1988) marked a transition from descriptive narratives to an aggressive critique of systemic racism, with police brutality framed as a collective indictment by the Black community (Peng, 2024). In the twenty-first century, hip-hop evolved beyond "gangsta rap" toward more introspective activism, exemplified by Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), where tracks like *The Blacker the Berry* explore not only institutional violence but also internal community conflicts (Craig, 2015; Vandagriff, 2015). Public Enemy redefined hip-hop as a political platform, merging futuristic aesthetics, Afrocentrism, and sonic militancy to resist racism, poverty, and historical amnesia (Collin, 2015). Despite internal contradictions and commercial pressures, these artists fostered a collective political sensibility, illustrating how hip-hop serves not merely as a mirror of social crises but as a medium for political imagination and cultural resistance.

In his 2008 publication, Kevin Dunn posits that punk rock functions as a novel paradigm of global communication, underpinned by the concept of the body, corporeality, emotion, immediacy, and the repudiation of hierarchical structures. In his manifesto against academic alienation, Dunn's perspective on punk transcends the confines of a mere musical genre, embracing its role as a comprehensive political message interwoven with DIY aesthetics and a culture of everyday resistance. In this discourse, the author posits that punk constitutes a domain of counter-hegemony, wherein novel meanings and forms of communication are disseminated not through conventional channels such as state or corporate media, but rather through alternative means including fanzines, cassettes, illegal clubs, international tours and even squats. Drawing upon his personal experience of participating in the local scene, the author demonstrates how, through sound, bodily engagement, and the destruction of the barrier between stage and audience, a political consciousness is formed – not imposed from above, but born from an internal sense of alienation and rage. Notwithstanding the critique of commercialisation, Dunn emphasises that the very form of punk – characterised by noise, disruption and anti-aesthetics—constitutes an intervention in the established order. Furthermore, in countries of the Global South, such as Mexico, Turkey, and Morocco, punk transcends mere expression of discontent, serving as a medium for the formation of subjectivity within a context of repression. As Dunn observes, within these contexts, the act of identifying as "punk" assumes a political dimension, given that the aesthetic itself becomes a potential threat to prevailing power structures. Punk is not merely a style; rather, it is a means of existing in a world where one's voice is not heard. As Dunn concludes: Dunn (2008, p. 209) asserts that the prevailing state of global affairs is unsatisfactory and that individuals have the capacity and responsibility to effect positive change.

The Riot Grrrl movement, which emerged in the United States in the early 1990s, combined third-wave feminism, punk aesthetics, and D.I.Y. politics into a powerful form of musical resistance and female self-organization that opposed both the mainstream music industry and the male-dominated punk scene (Collin, 2015). It is

evident that bands such as Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, and Heavens to Betsy utilised raw, aggressive sounds and intensely personal lyrics to address themes such as violence, corporality, mental health, and racism, thereby transforming intimate experiences into political acts. The dissemination of these ideas is facilitated by DIY zines, which serve to establish horizontal networks of solidarity, thereby subverting the conventional standards of popular culture. Concurrently, the so-called "angry women in rock"—namely, Alanis Morissette, Fiona Apple and Meredith Brooks—entered the mainstream, adopting many of the themes of Riot Grrrl (female rage, sexuality, trauma) in a more mellow, commercially appealing form that often reproduced rather than subverted gender norms. This transformation of radical speech into a marketable product demonstrated how the media and industry can appropriate and defuse a potentially threatening message, effectively transforming protest into a brand and rage into a sales strategy.

The advent of rave culture in Berlin following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 serves as a salient illustration of how the historical vacuum of Stunde Null gave rise to a cultural revolution, wherein chaos and anarchy became the crucible for the emergence of musical messianism. In an atmosphere characterised by destroyed buildings, inexpensive housing and legal uncertainty, techno music became the language of the new world, and the Love Parade its public liturgy. As Matthew Collin (2015) observes, the act represented more than a mere dance; it was a political statement. The march through the Brandenburg Gate, accompanied by sound systems and trucks emblazoned with club logos, was a manifestation of a new Europe without borders. However, by the mid-1990s, this utopian vision met with a stark realisation: the sponsorship of tobacco and energy brands transformed the parade into a corporate carnival, thereby diminishing its radical edge. In response to this, Fuck Parade emerged as a radical, anti-commercial alternative that insisted on the city's right to be a living organism rather than a mere showcase. The conclusion of the event was marked by a tragic incident: a stampede during the procession in Duisburg in 2010 resulted in the demise of 21 individuals, thereby serving as a poignant emblem of the

manner in which utopias, burdened by their own substantial mass appeal, succumb to the pressures of institutionalisation.

Electronic music can function as both the soundtrack and the body of protest. In the case of the British rave movement of the early 1990s, legislation was directed towards the structure of the music itself—defined as 'a sequence of repetitive beats'. Section 63 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 was the legislative basis for the police's power to shut down such events, with the explicit targeting of illegal techno parties (Mullin, 2014). The response manifested as mass street resistance, evidenced by protest marches in London and spontaneous 'free parties' outside Parliament. The repetitive nature of the beat thus became an act of disobedience, with the party itself becoming a performative form of resistance to state regulation of leisure. Furthermore, protest raves have been observed to function as a medium for the establishment of ephemeral autonomous zones. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the case of the Queerhana movement in Israel/Palestine. The organisation of these unauthorised social gatherings in public green spaces, beneath highway bridges, and even in subterranean shelters did not merely serve to establish safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community; it also served to interrogate the legitimacy of the state's monopoly on public space. The "radical joy" strategy entailed the transformation of thoroughfares into performance spaces, with dance serving as a medium for expressing emancipation. This approach drew upon the tenets of carnival, aligning with the philosophical tenets espoused by Mikhail Bakhtin (as elucidated in Bosque Utopico, 2017). By means of musical performance and the deployment of symbols such as pink ribbons and broken dolls, Queerhana sought to create an alternative reality that served to subvert heterocispatriarchal and nationalist norms.

In the post-Soviet space, the symbolic significance of techno and club culture acquired a particularly acute political dimension in the events surrounding the Bassiani club in Tbilisi. In the aftermath of a police raid that took place in May 2018, a significant number of young people organised a mass protest rave on the steps of

the former parliament building, declaring: "We Dance Together, We Fight Together." (Fedorova, 2018). In this context, music functioned not solely as a cultural indicator, but also as a foundational element for the pursuit of political self-determination. Bassiani had become a focal point for leftist, queer, feminist and anarchist groups, and the raid represented an infringement on their autonomy. The response to the political situation was not violence, but rather dance, which thus became a form of political solidarity and resistance.

In the cases of the UK, Israel and Georgia, electronic music functions as a form of "sound activism" in which rhythm, space and body form a single tactical module of resistance. Dance is not merely an abstract hedonistic practice, but rather a bodily manifesto: a means through which to regain control over space, time, and the body. The potential for electronic music to act as a catalyst for the formation of temporary communities that challenge the status quo is a political force that has not yet been fully realised.

In his meticulous historical study, José António Gomes (2024) emphasises the pivotal function of protest songs (*canto de intervenção*) in the context of Portugal's Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, underscoring their role as instruments of democratic resistance against the Salazar and Caetano dictatorships. Notable songs such as José Afonso's iconic "Grândola, Vila Morena" transcended their status as mere cultural artefacts, becoming active catalysts of change. "Grândola" was famously used as a coded signal to launch the military-led revolution that restored democracy. Gomes demonstrates that protest music, firmly embedded in Portuguese literary and folk traditions whilst concurrently influenced by international movements, characterised the revolutionary period with its emphasis on solidarity, justice and freedom. Furthermore, Gomes (2024) posits that the integration of poetry and political urgency in this music gave rise to a novel form of cultural expression, wherein musical performance became a medium for political action, thereby influencing both collective memory and future generations.

The multi-dimensionality is particularly evident when looking at specific historical cases from different parts of the world. In Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the Nueva Canción movement became the embodiment of musical resistance to dictatorships and economic inequality. Chilean performers Violeta Parra and Victor Jara used folklore as a language of popular political subjectivity. After the 1973 military coup, Jara was arrested, brutally tortured and killed. His songs, especially "Manifiesto", lived on in exile, becoming an instrument of collective memory and cultural resistance beyond the country's borders (Girolami, 2022).

In apartheid South Africa, protest music functioned as a transnational mediator of struggle. The African National Congress-affiliated Amandla Cultural Ensemble toured Europe, making the struggle visible to a global audience, while at home artists such as Sipho "Hotstix" Mabuse created politically charged content at the risk of their freedom and lives (Chemam, 2024). These forms of musical action created a cultural infrastructure of solidarity that complemented political mobilisation.

One of the recent Asian examples is protest music in Myanmar following the military coup in 2021. As McLachlan (2023) notes, in the context of digital repression and the militarisation of public space, musical forms of protest shifted from persuading mass audiences to bolstering the morale of resisters. Music became a form of ritual affective reinforcement for already engaged communities, especially young people, for whom it became a resource of mental and cultural resilience.

In general, and in the Western world between the 1960s and 2000s, English-language rock music became a crucial platform for articulating anti-war sentiments and critically engaging with militarism (Azhogina, 2022). Bands such as the Sex Pistols and Dead Kennedys sharply criticized military aggression and government violence, while groups like Metallica, Megadeth, and Slayer addressed the existential threat of nuclear war, conveying a deep anxiety about possible annihilation. Black Sabbath's "War Pigs" emerged as a canonical anti-war anthem, exposing the corruption of military and political elites. The Beatles, particularly John Lennon, played a vital role

in the anti-war movement, with songs like “Give Peace a Chance” becoming anthems for peace protests against the Vietnam War. Similarly, Pink Floyd’s albums *The Wall* and *The Final Cut* offered profound critiques of militarism, social alienation, and the psychological traumas inflicted by warfare (Azhogina, 2022).

In the aftermath of Yugoslavia's dissolution and the violent consequences of the Bosnian War, electronic music scenes, exemplified by those fostered by Desert Storm, emerged not merely as countercultural expressions but as mobile infrastructures of resistance, solidarity, and post-traumatic recovery. Matthew Collin in *Pop Grenade* offers an analysis of the transnational rave movement, conceptualising it as a "symbolic showdown" between the idealism embodied by free parties and the residual violence of state repression and war memory. In his account of the raves held in post-war Bihać, where local youth, British DJs, and NATO soldiers danced together amid signs reading "leave your guns at the door," Collin illustrates how sound systems offered temporary autonomous zones that transcended borders, class, and even trauma. These events were not merely expressions of unbridled exultation; rather, they served as liminal spaces wherein the political, the spiritual, and the sonic converged to form what the author has termed "a free zone in Babylon" – an idealised realm where music temporarily transcended historical divisions. Digital transformation: music, protest and protest music

The era of recorded sound began in 1877 when Thomas Edison recorded and played back his own voice for the first time using a phonograph. This practical invention allowed the recording of ephemeral sound events and contrasted with Guglielmo Marconi's more philosophical dream. The "godfather" of radio broadcasting believed that no sound ever disappeared without a trace but rather faded to a level inaudible to the human ear and could be restored with a sufficiently powerful device. Although Marconi's theory is scientifically incorrect, it reflects the deep human desire to overcome the transience of existence and leave a mark on history (Milner, 2009). According to Milner, it was Edison's invention that became the real embodiment of this dream of sonic immortality. The phonograph and subsequent recording

technologies realized the utopian idea of capturing the mechanical energy of a sound wave and recreating it, thereby making it permanent. This process led to a fundamental shift in perception: the representation of music — that is, its recording — gradually came to be perceived as music itself. Thus, the history of recording is the history of the evolution of the "Edisonian dream" and how technological change has affected the definition of music and its authenticity.

In the modern digital age, this evolution has reached a new level, transforming music from a purely auditory experience into a multimedia one. As Heather McLachlan (2023) notes when analyzing protest music distributed via social media (Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok), the visual component cannot be ignored. Often, the visual sequence accompanying a song carries the main semantic load, which cannot be deduced from the text alone. This aspect is especially important for understanding how music functions in the context of contemporary social movements.

The digital transformation of the music industry has significantly altered not only how music is produced and consumed, but also the very socio-technical systems that support its existence. As Dolata (2020) writes, this transformation spans several decades and includes a series of interrelated technological and organizational shifts: from physical formats (vinyl, CD) to digital downloads, and eventually to streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music. This shift from ownership to access represents more than a technical upgrade; it reconfigures the cultural logic of music consumption. Listeners now engage with music not as discrete commodities (albums, singles), but as continuous services embedded in platform ecosystems. As a result, the traditional model of distribution—centered around the sale of tangible or downloadable goods—has been supplanted by platform-mediated subscriptions and algorithmic recommendation systems. These changes are not neutral; they introduce new forms of control, visibility, and cultural production that reshape the relationships between artists, audiences, and intermediaries.

Central to this transformation is what Dolata (2020) characterizes as a shift in the mode of musical consumption from purchasing to surveilled and curated access. In earlier models, users selected music based on taste, genre, or social recommendation, often engaging with full albums or artist discographies. In contrast, today's users experience music as algorithmically filtered and pre-structured flows, designed to match specific moods, activities, and temporal contexts. This change is reinforced by the platform architecture: interfaces, playlist logic, and data-driven personalization collectively limit user autonomy while promising infinite choice. As Adam (2022) notes in their study of user experience on streaming platforms, such infrastructures subtly encourage passive listening and transform music into a background function—serving emotional regulation, concentration, or ambient occupation of time. This trend, often referred to as “functional listening,” shifts the cultural significance of music from expressive artifact to utility object, embedded within routines of productivity, leisure, or self-care.

Alongside algorithmic curation comes the intensification of user surveillance. As Dolata (2020) observes, platforms like Spotify rely heavily on data extraction and behavioral profiling to deliver hyper-personalized experiences. Every interaction—search, skip, playlist creation, time-of-day usage—is logged, aggregated, and monetized. Unlike traditional broadcast systems, which targeted broad demographics, digital platforms construct “data doubles” of individual users (Drott, 2018), enabling precision targeting not only of music, but of advertisements and branded experiences. Adam (2022) confirms this logic, noting that users frequently do not perceive the extent of monitoring they undergo, nor the economic value their behavioral data generates. In this context, the platform becomes not only a mediator of culture but a site of capitalist extraction—where musical enjoyment is intertwined with the commodification of attention and emotion.

Furthermore, digital transformation has redefined the role of intermediaries and reshaped the power dynamics of the industry. As Dolata (2020) points out, the most significant innovations—P2P sharing, iTunes, streaming—originated from actors

outside the traditional music business. Tech firms such as Apple, Google, and Spotify displaced major labels as the primary gatekeepers of access and visibility. While the “majors” (Universal, Sony, Warner) adapted and continue to dominate in terms of content ownership, their influence over distribution and listener engagement has waned. In turn, visibility on streaming platforms now hinges on algorithmic placement within curated playlists. As Adam (2022) explains, this dynamic creates a paradox: while streaming services offer unprecedented access to a global music archive, they also impose a logic of scarcity through recommendation hierarchies. Only a small fraction of available content is surfaced to users, making exposure increasingly dependent on opaque and commercially driven platform decisions.

Finally, the commodification of music itself has evolved. As Dolata (2020) elaborates, the product form has shifted from standalone albums or singles to assembled, contextualized listening experiences—mood playlists, algorithmic mixes, personalized “daily drives.” In this model, music is less a finished object and more a *configurable service*. This transformation affects not only how value is extracted but how music is experienced: no longer as a unified artistic statement, but as a modular element in a larger behavioral environment. Adam (2022) connects this shift to broader cultural tendencies toward personalization and affective self-regulation. Music becomes a technology of mood management, embedded in daily routines, and shaped by the same logics that govern advertising and social media. The result is a form of listening that is simultaneously intimate and externalized, deeply personal and highly orchestrated.

These developments signal not merely a new phase in the delivery of music, but a systemic rearticulation of its cultural, economic, and technological foundations. The digital transformation of the music industry exemplifies how technological infrastructures restructure the conditions of cultural production, distribution, and reception. As Dolata (2020) and Adam (2022) demonstrate, platforms do not just mediate access—they shape meaning, behavior, and value, fundamentally altering what music is, how it is heard, and how it is lived.

Digitalisation has transformed protest into what Emiliano Treré (2018) calls a hybrid media ecology, where digital and traditional channels co-exist, reinforce, and sometimes contradict each other. Music, long a vehicle of collective memory and resistance, now circulates through the same hybrid infrastructures as memes, hashtags, and livestreams. Just as the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico relied on YouTube and Twitter to contest mainstream media (Treré, 2018), protest songs today reach audiences not only through live gatherings but also via Spotify playlists, TikTok clips, or Telegram groups. This digital dissemination reshapes the temporal and spatial reach of music as protest: songs no longer need centralized rallies to mobilize, but can reverberate across global networks in real time, creating both new forms of solidarity and new vulnerabilities to state surveillance or algorithmic suppression.

At the same time, digitalisation introduces what Treré terms a “new grammar of protest,” in which short, affectively charged fragments—memes, slogans, soundbites—circulate as political shorthand (Treré, 2018). Music naturally adapts to this grammar, since rhythm, melody, and lyrical refrains already condense complex grievances into emotionally powerful symbols. Protest movements increasingly employ songs not just as cultural expressions but as viral media artifacts that embody collective identity, moving between street performance and online virality. This convergence highlights both the continuity of music’s role in protest and its mutation within digital capitalism: songs become at once commodities on streaming platforms and instruments of dissent, entangled within the sublime yet precarious ecology of digital activism.

2 Digitalisation of Protest in the Global Context

Since the beginning of the 2010s, social networks platforms have assumed a pivotal role in the mobilization, communication, and self-representation of movements. The Arab Spring (2010-2011) — a series of democratic protests and uprisings that spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa—was widely regarded as a "Facebook revolution" or a "Twitter revolution." This characterization underscores the pivotal role that digital platforms played in facilitating rapid, decentralized coordination and circumventing state-controlled systems. Media (Howard & Hussain, 2013). Subsequent social movements, including OCCUPY WALL STREET, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo, exhibited analogous dynamics. The utilization of hashtags and the rapid dissemination of visual content, audio recordings, and musical compositions via social media platforms played a pivotal role in mobilizing individuals and groups. These phenomena not only fueled direct action but also precipitated profound changes within the social landscape (Tufekci, 2017). According to Bennett and Segerberg (2012), these changes mark the transition from collective actions to "unifying actions," whereby individual expressions—tweets, remixes, live broadcasts—are combined into large-scale political participation using digital infrastructure.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the phenomenon of digitalization in protest movements transcends the confines of conventional commercial platforms. Messaging services such as Telegram and Signal, which are highlighted and partially open, have become vital tools in conditions of repression, censorship, and surveillance. During the Hong Kong protests of 2019-2020, Telegram channels and groups played a pivotal role in facilitating real-time coordination, efficient

information distribution, and the secure dissemination of crucial information, thereby counteracting state surveillance (Lee, 2020). In the Iranian green movement (2009) and subsequent protests, an encrypted relationship enabled activists to circumvent censorship and preserve transnational solidarity, despite the disruption of internet connectivity (Rahimi, 2011). Telegram, in particular, has evolved into a hybrid environment, combining both public and private characteristics. Within this environment, information disseminates through semi-closed channels, yet it retains the potential for rapid and widespread dissemination through forwards and reposts (Santos et al., 2021). The architecture of the platform has been demonstrated to be resistant to blocking, which has been evidenced by Russia's unsuccessful attempt to ban the platform from 2018 to 2020 (Nocetti, 2021). This has led to the strengthening of the platform's reputation as a "reserve exit" for those who find themselves in opposition within authoritarian conditions.

Concurrently, open social platforms—namely Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and semi-public servers (e.g., Telegram/Discord)—have facilitated the growth of the public blog community. As demonstrated by the works of Poell & van Dijck, these phenomena do not merely facilitate mobilization; they actively construct the very infrastructure of communication, employing algorithmic curation of feeds, personalization, and orientation toward virality. This transformation of communication into continuous flows occurs in real-time (Poell & van Dijck, 2018). This dynamic gives rise to what has been termed "connective action," whereby individuals find themselves profoundly divided by their personal perspectives, with varying degrees of commitment and the allocation of time and attention. This phenomenon has been observed to manifest in substantial mobilizations on a wide scale (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, this phenomenon is reinforced by the infrastructure of vulnerability, which encompasses the rules of use, the requirement for real names, the moderation of the "community," and the commercialization of data. These factors periodically suppress or deform activist visibility (Poell & van Dijck, 2018). Consequently, the protest transitioned from an event "on the street" to a quotidian practice of mediation. It accelerated, was archived, and circulated between

sites where algorithms rewarded affect, symbols, and repertoires capable of remixing and mass complicity (Poell & van Dijck, 2018). In the context of platform ecology, cultural forms—ranging from memes to songs—function as cohesive forces within collective experiences, rapidly traversing from online to offline and vice versa. This phenomenon gives rise to instances of digitalized protest music.

Drawing from two empirical works, it is posited that digital protest music functions as a unifying element, binding online communities and street mobilization. However, its operation is constrained by the paradigm of commercialized platform logic. O. Sadler's discursive analysis demonstrates that TikTok facilitates a range of expressions and forms of communication, including lip-sync as a gesture of challenge and hashtag tactics. Concurrently, it displaces the context and transforms the protest soundtrack into a background sound, driven by algorithmically rewarded attention (potentially risking takedowns and copyright claims on the audio track). Consequently, musical circulation and engagement are enhanced as a connective action. However, this process is accompanied by the risk of de-contextualization and commercial dilution of meaning. Concurrently, V. Lee and G. Kao utilize the BLM case to illustrate how BTS fans and broader K-pop networks translate emotional attachment to music into transnational solidarity, manifesting in the form of donations, coordination, and online mass mobilization. This process effectively transforms fan infrastructures into conduits of political participation. The amalgamation of these findings elucidates the phenomenon whereby music, within the context of a digital milieu, functions as a cohesive agent for affective communities while concurrently exhibiting vulnerability to the influences of platform framing and commercialization. A similar phenomenon was observed in Belarus, where Telegram channels such as NEXTA not only orchestrated protests but also disseminated protest songs and memes, ensuring that music would play a pivotal role in articulating dissent within an authoritarian environment (Wijermars & Lokot, 2022).

However, the advent of digital technology has also led to a reconfiguration of the risks associated with protest music. It is evident that platforms offer a certain degree of visibility; however, they concomitantly facilitate surveillance and censorship. In the Iranian Women, Life, Freedom movement, digital technologies have emerged as instruments of mobilization and a platform for cultural confrontation. As Victoria Balan observes, media portrayals underscore the dualistic nature of these technologies. On the one hand, they facilitate tactical creativity, horizontal connections, and digital "witnessing." Conversely, these technologies can be utilized as instruments of control and repression. In this context, protest songs shared on Instagram and YouTube played an instrumental role in fostering a sense of community and serving as a platform for public expression. However, musicians and activists confronted challenges such as content removal, diminished reach due to algorithms, and incessant digital monitoring by state entities. Consequently, musical protest expression in Iran became intertwined with a broader conflict between the potential of digital platforms for mobilization and their vulnerability to censorship and repressive surveillance (Balan, 2024).

In this sense, digitalization does not simply extend traditional protest music into new media; it alters its ontology. Protest songs are increasingly less about fixed lyrical texts or canonical performances and more about iterative, circulating fragments—choruses repurposed as memes, verses quoted in protest posters, or melodies remixed into new genres. This fluidity enables protest music to thrive within what Drott (2018) calls “the digital affect economy,” where circulation, remix, and visibility become forms of political agency in themselves. These global developments provide an essential backdrop for analyzing Russia, where Telegram, YouTube, and streaming platforms have played a crucial role in sustaining anti-war protest music despite censorship and repression.

During the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, music videos emerged as a powerful form of digital protest communication, particularly on YouTube, where activists responded to state-controlled mainstream media silence (Jenzen et al., 2020). This

chapter, part of the AHRC-funded Aesthetics of Protest project, situates protest music videos within broader discourses of video activism, aligning them with live-streams, mash-ups, and political remix culture. Music, though historically marginalized in political theory, is argued to be central to mobilization and resistance, especially when paired with digital tools and social media (Street, 2012; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004).

The authors analyze a corpus of 133 videos retrieved from over 300,000 tweets mentioning “Gezi Parkı,” noting that music videos comprised a striking 25% of the sample (Jenzen et al., 2020). These audiovisual materials were largely decentralized in production, created by individuals without official coordination, and circulated primarily via Twitter. Drawing on genres as diverse as rock, rap, jazz, folk, and pop, the videos offered not only emotional engagement and aesthetic appeal but also a critique of dominant political narratives. Remix aesthetics—such as juxtaposing police violence with hopeful lyrics or ironic reinterpretations of state media—allowed for multimodal resistance and the formation of a shared protest identity, notably around the reclaimed label *çapulcu* (“marauder”).

Importantly, the study highlights how YouTube became a key site for affective and rhetorical resistance, enabling protest music to transcend the streets and extend the movement’s temporal and spatial reach. Through musical performances, visual mash-ups, and hybrid cultural references, protestors articulated a collective voice across ideological divides—uniting nationalists, Kurds, feminists, and LGBTQ+ groups under a single audiovisual protest culture. In doing so, Gezi Park music videos offered not just representation but reimagination of political participation in the digital age (Jenzen et al., 2020).

An important testimony to the current situation of musicians is the journalistic and critical recording of their struggle for freedom of speech. Thus, in a recent essay by Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, published in the independent publication *Hearing Things*, it is emphasized that artists are under pressure from state structures,

corporations and concert organizers, but continue to use music as a form of protest and self-affirmation. The text cites examples - from the criminal prosecution of the Irish group Kneecap for a symbolic gesture of solidarity with Palestine to the boycott of European festivals by musicians protesting against the owners' ties to arms and oil and gas corporations. Particular attention is paid to the American context: the loss of Kehlani concerts due to their political position, solidarity gestures by Noname and Astrid Sonne, as well as an open letter from hundreds of classical musicians against censorship. These cases illustrate that music is not only an aesthetic phenomenon but also an arena of political struggle, where artists defend the right to expression and collective action (Shepherd, 2025).

3 Protest Music in the Russian Context

3.1 The Origins and Formation of Russian Protest Music: from Violent Romance to the Late Soviet Underground

The genealogy of Russian protest music as an independent cultural phenomenon can be traced back to skomorokhi (buffoons), who were medieval Russian semi-professional and professional performers. (Bolshaya Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya, N.D.). They combined music, dance, theatrical play, circus tricks, and satire, often organizing into large wandering troupes during the 15th–17th centuries. In their songs and skits, buffoons often ridiculed boyars, officials, and priests. Their texts were grotesque and parodic in nature, highlighting social vices—greed, hypocrisy, abuse. For other people, this was a safe way to hear criticism of the authorities in the public space. Although they reached the height of popularity as festive entertainers, their pagan associations and satirical edge provoked persecution from both Church and state, leading to their suppression by decrees in the mid-17th century, with only traces surviving in later folk culture.

The end of the 19th century was an especially important period, when revolutionary songs became a key tool for articulating collective discontent and mobilizing society. In his study of this period, Rustam Fakhretdinov (2018) focuses on the unique trajectory of the "Russian Marseillaise" by Pyotr Lavrov, a work, that later became decisive for the soundscape of the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Lavrov's text, laid upon the original Marseillaise music, was not typical of the canonical revolutionary anthem, as it deliberately borrowed the structure and intonation of the "cruel romance":

The rich kulaks, a greedy pack,

Plunder your hard work.

The gluttons grow fat on your sweat,

They tear your last piece.

It was a popular urban ballad genre at that time (with French anthem as primary source, obviously), characterized by increased emotional expression. It made it possible to combine elite revolutionary poetics with common people's emotional registers, understandable and close to a wide urban audience. The hybrid nature of the song, which combined political acuity with romantic melody, provided it with mass popularity and cultural roots. Thus, the "Russian Marseillaise" not only became a legitimate cultural artifact of mass mobilization, but also revealed a fundamental principle, that will define Russian protest music for decades to come: its ability to translate abstract political ideals into emotionally charged and culturally recognizable sound forms, that can evoke a deep collective response (Fakhretdinov, 2018). The endurance of the "Russian Marseillaise" as both revolutionary anthem and popular ballad was such that from February 1917 until early 1918 it even functioned as the provisional state anthem of Russia. Its lyrical structure—contrasting the "old" and "new" worlds, dramatizing the violent rupture—mirrored the dominant genre of the cruel romance, which was then the most widespread form of urban democratic song. This fusion of revolutionary content with a mass-cultural format explains why it resonated so powerfully with broad audiences across class lines (Snegovskaya, 2017).

The origins of the anti-war tradition in Russian song culture demonstrate a complex interweaving of the official militaristic canon and rare but significant voices of resistance. As early as 1917, Alexander Vertinsky created what is arguably the first and one of the most powerful Russian anti-war compositions. His "What I Must Say," composed subsequent to the execution of cadets in Moscow, signified a pivotal advancement in the public articulation of compassion for the "superfluous" casualties of the war. The song rapidly garnered the authorities' attention, as evidenced by its inclusion in the renowned apocrypha concerning the ban on "even breathing" as an extreme form of censorship pressure (Svoboda, 2022).

Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 8, composed in 1943 during the period of World War II, is regarded as one of the most poignant musical expressions of the

tragedy of violence. Despite the composer's self-professed "optimistic" character in official commentary, critics and researchers have noted that the work is based on a requiem intonation, conveying an atmosphere of suffering and despair (ABC Classic, 2019). Subsequently, the Soviet authorities condemned the symphony for "pessimism" and banned its performance, which only served to strengthen the perception of this work as a covert form of protest against the war and the totalitarian regime.

As this study focuses on songs and popular music, in the 1950s, during the Khrushchev "thaw", the contours of an independent youth culture began to shape in Soviet society. This process took place against the background of official rejection of Western musical trends, primarily jazz and early rock-and-roll. In 1955 jazz was formally rehabilitated, and saxophones, which had been banned since 1946, returned to pop orchestras. Still, the state ideology continued to cultivate a moral panic around "obscene body movements" and Western dance styles such as the twist. Attempts by the authorities to offer young people ideologically verified alternatives, for example, the *Moskvichka* dance or the East German *Lipsi*, failed completely. Against this background, the first noticeable subculture in the USSR emerged—*stilyagi* (like stylish *dudes*). They defiantly adopted an Americanized aesthetic: tight trousers, bright shirts, flashy accessories. Jazz and dance became central elements of their identity, causing both fascination and sharp public condemnation. The dudes did not create their own music, but they formed an autonomous cultural space and, more importantly, laid the foundations of underground networks for the exchange and distribution of Western recordings. It was these networks that contributed to the emergence of the unique phenomenon of "bone music"—the artisanal practice of recording illegal music on used X-rays. By the end of the decade, the availability of affordable reel-to-reel tape recorders made the copying process significantly more efficient, which laid the technological and social foundation for *magnitizdat*, which is a key phenomenon of underground music culture in the following decades.

Another example of this semi-official and yet oppositional youth creativity was the song “Makhnyom v derevnyu,” circulating among students and stilyagi in the late 1950s. Borrowing the melody from Osvaldo Farrés’ *Tres Palabras*, it combined humor, everyday Soviet imagery, and Westernized aesthetics. Its very performance outside state sanction marked a subtle protest: an assertion of cultural autonomy through music, anticipating the larger infrastructures of informal distribution that would define Soviet underground sound culture (Snegovskaya, 2017).

The 1960s marked the true birth of Soviet rock, which was inextricably linked to the global phenomenon of Beatlemania. As noted by Ingvar Steinholt (2003), the first manifestations of this movement were the beat groups, such as Tarakany, where Polish students have played, and Sokol, which began with the performance of cover-versions of The Beatles’ songs. At the same time, more experimental rock musicians, like Alexander Gradsky, created collectives in which they tried to synthesize Western rock-idioms with elements of Russian folklore. Gradsky’s band, created when he was 16, was called Skomorokhi (buffoons).

One of the key problems of the early stage was language ambivalence: attempts to sing rock in Russian were often perceived as clumsy and secondary, since many considered English to be an organic and integral part of the genre. Nevertheless, Sokol group’s “*Gde Tot Krai*” set a precedent for the formation of the Russian-language rock-repertoire. Later, one of the fundamental features of Russian rock, that distinguishes it from its Western counterparts, is its pronounced word-centricity. According to Steinholt (2003), in this cultural form, texts, often referred to as “rock poetry”, carried a significantly greater semantic load, than musical accompaniment. This emphasis on the word was due to a number of factors: strict censorship, a ban on dancing during concerts, which shifted the focus to listening, limited access to official media, and, importantly, the literary tradition deeply rooted in Russian culture, where poetry was historically perceived as a carrier of truth and civic conscience.

The bard tradition provided not only dissident voices such as Galich or Okudzhava but also more “legal” works that became enduring protest symbols. Aleksandr Gorodnitsky’s “Atlanty” (1963), awarded a state prize on the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, later acquired a second life as a civic anthem in Saint Petersburg. During demonstrations in defense of the Isaakievsky Cathedral in 2017, the song was performed as a rallying call, confirming how bardic poetics could be reactivated as civic protest across decades (Snegovskaya, 2017).

Material scarcity also had a profound effect on the aesthetics of the early stage, as chronic shortage of instruments and sound equipment forced musicians to resort to the inventive practice of DIY (do it yourself): guitars were made from pieces of furniture, and telephone capsules were used as pickups. This created a raw, noisy, but symbolically authentic sound, that became the hallmark of the underground. Informal beat-cafes and underground concerts served as grassroots venues for performances.

However, by the end of the 1960s, the Komsomol attempted to bring the spontaneous movement under control, by creating the VIA system (Vocal-and-instrumental ensembles). In exchange for their professional status and access to official venues, groups were required to meet strict ideological and aesthetic standards. Although VIA was often disparagingly referred to as the "government stage" by dedicated rock fans, its massive popularity and partial integration of rock-elements into the repertoire played an important role in gradually legitimizing the genre and introducing its aesthetics to a broad Soviet audience, paving the way for the cultural breakthrough of the 1980s (Steinholt, 2004).

The 1970s were a period of simultaneous consolidation and further underground diversification of Soviet rock-culture. While the state sought to channel and control the genre through official VIA structures, musicians and fans continued to find new forms of expression. Festivals in peripheral republics, such as Latvia and Armenia, provided a rare opportunity for open performances, sometimes attracting thousands of spectators, but at the same time attracting the attention of the authorities, who

feared a repeat of Western youth riots. At the same time, a subculture of Soviet hippies developed, which through external attributes—long hair, jeans, hitchhiking—and spiritual eclecticism, mixing Christianity and Eastern religions, expressed a silent protest against state atheism and unification. In the same period, such a semi-legal genre as rock opera also emerged. Thanks to their scripted, dramaturgically constructed form, rock operas were more easily censored, than unpredictable live concerts.

Recordings of *Jesus Christ Superstar* were widely circulated in magnetoizdat networks, and Soviet adaptations of the genre contributed to the further penetration of rock-aesthetics into popular culture. The official VIA system, in turn, institutionalized a preference for technically complex and virtuosic styles such as hard rock, fusion, and progressive rock, pushing more rebellious or lyrical forms into the underground. There, in the underground, bands such, as Saint-Petersburg, Time Machine and Myths, developed their own unique style, combining rhythm-and blues, the influence of bard songs and socially resonant lyrics. They gained popularity, despite constant harassment, lack of resources, and limited access to tools. The underground infrastructure was maintained by those organizing underground concerts at great personal risk, and the procedures of "litovka" (unofficial approval of texts) and the magnetoizdat network allowed musicians to circumvent censorship and distribute their recordings. By the late 1970s, the emergence of punk, new wave, and heavy-metal brought a new DIY-aesthetic and increased tensions with official culture, laying the groundwork for the breakthrough Leningrad Rock-Club (LRC) in the next decade (Steinholt, 2004).

Taking into account the same lyric-centrism mentioned above, Aquarium, Kino, DDT and Alisa were perceived by the audience not just as musicians, but as poets of their generation, articulating spiritual, civil and existential problems. In this sense, the lyrics of their songs functioned as a substitute for banned literature, as a means of communication in a limited public sphere, and as a space for preserving oppositional thought. Russian rock, according to Steinholt, inherited from the bard tradition

(Vladimir Vysotsky, Bulat Okudzhava, Alexander Galich) the belief, that the word itself can be a weapon of dissent. Thus, even with the weakening of straightforward political slogans, the "spiritual" dimension of lyricism retained its protest function, contrasting the values of authenticity, individualism, and nonconformism with the official ideology (Steinholt, 2004).

Alongside literary samizdat, the circulation of unauthorized tape recordings, or magnitizdat, was also developed. Julia De Florio (2020) defines it as an independent cultural sphere. Unlike the printed word, magnitizdat emphasized live performances and "intonation" capturing the uniqueness of oral presentations as an integral part of the dissident message. The mass availability of tape recorders, as well as the relatively mild punishments associated with their use compared to the distribution of texts, provided magnitizdat with much wider coverage than samizdat. De Florio traces its roots to tourist, amateur, and author songs, emphasizing that these genres carried an alternative system of values that opposed the state stage. According to De Florio, magnitizdat became a technology of dissent and an "intonation revolution," offering Soviet citizens an authentic way to express themselves and creating a unique archive of unofficial sound culture (De Florio, 2020).

At the same time, micro-movements of the early 2000s developed their own protest soundtracks. The radical ecologists' anthem "No pasaran!" exemplifies the narrow yet intense circulation of protest songs. Sung in summer camps at sites of contested construction projects such as Khimki forest, it operated as both mobilization tool and in-group marker. Its resonance shows how niche activist communities substituted themselves for a mass movement, using music to imagine collective resistance (Snegovskaya, 2017).

In a broader theoretical context, Peter Steiner (2008) suggests rethinking the phenomena of samizdat, tamizdat, and magnitizdat, abandoning the simplistic "truth versus propaganda" dichotomy. He argues, that these practices were complex cultural phenomena, that often mimicked and reinterpreted the language and structures of the

Soviet system itself. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural fields, Steiner shows, how samizdat functioned as a form of symbolic capital, generating prestige at home and economic value when published abroad (tamizdat). He views these phenomena as heterogeneous and dynamic forms of alternative communication, and thanks to this we see how informal music, art, and literature have blurred the boundaries between aesthetics, politics, and everyday social life (Steiner, 2008).

The 1980s began with an event, that became a turning point in the history of Soviet rock: the performance of the group Aquarium at the festival "Spring Rhythms" in Tbilisi in March 1980. As Steinholt (2003) describes in detail, the organizers invited the band, expecting to hear a low-key acoustic program. Instead, Aquarium presented to the public the first full-fledged rock and roll performance on the official Soviet stage. Their electrifying, improvisational performance with loud guitars and Boris Grebenshchikov's expressive stage demeanor shattered the rigid conventions of Soviet pop music, where artists were required to be static and predictable. Although the audience was mostly enthusiastic about the performance, the official reaction was immediate and harsh: part of the band's program was canceled, and a smear campaign was launched in the press, accusing the musicians of "immorality" and even "propaganda of homosexuality". As a result, Grebenshchikov was expelled from the Komsomol and dismissed from his job, forcing him to get a job as a night watchman. However, these persecutions had the opposite effect: the scandalous fame only strengthened the cult status of Aquarium in the underground and spread their fame throughout the USSR. The same festival was marked by a symbolic victory of "amateur" rock, when the first place was shared by Time Machine and Tallinn's Magnetik Band, which finally consolidated the dominance of underground aesthetics over the official one (Steinholt, 2004).

While Viktor Tsoi himself insisted that "Khochu Peremen!" ("I Want Changes!") was a song of inner freedom rather than politics, its reception in the late 1980s was overwhelmingly political. Already by the 2010s, the song had been reappropriated during Moscow and Saint Petersburg protests—in March and June 2017 crowds sang

“Khochu Peremen!” on Tverskaya Street and Marsovo Pole. This illustrates how a single work, despite authorial intent, can endure as a protest anthem, connecting the late Soviet underground to twenty-first-century mobilizations (Snegovskaya, 2017). This song quickly transcended the boundaries of rock culture and was embraced as an unofficial anthem of Perestroika. Although Tsoi himself repeatedly denied its political character, emphasizing that the lyrics referred to inner freedom and creative transformation, the social context made alternative interpretations impossible. As Lev Gankine notes, in the film *Assa* (1987), director Sergei Solovyov explicitly staged the performance as a protest gesture against bureaucratic ossification, fixing the song in public memory as a demand for systemic change (Gankine, 2017).

At the same time, there was a final collapse of trust in the state VIA system. Although some bands, such as the Stas Namin Group, were briefly successful, releasing records at the Melodiya company and touring abroad, most VIA groups faced growing irrelevance amid the new anti-rock campaign, launched under Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, interim General Secretaries before Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika. The main target of the crackdown was the Time Machine, which had recently made an attempt to integrate into the official framework. Forced to perform solo acoustic concerts and act in films, Andrey Makarevich hardly maintained the popularity of the group. Although in 1985–1986 new albums of Time Machine were released, they were perceived by critics and listeners as expressionless and opportunistic, which reflected the creative compromises, imposed by the VIA model. By this time, the audience's sympathies had finally shifted towards underground bands, which marked the exhaustion of official cultural structures and paved the way for a total breakthrough of Russian rock during the years of Perestroika (Steinholt, 2004).

The history of Leningrad rock, according to the periodization of Steinholt (2005), has passed through several key stages, reflecting the changing relations between musicians, authorities and society. After a period of apprenticeship (the 1960s) and a struggle for official recognition, culminating in the creation of the Leningrad Rock

Club, the stage of maturity began. The musicians, drawing on the traditions of bard songs and Western authors, developed a complex, metaphorical poetics, that found a deep response among the "children of the bard generation", who felt that rock finally spoke their language. By the mid-1980s, however, the younger generation of musicians began to openly challenge the authority of the LRC leadership, which led to a brief but intense politicization of rock. With the easing of ideological pressure in 1986–1987, the scene went far beyond the RockClub. At this point, when other cultural institutions were busy publishing previously banned works, it was rock that became the main channel for expressing the everyday anxieties and hopes of society, reaching the peak of its influence.

In general, as Mikhail Kozyrev recalls, the first major moment of resonance came in the 1980s, when three epicenters—Leningrad, Moscow, and Sverdlovsk. There were artists such as Boris Grebenshchikov, Yuri Shevchuk, Konstantin Kinchev, Viktor Tsoi, and groups like Nautilus Pompilius, Chaif, Televizor, and Zvuki Mu, created a common soundtrack for late socialism, and in the end they not only reflected but also catalyzed the social changes that shook and eventually dismantled the Soviet state (Kamenchenko, 2019).

Kozyrev further suggests that a dozen songs can be credited with “sinking the Soviet Union.” (Kamenchenko, 2019) Tracks such as Tsoi’s *We’ll Act Ourselves* and , Shevchuk’s *Civil War and Revolution*, Grebenshchikov’s *Train on Fire*, and Kinchev’s *My Generation* and *We Are Together* became collective anthems. Though some of these works were written as intimate reflections or metaphors, they resonated with broader historical anxieties and were reinterpreted as mass protest. In this way, private feelings of stagnation and hopelessness were transformed into public demands for change, illustrating how music can unexpectedly become the soundtrack of revolution.

However, this heyday was short-lived. The decline of the Leningrad rock scene was caused by several interrelated factors. First, the existing infrastructure could not meet

the growing demand for large concerts, festivals, and record distribution. Second, there was tension between musicians, cultural authorities, and new commercial structures. Many LRC groups were not prepared for a professional existence under market conditions. Third, the collapse of the USSR led to the dismantling of the Cultural Centers system, which had long provided rehearsal spaces and performance venues. Meanwhile, commercial pop music quickly dominated the media landscape, pushing rock into the background. Lastly, the deaths of the movement's central figures—Alexander Bashlachev, Viktor Tsoi, and Mike Naumenko—dealt a devastating blow to the scene's morale. By the early 1990s, the once-vibrant community had given way to nostalgia and a few "dinosaur" groups. While there has been a partial revival of the rock music scene in St. Petersburg since the mid-1990s, with the emergence of new clubs and studios, its development has been limited by the narrow domestic market and the reluctance of major Russian record labels to invest in rock music (Steinholt, 2004).

Concurrently, the transition of Soviet rock from an underground to a mainstream genre was inextricably linked to the overarching processes of perestroika. As Vasily Shumov (2013) observes, even prior to Gorbachev's reforms, musicians faced significant constraints in the form of blacklists, censorship, and arrests. However, by the mid-1980s, the mere act of forming an underground band had come to be perceived as a form of protest. With the liberalization of cultural policy, however, this underground movement suddenly entered the official sphere. Rock festivals were staged under the auspices of Komsomol organizations, and television programs such as *Muzykalny Ring* and films like *Assa* introduced millions of Soviet citizens to the aesthetics of formerly banned groups. This shift exemplifies what Steinholt (2003) has described as the "institutional paradox" of late socialism: rock remained under surveillance, but precisely because of its incorporation into state-supervised arenas, it acquired unprecedented resonance and legitimacy. Consequently, songs such as "Khochu Peremen!" and "Train on Fire" transcended their original function as mere expressions of personal dissent and evolved into instruments of a new cultural

contract, in which personal dissent was reframed as collective hope for transformation.

Outside of the capital's rock clubs, music served important social functions under more extreme conditions. During the Soviet-Afghan War, on the one hand, music became a significant tool for cultural mediation and symbolic rapprochement between soldiers. As Michael Myers (2019) illustrates in his analysis of fiction, musical exchanges became a form of cross-cultural communication. For example, Soviet soldiers performed homemade "Afghan songs," and the Afghan soldiers responded with their own military anthems praising courage and readiness for battle. Such exchanges could culminate in a joint performance of the popular Soviet hit "Podmoskovnye Vechery." In this context, the song lost its original entertainment function and became a universal symbol of solidarity and belonging that overcame language and cultural barriers. This example demonstrates how music could serve not only ideological or entertainment purposes in Soviet culture, but also become a channel for collective experiences and cross-cultural dialogue (Myers, 2019). At the same time, the Soviet-Afghan War was a highly controversial topic. While public figures such as Andrei Sakharov openly condemned the invasion, cultural responses were more cautious. As Artemy Troitsky observes, the semi-underground and semi-protest Russian rock movement remained surprisingly silent about Afghanistan. The notable exception was Yuri Shevchuk's *Don't Shoot!* (Не стреляй!) with his group DDT. Written immediately after the outbreak of the war, the song captured the pacifist mood of a generation. Its fate was paradoxical: on the one hand, Shevchuk faced harassment from the KGB for performing it; on the other, the composition was awarded at the official All-Union music competition "Golden Tuning Fork," although it was cut from the televised version. Decades later, Shevchuk refused permission to use *Don't Shoot!* in Alexey Balabanov's film *Brother-2*, underscoring his resistance to the commercialization or distortion of its anti-war message (Svoboda, 2022).

Simultaneously, a unique phenomenon of Siberian punk emerged, the central figure of which was Egor Letov and his project Grazhdanskaya Oborona (Civil Defense). As Nathan Klaitis (2024) analyzes, the group, which appeared in Omsk in 1984, cultivated a raw, garage-like, radically anti-Soviet aesthetic. Under the conditions of late socialism, state repression and censorship paradoxically only fueled the authenticity and nonconformist status of the group. Songs, recorded in apartment settings and performed in basements, became the embodiment of both cultural resistance and survival strategies.

However, with the beginning of Perestroika, this oppositional culture faced a deep existential crisis: what was previously subversive and forbidden, suddenly became allowed and even demanded. However, this growing popularity eroded the original message, as many fans perceived only energy and drive, ignoring the content of the texts. The tragic deaths of key figures of the scene, in particular Yanka Dyagileva in 1991, became symbolic death of Siberian punk. The collapse of the USSR simultaneously liberated and destroyed the conditions, that gave this movement its sharpness and meaning. Klaitis concludes, that this trajectory illustrates the paradox of subcultural resistance: Once the authoritarian discourse, that fueled it collapsed, punk lost its oppositional power, demonstrating the limits of music's ability to influence structural social transformations (Klaitis, 2024).

In parallel, Egor Letov's "Vsyo idyot po planu" (1988) captured the irony and cynicism of the Perestroika generation. Its grotesque imagery—Lenin decomposed into "mold and honey," the Soviet order melting into "bare ice"—became a shared code of everyday dissent. For many, this was the first song learned on guitar in the 1990s, symbolizing a diffuse, skeptical form of protest less tied to rallies than to quotidian cultural performance (Snegovskaya, 2017).

The examined materials demonstrate that Russian protest music emerged not as a direct opposition to the state, but rather as a network of subcultural domains with distinct regulations for the management of sound and lyrics. These worlds relied on

specialized channels of communication, including "bone" records, magnetizdat, apartment concerts, and semi-legal clubs. These venues transformed songs into circulating symbols of belonging and shared experience. In such an environment, music naturally became lyrical-centric: the text took on the functions of meaning, testimony, and hint, and the music was assigned the role of a carrier of intonation and memory. This is precisely why the term "anti-state" was rarely employed directly in this context: under conditions of censorship, it functioned figuratively—through metaphor, grotesque, ambiguity, allusion—where understanding by "one's own" was prioritized over an explicit declaration. Consequently, the protest functioned as a cultural technology, facilitating the recognition of one's own identity. This recognition was achieved not through the use of slogans, but through the adoption of a code, and not through posters, but through the collective practice of listening and singing along, which engendered an alternative form of publicity and a lasting memory of dissent.

3.2. Post-Soviet period: from barricades to sporadic actions

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the tumultuous events of August 1991 marked the peak of rockmusic's political influence. The Rock on Barricades concerts in Moscow, where the bands Mashina Vremya and Alisa performed virtually without equipment at the White House, and the parallel Rock against Tanks rally in St.-Petersburg, which attracted almost 50,000 people, established rock as a sound symbol of democratic resistance. However, according to an analysis, conducted by RBC (2019), in the following decades, musical performances at rallies became extremely rare: from 1991 to 2019, less than twenty such cases were recorded. These sporadic events, nevertheless, functioned as important cultural barometers, reflecting aesthetic pursuits, ideological disputes, and generational shifts. One of the most significant examples was the performance of Yegor Letov in 1994, when he, used a megaphone, to speak from the back of a truck at a communist rally. This act erased the boundaries between radical protest, partisan art, and public dissent,

demonstrating the ideological fragmentation of the post-Soviet protest field (RBC, 2019).

After the collapse of the USSR, “Khochu peremen!” underwent a remarkable transformation into a transnational protest anthem, repeatedly re-appropriated by diverse political forces. It sounded at the barricades of the Russian White House during the 1991 coup attempt, was later adopted by liberal opposition movements such as *Solidarnost’*, and became a fixture at the 2011–2012 Moscow protests. Beyond Russia, the song resonated strongly in Belarus during the 2011 “silent protests,” and in Ukraine during the Euromaidan, where both Russian and Ukrainian versions were performed. Its political ambivalence allowed for appropriation even by pro-government groups, from pro-Kremlin youth movements to nationalist rallies. Thus, “Khochu peremen!” illustrates how a single work can escape its author’s original intentions and become a floating signifier of protest across shifting ideological landscapes (Gankine, 2017).

The 2000s were marked by the first timid attempts to involve pop-music in the protest agenda. So, at a rally in defense of the independent NTV channel in 2001, along with political activists, such mainstream artists, as the Lyube group and Valery Syutkin performed. However, these cases remained isolated exceptions, and rock continued to dominate the public consciousness as an “authentic” voice of opposition. As the researchers conclude, the steady reliance on rock-aesthetics emphasized its symbolic role, even though its real political influence gradually waned amid the consolidation of state control over media and public space (RBC, 2019).

The early 2010s brought a more reflective and informed approach to protest music. During demonstrations in defense of the Khimki Forest in 2010, Yuri Shevchuk (DDT), faced with a power outage, borrowed a megaphone from one of the protesters and performed five acoustic songs. The gesture dramatized the idea of an intimate, urgent, and deeply personal political statement. The subsequent protests on

Bolotnaya Square in 2011–2012 demonstrated a further evolution. Music journalist Alexander Gorbachev created a special playlist for the rally, consciously trying to overcome well-established clichés, such as Kino's "Khochu Peremen!". Its goal was to mobilize the urban intelligentsia through a carefully chosen soundtrack. Although technical problems prevented the full implementation of this idea, the very fact of the curatorial approach marked an important shift: from spontaneous performances to the professionalization of the "sound accompaniment" of the protest, which was now thought of as a purposeful form of sound intervention (Lenta.ru, 2012).

The climax of this trajectory was Pussy Riot's "Bogoroditsa, Putina progoni!" performed in February 2012 inside the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Combining punk aesthetics with feminist performance, the song became a global symbol of Russian protest, amplified by the trial and imprisonment of the performers. Here, protest music reentered the international stage for the first time since the Cold War, with a distinctly gendered and visualized form of dissent (Snegovskaya, 2017). As Collin shows in *Pop Grenade*, punk in late Putin's Russia is not so much a musical genre as it is a form of political guerrilla warfare. In this form of warfare, sound, body, and publicity are combined into a performative weapon of resistance. Drawing on the traditions of feminist punk (Riot Grrrl, Bikini Kill), the Pussy Riot collective develops its own model of "holy foolishness," turning acts of musical expression into rituals of anti-authoritarian honesty. Their surprise actions in the metro, courts, and the Cathedral of Christ the Savior are "sound-and-vision seizures," in which forbidden words sound louder than any official speech. As Tolokonnikova explains, in a situation of political unfreedom, the only adequate form of communication is screaming, wailing, and expressing anger. Sound becomes what Honneth and Fraser (2004) call "the moral expression of suffering" — not an argument, but an act of exposure. However, Collin emphasizes that, unlike in the West, where protest music has long been incorporated into commercial culture, punk retains a radical potential in Russia in the 2010s. Pussy Riot refuses formal concerts, distribution, and legal venues, declaring: "We do not rent and do not intend to rent anything; we come and seize what does not belong to us." Their anti-consumer aesthetic sharply contrasts

with the ironic co-optation of protest in the West, ranging from Christmas rap for Nike to the political passivity of rock stars. In this sense, Pussy Riot's music is not just a form of expression; it is also a direct, physical confrontation with the regime. Risk, arrest, and public humiliation become part of the composition. Their "punk prayer" is a religious service, a political action, and an artistic explosion—an attempt to reclaim public space, symbolic power, and audibility. Thus, in the early 2010s, music in Russia once again becomes a zone of radical action—a way to be visible and audible under repressive conditions — and ultimately an attempt to reform the public sphere.

By the end of the decade, there was a final change in the genre leader: hip-hop replaced rock from the position of the main mouthpiece of dissent. At the 2019 rallies dedicated to protecting digital freedoms and demanding fair elections, artists such as Face, IC3PEAK and Krovostok dominated the playlists. Their abrasive sound, horror-inspired aesthetics, and coded, metaphor-filled lyrics resonated with a young audience deeply immersed in digital culture. The state's response was immediate: censorship, concert bans, and increased repression highlighted both the effectiveness of hip-hop as a mobilizing force, and the authorities' growing concern for a new generation of protest (RBC, 2019).

In her research, Ksenia Gulyaeva (2025) analyzes in detail how hip-hop, which originated in the United States as a voice of the struggle for civil rights, has transformed in the Russian context. Arriving in Russia with a significant delay, the genre gradually acquired its own identity, based on the concepts of "authenticity" and street experience, and over time turned into a powerful channel for expressing social discontent. Gulyaeva traces the genealogy of political rap in Russia, starting with Decl, who in the early 2000s was one of the first to address the topics of corruption and alienation of power ("Hope for Tomorrow", "Politics"). His work set the tone for future protest narratives. Next, the key figure is Noize MC, whose tracks ("Mercedes S666", "Yes Future!") have become a model of sharp satirical criticism of the regime. Groups like, kak Anacondaz and Krovostok, have used the grotesque, cynical, and

absurd to covertly protest militarism, corruption, and social degradation. Thus, rap, even in the face of growing censorship, retained its protest potential, continuing the line of cultural dissidence in Russia (Guliaeva, 2025).

The end of the 2010s marked a qualitatively new stage in relations between the Russian state and independent musicians. What previously appeared to be isolated cases of repression — cancellations of concerts under the pretext of safety violations, propaganda of extremism or the presence of obscene language,—turned into a systematic and targeted campaign to suppress dissent. As shown in Mikhail Kozyrev's documentary *Silent Rock-and Roll* (2025), the state has begun to use a wide range of institutional levers, from the fire inspection and police to the FSB, to intimidate organizers and put pressure on concert venues. Independent musicians, who have created their own cultural infrastructure through social media and grassrootsconcerts, have become targets of increasing harassment. The crackdown disproportionately affected the genres, most popular with youngpeople: rap, punk, and experimental pop music.

These repressions, however, paradoxically provoked powerful acts of cultural solidarity. The most significant event was the arrest of rapper Husky in Krasnodar in 2018 2018 after a series of disruptions to concerts on his All-Russian tour. In response, Oxxxymiron, Noize MC and Basta organized a joint charity concert in Moscow under the slogan "I will sing my own music". Tickets were sold out instantly, and the performance was broadcast live on the independent TV Rain channel. Many commentators called this event the last major public victory of the independent music community in Russia before the era of total repression. The concert not only raised funds in support of the Husky, but also became a symbolic declaration of creative autonomy and the right of artists to freedom of expression (Kozyrev, 2025).

By the early 2020s, pressure on musicians had taken on the character of preemptive censorship. Concerts by bands such as IC3PEAK, Pornofilms, and Louna were

systematically canceled, often hours in advance, and their lyrics were subject to checks for "extremist content." As Denis Boyarinov (2021) notes, in response to this, musicians increasingly began to turn to horror aesthetics and dystopian images, channeling collective feelings of fear, paranoia and despair into a form of artistic resistance. For example, IC3PEAK turned their performances into Gothic productions, depicting state violence and increasing the sense of alienation of young people. This shift to a darker aesthetic shows, how repression itself has become a thematic and artistic resource for protest music. The crackdown on the music scene should be seen in the context of broader efforts by the authorities to neutralize any dissent, particularly in connection with the so-called "Network" case (2017-2020), in which young activists received long prison sentences on trumped-up terrorism charges. Thus, the persecution of musicians was not just a control over art, but a deliberate destruction of the emerging political subjectivity of young people (Boyarinov, 2021; Kozyrev, 2025).

In his article for Colta.ru, music critic Denis Boyarinov explores the evolution of Russian protest music in the 2010s and early 2020s, focusing on a wave of politically charged tracks that emerged in response to increasing authoritarianism. Unlike previous generations that relied on symbols like Kino's "Khochu Peremen!", this newer cohort engages more directly with contemporary politics, often referencing police violence, surveillance, and political imprisonment.

Artists such as Tarakany!, Pussy Riot, and Antoha MC produce songs explicitly supporting opposition figures like Alexei Navalny and condemning systemic repression. For example, Tarakany! filmed a documentary-style music video during the February 2021 protests, aligning their lyrics—written earlier—with the real-time political persecution of Navalny. Pussy Riot's "Besit" ends with footage of the group's arrest, and Antoha MC, previously known for lighthearted lyrics, was himself detained during a protest in Moscow, leading to a shift in his tone.

Hip-hop plays a significant role in this modern protest scene. Artists such as ATL, Kasta, Noize MC, Face, and Krovostok craft narratives that blend personal trauma with political commentary. ATL's "Bracelets" transforms the metaphor of handcuffs into a dark symbol of national identity. Kasta's "Go Take a Walk" (2020) speaks against police brutality and was widely associated with protests in both Belarus and Russia.

Even mainstream figures like Basta offer veiled critiques of state hypocrisy and social decay. IC3PEAK, who faced repeated concert cancellations by authorities, use visual horror to depict the authoritarian turn. Other artists like Husky, Dolphin, Pornofilmy, and Louna continue to build on themes of surveillance, war, fear, and disillusionment.

The aforementioned article also highlights how musicians across genres—including unexpected voices like Stereopolina and SBPCh—have contributed to a rich, diverse soundtrack of dissent. The result is a dynamic sonic landscape that captures the emotional complexity of resisting state power in contemporary Russia. As Boyarinov notes, protest music has become more direct, experimental, and darkly poetic, moving beyond earlier euphemisms to confront political violence head-on (Boyarinov, 2021).

3.3 Music in the Era of the New Normal: Direct Speech, War, and Censorship

The advent of the 2020s was characterized by a marked escalation in political repression in Russia, which exerted a direct influence on the nature and tone of protest music. The protests that ensued following the poisoning of Alexey Navalny and the adoption of amendments to the Constitution indicated substantial shifts in the composition of public discontent, as reported in a 2022 study by the Liberal Mission Foundation. Despite their numerical inferiority to the rallies that transpired between 2011 and 2012, protest activity exhibited substantial geographical decentralization. A

notable shift in the geographical distribution of participants was observed, with a transition from an initial concentration of up to three-quarters of participants residing in Moscow and St. Petersburg to a distribution of 65–75% of mobilization originating from regional areas by 2021. A substantial proportion of the protestors were young adults between the ages of 20 and 24, with a notable percentage of first-time attendees, constituting 55% of the protestors in Kazan. This development signaled the emergence of a novel, value-oriented protest movement, one that was not spearheaded by charismatic leaders but rather driven by ethical convictions and socio-economic discontent (Liberal Mission, 2022).

In response, the state authorities implemented an unparalleled escalation in their repression. According to OVD-Info (2022), more than 11,000 arrests were recorded and over 130 criminal cases were initiated during this period. Political analyst Kirill Rogov posited that this shift signified the disintegration of a "hybrid" political system, wherein managed pluralism yielded to unambiguous authoritarian consolidation. In such circumstances, with institutional channels for expressing dissent effectively nullified, music and art emerged as a pivotal medium for sustaining collective resistance and emotional solidarity (Liberal Mission, 2022; OVD-Info, 2022).

As Denis Boyarinov (2021) has noted, the music scene responded by repudiating metaphorical criticism and adopting a direct and unequivocal stance against state violence, total surveillance, and political persecution. The punk band Tarakany! initiated a notable integration of its archival musical compositions with footage stemming from the pro-Navalny protests. This amalgamation of elements enabled the incorporation of real-time repression into the artistic milieu of the band's oeuvre. In their video "RAGE," Pussy Riot employed documentary footage of their own arrests, thereby obscuring the boundary between performance and testimony. The creative trajectories of artists were subject to change when confronted with direct pressure; for instance, Antoha MC, formerly recognized for his optimism, commenced the release of tracks that exhibited overtly critical content subsequent to his detention at

a rally. Hip-hop, a genre with a long history of political engagement, maintained its central role in the protest movement. For instance, the ATL track "Bracelets" transformed handcuffs into a metaphor for national identity, while Kasta's composition "Get Out for a Walk" (2020) directly articulated the theme of police brutality. The punk bands Pornofilms and Louna brought themes of war, total control, and social collapse to the fore, demonstrating how different genres expressed a common sense of impending catastrophe (Boyarinov, 2021).2022).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, caused a tectonic shift in Russian culture and decisively divided the music scene. As Robert Baumann (2023) notes, a significant portion of Russian rock veterans—including the groups DDT, Mashina Vremya, Akvarium, and Bi-2—openly opposed the war, which led to their being effectively outlawed and sparked a wave of repression. New laws on "discrediting the army," total censorship, and the creation of "black lists" of artists led to a mass emigration of musicians, including Oxxxymiron, Noize MC, Monetochka, Face, and members of Kasta. While the émigré scene became the main vehicle for the anti-war voice, state control over the music sphere intensified within Russia. Protest rap was replaced by state-sponsored patriotic anthems, symbolized by the singer Shaman, whose songs "Let's Stand Up" and "I'm Russian" received support at the highest state level and were actively used in official events (Tabeshadze, 2024; Guliaeva, 2025).

Under these circumstances, music became one of the few channels where moral resistance to the war was maintained. However, as Artemy Troitsky notes, Russian anti-war music was sparse and often metaphorical, unlike the hundreds of songs created by Ukrainian artists. This, in his opinion, reflects a moral asymmetry: a just war inspires, while an unjust war breeds despair (Shenkman, 2023). Nevertheless, several iconic pieces emerged. Boris Grebenshchikov released the song "Sorcery," where the war is portrayed as "black magic," and Yuri Shevchuk presented the stadium anthem "Bury the Wars." In the track "Meat," Zemfira created a poignant image of people being turned into "cannon fodder," while Vladi, a member of Kasta,

released an entire album directly raising questions about national guilt, complicity, and imperial heritage. A more radical position was taken by Maxim Pokrovsky ("Nogu Svelo!"), whose tracks, such as "Go Back, Russia!," became direct and uncompromising calls for resistance (Shenkman, 2023).

The overarching theme that emerged among the artists who departed was the profound sense of loss experienced due to their displacement from their homeland, and the subsequent process of reestablishing their sense of self in the context of exile. The symbol of this new protest language is Oxxxymiron's track "OIDA" (2022), which uses the idea of "rebuilding the house" as a metaphor for the country. The song's composition integrates elements of folklore with anti-war rhetoric, juxtaposing "us" (a society aspiring for freedom) with "them" (a power that brings destruction). However, in subsequent tracks, particularly "The World Is Burning" following the death of Alexey Navalny, the tone evolves towards a more somber disposition, signifying a transition from a sense of optimism to a recognition of the disaster's magnitude. In the realm of artistic expression, other artists have been known to introspect on the concept of their lost homeland, offering unique perspectives on the theme through their own artistic mediums. In the songs "Your Country" and "Man-Russia," Face conveys a sense of alienation and cynicism, asserting that the Russian populace has never fully possessed or identified with their nation. In the tracks "Atlantis" and "Cargo-200," Dzhizus employs the metaphor of a dying civilization, while Loqiemean, in the composition titled "On Pain 2022," draws parallels between the war and the impact of accumulated and unexamined national traumas (Guliaeva, 2025).

In this artistic milieu, Monetochka occupied a distinctive position. According to Ksenia Gulyaeva (2025), Monetochka emerged as a rare exemplar of a young, popular artist who articulated protest from a female perspective. Her song "Mama has a Secret" (2024), released on March 8, became a manifesto of women's strength and solidarity, and its video featured renowned women who opposed the war and were compelled to emigrate. In the composition "Above the Roofs" (2024), a motif

of hope for the future emerges, where the lyrical heroine envisions a post-war world in which flights between Moscow, Kyiv, and St. Petersburg are once again feasible. This phenomenon is exemplified by the apocalyptic imagery of the song "Zhuchka" (2024), where the loss of home is symbolized by a dried ficus tree, juxtaposed with symbols of renewal—a Christmas star and water in a well—which serve to counterbalance the former. The composition "In Memory of Alexey Navalny," a collaborative effort by a group of prominent musicians (including Vladi, Noize MC, and Zemfira), transcended its original intent, evolving into a poignant requiem and a defiant manifesto. This transformation underscores the assertion that memory, by its very nature, cannot be consigned to oblivion. Following February 24, 2022, there was a marked shift in the nature of protest music in Russia. The transition from direct political slogans to a more personal and philosophical reflection on the lost homeland, the pain of exile, and the fragile hope for the future signaled a shift in the function of music. It functioned as a space for preserving memory and truth (Guliaeva, 2025).

4. Evolution of State Control: from the "Neo-Soviet" model to digital authoritarianism

4.1. The "Neo-Soviet" Media Landscape

The evolution of Russian protest music is inextricably intertwined with the state's control over the media landscape. During the 2000s, the Russian Federation developed a system of media control that Sarah Oates (2007) characterized as a "neo-Soviet model." While the 1990s witnessed a transient period of pluralism, the subsequent decade was characterized by systematic pressure on independent publications. The state exercised control in two ways: directly, through ownership of key media outlets, and indirectly, through loyal oligarchs. This combination of economic, legal, and administrative pressures engendered a pervasive atmosphere of self-censorship among journalists (Oates, 2007).

This pattern of control underwent a substantial escalation following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In an effort to address the dissemination of what the Kremlin has termed "fakes" concerning the Russian military, new legislation has been enacted. These measures precipitated the swift closure or blocking of the country's last major independent media outlets, including the radio station Ekho Moskvyy and the television channel Dozhd. In the context of the Russian media landscape, prominent investigative outlets such as Meduza have been designated as "undesirable organizations." This designation effectively outlaws their activities and compels journalists to seek exile (McMahon, 2022).

The state's repressive practices also extended into the digital sphere. Access to prominent global social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter was restricted, while authorities proactively promoted domestic alternatives including VKontakte and RuTube. Research from the Citizen Lab indicates that requests from the state censor, Roskomnadzor, to remove online content increased thirtyfold after the invasion began. These takedown orders targeted not only media

outlets but also non-governmental and human rights organizations (Ruan & Scott-Railton, 2023).

Beyond the censorship of media outlets, the state has effectively criminalized independent journalism. While the assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 symbolized the early threats, by 2022, dozens of criminal cases had been initiated against reporters and bloggers. These legal actions, frequently grounded in legislation targeting "fake news," have rendered independent reporting within Russia a high-risk endeavor (BBC News Russian, 2021; Roskomsvoboda, 2021).

Meduza serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. The institution was established in Latvia in 2014 by Russian journalists who had been exiled from their country. It has since become one of the most significant independent Russian-language news sources. In 2023, the government designated Meduza an "undesirable organization," which criminalized not only working for the outlet but also sharing its content (Roth, 2023). This maneuver was part of a broader campaign to muzzle critical voices, which has also included assassination attempts on journalists reporting from abroad (Roth, 2023).

In the context of the suppression of traditional and digital media, the encrypted messaging application Telegram has emerged as a central platform for disseminating information related to armed conflict. Given the high rate of internet penetration in both Russia and Ukraine, Telegram's channel-based structure enables mass broadcasting without centralized oversight, thus rendering it an essential tool for both independent journalism and state propaganda. Research indicates that a considerable proportion of the Ukrainian and Russian populace now utilizes Telegram as a predominant news source (Oleinik, 2024). The platform's fragmented nature, exemplified by the operation of multiple channels by outlets such as Meduza, mirrors a more extensive trend of digital media adapting to thrive in environments characterized by significant repression (Malakhov et al., 2023).

4.2. Telegram as a paradoxical arena of information warfare

The Russian-Ukrainian war has profoundly impacted the role of popular music in contemporary conflict. As David-Emil Wickström (2024) points out, war songs were previously disseminated through centralized media such as radio and television. However, the contemporary conflict has become the inaugural "platform war," in which social networks (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram) have emerged as pivotal domains for expressing memes. Incorporating music into battlefield videos increases the emotional impact, making the war experience more interactive and immersive. An example of this is the song "Bayraktar," which combines authentic military footage with a heroic yet satirical soundtrack. It quickly became a viral symbol of resistance.

In this new reality, musical memes and "response songs" are used by both sides as propaganda and for identity formation. Ukrainian artists are actively re-recording historical protest songs such as "Oh, a Luzi Chervona Kalina," originally performed by Andriy Khlyvnyuk and later remixed by Pink Floyd. These actions transform these musical works into global symbols of national resistance. Concurrently, Russian artists are disseminating pro-war songs that rationalize aggression. In this sense, music can be conceptualized as a "territorial marker," asserting claims over spatial, historical, and identity domains. This phenomenon is not merely an observer of war; it is an active participant in the war effort, serving as a mobilization tool, a vehicle for propaganda, and an instrument for memory preservation. In the digital domain, this phenomenon operates with greater speed and effectiveness than conventional state propaganda (Wickström, 2024).

However, the state actively co-opted the same platform. Pro-Kremlin media outlets, "voenkors," and pro-war influencers used Telegram to disseminate propaganda, war maps, and misinformation. According to the DFRLab report (2024), Telegram's citation rate in pro-Kremlin media grew 481% between 2021 and 2023. Networks of thousands of bots promoted pro-Russian narratives in Ukraine's occupied territories (Atlantic Council, 2024). Thus, Telegram became a paradoxical space where

independent media and state propaganda coexisted and fought each other simultaneously. This struggle unfolded within the framework of what researchers call the first full-scale "internet war." According to 2021 data, 88.2% of Russians and 79.2% of Ukrainians were online, making Telegram the main source of news for millions of people (Oleinik, 2024).

The Russian-Ukrainian war has radically changed the role of popular music in the context of modern conflict. David-Emil Wickström (2024) points out that, whereas war songs were previously distributed through centralized channels such as radio and television, the current conflict is the first "platform war," in which social networks such as YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram have become key spaces for memetic struggle. Superimposing music on battlefield videos enhances the emotional impact, making the war experience more interactive and immersive. A striking example is the song "Bayraktar," which combines real military footage with a heroic-satirical soundtrack and instantly became a viral symbol of resistance.

PART II — Empirical Study

1. Methodology

1.1. Research Questions

The previous literature review established a robust theoretical framework for analyzing the role of music in political dissent. Our study moves beyond the restrictive, text-centric definition of "protest music" to embrace a more flexible, performative, and contextual understanding. Building on the work of scholars like Eric Drott, who identifies music as a discursive and contested term; Benjamin Taussig, who calls for the study of "sounding dissent"; and Jacques Attali, who views music as a prophetic political economy, this study analyzes the response of Russian-language music to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

This study includes tracks produced by mainstream and underground artists and distributed primarily through digital platforms. It represents a unique case study. The "protest" status of music is often inherent not only in its lyrics, but also created post hoc through acts of censorship, state repression, and public recognition. This echoes Drott's assertion that this category is "always relevant." Furthermore, the ambiguity of some of these works highlights the tension between art's utopian potential and its susceptibility to commercialization (Adorno), as well as its ability to express dissent through form and impact rather than just verbal content (Attali, Jameson, and Rancière).

Given the historical and political specificity of the Russian context, which is characterized by high levels of state control and censorship as well as the transnational dissemination of music, the following research questions aim to combine theoretical insights from the literature review with an in-depth, empirical analysis of the musical and cultural phenomena under study.

Research Question 1: What are the roles and functions of Russian-language protest music in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Research Question 2: How have these functions changed over time in response to escalating conflict and repression?

These questions form the basis of this dissertation. After conducting a literature review, the initial question, "How does music respond to war?" was deemed too general and had already been partially researched. For the dissertation research, it was necessary to narrow the focus. The Russian-language music scene was chosen because a unique dramatic process unfolded there: the simultaneous birth of a powerful anti-war discourse and its rapid suppression within the country. This suppression led to the discourse's transformation and displacement through emigration.

This research question enables us to understand how musical protest adapted to unprecedented political conditions. This study considers not only the content of musical works but also the entire set of "discursive events": public statements, concert cancellations, charity tours, and state repression. This approach is necessary because, in environments where direct political statements are criminalized, the artistic act itself—or its absence—becomes a political gesture.

Additionally, this study aims to examine how key concepts such as "patriotism," "guilt," and "hope" were redefined within musical discourse and confronted the dominant state narrative of militarism and national unity. We seek to understand how an alternative social reality was constructed through music and how a community of dissenters formed.

To answer the posed questions, the study examined the corpus of public messages from the Meduza LIVE Telegram channel during the critical period from February 24

to September 21, 2022. The chosen dates mark the beginning of the full-scale invasion (February 24) and the announcement of partial mobilization in Russia (September 21), thus framing the analysis between two decisive turning points of the war. Since the virtual liquidation of independent media in Russia, Meduza, operating from abroad, has established itself as a central information hub for the Russian-speaking opposition and diaspora. Its Telegram channel has become vital infrastructure for documenting acts of cultural resistance invisible in the state-controlled Russian media landscape. This archive provides a unique, chronologically organized cross-section of the phenomena we seek to understand.

1.2. Methods

I align with the approach delineated by Klaus Krippendorff, who defines content analysis as "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use" (Krippendorff, 2019). This methodological framework enables the formulation of research inquiries that facilitate a coherent transition from textual data to observable phenomena. Furthermore, it establishes a foundation for substantiating conclusions, thereby enhancing the rigor and reproducibility of research outcomes. In essence, a properly formulated question transforms content analysis into a means of scientific inference rather than a mere compilation of arbitrary descriptions. The division of approaches into quantitative and qualitative is largely artificial; these are two sides of the same coin. Quantitative analysis is characterized by its pursuit of accuracy and reproducibility, while qualitative analysis is marked by its emphasis on contextual relevance and interpretative depth. A synthesis of both approaches within a single study is a viable methodology. Krippendorff underscores the pivotal role of the researcher's reflexivity, asserting that it is the researcher who establishes the contexts, formulates the research questions, and delineates the analytical framework. Consequently, a consensus on the superiority of one approach over another, such as close but subjective reading of individual texts or large-scale systematic analysis of

large data sets, remains elusive. The selection of an approach is contingent upon the specific objectives of the research study.

The validation procedure plays a pivotal role in this methodological design. The concept of validity in scientific research signifies the significance of scientific results, which are then employed as a foundation for theoretical generalizations and practical interventions. The validity of a research result is contingent upon the relevance of its conclusions to reality, encompassing human beings, events, and actions. The validity of a method is contingent upon its ability to accurately measure the intended parameters. The validity of content analysis is contingent upon the corroboration of its conclusions by external sources, alternative interpretations, or practical consequences. Krippendorff's theoretical framework delineates a taxonomy of validity, distinguishing between different types of validity. Face validity is predicated on common sense and the recognition of the study as "meaningful" without the need for additional evidence. The concept of social validity is gauged by the extent to which research outcomes are incorporated into public discourse and political processes. Empirical validity is defined as the ability of conclusions to withstand testing by new data, criticism, and experiments. In accordance with the standards established by the American Psychological Association (APA, 1954), these approaches were delineated as content, construct, criterion, and predictive validity. Subsequently, beginning in the 1980s, the notion of multiple "evidence of validity" emerged in the extant literature, encompassing aspects such as test structure, process, relationship with other variables, and consequences of utilization. Concurrently, content analysis itself is confronted by three fundamental challenges to validation. The first of these is substantive in nature. It is associated with the fact that the meanings of texts are perceived differently by different readers. Therefore, it is impossible to validate only "by the text." The second is conceptual, associated with the error of considering the content of the text as autonomous, "in itself," without taking into account external correlations. The third is methodological, associated with the "trilemma": the absence of external data makes verification impossible; the use of the same data in constructing hypotheses makes verification dependent.

The empirical section of this paper analyzes Russian-language protest musical discourse in the context of the war in Ukraine and the growing repression in Russia. The source material was derived from the Meduza LIVE Telegram channel feed, encompassing the period from February 24 to September 21, 2022. This sequence of discursive episodes encompassed the public statements and actions of musicians, the reactions of state institutions, and the audience's responses. To facilitate a comparative analysis of the dynamics, I segmented the corpus into successive temporal intervals:

Part 1: February 24—March 25

Part 2: March 26—April 24

Part 3: April 25—May 24

Part 4: May 25—June 23

Part 5: June 24—July 23

Part 6: July 24—August 22

Part 7: August 23—September 21

Within each segment, events were systematically coded and summarized using specific functions. This approach enabled the identification of transitions or shifts from one period to another.

The unit of analysis was defined as a "discursive event," which was understood to include a post, a news item, an announcement, a video, a public decision by an artist, or an administrative action by the state related to music and war. Typical cases included infrastructural boycotts (e.g., self-withdrawal of catalogues, withdrawal from platforms), series of charity concerts with public reporting, major television benefit concerts, symbolic gestures and re-dubbing of the canon (e.g., changing lines in famous songs, collaborations with an obvious political framework), the

introduction of legal statuses and blocking, performative actions (e.g., joining the troops, witness videos), refusals to participate in pro-war formats, releases with obvious political semantics, as well as episodes of anti-discourse and mobilization of pro-war support.

The coding of each event was divided into multiple blocks. First, the type of action was documented, including infrastructure boycotts, charity concerts or tours, televised benefits, symbolic gestures or rewritings of the canon, repression, legal status or blocking, performative actions, refusals or breaches with "Z" formats, political releases, and counter-discourses. Secondly, the substantive context was delineated, that is, the configurations of meanings that were regularly reproduced in the corpus. The concept of an "infrastructure rupture" is a term that has been employed to describe the transformation of cultural memory through collaborative efforts and the reinterpretation of historical events. This shift has led to a transition towards the testimony of individuals and the assumption of personal responsibility. The "moral economy" of charity, which encompasses aspects such as amounts donated, beneficiaries, and transparent reporting, has also emerged as a significant aspect of this transformation. Additionally, public apologies and expressions of repentance have emerged as a means of mediating repression, and the boundaries of participation in official formats have been articulated. Thirdly, discourse functions were assigned—multiple, if the episode performed several types of social "work": mobilization, symbolic or supportive, diagnostic (naming reasons, guilt, crimes), performative, community-building, repressive or marginalizing (as a message about the price of an utterance), global legitimization (embedding the topic in mainstream formats and names), counter-discursive, affective or therapeutic. The observed consequences were meticulously documented, including collected funds, cancellations, fines, assignment of statuses, blocking, replication of symbols, and precedents.

The comprehension of analytical terminology was developed through the following sequence of steps. The term "role" was employed to denote the position of the

musical actor or utterance in the situation (e.g., a witness, mobilizer, symbolic anchor). The term "function" is employed to denote the social work executed by the episode, which encompasses the mobilization of resources, the formation of community, the articulation of guilt, and the delineation of boundaries for participation, among other aspects. One event could implement several functions simultaneously; the total count by periods allowed us to compare distributions and record shifts.

The count was of a semi-quantitative: frequencies were aggregated to visualize dynamics, but interpretation remained qualitative nature, and it entailed the aggregation of the frequencies of functions. The following text is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. From an ethical standpoint, open materials from public channels were utilized, song lyrics were quoted in fragments with proper attribution, and private data were not employed. The following conclusions can be drawn regarding the dynamics:

- From isolated post-factum statements, the protest musical discourse quickly moves to serial and infrastructurally supported practices (e.g., tours, benefit concerts, transparent reporting).
- Symbolic work is intensified through the re-voicing of the canon and easily replicable visual-sound gestures.
- Repressions become a regular background and an independent communicative signal.
- The diagnostic layer becomes more complex (e.g., shame, collective responsibility, articulation of war crimes).
- In parallel, a counter-discourse is activated, using mirror tools of the mass scene and glorification. This design enables the direct linkage of the observed forms of action, the meanings produced, and the functional effects and consequences in a unified logic of analysis.

1.3. Corpus

The empirical basis of the study was the Meduza LIVE channel on Telegram. This resource was chosen for several reasons. First, after independent Russian media outlets such as Ekho Moskvyy and Dozhd TV were blocked, Telegram became the primary platform for disseminating alternative information (Nieman Lab, 2022). Second, Meduza remains one of the largest independent Russian-language publications and continues to operate through Telegram despite being recognized as an "undesirable organization" in Russia (Associated Press, 2023). Third, Columbia Journalism Review (2023) notes that Meduza LIVE has over a million subscribers and serves as the primary news source for opposition audiences and the Russian-speaking diaspora. Thus, this particular source was chosen for its scale, regularity of publications, and central place in the opposition media sphere. For the analysis, the corpus included all Meduza LIVE publications related to music and cultural events from February 24 to September 21, 2022. The unit of analysis in this study was a "discursive event": a post containing a musician's statement, information about a concert or cultural event related to repression or the war. Each event was coded according to a developed set of functions (see the "Coding" section). This approach made it possible to systematize the material and identify how the role of protest music changed in the context of increasing repression.

1.4. Coding and categories

The analysis used the qualitative content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2019). Each event (Meduza LIVE post) was considered as a unit of analysis. An event was understood as a separate text or message about an action related to music in the context of war: a public statement by an artist, a song release, a concert cancellation, assignment of the "foreign agent" status, etc.

Each event was assigned one or more functions from the developed set. The coding was polysemantic, since a separate event could simultaneously fulfill several roles (for example, be both a symbolic gesture and an object of repression). Categories

were formed on the basis of a preliminary analysis of the corpus and existing research on the functions of protest music (Drott, 2011; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998).

Function	Definition	Example from corpus
Diagnostic	Calls to action, fundraising, organization of tours.	Oxxxymiron: “This is a catastrophe and a crime.”
Affective	Gestures, visual signs, or rewriting of cultural canon.	Zemfira’s concert video where the audience bursts into tears.
Mobilizational	The act itself as protest (cancellation, refusal, withdrawal).	“Russians Against War” tour by Oxxxymiron — raised \$200,000.
Symbolic	State response: bans, “foreign agent” labels, legal charges.	White-blue-white flag; altered lyrics in “Wind of Change.”
Performative	Pro-government actions and propagandistic concerts.	Face deleting his entire catalog from Russian platforms.
Repression	Support by Western artists, international collaborations.	DDT concert cancellations; Face designated as “foreign agent.”
Counter-discourse	Formation or reinforcement of diasporic or local communities.	State-sponsored concert with the “Z” symbol.
Global legitimization	Naming events and providing explicit evaluations (“war,” “catastrophe”).	Pink Floyd collaboration with Andriy Khlyvnyuk.
Community-building	Expressing emotions, collective grief, or solidarity.	“Voices of Peace” tour (Monetochka, Noize MC).

Table 1. Functions of protest music: definitions and examples from the corpus

Below I present a few examples of the coding procedure:

Example 1.

Event: Meduza LIVE post (03/15/2022): Face removed the catalog from streaming platforms in the Russian Federation.

Codes: Performative + Symbolic + Repression.

Comment: an action that irreversibly separated the artist from the internal cultural field.

Example 2.

Event: Message about the "Russians Against War" tour (Oxxxymiron).

Codes: Mobilization + Community + Global legitimization.

Comment: the artist's symbolic capital was converted into material assistance and strengthening of the diaspora.

2. Findings

This analysis aims to answer the first research question: “What are the roles and functions of Russian-language protest music in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine?” In response, the study systematizes the diverse manifestations of musical resistance, from the diagnostic articulation of war as a “catastrophe,” as when Oxxxymiron on February 24 declared the invasion a “catastrophe and a crime” and canceled all his concerts in Russia, to symbolic gestures like Zemfira’s performance of Don’t Shoot in Moscow with the words “I just don’t want war.” It also includes charity tours, such as the Russians Against War concerts in Istanbul and London, acts of emigration like the departure of composer Anton Batagov and prima ballerina Olga Smirnova, and international collaborations such as the London concert where Boris Grebenshchikov joined Oxxxymiron on stage. Tracing their dynamics over time, it becomes evident that protest music performs several interconnected functions at once: it expresses emotions, creates collective meanings, mobilizes resources, creates and strengthens communities, records historical memory, and directly clashes with the state counter-discursive machine.

An analysis of the corpus of Russian-language protest music from the month following February 24, 2022, reveals several interconnected, key functions. First, music served diagnostic and affective purposes. Artists leveraged their influence to openly label the events as a “war” and a “catastrophe,” challenging official narratives and establishing moral boundaries. Yuri Shevchuk of DDT, for example, called the war a “huge tragedy that deprives many of us of a future,” while Boris Grebenshchikov named it “true madness” and Ivan Dorn addressed Russian listeners directly, begging them to “stop this catastrophe.” These statements also articulated a collective sense of horror and rejection: Zemfira’s trembling “I just don’t want war” post or Leonid Agutin’s desperate cry to “STOP THE WAR!” turned private emotions into shared experiences.

Words were followed by actions that mobilized people and contributed to community building. Charity concerts became a crucial form of resistance: Oxxxymiron’s

Russians Against War tour in March raised funds for Ukrainian refugee children, while international events like the Polish–Ukrainian benefit in Łódź gathered artists across borders and created solidarity networks. Ukrainian musicians also transformed performance into direct appeals, as the Kyiv-Classic Orchestra on Maidan urged world leaders to “close the sky over Ukraine.” These moments not only raised resources but also forged communities of resistance in exile and abroad.

Protest was also manifested through symbolic and performative gestures. Resignations and departures — Tugan Sokhiev leaving the Bolshoi, Anton Batagov leaving Russia, or Olga Smirnova announcing her shame in staying — became political acts where silence or absence spoke louder than words. The refusal of international artists like Placebo, Måneskin, or Slipknot to play in Russia further reinforced this symbolic isolation, showing that even the possibility of celebration was denied during war.

At the international level, the participation of renowned Western artists served a global legitimizing function. Sting revived his 1985 song Russians, explaining its renewed tragic relevance, Pink Floyd removed their catalog from Russian streaming services, and Franz Ferdinand or The Killers canceled their concerts. These actions embedded the anti-war message in global culture, affirming its legitimacy and increasing the political cost of Russia’s isolation.

Meanwhile, the state's actions and responses took on their own meaning. State repression, such as the removal of Evening Urgant from air after Ivan Urgant posted #нетвойне, the arrests of Pussy Riot’s Maria Alyokhina, or the quiet circulation of “blacklists” of undesirable musicians, paradoxically gave the protests more weight by branding them dangerous and authentic. At the same time, the government organized its own spectacles, like the Luzhniki rally where Vladimir Putin appeared surrounded by pop stars, and police in St. Petersburg blasted Lyube’s songs to drown out protesters — proof that music had become a battlefield where both sides fought with sound.

Finally, the role of witnessing, primarily carried out by Ukrainian artists, was significant. Violinist Vera Lytovchenko's performances in Kharkiv bomb shelters or Svyatoslav Vakarchuk singing in the Kharkiv metro turned music into living testimony. These acts documented tragedy as it unfolded, but also provided moral strength, demonstrating that even under bombardment, culture survived and resistance endured.

During the first month of the war, Russian-language protest music served several interconnected functions. It diagnosed the situation, as when Shevchuk, Grebenshchikov, and Oxxxymiron called the war a catastrophe; it expressed emotions through the pain of Zemfira or Agutin; it mobilized resources through benefit concerts; it created symbolic gestures through resignations and boycotts; it resisted repression through the very persistence of voices like Pussy Riot's; it clashed with the state's counter-discourse at Luzhniki; and it preserved memory through the quiet, haunting notes of Lytovchenko's violin underground.

These functions did not operate in isolation but rather as a collective force; each action — whether a statement, boycott, concert, or music video — carried multiple layers of meaning. Together, they formed a new protest scene in which music shifted from being background entertainment to becoming one of the primary channels of political and cultural resistance.

Function	Count
Diagnostic	15
Affective	8
Mobilizational	5
Symbolic	7
Performative	2
Repression	6
Counter-discourse	2
Global Legitimization	2
Ambivalence	1
Community Building	1
Symbolic Isolation	1
Moral / Institutional Pressure	1
Personal Sanctions	1
Cultural Boycott	3
Technological Isolation	2
Economic & Cultural Isolation	1
Collapse of the Public Sphere	1
Symbolic Support	2
Total	20

Table 2: Distribution of functions in the first period

The second period of protest is characterized by a transition from individual statements to more consistent and diverse practices, during which the musical discourse becomes systematic and infrastructural. The actions of artists cease to be mere statements and become concrete acts: when Face removed his catalog from Russian streaming platforms on March 26, his boycott made a political position irreversible and marked a visible rupture with the internal ecosystem. Charity tours such as Oxxxymiron's "Russians Against War" in Berlin or Noize MC and Monetochka's "Voices of Peace" concerts in Riga and Vilnius became established formats with transparent financial reporting, converting musical capital into measurable humanitarian resources and strengthening diaspora communities.

The symbolic work also becomes more complex. Instead of simply creating new content, artists began rewriting the cultural canon itself. The Scorpions changed the line "I follow the Moskva" in *Wind of Change* to "Now listen to my heart, it says *Ukraine*," and Pink Floyd recorded their first new track in decades together with Andriy Khlyvnyuk of Boombox, turning his viral performance of a Ukrainian folk song into a global anthem of solidarity. These gestures, instantly translatable in the media, lowered the threshold for global audiences to understand the political context and performed the function of legitimization on a planetary scale.

Meanwhile, the diagnostic layer of protest deepens. The general slogan "no to war" is replaced by more complex reflection on guilt and responsibility. Face, in his March 30 interview with Yuri Dud, confessed his shame and said that "every one of us could have done more," while Noize MC in his new song *Ausweis* confronted the theme of collective responsibility head-on, singing about the burden of being marked by war.

Performative acts, where action outweighs words, also became more apparent. Ukrainian singer Max Barskih announced on April 3 that he had joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and other artists publicly refused to participate in state-sponsored events, like members of Nogu Svelo releasing the satirical track *We Don't Need War!* with samples of Lavrov's voice, or Andrei Kazachenko of Pilot quitting after his

band was booked for the pro-war marathon ZaRossiyu. In these cases, the stage itself became a frontline, a space for marking one's political position through presence or withdrawal.

In response, state repression became increasingly media-driven. Pussy Riot's Rita Flores was detained in Minsk and coerced into recording a pro-Lukashenko video; Maria Alyokhina faced escalating charges, with prosecutors demanding real prison terms. Face was officially branded a "foreign agent" on April 8, while the band Elyzium was forced to film humiliating public apologies after an anti-war performance in Moscow. Even Soviet cultural heritage was targeted: a YouTube upload of Mark Bernes' classic "Do the Russians Want War?" was blocked, and DDT saw its concert canceled in Tyumen because the venue was decorated with the militarist "Z" symbol. Each of these cases turned repression itself into a spectacle, sending a warning message to the audience about the cost of dissent.

Against this backdrop, a mirrored counter-discourse emerged. Pop stars like Philipp Kirkorov publicly supported pro-Kremlin figures such as Viktor Medvedchuk, while state-run rallies like ZaRossiyu sought to monopolize patriotic legitimacy. In these settings, pro-government artists employed the same cultural tools — concerts, songs, celebrity voices — to entrench the official narrative, turning music unmistakably into a battlefield.

In this period, the primary emphasis of protest shifted decisively to its symbolic dimension. The main forms of expression became gestures, allegorical texts, visual metaphors in music videos, and reinterpretations of the existing canon — from Renata Litvinova's poetic film using Marlene Dietrich's voice in Pete Seeger's *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* to Elyzium raising the opposition's white-blue-white flag in Moscow. In parallel, the diagnostic language of artists became more complex: beyond simple anti-war slogans, they articulated concepts of collective guilt, visualized trauma, and did not shy away from political labels such as "fascism."

As the protest's messaging deepened, state repression evolved from an exceptional reaction into a systemic and predictable practice, fully integrated into the public's perception of dissent. At the same time, the global resonance of the movement significantly increased. From Jamala performing at British benefit concerts that raised millions of dollars, to Ukrainian singers forming the shape of their country with refugee children at a football match in Poland, and Ukraine's strong symbolic presence at Eurovision, the narrative was successfully transformed into a transnational cultural code.

Ultimately, these processes led to the final polarization of the musical field into two distinct camps: on the one hand, a protest discourse built on symbolism, mobilization, and witnessing; on the other, a state-sponsored counter-discourse employing propaganda, pro-war concerts, censorship, and harassment of artists.

Function	Count
Symbolic Boycott	1
Performative	2
Mobilizational	9
Global Legitimization	4
Symbolic Support	2
Diagnostic	5
Repression	8
Counter-discourse	3
Affective	2
Community Building	3
Symbolic Protest	2
Marginalization	1
Symbolic	4

Function	Count
Total	46

Table 3: Distribution of functions in the second period (March 26—April 24):

The analysis of the third period reveals a clear shift in the protest discourse, with symbolic actions becoming the leading category. These functions manifest through both new artistic statements and the reinterpretation of past works, solidifying a visual and metaphorical language to discuss the conflict. When the rock band Bi-2 refused to play under a giant pro-war “Z” banner in Omsk on April 28, or when opera singer Liudmyla Monastyrskya wrapped herself in the Ukrainian flag at the Metropolitan Opera on May 1, music turned into a direct, visible act of symbolic resistance. At the same time, Pink Floyd’s collaboration with Andriy Khlyvnyuk on “Hey Hey Rise Up” and the Scorpions’ altered lyrics in “Wind of Change” signaled how rewriting the canon itself became a protest gesture that resonated across borders.

Simultaneously, state repression became more systematic and frequent, with seven distinct cases recorded in this period, making it the most numerous function. Moscow authorities pressured nightclubs to connect to the state’s facial recognition system; Morgenshtern and Face were officially branded “foreign agents”; Maria Alyokhina of Pussy Riot fled Russia disguised as a food courier to avoid imprisonment; and Yuri Shevchuk of DDT faced police intervention right after his viral anti-war speech in Ufa, where he shouted from the stage: “Motherland, friends, is not the president’s ass that must be constantly licked and kissed.” These examples show how repression turned into spectacle, with protocols, labels, and forced apologies becoming standalone political messages.

The diagnostic function also deepens, moving beyond a simple anti-war stance to articulate more complex themes of collective guilt, trauma, and dehumanization.

Noize MC sang *Ausweis* in Warsaw about the weight of collective responsibility, while Face told Yuri Dud in an interview that “every one of us could have done more.” Zemfira’s new video *Myaso* portrayed soldiers’ trauma in Mariupol with Renata Litvinova’s stark drawings, exposing dehumanization through art. Even international artists joined in: the Pet Shop Boys condemned “fascism in Russia,” explicitly politicizing their solidarity message.

While mobilization and community-building functions continued, they now took on hybrid and international forms. Noize MC and Monetochka’s *Voices of Peace* concerts in Riga and Vilnius raised tens of thousands of euros with full transparency. Face, Pornofilmy, and Nervy launched the *Stand with Ukraine* tour in Tbilisi, performing draped in Ukrainian flags and shouting “Russia will be free!” Kalush Orchestra’s triumph at Eurovision with *Stefania* not only secured Ukraine’s cultural presence but was used by Oleh Psiuk to cry out on live television: “Please help Ukraine, Mariupol. Help Azovstal right now!” The song’s official video, shot in Bucha and Irpin, tied this victory directly to the horrors of war.

This corresponds with the growth of global legitimization, as the Ukrainian theme became firmly integrated into Western media streams. Ed Sheeran’s collaboration with Antytila on “2Step” introduced Ukrainian lyrics about the first day of the invasion into mainstream pop, while Future, Drake, and Tems inserted the symbol of Ukrainian bread — *palyanytsia* — into a chart-topping music video. Such gestures integrated the Ukrainian narrative into everyday global culture, making solidarity unavoidable.

Finally, the state’s counter-discourse also became more organized, cementing music as a definitive space for ideological struggle. Posters insulting anti-war musicians like Monetochka and Morgenshtern appeared in Russian cities, while the lavish *Za Rossiyu* concert tour consumed nearly 100 million rubles of the state budget. Pro-war singers like Grigory Leps posed from occupied Donbas to demonstrate loyalty. In

parallel, Russian platforms such as VK announced RuStore, a “sovereign” app store to isolate digital space from Western culture.

In this period, the primary emphasis of the protest shifted decisively to its symbolic dimension. Gestures, allegorical texts, visual metaphors, and reinterpretations of the canon — from Kino reviving their 1980s anti-militarist song Love of Weapons to Renata Litvinova’s poetic video using Marlene Dietrich’s voice — became the dominant form of dissent. In parallel, the diagnostic language of artists grew sharper, invoking guilt, trauma, and political labels like “fascism.”

As protest messaging deepened, repression evolved from exceptional punishment into a systemic and predictable practice, already integrated into public expectations of dissent. At the same time, global resonance increased dramatically: Eurovision victories, international collaborations, and solidarity concerts transformed Ukraine’s cultural voice into a transnational code.

Ultimately, these processes produced the final polarization of the musical field into two distinct camps: a protest discourse built on symbolism, mobilization, and witnessing, and a state-sponsored counter-discourse deploying propaganda, pro-war concerts, and the systematic harassment of artists.

Function	Count
Symbolic Protest	3
Counter-discourse	4
Technological Circumvention / Isolation	2
Symbolic Support	4
Performance of Identity / Representation / Victory	3
Mobilizational	5
Global Legitimization	1

Function	Count
Diagnostic	5
Repression	7
Marginalization	1
Symbolic	6
Performative Protest / Performative	2
Mobilization of Support	1
Community Building	1
Artistic Statement	1
Symbolic Performance	1
Affective	2
Total	47

Table 4: Distribution of functions in the third period (April 25—May 24):

The fourth period marks a crucial phase where existing trends solidify and deepen. Repression transitions from a reactive measure to a stable, atmospheric background, becoming hyper-restrictive in its application. Censorship is no longer confined to overtly political statements but extends to any cultural output from artists deemed “suspicious.” The cancellation of DDT’s Moscow concert after Yuri Shevchuk’s anti-war speech in Ufa, the blocking of Pornofilm’s fan community on VKontakte, and the removal of Manizha from the “Stereoleto” festival all demonstrate how repression shifted towards suppressing not just dissent, but even the potential for it. By June, even school graduates in Yekaterinburg were forbidden to sing songs by Zemfira or MumiY Troll, under the pretext that the lyrics contained words like “kill”

or “grenade.” Such hyper-vigilance created a climate where any form of artistic expression could be interpreted as dangerous, forcing widespread self-censorship.

In stark contrast to this internal constriction, the global stage became a more potent source of symbolic support. Billie Eilish kissed a Ukrainian flag during her concert in Bonn after receiving it from a Ukrainian singer, and Imagine Dragons’ Dan Reynolds performed draped in a flag handed to him by a Kharkiv resident from a shelled neighborhood. These gestures, like Yungblud’s emotional condemnation of the war or Billy Talent auctioning a guitar for Ukrainian aid, functioned as a form of affective diplomacy. They embedded the Ukrainian experience into global cultural consciousness, transforming a distant conflict into an immediate emotional reality and normalizing the anti-war stance in mainstream pop culture.

This symbolic capital was increasingly converted into tangible outcomes through direct resource mobilization. The most striking example was Kalush Orchestra selling their Eurovision trophy for \$900,000, channeling the money directly to the Ukrainian military. Similarly, Face, Pornofilmy, and Nervy carried their Stand with Ukraine charity tour to Riga, raising funds while uniting diaspora communities, and Billy Talent’s auction of a signed guitar extended the practice of converting cultural symbols into humanitarian and military resources.

A significant development within this period was the entry of previously apolitical artists into the protest discourse. Belarusian superstar Max Korzh, who had long avoided politics, released the song *Svoy dom* with the line “Spring is crying, Ukraine is burning,” marking a powerful diagnostic moment. His subsequent decision to cancel his entire European and Russian tour — declaring that he could not sing about “living it up when lives are being taken every day” — transformed absence into protest, making refusal itself into an ethical statement.

Finally, the conflict’s influence expanded to encompass cultural memory. The dramatic rescue of Maria Prymachenko’s folk paintings from a bombed museum turned her into a global emblem of cultural survival. At the same time, the sudden

death of Yuri Shatunov on June 23 triggered waves of nostalgia for a lost, pre-conflict Russia of the early 1990s, showing how war reframes even the past. These events reveal the war as a totalizing phenomenon that reshapes not only present cultural life but also its historical memory.

Mobilizational	4
Community Building	2
Repression	6
Symbolic Support	3
Symbolic	3
Diagnostic	1
Affective	2
Performative Protest	1
Symbolic Resilience	1
Cultural Memory	1
Total	24

Table 5: Distribution of functions in the fourth period (May 25—June 23):

The fifth period represents a culmination of the confrontation, where the musical sphere becomes a fully structured and institutionalized battleground. The leading dynamic is the systematization of repression, which now operates not through sporadic actions but through established mechanisms. Entire rosters of artists are removed from festival lineups — Anacondaz and Louna were cancelled in July, Pornofilmly’s concerts shut down mid-performance, and Bi-2 was threatened with a

formal FSB ban on entering Russia. Informal “blacklists” of undesirable musicians circulate in the press, while official concert contracts begin including clauses forbidding political speech from the stage. Even institutions are taken over, as in the closure of the Gogol Center in late June. This institutionalization makes dissent a constant, calculated risk and formalizes the state’s control over the cultural field.

As the space for expression within Russia constricts, the global stage solidifies as a powerful platform for symbolic support. The Rolling Stones performed with a Ukrainian children’s choir in Vienna, Rammstein’s keyboardist waved the Ukrainian flag in Warsaw, and Ozzy Osbourne issued a Ukrainian-flag vinyl edition of his new album to raise funds for orphans. Imagine Dragons not only dedicated songs to Ukraine during their shows but also became official ambassadors for United24, Ukraine’s fundraising platform. These acts of solidarity from legacy artists broadcast from the world’s largest stages integrate the Ukrainian struggle into the canon of global pop culture, transforming support into a permanent part of international cultural memory.

This period also sees the intensification of the counter-discursive struggle for legitimacy, with both sides leveraging institutional tools. The Kremlin’s loyalists circulate “white lists” of artists approved for broadcast, while pop stars like Philipp Kirkorov perform in Crimea for wounded soldiers, calling them “heroes.” On the other side, Pussy Riot continued their European tour, donating €10,000 to a Kyiv children’s hospital, and Ukrainian bands like Okean Elzy released songs such as *Flowers of the Minefields* with proceeds going directly to the army. Even older protest anthems were revived, as Lyapis Trubetskoy re-recorded *Warriors of Light* in Ukrainian. In this way, the protest movement refined its mobilization practices, consistently turning symbolic capital into material resources.

The diagnostic function of music also deepened. Yuri Shevchuk in his *Voice of America* interview called the war a “spiritual catastrophe” for Russia, while at his concerts he was immediately served police protocols for “discrediting the army.”

Noize MC stood on stage reflecting on the shelling of his own Russian hometown, describing it with the same horror as the bombardment of Ukrainian cities, breaking down the line between national identities in pain. Ivan Dorn wrote in *The New York Times* about the failure of his dream to be a cultural bridge, admitting that only a total rupture remained possible. Zemfira's and DDT's new long-form music videos turned entire narratives into allegories of repression, trauma, and generational conflict.

Finally, a defining feature of this phase is the emergence of emigration as a distinct form of political protest. On June 24, Little Big released their biting music video *Generation Cancellation* and announced they were leaving Russia. IC3PEAK soon followed, framing their departure as an act of survival and defiance after years of persecution. Their absence from the Russian stage was itself a political statement: leaving became not merely a personal decision but a collective declaration of severance from the state. This consolidated a new cultural map of exile, where artists continued to create abroad, turning the very act of emigration into one of the strongest forms of protest.

Repression	11
Symbolic Support	6
Mobilizational	6
Diagnostic	4
Counter-discourse	4
Symbolic	4
Emigration Statement	2
Community Building	2
Affective	2
Performative Protest	2
Testimony	2
Global Legitimation	3
Performance of Resilience	1
Technological Circumvention	1
Total	50

Table 6: Distribution of functions in the fifth period

The sixth period marks a phase of entrenched confrontation, where repression solidifies as the central pillar of state cultural policy. This dynamic becomes multi-layered, moving beyond simple bans to encompass a strategy of total pressure — fines, criminal cases, preventive detentions, and even FSB raids on artists. The prosecution of Oleg Yagodin from Kurara for saying “No to war!” on stage, the

investigation into Pornofilmy's frontman for "extremist statements," the police raid on AloeVera's secret concert, and the detention of Yakutian punk musician Aikhla Ammosov for attempting to hang an anti-war banner all illustrate how repression became both institutionalized and "pinpoint," using intimidation to produce a climate of pervasive fear.

In direct response, the counter-discourse intensified to a record level, becoming the second-most prominent dynamic and turning the cultural sphere into an arena of open struggle. The stage itself became a frontline of defiance: Yuri Shevchuk's famous concert speech in Ufa about patriotism not being "the president's ass" continued to echo as his case wound through courts, while drag performer Bomba Kibersisi reappropriated the Russian anthem under a rainbow flag, provoking police investigation. Even mainstream bands like Anacondaz, forced to cancel their shows, transformed cancellations into performative protests and pledged to sue authorities, turning repression into an opportunity for counter-discursive pushback.

At the same time, the diaspora and emigration evolved from isolated protest acts into a new cultural infrastructure. Little Big confirmed their exile by canceling their Russian tour; IC3PEAK and Zemfira organized European tours as long-term alternatives to performing at home; Nervy's frontman spoke openly about cutting all ties with Russia. Together, these moves consolidated a "non-Russian" cultural circuit abroad, where exile itself became an artistic identity and a community-building force.

While direct acts of international support became less frequent, their qualitative significance remained high. Laima Vaikule appeared on stage in Lithuania with a Ukrainian flag; Ozzy Osbourne released a limited-edition album in Ukrainian colors to raise money for orphans; Eurovision organizers confirmed that, although the contest would move to the UK for safety reasons, Ukraine would still qualify directly for the final. These moments, like Imagine Dragons' continued symbolic gestures,

embedded Ukrainian resilience into global cultural consciousness, ensuring that the anti-war position remained visible in mainstream entertainment.

Finally, the conflict expanded onto the technological front. Patreon was blocked in Russia by the Prosecutor General's Office, cutting off an entire ecosystem of independent fundraising, while groups like Kasta encouraged fans to organize secret, decentralized concerts to bypass censorship. This interplay of state bans and grassroots circumvention revealed how digital resistance had become an integral part of the protest ecosystem.

In sum, the sixth period reflects a hybrid conflict: the state and dissenting artists using parallel tools — censorship versus symbolic protest, bans versus secret concerts, propaganda versus solidarity tours — to fight over legitimacy. Music here no longer functions as background commentary but as a central arena of ideological struggle, stretched across courts, concert halls, digital platforms, and exile networks.

Repression	10
Counter-Discourse	9
Symbolic	6
Mobilizational	3
Diagnostic	3
Emigration Statement	2
Testimony	2
Performative Protest	3
Symbolic Support	2
Community Building	2
Act of Solidarity	1
Global Legitimation	1

Technological Circumvention	2
Total	46

Table 7: Distribution of functions in the sixth period

In the seventh period, the logic of repression becomes all-encompassing, extending its reach into previously untouched domains like classical music and targeting iconic, historically untouchable figures. This demonstrates the state's intent to eliminate any remaining "neutral zones" within the cultural space. The most significant development, however, is the evolution of the counter-discourse, where artists begin to strategically appropriate the state's own language and tools as a form of resistance. Alla Pugacheva's public demand to be named a "foreign agent" is a prime example of this jujutsu-like tactic, transforming a stigma of state repression into a powerful symbol of defiance and moral clarity.

As direct rhetoric becomes increasingly perilous, symbolic gestures solidify as the main resource for protest. The physical return of exiled artists to Russia, the display of flags on stage, or the use of nostalgic aesthetics are all powerful, non-verbal acts that create significant cultural effects and articulate dissent in a climate of severe censorship. Concurrently, the diagnostic function of music matures, shifting from immediate emotional reactions to broader, more profound historical and civilizational formulations. Artists begin to frame the conflict not just as a political event, but as a moral catastrophe and the end of an entire era of freedom.

This internal dynamic is amplified by international recognition, where support from global figures like the Pet Shop Boys turns local acts of courage into part of an international cultural narrative, creating a "global resonance" effect. Finally, in the face of institutional pressure, new forms of solidarity emerge. Community-building

becomes a crucial infrastructure for survival, with crowdfunding campaigns and peer support initiatives showing audiences taking on an active role as partners in resistance.

Repression	10
Counter-Discourse	9
Symbolic	6
Mobilizational	3
Diagnostic	3
Emigration Statement	2
Testimony	2
Performative Protest	3
Symbolic Support	2
Community Building	2
Act of Solidarity	1
Global Legitimation	1
Technological Circumvention	2
Total	46

Table . Distribution of functions in the seventh period

An analysis shows that, in the first seven months after February 24, 2022, the music scene became a full-fledged front of cultural and political opposition. Initially, music played a primarily diagnostic and affective role, helping to articulate trauma and shock, as well as mobilize resources through solidarity actions. As the conflict developed, the protest statement became more complex and institutionalized: symbolic and performative gestures took on a leading role, charitable tours and

digital boycotts became established practices, and emigration became an independent political position.

Meanwhile, state repression evolved from targeted acts to systematic policies with legal control mechanisms, making any expression of dissent potentially punishable. However, this strengthened the value of each protest act, giving it symbolic authenticity. In the international context, the anti-war agenda was integrated into the global cultural imagination — from collaborations with Western artists to performances on major stages.

Thus, protest music evolved from situational reactions to a stable system of resistance, combining artistic, symbolic, institutional, and global dimensions. It ceased to be "background noise" and became one of the main channels for articulating moral boundaries, mobilizing resources, and fixing historical memory.

Research Question 2: How have these functions changed over time in response to escalating conflict and repression?

In the course of my research, I have traced a clear and dynamic evolution in the functions of protest music across seven distinct periods following the events of February 24, 2022. By analyzing both the quantitative frequency of different discursive roles and the qualitative content of artistic statements, a distinct trajectory emerges, showing how musical protest adapted to a rapidly escalating and increasingly repressive environment.

Initially, my analysis of the first period shows that the response was overwhelmingly diagnostic and affective. The data reveals a high concentration of statements where artists primarily sought to articulate the collective shock and directly label the event as a "war" or "catastrophe." At this stage, the function of music was to process reality and reflect a shared emotional state. Repression was present but appeared sporadic, and organized mobilization was still nascent, indicating that the initial phase was one of verbal and emotional reaction rather than strategic action.

However, as I tracked the discourse into the second period, a significant functional shift became apparent. The emphasis moved decisively from articulation to practical mobilization. My findings indicate a sharp increase in activities like charity concerts and organized fundraising, demonstrating that artists and their communities began to build a tangible infrastructure of assistance. This marks the point where music transitioned from a passive reflector of events to an active organizational tool.

As the conflict progressed and the risks associated with direct statements grew, my research of the third and fourth periods identifies a crucial turn towards a more complex symbolic discourse. The protest's language became more aestheticized and layered. I observed a rise in allegorical music videos, the reinterpretation of older songs with new meanings, and non-verbal gestures, which allowed dissent to be expressed in a less explicit but still powerful manner. This symbolic shift was also when the protest began to actively engage with narratives of cultural memory and draw legitimacy from the support of the global artistic community.

The fifth period, based on my analysis, represents the institutionalization of the conflict. It was here that repression peaked, becoming a systemic and formalized tool of state policy, as evidenced by the implementation of blacklists and legal mechanisms. In response, the protest's own structures, particularly mobilization and global symbolic support, also became more stable and routine. The cultural field solidified into a clear battleground, with both sides leveraging institutional power.

In the final stages I analyzed, the confrontation moved into new arenas. My findings for the sixth period point to a legal and diasporic turn. The conflict migrated to courtrooms and online platforms, with both the state and artists using the language of law as a weapon. The role of the exiled artistic community became central, forming a new, alternative infrastructure for cultural production and resistance. This culminated in the seventh period, which I characterize as a phase of high-stakes symbolic protest. With repression as a constant and pervasive background, dissent became reliant on the immense symbolic capital of major cultural figures whose local

actions, amplified by international recognition, were capable of creating global resonance. This shows a protest that has adapted to extreme pressure by becoming more targeted, symbolic, and reliant on the moral authority of its most iconic voices.

Function	Period 1 (24.02-25.03)	Period 2 (26.03-23.04)	Period 3 (28.04-23.05)	Period 4 (29.05-23.06)	Period 5 (24.06-07.08)	Period 6 (24.07-22.08)	Period 7 (23.08-20.09)
Repression	6	8	7	6	11	10	9
Diagnostic	15	5	5	1	4	3	4
Affective	8	2	2	2	2	—	1
Mobilizational	5	9	5	4	6	3	—
Symbolic	7	4	6	3	4	6	6
Symbolic Support	2	2	4	3	6	2	4
Symbolic Protest	—	2	3	—	—	—	—
Performative Protest	2	2	2	1	2	3	1
Counter-discourse	2	3	4	—	4	9	4
Community Building	1	3	1	2	2	2	2
Global Legitimation	2	4	—	—	3	1	1

Function	Period 1 (24.02-25.03)	Period 2 (26.03-23.04)	Period 3 (28.04-23.05)	Period 4 (29.05-23.06)	Period 5 (24.06-07.08)	Period 6 (24.07-22.08)	Period 7 (23.08-20.09)
Marginalization	–	1	1	–	1	–	2
Artistic Statement	–	1	1	–	1	2	2
Testimony	–	–	2	–	2	2	1
Symbolic Resilience	–	–	–	1	–	–	1
Performance of Identity/Resilience	–	–	2	–	1	–	–
Technological Isolation / Circumvention	2	–	1	–	1	2	–
Ambivalence	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Cultural Boycott	3	–	–	–	–	–	–
Cultural Memory	–	–	–	1	–	–	–
Collapse of Public Sphere	1	–	–	–	–	–	–

Function	Period 1 (24.02-25.03)	Period 2 (26.03-23.04)	Period 3 (28.04-23.05)	Period 4 (29.05-23.06)	Period 5 (24.06-07.08)	Period 6 (24.07-22.08)	Period 7 (23.08-20.09)
Personal Sanctions	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Moral / Institutional Pressure	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Symbolic Isolation	1	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 8. Distribution of protest music functions across all periods (February 24 – September 20, 2022)

The analysis reveals a systematic evolution of the protest's functional dynamics, shifting from an initial reactive phase to a structured, multi-faceted confrontation shaped by escalating state pressure. The primary external dynamic was the intensification of state control, with Repression evolving from a targeted tactic (6 cases in Period 1) to a systemic instrument, peaking at eleven instances in the fifth period and becoming an institutionalized norm. This was complemented by a growing Counter-discourse, which culminated with nine cases in the sixth period, indicating a shift from mere suppression to an active struggle over legal and cultural legitimacy.

The initial artistic response was consequently dominated by Diagnostic and Affective functions, heavily concentrated in the first period (15 and 8 cases, respectively) as a means of processing the initial shock and articulating a collective emotional state. However, as the conflict progressed, these reactive modes were supplanted by more

strategic and sustainable forms of protest. The Mobilizational function, which peaked with nine cases in the second period and then stabilized, transformed music into a tangible infrastructure for financial and logistical resistance. Concurrently, the Symbolic dimension—including direct symbolic support—remained the most consistently high function throughout the entire timeline, serving as the core language for dissent through gestures, reinterpretations, and signs in a climate of increasing censorship. Ultimately, these pressures led to a geographical restructuring of the cultural scene, with Emigration emerging as a distinct genre of protest. The departure of key artists and the consistent presence of community-building efforts solidified a new "exilic field," demonstrating the formation of alternative cultural networks beyond state control.

3. Discussion

This chapter addresses the research questions presented in the methodology. The analysis of the collected data provides a comprehensive overview of the roles and evolution of protest music in Russia following the events of February 24, 2022.

The empirical analysis reveals that protest music performed a complex set of interconnected functions, which can be categorized as diagnostic, affective, mobilizational, symbolic, and a dual role of engaging with repression and counter-discourse. These functions did not operate in isolation but formed a dynamic field of political and cultural struggle.

a) The Diagnostic Function

One of the most immediate and crucial roles of music was diagnostic. In the initial shock of the conflict, artists served as cultural arbiters, using their platforms to define the reality of the situation in defiance of the state's narrative. In a context where the Russian government prohibited calling the war a “war” and insisted on the euphemism “special military operation,” this diagnostic function became especially vital.

This is evident in the early statements from figures like Boris Grebenshchikov, who called the events “madness,” and Oxxxymiron, who labeled them a “catastrophe and a crime.” These artists leveraged their established cultural authority to provide a moral and political framework. By explicitly using the word “war,” they set the discursive terms for the protest that followed.

Over the following weeks, the diagnosis became deeper and more multifaceted. While early interventions were brief and categorical, by March and April, artists began reflecting on guilt, shame, and responsibility. For example, Yuri Shevchuk described the war as a tragedy that deprives people of their future, and Noize MC explicitly addressed the burden of collective responsibility in *Ausweis*. The diagnostic role evolved from straightforward rejection (“no to war”) to a more

nuanced moral analysis. This shift indicated that Russian musicians were not only condemning the war, but also interpreting its social and ethical implications for Russian society.

By late spring and into the summer, these statements persisted but became increasingly dangerous under repression. Some artists, such as Face, confessed shame in interviews, offering self-criticism that went beyond condemning the state. Others turned to allegory, embedding diagnostic language into metaphors, visuals, or music videos to avoid direct prosecution. For instance, Zemfira's "Myaso" depicted the trauma experienced by soldiers in Mariupol without explicitly naming the events. However, the diagnostic framing — depicting war as dehumanization — remained evident. Thus, the diagnostic function was not abandoned, but rather transformed into coded speech that balanced truth-telling with survival.

Over the summer and into early autumn, as emigration accelerated and repression intensified, the diagnostic role of Russian protest music shifted further toward exile voices. Statements from abroad by artists such as Face, Little Big, and IC3PEAK continued to name the war directly and criticize the state, but these statements increasingly came from outside Russia's borders. Inside the country, diagnosis became muted and was replaced by silence or carefully veiled allegories. Yet, precisely because of this scarcity, diagnostic acts became even more valuable; every rare public mention of the war carried greater weight and authenticity.

In general, this diagnostic function was nuanced by the artists' personal and generational backgrounds. For the established rock generation, represented by Yuri Shevchuk and Andrei Makarevich, the diagnosis was often framed through historical analogies and a sense of existential threat to the nation's future. For younger artists from the rap and indie scenes, such as Oxxxymiron and Monetochka, the emphasis was more on ethical responsibility, cognitive resistance against propaganda, and the urgent need for collective action.

b) The Affective Function

Beyond rational diagnosis, music played a significant role in the affective articulation of collective experience. This aligns with Michael Taussig's (2019) notion of "sounding dissent," where resistance is expressed not just through lyrical content but through non-verbal, emotional, and embodied forms. This was observed in symbolic gestures, tears on stage, and most powerfully, in performances that took place in highly charged locations like subways and bomb shelters.

In the earliest stage of the invasion, the affective function emerged almost instantly. Although diagnostic statements framed the war as a "catastrophe" or a "crime," it was the emotional resonance of the words and gestures of artists that reached audiences most directly. Zemfira's fragile declaration, "I just don't want war," and Leonid Agutin's cry, "STOP THE WAR!," exemplify how personal despair became a shared experience. These were not political programs, but rather, raw expressions of grief, trembling, and horror. This emotional intensity allowed audiences to process the initial shock together. At a time when the state forbade calling the war a "war," emotional music provided an alternative channel of truth, grounded not in facts, but in feelings.

As the weeks progressed, the affective role remained present but shifted in character. In March and April, Russian artists transitioned from spontaneous outcries to more contemplative expressions of loss and guilt. Boris Grebenshchikov described the invasion as "true madness," and Yuri Shevchuk said it was a tragedy that stole the future from an entire generation. These statements retained their emotional weight, but they were increasingly intertwined with diagnostic and ethical language. The result was a hybrid form in which emotion and analysis reinforced each other: grief became sharper when labeled "madness," and fear became heavier when tied to the idea of a stolen future.

However, by late spring and early summer, the affective function began to fade as an independent category. Direct emotional outbursts became less common under intensifying repression, when every word could lead to criminal prosecution. Artists

who had initially expressed despair turned to symbolic and performative forms of protest. For instance, Zemfira's music video "Myaso" expressed trauma through allegorical drawings rather than direct lament. During this period, although affect did not disappear, it became mediated, embedded in metaphors, visual language, or silence itself rather than in explicit cries of pain.

Over the summer, as repression became institutionalized and emigration spread, the affective function diminished further as artists prioritized survival, boycotts, and symbolic gestures. Emotions did not vanish from Russian protest music; rather, they were displaced into other registers, such as satire, irony, allegory, and absence. The raw vulnerability of February and March gave way to more coded expressions of despair designed to withstand censorship while maintaining symbolic resonance.

In sum, the affective function of Russian protest music was strongest during the initial weeks when shock and grief demanded immediate expression. Over time, however, as repression tightened, the affective function gradually yielded to symbolic, performative, and institutionalized forms of resistance. What began as trembling voices and desperate cries evolved into allegorical works, emigration statements, and silences that conveyed emotion implicitly rather than explicitly.

c) The Mobilizational Function

The research clearly indicates that music quickly evolved to perform a practical mobilizational function. In the terms of Eyerman and Jamison (1998), music acted as a form of "cognitive praxis," shaping a collective identity that could be channeled into direct action. Numerous artists, including Pussy Riot and Noize MC, consistently donated proceeds from their tours to humanitarian causes. In this capacity, protest music became more than just a form of expression, as it also served as a foundation for solidarity. Artists consistently redirected symbolic capital, such as concert audiences, media attention, and fan communities into humanitarian aid and activist networks. For example, Pussy Riot's European tours combined artistic performances with fundraising, directly donating to hospitals and refugee support

initiatives. These practices demonstrate how Russian protest musicians treated their platforms as both sites of cultural critique and organizational tools.

In this capacity, music became more than a form of expression; it transformed into an infrastructure of solidarity, effectively converting symbolic capital into material assistance and demonstrating its power as an organizational tool.

d) The Symbolic Function

In the context of the 2022 musical protest, its symbolic function is of particular interest. It deserves close attention since it did not emerge as a single phenomenon but rather as a complex, multifaceted system of practices that acquired decisive significance under the most severe censorship conditions. When direct statements were banned, symbols became the main language of resistance. Music and associated gestures turned into an allegorical code that expressed disagreement and solidarity where words were impossible.

This symbolic function manifested through a range of actions where presence and absence both became signs. Some of the earliest and most powerful symbols were gestures of refusal, such as the cancellation of concerts by Russian artists, the resignation of renowned conductors, and the Bi-2 group's refusal to perform under the militaristic "Z" banner, transforming silence and leaving the stage into loud political statements. Concurrently, international artists such as Placebo, Måneskin, and Slipknot formed a symbol of cultural isolation by refusing to tour in Russia, turning the "absence of music" into a tangible sign of rejection of the authorities' actions. At the same time, music became a language of global solidarity. Sting's revival of the song "Russians" and Imagine Dragons' performance with a Ukrainian flag on stage created instantly recognizable symbols of support.e) Repression and Counter-Discourse

Finally, the analysis shows that the protest field was defined by the state's reaction. Repression became a direct consequence of protest actions, with concert cancellations (DDT, Splin), the application of the "foreign agent" label (Makarevich, Face), and criminal cases (Shevchuk, Pussy Riot) becoming standard tools of suppression.

However, in line with Drott's (2011) framework, protest music also functioned as a powerful counter-discourse. Artists learned to appropriate the language of the state itself, turning labels like "foreign agent" into symbols of honor, as exemplified by Alla Pugacheva's public statement. In response, the state developed its own counter-narratives, such as the state-sponsored "patriotic" concerts featuring the "Z" symbol and coordinated smear campaigns against artists like Monetochka and Morgenshtern. This created a dynamic where music became a contested terrain for a broader struggle over meaning and legitimacy.

As events unfolded, the symbolic work became more complex, evolving from direct gestures to a rethinking of cultural heritage. Musicians began actively rewriting the existing canon, giving it new anti-war meaning. For example, the Scorpions changed the lyrics of their Perestroika anthem, "Wind of Change," and Pink Floyd recorded a track with vocals by Andrey Khlyvnyuk. They used world-famous melodies to deliver a protest message. The most significant symbolic act was emigration—the departure of renowned artists like Little Big and IC3PEAK from Russia became a potent political statement. Their absence from Russia became a symbol of dissent, and their continued activity abroad became a sign of an emerging alternative, free Russian culture.

The evolution of symbolic protest can clearly be traced over time. While simple and quick reactions dominated in February and March—concert cancellations and the first departures—in the spring, work with symbols became more thoughtful. When direct speech became increasingly dangerous, protest moved into the visual realm. The white-blue-white flag of the opposition and art videos, such as Zemfira's "Meat," spoke of the trauma of war through images.

By summer and fall, symbolic gestures had finally become the dominant form of protest. By September, the language of symbols had become the main tool of the struggle. This was exemplified by Alla Pugacheva's gesture of demanding to be recognized as a "foreign agent," which intercepted and reinterpreted the state stigma and turned it into a sign of moral rectitude and pride.

e) The Role of Repression and Counter-Discourse

The defining characteristic of the 2022 musical protest is its dual role as both a reaction to unprecedented state pressure and an active creation of an alternative moral and ethical space — a counter-discourse. These two functions are inextricably linked, feeding each other and transforming music from a mere collection of anti-war songs into a sophisticated mechanism of cultural resistance. Music constantly interacted with repression, turning it into part of its narrative. State pressure did not merely limit artists; it also became creative material and news for them.

The cancellation of a DDT concert or Bi-2's refusal to perform under a militaristic banner immediately became media events that spoke louder than any song about resistance. The designation of "foreign agent" shifted from a stigma to a symbol of quality and moral rectitude, a transformation symbolically solidified by Alla Pugacheva's gesture. Even the transition from direct lyrics to a complex language of images, as in Zemfira's "Meat" video, was not a retreat but a form of dialogue with censorship. It demonstrated that art will find a way to tell the truth, even under the threat of persecution. Thus, repression could not stifle protest; it merely changed its form and made every symbolic action more significant.

On the other hand, the musicians created a counter-discourse, building an alternative reality that opposed official propaganda. This counter-discourse had its own information field, including independent media and social networks; its own heroes, including the artists who left and stayed; its own economy, including charity collections; and, most importantly, its own value system, based on humanism and rejection of war. Charity tours such as RAW by Oxxxymiron and Voices of Peace by Noize MC and Monetochka not only raised money but also formed a transnational community of solidarity. New songs and videos offered an alternative perspective on events, filled with pain and compassion. These perspectives directly challenged the impersonal, heroic narrative of state media. By rewriting cultural canons, as the Scorpions and Pink Floyd did, artists symbolically

reclaimed culture from the state, demonstrating that culture belongs to society, not the authorities.

Ultimately, these two functions were inextricably linked. Repression gave the counter-discourse legitimacy and urgency, proving its validity simply by existing. In turn, the counter-discourse filled the fight against repression with meaning, turning disparate acts of disobedience into a common cause and consistent moral statement. The main strength of the musical protest of 2022 lay precisely in this dialectical unity of reaction to pressure and construction of an alternative.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the functions, meanings, and trajectories of Russian-language protest music in the context of the war in Ukraine after February 24, 2022. It sought to understand how musicians and audiences have utilized music as a political and social resource under conditions of authoritarian repression and digital transformation. By analyzing both songs and public actions, this study has demonstrated that protest music is not a stable genre but a flexible and adaptive practice, deeply entangled with media technologies, collective emotions, and historical memory. The findings confirm that during times of crisis, music operates simultaneously as a form of resistance, a mode of solidarity, and an instrument of political imagination, resonating with established theories of music as cognitive praxis (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998) and a prophetic force (Attali, 1985). The analysis of primary sources revealed several interlocking dynamics. A central paradox emerged between repression and circulation; while the state banned concerts and censored artists, digital infrastructures provided alternative channels for dissemination. Furthermore, emotion functioned as a key political resource, with songs serving less as explicit manifestos and more as vehicles for generating a sense of emotional collectivity and solidarity. This contemporary expression was often layered with historical resonance, drawing on older repertoires of dissent to create intertextual bridges with the past. The crucial role of exiled musicians highlighted the protest's diasporic and transnational dimensions, while the reliance on platforms like YouTube and Telegram underscored its digital transformation and the associated risks of surveillance and algorithmic invisibility. The study also confirmed a central contradiction of protest in authoritarian contexts: it can be symbolically powerful yet materially constrained in its practical reach.

It is important to acknowledge several limitations inherent in this study. The analysis is necessarily a snapshot in time, focusing on the period from February to September 2022, and subsequent developments remain outside its scope. Furthermore, the reliance on publicly visible digital traces creates an inherent asymmetry in the available data; while public statements are accessible, the everyday listening practices within Russia's diverse regions remain less understood. This points to a critical, yet underexplored, dimension of

audience reception, as the dissertation primarily foregrounded the production and circulation of protest music. Finally, while analogies were drawn to historical cases, a systematic comparative analysis was beyond this dissertation's scope but remains a valuable avenue for future work.

The findings from this study open several promising paths for future exploration. Longitudinal studies could trace how these protest songs circulate over time, potentially testing Attali's notion of music as prophecy. Such work would be powerfully complemented by ethnographic research on audience reception, which could reveal how different social groups engage with this music under repression, thereby connecting musicology with anthropology and political sociology. Another critical avenue is the analysis of digital platforms, examining how algorithms shape the visibility and suppression of protest content, a topic that links musicology with critical data studies. This could be further enriched by adopting a broader comparative perspective, placing the Russian case alongside Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Iranian protest music to reveal transnational patterns of artistic resistance. Further work could also explore the intersection with memory politics by tracing how songs referencing Soviet-era musicians connect to contemporary struggles over identity, as well as the function of protest music as a form of collective therapy for processing trauma, creating an interdisciplinary dialogue with psychology and affect theory.

In conclusion, this dissertation argues that Russian protest music after February 24, 2022, embodies the contradictions of cultural resistance in authoritarian times: it is simultaneously fragile and resilient, silenced and amplified, local and transnational. Its power lies less in its capacity to change policy directly and more in its ability to sustain communities of meaning, memory, and hope. As Jacques Attali (1985) wrote, music is not only entertainment but "a herald of times to come." In the Russian case, it testifies that even under fear and censorship, sound can carve out spaces of freedom. Future research must continue to listen closely, for in these songs we may hear the premonitions of social change yet to unfold.

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Appendices

A single access point to the corpus is provided via the Meduza LIVE Telegram channel (handle @meduzalive). Items in the Appendices are handle-only and open in the Telegram app.

February 24, 2022

- 11:40: Ukrainian musician Ivan Dorn issued a video address to Russian fans and colleagues, calling on them to recognize Ukraine’s sovereignty and resist the war.
- 13:36: Meduza LIVE reported a wave of condemnations from cultural figures, including Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Sergey Lazarev, Leonid Parfyonov, Boris Akunin, and Garik Kharlamov.
- 14:24: Yuri Shevchuk (DDT) described the invasion as a tragedy “robbing us of the future” and urged for calm but firm resistance.
- 14:42: Boris Grebenshchikov declared the war “true madness” and called its initiators “a disgrace to Russia.”
- 16:18: Rapper Oxxxymiron released an anti-war statement, framing the invasion as a “catastrophe and a crime.” He canceled six major concerts in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, stating he could not entertain while missiles fell on Kyiv.

February 25, 2022

- 06:53: Zemfira spoke against the war at a Moscow concert and posted, “I’m sad, it’s hard, I cry. I just don’t want war.” The post was deleted shortly after (reported at 08:20).
- 12:37: International celebrities, including Angelina Jolie, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Miley Cyrus, and Jared Leto, publicly denounced the invasion.

- 12:42: Russia’s Channel One pulled Evening Urgant from its broadcast after host Ivan Urgant posted #нетвойне (“no to war”).
- 16:20: Meduza confirmed that Russia was excluded from the Eurovision Song Contest 2022.
- 18:13: Russian riot police in Saint Petersburg used music by the band Lyube to drown out anti-war protests, while the group’s frontman Nikolai Rastorguev posted a call for peace at 19:02.

February 26, 2022

- 16:23: Ukrainian singer Dmitry Monatik published a poem directed at the Russian government, listing the horrors of war.
- 19:59: Ivan Dorn released a second video, asking Russians to critically examine propaganda and offering to share facts ignored by state media.

February 27, 2022

- 17:56: Meduza reported that Maria Alyokhina of Pussy Riot had been detained in Moscow for anti-war activism.

February 28, 2022

- 01:38: The Metropolitan Opera announced it would sever ties with any artists supporting Putin, a move impacting figures like Anna Netrebko and Valery Gergiev.
- Maria Alyokhina was sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest.

March 1, 2022

- 09:05: Valery Gergiev was officially dismissed as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic.
- 12:23: Western acts, including Franz Ferdinand, Green Day, and Iggy Pop, began canceling their concerts in Russia.
- 16:49: The Moscow music festival “Большой” was canceled after its headliner, Nick Cave, withdrew.
- 22:52: The Ukrainian national anthem was played at The Metropolitan Opera in New York.
- 23:21: Actor Jared Leto posted a message of support for Ukraine.

March 2, 2022

- 03:24: Leonid Agutin posted a personal plea: “I PRAY — STOP THE WAR!”

March 3, 2022

- 14:50: Slipknot postponed all upcoming concerts in Moscow, Kyiv, and Minsk.
- 22:15: Till Lindemann of Rammstein canceled his scheduled concerts in Moscow and Novosibirsk.

March 5, 2022

- 04:13: Anna Netrebko announced she was suspending her career.

– Gorillaz expressed support for Ukraine and “Russians who oppose this senseless war.”

– 08:44: The independent publication Colta.ru announced it would "go silent for a while," citing the repressive climate.

March 6, 2022

– 16:06: Tugan Sokhiev resigned as chief conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre, citing political pressure.

– 18:48: TikTok suspended new content uploads and live streaming in Russia.

– 19:51: Spotify disabled premium access in Russia.

– 21:34: Sting released a new performance of his 1985 song “Russians,” stating it had regained its tragic relevance.

March 8, 2022

– 18:28: Spotify began logging out many Russian users, signaling a deeper service withdrawal.

– 23:04: Universal Music Group announced its exit from the Russian market.

March 9, 2022

– 08:05: Ukrainian violinist Vera Lytovchenko was featured for her performances in a Kharkiv bomb shelter.

- 15:13: Musicians in Kyiv held a symphonic concert on Maidan, calling for a no-fly zone over Ukraine.

- 21:40: The Russo-Ukrainian band Nervy announced it would cease performing in Russia.

March 10, 2022

- Sony Music Group announced its withdrawal from Russia.

March 11, 2022

- Pink Floyd and David Gilmour pulled their music from Russian and Belarusian streaming platforms.

- That evening, the band Shortparis released a new video with a veterans' choir.

March 14, 2022

- 15:29: Yandex.Music and VK Music announced they could no longer add new releases by Western artists to their platforms. Previously added tracks remain unless individually withdrawn by artists.

- 18:47: A potential list of Western artists banned in Russia began circulating. Specific names were not disclosed.

March 15, 2022

- 07:17: The Metropolitan Opera in New York held a concert in support of Ukraine, displaying the Ukrainian flag on its facade.
- 19:05: Oxxxymiron launched his first charity concert in Istanbul for Ukrainian refugees.
- 20:38: The Istanbul concert concluded, raising around \$30,000. Proceeds were directed to a Polish charity for Ukrainian children.

March 16, 2022

- 12:40: Sviatoslav Vakarchuk of Okean Elzy performed in the Kharkiv metro. He had also sung in Odesa and Lviv earlier that week.

March 17, 2022

- 08:00: Olga Smirnova, prima ballerina of the Bolshoi Theatre, left Russia for the Netherlands. She had publicly condemned the war on March 1.
- 10:58: Oxxxymiron announced a second “Russians Against War” concert in London.
- 18:06: Renowned Ukrainian actress Oksana Shvets was killed during shelling in Kyiv.

March 18, 2022

- 10:13: Preparations at Luzhniki Stadium for a pro-government concert marking the anniversary of Crimea’s annexation were underway.

- 12:49: Russia's Interior Ministry reported 203,000 attendees at Luzhniki, both inside and outside the stadium.
- 13:15: Vladimir Putin appeared at the Luzhniki concert.
- 13:26: The TV broadcast was abruptly cut mid-speech; patriotic singer Oleg Gazmanov was aired instead.
- 16:19: Anonymous Ukrainian musicians released a track titled Anthem of True Russia, composed from sounds of explosions and shelling.
- 22:17: Russian electronic duo IC3PEAK released a new single and video Dead But Pretty.

March 20, 2022

- 10:36: Ukrainian-born rapper T-Fest left the Gazgolder label, canceled all concerts in Russia, and condemned the war in an Instagram post.
- 20:53: An online benefit concert “U FOR UKRAINE” took place.

March 21, 2022

- 17:06: A charity concert was held in Łódź, Poland. A young refugee girl appeared on stage alongside Ukrainian and Polish musicians.
- 17:53: Ivan Dorn’s label removed its entire music catalog from Yandex.Music and Spotify in Russia and Belarus.
- 22:47: Måneskin officially canceled their Russian tour dates, expressing solidarity with Ukraine.

March 24, 2022

– 21:06: Svetlana Loboda posted a video showing destroyed Ukrainian cities while reading a war poem. She revealed her family remained near Kyiv in Irpin.

– 21:11: Oxxxymiron's second anti-war concert began at O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire in London.

– 22:43: Boris Grebenshchikov made a surprise appearance at the London concert. Total funds raised by the first two events exceeded \$53,000.

March 25, 2022

– 06:13: Zemfira shared a backstage photo with Oxxxymiron and Grebenshchikov but did not perform.

– 19:49: At a concert in Crocus City Hall, Leonid Agutin publicly called for peace and an end to military actions.

March 26, 2022

– 12:13: Rapper Face announced he was removing all his tracks from Russian streaming services and would no longer perform in Russia.

March 27, 2022

– 16:54: A large international benefit concert aired on Polish TV channel TVP, featuring Sting, Imagine Dragons, Fatboy Slim, and Ukrainian stars like Tina Karol, Monatik, and Jamala.

March 28, 2022

– 22:15: The Scorpions altered lyrics in Wind of Change during a performance, replacing “Follow the Moskva...” with “Now listen to my heart, it says Ukrainia.”

March 29, 2022

– 09:31: Noize MC and Monetochka announced anti-war concerts in Riga (April 7) and Vilnius (April 10). Proceeds were set for Ukrainian refugees via Fundacja Siepomaga.

– 15:02: Russian general Shamanov claimed Russian forces had captured two Ukrainian men, one allegedly the author of an anti-Putin song. This claim remained unverified.

March 30, 2022

– 05:31: In the UK, a charity concert featuring Ed Sheeran, Camila Cabello, and Jamala raised over \$16 million for Ukraine.

– 12:25: Face gave an interview to Yuri Dud’ explaining his shame and decision to leave Russia.

– 21:31: Pussy Riot’s Rita Flores was detained in Minsk and forced to record a pro-Lukashenko video under threat of imprisonment.

April 1, 2022

– 12:36: Author Boris Akunin condemned cultural isolation, opposing boycotts of Russian literature and media, arguing such actions aid Putin’s propaganda.

April 3, 2022

- 11:07: Ukrainian pop singer Max Barskih (Mykola Bortnyk) announced he had joined the Ukrainian Armed Forces.
- 11:14: Sviatoslav Vakarchuk, frontman of Okean Elzy and officer of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, posted a video from Odesa with smoke rising in the background, showing the destruction behind him.

April 4, 2022

- 11:11: Oxxxymiron announced the final concert in his “Russians Against War” tour, to be held on April 6 in Berlin. In a video message, he condemned Russian war crimes in Ukraine and called for personal responsibility and resistance to indifference.

April 5, 2022

- 10:19: A new administrative case was opened against rapper Morgenshtern for alleged drug promotion in his music videos.
- 14:52: Meduza published an interview with Noize MC and Monetochka, who were organizing charity concerts for Ukrainian refugees in Riga and Vilnius. Both artists had spoken against the war since its first days.
- 15:23: The band Nogu Svelo released an anti-war song titled "We Don't Need War!" featuring a sample of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.
- 16:43: Russian prosecutors requested real prison time for Maria Alyokhina of Pussy Riot in the so-called “sanitary case.”

April 6, 2022

– 21:14: Oxxxymiron performed in Berlin at the third “Russians Against War” benefit concert, raising funds for Ukrainian refugees.

April 7, 2022

– 11:39: The Soviet-era anti-war song “Do the Russians Want War?” sung by Mark Bernes was blocked on YouTube’s Russian segment, sparking debate.

– 15:40: Roskomnadzor denied ordering the removal of the Bernes video, claiming it only requested the deletion of one extremist comment.

– 18:27: The first “Voices of Peace” concert by Noize MC and Monetochka took place in Riga. Donations went to the Fundacja Siepomaga charity aiding Ukrainian refugees.

– 20:31: Pink Floyd released “Hey Hey Rise Up,” their first song since 1994, featuring vocals by Ukrainian artist Andriy Khlyvnyuk of Boombox. Proceeds were pledged to Ukrainian humanitarian relief.

April 8, 2022

– 19:13: Russia’s Ministry of Justice labeled rapper Face and five other public figures as foreign agents.

– 21:52: Oxxxymiron confirmed that his “Russians Against War” concerts had raised \$195,000 for Ukrainian refugee aid.

April 9, 2022

– 18:22: VK launched a tool for transferring videos from YouTube, promoted as a response to the platform’s crackdown on Russian state content.

April 10, 2022

– 14:09: A major retrospective on Viktor Tsoi opened at the Manezh exhibition center in Moscow, reframing him as a street artist and underground conceptualist.

– 15:13: The viral “Coffin Dancers” meme was sold as an NFT, with 25% of proceeds donated to the Ukrainian “Come Back Alive” fund.

– 18:18: Russian band Elyzium held an anti-war concert in Moscow, featuring the white-blue-white opposition flag and Ukrainian-language songs.

– 18:56: Noize MC and Monetochka performed the second of their “Voices of Peace” concerts in Vilnius, raising €62,030 for Ukrainian refugees.

April 12, 2022

– 21:39: Ukrainian singers Tina Karol, Julia Sanina, Kateryna Pavlenko, and Dorofeeva staged a symbolic performance during a football match in Poland. They were joined by displaced Ukrainian women and children forming the map outline of Ukraine on stage.

April 13, 2022

– 10:52: Yandex.Music removed BBC’s “What Was That?” podcast following a demand from Roskomnadzor.

April 14, 2022

- 17:39: Roskomnadzor requested that SoundStream restrict access to podcasts by the independent outlet Holod.
- 22:08: Dmitry Kuznetsov of Elyzium posted a video apologizing for the band’s anti-war concert, followed by a second video recorded in front of the FSB headquarters in Moscow, repeating the same apology verbatim.

April 16, 2022

- 09:34: Pop singer Philipp Kirkorov publicly supported Viktor Medvedchuk, Ukrainian pro-Russian politician and close ally of Putin, after his arrest by Ukrainian authorities.
- 13:32: Andrei Kazachenko, member of the rock band Pilot, left the group after it was announced as a participant in the patriotic music marathon “ZaRossiyu.”

April 20, 2022

- 08:12: Ukrainian blogger Anton Ptushkin was banned from entering Russia until 2072 for his anti-war stance.
- 11:00: Belarusian rapper Oleg LSP released the video for his new song “Uragany,” opening with an anti-war message and promising to donate proceeds to refugee aid.
- 15:46: Russian authorities proposed a law to legalize forced licensing of foreign music and media — essentially legalizing piracy — as a response to Western companies withdrawing from Russia.

April 21, 2022

- 09:32: Maria Alyokhina (Pussy Riot) was sentenced to three weeks in a penal colony in the final ruling on the “sanitary case.”
- 19:20: The DDT concert in Tyumen was cancelled. Frontman Yuri Shevchuk explained that the original venue featured a giant “Z” symbol, and the replacement venue refused them.
- 19:56: Noize MC and Monetochka held the third “Voices of Peace” concert in Warsaw.
- 22:53: Noize MC performed a new song titled “Ausweis,” dealing with collective guilt and war responsibility. The series had raised €246,000 in donations by then.

April 22, 2022

- 22:10: Russian actress and filmmaker Renata Litvinova released a poetic anti-war video titled “When Will You Finally Understand?”. The piece uses the circular structure of Pete Seeger’s song “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” and features Marlene Dietrich’s voice singing the original anti-war version.

April 23, 2022

- 06:56: Okean Elzy held a charity concert in the Kyiv metro. The group had regularly performed in shelters since the beginning of the war, and the full concert was later broadcast on Ukrainian TV.

April 24, 2022

– 15:56: Meduza published a wartime playlist titled “From This Sorcery, Graves Grew in the Heart,” showcasing songs by musicians reacting to the war.

April 25, 2022

– 09:48: The Easter Sunday concert “And Everything Will Be Fine” by Okean Elzy was aired across Ukraine. It was filmed in the Kyiv metro and aimed to provide hope and support for children affected by the war.

April 27, 2022

– 15:35: Renata Litvinova gave an interview on “Radio Dolin,” reflecting on her friendship and artistic collaboration with Ukrainian filmmaker Kira Muratova and her current stance on the war.

April 28, 2022

– 14:22: The rock band Bi-2 refused to perform in Omsk due to a “Z” patriotic banner above the stage. Venue staff allegedly removed black drapes that the band had used to cover it.

– 14:31: Posters with insults targeting anti-war artists like Monetochka and Morgenshtern appeared in Krasnoyarsk and Saint Petersburg, glued to bus stops and even a school wall.

April 29, 2022

– 08:43: Access to Spotify, Netflix, and other streaming services began to be sold via darknet and platforms like Avito, as sanctions and platform exits intensified.

May 1, 2022

– 10:26: Ukrainian opera singer Liudmyla Monastyrskaya replaced Anna Netrebko in Turandot at the Met Opera in New York. During curtain call, she appeared wrapped in the Ukrainian flag, earning a standing ovation.

May 2, 2022

– 14:59: Ed Sheeran and Ukrainian band Antytila released a collaborative version of 2Step. The lyrics tell the story of the war's first day. All proceeds go to Music Saves UA.

May 3, 2022

– 14:29: Meduza reported that the Kremlin was concerned about growing anti-war sentiment among celebrities and was planning “creative countermeasures.”

– 20:59: Singer Monetochka published a video of her original anti-war poem reflecting on apathy, morality, and loss.

May 4, 2022

– 08:59: Kommersant reported that Moscow authorities were pressuring nightclubs to connect their security cameras to the state surveillance system.

May 6, 2022

– 19:13: Russian rapper Morgenshtern was officially designated a “foreign agent” by the Ministry of Justice.

– 20:33: Future, Drake, and Tems released a medieval-themed video for WAIT FOR U, featuring a Ukrainian palyanytsia (bread) with Ukraine’s coat of arms on a royal table.

May 10, 2022

– 19:48: Maria Alyokhina (Pussy Riot) fled Russia disguised as a food courier after being sentenced to prison. She later crossed into Lithuania with help from Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson.

– 22:14: Ukrainian group Kalush Orchestra reached the Eurovision final with their song “Stefania.”

May 11, 2022

– 13:30: Russian singer Grigory Leps posted from Donbas, showing support for Russia’s military presence.

– 15:31: BBC revealed that the pro-war concert series “Za Rossiyu” cost nearly 100 million rubles, funded by the federal budget and managed by a Kremlin-linked institute.

May 13, 2022

– 14:01: Russian authorities launched a criminal investigation against municipal deputy Lucy Shtein for alleged “fake news” about the army.

– 21:37: Sviatoslav Vakarchuk of Okean Elzy performed at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, calling it possibly “the first concert ever held there.”

May 14, 2022

– 14:21: Meduza profiled Kalush Orchestra ahead of the Eurovision 2022 final, noting their strong chances of victory and the political significance of their entry.

May 15, 2022

– 07:00: Ukraine won Eurovision 2022 with Kalush Orchestra’s performance of “Stefania,” which bookmakers had predicted with 70–75% confidence.

– 07:46: Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra won Eurovision 2022 in Turin with the song “Stefania.” After their performance, frontman Oleh Psiuk made a direct plea: “Please help Mariupol, help Azovstal right now!” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had also called on the public to support Kalush during voting.

– 09:14: Kalush Orchestra received 631 points in total, placing only fourth after jury votes but receiving a record-breaking 439 out of 468 points in the public vote.

– 09:26: Kalush Orchestra released the official video for “Stefania,” filmed in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, and Borodianka—towns heavily damaged by Russian attacks.

– 13:06: Eurovision commentator Timur Miroshnychenko, broadcasting from a bomb shelter in Kyiv, broke into tears live on air, dedicating Ukraine’s win to its armed forces.

May 16, 2022

– 10:09: Russian authorities issued a wanted notice for Pussy Riot member Lucy Shtein after she removed her monitoring bracelet and left Russia. She said staying in Moscow after the war began made her physically sick.

May 17, 2022

– 13:02: Soviet rock icons Kino and Yevgeny Fedorov of Tequilajazzz released a cover of the 1980s anti-militarist anthem “Love of Weapons.”

– 15:20: In Saint Petersburg, a play featuring Bi-2 was postponed after several of the band’s shows were canceled in other cities for covering pro-war banners on stage.

– 19:40: The first charity concert of Face*, Pornofilmy, and NERVY took place in Tbilisi as part of the Stand with Ukraine tour. Proceeds were pledged to Ukrainian war victims. (*Face is designated as a foreign agent in Russia.)

May 18, 2022

– 10:26: VK Group announced it would launch a Russian app store called RuStore on May 25 as an alternative to Apple and Google platforms.

– 12:37: British pop group Pet Shop Boys condemned Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, expressing hope for a “new Russia free of fascism and war.”

– 18:54: Rock icon Yuri Shevchuk (DDT) delivered a viral anti-war speech at a concert in Ufa, declaring, “Motherland is not the president’s ass that must be kissed all the time,” prompting applause.

– 21:33: Face*, Pornofilmy, and NERVY held another sold-out charity concert in Tbilisi, waving Ukrainian flags and chanting slogans like “Russia will be free!” and “Slava Ukraini!”

May 19, 2022

– 09:24: Police filed a protocol against Yuri Shevchuk under the “discrediting the army” law. Officers entered his dressing room after the show and isolated him from his band.

– 17:33: Zemfira released a music video for her anti-war song “Myaso” (“Meat”), illustrated with drawings by Renata Litvinova. The lyrics described a soldier’s disillusionment and trauma in Mariupol.

May 20, 2022

– 08:37: The administrative case against Shevchuk was transferred from Ufa to Saint Petersburg, where he resides.

– 16:24: Shevchuk refused to testify, asserting his right to silence under legal advice, while maintaining his anti-war stance.

May 22, 2022

– 08:11: British artist Yungblud posted a concert video passionately condemning the war in Ukraine and promising to use his voice to support fans on both sides suffering under authoritarianism.

May 25, 2022

– 12:39: Oleh Psiuk auctioned off his iconic pink bucket hat and the Eurovision trophy to raise funds for the Ukrainian army. The fundraising campaign was organized with the Serhiy Prytula Foundation. Donations in euros or crypto were accepted until May 28.

May 28, 2022

– 12:02: Dmitry Medvedev demanded stricter control over so-called “foreign agents,” accusing them of undermining the state during the “special military operation.” He advocated tougher punishments and labeling procedures.

May 29, 2022

– 10:24: Meduza published an excerpt from Ivan Beletsky’s new book analyzing patriotic motifs in Yulia Chicherina’s post-2014 music from a philosophical and anthropological lens.

– 19:17: Kalush Orchestra announced that their Eurovision trophy had been sold at a charity auction for \$900,000. Crypto platform WhiteBIT won the bid, with all proceeds going to aid the Ukrainian military.

June 1, 2022

– 10:34: Pussy Riot member Aysoltan Niyazova was detained in Croatia based on an Interpol warrant issued by Turkmenistan for a 20-year-old charge. She had previously been imprisoned in Russia under politically disputed circumstances. Just a

week prior, she was detained in Slovenia on the same grounds, but the Slovenian court released her, citing a systemic error.

– 16:24: The Moscow concert of the band DDT, originally scheduled for June 10, was postponed by one year. Though no official reason was provided, the decision followed growing state pressure on lead singer Yuri Shevchuk. A viral video from a May concert in Ufa captured him declaring, “Motherland is not the president’s ass to be kissed.” Authorities filed a protocol against Shevchuk for “discrediting the Russian armed forces,” but the St. Petersburg court later rejected it and returned it to Ufa police to fix procedural errors.

June 2, 2022

– 06:54: American pop star Billie Eilish kissed a Ukrainian flag on stage during her concert in Bonn, Germany. The flag was handed to her by Ukrainian singer Jerry Heil, who thanked Billie for helping the world “hear and see Ukraine again.”

– 20:11: The Russian Prosecutor General’s Office ordered the blocking of the “Pornos” VKontakte fan community. The punk band “Pornos,” known for its outspoken anti-war stance, had been participating in benefit concerts supporting Ukraine and was under increasing pressure from Russian authorities.

June 3, 2022

– 18:07: In Riga, a charity concert was held as part of the Stand with Ukraine tour, featuring Face*, Pornofilmy, and NERVY. The artists donated all proceeds from ticket sales and donations to help Ukrainians affected by the war. The tour continued through Vilnius, Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Wrocław.

– 19:46: The concert concluded with emotionally charged performances. Russian rapper Face* and the rock bands wrapped themselves in Ukrainian flags and shouted slogans like “Russia will be free!”, “Glory to Ukraine!”, and “Long live Belarus!”—directly challenging authoritarian regimes in the region.

June 4, 2022

– 14:27: Belarusian singer Max Korzh released the anti-war song “Svoy dom” (“My Home”), containing the lyric “Spring is crying, Ukraine is burning.” The emotional track addressed the tragedy of war and loss, marking a clear political statement from an artist previously considered apolitical.

June 6, 2022

– 07:23: Dan Reynolds, frontman of Imagine Dragons, held a Ukrainian flag on stage during their concert in Prague. The flag had been handed to him by a resident of Saltivka, a heavily shelled neighborhood in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

– 11:41: Max Korzh canceled his upcoming concert tour, stating: “I can’t sing about life being fun while life is being taken every day.” His tour had included performances across Russia and Europe, which he scrapped entirely in protest against the war.

– 19:13: The final livestreamed Stand with Ukraine concert took place in Warsaw. Face*, NERVY, and Pornofilmy performed alongside guests Roman Bakhairev and Lera Yaskyevich. Proceeds were again directed to Ukrainian war relief. The final stops of the tour were scheduled for Gdańsk and Wrocław.

June 7, 2022

– 13:28: Russian singer Manizha was removed from the Stereoletto festival lineup after online campaigns accused her of “discrediting the Russian military.” Organizers cited “external reasons” for the cancellation. The campaign urged citizens to report her to law enforcement based on her social media activity, showcasing the growing risks faced by artists expressing anti-war views.

June 8, 2022

– 17:34: Fighting in Severodonetsk has moved from the industrial zone to the city streets, said Serhiy Haidai, head of the Luhansk Regional Military Administration. He noted this differs from the battles in Mariupol, which centered around the Azovstal plant. According to Haidai, most of the city is under Russian control, but there is no risk of Ukrainian forces being encircled in the region. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu claimed the residential quarters had been “liberated” and that the industrial area was still being contested.

June 11, 2022

– 09:59: Meduza published answers from readers in Russia on how they continue to express their anti-war views despite censorship and the threat of legal persecution. More than two thousand cases had already been brought for “discrediting” the Russian army by that point. The responses included symbolic gestures, silent protest, and digital resistance.

– 13:39: Political scientists Margarita Zavadskaya and Alexey Gilev explained why labeling Russia a totalitarian state may be misleading. Despite rising repression, they argue the regime exhibits hybrid authoritarian features rather than full-scale totalitarianism.

June 13, 2022

– 10:42: Moscow municipal deputy and Pussy Riot member Lyusya Shtein was charged with “discrediting” the Russian military. She had previously been sentenced in 2021 and cut off her tracking bracelet before fleeing Russia in April 2022.

– 14:23: Ukrainian-American band Gogol Bordello released a song dedicated to Ukraine’s Territorial Defense Forces. Lead singer Eugene Hütz, whose friends had joined the defense effort, described it as a tribute to their courage, with the song rooted in the traditional Ukrainian dance, the arkan.

– 17:28: Deputy Head of Ukraine’s Presidential Office Kyrylo Tymoshenko announced preparations for Eurovision 2023, stressing security as the top priority. Various locations were being considered, though none were officially revealed.

June 15, 2022

– 06:32: Meduza published the story of Maria Prymachenko, a celebrated Ukrainian folk artist. After Russian shelling destroyed the Ivankiv Museum near Kyiv in February, local residents managed to save 12 of her paintings. Her artwork has since become a global symbol of peace, admired by Picasso and Chagall.

June 21, 2022

– 17:42: Kate Bush’s 1985 track "Running Up That Hill" returned to global charts after being featured in the latest season of Netflix’s Stranger Things. Meduza highlighted how streaming algorithms, fan engagement, and chart mechanisms helped the song outperform newer releases.

– 19:45: Canadian rock band Billy Talent announced they would auction guitarist Ian D'Sa's signed Fender Squire to raise funds for Ukraine. Placebo had previously donated tour gear for the same cause.

June 23, 2022

– 08:54: Russian pop icon Yuri Shatunov, former lead singer of the 1980s boy band Laskovyi Mai, died at 48 from heart failure.

– 14:13: Authorities in Yekaterinburg banned students from performing songs by Zemfira and Mumiy Troll at their graduation ceremony. Officials cited concerns over lyrics referencing violence.

– 15:03: Meduza and Teplitsa Social Technologies released a guide to anti-war initiatives in Russia, spotlighting Telegram channels, online actions, and civil resistance efforts by over 250,000 citizens.

– 18:06: Meduza published a tribute to Yuri Shatunov, remembering him as a reluctant icon of 1990s Russian pop and youth identity.

June 24, 2022

– 08:56: Russian band Little Big released the protest video "Generation Cancellation," calling for an end to the war in Ukraine and all wars worldwide. The YouTube description read: "Stop the war in Ukraine. Stop wars around the world. No one deserves war."

– 15:24: Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Culture Taras Shevchenko confirmed that Ukraine is compiling a "white list" of Russian artists who condemned the war and supported Ukraine.

– 17:41: Pussy Riot donated €10,000 to Kyiv’s Okhmatdyt Children’s Hospital from their European tour. Maria Alyokhina stated that no act of kindness could undo the devastation caused by the Russian military, but that silence was not an option.

June 26, 2022

– 10:04: Moscow’s Glavclub canceled concerts by Anacondaz, Manizha, and Neschastniy Sluchay after receiving pressure from state authorities. Organizers said they faced unscheduled inspections from Rospotrebnadzor and the Ministry of Emergency Situations shortly after refusing to cancel.

June 28, 2022

– 15:29: Police detained the mother of Pussy Riot’s Lyusya Shtein to question her about her daughter’s whereabouts. Shtein faces criminal charges for allegedly discrediting the military.

June 29, 2022

– 18:01: According to OVD-Info, since the start of the war, only one day—June 13—passed without a single detention for anti-war speech or symbolic protest in Russia.

– 20:10: Moscow’s Department of Culture announced the leadership change at Gogol Center. Director Alexey Kabeshev and artistic head Alexey Agranovich will be replaced by Alexander Bochernikov and Anton Yakovlev, signaling a state-led reorientation.

June 30, 2022

– 17:25: Actors, critics, and musicians responded with grief and anger to the closure of Gogol Center, a cultural institution founded by director Kirill Serebrennikov. Its final plays included *I Don't Participate in the War* and *Protect Your Faces*.

– 19:47: A short video showed an emotional farewell by the audience at Gogol Center after its final performance.

July 1, 2022

– 01:12: Imagine Dragons' frontman Dan Reynolds gave a moving speech dedicated to Ukraine during a concert, questioning the world's inaction and dedicating *Forever Young* to displaced Ukrainians.

– 11:06: In an interview with Voice of America, DDT frontman Yuri Shevchuk condemned the war, stating: "They are beating the soul out of us, turning us into cannon fodder and inhumans." His Moscow concert was canceled after he criticized the war at a show in Ufa.

– 13:09: Meduza published an interview with Little Big frontman Ilya "Ilyich" Prusikin following the band's release of the anti-war video *Generation Cancellation* on June 24. In the clip, a politician presses a red button, resetting human history — a metaphor for nuclear war and authoritarian destruction. Prusikin explained their delayed statement: "We spoke out — and now we can live. Or at least try." The band left Russia in March but had not made a public declaration until the video's release.

July 4, 2022

– 09:22: During a concert in Tashkent, rapper Noize MC (Ivan Alekseev) reacted to the shelling of his hometown Belgorod, equating it with the bombings of Kyiv,

Kharkiv, and Mariupol. He stated, “War is monstrous and inhuman. It should have ended before it began.” Noize MC has been outspoken against the invasion since February 24 and has been performing benefit shows abroad in support of Ukrainian refugees.

July 5, 2022

– 12:12: Concerts by anti-war bands Anacondaz and Louna were canceled across Russia, including at the Uletay festival. Organizers cited reasons “beyond their control.” Both groups had openly criticized the war, making them targets of informal censorship.

July 7, 2022

– 21:18: Fontanka published an alleged blacklist of musicians deemed “undesirable” by Russian authorities. The list includes Noize MC, Oxxxymiron, DDT, Zemfira, IC3PEAK, Little Big, Bi-2, and others who condemned the war or left the country. Promoters were advised to avoid booking these acts.

July 10, 2022

– 12:14: Ukraine enacted a law banning Russian music in public spaces and media. Meduza interviewed Russian industry insiders, who predicted it would drive more Russian musicians into exile and reshape the musical landscape, increasing demand for Ukrainian and diaspora-created content.

– 16:04: Ukrainian artist Ivan Dorn reflected on his failed attempt to serve as a “cultural bridge” between Russia and Ukraine since 2014. In a summary of his story

featured in The New York Times, Dorn acknowledged the collapse of his idealistic vision and confirmed he had cut all ties with Russia after the 2022 invasion.

July 15, 2022

– Russian rapper Timati becomes co-owner of the former Starbucks coffee chain in Russia, alongside restaurateur Anton Pinsky and the “Sindika” group of senator Arsen Kanokov. The rebranded chain will no longer use Starbucks branding, products, or technologies. (Source: Meduza)

July 16, 2022

– In Vienna, The Rolling Stones perform “You Can’t Always Get What You Want” on stage with two children’s choirs from Kyiv: “Dzvinochok” and “Vohnyk.” The Ukrainian choirs were invited specifically for this symbolic collaboration. (Source: Україна Сейчас)

July 17, 2022

– Christian “Flake” Lorenz, keyboardist of Rammstein, raises the Ukrainian flag during a concert in Warsaw’s National Stadium. (Source: Meduza)

July 18, 2022

– St. Petersburg court once again refuses to hear the case against musician Yuri Shevchuk (DDT) over “discrediting” the Russian army. The case is redirected to Ufa, where the original incident took place.

– Russian concert agencies begin including clauses in artist contracts banning political speech, Ukrainian symbols, and criticism of Russia’s military operation. Violations may lead to cancellation and blacklisting. (Source: Meduza)

July 20, 2022

– Ukrainian pop artist MONATIK returns to Kyiv and performs an anti-war set in the city’s metro at Maidan Nezalezhnosti station. He had previously left the capital with his family during early stages of the invasion. (Source: Meduza)

July 23, 2022

– Imagine Dragons are announced as official ambassadors of Ukraine’s United24 platform, supporting humanitarian and medical aid. President Zelensky thanks the band for continuing to amplify Ukraine’s voice internationally.

– Russian police interrupt an Anacondaz concert in Perm during the fourth song. Videos show officers entering the venue and surrounding the stage. The band is among those unofficially blacklisted. (Source: Meduza)

July 24, 2022

– Russian pop star Philipp Kirkorov announces concerts in Crimea and invites wounded Russian soldiers recovering in local hospitals to attend. His remarks support national unity during wartime. (Source: Meduza)

July 25, 2022

- Eurovision 2023 will be hosted by the UK despite Ukraine’s win. Security concerns prevent Ukraine from organizing the contest. Ukraine’s entrant will automatically qualify for the final.

- Interview with the protest audiovisual duo IC3PEAK, who fled Russia after facing surveillance and censorship since 2018. They reflect on state repression, digital resistance, and the metaphor of abuse in artist-state relations.

July 26, 2022

- Estonia bans the Russian pop group Ruki Vverh from entering the country for five years. Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu calls entertainment trips from Russia unjustified during wartime. (Source: PБK)

July 27, 2022

- Yuri Shevchuk’s court date is set for August 5 in Ufa. The case was previously dismissed in St. Petersburg due to procedural flaws.

- Little Big cancel their planned Russian tour, citing current circumstances, and reaffirm their love for their homeland and audience.

- Ukrainian band Okean Elzy release a video for their new song “Flowers of Minefields,” featuring imagery from Donbas. All proceeds go to a military vehicle fund. (Source: Meduza)

July 28, 2022

- A Russian MP asks the FSB to ban the band Bi-2 from reentering Russia, citing their alleged anti-state stance.

– Meduza publishes a detailed feature on how military summons are being issued in Ukraine — from beaches to techno clubs — amid volunteer enthusiasm and legal confusion.

July 29, 2022

– Pop duo t.A.T.u. announce their first concert since 2013, to be held in Minsk. It is unclear whether this marks a full reunion. (Source: Meduza)

July 30, 2022

– 18-year-old Ukrainian singer Zhanulka, known for her TikTok hit, shares her experience growing up during two wars: in Donetsk (2014) and in Kyiv (2022). Her recent songs explore themes of displacement and longing.

– Russian rap group Krovostok cancels a Moscow concert, citing “government pressure.” Their pinned tweet from February 27 denounces Putin and expresses solidarity with Ukraine. (Source: Meduza)

July 31, 2022

– Spotify ceases operations in Russia. Global music releases are increasingly blocked, and Russian audiences turn to piracy via Telegram. Meduza investigates the consequences for artists and listeners.

– Interview with Vladimir Kotlyarov from Pornofilmy on life after February 24, censorship, and staying true to protest roots amid fear and repression.

August 2, 2022

– Latvian-born singer Laima Vaikule performs with the Ukrainian flag during her concert in Palanga, Lithuania. (Source: Meduza)

August 4, 2022

– Ozzy Osbourne announces a Ukraine-themed limited edition of his album “Patient Number 9,” with all profits supporting evacuation of Ukrainian orphans with special needs.

– DDT releases a 10-minute music video “Not With You,” depicting generational tensions, state repression, and youth resistance in St. Petersburg. The video ends with a bleak twist revealing the protagonists’ parents are police officers. (Source: Meduza)

– 12:57: DDT released the 10-minute music video Not With You, exploring generational divides between free-minded youth and authoritarian parents. The video includes a reference to the Soviet film Courier and ends with a tragic revelation: the protagonists’ parents are police officers surveilling them. Music journalist Mikhail Kozyrev called the video’s conclusion “piercing.”

August 5, 2022

– 14:29: Leningrad frontman Sergey Shnurov denied visiting the self-proclaimed Luhansk People’s Republic, responding to a photo shared on Instagram by actor Georgy Bolonev. Shnurov claimed the image was doctored, and his representative said he was vacationing in Turkey.

August 6, 2022

– 09:08: Writer and politician Zakhar Prilepin taunted TV host Ivan Urgant, inviting him to Izium after Urgant mocked the committee that labeled him a “foreign influence agent.” The exchange followed a campaign to ban Urgant from Russian television.

August 7, 2022

– 08:56: Russia blocked access to Patreon following an anti-war post by Doxa on the platform. Due to HTTPS encryption, the entire site became inaccessible.

– 12:58: Roger Waters of Pink Floyd called U.S. President Joe Biden a “war criminal” and accused him of “fueling the fire” in Ukraine during his This Is Not A Drill tour. Waters previously condemned Putin’s invasion as “a gangster move,” but criticized the West’s approach to the war.

August 11, 2022

– 08:10: Kurara frontman Oleg Yagodin was fined 40,000 rubles for saying “No to war” during a festival performance. Authorities claimed he also insulted Putin, but his defense argued there was no evidence of that.

– 17:26: Vladimir Kotlyarov, frontman of Pornofilmy, was placed under investigation for alleged extremist posts. Kotlyarov has consistently opposed the war, and the band has performed charity concerts abroad in support of Ukrainians.

August 12, 2022

– 18:29: Chechen war veteran and drag artist Bomba Kibersisi (Sergey Nechaev) was charged after performing Russia’s national anthem in a gay club while holding a

rainbow flag. The club issued a public apology and called the act a “thoughtless mistake.”

August 13, 2022

– 14:24: The band AloeVera held a secret concert in Moscow after their official performance was canceled under government pressure. FSB officers later raided the venue. Frontwoman Vera Musaelyan had publicly condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

August 15, 2022

– 06:41: Premium headphones from brands like JBL, Bose, and Sony were reported to be running out in Russia due to import bans and company exits following the invasion.

– 07:36: Yakut musician Aykhal Ammosov was detained after attempting to hang an anti-war banner reading “Yakutian punk against war” ahead of Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin’s visit. He reported being subjected to a harsh interrogation and threats.

– 11:50: Boris Grebenshchikov launched a crowdfunding campaign for Aquarium’s new album House of All Saints, expected to be released ahead of their fall tour.

August 16, 2022

– 10:32: DDT’s Yuri Shevchuk was fined 50,000 rubles for “discrediting the army” after condemning the war during a concert.

– 10:50: Meduza published Shevchuk’s full anti-war statement, where he said: “I’ve always been against wars, in any country, at any time,” and criticized the glorification of power over compassion, calling true patriotism the care for ordinary people.

– 11:31: Yuri Shevchuk’s legal team announced plans to appeal the 50,000-ruble fine he received for "discrediting the army." His lawyer, Alexander Peredruk, called the verdict unlawful and stated they would take the case to the Supreme Court of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

August 17, 2022

– 08:39: Due to state pressure on venues and promoters, the band Anacondaz postponed all remaining 2022 concerts in Russia. The group, which has taken a vocal anti-war stance, announced legal action against authorities for concert disruptions in Yekaterinburg and Perm.

– 16:50: Rap group Kasta, banned from public performances in Russia, invited fans to organize underground shows privately and discreetly. “Book a small space, gather friends, contact us — we’ll come,” they wrote, warning against publicity to avoid shutdowns.

August 18, 2022

– 13:34: Zemfira announced a European tour beginning October 9 in Cyprus and ending November 3 in London’s Royal Albert Hall. The tour will also include stops in Istanbul, Tel Aviv, Germany, Paris, Vienna, and The Hague.

August 21, 2022

– 09:26: During the Chernozem rock festival in Voronezh, the band Splean dedicated their hit No Way Out to artists forced to flee Russia. Frontman Alexander Vasilyev praised the audience’s compassion and rejection of violence.

– 17:56: Organizers of the Chernozem festival responded to the performance, claiming they had not approved the dedication. They said the band’s set contained “ambiguous messages” and reported mixed audience reactions.

August 22, 2022

– 13:41: In an interview with Meduza, Nervy frontman Zhenya Milkovsky spoke about leaving Russia and the destruction in his native Donetsk region. He now resides in Georgia and supports Ukrainian refugees, stating, “There’s a war in my life, and for my friends — but for others, it’s just another holiday.”

August 23, 2022

– 08:28: Yandex agreed to sell its news aggregator and Zen platform to VK, while acquiring Delivery Club. The company also changed its homepage to ya.ru for login and identification services.

– 16:46: Splean’s Moscow concert, scheduled for August 26, was canceled after the band dedicated a song to exiled artists in Voronezh. Insiders told Kommersant the cancellation came following a direct call to organizers.

August 24, 2022

– 12:12: A Ufa court explained its fine against Yuri Shevchuk, claiming that by asking questions about the war’s purpose during a concert, he “provoked doubts” about Russia’s military objectives and “compromised” the official narrative.

August 25, 2022

– 13:17: Public figures including Boris Grebenshchikov, Yuri Shevchuk, and Andrei Makarevich submitted character references in defense of detained opposition figure Yevgeny Roizman, praising his integrity and humanitarian work. Meanwhile, prosecutors requested tight restrictions on Roizman’s movements.

August 27, 2022

– 18:14: Alla Pugacheva returned to Russia after months abroad. Although she hasn’t spoken publicly about the war, her husband, Maxim Galkin, openly condemned the invasion and has since performed across Western Europe.

August 28, 2022

– 20:48: Pitchfork reported that Arcade Fire’s Win Butler was accused of sexual misconduct by three women and one non-binary person. Butler admitted to sexual encounters but insisted they were consensual.

August 30, 2022

– 11:58: Writer Boris Akunin praised the song Tanki by indie band Maya Goryat and encouraged fans to support it, calling it worthy of more attention than its 1,000 views suggested.

August 31, 2022

– 08:12: Russian band SBPCh released Beregi, a nostalgic music video set to amateur Soviet home movies from the 1970s. The group, which canceled shows in Russia after opposing the war, plans to release a new album in autumn.

September 2, 2022

– 16:49: Pianist Polina Osetinskaya’s concert in St. Petersburg was canceled after organizers were told to replace her or cancel. She has been outspoken against the invasion of Ukraine.

– 19:21: The Russian Ministry of Justice designated Andrei Makarevich, journalist Kateryna Gordeyeva, and politician Yulia Galyamina as “foreign agents,” along with several other prominent media figures.

September 4, 2022

– 00:29: Alla Pugacheva posted a quote from Nikita Mikhalkov’s film A Slave of Love on Instagram, asking, “Where did the wonderful person Nikita Sergeyevich go?” She dedicated her words to the director, writing, “Gentlemen, you are beasts! Gentlemen, you will be cursed by your country.” The post followed her appearance at Mikhail Gorbachev’s funeral, after which she wrote about the loss of an era of freedom and nonviolence.

September 6, 2022

– 09:28: DDT launched a crowdfunding campaign for the release of their new album Creativity in the Void. Part 2, featuring 14 songs written mostly before the invasion of Ukraine. Yuri Shevchuk explained the project is part of a larger program titled Evolution.

– 15:21: Rapper Oxxxymiron was spotted filming in St. Petersburg, suggesting his return to Russia. His manager posted the video with the caption, “Autumn. Especially crazy birds return from the south.” Oxxxymiron had left the country after the invasion and organized benefit concerts under the banner Russians Against War.

September 8, 2022

– 10:12: Singer Monetochka was declared wanted in a civil case brought by singer Stas Kostyushkin, who claimed her anti-war song Mama, I’m Not Ziggung plagiarized his track Woman, I Don’t Dance. She was ordered to pay 500,000 rubles. Monetochka had previously stated that her song was a high school parody and left Russia following the war to perform anti-war concerts.

September 12, 2022

– 13:18: Drag queen Bomba Kibersisi (Sergey Nechaev) was fined 2,000 rubles for performing the Russian national anthem while waving a rainbow flag in a gay club. The court found him guilty of improper use of state symbols.

September 14, 2022

– 18:57: A DDT concert scheduled at Gazprom Arena in St. Petersburg was postponed to May 27 for “reasons beyond the organizer’s control.” A month earlier, Shevchuk had been fined 50,000 rubles for his on-stage anti-war remarks in Ufa,

where he said: “Motherland, friends, is not the president’s ass that must be kissed and fondled constantly. The motherland is a poor old woman selling potatoes at the train station.”

September 16, 2022

- 14:40: Oxxxymiron released a new music video titled Oyda, filmed in St. Petersburg and dedicated to the war. The clip includes references to symbols of the Russian anti-war movement.

- 17:58: Two hours after Oyda was published, a nationalist group filed a complaint requesting the video be investigated for extremism. They claimed the lyrics referenced the white-blue-white flag of "free Russia."

September 18, 2022

- 13:19: Alla Pugacheva formally requested the Ministry of Justice to label her a “foreign agent” following the designation of her husband, Maxim Galkin, who had criticized Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

- 17:37: Meduza revived its weekly music feature, noting that music by artists like Oxxxymiron, Boris Grebenshchikov, DDT, and Rina Sawayama has become a vital source of emotional support during the war.

September 19, 2022

- 10:04: Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on Pugacheva’s request to be labeled a foreign agent, calling it unrelated to the presidential office.

– 16:00: Pet Shop Boys praised Alla Pugacheva’s “courage and honesty,” saying her condemnation of Putin’s war showed bravery.

– 19:05: In a new Instagram post, Pugacheva reaffirmed her call for peace, freedom of speech, and an end to young Russians dying “for illusory goals,” prompting another wave of attacks from Kremlin propagandists.

September 20, 2022

– 14:06: Russian police launched a review of Pugacheva’s social media post for potential “discreditation of the army” following a civilian complaint. Her concert director said they were unaware of any investigation.

September 21, 2022

– 06:49: Meduza published messages of support for Alla Pugacheva from readers of all ages, who described her as a symbol of freedom, dignity, and resistance to state repression.

February 2022

Event: Ivan Dorn's video address (24/02/2022): The Ukrainian artist appealed to his Russian audience and colleagues to "stop this catastrophe."

Codes: Diagnostic + Mobilizational.

Comment: A direct appeal using cultural capital to frame the event as a "catastrophe" and mobilize an anti-war response.

Event: Anti-war statements by various Russian figures (24/02/2022): A wave of public condemnations from figures like Lazarev, Parfenov, and Akunin.

Codes: Affective + Diagnostic.

Comment: An initial articulation of collective trauma from within Russia, framing the invasion as a moral and emotional shock.

Event: DDT's (Yuri Shevchuk) statement (24/02/2022): The rock musician described the war as a "huge tragedy that deprives many of us of a future."

Codes: Diagnostic + Affective.

Comment: The statement defined the war as an existential threat and made an emotional appeal for dialogue.

Event: Boris Grebenshchikov's statement (24/02/2022): The artist called the events "true madness" and the war's initiators a "disgrace to Russia."

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: A radical moral assessment that symbolically separated the state's leadership from the identity of the country.

Event: Oxxxymiron's concert cancellation (24/02/2022): The rapper called the war a "catastrophe and a crime" and canceled six sold-out shows.

Codes: Diagnostic + Symbolic + Performative.

Comment: A performative act that rejected cultural "normalcy" and established an uncompromising anti-war stance.

Event: Zemfira's symbolic gesture (25/02/2022): At a concert, the singer performed the song "Don't Shoot" and posted an anti-war message.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic.

Comment: The use of an artistic work as a direct, yet metaphorical, anti-war symbol during a public performance.

Event: Zemfira's post deletion (25/02/2022): The anti-war post was deleted from the artist's social media shortly after publication.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A clear illustration of the atmosphere of fear and the pressure forcing artists into self-censorship.

Event: International artists' acts of solidarity (25/02/2022): Figures like Angelina Jolie and Miley Cyrus made public statements supporting Ukraine.

Codes: Global Legitimization.

Comment: The global cultural field began to align with the Ukrainian narrative, lending it international legitimacy.

Event: "Evening Urgant" removed from broadcast (25/02/2022): The popular TV show was taken off the air after its host, Ivan Urgant, posted an anti-war message.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A signal from the state that dissent was inadmissible, even within loyal mainstream entertainment formats.

Event: Russia's suspension from Eurovision (25/02/2022): Russia was officially banned from the Eurovision Song Contest 2022.

Codes: Symbolic Isolation.

Comment: A formal exclusion from a major pan-European cultural space, symbolizing the nation's growing isolation.

Event: Instrumentalization of Lyube's music (25/02/2022): Security forces used the patriotic band's music to drown out anti-war slogans at protests.

Codes: Counter-discourse.

Comment: The weaponization of culture by the state, using patriotic music as a tool to suppress dissent.

Event: Nikolai Rastorguev's (Lyube) ambiguous statement (25/02/2022): While his music was used to disperse protests, the singer posted a message calling for peace.

Codes: Ambivalence.

Comment: A demonstration of a split position or an attempt by an artist to preserve their reputation amid state co-optation.

Event: Dmitry Monatik's (Ukraine) anti-war poem (26/02/2022): The artist published a poem with direct accusations against the Russian authorities.

Codes: Diagnostic + Affective.

Comment: An artistic articulation of the victim's position, using poetry to express anger and pain.

Event: Ivan Dorn's second video address (26/02/2022): The Ukrainian artist urged Russians to think critically and resist propaganda.

Codes: Counter-propaganda.

Comment: A direct attempt by a cultural figure to break through the Russian information blockade.

Event: Maria Alyokhina's (Pussy Riot) detention (27/02/2022): The activist was detained in Moscow while riding in a taxi.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A pre-emptive action by the state to neutralize a well-known activist and deter potential protest.

Event: Metropolitan Opera's sanctions (28/02/2022): The institution announced it would sever ties with artists and organizations supporting Putin.

Codes: Moral and institutional pressure.

Comment: An action by a major cultural institution to force artists to define their political position through professional consequences.

Event: Maria Alyokhina's (Pussy Riot) arrest (28/02/2022): The activist was arrested for 15 days for disobeying a police order.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The legal formalization of state action against anti-war activists, using administrative charges as a tool of suppression.

March 2022

Event: Valery Gergiev's dismissal (01/03/2022): The conductor was dismissed from his post at the Munich Philharmonic.

Codes: Personal Sanctions.

Comment: The first major instance of personal, professional consequences for a cultural figure's refusal to condemn the war.

Event: Western artists' boycott (01/03/2022): Artists like Iggy Pop and The Killers began mass cancellations of their concerts in Russia.

Codes: Cultural Boycott.

Comment: A collective refusal by the international music community to engage culturally with the aggressor state.

Event: "Bol" Festival's cancellation (01/03/2022): The Moscow music festival was canceled due to headliner withdrawals and the tragic situation.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: The cancellation demonstrated the impossibility of "celebration" and normal cultural life during wartime.

Event: Metropolitan Opera's performance of the Ukrainian anthem (01/03/2022): The Ukrainian national anthem was performed on the stage of the New York opera house.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: A powerful gesture of recognition and support for Ukraine at one of the world's leading cultural venues.

Event: Jared Leto's act of solidarity (01/03/2022): The American musician and actor expressed his support for Ukrainians on Instagram.

Codes: Affective + Global Legitimization.

Comment: The expression of personal sympathy by a global celebrity, which contributed to legitimizing the anti-war stance.

Event: Leonid Agutin's anti-war statement (02/03/2022): The singer published an emotional post describing the events as "horror and tragedy" and pleading to "STOP THE WAR!".

Codes: Affective.

Comment: An articulation of despair and a direct call for humanism from a mainstream Russian artist.

Event: Placebo's boycott (02/03/2022): The British band canceled their Moscow concert, expressing solidarity with Russians "against these barbaric actions."

Codes: Cultural Boycott + Symbolic.

Comment: An action that combined a cultural boycott with a symbolic statement explicitly separating the Russian people from their government.

Event: Slipknot's boycott (03/03/2022): The American band postponed concerts in Moscow, Kyiv, and Minsk, expressing solidarity with anti-war fans.

Codes: Cultural Boycott + Symbolic.

Comment: The boycott was framed as an act of support for the anti-war audience within the aggressor and allied states.

Event: Till Lindemann's (Rammstein) boycott (03/03/2022): The German musician canceled his solo concerts in Moscow and Novosibirsk.

Codes: Cultural Boycott.

Comment: A straightforward act of cultural disengagement by a major international artist with a large Russian following.

Event: Anna Netrebko's "pause" in her career (05/03/2022): The opera singer announced a hiatus after Western venues canceled her performances.

Codes: Self-isolation.

Comment: A reaction to institutional pressure, resulting in a form of self-imposed isolation from the international stage.

Event: Gorillaz's act of solidarity (05/03/2022): The British band expressed support for the people of Ukraine and anti-war Russians.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: A statement that made a clear distinction between the Russian state and its citizens who opposed the war.

Event: Colta.ru's temporary closure (05/03/2022): One of Russia's key independent cultural publications halted its work, citing military censorship.

Codes: Collapse of the public sphere.

Comment: This marked the disappearance of a vital platform for independent cultural expression due to state repression.

Event: Tugan Sokhiev's resignation (06/03/2022): The chief conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre resigned, citing an "impossible choice."

Codes: Symbolic Protest.

Comment: A public refusal to work under political pressures that made international cultural cooperation untenable.

Event: TikTok and Spotify restrictions in Russia (06/03/2022): The platforms became inaccessible or restricted access.

Codes: Technological Isolation + Repression.

Comment: These actions restricted key channels for free information dissemination, contributing to Russia's digital isolation.

Event: Sting's re-release of "Russians" (06/03/2022): The artist performed his 1985 song, stating its new tragic relevance.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: An act that actualized the historical memory of the Cold War and served as a call for humanism in the present conflict.

Event: Universal Music Group's market withdrawal (08/03/2022): The world's largest music company suspended all operations in Russia.

Codes: Economic and Cultural Isolation.

Comment: A major economic move that severed the Russian music industry's primary ties with the global market.

Event: Vera Lytovchenko's (Ukraine) bomb shelter performance (09/03/2022): The Kharkiv violinist published videos of her playing in a shelter.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic.

Comment: An act of cultural resilience and a testimony to the continuation of art in the face of barbarism.

Event: "Kyiv-Classic" Orchestra's Maidan performance (09/03/2022): The orchestra played a concert in Kyiv with a call to "close the sky over Ukraine."

Codes: Mobilizational.

Comment: A direct political appeal to world leaders made through the medium of music.

Event: "Nervy" band's boycott (09/03/2022): The Russian-Ukrainian band announced the cessation of all creative and concert activities within Russia.

Codes: Cultural Boycott.

Comment: A personal and collective refusal by the artists to work in the aggressor country.

Event: Sony Music Group's market withdrawal (10/03/2022): The second of the "big three" global music labels suspended its operations in Russia.

Codes: Economic and Cultural Isolation.

Comment: This move further deepened the economic and cultural isolation of the Russian music industry.

Event: Pink Floyd & David Gilmour's digital boycott (11/03/2022): The legendary band removed its music from digital platforms in Russia and Belarus.

Codes: Symbolic Boycott.

Comment: A powerful gesture of condemnation from icons of world culture, leveraging their catalog as a tool of protest.

Event: Shortparis's music video release (11/03/2022): The band released the video "Apple Orchard," a surreal critique of militarism.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: A complex and ambiguous artistic statement that required interpretation to understand its critique of state memory rituals.

Event: Manizha's song release (13/03/2022): The artist released the song "Soldier," reinterpreting it as a call for humanism.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic.

Comment: The release promoted universal humanistic values in direct opposition to the violence of war.

Event: Anton Batagov's emigration (13/03/2022): The renowned composer and pianist announced he was leaving Russia.

Codes: Performative Protest.

Comment: The act of physical departure as an uncompromising political and ethical statement on the impossibility of living in the aggressor country.

Event: DDT's "Little Death" song release (14/03/2022): The band released a video with existential lyrics about an external force desiring death.

Codes: Symbolic + Affective.

Comment: The song expressed the existential horror of living under a regime seemingly bent on destruction.

Event: Andrey Makarevich's anti-war statement (14/03/2022): The artist published a post blaming the war on the "sick ambitions of one person."

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: A statement that identified a single individual as being responsible for the war, a common diagnostic framing.

Event: Yandex.Music and VK Music digital isolation (14/03/2022): Russian streaming services announced they could no longer add new Western releases.

Codes: Technological Isolation.

Comment: This event marked the severing of Russian platforms from the global music distribution network.

Event: Circulation of artist "blacklist" (14/03/2022): A potential list of artists banned in Russia began to circulate unofficially.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: This signaled the emergence of informal but powerful censorship mechanisms to control the cultural sphere.

Event: Metropolitan Opera's act of solidarity (15/03/2022): The institution held a concert in support of Ukraine, displaying the Ukrainian flag.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: Another public gesture of support from a major international cultural institution.

Event: Oxxxymiron's "Russians Against War" (RAW) tour launch (15/03/2022): The rapper started a charity tour in Istanbul to aid Ukrainian refugees.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The artist's symbolic capital was converted into material assistance and the creation of a physical space for the anti-war diaspora.

Event: Okean Elzy's (S. Vakarchuk) metro performance (16/03/2022): The frontman performed in the Kharkiv metro, then being used as a bomb shelter.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic.

Comment: A performance that served as a demonstration of cultural resilience and provided moral support to civilians under attack.

Event: Olga Smirnova's departure from the Bolshoi Theatre (17/03/2022): The prima ballerina left Russia for the Netherlands, stating she was "ashamed of Russia."

Codes: Performative Protest.

Comment: The defection of a high-profile cultural figure, framed as an act of political and ethical necessity.

Event: Oxxxymiron's London RAW concert announcement (17/03/2022): The rapper announced the next stop on his charity tour.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The continuation of the tour aimed to sustain fundraising efforts and strengthen the diaspora community.

Event: Oksana Shvets's (Ukraine) death (17/03/2022): The Honored Artist of Ukraine was killed during shelling in Kyiv.

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: Her death served as a stark diagnostic indicator of the human cost of the war on culture.

Event: State-organized pro-war concert at Luzhniki Stadium (18/03/2022): A large concert-rally was held to mark the anniversary of Crimea's annexation.

Codes: Counter-Discourse + Mobilization of Support.

Comment: The state's use of a mass cultural event to create an image of nationwide approval for the war and its narrative.

Event: Ukrainian musicians' "Anthem of True Russia" (18/03/2022): An anonymous community released a composition made from the real sounds of explosions.

Codes: Symbolic + Diagnostic.

Comment: A creative protest that reframed the Russian national anthem through the sounds of violence, offering a powerful diagnostic of the war's reality.

Event: IC3PEAK's "Dead But Pretty" music video (18/03/2022): The electronic duo released a new video continuing their theme of dark, surreal visuals.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: The video contributed to a dark, surreal artistic image of the current era in Russia.

Event: T-Fest's boycott and statement (20/03/2022): The Ukrainian-born rapper left his Russian label and canceled all concerts, declaring "I am Ukrainian."

Codes: Cultural Boycott + Diagnostic.

Comment: A clear assertion of national identity as the basis for his anti-war position and cultural boycott.

Event: Leonid Agutin & Anzhelika Varum's charity concert (20/03/2022): The artists participated in the "U FOR UKRAINE" online benefit concert.

Codes: Mobilizational.

Comment: An act of fundraising to provide material support for Ukrainian women and children.

Event: Various Artists' charity concert in Poland (21/03/2022): A benefit concert was held in Łódź featuring Ukrainian and Polish musicians.

Codes: Mobilizational + Affective.

Comment: The concert demonstrated international solidarity and highlighted the human face of the tragedy through performance.

Event: Ivan Dorn's Label's digital boycott (21/03/2022): The label closed its entire music catalog to users in Russia and Belarus.

Codes: Symbolic Boycott + Economic Sanction.

Comment: An action that combined a symbolic protest with a direct economic sanction against audiences in the aggressor and allied states.

Event: Måneskin's boycott (21/03/2022): The Italian band canceled their Russian tour dates in solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

Codes: Cultural Boycott + Global Legitimization.

Comment: An act of cultural disengagement from a globally popular band that legitimized the anti-war stance on an international stage.

Event: Svetlana Loboda's anti-war statement (24/03/2022): The singer published a video of destroyed Ukrainian cities while reciting a poem.

Codes: Affective + Diagnostic.

Comment: A personal testimony of the war's tragedy, combining artistic expression with the raw reality of destruction.

Event: Oxxxymiron & Boris Grebenshchikov's joint performance (24/03/2022): Grebenshchikov made a surprise appearance at the RAW concert in London.

Codes: Mobilizational + Symbolic.

Comment: A symbolic uniting of different generations of protest music for a common cause, amplifying the event's significance.

Event: Zemfira, Oxxxymiron, BG's symbolic gesture (25/03/2022): Zemfira published a photo with Oxxxymiron and Grebenshchikov backstage at the London concert.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: A non-performative gesture demonstrating the unity of key figures in the anti-war cultural movement.

Event: Leonid Agutin's statement at a concert (25/03/2022): In Moscow, the singer publicly called for military actions to end.

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: An act of reaffirming an anti-war stance from within Russia, a risky move given the political climate.

Event: Face's digital boycott (26/03/2022): The rapper announced he was removing his music from Russian streaming platforms.

Codes: Performative + Symbolic Boycott.

Comment: A definitive act of severing cultural ties with the state, framed as a performative protest.

Event: International charity concert on Polish TV (27/03/2022): A large-scale concert featured stars like Sting and Imagine Dragons to support Ukraine.

Codes: Mobilizational + Global Legitimization.

Comment: A major media event that demonstrated widespread international support and raised significant funds.

Event: The Scorpions' symbolic gesture (28/03/2022): The band altered the lyrics of "Wind of Change" to "Now listen to my heart, it says Ukrainia."

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: The rewriting of a historical anthem of peace to reflect the current political reality and show solidarity.

Event: Noize MC & Monetochka's "Voices of Peace" tour announcement (29/03/2022): The artists announced a joint charity tour to help Ukrainian refugees.

Codes: Mobilizational + Diagnostic.

Comment: An initiative framed as a moral duty to provide practical aid for those whose lives were "crossed out by war."

Event: Ed Sheeran, Jamala, et al. charity concert (30/03/2022): A benefit concert in the UK raised over \$16 million.

Codes: Mobilizational.

Comment: A demonstration of large-scale fundraising by major international pop stars.

Event: Face's interview on collective responsibility (30/03/2022): In an interview with Yuri Dud, the rapper expressed shame for the actions of Russia and its citizens.

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: An articulation of the difficult themes of collective responsibility and national shame by a prominent youth figure.

Event: Pussy Riot member coerced into pro-Lukashenko video (30/03/2022): Rita Flores was detained in Minsk and forced to record a propaganda video.

Codes: Repression + Counter-discourse.

Comment: An act of coercing an activist into producing propaganda, demonstrating the state's use of intimidation to create counter-narratives.

April 2022

Event: Max Barskih joins the Armed Forces of Ukraine (03/04/2022): The Ukrainian pop singer announced he had enlisted in the military.

Codes: Performative + Mobilization (Military).

Comment: An act of personal enlistment as a powerful patriotic statement, transforming the artist into a direct participant in the conflict.

Event: Okean Elzy's (S. Vakarchuk) testimony from Odesa (03/04/2022): The frontman, serving as an officer, posted a video directly documenting an attack.

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: The use of a personal platform to provide first-hand evidence of the ongoing conflict, blurring the line between artist and witness.

Event: Oxxxymiron's final RAW concert announcement (04/04/2022): The rapper announced the final concert in Berlin, condemning Russian war crimes.

Codes: Mobilizational + Diagnostic + Affective.

Comment: The announcement served not only to mobilize support but also to directly address war crimes and call for personal responsibility.

Event: New administrative case against Morgenshtern (05/04/2022): Authorities opened a case for alleged drug propaganda, seen as continued pressure.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The use of unrelated or pretextual charges to legally harass and pressure an anti-war artist.

Event: Nogu Svelo's "We Don't Need War!" song release (05/04/2022): The band released an anti-war track featuring a sample of Sergey Lavrov.

Codes: Symbolic + Counter-discourse.

Comment: The satirical use of an official's voice in an anti-war context, creating a direct artistic counter-discourse.

Event: Pussy Riot's Maria Alyokhina faces real prison time (05/04/2022): Prosecutors requested to escalate her sentence in the "sanitary case."

Codes: Repression.

Comment: An escalation of legal persecution against a prominent activist, moving from administrative to criminal punishment.

Event: Oxxxymiron's final RAW concert in Berlin (06/04/2022): The rapper held the third and final concert of his charity tour.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The culmination of the tour, which successfully raised funds and consolidated an anti-war diaspora community.

Event: Censorship of "Do the Russians Want War?" (07/04/2022): A YouTube video of the iconic Soviet anti-war song was blocked in Russia.

Codes: Repression + Symbolic.

Comment: The act of censoring a historical anti-war symbol, demonstrating the state's intolerance for even historical expressions of peace.

Event: Noize MC & Monetochka's first "Voices of Peace" concert (07/04/2022): The artists held their concert in Riga, with proceeds going to Ukrainian refugees.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The successful launch of a practical aid initiative fueled by cultural events.

Event: Pink Floyd's release of "Hey Hey Rise Up" (07/04/2022): The band released its first new song since 1994, featuring vocals by Ukrainian artist Andriy Khlyvnyuk.

Codes: Global Legitimization + Mobilizational.

Comment: A major act of solidarity that integrated a Ukrainian artist into the global canon and directed proceeds to humanitarian relief.

Event: Face designated a "foreign agent" (08/04/2022): The Russian Ministry of Justice applied the "foreign agent" label to the rapper.

Codes: Repression + Marginalization.

Comment: The state's use of a legal label to officially discredit, stigmatize, and isolate a dissenting artist.

Event: Oxxxymiron's mobilization results (08/04/2022): The rapper confirmed his three RAW concerts raised a total of \$195,000.

Codes: Mobilizational.

Comment: A quantifiable outcome of the protest action, demonstrating the conversion of symbolic capital into significant material aid.

Event: Elyzium's anti-war concert in Moscow (10/04/2022): The band displayed the white-blue-white opposition flag and performed a song in Ukrainian.

Codes: Symbolic Protest.

Comment: A rare and risky act of open dissent performed inside Russia, utilizing potent opposition symbols.

Event: Noize MC & Monetochka's second "Voices of Peace" concert (10/04/2022): The artists held their concert in Vilnius, raising €62,030.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The continuation of a successful fundraising model that also served to unite the diaspora.

Event: Ukrainian singers' symbolic performance in Poland (12/04/2022): Refugee women and children formed the shape of Ukraine on stage during a football match.

Codes: Symbolic + Affective.

Comment: A powerful visual representation of national unity and the human cost of the war, designed for an international audience.

Event: Yandex.Music censors BBC podcast (13/04/2022): The platform removed the podcast "What Was That?" at the demand of the state censor.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: An act of censoring independent international news content on a popular domestic platform.

Event: SoundStream censors "Holod" podcasts (14/04/2022): The service was demanded to restrict access to podcasts from an independent outlet.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: Continued pressure on digital platforms to remove independent journalism, shrinking the space for free information.

Event: Coerced apology of Elyzium's frontman (14/04/2022): Dmitry Kuznetsov posted a video apology for their anti-war concert, reportedly under duress.

Codes: Repression + Counter-discourse.

Comment: Public humiliation used as a tool of intimidation, forcing an artist to produce a counter-narrative against their own protest.

Event: Philipp Kirkorov's pro-war counter-discourse (16/04/2022): The pop star publicly supported pro-Russian politician Viktor Medvedchuk.

Codes: Mobilization of Support.

Comment: The use of mainstream celebrity status to legitimize pro-war figures and align with the Kremlin's narrative.

Event: Pilot band member's symbolic protest (16/04/2022): Andrei Kazachenko quit the band after it was slated to perform at a pro-war marathon.

Codes: Symbolic Protest.

Comment: A personal act of disassociation from pro-war propaganda, signaling a moral red line.

Event: Anton Ptushkin (Ukraine) banned from Russia (20/04/2022): The popular travel blogger was banned from entering Russia until 2072.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A long-term punishment designed to isolate a critical voice with a large Russian-speaking audience.

Event: LSP's (Oleg LSP) "Hurricanes" song release (20/04/2022): The Belarusian rapper released a new song with an anti-war message and a promise to donate proceeds.

Codes: Symbolic + Mobilizational.

Comment: The combination of an artistic statement with a commitment to practical aid.

Event: Pussy Riot's Maria Alyokhina sentenced to prison time (21/04/2022): A court replaced her previous sentence with time in a penal colony.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A significant escalation of legal persecution against a prominent activist, moving from administrative to criminal punishment.

Event: DDT's concert canceled over "Z" symbol (21/04/2022): The band's concert in Tyumen was canceled after they refused to perform in a venue decorated with a giant "Z."

Codes: Repression + Censorship (Concert Cancellation).

Comment: An example of the state creating impossible conditions for performances by artists who refuse to align with war symbols.

Event: Noize MC's "Ausweis" song release (21/04/2022): At a charity concert, the rapper performed a new song dealing with collective guilt.

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: The articulation of the difficult and internally divisive theme of collective Russian guilt for the war.

Event: Renata Litvinova's artistic statement (22/04/2022): The actress released a poetic anti-war video based on a classic Pete Seeger song.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: The use of a classic, universally understood anti-war text to comment on the current conflict.

Event: Okean Elzy's Kyiv metro performance (23/04/2022): The Ukrainian band held a charity concert in a metro station used as a bomb shelter.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic.

Comment: An act demonstrating cultural resilience and providing moral support to civilians in a space synonymous with wartime survival.

Event: Bi-2's refusal to perform (28/04/2022): The rock band refused to play a concert in Omsk because of a large pro-war "Z" banner over the stage.

Codes: Symbolic Protest.

Comment: A direct and public refusal to be associated with state war symbols, leading to immediate cancellation.

Event: Smear campaign against anti-war artists (28/04/2022): Posters with insults targeting anti-war celebrities were pasted in public spaces.

Codes: Counter-discourse.

Comment: An organized or grassroots campaign to discredit and intimidate dissenting voices through public shaming.

Event: Circumvention of Spotify and Netflix bans (29/04/2022): Users in Russia began buying access to streaming services through the darknet.

Codes: Technological Circumvention.

Comment: A demonstration of audience demand to remain connected to global culture despite official sanctions and isolation.

May 2022

Event: Liudmyla Monastyrskaya's (Ukraine) symbolic gesture (01/05/2022): The opera singer took her curtain call at the Met Opera wrapped in a Ukrainian flag.

Codes: Symbolic Support + Performance of Identity.

Comment: The use of a global stage to perform a powerful act of national identity and solidarity.

Event: Ed Sheeran & Antytila's (Ukraine) collaboration (02/05/2022): The artists released a collaborative remix of "2Step" with proceeds going to an aid fund.

Codes: Mobilizational + Global Legitimization.

Comment: The integration of the Ukrainian story and artists into global pop culture, serving both fundraising and narrative goals.

Event: Kremlin plans "creative countermeasures" (03/05/2022): Sources reported the Kremlin was planning a response to the growing number of anti-war celebrities.

Codes: Counter-discourse.

Comment: An acknowledgment by the state of the effectiveness of the protest discourse and its need to formulate an official response.

Event: Monetochka's artistic statement (03/05/2022): The singer published a video reciting an original anti-war poem satirizing apathy.

Codes: Symbolic + Diagnostic.

Comment: An artistic critique of societal passivity and moral indifference in the face of war.

Event: Moscow authorities increase surveillance (04/05/2022): Nightclubs were pressured to connect their security cameras to the state's facial recognition system.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The state's move to increase surveillance and control over public and cultural spaces.

Event: Morgenshtern designated a "foreign agent" (06/05/2022): The Russian Ministry of Justice applied the label to the rapper.

Codes: Repression + Marginalization.

Comment: The continued use of legal labels to discredit and isolate popular youth figures with anti-war stances.

Event: Future, Drake, Tems' symbolic gesture (06/05/2022): The music video for "WAIT FOR U" featured a Ukrainian palyanytsia bread with the coat of arms.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: A subtle but clear gesture of solidarity embedded in a major global cultural product.

Event: Pussy Riot's Maria Alyokhina escapes Russia (10/05/2022): The activist fled Russia disguised as a food courier to avoid imprisonment.

Codes: Performative Protest.

Comment: The act of escaping was transformed into a media event and a performative act of defiance against state power.

Event: Kalush Orchestra's (Ukraine) Eurovision participation (10/05/2022): The Ukrainian rap group advanced to the Eurovision final.

Codes: Symbolic Representation.

Comment: The act of representing the nation on a major international stage during wartime, imbuing the performance with political weight.

Event: Grigory Leps' pro-war counter-discourse (11/05/2022): The Russian singer posted from Donbas, showing support for the Russian military.

Codes: Mobilization of Support.

Comment: The use of celebrity to support the military and legitimize its presence in occupied territories.

Event: BBC investigation into "Za Rossiyu" Marathon (11/05/2022): An investigation revealed the state-funded pro-war concert tour cost nearly 100 million rubles.

Codes: Counter-discourse.

Comment: A diagnostic of the state's significant financial investment in creating and promoting a pro-war cultural narrative.

Event: Criminal investigation into Lyusya Shtein (Pussy Riot) (13/05/2022): Authorities began a criminal case for spreading "fake news" about the army.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The use of new censorship laws to criminally prosecute activists, escalating the legal consequences of dissent.

Event: Okean Elzy's (S. Vakarchuk) Chernobyl performance (13/05/2022): The frontman performed at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

Codes: Symbolic Performance.

Comment: A gesture of defiance and the reclaiming of a site of historical trauma, imbuing it with a new meaning of resilience.

Event: Kalush Orchestra wins Eurovision (15/05/2022): After winning, the Ukrainian band made a direct plea from the stage: "Please help Ukraine, Mariupol. Help Azovstal right now!"

Codes: Symbolic Victory + Mobilizational.

Comment: The winning platform was immediately used for an urgent political appeal, transforming a cultural victory into a direct call for action.

Event: Kalush Orchestra's "Stefania" music video release (15/05/2022): The video was filmed in the war-torn suburbs of Bucha, Irpin, and Hostomel.

Codes: Diagnostic + Symbolic.

Comment: The video transformed a song about a mother into an anthem of national suffering and resilience by visually linking it to the atrocities of the war.

Event: Pussy Riot's Lucy Shtein placed on wanted list (16/05/2022): The activist was put on a wanted list after fleeing Russia.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The criminalization of the act of fleeing persecution, extending state repression beyond national borders.

Event: Kino & Tequilajazzz's song release (17/05/2022): The bands released a cover of a 1980s anti-militarist anthem.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: The invocation of the historical authority and anti-war legacy of the Soviet rock movement to critique the current war.

Event: Bi-2's concert cancellations (17/05/2022): A play featuring the band was postponed, following a series of cancellations after their on-stage protest.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A demonstration of a chain reaction of censorship across regions, likely coordinated by local authorities as punishment.

Event: "Stand with Ukraine" joint charity tour (17/05/2022): Face, Pornofilmy, and Nervy started a joint tour in Tbilisi.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: An effort to unite different genres of protest music for a common cause, strengthening both fundraising and diaspora community bonds.

Event: VK Group's "RuStore" announcement (18/05/2022): The company announced the launch of a Russian alternative to the Apple and Google app stores.

Codes: Counter-measure + Technological Isolation.

Comment: An attempt to create a state-controlled digital ecosystem to counteract technological isolation.

Event: Pet Shop Boys' act of solidarity (18/05/2022): The British group condemned the "military aggression in Ukraine" and labeled the Russian regime as fascist.

Codes: Symbolic Support + Diagnostic.

Comment: An explicit act of solidarity that included a strong diagnostic claim about the nature of the Russian government.

Event: Yuri Shevchuk's anti-war speech (18/05/2022): At a concert in Ufa, the DDT front-man gave a viral speech, stating, "Motherland is not the president's ass that must be constantly licked."

Codes: Diagnostic + Symbolic.

Comment: A direct verbal challenge to the state that redefined patriotism in opposition to the regime and created a powerful, viral anti-war slogan.

Event: Face, Pornofilmy, Nervy's symbolic gesture (18/05/2022): During their charity concert, the artists wrapped themselves in Ukrainian flags.

Codes: Symbolic Protest + Performative.

Comment: A performative act demonstrating solidarity and open defiance of the Russian state's narrative.

Event: Police file protocol against Yuri Shevchuk (19/05/2022): A protocol for "discrediting the army" was filed against the musician following his speech.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The state's immediate legal reaction to a direct verbal challenge from a major cultural figure.

Event: Zemfira's "Myaso" ("Meat") music video release (19/05/2022): The singer released a song and animated video depicting a soldier's trauma in Mariupol.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic.

Comment: A poignant artistic statement on the dehumanization and horror of war, serving as an affective testimony.

Event: Administrative case against Yuri Shevchuk transferred (20/05/2022): The case was transferred, and Shevchuk invoked his right to silence.

Codes: Repression + Symbolic.

Comment: The continuation of the legal process, with the artist's act of silence serving as a form of protest.

Event: Yungblud's act of solidarity (22/05/2022): The British artist posted an emotional speech from a concert condemning the war.

Codes: Affective + Symbolic Support.

Comment: An expression of solidarity aimed at anti-war youth in both Ukraine and Russia.

Event: Kalush Orchestra's charity auction (29/05/2022): The band sold their Eurovision trophy for \$900,000 to support the Ukrainian military.

Codes: Mobilizational.

Comment: The transformation of a symbolic cultural prize into a tangible financial asset for the war effort.

June 2022

Event: Pussy Riot member detained in Croatia (01/06/2022): Aysoltan Niyazova was detained on an old Interpol warrant from Turkmenistan.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The use of international legal mechanisms, possibly for political motives, to target activists abroad.

Event: DDT's Moscow concert postponed (01/06/2022): The band's concert was postponed for a year following Shevchuk's anti-war speech.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A long-term cancellation serving as a clear punitive measure for dissent.

Event: Billie Eilish's act of solidarity (02/06/2022): The American pop star kissed a Ukrainian flag on stage during a concert.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: A highly visible gesture of solidarity on a global stage from a major international artist.

Event: Pornofilmy's fan community blocked (02/06/2022): The band's official fan community on VKontakte was blocked at the state's request.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The act of shutting down digital spaces for community organization to stifle dissent.

Event: "Stand with Ukraine" tour continues (03/06/2022): The joint tour of Face, Pornofilmy, and Nervy held a concert in Riga.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The continued effort to raise funds and strengthen the anti-war diaspora community.

Event: Max Korzh's "Svoy dom" song release (04/06/2022): The Belarusian musician released an anti-war song.

Codes: Symbolic + Diagnostic.

Comment: An explicit anti-war statement from a major artist previously seen as apolitical, signaling a shift in the broader cultural scene.

Event: Imagine Dragons' act of solidarity (06/06/2022): Frontman Dan Reynolds performed with a Ukrainian flag in Prague.

Codes: Symbolic Support + Affective.

Comment: A gesture of solidarity that connected with the personal stories of victims, amplifying its emotional impact.

Event: Max Korzh cancels all concerts (06/06/2022): The popular Belarusian musician canceled his entire tour, stating, "I can't sing about living it up when lives are being taken."

Codes: Performative Protest + Boycott.

Comment: The act of canceling concerts as a powerful ethical statement about the moral impossibility of entertainment during war.

Event: Manizha removed from festival lineup (07/06/2022): The singer was dropped from the "Stereoleto" festival after a targeted online campaign by pro-war activists.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: An example of "bottom-up" censorship, where pressure from pro-war activists leads to the cancellation of a dissenting artist.

Event: Administrative case against Lyusya Shtein (Pussy Riot) (13/06/2022): A case was opened against the activist, who had already fled Russia.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The continuation of legal persecution against activists in exile, demonstrating the state's long reach.

Event: Gogol Bordello's song release (13/06/2022): The Ukrainian-American band released a song dedicated to Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces.

Codes: Symbolic + Affective.

Comment: An artistic tribute to civilian resistance, celebrating the courage of ordinary people who had taken up arms.

Event: Rescue of Maria Prymachenko's art (15/06/2022): A story was published about the rescue of paintings by the celebrated folk artist from a destroyed museum.

Codes: Symbolic.

Comment: Art itself became a symbol of cultural survival and resistance against destruction.

Event: Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" cultural phenomenon (21/06/2022): The 1985 song topped global charts after being featured in "Stranger Things."

Codes: Cultural Phenomenon.

Comment: A cultural event demonstrating the power of media to resurrect and re-contextualize historical art.

Event: Billy Talent's charity auction (21/06/2022): The Canadian rock band announced they would auction a guitar to raise funds for Ukraine.

Codes: Mobilizational + Symbolic Support.

Comment: An act of fundraising that also served as a gesture of international solidarity.

Event: Death of Yuri Shatunov (23/06/2022): The former lead singer of the iconic Soviet-era boy band "Laskovyi Mai" died.

Codes: Cultural Memory.

Comment: The event prompted widespread public reflection on a past era of Russian pop music and youth identity.

Event: Censorship of Zemfira and Mumiy Troll songs (23/06/2022): Authorities banned high school graduates from performing their songs, citing certain lyrics.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: An act of hyper-vigilant censorship, extending to non-political songs by artists with perceived anti-war stances.

Event: Guide to anti-war initiatives published (23/06/2022): Meduza published a guide to major anti-war initiatives in Russia.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: An effort to consolidate and give visibility to the scattered anti-war movement within Russia, despite repression.

Event: Little Big's "Generation Cancellation" video (24/06/2022): The band released an anti-war music video and announced they had left Russia.

Codes: Symbolic + Emigration Statement.

Comment: The use of an artistic work to make an explicit anti-war statement, punctuated by the performative act of leaving the country.

Event: Ukrainian Ministry of Culture's "white lists" (24/06/2022): The ministry announced the creation of lists for Russian artists who condemned the war.

Codes: Counter-Discourse + Community Building.

Comment: An act of defining the boundaries of acceptable culture during wartime while building alliances with sympathetic artists.

Event: Pussy Riot's charity donation (24/06/2022): The group donated €10,000 from their European tour to a children's hospital in Kyiv.

Codes: Mobilizational + Community Building.

Comment: The conversion of proceeds from protest art into direct humanitarian aid.

Event: Cancellation of Anacondaz, Neschastny Sluchay, Manizha concert (26/06/2022): A Moscow club canceled their performances under state pressure.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The use of indirect state pressure on venues to silence dissenting artists.

Event: Coercion against Pussy Riot's Lucy Shtein's mother (28/06/2022): Police detained the mother of the exiled activist.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The persecution of activists' family members as a tool of intimidation and extra-legal pressure.

Event: Gogol Center leadership replaced (29/06/2022): The independent leadership of the influential Moscow theater was replaced by the state, leading to its effective closure.

Codes: Repression (Institutional Takeover).

Comment: The elimination of a major hub of independent cultural expression and dissent by the state.

July 2022

Event: Imagine Dragons' act of solidarity (01/07/2022): Frontman Dan Reynolds gave an emotional speech dedicating a song to Ukrainians.

Codes: Symbolic Support + Affective.

Comment: Connecting with the personal stories of victims on a global stage to create an emotional bond of solidarity.

Event: Yuri Shevchuk's (DDT) artistic statement (01/07/2022): The musician gave a major interview condemning the war from within Russia.

Codes: Diagnostic + Counter-discourse.

Comment: An act of framing the war as a moral and spiritual catastrophe for Russia, a direct counter-narrative to state propaganda.

Event: Noize MC's statement at a concert (04/07/2022): The rapper responded to the shelling of his Russian hometown by expressing the same horror he felt for Ukrainian cities.

Codes: Diagnostic + Affective.

Comment: A personal testimony of pain that transcended national lines, defining the war as an indiscriminate evil.

Event: Cancellation of Anacondaz and Louna concert (05/07/2022): The bands were removed from a festival lineup.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: Part of an ongoing campaign to remove "blacklisted" anti-war artists from all public platforms.

Event: Publication of an unofficial artist "blacklist" (07/07/2022): The media outlet Fontanka published a list of musicians whose performances were "undesirable."

Codes: Repression + Censorship ("Blacklist").

Comment: The informal censorship mechanisms became semi-public, formalizing the state's control over the cultural sphere.

Event: Ukrainian government bans Russian music (10/07/2022): A law was passed banning the public use of music by most post-1991 Russian artists.

Codes: Counter-Discourse.

Comment: A state-level legislative act to culturally dissociate from the aggressor nation.

Event: Ivan Dorn's artistic statement (10/07/2022): The Ukrainian artist reflected on the failure of his mission to be a "cultural bridge" to Russia.

Codes: Diagnostic.

Comment: A public reflection on the failure of cultural diplomacy and the necessity of taking an unequivocal stance in wartime.

Event: Criminal case against Oleg Yagodin (Kurara) (11/07/2022): A case was opened against the musician for "discrediting" the army.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The use of administrative prosecution to punish an anti-war statement made at a festival.

Event: Yuri Dud fined under "gay propaganda" law (12/07/2022): The prominent journalist was fined in a move seen as politically motivated.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The use of non-political legislation as a pretext for persecuting a critical media figure.

Event: Lyapis Trubetskoy's song release (12/07/2022): The Belarusian band re-released their anthem "Warriors of Light" in Ukrainian.

Codes: Symbolic + Mobilizational.

Comment: The reimagining of a famous protest anthem in Ukrainian to demonstrate solidarity and mobilize spirits.

Event: The Rolling Stones' act of solidarity (16/07/2022): The band performed with a Ukrainian children's choir in Vienna.

Codes: Global Legitimation + Symbolic Support.

Comment: A powerful demonstration of international cultural support from one of the world's most iconic bands.

Event: Rammstein's symbolic gesture (17/07/2022): The band's keyboardist waved a Ukrainian flag during their concert in Warsaw.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: A highly visible gesture of solidarity from a major international band with a massive following in Eastern Europe.

Event: Yuri Shevchuk's (DDT) case sent back (18/07/2022): A court sent the "discreditation" case against the musician back to the originating city.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The continuation of the legal process, symbolic of the bureaucratic obstacles used to harass and silence dissent.

Event: Concert agencies add "no politics" clauses to contracts (18/07/2022): Russian concert agencies began including clauses forbidding political statements from the stage.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The privatization of state pressure, where political censorship is formalized within commercial contracts.

Event: Monatik's performance in Kyiv metro (20/07/2022): The Ukrainian musician returned to Kyiv and performed in a metro station.

Codes: Symbolic + Performance of Resilience.

Comment: A demonstration that cultural life and national spirit were continuing even in spaces used as bomb shelters.

Event: Imagine Dragons become United24 ambassadors (23/07/2022): The American band became official ambassadors for Ukraine's fundraising platform.

Codes: Global Legitimation + Mobilizational.

Comment: The use of global celebrity status to formalize support and drive international fundraising efforts.

Event: Police stop Anacondaz concert (23/07/2022): Police physically entered the stage and stopped the "blacklisted" band's concert in Perm mid-performance.

Codes: Repression (Censorship).

Comment: A direct and forceful intervention by state authorities to silence a dissenting artist in real-time.

Event: Philipp Kirkorov's pro-war counter-discourse (24/07/2022): The pop star announced concerts in Crimea and invited wounded Russian soldiers.

Codes: Mobilizational + Symbolic.

Comment: The use of celebrity status to legitimize the war effort and support occupying forces.

Event: Eurovision 2023 to be held in the UK (25/07/2022): Organizers announced the contest would be held in the UK on behalf of Ukraine.

Codes: Symbolic Support.

Comment: An act that acknowledged Ukraine's victory while prioritizing safety, a gesture of supportive compromise.

Event: IC3PEAK's emigration statement (25/07/2022): The duo gave an interview about leaving Russia and their anti-war stance.

Codes: Emigration Statement + Testimony.

Comment: The framing of their departure as the culmination of long-term state repression and a definitive anti-war act.

Event: Ruki Vverh! banned from Estonia (26/07/2022): Estonia banned the Russian pop group from entry for five years.

Codes: Counter-Discourse.

Comment: A state-level sanction by a neighboring country, culturally dissociating from citizens of an aggressor state.

Event: New court date for Yuri Shevchuk (DDT) (27/07/2022): A new date was set in the ongoing "discrediting the army" case.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The continuation of the legal process, symbolic of the bureaucratic harassment used to silence dissent.

Event: Little Big's tour cancellation (27/07/2022): The band officially canceled their previously announced Russian tour.

Codes: Performative Protest.

Comment: The act of canceling the tour served as a powerful statement confirming their anti-war, exilic stance.

Event: Okean Elzy's "Flowers of the Minefields" song release (27/07/2022): The Ukrainian band released a music video with proceeds going to the military.

Codes: Mobilizational + Symbolic.

Comment: The transformation of a pre-war song into a tangible financial asset for the war effort.

Event: FSB ban on Bi-2 requested (28/07/2022): A pro-war deputy formally requested the FSB to ban the band from entering Russia.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: An attempt to formalize the "blacklist" and use state security services to persecute artists.

Event: Krovostok's concert cancellation (30/07/2022): The band's Moscow concert was canceled due to "pressure from the authorities."

Codes: Repression + Counter-discourse.

Comment: An act of state censorship that the band reframed as a validation of their critical stance.

Event: Pornofilmy's artistic statement (31/07/2022): The frontman gave an interview about the "list of forbidden groups."

Codes: Testimony + Diagnostic.

Comment: A first-hand account of the mechanisms of state censorship and its impact on artists.

August 2022

Event: Laima Vaikule's symbolic gesture (02/08/2022): The Latvian singer appeared on stage in Lithuania holding a Ukrainian flag.

Codes: Symbolic Support + Act of Solidarity.

Comment: A highly visible gesture of solidarity on an international stage from a beloved post-Soviet artist.

Event: Ozzy Osbourne's charity album (04/08/2022): The artist announced a limited edition vinyl in the colors of the Ukrainian flag to raise funds.

Codes: Global Legitimation + Mobilizational.

Comment: The use of a major album release to fundraise and show solidarity.

Event: DDT's "The Fog" song release (04/08/2022): The band released a 10-minute music video depicting a generational conflict.

Codes: Diagnostic + Symbolic.

Comment: The use of a narrative art film to critique the social and generational schism within Russia.

Event: Zakhar Prilepin vs. Ivan Urgant counter-discourse (06/08/2022): The pro-war writer invited the critical TV host to occupied Izyum.

Codes: Counter-Discourse.

Comment: An attempt to co-opt and delegitimize anti-war sentiment through a performative public challenge.

Event: Patreon blocked in Russia (07/08/2022): The entire crowdfunding platform was blocked by the state.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: The collateral censorship of an entire digital ecosystem to silence a few dissenting voices.

Event: Sergey Shnurov's artistic statement (05/08/2022): The musician publicly denied claims he had visited the self-proclaimed LNR.

Codes: Counter-Discourse.

Comment: A public refutation of pro-war propaganda that attempted to co-opt his image.

Event: Roger Waters' artistic statement (07/08/2022): The Pink Floyd co-founder accused US President Joe Biden of "fueling the fire" in Ukraine.

Codes: Counter-Discourse (Anti-Western).

Comment: A prominent Western artist shifting blame for the conflict onto Western leadership, a significant counter-narrative.

Event: Kurara's (Oleg Yagodin) repression (11/08/2022): The frontman was fined 40,000 rubles for saying "No to war!" during a concert.

Codes: Repression (Legal Persecution).

Comment: The use of administrative fines to punish and deter anti-war speech by artists.

Event: Pornofilmy's (Vladimir Kotlyarov) repression (11/08/2022): Police launched an investigation into the frontman for potential "extremist statements."

Codes: Repression (Legal Harassment).

Comment: The initiation of a formal police investigation as a method of intimidation.

Event: Bomba Kibersisi's performative protest (12/08/2022): A drag queen and veteran performed the Russian national anthem with a rainbow flag.

Codes: Counter-Discourse + Symbolic.

Comment: The reappropriation of national symbols to challenge state-enforced norms, leading to an immediate state response.

Event: AloeVera's secret show raided (13/08/2022): After their official concert was canceled, the band played a secret show which was then raided by the FSB.

Codes: Repression + Counter-Discourse (by artists).

Comment: A demonstration of the cycle of state censorship, artistic circumvention, and escalating state repression.

Event: Aikhal Ammosov's (Crispy Newspaper) repression (15/08/2022): A Yakutian punk musician was detained for attempting to hang an anti-war banner.

Codes: Repression (pre-emptive) + Performative Protest.

Comment: The state acting to prevent a protest, highlighting dissent in an ethnic republic.

Event: Yuri Shevchuk fined for "discrediting the army" (16/08/2022): A court fined the musician 50,000 rubles for his on-stage anti-war speech.

Codes: Repression (Legal Persecution).

Comment: The culmination of a legal process that formalized financial punishment for anti-war speech, setting a precedent.

Event: Yuri Shevchuk's (DDT) legal appeal (16/08/2022): The musician's legal team announced they would appeal the fine.

Codes: Counter-Discourse.

Comment: The use of the state's own legal system to challenge its repressive measures, a form of procedural protest.

Event: Anacondaz's tour cancellation and lawsuit (17/08/2022): The band postponed all Russian concerts and announced they would sue the authorities.

Codes: Performative Protest + Counter-Discourse.

Comment: The tour cancellation served as a statement, while legal action directly challenged the state's repressive actions.

Event: Kasta's planned counter-discourse (17/08/2022): The "blacklisted" rap group invited fans to organize secret, private concerts.

Codes: Technological Circumvention + Community Building.

Comment: The proposal of a decentralized model for performance to bypass state censorship.

Event: Zemfira's emigration statement (18/08/2022): The singer announced a major European tour, establishing a new touring circuit outside Russia.

Codes: Symbolic + Community Building.

Comment: A signal of a long-term professional break from Russia and an effort to build a community for the diaspora.

Event: Splean's performance censored (21/08/2022): The band dedicated a song to exiled artists at a festival; their set was later cut from the official broadcast.

Codes: Symbolic + Diagnostic + Repression (Censorship).

Comment: An act of solidarity with exiled peers was immediately met with state censorship, demonstrating the system's reflexive erasure of dissent.

Event: Nervy's (Zhenya Milkovsky) emigration statement (22/08/2022): The Ukrainian frontman gave an interview about leaving Russia and cutting all ties.

Codes: Testimony + Diagnostic.

Comment: A personal account of the war's impact, framing departure as a necessary political and ethical act.

Event: Yandex sells media assets to state-controlled VK (23/08/2022): Yandex sold its politically sensitive news and content platforms.

Codes: Repression + Digital Isolation.

Comment: A major corporate restructuring that consolidated the state's control over the digital information space.

Event: Spleen's concert canceled (23/08/2022): A Moscow concert was canceled after the frontman's previous anti-war statement.

Codes: Repression.

Comment: A direct consequence and punishment for an act of public dissent.

Event: Court's justification for Shevchuk fine (24/08/2022): The court published its reasoning, defining anti-war questioning as a punishable offense.

Codes: Repression + Counter-Discourse (State Propaganda).

Comment: The creation of a legal precedent to suppress dissent and codify the state's narrative.

Event: Cultural figures' act of solidarity for Yevgeny Roizman (25/08/2022): Prominent artists provided positive character references for the arrested opposition politician.

Codes: Symbolic Support + Counter-Discourse.

Comment: The use of cultural authority to challenge the state's persecution of a political figure.

Event: Alla Pugacheva's symbolic return to Russia (27/08/2022): The iconic singer returned to Russia after leaving at the start of the invasion.

Codes: Symbolic + Diagnostic.

Comment: An ambiguous but highly significant act that prompted widespread public speculation about its political meaning.

Event: Boris Akunin's act of solidarity (30/08/2022): The exiled writer promoted a little-known band's anti-war music video.

Codes: Community Building + Symbolic Support.

Comment: The leveraging of cultural capital to amplify the voice of a lesser-known dissenting artist.

Event: SBPCh's song release (31/08/2022): The exiled anti-war band released a music video using nostalgic Soviet-era amateur footage.

Codes: Artistic Statement + Affective.

Comment: The use of art to evoke a sense of a lost, peaceful past to critique the violent present.

September 2022

Event: Polina Osetinskaya's concert canceled (02/09/2022): The anti-war classical pianist's concert in St. Petersburg was canceled under pressure.

Codes: Repression (Censorship).

Comment: The extension of the concert cancellation campaign into the world of classical music.

Event: Andrei Makarevich designated a "foreign agent" (02/09/2022): The leader of the legendary band Mashina Vremeni was officially labeled a "foreign agent."

Codes: Repression + Marginalization.

Comment: The state's use of a legal label to officially discredit, stigmatize, and isolate an iconic figure of Soviet and Russian rock.

Event: Alla Pugacheva's artistic statement (04/09/2022): After returning to Russia, the singer posted a critique of a pro-war director and mourned the post-Gorbachev "era of freedom."

Codes: Diagnostic + Symbolic.

Comment: An indirect but clear anti-war statement from a figure of immense cultural authority, using her platform to diagnose a societal regression.

Event: DDT's crowdfunding campaign (06/09/2022): The group launched a campaign for a new album, bypassing official channels.

Codes: Community Building + Symbolic Resilience.

Comment: An act of engaging directly with their audience for support, demonstrating artistic continuity and resilience despite state pressure.

Event: Oxxxymiron returns to Russia (06/09/2022): The prominent anti-war rapper was reported to have returned to Russia after leaving at the start of the war.

Codes: Symbolic + Diagnostic.

Comment: A high-stakes return that prompted widespread speculation, functioning as a diagnostic of the regime's tolerance and a potential challenge to its authority.

Event: Monetochka placed on wanted list (08/09/2022): The exiled anti-war singer was placed on a wanted list for a pre-war plagiarism case.

Codes: Repression + Marginalization.

Comment: The instrumentalization of a non-political legal case to apply pressure and harass a prominent dissenting artist in exile.

Event: Bomba Kibersisi fined (12/09/2022): The drag queen was fined for "improper use of state symbols" after performing the national anthem with a rainbow flag.

Codes: Repression (Legal Persecution).

Comment: The legal punishment for reappropriating national symbols, formally sanctioning an act of counter-discourse.

Event: DDT's stadium concert postponed (14/09/2022): The band's major concert in St. Petersburg was postponed indefinitely.

Codes: Repression (Censorship).

Comment: The continued cancellation of performances, confirming the artist's effective blacklisting from major venues.

Event: Oxxxymiron's new music video (16/09/2022): The rapper released a defiant anti-war video filmed in St. Petersburg, which was immediately reported for "extremism."

Codes: Artistic Statement + Diagnostic + Repression.

Comment: A direct artistic challenge issued from within Russia, which was met with an immediate repressive response from authorities.

Event: Alla Pugacheva's "foreign agent" request (18/09/2022): The singer publicly asked the Ministry of Justice to declare her a "foreign agent" in solidarity with her husband.

Codes: Counter-Discourse + Symbolic + Performative Protest.

Comment: A direct challenge to the state, co-opting its repressive "foreign agent" label and turning it into a badge of honor.

Event: Pet Shop Boys' statement of support (19/09/2022): The British pop duo publicly expressed admiration for Alla Pugacheva's "courage and honesty."

Codes: Global Legitimation + Symbolic Support.

Comment: International artists validating and amplifying the protest act of a Russian colleague, placing it in a global context.

Event: Police investigation into Alla Pugacheva (20/09/2022): Police began an investigation into the singer for "discrediting" the army following her post.

Codes: Repression (Legal Harassment).

Comment: The state's formal response to her protest, initiating a legal process intended to intimidate one of the country's most iconic figures.