

THE SOUND CONCEPT OF HOPE IN UKRAINIAN CONTEMPORARY BALLET¹

VERONIKA ZINCHENKO-HOTSULIAK² 

SUMMARY. The concept of hope holds profound significance in Ukrainian musical art, particularly within the contemporary ballet works of modern Ukrainian composers such as Viktor Rekalo, Ivan Nebesnyi and Ivan Harkusha. Amidst the backdrop of a nation shaped by a complex contemporary narrative and ongoing socio-political and historical challenges, these composers infuse their ballet music with themes of resilience, aspiration, and hope. This research explores how hope is conveyed through musical structures, sound effects, thematic motifs, and emotional expression within a selection of contemporary ballet scores. The study delves into the intricate relationship between music and choreography, analyzing how these elements harmonize to evoke a sense of hope in the audience. Moreover, it discusses the broader cultural and historical significance of hope in Ukrainian society, emphasizing how these composers contribute to the shaping of national identity and collective memory. By illuminating the distinctive ways in which modern Ukrainian ballet serves as both an artistic expression and a form of cultural commentary, this research offers valuable insight into the power of music to inspire hope in the face of adversity.

Keywords: contemporary Ukrainian music, ballet genre, ballet music, soundscape of war, hope in music.

1. Introduction

Hope is a multifaceted and enduring aspect of human experience, often defined as the belief in the possibility of positive outcomes despite uncertainty or adversity. It functions as a psychological anchor, a spiritual compass, and a sociocultural mechanism of resilience. The Czech author,

¹ The article was created within the framework of The Kolasky Visiting Research Fellowship in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Law, Education, and Library Sciences 2025-2026.

² *PhD, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Humanities and Music Innovation in R. Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music, Kyiv, Ukraine. E-mail: veroniquemusik@gmail.com*



poet and dissident Václav Havel once said, “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out”³. In this sense, hope transcends mere optimism and becomes a mode of meaning-making. Philosophically, hope has been explored extensively. The German philosopher Ernst Bloch, in his seminal work *The Principle of Hope*, argued that hope is not passive but a driving force in shaping the future: “The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong”⁴. This kind of philosophy resonates with the Ukrainian understanding of hope, raising the question: what does hope mean within a cultural, historical and aesthetic context, and how does it sound and move in the language of contemporary ballet?

The aim of this study is to examine the philosophical, psychological, cultural, and specifically sound dimensions of hope in Ukrainian contemporary ballet, and to explore how historical experiences of adversity and resilience have shaped both collective and individual understandings of it. In Ukrainian contemporary ballet, composers and choreographers employ sound as a medium of expectation, suspension and release, while bodily movement extends these sonic gestures into space, creating an embodied narrative of endurance and renewal.

The hope in Ukrainian ballet is not merely a thematic motif but a sound concept, embedded in musical structure and expressive vocabulary; second, that collective experiences of adversity have generated a distinctive musical-poetic grammar of hope, characterized by a tension between lament and transcendence; and third, that the synthesis of music and choreography in contemporary Ukrainian ballet functions as a cultural practice of resilience, where sound itself becomes a medium of anticipation and survival.

To pursue these aims, the study employs an interdisciplinary methodology, combining philosophical analysis of hope as a concept, cultural-historical interpretation of Ukrainian narratives of resilience, and musicological examination of selected contemporary ballets.

2. The concept of hope in music.

Hope has long been recognized as one of the most resilient forces in human life, shaping our ability to endure adversity and to envision a future beyond present suffering. In philosophical and theological discourse, hope

³ Havel, Václav. *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala* Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

⁴ Bloch, Ernst. *The Principle of Hope (Principiul speranței)*. Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, MIT Press, 1986. 3 vols.

has been defined as a forward-looking orientation, a projection of possibility into the unknown. In music, however, hope is not merely represented but enacted: it takes form in sound, rhythm and gesture, becoming audible and perceptible through the dynamics of tension and resolution, silence and sound, fragility and transcendence. Music thus offers not only a reflection of hope but a phenomenological experience of it, one that engages both body and mind.

The first dimension in which hope appears in music is temporality. As Ernst Bloch observed in *The Principle of Hope*, hope is inseparable from anticipation; it is oriented toward what has not yet arrived. Similarly, music unfolds in time: it generates expectations, delays their fulfillment, and creates moments of release that listeners experience as resolution.

Silence plays a crucial role in this articulation. The pause before a return, the breath before a climactic resolution, or the moment of stillness after turbulence can embody the fragile interval where hope resides. Music not only narrates but performs hope through these temporal gestures, allowing listeners to inhabit the experience of waiting, longing and eventual release.

Psychological research as a work of C. R. Snyder⁵ has shown that certain patterns consistently evoke emotions related to hopefulness. Yet hope in music is not reducible to cheerfulness or optimism. Indeed, some of the most powerful musical expressions of hope emerge precisely from contexts of lament, mourning or despair. Hope in music is not confined to the individual listener but is profoundly collective. Songs of resistance, spirituals, and anthems have historically given voice to communities facing oppression. Ukrainian folk songs, ballads and contemporary compositions articulate national endurance in the face of adversity, often transforming private grief into communal solidarity.

Moreover, hope in music often involves a paradoxical interplay between fragility and strength. The concept of hope in music cannot be reduced to a single formula or style; it is embedded in the very structure of musical temporality, in the affective power of sound and in the cultural practices that transform music into a collective expression of endurance.

3. Ukrainian concept of hope

In the Ukrainian language, the word “надія” (nadiia) – meaning “hope” – carries an inherent active component, rooted in the structure of the word itself. Unlike passive interpretations of hope as mere wishful thinking or quiet

⁵ Snyder, C. R. (2005). Teaching: The lessons of hope. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 24(1), 72-84.

endurance, the Ukrainian term embeds the verb “діяти” (diiaty), meaning “to act”. This linguistic connection reflects a cultural understanding of hope not just as emotional endurance, but as a call to action, engagement, and forward movement.

This active connotation resonates deeply in the Ukrainian historical and cultural experience. Hope, in this context, becomes more than a feeling – it is an ethical and communal imperative. In times of war, political struggle, or cultural suppression, “Ukrainian hope” does not imply waiting idly for salvation, but instead inspires individual and collective agency. It motivates people to protect their language, defend their homeland, create art, and imagine a better future even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Such an understanding of hope aligns with what Ernst Bloch described as concrete utopia: not a passive dream of paradise, but a realistic, actionable vision of what could be, grounded in the potential of the present moment. In Ukrainian ballet and music, this version of hope is especially powerful – it manifests as movement, sound, rhythm and resistance.

The Ukrainian understanding of hope cannot be detached from the nation’s turbulent history, its geography between empires, and its repeated confrontations with suffering, resistance, and survival. Unlike abstract or purely theological treatments of hope in Western philosophy, the Ukrainian concept of hope is deeply embodied, collective, and pragmatic. It emerges not only from philosophical speculation but from lived experience – centuries of foreign domination, famine, exile, and war – that has repeatedly tested the resilience of the people. For Ukrainians, hope has never been merely a passive expectation of better times; rather, it is an active stance, a form of inner resistance, and a cultural practice that sustains meaning in the face of adversity.

Hope is often described as both deeply personal and inherently communal. In contexts of oppression, war, and displacement – such as those faced by contemporary Ukraine – hope becomes a tool for collective endurance and cultural preservation. In the context of Ukrainian musical and ballet art hope assumes a particularly poignant role, resonating deeply amidst a backdrop of socio-political upheaval, war, and a nation’s enduring quest for identity. I will try to explore the manifestation of hope in contemporary Ukrainian ballet through the works of contemporary Ukrainian composers Ivan Harkusha, Viktor Rekalo and Ivan Nebesnyi. Their ballet demonstrates how music and sounds serve not only as a vehicle for artistic expression but also as a conduit for emotional resilience and cultural commentary.

In contemporary Ukrainian ballet, the concept of hope has found a unique aesthetic form. The Ukrainian contemporary ballet transforms hope into a multisensory concept. It is not only heard in music but seen in movement, felt in the collective experience of performance, and remembered as a

cultural event. Works that address historical trauma or current struggles demonstrate how art can project a horizon of possibility, even when the political and social present is marked by uncertainty. Ballet thus becomes a site where the Ukrainian concept of hope is staged fragile, contested, yet luminous.

4. Ukrainian contemporary ballet and sound concept of hope

Ukraine's ballet tradition, historically struggled by politic of Russian Empire and Soviet Union has undergone a profound transformation in the post-independence era. As Ukraine continues to assert its national identity, its cultural institutions, including ballet, play a vital role. Modern Ukrainian composers infuse their work with indigenous themes, historical references, and emotional narratives that speak to both the trauma and the triumphs of the Ukrainian people. This cultural introspection is particularly evident in contemporary ballet, where music and movement coalesce to reflect collective memory and aspiration.

The day of February 24, 2022, divided the life of Ukrainians and the entire civilized world into "before" and "after". The occupation and destruction of Mariupol became an open wound in the heart of every Ukrainian. The pain from the destruction of Mariupol was reflected in the works of many artists. The ballet *Mariupol* (2022, Washington, US) was created by choreographer and dancer Vladyslav Detyuchenko together with composer and sound artist Ivan Harkusha well known as a sound artist John Hope (the concept of hope playing vital role in his artistic identification). Ivan Harkusha's *Mariupol* confronts the brutal reality of war while illuminating the unyielding spirit of the city's inhabitants. Composed in the aftermath of the Russian invasion, the score integrates industrial noise, ambient soundscapes. The island of hope we could find in second movement *Treadmill* which include quotation of Mykola Leontovych arrangement of Ukrainian folk song *Oh, from behind the mountain, snow is falling* his delicate melody, rooted in tradition, becomes a lifeline – a flicker of warmth and memory in a world seemingly reduced to cold repetition and ruin.

Rather than being overwhelmed by despair I. Harkusha's *Mariupol* insists on the endurance of spirit. The familiar folk motif becomes a symbol: of heritage, of connection, and of the unbreakable will to survive. As the music evolves, glimpses of light pierce through the darkness, suggesting that even in the bleakest moments, hope is not lost – it is reborn.

The synergy between music and choreography in these works is central to their emotional impact. Choreographer interpret musical cues not merely as indicators of rhythm or mood, but as narrative devices. In this case,

the performance tells the life story of a single man – from the moment of his birth to his death in war.

The Ivan Nebesnyi's *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (2023, Lviv National Opera, Ukraine) inspired by the novella of the same name by Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi and the iconic film adaptation by Serhii Paradzhanov, with original music by Myroslav Skoryk, Ivan Nebesnyi's *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* reimagines a cornerstone of Ukrainian cultural heritage through a contemporary musical lens. I. Nebesnyi employs modal harmonies and traditional Hutsul rhythms, weaving them together with contemporary dissonances and textural innovations. The resulting sonic landscape is both haunting and radiant – a world where the echoes of the past breathe life into the present.

Central to this interpretation is the idea of hope as a quiet, persistent force. The ballet's emotional journey – through communal rituals, personal tragedy, and spiritual transformation – evokes a deep reverence for ancestral memory but never succumbs to nostalgia or despair. Instead, it charts a course toward renewal. The presence of hope emerges not as a grand gesture, but as a subtle thread – in a gesture, a melody, a moment of silence – reminding us that identity is not static, but constantly reimagined and reborn.

In I. Nebesnyi's vision, the shadows of forgotten ancestors do not merely linger – they guide. They illuminate a path forward, where the weight of history is carried not as a burden, but as a source of strength. In this way, the ballet becomes a luminous meditation on cultural survival, where hope endures as both legacy and promise.

An entirely different kind of hope emerges in Viktor Rekalo's ballet *My Home on Two Feet* (2023, Insha Dance Company). Here, hope is not rooted in cultural memory or spiritual transcendence, but in the deeply personal act of perseverance. This is a story of displacement, fragility, and quiet defiance – where the concept of “home” is no longer tied to a place, but to the simple, resolute act of standing, moving, surviving.

Viktor Rekalo's ballet score captures the essence of displacement and the enduring connection to one's homeland. Through minimalist textures, soundscape of war, an intonational allusion to the mournful Ukrainian folk song *Plyne Kacha* – which has become a symbolic requiem for the fallen heroes of Ukraine. V. Rekalo evokes the emotional tension between nostalgia and forward-looking hope. The composition utilizes gentle ostinatos and layered string harmonies that suggest the rhythmic journey of individuals navigating exile and return. The choreography and scenography in turn mirror these musical elements, with dancers engaging in movements that symbolize searching, transition, and reconnection.

The presence of hope in contemporary Ukrainian ballet extends beyond the stage. These works contribute to a national dialogue about survival, dignity, and future possibilities. In a time of war and uncertainty, the arts offer a space for reflection and emotional catharsis. By channeling hope through music and movement, these composers and choreographers assert the resilience of Ukrainian culture and the enduring human capacity for renewal. Through innovative musical structures, evocative soundscapes, and dynamic choreographic partnerships, these composers illuminate the power of hope to inspire, sustain, and transform. In doing so, they reaffirm the role of Ukrainian ballet as a vital expression of national identity and human resilience.

5. Conclusion

The Ukrainian concept of hope, when filtered through contemporary ballet, acquires an aesthetic depth that unites sound, movement and cultural memory. Unlike abstract philosophical discourse, ballet gives hope a sensory form: it is heard in sound, embodied in motion, and shared in the collective act of performance. Ukrainian contemporary ballet, emerging at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, demonstrates how the experience of hope can be reframed as a sonic phenomenon. In this artistic sphere, the fragility of resilience and the persistence of aspiration are projected into musical and bodily gestures that resonate with Ukraine's historical condition and cultural identity.

REFERENCES

- Bloch, Ernst. *The Principle of Hope (Principiul speranței)*. Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, MIT Press, 1986. 3 vols.
- Clark, J. N. "Music, Resilience and 'Soundscaping': Some Reflections on the War in Ukraine." *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2024, pp. 150–170.
- Havel, Václav. *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvízd'ala* Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
- Ratcliffe, Matthew. "What Is It to Lose Hope?" *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2013, pp. 597–614.
- Snyder, C. R. "Teaching: The Lessons of Hope." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2005, pp. 72–84.
- Tabeshadze, Nino. *Music in the Times of War: Case Study: Ukraine and Russia (Muzica în vremuri de război: Studiu de caz: Ucraina și Rusia)*. Master's thesis, 2024.

Tortop, Hasan Said, & Ghvinjilia, Gvantsa. "War and Music: A Discourse Analysis of Ukrainian Musicians' Messages from a Transcultural Perspective." *Journal of Music Theory and Transcultural Music Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2024, pp. 63–83. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14008541>

Зінченко-Гоцуляк, В. Звуковий ландшафт балету «Маріуполь» Івана Гаркуші та Владислава Детюченка (*The Soundscape of the Ballet 'Mariupol' by Ivan Harkusha and Vladyslav Detiuchenko*)." *Південноукраїнські мистецькі студії (Southern Ukrainian Art Studies)*, vol. 3, no. 6, 2024, pp. 96–99.