

Music, resilience and 'soundscaping'

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Music, Resilience and ‘Soundscaping’: Some Reflections on the War in Ukraine

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Abstract

There exists a rich corpus of literature exploring some of the diverse roles – positive and negative – that music can play in war. This interdisciplinary article makes a novel contribution to this literature, and to research on the sociology of music more broadly, through its particular emphasis on resilience. Scholarship on resilience has increasingly moved beyond person-centred, psychology-based approaches towards more complex relational and multi-systemic framings that situate the concept in the interactions between individuals and their social ecologies (environments). However, it has given little attention to the sensory dimensions of these ecologies, including their acoustic dimensions. Focusing on the war in Ukraine and drawing primarily on media sources (including several online videos) to develop its analysis, the article argues that music can be a form and expression of resilience (and resistance) in war situations that directly acts on the acoustic ecology – a concept that to date has mainly been discussed within ecology and conservation research. Specifically, the article frames music as a form of ‘soundscaping’, in the sense of an active aligning of sound and wellbeing.

Keywords

Acoustic ecology, music, resilience, ‘soundscaping’, Ukraine, war

Introduction

A year after Russian forces invaded the sovereign state of Ukraine, there are many iconic images from the brutal war. The 40-mile long Russian military convoy ominously (and ultimately unsuccessfully) approaching Kyiv during the first weeks of the conflict; the faces of men standing on railway platforms and at roadsides waving goodbye to their

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wives, girlfriends, mothers, children, wondering if and when they will see them again; the blackened wasteland of Mariupol; the charred remains of the bodies of civilians in Bucha and Irpin; soldiers dug into World War I-type trenches in the Donbas. Writing more than half a century ago, Newhall (1952: 17) noted that ‘more and more photographers have discovered that the power of the photograph springs from a deeper source than words – the same deep source as music’. Crucial to elucidating this power, she argued, is the fact that ‘Long before we learn to talk, sounds and images form the world we live in’ (Newhall, 1952: 17).¹ In other words, images and sounds have a particular immediacy with which many of us can connect.

It is significant in this regard that alongside the many indelible images from the war in Ukraine, there have also been some powerful stories with a musical theme, from a Ukrainian violinist turned soldier playing the national anthem to an audience of his fellow soldiers (Linton, 2022) to seven-year-old Amelia Anisovych spontaneously singing ‘Let it go’, from the Disney film *Frozen*, in a bomb shelter in Kyiv (BBC, 2022). Indeed, in a virtual appearance at the 2022 Grammy Awards, President Volodymyr Zelensky himself emphasised the importance of music. Juxtaposing it with the silence of destroyed cities and the bodies of the dead, he declared: ‘Our musicians wear body armour instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals. Even to those who can’t hear them. But the music will break through anyway’ (cited in Shaw Roberts, 2022a).

Using Ukraine as an illustrative case study, this article explores music as an expression of resilience (and relatedly resistance) in war, a notion implicit in President Zelensky’s aforementioned assertion that ‘the music will break through anyway’. In this way, the research makes a highly original contribution to existing scholarship on music and war (see, e.g., Baker, 2016; Gerk, 2022; Hajduk, 2003; Pieslak, 2007), as well as to literature on the sociology of music (see, e.g., DeNora, 2004; Haynes and Nowak, 2021; Hofman, 2020; Marshall, 2011; Shelley, 2021). Crossley and Bottero (2013: 3) note that ‘There has been growing interest and a flurry of research within the sociology of music (or music sociology) in recent years on what are variously referred to as “scenes”, “fields”, “worlds” or “networks”’. This article, in contrast, places a strong accent on (social) ‘ecologies’, consistent with its particular approach to resilience and the inspiration that it draws – reflecting its interdisciplinary character – from the field of ecology.

Extant literature on resilience is vast and spans multiple (and diverse) disciplines, from biology and neurology to education and human geography. Increasingly, moreover, this scholarship has shifted from very individualistic and psychology-based approaches – which characterised ‘the first wave of resilience research’ (Vindevoel, 2017: 77) – towards more complex relational framings that locate resilience, as an inherently dynamic process, in the interactions between individuals and their social ecologies (environments) (Ellis et al., 2022; Theron, 2016; Ungar, 2011; Wessells, 2018). Viewed in this way, thus, ‘Resilience is not solely a quality within individuals; it grows from access to and use of the resources needed to support mental health and wellbeing’ (Ungar and Theron, 2020: 446). What largely remains missing from such analyses of resilience, however, is attention to some of the sensory dimensions of individuals’ social ecologies, not least their acoustic dimensions.

Acoustic ecology – ‘a field of inquiry concerned with the ecological, social, and cultural contexts of our sonic environments’ (Barclay, 2017: 145) – has primarily been

discussed within ecology and conservation research (see, e.g., Gottesman et al., 2021; Znidarsic and Watson, 2022). This article innovatively uses it as a way of thinking about the relationship between music and resilience in the context of war – a relationship that remains little explored within extant resilience scholarship.² War unavoidably has a huge impact on the myriad rhythms that constitute the everyday, polluting the acoustic ecology (Westerkamp, 2002: 52) and overall ‘soundscape’ (Schafer, 1993) – the sonic version of a landscape.³ Drawing on examples from Ukraine, this research argues that individuals can resist this disruption and effectively change, however briefly, their acoustic ecology through music. In this way, it conceptualises music as a form of ‘soundscaping’ (Hagood, 2011) – in the sense of an active aligning of sound and wellbeing – and, thus, as an expression of resilience. It further maintains that in bringing people together, music creates – and/or protects – social-ecological resources.

The first section outlines some of the myriad roles that music can play in war, thereby contextualising this research – and its distinctiveness – within a larger body of scholarship. The second section develops the article’s conceptual arguments centred on the relationship between music and resilience. Underlining the importance of sound as a significant and overlooked aspect of individuals’ social (and physical) ecologies, it discusses the idea of acoustic ecology and how it has been used in previous resilience research. The final section shifts the focus to the ongoing war in Ukraine, drawing on various media sources to empirically develop the central thesis that music – and what Small (1998) terms ‘musicking’⁴ – can be a form and expression of resilience in war situations that directly acts on and transforms the acoustic ecology. To thicken the analysis, it focuses on a small number of online videos, giving attention – like Böhler’s (2021: 197) research on the political significance of Cuban timba music – to issues such as ‘how the music sounded; what emotions, practices, and values it suggested; and how the audience responded to it’.

Music and War

The song ‘We’ll Meet Again’, recorded by the late Dame Vera Lynn in 1939, was ‘perhaps the most emblematic of Britain’s wartime tunes’ (Grant, 2020: 582). During the Bosnian war (1992–1995), Vedran Smailović, a concert cellist, played Albinoni’s Adagio in G Minor every day for 22 days, in memory of each of the victims killed in May 1992 as they queued for bread in Sarajevo (Galloway, 2009). Playing out in the open as the war raged around him, Smailović became ‘a symbol of civil resistance’ (Chae, 2020: 211). During the ongoing war in Syria, which began in 2011, Aeham Ahmad – a young Palestinian musician who now lives in Germany – became known as the Pianist of Yarmouk. Amid the ruins of Yarmouk, a suburb of Damascus, Ahmad would push his piano out onto the street and play. In his book, he recalls one occasion where he saw three birds perched on a balcony directly opposite; ‘It seemed a miracle, for normally birds vanish as soon as the shooting begins [. . .]. When I began to play, the three birds started singing again’ (Ahmad, 2019: 3).

These examples demonstrate that music and war are interwoven in various ways. This relationship reflects, in part, the power of music to lift our spirits, to transport us somewhere else, to move us – emotionally but also physically. As Nietzsche stated, ‘We listen

to music with our muscles' (cited in Sacks, 2006: 2528). We tap our feet in time with the beat, nod our heads, change our facial expressions, click our fingers or play the 'drums' on our legs. Neurological research, moreover, had revealed the deep sense of pleasure and satisfaction that music can foster (see, e.g., Bonvin et al., 2007: 527; Weinberger, 2004: 90), an important dimension of the latter's affective force. As Panksepp and Bernatzky (2002: 134) reflect, 'It is remarkable that any medium could so readily evoke all the basic emotions of our brains (and much more)' (see also Robertson, 2015: 71). Music, thus, can play many different roles in war. It can help to get soldiers 'pumped up' and 'psyched up' to fight and to kill (Daughtry, 2015: 229; Malmvig, 2020: 653); it can be used to stimulate or strengthen nationalist sentiment (Baker, 2016; Bohlman, 2004); and it can be co-opted to communicate trenchant anti-war sentiment, as in the Vietnam War (Andresen, 2003: 30).

A particularly salient theme within existing research on music and war, however, is the use of music to cause harm and suffering to others. This section looks at some prominent examples of the misuse and abuse of music in war, all of which powerfully support DeNora's (2003: 1) argument that 'If there is one thing the world shares, musically speaking, it is probably the recognition, at times the *fear*, of what music may allow' (emphasis in the original). This section additionally examines another important theme within extant scholarship and one on which this article directly builds – namely, music as a multi-layered resource.

The Misuse and Abuse of Music

In 2006, the trial of Simon Bikindi – a Rwandan singer and composer – commenced at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Tanzania. According to the Prosecution, Bikindi incited violence and hatred against the ethnic Tutsi through his songs and thereby actively participated in the 1994 genocide (Prosecutor v. Bikindi, 2008: paras. 186–187). The Trial Chamber focused on three specific songs and noted that they were recorded and disseminated in a climate of 'rising ethnic tension' (Prosecutor v. Bikindi, 2008: para. 247), linked to the civil war in Rwanda that commenced in October 1990. The Trial Chamber further found that the three songs were used as part of a propaganda campaign in Rwanda to encourage people to harm and kill Tutsi (Prosecutor v. Bikindi, 2008: para. 255). Ultimately, it adjudged that the evidence presented did not allow it to conclude beyond reasonable doubt that Bikindi had composed the songs with the intent that they would be used to incite violence against Tutsi (Prosecutor v. Bikindi, 2008: para. 255) – or that he had personally played a part in the deployment and dissemination of the three songs in 1994 (Prosecutor v. Bikindi, 2008: para. 263). Bikindi's trial was nevertheless unprecedented; 'Never before had an international court or tribunal been called upon to determine a musician's culpability for acts of genocide' (Parker, 2015: 2).

The broader point is that music has frequently been used in war to degrade and belittle particular groups (Shekhovtsov, 2013: 330). As one illustration, British narratives and media reports about the South African War (1899–1902) – also known as the Anglo-Boer War or the Second Boer War – made frequent reference to the concertina. Several short newspaper articles published during the Siege of Mafeking (October 1899–May

1900), for example, insinuated that the Boers could not resist the sound of the concertina, thus making it possible ‘for the British to lure them out of their hiding places and into captivity and/or death simply by playing a few notes of music on the instrument’ (Johnson-Williams, 2022). Particularly symbolic in this regard was the concertina’s unique structure – its fluidity contrasting sharply with the ‘sturdiness’ of other instruments, such as the piano or the trumpet – and the ‘wheezing’ sounds it made. In the context of the war, the concertina therefore became ‘a metaphor for a weak, if not diseased, human body that was intrinsically “other” to a notion of national strength’ (Johnson-Williams, 2022).⁵

The phenomenon of forced singing – which itself can be a form of ‘othering’ qua humiliation – is an especially common exemplification of the deleterious use of music in war. Discussing the Treblinka extermination camp in occupied Poland during World War II, Naliwajek-Mazurek (2013: 33) highlights that music not only provided entertainment for the camp guards, but also functioned as a form of psychological torture. In the Buchenwald camp in Germany, Jews were made to sing *Judenlied* (Jews’ Song); this ended with the words ‘Now our hooked Jew-noses mourn, we have spread hatred and discord in vain. Now we can no longer steal nor gorge ourselves, it is too late, forever too late’ (John, 2001: 276). More recently, forced singing was one of the methods frequently used to humiliate and debase individuals detained in some of the many camps set up during the Bosnian war (Baker, 2013: 417–418). The Trial Chamber judgement of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) against the former Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadžić, for example, discusses the infamous Čelopek camp – which was located in the municipality of Zvornik in north-east Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to the judgement, ‘On or about 10 June 1992, detainees were forced to sing songs and then forced to beat each other with the promise that the winner would be spared from being killed’ (Prosecutor v. Karadžić, 2016: para. 1298). Forced singing also occurred, *inter alia*, in the Luka camp in Brčko District (Prosecutor v. Jelisić, 1999: para. 76).

Instances of forced listening – widely used during the so-called ‘War on Terror’ – further evidence the potentiality and instrumentalisation of music as a method of torture. Prisoners held in United States (US) detention camps, including Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, Forward Operating Base Tiger in Iraq and Guantánamo in Cuba, were exposed to very loud music (and other sounds), with the aim of ‘breaking’ them psychologically (Cusick, 2008: 2) and forcing them to reveal crucial intelligence (Pinkerton and Dodds, 2009: 11). Looking at the bigger picture, Cusick (2008: 2–3) underlines that US forces have used music and sound as ‘weapons of interrogation’ for at least half a century.

If the above examples, which are intentionally diverse, illuminate, in part, the significance of context in shaping ‘what music can do and enable’ (Roy and Dowd, 2010: 184), they also evidence a more fundamental nexus between music and the performativity of violence (which in some cases can also be linked to the performativity of hypermasculinity; see Herrera, 2018: 491). This dialectic transcends cultural and contextual differences, and indeed there are many ‘everyday’ connections between music and violence (see, e.g., Chung, 2021; Mundici, 2022). Relatedly, the cases discussed in this section, which both reflect and exhibit important power relations and asymmetries, lend support

to DeNora's (2004: 219) argument that 'we have moved away from a sociology "of" music to a consideration of music as a dynamic medium of social ordering'.

It is important to emphasise, however, that there are many complex and multi-layered linkages between music and war. The examples adduced thus far, therefore, constitute only one part of a much larger story. Exploring how music can also be a valuable resource, the remainder of this section carves out the contours of its overall argument about music and resilience.

Music as a Resource

During the 1940s, music was widely used in the US to help heal individuals who had been physically and/or psychologically wounded during World War II (Rorke, 1996: 206). Music therapy has also been shown to have beneficial effects for war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Bensimon et al., 2008). In other words, music can be a therapeutic resource. This was especially evident in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As Americans struggled to process the enormity of what had happened, several high-profile concerts were organised that brought people together to collectively express their emotions. Fundamentally, 'the immediate reaction to 9/11 saw popular music functioning therapeutically, a means of uniting the nation, and giving vent to the wide range of emotions' (Jones and Smith, 2021). Over time, however, music came to reflect some of the wider divisions in society, notably relating to the war in Iraq. Country music artists, in particular, voiced staunch support for the invasion, while other artists used their music to express pacifist viewpoints (Jones and Smith, 2021). That music, as in this example, can be both healing and polarising illustrates how its functionality as a resource may change over time. Relatedly, the very concept of 'resource' has many different layers in the context of music and war.

In Nazi camps during World War II, prisoners were not just forced to sing, as previously discussed. Some of them voluntarily made and performed music as a way of dealing with their situation. According to Fackler (2010: 610), music 'created a feeling of community and solidarity, helped inmates to retain their cultural identity and traditions, and offered a last chance to maintain their dignity'. Music was also a way for prisoners to re-connect with, or in some way hold on to, the vestiges of their former lives and the sense of 'normality' that they had once known – and a form of escapism (Gilbert, 2005: 10). However, it had limitations, like any resource. Gilbert (2005: 10) notes that music was most likely 'only a small part of the coping framework, and a less essential one than smuggling or soup kitchens'. It was a resource, in short, that had a bounded temporality, due to its deep entanglement with the wider social ecology of camp life; and '[a]t a certain point in the world of atrocity, when people were exhausted, diseased, freezing, and dying of starvation, music could simply no longer flourish' (Gilbert, 2005: 10).

In a very different context, Daughtry's (2015) work examines some of the ways that soldiers utilise music. More specifically, he explores the role of the iPod during the war in Iraq (2003–2011). Music had a recreational function during periods when soldiers were awaiting their next mission, and their listening choices often reflected deliberate efforts – as in the previous example – to recreate a sense of their lives back home (Daughtry, 2015: 228–229). Their 'battle playlists', moreover, helped not only to

psychologically prepare them to fight, but also to anchor them within extremely dangerous and volatile situations. To cite Daughtry (2015: 230):

When they cranked the volume, they asserted control over noise in an environment where many noises were unpredictable and indexically related to death. When they chose the right beat for the moment, they asserted control over rhythm in an environment where coordination, dexterity, and timing were essential for survival. When they mouthed the lyrics, they asserted control over narrative to regularize their feelings about the immediate prospect of killing, and of being killed.

In other words, music was a resource that soldiers could use – even if they did not necessarily do so purposely – to at least partially recalibrate their relationship with the social ecology of an active war zone. This latter point, in turn, is particularly relevant to this article and to the nexus that it accentuates between music and resilience in war. Its core argument effectively frames resilience, expressed through music, as a sensory ‘recalibration’ of the relationships between individuals and their acoustic ecology.

Music, Resilience and Acoustic Ecology

Existing research on music and resilience has focused particularly on children and youth. Studies have explored, *inter alia*, the benefits of music therapy on children’s relationships and the potential for music-making to become an important resource in their lives (Pasiali, 2012: 45–46); the significance of music as a site of both resilience and resistance that ‘facilitates youth stepping into their power and agency and naming the world as they see it’ (Hess, 2019: 498); and the wider relevance of music education in schools for cultural health and community development programmes (Dillon, 2006).

More broadly, scholars have analysed some of the ways that music can foster or support resilience in a variety of different contexts. Writing during the 1970s, for example, McClendon looked at music as an expression of Black resilience (McClendon, 1976: 22). More recently, Lenette et al. (2016) have examined how engagement in musical activities can benefit asylum seekers and enhance their wellbeing; and Morris and Kadetz’s (2018) work has addressed the role of musicians in helping to build resilience in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Darweish and Robertson, for their part, have discussed music, and specifically poetry-singing, as a cultural and artistic response by Palestinians to Israel’s imposed military rule from 1948 to 1966. Underlining that music, as a social activity, ‘has the capacity to unite people and to create and/or strengthen social cohesion’ (Darweish and Robertson, 2021: 32), they argue that poetry-singing – an important element of Palestinian heritage – became a form of resistance that ‘contributed to raising awareness, enforcing national identity, and building resilience’ (Darweish and Robertson, 2021: 39).

Part of this article’s originality lies in its focus on music and resilience in the context of war. What is also novel is its particular framing of the relationship between music and resilience. To reiterate, this research adopts a social-ecological approach to resilience, viewing the latter not simply as a psychological or character trait, but as a dynamic and relational process that develops through the interplays between individuals and everything

that they have around them – including physically, emotionally and practically. To cite Ungar (2015: 4), ‘resilience is predicted by both the capacity of individuals, and the capacity of their social and physical ecologies to facilitate their coping in culturally meaningful ways’. These ecologies can include families, schools, neighbourhoods, churches, sports clubs and the natural environment.

Giving attention to individuals’ social ecologies – including in the sense of what they offer and what they lack – is important for developing contextually sensitive approaches to resilience. Another strength of social-ecological framings is that they do not attribute an absence of resilience in any way to personal shortcomings (Theron, 2012: 335). In this way, they directly challenge the common argument that resilience discourse serves a larger neoliberal policy agenda (see, e.g., Chandler and Reid, 2016; Joseph, 2013), according to which ‘Individuals are ultimately responsible for their own successes and failures, which become a result of their own resilience, namely, their capacity to adapt to the neoliberal market-based order’ (Mavelli, 2017: 495). Fundamentally, social-ecological approaches understand resilience as a ‘co-construction’ (Haysom, 2017: 1) or a shared process, meaning that individuals do not manifest resilience in isolation.

Within this corpus of scholarship, however, little attention is given to the sensory dimensions of individuals’ social (and physical) ecologies. Sound is particularly relevant in this regard. Paine (2017: 171) points out that ‘Every day we listen to sounds in the world to identify their source [. . .]. But we do not often listen to these sounds as a network, a mesh of relationships that forms an ecology’.⁶ Sounds, in other words, constitute an important acoustic component of our ecologies – and more broadly, a neglected system within expanding multi-systemic approaches to resilience (see, e.g., Höltge et al., 2022; Masten, 2021; Ungar, 2021).

The relationship between sound and resilience has mainly been discussed within the field of ecology; and indeed, some of the early pioneering work on resilience was anchored in this discipline (see, e.g., Holling, 1973). Ecologists study acoustic ecology – also referred to as soundscape studies – as a way to assess the impact of environmental disturbances and to gauge the resilience of complex ecosystems in responding to shocks and stressors. Gottesman et al.’s research, for example, recorded soundscapes to explore the impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017 on dry forest animal communities and coral reefs in Puerto Rico. They found that ‘soundscape recording and analysis can be used to quantify different aspects of ecological disturbance and resilience’ (Gottesman et al., 2021). Simmons et al. used passive acoustics to understand how coral reefs in the Lower Florida Keys dealt with the impact of Hurricane Irma in 2017. Studying the underwater soundscapes of coral reefs before, during and after the hurricane, their results revealed that ‘coral reef soundscapes may be resilient to a natural, acute disturbance despite experiencing physically destructive conditions’ (Simmons et al., 2021). For their part, Rajan et al. have used acoustic analysis to assess the effects of a natural disaster (flooding) on avian diversity in Kerala, India. Finding that reduced soundscape variability following floods in 2018 ‘indicate reduced avian species richness’, the authors underline the importance of acoustic ecology for the purpose of ‘rapid assessment of biodiversity’ (Rajan et al., 2022) – an issue highly pertinent to the recent discussions that took place at the United Nations biodiversity conference (COP 15) in Montreal.

On a practical level, research on acoustic ecology is now being used to forge new social-ecological relationships between individuals, communities and the ecosystems with which they interact, by encouraging active listening as a novel way of fostering respect for and ‘stewardship’ of the natural environment. The *River Listening* project in Australia (Barclay et al., 2018: 299) and the *Listen* project in the American Southwest (Paine, 2016: 369) are two important examples. Znidersic and Watson (2022: 1599) refer to such listening as ‘acoustic restoration’ which, they argue, ‘offers unparalleled opportunities for meaningful engagement’ with the environment.

While this discussion has focused on sound rather than music per se, it is nevertheless very relevant to the larger argument that this research makes about music and resilience. The following example – which is consistent with the article’s interdisciplinary approach – highlights this. Römer (2020: 312) notes that ‘insects often communicate within choruses of signallers of the same and different species, which gives rise to high levels of acoustic masking interference’. The resulting background noise can be loud enough to substantially interfere with early morning bird vocalisations. Some bird species accordingly seek to reduce or minimise acoustic masking interference, including through spatial distancing (Römer, 2020: 313). Notwithstanding the fact that the sounds of war can in some cases be useful (Hartford, 2017: 111), the crucial point is that they too can be construed as acoustic masking interference that affects the relationships between individuals and their social ecologies. As Daughtry (2014: 25) argues, ‘For those caught up in the violent ambit of a combat zone, armed conflict feels less like a geopolitical stratagem or “continuation of policy by other means,”⁷ and more like a full-spectrum sensory onslaught’.

The significance of music – and more particularly of making music and ‘musicking’ – is that it counters this ‘onslaught’ and the resulting acoustic masking interference. In this way, music-making can be viewed as a creative expression of resilience and, relatedly, resistance. Noting that resilience and resistance are often seen as mutually exclusive, Bourbeau and Ryan (2018: 222) submit that the two concepts are ‘engaged in mutual assistance’ (see also Cai, 2022; Darweish and Robertson, 2021; Ryan, 2015; Sou, 2022). As an illustration of this ‘mutual assistance’, this article maintains that processes of music-making and ‘musicking’ effectively challenge the acoustic shocks and stressors of war, as an expression of resistance. In so doing, they foster an alternative acoustic ecology, however transient, that brings people together and thereby forges new social-ecological relationships supportive of resilience. The final section develops this argument using the example of Ukraine.

That Ukraine is an active conflict makes it a particularly important and timely case study for this research. Music, moreover, is an integral part of the cultural fabric of Ukraine. According to the musician Iryna Ganzha, ‘Ukraine is a singing nation, we express ourselves through music’ (cited in Brooks, 2022). Evidencing this point, the world champion boxer Oleksandr Usyk recently performed a song about Ukrainian resistance during the final press conference ahead of his rematch with British boxer Anthony Joshua (PA Media, 2022). The example of Ukraine, thus, usefully illustrates how culture plays a significant role ‘in the shaping of responses to disasters’ (Furedi, 2007: 250).

Music and Resilience in Ukraine

On 24 February 2022, Russian forces invaded Ukraine from several directions. In the ensuing months, large swathes of the country and its ecosystems have been heavily damaged or destroyed, Ukrainian power infrastructure has been repeatedly attacked, thousands of soldiers (on both sides) and civilians have been killed and intense fighting continues in Bakhmut in the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland. In the course of the conflict, there have also been many references to resilience. Visiting Kyiv four months after the war began, for example, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, stated: 'I am deeply touched and humbled by the strength and the resilience of the Ukrainian people' (European Commission, 2022). She further commented on the country's 'resilient administration' (European Commission, 2022).

In an article in *Forbes* magazine, Charles Beames (2022), a retired US Air Force Colonel, argued that 'Since the invasion began, the Ukrainians have inspired the world with a winning strategy deeply rooted in a culture of resilience'. For his part, the director of the Carnegie Endowment's Programme on American Statecraft, Charles Chivvis, has insisted that Ukraine cannot win a long, crippling war of attrition. According to him, 'Ukraine wins by demonstrating the extraordinary resilience of political and economic liberalism to the world and starting that process as soon as possible, not in five years when the county is destroyed and the world has moved on' (Chivvis, 2022). This reference to liberalism is interesting, given that one of the common criticisms of resilience – as previously noted – is precisely that it forms part of a broader neoliberal agenda that seeks to shift the burden of dealing with uncertainty from governments to individuals (see, e.g., Chandler, 2014; Tierney, 2015).

If the above examples lend support to the argument that resilience has become a popular 'buzzword' (Boin et al., 2010: 1), they tell us little about everyday expressions of resilience, and what they look like, in an active war zone. Music – which has become entangled in the war in Ukraine in various ways⁸ – is very significant in this regard. As in other conflicts, music has been a medium for expressing opposition to the war (Hall, 2022), including in Russia – despite the substantial risks to those involved (Sedlyarova and Tobias, 2022). Relatedly, it has been a way for people to demonstrate defiance and resistance (Fleming, 2022; Walt and Trianni, 2022) – and what Ryan (2015: 300) has called 'resilient resistance', meaning living not *with* uncertainty but *despite* uncertainty.

A video of Ukrainian fighters singing from the underground labyrinth of the Azovstal steelworks in the city of Mariupol, prior to their surrender and evacuation in May 2022, offers a salient example (see The Highland Sun, 2022). The singing is led by a 21-year-old female soldier called Kateryana Ptashka. While the soldiers are holed out in the dark depths of the besieged steelworks, their singing – and Kateryana's beautiful voice in particular – conveys a sense of conviction, hope and determination to fight until the end. The words of the song include the following:

*And here we go in the battle of life.
Hard and strong, unbreakable as granite.
Because weeping has not given freedom to anyone yet.
And he who fights, he gains peace.*

*We do not want fame or reward.
Remuneration for us is the joy of struggle.
It's sweeter for us to die in battle than to live in chains like dumb slaves.*

In a separate video, a group of 16 soldiers – one of them holding a small dog – sing the Ukrainian national anthem in an Azovstal basement. They stand in a line, most of them holding a gun, and some of them have their right hand placed over their heart (see News.com.au, 2022). What the singing lacks in melodiousness it makes up for in its powerful rawness. The soldiers' choice of song further conveys their spirit of resistance. Ukraine's national anthem – which has been described as 'one of the world's mightiest patriotic songs' (Moore, 2022) – is called *Shche ne vmerla Ukrainy*, meaning 'Ukraine has not yet perished'.

In a war environment where there are so many losses and separations, music can also have powerful bonding qualities, thereby supporting individuals in dealing with adversity. The Ukrainian youth organisation *Repair Together*, for example, carries out 'clean up raves', in which young people and locals work together to clean up and restore areas liberated from Russian troops, while listening to techno music. According to one of the founders of *Repair Together*, 'We invited DJs, and it was cleaning with music and this gave a lot of energy, motivation and inspiration for our volunteers' (cited in Awomoyi, 2022). Moreover, when people come together to sing and to make music, as some Ukrainians have done in shelters and underground railway stations (see, e.g., Shaw Roberts, 2022b), 'there seems to be an actual binding of nervous systems, the unification of an audience by a veritable "neurogamy"' (Sacks, 2006: 2528).

A poignant example is the little girl Amelia Anisovych, referred to in the article's introduction, singing in a bomb shelter. In the video, which went viral, everyone in the shelter – young and old – stops to listen as Amelia begins to sing 'Let it go' (The Independent, 2022). They come together, as one, through 'musicking', all of them contributing in their own individual way to 'the nature of the event that is a musical performance' (Small, 1998: 9). Amelia's high-pitched voice has an innate sweetness and purity. It fills the space, which is cluttered with pieces of clothing, bags and other everyday items salvaged from war-torn lives, with something positive – with light (like the sparkling stars on Amelia's black jumper) and with hope. As DeNora (2021: 4) asserts, 'Hope recognises that what is hoped for may not happen, yet it pursues signs of the possible alleviation or transcendence of present (difficult) circumstances'.

The new subterranean worlds that wars create bring to mind Macfarlane's exquisitely written book *Underland*. In it, he invites us as readers to reflect on what exists beneath our feet and he poignantly argues that 'Into the underland we have long placed that which we fear and wish to lose, and that which we love' (Macfarlane, 2019: 8). In war, there is loss in the very journey underground, but there is also love – for those lost, for one's country and compatriots – which music can help to foster and nourish. Early in the war, the violinist Vera Lytovchenko played to her fellow residents inside a bomb shelter in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city. In a video that drew international attention (see Morresi, 2022), Lytovchenko, dressed in black concert attire, plays 'The Night is so Moonlit', a Ukrainian folk song about love. The people in the shelter sit close to her as she plays, as absorbed in the music – beautiful in its simplicity – as she is. In Lytovchenko's

words, 'We have become a family inside this cellar and when I played they cried' (cited in Morresi, 2022).

Being 'underland' blocks out the sights of war, the senseless destruction and scenes of suffering. In contrast, it is far more difficult to escape the sounds of war. Not only are they everywhere, but they can have physical dimensions. While based in Baghdad in 2003, the BBC cameraman Duncan Stone described the sound of an explosion as 'like someone thumping you in the chest' (cited in Barford, 2012). Daughtry (2014: 32), moreover, argues that 'the choreography of vibration ensures that we are never not connected to surrounding entities'. He mentions Noor, an Iraqi woman who could not protect her grandchildren from the sounds of war raging around them. All she could do was to hold them tightly, and in this way she used her arms 'to create a microenvironment for the children in which sound became marginally less frightening' (Daughtry, 2014: 34).

There are many situations in life where it can be desirable to block out external sounds and to soften or mute our acoustic ecology. Being on an airplane is one of them, as Hagood discusses in an article about Bose noise-cancelling headphones. Reflecting on the marketing of this item, he notes, that 'In the face of the discomfort and forced togetherness of travel, people are encouraged to employ noise-canceling headphones as soundscaping devices, carving out an acoustically rendered sense of personal space that Bose has marketed as "a haven of tranquility"' (Hagood, 2011: 574). In an active war zone, tranquillity can be chimeric and, at best, short-lived. This does not mean, however, that there is no place for 'soundscaping' and for individuals to actively shape or alter their sonic environments (Hagood, 2011: 575). The very fact that sound, when associated with violence and danger, can be a powerful catalyst for psychological trauma (Safa, 2022: 79) highlights the significance of 'soundscaping' in war. This, in turn, is pivotal to the relationship between war, music and resilience that this article ultimately posits.

Fundamentally, music itself can be viewed as a form of 'soundscaping' and, by extension, an expression of resilience. By making music, and by coming together through music, individuals can create – like Noor in Iraq – a micro-environment within the broader acoustic ecology of war (even if they do not necessarily view their actions as such). One of the most emotive examples of this is a video of a young pianist, Alex Pian, playing Hans Zimmer's composition 'Time' (the soundtrack to the film *Inception*) at a train station in Lviv, in western Ukraine, as an air raid siren sounds a continuous warning in the background (Pian, 2022). Even though it is not raining, Pian has his hood up, accentuating the idea that he is trying – for himself and the people gathered around him – to block out the surrounding sounds of war as the music gradually builds and becomes thicker in texture. On his YouTube channel, he explains: 'When war came to my country, I chose to play with all my heart for those who strongly need this. Music saves from stress, gives faith and hope for a better future' (Pian, 2022). Unlike noise-cancelling headphones, therefore, this 'soundscaping' in war is not about being in one's own private world. It is about communication, shared experiences and protecting social-ecological relationships and resources.

Pertinent to this discussion is Sykes' (2018: 39) argument that 'the result of equating wartime sounds with the sounds of weaponry is that men have been positioned as the primary subject for studies of wartime sound and audition (and weaponry the object)'. It is necessary to make clear, therefore, that in its framing of music as a form of

‘soundscaping’, this article is not reducing the sounds of war simply to the battle noises of artillery fire, exploding missiles or military drones. First, the sounds of war are forever changing, therein forming an acoustic kaleidoscope. They change as the weather and seasons change, as front lines shift, as the intensity of fighting varies and as parts of Ukraine – such as Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in the Donbas region – have become, in President Zelensky’s words, ‘dead cities’ (cited in Sands, 2022). Second, different individuals may hear different war sounds, depending not only on where they are but also on who they are. Kyrylo Demechenko, a student from Dnipro, signed up to fight in the war and his unit quickly came under attack. He recalls: ‘I remember the music of the war – the bomb attacks, the shooting of the guns’ (cited in Safi and Yusuf, 2022). His use of the word ‘music’ stands out. How does it compare to the sounds of war that many elderly Ukrainians, unable or too afraid to leave their homes, hear (Kariakina and Kassova, 2022)? Or what children hear? As Skyes (2018: 40) has commented vis-à-vis the civil war in Sri Lanka, ‘uses of sound and listening differed [. . .] depending on whether the person was a combatant or widow, politician or child soldier, Buddhist or Hindu, and so on’.

The argument that this article makes about music and resilience does not detract from the inherent contextuality and diversity of individuals’ soundscapes – and their relationships with them. To think about ‘soundscaping’ qua music as an expression of everyday resilience, however, also accentuates that individual soundscapes may blend and come together – notwithstanding the fact that ‘all musical meaning is the result of the interpretation of that music by the listener’ (Wright, 1975: 420). This is a further illustration of how music can foster solidarity. Early on in the war in Ukraine, nine-year-old Maksym gave an impromptu piano performance to women and children sheltering in the Lviv Academic Theatre. In Maksym’s words, ‘When I play the piano, I forget about the war’ (UNICEF, 2022). It is easy to imagine how those who listened to his music and shared in the creation of a new soundscape might have similarly forgotten, albeit momentarily, the war. Indeed, the aforementioned violinist Lytovchenko has made this point explicitly when reflecting on her own music (Morresi, 2022). According to Sykes (2018: 39), ‘the bleak house (which is to say, war) is a derangement, rearrangement and resignification of everyday life, rather than its dissolution’. If music can be an important response to this process, it also constitutes a ‘rearrangement’ in its own right that can help people deal with everyday life in an active war zone.

Conclusion

According to Oleksandra (Sasha) Zaritska, the lead vocalist of the Ukrainian band *Kazka*, ‘Right now, music can express something other than words. Because there are no words that can express what is happening’ (cited in Walt and Trianni, 2022). This article has specifically explored the idea, using illustrative examples from the war in Ukraine, that music can express resilience (and relatedly resistance). In so doing, it has developed its own novel conceptualisation of the relationship between music and resilience.

Social-ecological approaches to resilience, which locate the concept in the interplays and interactions between individuals and the environments with which their lives are interwoven, are increasingly multi-systemic. They explore the various systems that exist

across the levels of a social ecology, from the micro- to the macro-system levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It is significant, however, that ‘Systems live (and breathe) differently. We need to learn to listen to that breathing’ (Palmer and Jones, 2014: 237). If existing research on resilience has not listened to this ‘breathing’, it has also given little attention to the acoustic dimensions of individuals’ social and physical ecologies. In addressing this gap, this article has utilised the concept – primarily associated with ecology and conservation research – of acoustic ecology. It has asserted that through music, individuals can actively ‘soundscape’ their acoustic ecology, temporarily muting or blocking out the sounds of war in ways that can foster and contribute to wellbeing and solidarity. Such ‘soundscaping’ is a collective endeavour, which underscores that ‘Musical experience is inherently social in nature’ (Robertson, 2019: 123); and this is part of its beauty, as illustrated by such examples as Amelia Anisovych’s singing and Alex Pian’s piano playing. Indeed, Shank (2014: 3) insists on ‘beauty as the locus of music’s power’. He posits, moreover, that ‘The ability to produce beauty [. . .] is an index of the ability to measure a better future’ (Shank, 2014: 3–4), thereby drawing out an important relationship between music, resilience and hope.

The arguments developed in this article make it clear that resilience is not simply about the resources that social ecologies provide. It is also about what individuals actively do, themselves, to preserve what they have within these social ecologies or to create new resources. This, in turn, is ultimately relevant to larger debates in sociology and cultural sociology regarding the relationship between music, structure and agency. In his seminal book *Distinction*, Bourdieu maintained that an individual’s relationship with music is both shaped by and reflects deeper social structures and class divides. According to him, ‘nothing more clearly affirms one’s “class”, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music’ (Bourdieu, 2010: 10). If such arguments give too much weight to structure (see, e.g., Born, 2010: 178; De Boise, 2016: 184), Marshall has problematised a different type of structure, pointing to ‘a need to move away from the idea of a musical structure creating an effect upon a person and to transform listener(s) into active agent(s) in the creation of musical meaning’ (Marshall, 2011: 158–159). The contribution that this article makes in this regard is that it effectively ‘transforms’ listeners – and performers – of music into ‘active agents’ who act on the acoustic and sound ‘structures’ of war.

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Notes

1. Nagy et al. (2022: 502), for example, note that ‘The earliest foetal responses to sound occur at 16 weeks of gestation’.
2. There is important research discussing resilience in war contexts, although it focuses overwhelmingly on children (see, e.g., Betancourt and Khan, 2008; Tol et al., 2013).
3. As Schafer (1993: 6) points out, however, ‘it is less easy to formulate an exact impression of a soundscape than of a landscape. There is nothing in sonography corresponding to the instantaneous impression which photography can create’.
4. According to Small (1998: 9), ‘*To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing*’ (emphasis in the original).
5. The relationship between music and ‘othering’ is not specific to contexts of war. Critically discussing some of the common ‘tropes’ of African music, for example, Díaz (2021: 34) notes that ‘The idea of a rhythmic Africa versus a melodic and harmonic West is [. . .] connected to a discourse that portrays the African Other as a primitive subject’.
6. It is useful in this context to note Feld’s ethnographic research, undertaken during the 1970s, with the Kaluli people in Papua New Guinea. Although the work is not about resilience, it is a good example of listening to sounds as an ecological network. Fascinated by the entangled relationship between singing and crying among the Kaluli people, Feld’s (2012: xxiv) analysis of this relationship emphasises ‘copresent bio- and socio-acoustics, the interanimation and interarticulation of human and nonhuman sounds in the community setting of a rain forest environment’.
7. It was the Prussian general and military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, who famously declared that ‘War is merely the continuation of policy by other means’.
8. Ukraine’s Minister of Culture, Oleksandr Tkachenko, for example, has called for a boycott of Russian culture. In his words, ‘We’re not talking about cancelling Tchaikovsky, but rather about pausing performances of his works until Russia ceases its bloody invasion’ (Tkachenko, 2022). Moreover, Russian artists who have refused to denounce Vladimir Putin’s war of aggression have become internationally isolated, like the renowned conductor Valery Gergiev (Connolly, 2022).

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